

THE LAVENDER MAFIA

"Humble Beginnings"

(Pilot)

By Luke Yankee

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Registered WGAW

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. ABANDONED SERVICE ROAD - NIGHT

A black, moonless night with a few random stars. An idling RED MASERATI purrs seductively nearby. The swollen trunk of a FALLEN TREE is dragged into the middle of the road. The unseen dragger GRUNTS and PANTS under its weight.

NICK RALSTON (late 30's), once movie-star handsome, finishes placing the heavy branch. He wears a tuxedo shirt and trousers, but no jacket. There is BLOOD and SWEAT on his face. He stops to catch his breath and wipe his brow on his sleeve. He's also been crying.

Nick gets back into the car. Slumped in the passenger seat is a DEAD BODY OF A YOUNG MAN wearing a BLOOD STAINED, WHITE DINNER JACKET. His face is obscured in the shadows. Holding his breath, Nick lifts the body into the driver's seat.

With the driver's door still open, Nick carefully sits on the lap of the dead man, trying not to get sick from the smell. Nick FLOORS IT and jumps out of the car just before impact. He brushes himself off and examines the car. A smashed windshield and mangled hood. Perfect.

He lights a Lucky Strike to steady his nerves. Nick shakes and sobs, almost convulsively. He drops the cigarette and VOMITS by the side of the car. He looks back at the body.

NICK

Stupid, son of a bitch.

Wiping his mouth on his sleeve, he walks toward the main road.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE**CHYRON: TWO YEARS EARLIER - JUNE 1958**

EXT. HOLLYWOOD OFFICE BUILDING - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The white-hot California sun blazes down on a nondescript, office building on Sunset Boulevard. A few matted palm fronds barely soften the glare.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Nick and MURRAY (45), an uptight, talent coordinator who wishes he were a producer, sit opposite each other at a desk. Murray hands a HEADSHOT to Nick. He doesn't take it.

MURRAY

I don't think so.

NICK

Why not?

MURRAY

Not what we're looking for.

NICK

Are you kidding? He's perfect! He's featured in the new Widmark film.

MURRAY

I heard you the first three times.

NICK

What's wrong with him?

Murray hesitates before answering.

MURRAY

Too light.

NICK

Excuse me?

MURRAY

You know Arthur Gray won't work with any cocksuckers.

NICK

In the first place, I would never represent a homo! In the second place, Scott Guy is engaged to be married!

MURRAY

Like that means anything in this town? Scott Guy is too queer for this part.

Murray holds the photo out to Nick again.

NICK

You'll eat those words, Murray.

MURRAY

Nick, if anybody's gonna take you seriously, you gotta get some better clients.

NICK

Yeah, sure. I'll just go out to the movie star tree behind my bungalow and pick 'em off like grapefruits.

MURRAY

Too bad you couldn't land someone like Stephanie Fletcher. People might return your calls.

NICK

She's been with her agent since before she could walk.

BERNICE

She dumped him last week. Doesn't want to be with a kid's agent anymore. You didn't see it in *Variety*?

NICK

Of course I did! I was just waiting for the right moment. Wanted to give her a little breathing room.

MURRAY

Right.

INT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Nick walks to his car. SCOTT GUY (25), an attractive, boy-next-door type, waits anxiously.

SCOTT

Well? What did he say?

NICK

Are you kidding? He was crazy about you!

SCOTT

Really?

NICK

Oh yeah. But it all comes down to how they cast the girl. Said he'd get back to me next week.

SCOTT

You really think I'll get it?

NICK

In the bag, kiddo.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - DAY

Nick sits at his desk piled high with unread scripts and unopened photos as he sorts through the mail. POV Nick as he flips through the envelopes: Final Notice. Second Notice. Disconnect Notice. He puts them in the drawer.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - RECEPTION AREA - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Nick sidles up to the desk of his secretary, BERNICE WILDER (28), as she files contracts. Attractive, tough, takes no prisoners. Nick's voice oozes honey.

NICK

Bernice, that color is stunning on you.

BERNICE

Time and a half.

NICK

You haven't even heard the offer yet!

BERNICE

I'm sure it's a doozy.

She turns her back on Nick and returns to her filing.

NICK

I need you to go with me to the premiere of the new Dick Widmark movie at Graumann's on the 18th.

BERNICE

After six? On a Friday? Double time.

NICK

Do you know how many girls would
kill for an opportunity like this?

BERNICE

So, call one of them.

NICK

And I'll need a date for Scotty.
What about that roommate of yours?
The one with the big rack?

BERNICE

Myra. What's in it for her?

NICK

She gets to go to a premiere as the
date of Scott Guy, Hollywood's
hottest new star.

Bernice SNORTS.

BERNICE

Fifty bucks.

NICK

Twenty-five.

BERNICE

Thirty-five. Plus dinner.

NICK

Alright, you're killing me!

BERNICE

By the way, your hottest new star's
father called. He thinks your
kiting his son's check.

NICK

Everybody's a critic. Pay him
today.

BERNICE

With what? You're overdrawn again.

NICK

And get Stephanie Fletcher on the
phone.

BERNICE

Very funny, Uncle Milty.

NICK

We worked together as kids. Haven't spoken to her in years, though. She's looking for a new agent.

BERNICE

My sources say she already passed on four of the biggest reps in town.

NICK

Your "sources"?

BERNICE

We assistants have a network of our own, you know.

The PHONE RINGS. Bernice answers it.

BERNICE (CONT'D)

Nick Ralston's office. This is she. What? When? Can I speak to him? Tell him I'll be there as soon as I can.

Bernice hangs up the phone and reaches for her purse.

NICK

What's wrong?

BERNICE

It's Joey.

NICK

How bad?

BERNICE

Bad. Can I take an early lunch?

NICK

I'll drive you.

BERNICE

What about your one o'clock?

NICK

I'll reschedule. Meet me at the car.

Bernice quickly exits. Nick reaches into the desk and pulls out a PAPER BAG, then bolts out the door.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - COMMON ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nick and Bernice scan the room and see JOEY (17), a tough punk with LEG BRACES. He lies in a hospital bed looking at a Playboy centerfold and smoking a cigarette. His knees are heavily BANDAGED and his nose is swollen.

JOEY

Well, look what the cat dragged in.

NICK

Hey, Joey. How's it goin', champ?

JOEY

Hiya Nick.

BERNICE

Sweetie, how did you fall?

JOEY

See that little squirt?

Joy points to an adorable, FIVE-YEAR-OLD BOY in a WHEELCHAIR.

JOEY (CONT'D)

I was put in charge of him.
It was doughnut day and the kids
who get there first get the
chocolate ones. I moved too fast
and my braces locked.

Bernice's heart melts. She kneels down and examines Joey's bandaged knees and swollen face.

BERNICE

Are you in a lot of pain?

JOEY

Only when I breathe.

NICK

Here, kid. I brought you a care
package.

Nick hands Joey a paper bag. He pulls out a carton of Lucky Strikes.

JOEY

(smiling)

Who says Christmas only comes once
a year?

BERNICE

Did they give you some medication?

JOEY

Yeah, but it makes me so loopy, I can't even pee straight.

BERNICE

I'll talk to the doctor.

Bernice exits. Joey examines the carton of Luckies.

JOEY

This looks like its been taped shut.

NICK

(under his breath)

Open it carefully. There's actually four packs of Luckies, a pint of Johnny Walker and a couple of condoms.

JOEY

My fairy Godfather! Or should I say, "My Godfather, the fairy?"

NICK

Watch it, punk!

JOEY

Any conquests lately?

NICK

Been a dry gulch.

JOEY

That's not like you. What about that waiter at The Brown Derby?

NICK

Went back to his wife.

JOEY

There's no accounting for taste. What about your clients? Sampled any of their talent?

NICK

I try not to shit where I eat.

JOEY

If you don't fuck your friends, your enemies will.

NICK

Where'd you hear that?

JOEY

From you.

NICK

I'm trying to woo Stephanie Fletcher.

JOEY

I'd like to woo her. She's quite a tomato. How you gonna make her think you're a big shot?

NICK

I'll ask Vincent to let me use his place for a shindig.

JOEY

You can guilt an ex into anything.

NICK

So, how'd you really fall?

JOEY

(pointing)

See that nurse? The one with the ass like a what-not shelf?

NICK

Nice.

JOEY

I was boffing her in the linen closet. Just as she was taking me to paradise, the fuckin' janitor comes in and slugs me with a push broom.

NICK

Bastard.

JOEY

That's what made my snout look like a cross between Durante and Dumbo. The knees really did lock when I was getting that chocolate doughnut for pee-wee.

Bernice re-enters.

BERNICE

They're going to change your dosage. I'll come by tomorrow after work.

JOEY

Okay sis. Love you. Thanks for the
Luckies, Uncle Nick!

NICK

Don't smoke too much, kid. It'll
stunt your growth.

Nick and Joey exchange a knowing smile. As Nick and Bernice start to exit, they see a CHILD SCREAMING as he gets an injection.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - EMPTY BED - CONTINUOUS

As the child continues to wail, Nick pauses in front of an empty CHILD'S BED WITH RESTRAINTS.

FLASHBACK - DARK BEDROOM - DAY

Eight-year-old Nick is strapped to a chaise lounge with a belt. He is face down, screaming. A shadowy figure stands over him and shoves a wadded-up SOCK in his mouth.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

Disturbed by the memory, Nick stops at a DRINKING FOUNTAIN to get some water. Getting too close, he sprays water all over himself.

NICK

Son of a bitch!

A few nearby CHILDREN snicker at the outburst.

EXT. STREET OFF THE BOULEVARD - DAY

Nick and Bernice get out of his new, red Maserati. As they enter the building, Nick spots two attractive YOUNG MEN in oil-stained, muscle T-shirts fussing under the hood of their well-worn convertible parked across the street. Nick nods to Bernice, who returns to the office, smirking. He approaches the car.

JAMIE CHILENSKAS (25) has the kind of looks that appeal to women, men and small dogs...and he knows it. He speaks to GEORGE LANKEVITCH (23), a guy with a kind face and the quiet affability anyone would want in a best friend. Finishing the car repairs, they peel off their sweaty T-shirts to reveal very impressive chests.

NICK

Hey boys. You gotta watch that kind
of behavior around here.

Jamie and George stare at him questioningly.

NICK (CONT'D)

This isn't Muscle Beach. Some of these Beverly Hills cops can be pretty uptight. Take things the wrong way.

JAMIE

Thanks, mister. We're new around here.

NICK

Uh huh.

JAMIE

Wait a minute. Aren't you Nick Ralston? The agent?

NICK

I tried taxidermy, but I'm allergic to sawdust.

JAMIE

Geez, I had no idea--

NICK

Okay fellas, cut the rebop. Clark Gable used that gimmick before you were even born.

Jamie looks embarrassed.

JAMIE

I'm Jamie Chilenskas. This is my roommate, George Lankevitch. We sent you our headshots last week.

Jamie offers his oily hand. Nick refuses.

NICK

Interesting follow-up. Most people use the phone. What made you think I'd fall for the beefcake routine?

JAMIE

Well, I know some of your clients are young men, so I assumed--

Nick's face tightens.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Well, I just thought--

NICK
 (getting angry)
 Well, you thought wrong! Who the hell are you to go around making assumptions?

JAMIE
 I'm sorry. I didn't mean to imply--

NICK
 I think that's exactly what you meant! Those kind of insinuations can get you into a pack of trouble in this town, kid.

JAMIE
 I, I didn't--

NICK
 Do you know how they treat queers in prison? Even suspected queers? Worse than the coloreds! You bend over to tie your shoes, they're driving through you like the Holland Tunnel!

GEORGE
 We apologize, Mr. Ralston. Jamie didn't mean to offend you.

The boys start to go.

NICK
 Sorry. I got a little hot under the collar. You have a very marketable look. Any talent?

JAMIE
 We studied for two years.

NICK
 Where?

GEORGE
 At The Dayton Theater Guild.

Trying not to laugh, Nick sizes them up.

NICK
 I'm having a pool party at my place in Larchmont next week. It's for my new client, Stephanie Fletcher.

Nick hands business card to Jamie.

NICK (CONT'D)

Call my girl. She'll give you the details.

JAMIE

Wow, she's one of my favorites! By the way Mr. Ralston, I loved your movies.

NICK

Thanks, kid.

GEORGE

Why'd you give it up? You used to be big.

NICK

"I am big. It's the pictures that got small!"

Nick waits for a reaction. The boys stare at him blankly.

INT. UPSCALE LARCHMONT HOME - EVENING

Nick stands in the over-decorated study, with Oriental rugs and expensive art. VINCENT (50's), a well-dressed, older man, sits in front of him.

NICK

C'mon Vincent! When have I asked you for anything?

VINCENT

You've asked me for plenty, you little weasel.

NICK

Is that any way to speak to the boy you deflowered?

VINCENT

You were three years younger. And you begged me for it!

NICK

This is a party for Stephanie Fletcher. We were headliners together in Vaudeville when we were kids.

Vincent stares at Nick knowingly.

NICK (CONT'D)

Okay. Stephanie was a headliner.
I was in the chorus. But we were
pals.

VINCENT

Twenty-five years ago. What's in it
for me?

NICK

The cream of the crop.

Vincent considers his offer.

VINCENT

You better be on the square, Nicky.

NICK

How's this Saturday? And I'll need
you to invite some studio types.

VINCENT

Oh, for Pete's sake...

NICK

You think it's easy starting over
at my age? I can't afford to have
the agency fold.

Vincent hesitates. Nick stares at him with puppy dog eyes.

VINCENT

I suppose I could get a discount on
the studio caterers. Canapés and
Lime Rickeys by the pool. No more
than 25 people. And no one in the
house.

Nick goes to embrace Vincent. He stops him.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Save it. How'd I wind up stuck with
a barnacle like you?

NICK

(smiling)
Just lucky I guess.

Annoyed, Vincent tosses him a set of KEYS. Nick pockets them,
very pleased with himself.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. STEPHANIE'S HOME - ESTABLISHING - EVENING

A well-appointed, Spanish style bungalow with a beautiful rose garden sits nestled in the Hollywood hills.

INT. STEPHANIE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

STEPHANIE FLETCHER (24) lies stretched out on the living room sofa, reading a script. Warm, open, down to earth. With her delicate features and stunning profile, anyone can see why she is Hollywood royalty. LORRAINE, her barracuda stage mother, enters.

STEPHANIE

Who was on the phone?

LORRAINE

Nobody.

Stephanie glares at her. Lorraine hesitates.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

Nick Ralston.

STEPHANIE

That's a blast from the past. What did he want?

LORRAINE

Nothing. Invited you to some lame cocktail party in Larchmont this weekend.

Lorraine rips the paper with Nick's info in two and places them on the table.

STEPHANIE

That sounds like fun. Nick always made me laugh.

LORRAINE

You've got better things to do with your time than to waste the evening with some has-been. How's the script?

STEPHANIE

Crap. The same thing I've played in the last three pictures.

LORRAINE

I think you should do it. We need to get the roof fixed.

Lorraine holds up an expensive-looking, lacy, BLACK BRASSIERE.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

What's this supposed to be?

STEPHANIE

After all that surgery I had on my breasts, don't you think I deserve something from Frederick's of Hollywood?

LORRAINE

That surgery was meant to protect your health, not to turn you into a tramp.

STEPHANIE

You kept my breasts bound so tightly, it did permanent damage to the ligaments.

LORRAINE

How else could you have played Heidi at seventeen?

STEPHANIE

When are you going to let me grow up?

LORRAINE

Don't tell me you're having pre-marital sex! Your image would be ruined!

STEPHANIE

And what if I am?

Lorraine grabs her heart. As her eyes bulge, she GASPS, CONVULSES and slowly falls to the floor, motionless. Nonplussed, Stephanie steps over her mother, picks up the scraps of paper on the table and exits into the kitchen. Lorraine opens her eyes and notices that Stephanie is gone.

LORRAINE

(muttering)

Selfish little shit.

INT. BEVERLY HILLS MEN'S SHOP - DAY

Jamie and George are in an upscale men's shop trying on BATHING TRUNKS. RUSSELL (35), the slightly effeminate, overly attentive salesman, is dotting on them. Jamie enters in a clinging, square-cut bathing suit.

RUSSELL

That one is called the Adonis. One of our most popular lines.

JAMIE

I'm more interested in the curves than the lines!

Russell squints and GIGGLES like a school girl.

GEORGE

I think I need to try on a tighter pair.

George grabs another swim suit off the rack and heads towards the fitting room. Jamie follows him.

INT. BEVERLY HILLS MEN'S SHOP - DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Jamie, I don't feel right about this.

Jamie peels off his suit.

JAMIE

Have you seen the prices on these suits? We're doing this for our careers.

George removes his suit. Jamie calls through the curtains sweetly.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Russell! Could you come in here for a moment, please?

RUSSELL (O.C.)

Yes, gentlemen? Have you decided--

Russell enters and sees Jamie and George standing there naked. He turns beet red and averts his eyes.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)

Oh! I beg your pardon!

Jamie stands very close to him, holding his bathing suit coyly.

JAMIE

You know Russell, these suits are awfully expensive. We were wondering if we could work out some sort of a deal.

Russell is very nervous. And very excited.

RUSSELL

Well, um...we do offer a layaway plan...

Taking the cue, George stands behind Russell, pressing his body up against him. Jamie does the same in front.

JAMIE

We were hoping you'd give them to us.

Jamie grabs Russell's belt.

RUSSELL

I couldn't do that! I'd lose my job!

JAMIE

Of course, we could always tell the manager you seduced us.

RUSSELL

But--

JAMIE

Wouldn't it be more fun to play it our way?

Jamie starts to unzip Russell's fly.

RUSSELL

(whispering)

What if someone saw me come in?

Jamie grabs two SHOPPING BAGS and puts them in front of the gap in the bottom of the curtain. He motions for Russell to put his feet in them. Jamie grabs two more for George. POV outside the curtain as we see Jamie's naked legs and four shopping bags. Russell SQUEALS in delight.

EXT. UPSCALE LARCHMONT HOME - POOL AREA - EVENING

Jamie and George arrive for the party. They stand at the far end of the pool and size up the situation.

GEORGE

This isn't exactly what I was expecting.

JAMIE

Are you that surprised?

POV Jamie as he looks around the pool area and sees several attractive YOUNG MEN in bathing suits...but no women.

Nick approaches Jamie and George.

NICK

Hiya, boys. Glad you could make it.

JAMIE

Hello, Mr. Ralston. Where's Stephanie Fletcher?

NICK

The other guests will be here at eight. I asked you to come early so you could get acquainted with some of my clients. (Calling) Hey, fellas! Come meet the new guys.

The others gather round.

NICK (CONT'D)

Jamie, George, I'd like you to meet Scott Guy, who opens next week in "Guns of Fury" as Richard Widmark's son.

Scott steps forward and shakes their hands.

SCOTT

Hi there.

DON HALE (24), a blonde, surfer type, steps forward.

NICK

And this is Don Hale. I'm sure you recognize him from his supporting role in the last "Midgie" movie.

DON

"Hang ten, hepcats!"

Scott chuckles and shoves him playfully.

NICK

This is Rex Nockman, a featured player in the soon-to-be-released Jim Thorpe biopic.

REX NOCKMAN (22), a beefy, football player type, approaches George.

REX

Hey! Mind if I make a lateral pass?

The other boys laugh.

NICK

And last, but not least, Walter Mann, the Sunbeam Bread boy.

WALTER (25), a tall, bookish young man with glasses, steps in and strikes a pose.

WALTER

"Care for a slice of perfection?"

The other boys offer an amused groan.

NICK

Okay guys, relax for a bit. Take a dip, have a drink, but lay off the food until the other guests arrive. I need to speak to Jamie alone for a minute.

George watches curiously as Nick and Jamie exit. The rest of the boys head towards the pool and the bar, chattering animatedly.

INT. UPSCALE LARCHMONT HOME - STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Nick sits with Jamie in the study as the other boys frolic noisily in the water. Nick pours two scotches and sits next to Jamie on the sofa, facing the pool.

NICK (CONT'D)

You've got something special, kid. Charisma. Maybe even star quality.

Jamie blushes.

JAMIE

Thanks, Mr. Ralston.

NICK

Nick. How'd you like to be under contract? Part of my stable.

JAMIE

Gosh, we'd love it.

NICK

Not "we". Just you.

Jamie tries not to show his disappointment.

JAMIE

Well...that'd be great.

NICK

There's a lot of work to be done. Gotta polish you up. First, we have to change your name.

JAMIE

What's wrong with it?

NICK

Jamie Chi-len-skas? You think that'd even fit on a marquee? Here.

Nick hands him a MIRROR. A piece of masking tape is attached to the bottom of it, which reads LANCE WELLMAN.

JAMIE

Lance Wellman?

NICK

It's strong. Rugged. The women will all want to screw you and the men will all want to be you.

JAMIE

I like it.

NICK

And you'll have to dump your boyfriend.

JAMIE

Why? If we're discrete --

NICK

This town doesn't like queers. It'll destroy your chances in Hollywood if you live with a man.

JAMIE

It hasn't hurt Cary Grant.

NICK

He was already a star before he moved in with Randolph Scott. And he's been married. Twice.

Jamie is stunned.

JAMIE

But he's my best friend since grade school. Besides...I love him.

NICK

Love is a luxury people like us can't afford.

Jamie looks away, unable to face Nick.

NICK (CONT'D)

You could be the next Rock Hudson. Everyone throwing themselves at your feet.

Jamie stares out of the window and sees George in the pool, smiling and laughing with his new friends.

NICK (CONT'D)

And if you decide soon, I can get you a screen test for Arthur Gray's new film.

Jamie's stares in amazement. Is this really happening?

NICK (CONT'D)

He was a coffee boy when I worked for Selznick. But Arthur's very conservative. Won't work with any fairies.

Taking it all in, Jamie looks out at George, the pool and the Hollywood Hills in the distance.

NICK (CONT'D)

So, what's it gonna be? A life with him? Or a career with me?

Jamie downs his scotch as the doorbell rings.

NICK (CONT'D)

(smiling)

Lance Wellman. You could be on your way, kid.

Nick exits. Jamie glances down at the mirror with his new name, overcome with conflicting feelings.

POV Jamie as Nick enters the pool area with five or six WELL-DRESSED, OLDER MEN. They all stare at the boys in the pool and discuss them like horses in a derby. One of the men hands Nick a large WAD OF CASH. Nick motions to Rex, who grabs a towel and comes over and shakes the man's hand.

As Jamie figures out what is going on, he stares out at George and the others in disbelief.

VOICE (O.S.)

Excuse me. I'm looking for Nick.

Jamie turns around and sees Stephanie Fletcher. His eyes widen.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. UPSCALE LARCHMONT HOME - POOL AREA - EVENING

The pool party is in full swing. About fifty well-dressed men and women are drinking Lime Rickeys, smoking Kools, romping in the pool and dancing the Bossa Nova. Nick and Stephanie are holding court.

NICK

And the little girl said, "The bitch is in heat..."

STEPHANIE

"And Daddy says we'll have six more puppies before it's over!" I hadn't thought about that in years! Nick, you haven't changed since you were fifteen!

NICK

(laughs)

Then I'm in big trouble!

ALBERT, a paunchy, older gentleman, approaches Nick anxiously.

ALBERT

Nick, I've got to leave soon.

NICK

Albert, have you met Stephanie Fletcher?

ALBERT

Yes. Nice to see you again. (to Nick) But, we haven't completed our business discussion.

NICK

Stephanie, will excuse me for just a moment, please?

Vincent enters and saves the day.

VINCENT

Hello, Miss Fletcher. Vincent Rinaldi? Head of Production at Fox?

Stephanie turns on the charm.

STEPHANIE

Of course, Vincent. How have you been?

VINCENT

So glad you could come to my home.

STEPHANIE

I thought this was Nick's home.

VINCENT

Well...Nick and I have been friends
for so long, sometimes it feels
like--

Across the pool, Nick sees Albert hand Nick THREE FIFTY
DOLLAR BILLS. Walter (the Sunbeam Bread Boy) stands nearby in
his swim trunks.

EXT. ACROSS THE POOL - CONTINUOUS

Vincent approaches as Nick pockets the bills.

ALBERT

So, where do I go for my "slice of
perfection"?

NICK

Guest room. Second floor, end of
the hall. Try not to leave any
perfection on the chenille
bedspread.

Albert and Walter exit. Vincent speaks to Nick in angry,
hushed tones.

VINCENT

What the hell are you doing? Are
you whoring out your clients in my
house?!

NICK

How else was I going to pay for the
party?

VINCENT

Jesus, Nicky! We could all be
arrested! Get them out of here!

NICK

Stephanie actually showed, Vincent!
I can't break up the party now.

VINCENT

I don't care about her. Them!

From the house, there is the distant sound of Albert MOANING
in pleasure.

NICK
They'll be gone soon.

VINCENT
How stupid are you?!

NICK
Relax, Vincent! These people are so self-absorbed, no one is even--

VINCENT
I'm warning you!

NICK
Okay, take it easy. I'll get rid of them. But, don't forget, I promised you the cream of the crop.

VINCENT
I don't give a damn if it lands us all in jail.

NICK
Relax, baby.

Nick calls to Jamie.

NICK (CONT'D)
Hey, Lance! Lance! Jamie!

Finally getting it, Jamie crosses to them.

NICK (CONT'D)
This is my newest client, Lance Wellman. I'd like you to meet Mr. Rinaldi. He's with 20th Century Fox.

Stephanie approaches.

STEPHANIE
So Vincent, what projects are you working on at the mo--? (catching on) I hope I'm not interrupting.

NICK
Of course not! Stephanie, have you met Lance Wellman? A hot, new discovery.

JAMIE
I saw you in the house, Miss Fletcher. It's such an honor.

STEPHANIE

(cooly)

Hello.

NICK

Vincent, I'm sure Stephanie would love to hear about your new picture with Bob Mitchum. Lance, how about another Lime Rickey?

Stephanie watches Nick and Lance exit, sizing up the situation.

INT. UPSCALE LARCHMONT HOME - POOLHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Drink in hand, Jamie faces Nick.

JAMIE

So, this is how it works?

NICK

Sometimes. Yeah. But only until you get established.

George enters, unseen by them.

JAMIE

I can't do this!

NICK

How do you think careers are made, kid? Vincent's very powerful in this town.

GEORGE

Jamie! There you are!

Nick hovers in the doorway.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Some party, huh?

JAMIE

(deadpan)

Yeah. Swell.

GEORGE

What's eating you?

NICK

Well, Lance? Or is it Jamie?

JAMIE

I'll see you at home, pal.

George exits, hurt and confused.

EXT. UPSCALE LARCHMONT HOME - DRIVEWAY

A little while later, Nick walks Stephanie to her car.

STEPHANIE

So, why did you really want me here, Nick?

NICK

As you can see, I know a lot of players in this town.

STEPHANIE

And...?

NICK

I understand you're looking for new representation.

Stephanie takes out a cigarette, amused. Nick lights it.

STEPHANIE

Do you know how many fruit baskets are in my bungalow? What could you possibly offer me they couldn't?

NICK

I've seen your last few pictures. I thought you might be ready to start playing someone past the age of puberty.

Stephanie stomps out her cigarette. He's hit a nerve.

STEPHANIE

No one will even consider me for an adult role.

NICK

How about the lead in Sergio Miletti's "Hell On Wheels"?

Stephanie stares at Nick. Her dream role.

NICK (CONT'D)

You were born to play it.

STEPHANIE

Miletti's people wouldn't even return my agent's calls.

NICK

Let's discuss it over dinner next week.

STEPHANIE

I'm not interested in an agent who's also a pimp.

Nick looks shocked.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

C'mon Nick. Was I the bait to attract the Johns or the boys?

NICK

What if I said I'd give up that aspect of my business?

STEPHANIE

What if I said you're a fucking liar?

NICK

What if I said I'll get you a screen test for Sergio Miletto?

STEPHANIE

What if I said you get me the test? Then we'll talk turkey.

NICK

Looks like Thanksgiving is going be early this year.

Nick starts back into the party. The VALET (25) drives up in Stephanie's convertible. He is a stunningly handsome Russian man with piercing, blue eyes and thick accent.

VALET

Here you are, Miss Fletcher.

Stephanie takes him in.

STEPHANIE

Thank you...

VALET

Steve.

STEPHANIE

(Flirting)

You don't look like a Steve.

VALET

(Flirting back)

It's Sergei. But most people can't pronounce it here.

STEPHANIE

Well Sergei/Steve, I'm not most people. My grandfather was from Minsk. (Speaking in perfect Russian) *"You are too handsome to be parking cars."*

He smiles. As he closes her door, she scribbles her phone number on a FIVE DOLLAR BILL and hands it to him. Nick turns around just in time to see this. He laughs to himself.

INT. LOS ANGELES AUTO SHOW - DAY

Jamie walks past the various displays until he spots George standing in front of a SPORTS CAR with a CROWD around him. Lance stands to the side and watches.

GEORGE

The 1959 Pontiac Catalina is powered by a flathead, straight 8 engine, along with a sporty, airy feeling. This is truly the car of the future. I'll be right over here to answer any questions.

Once the crowd disperses, Lance approaches him playfully.

JAMIE

Hey mister! I want to buy a fleet of these cars. You deserve a raise!

GEORGE

You didn't come home last night.

JAMIE

But I made fifty bucks. I stopped at the Piggly Wiggly. The fridge is packed.

GEORGE

I'd probably choke on that food, knowing how--

JAMIE

Aw, c'mon. It was nothing. You know who has my heart.

George studies his face, wanting to believe him.

JAMIE (CONT'D)
(crossing his heart)
Or my name isn't Lance Wellman.

Immediately catching on, George moves towards Jamie as if he is about to hug him, then remembers himself. They start walking towards the exit.

GEORGE
Lance Wellman! It fits you like a glove! Did Nick mention anything about a new name for me?

Lance stops walking and faces George.

JAMIE
Actually, he's just interested in signing me. At least for right now.

George forces a smile.

GEORGE
Well...at least he wants one of us, right?

JAMIE
And Nick's getting me a screen test next week with Arthur Gray!

GEORGE
Jeez Louise! We'll have to celebrate this weekend. But, you're not going to have to keep doing...?

JAMIE
Never again. Scout's honor.

George beams.

LANCE
Let's go home and raid the icebox.
I even got a Boston Cream Pie!

INT. MURRAY GREENBERG'S OFFICE - DAY

Nick barges into the office of Murray (the casting coordinator from the opening scene) and hands him a cup of COFFEE in a paper cup.

NICK
Hiya Murray. Your secretary's at lunch. Extra light and sweet, right?

MURRAY

You're neither of those things.

NICK

Cute. So, I need a screen test for Stephanie Fletcher for "Hell on Wheels".

MURRAY

Impossible.

NICK

Come on, Murray. This is Stephanie Fletcher!

MURRAY

Who is all wrong for this part! She was submitted. Sergio Milette thinks she's too squeaky clean.

Nick twirls a pen playfully.

NICK

Funny, Milette himself doesn't seem to have that problem. I'd hate for anyone to find out about that thirteen-year-old girl who blew him last year on the set of *La Vida Loca*. Might put a crimp in your financing.

MURRAY

How'd you hear about that, you son-of-a-bitch?

NICK

(smiling)

You know me, Murray. I got grease in all the wrong places.

MURRAY

Is that so? I heard about your little pool party the other night.

NICK

Yeah. Stephanie's my new client.

MURRAY

If you can get her the test.

NICK

Are you kidding? We've known each other since we were kids! She stopped by for Lime Rickeys and--

MURRAY
Pigs in blankets?

Nick looks confused.

MURRAY (CONT'D)
Or should I say "salami under the
sheets"?

There is a long pause.

MURRAY (CONT'D)
Did you really think you could get
a star client by whoring out boys
right under her nose?

NICK
Okay. Who squealed?

MURRAY
(smiling)
You're not the only one with grease
in all the wrong places.

Nick lights a cigarette and reassesses the situation.

NICK
So, who's got more to lose here,
Murray? For me, it's a movie star
client. For you, it's a whole
picture.

The two men study each other.

MURRAY
How's Thursday morning?

NICK
After lunch. Two o'clock.

MURRAY
Two-thirty. Milette likes long
lunches.

Nick starts to exit.

NICK
(laughing)
I'll bet he does. Arrivederci,
baby!

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - EVENING

Nick gingerly opens the door and peers inside. He sees ARTEMIS (60's), an old-world Greek woman, snoring in bed. Nick removes his shoes and quietly enters with a bag of GROCERIES.

Without making a sound, he puts the groceries away, glancing anxiously at the bed every 20 seconds. As he places a box of Brillo pads under the sink, a SAUCEPAN falls out and clatters to the floor. Artemis stirs. If Nick could strangle the saucepan, he would.

ARTEMIS
Nikos? Is that you?

NICK
Hello, Mama.

ARTEMIS
Why didn't you wake me?

NICK
I didn't want to disturb you.

ARTEMIS
I sit here alone all day waiting
for you. What's to disturb?

Nick folds the grocery bag.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)
Did you remember the Bromo Seltzer?

NICK
Yes, Mama.

ARTEMIS
And the Filo dough?

NICK
They were out.

ARTEMIS
How can I make baklava without Filo
dough?

NICK
I'll go to Gristede's tomorrow.

ARTEMIS
Gristede's is too expensive.

NICK
I'll get it, Mama.

Artemis gets out of bed and makes tea.

ARTEMIS
So, Mr. Big Shot, any new clients yet?

NICK
Well Mama, I'm about to take on Stephanie Fletcher.

Artemis touches her heart.

ARTEMIS
Stephanie Fletcher! Kukla Moo! A little doll! But Nikos, isn't she a little young for you?

NICK
I'm not dating her, Mama.

ARTEMIS
A pretty, little thing like that would never fall for a big ox like you, anyway. Especially since you're not famous anymore. So, who are you dating?

She stares at Nick. Awkward pause.

NICK
Mama, I'm...I'm a confirmed bachelor.

Artemis SLAPS him hard across the face.

ARTEMIS
Shame on you! You're not one of those Hollywood degenerates! What did I raise you for if not to give me grandchildren?

NICK
Mama, please.

ARTEMIS
Even a has-been should be able to find someone.

Trying not to cry, Nick hands her a check as she gives him a cup of tea.

NICK
Here's your rent check.

ARTEMIS
So, my darling, where are you
taking her to dinner?

NICK
Ciro's.

ARTEMIS
Pffft! A dump! They wouldn't even
let your father wash the dishes!
A nice girl like Stephanie
Fletcher, you take her to the
Trocadero.

NICK
Alright, Mama.

ARTEMIS
And you'll get me a picture?
Signed?

NICK
Don't I always?

ARTEMIS
That's my Nikos.

She pats him on the cheek and puts the check in her cleavage.
Nick washes out his teacup in the sink and dries it with a
dish towel.

FLASH FORWARD - MEN'S LOUNGE - EVENING

Nick is in a state of shock, wearing a white dinner jacket
heavily spattered with BLOOD. Trying not to cry, he starts
wiping LARGE SPOTS OF BLOOD off the wall with a hand towel.

END FLASH FORWARD

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. THE TROCADERO - EVENING

Nick pulls up in front of The Trocadero night club with Stephanie. As she steps out of the car, PHOTOGRAPHERS and AUTOGRAPH HOUNDS descend upon her. While Stephanie is surrounded, Nick pulls STAN (40's) aside. He is a seasoned photographer with bad teeth.

NICK
How's it goin' Stan?

STAN
The wife left me. Haven't got a pot
to piss in.

NICK
Tough break. Here's twenty bucks to
help you piss. Now, I need a little
favor.

Nick whispers something to Stan as the crowd around Stephanie gets more vocal.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Hey Steffie, is this your new
fella?

NICK
Gentlemen, give Miss Fletcher a
little breathing room, please!

STEPHANIE
No, he--

NICK
My name is Nick Ralston - that's
R-A-L-S-T-O-N. I am Miss Fletcher's
new agent and the man who is going
to single-handedly transform her
from a child star into a grown-up
goddess!

Stephanie is pissed, but flashes a Hollywood smile for the cameras as Nick escorts her inside.

INT. THE TROCADERO - LATER

Stephanie sits with an untouched shrimp cocktail in front of her.

STEPHANIE
You've got one hell of a nerve!

NICK

Huh?

STEPHANIE

I have not agreed to sign with you yet! And you had to go and deliver a press conference?!

NICK

But, you said if I got you a test for "Hell on Wheels"...

STEPHANIE

Seriously?

NICK

I was going to tell you at dinner, but when those vultures descended...

STEPHANIE

I said if you could get me the test we'd talk about it.

NICK

I'm all ears.

STEPHANIE

You have to give up the rent boys.

NICK

Whaddya mean?

STEPHANIE

I'm no dummy, Nick. I've got an image to maintain. America's Favorite Teenager is not signing with someone who's got a stable of stallions on the side.

NICK

I thought you wanted to break out of that image.

STEPHANIE

I know this industry is run by homos, but that doesn't mean I have to like it.

NICK

Okay, Okay. Keep your voice down. So, do we have a deal?

STEPHANIE

Let me sleep on it. I brought the headshot you asked for.

NICK

Great. Can you sign it, "To Artemis?"

Stephanie looks at him questioningly.

NICK (CONT'D)

She's a make-up lady on the Fox lot. I owe her a favor.

Stephanie signs the photo and hands it to Nick.

NICK (CONT'D)

How did someone so young get to be so talented?

FLASHBACK - SOUNDSTAGE - FIFTEEN YEARS EARLIER

YOUNG STEPHANIE (9) is in front of the camera. YOUNG LORRAINE (30's) is nearby, holding Stephanie's prized possession, a speckled BUTTERFLY in a jar. Stephanie's reading is flat and mechanical. REGINALD, the director (30's), is not happy.

YOUNG STEPHANIE

"No, don't let them take me. Please. I'll be good, I swear."

REGINALD

And cut.

A BELL RINGS. Stephanie rushes over and grabs the jar from Lorraine.

YOUNG STEPHANIE

How's Mister Flutters? You didn't let him get too hot under the lights, did you?

YOUNG LORRAINE

He's just fine.

Reginald crouches down next to Young Stephanie.

REGINALD

Stephanie, darling, you do understand what's going on in this scene, don't you?

YOUNG STEPHANIE

Yes, Mr. Van Norden.

Stephanie stares at her butterfly, oblivious to the rest of the world.

REGINALD

Your mother just died and they're taking you to an orphanage. You're very upset. Now, I need you screaming and crying the entire time. Alright?

Stephanie nods, hands the jar to Lorraine and returns to the set.

YOUNG LORRAINE

She knows all the lines, sir.

REGINALD

Mrs. Fletcher, we've done twelve takes already. I'd hate to have to replace her.

Lorraine looks alarmed, then quickly recovers.

YOUNG LORRAINE

She'll get it this time.

Reginald calls to the crew. Once again, the BELL RINGS.

REGINALD

Okay, folks, one last time. Action!

Lorraine stands right in Stephanie's line of vision. She reaches into the jar, scoops out the butterfly and TEARS ONE OF ITS WINGS off. Young Stephanie SHRIEKS in horror.

YOUNG LORRAINE

(whispers)

Now, say the lines!

YOUNG STEPHANIE

"No, don't let them take me!
Please! I'll be good, I swear!"

With tears streaming down her face and convulsive SOBS, Stephanie plays the scene brilliantly.

END FLASHBACK

INT. THE TROCADERO - CONTINUOUS

Stephanie reaches for her shrimp cocktail. Her hand is shaking so badly, she spills cocktail sauce all over her cheek. Before she can react, Nick reaches over with his napkin and gently dabs her face.

She looks up at him gratefully as her eyes well up with tears. Nick holds her as she cries in his arms.

Just as Nick pulls away to hand Stephanie a handkerchief, FLASH! Stan, the photographer from out front, snaps a picture of them.

STAN

If that doesn't make the cover of
Confidential Magazine, I'll eat my
hat!

Nick CHASES Stan, but he bolts out of the club too fast.

EXT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

George comes out of a pawn shop, and opens a SMALL BOX. He joyfully removes a polished, sterling silver CIGARETTE CASE, engraved with the name, "Lance Wellman".

EXT. STEPHANIE'S HOME - PATIO GARDEN - A FEW DAYS LATER

As Stephanie prunes the roses, Lorraine SCREAMS in agony from inside the house.

INT. STEPHANIE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stephanie rushes to her mother's side. Lorraine is sprawled on the sofa, clutching her heart.

Lorraine holds up a copy of *Confidential Magazine* with a photo of Stephanie and Nick in an intimate pose on the cover. The caption reads: "STEFFIE'S SECRET LOVER."

LORRAINE

I don't know which is worse!
Signing with a two-bit agent behind
my back or letting the world think
you're in love with a pansy! You're
grounded for a month, young lady.

STEPHANIE

You can't ground me! I'm your
fucking meal ticket!

Lorraine BACKHANDS Stephanie. She STUMBLES and FALLS, hitting her face on the corner of the coffee table. Stephanie CRIES out in pain. Lorraine rushes to her.

LORRAINE

My baby! I'll get you an ice pack.

Stephanie pushes her mother away and rises.

STEPHANIE

Get away from me!

Stephanie puts her hand over her bleeding face and quickly exits.

INT. BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL DINING ROOM - DAY

Nick sits with Jamie (now Lance) at a quiet corner table, having lunch.

NICK

The silverware always goes in the order of usage. Start on the outside and work your way in.

Lance nods.

LANCE

How'd you get to be so cultured?

Nick shrugs.

NICK

I'd trade it in a second for looks like yours.

LANCE

Pretty boys are a dime a dozen in this town.

NICK

Not like you.

LANCE

That means a lot coming from you.

Nick and Lance both reach for a roll in the bread basket at the same time. Their hands touch. Nick starts to pull away. Lance holds his hand for a moment, then breaks the roll in half and hands one piece to Nick. Nick isn't sure how to react.

NICK

So, where's George Porgie living these days?

LANCE

He's staying with a friend until he finds a new place.

Nick GROANS into his Rob Roy.

NICK

You haven't done it yet, have you?

Lance stares at his Waldorf salad.

LANCE

I'll do it tonight.

NICK

I can't take a chance with Arthur Gray until--

LANCE

Tonight.

INT. LANCE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

George is putting the finishing touches on an elaborately set dinner table. Lance races into the apartment and removes his shirt, heading for the shower.

GEORGE

You're later than I thought.

LANCE (O.C.)

It was an incredible day! Nick bought me new headshots, a suit, he even took me to lunch at the Beverly Hills Hotel.

GEORGE

I hope you still have an appetite.

The SHOWER goes on, so Lance doesn't hear this. George pours the champagne and sits expectantly at the table, complete with candles and romantic music. Lance comes out in a towel and starts dressing quickly, still oblivious to George.

LANCE (O.S.)

I've only got a few minutes. Nick's taking me to a movie premiere at Graumann's Chinese. He'll be here any minute.

GEORGE

Tell me you're joking.

Lance finally notices George sitting at the table.

LANCE

Oh, crap.

GEORGE

We have a date. I've been cooking all day.

LANCE

I'm really sorry. But this is my big break. What I've been waiting for. Will it keep till tomorrow night?

GEORGE

That's all you have to say? Now that you have Nick Ralston, I don't count for anything?

LANCE

I thought you'd be happy for me.

GEORGE

Happy? Oh, I'm ecstatic! The minute some two-bit agent wants to trade a blow-job for extra work, you start treating me like used Saran Wrap!

George grabs Lance's arm. He pulls away, tearing his sleeve in the process.

LANCE

Hey! This is a new shirt!

GEORGE

Well, why don't you just ask your sugar daddy to buy you another!

LANCE

If you're going to act like a nagging wife, maybe you should just move out!

From outside, Nick HONKS HIS HORN. As Lance moves towards the door, George HURLS a BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE at him. He misses and it SHATTERS on the floor. George's outburst stops Lance in his tracks.

LANCE (CONT'D)

I want you gone by morning.

Lance turns on his heel and exits. George sits at the table laden with food, candles and roses. He looks at the WRAPPED GIFT on Lance's plate - the cigarette case. He rises, blows out the candles and starts picking up GLASS SHARDS from the smashed bottle. George picks up one and looks at his WRIST. As he considers his options, he sinks back into the dining room chair and cries bitterly.

EXT. MALIBU BEACH - NIGHT

Stephanie ambles along the beach with Sergei, the valet from the party. He has his hand down the back of her pants, fondling her ass. They are passing a JOINT back and forth.

SERGEI

What if you got your own place?

STEPHANIE

She'd be there all the time.

Sergei takes a hit on the joint and hands it to Stephanie.

SERGEI

You could move in with me.

STEPHANIE

Yeah, right.

SERGEI

What? Some dumb immigrant isn't good enough for America's Favorite Teenager?

STEPHANIE

I hardly know you. Besides, it would be career suicide. They'd think you're a commie.

SERGEI

Just because I'm Russian?

Stephanie shrugs.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

When are you going to stop being a studio prop and start acting like a real woman?

STEPHANIE

That's rich! You're an illegal alien who parks cars for a living!

She takes the joint and presses the lit end into his WRIST. Sergei winces in pain.

SERGEI

Ow! You little bitch!

As Sergei grabs his wrist, Stephanie takes the burning joint and presses it into his CHEEK.

As he screams, he reflexively raises a left hook and PUNCHES Stephanie in the mouth, drawing blood. She starts running as fast as she can, with Sergei in hot pursuit.

EXT. RUNDOWN HOLLYWOOD STREET - NIGHT

Nick and Lance walk up to a housing complex of rundown, pink stucco bungalows. They are both a little drunk.

LANCE

Where are we?

NICK

The last stop. I have to tell you something im--

LANCE

Ugh, what's that smell?

NICK

Rancid fruit. We're behind the Farmer's Market.

LANCE

(laughing)

What kind of two-bit loser lives in this dump?

NICK

You're looking at him.

Lance stares at Nick. He's not joking.

LANCE

But what about the big place in Larchmont?

NICK

Remember Vincent? The guy you--

LANCE

Yeah?

NICK

Belongs to him.

Lance is trying to wrap his head around this.

LANCE

But, you're Nick Ralston. You were a star!

NICK

Oh yeah, I was a big shot. It was great.

FLASHBACK - INT. NICK'S DRESSING ROOM - THIRTY YEARS EARLIER

YOUNG NICK (age 8) is playing gin rummy with Artemis.

YOUNG NICK

And...gin!

ARTEMIS

You always beat me! And I was so close! Are you sure these cards aren't marked?

YOUNG NICK

One more hand?

Artemis starts to shuffle the cards.

ARTEMIS

Nikos, Mr. Robertson is coming to see you this afternoon.

YOUNG NICK

You mean the man with the yellow teeth and icky breath?

ARTEMIS

Mr. Robertson could get you a three picture deal. He's coming to talk to you in private.

NICK

But you always do the business part.

ARTEMIS

Not this time.

Young Nick looks confused. There is a KNOCK at the door.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

Come in!

MR. ROBERTSON (40's) enters. Yellow teeth, worse breath - the epitome of a creep.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

Mr. Robertson! We've been expecting you.

ROBERTSON
Ma'am. Hello, Nicky.

Young Nick nervously shuffles the cards.

YOUNG NICK
Hello.

ARTEMIS
I need to go tend the flowers. You
two have a nice chat.

Artemis exits.

ROBERTSON
Like to play cards?

Nick nods.

ROBERTSON (CONT'D)
I know a game we could play.

EXT. OUTSIDE YOUNG NICK'S DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Artemis stands in front of a flower box, dead-heading geraniums. She softly sings a Greek folk song. When she hears Young Nick SCREAMING from inside, she hesitates, then sings louder.

INT. YOUNG NICK'S DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mr. Robertson has removed his belt and has tied Young Nick face down to a chaise, his pants around his ankles. Robertson takes off his shoes and socks as the boy continues to scream.

ROBERTSON
Shut up! I thought you wanted to be
in more pictures.

As Young Nick opens his mouth to scream again, Mr. Robertson wads up one of his SOCKS and shoves it into Young Nick's mouth.

EXT. OUTSIDE YOUNG NICK'S DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As the muffled screams continue over Robertson's grunting, Artemis sings and continues to pull leaves off the geraniums.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. RUNDOWN HOLLYWOOD STREET - NIGHT

Lance stares at Nick in the moonlight.

LANCE

Oh. My. God.

NICK

My mother still asks me every week when I'm going to find a nice girl and get married.

Lance stares at him in disbelief.

NICK (CONT'D)

This is it, kid. The real me. An over-the-hill loser living in a three room bungalow behind a fruit dumpster. I've never brought anyone here before.

LANCE

But...why me?

NICK

You still don't get it? I'm in love with you, you big dope.

Lance doesn't know where to look.

NICK (CONT'D)

Pretty funny, eh? When I finally fall for someone, not only is he the wrong sex, he's the most beautiful, the most unattainable...

Nick turns away. Lance reaches out and touches his shoulder. Nick stares up at him, pathetic and broken.

NICK (CONT'D)

That's why I need to make Lance Wellman a star. I don't want you to wind up some broken-down, shmuck like me.

Deeply moved, Lance pulls Nick into the shadow of an archway and starts to embrace him.

NICK (CONT'D)

Not here. I'll lose my lease.

As they walk towards Nick's apartment, from a distance they see a shivering, barefoot figure sitting on the stoop with a black eye and a split lip. It is Stephanie.

STEPHANIE

Don't be mad. I made Bernice give me your real address.

NICK

How long have you been here?

STEPHANIE

About an hour. I didn't know where else to go.

Stephanie collapses against Nick. Lance takes off his jacket and puts it around her shoulders as they help her inside.

INT. LANCE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

George has just finished packing the last of his belongings. He staggers to the front door with two heavy suitcases. He turns back to take one last look at the apartment. He places the gift wrapped cigarette case on the counter.

INT. NICK'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Stephanie sits wrapped in a blanket. Lance hands her an ice pack.

LANCE

Here you go, Miss Fletcher.

STEPHANIE

Thanks. Have we met before?

LANCE

At the pool party.

STEPHANIE

Right. You were the sacrificial lamb for Vincent.

LANCE

(embarrassed)

Well, I--

STEPHANIE

It's okay, Lance. I've been eating shit in this town since before you were born.

Nick enters holding a bathrobe and a man's sweatshirt.

NICK

You can sleep in this. And here's something for the pain.

Nick hands her a bottle of pills.

NICK (CONT'D)
I'll make up the sofa. You're
taking my bedroom.

STEPHANIE
You stay, Lance. I'll sleep on the
sofa. I'm the intruder.

NICK
(tenderly)
Don't ever say that again.

Nick puts his arm around Stephanie. They stare at each other for a long moment. Lance comes to the other side of Nick and puts his arm around him. The three of them reach in and touch their foreheads together in a moment of unspoken connection and understanding.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. LANCE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Lance enters his apartment in the same wrinkled clothes from last night. He walks into the bedroom and sees the empty dresser drawers and a stack of hangers on the bed. It all comes flooding back to him. He wanders around the rooms, which now feel large and empty.

Lance sees the gift on the counter. He unwraps the silver cigarette case engraved with his new name. Stretching out on the sofa, he holds it tightly to his chest.

EXT. SANTA MONICA BOULEVARD - NIGHT

George is standing in the rain, hustling on Santa Monica Boulevard. He's not very good at it. A car races by and he is drenched by a big, MUD PUDDLE. Cold, wet and flecked with dirt, he approaches STUART (50's), a well-dressed businessman.

GEORGE

Hey buddy. Looking for some company? Fifty bucks for the whole night.

STUART

Sorry. Not interested.

GEORGE

Twenty-five?

STUART

I'm straight.

As Stuart starts to get into his car, George tugs on his arm and stares at him pathetically.

GEORGE

Please, mister. I have no money and no place to stay.

George wipes specks of mud off his face. Stuart hands him a handkerchief.

INT. UPSCALE OFFICE - DAY

Nick sits in the office of the comfortably rumped, successful director/producer ARTHUR GRAY (40). The walls are adorned with framed movie posters and celebrity photos.

ARTHUR

Remember that Brazilian girl in the wardrobe department? Everyone in Selznick's office passed her around like a bottle of tequila. Damn, Nicky, there are times I envy you still being a bachelor!

Nick forces a laugh. He notices one of the FRAMED PHOTOS on the desk.

NICK

How are your girls, Arthur?

ARTHUR

Great! Best damn thing that ever happened to me.

Arthur holds up a photo and glows with paternal pride. Nick feigns interest.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Here they are on Halloween. This is Jenny. She's eight. And Suzy's eleven. She's the head of her Girl Scout troop now. Can you beat that? Got me selling their cookies all over the lot!

Arthur CHORTLES as he opens his closet door. It is stacked to the ceiling with boxes of GIRL SCOUT COOKIES.

NICK

Why don't I take them off your hands, Arthur? I can take them down to the children's hospital.

Nick writes a CHECK and hands it to Arthur.

ARTHUR

Gosh, Nicky, that's awful nice of you. But this is too much!

NICK

It's for your girls, Arthur.

ARTHUR

You're a prince, Nicky. Always were.

NICK

So, how's "Centurions of the Dawn" coming along?

ARTHUR

Gonna be a friggin' epic! I've got Chuck Heston, Hedy Lamarr, Yul Brenner. Biggest goddamn movie since "Gone with the Wind"! We finished casting last week.

NICK

I've got this new discovery. Zanuck and Wallis are both fighting over him. He's a young Ty Power. I'd love to have you be the one to launch him.

ARTHUR

He's not a fairy, is he? That new agent at the Morris office actually wanted me to cast some fruit! All those friggin' homos should be put under lock and key!

NICK

That's why I hate William Morris. No scruples. Artie, this kid really has it. Every woman I know is hot for him.

ARTHUR

We're all cast, but maybe I can find something. As long as I have your word that he's a man's man.

NICK

On my mother's grave, Arthur.

Nick smiles and shakes his hand.

INT. NICK'S CAR - DAY

A few minutes later, Nick sits squeezed into his Maserati surrounded by boxes of cookies. He nervously shoves handfuls of Thin Mint cookies into his mouth, four at a time.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Stephanie is in the dressing room, getting made up for her screen test. Dressed like a sexy, female hood, she wears tight, black Capri pants and a leather jacket. Lorraine is coaching her on her lines.

LORRAINE

Not so harsh, darling. Play with him. If you come on too strong, the scene has nowhere to go.

Stephanie nods, breathes deeply and puts more makeup on her shiner. Lorraine pulls a bottle of cologne out of her purse.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

I brought your father's Old Spice.
Put some on your lapels just before
you go on. I thought it would help
with your sense memory.

STEPHANIE

Good thinking.

Stephanie smells the cologne.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

This smell makes me miss Daddy so
much!

LORRAINE

Save it for the camera, darling.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Nick takes Stephanie by the arm. Lorraine hovers nearby. They approach SERGIO MILETTI (mid 30's), standing by the camera. He is a suave, attractive, Italian. He kisses Stephanie's hand.

MILETTI

This could not be Stephanie
Fletcher. When did that pretty,
little girl grow into such a *bella*
signorina?

STEPHANIE

Mille grazie, Signor Milette. I see
you have charm as well as talent.

Milette bows grandly. He is impressed. Stephanie steps in front of the camera. A MALE READER (20's) faces her, just off camera.

READER

"So, whaddya think, babe?"

STEPHANIE

"I think you've had too much joy
juice, hepcat."

Milette smiles at Murray. He likes her. Suddenly, Lorraine opens her handbag and takes out a LARGE BOOK and begins to read.

READER

"Come up to my pad, baby."

POV Stephanie as she sees the title of her mother's book:
"THE GOLDEN BOOK OF BUTTERFLIES."

Stephanie freezes. She goes up on her lines and stands there awkwardly. Milette looks at her expectantly. Stephanie runs off the set in tears. Lorraine and Nick follow her. Once they are gone, Murray turns to Milette.

MURRAY

I knew she wasn't up to it.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stephanie sits at her dressing table, her shoulders heaving as she cries. Lorraine massages her as Nick enters.

LORRAINE

Shhh. It's alright, baby.

NICK

What happened? It was going great!

LORRAINE

Mr. Ralston, you'd better let me handle this.

Nick exits reluctantly.

STEPHANIE

(screaming)

You did that on purpose!

Lorraine puts her arms around Stephanie. She pulls away.

LORRAINE

Did what, baby?

Stephanie grabs Lorraine's handbag and dumps it on the floor. She pulls out the large book. It is the SEARS CATALOGUE. Stephanie collapses into Lorraine's arms, crying into her breast.

STEPHANIE

Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!

Lorraine puts her arms around her and strokes her hair.

INT. STUART'S GUEST ROOM - MORNING

George is sleeping soundly in Stuart's upscale guest room. Stuart enters in a bathrobe and adjusts the blanket around him. George stirs. Stuart starts to exit quickly.

GEORGE

Wait a sec.

Stuart stops. George gets out of bed in his briefs and T-shirt and stands next to Stuart, who is not sure where to look.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Why are you being so nice to me?

STUART

You looked like you were down on your luck.

GEORGE

Is there anything I can do for you?

STUART

Yes. No. I'm not sure.

George stares at him knowingly.

STUART (CONT'D)

Can you tell me something? How did you know you wanted to...

GEORGE

To be with men?

Stuart nods. George sits on the side of the bed. Stuart watches him intently.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I just knew. I had a best buddy in school. We moved out here together. We were really happy. Or so I thought.

STUART

He left you for another guy?

GEORGE

Worse. An agent.

STUART

Would you talk to me? Tell me what it's like?

Stuart nods. George sits on the side of the bed. Stuart sits next to him, terrified.

STUART (CONT'D)

You're so young...and handsome...
I don't--

As Stuart starts to speak again, George gently places a finger on Stuart's lips. He then traces Stuart's mouth sensually. He slowly unties Stuart's bathrobe.

Stuart can hardly breathe. Finally, George reaches down and grabs him. Stuart's body immediately convulses as he has an orgasm. He stares at George in shock and embarrassment. George kisses Stuart, grabs the lapels of his bathrobe and pulls him on top of him.

INT. SCHWAB'S DRUG STORE - DAY

Lance is at his old hangout -- the magazine counter at Schwab's. He is looking at *Male Pictorial*, the 50's beefcake magazine. George enters cautiously.

GEORGE

I'm not surprised you wanted to meet here.

LANCE

It's a fitness magazine.

GEORGE

Uh huh. And you only read it for the articles.

LANCE

It's good to see you.

GEORGE

Don't play games with me, Jamie.
I agreed to come. What do you want?

LANCE

I have a really important screen test tomorrow. I need you there.

GEORGE

What about your fancy agent?

LANCE

(blurting it out in a hushed whisper)
It's a love scene, damn it! I can't get the feeling right.

GEORGE

If you're trying to tell me that you love me, it's a little late.

LANCE

Three p.m. Paramount. Stage 16. I'll pick you up at two. Okay?

GEORGE

I'm sure Nick will be thrilled to see me.

LANCE

Please? Will you go with me?

Pause. Lance stares at him expectantly.

GEORGE

You'd better get this part, you bastard.

INT. STUART'S BEDROOM - DAY

Stuart is lying in bed. George enters from the bathroom wearing Stuart's silk robe.

STUART

That looks better on you than it does on me. Why don't you keep it?

GEORGE

Stuart, you don't have to keep giving me things.

STUART

It's been really nice having you here. If my wife weren't coming back today...

GEORGE

It's okay. Can you drop me at the Y on your way to work?

STUART

I've got a better idea. I'll take your bags and put them in the trunk of my car. After work, we'll go find you a place. Would that be alright?

GEORGE

It would if I could afford it.

STUART

Will you let me help you? Till you
get on your feet?

George puts his hand on Stuart's shoulder.

GEORGE

That's the nicest thing anyone's
ever done for me.

Stuart smiles at George.

EXT. PARAMOUNT LOT - DAY

The next day, Nick enters the soundstage. As Lance enters
with George, Nick sees red.

NICK

(angry whisper)

What the hell is he doing here?
Didn't I tell you Arthur Gray hates
fags?

LANCE

Nick, calm down.

NICK

Do you know how much it cost me to
get you this fucking test? I had to
pawn my Aunt Irene's platinum
brooch. I'll be eating Girl Scout
cookies for the next twenty years!

LANCE

If anyone asks, say he's my
publicist.

Nick is seething. He takes a moment to catch his breath.

NICK

If this goes south, you'll be on a
bus out of town faster than you can
say "Red Skelton"!

Arthur Gray enters and overhears this. He eyes Lance
suspiciously.

ARTHUR

Nicky? Is there a problem?

Nick turns around and flashes a warm smile.

NICK

Hi, Arthur! No. Everything's great.
Meet Lance Wellman.

Lance gives Arthur a manly handshake. Arthur eyes George suspiciously.

ARTHUR

Who's that?

LANCE

That's my publicist, sir. He
insisted on coming along.

ARTHUR

Be careful, kid. Some people can do
your career more harm than good.

LANCE

Yes, sir.

NICK

Arthur, Lance loved the article on
your Arabians in "Esquire".

ARTHUR

Yeah?

LANCE

(catching on)

Of course, I grew up with Palominos
myself. I could ride before I could
walk. No greater feeling than being
in the saddle, is there?

ARTHUR

English or Western?

LANCE

With all due respect sir, riding
English is for pansies!

Arthur laughs and slaps Lance on the back.

ARTHUR

We should go riding sometime, kid.

LANCE

That'd be swell, sir.

ARTHUR

Get into costume and I'll see you
on the set. This guy's okay, Nicky.

Arthur exits. Once he is out of earshot, Nick whispers to Lance.

NICK

I just saved your ass big time.
Now, don't louse it up on camera.
And always stay at least ten feet
away from your "publicist".

INT. PARAMOUNT SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Lance stands on the set for his screen test dressed as a Roman soldier, complete with a bare chest and a plumed helmet. A beautiful STARLET (22) in a flowing, white gown faces him. Arthur stands to the right of the camera, Nick to the left of it. George is directly behind the CAMERAMAN. Arthur spots George and shakes his head in disgust.

INT. STEPHANIE'S CONVERTIBLE - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - NIGHT

Stephanie and Sergei are driving through the curvy, canyon roads of the Hollywood Hills, each POPPING PILLS and taking hits off a big BOTTLE OF JACK DANIELS. They are singing TV jingles and laughing hysterically. Stephanie SWERVES to avoid hitting another car as she keeps laughing and drinking.

INT. PARAMOUNT SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Lance is finishing his screen test. POV Arthur, watching Lance staring at the Starlet, followed by POV Nick, watching Lance staring at George. Arthur walks up to Nick and pats him on the back and shakes Lance's hand with a big smile. Once Arthur is out of sight, Nick pulls George aside.

NICK

I hate surprises, but I have to
admit it worked. I owe you one.

GEORGE

"Owe me one?!" You ruined my life.

NICK

Put it on a sampler, kid.

Nick starts to walk away. George SHOVES him hard. Nick stumbles into a nearby director's chair and goes CRASHING to the floor.

George exits slowly. Nick rises and feels a cut on his forehead. Needing a bandage, he walks into an empty dressing room.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As Nick enters, he sees Lance on his knees giving a blowjob to Arthur Gray. Arthur and Nick share a look of shock and recognition as Nick quickly exits.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Arthur catches up to Nick.

ARTHUR
It's not what you think, Nicky!

NICK
And what do I think, Arthur?

ARTHUR
(under his breath)
I'm not a fruit!

NICK
Of course not! You just like to get
sucked off by men.

ARTHUR
It's not--

NICK
You hypocritical son of a bitch!

ARTHUR
Nicky, calm down. We can help each
other.

Nick looks at him, puzzled.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
There are people in this
town...powerful people...who can
make things happen.

NICK
I'm listening.

ARTHUR
Not here. Meet me next Thursday
night. 7:30.

Arthur scribbles an address on the back of a card.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Come alone. And Nicky.
That never happened.

NICK
Does he get the part?

ARTHUR
I'll have to discuss it with--

NICK
If Lance Wellman gets the part,
this never happened.

ARTHUR
Done.

INT. CEDARS SINAI HOSPITAL - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

As Nick enters, Lorraine stands by the bed, feeding ICE CHIPS to Stephanie whose FOREHEAD is swathed in BANDAGES. She is hooked up to an IV and a HEART MONITOR. Before Nick can say anything, the barely conscious Stephanie raises her head.

STEPHANIE
I did it. I proved I'm a bad girl.
Now Sergio Milette will have to
give me another screen test.

Nick stares at Stephanie in shock. She did this on purpose?

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)
Will you call him Nick? Please?

NICK
Sure, honey. Whatever you want.

LORRAINE
Mr. Ralston, there are some tissues
in my purse. Would you hand them to
me, please?

Nick reaches into Lorraine's purse. He sees something that startles him. Unseen by Lorraine, he removes a FOLDED PIECE OF PAPER and puts it in his pocket. Nick hands Lorraine the tissues.

NICK
(to Stephanie)
You get some rest now, kid. I'll
see you tomorrow.

Nick adjusts the blanket around Stephanie and exits.

EXT. HOSPITAL GARAGE - NIGHT

Nick stands in front of his car, reaching for a cigarette.

As he searches for his Zippo, he pulls out the paper he removed from Lorraine's purse. It is the folded book cover for "THE GOLDEN BOOK OF BUTTERFLIES". He studies it for a moment, then RIPS it into several pieces and throws it into a TRASH CAN.

FLASH FORWARD - ABANDONED SERVICE ROAD - NIGHT

Standing by the side of the mangled car, Nick lights a Lucky Strike to steady his nerves. He shakes and sobs, almost convulsively. Nick drops the cigarette and VOMITS by the side of the car. He looks back at the body. POV Nick as he stares at the dead face of George.

NICK

Stupid, son of a bitch.

Wiping his mouth on his sleeve, he walks toward the main road.

END OF EPISODE