

BLACK WIDOW JOURNALIST

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Black Widow Journalist

FADE IN:

Act One

EXT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE - DAY

GEORGE WHITTELL JR. (86), a severely weathered curmudgeon, sits in a wheelchair on a huge deck overlooking Lake Tahoe in the bright sun. He's wearing a captain's hat, blue blazer, pressed white shirt, and green wool blanket covering his legs. Four mynah birds are equally silent in antique cages nearby. George always speaks in a gruff voice.

SUPER: Summer home of George Whittell Jr., east shore of Lake Tahoe, May 1968.

George pulls old newspaper clippings from his coat pocket and examines them: "Rich Man Never Worked," "Millionaire Playboy's Den at Lake Tahoe," and "Girls, Drinking, Gambling and George Whittell Jr." He looks out over the grounds and DAYDREAMS.

FLASHBACK "August 1942."

We see a wild party with forty scantily-clad GUESTS (20-40), drinking and laughing, including five naked SHOWGIRLS (21-25) sunbathing on towels near the Lake. Suddenly, George (then 60; in a swimsuit and Captain's cap) rides up on horseback with a bottle of scotch in one hand. He laughs, and forces the Showgirls into the lake. He yells.

GEORGE

When men stop boozing, womanizing
and gambling, the bloom is off the
rose!

George hears the door open behind him and the DAYDREAM ENDS. He shoves the newspaper clippings back in his pocket.

END FLASHBACK

RUTH CASEY (50), dressed in a nurse's uniform, is putting on a long, tan camel-hair coat as she steps onto the deck from the main house. Ruth is as sweet as candy.

RUTH

Out here daydreaming again,
Captain?

GEORGE

Having more trouble remembering what really happened compared to all those crazy stories they write about me.

RUTH

Sure you're going to be okay?

The birds remain silent. George shakes his head.

GEORGE

Told ya, I'll be fine. Just don't trust my own memories anymore.

Ruth tucks George's blanket into the chair.

RUTH

We'll be eight hours. Overnight if I can't find all the supplies or if the weather turns sour. Joseph is driving me.

She puts on white gloves.

GEORGE

I know. I've got Henri. We'll manage! Off with ya.

RUTH

Call the Zephyr Cove sheriff to hunt me down if needed, not the others.

GEORGE

I know.

Ruth checks the brakes on the wheelchair.

RUTH

Others are still mad at you for that land-deal gone sour.

GEORGE

(angry)

I know that, Nurse Ruth! Now, off you go.

RUTH

You go right inside if that wind picks up again!

George gives Ruth the evil eye. Ruth smiles.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Better smile or I won't remember to
buy your favorite scotch.

She turns to walk away. George semi-smiles.

GEORGE

That's insubordination!

Ruth smiles as she shuts the door to the lodge. We hear a car start up. The birds SQUAWK until the sound of the car dissipates. George looks worried. He glances over to the corner of the deck. We see a shotgun leaning against the house. George looks back across the lake. The birds are still silent.

George rests his eyes. Suddenly, the birds SQUAWK like crazy.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

No car!

He struggles to get to his shotgun, as the birds go nuts. George peeks around to the hill slope. He sees a trespasser, Samantha (SAM) Eriksson (25), in an overstuffed goose-down jacket, Levi jeans, hiking boots, wool cap, and backpack. She readies her CAMERA as she struggles down a steep rock staircase. In a clumsy manner, George poorly aims and fires the shotgun. White feathers fly from one shoulder of Sam's coat. Sam screams, spins, falls back, and hits her head on a stone step. Her camera smashes against the rocks.

George yells as blood flows from her head.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Henri! Henri! There's been an
accident! Henri!

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE OPIUM DEN - NIGHT

Sam is groggy as she tries to sit up in the small rock alcove with a thin mattress on it. She sees a fireplace with a devil on the metal screen. She surveys the small room, disoriented. A thick door is closed. One small light bulb dimly shines. She feels bandages on her shoulder and head. She's dizzy, and IMAGINES that her boyfriend, JOHNNY CHASE (25) from the Reno Examiner's mail room is laying in an adjacent alcove smoking a drug pipe. He's a dead ringer for Jimi Hendrix (tie-dye T-shirt, torn jeans, sandals).

SAM

I told you, I'm doing this myself!

JOHNNY

Coollest place I've ever seen!
 (beat)
 Don't assassinations take two of
 us?

SAM

You mean character assassinations?
 I search for truth and root out
 social injustice!

JOHNNY

Ha! Like the other two interviews,
 Kaiser and Mansfield. I forgot.
 I'll go back to my stable and wait
 for your call, Don Quixote!

SAM

Wait! Have you got another camera?

JOHNNY

Don't need a camera. The eyes are
 the windows to the soul.

Sam falls back.

SAM

Damn. I died and went to Hell!

A moment later, she sits up again. Johnny is gone! She's
 rolls her eyes in disbelief and regains her faculties.

SAM (CONT'D)

Wait! I don't believe in Hell!

She struggles to her feet, and wobbles to the door. It's
 locked. She struggles but her shoulder and head hurt. She
 looks around.

SAM (CONT'D)

Where's my coat? Where's my
 backpack?

(beat, looks around)

Where the hell am I?

She pounds on the door.

SAM (CONT'D)

Let me out of here! I know my
 rights. Let me out!

Sam hears light footsteps.

SAM (CONT'D)
 Small, leather heels, Oxfords, I
 bet. Ow!

She pounds on the door again, but grabs her head, then her
 shoulder.

SAM (CONT'D)
 Ow! Let me out.

The door opens. Sam makes out the image of a short Frenchman,
 HENRI (48) with a heavy accent, wearing yellow dishwashing
 gloves, and carrying a shotgun.

HENRI
 I am on-REE, the cook.

SAM
 (groggy)
 On-REE? Oh, Henry. You're French.

HENRI
 Oui. I bandaged you. Carried you
 here after your accident.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Henri leads Sam into the rock tunnel to the lodge.

SAM
 That was no accident. He shot me!
 Is this a tunnel? A mine?

HENRI
 Follow me. Captain is waiting.

Henri walks behind Sam as she struggles up a long rock tunnel
 to the kitchen.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Sam studies every detail of the kitchen. She eyes the weather
 indicators, alarm system, food and appliances, small bedrooms
 for the servants, and huge fan-like machine on the way to a
 steep staircase.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sam enters the room and sees George in his wheelchair, going
 through the contents of her backpack.

SAM
 Captain? Looks like I found the
 place.

She turns to speak to Henri.

SAM (CONT'D)
 Henri, my name is...

Henri is gone. Sam sees her smashed camera and grabs it.

SAM (CONT'D)
 My camera! It's ruined.

GEORGE
 Miss Samantha Eriksson. News
 reporter for the Reno Examiner.

SAM
 You're George Whittell Junior. You
shot me! I saw you shoot me!

Sam angrily looks around the room. She studies a lion skin.

GEORGE
 Didn't see you. I just shot!
 Trespassing. You came to rob me.

SAM
 Rob you?

Sam studies a motion-picture projector. George points to her
 smashed camera.

GEORGE
 Of my privacy. Maybe more. I called
 the sheriff.

SAM
 Don't think so. Would have been
 here by now. Maybe I'm like the
 cook you got mad at and tossed
 overboard from a yacht in 1922.

George stares at the interloper.

SAM (CONT'D)
 Paid him five grand for the story
 to go away. Or your first wife who
 your parents bought off, and got it
 annulled for you.

Sam circles George like prey.

SAM (CONT'D)

Or Evelyn Turner, the sexy blonde you hired in 1930 for a two-day bash who claimed you had her horse-whipped by two women, while you watched.

George looks more defiant.

SAM (CONT'D)

A jury awarded her five grand.

GEORGE

I've had enough out of you...

SAM

(interrupting)

Or the San Carlos cop you shot in the arm in the 1940s. He'd seen you empty your revolver into a woman's car in a jealous rage.

GEORGE

I'd been drinking! So what? And let me tell you, you trespassing, nosy reporter originally from Berkeley, California -- I saw your driver's license, library card, and old student ID -- you're not getting a story from me! Tell your boss, that Editor-in-Chief Jimmy Keenan, of that worthless rag called the Reno Examiner, that I said never!

(he struggles to stand and yell)

I'm proud of never working a day in my life. I never liked most people, and most never liked me. I have no apologies. And nobody's gonna interview me!

George sits back down, exhausted.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Get your things, and get out.

Sam paces while yelling back.

SAM

It's nighttime, I've been shot, my head hurts like a mother...

(beat)

And my editor, a chauvinist asshole like you, sent me here to fail.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

To get a fluff piece about a millionaire playboy. Gave me one day to research your life and get an interview. You're all pigs!

George snickers rudely.

GEORGE

Second day on the job. Ha! What will you make, seventy-five hundred a year?

Sam looks away.

SAM

I'll make nothin' if I don't get this filler story.

GEORGE

How'd you get here, Miss Samantha Eriksson?

SAM

Hitchhiked. Everybody calls me Sam.

GEORGE

'Cause you dress like a boy?

SAM

My camping clothes. Prepared to camp out up the mountain there.

GEORGE

Camp? You've got no tent. Just cheese, salami, and apples.

SAM

And water, toilet paper, matches, and a flashlight. Everything a real woman needs. Backpacked through the Canadian Rockies with less.

(angry)

You shot me!

(softly)

Do you remember a beach party here in August 1942?

GEORGE

What if I do?

George finds of Photo of himself and three showgirls the photo is dated 1942. He stares at it.

SAM

Remember a showgirl from the Cal-
Neva club named Bonnie Eriksson?
Long, blonde hair. Big...

George stars at one of the girls in the photo.

GEORGE

Don't play that game on me...

SAM

(sad)

I was born nine months later in
1943. My mom called me two weeks
before she died last year on her
death bed to tell me a story. The
least you can do is get me a
scotch!

George tosses the photo down. Then he turns his head and
yells though the open door to the kitchen stairway.

GEORGE

Didn't shoot you on purpose. No
proof. Henri, bring us a bottle.
(turns to Sam)
One drink and you go.

Sam sits on the couch and winces in pain.

SAM

I looked you up in the library,
after she died, and said forget it.
Then I got the reporter job at the
Reno Examiner. When I got this
assignment, I really dug into your
past. All in one day.

GEORGE

How did you research me in one day?

SAM

Overnight, actually. All the
newspapers are on microfiche.
Hundreds of tiny negatives, but I'm
a speed-reader. I scanned from 1936
when you bought this side of the
lake, to the present. The
microfiche said your filthy rich
parents left you everything. You
never worked a day in your life.

GEORGE

So you did all of your scientific homework, and learned nothing! Mark Twain said, "There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesale returns of conjecture out of such a trifling investment of fact." Same is true about your newspaper business!

George pulls out the newspaper clippings from his pocket, and waves them at Sam.

SAM

It's all I had to go on! And apparently you like to read 'em.

GEORGE

Thin ice. Lies and thin ice! I don't believe a word of it.

Henri enters with a shiny silver platter, a fancy bottle of scotch, a small crystal bowl of ice cubes, and two glasses. He pours two glasses and leaves without speaking.

SAM

Thanks, Henri. And thanks for bandaging me up.

George waits for Henri to leave.

GEORGE

We don't converse with staff.

SAM

We do as we please.

George turns and grunts before sipping his scotch. Sam chugs it down in one gulp. George is annoyed.

GEORGE

You can go now.

SAM

Sorry, Captain. Haven't got my fluff story yet. Where's your wife, Elia?

GEORGE

Paris.

SAM

Driver? Nurse?

GEORGE
Fetching supplies.

Sam pours herself and George another scotch. She chugs hers again, crouches down, and begins throwing her things back into her backpack.

SAM
Listen, Captain. I get it. You inherited millions, disappointed your parents, you were harsh with some people, and now you're a lonely, bitter old man.

GEORGE
See? There is no damn fluff story. I'll die before I do a paternity test. Go away!

As Sam stands with her backpack, and tosses on her down coat which is hemorrhaging feathers from the shoulder, she faints and crashes to the floor. George yells down to the kitchen.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Henri! Henri!

Moments later, Sam comes to with Henri helping her up to the couch.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Shouldn't drink with a head injury. You learn anything at college?

Henri exits quickly. Sam mumbles, as she collapses into the comfortable couch.

SAM
Thanks, Henri.

Sam blacks out. Moments later, she comes to, and sees that Henri has delivered hot soup, warm bread and butter, and hot tea on fancy china. Sam grunts and pulls herself up to a sitting position. George studies Sam.

GEORGE
Henri thought you should eat.

SAM
He's a saint.

GEORGE
Hardly. Elia and I plucked him out of a nice kitchen on the wharf, before Immigration caught him.

SAM
Private chef? Or slave of the
castle?

GEORGE
I pay him fair wages.

SAM
Does he pay taxes? Can he leave any
time he wants? Can he have guests
over? What are you, eighty-six,
Captain?

George ignores her. He sips his scotch, and grunts.

GEORGE
Yes! So leave me in peace.

SAM
What I mean is, you've had a target
on your back your entire life. I
understand why you don't believe
me.

GEORGE
You have no idea.

George leans back and DAYDREAMS.

FLASHBACK

EXT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE - DAY

From a hillside on George's property, Two FBI Agents (40s)
are lying down in black suits, looking through binoculars at
the Thunderbird Yacht just offshore. Three Showgirls (21-25)
and three men (all in bathing suits) are drinking and
laughing. George (68) has his captain's hat on.

SUPER "July 1948"

AGENT #1
It's Whittell, but who's with him?

AGENT #2
Maybe Sinatra and that other guy
from the Casino. Who knows?

AGENT #1
Dean Martin? The Governor?

AGENT #2
Can't tell. Could be anyone?

AGENT #1
Anyone who's filthy rich.

They hear a GROWL. They look behind them and see a CHEETAH!
The agents scream and run. George looks in their direction
from the yacht and laughs.

END FLASHBACK

George smirks as he hears Sam's voice.

SAM
And according to the actuarial
tables of life expectancy, you're
reaching...

GEORGE
(angry)
Don't remind me. Been in this chair
for over eight years!

SAM
Don't get pissed at me, Captain.
I'm only the messenger. We may not
get to pick our lot in life, but we
choose how to live it.

George sips his soup, alternating with scotch.

GEORGE
And you choose to bother people.

Sam nonchalantly chews bread and asks a question.

SAM
After I get my fluff story, I'm
outta here and you'll never hear
from me again.
(beat)
Tell me about Elia.

George is soothed by the request, but he glares suspiciously
at Sam.

GEORGE
(sarcastic)
Elegant enchantress. Like the
newspapers say.

SAM
Nothing like your showgirls dancing
on tables for Howard Hughes, Ty
Cobb, and others?

George glares at Sam, then his eyes wander off in a DAYDREAM. He sees, Elia (30), a sexy, Frenchwoman in 1940-era clothing, sauntering across the living room. She winks at George.

ELIA

I'm still your wife, dear. Almost fifty years. Tell her a cute little story so she leaves, George!

The DAYDREAM fades.

GEORGE

She loves the wildest animals and the finer things in life. She's as comfortable in high heels as she is on snowshoes. She's the only woman I met who sees through me.

Sam keeps eating.

SAM

But she's in Paris, and you're here.

GEORGE

We meet up.

SAM

Let me guess. You're not the easiest guy to live with?

George flings his bowls, silverware, and glasses off of his food tray. They CRASH. Henri comes running with a broom, dustpan, and towels, and quickly begins to clean up.

GEORGE

Get her out of here, Henri! Now!

HENRI

Yes, Captain.

Henri stops cleaning and gathers Sam's coat and backpack. He sees blood oozing from the bandage on her head.

HENRI (CONT'D)

Got to change that bandage first.

Henry races downstairs. George glares at Sam.

GEORGE

Should have never come here.

SAM

Sorry. It's my job!

GEORGE
Pitiful job, at that!

SAM
What was that mangled station wagon
doing on top of the ridge? Pretty
eerie, even in the daylight.

George drops his head and looks away.

GEORGE
It was Mae's. Mae Mollhagen's.
Killed in it on September 1, 1954.
I had it put on the hill.

SAM
1934 to 1954? She must have been
quite a...
(beat)
Companion. Sorry for your loss.

GEORGE
She loved sledding. With Elia, too.

SAM
Sledding, huh?

GEORGE
Strong-willed. Stubborn. Never took
no for an answer.
(beat)
Lot like you, but pretty.

SAM
You loved her.

George's eyes wander in a short DAYDREAM of Mae (30), a well-dressed progressive woman in 1945-era clothing, saunters across the living room, and winks at George.

MAE
Talk to her, you old coot!

The DAYDREAM fades.

GEORGE
She tolerated me.

SAM
Is that what you'd like to tell
her? If you could. You probably
didn't get to say good-bye.

George gets violently angry again. He shakes and stands.

GEORGE

Jesus Christ. You talk to the
spirits too! Get out of my house.
Get out!

George limps over to Sam and grabs her arm.

SAM

Okay. I'll go! Lonely old lunatic.

Sam shakes her arm loose and puts on her tattered jacket,
still spewing goose feathers.

Henri races up the stairs with a handful of bandages for Sam.
He sees George standing and limping backwards.

HENRI

Sit down, Captain. You'll hurt...

George spins and falls. Henri dives toward George, trying to
brace his fall. So does Sam, but George hits the floor with a
thud.

Minutes later, George is passed out on the couch. Sam is
sitting in George's chair (pulled close to the couch) with
fresh bandages on herself, and applying an ice bag to
George's freshly bandaged head. George slowly regains
consciousness.

GEORGE

What? What happened?

SAM

You fell trying to throw me out.
Henri went to fetch a doctor in
Zephyr Cove.

GEORGE

Henri can't drive worth a damn.

SAM

Then, I guess you're stuck with me.

George realizes he's in his pajamas and lush brown bathrobe.

GEORGE

Who changed me?

SAM

Henri thought you should be
comfortable in case we couldn't get
you up to your room. I helped him.

George looks horrified.

SAM (CONT'D)
Nothing I haven't seen before,
Captain.

GEORGE
I told you, Miss...Miss...

SAM
Sam Eriksson.

George scoots up. He's angrier than ever.

GEORGE
I had things given to me. I'm proud
of never working. I choose to be
alone, and I have no apologies.
(beat)
And nobody, I mean nobody, is
writing my damn story, especially
someone who falsely claims to be my
daughter!

Sam pulls the ice away.

SAM
Fine. I'll go now. I'll leave you
to bleed to death, and you can lay
here and pee in a milk bottle for
all I care. I'm tired of being
bullied and yelled at!

Sam throws the ice bag across the room, and stands up. She
immediately gets dizzy and sits down.

GEORGE
Don't pull that on me.

SAM
I'll leave when Henri comes back
with the doctor. If something else
happens to you, I don't wanna take
the blame.

GEORGE
I told ya! Henri doesn't drive. He
never leaves here. He won't find
Zephyr Cove much less a doctor.

SAM
Anyone else you can call? Friends?

George looks away, sad.

GEORGE

Don't want 'em to see me like this. Besides, they're busy people. Bill Harrah bought my baby six years ago.

SAM

The Thunderbird Yacht. Read about it.

George is groggy to the point of falling asleep.

GEORGE

Don't care much for company.

SAM

(softly sarcastic)
There's a shocker.

George is asleep. Immediately, Sam grabs her flashlight, and starts to poke around. In the living room, she sees that all the cabinets are double-locked. She whispers.

SAM (CONT'D)

Double locks? Not very trusting, Georgie!

She opens one set of doors on one side of the main entrance door, and finds a small elevator. She opens the doors on the other side of the room and finds a safe.

SAM (CONT'D)

How much you got in there, Georgie?

Sam heads upstairs, peeking back at George from time to time. She investigates George's room first. She sees one photo of young Elia and one of the yacht. She investigates his dresser and closet and finds nothing of interest until she finds a locked World War I-era munitions box.

SAM (CONT'D)

What's in there, Georgie?

She sneaks around to the second bedroom, which clearly hasn't been used in years. The dresser contains French lace undies, and slips, and negligees, which are pressed and scented. Sam smells them.

SAM (CONT'D)

Elia?

The closet has several fur coats in garment bags. Each garment bag is labeled with an "E."

SAM (CONT'D)

Elia!

Towards the back of the closet, she finds a single garment bag, without an "E" on it. Sam unzips the dark bag to find a luxurious fur coat. Sam rummages through all the pockets. In the last pocket, she finds a folded-up piece of fine stationary. The note reads, "To Mae, Merry Christmas, G."

SAM (CONT'D)

Just a secretary? Huh?

Sam tiptoes downstairs, and sees George is still asleep. She races down to the kitchen and pokes around, but finds nothing of interest. She quickly rummages through Henri's tiny room. She finds a few photographs of France, including one of a young woman and young boy. She puts them back. She finds a Playboy magazine under his mattress, and moves on.

SAM (CONT'D)

You little devil, Henri.

The next room is meticulous. A certificate of education is on the wall with several religious icons. The certificate reads, "Ruth Casey, Nursing Class of 1938."

SAM (CONT'D)

You sleep down here. Good for you,
Ruthie!

Sam sees a notebook of Ruth's medical notes on George. She "speed-reads" the notebook and stops at the words, "night terrors." She sets it down, and heads to the tunnel.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

It's cold and spooky as she follows the tunnel back to the opium den. Then, she follows it further to the old boathouse.

SAM

Too small for the yacht.

She follows it to the larger boathouse. She sees the yacht and is stunned by its size and beauty.

SAM (CONT'D)

Right! You sold the yacht to Bill
Harrah some years ago?

She follows the tunnel back to an iron spiral staircase, and climbs the stairs slowly. She opens a secret door to the shower off the card room.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE CARD ROOM - NIGHT

SAM

My fantasies are true?

She circles the card table in a DAYDREAM. She sees Ty Cobb (60), Howard Hughes (50), and George (50) in tuxedos, smiling, and drinking small glasses of scotch. They carry on civil conversation.

HOWARD

Aeronautics and electronics if you ask me.

TY

Professional sports teams and casinos.

GEORGE

Land, land, and more land.

Sam smiles as she circles the table.

SAM

Howard Hughes, Ty Cobb, Hollywood's rich and famous. Ten-thousand-dollar buy-in or he'd throw you out. I can only imagine.

Sam hears George SCREAM, and the card players DISAPPEAR instantly.

SAM (CONT'D)

Shit!

She races through the secret door and runs up the tunnel. She stops in the kitchen to grab a glass of water, and climbs the stairs to the main living room. George is still asleep. Sam brings George the glass of water and tugs on his bathrobe. George is groggy.

GEORGE

How long was I out?

SAM

A few seconds. You asked me to get you a glass of water.

GEORGE

I screamed something. What?

SAM

I was at the kitchen sink. Didn't hear you.

GEORGE
Thank God. Night terrors.

Sam RECALLS seeing the words "night terrors" in Ruth's notebook in her room.

SAM
Something bothering you, Captain?

GEORGE
I thought I saw Elia. Here. And Mae! She was alive.

SAM
It's not uncommon to dream about your wife and girlfriends. But at the same time?

GEORGE
But Elia's in Paris, and Mae is...

SAM
(interrupts)
Maybe you have unfinished business. Something to tell them?

GEORGE
I'm not dying.

SAM
We're all dying, Captain. But at your age, I'd tell them what they need to hear, whether it's through me or somebody else.

George is stunned.

GEORGE
That's what they both told me.

SAM
You see.
(beat)
Let me get my notebook.

GEORGE
No! Never. And you, bring me my scotch.

SAM
Not with a head injury!

George props up, angered.

GEORGE
You drank scotch with a head
injury!

SAM
I'm younger, and not getting
senile.

George slumps.

GEORGE
I miss Bill.

SAM
Your pet lion?

George laughs.

GEORGE
Went for rides with me in the car.

SAM
Just another creature you could
command and control.

GEORGE
Ha. Couldn't do either with Bill.

George launches into a DAYDREAM.

CUT TO:

INT. 1940'S BAR - NIGHT

George (50) enters a bar with Bill the Lion on a chain leash. Ten Patrons (males, 30-60) standing and drinking at the bar move back when they see Bill. The Bartender (60) knows them.

BARTENDER
If it isn't the Captain and his
pussy cat. Hi ya, Bill.

GEORGE
One double and I'm on the road
fellas, just pretend Bill isn't
here.

One tipsy patron slowly walks behind Bill to pet him. Bill GROWLS and swipes his paw at the patron's belly, leaving a ripped shirt and very bloody claw marks.

BACK TO:

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

George smiles. Sam is appalled.

SAM

I saw the news clip where Bill tore through the guy's stomach, and you bear no responsibility?

GEORGE

I paid him.

SAM

Can't buy redemption, Captain.

George's mood sours.

GEORGE

Not after redemption. Just want to live my life.

(beat)

Where's my scotch?!

Sam, angry, stands and paces. Suddenly, the mynah birds squawk, scaring Sam. Then George and Sam hear clanging downstairs.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

It's Henri.

(beat, yells)

Henri! Bring me my scotch!

We hear more pots clanging.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Henri! My scotch!

Sam continues to pace. Henri arrives with a tray of hot tea and Fig Newton cookies, and a fresh ice bag.

HENRI

Sorry, Captain. Doctor says no alcohol. Head injury.

SAM

Where is the doctor?

HENRI

Won't come. Says the lion, cheetah, and elephant are still on the loose.

GEORGE

Haven't been here for years.

HENRI

Doc says ice, twenty minutes on,
twenty minutes off. Change bandage
every six hours. Put Vaseline on
cuts before bandage.

GEORGE

When's he coming?

HENRI

Not coming, ever, Captain. Says you
cheated at checkers last time he
came here. He hates cheaters.

Henri races out and downstairs. George looks bewildered. Sam
grabs the ice bag and gently places it on George's head.

SAM

It's unanimous, Captain. Nobody
cares!

George grunts at Sam. He puts his head back, and rests. Sam
looks at her wristwatch.

SAM (CONT'D)

I'll take it off in twenty minutes.

George sleeps. Sam enjoys the tea and cookies. Then she
stands and investigates a small table with a single drawer.
She opens the draw and sees several old photographs. She
brings them back to enjoy with her tea. The first few photos
are of Elia (30). As she sips her tea, an apparition of Elia
(at age 30) struts into Sam's DAYDREAM and around the room.
Sam IMAGINES she can see and hear her.

SAM (CONT'D)

Elia Pascal. Quite a looker. But
how did you two really get along?

Elia sneers as she circles Sam.

ELIA

You both wearing matching head
bandages. Cute!

SAM

Were you after his money?

ELIA

You mean, was I after privilege,
security, and excitement? I'll
never tell you. You'll have to ask
the Captain. Ha!

SAM

From the old newspapers, it looked like a loveless marriage for forty of the fifty years.

ELIA

(laughs)

Come to Paris and find out!

SAM

Oh, you knew what the Captain here was up to...

Elia, in controlled anger, stops to address Sam.

ELIA

We don't talk about it.

(angrier still)

You'll get nothing from us!

Sam shakes her head in disgust, and finds photos of Mae. Elia DISAPPEARS. Mae (30) bounces in, happy and smiling. George can't see or hear her. Sam talks to the photographs.

SAM

Then bubbly Mae Mollhagen takes a job as your secretary.

MAE

The salary was more than generous.

SAM

Lotta money for a secretary.

Mae turns bitter.

MAE

You think I was much more than that, but you'll never know.

SAM

All men brag, and all women whisper, eventually.

MAE

Don't hold your breath, tomboy!

Sam holds a photo of Mae in one hand, and a photo of Elia in the other.

Suddenly, the apparition of Elia returns. She and Mae are circling George and Sam. Elia and Mae ignore each other at first.

SAM

Maybe they both had to pretend the other was strictly business!

ELIA

You'll never know, story-whore.

SAM

You two had to ignore each other later on! No other choice!

Elia seems to notice Mae. Mae glares at Elia.

MAE

Don't let her get to you.

Elia chases down Mae and grabs her throat.

ELIA

Shut up, you over-paid floozy! We don't discuss it!

Elia and Mae are at each other's throats, slapping away, when Sam gets up and tosses the photos back in the drawer. Elia and Mae DISAPPEAR. She returns to her chair, and takes the ice bag off George's head, and George wakes up.

GEORGE

What's going on in here?

SAM

Taking the ice bag off. Doctor's orders.

GEORGE

Where's Henri? I'm ready for bed. You've got to get out of here.

Henri enters and wheels the wheelchair over to the couch.

HENRI

Let's get you in the elevator, Captain.

George glares at Sam as she slowly climbs the stairs.

GEORGE

We don't have overnight guests here.

SAM

We'll talk about that in the morning. I'm not well enough to leave. I'll sleep in Elia's room.

Henri helps George toward to the elevator.

SAM (CONT'D)

Or is it Mae's room? Or the
showgirls' room? Seems you can
cheat on lovers, and you can cheat
at checkers, but you can't find a
way to cheat your conscience.

George is furious.

GEORGE

I want her out of here, Henri. I
want her out!

Sam snickers as she continues up the staircase.

SAM

Night, Captain. Sleep well.

End Act One

Act Two

EXT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE DECK - DAY

Sam, naked under a white fluffy bathrobe, sits in a tall-backed swivel chair turned away from the door, such that George doesn't see her when Henri rolls him out to the deck. Henri departs quickly, and George grabs his shotgun looking off to the hillside for interlopers. Sam swivels in the chair to greet George with a smile. Both still wear head bandages.

SAM

Top of the morning, Captain.

George turns his rifle to her.

GEORGE

You again! You were told to leave.
Now I will call the cops.

SAM

Why don't you just shoot me again?
Cops would find me in Elia's
bathrobe, naked.

George yells.

GEORGE

Henri! Henri! Call the police!

SAM

Or is this Mae's robe? Or some
showgirl's, perhaps?

George pauses, and puts down the shotgun. He grunts.

GEORGE

Where are your clothes?

Henri delivers coffee, fruit, and pastries to a table with one chair. George grunts at Henri as he leaves.

SAM

(to Henri)
Thanks, Henri!
(to George)
My shoulder's fine. Head's getting
better too. Thanks for asking. My
clothes were bloody, so Henri
offered to wash them for me.

George rolls up to the breakfast table.

GEORGE
Good! Evidence will be gone.

SAM
Except for the scars.

GEORGE
You'll heal.

Sam sits at the breakfast table.

SAM
Emotional scars of being shot could
last forever.

She takes a fresh pastry and moans in delight.

GEORGE
Extortion? Is that your game?

Sam sips coffee.

SAM
From what I read, you've paid off a
wife, a lion victim, a chef you
tossed overboard, a cop, and God
knows how many showgirls. What am
I, chopped liver?

George grunts, turns his wheelchair toward the lake, and sips
his cup of coffee in silence.

SAM (CONT'D)
When my clothes are clean, I'll go.

George looks back at Sam suspiciously.

GEORGE
You'll just leave?

SAM
Thought only journalists in a war
zone could get shot. Maybe they'll
send me to Vietnam next.
(sarcastic)
You were in the war-to-end-all-
wars, weren't you, Captain?

GEORGE
Decorated twice.

SAM
Public record, I know. For bravery,
right?

GEORGE

Right. I keep the medals upstairs
in a locked box.

SAM

People shooting at ya, dropping
mustard gas, cannon fire, the
works?

GEORGE

The works! Bravery, remember?

SAM

So why are you so afraid of a
skinny, unarmed, female reporter?

She pokes George in the belly with her finger and laughs.

SAM (CONT'D)

Afraid I'll stab you in the heart
with my pencil? Is that how you're
going to die, Captain George
Whittell Jr.? In fear of a rookie
reporter on her third day on the
job?

George stands, angry and defiant.

GEORGE

Look out over this lake and the
mountains. What do you see?

Sam takes a huge bite of a pastry, stands, and looks around
carefully. She pauses.

SAM

I see a public lake, Lake Tahoe,
one of the most beautiful lakes in
the world.

(beat)

I see large, unsightly private
developments on the north, west,
and south shores.

(beat)

I see your breathtakingly beautiful
private lodge, gently carved into
the landscape by Native American
stone masons, and surrounded by
your private forests -- all because
you have courageously chosen not to
despoil them with casinos,
subdivisions, and resorts.

George is impressed.

GEORGE

Is that all?

SAM

No, I see a lonely, insecure, potentially kind old man who is under the gross misconception that his legacy will be adequately described by newspaper clippings.

Sam steps closer to George to examine the blotches on his weathered face.

GEORGE

My legacy is no concern of yours.

Sam closely examines a large blotch on George's neck. She jumps back in fright.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

What's the matter?

Sam looks away.

SAM

Nothing. Never mind. Listen, I won't be here long. Can you show me the grounds? Please, Captain? Please? I'd love to see the card room before I go.

GEORGE

Too much trouble.

SAM

One quick look. I need to hear about your poker games with the richest man in America, Howard Hughes, and Ty Cobb, the greatest and dirtiest baseball player that ever lived! My dad loves him!

GEORGE

(devilish)
The card room?

SAM

No one knows the details but you, Captain. Please? Please?

GEORGE

One card room visit and you'll go?

SAM
I promise.

GEORGE
One condition.

SAM
Name it!

GEORGE
You won't reveal anything I tell
you in any form for fifty years.

Sam paces in anger.

SAM
Fifty years! That's ludicrous. I'll
be your age! Or dead!

GEORGE
That's my condition. Take it, or
leave it.

Sam pleads to his face.

SAM
But I'm a journalist!

She leans her head in to see the blotch on his neck. She has
a worried look.

SAM (CONT'D)
You win.

GEORGE
(laughs)
That's what Howard and Ty said in
the card room. Let's go. Henri will
have to help me.

George is smiling for once. He's spry and excited. He yells.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Henri! Henri! Get my cane, damn
you!

EXT./INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE CARD ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sam is dressed in her washed clothes. Her head bandage is
gone. A small scab remains. George remains in his bathrobe.
Sam carries George's cane, and Henri pushes George along the
rock path to the card room. The Lake steals the show.

SAM
If these grounds could talk...

GEORGE
We'd all have been arrested.

HENRI
This is too dangerous, Captain. If Nurse Ruth gets back there will be hell to pay.

GEORGE
I think I owe Hell a little money anyway. Let's go.

SAM
(baiting him)
If you'd rather not...

GEORGE
We've made it this far. Let's go.

It's a struggle to get George up the stone stairs into the card room. Sam acts surprised when she sees the room. The card table is set with champagne glasses, poker chips, and stacks of playing cards.

SAM
I can only imagine...

GEORGE
Can you? Henri, you can leave us for a few minutes.

HENRI
Yes, Captain.

Henri departs quickly.

GEORGE
What do you imagine, Miss Eriksson?

Sam acts like a movie director. Her imagination runs wild. The apparitions of the card players appear, in turn, as she IMAGINES them.

SAM
It's a warm summer night in nineteen-forty-six. Mr. Hughes sat there, looking like James Bond in a black tuxedo. He smokes imported cigarettes, and drinks a martini, shaken, not stirred.

HOWARD

Aeronautics and electronics if you ask me.

GEORGE

(baiting her)

Go on.

Sam moves to the next chair.

SAM

Ty Cobb is also in a tuxedo, but it looks less-tailored. He's well-shaved for his big night out. He sips scotch and beer, and smiles as he tells beloved baseball stories.

TY

Professional sports teams and casinos. Did I ever tell you about the time Jackie Robinson...

GEORGE

Go on. And me?

Sam moves to the next chair.

SAM

You sit here. Also in a black tuxedo. You wear a captain's hat, and sip scotch. You direct the conversation to uncover stock tips. Everyone in the world wishes they could be a fly on the wall, watching a playful card game with such interesting and secretive millionaires.

GEORGE

I say, invest in land, land, and more land.

(beat)

But maybe I'll take a shower first!

George takes his cane and swipes the table clean. Glasses go crashing against the stone walls and floor. Sam's apparitions DISAPPEAR.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

You people would never understand us! You'd rather make up a fairy tale than see the truth!

Sam is stunned to near-silence.

SAM

But...

George's more accurate apparitions APPEAR as he remembers them. George is stern and unyielding.

GEORGE

Howard Hughes, around forty, would fidget there in a wrinkled gray suit, unshaven and un-showered for days. He would drink my best scotch, while psychotically arranging peas on a plate by size prior to eating them. His poker chips are ordered by color with exactly ten chips in a stack, frantically rebuilding the stacks as he bet. He babbled to himself constantly.

Sam gasps. George points his cane to the bathroom. George scoffs. We see two naked Showgirls (20s-30s) soaping each other in the shower and giggling.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Two showgirls would be showering and giggling, while Howard worried about sorting his peas and chips.

Howard is arranging peas like a lunatic.

HOWARD

Have to be the same size. Have to be the same size.

George points his cane to another seat.

GEORGE

Ty Cobb, around sixty, sat in a dirty green bathrobe and pajamas that hadn't been washed in weeks. He grunted through a perpetual stupor of scotch and Darvon, easing the costs of playing a game he didn't care to talk about. It cost him his wife and kids, who hated him. He would lose ten or twenty grand after firing his butler, writing him a check for forty-five dollars, then calling the bank to stop payment before the poor fool could cash it.

TY

(mumbling)

I was eighteen when Ma shot Pa with a shotgun, but she got off.

(yells at the showgirls)

Do ya hear me? She shot him, and got off like nothin' happened.

SAM

I had no idea...

George points his cane to another chair.

GEORGE

I would wonder what my guests would say if I told them their secrets were not safe with me. Hell, Cobb would have shot me with the German Luger he carried in his ankle holster.

Cobb pulls his Luger and points it at George (at 65)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

How about another glass of scotch, gentlemen?

Sam stares back and forth at the two Georges (65 and 87).

SAM

Sorry! Had no idea.

The apparition of George (65) disappears.

GEORGE

Howard would have ruined me financially with his friends in the government.

George turns away, sad and teary-eyed.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

And I couldn't live with myself. As pitiful as we all were as human beings, we weren't alone. We were less than friends, more than strangers...

George wipes away a tear.

SAM

(interrupts)

But not alone. I get it.

GEORGE

I doubt it.

The apparitions of Howard and Ty DISAPPEAR. George turns to Sam in sadness.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

My time left is short. As I get closer to the end, I've been imagining the fairy tales of my life like you and others imagine them.

SAM

And you can't bear to re-live the truth?

GEORGE

Once you know the truth, it can't be re-lived, or unseen!

George struggles to walk to the door to the steps and pathway. Sam follows him. She turns back for one last look at the card room.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Which three card players do you see now, Miss Eriksson?

Sam sees the apparitions just as George described them. She drops her chin and says nothing.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

See. Once you've seen the truth...
(beat, yells)
Henri! Bring me my chair!

As they wait for Henri, Sam turns to George.

SAM

Fifty years?

GEORGE

I have your word.

They hear Ruth SCREAM from the house. They turn and see Nurse Ruth yelling from the desk.

RUTH

Captain, what are you doing out there? Who is that stranger? I'm calling the police.

GEORGE
All under control, Ruth. Up in a
minute!

Henri pushes George quickly. Sam follows, disillusioned.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sam is gathering her things for her departure. Ruth is pacing furiously.

RUTH
I step out for supplies and we are
bombarded with unwanted guests!

SAM
One guest. And he shot me!

RUTH
Trespassers deserve it. Get your
things and get out of here!

GEORGE
She's leaving.
(beat)
Give her fifty dollars for a cab
back to Reno.

RUTH
I won't give her one red cent!

Henri enters with a lunch bag.

HENRI
I made you a couple sandwiches for
your hike.

He goes to hand the bag to Sam.

SAM
Thank you, Henri.

Ruth intercepts the bag.

RUTH
We'll not reward trespassers and
unwanted guests. Captain, in a
minute I'm taking you upstairs for
your nap!

Sam gets angry. She throws on her fluffy coat, and feathers fly out again.

SAM

Fine! Nobody would believe what goes on in this stone loony bin, anyway!

Sam pulls on her backpack. Ruth tugs Sam by her sore arm, and she winces as Ruth opens the door, and tosses Sam out. Ruth follows Sam out, and shuts the door. Ruth yells, while winking and pointing at the door mat to Sam.

RUTH

And don't come back!

Ruth pulls at Sam, motioning for her to stay quiet and stand in the doorway. Sam looks bewildered, but does as she is told.

Ruth enters the main room and races George to the elevator.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Sounds like you've had a busy morning. I trust you'll sleep for a few hours.

GEORGE

I'm not tired.

RUTH

I'll give you a pill. Doctor says you need your rest.

GEORGE

I haven't seen the...

RUTH

Okay. This nurse says you need your rest!

LATER

Ruth tiptoes to the door, opens it, pulls Sam in, and ushers her downstairs.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Henri serves tea and cookies at a small table. Sam sees a lawyer's business card on the table. It reads "Leonard DiMarco, Esq." She looks puzzled, as Henri exits.

RUTH

I went through your things.

SAM
Everyone here does.

RUTH
You're a reporter. Henri tells me
you claim to be the Captains
daughter. That's a lie! What's your
real game? Extortion?

Sam starts to get up from the table.

SAM
No! He's not a likable man.
Biological father or not! Won't let
me write anything he tells me for
fifty years!

She points to her torn jacket and bruised head.

SAM (CONT'D)
And, he shot me.

RUTH
Back to extortion! Shot at me three
times, by accident. Henri twice.
And the poor milk man...

She shakes her head as she examines Sam's jacket.

RUTH (CONT'D)
What happened to your head?

SAM
The shot spun me around. Hit my
head on the rocks. Henri patched me
up in your dungeon.

Ruth laughs.

RUTH
Henri told me the Captain told you
about the card room.

SAM
Yes, but he swore me to silence.

RUTH
And the light on the chimney that
was switched to green when there
was a party going on, and red light
when his wife was home?

Sam pretends she was told the story, and nods, 'yes.'

RUTH (CONT'D)

You could see that green light from Crystal Bay. Party time. When the law or uninvited guests approached, the Captain's friends and showgirls...no offense to you mother...would escape down the tunnel to waiting boats. Oh, the parties they had...

SAM

(interrupted)

He told me all about them. So did my mother, but if you have other stories...

RUTH

And the dungeon, as you called it, was an opium den, but he must have told you that, too.

Sam nods, 'yes.'

RUTH (CONT'D)

If you believed everything you read in the newspapers, some of the biggest movie stars and millionaires of the day frequented that tiny place for sex parties that would shame the devil. Unlikely, I think.

Sam pretends to know.

SAM

I couldn't believe some of the names of his guests over the years. Don't suppose there's a list somewhere?

Sam turns to see Henri wearing yellow rubber gloves and pointing George's shotgun at her. Sam backs up in her chair to see Ruth holding a large, shiny butcher knife.

SAM (CONT'D)

What's this about?

RUTH

The photo in your backpack is a fake, and blood-type tests for paternity are totally unreliable. I'm so sorry. We must protect the Captain.

SAM

From me?

RUTH

From bad press. Scandal.

(beat)

Or extortion.

Henri cocks the shotgun. Sam is stunned.

SAM

You're serious.

RUTH

Deadly serious.

SAM

My editor's coming to pick me up in an hour.

RUTH

I doubt it. He sent you on a fool's errand. He knew George Whittell never grants an interview. He knew you would have to trespass on private property to get here. He knows the Captain isn't afraid to shoot first and ask questions later. Neither does our security guard, Joseph.

Sam turns to Henri for help.

HENRI

If the Captain's first shot would have killed you, we would have called the police and that would be that. Intruder shot.

RUTH

End of story.

SAM

You can't just kill people.

RUTH

But we can shoot burglars.

SAM

Burglars?

RUTH

You may not know that home security video systems were invented two years ago by Marie Van Brittan Brown. The Captain loves gadgets, hence all the weather sensors, alarm systems, and now security cameras -- he's testing them. The security guard is watching us now.

SAM

I did nothing wrong.

RUTH

Joseph, at the gate house, claims you were snooping around in every room last night. Your fingerprints will prove it. We could throw a string of pearls in your pocket at any time.

Ruth motions to the tunnel.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Let's get her to the gate house. We'll go by way of the tunnel so she doesn't disturb the Captain.

Sam SCREAMS for help.

SAM

Help, Captain, Help!

RUTH

Sleeping pill. He can't help you.

Sam doesn't move.

SAM

You'll have to shoot me here.

RUTH

The Captain's prints are on the rifle. We'll drag you up the hill where he shot you the first time, shoot you there, then again from the deck. We'll tell the police George is on heavy pain medications and doesn't remember a thing. They'll get the story from Henri and Joseph.

HENRI
I'm sorry, Miss Sam. Boss would
fire me.

Sam gets up and is led by Ruth to the tunnel.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

SAM
What are you going to do to me?

RUTH
That depends.

SAM
On what?

RUTH
On how much you help us, of course.
(beat)
The state of Nevada and dozens of
real estate developers are after
his land. Vultures circling.

SAM
I read the stories in the
newspaper.

RUTH
It's what's not in the newspapers.
A lawyer's coming by today. Elia's
in Paris. They won't talk to me.

SAM
What can I do?

RUTH
We're not keen on the lawyer who's
coming. I need you to can keep an
extra eye on him, and do some
digging around.

SAM
If I do, you'll let me go?

RUTH
Everyone has a few skeletons in the
closet, Miss Eriksson. We need to
find Leonard DiMarco's skeletons by
this afternoon.

Ruth and Henri usher Sam out of the tunnel by the boathouse.

EXT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE GROUNDS/GATE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ruth and Henri guide Sam around the main house and up to the Gate House. A kind and gentle Native American security guard, JOSEPH WHITEHORSE (50) greets them.

JOSEPH

Nice to see you again, Miss Eriksson.

SAM

Again?

Joseph points to the TV monitor.

JOSEPH

The video security cameras we're testing, remember?

SAM

Oh! Are you involved in my kidnapping too?

RUTH

He does as he is told.

Joseph smiles.

JOSEPH

Need the work.

RUTH

Joseph, show her around. She may use the phone if you dial. Cut her off if she tries anything funny.

Joseph takes out a pair of handcuffs, and handcuffs his wrist to hers.

JOSEPH

She's not going anywhere.

SAM

You will release me if I help?

RUTH

Get us the dirt on that lawyer who's coming in an hour.

HENRI

Joseph, I'll bring lunch up for you both in thirty minutes.

Ruth and Henri exit.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE GATE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Joseph and Sam sit at a desk, handcuffed together. They watch a security television showing the main floor of the lodge, which is empty. Joseph pushes the long cord of a Princess telephone to Sam's side of the desk, and he pulls a notebook and pen from a drawer.

JOSEPH

The lawyer's name is on the top of the pad. Please help us, Miss Sam. We need you.

SAM

Got a funny way of showing it. Kidnapping. False imprisonment. Attempted murder!

JOSEPH

One word to authorities and we cut the line. Then, you are back to being a burglar and jewel thief, shot down in her prime.

Sam stares at the pad of paper and the phone.

SAM

I need to call my office.

JOSEPH

I'll dial. You talk. No funny stuff.

Sam jots down a number, and Joseph dials. He hands the receiver to Sam.

SAM

Reno Gazzette? Connect me with Johnny Chase in the mail room. First person I met on the job.

(beat)

Black guy. The only black guy! I'll hold.

(beat)

Johnny, this is Sam. Do me a favor? Run up to my desk and wait for my next call. You're working for me now on a top-secret assignment. I need information on Leonard DiMarco.

(beat)

All the overtime pay I can get you, and another free lunch.

Sam hangs up.

SAM (CONT'D)
 If I live to tell about it.
 (beat)
 How'd you get this job, Joseph?

JOSEPH
 Stone-mason. I helped build this place when I was eighteen. Almost a hundred of us came from the Stewart Indian School in Carson City. Took two years with the Captain looking over our shoulders the whole time. I only just came on as the security guard, but the Captain remembered me by name, thirty-two years later.

SAM
 Magnificent craftsmanship. You should be very proud. Just a minute. I have to call my desk.

Sam makes a second call. This time, Joseph lets her dial.

SAM (CONT'D)
 Samantha Eriksson's desk please.
 (beat)
 Johnny. Get me everything you can on an attorney named Leonard DiMarco in Reno. Call me at this number, when you get something. Five-five-five, one-two-one-three.
 (beat)
 And hurry!

Sam hangs up.

SAM (CONT'D)
 I need to call the Washoe County courthouse.

JOSEPH
 No funny stuff.

SAM
 No funny stuff.

Sam dials. Joseph unlocks the handcuffs, while she's on the phone. Sam smiles.

SAM (CONT'D)
 This the Zephyr Cove's Sheriff's Department?

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

This is Officer Dundee, in Reno. We have a complaint about an attorney, Leonard DiMarco, and large land dealings around Lake Tahoe in the past few years. I'll hold while you check for DiMarco. That's D-i-m-a-r-c-o. It's urgent.

(beat)

I'll need dates, parcel numbers, amounts. Thanks, I'll hold.

Sam puts the phone down and waits patiently. Joseph smiles at Sam for helping.

JOSEPH

I need to use the john. Can I trust you?

SAM

Of course you can, Joseph. I'm on hold.

Sam smiles. Joseph takes two steps towards the bathroom, and turns. Sam doesn't turn around.

JOSEPH

I'd lose my job if Nurse Ruth...

SAM

I'll be right here, Joseph.

Joseph hurries to the bathroom, enters, and locks the door. Sam turns and waits until Joseph starts to pee, then she takes off running to the road.

INT./EXT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE GATE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Joseph exits the bathroom, and races after Sam. The chase is on. Sam cuts off the road and up into the forest. Joseph follows. Sam gains a lead scrambling between large boulders and trees, but Joseph is relentless. Joseph takes out his pistol, pauses, then replaces it in the holster and continues scrambling up the hill slope. Sam's feet skid out from under her on pine needles, and she slides down into Joseph's grasp.

SAM

Needed to stretch my legs, is all.

JOSEPH

Uh hum. Let's go!

Joseph begins to march Sam back to the gate house.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

You got him wrong. The Captain.

SAM

How so?

JOSEPH

He put my kids through boarding school and college. Didn't tell nobody. Henri's son, too. You think you know a man after two days, but you don't.

Sam looks away.

SAM

Had no idea.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE GATE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Joseph handcuffs his right wrist to Sam's left wrist as they sit at the desk. The phone receiver is laying on the desk, and they both hear a weak voice on the phone.

SHERIFF (O.S.)

Hello. Hello, Zephyr Cove Sheriff's Office. Are you there? Are you there?

Sam picks up the receiver immediately.

SAM

So sorry. Had to use the can.

Joseph rolls his eyes, then turns to the door as he hears a sports car driving up.

SAM (CONT'D)

Great. Please give the details to Mr. Johnny Chase, Assistant Editor-in-Chief at the Reno Examiner. He's working directly with our office on this story -- I, mean, case.

Joseph pulls Sam to the side of the door, so the driver of the car can't see Sam or the handcuffs. The driver, LEONARD DIMARCO (45, slick, dressed to impress), yells to Joseph.

LEONARD

Attorney Leonard DiMarco here to see George Whittell.

JOSEPH
You may proceed.

Leonard smirks.

LEONARD
Thanks, Chief.

Joseph scowls as Leonard drives down to the house.

SAM
That was demeaning.

Joseph ushers Sam back to the desk.

JOSEPH
I dislike him more than I dislike
you, but thanks for not causing a
scene or trying to escape, again.

SAM
With a lawyer. Don't think so.

Joseph and Sam stare at the video monitor. They see Ruth let
Leonard into the lodge.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

George sits in his brown bathrobe in his wheelchair, when
Ruth escorts Leonard into the main room.

RUTH
Captain, this is Leonard DiMarco,
attorney at law. I'll leave you two
alone. I'm needed downstairs. You
can show yourself out, Mr. DiMarco.

Leonard ignores Ruth and pals up to George. He pulls a chair
very close.

LEONARD
I finally get a chance to meet the
great George Whittell. Governor
Paul Laxalt sends his respects. I
know he represented you for several
years.

GEORGE
Some good. Some bad.

LEONARD
I got an offer that may interest
you.

GEORGE
 (interrupts)
 Just a minute.

George is looking around stalling.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE GATE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Nurse Ruth is racing up the rock path to the gate house to view the video monitor with Joseph and Sam.

RUTH
 Lawyer say anything?

SAM
 Not yet.

JOSEPH
 Captain stalled him for you.

They watch and listen closely.

BACK TO:

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Leonard inches his chair close to George and whispers.

LEONARD
 It's about your land.

GEORGE
 Speak up young man. Can't hear a thing.

LEONARD
 (yells)
 It's about your land.

GEORGE
 Bought forty-thousand acres in the thirties.

LEONARD
 Yes, sir. For peanuts. We all know the story.

GEORGE
 Peanuts?

George shakes his head in disgust.

LEONARD

You know what I mean, old-timer.

George sneers.

GEORGE

Lot of greedy crooks out there.
Land pirates at Incline stole a
five-hundred percent profit off my
land in one year!

LEONARD

Like the state stealing Sand Harbor
from you using eminent domain.
Taking your private land for the
greater public good.

GEORGE

The best beach on the lake. Sued
me. Stole it. Thieves, that's what
they are!

Leonard puts his arm around George who is uncomfortable that
it's there.

LEONARD

Now, my friend, the state of Nevada
wants it all your unimproved land
for themselves!

GEORGE

Unimproved?

LEONARD

They'll use condemnation as a
weapon to lower your land's value
and they'll practically steal it.

GEORGE

Like they stole Sand Harbor from
me!

LEONARD

Exactly. We've got to strike first.

GEORGE

How?

LEONARD

They'll say the land is unimproved
open space, worth practically
nothing.

GEORGE
It's worth a lot to me!

LEONARD
Your beneficiaries won't even get
peanuts.

The Captain gets upset.

GEORGE
I don't want neighbors.
(beat, yells)
Rather leave it to the animals in
the forest. I won't sell.

LEONARD
Then they'll just take it from you,
old-timer. You have to show some
land improvements somewhere.

GEORGE
I gave land to the University of
Nevada, St. Mary's Hospital, and
Sisters of Charity. They improved
the land! That'll do.

LEONARD
May need to do more.

GEORGE
I donated the land for the new high
school in Zephyr Cove.

LEONARD
I think they expect more, George.
I'm telling you this as a friend.

George screams in pain.

MATCH TO:

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE GATE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ruth screams, looking closer at the video monitor.

RUTH
Call Henri, then the ambulance.

Ruth is already racing out of the door, when she, Joseph, and Sam hear another of George's blood-curdling screams from the monitor. Sam stands and yells at Joseph.

SAM
Take the cuffs off. I've got to get
down there to help!

JOSEPH
What?

SAM
I know what it is!
(beat)
And it's not good!

BACK TO:

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ruth bursts in the door. Leonard steadies George in the chair, and George holds his head, fighting extraordinary pain.

RUTH
Captain, what is it?

LEONARD
He just snapped!

RUTH
You'd better go, Mr. DiMarco.

LEONARD
George was about to sign...

RUTH
He's not signing anything, today.
(to George)
We have an ambulance coming. Stay
calm. Relax.

Leonard drops off a 50-page document with dozens of red tabs sticking out.

LEONARD
A few initials will do.

Henri appears from downstairs pointing George's shotgun at Leonard, as Sam races in to comfort George.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
I could pick it up tomorrow?

Leonard is backing out, forced by Henri, as Sam examines George's scalp. George is hurting.

RUTH
(to Sam)
What are you doing here?

George looks up pitifully at Sam.

SAM
Has the Captain been suffering
night terrors?

RUTH
Yes, but...

SAM
Rapid weight loss?

RUTH
Yes.

SAM
Any seizures yet?

RUTH
What's this about?

George looks horrified as Henri returns, and puts the shotgun
down.

SAM
I saw the moles on his neck. The
multiple discolored, irregularly
shaped moles.

Sam looks away in tears. Ruth is angry.

RUTH
You're not a doctor!

SAM
My mom died last year at age fifty-
four. Sunbathed in San Diego, every
day 'til her skin was brown as shoe
leather.

Sam looks back at George, then she hugs him.

RUTH
(whispers to Sam)
Skin cancer? Melanoma?

Sam looks uncertain and shrugs her shoulders.

SAM
I pray it's not, but...

HENRI
Why the headaches?

SAM
He has to see a doctor! Now!

GEORGE
(to Sam, angry)
Why are you still here?

RUTH
I needed her help on a project,
Captain. She can go now.

We hear a siren in the distance.

SAM
Will they take him to Reno?

RUTH
Of course.

SAM
I'll hitch a ride. My office is a
few blocks away.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

George lays in a bed with a bandage on his neck. His eyes are shut. Ruth is by his side, when Henri and Sam step in. Ruth is angry at seeing Sam.

RUTH
Will you go away? I'll call
security.

SAM
Just tell me what the doctor said.

RUTH
You can't print a word of this.
Invasion of privacy. Defamation of
character. Libel. Unauthorized...

SAM
Relax. Fifty years. I promised the
Captain. I'll keep my word.

Ruth steps close to Sam and whispers.

RUTH
It'll take weeks to get the test
results.

SAM

Biopsy.

RUTH

(confident)

But you're wrong about melanoma.
Doctor says it's probably just
migraine headaches. Nothing to
worry about!

Henri leans closer. Sam hugs Ruth.

SAM

Good news.

RUTH

Doctor said rest and pain relief as
needed.

George opens his eyes widely.

GEORGE

I'll rest when I'd dead! Take me
home.

George sits up and turns his body so that his feet dangle.
Ruth and Sam race to his side.

RUTH

The doctor has to release you.

GEORGE

The hell he does. Not a prisoner!

Sam laughs.

SAM

I was! Come on, Captain, let's get
you out of here.

GEORGE

Miss Eriksson, can you stay the
night? I need to learn more about
your mother and her...illness.

RUTH

(to George)

No! She'll be disruptive. You'll
need your rest.

SAM

(to George)

Love to. Long as you don't publish
what I tell you for fifty years.

RUTH
Honestly, you two are a nightmare!

GEORGE
Night terrors! That's another
reason. Take me home! Now!

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

George is in his wheelchair and bathrobe. Ruth is at his side. Sam is pacing around the room. She passes Leonard DiMarco's contract several times, and glares at the cover each time. George is agitated.

GEORGE
Where's Henri with my scotch?

RUTH
Not with the painkillers.

GEORGE
I'll decide how I want to live
while I wait two weeks for test
results!

RUTH
I said, not with the painkillers.

GEORGE
You may be excused for the evening,
Nurse Casey.

Ruth huffs, and yells as she plods downstairs.

RUTH
Henri, one small glass of scotch
for the Captain.

GEORGE
(to Sam)
Well, out with it. What's this
about your mother?

Sam stops pacing and collapses on the couch. Henri enters with a bottle of scotch and a glass for George, who chugs the first glass like water.

SAM
It upsets me, and it's not relevant
if all you have are migraine
headaches.

George gets another terrible headache. He moans. Henri races downstairs. George screams at Sam.

GEORGE

Ahhh! You're no good to me!

SAM

I'm sorry. Can't talk about it.
Should have stayed in Reno!

Sam heads up to Elia's room. She's halfway up the stairs when George yells.

GEORGE

I'm frightened! Help me, damn it!

SAM

Ironic, isn't it? When you were young and having wild parties, everyone wanted to be you, or be with you. I came here foolishly expecting to see the same man: the millionaire playboy who bragged about never working a day in his life. Screwing showgirls seduced by your wealth and connections!

(mumbles)

Who would want to be you, now?

(louder)

I've been shot, held captive twice, and had my preconceived fantasies destroyed by a bitter, failing old man with painful headaches and heartaches.

(even louder)

You've treated me like shit. I'm the luckiest of us all. I'm walking out of here tomorrow morning and never looking back!

Sam takes one step before George yells back.

GEORGE

Maybe I didn't earn my inheritance. I am proud of never working a day in my life except to build all this.

(points around the room)

Most of the fools in my time lost it all in the stock market.

SAM

I read you pulled fifty-million dollars out of the stock market just weeks before the crash of 1929. Some historians think you started the panic! You!

GEORGE

I played with money, cards, women, and booze my whole life, and I have nothing to be ashamed of.

Sam points to herself. She yells.

SAM

Really, Mr. Whittell? You've got nothing to be ashamed of? Nothing?

Sam slowly climbs the stairs to Elia's room. George swears like a sailor and pours himself another scotch! He yells.

GEORGE

You'll all be back tomorrow as long as there's food to eat and a roof over your heads! Human mynah birds!

We hear the mynah birds SQUAWK!

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dawn breaks over the lake, as Sam quietly walks down the stairs with her coat oozing feathers, and her backpack on. She sees George and Ruth enjoying breakfast on the deck. She tiptoes now, and is close to the door, when the phone RINGS. George and Ruth turn to see Sam sneaking out. Ruth races in.

RUTH

This will be Elia. She wants to talk to you.

Ruth answers the phone with her back turned.

SAM

Elia Pascal Whittell?

Ruth turns and hands the phone to Sam.

RUTH

There is only one Elia.

As Sam grabs the phone, she IMAGINES Elia (at age 30, as before) in the room, pacing short distances as she speaks into a Princess telephone with a very long cord.

SAM

Hello?

ELIA

This is Elia. You must be the journalist I heard so much about from Ruth and Joseph.

SAM

Ruth and Joseph spoke with you? What time is it there?

ELIA

Little after four P.M. Paris-time.

SAM

Must be you.

ELIA

Ruth protects George. Joseph protects the house. Joseph reported that you slept in my bed.

SAM

I did. No real guest rooms here.

ELIA

On purpose.

(beat)

Ruth says that you think my husband has skin cancer?

SAM

I'm not a doctor.

ELIA

You're not his daughter either, but you know the signs?

SAM

Yes. My mom...

ELIA

(interrupting)

We'll wait for the doctor's report if you don't mind!

SAM

I don't mind...

ELIA

(interrupting, angry)

What are you doing in our house? We're private people.

Sam turns her back to the deck and doesn't see George wheel himself in.

SAM

To be honest, one reason I came was to get the story of an immoral, fat-cat, millionaire playboy who might be my father! But all I found was a bitter, pathetic, shriveled-up old man who shot me, and his mistreated, unhappy slaves who imprisoned me twice. I can't wait to get out of this stone-age insane asylum. And you, deserting your philandering husband for Paris -- you all deserve each other. Nut cases!

George clears his throat, and Sam turns around.

ELIA

And the other reasons you came?

Sam look pitifully at George.

SAM

'Cause I think everyone deserves an opportunity to set the record straight before they die.

(her voice fades)

Kind of like, an exit interview, I don't know, to see if his or her life was worth living. My mom never had the chance.

George looks away. Ruth looks down. Sam turns to Elia, now IMAGINING her as a frail, 85-year-old woman who is staring into the phone receiver in disbelief.

ELIA

(frail voice)

We're a private people. A private people.

Elia DISAPPEARS. Sam hangs up the phone, and speaks softly.

SAM

I'll be going.

RUTH

I'll have Joseph bring the car around.

SAM

I'll hike. Beautiful Lake Tahoe day. Not about to waste it!

Henri peeks in from the top stair. He's sadly holding a bag.

HENRI

Made you some muffins, Miss Sam.

GEORGE

(gruff)

They're only tolerable with hot coffee, Miss Eriksson. Join us on the deck for a quick breakfast. That's okay with you, isn't it Henri and Ruth?

They nod 'yes.' George turns to wheel himself out on the deck.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Exit interview? Never heard of anything so morbid!

EXT./INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE DECK - CONTINUOUS

George, Ruth, and Sam sit around a small table, as Henri brings a large tray of scrambled eggs, bacon, biscuits, jelly, and another pot of hot coffee. The Lake is bluer than the sky.

SAM

Thanks, Henri, and pull up a chair.

Henri's and George's eyes open widely. Ruth looks away.

SAM (CONT'D)

I won't tell anyone!

Henri reluctantly pulls up a seat, still further back than the others.

SAM (CONT'D)

No, Henri. Right up here.

Sam pulls his seat closer to the table.

GEORGE

You said your mom didn't have much time...

SAM

Thirty-seven days, after the diagnosis. She didn't tell me for two weeks, when she cried her last tears. Took me another two days to hitchhike home. By then, she didn't know me.

George's eyes open widely again. Sam is in tears. Ruth comforts her.

RUTH

That's enough, dear.

SAM

I could sense the pain in her vacuous eyes. Not knowing her only child.

HENRI

So sorry, Miss Sam.

SAM

Guilt. I didn't call home enough from college.

RUTH

Understandable.

SAM

I missed a few holidays because I had to work to pay rent and afford tuition.

George, bewildered, stares at Sam.

RUTH

Forgivable.

SAM

No chance for her to tell me more about her days at the Cal-Neva Casino, or to say she loved me.

George looks out at the Lake.

GEORGE

Mae. The car crash. No chance to say anything!

RUTH

(smirks)

Captain blared that awful music over the loud speakers for weeks.

GEORGE

Least Elia knows how I feel about her.

Sam GLARES at George. George turns to see her angry face.

SAM

I gotta go.

Sam stands, but George pulls her arm back to the chair.

GEORGE

Skin cancer. Melanoma. What's it do?

Sam pulls her arm back. She's angry enough to tell George the awful truth, like a horror story.

SAM

You've got migraine headaches and night terrors. Pray to God you never get melanoma. It sneaks up on you one night after years of enjoying the sun like it was your best friend. It masquerades as a small mole, maybe on your back, or on your scalp, not so you'd ever notice that it slowly changes its shape or color.

Henri and Ruth touch their scalps.

GEORGE

How thick are the moles?

SAM

If they're thicker than two dimes lying flat of a table, it may already have spread to a lymph node.

Henri stares at the blotch on George's neck.

HENRI

Two dimes aren't very thick.

SAM

By then you might have a forty-five to eighty percent chance of surviving five years.

RUTH

If the moles are thicker than two dimes?

SAM

Once it metastasizes, the cancer is incurable. It can hit the lungs, kidneys, bone,

(beat)

And brain. The doctor told my stepdad that there was a ten percent chance my Ma would survive five years.

HENRI

Geez!

SAM

(angry)

Then he said most people survive six months to a year.

GEORGE

Bad luck.

Sam grabs the two collars on George's bathrobe. She yells.

SAM

But my mom got just thirty-seven days! She was fifty-four years old, a great mom, and a loving human being! Why? Why? Why?

Sam pushes away from George. In tears, she turns to leave.

GEORGE

Why what?

Sam stomps away grumbling.

SAM

Why did a miserable human being like you get eighty-six years, and my Ma, full of love, get fifty-four?

Before Sam enters the house, they all hear a speedboat on the Lake, heading their direction. The boat is driven by a Sexy Woman (28) in a bikini. Standing in the boat like George Washington crossing the Delaware, is Leonard DiMarco. Even Sam turns to see the loud, fancy boat pulling into George's dock.

LEONARD

Morning, George. Permission to come aboard, Sir.

The Sexy Woman steadies the boat as Leonard jumps off. George, Ruth, Sam, and Henri look puzzled. Leonard can't hear them whisper on the deck.

HENRI
I'll get the shotgun.

Henri exits.

GEORGE
He's here for the contract.

RUTH
You didn't read it. Nobody did.

GEORGE
Miss Eriksson is the speed-reader.

George looks pitiful. He shakes, maybe too much for effect. Sam gives in.

SAM
Okay, I'll give it a quick read.
Stall him.

RUTH
I'll meet him at the front door.

Sam runs inside and begins to speed-read the contract. While Leonard races up to the rock path to the lodge, George has a DAYDREAM (MONTAGE).

BEGIN MONTAGE

FIVE scenes take place at George's dock over the course of one day.

SUPER "SUMMER 1942"

1. George helps Elia (50), well dressed in a dress and fur coat, onto a small, fancy, wooden speed boat. They wave good-bye to each other as the boat races south.
2. When the boat is out of sight, another, larger speed boat arrives from the north, with five Showgirls (25-35) in swimsuits. The Boat's Driver (40) remains aboard.
3. George is drinking, dancing, and fondling the Showgirls down at the water's edge.
4. George helps the five Showgirls into the larger boat, and it races north.

5. When the larger boat is out of sight, the smaller boat arrives. George is surprised that Elia is not aboard. He's angry.

END MONTAGE

George's DAYDREAM ends as he hears Leonard's loud voice as he enters the deck, with Ruth right behind him.

LEONARD

Ya see, George, it's all routine. Boilerplate. Fast-tracked, but with your interests in mind.

RUTH

He hasn't had time to read it. And his health isn't the best right now.

LEONARD

If it's good enough for the State of Nevada, it's good enough for me, hey George?

GEORGE

Well, I...

Sam races onto the deck from the lodge.

SAM

I'd send him packing, Captain.

LEONARD

What? Who is this? We agreed in principle, and I've looked it over thoroughly.

SAM

It's a lot of land, Captain. What does it mean when it says, "kept in either a park-like, natural, or other land use category?" What's this other land use category mentioned on pages seventeen, twenty, and twenty-three. Casinos? Subdivisions for Condo's? Golf courses? Trailer parks? Massive hotels? It's not specified.

LEONARD

Who is this? I demand an explanation.

Sam is ready to slap Leonard, but she steps back.

RUTH

The Captain may need a little more time to share this with his attorneys.

SAM

And it's all based on condemnation costs for the land. Even lower than open space. Captain's getting screwed!

Leonard lunges at Sam, but Henri appears with the shotgun.

LEONARD

(to Sam)

You shut the hell up, whoever the hell you are.

(to Henri)

You're not gonna use that thing.

Henri fires a shot over Leonard's head.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ!

Leonard stomps to the front door. George yells.

GEORGE

Guess the answer's no, Mr. DiMarco.

A minute later, they all wave to Leonard as he yells from the boat.

LEONARD

The governor's going to hear about this!

The boat speeds away. Sam puts on her torn jacket, throws the backpack on her shoulder, and turns to wave good-bye. There is a moment of silence.

SAM

Wish I could say it's been fun.

RUTH

I enjoyed meeting you, Samantha Eriksson.

HENRI

You have the muffins I made you?

Sam hugs Henri, and glares at Ruth.

SAM

Thanks, Henri. Almost makes up for the false imprisonment.

George looks out to the Lake and grumbles.

GEORGE

I'm sorry about your mother.

Sam snickers at the half-hearted comment.

SAM

Don't be too sorry. She lives in my heart and makes me smile every day. How many people do you make smile every day, Mr. Whittell?

RUTH

I'll show you out.

SAM

Don't bother. But call Joseph so he lets me pass without incident.

Ruth smiles.

RUTH

I'll do that. And I'm sorry for any trouble we've caused.

Sam shakes her head in disgust, and she exits.

SAM

Yeah, right. See ya, Captain.

George stares at her with curiosity as she leaves.

EXT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE GATE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Sam hikes past the Gate House at a fast clip. Joseph hangs up the phone, and yells out to Sam.

JOSEPH

Should hang around a few more minutes. Governor just called. He's on his way.

SAM

You gonna shoot and imprison him too? I couldn't write about for fifty years anyway!

Joseph laughs.

JOSEPH

We always hurt the ones we love.

Sam chuckles, as she strolls by.

SAM

Good one, Joseph.

Sam keeps walking. She waves without turning around.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Sam crosses the road from the lodge and holds out her thumb. Two Cars pass, but do not pick her up. Then, a Volkswagen bus driving south skids to a stop. It's Johnny from the mail room. Sam races across the street and dives into the back of the van. Sam doesn't see Joseph strolling up the driveway from lodge.

EXT./INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

The interior of the VW van looks like it's been inhabited by a pack of wolves. The bed is covered with manila envelopes, papers, photographs, and a typewriter. Johnny smiles.

Joseph looks on from behind a tree. The van's front windows are down, allowing Joseph to eavesdrop.

SAM

What are you doing here? If we're spotted together...

JOHNNY

(interrupting)

Nice to see you, too, Babe.

SAM

Just sayin' it could blow my cover. What do ya have for me?

Sam speed-reads the file labeled "DiMarco."

JOHNNY

You nailed the sleazy lawyer, Leonard DiMarco. Nickname is Leo the Shark.

SAM

Targets rich and elderly land owners.

JOHNNY

Represents the big-ass land developers around the Lake.

SAM

He makes it on the sale, and gets a cut of the developments?

JOHNNY

Exactly! What dirt did you get on Whittell?

Sam is silent. She scans more files, ignoring Johnny.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Your cover is going to be blown anyway when your exposes on Henry J. Kaiser and Jayne Mansfield hit the New York Magazine!

SAM

(mumbles)

I hate millionaires, okay!

JOHNNY

(snickers)

You destroy millionaires, is more like it. Kaiser built hospitals and helped millions of poor people with jobs.

SAM

(angry)

Warmonger industrialist trying to ease his conscience and buy his way into Heaven!

JOHNNY

He came clean with you in the interview. You don't let people change, do you?

SAM

Don't fight with me Johnny. Not in the mood. Got a camera I can borrow?

JOHNNY

No. And Jayne Mansfield. She'd been drinking. You got her to brag about conquests: JFK, Bobby Kennedy, movie studio chiefs. Big fucking deal. She was drunk. I was there.

SAM

It's the story they wanted to tell.
Needed to tell!

JOHNNY

You don't care who you hurt?

SAM

Don't go soft on me, Johnny. I'm
doing this for us. What dirt did
you find on the governor?

Johnny hands her a file from the front seat.

JOHNNY

Conservative as they get. Best
friend to Ronald Reagan. Was
Whittell's lawyer for many years.

Sam speed-reads the file.

SAM

Interesting, but I want dirt!

JOHNNY

(laughs)

You thought he wanted to develop
casinos all around the Lake?

SAM

So?

JOHNNY

So, you were dead wrong! He wants
regional parks and forests to
protect the Lake. You're the
asshole with misconceptions.
Where's the reporter digging for
the truth and fighting injustice?

Sam throws a stack of photos back at Johnny's face.

SAM

You're either with me or against
me! Are you with me?

Sam swings opens the door of the van. Johnny yells.

JOHNNY

Who else you gonna find to play
Sancho Panza to your Don Quixote?
You're never boring, you know that?

Sam giggles. Johnny dives at her, pins her down, and kisses her madly on the bed in the van.

SAM

If the Examiner fires us, we'll
find other work! Geez, Johnny, not
now.

Sam tries to resist him, then starts to surrender. Then, Johnny stops with a revelation.

JOHNNY

Wait! Have you noticed that the
people you interview die within six
months of being interviewed? You're
like the Black Widow of
Journalists! Who's gonna want to
get interviewed by you?

Sam pushes him off.

SAM

That's a mood-killer! Black Widow
of Journalists!

Johnny moans in regret, but laughs.

JOHNNY

True, isn't it.

SAM

Careful, or I'll interview you!

She shoves the ENVELOPES in her backpack, opens the door, and jumps out of the bus.

SAM (CONT'D)

I've got to warn the Captain about
DiMarco!

Johnny starts up the van. He has to yell over the sputtering motor.

JOHNNY

I think you owe Whittell an
explanation about lying to him
about being his daughter!

Johnny races away laughing. Sam turns to see Joseph. He's not smiling.

EXT./INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joseph marches Sam back down to the lodge, and follows her inside. George is out on the deck, Henri is downstairs, and Ruth turns towards the front door, while on the telephone angrily finishing a conversation, as Joseph enters and shoves in Sam.

RUTH

Thank you for your immediate attention on this matter. Mr. George Whittell Jr.'s reputation will not be tarnished, and his attorney has already been notified, Mr. Keenan!

SAM

You called my Editor-in-Chief?

RUTH

After I called the Governor, who will be here shortly, and our lead attorney.

George wheels in from the deck hearing the commotion. Joseph shuts the front door behind him, standing guard over Sam.

GEORGE

Seems like you just can't leave.

SAM

And I can't submit my fluff piece to my editor. Thanks a bunch!

RUTH

You won't be writing for anyone, Miss Eriksson. I also called your supposedly high-class New York Magazine. The Captain has an old poker buddy there who owes him a few favors.

SAM

How could you? That's why no one called the cops on me that first night!

RUTH

You're catching on, Miss Eriksson.

SAM

You all like to exact your revenge before you throw somebody out! You get even! Like the mob!

RUTH
Smart girl. You'll have to sink
your claws into another
millionaire.

SAM
You conniving...

GEORGE
Now, now, Miss Eriksson!

JOSEPH
You ain't heard the half of it.

RUTH
What's that Joseph?

JOSEPH
Miss Eriksson here met her hippie
boyfriend at the main road and they
were laughing and carrying on about
Henry Kaiser and Jayne Mansfield.

GEORGE
They're both dead.

George pulls out a flask of scotch and takes several gulps
before Ruth knocks it out of his hand.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Damn you, woman!

Joseph gets excited.

JOSEPH
That's the point. She got their
interviews, and they died within
six months!

SAM
Old age and a freak car accident.
Can't blame me.

JOSEPH
They call her the Black Widow of
Journalists!

SAM
My boyfriend called me that. He
wasn't serious.

JOSEPH
She's not your daughter, Captain.
Boyfriend said so.

George is devastated. Sam looks away.

SAM

You can't pull my articles from the New York Magazine! I'm their youngest contributing author! They paid me!

RUTH

(to Sam)

You'll have to pay it back. It's unethical to gain information under false pretenses: pretending to be a long-lost relative.

(beat)

Like you tried to do here with Captain. It's back to newspaper fluff pieces for you!

(to George)

She's filthy and she wanted dirt, Captain!

The phone RINGS. Ruth shakes her head in disgust at Sam, and goes to answer the phone. George's chin drops in despair.

GEORGE

I know what she wanted! She wanted to them to ease their minds before they...

Ruth answers the phone.

RUTH

Whittell residence. Ruth Casey speaking.

(beat)

Doctor?

(beat)

The x-ray specialist?

(beat)

Two additional opinions. I see.

GEORGE

What is it, Ruth?

Ruth turns from George.

RUTH

I see. I see. I know. Still awaiting the bi-... other test results.

GEORGE

What is it, Ruth? Damn it! Tell me!

George, in severe pain, grabs his head with both hands. Sam lowers her head, and turns away. Then Sam rushes to George to hug him.

RUTH

Yes, we should see Doctor Ely Harte
in San Francisco. The x-rays
weren't as clear as you'd like.
Thank you for calling, Doctor.

Ruth pushes Sam away in anger.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I hope you're happy now, Miss
Eriksson!

George tries to escape his pain in a DAYDREAM as they argue in the b.g.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Three scenes take place at George's dock over the course of one day.

SUPER "SUMMER 1948"

1. In the living room, George tries to snuggle with Elia (56) on the sofa, while showing the hit movie "Gentleman's Agreement." As George moves in for a kiss, she slaps him hard across the face, and storms out.

2. In the Card Room (with Howard Hughes and Ty Cobb; just as before), Howard and Ty split a huge pile of chips as George loses a big hand and angrily throws his cards down, and stomps out.

3. In Elia's bedroom, Mae, still dressed, reads a Life Magazine on the bed, as George enters the room drunk. George forces himself on Mae, who pushes him off the bed. She grabs her purse and the keys to the car on her dresser and races out.

END MONTAGE

George hears a car CRASH in his head, and the DAYDREAM ends. George shivers in fear.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I'll get the pain medication.
Joseph, get Miss Eriksson out of
here. For the last time!

Ruth races downstairs. George turns to Sam sadly.

GEORGE
Melanoma. You knew time seeks its
greatest revenge on the rich.

Joseph grabs Sam by the arm.

SAM
My mother wasn't rich.

George grabs Sam's hand with both his hands.

GEORGE
She, at least, had you.

George stares into Sam's eyes. They share a moment. Then,
they share tears.

End Act Two

Act Three

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE LIVING ROOM - DAY

George is clenching Sam's hand and staring into her eyes when Ruth returns to the living room with pain meds. Joseph stands by the front door, unsure of what to do.

RUTH

Joseph, I said to get Miss Eriksson out of here! Now!

GEORGE

I want her to stay.
(beat)
I need her to stay.

SAM

I misled you, Captain, and I don't know how to help you.

GEORGE

You knew before my nurse, before the doctors.

SAM

I'd seen it before. The headaches, the night terrors...

Ruth turns compassionate and kneels close to George.

RUTH

(interrupting)
The changing moles, the weight loss. I should have put it all together. I'm so sorry, Captain.

GEORGE

No one must know.

They all nod, 'yes.'

RUTH

You've been the target of land grabbers, charities, and liars and thieves for decades.

SAM

They'd be all over you. I understand.

George releases Sam's hand. Ruth races to the phone.

RUTH
I'll call the Governor and cancel
his meeting today.

GEORGE
No!
(beat)
Despite our differences, I need him
now, too.

RUTH
You're not well enough.

GEORGE
I'm just well enough. Give me half
a pain pill.

Ruth complies.

RUTH
(to Joseph)
You may go, Joseph. Buzz us when
the Governor arrives.

Joseph exits as Henri enters with a pitcher of ice water and
three glasses.

GEORGE
I'd like to speak with Miss
Eriksson, privately.

RUTH
That's not a good...

GEORGE
Privately! Down by the Lake.

RUTH
(reluctant)
Henri, help the Captain, please.

EXT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Henri wheels George to a rock walkway overlooking the Lake.
Sam has her notebook and pen. It's a beautiful day.

GEORGE
That will be all, Henri.
(beat, sincere)
Thank you, Henri.

Henri is shocked to hear a "Thank you."

HENRI
Yes, Captain.

GEORGE
I mean, for everything.

HENRI
Yes, Captain.

Henri departs with a smile.

SAM
You're Catholic, aren't you
Captain?

George turns angry.

GEORGE
I know where this is going...

SAM
(interrupting)
Confession is good for the soul?
I'm sorry I lied to you.

GEORGE
I repeat. I have no apologies.
(beat)
I do cheat at checkers! But,
nobody's gonna tell my story!

SAM
Same tired, old record. Is that how
you want to be remembered?

George looks out across the Lake. Sam gazes too.

GEORGE
Now turn around.

Sam turns to see miles and miles of undeveloped forests.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
That's how I want to be remembered.
Not with words.

Sam turns to the Lake again.

SAM
What about your wild parties?

George closes his eyes tightly, frustrated.

GEORGE

I can't...I can't imagine them
anymore.

SAM

Your behavior might have been very
disrespectful of your wife, Elia.

George shakes his head in frustration again.

GEORGE

I can't imagine Elia today.

SAM

And the wild poker games?

George shakes in fear.

GEORGE

Wild poker games? More like
pathetic old men, hoping that lady
luck might postpone the inevitable.

SAM

The opium den?

George looks to Sam for help remembering.

SAM (CONT'D)

I can't help you, Captain.

George looks to the Lake again, sadder than ever.

GEORGE

You told me what I had in store. I
worry about my mind.

SAM

Find peace, Captain. Your personal
stories are safe with me.

GEORGE

Fifty years?

SAM

Fifty years -- except for a four-
inch column fluff story about your
good ol' days, or I'll be fired --
if I'm not fired yet!

We see, but do not hear, George spilling his guts to Sam.

LATER

Ruth yells from the deck of the lodge, interrupting them.

RUTH
 Captain, the Governor called to say
 he's twenty minutes out.

GEORGE
 Send Henri down, please.

Ruth is shocked to hear the word, "please." She smiles as she re-enters the lodge.

SAM
 No apologies, Captain? None?

GEORGE
 Maybe one.
 (beat)
 To Elia.

George and Sam share a DAYDREAM of young Elia (at 30 years old) walking with a beautiful flowing yellow chiffon dress and matching parasol, strolling slowly past them. She smiles.

ELIA
 You could be a naughty, naughty
 boy, Captain.

She stops, and raises a hand to slap him, but doesn't.

ELIA (CONT'D)
 I never let on how much you hurt
 me. I should have let you have it!

George looks down and away.

GEORGE
 I was selfish and thoughtless.

SAM
 See, apologies aren't so hard!

Elia strolls buy, then turns her head back for the last word.

ELIA
 Rich men: Can't live with 'em,
 can't live without -- their money!

She winks, turns her head back, and keeps walking until she disappears. The DAYDREAM fades for George and Sam, as Henri yells from the top of the walk.

HENRI

Coming in a minute. Have a roast in the oven!

Henri exits again, and Sam seizes the opportunity.

SAM

What about Mae?

George gets defensive.

GEORGE

Lived like a queen while she was here. No apologies.

SAM

None?

George pauses, and saddens.

GEORGE

Didn't tell her I loved her.

SAM

(snickers)

Adultery, such an inviting quality in a man.

George isn't listening to Sam. He turns his head.

GEORGE

I didn't prove my love often enough. My parents, Elia, Mae, everyone...

SAM

(laughs)

We all make that mistake, Captain.

George scowls.

SAM (CONT'D)

Tell me about your parents.

GEORGE

Thought I was a lazy under-achiever and womanizer.

SAM

(snickers)

You showed them. You weren't a lazy womanizer.

GEORGE

They were humiliated when I ran away to join the circus after high school.

(beat)

They were right.

SAM

That's all in the newspaper clippings.

(beat)

How did you feel?

GEORGE

Like an orphan. An outcast.

(angry)

No apologies!

SAM

Think I've heard a couple today already.

They see Henri running towards them. He positions himself behind George, and pushes slowly. Sam follows.

HENRI

Making your favorite tonight, Captain. Nurse Casey's idea.

GEORGE

Roast beef, rosemary potatoes, and scotch.

(beat)

If I died tomorrow, I'd be happy.

George thinks about what he said, and turns sad.

SAM

Henri, do you have any regrets in life?

HENRI

Garlic. I should have used more garlic.

Sam and George are forced to chuckle on the way back to the lodge.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

When George, Henri, and Sam enter the downstairs of the lodge, Ruth is running around like crazy, making a list on a pad of paper. She doesn't stop to talk.

GEORGE
What's the hurry?

RUTH
Packing. Leaving tomorrow.

GEORGE
What?

RUTH
Better doctors in San Francisco.
Elia called. She's flying back from
Paris on the red-eye.

GEORGE
That means...

SAM
Last day at the lodge.

HENRI
Forever?

RUTH
Afraid so. Make a list of your most
important items to pack. We'll send
for the rest. Henri, pack your
things!

George sinks into depression. Henri races to his room.

GEORGE
I worked over every inch of the
blue prints. Watched nearly every
stone placed. Thirty years.
(beat)
The boathouse! I've got to see the
boathouse!

RUTH
We don't have time, Captain. And
the Governor's on his way!

SAM
I'll take him.

Sam doesn't wait for an answer. She wheels George around.

RUTH
You've got ten minutes! I want you
back and rested when the Governor
arrives!

Sam and George exit with a smile.

EXT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Sam is reckless with George in the wheelchair, and he enjoys it. He slightly giggles. She laughs.

GEORGE

We had some great fun on the boat.
Twin airplane motors. Over forty
miles per hour on the Lake.

They reach the boathouse in record time.

INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE BOATHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Inside is the Thunderbird yacht. Sam is mesmerized, again.

SAM

The legends are all true.

GEORGE

She's not mine anymore. Sold her to
Bill Harrah six years ago.

SAM

Harrah, the casino magnate?

GEORGE

He stores it here on occasion so I
can see her. Touch her. Hold her.

George pauses.

We SEE old FOOTAGE of George and showgirls out on the boat
(<http://www.yachtingmagazine.com/thunderbird-legend-lives>).

Tears form in George's eyes.

SAM

You'll miss this place.

Sam pushes George's wheelchair out of the boathouse.

EXT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

George turns angry, as Sam pushes George slowly.

GEORGE

Didn't want any neighbors!

SAM

What?

GEORGE

That's why I never built my casinos
at Sand Harbor and Zephyr Cove! Had
nothing to do with saving the land!
(yells)
Didn't want neighbors!

SAM

What difference does it make, you
old fool? You conserved the land
for plants, animals, and the Lake!

GEORGE

Look what they're doing to Incline
Village! South Lake! Tahoe City!
Something has to be done.

SAM

Or not done. I'm with you, Captain.
Your land looks mighty fine just
the way you're leaving it.

Sam pushes George as fast as she can. He giggles.

EXT./INT. THUNDERBIRD LODGE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sam pushes George into the living room. Their smiles
disappear and their chins drop as they see the sleazy lawyer,
Leonard DiMarco, standing next to GOVERNOR PAUL LAXALT (46),
a tall, handsome man in a dark-blue business suit, cowboy
hat, and cowboy boots. Leonard is in a gray shark-skin suit.
Ruth holds another copy of Leonard's contract. Paul rushes to
shake George's hand, and to meet Sam.

GOVERNOR

Captain, great to see you again!
(to Sam)
Who's this? I'm Paul Laxalt.

Sam stretches out her hand.

SAM

Samantha Eriksson, Governor. Nice
to meet you. I'm new at the Reno
Examiner.

GOVERNOR

Can't be too new, if you snuck your
way into this fortress.

SAM

I paid my dues.

George and Sam glare at Leonard.

GEORGE
Why'd you bring him, Paul?

GOVERNOR
Constituent, major contributor to
my campaigns,
(laughs)
And besides, he bought me lunch.
(beat)
Says you two are close to a deal.

LEONARD
Hi, George. I made the necessary
changes you... and your staff
requested.

As Ruth hands George the new contract, Leonard glares at Sam and Ruth. Sam examines the contract pages to see it hasn't changed. She shakes her head, 'no.'

GOVERNOR
I don't have a horse in this race,
Captain. Just doing a man a favor.

GEORGE
A favor. I see.

GOVERNOR
Big things happening, Captain. My
office has been working on a bi-
state regional planning idea for
the entire Lake Tahoe Basin.

RUTH
(to George and Sam)
California and Nevada joining
forces to save the Lake. Governor's
been telling us all about it! No
new docks. Acquiring more lands for
National Forests and State Parks,
and strict environmental guidelines
in the entire basin.

(beat)
All carefully monitored with
scientific research!

George smiles, then glares at Leonard.

GEORGE
So what's he doing here?

GOVERNOR

Not sure, really. I gave him a lift, 'cause he said you were close to a deal on some acreage, before any new restrictions came along.

Sam paces with suspicion. She waves the contract.

SAM

Circumventing the new planning process?

GOVERNOR

Mr. DiMarco here made a strong point at lunch that the hotel, gaming, and development interests in Nevada might throw their support behind the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency next year, if we throw them a bone or two this year.

SAM

Bribery?

LEONARD

I scratch your back, you scratch mine.

GOVERNOR

Quid pro quo.

SAM

Except something smells. This contract didn't change by one word.

Sam tosses the contract to George. He examines it.

GEORGE

I agree with my new friend. I don't like it. The land suffers. My land!

Leonard is furious. He starts pacing. The Governor is astonished by Leonard's arm waving and hysterics.

LEONARD

Don't be ridiculous! There's no hope for this Tahoe Regional Planning Agency if the biggest players aren't behind it! Dead on arrival!

The Governor moves in to calm Leonard down. Sam pulls five thick envelopes out her backpack, and prepares to read the contents of one labeled "DiMarco." She yells.

SAM

Let me tell you about Leonard
DiMarco, Esquire.

Everyone stops and stares.

LEONARD

Shut her up. She's trouble.

SAM

He's targeted seventeen elderly
land owners in the basin in the
past two years, urging them to sell
their land before it becomes
worthless open space, before it's
condemned and stolen by the state
using eminent domain.

Leonard races to the Governor, who gets angry.

GOVERNOR

You're working both sides of the
fence, DiMarco?

LEONARD

Giant, bureaucratic planning agency
you've been touting for years is
going to run us dry. Can't you see
that, Paul?

GEORGE

Get him out of my house.

Henri is one stair away, and enters with the shotgun. Leonard
charges over to Sam, and knocks the envelopes out of her
hands.

LEONARD

This is all your fault, you crazy
hippie bitch!

GOVERNOR

Gone too far, Leonard.

Leonard lunges to grab Sam's shoulders, but Sam doesn't
hesitate. She makes a fist with her right hand and punches
Leonard right in the nose with everything she has. Blood
squirts everywhere. Leonard crashes atop a wood coffee table,
which in turn, crashes to the floor.

GEORGE

Nicely done, Miss Eriksson.

Sam holds her sore wrist. The Governor picks up Leonard off the floor. Ruth opens the front door. Henri marches him out with the shotgun pointed at his back. Sam follows, smiling. The Governor yells at Leonard.

GOVERNOR

If there's land 'round here to be sold, I want to buy it for a state park. If you're looking for souls to buy, try Hell before coming back here!

Joseph is waiting outside the door, smiling and with his pistol drawn.

The Governor begins to pick up the envelopes on the floor. The envelopes are labeled. He sees the names, "DiMarco," "Mansfield," "Kaiser." He takes two steps to get another file. It reads, "Whittell."

Sam turns from the front door in a panic, as everyone sees. She lunges toward the last file, but the Governor beats her to it. The file reads, "Laxalt."

SAM

I can explain!

GOVERNOR

Let's hope so.

Ruth, George, and the Governor each take an envelope. Sam cowers in a stuffed chair.

RUTH

Jayne Mansfield's Exit Interview.
(beat)
This was the trash we pulled from New York Magazine? Articles you wrote?

SAM

(sadly)
I didn't write everything I found out. Could have been worse. Much worse.

GOVERNOR

Henry J. Kaiser: I confess?
(beat)
He was known throughout the business world as an honest, labor-supporting gentleman.

(MORE)

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)

He advanced medicine with the construction of modern hospitals, medical centers and medical schools.

SAM

Good man, but no saint! His residential developments on Oahu completely destroyed ancient Hawaiian fishponds and wetlands. Progress, he called it! He told me some things I would never write, but he just had to get them off his chest!

RUTH

Miss Eriksson claimed to be a long-lost relative to get her interviews. Tried the same dirty trick on the Captain.

The Governor puts down the Kaiser envelope and investigates the one with his name on it.

GEORGE

Mine just has newspaper clippings. I've seen 'em, but that's exactly why I never trusted journalists.

SAM

I didn't write your story. You made me promise I wouldn't write it for fifty years! I'll stick to that promise.

The Governor reads his file aloud.

GOVERNOR

Son of a Basque shepherd. Born in Reno. Carson City High School state basketball champ, Lieutenant Governor...I don't see any dirt.

He glares down at Sam like a judge and jury.

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)

Were you just gonna make stuff up about me?

SAM

No, Sir. I don't make things up, except for the long-lost relative part. You're mostly good! Very Good!

GOVERNOR
(sarcastic)
Gee, thanks.

SAM
But what about the rights of the
Paiute tribes at Pyramid Lake to
sue for their primary water rights
to all that Truckee River water?

The Governor gets defensive.

GOVERNOR
State agriculture depends on that
water...

RUTH
(interrupts)
This is terrible. Disgusting. I
should have known all along.

George is sad.

GEORGE
(to Sam)
I trusted you.

Sam stands and scolds George like an angry parent.

SAM
And I trusted you! I'm not a
religious person, but I know this:
Everyone does good and bad things
if they live long enough! And
you're a freakin' idiot if you
think you can be absolved of all
your sins at the end of your life
by the simple wave of a high
priest's hand and a few old
prayers.

Sam paces.

GEORGE
See here, Miss Eriksson...

SAM
(interrupts)
It's not just you, Captain!
Everybody's in your boat. Other
people can learn from your
mistakes, and build on the great
things you've started.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

Maybe they'll treat women with more respect. Maybe they'll honor their spouses, teachers, and home-care professionals!

Henri shows his face from the top stair leading downstairs. He clears his throat so others know he's there.

GOVERNOR

Mr. Whittell has done a lot of great things.

SAM

Then we owe it to the world to tell them the good,
(beat)
And the bad, so that we learn what humans are capable of, and how we can improve, to make the world a better place!

RUTH

A better place for whom?

SAM

For future generations.

GOVERNOR

They can learn from history books.

SAM

Really? Did you learn how Thomas Jefferson's little-boy slaves were whipped by his personal slave-handlers?

George suddenly has seizures in his wheelchair. Ruth quickly grabs George's arms to stop them from flailing. Paul steps back. Henri races in, but freezes at the sight. Sam calmly steps up.

SAM (CONT'D)

(whispers)

So he doesn't bite his tongue.

Sam takes a thick envelope (filled with files) and shoves it in George's mouth between his teeth.

RUTH

Steady, Captain. You'll be okay.

SAM
 (softly to George)
 They don't last long. Ride the
 waves, Captain. Don't fight them.

George's seizure stops. Sam removes the envelope from his mouth.

SAM (CONT'D)
 My mom had them, before...

RUTH
 Let's get you to your Woodside
 home, close to the doctors in San
 Francisco, Captain. Henri, call the
 ambulance! I'll get his things.

Henri races downstairs. Ruth races upstairs.

GEORGE
 (to Sam)
 It was like the 1906 Earthquake. I
 drove my father down those
 crumbling streets and through the
 burning city to safety.

SAM
 People need to know that about you,
 Captain.

GOVERNOR
 Don't worry, Captain. The doctors
 will know how to help.

George whispers to Paul. Sam hears him.

GEORGE
 Don't worry about me. Save my Lake.

GOVERNOR
 I promise, Captain. So long for
 now, my friend.

Paul hugs the Captain, and waves as he exits. Ruth yells at Sam from the top of the stairs.

RUTH
 I want approval of your short fluff
 piece before it goes to print, Miss
 Eriksson!

SAM
 Yes, Ma'am.

Ruth disappears into George's bedroom.

Sam kneels in front of George, gazing up.

GEORGE

Still gonna write a fluff piece
about me as a playboy millionaire?

SAM

What do you think?

GEORGE

You'll lose your job at the
Examiner.

SAM

My main squeeze and I are flexible.

GEORGE

Your boyfriend?

SAM

You'd like Johnny. Radical,
unconventional, charming in his own
way...like you, only handsome!

They hear a Volkswagen bus honk outside.

SAM (CONT'D)

Well, not exactly like you. Johnny
drives a VW bus instead of a
luxurious Duesenberg.

George laughs, then turns sad.

GEORGE

Will you write about me? I mean,
someday?

SAM

In fifty years, like I promised!

Sam kisses George on the side of the cheek, holds his hands
for a moment.

SAM (CONT'D)

I know you helped Joseph's kids
with school tuition. Henri's too. I
know about your charity work. You
cheat a little, but you're just
plain nicer than the world knows,
Captain. I'm just glad you're a
lousy shot with a rifle!

She smiles, puts on her tattered coat, throws her backpack on, and slips out the front door.

George hears the VW bus sputter away. He laughs as he shakes his head.

INT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - DAY

SUPER "MAY 2018"

It's early morning in a rustic cabin near Zephyr Cove. There's a crackling fire in the wood stove. We see Sam (now 75; gray, but youthful and fiery), typing the last page of her thick manuscript on an antique typewriter. Johnny (now gray and spunky at 75) brings Sam a hot cup of tea. He hugs her shoulders as he looks over them at the manuscript.

JOHNNY

Fifty years to the day, Babe?

SAM

Everyone deserves an exit interview, especially George.

JOHNNY

To redeem ourselves? Set the record straight?

SAM

To show that we've had a life worth remembering. Worth learning from.

He taught me a lot. I own him!

(beat)

We all do.

We SEE the title page, "BLACK WIDOW JOURNALIST" By Sam Eriksson. Sam types "THE END."

EXT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - DAY

We ZOOM OUT to a helicopter fly-over of the rustic cabin. The chopper cruises over George Whittell High School, of the east side of the Lake. It's breathtaking. Sam narrates.

SAM (V.O.)

My friend, Captain George Whittell Jr., died of melanoma eleven months after his interview on April 18, 1969. His estate was worth over \$40 million.

We SEE thumbnail photos of George with his pet Lion "Bill" and pet Elephant "Mingo."

SAM (V.O.)

Three-quarters of his estate went to the Defenders of Wildlife, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the National Audubon Society.

We SEE a thumbnail photo of Elia on a living room couch with her pet cheetah.

SAM (V.O.)

Elia Pascal Whittell, was by George's side when he died. She inherited a tidy sum and died ten years after George.

We see a thumbnail photo of Ruth (or the actress who played her). Sam laughs.

SAM (V.O.)

Ruth J. Casey inherited almost as much as Elia. She died on May 2, 1990.

We SEE a thumbnail photo of Paul Laxalt (later in life, he's 95 now, in 2017).

SAM (V.O.)

Governor Paul Laxalt worked with U.S. Senator Alan Bible and Congress to create the bi-state Tahoe Regional Planning Agency in 1969, which helped preserve and protect Lake Tahoe, thanks in a large part, to George Whittell Jr.

(beat)

Laxalt went on to serve two terms as a U.S. Senator.

(beat)

The Paiute Indians and Pyramid Lake are still getting screwed by water diversions along the Truckee River.

The helicopter circles back over the Thunderbird Lodge.

SAM (V.O.)

After George's death, the Thunderbird Lodge and much of the remaining Whittell land was purchased by Jack Dreyfus of Dreyfus Investments.

(MORE)

SAM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He added a building to the Lodge,
but sold most of the land in its
natural beauty to the U.S. Forest
Service and Nevada State Parks.

The helicopter view captures a panoramic from South Shore to
Incline Village.

SAM (V.O.)
(a little angry)
Real estate, gaming, and
development interests continue
their relentless attacks on the
natural areas in the Lake Tahoe
Basin. But we won't let that
happen! Will we?

ROLL CREDITS

End Act Three

FADE OUT.

THE END