

### Cast of Characters

MYRA, ageless; the last of the grande dame Hollywood literary agents and a lioness for her clients

SUSAN, 40s or 50s, a screenwriter with great credits which are fading into the past

ERICA, 20s, a newly-promoted TV movie executive

### Place

The waiting room of a TV movie executive, Los Angeles.

### Time

The present, Friday afternoon around 5:15.

### Set

A couch more or less at center. Two entrances, one at Right which leads to the unseen hall, one at Left which leads to the unseen inner office.

## ANDRE THE SEAL

by Mary Gallagher

(SUSAN is sitting alone on an office couch, waiting. Silence. Then she takes in and lets out an audible, anxious sigh. MYRA enters. SUSAN jumps up, goes to hug her.)

SUSAN. Myra! You didn't tell me you were coming!

MYRA. Oh, it's so good to see you, sweetie!

SUSAN. Oh, you too, it's been so long! And this is so great of you, you don't have to go to meetings with your writers, you're a legend in this town, you always were.

MYRA. Well, I came for *you*, angel, it's been such ages since you were out here in Los Angeles! So we'll do the meeting and then we'll go out and have a bite and a margarita, can we do that?

SUSAN. Oh my God, how perfect, I will love that! And now I'm glad we haven't started yet.

(Glances toward the inner office.)

But I've been waiting forever. And Kiki's assistant went to get me a bottle of water and she never came back. I was wondering if Kiki left early to beat the Friday traffic and I should just slink away—

MYRA. No no no, and thank God you didn't, because this is the only game in town for TV movies. Look, not to worry, come and sit, it's not about you, it's just chaos over here right now. But we still have this meeting—

SUSAN. And there *is* a rewrite job still open, right?

MYRA. Yes, darling, yes. And it is the *only job available*. When you said you'd fly out here if there was any *reason* to, I called all over town—well, I called everybody who *used* to do TV movies, who isn't retired or dead. And honey, they are all doing reality TV, or episodic mobiphone, or they're making videos for Homeland Security. Television movies are deader than the dinosaurs, it's *Jurassic Park* except right here in this room.

SUSAN. I know.

MYRA. (Pats SUSAN's knee:) But! This job is still open! A rewrite on a dreadful script. They all love the story but there are no characters, so that's where you come in.

SUSAN. Myra, I've got to get this job.

MYRA. All right, darling. You will. Look how many times you have. I used to fax people your résumé and it tied up their fax for twenty minutes, they were stunned!

SUSAN. And you said Kiki was thrilled that I was available. Well, we worked so well together on *The Broken Wing*, she really got that movie, she really fought my fights with me!

MYRA. I know, sweetheart. But I have to prepare you for one thing. We're not meeting with Kiki.

SUSAN. *What?* Oh, *no!* Who is it, her assistant? Her name's Tuscany, she can't even remember bottled water! Oh my God, I knew it was a bad sign that the meeting was at 4:30 on Friday afternoon! They're all totally burned out by now. This is a "Who cares?" meeting, a "Last meeting before I leave and pick up my dry cleaning"!

MYRA. No, no, angel, it's not that—

SUSAN. Of course it is, I haven't worked in seven years, I haven't even set foot in this godforsaken town! Why should they even remember who the hell I am?

MYRA. Of course they remember, sweetheart—well, the ones who've been here more than half an hour remember.

SUSAN. Yeah, everybody dead remembers.

MYRA. No, but listen now, we're not meeting with Kiki because she's gone. She walked away. Well, she drove away. From the job, the business, everything.

SUSAN. *When?*

MYRA. Last night.

SUSAN. Unbelievable.

MYRA. I know. Kiki was such a fan of yours.

SUSAN. She practically told you she was going to hire me, didn't she? That's why I flew out here from Vermont for this one meeting, because it was Kiki—who actually remembered me, who hadn't retired or died, who had a writing job that I had an actual chance of *getting*—probably the last job in the history of TV movies!—and she walked away? Why the hell couldn't she hire me and *then* walk away! I want to hunt her down and kill her!

MYRA. Me too, darling. Although she did have a breakdown or whatever they're calling it. She's been on so much medication, staggering in and out of meetings, people have been telling "Kiki jokes" for months. Mickey Nyburg calls me once a week with a new Kiki joke.

SUSAN. (*Revulsion:*) He would. Mickey Nyburg!

MYRA. But that was before Kiki called me from Ukiah, with her children sobbing and wailing in the background.

SUSAN. When did she call you?

MYRA. This morning. It was very decent of her because she was distraught, and her children were distraught, and it was a hundred and twenty-three degrees up there in Ukiah, and they'd just had lunch at a winery and Kiki had left the children's gerbils in the car with the windows up, and all the gerbils died. They got out of their cage and crawled up the windows trying to get out, but they fell back and died. The children found them after lunch. They had to throw them in the dumpster of the winery. So with all that going on—not to mention that she was "fleeing Hollywood and everything it stands for"—that's what she kept saying—it was decent of her to call me and tell me she couldn't make the meeting with you, *only* because she couldn't stand the business anymore. It wasn't about you, angel. Kiki said big hug and kiss and tell you she adored *The Cloak Of Sorrow*, but she thinks it's an independent film.

SUSAN. I hate it when they say that. And what the hell do I care what she thinks if she's abandoned ship and started over in Ukiah?

MYRA. Well the truth is, breakdown or not, I'm furious with her. She ought to know this business is not for the faint of heart. You shouldn't start establishing relationships and raising hopes if you're going to chuck it all just because it's hard to deal with the seamy side. That's what drove me crazy about Adlai Stevenson. I mean of course in some ways he was a dear, dear man—I was very close to Adlai, part of his inner circle—but I wanted to spit in his eye when he talked like that. That's why I knew he wouldn't win and he didn't win. Don't say you're going to go for it and then turn around and say you might *not* go for it because you're too good for it. Do one or the other.

SUSAN. (*Who also waffles:*) No, yes, absolutely right!

MYRA. But the point is that the network still needs someone for that rewrite. So when I hung up with Kiki, I instantly sent flowers to the *new* Kiki—I had them in her office in half an hour—and then I called her every ten minutes till she picked up and thanked me, and she's going to do the meeting with you.

SUSAN. Myra, you're my hero.

MYRA. No, darling, it's just what I do.

SUSAN. But you're such a fighter! You stick with it no matter what. I mean, you worked for *Stevenson*, and yet you can still make deals with scum like Mickey Nyburg.

MYRA. I can't do it every day, I get too furious. That's why I dissolved the partnership and started my own agency out of my garage.

SUSAN. (*Shaken:*) ...Your...your garage?

MYRA. That's why you always have to call my cell phone now. Our old agency number, that zero zero zero zero zero zero zero, that's history for me. Half the time I can't even remember it anymore. I only have five clients now—the five clients I *really want*—and you're number one. (*Gives her a little hug.*)

SUSAN. ...I'm number one? But Myra, I've been working in a yogurt plant for seven years.

MYRA. But now you're back! Because you're such a fighter too!

SUSAN. Myra, I'm really, really sorry that I haven't called you in so long. I just couldn't face it—not you—the business! I love you.

MYRA. I know, angel, I love you too. And I love your shoes.

SUSAN. Oh thank you, I paid three hundred dollars for these shoes, they'll be on the credit card long after I'm dead. But I bought them for this meeting. I always think if you've got great shoes and a great haircut, you can get away with whatever's in between.

MYRA. (*Pats SUSAN's knee, soothing, soothing:*) Don't worry, darling, you look like a writer. And it's really a tribute to *you* that the new Kiki is going to take this meeting with you. She just started this morning, she is *not* up to speed. But I told her that you *must* fly back tomorrow morning without fail, so she said, "Send her over." But she had to push the meeting back to 5:30 so she could quickly skim *The Cloak Of Sorrow*.

SUSAN. Because she never heard of me or anything I've written.

MYRA. She's a little child, darling, she's never heard of anyone. But now she has your résumé, and anyway, you know it all happens in the room. And you are always fabulous in the room, you know that. Everybody always calls to thank me for sending you, and they always, always say, "Susan tells a great story."

SUSAN. I know. I remember. They used to curl up in their chairs. They'd lean back and kick off their shoes and put their feet up. I should have served them milk and cookies.

MYRA. They adore your stories.

SUSAN. But they never bought one—not in twenty years of pitching. All the jobs I got were rewrites of *someone else's* stories—stories like "Spring Break Shark Attack." I could *never* think of that.

MYRA. Well, that's what this is, sweetheart. You don't have to pitch at all.

SUSAN. I couldn't stand to pitch again, I don't have it in me.

MYRA. Now let's focus on this meeting—

SUSAN. Last time I came out to pitch, seven years ago, I started to feel like I was Andre the Seal.

MYRA. Sweetheart, let's talk about the rewrite—

SUSAN. I saw him toward the end, you know—the real Andre the Seal and not the young one who replaced him. I saw Andre perform his act, if you could call it that. He was so old by then, practically half-dead. But he was still going for it, out there in the harbor, pointlessly trying to jump through all the hoops. It was pouring rain, and there were maybe six of us standing around under umbrellas, watching. But we were an audience, so he did his act for us—he was a fighter too. But he couldn't make it through all the hoops. He got stuck on one of them...and he just sort of dangled there...flapping his flippers...his trainer had to help him over. That's exactly how I felt the last time I pitched stories.

MYRA. Now Susan, you sound just like Adlai, and you've got that same look he had when he finally told us he wasn't even sure that he *wanted* to be President. After all those years of planning and hoping and strategizing and campaigning—

SUSAN. (*Overlapping:*) No, I wasn't going to tell you—

MYRA. You have no idea how hard I fought to get this meeting for you. You haven't been out here to pitch in seven years, why *should* anybody remember you or meet with you? Mickey Nyburg may be a sleazebag, I can't argue that, but he doesn't go away for years and then expect to be considered for a plum assignment. He doesn't refuse to pitch. He'll do *anything*, and he *never* goes away. Now I had to jump through hoops to get you in to see this girl, and if you don't go in there and perform like gangbusters, the way I swore you would, I'm going to go back to my garage and put my head down on my desk and cry. I am. I am.

SUSAN. Oh God, Myra, I swear to you, I want this job, I need this job, if I don't get this job I don't know what the hell I'm going to do! I can't stand another day in that yogurt plant! The pay is shit, the job

is shit, *of course* I have no health insurance, and last week I fell into a yogurt vat and almost drowned!

**MYRA.** Don't tell that to the new Kiki, they never hire the desperate ones.

**SUSAN.** No, I know, I won't, that's why I bought these shoes, they look successful. I won't let you down, Myra, I'll give it everything I've got.

**MYRA.** That's my girl! You're never going back to that yogurt plant!

**SUSAN.** Oh yes I am, I'll be back in my galoshes and my slicker Monday morning, 8 a.m. But if I get this job, *I'll quit!!* What's the new Kiki's name?

(MYRA struggles to remember. SUSAN mouths, "Oh, no...")

(The inner door opens and ERICA enters, looking very young and put-together. She closes the door and shakes MYRA's hand and then SUSAN's as:)

**ERICA.** Myra, it is such a privilege meeting you in person, you are such a legend, I'm in awe. And thank you again for the beautiful flowers—

**MYRA.** You're so welcome...*Erica!*

**ERICA.** And Susan, oh my God, I just finished *The Cloak Of Sorrow* and I almost cried! It is so moving, truthfully, you really got to me.

**SUSAN.** Oh thank you, Erica, that story is very close to my heart.

**ERICA.** And it shows, it really shows. Of course it's not for us, it's an independent film. But please have a seat—we'll have to meet out here because my office isn't ready yet—

(As they all sit, scrunched up on the couch:)

**MYRA / SUSAN.** Oh, we totally understand/Oh, please, we so appreciate...

**ERICA.** Now I do have to tell you that we already hired a writer for that rewrite.

(MYRA is speechless.)

**SUSAN.** ...Wow...

**ERICA.** Yes, Kiki's going to write it. She called from Ukiah. She's always wanted to take a stab at writing and she knows the project so well, it's a perfect marriage.

**SUSAN.** Oh of course...

**ERICA.** And it's Mickey Nyburg's project and he's thrilled that Kiki's back on board.

**SUSAN.** ...Well...thank you for...even...

**ERICA.** But Susan, you have such a great, historic track record, and now I've seen your recent work, I really am a fan. So if you've got a story to pitch, I'd love to hear it.

(Pause. SUSAN struggles with herself.)

**SUSAN.** Right...uh...I'm just...thinking...

**MYRA.** Sweetheart, what about...Andre the Seal...you know?

**SUSAN.** ...What?

**MYRA.** You know. That inspiring true story about the seal?

**ERICA.** The seal? Is he the protagonist? We don't do family programming, we're all about the women's market—

**MYRA.** No, the woman is the star, and she's one of Susan's wonderful rich characters, a great role for a leading lady. She struggles and struggles, but she never gives up, she's a fighter.

**ERICA.** Single mother?

**MYRA.** Yes.

**SUSAN.** ...Yes...and she has this awful job in a yogurt plant.

**ERICA.** ...A yogurt plant?

**MYRA.** It's blue-collar women, you know, like *Norma Rae*.

**ERICA.** Oh, I love *Norma Rae!* So what are the events?

**SUSAN.** Well...one day at the plant, she's so tired from her struggles that she falls asleep and almost drowns in a vat of yogurt...maple yogurt...

**ERICA.** ...Um...so...I don't get it, is that what turns her life around? Where's the story going? And is there a guy? Sorry to rush you, but I do have another meeting.

**SUSAN.** There's a seal. And a guy. The trainer of the seal. But there's conflict, you know, between the woman and the guy. Who's very attractive, but wary. He's been burned. And he's very protective of Andre, the seal. But then the woman, when she's at the lowest point in her life...

**ERICA.** When she almost drowns.

**SUSAN.** Yes. She quits and she walks down to the harbor in the rain. And she sees Andre do his act. With the trainer helping him.

Because Andre is very old now and he's fading fast. But he's still performing. Because he's such a fighter, he never gives up. And Andre teaches her that she can't give up either. And so...when the trainer breaks his leg before the seal's farewell performance, she takes over the trainer's role and does the act with Andre. Andre hasn't been able to jump through the highest hoop for months, that's supposed to be the climax of the act, but he can't do it anymore. But in his last performance, for *her*, he does it one last time. He jumps through the highest hoop. And he dies in her arms.

ERICA. Oh, Susan, it's beautiful! But it's so sad...

SUSAN. But there's a baby seal. And the heroine and the trainer are in love now and they train the baby seal. Andrea.

ERICA. Oh, Susan! Can you leave me a few pages on it?

*(Drained, SUSAN is speechless.)*

MYRA. *(To ERICA:)* We'll go straight back to my office, Susan will type it up and I'll email it to your Blackberry tonight.

ERICA. *(Rising, shaking hands:)* Wonderful. A pleasure, Susan, you tell such a great story. Myra, you were so right.

MYRA. Nothing but the best, darling, that's my agency.

*(ERICA goes out. MYRA rises, helps SUSAN rise. SUSAN's knees are wobbling. MYRA puts an arm around her and walks her out.)*

MYRA. You were fabulous, I almost cried.

SUSAN. I don't even remember it, how can I type it up?

MYRA. Don't worry, angel, I'll remind you.

SUSAN. God, I need a margarita.

MYRA. First we get our story down and email our new fan.

*End of Play*

## BOISE, IDAHO

by Sean Michael Welch