

## Teledivision

Mr. Kerswick said she shouldn't worry more than she could spend.

But she was still afraid of her balance, sinking like a rock. The real-estate she inherited would pay off in huge sums someday. But that could take a decade or two.

As she waited in the queue, she remembered Mr. Kerswick's words and took the set of razor-blades out of her cart. She was tempted to remove the bag of slimy-jellies as well, or at least one of the various ice-cream containers but she couldn't do it.

Melvin loved his slimy-jellies and if one of his favorite flavors was missing he could become very upset.

Well, then she would have to use her old lady-shaver again, she thought. It would have to last another month. Saving money could never hurt. And besides. Mr. Kerswick said lots of candy and ice-cream would just be fine at the moment, since he had Melvin signed up for the 9'o clock *Wednesday at Hensley's*, next week in New York. Having already gained a great deal of experience in this role Melvin would be the torn kid in a dramatic divorce again. A few pounds could never hurt to make it more believable, Mr. Kerswick said. The audience wants to feel sorry for him and you have to meet their expectation half-way.

While she put the shopping bags into the back of her old Ford, she wondered if Mr. Kerswick had already sent her the couples name and story. It was always a good thing to begin early with the rehearsal, while Melvin was still in a good mood.. After the first days of repeating over and over the names and background-stories he could sometimes become very nervous and then ice-cream was the only solution. Lots of ice-cream.

So as she sat in front of the wheel she called him up right away.

"Kerswick and Kramer, how can I help you?" It was his secretary, the skinny woman with the curly hair. She told her that Mr. Kerswick was not available at the moment.

"Could you do me a favor, dear and tell him that I called?" she asked.

"Of course, what's your name please?"

She couldn't believe it. There she was now, at least once a week rushing in and out of Kerswick's office and his secretary still pretended not to know her. Her husband would have told her to confront the matter, make it obvious that she was not just one of thousand costumers, show that they depended on her and Melvin. But his words faded long ago. They belonged to another time and didn't stick any longer. All that he'd left behind was the old real-estate, virtually worthless on the current market.

As she left the parking lot, she chose to call Mr. Kerswick again after lunch. She didn't need the approval of his secretary. She would meet him personally at Starbucks when her son was in speech-class, she told herself.

His strong hand-shake and his white smile would show her again that fate may have abandoned her to the bitter life of a widow but still she was in the middle of things, making decisions, signing contracts, all in the radiating presence of her new friend and helper.

Melvin was sitting on the backseat, silently digging away into an vanilla-mango ice-cream, as she crossed the crowded Hudson River bridge.

Suddenly she heard the nerve-wracking siren of an ambulance. She looked into the rear mirror and saw the flashing lights behind a cab, approaching her position.

As she put her foot on the brake and veered to the left, the ambulance zoomed by and a high-pitched scream burst out from the backseat.

In the rearview mirror, Melvin hung in his seatbelt, ice-cream all over his new pants and shirt, his head glowing dangerously red. As she accelerated again, she reached out with her left hand and tried to scoop up the pot from the floor. But the cars were already furiously honking at her and didn't allow to turn her head. So she stayed focused on the road, waited until she'd

passed the steel girders of the bridge and finally navigated her old Ford over to the sidewalk, her son still screaming, pausing only to take in huge breaths that were followed by even louder outbursts. She disconnected Melvin's seatbelt and started to rub a tissue against his smeared pants. But the screaming didn't stop until she'd put the ice-cream-container back in his small hands.

One part of her wanted to get angry at him for ruining his new clothes but she managed to keep calm, not wanting to give him a hard time before they'd even arrived at the studio. This morning, Melvin already had shown a lack of concentration during the rehearsal and she wanted to repeat the whole thing again before he went on stage. So she stroked his wooly head, waited until he'd finished his vanilla-mango and gave him a pack of slimy-jellies to keep him silent for the rest of the way.

As the backstage-coordinator kneeled down to ask Melvin about his name, he slowly turned his white face, looking at his mother with a trace of confusion. She nodded reassuringly. Melvin turned to the backstage-coordinator and said:

"My name is Melvin."

Out of a sudden impulse she raised both her hands to cover her mouth. The backstage-coordinator stood up and looked at her with a wrinkled eye, probably awaiting an explanation so she whispered:

„Don't worry. It's just that we've been sitting in the car since tomorrow morning. When he's on stage everything will work out just fine. I promise."

The coordinator grinned, then turned to Melvin again and said in a playground-tone:

„Okay, Steven. You see this green door there? We'll now go over there and then Suzie will give you a nice and shiny make-up, alright" Without waiting for an answer the backstage-coordinator grabbed Melvin's hand and walked over to the door, little blue eyes searching his mother, while the man at his hand showered him with briefings of important details.

She put on a smile and thought about Mr. Kerswick, who would probably be sitting in his office right now, wearing his navy-blue jacket and watching the Superbowl. Oh Yes! He was a lover of sports, work and family. An American hero with a heart.

Maybe he thought of her, too, just in that moment, she thought. You never knew. The last time she'd seen him was six and a half days ago. She still remembered the sunny afternoon in front of Starbucks, how he'd been so charming all the time, commenting her new blouse and showing so much care for Melvin.

"You shouldn't worry about him, too much!", he said. "Kids love to be the center of attention, you know? The insight gained from the shows will help him outrace his fellow classmates one day. Every experience is a plus. You should be proud of him!"

Her contract with him had been running for two and a half months now. Melvin in *Utah-Talk* as the Ukrainian refugee child. Melvin in *Oscar-Winfrey's* as the poor alcoholic's child.

Melvin in *Detroit Dates* as the exploited runaway child. Oh yes! Mr. Kerswick was a man of visions. He'd even promised her once that if their relationship will continue to be as profitable, Melvin might even be signed up for shaking the hands of the president in a few years. "And then who could stop him?"

These were his words but he was not only a man of talking. In the first half of the two months since she'd signed the contract, Kerswick already had fulfilled his promise of at least 820 \$ per month. At the beginning she'd already accepted the fact that she would have to sell her husband's real-estate too early for a ridiculous amount. But with Melvin's and Kerswicks help her balance slowly surfaced again. Sometimes she worried about Melvin's constant absences from school but Mr. Kerswick was right. Every experience *was* a plus. Already knowing about the media-routines in young years couldn't possibly hurt. In fact maybe he would rise

one day to participate in a casting-show and make his mother even prouder by singing songs through the television, for all the world to hear.

Mr. Kerswick sat on his toilet, watching the built-in screen in the restroom-door. Edgar Hensley danced down the steps, as frantically as ever, the camera swirling around him, theme song peaking, applause:

„Hello talkers and watchers! Today our topic is called: *Divorce for a Dime!*”

Mr. Kerswick noticed gloatingly that old Edgar still insisted on his poor topic-names.

Generally *Wednesday at Hensley's* couldn't compete with the new brand of talk-shows. Too much talk, not enough action, Mr. Kerswick thought.

While Hensley introduced his first guest, the sound boomed and a pudgy kid stepped into the vibrating lights saying: „Hello, my name is Melv...um..Steven and I want peace between my parents.”

*Hensley's* was the *only* show that still insisted on that introductory key phrase. More attention right from the beginning but mostly the whole story was already wasted by then. And besides, Hensley's interrogation skills didn't ever puncture the deeper layers. He should have become a high-school counselor or a psychologist but as a showmaster he was simply a bore, Mr Kerswick thought and watched as he asked his first question.

“So, Steven tell us when did it all start?” But he didn't come to the end of his sentence. The pudgy kid on the sofa suddenly started to cry. A remarkable act. Even the shivering tone in which he muttered seemed totally convincing:

“No start. My mother say I tell story and make her friend happy. But I don't want too make him happy no more. I want my ice-cream, Now!” Mr. Kerswick looked at the screen with mild amusement, planning to ask his colleagues about the responsible agency. It could be useful to know how much you pay for actors with that kind of talent.

But suddenly his thoughts grew quiet as a few words made it through the child's sobbings: “I am Melvin. Melvin is my name. I'm not Steven. I want to go home. I want to go to school!”

Mr. Kerswicks mind sprang into place like a stainless high-precision Swiss Clock and he slowly shook his head, making a mental note to abandon a contract. After the Superbowl..