

ANNA'S MOTHER, by Tom Smith

Characters: Veronica 49, mother to Anna and Sarah
 Sarah 28, her daughter
 Nicole 32, her daughter-in-law
 Bernie 50, Veronica's friend
 Olivia 30s, Entertainment agent

Time/Place: Today. Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Running time: 80 minutes.

Veronica receives news her eldest daughter, Anna, has tragically died while on duty as a firefighter. The news media picks up the story, and soon Veronica is thrust into the national spotlight as the mother of a hero.

After a year speaking to groups and becoming a sort of celebrity, Veronica must decide whether her choice to honor her daughter was based on her love for Anna or something more self-serving.

ANNA'S MOTHER

SCENE THREE

One week later. Stacks of cards and notes and packages on the table and in mail bins. Olivia hugging Veronica. She sits.

OLIVIA

Thanks for seeing me, Veronica. I know it's been a difficult time for you and your family.

VERONICA

Yes.

OLIVIA

I've never been to New Mexico before. You weren't kidding when you said it would be hot.

VERONICA

But it's a dry heat.

OLIVIA

I grew up in Kansas City. The humidity there is brutal.

VERONICA

Does Los Angeles get this hot?

OLIVIA

Not even close. How long have you lived in Las Cruces?

VERONICA

We moved here when I was in junior high. From Tucson. Came out to take care of my grandparents. The house was new then, if you can believe it.

OLIVIA

You've kept it up beautifully.

VERONICA

It's seen better days.

OLIVIA

Haven't we all?

(Short, awkward moment.)

Are we waiting for Sarah?

VERONICA

No.

OLIVIA

Oh, alright. So, as we discussed on the phone, my agency is extremely interested in representing you. We've read about Anna's brave sacrifice and are so compelled by her story.

VERONICA

Her life.

OLIVIA

Hmm?

VERONICA

Not her story: her life.

OLIVIA

Of course. It's amazing all the things she accomplished. The only female firefighter on a squad of 135. Sacrificing her life for someone who turned out to be a friend. Growing up disadvantaged. Being gay. Her life story can truly touch people. Deeply. It already has: look at those vigils.

VERONICA

I still can't figure out why this all happened.

OLIVIA

Because Anna's a hero. Not just because of what she did, but because of who she was. Because of you.

(Veronica is surprised by this.)

No one's ever said that before?

(Veronica shakes her head.)

I know this must seem overwhelming: so many strangers caring about your daughter. But they do. I do.

VERONICA

But why? I mean, firefighters die all the time.

OLIVIA

Not women firefighters. Not women of color.

VERONICA

Anna was white.

OLIVIA

She listed herself as "Mixed Race" on her application with the academy.

VERONICA

She was only a quarter Hispanic.

OLIVIA

It's also the timing that's getting her so much attention. Those Secret Service agents suing the president for gender discrimination; jobs still deemed "beyond women's capabilities." Anna's become a part of that whole national debate.

VERONICA

Sarah says because Anna lived four days before passing that people had time to invest in her. Root for her recovery.

OLIVIA

That's true.

VERONICA

Can you answer something? Why are those reporters still outside?

OLIVIA

There's a tremendous amount of interest. Fueled by you refusing to talk to them. Anna was female, minority, lesbian and poor. She hits all the categories of being disadvantaged in America, yet she still succeeded. That's why the AP picked up her story.

VERONICA

There were over ten thousand people at the vigil in New York.

OLIVIA

Coverage on major networks. The president even mentioned her in yesterday's Tweet. Anna's touched everyone, Veronica.

(Grabs Veronica's hand.)

And now we have the opportunity, you and me, to keep her legacy alive. You read the materials we sent? Saw the people we represent?

VERONICA

It's an impressive list.

OLIVIA

Because you recognize those people—that proves we know what we're doing. My agency gets our clients in front of the right people. And our clients are well-served by us: we've never lost one to another agency: not a single one. Because, above all else, we want to take care of you. This is especially true for our "Inspirational Mothers" division. We understand that for you, this isn't about how much money you'll make. It's about sharing your daughter's story with as many people as you can. To celebrate all the amazing things Anna accomplished. You and you alone have the right to do that; that gift.

VERONICA

I never thought of it like that. A gift.

OLIVIA

It's absolutely true. Because you knew Anna better than anyone else; you've been in her life since the day she was born. It's as much your story as hers.

VERONICA

Anna struggled, you know? She dropped out of college, made some bad choices. But she made her life better because she worked hard and took advantage of opportunities. That's what I want people to know.

OLIVIA

You instilled those values in her. And because of that, four people are alive today. Two children.

VERONICA

I want people to remember the way she lived, not how she died.

OLIVIA

I agree, and that's why I'm here. Everyone knows only one part of her story: her final act of courage. But there's so much more to her than that one moment.

VERONICA

Exactly!

OLIVIA

(Motioning all the cards and packages.)

I mean, just look at how many lives Anna and you have already touched.

VERONICA

I disconnected my phone I was getting so many calls. I'm using Anna's.

OLIVIA

People care about you, Veronica. They want to meet you, hear your story.

VERONICA

Me? But I'm nobody.

OLIVIA

You're Anna's mother.

(Veronica lets that sink in.)

So, let's discuss ways in which we can honor Anna together.

(Switching into a more business-like tone.)

We need to share your story with as many people as we can, as many times as we can, in as many ways as we can. The days of one exclusive are long gone. We'll have to be aggressive in multiple outlets from the very beginning.

VERONICA

Ok.

OLIVIA

First, we'll proceed traditionally. I've got two writers to ghost-write—with your full participation of course—a book we'll release under your name. There'll be a campaign around that book while will include print, internet, social media and promos on multiple platforms. I already have a publisher ready to commit once it's complete. We'll need to move quickly on all this. I'm hoping to see final galleys in two weeks. That's totally do-able since the book doesn't need to be more than a hundred and fifty pages and, frankly, a lot of that can be photos. We'll also set you up on a speaking tour. You'll go out to a few small markets at first, just to get your feet wet. We'll send you out initially with a coach, most likely Kirin, who will work on polishing your presentation and helping you navigate the QAs.

(Sees Veronica is lost for a moment.)

Question/Answer sessions. When the book goes to press, we'll send you to larger markets, scheduling you on LMPs and AMSs—"local morning programs" and "afternoon mom shows." The book should be in stores right as we hit national news programs. Any questions so far?

VERONICA

You've thought a lot about this already.

OLIVIA

Slow me down if you need to. I tend to go LA speed without realizing it.

VERONICA

No, I've got it. A book, a speaking tour and interviews.

OLIVIA

Now, don't be intimidated by the QAs and interviews. They're all the same. All you have to do is talk about yourself. That's easy enough, isn't it?

VERONICA

I guess so.

OLIVIA

So that's what we're prepared to commit to today. In the contract, we call that the Alpha Phase. But—and I can't impress this enough—we're here to help you reach your goals, not ours. We'll only do what you want us to.

VERONICA

...You mentioned other possibilities on the phone. Movies?

OLIVIA

Well, sure, there are additional Phases to explore if you sign with us. Assuming the book sells remotely close to what we anticipate, a screenwriter we've worked with—she and her partner have written a ton of stuff you've seen—will draft a screenplay and we'll pitch it as wide-release. Truthfully, this story is probably more indie, but you get the right money behind it, the right star and it might go wide. If there isn't studio interest but it still has legs, we'll pitch it to one of the original programmers. God forbid there's no bites there, we'll re-draft it into a "made-for": a TV movie for one of the smaller cable channels. But in any one of these scenarios, millions of people will hear your story.

VERONICA

You really think this could become a movie?

OLIVIA

Look at how many actors win Oscars playing real people. And throughout all this, starting the moment you sign, we'll be refining your brand so you can best reach your target audience:

women, gays, families of gays, households with income under 40K, people of color, and single mothers.

VERONICA

That's a lot.

OLIVIA

Three-quarters of the country. Which is why other agencies are talking with you as well, I'm sure. But can they also get you talk shows, radio, magazine features, keynote addresses, rallies—

(Sees Veronica kind of glaze over.)

blah-blah-blah. Sorry, Veronica. I don't mean to overwhelm you. It's just that we have a very small window of time. If you continue without representation, those reporters outside will eventually get what they want and you'll have nothing to show for it. But with my agency—we'll provide you with opportunities to control how your story is told and we'll get you compensation for it. But that means, unfortunately, that I'll need a firm commitment from you no later than 9 a.m. tomorrow morning, which I know feels rushed. But we only have a few months, a year tops if that lawsuit drags on, before people will want to move on to something else. But if we're lucky, and we think we might be in this case, the federal lawsuit will blow up—maybe additional agents will come forward. Now, I know you're wondering about compensation: how much you'll earn and how much my agency keeps. That's ok; don't feel guilty about it; that's all part of this. Will you make money? Yes. A lot. Are we talking thousands or hundreds of thousands? Hundreds; more if the book goes bestseller or we get a movie made. In the Alpha Phase, the speaking tour will make you the most. We can get you 50 to 60 grand plus expenses per speaking engagement; more if we book a national event. At some point, that'll drop down to 10 or 20 grand and we'll stay there until the calls stop coming. How much of that will you keep? I hope most of it—which is why you'll need a good lawyer. Do you have one already?

VERONICA

No. The only one I've ever worked with was for my divorce.

OLIVIA

Then I'll direct you to some in Las Cruces or, if you prefer, I can connect you with an entertainment lawyer in L.A. we've worked with before very successfully. In fact, she's already reviewed your contract—just in case!—and she's got time this morning to speak with you on the phone about it. Now, I realize you probably don't have a wad of cash to pay a lawyer. So, because you'd be a very special client to us, we are prepared to pick up any lawyer's fees, whether you sign with us or not, assuming you sign a Non-Compete and Sole Consideration to Contract.

VERONICA

What's that?

OLIVIA

A document that states that until you officially say no to our offer, you can't solicit or negotiate a deal with anyone else. You can't talk to anyone except your lawyer until our negotiations are complete.

VERONICA

And I have to sign this?

OLIVIA

Only if you want us to pay your legal fees. Otherwise, you can hire a lawyer at your own expense and talk to whomever you wish. But, Veronica, the reason my agency can afford to pay for this is because we're the most successful in our field. We take care of everything and, at the same time, you'll make a lot of money. Enough to pay off Sarah's student loans. Buy a new house. Create a scholarship in Anna's name. Retire. But more importantly: we'll ensure that Anna's passing means something.

VERONICA

...What about Sarah and Nicole?

OLIVIA

We're only prepared to extend an offer to you. Nicole was only together with Anna for three years. She can't speak to Anna's childhood or her struggles after your divorce. And, speaking as someone who has two sisters, I'd hate for either one of them to share my story with the world. However, if someone specifically asks for either Sarah or Nicole, we'll contact them. In those cases, we might be able to represent them on a one-time basis.

VERONICA

What about my job? I can't go away for weeks at a time.

OLIVIA

You'd have to quit. For the next year, you'll need to be available all day every day.

VERONICA

But I've worked my way up. I'm four bucks above minimum there.

OLIVIA

(Stifling a smile.)

You won't have to worry about that. You'll make a year's salary with one speaking engagement.

VERONICA

Jesus!

OLIVIA

People want to hear what you have to say.

VERONICA

One final question. I have a friend: Bernie.

OLIVIA

The same one who wrote the articles?

VERONICA

Yeah. She asked if she could write a book about Anna.

OLIVIA

(Startled.)

Did you tell her she could?

VERONICA

No, not yet. I'd like her to though.

OLIVIA

Did you talk terms? How much you or she would get paid?

VERONICA

Oh, no, it didn't go that far.

OLIVIA

So there's no written agreement?

VERONICA

No, she just asked.

OLIVIA

(Relieved.)

Fantastic! Well, do you want her to write it, Veronica?

VERONICA

...Sure. I mean, she knows...knew...Anna.

OLIVIA

Then let your lawyer know and she can get negotiate that into your contract.

VERONICA

So it's possible?

OLIVIA

Everything's possible for you, Veronica. Now.

(Pulling out a contract and handing it to Veronica.)

So, what do you say?

Lights fade.