

THE BROTHERS LAUGHTER

A musical journey of two brothers

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CHARACTERS

5 males & 1 female

Danny Meyers:.....A famous comedy writer
Evelyn Katchy.....A know-it all producer
Buddy Meyers..... A laid back comedy genius
Brooks Mcgee.....A Young gay writer of 23.
Rufus Reshman.....Funny N.B.C doorman
Howard Muntz.....The original "Oscar Madison"

SETTING AND TIME

The year is 1980: when writers had to use typewriters and really rely more on honest humor.

The place is a writing room at NBC studios in Burbank, California and in Danny Meyers immaculate condo in Sherman Oaks, California in the same year. Jimmy Carter is fighting to stay in The White House.

In those golden days of television, series comedies were guaranteed a minimum of thirteen weeks running time, before cancelation was possible.

The Brothers Meyers were a solid partnership until Broadway enticed the younger sibling, and series television called out to the older. The Brothers Meyers were once as close as two siblings could have been and then came their argument all about a play that Danny had started and Neil took over. It was a play about a slob and a neat-nick.

The Brothers haven't spoken to each other in eleven and a half years. Now the older brother needs the younger's blessing. That won't be easy!

THE BROTHERS LAUGHTER

A musical journey of two brothers
is

DEDICATED TO:

DANIEL J. SIMON

The very best comedy writing teacher in the whole of Show Business. For five years, this amazing man taught us writers exactly what it meant to write honest comedy. How people shown as "being themselves could be downright hysterical. He gave us terms of endearment that included the words "Deal With It!" "joke-jokes" and "The Honesty of the Moment. His widow laughed and cried at this show and it's writing, saying "Oh, honey, you nailed him good!" Danny taught his brother Neil how to write funny and he taught Woody Allen (referred in the script as "The Woodster") Woody has said: "I've changed a few things around, and I've added a few of my own principles, but unequivocally everything I know about comedy writing, I learned from Danny Simon. And he was such a nice man too! Wherever you are, Danny Simon: make God laugh-- Lord knows, He needs it!"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

AT RISE:

(We are in a writer's room at NBC television for a great situation comedy show pilot. It is July of 1980, in the days before personal computers, e mail and the like. The head writer is DANNY MEYERS, a late fiftyish short pudgy Jewish man who is bald except for the tufts of white hair that protrude on either side of his head. He wears thick glasses on his forehead ala Harold Prince of Broadway musical comedy fame. Neurotic DANNY is the head writer for this new show called "GOOD MORNING FRISCO". At DANNY's left is another writer by the name of EVELYN KATCHY. EVELYN is new to comedy writing having been famous for writing soap operas for years. Dear EVELYN is in her late 50'S, and is a wise cracking, in-your-face, and overall pain-in-the-ass, but she is a very gifted writer--just not in comedy-yet! At DANNY's right is a young writer named BROOKS MCGEE. Brooks is gay, in his early 20'S, but is bar none the cutest heartthrob you have seen in your life. You almost get the feeling that once girls realize he's not into women, they will all do something desperate--maybe all at once! The last person in the room is BUDDY JENNINGS, in his late 60'S: an older but very wise comedy writer. He has invented a lot of comedy series and comedy specials over the years. The one thing that both men agree one hundred percent upon is the absolute necessity of honesty in every comedy script. People laugh at comedy because it is honest. They actually see themselves in the characters shoes.

(CONTINUED)

Without that absolute truth what a writer has is simply people who are giving out one-liners. There is also a spinet piano that sits in the room! As THE LIGHTS go up, we see DANNY, BUDDY and BROOKS standing around a very large goldfish bowl with a huge opening. EVELYN's face is plunged into the bowl and DANNY holds her head briefly there. Poor EVELYN almost swallows the damn gold fish until she forces her face out of the bowl and the water begins spurting out that's been forced into her mouth, all over everywhere.

EVELYN

You big dumb shit! What the hell was that supposed to prove?

BROOKS

I wo uldn't mind knowing that, myself

BUDDY

Get o ut of her way, group, this could really get ugly!

EVELYN

Damn you, Danny Meyers. Damn yo u. Damn yo u. Damn yo u!

DANNY

Shut up and learn something.

EVELYN

(EVELYN grabs some Kleenex and wipes her face)

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Oh the hell with that. And the hell with you. I think I swallowed some seaweed.

BUDDY

Protein!

EVELYN

Protein, my bac kside.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

What have we learned here?

BROOKS

She has a conflict with the fish?

BUDDY

The fish is smarter than she is.

EVELYN

The hell with the go d-damn fish, I'm learning I need new writers. I could have drowned in there.

DANNY

What else?

EVELYN

I could have swallowed the fish.

DANNY

The fish isn't that stupid. What fish wants to exit the world through the bottom of you?

BROOKS

So what's the lesson here?

DANNY

It was funny. It was slapstick. It was Mack Sennett.

EVELYN

It's the basis of a law suit, you big schlopy dork!

BUDDY

But it wasn't honest.

EVELYN

The hell it wasn't. I honesty almost drowned.

BUDDY

I don't think so. It was just an easy laugh. A joke-joke! No honesty! Only it was action instead of words. And we can't write dialogue like that action. It's predictable.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Besides, you take in more water with a mixed drink. (A BEAT) That's why we can't hang our entire series on this dumb blonde. She's not a fish out of water. She's a fish in water, and can't tell the difference!

EVELYN

Even if The blonde is a great choice?

BUDDY

Who says a blonde can make a choice?

EVELYN

That makes you either chauvinist or cockamamie gay.

BROOKS

Wrong tree, auntie, I'm the gay guy! --remember? I can be objective. (A BEAT) As long as a cute guy doesn't pinch my backside first.

EVELYN

(EMOTIONAL) Who says a dumb blonde can't be honest? All blondes are hysterically honest. And this girl is honestly stupid.

DANNY

Honestly stupid? You know with that kind of logic, we ought to elect a blonde to be Vice President of the United States, just so she can be "honestly stupid."

BROOKS

I guess we better start over. Even though we've been at this for three whole days! No blondes. So what is funny?

BUDDY

Say kumquats-- that's funny. Blondes are human kumquats.

DANNY

But the kumquat is funnier!

EVELYN

Somebody spare me.

(CONTINUED)

BUDDY

Danny's right. Lots of people are human kumquats (A BEAT) They're honestly as dumb as they look.

DANNY

Or worse.

BROOKS

What's a kumquat?

DANNY

"Conflict with a peel" You put it in your mouth, and you think it's a tiny tangerine--

BUDDY

But it's not....

EVELYN

Surprise!!

DANNY

That's what you go for. (A BEAT) The surprise. Marriage is the biggest surprise of them all. Every day is like walking into a dimly lit room, and in that room full of shadows, your life just loves yelling...."Surprise" (A BEAT) Funny thing, before you recover from the shock, the marriage is over, and it's time to pay for the party.

BROOKS

I always thought anything blonde was funny. "A blonde walks into a bar... And you're going to get a laugh.

EVELYN

Oh fine. Chauvinist and gay. That'll bring us back to the Fourth Century.

DANNY

Didn't they teach you anything at USC?

BROOKS

They got Milton Berle to teach a guest course.

DANNY

I rest my case. Don't forget, I'm one of the guys who put "funny" in his mouth. Milton teaching theory is like depending on a custard pie to hit you in the face.

(CONTINUED)

EVELYN

Oh ho, so now you think a writing education is cheap, huh? I've been raising my nephew most of my life. Paying for everything he's ever needed. USC ain't cheap.

DANNY

Yeah, it has to pay for football!

EVELYN

In fifteen seconds, Mr. Meyers, you are going to get such a hit. Let's say Mars. I'd use the moon, but Gleason's used that line already.

BUDDY

Down, lady, down, it was nothing personal.

EVELYN

I'm sure the fish feels otherwise.

DANNY

They just asked me to teach at USC, myself. Maybe I should! Comedy today is in big trouble.

EVELYN

You know, for a guy who's always said that he didn't like writing, you sure the hell chose a funny profession.

DANNY

Yeah, but it was that chaotic, competitive environment that kept reeling me in.

BUDDY

Hook, line and laugh track.

DANNY

Well, I still say that we go with the grandmother like I keep telling you.

EVELYN

Maybe the fish needs to tell you this: Grandmothers are never, never, never funny enough.

DANNY

Dear God.

BUDDY

Three nevers? Three nevers don't make a right.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

They don't even make a left.

EVELYN

Look, yo u birds, it's 1979. Almost a new decade! I have no kids. (A BEAT) Thank yo u, Go d. (ANOTHER BEAT) I am, however, the guardian of a gay man, who ain't ever go ing to have any kids, himself, and even if this sounds terribly pre-arranged, I am dreading "the so-called go ddamned go lden years" bec ause there is nothing funny about being a grandmother!

DANNY

Want funny? Then yo u write her funny. You get into her head.

BUDDY

Or her bed.

DANNY

(DIRECT TO BUDDY) I'll leave that delight fo r yo u.

EVELYN

How do yo u try to make an old lady funny?

DANNY

If yo u try to make something or somebody funny-- yo u never will. It's the honesty of the mo ment that matters. Peo ple being themselves can be abso lutely hysterical.

EVELYN

I was being myself in that cockamamie fishbowl-- there was go d damned nothing hysterically funny about it! Besides, all of this sounds too co mplicated for me.

DANNY

Co mplicated my bac kside! You just have to think abo ut it more, not just dash down the first cheap joke that pops into yo ur head.

EVELYN

The only thing that "pops into my head", Mr Meyers, is the migraine I get just listening to yo u.

BROOKS

Okay, loo k everybody, let's not fight.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

There's nothing wrong with a great fight. Great fights can be hysterical.

BUDDY

Just ask my wife.

DANNY

What did she throw at you this time?

BUDDY

A brick-- attached to her lawyer's head shot.

EVELYN

A lawyer who wants to be an actor?

BUDDY

If you could be the new Perry Mason, "always be right" and never pay expenses, how great would that be?

DANNY

I think that's the ambition of every woman in the world.

EVELYN

My ambition is to take that god-damned fish and put into your underwear! How great would that be?

BROOKS

Okay, let's focus here. We have a script to write. Let's forget about the blonde.

BUDDY

I'm not old enough to forget about blondes.

DANNY

From your mouth to God's typewriter.

BROOKS

(TO DANNY AND BUDDY) Stop! Please. We have a great opportunity here, and that's because we have a "Plan B" character. We can make that crazy weatherman the star! He steals the show. That segment of his.

EVELYN

That was my idea! "Where in the World Weather" Pure genius on my part, even if I must be modest.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Oh must yo u? Pshaw!

EVELYN

(IGNORING DANNY) He gives the viewers the weather in Bolivia or The Galapagos Islands just to mix things up.

DANNY

(EXPLODING) Oh the hell with the weather in Bolivia! The hell with the weather in the Galapagos Islands. Who told yo u that weather was funny? All that crazy guy can be is a gimmick that we can call upon once every couple of episodes, not hang the whole cockamamie series on.

BUDDY

Co ckamamie-- I lo ve that wo rd.

(EVELYN gives BUDDY the look of "death!")

DANNY

So let's go with the grandmother in her seventies. She's an old lady. For Christ's sake, everybody old is funny.(A BEAT) Look at me!

EVELYN

An example of natural selection .

DANNY

Is that a fact? Hey, Mrs. Know-it-all, do we all wait here for yo u to get older, so that yo u finally get funny?

EVELYN

My husband says I've been hysterical fo r years.

DANNY

Entertaining whom? If you were a mo nkey with an organ grinder, I think the organ grinder wo uld be funnier.

EVELYN

And yo u and the Brillo pads at home make quite a co mbo.

DANNY

You're just jealous.

(CONTINUED)

EVELYN

Yeah, when I die I want to come back as the reflection in your soap dish.

BUDDY

There's nothing wrong with being tidy. Besides, Danny will get married again.

BROOKS

Sure he will. Maybe his wife will take him back.

EVELYN

I don't think they do re-runs in marriage.

DANNY

I'm not looking for double alimony, boys and girls.

EVELYN

If you promised never to see her again, Millie might pay YOU double alimony.

BROOKS

I don't have that problem. Maybe I'm an optimist. I would have slept with anybody that promised me the moon. But only after they promised to make me a star!

DANNY

Never go to that "Milky Way" huh?

BROOKS

No, I gave up acting and started masturbating for television. (A BEAT) My nickname was "The Reluctant Virgin"

DANNY

I knew there was a reason for the network's policy of not hiring kids under twenty-three.

BROOKS

Here we go again!

(BROOKS just shakes his head and goes for a re-fill of coffee)

BUDDY

Give him a break, chief.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Why?

EVELYN

Because he's my nephew, that's why-- you used to love him. You used to remember all of his birthdays.

DANNY

I remember lots of people's birthdays. I remember my therapist's birthday, my bookie's birthday. I remember Abraham Lincoln's birthday.

BUDDY

How?

DANNY

Every year I toast a big painting of him with a jig of whiskey.

BUDDY

Then what?

DANNY

We trade a few honest laughs, and exchange crazy ex-wife stories.

EVELYN

That's enough-- Look, gifted one, I hate to break this to you, but the entire concept for this show is based on my premise. It's a package deal.

BUDDY

Are we going to go over that "it's my premise thing" again?

EVELYN

Yes, we are. Life is tough ain't it?

BUDDY

Not half as bad as "the laughs" in this room.

DANNY

Oh, big deal, a premise-- a network show today has gotta have more going for it than a cheap premise. You're not making Lasagna here-- just piling layers of material, one upon the other is nothing but fattening!

(CONTINUED)

BUDDY

And the audience gets real tired of the indigestion.

EVELYN

Look, Danny, I'm the gal who pitched it, I'm the one who got it sold, and I'm the lady who hired you! Otherwise, Mr. Seventies has-been, you'd still be home scouring the pots and pans: one of your great natural pastimes!

DANNY

Seventies has-been? Want to see a list of my credits from the last decade?

EVELYN

One episode here, two episodes there. You might have even struck it rich with three! When's the last time you were a head writer? It was the 1960's and black and white was in full regalia. But I fought for you.

BUDDY

And she's still wondering why she did that!

DANNY

I partnered with Sid Caesar, Mel Brooks, Larry Gelbart, and my brother. I'm the best in the business.

EVELYN

You're the business all right-- and you're still leaving it in little piles, all over my life.

DANNY

Okay, okay, I'm a pain in the ass sometimes.

EVELYN

Sometimes?

DANNY

Okay, But admit it, you needed a known head writer to get the network to commit to an entire season instead of the usual thirteen weeks. You pitched a great idea? Fine! Wonderful! How you gonna write it? How you gonna keep it going? A great pitch does not a series make. You want to know what makes something funny? Well, sweet stuff it's not shtick! It's not a gimmick!

(THE MUSIC comes up for the song)

(CONTINUED)

BUDDY & DANNY

It's honesty!

(DANNY begins to sing "IF YOU'RE
GONNA BE FUNNY!")

DANNY

(sings)

IF YOU'RE GONNA BE FUNNY AND MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH
HAVEN'T FOUND YOU A CLOWN, GIRL OR A BUMBLING GIRAFFE
IF YOU HAVEN'T A CUSTARD PIE IN YOUR PATH
YOU BETTER HAVE HONESTY

BROOKS AND BUDDY

(sing together)

BETTER HAVE HONESTY!

DANNY

YOU BETTER HAVE HONESTY THERE IN YOUR PLANS!

BUDDY

(sings)

IF YOU'RE GOING FOR LAUGHTER AND NOT CHEAP APPLAUSE
WANT PEOPLE TO SCREAM WELL THE REASON THAT'S CAUSED

DANNY & BUDDY

(sing together)

EVERY DAY! WE SAY THAT'S HONESTY

DANNY

IF YOU TRY TO BE FUNNY YOU JUST NEVER WILL
DONT FORCE DOWN THAT LAUGH CAUSE IT'S ONE BITTER PILL
YOU BETTER HAVE HONESTY!

BROOKS, DANNY & BUDDY

(sing together)

FOR JUST LIKE BAD MEDICINE, THE CROWD HAS THEIR FILL
THEY'LL JUST GROW REAL QUIET AND TERRIBLY ILL
AND JUST TURN THAT CHANNEL GIRL

DANNY

HONEST THEY WILL!

(CONTINUED)

BROOKS, BUDDY & DANNY

(sing together)

DONT FORCE DOWN THAT LAUGH OR THEY'LL MURDER YOU STILL
YOU GOTTA USE HONESTY TO MAKE UP THE BILL

BUDDY

IF YOU'RE GONNA BE FUNNY AND MAKE PEOPLE HOWL
YOU GOTTA BE HONEST OR THROW IN THE TOWEL
IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT HONESTY, ITS MAYHEM SO FOUL

DANNY & BUDDY

(sing together)

IF YOU'RE GONNA BE FUNNY AND MAKE PEOPLE HOWL
YOU GOTTA BE HONEST OR JUST THROW IN THE TOWEL
IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT HONESTY

BROOKS, BUDDY & DANNY

(sing together)

IT'S MURDER SO FOWL, SO YOU BETTER HAVE HONESTY
FOR JUST LIKE MEDICINE
THEY'LL SOON HAVE THEIR FILL
THEY'LL JUST GROW REAL QUIET AND TERRIBLY STILL

DANNY & BUDDY

IF YOU WANT TO BE FUNNY, GET INTO THE HEADS
OF EVERY GREAT CHARACTER, MAYBE INTO THEIR BEDS
FIND OUT HOW THEY TICK IT'S A GREAT LITTLE TRICK

BROOKS, BUDDY & DANNY

SO YOU GOTTA USE HONESTY.

(There is a DANCE SEQUENCE here that
involves all of the guys that really
illustrates the point.)

BROOKS, BUDDY & DANNY (CONT'D)

IF YOU TRY TO BE FUNNY, YOU'LL NEVER DO THAT
YOU'LL WIND UP JUST BROKEN, LIKE A TIRE, YOU'RE FLAT

DANNY

IF YOU'RE GONNA BE FUNNY
MAKE THEM FEEL THEY'RE RIGHT THERE
IN THE CHARACTER'S SHOES, SITTING RIGHT IN THEIR CHAIR

(CONTINUED)

BROOKS, BUDDY & DANNY

(sing together)

YOU GOTTA BE HONEST, OR ITS CURTAINS OUT THERE
BETTER USE HONESTY, GEORGE WASHINGTON HONESTY
WHEN YOU WANT PEOPLE TO CARE
FOLLOWED BY LAUGHTER BETTER USE HONESTY THERE.

EVELYN

Yeah, For Sid, that's great. For Mel, it's wonderful, but remember, hot shot, Milton Berle could come out dressed as Grandma Moses, and get a laugh. And there's nothing honest about that!

DANNY

Drop the other shoe.

EVELYN

Honesty is for drama not comedy. I'm the one who pitched this thing!

DANNY

Hopeless.

EVELYN

Look, if you guys want to write this my way- Good! As you just said, we have a one year contract. Everybody stays employed for at least a year.

BUDDY

And we all change our names on New Years Eve.

EVELYN

As I said, boys, you want to write it my way? Stay! You don't? I understand Soupy Sales is looking for new work. Maybe those dogs of his can be comedy philosophers this time out!

DANNY

If we write it the way you want it, good old NBC will go out of business. The peacock will commit suicide on national television -- and in living color! And as sad as that moment may seem, the honesty of the moment might just be hysterical!

(CONTINUED)

EVELYN

(VERY PISSED) Honesty, huh? Funny thing, Mister Clean, yo u were never that honest when yo u were married. You drove yo ur poor ex-wife, my best friend, Millie abs o lutely, one thousand percent, bonkers! You drove yo ur own kids neurotic and smack into space cadet ac ademy! Your therapist has o nly three clients-- yo u, Millie and me! You and yo ur "cleanliness is next to godliness " ac t is pure crap.

(Much louder-- every one is surprised at how angry she has gotten.)

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Crap! Now you want to push this neat and tidy fo rmula-driven way to write way down everybody's go d-damned throat. That makes me mad! That makes me go d-damn boil! Why in the hell does everything we do fo r this pilot have to be yo ur way? Everything is yo ur way! The c haracters are yo ur way. The color of the water in that miserable toilet is yo ur way! Maybe the goddamn fish is doing everything yo ur way! You're a control freak!, Danny Meyers. You've always been a "coc kamamie" co ntrol freak! The last time the two of us talked, Millie s aid she was so mad at you, she was thinking of being the second married Meyers to land a veal chop with a vengeance!

(DANNY tries now to calm her down.)

DANNY

Hey. Do n't take me that seriously. In the first place, my marriage to Millie was a long time ago . We didn't get along. I couldn't teach her things. Our pots and pans failed to communicate! So let's separate the personal from the business, okay? I am who I am. Warts and all. So what if I fo llo w people around with air freshener? What's wrong with that?

BROOKS

He really does that?

EVELYN

Oh sure-- this is the same guy who could have been the lo go for "Looney Tunes"

(CONTINUED)

BUDDY

But, Evelyn, that's what he was, and that's who he still is. Mister neat nick! And that's who he's always going to be! And that's honest! Not to mention, funny as hell.

EVELYN

And why would that be funny?

BUDDY

Because Danny is the only guy in the universe who's toaster is cleaner than his toilet.

EVELYN

I still say this whole thing stinks and I'm not gonna stand around here and...

BROOKS

Can we stop fighting here? Okay, Evelyn got it pitched and sold, and Danny's reputation in the business guarantees a year of work in a thirteen week world. Who cares who has done what as long as we get what's funny on paper? As far as honesty goes, don't you people listen to yourself? You were pretty damn funny, just now, and everyone of you was simply being yourself, not some character in your head. Being yourself is funny. That's why we laugh at ourselves. Honesty is what made us laugh at Lucy.

(THE MUSIC begins for the SONG.)

BUDDY

The "L" word. Perfect.

BROOKS

Or Fred and Ethel Mertz.

DANNY

The mouths of babes save us again.

EVELYN

That's not what you said before, brother!

(BROOKS now begins to sing the song "We're Getting Nowhere, Fighting Like This")

(CONTINUED)

BROOK

WHAT ARE WE HERE FOR? WHAT IS THE GOAL?
WHERE IS THE JACKPOT? WHAT ARE OUR ROLES?
IT'S TIME TO KISS AND MAKE UP AND FIND US SOME WELL EARNED BLISS
CAUSE WE'RE GETTING NOWHERE FIGHTING LIKE THIS

WHY DONT WE TRY HARD TO FIND US A CLUE
FIND OUT EXACTLY WHAT WE ALL NEED TO DO
IT'S TIME TO PUT AWAY PRIDE THE EGO INSIDE MAKES US MISS
CAUSE WE'RE GETTING NOWHERE FIGHTING LIKE THIS

PUT AWAY YOUR REPUTATIONS: THEY DONT PAY A THING
THEY DONT PROVIDE SENSATIONS WHEN YOU'RE DANGLING BY STRING

SO LETS PUT TOGETHER OUR BRAINS ON THIS SCRIPT
MAKE OUR BEST FUNNY BEFORE WE GET RIPPED
IT'S TIME TO KISS AND MAKE UP AND FIND US
SOME WELL EARNED BLISS
CAUSE WE'RE GETTING NOWHERE DOWN AND OUT NOWHERE
WE'RE GETTING NOWHERE FIGHTING LIKE THIS

EVELYN

I hate to admit it, but the kid is right.

BROOKS

Hurray! I was right.

DANNY

The hell with Aristotle, I go tta study the persuasio nal
sec rets of yo uthful thinking.

EVELYN

Okay, okay, white flag time. I'm tired of arguing. What
the hell? What have we got to lose? The network bo ys
will tell us how right I am. So, where do we go from
here?

DANNY

We start at the very beginning.

EVELYN

A very go od place to start.

DANNY

Hey, Miss "Rodgers and Hammerstein" can we fo cus
here please?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANNY (CONT'D)

We start with the original pitch: "The cheapest morning show on television can't find anybody sane to co-host with its popular and sexy headliner until his wise cracking and very opinionated grandmother shows up as a guest one morning and rocks San Francisco like no earthquake ever dared."

BROOKS

That is so hot! There is so much potential in that!

EVELYN

You got that, Brooks, I thought of it.

DANNY

It's days like these that make me want to forgive my brother.

EVELYN

Let's not open that kettle of fish, shall we?

DANNY

Okay. Okay.

BUDDY

Look, people, it's gotta be a special occasion that the grandmother is on the show in the first place.

BROOKS

Maybe it's her birthday!

EVELYN

Her seventy-fifth birthday!

BROOKS

And that sexy host guy...

EVELYN

Monty

BROOKS

Yeah, sexy Monty.

EVELYN

Down, boy, down

BROOKS

I so want him.

(CONTINUED)

EVELYN

He's only a character.

BROOKS

Okay. Okay. What if the sexy host of the show puts his grandmother on the show as a co-host for her birthday present.

DANNY

That's great, kid. Keep going.

(THE MUSIC starts for the song)

BROOKS

And at first, everything's cool. But then granny gives her political views on the show shocking just about everyone.

EVELYN

Just about everyone conservative.

BROOKS

There's lots of that in Frisco, in a liberal kind of way!

EVELYN

Really?

BROOKS

Really. And then the ratings go through the roof!

(BROOKS begins to sing the song "Going Like Sixty")

BROOKS (CONT'D)

(sings)

ALL OF SAN FRANCISCO WANTS GOING LIKE SIXTY
A CRAZY OLD LADY WHO TELLS IT LIKE IT IS
SHE DOESN'T KNOW SUBTLE
AND THE ACT OF REBUTTAL IS A STUNT
SHE'S BEEN PULLING FOR YEARS

ALL OF SAN FRANCISCO WANTS GOING LIKE SIXTY
SHE TELL YOU OFF IN A FLASH
SO DON'T GET HER MAD. SHE'LL GIVE YOU HELL
AND YET SHE WILL SELL YOU ON
A FANTASTIC PARAGON OF THE CRAZIEST VIEWS

(CONTINUED)

ALL OF SAN FRANCISCO WANTS GOING LIKE SIXTY
IN FACT SHE'S DOING EIGHTY THERE ON THE ROAD
LOOK OUT CAUSE SHE'S CRAZY AND NOT A BIT LAZY
TO ROLL UP HER SLEEVES FOR THINGS THAT NEED TO BE DONE
THE LIBERALS ALL LOVE HER FOR THE THINGS THAT SHE DARES
CONSERVATIVE ACTION IS GOING NOWHERE
THEY OPEN THAT GOLDEN GATE
CAUSE "GOING LIKE SIXTY" IS GREAT
THE WILDEST OLD LADY ON THIS SIDE OF TOWN

BROOKS (CONT'D)

All of San Francisco suddenly wants "Going Like Sixty"-
that's the nickname she gets-- like crazy!

EVELYN

I guess that is pretty honest. That could really happen.

DANNY

I think she's getting it.

BUDDY

Big time!

DANNY

Thank you, God.

BROOKS

But maybe granny is a real slob. Can we write honestly
about that?

DANNY

I have. Honest to God, Brooks, you wouldn't believe
what I started!

BLACKOUT
END OF THE SCENE

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

AT RISE:

(It is now well into the evening of the same day. The clock on the wall reads: seven-thirty. It's been one hell of a day! DANNY, BUDDY, EVELYN and BROOKS have been at this writing effort all day with damn few things established, but at least they've got the title of the show and a few principal facts down pat that are very required here. EVELYN is snacking on King Oscar Sardines, putting them right into her mouth from the tin can.)

EVELYN
God, these things are good.

DANNY
Okay, lets review what we've got.

BUDDY
The show title is "Going Like Sixty"

DANNY
Our main character's name is Betty Jane Kander: a seventy-five year old grandmother.

(EVELYN pops another sardine into her mouth from the tin gaining the attention and consternation of DANNY.)

EVELYN
(SMACKING HER LIPS) Right now, I feel like a seventy-five year old grandmother!

DANNY
Yeah and lay off the sardines. You're beginning to smell like a seventy-five year old grandmother.

EVELYN
Really?

(CONTINUED)

(She pops yet another sardine into her mouth from the can! BUDDY walks towards the piano)

DANNY

Maybe we can convince the fish you almost swallowed to join the chorus in that can!

BROOKS

A musical fish!

(BUDDY plays the piano and sings)

BUDDY

(sings)

DOWN IN DE MEDDY IN A ITTY BITTY POO.
SWAM THREE LITTLE FISHES AND A MAMA FISHIE TOO.
SWIM" SAID THE MAMA FISHIE,
SWIM IF YOU CAN...

DANNY AND BUDDY

(sings)

AND THEY SWAM AND THEY SWAM ALL OVER THE DAM"

EVELYN

Hey, Ish KaBibble what has this got to do with anything?

DANNY

You swallow sardines like your Aunt Gussie!

BROOKS

Oh dear God, I'd almost forgotten about her.

BUDDY

I met her once.

BROOKS

I always had to kiss her when she came over to visit.

EVELYN

I sure she appreciated that, Brooks.

BROOKS

And then she'd hand me a silver dollar for kissing her.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

At my wedding reception. She's was the antique trying to catch the bouquet. Somehow she caught it! (A BEAT) I think she tried to give the bride the same silver dollar.

EVELYN

Now she's got the headstone at Mount Sinai that's catching all the pigeons.

BROOKS

At her funeral, I still had to kiss her lying in her casket.

DANNY

Oh dear God!

EVELYN

I'm sure she appreciated that too, dear!

BROOKS

Maybe that's why there was a silver dollar right next to her head.

DANNY

And now I remember where Evelyn gets her nasty fish habit. Most seals ate less sardines than than Aunt Gussie. (A BEAT) Present company excepted.

EVELYN

A girl's gotta keep up her strength

DANNY

Girl?

BUDDY

I thought she put in her will that she wanted to be preserved and put on display like they do with all those Catholic saints.

EVELYN

She did.

DANNY

But the rabbi nixed that foolishness, Jews don't embalm the dead.

(CONTINUED)

BROOKS

Good thing, I would have still had to kiss her when we went to visit her.

BUDDY

Without funding.

DANNY

Maybe we should use somebody dead to keep this cocaine thing alive! Use a little reverse psychology.

BROOKS

One more time! Can we focus here?

DANNY

Another Polaroid moment-- Focus away.

BROOKS

Okay. So-- the owner of the television station is a really rich, but terribly cheap, Texan cowboy, and his twenty-three year old blonde bombshell daughter runs the station for daddy.

BUDDY

And she's a real airhead.

BROOKS

And she wouldn't know talent if it fell on her.

DANNY

You don't need to recognize talent that falls on you. (A BEAT) Just steer it in the right direction.

BROOKS

As I was saying...

DANNY

All right, so how do we establish that this is the cheapest morning show in the universe?

BUDDY

They tape the damn thing the night before.

DANNY

Now that's cheap.

(CONTINUED)

BROOKS

And that's funny!

DANNY

Which is why that scatterbrained weatherman does that "Where in the World Weather" routine.

BUDDY

Because if the show is taping the night before, the poor Bozo has no clue what the morning weather really is.

DANNY

Finally a reason for this bird!

EVELYN

So he takes the forecast he's got and hopes for the best! Then he ushers in "Where In The World Weather" before any one in the viewing audience gets wise.

DANNY

Good work, group.

(DANNY begins to sing the song "Were Finally Getting Somewhere")

DANNY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

(sings)

LOOKS LIKE THE FOG IS GONE AND THE SHIP LOOKS SAFE
FINALLY WE CAN GO ON: WON'T FALL ON OUR FACE
WE'RE FINALLY GETTING SOMEWHERE

EVELYN

(sings)

THE PREMISE THAT WE HAD WHEN THIS WHOLE THING SEEMED BAD
LOOKS VERY PROMISING AND THAT MAKES ME GLAD
WE'RE FINALLY GETTING SOMEWHERE

BROOKS

(sings)

WE'VE GOT US A PREMISE AND A HELL OF A PITCH
WE'VE GOT US SOME CHARACTERS: A BIMBO A WITCH
GOING LIKE SIXTY AND WE DON'T HAVE A HITCH

(CONTINUED)

COMPANY

(sings together)

LOOKS LIKE WE'RE GETTING SOMEWHERE

DANNY

AND IF WE STAY HONEST THERE'S A HELL OF A CHANCE
WE'LL KEEP THE NETWORK HAPPY
AND WE WON'T HAVE TO DANCE.

COMPANY

LOOKS LIKE WE'RE FINALLY
THANK GOD WE'RE FINALLY
WE'RE FINALLY GETTING SOMEWHERE

DANNY

MIGHT EARN AN EMMY

COMPANY

LOOKS LIKE WE'RE GETTING SOMEWHERE.
WE'RE FINALLY GETTING SOMEWHERE

(The doorman: a big burly Polish guy by
the name of RUFUS RESHMAN now opens
the writing room door and walks in.)

BUDDY

Well, hello, Rufus. Is the intercom out?

RUFUS

Can't use the intercom, sir.

DANNY

Is it plugged in?

RUFUS

About as plugged in as you are, Mister Meyers.

DANNY

Oh cute-- another doorman who wants to be a
comedian.

RUFUS

Yeah, and if this new series of yours don't work out. I'm
told by people downstairs, who know, that YOU may be
the next doorman.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

That isn't the way you earn a tip.

RUFUS

With all due respect, sir, the last time you tipped me, you were writing "My Mother The Car!"

BUDDY

Ouch!

BROOKS

"My Mother, The Car?"

EVELYN

Oh yes, the epitome of all honest comedy.

DANNY

Hey, not everything that's dished out to us is... (A BEAT)
Caviar.

EVELYN

Cute, kid.

DANNY

So, tell me, oh great mind with noble eavesdropping ears, why didn't you just use the telephone?

RUFUS

Because he's standing right by that telephone, Mr. Meyers.

DANNY

Maybe I missed something here. Who is standing right there by the telephone?

RUFUS

Your brother, sir.

BUDDY

Oh my.

RUFUS

Big as life, sir.

DANNY

I don't talk to "his bigness" any more.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS

But you're brothers."The Brothers Laughter." That's what Ernie Kovacs used to call you two.

DANNY

Oh yeah? Well now were "The Brothers Pouting." We've taken a vow of silence.

BROOKS

Are we talking about that real famous Broadway playwright guy?

DANNY

That's the one, kid. That's my brother!

BROOKS

How 'bout that? The amazing Peter Meyers.

DANNY

Would you please not say those four words together? You're gonna jinx the script.

EVELYN

Why are you two still fighting?

DANNY

I got burnt by a brother I knew for all of my life, but I'm not a glutton for punishment like you've been in your relationships. I'm not going back for more of the same. "Once bitten, twice shy."

BUDDY

But good fighting is great conflict! Conflict is good!

RUFUS

Danny's been saying that for years.

DANNY

It is good--if the damn thing's in a script. On the stage of living, it's cockamamie lousy!

BROOKS

But why?

DANNY

Because in reality, boy, you never see the cockamamie last line of the play coming. But that's real life.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANNY (CONT'D)

We're imitating life here.

(A BEAT) Make believe with angst! And in make-believe where the Prince is a loser and Cinderella is fooling around with another Prince Point-in-his-Pants, you gotta have conflict: it's the heart of every story. You don't have conflict by page three, you haven't got a story for Christ's sake!

EVELYN

Maybe I missed that in "The Days Of Our Lives."

BUDDY

Writing a soap opera? How the hell can you miss conflict on one of those?

BROOKS

I'd like to know that myself!

EVELYN

You don't! It's something that you don't have to think about making up. We writers had the names of little crises, catastrophes and terrible diseases written out on little slips of paper that we kept in two big expensive bowler hats.

BUDDY

Catastrophe and disease in a fashion statement.

EVELYN

You drew a slip of paper from the hat, and voila! Instant conflict.

DANNY

Dear God.

BUDDY

Did you add water or swallow the pieces?

(A BEAT)- BUDDY takes a shot glass and fills it with the water from the fish bowl-- and he captures the poor frustrated thing and raises his glass in a toast!

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Hail, Moscow!

(CONTINUED)

EVELYN

(IGNORING HIM) If a star got temperamental you just walked around the set with one of those bowler hats, walked up to the big conceited jerk and then you smiled and said demurely "Hello, darling. Pick a slip, any slip we're helping out fate today." Boy, did their pissy attitude change then.

DANNY

That's you all over: "The Merchant of Vengeance"

EVELYN

And after we'd killed him off, if the star wanted to come back with his hat in his hands...

BUDDY

More hats?

EVELYN

We just make all the time that he's been gone all a great big dream.

BUDDY

(ADDRESSING THE FISH IN THE SHOT GLASS) See there, bitty poo, your recent torture was nothing but a dream! Imaginary conflict!

BROOKS

Mr. Berle told us students that he thought that God had to be a writer, himself-- because "conflict" fascinates the hell out of Him.

BUDDY

I really think it does.

DANNY

Bingo! I think Milton finally hit one.

BUDDY

And considering his golf scores, that's a miracle! Milton has been crazy for years!

RUFUS

But not as crazy as the day Danny moved in with Howard....

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

That was conflict mixed in a glass. We were very close.
And that was without sex.

BROOKS

Sex?

DANNY

Down, boy, down.

BROOKS

You used to write with your brother, didn't you?

DANNY

Those are the operative words, kid: "used to" "Mr. Big Shot didn't want to play second banana anymore. He left me stranded in the 1950'S. Off he went to Broadway.

BUDDY

But you guys did Broadway together.

DANNY

We did a couple of Revues-- "Catch a Falling Comet" or some such nonsense and something with "New Voices"-- I never could tolerate it. It's not exactly something the Nederlanders would be proud of. And by the way, there's nothing wrong with being a second banana. Ronald Reagan played second banana to a chimpanzee. He hasn't done so lousy. Especially if he becomes the next President of the United States this November.

EVELYN

I'd rather vote for the monkey.

BROOKS

You were an amazing team.

DANNY

Like a trapeze act. Well, boys and girls, I wasn't the one who let go in mid-air.

BUDDY

You were an incredible twosome.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

I used to think so.

BROOKS

What made you stop?

DANNY

Broadway did nothing for me. One critic in one night could close a show forever! And Professor-- I used to call Peter "Professor" when he was a kid, because he was always writing funny things on the blackboard at school - he thought Broadway was the only way a guy like him could really express himself. So I told him, "Go do what you have to do and when you fail, you can always come home and I'll take you back."

EVELYN

Who could resist an offer like that?

DANNY

Look, I taught that boy how to write funny. Peter was funny inside of himself, but he couldn't be funny out loud unless you prompted him. He was a straight man's dream. Costello with a phoned-in Bud Abbott. He was shy, horribly shy. He used to whisper jokes in my ears.

BUDDY

Still would if you let him.

DANNY

Well, I ain't doing that. Got me?

BROOKS

What was this terrible thing that he did?

DANNY

I don't want to talk about it.

EVELYN

Now who's not being honest?

DANNY

Oh now, you want honesty. And Jimmy Carter still wants to be president.

(CONTINUED)

EVELYN

Yeah? Well as long as I'm saddled a year with you, why the hell not!

DANNY

You really don't know this story?

EVELYN

Guess I miss all the juicy stuff.

DANNY

Maybe you were busy eating sardines.

EVELYN

That was a cheap shot.

BUDDY

And not very honest.

DANNY

Honest? Honest by my own petard!

RUFUS

He gave me a tip to tell you the news in person.

DANNY

Ah hah! There's your honesty. That should be enough of the personal in-your-face variety. Hey Rufus, go tell my brother that his long lost older sibling has just become the new Wizard of Oz, and holy baloney, he's just escaped with Richard Nixon in a balloon. Dick's looking for reality, and I'm off to find the Yellow Brick Road of Laughter.

BUDDY

I think you lost a few bricks along the way, yourself!

DANNY

Look, he's a very successful Broadway playwright. He writes wonderful shows. Even the book for a few musicals. Me myself? I'm either a character or an inspiration in most of them. Julius Caesar hasn't been a character in as many shows as me.

EVELYN

I don't think he's jealous.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS

Or worried.

DANNY

(TIGHT IN HIS FACE) That would describe your future,
Rufus: dead and worried.

BROOKS

Finish your thought, Danny. Just why are you angry?

BUDDY

It goes back to the days when I was living with Howard
Muntz.

EVELYN

If you call that living.

DANNY

I wasn't all wrong.

EVELYN

You couldn't be married. You couldn't be a roommate.

BUDDY

Nobody's perfect.

DANNY

And while I was married, I never cheated. Not one day.

EVELYN

It's what you did on a daily basis to poor Millie.

BROOKS

How bad could that be?

EVELYN

How bad could that be? Honey, Danny's the only guy
whose doilies are breaking in new doilies.

BROOKS

This could be a play all by itself.

RUFUS

You just said the secret word.

BUDDY

Without Groucho.

(CONTINUED)

BROOKS

I did?

DANNY

Yes, you did. That's the problem.

BROOKS

Oh really?

RUFUS

Pretty funny play if yo u ask me.

DANNY

Yeah? Well, a little credit for it wo uld have been nice. I started it.

BROOKS

You did?

DANNY

I started it. I lived it. I breathed it. I taught it. 1965. The damn thing ran for two years.

RUFUS

Not to mention the movie three years later.

BUDDY

And the televisio n show.

BROOKS

Guess comic books and two fighting celebrities kidnapped my attention pretty go o d.

EVELYN

Why are we bringing this up? Again?

BUDDY

Because we're stuck on conflict and the honesty of the moment, and were fac e to fac e with the honest-to-god King of Co nflict: Mister Felix Unger.

RUFUS

The "immaculate perception".

(CONTINUED)

EVELYN

Virgin Bavarian Nuns aren't that tidy! Next week, maybe you can teach the goddamned fish some of your "Miss Manners" memoirs.

DANNY

So I was a little tidy.

EVELYN AND BUDDY

A Little?

DANNY

How sweet!

BROOKS

Auntie claims you used to wash playing cards.

DANNY

Poker was a clean game when I played it!

RUFUS

Not even the face cards cursed.

EVELYN

They wouldn't dare.

BROOKS

I remember this story now.

DANNY

Oh goodie, after all these years, recognition at last!

BROOKS

And the story I heard was that you started to write a play all about your daily battles with Howard.

DANNY

Only daily?

BROOKS

So you wrote only a few pages of the play?

DANNY

Fifteen and two thirds pages I will have you know.

(CONTINUED)

RUFUS

It was fourteen. I've been around you for a long long time, Danny.

DANNY

I kept the last page and two thirds under wraps.

RUFUS

Under wraps? Like some great secret?

DANNY

Like losing your virginity.

BROOKS

I wouldn't know about that.

DANNY

You're kidding?

BROOKS

I've come close. (A BEAT) Just couldn't finish with it!

EVELYN

Neither could Danny!

DANNY

I was too close to it.

BROOKS

You couldn't have been any closer than I was.

BUDDY

That's okay, kid, Danny never got that close to a woman. And he was married with a couple of kids!

DANNY

Oh, very amusing. As that old saying goes: "Vos you there, Charley?"

BUDDY

I have a news flash for you, bub. For three whole weeks after your breakup with Millie, you confessed to me every morning like you were a school boy. If I wasn't there, it sure felt like I was.

RUFUS

Why don't we go back to the original question?

(CONTINUED)