

FRANCIE & FRANK

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INT. SUPERMARKET AISLE - AFTERNOON

PRELAP: Jaunty female whistling.

A British supermarket littered with DAYTIME SHOPPERS. The owner of a wide brimmed peach coloured hat sashays down the aisle of the clinically lit British supermarket. Her tight blonde curls bounce off her shoulders, her gloved hand swinging a woven basket.

As our heroine waltzes down the aisle A YOUNG MOTHER stops shouting at her SCREAMING TODDLER, an OLD COUPLE fall silent and a SMARTLY DRESSED WOMAN finds the back of a cereal packet less fascinating.

They all stare as she walks by.

FRANK (V.O.)

Every day, at 1.30 p.m. on the dot,  
Francie Mary Ellen Veronica Elkin  
visited her local high street  
supermarket to buy groceries.

As she puts down her basket and reaches for a bag of sugar, we finally see her.

FRANCIE MARY ELLEN VERONICA ELKIN. A 25 year old ray of god damn sunshine in a peach vintage dress. She is a budget Vivian Leigh, a reoccurring character on *Little House of the Prairie*. And she would look cool if it wasn't for the sincere grin etched across her face.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Francie led a simple life. One of  
virtue and impeccable manners.

She aims her grin at the smartly dressed woman, who offers a freaked out smile back, then scuttles away.

INT. SUPERMARKET AISLE - MINUTES LATER

Francie's gloved hands reach for a fresh apple, but she stops when she hears high pitched giggling.

She turns her attention to the source of laughter, a LOVED UP YOUNG COUPLE a little way up the aisle. Francie stares at them, her expression dramatically wistful. Everything she does has a sense of melodrama to it.

FRANK (V.O.)

Although she thought herself content  
with her little life, sometimes she  
got this ache in her heart, and  
somewhere further south of her heart,  
which she couldn't quite rationalise.

Then an IMPATIENT MALE SHOPPER shoves her out of the way, roughly knocking her out of her day dream. But she is all smiles.

FRANCIE

Do excuse me sir, I drifted off for a brief spell. Must be this heat. It's warmer than two cats fighting in a wool sock!

Francie's southern American accent floats jauntily out of her body, completing her look. A parody of a Southern Belle.

The impatient shopper grabs a couple of tins, and in a gruff cockney accent:

IMPATIENT MALE SHOPPER

Go back to Kansas love.

As he walks off:

FRANCIE

I'm from Louisiana. But have a peachy day!

INT. SUPERMARKET - MINUTES LATER

Francie heads towards a relatively empty checkout. A blonde disinterested 28 year old cashier, whose name tag reads SARAH, spots her and grimaces.

FRANK (V.O.)

The highlight of Francie's day was when she got to gab with Sarah, her dearest bosom buddy.

Francie bounds over with her shopping.

FRANCIE

Good afternoon Sarah, ain't it a day?

SARAH

Yep. Sure is. A day.

Sarah starts scanning her items, desperately trying to avoid making eye contact. Francie gestures to her beige work shirt.

FRANCIE

That's a mighty fine colour on you. I bet you get plenty of gentleman callers coming in here wanting to bend your ear about the price of ham.

Sarah focuses on scanning Francie's purchases.

SARAH

That's £35.78

Francie dolls out notes.

FRANCIE

Well alright. See y'all tomorrow.

And with that, Francie's whistling recommences and she heads for the exit of the supermarket.

FRANK (V.O.)

Francie's optimism shielded her from many truths, but little did she know, her life was about to change in ways she could not imagine.

INT. 'THE CITY TIMES' OFFICE - DAY

FRANK, a 28 year old wet rag of a man sits behind a reception desk in a busy modern open plan office. He wears a suit two sizes too big.

A large illuminated sign on the wall behind his head reads 'THE CITY TIMES.'

Frank stares at his computer screen and sips from a bottled milkshake.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Everyday, at 1:30 p.m. on the dot, Frank Leonard sat at his desk and dreamed up stories that would put his mark on the map. Tales of such heart, such beauty, such truth that all those who read them would explode with passion.

ON THE SCREEN: An empty word document, and a blinking curser.

He looks up from his computer screen, as a group of COOL LOOKING PROFESSIONALS head in his direction.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

As well as being a fantastic wordsmith Frank was also a amiable well liked gentleman, whose quick wit and easy looks made him a hit in the workplace.

Frank smiles keenly at them as they saunter pass.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Morning!

Some offer him a curt nod, the rest talk amongst themselves and ignore him.

Frank gets out his superhero branded lunch-box and pulls out a sad looking jam sandwich. The phone rings. He puts down the sandwich, and clears his throat. Smile on. Show time.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Good morning The City Times, Frank  
 Leonard speaking. How can I help?

A meeting room door bursts open, and out strides the bombastic 55 year old MOIRA HUNTINGTON, followed by a slew of JOURNALISTS. She barks out instructions.

MOIRA  
 I want a team in Heathrow scouting for  
 Susan Cho. I want to know what  
 happened with her and Tom Blaine. And  
 I want to know before The Post does.

She stops abruptly when she gets to Frank.

MOIRA (CONT'D)  
 (to Frank)  
 Stand up please.

Frank gets up, still on the phone. The short cord prevents him from standing up straight.

MOIRA (CONT'D)  
 Yes, you can hang up on them.

FRANK  
 (into phone)  
 Sorry, bye.

He stands up straight, trying to hide the abject fear on his face. Moira studies his skinny tall frame.

MOIRA  
 What's your fastest 10k?

FRANK  
 I don't know --

MOIRA (CONT'D)  
 Great. You're the runner.

And with that Moira, and her crew, stride away from a puzzled Frank.

GARY (O.S)  
 Frank?

Frank looks in the direction of the voice.

The cardigan clad GARY, 31, stands by the exit with ROCHELLE, 23, focused on her phone and JOHNNY, 45, a squat man with a scowl on his face. Gary gently beckons him over.

INT. GARY'S CAR - MINUTES LATER

Gary drives, Rochelle sits in the front, whilst Frank is squeezed into the back seat with the robust Johnny. He has spread his legs wide, like a dominant pit-bull with huge balls.

But Frank doesn't mind. He stares out the window in a blissful haze.

FRANK (V.O.)

Frank knew if he played his cards right today he could go from unpaid intern to copy writer then copy writer to feature writer. And then would come the money, and then the women -

Johnny's voice crashes into his fantasy:

JOHNNY

This is such bullshit. Some shitty actress gets cheated on by her rock star husband. Whoop di fucking do!  
(in Frank's face)  
I was there when they tore down the Berlin wall.

GARY

Alright, Johnny, we all remember the past.

JOHNNY

Whatever.  
(to Frank)  
Do you give a shit about this?

FRANK

(enthusiastically)  
Not if you don't!

JOHNNY

Aren't you a little old to be an intern?

FRANK

I'm only 28. And Charles Bukowski was 35 when he first got published -

JOHNNY

And Rochelle's 12, and she's the head of digital media so -

ROCHELLE

I'm 25. Actually.

Gary eyes Frank in the car mirror.

GARY

Frank. What do you want to do after your internship. You want to be a journalist?

FRANK

(eager)  
More than anything.

Johnny laughs cruelly.

JOHNNY

(imitating Frank)  
More than anything.

The car hits traffic, and slows. A deflated Frank looks out the window, and spies Francie. She walks along the street swinging her basket, grinning like the cat that got the cream.

Frank can't help but smile at the sight of her. She spots him beaming as she approaches the car. She offers him a little wave.

He lifts his hand to wave back, but then Johnny leans over and leers at her.

JOHNNY

What a freak.

The car speeds up. And she's gone.

EXT. HEATHROW AIRPORT - LATER

Frank, Gary, Johnny and Rochelle walk at a pace, weaving their way around PASSENGERS, AIRPORT STAFF and other PRESS as they head towards the terminal building.

Johnny gets out his phone as they walk and shows Frank a shot of the glamorous SUSAN CHO on the red carpet.

JOHNNY

If you see her, you follow her and you call us. Simple as.

Frank nods, a little scared.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Oh, and if it looks like we won't get there in time, you stall her. Simple as.

Frank nods, a little bit more scared.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

And ask her why she broke up with Blaine. Get a quote. Simple as.

They approach the terminal doors.

GARY

Here we go -

Gary and Rochelle enter the building, but Johnny grabs Frank before they head inside.

JOHNNY

One more thing. Watch out for her -

He shows Frank a head shot of NANCY HIGGENS on his phone, a striking 45 year old brunette with curly hair and a determined grin.

Frank can't hide his excitement.

FRANK

She's gonna be here!?

JOHNNY

Put it on ice mate. It's Nancy Fuckin' Higgens. The enemy.

Frank nods. Johnny heads in. But Frank stands outside for a beat, breathing deeply and trying to calm down.

Pre-lap of voice over:

FRANK (V.O.)

But Frank was about to learn that there is always a little rain before a rainbow.

INT. HEATHROW AIRPORT. LATER.

The voice over continues as a sweaty Frank races towards Gary and Johnny who are buried amongst a sea of reporters. Rochelle is still on her phone.

FRANK (V.O.)

And even then gold is not always at the end of that rainbow. Sometimes there is just one pissed off leprechaun.

Gary is scanning the departures screen.

Frank slows down as he approaches them, breathing heavily and attempting to talk, but giving up and shaking his head.

GARY

Fuck. Moira is not gonna be happy.

FRANK

Can I go to the toilet?

JOHNNY

No, you have to piss yourself.

Frank looks between them, to check whether this is true.

GARY

Save your bladder. Next departure isn't for half an hour. And grab us a coffee on your way back.

INT. HEATHROW TOILET - MINUTES LATER

In front of the sinks Frank sniffs his armpit and recoils at the scent. He then looks at himself in the mirror.

FRANK

No you have to piss yourself. Tosser.

INT. HEATHROW COFFEE SHOP - MINUTES LATER

Frank is in a long queue at a coffee shop on his phone. He gets out his phone. Calling MATILDA.

FRANK

(into phone)

Hey Mads! Guess what? I am working on a story! A proper one! Isn't this great? I think I'll definitely get kept on after this. Also, could you make pasta bake for tea. Thanks. Okay bye.

He hangs up and looks around the coffee shop. His eyes land on a woman wearing a baseball hat and sunglasses, drinking a coffee and trying her best to remain hidden behind mountains of luggage.

Frank gets out his phone and looks at a picture of Susan Cho. Yep, she is unmistakably Susan Cho.

Frank steps out the queue and calls Gary.

FRANK

(into phone)

I found Susan Cho!

INT. HEATHROW AIRPORT. CONTINUOUS.

Gary, still by the departure boards, clicks his fingers at Johnny.

GARY

(into phone)

Frank, you genius! Go talk to her. Tell her we are on her side.

INT. HEATHROW COFFEE SHOP. SAME TIME.

FRANK

(into phone)

What?

INT. HEATHROW AIRPORT. CONTINUOUS.

Johnny is now listening in on the phone call.

GARY

(into phone)

We might not get to you in time. So tell her that her husband is a scum bag and this is her chance to get *her* story across. Do it now before she bolts. You've got this.

Johnny grabs the phone.

JOHNNY

(into phone)

Don't fuck it up. Intern.

INT. HEATHROW COFFEE SHOP. SAME TIME.

Frank hangs up. He stares at Susan Cho. Takes a deep breath and walks towards her with purpose.

But just as he is at her table, he freaks out and takes a sharp right. He does a full circle walking straight into a striking brunette holding a coffee.

NANCY

Watch it! Jesus, I nearly spilled my drink.

It's only NANCY Fuckin' HIGGENS.

As Frank stares at Nancy, time slows down. He has an expression of abject worship on his face:

FRANK (V.O.)

When Frank was 16 years old he learnt the correct use of the terms figuratively and literally because he thought it would help him seduce girls. It didn't. But now none of that mattered, because he realised he had actually been saving himself for a *woman*.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Nancy Fuckin' Higgens.

NANCY

What?

FRANK

Sorry. I'm Frank. I'm a huge fan. I loved your book -

NANCY

Which one?

FRANK

The one...about...all of them. My names Frank. I said that. Hi.

He puts out his hand, which she shakes firmly, a little bemused by the whole exchange.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I work for The City Times. Well, I intern there, I want to work there.

This peaks Nancy's interest.

NANCY

Good for you. What are you doing here Frank?

Frank remembers his training. He tries to act coy.

FRANK

Oh. Nothing. Just hanging out.

NANCY

Come on, you can tell me. Journalist to journalist.

FRANK

Okay! I'm looking for Susan Cho actually. Like you I bet. She's right over there! I'm about to go talk to her... any tips?

Nancy looks in the direction Frank points in.

NANCY

Thanks, Frank. Almost missed her.

And with that, she pushes past him, and heads for Susan.

FRANK

Wait!

But it's too late. Frank, frozen to the spot watches in horror as Nancy walks past Susan Cho's table, and then 'trips' over Susan's handbag, stumbling a little and spilling her coffee on herself.

Susan quickly jumps up to help her, and offers an 'injured' Nancy a seat at her table. They start talking, and Susan laughs. Then Nancy gets out her notepad to scribble down whatever she is saying.

The manipulation is poetic to watch.

Gary, Rochelle and Johnny rush into the coffee shop, just in time to see the two getting cosy. They angrily turn to Frank.

INT. MOIRA'S OFFICE. DAY

A sweaty Frank sits in Moira's office facing an empty chair. He gets up and looks through her blinds. She is outside the door talking to Gary and Johnny.

Johnny is gesturing to Moira's office angrily, and doing the tosser hand gesture at frequent intervals.

They all suddenly look back at him in the office, staring at them. He lets go of the blinds and runs back to the seat.

Moira enters and takes a sit behind her desk. She flips her computer screen around.

MOIRA

You see The Daily Post?

Frank peers at The Daily Post website.

The headline reads *SUSAN CHO EXCLUSIVE: David stole my heart and my youth.*

FRANK

I'm sorry, I didn't think -

MOIRA

(interrupting)

Nancy used to intern here. Did you know that?

Frank shakes his head.

MOIRA (CONT'D)

From the moment I met her I knew. You can just tell with some people.

She flips the screen back round.

MOIRA (CONT'D)

I don't see a future for you here Frank and pretending otherwise would be a cruel punishment for us both.

Off Franks dejected face.

INT. CITY TIMES RECEPTION. LATER

Frank puts a sad looking cactus into an oversize cardboard box. He then picks up a The City Times pen for good measure, and plops it in.

He picks up the box. He takes one last look around:

FRANK (V.O.)

As Frank headed out into the big wide world, to scare it with his talent, he knew he would be missed at The City Times.

But everyone in sight carries on with their work. No one pays much attention to him at all.

As he gets to the exit he puts down his box, and runs back to return the pen.

INT. FRANCIE'S HALLWAY - LATER

Francie opens the door to the hallway, takes off her hat and gloves and places them on an ornate stand. The hall has wood panelling and is stylized to resemble a rich southern townhouse.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Francie loved coming home to see her mama. Because, as the saying goes, a girl is never truly alone as long as she has her mama. And a box of bakers yeast.

The door to the living room is slightly ajar. We can just about see the long greying hair of a woman lying on a chaise lounge.

Francie shouts through the door:

FRANCIE

Sorry I'm late mama. I'll fix up supper now.

Francie scurries down the hall with her shopping past several photos of family members, all in similar old fashioned deep south attire. She stops by a large black and white framed photo of a 35 year old HANDSOME MAN in an old fashioned army uniform. He stands in front of a fighter plane, and beams at the camera.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

Hi papa.

INT. FRANCIE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Francie enters the kitchen and turns on a light. The kitchen is pastel, with elaborate fixings and hosier cabinets. An old fashioned gas stove sits in the corner.

Francie puts down her basket and grabs two glasses. She pulls a pitcher of iced tea out of the fridge and pours from it.

She shouts through to the living room:

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

I was thinking mama, maybe it's time for me to go somewhere other than the shops. Just to the talkies, or for walks by the river. With your permission of course --

Francie takes the ice tea through to the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room is filled with dressers, taxidermy animals and many crochet blankets.

A antique ceiling fan whirls round noisily and mama's hand lolls off the antique chaise lounge.

Francie pushes open the door, puts down the glasses of iced tea.

FRANCIE

It might be good for me to have some friends. Lady friends.

Francie looks up. She trails off when she catches sight of her motionless mama. She stands in shock for a beat.

INT. FRANCIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Francie sits on the sofa and hugs an ugly cushion. She stares at the now empty chaise lounge. Her face is blank.

We see the green uniformed legs of a PARAMEDIC enter the screen.

PARAMEDIC

Is there anyone we can call for you?

Francie shakes her head, and then remembers her manners. Her smile returns.

FRANCIE

Would you like some peach cobbler? It has an extra thick crust on it. Perfect for summer.

PARAMEDIC

No thanks.

(beat)

It was sudden. She didn't feel any pain.

Francie nods, and looks down until the green legs leave. When she looks up, she notices a flowery tin box on the floor, by the chaise lounge.

Francie picks it up, confused.

She opens it to reveal a large pile of cash, and a folded up handwritten note. She unfolds the note and begins to read.

INT. SUPERMARKET. LATER.

Francie is searching desperately through the aisles of the supermarket.

Her blonde curls are a dishevelled mess and her flamboyant get up is a little more raggedy than normal. She looks wildly off-kilter.

She spots a male cashier stacking tins. His name tag reads BOB.

FRANCIE

Hi Robert. My name is Francie and I am looking for my good friend Sarah. Have you seen her please?

BOB

I think she clocked off about an hour ago. She's probably at The Duke's Head.

FRANCIE

What's a Duke's Head?

BOB

It's the pub next door. Free shot with every soft drink on a Friday!

(beat)

I finish in ten minutes, I'll come with you if you like? Buy you a soft drink.

He wiggles his eyebrows at her suggestively.

FRANCIE

(as pleasant as sunshine)

Thank you very much Robert, but it would not be appropriate for an unmarried lady such as myself to be out after sunset with an unmarried man she does not wish to court her. Good evening to you.

She strides off.

BOB

(to Francie's retreating back)

It's okay, I'm married!

INT. THE OLD DUKE'S HEAD - NIGHT

The pub is rammed with the drunken Friday night crowd. Frank sits at a table with Sarah.

He has his sad cardboard on the table in front of him along with several empty beer bottles.

He is pretty drunk.

FRANK

Charles Bukowski was 35 when he was first published, so I still have *some* time.

SARAH

Have you told Matilda?

FRANK

Not yet. Shit. I said I would start paying rent soon.

SARAH

You don't pay rent?

FRANK

Unpaid internships are famously unpaid.

SARAH

Yeah, but isn't this like your third one?

FRANK

She doesn't mind.

SARAH

(skeptically)

Uh huh. I wish I had a mum like yours.

FRANK

She's not my -- whatever, when I become a successful writer I'll dedicate my first Pulitzer to her.

SARAH

I don't think journalists win Pulitzer's.

Frank spots Francie over Sarah's shoulder, desperately looking around for her best friend.

FRANK

I know her!

Sarah turns and looks. And slinks down so far in her seat she is practically under the table.

FRANK (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Sarah slyly nods at Francie, whose appearance is beginning to cause quite a reaction amongst DRUNKEN REVELLERS.

SARAH

(whispering)

She's one of the supermarket nut jobs. We have this whole photo gallery of them in the staff room. There's 'Rubs Tins on her Bum Lady,' 'Cat Food Eater Craig.' And her. 'Freaky Francie.' She turned up two months ago. Always comes to my till and tells me weird stories about her mama and sunsets and shit.

(beat)

She thinks we're like, friends.

At that moment Francie spots Sarah. She waves frantically, fighting through the crowd to get to her. But Sarah quickly grabs her stuff.

SARAH

Well, this has been fun! See ya.

Sarah dashes out of the pub. Francie freezes, and forlornly watches her leave.

Frank watches the dejected Francie, a solitary frozen girl in a sea of bodies:

FRANK (V.O.)

The great philosopher Dr. Seuss once lamented, "set your hunches free to wander and follow them where they roam. Follow your hunch." And right now Frank had a hunch that there was something special about this girl.

Francie is barged into by HANNAH and GILLIAN, a couple of tipsy twenty-something's in body con dresses and make up that looks more like warpaint.

HANNAH

You alright hun?

Francie is rubbing the side of her arm.

FRANCIE

I'm as happy as a dead pig in sunshine.

HANNAH

You're hilarious. What's your name?

FRANCIE

Francie Mary Ellen Veronica Elkin.

HANNAH

I'm Hannah, this is Gillian and we --

Hannah grabs Francie by the hand.

HANNAH (CONT'D)  
Are doing shots!

Before she can protest Francie is dragged to the bar, watched by Frank.

INT. THE DUKES HEAD - HALF AN HOUR LATER

Francie, Gillian and Hannah are seated at the bar. There are several empty shot glasses in front of them. Francie has not touched hers, but Hannah and Gillian are too drunk to notice.

HANNAH (CONT'D)  
And I said no Jason, you can not come round here -

GILLIAN  
With your prick!

HANNAH  
Yeah, you prick with your prick, expecting me to tug on it because you fancy it. What about my needs?!

Hannah gestures to one of her shots.

HANNAH (CONT'D)  
You having that?

Without waiting for an answer, she downs it. Frank, beer in hand, takes a seat next to them. He begins to earwig.

GILLIAN  
You got yourself a fancy man Franny?

FRANCIE  
Bless your heart, no.

GILLIAN  
Why not?

FRANCIE  
I ain't met the right gentleman yet. It's my mama and my papa's fault really. They were so in love, that it's a mighty high step to reach.

GILLIAN  
How did they meet?

FRANCIE  
Oh, it's quite a story.

GILLIAN  
Yeah?

Francie suddenly finds herself the focus of an attentive audience. And eagerly warms to the role.

FRANCIE

Well, my mama was one of the most beautiful girls in Cedarsville, Louisiana. When she was 18 she had gentleman callers wanting to drink sweet tea with her from dusk to dawn, but she had a sharp tongue in her head, smarts for days, and she couldn't find a gentleman who could equal that. That is until she went to the Harvest Dance, and saw my papa.

Francie's voice fades out, and Frank's narration takes over.

FRANK (V.O.)

And then Frannie told a story of love at first sight, of two hearts colliding of -

FRANCIE

A real man who wasn't afraid to try, even if it meant he failed.

FRANK (V.O.)

And how miscommunication pulled these love birds apart. Tearing them asunder.

On this Francie pulls her hands apart.

As Frank narrates we skip through time, cutting between Francie's passionate gesticulations and Frank, Gillian and Hannah - each one totally engrossed by her story.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

After much conflict and a bit where her dad fought off a wild bear and her mum's crocheted blanket came first at the town craft show, Francie reached the nail biting conclusion of her epic tale --

Back to Francie, as she finishes her story.

FRANCIE

So a year passed, and papa was tending the sheep at grand pops farm, having lost all hope he would meet her again, when suddenly he saw a little yellow dress coming over the fields.

Gillian and Hannah clutch each other in anticipation.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

It was my mama.

Frank quietly does a 'yes' to himself.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

She had found one of his notes in a copy of *Huckleberry Finn* at a dime book store on the edge of Cedarsville, just past the chicken shack. They ran to each other and after that they never spent another minute apart.

GILLIAN

Fuck. That's beautiful. A man who never gives up!

HANNAH

(in Frannie's accent)  
Ain't that a thing.

GILLIAN

How do we meet someone like that Franny?

FRANCIE

I think you might need to work on your modesty if you want to attract the right kind of gentleman caller.

HANNAH

What do you mean, "our modesty?"

FRANCIE

Well, your dress is so tight, I can practically see your religion.

GILLIAN

Excuse me?!

The mood shifts. Francie looks like a rabbit caught in the headlights.

FRANCIE

I meant no disrespect -

Gillian and Hannah, scowls on their faces, take one step closer to Francie. But a tipsy Frank stumbles in front of Francie.

FRANK

Woah, woah woah! Come on ladies! We've all had a drink.

Hannah and Gillian take one look at the drunk swaying Frank, and both start laughing at him. And with that they saunter off.

Frank turns to Francie, looking pleased with himself for defending her honour.

FRANCIE

You didn't have to do that.

FRANK  
You are welcome!

FRANCIE  
No, I mean it. I can handle myself.

And Francie walks off.

INT. MATILDA'S HALLWAY - LATER

Frank stumbles through a dark hallway with his giant box. He pushes open the door to the living room and -

INT. MATILDA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

MATILDA, 36, lets off the cork of a champagne bottle and ROSE, 10, gestures to a homemade banner with CONGRATULATIONS! written on it.

MATILDA & ROSE  
SURPRISE!

FRANK  
Ahhhhh!

Frank is so shocked he drops his cardboard box. The champagne drips onto the floor as Matilda takes in Frank's dishevelled appearance.

MATILDA  
Oh Francis.

INT. FRANK'S BEDROOM - LATER

Frank lies on his bed, engrossed in a vintage copy of the comic book *Lois Lane: Star Reporter*.

The shelves in the room strain under the weight of classic adventure books, action figures and comics. Superhero posters adorn the walls. Yep. He has the bedroom of a 12 year old boy.

ON THE SCREEN: A cartoon panel of Lois Lane accepting a Pulitzer.

FRANK  
See, some journalists do win Pulitzer's.

He looks up at the sound of a kerfuffle between Matilda and Rose outside his room.

MATILDA (O.S.)  
And I told you, you're too old for those.

ROSE (O.S.)  
But Uncle Francis reads them!

MATILDA

Come on, go to bed. And take your thumb out of your mouth.

Matilda opens the door, holding a load of Batman comics.

MATILDA

Can you do a better job of hiding them?

She chucks them on Frank's bed.

MATILDA

They stop her doing her homework.

FRANK

Okay.

She spies the vintage comic in Frank's hand.

MATILDA

I can't believe you still have that.

Frank puts the comic down.

FRANK

Probably too old for it though.

MATILDA

I didn't mean --

Frank waves away her apology. She sits on the bed.

MATILDA

It just takes some people a little more time to work out what they want to do with their lives.

FRANK

But I know what I want to do. I want to write.

MATILDA

I know you *want* to.

FRANK

You don't think I can do it, do you?

MATILDA

No, I didn't say that. I just think it might be time to explore other options. Think outside the box. Not everyone can be Lois Lane, or whose that women? She was on *News Now* last week talking about that celebrity drug thing she uncovered. The one with the big curly hair --

FRANK

Nancy Higgens.

MATILDA

Yes! Nancy Higgens. She's great. Did you read her interview with Susan Cho? That Blaine guy is such a dick.

Matilda gets up and heads to the door.

MATILDA

Come on, tomorrow is a new day. Go to sleep.

Matilda leaves, and Frank picks up his comic. He turns to the first page. Scrawled on it is '*to my future Lois Lane, love mum.*'

Frank sticks his head in his pillow and lets out a big old muffled scream.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Francie, in an elaborate black dress with a matching black parasol, watches her mothers casket get lowered into a gravestone. She is the only mourner in attendance.

A PRIEST reads from a book of prayer.

PRIEST

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours.  
Amen.

FRANCIE

Amen.

The priest closes his book.

PRIEST

Would you like to say a few words?

FRANCIE

A few words? Oh. Okay. Hey mama. I hope it ain't too cold where you are, and if it is then, I er, hope you have a blanket. Or have the facilities to make one. Erm -

Francie gets a tupperware box out of her bag.

FRANCIE

I bought you a present. I know you always thought my peach cobbler was too sweet, but I thought you might want something sweet right now.

Francie seems unsure what to do next.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)  
I'll just leave this here --

She throws the box into the open grave. It hits the casket with a resounding thud, cracking open.

PRIEST  
Erm --

And with that, Francie's face crumbles and she sobs into her hands.

EXT. STREET - DAY

It's pouring with rain as Frank, back in his oversized suit, sprints into an upmarket bar called 'GENIE'S BOTTLE.'

INT. GENIE'S BOTTLE - DAY

Frank stands at the entrance and shakes himself off. He looks at his phone.

ON THE SCREEN: Nancy Higgen's Instagram. A picture of her with a large martini and a wicked smile. The caption underneath reads: *I heart the martinis at Genie's Bottle.*

He takes a look around the posh bar. Low level lighting, soft jazz music playing, cocktail waiters in penguin suits. Bar snacks that cost £6.95. That sort of thing.

He spots Nancy in a leather booth, drinking with a salt and pepper haired attractive OLDER MAN.

As he fights through the post work SMARTLY DRESSED CROWD to get to Nancy, he starts to change his posture:

FRANK (V.O.)  
Frank knew that to impress super important people you had to play the part. Walk tall, look confident and most importantly maintain eye contact. You look your target right in eye, like your eyes are heat seeking missiles seeking their eyes, which you hope are enemy headquarters and not hospitals filled with orphans.

As he gets to Nancy, and with his voice a little deeper than normal:

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Hi Nancy. Can I talk to you. Alone.

He attempts to keep his eyes on her eyes. Which sort of makes him look like he might be overly caffeinated. This freaks out Nancy's date.

OLDER MAN

I don't think so.

FRANK

Stay out of this granddad.

The older man stands up. He is surprisingly hench.

OLDER MAN

I'm a granddad who lifts.

Nancy puts a hand on the older man's arm. He stands down. She gestures to her partially full cocktail glass.

NANCY

Could you get me another one of these?

He nods, and heads to the bar. Nancy scoots up, and pats the seat next to her.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Sit down.

Frank, disarmed by her politeness, takes a seat.

NANCY (CONT'D)

I remember you, from the airport. You work for Moira don't you?

FRANK

I did. She fired me, actually. Because of you.

NANCY

That's sweet of you to say, but I think we both know that isn't true. So --

FRANK

Frank.

NANCY

Frank. What do you need?

FRANK

I need to know how I can be like you.

Nancy studies him for a second.

NANCY

This is how this is going to go. I am going to tell you what you need to do, and then I am going to finish this martini, and you are going to leave, without making a scene. And you will never turn up unexpected like this again, unless I specifically invite you. Are we clear?

Frank stops with the weird eye contact, looks down.

FRANK

Yes.

NANCY

You need to give up. I have been in this business a long time and I know what it takes to succeed, and you don't have it. You are not that guy.

FRANK

You don't even know me?

NANCY

You gave me your lead, without a second thought. So if you need permission to stop, I am giving it to you. Sorry sweetie.

Frank looks like he has been punched in the stomach. The older man comes back with two drinks, and nestles into the seat next to Nancy, and they continue talking, as though Frank isn't there.

NANCY

(to older man)

So when can you set me up an interview with your dear friend Martin Dular.

Frank peels himself off the seat, heads out the door. Into the rain.

INT. MATILDA'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Frank lies on the couch, his laptop resting on his stomach. He gulps down a large glass of red wine and watches an online clip of Nancy receiving an award.

ON THE SCREEN: Nancy Higgins on a podium smiling at the giant fuck off award she is clutching.

The sound of the front door opening.

MATILDA (O.S)

We're home!

Frank closes his laptop and struggles into a sitting position as Matilda and Rose enter the living room.

Matilda looks at a tipsy Franks dirty t shirt and grimaces.

MATILDA

(to Rose)

Go and practice your piano honey.

ROSE

But it's boring!

MATILDA

You'll thank me when you're older.

ROSE

Can't I just thank you now, and watch TV?

Matilda shakes her head, and Rose flounces out of the room. Matilda turns back to Frank.

MATILDA

A word Francis?

Matilda heads out. Frank drags himself off the couch and dutifully follows.

INT. MATILDA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Matilda gets out a wine glass, and heads to the wine rack whilst Frank takes a seat at the table, sipping the remnants of his wine.

The sound of Rose's disjointed piano playing floats through from the other room.

Matilda pulls out an empty bottle of wine. Heavy sigh. Frank doesn't notice.

MATILDA

Job hunt go well?

FRANK

No. My lead was a bit of a bust. But I'll try again tomorrow.

Matilda gets out a cup, and boils the kettle. Rose keeps hammering out the same tune, but restarting every time she messes up. Which is often. It's painful to listen to.

MATILDA

I spoke to Tim in the finance office and they are looking for someone to do some data input. I put in a good word for you.

Frank opens the fridge, takes out a whole cucumber and bites into it.

FRANK

You didn't have to do that.

MATILDA

(shouting over the piano)  
Francis -

FRANK

Call me Frank!

Matilda sticks her head out the door.

MATILDA

(to Rose)

Okay sweetie, that's enough piano for now.

(to Frank)

I need money. For Rose. She needs piano lessons. She's very bad.

Frank laughs, and softens a little.

MATILDA

And a little help towards food and wine would be appreciated as well.

FRANK

Okay, okay.

MATILDA

Great. You start tomorrow.

(beat)

So? Shit TV?

FRANK

Shit TV.

INT. MATILDA'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Matilda and Frank sip from large mugs of tea, half watching an old TV show.

ON THE SCREEN: we can see a YOUNG MAN in overalls sheering a sheep, in the middle of a sunny field.

MATILDA

If he keeps sheering the sheep like that he's going to stress it out.

FRANK

It's not a documentary.

MATILDA

I know. I'm just saying you're meant to start with long blows on their belly, not their hind legs.

FRANK

If you had done your degree you would have made one smug vet.

MATILDA

If I had done my degree then you would have been raised by Aunt Sue.

Matilda adopts an high pitched voice, crosses her eyes a little.

MATILDA

Francis, would you like some semolina?

Frank laughs.

MATILDA

I couldn't have done that to you.

FRANK

Even if it meant doing something you actually liked?

MATILDA

Not everything turns out perfectly.

Matilda gestures to the TV screen.

ON THE SCREEN: The young man spies a YOUNG WOMAN in a yellow dress at the edge of a field.

MATILDA (CONT'D)

It can't all be like *The Elkins*.

ON THE SCREEN: The young man and the young women run towards each other and embrace. Cheesy music plays.

Frank and Matilda watch for a beat. Frank is getting a strange sense of *deja vu*.

MATILDA (CONT'D)

Right, I'm going to bed. I have so much to do tomorrow. This guy Roger wants to change his pension, and we've had another complaint about Julie and her milk stealing -

Matilda stops herself, and plasters a big fake smile on.

MATILDA (CONT'D)

The wonderful world of HR. Never a dull moment.

FRANK

I bet. I'm going to finish the episode.

Matilda heads out. Frank turns his attention back to the screen.

ON THE SCREEN: The young woman hands the young man a thick book. They both have Southern accents, and their acting is very hammy.

YOUNG MAN

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn?*  
You found it!?

YOUNG WOMAN

Yes. In a little shop at the edge of Cedarsville, past the chicken shack. I never stopped looking for you. Since I taught you how to do the little apple I knew you were the one for me!

YOUNG MAN

Oh Mary-Ellen!

They kiss lovingly. Title card reads: THE END. *The Elkins* jaunty theme plays over the credits.

Frank turns the TV off.

FRANK

Huh.

INT. FRANCIE'S KITCHEN. SAME TIME

Francie, clad in apron covered in flour spatters, pulls a perfect looking cherry pie out of the oven.

FRANK (V.O.)

Meanwhile Francie may have had one less person to cook for, but she knew that was absolutely no excuse to become bone idle.

She gingerly puts it on the kitchen top, and sticks a fork in it. Takes a bite. Considers it. And then shakes her head.

FRANCIE

Needs more cornstarch, I reckon.

She goes back to it, and we zoom out to reveal a kitchen filled with many untouched cherry pies.

INT. FRANK'S BEDROOM - MORNING

A sleep deprived Frank, wearing last night's clothes, sits at his desk, focused on his laptop. He has many tabs open.

ON THE SCREEN: A website called: *The Ultimate Elkins Fan Page* he pauses on a picture. A screen grab of 'Mary Ellen Elkin.'

*Played by Michelle Gladstone*

He clicks on the link. The site shows an old black and white shot of MICHELLE GLADSTONE.

*Died of complications of pneumonia in 1997.*

The door bursts open, and Matilda enters.

MATILDA

Morning -

She trails off when she catches site of Frank's appearance.

MATILDA  
Have you been to bed?

FRANK  
No, but -

MATILDA  
(interrupting)  
We're leaving in ten minutes, I'll  
make you a sandwich for lunch.

Matilda walks off. Frank watches her leave, and Rose peeks her head around the door frame and offers him a smug smile.

INT. PORTLAND & SON'S BUILDING LOBBY - DAY

Matilda and Frank walk through the lobby of the busy office building. Matilda stops outside a door.

MATILDA  
This is me. You know where you're  
going?

FRANK  
Yes, up in the lift to the third  
floor, where Tim will meet me.

MATILDA  
You'll do great. I'll see you at 5.

Matilda disappears through the door. Frank looks at the lift. And then at the exit of the building, out into the world.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
(in Francie's accent)  
A man who never gives up. Ain't that a  
thing.

INT. SUPERMARKET STAFF ROOM - LATER

Sarah reads a book and dips buttered bread into a cup of soup. Frank enters the room. Sarah looks up at him in surprise.

FRANK  
Hey, there she is.

SARAH  
What are you doing -

FRANK  
You're always saying we should spend  
more time together so here I am -

Frank walks past her and heads for the staff notice board. It is filled with CCTV pictures of odd looking people. A printed out heading at the top says 'SUPERMARKET CRAZIES.'

SARAH  
I'm kind of at work -

Between a photo of a GREASY HAired WOMAN, with the caption *Rubs the Tins on her Bum Lady*, and a SKINNY MAN with the caption *Cat Food Eater Craig*, is a picture of Francie. The time stamp on the picture reads 1.35pm.

Frank looks at his watch. And then turns to Sarah and points to the buttered bread on her plate.

FRANK  
Can I have this? I am starved...

Before she can object he grabs it.

SARAH  
Hey?!

FRANK  
I just remembered I have a thing but this was fun, we should do it again sometime -

He backs out the room, leaving Sarah alone and confused.

INT. SUPERMARKET AISLE - MINUTES LATER

Francie is loading her basket with cooking ingredients. NOSY SHOPPERS stop and whisper, but she, as normal, is oblivious.

INT. ANOTHER SUPERMARKET AISLE - CONTINUOUS

Frank peaks around the aisle with his phone and snaps a sneaky photo of Francie. He then clumsily rubs the bottom of his shoes with the buttery bread.

INT. SUPER AISLE - CONTINUOUS

Francie is about to pick up a can of beans from a mountain like display when Frank skids past her, trips over her basket and smashes into the display of canned beans.

The beans noisily crash down, and he falls to the floor.

EVERYONE IN THE SUPERMARKET turns and looks at Frank, now a crumpled heap.

FRANCIE  
Oh my stars. Are you okay?

FRANK  
Yep. Ouch.

A crowd gather around him. Francie helps him to his feet.

FRANCIE  
I'm so sorry, this is all my fault.

FRANK  
No, I should have looked where I was going.

Frank winces a little as he stands upright.

FRANK  
(to the gathered crowd)  
I'm fine.

FRANCIE  
You're bleeding.

She points at his bloody elbow.

FRANK  
Shit.

FRANCIE  
(whispers)  
Please don't swear.

FRANK  
Sorry.

Francie reaches into her purse and pulls out a plaster.

FRANCIE  
I've got a band aid.

She gently applies it to his elbow.

FRANK  
Thanks.

Frank 'recognizes' Francie.

FRANK  
Hey! Don't I know you from somewhere?  
Yeah, from the pub the other night! I  
tried to knight in shining armour you.

Francie looks at his face, and realises she does recognise him. Then she removes her hand from his arm, and takes a step back.

FRANCIE  
I should skedaddle, this green bean  
casserole ain't gonna cook itself.

FRANK  
Let me thank you. I might have bled  
out if it wasn't for you. Maybe I  
could buy you a coffee?

FRANCIE

Thank you for the offer, but I'm busier than a one-legged cat in a sandbox today. Sorry again, I hope your cut mends.

She walks off, and he shouts after her.

FRANK

I'm Frank!

She turns around.

FRANCIE

Francie. Francie Mary Ellen Veronica Elkin.

Frank watches Francie exit the supermarket, a strange smile on his face. Sarah comes around the corner, and surveys the damage.

SARAH

What the actual fuck Frank?

FRANK

I gotta go, sorry about the beans!

And he runs off.

EXT. STREET - MINUTES LATER

Frank runs after Francie, watching her from a safe distance, as she sashays down the street. She stops by a HOMELESS MAN with a DOG, and enthusiastically pets the animal. Frank takes a photo of her on his phone.

INT. THE DUKES HEAD - EVENING.

Frank sits alone at a table, nursing a beer and studying the photos of Francie on his phone.

He makes a call.

FRANK

(into phone)

Hi, this is Martin Dular. Could you give Nancy Higgins a message for me? Tell her to meet me at Genie's Bottle in an hour, I'm willing to talk on the record.

Frank puts down the phone. And giggles to himself at how naughty he has been.

INT. GENIE'S BOTTLE - LATER

Frank waits in a booth with two martinis. He looks at the door, as Nancy enters the bar. He breathes deeply, attempting to summon calm.

Nancy approaches the booth. When she spies him, her expression changes from professional to playful.

NANCY

Oh. Very nice.

FRANK

Have a seat.

Frank pushes a martini towards her.

INT. GENIE'S BOTTLE - LATER

There are many martini glasses in front of them. Nancy is swiping through the pictures of Francie on Franks phone.

FRANK

I think there's definitely something here. Maybe it's a weird Elkins cult, and they all get naked and dance around a huge wicker sculpture of Teddy -

NANCY

Who?

FRANK

Teddy Riley? He's the major of Cedarsville. His son died in the war, he never got over it. Had a stutter? Have you never watched the show?!

Nancy's blank face says it all.

FRANK

Okay. Well it's good. In a bad way.

NANCY

I know a guy who might be interested. I'll set up a meeting.

FRANK

Really? Thank you!

Nancy gets out her phone, and looks at the calendar.

NANCY

He normally has a free slot on Wednesday at 4.

FRANK

As in this Wednesday?

NANCY

Yes?

FRANK

But that's in two days.

NANCY

So talk to Francie tomorrow.

FRANK

But I've just got this new job, and my sister will kill me if I don't go in. Again.

Nancy grabs her jacket, and puts it on.

NANCY

Okay Frank, good luck with your job.

FRANK

No. I'll figure something out.

NANCY

Great.

(beat)

You've proved me wrong. That doesn't happen a lot.

Nancy smiles, and heads out watched by an excited Frank. Then the bill is put down next to him.

INT. MATILDA'S HALLWAY - EVENING

Frank sneaks into the house and hangs up his coat. He can hear Matilda on the phone in the kitchen.

MATILDA (O.S)

I am so sorry, I'm sure he has a good reason for it -

He stands outside, ear wiggling. Then hears a quiet little cough. Rose is behind him.

FRANK

Jesus, Rose. You scared me.

ROSE

You are in so much trouble.

FRANK

Stop stealing my comics.

ROSE

(shouting)

Mum! Francis is home!

Rose legs it up the stairs, as Matilda opens the door.

FRANK

I can explain.

Matilda hugs him. Frank is surprised.

FRANK

Hey it's okay, I'm okay.

Then Matilda releases him and looks angry.

MATILDA

Now explain.

INT. MATILDA'S KITCHEN - LATER

Frank and Matilda sit at the kitchen table, Frank putting on a good show of 'remorse.'

FRANK

I just was so worried about making a mistake and letting you down, that I panicked and ran away. I know you worked hard to get me this job, and I didn't want to mess it up, like all the rest. I am so sorry.

MATILDA

If you were that worried about it you should have just told me. I would have understood.

FRANK

I know.

MATILDA

I get it's not what you pictured yourself doing -

FRANK

It's okay.

MATILDA

You'll be fine tomorrow?

FRANK

Yeah. Of course.

INT. PORTLAND & SONS ACCOUNTING OFFICE - DAY

Frank has an excel spreadsheet open, and earbuds in. He looks at a large clock in the office. 11 a.m.

A pair of SERIOUS LOOKING COLLEAGUES stroll past him, chatting, but as soon as they are gone he minimizes the spreadsheet and watches an online video of a scene from *The Elkins*.

ON THE SCREEN: Mary Ellen is strolling through a hay field, when she spots BILLY JO in the distance coming over the hill. Her face breaks out into a smile.

Then a GOLDEN RETRIEVER appears over the hill, bounds up to her and she pets it lovingly.

Billy Jo wipes his manly brow.

BILLY JO  
Phew it's hotter than two cats  
fighting in a wool sock out here!

MARY ELLEN  
Billy Jo! Who is this?

BILLY JO  
This is Jeronimo. I thought you could  
do with the company when I go -

MARY ELLEN  
Oh Billy, I don't want you to leave. I  
know its your duty but, you'll be  
taking my heart with you.

They embrace.

Frank lets out a little forlorn sigh. This show is really getting to him.

Fran's desk neighbour, BILL, a 45 year old jolly man glances at Frank's computer. Frank clicks off the website, but not before Bill catches a glimpse.

BILL  
*The Elkins!* Man, I loved that show.  
Did you ever see the one where Mary  
Ellen teaches that blind kid to waltz  
so he can win the dance-a-thon and use  
the money to buy a new gear for his  
dad's tractor?

FRANK  
No, I don't think -

BILL  
Spoiler alert. He does. I'm Bill.

FRANK  
Frank.

BILL  
Welcome to the accounting department  
Frank, where everybody counts. Ha.

FRANK  
That's funny.

BILL  
Thanks. I dabble in a bit of stand up  
comedy.

FRANK  
(flatly)  
Oh great.

Frank quickly turns back to his computer. Bill, a little hurt,  
does the same. Frank looks at the clock again, looks at Bill.

Lightbulb.

FRANK  
You ever heard of Jimmy Kline?

BILL  
Of course. He's only presenting every  
panel show going. He's great.

FRANK  
He's my uncle.

BILL  
No way! He's so funny.

FRANK  
I could always put in a good word for  
you if you want? Maybe get him to come  
watch you do a set?

BILL  
You would do that?

FRANK  
For a new friend, of course. I would  
need a tiny little favour in return  
though, nothing massive -

BILL  
Sure. Whatever you want!

EXT. DOG SHELTER - MORNING

Frank walks along a row of NOISY DOGS, all barking for  
attention. A DOG SHELTER WORKER gestures to a cage at the end.

He walks along to it and comes face to face with a GOLDEN  
RETRIEVER. He nods at the dog shelter worker.

EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON

Frank and the excited golden retriever try to navigate around a  
group of MIDDLE AGED WOMEN gathered outside a theatre. Frank  
realises they are all wearing t shirts with *The Elkins*  
emblazoned across the front, or *I Heart Billy Jo*.

He stops and looks at a huge placard above the theatre for a musical called HOME ON THE RANGE. The actor who plays Billy Jo, is displayed prominently on it. The same man Francie has a picture of in her hallway.

He is older, but very recognizable.

Frank stops and stares at his giant face.

EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON

Frank waits outside the supermarket with the dog. He looks at his watch.

FRANK

Come on.

He pets the dog, and notices a collar around his neck with the name Clyde on it. As he takes it off:

FRANCIE

Frank?

Frank quickly stands up, and slips the collar in his pocket.

FRANK

Francie, hi.

FRANCIE

And who is this gorgeous beast?

FRANK

This is Jeronimo.

FRANCIE

Get outta town! That was the name of my mama's dog growing up.

FRANK

That is so weird! I just love that name. You want to say hello to him? He won't bite.

She cautiously pets him,

FRANCIE

Lovely to make your acquaintance Jeronimo.

He paws her in excitement.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

Friendly ain't he?

FRANK

Only to people he likes.  
(beat)

Where are you heading? Maybe we could walk with you for a bit?

Francie looks uncertain.

FRANK

It's just since I tripped over your basket my arm has been really hurting, so it's difficult for me to hold his lead for too long --

FRANCIE

Oh. Of course. I can hold his lead.

FRANK

That would be great.

He hands her the lead, and they stand there for a beat, looking at each other.

FRANK

Shall we?

Frank gestures in front of them, and they fall into a slow paced walk.

FRANK

So I detect an accent. Where about's are you from? Other than the Americas.

FRANCIE

Cedarsville. Don't worry, ain't nobody round here heard of it. It's in Louisiana.

FRANK

(faux casual)  
Been here long?

FRANCIE

Since I was knee high to a grass hopper.

FRANK

And how tall exactly was this grass hopper?

FRANCIE

(laughing)  
I was two.

TWO OBNOXIOUS WOMEN walk past them, staring and talking about Francie. Frank notices, but Francie is oblivious.

FRANCIE

So, Frank, what is your occupation?

FRANK

My job? I am a data in-putter for a finance company.

FRANCIE

And that's your passion in life? In-putting this data?

FRANK

Sure. What about you? What's your 'occupation'?

A CAR BEEPS at Francie. A LOUD PASSENGER shouts from the window as he goes past.

CAR DRIVER

Weirdo!

Frank gestures at them, but Francie ignores it and keeps on talking.

FRANCIE

I don't have one as such. But I keep busy all the same. Keepin' the house, cookin'. A woman's work is never done.

FRANK

Ain't that the truth. I'm a terrible cook. Don't know an orange from a nectarine.

This odd phrasing makes Francie laugh.

FRANCIE

Well, I love it. When I cook I'm grinnin' like a possum eatin' a sweet tater. It's like the whole world melts away, my mind is completely occupied and I am the queen of my own little kingdom, and all my subjects - green beans, salt and pepper shakers - they are under *my* dominion.

(beat)

Sorry, look at me, running my mouth off like this.

FRANK

No, it's fine --

Then Jeronimo, spotting other DOGS, lurches on his lead towards a nearby park.

FRANCIE

Wow there doggy!

FRANK

Looks like he wants to go and hang out with his mates in the park.

FRANCIE

If it's all the same to you I have to visit mama before it gets too dark, and she wouldn't like it if you knew I strayed. But you go ahead.

FRANK

No, we'll walk you. Where does she live? Your mama?

Francie points to the entrance of a graveyard up ahead.

FRANCIE

There.

INT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Francie puts down flowers on her mothers grave, whilst Frank stands by looking super uncomfortable.

FRANCIE

Hi mama. I bought you some new flowers. This is Frank. He has a dog just like yours.

Frank's watch beeps.

FRANK

I should take Jeronimo back.

FRANCIE

I'm gonna natter at mama for a spell longer but thanks for the company today. It was unexpected. But pleasant. And I am truly sorry about your arm.

FRANK

It's okay. Maybe we could walk him together again sometime? Or I could sample some of your excellent cooking?

FRANCIE

That might not be appropriate. I'm an unmarried woman.

FRANK

Right. Of course.

(beat)

I guess I'll see you around then?

Francie nods, and turns back to her mama's grave. Frank and Jeronimo takes a few step away. But then, as an afterthought Frank adds:

FRANK

I'm sorry about your mum. I want to say it gets better, but I think you just kind of get used to it.

FRANCIE

You've known loss?

FRANK

My mum. When I was ten.

FRANCIE

That's gotta be rough.

(beat)

Listen Frank. I actually whipped up a new cherry pie recipe, might be nice to test it on someone. If you like?

Frank tries to hide the joy on his face.

FRANK

I do like. I mean, yes, that would be lovely.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - MINUTES LATER

Once Frank gets outside the graveyard entrance, he runs like the wind, Jeronimo following.

FRANK

Come on Jeronimo! Let's get you back to the shelter.

INT. PORTLAND & SON'S ACCOUNTING OFFICE. LATER

A sweaty Frank half walks half runs through the office door, to his desk. He plonks himself down next to Bill.

BILL

Hey buddy! I finished the Hanson file for you. I'll e-mail it over.

FRANK

Great. Did anyone ask where I was?

BILL

Tim did, but I told him you were in the toilet with the shits.

Frank looks over at Tim's glass walled office. TIM is talking on the phone, but spots Frank and waves sympathetically.

FRANK

Thanks. And I'll talk to Jimmy later for you.

BILL

Thanks man. My wife is not going to believe this. Jimmy Kline. This has made my week! My year!

Frank offers a tight smile, and turns back to his computer.

EXT. STREET. LATER

Frank stands outside the entrance to the Portland & Son's building, talking excitedly into his phone.

FRANK

(into phone)

Of course I'm ready. I know what I'm doing. This isn't my first rodeo. I mean I've never been to one. But I assume this is what they'll like.

(beat)

Yep. That was a joke. I promise I won't make any in the meeting. Thanks Nancy -

Frank hangs up, and whistles as he walks away from the building.

INT. LIFT - THE NEXT DAY

A smartly dressed Frank and Nancy wait in silence in the lift. Frank has a heavily loaded satchel bag on.

FRANK

I have been practicing my pitch. You wanna hear it?

NANCY

Sure.

Frank clears his throat.

FRANK

(dramatically)

*The Elkins*, a show that reminded people that there was once a time where old fashioned values and love for your neighbour counted for something. Where kindness held more weight than success. Where you fought for family, and not for power. And that message of hope is just as relevant today as it was 30 years ago. Because we are an increasingly narcissistic and self obsessed society, and Francie exists outside of that.

I think she could be one of the most fascinating sociological experiments of the last decade, and there is not a person on this planet like her, and I think, Mr. Editor, that your readers will find comfort in that. The same comfort your grandmother found in her favourite show.

(beat)

The last part is interchangeable depending on which of his relatives loved the show.

NANCY

No.

The doors open. We pre-lap Francie's voice:

FRANCIE (O.S)

When I cook I'm grinnin' like a possum eatin' a sweet tater.

INT. THE WEEKLY STAR, CALVIN'S OFFICE - DAY

FRANCIE (O.S)

(on tape)

It's like the whole world melts away, my mind is completely occupied and I am the queen of my own little kingdom, and all my subjects - green --

Francie's dulcet voice float out of Franks phone, which sits in the middle of the desk of CALVIN, 58, the bleary eyed story editor of The Weekly Star. Calvin has his eyes closed as he listens.

Nancy and Frank are squeezed together on the other side of the desk. But as the tape plays, Frank looks around the room.

CLOSE UP: Framed issues of the newspaper. 'The Loch Ness Monster Ate My Baby' sits proudly next to 'My Brothers Ghost Tried to Seduce Me.'

The loud beep of a car horn blares out of the recording. Calvin opens his eyes.

FRANK

It's not the greatest recording -

Calvin reaches across to turn it off.

CALVIN

I think I could listen to that voice all day. Probably in the bath.

(beat)

Is she mentally ill?

FRANK

I don't know. I don't think so. She seems pretty compos mentis to me. Just a bit delusional.

Calvin looks at some blown up photos of Mary Ellen's grave, and Francie at the supermarket.

CALVIN

And her mum, she was in this show? The Belkins?

FRANK

*The Elkins*, no she wasn't actually in the show. But she raised Francie as though she was. Like they were part of her lost long family.

CALVIN

Right. Any weird sex stuff?

FRANK

What?

CALVIN

Incest, fetishes, satanic rituals? That sort of thing?

FRANK

I don't think so.

NANCY

Calvin, it's still early doors. I'm sure once Frank really digs into it, he'll find some really fucked up shit.

CALVIN

And she'll talk to you?

NANCY

She trusts him. They both have dead mums.

FRANK

(flatly)

Yeah, we both have dead mums.

Nancy gestures to a image of Francie.

NANCY

Look at her. That butter wouldn't melt expression? Someone you would just love to 'corrupt.' She's perfect for your demographic.

Frank is about to interrupt again, but Nancy ever so slightly shakes her head at him.

CALVIN

Alright. I'll take a punt. And get me more pictures. And recordings. I like her voice.

INT. GENIE'S BOTTLE. LATER

Frank and Nancy sit in a leather booth drinking martinis. Nancy is pretty pleased, but Frank looks like he might throw up.

NANCY

Come on, be happy. He gave you a commission. You just have to make sure it isn't shit.

FRANK

But The Weekly Star? It's hardly respectable journalism.

NANCY

It pays well, you'll get your name out there, and I hardly see anyone else queuing up to give you this kind of opportunity. Just think of it as a stepping stone. A necessary one.

FRANK

It just makes me feel, icky.

NANCY

Lots of respectable journalists start out this way. I did. I use to write for them all the time. Sometimes I still do. Under a different name of course.

FRANK

What name?

NANCY

Claudette Omaha.

Frank laughs.

NANCY

What? Its a great name.

FRANK

I just think, would it be easier if I told Francie the truth? That I wanted to interview her for a newspaper.

NANCY

And what will you do if she tells you to fuck off?

FRANK

I don't think she swears so -

NANCY

You won't get interesting interviews if you let the subject dictate the playing field.

FRANK

Its just, you know, ethically, I'm not sure -

NANCY

Stop beating yourself up for having a little ambition. It's a good thing. And if you want to be ethical about it then don't think of Francie as a person, think of her as an obstacle, who is in the way of the truth, and the only reason you are lying to her is to get to *that* truth.

FRANK

But what if she isn't lying, what if this is real to her?

NANCY

Then you have a much better story.

She finishes her drink.

NANCY

Another?

INT. FRANCIE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

CLOSE UP: A gramophone, the sound of *The Elkins* theme tune blasting out of a unlabeled record.

We reveal Frank. Seated on the chaise lounge, he stares dumbstruck at the record. Jeronimo happily laps up water from a large bowl.

FRANK (V.O.)

And so Frank went over to Francie's totally normal house, ready to charm and delight her.

He turns his attention to all the old fixtures and antiques in the house. He eyes up a creepy taxidermic badger. It seems to look right back at him.

FRANCIE (O.S)

Try a slice of cherry pie whilst it's toasty.

Frank jumps at the sound of Francie's voice.

She holds a tray with two glasses of iced tea, a delicious looking cherry pie minus a slice, which is on another plate. She places it on a low coffee table.

FRANK

Thank you.  
 (gesturing to the record)  
 Who's this?

FRANCIE

It's a song from back home. It was kind of the anthem of Cedarsville. Mama said that the local fiddle band used to play it every founders day.

FRANK

Right.

FRANCIE

Please, try the cherry pie.

Francie watches him with eager anticipation as he picks up the plate, and forks some of the pie into his mouth.

His face lights up.

FRANK

Oh my god -

FRANCIE

If you could refrain from blasphemy in my house, I would appreciate it.

FRANK

Sorry. This is the best thing I have ever eaten. Ever.

Francie claps her hands eagerly.

FRANCIE

I am so glad. It was my nana's recipe. I mean I made a few tweaks, an extra pinch of cornstarch here --

FRANK

Aren't you going to have some?

FRANCIE

It's for you.

FRANK

I can't eat it all. Please? I hate to eat alone.

FRANCIE

If you insist.

Francie dishes herself out a slice of pie.

FRANK

So your nana? She and the rest of your clan still in Cedarsville?

FRANCIE

Yep. You know my nana actually had her own cookbook published there. Would you like to see it?

FRANK

I'd love to.

Francie gets a book off the shelf titled *Cook with Nana Elkins*. She hands it to Frank. It is clearly a tie in book to *The Elkins* series.

On the front cover is a black and white picture of an older southern belle, wearing an apron, in front of a table of food.

Frank opens it. The front pages have all been torn out, only recipe pages remain.

FRANK

Wow. That's something to be proud of.

Frank feigns a cough.

FRANK

Could I have a glass of water? My throats a bit dry.

FRANCIE

Of course.

Francie goes to the kitchen and Frank gets out his phone, and takes pictures of the cookbook, and the living room.

FRANCIE (O.S)

You know I was home schooled by mama, and although she was a great teacher. She could not keep house, so that was all down to me. But still, it's nice to have someone to cook for again.

FRANK

You didn't go to school at all?

Francie comes back in, just as Frank is putting away his phone.

FRANCIE

No.

FRANK

I'm jealous.

FRANCIE

You didn't like your school days?

FRANK

No. I was not popular. I liked comic books and I looked like this, but smaller and spottier so -

Francie gives him the water.

FRANK

Thank you.

As Frank sips from it she watches him. He keeps sipping and she keeps watching. It's a bit weird.

FRANCIE

Frank, do you want to marry me?

Frank nearly chokes on the water.

FRANK

What? No. I mean, no thank you.

FRANCIE

But you're drinking my iced tea, and eating my cherry pie?

FRANK

Is that a euphemism?

FRANCIE

What?

FRANK

No. I want to be your friend. Sorry if that wasn't clear.

FRANCIE

No one wants to be my friend.

FRANK

Sure they do. Maybe they just haven't had the chance.

FRANCIE

You might think me ignorant, but I know what I am.

FRANK

What's that?

FRANCIE

American.

FRANK

Okay, but I don't think being American should stop you having friends.

FRANCIE

Sorry. Mama and I, we didn't mix much. With anyone. She said people here would never understand our ways.

That they had a preoccupation with listening just for the sake of talking, and they normally just talked to you because they wanted something.

FRANK

I think that's true of people anywhere. Not just here.

They fall silent. Frank goes to say something but Jeronimo heads to the front door and starts whining.

FRANK

I think he needs the toilet. Why don't we take him out for a walk, go to a park, so he can, you know, relieve himself.

FRANCIE

I can't.

FRANK

Sure you can.

FRANCIE

No. I really can't.

FRANK

Okay. I'll just take him.

Frank grabs Jeronimo, and attaches his lead.

FRANK

Sorry for confusing things. I do want to be your friend though. Honestly.

FRANCIE

Well, maybe as my new friend you could try my chicken pot pie tomorrow. If you like?

Off Frank's smile:

INT. MATILDA'S LIVING ROOM. EVENING

Frank practically dances his way into the living room, where Rose and Matilda are arguing in front of the TV. Rose holds Frank's *Batman* DVD. They don't notice him.

MATILDA

You still need to finish your French homework.

ROSE

Please. Just five minutes.

MATILDA

I said no.

Frank clears his throat, and they look over at him.

FRANK

She can watch it if she wants, I don't mind. I could even watch it with her, and wind forward through all the unsuitable parts. So the film might only be about 4 minutes long -

MATILDA

Just go tidy up your room. It's a tip.

His smile drops and he stalks out the room.

INT. FRANK'S BEDROOM. LATER

Frank is on his laptop at his desk, engrossed in a government Registry page.

FRANK (V.O.)

Frank put on his best detective hat and did some investigative work, attempting to find out Francie's mother's real name.

He types a post code into a box: *search for property details*.

He presses enter, and property details come up. *5 Mockingbird Road owned by Mary Ellen Elkin*.

Matilda comes in, and he snaps shut the computer.

FRANK

Yep?

MATILDA

This came for you.

She hands him a thin brown envelope.

MATILDA

More comics?

FRANK

You know me!

MATILDA

Sorry for snapping. Rose is being a bit trying at the moment.

FRANK

Well you are a little hard on her.

A flash of annoyance on Matilda's face, but she doesn't respond.

FRANK

Just saying you were never that hard  
on me.

MATILDA

(changing the subject)  
Tim said he didn't see much of you  
today.

FRANK

Checking up on me?

MATILDA

No I -

FRANK

If you must know the fish pie you made  
last night gave me a funny stomach, so  
I spent part of the day on the toilet.  
But please feel free to tell Tim about  
that.

MATILDA

Okay, sorry. I didn't know.

Frank doesn't respond, looks at Matilda expectantly. After a  
beat she leaves, and shuts the door.

He opens up the envelope, and pulls out a birth certificate.

It's Francie's. Born to Mary Ellen Elkin. Saint Michaels  
Hospital. Brixton. No father written down.

Frank looks almost disappointed.

EXT. KEW NATIONAL ARCHIVES - DAY

Frank is outside a ornate building, which has a mast  
proclaiming it to be 'The National Archives.' He is on his  
phone.

FRANK

(into phone)

Hey Bill, mate could you cover for me  
this morning? I had too many beers  
with old Jimmy last night, so going to  
be in late. Just tell Tim you sent me  
down to records.

(beat)

Oh yeah, he loved that joke... And  
then I got off the bus! Could not stop  
laughing. He can't wait to see you  
perform next week. Cheers bye.

Frank hangs up, and heads into the building.

INT. KEW NATIONAL ARCHIVES - LATER

A stressed Frank, with rolled up sleeve, sits at a desk in a busy room, filled with other RESEARCHERS.

He has a two large piles of delicate looking folders on the desk, with the initial E on them.

He thumbs through the remaining folders in the smaller pile, but isn't finding what he is looking for. He groans in frustration.

INT. THE DAILY POST, NANCY'S OFFICE - LATER

Frank paces Nancy's office, whilst she types on her computer, mostly ignoring him.

FRANK

If she changed her name by deed poll  
they don't have a public record of it.  
So she probably did it quietly,  
through a solicitor.

He looks at Nancy for a response, but she just types something into her computer.

FRANK

So I could just ring up every  
solicitor in London and ask them if a  
crazy lady came in demanding to be  
named after a 1970s TV show character.  
That might narrow it down.

Nancy lets out a guffaw at something on her computer screen.

NANCY

Classic.

Frank throws himself into a seat.

FRANK

Nancy, this is important. I need some  
help. If I can find out who her mother  
really is, I might be able to find out  
why this all started.

Nancy finally looks up.

NANCY

But Francie was definitely born here?

Frank nods.

NANCY

Then why don't you just search her  
house. Pretend she's that girlfriend  
you never quite trusted.

FRANK

I can't -

NANCY

Not this again -

FRANK

No I mean, last time I was there she didn't leave me alone for more than 5 seconds.

NANCY

She likes you.

FRANK

Come on. She only asked me to marry her the once -

NANCY

What, really?

Frank smiles a little smugly.

FRANK

Yeah.

NANCY

Okay.

Without a word Nancy gets up and walks out.

FRANK

(to himself)

Jealous much?

Frank takes the chance to look at the many trophies Nancy has displayed on a shelf in her office. He picks one up, feels the weight.

NANCY

Frank.

He spins around, and almost drops the trophy. Nancy has brought a pissed off looking Johnny into the office.

JOHNNY

Oh for fuck's sake. Him? Really?

NANCY

So you've met.

FRANK

Sadly. I thought you worked for Moira?

NANCY

He's too good for her. If you get Francie out of the house tomorrow, then Johnny can look for the information you need.

Frank doesn't look happy with this plan, but Johnny flashes him a shit-eating grin.

JOHNNY

That won't be a problem. Will it, Frank?

FRANK

Yeah. No problem.

INT. THE DAILY POST HALLWAY - LATER

Johnny and Frank are waiting for the lift. Frank looks pissed off, but Johnny is still smiling like a Cheshire cat.

JOHNNY

So. Are you fucking Nancy?

FRANK

No.

JOHNNY

But you want to.

FRANK

I don't think that's appropriate.

JOHNNY

Ha. You haven't changed at all.

INT. FRANCIE'S HOUSE - LATER

Francie and Frank are nestled on the chaise lounge, Jeronimo asleep on the floor. Francie has an album open on her lap, filled with photos of her 'family.'

She is pointing to a black and white photo of a YOUNG BILLY JO with a fishing rod, standing by a lake next to an OLDER MAN.

FRANCIE

That's Uncle John with papa. It was the first time he took him out fishing. My daddy thought he was gonna catch a minnow the size of a beaver but he just fished out an old shoe instead. But John made him take it home anyway, show the rest of the family their 'dinner.'

Frank looks at her as she talks, so animated and barely unable to contain her giggles.

FRANK (V.O.)

The more Francie talked about her family, the more she convinced Frank that this world to her was very real. That maybe it was the only thing keeping her from coming apart at the seams.

FRANCIE

Oh nana nearly threw a hissy fit when John suggested they cook it on the fire.

And Francie breaks down into howls of laughter, and Frank can't help but smile at her infectious giggle.

The sound of a loud vehicle beeping incessantly floods through the open living room window.

DRIVER (O.S)

Wanker!

They both turn and look at the sound.

FRANK

If your mum loved it so much, why would she swap this -

He gestures to the happy pictures in the family album.

FRANK

For this?

He gestures outside, where two CAR DRIVERS are now shouting at each other.

FRANCIE

My papa passed just after she got pregnant with me. I think everything there reminded her of him. She wanted a fresh start.

Frank gestures to the album again.

FRANK

Do they know that she's gone?

Francie shakes her head.

FRANCIE

I don't even know how I would get in contact with them.

FRANK

I could help you?

FRANCIE

She wouldn't want that.

FRANK

But --

FRANCIE

You think I'm foolish? Respecting a dead woman's wishes?

FRANK

No. Of course not.

Francie shifts the family album to Frank's lap, and gets up and looks out the window.

FRANCIE

I wanted to go over for Christmas one year. See the lights, she was always telling me about the Christmas lights in the town. All the stores lit up, it sounded magical. But bringing it up got her so upset that she didn't get out of bed for a week, so, I stopped asking.

As she talks Frank looks at the picture of her papa, fishing. He realises it has been folded. He pulls it out of its holder.

He unfolds it to reveal a boom operator and several crew members in the corner of the picture.

Frank quickly folds it up and shoves it back in.

FRANK

What about going out? She wouldn't let you do that either?

FRANCIE

I could go to the shops. But only when she got too sick to go herself.

Frank closes the album, and joins her at the window.

FRANK

I know it's not Cedarsville, but its not that bad out there. And sometimes it's good to get outside your comfort zone. Push yourself to do things you didn't think you were capable of. Like when your papa rescued the Randall twins from the cave during the flooding season. I mean he had a broken leg, and he still managed to do it.

FRANCIE

Did I tell you about that? I don't remember telling you that story.

FRANK

Of course you did. How else would I know?

Francie looks out the window. The drivers of the cars are still arguing and exchanging vulgarities.

FRANCIE

What you got in mind?

EXT. PARK - LATER

Frank and Francie stroll leisurely through a large leafy park, Jeronimo leading the way.

It is littered with COUPLES, FRISBEE PLAYERS, JOGGERS and other DOG WALKERS.

FRANCIE

Did your papa raise you?

FRANK

I didn't have one really. My mum used a sperm donor.

FRANCIE

A what?

FRANK

You know when a man and a woman -- you know. You do know? Right?

FRANCIE

I'm not Mormon.

FRANK

Right. My sister did the same thing actually. I come from a line of women who understand the limitations of men. Ha.

FRANCIE

Some of them ain't too bad.

(beat)

So who took care of you, when your mama passed?

FRANK

My sister. She was only 18, about to go to Cambridge Uni - that's a place for terrifyingly smart people and future world leaders - to become a vet. And then my mum died. So she stayed here instead. To look after this idiot.

FRANCIE

I bet she don't regret it none. I bet you make her proud with all your data inputting.

FRANK

Yeah I do.

FRANCIE

You know it's funny. Maybe if my mama knew there were people like you and your sister around, she wouldn't have been so scared all the time.

A frisbee lands near them, and Francie excitedly picks it up and turns it over in her hands. The owner shouts at Francie.

FRISBEE PLAYER

Throw it back!

Francie looks at Frank, who nods encouragingly. She swings back her arm, and it sails high in the air and lands a foot in front of her. She laughs, picks it up and walks it over to the frisbee player instead.

Frank takes the opportunity to get out his phone. Texts Johnny. *You have 5 minutes.*

Francie strolls back.

FRANK

We should head back.

INT. FRANCIE'S HOUSE - LATER

Francie, Frank and Jeronimo enter the house. Francie flops down in a chair.

FRANCIE

That was a hoot. Where shall we go next?

FRANK

Anywhere you want.

Over Francie's shoulder Frank notices a freaked out Johnny at the top of the stairs. He tries to hide the panic on his face. Francie lets out a yawn.

FRANCIE

I am worn slap out, I think it's time for me to take my afternoon nap.

Johnny throws his hands up at Frank to do something, as Francie gets up.

FRANK  
(strangled shout)  
Wait!

Francie stops in her tracks.

FRANK  
Why don't you have a TV?

FRANCIE  
Mama didn't care for it.

FRANK  
But you have watched one, right?

Francie shakes her head.

FRANK  
So you have never seen a movie either,  
like at the cinema?

FRANCIE  
I told you, we didn't go out much.

FRANK  
What about... the internet. You ever  
been on the internet?

FRANCIE  
No. Now I really must lie down -

Just as she is about to turn around:

FRANK  
(loudly)  
Weird!  
(beat)  
I mean, that's a bit weird. You must  
admit.

FRANCIE  
I don't think so. I mean have you ever  
made a dress from scratch? Crocheted a  
quilt? Fitted a drywall, or taken care  
of a fruit tree until it gave you  
peaches? You ever done any of that  
Frank?

FRANK  
No, but -

FRANCIE  
But what? We all get by in different  
ways. Why is your way better than  
mine? What gives you the right to  
judge me?

FRANK

Nothing. You're right. I'm sorry. I,  
I...

(beat)

But how do you distract yourself?  
Like, what do you do if you are having  
a bad day, or you think you suck and  
you want to drown out the noise?

FRANCIE

I guess I just don't think I suck. Now  
I really do need a nap.

FRANK

Walk a gentleman to the door?

FRANCIE

Sure. I think you got a bit of sun  
stroke today.

They head outside, followed by Jeronimo.

EXT. FRANCIE'S DOORSTEP - CONTINUOUS

Francie rubs Jeronimo affectionately.

FRANCIE

See you both soon.

Frank spies, through the open door, Johnny climbing out of the  
kitchen window.

FRANK

Yep. And sorry for being an... idiot  
before.

FRANCIE

It's okay. But you should know that a  
lot of people are always looking for  
ways to bring other folks down, makes  
them feel better and what not. And if  
you think you suck then you are just  
making it a whole lot easier for them.

FRANK

Good point. Bye Francie.

Francie shuts the door, and they head off.

INT. PARK - LATER

An agitated Frank sits on a park bench, Jeronimo by his side.  
Johnny plants himself down next to him.

FRANK

What the fuck? If she had seen you?

JOHNNY

Do you want this or not?

Johnny hands Frank a faded passport. He opens it at the back to reveal a picture of a young woman, who looks an awful lot like Francie. He glances at the name.

FRANK

Charlotte Watson. Where did you find it?

JOHNNY

In the place where most people hide their passports.

FRANK

Right.

JOHNNY

Don't worry, I made sure to check out her underwear drawer as well.

He gets a pair of frilly knickers out of his pocket, and waves them in Frank's face.

FRANK

What the hell is wrong with you?

Frank tries to snatch them off him, but Johnny puts them back in his pocket.

JOHNNY

No way, these are mine.

Frank stands up, grabs Jeronimo's lead.

FRANK

Are we done?

JOHNNY

Yep. I'll start doing surveillance tomorrow.

FRANK

Surveillance?

JOHNNY

Oh, didn't you know? Nancy wants me to follow her, get some photos. See where she goes, what she does.

FRANK

We know what she does already.

JOHNNY

We know what she tells you.

MONTAGE:

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

As the weeks went by Frank continued to balance earning an honest living with following his passion.

- Frank giving a pile of his work to Bill, laughing over eagerly at whatever Bill is saying, before sneaking out of the office.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Francie told him more about *The Elkin's* family history.

- Francie and Frank in her hallway, both holding plates piled high with apple crumble. Francie talks him through the photos on display.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Perfect parables and moral tales that poured out of her mama's mouth. Stories of kindness, charity and the importance of family.

CLOSE UP: The photo she is fawning over. It's a wedding picture of Mary Ellen and Billy Jo, outside a church but Mary Ellen's face is conveniently hidden by a wedding veil. They are surrounded by *The Elkins*, beaming at each other and about to kiss.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

All echoes of a TV screen.

- We morph to the same shot on a TV screen, as Mary Ellen and Billy Jo kiss, and confetti is thrown.

- Frank sits on Matilda's sofa, watching the screen and making notes. Matilda puts her head through the door, but Frank doesn't see her. She heads into the hallway, where several boxes of stuff from Frank's room are piled up. She picks up a action figure poking out the top.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Frank spent his evening painlessly researching and learning all he could.

- Frank at his computer, staring at an open empty word document.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Mixing effortlessly with his peers.

- Frank in a crowded upmarket wine bar, drinking with Nancy and a crowd of WEALTHY TWATS. As they all laugh at a joke, Frank is a step behind, lost in thought. Nancy elbows him, and he offers a weak fake smile.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And although he liked Francie, he kept a professional distance.

- Francie and Frank jovially walk Jeronimo through the park.

A PERVY MAN stares Francie up and down as he walks past them. Francie is oblivious. But Frank turns around and catches him gawping at her bum, and flips him off.

FRANK (V.O.)

She was just a story after all. A increasingly fascinating one.

- Frank at the desk in his room, looking over a huge spread of surveillance photos of Francie on the table. One's of her shopping, one's of her leaving flowers at her mothers graves, one's of her entering her home.

Frank picks one of the photos up. A rare close up of an unsmiling Francie, oblivious to Johnny's camera lens.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And his relationship with the charming Nancy progressed, their intellectual and emotional connection ever deepening.

- As Frank and Nancy walk down the street, Frank spots Sarah outside the supermarket having a cigarette. He quickly turns his head to Nancy, as if he hasn't seen her. Sarah watches him walk past, ignoring her.

FRANK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He let go off his past fears, anything that was holding him back. He was, finally, a real man.

INT. NANCY'S BEDROOM - MORNING.

Frank wakes up in Nancy's bed. He slyly turns to check. Yes, Nancy is asleep next to him. He looks at her, smiles and she opens her eyes.

FRANK

Morning!

NANCY

(less enthusiastically)  
Morning.

Frank sits up in bed. Nancy jumps out and starts getting dressed, throwing on some work out clothes. Frank watches her in quiet adoration.

FRANK

You know Superman?

NANCY

I am aware of him.

FRANK

I loved the comics when I was...  
younger. But not because of Superman,  
because of Lois Lane. Like, he was  
born with all these natural advantages  
so it was kind of easy for him to help  
people and save lives, but Lois. She  
worked hard, and she had integrity,  
she used her writing to save lives.  
Change the world. She's kind of my  
hero. She reminds me of you actually.

Nancy shoves on some trainers, ignoring his last comment.

NANCY

I'm going to a yoga class, so if  
you're good?

FRANK

Right, of course.

Frank starts throwing on his clothes.

NANCY

You going to send me your first draft  
soon?

FRANK

Yeah. Of course.

NANCY

And her mother? Any news on her  
background?

FRANK

I'm still looking into it.

(beat)

You know the surveillance photos, they  
showed she wasn't lying. She really  
does do the same thing every day.

NANCY

Okay?

FRANK

I'm just saying she didn't lie to me.  
I don't think she's capable of it.

Frank's phone rings. He scrambles through his pockets for it,  
whilst Nancy watches him coolly. Considering.

FRANK

(into phone)

Hello!

(beat)  
Oh shit! I'm coming!

Frank hangs up the phone.

FRANK  
It's Rose's birthday party. I completely forgot.

Frank shoves on his shoes.

FRANK  
But maybe we could meet later, at our usual place?

NANCY  
I don't think so. I think from now on, we should keep it professional.

FRANK  
Did I do something wrong or -- ?

She hurries him out the bedroom door.

NANCY  
Have a good time at your sister's birthday -

FRANK  
It's my ---

The door slams in his little heartbroken face.

FRANK  
Niece's.

INT. MATILDA'S HALLWAY - DAY.

Frank enters a noisy house overrun with excitable giggling CHILDREN. A troupe of them stream past, nearly knocking him over.

FRANK  
Wow there -

INT. MATILDA'S KITCHEN - SECONDS LATER

Lots of PARENTS stand around chatting, nibbling on a buffet. Matilda and JULIET, a meek 32 year old, are packing party bags in the corner.

Frank approaches Matilda tentatively.

FRANK  
Sorry I'm late -

MATILDA

Late? You've missed most of the party!  
Luckily, Juliet was here to help.

JULIET

(quietly)  
Hi, I'm Juliet, and it's no bother, I  
wanted to help -

MATILDA

She could have been enjoying the  
party, but she had to fill in for you.

JULIET

Honestly, I was happy to -

FRANK

I said I was sorry. I was going to  
wait to tell you this, but I've had a  
story commissioned. I'm going to be a  
published writer!

He does a ta-da gesture. Matilda goes back to making party  
bags.

MATILDA

You already have a job Frank.

FRANK

It's the real thing this time. It's  
actually kind of a big deal.

MATILDA

We'll talk about it later. Just go and  
top up people's drinks. Please.

Frank looks through the kitchen window, and spots Rose in the  
garden outside. She is on her own, sitting on a bench and  
looking bored.

FRANK

Didn't Rose want a superhero themed  
party?

MATILDA

She's too old for that.

FRANK

(louder than intended)  
Are you fucking kidding me?

Everyone at the party goes quiet as his swear word lingers in  
the air. Like a fart. A bunch of nearby CHILDREN look thrilled,  
but their PARENT'S shoot Frank a look of disgust.

JULIET

Oh, the lemonade -

Juliet wonders off. The parent's slowly go back to chatting.

MATILDA

This is the best thing for her.

FRANK

What, being controlling, stopping her doing what she wants? Letting her enjoy her childhood?

MATILDA

She can't be a child forever Francis. As nice as that must be.

Frank gets it.

FRANK

Oh, so that's what this is, you're worried she's going to turn out like me.

Matilda doesn't say anything. Frank half laughs.

FRANK

Thanks for that.

Frank turns around and heads for the door. He passes a wide eyed Juliet on his way out. He turns back to Matilda.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Juliet totally fancies you by the way.

A caught out Juliet offers a confused Matilda a terrified smile.

INT. FRANCIE'S LIVING ROOM - LATER.

Frank stands in front of Francie's intimidating book collection. All worn American classics. Faulkner jostles for space next to Twain and Hemingway.

Francie enters with a tray of lemonade and southern style biscuits.

FRANCIE

Angel biscuits and lemonade, fresh out of the lemon.

FRANK

Got anything stronger?

FRANCIE

Mama wasn't a big fan of the devil's drink.

Frank turns back to her books.

FRANK

Sometimes I dream about ringing up work and saying, I can't come in today, I'm reading a good book, and they say "we get it, stay home until you finish it."

(beat)

Have you read all of these?

FRANCIE

Some of them three times over.

FRANK

Why don't you buy some more?

FRANCIE

Mama said you could always find a fresh perspective every time you read them.

Frank picks up *Gone with The Wind*. Francie joins him by the bookcase.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

That one is such a doozy. Say what she want about Scarlett O'Hara, but she knew how to get shit done -

Francie's hands instantly fly to her mouth. Frank almost drops the book in shock.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

Oh. My. Stars.

FRANK

You just swore! About books!

Francie slowly pulls her hands from her mouth.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Felt good right?

She shakes her head, but then starts to nod.

FRANCIE

(tentatively)

Fuck.

She giggles.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

(braver)

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck!

And with a twirl Francie dances around the room swearing, and Frank joins her.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)  
 (singing)  
 Fucking fuck fuck fuck!  
 (beat)

FRANK  
 Fuck fuck fuck!

FRANK  
 CUNT!

And with that eruption Francie stops dancing, and 'faints' in horror onto the chaise lounge.

FRANK  
 Shit.

Frank rushes to her motionless side, unsure of what to do.

FRANK  
 Francie, are you okay? Where are your smelling salts?

She opens one eye, and then starts laughing.

FRANK  
 Very nice.

FRANCIE  
 Smelling salts!?

Francie starts laughing again, and sits up on the sofa. Frank flops next to her.

FRANCIE  
 That sure felt good though! Like I took off a really tight sock.  
 (she looks up to the ceiling)  
 I'm sorry mama, I'll be good from now on.

Frank's phone rings. It's Matilda.

FRANK  
 Nope.

He hangs up on her.

FRANCIE  
 Everything okay?

FRANK  
 Yeah.

FRANCIE  
 So tell me about your day Frank? Did you input data?

FRANK  
 No. It was my nieces 11th birthday party.

FRANCIE

For my 11th birthday mama let me watch the fireworks the neighbors were putting on. I had to stay on the porch, but it was a good day all the same!

FRANK

What about in the states? Any birthdays you remember from back then?

FRANCIE

I wish. That time is all a bit of a fuzz.

FRANK

So you don't remember anything?

FRANCIE

You want me to lie?

FRANK

No, but if you can't remember then how do you even know -

He trails off.

FRANCIE

Know what?

FRANK

Nothing. Sorry. I should go, it's been a long weird day -

FRANCIE

No, no, no. Sit down. You ain't leaving in this mood. See if I can't make you glad in the same britches you got grumpy in.

Francie heads over to the bookcase, selects *Gone with The Wind*. She sits back down opposite Frank.

She opens the book, and begins to read.

FRANCIE

*Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realised it when caught by her charm as the Tarleton Twins were. In her face were too sharply blended the delicate features of her mother, a Coast aristocrat of French descent, and the heavy ones of her florid Irish father.*

As she talks Frank leans back on the sofa. His eyes slowly start to close. And he drifts off.

INT. FRANCIE'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

The room is pitch black. Frank wakes with a start. He has been covered up in one of Francie's hand made blankets.

He removes it, and checks his phone for the time. It's late. He heads for the door. But then stops.

He heads towards the stairs.

INT. FRANCIE'S HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

He slowly opens a door, to reveal Francie through a crack. She is fast asleep in a nightgown high up to her neck, and has a white bonnet on her head. She looks peaceful.

FRANK (V.O.)

In classic romantic literature watching a sleeping woman is normally a sign of absolute love. The height of romance, rather than actually a really creepy thing to do. Not that he was being romantic or creepy. Because she was just a story.

He shuts the door. He stands in the hallway for a beat. And opens the door opposite. He enters.

INT. FRANCIE'S MOTHERS ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Frank turns on a light, illuminating another bedroom. Another old fashioned and perfectly kept room. On the wall is a portrait picture of Francie's mama, and Francie. Francie is beaming, but her mother looks stiff. They are both dressed in their usual Southern Belle attire.

FRANK

Nice to finally meet you, Charlotte Watson.

He looks around, unsure of his next move. He heads for a bedside cabinet.

He opens it. And pulls out an iPad.

He looks at the iPad. Then shakes his head disapprovingly at the photo of Francie's mama.

FRANK

Really Charlotte? Really?

He then picks out a dusty photo from the cabinet, and looks at it.

ON THE SCREEN: Francie's mum, younger and sickly looking, in a hospital bed holding a tiny baby. It is a stark contrast to the stiff image on the wall. He puts it in his pocket.

INT. FRANCIE'S LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

He grabs his coat which has fallen on the living room floor. He notices a flowery tin box stuffed under a dresser.

He opens it up, and reveals a pile of money. And a handwritten note. He unfolds it.

Prelap of voiceover:

FRANK (V.O.)

Dear Francie, this money should last you a while. I am so sorry I have to go but I don't think I can carry on.

EXT. GENIE'S BOTTLE. EVENING.

Frank is at his usual booth with Nancy, reading from his phone.

FRANK

You will be fine without me, you are so much braver than I ever was. Please remember everything I did, I did to protect you. Mama.

NANCY

She killed herself.

FRANK

(sombre)  
Yeah.

NANCY

That's brilliant Frank! Now you have your hook! She did it because of the guilt she felt over what she did to Francie. Seriously, you play your cards right and this story could get you a lot of attention.

FRANK

(flatly)  
Huh.

NANCY

The next Lois Lane. How about that?

Frank offers her a stiff smile.

FRANK

How about that.

EXT. STREET - EARLY EVENING.

A display board above a cinema has *Gone with the Wind*, in large letters. Francie and Frank exit the cinema, Francie practically vibrating with excitement.

She is dressed extra special tonight, carrying a delicate umbrella and wearing a large brimmed hat, secured to her face with a ribbon.

As they walk along the street:

FRANCIE

The screen was so big that Rhett Bulter's face was the size of the moon.

(beat)

I can't wait until we land on it.

Frank checks Francie's face to see if she is serious. It appears she is.

FRANCIE

Thank you for taking me to the talkies.

FRANK

Wasn't as scary as you thought?

Francie shakes her head, and they walk past a nightclub and hear the sound of a live energetic fiddle band spilling out on to the street. The tone of the song not too dissimilar to *The Elkins* theme.

They both look at each other.

A ELOQUENTLY DRESSED COUPLE exit the nightclub, wearing a similar period costume as Francie, but with a modern twist.

Frank and Francie exchange a puzzled look, as the pair light cigarettes at the end of holders.

FRANK

Hey, what's going in there tonight?

ELOQUENTLY DRESSED MAN

Vintage night. Pretty sweet. All Americana music and shit.

Frank looks at Francie.

FRANK

You feeling brave?

FRANCIE

Lets go home.

FRANK

Come on, these are your people. It'll be fun.

FRANCIE

It's getting late --

She starts walking off. Frank catches up with her.

FRANK  
Sorry, I just thought -

FRANCIE  
It's too much.

TEENAGE BOY (O.S)  
Fucking freak!

Frank looks across the street. A gang of TEENAGE BOYS across the road are laughing and gesturing rudely at Francie.

Francie appears not to have heard them.

TEENAGE BOY (O.S)  
(shouting at Frank)  
She a good fuck mate?

Frank turns back to look at them. They are now keeping pace on the other side of the street.

More jeering from the gang of lads.

TEENAGE BOY (O.S)  
Wanna come and sit on my dick?

FRANK  
Oh, that's it.

Frank gears himself up to cross the road and deck the laughing boys. But Francie touches him gently on the arm, shakes her head. They carry on in silence. The insults and laughter follow them.

They get to a underground station. People stream in and out. Francie stops at the top and peers into the depths.

Then she carries on down. Frank follows.

INT. LONDON UNDERGROUND - CONTINUOUS

Frank and Francie walk in silence through a virtually empty underground walkway.

Then the sound of loud teenage boys floods the hall.

TEENAGE BOY  
What's under your dress love? Is it as ugly as you're face?

Francie grabs Frank's hand, and marches him away.

INT. UNDERGROUND PLATFORM - MINUTES LATER

They wait in silence. Frank steals a concerned glance at Francie, her normal cheerful face one of dismay.

FRANK

What's wrong?

Francie begins to cry.

FRANCIE

I just miss her. That's all.

Frank nods, and puts his arms around her and hugs her. She pulls back, and it looks like they are about to kiss when:

A tube train whooshes into the station. The spell is broken. They pull apart and board it.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Frank watches Francie put her key in her front door. She opens it, and hesitates.

FRANCIE

You gotta girlfriend Frank?

FRANK

It's complicated.

FRANCIE

Mama said all the good men died in the war. She said the one's that were left, they just want you to take care of them. But in secret, so they're pride ain't hurt none.

FRANK

You want to meet someone?

FRANCIE

I thought I did, but I don't know anymore. I don't think I want to take care of anyone. Not again.

FRANK

Maybe it only works if you both think you're taking care of the other.

FRANCIE

Yeah. Maybe. Good night, Frank.

Francie heads inside. Frank turns to leave but Johnny emerges from the shadows.

JOHNNY

Alright.

Frank staggers back in surprise, and Johnny laughs.

JOHNNY

Sorry to interrupt your date.  
 (does impression of Francie)  
 All the best men died in the war.  
 (as himself)  
 She's batshit mate. Like her mother.

FRANK

What?

Johnny gets a brown envelope out of his shoulder bag, and hands it to Frank.

JOHNNY

Information about Charlotte Watson.  
 She was sectioned a couple of times,  
 manic depressive, had Francie just  
 after she was banged up in a mental  
 hospital.

FRANK

How did you get this?

JOHNNY

I'm good at my job. Nancy asked me to  
 look into it, was worried you were  
 being slow.

Frank turns the brown envelope over in his hand.

FRANK

(sadly)  
 Thanks.

JOHNNY

I'll be seeing ya.  
 (beat)  
 And calm down mate. It's just a story.

Johnny disappears into the evening.

INT. FRANK'S BEDROOM - EVENING

The brown envelope lies open. It's contents, hand written notes and medical reports, are spread out over Frank's desk. Frank grimaces as he reads one of the reports.

His laptop is open on his desk, his phone next to it. It vibrates and makes him jump. He answers it.

FRANK

(into phone)  
 Hi. Yep. I know when the deadline is.  
 I'm sending it now. *I am.*

He moves his chair over to his laptop. He clicks a few buttons, and we hear the sound of an e-mail whooshing away.

FRANK  
 (into phone)  
 There. Done.  
 (beat)  
 A party. Sure. Sounds great.

He hangs up. He looks back at his laptop, at that sent e-mail. And shuts the lid.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - EVENING

Frank stands alone by a elaborate buffet table eating a plate piled high with salmon. He is wearing a plush suit, and looks the part. If it weren't for his wonky bow tie. He is surrounded by WELL DRESSED PATRONS drinking champagne, and chatting.

FRANK (V.O.)  
 Frank loved parties, his small talk was impeccable and his networking skills left people begging for his card.

He pulls out his business card. It's clean, and boring. It simply says Frank Leonard. Writer.

The sound of familiar laughter makes him look up. He spots Nancy across the room having an intimate conversation with a DARK HAired MAN.

He walks up to her.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
 Hi.

NANCY  
 Frank. Hi.

She kisses him quickly on the cheek.

NANCY (CONT'D)  
 This is Gareth Richards, he's the features editor for The Tribune. Frank's the writer I was telling you about, doing the piece on that nutty Vivian Leigh type -

GARETH  
 Frank. Of course.

As Gareth and Frank shake hands:

GARETH  
 Can't wait to read it, sounds hilarious.

Frank goes to say something, but Gareth is already putting his business card in his hands.

GARETH

You should come in for a meeting  
sometime, pitch us some ideas.

(to Nancy)

Another martini?

NANCY

Are you trying to get me drunk?

GARETH

Always.

Nancy laughs, and Gareth walks off. When he is out of range, her fake smile quickly fades. She talks to Frank but always has an eye on the room, looking for other people to talk to.

NANCY

Well done on the story. You had me  
worried for a while, but you really  
didn't pull any punches. And the stuff  
on her mother -- brutal.

Before Frank can reply, she spots someone she knows and offers them a wave.

NANCY

Go and mingle with some people, tell  
them about your story.

Nancy wonders off, leaving Frank alone.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - LATER

Frank walks around on his own, occasionally lingering near other guests. He checks his phone. Nothing.

INT. FRANCIE'S LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Francie is listening to music on her gramophone, humming to herself and sewing up the hem of a dress. She hears a crunch, coming from the garden. Like a heavy foot treading on leaves.

She turns off her gramophone and listens intently. Another crunch. She heads to the kitchen.

INT. FRANCIE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She peers out of the kitchen window into the darkness. Nothing. And then a dark shadow moves. She covers her mouth to stop a scream escaping, and legs it from the kitchen.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

FRANCIE (V.O.)

You know there isn't going to be any war," said Scarlett, bored. "It's all just talk. Why, Ashley Wilkes and his father told Pa just last week that our commissioners in Washington would come to -

Frank stands outside the hotel, with white ear buds in, listening to Francie talk.

Nancy comes outside, and spots Frank. He quickly takes out his headphones.

NANCY

I wondered where you were hiding.

FRANK

I wasn't hiding.

Nancy lights a cigarette.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I didn't know you smoked?

NANCY

Now you're the only one who does. What's with you tonight?

FRANK

I just, I can't -- I'm finding it difficult to -

NANCY

Detach?

FRANK

Yes.

NANCY

(exasperated)

You need to let go of this image you have in your head of this completely amoral person. It's a fantasy, okay? If Lois Lane were real, and dating Superman, you don't think she would be using that relationship to get the inside scoop on him? Because if she was any kind of good reporter, that's what she would be doing. That's what I would do.

(beat)

I'll see you in there.

Nancy heads back in. Frank stares after her.

FRANK (V.O.)

He always knew when to leave a party.  
When they wanted more.

He walks away from the hotel.

INT. MATILDA'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Frank walks into the kitchen, exhausted.

FRANK

Well butter my butt and call it a  
biscuit, what a shitty evening -

He stops mid sentence. Francie is sitting at the kitchen table  
with Matilda, sipping a cup of tea.

FRANK (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

FRANCIE

I am so sorry for turning up like  
this. I shouldn't have -

MATILDA

(interrupting)

She was scared so I invited her in.

FRANK

What's happened?

FRANCIE

Oh, it's stupid, I probably got my  
knickers in a knot over nothing but I  
thought there was someone in my garden  
- it's so silly.

FRANK

In your garden? Who?

FRANCIE

I think they were a man. Had a bread  
basket bigger than a bread box, if  
you'll know what I am saying.

Frank nods, she is describing Johnny.

FRANK

(translating to Matilda)

They had a large build.

(beat)

Do you think maybe all this time  
alone, maybe your imagination might be  
getting the better of you?

MATILDA

Or it could have been a burglar -

FRANCIE

No, I'm sure Frank's right.

(beat)

Thank you for the tea Matilda, I should really get going -

FRANK

Have you eaten?

INT. DINING ROOM. EVENING.

Matilda, Francie, Rose and Frank sit around the table. A huge half eaten pizza sits in the middle. The girls are in fits of giggles as Matilda attempts to spit out a story.

MATILDA

He was refusing to leave class, and then the teacher called me in and told me that he had gotten "married" to a stick he'd found in the playground, but had accidentally broke it, and wanted to be taken to the police station to turn himself in for murder!

FRANCIE

A stick!

Matilda bursts into laughter, which sends Francie into a fit of giggles. Frank looks less amused.

FRANK

I was a weird kid. Okay?

MATILDA

No you weren't. You were just a bit sensitive.

FRANCIE

I bet he was the sweetest.

MATILDA

He was.

(beat)

Oh, I have to show you something!

She darts out the room. Rose is staring at Francie.

ROSE

Why are you dressed weird?

FRANK

Rose!

FRANCIE

It's okay. I dress like this because I come from a tiny town in America, where we all dress like this.

ROSE

Oh. Cool.

Matilda re-enters holding a tattered looking A4 booklet.

MATILDA

You are gonna love this Francie.

FRANK

What's that?

MATILDA

It's your first foray into journalism.

Matilda hands Francie the booklet and pulls up a chair next to her.

FRANCIE

Oh, it's a newspaper! *The Leonard Family Express*

ON THE SCREEN: A crudely handmade newspaper. The front page has The Leonard Family Express scrawled on it in childish handwriting.

FRANK

Why do you still have that?

MATILDA

Because it's amazing.  
(to Francie)  
Open it!

Francie does as she is commanded.

MATILDA

He interviewed us all for it. Look at this page -

FRANCIE

(reading)  
'Clare Leonard, 39, is a mother who enjoys dancing, singing and making banana bread.' That your mama?

Frank nods, slowly.

MATILDA

And he interviewed the nurses at the hospice she was in too. Wrote about how nice they were, made them all cry -

And with that Matilda starts welling up, and Frank quickly gets up from his chair.

FRANK

Excuse me.

EXT. MATILDA'S HOUSE. LATER

Frank sits on the porch, looking a little shell shocked. The door opens, and Francie exits the house, shouting her good-byes as she goes.

FRANCIE  
Thanks again Matilda! Bye Rose!  
(to Frank)  
What a delightful evening.

Frank offers a tight smile. She sits down next to him.

FRANCIE  
Your newspaper was really great Frank.

FRANK  
Bit sentimental.

FRANCIE  
No. I wish I had known you when you were knee high. I bet we would have been great friends.

FRANK  
I bet.

FRANCIE  
I should get going. But thank you again for being so kind to me.

FRANK  
No problem.

Francie smiles, and suddenly they are leaning in closer. Inches apart and Frank says:

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Wait -

But at that moment Francie kisses him, very softly on the lips.

FRANCIE  
I knew you wanted to be my husband.

Frank panics, ready to protest but then he notices a coy smile on Francie's lips.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)  
I'm just messing with you.  
(beat)  
I'll see ya.

And with that she gets up, and walks off. Whistling as she goes.

INT. ROSE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Matilda is putting a sleepy Rose to bed. Frank barges in.

FRANK

Sorry about -

Matilda shhhh's him. He backs away to the door as she finishes tucking Rose in. She joins him at the door.

MATILDA

She was different.

FRANK

Yep.

MATILDA

I liked her. I really liked her. I'm glad you have a friend.

FRANK

Thanks?

MATILDA

I mean I know you have friends. But a friend like her. You both have a lot in common.

(beat)

Frank, you know if anything happened to me -

She looks at the peaceful Rose.

FRANK

I know.

MATILDA

I just can't stand the idea of her being alone.

(beat)

Oh. I had lunch with Juliet today.

FRANK

How was it.

MATILDA

Good. Really good.

INT. FRANK'S BEDROOM. LATER

Frank lies on his bed, opens his bedside drawer and pulls out an old Polaroid. It's a picture of YOUNG FRANK and his MUM. She is in a hospital bed, with her arms around him.

He gets up and pulls the picture of Francie and her mum out of his coat pocket.

He places them both on his desk, side by side. He opens up his laptop and starts typing:

FRANK (V.O.)

This is a story of grief. Of trying to survive terrible pain and loss the only way you can. By deluding yourself. And sometimes that delusion can be beautiful -

INT. FRANCIE'S HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Francie, in her super high neck nightgown, walks along her hall, and stops by the picture of her papa. She kisses her fingers and places them on the picture.

FRANK (V.O.)

- it can help us get out of bed in the morning, protect those we love the most. Sometimes it is the only way to survive.

Francie looks at a picture of her mama. Alone in a frame. And turns out the light.

INT. THE WEEKLY STAR, CALVIN'S OFFICE. DAY

A pained Frank watches as Nancy and Calvin both read from their separate electronic devices. Nancy finishes first, and looks up at Calvin, refusing to look at Frank. Then Calvin finishes. Puts down his device.

CALVIN

What the fuck did I just read?

FRANK

I think it's a lot better than the first version -

CALVIN

No, it's not. It's awful. It's like some teenage girls diary. And she's on her period.

FRANK

You're entitled to your opinion, but you either print this, or nothing.

Calvin looks at Nancy like 'who is this guy?'

CALVIN

Get out.

Frank goes to say something, but Nancy stands up and touches him on the shoulder.

NANCY

I'm so sorry about this Calvin.

Calvin waves his hand to dismiss them, and goes back to looking at his computer.

EXT. THE DAILY POST, HALLWAY - LATER

Frank and Nancy are waiting for a lift at the end of the hallway. Nancy is stony faced, not looking at him.

FRANK

I don't care what he says, that was the better version. Why throw her under the bus when you can make people see her, really see her, and realise she isn't so different.

He turns to face Nancy.

FRANK

It was the right way to tell the story.

The door lifts open. They both get in, followed by two chatting SUITED COLLEAGUES. Nancy talks to Frank as though they are not there.

NANCY

You know, even if it was just badly written we could fix that, but it's worse. It's boring. No one gives a shit about your dead mum, or hers.

The two suited colleagues stop talking, and look over at them.

NANCY

And you lied to Francie, for nothing. So no happy ending there either.

Frank, although a little thrown, attempts to remain composed.

FRANK

I'm sorry I wasted your time. But I think it's for the best if we just let the story die now. Okay?

Nancy doesn't answer, and as the doors ping open she marches out of the lift. The doors shut.

INT. PORTLAND & SON'S, ACCOUNTING OFFICE. DAY

Frank is staring blankly at his computer screen.

Tim stops by his desk, snapping him out of his daydream and looking exceptionally serious.

TIM

Can I have a word?

INT. TIM'S OFFICE. MINUTES LATER

Through the clear glass of the office we see Tim behind his desk, facing Frank. Bill is sitting next to him, looking sheepish. Tim looks stern as he talks to Frank, who looks at Bill, who in turn avoids his gaze.

Eventually Frank stands up and walks out the door.

EXT. PORTLAND & SON'S BUILDING - DAY

Frank, with a box of his belongings, exits the building. RING RING. He pulls his phone out of his pocket. He doesn't recognise the number.

FRANK

Hello?

INT. MOIRA'S OFFICE. CONTINUOUS

Moira sits at her desk, with a open tabloid in front of her. It's The Weekly Star. We see a picture of Francie with the headline SEX CRAZED INCESTUOUS ELKIN CULT.

MOIRA

(into phone)

Frank, why didn't you come to me with this story?

EXT. PORTLAND & SON'S BUILDING. CONTINUOUS.

Oh shit.

FRANK

(into phone)

Huh?

INT. MOIRA'S OFFICE. CONTINUOUS

MOIRA

(into phone)

The Elkin story! It's so much fun. You must do a follow up with us. Why don't you come in for a meeting -

EXT. PORTLAND & SON'S BUILDING. CONTINUOUS.

Frank abruptly hangs up. For a beat he is at a loss for what to do. And then he starts to run.

EXT. FRANCIE'S HOUSE. DAY.

Frank hammers on the front door of Francie's house.

FRANK

Francie! It's Frank. Let me in.

No answer. Frank looks at his watch, and sprints off.

INT. SUPERMARKET. LATER

FRANK (V.O.)

Francie had suffered more grief in her life than most, and she had always managed to pick herself up with a song in her heart and a smile on her face. Nothing could break her spirit. Of that she was sure.

Francie, woven basket in hand, is picking up some apples.

Then Bob, the married sleaze, approaches her with a copy of The Weekly Star. He gestures to something inside, and to her. A confused but still smiling Francie takes the newspaper. And as she reads, that almost constant smile finally drops.

INT. SUPERMARKET. LATER

Frank dashes between aisles of the supermarket, desperately looking for Francie.

He spots an apple at the end of an aisle and then another, and he follows the trail around, until he finds Francie. She is slumped on the floor, her back against a freezer. She is still reading the newspaper.

She looks up as Frank approaches.

FRANCIE

(reading)

Francie thinks she is a southern belle despite being born in a Brixton hospital, and her mother was a manic depressive with bouts in mental health facilitates, -

FRANK

I didn't know they were going to print that version, I swear -

FRANCIE

(reading)

- who modelled her life on the cheesy 1970's cult drama The Elkins. In her mothers suicide note she claimed she was 'protecting her...'

FRANK

I am so sorry Francie.

Frank kneels down to comfort her, but she pushes him away. A unstable Frank falls on the floor.

There is an anger in Francie's eyes, almost animalistic.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

Don't you fucking touch me.

Francie gets up and runs away.

EXT. STREET - MINUTES LATER

Francie stumbles through the street, banging into PEDESTRIANS as she goes. Her vision swims, and as she lurches past ON-LOOKERS she starts to notice every stare, every comment and every whisper.

She stops, trying to drown out the cacophony of judgemental faces and harsh words.

She catches sight of herself in the reflection of a shop front. She stops, and stares at her clothes, as if seeing herself for the first time.

She begins to frantically pull at them, tearing parts of her sleeves off, pulling at fabric in desperation until her dress is a dishevelled mess. She pulls off her pearls, and unpins her hair.

She looks around, and spots a nearby bridge. She heads towards it, nearly getting hit by a car as she crosses the street. Breathing hard she leans against the side of the bridge and stares into the water below.

CONCERNED MOTHER (O.S)

You alright love?

Francie turns to face the voice. A CONCERNED MOTHER, who is clinging onto the hand of her YOUNG DAUGHTER, is watching Francie, her face full of pity.

FRANCIE

Did you...did you ever watch The Elkins?

CONCERNED MOTHER

Are you okay?

FRANCIE

(smiling)  
Fine, and...

She stops herself.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

Please. The Elkins. It was a TV show. Did you watch it?

The mother nods.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

Was it good?

CONCERNED MOTHER

It was a bit cheesy, but it was okay.

FRANCIE  
Okay. It was okay.

Francie laughs to herself, suddenly giddy.

CONCERNED MOTHER  
Can I call anyone for you?

FRANCIE  
I ain't got no one to call.

A large red bus goes past, slowing for traffic. It proudly displays an advert for HOME ON THE RANGE. Francie gazes at it in shock.

FRANCIE  
Papa.

Francie reads the advert.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)  
Victoria Palladium.  
(to the concerned mother)  
How do I get there?

EXT. STREET. AT THE SAME TIME.

Frank paces along the street, minutes behind Francie, desperately searching for her amongst the sea of pedestrians.

Then the same red bus goes past Frank, proudly displaying that advert. He watches it go.

FRANK  
Shit.

EXT. STREET. LATER

Francie waits by the stage door of the Victoria Palladium, along with some ELKIN FANS. They have on their 'I heart Billy-Jo' and 'The Elkins' T-shirts.

Francie eyes them with distrust. And then out comes Billy Jo. His fans swarm him with autograph books and phones.

Frank appears at the edge of the crowd. He spies Francie amongst the army of fans, but he can't get to her.

Francie fights to front, until she is smack bang in front of 'Billy Jo.'

'BILLY JO'  
Nice outfit. What do you want signed?

FRANCIE  
Papa!

Francie throws herself at him, hugging him tightly. He quickly untangles himself from her.

Frank, stuck between TWO EXCITED FANS, watches as the scene plays out in front of him.

'BILLY JO'

Wow there, just photos or autographs.

FRANCIE

Tell me you remember me. Please tell me you remember me.

'BILLY JO'

I'm sorry. Should I?

She stumbles back from him, letting his other fans through. Frank goes after her.

FRANK

Francie, wait.

Francie spins round and faces him, tears pouring down her cheeks. He takes a step towards her. She motions for him to stop. He does.

For a moment they just stare at each other. And then she walks away, and he lets her.

INT. MATILDA'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Frank opens the door to the living room. Matilda is sitting on the sofa and watching the television.

MATILDA

There's some lasagna in the oven if you're hungry.

Then she catches sight of Frank's heartbroken face.

MATILDA

What happened?

INT. MATILDA'S KITCHEN - LATER

They sit at the kitchen table, sharing an almost empty bottle of wine.

FRANK

F. Scott Fitzgerald told Hemingway that he was a virgin before he met his wife, and she said he could never satisfy her because he had a small penis. You know what he did with that story?

Matilda shakes her head.

FRANK (CONT'D)

He put it in a fucking book.

Frank starts to cry, and Matilda squeezes his hand.

MATILDA

It's okay.

FRANK

I let you down -

MATILDA

No -

FRANK

I did. I just, god this is so lame, I kept picturing the look on your face when the article was printed. I thought maybe then it would have all been worth it, everything you have done, or couldn't do. For me.

MATILDA

I love you, you massive shit head. Okay. We are fine. We will always be fine.

Frank nods, wiping his tears on his sleeve.

MATILDA

Why don't you go and read Rose a bedtime story. I'm sure she'd like that.

FRANK

Okay.

Frank heads to the door. Matilda's voice stops him.

MATILDA

Maybe something a little different tonight. Something with a powerful female character in it. Maybe one who has a Pulitzer prize?

INT. ROSE'S BEDROOM. EVENING.

Frank sits on the edge of the bed, in front of a captivated and tucked up Rose. He holds his vintage Lois Lane comic book in his hands.

FRANK

My mum, your grandmother, gave this to me when I was your age. I know it's not Superman, or Batman, but I think she's cooler than them both.

Frank turns to the first page.

FRANK  
 (reading from the comic)  
 Lois Lane was in trouble. Lex Luthor  
 had coated Superman's cape with  
 Kryptonite --

INT. DOG'S HOME - DAY

FRANK (V.O.)  
 Over the next few months Francis  
 worked valiantly to restore balance to  
 his life and fix all the mistakes he  
 had made.

Frank goes to the kennel where Jeronimo was, but it's empty. A  
 KENNEL WORKER gestures that he has gone.

EXT. STREET. DAY

Frank walks past a recycling box, and spies a copy of his  
 article in it. He fishes it out, opens it and zeroes in on the  
 picture of Francie and her mum.

Underneath the headline: by Frank Leonard. Additional reporting  
 by Claudette Omaha. He throws it back in.

FRANK (V.O.)  
 He had produced an article which made  
 everyone like him.

INT. GENIE'S BOTTLE. DAY

Frank enters the bar, and spies Nancy across the room drinking  
 and laughing with Calvin and Johnny.

She spies him. For a second the mask drops and she looks  
 concerned, almost guilty.

Then it is gone. And she goes back to talking to Calvin.

FRANK (V.O.)  
 He fixed all the problems in his life.

Frank watches her for a second, and turns around and leaves.

INT. SARAH'S LIVING ROOM. EVENING

Sarah splatters black paint onto a huge canvas whilst Frank  
 lies comatose on the couch flicking through the channels.

He stops on an episode of The Elkins. Sarah looks at him in  
 concern, as he mouths along.

FRANK (V.O.)  
 He had always prided himself on being  
 a positive man, who could pick himself  
 up.

His phone vibrates. A text from Moira: Come in for a meeting next week.

INT. SARAH'S KITCHEN. LATER

Frank throws his phone in the bin.

FRANK (V.O.)  
And who knew how to make everyone  
happy.

INT. SMALL CAFE - EVENING

Francie, nearly unrecognizable in a hoody and jeans, wipes down a crumb ridden table in an elegant small cafe. We reveal Frank, watching from outside the cafe. Francie turns around, spots him and freezes.

He offers her a meek wave, a hesitant smile.

Her expression cold, she takes a deep breath and turns around and continues to clean the table.

FRANK (V.O.)  
And he knew that he and Francie would  
be okay. Eventually.

Frank walks on. We linger on Francie. She doesn't turn around.

INT. BUSY PUB - EVENING

Frank sits at the back of a pub, watching Bill finish up a comedy set. The AUDIENCE is sparse but he tries to make them laugh all the same. As Bill walks off stage, Frank joins in the smattering of applause and throws in some loud whooping and cheering for good measure.

Bill spots Frank in the audience, and Frank gestures to one of the two pints of beer in front of him.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - EVENING

Frank walks amongst crumbling gravestones. He holds a cake box in his hands.

FRANK (V.O.)  
There was only one person left to talk  
to, who he knew would always be there  
for him. No matter what. Who would  
listen to him. Because she didn't have  
a choice.

He stops by a grave. It reads CLARE LEONARD. BELOVED MOTHER.  
1973 - 2013

FRANK (CONT'D)

Hi mum. I don't know if you like this kind of cake or not because -- you're dead. And unable to eat. Fuck this is so stupid.

(beat)

It's me. Frank. Your son. I hope you're okay wherever you are. Which is probably nowhere. But at least you're not in any pain. I am kind of glad you aren't here at the moment. I think if you were here you would tell me I let you down. Badly. I super fucked things up and I know you would not give a shit about whether I had made it or not. You would probably rather I was just a good person. Which I actually think is harder.

Frank sets down the cake box.

FRANK

Okay. I miss you. Bye.

He walks away.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE. DAY

ON THE SCREEN: SIX MONTHS LATER.

Frank sits behind a plastic looking desk, facing a 25 year old smartly dressed BESPECTACLED WOMAN.

His tiny office is small but functional. The tatty cover of The Leonard Family Express hangs on the wall.

There is a copy of The Weekly Star on the table in front of them. The headline reads 'My Sweet Bonks with Sour TV Chef.'

He writes notes as she talks.

FRANK

So you originally spoke to Johnny around November time?

BESPECTACLED WOMAN

Yeah. He came into my office, said he wanted to buy a flat, I showed him a couple of properties.

FRANK

And when you first told him about your relationship with Malcolm, you had no idea he was a journalist?

BESPECTACLED WOMAN

If I had I wouldn't have said anything! Not that I said half of this bullshit anyway --

She gestures to the newspaper.

BESPECTACLED WOMAN

I know I seem naive but we'd become friends. He was a good listener.

Frank can't help but guffaw to himself.

FRANK

Sorry. I don't mean to - it's just, I've met the guy, and that surprises me.

BESPECTACLED WOMAN

People can put it on though, can't they?

FRANK

Yep, they certainly can.

(beat)

I don't know how much you know about the website --

BESPECTACLED WOMAN

You're trying to stop people like Johnny treating people like me like shit? Right?

FRANK

Pretty much, I'm hoping by shining a light on the journalistic practices of The Weekly Star and other newspapers similar in style, I can show that there is a metaphorical body count to some of their work. Consequences.

BESPECTACLED WOMAN

Like the fact no one will hire me, and my dad refuses to talk to me?

FRANK

Yeah. And you know that you have final say on everything I write, you can back out anytime if you feel uncomfortable.

She nods.

FRANK

Great. So are you in?

BESPECTACLED WOMAN

He destroyed my life. I have to do something.

(beat)

So how did you use to know Johnny?

FRANK

Oh, I used to be a bit of a prick.

Knock on door.

FRANK

Come in.

The door opens and in strolls Francie.

She looks like an on trend mix between the old her, and a modern updated version of her. Sure, she wears jeans, but her hair is styled into perfect ringlets and she is adorned with pearls.

Frank is speechless for a second.

FRANCIE

Hi.

FRANK

Hi.

(to the bespectacled woman)

Would you mind if we picked this up again tomorrow?

BESPECTACLED WOMAN

Yeah. Sure.

FRANK

Thanks.

Frank shakes her hand. And the woman heads out, offering a smile to Francie as she goes.

Frank gets up from behind his desk, and faces Francie.

FRANK

Hi.

Francie eyes land on the framed The Leonard Family Express.

She smiles.

FRANK

Do you want to sit down?

FRANCIE

I can't stay long.

FRANK

Of course.

Francie sits on his futon, and Frank leans against his desk.

FRANK

Do you want a --

His eyes fall on half a sausage roll in a paper bag on his desk.

FRANK

Sausage roll?

FRANCIE

I'm good thank you. So, Matilda told me you moved out?

FRANK

Yeah. Finally. That's my bed.

He gestures to futon.

FRANCIE

She also told me that you're some sort of crusader now, with your website?

FRANK

I'm not quite there yet but I have definitely been crossed off a few national newspapers Christmas lists.

(beat)

Have you seen it?

FRANCIE

I have. I finally went on the internet. It's admirable work.

FRANK

Thank you.

After a beat of silence, Frank finally acknowledges the elephant in the room.

FRANK

I'm sorry. For everything I did to you.

FRANCIE

I know. But now we have to both move on now as best we can.

(beat)

I actually came here for a reason. I thought maybe it was time you told my story. For your site. My mama, she may have been a troubled woman, but she didn't deserve what you said about her. I owe it to her, to set the record straight.

FRANK

Of course.

Before Frank can say anything else, Francie stands up to leave.

FRANCIE

Good. I have to go.

FRANK

Already?

FRANCIE

I'm meeting -- someone.

FRANK

(understanding)

Oh. So you're happy?

FRANCIE

Taking it day by day, but I'm getting there. I'll be back tomorrow. Maybe I'll bring pie.

FRANK

Great. I'll see you tomorrow.

FRANCIE

Bye Frank.

Francie gets to the door, and turns around. She gestures to the office.

FRANCIE

This. It suits you.

And with that she waltzes out. Frank leans back, a sad little smile on his face.

He goes to the window and watches Francie, still a ray of god damn sunshine, as she walks along the street, whistling and smiling at people as she goes.

FRANK (V.O.)

Francie Veronica Mary Elkin lead a simple life. One of virtue and impeccable manners, but she was content with her little life, one that had weathered and could weather any storm. Of that she was certain.

Frank's phone rings, and he sits back down at his desk and goes back to work.

FRANK

(Into phone)

Frank Leonard.

Mr. Reynolds, thank you for calling me  
back - so you were interviewed about  
six months ago by The Star -

FADE OUT.

THE END.