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The Last Word

By Stuart Ross Fink

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Louis, no, no, no, no.

You do not trim these hedges
from top to bottom,
but from bottom to top,
as we've discussed.

I understand, Ms. Lauler...

And I do not want bushy hedges.

You do not want bushy hedges.

We talked about this.

We have. Yes.

Many times.

All right, I'll trim
the bushes myself.

Give it to me.

Yes.

Thank you.

And you can cut the grass.

You cut the grass yesterday.

In a diamond pattern.

Yes.

Then I guess you can go.

Thank you.

Oh! These are not sharp.

Look, Louis, you have
to have these sharp.

I'll look in the truck. Please.

Mmm-hmm.

Oh.

This is much more to my liking.

Looks good.

Thank you for your approval.

Yeah. Yeah, we keep
them on the floor,
so that's perfect.

Thanks, dean

Hello, Ms. Lauler,

I'm Dr. Morgan.

It says here
this was an accident.

Well, do you think I'm lying
or just simply can't read?

Ms. Lauler, I'm just
doing my job.

These gowns?
You call these gowns?
If I was wheeled out
in a wheelchair,
would you call that my chariot?
Ma'am...
Don't call me "ma'am."
You never call
a woman "ma'am."
That makes her feel old.
I'm sorry.
You're sorry?
Oh, you're so sorry.
You washed down four clonazepam
with a bottle of red wine.
Yes. I was sleepy
and I was thirsty.
You don't strike me
as the type of person
who does anything
by accident, okay?
That's what it seems like to me.
What I'm experiencing here.
So, I'm going to
do some tests. Okay?
And if you have a problem
with that, I don't care.
Hi, this Anne Sherman.
Do you know who I am?
Yes.
Uh, no.
Your predecessor did.
Your predecessor
knew me very well.
My father?
Lam Harriet Lauler.
And for the better part
of the last 25 years
this newspaper
stayed in the black
because of the media buys
that I purchased every month.
Lauler Advertising.
Of course. Uh, what can I

do for you, Ms. Lauler?
I request a formal introduction.
Okay.
My name is Ronald Odom.
I'm the editor-in-chief.
I attended
the school of journalism
at Ohio University.
Mr. Odom.
I married Katie Sparrow.
She kept her name.
Mr. Odom. I do not require
the formal introduction to you.
Hey. Hey.
Wha...
Come with me.
Why?
'Cause I'm your boss.
Are you firing me?
You should be so lucky.
Come on, come on, come On.
Ms. Lauler,
this is Anne Sherman.
Ms. Sherman.
Let us have the room, please.
Please sit down.
Oh, I'm cool.
Well, be that as it may,
I wish you would sit down
because I have a job offer
to discuss with you.
I have a job.
Hmm.
Sit down, Ms. Sherman.
Lois Schenken was a bitch.
"Lois Schenken,
"a tireless
animal rights advocate,
"passed away last night
at the age of 78."
Right, Lois Schenken.
I wrote that.
Yes.
Do you know why Lois Schenken

loved animals so much?
Because people hated her.
They hated her parties,
they hated her gossiping,
and they hated
her costume jewelry.
Only homeless dogs could bear
to be around Lois Schenken
for longer than seven minutes.
Well, the people that I spoke to
had nothing but kind things
to say about her.
She was dead and
they were being polite.
"Eugene Baker, with a song
not just in his heart,
"but always on his lips.
"Eugene Baker sang his way
"into the lives
of all who met him."
Do you know why he sang so much?
He was a drunk.
Okay, well, that's not something
that I was going to write
in his obituary.
"After a long illness,
"Mary Ramos passed
away this morning.
"She left an indelible
mark on all..."
Yeah, right.
She had syphilis, I know.
That's not something that
you want to memorialize.
I knew these people.
I'm... I'm sorry
for your losses.
No, these were awful people.
Well, I'm...
I'm not sorry then.
But you made them sound as
though they were magnificent.
You made their lives
sound full of achievement.

That's what you'll
be doing for me.
You want me
to write your obituary?
That's what I want.
Okay. Well, I am
the obituary writer,
so when the time comes,
I will be writing your obituary.
I want you to write it now.
Huh.
Is Ron coming back?
That's the wrong question.
The right question is, "Why?"
Why?
Good question.
Thanks.
Ms. Sherman,
I'm a reasonable woman.
I have never been
surprised about anything.
And I've never found myself
in a situation
that I couldn't handle.
So, as a reasonable woman,
the thought of leaving
my obituary to chance
is completely
unreasonable to me.
But that is what everybody does.
That is what people have been
doing for hundreds of years.
If I had motivated myself
by what other people
thought and did,
I would not have achieved
what I've achieved.
And I've achieved a great deal.
How my achievements
are memorialized by you
is of great interest to me.
Okay.
Here's the names
of a few hundred people.

I've taken the trouble
to alphabetize them.
Also, restaurants are listed
that they might like to go to
while they discuss me with you.
What...
What about family?
I have a daughter, and I haven't
spoken to her in many years.
Okay.
There's an ex-husband.
He's a jackass.
Right, all right. What's... What's
the timeline that we're looking at?
Monday.
No.
Yes.
I want it by Monday.
I have plans.
You're excused. Go.
That's what I want.
Hey. She puts the
"bitch" in obituary.
I understand.
I don't think you do, Ron.
You got to do it.
What? Why?
Because at one time,
this woman was a real
friend of the paper.
And if she were to extend
that friendship
at the time of her passing,
that would be extremely
helpful to all of us.
What are you saying?
I'm saying look around.
I mean...
We're in trouble here.
The digital age wasn't a fad.
I mean, who knew, right?
Everybody.
Why do you all say that?
Are you saying

I could lose my job?
I'm saying we could
all lose our jobs.
Okay. So what am I
supposed to do?
Make her happy.
This is Robin Sands for KOXA.
Hello, Robin Sands.
Playing independent music
for independent minds.
For independent minds.
How long were
you and Harriet married?
Um, a little over 19 years.
And, you know,
when we got married,
she did not take my name.
Did you know that?
Who did that back then
but Harriet Lauler?
Yeah. I get the
impression that she...
Control is very
important to Harriet.
Well, she asked you
to write her obituary
while she is still alive.
Yeah, I think it's safe to say
that control is very
important to Harriet.
Was she always like that?
Well, you gotta understand
that when she started out,
it was a different world.
I mean, the men that
she had to work with.
Men she had to work for.
She had to be twice as good,
twice as smart,
twice as forceful.
And she was, too.
See... She always thought
she was right.
Always.

But the one thing that made
her light up with excitement
was finding out
that she was wrong.

Yeah, see...

If you were willing to go
toe-to-toe with Harriet,
prove that you were right
and she was wrong,
she loved that.

And she would laugh.

Now, she never said,

"I'm wrong."

But hearing that laugh...

That was enough for me.

What about your daughter?

Hey, if you were

looking for somebody

to say something nice

about Harriet,

don't ask Elizabeth.

Trust me on that one.

Good luck.

You'll need it.

My name is Anne Sherman.

I'm calling from

the Bristol Gazette.

I'd like to talk to you

about Harriet Laufer.

"If I want your opinion,

I will give it to you,"

that's what she told me.

So you know Harriet how?

I was her gynecologist.

So how did you become

Harriet's hairdresser?

She walked in the door

and said, "Cut my hair."

Okay...

And I was like,

"I'm actually cutting somebody

else's hair right now."

And she asked

the woman to leave.

I'm calling
from the Bristol Gazette.
I'd like to talk to you
about Harriet Laufer.
Hello?
I learned a long time ago
if you don't have anything
nice to say about someone,
say nothing at all.
She insisted
on examining herself.
Her diagnosis, always correct.
I had to give her
her co-pay back.
Just a, uh,
hateful, hateful woman.
I hated her.
I hated her so much.
So much.
What do you think of Harriet?
I've worked very hard in
therapy not to think of her.
If there's just one thing
you could say
about her that's nice.
One thing nice.
If she were dead, that would be nice.
How's that?
She's like a human black cloud.
Angriest vagina
this side of China.
"Give me the wafer this way."
"Hand me the wine that way."
"That wine is horrible."
Like, nothing?
Zippo.
I don't...
So this is what you wrote.
It's a first draft.
No. This is a
first paragraph.
It's succinct.
It's one paragraph.
It's to the point

and I think that's good.
No, it's the life of a loser.
I wouldn't say that.
This is the life of a nobody.
I definitely wouldn't say that.
Then what would you say?
Because you certainly
have not captured
an impressive life,
an important life.
I did my best.
That is really unfortunate
for both of us.
Well, I didn't have
a lot to work with.
No, you had my life
to work with.
And I did the best
that I could with it.
Huh.
How grossly I overestimated
your talent as a writer.
With all due respect...
Oh, now you respect me.
I was not really sure of that.
The problem
isn't with my writing.
What is the problem?
It's the subject.
You are the problem.
Excuse me?
You are the problem.
What? How dare you?
No, I... I'm sorry.
How dare you?
No one, and I mean nobody,
had one nice thing
to say about you.
No colleagues, no friends.
Certainly no family.
What did you just say?
I said certainly no family.
Hmm.
Get out of my house.

I'm just... I'm just
being honest with you.
You expected these people
to sing your praises?
I mean, you're way off.
Get out of my house!
Now!
Bitch!
Harriet, what are you...
What are you doing here?
I do not wish to be
sodomized in the hallway.
Do you know what time it is?
Sit down, please.
We need to talk.
What is this shit?
These are obituaries
from newspapers
all over the country.
I want you to read them
and see what other
obituary writers are doing.
Wow, I'm sorry you
don't like what I wrote,
but that's... That was just
me writing about your life.
But my life is not over. Yet.
Now, I have determined
there are four
essential elements
to a really great obituary.
Is that right?
That's right.
One, the deceased should
be loved by their families.
Right.
Two, the deceased should be
admired by their coworkers.
I... I know.
Three, the deceased must have
touched someone's
life unexpectedly.
And if said person was
a minority or a cripple,

so much the better.
Okay, and the fourth?
And the fourth,
that's the wild card.
I do not know
what my wild card is.
Wild card?
Yes, a statement of
such breadth and wonder
that it's the opening
line of the obituary.
For example,
"A noted lover of arts,
"Bonnie Lee Johnson
passed away today."
Right, right.
"A three-time state
ballroom dancing champion,
"Lou Mendoza
died last night."
Okay, I have a question.
Yes.
Well, four to be exact.
Four?
Oh. Four. Mmm. Family?
My child and I have not had
any contact for several decades.
My colleagues,
as you have discovered,
are not exactly beating down
my door to sing my praises.
I don't know any
crippled black kids.
And four, I have no idea
what the wild card would be.
Those are the questions.
Yes. And you're going to
help me find the answers.
Uh, you don't say.
Oh, yes.
You're going to help
shape a legacy
instead of just transcribing it.
I bet you have not been

offered that very often.
To write a story
before it's over.
That's what I've been talking
about, Anne. Yeah.
So you're going to change
your life, like, right now?
Exactly.
Do you find any problem
in procuring me
a disadvantaged youth to mold?
Oh, um, Home Depot is probably
getting another
shipment in soon.
The shelves will be stocked.
Sarcasm, the wit of the witless.
Condescension,
the repartee of the rude.
Sorry. Shit. Sorry.
No, no. Never apologize
for speaking your mind.
Thanks for coming.
B-2.
I'm going to find the
woman that I spoke to.
Wanda? Hey.
Walking.
Harriet, this is...
This is Wanda Barnes.
She runs the program
for at-risk kids.
Hello, Wanda. Who runs the
program for at-risk visitors?
Ms. Lauler, no need to worry.
This is a safe space.
I'm very reassured.
Thank you.
I know the children,
especially the girls,
would greatly enjoy it
if you would come in
and speak with them.
You want Harriet to speak
with a group

of at-risk children?
I think the kids would love it.
Or, I'm just throwing
this out there,
she could write you
a big, fat check.
Am I supposed to talk
to your boss yet again?
I'm... I'm just saying that
money makes a difference.
Am I right, Wanda?
Well, certainly...
A woman who wrote a check
to a small community center
died last night, Harriet Lauler,
leaving behind a legacy
of unfulfilled goals
and half measures.
Can I circle back
on that big, fat check?
So I hear you kids are at risk.
All kids are at risk, you know.
Show me a kid who is not at risk
and I'll show you a kid
who will be a nobody.
Taking risks is what
life is all about.
I took a risk. I went to college.
And in my day,
no man wanted to marry
a woman who was educated.
No man wanted to marry
a woman who worked.
No man wanted a woman
that he worked for.
But my favorite was
no one wanted to marry
a woman in business.
But those were the risks
I was willing to take.
Why? Why did you
take those risks?
Because there was no way
I was not going to

live up to my potential.
So you have to ask
yourselves this question,
are you willing to take a risk
to do something stupid?
Or are you willing
to take a risk
at doing something great?
WOW.

I think you gave those girls
something to think about.
Seem to be quite skilled
at selling Pablum
to a bunch of pre-teen punks.
Great, Pablum.

But you know that
speech is not enough.
We have to come back
and we have to find
our own hooligan
who will benefit most
from my wisdom
and that will be
the unexpected person
whose life I touch.

Hey, kiddo.

Hey, Dad.

Didn't know
you were coming today.
Leigh Ann's not here. Right?

No, she's got her class.

The coast is clear.

Ta-da!

Oh, look.

Just what I always
wanted. Dirty clothes.

There you go.

Thank you very much.

Laundry in?

Yep.

Great.

You hungry?

No thanks.

Oh, come on.

Let me make you a sandwich.
I'm okay. Thank you.
I'm really not hungry.
I got you that tea you like.
Um, thanks.
You're still doing
the essay thing?
Yeah.
How're they shaping up?
Slow but steady.
So when was it you first
started working on those?
I can't remember.
I'm just treading water, okay?
No pressure.
I'm just... You know.
You might want to say
pencils down at some point
and actually let
somebody read them.
Like you?
Yeah, I'm sure
they're wonderful.
They're not.
Well...
See, now I think you're just
being too hard on yourself.
Would you consider yourself
to be the kind of person
who takes risks in their life?
Nah.
No.
No, your mother...
I got to admit. She was
more of a risk taker.
So is that what
we're calling it?
Well, it was a long time ago.
Why not?
Because that sounds like
what she did to us
was almost noble,
which it wasn't.
Look, you don't have to

like what she did, okay?
I mean, I didn't like it.
But obviously she
wanted something else,
and so she just went after it.
So as long as she's,
like, living the dream,
that's all that matters?
Anne... I'm happy.

Good.

Okay? Finally.

And I pray every single
day that you are too.

Hi. Excuse me,
is Mr. Samuels available
to talk for a minute?

And you are?

My name is Anne Sherman,
I work for the Bristol
Gazette. I'm a writer.

Good for you. What is
this in reference to?

Harriet Laufer.

Actually, he isn't in today.

I don't even know why I
asked who you were. No?

He's not even here.

He's not here? Okay.

Mmm-mmm.

What about Mr. Schmidt?

Mmm, sorry.

So none of them are here.

Mmm-mmm.

Great.

Brenda! Brenda!

You realize this
little stunt of yours
will take weeks to fix?

Don't need to be fixed.

My way is better.

I know you think that,
but this is what libraries do.

Just because that's
the way it's always been

don't mean I give a shit.
There's nothing wrong
with the Dewey Decimal System.
Having to write down
some six-digit number
with a decimal
just to find a book,
don't tell me that makes sense.
What the fuck do I
need with the decimal?
Just want to read a book.
That's the juvenile delinquent
I'll put my mark on.
You arranged every book
in alphabetical order.
You should be thanking me.
Hello.
Uh, Wanda.
You know, when you utter
profanity in public like that,
you risk others thinking
that you're too uneducated
to find the right words.
Who the hell are you?
How about, "I'm sorry.
Have we met before?"
I ain't sorry.
Just want to know who's
getting all up in my business.
Well, I know
that I am the world's
least qualified fairy godmother,
but it is me who is getting
up all in your business.
Da fuck?
You see, instead of "Da fuck,"
why don't you just
say, "Excuse me?"
What do you want?
What do you want?
Oh, I see.
It's community service.
You got busted for
drunk driving. Didn't you?

Now, what on Earth
made you think that?
You're white.
And you're here.
This is true.
However, I'm here
of my own accord.
No obligation at all.
To try to get to know you
and to impart my considerable
breadth of knowledge.
You want to teach me some shit.
You want to teach me some stuff.
Seems like we've already begun.
Oh, shit. Sorry.
Ugh.
Let me move this
trash.
What are you doing?
This is a collection of essays.
Yeah, they're mine.
Am I supposed to assume that you
care about things... Christ.
Besides writing
about dead people?
You can assume
whatever you want.
That's how I generally operate.
Yeah, no shit.
What do you care?
I never said I did care.
Okay, well, in the interest
of me getting back to my life,
what do... What do you
think your wild card
could end up being?
How about this?
"Harriet Lauler, ultimate
lover of clean cars,
"died this afternoon after
contracting a staph infection
"from inside
a Volvo station wagon."
All right.

I'll take that as a "no."
Get in the car!
No!
All right, all right,
I'm just going to
drive away with your purse.
Put this trash back here.
Bye.
Ugh!
That's what I thought.
Oh, God.
Would you like
to come in for some tea?
What? Tea! Would
you like some tea?
Sure.
Well, good. Come.
Okay.
Holy shit, Harriet.
Oh! I forgot I had those.
You forgot you had
an extensive collection
of records?
Yeah.
What?
You forgot about this?
Yes.
God, '50s, '60s, '70s.
Where's the rest? Did you...
Did you start collecting CDs?
No. I'd rather listen
to elevator music.
Why, because it's tinny,
and there aren't enough
nuances in the mix?
Very good, Anne.
Yeah, thanks. Analog,
I know, all the way.
I'm totally into it.
If you don't
have a CD collection,
then where's the rest
of your records?
There isn't any rest.

That's it.

Why?

Why are you so interested
in this? Really?

Yes, I am.

I would like to know.

When I was a kid,

I loved to listen to the radio.

I loved the disc jockeys.

I loved what they chose to play.

They would play something

very exploratory

and I would think,

"Yes, I like to go there."

And I would listen to the music.

Then they'd play

something really bad,

like, almost violent,

and I would take a look

at what I thought.

See what I mean?

They were in control of,

I guess, basically my

kind of budding imagination.

Wait. So, um, who was

your favorite disc jockey?

Bobby Dale. Bobby Dale.

Eclectic taste.

Minimum patter.

And really brilliant sequencing.

But then, you know,

as with everything,

music became business.

And they put the music in a box.

And then my disc jockeys

became computers.

I didn't do it anymore.

Yeah, but that still

exists, you know.

I mean, this radio station

that I listen to, KOXA,

that's exactly what

you're talking about.

The DJs get to play

whatever music they want.
They have complete control
over the music they play.
It's amazing.
Harriet, you would love it.
"KOXA, independent music
for independent minds.
"Number 107.2 on the dial.
Number one in your heart."
Hmm.
Okay.
Thanks.
Anne.
Joe Mueller.
I'm here about Harriet Lauler.
What could the ad agency do
to make the commercial better?
Why are the people cartoons?
Is this an ad for kids?
Well, no. As I
mentioned at the beginning,
if this turned into
a real advertisement,
they'd use real people.
They should use a celebrity.
I love Shelley Long.
Oh, would you just shut up?
I'm Harriet Lauler.
I'm the creative director
of this agency.
A creative director is in charge
of the creative decisions
you make in your company!
Not other people, who sit around
motivated by plates
of pizza and \$15.
No, you know what?
I'm not going to do this.
Because it's stealing.
You give me your money
and this is what
you expect in return?
It's bullshit. I Won't take
your money anymore,

you spineless pieces of shit.
Harriet.
Get her out of here.
Get the fuck
off of me. You hack!
They just threw her out.
Yeah.
It's her company.
She started it.
How can they do that?
She scared them.
Didn't like her.
'Cause they couldn't
control her.
Jesus Christ, man.
Exactly.
But you... You liked her?
I respected her.
I feared her.
Why did you show this to me?
Guilt, maybe.
Probably.
She got screwed.
I didn't open my mouth.
They say
that the really great music
can take you to those places
that you could never
get to on your own.
Well...
This one definitely
does that for me.
So whatever your journey is,
see where this one takes you.
Robin Sands, KOXA.
Well, I wish to speak
to Robin Sands. Please.
Yeah.
Hi, I'm Robin.
Yes, I'd like a job
as a disc jockey.
Uh, yeah. Um...
I'm not really
looking at the moment.

But I noticed that
your sound transmission
is not compressed.
That's right. Yeah.
Is that because of the
Teletronix tube that you use?
Yeah, yeah. Absolutely right.
Mmm-hmm.
Yeah, we couldn't afford
the big digital stuff
even if we wanted it,
and we don't want it.
Oh, I should hope not.
Damn right.
And who are you?
I'm Harriet Lauler,
formerly of Lauler Advertising.
I am an older woman,
as you might have gathered.
But with age comes
certain attributes,
and one of mine is I'm up
very early every morning.
I would gladly take over
the drive time slot
of Dawn Silver.
Uh, I'm... I'm Dawn.
No, you're out.
Your voice is thin and
your taste is pedestrian.
And what kind of music
would you play?
Robin, are you fucking kidding me?
Wait, just...
Now, that is the wrong question.
Is it?
Hmm.
What's the right question?
The right question
would be what would I play
after I play Nina Simone's
Gin House Blues.
What would you play after you played
Nina Simone's Gin House Blues?

Good question.

Thank you very much.

I would play Very Special,
Duke Ellington.

Great.

Then I would play

Van Morrison, Ro Ro Rosey.

Great. And I'd probably end
with something by The Kinks.

You like The Kinks?

Oh, the most underrated band
of all time.

Of all time.

That's what I keep saying.

I keep saying that.

Don't I always say that?

You see, Robin, anybody
can pick a good song.

But a true disc jockey
is interested in the flow,
in the sequencing,
in the block, if you will.

I am very interested
in the block.

And I'm very wealthy,
so I do not have
to have a salary.

Oh. Well, that's great.

And who is this?

It's my intern.

What up?

What up?

All right,

Harriet Lauler, let's chat.

Whoa. Let's do this.

Mmm.

Did I just lose my job
to a 100-year-old woman?

You know, as a general rule,
most people are idiots.

Yeah.

So when you're confronted
by an idiot,
rather than make themselves

aware of their idiocy,
it's best just to treat them
like a dumb, stupid child
who doesn't know
any better, you know?
So be patient
with the dummies, right?
Exactly.
Yeah.
This is Harriet Lauler for KOXA.
Playing independent music
for independent minds.
Up next, we're kicking off
wild card weekend.
Harriet.
Who's the disc jockey?
I... I'm stunned.
No. I wanted to do
something like this
and I just made it happen.
Oh. Just like that?
Yes, of course.
Can I... Can I
stay and watch?
Go outside.
I got work to do here.
You can watch from out there.
Okay.
Eddie Cochran
was a solid choice.
Much respect to the rock block.
Wild card.
Much respect.
So where is he taking you?
No.
Oh!
Well, I orchestrated
the whole thing.
Why would you do that?
It just felt like
something that I should do.
No. You don't get to
control me, Harriet.
Is he taking you somewhere nice?

We're going to The Cave
this weekend.
The Cave! No. No. No.
Absolutely not.
That is not the place.
What you have to do is tell him
to take you to Cafe Bouchon.
What did I just say?
I heard what you just said.
But a proper date
really does include
a very, very nice dinner.
This is not a proper date.
We are going as friends.
That is what I told him.
Why would you say that to him?
Because I don't want
to ruin what we have.
But you just met.
You have nothing.
I have his show.
Ah.
Oh. Well, there you have it.
What do I have?
It just shows me
what kind of child you are.
"Anne Sherman
"died from lethal
injection last night
"for the murder
of Harriet Lauler.
"Her last words were,
'It was worth it.'"
Very good, Anne.
Excellent.
Hey, I was looking for you.
How's our favorite
senior citizen?
She's a handful.
I remember the stories
my father used to tell.
Scary, scary stories.
Thanks for passing
her off on me.

Well, it wasn't my choice.
You know, she chose you.
You should feel...
No. Don't say "honored."
Fair enough.
How about this? Thank you.
Thank you for at least
giving me the chance
to not be the first Odom
to completely destroy
his family's legacy.
Hmm.
Not going to say,
"You're welcome."
I'm just not going to say it.
This is Harriet Lauler
saying good morning.
On.
Hello, boss.
I have missed that so much.
Come in.
Liquid lunch?
Ooh! My favorite.
I remember.
Oh...
Terrace. Go.
Oh, Joe. Now tell me
why you're really here.
That's the original.
Oh, God.
Those bastards.
They still are.
Wasn't exactly my finest hour
either, though, was it?
You were trying to protect
the agency. Your agency.
You were a goddamn hero.
Hmm.
Harriet Lauler, goddamn hero.
I like it.
So that's the original.
Any copies?
Yeah, I made a copy
for your friend Anne.

Anne has seen this?
In your company!
Not other people, who sit around
motivated by plates
of pizza and \$15.
No, you know what?
I'm not going to do this.
Because it's stealing.
It is stealing.
You give me your money
and this is what
you expect in return?
It's bullshit. I Won't take
your money anymore,
you spineless pieces of shit.
Harriet.
Get her out of here.
Get the fuck
off of me. You hack!
No, I like to think of myself
as a curator, you know?
Bringing new artists
and songs to my listeners
that may be outside
of their norm.
Sort of like, um, you know, one
of those old wildlife explorers
bringing an exotic spice
back to the world.
I sound like
such a douche right now.
Robin Sands, rock and roll
spice merchant.
It's kind of Excellent..
You're funny, you know that?
Why are you so surprised?
Why is everybody always
surprised when I crack a joke?
Well, you know, obituary writer.
I'm not, like, tortured
and tormented.
I'm just gainfully employed.
I mean, there's, like,
a voyeuristic quality to it

that I find really interesting.

I'm... I have a backstage
pass to somebody else's life.

Okay, so what's
the career trajectory
for an obituary writer?

Do you hope to, like,
write about famous people
when they eventually die or...

No. No.

I'm really good with
where I'm at right now.

Oh, no.

What?

No. No, no.

This is not healthy,
for you to lie while you're...

I know it's not
technically a date,
but don't lie at the
beginning of a relationship.

Harriet, wha...

What are you doing?

What are you doing here?

I am...

Did she tell you
she wants to be a writer?

Yes, she is a writer.

No, no. A real writer.

She wants to be an essayist.

Harriet, don't do that.

An essayist is someone
who has a unifying
view, a worldview.

Tell me something, Anne,
what is your...

What are your collection
of essays saying?

I don't know.

Well, I don't believe you.

Do you believe her?

You know what, Anne,
let's get out of here.

No, no. Ms. Sherman,

I really am just
looking for an answer.
What is it that you want
to say in your essays?
Nothing. I don't want
to say anything.
I have nothing
interesting to say.
Oh, that's such bullshit.
Harriet, knock it off.
No. Mmm-mmm.
Don't you protect her like
some kind of wounded animal.
No, no. If she wants
to be a writer,
she has got to learn
to express her mind.
You don't have to listen
to any of this, Anne.
No, don't listen.
He's right.
Don't listen. Go back in your
little bubble. No problem.
Man, what is your problem?
Ambition neutered
by self-doubt.
Desire.
Desire. Desire is what
my essays are about.
It's, um...
It's, uh... They're about
the sacrifice that we make
in order to fulfill our desires.
I'm so sorry I asked.
Oh, fuck off. All right.
Oh, life! I see some life!
You bait me into
talking about shit
that I don't want to talk about
and then when I talk
about it, you mock me!
What's wrong with you?
Why don't you calm down?
I just want to understand

what is in your essays
and what you're trying to do.
They're just so very
precious it seems.
Oh, really? Are they?
I... I need. I yearn.
I long. I deserve.
Oh... And the world,
the world is so much
harder than you've dreamed.
And my trophies...
I don't have any trophies.
I was supposed to get trophies.
You know, in hindsight,
this all makes some sense.
Oh, really? Go ahead.
Should be good.
I think you're trying
to write about yourself
and you haven't got a goddamn
idea of the subject matter.
Go fuck yourself, Harriet.
So, uh...
Did you have a title
for your collection of essays?
Uh...
Does it have a title?
Andalusia Now.
Andalusia Now.
Does it mean something to you?
Or is it just, like,
something you came up with?
When I was three,
my mom gave me this globe,
and every night
we would play a game.
Close your eyes.
Spin the globe.
Touch the globe and wherever
your finger would land,
that's where you would
someday live.
And one night, my finger
landed on this place

in the southern coast of Spain,
and my mom told me
it was Andalusia.
And I just thought that was the most
beautiful word I had ever heard.
So that was the last time we
played that game before she...
She left.
Thank you for telling me that.
Which way are you going?
This way?
Yeah. Up that way.
We laid out four things
essential to a good obituary.
I'd say I have
more than enough material
to make three of them work.
All that is left is family.
You need to see your daughter.
And you need to make it right,
because that is all that's left.
And that is the only thing
keeping me
from ever having
to see you again.
Oh, I see.
I spoke to your ex-husband.
He told me that Elizabeth lives
a few hours north of here.
We're going. I'm driving.
In your car?
Yes, in my car.
And Brenda's coming too.
I need a buffer.
I already called her mother.
Hey. How's everybody
doing this morning?
Mr. Sands, would you please
make me a mixed CD?
Anne and Brenda and I
are going on a road trip.
Great.
A compilation of songs
perfectly suited

for the occasion, please.
And what's the occasion?
We're visiting my daughter
and she hates me.
Okay. So let me
get this straight.
Senior-citizen control freak,
estranged daughter,
the obituary writer is driving,
and the nine-year-old intern
from the projects
is in the back seat.
Yeah, I can get
37 songs out of that.
Very good.
Perfect.
I agree.
Me too.
Harriet, it's a one-day trip.
It's a day trip.
Yeah, in your
filth-mobile.
I've packed a change of clothes
and I've packed some
smoked salmon tartines
with fresh dill capers
and a sprinkling
of goat cheese. Ah!
What the hell is a tartine?
It's a fancy name
for a sandwich.
We're going to hit McDonald's, Brenda.
Don't worry.
Okay.
No, we're not.
Who wants McDonald's?
I do.
Here you go, darling.
Harriet?
Yeah. I don't
want anything, really.
Oh, God.
Oh! Yes.
Road food.

This is better than
any fucking tartines.

Whoa!

Amen, sister.

"I was five when
the circus came to town.

"I was six when it left.

"I was seven when I realized
it was never coming back.

"The ringleader spun plates,
sailed through rings of fire,
"creating a world
of magic and mystery.

"And then,
in a puff of diesel smoke,
"the ringleader was gone.

"Three rings, two rings,
one ring, nothing.

"There's nothing
like a circus."

Very evocative.

Lyrical. I like it.

Who wrote it?

Me.

I don't get it.

It's okay.

It's about

mothers and daughters.

So basically you're a poet.

I don't know what I am, Brenda.

Well, you got to be something.

God put you into the world
so you can be something.

You got to be something.

I got to pee.

Go ahead.

No problem in this car.

Please don't do that.

I got to pee all over the place!

Now I gots to pee!

I've gots to pee.

This is not funny, Harriet!

I can hear you!

Tiny dancer outside.

You know, I used to have
this recurring nightmare
that I'd be wrapping Elizabeth
in blankets, pillows,
and swaddling her,
and loving her,
and protecting her.
And then I would
look down and realize
I was so overprotective
that I smothered her to death.
Whoa, Jesus.
Well...
I wonder what she's like now.
What she'll think of me.
It's kind of great
that we get to find out.
Thank you.
You're welcome.
So this is where
she wanted to meet?
Your ex-husband said
she eats lunch here
every Thursday at 12:35.
Thirty-five?
It's a little gauche,
don't you think?
Let's just focus
on your daughter.
Oh, my God.
Hello, Mother.
Hello.
I didn't know we were going
to have an audience.
Oh, no. This is a young
woman I know named Anne.
And this is Brenda.
Well, I don't have much time.
Maybe enough for a salad.
But you just got here.
Mother, relax. Have a drink.
Why don't we order?
Excuse me.
Okay, Brenda.

How's the lobster?
No. No lobster. No.
Chicken parm.
Same.
Mother.
I will have a salad Nicoise,
not raw, just seared,
and some beans, yellow and
not red, and some capers.
I'll have the panzanella.
Capers instead of olives.
White onions instead of red.
Make sure the heirloom
tomatoes are ripe.
And I want
some basil. Fresh.
I want some basil too.
On the side.
On the side.
So...
So, how are you?
Well, I'm wonderful.
Good. Tell me.
Where did we last leave off?
Oh, yes! I remember.
It was when you told my boyfriend
he wasn't good enough for me.
Well, I was hoping maybe
he would prove me wrong.
It was our engagement party.
Well, that was bad timing.
That is true.
But you didn't bring him around
to meet me until then.
Gee, what was I thinking?
I don't know.
What were you thinking?
Forget it.
This whole thing is so ironic.
What do you mean, ironic?
How all these years
I've resented you,
and then I find out
I'm just like you.

Oh, you're being cryptic,
Elizabeth.

Mmm-mmm.

I was diagnosed with
obsessive-compulsive
personality disorder.

It's a condition. That,
unfortunately, we both have.

I'm sorry?

An unyielding belief that
everyone else is the problem.

Well, but for

the most part that's true.

Obsession with perfectionism.

You don't want to settle
for anything less.

I see nothing wrong with that.

Uh-huh.

Look, it's not too late
to let go of the condition.

You can unburden yourself, you know.

You can be happy and at peace.

Elizabeth, I am who I am.

You're a grandmother.

Really?

Yeah.

I have two sons. Two sons.

Spencer and Sage.

Wait, wait, wait.

Please tell me you're married.

I'm married. Yes.

His name is Josh. He's a...

Yeah, what do you do now?

What's your job?

I'm a neurologist.

Mmm-hmm.

Some consider me
to be one of the best...

And are you happy?

In the country.

I am happy.-

Oh!

I have a good life.

And you should be a part of it.

I would really like that.
Mmm!
Great.
So you'll see a therapist?
I can't bring you into the
house with you being this way.
You gotta meet the kids.
You'll see they're wonderful.
You'll fall in love with them.
Is that funny?
What's funny about it?
I don't understand.
I seriously...
I don't know what this is.
I've literally never seen
my mother laugh.
What are you laughing about?
Mother, why are you laughing?
Mother, why are you laughing?
She only laughs
when she's wrong.
Wrong? What were you
wrong about?
List the many things.
About me.
I was wrong about me.
About you?
I was wrong about me.
I don't understand.
'Cause you got
this wonderful husband.
And you got
these two great kids.
And you're happy.
You said you're happy, yes?
Yeah. That's true.
That means I was a great mother.
What?
You know, I succeeded
in spite of you, Mother.
No. It was me.
Why did you want to see me?
I guess to take inventory.
Well, isn't that perfect.

Goodbye, Mother.
Bye.
I was a good mother.
Mmm. Wow.
Harriet, you're a piece of work.
I am who I am.
Let's get out of here.
Come on.
Something's wrong with the car.
For God's sake,
we all knew this was coming.
But you can definitely get
it fixed by tomorrow morning?
It's all the way down here.
Come on!
To sleepover! Sleepover!
We're going to have a sleepover.
You think someday
my dad may show up
and want to get food with me?
I don't know.
Is that what you want?
I get it. You want it,
but you wish you didn't.
Yeah, I guess so.
I get it.
My mom left us when I
was younger than you.
Have you seen her since?
No.
I ain't seen my dad either.
Sucks, right?
His loss. Yeah.
His loss.
Yeah.
I'm awesome.
Yeah, you are awesome.
I really am awesome.
Yes.
I know.
You're kind of awesome, too.
You think so?
You think that I'm awesome?
You know what I think?

What?
Fuck your mom.
Where are we going?
It's so warm.
Careful.
It looks so pretty.
What do you think?
It's nice, huh?
Do you think we should go in?
Yeah.
Let's go.
Let's not get anything wet.
Let's put it all on the side.
One.
Two. Three!
Oh, yeah.
This has been the best day ever.
You have so many good days
ahead of you, my honey.
It's true.
Want my Kit Kat?
No. Nobody gets sugar now.
You see that bird over there?
Look, there's a bird
living in the...
Thank you so much. Shake.
Appreciate it. Thank you.
Thanks for paying.
Oh...
Brenda.
Can we get a...
Can we get a picture?
Let's get a picture.
Yes, yes.
One selfie for memories.
Okay.
Ready?
Call me Mrs. Long Arm.
Good. All right, let's go.
Okay.
Shotgun!
This is Dr. Morgan
calling for Harriet Lauler.
If you could get back to me

at your earliest convenience,
I would like to discuss
your test results with you.
Congestive heart
failure, simply put, means
the volume of blood
being pumped by your heart
is unable to meet
your body's needs.
I don't have a weak heart.
No, no.
But it is overworked.
Treatment?
Um...
You're not really a suitable
candidate, I'm afraid.
How long do I have?
It's difficult to
assess prognosis, uh,
really, with these
types of cases.
And how will it happen?
Again, it's...
Difficult to assess. Yeah.
This does not work for me.
I wish I had better
news for you.
I'm really sorry.
I suppose the word "sorry"
and its usage in this case
is reasonable.
I've been working on
my bedside manner.
Like I give a shit.
What's going on?
You okay? What happened?
I had no one else to call.
So you've got a weak heart?
No. I have
an overworked heart.
And it could happen at any time?
That's what he told me.
Like in the shower?
Yes.

Like going to the bathroom?
Yeah.
Talking to me, like, right now?
Yes. Why are you struggling
to understand this?
No, I'm just...
It must be killing you.
You know what I mean.
Yeah.
You're basically just waiting.
Well, we're all waiting.
Anne, the obit.
You have enough material
now to do a re-write, yes?
Yeah.
Okay.
Okay. All right,
I'm gonna get on it.
Good. Thank you.
As I live and breathe.
Well, from the looks of it
I'm not sure you do.
I see you still have that stick
stuck up your Nicoise.
I would tell you
to go drop dead,
but I'm afraid
you'd take me up on it.
I'm going to go make some tea.
So you want to talk to me
about why we split?
Is that why you're here?
It's been 22 years.
I just finished
paying off my attorney.
With my money.
That's right.
Thanks.
Edward, please help me here.
Well, I never subscribed
to the notion
that marriage is about
learning to compromise.
Well, compromise just means

that two people are
miserable instead of one.
Sometimes you got your way.
And sometimes your husband
buys an alpaca farm.
Sometimes your wife spends
a small fortune
on the world's most
uncomfortable couch!
That wasn't a couch!
It was a settee.
That's French
for herniated disc.
But you're not
supposed to lie on it.
It's a couch!
That's what it's for.
Okay.
I'm so tired, Edward.
I knew what I was getting
when I married you.
That was my choice.
And I have never regretted it.
Never
Well, Elizabeth
didn't have a choice.
She was stuck with me.
You did the best you could.
No, I didn't.
You did good. You were
better than me. You...
Oh, yeah,
you were her protector.
You were such a good father.
Yeah.
I understand you've seen her.
Yes.
Well, you know, Elizabeth,
she is convinced
that you have some kind
of mental condition.
Hmm?
Yes!
May be true.

Thank you.
This is Harriet Lauler
saying good morning,
and what does that really mean?
Please don't have a nice day.
Have a day that matters.
Have a day that's true.
Have a day that's direct.
Have a day that's honest.
A nice day, mmm-mmm.
You'll be miserable.
Anyway, that's my thought
that you should carry through
as you're doing your
housework, your homework,
your driving work,
your playing work,
your working work.
Have a day that means something.
Okay, I'm going to listen
to this music now
and try to make
this time mean something.
You ready?
You tell me.
You're a great writer.
Yeah. Wow.
You're a great obituary writer.
Okay. I...
Yeah. I knew it, all right.
No, no, no. Stop.
These are good.
These are very good.
But they're fantasy.
They're a girl's fantasy.
You're a woman.
I would like you
to write that reality.
I...
I'm afraid of making a mistake.
No. You don't make mistakes.
Mistakes make you.
Mistakes make you smarter.
They make you stronger.

And they make you
more self-reliant.
But I'm not like you, Harriet.
I don't possess
your fearlessness.
Let me tell you something
I never could tell my daughter.
Fall on your face!
What?
Fail.
Fail spectacularly.
That's...
That's your advice?
Yes, because when you fail,
you learn.
When you fail, you live.
I don't know if I can
write your obituary.
Oh, please.
They're just words.
Yeah, but...
I mean, I know. I just...
I'm just not ready to close
this chapter of my life.
No, but this is my life
that we're closing, not yours.
Yes, but your life is
way more interesting.
Oh, honey, come here.
Yours hasn't even begun.
Yes.
I wanted to do that.
Thank you.
Okay, see you.
Okay.
No, I'm just kidding.
You smell nice.
It's vinyl and
stagnant '90s apathy.
Thanks for the coffee.
Can I...
I kind of want to keep this.
Hello.
Harriet?

I'll be right there.
At least when you
do the F-word...
I just learned a truly
remarkable turn of phrase.
What?
Fuck-bomb.
Sorry?
Fuck-bomb.
Yeah, that's what
I thought you said.
Explain.
All right.
First you got the F-word.
One level up from that,
that's the F-bomb.
One level up from that,
that's "fuck."
But something
seriously fucked up,
that's a fuck-bomb.
That's... That's
what you wanted to tell me?
I'm sorry,
but I do need your help.
The act of public aggression
that I have planned
will probably end up
with you and me in jail.
What about me?
Juvie.
I'm in.
And then you will have to
call her mother from jail.
Criminal mastermind
Harriet Lauler
gunned down in a blaze of glory.
Now that's a wild card.
Yes, it certainly is.
Now, here's my plan.
Hey, Towy, come here.
Thanks for coming.
Take the chain
out of there, wind it,

go over there to that sign
and rip off the
Hurry UP-
Let's do this.
Got it?
Come on, Towy.
Tie it up. Let's go.
Okay, faster, faster, faster.
Hurry, hurry, hurry.
One more time.
Move your ass!
Maybe, like, two inches left.
It's all done.
In the truck. Hey!
In the car. In the car.
Thank you, sir.
Harriet!
What on Earth do you think
you're doing now?
I'm doing exactly what I should
have done a long time ago.
That's it! I will
personally see to it
that every single shred
of evidence
that you ever even worked here
is wiped out.
Good. I can live with that.
Come on, Harriet!
Punch it!
A fuck-bomb! Yeah!
Fuck-bomb!
- A fuck-bomb!
Welcome to
The Anne and Brenda Show!
She's just sleeping.
Now, Harriet Lauler
was thoughtful enough to
provide me with instructions
for her service today.
A thorough set of instructions.
The flowers,
the music, the readings,
the seating arrangements.

All chosen by Harriet.
I was also asked by Harriet
to inform you all
that she has bequeathed her
house to the town of Bristol
so it can be turned
into a new public library.
A library where all the books
will be displayed
in alphabetical order
because, and I, uh....
I quote,
"The Dewey Decimal System
is for losers."
A sizeable donation has also
been granted to the Gazette.
And I'm supposed to say,
"You can relax now, Ronald."
And finally to Robin Sands
and KOXA,
Harriet offers her expertly
curated record collection,
including every record
by The Kinks,
the most underrated band
of all time.
At this time, Harriet has
requested for her friend,
Anne Sherman, to speak.
For no more than
three and a half minutes.
"A lifelong lover
of rock and roll,
"who became a disc jockey
at the age of 81,
"Harriet Lauler passed away
Thursday evening.
"As the founder of
Lauler Advertising,
"she presided for many years
"over one of the most successful
"advertising agencies
in the state.
"She remained close

with former colleagues.
"And recently was often found
at the community center,
"where she mentored
Brenda Wilson,
"a young girl
from South Bristol.
"She is survived
by her daughter,
"Dr. Elizabeth O'Malley,
"and two grandchildren,
Spencer and Sage."
This is her obituary
and it's shit.
I wrote it.
The truth is, I didn't think
that in the matter of
a couple weeks, a month,
that I would be standing here
talking about a woman
that I truly loved.
A woman who made me
want to quit my job.
And a woman who made me feel
like I was a piece of shit.
Um...
But she didn't feel
that way about me.
And she didn't feel that way
about any of you.
She was just challenging us to
be the best... Our best selves.
Because she saw what we had,
that we didn't, and that's...
That's the most amazing thing.
Um...
So...
I think it's a really good thing
that we knew Harriet Lauler.
I think it sucks that she died.
But,
at the end of the day,
all I really needed to say,
all I really ever needed to say

was that she will not
be forgotten.
That's the best that
any of us could hope for.
That we will not be forgotten.
Harriet Lauler lived her life.
And I'm going to honor her
memory by doing the same.
This is not
my letter of resignation.
This is my obituary.
The young girl who worked for
you for the last seven years
is dead and buried.
She leaves behind a lifetime
of indecision,
hesitation and fear.
She will not be missed.
She will not be mourned.
Because she was really
never alive to begin with.
But she is now.
And she has her entire life
in front of her.
An entire life
just waiting to be filled.