

# "When The Bottom Fell Out"

## A Play in Two Acts

Written by

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Synopsis: During the "me decade" a female auditor working for a very conservative firm poses nude for a men's magazine and her whole life gets turned upside down.

### CAST

(In order of appearance)

**KAREN MCPHERSON** - hard working auditor for the Wilson Auditing Firm. Approximately twenty-five years old, blonde hair, trim figure, very attractive and intelligent

**SECRETARY # 1** - Female administrative assistant for Wilson Auditing Firm. Represents the large female population within the company. If doubling up is required, may also play the role of "June".

**BRUCE TALBOT** - Slovenly maintenance worker for the building that Wilson Auditing Firm owns. Approximately fifty years old, good looking, funny and intelligent...in his own way.

**HENRY CORBETT** – Immediate Supervisor to Karen and the company "messenger boy" for its president. Mid-forties, receding hairline. Nervous, obnoxiously polite fellow. An irritant for all the other employees at the firm.

**MARCUS ALTEN** - Owner and publisher for "Men's Media Magazine". A con man who acts the part of a suave, sophisticated gentleman with fancy clothing and personal rapport. A real smooth-talker. All wrapping but no gift.

**MRS. MCPHERSON** - Karen's mother. Approximately fifty years old. Emotional woman who has strict ways of looking at things. Very well dressed woman with a secret.

**JUNE SOMMERS** - A gorgeous model. 20-ish, very athletic build, sweet but not too bright. (If doubling is required, may also play the role of "Secretary # 1")

**AUTUMN FALL** - Another gorgeous model, 20-ish, very athletic build, sweet, cheerful.

**PAMELA MAXWELL** - Karen's frumpy-looking friend. Overweight, nerdy, wears geeky-looking glasses and a sweater. Extremely intelligent.

**MS. MARTHA CROM** - Alten's administrative assistant. Older woman, late forties, no-nonsense type.

**GUIDO PETRINO** - A handsome pool cleaner. 20-25-ish.

**MALE EMPLOYEE** - A strange young man, around early twenties.

**MR. GORDON HENDERSON** - President of the Wilson Auditing Firm. Round, little man in his early sixties. Speaks with a Southern drawl. Retired colonel with a great deal of power. Bold and demanding man with a flair for fast talking.

Additional EMPLOYEES may be added as needed.

**Setting: The Town of Millborough**

**Time: 1987**

## **ACT ONE**

### **Act 1, Scene 1 – Wilson Auditing Firm – Early Morning**

(At LIGHTS UP, we are in the main office for the Wilson Auditing Firm. The office is busy with FOUR SECRETARIES moving from desk to desk at an extremely brisk pace. KAREN arrives at work and does not get her day off to a good start. Backing in through the main office door stage center, she carries several large ledgers, an attaché case, and a purse. She unknowingly has undone a button on her blouse. She bumps her behind into the behind of one of the harried secretaries, who also has her back to KAREN)

KAREN and SECRETARY # 1 - (Simultaneously) Oof! (They look at one another) Hey! Watch where you're going! (Pointing to themselves) Me? (Pointing to each other) You!! Can't you see I'm in a hurry? Sheesh! (The TWO WOMEN walk away from each other, SECRETARY # 1 stage left to her desk, KAREN stage right to her office. It's small, with not too many furnishings. KAREN places items on her desk. She sits down behind her desk and evokes a much-needed sigh of relief. The door opens as BRUCE peeks in on KAREN)

KAREN - Whew! If I don't get these reports finished soon, they'll kick my ass out of here. Then, I'll be ready for the funny farm!

BRUCE - (Bursts in) Funny Farm calling! We have a pick-up for a Karen McPherson! (Laughs maniacally)

KAREN - (Startled) Christ! Don't you ever knock before entering a room?

BRUCE - Who? Me? Get real. (Brings out a mop and bucket. Starts clanking and swishing it around as he proceeds to clean KAREN's office) I have to clean up in here.

KAREN - (Irrked) Now? (BRUCE continues to clean) Bruce, why can't you clean up after office hours, like more reputable janitors do?

BRUCE – Hey-hey-hey! “Maintenance worker”. I’m *not* a janitor. And who said I was reputable? I never did. (Mops under her desk from the right side)

KAREN – (Annoyed) Hey! I'm not in your way, am I? (BRUCE continues to clean) What in the hell? (BRUCE swishes the mop in the bucket and continues) Bruce, has anybody ever told you how exasperating you are?

BRUCE - (Stops, pausing to look at her, then continues to clean) Lift your feet again. I missed a spot. (She does so. BRUCE starts to mop from the left side. BRUCE puts mop back in bucket and then picks up KAREN's wastebasket from the side of her desk. He lifts up and takes a whiff of a half-wrapped sandwich) Oof! What the hell is this? Salmon *and* roast beef? That's just *sick*. (Throws it back in the basket and lifts out a utility bill) You better pay this electric company bill before they shut you off again.

KAREN - (KAREN swipes the wastebasket away) Give me that! (Puts the basket back to the side of her desk) Can't you do this some other time? I mean, I've got work to do!

BRUCE - (Hands her the electric bill then returns to his bucket) What do you think this is for me...a hobby? (Dunks the mop in the bucket and swishes it around)

KAREN - No. You're continual pestering of me...*that's* your hobby.

BRUCE - (Leans over the desk and smiles at her) Well, it *is* the only chance I get to look at your lovely face *and* bug the hell out of you at the same time.

KAREN - And a fine job you do at BOTH, I might add.

BRUCE - Thank you. That's a lovely blouse you're wearing, by the way. But, may I make a suggestion?

KAREN - No! Now, (Walking to the door) if you are quite finished with both your professional and recreational activities, I'd like to tell you something very important.

BRUCE - (Final wringing out of the mop in the bucket) Oui, mademoiselle. I am finished. (Approaches her at the door, trying to be very romantic, in a silly way) Now, what is it, my darling Karen? What have you to say to moi?

KAREN - (Cold) Get the hell out of my office.

BRUCE - (Shocked) What?

KAREN - I've got an important client coming in any minute and I don't want you around when he arrives.

BRUCE - (Overacting) Alas! She doth kick my sorry ass out of her office! All right, fair maiden, I shall take my leave. But know ye this: I shall return! (KAREN heads back to her desk as BRUCE opens the door and peeks back in) And one more thing before I go: just a piece of sound, sage advice.

KAREN - (Disinterested) What is it?

BRUCE - Learn to button your blouse, correctly, please? It's ill-becoming for an assistant auditor.

KAREN - (Noticing error) Oh, well, I was in a hurry this morning! (Calmly, approaches BRUCE) Now, if you don't mind (Pushes his toward the door) get out of here before I slap you silly!

BRUCE - Ah, yes! She DOES care for me! I knew it! (She pushes BRUCE out and slams the door shut. As she does from behind it we hear BRUCE say) When's coffee? (PAMELA enters quickly)

PAMELA – Karen, you up for lunch?

KAREN – (Frazzled) Arrggh! Pam! I just got here!

PAMELA – Is that a yes?

KAREN – Can I call you in a few minutes?

PAMELA – Sure. I'll be in my office. (Sees mop and bucket) I see Bruce was here. You know, your blouse is...

KAREN – (Fixing her blouse) I know, I know! (PAMELA exits, shutting the door behind her) Someday I'm going to sue that Bruce. I'm just not sure what I can sue him for. Sexual harassment or just plain mental cruelty. Of course, either way, he'd probably get off on an insanity plea. (Returns to her desk) Only problem is he's one of the saner ones in this place. (HENRY enters through the door. He leans in and smiles a big grin at KAREN)

HENRY - Hi, Karen!

KAREN - (Hand to forehead, muttering) Oh, Jesus H. Christ. Speak of the devil.

HENRY – (Struts into the office and sits at chair opposite KAREN's desk) And how's our little busy bee doing this fine morning, hmmm? (Grin becomes increasingly wider and brighter to KAREN)

KAREN - (Cold) Henry, would you please turn off the charm? Mr. Henderson isn't here for you to suck up to and I've got enough refracted light in here. All your great-white-smile does is put a glare on my paperwork! (HENRY stops smiling)

HENRY – Well, aren't *we* in a snit today. I just came in to inform you that Mr. Henderson...you remember, the person who hired you? Well, he wanted me to repeat that it is essential that Mr. Alten, our new client, is treated with the utmost cordiality during his audit.

KAREN - (Looks up from her paperwork) How else *would* I treat him, Henry?

HENRY – (Smirking) Well, of *course* how else? You are a professional little busy bee, aren't you? It's just that Mr. Alten does have a "certain reputation" that someone of your, ahem, gender, might find a bit disquieting.

KAREN - The only thing I find "disquieting" is your insinuation that I can't do my job. I know all about Marcus Alten. I have his file right here. (Pulls up a file but doesn't open it up) I make it a habit to review all prospective clients to make sure we *both* know where we stand. (Tosses the file to HENRY, who opens it. KAREN stands and paces, reviewing the contents of the file off the top of her head) Mr. Alten received his master's degree in journalism from Penn State. He's a liberal. Runs "Men's Media Magazine", a periodical which features extremely revealing articles and even more extremely revealing pictorials of women. He's married. Two kids: a boy and a girl. Four pets: one dog and three cats. And then there's his mansion. An estate worth 27.5 million dollars. (Sits back down at her desk) Have I missed anything, Henry?

HENRY - (After a moment's pause, he closes the file) No, I suppose not. (Hands her back the file and stands) Mr. Henderson made it *particularly* clear to me that he wanted a woman for this assignment, to avoid any chance of bias or impropriety. So, you wouldn't hold the fact that he runs (swallowing) eh, *that* magazine against him, then?

KAREN - (Suspicious) Why would I, Henry? (Stands up again) Because I'm a *woman*?

HENRY - (Quite nervous now) Now, now. Did I say that? (Opens the door to leave) Have a nice day, you precious little busy bee. (One last wide grin and then he's out. Telephone on KAREN's desk rings)

KAREN - (Answering it) Hello? Oh, Hi Pamela. No, I can't do lunch. But I'm good for tonight if you wanna do something. (Pause) Where did you wanna go? "Lethal Weapon" is playing in town again. It's four fifty. (Pause) No, for each of us. (There's a knock at the door. ALTEN is there, dressed in proper business executive attire, carrying a briefcase. KAREN waves him to enter. He does and stands by the chair opposite KAREN's desk) Okay, Pam. What time's good for you? It's at seven and nine-thirty. (She writes down the time as ALTEN sits in front of her desk. He grins at her) All right. We'll see you then. Bye. (Looks at ALTEN and smiles) Hello. Please excuse the phone call. Are you Mr. Alten?

ALTEN - (Stands and bows) That is correct.

KAREN - Well, I'm Miss McPherson, but please call me Karen. (Extends her hand out for a handshake, but ALTEN takes and kisses it instead, stunning KAREN by his brashness)

ALTEN - (Almost crooning to her) Please, call me Marcus, my dear. Your *boss*, Mr. Henderson, highly recommended you to me, but he did not mention how incredibly attractive you are.

KAREN - (Not exactly flattered, more amused) All right. Mr. Alten (Opens up his file on her desk and peers over some papers) looking at your portfolio, it seems that you've made some rather unusually diverse investments lately. Is that true?

ALTEN - (Sits, nodding) Yes, that it quite true.

KAREN - Why is that, sir? I'm only asking in case my senior auditor wants more info.

ALTEN - Well, my wife, whom I consult with on all financial matters, proposed to me that it would be advisable.

KAREN - (Curious) How come?

ALTEN – Because she told me she's going to *bleed me dry* in our divorce settlement. However, the footing of the magazine is rock solid, financially speaking. The fact of the matter is that "Men's Media Magazine" has been looking to expand to other markets.

KAREN – That's interesting. How?

ALTEN - The company has been considering evolving our magazine into the video format. We believe that VHS is here to stay and we need to be on board. (Looking at KAREN's chest) There's quite a... blossoming...market for such things, (Pulling out his own files from his briefcase) but our internal auditors require we seek out new capital in order to meet our distribution goals for this coming year.

KAREN - I see. (Fumbles through her notes) Well, you've really gone all out on this endeavor. (Looking around) However, I seem to remember looking at your company's ledger for this month and there were some discrepancies in...hold on, Mr. Alten. I'll see if it's in my file cabinet. (KAREN stands up. Knocks over the empty mop and bucket that have been left by her desk) Oh, damn! Excuse me, Mr. Alten. I'm not usually this clumsy. I'll just be a minute. (Leans over the bucket picking up the mop and placing it back into the bucket. ALTEN stands up, amazed at the sight of KAREN's behind)

ALTEN – (Impressed) Eh, quite all right, my dear.

KAREN - (Embarrassed, moves the mop and bucket aside) The, um, cleaning crew left this stuff. I'll just put it over here. (Pauses) Now, what the hell was I doing? Oh yes. The ledger. I'll get it. (KAREN goes back over to the file cabinet near her desk and bends over to open the bottom drawer, which falls out of the cabinet onto the floor) Jesus H. Christ! (Catches her remark) Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Alten. Please excuse my language.

ALTEN - (Smiles) Perfectly understandable. (Being gallant) Do you require assistance?

KAREN - No, thank you. I've got it. (KAREN bends over again to pick up the drawer back in the cabinet)

ALTEN - (Leering at KAREN's backside again, sits back down, saying to himself) Jesus H. Christ! (KAREN doesn't hear this)

KAREN - (Returning to her desk with a folder) Here we go, Mr. Alten. Now, if you take a look at last year's books, I think you'll find there's a significant deficit in securable collateral available via your many...

ALTEN - (Interrupting, stands up) Excuse me, Karen, but has anyone told you how lovely your...?

KAREN - ...Assets...

ALTEN – Are?

KAREN - (Flattered but embarrassed) Thank you, Mr. Alten, but we were discussing your investment portfolio?

ALTEN - (Rises and circles KAREN, observing her features through his hands which are held up together as if they were a camera lens) Yes, you have many beautiful features. (Idea hits him) Why not? You'd be perfect!

KAREN - (Suspicious, KAREN places the folder down to her right on her desk) Mr. Alten, I don't know what your agenda is here. I'm glad you think I'm attractive, but as an auditor, let me just point out that if you think flattery will allow you more exemptions than you're entitled to, then you are absolutely...

ALTEN - Oh, "attractive" isn't the word for such beauty, my dear. You are absolutely ravishing!

KAREN - (Taken by ALTEN's charm, shy) ...mistaken. Do you *really* think so?

ALTEN - Absolutely! Now, don't get me wrong, Ms. McPherson. My intentions are ALL honorable. (Goes back to his chair and sits. Pulls out some folders from his briefcase. Comes around to Karen's side of the desk and places the folders down on her left side) These folders contain charts and graphs listing all investments the company has made for this quarter. I thought I would bring them personally, thus you could verify with my own financial staff as to their legitimacy and accuracy. (While KAREN looks at the folders he hands her from the left, ALTEN surreptitiously removes the folder from the right side of KAREN's desk and places it into his briefcase) But now, having seen you, an absolute vision of loveliness, I have new intentions.

KAREN - (Still looking at the folders he handed her, self-conscious) This is a highly inappropriate discussion, Mr. Alten.

ALTEN - Very well, then. (Pulls out a business card) Let's meet at a location where it *would* be appropriate. To show you that I am not just being flattering, let us meet again, at my estate. We can discuss my offer in full. (Hands her the business card) Call my personal assistant at this new number to make an appointment.

KAREN - (Takes the card and looks at it. Doesn't like ALTEN's ambiguity) Nice picture of you. (Looks at ALTEN) Wait a sec. What "offer"? You mean...?

ALTEN - I want you to appear in my magazine.

KAREN - (Shocked) Me? You can't be serious!

ALTEN - (Confused by her response) Is there a problem?

KAREN - (Disturbed) I'll say there is! I don't know what game you're trying to play here, Mr. Alten, but you're way out of line. (Approaches the door, opens it for him) Thank you for your "offer" but no thanks. Good day.

ALTEN - (Shrugs, picks up his stuff and heads towards the door) Very well. As you wish. But, if you should happen to change your mind, and I hope you will...

KAREN - I said "good day", Mr. Alten. Please leave.

ALTEN - Good day, Ms. McPherson. (Exits out the door. KAREN slams the door shut after he leaves, right into BRUCE's face)



BRUCE - (From behind the closed door) Ow! Hey, Karen! What gives? (KAREN rushes to open the door. BRUCE enters holding his nose)

KAREN - Oh, Bruce! I'm so sorry! (She turns away, staring at the business card ALTEN gave her)

BRUCE - Ouch! Came back for my mop and bucket. (Looks at his hand) Blood? (Shocked) Ack! My nose! Hey, Karen. Is my nose bleeding? (KAREN says nothing) Hello? (KAREN doesn't respond. BRUCE takes a piece of paper from her desk and rolls it up into a megaphone. Shouts into it) Earth to Karen McPherson! Anybody home?

KAREN - Oh, stop it! (Takes the megaphone and smacks BRUCE's face with it)

BRUCE – Ouch! (Holds his nose again and speaks in a faux Yiddish accent) Enough with the hitting and the hurting! What is it with you, anyway?

KAREN - (Sits on the side of the desk) None of your business.

BRUCE - (Sits next to her) Okay, but I don't offer an ear too often. Better take it while you can afford it.

KAREN - (Conceding) Bruce, help me out, would you?

BRUCE - My God, she's asking for my help. Yes, foolish mortal female. What is it? Lose a patient? Or is it a "patent"? I can never tell with you professional types.

KAREN - Be serious.

BRUCE - Never. What is the problem, though?

KAREN - Well, you know the guy who just walked out?

BRUCE - You mean Marcus Alten from "Men's Media Magazine? Sure!

KAREN - Yeah, well he...Hey! wait a second! How'd you know who he was?

BRUCE - (Raises his eyebrows and grins a devilish grin) Heh-heh-heh.

KAREN - I should have known. You're a pig. Well, we were looking over his company's portfolio, and...

BRUCE - And he took a look at your "portfolio" and now wants you to pose for him, right?

KAREN - (Astonished) Yeah! How did you know that?

BRUCE - Takes a pig to think like a pig. (Smiles) Heh-hehheh.

KAREN - (Irrked) Will you stop that?

BRUCE - I'm sorry. So?

KAREN - So...what?

BRUCE - You have a short-term memory? When are you gonna do it?

KAREN - (Stands up, shocked) What do you mean, "When are you gonna do it?"

BRUCE - I believe that was *my* question.

KAREN – And *what* a question! Really, Bruce. How inappropriate. What would ever possess you (laughs half-heartedly) to think that I would pose nude in *that* magazine? Among other things, my mom would freak and you know it!

BRUCE - So it's your mommy you're worried about? I don't think so. You're twenty-five. Old enough to make your own decisions. (Gets up to get his mop and bucket) Plus, it's the eighties. Tons of professional chicks are posing in these magazines, and it's perfectly okay. *Alten's* magazine spreads are usually pretty tasteful. It's the 1980s. Stuff like this doesn't have the old stigma it used to.

KAREN - It still doesn't feel right, though.

BRUCE - Why? Secretaries, policewomen, firefighters, teachers, hell, even women in the military. Although I've got to admit, I've never really been attracted to a woman who has more tattoos than me and can bench press me over their head. But women in the workplace? They do these all the time.

KAREN - And get fired for it, too!

BRUCE - Not always.

KAREN - Well, maybe I don't appreciate the magazine like you obviously do.

BRUCE - (Smiles) Heh-heh...

KAREN - STOP THAT!

BRUCE - (Laughs) I'm sorry! But, maybe that's not the real reason you're bothered. (Seriously) Maybe you're just afraid.

KAREN – Afraid?

BRUCE – Is there an echo in here?

KAREN – I am *not* afraid. Maybe "*Men's Media*" IS better than some of the sleazier magazines of its "type" that's out there. But it's still sleaze and I would *never* pose in something like that.

BRUCE - (Acting nonchalant, sits back down at the desk) Yeah. I can see why, too.

KAREN - And sure, *maybe* the magazine has even got some reputable qualities, but still...why? Why would they even *want* me to pose for them?

BRUCE – (Curious) Yeah, why?

KAREN - You know, I...(Pauses, she glares at him angrily) And just what did you mean by *that*, Mister Talbot?

BRUCE - (Innocently) By what?

KAREN - Those last two comments.

BRUCE –Those last two comments?

KAREN – Is there an echo in her? Yes, those last two comments! What did you mean by them?

BRUCE – Boy! You are just full of fire today. (Laughs. KAREN hits him with the crushed up paper megaphone again) Ouch! Same spot. (Laughs)

KAREN - Don't you laugh! (BRUCE stops laughing) "I can see why". Don't you think I'm pretty enough?

BRUCE - (Grasping for words) I, guess. I mean, well, yeah, I suppose, for an icky girl. But, I can see whereas I've seen better.

KAREN - What?

BRUCE – (Struggling) I mean, I mean...hoo-boy.

KAREN - (Pacing up and down, angrily) Ooooh, you get me so mad, sometimes! First you tell me I am pretty, then you tell me I'm *not* pretty. Well, I just want to say "Thank you, Bruce Talbot!" (Shakes his hand) Thanks for all your support. You are a real comfort, you know that? You sure think highly of women, don't you?

BRUCE – What did *I* say against *women*?

KAREN - You implied that we can't be pretty *and* successful in our careers at the same time. What's the matter? Why do you have to be the doubting Bruce all the time? Why can't you have a little faith in me, once in awhile?

BRUCE - Karen, the opposite of faith is not doubt.

KAREN - (Continuing her pacing) I'll tell you, maybe I *should* do the offer, just to convince you and other men that we women are capable of being both attractive *and* qualified business professionals! I mean, you said it yourself: other women have done it. Why not me?

BRUCE – Uh, okay.

KAREN - I'm damn good at what I do, and everyone around here knows it, too. That's why Mr. Henderson gave me the Alten account to begin with. So, who knows? (Stands in front of BRUCE and opens her blouse a little bit more, being sexy) It might even be (takes a deep breath, heaves herself towards BRUCE) "fun".

BRUCE - (Burps in her face, then bursts out laughing. KAREN backs off, angry) Sorry, babe. Nice try. That 'womanly ways' shit don't work on me. (Goes back over and starts moving the mop and bucket close to the office door) But, my advice is, if you're seriously considering doing this?

KAREN - (Earnestly) Yes?

BRUCE - Just friggin' shut up and *do* it, already!

KAREN - (Convinced, after a beat) Yeah. Why not?

BRUCE - (Leaves the mop and bucket by the door and approaches KAREN, reassuring) Yeah. Why not? That's what I've been trying to tell you all along, but you were being too stubborn to listen. So, I had to let you convince yourself.

KAREN - (Looks curiously at BRUCE) Wow. You are sneaky.

BRUCE - Uh-huh. But don't make any snap decisions. Talk to the guy. See what he has to offer you. Then, think it over carefully. That way, you can make the best decision. Not for anybody else...for you.

KAREN - (Looks deeper into BRUCE's eyes, sensing there's something less altruistic to his advice) Thank you, Bruce.

BRUCE - No problem. Gotta run. Six more people I gotta bug before lunch time. See you later, babe.

KAREN - Bruce?

BRUCE - (Turning back from the door) Yeah?

KAREN - All that stuff you just said to me, being so wise and thoughtful?

BRUCE - Yeah?

KAREN - You just said it 'cause you wanna see me naked huh?

BRUCE - (Smiles as he leaves the office) Heh-heh-heh. (KAREN throws a magazine at the closed door, as LIGHTS DIM. Scene Transitions to Act 1, Scene 2)

### **Act 1, Scene 2 – Karen's Apartment – Three Days Later**

(It's a week before KAREN begins her layout shoot for "Men's Media Magazine". LIGHTS UP on a well furnished apartment, with an extension leading into the bedroom area stage left. There is also an area for a kitchen, bordered by a breakfast bar or counter, with a spacious living room center. As the scene opens, KAREN and her MOTHER are sitting at the counter, facing each other on opposing sides. Having just been told by KAREN of the pictorial, MOTHER gives her initial reaction)

MOTHER - YOU WHAT?? Karen, how could you? How could you DO such a thing?

KAREN - (Firmly, but trying to have a calming tone) Mother, will you please calm down? It's not as bad as you make it sound. Really!

MOTHER - (Stepping down from the counter area) The blazes you say! I can't believe it, Karen. After all you've been taught.

KAREN - Oh, Mom, stop it. This goes against nothing I've been taught. It's going to be a first-class experience for me. It's all being done in good taste.

MOTHER - "Good taste"? It's a *nudie* magazine! (Looking up to the sky) I thought I would have taught you to use better judgment than this.

KAREN - There is no problem with my judgment. Right now, mother, my only problem is YOU.

MOTHER - I suppose people really don't change. You were always the presumptuous girl. (Reflecting) It was lack of better judgment that ruined your prom night.

KAREN - What are you talking about? My prom night was the best night of my life. So, Michael and I were a little late on my curfew.

MOTHER - Late? You didn't get home until the next morning!

KAREN - His, uh, van broke down. (MOTHER gives her a doubtful look) Mom, all kids are late coming home on prom night.

MOTHER - Your brother wasn't late.

KAREN - He didn't go to his prom. He dropped out of school.

MOTHER - Still.

KAREN - Mother, I really don't want to discuss this.

MOTHER - I am making a point.

KAREN - You're making a scene.

MOTHER - You informed me of Michael's van.

KAREN - (Overlapping) Back to the van?

MOTHER - (Continuing) At ten thirty that evening, my dear daughter. (Sits on couch)

KAREN - So?

MOTHER – (In an accusatory tone) So, you didn't make it home until four thirty the next morning!

KAREN – (Becoming a bit more uneasy) I told you we had to find someplace to wait till his van was fixed.

MOTHER - The "Great Neck Motel"?

KAREN – (Shocked) How did you know?

MOTHER - You used MY credit card to pay for the room!

KAREN - Oh, yeah. (Pauses, then embarrassed) Heh-heh-heh? (Admits) Okay, okay, okay! So, we fooled around, all right?

MOTHER - Oh-my-dear-Lord! Where did I fail? (Paces up and down room, KAREN right behind her) Where did I go wrong? Was it because... (Stops herself)

KAREN - Mom, please. You and I both know that it had to happen sometime. Michael and I were in love, so...

MOTHER - (Comes back to couch, looks to sky) Harry! Our only daughter made it with some grease monkey at a combination motel gas station.

KAREN - Mom...

MOTHER - A boy who, in seventh grade...

KAREN - Mom...

MOTHER - Ran into the girls locker room...

KAREN - Oh, mother...

MOTHER - Stole all of the girls training bras...

KAREN - (Whispering, exasperated) Oh, Jesus!

MOTHER - Ran them up the school flagpole...

KAREN – Would you stop it, already, Mom?

MOTHER - And sang at the top of his lungs (singing) "The hills are alive with a bunch of tissues"! (To KAREN) Oh, the PTA never recovered from that little fiasco. (Back to the sky) And now, Harry? Now our baby girl is going to pose in a sleazy magazine! (Starts to faint) I think I'm going to...

KAREN - (Furious) Okay, Mother. That's it! You always go off on these rants, and I'm sick of it! (Grabs her coat on chair stage left and heads for the door) I've had enough! I'm leaving! (KAREN exits through the door right. There is a slight pause. She returns and quietly shuts the door) I live here. (Returns to the couch and sits down next to her MOTHER)

MOTHER - Karen, I just don't know what I am going to do with you.

KAREN - (Holds up one hand as if to stop her MOTHER from saying anything else) Mom, there's nothing you are supposed to do. Can't you see that I am a grown woman who is capable of making her own decisions? I am a responsible adult who works for a reputable accounting firm.

MOTHER - Then why risk throwing away all you've accomplished? I'm really afraid that you're making a decision you'll regret later.

KAREN - Mom, I've been making decisions, right and wrong, for over quarter of a century, now. I don't recall anyone establishing an age for when a person is supposed to stop making decisions for themselves. God knows...

MOTHER – (Indignant) Oh, now don't bring *his* name into this discussion, young lady.

KAREN - What? Oh, please! Don't be such a prude!

MOTHER - What you're doing is for whores! Prostitutes!

KAREN - (Shocked, stands) Mother! How come you're being so Victorian about this? You had me during the sixties. Burning bras. Free love. (Can't think of anything else) Jim Morrison.

MOTHER – Well, it may have been the sixties, but this *isn't* the type of women my generation thought we'd be raising! (Grabs her things and storms out of the room, crying)

KAREN – Why are you over-reacting like this? (Chasing after her MOTHER) Mom, wait, please! (Door slams shut. KAREN speaks softly) Support me, don't condemn me. (A loud thud is heard from the bedroom area. KAREN slowly turns from the door and moves to the front of the couch and lights a cigarette) Bruce! Get out here this very minute! (BRUCE enters from the bedroom area clad only in a woman's bathrobe and a towel around his head for his wet hair. He crosses in front of KAREN moving to the chair left)

BRUCE - (Sitting) Man, I thought she'd NEVER leave!

KAREN - (Building into a furious rage) Bruce, I am angry. (BRUCE says nothing. KAREN goes over to the chair and leans over BRUCE) Look at my eyes. I am *angry*! (BRUCE flinches) How in the hell (BRUCE falls backwards in the chair) did you get in here?

BRUCE - (Peering over the chair) Relax, woudja? (Pulls out a set of keys from the pocket of the bathrobe) You gave me your spare keys and asked me to look at your leaky faucet, remember? I told you I wasn't sure when I could do it, so you gave me the key. I happened to have some time, so I came over.

KAREN - I told you to call first.

BRUCE - I *did* try to call, but I couldn't reach you. Your phone's shut off.

KAREN - What? (Goes over to the phone. Picks it up. Blows into it. Doesn't hear anything. Hangs up) Oh, damn!

BRUCE - You know, (Climbs back over the chair and sits down) I really gotta wonder about that business degree of yours if you can't even remember to pay a lousy twenty-seven dollar telephone bill.

KAREN - (Defensive) I *did* pay it, wise ass.

BRUCE – Then what happened?

KAREN - (Admitting) The check bounced.

BRUCE - Karen!

KAREN - Well, I had a charge come through and it was more than what I anticipated, so it threw my whole accounting off. (Pauses) Just *how* did you know my telephone bill was twenty-seven dollars?

BRUCE - It was next to the electric bill you threw in the trashcan back at the office.

KAREN - That figures. Why are you in my bathrobe? And why are you all wet?

BRUCE – Still full of questions, I see. Well, let's see. While I was in the bathroom I decided to take a look at your showerhead. So, I took a look at *it*, and *it* took a look at me, didn't like what it saw and *spit* all over me! So, I improvised some new attire. (Posing) What do you think?

KAREN - It does nothing for your eyes. (Blinking) Or mine. (Moves to the couch) Bruce, I should have you arrested for this stunt, but since I'm used to your little pranks from work *and* college, I'll let it slide... again.

BRUCE - (Puts his feet up on the coffee table in front of the chair, reflecting) Ah, yes! Fillmore Undergraduate College. Otherwise known as good old FUC. Those were the good old days, weren't they?

KAREN - (Ignoring him) Not for your teachers, I'm sure.

BRUCE - What? I graduated.

KAREN - You got kicked out!

BRUCE - I finished my last class.

KAREN - But you got kicked out!

BRUCE - I received my diploma.

KAREN - It was mailed to you, because *you got kicked out!*



BRUCE - It was a little prank. A teensy weensy little cherry bomb.

KAREN - That you set off under the dean's seat!

BRUCE – Could I help it if he didn't have a sense of humor about it?

KAREN - Bruce...(Giving up) Oh, forget it! (After a beat, changing the subject) Did you hear any of the conversation I had with my mother?

BRUCE – What? At graduation?

KAREN – No! Just now.

BRUCE – Just now? Nope.

KAREN - Good. (Sits)

BRUCE - I heard *all* of it. (KAREN scowls at BRUCE) Karen how could I not *help* but hear that shouting match? Relax. We all get into scuffles with our parents. Remember how my folks reacted after the cherry bomb incident? Don't worry - she'll come around.

KAREN - I sure hope so.

BRUCE - (Chuckles) That guy Michael sure sounded like a real *loser* to be losin' it *with*, though. Hah! What a joke!

KAREN - I'll ignore that last comment ...asshole. Anyway, Michael and I broke up shortly before we left for college.

BRUCE - Yeah. That's not uncommon, either. But hey – no loss.

KAREN - What makes you say that?

BRUCE - (Smiling at her) You met *me*, didn't you?

KAREN - (Sighs) Yes, and my life hasn't been sane since. God, (Lays back in the couch) to think I've put up with you for almost six years! Why have I tortured myself for so long?

BRUCE - Oh, perhaps it's just my charming personality. Besides, I was always there when you needed a friend. (KAREN throws him a doubting stare) I was! You know it. (KAREN nods. BRUCE goes to the refrigerator, opens the door and sticks his head all the way in) Got any eats or has the grocery store repossessed all your food?

KAREN - You'll find something, I'm sure. (Reflective) Yes, you've been there for me, I'll admit. (BRUCE takes out some small piece of food from the fridge and bites into it) And, I think I'll need you again for this one. (BRUCE spits out the food and sticks his head back into the fridge)

BRUCE - (Head still in the fridge) Karen, us what's the date today?

KAREN - April the sixth. Why do you ask?

BRUCE - Oh, well then (pulls out a smelly box of cheese, potent to both of them) I guess it's this cheese's birthday, huh? (Holds his nose, tosses the cheese to KAREN) Catch!

KAREN - Yah! (Moves away) Oh, my God! I got that cheese when I first moved in here!!

BRUCE - No wonder you don't entertain much.

KAREN - (Holds her nose) Trash dumpster...down the hall...get *rid* of it! (BRUCE complies as he takes an empty wastebasket, scoops up the box of cheese, and heads to the door. As he opens the door, ALTEN is there, about to knock on it. Carrying his briefcase, ALTEN reacts to the odor, as well)

ALTEN - My word! (Holds his nose)

BRUCE - Don't worry - it tastes worse than it looks. Excuse me. (BRUCE rushes out, closing the door behind him. There is the off-stage sound of cat calls, hoots and hollers from KAREN's neighbors at the sight of BRUCE in the pink bathrobe) Shaddup! Assholes! (KAREN and ALTEN look at one another. KAREN is rather embarrassed about the cheese incident. She motions to ALTEN to enter)

ALTEN - You know, pink is a very good color for him.

KAREN - Mr. Alten. Won't you come in?

ALTEN - You're sure this is a good time? (Looking back out where BRUCE just exited) I'm not, ahem, interrupting anything, am I?

KAREN - What? Bruce? Oh, no. We're just friends. He works in maintenance down at the office. He just stopped by to look at my plumbing.

ALTEN - I see. Well, if what he just tossed out came from your plumbing, I'd suggest seeking out a new residence, my dear. (He chuckles)

KAREN - (Laughs, then brings ALTEN down to couch) Please. Have a seat. (They BOTH sit. ALTEN places briefcase down next to him)

ALTEN - My personal assistant, Ms. Crom, informed me that you called? You've reconsidered my proposal?

KAREN - Well, I wanted to talk to you some more about it, if that's all right.

ALTEN - But why here? Why not at my mansion?

KAREN - Well, I guess I wasn't sure if I'd feel comfortable. I've heard some stories about some wild goings on there. I wanted to discuss this in a more neutral setting, if that's all right with you.

ALTEN - On your own "turf", eh? Well, it is a bit unusual. However, as I happened to be in the area, I adjusted my schedule to meet with you. I also wanted to apologize if I seemed a little forward with you earlier.

KAREN - Oh, Mr. Alten, I...

ALTEN - (Takes her hand again and holds it) Please. Marcus.

KAREN – (Flattered) All right. Marcus. I wanted to apologize for the way I blew up at you, too. I don't usually act that way with clients. I was just so shocked when you asked me to pose for your magazine. I mean, why me?

ALTEN - (Rising, almost wooing KAREN) Because, my lovely young lady, I have always sought to bring out the beauty in this world. Oh, the title of my magazine may suggest nudity, but that is merely for consumer productivity. Strictly for business purposes, if you will. Sometimes we have males pose for us, as well, but it's the female form which has always proven to be the most beautiful and most marketable commodity. It won't be easy, I'm sure, but in the end, we shall all benefit from the experience. Don't you think?

KAREN – (Nods, then shakes her head) I have no idea what you just said.

ALTEN - (Chuckling) Ah, you will see, later, when you come by my mansion for the actual shoot. (Pulls out some forms) But for now, I have the contracts ready to be signed. (Smiles, pulls out a pen and offers it to her) You will be our May centerfold.

KAREN - (Takes the pen, signs as ALTEN smiles and BRUCE comes back into the room) Where have you been? We were wondering what happened to you.

BRUCE - Well, that landlord of yours wouldn't let me throw the cheese into his nice clean dumpster. What a putz. Then, on the way back, one of your neighbors invited me in for some, um, "tea"? I had to tell *him* "no". I still had to find some way of getting rid of that cheese. (Heads for the bedroom area)

KAREN - So what did you do with it?

BRUCE - Oh, don't worry. I'm sure that puppy won't get too sick.

KAREN - (Disgusted and embarrassed) Oh, Bruce!

BRUCE - (Mimicking) Oh, Karen! Listen, I'll go see if my clothes are dry and get changed up. I gotta get outta here. Nice seeing you again, Mr. Alten.

ALTEN - (Puzzled) Have we met before, my good man?

BRUCE - (Exiting into the bedroom) Heh-heh-heh. (ALTEN stares, dumfounded. KAREN continues)

KAREN - Don't worry, Mr. Alten, you get used to it, after awhile. Shall we go on?

ALTEN - (Still staring) Ah, yes, well...(Back to the forms) The forms are pretty self-explanatory. (Looks at her) After you sign them, bring them to my mansion next Wednesday morning and present them to my secretary. Then, she'll take and introduce you to the photographer who will be managing the shoot.

KAREN – Just like that? That's all there is to it?

ALTEN – That's all there is. (Rises, smirking) You'll do marvelously, my dear.

KAREN - If you say so, Marcus. (Rises) Then, I guess that's it for now. (Follows ALTEN to the door)

ALTEN - (Opening the door) By the way, if you find yourself in need of assistance, (Pulls out another business card) don't hesitate to call me at once, at this new number.

KAREN - Another new number? Okay. (Takes the card and looks at it) My goodness. You sure do have quite a few numbers, Mr. Alten.

ALTEN – (Congenially) Please...Marcus.

KAREN – (Smiles) Marcus.

ALTEN - Well, yes. It keeps both myself and the phone company in business. Ta! (Exits)

KAREN - Good day, Marcus. (Shuts door, moves to bedroom entrance and calls out to BRUCE) Bruce? Are your clothes dry?

BRUCE - (From the bedroom) Not yet, but I found something else to wear. Alten take off?

KAREN - Yes. (Moves to couch) You know, maybe I had Alten all wrong. He genuinely seems to think I'm good enough to be in his magazine. Don't know why I was so suspicious. Said he wants me to go to the mansion Wednesday.

BRUCE - That when they're gonna shoot you?

KAREN - I wish you wouldn't put it like that, but yes.

BRUCE - You still sound a bit, I dunno, hesitant.

KAREN - Yeah, guess I am. (Pause) Bruce, if anything happens, (Sits down on the couch) can I count on you for some emotional support?

BRUCE - No.

KAREN - Bruce. Be serious.

BRUCE - Sorry. Sure, I guess. But, I'm sure Pam and your other geeky number crunching friends will support you, too.

KAREN - I'm talking about back at the office. I don't know what to expect there.

BRUCE - How can I help?

KAREN - Just promise me - Promise me you won't pick on me about it while we're at work.

BRUCE - You take all my fun away. You know that? (KAREN looks at the bedroom. BRUCE can feel her harsh stare from the bedroom and sighs) Okay. I promise.

KAREN - (Lights another cigarette) Thanks. (Curious as to why BRUCE hasn't emerged from the bedroom, yet) What the hell are you doing in there, anyway?

BRUCE - I'm afraid to come out.

KAREN - Why?

BRUCE - Because (Enters wearing a very bright pink jumpsuit, which is obviously too small for him) I don't think *this* outfit is going to be any better than the *bathrobe*!

KAREN - (Sees BRUCE and bursts out laughing) Oh, Bruce! It's you! (Puts out cigarette)

BRUCE - (Sarcastically) Ha-ha. Is everything you own pink? (KAREN is still laughing) It's *not that funny!* (KAREN stops laughing. Then starts up again) Jesus H. Christ. Let me know when you're all through making an ass of yourself.

KAREN - (Stops laughing) Okay. I'm done.

BRUCE - Good. (Serious) Now, Karen, I meant what I said. (Sits down on the couch next to KAREN) If you need me, I'm there. (Pauses) I always have been.

KAREN - (Rises) I know. (Smiles at him) Thank you, Bruce. (THEY stare at each other for a moment) Now, get out.

BRUCE - Huh?

KAREN - Get out of here. I wanna get some rest. You *can* let yourself out, I take it?

BRUCE - Let myself in, guess I can let myself out. (BRUCE watches KAREN exit into her bedroom) Good night.

KAREN - (From the bedroom) Night. (BRUCE exits. KAREN returns for a moment and looks back at the door. She smiles a very curious smile, then heads back into her bedroom. Beat. She then immediately returns with BRUCE's wet clothes and approaches the door) Bruce! (Opens the door, BRUCE is standing there. There is the sound of assorted cat calls and laughter again from the other residents) You forgot...

BRUCE - (Embarrassed) My clothes, I know. I know. (Takes the clothes from KAREN then leaves. KAREN closes the door and leans back against it) You all suck, you know that? (KAREN chuckles as she listens to the assorted cat calls and laughter from the neighbors. LIGHTS DIM as scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 3)

### **Act 1, Scene 3 – Alten's Mansion, Home to "MEN'S MEDIA MAGAZINE" - Wednesday**

(LIGHTS UP on the lavish Alten Estate. It is Wednesday, the day of the shoot. As the lights come up, we hear mid-eighties "heavy-on-the-keytar" disco sounding aerobic music playing as we see a huge living room area located right near the entrance doorway to the mansion. Two voluptuous girls, JUNE SOMMERS and AUTUMN FALL are seen exercising in the middle of the room. They are wearing matching brightly pastel-colored spandex workout attire, replete with ankle weights and leg warmers. Their hair is tied back into ponytails)

JUNE – (Counting out their exercise movements) And fo mo, thee mo, two mo, and stop, other si - an a one (beat), two (beat), thee (beat), fo! (This continues as we hear a knock at the door. The GIRLS continue exercising as the knocking persists, off-beat to the rhythm of the music, which starts to throw off the girls counting until they finally stop exercising and stare at each other)

AUTUMN - June, is there something wrong with the tape? It's sounds like it's skipping!

JUNE - I don't think cassettes *can* skip, Autumn.

AUTUMN - Oh, yeah. Duh! (They giggle as there is another knock at the door)

JUNE and AUTUMN - (Realizing) There's someone at the door! Duh! (They go over to the door and open it up. KAREN walks in carrying an envelope. KAREN is accompanied by her frumpy looking friend, PAMELA. PAMELA is short, a bit heavy, a nerd, and wears glasses and a sweater. PAMELA enters the room to stand between JUNE and AUTUMN, who are taller than she. She looks at the girls seemingly perfect bodies and sighs. JUNE AND AUTUMN BOTH cheer) Hi there! Welcome to the Alten mansion, home to "Men's Media Magazine"! (They giggle and jump up and down, which startles BOTH PAMELA AND KAREN)

PAMELA - I think I'll just go home now, Karen.

KAREN - Why, Pamela?

PAMELA - I wanna move the car into the garage, close the door and suck on the exhaust pipe.

KAREN - Pammy, don't go. I need you to stay with me. I'm not sure how I'll get through this day without you.

JUNE - Hi! I'm Autumn!

AUTUMN - And I'm June. Wait a minute.

JUNE - That's backwards.

JUNE and AUTUMN - Duh!

AUTUMN - I'm Autumn!

JUNE - And I'm June! Sorry! We get a little nervous when a new girl shows up with her mom.

PAMELA - (Looks at the GIRLS, then at KAREN, then realizes the GIRLS are talking about herself) What? I'm not her Mom! I'm her friend!

AUTUMN - (To KAREN) It's so nice of you to be kind to the elderly.

PAMELA - We're the same age!

JUNE and AUTUMN - (Gasping) You are? (THEY look at one another in horror)

JUNE - I am soooo happy for my plastic surgeon.

AUTUMN - Me, too. (Looks at KAREN) You must be, too.

KAREN - Me? (Defensive) I've never had plastic surgery. (AUTUMN and JUNE look at one another, then giggle)

AUTUMN - Sure! (Winks at JUNE)

JUNE - She's so adorable. So, you're here for your shoot, honey?

AUTUMN - Would you like to come in, sweetie?

PAMELA - (To herself) I wish I were in a coma.

KAREN - Yes, please. I was told to give this paperwork to Mr. Alten's secretary?

AUTUMN - Oh, Ms. Crom? She's in the grotto pool area. The pool guy's in her now.

PAMELA – (Correcting AUTUMN) You mean in *with* her?

AUTUMN - (Thinks for a moment) Well, I think he'd *have* to be. (To JUNE, tossing a sarcastic nod towards PAMELA) Duh.

PAMELA – (Rolling her eyes to KAREN) Good-bye.

KAREN – (Grabbing PAMELA's arm) So, I take it you two girls are models?

AUTUMN - Oh, we're MUCH more than models. (Proudly handing PAMELA a business card) I'm a licensed real estate broker!

PAMELA - (Looking at the card) Pretty impressive. (Looking closer at the card) Holy shit. I'm surprised they allowed you to use *that* photo on your business card.

AUTUMN - (Giggling) Oh, you like them? Mr. Alten had them specially made up. He said I'd get more clients that way. And you know something? He was right!

KAREN – I don't doubt it. (To JUNE, forgetting her name) And what do you do, uh, May?

JUNE - (Giggling) June. (Proudly) I work with kids. (Thinks) Actually, I work with babies. (Thinks) Actually, it's middle-aged guys who dress like babies. You know there was this one guy? Kept wanting to call me "Mommy". Creeped me out. (Concluding) But, I do like kids!

PAMELA - (To KAREN) Okay. Let's go. (Grab KAREN's arm, but KAREN pulls away and the two move to one side)

KAREN - No, Pam. I've signed the contract and I've already talked myself into doing it.

PAMELA – Why can't you talk yourself *out* of doing it?

KAREN - I need the money.

PAMELA – I'll loan you the money.

KAREN – You're broke, too!

PAMELA – (After a beat) Oh, yeah. That's right.

KAREN – Look, Pam. I've got to do this. I'm committed.

PAMELA - You should be...for even *thinking* of doing something like this.

KAREN - Now, don't you start. You sound like my mother.

PAMELA – (Speculating) You know something? I think you actually *want* to do this. (KAREN says nothing) That's it, isn't it? You actually want to do this.

KAREN – (Admitting) Is it *that* terrible?



PAMELA – (After a pause, considers) Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe I'm just being a little jealous bitch. I dunno. I just don't want to see you hurt, that's all.

KAREN – I know. Thanks. (Returning to AUTUMN and JUNE) Sorry about that.

PAMELA – Yeah. Just had to talk something over with my "little girl", here.

AUTUMN – (Smiling) No prob! Why don't you give me the stuff for Ms. Crom and I'll go bring it to her?

KAREN - That would be great, thank you. (Hands her the envelope)

PAMELA - (Murmuring) Any luck she'll fall in and drown.

KAREN - Pamela. (AUTUMN jogs out to the next room which is offstage right,)

PAMELA – (Watching AUTUMN jog) Oh, yeah. I forgot. Silicone floats.

KAREN - (Elbows PAMELA) So, June! That's a pretty name. What's your last name?

JUNE - (Thinks about it for a moment) Sommers.

PAMELA - June Sommers?

JUNE - Yeah. Autumn's last name is Fall.

KAREN - June Sommers? Autumn Fall? (Looking at their breasts) Those are your real...uh, names?

JUNE - Oh, no. Those are our stage names. We only use our real names on like contracts and legal crap like that.

PAMELA - So what is your real crappy name? (JUNE stares off) Never mind. (To KAREN) I knew it was going to be too tough a question. (AUTUMN returns with MARTHA CROM, who has a bathrobe on. She is an older woman with white hair that's pulled back into a shower cap. MS. CROM has the envelope in her hands)

MS. CROM - (To KAREN) Sorry to keep you waiting. I'm Ms. Crom. You are Ms. McPherson?

KAREN - Yes, Ma'am.

MS. CROM - You wanna stick with that name?

KAREN - It's my name.

MS. CROM - It's your life.

PAMELA - Could we move it along, Ms. Crumb? There's a strong smell of hairspray in here that's starting to make me nauseous.

MS. CROM - (Looking at the paperwork) It's "Crom". Not "Crumb".

PAMELA - You wanna keep *that* name?

MS. CROM - (Looks at PAMELA) You must be the mother. (PAMELA rolls her eyes again, offended, starts to leave)

KAREN - (Grabbing onto PAMELA's arm again) She's my friend. She's here to support me, Ms. Cram.

PAMELA – Crumb.

MS. CROM – Crom! I'm Mr. Alten's personal assistant. (Open's the envelope KAREN brought) I'll be checking your paperwork and then we'll get you over to the photographer. (Looks over the enclosed paperwork) Just *how old are you?*

KAREN - Twenty-five.

JUNE and AUTUMN - (Pitying) Aww.

MS. CROM – Hmmm. Usually we don't take girls that old. Mr. Alten must really like you.

KAREN - (Shrugs her shoulders) I guess.

MS. CROM – Can't understand why. (Sees on the application) You work at the Wilson Auditing Firm?

KAREN - Yes, I'm an auditor and financial consultant.

MS. CROM – Ah-hah! (Shaking her head) Now it makes sense. (KAREN looks at PAMELA, not understanding what MS. CROM is talking about. MS. CROM puts all the paperwork back into the envelope) June. Autumn. Why don't you girls take Karen down to the photographer?

KAREN - (Confused) So soon? Is that all there is?

MS. CROM - That's it.

KAREN - Don't you have any more questions?

MS. CROM - Yes. I do have one.

KAREN - What?

MS. CROM - Could your "friend" possibly wait for you in the grotto area? We're going to be having some work done and she might feel more comfortable out there.

KAREN - (To PAM) Pam?

PAMELA - Why don't I just wait in the car for you, Karen? (PAMELA sees A HANDSOME MAN, GUIDO, stepping into the room from the next room offstage right, clad only in swim trunks. He is NOT an eloquent speaker)

GUIDO – Yo, Martha! Is yous comin' back or what?

MS. CROM - (Answering) I'm afraid not, Guido. I've got work to do.

PAMELA - (Stunned) Who...who...who is that?

MS. CROM - That's the pool guy.

PAMELA - (Quickly changing her tune) I'll be in the grotto, Karen. (Joins GUIDO to exit back out. Looks back one more time to throw KAREN a big smile) So, Guido. Can you show me that thing you use to clean the pool?

GUIDO - What? You means my stick?

PAMELA – Oh, yes. I means your "stick". (Out)

JUNE - (Giggling, to AUTUMN) I like her.

AUTUMN - Yeah. She sure is a funny old lady!

KAREN - (To the GIRLS) She's not (Realizing how futile it is to explain) ah the hell with it. (To MS. CROM) Ms. Crom. I was wondering if you knew if Mr. Alten was going to be here today?

MS. CROM - Mr. Alten's away on business. He won't be returning for at least three months.

KAREN – Three months?

MS. CROM - Don't worry, though. The girls will introduce you to Antoine, Mr. Alten's principal photographer. He does all our layouts. (Gently grabs KAREN's face and turns her cheeks right and left) Hmm. He may need to do more brush strokes than usual to get rid of some of these age lines.

KAREN – Age lines? What...?

MS. CROM - (Letting go of KAREN's face) But you needn't worry, my dear. You are in good hands.

AUTUMN - C'mon!

JUNE - Let's go! (JUNE AND AUTUMN escort KAREN out, leaving MS. CROM alone on stage. There is a pause. Then, from the outside door, ALTEN quietly enters the room. He approaches MS. CROM center)

ALTEN - It's done, then?

MS. CROM - All set, sir.

ALTEN - Good.

MS. CROM - Are you certain this plan of yours will work?

ALTEN - It had better, Ms. Crom. It had better. I'll be checking in from my "other" office. You have the number at the hotel? (MS. CROM nods) Let me know the minute the money's been wired into the off-shore account. (Indicating to where KAREN left) Also keep me posted on *her* progress. It's critical to the whole operation. I'm counting on you, Mildred.

MS. CROM - Martha, sir.

ALTEN - Martha, Martha. Of course. Excuse me. (Heading back out the door, he turns back one more time) Remember: Three A.M. Tuesday. (Exits)

MS. CROM – Three A.M. Tuesday. (LIGHTS DIM as scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 4)

#### **Act 1, Scene 4 - Back at the Wilson Auditing Firm - Six Weeks Later**

(LIGHTS Up again on the Wilson office. The May edition of "MEN'S MEDIA MAGAZINE" has just been released, with KAREN as its centerfold. As the scene begins, numerous EMPLOYEES are gathered around a coffee machine cart, gabbing away on the subject of the spread. A MALE EMPLOYEE runs over to the other EMPLOYEES, carrying a copy of the magazine. He calls to the others)

MALE EMPLOYEE - Hey, guys! C'mere! Check this out! (The EMPLOYEES comply and move stage right to meet the MALE EMPLOYEE. He opens up the issue and unfolds the centerfold picture of KAREN. Assorted reactions as the FEMALE EMPLOYEES react with disgust while the MALE EMPLOYEES react with hoots and hollers. However ALL commotion stops as KAREN enters through the stage center door. THE MALE EMPLOYEE hides the magazine quickly as EVERYONE returns to their desks. KAREN pauses, notices everyone acting strangely, with some staring at her. She proceeds to her office. While passing the cart, THREE WOMEN give her nasty looks. KAREN enters her office and closes the door)

KAREN - (Under her breath) Okay, I guess it's starting. (Phone rings. KAREN answers it) Hello? (Pause) Hello? (Pauses) Could you breathe a little louder so I can get your name? (Slams the phone down) Jesus H. Christ! People are so cruel. Don't they ever get tired of such sick garbage? (Sits) I just need one more thing to go wrong this week, and I'll...

HENRY - (Enters with a vase of flowers in hand, smiling ear-to-ear) Hi, Karen! (KAREN plops her head onto her desk) I just thought I'd stop in to see how our little busy bee is doing on this fine morning.

KAREN - (Head still on desk) Henry, what do you want? (Raises head) Another (Looks away quickly) Oh, damn those teeth, Henry. Turn off the power, will you please? Those teeth are going to give me sunburn.

HENRY - (Still smiling, stubbornly polite) Now, now, now. Is that any way to treat an admirer? (Leans over, pinches her cheek) Hmmmm? You should relax. Enjoy the day. (Puts the vase of flowers on her desk) I brought these flowers just for you. Aren't they lovely?

KAREN - (Unimpressed) Lovely. Thank you, Henry.

HENRY - Oh, don't thank me. Mr. Henderson ordered me, ahem, that is, he asked me if I would give them to you.

KAREN - How nice of him.

HENRY - But of course it *was* I who ordered them for him and *brought* them to you, *personally*.

KAREN - How nice of *both* of you, then. And why do I deserve such an honor, Henry?

HENRY - (Pinches her cheek again) Oh, don't act so naive, my dear. If it weren't for you, our clientele would not have doubled in a mere few weeks. So, these flowers are merely our way of saying "Thank you".

KAREN - Thanks. I guess.

HENRY - (Trying to sound sincere, but sounding more accusatory) It's simply astounding how you've managed to book so many audits lately. Any idea how this phenomenon may have occurred?

KAREN - I have a theory. (Sidesteps the issue) But, if you don't mind, Henry, I've got work to do. (Phone rings) and I'm sure you've got a lot of sucking up to do elsewhere. (Picks up the phone) Hello? (Pause) Hello? (Pause) God Damn You! (Slams the phone down. She turns her back to HENRY as she throws the telephone into the bottom drawer of the file cabinet)

HENRY - My, my. A little edgy on this fine May morning, aren't we little (Pats her behind) busy bee? (KAREN turns to slap HENRY, but before she can HENRY pulls out a copy of the magazine from where he had it hidden in his suit. Cautioning) Now, now, now. I don't think we want to discuss matters of "impropriety", now do we?

KAREN - (Grabs the magazine and throws it away) As a matter of fact I *do* want to discuss it, Henry. (HENRY is startled) Let's start with the fact that you are an inappropriate slimy little weasel. You come in here with your smarmy attitude (KAREN starts backing HENRY up to her office door. On her way, picks up the flowers from her desk) and stick *these* in my face.

HENRY – Well, I...

KAREN – Then, you touch me in an area which is, using office lingo, "restricted for private use only". And then, you suggest that my doing this magazine was “inappropriate”? (HENRY is now verbally pinned against the door) Henry, if you *ever* want to enter this office, *my* office, ever again, you had better comply with three conditions or I swear I will file a lawsuit against you and this company so quickly it will make your head spin.

HENRY - (Frightened) Wh-wh-what?

KAREN - First, we talk business and *only* business. Second, no messages from Henderson. If he wants to talk to me, let him talk to me personally. And three...Are we listening Henry?

HENRY - (Nodding very fast) You have my complete and undivided attention. (Opens door)

KAREN - Don't you ever, EVER call me your "busy bee" ever again! Now, if you don't mind, *Mister* Corbett, GET OUT OF MY OFFICE!

HENRY - (Leaving quickly) Yes, Miss McPherson, sir! I'm going! (KAREN slams the door, walks back to her desk with the flowers. KAREN pulls the flowers out of the vase, walks back to the door, opens it and throws the flowers out)

KAREN - And take your plastic fake flowers with you! (Slams the door shut. Returns to her desk and picks up her files to start working. BRUCE enters wearing a new suit and the thrown flowers)

BRUCE - Hey, Karen. Funny thing just happened. I came across these flowers and immediately knew that I just had to get them for you. They just flew right at me. (KAREN again plops her head on her desk. BRUCE plants the flowers back in the vase on KAREN's desk) Everybody in the office wanted me to thank you.

KAREN - (Raising her head) Thank me? For what?

BRUCE - (Sitting on the side of the desk) For telling off that shitty little weasel. You told Henry exactly what everybody here feels about him. Good job, (imitating HENRY) you "little busy bee" you.

KAREN - (Stands up) Don't call me that!

BRUCE - (Chuckling) Sorry, but take the flowers, anyway.

KAREN - (Looks at the flowers, then at BRUCE) Fine. From YOU I'll accept the flowers, plastic though they may be.

BRUCE - Good girl. Dust regularly.

KAREN - But, as for the others, you can tell them all to kiss my ass.

BRUCE – Ummm...right now I don't think that's the message you wanna send.

KAREN - Why not?

BRUCE - Because, (Grabbing the magazine from wherever it landed after KAREN threw it) given the circumstances, some may take you up on that offer.

KAREN – (Sighing) Oh, Jesus Christ. (Takes the magazine from him). Then everybody can all just go to hell.

BRUCE – Who else besides Henry has been giving you a hard time?

KAREN - (Goes over to the door and points out) The entire city! I've never received so many crank and obscene phone messages since my Uncle Norman died.

BRUCE - Uncle Norman? Wait. Wasn't he that camp counselor they found up in a tree house with a dominatrix?

KAREN - That's him.

BRUCE - Quite a family you got there, Karen.

KAREN – Tell me about it. You remember Michael? My old boyfriend? (BRUCE nods) He called.

BRUCE – He did?

KAREN – Yeah, said we should "get together" sometime. I told him to go take some tissues and shove them up his ass.

BRUCE - You didn't!

KAREN - I did! But it didn't faze him. Know what he does for a living now?

BRUCE - I shudder to ask.

KAREN - Sells bras.

BRUCE - Go figure. (KAREN Heads back to her desk and picks up her pocketbook)

KAREN - I can't take it anymore, Bruce. Plus, get this: I haven't been paid, yet. I can't get in touch with Alten, either. (Pulls out business card) I tried reaching him at the number listed on his business card. A message comes on and says "the number you have dialed is temporarily out of service at the owner's request".

BRUCE - (Taking the card from KAREN) I don't doubt it, with the fire and all.

KAREN - (Curious) What fire?

BRUCE - The fire at Alten's mansion. It happened about a week or so after your shoot. Burned the whole place down. How could you not know?

KAREN – (Shakes her head) I couldn't reach them.

BRUCE - But it was in the news.

KAREN - I don't watch the news.

BRUCE - You really need to expose yourself to more new things, Karen.

KAREN – “Exposing” myself is what got me into this mess to begin with. I (noticing the suit BRUCE is wearing) What's with the suit?

BRUCE - Now she notices! It's my day off and I'm taking you to lunch.

KAREN - Lunch? Why?

BRUCE - Because I got my tax refund and I wanted to splurge a little. That okay with you?

KAREN - I guess so. But won't that be sorta like a date?

BRUCE - (Standing, indignant) Eww! Pish-tosh! Don't flatter yourself. You're not exactly June Sommers, y'know.

KAREN – Sure. (After a beat) I thought about getting my number changed.

BRUCE – (Looks around, then back at KAREN) What? Oh, we're back on the old subject again, aren't we?  
(KAREN nods) Thought so. So, why don't you?

KAREN - Because I don't want to start hiding. Plus I use my home phone for business sometimes.

BRUCE - Okay.

KAREN - But I'm just sick of the stares. Guys leering at me. Girls scowling at me. All of them talking about me behind my back. Except this one girl, Sheila, whose been nothing but supportive since the whole thing began.

BRUCE - Sheila? Isn't she the dyke from the copy room?

KAREN – (After a beat) Well, that explains all those free hole punches she's been giving me.

BRUCE - How's your mom taking it?

KAREN - She hasn't spoken to me in almost six weeks.



BRUCE – Wow. That's gotta be rough. Look, Karen, these things pass by so quickly. Give it another week and it'll all be ancient history. Trust me.

KAREN – (Shakes her head) I doubt it. The only other people I can count on, besides Sheila, of course, are you and Pammy. Pam's been busy with her new boyfriend. And I hardly ever see you anymore, since they moved you to the night shift.

BRUCE - Confidentially, I was *always* on the night shift. They just caught me working daytime hours one too many times and said I either work the hours I'm supposed to work or I can find another job. So, I found another job.

KAREN - (Surprised) What? What do you mean?

BRUCE - Well, that's the surprise I was gonna tell you about at lunch. I just got a part-time job as a correspondent for the "Millborough County Sentinel".

KAREN - (Pleased for him) What? Bruce, that's wonderful! So, you're finally going to put that journalism degree to work, huh?

BRUCE - (Smiles proudly) I think even old Dean Willoughby would be proud, huh? But, my new hours means I have to give up my job here.

KAREN - (Upset) What? You mean, you won't be around to bug me, anymore? (Punches him gently) You jerk.

BRUCE - Yeah, I (interrupted by HENRY entering the office again. HENRY carries a white flag and slowly peeks his head inside the door) Hey! It's the weasel! Hi Henry!

KAREN - (Still angry at HENRY) What do you want, Henry?

HENRY - (Sheepishly) Um, excuse m-m-me. Mr. Henderson w-would like to s-see you in his o-o-office immediately. (Exits quickly, slamming door)

KAREN - That little fink! He went and told Henderson that I threw his ass out of my office.

BRUCE - How do you know that?

KAREN - We're talking about Henry, aren't we?

BRUCE - Oh, yeah. (Shakes his head) Karen, I really don't think that's what Henderson wants to see you about.

KAREN - (Heads for her file cabinet to get the phone) What? (Stops. Forgets the phone) Why?

BRUCE - Because Henderson is one of them old school "good ol' boys". Oh, he may give the impression of being a southern gentleman, but he's always been interested in the "advancement of his female employees", IF you know what I mean.

KAREN - What? Bruce. You must be mistaken. I mean, look at how many women work for Mr. Henderson.

BRUCE - In "administrative" positions, secretaries and receptionists. Look, a good reporter isn't inclined to spread rumors, but I have heard a lot of stories passing by the coffee cart.

KAREN - I don't believe it. You've never passed by a coffee cart in your life. Look, Henderson has never been anything but a gentleman around me. So, I don't have time for your unsubstantiated claims, Mr. Reporter. Come back at around noon and we can have that lunch. Okay?

BRUCE - Fine. Okay. (Steps in front of KAREN as she heads for the door) Karen, I...

KAREN – (Stopping) What?

BRUCE - Nothing. See you at noon. (KAREN looks at him curiously, fixes his tie for him, then exits. BRUCE watches her leave, then says to himself) If that woman were visiting a maximum-security prison, she'd ask for directions to the nearest ladies room. (LIGHTS DIM as scene TRANSITIONS to Act 1, Scene 5)

### **Act 1, Scene 5 - Mr. Henderson's Office – Moments Later**

(LIGHTS UP on an extremely well furnished room with numerous certificates and pictures adorning the walls. MR. HENDERSON is seated center in a high-back tufted chair behind his desk, busily signing papers. His business solitude is interrupted by KAREN bursting through his office door stage right. KAREN begins pacing, obviously anxious about this meeting. HENDERSON, unfettered, keeps writing)

KAREN - (Babbling) Mr. Henderson, sir. I am flattered by the fact that you think I'm responsible for the increase in the number of our clients, but sending Mr. Corbett into my office with flowers? I mean, really. I do my job and I do it well, and if he came into this office to tell you anything negative about the work that I do here, well let me just tell you that Mr. Corbett is the most irritating and obnoxious person I have ever had the displeasure of working with. (HENDERSON keeps writing) And he said and...did...some things which I found totally unacceptable. So, if that's why you called me in here, well I just wanted you to know that I have no intention of apologizing to him. (After a beat) Sir.

HENDERSON - (Still writing, speaks in a dry, southern drawl) Just who the fuck *are* you, anyway?

KAREN - (Embarrassed) Oh, my God! You have no idea why I'm here, do you? (HENDERSON stops writing, looks up at KAREN and shakes his head) Uhhh...McPherson. Karen McPherson. That's my name. I am so sorry about babbling like that, sir. (Starts to babble again) You see, I thought you sent Mr. Corbett into my office to have him tell me to come see you about what he had done back in my office, and I thought maybe you wanted to talk to me about my actions regarding Mr. Corbett back in my office when he...

HENDERSON - Ms. McPherson?

KAREN - Yes sir?

HENDERSON - You're doin' it again, ma'am. Babbling? (Puts his pen down on his desk and sits back in his chair) Now, just who the hell is Coronet?

KAREN - Corbett, sir. Henry Corbett. Henry?

HENDERSON – Oh, yes! The little weasel.

KAREN - Yes, sir. That's him. And he just aggravated me so much, that I just had to...

HENDERSON - (Motions her to stop) Ma'am, please! Don't start that again! I'm beggin' you! I didn't call you in here to discuss your issues with Conway.

KAREN – Corbett.

HENDERSON – Whatever. (Rises, walks over to file cabinet stage left) But, I *will* have a talk with Corbin...

KAREN – Corbett.

HENDERSON – Whatever...next time I...well, recognize him, anyway. (Opens the cabinet) Have a seat, won't you? (Fumbling through files in the cabinet) I'll be with you in just a second.

KAREN - (Relieved) Thank you, sir.

HENDERSON - Tell me, Ms. McPherson. How often is it that you barge into office shouting at your superiors?

KAREN - (Humbled) I'm really sorry about that, Mr. Henderson. I really am. Henry just got me so riled up.

HENDERSON - Don't be. (Shuts the cabinet drawer after taking out a file) That's just the kind'a gumption it takes to make an employee an employer someday. Why, that's how I got to where I am today. Know where I'm comin' from, little lady?

KAREN - (Nodding) I think so, sir. Thank you?

HENDERSON - Why, I built this galdurn company up from an acre o' shit, and it's given me forty-five years of the greatest pleasures known to man. Know what that is?

KAREN - Self satisfaction at a job well done, sir?

HENDERSON - (Mimicking) "Self-satisfaction at a job well done?" (Stern) Fuck that! Money! Money, and the power that it brings to an otherwise ordinary, common man. Power. That's what I'm talkin' about. I'm not the kind of man who stands on formalities. I come out and I tell people what I think. (Steps towards KAREN) If I felt like callin' you a Goddamnsonuvabitchboy, why you better believe I *will* call you a Goddamnsonuvabitchboy! That way we BOTH know where we stand. You see where I'm comin' from?

KAREN - (Starts to nod, then shakes her head) I'm not entirely sure. But it sure sounds interesting.

HENDERSON - Nah! You don't have the foggiest idea what I mean! That's why I'm up here in the president's office and you're two flights down. But, (now halfway between the desk and her with the folder) here's why I called you into this office. (Extends the file to KAREN, putting it on her lap gently) Do you know what the contents of this file are?

KAREN - (Reading the label on the file) It's Mr. Alten's audit. Is there a problem?

HENDERSON - Got a call from the FBI this morning. Seems they wanted to know the whereabouts of Mr. Alten. They went to his estate early this morning and he was gone.

KAREN - Gone?

HENDERSON - Disappeared off the face of the earth. They've begun a manhunt for him.

KAREN - A manhunt! Why?

HENDERSON - It appears he's been filtering money to an off-shore account. A little discrepancy that you didn't pick up on in your audit. That's why they called me. They wanted to know if I knew anything about this.

KAREN - But, I looked over all of his books meticulously!

HENDERSON - You looked over what Alten *gave* you to look over. He switched *his* company's audits for ours while you weren't looking!

KAREN – That's impossible!

HENDERSON – Not really. While he was wooin' you into posin' for his nudie magazine, he probably kept you busy long enough so's you wouldn't see him take the file. The only reason the feds caught wind of it is because he tried to funnel money he collected from his insurance company.

KAREN – Mr. Henderson, I...

HENDERSON – Lemme finish. Seems Alten torched the place, filed a claim, collected the insurance money and tried to funnel it into an off-shore account. But somebody tipped the Feds. When they reached his estate, he'd split. Nobody knows where he is. Stoppin' him was the easy part. Now, the feds have gotta find Alten, and I gotta figure out what to do with you.

KAREN - What do you mean?

HENDERSON - Well, this news is gonna hit the papers as early as tomorrow. Seems to me it won't take long till they find out about your connection to the whole mess. Then all those "new clients" you was just cheering on about are gonna take their business elsewhere.

KAREN - What?

HENDERSON - Take another look inside that folder. (KAREN opens it up)

KAREN - Letters. About me.

HENDERSON - Statements written by your supervisors, requesting your immediate dismissal.

KAREN - (Stands shocked) Dismissal? Me?

HENDERSON - You sure are a little slow on the uptake, aint'cha? Yes! They want me to fire you.

KAREN - Wait a minute. First you send me flowers telling me what a good job I've done. Now, less than an hour later, you're firing me?

HENDERSON - Sit down, little lady. (KAREN complies) I said they were *requests* for your dismissal. I make my own decisions. I gotta weigh all the factors involved before I fire an employee. I've done that in your case. (Pulls out a copy of "Men's Media Magazine") This all started because of you appeared in this magazine.

KAREN - But, I swear I didn't know what Alten was up to.

HENDERSON - Of course you didn't. That's the point. He took advantage of you because you were gullible! Stupid. Foolish! That's not the kind of reliable auditing this firm has built its reputation on. Not only might you be found criminally negligent, but WE also might be held liable.

KAREN - (Defeated) So, I'm fired?

HENDERSON – (Nodding) Considerin' the path you went down and the severity of this blunder, I'd say you was lucky you weren't fired weeks ago.

KAREN - Mr. Henderson, please! This isn't fair. I mean, there must be some other way. Some other way to convince you that I really am good at my job. That I just made a stupid mistake and that it won't happen again.

HENDERSON - (Pauses, looks up at her) As a matter of fact, there *is* a way you can convince me.

KAREN - There is? What?

HENDERSON - Sleep with me.

KAREN – Oh, shit. (After a beat) What?

HENDERSON - (Flips through the magazine) You are one fine, sexy lookin' little filly and I wanna ride ya'. (Rises, stands behind KAREN)

KAREN - Mr. Henderson, is this the way you got to the top?

HENDERSON - Nah, but now I *am* at the top, an' I'm offerin' you a chance to save your job. (Starts nibbling on her neck) Mebbe we could find you a nice secretaries' job somewhere.

KAREN - (Grumbling to herself) Suddenly, Henry's beginning to look a little better. (Lights start to fade)

HENDERSON – (From the darkness) Oh, Mommy!

**Blackout.**

**End of Act One**

**ACT TWO**

**Act 2, Scene 1 – Wilson Auditing Firm – Later That Night**

(LIGHTS UP on the Wilson Auditing Firm's main office. It is evening, and the office is bare of all activity and people. It's dimly lit save for Karen's office. Karen's taking some stale, leftover coffee from the coffee cart. She then proceeds to sit at her desk across from PAMELA. It is very, very quiet. MOTHER enters with a handbag through the main office door, and quietly moves to the entrance to KAREN's office. KAREN doesn't see her at first. KAREN takes a sip of her cold, stale coffee)

KAREN - (To PAMELA) So, I don't know what I should do next, Pam. If I sue Henderson for harassment, innocent people here at the firm could lose their jobs for something I did. If I don't, I'll have to live with *what* I did for the rest of my life.

PAMELA - The thing that still bothers me is Alten. Where the fuck could he have disappeared to?

KAREN - I don't know. Bruce's new newspaper is out looking for him.

PAMELA - Well, maybe I can help. (Looks around for the telephone) Where's your phone?

KAREN - Isn't your ride coming?

PAMELA - Just gimme the phone. (KAREN pulls the phone back out of the bottom file drawer and places it on the desk in front of PAMELA. PAMELA just stares down at the phone for a second, then back up at KAREN) You know, (Pulls out a business card from her purse) if you kept your desk a little neater (Picks up the phone and starts dialing) you wouldn't have to keep the phone in the file cabinet. (Pauses as somebody picks up on the other end) Hi. Is this Summer? (After a beat) Sorry, I meant "Autumn". (Pauses) I don't know whether or not you remember me, but my name is Pamela and we met last month at Mr. Alten's mansion. (After a beat) No, *not* the "four-way-around-the-world", but thanks for the image. I was with Karen McPherson, this month's playmate? (Pauses, shakes her head) Yeah, the mother. Listen, do you have a few minutes? I need to ask you a few questions. (After a beat) Great. You're just around the corner from me, so I'll be down in about ten minutes. Okay? (After a beat) Yeah. (Pauses) Bye. (Pauses) Hang up the phone now, dear. (Hears giggling on the other end of the phone. Hangs up)

KAREN - What do you...

PAMELA - It may be nothing, but I just want to ask her a couple of real estate questions. (GUIDO enters, dressed in an expensive looking suit, with his hair slicked back)

GUIDO - Yo, Pammy! You ready or what? I got da pool van out front, and I don't think this buildin' has a pool for me ta clean, so we's better get a move on, 'kay?

PAMELA - (Picking up her things and joining him at the door) I'm coming, Guido. (Returns to KAREN, giddy) I can't tell you how many times I've said that in the last month. (Heads back to the door, returns to KAREN, squealing) *Thirty-seven!* Ay-yi-yi! (Runs back out the door with GUIDO in tow. KAREN sips her coffee again)

KAREN - This coffee sucks. (There is a pause as KAREN looks up and sees her MOTHER standing there in the doorway. The two stare at each other for a moment before MOTHER speaks)

MOTHER - I (hesitating) got your message. (KAREN doesn't say anything) Mrs. Millborough, the maid, left it on the dining room table.

KAREN - I (hesitating) didn't think you'd come.

MOTHER - (Steps towards her) I almost didn't. You said, in the note that it was urgent and to meet you here. Why?

KAREN - (Becoming increasingly upset) Oh, Mom. I never thought it would turn out this way. Everything just seemed to unravel so quickly!

MOTHER - Karen, (Comes around to the other side of KAREN's desk to comfort her) Just tell me all about it, sweetheart. What happened?

KAREN - (Composing herself) I'm sorry. I don't mean to fall apart. Mr. Henderson, my boss? Well, he threatened to fire me unless I slept with him.

MOTHER - What? I can't believe that in this day and age a man would still try to pull such (having trouble finding the right word) such, such "crap".

KAREN - Well, he did.

MOTHER - So, what did you do?

KAREN - Well, I wasn't sure what to do.

MOTHER - Karen...you didn't...

KAREN – Mother! Of course I didn't. I pushed him away and kicked him.

MOTHER - You kicked him?

KAREN - Yes. And I won't tell you where, but let's just say he won't be "advancing" any female employees around here for a while.

MOTHER - (Breathing a sigh of relief) Thank goodness! It's nice to see that you still have some of your faculties left. (Hugs her) Are you going to press charges?

KAREN - I can't. You see, because of a mistake I made, the firm would get in trouble. People could lose their jobs.

MOTHER - I'm confused. What mistake?

KAREN - The pictorial I did? Turns out it was all a ruse. Mr. Alten, the magazine owner, only selected me in order to take my attention away from his more "creative" enterprises. My posing for him put this firm in jeopardy, but Henderson said he could make things right if I slept with him.

MOTHER - But you didn't sleep with him.

KAREN – (Nodding) Now I'm fired and there's nothing I can do about it.

MOTHER – Not necessarily. You could fight it.



KAREN - Fight what? Just because Henderson was wrong doesn't make what I did right! I let Alten manipulate me, and now I need to face the consequences. No one else. No. I'll just go. Let Henderson fix what needs to be fixed and I'll get another job.

MOTHER - Well, it's your decision, Karen. Like you said, you're an adult. You made a mistake, so now you'll do what you can to put things right. I hadn't realized how much of an adult you were until I saw your pictures.

KAREN – (Shocked) Mother! You *read* Men's Media Magazine?

MOTHER - (Indignant, takes KAREN's coffee cup) Please. I threw it in the trash where it belongs. But...I *did* save out *your* pictures, and you are as beautiful as the day your father and I first set our eyes on you. (Takes a sip of coffee and reacts) You're right, dear. This coffee does suck.

KAREN - (Smiling) Mom.

MOTHER - I do have a question, though. Were you trying to prove something by posing for the photos? (Pulls out a magazine from her handbag)

KAREN – I don't even know anymore, Mom. Maybe I was trying to prove something, to me.

MOTHER - What do you mean?

KAREN – I was so nervous when I got there. (Coming around the desk, KAREN stops center and paints the scene for her MOTHER) After the girls took me to meet the photographer, we got started. Things were moving so fast, it was like being caught in a whirlwind. All I know for sure is that: being there under the bright lights, dressing for the camera in soft, silky beautiful lingerie, with my hair done up like it's never been done before, I felt for the first time in my life, like I was the most beautiful woman in the world.

MOTHER – (Envious) I wish it had been that way for me.

KAREN - What do you mean? What are you talking about?

MOTHER - I want to show you something I never even showed your father. (Hands her a copy of an old men's magazine, opens up to the page where she appears nude)

KAREN - Mom! Oh, sweet Jesus! Oh, my God!! This is you! But who the hell are these *other people*??

MOTHER - (Embarrassed) You see, my dear, another charming man approached *me* when I was young. Only I was in *love* with him. I would have done anything for him.

KAREN – Looks like you did. (Looking closer) Is that a monkey?

MOTHER - He convinced me that doing these pictures would bring us closer together.

KAREN - Just how close did he want to be? (MOTHER turns the page) That close?

MOTHER - But I didn't know he was from a magazine, and I never expected these pictures to be made public. I didn't even know they existed for almost two years, and by then, it was too late.

KAREN – How did you find out?

MOTHER – I was in a grocery store one day. I was being followed by several clerks who were just staring at me. The magazine was out on the rack. Back in those days they didn't cover them up. I was in absolute shock!

KAREN – Were you on the cover?

MOTHER – No, but (Pointing in the magazine) she was. Just like that, so I had a *bad* feeling. I ran over to the magazine rack, found it, and saw myself inside the issue. I bought up every last copy at the store and rushed out. I went to every book store I could think of. All over town.

KAREN – You scooped up every copy in town?

MOTHER – I was mortified! What if your father had found out? We wouldn't have been able to show our faces at Wednesday night bingo every again.

KAREN - What happened to uh, (Pointing in the magazine) him?

MOTHER - (Correcting, pointing to somebody else in the magazine) No, *him*. I never heard from him again. I never felt so used in my life.

KAREN - Judging by these pictures, you were used quite a bit that day. Oh, Mom, (Hands her back the magazine) this is so gross.

MOTHER - (Places the magazine on KAREN's desk) Now you know why I was so opposed to you doing the magazine?

KAREN - But my pictures were nothing like (Having trouble finding the right word), like, like these. Ewww. Wow.

MOTHER - I understand that, now. Whatever else Mr. Alten (Not sure of name) Alten? (KAREN nods) Whatever else Mr. Alten may have been, judging by his magazine he *did* have exquisite taste in beautiful things, and he was absolutely right about your beauty, as well.

KAREN – (Hugs her MOTHER) Thanks.

MOTHER - Do you need me to take you home?

KAREN - No, Bruce will be here in a little while.

MOTHER - Did you tell him?

KAREN - (Nodding) He knows. He said he'll help me bring my things home from the office. Security told me to let them know when I was ready so they could escort me out.

MOTHER - Don't wait too long to tell him, dear.

KAREN - Tell who what?

MOTHER - Bruce. It's been six years. How long are you going to wait till you tell him that you love him?

KAREN - Mom, of course I love Bruce, but as a friend. I never (Pauses) felt (Pauses, realizing) well, I'll be damned. You're right. I am in love with him. You knew? (MOTHER nods) Wow. When did that happen?

MOTHER - Since you met. But you were so focused on your career that you didn't want to see it. He didn't want to stand in your way.

KAREN – Did he tell you this?

MOTHER – He didn't have to. He loves you, too.

KAREN - No. Not after all this. Plus, y'know, the magazine and all. How can I be sure he wants me for me and not just what he may *think* is me based on these pictures?

MOTHER - Give him a chance. Wait for the sign. (Pauses, KAREN looks at her puzzled) The sign that proves he loves you for you. (Pauses again) So, are you going to be okay?

KAREN - I guess so.

MOTHER - Well, then. In that case, I'll be off on my date.

KAREN - Date?

MOTHER - Yes. A nice young man I met at a drug store earlier today.

KAREN - Drug store?

MOTHER - Yes, he was buying a lovely artificial flower arrangement.

KAREN - That's great. It's about time you started going out again.

MOTHER - It's been two years since your father passed away. I felt it was time.

KAREN - (Hugs her MOTHER) I'm really glad you came.

MOTHER - So am I. Call me later? (KAREN nods. MOM heads out the door)

KAREN - (Realizing, calling after her) "Artificial flowers"? Mom! (MOTHER comes back into office) The guy! That guy you're meeting? What's the guy's name?

MOTHER – Conway? Corbin? Corbett? Oh, well, something with a "C" in it. Well good night, dear. (Closes door behind her)

KAREN - Oh, no! (Rushes to the door) Mom! (Opens the door, BRUCE is there) Don't go!

BRUCE - Don't go? I just got here! What the hell do you mean "Don't go?"

KAREN - Not you. Mom! (KAREN pulls BRUCE into the office, throwing him towards her desk. MOTHER has already exited out the main entrance, KAREN looks around) She's gone!

BRUCE - Who's gone? (Finds magazine on KAREN's desk)

KAREN - My mother!

BRUCE – (Looking inside the magazine) I think I found her.

KAREN - (Sees BRUCE opening the magazine) Bruce!

BRUCE - (Shocked at the sight in the magazine) Holy shit! Mrs. McPherson? (To KAREN) Quite a family you there, Karen! (Flipping through the magazine) Way to go, Mrs. McPherson, or should I say, "Miss April 1960"? You know that's a shitty way to treat a swing set. And what's with the monkey?

KAREN - (Swipes the magazine back from BRUCE) Give me that! (Throws the magazine back on her desk) Where have you been, anyway?

BRUCE - I told you I had a few things to take care of.

KAREN - Like what?

BRUCE - Like this. Okay! Everybody come in! (Suddenly the main office doors open wide and all the EMPLOYEES come in, with HENRY carrying a cake with KAREN's name on it with the words "OUR HERO". KAREN doesn't know what to say)

KAREN - I-I-I

HENRY - It's a cake!

BRUCE - (To HENRY) I think she knows that, Henry.

SECRETARY # 1 - We all wanted to show our appreciation to you for exposing Mr. Henderson.

MALE EMPLOYEE - Along with all the other things you exposed! (Laughs, gets hit by some of the other EMPLOYEES. He opens up the magazine and points out to himself) Nice photography.

KAREN - What? Mr. Henderson? What do you mean?

BRUCE - (Putting his arm around KAREN) Oh, don't be so modest, Karen. We all know it was you that reported Mr. Henderson to the authorities.

KAREN - What? (Pulls BRUCE aside, whispering) Bruce! I told you I didn't want to file harassment charges against Henderson.

BRUCE - (Whispering) Not harassment. (Raising his voice) Embezzlement!

KAREN - Embezzlement?

HENRY - It was a remarkable feat of deduction, Karen. Simply remarkable.

MALE EMPLOYEE - But how did you figure out that Henderson and Alten were working together?

KAREN - (Nodding) Together. Henderson and Alten.

BRUCE - (Leaning on KAREN's desk) Yes, Karen. How *did* you find out about their little plan?

KAREN - Well, I'm not sure. I mean, I don't want to brag. (PAMELA enters with AUTUMN, JUNE and GUIDO in tow. AUTUMN is carrying a brown gift-wrapped box in her hands)

PAMELA - Then let me do it for you.

KAREN - Pam!

PAMELA - (Clearing her way through the crowd to KAREN's desk) You see, it seems that our Mr. Henderson has a few unusual "hobbies" and a real gambling problem. He lost most of his money last year at Mr. Alten's casinos.

KAREN - (Whispering to PAMELA) How did you find that out?

PAMELA - (Whispering) Guido once told me his brothers work at the casino, so I asked Bruce to check it out while he was out in the field.

BRUCE - (To KAREN) The brothers told me that they see Henderson in there constantly. He's a real player.

PAMELA – Oh, he likes to "play" all right. All sorts of games. (Speaking loudly again) And, according to my favorite real estate agent here...

AUTUMN - (Waves, giggling) Hi everybody! Anyone want one of my cards? (Holds up some of her cards. SEVERAL MALE EMPLOYEES quietly lunge over each other to get a card, or two.)

PAMELA – (Continuing) Henderson's got two houses. One in the city and one upstate. He lost his city home to Alten. Autumn, working as a “favor” for Alten, took care of the sale.

JUNE – Goodness! It’s just like an old gangster movie!

PAMELA – (Continuing) Henderson was in danger of losing his other home when all of a sudden, Alten shows an amazing streak of generosity. He gives Henderson his house back and writes off the debt.

KAREN - What? (Catching herself) I mean, that's right!

SECRETARY # 1 - But, what made Alten do that?

BRUCE - Karen? (Whispering) Care to tackle one of these by yourself?

KAREN - (Deducing, to the GROUP) Well, it just makes sense. Alten's got these off-shore accounts that he's been funneling money to. He knows Henderson could ensure that all his books look on the up and up. Guess the only thing they didn't count on was me.

BRUCE - And that's where you have Henry to thank.

HENRY - Me?

BRUCE - Yeah. You’re the one who assigned Karen to audit Alten's books.

HENRY – So?

PAMELA - (Pointing to HENRY) Henderson originally assigned *you* to handle the audit personally, since he knew you wouldn't be bright enough to pick up on all of Alten's “creative financing”.

HENRY - (Thinking about it) Hmmm...I suppose you're right. (Realizing the accusation) Hey!

BRUCE – But when you delegated your responsibility to Karen, the spotlight suddenly shone a bit brighter.

PAMELA - Sure. Think of it - a woman handling an audit for a guy like Alten? Gloria Steinham and the rest of the women's movement would be perched for those results.

KAREN - (Throwing her arms up in the air) But I blew it when I posed for the magazine. Suddenly I became just another statistic - another woman gullible enough to be taken in by a man. I must have set the feminist movement back ten years.

PAMELA - (Putting her arm around KAREN) Fifteen. But who's counting?

BRUCE - Don't sell her short. Karen may have been used and abused, but she wasn't going to take things lying down. (MALE EMPLOYEE holds up his copy of Men's Media Magazine, whose cover clearly shows a scantily clad KAREN lying down. BRUCE looks at the GROUP) Okay. Bad choice of words. (Being overly dramatic to GROUP) But it was Karen's idea to bring down Henderson. To free all the female employees from his clutches and his oppressive harassment. (GROUP applauds)

GROUP - Yay, Karen! (ad-lib)

KAREN - (Embarrassed) Thank you! Thank you! Anyway...So, where's Henderson now? (EVERYBODY except KAREN laughs) What?

PAMELA - Guido?

GUIDO - (Looks left then right) Uh, he's in the van.

KAREN - In your van, Guido? How come?

GUIDO - It's where he landed.

KAREN - I'm confused.

PAMELA - Well, Bruce had the police already with him in Henderson's office when I showed up with Guido. But it was when Henderson took one look at Autumn and June that he realized the jig was up.

JUNE - He went nuts! He took one look at me, shouted "I'm sorry, Mommy" and then he jumped right out the window!

KAREN - Is he all right?

GUIDO - Sure. I had the sun roof open.

PAMELA - His office is only two flights up.

GUIDO - (Chuckling, slaps HENRY on the back) It was so funny, dude. He's stuck in there, but good. They gotta use the "jaws of life" to get him out. I'll tell you, it looks like somethin' outta one of dem "Roadrunner" cartoons (Continues chuckling).

PAMELA - And my lover boy sure knows his cartoons.

GUIDO - Hey! Classic TV.

KAREN - (Looking at the GROUP) Pardon me, but does all this mean we're out of a job?

HENRY - No. Since Henderson is charged with collusion, the board of directors will have to select a new interim CEO. Until that happens, I'll supervise. (Groans from the GROUP) Thanks for the support.

MALE EMPLOYEE - (Muttering under the groans) Lousy muttonhead.

KAREN - Henry, you? (Realizing) Henry, aren't you supposed to be out on a date with my mother right now?

HENRY - Your mother? (Laughing) Was *that* your mother? My goodness. I never would have guessed. There's hardly a resemblance. (BRUCE goes over to the desk and gets the magazine) However, I think she was making more out of it than was really there. I was just being polite. (BRUCE holds the magazine up to HENRY's face) Helping an older woman out at the store, as it were. (Pauses, takes the magazine) It's not as if I were really attracted to her. (Pauses, takes another look) That's really all there was to it. (Looking closer at the magazine) Okay, perhaps there's *some* resemblance. Is...Is that a monkey? (Looking even closer, then at KAREN) You mean that...that? (HENRY looks at the magazine again, then at KAREN, then at BRUCE, who nods back at HENRY) Gotta go. (Puts the magazine in his jacket) See you all later! (Exits quickly)

SECRETARY # 1 – We'd better go, too, Karen. But thanks again for all you've done. Getting rid of Henderson took a lot of guts. It was a great plan.

KAREN - It was nothing.

BRUCE and PAMELA - (Simultaneously mocking KAREN) It was nothing.

KAREN – (Smiling at them) I had great friends to help. (THE GROUP exits leaving only PAMELA, GUIDO, AUTUMN, JUNE, BRUCE and KAREN on stage)

KAREN – One thing that's still a mystery, though. Who tipped off the FBI about Alten to begin with?

JUNE – (Raising her hand) I think it was Ms. Crom. (Puts her hand down)

KAREN – Ms. Crom?

JUNE – I heard her on the phone. She was tellin' someone that Alten had been moving stuff "off shore".

PAMELA – Wow. And you *got* all that, huh? June, that's amazing. I'm really impressed.

JUNE – At first, I thought she was talkin' about like when you take rocks on the beach and you start movin' 'em back into the water one-by-one? (Looks at the GROUP, who all stare at her) What? Like you've never done it?

PAMELA – (Rolling her eyes) Welcome back, sweetheart.

AUTUMN - (Extending the package she's been carrying to KAREN) Oh, Karen, I'm glad we came here. Mr. Alten wanted us to give this to you if we ever saw you.

PAMELA - (To KAREN) You think he knew he was gonna get caught or that we'd figure things out?



KAREN - Could be. Why else would he have given this to Autumn? (KAREN starts to unwrap the package)

PAMELA – (Looks at JUNE, who is eating her own hair) Because June's too stupid? (Observing) Figures it'd be wrapped in brown paper, huh?

KAREN - (Pulls out a small white box, dropping a white piece of paper that was wrapped around it) What's that?

BRUCE - (Picking up the paper) There's a note. (Looks at it briefly, then shows it to KAREN) It's from Alten.

KAREN - (Hesitant) Read it, would you Bruce?

BRUCE - (Reading) "Dear Karen, if you're reading this, I wanted you to know that self-interest alone did not dictate my actions. (KAREN starts opening the box and pulls out something) I sincerely feel you are one of the most beautiful women I have ever known, and your beauty transcends far beyond your outward appearance. I wish you much success in the future and enclose a small token to help. Best Regards - Marcus." What did he give you?

KAREN - Business cards. Just like the ones Autumn has.

AUTUMN - (Handing BRUCE a card) Here! If you're ever in the market, call me. (EXITS with JUNE)

BRUCE - (To PAMELA) She *was* talking about a house, right? (Looks at the card) Whoa! (Tries to get a business card from KAREN) Lemme see one of yours.

KAREN - (Pulling away) No! Didn't you get your rocks off enough looking at my pictures in the magazine?

BRUCE - Whoever said I *saw* those pictures?

KAREN - What?

BRUCE - I never saw the goddamn pictures! (KAREN is stunned. There is a long silence)

KAREN – (Remembering what MOTHER had said) "Wait for the sign". (PAMELA looks at GUIDO, who doesn't get what's going on, and starts tugging at his arm)

PAMELA - Come along, Guido.

GUIDO - Wha?

PAMELA - I think these two wanna be alone.

GUIDO - Oh, yeah. Okay. I gotta go check out the roof 'a my car, anyway. (Waves) Bye! (PAMELA and GUIDO exit)

KAREN - Bruce. What did you mean you never looked at the pictures? I saw you with the magazine.

BRUCE - The magazine you threw away. But I never looked inside it. Never even bought it.

KAREN - But, why?

BRUCE - Because it wasn't the way I wanted to see them for the first time.

KAREN - (Confused) Bruce, you told me that "the opposite of faith isn't doubt". What did you mean by that?

BRUCE - Just something I heard once. "The opposite of faith is not doubt. It's certainty".

KAREN - What does that mean?

BRUCE - It means that I never doubted your ability or your beauty. Nor did I need to have faith in it. From the moment I met you, I was always certain of your ability *and* of how beautiful you are. Just as I am certain that I've always loved you and always will.

KAREN - Bruce, that's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. Kiss me. (BRUCE leans in and passionately kisses KAREN. As LIGHTS DIM we hear BRUCE exclaim)

BRUCE - Karen! What are you doing?

KAREN - (From the darkness) Heh-heh-heh. (LIGHTS DIM)

**Blackout**

**The End**