

"Cherinka"

an original screenplay by
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lyrics "Cherinka"
by Jacob Van Mater

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FADE IN:

EXT. BUSTLING MANHATTAN PET STORE - DAY (M.O.S.)

A brisk, sunny spring day. A pink neon sign blinks "Puppy Love" above the quaint storefront. Through the window we see an adorable variety of PUPPIES in holding pens inside. A cardboard sign reads "Puli Puppies for sale."

Through the window JACKSON STARR, a.k.a. JACOB STERN, 30s, strikingly handsome, dressed in jeans and a vintage "Ziggy Stardust" t-shirt, peers inside. The STORE OWNER waves.

Jackson enters the store, and crosses to a two-month old white PULI PUPPY. The STORE OWNER lifts the puppy into Jackson's expectant arms.

Jackson's fingers caress the puppy's thick locks. The puppy licks Jackson's face, repeatedly. Jackson grins.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOHO LOFT - ESTABLISHING - A LITTLE LATER

A converted factory loft in a four-story rental complex, strategically set amidst designer coffee shops, wine bars, and art galleries.

EXT. SOHO LOFT - CONTINUOUS

An ENTREPRENEUR, 40s, handsome and wearing an expensive suit, stands outside an executive car. He looks at his watch, then upwards at a fourth-story window.

As Jackson approaches the loft entrance, he glances over at the entrepreneur--they nod. A DOORMAN, 60s, opens the door to the building.

INT. SOHO LOFT - CONTINUOUS

Jackson enters. He holds the puppy in one arm, and SHOPPING BAGS in the other.

DOORMAN

A brilliant day, Mr. Starr.

JACKSON

It is, Sammy. It is.

SAMMY

(indicating the puppy)
Who's this little fellow?

JACKSON

This?

A beat. Jackson realizes he hasn't named him yet. He looks around, then his gaze falls down on his t-shirt.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
This is Ziggy. Ziggy Stardust!

Ziggy BARKS. The doorman smiles.

Jackson and Ziggy enter the elevator. The door closes, and Jackson pushes the FOURTH FLOOR BUTTON.

INT. SOHO LOFT - MOMENTS LATER

The two-level loft is decorated with modern, disjointed PAINTINGS, and sexy wooden SCULPTED FURNITURE of the male and female form. A quadrant of the huge space is devoted to artist's easels, paints, chisels, and other supplies.

PINKIE, a rose-breasted COCKATOO, perches in a metal bird cage. Jackson enters, holding Ziggy in his arms. Immediately upon seeing Jackson, Pinkie SCREECHES.

PINKIE
(bird-voice)
Jackson! Jackson!

Jackson crosses to the bird cage. He releases the latch.

JACKSON
Pinkie, chill out! I'm home.
Here...let's get you out of there.

Pinkie steps onto the metal bars, and hauls herself out of prison. Pinkie sees Ziggy, and HISSES.

PINKIE
(bird-voice)
Feh! Feh!

Frightened, Ziggy stuffs his head in Jackson's armpit. Jackson gently removes him, and scolds Pinkie.

JACKSON
Pinkie, stop it! You're scaring
him.

Pinkie hangs her head, ashamed. Then, she alerts to SHUFFLING sounds, and dresser drawers SLAMMING upstairs O.S. Her feathers ruffle.

PINKIE
(bird-voice)
Yenta! Yenta!

JACKSON
You're obviously referring to Regina.

Pinkie bobs her head.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
I thought so. Can't you at least
try to like her?

Pinkie shakes her head.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
I didn't think so.

Jackson's attention shifts to the puppy in his arms.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
Let's go meet your new mommy?

Ziggy's tail wags, apprehensively. Jackson walks up the stairs. Pinkie SCREECHES as they leave the room.

INT. BEDROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

REGINA WALTON, late 20s, a NYC career girl, stuffs her last designer SUIT into an overflowing Louis Vuitton SUITCASE, and closes it shut.

She crosses to the window, and looks down at the entrepreneur waiting at the entrance below. She waves.

JACKSON (O.S.)
Regina, baby! I have a little
surprise for you!

Jackson enters, Ziggy cuddled in his arms. He places Ziggy on the floor, and pushes him inside. Ziggy cautiously enters the bedroom, and sits.

Regina drags the heavy suitcase off the bed, then turns. She gawks at the frightened Ziggy, gazing up at her.

REGINA
What the hell is that?

JACKSON
I thought you'd love him. Isn't he--

Jackson looks at the packed suitcase.

REGINA
--an un-housebroken canine?

Ziggy WHIMPERS.

JACKSON

I thought he'd make a great addition to our family. That is...when we finally decide to have children.

A beat. Flabbergasted, Regina stares at Jackson.

REGINA

Jackson, I don't want a dog, and I don't want kids!

Regina drags the heavy suitcase across the floor towards the door.

JACKSON

Where are you going?!

REGINA

I'm out, Jackson!

JACKSON

You're leaving me? I thought we planned on getting married.

REGINA

You were planning. I've been avoiding it.

JACKSON

For two years? You told me, you loved me!

REGINA

People always say things they don't mean, Jackson.

Ziggy WHIMPERS louder. He PEES on the hardwood floor. Regina slips on the urine.

REGINA (CONT'D)

Son-of-a-bitch!

JACKSON

Now, look what you've done. You've scared the piss right out of him.

Appalled, Regina lifts herself off the floor.

REGINA

You've got to be kidding me! What I've done? Listen to me, Jackson! And listen good!

Jackson pushes Ziggy out the door, shutting the door behind him. O.S. we hear Ziggy HOWL.

INT. LOFT LIVING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Pinkie preens her feathers on her perch. She watches Ziggy, with his tail between his legs, trot from the hallway and into the main suite.

Ziggy plops down in the middle of the room. He HOWLS.

ZIGGY

I miss my mommy!

O.S. we hear Jackson and Regina ARGUING. Ziggy WHIMPERS. Pinkie stares at him. Then, in the VOICE of a Lower Eastside matron:

PINKIE

Hey, you! Bubbeleh!

Unsure, Ziggy looks around, then sees Pinkie. He pouts. Ziggy speaks in the voice of a four-year-old boy.

ZIGGY

My name's not Bubble-head! My name's Ziggy.

PINKIE

Whatever! Would you get over here, please! And stop with all that geschrei'ing! My heart can't take it!

Pinkie scrutinizes the puppy.

PINKIE (CONT'D)

What the hell are you doing here, anyway?

ZIGGY

Uh...I live here now.

PINKIE

I see. Isn't that interesting!

Ziggy gets choked up.

ZIGGY

And...And Jackson and the lady, they're fighting because of me.

Ziggy HOWLS. Pinkie waits until he's finished. Then:

PINKIE

Stop with the crying already! It's not you, you dumb putz! It's Jackson!
(MORE)

PINKIE (CONT'D)
 She treats him like dog shit!
 (a beat)
 You should pardon the expression.

Ziggy lifts his sad face. He SNIFFLES.

ZIGGY
 Are you sure it's not 'cause of me?

PINKIE
 Am I sure? Every day I have to listen
 to her kvetch. "Jackson! Don't do
 this!" "Jackson! Don't do that!"

Pinkie's feathers ruffle.

PINKIE (CONT'D)
 Just the sound of her voice makes me
 want to molt! Such a...bitch!

In the b.g., we see Regina dragging her suitcase down the
 stairs to the front door. Jackson grabs the suitcase,
 pleading with her. A tug of war. Ziggy whispers to Pinkie.

ZIGGY
 She's a mommy dog?

PINKIE
 (sotto)
 She's a she-devil. A curvah! And
 that poor dumb schmuck never had the
 chutzpah to get rid of her before
 she could dump him!

Ziggy turns his forlorn face towards the hallway. The ARGUING
 increases O.S.

ON THE FRONT DOOR - SIMULTANEOUS

Regina yanks the suitcase out of Jackson's hand, and opens
 the front door. Jackson grabs Regina's arm.

JACKSON
 Regina, don't! We waited because
 you wanted to focus on your career!

Regina shoves him backwards, SMACK against the wall.

REGINA
 And I did! I sold four multimillion
 dollar penthouses this year alone,
 and established myself in the most
 prestigious real estate agency in
 Manhattan.

JACKSON

But I was the one who supported you!

REGINA

Jackson, I met someone else. He's rich and successful. With his guidance, my career will explode. I just don't need you anymore.

She gazes angrily at the furniture and sculptures.

REGINA (CONT'D)

Besides, look at this dump. Our apartment looks like--like some deranged Stanley Kubrick movie set!

Then, she glares at Pinkie.

REGINA (CONT'D)

Your fricking cockatoo hates me.

Pinkie bobs her head up and down in agreement.

REGINA (CONT'D)

And, now...a stinking mutt.

Ziggy's expression shifts from anxious to sad.

REGINA (CONT'D)

It's over, Jackson. I'm walking!

Regina grabs her suitcase, and exits. Jackson stares at the closed door. Ziggy lopes to Jackson's side. He butts his nose into his leg, and WHIMPERS.

Jackson lifts the bundle of love into his arms. Ziggy licks his face.

JACKSON

Thanks, little guy!

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Mazel tov! Mazel tov!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LEAVITT FUNERAL HOME - AFTERNOON

SUPER: "CRESCENT CREEK, MASSACHUSETTS" - 4 MONTHS LATER

The funeral home is shadowed by a large weeping willow. Marble columns stand on either side of mahogany doors.

ORGAN MUSIC plays O.S., and a FEMALE SOLOIST SINGS a heartfelt version of "His Eye is on the Sparrow."

SPARROWS flutter down onto a window sill.

SPARROW #1
Don't you just love this song?

The birds CHIRP in agreement.

SPARROW #1 (CONT'D)
Poor Maxine! She looks so sad.
It's so tragic!

Through the window we see MAXINE CANNILY, late 20s, a pretty geek, dressed in black. She cuddles a Snowshoe Siamese CAT in her arms.

SPARROW #2
Absolutely dreadful! Her father
struck down--electrocuted--in the
prime of his life.

The body of a 60ish man, JAMES CANILLY, rests peacefully inside an open casket. He has frizzled white hair.

SPARROW #3
Whoa! He sure got fried!

A tear rolls down Maxine's cheek. MOURNERS extend their condolences.

Sparrow #2 peeks into the window.

SPARROW #2
How is she going to manage? No
mother, no father...All she has left
is that, that frightful--

All at once, the sparrows STOP chattering.

CLOSE ON a pair of pointed BLACK LACED HIGH-HEELED SEXY WOMEN'S BOOTS, and a pair of MEN'S BLACK SNAKESKIN BOOTS marching into the chapel.

RESUME

The sparrows CHIRP furiously.

SPARROW #3
Oh my goodness! It's...

WIDEN TO REVEAL

The object of their dismay! MRS. SELMA NOTTINGUD, 60s, a sourpuss aristocrat, dressed in a figure-flattering black sheath dress, carrying a snakeskin purse.

The sparrows swoop into the weeping willow, so they can chatter among themselves.

THE SPARROWS
(in unison)
...Selma Nottingud!

Walking beside Mrs. Nottingud is the devilishly handsome NEVILLE NOTTINGUD, 30s, wearing a black Armani jacket. From their perches in the tree, the sparrows panic.

THE SPARROWS (CONT'D)
And Neville the devil!

Mrs. Nottingud, and Neville walk past a MOURNER. The mourner bolts to attention, politely nods, then scampers away.

One by one the mourners turn. Fearfully, they separate, allowing Mrs. Nottingud and her son egress.

SPARROW #1
She's evil! She smashed my eggs!

SPARROW #2
He's dreadful! He put up spikes on the fence that jabbed me in the butt!

SPARROW #3
She's a menace! He's a meanie!
They're--

THE SPARROWS
(in unison)
Fowl terrorists!

SPARROW #2
(sotto)
Time to make like an albatross bird--

THE SPARROWS
(in unison, sotto)
And disappear!

Instantly, the sparrows take flight, FEATHERS flying.

INT. LEAVITT FUNERAL HOME - CONTINUOUS

Stoic, Mrs. Nottingud regards Mr. Canilly's corpse. Neville stands at her side. She nudges Neville. Sotto:

MRS. NOTTINGUD
Stupid bastard sure got zapped.

In the b.g., Maxine hugs a MOURNER in the procession line. The cat's face is squished in Maxine's arms.

Mrs. Nottingud makes a V-line to the procession line, with Neville one step behind, and pushes past DOROTHY, 50s, chubby, wavy tresses, wearing THICK GLASSES, waiting.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)
(barely sotto)
Damn it, Dorothy! Would you get
your fat ass out of my way? I swear,
you're the size of a woolly Mammoth!

Mortified, Dorothy moves. Finally, Mrs. Nottingud stands directly in front of Maxine. Neville eyes Maxine up and down.

MAXINE
Aunt Selma...Neville, I'm so glad
you could make it.

Cherinka HISSES. Mrs. Nottingud glares at the cat, then SNEEZES.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
Bless you, Aunt Selma.

Neville hands a HANKIE to his mother.

NEVILLE
Here, Mommy.

Mrs. Nottingud grabs the hankie and BLOWS her nose. She glares at Maxine.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
Why did you bring that mangy alley
cat to your father's funeral?

MAXINE
Dad would have wanted--

Mrs. Nottingud SNEEZES again. She wipes her nose.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
James was soft-hearted to a fault.

The cat HISSES. Maxine holds the cat closer.

MAXINE
Aunt Selma, Daddy loved her!
(MORE)

MAXINE (CONT'D)

He found Cherinka in a dumpster. He took her in, and gave her a home.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Just like he found you, in some disgusting Russian orphanage, all alone...so completely helpless.

NEVILLE

Uncle James had a thing for the strays.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

He did. Didn't he, Maxine? God rest his soul.

Maxine tears up.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)

Don't cry, dear. You'll mess your mascara.

Neville nudges his mother. Sotto:

NEVILLE

The will, Mommy. The will.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Oh yes. Maxine, I almost forgot. That Jew lawyer is reading the will tomorrow at--

NEVILLE

Three o'clock.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

--so be on time. And leave that beast at home!

Mrs. Nottingud and Neville push their way past the mourners. Maxine chokes up. Gently, Cherinka taps Maxine's face with her paw. Maxine pets her.

MAXINE

Ignore her, Cherinka. You are *kiska nohmer ahdeen*--kitty number one--and don't you forget that.

Tears trickle down Maxine's face.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Daddy chose us. And he loved us.

Maxine nuzzles her face into Cherinka's fur.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 God, I'm going to miss him.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JACKSON'S SOHO LOFT - AFTERNOON

Jackson, wearing a paint stained t-shirt and jeans, mixes PAINT on a PALETTE. He stares at a dark, moody, disjointed PAINTING of a woman.

The canvas is overshadowed by a SCULPTED TREE--an entanglement of hands, arms, feet, and legs. Pinkie perches in it. Ziggy sits at its base. He tilts his head up at the painting.

PINKIE
 (bird-voice)
 Dreck! Dreck! Dreck! Dreck!

JACKSON
 I know, okay! I know! It's shit.

Pinkie hides her head under her wing. Jackson pets her.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry, Pinkie. I'm just so pent-up. And you know how Louise can get.

Pinkie bobs her head up and down.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 How am I going to explain this to her. How?

Pinkie shakes her head. Jackson picks up a tube of PAINT and smears it all over the painting, obliterating the image.

CUT TO:

EXT. GUIZOL ART GALLERY - EVENING

Modern gray exterior. Through the floor-to-ceiling windows we see an ART SHOW in progress.

INT. THE GUIZOL ART GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

GALLERY PATRONS admire SCULPTURES and modernist PAINTINGS. The mildly disheveled Jackson wanders the gallery, aimlessly. His T-Shirt reads "Don't grow up, it's a trap."

Across the room, Soho slick LOUISE GUIZOL, 40s, chiseled, ends her conversation with a CLIENT. She crosses to Jackson.

LOUISE

I'm surprised you showed up! I haven't heard from you in weeks. Not a call. Not a word.

Jackson looks up.

JACKSON

I've been having a rough time of it.

LOUISE

It's been what? Four months since she left?

JACKSON

Four months, six days, five hours, and twenty-two minutes.

LOUISE

That's so borderline pitiful, yet somehow touching. You're much better off without Vagin-- I mean, Regina. Oh, shit! Regina-Vagina, what's the difference. Christ, I hated that bitch.

A beat.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Have you been working? I haven't seen one new piece since that woman left.

JACKSON

Sort of...I'm off. Dried up. I don't know what to do. I walk the streets searching for some kind of inspiration, and...nothing.

LOUISE

Maybe you need to go away for a while. Get a change of scenery. You need to do something, or someone.

JACKSON

And where would you suggest I go? A brothel?

LOUISE

(dryly)

How very droll. No, I happen to have a quaint little cottage in Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

(MORE)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

The town's a bit quirky--but it's relatively quiet. It might just give you the inspiration you need.

CUT TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE - NEXT AFTERNOON

An austere, finely decorated office. KENNETH SOLOMON, 60s, wears a starched shirt and double-breasted suit. He peers over his eyeglasses at an antique WALL CLOCK, reading "3:02."

MR. SOLOMON

She should be here momentarily.

His gaze shifts to...Mrs. Nottingud, who angrily DRUMS her fingertips on the arm of her high-back chair.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Would you just read it!

MR. SOLOMON

You know I can't do that. The will explicitly states--

WIDEN TO INCLUDE

Neville, who sits in a chair next to his mother. He places his snakeskin boots on top of the attorney's desk.

MR. SOLOMON (CONT'D)

(calmly)

Kindly, take your boots off my desk.

Defiant, Neville leaves his feet where they are.

NEVILLE

And who's going to make me.

Mr. Solomon stares pointedly at Neville. Grudgingly, Neville takes his boots off the desk. Mrs. Nottingud leans forward, her face icy.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

I'm not a person you should challenge, Solomon. I can make your life a living hell. So, I'm only going to say this one last time. Read the damn will.

MR. SOLOMON

(calmly)

When she gets here, Selma.

EXT. MAIN STREET - SIMULTANEOUS

Maxine pedals her BICYCLE down the street. She glances at her WRISTWATCH.

MAXINE

Darn it!

Cherinka hangs over the bike basket, HOWLING. Secured next to her is a covered FISHBOWL.

EXT. LAW BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Maxine parks the bicycle. On the front of the building, a BRONZE SIGN reads "Kenneth Solomon, Esq." Maxine grabs the fishbowl, and lifts Cherinka into her arms.

INT. LAW OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

TICK-TICK. The clock reads, "3:03." The hand shifts to "3:04."

Maxine rushes in...

MAXINE

I'm sorry, I'm--

...and trips. Cherinka flies through the air, landing in Mrs. Nottingud's lap. Mrs. Nottingud freaks.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Get this vile creature off of me!

Cherinka leaps onto Neville's lap, then onto the curtains. She YOWLS.

Mr. Solomon leans across his desk, catching the fishbowl. PAPERS scatter. The muslin cover falls to the floor. In it we see LEONA, a black LION FISH, swimming frantically.

WATER sloshes onto Neville's boots. He glares at Maxine.

MAXINE

(gratefully)

Thank you, Mr. Solomon.

Maxine sets the fishbowl on the desk, carefully. Then, she pries Cherinka's claws off the curtain. Mrs. Nottingud SNEEZES.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Oh, jeez! Aunt Selma... Neville...I'm so--

They glare at Maxine with eyes of stone. A beat. Cherinka HISSES at Mrs. Nottingud. Mrs. Nottingud HISSES back.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Sorry?! Horse pockey! What the hell is that feline and fish doing here anyway?

Maxine enfolds Cherinka in her arms, and takes her seat.

MR. SOLOMON

I requested that Maxine bring Cherinka. And Leona. It will become clear to you, soon enough.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Hurry it up, then! I don't have all day.

Mr. Solomon opens a manila ENVELOPE, and removes a rather old looking VIDEO TAPE. He places it into the TAPE PLAYER, sitting under a 42-inch TV behind his desk.

MR. SOLOMON

This is the last will and testament of James Canilly.

He pushes the START BUTTON. The grainy image of James Canilly, with salt and pepper hair, in his early 50s, appears. He's dressed in a sherwani kurta tunic. Behind him is a GONG, and burning INCENSE.

JAMES

(on TV)

Is it on yet? Okay. So, I figure since you're all watching me on the screen, I'm dead.

Maxine wipes away a tear.

MAXINE

Daddy...

Mrs. Nottingud and Neville lean forward. Cherinka gives a plaintive MEOW. Leona, the fish, stops swimming to watch. Her face looks sad.

James smiles into the CAMERA.

JAMES

(on TV)

As you all know, I made my money selling healing stones and dream weavers in the seventies.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

I got pretty lucky. Who'd have figured it would have become so successful.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

(to the TV)

Oh, get on with it, you damn hippie!

JAMES

(on TV)

Anyway, to my cat Cherinka and fish Leona, who have brought me so much joy and laughter, I leave the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars each. To be paid in increments of one thousand dollars each month. You'll never have to worry about food and shelter for the rest of your days.

Cherinka MEOWS happily. Leona emits BUBBLES in the fishbowl. Mrs. Nottingud SPUTTERS.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

That's absolutely ludicrous. He's insane!

A beat. Mrs. Nottingud SNEEZES twice, and BLOWS her nose into a hankie. Mr. Solomon wryly dabs his face with a tissue.

JAMES

(on TV)

To Maxine...You are so precious to me. You gave meaning to my life. You were, and will always be, my baby girl. I love you, sweetheart.

Maxine tears up. Cherinka snuggles against her.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(on TV)

To you, I leave my house, my personal belongings...and my gong and healing stones.

On the TV, James RINGS the gong. Mrs. Nottingud winces.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(on TV)

I also leave you the remainder of my estate, valued at thirty-five million dollars...give or take a buck.

Maxine's, Neville's, and Mrs. Nottingud's jaws unhinge.

MAXINE/NEVILLE/MRS. NOTTINGUD
 (together)
 Thirty-five million?

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 (to TV screen)
 What about us?! You fool! We're
 your real family!

NEVILLE
 (shocked)
 He left us nothing?! That cheap
 sonofa--

MR. SOLOMON
 Quiet! There's more.

JAMES
 (on TV)
 Maxine, you'll gain full control of
 the estate once you're wed.

Mrs. Nottingud and Neville glance at each other.

MAXINE
 (to TV)
 Wed? Did you say wed?

JAMES
 (on TV)
 That's right. Until you marry, your
 Aunt Selma will serve as executor.
 She will manage the finances of your
 estate and pay the bills.

Mrs. Nottingud angrily BLOWS her nose.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 (under her breath)
 Like hell I will! That bastard...

JAMES
 (on TV)
 Shut it, Selma... For your loving
 support and assistance, you'll receive
 five thousand dollars each month,
 until Maxine gets married.

Mrs. Nottingud fumes. Then, she SNEEZES again.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 (on TV)
 Well, I guess that's it.
 (MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

I wish I had some wise, prophetic words to say. But I don't. All I can say is, I wish you love. Namaste.

James closes his eyes, bends forward, and makes the gesture of peace. The TV screen goes blank.

Mr. Solomon turns off the TV, and ejects the video tape. After a beat:

MR. SOLOMON

Does anyone have any questions?

Maxine shrinks into her chair. Cherinka emits a quiet MEW. Leona swims back and forth, excited.

Contemplative, Mrs. Nottingud leans back. Neville smiles at Maxine.

NEVILLE

And what about you, sweetheart?

In disbelief, Maxine shakes her head.

EXT. LAW BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Maxine puts the fishbowl into the bike basket. Cherinka jumps inside the basket, and curls up beside the fishbowl. Maxine mounts the bike, and puts on her iPod EAR PHONES.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

FOLLOW Maxine bicycling through town, wearing her ear phones. Faintly, we hear music playing from the iPod O.S. Leona and Cherinka ride in the basket.

Cherinka speaks in the accent of a 30ish Russian woman.

CHERINKA

What we do? Nasty Auntie hate me!
She hate you! She hate Maxine!

Leona speaks in the voice of a 40ish denizen of the hood.

LEONA

You got that right! She's a BWP!
Beeyatch With Problems! And, she
can KMA. That means--

CHERINKA

Da, da, I know what that means.
But, no. We need help Maxine. We
need independence. We need find man--
but quick.

LEONA

And how we gonna do that? Maxine ain't fond of any man in town. She'd rather have a root canal, than kiss or lick, any one of them suckers.

CHERINKA

This true. I need think. Maybe...maybe man come to us.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

ON a RUBY RED 1956 ENGLISH FORD SQUIRE WOODY WAGON barreling down a single-lane road. The rear of the Woody Wagon is overstuffed with SUITCASES, a BIRD CAGE, CANVASES, and an EASEL.

A sign reads, "WELCOME TO BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS - underneath a painted cartoon rendition of a swooping pterodactyl."

INT./EXT. WOODY WAGON - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Jackson, wearing sunglasses, jeans, and a t-shirt that reads "Rock On", maneuvers the Woody down Main Street past: Tourist kiosks, quaint boutiques, restaurants, spiritual shops, and the Wampanoag Indian art gallery.

Jackson SHOUTS to the back of the wagon.

JACKSON

Ziggy! Pinkie! We're here!

Ziggy, now six-months old with full dread-locks, hangs his head out the window. Pinkie sits perched in her cage. Irritable, her crest plumes.

In the front seat, we see Jackson putting on his IPHONE HEADSET and speaks into it.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Hey, Louise! I just arrived...Yeah, it's interesting. Not quite exactly what I was expecting.

ON ZIGGY bounding back and forth between the back seat windows. In the b.g., we hear Jackson's MUFFLED voice.

Ziggy's voice is that of a preteen, or teenage boy.

ZIGGY

Golly gee, Pinkie! This place is cramazing!!

PINKIE
Schmeckel! This place is--

ZIGGY
Yeah, so kew-el! Look! There's
grass! And trees! And--

Ziggy spots a mangy, mean-looking WOLF HOUND peeing on a
FIRE HYDRANT painted like a Revolutionary soldier.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
--a puptacular urinal! This place
is totally sick! I love it!

He bumps into Pinkie's cage. She SQUAWKS and flaps her wings.

PINKIE
Will you please control yourself!

Ziggy's ears flatten in embarrassment.

ZIGGY
My bad.

VILLAGERS and TOURISTS mill between the stores.

PINKIE
We left New York for this? What a
dump! Where's Tiffany's? Where's--

Pinkie spies a bakery bedecked with gingham curtains.

PINKIE (CONT'D)
--Lichtman's bakery? What about my
knishes? No more chocolate *babka* on
Fridays?! Oy, my heart can't take
this!

Pinkie's feathers stand up, and she SPUTTERS.

ZIGGY
Pinkie, you're getting your feathers
all ruffled up for no reason. Chill,
okay? Give it a chance.

They pass a WIGWAM. Outside a sign reads "Hockomock Swamp
tourist office." TAKODA, 30s, a Wampanoag Indian, stands in
front.

Takoda rustles eager TOURISTS into his 1964 canary yellow
Volkswagen bus. The bus has brightly painted IMAGES of a
swamp, and a prehistoric bird on its doors.

Pinkie flips upside down, then right side up.

PINKIE
 (bird-voice)
 Oy gevalt! Jackson! Jackson!

JACKSON
 (into headset)
 Louise, I got to go. I'll call when
 I get settled in.

Jackson CLICKS OFF the iPhone. Then, he looks O.S.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 What the hell...?

Slowly, the Woody veers across the street. A car horn BLASTS O.S. The Woody heads straight towards a 1972 mint-condition grey ROLLS ROYCE SILVER SHADOW, driven by Neville Nottingud. Mrs. Nottingud SHOUTS out the passenger window:

INTERCUT WITH:

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 Tourist!

Alarmed, Pinkie's crest plumes.

PINKIE
 (bird-voice)
 Yenta! Yenta!

Frightened, Ziggy scampers over the suitcases, and hides his head between Jackson's legs.

JACKSON
 Ziggy! Get out of there!

Jackson tries to pry the puppy loose. Seconds before colliding with the Rolls Royce, Jackson yanks the steering wheel, sharply...and the Woody bumps over a curb.

Neville flips Jackson the bird out the driver's window. Mrs. Nottingud reaches across, and BEEPS the horn. We hear their LAUGHTER.

Ziggy trembles. Slowly, he peeks out. Pinkie's feathers ruffle.

PINKIE
 (bird-voice)
 Meshuga! Meshuga!

Visibly shaken, Jackson checks the rear-view mirror to see the Rolls Royce barreling out of sight.

JACKSON

You got that right! That was totally insane!

CUT TO:

EXT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - LATER THAT SAME DAY

An old oak tree shades the colorfully painted Cape Cod cottage with scalloped porch. It sits nestled on a quiet small-town street. BIRD FEEDERS hang from the porch roof. A sign reads, "Animal Friendly Zone."

We hear bright, cheerful salsa-like music. Amid tall grass a CAT'S TAIL bops up and down. The grass blades split apart to reveal Cherinka. Proudly, she sings.

CHERINKA

(singing)

*When you look into my eyes,
You may find it big surprise,
That everything I say is lies,
'cause I don't care.
I will scratch and I will bite,
Because to me it is delight.
I always looking for a fight,
'cause I don't care.*

Perched in the old oak tree, SPARROWS watch from above. They quiver. Cherinka gazes upward.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

(singing)

*I don't like. I don't want.
I am always nonchalant.
I am kiska number one through and
through.
I will give you little smile,
And deceive you all the while,
So when I strike is nothing you can
do.*

Cherinka HISSES. The sparrows take flight.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

(singing)

*I don't purr 'cause I don't like,
I am the hunter in the night.
In your eyes I see your fright,
'but I don't care.*

Cherinka sinks low into the grass. She belly-crawls. A MOUSE pokes his head out between fallen leaves.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*I will hiss and I will pounce,
 I will crush you, little mouse.*

Quickly, the mouse hides.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*Little bird, hear my word.
 I don't care.*

Cherinka crouches. Nearby, a beautiful ORIOLE tugs at a WORM.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*I don't like. I don't want.
 I am always nonchalant.
 I am kiska number one through and
 through.*

Cherinka smiles, proudly.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*I will give you little smile,
 And deceive you all the while,
 So when I strike is nothing you can
 do.*

Cherinka swishes her tail.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)
 (sotto)
 Tovarich! Your time has ended! Now
 you die!

Cherinka pounces. We hear the Oriole SCREECH. Two little FEATHERS fly into the air.

EXT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - MINUTES LATER

Cherinka promenades up the front steps, the dead oriole dangling between her jaws. She pushes through the pet door.

A NEWSBOY bicycles down the tree-lined boulevard. He tosses a NEWSPAPER onto the porch.

CLOSE ON NEWSPAPER

The headlines read, "New York Artist Takes Residence in Bridgewater." Below it is a photograph of Jackson. Below that, "Pterodactyl sighting in Swamp." Beneath it is a doctored photograph of a prehistoric bird.

INT. MAXINE'S FOYER - CONTINUOUS

We FOLLOW Cherinka from the pet door and down the hallway with her avian prize.

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

An eclectic-style living room, using a variety of periods and styles. A vintage Admiral TV set converted into a FISH AQUARIUM sits in the corner.

Leona chases a small fish around her castle. She corners it, gulps it down, then BURPS. Out of the corner of her eye, she spies Cherinka walking past with the bird.

LEONA

Hold up, girlfriend! You know she hates to be disturbed when she's therapizin'.

We hear a WOMAN'S muted VOICE echoing down the hallway. Cherinka stops, and drops the dead bird on the floor.

CHERINKA

I have present for Maxine. You mind business, or I pickle your herring.

LEONA

Why you gotta be like that, Cherinka? Don't be hating!

CHERINKA

I no hate, I just no like. Maxine sad. Now please, quit being crusty crab and let me give gift.

Cherinka clutches the dead bird between her jaws, and defiantly walks away. Shocked, Leona SHOUTS.

LEONA

Don't you come cryin' back to me when yo' ass gets chewed out! I won't be listenin'! Do you hear me?

A beat. Silence.

LEONA (CONT'D)

(mutters)

Girl's got no sense...No sense at all.

Through the living room window we spy the Woody pulling up next door. Jackson exits, Pinkie's perched on his shoulder. Ziggy hops out of the cab.

INT. OUTSIDE MAXINE'S OFFICE - A MOMENT LATER

On the slightly ajar door is a sign: "Maxine Cannily - Pet Therapist." We hear a WOMAN's muted VOICE. Cherinka stands on her hind legs, and pulls at the ajar door with her claws.

MAXINE (O.S.)

Having a new baby in the home is traumatic for Balfour. He's no longer the center of your attention, and he needs to be reassured that you still love him.

Cherinka pulls. Suddenly, the door slowly begins to open. Cherinka pulls harder...

INT. MAXINE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Animal TOYS and paraphernalia clutter the office. BOOKSHELVES are laden with animal psychology books.

Maxine consoles SUZANNE, plump, 30ish. BALFOUR, a Cairn Terrier, stands on a miniature CHAISE LOUNGE, angrily ripping it to shreds and growling. He wears a tartan scarf.

MAXINE

Suzanne, you can't allow Balfour to control you.

Balfour's ears perk as cat claws pry open the door. Cherinka peers in, holding her dead oriole.

SUZANNE

(sniffing)

He's been like this ever since I brought the baby home from the hospital.

Maxine crosses to Balfour, and slowly reaches out her hand to calm him. Uneasy, Suzanne watches Maxine.

MAXINE

Step one...showing Balfour who's in charge. Let me demonstrate.

Maxine bends down. Her hand reaches above Balfour's head. Balfour's legs go rigid. He GROWLS.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

(to Suzanne)

Remember, don't show any fear. You simply have to grasp him by the scruff of the neck and--

Suddenly, Balfour nips her. A drop of BLOOD falls to the floor. Quickly, Maxine retracts her hand.

Cherinka drops the dead bird, and HISSES. Startled, Balfour's ears stand erect. Cherinka pounces...Balfour YELPS. Cherinka chases him around the furniture. A book shelf CRASHES to the floor.

Maxine and Suzanne turn, aghast.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
Cherinka! STOP!

Balfour darts out of the room, followed by Cherinka.

INT. MAXINE'S HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Dog and cat skitter down the wooden floor.

CHERINKA
You bastard!

Balfour speaks with a 20ish, male Scottish accent.

BALFOUR
Yu' got it back-uds. I've been gutted. Tha' duffer lied t'me! She said she loved me! It's nowt fair!

CHERINKA
I don't care. I shred you to pieces, you pommy busturd!

Leona watches them run past.

LEONA
You best run like hell, boy! This ain't no tea party!

CHERINKA
I rip out your heart! I feed on your liver!

Balfour and Cherinka race out the pet door. Maxine and Suzanne scamper after their pets, CALLING OUT their names.

EXT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Balfour flies out the pet door, Cherinka right behind him. He looks back at his assailant.

BALFOUR
Yu' twat! Yu' bloody idiot!

CHERINKA

I no twat! I pissed pussy! You
die, soon!

Cherinka clasps Balfour's scarf with her teeth, choking him. Balfour GASPS! He yanks himself free, then flees. YELPING! Still in full pursuit, Cherinka chases after him.

Maxine and Suzanne burst out the front door.

EXT. JACKSON'S COTTAGE - SIMULTANEOUS

Jackson removes CANVASES from the trunk of the Woody, and carries them to the Cape Cod cottage. The picturesque home has three dormers, a pergola, and porch.

Pinkie watches perched on the tailgate. Ziggy bolts around the front yard. He snuffs his nose into the grass and dirt, then rolls over and over, gleefully.

ZIGGY

Pinkie! This is so cool! It's...

Suddenly, Ziggy's attention is drawn to...Cherinka chasing Balfour around a large oak tree. The animals run so fast they're a blur.

Ziggy leaps to his feet, and wags his tail. He BARKS.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)

Wow! Wow! Wee! New friends!

He sprints across the yard. Alarmed, Pinkie SQUAWKS.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Jackson! Jackson!

Alerted, Jackson turns. Immediately, he drops the canvases onto the ground.

JACKSON

Ziggy! Get back here!

Jackson runs after the ecstatic puppy.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Ziggy! Ziggy!

Pinkie shakes her head. Sotto:

PINKIE (CONT'D)

Get back here, you *pisher*!

Pinkie flutters down to the ground and across the lawn, towards the action.

EXT. MAXINE'S FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Suzanne chases Balfour and Cherinka around the tree.

SUZANNE

Balfour! Come to Mama!

Maxine positions herself in front of their path. Balfour runs between her legs. She dives for Cherinka, and misses.

MAXINE

Cherinka! Stop!

Balfour looks back at Cherinka, panicked. Cherinka is inches from capturing him. Then...she pounces, just as Ziggy leaps.

Ziggy and Cherinka collide in midair with a THWUMP, and tumble to the ground. Ziggy licks Cherinka's face. Balfour smiles, triumphantly, then bolts.

Cherinka HISSES, and arches her back. Ziggy backs away from the humans, so they can't be heard.

CHERINKA

You must want die!

ZIGGY

(unsure)

No...I came to play?

In the b.g., we see Jackson running towards Ziggy. Out of the corner of her eye, Cherinka spots Balfour running into the house.

CHERINKA

I get you now, Toto!

Cherinka sprints after Balfour. Jackson reaches out to grab Ziggy's collar...when Ziggy bolts after Cherinka, BARKING.

JACKSON

Ziggy! Get back here!

Cherinka, followed by Ziggy, dart through the pet door.

INT./EXT. MAXINE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Maxine bolts up the steps, and shimmies through the pet door. Suzanne catches up, then tries to crawl through behind her. But she gets stuck, her ass raised in mid-air.

SUZANNE (O.S.)
Maxine! Help!

Maxine turns. Suzanne is wedged in the pet door, half in/
half out.

Jackson bounds up the steps. He surveys Suzanne's buttocks.
Pinkie flutters up the steps.

JACKSON
Ma'am, excuse me? Did you say help?

SUZANNE
Of course I said help! I'm fricking--

Balfour skids across the linoleum in front of Suzanne.

SUZANNE (CONT'D)
Balfour! Baby!

Followed by Cherinka, and Ziggy. Ziggy wags his tail, and
happily BARKS. He SKIDS into the wall. A hanging herb
planter CRASHES to the floor.

JACKSON
Ziggy?! Is that you? Not cool,
dude!

SUZANNE
(glowering)
Get me the hell out of here! NOW!

INT. MAXINE'S KITCHEN - SIMULTANEOUS

Balfour skids across the linoleum, smashing into the kitchen
table. A VASE with flowers topples over. WATER cascades
down.

Cherinka leaps onto the kitchen counter, toppling the FLOUR
CANISTER. Its lid flies off.

Ziggy slides on the water, and SMASHES into the counter.
Flour puffs everywhere, in a white cloud. He sits, shaking
his head.

Balfour bolts, followed by Cherinka.

INT./EXT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Jackson straddles Suzanne's bulbous ass. He peers at Maxine
through the side window. Pinkie peers down from the lamppost.

JACKSON
I'll push! You pull!

Maxine nods. Suzanne lies face down, wedged tight in the pet door. Maxine braces herself in front of Suzanne.

MAXINE

You're sure you're okay with this?

Suzanne looks up at Maxine, irritated. O.S. a panicked YELP, then another CRASH.

SUZANNE

Just push, damnit!

Pinkie bobs her head up and down.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Pushi tuches! Pushi tuches!

Maxine grabs both arms, and...Jackson pushes Suzanne's ass with both hands.

MAXINE

Push!

Maxine pulls. Jackson thrusts forward.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Pushi tuches! Pushi tuches!

MAXINE

Push harder! I think she's coming!

Suzanne MOANS and GROANS.

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Balfour backs into a corner. Cherinka HISSES. Irritated, Leona swims back and forth.

LEONA

Watch out, Balfour! Chernobyl's about to explode!

Balfour pushes backward, tight against the corner.

BALFOUR

Chuffin' ell! Lis'en t'me! Tha' dirty trollop spends all 'er time with tha' wee bairn. 'E grabbin' and suckin' on 'er breasts. It's fuckin' disgustin'!

CHERINKA

I don't care!

Cherinka's claws slash at Balfour. He SCREAMS in pain.

BALFOUR
Are yu' daft?! Tek' the fuckin' rod
out-yer-arse, and listen t'me!

Cherinka pounces onto Balfour, her fangs inches from the terrier's throat. Panicked, Leona SCREAMS:

LEONA
Cherinka! Get off that redcoat! He
didn't mean no disrespect!

Cherinka glares at Leona.

CHERINKA
This...this cork sucker! He bite
Maxine! He must pay!

Balfour YELPS.

LEONA
Listen here, Balfart! I'd apologize
to her quick! Or your ship is sunk!

Cherinka raises her razor-sharp claws.

BALFOUR
(petrified)
For Chris' sake! I'm feckin' sorry!

Balfour sits on his hind legs, and begs.

BALFOUR (CONT'D)
I luv Maxine! Please!...I'm beggin'
yu'! I don't wanna die!

A beat. Cherinka scowls. We hear Maxine, Suzanne, and Jackson SHOUTING O.S.

INT./EXT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Jackson's braced firmly against Suzanne's buttocks. Repeatedly, he thrusts hard.

MAXINE (O.S.)
(shouting)
She's coming! Harder!

PINKIE
(bird-voice)
Pushi tuches! Pushi tuches!

Suzanne emits a deep GROAN.

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Cherinka's teeth press into Balfour's THROAT.

BALFOUR

I'll do anythin'! Wha'ever yu' want!
Jus' don't hurt me!

Cherinka SPITS out the scarf, with bits of fur. Balfour backs away in fear.

CHERINKA

No more bite! No more bark! Or
next time, I nip off your banger--if
I can find it!

INT./EXT. MAXINE'S FRONT ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

We hear a "Humph!" Suzanne is planted face down on top of Maxine. Maxine GASPS for air.

MAXINE

Help! I can't breathe!

Jackson enters. Pinkie flutters into the house. She stares at Maxine flat on her back, with the robust Suzanne on top.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Uh...Can you give us a hand?

JACKSON

Sorry about that.

Jackson rolls Suzanne off. Splayed on their backs, Maxine and Suzanne PANT.

MAXINE/SUZANNE

Thanks!

We hear Balfour's heart-wrenching YELP, Cherinka's HOWL, and Ziggy's frenetic BARKING.

SUZANNE

(worried)
Balfour!

JACKSON

(confused)
Ziggy?

MAXINE

(pissed off)
Cherinka!

Maxine jumps to her feet. She and Jackson help Suzanne off the floor.

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maxine, Suzanne and Jackson sprint into the living room. Pinkie sits perched on Jackson's shoulder. They skid to a stop.

The animals sit sweetly on the rug. Amidst chaos. Maxine gazes around at her destroyed living room.

Balfour sits next to a toppled chair. He smiles sweetly up at Suzanne, tail wagging. She runs to him, and lifts him into her arms.

SUZANNE

Balfour! Mommy's here!

Balfour licks her face, and snuggles against her. He BARKS.

SUZANNE (CONT'D)

Oh my God! He's back to normal!
It's a miracle...A miracle! Thank
you! Thank you!!

Maxine glares at Cherinka. Cherinka grins. Suzanne crosses to the hallway, and is about to exit when...

MAXINE

(calling out)
Same time next week?

Suzanne beams down at Balfour, then nods. They exit. An awkward beat as Jackson and Maxine meet.

JACKSON

I guess, I should introduce myself.
I'm Jackson. And, you're--

MAXINE

Maxine...Maxine Cannily.

They shake hands...Jackson smiles. He holds her hand, a beat too long. Suddenly:

PINKIE

(bird-voice)
Shikseh! Shikseh!

Questioningly, Maxine looks at the bird, then at Jackson.

JACKSON

And this is Pinkie.
(MORE)

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 She only speaks Yiddish.
 Shikseh...uh, means "pretty."

Flattered, Maxine smiles.

MAXINE
 That's very sweet.

We hear a BARK O.S. White PAW PRINTS track from the kitchen to...Ziggy, covered in FLOUR PASTE.

PINKIE
 (bird-voice)
 Ziggy! Ziggy!

MAXINE
 Oh! My--

Ziggy sits wagging his tail. FLOWERS from the knocked-over vase are stuck to the paste on his fur.

JACKSON
 Ziggy? What the heck--?

Ziggy stands, then shakes himself.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 Incoming! Duck!

Pieces of PASTE fly through the air...Jackson's SPECKLED in paste. A GLOB strikes the fish tank, KERSPLASH! Another GLOB SMACKS Maxine between the eyes.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 Here, let me help you.

Immediately, he removes a HANKIE from his pocket. Maxine removes her GLASSES. Jackson is awed by her natural beauty.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 There's a spot right here. And...

Gently, he wipes her face. An awkward beat. Timidly, Maxine retracts.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 Uh...Maybe you should do it. I'd better get them home.

Jackson grabs Ziggy's collar.

MAXINE
 Home? You live--

JACKSON
 --next door. I'm staying there for
 awhile.

MAXINE
 So, you're my new--

JACKSON
 --neighbor.

Cherinka curls around Jackson's legs. She PURRS.

MAXINE
 (surprised)
 That's strange. She likes you. She
 doesn't like anyone.

Cherinka smiles, slyly.

JACKSON
 Animals tend to like me. It's women
 I have a problem with.

Maxine smiles.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 I guess I'll be seeing you around?

MAXINE
 Sure, I'd like that.

Cherinka and Leona grin, and share a knowing look. Pinkie
 stares at them, annoyed. Her crest plumes.

JACKSON
 Come on, boy! Let's go home.

Ziggy BARKS, and wags his tail. Jackson exits with his pets.

PINKIE (O.S.)
 (bird-voice)
 Shikseh! Shikseh!

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Maxine crosses to the window, and peers outside. Suddenly,
 she GIGGLES.

MAXINE
 (to self and to pets)
 He's cute, isn't he?

Through the living room window we see Jackson walking across
 the yard, talking to Pinkie on his shoulder. Ziggy leaps in
 the air, BARKING.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

And interesting...in that artsy-fartsy kind of way.

Then, Maxine shakes her head.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

What am I thinking? Why would he be interested in me?

(sighing)

Forever the hopeful romantic.

Maxine exits the living room, and ascends the stairs. Cherinka and Leona watch her leave then as soon as she's gone. They look at each other, slyly.

LEONA

What do you think?

CHERINKA

I think man find us.

CUT TO:

EXT. NOTTINGUD MANSION - LATER

A forbidding fortress. Metal bird spikes adorn the rooftop, ledges, and gutters. Slowly, the iron gates creak open. The wrought iron signage above reads, "Nottingud Manor."

Neville shifts the Rolls Royce into gear. The car barrels through the gate, and SCREECHES to a halt in front of the mansion.

Mrs. Nottingud flings herself out the front passenger seat and marches headstrong to the front door past...

EZEKIEL, a large REDBONE BLOODHOUND lounging lazily on the porch. Mrs. Nottingud practically foams at the mouth.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

How dare he?! That despicable, ungenerous, repugnant bastard!

(screaming)

Neville?! Quit dawdling!

NEVILLE

I'm coming, Mommy.

Neville follows his mother into the house. The door SLAMS SHUT.

Ezekiel opens one eye, YAWNS, and stretches. Lazily, he stands scratches his butt, then saunters through the DOG DOOR.

INT. NOTTINGUD MANSION - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Nottingud storms into the opulent living room. STUFFED BEASTS and FOWL hang on the walls. RIFLES and PISTOLS hang on the gun rack.

A large painted PORTRAIT of a balding, outlandish businessman hangs on the wall. A plaque on the frame reads "Errol Nottingud 1942-2003."

Ezekiel belly-crawls to watch from the foyer, keeping a safe distance. Ezekiel speaks with a Southern accent.

EZEKIEL

Dang blast, what bug's gotten up her
ass? She's actin' crazier 'n' a
rabid coon.

Mrs. Nottingud kicks over furniture. She grabs a LETTER OPENER off the credenza and glares at a PORTRAIT of a little girl and boy, both dressed in clothing of the early 50s. The boy, 6 or 7, smiles broadly at us. The little girl, 8 or 9, scowls.

NEVILLE

Mommy, stop!

THWOING! The letter opener makes a BULLS-EYE in the young boy's forehead.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

We're his flesh and blood! Everything
should belong to us! But, no! He
leaves all his money, all his worldly
possessions, to that--that URCHIN!

Mrs. Nottingud grabs a flower-filled VASE and SMASHES it against the wall. Ezekiel crouches under an end table.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)

Condemned to servitude to that
guttersnipe! And her stinking fish
and her rotten pussy!

Neville is at the bar, filling an old-fashioned with bourbon from a crystal DECANTER.

NEVILLE

Now, Mommy, there's more than one
way to skin a cat...or fry a fish.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

You've peaked my interest. Tell me
more--and make it quick!

Neville hands her the drink. She takes a sip. Neville crosses to the PIANO, and strikes a few keys. The notes form a disjointed, dark melody.

NEVILLE

(singing)

*Accidents are simple,
And murder's always fun.
We'll have all their money,
If we kill them one by one.*

Mrs. Nottingud smiles.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

(singing)

*What a marvelous idea!
It's devilishly divine.
Without that orphan, fish, and cat,
James' fortune will be mine.*

Neville removes a small VIAL from a cabinet.

NEVILLE

(singing)

*It is! It is the perfect plan.
Her death I will ensure.*

Neville twists off the cap, withdraws an eyedropper, and squeezes two large drops of BLACK FLUID into a potted plant. Immediately, the plant wilts and dies.

NEVILLE (CONT'D)

(singing)

*A drop of poison in her wine.
Too bad there is no cure.*

MRS. NOTTINGUD

(singing)

*It's flawless!
You have pleased me so,
But don't forget that cat.*

A fly BUZZES above a desk. Mrs. Nottingud SQUISHES it with her hand, then flicks it to the floor.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)

(singing)

*We'll run her over with the car,
Then oops! Her name is splat!*

NEVILLE

(singing)

*Just one more left to murder,
That ugly, stupid fish.*

(MORE)

NEVILLE (CONT'D)
*Filleted, and spiced, and gently
 fried,
 She'll be quite the tasty dish.*

UNDER, Ezekiel slinks out the door.

EZEKIEL
 Dadgummit! I gotta warn Cherinka!

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 (singing)
*I am so delighted!
 I think I've hit the moon!
 Too bad they'll die a painful death.
 Be quick! Let's do it soon.*

MRS. NOTTINGUD/NEVILLE
 (singing)
*Accidents are simple,
 And murder's always fun,
 We'll have all their money,
 When we kill them one by one!*

Pleased, Mrs. Nottingud and Neville CLINK glasses.

CUT TO:

EXT. JACKSON'S COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

Jackson rinses off the flour paste from Ziggy's fur with the garden hose.

JACKSON
 What is wrong with you? She was nice.

Ziggy BARKS in agreement. Perched on an adjacent low-hanging tree branch, Pinkie stops preening her feathers. Her crest plumes.

PINKIE
 (bird-voice)
Feh! Feh! Shikseh! Shikseh!

JACKSON
 Aw! Come on, Pinkie! Don't be like that. You know, sometimes your attitude really stinks!

Suds, wilted flowers and flour paste run down Ziggy's dejected face.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 I wanted a break from all the drama,
 and the minute we arrive you both
 create chaos! I'm upset, and
 disappointed in both of you!

Ziggy tucks his tail between his legs and looks up at Jackson,
 sheepishly. Ashamed, Pinkie hides her face under her wing.
 She peeks out, then COOS.

PINKIE
 (bird-voice)
Ich han dich lib!

Ziggy BARKS.

JACKSON
 I love you, too. So, you can quit
 sucking up. I guess, no harm. No
 foul.

Jackson turns off the garden hose, and looks at the drenched
 pup.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 Maybe after this, you can mop up the
 floors.

Ziggy BARKS. Drenched in water, Ziggy shakes. WATER sprays
 everywhere, soaking Jackson and Pinkie. Pinkie's feathers
 ruffle.

PINKIE
 (bird-voice)
 Putz! Putz!

Jackson LAUGHS.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - LATER THAT SAME DAY

Ezekiel enters through the front pet door, and SNIFFS.

EZEKIEL
 Cherinka! Baby-doll! Where you at,
 sugar?

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cherinka races down the stairs. We hear Maxine cleaning in
 the kitchen, O.S. Ezekiel enters and smiles lasciviously at
 Cherinka.

EZEKIEL

Now, ain't you a sight for these
tired, sore eyes!

Leona eavesdrops from the aquarium.

Ezekiel swoons as he gazes into Cherinka's sparkling blue eyes. He licks her face. Cherinka bats him away with her paw.

CHERINKA

Get away, hound dog, before I slash
off your *perogies*! No more dumplings
to dangle between legs.

EZEKIEL

Now baby-doll, don't go be like that.
You know I love you.

Leona looks out of her aquarium. As she speaks, BUBBLES float to the surface.

LEONA

Bubba, please! You did not just say
that!

CHERINKA

Don't call me baby-dull! I no like,
and I no want!

EZEKIEL

Come on, darlin'. You know I'd do
anythin' for you. I just came on by
to make sure y'all was safe.

CHERINKA

We safe. We home. *Dosveydana*.

Leona smiles to herself.

LEONA

He sure is sweet on her. Crazy-ass
coon dog.

EZEKIEL

You might be home, but y'all are
definitely not safe.

LEONA

Say what?!

Cherinka scoffs at Ezekiel.

CHERINKA

You must be rabid. Chase too many
possum.

EZEKIEL

Dadgumit, you better listen to me,
and listen good. I heard them
conversatin'.

Cherinka's tail starts to swish with agitation.

CHERINKA

Who you hear? What they talk? Speak,
Ezekiel. I getting mad.

LEONA

Yeah! Who, who?!

EZEKIEL

Selma and Neville...they plan to
kill off Maxine. And you. And Leona,
too!

Bubbles burst to the top of the aquarium.

LEONA

(aghast)
Say what?!

CHERINKA

(surprised)
What I should do?

Leona THUDS into the aquarium glass, wanting to be heard.

LEONA

Excuse me?! That's what we should
do, Putin Putty Tat. That cracker's
coming after us.

EZEKIEL

I reckon if it was me, I'd think
about high-tailin' it out of town.

We hear POUNDING on the front door, O.S.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (O.S.)

Maxine?! Maxine! Open this damn
door!

Ezekiel ears stand up. He sinks to the floor, and crouches.

EZEKIEL

Time for me to skedaddle!

In the b.g., Maxine trots to the front door. Ezekiel slinks out through the kitchen.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Maxine opens the door, surprised.

MAXINE

Aunt Selma? Neville? What are you doing--?

Cherinka's back arches, she HISSSES. Maxine is dumbfounded. Mrs. Nottingud SNAPS her fingers.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Neville!

Neville opens a threadbare RING BOX...to reveal an old, microscopic DIAMOND ENGAGEMENT RING. He gets down on one knee.

NEVILLE

Maxine, I know you don't really like me. As a matter of fact, I never really liked you. But in the last few months my feelings have grown for you, and somewhere deep in the pit of my groin, I know we're meant to be together. So, I'm asking you right now...Will you marry me?

Neville tries to push the diamond ring onto her finger. Maxine shoves Neville off.

MAXINE

What?! Neville, you're my cousin!

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Not by blood.

MAXINE

But, he's--! I'm not--! I don't want--!

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Enough!! I know what's best.

Mrs. Nottingud grabs Maxine's hand, and shoves the ring onto her finger.

MAXINE

Ow!

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 You're marrying Neville, whether you
 like it or not!

Inside the doorway, Cherinka GROWLS. Maxine struggles to
 remove the tightly fitting ring off her finger. Finally,
 the ring is free. Maxine shoves it into Aunt Selma's hand.

MAXINE
 Aunt Selma! I don't want to get
 married! Especially not to Neville!
 Sorry, Neville.

Neville's fists clench.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 So, if you wouldn't mind.
 (screaming)
 Get the HELL OFF MY PROPERTY!

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 (with venom)
 Don't you dare talk to me like that!

MAXINE
 NOW!!!

A beat. Maxine points to the Rolls Royce. Mrs. Nottingud
 fumes.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 You're going to regret this!

Mrs. Nottingud and Neville march back to the car. In the
 corner of his eye, Neville spies Jackson.

NEVILLE
 It's him! From the newspaper!

Neville points at...

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. JACKSON'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Jackson carrying a MOVING BOX to the cottage, with Pinkie
 perched on top. Ziggy trots, happily at Jackson's side.

Pinkie sees Mrs. Nottingud and Neville. She flaps her wings,
 enraged.

PINKIE
 (bird-voice)
 Jackson! Jackson!

Mrs. Nottingud shakes her fist at Jackson.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
You dirty rotten tourist! You
Bohemian! You New Yorker!

Scared, Ziggy's tail falls between his legs.

JACKSON
It's you! The same--You nearly ran
into me this morning!

Pinkie SCREECHES.

PINKIE
(bird-voice)
Yenta! Yenta!

MRS. NOTTINGUD
Our mistake! Next time, we won't
miss!

Mrs. Nottingud gets in the Rolls Royce, and slams the passenger door closed. Neville jumps into the driver's seat.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)
Hit it, Neville!

INT. 1972 ROLLS ROYCE - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Neville BURNS RUBBER. The Rolls Royce fishtails down the street. Mrs. Nottingud YELLS out the passenger window at Jackson.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
Go back where you came from!

Mrs. Nottingud reclines into her seat, satisfied.

Neville swerves the car towards a PEDESTRIAN crossing the street. He blasts the HORN. The pedestrian dives out of the way.

CUT TO:

EXT. JACKSON'S COTTAGE - SIMULTANEOUS

Ziggy races towards the street, BARKING. He stops at the property line, and watches the Rolls Royce barrel out of sight.

Still holding the moving box, Jackson WHISTLES. Ziggy's ears perk. He turns, and trots back to the house. Jackson looks across at Maxine, standing on her porch.

Maxine looks across at Jackson, then quickly away. Embarrassed, she retreats into the solitude of her home.

Jackson looks at Pinkie, then down at Ziggy.

JACKSON
What the hell is going on around here?

Pinkie shakes her head. Ziggy turns his head sideways, confused. Jackson carries the box into the house.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. 1972 ROLLS ROYCE - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Neville barrels the Rolls Royce down a narrow side-street. Mrs. Nottingham, riding shotgun, fumes.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
Nobody talks to me like that! Nobody!
She's going to pay for her insolence!

NEVILLE
What did you expect, Mommy? She detests me.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
(sardonically)
What did you expect, Mommy?
(vehemently)
I expect her to do, exactly, what I tell her to do! And trust me, she will. I'll make damn sure of it!

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON'S LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Decorated with modernist furniture, and select artwork and sculpture.

Pinkie rips open a MOVING BOX with her beaks and claws. Ziggy yanks on BUBBLE WRAP. It POPS. Startled, he BARKS, then bites it again. More POPPING.

PINKIE
Would you stop that! It's not a toy, you putz!

Jackson lugs the SCULPTED TREE we saw earlier into the living room. His T-shirt reads "Earth without Art is "Eh"."

PINKIE (CONT'D)
 (bird-voice)
 Jackson! Jackson!

Jackson perches Pinkie in the tree. He gazes around the room.

JACKSON
 What do you think? This place isn't
 that bad. Is it?

Pinkie ruffles her feathers. Ziggy BARKS, and wags his tail.

Jackson admires the double-D shaped wooden CABINET BAR, hanging on the wall. Its brass nameplate reads "Mother's Milk" by Jackson Starr."

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 At least, the artwork is nice.

Pinkie bobs her head in agreement.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 Louise does have exquisite taste.

Pinkie's head bobs in agreement. Jackson opens the bar, and removes a BOTTLE of liquor.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 And exceptional taste in booze.

Jackson pours himself a drink, then lifts the glass in a toast.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
 I guess...here's to us! And to new
 beginnings. L'chaim!

Pinkie bops up and down.

PINKIE
 (bird-voice)
 L'chaim! L'chaim!

Ziggy BARKS. Jackson takes a swig of his drink.

INT. JACKSON'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Ziggy sneaks out of the house past Jackson, who's carrying empty BOX CRATES to the garbage can at the rear of the house. Pinkie's watches from her perch in the tree. Her plume flares.

PINKIE
 (bird-voice)
 Ziggy! Ziggy!

Pinkie flutters off her perch, and out the front door.

EXT. JACKSON'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Ziggy stands on the top step. He descends the stairs, when...Pinkie flutters through the front door.

PINKIE
 Hey, you! Schlemazel! You aren't considering going over there, are you?

ZIGGY
 But Pinkie...couldn't you see? She's in trouble.

PINKIE
 Why should you care? She's nothing to us. A stranger...We don't know a thing about her.

ZIGGY
 Jackson likes her, and I like her. That's enough for me. And, I could tell you liked her. You called her a Shitzsu.

PINKIE
 (agitated)
 She's a shikseh, not a Shitzsu! A Shitzsu's a dog.

ZIGGY
 Oh!... Well, I want to help her.

PINKIE
 You're hopeless! What goes on over there is none of our business.

ZIGGY
 I'm going! And you can't stop me!

Ziggy bolts down the steps. Pinkie SQUAWKS.

PINKIE
 (to self, dramatically)
 Oy vey! I can't believe he's doing this to me...

Pinkie FLAPS her wings, then wraps them around her chest.

PINKIE (CONT'D)
 You're killing me! I'm having angina
 here! Ziggy! Ziggy!!

Ziggy runs across the yard toward Maxine's.

PINKIE (CONT'D)
 I'm not going over there! Do you
 hear me, boychik?!

A beat. Pinkie watches, as Ziggy pushes open Maxine's pet door, and disappears inside her cottage.

PINKIE (CONT'D)
 (to self)
 The little pisher has no idea what
 he's getting himself into.
 (resigned)
Vey is mir...

Pinkie flutters, and skips across the yard after him. In the b.g., we see Jackson reenter his cottage.

INT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Pinkie pushes open the pet door. She hears the ANIMALS talking in the living room, and tiptoes towards their voices. We hear Maxine's MUTED VOICE upstairs.

Ziggy sits politely next to the aquarium. Cherinka sits on the sofa. Pinkie listens from the foyer, unnoticed.

ZIGGY
 Gee, that's horrible. I feel so bad
 for her. Maybe she can leave? You
 can all run away from home. We did.

Leona swims into the aquarium glass, THUD! Getting Ziggy's attention.

LEONA
 Nigga, please! We can't just pack
 up and leave. Maxine's whole life
 is here. Look at me. I'm in a tank!
 Without water, I'll die! Without
 her animal psycho-hoodoo, inside
 Maxine will die.

CHERINKA
 It true. This is home. In old
 country, I had no home, I had no
 food, I had nobody.

ZIGGY

But if you stay, you're all dead!
You're just waiting for them to kill
you.

Hearing this, Pinkie hangs her head in shame. Then, she
flutters into the room.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)

Pinkie! You're here! I knew you
would come!

PINKIE

Of course I'm here! Why wouldn't I
be here? I came to help.

CHERINKA

(surprised)

Why you help? You no like cat. I
no like bird.

PINKIE

I know hardship. I was held captive
in the back of a garage. It was so
dark and cold. They cut my wings,
and put a numbered band on my foot.
Strangers came, and they fondled me.
It was so disgusting!

Ziggy ears perk. Leona stops swimming to listen.

PINKIE (CONT'D)

I was about to give up, when an animal
rights activist burst through the
door. She rescued me, and shut the
place down. That...was Jackson's
grandmother. I promised her that
one day I would help someone else in
need.

Cherinka bows her head after hearing Pinkie's tale.

CHERINKA

They put me in shelter. They feed
us, pet us, then trick us. I watch.
They take family from cell, and inject
poison.

Pinkie wraps her wing around Cherinka's shoulder. Leona and
Ziggy SNIFFLE.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

They all dead. Cage door left open,
and I escape...to freedom!

(MORE)

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

You understand. You are tovarich.
You are friend.

Cherinka nuzzles Pinkie with her nose.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

Even though you smell tasty, like
hot kielbasa on cold winter night.

Ziggy and Leona GULP.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

I not hurt you. We must make plan.

PINKIE

Your sentiments are indeed touching.

Pinkie butts Cherinka's nose away with her beak. Ziggy and
Leona sigh in relief.

PINKIE (CONT'D)

Besides, I'm starting to like Maxine.
She's definitely better than that
bitch he lived with for two years.
Jackson needs a good woman.

CHERINKA

And Maxine need nice man.

PINKIE

Our solution is simple. We make a
shidduch!

CHERINKA/ZIGGY/LEONA

What's that?!

PINKIE

We get them married!

CUT TO:

INT. MAXINE'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

A mixture of vintage, and Asian contemporary chic furnishings.
Feminine pillows adorn an airy window seat where Maxine sits,
clenching a pillow. Cherinka pushes the bedroom door open,
and crosses to her.

MAXINE

I can't believe the nerve of her.
Neville! He's...he's a creep...a
leech!

Cherinka jumps up onto the window-seat, and butts Maxine with her nose.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 You understand. Don't you, Cherinka?
 I want to fall in love.

Cherinka MEOWS. Maxine sits upright, and pets Cherinka.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 I want to find someone who is kind,
 and caring, and--

Cherinka MEWS.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 Of course! He must like cats. But,
 do you think I'll ever find him? Is
 he out there?

We hear a dispirited country western-type ballad, as Maxine stares out her bedroom window.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*I stare out my window,
 And wonder if he'll ever show.
 I am tired of living,
 My life here all alone.*

Cherinka jumps into Maxine's lap. Maxine holds her.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*I don't know what's going to happen,
 Or what life will bring to me.
 All I know is I need love's magic,
 To end my misery.*

Maxine lifts Cherinka up.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*Will I ever find Mr. Perfect?
 Will he take me in his arms?*

Maxine hugs Cherinka.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*Will he tell me that he loves me,
 And no one will do me harm?
 Will he hold me and kiss me,*

Maxine kisses, and cuddles the cat.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 And make life for me complete?
*Will he bring me love's magic,
 To end my misery?*

Maxine and Cherinka butt noses together. Cherinka PURRS.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAXINE'S FRONT YARD - EVENING

Jackson stands at the base of the oak tree catching FIREFLIES and placing them in a MASON JAR. Pinkie perches on a limb.

A FIREFLY lands on Ziggy's nose, ILLUMINATING him. Ziggy wags his tail, and LAUGHS. The firefly zooms off. Ziggy chases after him.

ZIGGY
 Come back! Where are you going?

The firefly stops, and hovers with his tail aglow.

CLOSE ON THE FIREFLY

The little beetle-like creature is frightened. He waves his four arms, and kicks his two legs.

LITTLE FIREFLY
 I'm scared! If the big man catches
 me, I'll die! We can't live in a
 jar.

RESUME

ZIGGY
 Gosh! That's horrible. I didn't
 know.

A larger FIREFLY hovers in a clearing. In an adult woman's voice:

LARGE FIREFLY
 Blaze! Quit talking to the enemy!

LITTLE FIREFLY/BLAZE
 Coming, Mom!
 (to Ziggy)
 Gotta fly! Nice nosing you.

The fireflies DISAPPEAR.

Jackson WHISTLES for Ziggy's return. Pinkie copy-cat WHISTLES.

JACKSON

Come here, boy! Pinkie, stop it!

INT. MAXINE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Cherinka stretches out on the window-seat, peering out. Her tail swishes.

Maxine reclines next to Cherinka, reading the book "How can I love these people?" Under the title it reads, "Surviving the dysfunctional family."

Through the window, we see FIREFLIES BLINKING and FLITTING about the large oak tree. Below, Jackson catches fireflies.

Cherinka taps the window with her paw, and YOWLS. Disrupted, Maxine peers outside.

MAXINE

What the hell?!

EXT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Maxine runs toward Jackson. In the b.g., we see Cherinka and Leona watching through Maxine's living room window.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?!

Maxine grabs the mason jar, and twists off the lid.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

You're killing them! Don't you know that?!

Maxine releases the fireflies. Away they fly, their BLINKING LIGHTS gradually disappear into the night.

JACKSON

I'm sorry...I...

Ziggy covers his face with his paws. Pinkie hides under her wing, then peeks out.

MAXINE

Fireflies aren't meant to be kept captive. You can't just steal their freedom!

JACKSON

I wasn't going to...

MAXINE

They need food and humidity.

(MORE)

MAXINE (CONT'D)

You don't have any grass in the jar to make them feel at home, or an apple.

JACKSON

How do you know so much about bugs?

MAXINE

My dad. He taught me a lot of things. He...

Maxine hands the mason jar back to Jackson.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

...my apologies. I didn't mean to come off so abruptly. If you'll please excuse me.

Maxine walks away. Ziggy WHIMPERS, then BARKS.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Jackson! Jackson!

JACKSON

Maxine! Wait!

Maxine turns, surprised. Jackson runs towards her.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

If I made you uncomfortable, I apologize.

A beat. Maxine nods.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

If you're interested, I can make us a pitcher of margaritas. What do you say? I'm new to the neighborhood and could use the company.

Another beat. Maxine is wavering.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Come on. I have those cute little umbrellas, and maraschino cherries.

A final beat. Maxine yields.

MAXINE

Sure, I'd love to. As long as the cherries are organic.

Jackson perches Pinkie on his arm, and winks.

JACKSON

Trust me...They're Kosher.

He and Maxine walk towards his cottage. Ziggy races ahead.

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Through the window, Cherinka's watches Jackson escort Maxine to his cottage. Her tail SWISHES happily. Delighted, Leona swims round and around.

LEONA

Do you see that? Do you see that?!
Step one accomplished!

CHERINKA

I see, tovarich! But, next step
harder. They must fall in love.

Cherinka thinks, then:

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

I must talk to Ezekiel. He understand
how American man think.

INT. JACKSON'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Jackson enters with a PITCHER and TWO GLASSES. He crosses to Maxine sitting on the sofa. Jackson pours two cocktails, and hands one to Maxine.

Ziggy places his head into Maxine's lap, and wags his tail. Maxine scratches behind Ziggy's ears. Immediately, Ziggy scratches his hindquarters.

JACKSON

He likes you.

MAXINE

And I like him. You can tell a lot
about a person by their pets.

JACKSON

And, what do they tell you about me?

Maxine squirms. Pinkie keenly watches from her perch in the sculpted tree.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)
Gut! Gut!

MAXINE

That... You're a good person, and
caring.

Jackson smiles, slightly abashed. Maxine scratches Ziggy's backside. Suddenly, Ziggy leaps up, and straddles Maxine's leg.

EXT. JACKSON'S COTTAGE - SIMULTANEOUS

Cherinka scampers up the front steps. Ezekiel follows two steps behind.

CHERINKA

You need hurry up! Eat too many dog biscuits!

EZEKIEL

Oh, hush! You're as jumpy as a cricket in a hot fryin' pan.

They peer inside the living room window. Suddenly, Ezekiel HOWLS in LAUGHTER. Cherinka GROWLS.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

Look at him go to town! That little fella's hornier n' a four-peckered billy goat.

Through the window, we see Ziggy humping Maxine's leg. His butt bumps against the coffee table.

We hear Pinkie SCREECHING from her perch as a framed photograph topples off the coffee table.

PINKIE (O.S.)

(bird-voice)

Oy vey! Oy vey!

Cherinka swats Ezekiel.

CHERINKA

Not funny! Dog disgusting! He need fix! Snip! Snip!

EZEKIEL

Darlin', you wanted to know how an American man thinks. Well, I'll tell ya. Whether a woman's a saint or a whore, a man or dog, only wants one thing...and that's pussy.

INT. JACKSON'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jackson pries the puppy off Maxine's leg. Ziggy's ears flatten. He skulks under the coffee table. Maxine straightens her clothing, and sits on the sofa.

JACKSON

I'm really sorry. Ziggy's never acted like this before.

MAXINE

He's never humped before? Or maybe, you just haven't seen him.

JACKSON

You're right. I'm not a voyeur, and until today, I didn't realize he was an exhibitionist.

Maxine laughs. Jackson sits next to Maxine. Maxine picks the framed photograph off the floor, and examines it.

In the photo, Jackson's grandmother, ESTHER STERN, 60s, stands at the rear of the Woody, smiling broadly. Her T-shirt reads "Animal Power." Pinkie perches on the tailgate. Behind Esther, the Woody is stuffed with tropical birds in cages.

MAXINE

Who's this?

JACKSON

That's my grandmother--Esther Stern. She loved animals, and animals loved her. That's how I got Pinkie.

MAXINE

I thought your name was Jackson Starr.

JACKSON

My real name is Jacob Stern. Jackson Starr is just a cooler artist name.

MAXINE

Your parents must of freaked when your grandmother gave Pinkie to you?

JACKSON

My parents died when I was three. Their boat capsized during a storm, off the Long Island Sound.

MAXINE

I didn't realize--

JACKSON

It's okay. How would you know? I lived with my *bubbe*, my whole life. When she passed away, Pinkie became mine.

Maxine looks up at Pinkie. Pinkie COOS.

MAXINE

So, that's why you and Pinkie are so connected?

Jackson nods.

JACKSON

What about you? What's your story?

MAXINE

Me?...I was orphaned. I was abandoned at birth, so I never knew my parents.

JACKSON

Are you serious?

Maxine nods, then recounts her sad tale.

MAXINE

I barely remember the orphanage. I was too young, or maybe, I just don't want to. I do recall being crammed together in these tiny cribs. At night, I would wake up to the cries of the other children.

JACKSON

That sounds awful.

MAXINE

I was barely walking when my dad--my adoptive father--flew to Russia on a peace mission. He saw me, and fell in love. At least, that's what he told me. And the rest is history.

JACKSON

That's cramazing! He's amazing! Maybe one day, I can meet him.

A beat.

MAXINE

Uh... He just died.

A tear rolls down Maxine's cheek. Jackson wipes the tear away.

JACKSON

I'm so sorry. If you don't mind me asking...how did it happen?

MAXINE

It was an accident.

(MORE)

MAXINE (CONT'D)

From what the coroner said he was
electrocuted. Overloaded circuits.
He was toast.

Jackson takes Maxine's hand, and peers into her eyes.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

I'm okay.

JACKSON

It's really hard losing someone you
love. Trust me...I know.

Jackson wraps his arms around Maxine, and holds her tight.
Maxine looks into Jackson's eyes. He leans forward, and
their lips lock, igniting a deep, passionate desire.

Under the coffee table, Ziggy's tail BANGS rhythmically
against the floor.

From her perch, Pinkie watches as Jackson whisks Maxine up
into his arms, and exits with her to his bedroom. Pinkie's
crest plumes straight up.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Schtup! Schtup!

Ziggy and Pinkie turn towards the window. Pinkie bops her
head, up and down. Ziggy BARKS.

EXT. JACKSON'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cherinka and Ezekiel peer inside. Ezekiel nudges her with
his nose.

EZEKIEL

Ain't that a kicker. Maybe all your
worries will be over soon.

CHERINKA

I hope you right, hound dog. I hope
you right.

EZEKIEL

(sexily)

Givin' ya any ideas, darlin'?

Cherinka swats him away.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Japanese-style modern furniture is set amidst an oasis of
palms and ferns.

Jackson kicks open the door. Locked in a kiss, he carries Maxine and lays her on the bed. He undoes two buttons on her shirt, then pauses.

JACKSON
You're sure you want to do this?
You don't have to?

Maxine shushes Jackson, and pulls him close.

MAXINE
I need to.

They kiss.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
And I want to.

They entwine in crazed lovemaking

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Ezekiel carries Maxine's ULTRABOOK between his teeth. He places it on the coffee table, and opens it with his paws. The screen faces the fish tank.

LEONA
It ain't centered, Zeke.

Ezekiel taps, then swipes the SCREEN with his paw.

EZEKIEL
Hush! You can see just fine.

LEONA
You sure you got the right login and password?

EZEKIEL
Honey I'm on it like white on rice.

Ezekiel sits next to Leona.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A nude Maxine and Jackson sleep soundly, under the bed's ruffled covers. At the end of the bed, Ziggy holds Jackson's iPhone between his paws. Cherinka sits next to him.

ZIGGY

Are you sure we should be recording
this?

CHERINKA

It call videotape, and it fine.

ZIGGY

I don't want to get Jackson mad.

Pinkie TAPS at the iPhone with her beak.

CHERINKA

Leona comrade. She want see.

PINKIE

Okay, everybody! We are live in
three, two, one...

Ziggy, Cherinka and Pinkie stare at the lovely couple cuddled
in each other's arms.

ZIGGY

Is that what love looks like?

PINKIE

It's close enough.

INT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Displayed on the ULTRABOOK is... a nude Maxine and Jackson
cuddled together in bed. Leona and Ezekiel SIGH.

LEONA

Ain't that the most beautiful thing?

Ezekiel nods.

EZEKIEL

Dern tootin'. There ain't nothin'
between them but God and a smile.

INT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Abruptly the door FLINGS open. Mrs. Nottingud enters,
followed by Neville.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Maxine! Get up!

Leona and Ezekiel turn. They GASP. Ezekiel slinks under
the coffee table to hide.

Mrs. Nottingud and Neville amble into the hallway as if they
own the place.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)
Maxine?! Where the hell is that
damn girl? Neville, go check round
back.

Neville exits into the kitchen. Mrs. Nottingud crosses to
the stairs.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)
Maxine!!!
(to herself)
Goddamn it.

Mrs. Nottingud stomps up the stairs. Ezekiel peeks around
the sofa.

EZEKIEL
I'm shakin' like I'm gonna shit a
peach! I gotta shut this thing down.

Ezekiel swipes the computer screen with his paw. The screen
goes blank.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)
(whispers)
I'll catch y'all on the flipside.

Ezekiel bolts out of the living room. Then, the computer
restarts. Leona SHOUTS.

LEONA
Fool! Get back here! This computer
ain't shut itself off!

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cherinka's, Ziggy's, and Pinkie's ears perk. They are
motionless.

ZIGGY
Did you hear that?

The bedcover shifts. They look up to see Jackson and Maxine
stirring.

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Neville enters the living room from the kitchen, and notices
the Ultrabook. Intrigued, He lifts it up, and swipes his
hand across the screen. It opens to video. He hits "play."

NEVILLE
Mommy! I think I found Maxine.

Displayed on the screen are Maxine and Jackson cuddled asleep in bed. Leona GASPS. Bubbles float to the top of the tank.

NEVILLE (CONT'D)

What a little whore...I like that.

Mrs. Nottingud flies down the stairs, and into the living room. She looks around the room, annoyed.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

I thought you said you found her.

Neville stares at the computer screen. Neville hits "rewind."

NEVILLE

I did.

Mrs. Nottingud follows Neville's gaze, and shifts her attention to the Ultrabook's screen. She YELLS at the top of her lungs.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

MAXINE!!!

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Cherinka HISSES, and darts out of the room. Pinkie flutters, and lands on the headboard.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Jackson! Jackson!

Ziggy pounces on top of Jackson. He awakens with a start. Pinkie stares down at Jackson.

JACKSON

Ziggy?! What are you two--?

Maxine sits bolt upright, confused.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Yenta! Yenta!

Suddenly, Ziggy's ears perk. He dashes out of the room. Pinkie flutters after him. Maxine scrutinizes the animals' strange behavior.

MAXINE

Something's wrong. I gotta go.

Maxine grabs her clothes. Jackson grabs her arm.

JACKSON

Wait...I'm coming with you.

Jackson hops out of bed.

INT. MAXINE'S HALLWAY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Mrs. Nottingud storms toward the front door. Neville follows one step behind. She SNEEZES. Through the pet door bolts Cherinka.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Cherinka?! Is that you? Come here, kitty-kitty. Such a precious kitty-cat! Come on...come to Auntie Selma.

Cherinka backs away, and HISSES. Mrs. Nottingud signals to Neville.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)

Grab her!

Neville grabs the sofa THROW COVER, and creeps towards Cherinka.

NEVILLE

Come here, Cherinka. Nobody's going to hurt you...

Cherinka backs into a corner. She unsheathes her claws, but too late: Neville tosses the throw over her, and bundles her inside. Cherinka struggles wildly inside the cover, HISSING. Mrs. Nottingud SNEEZES.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Let's go!

They race to the front door, SLAMMING it shut behind them.

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Leona swims frantically in her tank.

LEONA

She snatched Cherinka! I gotta tell somebody, quick! Anybody!

Leona suddenly stops.

LEONA (CONT'D)

Now how the hell am I gonna do that? Shit, sometimes bein' a fish really sucks...

EXT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Nottingud hurries to the Rolls Royce, followed by Neville. He carries the bundled Cherinka under his arm. The sparrows watch from the treetops, and CHATTER.

Inside the bundle, Cherinka twists and WAILS.

NEVILLE

Stop squirming! Nasty little pussy!

EXT. JACKSON'S COTTAGE - SIMULTANEOUS

Ziggy dashes out of the cottage, and across the front yard. Suddenly, he stops. His ears stand up straight.

ZIGGY

Cherinka?

Ziggy watches Neville toss the bundle into the trunk of the Rolls Royce. He closes the trunk, and BANGS on it.

NEVILLE

Enjoy the ride!

Mrs. Nottingud flings open the passenger door, and SHOUTS:

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Get in!

Neville hops into the driver's seat, and hits the gas. The Rolls Royce zooms away from the curb, and races past Ziggy. Mrs. Nottingud inserts a CD. Triumphant classical music blares from the car speakers.

CHERINKA'S VOICE

(from inside the trunk)

Crazy count! Pucker you! Let me
out! I *kiska* number one! I no like!
Let me out!

Alarmed, Ziggy runs after the car.

ZIGGY

Cherinka?! Jeez Louise! Is that
you?

CHERINKA'S VOICE

(from inside the trunk)

Of course it me! I need help!

ZIGGY

Don't worry! I'll save you!!!

Impulsively, Ziggy chases after the Rolls Royce.

INT. 1972 ROLLS ROYCE - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Neville checks her rear-view mirror, and sneers. He motions to his mother.

NEVILLE

Mommy...

Mrs. Nottingud checks the side-view mirror, and sees Ziggy racing after the car.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Two for the price of one! How absolutely delightful!

Mrs. Nottingud CACKLES.

INT. 1972 ROLLS ROYCE -MOVING - CONTINUOUS

The Rolls Royce swerves down a quiet suburban road. Ziggy chases after it, frantically.

ZIGGY

Stop! You thief! You mean old lady!
You cat-napper!

Neville takes a corner wide, and CRASHES over the curb. He hits the gas. Cherinka YOWLS O.S.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Oh, that stupid girl doesn't even know you're missing! So, scream! Scream louder! LOUDER!

Cherinka's O.S. wails stop.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)

Because soon I will make you scream. Like you've never screamed before.

The Rolls Royce barrels out of sight, raising DUST in its wake.

EXT. JACKSON'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Pinkie flutters out the cottage door. Maxine and Jackson follow. Jackson's Andy Warhol T-shirt reads "I hate tomato soup." Pinkie glimpses Ziggy in the distance.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)
Jackson! Jackson!

MAXINE

What is it, Pinkie?

Pinkie flaps her wings, and suspends herself in midair.

PINKIE
(bird-voice)
Tsuris! Tsuris!

Immediately, Maxine turns to see where Pinkie's pointing.

MAXINE
Jackson, over there!

In the corner of his eye Jackson catches a tiny glimpse of Ziggy's hindquarters before he dashes around the corner.

JACKSON
Sonofabitch! I have to go get him!

Jackson rummages in his pocket, and removes a set of CAR KEYS. He drops them onto the ground.

MAXINE
He couldn't of gone far.

Maxine bends down, and hands the keys to Jackson. Pinkie SCREECHES. Maxine perches Pinkie on her shoulder.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
And we're going with you!

INT. WOODY WAGON - A MINUTE LATER

Jackson hops into the driver's seat. Maxine rides shotgun, with Pinkie perched on her headrest.

PINKIE
(bird-voice)
Ziggy! Ziggy!

The Volkswagen tourist bus drives past. Takoda waves to Maxine, and HONKS.

EXT. SIDE-STREET - CONTINUOUS

Ziggy sprints down the street, then slows to a jog. He stops, PANTING. The DUST clears. The Rolls Royce's a mere spot on the horizon.

ZIGGY
Cherinka?! I'm coming... I just
have to catch my breath!...

Suddenly, the Wolf Hound springs out from an alleyway! Behind him, a pack of mangy STRAY DOGS. They SNARL and GROWL.

WOLF HOUND
What's this? Fresh meat!

Ziggy backs away, frightened.

WOLF HOUND (CONT'D)
We've tagged our 'hood, bitch. Didn't you smell our scent?

ZIGGY
I didn't sniff! I haven't even lifted my leg! I'm trying to rescue my friend Cherinka!

WOLF HOUND
Cherinka? Cherinka's your home-girl?

Wolf Hound towers over Ziggy. He drools, and SNARLS.

ZIGGY
(uncomfortable)
Well, yeah! She's nice.

WOLF HOUND
She's nice? SHE'S NICE?! See this?

The Wolf Hound turns his head, showing a SCAR on one side of his face, and a BLIND EYE on the other.

WOLF HOUND (CONT'D)
That's a present from your friend.

ZIGGY
Shut up! That's so wicked!

WOLF HOUND
Any friend of that crazed feline is no friend of ours. Let's get him, boys!

THROUGH THE STREETS

Ziggy bolts. The Wolf Hound and the stray dogs give chase. They zigzag around trees, jump through and over fences, until they come to--

A WOODEN SIGN. It says "Danger-Keep Out." Below it, a plank with the words "Hockomock Swamp" hangs lopsided off the wooden pole.

Behind the sign, the swamp looks ominous. Moss hangs from the white cedar trees, and clings to dead stumps. Thick underbrush hides a dirt hiking path.

Frightened, Ziggy stops. The stray dogs stop dead in their tracks. They stare up at the sign, then step slowly backwards. The Wolf Hound charges.

WOLF HOUND

What's wrong? Are you all a bunch of pussies?

The Wolf Hound pounces on top of Ziggy, and sinks his fangs into Ziggy's shoulder.

ZIGGY

Ouch! That hurts! Stop!

One of Ziggy's DREADLOCKS wraps around one of the Wolf Hound's bared fangs. He rips it out, and SPITS. Ziggy YELPS.

Ziggy races into the swamp. The Wolf Hound turns to his troop, and GROWLS.

WOLF HOUND

Let's go get him!

STRAY DOG #1

Dude! Are you crazy? That's the Devil's swamp. That place is cursed!

WOLF HOUND

Someone's been yanking your collar! There's no such thing as a curse. It's a story. A furry tale.

STRAY DOG #2

Naw, it's true, dude! There's no way I'm going in there!

WOLF HOUND

(mocking)

Meow! Meow! Be a dog and get a bone! Are you coming with me, or not?

The stray dogs don't budge.

STRAY DOG #1

Wolf! Nobody comes back alive. And neither will you. Let him go. He's already dead.

A beat. Suddenly, a strong wind RUSTLES the trees. O.S., we hear a pterodactyl-like SCREECH. The stray dogs YELP.

WOLF HOUND

It's just the wind blowing between the trees.

A BIRD-LIKE SHADOW falls over them.

STRAY DOG #2
Does that look like the wind blowing
in the trees?

A beat. The dogs look up. O.S., another SCREECH.

WOLF HOUND
Let's get the hell out of here!

The dogs flee, YELPING...with Wolf in the lead.

EXT. HOCKOMOCK SWAMP - LATER

Panicked, Ziggy runs deep into the white cedar swamp. He hops over small SINKHOLES.

Exhausted, and unable to run any further, he stops. He looks north, south, east, and west. Nothing but white cedar trees.

ZIGGY
Everything looks the same.

O.S., a prehistoric SCREECH. A SHADOW blocks the SUN.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
What's--?

We hear wings FLAPPING. A BREEZE RUSTLES the trees. Ziggy looks up. O.S., another ear-splitting SCREECH.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
You're shitting me!

Ziggy races deep into the swamp. SNAKES slither past to the safety of their holes. TOADS hop into the bog. RACCOONS and POSSUMS hide in tree stumps, and deadfalls.

The SHADOW follows, gaining speed. Trees and bushes CRASH. Ziggy leaps over a patch of sand, but his hind legs get stuck in the muck. He starts to get sucked down. It's QUICKSAND!

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
Help! I'm sinking!

Ziggy looks up in terror. The SHADOW looms.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
Please don't hurt me! Please don't
hurt me! Please--

TWO LARGE CLAWS grasp him, knocking off Ziggy's COLLAR, and lift him upward and out of FRAME. He HOWLS. The collar falls off, and lands on a clump of peat moss.

EXT. ON THE WOODY WAGON - MOVING - SIMULTANEOUS

The Woody slowly cruises down a residential neighborhood. From the passenger and driver windows.

JACKSON (O.S.)
Ziggy!

MAXINE (O.S.)
Ziggy!

The Woody turns a corner. In the distance, we see the outskirts of town.

INT. WOODY WAGON - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

A tree-lined street with Cape Cod houses. Jackson slows the Woody down. Pinkie looks out the window, then turns to Jackson, saddened.

PINKIE
(bird-voice)
Nicht gute! Nicht gute! Ziggy...

Maxine pats Pinkie to calm her.

JACKSON
Do you see any sign of him?

Maxine shakes her head.

MAXINE
Don't worry. If we can't find him,
I'm sure he'll find his way home.

Maxine squeezes Jackson's hand. Jackson smiles, weakly.

CUT TO:

EXT. NOTTINGUD MANSION DRIVEWAY - DAY

We hear muffled HOWLS from inside of the parked Rolls Royce's trunk. Neville fumbles with the CAR KEYS. The trunk POPS open.

Neville's gingerly lifts the squirming blanketful of cat out of the trunk, and into the garage..

EXT. REAR OF NOTTINGUD MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Ezekiel lays in the grass, gnawing on a BONE. Suddenly, he bolts upright! He listens, keenly.

We hear another muffled distant MEOW, O.S. Ezekiel drops his bone, and SNIFFS the air.

EZEKIEL
 Cherinka?! What in tarnation is she
 doin' over here? Auntie Selma!
 Dadgumit! She's in trouble!

EXT. NOTTINGUD FRONT LAWN - A MOMENT LATER

Ezekiel SNIFFS the ground, then makes a beeline to the trunk
 of the Rolls Royce.

EZEKIEL
 Cherinka? Where you at, girl?

Moving faster, Ezekiel keeps SNIFFING the ground to the front
 steps of the mansion.

INT. NOTTINGUD MANSION KITCHEN - SIMULTANEOUS

A sparkling clean, commercial kitchen...so clean it's obvious
 nobody cooks in it. Mrs. Nottingud places a WIRE CAGE on
 the kitchen table. She SNEEZES, repeatedly.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 Would you hurry...
 (sneezes)
 ...it up?!
 (sneezes)
 My allergies!

Neville brings in the writhing blanket. From inside it,
 Cherinka gives a feline SHRIEK.

EXT. NOTTINGUD MANSION - ON THE PET DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Ezekiel's ears perk.

EZEKIEL
 I'm comin', baby doll!

Furious, he charges through the pet door!

INT. NOTTINGUD MANSION KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Neville reaches inside the opened blanket, grasps Cherinka
 by the scruff of her neck, and lifts her into the air. She
 HISSES and claws.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 Take that rodent to the old well.
 Let's see how much she likes living
 with the rats and the snakes.

Alarmed, Cherinka slashes out. Neville winces, and quickly
 touches his face. His fingers come away stained with blood.
 He's enraged.

Ezekiel stops at the kitchen doorway. He gives a deep GROWL.

NEVILLE
(to Cherinka)
I'm going to break your neck, you
little--

Ezekiel leaps. His teeth sink deep into Neville's rear-end, puncturing his leather jacket.

NEVILLE (CONT'D)
Son-of-a-bitch!

Neville kicks Ezekiel across the room, SLAMMING him against the wall. He looks at his jacket.

NEVILLE (CONT'D)
You stupid, fucking mongrel! This
was one-of-a-kind!

Mrs. Nottingud grabs the wire cage, and crosses to Neville. Neville tosses Cherinka inside. Mrs. Nottingud snaps the cage closed.

Cherinka stares at Ezekiel lying motionless on the floor. Mrs. Nottingud holds the cage as far as possible from her body.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
Take this--beast out of here.

Cherinka HISSES, and slashes. Neville grabs the cage, and sneers at Cherinka. He HISSES back.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)
And I'll tie up this--stupid cur.

NEVILLE
Yes, Mommy.
(to Cherinka)
Let's go, putty-tat!

Neville walks towards the kitchen door, carrying the cage. Cherinka looks back at Ezekiel.

Mrs. Nottingud grabs Ezekiel by the collar, and places a MUZZLE around his snout. The dog GASPS for air. Alarmed, Cherinka WAILS.

EXT. OLD WELL - MOMENTS LATER

At the rear of the house, Mrs. Nottingud chains the muzzled Ezekiel to a post. Ezekiel emits a muffled WOOF.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Take your bow-wow-wow, and stuff it!

Neville marches to a GAZEBO; in its center is a wood-planked water well. Neville removes the heavy wooden cover, then ties Cherinka's cage to the well's ROPE.

NEVILLE

If I had my way, I'd rip out your claws slowly, one at a time.

Cherinka glances at Ezekiel, and YOWLS. Mrs. Nottingud joins her son, and snaps her fingers.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Your phone.

Neville hands her his iPhone.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. WOODY WAGON - MOVING - SIMULTANEOUS

Jackson steers the Woody towards the outskirts of town. Now perched on Jackson's headrest, Pinkie searches out the window.

Maxine's cellular phone RINGS. She looks at the caller I.D., it reads "Selma Nottingud." Maxine answers.

Immediately, Pinkie settles. Maxine answers.

MAXINE

(into phone)
Aunt Selma?

MRS. NOTTINGUD

(into iPhone)
Hello, Maxine. I want you to listen,
and listen good.

Mrs. Nottingud nods. Neville free-drops the cage into the well. The cage plummets down the well, past its wood cribbing planks. It hits the black water with a SPLASH. Cherinka thrashes, and HOWLS.

Mrs. Nottingud holds the iPhone over the well so Maxine can hear Cherinka HOWL.

Chained to the post, Ezekiel struggles to free himself. He emits a muffled BARK as he hears Cherinka's plaintive WAILS.

MAXINE

(into phone)
Cherinka?!

Through the iPhone Maxine hears the cage BANGING against the wood planks, and water SPLASHING. She realizes what has happened. Cherinka SHRIEKS.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 (into phone, panicked)
 Cherinka!! You bitch!!

Neville SNORTS derisively. Jackson and Pinkie look over at Maxine, concerned.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 (into iPhone)
 She'll be dead in two minutes unless
 you do exactly what I say.

MAXINE
 (into phone)
 I don't understand--How could you?!
 Why?

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 (into iPhone)
 We know what you did last night.
 How selfish! How thoughtless! You
 have no clue how much you hurt poor
 Neville?

Mrs. Nottingud nudges Neville, who smirks. Maxine looks at Jackson. He gazes at her, questioningly.

MAXINE
 (into phone)
 What do you want?

Cherinka SHRIEKS. Ezekiel BARKS, furiously. Cherinka SPUTTERS for air.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 (into iPhone)
 Oh, my! I think her cries are getting
 weaker, Maxine.

Mrs. Nottingud holds out the iPhone so Maxine can hear.

MAXINE
 (into phone)
 Don't you dare hurt her!

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 (into iPhone)
 Then you'll agree to marry Neville?

Cherinka fights to keep afloat in the dark water, but she sinks. Maxine hears Cherinka's cries, weakening. Then:

MAXINE
 (into phone)
 Yes...I'll marry him.

Mrs. Nottingud nods to Neville. He rewinds the rope. The cage rises above the surface, and stops suspended six inches above the waterline. Cherinka's fur is soaking wet. She looks like hell. She GASPS for air. Neville LAUGHS.

NEVILLE
 Nothing like a little wet pussy!

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 (into iPhone)
 Be here tomorrow at eleven, Maxine.
 And don't even think about calling
 the police, or you'll find her dead.

Cherinka looks up as the cover is placed over the well's opening. She MEOWS, plaintively. DARKNESS. Above, someone KNOCKS on the planks.

NEVILLE'S VOICE
 Enjoy your new home, kit-kat!

Mrs. Nottingud and Neville walk off, LAUGHING.

Cherinka's eyes accustom to the BLACKNESS. RED EYES GLOW and BLINK between the wooden planks. A WATER SNAKE slithers in the black waters below.

CHERINKA
 This not good! I think I in big
 trouble. Like Solzhenitsyn in Siberia
 Gulag.

Cherinka SHIVERS.

INT. WOODY WAGON - MOVING - A MOMENT LATER

Jackson slams on the brakes. The Woody comes to a dead halt. Pinkie flaps her wings. Startled, Maxine looks at Jackson.

JACKSON
 What the hell is going on? You're
 getting married?!

MAXINE
 (miserably)
 I have to. I don't have any other
 choice. Cherinka's being held
 captive...by my Aunt Selma.

JACKSON
Who the hell is Aunt Selma? And no,
you don't have to!

MAXINE
(tearing up)
You met her yesterday. She was at
my house with her son, Neville.

JACKSON
You mean that crazy--

PINKIE
(bird-voice)
Yenta! Yenta!

JACKSON
You know where she lives... Let's go
kick the old bitch's ass and get
your cat back!

Pinkie's head bops up and down. She SCREECHES her approval.

MAXINE
I can't! She swore she'd kill
Cherinka!

Pinkie shakes her head.

JACKSON
That's blackmail, and it's sick. We
have to go to the police.

MAXINE
Nobody will listen to us. Everybody's
on Auntie Selma's payroll... the
mayor, the judges, even the police.

JACKSON
Maxine, this is insane! You're not
going to marry a man you don't love.
Okay? We'll figure something out.

Maxine nods. She stares out the passenger window. Pinkie
waddles over to her, and nuzzles her face against Maxine's
cheek. Maxine pets her.

PINKIE
(bird-voice)
Nicht gute! Nicht gute!

INT. AN ANIMAL'S LAIR - AFTERNOON

BEETLES and CENTIPEDES scurry along the rock walls, and floor.
Ziggy huddles, shivering in fear.

ZIGGY
Crapola! I'm trapped! How am I
going to escape?

The beetles WHISPER.

BEETLES
Never mind that! Never mind that!
How are you going to survive? How
are you going to survive?

A CENTIPEDE crawls along Ziggy's fur. Ziggy swats it off.

ARMANDO, an ANDEAN CONDOR, snatches the centipede, and
swallows it in one gulp. He speaks in the thick accent of a
40ish male Spaniard.

ARMANDO
Delicioso! But, it's better with an
itty-bitty splash of hot sauce. I
am Armando.

Slowly, he walks towards Ziggy, and towers over him. Ziggy
CURLS into a ball.

ZIGGY
Please don't eat me! Please don't
eat me!

Armando inhales Ziggy's scent. He SMACKS his beak.

ARMANDO
Jou smell so good! Jes, I'd love to
take a tasty bite out of jou. But,
not quite jet, eh? I like to play
with my food.

ZIGGY
I'll be your best friend!

A beat.

ARMANDO
(tearfully)
OH!! That's so SWEET! That's so
TENDER!

The Condor's mood shifts, dramatically.

ARMANDO (CONT'D)
And so totally ARTIFICIAL! That's
what jou all say. Then, jou'll leave!
Disappear! Vanish! Like they all
do.

Armando points to a pile of animal BONES and SKULLS.

ZIGGY

No! I promise. You'll be my best friend...forever.

ARMANDO

Como? Jou mean... jou'll be my life partner?

ZIGGY

Um... I didn't quite say that.

ARMANDO

Jou know Massachusetts is the *primero* state to allow same-sex marriage.

ZIGGY

But I'm a dog. And, you're a...bird.

ARMANDO

I know! It's... It's *magnifico*! A gay and mixed marriage.

Armando enfolds Ziggy under his wing.

ARMANDO (CONT'D)

I am so happy! I have finally found true love.

Ziggy GULPS.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. WOODY WAGON - MOVING - AFTERNOON

Jackson SHOUTS out the Woody's window. Riding shotgun, Maxine scans the landscape.

JACKSON

Ziggy!

Pinkie, perched on Maxine's shoulder, SCREECHES.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Ziggy! Ziggy!

The Woody passes Mrs. Nottingud's estate. Maxine looks at the mansion in dismay.

JACKSON

What's wrong?

Jackson looks up at the forbidding mansion. The entry gate is shut closed, and PADLOCKED.

Pinkie's crest plumes.

PINKIE
(bird-voice)
Tsuris! Yenta! Tsuris! Yenta!

MAXINE
That's Auntie Selma's.

Jackson rubbernecks.

Maxine spots Takoda's empty Volkswagen bus parked at the edge of the Hockomock Swamp. The Woody slows to a stop.

EXT. HOCKOMOCK SWAMP - CONTINUOUS

Indian Guide Takoda picks up a hammer, straightens the lopsided sign, and nails it in place. We hear BANGING O.S.

Jackson leans out of the driver's window.

JACKSON
Excuse me! Excuse ME!!

Takoda stops hammering. He turns, and crosses to the Woody.

TAKODA
Maxine, you're looking radiant.

Maxine smiles, slightly abased. Takoda turns to Jackson.

TAKODA (CONT'D)
How can I help you?

Jackson holds up a photograph of Ziggy.

JACKSON
I wondered if you ran across my dog.

Jackson realizes:

JACKSON (CONT'D)
I mean, saw him.

Takoda examines the photograph. He looks down, and notices Ziggy's dusty ripped dreadlock on the dirt road. He examines it, and the tracks leading to the swamp.

JACKSON (CONT'D)
That's his!

Takoda hands the dreadlock to Jackson.

TAKODA

His tracks lead into the swamp. We must find him. I will help you.

INT./EXT. WOODY WAGON PARKED - MOMENTS LATER

Jackson rolls down the window a crack, and locks the door. Pinkie flaps her wings. In the b.g., we see Takoda removing a backpack from the trunk of the Volkswagen bus.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Jackson! Jackson!

JACKSON

Don't go all JAP on me now, Pinkie.

Pinkie SQUAWKS. Maxine places her hand against the glass.

MAXINE

It's okay, Pinkie. We'll be back soon, with Ziggy.

Immediately, Pinkie calms. She PEEPS, sadly. Jackson turns to Maxine.

JACKSON

Thanks...
(to Maxine)
Let's go.

Pinkie watches Jackson and Maxine cross to Takoda, standing outside the Volkswagen bus.

PINKIE

(sniffing)

Bring him back... I love that dumb little *schmekel*.

EXT. VOLKSWAGEN BUS - CONTINUOUS

Jackson and Maxine watch as Takoda opens his backpack and removes a stick of POT.

TAKODA

We must first purify our energy before we enter the Devil's swamp.

Takoda lights the joint, inhales deeply, and then exhales. Maxine COUGHS.

JACKSON

Is this supposed to cleanse us of bad energy?

TAKODA

Shit, no. I just like to get high!

Takoda hands the joint to Jackson. Jackson waves his hand, politely declining. Maxine's nose crinkles.

JACKSON

No, thanks. We're trying to cut down.

TAKODA

Suit yourself...Let's go!

Takoda, followed by Jackson and Maxine, track Ziggy's steps. Takoda stops and points down at the ground.

TAKODA (CONT'D)

He ran frightened. I can tell by the length of his strides. He went this way. Follow me.

They step over a decaying tree covered in moss, and wade across a shallow bog.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE SWAMP - MINUTES LATER

Takoda, Jackson and Maxine trek through foliage, peat moss and around sink holes. Suddenly, Takoda stops.

TAKODA

His tracks stop here.

JACKSON

Then, where is he?

Jackson takes a step forward. Quickly, Takoda grabs his arm.

TAKODA

Stop! It's quicksand.

Takoda picks up a baseball size ROCK, and tosses it into the quicksand. It slowly SINKS.

TAKODA (CONT'D)

The more you struggle, the faster it'll suck you down.

Takoda examines the DOG TRACKS.

TAKODA (CONT'D)

The tracks don't lead out.

Then, he stops and leans down. He finds Ziggy's torn collar resting in peat moss. He picks it up and shows it to Jackson.

TAKODA (CONT'D)

This his?

Jackson nods, concerned.

TAKODA (CONT'D)

It was sliced by the claw of a fierce animal.

Takoda hands Jackson the dog collar. Jackson stares at it, a lump in his throat. Maxine's puts her arm around Jackson's waist. With hope almost gone, she wants to know...

MAXINE

Is he...dead?

TAKODA

(nods)

I'm sorry, man. He's gone.

Maxine hugs Jackson in sorrow.

Takoda notices a large BLACK FEATHER stuck atop the quicksand. He picks it up, and stuffs it into his HEADBAND.

TAKODA (CONT'D)

We better go. It'll be getting dark soon.

Disheartened, Jackson nods.

CUT TO:

INT. OLD WELL - LATE AFTERNOON

The water snake slithers over the cage. Cherinka hovers in a corner. The water snake speaks in a sibilant HISS.

WATER SNAKE

Ssso...the notoriousss Cherinka joins usss. Still "kissska number one"?

RED EYES GLOW and BLINK between the well's wood-planked walls.

CHERINKA

Screw you!

FAT RAT crawls out of a crevice; his red eyes aglow.

FAT RAT

(calls out)

This is the cat that killed Homer!

Slowly, more RATS appear from every crack and fissure. They SCREECH with delight.

WATER SNAKE

We're all here! Your toysssss! Your playthingssss! How does it feel?

FAT RAT

Now you've become the hunted!

CHERINKA

I in cage. This no hunt! This cruelty! This murder!

WATER SNAKE

That'sss sssomething you surely know how to do. How to be cruel. And, how to kill.

The rats and the water snake move toward the wire cage.

Cherinka HISSES at the approaching rats. The water snake curls on top of Cherinka's cage, yelling directions to the rats.

WATER SNAKE (CONT'D)

Grab the classssp with your teeth!
Pull!

The Rat pulls at the CAGE DOOR CLASP, then yanks it.

WATER SNAKE (CONT'D)

Harder! Harder!

The rats join in unison with his chant, "Harder! Harder!" Cherinka is enraged. She HISSES.

CHERINKA

You must stop! STOP NOW!

EXT. OLD WELL - CONTINUOUS

Still chained to the post, Ezekiel struggles to free himself. His muffled BARKS bear the sound of desperation.

We drift up towards a second-story terrace of the Nottingud mansion. The sheer curtains framing the French doors move aside. Mrs. Nottingud steps onto the terrace, and SHOUTS:

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Ezekiel! SHUT THE HELL UP!

The terrace doors, SLAM shut. Ezekiel cowers, and falls silent, slinking.

INT. OLD WELL - CONTINUOUS

Immediately, the rats chanting stops, save for one last "Harder!" Cherinka glares. The rat recedes.

CHERINKA

Stupid rats! Idiot snake! We have same enemy! They want me dead! They want you dead! They poison rat and snap neck with trap! They make boots and purse from snake! We should unite, and fight!

The animals GRUMBLE. Timidly, a BABY RAT steps forward.

BABY RAT

(tiny voice)
She's right.

The animals glare at the nervous tot.

BABY RAT (CONT'D)

The Nottingud's are evil and mean.
I say we help Cherinka.

The animals MUMBLE, disgruntled.

FAT RAT

Why? So, she can kill us? They are all our enemies.

The animals CHEER.

CHERINKA

Nyet! I can change!

GUFFAWS and LAUGHTER.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

I no more kill! I no more hunt!

WATER SNAKE

Why ssshould we believe you?

CHERINKA

Maxine in danger! I no lie!

FAT RAT

(surprised)
Did you say Maxine?

CHERINKA

Da! Da! Auntie Selma make evil plan!

FAT RAT

One minute!

The animals scurry, and hover together. We hear them DELIBERATING. Then:

FAT RAT (CONT'D)

I say, yes!

A cacophony of "yes." A beat. The water snake HISSES.

WATER SNAKE

(reluctantly)

Yessss....At leasssst...for now!

The water snake slides off the cage, and disappears into the black water below.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODY WAGON - DUSK

Pinkie sleeps curled under her wing. The driver and passenger doors open. Sorrowfully, Jackson and Maxine enter. Pinkie awakens.

Hopeful, Pinkie SCREECHES repeatedly.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Ziggy?!

JACKSON

(sadly)

He's gone, Pinkie. It's just you and me now.

Saddened, Pinkie hangs her head, and BEWAILS. Jackson pets her.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Oy, vey iz mir!

JACKSON

I know...We're going to miss him.

Maxine pets Pinkie's head consoling her.

MAXINE

He was a good friend.

Pinkie's wings slump. Maxine grasps Jackson's hand, and squeezes it.

Jackson releases her hand, then places the car keys in the ignition. Jackson kicks the Woody into gear.

In silence and simultaneously, Maxine, Jackson and Pinkie turn to take one final look at the swamp.

CUT TO:

INT. CONDOR'S LAIR - DUSK

Armando's eyes gently close. Armando's wing is wrapped around Ziggy's shoulder. He starts to nod off. Ziggy prays.

ZIGGY

(whisper)

Hi, God...it's me--Ziggy. Please help Jackson find me. I don't want to die. I want to go home...

EXT. JACKSON'S COTTAGE - EVENING

Jackson exits the Woody. Maxine hops out from the passenger door, and crosses to Jackson. They embrace.

JACKSON

I'll call you in the morning.

Maxine nods, then walks across the yard. Jackson perches Pinkie on his shoulder, and walks to his darkened cottage.

EXT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Maxine climbs the steps to her front door. An unlabeled DRESS BOX sits wedged against it.

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maxine slowly walks into the living room, curious about the contents in the box. Bubbles abound as Leona anxiously swims around her tank.

Maxine opens the dress box, and lifts out a WEDDING DRESS and VEIL. She tosses the box across the room, and runs out in tears. Leona talks to the diver statuette in the bottom of her tank.

LEONA

I feel like ten pounds of shit in a five-pound sack. This just ain't right...none of it.

INT. JACKSON'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jackson opens the bar, and pours himself a stiff drink. On the counter sits a PHOTOGRAPH of Jackson, Ziggy, and Pinkie at a park. He picks it up and crosses to the sofa.

Jackson sits, and stares at the photograph. He removes Ziggy's collar from his pocket, and clenches it tight.

JACKSON

We should never have moved here.

Pinkie crawls across the sofa, into his lap, and onto his chest. She rubs her top of her head against his chin.

PINKIE

(bird-voice)

Nicht gute! Nicht gute!

Jackson cuddles her, and kisses her on the top of the head. Pinkie COOS, but sadly.

EXT. NOTTINGUD YARD - NIGHT

Still chained to the post, Ezekiel HOWLS. We tilt up to a LIGHTED second-story terrace.

Mrs. Nottingud steps out. She wears a nightgown, her hair is in CURLERS, and her face is covered in NIGHT CREAM. She leans over the terrace, and YELLS:

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Ezekiel! SHUT YOUR TRAP! Before I come down there, and shut it for good!

INT. OLD WELL - CONTINUOUS

Cherinka shivers. Trapped inside the cage, she gazes upwards.

CHERINKA

(sotto)

Ezekiel...

The water snake coils around the rope.

WATER SNAKE

Sssso...what'ssss your sssstrategy?

Rats hover and cling over the wooden planks. They lean forward toward Cherinka. Cherinka studies the rope, then her eyes light up.

CHERINKA

Ezekiel! He must be free.

FAT RAT

The hound dog?

CHERINKA

Yes! He strong. He can pull rope.
It lift me out of well!

WATER SNAKE

What shall be my assssignment?

CHERINKA

Go into swamp. Get all snakes.
Make all come.

FAT RAT

What about us?

The FAT RAT motions to himself, and the rats.

CHERINKA

You must gnaw off muzzle and collar!

Cherinka addresses all the animals.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

Go! Soon, it time for revenge.

The rats scamper away, between the planks. The water snake slides into the dark water, and disappears.

EXT. NOTTINGUD HOUSE - NIGHT

Ezekiel focuses his eyes at the rats scurrying towards him. Their red eyes glowing in the dark. He sits up.

EZEKIEL

They's a whole mess of varmints
headin' this way! I reckon they's
fixin' to finish me off! Well, this
here rebel ain't goin' down without
a fight!

Ezekiel SNARLS and SNAPS. The rats stop. Fat Rat stands up on his hind legs, and crosses his arms.

FAT RAT

You crazy cur! We're here to help!

EZEKIEL

I didn't fall off no turnip truck!
Cherinka's dead! And you killed
her!

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. OLD WELL - CONTINUOUS

The cage dangles from the rope. Alone in the well, Cherinka listens to the commotion outside. She YELLS:

 CHERINKA
Ezekiel! It true! I alive!

Ezekiel stops snarling.

 EZEKIEL
Cherinka! Is that you, baby doll?

 CHERINKA
Of course it me, dumb dog! Who you think it is? Now, shut mouth and let rats do job!

Ezekiel brightens.

 EZEKIEL
Who-eee! I like it when you talk to me like that, sugar pie. Gets my gonads all fired up.

The rats shake their heads. Dogs.

 CHERINKA
(yelling)
Enough stupid talk! Let rat chew. I need you free!

 EZEKIEL
(to rats)
You heard the lady. Now get chewin'.
(calling out)
I love you, sweetheart!

The rats scoot to the rope, and start gnawing on it.

 CHERINKA
(to herself)
I love you too, hound dog.

CUT TO:

INT. CONDOR'S LAIR - NIGHT

Armando's huge wing is still wrapped around Ziggy. He shifts in his sleep, hiding his head under the opposite wing. With caution, Ziggy wiggles free.

 ZIGGY
(whispering)
Sorry, Armando!

Ziggy carefully creeps to the lair's entrance. He stumbles on BONES. They CLATTER.

Armando shifts in his sleep. He SNORTS, and MUMBLES:

ARMANDO
Jou so nice! So sweet...I love jou.

Petrified, Ziggy stops.

ZIGGY
(whispering)
Crimpers!

Ziggy looks back. Armando settles into a deep slumber. Ziggy tiptoes...

EXT. CONDOR'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

Quietly and slowly, Ziggy exits the lair and traverses the swampy terrain. In the shadows, predatory eyes GLEAM. We hear the HOOT of an OWL, and branches BREAKING.

ZIGGY
What's that? Is anybody out there?

He WHIMPERS.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
D...Don't make me want to hurt you!

A BRANCH BREAKS. Frightened, Ziggy breaks into a run. Suddenly, he trips...

EXT. HOCKOMOCK SWAMP - CONTINUOUS

Ziggy falls face-down in peat moss. Frightened, Ziggy looks around, then he gazes upwards.

ZIGGY
Oh, gosh!

HUNDREDS of FIREFLIES LIGHT up the trees.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
Hey! I'm down here! Please! I
need help. Please, listen to me!

We hear Ziggy's sorrowful lament.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
(singing)
*Fireflies light my way,
Take me home,*
(MORE)

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
*'Cause I'm afraid.
 It's dark outside,
 I'm all alone,
 There's no one here,
 To keep me warm.*

The fireflies zip back and forth between the tree branches, ILLUMINATING them.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*The swamp is dark,
 There's creatures here,
 They wait in hunger,
 And smell my fear.
 Please shine your light,
 And guide my way,
 Light my path,
 So I don't stray.*

One by one the fireflies zoom closer to Ziggy, their tails AGLOW.

ZIGGY (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*I want my bed,
 I want my bowl,
 I beg of you,
 Please...Take me home.*

A GLOWING FIREFLY flutters towards Ziggy. It's Blaze!

BLAZE
 Ziggy? Is that you?!

Ziggy sits up, happy.

ZIGGY
 Blaze! This is freaking awesome!

Blaze lands on Ziggy's nose, ILLUMINATING it. Then Blaze zooms off, and hovers nearby.

BLAZE
 Mom! I told you it was Ziggy!

Blaze's mother zips toward the duo.

FIREFLY MOM
 Ziggy! What in heaven's name are you doing here?

ZIGGY
 (sniffling)
 I'm lost. I need your help.

FIREFLY MOM
 (kindly)
 Let me see what I can do.

Blaze's mother darts into the trees. We hear fireflies BUZZING. Quickly, she returns.

FIREFLY MOM (CONT'D)
 Follow us, Ziggy. We'll take you as far as we can.

The mass of fireflies LIGHT Ziggy's path out of the swamp.

CUT TO:

EXT. MRS. NOTTINGUD'S MANSION - BREAKING DAWN

The rats gnaw through the leather muzzle, and the last THREAD of the collar. Ezekiel rips of the muzzle, and yanks himself free. He lopes over to the--

INT. OLD WELL - CONTINUOUS

Ezekiel grips the wood cover with his teeth, and pulls. Suddenly, the cover shifts, and slides off.

Ezekiel peers down the well. Rats join him, and peer down on either side.

EZEKIEL
 Cherinka! Sugar! Are you all right?

Cherinka looks up, relieved.

CHERINKA
 Hound dog! You here!

EZEKIEL
 Ain't you a sight!

Cherinka's fur is matted, and wet.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)
 But you still the cutest gosh-darn pickle in the jar! Now, how we fixin' on gettin' you out of here?

CHERINKA
 Pull rope! Pull!

Ezekiel grips the rope with his teeth. He tugs. The cage wobbles. But, the pulley stop does not release.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

Pull harder, hound dog! Prove you love me!

Ezekiel pulls harder. The pulley stop releases. Slowly, the cage inches up toward the top of the well.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOCKOMOCK SWAMP - BREAKING DAWN

The fireflies LIGHT a path, Blaze and his mother lead the way. Ziggy follows. The fireflies stop at a trail head.

FIREFLY MOM

This is as far as we can go, it'll be light soon. Use that nose of yours. This trail should lead you back home.

Ziggy SNIFFS the ground. He looks down and sees a FOOTPRINT. He wags his tail.

ZIGGY

Oh boy! It's Jackson! I smell Jackson! Thank you! G'bye!

Ziggy scampers down the trail.

INT. OLD WELL - BREAKING DAWN

Ezekiel's legs quiver. He GRUNTS. Rats peer over the edge of the well. Cherinka dangles in the cage just two feet from the top.

RATS

(in unison)

Pull! Pull! PULL!

FAT RAT

She's almost to the top!

The wire cage is hoisted above the well entrance.

FAT RAT (CONT'D)

Secure the rope!

A rat scampers across the rope, and engages the pulley stop. Cherinka leaps out of the cage, onto the well's LEDGE.

CHERINKA

Spasiba! Thank you!

A RAT scurries onto the ledge, and SHOUTS:

FAT RAT
Release the latch!

The rat releases the latch. The cage plummets down the well, and is locked in place.

EXT. OLD WELL - CONTINUOUS

Ezekiel lies exhausted on the ground. Cherinka trots to him.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)
Hound dog? You okay?

EZEKIEL
I'd have to feel better to die, sweet cheeks.

A beat. Cherinka nuzzles his nose, and gently licks his face.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)
Sure as the vine twines 'round the stump, you are my darlin' sugar lump.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOCKOMOCK SWAMP - BREAKING DAWN

Ziggy races down the trail, to the entrance. He stops at the broken sign, "Hockomock Swamp - Danger Keep out." Then, he sprints toward town.

INT. CONDOR'S LAIR - BREAKING DAWN

Armando stretches his wings. He YAWNS, and SMACKS his beak.

ARMANDO
Bueno dias, chulo! It's time to wake--

Armando scans his lair for Ziggy.

ARMANDO (CONT'D)
Ziggy?!

Infuriated, he SCREECHES, and flaps his wings.

ARMANDO (CONT'D)
ZIGGY! No!!!
(seething)
It's time to feed!

Armando spreads his wings, and whooshes out of the cave entrance.

CUT TO:

EXT. NOTTINGUD ESTATES - MORNING

Ezekiel struggles to squeeze through the wrought iron gates of the driveway. With ease, Cherinka steps through. O.S., a BARK. Ziggy runs toward them.

EZEKIEL

Ziggy?! What the heck you doin' here, boy?

ZIGGY

I came to rescue--
(elated)
Cherinka!

Ziggy eagerly licks her. She bats him with her paw.

CHERINKA

I rescued. Hound dog--my Ezekiel--
he rescue me.

ZIGGY

Your Ezekiel? Whoa, you're an item?

CHERINKA

Da...Yes, he my man.

Ezekiel licks her, delightedly.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

Enough kiss! Stop!

Cherinka swats him.

CHERINKA (CONT'D)

Sweet stuff, later! First, we must
stop wedding! We need go home! Now!

The trio race down the road.

CUT TO:

INT. MAXINE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Maxine dons her white wedding gown. She stares at her image in a full-length MIRROR. She's beautiful. Sadly, she exits the bedroom.

INT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Maxine descends the stairs. She stops at the living room entryway.

Aghast, Leona sputters. She spins around the castle. BUBBLES float to the top of the tank. Maxine gives her a forlorn smile.

MAXINE

I know what you're thinking. I'm not making a mistake. I'm going to get Cherinka back, and nobody's going to stop me.

Maxine exits. A beat.

LEONA

No! Don't do it, Miss Maxine! It's a trick. Stop! Stop!!

INT. JACKSON'S COTTAGE - SIMULTANEOUS

Still dressed from the night before, Jackson sleeps soundly on the sofa, snuggled under a cozy blanket. A half-empty bottle of liquor on the coffee table. Pinkie's bird cage sits in the corner.

Pinkie sleeps under her wing. The O.S. BEEP of an electronic car key. Pinkie stirs, then she settles back to sleep.

EXT. MAXINE'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Maxine enters her convertible MINI-COOPER. She kicks the car in gear, and barrels down the road. The wedding veil flies off.

Sparrows perched in the weeping willow watch Maxine leave. They CHIRP.

SPARROW #1

Where's she going?

SPARROW #2

And what's she wearing?

SPARROW #3

Something's wrong!

A beat. The birds CHATTER rapidly.

SPARROWS

(in unison)

Let's follow her!

Together, the sparrows take flight.

EXT. ON THE MINI-COOPER - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

FOLLOW Maxine driving recklessly down side-streets towards the outskirts of town. The wedding gowns train blows upward in the wind.

In flight, the sparrows follow her. One by one other BIRDS join the sparrows, making a big V-line in the sky.

EXT. ALLEY WAY - SIMULTANEOUS

Ezekiel, Cherinka, and Ziggy scramble down a plank-fenced alleyway. In the b.g., we see Maxine in her Mini-Cooper drive past.

Cherinka stops at a crack in the fence. Through the crack, we see Balfour digging a hole in the backyard. Next to him, a BONE. Cherinka SHOUTS.

CHERINKA

Balfour! We need talk, now!

Balfour freezes. Immediately, he hides face-down in the shallow hole. He covers his head with his paws.

BALFOUR

(muffled)

Cherinka?! Don't hurt me!

CHERINKA

I need help!

Balfour slowly peeks out, between his paws.

BALFOUR

(pleasantly surprised)

Yu' need my help?

CHERINKA

Da, I need you get all *kiska*. Big pussies, small pussies ...I don't care. We get pitch Auntie Selma and busturd son.

BALFOUR

(surprised)

The Auntie Semite! I wouldn't a-reckoned it!

Balfour studies Cherinka. A beat.

BALFOUR (CONT'D)
 Yu' know, they may not want t'help
 yu'. Yer a bit of a--

Cherinka grits her teeth. Then, sweetly:

CHERINKA
 Tell them... I no more harm.

BALFOUR
 (grinning)
 Aye! Then, I'm yer man.

Ezekiel GROWLS possessively.

CHERINKA
 Everyone! Meet at mansion half-hour.

Balfour dashes off. The trio run down the alley-way in the opposite direction.

Overhead, a bird-shaped SHADOW darkens their path. Ziggy looks up, alarmed.

ZIGGY
 It's Armando!

Cherinka and Ezekiel look up.

EZEKIEL
 Who the heck is Armando?!

ZIGGY
 Hmm...Sort of my ex-boyfriend?

Armando nose-dives for Ziggy, SCREECHING.

ARMANDO
 Ah-ha! There jou are! How could
 jou? I loved jou!

ZIGGY
 (to the others)
 And he has issues.

CLAWS reach out...inches from grasping Ziggy's dreadlocks!

CHERINKA
 Follow me!

The trio darts through a gap in the plank fencing. Armando SLAMS into the fence. He SCREECHES in frustration.

Cherinka, Ziggy, and Ezekiel run down the side street, and duck inside a STORM DRAIN.

CUT TO:

EXT. NOTTINGUD'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

The steel iron gates automatically CREAK open. The Mini-Cooper zips through, then comes to an abrupt halt next to the Rolls Royce, and a 2012 Black Mercedes.

Maxine hurries toward the mansion's entrance. The birds following Maxine land, and perch in the treetops.

MAXINE

Aunt Selma?! Aunt Selma! I'm here!

We hear muted VOICES. Maxine enters the mansion.

EXT. ANOTHER SIDE STREET - MAXINE'S NEIGHBORHOOD - SIMULTANEOUS

Cherinka, Ezekiel, and Ziggy race toward Maxine's cottage.

CHERINKA

We almost home!

EZEKIEL

I declare! We gon' make it, baby doll!

Suddenly, they stop. They see the wedding veil on the ground.

ZIGGY

Oh no! We're too late...

CHERINKA

Nyet! We not too late! She home! She no go! Maxine?! Maxine!

Cherinka grabs the wedding veil with her teeth, and races towards the cottage, dragging the veil behind her.

EZEKIEL

Sugar! Come back! Ziggy! Go get your human! It's comin' up a bad cloud, and we gon' get ourselves drenched.

Ezekiel chases after Cherinka. Ziggy veers off to Jackson's cottage.

EXT. JACKSON'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Ziggy races up the front steps, and bolts inside, BARKING.

INT. JACKSON'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Pinkie SCREECHES from inside her cage.

PINKIE

Oy, Ziggy! Ziggy! I was so worried
about you! We thought... Hey, you
get back here, you little schmendrick
putz!

Ziggy races upstairs, past Jackson, still asleep in the
armchair.

PINKIE (CONT'D)

(bird-voice)

Jackson! Jackson!

Hearing Pinkie, Ziggy races downstairs. He leaps onto
Jackson. WHOOMP! Jackson awakens with a start. He smiles.

JACKSON

Ziggy! You're alive!

Ziggy licks his face, repeatedly. Jackson LAUGHS. Then:

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Hey, Maxine!

Jackson sprints out the front door. Ziggy crosses to the
bird cage door, lifts the latch with his paw, and releases
Pinkie.

ZIGGY

Come on! Time to fly...

Pinkie hops onto Ziggy's back, and holds on.

INT. MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cherinka sits in front of the fish tank. She MEWS softly.
Leona swims back and forth. Ezekiel nuzzles his kitty-cat.

EZEKIEL

I know you're feelin' lower 'n' a
snake's belly in a mud rut, but we
still have a fightin' chance.

CHERINKA

(sniffing)

She gone! Ziggy right! We too
late...

LEONA

It ain't never too late!

(MORE)

LEONA (CONT'D)

And you better git on the stick if
we gon' help her.

Jackson rushes in through the front door. Ziggy at his heels.
Pinkie flies off Ziggy's back.

JACKSON

Maxine?!

Cherinka YOWLS. Ezekiel BARKS. Leona spins around her
castle. BUBBLES float to the top of the tank.

Ziggy tugs at Jackson's pant leg. Jackson looks and sees
Maxine's wedding veil on the floor. Jackson's face turns
grim. He picks it up, and crumples it.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Come with me! We have a wedding to
stop!

CUT TO:

INT. NOTTINGUD MANSION BALLROOM - DAY

An opulent ballroom decorated with 19th century Italian tables
and chairs. Full-length French doors define the back wall,
and through their windows we see the old well.

The ferret-like JUDGE PRICKLING, 80s, dressed in an outdated
suit, waits impatiently. Facing him are Neville, dressed in
an black Armani suit, and Maxine.

MAXINE

Where's Cherinka? I want to see
her, now!

Mrs. Nottingud crosses to Maxine, and shoves wilted FLOWERS
at her chest.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

You'll see her after the ceremony.

MAXINE

I'm not proceeding unless I know
she's alive!

A stand-off. Mrs. Nottingud fumes at Maxine's defiance.
She turns to Neville.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Well?! What are you waiting for!?
Go get that wretched thing!

MAXINE
I'm going with him!

MRS. NOTTINGUD
We'll all go!...

Nervously, Judge Prickling clears his throat. Mrs. Nottingud turns, and with venom:

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)
And you! Don't you dare go anywhere!
Got it?

Judge Prickling nods, quickly.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODY WAGON - MOVING - MORNING

Jackson backs the Woody out of the driveway, tires SQUEALING. Pinkie perches on his headrest. Cherinka and Ezekiel sit in the front seat, and Ziggy sits the rear.

ON a bird-shaped SHADOW trailing after them.

EXT. A RESIDENTIAL STREET - A MOMENT LATER

The Woody speeds past Takoda's Volkswagen bus going the OPPOSITE direction. Ziggy pops his head out the back window, enjoying the wind.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN BUS - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Takoda glimpses Ziggy hanging his head out the rear window of the Woody. For the benefit of the non-Indian tourists, he turns to "Tonto mode."

TAKODA
Thanks to the Great Spirit! He has
found his friend.

Then, through the front windshield, Takoda notices the bird-shaped shadow in pursuit of Jackson's vehicle. He removes the black feather in his headband, and examines it.

TAKODA (CONT'D)
Holyshit! The condor!

He then sees HUNDREDS of CATS race ahead of, alongside, and after the Woody. Leading the charge is Balfour.

TAKODA (CONT'D)
It's a sign. The animals are
gathering. I must follow!

Takoda SLAMS on the brakes. To the tourists, dropping the Tonto-tude.

TAKODA (CONT'D)

Hang onto your butts everybody!

The tourists grasp the railings. Takoda whips a quick U-Turn, and gives chase. The tourists HOOT in delight; several pull out CELL PHONES to record the event.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD WELL - MOMENTS LATER

The Judge stands at the French doors, and watches Mrs. Nottingud hop-scotch over the undulating, SNAKE-infested yard.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Get these creepy crawlers away from me!

At her side, Neville boldly kicks and flings the snakes out of his way.

NEVILLE

Yes, Mommy!

Maxine steps carefully across the yard. The snakes separate to make her a path and allow her egress, as if she were Moses parting the Red Sea.

MAXINE

(to a snake, whispering)
Thank you.

A snake HISSSES, nods his head, and slithers away.

Neville crosses to Ezekiel's tying post. He lifts the gnawed dog muzzle and rope off the ground.

NEVILLE

Mommy?

Mrs. Nottingud stares at the muzzle and rope.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

What the hell is going on around here?

She notices the well cover on the ground, and marches over to it.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)

Neville!!!

Neville tosses the muzzle and rope aside, and hurries over to his mother. Mrs. Nottingud discus-tosses the cover. Maxine catches up to her Aunt and cousin.

MAXINE

I don't know what type of game you two are playing, but I want to see Cherinka. Now!!

Mrs. Nottingud nods to Neville. He winds the well's rope.

INT. OLD WELL - CONTINUOUS

Coiled inside the cage, the water snake prepares to strike. He gazes upward as the cage slowly rises to the surface. Quietly, he HISSES. Red eyes blink behind, and between, the well's plank walls. A rat scurries, and hides.

EXT. OLD WELL - MOMENTS LATER

Neville winds the rope up hastily. Mrs. Nottingud peers over the edge. Anxiously, Maxine watches. In the b.g., the Judge opens the ballrooms French doors, and steps outside.

The wire cage is hoisted above the well entrance. Immediately, Maxine notices:

MAXINE

That's not...

The water snake strikes, its FANGS pierce Neville's neck. Neville winces in pain.

NEVILLE

Ouch! MOMMY!!!

Neville flings the snake across the yard. He grabs his neck, grimacing. The cage plummets down the well. SPLASH! Mrs. Nottingud races to her son.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

My baby!!

The snake slithers behind the well. It coils and readies to strike again. Mrs. Nottingud turns against Maxine.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)

It's because of you, my baby boy's hurt!

MAXINE

I didn't do any--

MRS. NOTTINGUD

If James never adopted you, none of this would have happened! It's all your fault!

(to Neville)

I want her dead! Kill her! Kill her, NOW!

Neville touches the puncture wound, then looks at his blood stained fingers.

NEVILLE

Gladly, Mommy.

Angrily, Neville grabs Maxine's arms.

MAXINE

Let go of me!

Maxine angrily knees him in the groin. Neville buckles over.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Neville?!!

(to Maxine with venom)

You--

Maxine punches Mrs. Nottingud in the face. The old woman tumbles backward.

MAXINE

BITCH!

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. NOTTINGUD MANSION BALLROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

The frightened Judge panics. He bolts to his car.

JUDGE PRICKLING

Sometimes the money just isn't worth the effort.

Neville assists his mother back to her feet.

NEVILLE

You shouldn't have done that, sweetheart.

Neville hoists Maxine off her feet. She flails in the air, and SCREAMS:

MAXINE

Help! Someone help me!

NEVILLE

Time to make a wish!

The Judge jumps into the Mercedes, and peels out the driveway.

Jackson SMASHES the Woody through the iron gate, honking his HORN. He drives past the judge going the opposite direction.

Balfour, followed by hundreds of cats swarm onto the estate. Armando's SHADOW looms.

Neville holds Maxine suspended above the well. Maxine twists her head around.

MAXINE

Jackson!!

The Woody barrels across the yard. It skids to an abrupt stop ten feet from the well. Takoda's Volkswagen bus follows two car lengths behind.

CAMERAS FLASH as the tourists shoot photos of Armando SCREECHING in the heavens, and at the reptile-and cat-infested lawn.

Jackson races to the well. Cherinka, Ezekiel and Ziggy leap out the driver's door right behind him.

INT. WOODY WAGON - CONTINUOUS

Pinkie grasps the door handle, and shuts herself safely inside the cab. She peers through the front windshield, anxiously.

PINKIE

Oy! My heart can't take this! I think... I think I'm going to faint.

Pinkie flips upside down, unconscious on the driver's seat.

AT THE WELL - CONTINUOUS

Jackson, Ziggy, Cherinka and Ezekiel sprint to the well. Maxine sees her cat.

MAXINE

Cherinka!!!

Mrs. Nottingud and Neville turn, shocked.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

But...that's impossible. How...?

Jackson SHOUTS:

JACKSON
 (to Neville)
 Get your hands off of her!

NEVILLE
 With pleasure.

Neville drops Maxine down the well. She falls out of sight.

JACKSON
 Maxine!

Suddenly, Neville removes a COLT 45 hidden inside his coat jacket and points it at Jackson.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 CAP HIS ASS!!!

EXT. VOLKSWAGEN BUS - CONTINUOUS

Takoda removes RED LIPSTICK from his fanny pack, and quickly streaks "war paint" across his cheekbones. He reverently touches the BIRD PENDANT hidden under his shirt.

TAKODA
 My totem is guiding me. I must help.

He opens the glove compartment and removes a traditional knob-headed TOMAHAWK.

Takoda sprints to the well with an Indian WAR WHOOP. Mrs. Nottingud sees Takoda running towards them with a tomahawk. She SHRIEKS:

MRS. NOTTINGUD
 Are you fucking kidding me?!

The tomahawk FLIES in the air.

AT THE WELL - SIMULTANEOUS

Balfour grips the hem of Mrs. Nottingud's dress with his teeth, and yanks. Mrs. Nottingud twirls to disconnect him. Balfour spins in the air, as if on a swing.

Ziggy leaps, to the rescue. Armando nose-dives for Ziggy, SCREECHING.

ARMANDO
 I got jou now! Jou *embustero*! Jou liar!

Neville cocks the Colt's trigger. CLICK.

ARMANDO (CONT'D)
 (suddenly horrified)
 ZIGGY!

The tomahawk WHIZZES past the well, striking Neville's arm. The gun MISFIRES, and flies in the air, landing out of reach.

ON THE LAWN - CONTINUOUS

Armando falls to the ground. He CRIES OUT in pain. Ziggy halts, and races to Armando. Crimson stains Armando's wing. Takoda sprints to the hurt condor.

AT THE OLD WELL - CONTINUOUS

Neville sprints to the gun. Snakes slither towards him, HISSING. Neville trips, and falls. The water snake urges his reptilian troop onward.

WATER SNAKE
 (sotto voce)
 Yessss....It'ssss time!

In unison, hundreds of snakes coil around Neville. The snakes envelope him, like a slithering overcoat. They pull him down, and drag him, kicking to the swamp. Neville SCREAMS.

INT. OLD WELL - CONTINUOUS

ON FINGERS grasping onto the ledge, followed by Maxine desperately clinging for her life.

MAXINE
 HELP!!! I need--

Suddenly, Cherinka and Ezekiel lean over ledge, grip Maxine's sleeves with their teeth, and pull. The clothe begins to tear.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 That's it! Pull!

Panicked, Maxine scrambles upwards. Then, her feet slip on the slick wood planks.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 Oh my God! I'm going to--

Her fingers lose their grip... At the last second, a HAND grasps Maxine's arm.

MAXINE (CONT'D)
 Jackson!

Jackson lifts Maxine out of the well. They embrace.

JACKSON
You sure you're okay?

Maxine nods. Cherinka MEWS and Ezekiel BARKS, happily.

AT THE OLD WELL - CONTINUOUS

Balfour loses his grip on Mrs. Nottingud's hem. He flies through the air, YELPING, and lands in a hedge.

Satisfied, Mrs. Nottingud turns, and beholds Maxine and Jackson embraced. She scowls.

MRS. NOTTINGUD
You dirty little tramp! You're not going--

Suddenly, Cherinka emits a low guttural GROWL. In unison, hundreds of cats stand alert. Threatening, the cats creep towards Mrs. Nottingud.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)
No! This can't be happening!

Mrs. Nottingud looks side-to-side. Fearful, she flees to the mansion. The cats--led by Cherinka--chase after her.

MAXINE
Cherinka! STOP!!!

Maxine bolts to the mansion, alongside her run Jackson and Ezekiel.

ON THE LAWN

Perched in the treetops, sparrows and other breeds of birds, watch Mrs. Nottingud escaping to the mansion.

SPARROW #1
She's getting away!

They TWEET and CHIRP, furiously.

SPARROWS/BIRDS
(in unison)
Bomb squad!!

The birds and sparrows take flight. The birds SCREECH. SPLAT! SPLAT!! SPLAT!!! Nottingud is covered in bird SHIT. Cherinka looks up, and grins.

INT. NOTTINGUD MANSION FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Maxine runs up the main stairwell, following Ezekiel's lead. By her side is Jackson.

We hear MEOWING and cats HISSING O.S.

INT. SECOND FLOOR CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Ezekiel runs down the hallway to an open bedroom door. He BARKS. Maxine and Jackson race after him.

INT. MRS. NOTTINGUD'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Nottingud SMACKS into the bed, her eyes streaming and swollen shut. WHITE BIRD SHIT dribbles down her face. She wipes it away.

Cherinka and the cats encircle her, GROWLING. Mrs. Nottingud panics.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Get away from me, you miserable
beasts!

Blindly, she reaches out with her hands, and spins around. She SNEEZES, repeatedly.

MRS. NOTTINGUD (CONT'D)

Where are you? I'll kill you! I'll
kill you all!

Ezekiel stands at the doorway. Maxine and Jackson join him.

MAXINE

Auntie Selma?!

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Maxine? Is that you, precious? Why
don't you come here, dear? Let me
kill you, like I killed your worthless
father.

MAXINE

You...you killed my father? Your
own brother?

Ezekiel GROWLS. Cherinka HISSSES. Mrs. Nottingud walks with arms outstretched, toward Maxine's voice.

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Of course I did! That dumb bastard
never had a clue. We purposely
overloaded the circuits, so when his
fingers touched the toaster...ZAP!
Good ole James lit up like a Christmas
tree!

MAXINE

But...why? You're rich! You don't need his money!

MRS. NOTTINGUD

Because I loathed him. Since the day he was born! Everybody loved James. Baby James this! Little James that! How handsome! I became second-best. Yesterday's news... ignored! I grew to hate him. Like I hate you! Like I hate you all!

Mrs. Nottingud reaches out, and snatches Maxine. She twists her hands around Maxine's throat. Maxine GASPS.

JACKSON

Maxine! Let her go!

Cherinka springs, landing on Mrs. Nottingud's back. Ezekiel nips at her heels.

Mrs. Nottingud whirls, letting go of Maxine. Maxine falls to the floor. Jackson lifts her up.

Mrs. Nottingud stumbles toward the French doors. Cherinka slashes at her, drawing blood. Mrs. Nottingud YELPS.

Mrs. Nottingud gets caught up in the sheer CURTAINS. She tries to twist her way out. Her face CONVULSES. Then, she SNEEZES violently, propelling herself out the French doors, SHATTERING them. Ezekiel HOWLS.

EXT. MRS. NOTTINGUD'S BEDROOM BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Still blind, Mrs. Nottingud flails towards the railing. The curtains twist around her. Relentless, Cherinka clings to her back.

Mrs. Nottingud whirls, and heads right over the railing, out of sight. We hear Cherinka's petrified YOWL, and then a CRUNCH as Mrs. Nottingud lands on the ground below, lifeless.

Remnants of the torn sheers dangle over the terrace. We hear a soft MEW.

MAXINE

Cherinka!

Jackson enfolds Maxine in his arms. In the corner of her eye, she sees PAWS grasping onto the ledge.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Cherinka?!

Maxine runs to the ledge, and lifts her kitty to safety. Tightly, she cuddles her. Cherinka PURRS, then nuzzles Maxine's nose. Jackson wraps his arms around Maxine. Ezekiel BARKS, concerned.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

It's okay, Ezekiel. She's all right!

Ezekiel WHIMPERS, happily. He jumps up, and licks Cherinka's face.

EXT. NOTTINGUD MANSION FRONT STEPS - MOMENTS LATER

Maxine and Jackson exit onto the veranda in an embrace. Cherinka and Ezekiel stand at their side, nuzzling.

MAXINE

I don't know what to say.

JACKSON

You don't have to say a thing. How about you show me?

Maxine grins... their lips lock, in a passionate kiss.

INT. WOODY WAGON - CONTINUOUS

Splayed out unconscious on the driver's seat, Pinkie opens one eye. She sits up, preens her feathers, then peers out the windshield. She beams.

PINKIE (CONT'D)

Love... So wonderful.

Pinkie gazes heavenward.

PINKIE (CONT'D)

Yeah, yeah, Esther. I'll make sure she converts. Now, there's only one thing to say...

DISSOLVE TO:

We hear the SMASHING of GLASS O.S.

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

(bird-voice)

Mazel tov!

INT. NOTTINGUD MANSION BALLROOM - DAY

SUPER: "ONE YEAR LATER"

Jackson, in a tux, lifts his foot from the goblet he's just smashed in the old Jewish tradition. A joyful wedding scene.

In the front row, Pinkie perches on an elegant chair. She bops up and down.

WIDEN

Maxine and Jackson locked in a passionate kiss. Maxine wears an elegant, no-frill wedding dress. They stand in front of a RABBI, 40s.

Maxine and Jackson turn, and walk down the aisle between WEDDING GUESTS.

Next to Pinkie... Ziggy sits, wagging his tail. He BARKS. Leona swims in circles--bubbles burst to the top of her fish bowl. Ezekiel and Cherinka nuzzle noses.

In the second row...Takoda, in tuxedo, lets out a WHOOP. Armando, wears a matching tux and an Indian headband. He SQUAWKS. Across from them, Balfour stands on his chair, YIPPING.

EXT. NOTTINGUD MANSION BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the tree-tops sparrows CHIRP, and orioles SING. The sparrows peer through the French doors, then CHATTER between themselves.

SPARROW #2

Look at her!

SPARROW #3

Isn't she just absolutely--

THE SPARROWS

(in unison)

--beautiful!

The sparrows COO, and nestle.

WIDEN

Gingerbread-style animal housing units. Happy critters peer out the windows. We hear a cacophony of "meows", "barks", and "tweets."

We proceed through the iron gate. The wrought iron sign now reads "Pawsitively Purrfect".

FADE OUT:

THE END