

CAN YOU TELL ME HOW?

[Joan Ganz Cooney, Jim Henson & how they got to *Sesame Street*.]

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WHITE...

The orchestra glistens, and the fluffy white clouds part to reveal we are high above a beautiful day in New York City!

A PIGEON walks up to the edge of the clouds.. then DIVES through the gap in the sky, soaring down to Manhattan.

Flies through: an Office Bullpen of Day Traders at green & black IBMs... Down to a 2nd Floor Jazzercise class... To Subway Stairs where Working Girls in pantyhose & Reeboks drinking Slim-Fast, get *splashed* by a Checkered Cabbie *whistling* at a Leotard Gal roller-blading past a Jalopy of Grouches. You know, general hubbub.

GROUCH
Hey, watch it, Mac!

At a Cafe Table: a Newspaper dated **MAY 16, 1990** is lowered by JOAN GANZ COONEY (59, Frances McDormand) shoulder-padded suit jacket, matching necklace & earrings, hair that doesn't move.

Joan puts her coffee cup down.. then spots her fingers clamped on the handle, involuntarily clamshelling open and closed. She realizes what she's doing and gives a small melancholy chuckle. When she hears a COO... and looks down - it's the Pigeon.

JOAN
Is it time, already?

Another COO. Joan checks her watch, despondently. It is.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Thank you, Bernice.

INT. THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE - A MEMORIAL - DAY

Joan is handed a PROGRAM, and a Butterfly made from felt on a rod. She walks down the grand aisle. In the Left Pews: Hippie-Artsy Types wave - she smiles warmly, her people. They scowl over to... The Right Pews: A fleet of Corporate Men, including their leader:

MICHAEL EISNER (Michael Shannon/ Bill Hader), Corporate CEO, who gives Joan a villainous "I see you" head nod and smile.

Joan sits alone.. Then sees A MOM (25, black) & her BOY (4) in the aisle, looking for a seat, and scootches in so they can sit next to her. The Boy is holding a stuffed Grover toy, looking all around the church, a bit confused. Joan watches him - captivated.

THE BOY
Where is he?

Joan's lips part, no idea how to answer. But--

MOM
Remember, sweetie? We talked about this. He's... well, he's dead. He's not coming back. He's gone.

The Boy nods, brow furrowed, processing. Joan can't look away. When.. he reaches for Joan's hand. She's caught by surprise, but gives it. He uses it to climb up & stand on the pew - calling out:

THE BOY
WE'LL MISS YOU, MISTER HENSON!

This takes Joan's breath away for a moment. Mom pulls him down.

Everyone in the pew ahead turns around: OSCAR, GROVER, THE COUNT, ERNIE & BERT, COOKIE MONSTER, etc. warmly smile and wave to Joan - their matriarch. A *Coo* from Bernice the pigeon on Bert's finger.

Joan notices the Boy staring at her, trying to figure her out.

JOAN
We're all gonna miss him.

THE BOY
Did you watch the show?

JOAN
Uh... Well... Yes.

THE BOY
Yah. It's really good.

Joan guffaws. When a large shadow casts down the aisle. She turns to see SNUFFY bashfully peeking in the main door. She goes to him.

SNUFFY
Heeey, Jooan. I-- I hope I wasn't bothering anyone.

JOAN
Nonsense, come in, sweetheart.

They join the Sesame Street family - dressed up, mournful.

GROVER
Joan, I heard some people saying.. now that Jim is gone, that man [Eisner] is trying to get us all to move away from Sesame Street.

JOAN
Ya know, Grover, the truth is Jim was always a big fan of Walt Disney, since he was a little boy.

ERNIE
Since Walt Disney was a little boy?

BERT
No, Ernie, Since *Jim*-- ugh, nevermind.

JOAN
He told me he saw *Snow White* in the movie theatre, ten times.

GROVER
Ten? Augh. That is a lot of times!

JOAN
Mhm. And I think.. well, an invitation to have Kermit & Piggy & Fozzie & Gonzo be a part of that.. That was Jim's dream. But he *never* wanted any of *you* guys from Sesame Street to go with them.

Eisner now stands in the aisle, right next to Bert & Cookie, who don't see him yet... talking as Cookie eats a hymnal:

BERT (TO COOKIE)
No, I don't think they would typically
have cookies... at a funeral.

COOKIE MONSTER (TO BERT)
Okay, me thought maybe.

Bert & Cookie see everyone looking at them, then slow-turn and see
Eisner! Bert shudders! Cookie screams/throws hymnals in the air:

EISNER
Helloooo Muppets. ...Joan.
I'm Michael Eisner, head of the Walt
Disney Company, and according to our
contract with Jim.. your new boss.

JOAN
Jim would never do that.

EISNER
He already has.

JOAN
Well, you can show me where he said
that, in writing. But for now--

EISNER
Joan, Joan, Joan.. It's a 150 million
dollar contract. We're the biggest
entertainment conglomerate in the Universe.
It's completely confidential. But I
wouldn't expect you to understand that,
with your pledge drives & your tote bags...
(laughing)
Yes! Gonna make alotta changes 'round
here. Starting with these clothes.

ERNIE
But Bert gave me this shirt.

BERT
I think it's very flattering on hi--

EISNER
Sure, but every day? And Cookie...
How would you like to be on the
cover of every Nabisco box?

COOKIE MONSTER
Why I want that? I want what IN box.

SNUFFY
But.. what will become of Sesame Street?

EISNER
Your wizened tenement block of nostalgia?
Knocking it all down this afternoon,
to build luxury high-rise condominiums.

He pulls out/ unrolls ARCHITECTURAL RENDERINGS of **SESAME PLAZA**.

MUPPETS
What?!/ No!/ Sesame Plaza?!/ Who brings
architectural plans to a funeral?

Barkley the Dog starts GROWLING/tugging at Eisner's pant leg.

EISNER
We'll still make a version of the show.
And if people want their kids to watch
it, they'll pay whatever I tell them.

JOAN
But *Sesame Street* is free for all kids.

EISNER
...Not anymore.

Barkley gives Eisner's pant a good tug, and Eisner KICKS the dog square in the face! Barkley *YELPS*... whimpers. Everyone *GASPS*! Joan stands, incensed -- guarding everyone cowering behind her.

EISNER (CONT'D)
Kiss your furry little babies goodbye.
(then, singing as he leaves)
On my way to where the air is sweet...

OSCAR THE GROUCH
Gee, he seems like a real swell guy!

THE COUNT
ONE! One villainous, corporate monster!
Ah-ah-ah!

TELLY
We gotta stop him!

GROVER
This sounds like a job for SUPER-Grover!

He ducks down, and pops back up in a Super Grover Hat & Cape. Melee... until in the pew ahead, SAM THE EAGLE turns around.

SAM THE EAGLE
Ah-ah-ahem! Please have some sense of decorum. This is still a memorial.

ERNIE
Maybe if we take the street sign down,
he wont know where to find us.

OSCAR
Except that we're the only block
with'a 6-foot-tall canary!

They all turn to reveal: BIG BIRD at the far end of the pew.

BIG BIRD
But, Joan... Sesame Street is our home.

JOAN
I know, Big Bird... but when we were
creating the show, we knew that numbers
& letters would never be able to
compete with cartoons for the kids'
attention - unless we had something as
amazing as.. well, you *all*.

The Cathedral's Pipe Organ warms up. Joan looks to LARGE B&W PHOTOS HANGING UP of JIM - one with Frank performing Ernie & Bert.

JOAN (CONT'D)
So when I met Jim and saw how
funny, how... *genius* he-

She turns to see them all, mouths agape, hanging on every word.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Have I never told you where you all
come from?..

They quietly shake their heads no - eyes brimming with wonder.
When the Cathedral's pipe organ begins... **THE SESAME STREET THEME.**

OPENING CREDITS "CAN YOU TELL ME HOW"

*A 1960's Saul Bass-style animated Titles sequence - to the
Arthur Fiedler Boston Pops Orchestral Sesame Street Theme.*

SMASH TO BLACK.

CHYRON: 1962

A TV monitor tube snaps on - black & white. The shot focuses on:
City SUPERVISOR (60, Tracy Letts). The sound clicks on.

SUPERVISOR
ABCD-EFG-HIJK-LMNO-P--

Wider: Supervisor & 2 Other White Men in armchairs, grey suits.

A VOICE (O.S.)
That's good. Now you, Councilman.

ANOTHER MAN
QRS-TUV-WX-Y and Z.

Wider still: The men are seated on one side of a TV Interview
Stage, and on the other side... sit 12 empty chairs. We're in...

INT. WNBT PUBLIC TELEVISION SOUNDSTAGE (1962) - NIGHT

Supervisor hands a folder to TIM COONEY (30, Jesse Plemons).

SUPERVISOR
I'll sign them back at City Hall.

TIM COONEY
Yessir.

Into the light steps JOAN (30, Julia Garner/Phoebe Waller-Bridge),
courteous smile, immaculate appearance, keeps the trains on-time.

JOAN
Evening, gentleman. The format tonight--

SUPERVISOR
Ah, little Joanie Ganz, all grown up!

JOAN
Thank you for joining us, Supervisor--

SUPERVISOR
Jesus, you must be *married* by now.

Tim, his assistant, perks up at this... listens interested.

JOAN
Ah, fortunately we've got much more
important things to discuss. Such as--

SUPERVISOR
How many kids? Got photos? A VOICE (O.S.)
One minute to air.

LEWIS

Boy, I hope you're better at producing shows than you are at naming them.

Joan sighs, then MOUTHS ALONG HER WORDS with the following:

MODERATOR (from prompter)

"You gentlemen run public policy for poverty in our city, where many say a child born into disadvantage today has boots with no straps - no way to pull herself up and out - just an intentionally endless cycle of discriminatory low-pay jobs, opportunistically high-rent housing, illiteracy and hopelessness."

The men are BLINDSIDED. Tim is GOBSMACKED at Joan's boldness. Joan is pleased, peeks into the GREEN ROOM: We can't see inside, but she politely gestures for them to stay quiet, and follow her.

SUPERVISOR

Not true. The city's provided a great many opportunities for the uh-- *Urban Poor*. *IF* they they're willing to work hard.

ANOTHER MAN

My father was born on a farm, and now I live on Park Avenue, so I'm proud to say it is still possible in America.

A THIRD MAN

I think if you took your cameras to Harlem, the Bronx, even Bed-Stuy, and asked the *Urban Poor* -- they would tell you that things have gotten much better.

MODERATOR

Yes, let's ask them.

The lights come up on the other side of the stage, as MEN & WOMEN FROM THESE NEIGHBORHOODS WALK UP & FILL THOSE 12 CHAIRS. The three panelists are FROZEN, mouths open, stupefied.

CARL

God, I love live television.

Tim looks to a quietly proud Joan - Tim is in disbelief at what she pulled off, beyond impressed... turned on, he whispers to her:

TIM

You owe me a drink.

JOAN

How do ya figure?

TIM

I'm gonna lose my job for telling my boss, to do your show.

JOAN

..You told him that?

TIM

Of course. It's amazing. You're amazing.

Lewis hears this, quietly looks to Carl, they raise an eyebrow.

JOAN
Oh, I'm convinced that Indian on the Stand-by logo gets better ratings.

TIM
A typical response would be *thank you*.

JOAN
You want a typical response, go find a typical girl. They're everywhere.

TIM
Guessing maybe you haven't found that husband and family just yet?

JOAN
What gave it away? The job? The sense of self? The fact that I don't want my whole world to be just women & children like a lifeboat on the Titanic?

Tim smiles/ shakes his head as if to say "wow"... He loves this.

TIM
Where does all that fire come from?

LEWIS
Arizona.

Joan rolls her eyes, steps out of the Control Room, Tim follows.

TIM
Seriously. Why do you... care?

JOAN
Maybe you should ask the people who *don't*.

TIM
I'd rather talk to you.

JOAN
..My father ran a bank, in a depression, so you learn pretty quick that some people have more than they need, and others need more than they have. And watching him take care of those people, people nobody else seemed to care about, well, I thought maybe I could...

Vulnerable, she starts back into the Control Room, opens the door:

TIM
Well... *I* believe in you. In what you're trying to do.

She hears this PROFOUNDLY. Touched... almost confused. Then-

JOAN
You do?

He nods. He means it. She can tell. She looks him up & down.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Well... Seems like an even trade. Lose a job... get a girlfriend.

Tim's face lights up. Lewis looks to Carl, happy for their girl.

ON-STAGE: All 12 NEW YORKERS are now seated in the chairs...

SUPERVISOR
Now who the hell are they?

BLACK WOMAN
We're the *Urban Poor*.

PUERTO RICAN WOMAN
Pleasure to finally meet you.

PRELAP: A crowd laughs/ applauds as we **MATCH CUT TO:**
This CLIP of Joan's TV Program shown on the big screen at...

INT. LOCAL EMMY AWARDS - NIGHT

Joan's nervous hand is steadied by Tim's - matching WEDDING RINGS.

PRESENTER (READING ENVELOPE)
"Poverty, Anti-Poverty & The World"!

Joan kisses Tim, hugs Lewis. Gets to the stage, in front of a projected still of a ROUGH HARLEM STREET CORNER.

JOAN
Wow. I want to thank my boss Lewis, my husband Tim, and my field team who follow me into our most vulnerable neighborhoods week after week, in the hopes that shining light on these issues will make a real lasting change.

The Still Frame of the Street Corner... **MATCH CUTS TO:**

EXT. THE SAME ROUGH HARLEM STREET CORNER - 5 YRS LATER - NO CHANGE

CHYRON: FIVE YEARS LATER

Joan sees, sighs. Many residents know Joan, wave, "Hey Joanie!".

EXT./EST. JOAN'S STREET (IN SHARP RELIEF) - AFTERNOON

Joan on her tree-lined street, grocery bags in tow, passes an Electronics Store window, where HER SHOW is on. Thrilled, she peeks into every apartment window to see if they're watching. She climbs stoops, fire escapes, on the ground to look in garden apts. But they're all watching *Bonanza*. ...That inane theme song.

INT. JOAN & TIM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

JOAN
Because, I'm thirty years old, and I'm just plagued by the idea that I'm going to live and die without being able to make any real difference in this world.

Tim's setting the table, refills his Scotch. Joan notices, but goes back to cleaning - unusually fastidious, per Tim's face.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Lewis invited Lloyd Morrisett tonight...
Vice President at Carnegie...
(Tim draws a blank)
As in, "This program is brought to you by The Carnegie Corporation of New-"

TIM
Ohhhhhh. Right-right-right.

Joan sees a Stack of BOOKS, on top: The Feminine Mystique, so prominently displayed, so she tucks it under the other books. Now Giovanni's Room is on top - she winces - shuffles again. Silent Spring. Oy - shuffles again. Autobiography of Malcolm X. She gives up, just throws them all in a closet and slams the door.

A KITCHEN TIMER GOES OFF. She checks on her STEW. She wheels the TV to the kitchen, stirring along with Julia Child on TV...

JULIA CHILD (ON TV)
You want the flavor of the onions and the beef to all blend themselves with the stew...

TIME CUT TO: The Party Underway: Three Couples. Men are at one end, women another. Joan stands to the side with hors d'oeuvres, unsure where she belongs. Tim sees this, smiles, fucks with her.

TIM
Go talk to the wives.

JOAN
(through a fake grin)
I don't wanna talk to the wives.

TIM
Just be yourself.

JOAN (CONT'D)
They don't like myself.

He pushes her in a seat next to pregnant MADGE (34, Nina Arianda).

MADGE
Joan, I haven't seen this program'a yours, I'm more a fan'a soaps. But you know ya gonna have to give it up once the kids come. Tim can't nurse'em himself!

The Wives laugh, Joan feels shitty but stays on her best behavior.

JOAN
You got it all figured out, Madge.

MADGE
Besides, then ya don't have to worry 'bout getting shot up in Harlem, by some drug dealer.

Madge laughs, the Wives laugh. Joan's face = NOPE.

Tim nudges Lewis to "watch this". As does the man from Carnegie: LLOYD MORRISETT (35, Jim Parsons) measured, mannered, very intelligent in that square, picked-last-for-kickball kinda way.

JOAN
You know why they call them *Soap Operas*? The whole reason the maudlin genre exists... is to attract women who don't work, and stay home watching TV, to buy their soap. That is the extent of your power as a woman in this country in 1966. ...I'd rather get shot! Hahaha!

The others laugh politely, confused by her delivery. *DING!*

JOAN (CONT'D)
Oh! Excuse me, ladies. Dinner's ready.

Joan gets the Beef Stew - circles the table - listening & ladling.

LEWIS
..is that you can't blame the *technology*.
Gentlemen, we're using atomic energy to
make fried bologna sandwiches! Imagine
instead of *Flipper & The Monkeys*, a fella
used his RCA to learn Astrophysics or
..Siamese over his Swanson's T.V. Dinner!

TIM
And I'm saying what are our priorities as
a country? We spend millions to go to the
moon, and millions more so everyone can
watch on a brand-new color set.. While a
few blocks away, millions of American
children are going to bed starving.

LLOYD
We've been wrestling with the same root
question I believe you're both asking,
which is "How to ensure all Americans
achieve their potential"? And it seems
to concern closing an Achievement Gap
between... well... your children in New
Rochelle, and those in the inner city
who are dropping out at alarming rates.

MADGE
Can't just tutor the kids or--?

LLOYD
They've tried intervening in high
school, middle school, primary school.
Nothing's worked. We found that most
of those kids who dropped out.. started
first grade *six months* behind their..
middle-class brethren. And by fifth
grade they were *two years* behind.

JOAN
Then the kid is so humiliated at not
being able to keep up with his class,
that he acts out, clowns around, to
distract from the fact that he can't
compete academically. ...Then the
school writes it off as an "attitude
problem" instead of taking
responsibility for a system, a country,
completely failing them. And the kid
gets so frustrated, so embarrassed that
they just never come back to school.

She finishes serving, sits, looks up - they're all looking at her.

LLOYD
JOAN, is it?

They feel an immediate kinship. Someone who understands. Lloyd
tastes the stew and is surprised nay confused by how good it is.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
Mmmm...

MADGE
Why can't the parents just help?

LLOYD
It can be hard to help with homework,
if both parents work a job.

JOAN
Let alone three.

TIM
You said the kids are behind by six
months... what is it they don't know?

LLOYD
We've found most children who drop out
didn't know their A-B-C's & 1-2-3's
when they started first grade.

JOAN
That's it? Just A-B-C's and 1-2-3's?

LLOYD
Yes. We, at the CarNEgie Corporation--

<p>ANOTHER WIFE Ahhh... I've always wondered how you pronounce that.</p>	<p>THIRD WIFE I was always saying CARnegie, CARnegie, like an automobile.</p>
--	---

Lloyd tries to smile to her like he's seen humans do, then.

LLOYD
We've tried "pre-school" programs, to
close the gap... but we only have the
resources to reach a few hundred children.
(Hm. His eyes narrow)
Joan, you produced that TV documentary about
the pre-school intervention in Harlem?

JOAN
Yes...

LLOYD
Do you think.. *television* could be used
to teach pre-school aged children?

Joan hears this... stops... thinks...

LEWIS
We can't compete with *Batman* for
adults, how the hell would some
schoolmarm get *kids* to change the
channel from *Bozo the Clown*?

ANOTHER WIFE
Kids wanna watch cartoons--

TIM
I think he was asking Joanie.

LLOYD
I bet we could find some funding
for you to do a proper study, Joan.
Put together a report for us?..

LEWIS
Oh, Joan wouldn't be interested in that--

JOAN
OH YES JOAN WOULD!

She pauses - too strident, even for her.

LEWIS
I mean to say, you're a *Producer*, not
some researcher.

JOAN
(bashful, subservient)
Of course... I'm sorry.

LLOYD
Ah. Wouldn't want to steal away your MVP.

MADGE
No offense, Joan, but whaddyou know about
teaching kids? Ya haven't even got any.

JOAN
Well... my mother always said "if you
teach, and your husband dies, you'd have
the same hours and summer vacation as
the kids." Very progressive. So I
majored in education in college.

TIM
Madge, what did you major in again?

MADGE
I went to a very prestigious secretarial
program. *The Katharine Gibbs School...*?
Next to the *Horn & Hardart*--

LLOYD
Joan, what is this stew?

JOAN
Ugh... Beef Bourguignon. ..Is it okay?

LLOYD
(confused, dry)
It's outrageous. A complete success.

Madge gets curious... tastes it, confused how great it is.

MADGE
Say, where did you learn to make a
thing like that?

Joan thinks earnestly for a moment... then remembers, laughs..

JOAN
Television.

INT. JOAN & TIM'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Joan sneaks in, ready for bed. Tim's asleep, an EMPTY SCOTCH GLASS
on his belly. It clearly triggers Joan, who picks it up and sees:
ON TV: "MIKE DOUGLAS Show" Florence Henderson & ROWLF (The MUPPET).

FLORENCE (TO ROWLF)
Are you interested in natural childbirth?

Rowlf & Joan make the exact same wide-eyed WINCE & GROWL.
Joan sets the SCOTCH GLASS on top of the TV, and SNAPS it OFF.

INT. CHILD PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

CHILD PSYCHOLOGIST (TO CAMERA)
Personally, I wouldn't put a
television anywhere near a child.

INT. TELEVISION PRODUCER - DAY

TANNED BLONDE MAN (TO CAMERA)
Hard pass. Kids wanna see cartoons..
violence.. explosions! Don't forget
what these children really are...

JOAN
What's that?

EXT./INT. INNER-CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL (LIKE AN OLD PSYCH WARD)- DAY

PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER
Oh, they're monsters.

The kids are running riot everywhere. Loud! A catastrophe.

INT. MONTESSORI SCHOOL - DAY

Classical music. Some children teaching themselves to waltz.

MONTESSORI TEACHER
Maria Montessori shows us that children
learn, not from watching, but from *doing*.

Joan takes NOTES: "Can't learn from just watching."

MONTESSORI TEACHER (CONT'D)
Oh! Happy birthday, Calvin.

Calvin (5), a small Noel Coward character has fashioned his own
birthday cake from found materials as art. It's on fire.

CALVIN
It's the oldest I've ever been.
..And the youngest I'll ever be.

Calvin stands there, staring at Joan with a creepy smile, eyes
sparkling in the firelight. Worried, Joan blows out the fire.

INT. WCAU-TV, PHILADELPHIA PUBLIC TV STATION - DAY

STUDIO HEAD
Our shows are for everyone in Philadelphia.

JOAN's happy to hear, on a tour with a STUDIO HEAD (White, 50).

STUDIO HEAD (CONT'D)
For instance, what does a woman need most--

JOAN
...A chance to--?
STUDIO HEAD (CONT'D)
Cooking shows.

Joan hides a wince, but one person sees/smiles - we'll learn he is
MATT ROBINSON (Black, 30s - Andre Holland) smart, warm, paternal.

STUDIO HEAD (CONT'D)
And Matt here is a writer on our show
"*Opportunities in Philadelphia*"
targeted at the needs of the Negro.

JOAN
Oh, wonderful. And what are the needs of--
Matt opens his mouth to answer, but--

STUDIO HEAD
Employment listings.

Joan smiles the same smile to Matt, who laughs quietly - bonded.

STUDIO HEAD (CONT'D)
But if it's *children* you're after...

INT. CHILDREN'S SHOW SET - PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION - DAY

Joan watches them film a local Children's TV Show: shoestring budget, small puppet thing... Mind-numbingly slow and dull. She falls asleep, but her own *SNORING* wakes her as a Cameraman scowls.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

BORED, loudly typing up her REPORT. Amidst dry hardback books, University reports, her own notes... she hears the TV..
ON TV: WILKINS COFFEE COMMERCIAL: Two **MUPPETS**- WILKINS & WONTKINS.

WILKINS (VOICE OF JIM HENSON)
Okay, buddy, whaddyou think of
Wilkins' Coffee?

WONTKINS
'Never tasted it.

Wilkins fires a Canon - hilariously EXPLODING Wontkins!
Joan laughs despite herself. Huh. The next noisy commercial comes on, she shuts the TV. Then thinks on it again, laughs.

INT. HARVARD UNIVERSITY QUAD - DAY

GERRY LESSER (40), a bright, friendly academic, walks Joan.

JOAN
Thank you for meeting me, Gerry.
Lloyd said you run Harvard's Lab on..

GERRY
Human development. Educational
psychology. How people learn.

JOAN
I heard that children learn from
doing, rather than watching--

GERRY
We all learn differently. In infant
studies, *sight* leads the learning.

JOAN
Really? That's- well, that's great news,
as we're hoping to see if television
could do the same for young children.

GERRY
(hands her a business card)
You should go *here*.

INT. BEHAVIORAL LAB / OBSERVATION ROOM - DAY

Joan is behind a DOUBLE-SIDED MIRROR, watching a room of six very POLITE CHILDREN. When A LAB ASST enters, with an inflatable clown BOBO DOLL - the kind weighted at the bottom, so it rocks back up.

The Lab Asst pushes Bobo gently - he bobbles over and back up. The kids are politely delighted! Joan leans in, curious. Again the Lab Asst, pushes the Bobo doll, this time with more force - and the doll sways back up to standing. She then exits.

In the Observation Room: The Lab Asst enters, stands next to Joan.

JOAN

And you think just by *watching* they--

The Lab Asst holds up her finger, to say "just a moment..."

Then Joan's expression turns to shock-horror as...

THE CHILDREN BEAT THE ABSOLUTE FUCKING SHIT OUT OF THIS DOLL.

It SLAMS against the glass next to Joan, and she leaps in the air!

JOAN (CONT'D)

Oh!!! Ahem.. Thank you, very.. interesting. So it *IS* possible.

She takes her notes out, as the doll POPS & flies around the room.

INT. A FRIEND'S SMALL APARTMENT - NIGHT

PATTI (30, a young Julie Kavner) a friend, hands Joan a blanket & pillow for the couch. Joan makes it work and soon falls asleep.

THEN WAKES UP VIOLENTLY - to a BLARING LIGHT and LOUD NOISE!

Joan wipes her eyes, gets her bearings... Her watch reads: 5 AM.

Patti's KID (5) is in front of the TV, like *Poltergeist*, with only the "Standby/ Station ID Logo" and that loud *BEEEEEP!* Joan's eyes are wide, WTF?! Patti hands Joan a cup of coffee.

PATTI

She does this every morning, 'til the cartoons come on.

JOAN

In an hour?

Patti nods calmly, but Joan is weirded out. *BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP!*

Then at Breakfast: The Kid sees a carton of cigarettes.

THE KID

(singing the jingle)

*ME AND MY WINSTON'S
WE GOT A REAL GOOD THING!*

Patti takes the cigarettes and puts tater tots on the Kid's plate.

THE KID (CONT'D)

I only have room for *four* tater tots.

JOAN

That's six.

PATTI

Haven't done numbers yet.

(to her kid)

Well, then I want *quality* bites, ma'am.

THE KID
Move Up To Quality... Move up To Schlitz!

Joan clocks this, Patti doesn't even hear it anymore.
 In the Kid's theatrics she spills ketchup.

PATTI
 Ugh, sweetie, you got it on your shirt.

THE KID
AJAX DETERGENT IS STRONGER THAN DIRT!

Joan stares quizzically as it flows out of her involuntarily.
 A new TV theme starts & the Kid runs to the Living Room to watch.

JOAN
 Patti... Tim wants kids.

PATTI
 Oh wonderful, are you...?

JOAN
 No-no... Well, between you and I...
 Tim may have trouble with the bottle.

PATTI
 Oh, you just hold it at an angle,
 he'll get the hang of--

JOAN
 No, not *that* bottle.

PATTI
 Oh? ... Oh. Well, I'm sorry... Have
 you uh, brought it up? Maybe spoken
 to a pastor, or-- I know your Mom had
 such a hard time with--

JOAN
 I can't go through what my mother
 did - kids to support, no job, no
 husband to help..

Joan stops, remembers Patti's situation. Feels awful.

JOAN (CONT'D)
 Oh, god, I'm sorry, Patti, I-

PATTI
 No. It's fine. Joan--

JOAN (CONT'D)
 What a thing to say. I
 didn't-- I mean to say I'm
 not that strong.

PATTI
 I know what you mean. Believe me,
 this wasn't the plan.

Then Patti shakes herself out of it, puts her hand on Joan's.

PATTI (CONT'D)
 If the drinking really is that bad.. I
 don't think anyone would blame you for
 not wanting to have a family with him.

AN EPIPHANY FOR JOAN. Maybe she wont have to have a baby.

JOAN
Really?... Well, I was never like those women you see in the commercials anyway, who get orgasms waxing the kitchen floor.

THE KID
GLO-COAT! USE HARD WAX - GLO COAT!
FLOORS SO CLEAN, FLOORS SO BRIGHT...

Joan's eyes light up hearing this... she's GOT IT!

INT. CARNEGIE CORPORATION - LLOYD MORRISETT'S OFFICE - DAY

A 52-page report lands with a THUD on his desk. "The Potential Uses of Television in Preschool Education" By Joan Ganz Cooney" Lloyd looks up. It's Joan. Suitcase and coat in hand.

JOAN
We'll make it quick-cutting, fast moving, like the cartoons, to hold their attention, and we'll have jingles and animation - commercials!

LLOYD
What do you mean? Advertisements?

JOAN
Kids've memorized every beer commercial and cigarette ad. If we make catchy, short, colorful, musical ads - for each letter and number - and run it as often as *Chock-Ful-A-Nuts*, they'll know 'em by heart in no time.

She stops, Lloyd has no poker face...

JOAN (CONT'D)
What?

INT. JOAN & TIM'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

JOAN
Lloyd said he tried the whole time, but Carnegie wont fund it. No one will...

He puts her head on his chest- calms down. He smiles, then--

TIM
You went to see Lloyd *first*?

INT. CARNEGIE CORPORATION - LLOYD MORRISETT'S OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

Lloyd reads the 52 page report... RAPT, almost nauseous with how good it is. He closes it. Blown away. His SECRETARY stops by.

SECRETARY
You want me to make another pot'a coffee?

LLOYD
She did it.

SECRETARY
Who?

LLOYD
Joan. Not only proved it can be done, but she goes on to explain precisely how. An entirely new educational model.

SECRETARY
That's great.. right?

LLOYD
Not if I can't figure out where to
get four million dollars to make it.

SECRETARY
...I'll make another pot.

EXT./EST. THE SUN RISING OVER NEW YORK CITY

EXT. CAFE IN ROCKEFELLER PLAZA - MORNING

Joan sits with EVELYN (30s, Tiffany Haddish) over coffee.

JOAN
And how did your work as a Community
Liaison prepare you for a job here at NBC?

EVELYN
Well, P.R. isn't just press releases,
it's knowing how the viewer wants to
engage with your show. People find a
new program because of a conversation at
the bus stop, or the beauty parlor, not
just because the New York Times says to.

JOAN
And what are *your* favorite programs?

EVELYN
Um, I love *Carol Burnett*.. *Bewitched*--

JOAN
Anything on *our* network?

Evelyn looks CAUGHT, then smiles/shakes her head, "No." Joan
laughs. It's now clear they're friends doing a mock-interview.

EVELYN
Lassie? Is that y'all? ...*Bonanza*?
They ask you that when you worked here?

JOAN
It's your third interview - you have the
job. Just say *Laugh-In*, you'll seem hip.

EVELYN
I *am* hip. Ooo, and *late*. Headed to work?

JOAN
Oh, uh, no. They-- well, they couldn't
find the funding for the project, so...

EVELYN
What?! Joan! Why didn't you say that?
You let me go on about this stupid job
and-- What are you gonna do?

JOAN
I... I don't know.

EVELYN
Ugh, why don't we get a drink after.
I just have to head to this meeting, hit
the ladies' first and...
(looks in her purse for something..)
Damn. Really? S'there a drug store, or--?

Joan puts her own PURSE on the table, unzips it, with a wry smile. Evelyn peeks in, sees it, sighs. She checks the coast is clear and then begins to stealthily reach in Joan's Purse for it, when..

WOMAN AT THE NEXT TABLE

Excuse me...

Evelyn *throws* the purse down. It's a Woman at the Next Table (70):

WOMAN AT THE NEXT TABLE (CONT'D)

Have you any sugar?

EVELYN

Sugar! YES! Of course. Here you are.

She hands the Sugar. Evelyn reaches for the purse again, when--

WAITER

Ladies, is there anything else I can--

EVELYN

NOPE! Just leaving.

Joan laughs, zips her purse closed. Oh well. Evelyn walks away. Waiter leaves. When Evelyn *runs* back, starts to UNZIP the purse...

ROCKEFELLER PLAZA ANNOUNCER (ON P.A.)

We ask you now to join us in a moment of silence for our Apollo astronauts.

Evelyn & Joan bow their heads, reverently. Then Joan hears a slow UNZIIIIIP - DEAFENING in the silence. Joan can't help laughing as Evelyn grabs the KOTEX, starts off - but it CRINKLES SOOO NOISILY.

EVELYN

(under her breath)

Why do they make these wrappers so damn loooud?

JOAN

(laughing, whispered)

Break a leg!

INT. JOAN & TIM'S APARTMENT - THAT MORNING

Joan walks in, pulls her earrings out. Sits, looks around... Bored. Turns the TV on - Soap Operas - her face is *horrified*.

TIME LAPSE: Joan cleans the house. She mops, reading the Wax instructions, trying to be domestic. Darns a hole in Tim's coat, poorly. Cooks a giant dinner. Even does her hair & makeup. ...And is now just sitting on the couch, bored out of her mind, reading a magazine, trying to smile like the women on the Mop Wax. When *THE PHONE RINGS*. And the fake smile melts away.

JOAN (ON THE PHONE)

Lloyd! No, just relaxing.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - THE MALL - DAY

Lloyd & Joan walk briskly down the WASHINGTON MALL, real purpose.

LLOYD

I don't know how you do it, Joan Cooney. But you always seem to win.

JOAN
Do I?

LLOYD
Ever write one of those reports before?

She shakes her head, no.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
It's all I do, all day... *Yours* is far better. It's *insufferable*. Even that damned beef stew. I've eaten beef stew at least once a week for forty years, and-- I'm guessing that was your first time out of the gate?

She nods, reticently.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
Insufferable... Well, we need that Joan Cooney magic today. Everyone - and I *do* mean everyone - has said no to funding this. Got a call back from Doc Howe, President Johnson's Commissioner of Education. He said he would listen to a pitch about contributing some federal funds towards it. After which it *might* be possible to secure other partners and get this made. And if not... Well...

She nods, she understands the stakes, he doesn't have to say--

LLOYD (CONT'D)
Hundreds of thousands of Americans will die avoidable deaths of illiterate poverty.

No Pressure. And with that, he marches up the marble stairs. She takes a deep breath, and follows him into...

INT. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (D.C.) - GRAND HEARING ROOM - DAY

DOC HOWE (Tommy Lee Jones), a no-nonsense patriot & Sancho Panza'y MEL, (Wallace Shawn) who tries to quiet the *MIC FEEDBACK*.

DOC HOWE
God damnit, why're we spendin' good taxpayer dollars on this shitty hi-fi? Toldja I don't want this microphone. Like I'm Merv fuckin' Griffin. Next!

Joan & Lloyd are before a semi-circle of Bureaucrats perched like a Congressional Hearing. Intimidated - Joan rises.

JOAN
Joan Ganz Cooney on behalf of the Children's Television Preschool Project.

DOC HOWE
Yup. Read your report. *This* fella says he showed it around to some TV folks, and--

MEL
This program would cost *double* what you're projecting. Not four but *eight* million.

A beat. Joan looks to Lloyd, frozen - they *WHISPER* to each other:

LLOYD
Is that true?

JOAN
I.. I asked around, and this was the consensus, but it's a new format--

LLOYD
Ohhh man. I thought you said you knew television, Joan--

JOAN DOC HOWE
I... I do, but this model is-- Ms. Cooney?!

LLOYD
Guess your luck has run out.

Mel is satisfied with himself. Joan turns back to the panel:

JOAN
Well... As you know, The NEA has asked the U.S. government to expand school to a full year before kindergarten.

MEL
That's not the same thing as--

JOAN
Time Magazine projects that will cost 2.75 billion dollars, and that's before construction costs to accommodate the five million pre-schoolers. So even at eight million, our show is still a bargain.

DOC HOWE
*I like this girl...
(He looks at Joan, takes a breath)
..So, I'm gonna give you the four million you asked for.*

JOAN
..what?

MEL
What?!

LLOYD
WHAT?!

DOC HOWE
Then I'm gonna tell my friends over at The Ford Foundation to cough up a few million. You folks at Carnegie can make up the difference, string bean?

Lloyd nods eagerly.

MEL DOC HOWE (CONT'D)
Sir, we-- God damnit, what is it, Mel?

MEL
In this climate of war and poverty, there just isn't the money for a.. teevee show.

The other BUREAUCRATS in the semi-circle nod in agreement.

DOC HOWE

Aw, Jesus Christ, Mel. You've been goin' on about the poor, and prisons, and how the Soviets' education is better than ours, since.. since Sputnik! Now how we gonna claim to be the greatest country in the world if our kids can't even read? Someone taught you! What's so god damn hard to understand about that? Alright, lets take a vote! All in favour say "Aye"... AYE!

ONLY Doc Howe, raises his hand in support.

DOC HOWE (CONT'D)

All opposed..?

EVERYONE ELSE raises their hands "NO":

EVERYONE

NAYE!

Joan's heads falls. ...Damnit. DOC GAVELS LOUDLY!

DOC HOWE

Looks like the Aye's have it!

MEL

What!? No, we-- Can he do that?

DOC HOWE

Just did! You're an *advisory* council. It's ultimately my call.
(leaning to Joan, smiling)
Who should we make the check out to?

JOAN

Uh... *The Children's Television Workshop*.

Joan turns to a flabbergasted Lloyd:

LLOYD

...*Insufferable*.

INT. THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE - BACK TO MEMORIAL

COUNT

Eight! Eight million dollars! Ah-ah-ah!

BIG BIRD

Sure could buy a lotta birdseed with that money.

EISNER

Did somebody say "money"?

All Gasp! Then Barkley chases him back to his side of the aisle.

GROVER

And noooow is the part of the picture where you get to meet Ga-RO-ver!

JOAN

We knew someone had to help those kids, and that TV could teach. But ya gotta get 'em in the church before you preach, and I had no idea how we could get kids to pay attention. Until...

EXT. A NEW YORK STREET - NIGHT

Joan is walking home from work, headshot/resumes in hand of various children's performers, ventriloquists, clowns, etc. When a small YELLOW FEATHER blows up to her feet.

Curious, she reaches down to pick it up, but it blows away. So she follows that yellow feather, around the corner... Where she hears laughter, excitement, people walking into a Movie Theatre... and on the POSTER Outside: "The Hilarious Puppet World!"

The feather takes a hard right turn and flies INTO THE THEATRE.

Joan turns to the camera, with a look, shrugs... and goes in.

Across the street, we see the back of a Tall, Lean, Bearded Man (30s) under a street light - in a floral shirt and suede jacket. He crosses to the theatre, as we now see on the MARQUEE:

"The Hilarious Puppet World ...of JIM HENSON"

And in he walks.

INT. A MOVIE THEATRE (MANHATTAN) - NIGHT

Joan takes a seat in the back of a dark theatre. ROLLING LAUGHTER.

ON THE SCREEN: A Reel of Jim Henson's Early Muppet Commercials

WILKINS COFFEE: Two puppets - WILKINS & WONTKINS in close-up.

WILKINS
Okay, buddy, whaddyou think of
Wilkins' Coffee?

WONTKINS
I never tasted it.

Wilkins fires a Canon - EXPLODING Wontkins. Joan laughs, recognizes it... her eyes narrow, as if kismet brought her here.

MARATHON GASOLINE: Two Puppet Gas Pumps Sing a Jingle!

GAS PUMPS
..OUR FEELING OF PRIDE,
CAUSE WE'VE GOT MARATHON GASOLINE
SURGING INSIIIDE!

Joan can't believe it, it's perfect. She looks at the people all around her: Adults, watching puppets, crazy for it.

LACHOY DRAGON: A Mother and Boy are in the Grocery Aisle, when a 7-foot-tall full-body Dragon Muppet walks out.

DRAGON
What you need is LaChoy Chow Mein!

BOY
Boy, a real dragon!

His tail keeps knocking over all the cans. He breathes fire, catching the store on fire, as a Clerk tries to put the fire out, and his tail still knocks everything off the shelves.

Joan can't stifle it any longer, just cathartically guffawing!

INT. JOAN & TIM'S APARTMENT - TABLE - NIGHT

JOAN

(pacing)

He's self-produced 100 hilarious commercials, and vaudevillian sketches on *The Jimmy Dean Show*. He's artful but accessible. Absurd, but not inappropriate. Joyful, but not syrupy. And tomorrow I'm just gonna drive out and ask if he'll join our show. And this composer Joe Raposo. And this writer/director Jon Stone. They're evidently THE BEST and if I can get all three, maybe we'll have a show-- Sorry! How was *your* day?

TIM

Um.. ya know... *New York Council Against Poverty*, so.. always fun.

She eyes the Scotch Bottle - empty.

JOAN

Oh, I'm sure you made some great steps forward that--

TIM

No, we didn't actually.

JOAN (CONT'D)

You're very hard on yourself--

TIM

I'm not being fucking *modest*, Joan. I'm telling you, we haven't been able to do *anything* of any significance. ...You know how it is.

JOAN

Actually.. This time feels different. Like if I get it just right.. not just the letters and numbers, but to show kids what tomorrow could look like. It feels like it could actually help, like in a *real* way, ya know? And that maybe... this is what I'm *supposed* to be doing.

Tim hears this. Not in the same boat anymore, it would seem.

TIM

I know if anyone can do it - *you* can. ..But you were asking about *my* day, and I cannot be as optimistic. 'Cause nothing my team can afford to do is making a dent against a system built by rich slumlords. And I worry, alllll the time - in the shower, when I wake up and flip my pillow over in the middle of the night - that not only am I letting the entire community down, but.. that City Hall is just *using* our flaccid, underfunded organization, so they can point to us, throw up their hands and say "Well, we tried, but I guess it can't be fixed." Knowing their friends are profiting off it. And that giving them that scapegoat, is WORSE than doing nothing at all!

He THROWS a dinner plate, SHATTERING on the wall. Joan looks down.

TIM (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I just...

She starts to say something, when she sees a bandage on his arm.

TIM (CONT'D)
Oh, just blood drawn. Annual checkup.
..Doctor asked if we were "trying".

This stops Joan. Tim is warm, but...

TIM (CONT'D)
Realized I didn't know what to tell him.

JOAN
Yah, I just gotta get this show up and
running. And then we can talk about it.

He pauses. A real honesty in his face.

TIM
...Yah?

JOAN
..Yah.

That's more than he expected. He's happy.

TIM
Well, there's dinner in the fridge
if you're hungry.

JOAN
Chinese, or--?

TIM
No I-- I made it.

JOAN
Oh, Tim. I saw they were screening-- and
I have to find the right creatives, or--

TIM
I know, I'm not saying it out of..
Just saying.. if you're hungry.

He kisses her head and heads to bed.

EXT. A COMMERCIAL SHOOT IN THE WOODS - THE NEXT DAY

An APPLE sits atop a Colonel Sanders-looking MUPPET... shaking.
An ARCHER pulls back a very real ARROW. Off-camera, we hear:

ONE MAN (O.C.)
Oh, god... Oh, man...

ANOTHER MAN (O.C.)
Aw, don't worry ole buddy, it'll be fine.

The arrow FIRES! EXPLODING the apple, but missing the Muppet.
We see the two men, laying in the dirt, operating the Muppet.
One trembling bald man in glasses - FRANK OZ (30s, David Cross).

The other is JIM HENSON (30s, John Krasinski), the tall bearded
hippie from outside the movie theatre - directing barefoot.

ARCHER

You want me to take it again?

FRANK OZ

NOPE! That was good. I'm sure we got it.

JIM

Just one more. I'd like to see if we can get the arrow to stay in the apple this time.

FRANK OZ

Hmph!

Joan, quietly trudges through loud leaves to set. Finally making her way to a kind woman - JANE HENSON (30) stitching a puppet.

JOAN

Touch-ups on one of the actors?

JANE

Exactly. The Henson Stitch.

JOAN

You must be--

JANE

Jane. Henson.

JIM

Standby!

FRANK OZ

Oh god... Oh god...

The Archer pulls back. Frank closes his eyes. FIRES. IT STICKS.

JIM

And cut! Got it! Great work, everyone.

Frank opens his eyes, pants with relief. Jim gets up.

Joan takes a deep breath... this is it... this is it.

JOAN

Mister Henson, I'm Joan Ganz Cooney.

JIM

Hi, Joan, I'm Jim. Over there is Frank Oz, best puppeteer in the world. And I think you met my wife, Jane.

JOAN

Yes. I uh, well I think what you do is just wonderful.

JIM

Gee, thanks. You have great taste.

JOAN

I wanted to talk to you about you joining our television program.

JIM

Oh, yah? Are you a booking agent?

JOAN

No, it's a full series order. And, I think your characters could be the stars.

JIM

Oh! You know I've been trying to put together a series. These commercials pay the bills, but I think there's a lot more we can do, with real character work, not just novelty jokes and gags.

JOAN

Absolutely!

JIM

I should tell you, I pitched a few networks, but nobody really believed people would tune in for a bunch'a puppets. Who's this one for?

JOAN

It's for *The Children's Television Workshop*, and it would be--

JIM

Oh.
(momentum coming to a halt)
Gosh, I... well, I wish I knew that before you drove all the way out here.

JOAN

Why's that?

JIM

I don't do kiddie-shows, Ms. Cooney.

JOAN

Oh, well it's really a--

JIM

But I do wish you the best of luck.

JOAN

I--

BERNIE

Jim.

Jim's Manager BERNIE approaches Jim with a contract & pen.

JIM

Excuse me.

BERNIE

Got Frito-Lay to pay 100 grand for the Munchos ad. Just need your Hancock.

JIM

(reading the contract)
This says they would own the character.

BERNIE

Jim, you got hundreds of 'em. Look!
(taking off his shoes, re: his socks)
Two more!

Jim's upset, but wouldn't show it. He puts the puppet back on.

JIM
(as the Puppet)
Never sell any of my muppets.
I own my characters.. Always.

Jim hands the contract back to him. Returns to the shoot.

JIM (CONT'D)
Alright, everybody! Movin' on!

Joan, disappointed... defeated... heads off. FAIL.

EXT. AN A-FRAME HOUSE - THE VERMONT COUNTRY - DAY

JON STONE (Kevin Kline) salt & pepper hair, a big beard - a gruff bear of a man with a commanding theatre-trained voice, is pulling office file boxes out of his car, onto his porch.. As Joan's sad little car pulls up, and she gets out in her City Mouse suit.

JON STONE
Ah! You know, after you hit thirty, you are no longer required to sell the cookies door-to-door. But since you've made it all this way, I'll take a box of those Chocolate Mint ones!

JOAN
Jon Stone? I'm Joan Cooney, I called about our new television program.

JON STONE
You? You look like a.. Texas High School Principal who became a Republican senator.

JOAN
Everyone seems to agree you are the single greatest writer and director in childrens' television. Yale Drama, Captain Kangaroo, years of--

Joan grabs a box, walks with him, sets it next to his DAUGHTER(5).

JON STONE
Young lady, as you can well see, I have no interest in putting more time into the vapidty of banana peel humour and sock puppet shenanigans.

JOAN
Yes, but the--

JON STONE
The world is amiss, my dear! I can no longer stand idly by as these children grow up in a deranged country, divided - by race, by age, by class, by gender! ..And a box'a those Peanut Butter Sandwich ones if you have 'em.

JOAN
I'd rather teach a man to eat.. cookies.

A beat. He winces. Puts the file box down where he stands.

JON STONE
Wow, you *do* need a writer.

She nods, embarrassed.

JON STONE (CONT'D)
You know who would be splendid for this? A puppeteer by the name--

JOAN
Jim Henson... yah. I tried. He said he doesn't do kiddie shows. Joe Raposo the composer wont answer my calls. And now I have millions of dollars and this chance to make something extraordinary, but--

JON STONE
You seem kind, smart, well-mannered.. I'm not sure you're really *cut out* for producing national television. And my daughter doesn't need another kiddie show.

Now or fucking never, Joanie... Deep breath.

JOAN
With respect it's not really for your child. Not for a man with a house in the country, who drives his Porsche into the city for Oysters & a Broadway show.

He pauses. Turns. Now it's interesting scene-work to him.

JOAN (CONT'D)
It's for the poor kids, immigrant kids, kids who don't have two parents at home, left to fend for themselves in this garbage world you mentioned. We have the first workshop in a few weeks, if you'd consider putting your world-class expertise for purposes nobler than selling paper towels for CBS. I know TV can be used to teach, but if it's not entertaining.. Well, nobody leaves *My Fair Lady* humming the plot.

JON STONE
(impressed she took the note)
Annnnd cut. Much better. But alas I'm not your man.

He takes her card, thinks, then... looks to his daughter.

JON
Did you say all *that* to Jim?

Off Joan, realizing she didn't.

INT. WCAU-TV, PHILADELPHIA PUBLIC TV STATION - DAY

Matt Robinson("Opportunities in Philadelphia") picks up the phone.

MATT (ON THE PHONE)
Hello? ... Ah, no he is away for the summer, teaching. ... You bet.
(about to hangup, then)
When's the workshop? ... Okay.

INT. CARNEGIE CORPORATION - LLOYD MORRISETT'S OFFICE - DAY

Joan sits across from Lloyd's desk, as he hangs up the phone.

LLOYD

Can't even get *Philadelphia* to come to the Workshop. I've only got a handful of RSVPs for from any psychologists or educational experts.

JOAN

Alright, so no experts, no creatives... Great start.

LLOYD

Well, we knew getting Jim & Jon & Joe was a long shot. But I'm glad you tried. And... I've been getting pressure from the higher ups here at Carnegie, who want to make sure the program is also... for middle class children.

JOAN

Also? Or... Only?

LLOYD

Well... I know it's possible to get the middle class kids to watch, get their scores up. The *other* kids... well, we're biting off a lot in our first year. And I just don't want to set us up for a goal we can't achieve.

JOAN

Well, I think we can. Besides, we promised the Ford foundation and Doc Howe it'd help the *disadvantaged* child.

LLOYD

Yes. The Middle Class and Disadvantaged child.

JOAN

I don't think-- I mean I don't know if-- Can it be for both at the same time?

LLOYD

That is... fortunately *not* my department. But a question for the new Executive Director of *The Children's Television Workshop*. Joan...

Joan leans in...

LLOYD (CONT'D)

Could you make a list, of all the men you think are qualified for the position?

INT. JOAN & TIM'S APARTMENT - THAT NIGHT

Joan is making a list of men for Lloyd.

TIM

Then what did you say to Lloyd?

JOAN
What do you mean? I'm making the list.

TIM
Jesus Christ, Joan... YOU should be the Executive Director, don't you see that?

JOAN
Lloyd said I could be "Deputy Director".

TIM
"Deputy"?.. Who are you - Don Knotts!?
(off her reaction)
Sorry, I'm angry FOR YOU.

JOAN
Tim Cooney, now you are the first feminist I ever met, of either sex, but I've never seen a single.. *person* like me in a position like this? Because I can't see them giving a job like this, head of the entire project, a multi-million dollar national show to.. to...

TIM
Say it. Say, "A woman"... I don't know why you do that.

JOAN
Do what?

TIM
You pretend like it's not a thing, so maybe in your head you... Look, you researched this show, you *created* this show. Tell them if you don't get the top job, you just wont do the show.

Joan balks... too ballsy for her. ..right?

JOAN
I fight for things. Important things...

TIM
Not *yourself*.

JOAN
Wha-- I mean. ..Why is that?

TIM
I imagine... that's because it's awfully vulnerable to admit that you need help in the first place.
...That you're hurting.

Joan looks to him, glass of ice trembling in his hand. OH. She looks away, not prepared for *this* discussion. He takes her hand, as if to say, "PLEASE LOOK. Please say something..."

TIM (CONT'D)
That if you don't acknowledge the problem... if you keep pretending it's not getting in the way... then maybe you wont ever have to deal with it.

Joan looks to Tim - to the glass - to him, his eyes pleading... Holy shit, Joan, does he have to come right out and say it? She looks to him... then quickly away, too scared to engage...

On TV: The Loud Intro of "THE TONIGHT SHOW with Johnny Carson"

Tim looks back from the TV, but Joan's gone.

INT. SUBWAY - EVENING

Joan rides silently. Then something triggering, turns to see a Homeless Guy and a bottle of booze has spilled. That smell.

Quietly, out of focus in the background, we introduce her ALCOHOL COPING MECHANISM: An IMAGINARY MUPPET WORLD - NYU kids, Hassids, construction workers, a mariachi band - ALL MUPPETS.

EXT. NBC, 30 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA - NIGHT

Joan, sees a Security Guard she knows (we only see from behind).

SECURITY GUARD
Ms. Ganz! S'been a long time!

JOAN
Hi, Sam, just meeting some of the old gang for cocktails. Do ya mind?

SECURITY GUARD
'Course not!

He welcomes her with his FELT MUPPET HAND. Joan walks in.

INT. 30 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA - STUDIO 6-B "THE TONIGHT SHOW" - NIGHT

JOHNNY CARSON footage on the LIVE monitor: talking with Kermit. Applause. Commercial. Jim comes out, on a high, total success.

JOAN
I didn't know puppets could be so.. *Hip*. I'm obviously the farthest thing from. Clearly, you're far more than just a childrens' entertainer...

JIM
That's very nice of you, Ms. Cooney--

JOAN
I know why you hate kiddie shows. Because they're loud, mindless affairs, pandering to the dumbest, most artless child, sitting in front of the TV like a zombie, eating a box'a Mallomars.

Jim tilts his head, eyes crinkle, grins. That *is* what he thinks.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Childrens' television is a wasteland - a complete shitshow. Too hip for ya?

Jim starts to say something, but no argument, just blushes.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Our show exists for one reason... to help kids whose parents cannot help them. It's there to teach numbers and letters to children who would otherwise remain illiterate their whole lives and never be able to compete in the world, because of the circumstances they were born into.

Jim looks down to KERMIT in his hand...

JOAN (CONT'D)

We've assembled the best educators in the world, but *your* muppets are the only thing I know that'll hold the kids' attention long enough to teach them what they need to know. And, the 5-year-old doesn't control the TV, his older brother or his mother do -- and your comedy works for *all* of them. I have millions of dollars to fund you experimenting with avant-garde shorts, animation, stop-motion, absurd comedy. You'll show everyone what you can do, and in the process, give a few kids a real shot. ...What's hipper than that?

KIDS (O.S.)

DAD!!! / DADDY!

When FOUR of Jim's own children - all under 10 - run up to him. Joan had no idea he was a Daddy.

JIM

Hey kiddos!

She just smiles, offers her card. His son BRIAN (5) takes it.

BRIAN HENSON

"Joan Cooney."

Joan smiles, and sees herself out. Her point made for her. Jim takes Joan's card from Brian, flips it over, it says: "And you can own your characters."

EST./EXT. THE WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL - MORNING

A SIGN on an easel "THE CHILDREN'S TELEVISION WORKSHOP" in...

INT. WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL - HALL OUTSIDE THE BALLROOM - DAY

Joan & Lloyd walk up to the sign.

LLOYD

Well... this is it. I sent notes back to everyone who said they couldn't come, pleading with them... I spent forty-five dollars on bagels & cream cheese. *Someone* better show up.

Joan bashfully hands him a LIST of Men's Names.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

What's this?

JOAN

It's the list you asked for, of Executive Directors.

Lloyd looks, reads on the list: "JOAN GANZ COONEY"

LLOYD

But... I thought you wanted a *man* for this position.

JOAN
Why would you assume that only a--?

Lloyd looks in his Briefcase, pulls her 52pg report, flips, reads:

LLOYD
"He will have to be expert at both television and education. HE will need to be able to manage creative and research--"

JOAN
I wrote that?

He nods. A sheepish beat for her.

JOAN (CONT'D)
But I... I--

LLOYD
I told everyone you would do a great job, but it's just.. I know you've never done something like this before.

JOAN
Nobody has. ..What did everyone say?

LLOYD
Well, most people were open to the idea, except the um, Ford Foundation--

JOAN
The Fo--? She's a woman! The only--

LLOYD
Look Joan, there's just no room for error on this and I don't want it to be your head if we can't pull this off.

JOAN
We can. And.. If I'm not Executive Director, then.. Then I'm not going to be any part of the show.

And with that she throws open the door to the WORKSHOP BALLROOM...

It's PACKED! Joan has the wind knocked out of her. She walks down, shakes hands, greets many smiling faces, when... Someone hands her a box of GIRL SCOUT COOKIES. Joan turns to find:

JON STONE
Let's teach a man to eat cookies.

Joan gives Jon a big bear hug.

JOAN
What changed your mind?

JON STONE
I got a call from someone...

Then Jon points behind her.

A FAMILIAR VOICE (O.S.)
Hi there.

Joan turns. It's JIM HENSON.

JIM HENSON
I'm here to help.

Joan smiles, almost at tears. She hears a piano sparkling... turns to see JOE RAPOSO (28) at an upright piano.

JON STONE
I believe you know Joe Raposo,
composer, boy genius, star fucker.

JOE RAPOSO
I'm gonna tell Lena Horne you said that!
(singing and playing)
HELLOOOOO, JOAN COOOONEY!

JOAN
Well, Joe Raposo, you *do* exist.

JIM HENSON
Sure, just call Barbara Streisand
and ask her.

JOE RAPOSO
That's Murray Hill 7-7-500.

JOAN
I guess the three of you know each other.

Gerry, that Harvard Academic from Joan's trip, approaches.

JOAN (CONT'D)
This is our Harvard developmental
psychologist, Gerry Lesser, who will be
leading our educational team and running
our Workshops, to figure out what you
guys are writing songs and skits about.
Gerry, this is our Creative team.

JIM
Gerry. I'm Jim. That's Joe, Jon
and you know Joan.

GERRY
Jim.

JON STONE
Gerry! Jon.

GERRY
Jon!

JON STONE
Gerry, you know Jim, Joan, Joe.

GERRY
Joe!

JOE RAPOSO
Gerry, Joe! Jon, Jim, Joan!

All laughing. Joan is thrilled. COMPLETE SUCCESS!

When Evelyn (Tiffany Haddish) approaches Joan.

JOAN
Evelyn! What happened to the job at NBC?

EVELYN

I was going to take it, but then..
they gave it to someone else. Said my
experience was not applicable to the
major leagues.

JOAN

I can't tell you how essential it
will be to what we're about to do..
If you would be up for joining us?

Evelyn smiles, nods.

Joan walks to the front of the conference table, looks to Lloyd
who is looking at Jim & Jon & Joe & Gerry - beyond impressed.

LLOYD

Insufferable.

And Lloyd tears up her LIST of other Executive Directors.

Joan smiles. Then addresses the group (polite, if not meek):

JOAN

Good morning, I'm Joan--

But a few people aren't seated/listening. Jon gives her some
silent "direction" - a bit of poise, calm, power.. She tries it:

JOAN (CONT'D)

(to the stragglers)
Thank you, we're beginning.

They immediately sit, silent. Jon makes an "Ooo, Perfect!" face.

JOAN (CONT'D)

(new poised & powerful Joan)
I'm Joan Ganz Cooney, Executive Director
of The Children's Television Workshop.
We have an unprecedented opportunity to
use television to teach, and have asked
you here to help decide just what it is
middle class & disadvantaged children
need to learn most before starting first
grade. I'd encourage you, rather than
trying to shove the classroom model into
that little box, to lean into the
extraordinary things T.V. can do that
the classroom cannot. Especially as
school has a captive audience, whereas
our program must be entertaining enough
to hold the *child's* attention - no small
feat. The question before us, is no
longer *whether* children learn from
television, we know they do, it's our
mission to decide *what* they will learn.

Gerry takes over, he has listed "GOALS" on the chalkboard.

GERRY

So lets brainstorm big picture goals.
Alright, just call 'em out.

SOMEONE

Teach 'em to count!

GERRY
Great. So *Numbers*...

SOMEONE ELSE
Teach them to read!

GERRY
Okay. We'll call that *Letters*...

MATT
I'd like this program to prepare my three-year-old daughter to react properly the first time someone calls her, "*A Nigger*".

All turn to MATT ROBINSON (from Philly), sitting there smiling.

Jim goes from slouching to upright. Gerry looks to Joan. Joan looks to Lloyd -- who is at the bagels, pretending he can't hear.

JOAN
Everyone, this is Matt Robinson, a talented writer from Philadelphia, joining us for the workshop.

MATT
I think this is an amazing opportunity, it's just.. this is a lot of very nice, very smart, but...

JON STONE
...very *white* people to make a show for a bunch of inner-city kids?

MATT
(smiling, almost blushing)
I wasn't gonna say it like that, but...

Jon *LAUGHS*, throws his arm around Matt, big squeeze, fast friends.

MATT (CONT'D)
I don't know if the plan was to invite some of us to the table *for show*, hoping we'd stay quiet? But Joan, I know you spent a lot of time in the community, so you know that we don't really just sit quiet. Especially with an opportunity like this to help our kids.

She smiles. Gerry, rolls up his sleeves...

GERRY
Well, that makes for a great question. *Who is the audience for our show?*

EVELYN
I wrote down, "*Middle Class and Disadvantaged children*"... But those are two very different kids from two very different communities, who lead very different lives. Hi everyone! I'm Evelyn, in-charge of getting the kids to watch the show. P.R./Community Outreach.. and I'm just looking for clarification on what community it is I'm.. reaching out to.

JOE RAPOSO
 What about Puerto Rican kids.. Chinese?

SOMEONE
 The kids in Appalachia?

MATT
 I mean, black people haven't cornered
 the market on illiteracy.

EVELYN
 No, those white southerners give us
 a real run for our money.

ARTHUR (50s, white - Jeff Daniels) Academic, confident, lecturer.

ARTHUR
 Arthur Johnson, University of California
 - we are talking about using this
 program to try to close the Achievement
 Gap for inner-city children, are we not?

MATT (happy to have an ally) Absolutely. EVELYN Yes!

ARTHUR
 Which is rooted in a Deficit Model.

GERRY Arthur, I-- MATT Let the man talk, Gerry.

ARTHUR
 We have an opportunity to not just
 teach curriculum, but values.

Matt and Evelyn's head nod up and down.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
 The inner city child wants what the
 white child in the suburbs has. Their
 parents-- or rather parent, *singular*
 wants that white life for their child.

EVELYN
 I'm not sure I would say it like--

SOMEONE
 Wait, is this a *black* show?

JOE RAPOSO
 What's a *black show*?

JON STONE
 I assume most of the people in that
 neighborhood would be black or
 Hispanic, or immigrants of some ilk--

Joan freezes, keeps a smile. Hadn't thought of it, frankly.

SOMEONE
 What neighborhood?

JON STONE
 Well it's set in Harlem, isn't it?

IS IT!?

SOMEONE

SOMEONE ELSE

Oh, MY!

ARTHUR
And ghetto children live in what is tantamount to a War Zone - a violent, unstable, unloved climate. They speak an inferior dialect of English...

JOAN
Arthur...

Joan starts to stand up, but Matt's gestures to her - he's got it.

MATT
I guess, is British.. or Australian English inferior to--?

ARTHUR
"Are" they inferior? *Plural.*

Ooooo... Matt's eyes go wide.

GERRY
Let's get away from criteria like "deficits". More than reciting lectures, we need--

ARTHUR
To put the fashionable sensitivities of the day above these children's well-being? It's not even been empirically proven whether or not the *deficit* gap can even be closed in the first place. It may not be nurture as much as...

A beat. Even the Academics look to him with new eyes. Fuck.

EVELYN
I'm sorry, I missed that.

MATT
He's saying there's a chance it's just... a *genetic defect*?

ARTHUR
If we really do want to help, then it doesn't help anyone, least of all those children, to pretend we live in a world where everything is equal.

Joan rises again, but Evelyn's waves to her that she's got it.

EVELYN
You'll forgive me, I'm just a community organizer, so I'll speak to that community - where life is far more challenging, stacked against them. But that doesn't mean there is an intellectual gap, or "deficit" in their aptitude. In fact, those kids are racing up the same hill as the other kids, with much more weight on their backs, trying to keep up. And perhaps if any distinction, there is something to be said of their ability to survive in that environment.

JON STONE
Well-said.

ARTHUR
Well, a tee-vee show wont save them.

MAN'S VOICE
Then I just wasted four million bucks!

They turn to see DOC HOWE (Tommy Lee Jones), who snuck in.

ARTHUR
I'm sorry, and you are?

DOC HOWE
A spy, sent by Captain Kangaroo.
Harold Howe, Commissioner of Education
for these United States. I was in town
for some United Nations horseshit, when
I remembered y'all were getting started
just down the street helpin' the
kiddies, and thought I'd peek in.

Doc holds up an Envelope.

DOC HOWE (CONT'D)
This is a little Test our team in D.C.
drafted up, they're gonna give to a
bunch of kids before and after watching
your show, to see if they learned what
you said they would. Thought I'd sneak
ya a copy ahead'a time, hedge our bets.
If there's gonna be a future for this
show, I gotta show all those whackjobs
down in Washington whether or not this
cockamamie idea'a yours really can
change the world. Or if we just wasted
millions of dollars in the middle of a
war and famine... on puppets and songs.
(hand on Jon's back)
Sound good to you, Pappa Bear?

JON STONE
Aye-aye, Sir.

DOC HOWE
That'a boy. Break a leg, everyone.
The futures of those kids lives rest
on your thin liberal arts shoulders.

Doc leans to Joan's ear, eyes Arthur:

DOC HOWE (CONT'D)
Now listen, don't you go taking any
shit from.. anybody, ya hear me? Make
the show you talked about.

Joan nods, smiles. Doc grabs a bagel, leaves.

ARTHUR
The show may help kids who have parental
reinforcement, but if you think children
in Harlem, D.C., Bed-Stuy will even
watch an educational program.. I can't
be of any help. You'll be lucky to get
five percent viewership in the ghettos.

JOAN
Well, we'll see about that.

MATT
This isn't some study.. for a scholarly journal somewhere, or some part-time volunteer program where white folks pitch in to help and hope for the best. This is whether or not these kids will be able to learn to read, find a job, support their families. And none of their lives will be improved by all of us just giving it the old college try.
(he turns to Joan, re: Arthur)
We have to WIN.

Joan takes a deep breath - intimidating, but knows he's right.

GERRY
So, some questions to consider in our workshops. Who is our audience? Where is the show set? Who are our characters?

ARTHUR
Well *what* are they? Black.. white?

JIM
Maybe... the characters don't need to be black or white.

They turn to Jim, slouched in his chair sketching: Two Puppets. One stout & orange, one long & yellow. This SKETCH is illuminated by a Workshop Lamp *CLICKING* on, in...

INT. MUPPET WORKSHOP - ANOTHER DAY

OPERATING TABLE: Scissors, Needles, Cotton Balls, Rubbing Alcohol. Paper pattern sketched. Cut out. Foam rubber, rubber cemented. Orange and Yellow felt fabric cut. Stitched. Cardboard. Paint. A tongue. Two Eyes. A Nose. Tuft of Hair.

Then... Two figures slowly rise into frame: A long Yellow puppet & a stout Orange puppet - we'll one day know as Bert & Ernie.

Reveal... Jim & Frank puppeteering. Bert on Jim, Ernie on Frank. We are behind the two of them, facing a mirror, slowly pushing in, as they play with voices, mannerisms -- improvising, exploring:

JIM/YELLOW
Hey.

FRANK/ORANGE
Hey yourself.

JIM/YELLOW
(now a posh voice)
And just hooow, may I ask, are yooooo--

FRANK/ORANGE
(matching posh)
Quite well, yes, quite, yes.

Jim shakes his head, they try again, *different* voices:

JIM/YELLOW
Yeah, Havin' a good one, cow polk?

JIM/ERNIE
 Would you like me to TELL you what day
 comes after Monday, oh best friend of mine?

FRANK/BERT
 No, not particularl--

Jim stifles a hearty laugh, but pushes through. This is the game.

JIM/ERNIE
 TUUUUESday. That is the day that..

FRANK/BERT
 This isn't really news to anyone.
 There's a calendar in every room.

Jim looks away, chuckling, then--

JIM/ERNIE
 And can you imagine, just look into
 the future and guess what could
 come after Tuuuuesday?

FRANK/BERT
 I bet you're gonna tell me.

Jim just rolls on the floor, laughing that Ernie "Hee-hee" laugh.

INT. A NICE RESTAURANT - PRIVATE BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Private room cocktails: Joan, Jim, Jon, Joe, Gerry, Matt, Evelyn,
 Lloyd and WIVES mingle... Joan sees Tim alone with a seltzer.

JOAN
 Go talk to the wives...

TIM
 I don't wanna talk to the wives...

She laughs, but he's kinda serious, as she nudges him into them.

WIFE
 Oh! You must be Mister Joan Cooney.

Tim nods, forces a smile, a good sport. Joan approaches, Jim:

JOAN
 Where's Jane?

JIM
 One of the kids is sick.. and the dog.

JOAN
 Rowlf?

JIM
 Yah... Some sort of intestinal issue.
 Something to do with having someone's
 arm two feet up his ass..

Joan laughs, covers her mouth, scandalized.

JIM (CONT'D)
 The Vet said he had only seen this
 kind of thing before in The Village.

Tim sees Joan laughing with Jim, while he's stuck with wives.

EXT./EST. SUN RISING OVER THE WALDORF - MORNING

INT. WALDORF ASTORIA BALLROOM - THE WORKSHOP - DAY 2

Gerry writes: "DAY 2". Lloyd puts out new bagels. Joan grabs one.

LLOYD

Joan. Did you see Jim's contract?
He's asking to *OWN* the characters.

JOAN

Yah, did you see his *salary*? I know for a fact he normally gets paid ten times that. He's doing this for cost, and for the right reasons... And I don't know how we do the show without him.

LLOYD

What if one day he changes his mind, and takes his puppets with him?

A moment... Joan has no idea.

A HOTEL BELLMAN

Mr. Morrisett, a phone call.

Lloyd leaps to the Lobby, As Evelyn enters with poster materials:

EVELYN

Just the woman I wanted to see. So. I wanted to get started, you know getting the word out, but I thought, if there was a little money for materials. I know it's non-profit and all, but I thought if I could get Jim to draw some characters I could get my sister to let me use the copy machine at her office if I go in on a Saturday-

Joan is so touched but finally stops her.

JOAN

Evelyn, we... budgeted money for you. Getting *these* kids to watch, is probably the hardest part-- the most important part of the whole project.

EVELYN

Oh. Well, that's great, because I thought if we can put some small ads in the bigger congregation's church bulletins. Now they can be upwards of a *dollar* per week, for - I'm thinking - a few weeks leading up to the premiere. If we have *thirty-five.. forty* bucks, I could really stretch it, get people talking, and kids--

JOAN

Evelyn.

EVELYN

What?

JOAN

We put aside a little more than that.

At the Bagels, across the room: The academics steep their tea.

ACADEMIC
I think this one is an "everything".

SOMEONE ELSE
Whatever happened to "plain"? Haha..

They laugh to each other, when from across the room, they hear:

EVELYN
A MILLION DOLLARS?!?!?!

Joan blushes at Evelyn's excitement.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
I'm gonna buy a movie theatre and have
our show playing on the big screen all
day, every day. Up on the marquee at
The Apollo Theatre! Hell, I'll get
Martha and the Vandellas to sing about
it from a limousine, as the whole Alvin
Ailey company dances up 125th!
(singing & dancing with Joan)
CAAAAALLING OUT AROUND THE WORLD,
ARE YOU READY FOR A BRAND NEW BEAT?

Joe hears her, and accompanies on the PIANO.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
SUMMER'S HERE AND THE TIME IS RIGHT,
FOR DANCING IN THE STREET!

MATT
PHILADELPHIA, P.A.!

Matt joins her, dancing. As does Jon and Jim and Gerry...

JON/JIM/JOE/GERRY
DANCIN' IN THA STREET!

EVELYN
ALL WE NEED IS MUSIC. SWEET MUSIC!..

When the door opens and Lloyd enters. Sees this. Oh, his face.

LLOYD
What is this, American Bandstand?

MATT
Can't be! There's colored people!

Evelyn high-fives Matt!

Lloyd waves Joan to follow him out to the Lobby: Shuts the door.

LLOYD
You have to pick a Producer to be your
eyes & ears, so YOU can start visiting all
the affiliate public TV stations around
the country who will carry our show.

JOAN
I leave tonight to meet with Seattle and
then Portland.. Why are you so--?

LLOYD

I just got off the phone with our Affiliate station in Dallas, and luckily I was able to talk them off a ledge, but you have to get every city to agree to air it, or no child will ever see it.

JOAN

I understand how television works, Lloyd--

LLOYD

No, Joan. You live in New York City. You eat.. *ethnic* food on your way to.. jazz clubs, with your.. lesbian friends, talking about.. Votes for women, and--

JOAN

We got the vote, Lloyd, a while back--

He sidles upto a MAP OF AMERICA in the lobby, as a visual aid.

LLOYD

Seattle will be fine, hippies in Portland, San Francisco will love it... BUT, down here (the south), and here, (midwest) we're gonna have real trouble.

JOAN

Okay, so just the *whole* country.

LLOYD

To people in Mississippi, Alabama, Nebraska ...MISSISSIPPI, our program is going to be a lot to take. There are already rumblings about this show having.. an Agenda.

JOAN

We do... To teach kids their ABC's.

LLOYD

Mhm. Some programmers are worried it will seem... *political*. *In-your-face*...

JOAN

You mean...?

The ever-subtle Lloyd just OPENS THE DOOR, without breaking eye contact with Joan -- where they're dancing on the table. A Hispanic Academic, spinning a Chinese Teacher in a Wheelchair...

EVERYONE

DANCIN' IN THAAA STREET!

Door closes.

LLOYD

We can't risk ostracizing the very people we need to reach. You saw *Fiddler on the Roof* on Broadway. Half the audience were..

JOAN

(fucking with him)
Fiddlers? ... Roofers.

LLOYD
Jews, Joan, Jews. People like to
see themselves.

JOAN
Exactly.

LLOYD
You know I'm on your side. But this
is why we need to stick to *CURRICULUM* -
letters and numbers, nothing.. *social*.

JOAN
But we discussed it was equally
important to share *VALUES*, of
equality and representation and--

LLOYD
And what happens when one of the
affiliates doesn't share those *values*?
I'll tell you what - they pull the show.
Then they talk to other stations, it
creates a domino effect, and suddenly
nobody gets to see your show. Last
year, a station refused to air The Lab's
episode on *Race Relations*. Word got
out, people called their local stations.
The whole country pulled it.

JOAN
What are you suggesting?

LLOYD
No one objects to A-B-C and 1-2-3.
Aim for the targets you know you can hit.

He nods to DOC's TEST in her hands. She nods... Then she sees a
FILM REEL sticking out from Lloyd's briefcase.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
You know I never meddle, *artistically*.

JOAN
But?...

LLOYD
Well, I think I found an actor who
would be great for one of the hosts.
Someone affiliates would just love.

INT. TV VARIETY SHOW STUDIO SET - CLIP

BOB MCGRATH (The whitest person you've ever seen - STEVE CARREL)

BOB MCGRATH
*BOOOOOOOORN FREE,
AS FREE AS THE WIND BLOWS,
AS FREE AS THE GRASS GROWS,
BORN FREE TO FOLLOW YOUR HEART!*

REVEAL: This is being shown on a TV MONITOR in the Workshop.

REVERSE SHOT: Jon, Joe, Jim, Matt, Evelyn watching, horrified.
Lloyd is enraptured, eyes soft, mouthing along.

JON STONE
Is this a joke?

LLOYD
His name is Bob McGrath.
There are a lot of *Irish* immigrants.

MATT
Yah, in the 1860's...

Small high-five from Jon to Matt - now thick as thieves.

LLOYD
Well, we'll have all kinds of viewers,
and for some, seeing Bob--

ACADEMIC
In our profession we call it *Patterning*.

GERRY
So this brings up a great question
about our cast of characters. *Who
are the people in our neighborhood?*

JOE RAPOSO
(at the piano)
OHHH OHHHHH...
*WHOOO ARE THE PEOPLE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?
..IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?
..IN YOUR NEIGH-BOR-HOOD?*

ACADEMIC
What is this?

JIM HENSON
In our profession, we call it a *SONG*.

GERRY
Shall we get started?

Matt looks to the empty chair next to him.

MATT
Are we gonna wait for Arthur?

Gerry looks to Joan, then...

GERRY
I did not invite him back.
When people tell you they can't be
of any help... believe them.

Everyone sits up straighter. A newfound respect for Gerry.

JOE RAPOSO
*OH... A BIGOT IS A PERSON
IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?*

Everyone laughs, some sing along.

JOE & CO.
*..IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?
..IN YOUR NEIGH-BOR-HOOD?*

MATT
I like this song...
EVELYN
It's catchy.

JOE RAPOSO
*THE PEOPLE THAT YOU PASS,
DISADVANTAGED... MIDDLE-CLASS!*

JOAN
No!

JOE RAPOSO
THE PEOPLE THAT YOU MEET,
NYMPHOMANIACS IN HEAT-
JEAN-PIERRE AND MARGUERITE.
ON THE GLITTERY CONCRETE--
WHEN YOU'RE WALKIN' DOWN THA-

JON STONE
Kids, Joe.
In the projects?
When you're walkin' down the
street?

GERRY
Wrap it up.

JOE [& JON, IN COUNTERPART]
THE PEOPLE THAT'CHA MEET
[PEOPLE THAT'CHA]
WHEN YOU'RE WALKIN' DOWN THA
[WALKIN' DOWN THA]
(perfect harmony)
THEY'RE THE PEOPLE. THAT. YOU. MEET!
EACH DAAAAAAAAAAAAAY!

JOE RAPOSO
So whaddya say?!

They finish, heads on hands, like old vaudevillians...
The Academics are astounded, jaws on the floor. APPLAUSE.

MATT
I mean, Joan, you told us to lean into
what TV does well. Regarding casting,
maybe we "show, don't tell". Just have
a terrific black lady and Bob - the
whitest man the world has ever known -
hanging out like it's nothing.

JON STONE
Are we showing the world as it is?
Or as we'd like it to be?

A Moment... They all look to each other - good question.

JIM HENSON
I mean, there are puppet *monsters*...

ANOTHER ACADEMIC
It's not healthy to mix make-believe
and real life, or it confuses the
child. Just look at Fred Rodgers'
program. That trolly goes to The Land
of Make-Believe. A clear line.

GERRY
Yes, but he focuses on emotional needs,
whereas we have *curriculum* goals--

MATT
And Values. We can teach about the
prejudice that exists for these kids--

LLOYD
I think we need to stick to letters and
numbers. The things Doc is *TESTing* for.

EVELYN
Okay, I hear that, but... well...

MATT
I mean, it doesn't matter what comes after A & B, if you're too scared to walk to school in the first place?

LLOYD
Why would you be scared of school?

MATT
'Cause they beat the shit outta you!

Very raw. More than he intended. He takes a breath, regroups.

MATT (CONT'D)
Who is this show for? Hmm?
(he sees Gerry--)
No, don't write it on the board, Gerry.
(he turns to-)
Joan... Who is this show for?

Joan looks to Lloyd.

JOAN
The truth is, Matt... Carnegie wants our show for middle class kids. The U.S. Department of Education and the Ford Foundation want it for disadvantaged kids--

MATT
Who do YOU want it for?

JOAN
I think.. there's no reason this program cannot enrich the lives of *all* children.

Matt looks off, in that way you do to try and keep the sad down.

MATT
(soft, to himself)
You spend so much of your life trying to throw people off the scent. Then when you finally need to... Ahem.
(comes right out with it)
When my father sat me down, and tried to explain.. why people hated us, for no reason. It's probably the *only* thing I remember my father ever sitting me down to teach me..

LLOYD
There are real risks to the child discussing these things without proper emotional support structures in pla--

EVELYN
There are risks to these kids walking to the corner to get a quart of milk!

LLOYD
I'm saying for the purpose of the show, we might want to stick to the fundamentals of our world.

MATT
Of *your* world. Your *advantaged* world. See, *that's* the advantage. Not having to worry about all that, all the time.

JOAN

(rises, leads)

This program will proudly help teach middle-class kids. But... please hear me when I say... If this show does not improve the education, the life, of the inner-city child -- I would personally consider our entire experiment a failure.

They all nod. Their marching orders clear. Jim nods to Joan.

JOAN (CONT'D)

It will be much harder to succeed with children of *any background*, whose parents can't provide reinforcement. And much harder for our amazing Evelyn to get them watching in the first place. But of course, that's why those kids need this show the most. They are.. the Bull's Eye of our target.

JON STONE

Good.

JIM HENSON

Good.

EVELYN

Maybe we can think up another metaphor for black kids that's not a *Bull's Eye*, but.. good!

MATT

I'm just-- I mean, I know Doc's test will show if kids *can* learn from the show, but... well, how are we gonna know if the kids we made the show for.. are even watching?

They all turn to Joan.

JOAN

...I dunno. But I'll figure it out.

INT. JOAN & TIM'S APARTMENT - EVENING

New confident Joan packs, calling off to Tim at the bathroom sink.

JOAN

I leave tomorrow morning for Seattle. And I think I just *bring it up* to the affiliates, acknowledge the issue, so we can deal with it.

She looks at the liquor cart, empty.. immediately nervous again.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Tim, I um, wanted to mention that I saw a place that said it could help with--

A KNOCK at the door. Joan gets it - a DELIVERY MAN (Muppet).

DELIVERY MUPPET

Hi there, you uh Tim Cooney? Sign here please. Thank you.

He hands her a BAG, A LIQUOR BOTTLE. She closes the door.

JOAN
Tim, can we--

TIM
Who's the--(bottle)?

JOAN (CONT'D)
No, please Tim, let me say
this, because--

Tim sits at the table, with supplies, re-bandaging his hand.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Ooo, what happened to your hand?

TIM
It's been like that for three days.

JOAN
No...

TIM
Yah, I thought you were trying to
save me embarrassment.

JOAN
It's been lots of late nights and
early mornings, I guess I just see
you in bed, or... What happened?

Tim sits, determined to be honest, not embarrassed.

TIM
So, three nights ago, you didn't come
home for dinner again, and I got a
steak because I had a shitty day at the
office where I almost got fired--

JOAN
Fired?

TIM
Guess I had more to drink at lunch
than I thought, and not enough food
to.. balance it out, or...

JOAN
Tim Cooney..

TIM
So then I came home, upset, determined
to tell you, to... I don't know, like if
I told you, then I'd be too embarrassed
to do it again, or-- so I got a nice
steak, so you'd be less mad. Then it
was nine o'clock and you still weren't
home. So I finished the scotch. Then I
was so drunk, when I went to cook the
steak I burned my hand on the pan--

JOAN
What?

TIM (CONT'D)
Had to go to the hospital--

JOAN
Why didn't you call or--

TIM
..where I realized I hadn't paid the
insurance for six months...

JOAN
What?!

TIM
And I spoke to a doctor. Asked for help.
Joan is floored. Thrilled.

JOAN
With the--
He nods.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Oh. That's great. What did he say?
He pulls out a PRESCRIPTION PILL BOTTLE.

TIM
Antabuse. Makes you sick if you
drink. So sick you don't wanna drink.
Threw all the liquor away - hope ya
don't mind.. Saved that bottle from
the Finger Lakes we got together,
which was shitty wine, but thought
maybe it had some sentimental-

Joan is trying to process what all this means. She looks at the
BOTTLE just delivered, with a "then who..?" Finds a small card:
"Break a leg at the workshop. Love Lewis & The WNDT Gang".

TIM (CONT'D)
Your friend Patti called, the night I
had a little too much-- one of the
nights. She found an earring behind the
couch from when you stayed over on your
research trip, she was mailing it and
needed our-- And.. I heard her-- her
daughter, in the background.. And she
said she'd kill me if I told you - but
she mentioned what it was keeping you
from feeling ready to have a baby.

Tim produces a PAMPHLET: A Doctor with a Couple & a BABY.

TIM (CONT'D)
So I'm done drinking. Forever. And.. I
made an appointment for next week.
Figured your show premieres in a little
over a year.. so we enjoy the summer,
then once it gets cold out... we find a
way to keep warm, then, in a year from
now, we'll have your amazing show, and a
new audience member to watch it!

She starts to say... but then stops, forces a smile.

INT. JOAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A MAP OF AMERICA - GREEN Pins in SEATTLE & PORTLAND - **MATCHES TO:**

EXT. AMERICA FROM ABOVE/ INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Joan, looking down at the country.

INT. A LOCAL STATION - DAY

Joan trucks in her luggage, shakes hands hello...

INT. JOAN'S OFFICE - MORNING

Three GREEN PINS in Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco. When there's a knock at the door, it's a MAN IN A SUIT (Black, 40s) sits down with Joan and shows her a RED FOLDER.

INT. HOWARD JOHNSONS - ICE MACHINE - NIGHT

Joan, bag in tow, is keying in her room, when she sees *another BUSINESS WOMAN??* (40s) at the ICE, who gives her a warm smile.

BUSINESS WOMAN??
Hi there.

JOAN
Hi...

She sees Joan's face, starts to say something, then doesn't, then:

BUSINESS WOMAN??
Sorry.. are you okay?

Joan nods, but not believably. Joan opens her Room Door, then turns back - about to SAY SOMETHING... When the Woman's KIDS run up. Joan forces a smile, shuts the door. Alone.

INT. MUPPET WORKSHOP - DAY

Joan walks past, towing luggage, and sees Jim at that Operating Table, sewing blue fur together [Grover].

JIM
Well hey there! How was ..Chicago?

JOAN
Signed on. How was the workshop?

JIM
I wanted to do an insert about the number 7, but according to the experts 1 and 7 look waaay too much alike and the kids will be confused. As do 3 & 8, 2 & 5. And that god damn 6 is clearly just masquerading as an upside-down 9. And don't get them staaarted on zero!

Joan laughs. Then looks at his handiwork.

JOAN
Is that the famous Henson stitch?

JIM
How'd you hear about that?

JOAN
Your wife. First day I met you.
(then)
How do you... keep it all together?

JIM
It's a zig-zag stitch that--

JOAN

No, I mean... the fact that you're so ambitious and still-- I'm struggling to... and I don't know if there's anyone in the exact same boat, but when I see you with-- What I mean is--

JIM

..Is that what you came to ask me about?

JOAN

(handing him a contract)
We have the final contract. Split profits from any licensing, but you own your muppets.

JIM

Terrific. Sorry for the hassle, I just wanted to make sure.. I dunno.. That they have some integrity, not just change themselves for whatever the--?
(then)

I think maybe one strengthens the other.

JOAN

Beg your pardon?

JIM

This job makes me a better Dad.. And I think being so amazed by my kids makes me work harder to get this just right.
(seeing her face)
But that didn't answer your question.

JOAN

I just don't understand how anyone can manage both. I never see you stress out, or--

JIM

Oh, that's easy. I hide behind the puppets. They can say things I never could.

JOAN

It's just all so.. seamless.

He waxes the thread. Sews two pieces of fabric, side-by-side.

JIM

It only seems seamless. It's a somewhat labor-intensive quilting stitch. But when done correctly that stitch, and all the hard work and long hours just..
(he flips the fabric)
Disappear.

INT. JOAN'S OFFICE - DAY / INT. AIRPLANES / INT. AFFILIATES...

More CITIES... More HANDSHAKING... More GREEN PINS... Always looking at the forebodingly un-pinned Mississippi on the map.

SOMEONE ON A PLANE

So, whaddy you do?...

Airplane Tickets, Green Pins... Hotel Keys... Luggage Tags...

ANOTHER SOMEONE ON A PLANE

Oh, Television, that's great...

Hotel showers... Date book appointments... Shitty food...

AND ANOTHER SOMEONE ON A PLANE
We'll be watching for it!...

Train platforms... Script pages... Green pins... Taxi receipts...

The MAN IN SUIT & Joan look at another RED FOLDER..

YET ANOTHER SOMEONE
And what happens if they don't sign on?

WHOOSH... Joan's Auto-pilot stops at this question. She turns.

JOAN
...What?

YET ANOTHER SOMEONE
If they don't agree t'show your program.
Or people don't watch the show.
...Whaddya do then?

Across the aisle, a BABY cries. Joan turns to it, but all she can see is the WHITE READING LIGHT - which MATCH CUTS TO: A bright LAMP over an Operating Table, in...

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Joan looks around: Scissors, Needles, Cotton Balls, Alcohol.
When a DOCTOR (MUPPET) enters - if Olympia Dukakis was a Muppet.

DOCTOR
Hi, Joan? Got a call from ..Tim.
Said you two were trying to have a baby?
(She waits.)
That's where you would say "Yes!"
in an excited voice.

JOAN
Sorry. It's just been a very busy
time at work, so I'm--

DOCTOR
Oh, you work?

JOAN
(earnestly)
Yeah. ..Is that okay?

DOCTOR
Whaddya mean "is that okay", whaddya
think *this* is, Club Med?

JOAN
Do you have kids?

DOCTOR
I'm the premiere fertility expert in
New York City. I've had a'lotta kids.
You're.. 35, and just starting now?

JOAN
I uh-- Tim had a problem with alchohol--

DOCTOR
And you didn't have a problem with that?

JOAN
Well.. he didn't have a problem with me
working and not having a baby, so...

DOCTOR
So it all worked out.. Look up.
(checks Joan's Lymph nodes)
People cope in all kinds'a ways.

JOAN
You don't feel.. as a woman.. you're...

DOCTOR
What? Like I'm not fulfilling my job
requirements as a uterus? Other women
can't do *this* job.. Some can barely push
a stroller and chew gum at the same
time. I figure I can do a lot more for
the children of the world in this job,
than by pushin' out one'a my own.
(then)
But, I know what'cha mean. 'Not exactly
like ya have a lot of women to pattern
after, or even talk to about it.

JOAN
Exactly! I mean do you think--

DOCTOR
Say "Ahh."

The Doctor's flashlight, MATCHES to the CHANDELIER in...

INT. WALDORF ASTORIA BALLROOM - NIGHT

Gerry has a board full of possible Titles for the show.

GERRY
Alright, this is our last workshop,
we're supposed to be outta here an hour
ago, but I promised Evelyn a name for
this show by Monday so she can, you
know, tell people what to watch.

JIM
I like "1-2-3 Avenue B"...

MATT
What happened to "A Negro's in Brooklyn"?

JON STONE
Yah, like *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, but...

GERRY
...I thought you guys were kidding.

Jon & Matt shake their heads "no"... then break, laughing.

MATT
We were Gerry. We were.

JON STONE
Well, you all have the weekend to come
up with a real title. And we're not
calling it "Down to Fun Town"-- Sounds
like a euphemism for cocaine.

SOMEONE
 How 'bout.. "Sesame Street"?
 (then)
 You know, a city block where anything
 is possible, like "open-sesame".

People consider it, say it to themselves. Then...

JON STONE
 I think that's about the *worst* name
 I've ever heard.

Okay... SOMEONE JON STONE (CONT'D)
 Like a Turkish Grocery Store
 in Queens.

Joan enters, haggard, with luggage - takes stock, then...

JOAN
 Where's Joe?

JIM
 He's on a yacht with Frank Sinatra.

JOAN
 Seriously?

JIM
 He called ...*from* the yacht.

JOAN
 (re: the Board of names)
still don't have a name?

Sesam-- SOMEONE NO! JON STONE

Joan sits. They get quiet. She pulls a RED FOLDER.

JOAN
 I was thinking about what Matt asked,
 about how to make sure the people we
 were making the show for actually saw
 it. Doc's Test will show in a lab
 setting if the show can actually teach.
 But I hired a company, to do a kind of
Census, sending people out on foot into
 our most vulnerable areas, knocking on
 doors, to see if *those* kids are
 watching, if they're.. learning.

Beat. Wow. Okay.

MATT
 What areas?

JOAN
 (reading the Red Folder)
 Harlem, D.C., ...*Bed-Stuy*.

MATT
 Really?

JOAN
 Really.

EVELYN
Do or die...

JOAN
Alright. Some of you we'll see Monday on set. Most of you.. thank you so much for your time in this workshop, and everything you did to help us make..
Sesame Str--

JON
NO!

They all laugh, applaud, get up, shake hands, hug. Matt packs up, checks his TRAIN Ticket to PHILLY. Then sees a note for "Matt". He looks around, then curious... opens it.

INT. A BAR - FEW MINUTES LATER

Matt walks in. Sees Joan, Gerry, Jim, Jon.

MATT
Heeey.. guys.

JON Ah, Matthew my boy! JIM Hey, there he is!

MATT
Oh, you're the people who left me this serial killer note to meet you at an undisclosed location, late at night?

They laugh.. When Evelyn ruuuns in, throws her arms around Matt:

EVELYN
Sorry I'm late! Next round on me!
Congratulations, *Mister Producer!!!*

Evelyn sits. Sighs. Then sees their faces.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
...You didn't tell him yet?

Beat. Matt looks to them super-confused. To Joan.

JOAN
So the workshop was a great success, in large part to you. It set forth an ambitious, never-attempted, potentially impossible mix of curriculum and values that we now have to try to *whip up* into a wildly entertaining show. And from day one it's been clear that this is just as much your show as anyone here. And I speak for everyone when I say it would be our great honor if you'd join us as a Writer/Producer in this.. ambitious, never-attempted, potentially impossible mission we are embarking upon.

Matt hears this... Overwhelmed.

MATT
Yah. Yah, I can do it! WE can do it.

Everyone celebrates.

MATT (CONT'D)

(to Joan)

And I know we can get forty.. fifty percent of those Bed Stuy kids.

JOAN

In Bed Stuy, I'd be happy with 20.

MATT

I'm gonna go call my wife.

Matt runs to the phone. Something clicks for Joan "oh shit." And she grabs her purse, ruuuns out, past:

MATT (ON THE PHONE) (CONT'D)

Hi baby, it's Daddy.

INT. A RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Tim looks at his watch, 8:45, smiles to the other two Working Man/Doris Day Wife COUPLES at the table. Joan runs in late.

JOAN

I am so sorry, it was a late night at work and we-- Hi, sweetie.

He smiles, but Ooooo he is not happy. He sips his seltzer.

WIFE

Do you also work in social--?

JOAN

Yes, in a--

No.

TIM

TIM (CONT'D)

Joan is in show business.

Everyone's thrilled to hear, except Joan.

EXT./EST. THE SUN RISING OVER THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE - MORNING**INT. STUDIO - MORNING**

The whole gang is crowded around the stagedoor, ready to go in.

JON STONE

Before we go in and see the set... I asked you all to take the weekend to think up a name for our show...

He looks around... Nobody speaks up.

EVELYN

I have to go to press this week, Jon.

JIM

I guess "Sesame Street" it is.

JON STONE

Are you kidding me? Come on, someone must have something!?

JIM

...Alright! Welcome to *Sesame Street*!

JON STONE
Oh, Jesus Christ...

SOMEONE (O.S.)
BLUE SKIES!

GERRY (TO JOAN)
That's what they say when there are
kids on set, so Jon doesn't curse.

Then they turn the corner... There's the SET!

MATT
Wow... it looks just like... Look--
Exactly like in the tenements.

LLOYD
(not as pleased)
Yes...

Joan shakes her head at Lloyd, who's dusting the set.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
Mississippi called. They would
like to see any film or images we
have as soon as possible.

Joan nods to Lloyd, trying to stay calm., then turns to Jon:

JOAN
It's a... *fine* name.

JON STONE
For a god damn Lebanese Bakery...

SOMEONE (O.S.)
BLUE SKIES!

Then Jim takes note of the trash can he's leaning on. Peeks in...

JIM
Hmmm.

JON STONE
Or maybe the kids should learn it's
okay not to be happy all the time.

Jim hears *that*. Writes it down... Sketches the can...

CREW
Okay... First up is "Bob sings".

BOB MCGRATH - in a turtleneck, joins them on the stoop.

BOB MCGRATH
Hi everyone. Hi kids.

He starts doing a litany of VOCAL WARM-UPS, STRETCHING as everyone
is trying to do get ready... The kids hate him. So does Jon.

BOB MCGRATH (CONT'D)
Red leather, yellow leather...
Toy Boat, Toy Boat, Toy Boat, Toy Boat...
KNAPsack straps, KNAPsack straps...
Bumble bee baby boy, Bumble bee baby boy...

JON STONE
BOB!

JOAN
12 months to make 100 episodes.

JON STONE
(his "Action" cue)
ROLIOLIOLIO!

GIRL CHORUS (PRELAP)
(whispered)
TWELVE!

CLASSIC SESAME STREET CLIP: THE PSYCHEDELIC ANIMATED PINBALL MACHINE

A metal ball is pulled back... and the hammer HITS IT! Into a thrilling put-put golf course style world of Numbers.

GIRL CHORUS (SINGING)
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12!

JOAN: Joan Meeting remote affiliates, shaking hands, showing clips.

EVELYN: Looking at Posters with different Sesame Street logos.

JON: Animators Animating the Pinball animation:

JON STONE
What is this shit?

SOMEONE (O.C.)
BLUE SKIES!

Jon turns to see: A Black Kid & White Kid doing Voice Over.

JOAN: RECORDING THE AFFILIATE PITCH FILM (TO CAMERA)

JOAN
We want to emphasise that the Children's Television Workshop is an experiment. Research is woven into the total fabric of the show. Every segment is being tested and evaluated by the toughest critics of all - the children themselves.

This Pitch on a Monitor Lloyd watches: Cuts from Joan to an ANIMATED SHORT - A Black Kid & White kid staring at a Letter J.

LLOYD
Have you sent this to Mississippi?

JOAN
No. ...Not yet.

LLOYD: Touring Texan Affiliates through the SET, it's weird to them. They see costume sketches of a Mixed Race Cast. They even look askance at Ernie & Bert. When they turn away, Frank & Jim pull their puppets off to reveal holding up their middle fingers.

MATT: At a typewriter, late, more coffee... more scripts...

STUDIO: A BAKER (actor) atop a flight of stairs with PIES in hand.

BAKER
10! 10 Banana Cream Pies!

And he falls down the steps. Jim and Jon think it's *hilarious*.

JOAN'S MAP: More Green Pins... New York, Boston, Philadelphia, DC.

JON & JIM: At a favorite Pub after work. Jon's reading a script, Jim sketches that Trash Can, when a cantankerous WAITER approaches.

WAITER
Say, you fellas gonna order or what?!

Jim and Jon are thrilled with how comically rude he is.
Jim has sketched a Mean Monster sticking out of the Trash Can.

WAITER (CONT'D)
You gonna draw all night, Picasso,
or ya gonna eat? Sheesh!

Later: Jim and Jon laugh their way out of "OSCAR'S TAVERN".

GERRY & MATT: At a DAYCARE: Testing the "J" animated clip with kids.
They show the kids 5 letters on a table, the kids pick the "J".

ON TV: Ernie in the bathtub with his toy.

ERNIE
RUBBER DUCKY I'M AWFULLY FOOOOOND OF YOU!

There's one little boy JOHN JOHN (4), the most adorable little kid, who is standing, gesticulating, singing along!

JOHN JOHN
FOOOOOND OF YOUUUUUU!!!

Matt watches John John. He impishly waves back. Matt laughs.

JIM & FRANK: Performing Ernie & LEFTY the salesman.

LEFTY
Hey, PSST! How'd ya like'ta buy an 8!

And Lefty opens a trenchcoat, where he has a Number 8.

ERNIE
An 8?

LEFTY
Riiiiiiiiight.

Lloyd is watching, taps Matt on the shoulder, next to Jon.

LLOYD
Excuse me, is he selling the number
8 as if it were drugs?

JON STONE
Shhh...

LLOYD
You think that's appropriate?

JON STONE
Wouldja get the hell outta here?!

SOMEONE (O.S.)
BLUE SKIES!

BOB MCGRATH
BLUEEE SKIIIES, SMILIN' AT MEEE!

JON STONE
AW SHUT THE FUCK UP, BOB!

JOAN'S MAP: Green Pin on Texas, Louisiana... Florida, Alabama...

JOE: AT STUDIO 54, Joe knows everyone. Sees his friend SYLVESTER singing and his BACKUP Girls. Joe gives the Backup Girls his card.

EVELYN'S NEIGHBORHOOD KIOSK: Kids watching a clip on a TV.

A CHINESE WOMAN (70s), translates for a 90-year-old - to Joan.

CHINESE WOMAN
There *Chinese* people on this show?

Joan nods. She's surprised, translates. Both taken aback.

JOAN
(looking at the neighborhood)
Actually, it looks a lot like this.

Evelyn holds out candy to KIDS, but before she hands it over:

EVELYN
Now, what's it called?..

KIDS
Sesame Street?

EVELYN
When's it on?..

KIDS
8 o'clock!

ONE KID
And again after school!

EVELYN
And why should you watch it?..

KIDS
Cause it's gonna help me make my
dreams come true!

EVELYN
Good job!

Evelyn hands out candy... Then sees a pair of PUERTO RICAN BOYS (5 & 7) tearing off sheets of ALUMNIUM FOIL, selling it to Kids for a nickel. They see Evelyn watching them, and give her a Bronx Cheer.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Grover is talking with precocious JOHN JOHN - from the Day Care.

GROVER
John John? Can you count to ten?

JOHN JOHN
I want to count backwards!
TEN!!! NIIIIINE!!! EIGHT! SEVEN!

Joan is watching, amazed.

RECORDING STUDIO - We see who's singing: Sylvester's Backup Girls!

GIRL CHORUS (SINGING)
(big finish!)
ELEVEN, TWE-E-E-E-E-ELVE!

Joe looks to Jon in the booth. Thumbs up!

AN ASSISTANT runs in the booth with Flowers.

ASSISTANT
Flowers for The Pointer Sisters!

RUTH POINTER takes them, then looks to camera...

RUTH POINTER (TO CAMERA)
That's right.

JUNE & ANITA POINTER poke their heads into frame as well.

JUNE POINTER (TO CAMERA)
Everybody's gotta start somewhere.

ANITA POINTER (TO CAMERA)
Tell it!

Then Joe's head pops into frame from the booth - on that mic:

JOE RAPOSO
Sorry girls. Something unspecific
about the tape malfunctioning. Can
we get that ending one more time?

RUTH POINTER
(winking at the camera)
'Course ya can. Girls?

And they each SHOW OFF in a COMPLETELY Unnecessary Encore PLAYOFF!

ANITA POINTER
WITH'A 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10!

JUNE POINTER
YA KNOW THAT 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10!

RUTH POINTER
SINGIN' 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10!

ALL 3 POINTER SISTERS
ELEVEN, TWE-E-E-E... E-E-E-E... E-E-E-E... E-E-ELVE!!!

GERRY (PRELAP)
We have a problem.

INT. DAY CARE - DAY

COOKIE MONSTER (ON TV)
C IS FOR COOKIE, THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME!

Joan, Gerry, Jon, Jim & Matt watch all the DAY CARE KIDS.

GERRY
They love Cookie, and Ernie & Bert and
Grover and the songs and animations
and sketches... and then...

ON TV: They cut back to the Street... where BOB comes out.

BOB MCGRATH
Hey Kids, ready to hear a story?

Then they see The Day Care KIDS TUNE OUT COMPLETELY:

THE KIDS IN THE DAY CARE
Ugh...

BOB MCGRATH
Once upon a time...

The kids in the Day Care stand up... talk... fight.

GERRY
The kids are ZOMBIES for the Muppets, but when we get to the Street itself, with just humans, and no muppets, they completely tune out. If we don't fix this, when Doc does his tests, I don't think the kids will be able to remember anything from the street segments.

JIM
And if they don't pass Doc's Test...

JOAN
No more Sesame Street.

JON STONE
You're telling me we built the street set, and shot all these scenes for nothing? It's half the god damned show!

ONE DAY CARE KID
(at the screen)
SHUT UP, BOB!

JON STONE
Well, can't argue that.

MATT
There must be a solution...

Jim thinks... walks over to a YELLOW BIRD in a Birdcage.

Lloyd charges in. Jon sees he's in a tuxedo.

JON STONE
I'll have the salmon.

LLOYD
I was at a-- Joan, can I speak to you?

EXT. DAY CARE IN HARLEM - CONTINUOUS

JOAN
What's so important you came to Harlem?

LLOYD
Mississippi, Joan. They saw the film strip pitch where negro kids and chinese kids and white kids are all playing together on one block--

JOAN
You mean our show?

LLOYD
They refuse to air a show that is set on an integrated street.

Joan takes a beat. Wind knocked out of her. He hails a cab.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

We booked *you* on a 4:15 flight.
You have to FIX this, Joan. Before
anyone else finds out about it and
all the affiliates pull out.

JOAN

That integrated street-- that's just as
important as the curriculum. ..Isn't it?
I mean, I know we can't compare--

LLOYD

Yes, you *can* compare, Joan. You *must*
compare. Would it be better if we didn't
have the oppressive history of insane
bigotry, holding this country back, and
could make this show whatever we want?
OF COURSE. But we live in America.
And if I had to pick between a socially
progressive show that exposes kids to
equality & pluralism, but only airs in three
cities and gets cancelled within a year.
...OR one that sticks to curriculum,
doesn't ruffle feathers, and creates a
new generation who can ALL READ - a book,
a street sign, fill out a job
application, vote, breaking that cycle of
illiterate poverty, giving them the tools
to fight for themselves for years to--

JOAN

So we just cater to the lowest common
denominator in Mississi--?

LLOYD

The lowest common denominator have kids!
Who advocates for *them*? The *millions* of
kids who were born in the wrong place at
the wrong time if they wanted an education.

(angry now)

Whose parents don't say, "I want a better
life for my child," like you'd assume any
human being would, but instead say "I never
learned to read and I turned out fine!"

(then, calming)

If we miss the opportunity to teach
millions of children to-- to give them
some tools to pull themselves out of
that.. because we said it was more
important to stand our ground on..

JOAN

..on social progress?

LLOYD

Learning to read *IS* social progress.

INT. JOAN & TIM'S APARTMENT - MID DAY

Joan throws a suitcase on the bed, clothes in. Hears a smash.
Peeks around the corner... where Tim is on the bathroom floor.

JOAN

Tim? What are you doing home?

He vomits.

JOAN (CONT'D)
Oh, honey. Are you sick?

TIM
No...

She sees the Alchie pills... A flask in the trash. Ah.

TIM (CONT'D)
See... You're not-- not even upset.

She looks in the mirror... she's not, at all.

TIM (CONT'D)
That's what I wanted to see, I think.

JOAN
Tim. I want you to be okay.

TIM
No... you-- You're relieved.

JOAN
I am not--

TIM
Yes! You're happy ...to have an excuse.

Joan is upset, in that way when someone is right. She storms out with her suitcase. Slams the door.

INT. AIRPLANE TAKING OFF IN NEW YORK - DAY

Joan looking at the clouds, thinking...

HIPPIE GIRL (PRELAP SINGING)
*ROWS AND FLOWS OF ANGEL HAIR
AND ICE CREAM CASTLES IN THE AIR
AND FEATHER CANYONS EVERYWHERE...*

INT. CASTING - AUDITION ROOM - DAY

HIPPIE GIRL
I'VE LOOKED AT CLOUDS THAT WAY...

Long-flowing hair, floral blouse, accompanying herself on guitar. It's ...fine. **Sign: "AUDITIONS: SUSAN"** Jon & Matt politely smile.

Meanwhile in The WAITING ROOM: Folding chairs with ten more of the same thin, young, hippie white woman with long hair, and guitars. When in walks LORETTA (32, Black) big afro, short skirt, long red nails, sheet music - walks up to the CASTING ASSOCIATE.

LORETTA
Sorry, I teach up in the Bronx and only could get someone to cover for me for half the day and I--

CASTING ASSOCIATE
And where is your guitar?

Then she looks. They all have guitars.

LORETTA
They always have a piano player. I'm
a Broadway girl. Did you see *Pippin*?

CASTING ASSOCIATE
Mhm.

LORETTA
Ah... Well, I was almost in that.

TIME CUT TO LORETTA IN THE AUDITION ROOM:

LORETTA (CONT'D)
HERE IS MY HANDLE, HERE IS MY SPOUT!

She plays to the camera, full panto. Matt and Jon are charmed.

LORETTA (CONT'D)
WHEN I GET ALL STEAMED UP, HEAR ME SHOUT!
Everyone!

LORETTA & JON & MATT
"TIP ME OVER AND POUR ME OUT!"

Jon and Matt giggle to have joined in so willingly.

MATT
You said you teach in the Bronx?

LORETTA
Substitute. AND I got great notices
in a play at the Roundabout.

JON STONE
The one under the Gristedes?

She nods. Matt sits next to her, hands her pages.

MATT
You would be one of four adults,
kind of educational guides...
Should we have her do the scene?

LORETTA
Can I ask, what Susan does for work?

MATT
Well, I thought one of the things
missing from the black home was a
reliable homemaker figure, help the kids
with homework, reading, loving...

LORETTA
Didja... Huh. Okay...

MATT
What?

LORETTA
No... Nothing. I gotta give you
white suburban housewife better than
those Joan-Baez-lookin' girls. So
that's what I'm gonna do!

Jon GUFFAWS! Matt blushes. Jon presses record on the camera.

JON STONE
Roliolioio!

MATT (AS GORDON)
Hi, Susan. I was just telling Enzo and Barney all the places they could find circles in their home.

LORETTA (AS SUSAN)
Well this pan is a circle. And these cookies! Would you boys like one?

TIME CUT TO: Loretta is leaving.

LORETTA (CONT'D)
Come by to see the play, or... just to grab some groceries.

Jon and Matt laugh as Loretta waves and leaves, as the Casting Associate brings a rotary phone in.

CASTING ASSOCIATE
It's for you, Matt.

MATT (ON PHONE)
Hi, Hon. Yeah, it's almost wrapped, should be on the 7 o'clock train-- Yes, I understand, but... Alright, you're right, would you put her on?
(then)
Hi, Holly. How was your day? The zoo?

Jon watches, then focuses on Matt with the camera. Presses Record.

MATT (CONT'D)
What color was the zebra? You have a great memory, I can't remember what I had for lunch. Maybe you could be a lion tamer one day... Ooooo! Listen sweetie, you have to go to bed before I get home so I wanted to-- Excuse me? Oh, I'm sorry, I thought I was speaking to a young lady. Perhaps the calls got crossed with a nursery school. OPERATOR!

Jon laughs quietly to himself.

MATT (CONT'D)
Operator, would you please put Holly on? Oh, there you are. Okay. Well, I love you too.

Matt hangs up. Sees the red camera light is on.

JON STONE
I think we know who our Gordon is.

MATT
No.

JON STONE
You wrote the character you wanted to see. Nobody we auditioned gets the essence of it like you.

MATT
Two black leads? There hasn't ever been on a show on TV with two black leads...

JON STONE
Exactly.

MATT
Oh, no... I think one Loretta, one
Bob, one old man...

JON STONE
Wouldn't it be nice to see a strong,
warm, smart, father figure. When all
they see is maids and drivers...

MATT
Don't give ME the *Maids & Drivers* speech!
Besides, now we have Uhura.

JON STONE
"We call it patterning!"

MATT
You met John John, we have plenty of
smart black kids for--

Jon dials the phone.

JON STONE
Not the kids... Parents need a
good role-model too sometimes.
(then, on the phone:)
Hi Sweetie, it's Daddy.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI / PLANE LANDING - TWILIGHT

NINA SIMONE (V.O.)
The name of this tune is "Mississippi Goddam"
...And I mean every word of it.
*ALABAMA'S GOT ME SO UPSET,
AND MEMPHIS HAS MADE ME LOSE MY REST.
BUT EVERYBODY KNOWS ABOUT MISSISSIPPI GODDAM!*

Joan exits the plane, onto the ladder cart, looks out, feeling she
can definitely do this-- *oh*, a confederate flag... Wow. Okay...

NINA SIMONE (V.O.)
I DON'T BELONG HERE.

Joan's Taxi stops at a Red Light. She sees a Public Washroom.
"WHITES" & "COLOREDS" is visible under a translucent whitewash.

NINA SIMONE (V.O.)
YOU KEEP ON SAYING 'GO SLOW!'...

INT. MISSISSIPPI STATE COMMISSION ON EDUCATION - NIGHT

A SECRETARY from the 1800's, sits behind the Reception Desk.
Joan is sweating. There's tissues on the desk. Secretary eyes
them, and Joan, and Joan eyeing them... then returns to typing.

JOAN
Joan Ganz Cooney, from the--

MISSISSIPPI SECRETARY (INTO INTERCOM)
She's here.

NINA SIMONE (V.O.)
MISSISSIPPI, GODDAM!

The Wooden DOUBLE DOORS warmly open to SALLY (SALLY FIELD, 60s)
Just the warmest, most hospitable, cutest, kindest, earnest woman.

SALLY

Oh my god. Wow. Mrs. Cooney. May I call you Joan? Would you please come in? I really am so tickled that you're here, I'm such a fan of your documentaries. So when I heard about *Sesame Street*, well... I don't think it can be overstated how terrific it is going to be for children. I think you're just about the most.. brilliant person I've ever met. And you know Jim Henson, is from Mississippi. Yes. We're very very proud.

Joan looks around to check she's in the right room. Door closes.
Sally is on the other side of the room, slicing a piece of...

SALLY (CONT'D)

Do you like cake? Tess out there made this. I'm sure you've got much fancier things in New York City, but growing up I thought Mud Cake was just about the greatest thing since.. Well *much* better than sliced bread frankly. I mean I remember when we had to slice it ourselves - it wasn't that big a deal.

Joan genuinely laughs, charmed.

SALLY (CONT'D)

She's actually an amazing baker, ..a terrible secretary, but an amazing-- well, try it.

JOAN

Oh, it's terrific. WOW, what is that--

SALLY

Butter. That's how you can tell a southern recipe, it's not measured in tablespoons, but in sticks. Ugh, you know who loves her butter - same station as y'all - Miss Julia Child. You ever cook any of her, uh--

JOAN

Yes, actually I have.

SALLY

I knew it... Such a different world. A couple girlfriends and I drove up to New York once, cause I don't like planes, but I remember thinking "MY GOD!" All those people! Like the whole town was a stadium on game day. Anyway, I am just so honored to have you here. Now! How do we two gals get this show of yours on the air here?

JOAN
 ...I'm sorry... I thought-- I was told
 that you and your colleagues at the--

SALLY
 ..State Commission on Education.

JOAN
 Yes, that you decided not to show it.

Sally leans forward, bit of mischief.

SALLY
 I had an idea. A bit.. rebellious.
 Get around these people who think
 everything has to be one way or the
 highway. All or nuthin'.

JOAN
 I agree.

SALLY
 I knew you would, oh I *knew* you would.
 So you're running a kind of variety
 format, with about 100 hours of
 programming. Animated bits, the muppet
 skits, then the street segments.
 All interchangeable, repeatable?

JOAN
 Yes, exactly.

SALLY
 So... when I went off to college,
 Mississippi State College for Women -
 the first public women's college in
 the country - up in Columbus. Ugh, I
 remember my mother thinking it was so
 far away. Well, one of the things
 that had just the biggest effect on
 me was the mess hall. The uh-
 cafeteria. Oh my god! To be able to
 take a roll, green salad, piece'a
 chicken, little bowl'a lime Jello..
 Ugh, I felt to the manor born!

Joan smiles but wonders where this is going...

SALLY (CONT'D)
 So I realized... We could take all
 those pieces of yours, and make a
 different *local* version that reflected
 our own community here. A'la carte!

JOAN
 (walking softly)
 You want to take the.. black people
 out of the show?

SALLY
 Oh, no! Not at all. I think it's
 very important for people to be
 exposed to all different cultures.
 I just know there are some segments
 where you have a little colored boy
 and a white boy sitting together.

(MORE)

SALLY (CONT'D)

Or on the street, you see an oriental girl playing with a regular girl and... Mississippi... well, they're not ready for a show like that.

Joan takes a beat, plans her move.

JOAN

I'm sure.. you know your people better than I do. But it reminds me of the Henry Ford quote when he was building the first automobile, he said--

SALLY

"If I asked people what they wanted, they would'a said a faster horse."

Joan nods. Sally smiles, kind-hearted... equally matched.

SALLY (CONT'D)

You know who I found was one of the biggest proponents of keeping things organized, culturally? Mister Malcolm X. When I heard his speech to his own people I thought, alright, I guess everyone wants the right to *celebrate* their own distinct culture.

JOAN

I had Malcolm on my TV program. He changed his mind on that before he--

SALLY

Well what does Julia Child call it? *Mise en place*? Right? Everything in its place.

JOAN

We have a choice when we were creating this program. Between showing the world as it is, or.. well, as it should be. As it *will* be, one day. And--

SALLY

I know you mean well. But that's not the world as it is *here*. And I have to say, it doesn't look like that's how it's going to be any day soon. So for a little colored kid to see that, and think that's how life is going to be-- how he or she is going to be.. *received* by the world. Well, I think that could be potentially far more dangerous.

Off Joan's face.

INT. DAY CARE - DAY

Showing the kids The Audition Tape of the white hippie "Susans":

HIPPIE "SUSAN" (ON TV)

I'VE LOOKED AT CLOUDS FROM BOTH SIDES NOW...

Jon, Jim, Gerry, Joan, Matt all sit in tiny plastic kids' chairs. They watch the kids, who aren't even watching this Woman on TV. Another failure... Joan is a million miles away. Matt sees.

MATT

You okay?

JOAN

I um... Mississippi said they would not air an integrated version of our show.

MATT

What does that mean? Our show *is*--

JOAN

It means that hundreds of thousands of kids in Mississippi, who could really use the show aren't gonna see it. And if this gets out, and it will, other stations may pull it too. Possibly the whole country.

MATT

What's the other *version* of our show?

JON

What do you mean?

MATT

You said they wont air the *integrated* version.

JOAN

Well, they suggested we could.. keep the segments with black kids.. separate.

MATT

And *you* said..?

JOAN

Carnegie, the Ford Foundation, The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the U.S. government, have given us millions of dollars, assuming our program was for the whole country. If we can't show the country watched, they will not fund a second season.

A beat... A LITTLE GIRL (Black, 5) tugs at Joan:

A LITTLE GIRL

(re: the woman singing on TV)

This woman is boring me.

JOAN

I know, sweetie...

Matt picks her up. Rocks her a bit.

MATT

Do you want me to.. give you permission to do that? To segregate Sesame Street? Is *that* what you're asking? You want like a black sign-off for a--

JOAN
 No. MATT (CONT'D)
 ..Under some busted notion
 that it'll reach more kids?

MATT (CONT'D)
 White people think everything is
 just for them. This was one thing
 we had that... Ugh.

Matt's eyes start watering, he puts the girl down, she walks back.

MATT (CONT'D)
 When my sister was about that big,
 she had scarlet fever. But there was a
 cure, so we all got in the car and drove
 her over to the hospital. Me holding my
 sister, screaming, in the back seat. We
 pull up to the nearest place, my dad gets
 out, picks his daughter up in his arms,
 runs into this hospital with his little
 girl. And then two minutes later comes
 running back. Throws her in the back
 seat, and starts driving again.

Joan's confused.

MATT (CONT'D)
 The next hospital, same thing. Dad runs
 in.. then a few minutes later, runs back
 out. My mother looking at a map, trying
 to find the next one. We went to eight
 hospitals that night, my sister writhing
 around in my arms, in the back of that
 car. None of them would treat her...
 (sniffs a tear in)
 A little girl. Doctors! Our most
 educated-- people who took an oath, and...

JOAN
 What happened?

MATT
 She died in the car.

JOAN
 (gut punched)
 I'm so sorry, Matt, I-- Jesus.

MATT
 And I don't know if there is a cure for
 what those doctors had. But I do know
 you have to teach that kind of hate to
 a person. To a kid. So I thought, I
 dreamed, that mixed in with the A-B-C's
 and 1-2-3's, it was possible... for our
 show to teach the *opposite*.

Then as this sinks in... they see the kids watching the TV are on
 their feet. They look to the TV: and see it's LORETTA.

LORETTA (ON TV)
 HERE IS MY HANDLE, HERE IS MY SPOUT.

The kids LOVE Loretta. Clapping along. Copying her panto.

LORETTA (ON TV) (CONT'D)
Everyone!

THE KIDS
TIP ME OVER AND POUR ME OUT!

Joan and Matt were mouthing along too. A miracle.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Joan waits.. Sees *PARENTS* magazine. OY. She picks it up, flips... An AD FOR "SESAME STREET". When DOCTOR (MUPPET) enters.

DOCTOR (MUPPET)
There she is.

JOAN
Hi. I um... Well--

Joan smiles, Doctor looks to her, understands... Joan just cries. Doctor puts Joan's head on her shoulder.

DOCTOR
So, things are good?

Joan laughs through tears. Doctor pats Joan's back.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Ya know, the thing they never tell ya about getting to tha top.. maybe they just don't tell the girls. When you make it.. it feels good for about ten seconds. *Then* you realize there's nobody to go to for advice, and you just gotta make these huge nauseating decisions yerself, and just hope to god you're right.

Joan nods. Doctor feels Joan's lymph nodes.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Especially when there's no one around who looks like you.. and ya wanna make it seem like you belong, so you pretend like yer absolutely fine. But inside...

JOAN
Yah. Well...

DOCTOR
Frankly, I didn't expect ya back here.

JOAN
Neither did I... but it seems more and more possible that my job might be coming to an end soon. And this might be my next, um-- Is alcoholism genetic?

DOCTOR
We don't know yet, they're doing studies. What I do often see is people who grew up with it are more likely to put up with it. We're not always attracted to what's good for us. We're attracted to what's familiar.

JOAN
What the hell does that mean?

DOCTOR
Well... If it bothers you so much,
some part of you must already know.
Of course then it just makes it
harder to leave'em, because it
feels like you're losing your
father all over again.

Doctor looks to Joan who's miles away... processing deeply.
She moves a lock of hair out of her face, lovingly.

JOAN
If I had been home, doing what he--
keeping up my end of the bargain--

DOCTOR
Oh my god, do you hear yourself?

She grabs Joan's face with her green felt hand.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Ya can't run around all yer life,
trying to be a version of yourself you
think makes other people more
comfortable! You have to just figure
out who you are, what you do, and do
it! ..Ya can't be everything to
everyone. You are not an Entenmann's.

JOAN
..How did you figure it out?

DOCTOR
I'll tell you... but after that you
gotta promise to either open your mind..
or your legs - cause I got a lotta
appointments today.

Joan nods.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
This girl I delivered when I was in
medical school, back when Ulyses S.
Grant was President - she came in
pregnant herself a few years ago, and I
pulled a baby out of HER. They say,
for a mother, that's when you feel the
cycle is complete - not when you have
the baby, but when your baby has a
baby. And I realized then and there,
that I am capable of extraordinary
things. And if I wanted a baby of my
own that badly... I would know. I would
know because I would HAVE one.

A beat. This sits with Joan.

**GO WIDE to Reveal: The DOCTOR MUPPET is being PUPPETEERED BY JOAN.
Talking to HERSELF, through this Muppet, on her own hand.**

She's *actually* sitting in...

JOAN
This is John John's mom. This is
Matt, one of our Writer/Producers.
He saw John John at the Day Care and--

John John's Mother hugs Matt. HARD. Dries her eyes.

MOTHER
(to Matt and Joan)
Thank you.

JOHN JOHN
W-X-Y...

GROVER
And do you remember the last one?

JOHN JOHN
Uh-huh.

GROVER
What is it?

John John gestures with his finger for Grover to come closer.
He does... John John gives him a kiss. Grover gasps.

JOHN JOHN
Z!

Reverse Shot: The Entire Crew crying.

Then John John sees his Mother, runs to her.

JOHN JOHN (CONT'D)
Mamma!

MOTHER
I am so proud of you, John John!
I cannot believe you can do all of
that. You know how hard that is?

JOHN JOHN
Awww, it's eeeasy!

MOTHER
No, it's not. No it's not... You
are sooo smart. I am so proud to
be your mom.

She kisses him so hard.

Joan sees this... it sits with her... She walks back..

INT. JOAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

She has been working away... then stops, looks at her watch,
grabs her luggage, her plane tickets, shuts the light, leaves...

INT. MUPPET WORKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

Joan passes by the doorway, and sees Jim here, still working.

JOAN
Hey. ...Still here?

JIM

Yah. Jane and I had.. well.
Sometimes that ole Henson stitch
comes unraveled. And I'm pretty
sure she was completely right.

(then)

And I'm pretty sure I was
completely wrong.. with you.

Joan looks confused.

JIM (CONT'D)

I told you I had it all. But I, well,
I have a Jane. She used to be my right
hand... literally. Then the kids came
and I got to be a dad *and do this*.
Because I have two right hands.

Joan hears this... Jim sees her LUGGAGE.

JIM (CONT'D)

I'm sorry you didn't have a better time
in Mississippi. I had a good time
catching frogs in those streams as a
kid, but... You ever catch frogs?

She gives him a, "Do I look like I ever *caught frogs*" face.

JIM (CONT'D)

You have to stand still. And well,
Mississippi has a long proud
history of standing still. And I
was never very good at that.

Joan hears this.

JIM (CONT'D)

I remember how people used to talk in
town, about other people... who were
different. And you're a kid so you do
what the grown-ups do... "Patterning".
But at some point, someone had to tell
me the difference between right and
wrong. And for millions of kids... I
think that someone is you, Joan.

Joan looks at all the Muppets around them... The seed of an idea
in her brain, but not yet there. She's frustrated. Matt walks by.

MATT

Are Mom and Dad fighting?

Jim and Joan look to each other.

JIM

Ya know, what you and I have is a lot
like a marriage, isn't it? Lots of
valuable time together ..and no sex.

JOAN

I was thinking of what she said, in
Mississippi, about our show... trying
to understand where they're coming
from.

(MORE)

JOAN (CONT'D)

Seeing new things, different things
as.. scary. And I thought..
we have actual MONSTERS on the show..

MATT

And the colored folks is what scares 'em.

JOAN

EXACTLY. And you know how when we test
the episodes for the kids at the Day
Care, we lose their interest any time we
cut from the Muppets back to the street?

They nod... Joan looks at Matt and Jim - framed by all these
muppets and monsters and whatever... She sees THE DOCTOR
MUPPET in the pile... And something clicks.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I have an idea, but I don't know if
it would make any sense.

JIM

Those are the best kind of ideas.

JOAN

What if we INTEGRATE *EVERYTHING*.
Not just the people... What if we mix
the Muppets in *with* the People, have
them walking up and down the street,
Ernie and Bert can live below Susan.
They work together, live together, eat
together, hang out together. Say, THIS
IS WHO WE ARE, take it or leave it.
Then maybe those people who see a black
man and a white man hanging out as
absurd, will get a little perspective?

MATT

Didn't the child psychologists mention
that we need a clear line between real
life and... make believe?

JOAN

I think... to get through life...
sometimes the two are not as
distinct as you might think.

JIM

I think that's about the best thing I
ever heard! And I know just the Muppet.

Jim is sketching, a tall, yellow bird, with a man inside.

THIS MATCH CUTS TO:

INT. STUDIO - BACKSTAGE - MINUTES LATER

CARROL SPINNEY - a lean hippie-ish puppeteer, wears familiar
orange stripey legs and big orange bird feet.

JIM

Carroll, this is Kermit, he designs
all the muppets with me.

KERMIT LOVE, puppet builder (50) hands Carroll a small TV monitor:

CARROLL
Your name is Kermit?

KERMIT
Your name is Carroll?

JIM
You'll need *this* to see.

CARROLL
What?

And with that, Kermit and Jim hoist BIG BIRD up and over Carroll, and flip on a camera.

CARROLL's POV: Inside a warm yellow glow, as Carroll sees himself in the bird costume on the monitor in his hand.

BIG BIRD
Hiii, everybody!

JON STONE
You ready?

JIM
Ready...

JON STONE
Rolioliolio!!!

The new "SESAME STREET" street sign is up. Now populated with people, kids... and MUPPETS - in windows, on the street, in cars!

Matt walks out as GORDON and greets Loretta (as SUSAN).

LORETTA (AS SUSAN)
Well, hi Gordon!

MATT (AS GORDON)
Morning, Susan!

And now Ernie and Bert have moved into the building! And from the many different faces of Sesame Street... out walks BIG BIRD!

ERNIE
Hey Big Bird!

BIG BIRD
Hi everybody! Hi Gordon! Hi Bob!

Reverse Shot: Jim's kids watch the monitor, completely fixated! Jim, Jon Joan, Joe, Gerry see this - pleased as punch!

LLOYD
Sesame Street...

THE WOMAN WHO SUGGESTED IT
It's like "Open Sesame," but--

JON STONE
No, we get it!

LLOYD
Joan, am I imagining it, or that
Will Lee - who was blacklisted by
Senator McCarthy?!

A small Jewish Man in a bowtie, horn-rimmed reading glasses and an apron is laboring over the script - MR. HOOPER.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

I bring you Bob. You bring me two black leads and a Communist. And don't think I don't see what you're doing with Ernie and Bert. And we wonder why middle-America isn't throwing it's arms around us.

(then)

What did you tell Mississippi?

JOAN

We're keeping *Sesame Street* just as it is. The only thing the Mississippis of the world respond to is popular opinion. So we have one month, to make this show the most extraordinary undeniable hit, that they will beg us to show it.

And out she walks with her luggage - the fucking boss.

INT. A CAB TO AIRPORT - DAY

The Taxi stops at THAT SAME ROUGH HARLEM STREET CORNER. No change.

JOAN

One month...

ARETHA (PRELAP)

*...BILLY RAY WAS A PREACHER'S SON
AND WHEN HIS DADDY WOULD VISIT HE'D COME ALONG...*

EXT. 125TH STREET SUBWAY EXIT - RAINY DAY

Evelyn reaches in her bag, a little lipstick, pats her hair.

EVELYN

One month... Here we go!

She opens her umbrella - a hole in it - deep breath, then a puddle... of course... alright... Mhm... She shakes it off, smiles. Holds out flyers on the corner. Nobody wants it. She smiles HARDER... follows someone trying to explain why it's so god damn important... nothin. Gets splashed by a passing CON ED Van.

The PREACHER'S SON on the church steps, sees Evelyn in the rain, and runs to her with HIS umbrella. She explains. We're far away, watching them walk, but it is clear but she is doing VERY well... He's amazed... She stops... looks to him... this is it... He NODS!

He gestures for her to follow him. And as soon as he goes inside... Evelyn jumps up and down - SUCCESS!!!

ARETHA

*THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD EVER REACH ME,
WAS THE SON OF A PREACHER MAN!*

THE BLACK COMMUNITY RISES TO THE OCCASION:

- Preacher's Son introduces her to An Older Black Couple.
- Older Black Man introduces her to a few Black Businessmen.

-Older Black Woman introduces her to some Black Teachers.
 -Another Meeting - Con Edison Bldg: They're thrilled to see HER!
 -Another Meeting - Expensive Dinner. They get the check.
 -Evelyn Pitching in Board Rooms, Classrooms, Beauty Shops...

Evelyn at 125th Corner: Mothers passing out her flyers. Everyone takes them - excited! But to Evelyn, it's not quite enough. When... *HONK-HONK!* A fleet of beat-up CON-EDISON vans pulls up.

An AutoBody/Paint Shop: Evelyn is done UP, heels... walks into the garage. Looks around. Then pulls on some legs from under a car - a fucking Gorgeous Mechanic in coveralls. She explains her plans for the vans... Shows drawings in her binder. He's skeptical.

Harlem Park: 30 Women - Jews, Puerto Ricans, Blacks, Joan - kinda not sure what they're doing there. When... A FLEET of TEN PAINTED SESAME STREET VANS pull up. Evelyn slides the door open. They're OUTFITTED with TV monitors. Joan's jaw drops! Evelyn passes pre-routed MAPS: Bronx, Harlem, Bed Stuy, DC, Philly... then throws keys to women who rev up & DEPLOY IN ALL DIRECTIONS!

These Colorful Vans - Driving all over the North East!

Van Stops - in the Bronx, Harlem, Bed Stuy, etc: The women show the TV clips, books, pass out fliers, to kids just waiting in a LINE AROUND THE BLOCK! Joan's AMAZED.

THAT BIG HARLEM CHURCH - SUNDAY SERVICE! EVELYN DOLLED UP! Mic by the cord, working the room, KILLING IT! Muppets wave from behind the altar (Jim and Frank underneath) Kids go NUTS!

They do a live SKIT. Evelyn brings a kid up, holds up a POSTER WITH "A" on it - the kids scream "A!" The crows goes fucking WILD!

On a high, She walks upto the Preacher's Son, points to her cheek. He rolls his eyes. The crowd goes NUTS! HE KISSES HER CHEEK!

ARETHA

*WHOA, THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD EVER REACH ME...
 WAS THA SWEET TALKIN' SONNOFA PREACHA MAN!!!*

INT. STUDIO - DAY

They've installed a new METAL TRASH CAN with a hole in the bottom.

JON STONE

Jim wanted to test the-- Where's Caroll?

An Assistant is holding the OSCAR PUPPET.

BOB MCGRATH

*WHERE OH WHERE CAN MY CAROLL BE!
 THE LORD TOOK HIM AWAY FROM ME...*

Jon hates this man. Loretta approaches Joan:

LORETTA

(comes up to Jon)
 Have you seen Joe? We were gonna go over one of the songs for--

MATT

No, he's--

JOAN
Lemme guess, on the Concorde with Elvis?

MATT
Next door, at a recording session--

Door slam. Joan is gone.

BOB MCGRATH
...SO I CAN SEE MY CAROLL WHEN I LEAAAVE--

JON STONE
BOB!!!

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREETS - DAY

CAROLL nervously hails a CAB, looking over Jim's OSCAR sketch & script, trying out different voices, unhappy:

CAROLL/ OSCAR
"Hey there, kids." "Well, hallo kids!"

CAB pulls up, Caroll jumps in. CABBIE (*Real-life Caroll Spinney*).

CABBIE
Where to, Mac!?

The exact Oscar voice. Caroll is thrilled!

CAROLL
"Where to, Mac?" YES! I'm sorry,
I'm going to ugh, to *Sesame Street*.

CABBIE
Can you tell me how to get to
Sesame Street?

INT. 30TH STREET RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

Joan busts past a receptionist, soundproof doors and red lights...

JOAN
Where's Joe?

SOMEONE
Ma'am, you can't go in there--

She enters the recording studio, where Joe is on a box, surrounded by weird people with weird instruments... a little toy piano... a small group of KIDS in front of microphones.

JOE RAPOSO
STOP...stop.. stop... It's too clean. I
want to feel like it's a wocka-wocka
block-a party, a song everyone already
knows and just started jamming. So
drums, can you give me a little booda-
badoom after measure-- after, "how to
get" booda-ba-doom. Xylaphone can be
less military, more pakonka lapatah -
"Good Vibrations". Jean, harmonica is--
just do whatever you're doing.
(to the Recording Booth)
Let's go again, right now.

VOICE (FROM BOOTH)
Ready when you are Joe.

JOE RAPOSO (CONT'D)
Can we get the kids
tambourines?

JOE RAPOSO (CONT'D)
Kids! Circle up.
(they look to him, a great coach)
This is your song, this is your time,
this is all for you! Your parents made
a mess of things. You are the great
hope for a tired weary world. "Happy
people like-- what a beautiful!" You're
overwhelmed by everything that's
possible in your lifetime!

Joan's face softens.

JOE RAPOSO (CONT'D)
You're taking over! You own the city,
march around like it. Yesterday was
rough, but it's over. Tomorrow is
yours. You're on your way to where the
air is sweet! To a place where you
belong. A place where people will help
you grow. Where people love you just
for being you. You hear me?

They nod earnestly. Joan's eyes starts tearing up. He's magic.

JOE RAPOSO (CONT'D)
Okay. Here we go. 1-2!

The SESAME STREET THEME begins.

KIDS
*SUNNY DAYS! SWEEPIN' THA CLOUDS AWAY!
ON MY WAY TO WHERE THE AIR IS SWEET!
CAN YOU TELL ME HOW TO GET--
HOW TO GET TO SESAME STREET.*

Joan sees the chorus of kids: two thrilled Black girls, a super gay Italian kid, a very serious Cuban girl and her little brother, a chunky little Dominican boy in coke bottle glasses, a Blonde girl in pigtails with a huge crush on the Chinese boy.

It's all PERFECT! Joe sees Joan's expression and smiles as if to say "Of course it's amazing." She laughs, shakes her head. He points to a percussion tray, she mouths no, he nods yes. Joan picks up a little EGG SHAKER and joins in.

KIDS (CONT'D)
HOW TO GET TO SESAME STREET...

The song continues as we **DISSOLVE INTO:**

THE OPENING TITLE SEQUENCE OF SESAME STREET - all kinds of kids running and playing on a playground... TOGETHER.

Pull Wide to Show this is on a TV Monitor, in:

INT. DAY CARE - DAY

The kids are completely into it. Gerry gives Joan a thumbs up.

The episode MATCH CUTS to a TV in...

INT. JON STONE'S HOME IN VERMONT - DAY

Jon watching his kids watch it... Nervous.

INT. JIM HENSON'S HOME - DAY

Jim watching his kids watch it... Nervous.

INT. LLOYD MORRISETT'S HOME - MORNING

Joan is watching the show with Lloyd's family.

LLOYD
I can't believe nobody else pulled
out except Mississippi. It's a
miracle. Where's Tim?

JOAN
Oh, I've been um, staying with a friend.

LLOYD
Oh. Well, congratulate him for me.

JOAN
What do you mean?

LLOYD
What do you mean, what do I mean?
He's the one who called me.. after
your dinner party, to convince me
to hire you for the study.

A moment - he realizes she genuinely doesn't know.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
He never told you?

Joan just shakes her head.

The Show on Lloyd's TV MATCHES TO TV Sets in windows all over:

INT. JOAN'S BLOCK - MORNING

That same block Joan walked before, looking for her show.
But now EVERYONE has Sesame Street turned on. They're on the
cover at the Newsstand. She hears kids screaming out...

KIDS
A!!! B!!! C!!!

Sesame Street on the cover of Newspapers on everybody's Doorstep:
"A TRIUMPH", "The Best Argument for Television" Etc.

She passes her apartment... There's Tim on the stoop. She sits.

TIM
You really did it.

JOAN
You watched?

TIM
Of course I watched.

JOAN
...Thank you.

TIM
You think I'd miss it, after all that?

JOAN
No... thank you... for all the
breakfasts, and the sack lunches, and
dinners and the dry cleaning, and... for
telling me that I could do it, when I
didn't have anybody to.. to look to.

He smiles, kisses her head.

TIM
Well... now we can have that baby.

She looks at him. He knows.

JOAN
I'm sorry, Tim.

TIM
Me too...

This hits them both hard. He puts his arm around her. She
puts her head on his shoulder.

JOAN
I didn't know you were the one who
told Lloyd to give me that chance.

TIM
A woman? For a job like that?
How will she fit in her duties as
your domestic servant.

Joan laughs through wet eyes.

JOAN
She won't.

TIM
You don't owe me anything...

She looks to him, grateful for that generosity.

TIM (CONT'D)
But boy... I always knew how amazing
you were. I just.. I always thought I
would be that kind of amazing... as a Dad.

She nods - the hardest possible thing to hear.

Puts her head back on that shoulder...

INT. CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE - BACK TO MEMORIAL

Up on the altar is JANE HENSON (55) surrounded by her ADULT KIDS.

JANE
I don't want to pretend that I know
what happens after this life. Or that
Jim knew. But he had great plans...

Joan laughs, the whole crowd does.

JANE (CONT'D)

Ugh... mostly, I think now, I just feel like it's only us - his family. These are only his kids, I'm only his wife. They had messy rooms. I burned the dinner. He didn't come home. The dog died.. You know, whatever... it's only us.

Joan smiles at this humanity.

JANE (CONT'D)

And because everyone else was working, I was often used for interviews. And the press would ask me "did you ever have any idea it would get this big". And what I didn't know is that it had gotten this big. I just didn't know...

INT. STUDIO (1969) - DAY

Jane & the Henson kids are there with Jim. All the families.

LLOYD

(toasting)

The cover of the Arts section of the Times! And the highest ratings children's programming or public television have ever seen!

JON STONE

To... *SESAME STREET!*

EVERYONE

CHEERS! HERE-HERE! Bravo!

THE WOMAN WHO SUGGESTED IT

Like as in, "OPEN Sesame..."

JON STONE

We get it!

Gerry holds up a PAPER... Everyone quiets, nervous.

GERRY

(announcing)

Got the results from Doc Howe's lab tests in Washington. "In Recognition of numbers 1 through 10, Letters A through Z, Shapes, Space and Time, Beginning Logical Concepts and Reasoning Skills... The childrens' scores.. *improved in all areas!*"

Applause for everyone. Glasses clink!

Gerry, Lloyd, Jon, Jim, Joe, Matt, Evelyn shake hands... then look around. They find our Joan sitting alone on the stoop of 123.

JOAN

(kind but hollow)

Congratulations.

JON STONE

Look how she's *still* not happy.

JOAN

I had no doubt we would hit our marks with *those* kids. I am very proud of that. But... I'll be happy when we get the results of the Census.

MATT

Bed Stuy...

EVELYN

Do or die.

EXT. BED-STUY CENSUS - DAY

A fleet of college-aged black men and women with clipboards are dropped off, and spread out. They talk to every man, woman and child. Every babysitter. Every one. Taking notes.

EXT. HARLEM CENSUS - DAY

More young men and women with clipboards canvas the street.

EXT. THE BRONX CENSUS - DAY

Evelyn walks out of her home, goes into a bodega, and sees those same Two Young Puerto Rican ALUMINUM FOIL BOYS with all their nickles buying 5 more rolls. She looks at them weird. They scoop up their rolls, give her a "don't look at us" look, and head out.

INT. JOAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Joan picks up the phone...

DOC HOWE (ON THE PHONE)

There she is!

JOAN

Hi, Doc!

DOC HOWE

Wanted to call you to congratulate you. Hell, they knew their ABCs, 123s, they could name Susan, Gordon, Bob, Oscar, even that little gay couple--

JOAN

They're not--

DOC HOWE

I'm sayin, ya got an A.

JOAN

Thank you.

DOC HOWE

...But you're still just thinkin' about Mississippi, aren'tcha?

JOAN

How did you know about that?

DOC HOWE

So I'm gonna tell ya a little story. You remember those schools in the South who refused to integrate?

JOAN
(curious)
Mhm.

DOC HOWE
And you remember those fellas in D.C.
who wouldn't give those states any
federal funding until they did?

JOAN
That was you?

This does make her feel pretty great.

DOC HOWE
You take care now, Joan Cooney.

Joan hangs up. As a Hispanic woman, RENA (30) walks up.

RENA
I'm looking for who's in charge here?

JOAN
That's me.

RENA
Oh, what a surprise.

JOAN
Why's that?

RENA
My colleagues and I were confused why
Susan is such a stereotype.

Joan is given pause. Matt approaches.

MATT
She's an articulate, beautiful,
caring woman. We don't see black--

RENA
Not because of her race, sir. Susan,
the ONLY woman on the most progressive
show on television, is a homemaker?

MATT
We need women at home taking care--
I'm sorry, who are you.. with?

RENA
I'm Rena, with the National Association
for Women. And it came up at our
meeting, as everyone had seen the show,
and many of these women were out in the
neighborhoods getting the word out--

MATT
These are the same critics who say
we're more Westchester than Watts.

RENA
I'm not even getting into complaints
from the Hispanic population of where
they are in this show. I'll just
stick to a scene where Big Bird is
helping Gordon. Gordon says,
(reading)

(MORE)

RENA (CONT'D)
 "You're a boy bird, you have to do *men's* work, the heavy work, the *important* work. Girls arrange flowers, decorate."

Matt begins to speak, but she gives him an "I got this".

RENA (CONT'D)
 The way women are portrayed, who young girls have to look up to and pattern after, prevents them from realizing their full potential.

Joan laughs to herself.

RENA (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry, but this isn't funny to the members of my--

JOAN
 No, you're... You're completely right. I was so worried about... Would you like a job?

RENA
 ...what?

Joan nods.

RENA (CONT'D)
 You don't need to check with someone first?

JOAN
 No... I'm in charge.

Rena smiles. JOAN TURNS, pretending to grab something from a drawer, but really just smiling broadly herself about that too.

Prelap: The Piano score of "Turn Back Old Man" from...

INT. GODSPELL ON BROADWAY - NIGHT

Joan, Jon and Matt are at the theatre... When out walks SONIA MANZANO - beautiful, Puerto Rican woman. They eye each other.

SONIA
 TURN BACK OLD MAN...
 (to Matt)
 Is your seat comfortable, sir?

Matt looks to Joan. Joan looks to Matt. They look to Jon.

CHORUS
 TURN BACK OLD MAN,
 FORESWEAR YOUR FOOLISH WAYS...

As the song continues, we see:

-Matt, Jon and Joan at the stage door, talking to Sonia...
 -Sonia on-set, as MARIA - opening a FIX-IT Shop, and meeting LUIS.
 -Joan looks to Matt, both nod. They look to Rena - very happy.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Evelyn rides around in her van, watching people talk to the CENSUS SURVEYORS... worried. When she sees those Aluminum Foil Boys.

EVELYN
Hey... HEY!

They see her and run. She runs faster... They hide in a...

INT. BODEGA CORNER STORE - CONTINUOUS

Evelyn chases them in...

EVELYN
What are you boys doing?

BOY 1
What are YOU doin'?

BOY 2
What are YOU doin'?

BOY 1
Drivin' around, luring kids into your car with candy, like some pervert.

BOY 2
Like some pervert.

The Bodega owner laughs.

EVELYN
Now what is going on with you boys, y'all should be home reading, or--

BOY 1
READING! Shit, we're making a fortune!

BOY 2
A fortune.

EVELYN
Ugh, do you hear an ECHO in here?
(to Boy 2)
How old are y'all.

BOY 1
He can't count, Miss. He's retarded.

EVELYN
You should both be in school.

BOY 1
That's my brother, I watch him. School tried for years to teach him, but they couldn't, so now we work.

EVELYN
Oh... Well.. What's all this foil about? You building a spaceship or something?

BOY 1
People don't get good reception on UHF stations, but most nobody wanted to watch those shows anyway.

BOY 2
BUM-BUM, BUM-BUM, BUM-BUM BADDA BUM!

BOY 1
If you put foil on your antennas it comes in better, and you don't have to keep getting up to move them, and since kids are crazy to get that station now, because of some new show. We're making a fortune. Block by block. Square by square.

BOY 2
Block by block. Square by square.

EVELYN
...What's the name of this new show?

CUT TO: The Checkout Counter - Evelyn puts THIRTY DOLLARS DOWN.

CUT TO: Boy 1 walks out of the Bodega, with all-he-can-carry arms full of FOIL, and Boy 2 pulls a brand-new Radio Flyer wagon STACKED FULL OF FOIL, with "SESAME STREET" Bumper stickers.

EVELYN (FROM HER VAN) (CONT'D)
I love you boys! Go make some money!
If you need more foil, you got my number. And please... make sure you both watch the show. Okay?!

They nod. Wave.

INT. THE STUDIO - NIGHT

The Whole Gang... Up late, waiting... Chinese food...

JOAN
The Census team said we'd have the results tonight.

On the TV NEWS: ARTHUR (Racist Academic from the Workshop).

GERRY
Whoa, whoa, everybody look who it is!

REPORTER (ON TV)
Professor Johnson's new report stated...

ARTHUR JOHNSON (ON TV)
The... Deficit Model, wherein the negro child is born behind the white child, and society, educators, Washington, even public television is now consumed with putting braces on their legs so they can run with the big kids. But I'm here to tell you that it cannot be addressed with education...

REPORTER (ON TV)
Is *Sesame Street* a dead end road?

ARTHUR JOHNSON
It might be a kind of entertainment... but unfortunately, it comes down to genetic differences between the Races.

Moron! JIM JOE RAPOSO
Screw you!

LLOYD
Asshole!

They all turn to buttoned-up Lloyd... impressed.

JON STONE
God, I hope those black kids blow everyone else out of the fucking water.

EVELYN
(to Joan)
You know, after our premiere... I got a call from NBC, asking if I wanted to work in Prime-time.

JOAN
Oh, wow, congratulations Evelyn!

EVELYN
I would love to stay here, but in case these numbers are not what you were hoping for...

JOAN
Evelyn, I--

GERRY
I think we should be realistic. As you said these kids don't have the same support... so I think even... 10-20%?

JON STONE
Yah, 25 percent? I'd be thrilled.

JIM
A quarter learning to read and write. That's gotta be a big win, right?

MATT
I haven't had dinner with my daughter and wife in over a year. We better have reached at least half those kids.

When a MESSENGER ARRIVES... Everyone freezes. Joan gets up... takes it... opens it... They stand up. Nervous. Joan reads:

JOAN
"A Report of Three Studies on the Role and Penetration of Sesame Street in Ghetto Communities - East Harlem, Washington, D.C. ...and Bed Stuy"

Evelyn grabs Matt's hand.

EVELYN
Do or die...

JOAN
"To determine whether or not the program was achieving its prime objective of servicing underprivileged children."

Matt breathes heavy...

JOAN (CONT'D)
 "The results left no question that *Sesame Street* has indeed achieved this goal."

Everyone freezes. Joan starts to speak... Cannot.

JOAN (CONT'D)
 Our research indicates that...

Joan looks... doesn't understand.

MATT
 What?

EVELYN
 What is it?

JOAN
 ...92 percent.

A still moment... Impossible.

JOAN (CONT'D)
92 percent.

PEOPLE START SCREAMING!! Joan doesn't know what to do.

Evelyn falls to her knees, hands on her face, sobbing.

Matt gets down on the floor to hug Evelyn - tears streaming.

Jon sits there, eyes wet, hand over his mouth, heaving.

Gerry and Joe lift Evelyn up in the air, heroically, and leave her in Oscar's trash can, laughing.

Joan laughs, then sees Jim, and they both burst into happy tears.

BOTH (AT THE SAME TIME)
 You did it.

They embrace. The others embrace around them. A big hug. Then...

JIM
 (to Joan)
 You're thinking "what about that other 8 percent?", aren't you?

Joan laughs!

JOAN
 I think your kids will be very proud of you.

Jim is touched, he nods, grateful...

JIM
 And that 92% will one day be very proud of You. ...Your kids.

Joan can't hold it back anymore, cries over Jim's shoulder.

JOAN
 ...thank you.

Matt and Evelyn see, and come running for Joan. Squeezing her. COMPLETE SUCCESS. Joe plays something congratulatory on the piano that Jon sings triumphantly to... Champagne!

Joan looks to Lloyd - both stunned speechless.

LLOYD
92 percent...

Joan nods.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
Insufferable.

Joan laughs, they embrace.

...When someone in the background almost trips behind a backdrop.

A WOMAN
Oh my...

Joan looks around the corner... It's Sally Field.

Everyone stops. Joan walks over.

JOAN
Hello, I didn't um, I didn't know you were coming. Welcome to *Sesame Street*.

SALLY
Thank you.

JOAN
Champagne?

SALLY
No.. Thank you, I can't stay long. Gotta get a flight back to Mississippi.

Everyone's face registers who this is. Pretends to not listen.

JOAN
I thought you hated to fly.

SALLY
I do... but... well... the truth is, Look, I don't know the last time you had to change your mind about something. A big something. It's-- well, it's hard. And growing up down there, especially as a-- Well, it takes a certain kind of... a bravery, really.. to make tomorrow come a little faster. I tell myself it's cause I never had anyone with those ideals look up to. Especially a--
(she gestures to Joan)
Well, 'til now.

Joan looks at her team, whose expressions say "HOLY SHIT!"

SALLY (CONT'D)
I'd like... I hope you all can accept our apology.

(MORE)

SALLY (CONT'D)
And ask that we could please show
Sesame Street... - as is - to the
children of Mississippi.

JOAN
It would be our pleasure.

Everyone breaks the silence, going over to say hi to Sally.

Matt shakes his head, wow, to Joan -- whispers through a grin:

MATT
Now don't go walkin' around with that
smile like you cured racism or anything.

JOAN
I think you made that world a little
better for your daughter to grow up in.

He nods, grateful to hear that.

JOAN (CONT'D)
And did your sister proud.

His face crinkles, tears come close behind. They embrace.

ASSISTANT
Evelyn, there's a call for you.

Evelyn steps to the side to pick up the receiver.

A VOICE (ON THE PHONE)
Yah, Miss Evelyn, please.

EVELYN
This is her.

A VOICE (ON THE PHONE)
Listen, we watched your show. He's
been watching for a week straight
every morning and afternoon.

EVELYN
Is this?..

INT. THE ALUMINUM FOIL BOYS' APARTMENT - BRONX PROJECTS - DAY

Those two Puerto Rican Aluminum Foil Boys. Boy 1 is on a chair, on a rotary phone with Evelyn's card. Boy 2, his little brother, is in the living room watching *Sesame Street*.

EVELYN
I thought you two would be out
selling foil?

BOY 1
No ma'am, not anymore, that boy's
going to college. Listen!

He holds the phone out. Evelyn listens.

BOY 2
1! 2! 3! 4! 5! 6!

INT. STUDIO - SAME

Evelyn is mouthing along, moved...

BOY 2 (ON THE PHONE)
SEVEN! EIGHT! NINE!... TEN!

EXT. MATT ROBINSON'S HOME (PHILADELPHIA) - NIGHT

Matt gets out of the cab, and in the doorway are his WIFE and Daughter. He drops his bags and runs up to them. Kisses them.

HOLLY ROBINSON
I saw you on TV!

MATT
Yeah?

HOLLY ROBINSON
Yeah, you were helping people.

MATT
Yeah, I was.

HOLLY ROBINSON
That was nice of you.

Matt hugs Holly. He can't kiss her enough.

INT. MATT ROBINSON'S HOME - SAME NIGHT

-Matt eats dinner with his family. He's home. They're overjoyed.
-They watch *Sesame Street*, together. She loves it.
-Then after he puts Holly to bed, and he's thumbing through MAIL:

*"FROM THE DESK OF JOAN COONEY:
Another study I was sent from a University...
I figured you'd want to see."*

He opens it. Reads it. Can't believe it. Then sees included is the envelope from Joan is a business card & address for ARTHUR. So Matt goes to his typewriter... Types an ENVELOPE.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA - PROFESSOR ARTHUR'S OFFICE - DAY

THIS ENVELOPE is picked up by Arthur. He uses a haughty letter opener to open it, confused at the return address.

MATT (V.O., READING)
Dear Arthur, Enclosed you'll find not only the report disproving your prejudicial, unlettered claims about black children's ability to learn. But also a University study...

INT. A STUDY - THREE WHITE CHILDREN IN THREE LAB ROOMS - DAY

-KID 1: Is sitting politely in a chair watching *Sesame Street*.
-KID 2: The show is turned off and she's called to the table.
-KID 3: A Lab Assistant shows FOUR PHOTOS OF DIFFERENT CHILDREN.

MATT (V.O.)
Where they showed little kids photos of many different children. And asked them *which* child they would like to be friends with...

-Kid 1 looks at the photos intently.
-Kid 2 flips through the FOUR PHOTOS: THREE WHITE, ONE BLACK GIRL.
-Kid 3 knows who... looks to the Lab Assistant. Pulls one.

MATT (V.O.)

Kids who had watched *Sesame Street*
almost all said they would prefer
to be friends with the black kid.

And we push in on the photo they're all holding... THE BLACK GIRL.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA - PROFESSOR ARTHUR'S OFFICE - DAY

Arthur's face is furrowed, his brain warm. He reads the end:

MATT (V.O.)

So maybe you should consider
watching the show, yourself.

That letter MATCH CUTS to one in BRIAN HENSON's hand - now 40...

INT. THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE - BACK TO MEMORIAL

BRIAN HENSON

Dad wrote us all letters, and I want to
read you a part of... It says, "Have a
wonderful time in life everybody. It
seems strange writing this kind of
thing while I'm still alive... but it
wouldn't be easy after I go..."

Jim's son, Brian is on the altar reading... The crowd laughs.

BRIAN HENSON (CONT'D)

"To each of you, I send my love. If on
this side of life I'm able to watch over
and help you out - know that I will."

Joan hears this. Looks to Jim's pic. Then sees EISNER.

BRIAN HENSON (CONT'D)

"This may all seem silly and over the
top to you guys, but what the hell,
I'm gone and who can argue with me?"

Gets a big laugh! The New Orleans Jazz Band begins a trip
back up the aisle. Everyone starts walking out.

Joan looks at Jim's picture in the program... it's a lot.

THE BOY

You okay, Joan?

JOAN

I guess maybe I have to start thinking of
him as gone. Of all of them as gone...

She looks ahead to the pew of Muppets.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I guess it couldn't last forever.
I just... I wonder what Jim would
want me to do...

THE BOY
 "Please... watch... out.. for each
 other. -Jim Henson."

Joan turns to see The Boy reading the memorial program.

JOAN
 You can read that?

He nods, smiles, something familiar to it.

THE BOY
 I start kindergarten in a week.

When, his FATHER comes to join The Boy and his Mother.

FATHER
 I'm so sorry I'm late.
 (to Joan)
 I hope he wasn't bothering you.

JOAN
 Not at all.

He gives his son a big kiss, picks him up. Smiles to Joan.

FATHER
 Uh... Miss Cooney?

JOAN
 Do we know each other?

FATHER
 A long time ago. Maybe this'll help...
 (he postures proudly)
 A! B! C! D! E!!!

JOAN
 John John?!

They embrace.

FATHER
 Yes, ma'am. And this is my wife,
 and looks like you met our son.

JOAN
 He's terrific.

FATHER
 I have a good job. A good house.
 A great family... I meant to write
 a hundred times, but well, we
 wanted to be here for this.
 (then)
 I taught him what you taught me.

THE BOY
 ABCD-EFG-HILK-ELLEMENO-P!

Then it's their turn to clear the pew, into the aisle.

Joan watches as The Boy grabs John John's hand and they walk...

Joan starts into the aisle... Alone.

Then she looks down... to find Grover and Ernie holding her hands.

Joan smiles, and repeats the sentiment:

JOAN
SO HAPPY THAT WE GOT TO SAY--

A MAN'S VOICE
Hello.

They turn, and there on the bench is JIM HENSON - playing the Banjo stinger from *Rainbow Connection* in counterpart.

JIM
Please watch out for each other.

Joan nods, her instructions clear.

JIM (CONT'D)
And love and forgive everybody.
It's a good life, enjoy it.

JOAN
I'm gonna miss you. I-- I don't
know how to begin to say goodbye.

JIM
Well, you don't have to... because...

THE LAST CHORUS OF THE SONG:

ALL THREE (In 3-Part Harmony)
INSTEAD OF JUST A SAD GOODBYE,
I'M HAPPY THAT WE GOT TO SAY 'HELLO'.

And with that Jim is gone. Joan kisses Grover's little blue head.

Bernice the pigeon flies up from their bench, around the corner...
Where EISNER pulls up at a light, in his BLACK STRETCH LIMO.

EISNER
(on a brick car phone)
No, of course Jim didn't sign the
contract. But they don't know that.
Whadda they got, a few kids from the
projects? I've got enough lawyers to
repave Sesame Street, and bury Joan
underneath it. We're gonna crush 'em!

The limo peels off. BUT... in the FOREGROUND: An OLD TRASH
CAN LID raises, it's OSCAR, he heard the whole thing!

INT. JOAN'S NEW APARTMENT LOBBY/ELEVATOR - DAY

Joan waves to the doorman, walks into the ELEVATOR, and the
doors begin to close, when she hears:

A VOICE
Hold the elevatah, please.

Joan puts her hand out. Someone enters. It's the Doctor Muppet!

DOCTOR
Well, look who it is! Haven't seen
you in a New York minute. 'Course
there'a people in this building I
haven't seen since Roosevelt. So
how's uh-- what's his name--?

JOAN
Oh, well... We're divorced.

DOCTOR
As soon as the question came out of my mouth I noticed you were dressed like yer coming from a funeral, and thought--

JOAN
Oh, I am-- but it's for a-- well, we founded the company together.. which looks like it's coming to an end--

DOCTOR
..And now you gotta keep the family together. Story as old as the hills.

JOAN
Oh, no I was thinking maybe it was time for me to, I dunno--

DOCTOR
To what? *Retire?* *YOU?* You wanna take the bus from Zabar's to a matinee with women who smell like wet fur and colostomy bags? No.

JOAN
I'm just not sure what else to do.

The Doctor Muppet just stares at her.

DOCTOR
Whaddyou talking about!? You do, what have you done yer whole life! What mothers have done since the beginning of time! You fight! For your job, for your family! For your god damned kids.

Joan knows she's right, when the Elevator *DINGS* and she calms.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Well, this is me.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK/ JOAN'S NEW APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Joan walks outside in a haze, when Oscar drives up in his JALOPY.

OSCAR
Get in, Tootz!

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY - SUNSET

Oscar driving, with Joan in the passenger seat.

JOAN
I *knew* he was just trying to bully us. You think it's too late to stop him?

OSCAR
There he is!

Pointing to a black stretch limo ahead of them... AND THEY'RE OFF!

Then along the way, they stop at a stop sign, and Joan realizes she's at that ROUGH HARLEM Corner...

It's not perfect... but now there's a GIRL (6) on that same stoop, and she's reading a book. Joan sees, is moved, and immediately something clicks in her - a fight instinct.

Then, along the FDR Drive: They catch up. Eisner rolls his limousine window down. Joan calls out from moving cars:

JOAN
The jig is up, Eisner! We know you don't have a contract with Jim, and are just trying to intimidate a small non-profit children's educational program.

OSCAR
(to Eisner)
Ya know, I really admire you!

EISNER
Well, thank you.

OSCAR
It's not everyday you see such a garbage person. Heh-heh-heh.

EISNER
(to the driver)
To the bridge!

JOAN
Didja hear that? He's headed for Sesame Street! Step on it, Oscar!

EXT. THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE - DAY

They're in a high speed chase... Eisner CALLING OUT THE MOONROOF: Eisner empties a box of TACKS onto the road, Oscar rolls over.

OSCAR
Joke's on him! The tires were flat already!

When in the back seat - Ernie, Bert & Cookie with Popcorn:

ERNIE
GEE, BERT! Is *this* how you thought this movie would end?

BERT
I was hoping for more of a quiet independent film.

JOAN (TO CAMERA)
So was I.

COOKIE MONSTER
Me think this what Jim would have wanted.

They all nod, he's right.

EXT. SESAME STREET - A REAL BLOCK - DAY

The Limo & Jalopy screeches around a corner onto Sesame Street - not a set, but a VERY REAL city block - a WRECKING BALL awaits.

JOAN
Hold it, right there, Eisner!

EISNER
Give up, Joan, it's over... you lost.

JOAN
If you keep this up, I'll be forced to go public, and file a report with the Attorney General of New York.

When The Attorney General of New York (BARACK OBAMA) walks by.

ATTORNEY GENERAL
Excuse me... I'm the Attorney General of New York.

EISNER
What?!?

ATTORNEY GENERAL
Is there a problem here?

EISNER
Jim Henson promised me the muppets! I can have my *lawyers* explain.

ATTORNEY GENERAL
That wont be necessary.

A.G. opens his COAT: He's wearing a VINTAGE SESAME STREET T-SHIRT.

JOAN
May I show you?

Joan gestures INSIDE the window of 123 Sesame Street, they look...

INT. MUPPET WORKSHOP - FLASHBACK

Jim and Joan (1990), up late one late night.

In the Window: The Attorney General, muppets and everyone watches:

JIM
Joan, I wanted you to know that I'm starting work with Disney on some new movies, a TV series, a show at the park..

JOAN
Oh, Jim! Wow... Congratulations!

JIM
Thank you... But I want you to know... that the *Sesame Street* muppets are not part of that deal.

JOAN
But they're yours...

JIM
Not anymore.

Joan tilts her head, curious. Jim smiles.

JIM (CONT'D)
I'm leaving the *Sesame Street* muppets to the children of the world.

Joan is speechless. A hug. EVERYONE OUTSIDE ERUPTS IN A CHEER!!!

EXT. SESAME STREET - A REAL BLOCK - CONTINUOUS

The Attorney General folds his arms. A CROWD now surrounds Eisner.

ATTORNEY GENERAL
Well?...

JOAN
Sesame Street is a dead end for
you, Eisner. I'll give you ten
seconds to get outta here.

JOHN JOHN
10-9-8-7...

EISNER
Well... under the
circumstances...

JOHN JOHN & HIS SON
6-5-4...

EISNER
It would appear best...

ALL THE KIDS
3-2...

EISNER
For the *Sesame Street* Muppets...
to stay part of the Children's
Television Workshop!

AN EXPLOSIVE CHEER FROM EVERYONE ON THE STREET!

EVERYONE
HOORAY!!! We did it!!!

EISNER
Driver, get us out of here!

They try to start the limo, and it stalls, makes a weird noise.
He opens the hood - Cookie Monster has EATEN much the engine.

COOKIE MONSTER
Sorry!

Eisner goes to the FIX-IT Shop.

EISNER
Excuse me, can you help me with my car?

The two mechanics turn... IT'S THE REAL MARIA & LUIS

THE REAL MARIA
I'm sorry.

THE REAL LUIS
Lo siento. We're closed.

BARKLEY BARKS at Eisner, and The REAL GORDON & SUSAN exit 123:

THE REAL GORDON
What is it, Barkley?

THE REAL SUSAN
Yah, what's all the commotion?

LINDA BOVE ASL Signs for Eisner.

OSCAR
She says "Get the heck outta here!"

When a Baker appears atop a flight of stairs.

BAKER
10 Banana Cream pies!

EISNER
Oh no...

The baker tumbles, and the pies end up all over Eisner.

JOAN
Well, there's only one more thing to do.

BOB MCGRATH (STEVE CARELL)
*SING... SING A SONG...
SING OUT LOUD. SING OUT STRONG!*

When he's joined by THE REAL BOB MCGRATH:

THE REAL BOB MCGRATH
*DON'T WORRY THAT IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH,
FOR ANYONE ELSE TO HEAR.*

BOTH BOBS!
JUST SING... SING A SONG!

And the entire cast sings a verse, over their CREDIT: Including...
...From Oscar's Trash Can: The Real Carroll Spinney.
...From Below Grover: The Real Frank Oz.

Joan (1990) climbs to the TOP OF THE STOOP, joins Joan (1960s)...
And the FRONT DOORS OPEN to reveal REAL JOAN COONEY!
As Thousands of Joan's Children come out from around the corner.

THE CHILDREN
LA-LALALALA LA-LA LALALALALA..

The CHILDREN OF THE WORLD and the Muppets of their International Productions of *Sesame Street*, ALL SING "SING" in their language: China, Mexico, Brazil, Germany, India, Israel, South Africa...

*"Sesame Street has taught more than a billion children,
in 180 countries, including 90 original international
productions, around the world."*

*"Sesame Street went onto be nominated for 268 Emmys, winning
over 100. Including a Lifetime Achievement Award for Joan."*

"Joan was awarded The Presidential Medal of Freedom."

PRESIDENT CLINTON
She taught a generation not just how to count
and read, but how to get along... together.

*"Joan remarried & became stepmother to five children.
And today watches Sesame Street with her grandchildren."*

PULL BACK.. FROM SESAME STREET TO THE CLOUDS HIGH ABOVE NEW YORK CITY

Where Super Grover is flying in the clouds.

GROVER
Sesame Street was brought to you by
the letters J-O-A-N.

THE END!