

# ***AMERICAN TABLOID***

Written by

Adam Morrison



How the First Lady of Fashion Does It  
**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** LATE 15¢  
**JACKIE'S BEAUTY SECRETS**  
 Revealed by 14 Fashion and Beauty Experts



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** SPORTS 15¢  
**Temper N' Talent**  
 -That's the Explosive Mixture Called...  
**FRANK SINATRA**  
 STORY ON PAGE 4



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** FEATURE 15¢  
**EXCLUSIVE Lynda Bird Says:**  
**LIFE WAS MORE FUN BEFORE DADDY WAS PRESIDENT**



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** SPORTS 15¢  
**Beverly Hillbillies' Donna Douglas Says:**  
**I WANT TO BE WILD**



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** LATE 15¢  
**I'm Not a Bottle Baby, Says Dean Martin - BUT I'VE GOT A RIGHT TO GET TIGHT!**



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** FEATURE 15¢  
**NATALIE WOOD'S KID SISTER, LANA, SAYS:**  
**I'M ONLY 20 AND... I'VE ALREADY HAD 3 HUSBANDS**



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** FINAL 15¢  
**'MODERN WOMEN AREN'T HUMAN!'**  
 ...IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE IT...  
 -This Man Tells Why



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**EXCLUSIVE PHOTO**  
**OSWALD'S CORPSE**  
 Morgue Photo Shows Body Of JFK's Killer and Bullet Hole Made by Ruby's Gun



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**ECSTASY AND ME**  
 By Hedy Lamarr  
 Her Own Shocking, Revealing Life Story



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**LINDA DARNELL'S LAST INTERVIEW**  
**I HOPE MY LIFE WON'T END IN TRAGEDY**



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**First Interview With Officer Tippitt's Widow**  
**JFK'S KILLER MADE ME \$650,000 RICHER**  
 ...But It Can't Bring Me Back My Dear Husband



**Beatle Drummer's Girl Friend Admits:**  
**I'm Too Afraid of Ringo to Even Look at Another Man**



**Girls Hate Me Because A Beatle's My Boyfriend**  
 Says Paul McCartney's Girl Friend, Jane Asher



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** 35¢  
**RUSSIANS SAY THAT FLYING SAUCERS EXIST**

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**Anita Ekberg Brags About Her New Husband...**



**...according to the National Enquirer**

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**Stephen Boyd Says: Gals Marry The Boy Next Door - But Dream About 'Bad Boys' Like Me!**  
 Dana Wynter Tells How...  
**MY WIGGLE MADE 'EM GIGGLE**



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**EXCLUSIVE LONDON INTERVIEW**  
**Richard Burton Tells Why... I'LL NEVER MARRY LIZ!**



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**Blonde Bombshell Elke Sommer Warns:**  
**I SOCK MEN WHO MAKE PASSES AT ME**



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** 40¢  
**How Your Fingers Reveal Personality**  
**CERTAIN FOODS MAKE YOU TALK MORE**



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** SPORTS 15¢  
**Girl Friend Was Alive When... HE CUT OFF HER HEAD**



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** SPORTS 15¢  
**After 11 Years in Hollywood Marlon Brando Says...**  
**I'VE LOUSED UP MY LIFE**  
 I'm Rich but I'm Stuck With The Phony 'Brando' I Created  
**...That Skinny Pigeon-Toed Troy Donahue...!**  
 Tough Talk Like This Pays



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** FEATURE 15¢  
**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**  
**I HAD TO LIVE ...For the Baby Inside Me**  
 PAT NEAL



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**Embarrassing Photos**  
**Angry Laurence Harvey Insists: I'M NOT TRYING TO STEAL SINATRA'S WIFE**  
 13 Photos and Complete Story



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** FEATURE 15¢  
**Tired of Elvis Presley, Now 30, Moans:**  
**I'M LOOKING FOR A WIFE ...But I Can't**  
 Yvette Vickers Tells Why...  
**I Swept The Beatniks Out of My Life**



**NATIONAL ENQUIRER** SPORTS 15¢  
**Girl Friend Was Alive When... HE CUT OFF HER HEAD**



FADE IN:

EXT. PLAYGROUND - 1940 - DAY

SCHOOL KIDS watch a fight: GENE POPE JR, 8, a rich know-it-all who never gives up, gets his ass KICKED by a SCHOOL BULLY, who SITS on Gene, PUNCHING him.

SCHOOL BULLY

You think you're so smart? You think you know all the answers. Raise your hand now!

He PUNCHES Gene again. Gene looks to his brothers in the crowd: FORTUNATO, 11, and ANTHONY, 9.

GENE

Are you just gonna stand there?

SCHOOL BULLY

Your brothers ain't helping you. Now, you gonna fight back or just piss yourself like a sissy?

GENE

Call me a sissy again.

SCHOOL BULLY

Sissy!

Gene PUNCHES him, ROLLS on top, gaining the upper hand. The BULLY tries to cover his now BLOODY FACE from Gene's relentless PUNCHES. *The victim has become the villain...*

GENE

Who's the sissy now?

FREEZE FRAME ON GENE'S FIST ABOUT TO LAND ANOTHER BLOW...

GENE (V.O.)

There are two kinds of people in the world: those who fight back and those who take it up the ass. I'll give you one guess which one I am.

Gene SMASHES his FIST into the BULLY'S FACE.

INT. POPE PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

The Pope family has money and a LOT of it. GENEROSO POPE SR, 45, a man of morals, CATHERINE, 42, an old school Italian matriarch, Fortunato, Anthony, and, of course, Gene dine.

They're fast -- TALKING over each other as they SLURP down their food. It's not *classy*, but it looks fun.

GENE (V.O.)

High society calls us wops -- loud, dirty Italian immigrants who dared to come to this country, make a fortune, and live on Park Avenue.

EXT. PARK AVENUE APARTMENT - DAY

Generoso Sr, dressed for work, exits his fancy building with little Gene Jr trailing behind him. A SNOBBY WOMAN, wearing a mink stole, GASPS as Generoso Sr NODS and TIPS his hat.

GENE (V.O.)

But we didn't care what those motherfuckers whispered behind our backs. Papa single-handedly built an empire and we were *goddamn* proud of it.

EXT. LITTLE ITALY - DAY

The Italian owned and operated area of New York. Generoso Sr talks to the LOCAL MERCHANTS, helps UNLOAD DELIVERIES. Gene Jr does the same. *Like father, like son.*

GENE (V.O.)

Too many Italian immigrants couldn't speak or read English, so they were at the political mercy of those who did. Papa said, "Well, we'll just see about that."

INT. IL PROGRESSO - NEWSROOM - DAY

OFFICE GIRLS rush around. Telephones RING OFF THE HOOK. REPORTERS TYPE furiously at their typewriters.

GENE (V.O.)

Enter Papa's crown jewel: Il Progresso. The largest Italian language newspaper in New York. It had a circulation of 200,000 and gave the Italian immigrants a chance to be informed about the world around them.

Gene Jr listens intently as his father shows him the layout. Then FRANK COSTELLO, 58, a tough son of a bitch, enters.

Generoso Sr GREETs him, clearly old friends.

GENE (V.O.)  
And looky here: my godfather  
stopped by to say hi...

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A COUPLE of THUGS DRAG a SCREAMING MAN toward Frank -- he's got his SLEEVES ROLLED UP -- a pair of PLIERS in his hand.

GENE (V.O.)  
You know Frank Costello, the head  
of the New York mob. I'm one lucky  
son-of-a-bitch to have him looking  
out for my moral guidance.

Using the pliers, Frank YANKS TEETH from the MAN'S MOUTH.

INT. POPE PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - DAY

Gene tries to SCURRY AWAY as Catherine GRABS him.

GENE (V.O.)  
Not that my current moral guidance  
was anything to brag about.

CATHERINE  
I told you to clean that room of  
yours, you dumb son-of-a-bitch!

We FREEZE ON Catherine RAISING her hand to HIT Gene.

GENE (V.O.)  
See, Ma hated me. I think it was  
because I'm too much like Papa and  
she was forced to marry him back in  
Italy -- like that was my fucking  
fault. But whatever, Ma! I'm ready!

Catherine FULL ON SLAPS HIM ACROSS THE FACE.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A TEACHER points to a MAP of the United States. Gene RAISES his hand, while others SLUMP in their chairs.

GENE (V.O.)  
But the prick at the beginning was  
right: I did know all the answers.  
(MORE)

GENE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 It's because I did my fucking  
 homework. And because I did...

INT. M.I.T CLASSROOM - DAY

Gene's all grown up now, still RAISING HIS HAND before the  
 TEACHER can even get the question out.

GENE (V.O.)  
 I got into M.I.T and not because I  
 was good, which I was and don't  
 fucking forget it, but cause those  
 silver spoon fat cats didn't know  
 the first thing about hard work.

INT. IL PROGRESSO - NEWSROOM - DAY

Gene's now going over the layout with the STAFF. He's in his  
 element, he's good at this, he's respected...

GENE (V.O.)  
 After graduation, Papa wanted to  
 retire and chose me to take over Il  
Progresso. I put in the time, I put  
 in the work, and now it was my turn  
 to find my place in the sun.

Finished, Gene leans back in his chair and CRACKS OPEN the  
 latest edition, fully *satisfied* with himself.

TITLE CARD:

**Modern Language Association  
 Steps for Writing an Article  
 Step #1  
 The Big Idea**

An old school LIGHT BULB turns on, growing BRIGHTER and  
 BRIGHTER until it EXPLODES -- SHATTERING GLASS toward us.

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - DAY

It's springtime in 1950s Manhattan: BUSINESS MEN, with their  
 POMADE HAIR and DAPPER SUITS, and WOMEN, clad in SWEATER SETS  
 and PEARLS, CHATTER as they hurry off to work.

Gene buys a copy of Il Progresso from a VENDOR when a  
 PUBLICITY PHOTO BLOWS into him. Gene looks up to see *the same*  
*flustered, much less polished woman* - PATTY MCMANUS,  
*desperately* gathering up her *scattered* PHOTOS and CLIPPINGS.

GENE

Are you okay? Need some help?  
 (picks up a CLIPPING)  
 What's this?

PATTY

*Nothing.* Have a nice day.

Patty SNATCHES it back, hurries off. Gene CHASES after her.

GENE

Hey, hey, hey. Where's the fire?

PATTY

I'm late for an audition is all.

GENE

Ahhh so you're an actress?

PATTY

Is that all right with you?

GENE

Well sure! Here your beautiful face  
 blows right into mine and then I  
 look up to see you in a tizzy, hair  
 wild like a banshee--

PATTY

-Is this your way of making a pass  
 at me? Because if you are, you're  
 really, *truly* bad at it.

GENE

What can I say? I'm ensorcelled.  
 You're smart, *clearly* driven. And  
 we both know I'm a catch: from a  
 good family, not terrible to look  
 at, not one filling in this mouth  
 if you can believe it.

PATTY

And humble. Don't forget humble.

GENE

Plus, I run my own newspaper.

PATTY

You run a newspaper?

GENE

*Mostly, kinda.* I can tell you all  
 about it over drinks.

PATTY  
No, thank you.

GENE  
Give me one reason why not.

PATTY  
I'll give you three: you're too young, I don't drink, and I've had too many men distract me from what I'm supposed to be doing here.

Patty approaches the revolving doors of a building

GENE  
*Anni, amori, e bicchieri di vino,  
nun se contano mai.*

PATTY  
What does that mean?

She continues inside -- PUSHING the REVOLVING DOOR and he takes her question as an opening to go around with her.

GENE  
It means meet me at The Stork Club tonight. 8 o'clock.

PATTY  
Sure. Just let me get my ball gown back from the cleaners.

GENE  
Hey my tux is there now! We can pick them up together!

She steps out -- he *stays*, HOLDING the REVOLVING DOORS -- to the great *impatience* of PEOPLE trying to come in.

GENE (CONT'D)  
I'm not leaving till you say yes.

PATTY  
You don't give up, do you?

GENE  
Never once in my entire life.

PATTY  
I--I don't even know your name.

GENE  
Generoso Pope, Jr. I'll see you tonight, Patty McManus.

PATTY

How did you know my--

Gene WINKS at her - TAPS the file of CLIPPINGS before JOGGING across the street. Patty *considers* him, then SHAKES her head, takes a DEEP BREATH, and heads into her audition.

INT. IL PROGRESSO - NEWSROOM - DAY

Gene SWEEPS in as CATHY, an older by the book office manager, hands him a file. They weave through the chaos.

CATHY

You're late. We need to approve the layout for the weekend edition, print a clarification about the Sainthood of Alphonsus Liguori--

GENE

-Wait? What? Why?

CATHY

We said he died in 1887.

GENE

When did he actually die?

CATHY

1787.

GENE

Can't imagine the Church is happy about that.

CATHY

They're tickled pink. I've gotten calls from a dozen priests in the last half hour alone.

GENE

These people are too sensitive. It was a typographical error.

CATHY

Yeah, well, *these people* are calling for a boycott. Also, someone broke the drip-o-lator.

GENE

Cathy, it's Friday and I have a date with a beautiful woman. Nothing you can say is gonna ruin my good mood.

CATHY

Can I get odds on that?

GENE

*(ignoring that)*

Print the clarification, issue an apology to the Church, I'll approve the weekend edition while you send a runner down to Sears & Roebuck for a brand new drip-o-lator. And can someone pick up my--

Cathy HANDS him a freshly PRESSED TUX from the CLEANERS. He WINKS at her and goes into his office.

INT. THE STORK CLUB - NIGHT

A party at the FANCIEST SUPPER CLUB in all Manhattan. It's full of CELEBRITIES, POLITICIANS, the SOCIAL ELITE.

Gene, looking DAPPER in his TUX, SIPS a MARTINI. The ELEVATOR DOORS open. Patty STEPS out, *looking amazing*.

GENE

Looks like you got to the cleaners in the nick of time.

PATTY

I borrowed it from a friend. Are these yours?

GENE

What? You're not used to rubbing elbows with movie stars and elected government officials?

PATTY

Now that you mention it, I've got to ring Marilyn back. We're going shopping at Harry Winston's.

GENE

Diamonds are a girl's best friend. You know who mine is?

*(points out his father)*

Papa came here with nothing. He founded Il Progresso, built the biggest gravel company in the world, and established Columbus Day as a national holiday. We may be surrounded by millionaires and movie stars, but we're not really one of them. We only pretend to be.

PATTY

Hey buddy, *you* invited *me* here. I'm not after you or your money.

GENE

I know you're not.

PATTY

Oh, so you just wanted to show off that chip on your shoulder?

GENE

Hey, if this is gonna work, you can't be afraid of my penchant for self-aggrandizement.

PATTY

It certainly won't work when I've been here five minutes and you haven't bothered to offer me a drink.

GENE

You don't drink, also I'm too young and a distraction -- assertions I plan to fight vigorously at another date and time.

PATTY

Maybe I was just trying to get rid of you.

GENE

*Prove it.*

Gene GRABS a GLASS of CHAMPAGNE of a passing WAITER'S TRAY. He HANDS it to her. Patty smiles. They CLINK GLASSES and DRINK. Gene's brother, Anthony, comes over.

ANTHONY

It's time for the toast.

GENE

*(nods, to Patty)*  
They're playing my song.

He KISSES her gently on the cheek, WRAPS his arm around Anthony's shoulders, and heads off to meet his destiny.

INT. THE STORK CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

A KNIFE CLINKS a GLASS to get everyone's attention. The NOISE of the party quiets as the GUESTS turn to Gene.

GENE

Tonight we celebrate my father as he transitions into his next phase of life: staying home all day and driving my mother crazy.

(polite LAUGHTER)

My father has spent his life fighting for immigrants to be informed, celebrated, and have access to capital to build their own empires. I'll never be able to fill your shoes, Papa, but bet your bottom dollar I'll die trying. Without further ado, my father, Generoso Pope Sr.

APPLAUSE. Gene Sr stands, but then STOPS and COLLAPSES, CLUTCHING his chest. Gene RUSHES over -- CHECKING HIS PULSE.

GENE (CONT'D)

Somebody get some help!

EXT. WOODLAWN CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

MOURNERS huddle under umbrellas to shield themselves from the rain as they pay their condolences to GENE SR. Gene stands with Catherine, Fortunato, and Anthony. He's heartbroken.

LATER

Gene GREETs the MOURNERS. He spots Patty under a tree. Gene makes his way over to her. Fortunato notices.

GENE

I fouled this up from the start. Retirement dinners and funerals aren't exactly proper dates.

PATTY

I'm not exactly a proper girl, I guess. But here I am.

GENE

It's a complicated day. My family's a mess. I'll call you soon.

(TURNS away, then:)

We're having some people back to the house. You hungry?

INT. POPE PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Patty's eyes GO WIDE upon seeing the lavish home.

PATTY

You said you were having people  
back to the house. You didn't say  
it was Carnegie Hall.

GENE

I promise the toilets flush the  
exact same way.

Gene SPOTS Frank, who everyone's avoiding -- possibly because  
he brought his thuggish BODYGUARDS with him.

GENE (CONT'D)

Grab some food. There's tons. I'll  
find you in a minute.

PATTY

You invited me to your father's  
funeral and now you're ditching me?

GENE

...yeah.

Patty LAUGHS -- goes to get food while Gene talks to Frank.

FRANK

You'd think I had the plague the  
way I'm being ignored.

GENE

You run in different circles than  
these people, Frank. Your guard  
dogs need a bath, by the way.

FRANK

My dogs are loyal.  
(re: Fortunato/Anthony)  
Unlike those blowhards -- they got  
it in for you.

GENE

You talking about the paper? Nah.  
Papa already decided. Plus the will  
reading's next week. It'll be fine.

FRANK

Just watch your back.  
(teasing, re: Patty)  
And use a preservativo with that  
one. She's fertile. I can tell.

Frank PATS him on the back -- heads out. Gene finds Patty in  
line -- FILLING her plate with DELICIOUS LOOKING FOOD.

GENE  
You like Italian food?

PATTY  
Does spaghetti count?

GENE  
Does spaghetti count?!? Try the  
baked ziti. *Here.*

He FEEDS her a bite. Fortunato NOTICES as he walks by -- a drink in his hand.

FORTUNATO  
*Unbelievable.*

GENE  
What's eating you?

FORTUNATO  
Pa's dead. And you're what?  
Gettin' sweet on some cheap skirt?

PATTY  
I should go.

GENE  
Nah. My brother's just drunk. We're  
gonna step outside for a minute.

Gene GRABS his arm.

FORTUNATO  
You think I'm leaving a shtate in  
the house unsupervised? Forget it.

Fortunato PUSHES him off. Catherine sees what's happening -- steps in to settle this.

CATHERINE  
What is this? What is *this*??? I  
will not have a scene at your  
father's funeral. *Behave.*  
(taking in Patty)  
And you are...?

PATTY  
Patty McManus. I'm a friend of  
Gene's. I'm really very sorry for  
your loss, Mrs. Pope.

CATHERINE  
That's kind, but this is *strictly* a  
family affair. You understand.

PATTY  
Oh, of course, I--

GENE  
-Ma, come on. I need her here--

CATHERINE  
-Non e italiano, Generoso.

That's the end of that.

EXT. PARK AVENUE APARTMENT - EVENING

Patty hurries into a cab as Gene RACES after her. He KNOCKS on the window. *Reluctantly*, Patty ROLLS it down.

PATTY  
Why did you bring me here? If that's what your mother is like why did you bother?

GENE  
She never behaved like that before. I'm *sorry*. I just wanted to spend time with you. Funeral be damned.

PATTY  
That's not... the *worst* answer in the world.

GENE  
You know what? Scoot over.  
(he gets in, to CABBIE)  
56th and Lex.

INT. IL PROGRESSO - PRESS ROOM - NIGHT

PRESSES *churn* out papers for the morning edition. STEAM emits from them as NIGHT WORKERS monitor the progress. Gene enters with Patty. She takes a look around, *impressed*.

GENE  
I got it, boys. Have a good night.

The NIGHT WORKERS exit. It's just Gene and Patty now.

PATTY  
Do you bring all your girls here?

GENE  
Who says I get girls? I wasn't always this charming, you know.

PATTY

Who says you're charming now?

GENE

Yeah, well no one likes the smartest kid in school and it's not like I could keep my mouth shut.

PATTY

You? Never.

GENE

But then I'd come here and Papa would show me the presses, teach me the integrity of journalism. It was better than being at home.

PATTY

At least you have a family. Mine practically disowned me when I moved here to act.

(then)

What's this?

Gene WHIPS a sheet off an old machine -- like a magic trick.

GENE

Manual printing press from 1886. Papa liked having it around. Said remembering where you came from keeps you humble. I like that.

(she DODGES a kiss)

What are you doin' to me? I'm working here.

PATTY

Yeah you are. Using the memory of your dead father to get to first base? I don't think so.

GENE

First base? Who are you kidding? I hit home runs all day!

PATTY

(DODGES another kiss)

What'd you say in Italian that day?

GENE

*Anni, amori, e bicchieri di vino,  
nun se contano mai.*

PATTY

Translation?

GENE

*Years, lovers, and glasses of wine,  
these are things that should never  
be counted.*

PATTY

You're a real slick one, Gene Pope.

GENE

(closing in on her)  
I've been called worse.

PATTY

Why are you even bothering with me?

GENE

Because you're the only good person  
I have in my life.

*Finally, Gene KISSES her. It gets heated quickly.*

INT. IL PROGRESSO - PRESS ROOM - LATER

Gene STRETCHES out on the press, naked, watching Patty dress.

PATTY

I can't believe we did that.  
Someone could've come back in here.

GENE

That's not going to happen. I'm the  
boss. *Mostly*.

PATTY

Will you put your clothes on?

GENE

What? I'm not allowed to be naked  
in front of my future wife?  
(that STOPS Patty)  
I'll make a good husband. I'll take  
care of you.

PATTY

You're crazy.

GENE

That's true.

PATTY

And I hardly know you.

GENE

Also true.

PATTY

You're in an emotional state since your father just died.

GENE

I am devastated.

PATTY

Plus your mother hates me.

GENE

Hates me too. You're in good company. I'm serious. Marry me. Everything else is just details!  
(Patty smiles, *relenting*)  
Is that a yes? Is that a yes?!?

Gene COVERS her in kisses. Their affection is palpable.

PATTY

I must be crazy.

GENE

Two psychopaths.

INT. CARLO GOLDONI'S OFFICE - DAY

Catherine, Fortunato, Anthony sit on one side of the table with Gene and Frank on the other. CARLO GOLDONI sits at the head of the table, going over the will.

GOLDONI

The boys are to receive a cash payout of \$15,000. All else goes to Catherine. The stocks, bonds, the apartment, everything.

FORTUNATO

What about the paper?

GOLDONI

Catherine, you own the paper, but there's a board. You can't make any changes without their approval.

FORTUNATO

This is ridiculous. The paper is losing money--

GENE

-No it's not. I've been workin' there since I was--

FORTUNATO

-getting your ass kicked on the playground? Yeah, I remember.

GENE

This is what Papa wanted. Why this is even a discussion is beyond me.

FORTUNATO

Things change.

Gene HANDS a FILE to Catherine and Goldoni.

GENE

The Board agrees with Papa's wishes to have me stay on as editor. If you want a job, I'll train you--

CATHERINE

-Train him? You'd steal your brother's birth rite like this??

GENE

*Steal*??? I'm letting you sit back, relax, and collect checks. I'm good at this and I'll make the paper even more successful. You'll see.

Catherine gets up and leaves. Fortunato and Anthony follow. Gene hangs his head in *disgust*.

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

Gene HURRIES, *relieved* to find Patty waiting for him. He TAKES her hand. Patty BEAMS at him.

GENE

You ready to do this?

INT. CITY HALL - DAY

Gene and Patty exchange RINGS -- KISS. They're officially married. Neither of them could be happier.

INT. IL PROGRESSO - NEWSROOM - DAY

Gene TWIRLS the OFFICE GIRLS as they *congratulate him*. Gene TURNS -- comes face to face with Anthony. Uh oh.

INT. IL PROGRESSO - GENE'S OFFICE - DAY

Anthony *tosses* down a section of The New York Times. It's a wedding picture of Gene and Patty. Gene SHRUGS.

GENE

What can I say? I'm a man in love.  
How pissed is Ma?

ANTHONY

You're going to be a man without a family. She forbid all of this.

GENE

Are you hearing yourself? I'm an adult and, by the way, so are you. You could've had my back at the will reading. I know you don't want to work here.

ANTHONY

I don't, but you know how she is. She gets an idea in her head and that's it. She thinks the paper is Fortunato's birthright. And then you go and marry this girl--

GENE

-Her name is Patty.

ANTHONY

It was salt in the wound, Gene. Can't you see that?

GENE

All right, all right. You got any bright ideas in that head of yours?

ANTHONY

Come to the house for Sunday dinner. Bring Patty. Play nice.

The door BURSTS open and in walks Frank, all smiles.

FRANK

Your father's been dead less than a month and you've already got his office? I like it.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)  
 (to Anthony)  
 Good to see you, Tony.

ANTHONY  
 You too, Frank.  
 (to Gene)  
 I'll see you Sunday.

He heads out, closing the door. Frank hands him an ENVELOPE.

FRANK  
 A little something for the wedding.

GENE  
 You really don't have to--

FRANK  
 -Shut up and take it. Send best wishes to Miss What's her name.

GENE  
 Mrs. Generoso Pope.

FRANK  
 Mrs. Generoso Pope, Jr. Don't let you mother hear you saying that.

GENE  
 Good point. What can I do for you?

FRANK  
 Saw you got appointed to the New York Board of Education. A lot of congratulations coming your way.  
 (Gene NODS)  
 A friend is looking to fill one of those seats coming up. A good word from you would go a long way.

Gene understands the *gravity of this* -- keeps SMILING.

GENE  
 Consider it done.

He CLEARS his throat -- *a little uneasy*.

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

MOVING BOXES line the walls. PAINTINGS aren't hung. It's nice, but not lavish. Gene and Patty have sex.

PATTY  
 You remembered the wine?

GENE  
I got the wine.

PATTY  
What about the flowers? You said  
lilies were her favorite.

GENE  
Can we not talk about my Ma while  
I'm inside you?

PATTY  
You're right, I'm sorry.  
(Gene FUCKS her, then:)  
It's just the last time I was in  
her home, she threw me out of it.

GENE  
Are you serious right now?

PATTY  
I'm allowed to be nervous. This is  
important.

GENE  
So is this!

PATTY  
Don't yell at me.

GENE  
I'M NOT--I have the flowers, I have  
the wine. We're gonna go, I'll kiss  
the ring and it'll be fine. Okay?

PATTY  
That's all I needed to hear.

Patty RESUMES SEX, but Gene STOPS her - *erection gone*.

GENE  
Fuck. We better get ready anyway.

He DISAPPEARS into the bathroom. Patty pulls a PILL BOTTLE  
out of the NIGHT STAND, POPS one, and SWALLOWS it down.

INT. POPE PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mid-dinner: Catherine, Fortunato, Anthony, Gene, and Patty  
eat in silence. Patty nervously glances at Catherine.

PATTY  
Dinner is wonderful, Mrs. Pope.

CATHERINE  
My cook spent all day preparing it.

PATTY  
Oh. Well, your cook is wonderful.

CATHERINE  
Why, thank you, *Mrs. Pope*.

Patty shifts, *uncomfortably*. The doorbell RINGS. A MAID enters with a WRAPPED PARCEL. She sets it on the buffet and hurries out. More silence.

GENE  
Okay Ma, can we get to it already?  
*I'm sorry. I'm in love.*

CATHERINE  
I spoke to Father Castiglia. He said an annulment is possible.

GENE  
No, Ma. Patty isn't going anywhere.  
We're married. End of story.

CATHERINE  
This is how you speak to me? Your father passes and you think you can sit at my table, make demands, embarrass me in front of lawyers--

GENE  
-That's not what I--

CATHERINE  
-I am not finished. You are my son. This is your family and you will do as you are told.

GENE  
Which means?

CATHERINE  
You will step down as editor in chief of Il Progresso--

GENE  
-No.

CATHERINE  
You'll have this marriage annulled--

GENE  
-Ma!

CATHERINE  
You will do this, Generoso.

GENE  
That's it. We're outta here.

Gene THROWS down his napkin and stands. Patty follows suit.

CATHERINE  
I got you a wedding gift. It's the morning edition.

That stops Gene. *Seriously?* Catherine goes to the WRAPPED PARCEL on the buffet. She UNWRAPS it -- HANDS out COPIES.

GENE  
The morning edition doesn't come out for another few hours.

CATHERINE  
Not Il Progresso. The Times.  
(HANDS Gene one)  
*Congratulations.*

Gene looks down at the front page. His face goes WHITE.

INSERT - NEWSPAPER

**BOARD OF EDUCATION UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR POPE'S MOB TIES**

BACK TO SCENE

Gene can't believe what he's just read -- looks to Anthony.

GENE  
You did this. How could you...?

Catherine HANDS Gene a FILE. He *reads*...

CATHERINE  
You aren't the only one who can call an emergency board meeting. We can't have the editor-in-chief of Il Progresso trading political favors with a known mobster.

GENE  
This is Frank we're talking about! You named Frank! Do you have any idea what you've done?!?

FORTUNATO  
It's no big deal, brother. Everyone goes down eventually.

GENE

Tony???

ANTHONY

It was just your turn.

Gene LUNGES for Anthony -- POUNDING him as they TUMBLE to the ground. Patty SCREAMS. Fortunato DRAGS a BLOODIED Gene off.

CATHERINE

It's time you left, Generoso.  
(re: Patty)  
And take the mick with you.

TEARS fill Patty's eyes as Gene SPITS BLOOD on the floor.

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Gene's in his underwear as Patty CLEANS his wounds.

PATTY

I'm sorry. This is all my fault.

GENE

You're damn right it is. And don't think I'm gonna forget it.

PATTY

(*mocking*)  
Oh, *really?*

GENE

Yes, *really*. I'm out of a job and a family all because I can't keep my prick in my pants. Why do you have to be so damn attractive?

PATTY

I'll work on that.

GENE

Good. And ship Ma back to the old country while you're at it, will ya?

All joking aside, Patty's clearly hurt by this.

GENE (CONT'D)

Hey, look at me.  
(she won't)  
Look at me, Patty.  
(finally, she does)  
(MORE)

GENE (CONT'D)

You sure you still want me now?  
Even though I got nothin'?

PATTY

You wanted me when I had nothing.

That melts Gene's heart. He takes a deep breath, allowing his silver-lining self to return again.

GENE

It's not the end of the world. I'll  
find work or you'll just have to  
become a big huge movie star.

PATTY

Not sure that'll be happening any  
time soon. I'm pregnant.  
(trying not to cry)  
See? You aren't out of a family  
after all.

This hits Gene like a ton of bricks. He PULLS her to him, trying to hide the fear in his eyes.

GENE

Don't you worry. Not one bit. I'm  
gonna fix this. You'll see.

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - NIGHT

Gene PASSES a newsstand selling The Times with that DAMNING HEADLINE. Gene moves on to a rundown area of town. He STOPS outside of a seedy restaurant. *Deep breath*. He goes inside.

INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER

Dark. Dirty. Nothing legal happens here.

It's empty save for Frank playing CARDS, SIPPING wine. His BODYGUARDS are at a nearby table. Sweating, Gene APPROACHES.

GENE

I want to apologize. From the  
family. I should've listened to  
you. All this shit, it's about me.  
Not you.

He goes to sit down. The BODYGUARDS stand -- Frank WAVES THEM OFF, still focusing on the cards as Gene sits.

GENE (CONT'D)

They don't mean disrespect.

(no response)

I don't want nothing to happen to them.

Frank SNEERS. He FLIPS over the table -- sending the cards FLYING. Frank SMASHES a BEER BOTTLE and SHOVES Gene down onto a tabletop -- the JAGGED BOTTLE at his throat.

FRANK

You come in here, talking about respect? Is that what you're doing?

GENE

Frank--

FRANK

-Don't say my name, you little prick. You ain't the only one with your name in the paper and I've got problems of my own.

GENE

(*terrified*)

What's wrong?

FRANK

None of your fucking business is what's wrong.

GENE

I... I owe you. I can help.

FRANK

And how the fuck are you gonna do that?

GENE

I dunno. But we're family, Frank. We're family.

Frank playfully SLAPS Gene's face -- TOSSING the bottle over his shoulder. It SMASHES into a LIGHT BULB above the bar. Gene sits up, righting himself as Frank picks up his cards.

FRANK

Your mother's a cunt. She's always been a cunt. When she's 100, she'll be a very old cunt.

GENE

I didn't just come here to apologize, Frank.

(MORE)

GENE (CONT'D)

I'm gonna make this right, but to do that, I'm gonna need your help first.

FRANK

Those are some balls you've got. I'll give you that.

GENE

I made some calls. There's a small paper for sale. Circulation's about 18,000. I wanna buy it.

FRANK

How much do you need?

GENE

I have ten grand to put in.

FRANK

How much?

GENE

I need another sixty-five. I wouldn't ask if there was any other... I'm only in this position because you asked for my help. Now I know I should've listened to you, but I'm trying to fix this. Patty's pregnant and I need--

FRANK

-I'll loan you the money. But it ain't free.

(Gene knows)

Go on. Buy your paper. I'm sure you'll make it a huge success.

Gene NODS -- gets the hell out of there.

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - NIGHT

Gene EXITS the restaurant -- EXHALES and WIPES the SWEAT from his face. He doesn't get a few steps when his STOMACH TURNS. Gene BOLTS into the nearest bar possible.

INT. BAR - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Gene VOMITS his guts out. He takes a couple of breaths to steady himself -- WIPES his mouth and goes into the...

BAR - CONTINUOUS

If the restaurant was seedy, this is downright *filthy*. A RED LIGHT SHINES from the ceiling. Gene SADDLES up to the bar.

GENE

Can I get a bourbon?

The BARTENDER POURS the drink -- Gene DOWNS it.

GENE (CONT'D)

Again please.

The bartender OBLIGES. Gene DOWNS it again, finally seeming to catch his breath -- SIGNALS for another.

MAN (O.S.)

You keep that up, you're gonna make some bad decisions...

Gene TURNS to KENNY CROSS, 31, a stylish, flirty man who doesn't let anyone run him, sitting near him at the bar.

KENNY

...unless that's what you're after.

GENE

It's been a rough few days. You ever feel like your whole world's about to come apart and no matter what you do, you won't be able to fix it?

KENNY

Every minute of my fucking life.

GENE

I'm starting a new job and if I screw it up, I'm pretty sure I'll end up dead.

That gets Kenny's attention. He PASSES his drink to Gene.

KENNY

Quite the femme fatale are you. Maybe retirement's in order.

GENE

I've got too many responsibilities for that.

KENNY

What a pity. You know, they got a room in the back. You can lay down, relax. I bet I can make you forget about all those *responsibilities*.

GENE

Wait. *What?*

KENNY

Sometimes people like to watch, but it's pretty private.

GENE

I think you got the wrong idea.

KENNY

(PUSHES a \$20 to him)

Does that change things?

GENE

No, it doesn't. I'm married.

KENNY

Bad boy. Don't worry, I can pop you off nice and good in under 20 and get you home in time for Lucy.

GENE

You don't give up, do you?

KENNY

Never once in my entire life.

That sounds vaguely *familiar* to Gene.

GENE

Not for nothin', but if you keep talkin' like that, someone's gonna punch you in the mouth.

KENNY

(LAUGHS)

Not here. Unless some idiot wanders in off the street and doesn't realize where he is.

Gene looks around. All FIT MEN in TIGHT SHIRTS. *Realizing...*

KENNY (CONT'D)

Don't worry. We were raided last night. The police never come here two nights in a row.

GENE

That's very comforting. Thanks for listening. And the drink.

He DOWNS his drink. Kenny WATCHES as Gene goes.

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Patty's getting ready for bed. She POPS a PILL as the FRONT DOOR SHUTS. She quickly HIDES the PILL BOTTLE. Gene comes in.

PATTY  
How'd it go?

GENE  
I got the loan. See? I told you everything would be okay.

PATTY  
You sure did.

GENE  
How's the little one doing?

PATTY  
Excited to meet his Papa. Or her Papa. Haven't decided which.

Gene KISSES her barely visible BABY BUMP.

TITLE CARD:

**Step #2:  
Research**

A RED MARKER CROSSES OUT job notices in the paper. One after another gets X'ed out until whoever is searching gets frustrated and STABS the PAPER with the MARKER over and over.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - MORNING

Gene HURRIES to catch a elevator.

GENE  
Hold the elevator!

INT. ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER

Gene finds Kenny -- a CAMERA around his neck. Kenny BEAMS.

GENE  
You again.

KENNY  
And look at you. Still alive. I'm *impressed*.

Gene notices Kenny's camera.

GENE

Is that camera for personal or professional use?

KENNY

Why? Do you have something in mind?

GENE

No, but before you make another pass at me, there's something I should probably tell you.

DING! They step out onto the fifth floor, right in front of a door with a sign that reads: **The New York Enquirer.**

KENNY

I already know you're married. How much worse can it get?

GENE

Much worse. I work here.

KENNY

No, you don't. I work here.

GENE

I told you I was starting a new job. It's my first day.

KENNY

That could *theoretically* be possible, except that we've been on a hiring freeze--

GENE

-Because circulation was down?

KENNY

Uhh, yeah. How did you--

GENE

-Which meant that advertisers started dropping you, which made your owner's widow, Mrs. William Griffin, nervous.

KENNY

You know Mrs. Griffin?

GENE

So nervous, in fact, that she sold your paper in the darkness of night and skipped town without so much as informing the staff.



GENE

You do?

KENNY

Yes.

GENE

Well we have a problem. *First*, that was incredibly long. *Second*, I don't know where my office is.

Kenny points to the corner, follows Gene into his...

OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Gene sets down his stuff.

GENE (CONT'D)

I don't know your name or what you do here. Whaddya say we give each other a pass on everything that was said and done the other night?

KENNY

Works for me.  
(off Gene's look)  
*What?*

GENE

Your name, Judy Garland.

KENNY

Kenny Cross. I'm your senior photo editor. And for the record, mocking Judy is a deal breaking offense.

GENE

Noted. Can you do me a favor and rally the staff? I'd like to say hello. Also for the record: I don't care how good you are, it would've taken hell of a lot longer than 20 minutes to pop me off.

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

A little later, the entire staff has gathered. It's pretty packed in here. Gene enters. Everyone immediately *quiets*.

GENE

Good morning. In case you haven't heard, Mrs. Griffin has sold the Enquirer. I'm Gene Pope, Jr.

(MORE)

GENE (CONT'D)

I ran Il Progresso for the past three years and am excited to be here.

(a beat)

Any questions?

DONNA LEE, 36, talks like she's chewing her face, speaks up.

DONNA

How many of us is getting laid off?

GENE

Nobody. I will be evaluating the staff, but right now my focus is righting the ship.

NORMAN DUPREE, 48, fat, balding, and pissed, speaks up.

NORMAN

And how are you going to do that?

GENE

I'm not going to write a bunch of key words on the blackboard like some goddamned asshole. I have two responsibilities: to create a good product and then sell the shit out of it. Changes will be small because I like that you report on local politics and social issues. That's the heart and soul of this place and I want to keep that intact. We may be the little guy, but The New York Enquirer is going to be known for *two things* and two things *only*: **quality** and **journalistic integrity**.

(the Staff CLAPS)

You'll see. It's gonna be great!!!

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Patty (now 9 months pregnant) COOKS breakfast while Gene CIRCLES stories in The New York Times. He gets into the deep, back pages with the CRIME, ACCIDENTS, and BURGLARIES. He CIRCLES them FASTER and FASTER as he goes.

GENE

Paper of record. Bullshit.

PATTY

I don't know why you bother reading it. It only makes you angry.

GENE

I have to. If they cover something,  
we gotta cover it too or else we  
look like their ugly stepsister.

Patty turns on the sink. The faucet EXPLODES -- SHOOTING  
WATER everywhere. Gene gets under the sink to turn it off.

GENE (CONT'D)

I thought you called the super.

PATTY

I did. They sent someone over last  
week and said nothing was wrong.

GENE

The understatement of the century.

The water STOPS. Gene stands. He's SOAKED from head to toe.

PATTY

My hero.

GENE

Call the super again, will ya?

They KISS. Patty TOSSES a TOWEL at him as he goes back to his  
paper, picking up where he left off.

GENE (CONT'D)

They don't even name their sources  
properly. Listen to this! Union  
bosses say a strike is imminent.  
Who the hell are these union  
bosses? I dunno. Could be my Aunt  
Ester. And here...

(he BLANCHES)

Oh fuck me.

PATTY

What is it?

GENE

The strike. It's the goddamned  
newspaper delivery men.

He GRABS his coat -- HURRIES out. Patty wipes SWEAT from her  
face. She sits down, exhausted.

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - MORNING

A MOB FLOODS the street with STRIKE signs. They CHANT as Gene  
SQUEEZES his way through, HURRYING inside his office.

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - MORNING

Gene -- still wet -- stalks through the newsroom. He's quickly joined by Kenny, who's more than a little panicked.

KENNY

What the hell happened to you?

GENE

Home repairs.

KENNY

Home repairs have you looking like the creature from the black lagoon?

GENE

Only if I get to drown the person closest to me. How did we not know about this?

KENNY

Only the top papers in the city were invited to the negotiations.

GENE

And all they want is two more bucks a week? My livelihood is being threatened over two bucks?

KENNY

People need to pay their bills and you're not exactly helping out in that department.

GENE

Kenny--

KENNY

-You came in here with your big speeches and it's been six months and nothing has changed.

GENE

I'm still evaluating.

KENNY

*Oh really?* Are you still evaluating whether you want to pay your staff?

GENE

Shit Kenny. You try getting disowned and sink your life savings into a fledgeling enterprise.

KENNY

I get it, but there are only so many bounced checks you can write before you start bleeding staff. Then it won't matter who is or isn't striking because you're not going to have a paper to put out.

GENE

I'll take care of it. And you can be nicer to me.

KENNY

Gene, this is me being nice.

GENE

(to SECRETARY)

Can you get Frank Costello for me? His number's in the Rolodex.

KENNY

You know Frank Costello? Like the Frank Costello?

SECRETARY

Gene, line one.

GENE

You got Frank?

SECRETARY

No. It's the police.

INT. POLICE STATION - AFTERNOON

Gene talks with an OFFICER while Patty sits nearby, nervous.

POLICE OFFICER

We found her in the park. She was lost and didn't know her name or where she lived. We found these in her purse when we asked for her identification. Is there any history of mental illness?

The OFFICER hands over a BOTTLE OF PILLS. Gene examines it. Hiding his embarrassment, he STUFFS them in his pocket.

GENE

No. And fuck you very much.

He goes to Patty and gets her the hell out of there.

INT. CAB - AFTERNOON

Patty rests against the window, falling asleep.

GENE

You scared the shit out of me. What the hell is going on?

PATTY

I just got confused, that's all.

GENE

*Confused?* How do you get confused about where you live?

PATTY

Gene, I'm tired...

GENE

(re: PILL BOTTLE)  
And what the hell are these?

PATTY

They're for my nerves. You know me.

They pull to a STOP. Patty gets out. Gene follows, not even close to being done with this conversation.

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Patty enters, lays down on the sofa. Gene's right behind her.

GENE

Are they safe for the baby?

PATTY

They're from a doctor.

GENE

I didn't ask if they were from a doctor, I asked if they were safe.

PATTY

I wouldn't hurt our baby, Gene.

GENE

Yeah, but now you're wandering the streets acting like a crazy person and I wanna know what's going on.

PATTY

It's fine. *Really*. Can we talk about this later? I'm tired.

GENE

You're carrying our child. You have to be more careful. You're the most important thing in the world to me.

PATTY

Yeah. Me and the paper.

GENE

What is *that* supposed to mean?

(no response)

I'm heading out for a bit, but I won't be long. Do you want to grab a late dinner?

But she's already asleep.

EXT. BOARDWALK - NIGHT

Frank and Gene walk along the Hudson, deep in conversation. The BODYGUARDS trail behind them.

GENE

Circulation isn't budging and with the strike, I can't pay the rent, the staff. I'm about to have a baby and Patty isn't herself. It's like I had both hands tied behind my back before I even got started.

FRANK

How much *more* do you need?

GENE

Ten grand. If we stay afloat while the other papers are dark, we can gain a subscriber base. Then I'll be able to pay you back.

FRANK

How do you suggest getting striking drivers to deliver your paper?

GENE

Do I gotta say it?

FRANK

Yeah, Gene. You gotta say it.

*Fuck.*

GENE

Take care of it. Just not too bad.

FRANK

There's no such thing as not too bad. The bad is what gets it done. I'm leaving town for awhile, so you're going to be on your own.

GENE

What's going on, Frank?

FRANK

Immigration wants to deport me back to Sicily.

GENE

I'm sorry. Anything I can do?

FRANK

My guy will contact you. Tell him what you need. It'll get done. I'll get you the rest next week.

Frank hands over an ENVELOPE OF CASH -- heads off. Relieved, Gene counts the cash as Judy Garland's GET HAPPY plays...

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - DAY

Gene SWEEPS through the office, PAYROLL CHECKS in hand. He's in his own tap-dance, musical comedy as he passes them out.

GENE

Norman DuPree? Loretta Jones?

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - SAME

A TRUCKER checks tire pressure. A THUG approaches him -- a CROWBAR lowers from his sleeve.

THUG

William Scott?

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - SAME

Gene uses the CHECKS like a fan, calling out...

GENE

Do we have Donna Lee in the house?

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - SAME

William HOLDS up his hands.

THUG  
Tell all your friends...

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - SAME

Gene HOPS on a desk, THROWING CHECKS to his STAFF.

GENE  
Stanley Farrell, Gloria Iglowitz...

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - SAME

The Thug BEATS William -- BASHING him in the stomach, the back, even his head. Blood SPRAYS--

THUG  
The Enquirer gets delivered...

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - SAME

GENE  
Where's Kenny Cross? Where's that  
lucky son of a bitch!?

Gene GRABS Kenny by the LAPELS, PULLING him close.

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - SAME

The Thug pulls William close to him by his LAPELS.

THUG  
Or I'll find every last one of you--

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - SAME

Gene looks *deeply* into Kenny's eyes.

GENE  
-And make your dreams come true.

He gives him a SLOPPY KISS. The STAFF SPRAYS CHAMPAGNE.

EXT. NEWS STANDS - VARIOUS - DAY

Stacks of The New York Enquirer get tossed from DELIVERY TRUCKS, landing with their VENDORS. One after another after another. The New York Enquirer is back in business.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Patty SCREAMS BLOODY MURDER as she gives birth. Gene CHEERS her on. A DOCTOR KNEELS between Patty's legs.

PATTY  
Get it out of me!

DOCTOR  
1, 2, 3, push!!!

Patty PUSHES HARD. We hear CRYING. The DOCTOR hands the BABY to Gene. *Proud*, he SHOWS Patty their baby.

GENE  
Here he is. Our boy.

PATTY  
I can't right now... I'm so tired.

Patty TURNS away. Gene stands there, stunned.

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gene holds his SCREAMING son, *trying to comfort him*. The phone RINGS. Gene FUMBLES to answer it.

GENE  
Yeah?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - SAME

Kenny WINCES at the baby's SCREAMING is right in his ear.

KENNY  
That's one happy newborn.

GENE  
What can I do for you, Kenny?

KENNY  
We need you to approve the layout.

GENE  
Sorry, Patty's not feeling well.  
Messenger it over. I'll make notes  
and send it back.

KENNY  
Is this how it's going to be now?

GENE

What do you want from me, Kenny?

KENNY

We just got ourselves on solid ground. We need you here.

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's dark and quiet in here. Gene DRAGS his tired ass into bed next to Patty.

GENE

I thought we were going to do this together. I can't look after him and run the paper, Patty. I can't.

PATTY

I don't want to be like this, but all he does is cry and I don't know what to do.

(a beat)

I don't think I like him.

GENE

Sometimes I don't like him either.

PATTY

*You don't???*

GENE

Of course not. He pees and poops and throws up -- that is, when he's not screaming at the top of his lungs. But he's our son. And our son needs to get baptized. What if we had a little party? Everyone's dying to meet him.

PATTY

I don't think I'm up for that.

GENE

I'll take care of everything. All you gotta do is show up.

PATTY

I'll try. Can I ask you something?

(Gene NODS)

What did you name him?

That breaks Gene's heart.

GENE  
Generoso Pope, *the third*.

She NODS, goes back to sleep. Gene's at a loss for words.

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Tons of GUESTS have gathered -- drinking, *laughing*, and enjoying food. Gene answers the door to find Kenny.

GENE  
Hey, hey! Get in here already!

KENNY  
Thanks for the invite.

GENE  
Funny how ya missed the actual ceremony.

KENNY  
I'm not setting foot in an actual church. Now where's the screamer?

Patty, barely paying attention to the BABY in her arms, PASSES her son to Gene, *FANNING* herself as if she's *relieved* to be rid of it. Gene PRESENTS his son to Kenny.

KENNY (CONT'D)  
Ooooo, I want one. Not really, but if I did, I'd steal yours.  
(re: Patty)  
What's going on with Patty?

GENE  
Nothing. She's fine.

KENNY  
She looks like she's seen a ghost. Or maybe an alien. You ever heard of Grooms Lake at Area 51?

GENE  
No. And what is it with you and all this nerd shit?

KENNY  
It's not nerd shit.

GENE  
Fine. Geek shit.

KENNY

It's not when you're talking about a massive government conspiracy to hide the truth about what's really out there. Irregardless, I'm telling you, Patty looks sick.

GENE

Give my wife a break. The woman just gave birth. Let's get you some of my famous baked ziti before I punch your lights out.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Oh god! Gene! The faucet!

Gene hands the baby back to a reluctant Patty. He and Kenny hurry off. Patty GULPS some water, FANNING herself.

KITCHEN - SAME

Water SPRAYS everywhere. Gene's under the sink again while Kenny tries to stop the EXPLOSION of WATER with a rag.

GENE

I got it.

KENNY

(gets SPRAYED in the face)  
Doesn't feel like it.

One more TWIST and the water dies. Gene gets up. Both he and Kenny are soaked. He LAUGHS -- TOSSES a TOWEL at Kenny.

GENE

Two creatures from the black lagoon.

LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The men come in, drying off with their towels.

GENE (CONT'D)

Hey Patty, I thought you said you called the super...

But he notices Patty's nowhere to be found. Neither is the baby. He sees some movement out on the balcony. Gene PUSHES his way past GUESTS wanting to congratulate him.

Wind PLAYS havoc with the CHIFFON CURTAINS, further OBSCURING Gene's view. He WHIPS them away and goes out on the...

BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

And finds Patty STEPPING OVER the railing holding the BABY!!!

GENE (CONT'D)

NO!!!

Gene RACES over, trying to get the baby away from her.

GENE (CONT'D)

Give him to me! Give him!

(she doesn't respond)

NOW, Patty! Give me my son!!!

Patty HANDS the BABY over. Gene's YELLING has brought Kenny and other GUESTS out on the balcony. Gene HANDS the BABY to Kenny -- *turning his attention back to Patty.*

GENE (CONT'D)

I'm going to help you back over,  
okay? Careful. Be very careful.

Gene HOLDS her while Patty climbs back over, COLLAPSING into his arms. They SINK to the ground -- adrenaline pumping.

PATTY

I was so hot, so hot, the baby and  
I were so hot...

Still wet from the sink, Gene LOOKS UP at all the WORRIED FACES staring at him. *Fuck.*

INT. GENE'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Kenny drives. He GLANCES in the rearview mirror -- *sees* Gene comforting a sleeping Patty in the back.

EXT. EDGEWOOD STATE HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

Gene HELPS Patty into the hospital. Once they're out of sight, Kenny pulls The New York Times from the backseat.

The headline reads: **Pope's Wife Tries to Leap to Her Death -- Baby in Arms**

INT. EDGEWOOD STATE HOSPITAL - OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Gene signs some papers, passing them back to DR. CLIFTON, 40s, a man with kind eyes.

GENE

She was taking these pills. She  
said they were safe...

CLIFTON

Unfortunately, there are quack doctors who've lost their licenses and will do anything for money. Those pills weren't safe, or legal. Your wife is very ill.

GENE

How long will she have to stay?

CLIFTON

That's up to her. Costs will be considerable, but I'll do everything I can to help Patty.

INT. EDGEWOOD STATE HOSPITAL - HALL - AFTERNOON

Gene finds Patty sitting in the hall, waiting. He KNEELS down to KISS her goodbye.

GENE

I have to go, but you're going to stay here for awhile. If you need anything, you can call me. You know the numbers, right? The house and the office?

(she nods)

I love you. You're going to get so much better. I promise.

(she nods again)

You used to fight with me. You used to fight with me all the time.

PATTY

I'm tired.

Gene walks away.

TITLE CARD:

**Step #3:  
The First Draft**

We LOOK DOWN at the top of a BALD HUMAN HEAD. A SCALPEL CUTS away the top of the skull REVEALING a THROBBING BRAIN. The SCALPEL then CUTS into the brain, SPILLING BLOOD.

INT. GENE'S CAR - EVENING

Kenny drives as Gene studies the newspaper article. Annoyed, he TOSSES it in the back as they SLOW to a stop. Gene CRANES his neck to get a better look as to what's going on.

KENNY  
You see anything?

GENE  
An accident, *maybe*.

Gene and Kenny INCH along far enough to see a MASSIVE TWO-CAR WRECK on the side of the road. Everyone STOPS and STARES.

KENNY  
Jesus. Bunch of looky-loos.

Gene looks back and forth between the TWISTED METAL and MANGLED BODIES and the MOTORISTS unable to look away.

GENE  
Do you have your camera?

KENNY  
I always have my camera.

GENE  
Pull the car over.

KENNY  
What?

GENE  
You heard me. Pull over.

EXT. HIGHWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Kenny SWERVES, PARKS. Gene RACES over to the accident. Kenny follows, SNAPPING pictures. FLASH!!!

GENE  
Get closer.

KENNY  
Any closer and we won't be able to see the cars. It'll just look like a bunch of blood and guts.

GENE  
Just do it.

Kenny OBLIGES, continues to SNAP pictures. FLASH FLASH!!!

GENE (CONT'D)  
Get in there--

KENNY  
-But--

GENE

Get the fuck in there!

Gene pushes Kenny to where he's practically inside the car with the VICTIMS. It's dark and bloody -- BONES stick out in VARIOUS DIRECTIONS. FLASH FLASH FLASH!!!

RED and BLUE LIGHTS of a police cruiser FLASH over them. Gene and Kenny HAUL ASS back to their car and SPEED AWAY.

INT. GENE'S CAR - NIGHT

Gene PULLS OVER in front of Kenny's apartment.

KENNY

What was all that about back there?

GENE

I don't know. Maybe we'll run a special crime section or something.

(a beat)

Thanks for today.

KENNY

If you need me, I'm up late. And not like that. I'm over you. Unless you're switching teams now that your wife is locked up in a mental institution, cause then--

GENE

-Get out of my car.

Kenny OBEYS. Gene DRIVES off.

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gene ARRIVES home to find SALLY, 28, a sweet, mousey thing, gently ROCKING his son. She hands the baby over.

GENE

Sorry I'm late.

SALLY

It's fine. I lost track of time looking at this little one.

GENE

Can we make this a full time thing? I need someone and he likes you.

SALLY  
Uhhh, maybe. I'll have to check  
with the agency.

GENE  
Fuck the agency. I'll pay you a  
hundred dollars a week.

SALLY  
*A hundred??*

GENE  
You play hardball, huh? *Fine*. Two  
hundred.

SALLY  
I'll... I'll start Monday.

Sally heads out. Gene RUBS his son's back, soothing him.

GENE  
Looks like it's just you and me.

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gene ROLLS around in bed, *tormented* by a dream.

FLASH FLASH FLASH!

Two cars SMASH into each other in a head-on collision.

FLASH FLASH FLASH!

A MAN SHOOTS his WIFE while she FUCKS another MAN.

FLASH FLASH FLASH!

A WHEELCHAIR BOUND GRANDMOTHER get pushed down the stairs.

FLASH FLASH FLASH!

A MOTHER DROWNS her baby in a bathtub.

BACK TO SCENE

Gene BOLTS up, COVERED in SWEAT. He THROWS off the covers.

INT. KENNY'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

There's a POUNDING at the door. Kenny, WRAPPED in a SHEET,  
*answers*. Gene STORMS right in -- BABY in his arms.

GENE

You said you stay up late. I have an idea I need to talk through.

KENNY

So you brought your son?

GENE

Nanny doesn't start till Monday.

Kenny gets back into bed with a SHIRTLESS hunk, MARCO. They both sit up, listening to Gene as he rants.

GENE (CONT'D)

I tried to sleep, but I kept having this dream about people doing these terrible, violent things. And then I thought about the car accident and how everyone couldn't look away. There's a never-ending public thirst for tragedy.

KENNY

And you have evidence of this?

GENE

You mean besides my being front page news when my family disowned me and my wife tried to jump off the balcony with our child?

(the baby *cries*)

It's okay, buddy. Papa's here.

MARCO

Man, that sounds rough.

KENNY

This is *not* the group participation portion of the evening.

GENE

No, he's right. He's absolutely right. Hi, I'm Gene Pope Jr. Nice to meet you.

(back to Kenny)

I think we need to put the car wreck on the front page.

KENNY

The front--Gene, we can't.

GENE

Why not?

KENNY

Because there was tons of blood,  
broken bones sticking out every  
which way, smashed skulls--

GENE

(snaps fingers)  
-Exactly!!!

KENNY

Gene, it's late. You're not  
thinking clearly. It's too graphic.

GENE

You want to talk about graphic? I  
could have you two Judys arrested  
for what's going on in here.

MARCO

That's my cue.

Marco stands to leave. Gene waves him off.

GENE

Sit down. Your ass is safe.  
(back to Kenny)  
I think we need to rebrand.

KENNY

As what?

GENE

People need to know how the world  
works. Not this Candyland, Leave It  
To Beaver bullshit the powers that  
be shove down our throats. We're  
going to give the people the truth.

KENNY

Exactly what kind of truth are you  
talking about?

GENE

The kind that real Americans face  
every day. I'm talking about rapes!  
Murders! Teenage mothers who twist  
off their baby's heads!!!

MARCO

That's my cue again.

Marco SCRAMBLES away as Gene sits on the bed with the baby.  
Kenny's in *complete and utter shock*.

KENNY

Can you hand him to me?

GENE

Why?

KENNY

I'd feel more comfortable having a conversation about dead babies if you weren't holding a live one.

GENE

It won't just be dead babies. We'll do train accidents and suicides too. You wanna toss grandma down the stairs for your inheritance? We'll give you an exclusive.

KENNY

No, no, no, no--

GENE

-Why not? It's news.

KENNY

It's not news. It's... gore!

GENE

We'd be telling the truth. Isn't that why we got into this business?

KENNY

Yeah, but--

GENE

-Who else is bringing this kind of news to the public? We can be leaders of a movement!!!

KENNY

Gene, we'll lose all respect and credibility--

GENE

-At first, *maybe*--

KENNY

-We report on local issues, world affairs. If we do this, we will--

GENE

-Fold!

That came out harder than Gene intended.

KENNY

I thought we were doing better. We got paid.

GENE

It was a band-aid. I need to make a big move. I've got Patty and the doctors and my son to pay for. And this life you love so much?  
Goodbye.

(a beat)

I need you with me on this.

Kenny leans his head back against the wall, considering.

KENNY

If we're gonna do gore, can we at least do the classy version?

GENE

Classy gore. No problem.

KENNY

Maybe it could be a warning of sorts. Like the accident could be us cautioning the public against driving without seat belts.

GENE

We're performing a public service.

KENNY

People might actually thank us.

GENE

Yes!!! Baby Gene thanks you. It's gonna be great! Just you wait!

Gene *playfully* SMACKS him across the face before heading out. Kenny leans his head against the wall. *What has he done?*

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

*Like an ass*, Gene writes GORE on a chalkboard for his staff.

GENE

Any questions?

(no one says a word)

Don't be afraid. I'm open to suggestions.

(still nothing)

Okay, okay, I get that this is a *slight* shift in direction--

DONNA LEE

*Slight?*

GENE

This will be fun.

STANLEY FARRELL

Giving up our moral and ethical standards is fun?

GENE

Yes! No! You're not giving up anything. We're alerting the public to the realities of the modern world. Consumers are curious by nature and we are going to satisfy that thirst.

(silence)

Let's play a game. Someone give me a bad headline. *Anybody?*

LORETTA JONES

*"The Dow Jones Plummets 400 Points."*

GENE

Okay, I see where your head is at. But we want something that sounds a little bit scarier.

LORETTA JONES

Fine. *"The Dow Jones Plummets 500 Points."*

GENE

Guys, come on. This is serious. Do you think I'd be making you do this if we weren't in a dire situation? Help me out here.

GLORIA IGLOWITZ raises her hand.

GENE (CONT'D)

Gloria! What do you got for me, baby?

GLORIA

*"Man Hit By Bus."*

Gene writes the headline on the chalkboard.

GENE

Better! Not only did you invoke tragedy, but you also alerted us to an important issue regarding the training of New York City bus drivers. But we need to work on that headline. We need something a little bit... *splashier*. Norman, what do you got?

NORMAN

*"Retired Vet Hit By Bus."*

Gene CLAPS his hands, *excited*. He ERASES "man" and REPLACES it with "retired vet."

GENE

Yes! Do you know what you did? You added context for the victim! Now that we know he's a retired vet, you know what we do? We care. But we can do better! Donna, juice up the accident for me.

DONNA

Uhhh, how?

GENE

Our fictitious vet wasn't just hit by the bus was he, Donna?  
(no response)  
How was he hit?

DONNA

He was... *pulverized*?

GENE

Yes! He was! Yes!

Gene ERASES "hit" and REPLACES it with "*pulverized*." The STAFF is starting to get into this.

GENE (CONT'D)

We have "*Retired Vet Pulverized by Bus*." We've come a long way, but it's still not quite there. Kenny, what's wrong with this headline?

Kenny LOOKS at all the EXPECTANT FACES. *Deep breath...*

KENNY

We don't know anything about the bus driver.

GENE

Yes! Finish it off for me!  
 (ERASES "bus", waits)  
 Kenny? You blanking, buddy?

KENNY

(*reluctantly*)  
 "Retired Vet Pulverized by Drunk  
 Bus Driver -- Police Investigating  
 MTA cover-up."

Gene DROPS his chalk, TURNS to Kenny -- *in shock*.

GENE

Ladies and gentlemen, a man after  
 my own heart! This is the future of  
The New York Enquirer! Give a round  
 of applause to my new right hand  
 man, Kenny "The Boss" Cross!!!

Everyone CLAPS and CHEERS. Kenny takes it all in, unsure, but  
 Gene's positivity is *infectious*. Kenny SMILES, NODS as Judy  
 Garland's THE TROLLEY SONG plays...

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - DAY

The STAFF *flies* around, trying to put together the paper.  
 Kenny RUSHES over with the PHOTOGRAPHS.

KENNY

What do you think?

GENE

Can you make the gash in the baby's  
 head bigger?

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - DAY

A BUSINESS MAN stops at a newsstand -- GLANCES at the papers,  
 but stops upon seeing The New York Enquirer and GRABS it.

The headline reads: **I Put My Baby in a Waste Basket and  
 Poured Concrete Over Her.**

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - NEWSROOM - DAY

Stanley HANGS UP the phone -- SHOUTS to Gene and Donna.

STANLEY FARRELL

Up to 25,000!

EXT. HAIR SALON - DAY

OLDER WOMEN read the latest edition while under the dryers.

The headline reads: **Teenager Twists Off Corpse's Head to Get Gold Teeth.**

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - NEWSROOM - DAY

Gloria SMOKES while going over an article with Gene.

STANLEY FARRELL  
32,000 and climbing.

INT. ELK'S CLUB - DAY

DIRTY OLD MEN down beers as they read the paper.

The headline reads: **Mother Uses Son's Face as Ashtray.**

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - NEWSROOM - DAY

Norman Dupree shows a PHOTO SPREAD to Gene.

STANLEY FARRELL  
39,000!

GENE  
That's huge!!!

Something TURNS in Gene's stomach. He RACES off into the bathroom and VOMITS. He steps back out, WIPING his mouth.

GENE (CONT'D)  
Can we make her tits bigger? This isn't a cartoon. Where are her nipples?

INT. HIGH SCHOOL BOY'S LOCKER ROOM - DAY

TEENAGE JOCKS CHEER as they ogle the pictures of SEXY GIRLS in BIKINIS. Someone turns the page. Everyone FREAKS OUT!

JOCKS  
Turn it back!!!

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - NEWSROOM - DAY

Stanley SHOUTS at Gene as he confers with Kenny.

STANLEY FARRELL

57,000!

GENE

Great!

(to Kenny)

Is that a new watch? Someone's  
enjoying his bonus.

INT. ALL AMERICAN HOME - DAY

HOUSEWIVES sip coffee as they read the latest edition.

The headline reads: **Mom and Dad Torture Cripple Son to Death -  
Claim He was the Devil.**

HOUSEWIFE 1

This is disgusting.

HOUSEWIFE 2

Deplorable.

(a beat)

How long did they get?

They turn the page, *excitedly*.

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - NEWSROOM - DAY

Stanley SHOUTS at Gene as he talks with Donna.

STANLEY FARRELL

62,000!

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

A BARBER tries to shave his CLIENT, but he's LAUGHING too  
hard as his CLIENT reads the paper.

CLIENT

Don't cut me! Don't cut me!

BARBER

I'm trying!

The headline reads: **I Cut Her Heart Out and Stomped on It!**

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - NEWSROOM - DAY

Stanley SHOUTS at Gene and Loretta, who go over an article.

STANLEY FARRELL

78,000!

GENE

Maybe he'll cut out her pancreas next. We can make it a two-parter.

(to Loretta)

What I really want to know is: what did she season it with?

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

The headline reads: **Mother Boiled Her Baby and Ate Her.**

A HUSBAND reads the paper as his WIFE comes in with a plate and sets it down before him. He eyes her, *suspiciously*.

HUSBAND

I haven't heard Hannah. Is she ok?

WIFE

I took care of her. Enjoy your dinner.

She WINKS at him. The Husband SNIFFS his food, *uneasy*.

INT. EDGEWOOD STATE HOSPITAL - CAFETERIA - DAY

Proud, Gene PRESENTS the fully redesigned paper to Patty. The headline reads: **Girlfriend Was Alive When He Cut Her Head Off.** Patty's there, but not *there*.

GENE

This is it. New layout, content. Took awhile to convince everyone, but I think it was worth it.

PATTY

It's scary.

GENE

*Really?* No. You think?  
(she just turns the pages)  
We miss you at home. Little Gene and me. You feeling better?

Still nothing.

INT. EDGEWOOD STATE HOSPITAL - DAY

Gene walks and talks with Dr. Clifton.

GENE

Patty's no different than when she got here. What can we do?

CLIFTON

There are electro-shock treatments, lobotomies--

GENE

-Wait, what's a lobotomy?

CLIFTON

We cut into the prefrontal lobe and remove a section of the brain.

GENE

*(horrified)*

You actually do that? Does it work?

CLIFTON

Sometimes it helps relieve pressure, but I wouldn't recommend it for Patty. She has to come out of this on her own.

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The STAFF has doubled in size. The office looks nicer too. Everyone CHEERS to the news Gene's just revealed.

GENE

The rebrand was a huge success! Stanley, give them the good news.

STANLEY FARRELL

The good news?

GENE

The numbers, Stanley. People like numbers. Fork 'em over.

STANLEY FARRELL

Last month we averaged 74,000 readers.

GENE

That's great!

*(realizing, to Stanley)*

What the fuck?! The last issue you told me we were at 78,000.

STANLEY FARRELL

That was five weeks ago.

GENE

Five weeks and we dropped 4,000 readers? What? Did they move? Drop dead of a mysterious illness?

LORETTA JONES

I actually did have a couple friends move.

DONNA LEE

You did? So did I.

GENE

No you didn't. When? Where? Why?

LORETTA JONES

One of those housing developments upstate. They said it was safer than living in the city.

GENE

That's horseshit. This city is perfectly safe.

KENNY

Have you read our paper lately?

GENE

You're blaming us? Every story we run is 100% factual.

KENNY

And 100% terrifying if you want to raise a family here.

GENE

We're not responsible for shifts in culture and human migration, Judy.

KENNY

All I'm saying is it wouldn't kill us to tone it down a little. We can go back to the way things were--

GENE

*-Go back?* Are you out of your mind?

KENNY

We have a solid subscription base, we don't have to write stories like these anymore.

GENE

Stories like these are what sell.

KENNY

Tell that to your 4,000 readers.

GENE

Well they can't run and hide. We're going to put our paper in every bar or barber shop or whatever the hell they have out there and not only will we get our readers back, but our circulation will soar. Now who's with me?

(no response)

Let's try this another way: who wants to have their job on Monday?

Everyone's hands SHOOT UP.

TITLE CARD:

**Step #4**  
**Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite**

A COPY OF THE PAPER gets TOSSED into a waste paper basket. Someone UNZIPS their FLY and PISSES all over it.

EXT. SUBURBIA - DAY

ROWS of IDENTICAL HOUSES line the streets. KIDS skip down the street. Birds CHIRP. Dogs PLAY. Sun SHINES from the heavens.

INT. GENE'S CAR - DAY

Gene drives. Gloria's in the front. Donna, Loretta, and Kenny sit in the back, annoyed. Kenny LIGHTS a joint.

GENE

(*sniffs, pissed*)

Is that grass? Are you smoking grass? In my car?

KENNY

Gene, it's Saturday. On Saturdays, I get stoned and have anonymous sex. I will not have my life stolen from me.

He OFFERS it to Loretta. She accepts, TAKES a hit -- PASSES it to Donna, who does the same. Donna COUGHS horribly.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Gloria? Gene?

GENE

No! No one else is getting stoned. We need to focus. Without subways, there are no news stands. Without news stands, there are no papers. And I haven't seen a single bakery or butcher shop since we left the city. Where the hell do these people shop?

Gene TURNS and comes to a SCREECHING HALT. Everyone's eyes GO WIDE as they behold the SITE BEFORE THEM...

A SUPERMARKET.

GENE (CONT'D)

What. The fuck. Is that?

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

It's another world in here: CLEAN, SPARKLING, and NEW. Aisles upon aisles of PERFECTLY LINED FOOD. Gene, Kenny, and the women stand in the middle of it all, mouths AGAPE, as CUSTOMERS shop like this is normal.

LORETTA JONES

That's it, I'm moving.

GLORIA IGLOWITZ

They literally have everything.

DONNA LEE

I can get a roast, a loaf of bread, and hair spray? I'm never leaving.

LORETTA JONES

Is this even legal?

GENE

Ladies, focus. Yes, it's legal. Yes, it's revolutionary. But you know what they don't have?

KENNY

Oh they have rubbers. I checked.

GLORIA IGLOWITZ

(off that)

Be right back.

LORETTA JONES

Plus we're running out of paper towels at home.

DONNA LEE

And the kids would never forgive me. Soda's on sale!

The WOMEN run off.

GENE

See? This is what happens when you take women shopping. Kenny, go grab a copy of the paper from the car.

(Kenny doesn't move)

What?

KENNY

I don't remember where we parked.

(off Gene's glare)

I'll find it.

Kenny casually walks off. Gene STOPS a STORE EMPLOYEE.

INT. SUPERMARKET - MOMENTS LATER

Gene PITCHES to WAYNE, 50, a gruff and portly manager, who doesn't seem to be enjoying these city-folk.

GENE

You've got a great gig going here. Really. Hat's off to you.

WAYNE

Uh-huh.

GENE

But there's a product you don't have -- one that I can offer you.

WAYNE

Yeah? What's that?

Kenny returns. He PRESENTS the PAPER with a headline that reads: **Man Eats Dogs: He Hammers Them, Boils Them, Eats.**

GENE

A cutting edge newspaper from Manhattan. Like I said, you've got a great thing going, but it's not reality. You and me, we know this. This is a bubble and that's fine. But when you live in a bubble, it's fun to see what goes on outside the bubble. Know what I mean?

WAYNE

No.

KENNY

What Mr. Pope means is it's not fun for the Princess to live in the palace her whole life.

WAYNE

What?

KENNY

You know? The Princess in the tower? With the servants?

WAYNE

I'm confused. Are we talking about bubbles or Princesses?

GENE

Neither. The people need news and you don't sell the news. You sell literally everything else, but no news. Put The New York Enquirer at the cashier and I guarantee you, it'll fly out of here faster than a pot roast on Sunday.

Gene and Kenny give him their best smile. Wayne *glances* at the paper -- and that headline.

WAYNE

Are you two on drugs?

GENE

No.

KENNY

Yes.

Gene *glares* at Kenny.

KENNY (CONT'D)

He *asked*.

WAYNE

I appreciate you boys stopping by, but I can't have shit like that in my store. Women shop here.

He NODS toward Loretta, Gloria, and Donna who now have GROCERY CARTS full of FOOD. They WAVE.

GENE

Oh, those aren't women. They're my staff and they approve every inch of this paper.

WAYNE  
It's a murder rag.

GENE  
No it's not!

WAYNE  
Men hammering their dogs? What the hell do you call it?

KENNY  
A public service announcement about the dangers of animal cruelty!!!

Wayne's had about enough of this -- gets in Gene's face.

WAYNE  
Take your queer friend, your cheap women, and your piece of shit paper back to the city where it belongs. You get me, Guido?

That's when they notice Kenny is PISSING ON WAYNE'S LEG! Gene and Wayne are too shocked to react. After ZIPPING UP...

KENNY  
I think we're done here.

INT. GENE'S CAR - DAY

The women sit in the back with their BAGS OF GROCERIES. Kenny's in the front, MUNCHING on a bag of POTATO CHIPS.

KENNY  
Want some?

INT. GENE'S CAR - DAY

The RADIO plays as Loretta gets out of the car. It's just Gene and Kenny now. Gene TURNS OFF the radio as he drives.

GENE  
What the fuck is wrong with you?

KENNY  
It's possible I smoked too much pot, but I stand by my choices.

Kenny TURNS it back ON. A RADIO ANNOUNCER comes on.

RADIO ANNOUNCER  
*...was found dead by her  
housekeeper early this morning in  
her Brentwood home...*

GENE  
If we can't get into those  
supermarkets, we're going to go  
under. Don't you get that?

Gene *TURNS OFF* the radio.

KENNY  
Yeah, okay.

Kenny *TURNS* the radio back *ON*.

GENE  
*What?* You don't believe me?

RADIO ANNOUNCER  
*...she was found nude in her bed...*

Gene *TURNS IT OFF*. Kenny *huffs*.

KENNY  
I see the same numbers you do. We  
are doing just fine. We don't have  
to be everywhere. And that guy was  
a dick, so...

Kenny *TURNS* the radio back *ON*.

RADIO ANNOUNCER  
*...an empty bottle of pills were  
found near the bed...*

Gene *TURNS* it back *OFF*.

GENE  
I know! But you don't seem to know  
what I'm dealing with here. Patty's  
counting on me.

KENNY  
I just love when you deputize your  
ailing wife as a defense of action.

Kenny *TURNS* it back *ON*.

RADIO ANNOUNCER  
*...was an empty water glass in what  
is believed to be an apparent  
suicide...*

Gene *FLIPS* it *OFF*.

GENE  
I don't do that.

KENNY  
You don't--I want one day where you don't complain about the penthouse you were thrown out of, the paper that was stolen from you, or how your crazy wife doesn't remember who you are anymore.

He *FLIPS* the radio back *ON*.

RADIO ANNOUNCER  
*...the world begins its mourning...*

GENE  
You're goddamned lucky I don't punch you in the mouth.

Gene *FLIPS* it *OFF* -- PARKS the car.

KENNY  
Will you stop?!? This is a big fucking deal!

Kenny *FLIPS* the radio back *ON*.

RADIO ANNOUNCER  
*...for our beloved movie star, Marilyn Monroe, dead at 36.*

Now Kenny *TURNS IT OFF* -- gets quiet for a moment.

KENNY  
Why can't you be happy with what you have?

Kenny gets out - *SLAMS THE DOOR* - leans through the window.

KENNY (CONT'D)  
No one cares about your tragedies, Gene. You're not famous enough.

Gene *WATCHES* as Kenny walks off.

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gene, *once again*, *ROLLS* around in bed. A nightmare consumes him. *FLASHES* of *MOVIE STARS* in the midst of their tragedies. *SLAPS, DIVORCES, AFFAIRS*. Gene wakes up with a start.

INT. KENNY'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Kenny gets BUTT-FUCKED by ETHAN, an even hunkier stud than Marco, when Gene BARGES right in with his son in his arms.

GENE

I know how to get The Enquirer into supermarkets.

Ethan FREAKS out -- PULLING A SHEET OVER HIM.

ETHAN

Jesus! Who the fuck are you!?!

GENE

Don't worry. I'm Kenny's boss.

ETHAN

Who's Kenny?

KENNY

I am!

(to Gene)

And you brought your son. Again.

GENE

What was I supposed to do? Leave him at home unsupervised?

KENNY

No that would be irresponsible. How did you even get in here?

GENE

Your door was unlocked. Did you redecorate? It looks great.

KENNY

I did. Thank you. And no, the door wasn't unlocked. This is New York.

GENE

I may have stolen a key last time. Doesn't matter.

KENNY

*Doesn't matter???*

GENE

You were right before. No one cares about my problems. When we saw the accident that night, we saw tragedy, right?

KENNY

And blood, guts, and gore, *yeah*.

GENE

If you take away the blood, guts, and gore, that leaves us with...

KENNY

*Tragedy?*

GENE

Exactly! But tragedies of people we feel we already know. People already in the news. Celebrities!

KENNY

You want to turn us into a fan magazine?

GENE

No, no, no.

KENNY

Thank god.

GENE

I want us to write about their abortions!!!

Kenny's eyes GO WIDE. He tries to speak very calmly.

KENNY

Gene, hand me the baby.

GENE

No. He's mine.

KENNY

Listen carefully: I need you to sit down. You've had a stroke--

GENE

--Just hear me out--

KENNY

--An explosion in your brain--

GENE

--This is real. And it won't just be about celebrity abortions.

KENNY

Oh well in that case, pizza for everybody!

GENE

We'll also cover breakups, spousal abuse, mental breakdowns, alcoholism, homosexual perversion--

KENNY

-Hey!

GENE

Sorry to say it, Kenny, but news is news and this will get us into the supermarkets. Staff meeting at 10am. It's going to be huge!

(leaves, comes back)

By the way, he's way better looking than the last guy. Well done you.

The baby GIGGLES. Gene leaves. Ethan TURNS to Kenny, pissed.

ETHAN

Who was the last guy? What's his name? Do I know him?

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Sally comes in as Gene RACES around to leave.

GENE

You're here. Great. I've got a big day ahead of me. Wish me luck.

SALLY

I actually wanted to talk to you.

GENE

Can it wait? I'm late.

SALLY

No, it can't. I have to turn in my two weeks.

GENE

Wait, what? Really? Why? Do you need more money?

SALLY

No, no. I'm getting married. Ben's in the Army and they're transferring him to California.

GENE

Well, I can't lose you. We have to find a way to work this out.

SALLY

How? You gonna call the Army?

GENE

Maybe. No, that's nuts. What if I marry you?

SALLY

*What???*

GENE

I'd make a great husband. I can take care of you. Little Gene loves you. You'll see. It'll be great!

SALLY

*(pained)*

I'm not that kind of girl, Gene.

GENE

No, I know. So you're marrying Ben! Congrats on that. I was only kidding before. *Mostly*. It's fine. I'll find someone.

SALLY

You're going to be late for work.

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - MORNING

Gene writes on the chalkboard as he talks to his staff.

GENE

From now on, we are going to focus on four things. Number 1: any and all things involving **celebrities**.

*(turning to them)*

Just because someone's famous, we automatically think their lives are perfect. They're *gorgeous, talented, rich*. They can't possibly be suffering like us. But they do. We're going to *lift* the veil -- show that, *yes*, celebrities are just like us. They have the same hopes, the same dreams, and the same failures.

*(silence from the staff)*

Now *personally*, I prefer tragedy, but happiness can sell too.

Romances being kept under wraps, luxury purchases, feuds resolved.

(MORE)

GENE (CONT'D)

Those can easily run alongside tales of bitter divorces, backstabbing, and bankruptcies. Okay. Number 2: **Ghost stories.**

KENNY

Wait, what?

GENE

People love paranormal activity, don't they, Kenny?

KENNY

Recreationally, sure. That doesn't mean it's newsworthy.

GENE

Even if it's a massive government conspiracy covering up an alien invasion?

KENNY

That's *different*.

GENE

How?

(Kenny doesn't know)

We need UFOs, haunted houses, people coming back from the dead--

DONNA LEE

-No one's gonna read a story about people coming back from the dead.

GENE

Unless a celebrity came back from the dead, but we'll get to that later. #3: **Medical Breakthroughs.**

STANLEY FARRELL

Like discovering a cure for cancer?

GENE

Hardly. There are tons of doctors who've lost their licences, but are still *technically* doctors, so their medical opinions mean just as much as practicing physicians. One such doctor friend of mine just told me that eating a well done steak was the medical equivalent of smoking 3000 cigarettes.

LORETTA JONES

Is that true?

GENE

*(winking)*

I dunno. Read about it in next weeks' issue.

KENNY

And number 4?

GENE

It's something I like to call **Hey, Martha** stories. Picture it: your wife is cooking you breakfast. You're sipping your coffee, casually reading the paper when SUDDENLY you come across a story that's SO SHOCKING, SO TITILLATING that you SHOUT "HEY, MARTHA! CAN YOU BELIEVE THIS?!?"

DONNA LEE

That is incredibly sexist.

GENE

What's sexist? No it's not. How?

LORETTA JONES

Cause the man is the one reading the newspaper.

DONNA LEE

Yeah. Women can do more than cook and clean for their husbands.

GENE

You know what I think? I think you're being too sensitive.

DONNA LEE

Like women are prone to be?

GENE

My wife tried to throw herself off our balcony while holding our newborn baby! The proof is in the pudding, my friend.

KENNY

*(trying not to lose it)*

Is there anything else we can do for you, Gene? Before the entire staff throws you off the balcony?

GENE

Yeah, *actually*, there is. A big rebrand requires a bigger name. From now on, we will be known as The National Enquirer.

STANLEY FARRELL

What's wrong with New York?

GENE

We've already conquered New York. Now it's time to conquer the world.

KENNY

Like Hitler?

GENE

(*ignoring that*)

And in that spirit, do we have anything on Henry Kissinger? We should do a story on him. I think he's up to no good.

KENNY

I'll assign it today.

GENE

No, I want you to do it, smarty pants. Go to his house and dig through his trash if you have to.

KENNY

You want me to... *what*?

GENE

Go to his house. Dig through his trash. It's not illegal.

KENNY

But... it's his *trash*.

GENE

Like that's something sacred. Gloria, what's in your trash?

GLORIA IGLOWITZ

Champagne and bonbons.

GENE

See! We gotta a sad, middle aged alcoholic with a weight problem. Trash tells you everything! Let's move, people!

Kenny can't believe what he's hearing.

EXT. HENRY KISSINGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

No one's around outside of the Secretary of State's home. Kenny SLIPS around the side of the house -- finds the TRASH CANS. He looks at them, *debating*.

KENNY

There is no shame in this. He's an influential public figure. His garbage could be a matter of national security.

*(lifts trash can lid)*

Oh, that's raw.

Kenny digs through the trash -- a small FLASHLIGHT in his mouth. He examines a PILL BOTTLE.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Anti-depressants. Gene will love that.

That's when BLUE & RED POLICE lights FLASH over Kenny. He turns toward them -- FLASHLIGHT IN HIS MOUTH. Fuck.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Kenny RUBS his WRISTS as Gene guides him toward the car.

GENE

It's perfectly legal to dig through someone's trash.

KENNY

You and the secret service have slightly different definitions of what is and what is not legal.

GENE

No one's filing charges.

KENNY

They arrested me, Gene. I was handcuffed and bent over the hood of a car!

GENE

Just like every other Saturday night. What did you find?

*(Kenny hesitates)*

You holding out on me?

KENNY

We already have the story about Kissinger and Carol Burnett ready to go. We don't need to run this.

GENE

I run everything.

(Kenny hands over the PILL BOTTLE)

Well, well. Wonder what the Secretary of State is so stressed out over that he's taking anti-depressants...

A NATIONAL ENQUIRER FLIES TOWARD US with the headline: **Job Stress Drives Kissinger to Drugs.**

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Kenny's hard at work. Gene pokes his head in.

GENE

I got another assignment for you.

KENNY

Oh yeah?

GENE

Bing Crosby just died.

KENNY

That's awful. I always liked him.

GENE

One of the best.

(a beat)

You a 42" long?

INT. COSTUME SHOP - DAY

Kenny gets fitted for a PRIEST'S ROBE by the SHOP OWNER. Gene stands off to the side, *observing*.

KENNY

I'm pretty sure impersonating a priest is definitely illegal.

GENE

Impersonating government officials and law enforcement officers is illegal. Religious figures are up for grabs. I checked.

KENNY

I can't tell you how comforting that is, thank you.

GENE

Now, when you talk to the family--

KENNY

-You said observe and report.

GENE

Yeah. And then comfort them. These people are hurting, Kenny. They'll appreciate it.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Kenny, dressed in his new PRIEST ROBE, comforts Bing's daughter, MARY CROSBY, 18.

MARY CROSBY

I miss him so much. I can't believe Dad's gone.

KENNY

I'm sure he loved you very much.

MARY CROSBY

You're very kind. I've always respected men of the cloth.

She SQUEEZES his butt. Kenny's eyes go WIDE.

A NATIONAL ENQUIRER FLIES TOWARD US with the headline: **Inside Bing Crosby's Funeral: A Touching Tribute.**

INT. THE NEW YORK ENQUIRER - KENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Gene's back with another idea. Kenny doesn't look up.

GENE

I admitted you to the Betty Ford Center for substance abuse. You leave tomorrow.

KENNY

Okay, thanks.  
(realizing, LOOKS UP)  
Wait. WHAT???

INT. BETTY FORD CENTER - DAY

It's a group therapy. Kenny sits across from JIM MORRISON.

JIM MORRISON

Death has always haunted me. When I was a kid, I was in New Mexico and saw this truck crash. There were all these blood-soaked bodies in the road. It was real intense.

KENNY

(sighing)

Please... please stop talking.

JIM MORRISON

It's my truth, man. It was the first time I tasted fear. I could see my own death. And it's soon.

A NATIONAL ENQUIRER FLIES TOWARD US with the headline: **Jim Morrison Fears He'll Die Young.**

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

CHAMPAGNE BOTTLES POP. The BAND plays. The LAUGHTER grows. Everyone APPLAUDS as Gene TAKES the mic. It's showtime.

GENE

The National Enquirer would like to thank the National Convention of Grocery Store Owners for having us. We've gone through a painstaking reinvention to please you. Well, that and an unlimited bar tab.

(polite LAUGHTER)

Our paper is new and improved and I'm not the only one who thinks so. Gentlemen, let me introduce our celebrity guest of the night, Ms. Jayne Mansfield!!!

JAYNE MANSFIELD steps on stage. The men CLAP and CHEER and WHISTLE. Jayne's wearing a virtually SEE-THROUGH dress with her TITS practically spilling out of the top.

JAYNE

Oh my goodness! Thank you! You're so sweet. I have been a big fan of The National Enquirer and I hope you are too.

(MORE)

JAYNE (CONT'D)

Now Mr. Pope has promised me that if you agree to have his paper in your stores, it will be classy and something that you can be proud to have next to the cash register. Plus, I'd be very, very grateful.

Jayne LAUGHS and SHAKES her tits at the DROOLING MEN.

JAYNE (CONT'D)

Now, who's with me?  
(the men CHEER)  
I can't hear you!

She SHAKES her TITS some more, *egging* them on.

JAYNE (CONT'D)

That sounds like a yes, Mr. Pope.  
That sounds like a yes!!!

OFF STAGE: Gene CLAPS and WHISTLES too.

KENNY

This makes me nervous. It all feels too good to be true.

GENE

Why don't you sing, Judy?

KENNY

Gene, I'm trying to talk to you--

GENE

-And I'm trying to give you your dream. There's a band right there! That's why you came to New York.

KENNY

Yeah, but I gave up on all that.

GENE

*Did you?*

Gene STEERS Kenny toward the huge CHEERING CROWD. It's too *intoxicating* for him to resist. He instructs the BAND LEADER as to which song to sing and steps center stage.

The BAND LEADER plays Judy Garland's THE MAN THAT GOT AWAY. Kenny takes a DEEP BREATH and SINGS.

KENNY

*The night is bitter  
The stars have lost their glitter  
The winds grow colder  
(MORE)*

KENNY (CONT'D)  
*Suddenly you're older  
 And the dreams you dreamed have all  
 gone astray*

While Kenny *sings*, Gene MINGLES amongst the crowd. He SMILES, SHAKES hands. A *schmoozing dynamo*. But then he spots EDITH MOORE, 35, a woman who looks like a million bucks and knows it. She ADVANCES. Gene SWALLOWS hard.

EDITH  
 You're the guy with the paper.

GENE  
 That's me.

EDITH  
 My date's drunk and got a little handsy with Ms. Mansfield over there. A couple of your big tough guys had to take him out back and beat the crap out of him.

GENE  
 Sorry about that.

EDITH  
 Don't be. He smelled like spearmint and pig fat. I owe you.

GENE  
 It's on the house.

He starts past her. Edith STOPS him -- a HAND on his arm.

EDITH  
 Doesn't have to be.

GENE  
 I'm married.

EDITH  
 Whaddya know. The one honest guy in the room. I better go find the pig fat man.

She SASHAYS past him. Gene can't keep his eyes off her.

FRANK (O.S.)  
 Quite the party, Mr. Pulitzer.

He TURNS and comes face to face with Frank. Gene HUGS him.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Your paper is everywhere I look.  
What's your circulation at?

GENE

We're doing okay. Hovering under  
100,000.

FRANK

Nipping at your father's heels is  
better than okay. You got dealt a  
rough hand and really turned into  
something. All on your own.

(teases)

Or almost.

GENE

What can I do for you, Frank?

FRANK

You sound so serious, Gene. This is  
a social visit.

GENE

I owe you. I know that. Just tell  
me what I can do.

FRANK

This business with the immigration  
people, it bled me dry.

GENE

That why your dogs are gone?

FRANK

(nods)

Run the numbers for me. In the back  
with the classifieds. No one will  
even know it's there.

GENE

That's it? Consider it done.

FRANK

Yeah?

GENE

I can't say no to you, Uncle Frank.  
And thanks for supplying Jayne.  
She's a big hit.

(Frank hands him an  
ENVELOPE)

I'll run them in the next edition.

They CHEERS, DRINK. Frank moves on. Kenny's killing it on stage. Gene gives him an APPROVING SMILE.

KENNY

*That great beginning  
Has seen it's final inning  
No more that all-time thrill  
For you've been though the mill  
And never a new love will  
Be the same*

Gene SIPS his drink. A WAITER brings a phone over.

WAITER

Phone call, Mr. Pope.

GENE

(into phone)  
Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. EDGEWOOD STATE HOSPITAL - DR. CLIFTON'S OFFICE - SAME

CLIFTON

Mr. Pope, do you have a minute?

GENE

I can't hear you.

CLIFTON

It's about your wife. It's important.

GENE

Is she okay?

CLIFTON

She's gone.

GENE

What? She left?

CLIFTON

No. I'm sorry, Gene--

GENE

-I still can't hear you--

CLIFTON

-She's dead, Gene!  
(softening his tone)  
She hung herself in her room.  
(MORE)

CLIFTON (CONT'D)  
 You'll need to come in, make  
 arrangements. Gene? Are you there?

Gene HANGS UP. He looks around his party in full swing.  
 Kenny's bringing it home -- *singing* his heart out.

KENNY  
*The road gets rougher  
 It's lonelier and tougher*

Edith GLANCES over at Gene -- sees instantly that something's  
 wrong. She STRIDES over to him.

EDITH  
 Are you all right?

Gene breaks down. Edith HOLDS him, letting him cry as  
 everyone else dances around them.

KENNY  
*There's just no let up the live-  
 long night and day  
 Ever since this world began  
 There's nothing sadder than  
 Looking for the one that got away*

TITLE CARD:

**Step #5:  
 The Polish**

A STAR gets PLACED on top of a fully decorated Christmas  
 tree. It looks nearly perfect... until one of the lights  
 CATCHES fire and the tree soon is ENGULFED in FLAMES.

INT. EDGEWOOD STATE HOSPITAL - DR. CLIFTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Gene SIGNS the necessary paperwork -- hands it over.

GENE  
 Did she say anything? Leave a note?  
 Something?

CLIFTON  
 No. I really am very sorry.

INT. WOODLAWN CEMETERY - DAY

Gene's alone, unable to take his eyes off Patty's CASKET as a  
 PRIEST reads from the bible. When he's finished...

PRIEST  
Anything you'd like to say?

Gene SHAKES his head no. He LIGHTS a cigarette -- walks away.

INT. THE STORK CLUB - NIGHT

Gene sits alone. He SPOTS Edith checking her mink -- quickly stands -- PULLS OUT her chair as she approaches. They sit.

GENE  
I didn't think you'd make it.

EDITH  
It's not every day a girl gets an invitation to The Stork Club.

GENE  
I'll be better company this time.

EDITH  
Did you have a service?

GENE  
Not really. She hadn't been well in awhile. No family or friends.

EDITH  
I really am sorry.

GENE  
Me too.  
(CLINKS her water glass)  
To new beginnings.

EDITH  
You're not supposed to make a toast with water. It's bad luck.

GENE  
Screw it. We'll make our own luck.  
You hungry? They have the best veal in town.

He DRINKS. They open their menus when Anthony walks in. He's *agitated* and *panicked* as he STALKS over to them.

ANTHONY  
Gene, I need to talk to you.

GENE  
I don't have anything to say to you. Now, if you'll excuse me--  
(MORE)

GENE (CONT'D)  
(to Edith)  
Did you find something you liked?

ANTHONY  
The paper's going under.

GENE  
(to Edith)  
You must be hungry.

ANTHONY  
Did you hear me? Papa's paper is going under. You have to help us.

GENE  
I don't have to do anything.

EDITH  
I can give you two a minute alone.

GENE  
It's fine. You must be hungry.

ANTHONY  
You won. Don't you see? You did.

GENE  
I haven't won.

ANTHONY  
Why's that?

GENE  
Because you're still standing here.

ANTHONY  
They're going to auction off all our things. You'd let your family go bankrupt?

GENE  
You're doing that all by yourselves. Please leave. You're embarrassing me. And yourself.

ANTHONY  
Jesus. Papa'd be real proud of the greaseball you turned out to be.

Gene LEAPS up. He PUNCHES Anthony before SMASHING his head on the table. GUESTS GASP as Anthony SLUMPS to the floor. Gene takes his seat -- WIPES some BLOOD off his cheek.

GENE  
You still hungry?

EDITH  
No. *Thirsty*.

INT. GENE & PATTY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mad, raw FUCKING. Gene and Edith climax -- their sweaty bodies falling onto the mattress. Gene's chest *heaves*.

EDITH  
Did I ever tell you I was a game show hostess?

Edith SMILES, *coyly*, KISSING her way down Gene's body.

GENE  
(*straining*)  
No. No, you didn't.

EDITH  
It was my job to keep the contestants happy even when they lost a lot of money.

GENE  
I bet you were pretty good.

She starts BLOWING him. He can't take it anymore.

GENE (CONT'D)  
By any chance, do you like kids?

Edith looks up at him, confused.

INT. CHRISTIE'S AUCTION HOUSE - DAY

The Il Progresso auction. Catherine, Fortunato, and Anthony sit up front as their things are auctioned away.

AUCTIONEER  
Sold!  
(BANGS gavel)  
Next up, we have an antique from the Il Progresso archives: a one of a kind Chandler & Price printing press from 1886. We will start the bidding at \$500.

A BIDDER RAISES a PADDLE.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

We have \$500. Do we have 6?  
 (another PADDLE RAISES)  
 We have 6. Do we have 7?  
 (another PADDLE RAISES)  
 7 to the gentleman. Do we have 8?

GENE (O.S.)

Two thousand dollars.

Catherine, Fortunato, and Anthony TURN (as does everyone else) to see Gene in the back of the room.

LATER

*Cautiously*, Gene APPROACHES Catherine and his brothers.

GENE (CONT'D)

Hey, Ma. How are you?

CATHERINE

I'm auctioning off my family's belongings. How do you think I am?

GENE

I'm sorry about that. I've made some mistakes, I know that, but... I don't know if you heard, Patty passed away... I'm getting married again, so that's happening. Little Gene is growing up fast. I'm sure he'd love to meet his family. Maybe you could come to the wedding if you wanted.

(re: Anthony's FACE)

I'll be on my best behavior. Hand to god. Whaddya say, Ma? Can we bury the hatchet?

Catherine STANDS -- looks him DEAD in the EYE.

CATHERINE

I should've aborted you when I had the chance.

She LEAVES. The brothers FOLLOW. Gene stands there, *stunned*.

INT. CENTRAL PARK CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT

SNOW has fallen outside. Inside, Gene and Edith have just been married. Gene *kisses* his bride. Their guests APPLAUD.

INT. CENTRAL PARK CLUBHOUSE - NIGHT

The reception. Everyone fawns over Edith's GIANT DIAMOND RING. Gene gets a drink at the bar, *watching* her. He smiles to himself -- so proud. Frank comes up, PATS him on the back.

GENE

Frank!

FRANK

I finally made it to one of your weddings. Was sorry to hear about Patty. That's a real shame.

Gene NODS, a little nervous as Frank ushers him away.

GENE

Did you get everything squared away with the immigration people?

FRANK

They're letting me stay for now. You know Walpurgis Nacht? You must. You had a first class education.

GENE

It's German, means Witch's Night.

FRANK

When the demons come out to play. Ever notice things go to shit anytime you throw a party?

GENE

Frank, *listen*, I've been meaning to ring you about the numbers--

FRANK

-What's your circulation up to these days?

GENE

(*downplays*)  
302,000.

FRANK

302,000. That's really something. You've eclipsed your old man.

GENE

I haven't eclipsed anyone--

FRANK

-No, no, no. This is a red letter day. Your brothers' business is bankrupt, you eclipsed your father, and you just married Miss Tits on a Stick over there.

GENE

Frank, I was gonna run the--

FRANK

-You're living the high life. Who gives a fuck about the rest of us who got you there?

GENE

I'm sorry. Things have been crazy with Patty dying and--

Frank full on SLAPS GENE ACROSS THE FACE.

FRANK

That dying wife shit may work on other people but it don't work on me. Who do you think you are???

Frank STRAIGHTENS Gene's TIE, BRUSHES his JACKET clean, and SMOOTHS out Gene's hair. *Terrified*, Gene doesn't move.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Now, you're gonna be a good little boy, go back to the office, and run the numbers like Uncle Frank asked you to do the first time.

(Gene NODS)

See, it's so much better when we can just enjoy each other's company and be *friends*.

(hands him an ENVELOPE)

A little something for you and the great pair of tits. Don't make me cut 'em off.

Gene WATCHES as Frank leaves. *Shaken*, Gene goes to the bar.

BARTENDER

Everything all right, sir?

GENE

Yeah. Is there a phone I can use?  
It's an emergency.

The Bartender hands him a phone. Gene waves the Bartender away to have some privacy -- DIALS a number.

GENE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hey... That thing we talked about,  
we're a go for tonight. He's  
staying at the Majestic... Yeah, it  
has to be tonight. Thanks.

He HANGS UP -- and immediately VOMITS in a forgotten ICE  
BUCKET. He WIPES his mouth just as Edith SNEAKS UP behind  
him. She THROWS her arms around his waist. Gene JOLTS.

EDITH

You okay?

GENE

Just had to make a work call. I  
believe I owe you a dance.

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - SAME

Frank walks home in the snow. A SHADOW *crosses* in front of  
him. Frank pauses, but there's no one there. He continues on.

INT. CENTRAL PARK CLUBHOUSE - SAME

Gene TWIRLS Edith away -- pulls her back to him.

INT. THE MAJESTIC HOTEL - LOBBY - SAME

MAN (O.S.)

This is for you, Frank!

Frank TURNS in time to GLIMPSE a GUN BEING FIRED.

INT. CENTRAL PARK CLUBHOUSE - SAME

Gene KISSES Edith. It's tender, sweet. Gentle.

INT. THE MAJESTIC HOTEL - LOBBY - SAME

Frank FALLS to the floor, blood GUSHING from his head. A  
HOTEL CLERK rushes over.

INT. CENTRAL PARK CLUBHOUSE - SAME

The song reaches its CLIMAX. Gene DIPS Edith. APPLAUSE  
abounds as he RAISES her to him, kissing her.

INT. THE MAJESTIC HOTEL - SAME

Blood DRIPS from the stretcher as MEDICS wheel Frank's near LIFELESS BODY from the hotel.

INT. KENNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gene, *frenzied*, tries opening Kenny's door but it's CHAINED.

GENE

The chain's on, Kenny. Why's the chain on?

Kenny, in a t-shirt and underwear, UNCHAINS the door.

GENE (CONT'D)

You don't have company, do you?

KENNY

No, it's just me. What's going on?

GENE

I think it's time we moved. Spread our wings. *Expand*.

KENNY

Like to a new office?

GENE

Like to a new state.

KENNY

What? Why?

Gene PULLS out a suitcase -- TOSSES Kenny's clothes in it.

GENE

I know you like it here, but it's so cold. I feel like we need someplace warmer. Florida, maybe.

KENNY

What brought this on?

GENE

Nothing. But sometimes you've got to take life by the balls and make a move. Also Frank was shot.

KENNY

*He what?!?*

GENE

Tonight. At his hotel. In the head.  
But the old man won't die. Know  
what I mean? It's crazy!

He keeps *hurriedly* STUFFING clothes in Kenny's bag.

GENE (CONT'D)

I mean, you'd think a bullet to the  
head would do the trick. But no!  
Hey, why weren't you at my wedding?

KENNY

I wasn't invited.

GENE

You wouldn't have had fun anyway.  
Do you need all these clothes?

KENNY

Gene, stop. I need you to look at  
me and tell me the truth.

GENE

I can do that.

KENNY

(dead serious)  
Do we need to move?

GENE

I'm thinking maybe. Actually, yes.  
Absolutely. There's a cab waiting  
downstairs to take us on a red eye.

Immediately, Kenny helps him pack.

KENNY

Jesus, Florida, what are you doing?  
Leave the sweaters. Pack the tank  
tops, shorts, and cute underwear.

GENE

(re: Kenny's outfit)  
Wait, what's cute underwear? *That?*

Kenny covers his junk.

EXT. PALM BEACH - DAY

The sun's shining. The palm trees SWAY in the wind as ocean  
waves CRASH against the shore. *It's the good life here.*

INT. GENE & EDITH'S HOUSE - DAY

A sprawling mansion. Much nicer than anyplace Gene's lived in before. He's made it. Edith **THROWS** open the **SLIDING GLASS DOORS** that lead out to the **BEACH** and **STUNNING OCEAN VIEW**.

EDITH  
This is ours?!?

GENE  
It's a rental, but for now, *yeah*.

EDITH  
Does it have a pool?

GENE  
You want a pool? You've got the whole ocean right there!

He **GRABS** her -- *kisses* her. Gene **III** **STUMBLES** in, **TRIPS**, **FALLS** -- **SCREAMING** at the top of his lungs.

GENE (CONT'D)  
(heads for the door)  
On that note.

EDITH  
And where do you think you're going? This is our honeymoon.

GENE  
I know, babe, but I've got a paper to get out. We'll celebrate later.

Edith *scowls* as Gene **SHUTS** the door.

EXT. THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A **MASSIVE COMPOUND** with a **BIG ASS FUCKING GATE**. In the center of the compound, a **GIANT CHRISTMAS TREE** is being erected. Gene leads the staff meeting outdoors.

GENE  
I'm sorry for uprooting your lives, especially around the holidays, but we outgrew New York. As a symbol of my appreciation -- in addition to your relocation fees and Christmas bonuses -- there will be gifts for the entire staff under this Douglas fur that stands 125ft tall. It's going to be an adventure here. Welcome to Lantana!

TITLE CARD:

**Step #6:  
Publish**

Champagne bottles POP, LINES OF COCAINE get SNORTED, TITTIES get SUCKED. A gluttonous orgy of sensory overload...

INT. THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Gene Sr's PRINTING PRESS has been delivered. The rest of the staff files in as well, setting up their desks. Gene notices that Loretta now has CORNROWS, Gloria has a NOSE-JOB BANDAGE.

GENE

What's with Gloria?

KENNY

What do you mean?

GENE

Her face. Did she get mugged or hit with a tennis racket or something?

KENNY

No. I think the relocation money you gave went straight to her nose.

GENE

That's wasteful. She's a writer. No one cares about her face.

KENNY

She does. But why do you?

GENE

It shows bad judgement. Fire her.

KENNY

*Excuse me???*

GENE

And Loretta too.

KENNY

Loretta didn't get a nose job.

GENE

No, but those things in her hair freak me out.

KENNY

The cornrows? Gene, you can't go around firing people because you don't like their hairstyle. We'll have no one left.

GENE

There will always be someone as long as the money doesn't run out.  
(to Loretta/Gloria)  
Loretta, Gloria, you're fired.  
(to Kenny)  
See? Easy.

INT. THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER HQ - GENE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Kenny FOLLOWS Gene into this office.

KENNY

Gene, what is wrong with you?

GENE

Nothing. I just like my business run a certain way.

KENNY

You were never like this before.

GENE

I didn't have anything to lose before. Things were different back in New York. I let everyone have their say on every decision I made because I thought that's what a good boss did. That ends now.

KENNY

This is insanity.

GENE

See, *this* is why we have a problem. You think this is an acceptable way to talk to your boss. It's *not*. It's *disrespectful*. I'm who signs your checks. I'm not your friend.

KENNY

You've *broken* into my apartment--

GENE

-That was for a business meeting.

KENNY

You *watched* me have sex--

GENE

-an unfortunate by-product of said business meeting.

KENNY

You *took* me to commit your wife to an insane asylum! You're telling me all THAT doesn't equal friendship?!

GENE

I needed a driver.

(a beat)

Look, you do a good job. I need you. But you're *also* replaceable. I set the course. You can get in line or get out. Either way, I'm getting more respect around here.

KENNY

(*defeated*)

I'll make sure Gloria and Loretta are gone by the end of the business.

GENE

Good boy. Now, I want to talk to you about our celebrity death coverage. It *stinks*.

KENNY

What's wrong with it? We cover them all: Betty Grable, Bobby Darin, Edward G. Robinson, Joan Crawford.

GENE

Anyone can cover a funeral. I want us to go the extra mile. Our readers expect something extra.

KENNY

Like what? A dead body?

(off Gene's look)

Gene, no! You cannot steal a dead celebrity!

GENE

I'm not stealing a dead "anything" yet. This is all theoretical.

KENNY

It's not theoretical when someone could look at this conversation and call us conspirators.

GENE

People can't conspire if it hasn't happened yet. We're just talking.

KENNY

That's exactly what conspiracy is! My god, I really need to know every letter of the law with you.

GENE

Kenny, I'm fucking with you. I don't want to steal a dead body, but you failed my test miserably. I set the course. Remember?

KENNY

Right. Sorry. Force of habit. I'll work on that.

GENE

I appreciate it. Steal a dead body. How crazy do you think I am?

KENNY

I don't know what I was thinking. It was pretty crazy.

The men both start LAUGHING -- it's a RELEASE of all that tension. But Gene's LAUGHTER suddenly STOPS.

GENE

I want a photo of a dead celebrity in their coffin.

KENNY

You want *what*?

GENE

The next time a celebrity dies, I want a picture of them in their coffin. It's for the cover. It's never been done before.

KENNY

I can't imagine why not.

GENE

Clearly, you're not a visionary.

KENNY

You're right. But why stop there?  
We can have me buried with a  
celebrity and get a first hand  
account of how their body rots!

GENE

Now you're talking! We won't have  
to wait long. Stars are dropping  
like flies nowadays. Fingers  
crossed someone has a wild weekend.  
Have your camera ready.

Gene EXITS. Kenny BANGS his head into the wall over and over.

EXT. GRACELAND - DAY

Thousands of FANS are outside of Graceland with pictures of  
Elvis, flowers, candles.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

Nearly 80,000 fans of the late  
Elvis Presley have gathered to pay  
respects to the King who passed  
away on Tuesday afternoon from an  
apparent drug overdose. The singer  
had been struggling in recent  
months to complete his touring  
obligations. Recently, Presley was  
having trouble singing, dancing,  
speaking, or even standing...

The FANS SCREAM as a procession of BLACK LIMOS pass them,  
followed by a HEARSE, which gets let in through the gates.

OFF TO THE SIDE OF THE MAIN ENTRANCE

Gene and Kenny CLIMB a fence. They remain *hidden*, keeping in  
the bushes as they make their way toward the main building  
where Elvis' FRIENDS and FAMILY have gathered.

GENE

There. That's Elvis' cousin.

Gene nods toward BOBBY MANN, 38, a sly son-of-a-bitch who's  
having a cigarette near the back entrance. Gene heads over.

KENNY

Where are you--Gene!

Kenny has no choice but to follow his boss. He finds Gene  
bumming a cigarette from Bobby Mann.

GENE

Well this is a shit show.

BOBBY MANN

Yeah, man. That's what I'm saying. It's weird to look at him like that. All fat. He looks sweaty even when he's dead.

Gene takes a drag off his cigarette, *considering*.

GENE

That's a damn shame. A damn shame. But I'm sure you and your entire family will be taken care of.

BOBBY MANN

Elvis? None of the family is gonna see shit. *Especiallly* me.

GENE

That's not fair. What if you could earn a little cash? After all, you're in a very powerful position at the moment.

BOBBY MANN

I am? How?

GENE

Access. You want to earn ten grand?

BOBBY MANN

For what?

GENE

All you gotta do is take a picture. One picture.

BOBBY MANN

You're seriously gonna pay me ten grand for a picture of the funeral?

GENE

No. I want Elvis. In his coffin.

Bobby STARES them down as he smokes. Kenny *swallows* hard. Gene doesn't back down. Not for one second.

BOBBY MANN

I want twenty.

GENE

Fifteen.

BOBBY MANN  
Eighteen, motherfucker, or I start  
screaming.

GENE  
Will you take a check?

BOBBY MANN  
Cash is king. The only king.

Gene smirks to himself. He FILLS out a check. Gene TEARS it  
off -- HANDS it over.

GENE  
I own The National Enquirer. I'm  
sure you've heard of it.

Bobby Mann takes the check, EXAMINING it.

BOBBY MANN  
(*smiling*)  
Yeah, I know it.

GENE  
Then you know that check is as good  
as gold.

BOBBY MANN  
I don't got a camera.

GENE  
Kenny?

He motions to Kenny and the CAMERA that's AROUND HIS NECK.  
Kenny's eyes go wide. But Gene isn't fucking around. The look  
on his face says, "*Give it to me now, or die.*" Reluctantly,  
Kenny HANDS the CAMERA over to Bobby Mann.

BOBBY MANN  
Ride or die, right?

Bobby Mann DISAPPEARS inside. Kenny can't even look at Gene.

GENE  
It was the only way.

Kenny says *nothing*. They wait another minute. Finally, Bobby  
Mann returns -- GIVES the CAMERA back to Kenny.

GENE (CONT'D)  
Did you get it?

BOBBY MANN  
I don't know. Did I?

GENE  
*(bluffing)*  
 Hope so. We can have that developed  
 before you cash that check.

BOBBY MANN  
 Can you?

Bobby FLICKS away his cigarette and WALKS off.

EXT. RAMADA HOTEL - DAY

A RENTAL CAR comes to a SCREECHING HALT. Gene and Kenny RACE out of the car and up the steps.

GENE  
 How many did he take?!?

KENNY  
 Four.

They burst into a...

HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Norman and Stanley are there, *waiting*.

KENNY (CONT'D)  
 Turn out the lights! Cover the  
 windows!

Kenny TRANSFORMS the hotel: **RED LIGHTS go on, CHEMICALS get mixed in trays, the film gets BLOWN UP on developing paper...**

GENE  
 How much longer?

KENNY  
 Give it a minute!

GENE  
 I paid eighteen thousand dollars  
 for that picture and I'm not about  
 to be buttfucked by some hick, so  
 show me the goddamned--

The IMAGE comes to life before their eyes.

IN THE DEVELOPING TRAY: **A perfect picture of Elvis, dead, in his coffin.**

Gene can't believe what he's looking at. TEARS FILL HIS EYES -  
 - like a kid on Christmas morning.

GENE (CONT'D)  
It's perfect. It's the most perfect  
thing I've ever seen.

KENNY  
He actually does look sweaty.

A phone RINGS. Stanley answers.

STANLEY FARRELL  
(into phone)  
Hello?

Gene TURNS to Kenny -- HANDS ON HIS SHOULDERS.

GENE  
Do you have any idea what this  
means?

STANLEY FARRELL  
Gene--

GENE  
-Every man, woman, and child is  
going to buy this.

STANLEY FARRELL  
Hey Gene--

GENE  
We are going to have the largest  
paper in the history of the world.

STANLEY FARRELL  
Gene--

GENE  
-The King is dead. You hear me? The  
King is dead!!!

STANLEY FARRELL  
Gene!!!

GENE  
*What?!?*

STANLEY FARRELL  
We're being sued.

INT. GENE & EDITH'S HOUSE - DAY

Gene's finishing in the shower. Edith comes in -- pissed as  
he gets out, dries off, and gets dressed.

EDITH

Gene, when did you get back?

GENE

20 minutes ago. I have to run to the office. There's an emergency.

EDITH

There's always an emergency.

GENE

This is different. We're being sued.

EDITH

Gene, all I do is fuck you and take care of your kid. What the hell kind of marriage is that?

GENE

A normal one?

EDITH

I did not marry you so I could be a babysitter to two babies.

GENE

That's a low blow, babe. And in all fairness, you're the best paid babysitter in the state.

She SLAPS him. Gene doesn't react.

EDITH

I want a divorce.

GENE

Yeah, ok. I get it.

(a beat)

Any chance you want custody of the kid?

INT. THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The staff has gathered. It's become increasingly more WHITE and MALE with Gene's firings. Gene stands before his STAFF -- the king in front of his subjects.

GENE

This lawsuit is bullshit. I know that. You know that. But this is real now.

(MORE)

GENE (CONT'D)

We've never been sued before, so how we conduct ourselves in the coming days and weeks will determine the future of these nuisance suits. Let go over this together. Kenny, take it away.

KENNY

In March of this year, the following article ran with the title: **Carol Burnett and Henry K in Row**. It read: *In a Washington restaurant, a boisterous Carol Burnett had a loud argument with another diner, Henry Kissinger. Then she traipsed around the place offering everyone a bite of her dessert. But Carol really raised eyebrows when she accidentally knocked a glass of wine over on one diner and started giggling instead of apologizing. The guy wasn't amused and accidentally spilled a glass of water over Carol's dress.*

(a beat)

Carol Burnett is suing for a million dollars over those 67 words.

NORMAN

Why? Because she was drunk off her ass and got in a screaming match with the secretary of state?

KENNY

Because the article implies she was drunk while dining at Rive Gauche restaurant. In fact, Carol doesn't drink and is very sensitive to this as both her parents are alcoholics.

GENE

And a million dollars is sure to ease her pain and suffering.

KENNY

I think we should settle.

GENE

You do?

KENNY

It sends a strong and clear message that we take this seriously.

(MORE)

KENNY (CONT'D)

We made a mistake, we are rectifying it, and we won't be doing it again.

GENE

See, I think settling sends a different message: **That we're fucking guilty.**

KENNY

Which would matter if we were, you know, *actually* innocent.

GENE

Hey, I'm not going round for round with Carol Burnett over what does and does not imply intoxication.

KENNY

Actually, that's exactly what a lawsuit is. They're going to haul you in to go "round for round" over every single thing we do here.

GENE

We do good news work.

KENNY

No, we do work. And all she has to do is prove actual malice.

GENE

You'll have to explain what actual malice is, because, as you know, I am incredibly stupid.

KENNY

I didn't say you were--

GENE

-I don't hate Carol Burnett nor did I publish an article *willfully* knowing it was false.

KENNY

Did we behave with reckless disregard for whether or not the story was true? They can show we did by establishing a pattern of behavior with previous stories.

GENE

I'm not sensing a lot of loyalty here.

KENNY

I'm trying to help you. Do you really want to sit in front of a team of lawyers and defend each and every story we've ever published?

GENE

Have you ever -- *in your life* -- found me to be someone who loses an oral argument?

(to the staff)

What do you think? Should we give in?

Stanley STANDS.

STANLEY FARRELL

No.

GENE

Should we settle?

Norman STANDS too.

NORMAN

No.

GENE

Should we let these sons of bitches tell us how to cover the news?

Six more STAFF MEMBERS stand.

STAFF

No!

GENE

Are we going to win?

Another five STAND UP.

STAFF

Yes!

GENE

Because we're smarter than them?  
Because you're the best newsmen in the history of the world?

The ENTIRE STAFF STANDS -- HIGH-FIVING each other like fraternity buffoons. The PHONE RINGS. Stanley GRABS it.

STAFF

Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!

They all CHEER as Stanley COVERS the call.

STANLEY FARRELL  
Listen up!! Sales are in for the  
Elvis death issue.

GENE  
What is it?

STANLEY FARRELL  
6.1 million copies!!!

**BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!**

The CHEERING THUNDERS through the newsroom. Kenny SHAKES his head as the staff POSE and SNAP pictures of each other, CELEBRATING their good fortune.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Gene BURSTS in, about to throw up, but doesn't. Somehow, he keeps it down, FIXES his tie -- SMOOTHS out his hair. Gene exits the bathroom and goes into a...

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

It's a formal office building. Gene strides down the hall, fully in control and enters a...

CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gene sits across from one lawyer: SIMON CRAIG, 43, who's just as ready for action as Gene is.

SIMON  
Mr. Pope, do you know why you're  
here today?

GENE  
Yes. Carol Burnett is an idiot.

Gene LIGHTS a cigarette, BLOWING smoke *right in Simon's face*.

SIMON  
There's no smoking in this  
building, Mr. Pope.

GENE  
But there's an ashtray right there.

SIMON  
So?

GENE

So why's a fucking ashtray sitting there if I can't smoke?

SIMON

I'm sure I don't know. Can you please put it--

GENE

-I mean, would you leave a syringe filled with heroin on the table and then get aggravated when I wanted to shoot up?

SIMON

I understand your metaphor--

GENE

-I didn't use a metaphor. A metaphor would be me saying I'm making your blood boil, which by the color of your face might be accurate. What I suggested was hyperbole: *an exaggerated claim that's not meant to be taken seriously*. But I wouldn't expect you to know that. Stanford is a fine institution if you're into that sort of thing.

SIMON

How do you know where I went to school?

GENE

Your client doesn't have any brains. Why should her lawyer?

SIMON

My client is one of the biggest stars on television.

GENE

I'm going to stop you right there. You seem like a nice guy, so I'm going to help you out. Don't ever say that out loud in public again.

SIMON

Mr. Pope--

GENE

-Since when does being a star automatically mean you're smart?

SIMON

Well, I *imagine* you have to have a certain amount of--

GENE

-No. See, *this* is where Stanford failed you. You can't start off an argument with "*I imagine.*" But sure, we'll go with your idiotic supposition that if you reach star status, you must be of moderate intelligence... or at least have a damn good agent.

SIMON

That's all I was saying. Plenty of smart famous people out there.

GENE

Name one.

SIMON

Johnny Carson. He's a smart guy. And Ronald Reagan. He became the governor of California.

GENE

You found two. Any others?  
(Simon thinks, *hesitating*)  
Can't think of anyone else?

SIMON

How did you know where I went to school?

GENE

Jayne Mansfield was a star. A huge one. Or at least she *was* until she got her head chopped off.

SIMON

Jesus, Mr. Pope--

GENE

-They may be *beautiful*. They may be *talented*. But they are stupid. Want me to tell you how I know? It's because I make millions a year *showing them* being stupid. Look, I'm a newsman; a truth teller. I know who's fucking, who's cheating, who's a fag, who sold their newborn baby to Mexico...

(off Simon's look)

(MORE)

GENE (CONT'D)

True story. You wanna know? Give me 5 bucks and I'll tell you.

SIMON

No.

GENE

I'll give you a hint: Her movie was #1 at the box office last month.

SIMON

Really?--No, stop it. I don't want to hear this shit.

GENE

Yes, you do. Everyone does. And that's okay. Enquiring minds, right? We build them up so we can tear them down. It's *primal*. I'm a living example of it and you don't see me complaining. But here's the real truth: I turned a no-nothing local paper with a press run of about 15 into The National Enquirer, a cultural phenomenon with a weekly circulation of 3 million. So, if you're going to come for me, you better start with more than a basic understanding of the English language, *baseless* accusations of libel, and a piece of shit ashtray--

SIMON

-How did you know where I went to--

GENE

-Because of your fucking pin!

Simon looks down, sees that he's wearing a Stanford pin on his tie. Gene's been staring at it the whole time.

GENE (CONT'D)

I went to MIT. At least we know what we're wearing when we leave the house in the morning.

SIMON

Mr. Pope, I just need you to confirm a few things for me. Then you're free to go.

GENE

That's it?

SIMON

Hand to god.

GENE

Everyone gets to be famous for fifteen minutes. You're on the clock, Stanford. Whaddya got?

SIMON

Did you publish a story titled ***JFK Given Speed as President?***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***Girl Kicks a Paper Bag and a Man's Head Pops Out?***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***Eating a Well Done, 1 Pound Steak Equals Smoking 3000 Cigarettes?***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***Boy Can See with his Ears?***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***Adam and Eve were Astronauts?***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***Man Starts Chinese Restaurant in Bathtub?***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***The Thrilling True Story of the Capture and Taming of a Wolf Girl?***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***Drinking Milk Causes Heart Attacks?***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***Drinking Beer Prevents Cancer?***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***JFK's Killer Made Me \$650,000 Richer?***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***Sophia Loren's Husband Boasts: I Married the Perfect Female Animal?***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***Rita Hayworth says "I'm Back From the Dead -- For Two Years I was a Zombie!"***

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

***Scientists Perform Monkey Head Transplant, Humans are Next?***

GENE

Yes.

Simon TURNS the page -- PAUSES. This is the big one.

SIMON

***Mary Tyler Moore -- Couldn't Give Him the Love He Needed -- Son Kills Himself?***

That's as bad as it gets. Gene swallows hard.

GENE

Yes.

SIMON

Were all these stories vetted with the same standards and practices as the Carol Burnett piece?

Gene stares at Simon -- hating him. But there's only one answer he can give.

GENE

Yes.

Simon CLOSES the file.

JUDGE (V.O.)

Has the jury reached a verdict?

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The courtroom is packed. REPORTERS are everywhere. Gene sits at the defense table with Kenny by his side -- while CAROL BURNETT sits with the PLAINTIFFS. A FOREMAN stands.

FOREMAN

We have, Your Honor.

He PASSES a NOTE to the JUDGE. He reads it -- PASSES it back to the Foreman.

JUDGE MCLAREN

What is your verdict?

FOREMAN

The people find the defendant, The National Enquirer, in the above titled action, guilty of libel and defamation of character against Carol Burnett.

Everyone CHEERS. The reaction is THUNDEROUS. Kenny wants to crawl under the table and die, while Gene sits and listens to the Foreman intently.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)

We award Ms. Burnett \$300,000 in compensatory damages and \$1.3 million in punitive damages.

Gene GRITS his teeth while everyone CHEERS around him.

INT. COURTHOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Carol *beams* with joy as she gets interviewed by REPORTERS.

REPORTER

Ms. Burnett, what is your reaction to today's outcome?

CAROL BURNETT

I'm overwhelmed. These people -- *if you can call them that* -- they lied and they hurt me. Maybe with a judgement like this, they'll think twice about reporting false information.

REPORTER

What do you plan on doing with the \$1.6 million the court awarded you?

CAROL BURNETT

I try to keep it classy, so I'm gonna buy a big fat fuck you diamond ring and then donate the rest to charity.

While Carol continues to give her "victory lap" interview, Gene and Kenny slink out the side exit.

TITLE CARD:

**Step #7:  
Start Again**

The BULB EXPLODES, the MARKER X's out jobs, the SCALPEL CUTS into a BRAIN, PISSING into the trash, the tree CATCHES on FIRE, and then the CHAMPAGNE, COKE, and TITTY SUCKING. Faster and faster we RIP through them -- a never ending cycle.

INT. THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER HEADQUARTERS - EVENING

The place is deserted. Gene POPS champagne, POURS TWO GLASSES as Kenny goes through the mail -- HOLDS UP a LARGE ENVELOPE -- reading through everything.

KENNY

More lawsuits are coming in. Looks like word got out. We're officially open for business.

GENE

Have a drink with me.

KENNY

This is serious. You've always been a genius at re-branding the paper when disaster was about to strike.

(MORE)

KENNY (CONT'D)

We need you to do it...oh, god...  
 (re: letter)  
 Gene, I'm so sorry. Frank died.

Gene SIPS the champagne.

GENE

I want to buy an island.

KENNY

Did you not hear me? Frank died. He was recuperating at home and his heart gave out.

GENE

We'll call it Enquirer Island. We can all move there. I can be king and you can be--

KENNY

-Don't say it.

GENE

(DRAINS his glass)  
 Where nothing can be taken away.

KENNY

I'm sorry. With the judgement and now Frank, you must be in shock.

GENE

Is that so?

KENNY

He was your family and it's a lot of money to pay--

GENE

-how would you know? You're not the one writing the checks. What the hell do you care how much money I have to pay out?

KENNY

I'm trying to help you, the paper; to keep this thing going.

GENE

You don't think I *can*.

KENNY

No, that's not what I meant.

GENE

Isn't it? Because it seems this entire conversation is predicated on the assumption that we'd be better off if you ran things.

KENNY

They're going to keep suing us. Don't you get that? This isn't going to stop!

GENE

Exactly.

(Kenny doesn't understand)

Let. Them. Sue. Do you really think I'm going to pay that has been \$1.6 million dollars?

KENNY

You were ordered to.

GENE

And not being someone who's ever run a business, a household, or from what I can tell, a *marathon*, I wouldn't expect you to understand the delicate inner workings of the legal system, let alone the court of appeals. A court of which -- I can assure you -- I will take full advantage of. And in the end, Burnett won't get but a fraction of that 1.6 million and I'll get free publicity the entire time. God, I love this country.

KENNY

No, Gene. You can't do this.

GENE

*Can't?* Who do you think you are?

He stands up -- *towering* over Kenny. Gene SMACKS Kenny's head -- *not as playful* as it once was.

GENE (CONT'D)

Who? Tell me.

He SMACKS Kenny's head again. Kenny's trying not to cry.

KENNY

I'm just trying to--

GENE

-Make demands, embarrass me in front of the staff? Who the hell are you?!?

He SMACKS Kenny's head again -- it's getting violent.

KENNY

(crying now)  
Your employee--

GENE

-You're a fucking faggot! You would have never made this paper what it is. I did!

Gene HITS Kenny over and over and over again. Kenny tries to fight back, but Gene TOWERS over him.

KENNY

Gene, stop! Please!!!

Gene's hands are BLOODY now. Chest heaving, he backs away from Kenny who SPITS some BLOOD on the floor.

Kenny PULLS himself up -- comes face to face with Gene. The men STARE at each other for a long, *hard* moment.

But then Kenny TURNS AWAY -- WALKS out. Gene FOLLOWS.

GENE

And where the hell do you think you're going, huh?  
(Kenny doesn't respond)  
You're not going to talk to me now?  
The faggot finally shut up. I bet I can make you talk.

Gene GRABS Kenny's prized CAMERA -- BASHES it on his father's PRINTING PRESS. The camera SHATTERS. Even though he's CRYING, Kenny doesn't dare look back. He HURRIES down the spiral staircase, ignoring Gene's taunts as he follows after him.

GENE (CONT'D)

A million people can do what you do. All I have to do is wave some dirty cash and you sissies will come running to dig through trash and report on your favorite stars to keep your fancy lives going. I built this. Me! And no one's going to take it from me. Not you. Not fucking Carol Burnett. *Nobody!*

But Kenny's made it to the bottom of the stairs. He pushes his way out of the building and into the night.

Gene goes back into the office -- sits at his desk, which is full of PICTURES to be published in the newspaper. He puts his hands over them -- his most prized possessions.

GENE (V.O.)

That's how it all began. Don't believe me?

Pat Benatar's Hit Me With Your Best Shot plays as a...

MONTAGE BEGINS:

It's all of the famous National Enquirer pictures and headlines that came after this moment in time. They include:

Madonna and Sean Penn marry, Michael Jackson marries Elvis' daughter, JFK Jr's plane crashes, Princess Diana dies, OJ Simpson murders Nicole and Ron, UNA Bomber strikes, Bill Clinton hugs Monica Lewinsky, Tom Cruise sues gay wrestler, Oprah loses weight again, Richard Gere gets a blowjob in the ocean, Hugh Grant gets caught with a hooker, JonBenet Ramsey is murdered, Nancy Kerrigan screams "Why me?" The Menendez Brothers kill their parents, Amy Fisher shoots her lover's wife in the face, Lorena Bobbitt cuts off her husband's penis, Melanie Griffith gets Antonio Bandaras hard on a boat, and Elvis comes back from the dead.

It's all so much fun as the song reaches its CLIMAX. Then:

INT. THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

It's deathly quiet in here. Dark too.

We PUSH IN on Gene back at his desk, completely alone, working hard on the latest edition. Finally, he looks up, STARES DIRECTLY AT US.

GENE

You're welcome.

SMASH CUT TO  
BLACK.