

PUSHING DAISIES

"Frescorts"

Episode #3T7054

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FINAL DRAFT 

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

TIGHT ON - A giggling BABY EMERSON, bouncing up and down.

NARRATOR

Emerson Cod was 5 months, 3 days and 4 hours old when his mother planned his death.

FIND - CALISTA COD, COOING and playing "airplane" with her baby at the top of the courthouse steps. She settles the tot back into his pram, then shoves it down the stone staircase.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

It would be quick, painless...

Calista SCREAMS! PASSERSBY dive for the pram as it bounces down the stairs and smashes into a mailbox. The baby goes hurtling, but is suddenly plucked from the air by DENNIS DALWHIMPLE, whose smile drops when he realizes he's holding -- A BABY DOLL.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

...and the easiest way for Private Detective Calista Cod to bust Dennis Dalwhimple, a stock clerk claiming millions in pain and suffering as the result of a forklift accident.

POP WIDE - Dennis, in leg casts and a back brace, has jumped out of his wheelchair to make the catch. A CAMERA FLASHES.

Calista steps in to grab another shot. Her trench coat falls open, revealing Baby Emerson, safely strapped to her in a papoose. Mother and son glare at the criminal before them.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

While most children with single, working mothers were banished to mundane day care centers, Emerson Cod -- code name: "Lil' GumShoe" -- reveled in on-the-job training as his mother's best friend and business partner.

INT. CALISTA'S OFFICE (ONE WALL) - DAY - FLASHBACK

Calista and a husky YOUNG EMERSON sit behind a desk with "MS. COD" and "MR. COD" nameplates. A brave-faced WIFE is across from them. She offers up a PHOTO of her HUSBAND.

NARRATOR

The firm of Cod & Cod dedicated itself to the pursuit of truth at all costs...

CAMERA ZOOMS IN on the HUSBAND'S PHOTO. PULL BACK TO FIND...

EXT. MOTEL - ROOFTOP - FLASHBACK

Young Emerson waits as Calista ties a rope around his ankles.

NARRATOR

...a pursuit Young Emerson found "badass."

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The HUSBAND from the photo kisses his MISTRESS as, OUTSIDE THE WINDOW... a gleeful Young Emerson drops UPSIDE DOWN INTO FRAME.

NARRATOR

Faced with scoundrels, cheats and the havoc they wreaked, mother and son made a vow: to never let lies come between them.

A FLASH from Emerson's CAMERA takes us back to--

INT. CALISTA'S OFFICE (ONE WALL) - DAY - FLASHBACK

The now teary-eyed wife studies the PHOTO. She hands over a STACK OF CASH and exits. Calista splits the money with Emerson.

NARRATOR

It was a profitable decision. For as the Cods' bond grew, so did business, and cemented in the detectives' hearts that truth is the cornerstone of any successful relationship.

INT. EMERSON'S OFFICE - DAY

An ILLUSTRATION of a PIGTAILED GIRL, hanging upside down by a rope and peeking into a motel window, FILLS FRAME.

NARRATOR

Years later, as in now, Private Investigator Emerson Cod found himself less successful in another venture: aspiring pop-up book author.

The illustrated rope MOVES, hoisting the girl back up. FIND - ADULT EMERSON, pulling a tab of his POP-UP BOOK, "Lil' GumShoe."

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

"Lil' GumShoe" was based on the detective's exciting childhood adventures. However, its greater purpose was for his missing daughter who, as a baby, had been spirited away by his ruthless ex. The P.I. hoped that the child would find hidden in the story the map that could lead her back to him. If only it had not been rejected by every pop-up publisher.

Emerson pores over a stack of rejection letters.

EMERSON

"Complex plot, lack of theme, child endangerment." Man, that's cold.

NARRATOR

So, at this moment, Emerson Cod, a failure at fatherhood and fiction, decided to quit.

As Emerson sets fire to one of the letters with his cigar...

INT. PIE HOLE - DINING AREA - NIGHT

...A FLAME touches the end of a cigarillo.

NED (O.S.)

Who is she?

CHUCK (O.S.)

Don't know. She just rolled in. Like a moody, mean thundercloud.

NED and CHUCK steal glances at a BROAD in her 60s, smoking a cigarillo. She BANGS her glass. OLIVE approaches, re-fills it.

OLIVE

Know what you want?

BROAD

Yeah. Nothin', with a side of buzz off.

She goes back to her newspaper. Ned steps up.

NED

Ma'am, sorry to bother, but perhaps you didn't realize this is an eating establishment and not a park bench, for example, where one can loiter and smoke and not consume food to one's heart's content.

BROAD

Got a problem, we can take it outside.

Ned and Olive retreat back to Chuck.

CHUCK

Maybe I can get her to ask me to take it outside. Then, I'll say, "Okay. After you." Then, when she goes, I'll slam the door and lock it behind her.

A dejected Emerson enters.

OLIVE

Ooh, good! Someone with a gun.

EMERSON

Rhubarb. Whole pie'll do.
(stops, smells something)
And, Momma, when will you treat yourself right
and spring for a decent stogie?

CALISTA

The next time I trail a white-collar money
launderer to Havana.

He wraps her in a hug as the Pie Holers stand by, speechless.

EMERSON

People, meet the P.I. who taught me everything
I know. Also happens to be my best bud and
momma to boot -- Calista Cod.

NED

I'm Ned. This is Chuck and Olive. Sorry, we
didn't know. Although, we should've. I mean,
in retrospect, it makes a lot of sense
actually.

CHUCK

So, Calista, what brings you to our neck of
the woods?

CALISTA

A fraud case. And, I've been missin' my Lil'
GumShoe.

(to Emerson)

Now, can we hit a bar? I'm starving.

OMIT

INT. PIE HOLE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Chuck joins Ned, who is tidying up for the night.

CHUCK

Wasn't she comforting? The brutal honesty, the
sardonic wit, the appetite for hooch. Add an
eyepatch, and Calista could be Lily.

NED

How are you doing with that?

CHUCK

What's "that"?

NED

Living with the fact that the woman you've
known your whole life as a tied-for-first-
place favorite aunt is really your mother.

CHUCK

Oh, that "that." Well, I'm happy to have a mother who's alive. I'm not as happy she can't know I'm alive. Oh, no. Suddenly, what I found comforting before is giving way to sadness.

NED

Then I'll be your comforter. Consider me a king-sized duvet ready to wrap you in goose-down goodness. Tonight.

CHUCK

I'd love to, but I have plans with Olive.

NED

You two have hung out every night since she got back. Not that I'm counting. Are you like new best friends or something?

CHUCK

No. Wait. Why not? I mean, I guess she is. I have a new best friend. Isn't that superb?

NARRATOR

The Pie-Maker did not think so, for the more time Chuck spent with her new best friend, the less time she had for him. He felt alone. But he feared the truth would make him sound needy, so instead, he lied.

NED

It sure is. Superb. For you. Both.

Olive enters from the dining room. To Chuck:

OLIVE

Wanna head home, roomie?

NARRATOR

Charlotte Charles and Olive Snook's decision to cohabitate was sudden, just like Olive's earlier decision to join a nunnery...

EXT. NUNNERY - COURTYARD - DAY - FLASHBACK (EP 201/SC 43 RE-USE)

Olive's face drops as DOZENS OF POOR bumrush her belongings.

NARRATOR

...where all her earthly possessions had been given to the poor. It was a gesture she'd all but forgotten until she arrived home with a new pet pig by her side...

INT. OLIVE AND CHUCK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Accompanied by PIGBY, Olive enters, finds Chuck packing.

NARRATOR

...and found Charlotte Charles and all her earthly possessions residing there.

CHUCK

I'm moving out. Having moved in, which organically came out of missing you. And watering your plants. Like you asked. Don't worry. Tomorrow, this'll all be gone.

Olive notices DIGBY asleep in a corner. Pigby sniffs him.

OLIVE

Everything? Even the couch, the curtains, that adorable ceramic cheese set?

CHUCK

I figured you'd want to start from scratch.

NARRATOR

Truthfully, Olive Snook did not. What she wanted was a furnished apartment, so she gambled on her squatter's accommodating nature and said:

OLIVE

Scratch that. Let's be roommates!

CHUCK

No, I couldn't impose.

NARRATOR

Truthfully, Charlotte Charles could. Like Olive Snook, she enjoyed her things and the feeling of independence they brought her, so she gambled on her quasi-landlady's accommodating nature and said:

CHUCK

But if I were to impose, you should know I'm a morning showerer, a heavy sleeper and a dish drier.

OLIVE

I'm a late-night bath taker, a snorer and a dish scrubber. Welcome home!

CHUCK

Is there anything bigger we should discuss?

OLIVE

If you're referring to the time you made me
an unwitting drug mule for your aunts...

CHUCK

Oh. I wasn't, but--

OLIVE

Good! 'Cause I done roasted that old chestnut.

CHUCK

And I'm fine with how you hid the fact that one
of those aunts was really my mother.

OLIVE

Right... Just like I'm a-okay with you not
explaining to me why you faked your own death.
My, look at all those bridges--

CHUCK

And all that water flowing under them. I'm
proud of us. For having the courage put it
all on the table, deal with the tough stuff--

OLIVE

And then quickly move off it.

NARRATOR

*Chuck and Olive had simultaneous and sneaking
suspicions that they were fooling themselves.
But they read each other's anxiety as giddy
excitement, so Olive Snook changed the subject
with the help of two four-legged creatures.*

OLIVE

'Sides, who woulda' thought they'd hit it off?

She indicates Digby and Pigby, now napping together.

CHUCK

Which reminds me, mind if I take the bed by
the window?

OLIVE

Absolutely... not!

OFF Olive, pretending not to mind at all...

OMIT

INT. EMERSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

TIGHT ON - Emerson, clearly uncomfortable as Calista helps him
squeeze into a knitted double-shoulder holster.

CALISTA

Knew I should've knitted it larger.

EMERSON

Wool stretches.

CALISTA

Not to China, sweetheart. Hey. You got a girl somewhere?

Emerson freezes at the sight of his mother, perched on the desk next to -- the pop-up book and the rejection letters.

NARRATOR

Emerson Cod had lied to his best friend and mother about two things. One: that he did have a girl somewhere, age 7. Two: that he had written a book designed to bring this girl back into his life. The guilt he felt over these secrets was immense, and the primary reason he had begun to limit his contact with Calista.

EMERSON

Girl? Why?

CALISTA

Someone's been feeding you. What's her name?

EMERSON

Pie-Maker.

CALISTA

Damn. And damn sad, me not knowin' what's happening in your life. I know we're both busy, but it's not right.

NARRATOR

Emerson Cod agreed. It was no longer right to be in his mother's presence without coming clean and cleaning off their cornerstone. His decision to share his secrets was a noble intent...

EMERSON

Here's the dilly, Ma--

NARRATOR

...if not for another visitor.

At that moment, a FEMALE SILHOUETTE appears at the office door. VERONICA VILLANUEVA -- busty, sexy -- enters.

VERONICA

Mr. Cod, I'm in desperate need of assistance.

EMERSON

What has you so desperate, Miss...?

VERONICA

Villanueva. Veronica Villanueva. An unsolved murder. Namely, that of my best friend, Joe.

EMERSON

Office is closed. Family matters.

VERONICA

Please. I'm opening my heart to you.

CALISTA

Just open that blouse.

Veronica does, to REVEAL a wad of cash. Calista takes it, not noticing Emerson's dismay. He locks the book and rejection letters in a filing cabinet and turns back to Veronica.

EMERSON

Got a description of this Joe?

VERONICA

Picture's worth a thousand words.

She pulls a STACK OF PHOTOS from her blouse, hands them over.

CLOSE ON - THE PHOTOGRAPHS - Veronica and a handsome man, JOE, get mani-pedis, drink cosmos, shop, do yoga.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

They found his body dumped in an alley last night. He'd been missing for two days.

EMERSON

Cops got anything?

VERONICA

They shut me out for not being family. But Joe was like a brother. He meant everything to me. I want justice at any price.

CALISTA

That's our kinda' justice. We'll be in touch.

Veronica exits.

EMERSON

I'll be dental damned.

CALISTA

With a girl like that, you certainly should.

EMERSON

Talkin' 'bout a dentist by the name of Dr. Eugene Halifax. Came in this morning about the murder of his best friend, Joe.

Emerson unearths another set of photos. They depict the same Joe with DR. EUGENE HALIFAX (short, bookish, balding) as they rock climb, skydive, guzzle beer and floss.

CALISTA

(off Veronica's photos)
With Miss Villanueva, he's a cosmo-drinkin' shopaholic. Queer.

EMERSON

You bet it's odd. Dr. Eugene's got him as a tough guy who's tough on plaque. Seems Joe was a different friend to different people.

CALISTA

Meaning both your clients. Gonna thank Momma for getting you paid twice to solve one murder?

INT. MORGUE - LAB - DAY

A SHEET FLIPS UP, pulled back by Emerson. He, Ned and Chuck stare at JOE'S BODY.

EMERSON

That's Joe, all right.

Ned sets his watch, reaches out and SPARK! Joe opens his eyes. They glint like an Up with People rally.

JOE

Heya, folks. What's goin' on?

EMERSON

You're in the county morgue. Our condolences. Happen to know how you happened in here?

JOE

Last I remember, I was getting ready to play ball when suddenly, there was a doozy of a pain in my back.

There's a crudely sewn-up wound on Joe's upper back/shoulder.

EMERSON

Stab wound. Killer stitched it up. Poorly.

JOE

Lemme see.

He sits up. WHOOSH! Clear fluid rushes from the wound.

JOE (CONT'D)

What the hay?

Joe BLOCKS the flow with his hand, causing fluid to SPURT from his ear, instead. Chuck PLUGS his ear with her finger.

JOE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

CHUCK

You're welcome. Is it just me, or is that odor reminiscent of 8th-grade Biology. Specifically, formaldehyde.

JOE

The coroner must've already embalmed me.

EMERSON

Coroner don't embalm. Just looks for cause of death. Preservin' happens after 'n' elsewhere.

Joe covers his mouth, SNEEZES. Liquid SHOOTS across the room.

NED

Bless you.

JOE

No, bless Downy. She was my one and only. Never gotta chance to tell her how much I cared. Now, she'll never know.

EMERSON

Any thoughts as to who might've wanted to pickle your gherkin?

JOE

None. Honestly, I've always considered myself pretty darn affable. Huh. Wonder if it has something to do with my best friend?

EMERSON

Which one? Veronica or Dr. Eugene?

JOE

You know those two? Small world! Such a cold one, too. I don't know what they'll do without me. Promise you'll keep an eye on 'em?

EMERSON

Oh, we aim to.

Ned touches Joe. FLASH! He falls back onto the table.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Looks like we gotta get more friendly with a
coupla' best friends.

There's an O.S. TRICKLE of liquid from the morgue table.

CHUCK

And a mop.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. EMERSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Emerson and Calista stand across from Veronica and DR. EUGENE.

NARRATOR

Under normal circumstances, a P.I. would question separate clients separately. However, the presence of one P.I.'s P.I. mother allowed him to employ a time-saving interrogation technique known as the Kalashni-Cod. Like the Russian machine gun for which it was named, its operation was simple. The scope was set...

Emerson levels his gaze on Eugene. Calista takes Veronica. The P.I.s SLAM their hands, in unison, on the desk.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

...the magazine loaded and the trigger pulled.

EMERSON
Who's Joe's best friend?

CALISTA
Who's Joe's best friend?

Both suspects raise their hand.

EMERSON
Got it on good authority Joe's BFF made him RIP. Who wants the title now?

Veronica and Eugene point at one another.

EMERSON (CONT'D)
Where were you last Friday night, pearly?

CALISTA
Where were you last Friday night, girly?

EMERSON (CONT'D)
Were you obsessed?

CALISTA
Where'd you buy the formaldehyde?

EMERSON
Did givin' him the stab-stab feel good?

VERONICA
What is this? I'm not a suspect. I hired you.

DR. EUGENE
...And I think I'd like my money back.

EMERSON

I don't give refunds to people who waste my time. When my services are retained, I require the facts. All of 'em. But lookin' at you two -- the averted eyes...

CALISTA

...the lowered heads...

EMERSON

...the nibbled lips -- tells me you're hiding something.

SLAMMING their hands in unison again--

EMERSON (CONT'D)

What is it?

CALISTA

What is it?

VERONICA

Fine. Here's the truth. The dirty, humiliating truth. Joe was a Frescort.

DR. EUGENE

It's short for "friend-escort." Basically, a friend for hire. You pick from a catalogue, and they become anyone you want them to be.

EMERSON

What's wrong with pickin' someone the old-fashioned way? Walking up and sayin', "Hi, I'm Blah-dee-blah. You like bloo-dee-blooin'?" Me, too. Let's be friends."

DR. EUGENE

But I'm shy. When I try that, I start sweating, my brain goes numb and I suffer awful xerostomia. Cottonmouth.

Emerson pulls out the pictures of Joe and Eugene.

EMERSON

You tellin' me you had the guts to jump out of a plane, but not into a happy hour?

DR. EUGENE

I thought all those stunts would help build my confidence. They didn't.

CALISTA

(to Veronica)

I get why Dr. Bashful needs a pay-a-pal. But back when I had a rack and coupla' getaway sticks like yours, I had no problem makin' acquaintances.

VERONICA

Initial contact is easy. This...
(gesturing to her body)
...attracts all kinds. But no one wants to
get to know who I am. Men only see me as a
score not-yet-scored.

EMERSON

And the women?

VERONICA

(off her body again)
This...

CALISTA

Yeah, we got it.

VERONICA

...prompts instant jealousy. I was all alone.
Yearning for genuine companionship. So, I
called in the professionals.

She offers a business card, which reads: "MY BEST FRIEND, INC."

NARRATOR

*As Emerson Cod read the words, he was reminded
of Frescort Joe's final ones. That his murder
may have had to do with:*

EMERSON

My Best Friend. Inc.

EXT. MY BEST FRIEND, INC. - DAY

A BUBBLE-LETTER SIGN reads: "**MY BEST FRIEND, INC.**" PAN TO FIND --
EMERSON'S CAR, parked across the street.

INT. EMERSON'S CAR - DAY

Emerson scopes the building with Ned, Chuck and Olive.

EMERSON

Everyone clear on their role in this?

CHUCK

Olive and I are Frescort wannabes. Our
mission: to find Joe's "one and only" Downy.

OLIVE

Who can hopefully tell us why Joe is now
Frescorting at that big mixer in the sky.

EMERSON

Meantime, me and the pie-man'll have a sit-
down chitty-chat with the CEO.

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Find out who Joe was pretend-friending the night he died. Any questions?

Ned raises his hand.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

That there was rhetorical.

NED

My query is not. What happened to you and your mom working this together?

EMERSON

She's workin' her own case, and I might need a diversion, so, as I said, you're with me.

NED

(raising his hand)

This isn't a question. More of a suggestion. Merely a tiny change of plan where Chuck goes undercover with... me, for instance.

NARRATOR

The Pie-Maker's intention wasn't to make waves. He was just trying to spend time with his beloved and always-others-occupied-lately Chuck.

CHUCK

Sure. It's just, Olive and I kind of already came up with aliases and back-stories--

OLIVE

And a secret incognito-partners' handshake.

Which Chuck and Olive demonstrate.

EMERSON

Nice. Plan stays as planned. Move out.

INT. MY BEST FRIEND, INC. - BUDDY'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON - A NAME TAG: "**BUDDY AMICUS, CEO.**"

BUDDY (O.S.)

Welcome to My Best Friend! Where everyone's in the in-crowd.

REVEAL BUDDY, handsome and warm. Arms outstretched, he steps toward Ned and Emerson. They take a simultaneous step back.

EMERSON

I'm a P.I. Less interested in the in-crowd and more in the out. As in, murdered.

BUDDY

You're here about Joe. Such a devastating loss. He was our top performer.

EMERSON

That what you peddle? "Performers"?

BUDDY

Truthfully? I'd say it's atonement.

Buddy gestures to his office full of high school memorabilia: pennants, trophies, etc. Sporting equipment lines the walls.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Back in high school, I was a colossal creep. Math geeks, male cheerleaders, even our pitiful team mascot, were just sad, pimply targets for a varsity quarterback like me.

Buddy eyes a QUARTERBACK MANNEQUIN, housed in a glass case.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Until two blitzing linebackers destroyed my knee and put me on the DL the rest of the season. Suddenly, I was no different from all those nerds I put through hell. From that point on, I swore I'd use my powers for good, providing -- at a nominal fee -- what everyone has the right to: friendship.

EMERSON

From the looks of these digs, your nominal fees are addin' up.

BUDDY

No matter how much the modern world thinks gadgetry has brought us together, it's driven us further apart. We converse via electrical wires, hide behind glowing screens and then, after weeks become years, finally look up to discover we no longer know what personal connection is or even how to make one. We're isolated. All alone. And being alone is hard.

NED

Yes. I mean, certainly. It can be.

BUDDY

Here at My Best Friend, Inc., we strive to fill that chasm of loneliness. Once trained, my Frescorts integrate seamlessly into clients' lives and function as the best companions money can buy.

EMERSON

Who was Joe companioning the night he died?

BUDDY

Let me check his file.

Buddy rifles through a stack of files on his desk, opens one marked: "JOE."

BUDDY (CONT'D)

No client appointments.

EMERSON

Mind if I take a gander?

BUDDY

We keep all records confidential.

Buddy notices Ned looking at a two-armed contraption.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Ah. The Hug Machine. Our most valuable teaching tool.

EMERSON

How 'bout a demonstration on my associate?

NED

No, thank you.

EMERSON

(low)
Divert.

BUDDY

Come on, you! See, proper hugs are a science.

Buddy puts Ned into the machine, flips a switch. The metal arms close. Meanwhile, Emerson scans Joe's unattended file.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

They must be platonic, but not cold. Firm but not painful...

NARRATOR

The Pie-Maker didn't want to be hugged by a machine. He wanted to be hugged by the one he was lonely for. But to his surprise, Buddy Amicus was right. Proper hugs were a science. As the clinch grew stronger, so did the warm and satisfying feeling inside him. For a fleeting moment, the Pie-Maker's aloneness abated. So he closed his eyes, thought of Chuck and hugged back.

NED

I like that.

BUDDY

We'll have models in the gift shop by Christmas.

EMERSON

I'll stick one in your stocking. Let's go.

NARRATOR

Emerson Cod had uncovered Joe's home address...

INT. MY BEST FRIEND, INC. - LOBBY - DAY

Chuck and Olive enter a lobby bustling with CLIENTS.

NARRATOR

...as Chuck and Olive addressed going undercover.

The girls approach a welcome desk shaped like an Irish friendship ring. It's manned by BARB, a bubbly Frescort.

CHUCK

Are you Barb? I'm Kitty Pimms. This is Patty Boots. We're two highly-motivated candidates here to befriend the sad and lonely.

OLIVE

For pay.

BARB

You already passed the first test.

(singsong)

"Kitty Pimms, Patty Boots, Kitty-Kitty-Kitty, Patty." What wonderfully rhythmic names. They just scream "good humor" and "bonhomie." Now. Can you "F-f-fake It Real"?

OLIVE

W-w-what?

BARB

Were you making fun of my stuttering?

OLIVE

No, I was just--

BARB

Passing the second test. See, I don't stutter, but if I did, what you just did would put me at ease by subtly saying, "You're OK; I'm OK; We're OK, OK?" That's what's so wonderful about this job. We get to help people feel comfortable. Kitty, we're at a dinner party. There's spinach stuck in my teeth. Whadya do?

CHUCK

Stick an even bigger piece in mine?

BARB

"B" to the "I" to the "N-G-O." Now, back to "F-fake It Real," which isn't about stuttering but copyright infringement. An erotic toy company nabbed "Fake It Real" before us, but no matter what you call it, it's our key to successful Frescorting. On any given day, clients are going to depend on you to summon up every feeling in the book, even if you're not feeling it. Show me "happy."

Chuck and Olive smile, then change their looks to comply with:

BARB (CONT'D)

"Sad," "surprise," "fear," "zest," "consternation," "constipation." Know what I'm showing you? "Heck, yeah!" We're getting you into training ASAP.

CHUCK

Is a course in self-defense included? I hear this job can be dangerous.

BARB

You're referring to Joe. So horrible.

CHUCK

Did you know him?

BARB

Just by name. Frescorts are forbidden to fraternize. We focus all our energies on clients, not each other. You two are friends, aren't you? Don't answer, I can tell. Thing is, you're awesome, and I only want to bring the best people into this organization, so keep things on the q.t.

OLIVE

We won't even carpool.

NARRATOR

At that moment, another carpool had landed at the apartment of a murder victim.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - JOE'S DOOR - DAY

Emerson and Ned move down the hall.

EMERSON

Somethin' off about Frescortville. People come in hungry for connection, and they're served up a *smörgåsbord* o' lies.

They arrive at a door. Emerson gets to picking the lock.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Those Frescorts are cons hiding behind good intentions. My experience: people don't appreciate being conned, even if they're pathetic losers who signed up for it in the first place. Now, we're gonna find Joe's list of clients. Find out if one 'em did him in.

NED

Why are they pathetic losers? 'Cause they're alone?

EMERSON

'Cause they're payin' for something that's free.

NED

There's nothing wrong with needing a little extra help. No one thinks twice if a person with a wobbly backhand hires a tennis coach. And I'm guessing you have no clue how to bake a rhubarb custard pie. But do I call you pathetic for paying me to do it? You've had a best friend since birth. Not all of us are that lucky.

EMERSON

Don't be jealous of my luck. Ain't nothing but one sorry leaf hanging off that clover.
(a beat)

Momma and me aren't supposed to have any lies between us. Now, technically, I never lied. But I also never told her I have a daughter.

NED

Most mothers would consider that splitting hairs.

EMERSON

She spent her whole life teachin' me how to collar cons. Guess I'm embarrassed havin' her know my baby's mother conned me. But I'm chucking my chagrin overboard, lettin' loose the truth. Yep. Gonna sit her down, take a deep breath and look her straight in the--

RANDY

Hi!

The door has opened to REVEAL RANDY MANN. He holds a set of giant tweezers, which grip a glass eye. And OFF this...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - JOE'S DOOR - DAY

The goofy-yet-gregarious Randy smiles at Ned and Emerson, who can't look away from the eye in Randy's grip.

RANDY

Uh-oh. Cat got your eye? Priceless! Sorry. This bothering you? It's just glass. For a sculpture I'm working on. Gonna be a beaut.

EMERSON

Mind stowin' it for a bit? We're investigators, here about a murder.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Randy ushers them into the tidy apartment.

RANDY

Joe was my roommate.

EMERSON

And what's your name, roommate?

RANDY

Randy Mann. I've got some knee-slappers about that. Wanna hear? Probably not. In the face of tragedy, I try to keep things light. It's just weird, not having him here anymore. Joe had such a big personality.

NARRATOR

The Pie-Maker identified with the affable Randy Mann, for he, too, was struggling to stay positive in the face of his own tragedy.

NED

It's tough. You share your life with someone, then suddenly, there's an abyss where a person always was before.

RANDY

You lost a roommate, too?

NED

And girlfriend. Same person.

RANDY

Dude, your roommate-slash-girlfriend died?

NED

Yeah. I mean, no. She moved out. Sorry.
Doesn't compare. Not even remotely.

Oblivious, Randy plucks a hair from Ned's jacket, inspects it.

RANDY

But you're not completely alone. Golden
retriever, right?

NED

Yes. Digby. Who'd be a source of comfort if
he didn't prefer bunking with my girlfriend,
her new bestie and their pig.

Emerson shoots daggers at Ned.

EMERSON

You aware Joe worked as a friend for hire, Mann?

RANDY

I thought he was a tutor for "special folks"
or something like that.

EMERSON

Happen to know who he was with the night he died?

RANDY

Sure don't, pal. What are you doing?

Emerson heads for a back room.

EMERSON

Bedrooms back here? I wanna see Joe's.

For a moment, Randy's mood darkens as he blocks Emerson's path
and shuts the door.

RANDY

Wish you could, but ya can't. I'm late for
something. Seriously, though, come back anytime.

OFF his winning smile...

INT. PIE HOLE - BOOTH - DAY

Emerson and Calista sit with Ned, Chuck and Olive.

CALISTA

Randy's a nutjob's name.

CHUCK

Totally. If one Randy isn't tossing small
animals off bridges--

OLIVE

Another's luring small children under them.

NARRATOR

Chuck and Olive had decided to test their Frescort skills and fake a real connection with one tough customer, Calista Cod.

CALISTA

These gals know what I'm talkin' about.

NED

Randy can also be a fun guy's name. You grab a beer with Randy. Grill brats with Randy. Pick up chicks with Randy--

EMERSON

And help stuff 'em in Randy's freezer with Randy.

NED

Can you be a little nice? His roommate died.

EMERSON

Notice how nice 'n' crazy-behind-the-eyes he got when I tried to get into that back room? What's he hidin' in there?

NED

People are private. I've never seen your back room.

CHUCK

I've never seen your front room.

NED

I've never seen your front door. Where do you live, anyway?

OLIVE

(to Calista)

Your son is rather secretive.

CALISTA

He didn't get it from me.

EMERSON

My hizzy ain't none of ya'll's bizzy. Randy Mann's shady. I'm getting back in his place. Just gotta wait for him to take my bait.

(to Chuck and Olive)

Meantime, what've you got?

CHUCK

No sign of Downy yet. And since company policy dictates Frescorts can't date, it might even be a dead end.

CALISTA

Dunno. Lotsa people get a rush outta sex on the sneak. Continue the covert ops.

TAP-TAP. Randy stands outside, his face pressed to the window.

RANDY

Heya, Ned.

They all slap on smiles, speak through gritted teeth--

EMERSON

(to Ned)

Heya, bait.

RANDY

Found the "Free Cooking Class Coupon" you left me.
(holding up food containers)
So, I brought offal.

OLIVE

"Awful"?

NED

"Offal." O-F-F-A-L. Animal organs and innards. For meat pies.

CHUCK

So, "awful." Like this idea. I'm not leaving Ned alone with Backroom Randy. This place is full of freezers, perfect for body-stuffing.

EMERSON

It's also full of customers. C'mon in, Randy!

Ned heads for the front door to meet Randy.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Girlies One and Two, get Frescortin'.
(as they go)
Ready? Ma.

But Calista's PAGER has gone off. She checks it.

CALISTA

Dammit. My target's on the move.

EMERSON

Can it wait? Thought we could have some catch-up time while we toss that apartment.

CALISTA

Darlin', you know what it is to be married to
the job. There'll be time for talking tomorrow.

She pecks his cheek. A pained Emerson can only watch her go.

NARRATOR

*But Emerson Cod couldn't wait until tomorrow.
With each missed opportunity, the weight of the
untruths about his missing daughter grew
heavier. So heavy, that he felt he'd soon be
crushed beneath them.*

INT. RANDY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Emerson rifles through papers and files in Randy's apartment.

NARRATOR

*And so he entered the apartment of a
suspected killer with a different death on
his mind -- that of his and his mother's
friendship. Already, he felt her pulling
away and wondered if the ever-perceptive
Calista somehow knew without knowing the
irreparable damage her son had caused.*

He focuses in on an "INVOICE TO RANDY MANN" from My Best Friend,
Inc. Stamped across it: "OVERDUE: FINAL NOTICE." Joe's
"Frescort Profile" is clipped to it.

EMERSON

Tutor of some sort, my glue stick.

NARRATOR

*As Emerson Cod faced the door to the back
room, he wondered what larger lies Randy Mann
had lurking there.*

Emerson draws his gun, moves to the door and throws it open.

INT. BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Emerson stops in his tracks. A DARK FIGURE looms in the corner.

EMERSON

Freeze!

He flips on the lights. The figure is actually a TAXIDERMIED
GRIZZLY BEAR, wearing a tutu. The entire room is packed with
TAXIDERMIED ANIMALS in the VICTORIAN STYLE: mice having a tea
party, poker-playing squirrels, two frogs getting married, etc.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Holy Noah's Nutty-as-a-fruitcake Ark.

Emerson moves to a workbench, full of taxidermy tools.

NARRATOR

But the menagerie of taxidermied animals would not be nuttiest thing Emerson Cod would find.

Emerson's stunned look is on a SEALED JAR, labeled: "Joe." Inside, floating in clear liquid, is a human body part.

NED (PRELAP)

Yum.

INT. PIE HOLE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ned and Randy pull pies from the oven and put them on racks.

NED

Meat pies. So... Sweeney.

Randy grabs a fork, dives in, but notices Ned holding back.

RANDY

Aren't you gonna chow down?

NED

I'm a vegetarian.

RANDY

Too bad. This stuff will make you strong. "Gobbling gizzards makes muscles." 'Least that's what Mom used to say.

NED

Um. Why?

RANDY

I had loose ligaments as a kid. Always falling, bruising my tailbone, bumping my head. A total disaster -- especially at sports. The kids at school always made fun, but I didn't care. I just played with my pets. 'Cause pets are cool with you, no matter what. Like your dog. "Digby," right? He digs you just the way you are. Forever will, too. Man, I gotta stop going on about stuff like that. Makes me seem like a weirdo.

NARRATOR

However, the Pie-Maker did not see a "weirdo." For he, too, knew what it was like to be an outsider due to things outside his control. So the Pie-Maker decided to make a connection with the one thing at his disposal -- the truth.

NED

I didn't have any friends at school, either.
And you wanna talk about a disaster at sports?
They wouldn't even give me gym clothes.
Instead, I'd sneak off on my own and bake pies.

RANDY

That's how I got started with my hobby, too.
I don't usually share it with people, but
the minute we met, I thought you'd be okay,
so I brought it along and hid it out back.
Wanna see?

NED

Sure.

With a flourish, Randy throws open the back door TO REVEAL: A TAXIDERMIED DIGBY, standing on his hind legs and strumming a guitar. And OFF Ned's horror...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. PIE HOLE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Shocked, Ned gazes at the stuffed, guitar-playing dog before him. Randy looks on proudly.

NARRATOR

The Pie-Maker desperately wanted to touch Digby, for in the past, when someone he loved died, he was able to restore their life force with a mere tap. Only, he had already brought Digby back once. Thus, a second stroke would do nothing, except confirm what his eyes told him -- his beloved companion was gone.

RANDY

Listen. He's singing "American Pie" for you.

NED

You killed my dog!

RANDY

No! That's Butterscotch, my dog. You said your golden retriever was staying with someone else, so I thought I'd lend you mine. He's been my best friend since I was five.

NED

This is how you repay him?

RANDY

He looks happy. He makes me happy. If you had a chance to hold onto someone you loved after he or she died, wouldn't you?

NARRATOR

The Pie-Maker couldn't tell Randy the truth: that, yes, he would. As a matter of fact, he had. Twice. So instead, he said:

NED

Please leave.

RANDY

I thought we might've had something in common.

Hurt and bewildered, Randy scoops up Butterscotch, exits, then re-enters. Emerson Cod is behind him with a gun to his back.

EMERSON

You're a sick man, Randy Mann. Stuffin' all those critters. Posin' 'em in twisted ways.

RANDY

It's why I don't tell people about it. They don't understand.

EMERSON

Know who don't understand? That poor hamster you have plungin' a toilet for all eternity.

RANDY

His name is Peanut, he was my first pet and I love him. Ned, do you think it's twisted?

EMERSON

He sure does! He was just baby-sittin' while I gathered evidence against your murderin' ass.

Betrayed, Randy turns to Ned, who can't hold his gaze.

RANDY

Liar. Liar.

EMERSON

Your pants on fire. You weren't Joe's roommate. You were his client.

RANDY

Why would I tell you that? It's embarrassing, having to pay someone to hang out with you.

EMERSON

Even more humiliatin' to have your Frescort repo'ed. Musta' been the last straw before you offed Joe.

RANDY

No, I offered him a deal. Be my roommate, rent-free. He agreed. Said it'd be like a real friendship.

EMERSON

Is that why you kept a piece of him?

Emerson presents the jar from Randy's apartment.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

An appendix. Floating in formaldehyde.

NED

Which was flowing from Joe's body. Oh, god...

EMERSON

'Cept, you discovered quick that preserving a human is tougher than a chipmunk, so you had to dump the body instead.

RANDY

That appendix is mine. Joe gave it to me. As a joke. Check his medical records. Or ask his girlfriend. He must've told her about it.

EMERSON

What's her name?

RANDY

I don't know. Someone at work. Guess it was serious. Joe was even gonna quit so they could be together.

Ned and Emerson exchange a look. OFF this:

OMIT

INT. MY BEST FRIEND, INC. - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Olive ties her shoe next to her locker. Chuck sidles up.

CHUCK

Psst. Ned just paged me at the welcome desk. He says no doubt there's a Downy among us.

OLIVE

Okay. I'll nose around my "When Words Escape - How To Flatter and Reassure the Profoundly Ugly" symposium.

CHUCK

And I've got a "Mix Discs That Matter" lab in five. Maybe someone there will know--

BARB (O.S.)

"Kinship." Anyone got another word for it? I'm afraid there's a "q" involved.

FIND Barb in the next row of lockers. She works a crossword.

CHUCK

"Propinquity."

BARB

Nice! Gimme another?

OLIVE

Four across is "Gelding."

BARB

Thanks, but someone else does the acrosses. I only do the...

ANGLE ON - THE CROSSWORD - Just the downs are filled in.

CHUCK
...downs. Barb -- you're Downy.

BARB
No, I'm not.

OLIVE
Well, you sure aren't f-f-faking anything to
the contrary.

Barb bursts into SOBS. Chuck and Olive share a look: "Sheesh."

CHUCK
We just want to help. Is Downy a nickname Joe
gave you?

BARB
Tissue... please. I'll tell you everything...

Blubbering, Barb gestures to her open locker. Chuck and Olive
turn to it. Barb LUNGES, shoves them inside and slams the door.

BARB (CONT'D)
Fake that, bitches!

CUT TO BLACK, over which:

OLIVE (O.S.)
Crap.

INT. EMERSON'S OFFICE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Emerson unlocks his door. He stops short when, through the
glass, he sees a SILHOUETTE, rifling around in his office with a
flashlight.

EMERSON
Crap.

INT. EMERSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Emerson bursts in TO FIND a SKI-MASKED INTRUDER, ransacking his
filing cabinet. Emerson rushes the intruder, who vaults over
the desk in a shower of papers and office supplies.

Emerson grabs a COFFEE CUP, takes aim and drops the intruder
with a shot to the head. The figure struggles to his feet, his
hand almost to the doorknob when--

Emerson seizes him by the neck, pins him to the door. The
intruder strikes back, grabbing Emerson by the neck, as well.

EMERSON
Oh -- hell -- no!

Emerson rips off the mask TO FIND -- Calista Cod. OFF this...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

INT. EMERSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Emerson and Calista grip each other by the throat.

EMERSON

Ma?

CALISTA

Yes, dear?

EMERSON

I can't breathe.

CALISTA

Yeah? I gave you breath, and this is the thanks I get?

Calista pulls Emerson's copy of "Lil' GumShoe" from her satchel.

NARRATOR

The facts were these:

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE (ONE WALL) - DAY - FLASHBACK

MISSY SCRIVNER sits at her desk and stamps rejection letters. She tries to smile but can't. Her jaw is WIRED SHUT.

NARRATOR

Missy Scrivner, editorial assistant at Book 'Em Books, oversaw all rejected manuscript letters. It was a somber job, but one that reminded her there were bigger rejects than she. Underbite surgery had left the girl shackled to a liquid diet, which found its way onto the rejection letter of one Emerson Cod.

Missy's spill smears across Emerson's return address. She picks up the phone, struggles MOS to get the words out.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Unable to decipher anything but the words "E" and "Cod," Missy phoned directory assistance. Mistaking her garbled "E" for a "C," the operator gave the address of Calista, who read the critiques of "a distant parental figure" and "an inhumane portrayal of childhood" and assumed her son's secret book was:

OMIT

BACK TO - Calista and Emerson.

CALISTA

A thinly-disguised tell-all! To show the world what kind of horrible mother I was!

EMERSON

Did you read it?

CALISTA

Didn't have to. Cover screams, "Smear campaign!" What's with the main character being a girl? Ya sayin' I turned you gay?

EMERSON

I ain't gay, and this ain't about you. It's about my daughter.

CALISTA

What daughter?

EMERSON

She's seven. Her momma ran off with her when she was a baby. Been trying to find her ever since, with no luck. That's why I finally wrote "*Lil' GumShoe*" -- to help her find me.

Calista opens the book. Lil' GumShoe POPS UP, gazes at her.

CALISTA

Why didn't you tell me?

EMERSON

I never even told my friends.

CALISTA

I'm not your friend. I'm your mother.

EMERSON

Oh, now you're my mother.

CALISTA

What was that, Mumbles?

EMERSON

I said, only time you say that is when you wanna make me feel guilty about somethin'. But if you've switched over to Momma mode, I can roll with that. Tell me, what kind of mother spies on her own son?

CALISTA

It's not like I wanted to.

EMERSON

It was an accident, huh? Know what? I think you're lying. Matter of fact, I bet you're not even on a case right now.

Calista barely flinches, but Emerson clocks it.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Damn, woman. That's shrewd. Faked a fraud case, set off your own beeper, even made me take two clients at once so I'd be doubly busy. All to poke around my personal life. Sad thing is, I was gonna tell ya everything.

CALISTA

Uh-huh. After seven years of silence, you just happened to decide to come a hundred percent clean? What kinda fool you take me for?

EMERSON

Sayin' you don't believe me?
(off her silence)
Then there's nothin' left to say.

There's a KNOCK. An agitated Ned enters.

NED

Chuck and Olive haven't checked in. Don't want to be alarmist, but what if they need--

CHUCK / OLIVE (PRELAP, O.S.)

Help!

INT. LOCKER - NIGHT

Chuck and Olive are packed like sardines. They YELL again, then:

CHUCK

Why would Barb kill Joe if she was his "one and only"?

OLIVE

Doesn't matter. The fact she locked us in here means she's guilty of something. And if this locker is hers, the first felony's freesia.

CHUCK

"Freesia"?

OLIVE

Ugh. It's like we're trapped in a sachet in the panty drawer of a dead shut-in, who was shut in her bedroom by her cats so they wouldn't have to suffer the stench of freesia. Can't you smell it?

CHUCK

Yes. It's my freesia tangle-free conditioner.
Which you said smelled "amazing" yesterday.

OLIVE

Wish I hadn't, now.

CHUCK

Wish I hadn't, either.

NARRATOR

Charlotte Charles and Olive Snook had been proud of all the water flowing under their friendship bridge. But they had been fooling themselves, so neither was prepared for the flash flood that was about to hit.

OLIVE

What?

CHUCK

Told you those capris make you look taller.

OLIVE

Liar!

CHUCK

No, I'm a truth-ar. I came clean unprompted.
You only admitted to lying after getting caught,
which never would've happened if a crazed murder
suspect hadn't shoved us in here.

OLIVE

And here comes the center of the universe, pulling
us all into her gravitational orbit of blame.

CHUCK

FYI, there is no center of the universe
because our universe is ever expanding.

OLIVE

Like your neediness. "Wah, respect my feelings."
"Wah, you can't fence me in." "Wah, don't treat
me like I'm dead." But if you're so dead, how can
you be so needy? Oh, right. You're selfish.

CHUCK

"Selfish"? I'm sharing all I own with you.

OLIVE

Big whoop. Secondhand stuff.

CHUCK

That's what you're angry about. The one thing
I won't share. Ned.

OLIVE

I cannot believe you just said that.
(off the silence)
Don't you shrug at me in the dark, Charlotte
Charles. That was a low blow.

CHUCK

Well, I'm in a no-win situation. I can't say
anything to you because it would be
insensitive. I can't say anything to Ned
because he's not doing anything wrong. But if
I had a nickel for every time the three of us
are together and -- unexpectedly, accidentally
-- I catch you looking at him--

OLIVE

Stop talking, stop talking, help-help-help!

CHUCK

--and you've got that sad, pining, "Why won't
you love me?" look. And I start feeling like a
jerk for being in love with my own boyfriend.

OLIVE

A boyfriend you don't touch.

CHUCK

I told you -- we can't.

OLIVE

That doesn't make sense! How can you be with
someone you can't hold or kiss? Especially
when he's that good a kisser.

CHUCK

You would know, wouldn't you?

OLIVE

Yeah. I would.

CHUCK

I am so glad I took that bed by the window.

OLIVE

Petty.

CHUCK

Spiteful.

OLIVE

I'm finished!

CHUCK

Me, too!

NARRATOR

At this moment, the truth-tellers had reached the point where telling is replaced by stomping -- off, and in opposite directions. Fortunately, it was an urge fulfilled by the lock-picking talents of Emerson Cod...

The door opens, revealing Emerson. Ned peers in behind him.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

...who knew which lock to pick by the shouting coming from behind it.

OLIVE

I'm going home. To my home.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Olive pushes her way past Ned and Emerson and exits. Chuck steps out, tries to compose herself.

NED

What happened?

CHUCK

Roommate squabble. Brought on by the suspicious actions of Barb -- aka, Downy -- who's definitely a person of interest.

EMERSON

Got an address, phone number on her?

CHUCK

No, but I know who would.

INT. MY BEST FRIEND, INC. - BUDDY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The door swings open, revealing the Mod Squad.

CHUCK

Mr. Amicus?

ANGLE ON - THE HUG MACHINE - The BODY in it.

NED

Shhh, Buddy's getting a hug. We should come back. It's a rather religious experience.

EMERSON

Religious like, "Howdy, I'm God, your maker. Come meet me."

Emerson props up the slumped body. The Mod Squad reacts when they see it belongs to a crushed, lifeless Barb.

Emerson turns off the machine. Ned sets his watch, touches her.
SPARK! Her eyes flutter open and land on Chuck.

BARB

Oh, good, Kitty. You got out of the locker.
Sorry 'bout that. And I'm so sorry I called
you a bitch. That was the panic talking. I
thought you were going to tell on me.

EMERSON

For killing Joe?

BARB

No, for dating him. I didn't want to get
fired. This job's the only place...

Barb tries to continue, but can only WHEEZE.

NED

Her lungs are crushed. Who knows CPR?

Barb raises her hand.

NED (CONT'D)

Get her to the couch.

Emerson and Chuck do so. Ned grabs a ball pump from Buddy's bin
of sports equipment, puts the nozzle into Barb's mouth and
inflates her.

BARB

...the only place my relentless positivity and
encyclopedic knowledge of hair braiding meant
something. I couldn't hurt Joe. I lo--

She peters out again. As Ned gives her another PUMP--

CHUCK

You loved him.

BARB

When he was around, I could be my true self.
Only now, I'll never know if it was just our
mutual passion for crosswords that brought us
together, or if he felt the same way.

CHUCK

He did. You were his "one and only." He was
going to quit the company to be with you.

BARB

(holding back tears)

He said he had something important to tell me.
The night he died, I waited for his call, but he
never made it back from his Frescorting gig.

EMERSON

Hold up. Joe wasn't working that night.

BARB

He was moonlighting. A standing sports date.

EMERSON

Who with?

BARB

Joe never said, but the guy sounded tragic. Two years of playing ball... and he was still a spaz. Some clients simply lack the jock gene. Buddy calls 'em... "bleacher leechers."

This registers with Ned.

EMERSON

Skip to how you ended up the main squeeze.

BARB

I was having a meltdown. Came in for a hug... Pretended those arms were Joe's. That's when the dial got turned to eleven by the Spar... Spar... Spartan. I tried to fight--

Barb opens her hand, REVEALS a fistful of BRIGHT-RED HAIR.

CHUCK

You did good, Barb.

BARB

So did you. For making my sad ending... happy.

Barb smiles, and Ned re-deads her.

EMERSON

No Spartan's running around killin' popular people. This ain't Thermopylae High.

CHUCK

Right. It's Spartanburg West...

Chuck eyes Buddy's high school pennants, depicting the SPARTANBURG WEST SPARTAN. He wears a plumed helmet and holds a sword.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

...and Buddy's team mascot.

EMERSON

Well, how are we gonna find out who that was?

NED

I'm having the most unfortunate of hunches.
Randy was an uncoordinated "bleacher leecher."
He told me the kids at school teased him
mercilessly for it.

EMERSON

Maybe one of them kids was varsity quarterback
and self-proclaimed dork tormentor Buddy Amicus.

BUDDY (O.S.)

Detective Cod, what are you doing here?

They turn to find Buddy.

EMERSON

Closing in on Joe's killer.

BUDDY

With Kitty?

EMERSON

Yeah. Kitty's with me.

BUDDY

What's wrong with Barb?

EMERSON

Oh, she's dead. Thanks to your happy Hug
Machine.

Distraught, Buddy rushes to the corpse.

BUDDY

Not Barb! Sweet, adorable, conciliatory Barb!

EMERSON

Don't worry, we're closin' in on her
killer, too.

BUDDY

This can't be happening. Who could do
something so horrible?

NED

Does the name "Randy Mann" ring a bell?

BUDDY

Should it?

EMERSON

We think he's your old team mascot. The Spartan
you rumbled with back then is back, and he's
pissed. First, he snuffed your top Frescorts, now
he's ready to snuff you.

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (4)

EMERSON (CONT'D)

His plume matches what was found in Barb's hand.
And he's got a big, sharp sword that he probably
sharped Joe with.

But Buddy's in a full-tilt panic.

BUDDY

I'd only know the guy by his underwear. I
mean, that's all he was to me. A waistband
wedgied over a breastplate.

CHUCK

Do you have a high school yearbook?

Buddy pulls a book from a shelf, hands it to Chuck.

BUDDY

I have to evacuate the building. Someone call
the police, tell them there's a vindictive
person with low self-esteem on the loose.

Buddy goes. Ned grabs the phone. Chuck flips through the book.

CHUCK

No Randy Mann listed. Maybe it's an alias?

NED

Phone's dead.

The LIGHTS GO OUT.

EMERSON

No way we're mid-coinkydink. Let's move.

Chuck turns to go, but doesn't see the ball pump, discarded on
the floor. She trips, sails right for Ned.

CHUCK

Look out!

Chuck uses the yearbook as a shield. She shoves Ned out of her
path, but sends him slamming into the mannequin case. It
topples over in a shower of glass.

NED

That was close. Last thing we need is another
dead body on our hands.

Ned props the quarterback mannequin back on its stand when...
SPARK! It GRUNTS, creaks to life.

EMERSON

Too late for that.

And OFF this chilling turn of events...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

FADE IN:

INT. MY BEST FRIEND, INC. - BUDDY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The Mod Squad stares at the quarterback mannequin ("QB"). He claws the air. The stand fused to his back keeps him in place.

NED

Hello, there. This is a surprise. For you, too, I'm sure. We're just having a little trouble getting a good look because there's a mannequin face over yours. Maybe if you took your helmet off...

QB does. Although we do not, nor will we ever, see the QB's real face, Ned, Chuck and Emerson do. They SCREAM at the sight.

EMERSON

Helmet on! Helmet on!

QB puts the helmet back on, thereby covering his face again.

CHUCK

Sorry about that. We weren't expecting such a leathery, mummy-like, um... Can you speak?
(off his head shake, "No")
Well, we'd love to know who you are.

QB mimes throwing a football.

EMERSON

The Spartanburg West quarterback.

Chuck scours the yearbook, finds a PHOTO OF THE QUARTERBACK.

CHUCK

Ares Kostopolous? Wow. You were a hottie.

NED

But Buddy said he was the quarterback.

Upon hearing the name "Buddy," QB shakes his head "No" and points to a PHOTO of the SPARTAN MASCOT.

EMERSON

Buddy was the Spartan mascot?

QB nods vehemently, then motions like he's being stabbed.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

He's the one who killed you, too?

Another nod from QB before Ned re-deads him.

NED

So the Buddy Amicus legend about being the high school golden boy was a total lie.

CHUCK

And a total horror show. What kind of person holds onto a body?

The tip of a sword ENTERS FRAME, presses against Chuck's throat. REVEAL BUDDY, in full Spartan regalia.

BUDDY

The kind who wants to preserve a friendship.

NARRATOR

The facts were these:

OMIT

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - STANDS - DAY - FLASHBACK

TEEN BUDDY, wimpy and pimply, sits by himself.

NARRATOR

As a teen, Buddy Amicus was unknown and invisible.

A FOOTBALL beans Buddy in the head. He looks onto the field, where quarterback ARES KOSTOPOLOUS smiles and waves at him.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

As Varsity Quarterback, Ares Kostopolous was admired by all. Especially Buddy.

ANGLE ON - A CHICK behind Buddy. Holding the ball Ares threw. PAINTED ON IT: **"Your bazooms. Under the bleachers. 9:00."**

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

That the smiles and waves were never meant for him made no difference. In his fragile and obsessed mind, Buddy was best friends with the big man on campus. And he had to get closer, no matter what.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - SIDELINES - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Dressed in his Spartan uniform, Buddy runs the sidelines.

NARRATOR

The nameless, faceless mascot strove to make his pigskin god proud.

TEENAGE BUDDY

Spartans!!!

NARRATOR

*No one noticed until the State Championships --
when everyone did.*

THE FIELD - Ares passes to a RECEIVER. He's about make the catch when a spastic SWORD ENTERS FRAME and bats the ball away.

OFF a mortified Buddy, feeling the hate of the crowd...

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Post-game. Still in his Spartan uniform, Buddy crosses the empty field. A jockstrap hits him in the head. He turns to see THE TEAM closing in on him with ATHLETIC CUPS and SUPPORTERS.

FLASHES: A shower of CUPS and JOCKSTRAPS hit Buddy; HANDS tear off his uniform; JOCKSTRAPS bind his ankles and hands.

The mob parts, pushed aside by Ares. He looks at Buddy, tied to the goalpost in his boxers. Ares extends a hand, but instead of helping, he pulls off Buddy's helmet, then departs with the team. Buddy's head snaps to the side. His eyes fill with crazy.

NARRATOR

*The realization that their friendship was a
lie was so painful, it drove Buddy mad...*

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT - MUCH LATER - FLASHBACK

Ares waits for his "date" by the bleachers. He sniffs his pits, spritzes his mouth with breath freshener. Unnoticed, Spartan Buddy sneaks up from behind, raises his sword and strikes.

NARRATOR

*...and murderous. With no body to be found,
Buddy the "nobody" got away with the crime.*

OMIT

INT. MY BEST FRIEND, INC. - LOBBY - DAY - FLASHBACK

Present-day Buddy surveys his bustling domain.

NARRATOR

*Years of dermatology, orthodontics and steroid
abuse transformed Buddy Amicus into the man he'd
always wanted to be. He founded "My Best
Friend, Inc." and found among his Frescorts --
Joe, who triggered in him a new, albeit
familiar, obsession.*

A NEWSPAPER smacks Buddy in the head. He looks up to find Joe, smiling and waving at him. If this feels eerily reminiscent, that's because Joe is really waving at...

...BARB, working the welcome desk behind Buddy. She winks at Joe, unrolls the newspaper. It's THE CROSSWORD PAGE with the acrosses filled in. Written on it: "**For Downy.**"

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

This time, Buddy knew things would be different. Now, he was the big man on campus, able to befriend anyone he chose. It was only fitting, then, to choose his most popular Frescort.

Buddy moves to shake Joe's hand.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY - FLASHBACK

Buddy and Joe run football drills in matching jerseys. Joe puts up a good front as Buddy fumbles and trips over himself.

NARRATOR

A Frescort so well-trained in "Faking It Real," that his bleacher-leecher boss never suspected the truth -- that their friendship was a sham. Until the day Joe brought it all to an end.

Joe tosses the ball to Buddy. DOLLY around BUDDY TO REVEAL...

INT. MY BEST FRIEND, INC. - BUDDY'S OFFICE - DAY - FLASHBACK

...Joe tossing Buddy a resignation letter.

NARRATOR

He was quitting to be with fellow Frescort Barb. Which meant he was also quitting Buddy, no matter how much the desperate, delusional man offered to pay him to stay.

Buddy shoves money at Joe. Joe tries leave, but Buddy grabs him. Fuming, Joe throws the cash in his face. ON BUDDY - Imagining the flurry of bills TURNING INTO JOCKSTRAPS. His head SNAPS to the side.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The realization that another friendship had been another lie drove Buddy mad and murderous, yet again. He convinced Joe to meet for one last game, then followed his own twisted Golden Rule: Hurt others more than they hurt you.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Joe stoops to tie his shoe on the darkened field. Spartan Buddy steps from the shadows, raises his sword, STRIKES.

RESUME - With the Mod Squad and a deranged Buddy.

EMERSON

Why'd you heave-ho the body?

BUDDY

I tried to preserve him like I preserved Ares. Sadly, the formaldehyde triggered my asthma.

CHUCK

And Barb. She took Joe. You took her life.

BUDDY

Wanna know the most senseless thing? I started this company to help people. So the friendless wouldn't suffer as I did!

NED

Oh, they suffer. I've seen it up close. At first, the bogus friendships you sell seem good, but deep down, those clients never stop feeling like weirdos who need to be fixed. So they keep paying. Hoping someday those feelings will go away.

BUDDY

And... I'm killing you first.
(charging Ned)
Say goodbye.

EMERSON

Goodbye, friend.

Emerson slams Buddy in the breastplate with a baseball bat. The blow forces him back into the Hug Machine. Chuck turns up the dial, and the arms grasp Buddy, trapping him.

NARRATOR

A victorious Emerson Cod should've felt happy. But here in the offices of the soon-to-be defunct My Best Friend, Inc., he was preoccupied with thoughts of his own defunct friendship -- with his mother.

INT. EMERSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Emerson enters, heads for his phone. Before his hand touches the handset, he stops. Without turning around--

EMERSON

Finally. A decent stogie.

Calista sits on the couch with a cigar and reads "*Lil' GumShoe.*"

CALISTA

I needed some comfort tobacco.

EMERSON

Was just about to ring you up to say how much
I been regrettin' our previous words.

CALISTA

Was just about to get on a plane till that same
regret had me turnin' around, coming back here.

(then)

You were right. Our relationship is done.
Meaning, how our relationship was. Being best
friends. I'm your momma, Emmy. I gotta start
acting like it. That means I can't expect you
to be as strong as me, or as grown-up. Gotta
feel you can be vulnerable and make mistakes
and still tell me about 'em. Deal?

EMERSON

Yeah. Do I get an allowance?

CALISTA

No, but you do get notes.

(off the book)

On this, from me.

EMERSON

Publishing folks are right. Book's a stupid idea.

CALISTA

Book ain't stupid. The story is. This is
about your childhood with your crazy mother.
Read it to a kid at bedtime, they'll piss the
box springs. You gotta write about the grown-
up Emerson Cod -- how great he'd be as a
daddy. Do that, and your little girl will be
running back in no time.

Calista gives him a kiss, picks up her suitcase.

EMERSON

I'm real glad you came.

CALISTA

Get typing. I want a new draft in two weeks.
Meantime, I'll put out some feelers of my own.

With that and a WINK, she's gone.

NARRATOR

*At that moment, the Pie-Maker was putting out
his own feelers.*

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - JOE'S (RANDY'S) DOOR - NIGHT

A door swings open to REVEAL Randy -- none too pleased to find Ned standing on his doorstep, holding to-go boxes.

NED

Your meat pies. I can't eat 'em, so... This is Digby, by the way. Digby, say hi to Randy.

Digby BARKS. Randy's won over. He scratches Digby's head.

RANDY

Aren't you a nice boy, Digby? So unlike your owner.

NED

I deserve that. Like you deserve an apology.

RANDY

Apology accepted. Goodbye.

NED

Wait. You don't have to pay for it. Friendship. Truth is, there are a lot of people like you -- us -- with strange hobbies, or talents or gifts that we hide because we're afraid of seeming weird or turning people off.

Ned stops as something huge dawns on him.

NED (CONT'D)

But that's a mistake. What makes me unique brought every person I love into my life. It can be the same for you.

RANDY

There's nothing wrong with being alone, ya know. Joe taught me that; called it the "first step." You're no good to somebody else if you can't be good with just you.

NARRATOR

Advice an alone Pie-Maker could use as well.

NED

Joe knew his stuff.

RANDY

But now he's gone, and I don't know what the next step should be.

NARRATOR

With the aid of former Frescort Kitty Pimms, the Pie-Maker obtained Buddy Amicus's client list and invited those listed to bring their true selves to a low-key mixer.

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Admission was free. So was the pie and coffee. And while the intention was good...

INT. PIE HOLE - DINING AREA - NIGHT

AWKWARD MEN are wedged against one side of the restaurant. SHY WOMEN are on the other. Ned and Chuck stand by helplessly.

NARRATOR

...the evening was an unmitigated disaster. Until the second hour, when everyone finally started to come out of their shells.

Guests chat. Veronica and NARCISSISTIC WOMEN bond. Dr. Eugene and Randy are in deep conversation -- about Randy's teeth.

INT. PIE HOLE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ned and Chuck watch the now-bubbling group from the kitchen.

CHUCK

In another ten minutes, I was gonna put out tequila shots. If that didn't work, I was gonna pull the fire alarm and call it a day.

NED

Can you give Digby another hug?
(as she does)

Tighter. Now give his belly a rubba-rubba-rubba. Aw, Digby, that feels good, huh?

CHUCK

If you want, I'll hug him all night. When I sleep over at your place. Permanently. Did I forget to tell you? Great news. I'm moving back in!

NED

That squabble between you and Olive was clearly more than a squabble.

CHUCK

We let loose with everything we were thinking and feeling. Flogged our friendship to death with a giant truth club.

NED

Huh. Does that mean, when it comes to us, I should keep my truths to myself?

CHUCK

No, of course not. Hold on. Am I setting myself up for something?

NED

I was setting myself up. To tell you that ever since you moved in with Olive, I feel like I don't see you anymore. And please don't take that any other way than, "I miss you."

CHUCK

That's sweet. I miss you, too. All the more reason for me to move back in.

NED

Sorry. You can't.

CHUCK

But, you promised me comforting. You're my king-sized duvet of goose-down goodness.

NED

I know. Selfishly, I want to duvet you right this second. But I've got to work on being okay with being alone. And you have to work on your friendship with Olive. We may not like it, but it's true.

CHUCK

Well, I'm gonna need a pie.

INT. OLIVE AND CHUCK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

TIGHT ON - A PIE BOX opened by Olive. Chuck stands by.

OLIVE

I'm a sucker for shoofly.

CHUCK

I know. It was a completely manipulative selection on my part.

OLIVE

I'll grab some of your plates and forks.

CHUCK

So, what do you think? Can we fix this?

OLIVE

We should assess. I'm working on the having-feelings-for-your-boyfriend thing. That's all I can offer. Wish there was a switch I could just throw to "Off," but there isn't.

CHUCK

I know. While you do that, I'll work on the center-of-the-universe thing. In fact, I'm ready to ditch that part for a new one: selflessly-centered roommate.

OLIVE

You're staying?

CHUCK

Was that a good or incredulous question mark at the end of your question?

OLIVE

Very good. Besides, the heavy lifting is behind us now.

CHUCK

We laid our cornerstone of truth.

OLIVE

And pounded that sucker into place. It'd be a waste of time and effort if you left.

CHUCK

Agreed.

They CLINK forks.

NARRATOR

As Chuck and Olive celebrated their reunion with a couple of pie pieces...

ANGLE ON the pie from above, as it's sliced...

INT. NED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

...ANGLE ON a pizza pie -- and a piece being pulled from the rest. Ned watches TV on the couch. Digby is by his side.

NARRATOR

...the Pie-Maker had a peace of a different sort. The quiet, solitary, bachelor kind. Until...

A KNOCK. Chuck enters, wrapped in a comforter.

NED

Oh, no. Disaster with Olive?

CHUCK

It went well. So well, I wanted to wrap you in goose-down goodness as a thank-you.

NED

Great. But you know, my duvet was metaphorical.

CHUCK

So's mine.

Chuck drops the comforter. ANGLE ON Ned. We don't see what he sees, but he's clearly happy to see it.

NED
I've really missed you.

And OFF the two and their romantic night in...

FADE OUT.

END OF SHOW