

PUSHING DAISIES

"Kerplunk"

Episode #3T7063

Written by

Gretchen J. Berg & Aaron Harberts

Directed by

Lawrence Trilling

FINAL DRAFT 

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4000 Warner Boulevard, Bldg. 133
Burbank, CA 91522
(818) 954-6341

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

YOUNG LILY (5) stares INTO CAMERA from behind white wood slats. One of them blocks her left eye. She holds a PIRATE TEDDY BEAR.

NARRATOR

At this moment, Young Lily was 25 years, 7 weeks, 2 days from becoming "Aunt Lily." 96 hours earlier she had earned a different title. "Big Sister." Baby Vivian had barely survived birth due to a hole in her heart. Cardiologists patched the flaw, and Lily received her orders: to always put her vulnerable sibling before herself.

Lily glares between the slats of a CRIB at BABY VIVIAN.

The baby starts to CRY. MOTHER appears. She plucks the teddy bear from Lily's hands and places it in the crib.

INT. CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

YOUNG LILY (11) wears a swimsuit, swim cap and nose-clip. She stares forlornly at the unwrapped box from whence they came.

NARRATOR

On her 11th birthday, Lily was given a swimming suit and backyard pool. The unwanted gift was actually for Vivian -- to bring about further cardiovascular conditioning.

YOUNG VIVIAN (6) stands next to Lily, in matching swimwear. Mother tries to take a picture. Lily crosses her arms petulantly, waves her off. Vivian copies the gesture.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Constant exposure to her older sister made Vivian a devoted mimic. Something Lily hated...

Lily sticks her tongue out at Vivian, raises her fist to mock-punch her, but Vivian refuses to do this. Instead, she smiles and crosses her eyes, causing a stunned Lily to soften.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

...until she realized her sisterly sacrifices had given her unconditional love and the knowledge that contentment comes from putting another's happiness first.

Lily matches Vivian's smile and crosses her eyes. She kicks her leg out, does a spin. Vivian follows along perfectly.

On cloud nine, the girls continue their perfectly-synced dance. It ends as Vivian jumps into Lily's arms with a flourish.

There's a FLASH as Mother takes a picture. THE IMAGE FREEZES, now a BLACK-&-WHITE PHOTOGRAPH.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

At this moment, one fateful birthday marked another -- that of renowned synchronized swimming duo, the Darling Mermaid Darlings...

THE PHOTO DISSOLVES into a 1960s PUBLICITY STILL of the ADULT DARLING MERMAID DARLINGS.

INT. CHUCK'S AUNTS' HOUSE - PRESENT DAY

TIGHT ON a cheese bagel with a lit candle in it.

NARRATOR

...who, at this moment, were commemorating another birthday; specifically, a half-birthday for their niece, Charlotte, who had passed away one and one-half birthdays ago.

VIVIAN and LILY are at the table. Lily is buried behind the newspaper. The birthday bagel is in front of an empty seat.

VIVIAN

Should we sing? It might brighten our moods.

LILY

No jingle's gonna warm these cockles.

VIVIAN

She was such a happy girl. It's as if when she died, the merriment in this home died with her.

LILY

Good lord.

VIVIAN

Sorry for being dismal. It would be a relief to be as strong and stoic as you.

ON Lily, hiding behind the paper. A tear slides down her cheek.

NARRATOR

But Lily was in great pain, for Charlotte wasn't her niece but her daughter -- the result of a secret affair with Vivian's fiancé, Charles Charles.

Vivian stares at the newspaper. Something comes into focus -- AN AD for "*Jimmy Neptune's Aquacade: A Night of 1,000 Bubbles.*"

VIVIAN

Dear me, the aquacade is in town. Remember taking Charlotte there for her half-birthdays? It's as if an angel called the *Papen County Picayune* and placed an ad on the back page.

LILY

Are you done gawking? The birdcages need fresh liners.

VIVIAN

Lily, this is a sign that it's time to make Charlotte's special day happy again. Let's go to the aquacade. It could be just the thing to help the gloom pass. Please. For me?

NARRATOR

Though Lily was weak with grief, her compulsion to put her sister's happiness before her own drove her to say:

LILY

Find my opera gloves. That place will be crawling with germs.

INT. PIE HOLE - DAY

TIGHT ON a cheese bagel with a candle stuck in it. NED, CHUCK and EMERSON share a booth.

CHUCK

I can't believe you remembered my half-birthday.

NED

How could we forget?

EMERSON

With you not shuttin' up about it?

(then)

Here's a lil' something from me.

He hands her a gift. She opens it; it's a copy of *Lil' GumShoe*.

CHUCK

A first edition, and signed by the author! I love it. Thank you.

EMERSON

Where's yours, boyfriend of half-birthday girl?

CHUCK

Ned thinks he's a terrible gift-giver.

NED

I am.

CHUCK

He gets obsessed with finding the perfect present, which doesn't exist.

NED

It does.

CHUCK

So he psychs himself out to the point that he doesn't gift anything. But Ned's already given me the greatest gift, my life again. Can't beat that.

NED

Still, I'm not giving up.

OLIVE enters. She struggles with two matted full-length furs.

NED (CONT'D)

What died?

OLIVE

Couple dozen minks, give or take. Lily asked me to run 'em by the furrier for a fluffing. She and Vivian are going to the aquacade tonight in honor of Chuck's half-birthday.

CHUCK

I'm so touched! Ned, aren't you touched?

NED

I'm not sure. What's an "aquacade"?

CHUCK

It's a traveling water show, but instead of a stage, there's a giant pool filled with swimmers, divers and breathtaking daredevils. It always came to town the month of my half-birthday, and Lily, Vivian and I would go.

NED

That's it! My perfect gift! I'm buying six tickets to the aquacade. Emerson can call Simone--

EMERSON

In with the flu.

NED

Olive can call Randy--

OLIVE

Out with the gout.

NED

So, four tickets for the aquacade.

OLIVE

Double date! Double date!

CHUCK

That's very sweet. But I think I'll pass.

With a prim smile, Chuck exits to the kitchen.

INT. PIE HOLE - KITCHEN - DAY

Ned joins Chuck, who throws herself into crimping crusts.

NED

It's your half special day. We should do something that makes you happy.

CHUCK

I'm not sure this would. So many memories of my old life are tied to that place. Seeing my aunts there without me -- please don't think I'm being unappreciative, but... it could be like attending my own wake.

NED

Now, you see why I'm a terrible gift-giver?

CHUCK

You're not terrible. The decision we made to keep my alive-again-ness from my aunts we made together. It's a decision that keeps all of us safe, keeps what you can do a secret.

NED

I understand. But what if the terrible gifter re-gifted his gift by wrapping it in a different way. Lily and Vivian are going out to celebrate you. Wouldn't it be nice to celebrate with them in person, but incognito?

CHUCK

(considers, then)

Promise you'll buy me a dolphin dog?

INT. AQUACADE - LOBBY - NIGHT

A faux sea cave. Ned, Chuck (disguised), Olive and Emerson enter with sea animal souvenir balloons (Emerson's is a crab).

CHUCK

Prepare to be doused with amazement. There hasn't been this much talent around a body of water since Moses played the Red Sea.

She gestures to the MARQUEE POSTERS OF EACH PERFORMER.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

First, Master of Ceremonies and Song, Jimmy Neptune; solo synchro-sensation, Sid Tango; shark-rider, Galveston Gus, and his dorsal-finned friend, Bubba--

NED

And your aunts.

Everyone hides behind their programs as mink-clad Lily and Vivian make their grand entrance.

OLIVE

I brought pens to pass out for autographs, and pepper spray in case there's a stampede.

But there's not. The aunts pass by unnoticed.

CHUCK

They're the Venus and Serena of water ballet, and no one's looking.

EMERSON

No one's even not looking the way you pretend to when you're actually looking.

NARRATOR

But someone was.

BLANCHE / CORAL (O.S.)

Hooyah. The Darling Mermaid Darlings.

NED

Look. Fans.

BLANCHE and CORAL RAMORA (50s), water vipers in stars-and-stripes evening gowns, step into a shocked Lily and Vivian's path.

CHUCK

("the horror")

Those aren't fans. They're the Aquadolls. My aunts' biggest rivals.

NARRATOR

The facts were these:

OMIT

INT. AQUACADE - LOBBY - PRESENT - NIGHT

Lily and a frozen Vivian face off with Blanche and Coral. During the exchange, CROWD MEMBERS approach the Aquadolls for autographs, which Blanche, and only Blanche, greedily signs.

NARRATOR

Blanche and Coral Ramora, aka the Aquadolls, had been introduced to the water by their father, a Navy Seal, and shaped their act into a swimming celebration of the red-white-and-blue. But the Aquadolls weren't the only synchronized sister duo. The Darling Mermaid Darlings were, too, and thus grew a bitter rivalry.

BLANCHE

What has you two chumming the waters?

LILY

I could ask the same, chum.

CORAL

The Charles sisters, still out of the loop. How quaint and refreshing and sad. We're tonight's headliners. Didn't you know?

LILY

No. Where's your poster?

CORAL

Still at the printer. Our contract--

BLANCHE

Lucrative contract requires it to be twice as big as the others.

SHANE TRICKLE, a surfer-dude Adonis in his 30s, approaches.

SHANE

Yo, Dolls, shake tail. Curtain's in twenty.

CORAL

This is our manager, Blanche's husband--

BLANCHE

Insatiable husband, Shane Trickle. I found him when we were performing in Honolulu.

SHANE

Mondo.

CORAL

Well, it's off to do what we do best. Swim for Christ and country.

LILY

Might wanna pick a new flag. One without horizontal stripes.

CORAL

Such a shame cutting this short. Why don't we meet in our dressing room--

BLANCHE

Lavish dressing room, after the show?

CORAL

That is, if the shuttle-bus isn't in a hurry to get you back to the home.

They leave. Vivian turns to Lily.

VIVIAN

This was an unanticipated stressor. I would like to go.

LILY

Vivian, do you think I wanted to drive 20 miles to a family-friendly venue and its general-admission parking lot? They don't even serve alcohol here.

VIVIAN

My goodness. Do you need to sit down? At home?

LILY

No. We are going to stand up. This is Charlotte's celebration. Her memory comes first. Now, get out your ticket.

EXT. AQUACADE - BLEACHERS - NIGHT

CLOSE ON A TELESCOPIC POV OF THE AUNTS. Vivian nibbles a corn dog. Lily empties her flask into a shark-shaped souvenir cup.

CHUCK (O.S.)

Do they look rattled?

FIND Chuck, watching the aunts through opera glasses. She, Ned, Olive and Emerson sit in the back of the stands.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

The Aquadolls are the worst thing that could've happened. I'm gonna sneak closer, see how they're coping.

NED

Chuck...

CHUCK

The cotton candy vendor down there is a very large man with a doubly-large display of spun sugar to hide behind.

(MORE)

CHUCK (CONT'D)

(off his look)

You're right. But I have to do something.
What can it be from way back here?

OLIVE

Ooh, let's lift their spirits with an aunt-
chant. Or the wave. Never been more
appropriate. Emerson, you start.

His look says it all.

CHUCK

How about something more to the point.

(disguising voice)

"Screw the Aquadolls!"

(peeking through opera glasses)

Yay! That got a smile.

INTERCUT THE STANDS, AS NEEDED, WITH:

EXT. AQUACADE - POOL/STAGE - SAME TIME

ON STAGE - A DRUMROLL. A SPOTLIGHT illuminates Jimmy Neptune.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Greetings, ladies and gents! Welcome to my
"Night of 1,000 Bubbles." Is this a frothy
crowd or what?

There's a SPLASH from an adjoining pen. A DORSAL FIN circles.

JIMMY NEPTUNE (CONT'D)

Bubba the shark thinks so! More from him
later. But right now, let's rise for our
National Anthem, as interpreted by those
patriotic paddlers, the Aquadolls!

The opening fanfare of the NATIONAL ANTHEM begins. Blanche and
Coral dive in and begin their routine.

IN THE STANDS - Vivian turns to Lily, clasps her hand.

VIVIAN

Thank you for insisting we stay. Now, the
task is staying strong.

LILY

It's gonna take some fortitude. Esther
Williams would piss her cotton panel at the
sight of those rocket splits.

VIVIAN

Lily, behave. Though I will admit, Blanche is
looking less than buoyant.

LILY

Are you kidding? She's dead in the water.

The MUSICAL INTRO reaches its climax. Jimmy Neptune steps up to SING, just as Coral boosts Blanche into the air.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

OH, SAY CAN YOU...

As she skims across the pool, no one is prepared for the jaws of BUBBA THE SHARK, breaking the surface and swallowing her whole.
And OFF this...

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

OMIT

INT. CHUCK'S AUNTS' HOUSE - DAY

The aunts sit at the table. As before, Lily hides behind the newspaper. Vivian studies the FRONT PAGE PHOTO of the shark attack on Blanche Ramora, with the HEADLINE: "ATROCITY AT AQUACADE - ONE AQUADOLL EATEN, ANOTHER PULLED FROM JAWS OF DEATH."

VIVIAN

I must pen a sympathy note to Coral Ramora.

LILY

Don't sign my name to that "Sorry a shark ate your bitch of a sister" letter. She wouldn't think twice if it happened to us.

VIVIAN

But to have a sister die. I don't know how I'd survive if I lost you.

LILY

Vivian, it was a horrible night, which left me more depressed than before I went. Stop talking about it, or go play in the yard.

A KNOCK. Vivian opens to a joyful Jimmy Neptune.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

The Darling Mermaid Darlings, scales, tails and all. I overheard your verbal skirmish with the Aquadolls last night. Hoped to grab you after the show, but you must've been swept away by the departing crowd.

LILY

We small-boned persons are vulnerable to exoduses of the mass and panicked variety.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

All of us thought the Charles sisters had gone the way of legend, but gee whiz, what a time for a comeback!

LILY

Come again?

JIMMY NEPTUNE

My father owned the aquacade before me. His father before him. That's how I know Sam Neptune gave the Darlings their first break.

VIVIAN

You're Sam's grandson? How is he?

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Dead. Didn't want to mention it lest it dampen the pitch. As a boy, I watched your set every night from the water wings and never forgot the look of the audience as they soaked it in. You two have a gift unlike any I've seen. Your swimming brings people joy.

VIVIAN

Our swimming brings-- brought us joy, too.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

I'm in desperate need of a new opening act. Come back to the pool, Mermaids -- after a twenty-four-hour mourning period for poor Blanche, of course. The water's nice.

LILY

We're retired.

VIVIAN

People come out of retirement all the time. It continues to work for Cher. For how many performances would you like us?

LILY

(jerking Vivian aside)
What has gotten into your gills?

VIVIAN

It's not like we're out of practice.

LILY

Swimming with you in a private pool is a far cry from splashing in front of paying patrons. We had our time.

VIVIAN

And here it is, back again. I have tried to tune out my sadness, hoping it would fade like patio furniture in the sun, but it hasn't. Not since Charles abandoned me has an ache gone so deep. If we don't do this, grief may swallow me whole.

NARRATOR

For once, the impulse to ensure her sister's happiness was not Lily's sole motivator. Instead, the name "Charles," and the shame of his and Lily's affair -- an affair which produced a girl named Chuck -- did the trick.

Lily turns to Jimmy, who has produced chocolates and champagne.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Well? Are we swimmin', wimmin'?

LILY

Save it. We're in training.

INT. EMERSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Emerson unwraps a fish sandwich at his desk. He's about to eat when A COWBOY SILHOUETTE appears at the door.

GALVESTON GUS (O.S.)

Do I smell a fishwich?

EMERSON

Yes.

GALVESTON GUS (O.S.)

Do you mind stowin' it away?

EMERSON

Hell, yes.

CASH is shoved under the door. Emerson puts the sandwich in a drawer, sprays air freshener.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

All clear.

A teary Galveston Gus enters.

GALVESTON GUS

Sorry to inconvenience, but the scent of fried flounder takes me back to my recent loss. You came highly recommended, Mr. Cod. My name's--

EMERSON

Galveston Gus. And I'm assuming your loss in question is Bubba, the shark.

GALVESTON GUS

You heard?

EMERSON

I was there.

GALVESTON GUS

Hope you're not part of the negligence suit against me. Those lawyers want to take everything I have. That's why I need you. To prove I wasn't asleep in the saddle.

EMERSON

Not much I can do. Three hundred of us watched your Great White make fish food outta that unlucky water-hooper.

GALVESTON GUS

I know you can't prove Bubba didn't eat Blanche. He did. And what a crap last meal that musta' been. But you can prove someone else at the aquacade let him out of his pen and caused this horrible accident.

EMERSON

What's got you floating that theory?

GALVESTON GUS

I triple-check the gate on his paddock before every performance.

Gus removes his boot and fishes out a REMOTE CONTROL.

GALVESTON GUS (CONT'D)

This here is the only way to open it, and it never leaves my person. No, sir, someone else opened that pen and set me and my boy up.

Gus pulls off his other boot and dumps out a stack of cash.

GALVESTON GUS (CONT'D)

Mr. Cod, Bubba was my best friend ever since he was a guppy of a pup. Only happiness I'll get from this mess is knowin' his good name is clear. Please, help a sentimental cowpoke out.

INT. MORGUE - LAB - DAY

BUBBA'S CARCASS hangs by its tail, an incision down his belly.

EMERSON

In third grade, I did a report on Great Whites. Discovered we were a lot alike, seeing how we're both misunderstood badasses. I know this is a long shot, but...

CHUCK

Let's give the big fish a fair shake.

Emerson and Chuck pull back the incision with surgical clamps. A LICENSE PLATE and a BOOT fall out, and we REVEAL BLANCHE'S FACE. Ned sets his watch, touches her. SPARK! She opens her eyes.

NED

Ms. Ramora, I'm sorry to inform you that you've been eaten by Bubba, the shark.

BLANCHE

Did everybody cry? Oh, they must have. I'm the fan fave.

EMERSON

Happen to notice anything strange before--
(à la "Jaws")
Duh-nuh?

BLANCHE

Yes. My sister asked if I was going gray.

EMERSON

How 'bout something pertinent?

BLANCHE

For me, it's strange. My mother was auburn till the end. Only other thing that could bring on gray hair is stress. And my husband, Shane, is the biggest stress-reliever I know. Big-gest.

CHUCK

Actually, I do see some white in there. But it's not hair, it's...

Chuck touches one of the faint white streaks on Blanche's head, shows Ned and Emerson the greasy substance on her finger.

BLANCHE

My hair gel.

EMERSON

Sure it ain't shark slime?

CHUCK

No, water ballerinas use thick, waterproof products to keep their styles in place. It's like shellack.

NED

Shellack that has the faint smell of... lard! It's used in pie crust all the time.

CHUCK

Someone mixed pig fat into her hair gel?

EMERSON

Sharks can smell a drop of blood a quarter-mile away. Lard sure as hell would've driven Bubba to strike.

NED

All someone would have to do is open the pen...

EMERSON

And we're talking bona fide murder by Great White.

BLANCHE

Me? Murdered? I'm universally adored. Wait. Lily and Vivian Charles. Why else would they come out of seclusion after all these years? Those shrews, always after our limelight.

CHUCK

Your limelight? You'd be nothing without the Darling Mermaid Darlings! They put sibling synchro-swimdance on the map!

BLANCHE

They're as washed-up as two beached whales.

CHUCK

Oh, yeah? Well, your back layouts are sloppy. More like back... lameouts.

EMERSON

Dead Girl ain't a very effective mean girl.

NED

I don't think she's had a lot of practice.

BLANCHE

Who are you?

CHUCK

Charlotte Charles. Niece of Vivian, daughter of Lily. You and your sister hurt their feelings on a night when they were feeling very, very fragile. So, you'd better shut up about my family, Blanche Ramora-Trickle, or you'll end up... well, I can't think of anything worse than where you actually are right now. So, snap!

(quickly, to Ned)

Touch her before she talks back. Touch her before she talks back!

Ned does, DEADING her again.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

Whew. That felt kinda' good.

And OFF this...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. PIE HOLE - COUNTER - DAY

Ned, Chuck, Olive and Emerson, at the counter.

OLIVE

That hapless shark was just a patsy?

CHUCK

He got a whiff of the lard mixed into Blanche's hair gel and simply followed his instincts.

EMERSON

The killer needed access to the Aquadolls' dressing room and the remote control to the shark gate, all of which hollers "inside job."

NED

Suddenly, our sweet aquacade's looking nastier than a backed-up sink on Thanksgiving.

EMERSON

No way our bad fish is gonna nibble if a bunch of P.I.s come trolling for a murderer. What we need is a cover.

CHUCK

We could pose as pool doctors. Thanks to my aunts-- My aunts!

She ducks behind the counter as Lily and Vivian enter. Throughout the scene, their every move is synchronized.

NED

Lily and Vivian! Booth? Pie? Booth and pie?

LILY / VIVIAN

Perhaps a sugar-free apricot custard, to go.

EMERSON

My, you're very... coordinated today.

Chuck uses a ladle as a periscope/mirror to watch the aunts.

LILY / VIVIAN

Olive, we'd like back the Darling Mermaid Darlings costumes we gave you some time ago.

OLIVE

Oh. Feeling nostalgic?

LILY / VIVIAN

No. We're joining the floating cast of Jimmy Neptune's "Night of 1,000 Bubbles." This is our "living in sync" practice hour.

Olive SCREAMS.

OLIVE

OMG! GR8! TTFN! No, BRB!

She races out.

EMERSON

She's got a case of the dumb-ASS.

NED

(to the aunts)

How about a seat far over there? With plenty of room for whatever it is you're doing.

Busy sweeping their arms in large, graceful movements, they ignore Ned. There's a THUMP from behind the counter.

Emerson and Ned peek over at Chuck. She holds a napkin. Written on it: "**Aunts = Your Cover!**" Ned looks at Chuck: "Are you insane?" Emerson looks to Chuck: "Are you sure?" Chuck mouths, "Pleeeeeease?" Emerson turns to the aunts.

EMERSON

Well, ladies, if it isn't a small sea. I have business at Jimmy Neptune's myself. Would you mind stepping outside and having a chat?

LILY / VIVIAN

After you.

They wave Emerson out with an extravagant gesture and follow him through the exit. Dumbfounded, Ned peers at Chuck, who stays hidden.

CHUCK

No stares of disbelief, I beg you. I just couldn't pass up the opportunity for an all-access pass to the aquacade.

NED

It may be all-access, but unfortunately, it's not all-inclusive.

CHUCK

Meaning, I can't go. I know, and I don't care. Lily and Vivian are back in the water. For pay! I want you there taking notes, pictures, whatever you can and reporting it back to me.

CONTINUED: (2)

NED

Seems unfair. Like the rest of us are on spring break, while you're stuck in detention.

CHUCK

"Detention" is easier knowing my aunts are surrounded during this emotionally-vulnerable time by people who care about them. Just make sure Emerson's a vigilant bodyguard and sticks to them like glue.

NED

Still, it's detention. You're sure the urge to break out isn't gonna be hard?

CHUCK

I would never show up and risk having them recognize me. Now, paddle out.

And OFF this pact...

EXT. AQUACADE - POOL/STAGE - DAY

Emerson, Ned and Olive flank Lily and Vivian. Emerson and Olive (mermaid tails slung over their shoulders) sport "Team Darlings" tracksuits. Ned wears sunglasses and a suit. They stare up into the bleachers at--

THE AQUACADE CAST. WATER BALLERINAS and COSTUMED SEA ANIMALS are among the group, as well as Coral Ramora and Shane Trickle.

VIVIAN

Dipping a toe back in our old milieu and solving a murder. The thought brings tingles. Can't you feel the vibrations in the air?

LILY

Stifle, Vivian. It's the pool filter.

EMERSON

All right, here's the lane assignments.

(to Olive)

Itty-Bitty, you're hair and makeup. Get into Blanche's dressing room and find that homicidal hair gel. Pie-Maker, you're the deal-maker, aka, the Mermaids' agent. You stick to Jimmy Neptune. As team coach, I'll sidle up to Aquadolls' manager and grieving husband, Shane Trickle.

(to the aunts)

And as team heavy, I'll also make sure you two aren't worried about anything but scissor-kicking ass and taking names.

Jimmy Neptune, microphone in hand, approaches.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Aqua-troupe, circle 'round for an important announcement. Tragedy has brought us to the--

The mic cord hits a puddle of water. There's a SPARK.

JIMMY NEPTUNE (CONT'D)

Whew! Almost had another tragedy there. Where was I? Yes. As terrible as these circumstances are, they've also brought us something wonderful. A pair of luminaries. Everyone, put your fins together for the "Night of 1,000 Bubbles" new headliners, the Darling Mermaid Darlings!

The CAST turns to a poker-faced Coral. She takes a dramatic beat, steps toward the aunts, locks eyes with Vivian.

CORAL

Thank you for your note.

She goes. Shane Trickle, however, isn't as composed.

SHANE

That's bogus, Neptune. We have a signed thing.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Which I will honor by finding a boffo new act for Coral.

SHANE

Does anybody even know who those two are!

Expecting the worst, the aunts shrink. A MAN and WOMAN in LOBSTER COSTUMES pipe up.

SHE-LOBSTER

I met my husband at a Darling Mermaid Darlings show.

HE-LOBSTER

They're the reason we devote our lives to this.

OLIVE

I have pens for autographs!

The cast swarms the aunts as Shane gets in Jimmy's face.

SHANE

I should punch you in the snot-locker, but that's not the aloha spirit.

He goes. A rattled Jimmy spots Ned.

CONTINUED: (2)

JIMMY NEPTUNE

The Mermaids' agent, I presume? Here's the contract. Let's close by tomorrow.

Jimmy hands Ned the papers. Meanwhile, Olive ducks into a nearby dressing tent.

INT. DRESSING TENT - DAY

Olive beelines for two makeup stations, marked "BLANCHE" and "CORAL." Blanche's is empty.

SID (O.S.)

Are you the new sea horse?

Olive looks down to find Sid Tango -- clad only in a Speedo with clamshell belt -- on the ground in the splits.

OLIVE

Heavens to hamstrings! No, I'm Sally Boots. Gal Friday to the Darling Mermaid Darlings.

SID

Snap back, G-string. I love them.

OLIVE

I love you.

Olive drops into the splits next to him.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

Who are you?

SID

Sid Tango. I open the Second Act.

OLIVE

Why aren't you out with the rest of the group?

SID

Jimmy wanted me to pack up my dance belts and eyeshadow to make room for your peeps. They're re-locating me out by the porto-lets.

OLIVE

Shoot. There's room in this bowl for all us fish.

SID

You know what? Thank you. If only more people here could be as accepting of who I am.

OLIVE

People aren't accepting? Here? Honey, there are so many rainbows over this aquacade, it may as well be Oz.

SID

I was referring to my gender. You know, being a man in aqua-entertainment. Which is to say, unappreciated and invisible.

OLIVE

That never occurred to me. I guess because in a male-dominated society, issues such as the discrimination against male synchronized swimmers are simply irrelevant.

(off his look)

I had a full ride to Vassar on a jockey scholarship; these things were discussed. All the freakin' time.

SID

Probably as many times as that jerk Jimmy Neptune promised me the headliner spot. Thought I'd get it when Blanche kicked. Then, I hear they're dragging the musty mermaids out of retirement. Foiled again.

(catching himself)

Don't get me wrong, I love them.

Suddenly, the atmosphere has changed.

OLIVE

So you said.

SID

Oh, well. Someday, it'll be my turn. Until then, I'll be content watching others glimmer and gleam.

NARRATOR

Ironically, Olive found those same words staring back at her from the vicinity of Coral's dressing table.

ANGLE ON THE TABLE - A pot of "GLIMMER & GLEAM HAIR GEL" lies forgotten beneath it. She grabs it.

OLIVE

Think Coral will mind if I borrow this? My girls need a touch-up before splashdown. Nice to meet you. Bye.

As Olive beats a path for the door...

OMIT

EXT. AQUACADE - BLEACHERS - DAY

Olive finds Emerson. She hands over the pot of hair gel.

OLIVE

I combed the dressing room for the murder weapon. Well, murder-weapon trigger. Blanche's beauty area had already been broomed, but I found Coral's hair gel. It smells fine.

EMERSON

Nice work, Sea-Wee. I got a bucketful of nothin'. Still, your find confirms our theory. Blanche was definitely the target.

Suddenly, the OVERTURE to *CARMEN* booms from the LOUDSPEAKERS. Sid Tango slides onto the pool deck and begins his rehearsal.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Holy Ibiza, Monaco and St. Tropez. That is some banana hammock.

OLIVE

That's Sid Tango. I found him hanging in Blanche's dressing room. He's sorta' fun. Slightly confused. And just a teensy bit angry about being overlooked to lead the aquacade due to his -- well, what's in his banana hammock.

EMERSON

I should look away, but I can't.

OLIVE

Do ya' wanna go blind?

EMERSON

I wanna catch a killer. Watch the shark pen.

ANGLE ON THE SHARK PEN. The GATE opens and closes.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

It happens each time Sid touches his belt.

ON SID - Tapping his clamshell belt with jazz hands. He sashays to pool's edge, is about to dive in when Emerson blocks him.

SID

Um. This is where I dive.

EMERSON

Oh, you're gonna belly flop, all right. Into a cesspool I like to call the County Pen.

Emerson pulls off Sid's clamshell and removes the jerry-rigged remote control GATE OPENER hidden inside. And OFF a synchro-swimmer-turned-murderer...

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. JAIL - PHONE BANKS - DAY

Emerson and Olive sit across from Sid Tango.

EMERSON

You called. I came. She tagged along.
Wha'dya want, Tango?

SID

You to get me out of here.

OLIVE

Life on the inside rough? I'll call in a favor
with the warden, see if he'll ease up a little.
(off Emerson's look)
He's a regular. I serve his pecan pie with an
extra spoon of caramel sauce, complimentary
like.

SID

Actually, the boys on my block are great, just
misunderstood victims, like me. Detective
Cod, this was a frame job. I had nothing to
do with killing Blanche.

EMERSON

Save the "I didn't do it" dance for the judge,
Tango. You had opportunity. You had motive.

OLIVE

You told me yourself how jealous you were of
the Aquadolls' headliner spot.

SID

My jealousy has nothing to do with them. It
stems from loving an art form that doesn't
love me back. And, hello? If envy is your
motive, why aren't you shining your spotlight
on Coral? It's what she wanted all her life.

EMERSON

Keep splashing.

SID

There may have been two Aquadolls, but it was
really "*The Blanche Show*." She always put
herself first. With the fans. With the
business and creative decisions. Coral hated
her for it.

EMERSON

You think little sissy got tired of living in big sissy's shadow and engineered the attack?

SID

Coral did launch Blanche in the direction of the shark. Sure, that boost was always part of their routine, but it's certainly a thing that makes you go--

EMERSON / OLIVE

Hmmmm.

SID

If that's not enough to get your wheels flip-turning, here's another thing: Why would I keep the murder weapon in my Speedo? I'm double-jointed, not double-stupid.

NARRATOR

Neither was Emerson Cod. But as he side-stroked back to the aquacade, little did he know that strokes of a different nature were being doled out.

EXT. AQUACADE - POOL/STAGE - DAY

Ned crosses the pool deck. There's the sound of SHOUTS as Coral and Shane storm out from the wings. Jimmy is on their tails.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Pack your spandex. You're fired!

SHANE

Everybody, chill, I can fix this--

CORAL

Save it, sand for brains. You're as useless as teats on a boar.

SHANE

"Teats." Awesome. Coral, wait!

He chases after her. Jimmy looks to Ned.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Can you believe the claws on that sea monster? Trying to pinch my aquacade and turn it into a vehicle for herself?

NED

Talent. They're like children.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Know what she pitched? A one-woman tribute to
"A Chorus Line."

NED

Don't you need a chorus? And a line?

JIMMY NEPTUNE

She figured out a way around it! The last
thing I need is another water dancer. With
Galveston Gus gone, the audience is thirsting
for a daredevil act. Picture this. A
motorcycle. But it's on fire. And there's a
ramp, twenty-feet high, on fire, too. The
rider appears--

NED

Also on fire?

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Better. In chains. She guns the engine, soars
off the ramp, through a hoop -- maybe flaming,
maybe not, I'll have to crunch the numbers --
and lands on the other side of the pool.

NED

Wait. "She"?

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Yes! Coral! At least, it was supposed to be
until I canned her. Still, isn't that an act
that would put butts in seats?

NED

Absolutely.

(pulling out contracts)

But I know another act butts absolutely love.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Of course. The Darlings' contract.

NED

There are a couple of sticking points.
Nothing tsunami-sized, but--

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Whatever you want.

NED

Really? Because I came up with a bunch of
stuff we don't really need, but wanted to see
if we could get away with.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

The Charles sisters are as easy as a lazy river. It's a pleasure to have them aboard. On one condition.

OMIT

INT. AQUACADE - LOBBY - DAY

Lily and Vivian stand back-to-back, silhouetted against the underwater window. They inhale and exhale together.

LILY

I breathe you, and you I breathe.

VIVIAN

One and the same, trust our aim.

Vivian turns, falls backward. Lily catches her. Lily returns her to her feet. Ned arrives.

NED

Great news. Jimmy agreed to all our demands.

VIVIAN

The fresh lilacs? The Egyptian cotton towels?

LILY

The vodka fountain?

NED

All in there. The papers will be ready tomorrow. But you should know everything hinges on one thing. Jimmy is taking the aquacade on a European tour. Signing means you'll go.

VIVIAN

Europe is out of the question. Who would take care of our birds? Place flowers at Charlotte's grave? Besides, Lily has already indulged me enough. So our answer is--

LILY

Yes. Originally, I dragged you here to lift your spirits. I agreed to perform for the same reason, never dreaming these waters could heal me. But for the first time since Charlotte died, I feel it's okay to leave sadness behind and start putting our happiness first.

VIVIAN

(to Ned)

What do you think?

NED

I think Chuck -- Charlotte -- as you've described her, was a wonderful, caring woman. And she, like me, would want you to put your happiness first, too. So I think we're all in agreement when I say -- swim on, Mermaids.

LILY / VIVIAN

We will.

NARRATOR

However, the moment of unexpected solidarity would be interrupted by the unexpected arrival of something else.

ANGLE ON THE POOL WINDOW - As Coral, bound in chains, sinks to the bottom of the pool. OFF this and our heroes' shock...

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

EXT. AQUACADE - POOL - DAY

Ned, Lily and Vivian rush to the pool as Shane pulls an unconscious Coral from the water. A CROWD gathers.

SHANE

(starts mouth-to-mouth)
Everybody, stand back! I was a lifeguard!

NED

Was she attacked?

OLIVE

We saw the whole thing!

Olive and Emerson approach. Olive points to an overturned motorcycle -- its wheels still spinning -- at the pool's edge.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

She chained herself up, hopped on that chopper and rode it like a Hell's Angel in drag till she fell in.

EMERSON

Woulda' been funny if it wasn't so tragic.

Coral comes to, coughs up a bit of water.

OLIVE

Hallelujah, funny again.

JIMMY NEPTUNE

(rushing in)
Coral, what the hell were you doing?

She opens her eyes, plays it hilt like Bette in *"Dark Victory."*

CORAL

Jimmy? Jimmy? Is that Jimmy?

EVERYONE

Yes!

CORAL

I was trying to show you I could do it. The daredevil act you wanted. Foolish me, I confused the clutch with the brake, then everything was a blur. Not to worry, I have the hang of it now.

Olive and Emerson share a look: "No, not really."

JIMMY NEPTUNE

Well, thank heavens you're okay.
(then)
Ya' think you could do it on fire?

SHANE

Back off, dude. This is a serious situation.
Seriously. Like, with law and suits and stuff.

CORAL

Hush, Shane. I'll do anything if it means
staying in the show. Without the aquacade, my
life's worth nothing. Jimmy, I'm sorry I hit
you and called you an ass. I was feeling
hurt, replaced. Is that so wrong?

EMERSON

No. But you know what is? The way your
brother-in-law-slash-manager has his hands all
over your perky-slash-heaving-boobs.

The group looks at Shane, totally busted.

SHANE

This is a certified lifesaving position.

CORAL

(pushing him away)
Get off me, idiot, I told you we were through!

OLIVE

For shame! You were doing the skinny-dip with
your sister's husband?

SLOW ZOOM IN ON LILY - Expressionless as this sinks in.

NARRATOR

*At that moment, Lily Charles had something in
common with a lifelong enemy. Both were
adulteresses. Both had stolen men their
sisters loved. Both were:*

LILY

Disgusting.

EMERSON

You put the evil in Knieval, lady. The
spotlight wasn't the only thing you didn't
want to share with Blanche.

OLIVE

You wanted to have Trickle's pickle all to
yourself. So you fed her to the sharks.

NED

Literally. Well, just the one shark. You fed her to the shark. To be literally literal -- you killed Blanche, Coral!

Coral breaks down. Now, it's real. All eyes are glued on her.

CORAL

I admit, I slept with Shane to spite my sister. I was jealous of her happiness. But I didn't kill her. I couldn't. Despite our differences, Blanche and I were two halves of one flag-waving whole. I loved her, and now, she's gone -- everything is gone. Where do I turn?

VIVIAN

To us. Coral, you will swim with our act tonight.

LILY

What?

VIVIAN

I can't imagine the pain of losing a sister. I would come undone. However, in the past, when I felt incapacitated by grief, getting back in the water was the best cure. It will heal you. Isn't that right, Lily?

But Lily is speechless.

CORAL

Really? I can be a Darling? After the terrible things I've done?

VIVIAN

Of course. There's no sin that can't be washed away.

Vivian pulls a sobbing Coral into an embrace.

OLIVE

Think she's telling the truth, Cod?

EMERSON

Yeah. Too bad, too, 'cause jealous, crazy lady who kills her sister in order to be with the mimbo brother-in-law is always a welcome rest-stop on the motive turnpike.

NED

What if the rest-stop is the same, just on the other side of the road?

OLIVE

As in, the mimbo did it. Wait. Where's the mimbo?

On that, there's the RUMBLE of a motorcycle. They turn just in time to see Shane peeling out on Coral's forgotten chopper.

EMERSON

Getting away with murder.

INT. NED'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ned reports back to Chuck. There's a wrapped gift on the table.

CHUCK

He just rode away?

NED

Like a stingray outta... wherever stingrays get out of quickly. The police searched Shane's van, found the lard-laced hair gel and really specific instructions on how to clone a remote-control gate opener. An APB's already out.

CHUCK

How are Lily and Vivian handling the excitement?

NED

Very well. Emerson asked them if they wanted to quit the 'cade, but they said the show must go on. Their safety is his priority. He'll be patrolling the amphitheater all night. Now for the big news: The Darling Mermaid Darlings picked up a third.

CHUCK

Whaaaat?

NED

That was fake surprise.

CHUCK

It was. Olive's been keeping me updated on all things Charles sisters. But you're right -- it's huge. The Darlings and Aquadolls were the biggest rivalry in or out of the pool for decades. How are the divas getting along?

NED

Vivian is being her usual sweet self. Lily seems cautious, but professional. Coral is thrilled to have a job that doesn't require a flame-retardant one-piece.

CHUCK

That all sounds great. Now, I've waited long enough. What's in the box?

Ned slides it to her. She opens it to find a lovely veiled hat.

NED

A beautiful woman in a beautiful hat in the front row attracts far less suspicion than a beautiful woman in a moustache backstage.

CHUCK

Killer tickets and a top-notch tam. Thank you.

NED

It's the Darling Mermaid Darlings' first professional appearance in years. There's no way you can miss it. Especially since -- and here's a juicy tidbit not even Olive Snook the Spy knows -- the aquacade is hitting the road, and Lily and Vivian are going with it.

CHUCK

"Road"? What road?

NED

A bunch of them, really. Downing Street. The Autobahn. The Champs-Élysées.

CHUCK

Those are European. As in, in Europe.

NED

That's right!

Ned waits for Chuck's joyous reaction. It doesn't come.

NED (CONT'D)

I didn't expect fake surprise, but I didn't expect stunned silence, either.

CHUCK

How could you have let this happen?

NED

I did what you told me. I took care of them, made them feel safe. So safe that they made the choice to do this. I thought you'd be happy.

CHUCK

They think I'm dead. The only way that's been bearable is because I can keep tabs on them both.

(MORE)

CHUCK (CONT'D)

If they need something, I can know about it and try to help or fix it, and while I'm completely removed, in some way -- my way -- I'm still part of their lives. I can't be happy if they're in Europe!

(then)

This is a game changer.

NED

"Game"? What game? This is no game.

CHUCK

You're right. It's my life, and you just modified the rules. Now, I'm going to have to reevaluate the ones that keep me here.

With that, Chuck goes. And OFF a shocked Ned...

INT. DRESSING TENT - NIGHT

Lily sits patiently as Olive makes up her good eye.

OLIVE

I've already achieved "dramatic intrigue" on you. But if I add a smudge highlight...

Olive turns to the mirror. Only now do we see that she has made-up her own right eye with colorful flair.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

Voilà! "Unbridled passion." Which'll it be? Intrigue. Passion. Intrigue. Passion.

LILY

Use your judgment, if you got some left. I'll sit here and concentrate on not throwing up.

Olive looks to Lily's RIGHT PINKIE. It twitches slightly.

NARRATOR

Olive had been briefed on Lily's stage fright. Though her right pinkie was far from curled, the devoted makeup girl leapt into action.

OLIVE

Butterflies making you queasy? What say we drown 'em with a dip in the vodka fountain.

LILY

I never drink and dive. It's disrespectful to the audience and, more importantly, to Vivian.

OLIVE

Where is she?

LILY

Meeting with the sound tech. The underwater
speakers sounded muddy in rehearsal.

A dressing curtain slides to REVEAL Coral, in her costume.

CORAL

Hope it's solved by showtime.

Lily takes in Coral. Their matching costumes make them twins.

NARRATOR

Often, those who share the same sin find understanding in each other. For Lily, this was not to be. Coral had slept with her own sister's husband. Lily had done the same with her sister's fiancé. The symmetry made her feel as if she were looking at a reflection of herself. And since "herself" was what she hated most, she rejected the mirror.

Lily turns away. Coral starts on her own makeup.

CORAL

It's the last thing we need in front of an audience this huge. And boy, is it -- in number and waistline. America. God bless it. Say, what's our choreography at measure one-twenty, again? Are we reverse craning into a ballet leg thrust?

LILY

Full corkscrew first.

CORAL

Sure? I thought corkscrew was last. Hold on. No, that's right -- meaning you're wrong. Corkscrew comes last. You're losing it, Lil.

Lily's pinkie starts to curl. She heads for the vodka fountain.

LILY

Think I'll have that nip after all.

OLIVE

Are you sure--

CORAL

Hey, short round, a little help with my bun?

Olive obliges, but A STRIP OF FABRIC poking out of Coral's bodice catches her eye.

OLIVE

You've got something poking out.

CORAL

Leave it.

OLIVE

Sorry. I see a string, it's gotta be yanked.

Olive gives the fabric a yank. Out comes a gold bow tie.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

Great gold lamé!

In a flash, Olive RIPS Coral's outfit, revealing the finale costume from "A CHORUS LINE."

OLIVE (CONT'D)

You're trying to be a singular sensation! You swam your way back into the aquacade by preying on Vivian's sympathy, only to try and break up the Darlings by stage frightening Lily so you could rule the pool in a one-woman *Chorus Line*. Where's the top hat? I'm gonna shove it up your--

LILY

Olive, excuse us.

(after she goes)

Did you know my sister was born with a hole in her heart? The doctors fixed it, but sometimes it leaks a bit, and stuff gets through. Stuff like you. Vivian may think a woman who sleeps with her sister's husband deserves a second chance, but I don't. You'll always be what you are. A selfish, conniving wretch. It's time to pay the price for that.

CORAL

They always said you kept a shiv in your swimwear. Just try and use it.

Coral snatches up a can of hair spray, wields it like mace.

LILY

No knife needed. I can gut you just by taking away your spotlight. That's what you care most about. Thing is, the Darling Mermaid Darlings is a team that puts each other first. So get in your showboat, and row it to hell.

Never one to back down, Coral tries a different tack.

CORAL

This "putting others first" you're so proud of? I assume it didn't apply to your baby.

LILY

I never had a baby.

CORAL

That's what Vivian told me. We were making small talk; I casually asked if you had a son or a daughter, and she told me neither of you had children. Isn't that strange?

LILY

World's full of spinsters.

CORAL

Thirty years ago, you and I changed next to each other after a show. The seamstress had to let out your costume. Your flippers wouldn't fit your feet. You had that just-knocked-up glow about you. Then, you disappeared for nine months. Where's the kid, spinster? And why are you hiding it from Vivian?

LILY

Breathe another word, it'll be your last. Now, get out.

CORAL

You'll regret this.

A costumed Vivian enters. Coral scoots past her and exits.

LILY

Coral had to cancel. She's sick.

VIVIAN

Oh, no. Then, it's just us. As it really should be, I suppose. Ready?

But Lily is trembling now, her pinkie curled back into her palm.

LILY

I... I can't.

VIVIAN

You can. Lily, we've come this far. This time, don't do it for me. Do it for you.

Lily shakes her head. Hyperventilating, on the verge...

NARRATOR

At that moment, like a light at the end of her tunnel vision, Lily Charles saw it: The gift in the familiar spot, tied with the familiar bow...

ON THE DRESSING TABLE is a BOX. Lily moves to it, opens it with trembling hands TO REVEAL TWO RHINESTONE MERMAID HAIR COMBS.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

...and filled inside with the love of Chuck.

And with this, Lily's panic subsides. Both aunts stare at the combs in amazement.

Lily places a comb in Vivian's hair. Vivian returns the favor.

LILY

It's time.

And OFF two sisters, stronger than ever...

EXT. AQUACADE - NIGHT

Cast members move about, preparing for show time. On high-alert, Emerson patrols the wings.

NARRATOR

Meanwhile, the Darling Mermaid Darlings' one-man security detail spied a lurking shadow...

Out of the corner of his eye, Emerson glimpses something. A SHADOWY FIGURE darting into the sound booth.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

...which called to mind a murderous surfer named Shane.

EMERSON

Oh, hell yes.

EXT. SOUND BOOTH - NIGHT

Emerson approaches the sound booth. The lock has been picked.

INT. SOUND BOOTH - NIGHT

Emerson charges into the room -- gun drawn. In the darkness, the figure stands over the sound board.

EMERSON

Trickle, down! On the ground.

The figure turns. It's Chuck. In her janitor's disguise.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

What you doing up here? Don't you know there's a killer on the loose?

Before she can answer, Chuck's eyes go wide. Emerson whirls, follows her look to another FIGURE lurking in the shadows.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Think again, fool, 'cause I got six hollow-points to prove I ain't playing. Step out with your hands up.

The figure steps from the shadows, REVEALING it's Ned. As he gives them a sheepish grin, we...

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

FADE IN:

INT. SOUND BOOTH - NIGHT

Emerson lowers his gun. Chuck moves to Ned.

CHUCK

What are you doing here?

NED

What are you doing here?

CHUCK

I asked you first.

EMERSON

The person sneaking around in the dark wearing a disguise is usually the one with the most explaining to do. That means you, Dead Girl.

CHUCK

I was just trying to find a good vantage point to watch Lily and Vivian swim.

NED

She's lying. From my excellent vantage point in the shadows, I saw her take their music out of the CD player.

CHUCK

I did not! Look! It's still in there... Because I put it back. I'm so ashamed of myself.

EMERSON

And you're terrible at explaining things, 'cause the more you talk, the more lost I get.

CHUCK

I was happy for Lily and Vivian until their happiness threatened my happiness. In a moment of weakness and panic, I came up here to sabotage their number in the hopes they'd stay.

EMERSON

Despicable. Now, you.

NED

(covering)

I guess I must've thought Chuck would try something rash, so I came up here to stop her.

Olive bursts through the door, hands Ned a CD.

OLIVE

Here's the Pie Hole Mellow Mix 2006 that you asked me get out of my car, ASAP. Know what I realized on my full-tilt run back up here? First, there are a lot of stairs in this place, and second, Lily never mentioned there was a last-minute change of music.

EMERSON

There ain't. Pie Boy was gonna torpedo their performance.

OLIVE

(a gasp)
How could you?

NED

When Chuck's happiness was threatened by Lily and Vivian's happiness, my happiness was freaked out because I thought Chuck was going to leave me and follow them to Europe.

EMERSON

I'm a solo guy by nature, but I choose to affiliate myself with you both. Reason is, when dealing with bad guys every day, you want the best of the good guys in your corner. Normally, you two are as solid as they come. Your moral compasses are permanently set due "the right thing." Clearly, something's screwing with your magnetic fields, 'cause ya'll seem to be real lost. So I'm gonna help you find your way by personally escorting, then physically ejecting, you from the premises. What do you say to that?

OMIT

EXT. AQUACADE - POOL/STAGE - SAME TIME

Blackness. Then, a spotlight hits a pair of clasped HANDS.

REVEAL the hands belong to Lily and Vivian as they lift them high overhead, united, resplendent in all their Darling Mermaid finery. They step to the beat, then DIVE INTO the water.

ANGLE ON THE MOD SQUAD - Spellbound.

NARRATOR

At that moment, Charlotte Charles's walk of shame turned to triumph at the sight of her beloved Mermaids doing what they loved best.

EXT. UNDERWATER - NIGHT

Lily and Vivian not only swim, but swim beautifully, true mermaids, real darlings, as the music continues...

NARRATOR

For Lily and Vivian, the beat of their happy hearts and the blare of the underwater speakers drowned out the sound of impending doom.

CAMERA RISES UP OUT OF THE WATER, REVEALING...

EXT. AQUACADE - POOL/STAGE - NIGHT

Jimmy Neptune, microphone in hand, watches, mesmerized. The little fanboy he once was has fully emerged, watching the Mermaid magic unfold before him...

And totally UNAWARE of the LOBSTER-COSTUMED MAN sneaking up behind him until -- BAM! He's hit on the head and falls, unconscious.

TIGHT ON the microphone as it falls -- and is CAUGHT by fake lobster CLAWS. The man removes his lobster costume head, REVEALING himself to be -- Shane Trickle.

Shane jerks off the costume, steps center stage and yells:

SHANE

Coral!

The shocked audience reacts.

INTERCUT THE POOL/STAGE WITH:

EXT. AQUACADE - WINGS - SAME TIME

Ned, Chuck, Emerson and Olive do, too.

CHUCK

Oh, no! It's--

OLIVE

(à la...)

Shane!

SHANE

I did it for you, Coral!

To our heroes' surprise, Coral steps INTO FRAME next to them. She carries a suitcase.

CORAL

No one asked you to, Shane!

SHANE

Hey, babe. Know what's great about people thinking you're stupid? They assume you can't get away with murder. But I did!

NED

Technically, he didn't pull off the "get away" part yet.

OLIVE

No, he did. Then he came back.

Meanwhile, Lily and Vivian continue to swim. The UNDERWATER SPEAKERS keep them in the zone and unaware of the scene above.

SHANE

Killing Blanche wasn't easy. I had to know about lard and hair gel and cloning remote controls. I've never done that much reading in my life, but I stuck with it. For you!

CORAL

You also sent a shark into water where I was swimming! Did you think about that, professor?

SHANE

Yes! It's why I smeared your costume with the protein secretions of the Red Sea Moses sole.

CHUCK

A little-known shark repellent. He did do a lot of reading.

OLIVE

How long before this winds down? He's talking over their entire routine.

EMERSON

I'm afraid this may just be the wind up.

Emerson nods to the microphone Shane now holds JUST OVER THE WATER. Chuck tries to rush the stage, but Emerson stops her. He draws his gun, moves cautiously closer.

EMERSON (CONT'D)

Hey, Trickle, why don'tcha put the mic down?

SHANE

Oh, I plan to! In the pool! 'Cause the cord will shoot a current through the water and electrocute the Darling Mermaid Darlings! Yah, read about that, too!

EMERSON

Don't make me Waiki-kill your ass.

SHANE

Shoot me, and the Mermaids fry!

CORAL

Oh, who cares? Pop him already!

SHANE

But, I've dedicated my life to your happiness.

CORAL

Shane! You killed my sister, ticked off my boss and now you're totally embarrassing me. How would any of it make me happy?

SHANE

Because, after Lily and Vivian Charles are dead, Jimmy will finally have to make you the star of the show. That's all you ever wanted.

CORAL

Oh. Now I get it.

OLIVE

Coral, a little help.

SHANE

Look at me, Coral. It's all for you.

Shane DROPS the mic -- CAMERA FOLLOWS its slow-mo FALL to the water as the Mermaids swim beautifully, oblivious...

TIGHT ON THE MIC - Inches from the water's surface when it bounces to a stop -- CAUGHT -- by a long-armed pool NET. Holding the net -- is Ned.

ANGLE ON SHANE, incredulous, as -- WHUMP! -- a LIFESAVER slams down over his torso, pinning his arms, compliments of someone wearing the lobster costume head.

NED

Chuck?

The lobster head shrugs a Chuck shrug: "Yeah, it's me."

ANGLE ON THE POOL - The Mermaid Darlings finally EMERGE from below, rising up triumphantly, striking a final pose as the MUSIC CLIMAXES. The crowd is on its feet APPLAUDING. And OFF Lily and Vivian, basking in true happiness at last...

DISSOLVE TO:

OMIT

INT. NED'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A sheepish Chuck enters in her bathrobe. She finds a sheepish Ned nursing his morning coffee. There's a gift on the table.

NARRATOR

But the victory of the previous night faded in the light of a conversation yet to be had.

CHUCK

I hope that isn't for me -- I mean, my half-birthday is over.

NED

And the gifts I got you before triggered crisis and misery.

CHUCK

They did? I don't think I noticed.

NED

Would you give this one a shot?

Chuck opens the box to find A FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH. It's an image of Lily, Vivian and YOUNG CHUCK wearing a half-birthday hat. Astounded, Chuck stares at it.

CHUCK

I don't know this picture. I mean, I remember the day -- the half-birthday after my sixth -- but I've never seen this shot before.

NED

Because I took it. With my junior Instamatic. It was the first time I met your aunts. They were buzzing through town on the way to some far-off and fantastic place. I remember thinking they were the most exciting people I'd ever met.

CHUCK

I totally forgot about those aunts. Thank you for reminding me, and thank you for the photo. I'm sorry I said what I said to you, Ned. You did for Lily and Vivian exactly what I asked you to do. They can't pass up the European aquacade opportunity.

NED

But it makes sense it's not easy for you.

CHUCK

Well, we all want the people we love to stay close to us.

NED

In this case, it's a little more than that. Chuck, I work very hard at being a good boyfriend. I believe that every day, even in the smallest ways, I try to put your happiness before my own.

CHUCK

I agree with that wholeheartedly.

NED

The problem is, the every-day and smallest ways aren't enough. Despite all my earnest efforts, there's one area in which I keep my own happiness first and foremost, front and center. The magnitude of my selfishness is so great, it prevents you from being a hundred-percent happy.

Ned takes a moment, summons his courage.

NED (CONT'D)

I've been lying to you. Not that it's any kind of excuse, but I think it's because I've been lying to myself, too. If Lily and Vivian knew you were alive, the only person who would be in danger is me. That danger itself is a lie. It's irrational fear in danger's clothing, whispering in my ear, saying, "Chuck loves her mom and aunt so much, there's no way she'd spend her life with you if she could still be with them." So I put my happiness first, and told everyone that no one could know you were alive-again. Especially Lily and Vivian Charles.

CHUCK

You didn't know what you were doing.

NED

I know now. And now -- I'm finally putting your happiness before my own. If you want to tell them you're alive... you should.

Speechless. Breathless. Defenseless. None of these can sum up what each of them is feeling. All that's left to say is:

CHUCK

I would.

And OFF this game, changing for better or worse...

INT. CHUCK'S AUNTS' HOUSE - DAY

Lily, wearing a smile and holding a pen, descends the stairs.

NARRATOR

At this moment, another alive-again, life-altering moment was taking place. Flush with the victory of the previous evening and ready to sign a world-tour contract, Lily Charles had begun to experience feelings that had become foreign: excitement, pride, even -- some would dare say -- bliss. These pleasant sensations...

Coral Ramora glides past Lily on her way to the front door.

CORAL

Lily.

LILY

Coral?

Coral exits, but before Lily can fully process this--

A CHINA PLATE flies at her head. She ducks, and it SHATTERS against the wall behind her.

NARRATOR

...were not to last.

On the couch is a stoic Vivian.

VIVIAN

I loved that plate. But the urge to kill you was stronger. Coral and I just had an illuminating conversation. One that helped me put together the pieces of a 30-year-old mystery.

Lily opens her mouth to speak:

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

There's a part of me that always knew. It did seem awfully suspicious when, the moment Charles left me, you began a nine-month apprenticeship at the *fromagerie*, and then returned not knowing the difference between *Rogeret* and *Rocamadour*. But I wouldn't allow myself to entertain those horrid thoughts. That my beloved sister would go behind my back with my fiancé... and have a child. It was Charlotte, wasn't it?

LILY

Yes. I tried thousands of times to tell you, but I couldn't find a way to do it. Why do you think I hid from the world? This vile stain covers me. I couldn't bear to have anyone else see it.

VIVIAN

I understand. I can't bear to see it... or
you... either.

The DOORBELL RINGS.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

I took the liberty of calling you a cab. I
also took the liberty of signing the aquacade
contracts. With my new partner. Coral.

LILY

Where am I supposed to go?

VIVIAN

Anywhere but here.

LILY

I have spent half a lifetime trying to make
amends. I gave up the only man I've ever
loved as well as my beautiful baby daughter,
because I knew the truth would shatter you. I
did what I've done since the day you were
born. Chose your happiness over mine.

The DOORBELL RINGS again.

VIVIAN

You don't have to anymore.

Hearts breaking, they hold each other in a look. Finally:

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

Kindly leave.

DOORBELL again. Lily throws open the door.

LILY

All right!

It's Chuck and Ned, with frozen smiles, and armfuls of champagne
and flowers. Blinking, the aunts stare at this apparition.

CHUCK

Lily. Vivian. I'm alive.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF SHOW