

WORDS

(Finishing Rockefeller)

by

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CHARACTERS

DONALD STEINMAN (70s) A cantankerous old writer.

TOM MITCHELL (mid-20s) An aspiring writer and Donald's writer's assistant.

SHAYNA STEINMAN (30s) A rising Hollywood producer and Donald's daughter.

SETTING

Donald's Malibu Home, Present Day.

First and last scenes, Academy Awards, Hollywood, California.

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ACT 1

As the audience settles into their seats, they realize that they're actually at the Academy Awards.

DONALD STEINMAN, 70, sits among the audience and stares at the podium in the middle of the stage. He has white hair and nervously shifts in his tuxedo. A spotlight illuminates the podium as peppy orchestra music kicks in.

Female presenter (OFF STAGE)

And now, here are the nominees for Best Original Screenplay.

Male presenter (OFF STAGE)

Aaron Sorkin for *Castle on Sunset*. David Seidler for *The Lady Who Went Too Far*. Billy Ray for *The Tennis Club*. Donald Steinman for *Murder at Greystone Mansion*. Terence Winter for *Warhol*.

APPLAUSE.

Female presenter (OFF STAGE)

And the Oscar goes to ... Terence Winter. *Warhol*.

APPLAUSE. Donald hangs his head. We hear Terence Winter's speech fade as LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP on DONALD milling through a group of people after the award show. TOM, mid-20's and wearing a tuxedo, gathers the courage to approach.

Tom

Excuse me, Mr. Steinman? Hi. I'm Tom Mitchell. I'm a big fan of your work.

Donald

Speak up.

Tom

I'm inspired by your writing.

DONALD

Exactly what I've been aiming for my entire career -- to impress you!

Tom

And I, I loved Murder at Greystone Mansion. I saw it three times.

Donald

Thank you for fueling the box office.

Tom

Your writing truly jumps off the page. I've read and studied all of your screenplays.

The words you use. Your plots, themes. Your character arcs.

Donald

I've had years to practice, now if you'll excuse me, I must be going. Vanity Fair party.

(leaves, over his shoulder)

But now I can sleep better knowing that I inspire a younger generation.

Tom

Wait. Mr. Steinman.

Donald

Spit it out, son.

Tom

I was wondering if you might need a writer's assistant for your next project on John D. Rockefeller. I read about it in *Variety* and I think I would be uniquely qualified.

Donald

I'm sorry, who are you?

Tom

Tom. Tom Mitchell.

Donald

No. *Who* are you? What are you doing here tonight? *Why* are you here?

Tom

I, I helped out with the technical direction.

Donald

A seat filler.

(Tom sheepishly nods.)

I might be a dinosaur, but I won't employ the meteorite that is aiming towards my extinction.

Tom

What? No, you don't understand. I'm a writer and I thought that--

Donald

You're a seat filler. Everyone in this town is a seat filler until they put in the time. Hobnobbing in a place you don't belong doesn't count towards anything. You haven't earned this.

Tom

I, I'm sorry. I guess I thought you'd be open to an assistant and would be, quite possibly -- generous.

Donald

Since when do you relate generosity to this fickle and capricious industry?

Tom

You're a lot different in person compared to your award season interviews.

Donald

Then I guess my publicist is doing her job. You can thank the studio for that.

Tom

Then perhaps I should talk to the studio about the job.

Donald

There IS no job. And, you don't deserve one just for having the gall to inquire.

Tom

Then how else can I get ahead? There's nothing I want more than to make it here one day for my writing. To earn this, like you said. I figured there's no harm in asking.

Donald

Yes, there is harm in asking for something that doesn't exist, but then again, I shouldn't fault you for being part of the most self-entitled generation.

Tom

I'm very sorry for this misunderstanding and for taking up your time. Congratulations on your accomplishments.

Donald

This whole industry is self-entitled and wants something.

Tom

You've made your point.

Donald

Would you approach someone after finishing a 12-hour triathlon to ask them for a favor?

Tom

No, of course not. I mean--

Donald

Well, that's exactly what this is like, only multiplied by 50 years!

Donald exits. Tom stands dumbfounded and hangs his head as LIGHTS OUT.

Scene 2

LIGHTS UP on DONALD'S MALIBU HOME. We're in Donald's study which is well-decorated in a modern nautical theme with bookshelves, paintings and picture frames on the wall and - quite peculiarly - his Golden Globe trophy sitting on the ground near the door.

Donald paces while on the phone.

Donald

You're full of crap. You said I'd have to beat the offers off with a stick after just being *nominated* -- spec sales, rewrites, pilots. It's been six months and we have nothing! What happened to revoking Billy Ray's license as Hollywood's script doctor of choice?

(He grabs a framed photo of him and a WOMAN then places it face down)

No. I'm not counting the Rockefeller project. You didn't have a hand in that one, but you'll still get your ten percent, won't you? Robbery!

(pause)

Jay, I'm 72 years old. Patience is not my virtue. You saw how long the last project took -- I'll be in the grave before this gets off the ground!

(then)

Fine. I'll get back to work on Rockefeller but you'd better get a top-notch director attached. I don't want anyone ruining my script!

Donald slams down the phone then sits and reflects.

Donald

The world's richest and most *boring* man. A *perfect* movie.

There's a knock at the door, then it opens. SHAYNA STEINMAN, 30's, enters. Her beauty and charm is from her mother, trait of not suffering fools -- her father. She is holding a box of books and magazines. She sees the GOLDEN GLOBE trophy on the floor.

Shayna

What is this doing on the floor?

(puts box down, then picks up trophy)

Most people put them on their mantle.

DONALD

Stop. That's where it's supposed to be. Put it back.

Shayna

Really, Dad?

Donald

And now that you're here, you can prop the door open for some circulation. See -- it serves a purpose.

Shayna shakes her head followed by a familiar shrug. She then props the door open using the Golden Globe as a door stopper. Donald cracks a sly grin.

Donald

So, is this visit for business or pleasure?

Shayna

Does it always have to be like this, dad?

Donald

I don't know these days. I don't know with *you*.

Shayna

I knew it was a bad idea to lobby for you on this project. You're not even grateful.

Donald

I certainly wasn't grateful when you passed on my last script. You know, the one that was just nominated...

Shayna

Dad, I get it. You've made your point.

Donald

Most family members use their resources to help each other.

Shayna

You know it's not up to me. I have very little say in what gets produced.

Donald

Yeah, your little spiky-haired boss has so much damn hair gel on his head that it must've penetrated his skull and got into his brain.

Shayna

He's the same boss that just gave you a six-figure deal for the Rockefeller project. You're always focused on the negative, always holding a grudge.

Shayna sifts through the box.

Donald

What's in the box?

Shayna

Some reference materials to help you.

Donald

From you, my *daughter*, or from you, the *creative executive*.

Shayna

Does it matter?

Donald

Yes, it matters! Did Picasso's benefactors give him the brushes to use? Did they pick out the paint and canvases for him? I should be able to do what I want and get my materials where I please. I'm the artist here.

Shayna

Picasso, eh? Well, guess what, *Picasso*? Your benefactors almost fired your ass today in a production meeting after turning in *this*.

(holds script like a dirty sock)

Come on, Dad, I know you're getting older but your mind is still as sharp as a tack.

Donald

It's a waste of a story, completely superfluous. I did my best.

Shayna

You know there's a story in there and you're the best person to crack it. You did it with Edward Doheny, you can do it with John D. Rockefeller.

(turns and gets in his face)

I think you're doing this on purpose, to get back at us for rejecting your last script. So, fine, this is coming from your daughter, who loves her father and wants him to succeed.

Shayna drops the script on his desk. Donald slowly walks over and picks up the script as a feeble surrender.

Shayna

Dad, it's practically a page one rewrite -- you either fix this, or we hire Billy Ray to rewrite it and put *his* name on it.

Donald

That guy?! Gimme a break!

Shayna

If someone can make people feel sorry for a stuttering king, you can certainly make people empathize with the world's richest man.

Donald

(flipping through the script)

You made notes for me?

Shayna

(sly smile)

No. Those are from your new writer's assistant. Hired by me -- your *creative executive*.

Donald

WHAT?! A writer's assistant?! I don't need a frickin' writer's assistant! Shayna, you've got to be kidding me. Please tell me you're joking.

Shayna

Yep, he'll be here any minute. He even helped find some of the reference material in that box. My little spiky-haired boss thought it was a good idea to hire someone to keep you on track!

Donald

How is some dim-witted assistant going to keep me on track? You hired a spy! Shayna's smile widens. An agitated Donald flips through the script, now a bit more aggressively.

There's a KNOCK at the door. Shayna opens it.