

BABY, YOU WERE GREAT

Screenplay written by

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Based on the short story *Baby, You Were Great* by

Kate Wilhelm

A brightly lit bedroom. White walls, a canopy bed with soft blue tulle draped over the frame. Posters are thumb-tacked in an orderly manner across the visible walls: A FILM POSTER, an LP COVER, and a collage of photographs. This is a young woman's bedroom. Our view comes from the mirror of a VANITY TABLE reflecting the room in a STATIC SHOT.

VANESSA LOPEZ, 18, enters the bedroom; her voice is loud. She is already in conversation with her mother, SOLEDAD LOPEZ, 46. She has soft brown eyes and a pretty face. Her blonde hair is pinned up to her head with velcro rollers, many around her head. She is evidently getting ready to go somewhere important.

VANESSA
(calling to Soledad)
I'll drive there after. I'm already
late.

SOLEDAD does not reply. Vanessa shuts her bedroom door. She approaches the vanity and sits. Closer on her. She has big, round eyes and plump lips. Her makeup helps accentuate her face. She gives the mirror a winning smile, then squints her eyes and scrunches her mouth inward in a grimace. She relaxes her face and smooths her skin over with her thumbs.

Down on the vanity's table, her eyes land on a small set of stapled papers. The cover reads:

JAVITS PRODUCTIONS

UNTITLED PROJECT # 7

Casting Call

TV SERIES (CASTING: FEMALE, 18-20, lean, beautiful, gifted actress with 2+ years of TV experience)

VANESSA sighs. She shuffles the flyer in between more papers and squeezes them all onto a crammed drawer beneath her vanity. She clicks her SPEAKER on, and POP-PY, UPBEAT MUSIC blares loudly around the room.

In a succession of shots, Vanessa finishes her eye makeup, puts on shiny lipgloss over a pink lip tint, and removes the rollers from her hair, making sure to shake off the curls into loose waves. She dresses in a flowery white top and a jean skirt, with open-toe platform wedges that help with her short height.

One last check in a full-body mirror to the side of her vanity, and VANESSA exits her bedroom.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
(O.S.)
(calling to Soledad)
See you later, Mom!

2 EXT. JAVITS PRODUCTIONS HEADQUARTERS - DAY 2

The JAVITS headquarters is a massive 15-floor building. It is square and metallic, with panels that reflect the line of trees fencing it around. The architecture is futuristic and wide, with glass windows and mirror doors to the outside. It is impossible to view the inside.

3 INT. JAVITS PRODUCTIONS HEADQUARTERS / FLOOR 3 - DAY 3

VANESSA walks across a long hallway lined by doors on one side and by a spectacular view of an indoor garden on the other. She rounds a corner and enters through a glass door. We stay outside. As she steps further into the room, through the door, we can see many other WOMEN, similar to her, sitting in see-through chairs.

4 INT. JAVITS PRODUCTIONS HEADQUARTERS / WAITING ROOM - DAY 4

ON VANESSA as she waits on a chair. She looks forward, squaring her shoulders as she fixes her long hair. A faint sound of surprise comes from somewhere beyond our view, echoing into the waiting room. Vanessa takes out a small compact mirror and checks her lipstick.

ASSISTANT
(O.S.)
Vanessa Lopez?

VANESSA clicks her mirror shut and smiles, the same winning smile from the vanity.

VANESSA
(light)
Here!

5 INT. JAVITS PRODUCTIONS HEADQUARTERS / AUDITION STAGE - DAY

A THREE-WALL SITCOM-LIKE STAGE sits static with warm lights illuminating a fake living room. In the center, a red couch is set with a throw blanket and vibrant pillows. It looks warm. Around the couch, the stage is a cozy American home. The walls are lined with stock photographs, and a few other pieces of mahogany wood finish the set. A fake window shows a setting sun behind the red couch.

In the FIRST-PERSON POV, we move from the side of the stage directly ahead to the couch. The bright lights make it impossible to view a lot beyond the set.

MOVING IN SLOWLY on VANESSA, as her heels click softly on the wooden floor. She steps over the rug under the coffee table and sits carefully on the couch. She adjusts her skirt. Her eyes blink fast when they are hit by the set lights. She moves a hand over her eyes to shield them and laughs nervously in the quiet room. She waits.

CUT to: a ONE-WAY MIRROR on the set. Hold for a beat.

Back in a SLOW PUSH-IN, Vanessa looks down to the floor and clasps her hands by her lap, waiting with pent-up nerves. She waits for her scene partner. A door swings open to the side. Vanessa looks up fast.

QUICK SWIPE to the door. A CRAZED MAN enters fast and heads directly for Vanessa. His eyes are wide and dark. He intends to harm her or violate her. His teeth are bared.

On CRAZED MAN as he walks in an accelerated stride toward her.

VANESSA
(O.S.)
(confused)
Hi. Hello, are you--

The MAN walks faster to her. VANESSA's breathing picks up.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
(O.S.)
(panicked)
What- what are you doing?

The CRAZED MAN grunts and picks up his pace to her. VANESSA SCREAMS a blood-curdling sound. As the MAN reaches VANESSA, he looms over her. He kneels down and puts his hands on her thighs, using his body to lock her legs in place, making her unable to escape. He runs his cheek across her knees and leg.

SLOW PAN OUT as Vanessa writhes and flails, attempting to get away from him.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
(horrified)
STOP! PLEASE, STOP!

The MAN groans and hums at her as he moves his hands and face on her legs.

PULL BACK continues past the set, past the standing lights illuminating the stage. We see the cables and the rest of the bare sound stage on the edges.

Over an INTERCOM, a voice echoes loud across the set.

HERB
(O.S.)
(huskily)
Cut! Hire her.

PAN STOPS. We are at the back of the set, further from the action. The MAN STOPS. He stands and leans down to VANESSA. The SOUND of his lips kissing her cheek echoes across the room.

VANESSA is visibly distraught and traumatized. She shakes violently as the MAN steps away from her and exits the set. She does not move from her cowering position, her hands scrunched up by her chest. Her body fights violent tremors. She gasps out a sob that resonates across the big room.

CUT TO:

6 INT. JAVITS PRODUCTIONS HEADQUARTERS / CASTING ROOM - DAY 6

The casting room is beyond the one-way glass in a dimly lit but elegant room. A few leather chairs line the window viewing into the audition room.

In a profile view, we see HERB JAVITS, 51, sitting on a comfortable leather seat. He wears a sleek HEADSET. It's a band of aluminum metal fit snugly over his forehead. Cushioning layers the inside of the headset. HERB smirks. A door opens to his left. He removes the headset. His brow is shiny with perspiration.

HERB JAVITS
(excited)
Johnny, my boy! Come in.

JOHN LEWISOHN, 36, is handsome but plain. He has brunette hair and muted blue eyes. He is tall, and he wears a smart suit. He stands by the door. His eyes move fast away from HERB and up to the ceiling.

JOHN
(uncomfortable)
Herb.

HERB looks down at his groin area and chuckles roughly.

HERB JAVITS
(amused)
These auditions get me excited.

On JOHN as HERB adjusts himself.

JOHN
Right.
(beat)
When did you start doing auditions
like that?

HERB walks to John and slaps his shoulder in greeting. They walk out of the office and down a long, clean corridor. HERB talks and walks with JOHN. We follow behind them.

HERB JAVITS
Since it works. We had to, Johnny.
That's the six hundred-nineteenth
girl we've tried out. Six hundred
nineteen! All corpses. Dead from
the neck up. Do you have any idea
how long it used to take us to find
that out? Hours for each one. Now
it's a matter of minutes."

JOHN's gait is rigid, whereas HERB's is blasé and confident. They round a corner and reach the beautiful corridors with the internal garden.

JOHN
But she was only a kid, wasn't she?
What about parents, legal rights?

HERB JAVITS
(amused)
That is why we audition eighteen-
year-olds, Johnny Boy. I wasn't
born yesterday. She signed away all
her rights in the audition form
when she came in. They all do. It
is only effective if I hire 'em, of
course. Don't worry.

HERB chuckles a scratchy sound. John is unsure next to him. They climb onto a waiting elevator.

HERB and JOHN stand beside each other, facing forward. The elevator softly hums as it rises bullet-fast to the top floor.

JOHN

When I advised you to find a basic anxiety situation for the tests, I didn't think you'd do this, if I'm honest.

HERB's slight amused smile remains, but his voice is clear and cutting.

HERB JAVITS

In this business, you can't have that stupid fucking voice in your head, John. It'll never make you money like cunning wit can.

JOHN visibly tenses at the change of tone. He nods once. A beat. The elevator dings at arrival.