RESCUE

A Play for Radio

by

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2 The Crossways Troy, NY 12180 518-272-1446

CHARACTERS

* Olivia Fuller, 45

Mr. Fuller, Olivia's father, in his late 60's

Mike, early 40's

Dave, 30

Dispatcher, a man

* A note on punctuation in Olivia's speeches:
the erratic commas are intended as suggestions, not
as directions for the actor. I hope to remind the
reader with these oddly placed commas that Olivia
is having difficulty with her breathing until near
the end of the play.

Olivia's breathing: shallow breaths that seem to echo.

The tones of a touch-tone telephone being dialed . . . the phone ringing.

DISPATCHER

Emergency line, Ashford Fire Department.

OLIVIA

(trying to sound like a child) Please, send help.

DISPATCHER

Are your parents at home?

OLIVIA

I'm stuck on, my toilet.

DISPATCHER

Can you call your mother to the phone?

OLIVIA

(coughing)

I, can't move. I weigh three, hundred, fifty pounds. I need, help.

DISPATCHER

Okay, wait a second. Tell me where you live.

OLIVIA

Second Avenue, number, three seventy, five.

DISPATCHER

Okay, now, don't hang up.

OLIVIA

Bottom, floor.

DISPATCHER

Wait a second. We're sending help. Call to your-

Olivia hangs up the phone.

She laughs a little as she strains to take in air, but her laugh turns to a cough.

DISPATCHER (CONT.)

Dave, did you hear that.

DAVE

350 pound kid stuck on a toilet. My favorite call. How could I miss it?

DISPATCHER

Where's Mr. Personality, in the sack?

DAVE

Who knows . . . chewing nails somewhere.

Olivia's breathing becomes sporadically labored as she speaks.

I am, disgusting aren't I? The firemen, they'll see that, when they find me. Whether I'm, dead or not, they'll see me, and laugh. They'll have to, move my, legs that look like, two alien worms, giant worms pressing, into each other. I can't, even feel them anymore. (She coughs) I can squeeze a whole handful of one, like this and it's, like grabbing Jell-o, like reaching into, vanilla custard. Stick a needle in, it gets, swallowed. I had a, boyfriend once. Butch. No last name. He was a fireman, the cook at, his station. He had an old, Chevvie, a red '51 something he, named Olivia, for me.

(yelling)

Father? . . . Answer me . . . Father? (She coughs hard)

We drove every week to, Hoosick for, for the drive-in, movie there, most of one summer, before my, father said he'd, kill him. Sometimes Butch brought, food he'd made, leftovers maybe, from his station. Chicken parmigiana, once, chick parm he called it, chick parm and we, sat in the back seat, eating it cold. Butch was, a fat-lover. I'm not, stupid. I have a, TV on the sink on, the cabinet. I watch talk shows, the same as, you can, with transsexual police sergeants, and pregnant, great-grandmothers and, fat-lovers. Butch cried and, held my, breasts he, pumped them and, licked like, like he could, get something out, from me, and we went to Hoosick, every week.

Olivia's voice dissolves into the sound of a paramedic truck driving on a wet street, with its siren screaming lazily up and down. Where we going?

DAVE

What, you don't sleep in the bunkroom anymore? Where the hell were you?

(pause)

Okay, what? That suicide get to you? . . . Earth to Mike, come in.

MIKE

On the couch.

DAVE

Oh ho, after midnight, skin search on the tube. What did you find, *Emmanuelle*? Come on, what number?

MIKE

Don't, Dave.

DAVE

I bet it was Emmanuelle 6, the one where she does . . .

MIKE

Don't start with the . . .

DAVE

. . . the Buddhist psychic in the temple with all . . .

MIKE

. . . sucking up to me after . . .

DAVE

. . . the smoke and the bells gonging while he's-

Dave, don't. I mean it.

DAVE

What?

DISPATCHER

(on the truck radio)

Medic 1?

MIKE

Medic 1 on.

DISPATCHER

Be advised: all engines are still on location at Box 718, along with all ambulances. Other units are en route, but ETA is probably two-five to your call. Do you copy?

MIKE

Received.

The sounds of the truck and the siren fade into Olivia's labored breathing again.

Olivia's breathing gets louder just before her speeches, to accentuate the shift of location.

OLIVIA

When you're, fat, people won't, listen. If I, told the dispatcher, "I'm a fat woman, locked in a, bathroom," he would have asked, "Why? What's wrong?" How do I, say why? And he, wouldn't send anyone, if I did. So I, lied. I said a, three hundred fifty, pound kid was, stuck on a, toilet. It's still a kid. They have to, send someone, for a kid.

(She coughs hard now)

Three hundred fifty is, where the doctor's, scale stops. Dr. Eckert. He put those, white gloves on, to keep his hands clean. "I have to, touch this slob," he was thinking. "Step up here, " his nurse said, and moved the scale weights, all the way to, the right. (She breathes in sharply, painfully) The nurse rolled, her eyes and, wrote 350, with a plus, on her chart. "Hungry?" she asked me. "Leave your blouse on," Dr. Eckert said, and shoved his, stethoscope up, pushed my breasts, out of his way. "I won't treat you if, you can't lose weight," he said. All I wanted was, some cough medicine, not to cough myself to death and, he said, "Okay, I'll give you some, but lose twenty, pounds in two weeks, or don't, come back." (She coughs again) When you're, fat, people want to look but, when you aren't, looking at, them. In Shop and Save, the stock boys, pretend they're, pricing soup cans, until I'm past and, then stare at my ass I've, caught them, laughing. The register girls, look sideways at my arms, hope it won't, happen to them, like cancer. Oh, my fingers are, blue now. Maybe they're, all at a fire and, can't come, in time. Maybe they're, eating cheesecake. Shouldn't have, waited so, long to call.

Behind Olivia's sounds, the approaching siren increases steadily, until the interior and exterior sounds (Olivia and the truck sounds) can both be heard.

OLIVIA (CONT.)

I won't go to Shop, and Save, ever again. A man in, the snacks aisle, pulled himself out. "You want this?" he kept asking. When I, tried to get, away he said, "I screwed a dwarf and, a one-legged girl, but I never, screwed a, fat girl before." Why would, anyone, say that? What is so, wrong with, me?

Olivia's breathing, and her coughs, also drift in and out occasionally when she isn't speaking, to remind us she's always there, until near the end of the play.

DAVE

So, Mike, come on. What's the problem?

MIKE

You know what.

DAVE

What? The last call? The shooter, you knew the guy, right?
. . . It's the jugular stick, isn't it?

MTKE

No, it ain't.

DAVE

I slipped in the jugular stick on that shooter and you didn't like it. Mike the trauma medic upstaged, and in front of the black glove squad. Ooh, payback's a bitch. That's it, isn't it? Admit it. That's what-

Up yours. You didn't do shit for that guy.

DAVE

Hey, it was the right thing to do. I'm a paramedic, too, you know. I actually know what I'm doing. You're not the only competent fireman in the city, okay? Now I-

MIKE

Shut up, all right?

DAVE

Address the issue. You're pissed off because I took control at the last call, right or wrong?

MTKE

Wrong, probie.

DAVE

Five years on the job, I'm a probie, huh?

MIKE

That's right, Mr. Higher Education, Mr. Top of the snotnosed social heap, Mr. Cross the tracks and help the knuckle- draggers save the low-life city. You're a probie. A sweat.

. . . Mr. Silver Spoon up his own ass.

DAVE

You think you're so easy to work with?

MIKE

Bid off the shift. I'm sick of showing you what to do.

DAVE

You bid off, Big Cat. I'm here to stay.

Where we going?

DAVE

375 Second Avenue.

MIKE

What do we got?

DAVE

Some weird kid stuck on a toilet. I heard the call come in.

MIKE

(taunting)

What, you don't sleep in the bunkroom anymore? . . . How's a kid get stuck on a toilet?

DAVE

"A three hundred and fifty pound kid stuck on a toilet."
That's what the kid said -- herself. You're the veteran.
I'll let you handle the extrication on this one.

MIKE

Oh yeah? Thanks.

(pause)

Jesus, this ought to be good. 4 a.m., we get a fat kid stuck on a toilet.

OLIVIA

I can't move, but I'm, sinking. The wall is, tightening, on my head. I can hear, my heart, jumping now, looking for, a way out.

The truck sounds increase again.

There it is. The brown one, with the broken steps.

MIKE

(on the truck radio)

Dispatcher, Medic 1 arriving at 375 Second Avenue, investigating.

DISPATCHER

Received, four ought three.

The siren cuts off abruptly. The engine stops. Doors open and slam shut.

The light rain is still falling.

OLIVIA

I'll show them, my mother's, picture if, they find me. This one, with her Studebaker, and her, hair we colored, strawberry blonde . . . Here, this one. Look at her, hair.

Mike and Dave's footsteps on the wet street and sidewalk.

The footsteps move up creaky wooden steps and across a porch.

DAVE

I think we've been here before.

A strong knocking on a door.

Fire department. Open up, please.

DAVE

375 Second . . . That ring a bell?

More knocking.

MIKE

You want to check the address?

Footsteps across the porch.

DAVE

Wait a minute. The curtain moved.

Sharp rapping on the window pane.

MTKE

Somebody in there need help?

OLIVIA

My father won't, let them in, not in his, house. He unplugs, his lights, so no one, sees him. My father can see, in the dark. He knows, where everything is, knows where to, place his feet so, the floor can't, warn you he's, coming.

DAVE

(yelling)

Hey! Go to the door. We're the fire department. Someone here called for us.

A strong pounding on the door begins and continues until it opens.

MTKE

We need to talk to you, right now. This is an emergency. I'm gonna call the cops you don't open this door. You hear me in there?

DAVE

Somebody's moving your way.

Footsteps back across porch.

The door slams open.

MR. FULLER

Get out of here.

DAVE

Mike, he's got a knife.

MIKE

Jesus Christ.

MR. FULLER

I'll cut your balls off, you-

DAVE

Watch it.

MR. FULLER

The last time . . .

The men scuffle.

Grab his other hand.

MR. FULLER

. . . told you filthy bastards I . . .

DAVE

Look out.

MIKE

Drop it, now. Drop it.

MR. FULLER

NO, NO, IT'S MINE, NO.

The knife clatters away.

MIKE

It's over. Calm down. It's over.

DAVE

Just a steak knife.

OLIVIA

My father caught, Tommy Keegan, once, under my window, singing a Beatles song, for me.

(sings)

Anytime at all . . . anytime at all . . . all you got to do is . . .

(she coughs, and then laughs)

Picked Tommy up, by the, neck and squeezed him, until Tommy cried. "Boys can't, help what they, want," my father said.

MR. FULLER

You touch her again, I'll-

Shut up, mister. Sit down . . . Right here.

DAVE

We need a zone car?

MIKE

I don't know . . . I mean it, pal. Calm down.

OLIVIA

They won't, even, find me. He'll tell them, I'm not here. He'll tell them, not to touch me. How can they . . . I can't, feel my, hands. Will they, drag me with, a rope? I'll catch in, the doorway.

(Getting hysterical suddenly, she tries to yell, but she is overwhelmed by coughing)

HERE! I'M HERE. I NEED, HELP, I'M -

MIKE

Somebody here called the fire department. Who needs help here? . . . Who's inside?

MR. FULLER

Get out. There ain't nobody here.

DAVE

And you didn't call?

MR. FULLER

Let me up.

MIKE

Don't move, pal. Dave, see what's going on.

(into his portable radio)

Dispatcher, Medic 1. Check our call address, will you?

MR. FULLER

I want your badge numbers.

MIKE

We're not cops, buddy. We're paramedics, with the fire department. If we were cops, you'd be dead by now.

OLIVIA

(calmer now)

Nothing, matters anymore. (She coughs) I want to, see Mama again. We took a, drive together. I remember we, got lost in, Vermont and, found a, convent. The nuns there, made, cheesecakes. Below a bright, mountain with leaves, all yellows, oranges . . . Amaretto cheesecake . . . "We, shouldn't," my mother said. "Yes, we should. Just buy, all of them," I told her, and she, smiled at me.

DISPATCHER

(from Dave's portable radio)

Medic 1, that's the first floor at 3-7-5 Second Avenue.

DAVE

Received.

MR. FULLER

It's my house. Get off of me.

DAVE

Take it easy, sir. We could have you arrested. Assaulting a paramedic is a felony.

MR. FULLER

You think I don't pay no taxes?

Hey, look, we don't have time for this. It's past four in the morning. There are people out there who might really need us. We got a call for this address, okay? Just answer the question. Did somebody here call for us?

DAVE

"Three hundred and fifty pound kid stuck on a toilet."
That's how it came in.

MR. FULLER

Nobody called you.

MIKE

Somebody here called our dispatcher and said there was a kid stuck on a toilet. You say there's nobody here. Fine. We'll come in and look around, and if there's no kid stuck on a toilet, and nobody who needs our help, we'll figure you're having a bad night and let it go at that. How's that sound?

MR. FULLER

Leave my daughter alone. I warned you.

MIKE

Dave, get a zone car. I don't trust this guy.

OLTVTA

But we ate, one, Mama and I, one whole one, with the nuns, there, at the, picnic tables, their tables, outside the kitchen and, we could, smell them, baking. The nuns kept, talking to, us and, eating their own, cheesecake. We were, all laughing, so much and, I looked, at Mama and, I said, "Can we, just stay?" And she wouldn't, look back, at me. She said, "Your father, needs us. You, know that."

Hold on. Where is your daughter?

MR. FULLER

In the bathroom. She lives in there.

DAVE

What do you mean, lives?

MR. FULLER

She don't come out. Stays right in there. Got her a TV, phone, small fridge, magazines, clothes, all in with her.

MIKE

Where's the bathroom?

MR. FULLER

She only comes out for food. She ain't stuck on no toilet. She's fat is all, like her mother was. If she called, it was to get you boys here, but she ain't stuck in there.

DAVE

How old is your daughter, sir?

MR. FULLER

She's probably out food shopping.

DAVE

Wait a minute. It's the middle of the night. It was a little kid that called us. I heard her. She's not going to be-

MIKE

Son of a bitch. I got it.

DAVE

What?

I know this guy. We had his wife, remember? The huge one, on the stairs, with her face all smacked up. Call came in for a woman who fell in the bathtub?

DAVE

Shit, that's right. I knew we'd been here.

OLIVIA

The leaves, here aren't, (She coughs), don't get, colors like, we saw with them. (She laughs) We bought, seven, cheesecakes. All the, amarettos, they had . . . Mama and I drove, back to Vermont, twice but, couldn't get lost, the right way. (She coughs hard now) When Mama, and I come, back here, after, I want to, be there with, those nuns.

MIKE

Fuller, that's his name . . . Come on, Mr. Fuller, back in the house. Now. Let's find your daughter.

MR. FULLER

You ain't gonna push me in my own house.

MIKE

Yeah, we are gonna. Move in there. Let's go.

The door creaks as it swings open again.

MR. FULLER

Hey. I pay taxes for you, you son of a bitch. You don't push Jim Fuller. Thirty-five years I worked. Get your hands off.

MIKE

Find a light, Dave.

Switches don't work.

MIKE

Christ, it stinks in here . . . Sit down there, Mr. Fuller.

OLIVIA

Amaretto, cheesecake. I'm, hungry. Can you, believe that?

MR. FULLER

Thirty-five years. People from all over stop to see us working. Dead of winter, me and Vinnie up on the brick smokestacks we was taking down for the hospital. Jackhammer a course at a time from the top. Three or four courses you drop the staging and move. Dead of goddamn winter, freezing.

DAVE

Mike, you see the walker and the saline bags?

MIKE

I got some lasix here. Olivia Fuller, 375 Second Avenue. Dr. Eckert. Is that your daughter's name?

DAVE

Mr. Fuller, is your daughter being treated for congestive heart failure? C-H-F? Did her doctor ever say that to you?

MR. FULLER

You fall, I don't give a shit, inside the stack or out on the walk, either way, twelve stories, stiff as a gravestone in that kind of cold. They scoop up your balls with a trowel.

MIKE

MR. FULLER! Where's Olivia?

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. . . hands would freeze up . . . we'd take a mouthful of whiskey, spit some on our fingers and lick it off . . .

DAVE

Medic 1, dispatcher.

DISPATCHER

Go ahead, Medic 1.

DAVE

Point of origin and contact person for Second Avenue call, please? And dispatch a zone car, possible felony assault.

MIKE

I'll look for the bathroom.

MR. FULLER

. . . hold 'em inside our mouths so they'd bend again, wrap around the jackhammer, the smell of brick dust . . .

DISPATCHER

Medic 1: You heard it come in, but I checked the tape. Call is for the 1st floor apartment at that address. Caller was a child. I don't have a name, but I pulled the phone number. Zone car is en route.

DAVE

Ring that number for me right now, dispatcher.

DISPATCHER

Received.

MR. FULLER

. . . Vinnie caught me once I slipped. I wanted to kiss him once I stopped shaking. You go up, I told the son of a bitch foreman. This cold, you go up, you die for this shit pay.

DAVE

Insulin and hypos here . . . Mr. Fuller, your daughter is a diabetic? . . . Look, this is serious. Where is she?

A phone begins to ring somewhere in the apartment. Footsteps follow it.

MIKE

I got ringing in here. Olivia? You in there?

OLIVIA

Amaretto cheesecake. Oh, God.

(She coughs, hard, then calls, faintly)

I'm, here . . . in here.

Mike knocking on a door, then trying the doorknob. The phone continues to ring.

DAVE

Mr. Fuller, when was the last time you saw your daughter? When did you talk to her?

MIKE

Olivia, can you hear me? . . . Move away from the door.

The phone is still ringing.

MR. FULLER

(yelling suddenly)

OLIVIA! OLIVIA !

The crash of a door being kicked open.

MIKE

It's a bedroom.

(calling now)

Olivia, we're firemen. We want to help you. Try to make some noise.

MR. FULLER

Don't say nothing, Olivia. I told you what boys want.

DAVE

Okay, shut up.

A soft, slow knocking from inside the bathroom.

MIKE

Are you in there, Olivia? . . . (calling) Dave, I can hear her breathing.

OLIVIA

I can't, move.

The phone is still ringing.

MR. FULLER

You dropped my wife five years ago, trying to get her down. She didn't hurt nobody her whole life. Too fat to pick up and carry, that's what you said. Dropped her coming down the stairs. One of you I seen laughing.

Your wife was dead before we got here, Mr. Fuller. We did the best we could to bring her back.

MIKE

Olivia, are you against the door? . . . Try to move back. Cover your face.

Mike's shoulder slamming into the door.

OLIVIA

Do you, know Butch? (coughing) He, had a red, Chevvie . . . Don't be, angry with me.

The door splinters.

MIKE

Jesus Christ.

(calling)

Dave, get in here with the monitor. This ain't no kid.

The phone stops ringing.

Dave's hurried footsteps that we follow to the bathroom.

MR. FULLER

(calling from the front room in all his remaining speeches)

Olivia, don't give 'em nothing.

MIKE

Olivia, we're paramedics. We're here to help you.

OLIVIA

Where is, Mama's picture . . . "I'll make your, mother get, sick," he said. He put his face, close, and grabbed my face, with his hand, and squeezed. "She'll, get sick and, die."

DAVE

Christ, Mike, look at her. There's no room to work in here. (whispering) She must be fifty, for god's sake. She's going to crap out on us. We can't do this alone.

MIKE

You think you can lift her? It's here or nowhere. She's wedged, okay? . . . Olivia, we're gonna get some oxygen for you, help you breathe a little easier.

OLTVTA

The door, first, thing you hear, its metal thumb where, it, catches. Click. (She coughs)

DAVE

Olivia, I need to put this mask on you, okay?

OLIVIA

Tell Butch, he can call, me again.

MR. FULLER

Give boys what they want and they'll treat you like dirt.

OLIVIA

No, I have to, tell you. One time I, hid, under the bed. The whole night, he couldn't, find me. Click. Next night he . . . "Don't, hurt Mama," I said. "I won't, hide."

MIKE

She's not talking about? . . . Oh, Jesus, I'm gonna kill this son of a bitch.

Mike, don't touch him. Zone car's on the way. Let them handle the guy.

OLIVIA

I held my, face, against my, pillow. "Olivia"- he would, whisper, like that, gasping- "Olivia." (She coughs) Before I heard, that, I liked my name. (She coughs again, much harder, and her breathing starts to get erratic)

DAVE

Olivia, wait. Please, you've got to put this mask on.

MR. FULLER

They're gonna call you a whore, you know.

OLIVIA

(singing, faintly)

Anytime at all . . . all you got to do is call and . . . I'll be there.

MIKE

Forget the mask. I'm losing her pulse. Put the fast patches on while I get a tube ready. Let's go.

OLIVIA

Oh, God. Don't show me, all the, faces, laughing again. It was, (She coughs very hard) so, easy, for them. . . Say, "Fat." Then, laugh. "Fat, fat, fat." Go on. Say it. All those, faces, turned away, laughing, when I was, just, shopping . . . Okay, Mama. Okay . . . Mama just, asked me, for a, kiss. (She takes a long, final breath)

MIKE

God damn it, asystole on the monitor. Assemble a bag valve mask, then take over these compressions so I can tube her.

Mike, we've got to move her. We can't work on her in here. I'll pull and you hold her head. We'll slide her onto the rug and drag her out.

MIKE

NO! She's too big. Look at her, for God's sake. There's nothing firm enough to grab. This is our only shot. Bag her, will you.

DAVE

Dispatcher, Medic 1. We have a full arrest at 375 Second Avenue. We need an engine crew now, and a current ETA on the ambulance.

DISPATCHER

Received.

OLIVIA

(Intimately, as if she is right next to us, in all her speeches to the end)

The stars are so bright in the morning air. Look, right up here . . . The tall fireman, with the grey moustache, who is trying so hard to save me, should call his son before it's too late . . . Will they listen to you, these two? . . . Tell them to let me go.

DISPATCHER

Medic 1, be advised: Engine 3 is en route, and ETA for the ambulance is zero three.

MIKE

Dave, suction her. I can't see to place the tube.

MR. FULLER

They'll brag over what they got from you. What you gave 'em. You know that, Olivia. Them boys ain't gonna marry you. They ain't gonna love you.

Sound of a suction machine.

MIKE

That's good. Pull a high-dose Eppie out, will you? We'll go down the tube with it.

The suction machine stops.

OLIVIA

I can hear the polka Mrs. Kramer is playing for us, echoing over these clouds. It's a Tuesday morning. Tommy Keegan, my regular partner, is home with the chicken pox, and all the others line up to dance with me: Paul Baker, Bill Freeman, Tony Clemente, all the boys pushing and reaching for Olivia, the prettiest girl in second grade.

DAVE

Eppie's on the sink, Mike.

MR. FULLER

Thirty-five years a man works, he's owed a few things.

MIKE

Jesus, come on . . . This ain't gonna work. You're right. We got to move her out of here.

OLIVIA

Mama's face fills up this whole shining tree . . . look over here. I want you to meet her . . . and these flowers lean open for everyone. I can hear them laughing out in the field.

Still asystole.

MIKE

Positive on the airway. Okay, grab her legs. Easy, now, let her down. Jesus, I can't . . . Go ahead and pull.

DAVE

She's catching on the sink base.

MIKE

You got to be kidding me.

DAVE

What do you think?

MIKE

We got to rip the cabinet out. Shut off the valves and rip it out. I'll push her up.

MR. FULLER

You'd better damn well listen to your father, Olivia. You tell them anything, I won't take you to Shop and Save. You hear me?

MTKE

Pull it, Dave. Just tear it out, for chrissakes.

A siren, in the distance, approaching.

OLIVIA

Mrs. Kramer made me a paper crown to capture sunlight. You want to disappear? Watch me spinning alone in the wind. Close your eyes. That light you can hear is my heart, flying around you. Come on, don't be so afraid of it.

The cabinet being ripped off the wall.

OLIVIA (CONT.)

Stand up. Call to the firemen. Call their names . . . Mike . . . Dave . . . Go ahead. They can hear you.

MIKE

Give me your radio.

DAVE

What do you want to do?

OLIVIA

Tell them. I'm with Mama now. I don't have to stay with Father anymore.

MIKE

Give it to me.

OLIVIA

Call to them . . . They'll listen to you.

MIKE

(into the portable)

Dispatcher, Medic 1. God damn it, we need help here. Where's Engine 3?

DISPATCHER

Engine 3 should be close, Medic 1.

Engine 3, monitor this call. We need air bags and a long board at 375 Second Avenue, and we need them now. Possible domestic here, do you read me? Be careful when you come in the house.

DAVE

Mike. we're losing her. Come on.

Dave's fist delivering a cardiac thump to Olivia's chest.

MIKE

Olivia, come on back. Wake up.

Another thump.

MIKE (CONT.)

Give me 300 joules and get clear. Watch the water there. Okay, here we go. Talk to me, Olivia. Talk to me, god damn it.