

GAVIN. Good!

JEREMIAH. And the boy ... he has to get her quiet —

GAVIN. Great! Now he's active.

JEREMIAH. So he puts his hand over the woman's mouth and gets her quiet.

GAVIN. And the snake?

JEREMIAH. It ... it slithers right over his foot ... and out the door.

GAVIN. Not bad.

JEREMIAH. But ... Mr. Miller — why would the snake go this way, and then turn around. Doesn't make much sense.

GAVIN. This snake with the Actor's Studio? He needs motivation? He did it because you wrote it that way! *(Gavin waits for a reaction. Finally ...)*

JEREMIAH. But ... that's not the way it happened.

GAVIN. So what! I got news for you; nobody ever stood at the front of the *Titanic* shoutin', "I'm king of the world" either. You're writing a movie so get off this truth kick. *(Hands him the paper.)* You're off to a great start. Go home and rewrite it.

JEREMIAH. I wanted to move ahead —

GAVIN. No, because I want you to learn something here and it's very important. Make it rough on your characters. *(Lights rise on Melanie, who holds a manila folder.)*

MELANIE. Two messages —

GAVIN. The minute you go easy on them, you're screwed. *(He moves to her as lights fade on Jeremiah.)*

MELANIE. Joel's assistant called. *(Before he can react.)* He set up a conference call with Disney. I put it on your calendar. *(Gavin just nods.)* So you decided to do it?

GAVIN. I haven't decided anything. What's the other message?

MELANIE. Audrey called. She feels you're avoiding her.

GAVIN. Very perceptive.

MELANIE. Why didn't you bring your student evaluations home from last semester? She said they were through the roof —

GAVIN. One little prick didn't like me. I recognized the handwriting. Wait till I get him in Screenwriting 2.

MELANIE. She needs an answer —

GAVIN. Do you have any idea —

GAVIN and MELANIE. — what that job pays. *(He gives her a "stop that" look as she sits next to him opening the folder.)*

MELANIE. This is our entire financial portfolio. Sit down, we're going over it.

GAVIN. No thanks. *(They speak simultaneously.)*

MELANIE. Bank statements. The 401 K's. Money market. Here's what I did with the money from the other house. Here is what I did with my golden parachute. And here is our total debt. Zero.

GAVIN. What is this, the report to the stockholders? Mel, I am not interested in — will you — this is your department I am not — Mel, knock it off. Why the hell are you doing this? *(Silence.)*

MELANIE. You do not have to do this call.

GAVIN. I knew it —

MELANIE. You do not have to put yourself —

GAVIN. Don't start —

MELANIE. Me? You're the one doing the call.

GAVIN. Hey, they called me, okay? They want me — what was I supposed to do?

MELANIE. Try saying no. Tell them we live here now, that you're a teacher —

GAVIN. It's just a phone call, Mel —

MELANIE. That's gonna get you thinking about going back and — and, and I'm getting very tired of you having one foot out the door. I would like to put down roots, Gav. I would like my house unpacked — I'm funny that way. But your big excuse is that we can't afford it. Well, we can. So please sit down, I'm going over this with you.

GAVIN. I am not looking at this stuff.

MELANIE. Why not? Come on, Gav, gimme one good reason.

GAVIN. Because you always say I shouldn't worry my pretty little head about such things. *(She starts to respond, then realizes what he just said. She starts to laugh, then catches herself.)*

MELANIE. Oh no ... no, no, no — *(Simultaneously. He doesn't hear a word she says but she hears him and tries to keep a straight face.)* I'm serious about this, Gav. I want you to see that we are perfectly — Gav, will you — I just want you to — will you stop it?

GAVIN. Which means I have to die first or I become the male version of the old cliché: husband dies and the little woman has no idea where any of the money is. Well, in this relationship, I'm the little woman. *(He observes her, knowing he's won a momentary victory. Mel, although still angry, keeps laughing.)*

MELANIE. You do this every time ...

GAVIN. Don't worry, you'll do fine. You'll be one of those cure old ladies who volunteer at the library and then go home and bang the pool boy.

MELANIE. You're like a five-year-old sometimes, you know that? I am serious about something and you make me laugh.

GAVIN. Great system.

MELANIE. Some day that's not going to work, you know.

GAVIN. Sure it will. You're my best audience. *(Hands her the folder.)*

Put this away please.

MELANIE. You hate David.

GAVIN. I hate most people.

MELANIE. You don't have to do this meeting —

GAVIN. Jesus ... is it six o'clock yet?

MELANIE. Do you want to move back?

GAVIN. I never said a word about moving —

MELANIE. Then unpack. And Audrey needs an answer before Christmas break. *(They stare at each other a moment in silence. Gavin smiles at her. She looks at her husband a moment, sighs, then smiles back.)* We don't have a pool.

GAVIN. I'm well insured. Put one in. *(Again, despite herself, she laughs as lights rise on Jeremiah as Gavin crosses to him, picking up pages.)*

JEREMIAH. What do you think?

MELANIE. *(Checking her watch.)* Five-forty-eight. Twelve minutes won't kill us. *(Lights fade on her.)*

GAVIN. Much better. Much, much better. *(Jeremiah raises his hand.)* It's just us. You don't have to do that.

JEREMIAH. It's just ... well, seems there's a very ... fine line between lying and fantasy. That's all —

GAVIN. You're telling a story —

JEREMIAH. Well, it's just that in Psalms —

GAVIN. Maybe we should change the subject. You don't want to get me started on religion.

JEREMIAH. Why not?

GAVIN. Because ... you're religious, and I respect that —

JEREMIAH. No you don't. *(A beat.)*

GAVIN. You're right. That was reflex-political-correctness. *(Playing on.)* Now, I want you to walk through the rest of the movie with me. Broad strokes. So ... what happens next?

JEREMIAH. Family's forced to leave the village.

GAVIN. Where'd they go?

JEREMIAH. Here.

GAVIN. *(Excited.)* Really?

JEREMIAH. Ghetto. My father doesn't like to use that word but ... filthy ... criminals — whole place ... just smells.

GAVIN. *(He leaps up, pacing.)* Let's see what we've got here. Naive, white kid raised in the wilderness suddenly finds himself plopped down in the city. What happens next?

JEREMIAH. Well, my father opens this shelter and ... and ... I'm not sure.

GAVIN. Common problem. Get out the notebook — we're gonna brainstorm here. Can the shelter maybe ... be in some sort of trouble? Evil landlord — wants to foreclose —

JEREMIAH. Church owned it.

GAVIN. Write it down anyway. *(Jeremiah looks at him.)* Trust me, this has a point. *(Jeremiah makes the note.)* What about a love story? Falls in love with a black girl — *West Side Story* without the prancing. *(Jeremiah shakes his head.)* Put it down. What about soccer? You set it up in the opening — maybe that's what drives the story.

JEREMIAH. How?

GAVIN. Say ... Jerry wants to go out for the team, dad forbids it.

JEREMIAH. My father wanted me to. *(Silence for a moment as Gavin stares at him.)*

GAVIN. Mr. Collins ... what do you have against conflict?

JEREMIAH. Nothing.

GAVIN. Oh, I think you do. Dad says "yes" there's no scene. Dad says "no" — now there's a scene. Why? *Because there's conflict!* *(He moves back to his home.)* Hey, I am not saying any of this is brilliant. But ... five minutes ago you had the scariest thing in the world. A blank page. *(Lights remain on Jeremiah as he writes, very seriously.)*

JEREMIAH. When the character says "yes" there's no scene. When the character says "no" — *(Lights rise on Gavin, who holds the phone and reams of scrawled notes.)*

GAVIN. Hello, David ...

JEREMIAH. — there's a scene.

GAVIN. Yeah, long time ... *(Lights fade on Jeremiah.)* No, no ... just wanted to do some teaching for a little bit ... just temporary — and Mel's parents are getting up there so we — right, old story ... no, no, no, strictly temporary, we'll be back soon ... and in the meantime I can always commute — I mean, I can be out there on a day's notice and — okay, okay, sure. *(Checking his notes.)* Well, I'll