

The Letter G
a play
by
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CHARACTERS

Uncle Lou Taminski: 50s/60s, affable children's entertainer.

Elizabeth Taminski: 30s, his hard-headed producer.

Jim Bradley: 50s, his long-time puppeteer.

Amelia Papageorge: 40s, station head.

SETTING: A public-access television studio.

TIME: The present.

SCENE 1

(A dark stage. A chipper theme song begins to play. It is the theme to "Uncle Lou's Workshop," a once-popular public-access children's show.)

MUSIC (RECORDED:)

Put on your overalls
Pick up your gloves
It's time to build something
You're going to love

In Uncle Lou's Workshop
We'll have a real good time

Forget all your worries
Forget all your cares
Come build with us
We've got parts to spare

In Uncle Lou's Workshop
We'll have a real good time.

Let imagination
Show you the way
Come in once
And you'll wanna stay

In Uncle Lou's Workshop
We'll have a real good time
We'll have a real good time.

(The lights come up, revealing the set of the show: a colorful workshop complete with tools and a workbench, with a window looking out on a colorful cartoon landscape. It all looks handmade and not in very good shape. UNCLE LOU is onstage. He wears a rather loud ensemble. He is working on some project in the

workshop as the theme song ends. He looks at the audience.)

LOU

Oh, hi there! Welcome back to *Uncle Lou's Workshop*. I'm Uncle Lou, and this is my workshop. Now comes our favorite portion of the show, where we make something together! We make all kinds of magical things in here. Anything your imagination can dream up! But before we do, there's something very important I forgot to do: greet the Sun on this beautiful day!

(He turns to face the window.)

Hello there, Sun!

SUN

Hello there, Uncle Lou!

LOU

And how are you this morning?

SUN

Bright-eyed and bushy tailed, of course!

LOU

I can see that. You're so bright, you're hurting my eyes!

SUN

Oops, sorry, let me turn it down!

LOU

No, that's alright, Sun, you keep on shining!

SUN

Will do, Uncle Lou!

(He turns back to the audience.)

LOU

Nice guy, that Sun. He's got a bright future!

(Pause for nonexistent laughter.)

Alright, what should we make today? A rocket for flying through space? A submarine to explore the ocean? A birdhouse? Tell you what, let's check our handy dandy tablet for inspiration!

(He produces a tablet. Its cold technological look stands out in very sharp relief to the handmade feel of the rest of the set. LOU is not very comfortable with the technology.)

Alright, let's take a look here, see what we got.

(He tries to do something on the tablet.)

Uh oh, that doesn't look right. Seems like this thing doesn't want to wake up today! Hmm, let's see...nope, that's not it. Maybe if I just...nope. Uncle Lou's not too used to this new fangled stuff!

ELIZABETH

(Offstage:)

Cut! Cut cut cut.

(She enters.)

For the last time, you have to swipe to the left to unlock it. Then go to your browser. The page should be up already. We've been over this twenty times now!

LOU

I just don't think this whole idea is working, Liz.

ELIZABETH

It would work if you would remember how to use it. Here, I'll show you one more time.

(She takes the tablet from him, messes with it for a second.)

There. See? It's really user friendly.

LOU

You know how us old farts are with this stuff. Old dog, new tricks, all that?

ELIZABETH

Well this little trick is the only thing standing between you and cancellation right now.

LOU

How, pray tell?

ELIZABETH

You know as well as I do the numbers have been dropping, and fast. We couldn't just keep doing what we were doing because clearly it wasn't working. It felt stale. Throw in some new technology, be a little *contemporary*, maybe it'll help.

LOU

What do you mean, stale? Uncle Lou is an institution! He's not *stale*.

ELIZABETH

Yes he is, I'm sorry to tell you. All this stuff, the puppets, the props, the whole bit, it's not what kids respond to anymore. We have to switch it up.

LOU

Kids have been responding to what I do for thirty years.

ELIZABETH

I know. You've said that many times. But if you want to stay alive, you have to adapt. You think *Sesame Street* doesn't know that? Trust me, they do. You don't have any idea what it's like dealing with the numbers, with the social media. I do. You're a nostalgia act at best, a bad joke at worst.

(Beat.)

Sorry.

LOU

No. You're right, I don't know what it's like. That's why I have you. Gimme the tablet thing.

(ELIZABETH hands him the tablet.)

ELIZABETH

You remember what to do?

LOU

I think so. Let's roll it again.

ELIZABETH

Alright. We'll go from "what should we make today." Whenever you're ready.

(ELIZABETH exits.)

ELIZABETH

(Off:
Action!

LOU

What should we make today? A rocket for flying through space? A submarine to explore the ocean? A birdhouse? Tell you what, let's check our handy dandy tablet for inspiration!

(He uses the tablet again and manages to figure it out.)

Alright, there we go! Let's see what our followers on the Twitter have to say! @pablomasgrande says "is this still a real thing?" Hm. Not sure how that one got in there, I thought we screened all of these.

ELIZABETH

(offstage:)

Cut! Just skip to one that is actually relevant, okay? You don't have to read them all.

LOU

I thought you were supposed to delete the ones like that.

ELIZABETH

Sorry, but I've been stretched a little thin, since I'm the only one that knows how to do anything. Just...skip it for now.

LOU

God, look at some of these. "OMG I remember this show, always thought Lou was a pedophile." Charming. "Can you build me a dildo, Uncle Lou?" Wow. Oh, here's one. "My daughter says you should build a robot to help her clean her room." Could be cute, make a little robot, what do you think?

ELIZABETH

I don't care, whichever one sounds good to you.

LOU

Alright, roll it.

(Slight pause, back into character.)

Let's see what requests we got on the Twitter, folks! Let's see...@bosssdad says "My daughter says you should build a robot to help her clean her room." I think we'd all like one of those, huh folks? I know I would! How about it, should we build one? We're gonna take a little break, and then we'll get right on it, kids! Don't go anywhere!

ELIZABETH

Alright, cut.

(She enters again.)

There, that wasn't so bad, was it?

LOU

I still don't know about all this twitter stuff, Liz. It seems like more trouble than its worth.

ELIZABETH

It's important to keep a social media presence. It's a way for our fans to communicate with us directly.

LOU

I just can't believe some of the stuff they say on there. I mean, a kid could see that!

ELIZABETH

Some people are just assholes. Don't let it bother you. I'm sure they're a minority.

LOU

I don't know, flipping through those, sure seems like more of those than anything useful.

ELIZABETH

Just use common sense. If it's dirty, don't read it when we're rolling.

LOU

Or we could just forget the whole damn twitter thing and do what we always did: use the write-ins.

ELIZABETH

Write-ins aren't nearly as convenient as this. Besides, we don't get all that many of those any more.

LOU

But come on, remember what it was like, opening a kid's letter, holding it up for the camera to see, all that loopy handwriting scrawled on there in crayon? Jesus, you could make a kid's life if they saw their letter on TV. You can't replicate that with these twitters, I guarantee that.

ELIZABETH

Tweets. They're called tweets.

LOU

Whatever they're called, it's not the same.

ELIZABETH

I'm sure you still make a kid's life if they see their suggestion on the show, regardless of the medium.

LOU

Sure, I'm sure those asshole college dropouts would love to see their fake suggestions for dildos and bongos and whatever else, why don't we just do those?

ELIZABETH

Just...we're doing it that way. The higher-ups thought it was a great idea, and it probably bought us a little time.

LOU

Ah, they have no idea what's good and what's not. They come in from on high with their suggestions and their demands, more this, less that, they don't know what kids really like, what they really want to see. All they care about is the almighty dollar, that's it.

ELIZABETH

You're right. That is what they care about. Numbers. And right now, ours are dangerously low. The lowest they've ever been. I've already been assured by many—most—of our stations that we are *this close* to being dropped. And you know what happens if we're dropped? You won't be entertaining any kids anymore, because there'd be no more show. You understand?

LOU

I understand. You don't have to talk to me like I'm an idiot.

ELIZABETH

I just want to make sure you're absolutely clear on what kind of situation we're in. I know you think these things are dumb, but we have to stay relevant somehow. Otherwise we're dead. Then I'm out of a job, same as you. Then what are you gonna do, tour? Do the live circuit? You want that stress at your age?

LOU

I'm sorry, but I'm just...the Twitter stuff is going. That's it.

ELIZABETH

I don't think you should make that decision.

LOU

Well I do, and since this is my show, I think I get some say.

ELIZABETH

Did you not hear anything I said? We are fighting to stay alive, and you want to get rid of the one good idea we've had in years.

LOU

We don't need it. It's pointless. Sorry, kiddo, but I'm putting my foot down. I tried it because I trusted you, but it's not doing anything for us. It's been a month and we haven't seen any improvement. And

trust me, I have been paying attention.

ELIZABETH

You just have to give it time. Everything we do is grassroots at this point. We just have to wait to see if it catches on.

LOU

I'm sorry, honey, I am. I know you're trying, but this particular idea is not working. I'm sure you'll have other ideas.

(Beat.)

ELIZABETH

Fine. You are the boss, after all.

LOU

Thank you. Besides, I've got my own idea in mind.

ELIZABETH

Care to share this grand idea of yours?

LOU

You'll see. In time.

ELIZABETH

It might be a good idea to clear it with your producer first...whatever it is.

LOU

Just trust me, okay? I've got something in mind that's better than a thousand Twitters put together.

ELIZABETH

...Cryptic. Okay, fine. Wow me when the time comes.

LOU

I have a feeling I will. Where's Bill, is he in his dressing room? Let's get him out here and do this.

ELIZABETH

I'll go get him.

(ELIZABETH exits. LOU wanders around the set, looking at everything. He runs his hands along the table. He sits in a chair and sighs. He is profoundly alone for a moment. ELIZABETH enters with JIM in tow. He moves slowly. He carries a puppet of an anthropomorphic hammer.)

ELIZABETH

Get into your places and we can start.

(She exits.)

JIM

Hey, Lou.

LOU

Hey, Jim. Ready to roll?

JIM

Ready as ever.

LOU

You look a little rough. You okay?

JIM

Yeah, yeah I'm good. Just...didn't get much sleep.

LOU

I see.

(Beat.)

You're not hung over, are you?

JIM

No, of course not.

LOU

Because you remember what I told you about that, right? I don't want that on my set. You have to be professional.

JIM

Yeah, I know what you told me.

LOU

Jesus, Jim. You are. I can smell it. Don't lie to me. Are you drunk right now? How much have you had?

JIM

Just calm down, will you?

LOU

I'm not gonna calm down! You come into my shoot drunk off your ass, again, and you want me to calm down?

JIM

I got it under control. It was just a nip, just a little hair of the dog. It's not gonna affect me, I promise.

LOU

Make sure it doesn't. I can always get another puppeteer.

JIM

Oh you can, can you? Why don't you then?

LOU

Keep pushing me, maybe I will.

JIM

That'll be the day.

(Under his breath:)

Shoulda taken that job with Henson when I had the chance.

LOU

Oh God, if I have to hear about Henson one more time...

JIM

Alright alright, I'm ready. Let's just get started.

LOU

Alright then. Let's do it.

JIM

Aye aye, captain.

(JIM goes to his place behind the workbench and ducks down.
LOU gets back into character.)

LOU

Welcome back, kids! Ready to make that robot? Let's do it! But of course, no project would be complete without my most trusted tool, Henry the Hammer! Where are you, Henry?

(The hammer puppet appears from beneath the workbench.)

JIM

Right here, boss!

LOU

Hey Henry, how's it going?

JIM

Not too bad, boss, but I've got a pounding headache!

LOU

That's too bad. We'll try to go easy on you. What do you say?

JIM

Gee, I'd sure like that, boss. What are we building today?

LOU

Well, the kids want us to build a robot to help clean their rooms. Think you're up for it?

JIM

Sounds great. You know, you could use one of those to help clean this place up. It's a dump in here! It's falling apart!

(LOU is somewhat thrown by this.)

LOU

Uh, well, maybe we'll test it out in here when we're done. First thing you wanna do, kids, is make sure your parents are watching you, so you don't hurt yourself, okay? Next, let's see what kind of materials we have for our robot, huh?

(LOU reaches under the workbench and pulls out a large crate labeled "parts." He starts rummaging through them. Upon finding each item, a sound cue dings.)

Let's see what we've got here. A can, that'll make a nice head. What else...

JIM

Jeez, boss, where'd you get all this junk? The dumpster?

(LOU is thrown again, but tries to ignore it. Clearly JIM is going outside of the usual parameters.)

LOU

Some cardboard tubes, very good, we'll use those for the legs. Ah, now this is very important: some pieces of duct tubing, like this. These we'll use for the arms. See how bendy they are? If you don't have any of these, have your mom or dad take you to the hardware store and pick up a few. Now, we need a body. What can we...ah here we go! An old tissue box! That ought to work just perfectly.

JIM

Good luck kids, hope you have some old duct tubing lying around, but then, who doesn't?

LOU

One more word out of you and you're going back in the drawer. So that's what we're gonna use, kids. We have a tissue box, some duct tubes, cardboard tubes, and a soup can. Make sure you take the label off that last one. Now, we need some glue!

(He produces some glue from under the workbench.)

Just some good old Elmer's Glue will do. We're gonna glue the legs to the body, like this.

(He demonstrates.)

There. Just like that. Now these other pieces are gonna need something a little stronger. For that, we're gonna need hot glue. You're gonna wanna get your mom or dad to help you with this part, because you don't wanna burn yourself!

(He produces a hot glue gun from underneath as well.)

Now, you want to have your mom or dad take their hot glue gun, and hot glue the head and the arms on, like this.

(He demonstrates.)

JIM

Wow, what else you got down there, boss? Got any nails? I'd sure like to nail something.

LOU

Alright, stop. What the hell, Jim? What is your problem?

JIM

What? I was just free-associating, like you tell me to do.

LOU

Family friendly, Jim, for Christ's sake. And you can cut out the insult comedy while you're at it. It's not funny.

JIM

Sorry, I thought you could take it. I see I was mistaken.

LOU

What's up your ass today, Jim?

JIM

You are. Getting on my case as soon as I walk in the door. What's that about?

ELIZABETH

(Offstage:)

Do you guys have to do this now? We're on a time limit, let's get this done.

LOU

Don't talk to me about it, it's all him.

JIM

Me? He's the one stopping the show.

LOU

I only stopped because you're trying to sabotage my shoot. Showing up drunk, making...off color jokes, I'm sick of it.

JIM

Come on, I've shown up drunk plenty of times over the years. I did some of our best shows drunk!

LOU

That's not gonna fly anymore, Jim. You gotta shape up. We all do. If we don't, we're dead. Right, Liz? Tell him.

ELIZABETH

(Offstage:)

The show's not in good shape, Jim. The numbers are low.

JIM

No shit the numbers are low, they've been low for years!

(ELIZABETH enters.)

ELIZABETH

Not like this. Some of our stations are gonna drop us if we can't get the numbers up, and fast. We have no more leeway.

JIM

Well, that is...a problem. How come nobody tells me this stuff?

ELIZABETH

Because it's not your job to worry about it, it's mine. I'm trying to fix it. Our fearless leader over here nixed another idea of mine.

JIM

What, the Twitter thing?

(ELIZABETH nods.)

I thought that was great! What's wrong with it?

LOU

It's not working. I decided.

JIM

How do you know it's not working?

LOU

Because we've been trying it for a month and I can tell it's not working.

JIM

It's only four shows!

ELIZABETH

That's what I said. I think he just doesn't want to learn the new technology.

JIM

That sounds about right. Lou's always been an old-fashioned guy, right Lou? Remember what kinda hard time Smitty had trying to convince you to shoot on video to cut costs?

ELIZABETH

Well I just hope this time it doesn't cost us the show.

JIM

Yeah, me too. I hope you got something up your sleeve, big guy. Otherwise we are up you-know-what creek.

LOU

Yes, I'm aware. Let's just get rolling. We'll edit out Jim's little...slip up.

ELIZABETH

Fine by me. One second.

LOU

And Liz? Whatever happens...just keep rolling.

ELIZABETH

Why would I...?

LOU

This is when I need you to trust me, okay? I'm gonna go off script, but I need you to keep rolling.

ELIZABETH

What are you planning...?

JIM

Oh God, he's gonna blow his brains out on air, isn't he?

LOU

I am not gonna blow my brains out. Both of you just calm down, okay? Let's do it.

ELIZABETH

Okay then...

(ELIZABETH exits again.)

ELIZABETH

(offstage:)

Rolling!

LOU

So there you go, kids! Your robot's all assembled, ready to help you with your chores! All you have to do now is decorate him any way you like. You can glue some colored paper on the body, here, draw a face right here, you can add any knobs and wires and bells and whistles that you like, let your imagination run wild! What do you think about that, Henry?

JIM

Good stuff, Boss! I can see this place getting cleaner already!

LOU

I can too, Henry. I can too.

(He sets the robot down and comes around the other side of the workbench.)

Now kids, I want to talk to you about something very important. I'm sure a lot of you have moms and dads, maybe just a mom or just a dad. But maybe you've got two moms, or two dads. Maybe a lot of people think that's kind of funny that you have that. Maybe they think you're strange. But kids, you're not strange.

JIM

Uh, boss, what are you talking about?

LOU

You see, kids, sometimes a man loves a woman, but sometimes a man loves a man, or a woman loves another woman. This is called being homosexual, and kids, there's nothing wrong with it.

JIM

Boss?

LOU

You see, kids, your Uncle Lou? Well the truth is, I'm a homosexual too.

(Silence.)

ELIZABETH

(Offstage:
Cut!

(She comes onstage.)

What the hell was that about?

(Beat.)

Dad?

(Lights dim.)

SCENE 2

(The workshop, later that night. The lights are dimmed and LOU and JIM are sitting on the set, sharing a drink.)

JIM

I gotta hand it to ya, that was some pretty audacious stuff.

LOU

Thanks. I hope I didn't just screw myself.

JIM

These days? Nah, they'll probably give you a Nobel prize for it. Far and away from the most shocking thing on TV anymore.

(Beat.)

So, you're a fruit, huh? Never would've thought.

LOU

You put it so delicately.

JIM

You know I don't mean nothing by it. I could give two shits what you're into. Just...surprises me is all. Mostly that you were able to keep it from me for so long.

LOU

Well, being married for thirty years is a pretty good cover up, I'd say.

JIM

Yeah, guess I never questioned it. Sheila never knew?

(Beat.)

LOU

I'm not sure.

JIM

Damn, it's too bad. I always thought she was such a great lady. And so attractive, in her own way. In an honest way. She didn't have to work at it. There were times, I thought I loved her, you know?

LOU

I know what you mean. She was very loveable.

JIM

That she was, that she was.

(Beat.)

How you think Elizabeth is gonna handle it?

LOU

I don't know. We didn't really have time to talk earlier. I'm trying to forestall it until I get a little more courage.

(He holds up his glass.)

JIM

That's my kinda courage. Here, have some more.

(He pours some more booze into LOU'S glass.)

LOU

She'll probably try to convince me not to air it. Hell, she may have cut it out herself.

JIM

I got a feeling there's gonna be a bit more to discuss than just that, anyway.

LOU

You're probably right.

(ELIZABETH enters.)

ELIZABETH

Hey, Jim.

JIM

Hey darlin'. I suppose you two have a lot to talk about.

ELIZABETH

You could say that.

JIM

I'll leave you to it, then.

ELIZABETH

Thanks.

(JIM exits. As he does, he hands ELIZABETH the bottle. There is a long, uncomfortable pause.)

So...Jesus, I don't even know where to start.

LOU

We can start wherever you want.

(ELIZABETH swigs directly from the bottle.)

ELIZABETH

How long?

LOU

How long what? Did I know? Since I was six.

ELIZABETH

Did Mom--

LOU

I loved your mom, you know that.

ELIZABETH

But did she know? I mean, how did you guys...?

LOU

We didn't all that often. When we did, I just used my imagination.

ELIZABETH

Jesus.

LOU

I want to let you know right now that this does not reflect on you. I have always believed, since you were born, that you were the best thing to ever happen to me. Just because my...preference is different doesn't change that at all. I want you to know that first and foremost.

ELIZABETH

I know. I think. God, all I can think right now is, my poor mother...

LOU

Your mother never wanted for anything. She wanted someone to love her, and I loved her.

ELIZABETH

Just not like that.

LOU

I loved her, and that's what counts. She died knowing she was loved. By me and by you.

ELIZABETH

I just can't believe you wouldn't have told anybody!

LOU

It was something I dealt with my whole life, and I got really good at dealing with it.

ELIZABETH

So, what, you kept it from everyone, but had some on the side, is that it?

(Pause.)

How many?

LOU

A few, over the years. Purely to...fill a need.

ELIZABETH

Wow. Wow wow wow.

(Long pause. ELIZABETH tries to collect herself and isn't doing very well. LOU goes to her.)

LOU

I know how this must feel.

(She pushes him away.)

ELIZABETH

Do you? Do you really? Because I don't even know how this feels. I'm figuring it out as I go. Right now, it feels pretty fucking terrible, Dad.

(She takes another drink.)

Why didn't you tell me sooner? Why did I have to go another five years in the dark?

LOU

I didn't know how you would handle it.

ELIZABETH

So you thought the best course of action would be to turn it into a...ratings stunt?

LOU

Somehow I figured that would be the best way. It made it less personal.

ELIZABETH

No, it didn't, Dad! If anything, it made it worse! You don't even tell me to my face, and then you'd rather broadcast it all over the fucking country than tell me?

LOU

Look, you said we needed a boost, and this was my idea. I really think we should air it as is.

ELIZABETH

Can you forget the show for one second and realize that this is your daughter here? Maybe think that I've just learned some really fucking big news? Can you focus on that for a minute?

LOU

I know this is big news for you--

ELIZABETH

Slightly.

LOU

But I really want to urge you not to cut it out. I think you're gonna be really happy with what it does for the show.

ELIZABETH

Jesus Christ, Dad. I mean really. It's all you care about, isn't it? Clearly it is, since you were saving this particular revelation for the show. You honestly have no concept of the world outside your little creation, do you?

LOU

You bet I do. Have you been out there? That world is a dangerous, messed up, pointless, aimless place. Nothing makes sense out there. At least in here, I control what happens. The only rules are the rules *I* want. You wonder why I care so much about the show? That's why. What else is there to care about? What out there is so great that I should devote any single second of my time to thinking about it?

ELIZABETH

How about me? I'm out here. How about me?

(Beat.)

LOU

Of course you. But I've brought you into this world too. You're a part of it. We can be in it together. We don't need anything else.

ELIZABETH

I am not part of your world. I'm peripheral at best. I don't get to play with puppets and sing songs and build things. I'm on the outside. My job is to stay there and make sure you don't do anything stupid that would send that world crashing down around you. Because wouldn't that be a tragedy, if suddenly you had to deal with the real world?

LOU

That's why you're so important to me.

ELIZABETH

So the fact that I'm your daughter doesn't seem to factor into it.

LOU

Of course it does. It always does. But I'm saying you're bigger than that. You're the glue that holds my world together, in more ways than one. When you were born, it was like everything started to make sense. When you started working for me, a whole different world started to make sense. Don't get me wrong, Smitty was a good producer, but he couldn't do what you do. You challenge me. You push me and the show in different directions. They don't always work out, like the Twitter stuff--

ELIZABETH

Oh God...

LOU

--But the point is, you bring it out in me. So I'm asking you to air the show as is. For my sake. For the sake of our viewers. For the sake of your job.

ELIZABETH

You are really unbelievable, you know that? I'm not thinking about the show right now. In fact, I don't think I'm gonna be able to think about the show for a while. Something more important has come up.

LOU

Well that I can't accept.

ELIZABETH

Oh you can't, huh?

LOU

No. Your job is to be concerned about the show. And we are on a deadline. We don't have time to worry about anything else. You worry about that in your free time. Right now, the show is most important. And besides, didn't you just tell me *today* that we're about to be cancelled? Now, all of a sudden, you don't care about the show anymore. Is that right?

(Beat.)

ELIZABETH

Wow. Now you're just being cruel.

LOU

I'm sorry, but that is the reality of broadcasting. I've been at it a long time, and I know sometimes you have to put your personal stuff aside for the sake of the work. I thought you of all people would recognize that.

ELIZABETH

Oh I recognize it. And right now, I regret ever taking that job.

LOU

Really? Because I seem to recall a young woman, fresh out of school, begging me for a chance to come work on the show. Because that was her life's dream. Because she loved the show *so much*. What happened to that?

ELIZABETH

Right now, that feels really far away.

LOU

I need you to bring it back. Do whatever you have to do, but I'm gonna need you. I need you to air this thing as is.

ELIZABETH

I don't think I want to do that, Dad.

LOU

Why not?

ELIZABETH

Because that doesn't matter to me anymore. None of it matters. In fact, I think I quit.

(Beat.)

LOU

You quit?

ELIZABETH

Yeah. I quit.

LOU

Don't be like that, please. The show needs you. *I* need you.

ELIZABETH

I don't know, Dad. I don't really know anything right now. I don't know whether I want to cry, hit you, walk out on you, hug you, anything. I don't know.

LOU

Right. You need time. I respect that. Just...before you go, tell me you'll air it as-is. That's all I need to hear, then I'll leave you alone for as long as you need. Well, at least until we have to start shooting again. If you decide to quit, then I can't stop you. But I hope you won't. Just do this one thing for me.

(Long pause. ELIZABETH takes another drink.)

ELIZABETH

Just...do what you want.

LOU

Thank you. You won't regret it. When it airs, you're gonna be pleasantly surprised, I guarantee it.

ELIZABETH

Sure.

(Beat.)

I'm gonna go home now. I've got a lot to think about.

LOU

Sure, of course. Take your time.

ELIZABETH

Tell Jim thanks for the booze.

LOU

Sure, I will. Have a good night, Sweetheart. Sleep on it. I'll take care of it from here. You go home, get some rest, get back to me. Okay?

ELIZABETH

Okay.

(ELIZABETH hands him the bottle.)

Love you, kid.

LOU

(But she's gone. Lights dim.)

SCENE 3

(The theme song plays again. The image of LOU giving his coming out speech is projected directly onto the set. As he speaks, other images begin appearing, including headlines: "Uncle Lou Comes Out," "Kids' TV Host Out of Closet," along with tweets, status updates, video reactions, all pertaining to the episode. They are both liberal and conservative, ecstatic and horrified. It becomes a cacophonous, swirling mess, a social media firestorm, before calming down into the image of Uncle Lou repeating "I'm a homosexual" over and over. Lights dim.)

SCENE 4

(Lights up on the workshop, the following day. LOU sits on the set with a guitar in hand.)

LOU

You know, kids, sometimes your parents make you do things you just plain don't want to do. They make you clean up your room, put away your toys, come down to dinner when you were just fine playing on your own. And I know it's no fun--

JIM

(Offstage:)

Hold on, hold on, I wasn't rolling.

LOU

What do you mean, you weren't rolling?

JIM

I mean I didn't have the camera on.

LOU

Jesus, Jim, you have to tell me these things before I start. How hard is it to say, "hold on, Lou, the camera's not on?"

JIM

Sorry, but this isn't exactly my job. I don't see you running the camera.

LOU

How can I run the camera when I'm out here?

JIM

You're just lucky I know how to use this thing, that's all I'm gonna say. If Liz were here, we wouldn't have to worry about this shit.

LOU

Liz will come back when she's ready. We can manage without her for the time being. Let's just start, okay?

JIM

Okay, one second.

(Beat.)

Alright, we're rolling.

LOU

You know, kids, sometimes your parents make you do things you just plain don't want to do. They make you clean up your rooms, put away your toys, come down for dinner when you were just fine playing on your own. And I know it's no fun, but sometimes, you just have to do it. It's all part of being a good kid, respecting your parents. Because they love you and they know what's best for you. So next time cleaning your room gets you down, just remember this song.

(LOU plays a simple chord progression on his guitar and begins to sing.)

Sometimes your folks make you
do some things you don't want to do
it's enough to make you feel real mad
but kids, don't you feel too sad
'cause your parents want what's best for you
that's why they do the things they do
being fed and being clean
doesn't mean your folks are mean
they want you to be the best you can be
and that's Uncle Lou's guarantee
Sing with me now!
Your parents want what's best for you
that's why they do the things they do--

(AMELIA enters, watches from the side while LOU finishes his take.)

being fed and being clean
doesn't mean your folks are mean
they want you to be the best you can be
and that's Uncle Lou's guar-an-tee!

Alright, cut. How was that, Jim?

(He notices AMELIA.)

Amelia? This is a surprise.

AMELIA

Hey Lou, I hope I'm not interrupting.

LOU

Not at all, I always have time for you. What can I do for you?

(JIM enters.)

JIM

You know, Ms. Papageorge, all due respect, but we're right in the middle--

LOU

It's okay, Jim, we'll take a break for a few minutes. Amelia's time is very valuable.

AMELIA

Hardly. It's your time that's the valuable one.

JIM

Alright well, I'll be in my dressing room, I guess.

(JIM starts to exit. Under his breath:)

Sure, nobody cares about my time. Jerks...

(JIM exits.)

AMELIA

Is he okay?

LOU

Yeah, he's fine. Just...a cold, I think. What can I do for you?

AMELIA

Well, Lou, we just saw the last episode, and ensuing media firestorm...

LOU

I haven't been following it.

AMELIA

Well trust me when I tell you, if you wanted to create a sensation, you did, believe me.

LOU

I hope it hasn't brought you any grief. We thought—I thought—it would be a good way to get the show relevant again. You know, bring Uncle Lou back into the public eye. For a new generation, so to speak.

AMELIA

Right, I understand that, really. It's just...you couldn't have run it by me first?

LOU

I know, I apologize, it was sort of a spur-of-the-moment idea. Liz said the ratings haven't been great--

AMELIA

You know Lou, quite frankly I expected better of you.

LOU

I'm sorry?

AMELIA

This sort of rash decision making doesn't suit you. I've given you a lot of freedom over the years, haven't I? And that's because I've always trusted you and your ideas. But this...this is different. I'm afraid I can't allow this.

LOU

What are you saying? You're gonna cancel us?

AMELIA

No, Lou, I wouldn't go to that extreme. You're an institution! No one knows that better than me. My siblings watched you when they were kids. My *kids* have watched you for years! But...this is a family station, and this sort of stuff kind of undermines our values, you know what I mean?

LOU

How so?

AMELIA

I shouldn't have to tell you. Most of our viewership in this time slot are kids and their parents, and quite frankly I just don't think this new direction is appropriate for that.

LOU

How so? I don't think I said anything inappropriate.

AMELIA

It's just...making Uncle Lou a homosexual puts all sorts of ideas in kids' heads. It brings up too many questions for your target age group.

LOU

So it's wrong to ask questions?

AMELIA

No, no, not at all, it's just...these sorts of ideas just aren't appropriate for kids of that age. They're not ready for it. It's too big.

LOU

Well forgive me, but I think the earlier the better for this sort of thing.

AMELIA

I respectfully have to disagree, Lou. And since this is my station, I'm afraid I can't allow this.

LOU

I never pegged you for a bigot, Amelia.

AMELIA

Bigot? Lou, that hurts my feelings! I have no problem with...those people, I assure you. This isn't about that. It's about what's right for the kids.

LOU

Amelia, with all due respect, I've been a kids' entertainer for a long time. I think I know a thing or two about what's right and wrong.

AMELIA

I know you do, Lou. But not this time. I'm sorry.

(Beat.)

LOU

So this is a cancellation, is it?

AMELIA

Not yet. I want to give you the opportunity to include a redaction. In the next episode, you can say that Uncle Lou isn't really a homosexual, that it was a...a joke or something. I don't care how you do it, but that's the jist that I want you to get across. Once you do, it'll be like nothing happened, and I won't ever interfere with your process again, I promise. I just need you to do this, Lou. The station needs you to do this.

LOU

I don't know if I can, Amelia.

AMELIA

Yes you can, Lou, I believe in you. It was an...interesting thought for boosting ratings, but it didn't work. I'm sorry.

LOU

I don't know how you can say it didn't work, we haven't even aired another episode--

AMELIA

Let me rephrase, then. It can't work. I won't allow it. We have to nip this in the bud before we get any more undue publicity. It's like you've said hundreds of times over the years: you're here to entertain kids. Make them laugh, make them smile, maybe teach them a thing or two. But not about this. This isn't Uncle Lou.

LOU

Maybe it's time for Uncle Lou to change.

AMELIA

Why now? You've had a good thing going for years now. You don't need to do this.

LOU

We've been stagnant for so long, I just wanted to--

AMELIA

Being stagnant isn't always a bad thing. Just go back to the formula that works, the formula people love. People want to think of Uncle Lou as their fun uncle, the one with all the songs and the stories. They don't need this to be some kind of...ideas show. What would your wife think about that?

(Beat.)

LOU

I don't know what she'd think. She's dead, after all.

AMELIA

Just think about it, Lou. For my sake, and hers. You've been a staple of this station for so long, I'd hate to see you mess that up somehow.

LOU

What happens if I say no?

AMELIA

I think you know what would happen.

(Short beat.)

Take care, Lou. Think about what I said. Again, I hope I didn't take up too much of your time.

(She turns to leave, stops.)

Oh, and Lou? Just out of curiosity, I know this is a very personal question, but it is the *character* we're dealing with here, right? That's it?

(Beat.)

LOU

That's it.

AMELIA

Okay. It's a bit of a strange artistic choice, I have to say.

(AMELIA exits. Lights dim.)

SCENE 5

(Lights up on AMELIA in her office. She is sorting through a pile of mail, opening a letter. She reads it, throws it down in disgust. After a moment, a knock is heard.)

AMELIA

Come in.

(ELIZABETH enters.)

Elizabeth, please come in. It's lovely to see you.

ELIZABETH

Likewise.

AMELIA

You look tired. Are you okay?

ELIZABETH

It's just been...a hell of a couple days.

AMELIA

Tell me about it. Anything you need to...get off your chest?

ELIZABETH

I'm just...still processing it. It's a lot to take.
You know, Amelia, I should tell you, I decided--

AMELIA

Wait. Before you say anything, I have a favor to ask of you. I know your dad's been a bit...rash recently--

ELIZABETH

You can say that.

AMELIA

But you were always so good at talking him down. Better than anyone. Better than me, that's for sure. He trusts you. He knows you only have the show's best interests at heart.

ELIZABETH

I'm not so sure about that. Not anymore, at least.

AMELIA

I'm sure he does. He needs you. I need you. This station needs you. This whole...publicity stunt of your father's is proof that he has too much creative control. I need you to rein him in a little bit. This whole...*homosexual* thing. It's out of line. Now, I've already told him that he needs to back off a bit, but I need you to make sure he does. I feel like if it's coming from you, it'll mean more. Does that make sense?

ELIZABETH

What do you mean, back off? Like, don't talk about it again, or...?

AMELIA

I've told your dad he needs to put some form of redaction in the next episode. Just something about how what he said wasn't true, that sort of thing. But I need you to really drive that point home, as it were.

ELIZABETH

So you want him to denounce his sexuality?

AMELIA

No, no, honey, no. Just the character's. Uncle Lou can't be a homosexual. It just can't happen.

ELIZABETH

I don't know about that, Amelia. I feel like that might do more harm than good.

AMELIA

How so?

ELIZABETH

Well, to do something like that on TV, to make it known so publicly...a lot of people might be really upset if he backpedaled on that.

AMELIA

You think people aren't upset already?

ELIZABETH

I'm sure some people are, but--

AMELIA

You see these letters? These came in the mail today. All of them. Each and every one another outraged viewer, or parent, or worst of all, donor. The response is overwhelming. They will not accept this, and neither will I.

Go ahead. Read any one of them. I have a feeling you'll get my point.

(ELIZABETH picks up a couple letters, scans them over.)

ELIZABETH

These are...this is ridiculous!

AMELIA

Exactly.

ELIZABETH

You're really gonna let a few letter writing crackpots dictate what we do?

AMELIA

These are not crackpots, Liz. These are real, honest people. Longtime viewers. Viewers whose donations we depend on to keep the lights on in this place. If they stop watching, you think the show will survive? This is a family station, for regular families. They don't need this sort of propaganda crammed down their throats.

ELIZABETH

How is this propaganda?

AMELIA

It is, Liz. It's a point of view which clearly many of our viewers don't appreciate.

ELIZABETH

Just because they don't like it doesn't mean it's not valid.

AMELIA

No one's saying it's not valid, but I'm saying it has no place on this station. Look, I understand that your dad's been at this for a really long time. I know the show is his baby. Well, besides you, that is. I'm sure it's only natural, when a show's been on as long as this one, that he would come up with some...crazy ideas for ratings. This is daytime TV, Liz. We're not a major network, we're a local affiliate. Our chief demographics are kids and their moms, the elderly, and pets left home alone. We're not a place for this sort of programming.

ELIZABETH

Can we at least see what it does for ratings? We haven't even aired another episode yet. Maybe afterwards--

AMELIA

We can't afford to wait that long. By next week, we might lose what few viewers we had left. You need to get him to make a statement, and soon.

ELIZABETH

I get your concern, I do, but have you seen the social media? Uncle Lou was huge on Twitter over the weekend. Someone uploaded the clip to Youtube, it's been shared millions of times! I know all you've seen are angry letters, but trust me, a lot of people are really excited about this. A lot of people see it as a really positive step.

AMELIA

And how many of those people that shared that video are going to actually watch the show, do you think? How many are going to buy ad space, or donate? I guarantee you, not a one. They like to share their opinions, but that's as far as it goes. You'll never hear from a single one of them again.

ELIZABETH

You don't know that.

AMELIA

Yes I do, honey. I've been at this a long time, and I know lip service when I see it.

ELIZABETH

I just don't understand why you'd shut it down before you really know what's gonna happen.

AMELIA

I do know what's going to happen.

(Short beat.)

Sweetheart, I admire your optimism. I really do. I know it can't be easy. I know you want what's best for the show. Believe me, I do too. That's all I want. What's best for the show, and what's best for the

station. And right now, what's best for both is to make our viewers happy. If the viewers come back, maybe sometime down the road we can revisit this...idea. But not now. Not when the show is barely holding on to begin with.

Please. You have to do this.

(Beat.)

ELIZABETH

So you didn't get a single letter that wasn't angry.

AMELIA

Not a one.

ELIZABETH

I can't believe that. So many people online were flipping out.

AMELIA

That doesn't matter. Not as far as ratings are concerned.

ELIZABETH

Is it possible this is about more than ratings now?

AMELIA

Maybe it is. But ratings are my business, and right now, that's what matters.

Liz. What do you want me to say to you? You want me to beg you? Because I won't do that. One, this skirt is too tight to kneel. Two, as much as I love your show, I will find something to fill that time slot. Make no mistake about that.

ELIZABETH

I can't do it. Not anymore.

AMELIA

Why?

ELIZABETH

That's what I wanted to tell you. I...sort of quit the other day.

AMELIA

You quit?

ELIZABETH

Yeah.

AMELIA

No. No, that is not allowed.

ELIZABETH

You can't force me to stay.

AMELIA

You're right, I can't. But I urge you to reconsider. We need you now more than ever. This whole...stunt is proof your father can't manage his own show. He's too big for his rainbow britches or something. If he's not careful, he's going to destroy his own show and take us all down with him.

ELIZABETH

I don't think it'll do much good anyway. He won't listen to me anymore.

AMELIA

He has to. You have to make him. We have no wiggle room here. I'm gonna level with you, Liz, because I think you can take it. I love the show. It's been a mainstay of this station for decades. Kids all over the country have grown up on it. Hell, my kids did. You think I want to be the one who makes that all go away? But the truth is, that nostalgia, that warm fuzzy feeling? That's the only thing keeping the show on the air at all. The ratings keep dropping, nobody's buying ads during that timeslot anymore. Things are changing. You know that, I know that. I don't think your dad does, or if he does, he won't accept it. But it's the truth. The world doesn't really have time for Uncle Lou anymore. Hell, everyone in broadcasting knows nobody has time for TV anymore, period. I don't want to have to be the one to kill *Uncle Lou*. But if I have to put the final nail in the coffin, I will. He's gone too far. This is your chance to save it. Take it or leave it.

ELIZABETH

I...don't know.

AMELIA

How about this. You do this for me, and you can wash your hands of the show. Move on to greener pastures, and leave your dad to fend for himself. Just do this one last thing as a favor to me. Please?

(Beat.)

ELIZABETH

I'll talk to him.

AMELIA

Good! I knew I could count on you, sweetie. You're a good kid. You're more than this job deserves. Now if you'll excuse me, I have some more letters to read.

(AMELIA goes back to opening letters. ELIZABETH gets up and leaves. Lights dim.)

SCENE 6

(Lights up on LOU in the middle of an episode, with his guitar in hand.)

LOU

You know kids, sometimes in life you're gonna encounter bullies. Hopefully you haven't already, but if you have, you know what I'm talking about. Bullies are people who pick on you just for being you. They make you feel bad for no reason. But kids, you don't have to listen to them.

(LOU tunes his guitar as he talks.)

Because kids, bullies are just as scared as you are. It may not seem like it, but it's the truth. They pick on you because they're scared, they're insecure, they don't know what they want. Maybe something's going on at home that's hard on them.

So the next time a bully picks on you, just look them in the eye and tell them, I know you're as confused as me, but you can't hurt me. I'm too strong for you.

You're gonna encounter a lot of these people in your life, but the stronger you are, the less it can bother you. So you have to stay strong, and not listen to those Negative Nancys.

And hey, if you like, you can always sing them this song.

(He plays a short chord progression over the following.)

Bullies can't hurt you
oh no, oh no
if you don't let them
oh no, oh no
they might try to wound you
with words, with words
they might try to hurt you
with force, with force
But they can't hurt you
as long as you're strong
and if you feel scared
then just sing along

Big old bullies
aren't so tough
all their big words
are just a big bluff
they're just as scared
as you are of them,
so don't let them make you feel small

So there you go, kids, just a little something to change your ideas about bullies. They're not so tough, and they don't have to make you feel bad. I know Uncle Lou has his fair share of bullies, but I don't let them get me down, and neither should you! We're gonna take a quick commercial break, and we'll be right back to build something together!

(Lights dim. In the darkness, the sounds of protest begin to grow. We hear a chant start out quietly and grow louder and louder:
"Uncle Lou, God hates you, you'll burn in hell your puppets too."
The chant continues for a little while in the darkness before fading, though still audible, as the lights rise on:)

SCENE 7

(Lights up on the studio, mid-filming. The chant can still be heard, underneath the scene.)

LOU

Hi kids! Welcome back to *Uncle Lou's Workshop*. I'm Uncle Lou, and this is my workshop. Ready to have some fun? I knew you were!

(A doorbell is heard.)

Well who could that be? Let's find out!

(He goes to the door and opens it. Toadie, a toad puppet also controlled by JIM, is there.)

Well look who it is, our old friend Toadie! What's up, Toadie?

JIM

I'm sad, Uncle Lou.

LOU

Uh oh, why's that?

JIM

Toadette said she'd go to the dance with me, but I kinda sorta told her I'd pick her up in my car.

LOU

Well what's wrong with that?

JIM

Oh nothing...except I kinda sorta don't have a car.

LOU

Oh. I see the problem now.

JIM

Yeah, me and my big mouth! Can you help me, Uncle Lou?

LOU

What do you think, kids? Can we help him?

(Pause for response.)

I thought you might say that. Sounds like we can help you, Toadie!

JIM

That's great! I sure do appreciate it, Uncle Lou.

LOU

No problem, Toadie. That's what friends are for! We'll build a car fitting of a fancy frog like you.

JIM

Toadette's gonna be so thrilled!

LOU

(Breaking character:)
Alright, cut.

(JIM stands up.)

JIM

What's wrong?

LOU

These god damned protesters. I can't focus with this going on.

JIM

We can ignore it. It's probably not loud enough for the mics to pick up.

LOU

I know, it's just...you can only hear you're gonna burn in hell so many times before it starts to get to you.

JIM

I hear that. They said your puppets would too. Which just doesn't make a whole lot of sense, if you ask me. Don't let it get to you. They're trying to rattle you. If you don't just keep doing what you have to do, that means they win.

LOU

Jesus, I wish Liz were here. She'd know what to do.

JIM

You think this is in her wheelhouse any more than it's in ours?

LOU

I don't know. It just seems like she'd know how to handle this. Better than I do, at least.

JIM

How long since you heard from her?

LOU

Not since she left. Not for lack of trying on my part, either. I kept thinking she'd come back when she was ready, but...

(A lonely beat.)

Alright, let's get back to it.

(Before they can, a window breaking is heard.)

What the hell was that?
JIM

I have no idea.
LOU

(LOU exits, returning a moment later with a large rock on which the words "FAG BURN IN HELL" are painted. He sets it down on the workbench.)

Jesus Christ.
JIM

It's fine. Let's just...let's get it out of here and get back to work.
LOU

Maybe you're right, maybe we should stop. I don't think we're in any condition to get anything done.
JIM

No, you were right. We need to just get on with the work. We've got a show to shoot, let's shoot it.
LOU

(The chanting has grown louder with the open window and the protestors' renewed vigor.)

Sounds like they're getting angrier.
JIM

Forget them. They can do what they want. Let's just get going.
LOU

Maybe we should call the cops before this gets any uglier.
JIM

We don't need them. This was just a bluff. They're not gonna do anything worse. Let's get to filming. Go get those cameras rolling.
LOU

Lou--
JIM

God dammit, Jim, just do it!
LOU

(Beat. JIM exits.)

JIM

(Offstage:)
Alright, we're rolling.

LOU

Alright, let's go from your line. "Toadette's gonna be so thrilled." Come on back.
(JIM reenters and puts the puppet back on.)
Wait.

(He picks up the rock and moves it off to the side out of the camera. JIM drops under the workbench.)

JIM

Toadette's gonna be so thrilled!

LOU

Alright, first thing we need is a...a body. For the car. Something to sit in. let's see...

JIM

How about this box?

LOU

Perfect! Its nice and big with plenty of room for you and Toadette to ride in style. What color should we make the car?

JIM

How about green? To match Toadette's skin.

LOU

Good idea. Let's get some green paint out of our paint cupboard.

(LOU goes to the cupboard. It is clear the chant is really beginning to bother him. He pulls out a tube of green paint and a paint brush and brings it back to the table. He begins to paint the box. As he does, he grows more and more agitated, slapping paint on with great fervor. With a shout, he begins smashing the box, getting paint all over himself and everywhere. JIM stands up.)

JIM

Alright, Lou, just calm down. Let's take a break, okay? In fact, let's call it a day.

LOU

I don't want to call it a day! I want to do my job, god dammit! I want to do the work I've been doing for thirty years! I never ruffled any feathers. I'm a children's entertainer, for God's sake!

JIM

When you drop a bomb like you did on TV, you gotta expect some ruffled feathers.

LOU

I never anticipated this. I thought things were different now. I thought it was safe.

JIM

Sometimes you're really naïve, you know that? You of all people should know, it's never been safe. Probably never will be. But isn't that why we're here?

(Beat.)

I've been with you a long time, Lou. I know people love the show. I see the way kids look at you when they meet you, like they can hardly believe you're real. I haven't experienced that firsthand, but that's alright. That's my job. They're not supposed to see me. I'm not in it for personal glory. I'm in it for the same reason you are: making kids laugh is the only thing that ever made sense to me. It's the only thing I knew how to do. And I've stuck with you all these years because I believe in the show. And I still do. Trust me when I tell you, these guys can't take us down. They're just a nuisance. A noisy one, for sure, but a nuisance nonetheless. Eventually they'll realize they can't do anything at all and they'll shut up. Let's just wait it out. We can last a whole hell of a lot longer than they can, I can tell you that.

LOU

God, I hope you're right.

JIM

Let's call it for today. Just for today. We'll see what it's like tomorrow. We'll have the station replace that window and if they're still there, we'll just be louder. That's all we can do.

(A knock is heard offstage.)

LOU

Maybe they want their rock back.

JIM

(Yelling toward the door:)

You want your rock back, assholes? Well we're not giving it back. It's ours now. I might put it on a pedestal, show it off.

ELIZABETH

(Offstage:)

Dad?

LOU

Liz?

(ELIZABETH enters.)

ELIZABETH

I've been following what's going on. It's all over the news.

JIM

Good. Maybe we can get more protesters to protest these assholes.

ELIZABETH

I had to fight my way through them to even get in the building. How can you work with all this noise?

LOU

We were gonna call it for the day. There's not much we can do with the broken window.

ELIZABETH

Broken window?

(LOU picks up the rock and sets it down on the workbench.
ELIZABETH goes and looks at it.)

Jesus.

JIM

That's what I said.

ELIZABETH

What did you do? Did you call the cops?

LOU

We mostly just tried to ignore it.

ELIZABETH

You should call the cops. This goes way beyond freedom of assembly.

JIM

That's what I said too.

LOU

I'm not calling the cops. I can handle these people. They don't scare me.

ELIZABETH

Dad, they threw a rock through the window. You need to call the cops, at least make them aware of what's going on.

LOU

We don't need to get them involved. This is just a...momentary distraction. They'll go away as soon as there's something else to be outraged about, right Jim?

ELIZABETH

And in the meantime, they'll kill the show.

(Short beat.)

Look, Dad, I need to talk to you.

LOU

I know.

ELIZABETH

No, it's not about that. I've been doing a lot of thinking the last few days, about you, and about the show, and this new direction and everything, and I think maybe...

LOU

Look, Liz, before you say anything else, I just wanted to say I'm sorry if I acted cruelly or made you feel bad about everything. I want you to know that I hear you, and I understand how you're feeling. It was wrong of me to make it all about the show and ignore what you're going through. So I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH

Dad--

LOU

I know this is a big thing, and I know I didn't handle it all that well, but I just need your patience. We're gonna get through this. Together. Now. What were you saying?

ELIZABETH

I...

(She takes a deep breath.)

I've been thinking, about the show and everything that's going on, and all this hateful stuff that's coming out, and now these *protesters*, and this...this *rock*, and I think...maybe this isn't the right time for this. For you, I mean.

LOU

What are you saying?

ELIZABETH

I'm saying...maybe it's better if we do some kind of redaction.

(Beat.)

LOU

Jim, can you excuse us for a moment?

JIM

Sure thing.

(JIM exits.)

LOU

Come again?

ELIZABETH

I know it sounds harsh, but I think maybe it's best if we pull back from this. For now. We can come out and say that it was a joke or something.

LOU

A joke?

ELIZABETH

Yeah. Or a...an experiment of some kind.

LOU

You know, it's funny, Amelia said almost those exact same words to me the other day. You two wouldn't have spoken, would you?

ELIZABETH

We just want what's best for the show, Dad.

LOU

Wow. I cannot believe that you would go behind my back on this.

ELIZABETH

She called me into her office and I decided to hear her out. I know it sounds crazy but I think she's right this time. I mean, look at all this, Dad. Look at *this*.

(She gestures to the rock.)

This can't be what you had in mind. Any of it.

LOU

I anticipated some pushback, of course.

ELIZABETH

But this? This goes way beyond pushback, Dad. This is violent. It's ugly.

LOU

Change is never easy, Liz. Now I know you're upset with me about everything--

ELIZABETH

Okay, don't do that.

LOU

Do what?

ELIZABETH

Put this back on me like I'm...getting back at you or something.

LOU

I'm just saying, I know you're upset, and I can see why you'd want to...

ELIZABETH

That is not what this is about! Are you kidding me? Dad, these people threw a rock through the window. Do you think that's as far as they're gonna go?

LOU

What are they gonna do? Kill me? Bomb the studio?

ELIZABETH

Who knows! I just want to keep you safe, and if this is how people are gonna react...maybe we're not ready for gay Uncle Lou yet.

LOU

And what about all those people who *are* ready? All those people who have had to hide for so long? Do they matter at all?

ELIZABETH

Right now, the other side is louder. And they can ruin us.

(Beat.)

LOU

You know, for a long time, the world knew me as Uncle Lou, and as far as they were concerned, there was no difference between me and him. So much so that I began to wonder if there was a difference either. I couldn't be myself on the show which meant I couldn't be myself out in the world either. And now, after all this time, I finally feel like I don't have to hide. These last few days, I've felt more myself than I've ever felt. I can't go back now, I just can't. I know you're angry with me, and you have the right to be, but don't ask this of me.

ELIZABETH

I'm sorry, Dad. Really, I am. Trust me when I say I don't want this. But you know what I also don't want? I don't want you to lose your show, and I know that if you don't do this, you will. Amelia is looking for any excuse to get rid of you, and this is all she needs. And who knows, maybe somewhere down the line, Uncle Lou can come out again, when the time is right.

LOU

You and I both know the time's never gonna be right. Not in my lifetime, at least.

(Beat.)

If this is what you want, then I'll do it. But only if you agree to come back to the show.

ELIZABETH

I will.

LOU

Good. I need you. Jim's a terrible camera op.

ELIZABETH

It's hard being in two places at once.

LOU

That it is. You're sure this is the right move?

ELIZABETH

Not really. But I don't see us having any other choice.

I think you're right. We're not gonna get any work done with all this noise. We'll try again tomorrow.

(They exit. The lights linger on the rock which sits like an ugly blemish in the middle of the set. Lights dim. The chant gradually dies down. Silence for a beat. Then, in the darkness, we hear the sound of another window breaking, footsteps in the studio. We hear the hiss of a spray paint can for a while as an unseen message is scrawled on the wall.)

SCENE 8

(The studio door opens. ELIZABETH walks in, turns on the studio lights. The words "Uncle Lou is a Fag" have been spray painted in large letters along the back wall of the set. At first, ELIZABETH doesn't notice, going about her morning business, before it finally catches her eye. She stares at it for a long time, before struggling to fight back tears. A moment later, JIM enters.)

JIM

Morning, Liz.

(ELIZABETH doesn't respond. JIM walks over to where she's standing and sees the wall. He stares at it for a moment.)

Is that new?

(ELIZABETH sobs quietly.)

Oh, hey, c'mon, honey, it's not so bad. We can shoot around it.

ELIZABETH

Shoot around it?

JIM

Yeah, you know, different...angles...and...
Shit.

ELIZABETH

Yeah.

JIM

When did this happen?

ELIZABETH

Must've been overnight.

JIM

I see they broke another window. Why bother breaking another one when you can just climb in the one

that's already broken?

ELIZABETH

What am I gonna do, Jim?

JIM

I don't know there's much you can do, darlin'.

ELIZABETH

Dad cannot see this. I'm worried about him already. I think this whole redaction thing is hard for him to take, and then this...

But how the hell am I supposed to keep him from seeing it? He'll be here any minute. It's not like we have a spare rear wall lying around.

JIM

Maybe we can...tell him the studio's flooded. Sewer main break. Water and shit everywhere. Nothing's damaged, but it's closed for repairs. Something like that?

ELIZABETH

My god. So...ugly. So *unnecessary*.

JIM

I don't think they think of it that way.

ELIZABETH

I mean, who would do this? Who has so much hate in them that they would...
Oh god. This is all my fault.

JIM

How's that?

ELIZABETH

I was the one that kept telling him we needed to change. I was the one who pushed him into this.

JIM

Come on, you know Lou makes up his own mind about everything.

ELIZABETH

Maybe if I'd just let him do the show he wanted to do, he wouldn't have felt the need to make some big *thing* about it.

JIM

You know that wouldn't've worked. We were on the ropes. We had to do something.

ELIZABETH

But *this*? All this? It's just...it's unbelievable.

(The door opens. LOU begins to enter.)

JIM

Oh shit, there he is. Hold on.

(JIM runs over to stop LOU.)

Morning, big buddy. Bad news. There was a sewer main break. *Huge* mess. We're not gonna be able to shoot today. Let's all bug off and hit the bar, what do you say?

(He can't keep LOU from seeing the graffiti. Silently, LOU walks past JIM and over to look at the wall. He and ELIZABETH exchange a look. LOU walks up to the wall and touches it.)

LOU

I built this flat myself, back in 78. Back when we were local in Cincinnati. My very first show. At first, I didn't even have you, Jim. I had to do everything myself. Puppets, camera, lights, sound, all of it. This flat is older than you are, Liz.

ELIZABETH

I know, Dad.

LOU

You know at first they didn't even think my show had much going for it. Kids didn't care about building things, they told me. It's not a strong enough hook. All these years later...here we are.

ELIZABETH

Dad, I am so sorry.

LOU

Sorry for what?

ELIZABETH

For...all of this.

LOU

It's not your fault. I brought this on myself. Better get it over with, huh?

ELIZABETH

You want to shoot today?

LOU

Of course I want to shoot today. We lose time and money otherwise.

ELIZABETH

We have to fix this first. Are you sure you wouldn't rather wait until--

LOU

It's only one wall. Let's just shoot it facing the window instead.

JIM

See? That's what I mean, shoot around it.

LOU

I don't suspect it's really gonna matter much, so let's just do it, shall we?

ELIZABETH

I don't know if you're in the right frame of mind--

LOU

I'm in a perfect frame of mind, honey.

JIM

You know, Lou, I kinda agree with Liz here. We have to do some stuff before we go ahead with this. For starters, we need to call the god damn police about this.

LOU

Jim, I already told you, I don't want the police involved.

JIM

A rock through the window was bad enough. This is *breaking and entering*, Lou. Vandalism. Hell, this is a friggin' hate crime! You can't just let this slide. We have to set an example here, call the cops, make statements, get an investigation going. We can't just roll over and take it.

LOU

That could take a lot of time that we don't have. We're already a day behind schedule after yesterday.

JIM

So we air a rerun this week. Amelia will be reasonable, especially after this. She has to be.

LOU

No, she doesn't. She'd probably cancel the show just to avoid the bad publicity. We're doing what we came here to do today, and that's final.

ELIZABETH

Dad--

LOU

No, Liz. I agreed to do this, and you agreed to help. You have to keep up your end of things.

ELIZABETH

I just think--

LOU

I think this is my show, and I'm in charge, and I say we're shooting the god damn thing today. No excuses. Is that clear?

(Beat.)

Good. Let's fire up the equipment. Jim, give me Henry the Hammer and Toadie. Liz, let's do a tight focus with camera B on the other wall.

JIM

Sir yes sir.

(JIM exits to go get the puppets.)

LOU

Liz? I need you to be on your game here. Whatever your feeling, just put it away. We don't have time. You can grieve later. Okay?

ELIZABETH

Okay, Dad.

LOU

Thank you.

(ELIZABETH exits to go turn on the equipment. LOU looks back at the wall once more before exiting. Quick blackout.)

SCENE 9

(Lights up quickly on LOU, in his Uncle Lou costume, sitting on a stool in front of the other wall. JIM, out of view, holds the Henry the Hammer and Toadie puppets next to LOU.)

JIM

You know how you're gonna do this?

LOU

I wrote a little something last night.

JIM

What do you need me to do?

LOU

Just follow my lead, okay?

JIM

You got it.

LOU

Ready when you are, Liz.

ELIZABETH

(Offstage:)

Alright, we're rolling...

And...action.

LOU

Hey kids, gather 'round your TV sets for a moment, if you will. Uncle Lou's got something very important to tell you.

JIM

(As Henry:)

What is it, Boss?

(As Toadie:)

Yeah, what's going on, Uncle Lou?

LOU

Well fellas, and all you kiddos out there...you may recall your Uncle Lou using a funny word last week. The word was *homosexual*.

JIM

(As Henry:)

Ho-mo-sexual. What does it mean, Boss?

LOU

What it means, Henry my friend, is a boy who likes boys instead of girls, or a girl who likes girls instead of boys. You may remember that Uncle Lou said he was a homosexual. And I bet you were pretty confused about that, huh? Uncle Lou, liking boys? It's hard to imagine! Well kids, you don't have to worry about imagining it any more...because it's not true.

Uncle Lou is not, and never has been, a homosexual.

Now, I know what you're thinking. Why would I say such a silly thing if I didn't mean it? Well, I don't have a good answer for you, but I will tell you this: I'm the same Uncle Lou you've always known and loved, and I'm never gonna change.

And I'm sure there's a few of you out there who might have two moms, or two dads, and you're probably a little sad to know that Uncle Lou isn't..that way after all. Well I want you kids out there to know, there's nothing wrong with your parents at all. Just because Uncle Lou isn't like them doesn't mean they're not allowed to be who they are. But Uncle Lou isn't.

I'm sorry to all of you, especially you kids with two moms or two dads. I'm sorry to anyone who felt confused or scared after last week's episode, young and old. I'm sorry to those just tuning in now, not expecting something like this to happen. I'm sorry for everything.

(By this point, LOU is really struggling to keep it together.)

But don't worry! *Uncle Lou's Workshop* will be back to normal in no time, and we'll help you make all kinds of amazing things! So be good to each other, and we'll see you next week!

JIM

(As Henry:)
Bye!

(As Toadie:)

B-bye now!

LOU AND JIM

Bye!

(LOU smiles and waves at the camera for a moment.)

ELIZABETH

(Offstage:)
Cut.

(LOU'S smile immediately disappears.)

LOU

Think they'll go for it?

JIM

I don't see why not.

(ELIZABETH enters.)

ELIZABETH

That was really good, Dad. Really, really good.

LOU

Let's hope it's good enough to save us.

JIM

It's still such a damn shame we even have to do it in the first place.

ELIZABETH

Trust me, I know. Let's take a break, okay? Unless you want another take, Dad.

LOU

No, I think one is all I can do.

ELIZABETH

Fair enough. Let's say five minutes?

JIM

Perfect.

(JIM exits.)

ELIZABETH

How do you feel?

LOU

Like I've sold my soul.

ELIZABETH

For what it's worth, I think it was a really lovely speech. Direct, honest...conciliatory.

LOU

Yeah, well, if I'm going to go back into hiding, might as well do it with grace.

ELIZABETH

I know this stings. Really, I do. But it's the only way forward for now.

LOU

I suppose so. If this...ugliness proves anything, it's that there's no place for a gay Uncle Lou on TV.

ELIZABETH

For now. We can come back to it later, when we're back on our feet. When we've recovered from this.

LOU

I'm not so sure we will. Recover.

ELIZABETH

Yes, we will.

LOU

No, honey, we won't. After we're done with this episode, I'm ending the show.

ELIZABETH

What?

LOU

We can't come back from this. Even if we air this speech, the damage is done. Sure, kids might not think about it, but their parents will. They'll see right through it. And all those people on the internet you always talk about? They'll abandon us too, once they see what we did. They'll feel betrayed, just like everyone else.

ELIZABETH

Dad, you can't be serious. This show is your life!

LOU

Not anymore. I think *I* see right through it too. Uncle Lou is an old part of me, one that's been dying on the vine for a long time. It's time to put him to rest. We had a good run, an enviable run really, but it's like you always said: we're not relevant anymore. We've run our course. It's time to move on.

ELIZABETH

No, Dad, this is...this is just a minor blip! We'll get over it. We'll take the show in all sorts of new directions. We'll find that thing we're missing and we'll be okay, I promise.

LOU

Sweetheart, it's okay. I know you feel it too. We're done. We've been limping along for too long now. I tried something, it didn't work, and that's that. If there's no place for Uncle Lou anymore, there's no point in forcing it.

I'm sorry honey, I know you tried so hard. We all did.

ELIZABETH

I...don't know what to say. I can't believe you'd just give up like this.

LOU

Don't think of it as giving up. Think of it as moving forward.

ELIZABETH

And what about me, hm? What about Jim? We're both supposed to just accept this?

LOU

I'm afraid you don't have a choice.

ELIZABETH

What are you even gonna do? What's Jim gonna do? He's been working for you for the last thirty years. What's he supposed to do now?

LOU

He's a tough old you-know-what. He'll be okay.

(JIM reenters.)

JIM

Who you callin' old, punk?

What are we talking about?

ELIZABETH

Tell him, Dad. He has a right to know.

JIM

Tell me what?

LOU

I'm ending the show, Jim. After this episode is done, we're done.

JIM

What the hell are you talking about? This is...this is a joke, right?

Liz?

ELIZABETH

I don't think so, Jim.

JIM

You gotta be fucking kidding me. After all these years, *this* is what sinks us?

LOU

Better to go out on our own terms than wait to get cancelled.

JIM

Who says we're gonna get cancelled? Isn't that the whole point of this stupid redaction thing?

LOU

Even if Amelia let's us keep going, we're not gonna be able to get back the audience we've already lost. There's no way. Besides, I'm not so sure she wouldn't cancel us anyway, redaction or not.

JIM

That would be like her. The bitch.

ELIZABETH

Let me talk to her, Dad. We did what she asked, she has no right--

LOU

She can do what she wants. It's her studio.

ELIZABETH

I can't believe you.

LOU

I'm sorry, honey. I really am. I'm sorry it had to be this way.

ELIZABETH

Jim, can you try talking some sense into him? This is ridiculous!

JIM

I'm not so sure he'll listen to me either.

LOU

This is not negotiable, guys. I'm sorry. Liz, try and get Amelia on the phone. I want to set up a meeting after the shoot. And let's get the wall painted back to normal. I think we've got enough paint in here somewhere, we'll just fix it up and then get back on track.

ELIZABETH

I kind of want her to see this.

JIM

Not a bad idea.

LOU

No. We don't have time for that. Jim, help me look for some paint. Liz, you call Amelia, then we'll get to painting.

(LOU and JIM exit. ELIZABETH pulls out her phone and looks at it. She looks back at the wall. After a brief pause, she holds up her camera and takes some pictures. Lights dim.)

SCENE 10

(Lights come back up on LOU, mid-shoot. The graffiti has been painted over and the paint isn't fully dry. He strums a final chord on his guitar. Toadie sits on a crate next to him.)

LOU

So there you have it, kids, a little ditty about the importance of keeping your work space clean!

JIM

That was great, Uncle Lou! Who knew cleaning could be so much fun to sing about?

LOU

Well I'm sure glad you think so, Toadie. And remember kids, if cleaning ever seems like a chore, just hum old Uncle Lou's cleaning song and you'll be finished in no time! We'll be back in a jiff, with a very special message. Make sure you come on back!

ELIZABETH

(Off:)
Cut. How did that feel?

LOU

I think that's a wrap.

ELIZABETH

(Off:)
Alright then. We'll get it edited and turn it in.

JIM

So that's it, huh?

LOU

That's it.

(AMELIA enters.)

AMELIA

Good evening, everybody. How did the shoot go?

ELIZABETH

We just wrapped, actually.

AMELIA

Beautiful. And Lou? How are you feeling?

LOU

Fine. Just fine.

AMELIA

I'm so glad to hear it. What was it you needed from me?

ELIZABETH

My dad has an announcement to make.

AMELIA

What is it?

LOU

Amelia, I've decided that this is it for Uncle Lou.

AMELIA

What do you mean, this is it?

LOU

This was our last episode. We're done.

AMELIA

Oh. Oh thank God.

JIM

Excuse me?

AMELIA

I thought I was going to have to cancel you, but now I don't have to! That's terrific!

JIM

Are you serious? Is she serious?

AMELIA

Look, it's nothing personal, but...we all knew it was over already, didn't we? This can't be news to you. Uncle Lou was dead the moment you aired that last episode, regardless of what you did afterwards.

ELIZABETH

So...we did what you told us to for nothing?

AMELIA

Not for nothing. The station really needed that redaction. It just makes everything...neater.

JIM

Now hold on a minute. Look, lady, I've taken a lot of your shit over the years, but I didn't say anything because the show was more important. Now it turns out you were gonna shit-can us no matter what we did?

AMELIA

I wasn't going to. I was going to let the ratings do it.

JIM

You bitch. You heartless little--

ELIZABETH

Calm down, Jim.

JIM

Don't tell me to calm down! What the hell has gotten into you two? You're gonna let her walk all over you, turn up your asses to the air and say "yep, right in here!"

ELIZABETH

What choice do we have?

JIM

There's gotta be something else besides just showing her your soft underparts.

AMELIA

Jim, I understand you have some...strong opinions, but can you give us some space? We don't really need to hear from the puppet guy.

JIM

The puppet guy? Fuck you, lady!

LOU

Jim's been a part of this show for a long time. He stays.

AMELIA

Alright, fine. It doesn't really matter anyway.

Lou, I just want to thank you. For your years of service to this station, and to this country. It's been an honor having you here, and I'm sorry it had to go this way. I do wish you the best of luck.

JIM

So that's it, huh? Just shake hands and goodbye, like all those years don't matter?

AMELIA

No one's saying they don't matter. They matter a great deal! What more do you want from me,

exactly?

JIM

How about a little fucking compassion, maybe?

LOU

Jim, that's enough.

JIM

You know what? Whatever. I need a drink. Yeah, the puppet guy drinks. Anything to say to that?

(JIM exits.)

LOU

Forgive him. He's just upset.

AMELIA

I understand. We are really gonna miss you, Lou. I mean that.

ELIZABETH

You can change that, you know.

AMELIA

I'm afraid I can't. But I'd love to have you work for me, Liz. If you want to. Just think about it.

(AMELIA starts to exit, notices the repainted wall.)

Did you do a touch up here? It looks...brighter than usual.

(AMELIA exits. Lights dim.)

SCENE 11

(The pictures ELIZABETH took of the wall suddenly appear on projected onto the stage. Then, a flood of comments comes pouring in from all sides. Some are shocked, some are elated, some sarcastic, some funny, some sad; they run the full gamut. They fill the stage. A light comes up on ELIZABETH, looking at all of these responses on her phone.)

ELIZABETH

Holy shit.

(She dials a number.)

Hey Dad? It's me. Are you there? Pick up if you are, please. I know you're home because you never go anywhere else.

Look, I need to talk to you. Now. It's important. Meet me at the studio in a half an hour. I'll be there one way or another.

(She hangs up, and the light dims on her. The comments all start

to blink out, one by one, until just the photos are left. Lights dim.)

SCENE 12

(Lights up on the studio, a half hour later. The only illumination is a bright ghost light in the center of the set. ELIZABETH is there waiting. A moment later, the door opens, and LOU enters.)

Liz?
LOU

I'm here, Dad.
ELIZABETH

What is this all about? It's so late.
LOU

I know, but this is important.
ELIZABETH

So important it can't wait until tomorrow when we start breaking down?
LOU

I think so.
ELIZABETH

Okay then. What is it?
LOU

I had an idea. Maybe being taken off the air isn't such a bad thing if we can go out with a bang.
ELIZABETH

What are you talking about?
LOU

I'm talking about making a big statement. Use the show as a way to get even with these people. Do something people are *really* going to remember. We show the audience the rock. We show them the photos of the set before we painted it.
ELIZABETH

What photos?
LOU

I took a couple photos while you were looking for paint.
ELIZABETH

LOU

Why would you do that?

ELIZABETH

Because someone needs to be made aware of this! If we don't share what happened, then they just get to keep on doing what they do. This is bigger than our show, Dad. It has to be.

LOU

I want you to delete those photos immediately. Understand?

ELIZABETH

Why?

LOU

Because it doesn't make any difference now. We're done. Let's just leave it as it is and walk away.

ELIZABETH

It's too late for that.

LOU

How so?

ELIZABETH

I may have...made an unofficial Twitter account for the show and posted the pictures online.

LOU

You did what?

ELIZABETH

But it worked, Dad! People are horrified! They're sharing it like crazy, even more than the last episode. I've already gotten calls from like five different newspapers!

LOU

You had no right to do that. None whatsoever.

ELIZABETH

I'm the executive producer of this show. I think I have a right.

LOU

Not without consulting me you don't. Jesus, Liz, I cannot believe this! Why are you so intent on sabotaging my show?

ELIZABETH

Sabotaging?

LOU

You pushed this redaction on me, now you turn around and do this? If I didn't know better, I'd say you

wanted us to fail.

ELIZABETH

How can you say that to me?

LOU

I'm just calling it like I see it, honey. You were mad at me about everything and you wanted to get back at me in the worst way possible.

ELIZABETH

That is completely untrue! I did everything I did for you and this show. How dare you say that to me?

LOU

Why else, pray tell, would you do that?

ELIZABETH

Because...if I set my feelings aside, I can see how you're feeling. You're hurting, in a way I've never seen you hurt before. Don't think I don't see it. I know that speech you wrote almost killed you, and to see that, it almost killed me too. I don't want you to have to sell your soul for our show.

LOU

My show.

ELIZABETH

Right. Your show. But you know what? This is my show too. I've worked on this for ten years. That's a third of my life, dedicated to *your* show. And I've tried everything to keep us on the air. That came from me, not you. You could give two shits about ratings, but what you don't realize is if it weren't for me, there would be no show. So don't say it's your show, like you're the only one who's done anything, because I have too. You sing songs and play with puppets, I make sure you can still do that in the one place where it doesn't make you a crazy person: on television. Without me, you'd be doing your act down at the cancer ward at the children's hospital, so don't forget that.

(Beat.)

LOU

I'm not doing it. This is my show, and I will end it the way I want to end it. That's final.

ELIZABETH

Why are you so afraid of standing up for something? For God's sake, Dad, you were in the closet for how long?

LOU

I hate to tell you, honey, but even if I did do something, they wouldn't be talking about it for very long. Sure, it might be a blip on the radar for a little while, but before long people will go about their lives and they'll forget all about it. Because that's the way people are now. They just wait for the next fresh outrage and forget about the last one.

(Beat.)

ELIZABETH

I know you've never really thought I could do this job. I know you only gave it to me because you felt like you owed it to me or something. But I can do this job. I have been for ten years, and I'm damn good at it. I've been in a lot of meetings without you, and I've had to make a lot of concessions so that you could keep doing what you were doing. And there were plenty of times I drew the line, for your sake. 2007, they wanted you to update your set for a new generation. They had all these terrible plans drawn up, ways to make it more “modern” and “hip.” Lots of sleek white surfaces, pointless screens, a fucking *rapping dog* puppet, Dad. But I convinced them the show didn't need changing, that its appeal was timeless, and they relented. I never told you about that because I didn't want to upset you.

LOU

That hasn't changed, Liz. It's still timeless. Or it was, I suppose. I should've followed my own advice and just kept it to myself.

(Beat.)

ELIZABETH

We haven't really had a chance to talk about it, you know.

LOU

About what?

ELIZABETH

About you. I was so freaked out when you told me that I bailed. But I want to talk about it now, for real.

LOU

I do too, and we can talk about it later, but for now--

ELIZABETH

No, I think now's a good time. I think I need it.

LOU

Honey, it's eleven at night, and I'm an old person. If we're done here, I need to go to bed.

ELIZABETH

We're not done here, Dad. Not yet.

LOU

Why not?

ELIZABETH

Because I think you're gonna keep saying we'll talk about it later until it just becomes something we never talk about. Or worse, maybe I just stop talking to you because I can't get over it. I don't want that.

(Beat. LOU starts to exit.)

LOU

It's late, and I'm going home.

ELIZABETH

Dad, I swear to God, if you don't talk to me about this, I will walk off this set and I will never speak to you again. That's a promise.

(Beat. LOU turns around.)

LOU

Alright, fine. You want to talk, let's talk. What do you want to know?

ELIZABETH

First off, I want to know why.

LOU

Why what?

ELIZABETH

Why keep it a secret? Why live a life you didn't want?

LOU

Who says I didn't want that life? When I was young, it was just something you didn't talk about, especially in my hometown. You probably don't remember your grandfather very well, but suffice it to say, he wouldn't have been able to hear me. He probably would've thought he could beat it out of me. And if you wanted to be an entertainer, particularly a *children's* entertainer? There was no way in Hell you could tell anyone, or they'd never give you a job. It was considered a perversion back in those days. Jesus, if I'd done what I did back then, I would've been strung up in the street. I wanted to entertain kids. Sing for them, make them laugh, make them smile, that's all I wanted out of my life. That, and a kid of my own. And if I had to hide who I was for that to happen, then so be it. Your mother and I were friends when we were kids, but you knew that. High school sweethearts, they called us. And we did love each other. Your mom was my closest friend. I loved her with all my heart. She wanted kids, and so did I, so I gave her one. It's really no different than a regular marriage. We both loved each other, and we loved you. That's what matters.

ELIZABETH

But you cheated on her! You told me you slept with men on the side, more than once.

LOU

I know I did, and she did too.

(Beat.)

ELIZABETH

What?

LOU

Your mother knew about me. She knew everything. She condoned it. She saw that there was a part of me that felt unfulfilled, and she gave me her blessing to fix it. I never really thanked her for that, but without it, I never would have survived. It was the greatest gift she could have given, besides you.

ELIZABETH

She *knew*?

LOU

She knew everything. And she was happy because I wasn't living a lie.

ELIZABETH

You really believe that? She knew her own husband didn't find her attractive, didn't desire her, and that she'd just say, "oh, okay, well it's all about him, so it's okay!" Don't you think she ever wanted to feel like you wanted her? God, I can't believe I'm asking my *father* that question about my *mother*, but I want to know.

LOU

Your mom was perfectly satisfied. You think I wouldn't return her courtesy and make her stay celibate while I went off and slept with other people? She had her own lovers over the years. She didn't love any of them, and I didn't love any of mine. We loved each other.

ELIZABETH

So are you even my father?

LOU

Of course I am.

ELIZABETH

It just seems like there's one crucial element missing to make you my father and her my mother. I mean, how did you even...?

LOU

We knew we wanted a child together, so we had one.

ELIZABETH

So what, did you just close your eyes and think of...baseball players or something?

LOU

Okay, now you're going a little too far.

ELIZABETH

I don't care. We're airing out all of our dirty laundry, might as well get dirtier.

LOU

I don't feel comfortable talking about this with you.

ELIZABETH

Alright, fine, we don't have to. I don't really want to know anyway.

LOU

I want you to know, no matter what, that I did love your mother. She never lacked for love from me. Just because I didn't want her in that way doesn't mean I loved her any less. It's important that you know that.

ELIZABETH

I want to believe that, Dad. Really, I do. But it all just seems kind of insane to me.

LOU

Why is it so insane? You're a child of a new line of thinking, honey, you should be able to have an open mind about this. You think just because I didn't want to sleep with your mother that I didn't love her? Or that she didn't love me?

ELIZABETH

I'm sure she loved you. That's why she let you fuck men over the years.

LOU

But you think I didn't love her.

ELIZABETH

I know you did, it's just...God, it's so fucking screwed up.

LOU

I don't think it's all that screwed up. We still gave you the childhood you deserved, didn't we? Did you, at any point in your childhood, feel unloved?

ELIZABETH

No.

LOU

Did you ever feel like your parents seemed to hate each other, or have anything other than love for each other?

ELIZABETH

I guess not.

LOU

Then why is it that hard to understand?

(Beat.)

ELIZABETH

I don't know. I was hoping I'd feel like some questions were answered, but I just feel like I know less than I did when I started.

LOU

I'm sorry, Liz. I know I didn't handle all this very well. I wanted to tell you before. I've wanted to tell you since your mom died. But there's no graceful way to broach that subject.

ELIZABETH

Yeah, you know what would really not be graceful? Telling me by not actually telling me, but just by letting me find out as you tell the whole fucking nation. That would be really clumsy.

LOU

I know. I did what I had to do for the show. Everything I've done, I've done for the show. I kept in the closet for the show. I gave up a lot for the show. I wish I could make it up to you, but I don't know how.

ELIZABETH

You want to make it up to me? Do something for me, for once. Not for the show. You really care about making it up to me, then do this for me. Don't just go along like it doesn't matter, because it matters. To me, and to lots of people out there. Indulge me, just this one last time.

LOU

What difference is it gonna make anyway? The episode's in the can. Amelia should have it by morning.

ELIZABETH

Leave that to me, okay?

(Beat.)

LOU

Okay.

ELIZABETH

Okay?

LOU

Okay. We'll need Jim.

ELIZABETH

Already on the way.

LOU

You called him already?

ELIZABETH

I figured I'd cover my bases.

LOU

You're a smart kid, you know that?

Give me a few minutes to prepare.

ELIZABETH

Thank you, Dad.

LOU

Just promise me it's gonna be worth it?

ELIZABETH

I promise. You won't regret it.

(JIM enters, it's clear he's had a bit to drink.)

JIM

Hey, I'm here. I came as soon as I could.

ELIZABETH

You didn't drive, did you?

JIM

What am I gonna do? Ride a bike?

ELIZABETH

You could take a cab.

JIM

I don't believe in cabs. I'm not paying some guy a bunch of money to cart me around when I can do it my own damn self.

ELIZABETH

That's extremely reckless of you.

JIM

Yeah well, that's me. The bad boy puppeteer.
So. What are we doin'?

LOU

We're gonna film an alternate ending.

JIM

I know that part. I mean, what are you guys doing?

ELIZABETH

Nothing, just airing out some grievances.

JIM

Ah, I see. Well while we're on the subject, I've got something I'd like to say. I'm only saying this

because the show's dead one way or another, and full disclosure, I have been drinking this evening. Lou, I slept with your wife. Many times.

LOU

I know you did, Jim. It's okay.

JIM

Wait, what?

LOU

I know you two slept together. I wanted you to sleep together. I know you always had an eye for her, and I know she felt the same about you. You gave her something I never could. So thank you.

JIM

Wait...what? Are you serious?

(LOU nods.)

Well shit. I've got a few more things I could stand to let go of, matter of fact--

LOU

Later, okay? I'd like to do this before the sun rises. Get the puppets ready and we'll get going.

JIM

How are we gonna do it?

LOU

We'll improvise.

JIM

Hot damn, just like old times, huh? You and me improvising, me quite inebriated. It's like the 80s all over again! I bet Henson wouldn't've let me do that, so they can suck it.

(Lights dim.)

SCENE 13

(Lights up on LOU, strumming his guitar.)

LOU

You know, kids, you might remember a week ago, when Uncle Lou told you he was a homosexual. I wanted to talk to you a bit more about that before we sing our song. I want you kids to know that it doesn't matter who you love in this world, as long as you love somebody and are a good person to everyone else. So you might have two dads at home, or two moms. Other kids might make fun of you for that. But you hold your head high and say, "my parents love each other, and they love me, and that's what matters." There's nothing wrong with being a man who loves another man, or a woman who loves another woman, as long as you live a happy life filled with joy and love and song. And last but not least, I'd like to share a piece of viewer mail I received the other day!

(He retrieves the rock and sets it on the workbench.)

This piece of mail comes to us via air mail from an anonymous viewer. That's a viewer we don't know the name of. Now I bet you're wondering what it says, aren't you? Well suffice it to say, it's not a very happy message. In fact, it's a sign that a whole bunch of people out there aren't so happy with Uncle Lou at the moment, and I have a message for them too: I love you all. This song is for you.

(He does a simple chord progression and begins to sing:)

Well Sally's got two mommies
Patrick's got two dads
Other kids might think it's strange
But they never feel sad
'Cause they've got parents that love them
Parents who give them such joy
The kind of parents wanted
By each girl and boy

Two men, two women
or maybe one of each
It doesn't matter
If love is in reach
Loving your own gender
Is an okay thing to do
'Cause Uncle Lou does it too!

Everybody sing with me!

(The Henry the Hammer puppet and the Toadie puppet come out, controlled by JIM. They all sing the chorus.)

Two men, two women
Or maybe one of each
It doesn't really matter
If love is in their reach
Loving your own gender
Is an okay thing to do
'Cause Uncle Lou does it too!
Yes Uncle Lou
Does it too!

(Everyone claps and cheers as the song ends.)

So there you have it, kids. It's okay to love who you love in this world, no matter who they are. And that's one thing I hope you never forget.

JIM (as TOADIE.)

I know I won't!

(As HENRY:)

Yeah, me neither, Boss! I feel so much better, I'm gonna ask out Helen the Handsaw right now!

LOU

That's the spirit!

JIM (As TOADIE:)

Yeah, and I'm gonna go tell Toadette that I love her, and I'd love her even if she was a frog or a newt or anything else!

LOU

You got it! Now kids, You might not see Uncle Lou for a while, but don't be afraid, because no matter what, I'll always be there for you. When you're lost, confused, scared, just think about all the songs we've sung together over the years, maybe sing them if you remember the words. Good night, and as always, be good to each other.

ELIZABETH

(Off:)
Cut!

(She enters.)

That was really good, Dad.

JIM

Yeah, not bad for something you cooked up in twenty minutes. How are we gonna make sure it gets on the air?

ELIZABETH

Don't worry, I'll make sure it does.

JIM

Sounds damn devious.

ELIZABETH

Sometimes you have to be.

JIM

Hey, if it means sticking it to her, I'm all in. It's been an honor. I mean it. I'm gonna hit the head.

(JIM exits, with his puppets. Beat. ELIZABETH beams at LOU.)

LOU

What's that smile for?

ELIZABETH

Nothing, just...I'm proud of you, that's all. I'll be honest, I never thought you'd do it.

LOU

Well, I just hope this is worth it, is all.

ELIZABETH

I think it will be, one way or another. We'd better get to editing, huh?

Yeah, you're right.
LOU

Liz?
(Beat.)

Yeah?
ELIZABETH

You're good at your job, you know that?
LOU

You're damn right I do.
ELIZABETH

(They exit together. Lights dim.)

SCENE 14

(Lights up on the set, which has been almost completely dismantled. LOU, JIM, and ELIZABETH are finishing to take it down.)

Alright, get ready, once I take out this bolt, that wall's coming down.
JIM

(He does. LOU and ELIZABETH lower the wall to the ground.)

Well, that's it I guess. Let's get this out to the dumpster and get out of here.
LOU

It's a damn shame it had to go out this way.
JIM

Yeah, it is.
LOU
(Beat.)

What the hell am I gonna do now?

Hey, I'm sure with all the syndication money, you'll be set for life.
JIM

I'm not worried about the money.
LOU

Yeah, I guess not. I am. There's not a lot of places wanna hire an old drunk puppeteer around here.
JIM

Maybe I'll have to take my act down to the park, start up a collection bin. At least it'd be booze money.

LOU

You'll find a way. You always did.

JIM

Your mouth to God's ear. I need some water. And I *mean* water.

(JIM exits. Beat.)

ELIZABETH

How you holding up?

(LOU shrugs.)

ELIZABETH

Good, then we're on the same page.

LOU

The world might be fine without Uncle Lou. Hell, they've been fine with him this whole time, and they've barely even noticed him for a while. The question is, am I gonna be okay without him?

ELIZABETH

You don't have to retire him for good. We can find another way to get him out there.

LOU

I know, but maybe it's for the best. Without the workshop, it just wouldn't feel the same. Maybe we all just need a clean break from him.

ELIZABETH

I know one thing, if I ever have kids, I want them to meet Uncle Lou, so don't throw out that sweater just yet, okay?

LOU

I thought you didn't want kids.

ELIZABETH

I don't know, I never said that specifically. Besides, I've got a lot of time on my hands now, so...

LOU

You'll find something else. You'll have a glowing recommendation, that's for sure.

ELIZABETH

I think I just want to spend a bit of time taking care of myself for a while. It's funny, it sucks to lose the show, it's been my life, but I feel like I can *breathe*, you know? I feel like I can be me for the first time in forever. Don't you get that at all?

LOU

I don't know. I don't know how to be me without Uncle Lou. I don't even know where he ends and I begin.

ELIZABETH

Maybe you need time to figure that out too.

LOU

Maybe. I just hope you'll be there while I do.

ELIZABETH

I plan to, Dad.

(JIM returns.)

JIM

Alright, what say we get this bad boy to the dumpster, eh?

ELIZABETH

I'll help you.

(JIM and ELIZABETH pick up the piece of wall and carry it out. All that remain are pieces of the frame and random scraps. LOU surveys the wreckage for a long beat. His guitar sits in its case against a wall. He goes to it, opens the case, pulls out the guitar. He strums it tentatively for a moment, before growing more assured, strumming louder and with purpose. JIM and ELIZABETH return a moment later, watching him.)

LOU

(Singing:)

Put on your overalls

Pick up your gloves

It's time to build something

You're going to love

In Uncle Lou's Workshop

We'll have a real good time

Forget all your worries

Forget all your cares

Come build with us

We've got parts to spare

In Uncle Lou's Workshop

We'll have a real good time.

(ELIZABETH and JIM come to join LOU in
song.)

LOU, ELIZABETH, AND JIM

Let imagination
Show you the way
Come in once
And you'll wanna stay

In Uncle Lou's Workshop
We'll have a real good time
We'll have a real good time.

LOU

We'll have a real good time.

(Beat. LOU packs up his guitar and they all exit.
Lights to black.)

END OF PLAY