The Astronaut Wives Club

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inspired by the book by
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FAKE EMPIRE
GROUNDSWELL

NETWORK DRAFT 1/21/14

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

A ROCKET soars through the sky, a thick tail of exhaust fanning out behind. We hear shallow BREATHING, accelerating, and a BEATING HEART, getting louder and LOUDER. OVER --

QUICK CUTS

ON THE BEACH, a CROWD looks toward the sky, hands pressed together in prayer or pulled to mouths to cover gasps.

ON A SUBURBAN STREET, REPORTERS jostle each other for a view of a tiny monitor inside a NEWS VAN. Not even doing their jobs any more, the chant "Go! Go! Go!"

IN A MODEST LIVING ROOM, CHILDREN pump their arms in front of the TV. Food, drink and overflowing ashtrays cover every surface. SIX WOMEN (we'll meet them shortly) are arm-in-arm, eyes wet with wonder and fear, smiles of awe and disbelief.

TITLE: MAY 5TH, 1961

TIGHT ON A TELEVISION

Shimmering thrusters propel the rocket further from view, its path made darting and jagged by the long lens of the observing camera. It's hard to believe there's a pilot up there. Not just a pilot, but a husband and father.

TV ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
He looks so lonely.

An IN-STUDIO feed replaces the live footage.

TV ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
And... he's gone! Off into space. We won't have visuals for a few minutes now.

We're --

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME (NORFOLK)

The room is dark, blinds pulled tight to keep out the peering eyes of the press, whose din outside is faintly heard. The TV casts an eerie glare on the small group gathered.

A reporter (LOUDEN WAINWRIGHT, JR., 30s) sits with a pen and notepad in his lap while three girls GILLIAN (13), JOANIE and ROSE (both 10) clutch each other at the feet of

LOUISE SHEPARD (30s)

Tall and slim with dark hair and aristocratic features, she looks like she's been strapped into a roller coaster that's flown off the tracks. It's Louise's heart we've been hearing, and as we PRESS IN on her terrified face, it accelerates to the point of bursting --

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY (PREVIOUSLY)

Louise carefully dusts a few treasured objects. WEDDING PHOTO in a silver frame, PICTURES of two little girls through the years. A MODEL AIRPLANE made of tin. And then -- unexpected -- a MUSIC BOX, ornate and expensive-looking.

She's startled by the warped notes of a TCHAIKOVSKY BALLET that escape as she picks it up, recognizing the box but unsettled to find it here. Then, the TELEPHONE RINGS --

TITLE: TWO YEARS EARLIER

She heads past two SIAMESE CATS with their ears pulled back, annoyed by life in general and the phone in particular. There is an alarming number of NEEDLEPOINT PILLOWS on the bed.

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Louise passes the TV, where BARBIE models a wedding dress and an insipid THEME SONG praises her small waist and big closet. The three girl are riveted. Louise answers the phone.

LOUISE
Hello?

When she hears who's calling, the look on her face tells us we're witnessing a moment that changes lives.

INT. US FLEET FORCES COMMAND - DAY

Louise's pointy pumps clack against the floor as she hurries down the long tiled hallway. She pushes through a door --

INT. ALAN'S OFFICE - DAY

She rushes past a vestibule where a secretary's sweater hangs on the back of a chair, about to turn the knob of the door to the private office when she hears --

LAUGHTER. Giggly, girlish. This registers, then resolved, Louise enters --

INT. PRIVATE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A CURVY YOUNG WOMAN balances on a rolling desk chair in front of the window, attempting to adjust the tweaked slatted blinds. As she wobbles, two strong hands reach up to steady her, gripping smooth, stockinged calves.

LOUISE
Alan --?

As ALAN SHEPARD (30s) spins to face the door, the woman topples into him with a laugh. Once awkwardly extricated from her shapely limbs, we see his wiry frame and piercing blue eyes. With a buzz cut and neat uniform, he's the very embodiment of "The Right Stuff."

ALAN
Louise, hey. This is Sheryl, my new secretary. She was just helping me fix the blinds. Sheryl, this is my wife, Louise.

Sheryl sways past, dismissing Louise with a once-over glance and the 1950s equivalent of a middle finger -- an arched brow. Louise gives good eyebrow herself, and holds nothing back as she bores an imaginary hole in Sheryl's head. Then she hands Alan a piece of notepaper with a phone number.

LOUISE
Mr. Donlon called from NASA.

She glances to Sheryl, now applying lipstick at her desk. As she takes in the secretary's buxom silhouette -- a little too reminiscent of the Barbie doll she just saw on TV -- true vulnerability flashes across her face.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
There was no answer here. I thought you'd want to know right away.

Message delivered, she turns to head out, but Alan stops her.

ALAN
Don't you wanna hear what he says?

AT ALAN'S DESK - MOMENTS LATER

Alan hangs up the phone and jumps to his feet, elated --

ALAN
Yes! Project Mercury! There's seven of us.
(savors the word)
(MORE)

ALAN (CONT'D)
Astronauts!
(then, off her look)
What's wrong?

LOUISE
I'm very happy for you. It's a terrific achievement.

ALAN
The second toughest thing I ever did, after getting you to marry me.

Then, seeing she isn't smiling, he nudges the door shut.

ALAN (CONT'D)
I'm sure I've been hell to live with lately. It's this job, being behind a desk --

LOUISE
Not to mention all the difficulties with the faulty blinds.

She stares at him meaningfully. He becomes contrite.

ALAN
I swear to God, all that is in the past. I am walking out of here with you right now and never looking back. This is my chance. Our chance. Everything we ever wanted.

LOUISE
I want to believe you.

He picks up her arms, holds them out like an airplane.

ALAN
C'mon. Fly with me, baby. Fly...

He animates her, makes a jet sound. She smiles slightly.

LOUISE
You are a child...

ALAN
Then play with me! I want this. I want it so bad. Deep down I know you do too.

He drops her arms and moves closer until they are nose to nose and he stares at her, practically cross-eyed.

ALAN (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Fly...

She breaks up laughing, won over for the moment. He kisses her. A beat, then she kisses him back.

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - ANOTHER EVENING

Louise tucks the music box into a bottom drawer of keepsakes.

ROSE (O.S.)
Do you not like it?

She turns to see Rose in the doorway, staring concerned.

ROSE (CONT'D)
I found it in there. With the photographs. I look at them sometimes. It's so pretty, I thought you'd like to see it.

Louise shuts the drawer and smiles.

LOUISE
Sometimes it's better to pack our memories away.

Just then, they hear from the other room --

JOANIE
Astronauts!

GILLIAN
Daddy's on TV!

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

NEWS COVERAGE of the Mercury 7 Press Conference is on TV. The astronauts (we'll meet the other six later) sit at a long table fielding questions from REPORTERS.

Louise and Rose enter to find Joanie and Gillian vibrating with excitement. Alan's ON-SCREEN, handsome in a suit and skinny tie.

ALAN (ON TV)
... I have no problems at home. My wife supports me 100%. My family is in complete agreement.

GILLIAN
He's talking about us!

As the broadcast cuts to a REPORTER, Louise smiles, proud.

INT. WILLARD HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT (D.C.)

Alan stands at a bank of PAYPHONES, chuckling. The grand lobby is jumping with activity. A couple of the astronauts shake hands and pose for photos.

ALAN
... the wives were all anyone wanted to talk about. "Brother Shepard, how do you plan on quitting smoking?" And, "What does Louise think about you going into space?"

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - INTERCUT

Louise is on the phone, clearing dishes. She smiles, amused.

LOUISE
How do you plan on quitting smoking?

He laughs and snubs out the cigarette in his hand.

ALAN
Cold turkey. Just finished my last one.

LOUISE
We'll see how that goes next time we're out for dinner and you're on your third drink.

ALAN
Speaking of dinner and drinks, the guys have a meeting -- business stuff -- but we're doing it at a country club, and thought we'd invite the wives.

She doesn't like the idea of this.

LOUISE
If it's a business meeting, I don't see why that's necessary.

ALAN
It's not. We thought it would be fun. NASA's gathered together the strongest, smartest, bravest men in the country --

Mercury astronaut GORDO COOPER (32, a good looking slow-talking Okie who turned down a football scholarship for the military) slaps Alan on the back as he passes by.

GORDO
Talkin' 'bout me again, Al?

He stops for a photo with a fawning female FAN. Alan raises his voice, making sure the fan hears his first line --

ALAN
All the astronauts are married. To great gals, I'm sure. We'll make a night of it. Get dressed up, dinner and dancing.

LOUISE
A party..?

ALAN
I know they're not your thing. But it will be good for you to make some friends. I know it's been hard since --

She cuts him off. Doesn't want to talk about that.

LOUISE
Who has time for friends? I've got you and the girls, the house. Golf. My needlepoint.

ALAN
If you mention the cats --

LOUISE
They are a lot of work. Finicky eaters, they pee in the plants...
(off his silence)
I don't want to go to a party.

ALAN
You're going. Everyone's going.

MUSIC UP.

INT. CHEVY CHASE COUNTRY CLUB - ANOTHER NIGHT

Dressy COUPLES down cocktails and glad-hand while a Les Baxter-y band performs on a small stage. The room has the swirling energy of a celebration, everyone on the move. Louise and Alan enter, looking sharp.

Louise has the slim elegance of a Capote “Swan,” and even though her dress is from a department store, she looks like she stepped out of a Parkinson fashion photo.

ALAN
Fun, right?

LOUISE
Super fun.

ALAN
Be nice. Smile with your whole face, not just your lips.

He puts his fingers on her cheeks, pushing them up comically. Now she smiles for real, charmed by him.

LOUISE
Like this?

They turn to a commotion by the door. CAMERAS FLASH, like a celebrity’s arrived. But they’re not fussing over astronaut SCOTT CARPENTER (30s, handsome and outdoors-y, uncomfortable in a suit and dress shoes). It’s who’s on his arm, wife

RENE CARPENTER (30)

She’s got platinum hair and an hourglass figure, but don’t dismiss her as a bombshell -- the bottle of that hair color reads “Blonde Ambition.”

SCOTT
Hey Al, meet my wife --

RENE
Rene. Rhymes with “peachy keen.”
Hi. Hi.

LOUISE
Louise. Rhymes with... Louise.

RENE
Love your dress. *Tres chic*.

LOUISE
And yours... *Tres* pink.

Rene doesn’t register the barb. She’s already moving on.

RENE
Oh, there’s Mr. Bromley! Have you met him? He does PR.
(with a wink)
Gotta work the room!

And she heads off with Scott. Louise smiles at Alan dryly.

LOUISE
I think I just met my soulmate.

ALAN
There's John. Way he talks about his wife, she seems more your type.

He motions to JOHN GLENN (30s, boyish in a bowtie with a sweet Charlie Brown face and baby pale hair) and his wife.

ANNIE GLENN(30s)

is petite, with dark eyes like giant saucers. She's known John since they were toddlers in Ohio. She wears a cutesy, church-y dress that makes her seem younger than she is.

ALAN (CONT'D)
John, I want you to meet Louise.

JOHN
(as they shake)
It's a pleasure. This is Annie.

LOUISE
So nice to meet you.

Annie smiles, shaking without a word. An awkward beat, then John jumps in.

JOHN
Annie was just telling me how excited she is to get to know all the other wives, weren't you dear?

Annie smiles and nods, remaining silent. Not knowing what else to say --

LOUISE
Well I look forward to it.

Moving deeper into the room --

LOUISE (CONT'D)
Another great conversationalist. Two strikes, Shepard.

BACK WITH JOHN AND ANNIE

She grips his hand tightly.

JOHN
I can't be at your side all night. You sure you're going to be okay?

OFF ANNIE, not sure at all, buckling under the pressure.

ANGLE ON

MARGE SLAYTON (30s)

a cocktail in hand, a little buzzed. She's got warm brown eyes and an easy smile. Growing up hardscrabble poor in Mickey Cohen's Los Angeles, there's a touch of the gangster's moll to her. Rita Hayworth's scrappier little sister.

MARGE
... and I told him I needed a minute -- I mean, I had curlers in my hair. But he said the General didn't have a minute. It was a matter of national security. So there I was at four in the morning, typing a letter for Eisenhower in slippers and a robe.
(downs her drink)
And I didn't make one mistake.

Reveal Louise and Alan listening with a group, laughing.

ALAN
This was in Germany? Where you met Deke.

MARGE
Japan. I lived there before Deke.

LOUISE
Single and overseas? I bet that was an adventure.

MARGE
Yes, it uh --

Marge realizes she's said too much just as DEKE SLAYTON (30s, farm boy, WWII hero, a bit of grey showing in his temples) swoops in and rescues her.

DEKE
Steal my girl for a dance?

MARGE
Of course. Excuse me.

As Marge heads off, Alan looks to Louise.

ALAN
She seems nice.

LOUISE
(a knowing smile)
She's divorced.

ANGLE ON

As Marge and Deke hit the DANCE FLOOR, he takes her drink.

DEKE
(teasing)
Watch your liquor, Irish. The last thing I need is a lot of questions about your life before me.

MARGE
It's just such a funny story...

DEKE
Well I want you to be able to tell the story of how your husband went into space, so ix-nay on apan-jay.

He tenderly pushes a stray curl behind her ear and she nods. Just then, WALLY SCHIRRA (30's a thick mane, tan and wide smile; he looks more like a game show host than an astronaut) comes by.

WALLY
Hey, meeting's about to start.
(offers his hand to Marge)
Wally, hi.

She goes to shake, but jumps when she's goosed by the JOY BUZZER Wally reveals in his hand, cracking himself up.

WALLY (CONT'D)
Ha! Gotcha!

Deke rolls his eyes to Marge as he follows Wally.

DEKE
"Jolly Wally." Not funny, I know.

ANGLE ON

Louise watches Alan head off to the private dining room with John, Scott, Wally and Deke.

TRUDY COOPER (28)

gives husband Gordo a dramatic kiss goodbye. With flipped hair and a kittenish way, her first impression is “sweet.” But there’s a lot going on behind those flashing eyes.

TRUDY
Bye! Miss you already!

BY THE DINING ROOM, GUS GRISSOM (30s, the smallest of the group, with dark hair and Fred Flintstone’s five o’clock shadow) pulls up the rear, door almost closing on him.

VOICE
Isn’t it always the way?

Louise turns to find

BETTY GRISSOM (30)

a bouncy redhead with curls askew, smiling at her. She speaks with a folksy Hoosier accent.

BETTY
The men goin’ off to talk, and a big door closin’ in our faces?

Betty sneezes into a Kleenex, balls it up in her hand as she reaches out for a shake.

BETTY (CONT’D)
I’m Betty Grissom. Gus’s wife. Woke up this mornin’ with a cold.

Louise just stares at her sneeze-dampened hand.

INT. CHEVY CHASE COUNTRY CLUB - LADIES ROOM - NIGHT

Marge and Trudy fix their make-up.

TRUDY
There’s a reporter here tonight.

MARGE
Remind me to avoid him. I already stuck my foot in my mouth in front of Deke. I should learn from that odd little Annie Glenn and not speak at all.

Trudy laughs.

TRUDY
If someone asks you a question you don't want to answer, just bat your eyes and say, "Sorry, that's classified."

MARGE
That what you're gonna say when they ask about your marriage?

TRUDY
I made a promise to Gordo and I'm going to keep it. NASA only wants family men with model marriages, and that's exactly what they're going to get from the Coopers. Gordo may be arrogant and infuriating --

MARGE
That's why they call them *ass*-tronauts.

TRUDY
But he deserves to be here. No one needs to know the truth. And who knows, if I play nice now, maybe one day it'll be <u>me</u> going into space.

MARGE
Darlin', Gordo may let you put-put around in that Piper Cub and race other girls in a "powder puff" derby, but the pigs will fly in space before a woman does.

Trudy knows Marge doesn't mean anything, but real frustration flashes across her face.

TRUDY
He doesn't "let" me do anything. And there are studies that women are actually <u>better</u> suited for --

Just then, Louise enters. Marge takes this opportunity to end Trudy's rant.

MARGE
Hey Louise, you met Trudy?

They smile and shake. Then Louise primly powders her nose.

LOUISE
Gordon's wife? Alan says he's the real competition.

Trudy looks at Louise, bristling. *Excuse me?*

TRUDY
Gordo's the best. He has no competition.

But if you serve Louise Shepard, she dances back. And with the look she gives Trudy, *it's on*.

LOUISE
I'm afraid you're quite mistaken.

BACK IN THE DINING ROOM

Trudy and Louise face off, arguing. Marge, Betty, Jo, and Rene have gathered, like school kids egging on a fist fight.

TRUDY
Gordo says Alan is a desk jockey.

LOUISE
Well you can tell Captain Cooper that Lieutenant Commander Shepard got assigned to a "desk" at Fleet Command because he has a Master's Degree.

TRUDY
You can't learn to fly from a book. Gordo's flown 7,000 hours. In Thunderjets and Sabres --

LOUISE
(shutting it down)
Demons, Crusaders, Skyrays and Tigers. 8,000 hours.

JO SCHIRRA (30s)

chimes in. She's a perky perfectionist, a social climbing Navy brat in white shoes and her signature pearls.

JO
What about John Glenn? He flew across the whole country in three hours. I think that's just amazing.

MARGE
He's not even your husband.

JO
I know. Nothing against my Wally, but I think John's really something. Do you think he'll be first up? Where's Annie? She's the wife I wanna meet, no offense.

BETTY
If you ask me, she's a bit full of herself. Too good to even speak to ole Betty? Okey-dokey then...

But just then, Betty looks up to see Annie has landed and overheard. She reacts, stung. Betty goes red.

JO
(waves to her)
Hi! Jo Schirra!

LOUISE
(to the group)
Look, our husbands are rivals. They want to go up first and we're here to support them. Alan doesn't apologize for being good at his job and I'm not going to apologize for being good at mine.

RENE
I don't think it has to be all about the guys. We have our own platform now. What message do we want to put out?

MARGE
(eyeballing her)
Oh, we know what you're puttin' out...

RENE
I am a mother of four. I supported my husband while going to college myself --

BETTY
Well isn't that fancy. After four years at the phone company I got a PHT, for "Putting Hubby Through."

MARGE
The phone company? That sounds like a dream. Try fifteen years old and --

Marge stops herself, realizes she's already gone too far.

THE OTHER WIVES
And what..?/Fifteen?/Tell us!

They all look at her, even Annie.

MARGE
It's not important.

LOUISE
(exasperated)
None of this is. We're only arguing because we're expected not to. But we're here for our men, not each other. We don't have to like each other, or even pretend to like each other --

Just then --

ALAN (O.S.)
It's official! We have a deal!

Alan, Gordo and Louden (from the opening) land. Gordo wraps his arm tight around Trudy. She smiles at him, adoringly.

GORDO
LIFE magazine's arranged insurance. And is giving us half a million.

TRUDY
Half a million... *dollars*?

ALAN
Well, split seven ways --

GORDO
And divided over three years.

RENE
Still -- that's... $23,000 a year!

JO
(sotto, impressed)
She must have been a math major.

BETTY
Why would a magazine pay you twice what the service does?

ALAN
'Cause we're gonna be in it.

LOUISE
You mean you are?

GORDO
We all are.

LOUDEN
I can explain --

ALAN
This is Louden Wainwright, from the magazine.

Louden steps up, the other men step away.

LOUDEN
Hello, Astronaut Wives.

JO
(patting Annie's arm)
Oh, I like the sound of that!

LOUDEN
It's nice we can meet before our cover shoot.

RENE
Cover shoot? Us?
(then, psyched)
I'm ready.

But the other wives are more uncertain, exchange looks.

BETTY
The cover of LIFE? Why? Who wants to see a bunch of regular people in a magazine?

LOUDEN
That you are regular makes you fascinating.
(off them, huh?)
Seven ordinary military families becoming American royalty -- that's the Mercury story.

LOUISE
So we give up our privacy for..?

RENE
Money. Fame --

LOUDEN
America.
(off their looks)
NASA's determined to win this "Space Race" with the Russians in the air and in the press. Wives and children put a friendly spin on things. It's not about the Cold War, it's about family.
(hitting it home)
Baseball, apple pie... astronauts.

LOUISE
Sounds like we're propaganda.

LOUDEN
Let's just say that when you're sick of cameras clicking and me scribbling on my notepad, remind yourself that it's your patriotic duty to smile.

He looks around -- their uncertain looks and shifting gazes.

LOUDEN (CONT'D)
It'll be fun. I see you've all become fast friends.

MARGE
Nothing gets past you reporters.

LOUDEN
A great group like you ladies, it shouldn't be a problem. I mean, it's not like you have a lot of bad habits or big secrets.

TRUDY
(worried, covers)
What secrets could we have?

Louise makes eye contact with Alan across the room. He motions for her to smile, and she does just that.

LOUISE
We're just a bunch of housewives.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. LANGLEY RESEARCH CENTER - DAY

MUSIC UP. A pale DAYTIME MOON is eclipsed as a red ATLAS SPACE CAPSULE cuts through the sky. GEARS grind, CABLES strain, and a TRUCK pulls a WHEELED PLATFORM into position. It seems like a major feat of engineering until we realize we're not on a launch pad --

We're on a LAWN. And there's not an astronaut in sight.

In FAST-MOTION, ASSISTANTS converge, buffing and polishing the capsule. BZZT -- a POLAROID camera spits out a print. Louden paces. Then wives arrive.

First Louise (*always* early), then Trudy and Marge together. They get a frosty eyebrow greeting from Louise, who glances at her watch. Then Betty shows up. Shy Annie, reluctant and ignored by everyone but fawning Jo (again in her white shoes and pearls). Then finally, fashionably late Rene.

All the women are in coordinating shirtwaist dresses in pastel colors, but Rene rocks a wiggle dress covered in red roses. She points to the capsule, winks at the PHOTOGRAPHER.

RENE
Look, I match!
(then to Louise, sotto)
Just doing my job...

The wives are arranged around the capsule like petals on a flower. Assistants pull back shoulders, cross ankles and tweak hips. Louise has perfect posture. Rene finds the light, warming to its glow.

Now faces close together. Louise in the middle. Then Annie, then Rene. As wives smile and the camera CLICKS, we catch the awkward looks that reveal their inner states -- anxiety for most, over-eagerness for Jo, and pure heaven for Rene.

CUT TO:

The LIFE MAGAZINE, published, in someone's hands. Rene's in the middle, of course. Reveal we're --

INT. CHEVY DEALERSHIP - SHOWROOM - DAY

The magazine is clutched by an excitable MANAGER, who's showing off the new Chevy Nomad STATION WAGON to the wives.

PARKING LOT

They each drive off in matching white Nomads until we get to Trudy, who turns up her nose. This is not the car for her.

TRUDY
What did the guys get?

EXT. HOLIDAY INN (COCOA BEACH) - DAY

Clutching A LIFE magazine with *the astronauts* on the cover is JIM RATHMANN (30s), former Indy 500 champ, current playboy and gearhead. Watches gleefully as the astronauts do donuts in the parking lot. All behind the wheel of custom Corvettes.

JIM
Corvettes and astronauts! Janice, this is the beginning of a beautiful relationship.

He stands underneath a giant readerboard, "Cocoa Beach Welcomes our Astronauts" with his secretary JANICE, a buxom blonde in a pencil skirt. Alan pulls up.

JIM (CONT'D)
Well, what d'you think?

ALAN
I'm in love, Jim.

He means the car, but he smiles at Janice. She smiles back.

BACK AT THE DEALERSHIP

Trudy steps on the gas -- of a shiny red Impala.

EXT. MARGE'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

A FOURTH OF JULY barbecue is underway. The wives set out condiments at red, white and blue covered picnic tables and man the grill, while Louden and a PHOTOGRAPHER document the happenings. KIDS play tag and wave BOTTLE ROCKETS as Marge's Weimaraner, ACIE, barks. MUSIC DOWN.

INT. MARGE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME

The counter is lined with Pyrex casseroles filled with side dishes. Louise mixes Miracle Whip into Jello salad.

OUT THE WINDOW, she watches her two youngest girls play with the Cooper's preteen daughters, who wear MOUSE EARS with their names on them (KAI and LEA).

THE DOORBELL SOUNDS, and she glance out to Marge, laughing with her little boy SHAUN (3). The DOORBELL sounds again, a little insistently. Louise wipes her hands.

INT./EXT. MARGE'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Louise opens the door to a faded beauty who's got a cigarette in one hand and an enormous carpetbag in the other. This is VALENE (50s).

LOUISE
Can I help you?

VALENE
Depends. You know where they keep the whiskey? It's been a long train ride.

LOUISE
Is Mrs. Slayton expecting you?

VALENE
Always.

Valene drops her bag at the front door and Louise let's her pass. Acie comes running to greet her.

VALENE (CONT'D)
Hiya Acie. *Guten Tag.*
(to Louise)
He's from Bitburg, speaks German.

As Louise follows her INSIDE, Marge enters from the back --

MARGE
Louise, how's the salad?

Marge freezes and smiles stiffly at Louise.

MARGE (CONT'D)
I see you met my mother, Valene.

INT. MARGE'S HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Valene unpacks into the dresser. She's brought the bottle of whiskey in with her.

MARGE
Mama, what you doing here?

VALENE
I figured you could use the help. With Deke down in Florida training, you're all alone with Shaun. Not to mention all the fuss in the papers. I read about this or that "astronaut wife" every day. Sounds exhausting.

MARGE
I don't believe for a second you came here for me. What happened? Pinched for shoplifting? Bad checks again?

VALENE
Don't worry, I'm not on the lamb. But there may have been a thing at the SRO, involving a cigarette burn and a couch...

MARGE
Fine, we'll pay for the couch --

VALENE
Well, the couch set fire to the floor, fell into another apartment.

MARGE
Mama --

VALENE
It's okay... Jacques was 17. That's old for a parrot. It was his time.

The look on Marge's face says it all: *this is a disaster*.

MARGE
We'll deal with this later, but right now I have a house full of astronaut wives and a very curious reporter. Why don't I give you a dollar and you can go to the movies?

Valene eyeballs her. Knows what's behind the request. Uses it to her advantage.

VALENE
Make it two and I'll stay for the second feature.

INT. MARGE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The front door SHUTS. Marge enters, finds Louise. It's not her way to get involved in other people's business, but there's something about Marge's distress that softens her.

LOUISE
Is your mother okay..?

MARGE
Does she seem okay to you?

LOUISE
Well, no... Which is --

MARGE
(almost to herself)
Her showing up is the last thing I need. Deke is gonna hit the roof.

LOUISE
Why? He's not even here.

MARGE
Did you see the latest pictures? Annie drivin' the boat while John waterskis? It's adorable. And Gordo and Trudy, young and sexy with each other. Then there's Rene. You know she's getting her own cover. Down home Betty. Jo, the Admiral's daughter. And perfect, poised Lady Louise...

LOUISE
What are you saying? You think they'd chose one guy over another because the wife's a better story?

MARGE
You don't? Please. You weren't even coming today until you heard Louden and the photographer were gonna be here.

LOUISE
I do what I have to for Alan's sake. I don't think about it anymore than that....

MARGE
Well maybe you should start. Because all the guys are qualified.
(MORE)

MARGE (CONT'D)
And what we do -- who we are -- matters.

Louise picks up her salad and heads out, leaving Marge upset.

EXT. MARGE'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - SAME

The Shepard girls have stopped playing their board game with Kai and Lea and sit frozen, trapped by their inquisitive stares.

KAI
... but how can you both be ten?

LEA
Are you twins?

KAI
You don't look the same.

ANGLE ON

Louise exits the house and sees Rose looking to Joanie with large eyes, on the brink of tears. They're in distress.

BACK WITH

Joanie stammers out the truth --

JOANIE
Rose isn't my sister. She's my cousin. Or, she used to be my cousin. Now she's my sister --

Louise rushes over --

LOUISE
Alright, girls. There's hotdogs and 7Up on the table. Let's go...

Louise sends them off, distracted for the moment. Rose and Joanie stare up at Louise, afraid they're in trouble.

JOANIE
I'm sorry...

ROSE
I didn't know what to say.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
You didn't do anything wrong.

Across the lawn, Louise sees Marge, watching with eagle eyes.

FIREWORKS

explode in the NIGHT SKY. We're --

EXT. COCOA BEACH - NIGHT

TAILGATERS eat, drink and make-out. The astro-Vettes are parked along the sand. Alan sits on the hood of his, sipping a beer. He talks to Rathmann's secretary, Janice.

ALAN
...it's not the training, it's the downtime. When I'm training, I'm focused, no other thoughts. But after? My mind's racing -- I can't get out of my head. Can't fall asleep, read the paper, watch TV. My golf game's gone to shit...

JANICE
They could give you something for that. Maybe not golf, but the rest of it. They're doctors.

ALAN
The doctors will give you whatever you want. Then they ask 100 questions. "Do you have anxiety?" "Could you rate this anxiety on a scale of one to ten?" Next thing you know, there are three pages of notes in your chart and it's moving to the bottom of the pile.
(re: his beer)
There's nothing wrong with a drink once in a while. But go too hard one night, next morning a couple of Germans show up and make you piss in a cup.

She laughs.

JANICE
Wanna go for a drive? Put the top down, forget yourself for a while?
(smiles)
And if that doesn't work, there's some other things we could do that the Germans would never have to know about.

He looks at her, tempted. Very tempted.

INT. TRUDY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Trudy lies in bed. Dials the phone.

INT. HOLIDAY INN - GORDO'S ROOM - INTERCUT

Gordo undresses, answers. Knows before she says a word --

GORDO
(smiles)
Hello Trudy.

TRUDY
Ten o'clock bed check.

GORDO
Well I'm here. And I'm going to bed. Alone.

TRUDY
You're a good boy, Gordo. Don't think I'm not noticing.

GORDO
Is that right..? Well maybe I could get a reward? An incentive of some type. A brief description of what you're wearing right now, or --

Just then, there's a KNOCK on Deke's door.

GORDO (CONT'D)
Wait, hold on one sec.

He puts the phone down on the bed and answers. It's Alan.

ALAN
Hey, I see you got a double. I got two singles. You mind switching?

GORDO
What? Why?

Janice steps out and waves at him.

JANICE
Hi.

GORDO
Oh man, don't put me in the middle of this --

ALAN
You're not in the middle. You're leaving. We'll be back in ten.

GORDO
Oh man... Okay...

Alan nods thanks, leaves. Gordo returns to the phone.

GORDO (CONT'D)
Hey, Trude --

But all that's there is a dial tone. Gordo hangs up. Fuck.

INT. HOLIDAY INN - JOHN'S ROOM - NIGHT

John is dead asleep when the phone rings, waking him.

JOHN
Hello?

WOMAN'S VOICE(ON PHONE)
Is this John Glenn?

The woman has a slight German accent. Or is it British..?

JOHN
Yes.

WOMAN'S VOICE (ON PHONE)
I'm calling from Mr. Wainwright's office. Something's come to our attention and I thought a gentleman with your fine, upstanding moral character --

INT. TRUDY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - INTERCUT

The voice on the phone is Trudy.

TRUDY
-- would know exactly what to do.

INT./EXT. HOLIDAY INN - ALAN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

An irate, shirtless Alan throws open the door and finds John.

ALAN
What do you think you're doin'?

JOHN
There's a reporter who saw you bring a woman in here. We gotta get her out before a photographer shows up.

Janice sits up in bed. Oh shit. As she quickly dresses, party over --

JOHN (CONT'D)
This is not behavior befitting an astronaut. There will be a discussion.

BACK WITH TRUDY

She's on another call.

TRUDY
Hi Mr. Wainwright, this is Trudy Cooper.

LOUDEN (ON PHONE)
Hi --

TRUDY
Sorry for calling so late, but the wives have decided to come down to the Cape for that test launch after all. We'll see you next week.

EXT. HOLIDAY INN - NIGHT

A convoy of Corvettes pulls into the parking lot, each astronaut with his wife. There's a handful of nervously bobbing YOUNG WOMEN. A ripple runs through the group as the cars stop and start to unload.

But one of the girls has gone into the restaurant. And comes out with a DOZEN more women --

CAPE COOKIE
Look! Astronauts!

And the gang SCREAMS like they've just seen seven Frank Sinatras. "Oh my god!" "I'm gonna faint!" John and Annie push through the crowd. John looks to Alan, sharp --

JOHN
I warned you this would happen.

Louise looks at John. <u>He did?</u> Jo sees that Annie's leaving.

JO
Wally, let's go.

The Carpenters exit, but Rene seems more impressed than outraged.

INT. HOLIDAY INN - SCOTT'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

As the door shuts, Rene kisses Scott. The cookies are nothing but a turn on for her.

RENE
I'm married to Elvis!

She rips off his shirt and buttons fly.

BACK OUTSIDE

As wives look on in horror, Alan, Gordo, Deke and Gus are mauled by the throng. Then Jim Rathmann pulls up with Janice and a FRIEND. Janice jumps out, makes a bee-line for Alan. Before he can stop her, she grabs him and leans in, quiet --

JANICE
Hey, I think I left something upstairs in your room.

But she's not quiet enough. Alan feels Louise's gaze.

ALAN
Janice, meet my wife Louise.

Janice balks. Louise stalks upstairs without a look. Trudy, Marge and Betty watch, mortified. And Rathmann realizes --

JIM
Right. This is the weekend the wives are comin'...

INT. HOLIDAY INN - GORDO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Trudy pulls on her nightgown as Gordo enters from the bathroom. He catches a flash of bare back, nylon panties.

TRUDY
Hey! You gotta knock. Your bed is in there and it's called a bathtub.

GORDO
Come on, Trudy. I've gotten offers. Lots of 'em.
(MORE)

GORDO (CONT'D)
(smiles)
I'm the youngest, handsomest one. But I've turned them all down, I swear.

TRUDY
I'm not saying I doubt you. But it doesn't change anything. You knew the terms when I came back, and I'm not going to apologize for being a strong, self-respecting woman.

GORDO
I'm not asking you to. I just miss you so damn much.

He slumps down on the bed. She sits next to him.

TRUDY
You're a good pilot, Gordo. The best. You've earned the right to go up, and I came back to help you with that. But that doesn't mean I'm going to forgive and forget. If you ever get back in my bed? It's because you earned it.

GORDO
(smiles)
So you're sayin' I got a shot?

Trudy smiles, pushes him away toward the bathroom.

TRUDY
Go to your room.

EXT. HOLIDAY INN - ALAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

The women have cleared away. Alan's got a hot tea and a piece of pie. He uses his key in the door, but the safety chain catches. A beat, then he quietly shuts the door and walks away. He knows how badly he screwed up.

INT. HOLIDAY INN - ALAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Louise lies on the bed, back to the door. Unblinking. Unforgiving.

END ACT 2

ACT 3

INT. SPACE CAPSULE - DAY

An EXPLOSION. METAL peels and splits like flesh, seared by a heat so hot it seems to SCREAM. And cutting through the chaos of roiling FLAMES and melting CIRCUITRY -- the tiny sound of a voice on a radio, helpless and desperate.

VOICE
We're burning up...

Reveal --

INT. HOLIDAY INN - GUS' ROOM - MORNING

Betty wakes from a NIGHTMARE with a gasp. She sits up with a jolt, waking Gus.

GUS
Hey Betts. You okay?

BETTY
Yup, just fine...

She gets up and goes to the bathroom, leaving the door open.

GUS
Did you have one of your dreams?

BETTY
Nope.

GUS
You did. Just like with the tractor accident at my cousin's place, and that tornado in Montgomery County.
(shakes his head)
You got a gift. I can't explain it, but I always believe it. What'd you see this time?

He enters and brushes his teeth as Betty pees.

BETTY
A big plate of pancakes. Buy me breakfast?

GUS
Put 'em on my tab, but I'm goin' running with John.
(MORE)

GUS (CONT'D)
He’s got the guys doing 5BX -- “five basic exercises,” from the Royal Canadian Air Force.

He does a deep knee bend, then spits.

GUS (CONT’D)
You’re really not gonna tell me?

She flushes the toilet.

BETTY
Nothin’ to tell.

But as she exits, we see how upset she really is.

EXT. HOLIDAY INN - MORNING

Alan sleeps, head back and mouth open, body uncomfortably splayed across the front seat of his CORVETTE.

A KNOCK on the window startles him. It’s Marge. She points upstairs; the door to his room is open. Alan nods thanks.

INT./EXT. HOLIDAY INN - ALAN’S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Louise is freshly showered, crisp, sitting on the end of the bed. Alan steps in and shuts the door, rumpled and aching -- and not just from his bad sleep the night before.

LOUISE
(matter of factly)
Everybody warned me about you. My family. Your family. The coxswain on the Navy rowing team. They all said the same thing.

ALAN
That you were too good for a rotten SOB like me. You were too good. You are.

LOUISE
It’s true I could’ve married an easier man. A man with a more secure job, who could buy me better things. But that man wasn’t smart, and didn’t make me laugh. He didn’t make my heart beat fast or my head spin. And he sure didn’t make me think that life with him would be much of an adventure.

ALAN
Is that what you were looking for?
(remembering)
Pretty, serious Louise Brewer with her blouse buttoned up to the top... wanted adventure.

LOUISE
I know exactly who you are. I've always known.
(smiles wryly)
You are a rotten SOB. The rottenest. But you're also a great man. I think you'll do something no one else has ever done. I think you'll make history.

ALAN
Not without you at my side, I won't. How do I fix this?

LOUISE
Don't make promises you can't keep. Don't humiliate me. Not in private, but especially not in public. And be amazing. You do that, and you'll give up on yourself long before I ever give up on you.

Off Alan -- can he do it?

INT. HOLIDAY INN - RESTAURANT - MORNING

Marge eats with Trudy and Betty. Coffee, pancakes and bacon.

TRUDY
You think Louise will divorce him?

MARGE
No way. Raising those girls on her own, getting some kind of a job -- as what? She's smarter than that.
(off Trudy)
No offense.

BETTY
Why would Trudy be offended?

Trudy stares daggers at Marge. Marge looks back at her, raises an eyebrow. *Well?*

BETTY (CONT'D)
What? No. Gordo would never cheat. He's crazy about you.
(off Trudy)
Don't tell me he did!

Trudy tells the truth.

TRUDY
When he volunteered, I was filing the papers. Technically our divorce wasn't final when he volunteered, so he didn't exactly lie. But I'm only back for his career.

MARGE
I dunno, I've seen you two together. You might call it a sham, but I think that boy's wearin' you down.
(off Trudy's smile)
Yup. I knew it. Only a matter of time 'til you're givin' him sugar again...

The women laugh.

EXT. HOLIDAY INN - MORNING

Annie is getting a bag out of John's Corvette when she's cornered by a LOCAL REPORTER --

LOCAL REPORTER
Mrs. Glenn?
(as Annie balks)
I'm with the Sentinel. There's speculation your husband's going to be picked to man the first Mercury flight. Any comment?

UPSTAIRS, Rene comes out of her room. She notices Annie and the reporter, pauses --

DOWNSTAIRS, Annie shakes her head no. He smiles.

LOCAL REPORTER (CONT'D)
Just a word or two? C'mon. I'm not gonna let you go until you tell me something.

Annie moves to get around him, he moves the same way. His smile turns menacing. She looks scared.

LOCAL REPORTER (CONT'D)
I don't wanna have to report you were rude to me, now...

ANNIE
D-d-d-on't. P-l-l-eeease --

And we realize that something is indeed wrong. Just then -- Rene comes striding down the stairs.

RENE
Excuse me. You've upset this poor woman so much she can barely speak. And I'm sure you know the astronaut families have an exclusive deal with LIFE magazine. You need to leave right now.

Rene sets a protective arm around Annie and turns her away from the reporter. As they clear, Annie turns to Rene.

ANNIE
Thhhh-aank Yyyy-ou.

They look over as John, Gordo, Gus, and Deke jog up together in grey sweatsuits. The reporter gets in his car and drives away. Rene gives her a warm smile.

RENE
You're welcome. And no, I won't tell anyone.

EXT. COCOA BEACH ESTABLISHING - DAY

Cars park on the hard-packed white sand while families picnic and play. The water is almost waveless (A/F).

OVERLAPPING VOICES (O.S.)
... minus 30... Range operations -- go. Mercury capsule -- go. The ready light is on... Counting. Engines start... 10, 9...

EXT. COCOA BEACH - CONTINUOUS

The Astro-couples, Louden, and some NASA Execs gather around a transistor RADIO. Alan puts his arm around Louise. She holds her head high. Marge gives Trudy and Betty a look -- she was right.

VOICE (O.S.)
...3, 2, 1. Liftoff.

The sound, even across the water, is deafening, and the ground shakes. Everyone watches in awe as the rocket rises. It's beautiful. Until it isn't. Something seems wrong -- very wrong -- and then -- it

EXPLODES

A mushroom cloud in the sky and one thought on every mind -- *there could have been an astronaut inside*. A horrified beat, then Jo tries to joke --

JO
Least the monkey wasn't in there.

Louden glances at the gut-punched group, then puts his hand up in front of the photographer's lens.

LOUDEN
Today is off the record.

The men huddle up and head off --

DEKE
Thank God that was test.

JOHN
No one got hurt...

ALAN
Will this affect the first flight?

-- leaving the wives alone.

MARGE
(gape-jawed)
Are they (fucking) kidding?
They're gonna put a man up there?

This brings on an explosion --

RENE
My heart stopped beating!

BETTY
I think I wet myself a bit.

TRUDY
Do they know what they're doing?

JO
Our husbands are not fodder for some reckless experiment!

Louise interrupts.

LOUISE
Enough!
(off their looks)
It's fine. I'm sure they'll learn from their mistakes, make corrections. That's why they do tests.

Betty's face is red, eyes brimming with tears.

BETTY
Oh don't give us that bull-crap! Maybe you don't care about Alan, but it coulda been my Gus up there.

LOUISE
I <u>care</u> --

BETTY
I gotta get outta here before I say somethin' I'll regret.

JO
Too late.

Betty rushes off, troubled. Marge is about to follow, but --

TRUDY
Let her go. She needs a minute.
(then, turning on Louise)
Unlike Mrs. "I'm fine" over here.

LOUISE
What do you mean by that?

TRUDY
A rocket explodes. It's "fine." You're husband sleeps around. That's "fine" too. Look the other way and life goes on. Well it's not "fine," Louise. None of it.

LOUISE
What it is, is none of your business. Alan loves me. That's what matters.

TRUDY
If you've made some kind of deal with him, then you're giving up on yourself and your marriage. Part of being a modern wife is challenging your husband to be better.

LOUISE
My husband <u>is</u> better. He's the <u>best</u>. And the only "deal" I made was to be a real partner in this. If none of you can understand that, it's because you're in average marriages to average men.
(MORE)

LOUISE (CONT'D)
(then)
We make our own rules. And I won't be judged by any of you.

And with that, she marches off.

EXT. DOWN THE BEACH - LATER

Gus finds Betty sitting by herself, upset.

GUS
Hey, there you are. You been crying? What for?

BETTY
Are you seriously askin'?

GUS
Yup, that happened, but everyone's okay, so --

BETTY
This time, Gus. Everyone's okay this time.
(off him)
That dream I had? It was an explosion. Like today, but worse. I didn't wanna tell you, but I'm gonna lose my mind if I don't -- you were in a fire. I dreamt you died.

GUS
Well I don't doubt you saw something... but whatever it was, it won't keep me from going up.
(off her)
Why you lookin' at me like that? You're the one who convinced me I could do this! And you were right.

BETTY
You listened to me then. You should listen to me now.

GUS
Betts, it's not about bein' in LIFE magazine or a history book, or even doin' right by my country. It's about Gus Grissom from Mitchell Indiana -- too short for basketball, too skinny for wrestlin' -- going into space.

Betty understands this, which makes what's next even harder.

BETTY
I want you to have all of that. But not more than I wanna have you. We've gotten this far by stickin' together, puttin' each other first. Let's not quit now.

GUS
But this... it's the opportunity of a lifetime.

BETTY
Oh really? Whose life? Not mine.
(off Gus)
I worked at Bell so you could go to Purdue. I gave birth to our son alone 'cause you were off trainin', then I raised him by myself 'cause you were off fightin'. All that time, I thought we were a team. Was I wrong?

GUS
Of course. Don't be like that...

BETTY
What d'you expect? For me to say, "Gee Gus, that's fine, you do what you like. Maybe I'll try to stop lovin' you so I'll be less sad when you die?"

Gus hardens in a way he never has and stands.

GUS
I'll never stop loving you, but go ahead and suit yourself. The guys are heading to the base to listen to the tapes. We're gonna make sure this doesn't happen again.

He moves off, leaving Betty stung. She lets out a soft sob and buries her head in her hands.

END ACT 3

ACT 4

EXT. STREET - NEWSSTAND (ARLINGTON) - DAY

A pile of freshly delivered LIFE magazines are tied up. The top of the March 3rd 1961 cover is visible. "Astronaut First Team Announced." But who's the team? As a magazine is pulled out --

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

A pretty teen, SHAR (13) is on the phone.

SHAR
Daddy says he's glad you like it.

She's talking to Annie, who holds the LIFE. Annie goes to scribble something on a notepad, a message for Shar to relay, but she grabs the phone instead, excited --

ANNIE
I'm s-oo pppp-rrr-oud.

INT. HOLIDAY INN - JOHN'S ROOM - INTERCUT

John smiles, shuts his eyes.

JOHN
Darlin', I love the sound of your voice.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Betty pushes her cart up to the check-out.

CASHIER
Congratulations Mrs. Grissom. You must be so excited.

BETTY
(sighs)
Yup. Thrilled.

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Louise cooks breakfast for the girls, surprised when --

ALAN
Special delivery.

Alan appears behind her, holding the LIFE magazine. On the cover we see the three astronauts chosen for the first flights are John, Gus and Alan.

LOUISE
What are you doing home?
(teasing)
Going into space isn't enough?
LIFE's got you going door to door
now too?

He puts his arms around her.

ALAN
I'm gonna be first.

LOUISE
I read something about that.

ALAN
No, first first. The first man in
space.

LOUISE
What do mean? How--?

ALAN
It's not public yet, but yesterday
they brought all of us into a room
and just -- told us. The other
guys were real gentlemen, good
sports. They came over one by one,
shook my hand, walked out. Until
there I was -- the only guy left in
the room.
(off Louise, thrilled)
You knew I could do it. You knew
it was going to be me the whole
time.

They kiss. Gillian enters. Not used to her parents' PDA.

GILLIAN
What's... happening?

LOUISE
Your father's making history.

PRE LAP: An excited CROWD.

INT./EXT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - ANOTHER MORNING

A sign on the door: **NO REPORTERS INSIDE. I WILL HAVE A STATEMENT FOR THE PRESS AFTER THE FLIGHT.** It opens to reveal Louise, irked to see:

The other six wives holding Pyrex casseroles filled with things made from Campbell's soup, tuna, and crushed pineapple (hopefully not all mixed together). Rene has champagne.

MARGE
Hi. It's us.

JO
Annie made ham loaf. We've got enough food for an army --

RENE
And bubbly to wash it all down!

BEHIND THEM IN THE STREET, people shout when they see Louise, "Mrs. Shepard, over here!" "How about a quote?" The wives have to raise their voices to be heard over the din.

LOUISE
I'm not sure what you're doing here.

BETTY
We know we weren't invited, but just because NASA won't let wives into mission control, doesn't mean you should be alone.

Betty nudges Marge -- *you try*. Marge swallows, then --

MARGE
No one can truly know what you're going through, but hopefully we're the next best thing.

LOUISE
I appreciate the gesture, but --
(a cool smile to Trudy)
-- I'm fine.

But Trudy's not going to let her get off that easy.

TRUDY
Louise, do you know the difference between a Redstone rocket and a nuclear missile? Nothing, except your husband is sitting where a warhead would go.
(MORE)

TRUDY (CONT'D)
Any moment now they're going to launch that missile, and Alan is going to leave the planet.
(off Louise)
If he survives the blast off, once in space, he will face suffocation, incineration, decompression, and possible madness. So today is really not the day to turn up your nose at a little human kindness.

LOUISE
If you care about kindness, you'll leave me alone today.

And with that, she shuts the door. A beat, then --

MARGE
Party at my place?

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

It's dark inside. The blinds are drawn tight to keep out the press. Louise enters to see Louden holding the phone.

LOUDEN
MCC has Alan in the capsule.

LOUISE
(rushing)
Alan--?

ALAN (ON THE PHONE)
Hey there, Louise.

LOUISE
How... how are you?

ALAN (ON THE PHONE)
Good. Been ready for a while. Just sittin' here, waiting for the weather to clear.

LOUISE
Yes, that was on the TV --

ALAN (ON THE PHONE)
If you ask me, none of these chickens want to pull the trigger, have it be on him if --
(stops himself)
The girls are good?

She glances to them, watching TV with the cats.

LOUISE
They're nervous. Proud. You want to talk to them?

ALAN (ON THE PHONE)
Nah, prob'ly just scare 'em. And I should go.
(then, as much to himself)
It's just 15 minutes, straight up and down. Less time than I need to cook a steak how you like.

As she laughs softly, his voice gets very small.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Alright, I love you.
(pointed)
See you soon.

LOUISE
See you soon.

And he's gone. Suddenly she realizes she's shaking all over.

LOUDEN
You sure you don't want to call Mrs. Slayton or Mrs. Cooper? I bet they'd come back if you asked.

LOUISE
I may have spoken to my husband for the last time ever, my daughters are scared out of their minds, and I have <u>you</u> staring at me over your notepad. The last thing I need in this house is six giddy women and their deviled eggs.

LOUDEN
(with a smile)
I assume that's off the record?

INT. MARGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The house is jumping. Women, children and Acie, watching TV, eating (yes, deviled eggs), and nervously chatting. Marge whispers to Shaun, who's in front of the TV with the GRISSOM BOYS (JAMES and BOBBY, in COWBOY HATS).

Trudy spies Valene's Lucky's plucks a cigarette.

TRUDY
I didn't know you smoked?

MARGE
It's my little secret.
(then, quiet to Shaun)
Where'd your Gram get to?

SHAUN
Said she was going to the movies.

His attention is pulled to the TV --

SHAUN (CONT'D)
The countdown's starting! C'mon!

KIDS
10 --

The women wrap arms around each other. We cut from FACE TO FACE as we count down. Even Annie joins in. Rene smiles at her and clasps her hand.

WIVES
9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4 --

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Louise sits in a chair in front of the TV with the girls at her feet. Louden's off to the side with his notepad in his lap. The house is completely quiet. Only the sound of the television and the far off din of the press outside.

TELEVISION
3, 2, 1...
(beat)
We have liftoff.

ON TV, MERCURY-REDSTONE 3 blasts off (A/F). Louden glances at Louise. She's terrified (and we've caught up with the opening).

BACK AT MARGE'S

Hands come up to faces, eyes close then peel open, kids jump up and down. Fear, wonder, exhilaration. Rene and Jo smoke with Trudy.

OUTSIDE LOUISE'S

The press is swept up in the moment. Not even doing their jobs anymore, they gather around a screen in the back of a van chanting "Go, Go, Go!"

ON COCOA BEACH

A CHEERING crowd has their eyes fixed on the sky (A/F).

LOUISE'S

The girls hug Louise's legs as we PRESS INTO her face, frozen, then INTO the TV. MR-3 gets smaller and smaller.

TV ANNOUNCER
He looks so lonely...

BACK AT MARGE'S

The TV cameras can no longer see Alan. It's just the ANNOUNCERS on the screen.

RENE
He's up!

TRUDY
(sotto, to the TV)
Alright. Now we need you to come down...

LOUISE'S

The TV coverage has cut to an AIRCRAFT CARRIER, where helicopters are on standby for Freedom 7's retrieval. Cameras pan to and fro over a watery horizon.

TV ANNOUNCER
If re-entry is successful, we should see him any moment now...

Louise watches, catatonic. The girls clutch each other, eyes squeezed tight. Louden realizes just how intimate this is. He pockets his pen, rises, puts his hand on Louise's chair --

LOUDEN
Would you like me to listen to the radio in the other room?

He's not sure she's heard him. Then -- like something from out of a horror movie -- her hand whips up and grabs his.

INT. MISSION CONTROL CENTER - SAME

Deke is in front of a CONSOLE, HEADSET on. He's surrounded by Gordo, Gus and John.

ALAN (ON THE HEADSET)
G build up. 3, 6, 9 --

His voice gets more strained, fading...

ALAN (CONT'D)
Okay... okay... This is... 7 --

Then -- it's just static.

DEKE
Freedom 7 this is CapCom. Do you read me? This is CapCom, do you read?

There's nothing there. They look at each other.

DEKE (CONT'D)
Capsule's holding. All the readings are good.

JOHN
Scott and Wally are still in the chase planes.

GORDO
What're they gonna do?

GUS
(with dread)
It's the G's...

BACK AT MARGE'S

Shaun looks at his mom.

SHAUN
Is it supposed to take this long?

OUTSIDE LOUISE'S

A TV REPORTER looks to his producer.

TV REPORTER
Does the station know anything?

INSIDE LOUISE'S

Louise is stricken. This is her worst fear.

MISSION CONTROL CENTER

Deke tries not to show any emotion in his voice --

DEKE
... this is CapCom. Do you read?

And long beat. He glances to John -- this is bad. Then --

ALAN (ON THE HEADSET)
CapCom this is Freedom 7.

LOUISE'S

ON THE TV: the capsule, chute out, is visible in the distance above the choppy water. Coming down hard but clean.

TV ANNOUNCER
Mission Control is in communication with astronaut Shepard and he is okay -- repeat, he is okay!

The girls let out gasps, hug each other.

OUTSIDE LOUISE'S

A huge CHEER goes up.

BACK AT MARGE'S

It's New Years Eve. Champagne popping, hugs and laughter.

MISSION CONTROL CENTER

The place is on its feet. For every man in there, this is the best day of his life. The astronauts congratulate each other, take deep breaths, wipe away small tears.

LOUISE'S

The girls look at their mother, still stiff in her chair. The capsule SPLASHES DOWN on TV.

GILLIAN
Daddy's fine. He did it!

We hear the room from INSIDE LOUISE'S HEAD, heart pounding, head spinning. Gillian sounds like she's talking from the bottom of a swimming pool. So does --

LOUDEN
You promised the press a comment.

And he gently releases his hand from her grip, leading her --

EXT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The press rushes her as Louise opens the door, almost knocking her down. Louden steps in.

LOUDEN
Everyone stop pushing. Now take three big steps backwards. Mrs. Shepard's not saying a word 'til she's got some breathing room.

They do. Then cameras click and microphones point as a blurry Louise reads from a paper in her hand, monotone:

LOUISE
I am very grateful for the efforts of the entire Mercury Program...

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Louise enters, closes the door. Louden smiles.

LOUDEN
That was good. Well, not good. But okay. As for what happened in here earlier, let me handle it. I'll come up with something.

LOUISE
Thank you. I --

And then -- her legs give out and she faints into his arms.

GILLIAN
Mama!

Louden lays Louise on the couch as Gillian runs to her side. Louise comes to, almost delirious, clutching Louden --

LOUISE
Get a doctor. I think I'm dying --

END ACT 4

ACT 5

EXT. MARGE'S HOUSE - DAY

Marge's driveway is a temporary car wash. Trudy's Impala is soaped and hosed, with multiple moonwagons on deck.

TRUDY
Personally, I think it's a crime to waste a White House visit on Louise Shepard. Forget how she feels about us --

MARGE
It's more how she feels about you.

TRUDY
-- she's just cold.

BETTY
She does put on airs. It's from growing up in that fancy house.

TRUDY
Her father was the DuPonts' groundskeeper. She did not grow up in that house.
(cutting off Betty)
And don't tell me how she's a "real life *Sabrina*" because she is no Audrey Hepburn.

MARGE
Well she definitely didn't marry Humphrey Bogart.

INT. THE WHITE HOUSE - RECEPTION ROOM - EVENING

An elegant dinner is over. Men chat with men, women with women. Alan's with JOHN F. KENNEDY (44 and, well, you know).

JFK
I'm probably not gonna be making the trip, so tell me, really -- what was it like?

Alan just shakes his head.

ALAN
Just -- impossible to describe.

JFK
Okay, I guess they didn't select you for your poetic abilities.

The President laughs and Alan goes along with his joking.

ALAN
No sir...

JFK
So why were you first? They ever say?

ALAN
Not in so many words, but I think they figured since we didn't know what the hell would happen, they wanted the smartest one up there in case something went wrong.

JFK likes this answer.

JFK
Okay, good. Well if you're the smartest one, lemme ask you something. Vice President Johnson thinks the only way we beat the Russians is to get to the moon. D'you think we can do that?

ALAN
You mean -- put a man on the moon?

JKF
Yes. A man who plants the American flag and returns a hero to the whole world.

Alan takes in the enormity of this, then --

ALAN
Yes sir, I think we can.

JFK
Alright, well you would know better than me. We should do it then.
(they laugh, "cheers")
Let's go to the moon.

ANGLE ON

Louise talks with JACKIE KENNEDY (32 and, well, you know). Louise looks lovely and is not intimidated.

JACKIE
... my parents knew the DuPonts well. I went to parties at Longwood Gardens growing up.
(smiles)
Maybe we were at one together?

LOUISE
Oh, wouldn't that be something!
(remembering fondly)
The DuPonts were extremely kind. They had no children but loved to buy things on their travels, so my sister and I got some lovely gifts. It was very special...

Louise's focus is pulled by seeing Alan, still with JFK but now talking to an ATTRACTIVE FEMALE GUEST who has drifted to the men's side of the room. As Alan laughs at something she says, Louise looks away. Jackie notices.

JACKIE
It's hard to be married to an important man.

Louise looks at her. *What is she saying?* But Jackie has a kind, genteel manner with no accusing tone in her voice.

JACKIE (CONT'D)
The stress, the loneliness. Not to mention that anything he wants, he can take.
(off Louise)
I try to focus on what he chooses <u>not</u> to take. I mean, if you add it all up, that's <u>a lot</u> of restraint.

Louise chuckles at the joke.

JACKIE (CONT'D)
See? All it takes is one other woman who can laugh with you. I have my sister. You're lucky you have yours.

LOUISE
(a great sadness)
Actually... my sister died. Alan and I are raising my niece Rose.

JACKIE
Well if you don't have sisters, you need to find them. Because you will not survive without them.

OFF LOUISE as this lands.

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Louise takes the music box out of the drawer.

INT. LOUISE'S HOUSE - THE GIRLS' BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Louise enters and puts the box on a bedside table. On the table is a photo of Rose with a beautiful woman -- LOUISE'S SISTER. She winds the music box and sits, listens, let's the sound bring back memories.

EXT. MARGE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - ANOTHER DAY

Patrick and the other kids run through a SPRINKLER. Marge, Trudy, Betty, Rene and Jo are gathered with a new LIFE magazine, "Exclusive: Mrs. Shepard's story." <u>But the cover is a shot of Alan getting helicoptered out of the ocean</u>.

JO
Looks like someone's photo didn't make the cover...

RENE
I guess each wife has to earn her coverage.

Rene smiles. When her time comes, <u>she'll</u> be a cover girl.

BETTY
(flipping through)
Louden certainly captured Louise's personality -- or lack of one. This story's as dry as a biscuit.

RENE
It's such a missed opportunity to let people know what we're really going through. It wasn't even my husband and I was a complete wreck.

Trudy grabs the magazine from Betty, reads in a prim falsetto, mocking Louise.

TRUDY
"I watched in great peace and joy, knowing that Alan was doing his job without trouble."
(hams it up)
I was <u>never</u> afraid.
(MORE)

TRUDY (CONT'D)
You see, fear is an emotion and I would never lower myself to have one of those --

MARGE
Um, Trudy --

She looks up, sees that all the women are staring at Louise.

LOUISE
Hi.

TRUDY
Oh, hey. I was just --

LOUISE
Making fun of me. I got that. Barely, though. That is a terrible impression.
(smiles, then)
I haven't changed my mind about friends. I still don't want any. But I now believe I need them.
(off their looks)
With what's coming our way, we're all going to need each other.

This hits home for all of them. But especially Betty.

INT. BETTY'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Betty, readying for bed, answers the phone --

BETTY
Hello?

INT. HOLIDAY INN - GUS' ROOM - INTERCUT

Gus is in bed, looking up at the ceiling.

GUS
Hey Betts. Hope you don't mind me calling.

Things have been strained since their blow up in Cocoa Beach.

BETTY
'course not. It's just hard. I know what I know, and you're gonna do what you're gonna do, and how do we ever get past that?

GUS
Well, speakin' of --

BETTY
You've come to your senses and you're droppin' out?

A beat. Gus isn't sure how she's going to take this news.

GUS
Not exactly.
(beat)
I'm next. Mercury-Redstone 4.
(off her silence)
I know you're scared. I'm scared too. And maybe part of me thought I could do this without you. But now that it's real, I know I can't. I need you to believe I can do this.

Betty fights her tears, knows what she has to say.

BETTY
I do believe, Gus. With all my heart I believe.

INT. MARGE'S HOUSE - SHAUN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Marge tucks Shaun into bed.

MARGE
You gonna be okay if I take Acie for his walk?

He nods sleepily and she kisses his head.

MARGE (CONT'D)
Gram should be home from the movies any minute now.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT (ARLINGTON)

Valene sits at the bar, downs a shot of whiskey. She's drunk.

BARTENDER
Alright, Valene. I'm cutting you off. I know you only got two bucks.

VALENE
My daughter gives me money to go to the movies. She's ashamed of me, y'see. Her husband is a very famous man. Or, he's going to be.

BARTENDER
He an actor or something?

VALENE
Actor? Hell no. He's an astronaut.

Down the bar, a MAN looks up, interest piqued. We see that he's jotting down notes on a pad that says "The Arlington Chronicle."

MAN AT THE BAR
An astronaut...? Isn't that something.

VALENE
(eyeballs him)
Buy me a drink and I'll tell you all about it.

She smiles as he pockets his pad and slides over.

INT. HOLIDAY INN - RESTAUARANT - NIGHT

Gordo sits with a Cape Cookie. She hangs on his every word and he, while not crossing any line, is happy for the attention.

CAPE COOKIE
... but the government wouldn't launch a rocket if it wasn't safe --

GORDO
Well, it's as safe as we can make it. But we're doing something that's never been done before.

CAPE COOKIE
So there's a chance you could die??

GORDO
Yeah. A pretty good one.

This is not Gordo showing-off. This is just the truth.

CAPE COOKIE
That is so scary!

ALAN (O.S.)
It's more lonely than scary, if you want to know the truth.

Gordo and the Cookie look up to see Alan heading out.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Not that Gordo here would know. I'm Alan --

CAPE COOKIE
-- Shepard. I know. Wow. Oh. Wow. The first man in space!

GORDO
First <u>American</u> man.

ALAN
(to Gordo)
There's a party at Jim's. You and your friend should come.

CAPE COOKIE
An astronaut party? I'd love to!

The Cookie looks at Gordo with pleading eyes. Alan smiles at Gordo's dilemma. OFF GORDO -- what's he going to do?

INT. TRUDY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Trudy holds the phone.

INT. HOLIDAY INN - GORDO'S ROOM - SAME

The receiver rings and rings, unanswered. MUSIC UP. A contemporary cover of an era-appropriate song about big girls not crying, finding lipstick on his collar, or wondering when we will be loved.

EXT. COCOA BEACH - "THE STRIP" - NIGHT

Flanked by NEON SIGNS for motels with names like *AstroCraft* and *Starlite*, Alan and Gordo drag race their Corvettes. <u>And next to Gordo, the Cookie squeals and tucks under his arm.</u>

INT. TRUDY'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Trudy hangs up the phone, deeply suspicious. Then she hears the DOORBELL. And opens the door to -- Louise.

LOUISE
I couldn't sleep. Was driving around, saw your lights still on.

INT. RENE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rene is removing her make-up when she hears some noise from outside. She walks to the phone in the HALL.

INT. JO'S HOUSE - HALL - NIGHT

JO answers the phone. She's also getting ready for bed.

JO
Hello?

RENE
Is Trudy Cooper having some kind of a party? Look out your window.

JO
If she is, she didn't invite me.

Jo goes to it, peers outside. We don't see what she sees.

EXT. TRUDY'S HOUSE - BACK PORCH - NIGHT

Trudy and Louise now sit with Marge, who's got Acie.

BETTY (O.S.)
Knock knock.

A red-eyed Betty pops her head up over the fence.

BETTY (CONT'D)
I thought I heard music?

Annie walks out of the house, carrying mugs of hot cider. She's flanked by Jo and Rene.

ANNIE
Yyy--ou dddd-id.

The women exchange looks. <u>This is why she's been so silent</u>.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Tttt-urn it up.

RENE
No, change the station. Let's find a better song.

TRUDY
I like this song.

Trudy turns up the RADIO and starts to do a little twist.

TRUDY (CONT'D)
Louise, c'mon --

LOUISE
Um, no. I'm good right here thanks.

MARGE
Oh, did we find the one thing you're not good at? Dancing?

Marge joins Trudy.

LOUISE
I'm a fine dancer.

BETTY
(getting up)
Don't believe you.

Rene takes Annie's hands and twirls her around.

RENE
Annie's got moves. If we had a contest, I think she'd win.

JO
I'll put a dollar on Annie.

LOUISE
Oh, I don't think so.

If you serve Louise Shepard, she dances back. And she steps up with some crazy mish-mash of the Charleston and the Jive that gets everyone laughing.

Trouble will come soon enough. But for now, the women are with each other and on their feet. And their best *American Bandstand* moves take us out as The Astronaut Wives Club is unofficially formed...

END OF PILOT