

**CONFESSIONS OF AN ACCIDENTAL ALIEN**

**A Hollywood Tragicomedy**

**Written by**

**Anton Diether**

CONFESSIONS OF AN ACCIDENTAL ALIEN

FADE IN:

EXT. SANTA MONICA BEACH - EARLY 1950'S - DAY

A mansion towers on a Palisades Park cliff top over white sands and the Pacific Coast Highway, a narrow dirt road.  
TITLE/CARD: "ACT ONE, Stranded in California".

VOICEOVER

I was born in Hollywood, literally.  
Well...that was my cover story. My  
parents were Canadians who moved  
from Vancouver to California...

A butler focuses binoculars down on the beach below.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

By Fifties American standards, they  
were a bit too bohemian...

Below on the shoreline, a young, pregnant woman (MOM, 30's)  
and her husband sunbathe on the sand -- *in the nude*.

Their Packard sits on the roadside, loaded with boxes. A  
police car pulls over behind it.

Two cops pick their way across the beach toward the naked  
couple, their shoes clogged with sand.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

They spent their first day in  
America in the Santa Monica jail.  
So did I. Even in the womb, my  
life was already a bit dicey.

EXT. QUEEN OF ANGELS HOSPITAL - DAY

The hospital looms over the Hollywood Freeway by a Western  
Exterminator billboard, a man bent over a bug with a hammer.

INT. DELIVERY ROOM - DAY

A newborn gasps and chokes, his entangled umbilical cord  
strangling him. A DOCTOR cuts the cord and leans over him...

DOCTOR

C'mon, little guy -- *breathe!*

He SMACKS his face. The baby SHRIEKS in traumatized terror.

## VOICEOVER

Abused from Day One. Even my name was an insult: "Gustav Goebbels". But like I said, that was just the cover story. Let me give you the short version of the truth...

EXT. VANCOUVER HOUSE GARDEN - FLASHBACK - DAY

Mom sunbathes topless on a backyard hammock, her eyes closed, basking in the bright sunlight. The sky darkens from...

A LOW-HOVERING UFO. AN ASTRAL BEAM ZAPS DOWN AND PENETRATES her slim abdomen...

## VOICEOVER

Mom's real name is Jara. My real dad is Commander Kronos from Planet Zzzzyk. Hey. No joke. I'm an alien. Born and stranded in L.A.

Lying obliviously, Mom squirms from a slight discomfort.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Unfortunately, even advanced civilizations don't always get it right. The impregnation cursed me with a permanent erection and turned my mother into a lesbian.

EXT. SAN FERNANDO VALLEY HOUSE - 1960'S - EVENING

A stucco tract home in the Valley's cookie-cutter suburbs.

INT. VALLEY HOUSE - EVENING

Mom, now mid-40's, plays an exquisite CHOPIN ETUDE on a Steinway. DENISE (30's), mannish with facial hair, watches "Roller Derby" on TV. YOUNG GUS (14), cute but withdrawn, watches the game with a frozen dinner on a TV tray.

## VOICEOVER

Mom gave up her concert pianist career and left my earth dad for the "Gorilla", a Brooklyn Sicilian dyke who hated me on first sight. She resented Mom's maternal love for me like some sibling rival.

A commercial break. Gus sneaks a hand toward the TV remote. Denise snatches it up and glares at him...

DENISE

Homework before TV, buster. You know the rules. Up and at it!

Gus rises in a sulk and shuffles off, muttering low...

YOUNG GUS

You're not my dad.

Denise barks at Mom who tries to focus on playing piano...

DENISE

That kid is spoiled rotten. You just let him do whatever he wants.

MOM

Denise, I'm trying to practice...

DENISE

He needs discipline. He'll never survive in the real world.

(coos at her)

C'mere, baby, let's cuddle up and watch the game. The Thunderbirds are winning.

Mom HITS A DISCORDANT CHORD on the keyboard.

BOY'S BEDROOM

Messy but tasteful for a teenager. Gus sprawls on his bed and picks up a framed photo of his dad. He turns it over to gaze at a drawing of his alien father, Commander Kronos...

YOUNG GUS

Where are you when I need you?

He opens and reads a book, "*Inside the Spaceships*", studying photos of flying saucers blazing across a night sky...

VOICEOVER

My mom believed in UFO's, so she gave me a book by a plumber who claimed he'd been chosen by alien visitors to fly around in their spaceships. He was chosen, right? Hey, I didn't need to be chosen. I was already visiting.

A MUFFLED QUARREL in the living room, DENISE'S VOICE RISING.

Agitated by her voice, and a painful erection in his shorts, Gus masturbates while he reads.

INT. VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

History class. A teacher LECTURES AD-LIB about Hitler's Nazi Germany, textbooks open to a photo of *Joseph Goebbels*.

Eyes glance toward Gus. He cringes from students' glares, in particular the evil grin from the beefy face of JOSH (15).

VOICEOVER

I survived high school by avoiding the name Gustav. Forget Goebbels. I was just "Gus". But I had to use my wits to fend off bullies who were bent on beating me to a pulp.

EXT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Gus sits alone at a far removed table, scribbling into a notebook. Josh and TWO BULLIES descend upon him...

JOSH

Hey, Nazi. That's our table.

YOUNG GUS

Excuse me...you're blocking my view.

BULLY 1

Beat it, kraut!

BULLY 2

Yeah, *Herr Goebbels!*

YOUNG GUS

Would you mind? I'm observing.

JOSH

Observing what? Your tiny pecker?

YOUNG GUS

Teenage culture. Earthlings seem to divide up into social circles based on their levels of stupidity.

BULLY 1

Are you callin' me *stupid?*

YOUNG GUS

No, just the human race in general.

JOSH

What the fuck are you talkin' about?

YOUNG GUS

Signs of intelligent life on Earth.  
It's all part of my research study.  
I observe, then I write notes...

He opens his notebook and fans through pages of scribble,  
broken by detailed drawings of humanoids and planetary maps.  
Josh snatches it away from him and flips through it...

JOSH

Some weird shit ya got here.

BULLY 2

I told ya, Josh, he's a fruitcake.

BULLY 1

Yeah, let's take him out to the  
handball court.

JOSH

Wait a minute...

BULLY 1

Let's tear him a new A-hole--

JOSH

Shaddup!

(to Gus)

What're you sayin', piglet? You're  
from outta space?

YOUNG GUS

Alpha Centauri, to be exact. My  
dad's a high-ranking officer on  
Planet Zzzzyk. He had me trained  
to infiltrate your Earth society...  
posing as a high-school student.

Josh hard-eyes him, absorbing this. Gus leans forward...

YOUNG GUS (CONT'D)

Wanna know what life is like out  
there? How we use electromagnetism  
to power our ships? How we mate  
with our young *females*?

BULLY 1

What a freak! Let's pound his  
sorry ass.

Josh plops down on a seat across from Gus, fixing him with a  
steely stare. His buddies frown back...

BULLY 2

C'mon, Josh -- let's take 'im out!

JOSH

Later. Take a hike.

The Bullies strut away in frustration. Josh assesses Gus...

JOSH (CONT'D)

Y'know, I'm a sci-fi buff myself.  
Ever read Robert Heinlein?

YOUNG GUS

Of course. He's one of us.

JOSH

I'm not stupid, y'know.

YOUNG GUS

What a relief.

JOSH

I suppose you're gonna tell me you  
get laid in outer space?

YOUNG GUS

Gravity free, Josh, it's the best.  
My parents always encourage me to  
penetrate as many vaginas as  
possible.

Josh gawks in awe, then grins and gives him a painful noogie.

JOSH

You almost had me going!

Gus winces in agony. Josh lets go and turns serious...

JOSH (CONT'D)

Tell me more about the sex stuff.

FREEZE FRAME ON Gus' smile...

VOICEOVER

In time, Josh began to believe I  
really was an alien. Our budding  
new friendship was precarious at  
first. That changed later...

INT. CHEMISTRY CLASS - DAY

Sparks fly from a tabletop volcano. A teacher AD-LIB EXTOLS  
the wonders of ammonium dichromate.

## VOICEOVER

When I took up chemistry.

Gus gazes deep into the sparks, his imagination on overdrive.

## INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY

The annual science fair. Gus impresses Josh and his buddies with his new chemistry project...

A display board of labeled ingredients: pool acid, ammonia cleaner, Drano, gun powder from firecrackers. With a project title...

"HOW TO BUILD BOMBS FROM HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS".

## VOICEOVER

I learned to specialize in the science of blowing things up.

## EXT. VALLEY HOUSE - DAY

World War II in the back yard. A doll house, rigged with a remote-controlled charge, EXPLODES INTO SMITHEREENS. School and neighborhood kids CHEER and APPLAUD.

## VOICEOVER

Luckily for me, my absentee earth dad shipped me all the ingredients I asked for on my birthday lists. Anything to keep me out of his new life on the east coast...

## CUTAWAY - BOTTLE LABELS

On a garage shelf: nitric acid, sulphuric acid, powdered magnesium, all with skull-and-crossbone warning signs.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

He sent me some very serious shit.

## BACK TO SCENE

Gus and Josh set off a heavy rocket randomly into the burbs. It flies a hundred yards -- decimates a mailbox. Watching from a house window, Denise protests to Mom...

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Denise didn't approve, arguing that I'll blow myself up. But given her and Mom's secret lifestyle, she had to keep her loud mouth shut.



INT. SCHOOL RESTROOM - DAY

Gus holds a cotton-ball bomb over a toilet bowl. To Josh...

YOUNG GUS

See this outer layer? Sodium peroxide. It ignites on contact with water, like a bomb fuse.

JOSH

Excellent, dude.

Gus drops the ball into the toilet and flushes it down.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

The two run outside to witness: an UNDERGROUND EXPLOSION on the athletic field. A geyser of water shoots skyward.

VOICEOVER

Ultimately, the Gorilla was right.  
My science career ended abruptly...

EXT. VALLEY HOUSE - GARAGE - DAY

A lab bottle EXPLODES -- hurtles Gus out onto the driveway.

Jars of oxidizers in his lab ignite from the flying glass -- a chain reaction, KABOOM-KABOOM-KABOOM! The garage catches fire, a conflagration of smoke and flames.

Mom and Denise rush outside to find Gus sprawled unconscious on the asphalt, covered in blood and glass shrapnel.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Gus recovers from lacerations and flash burns, his face skin peeled away, his features hairless and otherworldly.

Josh visits him with an entourage of hot prom-queen types. Gus gazes around at them through a sedated haze...

YOUNG GUS

Josh? Who are all these girls?

JOSH

They wanted to see the Alien Kid Who Blew Himself Up. Oh...this is Linda. She came on her own.

Plump, winsome LINDA (16) steps forward. Gus nods at her...

YOUNG GUS  
Hi. You look familiar.

LINDA  
You probably saw me in one of the school plays. I'm a thesbian.

YOUNG GUS  
A lesbian?

LINDA  
No, silly, an actress. How could I be a lesbian? I mean, duh, I'm still a virgin. Oh gawd...I can't believe I just said that.

YOUNG GUS  
No, that's cool. So am I.

They exchange flirting smiles, Gus' look of pain fading away.

VOICEOVER  
I realized chemistry was just an excuse to entertain. I found my true calling through Linda. She introduced me to a brand new world: the theatre arts department.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL THEATRE - DAY

Onstage, utter chaos. Gun battles and spurting fake blood on a space-ship set. Gus plays the role of an alien scientist, emoting in heavy makeup.

VOICEOVER  
We were the elitists on campus. Classes shut down so kids could come watch our one-act spectacles. Like "*Jesus M38*", my play about Christ in a UFO over Bethlehem...  
(beat)  
Professor Christ, that is, the inventor of a Jesus robot to save Planet Earth. But he was betrayed by his alien assistant Judas...

Galactic guards arrest Gus and stage-punch him in the face. Gus spews out a mouthful of fake blood -- splatters the front row. Students squeal in disgust.

For no particular reason, the guards start BLASTING machine guns with blanks into the delighted, screaming audience. A mindless, joyful theatre experience.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

But that all ended when I got too serious and staged Edward Albee's "Zoo Story". The wrong play at the wrong time...

## ONSTAGE - ANOTHER DAY

Gus portrays gay "Jerry" who provokes "Peter" to stab him in the gut. Gushing blood, he delivers a long dying speech...

## GUS/JERRY

Oh Peter...I was so afraid you'd go away and leave me...

A LUNCH BELL interrupts his death finale. He skips lines and accelerates his agonizing monologue...

## GUS/JERRY (CONT'D)

You lost your bench, Peter, but you defended your honor...

Students leave in droves for lunch. Backstage, an outraged PRINCIPAL berates the DRAMA TEACHER.

## VOICEOVER

A play with homosexual undertones was too out there for high school. I was summarily booted out of theatre arts. I said to myself, well fuck theatre -- I'm gonna be a FILMMAKER. Movies is where it's happening, the medium of choice.

## EXT. L.A. FREEWAY - DAY

Two Volkswagen bugs chase each other on the congested 101, zipping around traffic. Gus aims an Arriflex camera with a long zoom lens from the back of the convertible VW chaser. Linda drives, racing to keep up.

A teen actor in the pursued VW FIRES BACK with a realistic stage pistol. Alarmed motorists veer out of the way.

GUMBALLS FLASH -- A SIREN WAILS. A highway patrol car pulls the two Volkswagons over. Cops draw their firearms -- on Gus with the long-lens camera, mistaking him for a shooter with a sniper scope.

## VOICEOVER

Okay, maybe not a film MAKER. What did I know about street permits? I wasn't good at directing either...

EXT. VALLEY HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

ADULT GUSTAV, 18 going into adulthood, types feverishly on an Underwood at a patio table by an orange grove in the rear.

VOICEOVER

But I figured, hey, I could always write movies. I mean, anybody can be a screenwriter.

SHOUTING and CLATTERING inside the house kitchen. Mom fights with Denise who throws around pots and pans.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I gave up chase scenes and blood splatter to learn the basics of character and plot. I got my plot from that old UFO book, except I changed the plumber to a truck driver who's been chosen by aliens. Write what you know, right?

(beat)

I gave my first script a catchy title: "Alien Encounters".

Gus notices Mom hasten away from the house in a distressed state. He jumps up and follows her into...

ORANGE GROVE

Mom collapses on a tree stump in tears. Gus sits beside her. He reaches out a hand to console her...

GUSTAV

I'm sorry you feel so sad, Mom. I wish I could do something to make you happy.

MOM

Oh honey, you already have. You're my best friend in life.

She squeezes his hand and smiles. A beat between them.

MOM (CONT'D)

You're graduating soon. What do you wanna do with your life?

GUSTAV

Be in the movie business, I guess. I wanna go to film school, but with a C-plus average, I can't get a scholarship to NYU or USC.

MOM

I should have saved up for your future. So many wrong choices I made, letting someone take over my life. But I *did* save a little.

GUSTAV

Maybe UCLA. It's cheaper.

MOM

I'll get you there. I promise.  
(beat)  
Just one thing, Gus, if you really wanna make me happy?

GUSTAV

Sure. Anything.

MOM

If you ever get rich, buy a place with a guest house...one just for me. I wouldn't be a bother. All I wanna do is live by myself.

She glances off toward the house. Gus understands.

GUSTAV

I swear to God, Mom, I will.

MOM

God is only a myth, dear. Swear on something else.

GUSTAV

Mom? Are you an alien?

Mom laughs and hugs him with tender affection...

MOM

Of course I am, sweetie. I don't belong in the human race.

GUSTAV

Yeah. Neither do I.

INT. UCLA CLASSROOM - LATE 1960'S - DAY

The cinema arts division. Gus sits bored in a film theory class. A COLLEGE STUDENT leans over in a low voice...

COLLEGE STUDENT

UCLA is so dead. The real action's over at USC.

GUSTAV

The expensive film school?

COLLEGE STUDENT

Yeah. Some graduate there, George Lucas? He's shooting a really cool futuristic short... "THX-1138 4EB".

GUSTAV

A student short?

COLLEGE STUDENT

Yeah, but with a big budget. It's an open set. Go check it out.

GUSTAV

Maybe I will.

INT. USC COMPUTER CENTER - NIGHT

A late-night shoot in a computer room dressed up as a 25th-century control center. Full crew, sophisticated equipment.

Gus sneaks in, carrying a script envelope under his arm. He watches a young GEORGE LUCAS at the camera.

VOICEOVER

I was too chicken-shit to talk to the guy. But I left my "Alien Encounters" script behind on the set, hoping he'd pick it up and take a look. Ya never know, right?

(beat)

I didn't know about his new pal over at Cal State Long Beach... some kid named Steven Spielberg.

INT. WILSHIRE THEATRE - EVENING

A classic movie theatre with reserved seats and programs. Gus watches "Doctor Zhivago" on the big screen...

VOICEOVER

David Lean rocked my world. *This* was the kinda movie I wanted to write. I'd promised Mom that guest house out of lesbian hell -- and by God, I was gonna get it for her.

Beautiful blonde JULIE CHRISTIE appears onscreen. Dreamy blue eyes, luscious lips. Gus gapes at her in awe...

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I fell in love with Julie Christie.  
I was gonna marry me a blonde, blue-  
eyed *Russian*. Never mind that  
Julie Christie was British.

## INT. HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT - DAY

Gus lives in a funky one-bedroom with Linda from high school.  
He juggles between reading a book and diapering an infant.

## VOICEOVER

Instead, I married Linda who got  
pregnant the first time we lost our  
virginity. Only nineteen with baby  
Johnny...my life cut down in its  
prime. But I kept writing.

He studies pictures of Rosie the Riveter of the home front.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I researched the Forties for a  
script about wartime taxi dancers.  
If it was gonna be crap, at least  
it would be *authentic* crap.

## EXT. COLUMBIA STUDIOS - DAY

Gus drives onto the Burbank lot in the same VW convertible  
from his school days. He gazes wondrously around.

## VOICEOVER

A friend who liked the script gave  
it to a friend of a friend at  
Columbia. Life's what happens to  
you while you make other plans.

## INT. JERRY KASTNER PRODUCTIONS OFFICE - DAY

A secretary leads Gus into the suite of JERRY KASTNER (50's),  
a gruff movie tycoon. Jerry reacts to Gus' youthful face...

## JERRY

Well, fuck me. You wrote "Paradise  
Ballroom"? How old are you, kid?

## GUSTAV

Twenty-one.

## JERRY

Not bad for a Forties period story.

GUSTAV

Do you wanna produce it?

JERRY

Nah, I don't make chick flicks.  
But I'd like to offer you a job.

GUSTAV

Uh, okay...doing what?

JERRY

Coverages.

GUSTAV

What's that?

JERRY

Reading scripts. Yes, no or maybe,  
with comments. But be careful with  
the yes's. If you turn out to be  
wrong, I'll fire your ass.

Gus asborbs all this, lost for words. Jerry explains...

JERRY (CONT'D)

You represent the studio. You make  
decisions before I have to. I'm  
giving you the power of God -- at  
a hundred and fifty bucks a week.

Gus' eyes grow wide.

VOICEOVER

It was shit pay, but I didn't care.  
I was suddenly on the inside track.  
I was a fucking STUDIO READER!  
Welcome to Hollywood.

EXT. BEACHWOOD DRIVE - 1970'S - DAY

Below Hollywood Hills, a low-rent residential street.

INT. BEACHWOOD APARTMENT - DAY

Alone in a studio flat, Gus combs through a stack of studio  
scripts on his dining table. He's distracted by a fleeting  
vision outside his window...

A hot female tenant (HILDA) in hip Euro fashions rides behind  
a biker on a Harley, speeding home.

Gus goes back to his pile and picks out a script to read.



## VOICEOVER

I dropped out of UCLA to get a *real* education. My marriage didn't last long. We were just kids. Linda remarried and moved to Austin.

## CUTAWAY - NORMAN ROCKWELL PAINTING

The Dust Bowl, Oakies migrating past flat Texas oil fields.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I had no interest in Texas, so I didn't see my son Johnny for a long time. I wanted to, but I was just too busy. Reading scripts, hanging out with the brightest of Seventies cinema...mostly fucking.

## SAME SCENE - NIGHT

Gus performs oral sex on a young starlet on the couch, while she REHEARSES LINES ALOUD for an audition.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Mostly neurotic actresses. Then I graduated to studio-brass cougars to advance my career. I smartened up and became a Hollywood whore.

## INT. BEL AIR HOUSE - NIGHT

Gus doggie-fucks an older woman executive, JANICE (50's).

## JANICE

Spank me, toy boy!

## INT. LAMBORGHINI (MOVING) - EVENING

Janice races along a paved Pacific Coast Highway. Riding shotgun, Gus finishes reading a script and shakes his head...

## GUSTAV

What a piece of shit. A bunch of swamp goons kidnap some movie star and just rape her over and over.

## JANICE

"*Revenge in the Bayou*"? Oh, that project's been dead for years.

## GUSTAV

But Jerry wants positive coverage.

JANICE

Never mind that. Listen, you're gonna meet Carlos at the party. He's a major player. Play it smart, and he might hire you.

EXT. MALIBU BEACH HOUSE - BALCONY - NIGHT

At a railing, Gus leans over moonlit surf and scans a row of beach homes. A TWIGGY TYPE steps out for air. Gus turns...

GUSTAV

I wish I could live around here.

TWIGGY TYPE

In Malibu Colony? Dream on.

Janice bustles outside with CARLOS, an aging Italian bulldog chewing on a cigar, ushering him over to Gus.

JANICE

Carlos, this is Gus Goebbels.

Carlos nods whatever, checking out Twiggy. Gus glad-hands him with a big, friendly smile...

GUSTAV

Hey, Carlos! So, uh...are you from the north or south of Italy?

CARLOS

What? What did you say? Whaddya mean by that? Who the fuck are YOU, ya little kraut punk?!

Suddenly apoplectic. Twiggy slinks over, distracting him. Janice spirits Gus quickly away.

JANICE

Jeezus, Gus! If he remembers your name, he'll have you blacklisted out of the business.

GUSTAV

Why? What did I say?

Janice shakes her head at him, sweeping him out of the party.

VOICEOVER

How was I to know the guy was Sicilian, funding studio movies with mafia money? Social skills were never my strong point.

INT. COLUMBIA STUDIOS - KASTNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Gus walks in with an armful of scripts. The office foyer is filled with wannabe actresses. All the male staff missing.

VOICEOVER

"Revenge in the Bayou" was dead,  
but they put out a major casting  
call anyway. Just for kicks.

He looks into the audition room in the back. A naked girl sprawls on a bed and pretends to be raped. A camera rolls... empty of film. Jerry and a lot of guys watch and gloat.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Columbia's top talent were there,  
A-list directors watching starlets  
strip for a role that didn't exist,  
hustling girls on an assembly-line  
casting couch. It was Hollyweird.

INT. BEACHWOOD APARTMENT - EVENING

Gus works on a script on his Underwood, weary and depressed. A KNOCK on the front door. He opens it to...

HILDA (late 20's), a real looker with high-octane energy, Austrian born with a generic Euro accent...

HILDA

Ciao! I'm Hilda. Your neighbor?

GUSTAV

Oh right...the girl with the biker.  
I'm Gus.

HILDA

You mean like "Gustav"?

GUSTAV

No. Just Gus.

HILDA

Look dear, I'm dead out of alcohol.  
Do you have any wine to spare?

GUSTAV

Just Chianti.

HILDA

Ughh. Well, okay. Can I come in?

Gus starts to invite her in -- she zips right past him.

## KITCHEN

Gus pulls out a wine bottle from a shelf. Hilda assesses his good looks from head to groin. He offers it to her...

GUSTAV

Take the whole bottle if you want.

HILDA

I'd rather have it here. Are you busy at the moment?

GUSTAV

No, no...I'll get some glasses.

HILDA

Don't you ever drink Cab or Pinot?

GUSTAV

I was weaned on Chianti. My dad... uh, my Aunt Denise...was Italian. She lived with me and my mom.

HILDA

Your mother is Italian?

GUSTAV

No. She's an alien.

HILDA

Ach, I see. No green card. I've been there myself.

## LIVING ROOM

They bring in their wine glasses, Gus toward the couch, but Hilda sits at the dining table behind his typewriter. He joins her. She glances over a script page...

HILDA (CONT'D)

So you're a screenwriter.

Gus shrugs. Hilda nods around the room, scripts with studio covers piled everywhere.

HILDA (CONT'D)

You must be very productive.

GUSTAV

Well no, those are...I'm a reader, too. For Jerry Kastner.

HILDA

Kastner Productions? Impressive.

She turns over a stack of pages and peruses the title page.

HILDA (CONT'D)

But this one is yours. "Midnight Fantasies". Sounds provocative.

GUSTAV

It's an erotic thriller.

HILDA

How exciting. With lots of sex?

GUSTAV

Oh yeah. It's almost X-rated. Probably not a good idea for the mainstream market.

HILDA

I'm a writer, too. Well...an exec secretary at MGM. But I've been around the writer's block. Do you have any screen credits?

GUSTAV

I wish. I haven't sold anything yet.

HILDA

I've got a credit. On a kung-fu action flick, shot in Hong Kong.

GUSTAV

Really? That's great...

HILDA

Well, I fucked the producer. That always helps.

She downs a gulp of Chianti, grimacing at the taste.

GUSTAV

So have I. It didn't help a lot.

HILDA

We all do it, Gustav...

GUSTAV

Gus, please.

HILDA

The trick, Gustav, is knowing how to fuck your way to the top.

Gus smiles at that, turned on by her attitude.

GUSTAV

So...is the biker your boyfriend?

HILDA

Collin? Not exactly. We play in the same sandbox. He's coming over soon, you'll like him. We're going to drop some acid, maybe go to the beach. Why don't you join us?

GUSTAV

Uhhh...

HILDA

You ever get high, Gustav?

GUSTAV

Some grass now and then. Mostly anti-depressants.

HILDA

Hallucinogenics are the perfect cure for that. C'mon, get in the grove -- it'll be fun! And it's perfectly safe.

EXT. PIRATES COVE - ZUMA BEACH - NIGHT

The only underground nudist beach in L.A. County -- populated by naked HELL'S ANGELS and their BIKE MOMMAS. Campfires and Colemans, partying on the sand, surrounded by high cliffs and boulders. THE GRATEFUL DEAD BLARES from a boom box.

Hilda, Gus and COLLIN the biker climb through the boulders to reach the cove. Gus is tripped out of his mind on acid. He staggers onto the sand and stares dazedly around...

GUSTAV

Groovy!

HILDA

Let's go swimming!

She and Collin strip naked and dash into the surf. Gus drops his shorts and runs after them.

SURF WATERS

Gus swims past crashing waves and treads deep water. Riptide currents sweep him away from his friends...

HILDA (CONT'D)

Gustav!! You're in a riptide!

Gus can't hear her, succumbing to a bad acid trip in the treacherous surf. He looks skyward...

THE PSYCHEDELIC IMAGE OF A *BLACK-WIDOW SPIDER* HOVERS ABOVE.

Fighting the riptide, he gapes toward the camp-lit beach...

SCORES OF *LITTLE SPIDERS* SCALE DOWN THE CLIFFSIDES.

Hilda and Collin grab Gus and lifeguard him back to shore. His LSD-induced vision jars back to reality...

The black widow MORPHS INTO A POLICE HELICOPTER circling the beach.

The spiders on the cliffs are RIOT COPS in rappelling gear, raiding the cove to arrest all the nudists.

COVE BEACH

Sudden chaos on the sand. The three run for cover. Cops in visors swarm in to attack Hell's Angels with riot batons.

From Gus' TRIPPY POV, the cops TRANSFORM INTO UNIFORMED NAZIS, corralling Jews away -- except the Jews are angry bikers with swinging fists, knives and chains.

Naked bodies clash with uniforms. A violent melee.

Police converge on the escaping trio. Collin defends them. The cops bash him to the sand, beating him into a coma.

Hilda rushes Gustav away into the boulders, the two climbing and stumbling over rocks, far from the riot.

EXT. MUSTANG CONVERTIBLE (MOVING) - NIGHT

Hilda drives away from Zuma Beach, grinding gears in her souped-up '62 Mustang. Gus hyperventilates, totally acid-freaked. Hilda shouts gleefully into the night...

HILDA

*Ach du lieber!* Cowabunga! What a fucking trip!

Gus stares aside at her. She hits the pedal at top speed, laughing and crazed, her hair blowing wild. Gus' POV...

Hilda's skin MELTS OFF her face. Her EXPOSED SKULL CACKLES into the wind...

GUS' VOICE LAUGHS HYSTERICALLY WITH HER.

## VOICEOVER

I finally found my soul mate, since  
Julie Christie wasn't available.  
But Hilda was not like anyone  
I'd ever met.

## EXT. HILDA'S BEACHWOOD APARTMENT - EVENING

Stylish decor, a low-lit ambience. Hilda sits on a futon  
in a lotus position, breezing through Gus' finished script.

On the floor, Gus snorts a line from a mound of cocaine on a  
mirror. On a stereo, MOODY BLUES' "NIGHTS IN WHITE SATIN".

## GUSTAV

Where d'you get all this coke?

Hilda closes the script, excited by it...

## HILDA

Mein Gott! You're so talented!

## GUSTAV

You like it?

## HILDA

You really know how to write  
women's fantasies. But change that  
title... "Midnight Fantasies" is  
too on the nose.

She kneels beside him and snorts from the coke mound.

## GUSTAV

Well, how about "Nocturnal Games"?

## HILDA

We should write together. I've got  
a great idea for a pirate movie.

## GUSTAV

Pirates don't sell...

## HILDA

But women pirates do. Sex sells...

She kisses him impulsively. Then unbuckles his belt, unzips  
his fly and promptly wrenches down his pants...

## HILDA (CONT'D)

And you write erotica so well...



GUSTAV

I do a lot of research...

HILDA

A creative mind is the only thing  
that turns me on...

GUSTAV

Yeah, I can tell...

Hilda goes down on him. Gustav gasps. She deep-throats him,  
then stops and rises up close to his face...

HILDA

But don't use that name anymore,  
dear. You're not a "Gus" -- you're  
a "Gustav". Be proud of it.

GUSTAV

Whatever you say...

He shifts over and tries to mount her. She throws him back  
across the futon, then jumps up and peels off her panties...

HILDA

Anne Bonney and Mary Read.

GUSTAV

What?

HILDA

The only female pirates in history.

She mounts *him* instead, straddling his hips...

HILDA (CONT'D)

They disguised themselves as men on  
Calico Jack's ship...

(moans with pleasure)

Mmmm, that's it...

She grinds passionately against him, pitching her story...

HILDA (CONT'D)

But here's the twist -- it becomes  
a love triangle. Neither one knows  
the other one's true gender. And  
Calico Jack doesn't know they're  
both *women!* It's brilliant...

GUSTAV

It's fantastic...

He nods with enthusiasm, while Hilda fucks him blind.

## VOICEOVER

My first creative partnership,  
though Hilda couldn't write English  
very well. I did all the work.  
But she changed my identity. She  
broadened my horizons...

## INT. JANICE'S BEL AIR HOUSE - NIGHT

Three naked bodies on a waterbed. A menage a trois, Hilda  
giving oral to producer Janice, who in turn sucks off Gustav.

## VOICEOVER

I introduced her to *my* friends...

## INT. SANTA MONICA HOUSE - NIGHT

A dozen naked bodies on a fireside fur carpet. A coke-fueled  
orgy with a full staff of studio executives and secretaries.

## VOICEOVER

She introduced me to *her* friends...

Hilda orchestrates sexual positions, the queen of kamasutra.  
Gus watches her, studying her...

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

She manipulated people with all the  
social graces that I always lacked.  
And she knew how to attract the  
*Powers That Be.*

## EXT. BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - ROOFTOP BUNGALOW - DAY

A patio table outside a private bungalow, surrounded by vast,  
empty hotel rooftop. Gustav sits with handsome Seventies  
movie star VAL BATES (30's).

## VOICEOVER

That included Hollywood Casanova  
Val Bates who wanted to star in our  
pirate project.

Val fingers a script on the table, deliberating aloud...

## VAL

So Calico Jack falls in love with  
Anne, but she's in love with Mary?

## GUSTAV

Right.

VAL

But each thinks the others are gay,  
when in fact they're all straight.

GUSTAV

Exactly.

VAL

Is that your take too, Hilda?

Hilda reclines leisurely on a lounge chair nearby in dark sunglasses, dressed to kill. She just smiles back.

VAL (CONT'D)

Do I know you from somewhere?

Hilda shakes her head with a mysterious smile. Val addresses Gustav, but he can't take his eyes off Hilda...

VAL (CONT'D)

It's crazy. It's wild. I love it!

Gustav beams to himself. FREEZE FRAME ON him...

GUSTAV

This was the Big Leagues, where  
dreams come true. I already saw my  
star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

CUTAWAY - ANIMATION

A CARTOON IMAGE OF a shiny sidewalk star: "*Gustav Goebbels*".

BACK TO SCENE

Val focuses on Hilda. Gus measures the looks between them...

VOICEOVER

But Val seemed more interested in  
my partner than in our project...

EXT. PLAYBOY MANSION - NIGHT

HUGH HEFNER in his proverbial pajamas, flanked by Playboy bunnies, greets guests. A massive party crowd. Gustav wanders alone, looking for someone. Tense and uptight...

VOICEOVER

I knew he would try to fuck her.  
Hilda went out with him, but she  
kept it strictly business.

Val searches the pool area, ignoring the greetings of fans.

Gustav spots him and hurries over...

GUSTAV  
Val! Wait up!

Val stops and turns, annoyed by his very presence.

GUSTAV (CONT'D)  
Did you talk to Columbia?

VAL  
Not yet...have you seen Hilda?

GUSTAV  
You promised you'd commit, man.

VAL  
I don't need to be hounded every  
day about it.

He keeps going, searching a pool annex into an underground  
sex grotto. Gus catches up and grabs his arm...

GUSTAV  
It's because of *her*, isn't it?  
You're copping out -- because *she*  
won't be one of your conquests.

VAL  
C'mon Goebbels, lighten up...

GUSTAV  
You think you're the only stud in  
town? You know how many actresses  
I've fucked? But half of them say,  
"Oh yeah, I slept with Val Bates."  
*Everyone* sleeps with Val Bates --  
but not Hilda. Because she's a  
fucking *professional!*

VAL  
Yeah -- and frigid as an iceberg!  
Either that or she's a...

GUSTAV  
A dyke? Don't say it, Val, or I'll  
smash your pretty *face!*

Val reacts to that, somewhat amazed by him. Gustav means it.

HILDA (O.S.)  
Gustav! Val!

The two men react and turn toward the sex grotto...

Hilda languors naked in the water, a young guy in each arm.

VAL

*Hilda?! Is that you?!*

She laughs, righteously stoned. The guys take turns ducking underwater to go down on her. Her laughter rises a pitch.

Val stares at her in shock. Gustav isn't surprised at all.

VOICEOVER

Don't get me wrong. It wasn't always about sex. Val *did* set up our script at Columbia.

CUTAWAY - MOVIE POSTER

*"Lost Horizons"*, a Shangri-La musical starring Liv Ullmann.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

But the studio went bankrupt on an expensive flop and David Begelman took over. His first edict: no big budgets -- no pirate movies.

CUTAWAY - ANIMATION

A discarded soda cup SPLATS on Gustav's tarnished sidewalk star, ice splattering across his name.

INT. DIRECTORS GUILD THEATRE - NIGHT

Onscreen, the climax of Spielberg's *"Close Encounters of the Third Kind"*, Richard Dreyfus boarding the alien mother ship.

Watching with Hilda, Gustav stares dumbfounded at the screen.

EXT. GUILD PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The two walk out through the lot, Gustav fuming to himself...

GUSTAV

Fucking Spielberg stole my story!

HILDA

Not that old UFO piece... "Alien Encounters"? You wrote that in college. It was already outdated.

GUSTAV

Well, I got a great alien concept that Spielberg could never steal...

They cross the street to Hilda's new Harley Davidson, the big chopper twice her size.

GUSTAV (CONT'D)

This extraterrestrial gets stranded on Earth and hides out in a cave, until he's discovered by some kids.

HILDA

Oh no, please...

GUSTAV

He gives them psychokinetic powers, but the kids use the powers against bullies and parents. They become like "Children of the Damned".

Hilda mounts the Harley and FIRES UP. Gus shouts over it...

GUSTAV (CONT'D)

I'm thinking maybe the E.T. should kill off the kids in the end...

HILDA

Gustav! Forget this obsession with aliens. Nobody cares.

Gustav glares at her and hops on back, helping her to balance the monster machine.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Stick with low-budget exploitation. It's the only thing that sells.

They roar off on the Harley.

VOICEOVER

Hilda's instincts were always right. I was still a nobody in Tinseltown. So I lowered my bar of expectations...really low.

INT. KASTNER PRODUCTIONS OFFICE - DAY

Gustav enters with scripts, passing an army of movers. Secretaries pack boxes. Gustav gazes around at all the office furniture left behind.

VOICEOVER

By chance, I found a way to sell my first script...my own version of the Hollywood Hustle.

He pokes his head into Jerry's executive suite, his boss on the phone. Gustav waits for him to finish. Jerry hangs up.

GUSTAV  
So you're finally moving to Fox?

JERRY  
Columbia's on a losing streak.

GUSTAV  
Jerry, can I stick around and use the office to work on my scripts?

JERRY  
Sure, why not. The place won't be occupied for a coupla weeks. Don't make any long-distant calls.

SAME SCENE - ANOTHER DAY

A deserted suite. Gustav sits at Jerry's big empty desk in an executive swivel chair, pounding on his Underwood. The DESK CONSOLE BUZZES. Gus switches to speaker and answers...

GUSTAV  
Goebbels Productions.

PHONE VOICE  
Gus baby! Your black-exploitation comedy -- is it still available?

GUSTAV  
Yeah, I'm tweaking it right now.

PHONE VOICE  
Are you sitting down?

GUSTAV  
Yeah yeah, Ted...

PHONE VOICE  
A black music star wants to buy it. I'm sure you've heard of...

STATIC on the line. Gustav fumbles with the console...

GUSTAV  
Who? I didn't hear that.

PHONE VOICE  
...biggest name in the biz, the Godfather of Soul. He wants to cut an album for the movie. But he wants to meet the writer first.

Gustav fidgets excitedly, glancing around Jerry's suite...

GUSTAV

Set up a meeting here at my office  
at Columbia. Colgems Square. I,  
um...I'll get him a drive-on.

PHONE VOICE

Okay, I'll get back to you...

GUSTAV

Ted, wait. What's his name?

SAME SCENE - LATE DAY

Gustav rearranges the furniture, moving a plush armchair in front of Jerry's desk. With barely seconds to spare...

In walks a BLACK STAR with an entourage of bodyguards and babes in Afros. He finger-snaps them away, and they quickly retreat into the foyer. Gustav extends a hand...

GUSTAV (CONT'D)

Sir, it's a real honor to meet you.

BLACK STAR

Mister...Goebbels, is it?

GUSTAV

Call me Gus. Well no...Gustav.

BLACK STAR

Cool digs. Where are your office  
bitches?

GUSTAV

I let my secretaries go home early.  
Please, sit over here. Can I get  
you a soda or some water?

The Star shakes his head and plops into the armchair. Gustav sits behind the desk and swivels nervously...

GUSTAV (CONT'D)

So! So...you like my script?

BLACK STAR

Yeah. I was wonderin'...how does a  
white boy with the name "Gustav"  
know how to write about soul  
brothers in the 'hood?

GUSTAV

Watching "Sanford and Son"?



BLACK STAR

Say what??

GUSTAV

Just kidding.

He thinks fast, then spews out a stream of lies with a dead straight face...

GUSTAV (CONT'D)

Actually...I was orphaned at six, my parents killed in a plane crash. As a foster child I was raised by an African-American family in South Central. Y'know, East Jefferson?

BLACK STAR

That right?

GUSTAV

I also married an African American. Adopted her illegitimate son. A handsome boy, he looked just like a ten-year-old Sidney Poitier...

The bullshit just flows out. The Black Star just stares.

GUSTAV (CONT'D)

Did I mention I got my first start at Motown? A housekeeping deal for a Diana Ross movie...

BLACK STAR

Yeah, a'ight. Can you rewrite some scenes for my new songs?

GUSTAV

(grins wide)

Shit yeah! I mean, you the Man.

BLACK STAR

I can only offer five grand for the script. Is that acceptable?

GUSTAV

I can live with that.

BLACK STAR

Non-union, no bonus, no back end.

Gustav just keeps grinning...

GUSTAV

Right on, bro.

EXT. CRENSHAW BOULEVARD - LOCATION SHOOT - DAY

TITLE/CARD: *"ACT TWO, Stranded in Hollywood"*.

A low-budget action scene in a trash-strewn alley. FIVE BLACK PRODUCERS watch the BLACK DIRECTOR like hawks.

Gustav jumps into a chase car, a volunteer stunt driver.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Quiet on the set!

BLACK DIRECTOR

Yo, action!

Two bumbling black lead actors run for their lives down the alley, chase cars weaving around dumpsters after them.

INTO CHASE CAR

Gustav drives fast, steering wildly. Having a blast.

VOICEOVER

It was the worst movie ever made. The director was a jerk. But I didn't care. I was twenty-four-years old, on the shoot every day. I was all jazzed up about my first screen credit. But the producers, all soul brothers, didn't exactly like the sound of my Germanic name.

INT. FAIRFAX THEATRE - NIGHT

A shabby premiere, Gustav and Hilda in attendance with most of Black Hollywood. The film starts, opening credits...

Gustav clenches Hilda's hand in anticipation...

ON SCREEN: SIX NAMES are listed on the writing credits, led by five names like "Jackson", "Jones", etc. A misspelled credit at the bottom...*"And Gus Gobbles"*.

Gustav lets go her hand and stares blankly at the screen. Hilda shakes her head in disgust.

VOICEOVER

So they blended me out. I was a victim of Black Hollywood racism, and I couldn't do shit about it. I was an unknown and had no union protection. Bummer City.

EXT. COLDWATER CANYON HOUSE - REAR POOL - DAY

Hilda snort lines at a poolside table, Gustav refraining. She slides the coke dish over to SID (70's), an old-school producer with a hippy ponytail. He shakes his head...

SID

No thanks. At my age, I prefer to keep my body pure.

He picks up a script from the table...

SID (CONT'D)

This is awesome, Gustav. I love the ambience, the subtle tension.

GUSTAV

Thanks, Sid. It's been collecting dust for years...

Hilda shoots him a warning look, "don't say that".

GUSTAV (CONT'D)

But I'm very proud of it.

SID

Good title, "Midnight Fantasies".

HILDA

"Nocturnal Games" would be better.

SID

Possibly.

(to Gustav)

The main thing is creative control. If you and I don't share the same vision, you're the one who gets shafted. I won't let that happen. I stick by my writers.

GUSTAV

Well, that's refreshing.

SID

I'll talk to my investors.

Hilda snorts another line, more wired up than usual...

HILDA

I can find you matching funds. I've got money connections up the wazoo -- from all over town.

Sid humors her with a smile, seeing right through her.

EXT. COLDWATER CANYON STREET - DAY

Gustav walks Hilda to her Harley Davidson, Hilda in a rush.

GUSTAV

Good meeting. I like the guy.

HILDA

Me too, but I don't trust anyone.  
And you're too gullible. I always  
have to watch your back.

GUSTAV

You don't have to. I know how  
things work.

They reach her superbike. Hilda gives him a quick kiss...

HILDA

I have to go to another meeting.

GUSTAV

Oh, I thought we'd hang out...

HILDA

Not today, *liebbling*.

GUSTAV

We don't talk like we used to.

HILDA

We will tonight. I need to talk to  
you anyway about something else...

(beat)

I'm pregnant.

Gustav's jaw drops. He stares gobsmacked at her...

GUSTAV

You're shitting me! Is it...

HILDA

Of course it's yours.

GUSTAV

How do you know? I mean, c'mon...  
you know what I mean...

HILDA

You're the only one I ever let come  
inside me. Something about your  
genius genes.

Gustav absorbs all this, half dismayed, half thrilled.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Don't worry, darling. I absolve you of all responsibility. I plan to raise the baby on my own. You don't have to marry me or anything.

GUSTAV

But what if I want to marry you?

Hilda shakes her head and mounts the Harley...

HILDA

You just think you do.

She FIRES UP the engine. Gustav shouts over the ROAR...

GUSTAV

Hilda -- I'm in love with you!

HILDA

Don't be naive, Gustav. Go find your Julie Christie. And stay out of trouble.

She REVS UP and powers down the block on her big chopper. Crestfallen, Gustav shuffles to his Volkswagon...

VOICEOVER

But I wanted to be a father. I didn't wanna blow it like the first time when I was nineteen.

He gazes sadly after Hilda's dwindling figure.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Hilda always believed in me. She opened a lot of doors for me. I just didn't know where she got all her contacts...

EXT. LAUREL CANYON - NIGHT

CHOPPY TV NEWS FOOTAGE of a crime scene on a hilly street. Police cars, whirling gumballs, tape cordoning off an area.

VOICEOVER

It turned out she was moonlighting as a coke dealer, supplying half of Hollywood. She got addicted to her own product...

A blanket-covered corpse on a driveway. A pool of black blood around it, glistening under a street lamp.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I wasn't around when she was shot  
fatally on Wonderland Drive. Some  
drug deal gone sour...the kind you  
see in movies, not in real life.

## EXT. FOREST LAWN CEMETERY - DAY

A deeply shaken Gustav stands in a small funeral crowd around  
Hilda's flower-wreathed coffin, deaf to a PRIEST'S EULOGY.  
He murmurs a mantra to himself...

## GUSTAV

Life happens to you while you make  
other plans...life *fucking* happens  
while you make other plans...

Sid the old hippy producer wends over. He leans into him...

## SID

My condolences, son. Can we go  
somewhere afterwards and chat?

## GUSTAV

Let's go now. I hate funerals.

Sid leads him away with a consoling arm around his shoulder,  
talking and nodding encouragingly.

## VOICEOVER

I lost my soul mate, but I gained a  
new friend. Sid was dead set on  
making "Midnight Fantasies". He  
swore he'd keep my vision intact.

Gustav nods back, listening to every word.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I trusted him completely...until he  
lost all producer control, aced out  
by an Asian movie tycoon who took  
over the film rights to my script.

## EXT. OCEAN PARK HOUSE - TERRACE - DAY

A hillside house with a terrace overlooking Venice Beach.

## VOICEOVER

This Asian bigshot didn't give a  
rat's ass about my vision, so he  
brought in a French director with a  
reputation for erotic cinema...

A FRENCH DIRECTOR (50's) peers down through binoculars from his terrace. Gustav waits impatiently behind him, his script under his arm.

FRENCH DIRECTOR

*Venez ici! Venez!*

Gustav steps closer. The Director points downhill toward a pool behind a Venice beach house...

An ACTRESS with a ten-plus figure suns topless on a hammock.

FRENCH DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Debbie Ford. She wasn't always a big star. I made her career.

GUSTAV

Uh-huh. I didn't know that.

FRENCH DIRECTOR

She has sex fantasies in a bathtub. You know why? Her *maman* slit her wrists in a tub. Debbie found her soaked in blood. The color of red horrifies her, yet it excites her.

Gustav frowns at him, shocked by his debonair attitude.

FRENCH DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Anne Cherbourg, my Parisienne star? Her fantasies are even more *noir*. She was raped by Nazis as a young girl. I know all their darkest secrets. Why do I tell you this?

GUSTAV

Something to do with the script?

FRENCH DIRECTOR

Your lead character's motives are too shallow. I want to go deeper.

GUSTAV

Well, great...let's talk about it.

FRENCH DIRECTOR

*Ouais, ouais.* In good time.

He returns to his binoculars. Gustav watches him, repulsed.

VOICEOVER

I knew he was gonna anal-rape my baby. But who was I to complain? It was a *studio-level* project.

EXT. BRENTWOOD RESIDENTIAL STREET - 1980'S - DAY

A wooded, upscale neighborhood. Bekins movers carry boxes past a mansion toward an idyllic guest house in the rear.

VOICEOVER

What did it matter if my baby's head got bashed against a brick wall? For five figures, I could always birth up another one.

Gustav unloads a new IBM Selectric typewriter from his brand new BMW 2002 and hauls it up the driveway.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I needed a retreat to focus on my writing without any distractions.

INT. BRENTWOOD GUEST HOUSE - DAY

Gustav sets down the typewriter in a window nook. He checks an installed phone to make sure it's turned on. Gazes out at a secluded back yard of ivied walls and a rose garden.

VOICEOVER

Brentwood was the perfect place for privacy. Only blocks away from O.J. Simpson's house.

The PHONE RINGS. Oblivious to it, Gustav unpacks books from a box onto a shelf. The RINGING stops.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I didn't know at the time that Frenchy was casting an unknown actress for the lead role...with a full-page ad in Variety for the next undiscovered star. That's when the calls poured in...

RING-RING. Annoyed, Gustav keeps ignoring it.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

From actresses I knew, to others that I barely knew, then from total strangers. All of them desperate to be my new best friend.

PERSISTENT RINGING.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Never mind that I was just the fucking writer.



EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT

Well-lit grounds. An inflated air mattress by the rose garden, a mess of pillows and empty wine bottles. A trail of clothes leads from the lawn into the house.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

My bedroom suddenly had revolving doors, my peaceful domain littered with the refuse of carnal excess.

INT. GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT

Mixed underwear and a condom wrapper trail to the bedroom. SOUNDS OF A SQUEAKING MATTRESS, RHYTHMIC MOANS...

STARLET'S VOICE

Oh yeah...ohhh yeah! Oh Gussie, you're the BEST! Do it to me!...

(beat)

Did you spit yet?

A MALE VOICE GROANS, losing the urge.

VOICEOVER

I didn't get any work done for months. And I still had no guest house for my mom -- since now I was *living* in one.

EXT. VALLEY HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

By the orange grove, an aging Mom sits at the patio table beside Gustav, looking fragile. Gustav gazes around...

GUSTAV

I wrote my first screenplay here. Remember when I used to stage World War Two, blowing up doll houses? I think I was just using chemistry to make movies in my head.

MOM

Do you remember our mountain hikes in Big Bear? I miss that the most. Don't think I could do it anymore.

GUSTAV

You could, if you didn't have to always ask for permission.

Denise steps outside, greying but the same old bull dyke. She gives Gustav a neutral glance, then sweetly to Mom...

DENISE

Why don't you come inside, honey?  
I'll make you some mac and cheese.

MOM

Not yet, I like it here in the sun.

DENISE

I could come sit with you.

MOM

I'm fine. We're just talking.

DENISE

(suspiciously)  
About what?

MOM

Nothing, dear, just about Gus' new  
movie. I'm so happy for him.

DENISE

Hmph. Sounds like a porno to me.

Quick looks between her and Gustav, the childhood animosity  
still strong. Denise returns inside the house.

MOM

Let's go for a little walk, Gus. I  
haven't been in the grove for ages.

ORANGE GROVE - LATER

Mom hobbles over the rough turf with a cane, Gustav guiding  
her arm. He muses bitterly aloud...

GUSTAV

What happens to outsiders like us?  
Sometimes I feel so...alien-ated  
from the human race.

MOM

Life on earth can be very trying.

They reach the tree stump, their private place, and sit close  
together. Mom pulls out a taped roll of dollar bills...

MOM (CONT'D)

Are you okay, Gus? Do you need any  
money? I've got sixty dollars...

GUSTAV

Mom no, I'm doing great -- you know  
that. I'm successful now.

MOM

Because you're so gifted. You're gonna be famous one day.

GUSTAV

I'd rather be rich than famous. I haven't forgotten my promise to you. You know...the Great Escape?

A distant gaze in Mom's eyes. Gustav grips both her hands...

GUSTAV (CONT'D)

You're my best friend in life, remember? We are gonna be together soon -- I'm gonna take care of you.

MOM

Oh, I don't know...you've got your own life now.

GUSTAV

Mom please, don't give up on me just yet. I'm gonna get you out of here once and for all -- that's what you still want, isn't it?

His mother shrugs and smiles lovingly at him...

MOM

I only care about what you want. I totally believe in you, Gus. You're gonna do so well.

EXT. WESTWOOD THEATRE - EVENING

"MIDNIGHT FANTASIES" is emblazoned across a marquee. A crowd filters into the premiere screening. Paparazzi with cameras loiter about, waiting for celebrities who never show up.

INT. THEATRE LOBBY - EVENING

Gustav walks in with his young agent CHAD (20's). He passes a cardboard poster of the movie's lead, her sexed-up figure a life-sized cutout. Nervous anxiety on his face...

VOICEOVER

I'd heard rumors it was a stinker, but I had no idea. Only that it was shot in Manila to substitute for Beverly Hills, and that actors playing shopkeepers on Rodeo Drive had funny little accents.

## THEATRE ROOM

ON SCREEN: the lead creeps down a dark hallway in a flimsy nightie, then gasps in mixed fear and arousal to...

Her naked fantasy lover looming in the shadows -- wrapped in *boa feathers* and a *big, furry headdress*. Instead of a sexy phantom, he looks like Sesame Street's Big Bird.

CHUCKLES from the audience. In the third row, Gustav stares at the screen in horror. His chagrin simmers into fury.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

It was unrecognizable! The SECOND worst movie ever made -- the worst ever DIRECTED! With MY name on it!

## THEATRE LOBBY - MID-SCREENING

Gustav storms out into the deserted lobby, murder in his eyes, his flustered agent Chad in tow. He kicks over the poster and stomps on it, crushing it into pieces...

## GUSTAV

I will KILL that French cocksucker!

## CHAD

Take it easy, Gus...

## GUSTAV

He turned my erotic thriller into a goddamned COMEDY!

## CHAD

Maybe at the end it's not that bad--

## GUSTAV

Not that BAD?!

He picks up a cardboard and folds it into a blunt instrument.

## GUSTAV (CONT'D)

I'm gonna bash open his skull...

## CHAD

Chill out, Gus. It's just one movie, there will always be others--

## GUSTAV

The name's GUSTAV! Now it's gonna be Gustav SHIT!

They struggle over the cardboard weapon, Chad trying to take it away from him, Gustav going totally postal.

## CUTAWAY - ANIMATION

A drunk barfs -- VOMIT SPEWS over Gustav's sidewalk star.

## VOICEOVER

The bad reviews blamed the script,  
of course. I had lost my mojo and  
my boutique agent.

## EXT. PARIS CEMETERY - FLASH-FORWARD - DAY

Old Gustav leans over the director's grave and opens his fly.

## VOICEOVER

The only satisfaction I ever got  
was waiting for that no-talent  
French prick to die.

He stains the tombstone with a stream of urine.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I discovered that people in the Biz  
want you to fail -- to feel better  
about their own shitty careers.

## INT. BRENTWOOD GUEST HOUSE - DAY

Now in his 30's, Gustav types on a newer Selectric II, trying  
to ignore the FEMALE SOBS from another room...

## VOICEOVER

I had to start mine over from  
scratch. I felt like David Bowie  
in "Man Who Fell To Earth", doomed  
to live forever amongst despicable  
earthlings. In my case, bad film  
directors and bad ex-wives.

THE SOBS RISE TO GHASTLY WAILS. Gustav gives up and rises.

## BATHROOM

INGRID (20's), a withered beauty, lies naked and weeping in  
an empty bathtub. Gustav gazes dolefully at her...

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Don't ask me why I married Ingrid,  
a Danish porn star slash bipolar  
alcoholic slash drug addict. We  
were already divorced, but I just  
kept on supporting her. I guess it  
was my Rescuer's Syndrome.

He leans down to pick her up, Ingrid too weak to resist.

GUSTAV

C'mon, babe. I can't help you if you won't help yourself...

INGRID

You don't love me, you just wanna jerk off in my cunt.

GUSTAV

If that were true, you wouldn't still be here.

INGRID

Lemme alone...I need a fix.

GUSTAV

Get dressed for your AA meeting. C'mon, you'll feel better by then.

He gently lifts her out of the tub, wraps her in a bathrobe and half carries her to the bedroom.

VOICEOVER

What a failed romantic I was. A street-alley whore to my starved lust. My dick was my pimp.

INT. BEVERLY HILLS AA MEETING HALL - DAY

Rows of chairs before a podium. Filled to capacity, a who's who of addict stars, directors, writers and other industry whores. A SPEAKER AD-LIBS his pathetic life story.

Gustav sits close with a strung-out Ingrid, holding her hand.

VOICEOVER

We'd been to so many meetings that I stank of coffee and tobacco. But AA was a great place to network...

SAME SCENE - LATER

A stratosphere of cigarette smoke. Ingrid talks alone with her sponsor. At a coffee-dispenser table, Gustav listens to a chain-smoking FAT PRODUCER munching on a donut...

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

This addict producer happened to know a literary manager from his eating-disorders group. She was looking for new clients.

INT. NORTH HOLLYWOOD DUPLEX - KITCHEN - DAY

Gustav sits at a dining table with JESSICA ANDERSON (50's), an overweight, fast-talking Sue Mengers type. She shuffles a contract, munching on high-cholesterol snacks.

GUSTAV

Nice duplex.

JESSICA

Thanks. I keep a spare bedroom for my clients when they're homeless.

GUSTAV

Your kitchen is your office?

JESSICA

Well, I planned to lease an office on Ventura, but my ex-client Quint McCoy ripped me off.

GUSTAV

"Pulp and Circumstance"? *That* guy?

JESSICA

I got him that deal. In gratitude, he fired me, signed with ICM and refused to pay my commission.

GUSTAV

Jessica, that's awful!

Jessica slides over the contract. Gustav quickly signs it.

JESSICA

We're all victims in this biz. But I recognize talent when I see it. I love your Shanghai Jews spec.

GUSTAV

That's my passion project.

JESSICA

Well, I believe in it.

GUSTAV

You remind me a lot of my mom.

JESSICA

I'm everyone's mom, it's part of my job. Listen: I got the perfect producer for your passion project. He's an industry icon -- and he's a Jew who was born in China.

INT. CENTURY CITY OFFICE - DAY

An elegant office suite with bay windows overlooking the Avenue of the Stars. Gustav sits before...

MARK MENDELSSOHN (40's), an ex-studio president and a slick operator, pacing with infectious energy...

MARK

Yeah, it's true. My parents fled the Holocaust to Shanghai under Japanese occupation. I was born in the Hongkew district, the only Jewish ghetto in Asia.

GUSTAV

Wow, that's amazing -- my script is practically your childhood story.

MARK

Your script's not bad...Goebbels? Where did you get that awful name?

GUSTAV

My German heritage, I hate it. But I was so inspired by this story, I wanted to convert to Judaism...

MARK

Don't do that. You're too goy.

GUSTAV

But you liked the script...

MARK

It needs a lot more development.

GUSTAV

Then let's develop it.

MARK

Not the right time. World War II movies don't sell. I'd like you to write another project for me.

GUSTAV

Oh. Okay, cool.

MARK

It's a psychic thriller. A stage magician goes to Haiti to debunk the voodoo myth, then he finds the real deal and gets into a bunch of trouble. What d'you think?



Gustav hesitates, then with forced enthusiasm...

GUSTAV  
It sounds really cool.

MARK  
I want it to be authentic. No  
armchair research. I want you to  
personally go down there.

GUSTAV  
Sure. Down where?

MARK  
Haiti. All expenses paid.

Floored, Gustav plasters on his best hooker's smile...

GUSTAV  
Cool! I'll go down *anywhere!*

EXT. MAGIC CASTLE - NIGHT

A driveway winds up to a stately Victorian mansion in  
Hollywood Hills. Gustav steps out of his BMW at the valet.

VOICEOVER  
I figured I should first learn  
everything I could about magicians.

He gazes up at the gothic-looking edifice.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)  
The Magic Castle was their private  
club, the world headquarters for  
the Academy of Magical Arts.

INT. MAIN SHOWROOM - NIGHT

*"The Amazing Wanda"*, a fire-breathing magic act onstage.

WANDA (20's), exotic in a glittery body stocking, shoots out  
flames from her mouth and performs a linking-rings illusion.

Gustav watches her from the back row, at once mystified and  
turned on, his genitals on fire...

VOICEOVER  
I learned all about misdirection,  
prestidigitation, sex addiction...  
I mean, my inability to keep my  
dick in my pants.

## HOUDINI ROOM

A private Victorian dining room. Gustav sits alone with Wanda across a round table in subdued, artificial candlelight. Houdini posters on the walls.

Wanda flips a coin between her fingers and assesses Gustav with cool, mysterious eyes. He picks at his beef Wellington, talking animatedly...

GUSTAV

This magician skeptic, sort of a debunker like James Randi, sets out to expose Haitian voodoo. Then he meets this high priestess who turns his world upside down--

The round table LEVITATES. He drops his fork and stiffens in alarm. The table LOWERS BACK DOWN. Wanda smiles slyly...

WANDA

An extra perk in the Houdini Room.

GUSTAV

Did you just make that happen?

WANDA

That's for me to know.

GUSTAV

O-kay. I'm looking for a research consultant. What d'you think of the story?

WANDA

Magick.

GUSTAV

Magic what?

WANDA

"Magick", spelled with a "k".  
(nods at posters)  
That's what Harry was looking for. The ultimate illusion from beyond. But all he could do was debunk spiritualists. Voodoo priestesses, they practice real magic-k.

GUSTAV

Have you ever done that?

WANDA

No. I'm a practicing Goddess.

GUSTAV

A goddess?

WANDA

With a capital "G". I come from a long line of Goddesses. We're not interested in the male pursuit.

GUSTAV

I see. Thank Goddess for that.

WANDA

We live to be worshipped.

She leans forward, the chemistry heating up between them...

WANDA (CONT'D)

It takes a special kind of man to deal with that.

GUSTAV

Interesting. Would I qualify?

WANDA

Hard to say. What's your sign?

GUSTAV

Taurus.

WANDA

Mmm...a lover. That's a start.

An enticing smile that would make a strong man weep. Gustav leans closer with a steady gaze...

GUSTAV

When do I start worshipping?

WANDA

Depends on what you have to offer.

GUSTAV

Where's your altar? At your place?

WANDA

I'm not that easy, slick. You'll have to do better than that.

GUSTAV

Okay then. How about four weeks in Haiti?

Wanda's sultry smile broadens to an ambitious grin.

INT. PORT-AU-PRINCE HOTEL BAR - HAITI - DAY

Bar patrons stare outside hotel windows at a protest march of SHOUTING Haitians on the street.

Gustav sits dismally at the bar, nursing a tropical drink.

VOICEOVER

Just my luck. A revolution in Haiti. Dictator Baby Doc was being ousted, the city under martial law. We were stuck in the hotel. So much for field research.

Wanda hurries over in a stunning Arabian Nights outfit, arm in arm with JACKO (40's), an Aussie charter skipper...

WANDA

Gustav, look who I found! Jacko here has a catamaran for charter hire. He's got this terrific idea for our research.

Gustav shakes the man's hand, not that easy to impress.

JACKO

G'day, mate. Love yer missus here. She's a regular cock magnet.

GUSTAV

Yeah, so I've noticed.

JACKO

Lookin' into voodoo stuff, eh? Why don't you two sail with me to the Virgin Islands? They got another kinda voodoo down there...the "macajumbi". On St. John.

GUSTAV

St. John? Sure, why not. Anything is better than *this* hellhole.

EXT. CHARTER BOAT (MOVING) - CARIBBEAN SEA - DAY

Far at sea, a sleek catamaran slices through gentle waves across inter-island waters.

ON DECK

Gustav and Wanda sunbathe on the foredeck, languoring lazily with rum cocktails. Jacko works between rigging and engine, switching from sail to motor power.

## VOICEOVER

Why St. John? Well. There was a slave rebellion four centuries ago. They killed the plantation owners and took over the island.

## INT. BELOW DECK - NIGHT

Guest quarters. Gustav and Wanda make love on a waterbed under an open hatch. Wanda suddenly loses her momentum, her face darkening. She pushes Gustav away and starts crying...

## VOICEOVER

Cutaway to the present. My Goddess had sex issues...she was gang-raped by mestizos while smuggling Aztec artifacts. She never got over it. I worshipped her nevertheless.

They lie side by side, gazing up at the sky. Rain drops splat their faces -- then a downpour. They struggle on the waterbed to close the hatch, laughing together.

## EXT. CHARTER BOAT (MOVING) - ST. JOHN COAST - DAY

Tranquil emerald waters. The catamaran sails through a pass bordered by high island cliffs.

## VOICEOVER

Cut back to the slave rebels...

Gustav and Wanda gaze out from a taffrail, Jacko beside them.

## JACKO

Privateers came in to wipe 'em all out. Rather than surrender, the slaves jumped into the sea in a mass suicide...

He points to a cliff top high above them.

## JACKO (CONT'D)

From up there. If ya listen real quiet like, you can hear their drowned souls.

Gustav and Wanda listen. AN EERIE, GHOSTLY WAIL in the wind.

## EXT. ST. JOHN PORT VILLAGE - DAY

Thatched huts mingle with hotels, a tropical paradise.

Gustav and Wanda stroll down the main drag, observing the black islanders who far outnumber the whites.

VOICEOVER

But the slaves left behind their surviving *children*. The islanders today are their descendants. The *macajumbi* are the voodoo spirits of those slave rebels...

(beat)

So what's this gotta do with a magician in Haiti? Well, better if you don't ask.

EXT. BEACH HUT - DAY

Gustav reclines on a hammock bed, swinging idly in a breeze.

Wanda rushes over in a bikini, all excited...

WANDA

Gustav! You gotta meet this guy I found -- he's got an incredible story to tell! C'mon!

BEACH DOWNSHORE

A full-blown ganja party on the sand. A bevy of bikinied beauties sit around the object of their adoration...

JOHN SMITH (40's), a muscular hippy sitting in a lotus position, smoking a huge joint. Long, straggly blond hair, the twin brother of a young Robert Redford.

Wanda ushers Gustav over. They plop down beside him.

WANDA (CONT'D)

Gustav...John Smith. John harbors famous fugitives on his boat. He's a legend in these islands.

John chuckles dismissingly at that, then nods to Gustav...

JOHN

"Gustav". I like that name.

GUSTAV

Thanks, nobody else does. So like, which famous fugitives?

JOHN

Well, Abbie Hoffman was one of 'em, when he was hiding from the feds.

GUSTAV

The revolutionary from the Sixties?

WANDA

John champions the cause of sea mammals too, protecting them from his boat. *The Carriacao*, right?

JOHN

My pride and joy. Thar she blows.

He nods toward a bedraggled old sloop anchored offshore.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You guys wanna go for a ride?

EXT. JOHN'S SLOOP (MOVING) - AT SEA - DAY

*The Carriacao* cruises along on one sail, the British Virgin Islands in the distance.

VOICEOVER

John Smith was a single-hander with no radio. If he was lost at sea, no one would ever even know.

(beat)

So what's John Smith gotta do with my movie project? Well, just... just never mind.

John works the rigging. Gustav helps. Wanda, topless in a bikini bottom, climbs up the mast to a crow's nest.

JOHN

Hand me that block, mate.

Gustav hands it over, eying him keenly...

GUSTAV

So how did you end up down here in the Caribbean?

JOHN

My family was New England Navy. I went that route for a while... 'til I saw the Navy experimenting on dolphins. They were hitching mines to their dorsal fins to blow up enemy ships. Dolphin torpedos.

GUSTAV

That's fucking cruel.

JOHN

Yeah, it kinda politicized me. I went AWOL and dropped out. Been here ever since, fighting for my friends out there.

Wanda distracts them, waving and WHOOPING JOYOUSLY from atop the crow's nest. She semaphores out to sea...

WANDA

Land ho!

Gustav and John gaze out: an island strewn with boulders.

GUSTAV

Virgin Gorda. Let's dock there.

JOHN

Not the BVI's. The limeys got an arrest warrant out on me. Better you don't ask why.

GUSTAV

Y'know, John, I would love to write your story.

JOHN

What for?

GUSTAV

You'd make a great subject for a feature film.

Distracted away, John nods toward the starboard side...

JOHN

Hey look! My friends are here!

A school of *wild dolphins* skims and leaps through the water.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Let's go say hello!

He drops the anchor and hurries to the gunwale -- and dives overboard. SPLASH!

Gustav gapes after him. Wanda climbs down and watches beside him.

John swims overhand strokes in the deep blue, right alongside the mammals of the sea.

Quick looks between Gustav and Wanda -- they both jump onto the railing and plunge over. DOUBLE SPLASHES!



## UNDERWATER/ABOVE WATER

Chaos in the sea. Gustav, Wanda and John swim with the sleek dolphins. SQUEAKS AND SONAR CLICKS all around them, the creatures streaking between them...

They circle around Gustav's body at very close range.

## VOICEOVER

I was stoked! All I wanted to do was write about John Smith, about the slave rebels, about my magician Goddess -- everything except what I was *hired* to write.

## INT. LAX AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

Gustav and Wanda walk toward the baggage area, enervated but exhilarated, both deeply tanned.

## VOICEOVER

I tried to stay in touch with John. Sadly, he disappeared at sea.

Waiting for luggage on the ramp, Gustav and Wanda embrace and kiss like two teenagers in love...

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Wanda left for a casino tour on South Africa's Gold Coast. Sadly for *me*, she fell in love with a Afrikaner drummer.

## INT. SOUTH AFRICAN CASINO - NIGHT

Onstage, Wanda shoots out jets of flames from her mouth. In b.g., a Dutch musician beats maniacally on multiple drums.

## VOICEOVER

She was the first woman magician ever, retiring early from liver poisoning...all that lighter fluid, y'know. My Goddess-worshipping days were over. It was back to the Hollywood grind.

## INT. CENTURY CITY OFFICE - DAY

Mark Mendelssohn **THROWS** a script across the room at Gustav -- it **HITS** him in the chest, so hard that the brads break apart. Pages scatter all over the floor.

MARK

WHAT THE FUCK! Two months of paid research -- and THIS is what you come up with?!

Gustav kneels down to pick up the pages. Jessica watches from a couch in silent reserve.

MARK (CONT'D)

I wanted a voodoo thriller -- not a fucking history lesson!

GUSTAV

I can fix all that, Mark...I'll do a free rewrite...

MARK

You made the magician a fucking GIRL! I wanted a big male star for this movie, you stupid fuck...

(bellows at him)

You fucking worthless PISS ANT!

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Gustav walks with Jessica to the elevators in a foul mood.

JESSICA

Don't let Mark get you down. It was all just a ruse anyway.

GUSTAV

What's that supposed to mean?

JESSICA

This assignment. He wanted to keep you from selling your Shanghai Jews project. My fault...I should've seen it coming.

GUSTAV

Jessica, what're you saying?

JESSICA

He's going into production with his own Shanghai film. I'm sorry, hon, but your passion project is dead.

Gustav stares at her in utter desolation.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Don't worry. I'll find you other gigs.

## CUTAWAY - ANIMATION

Mark Mendelssohn urinates on Gustav's trashed sidewalk star with an EVIL CACKLE.

## INT. BRENTWOOD GUEST HOUSE - 1990'S - DAY

Gustav hammers away on his Selectric II, self-correcting paper typos. Dispirited, barely able to focus...

## VOICEOVER

Jessica got me the gigs all right. Shit pay on low-budget turds. For years I worked on everyone's crappy ideas but my own. I hadn't written a spec script in half a decade.

His PHONE RINGS. Gustav picks it up, mumbling "Yeah?"

## INTERCUT WITH:

## INT. NORTH HOLLYWOOD DUPLEX - KITCHEN - DAY

Jessica on her headset, scarfing on greasy take-out fries...

## JESSICA

Gustavy! I just met with Daniel Pyne, a hot British director -- he loves your Moscow murder mystery!

## GUSTAV

Yeah? Does he wanna make it?

## JESSICA

Well, no. But he needs a writer to flesh out some family ghost thing. It's in development at Disney.

## GUSTAV

Uh-huh. What's the Catch-22?

## JESSICA

Gussie, he wants you!

## GUSTAV

Yeah, yeah -- what's the catch?

## JESSICA

He wants you to work with him on his own turf. Disney is paying -- first-class round trip to London.

Gustav nearly drops the receiver. He just stares at it.

VOICEOVER

My life was about to change like a  
third-act turning point.

EXT. HOLLAND PARK, LONDON - DAY

London's upscale district in the mid 1990's.

TITLE/CARD: "ACT THREE, *Stranded On Earth Forever*".

An unseasonably hot summer. Gustav exits a private gym and strides merrily along in a tank top and cargo shorts, carrying a *pink bowling case*.

VOICEOVER

It was my first time overseas,  
thanks to my new British friend  
Daniel, possibly the only competent  
director I've ever met.

PORTOBELLO ROAD

A sidewalk antiques market. Aristocrat DANIEL PINE (40's) browses with his Brit friend ALAN (40's), both fully dressed despite the heat. They turn with droll smiles to see...

Gustav heading their way, waving in high spirits.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Danny and his pal Alan found me  
"rather" amusing, as elitist Brits  
tend to do with naive, dumb-ass  
Americans like me.

He joins them. The two glance over his outfit, trying not to burst out laughing.

GUSTAV

Hey, Danny! Hey, Alan!

DANIEL

Gustav. Where on earth did you get  
that *bowling case*?

GUSTAV

Oxfam. I needed a gym bag.

DANIEL

Oh dear lord...that's brilliant.

ALAN

Pink is rather effeminate, don't you think?

GUSTAV

It's the only color they had. It's a thrift shop.

DANIEL

Yes, yes, I know. I must take you to my tailor. You'll need formal wear for the party tomorrow. There will be gobs of royalty present. I can't have you embarrassing me in front of *Fergie*, now can I?

GUSTAV

Who's *Fergie*?

Alan rolls his eyes. The three continue down Portobello.

VOICEOVER

I knew they looked down on me, but I was unfazed. I was on a roll... a working screenwriter in *London!*

EXT. RED BUS (MOVING) - LONDON STREETS - DAY

Gustav rides the open top of a double decker bus. A virgin tourist, gazing out in wonder at passing sites...

Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, Buckingham Palace, the Big Ben clock, the Thames River, the Tower Bridge.

INT. TOWNHOUSE (MOS) - NIGHT

A dinner party of dukes and duchesses at a long, elegant table. Gustav sits in a tailored English suit between Daniel and a friendly, chatty DUCHESS FERGIE.

A liveried servant places a chilled salad plate before him. Gustav ponders a row of silverware, glancing aside at...

Daniel, who nods "watch me". He picks up the salad fork and a knife, cuts the lettuce into tiny pieces and eats only small portions. Gustav follows suit.

EXT. CHELSEA HOUSE ROOFTOP (MOS) - NIGHT

FIREWORKS EXPLODE over a rooftop mobbed with international celebrities.

A Fourth of July party for Yanks in London, hosted by a younger JACK NICHOLSON. He orchestrates the fireworks like a hammy conductor. Everyone applauds.

Gustav hobnobs with an ancient JOAN COLLINS. Well-dressed but out of his element, he spots a very familiar actress talking to STEVE MARTIN across the roof...

An older but still stunning JULIE CHRISTIE. Totally excited, Gustav beelines toward her. A hand pulls him away...

Daniel redirects him in another direction...the vision of Gustav's first love fades into the crowd. Daniel introduces him to BERNARDO BERTOLUCCI and STANLEY KUBRICK.

VOICEOVER

Hilda had taught me how to be a Hollywood whore, but Danny taught me how to be a *world-class* whore. Exit Gus, the provincially stranded alien of L.A. Enter Gustav -- the *internationally* stranded alien.

INT. HOLLAND PARK FLAT - THIRD FLOOR - DAY

Gustav pounds away on a rented Selectric, churning out script pages. Sunlight pours in from tall open windows over a busy residential street. SOUNDS OF TRAFFIC AND PEOPLE.

VOICEOVER

So I rented the top floor of his friend Alan's three-story flat.

Gustav rises and closes the windows for quiet. He takes a break and wanders around his habitat, browsing over Russian artwork and icons on the walls. He opens a spare closet...

A wardrobe of fashionable women's dresses and gowns.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

A *female* once lived on this floor.

A VOICE DOWNSTAIRS distracts him to the staircase. He overhears agitated Alan on a SPEAKER PHONE a floor below...

ALAN (O.S.)

No -- absolutely not! I'm selling the flat. You can't stop me.

A PHONE VOICE, HER ACCENT A MIX OF BRITISH AND RUSSIAN...

WOMAN'S VOICE

Then I'm flying straight to London.

ALAN (O.S.)  
No, you can't! I have an American  
screenwriter living here now...

WOMAN'S VOICE  
Then you and your screenwriter are  
flying out the WINDOW!

INT. WEST KENSINGTON RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Gustav dines with Daniel and Alan. He wears smart casuals,  
looking well adjusted to the London lifestyle. Danny speaks  
offhandedly, choosing his words carefully...

DANIEL  
Enjoying your stay in Alan's flat?

GUSTAV  
Sure. I'm already on page forty.  
It's the perfect work environment.

DANIEL  
I'd like to keep it that way.

GUSTAV  
Uh, okay...

ALAN  
I have a spot of trouble with my  
ex, Katya. She co-owns the flat,  
so she can use it whenever she  
wants to. Against my wishes.

GUSTAV  
Uh-huh. So?

ALAN  
It's just a property dispute, old  
boy, nothing at all to do with you.  
But I would appreciate it if you  
do not talk to her.

DANIEL  
Stay away from her, Gustav. She's  
*Cruella DeVille*. A black widow who  
eats men for breakfast. Avoid her  
like the plague.

GUSTAV  
Wow. Okay.

ALAN  
I trust you'll cooperate on this...

GUSTAV  
I said I would.

DANIEL  
Very good then. To be forewarned  
is to be forearmed, right-o?

GUSTAV  
Right. I won't say a word to her.

Daniel and Alan resume eating. Gustav eyes them curiously...

VOICEOVER  
It didn't matter to me. But...  
you don't tell a *Taurus* what to do.  
We'll just do the exact opposite.

INT. HOLLAND PARK FLAT - KITCHEN - DAY

Gustav makes a sandwich at the counter. He opens the fridge  
and grabs a jar. Closes the fridge door, startled by --

KATYA (30's), standing a foot away. A blonde, blue-eyed,  
*utterly stunning* Russian. With a silky voice...

KATYA  
Hello. Who are you?

Gustav stares in momentary shock. He turns back to the  
counter without a word and quickly assembles his sandwich,  
his nerves unhinged...

VOICEOVER  
Christ! Cruella DeVille was the  
spitting image of *Julie Christie* --  
from "Doctor Zhivago"! Her voice  
could give you fellatio without  
even touching you. Oh fuck!...

KATYA  
Excuse me? I'm talking to you.

GUSTAV  
(a raspy whisper)  
Sorry...laryngitis...

He tosses the sandwich on a plate, in a hurry to leave.

KATYA  
You must be Gustav, the writer.  
That's an interesting name.



GUSTAV  
 (a normal voice)  
 I...I really can't talk to you.

Katya raises a curious eyebrow. Gustav grabs the plate and turns to exit...Katya blocks his path.

KATYA  
 Why not? Did Alan say something about me?

GUSTAV  
 Sorry. Gotta go.

He sidesteps her and rushes out of the kitchen, leaving her bewildered.

PARLOR ROOM - EVENING

Gustav sits on a divan under low lamplight, watching a film classic on TV, "Bram Stoker's Dracula".

Katya walks quietly in, a wine glass in hand. Noticing her in the corner of his eye, Gustav stays focused on the movie.

KATYA  
 Has Alan been here tonight?

Gustav shakes his head, his eyes glued to the TV screen.

KATYA (CONT'D)  
 Would you like some Pinot?

He shakes his head again, studiously ignoring her.

KATYA (CONT'D)  
 Still not talking? That's a bit rude, you know.

Gustav says nothing. Katya sighs and plops down into a far armchair. Both watch the movie in silence, absorbed in it...

TV SCREEN: Gary Oldman's gentleman vampire emotes eloquently to Winona Ryder in his Transylvanian accent...

GARY OLDMAN (ONSCREEN)  
*I have crossed the oceans of time to find you.*

Both Gustav and Katya mouth his dialogue at the same time. The two notice that, trading quick looks...

KATYA  
 It's one of my favorite films.

GUSTAV  
Yeah. Coppola's a genius.

A long beat, watching the movie...

KATYA  
Blood lust and sexual desire are  
the same thing here. It blurs the  
line between man and monster.

GUSTAV  
Exactly. He's not just a monster,  
he's a victim of love gone wrong.

KATYA  
I feel sorry for him.

Smiles flit between them. Katya eyes Gustav pensively...

KATYA (CONT'D)  
What did Alan say about me?

GUSTAV  
Nothing. You both own this flat,  
that's all I know. I guess you  
don't want him to sell it.

KATYA  
Do you know why?

GUSTAV  
It's none of my business.

KATYA  
Did he tell you that we have two  
children together? That he refuses  
to support them?

Gustav stares at her, astonished.

KATYA (CONT'D)  
He's just selling the flat to pay  
off his gambling debts, while he  
leaves me and my boys stranded.

GUSTAV  
My God.

KATYA  
*Bozhe moi*, exactly. "My God."

GUSTAV  
Well, uh...I guess I *could* have a  
little Pinot Noir.

## SAME SCENE - LATER

The two sit together on the couch, the TV off, two glasses and a nearly empty wine bottle on a coffee table. Both inebriated and focused on each other...

GUSTAV (CONT'D)

I'd be curious what you think of my Moscow script. I've never been there, but Russia fascinates me...

KATYA

You wouldn't like Moscow. It's not like St. Petersburg where I grew up. My city is beautiful. I own an apartment there.

GUSTAV

Cool. So you could always live there if you had to...

KATYA

But my work is here in England. I've been a documentary filmmaker here for ten years.

GUSTAV

You're a *filmmaker*?

KATYA

I'd rather make films in America.

GUSTAV

Not in Hollywood. That place specializes in killing off every ounce of the artistic spirit.

KATYA

But you have artistic *freedom*. You can do anything you want.

GUSTAV

I wouldn't say that.

KATYA

I want to start my own independent company and direct my own features, from scripts with real heart.

Gustav listens, enthralled by the sound of her voice. Katya leans in and rivets him with those piercing blue eyes...

KATYA (CONT'D)

Are you married, Gustav?

GUSTAV  
No. I'm divorced like you.

KATYA  
I'm not divorced.

GUSTAV  
But Alan said you were his "ex".

KATYA  
We were never married. He knocked me up twice, but he has no interest in raising children. My babies barely exist to him.

GUSTAV  
That's awful! Can't they stay here in the flat with you?

KATYA  
No. Too much bad blood.

Gustav leans intimately closer...

GUSTAV  
I'd never do that to any woman.

KATYA  
Ya znayu. I can sense that.

GUSTAV  
We Americans take care of our women and children...

They lock eyes, inches apart...

KATYA  
Da. I love Americans...

A sudden, compulsive kiss between them. They fall together to the floor, groping and caressing, upsetting the coffee table. Wine glasses and the bottle topple over.

GUSTAV  
Let's go to my floor...

KATYA  
My floor, you mean...

They stagger up and rush together to the staircase, kissing and peeling off their clothes all the way up...

KATYA (CONT'D)  
Alan might come home...

GUSTAV  
No, he's staying with a girlfriend.

THIRD-FLOOR BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Gustav and Katya topple naked onto the bed with abandon, ready to make love. Gustav stops himself...

GUSTAV (CONT'D)  
I don't have a condom.

KATYA  
You don't?

GUSTAV  
I wasn't prepared for this...I was supposed to avoid you.

KATYA  
Never mind -- just pull out when you come.

Gustav enters her. Katya cries out with a gasp...

KATYA (CONT'D)  
*Bozhe moi!* Don't come inside me...

GUSTAV  
I won't...

KATYA  
If you get me pregnant, Gustavich, I swear I'll have to kill you.

They start to fuck, hard and furious like two gold medallists at the Sex Olympics.

VOICEOVER  
That should've been the first warning shot. But me, I was too blindsided. I was in heaven on earth, or some such place.

INT. EAST END FLAT - DAY

MOS MONTAGE. The sex marathon continues, Gustav and Katya hammering each other on an unfurnished carpet...

VOICEOVER  
It was all kept top secret. We ditched Alan's flat for a rented love nest in an East End mews...

They bang away against the glass of a bay window, two stories above a busy residential alleyway...

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Week after week. My dick was so damaged that we had to summon an acupuncturist for a house call.

A CHINESE ACUPUNCTURIST sits over Gustav on a floor mattress with Katya, blocking our view of his private parts. She sticks needles into his groin -- Gustav jolts in shock.

SAME SCENE - ANOTHER DAY

Gustav and Katya sit at a dining table, watching rough-cut footage of a documentary on a camcorder screen. Katya beams with pride. Gustav nods with approval.

ILYA (5), a hyperactive toddler, bounces happily on the floor mattress.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Alan didn't have a clue. Daniel, though, sensed the real truth. The celebrity parties suddenly stopped. I was now an American scandal.

A PHONE RINGS on a moving crate. Gustav picks it up. Before he can answer it, a VOICE ON FILTER CUTS IN...

DANIEL'S VOICE

What the *devil* are you doing?

GUSTAV

Something wrong, Danny? The script is finished...

DANIEL'S VOICE

Then why aren't you on a plane going home?

GUSTAV

I need some down time to be a tourist. That's what we "dumb" Americans like to do, right?

DANIEL'S VOICE

You don't know what you're getting into, mate. That bitch won't let Alan see his kids.

GUSTAV

What's that gotta do with *me*?

## DANIEL'S VOICE

Oh come now! I'll bet you're with her right now. Probably with the kids, too.

Katya watches with concern. Gustav signals her to relax.

## GUSTAV

If Alan cared so much about those kids, he wouldn't sell that flat.

## DANIEL'S VOICE

That's not the point. He's suing Katya for child custody. The court will decide whether or not she's fit to be a mother.

## GUSTAV

Is that how you Brits treat your women? What a bunch of Victorian misogynists.

## DANIEL'S VOICE

Go home, Gustav, don't get involved in this--

## GUSTAV

Don't tell me what to do!

Looking scared, Katya gestures at Gustav to hang up.

## DANIEL'S VOICE

She's using you, Yank, you're just her American pawn. When she's done with you, she'll toss you aside like some bloody tampon.

Gustav slams down the phone.

## KATYA

What did he say?

## GUSTAV

Nothing. He's just defending his buddy. Don't worry about it.

## KATYA

I have to worry. Alan will take my boys away out of spite, then dump them in the nearest orphanage.

## GUSTAV

That's kind of hard to believe...

KATYA

You don't know the British courts.  
They always side with the father --  
I have no rights here.

GUSTAV

Katya. Do you love me?

KATYA

More than you can imagine.

GUSTAV

Then trust me. We'll sort it out  
in the end.

(calls out)

Hey, Ilya! *Kak dela?*

He steps over and bounces on the mattress with Ilya. The boy tackles him to the mat, and they wrestle playfully.

SONYA (60's), a strict, solemn-looking babushka, carries in Tesco grocery bags with 3-year-old NIKITA in tow.

VOICEOVER

Okay. So maybe I was taking on too  
much. But these boys made me fall  
in love all over again...

Little Nikita runs over to the mattress and jumps on top of Gustav's back, riding him like a bucking bronco.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I felt more like a father to them  
than to my own son in Texas, whom I  
hadn't seen in decades. I was  
ready for a family...

Katya ARGUES IN RUSSIAN with Sonya over the groceries...

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Except for Sonya, Katya's mother.  
She spoke no English. Those two  
didn't get along well at all.

INT. HEATHROW AIRPORT (MOS) - DAY

An international mob scene. At a ticket counter, Gustav haggles with a British Airlines agent.

VOICEOVER

That didn't really matter to me at  
the time. I was madly in love,  
this time for keeps.



Katya, Sonya and the kids wait with piles of luggage, as Gustav negotiates over a stack of boarding passes.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I converted my first-class return ticket -- pre-paid by Disney -- into five economy tickets.

Katya home-videos her family with a camcorder, "directing" them as if she were on a production set.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Maybe I was being used. Katya had her sights set on Hollywood, and she wanted her kids out of England. It was all happening so fast...

(beat)

But Katya was my muse, she inspired me to write. And I was her white knight with benefits. I mean, that wasn't such a bad trade-off, right?

EXT. VENTURA BEACH - DAY

Sunny Southern California, a beach near a Channel Islands marina of condos. Gustav frolics in the surf with Ilya and Nikita, the three bonding together.

On the shore, Katya and Sonya QUARREL VEHEMENTLY IN RUSSIAN, their body language harsh and volatile.

VOICEOVER

We married in Las Vegas and moved to Channel Islands miles from L.A. I legally adopted her sons under California law. It was the best of times and, holy hot mess, it was the worst of times...

Katya suddenly PUNCHES Sonya in the face, drawing blood. Gustav races upshore and grabs Katya away from her mother...

GUSTAV

Whoa, whoa! Katya! Stop it...

Katya flails at Sonya in hellish fury. Her mother nurses a bleeding nose. Ilya and Nikita watch impassively.

GUSTAV (CONT'D)

Take it easy, honey. What the hell is going on?

KATYA

She's so ungrateful! She wants to go back to Russia...

(shouts at her)

To suffer even more!

GUSTAV

Just let it go, okay?

KATYA

All she's good for is watching the boys like some Soviet guard dog.

GUSTAV

Then let her. Let's go home.

He leads her away toward a condo, a bloodied Sonya left behind to tend to the children alone.

GUSTAV (CONT'D)

Why does she wanna go back?

KATYA

Our apartment in St. Petersburg is rotting from neglect. Everything in Russia rots...

(nods around)

Like *this* place. Smells of rotting fish. Nothing but fishermen and boats...it's so boring. We need to live closer to the city where the movie people live.

GUSTAV

We will soon, I promise. I just need to kickstart my career.

KATYA

Mine too. I didn't come all this way to end up in Ventura County.

GUSTAV

Don't worry. It's only a matter of time and money.

INT. VENTURA CONDO - NIGHT

In a guest bedroom, Ilya and Nikita sleep with Sonya, all crammed together on a queen mattress.

In the master bedroom, naked Mr. and Mrs. Goebbels video a home porno together on a king bed. Katya straddles Gustav, her camcorder strapped to her shoulder. "Directing" him.

## VOICEOVER

The great sex got us through the rough patches, our one saving grace. Before long, I was coitus interrupted...by the lure of work and money. A lot of money.

INT. AIR FRANCE JET (MID-FLIGHT) - DAY

Gustav browses a fat paperback novel, too fatigued to focus.

## VOICEOVER

A page-one rewrite of a four-hour miniseries. My first foray into long-form television.

He peers out a portal over a vast Mideast desert landscape.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Daniel Pyne needed me again, this time to rescue a sinking ship he was directing called "Babylon". The script sucked, and they were weeks from production on a ten-million-dollar set in Morocco.

Gustav glances back at the thick best seller in his lap.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I didn't even have time to read the thousand-page source material.

EXT. OUARZAZATE STUDIOS - MOROCCO - DAY

A massive set of ancient Babylon, columns and mock-ups towering over a studio lot in the middle of sandy wasteland.

Beyond the studio walls, a luxury hotel oasis.

EXT. OUARZAZATE HOTEL - DAY

Poolside. Gustav scribbles notes on a pad, sitting on a lounge chair. Daniel huddles over his shoulder.

## GUSTAV

Just how many battle scenes are we talking about here?

## DANIEL

Five or six, but we'll shoot them all together in one location.

GUSTAV

That's gonna get awfully redundant.

DANIEL

Let me worry about that.

A MASSIVE GUST OF WIND SWEEPS ACROSS the pool area. Gustav clutches his note pad from blowing away and jumps up. The lounge chair tumbles away from under him.

The two run for cover. Airborne tables, umbrellas and chairs ZIP PAST them in a hail of sand.

They take refuge in a lobby recess, watching all the outside furniture fly into the swimming pool.

GUSTAV

What the hell was that?!

DANIEL

A sirocco. Better get used to it.

He looks aside at Gustav with a curious smile...

DANIEL (CONT'D)

By the way, how's your wife?

GUSTAV

My...I'm not married.

DANIEL

Of course you are. You can't keep a secret like that from me.

GUSTAV

There's no secret, for fuck's sake.

DANIEL

It's quite all right, old chap, I understand. I mean, it's wrong to keep a man from ever seeing his kids, but Alan's a bloody bachelor to the core. He just wanted to show off Ilya at the pub. The boy looks a lot like him, doesn't he?

GUSTAV

I wouldn't know.

DANIEL

You're becoming such a good liar.

GUSTAV

I'm not lying. Just drop it.

DANIEL

Alan wouldn't have made a proper dad anyway. The question is, will you? It's you I'm worried about.

GUSTAV

Enough! Let's just focus on this project.

DANIEL

Be careful, Gustav. She's a very dangerous woman.

Fuming, Gustav starts to walk away. Daniel stops him...

DANIEL (CONT'D)

All right, never mind. Let me show you something you'll like.

EXT. DESERT LOCATION - DAY

A windy bluff over a canyon of sandstone walls around a vast clearing. Daniel and Gustav climb to the bluff's edge, joining an aging, weathered cinematographer, CHARLIE.

DANIEL

Gustav, this is Charlie, our D.P.

Gustav and Charlie shake hands in the bluster of wind.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Charlie was the assistant D.P. on "Lawrence of Arabia".

GUSTAV

Seriously? You worked for Freddie Young, David Lean's cameraman.

CHARLIE

Aye, mate. No effects back then. When they wanted a thousand extras, it really was a thousand extras.

Danny waves his hands over the canyon like a maestro...

DANIEL

This is it. The *battlefield*. Chariots over here, cavalry there. Real swords and spears, twenty kilos each. When they clash, you'll feel every blow of metal.

Gustav stares out in awe, the wind blasting around them.

## VOICEOVER

It was all so...epic! I was living  
in a virtual David Lean fantasy!

INT. HOLLAND PARK HOTEL - LONDON - DAY

A plush suite, wide windows with a full view of Holland Park.

## VOICEOVER

My new workplace was a five-star  
hotel with London's best restaurant  
for room service. And a 300-pound  
cash per diem, half of it going to  
my wife's shopping list, the other  
half to my son Johnny who needed  
college funds for Texas State.

Gustav sits at a new PERSONAL COMPUTER, typing at a laborious  
pace, trying to figure out its key functions...

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I had to dump my trusty Selectric  
typewriter for...a PC? With brand  
new Final Draft...software? With  
no PAPER in the machine? Fuck me!  
Old habits do die hard.

Daniel storms into the suite in a frantic state...

## DANIEL

Where's the third act?

## GUSTAV

I'm still in the second.

## DANIEL

Bloody hell...

## GUSTAV

It's *twice* as long as a feature --  
every act is *eighty* pages.

## DANIEL

Your deadline was three weeks to  
finish -- this is the third week.

## GUSTAV

At sixty pages per week? I need at  
least *four* weeks.

## DANIEL

No-no, you've gotta wrap it up *now!*  
Preproduction is in chaos.

GUSTAV

Okay, okay! Do you at least *like* what I've written so far?

DANIEL

I can't afford an opinion, Gustav, there is no time for revisions. *This* is the bloody shooting script.

GUSTAV

I...I can't work like this. I have to go for some level of quality--

DANIEL

Fuck the quality, just get it DONE!

GUSTAV

Okay, okay, OKAY!...

He SLAMS his palms on the keyboard in frustration -- the screen blitzes out. The PC crashes.

EXT. PARAMOUNT STUDIOS - LOS ANGELES - EVENING

A big, splashy, star-studded premiere event at the Paramount lot theatre. "BABYLON" lit up on posters. Costumed extras pose as muscular gladiators and nubile slave girls.

Gustav moves forward in the guest line with his manager Jessica, the area illuminated by TV-news coverage.

JESSICA

Where is your new Russian bride?

GUSTAV

She's home sick with the flu.

JESSICA

That's a shame. To miss something like this.

Gustav glances ahead...

His director *Daniel* moves in line with an entourage of cast members...the only man who knows his secret.

GUSTAV

Oh, she won't mind. We can watch it together on TV.

They pass the media interviewing guests. Jessica signals a publicity girl, who brings over an ABC news team. A REPORTER shoves a mike at Gustav, vidcam lights blinding him.

ABC REPORTER

Mr. Goebbels, how do you feel about the overall production from the writer's standpoint?

GUSTAV

Uh, I dunno, it was...challenging.

JESSICA

He's absolutely thrilled. With a great future ahead of him.

They move on. Jessica murmurs aside...

JESSICA (CONT'D)

You've gotta *sell* yourself more.

GUSTAV

I don't like being on camera.

JESSICA

Opportunities like this don't last. When are you gonna learn that?

GUSTAV

When I can afford a guest house for my mother.

INT. PARAMOUNT LOT THEATRE LOBBY - NIGHT

A post-screening party, the energy in the crowd upbeat. Daniel intercepts Gustav in the crush of bodies and abducts him away from Jessica.

He ushers him over to a group of STUDIO BRASS and PRODUCERS, among them FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA. Everyone shakes Gustav's hand, congratulating him. He nods and smiles in a daze.

VOICEOVER

I write *movies*, not television. But for the first time my every word was up there -- on the screen. I was suddenly in demand around town, mid six figures per show, closing in on a cool two million.

(beat)

Life *is* what happens to you while you make other plans.

CUTAWAY - ANIMATION

Gustav's Hollywood sidewalk star GLISTENS in the sun, all shiny and spanking new.



INT. CEDARS SINAI HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Gustav's decrepit mother waits in a wheelchair beside a hospital bed, a travel kit in her lap. Her hands tremble from a stroke. A distressed Gustav fidgets around her...

GUSTAV

Let me take you downstairs.

MOM

No, no...I have to wait for Denise.  
She'll get mad if I don't.

Gustav plucks the travel kit out of her lap...

GUSTAV

Then let me take this for you.

MOM

She told me to hold onto it.

GUSTAV

Don't let her boss you around all  
the time. I'm your son, you know?  
And I'm worried about you, too.

MOM

Oh, it was just a small stroke.

Gustav checks the doorway, then leans close in a low voice...

GUSTAV

Mom, I'm buying a house. The Great  
Escape is coming. Any day now.

MOM

The great what?

GUSTAV

Don't you remember?

Denise marches into the room, hospital paperwork in hand...

DENISE

Okay sweetheart, you're discharged.  
Let's go home. I'll take that...

She grabs the travel kit from Gustav. He won't let go of it, a brief tug of war between them. Denise snatches it away. Gustav glares back, Mom watching them nervously.

GUSTAV

I'll walk down with her too if you  
don't mind, Denise.

DENISE

Whatever, just don't upset her.

GUSTAV

Why would I upset her? I'm not the commandant in charge, but I have every right to be here.

Ignoring that, Denise pushes Mom's wheelchair out the door and leans over her like a parent over a child...

DENISE

You're gonna get lots of rest, hon. I'm not letting you outta my sight.

MOM

No need to make a fuss over me...

DENISE

I'll be the judge of that.

Gustav follows, staring after them with glum frustration.

EXT. MALIBU COLONY HOUSE - DAY

An inland suburban one-story. Not beach-front property, but inside the prestigious Colony. A moving van outside.

BACK YARD

Lush landscaping around a pool and a jacuzzi, dominated by a lone, towering palm tree.

Sitting alone poolside, Gustav gazes meaningfully at the palm tree. He pulls an old photo album out of a Bekins box and opens it. Scans childhood shots of his mother...

*Mom posing on a beach with baby Gus, youthful and pretty... designing the display board for his chemistry project... Mom and teenage Gus hiking on a mountain trail... Mom sealing rolled-up dollar bills with tape... then sneaking a money roll into adult Gustav's coat, caught unaware by the camera.*

Gustav turns to observe a small boat house across the yard, converted into a sauna. He glances toward the main house...

In the living room, Katya "directs" movers with furniture. Ilya and Nikita dash maniacally about, old Sonya trying to control them like a mother hen. Katya hurries outside...

KATYA

Gustav! I need your help. I can't do everything by myself.

GUSTAV

You seem to be doing just fine.  
You'll make a great director.

KATYA

I already *am* a great director.

She smiles and kisses him, massaging his shoulders. Gustav looks up at the solitary tree...

GUSTAV

Never thought I'd own a palm tree.

KATYA

Forget the palm tree -- we're in *Malibu Colony!* Think of all the new friends we're gonna meet...all the new *contacts*. Half of our neighbors are movie stars.

GUSTAV

Only on the beach side. Whaddya think about that sauna over there? It's an old boat house, but we can convert it into a *guest house*.

KATYA

Or a private office for you and me. You'll write the scripts and I'll direct them. Working together as a team, like we talked about.

GUSTAV

Sure, sure. But I meant a place for a *guest...like a family member*. Like my mother, in fact.

Katya stops massaging him, her smile strained...

KATYA

Your *mother*?

GUSTAV

Well, yeah. She's at the end of her life. I wanna be close to her and take care of her, before it's too late.

KATYA

You want her to *move in* with us?

GUSTAV

It's important to me, Katya. I'm sure you can understand that.

KATYA

Of course. But don't you think we have enough family in one house?

GUSTAV

Your family.

KATYA

Darling, we are your family. Let's go inside...

She grabs his hand and drags him back into the house.

KATYA (CONT'D)

We have to decide on the position of our bed. The feng shui has to be perfect for making love.

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Darkness. Two dim figures on the bed, faintly lit by the moonlight of a window. Indistinguishable except for two female legs spread apart...a male head between them.

KATYA

To the left...higher...harder!  
No, stop. Must be the feng shui.

An exasperated sigh. Gustav rests his head over her belly and catches his breath...

GUSTAV

Katyanushka...about my mother...

KATYA

Please...not now.

GUSTAV

I need some quality time with her, away from the Gorilla. I told you about all that before...

KATYA

Too many times.

GUSTAV

Yeah, but your mom lives with us.

KATYA

Babushka takes care of the boys twenty-four seven. If she didn't, our sex life would be kaput.

GUSTAV

It's funny how you defend someone  
you loathe and despise...

KATYA

Because she's a work horse! I need  
her here -- and so do you.

GUSTAV

Don't get so riled up, hon. All  
I'm saying is, I need to be with my  
mother before she dies. Visiting  
her at *their* house is like going to  
a maximum-security prison...

KATYA

*Stoy, pozhalsta.* Get on top of me,  
darling -- I need an orgasm.

GUSTAV

Katya, I have to do this for her.  
We need to talk about it...

KATYA

Don't talk. Just fuck me...

She pulls him on top of her with needy desperation...

KATYA (CONT'D)

*Moya lyubov,* I need your manhood  
deep inside me...

Unable to resist, Gustav climbs into missionary position...

KATYA (CONT'D)

But don't *come* inside me.

GUSTAV

I know, I know...

Penetration. Katya gasps out...

KATYA

*Bozhe moi!*

The relentless fucking begins, the nymphomaniac and her sex  
slave. Katya's MOANS RISE UP THE CLIMAXING SCALE.

VOICEOVER

How long does it take for a young  
woman to reach menopause? Twenty  
years? Until that day, I would  
have to withdraw my semen as often  
as I did money from the bank.

## EXT. PRIVATE SCHOOL - DAY

An orientation tour across the grounds of an exclusive private school atop Mulholland Drive, attended by a crowd of film-industry parents. Gustav and Katya among them.

## VOICEOVER

I planned to rent an extra guest house for Mom, but then I couldn't afford it...not with a five-grand-per-month mortgage, family trips to Europe and Russia, private schools for the boys and college loans to Johnny, all paid by yours truly.

Katya hobnobs with a FAMOUS COUPLE, very casual at first, then she starts to aggressively pitch them.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Katya was born for Glitter Gulch. But she had this nasty habit of over-hustling people...like Steven Spielberg and his wife Kate.

The couple steers clear of her, but Katya keeps talking at them. The two exit into the parking lot. She follows them.

A chagrined Gustav watches his wife harassing them...all the way to Spielberg's vintage pickup truck.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Later she hounded them at a school soccer match. Spielberg's lawyers filed a restraining order. That was really embarrassing. But there were upsides to Katya, too...

## MONTAGE - EUROPEAN LOCATIONS

Mediterranean Sea. Gustav and Katya have underwater sex off the shoreline of the French Riviera...

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

She broadened my world view, she showed me how to be a European...

The Jungfrau Alps of Switzerland. High on a ski-lift chair, husband and wife pleasure each other under their parkas...

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

She taught me how not to be a dumb tourist and travel like a pro...

Inside Paris' Louvre. The two make out in a museum recess...

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)  
How to appreciate the fine arts.

Kissing and groping, while rambunctious Ilya and Nikita dash around paintings -- Sonya and museum guards in hot pursuit.

INT. VALLEY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Gustav's mother lies paralyzed in a hospice bed. A forlorn, teary-eyed Denise sponge-bathes her. Mom's eyes stare vacantly into space, her frail body immobile.

Gustav stands watching in grief, his heart torn apart.

DENISE

Three strokes in a row. She can't talk, she can't move, she can't even focus her eyes, the poor thing. My poor, poor baby...

She kisses her cheek and wipes the drool from her mouth.

Gustav looks away. He can't bear to watch.

DENISE (CONT'D)

You can leave if you want. There's no way to communicate with her.

GUSTAV

I'll stick around.

DENISE

It's up to you, son.

Gustav flinches at the word "son". He gazes morosely at the old dyke and his invalid mother.

DENISE (CONT'D)

I lie with her all night long. Sometimes I think she senses my touch. She might sense you too, Gus, if you'd like to try.

SAME SCENE - NIGHT

Gustav and Denise lie on each side of Mom on the bed, their arms around her, holding her close. Denise gushes weepily...

DENISE (CONT'D)

I love you, baby, with all my heart. I'll take care of you, I'll never leave your side...I'll always be here for you.

Gustav sighs grimly to himself. Denise gently wedges a pillow under Mom's back, shifting her limp body around toward Gustav. Mom's dead eyes rest on her son's face...

A *glimmer of recognition*, her eyes focusing on him. Gustav peers deeply back...

VOICEOVER

Mom's eyes seemed to be crying out to me, trying to say..."*SAVE ME!*"

Gustav stares back, helpless. Tears stream down his face.

An ASTRAL BEAM RADIATES INTO the room...the same UFO light from long ago. The BEAM ENVELOPS Mom's entire body. Denise doesn't notice a thing. Gustav watches in silent awe.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

She passed away that night. I'd never see her again...at least not on *this planet*.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

A brass cremation urn sits on a shelf. A pair of gloved hands snatches it off the ledge and spirits it away.

VOICEOVER

I didn't want Mom's ashes left in L.A. with Denise. I wanted them somewhere else, far away from the smog and stench of Hollywood.

EXT. LAKE TRAVIS (MOS) - AUSTIN, TEXAS - DAY

A summer birthday party on a rocky shore. Balloon-decorated picnic tables. Lake boats anchored offshore.

Gustav sits alone at a picnic table, nursing a Lone Star beer, watching the festivities around him.

VOICEOVER

I finally decided to visit my first son Johnny in Austin, on his thirtieth birthday.

JOHNNY (30) leads a flirting contest on a motorboat. Texas girls flip off their bikini tops and brandish their boobs. Applause and laughter. They all dive overboard.

On the shore, Gustav's older ex-wife Linda and her HUSBAND cheer them on. She waves to Gustav at the table.



Gustav waves back with a frozen smile. He watches TWO TOTS in life vests, swimming by the motorboat with Johnny...

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Johnny had kids of his own now, his first one at nineteen just like me. So I was a grandfather at thirty-eight. It was strange. I had been disconnected from an entire family clan that I never got to know.

EXT. DOWNTOWN AUSTIN (MOS) - LADY BIRD LAKE - DAY

Gustav wanders alone on a wooded path by the Colorado River, toting a shopping bag. Joggers and bikers everywhere.

VOICEOVER

I always thought Texas was flat and barren, but this was Hill Country. It was all green and full of life.

He sits on a secluded riverside bench, watching kayakers and paddleboarders. Then he opens Mom's cremation urn from the bag and discreetly scatters its ashes into the river.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Mom's guest house in the sky would be here now. I had to atone for my failure to keep my promise to her, just as I had failed as a father.

He gazes around at all the joggers, bikers and strollers.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Austin seemed like the perfect escape from L.A. People here act actually human, and you don't have to climb over bodies to survive. But...I was tied ball and chain to Katya and Tinseltown.

INT. AGENCY OFFICE (MOS) - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Gustav pitches to a SENIOR AGENT, Katya by his side.

VOICEOVER

I had a new business partner...my wife. As a writer-director team.

Katya keeps interrupting Gustav, chattering animatedly away. The agent just stares at her with a poker face.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Yet in spite of my credentials, we  
couldn't get arrested.

INT. UNIVERSAL STUDIOS (MOS) - BLACK TOWER - DAY

Katya pitches a story to an EXECUTIVE. She talks fast, while  
Gustav backs her up. An army of assistants take notes.

The blank-faced Executive finally puts his feet on the desk,  
blocking all eye contact with Katya.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Something about Katya rubbed them  
wrong. I didn't have a clue what.

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS HOUSE - NIGHT

A brightly lit lawn party around a Las Vegas-sized pool,  
crowded with industry elite. Caterers wend through with  
trays of champagne flutes.

Katya, visibly drunk in a miniskirt, grabs a glass from a  
tray and plops back an empty one. Gustav leans into her...

GUSTAV

Honey...that's three too many.

KATYA

Don't "honey" me. I know when I've  
had enough.

GUSTAV

Not from *my* experience.

KATYA

I can socialize in any condition.  
You just stand around like a wall  
flower and collect dust.

She bottoms up her champagne. A tension between them...

GUSTAV

You're not exactly sober when you  
hit up on every guy in sight.

KATYA

I'm making contacts to help our  
careers.

GUSTAV

Whose career? Mine or yours?

KATYA

Fuck you.  
 (glances away)  
 Oh look -- Oliver Stone.

She grabs another champagne from a passing tray and heads off. Gustav grabs her arm...

GUSTAV

Katya, don't...

Katya yanks away and beelines toward OLIVER STONE chatting up a starlet. She barges in between them and whispers into his ear, Mr. Stone alarmed but titillated by her.

Watching them, Gustav struggles to make a decision. He steps forward to intervene. Before he can reach them...

Katya staggers off balance and FALLS FLAT on her back, her legs spread open -- no panties, her crotch FULLY EXPOSED.

Mr. Stone, and everyone else, stare down in shock.

Gustav picks up Katya off the grass and half-carries her to a poolside recliner. Katya suddenly lurches forward...

She VOMITS into the pool. Guests watch with dismay.

The producer host (FRED) hurries over. Gustav plops Katya onto the recliner. Katya's head weaves dizzily...

KATYA

Sorry...I shouldn't wear high heels  
 on a lawn...

She passes dead out. Fred approaches. Gustav looks up...

GUSTAV

Fred, I don't know what to say.  
 Let me pay for the damages. Just  
 send me the pool bill.

FRED

Forget it, kiddo. You better take  
 your wife home.

GUSTAV

Yeah. I might need some help.

Fred waves over two caterers. They struggle to pick up Katya. Fred turns to Gustav...

FRED

I like you, Goebbels, you're a good writer. I would have loved to work with you...but you shouldn't have brought her into the mix.

GUSTAV

What d'you mean?

FRED

She pulled that crotch stunt before on another producer. You weren't there. Wake up, man. Don't you know she's clinically insane?

Gustav glares back in surprise, turning defensive...

GUSTAV

What? Huh?! How can you say that? You're talking about my wife!

EXT. SUNSET STRIP RESTAURANT - DAY

An al fresco table over the Strip. Gustav picks at a salad. Jessica nurses a club soda, her face wan and pale...

JESSICA

No lunch for me, not with this stomach tumor. No more junk food. I have to start chemo soon.

GUSTAV

I'm so sorry, Jessica, but I'm sure you'll get through it.

JESSICA

Oh, no doubt. I'll just keep on working 'til I drop dead.

GUSTAV

I hate to bring this up again, but have you thought about...

JESSICA

Katya? I only met your wife once, but she seems, I dunno...a bit off somehow. I can't place it.

GUSTAV

That's just her creative energy. She's really very talented.

JESSICA

You don't know that. That's the hard thing about director clients, especially those with no credits.

GUSTAV

Sign her on...for my sake. It'll take a lot of pressure off of me. You're my best friend. Since my mom died, maybe my only friend.

JESSICA

(sighs)

Okay...I'll give her a shot. But only as a favor to you.

Gustav smiles, deeply relieved.

EXT. MALIBU COLONY HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

Gustav reads a script on a lounge chair. The kids play in the pool. Big ILYA (10) looks like Alan, small NIKITA (8) a precocious runt. They smack each other with pool noodles.

Katya paces anxiously before Gustav...

KATYA

Why doesn't she return my calls?

GUSTAV

Jessica has a lot of clients, hon. You just have to be patient...

KATYA

She's ignoring me, I can tell.

GUSTAV

Hiring a first-time director is risky business. All she can sell you on are your documentaries.

KATYA

That should be enough.

GUSTAV

Not for a dramatic feature, Katya. You know that.

Katya knows, her frustration strained to the limit.

In the pool, Ilya keeps bopping Nikita on the head with his noodle. Katya SHOUTS IN RUSSIAN at him to stop. Ilya ARGUES BACK IN RUSSIAN. Katya glowers furiously at him.

## VOICEOVER

Ilya reminded her too much of his biological father, a man she hated. Alan was a family secret. To the boys, I was their only dad.

In a rage, Katya snatches away Ilya's pool noodle and bashes it repeatedly over his head, CURSING HIM IN RUSSIAN.

Sonya runs out and confronts Katya, SHRIEKING. VILE RUSSIAN between them, tempers rising. Katya shoves Sonya into the pool -- SPLASH! Gustav jumps up. Ilya yells at his mom...

## ILYA

Leave her alone, you CRAZY MONSTER!

Recoiling from his words, Katya bursts into tears and dashes off into the boat-house sauna. SLAMS the door behind her.

Gustav hears her LOUD SOBBING inside, tempted to go to her. But he doesn't.

## EXT. STUDIO CITY OFFICE COMPLEX - DAY

Clients carry file boxes into the open door of Jessica's new low-rent Valley office. Gustav among them.

## INT. JESSICA'S OFFICE - DAY

Jessica, patches of her hair gone from chemo, wipes her new office desk clean. Gustav piles boxes with the others.

## GUSTAV

This is great. You finally got out of your kitchen.

## JESSICA

If I can ever get any peace. Tell your wife to lay off the calls. She's been hassling me to death.

## GUSTAV

Sorry about that. I'll give her a good heart-to-heart talk--

Katya suddenly explodes through the open door. She storms over -- SLAMS Jessica against a wall, her hands gripped around her throat. Spitting the words into her face...

## KATYA

I hope your insides ROT! I hope you DIE of cancer!

Gustav pulls her off a gasping Jessica. Katya breaks away and storms outside. Gustav gapes after her, dumbfounded.

VOICEOVER

Well, hell. It wasn't always like that with Katya. There were times we fell in love all over again...

INT. RANCH HOUSE KITCHEN (MOS) - DAY

Gustav huddles over a script at a dining table, taking fast notes. A handsome, virile ACTOR paces enthusiastically around him, improvising the lead role's dialogue.

VOICEOVER

Like the time I wrote a project for Patrick Swayze, before he got sick with pancreatic cancer. I got to know him and his wife Lisa, working at their Sun Valley ranch house.

Patrick's beautiful WIFE prepares a salad at a counter, watching the antics between them. Joking around, Patrick yanks Gustav to his feet and DIRTY DANCES with him, his big thigh gyrating between Gustav's thighs. Everyone laughs.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

He invited me and Katya to their umpteenth anniversary party...

EXT. RANCH HOUSE GROUNDS - NIGHT

A lit outside dancing arena, surrounded by dozens of guests. Patrick and Lisa ballroom dance together under the stars, gazing adoringly into each other's eyes.

Gustav and Katya watch them from the crowd, moved by the vision of two incredible professional dancers in love.

VOICEOVER

I had never seen a married couple so deeply in love with each other after so many years together. Neither had my wife.

Looks between him and Katya. Guests start to ballroom dance, swirling around the host couple. Gustav leads Katya into a dance, his arms encircling her, their eyes locked.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

It was like renewing our vows. If only it had lasted a little longer.

## NEWS FOOTAGE OF 9/11

The ghastly crumbling of the World Trade Center buildings.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

When Al-Qaeda crashed those planes into the twin towers, the Hollywood economy crashed with them. Most screenwriters were suddenly out of work. My fifteen minutes of fame were over, as I faced bankruptcy and a house foreclosure.

## EXT. MALIBU COLONY HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

A "For Sale" sign protrudes from the front lawn.

## INT. MASTER BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

A bathrobed Katya lashes out against Gustav in his pajamas, both of them seriously drunk...

## KATYA

You fucking loser! You can't even support your family -- not with that disaster you call a career!

## GUSTAV

You should talk -- Miss Wannabe Movie Director!

## KATYA

I AM a director, if I had half the chance! But YOU! You can't even close a deal -- you don't even know how to TALK to people!

## GUSTAV

Maybe I should just shove my PUSSY in their faces!

He staggers out with dramatic flair. Katya follows him...

## HALLWAY

Down the hall to the kitchen, badgering him...

## KATYA

You're a pathetic washout...

A bedroom door opens, the boys peering out -- Sonya yanks them back inside and shuts the door.



## KITCHEN

Gustav grabs a Stoli bottle, Katya hot on his heels...

KATYA (CONT'D)

You can't make a living! All you  
can do is waste away your money--

GUSTAV

(turns, inflamed)  
No -- YOU wasted it! You drained  
me of every penny!

He spills vodka into a glass. Katya sweeps it away, a CRASH  
OF GLASS! She shoves her face into his...

KATYA

You're just a hopeless alcoholic!

GUSTAV

I'm just catching up to you.

KATYA

You can't even get it up with that  
limp dick of yours.

GUSTAV

I can't fuck a bitch who's fucked  
up my career--

Katya SMACKS his face with a wallop. He reels from the blow.

KATYA

You disgust me! You're not even  
half a man anymore!

Gustav SLAMS her against a counter, one hand on her throat,  
the other raised in a clenched fist...

GUSTAV

Shut up, or I'll bash your face in!

KATYA

Go ahead, big shot! HIT ME!

Gustav is very tempted, his fist poised in midair. He stops  
himself and pushes her away...

GUSTAV

Go fuck yourself. I never hit a  
woman in my life.

He lurches through the living room. Katya snatches up a  
*butcher knife* from the counter and goes after him...

## LIVING ROOM

She STABS him from behind -- the blade slashes his pajamas, drawing blood from his shoulder.

He whacks away the knife and shoves her onto a sofa. Then throws open the front door and bolts outside.

## EXT. MALIBU HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

Gustav half-runs across the lawn, too drunk to sprint. In pursuit, Katya seizes him from behind, tearing his pajamas...

KATYA

Don't you leave me! I'll KILL you!

Gustav grapples with her, throws her on the grass and hurries away. Katya wrenches up the "For Sale" sign and hurtles it after him, SCREAMING RUSSIAN INVECTIVES.

## EXT. MALIBU SUBURB ROAD - LATE NIGHT

Gustav stumbles down the block through the Colony in his torn, bloodied pajamas. More dazed than injured...

VOICEOVER

I had been in denial for too many years, too blinded by love.

The headlights of a police cruiser flood over him. Gustav staggers around like a vagrant. TWO COPS step out...

1ST COP

Hey bud, where are you going? This neighborhood is private property.

2ND COP

Wait a sec...that's Mr. Goebbels.

1ST COP

No shit. The screenwriter?

2ND COP

Yeah. He lives here.

## EXT. MALIBU HOUSE - LATER

The patrol car is parked on the driveway. The Cops help out Gustav who's too weak and dispirited to walk on his own.

Katya runs over on a rampage, pointing at him...

KATYA

Arrest that man! He attacked me  
with a knife!

(points at her robe)

Look at this! Blood!

GUSTAV

That's my blood.

1ST COP

Awright, lady. We don't wanna take  
you both in, so just settle down.

2ND COP

You folks need to work it out. Or  
get yourselves divorce attorneys.

The two officers glance over at Katya, one muttering aside to  
the other...

1ST COP

Crazy bitch.

Gustav stares soberly at Katya, the words sinking in...

VOICEOVER

"Crazy"? I know. Call me stupid.  
It took me this long to figure it  
out...my loving Russian wife was a  
card-carrying *psychotic sociopath*.  
And my worst enemy.

EXT. MALIBU HOUSE - ANOTHER DAY

Katya and Sonya pile the children into a family SUV. Gustav  
watches them from the house doorway.

VOICEOVER

Our usual summer trip to Russia was  
canceled, obviously for lack of  
funds. Katya took off to visit a  
friend in San Francisco.

Katya jumps in without any acknowledgement of Gustav. Ilya  
and Nikita wave at him from the window as they drive off.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I already missed my boys, the only  
joy left in my life. I mean, I was  
their dad. I'd raised them since  
they were babies. Of course I  
didn't miss *her*. I hoped she'd  
never come back. But she would.

## BACK YARD - LATER

Gustav gazes for a long time at the palm tree, as if he were trying to bond with it.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I was home alone for the first time in years. The solitude soothed and massaged me, inspiring me...

## SAME SCENE - NIGHT

The palm tree looms eerily in the rippling pool light. Gustav pounds energetically on a laptop by the pool. Its underwater lamps cast a ghoulish glow over him.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I wrote a new spec script. A horror story about a wife who goes mad and tries to murder her family. Write what you know, right?

## EXT. NORTH HOLLYWOOD DUPLEX (MOS) - DAY

Gustav, a script under his arm, walks to the front door and rings the bell. Jessica opens the door, her head *completely bald* from chemotherapy, but always in good spirits.

## VOICEOVER

I gave my new script to Jessica to peddle around. Even if it never sold, I felt proud of it.

They talk briefly, then exchange quick goodbyes. Gustav saunters away, walking tall, feeling good about himself. Then he stops, thinking twice about that.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

The script was summarily rejected. Too depressing, the buyers said, too implausible. How could it be *implausible*? It was real life -- it was happening to *me!*

## CUTAWAY - ANIMATION

A CARTOON studio desk. Scripts plop down on the desktop, revealing new titles -- each one stamped "REJECT" by a huge hand stamp in bloody red ink. Script after script...

"BEAUTY AND THE ZOMBIE BEAST"... "THE PERFECT TYPHOON"...  
"STEPFORD HOOKERS"... "ALIEN CIRCUS"... "NARCOVILLE".

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

But the real problem was that every other spec I wrote was passed on.

Gustav's ANIMATED Hollywood star suddenly IMPLODES AND CAVES IN, SINKING UNDER the sidewalk INTO A FIERY PIT...

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I couldn't get hired either. This time I couldn't blame Katya at all. I was simply out of touch with the market of the New Millennium...

The Hollywood sidewalk pit FILLS WITH earth and MORPHS INTO a grave mound -- trampled over by a MASS STAMPEDE of DC and Marvel Comics SUPER HEROES.

## EXT. PASADENA COTTAGE - DAY

Modest with a weedy, unkempt yard. Gustav, Sonya and the boys lift a sofa out of a self-haul truck. Their SUV and an old Mercedes parked at the curb.

## VOICEOVER

Hollywood was a harsh mistress, even worse than my wife. I sold the Malibu house at a loss. It was the beginning of the end.

Katya carries a two-sided Kandinsky original painting to the cottage, not letting anyone touch it.

## VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

I couldn't pay next month's rent, even though Katya's art collection was worth a fortune. She wouldn't part with a single one.

## EXT. PASADENA PARKING LOT - DAY

An empty lot. The Mercedes rolls slowly, weaving off course, jerking erratically from too much brake pressure.

## INT. MERCEDES (MOVING) - DAY

TEENAGE ILYA (15) behind the wheel, his first driving lesson. Gustav watches nervously from the passenger side...

## GUSTAV

Easy on the brakes, Ilya! Steer in a straight line...

ILYA  
I am in a straight line!

GUSTAV  
Okay, good. Now imagine there's a  
stop sign ahead. What d'you do?

Ilya SLAMS on the brakes -- the engine stalls out.

GUSTAV (CONT'D)  
Easy, I said!

ILYA  
I'm trying to!

GUSTAV  
All right...you'll get used to it.  
Shift into park and let's take a  
break.

Ilya shifts and sets the parking brake. Gustav takes a  
breath and relaxes.

GUSTAV (CONT'D)  
Oh...congratulations on your new  
scholarship. What're you studying?

ILYA  
Anthropology, Oriental Philosophy  
and...Advanced Calculus.

GUSTAV  
Jeezus. I wish I'd gone to private  
school. I flunked out of Geometry.

ILYA  
Dad? Are you and Mom gonna get a  
divorce?

Gustav stares at him. He sighs, deciding not to lie...

GUSTAV  
I don't know, son...it seems pretty  
inevitable. I'm sorry for what you  
guys have been through. Sorry for  
what lies ahead of you.

ILYA  
What lies ahead?

GUSTAV  
Years of therapy. Your mom has  
been pretty tough on you.

ILYA

What can I do? She's my mom.

GUSTAV

Yeah, well. So was Joan Crawford.

INT. PASADENA COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

On the sofa Ilya and Nikita work on homework. Gustav reads a book in an armchair nearby, trying to remain oblivious to the RUSSIAN SHOUTING in the dining room...

Katya and Sonya BATTLE LOUDLY over a stack of bills on the dining table. Tension cuts the air like a knife.

Gustav can't focus on his book. He leans aside to Ilya...

GUSTAV

What are they bitching about?

ILYA

Mom wants Babushka to take out her savings to cover the bills that...  
"so and so" can't pay.

GUSTAV

Who's "so and so"?

ILYA

The "American loser".

The dining-room QUARREL turns vociferous -- Katya SLAPS her mother's face. Defiant, Sonya SLAPS her back. She storms off into a bedroom and SLAMS the door.

Katya grabs the bills and marches into the living room toward Gustav, on the warpath. She glares aside at the boys...

KATYA

What are YOU two looking at?!

Ilya and Nikita quickly pack up their homework and hasten into another bedroom. Katya zeros in on Gustav...

KATYA (CONT'D)

What are you gonna do about this?

She throws the bills at him. They scatter to the floor. Gustav blatantly ignores her.

KATYA (CONT'D)

Just sit there and do NOTHING, like some impotent lump of shit?!

Gustav refuses to make eye contact. Katya WHACKS the book out of his hands...

KATYA (CONT'D)  
I'm TALKING to you!

Gustav leans down to pick it up -- Katya kicks it out of his range. He rises slowly, rigid with hatred. Locks dagger eyes with her. She glowers back in a challenging tone...

KATYA (CONT'D)  
What are you gonna do? Huh?!

Gustav checks himself. He turns very subdued...

GUSTAV  
I'm going to the liquor store.

KATYA  
So you can get drunk again? LOSER?

Gustav grabs the Mercedes keys, turns and opens the front door. Katya fumes at him but she doesn't stop him. Steeling himself, he calmly walks out.

EXT. PASADENA COTTAGE - NIGHT

Gustav moves toward the Mercedes at a steady gait. Katya watches from the open door. He senses her eyes on him, but he doesn't look back. Katya calls out...

KATYA  
Get me some Stolichnaya!

Gustav nods and jumps into the car. He fires it up and drives away. His tail lights disappear into the night.

INT. MERCEDES (MOVING) - NIGHT

Gustav drives grimly, his grip tight on the wheel.

VOICEOVER  
I left behind everything I owned.  
My clothes and my belongings, naked  
into the wilderness...

He glances back: his laptop and files on the back seat.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)  
Well, not everything. I didn't  
really plan all this in advance...  
but I was *never going back*.



EXT. NORTH HOLLYWOOD DUPLEX - NIGHT

Jessica opens the door in a dressing gown. She looks at Gustav standing there like a homeless waif. Shaking her head at him, she gives him a hug. Then escorts him inside.

VOICEOVER

I hid out at Jessica's duplex while I filed for a divorce. I secured a loan, so the family cottage would be fully paid for a year. But it was the idea of deserting my sons after ten years that hurt the most.

INT. DUPLEX - GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT/DAY

Gustav lies on a bed in a guest bedroom. A TIME TRANSITION, DISSOLVING FROM NIGHT TO DAY TO NIGHT...

VOICEOVER

I stayed in a room Jessica reserved for her homeless clients. I was wracked with guilt, depression... then finally a dead resolve.

A STREAM OF VOICE MESSAGES on his phone. At first begging...

KATYA'S VOICE

*Moy dorogoy!* Don't do this to me!  
Please, my darling, come home...  
(sobbing)  
Come back to me! *I love you!*

BEEP. Then a different tone...

KATYA'S VOICE (CONT'D)

(with Russian curses)  
You cowardly, dickless piece of shit scum! You're worse than Alan! Don't you even care about the boys?! I promise you, *sooka* -- I will KILL you for this!

BEEP. Then turning sinister...

KATYA'S VOICE (CONT'D)

I have friends in the Russian mafia. They will hunt you down and put you in the hospital. When I find you, I will skin your penis with a razor blade, very slowly, then cut off your balls -- just before I SLIT YOUR THROAT!

Gustav switches it off, staring bleakly in the darkness.

VOICEOVER

I never replied. Never spoke to her once. Not ever. Was I wrong? Was I a contemptible, lowly coward? Perhaps so. But I was NOT gonna give in. I did NOT want to die. I wanted to LIVE.

INT. YMCA GYM - EVENING

Gustav works out on free weights in gym clothes. He glances around, nagged by paranoia...

VOICEOVER

The bitch hunted everywhere, never realizing I was hiding in plain sight. Then she found me...

He spots someone in the gym entrance...

Katya, arguing with a desk person to let her inside.

Gustav jumps up and runs out, dashing for the parking garage.

Katya catches a glimpse of him. She bolts back outside.

EXT. YMCA GYM - EVENING

Katya races around the building at full throttle, toward the driveway entrance into its parking structure.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - EVENING

Gustav sprints toward his Mercedes parked on the far side, a hundred-yard dash...

A distance away, Katya bears down on him at a murderous run. Hell hath no fury...

Gustav dodges her through a labyrinth of vehicles. A tense cat-and-mouse chase across the shadowy garage.

Evading her, Gustav finally reaches the Mercedes. He manually unlocks it and jumps inside, firing up the engine...

INT. MERCEDES (MOVING) - EVENING

He skids forward, SCREECHING around cars toward a far exit.

INTO REAR-VIEW MIRROR

Katya's figure sprints after the car, her legs pumping fast.

VOICEOVER

My blood pressure was skyrocketing.  
I was a heart attack waiting to  
happen. I had to run. Had to get  
outta town. Just go! *Anywhere!*

EXT. INTERSTATE 15 - CALIFORNIA BORDER - NIGHT

The Mercedes races across the state line into Nevada.

INT. MERCEDES (MOVING) - NIGHT

Still in his gym clothes, Gustav drives hard, his eyes fixed on the road ahead, his knuckles white on the steering wheel, on the edge of total lunacy...

VOICEOVER

I had no idea where I was going. I  
was losing it, my brain infected by  
the madness of my enemy. It took  
me a while to realize I was leaving  
the City of Angels forever. I had  
to go home. But where was home?  
Not on this wretched Planet Earth.

EXT. NEVADA HIGHWAY - LATE NIGHT

Nothing but flat, vast, empty desert. The Mercedes speeds through the dead of night. Not another car in sight.

INT. MERCEDES (MOVING) - NIGHT

Gustav drives on, exhausted. He dozes off, almost falling asleep at the wheel. Something catches his eye...

Ahead on the black horizon, a *UFO LIGHT SLOWLY DESCENDS LOW* before the car.

Gustav squints, its *BLINDING GLARE* searing his eyes...

VOICEOVER

Was it a hallucination? Or was it  
really happening?

He gapes out at the approaching light. Then a knowing smile spreads across his face...

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

It was *real!* They were coming for me! My mother Jara! My father, Commander Kronos! Come to rescue their stranded alien son and take him back home to Planet Zzzzyk! Finally! *Finally!*

THE UFO LIGHT SPLITS INTO TWO IMAGES...

*Two oncoming headlights. Speeding closer and closer...*

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

What will it be like on that world? Impossible to describe, but it would feel like home...

The two lights BLAZE BRIGHTER. A CAR HORN BLARES...

OUR VIEW WHITES OUT.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

It would be like, I don't know...

BLACKNESS. Then a starry night sky...

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Kind of like...

EXT. CENTRAL TEXAS HIGHWAY - DAY

The sky FADES TO DAYLIGHT. WE CRANE DOWN OVER green Hill Country. On a distant highway, a moving Mercedes.

VOICEOVER

Austin, Texas. Where local aliens keep it weird and real...

Amidst a field of bluebonnets, an "AUSTIN CITY LIMIT" sign.

VOICEOVER (CONT'D)

Just not as crazy as me and those humans in Tinseltown.

FADE OUT.