

~~MIKE. Close. Catholic.~~

~~WYLER. Unattractive.~~

~~MIKE. Your call.~~

~~WYLER. No, you're cute.~~

~~MIKE. Really, how cute?~~

~~WYLER. Don't ... milk it, you're cute.~~

MIKE. Fair enough. Anything else?

WYLER. Uh.... You were married. To each other.

MIKE. No.

WYLER. Lovers?

MIKE. Not likely. I'm queer.

WYLER. Yeah well, that's not exactly a brick wall ending for her.

MIKE. So —

WYLER. More just a speed bump.

MIKE. You're queer?

WYLER. Yeah.

MIKE. Oh. So. And you think I'm cute?

WYLER. Let's not — I'm not pursuing that right — You really don't do charming. You're direct.

MIKE. That's 'cause I tell the truth. Only people who are deceitful have to be charming.

WYLER. Well maybe a little charm —

MIKE. Probably right. I'm over compensating for lessons learned young. What else did she tell you about me?

WYLER. Uhm ... *(He looks in the book again.)* — impossible Polish last name which is —

WYLER and MIKE. Stabinsky.

MIKE. True.

WYLER. And that you discovered her and created her which is probably —

MIKE. True.

WYLER. False. True? Really?

MIKE. Yeah.

WYLER. But you — I thought you just said — about not being charming but truthful and —

MIKE. Overcompensating for lessons learned young.

WYLER. Got it. So — what do you mean, you created her?

MIKE. Why do you want to know?

WYLER. I'd like to know what makes a person this way —

MIKE. And you want revenge?

WYLER. Maybe. Or get my money back. Make sure she doesn't do it again.

MIKE. Revenge strikes me as such the colossal waste of time. Look. What do you do?

WYLER. I'm a writer.

MIKE. Why don't you just go off and write something. Forget about Alexa.

WYLER. I can't write.

MIKE. *(Sarcastically as he gets the coffee.)* Yeah yeah, you can't write.

WYLER. I mean I can't write.

MIKE. Are you serious? *(He is taken aback.)*

WYLER. It isn't just the money that Alexa stole from me. She stole my arrogance. The arrogance it takes to just shamelessly write something and assume someone, anyone might read it. The gall to think I might be a success. It's gone. Killed. I can't. I'm blocked. I can not write.

MIKE. Oh God. I had no idea. I'm so sorry. I —

WYLER. Just tell me about Alexa. Or, maybe I should leave. I mean, if you —

MIKE. No. No. Don't leave. I'll tell you.

WYLER. Really?

MIKE. Why not? My painting is going slowly. You're cute. You think I'm cute.

WYLER. I'm not —

MIKE. Enough tar?

WYLER. Thank you.

MIKE. OK, Alexa Vere de Vere.

WYLER. Where'd her name come from?

MIKE. We'll get to that later. Before Alexa it was Brenda.

WYLER. Brenda?

MIKE. Brenda Gelb. *(Alexa appears as Brenda. A younger girl with long blonde hair and a rough edge or ten. She is in the Eighties.)*

ALEXA. Brenda Gelb and Mike Stabinsky. WE are soul mates, got it?

MIKE. I had graduated from Philadelphia College of Art and had gone back home to West Reading, Pennsylvania to earn money for —

ALEXA. New York City.

MIKE. And had taken a job working tables in some Amish all you can eat nightmare and. And also working there was a waitress.

ALEXA. Mike, we gotta get to New York City. We can save enough money if we really scrape, till September and we can get a big loft in Soho and you can paint and I can —

MIKE. She was just out of high school and she had dreams.

ALEXA. — be a writer.

WYLER. To be what?

MIKE. A writer.

ALEXA. I can be really great.

WYLER. *(Laughing.)* Of course. A writer.

ALEXA. I mean my insights are so uncanny and my vocabulary is just so whatever it's so huge.

MIKE. So we scrounged and saved and got ourselves to New York.

ALEXA. Us. Living in New York. Total everything of it all!

MIKE. It was a great time. We found a hole in the wall space and just, you know homesteaded. I painted. Brenda wrote. We worked graveyard shift at a diner. It was — it was OK, you know?

ALEXA. Mike, we gotta get some money quick.

MIKE. But nothing good lasts long.

ALEXA. I just heard that our beloved day job is going belly up.

WYLER. What happened?

ALEXA. They're turning our greasy spoon into a trendy restaurant with models as waiters.

MIKE. Everything that was good ran away.

ALEXA. We need something fast or it's back to West Reading.

MIKE. And we all needed something fast to replace it.

ALEXA. Art. And fame.

MIKE. And we all found it. Art and fame.

~~ALEXA. Art is exploding, Mike.~~

~~WYLER. Art.~~

~~ALEXA. You can't see your way through the East Village with-~~

out stepping over a million galleries.

WYLER. And fame.

ALEXA. Art art, everywhere you look.

WYLER. Of course.

ALEXA. And people are buying. And you're better than anybody else out there. How soon can you get a show together? We could make some money here. *(Mike turns to her. They are in the scene together. They are in the Eighties. Wyler watches.)*

MIKE. Brenda —

ALEXA. Mike, you're so good. Look, I know this guy who works down at the copy center and he's semi-dating this guy with a column and he says that when you get a show together, I told him about your work, he is way way intrigued, and he said that his demi-boyfriend would definitely be there. And write it up!

MIKE. I can't get a show together by —

ALEXA. Don't you get it? If you do it, someone will write about it. And if somebody writes about it, somebody else will read about it. And if somebody else reads about it they figured if somebody wrote about it, it must be good and then they buy it! How many paintings do you have done?

MIKE. Seven. Really only one, but the last six I could rush and —

ALEXA. Why do you take so long? What about this one?

MIKE. That's only a color study.

ALEXA. They don't need to know that.

MIKE. Brenda!

ALEXA. It's a seller's market. And seller's markets don't last forever.

MIKE. Art is eternal.

ALEXA. Eternal isn't as long as it used to be.

MIKE. No gallery —

ALEXA. What gallery? We take all the furniture in this loft, right? We move it to one end? Put a drop cloth over it. We have a gallery. Some rancid cheese, some three dollar wine, we've been to enough of these openings, I mean what's the overhead?

MIKE. What would we call it?

ALEXA. I don't know. Something big and foreign and grand.