

CABALLERO

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FADE IN:

EXT. VALENTINE'S MANSION - NIGHT - 1928

A sprawling Spanish Colonial estate glistens in the rain.

A thunderstorm cracks across the night sky.

A vintage roadster rests in the driveway.

The wrought iron gates swing closed.

SUPER: BEVERLY HILLS, 1928

INT. VALENTINE'S MANSION - NIGHT

Moving slowly up a grand staircase where framed movie posters line the walls:

- THE COUNT OF HAVANA

- BLOOD AND LACE

- MIDNIGHT IN SEVILLA

- THE GAY CABALLERO

All starring VALENTINE CABALLERO.

All dripping with passion, drama, romance.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dim lighting. Elegant décor. A bedside radio plays soft orchestral music.

VALENTINE CABALLERO (32), devastatingly handsome, lies in bed in a silk robe, thumbing through a script.

A cocktail within reach.

A ham sandwich untouched on a gold-rimmed plate.

He leans back, eyes scanning the page.

THUNDER rumbles.

His eyes flutter. His chest rises.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. VALENTINE'S MANSION - NIGHT

Flashbulbs explode.

Photographers shout through the rain as TWO ATTENDANTS wheel out a stretcher.

On it: A COVERED BODY. Lifeless. Anonymous.

CLICK - CLICK - FLASH.

A NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (V.O.) begins

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 Tragedy strikes Hollywood today as
 the silver screen's most luminous
 lover is gone too soon...

MONTAGE - NEWSREEL FOOTAGE

- Black cars clogging Beverly Hills streets
- Weeping women collapse into police arms
- Marquees lit: VALENTINE CABALLERO - FOREVER
- Crowds outside a cathedral
- A coffin carried like royalty
- Newsboys holding up papers: SUICIDE AT SUNSET - SHE LEFT HIM

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER
 Born in Rio de Janeiro... crowned
 America's Latin Lover... it was
 Baroness Von Zolt who broke his
 heart. And when she left him... so
 did the will to live.

FAKED HOME MOVIE - 1920S STYLE

- Valentine poolside with a glamorous starlet
- Dancing at the Coconut Grove
- At a premiere, arm around a woman in furs
- Fencing on set
- Kissing the same woman in three different outfits

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

His death comes just as Hollywood finds its voice. Talkies are the rage, but Caballero will forever be remembered in silence. Women adored him. Men envied him. A lover... a dreamer... a man of mystery.

A final shot shows Valentine, smiling at the camera.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STRETCH LIMOUSINE - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

Modern luxury. Sleek lines. The limo pulls up to a red carpet premiere.

On the marquee: JAXSON ARCHER. BLOOD RUSH 6 - VEINS OF STEEL.

Inside: JAXSON ARCHER (30), movie star handsome, his scowl sharper than his tux.

Next to him: LANA REYNOLDS (29), platinum blonde bombshell in a silver gown, cradling her tiny dog, POOCHY, who snarls at anything male that moves.

Jaxson stares out the tinted window -- numb to the noise, untouched by the glitz.

JAXSON

I'm dying in this career.

LANA

Poochy, twenty million a movie is not dying.

JAXSON

Why do you call me "Poochy."

LANA

Because it's cute... like you!

JAXSON

Your dog's name is Poochy.

LANA

He's cute, too!

Jaxson rolls his eyes.

LANA (CONT'D)

Are you actually gonna watch the movie this time? Or play poker in the manager's office till it's over -- like always?

JAXSON

You won't be alone. You've got Poochy.

Poochy GROWLS -- deeply offended.

EXT. FRONT OF THE THEATER - NIGHT

Fans SCREAM. Flashes pop like fireworks.

The limo door opens -- Jaxson steps out all smiles, extending a hand.

Lana exits with dramatic flair, striking hammy poses for the crowd.

PREMIERE ANNOUNCER

Here he is, ladies and gentlemen -- the star of tonight's movie -- Jaxson Archer! And with him, the lovely Lana Reynolds!

The crowd erupts.

Jaxson fields questions down the line with a smile -- all charm, no warmth.

REPORTER 1

Will there be a Blood Rush 7?

Jaxson laughs.

JAXSON

Let's see how we do with 6!

A few feet down the line, Lana glides toward another reporter, basking in the spotlight.

REPORTER 2

Is it true your next movie is a western?

LANA

Yes! It's true! I'm so excited. I always wanted to let my hair down and ride a horse.

REPORTER 3

Are you and Lana Reynolds going to tie the knot?

Jaxson laughs.

REPORTER 4

Rumors abound that you and Jaxson Archer will be married. Any truth to that?

Lana makes a hammy, fake expression of surprise.

REPORTER 4 (CONT'D)

It's been reported that you're both quite serious, and possibly living together --

JAXSON

Don't believe the tabloids. We're just good friends.

LANA

(piously)
As you know, I was brought up a Quaker and will not sleep with my intended until marriage.

Another bombardment of camera flashes.

INT. JAXSON'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Designer clothes scattered like crime scene evidence.

A phone RINGS.

Lana lies corpse-still, arms splayed, silk mask over her eyes. Poochy snores next to her.

RING.

Silence. No movement.

RING.

An arm reaches from beneath the blanket, grabs the phone, and retreats.

JAXSON (O.S.)

Speak.

MACKIE (V.O.)
 Jaxson! Wake up! This is
 important!

Jaxson emerges from the covers, checks the clock.

JAXSON
 It better be important -- it's
 only eleven thirty in the morning.

INT. MACKIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Power desk. Wall of client headshots.

MACKIE "BULLETS" MacKENZIE (70s), five-foot-nothing in a
 \$10K suit and Coke-bottle designer glasses.

A compact powerhouse. The closer's closer.

MACKIE
 You know the rest of the world is
 up and working by eight, right?

JAXSON (V.O.)
 So am I when I'm working. What's
 your point?

MACKIE (V.O.)
 The reviews are in. Solid.

JAXSON
 Cool.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

MACKIE
 Studio's sending a contract. Need
 you to come sign it.

JAXSON
 For what?

MACKIE
 Blood Rush 7 and 8. What else?

Jaxson is now fully awake.

JAXSON
 I don't want to do Blood Rush 7
 and 8.

MACKIE

Oh -- you wanna hold out for more money? Let's wait for the weekend box office and --

JAXSON

No. No more Blood Rush movies. I'm done with them.

MACKIE

What!? So, what do you want to do!?

JAXSON

I don't know... something different?

MACKIE

Huh?

JAXSON

Something with meaning.

MACKIE

500 mil at the box office -- that's meaning, kid.

JAXSON

I feel empty. Like I'm punching stuntmen in front of green screens.

MACKIE

Hell, you're starting to sound like an actor!

JAXSON

I am an actor!

MACKIE

You're an action hero! You drive fast, drop one-liners, bang a bombshell, and rake in cash for the studio. That's your job!

JAXSON

Bullets -- you're one of the best agents in town.

MACKIE

The best.

JAXSON

Then find me something that shows
what I can really do.

MACKIE

The world doesn't care what you
can do! The world wants drive,
crash, screw, smile! That's it!

JAXSON

Please. Just for me. Find me
something else. Something where I
can actually act.

MACKIE

It won't pay what you're used to.

JAXSON

It's not about money --

MACKIE

Excuse me while I clutch my chest
and call an ambulance.

JAXSON

I trust you.

He ends the call.

Jaxson turns to Poochy -- who growls.

EXT. JAXSON'S SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Lana sunbathes in designer swimwear, oversized shades,
and a floppy hat over her signature platinum blonde.

Nearby, Jaxson sits poolside under an umbrella, margarita
in hand.

LANA

You gonna miss me, Poochy?

Silence.

LANA (CONT'D)

Poochy?

Silence.

LANA (CONT'D)

Jaxson!

JAXSON

I thought you were talking to the dog.

LANA

You should know by now -- if I say "Poochy" and expect an answer, I'm talking to you -- not the dog.

JAXSON

Oh. What was the question?

LANA

Will you miss me when I'm on location?

JAXSON

Of course, I will. What color will you be dyeing your hair?

She frowns, confused.

LANA

Huh?

JAXSON

You can't have that hair.

LANA

Are you crazy? I'm not dyin' my hair!

Jaxson goes to her, kneels beside her.

JAXSON

(low, seductive)
They didn't have platinum blondes in the Wild West.

He kisses her.

LANA

(low and seductive)
They do now. It's in my contract.

She kisses him.

JAXSON

(seductive and low)
After your reviews for The Clara Barton Story, I figured you might've reconsidered.

A longer kiss.

LANA
 (seductive and low)
 Nope. Not gonna happen. What would
 my fans think?

Another kiss... she twirls her fingers through his hair.

LANA (CONT'D)
 I'll miss you sooo much. And by
 the time I'm done shooting, you'll
 probably be off doing number 7.

JAXSON
 There isn't going to be a 7 -- not
 with me, anyway.

Lana sits up, full alert.

LANA
 What!?! What the hell do you mean!?

JAXSON
 I'm done with Blood Rush.

LANA
 Poochy, your career!

MACKIE (O.S.)
 That's what I tried to tell him.

They turn -- Mackie marches in, crisp suit, sunglasses
 gleaming, script in hand.

MACKIE (CONT'D)
 I hope you don't mind. I let
 myself in.

JAXSON
 You got a script!?

Mackie hands it over. Jaxson flips through it.

MACKIE
 Been all over town. They need an A-
 lister to make it happen. Everyone
 passed.

JAXSON
 Why?

MACKIE
 It's a biopic. 1920s.

LANA

Oh! That would go perfect with my hair!

JAXSON

What's the catch?

MACKIE

No catch. Art house, modest budget. You won't see your usual twenty mil. Lucky if you get a hundred grand. But it's Oscar bait.

Jaxson looks up from the script.

JAXSON

(hooked)
Valentine Caballero?

MACKIE

Massive silent star.

LANA

(flatly)
Who?

A beat.

MACKIE

(to Jaxson, ignoring her)
The role of a lifetime.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD FOREVER CEMETERY - DAY

Sunlight cuts between towering palms. Granite angels stand guard.

Stillness... broken only by a slow drift through memory and marble.

Jaxson sits alone on a white stone bench. The script in his hands.

He stares at a wall of crypts -- names etched long before he was born.

Rows of lives. Final titles.

He scans a page of the script. Looks up.

Rises. Walks to the wall.

VALENTINE CABALLERO. 1896-1928. AT REST.

He brushes his fingers over the name. Pauses.

Eyes drop to the script again.

EXT. JAXSON'S HOME - DAY

Modern mansion, California-cool. Inside: the faint CLICK-CLICK of typing.

INT. JAXSON'S STUDY - DAY

Jaxson types... hits ENTER.

On screen: a vintage newspaper headline from 1928.

CABALLERO DEATH RULED SUICIDE.

LANA (O.S.)
Why'd he kill himself?

Jaxson turns. Lana lounges behind him, script in hand, Poochy curled in her lap.

JAXSON
Do I really wanna play a guy who
offs himself?

LANA
It's very Shakespearian, Poochy.

Poochy WHIMPERS.

Lana cradles Poochy's snout.

LANA (CONT'D)
Not you, sweetie.
(to Jackson)
Well? What's it say?

JAXSON
(reading)
"After his scandalous affair with
Baroness Von Zolt - a European
temptress known for smuggling
jewelry in her corsets - Valentine
descended into a state of tragic,
poetic despair...".

JAXSON (CONT'D)

...On the night she left him for a Mongolian prince-slash-spy, Valentine retreated to his candlelit bedroom, played their favorite waltz...

...swallowed a heart-shaped locket filled with her perfume -- unaware it was alcohol-based... and fatal. He was found the next morning. A single tear frozen on his cheek."

LANA

Oh Gawd, that's awful! What a two-timing hussy! A real Black Widow. I want to play her.

JAXSON

I don't cast the movie, Lana.

LANA

No, but you can put in a good word.

Jaxson leans back, eyes locked on the screen.

JAXSON

I don't know...

LANA

What?

JAXSON

This sounds like one of those old studio cover-ups.

LANA

They couldn't fake an autopsy! They obviously yanked the locket out of his guts..

(scrunches in disgust)

Poochy, if I go, don't let them do that to me... if I'm dead, how I got there doesn't matter.

Jaxson types... and hits ENTER.

Valentine's photo appears on-screen.

It catches Lana's eye. She makes her way to Jaxson.

LANA (CONT'D)

Gawd! He's drop-dead gorgeous -- poor choice of words.

She leans in, curious now..

LANA (CONT'D)
How old was he when he...?

JAXSON
Thirty-two.

LANA
Thirty-two. So young. All for a
smuggler in beads.

Jaxson stares at the screen.

Lana clocks the intensity.

LANA (CONT'D)
What?

JAXSON
He had women across the country
falling for him. Why kill himself?

LANA
You know what they say... love is
blind.

JAXSON
It's also replaceable.

LANA
I beg your pardon! Are you saying
I'm replaceable!?

JAXSON
I'm just saying... if you left me
for a Mongolian prince... I could
easily --

LANA
Pick up some wanna-be actress!?
Oh, I bet you could!

Poochy GROWLS.

JAXSON
Lana, please. Let's not get
hypothetical.

LANA
I'm not hypothetical -- I feel
great!

JAXSON

Huh?

LANA

You would really replace me if I dumped you?

A beat.

JAXSON

You hear what you just said?

LANA

Of course.

JAXSON

So if you dumped me... I shouldn't move on?

LANA

Well... not until we're sure I'm not gonna change my mind.

Jaxson chuckles.

JAXSON

You're one of a kind, Lana.

He types.

ON SCREEN:

BARONESS VON ZOLT (60s). A cross between Marie Dressler and Margaret Dumont.

LANA

Who the hell is that?

JAXSON

Baroness Von Zolt.

LANA

What the hell happened to her face?

Jaxson squints, leans in.

JAXSON

(whisper)
I don't get it...

LANA

Let's watch one of his movies.

JAXSON

Yeah... they gotta be streaming
somewhere.

INT. JAXSON'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Popcorn between them, and Poochy on Lana's lap, they
watch the flickering image.

ON SCREEN:

TITLE CARD - VALENTINE CABALLERO in THE GAY CABALLERO!

LANA

It's a gay movie?

JAXSON

In those days "gay" meant
joyful... happy... full of life...

TITLE CARD - With LORETTA DEL MAR

TITLE CARD - DIRECTED BY JOHNSON W. WILCOX

The film begins.

ON SCREEN:

A dusty hacienda courtyard. Flamenco music from the TV.

VALENTINE CABALLERO rides in on a black stallion, dressed
head-to-toe in dark finery -- ornate waistcoat, boots,
wide-brimmed hat. A sword gleams at his hip.

Regal. Effortless. Pure movie star.

He dismounts in one fluid move.

From beneath a stone arch: ROSITA DE CASTELLANO (20s),
raven hair, silk mantilla, meets his gaze. Unblinking.

Their eyes lock. The world melts away.

BACK TO SCENE:

LANA

(transfixed)

Gawd, he's gorgeous. So classy. We
don't have actors like that
anymore...

Jaxson side-eyes her.

LANA (CONT'D)

I mean -- he's been dead forever
and I'm salivating. That's star
power, Poochy.

ON SCREEN:

A shadowy cantina. Candles flicker. Unsavory men growl
and glower.

A brawl erupts. Valentine stands calm, sipping wine.

A brute charges him with a broken bottle --

Valentine sidesteps, flicks a tray like a discus --

WHACK. MID-AIR KNOCKOUT.

He doesn't spill a drop.

ROSITA appears in the doorway. Valentine turns -- grins --
bows with a flourish.

TITLE CARD - "For you, mi corazón... no man shall raise a
hand."

BACK TO SCENE:

LANA (CONT'D)

He just took that guy out with a
tray.

JAXSON

While drinking wine.

LANA

Now that's masculinity. Where did
that go?

Jaxson gives her another look.

ON SCREEN:

Moonlight over a balcony. Rosita stares over vineyards,
bathed in silver glow.

Valentine appears -- shirt open, cape draped across one
shoulder. He holds a red rose.

She turns. He drops to one knee.

TITLE CARD - "I have scaled walls, crossed deserts, and
dueled three noblemen to reach your lips."

She swoons. Music swells. He dips her...

BACK TO SCENE

LANA (CONT'D)

You see that? That's how you stage a kiss. Nowadays, the guy looks like he's eating lunch.

JAXSON

They knew how to stage everything.

LANA

That's not acting. That's poetry.

Jaxson studies the screen.

ON SCREEN:

Dusk. Church courtyard. Candlelight flickers through stained glass.

Valentine kneels, bruised and beautiful, clutching a rosary. A single tear falls.

Rosita appears behind him -- veil in hand. She runs, collapses into his arms.

He looks to heaven.

TITLE CARD - "Take me, Rafael... I'd rather burn with you than live without you!"

BACK TO SCENE

Lana leans in, mesmerized. Jaxson watches -- quiet, unreadable. The screen reflection flickers in his eyes.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - BEVERLY HILLS - DAY

All glass and money. Beverly Hills flash.

MACKIE (V.O.)

Okay, Sam, I owe ya an exclusive -- and I'm givin' it to ya.

INT. MACKIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Mackie leans in, ready to drop the scoop. A cigar smolders in a gold ashtray.

MACKIE

No, not for the paper. I can't sit on this till the morning edition... this is for your online blog. Okay -- Jaxson Archer leaves the Blood Rush franchises -- will star as silent film legend Valentine Caballero in "Caballero," to be directed by Fred Finkelman. Got that? No, baby, that's all there is and it's more than enough. Be honored it's comin' from me, not some press flack.

He hangs up.

EXT. JAXSON'S SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Jaxson swims.

Lana relaxes under an umbrella with Poochy and a pair of drinks -- his in a silver bowl.

She flips through her script. Her laptop is on a table next to her.

LANA

It says I have to gallop full-speed on a stallion. That's not acting -- that's rodeo.

JAXSON

You can ride, can't you?

LANA

The closest I ever got to a horse was a Mr. Ed rerun.

JAXSON

You told them you could ride?

LANA

Of course! I didn't want to lose the part.

JAXSON

Then you better call the best stuntwoman SAG's got.

LANA

Is riding really that hard?

JAXSON

If you don't know what you're doing it can be.

LANA

Oh, jeez.

Her computer BINGS.

LANA (CONT'D)

Hey! I just got a Jaxson Archer alert!

Jaxson swims to the edge.

LANA (CONT'D)

Listen to this, Poochy: "Mackie 'Bullets' MacKenzie, agent for superstar Jaxson Archer, announces his client will star as silent film legend Valentine Caballero in the biopic "Caballero." This is a drastic departure from Archer's blockbuster "Blood Rush" franchise. Will fans follow him? Stay tuned."

JAXSON

"Will they follow me?" What the hell does that mean?

LANA

I think he means... will your fans follow you from action to art house.

Jaxson nods slowly.

JAXSON

I guess it's real, now, huh?

Lana offers a warm smile.

JAXSON (CONT'D)

One line of copy... and I feel like I signed my own obituary.

LANA

(sympathetic)

You'll be fine. If the movie tanks, you can always do Blood Rush 9: Nursing Home Apocalypse.

Poochy GROWLS.

INT. JAXSON'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jaxson watches the vintage newsreel. Valentine's body is wheeled from the mansion.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER
Tragedy strikes Hollywood today as
the silver screen's most luminous
lover is gone too soon...

Jaxson pauses the footage. Leans in.

ON SCREEN:

A glimpse of the mansion's façade. Tiled roof. Arched entry. Rain on stone.

JAXSON
(to himself)
I've seen that...

BACK TO SCENE

He picks up his phone and speaks into it.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
Where was Valentine Caballero's
house located?

ON HIS PHONE: A map appears. A red pin drops.

His eyes widen.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
(whispers)
I'll be damned.

EXT. A STREET IN BEVERLY HILLS - DAY

A sleek black Corvette glides to a stop in front of the gates of the Caballero estate.

Behind the tall wrought iron fence, Jaxson catches a glimpse of the iconic Spanish tile roof -- rising like a crown above the treetops. Unmistakable.

He steps out.

Waiting at the gate is BERNIE (20s), realtor, dressed sharp but trying a little too hard. His face lights up with fanboy joy.

BERNIE
Mister Jaxson!

JAXSON
Hey.

They shake hands.

BERNIE
I'm a big fan, sir. Bernie.
Seen all your movies. Blood Rush 4
was my favorite!

JAXSON
Thanks. Appreciate it.

BERNIE
Excited to show you the Caballero
place.

He fiddles with a heavy key, unlocking the gate with a
loud CLACK.

BERNIE (CONT'D)
Normally, the gate's electric, but
it's been shut off. The house
hasn't been lived in for a while.

JAXSON
How come?

Bernie falters, nervous smile never wavering.

BERNIE
Uh... taxes, maybe. Square
footage... you know -- the --

JAXSON
(flat)
It's Beverly Hills.

BERNIE
Right! Classic charm!

The gate creaks open. Jaxson steps inside -- and there it
is:

THE CABALLERO MANSION.

A looming, sun-bleached Spanish Colonial. Stuccoed
arches. Iron balconies. Proud. Private. Time-worn. The
ghosts of old Hollywood practically hum in the air.

Jaxson stops, taking it in.

JAXSON

Wow.

BERNIE

It... definitely has a "wow"
factor.

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - DAY

They step into darkness.

The main hallway yawns open -- cool and hushed. Furniture buried under dusty white sheets -- like icebergs lining the walls.

Jaxson's eyes trace the grand staircase, where Valentine's faded posters line the walls -- a gallery of lost dreams.

The front door closes behind them. A shaft of daylight cuts across the room -- illuminating the floating dust and stillness.

Jaxson is stunned.

Bernie follows as Jaxson turns and heads for --

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jaxson steps into the vast sunken living room, and time seems to pause.

Ornate molding. Vaulted ceilings. Hand-painted beams. The faded glamour of another era lingers in every corner.

A massive stone fireplace dominates one wall, flanked by built-in shelves lined with antique books and forgotten knickknacks.

Heavy velvet drapes, once crimson, hang limp over towering arched windows. Dust motes swirl lazily in shafts of filtered light.

Beneath a grand chandelier: furniture from another century, covered in white sheets like ghostly guests at a long-forgotten party.

A tarnished baby grand piano sits in the corner, its keys yellowed, a sheet of music still open.

JAXSON

It's a time capsule.

Bernie shifts uncomfortably as Jaxson lifts a tarp, revealing the vintage sofa beneath.

JAXSON (CONT'D)

This furniture... it looks original to the house.

BERNIE

It is.

Jaxson turns to him.

JAXSON

After ninety years? Didn't anyone ever redecorate?

BERNIE

N-no. No one ever stayed here long enough.

JAXSON

What does that mean?

BERNIE

(nervous shrug)
Taxes... square footage...

Jaxson sees his unease.

JAXSON

You don't like it here.

BERNIE

Oh, no! Not that... just... they always send the new guy to show this house... I'm new.

JAXSON

Why do they send the new guy?

BERNIE

The others won't step foot in it because.... Um -- they're busy.

Jaxson looks to the top of the stairs.

BERNIE (CONT'D)

What's your next movie? Blood Rush 7?

JAXSON

Actually, I'm going to play Valentine Caballero. His life story.

BERNIE
(crestfallen)
Oh. That should be... exciting...
huh?

Jaxson notices the expression. Suppressed alarm. He turns and strolls back to the hallway.

JAXSON
How much is it?

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - DAY

Jaxson heads for the bottom of the stairs and studies the old posters on the walls... Valentine still lords over the home.

Bernie follows, checking his paperwork.

BERNIE
The previous owners are asking 25 million.

JAXSON
They're still alive? This place looks like it's been empty for...

BERNIE
20 years.

Jaxson slowly turns to him. Then back to Valentine in The Sheik. It's like the eyes of a man and a painting meet.

A beat.

JAXSON
I'll write a check.

Bernie -- stunned.

BERNIE
Yes, sir! If you can come back to the office, we can get the paperwork in order.

He casts a final glance at the poster -- then follows Bernie out.

The door THUDS closed.

Darkness. Silence.

A soft piano melody begins.

Faint. Then rising. The same music Valentine played the night he died.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

The baby grand sits untouched.

Its keys press down -- one by one.

No one is there.

The music plays on... echoing through the empty house.

EXT. THE MANSION - DAY

Several moving trucks in the driveway alongside Jaxson's Corvette and a black BMW.

LANA (V.O.)
Poochy... it's so...

JAXSON (V.O.)
Incredible?

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - DAY

Lana, with Poochy under her arm, looks in all directions.

LANA
Old.

JAXSON
It's history, Lana.

LANA
Are you keeping all this stuff?

JAXSON
All of it. I'm moving my desk and office things in, though.

He takes her hand and leads her to the stairs.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
Wait till you see the upstairs!

They ascend as she notices the posters on the wall.

LANA
There he is... good-looking.

INT. UPSTAIRS LANDING - DAY

Corridors veer off to the center, left, and right.

LANA

Jeez, this place is massive. No wonder he had so many women over...

She snuggles up to Jaxson and runs her fingers through his hair.

LANA (CONT'D)

It could get lonely here...
(whispers in his ear)
Where's the bedroom?

Jaxson leads her into a room.

INT. THE MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Elegant. Timeworn. A grand four-poster bed commands the space beneath tall arched windows, where velvet drapes mute the light. The wallpaper, once deep crimson, has faded with dignity.

A vintage vanity, untouched, still holds old cologne bottles and a gold lighter.

Framed photos on the mantel capture Hollywood's golden age -- and one man at the center of it all.

Jaxson and Lana enter. She continues to hold his hand as she sits on the bed -- a puff of dust escapes.

LANA

(coughs)
Jeez! When's the last time they changed the sheets around here?

JAXSON

Twenty years ago.

She springs up -- the mood dies.

LANA

Are you sure you want to give up your house for this?

JAXSON

Yeah. This is real Hollywood.

Lana roams, skeptical.

LANA
 Real Hollywood's outside.
 (beat)
 This is a relic.

She opens a door and enters --

INT. VALENTINE'S BATHROOM - DAY

A powder-pink dream, trimmed in polished gold and rose-tinted glass. The clawfoot tub gleams beneath a silk canopy, flanked by vases of dried lavender.

Gold swan-neck faucets. Crystal knobs. Cologne bottles lined in perfect rows.

It's less a bathroom, more a boudoir in blush.

LANA
 Oh! Oh, I love it!

She twirls in place, admiring every inch - until something dawns on her.

LANA (CONT'D)
 Wait. This was his?

JAXSON
 I guess.
 (a beat)
 I'll paint it.

Lana strolls away. Jaxson lingers... staring at the fixtures, the walls - the life once lived here.

EXT. THE STAIRCASE - DAY

Jaxson and Lana descend the steps.

JAXSON
 When are you off?

LANA
 Jet leaves in an hour. But I'm excited, Poochy. I think Hell's Harlot Rides Again is gonna be one of the all-time great westerns.

JAXSON
 Yeah? I didn't read it --

LANA

It's an elevated feminist revenge western. You'll love it! We'll be in Utah for a couple of days, then back before New Mexico.

They reach the front door. A kiss.

LANA (CONT'D)

I'm gonna miss you terrible.

She waves Poochy's paw.

LANA (CONT'D)

Say goodbye to Poochy, Poochy.

The dog growls. Jaxson grins crookedly.

She exits from the mansion gloom into sunlight.

The door closes.

THUNDER! A crack of it.

DING-DONG!

INT. ENTRY HALL - DAY

Jaxson -- now changed -- opens the door to pouring rain and reveals --

ANTOINE LaCARVA (50s), decorator to the stars, Flamboyant, not cartoonish. A professional man who understands fabrics and designs.

ANTOINE

Mister Jaxson?

JAXSON

Come in!

As he enters, Antoine's eyes drink in the house.

ANTOINE

Oh! Oh, my! I always wanted to see the inside of this home. Magnificent.

JAXSON

Would you like a tour?

ANTOINE

Yes -- but business first. The bathroom.

INT. VALENTINE'S BATHROOM - DAY

Antoine surveys the room. One eyebrow slowly raises.

ANTOINE

It's very... pink.

JAXSON

Yes. Not my favorite color. This is the room I want to re-do. Lose the pink.

ANTOINE

Hmm... I see masculine gray, black accents... maybe a whisper of Art Deco to honor the rest of the house.

(turns to Jaxson)

I can have my men in here tomorrow morning at nine.

JAXSON

Perfect.

EXT. THE STUDIO - OFFICE BUILDINGS - DAY

A water tower looms. Glass windows. Narrow road. Jaxson's black Corvette parked out front.

INT. STUDIO OFFICE - DAY

Sparse, sterile. A long table, stackable chairs. No frills, all business.

Around the table:

FRED FINKELMAN (50s), baseball cap, gum, director's viewfinder around his neck. Always chewing on something.

CARL HOSKINS (60s), screenwriter. An Oscar winner, and absolutely sure you should know that.

RACHEL MARKS (30s), poised, beautiful, calculating. Rising star with excellent PR instincts.

Jaxson - quiet, absorbing.

FRED

Now -- I wanted to get our two stars and Carl in a room. Just to start feeling the vibe. You two worked together before?

JAXSON

No.

RACHEL

No, but I'm a fan.

JAXSON

Thank you, Rachel. What pictures of mine have you seen?

Rachel freezes for a half-beat -- busted.

Jaxson offers a polite smile and moves on.

FRED

Any questions about the script?

RACHEL

No, it's wonderful. Feels... timeless.

JAXSON

I was wondering... how sanitized is the narrative?

CARL

Sanitized?

JAXSON

Did Caballero really kill himself over some Baroness?

CARL

I do my research.

JAXSON

I'm sure. But... something about it feels fake.

FRED

Fake? How so?

JAXSON

Can't quite put my finger on it -- it just doesn't add up.

FRED

Suicide rarely does.

CARL

It's romantic. It's what people expect... and it tested well.

JAXSON

But he was about to make his first talkie. He had women chasing him. Top of his game. Doesn't sound like someone ready to end it all.

CARL

It's what the world wanted to believe.

FRED

It's been a hundred years. This is the legend. Don't dig too deep -- we're not making Dateline. This sells. If you find out he had a thing for chorus girls... who cares? It's blah... not our story.

JAXSON

I just think we owe it to him to ask if there's more --

CARL

I won an Oscar.

Jackson's brow tightens.

EXT. A STREET IN BEVERLY HILLS - DAY

Jaxson's Corvette cruises at a leisurely crawl -- cars stack up behind, but he doesn't care.

TANGO MUSIC blares from his speakers, pouring into the quiet neighborhood.

Pedestrians stop to stare. One woman clutches her dog.

EXT. VALENTINE'S MANSION - DAY

The gates swing open.

Jaxson pulls in, music still blasting.

As the gates close behind him, the music lingers -- loud enough for neighbors to raise eyebrows.

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - DAY

Jaxson strides inside, humming the tango.

He spins into a quick, cheeky dance move on the stairs and sprints upward.

INT. VALENTINE'S BATHROOM - DAY

The remodel is complete.

Gray walls. Black trim. White tile accents. The gold swan-neck faucets -- gone.

It's clean, masculine, Art Deco elegance.

JAXSON

Wow!

He pulls out his phone and dials.

JAXSON (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Antoine? Jaxson Archer, here. Hey, fantastic -- the bathroom looks fantastic!

(pause)

Yeah, I'm very happy with it.

(pause)

What? No... I don't have a player piano...

(confused)

They did?

(pause)

Maybe it was the neighbors... anyway -- thank you again.

He pockets the phone.

INT. THE MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Jaxson drops onto the bed.

Opens the script. Reads.

A few quiet moments... his eyelids grow heavy...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Sunlight filters in through the tall window.

A single beam creeps across Jaxson's face.

He stirs. Sits up, groggy. Notices he's still in yesterday's clothes.

JAXSON

(mutters)

Stupid ass. Stupid, stupid...

He scuffs toward the bathroom, yawning.

Flinging the door open.

INT. VALENTINE'S BATHROOM - MORNING

Pink walls.

Gold swan-neck faucets.

The original bathroom -- completely restored.

Jaxson blinks in shock. He slowly backs out... turns... and hurries to grab his phone from the nightstand.

He snaps a photo.

He taps. Dials.

JAXSON

(into phone)

Hey Antoine, Jaxson Archer.

(pause)

Yeah, I know what time it is.

Check your text.

(pause)

I know they're pink again! How!?

You use dissolving paint or something?

(pause)

I have pre-productions meetings all day -- but yeah, send them over!

SERIES OF SHOTS - JAXSON HEADS OUT

- Jaxson descends the grand staircase in a fresh outfit - sharp, casual, confident.

- A key fob BEEPS. His sleek black Corvette flashes.

- The front gate hums and slowly opens as the car pulls down the driveway.
- TANGO MUSIC blasts from the speakers as he cruises through the leafy streets of Beverly Hills.
- The Corvette cruises through Beverly Hills, slicing between palm trees and Teslas.
- It slows... then glides to a stop in front of an exclusive restaurant.
- Valet attendants snap to attention.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Every inch looks exclusive and expensive. Jaxson sits opposite Rachel Marks in a quiet, out-of-the-way corner.

Empty plates before them. Rachel peels another crumb from a dinner roll and shrugs innocently.

RACHEL

I'm glad we're working together.
It's not the kind of story people expect from you -- and that's why it'll work.

JAXSON

What do you mean?

RACHEL

Well... you've got a brand.
Explosions. Guns. Veins.
Caballero? It's layered. Elegant.
It's the kind of project that lets people see you act.

JAXSON

It is.

RACHEL

So why mess with it?

JAXSON

I'm not trying to. I just think there's more to the story.

RACHEL

Don't overthink it. The mystery works. It's sexy.

JAXSON
Suicide isn't sexy.

RACHEL
It is when I'm playing it.

Jaxson notices people staring at her. He shows a slight smile to them.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You got top billing. I respect that. But if the script changes -- I become a very expensive problem.

She flashes a polished smile -- all teeth, no warmth.

JAXSON
Is that a threat?

RACHEL
That's a promise, darling.

Jaxson responds with polite charm.

JAXSON
Three things. The movie is about Caballero. The Baroness is ancillary... and don't ever threaten me again.

He rises, tosses his napkin on the table, and leaves her smiling -- but blinking fast.

EXT. STREET IN BRENTWOOD - NIGHT

The black Corvette cruises slowly through winding residential roads. The tango music plays low.

EXT. VALENTINE'S MANSION - NIGHT

The electric gate parts. The car glides silently through. The gate closes behind like a curtain falling.

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - NIGHT

The front door swings open. Jaxson steps inside alone. Silence greets him.

INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT

He climbs the stairs, slower now, fingertips grazing the banister. The house breathes around him.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jaxson enters. A faint breeze nudges the curtain. He loosens his collar, looks in the mirror, notices the door to the bathroom.

He opens it.

As before, gray, black, white, amazing.

JAXSON

Antoine -- you're brilliant!

He leans back into the bedroom and tosses his tie onto the bed and kicks off his shoes. He steps into...

INT. VALENTINE'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

In an instant, the bathroom is pink again. Jaxson takes a step back and hits the wall -- his eyes bulging as he scans the room -- impossibly transformed in a second.

On the mirror -- in dripping gray paint: LEAVE IT ALONE.

EXT. THE MANSION - NIGHT

Golden light glows from every window. Rain beads off the tile roof. The old house is wide awake.

JAXSON

I appreciate your coming out here at night, Antoine... but --

ANTOINE

No, no! You were quite right...

INT. VALENTINE'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Antoine and Jaxson are both clearly on edge.

Nerves frayed.

ANTOINE

I don't understand this... I was here not more than three hours ago. I saw what my workers created... it was magnificent... where is it!?

JAXSON

You actually saw this room in gray?

ANTOINE

Yes! How could this happen!?

JAXSON

Not once... twice.

Antoine starts looking all over.

ANTOINE

You are not alone in this house! I can't stay here any longer!

JAXSON

What!?

Antoine bolts from the room.

JAXSON (CONT'D)

Hey!

EXT. THE MANSION - NIGHT

Antoine's car screeches out through the open gate and vanishes down the dark, rain-slick street.

INT. THE TOP OF THE STAIRS - NIGHT

Jaxson sits slumped on the top step -- dazed. Catatonic. His phone RINGS in his pocket.

He slowly answers.

JAXSON

(on phone)

Yes?

(pause)

Hey, Lana... Yeah, everything's fine. I gotta go.

He hangs up.

A faint mechanical WHIRR... then the rhythmic CLICK of a movie projector.

He doesn't move.

Eyes widening, he rises, descending the stairs like someone walking in a dream.

INT. ENTRANCE TO THE THEATER - NIGHT

Jaxson approaches the door, drawn by the sound. He presses his ear to it -- the unmistakable GRIND of old reels spooling on the other side.

He eases the door open.

INT. THE THEATER - NIGHT

A 1920s screening room -- lush red wallpaper, gold sconces casting warm pools of light. Four rows of velvet chairs face a large silver screen glowing to life.

Projected: The Gay Caballero.

Bigger. Crisper. Almost alive.

From the hallway, Jaxson peers through the projection window -- it's empty.

JAXSON

Hello?!

Nothing.

The movie plays on.

He takes a seat in the second row, eyes fixed to the screen, entranced.

ON SCREEN:

Valentine delivers silent dialogue with expressive, dramatic, intensity.

JAXSON (CONT'D)

(to himself)

What was your voice like...

He leans forward, watching Valentine's lips move.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
(trying voices)
You have shied from me much too
long... shall your father keep you
a prisoner from my love?

Adjusting tone --

JAXSON (CONT'D)
I have come a long way... I shall
wait for an answer...

From behind, a subtle shift.

In the last row: a SHADOWY FIGURE sits, barely defined.

The screen abruptly FLICKERS OUT. Lights rise.

Jaxson spins around -- empty.

He bolts up, rushes to the projection booth -- no one.

He stands alone in the middle of the theater, breath
held. Waiting.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jaxson enters, stripped down to a tee and boxers, a full
glass of whiskey in hand.

Half gone in one gulp.

JAXSON
(to himself)
Calm down...

He flicks the light off and crawls into bed.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
(to himself)
All in your mind...

The sheets next to him lift slightly.

The mattress beside him dips.

A pillow depresses.

Jaxson pauses. Opens one eye. Turns slowly...

A clear indent -- someone is lying there.

He YANKS the sheet back -- no one.

He SCREAMS and tumbles out of bed.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
What the hell!

The phone RINGS.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
What the hell!?

He grabs it off the nightstand.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
What!?

VALENTINE (V.O.)
You don't belong here, carus.

JAXSON
Who is this!?

VALENTINE
Someone who prefers his bathroom
in pink, and his leading men in
better lighting.

CLICK.

The line goes dead.

Jaxson stares at the bed. Then the door.

Shaken to his core.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Sunlight spills across the piano.

Jaxson lies sprawled on the couch, wrapped in a blanket.

DING DONG.

He doesn't move.

DING DONG.

VALENTINE (O.S)
Someone's at the door!

The blanket WHIPS off and hits the floor.

Jaxson bolts upright, disoriented -- wide eyes scanning
the room.

DING DONG.

He stumbles toward the hall.

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - MORNING

Jaxson opens the door to reveal Fred, scarf wrapped around his neck, looking equally unrested.

They stare at each other.

FRED
Can I come in?

Jaxson steps aside.

JAXSON
Sorry. Just woke up.

FRED
I gathered.

Fred scans the house interior.

FRED (CONT'D)
Holy crap. This is Caballero's house?

JAXSON
Yep.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jaxson picks the blanket up from the floor.

Fred grabs a chair. Jaxson settles back on the couch.

JAXSON
What's on your mind?

FRED
The script... the studio... you.

JAXSON
Me?

FRED
The rewrites.

JAXSON

I wasn't demanding a rewrite -- I just wanted to make sure we were true to the facts.

VALENTINE (O.S.)

Which you are not.

Jaxson flinches.

FRED

Carl says it works. I like the script.

JAXSON

So do I... but it feels... contrived.

FRED

I can make it work.

VALENTINE (O.S.)

Ah, yes, the scarf-wearing visionary.

Jaxson spins sound on the sofa and looks behind him.

JAXSON

What!? Who said that!?

FRED

I said, "I can make it work."

VALENTINE (O.S)

Not with that script.

JAXSON

Not with that script? Who said that?

FRED

You did?

Panic now -- Jaxson jumps up and ushers Fred toward the front door.

JAXSON

Hey, Fred, now's not a good time -- I'm not myself at the moment... I need a coffee...

FRED

Let's go get one --

JAXSON
No, I drink alone...

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - MORNING

Jaxson rushes Fred to the door with polite urgency.

JAXSON
By the way, how did you get past
the gate?

FRED
It was open.

JAXSON
Ah. Gotta fix that. See you soon!

Fred steps out. The door SLAMS.

Jaxson leans against it. Breathing heavy. Trying to center himself.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
Am I going crazy!? What do you
want from me!?

A long beat.

VALENTINE (V.O.)
Sadly, nothing now -- but when I
was alive -- oh, baby!

JAXSON
(yells)
Where are you!?

Silence.

Then -- GRRRRRIND. The WHIR of the projector kicks in.

INT. THE THEATER - DAY

Jaxson bursts through the door.

The room is dark. The old projector flickers.

ON SCREEN:

Valentine in The Gay Caballero -- locked in a passionate embrace with his co-star.

Jaxson sits. Transfixed -- hypnotized.

ON SCREEN:

Valentine dips the actress in a sweeping kiss.

Suddenly, the projected image layers over something real. The shadow aligns... deepens... and takes shape.

A figure emerges beneath the flicker -- Valentine, dressed exactly as on screen, now occupies the same space... still partially lit by the projection, he seems to glow -- half light, half legend.

VALENTINE

I dropped her on take one.

(beat)

I can't remember, but I think it was on purpose.

Jaxson SCREAMS -- jumps up and falls backward into the row behind with a CRASH.

The projector CLICKS OFF. The house lights rise.

VALENTINE stands at the front -- dressed in full Gay Caballero costume. Suave. Regal. Slightly out of time.

His voice is a soft, syrupy Upper Midwest lilt. Slightly effeminate, but not excessively so.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

Come out, darling. I won't bite.

Jaxson peeks over the seats.

JAXSON

You're... dead.

VALENTINE

My body is. I, on the other hand, am very much a presence.

JAXSON

You're not... Latin.

VALENTINE

Another astute observation, darling.

JAXSON

Why are you calling me darling?

VALENTINE

You're a guest in my house.

JAXSON
My house. I bought it.

VALENTINE
I built it. I haunt it. You are
merely passing through.

Jaxson stands... and passes out.

Valentine peers over the seats and sees Jaxson. Out cold.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)
Hm.

EXT. THE MANSION - NIGHT

The house is in darkness except for a downstairs light.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A nervous Jaxson is on the sofa.

JAXSON
So I was imagining you, is that
it?

Silence.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
I was seeing things this morning.
You didn't actually step out of a
movie screen with a voice like
Liberace.

Silence.

DING DONG.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
AH! You're ringing the doorbell!

He hurries out of the room.

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jaxson opens the door and is caught off-guard as he comes
face to face with Rachel.

JAXSON
Rachel?

RACHEL

Truce?

He stares at her.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to ask me in?

JAXSON

How did you get through the gate?

RACHEL

It was open.

He snaps out of his confusion and lets her in.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

I wanted to feel the energy in the house. There's history here -- passion, scandal... unfinished business.

JAXSON

Valentine?

RACHEL

Valentine and the Baroness.

JAXSON

It's Valentine's house. She only popped in once in a while. You know -- this isn't the best time.

She makes her way to the staircase.

RACHEL

I have to see the bedroom. It's practically sacred. That's where he died for love -- over me.

JAXSON

He killed himself over the Baroness. Not you.

RACHEL

We're mirrors, Jaxson. Me and the Baroness. Only she had a better title.

She majestically climbs the stairs. Jaxson follows.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rachel steps into the room in a "method-like trance, full spirit-mode."

RACHEL

Oooooommmmm. Oooooommmmm. Heavy energy
in here... it's thick. I feel the
spirit of the Baroness... she's
still here...

JAXSON

(to himself)

Great. I've got two of them?

She slowly walks the room -- arms outstretched.

RACHEL

Baroness... I welcome your
essence. Your drama. Your tragedy.

VALENTINE (O.S.)

What the hell is she doing?

Jaxson jumps to full alert, eyes scan the room.

VALENTINE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You can't see me. I'm in your
head.

JAXSON

So you are in my mind!

VALENTINE (O.S.)

No, I'm in your head. Don't you
listen?

JAXSON

I listen... I just don't
understand.

RACHEL

There's nothing to understand. I
am connecting to the spirit world.

VALENTINE

She's closer than she thinks.

RACHEL

Baroness -- I feel you... you are
here...

VALENTINE (V.O.)
She's long gone... she didn't even
leave a vapor trail. Why is she
trying to contact Mitzie?

JAXSON
Who's Mitzie?

RACHEL
Mitzie? Who's --
(eyes pop open)
Wait. What?

VALENTINE (O.S.)
Mitzie Marie Morantz -- stage
name, Baroness Von Zolt.

JAXSON
She wasn't a Russian smuggler?

VALENTINE (O.S.)
Still my heart. She was born in
the Bronx.

JAXSON
The Bronx!?

RACHEL
What about the Bronx?

JAXSON
Oh! Ah -- the Baroness was from
the Bronx.

She ends the trance.

RACHEL
You're mocking me, aren't you?

VALENTINE (O.S.)
Darling, if I were mocking you,
you'd need a stunt double.

Jaxson LAUGHS out loud.

RACHEL
I came here in good faith -- to
bond. To connect.

She storms out of the room. Jaxson speaks toward the
ceiling with a slight smile.

JAXSON
You're good!

He rushes out after her.

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - NIGHT

Rachel descends the staircase in a huff, Jaxson behind her, not in any hurry.

RACHEL
But you want to be glib.
Fine. Good luck channeling
anything from this dusty
mausoleum.

JAXSON
Things have been weird --

RACHEL
That bathroom is a fever dream, by
the way. But maybe that's your
vibe.

She flies off the last step and tosses open the door --
to find Lana, her hand frozen inches away from ringing
the doorbell.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Lana!

LANA
Rachel! What are you doing here?

RACHEL
I was *trying* to make contact in
the bedroom!

LANA
What!?

Rachel zips past Lana and disappears into the night.

Lana, with an evil eye on Jaxson, enters. She wears a
small cowboy hat tilted rakishly over the platinum.

Poochy, under her arm, wears a similar hat and
neckerchief over a diamond collar.

Instant tension.

Poochy GROWLS through gritted teeth.

JAXSON
That dog hates me.

LANA

He's not a dog -- he's Poochy!

(beat)

Now tell me what Rachel Marks was doing here?

JAXSON

She's co-starring in Caballero... and you know that.

LANA

And she was... in the bedroom?

JAXSON

Yeah -- not like that. She was connecting to the "spirit energy."

LANA

(with a crooked smile)

Is that what we're calling it now?

JAXSON

Lana, come on.

LANA

I'm just saying... if I wanted to commune with your ghost, I'd do it with a Ouija board. Not my wardrobe.

JAXSON

Lana, come on. She wanted to see the room where Valentine slept with Baroness Von Zolt.

LANA

What did you two do? Reenact the event!?

JAXSON

Okay, enough of this. I'm an actor -- so are you. You should know when something is real and something is for a picture.

LANA

Yeah?

JAXSON

Hey! You just came back from two days in Utah kissing some cowboy!

LANA

What makes you think I was kissing anyone!?

JAXSON

Your movie is called "Hell's Harlot Rides Again." It doesn't sound like you spend the whole story knitting a sweater!

LANA

There is nothing between me and Tex O'Brian!

JAXSON

Who?

LANA

Never mind!

With her nose in the air --

LANA (CONT'D)

Come along, Poochy. Mama's done here.

She turns, heads toward the door.

JAXSON

Don't call me Poochy!

She stops, spins around on her heels.

LANA

I was calling *Poochy*, Poochy. You are a philandering son of a bitch!

She exits, SLAMMING the door behind her.

VALENTINE (O.S.)

Poochy, are those the women in your life?

Jaxson jumps! He turns to see the full-bodied apparition of Valentine Caballero on the stairway. His hand holds a cigarette at the end of an elegant holder. He wears a silk robe over a tux dress shirt and pants.

Jaxson can barely squeak out --

JAXSON

Yes.

VALENTINE
My sympathies, darling.

JAXSON
Why do you call me darling?

VALENTINE
It's an Irish expression. "Colonel
Darlin," you must have heard that.

JAXSON
You're Irish?

VALENTINE
No.

Jaxson stares at him -- eyes wide, nervous.

JAXSON
Okay, this is... is this some kind
of joke? Like a hologram or
something? A computer program...
projection with mirrors...

VALENTINE
You're speaking in tongues.

JAXSON
Who are you?

VALENTINE
Valentine Caballero.

The name halts Jaxson in his tracks. He takes it in as he
stares at the apparition. He speaks with slow caution.

JAXSON
You're... dead... dead and buried
over ninety years ago.

VALENTINE
Has it been that long?

He descends the stairs and heads for the living room arch
with a walk not unlike Fred Astaire.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)
Time flies when you're fluttering
around as ectoplasm.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jaxson enters and heads for the whiskey bottle. Valentine is already in a chair taking a casual puff.

VALENTINE

Be careful. That was John
Gilbert's downfall, you know.
Looks, charm, and a bottle of
scotch too many.

Jaxson's hand trembles as he pours. A splash over the rim. He tries to avoid eye contact -- but can't.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

You all right? You seem a bit...
shaky.

JAXSON

I'm fine -- I mean, no! No, I'm
not all right!

He crosses to the couch like he's walking underwater. Sits slowly.

JAXSON (CONT'D)

Are you... are you really...?

Valentine offers an elegant, almost theatrical nod.

JAXSON (CONT'D)

Then this is real?

VALENTINE

Indeed it is.

JAXSON

But how?

VALENTINE

(shrugs lightly)

Well... that's a long story, and
one best told under moonlight.

(pause)

Shall we go out to the pool? It's
far more... atmospheric.

JAXSON

You can go outside?

VALENTINE

I can go anywhere.

JAXSON

So... being dead isn't any
different from being alive?

VALENTINE

Of course, it is. I can't eat, I
can't sleep, I can't drive, I
can't have sex --

JAXSON

That's dead, all right.

VALENTINE

The pool?

Jaxson grabs his drink. Wordless, stunned, nodding.

EXT. VALENTINE'S POOL - NIGHT

Elegantly lit. A shimmer across still water.

Jaxson steps into the scene and glances back --

JAXSON

I keep thinking that --

No one's behind him.

VALENTINE (O.S.)

-- that you're dreaming?

He turns.

Valentine is now stretched out on a poolside chaise,
wearing a monogrammed terrycloth robe over a vintage 1927
bathing suit, tank top, and belted briefs. A lounging
ghost in high style.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

You don't look like me.

JAXSON

You don't sound like you.

VALENTINE

I've always sounded like this. I
think that dying when I did was a
mixed blessing.

JAXSON

How so?

VALENTINE

Sweetheart, I never would have survived the transition to talking pictures. The studio was days away from converting the stages.

He looks around, soaking in the glow.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

This was one of my favorite places. But you need pool boys.

JAXSON

Huh?

VALENTINE

At least one.

JAXSON

I don't plan on using the pool that much.

VALENTINE

So? You just... look at them.

Jaxson squints -- beginning to connect the dots.

JAXSON

What would the world's biggest ladies' man care about...

A beat.

JAXSON (CONT'D)

I... I mean... I'm still trying to wrap my brain around -- who are you!?

VALENTINE

My real name was Chester Fortesque. A Kansas nobody turned studio creation.

JAXSON

But you were born in Rio De Janeiro.

VALENTINE

Close. I was born on Rio Vista Street in Wichita.

Jaxson drops into a chair. Soaks it in.

JAXSON

Why are you... still here? I mean... shouldn't you have gone toward the light or whatever it is?

VALENTINE

I am here to right my life.

JAXSON

What does that mean?

VALENTINE

It means I died alone... with no one knowing who I truly was. Only the illusion remains. It's as if Chester Fortesque never walked the earth.

JAXSON

I don't know how you change that.

VALENTINE

Neither did I -- until now.

JAXSON

I don't follow.

VALENTINE

I was originally going to scare you away -- like all the others... I mean... repainting a man's bathroom.

JAXSON

Sorry.

VALENTINE

But now... I see you were put here for a reason.

JAXSON

What reason?

VALENTINE

Actors still aren't the brightest bulbs on the tree, are they?

(A beat, more serious.)

You are going to play me. And I want the real story told.

JAXSON

We're telling the real story.

VALENTINE

You suspected it was not right.

JAXSON

I wasn't sure the research was spot-on...

VALENTINE

Research will get you nowhere. I'm the only one left to tell it.

JAXSON

The script's pretty good.

A beat.

VALENTINE

I should like to read it.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jaxson pours another drink as he mumbles to himself.

JAXSON

Lana, guess what? My house is haunted. How do I know? He popped out of a movie screen and lounges around the pool in a terrycloth bathrobe. No, I'm not drinking too much.

He throws back the scotch in one gulp.

INT. VALENTINE'S STUDY - NIGHT

Dressed in a dark green velvet smoking jacket and surrounded by shelves of books, Valentine reads the script in a plush, leather chair.

He flips a page with anger. His face is stern.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jaxson is on the piano bench, a full glass of scotch in his hand. He listens -- then takes a healthy swig.

VALENTINE (O.S.)

Outrageous!

He takes another swig.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

Drivel! Nothing but drivel!

JAXSON

I don't think he likes it.

Suddenly -- the piano BANGS OUT the first few famous notes of Chopin's FUNERAL MARCH.

Jaxson jumps off the seat, and not seeing anyone there, makes his way to the living room exit.

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jaxson arrives at the bottom of the steps. Careful not to spill his drink. He YELLS up the stairs.

JAXSON

That doesn't sound like a rave review!

Valentine suddenly leans in from behind. A whisper, cool against his ear:

VALENTINE

Garbage!

Jaxson JUMPS and spills his scotch.

JAXSON

Son of a -- don't do that!

He turns to see Valentine, script in hand.

VALENTINE

Who wrote this hooey? J.M. Barrie!?

He holds the script under Jaxson's nose.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

Phonus Balonus.

JAXSON

It sucks?

VALENTINE

That, too.

JAXSON

What's wrong with it!?

EXT. VALENTINE'S POOL - NIGHT

Valentine and Jaxson take a leisurely stroll around the four corners of the pool, deep in conversation.

VALENTINE

My third act... or should I say,
my final bow, was fabricated.

JAXSON

You mean you didn't die?

VALENTINE

Oh, I died, all right. But over
the Baroness? Nonsense.

JAXSON

How did it happen?

Valentine stops walking.

He turns... and stares. Eyes locking with Jaxson's.

Dark. Deep. Hypnotic.

Theatrical stillness.

CRACK!

EXT. THE MANSION - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A LIGHTNING BOLT forks across the sky --

THUNDER booms like judgment.

Rain batters the tiled rooftop.

INT. THE MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Lavish. Candlelit.

Just as we saw it before -- but now, not so still.

Valentine Caballero lounges on the bed in his silk robe.
Someone is under the sheets next to him.

At the doorway stands Baroness Von Zolt -- not quite the
beauty the legends suggest. Regal, yes. Draped in
rhinestones, age, and delusion.

VALENTINE (V.O.)

The Baroness was indeed there...
but not for me. It was a quiet
hide-away.

A YOUNG WOMAN (20s), appears behind her, touches her arm with false urgency. The Baroness turns, intrigued, and is subtly lured away.

Something stirs under the sheets. Valentine pulls them back to reveal a YOUNG MAN (20s), delicate, mischievous, and dressed in full Elizabethan garb -- ruffled collar, doublet, and all.

YOUNG MAN

I've been waiting for you to join
me...

VALENTINE (V.O.)

With the Baroness in the guest
room with her dressmaker, Hazel
Daniels, I was getting ready to
play "Ring around the ding-dong"
with a 20-year-old extra in
ruffles.

VALENTINE

What picture are you making?

YOUNG MAN

Mary, the Scottish Queen.

VALENTINE

Why didn't you change?

YOUNG MAN

Because I couldn't wait to get
here...

He snuggles in close as Valentine whispers in his ear.

VALENTINE (V.O.)

I hadn't eaten all day and sent
him down to the kitchen to fetch a
glass of milk to go with my glazed
ham sandwich.

The Young Man rises from the bed and exits the bedroom.

Valentine reaches for the sandwich. Takes a bite.

Rain taps the window like impatient fingers.

VALENTINE (V.O.)

I knew I needed my strength for
the rambunctious night ahead.

He chews. Calmly.

He shifts! A hesitation. Something... catches.

We don't see him choke.

Just the smallest change in his eyes.

A pause.

He drops out of frame.

VALENTINE (V.O.)

No farewell. No broken heart. Just
me. Meat. And mustard.

SEVERAL MOMENTS LATER

The Young Man, the Baroness, and Hazel, stage the death
scene, with a new ham sandwich, a bottle of pills, and
Valentine, propped up in his death position in bed.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

Jaxson has stopped walking. Valentine doesn't notice.

VALENTINE

The Baroness called the studio,
they sent out the fix-it men, and
the legend of my death was born.

He turns to Jaxson, notices he isn't there, turns around.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

What?

JAXSON

You're gay?

VALENTINE

I was happy once in a while, just
like everyone, but I had my
moments.

JAXSON

Do you know what gay means?

VALENTINE

Gay means happy.

JAXSON

Now it means you like guys... not women.

VALENTINE

The hell it does.

JAXSON

Not back in 1928... but it does now.

VALENTINE

I think you mean "homo-sex-u-al."

Jaxson sits on the closest poolside chair.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

You know what that word means?

JAXSON

Of course -- but everyone uses the slang now.

VALENTINE

"Gay."

JAXSON

Yes.

VALENTINE

Absurd. But either way, it's what I was.

JAXSON

Your legend is part of Americana. You were one of Hollywood's all time great romantic lovers... like Errol Flynn, Clark Gable, Cary Grant...

VALENTINE

Never heard of 'em.

He holds up the script.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

Regardless. This whole thing is a lie. You can't film this.

JAXSON

But... I don't know how I can get them to --

VALENTINE

Do you know what it's like to be remembered for a life you never lived? To be adored for the lie... The truth erased?

Jaxson is speechless -- and Valentine fades away.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - DAY

An ice-cold Lana is on the sofa with Poochy, still sporting his cowboy hat and neckerchief.

Jaxson is in a chair opposite her.

JAXSON

Thank you for coming by.

LANA

I almost didn't.

JAXSON

I wouldn't have blamed you.

LANA

I leave for New Mexico in the morning.

JAXSON

I know. Lana --

Poochy growls.

LANA

It's all right, Poochy.

JAXSON

Thank you.

LANA

Not you.
(scratching the dog's neck)
This Poochy. Go on.

JAXSON

I want to apologize for the way I behaved earlier. Nothing happened with me and Rachel.

JAXSON (CONT'D)

She wanted to see the scene of
Valentine's death.

LANA

I know. I called her up last
night.

JAXSON

You did?

LANA

I wanted to know if you guys were
screwin' around. I mean... I
wanted to know if I might have to
change my hair or somethin'.

JAXSON

There will never be a "me and
Rachel." You can count on it.

LANA

I know that. She said you made a
diamond necklace feel like a flea
collar.

Poochy growls again.

Lana scratches him under his diamond collar.

LANA (CONT'D)

Mommy didn't mean you, Poochy.

JAXSON

Lana... I need to tell you
something. If I don't tell
someone, I'm gonna explode.

LANA

What's wrong?

JAXSON

I've uncovered information... that
Valentine Caballero... was gay.

LANA

That's impossible. Everyone knows
he was a skirt chaser.

JAXSON

That was just a cover.

LANA

But... what about the Baroness?
Didn't he die when they were
gettin' it on?

JAXSON

No. He choked on a glazed ham
sandwich while a young guy dressed
like Sir Walter Raleigh was in the
kitchen getting him a glass of
milk.

She gazes deep into his eyes.

LANA

You shittin' me?

JAXSON

I swear -- it's true.

Lana thinks a moment, then the serious thought goes away.

LANA

Oh. Well -- what's this got to do
with the movie?

JAXSON

I think if we're telling about his
life, we have to be truthful...
film it the way it happened.

LANA

Wait a second! Hold the phone!
Poochy... you mean you would
(whispers)
kiss another guy?

JAXSON

It's called acting, Lana.

She spirals.

LANA

Will there be a stunt kisser? I
mean -- I gotta go in there,
afterwards.

JAXSON

Lana, I need you to be serious.

LANA

Poochy --

JAXSON

Me or the dog?

LANA

You, Poochy. You're a big star.
You can't make an X-rated movie!

JAXSON

It won't be X-rated, Lana.

LANA

But -- what if you find out you
like guys? What will me and Poochy
do?

JAXSON

That's not going to happen. I
promise.

She goes to him and sits on his lap.

LANA

Oh, Poochy... The studio will
never go along with it.

JAXSON

I just need to know that you're
behind me on this.

LANA

Poor choice of words.

JAXSON

I need your support. Can I count
on it?

LANA

Of course. When are you gonna tell
Fred?

JAXSON

I called a meeting for the
morning. Fred, Carl, and Rachel.

LANA

Oh, jeez. Glad I'll be flyin' to
New Mexico.

JAXSON

With Tex?

She kisses him.

LANA
I just made him up to make your
blood boil...

A whimper from Poochy, getting crushed. Lana pulls back.

LANA (CONT'D)
Sorry, Poochy.

JAXSON
It's all right.

LANA
No, I was talking to the dog.

INT. STUDIO CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Fred, Carl, and Rachel sit at a large table in silence. Carl's halfway through a pastry, Fred checks his phone, and Rachel sips a green juice.

A moment later, Jaxson bursts through the door, clearly off his rhythm. Hair uncombed. Disheveled.

FRED
Ah. You made it.

CARL
So what's the emergency?

Jaxson takes a seat.

JAXSON
I've come across something.
Something that suggests
Valentine... wasn't who we think
he was.

CARL
What's your source?

Jaxson is stumped.

JAXSON
Well... uh...

VALENTINE (V.O.)
(in Jaxson's head)
I have a journal.

JAXSON
(blurts out)
I have a journal!

Silence. All eyes go to him.

CARL

What kind of a journal?

JAXSON

A private one... unpublished...

VALENTINE (V.O.)

Discovered in my house. Hidden.

JAXSON

Discovered in my house. Hidden.

FRED

Is it real?

JAXSON

It says that he was gay.

CARL

Whoever said that didn't know him very well.

JAXSON

He made the entry himself.

VALENTINE (V.O.)

It's in my handwriting. Who is this little shit?

JAXSON

The writer.

CARL

Damn right I'm the writer. Me, not you. He's not gay. That's that.

FRED

If we make a change like that the financiers will freak.

RACHEL

This is a romance, between a man and a woman.

VALENTINE (V.O.)

Tell them I also like sailors. That will spice things up.

JAXSON

He also liked sail -- no.

FRED
The script is locked.

JAXSON
I think we owe him the truth.

A beat. Fred rises and heads for the door.

FRED
Not gonna happen.

He exits.

CARL
It's not a documentary, Jaxson.
(sincere)
I don't even know how to write
something gay. I'm a Presbyterian.

He follows Fred. Rachel glares at Jaxson, then leaves in a quiet huff.

Jaxson's alone.

VALENTINE (V.O.)
That went well.

Jaxson leans over as his head hits the table -- THUMP.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD FOREVER CEMETERY - DAY

Jaxson stands before Valentine's crypt, silent, lost in thought. Behind him -- a soft breath and a whisper:

VALENTINE
Hello.

Jaxson jumps, startled.

JAXSON
Don't do that!

He turns to find Valentine -- now in a plain black suit with a red carnation in the lapel.

VALENTINE
You failed me.

JAXSON
Look, Valentine, I can't demand a script rewrite this close to shooting. I tried.

VALENTINE

Are you not the star of Caballero?

JAXSON

I am... but this is the first role where they're actually letting me act. They're taking a risk on me. Look... the movie will still bring you back. People will discover you -- maybe for the first time.

VALENTINE

No, not me. They'll discover a lie in Valentine's wardrobe.

Jaxson gives a slight nod to the crypt.

JAXSON

Why don't you just float back in there and rest easy like every other star in this place?

VALENTINE

Oh, no, no, no, no. There's nothing in there but bones and a moldy suit.

(gestures to his own outfit)

This suit -- it's the one I was buried in. It's a disgusting sight to behold in there.

JAXSON

You should have been cremated.

VALENTINE

Too close to the place where I will be going when I walk toward the light... poof -- straight down the shaft.

JAXSON

Oh, I don't think so.

VALENTINE

Oh, I do.

A beat.

JAXSON

Is there really a journal?

VALENTINE

Yes! In a hidden compartment in my closet.

JAXSON

Let me read it.

Valentine brightens -- practically floats.

VALENTINE

I will meet you back at my house!

Poof! -- he vanishes in a swirl of smoke.

JAXSON

(shouting after him)
MY house!

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - DAY

Jaxson enters through the front door to see Valentine, dressed as "The Sheik," posed dramatically on the stairs.

JAXSON

Why are you dressed like that?

VALENTINE

My biggest picture -- "Sand and Blood." I was brilliant in it.

JAXSON

You're so modest and down to earth.

VALENTINE

Thank you, very much! Follow me!

INT. THE MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

They face the double doors to the closet. Jaxson flings it open -- a massive space as large as most small rooms.

Filled with vintage wardrobe.

Valentine shows a warm smile.

VALENTINE

So many memories of this closet.

JAXSON

How can you have memories of a closet?

VALENTINE
Thayer MacDonald, Bennet
Deliquify, Gary Daniels...

JAXSON
They were stars, right?

VALENTINE
The biggest. They all hid in here
when their wives came looking for
them.

JAXSON
Not all three at the same time?

VALENTINE
Mmm-hmm.

JAXSON
Oh, brother. Where's the journal?

VALENTINE
Hidden compartment.

JAXSON
Where's that?

VALENTINE
Third floorboard in, second row
from the left. Heel tap twice,
then a wrist flourish from side to
side on the wood, but only after a
spritz of Arpège.

JAXSON
(deadpan)
You're serious.

VALENTINE
Of course, I'm serious. How else
would one access posthumous
confessions?

At the dresser, Jaxson digs through a dusty vanity tray,
finds the vintage perfume bottle, spritzes the air.

Valentine holds his arms out to his side, holds his head
back, eyes closed.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)
It must linger... let it envelop
you...

Jaxson smirks, heel taps the plank - TAP-TAP... and with his wrist turning back and forth, he covers one end of the plank to the next.

CLICK.

A discreet panel slides open at the baseboard. Inside is a velvet-lined nook. A thick, leather-bound journal rests inside, tied with a faded gold ribbon.

Jaxson lifts it -- stunned.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)
(softly, with pride)
That's me. All of me.

Jaxson takes a deep breath as he removes the ribbon.

JAXSON
I don't know -- it doesn't seem right... reading someone else's journal.

VALENTINE
Poochy, I've been dead for over 90 years.

JAXSON
Close to 100.

VALENTINE
Gad, don't remind me.

Jaxson takes several steps, Valentine follows. Jaxson stops and faces him.

JAXSON
Where are you going?

VALENTINE
With you.

JAXSON
No, now, listen. It's bad enough I have to read about... who knows what... but I don't want you in front of me when I do!

Valentine scowls and POOF! Gone in a wisp of smoke.

INT. VALENTINE'S STUDY - DAY

Jaxson settles down in a large chair, opens the book, and begins to read when a disembodied voice appears.

VALENTINE (O.S.)

I was born Chester Fortesque in
the little town of Wichita,
Kansas, on a hot, sultry, August
day in 1896... I knew from the
start --

JAXSON

I don't need you to read it to me!

VALENTINE (O.S.)

Sorry.

A WHOOSH as the curtains swirl when Valentine leaves. Jaxson turns a page and reads... his eyes grow wide.

JAXSON

You were only 10!? What the...

He continues reading.

INT. THE THEATER - DAY

The flicker of 1920s celluloid washes over the room.

ON SCREEN:

A glamorous black-and-white close-up of MABEL ST. CROIX (30), voluptuous, radiant... a vision in satin and sparkle.

She leans in toward Valentine -- eyes wide, lips parted. Romance incarnate.

On the screen, Valentine's character closes his eyes and subtly turns his face as she draws near.

In a second row seat, nostalgic --

VALENTINE

Mabel. How she adored her garlic
bread. I can smell it now.

ON SCREEN:

They kiss. A dramatic, drawn-out Hollywood kiss. Valentine pulls back slightly, face pained, eyes watering.

TITLE CARD - "I can't bear to leave you, my darling..."

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

What an odorous woman she was.
Gads.

He waves a hand through the air in theatrical revulsion, eyes flicking toward the screen with equal parts horror and amusement.

The door FLINGS open -- Jaxson stands in the frame... his face is void of color and expression, journal firmly in his hand.

VALENTINE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Took you long enough.

Valentine, in his smoking jacket outfit, cigarette holder in hand, takes a puff.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

I've gone through three of my
features.

With the wave of a hand, the projector turns off and lights come up.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

How did you like it?

Jaxson tries to speak with several false starts.
Finally...

JAXSON

Is there any man in Hollywood you
didn't screw?

Valentine ponders.

VALENTINE

There may have been one or two.

Jaxson falls into a chair.

JAXSON

This can't be real... it's
impossible... no human --

VALENTINE

Every word is true. I faithfully
wrote down every encounter...
except multiple encounters with
the same man -- for those I just
used check marks.

JAXSON

You really, really did all this?

VALENTINE

Poochy, I wasn't the only one in town. I was just the only one who wrote it all down.

JAXSON

Wasn't anyone straight?

VALENTINE

Of course! Fairbanks... Chaplin...
(A beat) Fairbanks and Chaplin.

Jaxson's eyes bulge as he reads more. He can't speak and holds up the journal. Valentine leans in and squints --

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

Ah, that one -- the concierge at the Ambassador. Wild with a luggage cart.

Jaxson smiles. A pause.

JAXSON

Was there ever one that lasted?
Not a fling... not a check mark.
Something real. Love?

A long beat. Valentine stares into the middle distance.

VALENTINE

No.

(quietly)

I died too soon for that.

(to Jaxson)

But on screen... I was happy as hell. And in Hollywood... that's all that mattered.

JAXSON

(softly, apologetic)

I'm sorry. But... Valentine... we can't film this. It's X rated!

VALENTINE

You don't film the actual acts... you just... allude to them. But I want who I really was to be the man in your movie.

JAXSON

Valentine --

VALENTINE

It's important! You don't want me floating around this place forever, do you?

He disappears in a swirl of angry, red smoke.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - STUDIO LOT - DAY

Jaxson bursts through the door in sunglasses, storming toward his sleek sportscar. He grabs the handle.

Fred and Carl charge out after him.

CARL

This would ruin my script! I'd have to start all over!

FRED

Not to mention it'd play two weeks in however many art houses are left in the country -- then show up as a Blu-ray in the five dollar bin at Walmart!

JAXSON

How do you know?

FRED

Because Midwestern America doesn't want to see the number one action star in the country play a Latin Lover light in the loafers!

JAXSON

You can't use derogatory terms like that anymore, Fred!

FRED

I can when there isn't a reporter around and I'm about to lose fifty million bucks!

CARL

If I wrote what you want me to write, my wife would kill me!

JAXSON

You can fight her off with your Oscar, Carl.

CARL

She knows Karate.

Jaxson composes himself.

JAXSON

Listen. For the last time. The man was real. We have a journal that proves everything --

CARL

An X-rated journal!

JAXSON

But it's the truth! Isn't that what it's all about?

FRED

Jaxson, since Hollywood was invented... it's been all about illusion.

JAXSON

But behind the illusion are real people. Don't you think we owe them a voice? To tell the world who they really were?

Fred hesitates -- thinking.

FRED

Let me talk it over with the producers.

Jaxson gets into his car. He pulls away, tires crunching the pavement, leaving Carl yelling at Fred and flapping his arms in frustration.

INT. JAXSON'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Valentine appears in the passenger seat. He wears a full dinner jacket with tails. Tears stream down his face.

VALENTINE

That was beautiful... you really do understand. Thank you...

JAXSON

They haven't changed their minds yet.

VALENTINE

You've been working on them for three weeks. If they don't change now -- they never will.

JAXSON

Have you been here the whole time?

VALENTINE

No, just since you came out --

Jaxson darts a side glance. Valentine grins --

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

Of the building.

JAXSON

This has to get better. It's been hell.

VALENTINE

Try living with it for over 90 years, Poochy.

JAXSON

Don't call me that.

VALENTINE

Oh! That reminds me.

(smiles)

Lana and Poochy are at the house. She just got back from location.

JAXSON

Oh, good!

VALENTINE

And she's reading the journal.

JAXSON

Uh-oh. Listen... give me some privacy with her, will you? Don't be hovering around...

VALENTINE

Cross my heart and hope to fade.

Valentine fades away. Jaxson continues to drive.

EXT. THE MANSION - EVENING

Jaxson enters, emotionally drained from the battle at the studio.

He sets his keys down.

Poochy growls.

Jaxson winces before he even gets a word out.

JAXSON
Hey, little guy -- take it easy.

FROM THE NEXT ROOM --

LANA (O.S.)
Is this some kind of joke!?

Jaxson follows the voice.

INT. THE DEN - EVENING

Lana sits on the sofa, Valentine's journal in hand. She's halfway between furious and stunned.

LANA
This is filth. Pornographic filth,
Jaxson.

JAXSON
It's not porn. It's his truth.

LANA
It's page after page of who he
slept with! Married men, studio
heads, foreign dignitaries -- oh
(flips a page)
Here's a novelty --
(reads)
Monday, went to the Farmers
Market. Cute bagger. Invited home -
- bagged him.
(flips page angrily)
And the kingpin of them all --
"Tuesday. Entire chorus line!"

JAXSON
Yeah. He told me the Follies were
in town.

LANA
Is this what you're fighting for?
To glorify some ghostly Casanova
with a fixation on bellboys?

JAXSON
He wasn't glorifying it -- he was
hiding it. His whole life.

Lana stares at him, A shift.

LANA
You know what people will say?
That you're just like him.

A long beat.

LANA (CONT'D)
I don't know who you are anymore.

She stands, Poochy in one arm, the journal in the other.

LANA (CONT'D)
Where did you find this? It just
magically appeared?

JAXSON
Lana. This house... is haunted.

LANA
What do you mean haunted!?

JAXSON
I mean that Valentine Caballero is
still here. He haunts this house.

Lana looks around, spooked. Escalates fast --

LANA
Oh! Well! That explains it!
(she blows up)
You're crazy! I am done, Jaxson!

She SLAMS the journal down and storms from the room.

JAXSON
Where are you going!?

He follows.

INT. THE MAIN HALLWAY - EVENING

Lana climbs the stairs, raging mad.

LANA
MEET ME UPSTAIRS! I'll show you
what a real woman can do! It'll be
a helluva lot better than what's
in that book -- which I bet you
wrote yourself to try and snag an
Oscar!

She reaches the top and turns to Jaxson, looking up at
her from below.

LANA (CONT'D)
 A ghost!? Gawd, Jaxson, you're
 losing your mind!

She disappears down the hall and is soon out of sight.

LANA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Hurry up!

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lana storms in, fuming as she peels off her clothes piece
 by piece.

LANA
 (muttering)
 Ghost. Must be sniffing the funny
 stuff... Jaxson, that is SO
 eighties... I bet he wrote that
 book! I'm in Arizona with Poochy,
 sweating my ass off in my air-
 conditioned trailer, and he's here
 writing that filth!

She yanks open a drawer, pulls out Jaxson's pajama top --
 oversized on her -- and throws it on.

LANA (CONT'D)
 Filth. Pure filth!

She opens the door and ushers Poochy out.

LANA (CONT'D)
 Outside, Poochy -- you can't watch
 Mama have fun.

Lana closes the bedroom door, plops into bed, clicks off
 the lamp.

A beat.

LANA (CONT'D)
 I'M WAITING!

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jaxson, slouched on the sofa, downs another drink.

The journal rests open on his lap. He flips through it,
 slower now, eyes scanning. Something clicks.

He stops.

Eyes narrowing on a page.

INT. THE MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Total darkness.

The door creaks open.

A SHADOW slips inside.

The door closes.

LANA

Sure took your sweet time about
it. I'm not gonna be horny all
night, you know.

The figure crawls under the sheets.

There is the shape of a body under satin -- close, warm.

LANA (CONT'D)

(little girl voice)
Jaxson... you *do* still like
women... right?

The center of the sheet rises.

Her eyes widen.

LANA (CONT'D)

Oh, boy! You're horny, too!

The sheet lifts higher. And higher.

LANA (CONT'D)

Hey! You're not that b-- is that a
bedpost or are you just trying to
impress me?

She throws back the sheets -- Nothing is there.

She GASPS, SCREAMS -- leaps out of bed, and SLAMS
straight into --

Valentine. Dressed in pajamas and an open robe.

VALENTINE

Hello, baby.

Lana is silent... then...

THUD.

She faints.

INT. THE MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lana lies unconscious on the bed, arms splayed like a fallen starlet. Valentine and Jaxson stand over her, flanking either side like reluctant paramedics.

VALENTINE

Throw some water on her.

JAXSON

I'm not throwing water on her! You could've been more... subtle, you know.

VALENTINE

She insulted my life! She called it --

(he mouths the words)

Porno-graphic.

JAXSON

It was passion and lust. You basically documented your conquests like a punch card.

VALENTINE

Passion, lust -- both ended with a cigarette and a satisfied sigh.

He brushes invisible lint off his sleeve and straightens his lapel.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

I'll be back.

JAXSON

Where are you going?

VALENTINE

A modest little home in Brentwood to visit Carl Hoskins.

JAXSON

(alarmed)

Why!?

VALENTINE

Why do you think?

Poof! He's gone in a burst of sparkles.

JAXSON
(yelling upward)
COME BACK HERE!

Lana lets out a soft groan -- eyes flutter open.

LANA
Poochy? Who are you yelling at?

She sits up, dazed.

LANA (CONT'D)
I just had the weirdest dream.
I was in bed with you... but I
don't think it was you. The size
was... well, anyway...
(beat)
I pulled the sheets back --
nothing was there! I was
completely alone! Then I jumped
outta bed and bam! I smacked right
into some weird guy I've never
seen before.
(beat)
Then I fainted. Or maybe I died?

Jaxson sits gently next to her, takes her hand.

JAXSON
Lana, honey... I need you to
really hear this. I need it to
sink in.

Lana looks around, puzzled.

LANA
What? The bed?

Jaxson drops his head down.

INT. CARL'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

A cluttered Hollywood bungalow. Half-eaten food. Crumpled pages. Trophies and insecurity. Carl sits hunched at his desk, rewriting with the weight of a thousand revisions.

A gust of wind flutters the gauzy curtains.

He mutters as he types.

CARL
 Revision... page fifty...
 Valentine and the Baroness...
 kiss... long and passionate...

VALENTINE (V.O.)
 (whisper)
 Not so long...

Carl pauses, stares, confused, then absentmindedly
 deletes "long."

CARL
 Not... so long?

He keeps typing, almost entranced.

VALENTINE (V.O.)
 The Baroness touches his cheek...
 then slinks away... into Hazel
 Daniels' room...

Carl types as if taking dictation.

CARL
 Where Hazel... who the hell is
 Hazel?

VALENTINE (V.O.)
 Her dress maker.

CARL
 Oh.

He types.. stops. Stares at the screen.

CARL (CONT'D)
 I didn't write this crap!

VALENTINE (V.O.)
 Yes, you did.

CARL
 No, I didn't!

He sits back, puzzled. Glances around the room like
 someone just flicked on the lights in his brain.

CARL (CONT'D)
 Where the hell did this come from?

VALENTINE (V.O.)
 The journal Jaxson showed you at
 the meeting. It's all there.

CARL

The journal... No. Can't be. I
don't remember details like this.
Nonsense! Nonsense!

He cracks his knuckles. Back to typing.

CARL (CONT'D)

Okay, where was I... the
Baroness...

VALENTINE (V.O.)

Went off making whoopee with
Hazel... so I snuck out to the
Coconut Grove.

DREAM VISION - INT. COCONUT GROVE - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

Decadent. Electric. A fantasy in black-and-white come to
vivid life.

Men in tuxedos. Women in pearls and feathered headbands.
Artificial palms sway around the dance floor.

Valentine, in his prime, lounges against a palm tree.
Debonair. Cigarette in hand.

His eyes lock with a YOUNG MAN (20s), across the room.

They smile. Valentine approaches.

INT. CARL'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Carl bangs away on the keys.

CARL

The Baroness and Valentine
tangoed. The room fell silent.

BACK TO THE GROVE - DANCE FLOOR

Valentine and the Baroness (rhinestoned and smug) tango
with flair.

The orchestra swells. Spectators turn to watch.

VALENTINE (V.O.)

No. That's not how it happened.
Write it as I am telling you!

THE GROVE - SHIFT

FLASH!

The Baroness vanishes mid-dip -- replaced by the YOUNG MAN. Valentine holds a rose between his teeth.

He dances with freedom. Passion. Defiance.

Gasps from the crowd.

CARL (V.O.)

No! It was the Baroness!

FLASH!

She's back.

VALENTINE (V.O.)

True! Tell it true!

FLASH!

She's replaced by the Young Man.

The music builds... intensifies... the dance mesmerizes the entire room.

The final flourish -- Valentine and the Young Man nose to nose, breathless and radiant.

VALENTINE (V.O.)

And that's how it was.

INT. CARL'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Carl jerks back in his chair, panting.

He rubs his eyes. Stares at the screen like it's haunted.

WHOOSH!

Another gust of wind. The curtains dance.

VALENTINE (V.O.)

(his voice fades in
an echo)

Thank you, Carl...

Valentine is gone.

Carl continues to glare at the screen.

CARL (V.O.)

No!

INT. THE GROVE - NIGHT

FLASH!

The Baroness reappears -- kisses Valentine, overcompensating. A studio-perfect ending.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

A busy production lot in full swing -- CREW MEMBERS hustle past soundstages, carts rattle with equipment, and a massive banner reads: CABALLERO -- NOW IN PRODUCTION.

A golf cart zips by, narrowly missing a teamster on a smoke break.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

A glammed-up facsimile of the Coconut Grove -- but under harsh studio lights, it all feels off.

FAKE PALM TREES wobble slightly as crew members adjust their bases and positions.

EXTRAS in tuxedos and flapper gowns sip water from paper cups and group in various conversations.

The lighting is flat. The energy? Staged.

AT THE MONITOR

A small video setup on the sidelines. Fred watches the lone monitor, Carl pacing behind him.

Nearby, a SCRIPT SUPERVISOR tracks notes with a pencil and clipboard.

CARL

I'm telling you -- it was weird. I was rewriting this scene last night and it just... changed.

(panicked beat)

Like someone else was typing. Like the story was *alive*.

FRED

You need a break. Or a bourbon.

Jaxson enters the set.

Hair slicked, mustache perfect -- he is Valentine Caballero. Tailored tux. Crisp lines. Haunted eyes.

The journal clutched under his arm. He scans the set.

VALENTINE (V.O.)

This isn't the truth.

RACHEL (O.S.)

The Baroness has arrived. Move your asses and let's roll!

Rachel storms in -- beaded gown, fur stole, chewing scenery like taffy.

A diva in full roar. She approaches Fred.

FRED

Delighted as ever. Look at you!

She smiles and turns to Jaxson.

RACHEL

No tongue on the kiss. Make it look real, but don't you dare touch anything.

Jaxson nods with a forced smile, then glances off-camera to see.

Lana in a director's chair, arms folded, Poochy growling in her lap. Her hat low, expression unreadable.

Jaxson approaches Carl.

JAXSON

Where's the rewrite?

CARL

(nervous)

We're locked. Studio signed off.

(avoids his gaze)

We're not changing a thing.

JAXSON

You're not afraid of the studio. You're afraid of your wife giving you a chop to the neck.

FRED

Don't worry about it, Jaxson. Let's just get the first shot in the can.

Jaxson gives a slow nod...

JAXSON

Right... let's get it in the can.

He grips the journal tightly.

Fred takes a seat beside the CAMERA OPERATOR (50s), who peers through a RED Digital camera.

A CREW MEMBER steps forward with a clapper.

CREW MEMBER

Caballero. Scene 106, Take 1.

CLAP!

FRED

Playback!

TANGO MUSIC kicks in. The set comes alive. A small band mimes playing.

FRED (CONT'D)

Ready... Action, Jaxson!

Jaxson struts forward with dramatic tango steps. He offers a hand to Rachel, seated glamorously nearby.

She places her hand in his. They rise and begin to dance.

At another table, the real Valentine, in tails, watches -- mortified -- seated beside a handsome young extra and his "date." His eyes narrow. He shoots daggers at Carl, clutching the script like a lifeline.

It's obvious that he can be seen by everyone.

As Jaxson dips Rachel -- he glances up... into Valentine's eyes across the floor.

Instead of lifting Rachel, Jaxson guides her to Valentine's table.

RACHEL

What? What are you doing!? Jaxson!

Jaxson locks eyes with Valentine... he plops Rachel into a chair, and extends his hand to Valentine.

A moment.

Valentine rises. Takes it.

They tango. Smooth. Bold. Electric.

JAXSON

Can people see you? They're acting
like they see you --

VALENTINE

They can -- uses a lot of energy.

REACTIONS AROUND THE STAGE

RACHEL

What the hell?

FRED

What the hell?

CARL

What the hell?

The Camera Operator has his eye in the viewfinder. He
pulls away and glances at the monitor.

On the monitor, Jaxson is dancing alone.

CAMERA OPERATOR

What the hell?

IN REALITY

Jaxson and Valentine are nose to nose.

VALENTINE

Wait... was I wrong? Are you
queer?

JAXSON

I'm acting. Don't get excited.

VALENTINE

I'll try my damndest.

The Camera Operator motions to Fred -- he steps up,
squints at the monitor, then at the set.

Fred walks to the monitor, sees Jaxson dancing with no
one. He looks up at the set, and sees Jaxson dancing with
Valentine. Blinks -- still there.

Lana arrives next to him and sees no one in the monitor.

LANA

Oh, my God... it's the ghost.

Fred turns to her.

LANA (CONT'D)

Huh?

He points.

LANA (CONT'D)

Poochy is dancing with the real
Valentine Caballero.

She watches them dance.

LANA (CONT'D)

A shame he's dead. He's really
hot.

FRED

Cut! CUT! THAT'S LUNCH EVERYBODY!
Clear the set! One hour!

RACHEL

Lunch? It's eight-thirty in the
morning!

FRED

That's BREAKFAST EVERYBODY! Clear
the set! One hour!

Cast and crew scatter as Fred races up to Jaxson. Carl
and Rachel follow.

FRED (CONT'D)

All right. Just one question. Who
were you not dancing with?

JAXSON

What?

VALENTINE (V.O.)

What?

FRED

I saw you ditch Rachel -- for a
guy. But the guy didn't show up on
camera!

VALENTINE (V.O.)

Damn. I looked so good, too.

FRED

Now I don't know what kind of half-assed special effect you're playing at, but it ends today. You hear me?

CARL

Fred, something's not right.

FRED

You bet your ass something's not right!

LANA

Poochy, you're not actually gay, are you?

JAXSON

Are you talking to me, or the dog?

Poochy growls.

CARL

I mean it. I saw this last night. When I was punching up the scene... Valentine was dancing with a guy at the Grove.

FRED

What is this, some kind of gay possession?

VALENTINE (V.O.)

I'm possessing no one. Don't confuse possession with suggestion.

JAXSON

Don't confuse possession with suggestion.

FRED

What the hell does that mean?

RACHEL

What the hell does that mean?

JAXSON

It means no one's possessed. I moved into Caballero's house -- and he haunts it. He wants the truth told. The real story.

FRED

So write a book! Don't screw up my movie!

JAXSON

Fred -- he lived his life in a total lie -- hiding from who he really was. He's had enough of it and wants to tell the truth.

FRED

Why pick on my movie!? This isn't some L-B...T...Q-XYZ story!

LANA

Poochy --

JAXSON

Me, or the dog?

LANA

You, Poochy. Maybe if you get Val to appear, they'll believe you.

JAXSON

"Val?"

LANA

Well... we were almost intimate with each other...

(whispers)

...and I think he liked it. If he appears, they'll believe you.

Jaxson looks around at the skeptical, scowling faces. He takes a deep breath. Resigned.

JAXSON

Valentine? Can you appear, please?

Nothing.

JAXSON (CONT'D)

Valentine?

Fred rolls his eyes.

JAXSON (CONT'D)

(stern)

I need you to appear!

Silence.

JAXSON (CONT'D)
Valentine, where are you!?

EXT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Outside the soundstage door -- the sun glares off the asphalt. Valentine is fully visible -- vibrant, charismatic -- leaning casually against the wall, chatting with a handsome MALE EXTRA.

VALENTINE
Do you ever go to the Grove?

MALE EXTRA
The Grove? You mean, like the
Grove in this movie?

Valentine nods -- dreamy, a little wistful. A heartbeat of old-world charm.

MALE EXTRA (CONT'D)
Hell, that place was torn down
years ago.

Valentine's face drops -- stunned.

VALENTINE
Why would they do a thing like
that?

EXTRA WOMAN (O.S.)
Hey, Harry!

The male extra turns his head toward the voice. When he turns back -- Valentine is gone.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Fred is on the phone. Jaxson is in a quiet, rocky conversation with Lana. Carl sits in a chair, arms folded, and Rachel takes a few selfies.

FRED
Right... yes... I understand...
right.

He ends the call. A tense beat.

FRED (CONT'D)
Front office. They said shoot the
script as-is. It's locked.

That hits hard. Even Poochy is silent.

Fred approaches Jaxson.

FRED (CONT'D)
If you get difficult, I have
orders to replace you.

Jaxson absorbs it. Long, heavy silence.

VALENTINE (O.S.)
I remember this studio.

Everyone hears it. Eyes shoot upward.

ON THE CATWALK ABOVE --

Valentine looks down like a phantom professor.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)
Well, not this building,
exactly...
(gestures)
But what stood here before. The
Pickford-Fairbanks Studios.

A beat.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)
We made art here. We made dreams
here. We created worlds that
should exist -- not ones that did.
Who wants to see those? You can
find them outside your front door.

The group watches, stunned.

Valentine paces the catwalk... stops at a rigged Fresnel.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)
Louis... our electrician. Always
perched up here. Started when we
first used lights. Old Louis --
pushing eighty -- still climbed
ladders, slugged down a flask of
bourbon with a liverwurst on
rye... before lunch. Never missed
a cue.
(softly)
It was always lit -- perfectly.

A wistful beat.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

No one remembers Louis... he's one of the shadows behind the camera that made the magic happen.

He vanishes -- a dissolve into air.

NEAR THE CAMERA

He materializes again, still elegant, still distant. The group at the table recoils -- except Jaxson.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

Our cameras made a grinding sound... You could hear the film spool its way through... capturing your performance forever. It was with you. A partner.

He gestures toward the RED Digital camera.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

Not this thing -- plugs, buttons...this switchboard that removes life with the flick of a finger. No "PRINT IT!" Just "keep it or erase it." Flat... soulless... images.

Valentine's eyes fall on Jaxson. Intense. Unblinking.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

Then there were people like me... Illusions on top of illusions. As artificial as the worlds we built.

(softly)

Housewives would flock to see me as a desert sheik... Or a man-about-town... They fell in love with me. Some even left their husbands -- or so I've been told.

He stands face to face with Fred, who's paralyzed.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

I gave my life for this town. For my audience. I was who they wanted me to be. All for them.

Fred, mesmerized, reaches to touch Valentine's cheek -- his hand glides right through.

He gasps, falling back into a chair.

Valentine now sits at a nearby table, a lit cigarette in a long holder. Regal, but weary.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

Then the lights went down... the fans went home to their families. And I went home to silence. The loudest sound you'll ever hear.

He manages a faint smile.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

They didn't want Chester Fortesque. They wanted the illusion.

A long beat.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

To be like me – back then – meant prison. So I invited company... Extras, actors... people like me. I could be... who I really was... if not just for a few hours.

His gaze sweeps the room.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

No one owes the truth to anyone -- not really. But I had hoped...

(beat)

...that Hollywood would finally give me one last role. To be remembered as me. Not as the sheik. Not as the duelist. Not as the Count of Havana or the Gay Caballero...

Back when 'gay' meant joyful... And queer... meant Chester Fortesque... who never forgot who he was.

(to Rachel)

And sorry, darling – the Baroness Von Zolt? Lustful. Loud. Lesbian.

He VANISHES in a wisp of smoke.

Silence.

Everyone stands frozen.

Fred stares up at the catwalks. The rigged lights above.

A long beat.

He takes out his phone and dials.

FRED

Hi, Sal? Yeah, I'm still on set.
Listen... we're shutting down for
a week. I'm coming up to your
office.

INT. THE MANSION - DAY

A black-and-white image of Valentine flickers across the screen -- a classic romantic close-up. Jaxson watches from the second row, calling out into the quiet.

JAXSON

Valentine? Where are you!?
Come on, it's been a week!

Silence.

The projector shuts off... the WHIR slows... then stops.

A SOUND behind him.

Jaxson turns -- startled.

Valentine sits coolly in a rear seat, draped in a camel-hair coat and matching fedora. Regal and sly.

VALENTINE

"The Gentleman of Sin." Not one of
my best. Even though it was banned
in Boston, Buffalo, and Bayonne.

JAXSON

Where have you been?

VALENTINE

Back at the crypt for a while. I
haven't aged well. Then I spent
some time haunting Montana
Buckmaster's old house... hoping
he might still be floating around.

JAXSON

Montana Buckmaster? The old cowboy
star?

VALENTINE

Legendary. Oh, we had some wild
nights playing "ride 'em cowboy."

Jaxson cracks a smile.

JAXSON
C'mon. Let's go out to the pool.
Lana was worried about you.

INT. MAIN HALLWAY/ FOYER - DAY

Jaxson approaches the back door -- and freezes.

Valentine stands just inside, waiting. At his feet: two monogrammed vintage suitcases.

JAXSON
What's this?

VALENTINE
It's time for me to go.

JAXSON
Why?

VALENTINE
Because, Poochy... Hollywood is
like a gambling house. It always
wins.

Jaxson quietly takes that in.

JAXSON
Well... come outside anyway.

VALENTINE
Just for a minute.

EXT. VALENTINE'S POOL - DAY

Sunlight glistens on the water. Lana lounges on a deck chair, Poochy sprawled beside her in a matching sunhat.

Jaxson moves to the poolside bar and pours himself a shot. Valentine surveys the sight as if it was for the last time.

LANA
Hi, Val. Come sit next to me.

He settles into the lounge beside her.

LANA (CONT'D)

(low voice, cheeky)

I took your advice and hired a pool boy.

(giggles)

Won't do anything for Jax, but it gives me something to look at when he's on location.

Valentine smiles politely.

VALENTINE

May I ask you something?

LANA

Sure. What?

VALENTINE

Why do you call Jaxson "Poochy," after your dog?

LANA

Oh, that? Jaxson had the name first – way before I got my adorable Poochy.

(turns to Jaxson at the bar with a fond smile)

He just whines less when he's hungry.

At the bar, Jaxson downs the shot in one throw.

JAXSON

It's been a week. I need to know what's going on.

LANA

You need to relax. Studios work in mysterious ways.

The phone RINGS.

Jaxson answers.

JAXSON

Yeah, Mackie?

INT. MACKIE'S OFFICE - DAY.

Mackie paces, phone pressed to his ear as smoke curls from his cigar.

MACKIE

I don't know what the hell you did on that stage, but the studio's going crazy!

JAXSON

What do you mean?

Jaxson puts the phone on speaker.

MACKIE (V.O.)

The producers of Caballero tried to get Fred and Carl committed to a mental health center. But Harry Zannquist said no. He fired 'em all.

JAXSON

He what!?

MACKIE (V.O.)

Fired 'em. Replaced 'em. New producers are taking over. Carl's been told to rewrite the script -- tell the real story. The hell Valentine lived through, closeted in the '20s. It's happening, kid. Shooting resumes Monday.

Jaxson ends the call.

LANA

Oh my God!

She leaps up and smothers Jaxson in celebratory kisses -- lipstick, hugs, the works. Poochy barks supportively.

Until something clicks.

JAXSON

Wait.

(turns to Valentine)

Doesn't Harry Zannquist live in... Montana Buckmaster's old house?

VALENTINE

(fake western accent)

Ol' Harry thought I was the ghost of Montana Buckmaster, and said I could ride up for a visit any ol' time.

Jaxson's raises his eyebrows.

JAXSON

Wow...

INT. THE MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Jaxson sits on the edge of the bed, Valentine's worn journal in his hands. He flips through pages, eyes pausing on one in particular.

VALENTINE (O.S.)

You keep going back to that complete chorus line page.

Valentine stands at the window, gazing out over the pool where Lana lounges under the sun, Poochy at her feet.

JAXSON

Because it's extraordinary.

VALENTINE

Indeed it was.

A nostalgic beat.

JAXSON

Are you still leaving?

VALENTINE

Yes.

JAXSON

Without seeing the movie when it's released?

Looking out the window.

VALENTINE

I don't need to see it. In fact, it might be painful to watch... all those memories flooding back. It boils down to this. It's in hands that I trust to get it done right.

He turns from the window, warmly.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

Carl's right. You can't show everything. But you'll capture the essence... the spirit of who I was. That's all I ever wanted.

A quiet glow begins to build through the window -- soft at first, growing steadily.

JAXSON

Where are you going?

Valentine smiles -- gentle, wistful.

VALENTINE

That's the mystery, darling.

(beat)

Toward the light... to see old friends. Louis and his liverwurst... the Baroness... the extras, the lovers, the late-night dancers...

The light spills brighter into the room now -- golden, surreal. Almost stage-like.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

I'm looking forward...

(softly)

...to my next great adventure.

The light washes over him.

He shows Jaxson a warm, parting smile... and glances back out the window.

He sees a young, hunky pool boy skim the surface of the rippling water with a long net. His shirt is unbuttoned, abs glistening in the sun. Lana watches from her lounge, eyes peeking over her lowered sunglasses.

The golden light quickly fades away from Valentine.

VALENTINE (CONT'D)

On the other hand...

A smile appears on his lips.

THE END.