Master of Arts

Vol 1 Exegesis

Black Comedy and the Principles of Screenwriting

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DESCRIPTON OF PROJECT

The creative project of this Masters by Research in Creative Writing is a feature length screenplay. The screenplay will be accompanied by this exegesis researching the sub-genre of black comedy in cinema.

This exegesis will aim to research and analyse the conventions of writing a black comedy in a feature film script. As a screenwriter with a particular interest in black comedy, my aim is to explore the technical structures of black comedy in order to facilitate the writing of a tragicomic screenplay. We will attempt to define the components of black comedy and survey its origin in theatre and literature.

We will also aim to examine the function of black comedy in relation to the psychology of the protagonist and the audience, as well as defining the characteristics of the genre in the context of Screenwriting. The research will inform the writing of the feature length screenplay entitled The Actions.

Screenplay Project

The screenplay is for feature film in the black comedy genre, to be written over three acts. The project will explore the themes of fame and celebrity as well as the difficulties of the relationships with oneself, partners and family.

The Actions is the story of Sam Adams, a film and television actor in his mid to late 50’s. He is most famous for disaster movies and cop shows he made in the late 1970’s. These days he is trying to reinvent his career in more credible film roles. Whilst not hugely famous, Sam is a trained actor with a track record and is always able to get a role when the older man is required. Living a fairly lavish lifestyle, Sam has developed a comfortable existence that revolves around his eccentric sunbaking, drinking and career. For this reason Sam has rarely seen his son John, who is a struggling actor, since he left his family many years ago.
John reveals he and his wife have a baby on the way and seeks his father Sam’s help in breaking into the film industry; Sam’s routine world is altered. Sam takes a lucrative role in a TV show and befriends his young, attractive and famous male co-star Jesse Grosso. When push comes to shove Sam chooses Jesse and the promise of a big movie, over his son John. But when the deal falls through and Jesse has no time for him, Sam quits the show, commits to a diabolical B-grade film before leaving everything behind and escaping on a plane.

When Sam finally returns from a small fishing village, he is thankful his agent is still able to find him some work. And as he tries again to alter his approach to his career, he finds he does the same in his life. Sam finally attempts some contact with his son, through an appreciation of his new grandchild; a childhood he doesn’t want to miss again.

**INTRODUCTION**

Black comedy is difficult to define due to its nature as a sub-genre. It is most commonly categorised as presenting issues not palatable in conventional comedies; themes generally regarded as taboo, such as death, sexuality, war, or human suffering. However, the ambiguity of what response is required of an audience is what makes black comedy elusive. What may seem dramatic to one viewer may be interpreted as comical to another. Where one audience member may experience events as tragic, another might experience them as honest or humorous. Therefore, to best attempt to define black comedy in this exegesis we will aim to explore what components comprise this ambiguous middle ground between drama and humour and position it in relation to the classical genres of tragedy and comedy.

An introduction to the ambiguity of black comic material we can observe in the film adaptation of the renowned play, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* In this dark comedy of relationships and repression, the audience is presented with a conflicted married couple whose verbal sparring and savage mockery of one another serves to both as comic tool and to reveal a tragic truth.
Early in the film as the married couple, George and Martha, entertain a young couple for drinks, Martha embarks on a comical story of how she once punched George to the ground. She progresses however to reveal the story as colouring their whole life together, how awful it was and how much it degraded George. As she concludes this inappropriate tale, George appears behind her with a shotgun, pointing it at her head and crying ‘Pow!’ A gag umbrella then pops forth from the gun barrel. As the other three reel in shock George repeats, ‘You’re dead’ in his own coded revelation of what lies in the psychological recesses of their relationship. An example such as this presents an audience comic mockery, slapstick comedy and satire as well as dramatic truth, repression and tragic breakdown. Whether one finds it tragic, comic or both; it is the occupation of both genres that we will use to locate black comedy.

In this exegesis we will seek an understanding of the tragic source of comedy, principally to inform the screenplay project. The difficulty in attempting to write a black comedy is in affecting the balance between comedy and drama; determining what percentage of tragic or dark tone will be required in relation to humour. A practical exploration of understanding, and writing black comedy, will be a case study examining the aforementioned film, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (directed by Mike Nichols and starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Bruton, it was adapted from the acclaimed stage play written by Edward Albee).

The major source of theory on dark comedy comes grounded mostly in the arts of theatre and literature. There is little written in regards to cinema, and even less in reference to screenwriting technique. It is therefore a goal of the proposed research to contribute to the field of screenwriting and cinema, and specifically the understanding of black comedy in those disciplines.

Canadian literary critic Northrope Frye details in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, four modes of classification under which the genre, context and form of myth and literature can be categorised. Using an allegory of the four seasons, Frye’s Theory of Mythos places comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony and satire, as headings alongside the banners of spring, summer, autumn and winter respectively. Frye’s theory is helpful in trying to define black comedy by presenting flexible categories under
which genres and sub-genres can be placed. Black comedy most comfortably fits under the Mythos of Winter: Irony and Satire, which Frye describes as combining the phases of comedy and tragedy. Frye’s theory helps to locate black comedy amid the difficulty of the genre often taking on so many forms.

J.L. Styan is one of the few theorists to write specifically about black comedy in his text *The Dark Comedy: The Development of the Modern Comic Tragedy*. For Styan, black comedy explores the darker recesses of humanity. The dramatic nature of black comedy concerns serious, emotional or taboo issues. The screenwriter’s comic exploration of this blackness, be it the pain of existence, the struggles of life and death, suffering or heartbreak; this is the domain of black comedy. Like Frye, Styan draws the connection between tragedy and black comedy, using the term, tragicomedy. The darker subject matter of black comedy is more commonly associated with something tragic, rather than funny.

Whilst Styan is primarily a theatre scholar, his theory of black comedy discusses the underlying structures of the writing of character and theme. Even with a theatrical grounding, Styan’s concepts can be applied to the writing of a black comedy for the stage, screen or page. Our case study *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, is representative of this as it is an example of an acclaimed stage play becoming an Oscar nominated film, with very little alteration of the script. This is why Styan is still an informative theorist with our cinematic focus as we hope to take his theories of structure, character and theme and apply them in a cinematic context.

Styan’s theory of black comedy will be aided in it’s application to a screen context by an examination of the work of Lisa Dethridge in her book *Writing Your Screenplay*, which details the principles and technical structure of the screenwriting process. Dethridge outlines the screenwriting principals of protagonist, problem, plot and premise in her book *Writing Your Screenplay*. Dethridge presents these principles as the four main structures in a coherent screenplay. Dethridge describes the screenplay, in comparison to a novel or play, as a coded document that is not an art form of itself, but rather a “seminal phase in a further process that leads to the creation of a more
complex art form— the film.” Nonetheless, the conception of a screenplay, like a novel or play, begins with an artistic vision, and through these principles, that vision, can best formulated into a screenplay.

Styan’s identifies black comedy as tragicomedy, and as part of a greater history of artistic practice. The very beginnings of storytelling through play in theatre are outlined in Aristotle’s major contribution to literary criticism, Poetics. In his Poetics Aristotle essentially discusses the Ancient art of Tragedy; from definition to technical analysis and furthermore his opinion of what makes the best Tragedy and why. Aristotle alludes to Comedy, but his promised discussion has not survived. His principal definition of Tragedy and Comedy is that they are ‘imitations’.

In the late 19th Century Friedrich Nietzsche traces, in his The Birth of Tragedy, the decline and ultimate death of Tragedy. Nietzsche’s philosophy, lends itself most fervently to this discussion as he argues that today, tragedy and comedy as Aristotle described them, no longer exist. As J.L Styan begins in his The Dark Comedy, discussing tragedy and tragicomedy, “we may doubt whether we can today know the catharsis of which Aristotle speaks.” Nietzsche’s theory then provides us with a context from which black comedy has emerged.

It is the aim of this research to illuminate the elements which comprise and define black comedy in order to inform the practice of writing for the screen. With Aristotle and Nietzsche providing an historical context, in the first chapter we will aim to define black comedy by exploring the relationship between comedy and tragedy according to the theory of Frye and Styan. We will then more specifically examine Styan’s two key theories of black comedy. In the second chapter we will introduce the case study, the film Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? which we will analyse principally in relation to Styan’s key theories and the structural underpinnings of screenplay form as outlined by Dethridge. The goal therefore, will be to clarify the

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various aspects of the sub genre of black comedy through an example of the genre in
film and in relation to the structures of screenwriting to inform my creative project.

CHAPTER 1
DEFINING BLACK COMEDY

What most distinctly differentiates black comedy from the other forms of comedy is
its dramatic core. While comic film genres such as the screwball comedy or the spoof
film, for example, are driven by their particular brand of humour; the humour in black
comedy emerges from the drama by which it is driven. Theorist J.L. Styan refers to
black comedy as best described as a form of drama, the primary focus being the
dramatic journey, message of the film or relationships of the characters, from which
the humour emerges.⁴

Styan refers to black comedy as tragicomedy or dark comedy, and sees a connection
with tragedy through the similarity of the ironies that govern both forms. He describes
the ironies which govern tragedy as part of a simple formula. Styan states, “Each step
the hero takes towards a supposed triumph is a step nearer his death, each step one
which strengthens the audience’s sense of a necessary end.”⁵ Styan indicates a
similarity in comic irony. He states that as the comic-pathetic hero attempts to assert
himself, he finds he is undercut by the very commonplace triviality of this action.
Styan also points out that comic irony can subtly occur a thousand times throughout,
and ultimately be as all-pervading in its effect as tragic irony.⁶ These subtle
mechanics of black comedy present an entertainment vastly different to the two
ancient Greek forms of Tragedy and Comedy. Here, Styan argues, not only is tragedy
transcended, but comedy too is destroyed to a degree. The intertwining of comedy and
tragedy create a drama, a dark comedy where the pathetic and comic, the ridiculous
and the tragic counterpoint each other, as Styan says, “to the point of disintegration”.⁷

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⁵ Ibid. Pg 40.
⁶ Ibid. Pg 41.
⁷ Ibid. Pg 131.
We can better understand the connection between comedy and tragedy through Aristotle’s definitions of the classical genres in his *Poetics*. Aristotle states that “a tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself. (Tragedy arouses) pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.”\(^8\) It is also his emphatic assertion that tragedy is a representation of action, not character. “Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery”\(^9\).

When discussing comedy Aristotle states, “As for Comedy it is an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the ridiculous, which is a species of the ugly.”\(^10\) This is in contrast to the hero of tragedy, an imitation of men greater than average. The other marked difference between ancient Greek comedy and tragedy for Aristotle is that whilst tragedy arouses pity and fear, happiness and misery, comedy is much more docile in its effect on an audience; “The Mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain.”\(^11\)

The proper tragedies of ancient Greece when Aristotle was writing were trilogies. These were three related plays building to a climax and resolution, invariably followed by a fourth piece, a comedy, in which the tragic material is turned upside down, mocked; this was called a Satyr play.\(^12\) Here we discover a number of things. For Aristotle and the ancient Greeks comedy was only an addendum to the art of tragedy, only explored to the extent of a mockery or satire of the tragedy witnessed. However, with the satyr born out of tragedy we also see the inherent connection between the two forms as varying reactions to the same occurrence. It is the intertwining of these reactions that Styan describes as the drama of tragi comedy.

To understand how Styan has arrived with this concept of a sub genre vastly removed from Aristotle’s classic theory, we will briefly examine Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The
Birth of Tragedy. As one of the fathers of existentialism Nietzsche presents a vastly different philosophical discussion of ancient tragedy. He explores the central Gods of the Ancient Greek pantheon, Apollo and Dionysus, the two art deities of the Greeks, to explain art and his conception of ‘the birth of tragedy’. Nietzsche describes the opposition between the Apollonian art of sculpture and the Dionysian art of music. He explores the dualism of the Apollonian, Dionysian opposition as that which creates Attic tragedy. It is the parallel nature of the differing artistic approaches, which produces a divine coupling. It is a dualism that reflects the fundamental nature of being; the inevitable, tragic Dionysian fate of man, contrasted and transcended by the Apollonian dream of beauty. It is between these two states where man lives, in contemplation.  

Nietzsche's discussion of the suffering Dionysus, the hedonistic god of wine, indulgence, theatre and mask, poses the question without total knowledge of all things, how can one know how to act? The Dionysian argument is, therefore: why not do what you want? If one cannot know absolute truth, is the only option to obey one’s impulses? Subsequently, for example, one drinks because one wants to drink, indulging the most base Dionysian practice. One enjoys whatever one wants in the Dionysian reality. Upon waking up, hung-over, the everyday reality clashes with, or “re-enters” consciousness and one feels nauseous; encounters nausea. This is what Nietzsche describes as “a will-negating mood”. It is this mood which places man in a quandary: on one hand one must act in some form; however on the other, it is of no consequence. This is crucial to the existential dilemma. And here Nietzsche provides a modern context in which we can understand black comedy. 

Nietzsche’s interpretation of tragedy has allowed for the development of 20th century drama and complex sub genres like black comedy. It provides a path which connects us with the theory of Styan, as well as critics like Northrop Frye. 

Frye observes the plot arc of tragedy as being inverse to that of comedy. However, in contrast to Aristotle’s ancient study, Frye’s theory of mythos expands upon the 

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14 Ibid. Pg 60. Here Nietzsche prefigures Jean-Paul Sartre’s existential exploration of nausea in ‘La Nausee’ (1938). His discussion draws comparison to existentialist literature, as he indeed explores questions of the existential dilemma.
analysis of the genres of literature that have burgeoned since Aristotle. Frye uses the headings of Comedy, Romance and Tragedy to explore what he describes as ‘phases’ that comprise the genre in some form. But it is his heading of Irony and Satire where he delineates the connection between tragedy and comedy. It is this the fourth season in his theory of myths, winter, where black comedy most comfortably fits where Frye describes the first three phases being parallel to comedy and the last three to tragedy. Frye describes Irony and Satire as attempting “to give form to the shifting ambiguities and complexities of unidealized existence”15. It is perhaps these very ambiguities that make black comedy elusive, but also define it.

Frye’s theory finds a greater complexity of both genre and character than that of the ancient Greeks. It provides a wider scope for a sub-genre like black comedy to be categorised according to its traits, in this case sharing the forms of comedy and tragedy. In discussing the characters of these modern genres born of the ancient ones, Frye refers to a quote from Milton which says, “for a Satyr as it was born out of a Tragedy, so ought to resemble his parentage, to strike high, and adventure dangerously at the most eminent vices among the greatest persons.” Frye qualifies this by saying “ a great vice does not need a great person to represent it.” These less than great characters who can strive for as much as the tragic heroes and may fail as ineptly as the comic buffoon are the complex beings of modern literature, and central to black comedy.

J.L. Styan’s theory of black comedy also questions the great characters of Greek tragedy, and presents a character of contrasting form. Styan writes that the hero of twentieth-century dark comedy is “the character who makes the grand speech, but who has to clear his throat and scratch his nose.”16 Here Styan indicates how black comedy explores the notion that all characters, human beings, are as great and ordinary as each other. The heroes of black comedy struggle bravely like the great men of the ancient tragedies, but their fallibility is acknowledged. This fallible being reminds us of Nietzsche’s Dionysian man, the complex character that Styan and Frye see traversing the ground in Aristotle’s time they were not allowed to go.


The Comic-Pathetic Hero

There are two specific areas of Styan’s discussion of black comedy which we will examine in detail. One is the reorientation of the audience. The other is his illumination of The Comic-Pathetic Hero, which in itself encapsulates Styan’s wider theory of dark comedy.

As we have discussed in the first section of this study, black comedy occupies a middle ground between comedy and tragedy. The ironies that govern comedy and tragedy highlight the fine line black comedy treads. Placing the two forms together not only more accurately represents the everyday human dilemma as Nietzsche philosophises, but distracts and draws the audience to the deeper conflict beneath the character they are observing - and who, now, they can not decipher so easily.

Styan describes the characterisation of the comic-pathetic hero as the residue following the distillation of tragicomedy. This distillation is the combination of comedy and tragedy to which we have referred, and the residue is a new breed of character, a comic-pathetic hero, who presents for the audience a combination of traits from both genres. The critic Henri Bergson in his theory on comedy, *Laughter*, suggests comic characters present only one side of themselves to the audience. He contrasts them to tragic characters, which he defines as being multi-dimensional in that they present various sides of their character to the audience. The development of dark comedy has been born of this very distinction. The comic-pathetic hero in dark comedy is able to achieve the universal, multi dimensional qualities of the tragic hero, through the very contradictions he possesses.

Styan describes these comic-pathetic heroes as “dramatic clowns”. Styan asserts that the function of the dramatic clown is to enable the audience to observe the both the comic and pathetic in man. This tragi-comic binary identifies a real vulnerability in the clown, expanding the bounds of a usually foolish and one-dimensional character. Human frailties are the important aspects the dark comic dramatist explores. These

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18 Ibid. Pg 257. A term which recalls the characters of Samuel Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*. In this case, the dual protagonists are actually clowns, vaudevillians, and presented as such so as to heighten the play’s satire of actual human psychology and behaviour.
frailties of boredom, stupidity, disappointment and mediocrity are not to be skipped over, deemed unimportant in comparison with other worldly feats a character could perform. It is this relentless trivia of life that is universal, often ignored, and when acknowledged both painful and comic.

According to Styan we can identify in black comedy a direct correlation with tragedy: the human everyman in crisis. We can also identify the total difference, as the character refrains from the action required of the tragic hero. This position opposing the tragic hero delineates that the comic-pathetic hero is viewed as a form of “anti-hero”. This complexity makes it difficult to draw definite conclusions.

The anti-hero is a complex, multi-dimensional character by nature. As he performs heroic deeds in the world in which he lives, he does so in a generally unheroic fashion, inherently presenting the audience with at least two sides of his character. This is also the very nature of the comic-pathetic hero. As Styan recognises, the character of the comic-pathetic hero calls for two or more responses from the audience, “positive and negative and all shades in between”\(^\text{19}\). So unlike Bergson’s comic character presenting only one side, the dark comic character reveals multiple sides; a character who entices an audience by deviating between one perception of the comic, and the pleasure it provides them, and another perception of the tragic, and the pain it allows them to feel.

The comic-pathetic hero extricates double responses from the audience. These responses emerge from the contradiction of the clown’s traditional role as joker, where he is seen to suffer the trauma of existence. As Styan states “he is shown as suffering the pains of mundane life, pains which would not have mattered to him or to us in his artificial character”\(^\text{20}\). Styan here draws our attention to the artificial nature of the old single-facet comic characters Bergson describes, and the necessity of black comedy to create a character which audiences can recognise as reflective of human truth.


\(^{20}\) Ibid. Pg 261
Styan states, the comic-pathetic hero is “a creature who at the crisis is so human as to remember and hope rather than heed and act.”\(^{21}\) Here we return to our discussion of the ancient tragic heroes. Styan is asserting that whilst the greater than average supermen of the ancient tragedies digested the problems before them and leapt into action to address them, the comic-pathetic hero is less capable, and more human. He is unable to perhaps even address the problem, let alone attempt to solve it. The premise of our case study *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is exactly the dilemma Styan describes. The protagonists are unable to acknowledge their problem directly, and subsequently find themselves unconsciously attacking one another as a means of engaging with the feelings they cannot solve.

### The Re-Orientation of the Audience

The second major element in Styan’s theory of dark comedy is the reorientation of the audience. As we have explored through the multi-dimensional comic-pathetic hero, the audience finds itself in unfamiliar territory when confronted with a contradictory comic protagonist. The audience is invited to re-evaluate their attitude toward the protagonist, who is no longer simply the joker.

Styan discusses how the author of black comedy, as well as inducing laughter, plays with an audience’s emotions and perceptions. He points out that “to build and break our comic attitude…is to intoxicate and then sober an audience which is also reluctant (to change its impression and look upon itself).”\(^{22}\) Styan observes this reorientation of the audience’s attention as an essential element of dark comedy. He describes it as drama, which “impels the spectator forward by stimulus to mind or heart, then distracts him, muddles him, so that time and time again he must review his own activity.”\(^{23}\) For example, in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Wolf?* the two central characters, George and Martha, frequently shift from vulnerable to cruel, which has the effect of forcing the audience to question their association with such characters.

\(^{21}\) Styan, J.L. *The Dark Comedy*. Published 1962, Cambridge University Press, London. Pg 260
\(^{22}\) Ibid. Pg 132.
\(^{23}\) Ibid. Pg 134.
The dark comedy is willing to place its audience in uncomfortable territory. The audience is precariously positioned where they are unsure of what to make of the characters in front of them. In our case study, the audience is presented with ugly characters. As opposed to being certain of our hero in dark comedy we are confronted by the obstacles that hinder any certainty of our anti-hero. As Styan says in reference to the characters before us: “How are we to regard them? As next of kin or as poor distant relations? What if we are unsure? That is the uncomfortable state of mind the writer of dark comedy aims to create.”

For example, in my creative project, *The Actions*, Sam Adams is a comically eccentric protagonist, but at the same time this eccentricity can lead to compromising behaviour, leaving the audience unsure of how to regard him.

Styan argues that the contradictions and ironies of character where reason is played off against emotion and vice versa, is what most strongly engages the audience. He describes this irony as the “central controlling agent” in black comedy.

Like Styan, Northrop Frye illustrates the role of irony in black comedy. Discussing the phases of the Mythos of Winter: Irony and Satire, Frye states that the first three phases are those of comedy. The first phase begins with a permanent and undisplaceable world, the second phase offsetting the ideas and dogmas of that world before the third phase brings the sublime and ridiculous to parody and provide a shift in perspective. The forth phase Frye describes as moving into the ironic aspect of tragedy, followed by the fifth phase which emphasises “the natural cycle that is the continuous turning of the wheel of fate and fortune.”

The sixth phase takes us human life into a realm of unrelied bondage in locations such as prisons and madhouses and places of execution. Frye says that whilst tragedy and tragic irony can take us to this hell of narrowing circles, persisting with the mythos of irony and satire will release us from this hell and allow a renewed perspective. This again reflects the connection between comedy and tragedy. In black comedy the role of tragic irony acts to give weight and meaning to the humour, whilst the comedy

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26 Ibid. Pg 239. Frye uses the example of Dante’s inferno, and encountering the devil encased in ice in the seventh layer of hell as this hell; confronting evil in a personal form.
restricts a formal tragic conclusion. This recalls Styan’s definition of black comedy as a form of drama, exploring both sides of the struggles of the human condition.

The irony, the juxtaposition of ideas and emotion for Styan, is the essential tool in the reorientation of an audience. It is the combination of both the multi-dimensional comic-pathetic hero and the uncomfortable, unsure state in which the audience is placed. It requires an audience to oscillate between altering points of view and engage through their detachment from the juxtapositions. It is this reorientation from mind to heart and vice versa, which is seen inherently in the combination of tragic and comic tones layered upon each other. For example in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* George and Martha appear to be joking, but also seem to provoke and humiliate one another. This transition from comic to dramatic irony invites the audience to question what is really going on between the married couple.

Styan states that effect of this reorientation; this reviewing of activity places the spectator on guard, and makes them not only more alert but more responsive. This is what Styan calls the tension of dramatic irony. It is this dramatic irony in dark comedy that causes the climax to occur not when the hero is challenged but when the audience can bare no more mixed feelings. The pain that can no longer be withstood is the pain where the final decision is ours; the burden is on the audience’s shoulders in their own minds, rather than on the shoulders of a hero to save the world. Frye also illustrates that the combination of tragic and comic forms, or phases places the audience in this position by drawing them from a comic world into a tragic one.

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CHAPTER 2
BLACK COMEDY AND THE SCREENWRITING PRINCIPLES: A CASE STUDY

In this chapter the screenwriting principles of ‘the four P’s’ and three-act structure that Lisa Dethridge details in her text, Writing Your Screenplay, will provide us with a context in which to apply our discussion of black comedy to the case study Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?
The film Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? was first an acclaimed stage play written by Edward Albee. The film made a considerable stir when it was released in 1966. It was the first film directed by director Mike Nichols, and the first produced by Ernest Lehman, two eminent American film figures of the past 40 years. Lehman also adapted the screenplay from Albee’s play, retaining its simple four-character structure and keeping it almost identical to the play.

The adaptation in this case is more of a transpositional process, from play text to film script. Whilst it could be argued the casting of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, not only giants of the screen, but a well-known married couple at the time, is a form of intertextuality, from a writing perspective the process was to transpose the play from the stage to the screen. The goal of our creative project is to write an original screenplay, and therefore we are more interested in applying the theories of Styan and Frye via the structure outlined by Dethridge to analyse the film Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

As the screenplay of the film is unpublished and because of the similarity of the screen text to the stage play, we will refer to excerpts from the published play manuscript for the examples we present in this chapter.

Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is the story of a married couple, George and Martha, who have a most volatile relationship. Whilst they share some moments of love and

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affection, they quickly give way to their primary way of interacting, mercilessly ridiculing one another. The story is set the night George and Martha have returned from a party having invited a young couple over for drinks. They make minimal effort to conceal their conflict; in fact it becomes a performance with the young couple, Nick and Honey, a naïve audience. Throughout both George and Martha make references to their child, their son. This can be interpreted as the child they never had, or couldn’t have, or indeed a concoction that is a metaphor for the repressions in their relationship. It is not clear for much of the film. Either way it is the symbol of something unresolved; a problem they conceal from the world, and repress in themselves. The result of the tumultuous evening is that George and Martha force each other to reveal their secret; that in fact there is no son and they are unable to have children. With their tragic secret exposed, George and Martha are finally forced to deal with themselves.

Three-Act Structure
Dethridge indicates that three-act structure is not specific to screenwriting. It is the basic narrative story form that presents a beginning, middle and end of the protagonist’s journey. This formula has been used by the ancient Greeks to which we have referred, in biblical times in plays, novels and stories of most any kind. It still stands as a definitive structure in Western storytelling, through which to convey a film journey, through the practice of screenwriting. This was the structure of Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? as a play, which made it easily transferable into a screenplay (as opposed to if had been a two-act play like many others). This will also be the structure of the screenplay that is the creative project.

Protagonist
The first principal Dethridge explains is of protagonist, the main or lead character. In the case of Styan’s theory of black comedy, this would be the comic-pathetic hero. Dethridge’s definition of protagonist includes their physical and psychological nature; their history; their immediate dramatic problem or dilemma; their character arc or journey; and the premise of the writer themselves. The writer allows for a range of characters on varying arcs in varying genres from infinite viewpoints, and the comic-pathetic hero, or anti-hero, is definitely a form of protagonist.
Whilst we have described the protagonist of dark comedy as a very specific creature, they will utilise these same traits of the protagonist found in other genres of film. As we stated, empathy from the audience is essential for the characters of dark comedy, and this is no different for any form of protagonist. Dethridge states, “the audience needs to like- preferably even ‘love’- the protagonist”\(^\text{29}\).

This is a difficult starting point for an anti-hero. Whilst it is preferable for the audience to love and understand the comic-pathetic hero in order to care enough to withstand their questionable behaviour, the required contradictions of such a character can make this a complex task. For example in our case study the main characters are difficult to love as they often appear so awful, particularly to one another. As we have discussed via Styan, with the audience placed in a position where they are unsure of how to regard the characters, gaining total empathy can be a challenge.

In *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* we have dual protagonists in the married couple, George and Martha. The evident problem is the shared animosity they have toward each other in their relationship. Dethridge refers to the dual protagonists appearing in genres like the buddy comedy, where the characters “function as flipside of the same coin.”\(^\text{30}\) Whilst *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is not a buddy comedy, a similar dynamic occurs in that George and Martha perform two sides of the one relationship. Thus, the second couple is introduced as another coin with two sides, to provide conflict. Whilst usually this other character would be an antagonist, in this case George and Martha play antagonist to each other, as well as to the other couple, which is evidence of the manner in which black comedy alters the screenwriting principles, and places the audience in an unfamiliar construction.

Styan describes the comic-pathetic hero as a form of anti-hero, which is true of both George and Martha. The audience is, as we have discussed, from the opening scene presented with two fairly undesirable people. However, the audience is never grounded in this perception. Only moments after Martha decides that George makes

\(^{29}\) Dethridge, L. ‘Writing Your Screenplay.’ Published Allen & Unwin, 2003. Pg 4

\(^{30}\) Ibid. Pg 61.
her “puke”, the pair are laughing and hugging on their bed. The next minute George is
pointing out Martha can “really swill it down”, referring to her drinking, and Martha’s
rage returns. The audience is positioned somewhat like a child, trying to comprehend
the parents’ erratic behaviour. The erratic changes in mood expand the humour, as
both appear to enjoy this well learned routine of mocking one another. The traits of
the comic-pathetic hero can be seen as the audience is presented with positive and
negative behaviour, as well as the areas in between.

This portrait of the comic-pathetic hero is demonstrated in an example from the first
act of Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? It is the major turning point of the first act,
where the jibes and jabs which could be mistaken for egocentric humour dissolve into
more serious, uncomfortable territory. Martha is re-telling Nick and Honey the story
of how her father, years ago, had asked George to box with him.

MARTHA: So, while this was going on…I don’t know why I did it…I got into a pair of gloves
myself…you know, I didn’t lace ‘em up, or anything…and I snuck up behind George, just kidding, and
I yelled ‘Hey, George!’ and at the same time I let go sort of a round-house right…just kidding you
know?
NICK: Unh-hunh.
MARTHA: …and George wheeled around real quick, and he caught it right in the jaw…POW! (NICK
laughs.) I hadn’t meant it…honestly. Anyway…POW! Right in the jaw…and he was off balance…he
must have been… and he stumbled back a few steps, and then, CRASH, he landed…flat…in a
huckleberry bush!
(NICK laughs. HONEY goes tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk, and shakes her head.)
It was awful, really. It was funny, but it was awful.
(She thinks, gives a muffled laugh in rueful contemplation of the incident.)
I think it’s coloured our whole life. Really I do! It’s an excuse, anyway.
(GEORGE enters now. His hands behind his back. No one sees him.)
It’s what he uses for being bogged down, anyway…why he hasn’t gone anywhere.
(GEORGE advances. HONEY sees him.)
And it was an accident…a real, goddamn accident!
(GEORGE takes from behind his back a short-barrelled shotgun, and calmly aims it at the
back of MARTHA’S head. HONEY screams…rises. NICK rises, and, simultaneously,
MARTHA turns her head to face GEORGE. GEORGE pulls the trigger.)
GEORGE: POW!!!
(Pop! From the barrel of the gun blossoms a large red and yellow Chinese parasol. HONEY
screams again, this time less, and mostly from relief and confusion.)
You’re dead! Pow! You’re dead!
George’s final action demonstrates Styan’s description of the comic-pathetic hero. George appears on one hand as the classic clown, the traditional joker with a ‘gag’ gun propelling an umbrella as its explosion. At the same time he is clearly someone in total suffering. His ‘joke’ represents a greater truth; that part of him wants to kill Martha for the pain and embarrassment she has caused him. Martha’s line, “It was funny, but it was awful” is much like the joke George plays on her, funny but awful. This is an example of how George and Martha go toe-to-toe with one another, exchanging blows with the same bat. It is also an example of the very essence of black comedy. It is the clown suffering the trauma of existence. It is funny but awful. Martha’s comfortable insensitivity; the image of her punching George into a bush; George’s extreme, childish reaction are all funny, but what they represent is awful.

The protagonist, Sam Adams, of the screenplay *The Actions* for the creative project, is intended as a model of Styan’s comic-pathetic hero, the clown suffering the trauma of existence. Like George, he is a man ill at ease with the path his life has taken. Unable to address the problems directly, he finds himself railing against them in funny, but at the same time detrimental ways. The task for the creative project is to affect this contrast in humour, and conflict of character.

**Problem**

The central dramatic problem is what Dethridge describes as “a special story mechanism to lure the audience into the story.”\(^{31}\) This problem provides the audience another invitation to empathise with the protagonist. As Styan suggests, the comic-pathetic hero is seen to suffer the pains of mundane life, which are indeed problems, and ones an audience knows well. Styan agrees with Dethridge, an audience must be immersed in the character and their problems in order to empathise with them, and begin the transference of themselves onto the character.

In black comedy the problem is often unclear, as in the case of *Who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Whilst George and Martha clearly have a problematic marriage, the central dramatic problem remains unclear until the final scenes. Here the audience is

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\(^{31}\) Dethridge, L. ‘Writing Your Screenplay.’ Published Allen & Unwin, 2003. Pg 48
invited to empathise and criticise the characters based on their behaviour, without giving us total knowledge of their situation.

Early in the set-up of the first act, as the guests arrive at their door, George and Martha first argue directly about their concealed problem.

MARTHA (GEORGE): Honestly, George, you burn me up!
GEORGE (happily): All right.
MARTHA: You really do George.
GEORGE: O.K. Martha…O.K. Just…trot along.
MARTHA: You really do.
GEORGE: Just don’t shoot you mouth off…about…you-know-what.

We can see that their action is a veil used to avoid their problem. The “you-know-what” refers to their unspoken ‘son’. This is their unresolved problem. The ‘son’ is representative of the beautiful, loving and innocent part of their otherwise dire marriage. As Styan recounts of the comic-pathetic hero, they are human enough to ‘remember and hope.’ In this case they remember the love they had for each other and hope that their problem will be solved even though they cannot discuss it. For all of abuse and ridicule George and Martha throw at each other, neither truly acts by leaving or killing or forgiving the other. Both are humanly fallible enough to ‘hope’ they will be able to carry on.

It is evident that this unspoken problem is responsible for George and Martha’s despair and the reason for their addiction to the anger and frustration.

GEORGE: Well, what’ll we play now? We gotta play a game.
MARTHA (quietly): Portrait of a man drowning.
GEORGE (affirmatively, but to none of them): I am not drowning.
HONEY (To NICK, tearfully indignant): You told me to shut up!
NICK (impatiently): I’m sorry.
HONEY (between her teeth): No you’re not.
NICK (To HONEY even more impatiently): I’m sorry.
GEORGE (claps his hands together, once, loud): I’ve got it! I’ll tell you what game we’ll play. We’re done with Humiliate the Host…this round, anyway…we’re done with that…and we don’t want to play Hump the Hostess, yet…not yet…so I know what we’ll play…We’ll play a round of Get the Guests. How about that? How about a little game of Get the Guests?
MARTHA (turning away, a little disgusted): Jesus, George.
GEORGE: Book dropper! Child mentioner!

A key technique used to allow George and Martha to avoid their problem is comic irony. Here in the latter half of the first act we can see this clearly through George in particular. His sarcastic tone is quite perverse, whilst his absurd notions for ‘games’ they could play are comical. As are his exclamations of such comic criticisms of ‘Book dropper’ and ‘child mentioner’; they sound non-sensical and childish, whilst also representing so much more. The final lines however, break from an almost playful comedy back to a bitter drama.

GEORGE: Martha…(Long pause)…our son is…dead.
(Silence.)
(A tiny chuckle) on a country road, with his learner’s permit in his back pocket, he swerved, to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a…
MARTHA (rigid fury): YOU…CAN’T…DO…THAT!
GEORGE: …large tree.

Here George description of the son’s car accident is identical to an earlier story he told about a school friend who crashed his car, with his learner’s permit in his back pocket, trying to avoid a porcupine, into a tree. Even in the climax of the Act 3, at this tragic point, the dark humour is still at play. They continue later in the scene:

MARTHA (great sadness and loss): You have no right…you have no right at all…
GEORGE (tenderly): I have the right, Martha. We never spoke of it; that’s all. I could kill him any time I wanted to.
MARTHA: But why? Why?
GEORGE: You broke our rule, baby. You mentioned him…you mentioned him to someone else.

It becomes apparent at the end of the scene that George and Martha were unable to have children. This is their secret, which they have repressed and hidden from the world and kept them at each other’s throats. Up until this climax the audience has been attempting to follow the relationship of George and Martha, but without a clear understanding of why exactly George and Martha are the way they are. Are they really good people underneath it all, or are they truly horrible? When this confusion can no longer be withstood, the truth is revealed in the climax. The audience is invited
to review the opinions they held of George and Martha, now that they know their tragic secret.

In the case of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, we see the resolution of the problem simply in that the problem is revealed to the audience. The characters themselves do not resolve the problem. As Styan states, “Affairs in dark comedy rarely conclude: they persist, and their repercussions may be felt to be unlimited.”32 This is due to audience’s role in the black comedy, and which Styan describes as the re-orientation of the audience. The level to which the creative project *The Actions* leaves matters unresolved requires delicate execution. The line between an audience being drawn in to the underlying affairs, and alienated to the point of disinterest, is a fine one. The appeal of this form of resolution in my creative project is that it is more truthful, than where in conclusion film characters find the answers to all their problems.

**Plot**

The plot, as Dethridge states, “usually follows the protagonist’s attempts to solve the complications arising from the central dramatic problem.” Now, whilst there is definitely a problem for the protagonist in black comedy, is it often more difficult to identify the plot. Perhaps this is why they are more difficult to make and to sell. As Dethridge suggests, film producers are prone to feel that the plot is what sells a film. In a dark comedy however, the anti-hero often fails to ‘solve’ the physical problems (and emotional problems for that matter) that arise of the dramatic problem. Dethridge asserts the problem must be clearly resolved or not so there is no confusion at the end of the plot.

Rather than an external plot and story, where their actions affect the waiting world, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is more internal. The greater story is their long and complex relationship. In this context, the opening lines of the film become more illuminating. After walking in the door from their party, the two stand in their somewhat untidy living room.

MARTHA (*look about the room. Imitates Bette Davis*): What a dump. Hey what’s that from? ‘What a dump!’

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GEORGE: How would I know what…
MARTHA: Aw, come on! What’s it from? You know…
GEORGE: …Martha…
MARTHA: WHAT’S IT FROM FOR CHRIST’S SAKE?
GEORGE (wearily): What’s what from?
MARTHA: I just told you; I just did it. ‘What a dump!’ Hunh. What’s that from?
GEORGE: I haven’t the faintest idea what…
MARTHA: Dumbbell! It’s from some goddamn Bette Davis picture…some goddamn Warner Brothers epic…
GEORGE: I can’t remember all the pictures that…
MARTHA: Nobody’s asking you to remember every single goddamn Warner Brothers epic…just one! One single little epic!

Here we are invited into an ordinary home, a world abounding in the triviality of the everyday. In George and Martha, we meet a couple who not only pronounce their own home “a dump”, but quarrel the moment we meet them. It is quickly apparent that George and Martha are struggling to connect with each other. Martha’s frustration in this scene arises from George’s apathy to her. Martha’s bullish approach to getting the attention she wants is the very reason that George is unresponsive and disinterested. They have reached a point of disintegration in their marriage. They are both unhappy, and their crisis causes them to take their unhappiness out on each other. The understanding they do not receive, they make sure the other does not get either. The crisis therefore is self-sustaining, and continues to burn.

The mid point of the film, in the Second Act, sees George and Martha drift the furthest from each other than any other point of the film. George disappears into the garden and the inference is that Nick and Martha have drunkenly engaged in sex. In the opening moments of a short third Act, the beginning of the climax, Martha reveals to Nick her feeling towards George, which from her behaviour to this point, we could almost never have guessed.

MARTHA: …George who is somewhere out there in the dark…George who is good to me and whom I revile; who understands me, and whom I push off; who can make me laugh, and I choke it back in my throat; who can hold me. At night, so that it’s warm, and whom I will bite so there’s blood; who keeps learning the game we play as quickly as I can change the rules; who can make me happy and I do not wish to be happy, and yes I do wish to be happy. George and Martha: sad, sad, sad.
NICK (echoing, still not believing): Sad.
MARTHA: …whom I will not forgive for having come to rest; for having seen me and having said: yes, this will do; who has made the hideous, the hurting, the insulting mistake of loving me and must be punished for it. George and Martha: sad, sad, sad.

Martha describes to Nick the irony of the their relationship. Here, the tone is not comic, but engaging more with the tragic. It explores the essential difficulty for human beings to exist in a relationship. It explores the responsibility they feel for the love they have given each other. And here we see that whilst Martha feels such guilt, she is unable to break the very pattern she can recognise as damaging. This is the tragic tone of black comedy. Where we have seen comic irony to this point, embodied in the incessant games and mockery that relieve the tension underlying each exchange, we now see a subtle shift to the tragic that gives way to a dramatic irony.

The creative project will attempt to drive the plot through the protagonist’s behaviour. The irony of Sam’s behaviour is that it will betray what he really needs, and the development of the plot (the unravelling of Sam’s career) will see him realise this pattern.

Premise
The premise is the moral, philosophical, intellectual or spiritual idea that is the central concept, which the writer channels through a constructed protagonist, problem and plot. Dethridge states that not only is the premise usually invisible to the audience, but that the premise is the overall concept that governs the story. The premise is the primary theme, from which the writer constructs his plot, protagonist and their problem to best communicate the underlying premise.

The principle of an invisible premise, and seamless plot that Dethridge details, is well founded. With such a plot and premise in place, the audience is far more likely to immerse themselves in the world of the character, and subsequently more likely to empathise and engage with the film. Black comedy adheres to Dethridge’s principals of plot and premise, but presents them to the audience in a different manner to many films. The invisible premise Dethridge refers to, can be identified in Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? The reason for George and Martha’s consistent arguing is not clear to the audience, yet it dominates every scene. This is where the author of dark comedy
invites the audience in to a kind of debateable premise. The existential path that dark comedy follows is one, which reveals some of these structural underpinnings to the audience to reorientate them. The audience, it can be argued, is drawn deeper as the artifices are stripped away. For example, if a plot or setting is revealed to be irrelevant, the characters are drawn into a timeless arena, where they will now address the ideas of the premise far more directly. This lack of invisibility can shatter the audience’s illusion, but it is the goal of black comedy to do so.

The muddling, or confusion Styan refers to in his theory of the re-orientation of the audience, bears connection to Dethridge’s principal of premise. In *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* this confusion is most clearly apparent in references to George and Martha’s son. The ‘son’ is the unspoken problem at the heart of the film’s invisible premise.

GEORGE: SON!
HONEY: When is…where is your son…coming home? (*Giggles.*)
GEORGE: Ohhh. (*Too formal*) Martha? When is our son coming home?
MARTHA: Never mind.
GEORGE: No, no…I want to know…you brought it out into the open. When is he coming home, Martha?
MARTHA: I said never mind. I’m sorry I brought it up.
GEORGE: Him up…not it. You brought him up. Well, more or less. When’s the little bugger going to appear, hunh? I mean isn’t tomorrow meant to be his birthday, or something?
MARTHA: I don’t want to talk about it!
GEORGE (*falsely innocent*): But Martha…
MARTHA: I DON’T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT!
GEORGE: I’ll bet you don’t. (*To HONEY and NICK*) Martha does not want to talk about it…him. Martha is sorry she brought it up…him.

This exchange takes place early in the story, and the audience, like the characters of Nick and Honey, are invited into confusing territory. George and Martha’s interaction creates doubt as to weather this ‘son’ is a beloved absentee or an absurd joke. Indeed, George and Martha’s behaviour in general makes the concept of their son seem quite ridiculous. The flipside, however, is that the audience, like a child, feels responsible for these two problematic characters. This is the “burden” that Styan asserts the audience of dark comedy takes on, as the original alienation has drawn them in to a
state of empathy and responsibility. The burden is enhanced by the presence of the other couple, Nick and Honey. Whilst they originally provide a level of normality with which the audience can associate in George and Martha’s alien world, they quickly become too naïve and disconnected with the emotional level the audience reaches with George and Martha.

The premise of the creative project, like Who’s Afraid of Virginia Wolf?, will explore how people respond and behave when trying to repress a fear or problem. How can one solve a problem if they do not acknowledge its existence? This is for the audience to explore through the comic-pathetic hero.

Our case study has allowed us to explore the various theories relating to tragedy and comedy, screenwriting and back comedy. The correlation of the theories of Styan and Detheridge illustrate the structural elements of humour and psychological insight, which the creative project will aim to emulate. The difficulty will be in effecting the appropriate balance of comedy and tragedy, and how great a burden is placed on the audience. The challenge for the creative project is to accurately articulate the dramatic irony and place the audience in an uncomfortable state. Affecting the balance between comedy and tragedy present a delicate balance for the author to achieve.
CONCLUSION

A principal investigation in this exegesis has been the engagement of black comedy with both tragic and comic themes, as it takes an audience on an emotional journey from the funny to the sad, the tragic to the comic. We have also examined how Dethridge’s screenwriting principals provide a structure in which Styan’s requirements for black comedy can operate. The wider context of thought, from Aristotle’s theory of story telling and tragic art, to Nietzsche’s pathway to an existential philosophy, provides a well from which the creative project can draw inspiration. The use of Dethridge’s 4 p’s, as well as Styan’s comic-pathetic hero and re-orientation of the audience are paramount in delineating a structure for the project.

The story of our case study explores the darker truths of relationships between human beings. Where Nietzsche’s Dionysus placates his despair with indulgence, a black comedy like the case study uses humour to diffuse the audience from the painful implications of our often problematic and sad behaviour. Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? is a formidable example of black comedy. It is an exploration of the human frailty and the elusive nature of complete resolution. As George and Martha engage with their own Dionysian reality, they avoid their despair by indulging in self effacement and vicious ridicule, whilst continually approaching their greatest fears, unconsciously drawing themselves back to the cause of their suffering. Suspended between denial and acceptance, indulgence and despair, their actions resist the judgement of an audience. As Styan states, “In dark comedy we are specifically asked not to be fanatics.”

The effect of black comedy on an audience explored through Styan’s theory of re-orientation can be seen in our case study through a process of muddling the audience and inviting them to question the protagonist. In Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, George and Martha are revealed through their own recollections that may be autobiographical or that may not exist at all. The audience is invited to interpret their story, which may be true, false, revealing of truth, or pure fiction.

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GEORGE: ...And one time, in the bunch of us, there was this boy who was fifteen, and he killed his mother with a shotgun some years before—accidentally, completely accidentally, without even a conscious motivation, I have no doubt, no doubt at all—and this one evening this boy went with us, and we ordered our drinks, and when it came his turn he said, I’ll have bergin…give me some bergin, please…bergin and water. Well, we all laughed—he was blond and he had the face of a cherub, and we all laughed, and his cheeks went red and the colour rose in his neck, and the assistant crook who had taken our order told people at the next table what the boy said, and then they laughed, and then more people were told and the laughter grew, and more people and more laughter, no one was laughing more than us, and none of us more than the boy who had shot his mother. And soon, everyone in the gin mill knew what the laughter was about, and everyone started ordering bergin, and laughing when they ordered it. And soon, of course, the laughter became less general, but it did not subside, entirely, for a very long time, for always at this table or that someone would order bergin and a new area of laughter would rise. We drank free that night, and we were bought champagne by the management, by the gangster—father of one of us. And, of course, we suffered the next day, each of us, alone, on his train, away from New York, each of us with a grown-up’s hangover…but it was the grandest day of my...youth.

Black comedy is perhaps more psychological than other genres because it suggests we examine things we would rather not. The crowd pounces upon the boy’s innocent mistake; a crowd that cannot accept such an embarrassment, such an embarrassment in themselves. So terrified it could happen to them, they affirm this fear by doing the very same to the boy. This is a tragic pattern of life and of society. A tragic event, as Styan has asserted; found in the mundane minutia of everyday life. A simple mispronunciation can say more about the psychology of human beings. We are left to ponder Martha’s line, “It was funny, but it was awful.” This tension in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* can reflect the tensions found in black comedy.

When discussing the myths of comedy Northrop Frye states that it is “more concerned with integrating the family and adjusting the family to society as a whole” whilst also moving towards a happy ending\(^3\). This is a far cry from his description of irony and satire as trying to give form to the ambiguities and complexities of unidealized existence. It is also apparent this is not the case in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Frye describes the settings of sixth phase of irony and satire as

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featuring prisons, madhouses, lynching mobs, and places of execution. These terms could all describe the marital home in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Two prisoners, driven mad and lynching each other to the point of execution. But black comedy relieves us, the viewer, of this tragic end. We are left to contemplate these complexities of existence and as Frye alludes, leave the depths of hell and go back up into the world.

We return however to Frye’s description of the ambiguities and complexities of unidealized existence. Through Styan and Frye we have tried to place black comedy in this unidealized world, occupying some ground between tragedy and comedy. Nevertheless, the variables within the boundaries we have covered still allow for interpretation. What we have discussed could be referred to as tonally ambiguous comedy based around a protagonist who inspires mixed feelings. Perhaps there we have yet another sub-genre, or perhaps the combination of these elements can appear to an audience as a black comedy.

For example, attempting to achieve this with the screenplay for the creative project enters into the difficulty of the interpretive process. The screenplay *The Actions* has been described as “a down-beat comedy of haplessness, not a walk on the uncomfortable wild side of our over-sophisticated understandings.” Such a description connects the screenplay with the theory we have explored, whilst inferring a lack of interaction with the truly tragic side of experience. It is indeed a complex challenge to combine the flights of creative inspiration and theoretical structure.

The theory and investigation of the exegesis has provided a body of research on which creative screenplay project can draw. Sam Adams is the protagonist and an intended version of the comic-pathetic hero. He will hold the key to the central dramatic problem, which in this case is his fear of failure, and subsequent neglect of his son and empty search for fame. The premise ties into the central dramatic problem similarly to *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* where the unseen problems drive the story. The plot will see Sam immerse himself in the lifestyle he has constructed to avoid the problems he cannot face, before in the resolution realising he must

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acknowledge them. As Styan has identified, this journey of the comic-pathetic hero will be one where the audience is unsure of how to regard them; can we empathise with Sam when he deliberately refuses to acknowledge the truth to his and others’ detriment? This question reflects a goal of the screenplay project for the audience to be forced to question themselves through the protagonist.

From our analysis we have examined black comedy in regards to it’s tragic and comic elements and identified the specific way these appear in our case study. Our contentions will undoubtedly inform the creative project, and may be best concluded by again referring to our main theorist. Styan asks, “What happens when the writer takes an element of the ridiculous and thrusts it into tragedy?” His answer is that if blue is poured on yellow, there is a new colour, the brighter for the brightness of the originals.36 It is this tragic inversion of which Styan speaks that creates dark comedy. It is the intertwining of the forms, which produces laughter and pain, and presents us with a new colour.

Word Count: 10, 526

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THE ACTIONS

by
Nick Maxwell
INT. 5 STAR HOTEL LOBBY – DAY

The lobby is library quiet as a handful of people mill about the vast marble sanctuary.

We see a journalist, BRIAN SCHULTZ, carrying a shoulder bag, amble towards reception.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL RECEPTION DESK – DAY

BRIAN approaches the desk. The CONCIERGE looks up from his empty desk.

CONCIERGE

How may I help you sir?

BRIAN

I have a meeting with a Mr. Sam Adams.

CONCIERGE

Just one moment.

The CONCIERGE picks up a small black phone handset as he types on his keyboard.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR – DAY

SAM ADAMS, tall, tanned, 55 years-old, smooths his white t-shirt over his stomach as he eyes his reflection in between the elevator buttons.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY – DAY

SAM ADAMS emerges from the elevator, wearing t-shirt, ankle-length pants and slip-on shoes without socks. He again eyes his reflection in the marble pillars.

From the corner of his eye he sees BRIAN signaling to him. He chooses to ignore this and approaches the RECEPTION DESK.

CONCIERGE

Yes Sir.

SAM

Are there any messages for me?
CONCIERGE
Ahh, no Sir. The man who is here to see you is waiting just behind you here, by the fountain.

SAM does not look around.

SAM
So...
(looking at the desk)
...there are no messages...

The CONCIERGE is getting on with his other work.

CONCIERGE
No Sir.

SAM
Do I need to sign anything, or...

CONCIERGE
(looking up)
No Sir...

An awkward pause.

SAM
What time does the pool close?

CONCIERGE
10pm.

SAM
(tapping the desk)
Right. Good.

Sam turns around and deliberately looks past BRIAN as he walks toward the fountain.

CUT TO:

INT. LOBBY LOUNGE– DAY

SAM shakes hands with BRIAN, who is rising from his seat. SAM stares distractedly into the distance.

SAM
Don’t get up, I thought I saw Calvin Klein...
(sitting)
(MORE)
I wanted to talk to him about a few things. I’m sure he owes me money, not that I’d accept it...

BRIAN
Oh right. Wouldn’t he be at Paris Fashion week? Maybe not.

SAM pretends he is not listening, although he is.

SAM
Hmmm?

BRIAN
OK. So are you right to begin. I thought we’d start talking about the movie and go from there. I wanted to maybe do something a little interesting, ask a little about...

SAM is looking around not listening at all.

SAM
Sure, sure. I just want to order some breakfast...Do you want anything?

BRIAN shakes his head and looks down at his note pad as SAM tries to get some attention. SAM spies a hotel worker some distance away.

SAM (CONT’D)
Can I..?
(miming spoonfuls into his mouth)
...From you?

INT. BIRTHING CENTRE LOUNGE- DAY

A WOMAN, LEONI, is explaining to a handful of seated couples the philosophy and process of the Birthing Centre.

A YOUNG MAN, JOHN ADAMS, is peering out the window at the rain falling heavily as he sits 3 storeys up. He is dressed in jeans and t-shirt. Next to him is CATHERINE JONES, his wife to be and carrying his child.

As the rain drops fall JOHN turns his head and tunes back in.
LEONI
Now we do not offer epidurals. Not that you won’t be able to have one if you need one, just that we’ll have to send you to another floor...OK..?

JOHN shoots CATHERINE a polite smile and looks down at his legs.

LEONI (CONT’D)
No, if the baby come vaginally you will come back here...yeah, OK?

LEONI smiles at JOHN who smiles awkwardly back.

INT. BIRTHING CENTRE RECEPTION- DAY

JOHN walks ahead toward the ELEVATORS as CATHERINE thanks the women at the RECEPTION DESK.

JOHN stops and turns around, waiting for CATHERINE. He echoes her SMILES and ‘THANK YOU’S’.

INT. ELEVATOR- DAY

JOHN and CATHERINE stand SILENTLY next to each other. JOHN is looking up at the descending floors, CATHERINE straight ahead.

JOHN
I mean, what if someone was actually in a rush? What if someone was dying, I mean this is a hospital after all.

CATHERINE is SILENT. JOHN looks over.

JOHN (CONT’D)
So. That was good? I mean, it was fine...

CATHERINE smiles.

CATHERINE
Yeah. It was nice. I think it will be a really nice place to have a baby.

JOHN’S eyes go back to the descending floors.
JOHN
That is if we have any money by then...I am hoping we don’t have to rely on that homeless man who insists he used to be a doctor...

The ELEVATOR doors PING open and the light and sound of the Hospital lobby flood in as JOHN and CATHERINE step out.

INT. 5 STAR HOTEL LOBBY LOUNGE- DAY

SAM is munching on thick cut sourdough toast, smothered in marmalade. In between bites he takes a slurp of his coffee.

SAM
I can’t live without marmalade. Most mornings I have it on a croissant, but they didn’t have...

BRIAN nods as he was present for the ordering. SAM goes back to his toast.

BRIAN
You seem passionate about food. Do you have any other specific loves or hates?

SAM
(swallowing)
Did I mention I love marmalade?
(laughing)
I like to eat well. In moderation...well that’s a lie. No look, I keep in shape but I do love food and wine. Gabrielle and I are particularly keen on French food.

BRIAN
So does your wife and family share your love of marmalade?

SAM
My girlfriend. They don’t unfortunately. My son is an actor as well. He may like marmalade I don’t know.

BRIAN
You’re not on good terms with your son?
SAM
I don’t care for his company.
    (smiling)
I am joking of course. He is an actor and it’s part of the job; going where the work is. So I don’t see him very much. I’ve done it. Now are you sure I can’t get you anything at all?

BRIAN
No, no thank you. I’m pretty much done here. Good luck with the movie...

SAM
Thank you.

BRIAN
    (putting pen to paper)
Do you have any other projects in the pipelines at the moment?

SAM
    (dusting his hands)
I am in talks for a few things. I’m considering a part in Irratio Gonzalez’s upcoming picture.

BRIAN
    (looking up)
Eternal?

SAM
    (surprised)
Yes, that’s right. Apparently there are only a couple of roles...

BRIAN
Yes. Brad Pitt has signed on. I heard yesterday, he and Jennifer Connolly.

SAM hides his disappointment.

SAM
Oh right. Yes, I thought that’s who he’d go with. I had a scheduling problem which was proving difficult.

BRIAN
    (packing up)
Right. Well thank you Sam.
SAM
(distracted)
Thank you. Are you sure you don’t want anything to eat?

BRIAN
No thanks.

SAM
What about a beer or something? They have a great deck here.

BRIAN
(smiling)
It’s a little early for me.

SAM and BRIAN stand up and shake hands.

INT. HOTEL DECK BAR—DAY

SAM stands on the deck with a deserted bar behind him. His mobile phone is at his ear.

SAM
What do you mean? I didn’t even do a screen test?
(Pause)
But they asked us?
(a beat)
Fuck Brad Pitt!

SAM lets his arm holding the phone fall by his side. His head drops and he puts his other hand to eyes and rubs hard. He puts the phone back up to his ear.

SAM (CONT’D)
(two beats)
What? No. Jim, I wasn’t listening. No, I wasn’t listening, start again.

A WAITER carrying an ornate cocktail on a tray appears behind SAM. SAM, having forgotten he had ordered the cocktail, waves the waiter away and in the same moment remembers and mouths a ‘THANK YOU’ pointing to a table. He sits down at the table where the WAITER has placed the drink.

SAM sips on the straw.

SAM (CONT’D)
TV. Yeah. Oh it sounds horrible. No I don’t remember ‘Manimal’?
(MORE)
SAM (CONT’D)
Oh look, I’ll think about it. I’ll see you when I get back.

SAM put the phone on the table and sips his drink with a sigh.

EXT. ADAMS DRIVEWAY- DAY

A distant GRINDING noise can be heard as SAM carries a leather travel bag from the boot of his MERCEDES E 500. It is only a step from his front door, parked in the wide, half-moon driveway. He stops to check what looks like a scratch on the passenger door. SHAKING his head he walks into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN- DAY

Closing the fridge door SAM emerges with a COKE and has long sip before setting the can down on the marble bench-top of the immaculate kitchen.

After standing in SILENCE a loud noise starts up.

SAM’S wife Gabrielle shouts from upstairs.

GABRIELLE (O.S.)
Sam.
(a beat, then louder)
Sam!

SAM
(trying not to yell)
Yeah?

GABRIELLE (O.S.)
There it is again, it’s driving me crazy!

SAM turns and looks out the window.

EXT. SAM ADAM’S POOL- DAY

SAM kneels down beside the swimming pool. He listens. He puts his hand in the water.

GABRIELLE (O.S.)
(screaming)
It’s not in the pool its the pump in the...
SAM
(restrained)
I know!

SAM in his well fitting pants and sock-less slip-ons
nimblly rises from the poolside and walks toward the POOL
PUMP hidden in the FERNS.

OPENING the lid of the pump, gas comes out into SAM’S
FACE. Turning away he tries to stick his hand in for a
second before whipping it out due to the HEAT.

SAM lets the lid SLAM.

SAM (CONT’D)
(walking away)
Oh fuck this.

INT. BEVERLY AND SAL MYERS HOME– NIGHT

SAM and GABRIELLE stand holding drinks in the formal
lounge.

SAL MYERS, 68, stands, drink in hand chatting along with
them. SAL is a wealthy Investment Banker, fresh from work
in shirt, tie and braces.

As GABRIELLE and SAL chat, SAM takes a closer look at
some antique ornaments on display on a mantle piece.

SAL
Well of course Bev wanted nothing to do
with it.

GABRIELLE
I know Sam is the same.

SAM
This is gorgeous.

BEV (O.S.)
Hello darlings.

The sound of quickly pacing high heels can be heard as
BEVERLY MYERS enters holding out her arms.

She is 56, glamorously attired; high heels, flowing gold
embroidered blouse. An actress, she is confident in her
age and appearance.

SAM
Hello Bev.
The two hug and kiss.

SAM (CONT’D)
How are you? You look fabulous.

BEV
Thank you darling. Hello Gabrielle, you look divine. And you old boy...
(to Sal)
How’s about you get me a drink?

SAM and BEV look at each other.

SAM
So how’s it going? You’re working now aren’t you?

BEV
Yes, yes. Joe Wright and all that jazz.
(eyeing Sam, smiling)
And you’re clearly not! So tanned and relaxed.
(to Gabrielle)
Isn’t he? Aren’t you both. Gorgeous things.

GABRIELLE
Yes. Well we’ve Sam’s just been promoting this film so we’ve worked some holiday time.

SAM
Yes this blockbuster, ‘Catastrophic’. End of the world business. Tremendous waste of money, but you know...

BEV
Yes well those films really are draining any creative integrity from the industry?
(to Gabrielle)
Aren’t they?

GABRIELLE smiles.

SAL reappears.

SAL
Here you are B.

BEV
Thank you darling.
SAM goes back to the mantle, picking up the porcelain robin he had been admiring earlier.

    SAM
    Sal this is absolutely beautiful.

    SAL
    Yes, well Bev collects them.

    SAM
    Oh Bev this is charming.

    BEV
    Well, yes that one is one of a kind as a matter of fact.

    SAM
    It is simply stunning. Oh, what a find. I would love to have something like this. Oh you must be thrilled.

    GABRIELLE
    (laughing)
    I didn’t know you were such a fan Sam...

    BEV
    Yes darling, it is just an ornament.

    SAM
    Oh no. The craftsmanship is impeccable. Just beautiful. Do you have this insured?

    SAL
    I don’t think its that valuable Sam.

    SAM
    Still you must treasure this. Wow. (looking closer) Just so special.

The others look to each other as SAM continues to marvel at the robin in his hand.

    SAM (CONT’D)
    (quietly)
    God, that is great...

    GABRIELLE
    So Sal are you still working long hours?

    SAL
    Not as long as Bev at the moment.
SAM
(interrupting but trailing off)
That is stunning, really.

BEV, SAL and GABRIELLE look over momentarily.

SAM heads towards the mantle to put the robin back.

GABRIELLE looks back to SAL.

GABRIELLE
Oh right. You must be exhausted Bev.

BEV
Well yes. But you know I love it. It keeps me going at the same time.

GABRIELLE
Of course.

SAL
And she is fit these days...

BEV
I am. I’ve been...

There is a loud SMASH from the corner where SAM is at the mantle.

The robin is in pieces at SAM’S feet.

GABRIELLE, SAL and BEV all freeze and look over.

SAM is looking down.

SAM
I am so sorry.

GABRIELLE
Oh Sam.

SAM
(closing his eyes)
Oh my god. I am so stupid...

GABRIELLE
Sam you idiot.

SAL
Don’t worry. I’ll get a dust pan...
BEV
Yes, get a...

SAM
Oh dear. What a waste. Bev I am so sorry.

BEV
Its OK Sam. It is a pity.

SAM
What a pity. Oh what a stupid thing to do. I was just putting on the ledge and it just...I don’t think the bottom was quite level.

(Occurring to him)
Maybe not quite as perfect as I thought.

SAL comes in with the dust pan.

GABRIELLE
Thanks Sal. Sorry Bev, he can be so absent minded.

SAM
Yes. Sorry Bev.

BEV
Oh stop it dear.

SAM kneels down and tries to help SAL sweeping up the mess. He actually makes the task more difficult.

SAM
Maybe if I...

SAL
Its OK Sam. Come on let’s have some dinner.

SAL leads the way as BEV and GABRIELLE follow.

SAM strolls out last.

EXT. JIM CAVARONE’S OFFICES- STREET- DAY
SAM parks and walks into the office building.

INT. JIM CAVARONE’S OFFICES- DAY
SAM paces down the hall toward JIM’S secretary’s desk.
He nods at the Secretary like ‘Am I right to go in?’ And she nods and smiles back.

INT. JIM CAVARONE’S OFFICE– DAY

JIM sits behind a big, empty desk on the phone. JIM is a tall, athletic man. Self interested he sits in tie, shirt, jacket hanging on his chair. He fiddles with his glasses as he signals for SAM to sit.

SAM sits down and looks around at the artwork on the walls.

JIM hangs up.

JIM
Sam. How are you?

SAM
(pointing to the wall)
I don’t know this one?

JIM
(thinking of other things)
Yeah. Ahh..that’s a Marilyn Greenberg.

SAM
New?

JIM
Yeah. It’s new. Now Sam...

SAM
(amused)
You look more like my lawyer than my agent.

JIM smiles, looks down.

SAM (CONT’D)
No. You look good. Professional.
(a beat)
So, what have we got?

JIM
OK. So it’s big Sam. We’ve got to get into this. We’ve got two offers...

SAM
Not from Gonzalez?
JIM
No...

SAM
Because Brad Pitt got it...

JIM
Because Brad Pitt got it...

SAM
And I didn’t get a screen test...

JIM
OK. So what we do have is big. Its big money Sam.

JIM grabs some papers with both hands.

SAM
So what is this ‘Manimal’?

JIM
No. Well, that’s the other offer. The money is not as good. Its a TV series remake. You would play the lead...

SAM
But I thought we said we were looking at film offers...what’s the other thing?

JOHN
Well it’s TV too. But its big money. Its set in the future after the world has flooded. You are a ship Captain of a scientific vessel that travels to globe searching for souls.

SAM
Sounds hideous.
(pause)
Ghosts.

JIM
It’s big these days. Supernatural. Disaster. Sam they’ll pay you a million for committing to the first season. If it’s popular, you’ll be looking at maybe million an episode.

SAM goes quiet.
JIM CONT’D
I know it’s not what you had in mind. But TV is huge these days. Respected.

SAM
I know, I know. Its just that..you know. I’ve been labelled before with a TV series.

JIM
I know. But as I say big names are doing TV these days. Jerry Bruckheimer is producing more TV than movies for gods sake.

SAM
Yeah, I know. Look I don’t know OK. I know it’s good money and all that...but its a lot of fucking work to. Especially TV. Full weeks all that shit.

JIM
I know. But can I arrange a meeting? (Noticing Sam wince)
At least to keep our hands in?

SAM
Yeah, yeah. OK.
(Standing up)
I’ve got to go, OK Jim?

JIM
(positive)
Sure. Good Sam. Take it easy.
(Grinning)
Hey. Have a think about what car you want to buy.

SAM SMILES.

INT. ADAMS LOUNGE ROOM- EVENING
The room is empty. Dimly lit. The TV is on. Someone in the kitchen can be heard.

CUT TO:
EXT. POOL—NIGHT

SAM sits POOL SIDE with a glass and bottle of whiskey. Smoking a cigarette he is lit by the lights from the pool and the house lights behind. The night is still.

CUT TO:

EXT. ADAMS DRIVEWAY—NIGHT

JOHN ADAMS butts out his cigarette as a cab pulls away. He looks UNEASY as he approaches the door. He inspects the damage to the E 500.

CUT TO:

EXT. POOL—NIGHT

SAM blows smoke and sinks into his chair, looking into space.

From the FERNS a RUSTLING is heard. With the sound of lid closing and a toolbox being picked up, a MAN in OVERALLS appears.

SAM doesn’t look up immediately and is unfazed.

    SAM
    (standing)
    Thank you for coming out at such a late hour.

    MAN IN OVERALLS
    That’s no problem.

    SAM
    I mean it was pretty broken? The noise was driving us crazy...

    MAN IN OVERALLS
    (trying to be tactful)
    Yes, well these things can play up. Its all right now.

SAM reaches around to the table.

    SAM
    Can I offer you a scotch?
MAN IN OVERALLS
Ahh no...well...
(taken by Sam and the
stillness of the night)
Ahhh..sure that would be nice...if that’s
alright.

SAM
Yes, sure. Sit down.

The two pull up chairs by the pool. SAM pours two
generous glasses.

CUT TO:

INT. ADAMS FRONT DOOR- NIGHT
GABRIELLE opens the front door where JOHN stands. He look
up and forces a smile.

CUT TO:

INT/EXT. ADAMS LOUNGE/POOL- NIGHT
JOHN walks through the house, SAM in the distance by the
pool. As he approaches we pick up SAM’s conversation with
the MAN

SAM
(laughing)
What do you mean? Did you just walk off?

MAN IN OVERALLS
Yeah. I just put the bag down and walked
right off the course.

SAM laughs loudly.

GABRIELLE calls out from the house.

GABRIELLE (O.S.)
Sam. There is someone here to see you.

SAM spins around to see JOHN nearing the table. He does a
slight double take and the smile fades from his face, but
not entirely.

SAM looks down at his scotch.
SAM

John.

(a beat)

You must hear this. This man was a professional caddy, and he was just saying when he copped too much abuse...

(laughing)

He just put the bag down and walked off the course.

The MAN smiles, sips his whisky and glances at JOHN.

JOHN smiles politely as SAM enjoys the story again.

SAM (CONT’D)

(to MAN)

That’s fantastic. Ohhh. We must play sometime.

(looking at John)

Sit down John.

JOHN sits.

An awkward pause. JOHN and SAM go to speak at the same time.

JOHN

Been a while Sam...

SAM

Yes. Do you still play or? Can I get you a scotch?

JOHN

Yeah, that would be great.

The three men sit in silence.

SAM

(to the Man)

So do you have any other golf stories?

MAN IN OVERALLS

Well one year I was over in Europe...

JOHN

(to Sam)

Look Dad, I need to speak to you about something.

SAM screws up his face.
SAM
Well, OK John, the man is trying to tell a story. Just wait please.

MAN IN OVERALLS
(uncomfortable)
It’s OK, it might be a bit long. Look I should go. Thankyou for the...

SAM
(standing)
Yes, thankyou. Look I have your details and ahh, if you just send me the bill?

MAN IN OVERALLS
Yes. OK. Bye.

The MAN walks off and SAM sits down.

SAM
(smiling)
He one of those guys you know?

JOHN drinks.

SAM (CONT’D)
(serious)
So what brings you around? How are things? Are you working?

JOHN
Well that’s it. Look you know I’ve never asked you for help. I mean we both feel the same way about nepotism...

SAM
(a well worn theory)
You must earn the work on your own merits...

JOHN
I know, I know. Look.
(a beat)
I don’t know exactly how to say this. Catherine and I are going to have a baby.

SAM is unmoved.

SAM
Catherine?
JOHN
(exhausted)
Yeah. Look. Anyway, we’re getting married
and having this baby and...

SAM
It’s not easy raising a child. Especially
when your trying to be available for
jobs...

JOHN
Yes I am aware. I mean you’re my Father.
That was my childhood, seeing you on
television rather than in person.

SAM
Well, that’s what I’m saying....

JOHN
Look. I’m not asking for a lot. I just
thought you might be able to get me in
somewhere- just to help get us started.
(a beat)
Do you have any projects at the moment?

SAM stands up with the bottle.

SAM
Look I’m very tired, I must go to bed.
You should call if you’re going to come
around this late...

JOHN
OK.

SAM
(walking inside)
I’ll think about it. Maybe I’ll talk to
Jim or something. I just have to...

SAM trails off as he runs up the stairs inside.

JOHN is left standing by the pool.

EXT. ADAMS DRIVEWAY- NIGHT

JOHN walks out onto the street to wait for a cab.

Holding his phone to his ear, the E 500 comes flying out
of the drive way.

JOHN sees SAM behind the wheel. SAM does not see JOHN.
INT. E 500 CABIN—NIGHT

SAM turns his head left and right as he drives along quiet, but built up street.

He fiddles with the radio finding an old jazz station. ‘A Night in Tunisia’ plays from the speakers.

EXT. CURBSIDE—NIGHT

The E 500 pulls up. The brake lights stay on.

INT. E 500 CABIN—NIGHT

The passenger window goes down as SAM glances ahead. A BLACK WOMAN comes to the window and leans in.

BLACK WOMAN

Hi.

SAM tries to turn down the radio, but turns it up first.

SAM

(eventually)

Hi.

BLACK WOMAN

So you want me to come for a ride?

SAM

reaches into his pocket.

BLACK WOMAN

Does your friend over there want to come too?

The BLACK WOMAN waves to her friend to come over. The friend, a WHITE GIRL leans in through the window.

INT. E 500 CABIN—NIGHT

The car is driving through the night. The BLACK WOMAN cannot be seen. The WHITE GIRL is in the back seat as SAM drives.

WHITE GIRL

Why don’t you pull over?
SAM
(a beat)
It's safer this way.

SAM appears to be intensely concentrating on the road.

The BLACK WOMAN'S head appears from the darkness over SAM'S lap. She tries to gather her bearings.

BLACK WOMAN
Where the fuck are we going, anyhow?

SAM
I have to get some ice cream after I finish up here. I'm pulling over, I wanted a safe area.

SAM glances in the rearview mirror as he stops the car.

WHITE GIRL
Hey aren't you that guy?

SAM
No.

BLACK WOMAN
What guy?

WHITE GIRL
That guy from that TV show...

SAM
Look can we go here, I'm not paying to...

WHITE GIRL
Yeah...

(a beat)
YEAH! It was a Cop show when I was a kid and he was like the Chief of Police or some shit, yeah.

SAM
Look...

BLACK WOMAN
HO-LY SHIT! (Laughing)

SAM
Ok. Yes. Well I've done a lot of other stuff too.

CUT TO:
INT. ICE CREAM STORE- NIGHT

SAM is sitting on one side of a BOOTH, eating with a plastic spoon from a tub. The PROSTITUTES sit opposite, also EATING ICE CREAM.

SAM
(cocking his spoon)
What about ‘The Avalanche’? Everyone’s seen that...

BLACK WOMAN
Oh yeah. I saw that when I was a kid.

WHITE GIRL
Oh yeah...
(laughing)
Oh man you were the guy with the big turtleneck...

SAM
(getting excited)
And have you hard about this movie ‘Catastrophic’ that’s coming out?

WHITE GIRL
What happened to your moustache?

BLACK WOMAN
That looks awesome!

SAM
I’m in that...

BLACK WOMAN
Your in that. Well that’s cool...

WHITE GIRL
What? You only do disaster movies?

SAM scoops out the bottom of his tub fervently. He licks the spoon clean.

SAM
No. You’ve seen the ‘The FBI Files’ and I did ‘Brush with Death’...

WHITE GIRL
And cop shows.
SAM
‘Brush with Death’ was a TV Movie. I was trying to say things you’d know... I was in ‘Wandering Sands’, but you probably wouldn’t know...

WHITE GIRL
Boring.

The BLACK WOMAN is concentrating on her ice cream.

SAM
Why am I trying to tell you who I am anyway. I mean, you’ll probably sell it to some tabloid...

WHITE GIRL
As if they’re going to want to hear about the guy from Avalanche.

BLACK WOMAN
Yeah.

(laughing)
‘Hey I blew the guy from Avalanche!’

SAM
The Avalanche.

WHITE GIRL
(laughing, to Black Woman)
Your picture on the front page...

SAM smiles as the two women laugh. He grabs his keys.

SAM
(fatherly)
Ok. Come on. Let’s go.

EXT. E 500- STREET- NIGHT

SAM and the two PROSTITUTES walk to the car.

SAM
Come on. I’ll drive you back to your...

BLACK WOMAN
Can I drive?

SAM
What?
BLACK WOMAN
Please. I’ve never driven a Mercedes.
Come on, it’s like two blocks...

SAM
(puzzling)
If I didn’t feel like such a joke to you,
maybe I....

BLACK WOMAN
Oh no. I like your movies. I’ll be the
first to see that Catastrophic shit. She
was the one who...

SAM
But I thought you ‘blew the Avalanche
guy’?

BLACK WOMAN
I did. That’s cool.
(smiling)
Man, I’m gonna tell my friends.

SAM smiles. Mulls it over.

SAM
What the hell.

CUT TO:

INT. E 500 CABIN- NIGHT
The car cruises along slowly.
SAM rides up front, the BLACK WOMAN behind the wheel. The
WHITE GIRL sits in the back.

BLACK WOMAN
Oooh. This is nice. Leather steering
wheel. Nice.

SAM
Watch the road.

WHITE GIRL
This is us. Pull over, pull over.

BLACK WOMAN
I am, I am. Shit!

The BLACK WOMAN begins to struggle with the car. SAM
braces himself as the WHITE GIRL mouths off.
SAM

Slow down.
(a beat)
Brake!

The car hits a street sign pole at slow speed and stops.
Silence.

BLACK WOMAN

Oh shit.

INT. FILM OFFICES- DAY

JIM CAVARONE sits in a wide armchair smiling at the two business-type men opposite him.

JIM holds a cell phone. He GLANCES at it repeatedly.

JIM

Sorry about this guys. Sam had a little car accident recently. I think he’s probably a little thrown being without his car. Hope he’s not walking here.

One man smiles. The other does not.

EXECUTIVE
(not smiling)
What was he driving?

JIM
(looking at phone)
What? Oh, a ahh E 500...

EXECUTIVE

Shame.

JIM

I mean he’s probably waiting for a car to pick him up. I’ll just give him another call.

JIM stands and walks to the other side of the room.
The room is silent.
JIM (CONT’D)

Sam.
(Speaking low)
Where are you?

CUT TO:

EXT. GOLF CLUB PUTTING GREEN– DAY

SAM has a putter in hand and the phone to his ear.

SAM
Jim. Sorry I’m golfing.

CUT TO:

FILM OFFICES–

JIM
Your what?

CUT TO:

GOLF CLUB–

SAM
It’s OK. Put me on speaker phone. Its Mike and Paul right?

CUT TO:

JIM
What? Yes that’s right. You want me to put you on speaker phone?

JIM looks over at the two executives.

JIM (CONT’D)
(trying to appear relaxed)
He wants me to put him on speaker phone.

JIM puts the phone on the coffee table in front of the EXECUTIVES.

SAM (ON THE PHONE)
Mike, Paul. Its Sam Adams. How are you?
PAUL
(leaning in)
Hi Sam. Paul here. Where are you pal?

CUT TO:

GOLF CLUB-

SAM
Look guys I got held up car trouble.

SAM receives a drink at an outdoor table overlooking the putting green.

SAM (CONT’D)
But I want to say...

CUT TO:

FILM OFFICES-

SAM (ON THE PHONE)
I am totally excited about this project.
And if you guys are OK with it, I’m in.

JIM smiles.

MIKE leans in to the phone.

MIKE
Sam. Mike here. That’s great, we’re really keen to have you on board so I’m happy if you’re happy. Its a pity you couldn’t be he...

CUT TO:

GOLF CLUB-

SAM
I’m happy. I’m going to leave the rest with Jim, and it was great talking to you guys and I can’t wait for this thing to be a big hit...

CUT TO:
FILM OFFICES-
MIKE has been cut off. But he and PAUL are smiling, nodding.

JIM picks up the phone.

    JIM
    I’m just going to see if he needs anything. And I’ll be back.

JIM steps outside.

    JIM (CONT’D)
    Sam? That was terrific.

CUT TO:

GOLF CLUB-

    SAM
    They liked it good. You just work out the deal like we talked about.

CUT TO:

FILM OFFICES-

    JIM
    Will do.

CUT TO:

GOLF CLUB-

SAM end the call and looks around contented.

A CLUB MEMBER walks past.

    MEMBER
    Phones are banned here?

SAM lifts his drink toward the MEMBER.

    SAM
    We must have a game sometime.
EXT. POOL—DAY

SAM lies by his pool in small bathers, sunglasses, under blue skies and sunshine.

He sips a glass bottle of COKE as he stares into the distance.

JIM CAVARONE marches through the glass doors from the living room, and out to the pool.

JIM
(raising his hands)
Sam? What are you doing. We’re meant to be going to the studio.

SAM is slightly startled. He seems not to be expecting JIM’s arrival. He looks over his shoulder but finds he can’t see Jim, so he spins around the other way, sitting up.

SAM
Jim.
(Standing)
Hi there. Hi.
(Smiles, a pause)
So.

JIM
Sam. We’re going to studio, let’s go here.

SAM
Right. OK. I’ll just...

SAM bends down to pick up his COKE. JIM puts his arm around SAM’s shoulders and leads him toward the doors.

JIM
Come on buddy...lets get changed.

SAM
Yes. I’ll just pop upstairs...and...yes.

INT. JIM CAVARONE’S CAR—DAY

SAM sits in the passenger seat looking ahead as JIM drives.

Large WAREHOUSES, LOTS and HANGERS pass by as they drive.
JIM
That’s Mario’s place over there. Car parts. Apparently making a fortune but he always needs more hands.

SAM
Oh right. John came round saying he needed work. I said I’d...

JIM
John?

SAM (casually)
My son. He’s having a baby.

JIM
Oh...well tell him to call Mario. He was just telling me how he needed guys.

SAM
Yes. Oh well that’s a good idea. I’ll give him a call.

SAM punches the keys on his mobile phone and puts it to his ear.

SAM (CONT’D)
John. Hi. Yeah it’s your father. Hi. Look I was just talking to Jim and he says this guy Mario is always looking for guys—he does car parts...

JIM
Warehouse. Distribution.

SAM (looking at Jim)
It’s a warehouse. Distribution. (a beat) Jim knows him really...

There is a long pause.

SAM (CONT’D)
Right. OK. I don’t know. (to Jim) Acting projects?

- JIM
SAM
We don’t have any right now. I’ll get back to you. Right.

SAM hangs up the phone.

SAM (CONT’D)
Apparently he’s got a job. He was hoping I could help him get acting work.

JIM
(thrown)
Oh.
(Thinking)
Well what’s he done lately..?

SAM
I don’t know.

JIM
Oh. I don’t know.

The two stare ahead in silence.

INT. STUDIO- DAY

SAM and JIM walk past tall wooden beams holding up sets through the vast, dark studio.

They come to a small group of people mingling on a set the front of a large, grey SHIP.

A WOMAN, SUSIE LEFTIS in a business suit charges toward them.

SUSIE
Sam, hi. Susie Leftis. How are you?
(To Jim)
Hi Jim.

JIM
Sorry we’re a bit late.

SUSIE
No trouble. We’re still waiting on some things for this photo shoot...but the set look fabulous don’t you think?

SAM
Right. The ghost ship...
SUSIE
(plastered smile)
Right.

SUSIE lurches back momentarily and returns with a young man of around 25.

JESSE GROSSO is short, dark haired boyishly handsome. A young actor on the rise he has everyone over and approaches with a big smile.

SUSIE (CONT’D)
Sam this is Jesse Grosso, he’s going to be playing Scott Maylaan the head investigator on the ship.

SAM has got things back to front.

SAM
Hi Scott.

SUSIE
(ignoring the mistake)
And Sam of course is our Captain.

SAM
(to Jim)
Captain Stubing...

JESSE
(to Sam)
It is fantastic to meet you. The Avalanche is like my all-time favorite movie.

SAM smiles as if The Avalanche was nothing special, but his interest is sparked.

SAM
Well...

SUSIE has left and returned.

SUSIE
(smiling)
We’re going to get you guys up on the ship with Marilyn and take some photos, OK?

SUSIE stands with JIM as SAM and JESSE make their way onto the set and up onto the SHIP.
JESSE
So I’m really looking forward to working with you. Especially on TV. I mean ‘FBI Files’ is legendary. I think this show is going to be really big.

SAM look buoyed by JESSE’s admiration and enthusiasm as they reach the SHIP’s BOW where MARILYN is standing.

MARILYN is in her mid 30s, blonde hair, attractive, trustworthy but fiery look. She is a well known actress to play the female lead on the show

SAM
Well it certainly is quite the eerie ship.

MARILYN
Well we will be searching for the dead.
(Smiling)
Hi, I’m Marilyn.

SUSIE calls our from below.

SUSIE
OK guys can you stand at the front of the ship please.

A DIRECTOR takes over the instructions as the three actors come to attention.

DIRECTOR
(looking at a piece of paper)
So we want the Captain back left, Maylaan front middle and Officer James back right.

The three move into position and the camera starts to flash.

DIRECTOR (CONT’D)
We want serious expressions. The world is destroyed and your on a thankless mission to search for lost souls. OK?

The cameras continue to flash as the three narrow their eyes and put on their best soul searching faces.

EXT. STUDIO PARKING LOT- DAY

SAM and JESSE stand next to JIM’s car.
JESSE
So I’ll see you for the shoot. Great to meet you man.

JESSE extends his hand.

JESSE (CONT’D)
Really cool.

SAM smiles. His smile follows JESSE as he gets into a two-door sports car and puts on sunglasses.

JIM walks over..

JIM
OK.

SAM
(watching Jesse)
He seems like a great kid.

JIM

JESSE burns out of the car park. SAM watches.

SAM
(thoughtful)
What’s that car?
(a beat)
I think this show is going to be pretty big.

SAM sits in the passenger seat and shuts the door.

INT. STUDIO- DAY

Some time later.

SAM is in a black Captains uniform. His brow furrows as he looks out into the distance.

SAM
Turn on the retractors.
(a beat)
We have a lost soul...

After a freeze, SAM’s face relaxes into a smile and voices break out on the set.
DIRECTOR
(calling)
Thanks guys...

JESSE laughs as he and SAM walk off the set.

JESSE
That was dark. I mean you could see those dead people...

SAM
(chuckling)
A bit hammy. But you’ve got to go there as best you can.

SAM stops at the food services table inspecting the muffins and cookies.

JESSE
No, it was perfect.
(pointing at cookies)
Hey you have to try these ones...

SAM
Oh yeah.
(bites)
Mmmmm.

They continue walking, nodding to crew members and producers.

JESSE
You are everyone’s favorite brooding father figure.

SAM
Yes, well that’s nice I suppose. But you’re the sex bomb!

JESSE grins.

SAM (CONT’D)
I mean they promote it like bloody pornography. But it’s working. I guess you’re not complaining. You must be beating them off...

SUSIE sidles up.

SUSIE
See you tonight guys. Big night OK. Talk it up, yes? Great show, amazing people, a pleasure going to work everyday...
SAM
All that shit.

JESSE
(fading smile)
Yeah Susie.
(Softly)
I spoke to Jeff about you getting me some stuff for tonight...like some clothes and a watch...

SUSIE’s face gets serious.

JESSE scrunches his up to look cute.

JESSE (CONT’D)
...and we were going to work it out so I’d just hang on to them anyway...

SUSIE
Right. I’ll...

JESSE
Thank you. That is...
(unbuttoning his shirt and turning to Sam
Great, OK.

JESSE leads SAM into his dressing room, taking off his shirt.

SAM
You are a smooth little whore aren’t you?

JESSE
(laughing)
What? Hey I just needed some things. It’s like...

SAM sits on the counter watching JESSE undress. He eats his cookie.

JESSE (CONT’D)
You can ask for stuff, you a star of this show too.

SAM
No. I can’t make demands, I’m not hot enough!

JESSE
You pretty hot. Hey, look I’ll get them to organise some stuff for you.
JESSE pulls on jeans and a t-shirt.

SAM

No.

JESSE

We’re gonna have fun tonight. I’ll have it sent to your place.

(Walking out)

OK.

SAM smiles, finishes his cookie.

SAM

(to cookie)

Mmmm. Very...good.

INT. JOHN AND CATHERINE’S APARTMENT- NIGHT

JOHN stumbles through the front door carrying a plastic bag and a pizza.

CATHERINE lies on the sofa watching TV. A bit dazed

JOHN

I got your special ice cream.

CATHERINE

Good. I think I’ll just have that. I don’t feel like pizza anymore.

JOHN

Fine.

CATHERINE

Have you spoken to your dad again?

JOHN

Yeah, he hasn’t called me back for weeks. I don’t know. He said he spoke to Jim and they didn’t have any projects now...I don’t know.

CATHERINE

(offhand)

Yeah. Well maybe they’d filled all the parts...

JOHN misses this as he brings the food to the sofa and they settle in.
JOHN focuses on his first slice of pizza, CATHERINE turns up the volume and eats her ice cream, eyes on her show.

JOHN glances at the TV as he munches. After a while his brow furrows as he watches the Captain of a gloomy ship.

        JOHN
What the fuck is this?

        CATHERINE
(blankly)
Lost Souls.

        JOHN
What? That’s Sam!

        CATHERINE
Yeah I know. It’s quite good. It’s a bit creepy but he’s quite a reassuring character.

        JOHN
Motherfucker!

INT. LIMO- NIGHT

SAM and GABRIELLE sit in the dark hire car.

SAM fiddles with a large silver watch he is wearing as GABRIELLE looks on irritated.

        GABRIELLE
That stuff they sent is way too young for you.

SAM is taken with the watch and not listening.

        SAM
Hmmm...

        GABRIELLE
I mean that jacket is for a twenty-year-old.

SAM doesn’t respond.

        GABRIELLE (CONT’D)
I still think this is a mistake to get locked back into TV.
SAM
(looking up)
It's a successful show. I think it's the best thing right now.
(a beat)
Maybe you don't need a new car.

GABRIELLE looks out the window.

EXT. RED CARPET- NIGHT

SAM talks to a reporter as GABRIELLE stands trying to look beautiful.

SAM
It's great. Yeah I'm a bit like Captain Stubing...if everyone was dead.
(Laughs)

SAM looks down the line of press and spies JESSE chatting to a female reporter.

JESSE look over, keeps talking, but smiles and waves to SAM. JESSE points to his watch. SAM holds his wrist up and tries to hold back a smile.

INT. PARTY- NIGHT

Around a ornate flower arrangement, the room swells with people and conversation.

SAM stand son his own, sipping from a tumbler as he looks around the room. GABRIELLE is talking to a group of people.

SAM eyes come across JESSE, standing next to SUSIE and TALL MAN with THICK GLASSES.

JESSE waves SAM over.

JESSE
(celebrating)
Sam! You look great! Nice watch hey?

SAM
Well it is heavy, but yes. It is...fantastic.

SUSIE
Yeah. Sam can you remember to bring that in next week?
JESSE looks at SAM shuts his eyes and shakes his head.

SAM
Sure.

SUSIE
OK guys. I’ve got to go and talk to Jeff.
(Walks off)

JESSE
Sam this is Michael Raemoff. He’s directed ‘Crayola Lies’ and...

SAM
(offering his hand)

JESSE
Michael and I have been talking about this script ‘Wonder’?

SAM nods.

JESSE (CONT’D)
It’s about this child genius who grows up to be a drug addict and disgraces his father who is small town business man. It’s sort of a father son story, and I was saying to Michael I thought this would be perfect for you.

RAEMOFF looks at SAM blankly.

SAM
Absolutely. I mean its the kind of departure I’ve been wanting to do for a while. People think of me as the strong and stern type, but I could really see this character as showing the underside of that.

RAEMOFF
(casually, monotone)
That’s exactly what I would want. Yeah. I think it’s kind of an exploration...you know...what is success and failure. And the father character would highlight that.

SAM
(trying to play it cool)
Yeah, well I’d have to see if...
(MORE)
SAM (CONT'D)
(to a passing waiter)
Can I get another one of these?
(Back to guys)
But yeah, it sound great.

SAM has not heard the waiter ask what his drink was and does not realise the waiter is still standing to his side.

There is a pause.

JESSE
Sam.

SAM
(looking around)
Oh. What?

WAITER
What drink?

SAM
A whisky sour.

MICHAEL mutters some things to JESSE. He turns to mingle elsewhere.

RAEMOFF
Thanks Sam. I might see you round.

SAM turns to JESSE.

JESSE
(grabbing Sam’s arm)
It looks good. He’s going to finalise the rights and all that. We’re going to have drinks with him and settle the deal.

SAM
That’s great. Working together again.
(Laughs)
Let’s get you another drink. You know this watch is really amazing.

JESSE
(excited)
I know. Do you know how big this is going to be! Raemoff is the hot guy. You and me man!
(distracted)
Hey Marilyn’s talking to a hottie.
SAM looks over to see MARILYN and GABRIELLE in conversation.

    SAM
    Oh I’ll introduce you, that’s my wife.

    JESSE
    You dog. You say I’m the ladykiller. Look at you.

SAM and JESSE walk over.

    JESSE (CONT’D)
    Hello.

    SAM
    Hi Marilyn. Gabrielle this is Jesse from the show.

    GABRIELLE
    Of course.
    (kisses Jesse)
    Oh you are cute.

    SAM
    OK.

    JESSE
    So its looks like Sam and I are going to do a movie together.

    GABRIELLE
    That’s fantastic. Oh wow. We must get some drinks.

GABRIELLE tries to find a waiter as the four of them sink into the throng.

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY- NIGHT

The door opens in darkness.

SAM stumbles in turning on the hall light. GABRIELLE, a BLONDE woman, and JESSE all lag behind equally drunk.

    JESSE
    What the fuck happened to your E Class?

    SAM
    Oh shit! I keep forgetting.
GABRIELLE makes it in the door, the other two still on the doorstep.

    SAM (CONT’D)
    Ahhh. Oh just an unfortunate accident.
    (a beat)
    A prostitute drove it into a pole!

GABRIELLE, the BLONDE and JESSE all burst out laughing.

As they all make in inside and SAM goes to shut the door, JOHN is revealed to be standing outside.

    JESSE
    (breaking the silence)
    Hey man.

    SAM
    John.

    JESSE
    A prostitute drove it into your pole!

    JOHN
    Can I talk to you.

SAM steps outside as the other move to the kitchen.

SAM overbalances slightly as he negotiates the steps and pulls the door behind him.

    SAM
    What is it boy? We’ve been at this magazine party. Do you know this guy Michael Raemoff- he wants me to do his fucking movie!

    JOHN
    Look. I can’t believe I come to you after all these years and all I ask is you use your position to help me get a gig. You say you’ve got no projects, I don’t hear from you then I turn on the TV you the Captain of a fucking ghost ship.

    SAM
    Hey hey. Calm down. I didn’t know I was doing that thing. You know these things happen. I just found out I’m doing this Raemoff thing, you know...that’s how it goes.

JOHN looks down.
JOHN
But you’re the star of a big show. Surely you can get me an audition for a small part. I don’t care. I need this, I’m having a fucking kid...

JOHN breaks off, overcome.

SAM
(putting his arm around him)
Hey, it’s OK. Sure. Sure. You come down to the set on Monday. I’ll get someone to have a look at you.

JOHN
OK. I mean, I don’t want to do this. I’ve just got no one else to help me.

SAM
How are you getting home?

JOHN
What? Oh..a taxi I guess.

SAM
Hey do want the E class?

JOHN
What? No.

SAM
Yeah. It drives fine. The front is just smashed.

They walk over to the car.

JOHN
What happened?

SAM
Why don’t you take it. You can drive it home. Then you can sell it if you need to or fix it up if you start working...

JOHN
(insulted)
So we forget about Monday at the studio right?

SAM
No. (Unsure now)
No. You come down. We’ll see how it goes.
JOHN
(turning toward the gates)
Good, I’ll see you there.

SAM
The car. Come on, just drive it home for now. You don’t want to be waiting...

JOHN stops. He pauses. He looks back at SAM.

SAM smile.

JOHN
So what it runs fine.

SAM
(running to the car, opening the door)
Yeah. Beautiful interior. Its a fucking five litre V8.
(running inside)
It’s just that the bloody nose looks terrible. I’ll just grab the keys.

JOHN looks at the car, unsure of what is going on.

SAM returns with the keys. SAM hops in the passenger seat, JOHN behind the wheel.

JOHN starts the car. He can’t help but smile as SAM beams at the sound of the impressive engine.

SAM (CONT’D)
Pretty good huh?

JOHN
What will you drive if I drive this home?

SAM
I’m getting a new car.

JOHN
(tired smile)
Oh right.

SAM
(getting serious)
This is a great car though. You’ll love it.

CUT TO:
EXT. E 500- NIGHT

The car with its crumpled bonnet speeds through the night.

INT. MERCEDES DEALERSHIP- DAY

SAM strolls around the highly polished car in the showroom tailed by a tall Easter European looking salesman, SAUL.

SAM
I just don’t want to look like an old rich fart, you know what I mean.

SAUL
Saam, Saam. You’ve made the right decision. You had an E class, now you move to the S class...Yes?

SAM
It’s just not very sporty. Not that I like sporty, just that it’s big and immovable. I don’t need to make that statement. I want something exciting you know, not just luxurious.

SAUL directs him to the SL 500.

SAUL
Saam. This cost a lot more, but it sounds like what you want.

SAM
Yeah, but it’s too showy.
(making a face)
‘I’ve got a little sports car- look at my sweater and my cap covering my bald spot.’

SAM looks around the room and spots the CL 500.

SAM (CONT’D)
What about that?

SAUL
Well Saam. It is also more expensive. But I could say you in this, for sure!

SAM hops in. He grabs the wheel and grins up at SAUL.
SAM
(already sold)
You like it Saul?
(Sam grins at the wheel)

INT. HOTEL/BAR— EVENING

JESSE sits in a fancy, minimalist, modern bar lounge sipping a drink.

He sees a CL 500 pull up out the front and SAM get out, and walk into the bar.

JESSE
(standing)
Hey nice car! Just replacing that heap you totalled?

SAM
(excited)
Yeah, it’s nice don’t you think. Do you wan to drive it.

JESSE
(no longer caring)
No. Look Michael should be here any minute. So grab a drink, I’m just going to use the bathroom.

JESSE goes off and SAM orders from the bar.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL/BAR— EVENING

JESSE examines his phone as SAM talks.

SAM
So I said fuck the S class, what is that!

JESSE
(disinterested)
Yeah?

SAM
So when I got in it...

JESSE’s phone rings. He takes the call, cutting SAM off, stands up and walks away.

SAM sips his drink.
JESSE returns.

    JESSE
    (holding his hand over the
     phone)
    Hey Sam. I’ve just got to take this.
    Might be a while. I’m just going out
    front.

SAM nods.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL/BAR- EVENING

SAM’s glass is empty. He looks around the empty room.

SAM stands and goes to the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL/BAR- EVENING

SAM stands just outside the bathroom door talking to an EMPLOYEE.

    SAM
    So it’s on an automatic flush.

EMPLOYEE
    That’s right.

    SAM
    So it doesn’t matter when I come in. They
don’t know if I’m there or not.

EMPLOYEE
    No.

    SAM
    Right.  (a pause)
    Isn’t that a little wasteful?

The EMPLOYEE shrugs his shoulders and walks away.

CUT TO:
INT. HOTEL/BAR- NIGHT

SAM sits. He looks at his WATCH: it reads 10pm.

SAM stands up and looks outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOTEL/BAR ENTRANCE- NIGHT

SAM peers around and can’t see a soul. No sign of JESSE.

Confused, he uses his phone, but gets no answer as he puts the phone away, shaking his head.

CUT TO:

EXT. CL 500- NIGHT

SAM opens the door and gets in looking around but sees no one.

The car burns off into the night.

INT. STUDIO- DAY

SAM is atop the ship, dressed in his black Captain’s uniform, this time with a traditional ‘old-time’ bell-shaped Captain’s hat on.

As the crew gets in order, from under the hat SAM is scanning the floor. He fidgets impatiently when he sees JESSE BREEZE in, kiss a woman ‘hello’, grab a muffin, and BREEZE out again.

DIRECTOR
Sam we’re ready. Is the hat ready Bill?
Let’s get this everybody.

SAM refocuses, straightens up and puts on his Captain’s face.

The lights dim and the HAT starts to GLOW.
INT. STUDIO- DAY

Walking quickly behind the set, SAM makes his way through crew members. He sees JESSE in the distance and heads toward him.

From nowhere the DIRECTOR appears, stopping SAM in his tracks.

DIRECTOR
Sam that was great.
(Looks up)
I think the hat is terrific- its a great concept it being your connector to the other side. Now...

SAM is distracted. Having forgotten he still has the large HAT on, he reaches for it but can’t get it off.

SAM
What’s with this, I can’t get it off?

DIRECTOR
Yeah, the cords. You’ll have to go and see Bill...Now are you fine to film the rest of the cut aways after we’ve done the other major scenes, just that...

SAM
(impatient)
Sure. That’s fine.

SAM starts moving towards JESSE again, although he his now disappeared from view.

Arriving where he had seen JESSE, SAM anxiously starts looking for him. He sees him talking to someone.

JOHN appears.

JOHN
Hey, how are you.
(Looks up)
Nice hat...

SAM
(totally confused)
John? (a beat) What are you doing here?
JOHN
(wincing)
You got me an audition for the show...

SAM
(still confused)
Oh... (looking over at Jesse)
Right...

SUSIE block SAM’S view of JESSE.

SUSIE
Hi John. We’re going to be in that room we were just in, OK? Are you ready Sam?

JOHN heads off.

SAM
For what?

SUSIE
Where auditioning John to play Jesse’s brother. We’re all going in there now.

SAM
When did this happen?

SUSIE
(exhausted smile)
This was your request Sam. Jim got me to organise it. Come on...
(walking off)
We’re fitting this in between the shooting schedule for Christ’s sake...

SAM goes to follow her. JESSE is still talking.

JIM appears.

JIM
(casually)
Hey buddy. (Looking around)

SAM looks up at JIM.

JIM (CONT’D)
Hey, nice hat...

SAM
What the fuck is going on? What is John doing here?
JIM
John called me saying he was coming to set see if we could organise someone to look at him. Then you called me, told me to organise an audition...don’t you remember?

SAM
No.

JIM
You said you gave him your car to drive. Which is very generous, Sam, but I don’t think that thing is road worthy. You don’t want anything to happen to the poor kid, and quite frankly it would be your head...

SAM
No one has called you about Michael Raemoff film.

JIM
No. Come on. We better get in there.

JIM heads off.

JESSE now turns to follow JIM down the corridor.

SAM speeds up and grabs his arm.

JESSE
(turning around)
Watch it man...

SAM
What the fuck happened to you the other night?

JESSE
(closing his eyes)
Shit. I really am sorry about that. I had to go meet Raemoff...I thought I said to you to come to the other bar...

SAM
No you didn’t. You said you were taking a phone call and you never fucking came back. Thanks a lot. It was fun sitting there with my thumb up my arse whilst you guys fucked off without me!
JESSE
(annoyed)
Hey take it easy, Sam...

SAM
So what’s going on with this guy? Are we doing this or not?

JESSE
Just relax, OK? Yeah things are moving along. But you might just want to improve your attitude if you want things to run smoothly.

JESSE turns and walks down the corridor.

SAM stands thinking.

A craft service guy with a BASKET appears.

CRAFT SERVICE GUY
(chirpy)
Would you like muffin Mr. Adams?

SAM
(distracted)
Yes.
(peering, chooses one from the basket)
Thank you.

CRAFT SERVICE GUY
No problem.

SAM bits his muffin, then heads down the corridor.

INT. AUDITION ROOM- DAY

JOHN and JESSE stand facing each other.

JESSE look bored, JOHN is reading from a script.

JOHN
...I may be dead, but I am still your brother.

JOHN looks around whilst JESSE, unimpressed sits down next to SUSIE and the DIRECTOR.

SUSIE
That was great John. OK. So is there anything else we’d like to see?
DIRECTOR
Look, I liked it. Jesse?

JESSE
(looking at the ground)
It didn’t work for me, you know.
(to John)
No offence dude. It was just like it wasn’t there. I couldn’t feel it. Maybe he needs to be older...

DIRECTOR
Well, I don’t think his age is a problem, but...

SUSIE
What do you think Sam?

SAM is still wearing the HAT, sitting next to JIM. He stares ahead with a worried expression. He doesn’t respond.

SUSIE (CONT’D)
Sam?

SAM
(snapping out of it’)
Ahh. Look. I thought John was very good, you know. Ahhh...

JESSE shoots SAM a look.

SAM (CONT’D)
But its up to you guys. I mean, if there isn’t a connection there for Jesse you know...I mean maybe...yeah...I think that is really important...

JESSE
I just didn’t feel like he’s my brother you know. I mean its not going to be real if...
(to director)
You know what I mean?

DIRECTOR
Sure. OK.
(To John)
Thanks John.

SUSIE walks over to JOHN.
SUSIE
Thank you John. We’ll have a chat and get back to you, OK?

JOHN nods and smiles.

JOHN
(walking out)
Thanks everyone.

SAM fidgets with his HAT.

INT. STUDIO—DAY

SAM sits in a make-up chair. The hat is being removed by Bill.

SAM spies JESSE passing the door.

SAM
Hey Don Juan...

JESSE
(popping his head around the door)
Hey.

SAM is amid a particularly awkward phase of getting the HAT off.

SAM
(wincing)
What’s up tonight? You know, sorry about before. I just want to make this movie. I thought I could take you guys out to dinner, or get some drinks...

JESSE
(glancing behind)
Yeah. I can’t. I’ve got to shoot here. You know those things from the other day, we’re doing them tonight...

The HAT comes off. SAM is relieved.

SAM
Oh, OK. Well let’s meet with him soon..

JESSE
Yeah man. It’s all going smoothly. Just relax and we’ll get it sorted.
JESSE leaves. SAM exhales.

SAM
Thanks Bill. That fucking hat was driving me crazy.
(realising Bill made it)
Not that its bad hat. It’s a fucking brilliant hat, you know. It just was, you know...ahh...

SAM trails off to confident nodding and eases out of the room.

EXT. STUDIO PARKING LOT- DAY

The afternoon sun still high in the sky, SAM tosses a small sports bag in the boot and hops in his CL.

CUT TO:

EXT. ADAMS DRIVEWAY- DAY

Pulling in to the driveway, SAM looks up sharply to see the boot of the E 500.

He breaks heavily to avoid crashing.

CUT TO:

EXT. POOL- DAY

In tiny bathers, SAM lies by his pool.

Sitting up to pour himself a Scotch, he knocks the bottle, which SMASHES.

SAM
Oh fucking shit.

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY- EVENING

Grabbing keys from the table, SAM calls out to GABRIELLE.

SAM
I’m just getting some ice cream.

CUT TO:
EXT. CL 500- NIGHT
The car cruises quite roads, the evening sun setting.
THE PRETENDERS 'DON'T GET ME WRONG' plays on the stereo.
SAM BOPS and HUMS along.

CUT TO:

INT. CL 500- NIGHT
SAM peers out of the passenger window.
Slowing down he sees some people in the window of hip bar. Looking closer. SAM sees JESSE’s smiling face.
As JESSE throws his head back with laughter he sees MICHAEL RAEMOFF, smiling.
As he slows further the car he finally focuses on the joke teller next to RAEMOFF. It is BEV MYERS.
SAM reels back in his seat.

CUT TO:

EXT. CL 500- EVENING
Parking down the street, SAM dashes across the traffic to an ice cream store.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE CREAM STORE- EVENING
Handed a cone across the counter, SAM stands in the shop window
SAM licks his ice cream, anxiously pondering.

INT. HIP BAR- EVENING
JESSE, RAEMOFF and BEV sit at their table talking earnestly.
Licking his cone, SAM draws level with the table looking straight ahead.
As if looking for someone, SAM get awkwardly close to the threesome’s table.

BEV glances up.

SAM
(feigning total surprise)
Bev! Hi, how are you?

SAM leans in for a kiss. BEV is slightly taken aback, but goes in to actress mode.

BEV
(kissing back)
Darling. I’m well. We’re just having a drink.

SAM looks across at an uncomfortable JESSE.

RAEMOFF is impassive.

SAM
(huge greeting)
Jesse, hi! Hey how did that shoot go this evening? Must have finished up early-
(turning to Bev)
You know Jesse is my co-star Bev...

BEV
Of course...

SAM
Well I should say I am his co-star.
(Offering his hand to Raemoff)
Michael right? We met the other night...

RAEMOFF
(shaking hands)
Yeah. Hi.

SAM
Say those are NICE glasses! Sorry Bev, Michael, could I borrow Jesse for a second. Just a few work notes I need to run by him.

BEV
Yes of course.

JESSE
Sam I think we could talk about these tomorrow...
SAM
(big smile)
Oh. Just a second.

(Placing his hands together)
Please.

SAM moves a few steps from the table and waits for JESSE
as he rises with a closed smile.

JESSE

Sorry guys. Excuse me a moment.

SAM leads JESSE to the corner.

SAM
(smiling through clenched teeth)
Well this is a nice little party.

JESSE
Yes it is. Sam what do want to talk about?

SAM
Gee I don’t know. I thought you were shooting late tonight?

JESSE
Look...

SAM
(getting loud)
You ditch me the other night. You say everythings going smoothly. Then I see you here...

JESSE
(forcefully quiet)
OK Sam. I hate to break it to you OK, but we’re going with someone else. Right?

SAM
(gesticulating with his ice cream)
Right. Why? What’s Bev doing here? I don’t understand...

JESSE
Look we think the mother would be far more interesting. The whole father son thing is a bit corny.

(MORE)
(looking back to the table)

And to be honest Sam your not exactly A-list, OK? You’re a nice novelty, but your not going to sell pictures.

SAM
Oh you are you little fucking shit.

JESSE
Whatever.

JESSE walks back to the table.

JESSE sits down as SAM charges past.

BEV
Are you not going to join us Sam?

SAM
Fuck you Bev.

EXT. HIP BAR- EVENING

SAM explodes onto the street, PANIC and FURY in his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. ADAMS DRIVEWAY- EVENING

The CL 500 speeds into the driveway, breaking quickly.

CUT TO:

EXT. POOL- NIGHT

The pool lights make for a serene evening, but SAM is pacing; a phone to his ear.

SAM
Jim, you gotta get me any film offer you can...

(a beat)

I don’t care, you do whatever you can. I need a film. I need to do press. Highest offer wins...

(pause for reply)

Good. Cause I’m quitting that fucking show.
SAM hangs up the phone.

CUT TO:

EXT/INT. POOL/KITCHEN- NIGHT

With his head down in thought, SAM walks into the house, the phone hanging by his side.

GABRIELLE with one hand on her hip in the kitchen. She looks as anxious as angry.

GABRIELLE
So what the fuck is going on?

SAM
(looking up, tired)
What?

GABRIELLE
I don’t know Sam. You lose this movie with Jesse, and your saying all this shit about quitting the show...

SAM
(furrowing his brow)
Why are you SO concerned?

GABRIELLE
I don’t know...because you’re having a fucking nervous breakdown.

SAM
What?

GABRIELLE
I mean what are you doing charging in on Jesse’s drinks? It’s crazy. You acting crazy. No wonder you getting fired.

SAM
(incredulous)
I’m not getting fired. I never got the fucking part. Jesse’s drinks were so he could go behind my back and give the part to someone else...to fucking Bev of all people. What the fuck are YOU talking about?

GABRIELLE
This all started with your fucking son. He came round here, desperate.

(MORE)
And he’s dragged you down with him.
You’re not quitting that show.

SAM
Or what? Hmmm. Why can’t I quit? Because
you won’t have enough money? Come on.
(moving closer to her)
How much do you want? I’ll give it to
you. Hmmm...

GABRIELLE starts out of the room.

GABRIELLE
You’ve gone fucking mad...

SAM
...You could always sell those fucking
things on your ears. I mean they’re only
worth a much as a small car!

GABRIELLE races upstairs.

GABRIELLE
Fuck you, you piece of shit.

SAM
(yelling after her)
They just make you look DESPERATE anyway!

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM- NIGHT

SAM enters as GABRIELLE pack things in the ensuit
bathroom.

SAM
What do you know about movies anyway?
Your not exactly a creative artist...

GABRIELLE
You know that film is going to be huge.
And you fucked it up!

SAM
Thanks for the support. You really are a
supportive little woman aren’t you?

GABRIELLE carries a make-up bag into the bedroom and puts
it in an overnight bag
GABRIELLE
I don’t believe in rewarding failure.

SAM
(laughing)
Oh right. Because you’re such an achiever.

GABRIELLE
(packing)
All you can do is shit. That shit TV show.

SAM
(indignant)
So you do think it’s shit...but I can’t quit?! Well, its obvious what your priorities are...

GABRIELLE starts out of the room.

GABRIELLE
Fuck you Sam.
(stopping,cold)
Don’t think I won’t be getting my share of this. And you know...you may never work again after this disaster.
(mocking, hands to her face)
Oh no Sam...you’ll be an out of work actor! Like your son.

GABRIELLE turns and marches out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. ADAMS HALLWAY- NIGHT
Hobbling in heels with her bags, GABRIELLE shuffles to the front door.

SAM comes bounding down the stairs.

SAM
You are a beast aren’t you? What’s your problem with my son? What do you care? The kid just wanted some help for Christ’s sake. I know I’m an old bastard, but aren’t you meant to soften me a bit?
GABRIELLE
(opening the door, her back
to Sam)
It’s not my job.

SAM
(yelling)
No, you don’t have a job!

GABRIELLE trots out to the driveway. SAM follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. ADAMS DRIVEWAY- NIGHT

SAM
You’re worse than me. You’re an animal.

GABRIELLE opens the door to the CL 500.

SAM (CONT’D)
.running over
What do you think you’re doing?
(grabbing her bag)
You’re not taking MY car.

GABRIELLE
(struggling)
Get off me! HELP! HELP!

SAM
Shut up.

GABRIELLE lets go of the bag. SAM, rearing back, SMACKS
his face against the open car door.

SAM drops the bag and CLUTCHES his face.

SAM (CONT’D)
Jesus Christ!

BLOOD is coming from his mouth.

GABRIELLE picks up the bag looking at SAM. She gets
behind the wheel and shuts the car door.

SAM holds his jaw, STUNNED as the CL pulls out of the
driveway.
INT. JOHN AND CATHERINE’S APARTMENT— NIGHT

JOHN is standing in the dark hallway, facing one way, listening the other, unable to move.

CATHERINE (O.S.)
(calling out)
Maybe I should just have water...

JOHN stands silently.

CATHERINE (CONT’D)
No. Bring the ice cream...

JOHN takes a step.

CATHERINE (CONT’D)
But I feel sick! Just bring me a cup of tea.

JOHN starts for the kitchen.

CATHERINE (CONT’D)
(yelling for John to hear)
TEA!

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN— NIGHT

Making tea, JOHN stares at kitchen counter.

CATHERINE (O.S.)
John?

JOHN
Yeah...

CATHERINE (O.S.)
(carefully polite)
Can you go and get me a diet coke?

JOHN sighs. His phone starts RINGING.

CATHERINE (O.S.) (CONT’D)
(louder)
John, your phone is ringing.

JOHN
(walking to phone, calling out)
I know...

Picking it up, the PHONE reads: CALLING- THE GREAT SAM ADAMS.

JOHN lets it ring.

CATHERINE (O.S.)

Answer it!

JOHN put the phone in his pocket.

He takes the freshly brewed tea up to CATHERINE in the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM- NIGHT

There is a warm GLOW in the room. With an tired smile SAM walks the tea over to a very pregnant CATHERINE lying on the bed. She is surrounded by magazines watching TV

CATHERINE

Who was that?

SAM

(softly)

There have your tea.

CATHERINE

(with a smile)

But I don’t want tea. I want a diet coke. And I think I’d like a hot dog as funny as it sounds.

JOHN’S phone rings again. Picking it out of his pocket JOHN does not answer.

CATHERINE (CONT’D)

What are you doing? Just answer it.

JOHN

Look I don’t want to...

CATHERINE

I feel sick OK! That noise is driving me crazy...just ANSWER IT!

JOHN moans and answers the phone, walking out of the room.
INT. HALLWAY/LOUNGE ROOM- NIGHT

JOHN
Hello...hello?

CUT TO:

EXT. POOL- NIGHT

SAM is in his bathers by the pool. With the phone to his ear and a cigarette dangling from his lips, he is preoccupied with filing a whisky glass.

SAM
(finally hearing John’s voice)
John! Johnny my boy. How are you?

CUT TO:

INT. LOUNGE- NIGHT

From the dark hallway, JOHN enters the dimly lit lounge.

JOHN
What do you want?

CUT TO:

EXT. POOL- NIGHT

Very drunk, SAM tries to sit up and compose himself.

SAM
I thought you might want to come and have a drink with me...

Through the PHONE comes JOHN’S voice.

JOHN (ON THE PHONE)
Surprisingly I don’t want to come an have a drink with you. OK? I’ve got to go...

SAM’S face has dropped as he looks on the verge of tears.
SAM
(small voice)
You know I loved you and your mother
don’t you?

CUT TO:

INT. LOUNGE- NIGHT

JOHN is silent. He looks down.

He regathers himself.

JOHN
What? What are you talking about?
(a beat)
Well why would I know that? I’ve never
really seen you. Generally if you never
see someone you don’t assume you’re
really important to them. No.

CUT TO:

EXT. POOL- NIGHT

SAM is hunched over. He looks a wreck. Almost naked,
cigarette burning in his fingers.

SAM
(rambling)
It wasn’t that I didn’t want to...I just
couldn’t. It couldn’t be like it was for
me. I wanted you to be happy.
(a beat)
One Christmas I took my brother’s car,
you know, I was just borrowing it. I was
young. But I rolled the fucking thing
and...

CUT TO:

INT. LOUNGE- NIGHT

JOHN furrows his brow.

SAM (ON THE PHONE)
...I couldn’t get out. I was stuck there
for hours. And my father never came, and
they had to cut me out, but he went mad
and I...
JOHN
(cutting in)
Sam. Sam! What are you talking about?

CUT TO:

EXT. POOL- NIGHT
SAM rubs his eyes and takes a breath.

SAM
I just couldn’t do it. It’s not that I didn’t love you. I had to work. I could only do it on my own. I had to be on my own.

CUT TO:

INT. LOUNGE- NIGHT

JOHN
Yeah, well that’s great. Think what it was like for me!
(a beat)
Just me and her. And you’d sent her fucking crazy. You don’t think I loved you? The only time I’d see you was on the TV, at some other kids’ house.

CUT TO:

EXT. POOL- NIGHT
SAM wells up.

SAM
I’m a shit. I’m a fucking piece of shit...

JOHN (ON THE PHONE)
I don’t want hear this OK...?

SAM
I’m sorry John. I was scared.
(a beat)
I’m scared.

CUT TO:
INT. LOUNGE - NIGHT

JOHN
Well so am I. But you gotta deal with it.
I’m going to have a child, and it looks like your going to miss its life as well.

CUT TO:

EXT. POOL - NIGHT

SAM
I’m sorry John.
(two beats)
John...John.

SAM lets the phone drop and slumps, sobbing on his banana lounge.

EXT. STUDIO PARKING LOT - DAY

The banged up E 500 has a little trouble parking.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

SAM walks onto the set. He is dishevelled, but could get away with looking casual. He is HUNGOVER.

DIRECTOR
Great. Sam. You’re finally here. OK everyone...

BILL the hat guy walks up to SAM holding the GLOWING bell-shaped Captain’s hat, outstretched.

SAM
(calming)
No Bill. There will be no need for that insane hat.

SAM takes the hat from a nervous BILL.

SAM (CONT’D)
(announcing)
From today I will no longer be your Captain as I am leaving the show.

No one says anything.
SAM (CONT’D)
So thank you to those of you who were pleasant.
   (Turning)
Like Bill here.
   (Taking him in)
A little odd maybe, but fairly pleasant.
   (Raising his voice)
He didn’t try to fuck me at every turn
like some other little tiny people around here.

The DIRECTOR is anxiously looking around. Still no one
says a word.

SAM (CONT’D)
OK. I’m done. See ya later!

Walking off set SUSIE walks right up to SAM. SAM sees
JESSE hanging back behind her, holding a muffin.

SUSIE
Sam...

SAM
(to Jesse)
Here...
   (throwing the hat at him)
Maybe you can wear this...
   (baby voice)
...You’ll like it...it glows!

JESSE walks over.

JESSE
(to Susie)
He can’t do this. We can’t shoot the show.

SUSIE
(serious)
Sam. You cannot do this. You have a contract.

SAM
Sorry.
   (Pointing at JESSE)
I’m not working with THAT. And I don’t
care Susie, OK.

JESSE takes a bite of his muffin.
SAM (CONT’D)
(to Jesse)
Choke on it.

INT. E 500- DAY

MELISSA ETHERIDGE’S ‘BRING ME SOME WATER’ plays on the stereo.

SAM is on the phone as he drives.

SAM
...Well I just have Jim.
(Pause)
Well you have to deal with it.
(Abruptly)
I’m her. I’m here.

INT. JIM CAVARONE’S OFFICES- DAY

JIM looks down at a handful of PAPERS, as he accompanies SAM down the hallway from his office.

JIM
So I don’t know. I’ll get Peter onto it.
I think because of the principal contract conditions we may be able to break even...

SAM is unfazed. His face is glazed, almost smiling.

SAM
And what about this meeting?

JIM shuffles the papers.

JIM
So it’s not great. And it’s barely an offer, I mean you can’t just demand a...

SAM
Fine. But it’s a meeting. I need to do something.
(Loosing it)
I’m not going to let that little shit make me look...

They stop at the end of the hallway.
JIM  
(calming Sam)  
OK, OK. It’s for this thing called  
’Babysitting the FBI’.  

SAM  
(positive)  
Great. I can do that.  

JIM  
(frowning)  
Well.  
(a beat)  
So you’re meeting a producer, Mitch  
Kaplan and your co-star.  
(Holding out paper)  
Now here’s the address. Now this guy is  
like a martial arts guy. He does action  
shows. It’s his first movie. To be frank  
it sounds…  

SAM  
(grabbing the paper)  
Great.  

JIM  
…terrible.  

SAM hightails it out of the office.  

SAM  
(calling back)  
Thanks buddy.  

EXT. POOL- DAY  
In his bathers at the end of the pool, SAM vigorously  
downs a mouthful of scotch and DIVES in.  

INT. JOHN’S CAR- EVENING  
CATHERINE holds her stomach in the passenger seat. Her  
eyes closed, she tries to breathe.  

JOHN looks anxiously between CATHERINE and the road.  

JOHN  
Just try to Zen out. OK. Just breath and  
we’ll be there before you know it.  

JOHN looks back to the road and breaks.
JOHN (CONT’D)
Arrgh! You stupid fuck!

CATHARINE
JOHN!

JOHN
Sorry. Sorry baby. The hospital is like right here. Just hang on.

INT. BEDROOM- EVENING

SAM crosses the room, HUMMING, towel drying his hair. In a white dress shirt and pants he discards the WATCH JESSE sent him, grabbing his wallet and keys.

INT. E 500- EVENING

The sky outside is deep orange. Alannah Myles ‘BLACK VELVET’ plays on the stereo.

SAM signs along loudly as he drives.

  SAM
  (eyes closed, singing)
  Black velvet in his little boys smile...

SAM opens his eyes and looks out of the window.

  SAM (CONT’D)
  ...slow southern style...

SAM’S eyes narrow as he sees a MAN walking quickly up a SIDE STREET.

  SAM (CONT’D)
  John?

EXT. STREET- EVENING

SAM runs across the road from the E 500.

He slows as he rounds the corner of the SIDE STREET.

The MAN is pacing ahead in the distance. SAM follows.

  SAM
  (calling out)
  John.
The MAN turns into the doorway of a building.

SAM quickens his pace up the street.

EXT. BUILDING DOORWAY- EVENING

SAM stands in front of the building. The street is oddly deserted.

The GLASS DOORS read: ‘MERCY STREET HOSPITAL’.

SAM enters.

INT. MERCY STREET HOSPITAL- NIGHT

There is not a soul about as SAM walks into the hospital.

Walking past the vacant RECEPTION, SAM heads down the main passageway.

He passes an OPEN door to a EXAMINATION ROOM.

Sitting in the room, pressing cotton wool to her arm is the BLACK WOMAN.

BLACK WOMAN
Hey baby! What are you doing here?

SAM is startled. He looks around the room and up and down the hall. He doesn’t respond.

BLACK WOMAN (CONT’D)
I’m just getting my shots, you know.

She puts a JELLY in her mouth.

BLACK WOMAN (CONT’D)
Its good though, they give you these to keep your blood sugar up. Taste pretty good. I haven’t seen you in a while, honey, where you been?

SAM
(focussing)
You crashed my car.

BLACK WOMAN
(remembering)
Oh shit. Yeah. Hey I’m really sorry..
A NURSE in a pristine white uniform appears next to SAM in the passageway.

NURSE
I’m sorry Sir. The hospital is closed.
You’ll have to be leaving.

SAM
(scoffing)
What do you mean its closed? There is a patient right here.

The BLACK WOMAN eats her JELLIES.

SAM (CONT’D)
I’m looking for my son. I think his wife must be in labour.

NURSE
(cold)
Sir. I have told you the hospital is closed. Please. You are not supposed to be here.

SAM
(laughing)
I don’t understand. Hospitals don’t close. There are patients...

The NURSE walks back to reception.

SAM (CONT’D)
...being treated.

SAM looks back down the passageway.

At the very end he sees the MAN he followed. The MAN turns into a ROOM.

SAM looks behind him, where the NURSE is on the PHONE at the RECEPTION DESK.

SAM ventures down the passage.

SAM (CONT’D)
John. JOHN!

SAM approaches the DOOR at the end of the passage. It is CLOSED.

SAM OPENS the door.
There are four perfectly made BEDS, BEDSIDE TABLES and CHAIRS.

The ROOM is EMPTY.

INT. DELIVERY ROOM- NIGHT

DOCTORS and NURSES rush about as CATHERINE is in labour.

JOHN watches on, trying to stay out of the way. As he moves forward to hold CATHERINE’S hand, his PHONE starts RINGING.

DELIVERY NURSE
Can you take that outside? We cannot have phones in here.

JOHN
I won’t answer it.

DELIVERY NURSE
Please go and turn it off.

CATHERINE is getting LOUDER.

JOHN walks across the room. He pulls his PHONE and desperately turns it off.

He goes back to CATHERINE’S side, where she is WHALING.

DOCTOR
OK. Here we go Catherine. I need you to push.

(a beat)
OK? Come on. Come on! Push!

CATHERINE
I can’t...

DELIVERY NURSE
Come on Catherine. You’re almost there.

CATHERINE STRAINS as JOHN grips her hand.

JOHN
That’s it baby. You’re doing fucking great.

DOCTOR
Keep going, keep going, keep going...
EXT. MERCY STREET HOSPITAL— NIGHT

Outside the GLASS DOORS, SAM pulls his PHONE from his ear examining the screen with concern.

The STREET is DARK now. SAM walks.

The STREET is unfamiliar. Walking, SAM can no longer see the MAIN ROAD where he parked his CAR.

SAM is LOST.

He stops. There is a BAR with a sign that reads: ‘THE RED BAR’.

SAM eyes the sign. He pulls the PAPER JIM gave him from his pocket. The PAPER reads: ‘Mitch Kaplan— producer. Aaron Prendlehauser— action lead. Drinks. The Red Bar. 8pm.’

SAM looks at his watch. It is 8.39pm.

INT. THE RED BAR— NIGHT

The bar’s name is becomes clear as SAM enters crimson lit den.

The bar is all but empty. The BARTENDER cleans glasses as SAM peers around the empty tables.

He comes across a face at a table.

AARON

Sam!

SAM

(unsure)

Mitch?

AARON

(standing)

No. Hey I’m Aaron Prendlehauser. Yeah, Mitch isn’t going to be able to make it.

SAM

Sorry I’m so late.

AARON

Yeah, well I hung around and had a few drinks in case. But I had given up.
SAM

Sorry.

AARON

(eager)
Sit down I’ll get you a drink.

SAM

(relaxing, smiling)
Thanks.

CUT TO:

INT. THE RED BAR- NIGHT

SAM and AARON sit at a table, each with a BEER and WHISKY. AARON has several empty glasses.

AARON

So most people know me as ‘Xtreme’. I did this show...you probably saw it...I was like this street assasin who took out criminals...anyway the name stuck...

SAM

(bored)
Right.

AARON

But doing movies, you know I use my real name. Because, you know...I want to be taken seriously.

SAM

Yeah.

(sipping)
So what is this film we’re doing about? Its called ‘Babysitters’ or something?

AARON

‘Babysitting the FBI’. Yeah. So we’re two agents. I guess I’m the skilled, fighting one and your the...older one. And we go undercover, with this family, and we’re with the kid each day right. But like...ahhh...he like ends up babysiting us.

AARON laughs. SAM SQUINTS with PAIN.
SAM
(alarmed)
There’s a child? Who’s, what? The main character?

AARON
Yeah, yeah. I guess its like a Home Alone thing.
(dumb laugh)
Sounds pretty funny, right?

AARON DRAINS his BEER. SAM watches him, putting his hand to his head.

AARON finishes and smiles at SAM. SAM forces a polite smile.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM- NIGHT

JOHN sits next to CATHERINE’S bed, where she lies unconscious.

A NURSE enters.

JOHN
(standing)
She’s going to be OK, right?

NURSE
Yes, Mr. Adams. She lost a lot of blood and she’s very weak. But she’s stable. She’ll be out for a while.

JOHN rubs his eyes.

NURSE (CONT’D)
I assume you will wait with her.

JOHN nods.

NURSE (CONT’D)
Will I bring the baby in for you?

JOHN
Can you do that? I mean, doesn’t it have to go to the mother first? For like its first memory and stuff?

NURSE
(smiling)
I think it’ll be OK. Your daughter has seen quite a few faces already.
The NURSE exits.

JOHN sits down next to CATHERINE.

The NURSE returns carrying the COCOONED BABY. She hands it to JOHN.

JOHN looks down at the tiny, sleeping face.

    JOHN
    Well, hello there.

INT. THE RED BAR-NIGHT

AARON laughs loudly as he drunkenly falls about the table.

SAM stares, blankly.

    AARON
    So this girl is like taking off her pants...
    (giggling)
    And I’m like, don’t you wanna go to my place first?

    SAM
    (pained grin)
    Look Aaron...

    AARON
    (Sam’s voice grabbing his attention)
    Yeah, do you want to party tonight? We could go out. There’s a strip club near here I can get us in for free. They know ‘Xtreme’! We could get some coke or something...whatever you want...

    SAM
    Thanks Aaron. I’m going to have to pass.

    AARON
    (annoyed)
    Oh come on man.

    SAM
    (standing)
    Sorry, I really have to get home.

SAM walks past AARON, offering his hand.
AARON grabs it HARD, pulling SAM into him.

AARON
(aggressive)
Come party with me man. What’s the problem?

SAM
(laughing)
I’m sorry. OK? I really do have to go.

AARON grabs SAM with his other hand, wobbling on his feet

AARON
(between clenched teeth)
Fucking too good for me or something?

SAM
(snapping)
Hey get your fucking hands off me.

SAM breaks free and AARON stumbles backwards.

SAM (CONT’D)
Jesus Christ.

SAM head for the door.

AARON
Faggot!

EXT. THE RED BAR- STREET- NIGHT

SAM paces quickly down the street.

After a while he is still unable to find the main road. Lost in back streets, SAM turns down an alleyway.

Half way down he hears a bottle SMASH behind him. A figure appears at the entrance to the alley. The figure starts moving down the alley. SAM starts running.

Hysterical, SAM’S breathing becomes a CRY. He runs faster, looking for an exit, but cannot find one.

SAM HURTLES to the end of the alleyway, and comes out onto a main road.

Looking back, the is not immediately apparent.

There is a sole TAXI parked on the other side of the road.
Out of breath SAM mops his brow and draws in deep. Looking for traffic, he crosses the road to the TAXI.

SAM hops in the back seat.

TAXI DRIVER
Where to?

SAM is peering though the back windscreen. He looks back to the driver.

SAM
(wide eyed)
Ahhh. Home. I want to go home.

EXT. ADAMS DRIVEWAY- NIGHT

SAM walks down the driveway with an OVERNIGHT BAG in his hand and his PHONE to his ear.

He stops at the gates. The TAXI, brake lights GLOWING, is parked across the street.

SAM
Hey Jim, it’s SAM. Look, thanks for all your help lately. I, ahhh...I’m not going to do that movie. Which I think would have been your advice anyway. (Sam looks over at the Taxi, a beat) I’m going to take a holiday for a while so, I might not be in contact. I call you.

SAM walks across to the TAXI. He gets in the back door.

The TAXI pulls away.

EXT. A TROPICAL FISHING TOWN- DAY

A couple of 50’s cars drive the sandy roads, past the market stalls.

Under clear blue skies a TUGBOAT leaves the palm lined shore.
EXT. TUGBOAT- DAY

A SMALL, DARK MAN stands at the helm as the TUGBOAT CHUGS out to sea.

CUT TO:

EXT. TUGBOAT- DAY

The SMALL, DARK MAN drops the anchor off the side and walks to the back of the boat.

SAM, in t-shirt, shorts, shoes without socks, is leaning over the edge of the boat DRAGGING in a FISHING NET.

The MAN helps, pulling the other side of the NET.

DUMPING the contents on the boat floor, the two men look confused.

SAM
That’s odd Manny. I hope someone’s not fucking you.

MANNY
(shaking his head)
Two to go.

They start to pull in the next net

As they get it half way out of the water, it is clear it is laden with FISH.

SAM
(smiling)
That’s more like it.

MANNY
Sometimes they just don’t get ‘em Sam.

They dump the on the floor.

The two pull in the last net, also full of fish.

They dump that net.

SAM
(excited)
OK, Man-Man! Get us back to shore.
MANNY heads to the helm while SAM starts sorting the fish into large CONTAINERS.

CUT TO:

EXT. TUGBOAT- DAY

As the boat pulls into shore we see SAM has stacked all the fish neatly into the containers.

He jumps off the boat into the SHALLOW water and helps another MAN on the beach pull the boat onto the sand.

SAM waves at MANNY on the boat as he heads off up the beach.

EXT. BAR- DAY

With the ocean in the background, SAM sits in the open air of the ramshackle bar.

Having changed his t-shirt, SAM scribbles in a small not book.

He looks up as a WOMAN puts a bottle of beer on his table.

SAM
Thank you.

SAM takes a sip of his beer.

He takes out his PHONE out of his pocket and ponders it.

It takes some fiddling to turn it on, before it begins a series of MESSAGE BEEPS.

SAM sips his beer as he listens to the messages.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAR- DAY

SAM stands away from the bar, looking out at the ocean, phone at his ear.

SAM
Hi Jim, it’s Sam.
(a beat)
Hi. I got your message.
(MORE)
SAM (CONT’D)
It was great to hear from you.
(pause)
Yeah it’s been a while. I’ve been doing this and that. A Bit of fishing, you know.

SAM smiles.

SAM (CONT’D)
To be honest I didn’t if I’d ever hear from you again. I couldn’t really believe it when I heard your message.
(a beat)
Yeah, I’m interested. It sounds perfect. I think I’m ready to come back. When do I need to be back?
(pause)
Yeah, I’m in. I just want to say thanks for all you’ve done. I think I would have been finished if it weren’t for you.
(a beat)
Thanks.

SAM ends the call.

INT. JOHN AND CATHERINE’S APARTMENT- DAY

CATHERINE sits on the sofa with their BABY at her breast, as JOHN makes sandwiches in the KITCHEN.

JOHN
(deadpan)
Look, I’m not one of these guys who has a problem with public breast feeding...just not when I’m eating OK?

CATHERINE
(slight smile)
We’re not in public.

JOHN
Well at least offer me a go.

CATHERINE
It’s not really milk, you know. It tastes like melon juice...apparently.

JOHN
(concentrating on the sandwiches)
Do you want mayo?
(pause)
Mayo?
CATHERINE
Hello...

JOHN
(still making his sandwiches)
Yes hello. Do you want mayo?

SAM spins around to see CATHERINE looking up the hallway.

CATHERINE
(wide eyed to John)
There is someone here to see you.

JOHN licks a finger and rubs his hands on the back of his jeans as he walks to the hallway.

SAM is standing in the open front doorway.

JOHN
(acting relaxed)
Hi.

SAM
Hi.
(Waving past John to Catherine)
Hi.

JOHN reaches the door.

JOHN
What do you want? I don’t really want to get in to...

SAM
(pleasant)
No, I won’t stay long. I just wanted to drop this off...

SAM produces a LARGE WRAPPED GIFT from behind his back.

SAM (CONT’D)
(peering around John)
...and say hello to the little one...

SAM fills JOHN’S arms with the GIFT as he steps inside the apartment.

SAM leads JOHN down the hallway, brandishing a CAMERA.
SAM (CONT’D)
(turning back to John)
I was hoping it would be OK to get a
photo. I got one of these digital
cameras.

JOHN
That’s pretty much all there is these
days.

SAM
I know I’ve just never needed a camera
before.

SAM and JOHN congregate around CATHERINE cradling the
BABY.

SAM (CONT’D)
Hi. Sam Adams.
(Smiling)
Its very nice to meet you two.

CATHERINE
Yes, hi. I’m Catherine and this is...
(a beat, to John)
Well, there’s still quite a few aren’t
there?
(Laughing)

JOHN
Yeah, well. I guess Macy will probably
stick.

SAM
(to baby)
Hi Macy.

JOHN
What is this giant thing?

SAM
Oh it’s a pram. Meant to be a good one. I
left the receipt in there in case you’ve
got one.

JOHN shifts uneasily.

SAM (CONT’D)
Look I better get moving.
(To Catherine)
Would it be OK if I got a photo
holding...
CATHERINE

Oh sure.

She hands him BABY MACY as SAM nervously hands her his camera.

As SAM adjusts to holding a baby, CATHERINE struggles with the CAMERA. She hands it to JOHN.

JOHN sighs. He bends down to take the picture.

SAM is wide eyed, too eager to form a smile.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN AND CATHERINE’S APARTMENT– DAY

SAM walks out the front door, followed by JOHN.

SAM

Thanks John. Congratulations.

He waves again to CATHERINE and MACY down the hall.

SAM (CONT’D)

Bye.

(to John)

Alright. Thanks again, it...

(a beat)

...well I’m grateful. Maybe we’ll I can come around again sometime.

JOHN

Maybe. Maybe you can call first.

SAM

(smiling)

Yes. I know, I’m sorry. I will do that.

SAM walks down the stairs as JOHN stands in the doorway.

INT. HOTEL POOL– DAY

With the large indoor pool to himself, SAM finishes a lap and hops out to dry himself.

His hair is shorter.
INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR- DAY

IN his regular t-shirt and pants, shoes without socks, SAM makes his way to a room with double doors.

INT. HOTEL ROOM- DAY

A lavish suit, SAM is greeted by a MAN with a CLIPBOARD. She directs him to two chairs by the window where a DARK HAIRED WOMAN is sitting.

WOMAN
(standing)
Hi Sam I’m, Mary Anders.

SAM
(sitting)
Hi Mary.

MAN
(leaning over)
Would you like anything to drink?

SAM
Ahh. Yes. An orange juice is that OK?

MAN
Absolutely.

The MAN steps away.

SAM
Sorry.
(Smiling, wincing)
Could I get some marmalade toast?

MAN
Of course.

SAM
(to Mary)
Would you like some?

MARY
(to Man)
No. I’m fine.
(pause)
(MORE)
OK. So I’ve heard you had a ball making this movie...

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM- DAY

SAM’S marmalade remains sit on the table next to them.

MARY is laughing, as SAM flails his arms.

SAM
...so I have no idea where I am. I’m totally lost and then this guy is chasing me...

MARY
(laughing)
What he’s chasing you now?

SAM
(smiling)
Well, I don’t know.

MARY
OK apart from being chased by potential co-stars, what do you do in your spare time? What takes Sam Adam’s interest?

SAM
(shaking his head)
Oh no I’m very boring. I swim a bit I guess.

(eagerly reaching for his pocket)
But you know what...here.

SAM pulls out a large leather wallet.

Opening the wallet, it is empty apart from a single PHOTO he removes.

SAM (CONT’D)
Here. This is my interest. That is me and my granddaughter Macy. How about that hey?

MARY
Yeah. She’s cute.

SAM
She’s cute alright. Yes my son John’s little girl.

(MORE)
SAM (CONT'D)
(excited)
He took the photo.

MARY
Oh OK. Well thank you Sam.

SAM and MARY stand up and shake hands.

As they go to leave the MAN comes up to SAM.

MAN
Mr. Adams we have the other press coming through in a minute. So if you could just wait there.

SAM
Sit here. Oh OK. Sure.

The MAN escorts MARY out, leaving SAM alone on his chair.

SAM looks at the photo, putting it back in the wallet, and in his pocket.

He sits waiting.

He looks out the window.

THE END