

THE C WORD

Episode 1 - Ego Death

Written and Created by

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INT. PUTNEY ARTS THEATRE - NIGHT

Dimly lit auditorium with several people spaced out between the seats.

ELIZA, 32, British-Italian, stands under a spotlight dressed in an imitation of her mother: leather jacket, leather pants, kitten heels and a cigarette dangling from the corner of her mouth.

It's the opening night of her one-woman play, The C Word.

ELIZA

September 11th 2001, the day my
mother left the house and never
came home.

A single tear rolls down Eliza's cheek.

Eliza's father, PEPE, 60, British-Italian, skin like a leather bag, sits in the front row, shakily recording the performance on an old video camera, dazed but supportive.

The audience looks bored. An audience member yawns loudly.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Some may say that my mother was
selfish for what she did, but is it
selfish to know your worth? To know
you are destined for greatness; I
don't think so...but then again,
I've always been my mother's
daughter--

The FIRE ALARM rings inside the theatre; lights come on, dozing audience members perk up, confused.

Eliza's sister, CARLA (30, British-Italian, looks harmless but would knock you out), locks eyes with Eliza, imitates putting a gun in her mouth and pulling the trigger.

Eliza tries to stay in character.

SPENCER, 50s, grey all over, Eliza's agent checks his watch, looking unimpressed.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

It was only with time that I was
able to understand the magnitude of
her sacrifice--

FIREFIGHTER

EVERYONE NEEDS TO EVACUATE.

FIREFIGHTERS usher the remaining audience members to the FIRE EXIT. Carla smirks. Pepe turns off the video camera. Eliza remains on stage.

ELIZA
Tickets are non-refundable!

INT. BELLUCI'S CAFE - DAY

Belluci's interior decor is cheap and cheerful: it's a modest size with vintage paintings of London, cracked leather sofas, scratched, wobbly wooden tables, and mismatched furniture.

CARLA - TALKING HEAD

Carla points at a black-and-white photo on the wall.

CARLA
I'm Carla, the Store Manager at Belluci's. This is my Nonno, Giovanni. He built this coffee shop in 1973 after immigrating. It's a family tradition for the eldest son to take over and run the business, but thanks to feminism, here I am.

Carla refills the coffee machines.

Eliza bursts into the shop carrying a large black bin bag.

Carla looks suspiciously at Eliza and the bag.

CARLA (CONT'D)
Did you get evicted?

Eliza forces an exaggerated laugh and walks towards a door labelled 'STAFF ONLY'.

Carla rushes past her to block the door.

PRODUCER (O.S.)
Is this your sister?

Yes.	ELIZA	No.	CARLA
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ELIZA (CONT'D)
I need to talk to Dad.

CARLA
Why?

ELIZA

This place looks stuck in the '80s
and not in a cool, gentrified way.

CARLA

Since when did you care about this
place?

ELIZA

Oh, didn't he tell you?
(to camera)
This will be fun.

CARLA

What are you talking about?

INT. BELLUCI'S OFFICE - DAY

Carla stomps around the office. Pepe rubs his temples, tired
and distressed.

CARLA

MANAGER?

Eliza smiles smugly at the camera.

CARLA (CONT'D)

HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO ME?

PEPE

Because she needs help.

CARLA

Psychiatric help.

ELIZA

May I interject?

CARLA

She's not even trained.

PEPE

She'll learn. She needs a purpose.

ELIZA

I have a purpose. I need money.

CARLA

(to ELIZA)

You have a personality disorder.

Eliza mimics a cat's meow with a clawing motion to the
camera.

CARLA (CONT'D)
What about my purpose?

PEPE
I'm promoting you.

Carla's rage diffuses on the word 'promoting'.

CARLA
Promotion? Really?

Pepe nods and hands Carla a contract. Carla skim-reads it.

PEPE
HR Director. All yours, Bambina.

CARLA
I want an office.

PEPE
Use the stockroom.

Carla smiles and kisses Pepe's cheek. Eliza stands up.

Eliza outstretches her arms for a hug. Carla shoves past her.

PEPE (CONT'D)
Play nice with your sister.

ELIZA
I'm always nice.

INT. BELLUCI'S CAFE - DAY

Eliza eyes up the tip jar, Carla immediately moves it.

Carla restocks the fridges, her face blank and void of emotion.

Eliza haphazardly wipes the counters and pockets coins from the tip jar when Carla isn't looking.

CARLA - TALKING HEAD

CARLA
I'm glad my hard work isn't going unnoticed...I love my dad, but honestly, this place would crash and burn without me...

Carla scowls as Eliza struggles to open a coffee bean bag.

Eliza rips the bag open with her teeth and spills beans everywhere.

Carla looks at the camera and mouths 'HELP'.

CARLA (CONT'D)

Don't tell him I said this, but for years, he thought cold brew was iced coffee...can you believe that?

PRODUCER (O.S.)

What is the difference?

CARLA

Are you serious?

Carla wipes the cutlery, inspecting every piece to ensure they are pristine.

Eliza struggles to work the coffee grinder machine, spilling grounds all over the once-clean countertop.

Carla shoos her away. Eliza nudges Carla; Carla smacks her with a wet dishcloth and Eliza retreats.

ELIZA - TALKING HEAD

ELIZA

How do I feel working with my sister? I mean, you've met her...she's a sociopath.

Carla meticulously organises the display counter, ensuring none of the cake slices touch.

Carla turns the door sign to 'OPEN'. Customers enter.

Eliza walks around the cafe, tidying up tables and making small talk with elderly customers.

ELIZA - TALKING HEAD

ELIZA

Working in a coffee shop is quite similar to working in a theatre. When you're on the floor, you must be ON, wear a big smile, participate with the audience, and give them the show they paid for.

(MORE)

ELIZA (CONT'D)

If you think about it, life is a performance, and the world is your stage...how was that? Was it too CBBC? Can I go again?

Carla continues tidying the store.

Eliza leans lazily on the bar, scrolling on her phone.

HARRIET, 40s, plain-looking, wound tighter than a corkscrew, stares at her in contempt.

A customer chewing gum approaches the bar.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Good morning. What can I get you?

GUM CUSTOMER

Where's your bin?

ELIZA

I can take it.

Eliza presents her hand, the customer spits their gum directly into it and leaves. Eliza's jaw falls open in disgust.

Carla approaches the bar, loose papers falling out of ring binders; Harriet instinctively picks them up.

CARLA

SHIT. SHIT. SHIT.

HARRIET

What's wrong?

CARLA

The mystery shopper is coming in, and I haven't briefed the trainees.

HARRIET

I can brief them.

CARLA

Only senior staff can do it.

Eliza's eyes light up with glee.

ELIZA

I can handle it. I love roleplay.

HARRIET

It's not a game.

CARLA

Eliza, why don't you make yourself useful and wipe the windows out front?

ELIZA

Carla, why don't you make yourself useful and lick my arse from back to front?

An elderly customer stares at Eliza in disgust.

HARRIET

Carla's maintained a four-star rating four years in a row, the highest in Putney.

ELIZA

I bet I can get us five stars.

Harriet and Carla erupt into mocking laughter.

CARLA

No one has a five-star rating.

ELIZA

Challenge accepted.

BEARDED CUSTOMER approaches the bar.

BEARDED CUSTOMER

Is the manager around?

ELIZA

Yes.

Yes.

CARLA

BEARDED CUSTOMER

Men's toilets are clogged.

ELIZA

I'll get that sorted.
Have a wonderful day!

Bearded Customer smiles at Eliza and drops a pound coin in the tip jar.

Eliza turns to Carla and points to her MANAGER badge with a shit-eating grin.

ELIZA - TALKING HEAD

ELIZA

I was born to be in charge.

CARLA - TALKING HEAD

CARLA
She won't last a day.

Harriet serves customers alongside JJ, 19, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. Harriet watches JJ steam the milk.

HARRIET
That's enough, now pour it in.

JJ haphazardly pours the milk into the coffee cup; it splashes and spills everywhere.

JJ
Like that?

HARRIET
Obviously not.

Harriet passes JJ a damp cloth. Eliza approaches the bar, eyes glued to her phone as she furiously types.

JJ
Eliza! I'm a huge fan.

ELIZA
Cute. What have you seen?

JJ
Carla showed us your Verruca ad.

Eliza's smile slowly falters.

ELIZA
I need this place spotless.
I've invited Spencer here to chat.

JJ
Is that your boyfriend?

ELIZA
My agent.

JJ
Is he taking on new talent?

ELIZA
He only works with clients with stage experience. I could give you some agencies for extra work if you're interested.

JJ
That's okay. I'm at RADA.

Eliza struggles to hide her jealousy.

ELIZA
The men's toilets are clogged.
Sort them out?

JJ's smile fades; she removes her apron and grabs a plunger.

INT. STOCK ROOM - DAY

Eliza does some vocal warm-ups and massages her cheeks.

ELIZA - TALKING HEAD

ELIZA
I've spent years trying to revive
local theatre, but unfortunately,
we live in the sanitised world of
television.

Eliza, dressed in a shirt and tie, takes off her makeup; JJ
slicks her hair back with gel -- for a more androgynous style.

JJ holds up the phone to frame Eliza and presses record.

JJ
ACTION.

ELIZA
This is Eliza Belluci, age 28, for
the role of Lee.

Eliza walks out of the frame and walks back in character.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
(teary)
So, what?
You don't love me anymore?
Just like that?

JJ (O.C.)
I don't trust you.

ELIZA
Give me another chance.

JJ (O.C.)
It's not that simple--

ELIZA
BULLSHIT. I KNOW YOU LOVE ME.

JJ (O.C.)
That's not your line.

ELIZA
(out of character)
What?

JJ (O.C.)
Your line is, "But you're all I
have, Elaine."

ELIZA
(groans)
One more time, from the top.

JJ (O.C.)
Are you sure you're supposed to be
auditioning for the male part?

ELIZA
This shows my range.

Carla suddenly enters the stockroom, hitting ELIZA with the door.

CARLA
What the fuck are you doing?

JJ stops recording.

ELIZA
Just showing our newbie where we
keep the stock.

Carla looks Eliza up and down.

CARLA
JJ, can you go back to the bar,
please?

JJ scurries out. Carla shuts the door behind her. Eliza bites her lip, looking sheepish.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Pepe sits at his desk, his laptop open on Match.com. He slowly types out a reply to a woman named Shirley.

PEPE
(to himself)
"Hello there, can I buy you a
drink? Maybe a Shirley Temple?
Winky face."

He looks at the camera with an impressed smile.

Suddenly, the office door swings open.

Carla and Eliza burst in, bickering like teenagers.

Pepe shuts his laptop.

PEPE (CONT'D)
Hey! Hey! What's going on?

CARLA
I can't believe how selfish you
are!

ELIZA
I'm ambitious, but you wouldn't
know the difference.

CARLA
Ambitious? You're fucking deranged!

ELIZA
Jealousy is a disease; get well
soon.

PEPE
STOP IT, BOTH OF YOU.

Carla and Eliza freeze. Pepe looks at them, disappointed.

PEPE (CONT'D)
What happened to playing nice like
a happy musical family?

CARLA
You need to fire her!

PEPE
I'll do no such thing.

ELIZA
HA, SUCK IT, BITCH.

Carla flicks Eliza's ear, Eliza screams in fake agony.

PEPE
 (in Italian)
 Hey, stop it, watch your language.

CARLA
 Dad, she always does this; she
 takes something I care about and
 fucks with it just because she can.

ELIZA
 That is not true. You haven't even
 trained up your newbies; how is
 that my fault?

PEPE
 I'm too tired and too old for
 this...my heart is weak...

Carla's attitude immediately switches

CARLA
 Are you okay, Dad?
 You should go home and look after
 yourself.

PEPE
 How can I? Who's going to look
 after you, huh? Acting like bratty
 little kids.

Pepe mimics their whining, and Carla and Eliza stare at the floor.

PEPE (CONT'D)
 (to CARLA)
 Bambina, let Eliza do the training.
 She's more than capable.

Eliza looks at the camera and smirks.

PEPE (CONT'D)
 Eliza, show your sister some
 respect.

Eliza's smirk fades.

Carla raises her eyebrows at the camera, pleased.

PEPE (CONT'D)
 You have a lot to learn from her.
 This is your last chance, don't
 disappoint me.

Eliza sighs and storms out. Carla follows behind.

Pepe opens his laptop and sees a new reply from Shirley.

Pepe lowers his laptop screen and gestures to the camera crew to leave the room.

INT. STAFF ROOM - DAY

MAX, 21, handsome yet clueless, raps quietly to himself, writing lyrics on a napkin.

JJ enters, her arms and apron covered in milk. She walks to the sink and begins washing it off.

MAX

Oi, JJ! Can you listen to this,
then tell me what you think?

Max begins to rap badly. JJ stands awkwardly.

MAX (CONT'D)

(rapping)

She said she wanted to take me
home,
but her room is a mess,
So we sneak into the disabled
toilet,
She lets my hands roam up her
dress,
Now she says she's feeling
confused,
but that we can still be friends,
Promised nothing would ever change
But then blocks me on Instagram

JJ looks nervously at the camera.

JJ

Did you write that?

MAX

Yeah, it's a poem about the first
time I felt abandoned.

JJ

It's...cool.

JJ looks wide-eyed at the camera again.

MAX

Appreciate it.

JJ - TALKING HEAD

JJ

(smitten)
That was the first time Max used my
name...he usually says, 'Oi, you,'
so I guess that's progress.

MAX - TALKING HEAD

MAX

I'm used to getting a lot of female
attention from all ages...but people
assume I'm a player because I'm a good-
looking guy, which hurts.
I respect women.

EXT. SMOKING AREA - DAY

Carla carries two full bin bags to the dumpster; one bag
splits open, spilling coffee grounds everywhere.

CARLA

Fuck sake.

Carla tosses the in-tact bin bag in the dumpster. As she
turns around, the FIRE EXIT door closes behind her and locks.

CARLA (CONT'D)

NO. NO. NO.

Carla sees the gate for the dumpsters is padlocked. She pats her
pockets and realises her phone and keys are missing.

In pure desperation, Carla yanks the FIRE EXIT handle, but no
luck.

CARLA (CONT'D)

FUCK.

(to camera)

Please don't film this.

INT. BELLUCI'S CAFE, BAR - DAY

The store is mostly empty.

Harriet, Max and JJ stare impatiently at Eliza while she
flicks through the EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK, struggling to find the
page she's looking for until Harriet finds it.