

LIGHT & SHADE

Screenplay by

Johnny Cohen

INT. FILM SET - NIGHT

3/4 TOP SHOT. A PRETZEL STICK LYING ON A 70'S CREAM LEATHER SOFA AND "WEARING" A DARK RED, VELVET SMOKING JACKET WITH ITS ARMS FOLDED BACK BEHIND ITS HEAD, AS IF RELAXING.

WARNER (O.S.)

Okay, roll VT. This is it people - the martini.

(under his breath)

What a marathon.

(full volume again)

Shepherd...are the agency and client okay with the shot?

(long pause)

Shepherd!

A guy in a leather jacket, seated on a Super Peewee dolly, lifts his eye from the eyepiece of an Arri 435 and looks up with irritation, waiting for a response. A beat later, a thirtysomething guy in a T-shirt walks up to him and tries to have a discreet discussion with the director.

SHEPHERD

Listen bud. The client isn't happy with the shot. She says...

WARNER

We agreed to this at the PPM. We showed her the sofa, the smoking jacket, the marble floor texture. We did War and Peace. What's the flipping problem NOW?!

SHEPHERD

She says it doesn't capture (under his breath, in a German accent) "ze funky party vibe".

WARNER

Let me talk to her.

SHEPHERD

Take it easy.

WARNER

(walking away)

Yada yada.

Warner walks up to a large monitor and VT setup in front of a group of concerned agency people who are gathered around a surly-looking female client - nodding their heads seriously.

WARNER (CONT'D)

So what's the deal with this shot?  
We discussed it at our 5 hour pre-  
production meeting, remember?

An attractive client service executive decides to speak up.

SHELLEY

The client doesn't think her hero  
product shot looks enough like a  
party. Pretzel Köning is supposed  
to be the king of parties.

WARNER

I know. But that's not the idea  
here. This is Hefner chilling out  
AFTER the party. If we could show  
smoking on TV, he'd have a little  
cigar in his mouth right now.

But the client isn't buying this rationale.

GERDA

(Distinct German accent)

Look. This commercial is supposed  
to be cool and funky. Pretzel  
Köning is the party king. And our  
last shot is so...gewöhnlich.

WARNER

Listen. There's only so much we can  
squeeze into one frame. You still  
need to put your titles somewhere.

GERDA

That is the challenge. You must  
find a way to make it funky.

WARNER

(turns and walks away)

Got it.

At this point, one of the creatives tries to placate the  
director, who is clearly annoyed with the latest development.

VOLKER

(also German)

Hey don't worry man. This is just  
an option for the client. We can do  
anything we like on our cut.

WARNER

Give me five, okay?

And at that, he walks briskly towards the studio door, but is intercepted midway by his assistant director who is standing with the cast: a group of four, with long chroma blue tubes completely covering their heads. There's Hef pretzel, in a red velvet robe, and a bevvvy of bunny pretzels around him.

ZACK

Can we let the cast go?

WARNER

I need some air.

HEF PRETZEL

(muffled by the tube)

Can we also get some air?

WARNER

No. It takes too long to get all of you dressed again. We may still need you for the last shot.

BUNNY PRETZEL

I need the toilet.

WARNER

Squeeze.

Then he steps out, fuming, into a parking area with film vehicles - interrupting a grip and his assistant who are discussing a complicated camera rig using hand gestures.

WARNER (CONT'D)

That client is a total oxygen bandit.

(shouting up into the sky)

Aaah!!

INT. APARTMENT (CONTINUOUS)

WARNER (O.S.)

Why is the woman alive?!

A guy lying in bed, wide awake, with the lights off, is staring up at the ceiling when he hears the shout. So he stands up and walks over to the window to see if he can identify the source of the noise.

WARNER (CONT'D)

Why can't she just curl up and die?!

Clearly shaken by what he hears, the guy turns from the window and looks at the figure in the bed next to him: a woman, sleeping peacefully. Then he walks to the dressing table unit on the other side of the room and turns on a small lamp, before crouching onto his knees and reaching for something in the narrow gap between the wall and the back of the unit. And as he does this, he looks back secretively over his shoulder, at the bed, to see if she is still asleep.

A large brown manila envelope emerges from the gap and, opening it carefully and silently, he removes an MRI plastic transparency and places it over the circular opening on top of the lamp shade - using it like a light box. Then he looks at it intently, shifting the sheet around so he can examine the images of a human brain. He looks totally devastated, lost in thought...

WOMAN  
(groggy, barely awake)  
Baby?

With a jolt, the guy snaps out of it and looks up at her with a smile...

MAN  
Hey.

...before turning the lamp off and heading back to bed.

WOMAN  
What were you doing, my love?

MAN  
Nothing. I was just having trouble sleeping. They're shooting late at the warehouse again. These people have no consideration.

WOMAN  
Mmm. Don't those idiots know that the guy living across the street on the third floor is a light sleeper? Good thing his wife sleeps like she's dead, right?

No response.

WOMAN (CONT'D)  
What's wrong?

MAN  
Nothing.

WOMAN

Hey...it's a joke, baby. Tomorrow we'll hear there's nothing to worry about. I think my headache is almost gone. Come and hold me.

He puts his arms around her.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Ah... Much better. I love you, you know. So so much.

MAN

And I love you, my lovely wife...

WOMAN

Do you think it's going to rain?

MAN

Well there's a high pressure front moving in from the east, with a humidity factor of around 40%, so we could expect scattered showers..

WOMAN

(smacking the arm, around her waist playfully)  
Stop it. I'm asking because I left the washing outside again.

MAN

Okay...I'll get it.

WOMAN

No. This is too nice.

MAN

Let me go, baby. I'll be a minute.

WOMAN

Hurry.

Getting out of bed, the guy heads for a door that leads onto the apartment balcony, before he steps out and starts to collect washing from a metal drying rack. As he reaches for a woman's T-shirt, he pauses suddenly. Then putting the items of clothing he's collected onto the outdoor table, he leans on the balcony railing and holds the garment at arm's length so he can see the faded print on it: YOURS FOREVER. And as his eyes well with tears, he looks up and blinks, trying to clear the thought from his mind..but then stops inexplicably - a look of complete bewilderment on his face.

Across the courtyard, in one of the rooms of the building directly across from him, a yellow light dances mysteriously in the dark, tracing the familiar peak and trough pattern of an ECG heart monitor. Then just as strangely, it comes to a halt when the apartment light is turned on to reveal a studio with enormous prints of abstract light paintings adorning the walls and a female photographer, in her late forties - MAXINE HERSCH - who walks up to a camera on a tripod and checks the shot, before heading out onto the balcony opposite him.

OVER HER SHOULDER. THE MAN HOLDING THE T-SHIRT IN HIS HANDS LOOKS AT HER.

And so Maxine lifts a small Maglite torch with a yellow gel over its glass and draws two eyes and a smile "in the air". But the guy just lowers his head again - looking back at the garment in his hands. So she mutters under her breath.

MAXINE

What a miserable shmuck.

YOUNG GIRL (O.S.)

Ma...

MAXINE

(turning around)

What, Chloe?

Standing behind her is a six year old girl, dressed in an oversized cartoon sleeping shirt - who has clearly been woken, judging by her half-closed eyes and grogginess.

CHLOE

Sunny's been knocking at the door for the last five minutes. Didn't you hear?

MAXINE

I had my iPod on. Why didn't you let him in?

CHLOE

I thought you told me not to.

MAXINE

What I said was "don't let him in if I'm not here." There's a big difference. I don't want him or his mates going through my stuff.

CHLOE

So I'll go let him in then.

MAXINE

Mazeltov.

Heading back into her apartment, she arrives to see a large black guy holding her daughter's hand gently and curtsying like a prince - which gets Chloe giggling - before the guy looks up and notices her...a smile and a trace of concern.

SUNNY

Max! How are you this fine evening?

MAXINE

I'm cool. Did you bring the paint?

SUNNY

Just like you wanted. One tube.

She steps forward to give him a hug and we see a seamless exchange take place between them: a crumpled white envelope.

MAXINE

Great. I'm going to check it out where the light's a bit better. You stay and talk to Chlo.

As she steps into a bathroom that leads off from the entrance hall, Sunny and Chloe are left there in an awkward moment.

CHLOE

Do you want some Coke?

SUNNY

What? No...thanks. But some water would be nice.

They head off to the kitchen, which is just as sparsely furnished as the other rooms in the apartment. And as Chloe opens the fridge and removes a bottle of water, Sunny pulls up a chair at a small table in the centre of the room - where the glass is placed carefully in front of him.

SUNNY (CONT'D)

(pointing to the cartoon character on her sleeping shirt: a smiling creature with its finger embedded in its nose)

Hey...why didn't you tell me you like Booger Lou?

CHLOE

(shrugging)  
You never asked.



SUNNY  
How about Squidge?

CHLOE  
Naaa.

SUNNY  
I can't believe you don't like  
Squidge...

CHLOE  
He's too childish.  
(imitating the character's  
repetitive silliness)  
Nyah nyeh nyeh nyeh nyeh nyeh

Sunny laughs as he watches her bobbing around the table, like Squidge, before he notices Maxine at the door, and stops.

MAXINE  
(tripping, but in control)  
It's good. It's very good. Thank  
you.

SUNNY  
(standing up to leave)  
Okay...so the usual price th...

CHLOE  
(cutting in)  
Ma, can't Sunny stay a bit longer?

MAXINE  
Chloe, how many times do I have to  
tell you not to interrupt when  
adults are talking!?  
(softening)  
Hey Chlo...

Chloe sits down sullenly on Sunny's chair.

MAXINE (CONT'D)  
Listen Sun...I'm a bit short at the  
moment. One of my clients owes me  
twelve grand for a company report  
shot and they still haven't paid.

SUNNY  
Max...you know Bastian is not an  
understanding man. What must I say  
to him?

MAXINE

Sun...honey...you know I've never asked you before. Please just cover me till next week. Hey?

SUNNY

Why didn't you tell me that before I came here?

MAXINE

Because you wouldn't have come. Let me take a shot of you quick to say thanks. It's my gift to you. When you come for your loot next week, I'll have it on a nice canvas.

SUNNY

And how do you know you'll get paid next week?

MAXINE

Because...I can tell the future sometimes. Seriously. Especially when I'm like this...everything just seems to click. You know...all the brush strokes, all the pixels. Like there's a massive design that we just can't see cos' we're too close to it. Stand against the wall there.

She positions him against one wall of her apartment where a Jackson Pollock style canvas, with bold random splashes of red paint in various hues, is lined up directly behind him.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

(reaching for her camera)  
Perfect. Now turn your head a little to the side. More...more... And lift your chin. A bit higher. Great. Now close your eyes. Beautiful.

AS THE SHUTTER CLICKS, WE CATCH A STILL FRAME OF THE MOMENT AND THE FINISHED PIECE PRINTED ON CANVAS.

SUNNY

Good night Max. Please...please don't let me down. I have no other opportunity for a job here.  
(calling out to Chloe who is still seated at the kitchen table, somberly)  
(MORE)

SUNNY (CONT'D)

Chloe! Princess...  
 (copying her imitation of  
 Squidge as he waves  
 goodbye and heads out the  
 door)  
 Nyeh nyeh nyeh nyeh nyeh nyeh nyeh

Chloe's laughter disappears as the apartment door closes behind Sunny and he heads downstairs.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

A moment after Sunny steps out of the entrance to Maxine's apartment block, his mobile phone rings: the first few bars of Singing In the Rain, whistled. And taking it from his pocket, he looks at the caller ID on the screen - BASTIAN - but decides not to answer it. Instead, he puts it back in his pocket, where it continues to ring. And ring.

Trying to ignore it, he puts his hands back in his pockets and keeps walking, but suddenly has his way blocked by two tik-fuelled, coloured street kids, no older than twelve - one of whom is wearing an old bowler hat.

KID 1  
 (bouncing on his toes)  
 Hey Uncle...

SUNNY  
 I don't have a cigarette my friend.  
 Don't you know smoking can kill  
 you?

KID 2  
 (pulling a blade)  
 A knife can also kill you, you  
 Nigerian doos. Now give us your  
 phone and your wallet.

SUNNY  
 Come on! How old are you guys?

KID 1  
 (slapping Sunny's face)  
 Shut up and give us your phone!

Realising these kids shouldn't be messed with, Sunny reaches into his jacket pocket and takes out his mobile, holding it out so they can see the name on the screen.

SUNNY  
 It's not even my phone! Do you know  
 who you are taking this from?

Taking no notice of the name on the screen, the tension of the scene is clearly getting to boiling point for these kids - fired up, as they are, on a head full of methylamphetamine.

KID 2

Shut up man! Shut up!

And then, without warning, he stabs Sunny in the neck, who falls to the ground immediately, as both kids start kicking him - with strains of Singing In the Rain hanging in the air.

KID 1

Stupid bladdy mayati! Why can't you people ever stop talking?!

A beat later, one grabs the phone out of his hand while the other searches frantically through his pockets, as the sound of a siren approaches. Then they hightail it out of there.

CLOSE-UP. TOP SHOT. SUNNY WITH HIS HEAD TO THE SIDE, EYES CLOSED, AS A SCARLET BLOTCH SLOWLY SPREADS OUT BEHIND HIM - AN ALMOST IDENTICAL MATCH FRAME OF MAXINE'S PORTRAIT.

INT. FILM SET - CONTINUOUS

Now back on set, Warner is pacing up and down, hands on his head, alongside the sofa with the Hef pretzel on it, as he tries to figure out a way to make the shot work. But as the sound of sirens grows louder and louder, inspiration strikes.

GERDA

Hey! Mr. Director! Look!

WARNER

What?!

GERDA

The lights from outside. It looks just like a party.

And then it hits Warner as well.

WARNER

Quick! Blaise! Quinton! Okes! Get that blackout off the windows. Now! And help me move this stuff over to the window. Top speed, people!

A moment later, he joins a bunch of panicked crew members who have split into two groups: one group removing sheets of draped blackout cloth covering the windows, while the other group slide the leather sofa and floor texture into position.

WARNER (CONT'D)  
Kill the house lights! Barry! Kill  
the flipping house lights!

A second or two later, almost all of the lights are off.

WARNER (CONT'D)  
Roll VT!

Silence.

WARNER (CONT'D)  
I said ROLL VT!

VT OPERATOR  
Rolling.

WARNER  
Are the client and agency watching  
the monitor?!

CHORUS OF VOICES  
Ja.

WARNER  
Roll camera.

3/4 TOP SHOT. A PRETZEL STICK LYING ON A 70'S CREAM LEATHER SOFA AND "WEARING" A DARK RED, VELVET SMOKING JACKET WITH ITS ARMS FOLDED BACK BEHIND ITS HEAD, AS IF RELAXING. BUT THIS TIME, THE SCENE IS BATHED IN SWIRLING RED AND BLUE LIGHTS FROM THE EMERGENCY VEHICLES PULLING UP IN THE STREET.

WARNER (CONT'D)  
Flip! That looks exactly like a  
party!

GERDA  
It's very very funky. Super geil.

WARNER  
(calling out to the agency  
and client)  
Happiness?!

CHORUS OF VOICES  
Happiness.

WARNER  
Cut.