

KEEP THE ROM, LEAVE THE COM

Original Screenplay

by Marc Serhan

Rough/First Draft

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INT. ELLIE'S APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING

The walls are plastered with faded rom-com posters like wallpaper — 'When Harry Met Sally', 'Annie Hall', 'Bridget Jones's Diary'...

Stacks of dog-eared screenplays and index cards scribbled in multicolor sharpie clutter every surface.

At the center of this creative hurricane: ELLIE HARPER, 28, messy hair thrown in a loose bun, sits at a table, fingers flying across the keys of a battered vintage typewriter.

STEAM hisses timidly from a boiling kettle in the kitchen behind her, a white plume rising like a thought bubble.

Ellie barely notices. Her eyes glisten with ideas; her lips move as she murmurs lines to herself.

ELLIE

(under her breath)

If you jump, I jump. But if we both
jump, who's left to...

She stops typing. Frowns. Re-reads the line.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Shit! That's too 'Titanicky'.

She yanks the page from the typewriter, crumples it and hurls it at an overflowing wastebasket. It bounces off a mountain of discarded drafts.

Without missing a beat, she slaps in a new sheet. Her fingers hover, hesitate. A flicker of doubt crosses her face.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

(under her breath)

Bobby: What if neither of us jumps?
That way, we can help each other
figure out what to do.

Ellie's eyes sharpen with renewed fire.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Sonia: What about we...

The kettle SHRIEKS in the background, reaching a fever pitch Ellie can't ignore. She spring to her feet and rushes to stop the noise.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Alriiiiiight!!!

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

The 'No Grounds for Drama' coffee shop sits next to an apartment building in a busy Los Angeles street. Ellie bursts out of the building wrestling her hair into a bun and beelines into the coffee shop.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

A jangle of the DOORBELL mixes with the mellow hum of indie folk MUSIC. The café is a quirky mosaic of chaos and charm —half thrift store, half forgotten film set. Faded murals of yesteryear's stars loom over mismatched tables.

The chalkboard menu reads: 'Espresso Yourself' and 'Life Happens, Coffee Helps.'

Ellie, apron askew, frosts a milk pitcher at the espresso machine like it's second nature. Her eyes are distant, locked in an invisible scene that only she can see.

Beside her, FRANKIE DELGADO, mid-twenties, curly-haired chaos personified, wipes down the counter with excessive flair.

Ellie is mid-froth, mechanically swirling the milk pitcher, steam hissing. At the counter, a young couple leans in close, oblivious to the world.

YOUNG MAN

(earnest, to his date)

I'll always be here for you. As
sure as day follows night.

Ellie's eyes light up and flick to them, like she's just spotted a buried treasure.

Without thinking, she grabs a napkin from the counter, and scribbles furiously.

ELLIE

(to herself)

"As sure as day follows night..."
Hmmm!

In her enthusiasm, the milk pitcher tilts too far —and a stream of warm cream pours straight onto Frankie's shirt.

FRANKIE

(jumps back)

Jesus frosting Christ, Ellie!

Ellie jolts, gasping like she's grasping for air.

ELLIE

Oh my God! Frankie, I didn't— Hold
still, let me—

FRANKIE

(mock heroic)

No, no. Save yourself or help the
customers, I'll clean myself up
myself.

Patrons chuckle. Ellie, flustered, keeps swiping at him with
a dish towel.

ELLIE

Sorry. I was...

She twirls a finger in the air near her temple.

FRANKIE

We should all wear hazmat suits
around you.

Ellie laughs despite herself, finally back in the moment.

Across the café, the young couple leaves, arms around waists.
Ellie watches them go, wistful.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Aw, Ellie. I saw that look. You'll
get there, worry not.

Ellie meets his gaze, moved by the sincerity under his snark.

ELLIE

Everything comes in time, doesn't it!

INT. GLOBESTAR STUDIOS / LIAM'S OFFICE - MORNING

Floor-to-ceiling windows let in filtered sunlight across the
minimalist décor. LIAM CARTER, 34, lounges behind a glass
desk, sleeves rolled up. He flips through a script, bored.

His lips tighten and without ceremony, he drops it into an
overflowing bin marked: REJECT. The nearby tray labeled
CONSIDER is glaringly empty.

He leans back in his chair. His gaze lands on a shelf against
the wall — a row of framed posters from past studio hits.
Explosions. Capes. Car chases. Guns, guns, guns.

He stares at them. Just long enough. A flicker of fatigue
tightens his jaw. He blinks it away like a reflex, snatches
the next script from the towering pile.

The door opens without a knock. VANESSA CROSS, 35, strides in, flawless in a razor-tailored power suit, clutching a script in her manicured hand. She moves like she owns the building and drops the script onto the desk with a thud.

VANESSA
This one's pathetic.

She leans in over the desk, close enough for her perfume to reach him.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Dinner tonight?

Liam doesn't even glance up from his script.

LIAM
Nah. Really need to find something
in those piles.

She circles his chair slowly —a shark sensing blood.

VANESSA
You do need a win. It's been a while.

Her words, meant to hide her vexation, are sugar-coated venom. Liam pushes back from the desk and rises to his feet.

LIAM
Appreciate the reminder.

He moves to the window, searches the skyline for answers.

Vanessa's lips twitch, frustration slipping through her.

VANESSA
Alright then. I'll leave you to it.

She exits with a flick of her heels on the polished floor. The door clicks shut behind her.

Silence. Liam rolls his shoulders and looks back at the script she left on the desk. He picks it up, reads the title page: 'KEEP THE ROM, LEAVE THE COM' -By Ellie Harper.

A flicker of amusement sparks in his eyes.

LIAM
(*smirks, to himself*)
'Leave the gun, take the cannoli'
...huh!

He sits back down, opens the script.

INT. ELLIE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Around the house, it's a battlefield of scattered script pages, index cards, and half-drunk mugs of coffee.

Ellie sits cross-legged on her couch, laptop propped on a pillow. Her hair is up in a messy twist, a pencil stabbed through it like a flag of surrender.

On the screen, AUNT BEV, 70s, wrapped in a leopard robe, puffs a vape pen. Oxygen prongs curl into her nostrils.

ELLIE

Actually, I'm working on something new. Another Rom-Com, of course.

AUNT BEV

Romantic Comedy, huh? Look at you, dreaming imaginary lives instead of living your own.

ELLIE

At least, dreaming them doesn't hurt.

AUNT BEV

Oh, sweetheart. We all suffer at some point, one way or another. Speaking of romcom... what happened to that story...

She can't remember the title.

ELLIE

Your journal?... 'Keep the Rom, Leave the Com.' I haven't heard anything yet. I'll send a follow-up tomorrow. It's been a month.

AUNT BEV

Good. Never give up! - It's past my bed time, I should go take a nap.

ELLIE

I'll call you earlier tomorrow. I'm on the opening shift.

AUNT BEV

Sleep tight, angel.

Ellie's smile turns wan -just for a second.

ELLIE

Good night.

INT. GLOBESTAR STUDIOS / BOARDROOM - EVENING

Floor-to-ceiling windows frame the fading L.A. skyline. Liam stands at the head of a long conference table, radiating casual energy, something more urgent humming underneath.

Across from him, MAX THORNTON, 50s, silver fox with too-white teeth, absently swirls his green juice. Beside him, Vanessa flips through Ellie's script with polite disdain.

Silent executives line the table, eyes glazed, laptop screens glowing.

LIAM

It's 'Frances Ha' meets 'The Big Sick' with teeth. Sharp, lived-in, and actually funny. None of that glossy nonsense. It's grounded.

MAX

Does it have IP?

Liam smirks, but it doesn't reach his eyes — like he's tired of this question, this room, these metrics.

LIAM

It has heart. — Harder to find.

A small beat. Max scratches his jaw, checks his watch.

MAX

Fine. Small budget. But if it flops, it's on you.

Vanessa closes the script with a snap.

VANESSA

Cute. I personally found it cheesy.

LIAM

(smiling, sharp)

That's what makes it work.

Vanessa's eyes narrow, just a shade. Liam doesn't flinch. Max, already half-standing, waves a dismissive hand.

MAX

Whatever. Get me a deck by Monday.

He strides out, trailed by the silent suits. Vanessa lingers a beat longer, assessing Liam.

VANESSA
(on her way out)
Passion can be expensive.

Liam ignores her. He picks up Ellie's script from the table like it's a prize and shakes it in victory.

INT. GLOBESTAR STUDIOS / HALLWAY - EVENING

Liam strides down a corridor, plastered with movie posters—explosions, car chases, snarling CGI creatures. He passes Vanessa's office without looking through its open door.

Vanessa's heels CLACK sharply as she quickly comes out and slips into step beside him, predator-smooth.

VANESSA
You really believe in this rose-watered love letter?

Liam keeps his gaze forward, unhurried.

LIAM
I do. Like I said, it's got heart.

Vanessa stops; her eyes narrow slightly.

VANESSA
When it crashes, you'll wish you listened to me.

LIAM
(walking)
Life will tell, won't it.

VANESSA
(silky, calling out)
Life always tells.

She veers off, leaving the echo of her heels behind. Liam keeps walking on, reinvigorated.

INT. ELLIE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Ellie sits hunched over her battered laptop, screen glow lighting up the tired determination on her face.

On the screen: an email draft. Subject line: Follow-Up: 'Keep the Rom, Leave the Com.'

Ellie re-reads her draft with a tinge of apprehension. A PING announces a new email. She clicks it open.

ON SCREEN: "Hello, Miss Harper. Loved your script: 'Keep the Rom...' Could you come in at GlobeStar for a pitch? Ideally, any day next week will do."

Ellie freezes, jaw dropped. Beat. She screams. From the adjacent apartment, Frankie's voice drifts out.

FRANKIE (O.S.)

What is it this time, roach or mouse?

Ellie stands and paces in a fast, tight circle, flailing her arms in disbelief.

ELLIE

(loud)

I'm in the movies now!

She stares back at the screen, almost not daring to believe it. A wild grin spreads across her face. Her breath catches—then she erupts.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Holy crap!

She dashes toward the wall where Frankie's voice came from.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

(laughing)

I'm in the movies now.

FRANKIE (V.O.)

Let's partyyyy!!!

INT. ELLIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ellie's living room is cluttered with crumpled Thai takeout containers, half-empty wine glasses, and a scattered stack of old rom-com DVDs.

Ellie, RAJ, and MARNIE sit cross-legged on the floor around the coffee table like it's a campfire, chopsticks in hand.

Ellie picks at her Pad Thai, squinting at a printed email.

ELLIE

Whatever option they offer is better than nothing. I'm broke.

RAJ

An option will get you representation. Beware of sharks, though. L.A. may be built in a desert, there's plenty of that around.

Marnie chuckles, sipping her wine.

MARNIE

Please!... I dated two of them. They circle you, dead eyes, perfect teeth...

ELLIE

Marnie, if it comes to it, I'll ask them to audition you for Bev's part.

MARNIE

Oh, yes, I can do her. You told me so much about her. I'll find her.

Raj raises his glass in turn, a sly grin on his face.

RAJ

To making sharks choke on our bones.

Ellie laughs. She shimmies, rolling her shoulders in a mini dance, lifting her glass.

ELLIE

(sings, off-key)

I will surviiiiive...

FRANKIE

(raising his glass)

To the three F's: failure, fame, and faking it till we don't have to!

They clink their glasses in a sloppy but heartfelt toast.

INT. ELLIE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ellie's laptop sits open on the cluttered counter. On screen, Aunt Bev lounges like a queen on her daybed, a vape pen in one hand, a lazy tabby cat sprawled across her chest.

ELLIE

What if they change everything? It's your story. You'd be okay with that?

Aunt Bev exhales a cloud of vapor; the cat flicks an ear.

AUNT BEV

It was never just mine. I just lived it first. I'm only a cold open -if even that.

Ellie stops pacing, stares at the screen, her throat tight.

ELLIE

I love you soooooo much. And I miss
you like crazy.

Aunt Bev laughs, rough and warm.

AUNT BEV

I miss you too, kid.

She sits up a little; the cat protests with a low grumble.

AUNT BEV (CONT'D)

Now... why don't you just wait and
see what they have in store for
you? Dress nice! It helps. And sell
it from your heart.

Ellie swallows hard, blinking fast as her eyes brim. She
swipes quickly at her cheek, pretending it's nothing.

ELLIE

Okaye.

Aunt Bev gives her a wink, raises the vape like a glass.

AUNT BEV

Go get 'em.

INT. GLOBESTAR STUDIOS / CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The room feels more like an expo room than a place of
creativity. Framed blockbuster posters line the walls —all
explosions and capes, loud and hollow.

At the far end of a glass table, Ellie sits stiffly. Her
outfit is unmistakably her: a blazer thrown over a worn
graphic tee that reads: 'Support CINEMA.'

Across from her, Max nurses a green juice, staring like he is
waiting for a sign from the burning bush. Vanessa scrolls her
phone. Liam offers Ellie a small nod in encouragement.

Ellie catches it.

ELLIE

It's based on my Aunt Bev's diary.
In the '60s, amid the Vietnam War,
a working-class girl and a wealthy
young man defy social divides with
a passionate secret romance.

She lets the table sit with that. Max blinks, but stays
blank. Vanessa swipes her screen, indifferent.