

LANCELOT

1 hr. single camera limited series drama

based on *Lancelot*
a novel by Walker Percy

- PILOT SCRIPT -

The Fire, The Letter, The Movie, The Storm

adaptation & script

by

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IN BLACK: the SOUND of a CRACKLING FIRE.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
I blame love.

Overlay the SOUND of a HEARTBEAT.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
That awful, wonderful mess of emotions
and hormones that binds us to the orbit
of another human being. As someone I know
once said: "We intersect."

Overlay the SOUND of a BABY CRYING.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
You never stop to think of the
consequences, what it might compel you to
do...

Overlay a DISTANT EXPLOSION.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
(deadpan)
Don't get me started.

1

EXT. BELLE ISLE, NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT (1 YEAR AGO)

A slow motion spray of EMBERS against a black sky;
SILENCE but for the SOUND of a CRACKLING FIRE.

Then LANCELOT ANDREWES LAMAR (50), drifts into view,
carried on the wind; whether in ecstasy or pain, it's
hard to say. At any rate, it's a stunningly beautiful
image.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
(headlines, high drama)
"Belle Isle Burns!" "Bodies Charred
Beyond Recognition!" "Crazed by Grief,
Lancelot Lamar Rushes Back Into the
Conflagration!"
(beat)
Not sure I recall that. But then my
memories of that night got shattered with
the windows of Belle Isle, and how much
is true or not... that's hard to say.
What matters is that at that moment, I
rediscovered my life.

As he disappears from view:

LANCELOT (V.O.)
 Wheeling up into the night like Lucifer
 blown out of hell - for the first time in
 30 years, I was set free.

A MASSIVE EXPLOSION!

SMASH CUT TO:

LANCELOT FLAT OUT ON A GRASSY LAWN, staring dazed at AN
 OLD NEW ORLEANS TOWN MANSION (BELLE ISLE) IN FLAMES. AN
 ENORMOUS FIRE fanned by HURRICANE VELOCITY WINDS.

Debris rains down, barely missing him, singeing the
 grass. In a surreal twist, SHATTERED FILM EQUIPMENT CRASH
 LANDS NEARBY: lights, twisting cables, burning
 costumes...

But Lancelot doesn't flinch, riveted by the apocalyptic
 image.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
 On that night, I remember thinking -
marveling really -- there are still great
 moments in life.

Then, **AS HE TURNS DIRECT TO CAMERA:** A BROKEN SMILE
 APPEARS ON LANCELOT'S FACE.

LANCELOT
 How 'bout that.

ANOTHER EXPLOSION!

BLACK. SILENCE.

TITLE CARD: TODAY - 1 YEAR LATER

2

INT. CHARTES-PONTCHARTRAIN CENTER - DAY (THE PRESENT)

Serenity.

FROM AN UNKNOWN POV: looking out a window onto a sunny
 day. In the near distance, we see A WELL-KEPT CEMETERY. A
 YOUNG WOMAN kneels at a gravestone, placing flowers.

REVEAL THAT WE'RE IN LANCELOT'S POV, watching as A
 PRIEST, in traditional collar & cassock, pauses in his
 traverse across the cemetery to speak with the woman.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
 Have you ever noticed that the narrower
 the view the more you can see?

Tap, tap, tap

Lancelot knows that sound.

As he moves from the window, we see him in full: cleaned up, dressed in an institutional manner in an institutional room - hard to say if it's a prison or something else.

Tap, tap

Lancelot settles down on the edge of the bed, and now we can tell that the tapping is coming from the other side of the wall.

Tap

Lancelot TAPS back in what might be some kind of code.

THE DOOR TO THE ROOM OPENS, revealing the Priest from the cemetery. This is PERCIVAL (Latino, 50).

LANCELOT

Did you speak to my Mirabelle?

PERCIVAL

Yes.

LANCELOT

And does she forgive me?

PERCIVAL

No.

LANCELOT

Good. Good. Regardless of what you may believe, forgiveness should not be freely given.

Percival closes the door, goes to sit by the window.

LANCELOT

I saw you out there, talking to that young woman. And I thought I should yell for her to run for cover. That you were a wolf in Jesus clothing.

Tap, tap, tap

Lancelot touches the wall tenderly.

LANCELOT

I think I may be falling in love with the girl next door. I know. How unbearably All American apple pie.

PERCIVAL

Astra inclinant, sed non obligant.

LANCELOT

There you go speaking that sexy Mexican again.

PERCIVAL

Latin. "The stars incline us, they do not bind us."

LANCELOT

Well, isn't that something. Well anyway, there's a twist: I've never seen her, my Anna.

PERCIVAL

Then how do you know you love her?

LANCELOT

Oh, we communicate.
(he taps twice)
Communication is simple when you're in love.

Lancelot clocks Percival looking out the window.

LANCELOT

You know, I've only recently managed to be content just living in this room with that single view.

Another few *TAPS* from the other side of the wall.

LANCELOT

It deepens my love for her to know she has the same prospect. And of course there's nothing like overlooking a cemetery to remind you how important proper landscaping is.
(abruptly, but not malicious)
What the hell are you doing back again?

PERCIVAL

I thought, as your friend -

LANCELOT

Careful now. Your naïveté is showing. You must realize that they think sending a priest and sometime friend will entice me to confess that it wasn't an accident.

PERCIVAL

You sent Mirabelle away the day before, and they feel that suggests -

LANCELOT

That there was a hurricane on the way?? You do remember the hurricane.

INSERT: FLASH of HURRICANE WINDS flinging trees through the air.

INSERT: FLASH OF 2 WOMEN AND A MAN we don't recognize in a 3 way, screwing furiously to match the hurricane's frenzy.

BACK TO SCENE:

LANCELOT

I was saving my daughter from damnation.

PERCIVAL

There is some disagreement about that --

Lancelot hears something, shushes him.

FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL: SINGING. Not terribly melodic, and wordless, still - a kind of beauty.

LANCELOT

What would you call that? A lamentation? She was gang raped, you know, in *la vieux carré*. Thrown into the *batture* and left for dead. And still she sings. Explain that to me.

PERCIVAL

Maybe she's found her faith on the other side of her personal hell. *Vincit qui se vincit*. - Sorry. "He conquers who conquers himself."

LANCELOT

That all you have to offer? Homilies in foreign tongues?

Percival stands.

PERCIVAL
I only came to -

LANCELOT
Hear my confession?

PERCIVAL
(exasperated)
Is that what you want?

LANCELOT
Who doesn't want that??

Lance drops dramatically to his knees.

LANCELOT
Bless me father, for I have sinned! It has been a thousand years since my last confession, and in the meantime I have screwed and been screwed over 10,000 times.

THUD!

No tap this time but a FIST SLAMMING ON THE WALL from the other side. Lancelot winces -- then clasps Percival about the knees.

THUD!

LANCELOT
But what say we start by shoveling out the shit?

THUD! THUD!

TITLE CARD: 25 YEARS AGO

3 INT. LAFITTE'S BLACKSMITH SHOP, BOURBON ST. - NIGHT (25 YEARS AGO)

A bar in the Quarter. The 'THUDS' have set the backbeat for music - the joint is jumpin'.

Lancelot and Percival - **BOTH NOW 25** - at the bar, drinking and drunk. Percival is on his phone, trying to connect with someone who isn't answering. He throws his phone on the bar.

PERCIVAL
Where the hell is she??

THE FRONT DOOR OPENS and A YOUNG WOMAN laughs her way in on the arm of A YOUNG MAN.

LANCELOT

Comin' soon to a theater near you.

Percival sees them, they him.

PERCIVAL

Fuck.

YOUNG WOMAN

(stops)

Oh shit.

Not skipping a beat, Percival stumbles to the young woman, shoves her against the bar and lands a solid right hook SQUARE IN THE YOUNG MAN'S FACE, SENDING HIM SPRAWLING. THE WOMAN SCREAMS! THE BAR ERUPTS, PEOPLE go the rescue, pull Percival off the terrified Young Man, BLOOD POURING FROM HIS BROKEN NOSE.

Lancelot watches from the bar, detached.

LANCELOT

I do so miss your passion.

BACK TO:

4

INT. CHARTES-PONTCHARTRAIN - THE PRESENT

Lancelot on the floor, and Percival back in the chair by the window, clearly upset by the recounting of the memory.

LANCELOT

Maybe you've rechannelled it into a passion for Christ. Nuns do. They marry him, gold band and all. I myself have never had much intercourse with God.

(a memory pings)

Though one time a hit of acid nearly did the trick.

INSERT: A MARDIS GRAS PARADE, but the costumed figures, floats, puppets and music are distorted.

REVEAL: Young Lancelot (17) staring at them slack-jawed.

YOUNG LANCELOT

I have surely seen the face of God.

BACK TO SCENE:

PERCIVAL

(droll)

Not the same thing.

LANCELOT

Perhaps you're right.

(drags himself to his feet)

I only bring it up because sin of the sexual kind is -- oh Percy, every life has chapters. I don't doubt for one moment that your promiscuous lifestyle led to a revelation that led you to that... *costume*.

PERCIVAL

I've confessed my sins.

LANCELOT

Good for the soul, was it? And now it's my turn? Fair enough. Well, let's at least call my confession something...

(got it)

"The Fire, The Letter, The Movie, The Storm". And it has one hell of a cast of characters, yourself included - Father Confessor, old comrade in a new guise. I, of course, play the Holy Fool --

He catches his reflection in a mirror.

LANCELOT

But there is no story without Mirabelle.

A TEAR FORMS IN THE CORNER OF HIS EYE. Not liking what he sees, he breathes on the mirror and the reflection blurs.

LANCELOT

The Fire, you know -- or think you do. All N'Orleans knew the storm.

INSERT: the hurricane flinging trees, people fleeing for their lives -- THIS TIME IN SILENCE.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

As for the Letter...

BACK TO SCENE:

Lancelot draws an 'O' in the fogged over mirror.

LANCELOT

That emptiest of all letters actually holds the key. For that 'O' was Mirabelle.

THE 'O' TRANSFORMS INTO THE IRIS OF AN EYE, A DISTINCTIVE IRIS: GREEN, FLECKED WITH GOLD.

THE EYE BLINKS.

INSERT: MIRABELLE (9), looking DIRECT TO CAMERA. She is beatific. We have no idea where we are now, and it doesn't matter.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

I have another daughter, also, as you know.

MIRABELLE BLINKS.

INSERT: LUCY LAMAR, an unremarkable 18 year old, chewing gum.

LUCY LAMAR

(to Camera, fed up)

Lucy Lamar. I already told you.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

Named after her mother, my first real love.

LUCY BLINKS.

INSERT: ON GRAINY FILM STOCK, a shot of **LUCY COBB** (20s) in tennis whites. She grimaces, blocks the lens for a moment, then the shot widens as she plays tennis.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

But then she died.

As she nails a serve -

INSERT: back with LUCY LAMAR, the unremarkable, gum chewing 18 year old.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

- leaving me with her namesake and spittin' image, a devastating daily reminder of what I'd lost. Honestly? Sometimes I wish she'd just go away, and take some of that pain with her.

Lucy blows a bubble, and when it pops -

INSERT: back with 9 YEAR OLD MIRABELLE, looking DIRECT TO CAMERA.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
 But I loved Mirabelle the moment I met
 her.

MIRABELLE BLINKS.

INSERT: MIRABELLE'S 3 YEAR OLD SELF, looking DIRECT TO
 CAMERA.

MIRABELLE
 Mommy's what?

LANCELOT (O.S.)
 Working.

MIRABELLE
 At what?

LANCELOT (O.S.)
 Acting. Making movies.

MIRABELLE
 (excited)
 Like *Honey Bear*?

LANCELOT (O.S.)
 No, movies for older people.

MIRABELLE
 Can we watch *Honey Bear*?

REVEAL: Lancelot (6 years younger), Mirabelle sitting on
 his desk in **A STYLISH CARRIAGE HOUSE**, playing with his
 things.

LANCELOT
 Soon. We'll watch it soon.

Mirabelle nods, keeps playing. Lancelot is clearly
 smitten. AS THE SHOT SLOWLY ZOOMS IN ON MIRABELLE:

LANCELOT (V.O.)
 (melancholy)
 The continents of the world are pulled
 apart by forces that lie in wait deep
 below the surface.

Mirabelle speak/sings, acappella:

MIRABELLE
Oh when the Saints, go marchin' in...

LANCELOT (V.O.)

The trembling of an earthquake tells us
plates have shifted. Molten rock brings
tales from the heart of the planet, this
place we are forced to call "home".

MIRABELLE

When the saints go --

SHE LOOKS UP. DIRECT TO CAMERA:

MIRABELLE

Daddy?

SHE BLINKS, AND WE LAND CLOSE IN HER EYE: THAT GOLD-
FLECKED IRIS.

ANOTHER BLINK

We are returned to the letter 'O' in the fogged over
mirror, back in the room in **CHARTES-PONTCHARTRAIN**.

LANCELOT

That single letter shifted the tectonic
plates of my life, foretold earthquakes
and storms.

The fog starts to clear, and once again Lancelot is
revealed looking in the mirror, his sadness palpable.

MIRABELLE (V.O.)

(singing)

*Now some say this world of trouble is the
only one we'll ever see...*

ANNA'S VOICE JOINS THE SONG:

ANNA & MIRABELLE (V.O.)

*But I'm waiting for that morning when the
new world is revealed - Oh, when the
saints...*

A deep moan of grief rises from Lancelot's gut, and in a
frenzy, he swipes the 'O' clean from the glass,
DISLODGING THE MIRROR WHICH SMASHES TO THE FLOOR.

ANNA & MIRABELLE (V.O.)

*- When the saints go marching in. Lord, I
want be in that number, when the saints
go marching - the saints go marching --*

Lancelot laughs, he can't help it. HE JOINS IN:

ANNA, MIRABELLE & LANCELOT
When the saints go marching in!!

Lancelot turns to Percival and, without warning, sweeps him into dancing, Lancelot leading, Percival too surprised to object.

A CHORUS PICKS UP THE SONG, AND THE SOUNDTRACK FILLS OUT:
 A MUSICAL IN THE MAKING.

LANCELOT
 (to Percival)
 Who was that woman you stopped to counsel
 out there? A random ass in need of
 succor?

Percival tries to pull away, but Lancelot won't let him.

LANCELOT
 Oh, I know you've traded in your
 libertine ways for the liberation of the
 Lord. But do we ever really?

They dance past the window.

CHORUS (V.O.)
 (ecstatic)
*Oh, when the trumpet sounds its call,
 when the trumpet sounds its call! Lord, I
 want be in that number, when the trumpet
 sounds its call!!*

THE SOUNDTRACK BLOSSOMS INTO FULL ORCHESTRATION, THE DOOR
 TO THE ROOM FLIES OPEN, AND LANCELOT EXUBERANTLY DANCES
 PERCIVAL OUT INTO -

5 INT. THE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A YOUNG WOMAN (presumably ANNA) is SPINNING LIKE A
 WHIRLING DERVISH, SINGING LIKE A DIVA.

ANNA & CHORUS
*Oh when the new world is revealed! When
 the new world is revealed! Oh, I want to
 be there on that morning, when the new
 world is revealed!*

As Lancelot twirls Percival down the corridor, DOORS
 SPRING OPEN AND OTHER PATIENTS POUR OUT, DANCING &
 SINGING WITH OTHER GUESTS, AND THE MEDICAL STAFF.

Lancelot spins Percival to THE MAIN DOOR, WHICH FLIES OPEN!

CUT TO:

6

INT. FRONT HALL, BELLE ISLE - A BRAND NEW DAY (1 YEAR AGO)

WE'RE IN THE VAST ENTRY HALL OF LANCELOT'S NEW ORLEANS MANSION. The walls are a ghastly, Pepto Bismol pink.

THE ROOM IS A SWIRL OF PEOPLE, setting up lights, camera, cables, props: A FILM CREW IN FULL FORM, THEIR ACTIONS CHOREOGRAPHED LIKE WE'VE BEEN THRUST INTO A HOLLYWOOD EXTRAVAGANZA.

Lancelot and Percival are quickly swallowed up, lost in THE SEA OF STRANGERS -- WHO SING!

THE FILM CREW

*Oh when the saints go marching in! When
the saints go marching in!*

Singing continues under:

TITLE CARD: 1 YEAR AGO

THE FILM CREW (V.O.)

*Lord, I want to be in that number, when
the saints go marching in!*

BACK TO SCENE: with Lancelot, NOW HIGH ABOVE THE ACTION ON A BALCONY. Beside him, Percival stares in wonder at the scene below.

LANCELOT

(to Percival, over the din)
They were making a movie!

"THE MUSICAL" DEVOLVES INTO REAL LIFE: cables are snaked, lights aimed; the cacophony of a dozen conversations, shouted instructions.

A TECHIE appears nearby, starts clamping a cinema light onto the balcony. He pays no attention to Lancelot or Percival: they're invisible to all.

LANCELOT

Now don't chip the paint.

As if he heard him, the Techie pauses in his work.

TECHIE
Better use a boom.

He heads off to get a boom.

LANCELOT
(to Percival)
After all, one must protect one's
investment, however hideous it may be.

PERCIVAL
Carthago delenda est.

LANCELOT
Not even gonna ask. You know, I realize -
you only knew Belle Isle when it was a
shambles.

As they look back down on the Hall -

INSERT: FLASHBACK

- It is indeed decaying, peeling, defiantly gone to seed.

Scaffolding is set up against a wall where A GROUP OF COLLEGE STUDENTS are plastering and painting while A BLOVIATING PROFESSOR points out this and that.

LANCELOT
In a fit of inspiration, I forged
relationships with the architectural
departments of some local universities.
For ten years, every semester, groups of
eager youngsters came to live in the
house for "field experience". Study the
design, and history, and along the way
effect some much needed repairs. I moved
into the carriage house. And they pay me,
isn't that amazing? Two birds with one
stone. Ten years later? Voila!

AS THE SOUND OF THE FILM WORLD FLOODS INTO THE MIX --

BACK TO SCENE: Lancelot and Percival on the balcony overlooking the hall.

LANCELOT
You know I didn't realize it, but it's
perfect that the pink monstrosity got
into pristine condition. Made its
destruction that much more tragic.

The Techie returns with a boom, is about to wrap a safety cable around a fluted pillar when:

ELGIN (O.S.)

Hey! What the hell are you doing??

ELGIN ADDISON (32, mixed-race) is coming up the stairs.

TECHIE

What?

ELGIN

Use sandbags.

TECHIE

(as he heads back down)

Whatever.

LANCELOT

(to Percival)

Elgin Addison. Former brilliant student I hired to stay on. By the time the movie people arrived, Elgin knew every square inch of this house - nook, cranny and indentation. That's important, and he has a major part to play, but not right now.

Lance looks down the long, curved staircase that leads to the front hall proper.

At the bottom of the stairs is MARGOT DELACROIX (40), studying a script in hand.

LANCELOT

Because mine is a love story! I suppose they all are. Anyway, it started out that way, ten years ago.

SFX: SHUTTER CLICK

7

INT. BELLE ISLE CARRIAGE HOUSE - DAY (10 YEARS AGO)

A "PORTRAIT" OF MARGOT (now 30) LOOKING DIRECT TO CAMERA.

MARGOT

Margot Delacroix. Margot of the One True Cross.

She smiles. You could drown in that smile. Drips of moisture trail pastels of makeup down her face.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

My Lord if she didn't have something *uncanny*.

Margot stretches, uncomfortable.

MARGOT

I just gotta get out of this damn thing.

REVEAL MARGOT, STANDING IN THE DOORWAY OF THE SMALL, RUSTIC CARRIAGE HOUSE, dressed in satin, hoop skirts -- *Gone With the Wind* to the Nth degree.

She takes off her period style shoes, a blessed relief.

MARGOT

They wore this stuff for real? Jesus please-us.

As she takes off a few more items of clothing -

WE OPEN TO REVEAL A YOUNGER LANCELOT (40), inebriated and lounging in the Carriage House we saw earlier, but in a previous, unrenovated state. It's a mess, barely habitable, filled with a mishmash of discarded furniture and such.

Percival is here as well (though only Lancelot can see him), sitting on the dilapidated stairs that lead to a second story.

LANCELOT

(to Percival)

She was a refugee from a theme party thrown by the dreadful people who inhabited the McMansion-ized dwelling next door.

INSERT: THE DREADFUL THEME PARTY NEXT DOOR

Drunk partygoers amidst a bunch of "RE-ENACTORS" dressed like Margot in antebellum attire, laughing coquettishly.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

One more wretched party thrown by the wretched idiot from wretched New Jersey -

PORTRAIT of the WOMAN FROM NEW JERSEY, garishly made-up, drunk.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

- who absolutely insisted on "authentic atmosphere" for her Garden District garden parties. Authentic my ass. This was New Orleans, not Ala-fucking-bama.

BACK TO SCENE:

Margot moves a few steps into the room, takes in the room, fascinated, as she continues to remove one of the many, many layers of her costume.

MARGOT

What *is* this place?? It's got so much potential.

LANCELOT

It's the carriage house of that pink wrought iron monstrosity you likely saw when you arrived.

MARGOT

I did! It's kind of amazing, actually. So it's all yours.

LANCELOT

The whole kit and ever lovin' caboodle.

MARGOT

But you live here.

LANCELOT

More concise. Things don't get lost.

MARGOT

And excellently decayed. But completely fixable.

LANCELOT

Are you an actress or some kind of interior decorator?

MARGOT

Both? But this -
 (re: her outfit)
 - is a favor for a friend who does parties for people like the wretched idiot from New Jersey. Never again.

She smiles that winning smile at Lancelot, keeping her eyes on him as her stripping delicately turns into more of a tease.

MARGOT

You don't have something to drink here, do you? I'm absolutely *dying*.

Happy to oblige, Lancelot realizes the bottle nearby is empty.

LANCELOT
 (to Percival)
 Why do they call them dead soldiers?

Percival shrugs; Lance gets a fresh bottle out.

LANCELOT
 No matter. My motto was: "always keep a
 platoon on hand."

Margot continues to undress, layer by layer, at the same
 time taking in the details of the room. As he pours
 drinks:

LANCELOT
 (to Percival)
 She knew with absolute certitude that she
 had me. That through some odd coming
 together of time and place, circumstance
 and hormones, calculation and drollness,
 she knew where the vector of desire
 converged.

MARGOT
 (re: a framed degree on the
 wall)
 Lancelot Andrewes Lamar, J.D. Smells like
 old money to me.

LANCELOT
 (to Percival)
 Turns out she had her own money. But
 something about the whiff of N'Orleans
 aristocracy captured her imagination. I
 tried to dispel the vapors.

LANCELOT
 (to Margot)
 Daddy even forced me to keep an office at
 his old firm. But the first time I
 glanced at a deposition, I glazed over
 and absented myself forthwith, so I could
 devote myself full time to the pleasures
 of glacially slow dissolution in the true
 New Orleans style.

MARGOT
 I will absolutely drink to that.

She raises her glass. They toast, Margot's eyes locked on
 Lancelot's.

MARGOT
 And the house?

LANCELOT

The what?

MARGOT

The pink monstrosity.

(continuing the striptease)

Has that simply been consigned as well to
glacially slow dissolution in the true
New Orleans style?

LANCELOT

Oh, father would never allow that. So I
had to be very clever.

MARGOT

I can just imagine. Do you have a speck
of ice?

LANCELOT

I do.

He goes to an old fridge, cracks off some cubes.

Margot has managed to get herself down to her bloomers.

MARGOT

Thanks awfully. And a splash?

Lancelot, his mouth now a bit dry, obliges by putting ice
in her glass, refilling it and his own.

Margot sidles over to the door where an iron key hangs.

She takes down the key, locks the door.

MARGOT

My god, it sounds like the dungeon at
Chillon!

She laughs, turns to face Lancelot, a gleam in her eye.
As she moves towards him:

LANCELOT

(absently, to Percival)

Could any woman have been as lovely?

Without a pause, she moves into his arms and they kiss.

PERCIVAL

(rising)

I understand. You can stop now.

LANCELOT

That is so not true.

MARGOT
(to Lancelot, seductive
whisper)

I love the Garden District.

They kiss again. It quickly turns passionate and they fall onto a daybed and go at it.

As Percival strides towards the door -

8 INT. CHARTES-PONTCHARTRAIN - DAY (THE PRESENT)

Percival pacing, agitated.

Lancelot sitting on the bed, gazing down at his reflection in the shards of broken mirror on the floor.

LANCELOT
She was like a feast. She was a feast. I wanted to eat her. I ate her -

PERCIVAL
I get the picture.

LANCELOT
Oh, I doubt it. After all, you have no experience in this particular form. But that was my communion, Father. That sweet dark sanctuary guarded by the heavy gold columns of her thighs, the ark of her covenant. You know, they say sex is the closest we come to dying before we die. Because for one brief moment we don't give a shit about the political situation, the state of our investments, the slow disfigurement of flesh, the victory of gravity, the goddamn weather. We transcend.

BACK TO:

9 INT. BELLE ISLE CARRIAGE HOUSE - DAY (10 YEARS AGO)

As Margot and Lancelot make love, WIND RAPIDLY RISES OUTSIDE.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
Maybe you priests get that when you commune with God, I don't know.

THE BUILDING STARTS TO SHAKE, WIND SPATTERS RAIN AGAINST THE WINDOWS. WE HEAR THE HOWL OF AN ARRIVING HURRICANE.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

But "The Passion of Christ", the climax
at the crucifixion...

SUDDENLY all around their bed, **TONGUES OF FIRE SPRING
INTO BEING.**

AS SHE STARTS TO CLIMAX, WE ZOOM IN ON MARGOT'S CLOSED
EYES --

LANCELOT (V.O.)

Now that's a dreadful journey that ends
with a very different kind of
penetration.

SFX: THE BLOW OF HAMMER ON STEEL!

Margot's eyes snap open -- **BUT IT'S NOT LANCELOT WE SEE
REFLECTED IN THEM.**

LANCELOT (V.O.)

Jesus knew all too well: betrayal is
love's co-conspirator.

ANOTHER BLOW OF HAMMER ON STEEL and we OPEN UP TO REVEAL
MARGOT'S LOVER FROM BEHIND: HIS LONG BLACK HAIR, MUSCULAR
BODY.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

And betrayal alters the very shape of
time itself.

WE ARE NO LONGER IN THE CARRIAGE HOUSE, BUT IN A BEDROOM
WITH RED WALLS. **THE FLAMES CONTINUE TO RISE.**

A THIRD BLOW OF HAMMER ON STEEL, AND **BOOM!** AN EXPLOSION
OF FIRE CONSUMES THE ROOM AND THE FORNICATING COUPLE AS
THEY CLIMAX.

10

INT. FRONT HALL, BELLE ISLE - 1 YEAR AGO

THE BALCONY: Lancelot and Percival looking down at
Margot, at the foot of the stairs studying a script.

Lancelot heads towards the curved staircase.

LANCELOT

I read the script. Tried to, anyway. Some
of it is in Polish. And - and this is
interesting - there's a hurricane in the
story and they intended to create one for
effect. Wind machines and all that.

He pauses at an elaborate antique "weather center" mounted on the wall. THE BAROMETER READS 1000 MILLIBARS. He taps the glass.

LANCELOT

Now if that gets down to 100, one would be wise to batten down the hatches. Already fallen just a tad.

(to Percival)

What do you think of that? With a real hurricane on the way, they still set about concocting an ersatz one. They are a different breed, movie people.

A FLOOD OF LAUGHTER takes his attention down to the Hall, where Mirabelle (9) is dancing among THE CREW, dressed in satin, hoop skirts: a child's version of *Gone With the Wind*.

MARGOT

(scolding)

Mirabelle. Let them work.

LANCELOT

(to Percival)

Mirabelle charms everyone.

PERCIVAL

Margot's very charming as well.

LANCELOT

Not in the same way. Her charm was -- *transactional*. Mirabelle's charm is true.

MORE LAUGHTER FROM BELOW.

LANCELOT

You know they were gonna put her in the film. Write a part for her. She'd have been brilliant, too.

Down below, ANOTHER MAN joins Margot: JANOS JACOBY (mid-40s, film director).

LANCELOT

'Course they never finished it, did they. Maybe that's one of the reasons Mirabelle can't forgive me.

WITH MARGOT & JANOS: spinning out of control, Mirabelle falls into them, knocking them off balance.

MARGOT

Mirabelle! Get out of that outfit and behave. Where's your grandfather?

MIRABELLE

I don't know! Somewhere. He's tipsy.

MARGOT

Christ.

(to Janos)

Gimme a minute.

Janos watches her go, appreciating.

SHUTTER CLICK

WE'RE NOW WITH JANOS: Percival and Lancelot observing him as if looking at an exhibit in a museum.

LANCELOT

Janos Jacoby: our very own *auteur*.
Apparently brilliant, though the one film
Margot forced me to watch left me -
what's the word? -- *wanting*.

INSERT: CLIP FROM A BLACK & WHITE FILM

A NAKED WOMAN, standing in the snow, on a cliff edge overlooking a turbulent ocean, her incredibly long hair whipped by the winds.

NAKED WOMAN

(in Polish)

Love is Janus, the two-faced emotion!!

THE NAKED WOMAN JUMPS! But instead of falling, SHE LEVITATES UP INTO THE AIR.

SHUTTER CLICK

BACK TO SCENE:

LANCELOT

(to Percival)

I think it was called *The Devastating Blow*. But perhaps that was an inadequate translation. Then there was the rest of the Polish contingent.

SHUTTER CLICK

Now with WOJCIECH PIRAKOWSKI (40).

LANCELOT

Actor Wojciech Pirakowski, renowned in a dozen countries, I am told.

SHUTTER CLICK

Now with WIDOK LINIA (50).

LANCELOT (V.O.)

Apparently brilliant cinematographer, Widok Linia.

SHUTTER CLICK

Now with MERLIN ATWATER (mid-50s).

LANCELOT

Merlin Atwater, Janos's diehard American producer. Merlin was a man of great faith. In Janos, that is. Why, I am not certain. I believe I mentioned *The Devastating Blow*.

INSERT: CLIP IN BLACK & WHITE

The NAKED WOMAN AGAIN.

NAKED WOMAN

(crying out, in Polish)

Love is Janus, the two-faced emotion!!

AS SHE JUMPS - **FREEZE FRAME.**

LANCELOT (V.O.)

There were more.

INSERT: BRIEF CLIP FROM ANOTHER FILM

BIBLICAL-ERA ZOMBIES biting into ST. SEBASTIAN, his body pierced by a dozen arrows as he looks to heaven with an ecstatic gaze.

INSERT: BRIEF CLIP FROM ANOTHER FILM

BALD SIAMESE FEMALE TWINS in a Fellini-style circus stare deadpan into the lens.

BACK TO SCENE:

Lancelot and Percival strolling, unseen, through the Hall as set up continues.

LANCELOT

Janos's films had so far eluded an American audience. But Merlin was convinced this hurricane drama would be his breakout. Apparently faith knows no bounds. Margot said she found Janos's work -

INSERT: MARGOT, DIRECT TO CAMERA, tears in her eyes -

MARGOT

Painfully inspirational.

As she weeps:

LANCELOT (V.O.)

Apparently Merlin also found Margot inspirational.

INSERT: FILM CLIP. Margot weeping, half-naked on a Medieval rack being tortured by BUFF INQUISITORS.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

Merlin had seen her by chance in a satirical short at a forgettable little film festival in Biloxi.

INSERT: Merlin in the audience, rapt.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

And on that scant evidence he took her over to Poland to play a role in Janos's latest effort.

TITLE CARD: MILEC, POLAND - 10 YEARS AGO

11 EXT. CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, POLAND - THE GOLDEN HOUR

Outside the modernist building is A SKELETON CREW, Merlin, Janos, Widok behind the camera.

There's also A TRIO OF ACTORS: a younger, nervous Margot, Wojciech Pirakowski (also younger), as well as the formerly Naked Actress from *The Devastating Blow* (MAGDALENA).

Lancelot & Percival are here as well, strolling through the proceedings, unseen by the others.

JANOS

(to Margot)

Yes, it is a short scene, but a critical one. Pivotal.

LANCELOT
 (to Percival)
 Janos said "pivotal" a lot.

JANOS
 Absolutely pivotal. You are the vapid
 American who refuses to go into the
 church because she doesn't believe in
 God.

WIDOK
 As if that matters.

JANOS
 Exactly! In order to get you inside,
 where they intend to rob you, Magdalena
 seduces you as Wojciech intones the *Ave*
Maria.
 (calling out)
 Alright let's catch the light!

Janos moves into director position, Widok gets set,
 slate, etc. and as the scene starts -

BACK TO:

12

INT. FRONT HALL, BELLE ISLE - 1 YEAR AGO

Lancelot and Percival unseen as the set up continues.

Lancelot's unremarkable 18 year old daughter, Lucy Lamar,
 passes by, still chewing gum.

LANCELOT
 Did I mention daughter Lucy wanted to be
 in the film business rather badly?

Lucy joins actor TROY DANA (30) and YUMIKO KWON, a
 popular Asian actress (30).

LANCELOT
 She was particularly attracted to those
 two. She was finally 18, so maybe
 Hollywood would whisk her away and - as I
 said - take some of my pain with her.

TROY
 (to Lucy)
 You could join us when we head back.

LUCY LAMAR
 (amazed)
 No.

YUMIKO
We would love that.

CLOSE ON: Lucy's thrilled face, a kind of beauty shining through her unremarkable features.

LANCELOT (O.S.)
18 years - how is that possible?

MATCH CUT TO:

INSERT: ON GRAINY FILM STOCK, **LUCY COBB** (20s) in tennis whites. She grimaces, blocks the lens for a moment, then the shot widens as she nails a serve IN SLOW MOTION.

THE CLIP SLOWLY DISSOLVES INTO -

13

INT. ABSTRACT SPACE

The world has receded, gone quiet.

Lancelot sits on the edge of his bed from the sanitorium.

But now it sits in AN ALL WHITE NOTHINGNESS: no walls, no door, nothing superfluous. On the floor are shards of the broken mirror.

LANCELOT
(melancholy)
Did she die that long ago? We had so little time. Like sand. All of it.

REVEAL PERCIVAL, sitting in the chair from the room at Chartes-Pontchartrain. Nearby, an empty window frame hangs in space.

LANCELOT
But what do you know? You measure your time in eternities.

PERCIVAL
"All the time in this world and the next one too."

LANCELOT
That must be nice.

YUMIKO, TROY & LUCY HAVE MATERIALIZED - Yumiko and Troy paying affectionate attention to Lucy. Yumiko brushes Lucy's hair out of her eyes.

LANCELOT

(observing)

Passion is the bait, and we're more than willing to put the hook in our mouths. That's the root of it all.

TROY GOES OFF, VANISHES.

Yumiko hooks arms with Lucy and they walk past Lancelot, of course paying him no heed.

LANCELOT

(re: Lucy)

I don't like to be around her. Not that I wish her ill. After all, she is my child.

And -

(as if it proves his innocence)

- she also survived the conflagration, you may recall.

(beat, thinking)

Is that what you call it? In the End Times or whatever? "The Conflagration"?

PERCIVAL

"The Cleansing."

LANCELOT

Sounds like the same thing.

YUMIKO & LUCY EVAPORATE.

9 YEAR OLD MIRABELLE APPEARS, dressed in her *Gone With the Wind* outfit.

MIRABELLE

Dance with me, daddy.

SFX: a needle is placed down on a record - a slow jazzy instrumental of *The Saints Go Marchin'*. Mirabelle starts them off dancing.

MIRABELLE

Did you ever dance with mommy?

LANCELOT

We did.

MIRABELLE

Do you love mommy?

LANCELOT

I seem to recall.

MIRABELLE

I do.

LANCELOT

That's good.

MIRABELLE

(perplexed)

How can you love two people at the same time?

LANCELOT

I don't know.

MIRABELLE

Did you love Lucy's mom?

LANCELOT

I did.

MIRABELLE

So you can even fall in love more than once?

LANCELOT

Yes -- but it's different the second time around.

MIRABELLE

How?

LANCELOT

Your momma was more like an obsession.

Mirabelle stops the dance.

MIRABELLE

(ick?)

What does that mean?

MARGOT (O.S.)

Yeah, what does that mean?

MARGOT HAS MATERIALIZED.

LANCELOT

Obsession is just a very powerful love.

MARGOT

Is it? Look, they asked me to tell you they're gonna be setting up the back lawn for the hurricane scene.

LANCELOT

But not the carriage house.

MARGOT

They know to stay away from your *sanctum sanctorum*.

LANCELOT

Ours.

MARGOT

Actually, I'm gonna stay in the main house for the duration. It's easier. We work late, I can hang out, plan the next day, drop into bed.

PRODUCTION MANAGER (V.O.)

(disembodied, amplified)

Let's set for Scene 7.

MARGOT

That's me.

Margot walks away.

MIRABELLE

Where am I staying??

MARGOT

Your room in the carriage house, silly.

MIRABELLE

And grampa Tex?

MARGOT

With you all. He and Lance can share their dissolution.

MIRABELLE

What's that mean?

LANCELOT

It's okay. You'll stay with me. We belong together.

MARGOT STARTS TO EVAPORATE.

MARGOT

Though really? Nobody belongs to anybody. We merely intersect.

AND MARGOT IS GONE.

MIRABELLE
Adults don't make any sense.

SHE DANCES OFF, AND VANISHES.

PERCIVAL
You kick through the ashes, you have to
give the dead their due.

LANCELOT
Oh, shut up.

NOW, AS PERCIVAL EVAPORATES --

BACK TO:

14 INT. FRONT HALL, BELLE ISLE

The film shoot seamlessly reappears around Lancelot, at the base of the stairs with Margot.

MARGOT
(to Lancelot)
You need to get her off the set.

Surprised that he's being addressed directly in this reality:

LANCELOT
Who?

MARGOT
Who?!
(gestures)
Her!

And there's Mirabelle off aways IN CONVERSATION WITH JANOS.

PRODUCTION MANAGER
(amplified)
Let's get in position!

Margot heads up the stairs.

Confused, Lancelot goes towards Mirabelle.

SET DRESSER
Watch it!

Lancelot looks down: he's nearly stepped on a piece of prop glass. In fact, THE ENTIRE ENTRYWAY FLOOR IS NOW STREWN WITH WHAT LOOKS LIKE SHARDS OF MIRROR.

LANCELOT

Sorry.

Mirabelle meets him, takes his hand.

JANOS

(calling out)

I'll see you in the hurricane scene!

MIRABELLE

(calling out)

Okay!

(to Lancelot)

He's nice.

LANCELOT

Is he?

They arrive at VIDEO VILLAGE.

TEX DELACROIX (70, Margot's father) taps the director's chair next to him.

TEX

Come sit by your grampa, bella Mirabella.

Unhappy about it, Mirabelle nonetheless pouts into the chair.

Tex takes a pull from a flask; then with a devilish smile, holds it out to Lancelot.

TEX

You said you could use a drink.

LANCELOT

Did I?

Tex nods.

Mirabelle disapproves, but Lancelot takes the flask, drinks -- as if it was preordained.

Janos stations himself at a monitor. FROM THE FLOOR:

CLAPPER/LOADER

This is Scene 7, Take 1.

He claps the slate.

JANOS

And -- action!

FILM ACTION, seen both for real and on monitor: Margot (in character) descends the staircase seething resentment towards Troy (in character), collapsed on the shard-strewn marble floor.

MARGOT as GENEVIÈVE

When?? Tomorrow? The next day or the next?!

TROY as LANCELOT DU LAC

How can I know?? The horrible banality of the past encroaches on the pure future --

MARGOT as GENEVIÈVE

The past devours the future like a tape recorder, converting pure possibility into banality.

Wojciech (in character) passes through the shot, repeating in Polish:

WOJCIECH as ZROBIC GLUPCA

The distinction between past, present, and future is but a stubbornly persistent illusion.

At the foot of the stairs, Margot picks up a shard of "mirror".

MARGOT as GENEVIÈVE

The present is the tape head, the mouth of time.

NOW WITH LANCELOT: confused, anxious, a knot of barely contained fury. Unaware that anyone can hear him -

LANCELOT

And there I was, the Holy Fool.

Mirabelle looks over, concerned.

MIRABELLE

Daddy?

The SCRIPT GIRL shushes them. Janos glances over, irritated.

LANCELOT

Feeding them, housing them.

MIRABELLE

Daddy, what's wrong??

IN THE FILM: Margot and Troy, the shard of mirror in Margot's hand, poised on Troy's throat. BUT THEY'RE BOTH LOOKING TOWARDS LANCELOT AND THE VIDEO VILLAGE.

LANCELOT

(louder)

Giving them free rein to make their little movie --

JANOS

(fed up)

Cut! Cut!

(to Lancelot)

What the fuck?!

PRODUCTION MANAGER

(amplified)

Back to 1!

SMASH CUT TO:

15 INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - NIGHT

SILENCE.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

...Back to one...

WE'RE LOOKING AT AN OFFICIAL APPLICATION FORM OF SOME SORT.

We're zeroed in on Line 27, "Blood Type" -- and the letter 'O' in the answer space, written in pen.

REVEAL: Lancelot, dissipated, staring at the form on his desk, a glass of Bourbon close at hand, a half empty bottle.

He picks up the glass, looks at the circle of moisture left by the perspiring glass.

CLOSE IN ON: THE CIRCLE OF MOISTURE... WHICH TRANSFORMS INTO THE IRIS OF AN EYE -- GREEN, FLECKED WITH GOLD.

WE RECOGNIZE IT AS MIRABELLE'S EYE.

THE EYE BLINKS, A SHUTTER CLICKS --

16 INT. CHARTES-PONTCHARTRAIN - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

Lancelot looking out the window. Percival seated on the bed.

LANCELOT

They had been in production at the house for a week or so. The hurricane was on its way, though its arrival date was uncertain. Whether or not it would even make landfall was uncertain.

(wry smile)

Even the plot of the movie was uncertain. What was certain is that Mirabelle was not nearly as enthralled by the movie people as Lucy was. She had her heart set on going to a summer art camp up in Ponchatoula.

Tap, tap, tap from the other side of the wall.

LANCELOT

Don't answer. She can hear us, and she wants to know what we're talking about. But she doesn't need to know. It would pain her, I think.

Tap, tap...

LANCELOT

Shh, shh.

He moves to the wall, en route his shoe crunching on a shard of mirror.

PERCIVAL

We should clean that up -

LANCELOT

But not now. It's part of the story.

17

EXT. CEMETERY - FOLLOWING

Lancelot and Percival strolling through the cemetery.

LANCELOT

Few people realize that cemeteries make the best parks. No one uses them, they're almost always empty, and quiet. One can think.

PERCIVAL

Memento mori.

LANCELOT

"Remember you must die." -- Contrary to lore, you know, the dead tend to stay that way. By the way, looks like he's gone - your *parishioner*.

PERCIVAL

I didn't know him. We merely intersected.

LANCELOT

(smiles)

Then you are listening.

PERCIVAL

"The letter 'O' was Mirabelle."

LANCELOT

Yes... You know, the thing about blood type is there are certain inviolable laws. Only a few possible combinations and results are possible. That is to say, A+B equals A or B. A or B+O equals A or B. You see, O is recessive, so only O+O may equal O. Margot was type O...

(beat)

But I was not.

PERCIVAL

(soft)

I see.

LANCELOT

Yes.

18

INT. DINING ROOM, BELLE ISLE - EVENING (1 YEAR AGO)

THE WHOLE GANG is here around A HUGE TABLE littered with food and bottles.

They're all chatting, drinking, etc. - but at the moment, THERE IS NO SOUND.

At one end of the table is Lancelot, despondent.

BUT THERE'S MORE. HE LOOKS QUITE DIFFERENT: he's unshaven, dissipated, drunk and drinking. His clothes are unkempt, his hair's a mess; he looks like he smells.

Though he's not at the table, Percival lingers nearby.

LANCELOT

(to Percival)

For a while I grasped at straws.

(MORE)

LANCELOT (CONT'D)

Perhaps a mistake had been made regarding
Mirabelle's blood type, or Margot's or
mine.

Lancelot looks at Mirabelle, sitting beside him,
fidgeting.

LANCELOT

But the terrible simple truth was --
Mirabelle is not my child.

Sensing his eyes, Mirabelle looks up at him, half-smiles.

Then, as her smile fades back into boredom: **THE SOUND OF
THE DINNER PARTY FLOODS INTO THE MIX**, Tex's guffaw
leading the way.

Janos appears with a bottle.

JANOS

(to Lancelot)

Let me top you off.

As he pours:

LANCELOT

(to Percival)

With my own wine. So generous.

JANO

I must thank you for being such a
generous host.

LANCELOT

You should thank Margot.

JANOS

I will!

He grabs a seat next to Margot, thanks her, tops off her
glass as well.

Margot looks over, raises her glass to Lancelot, who
manages a thin smile.

Lancelot starts to drink --

PERCIVAL

(re: the wine)

You sure you want that?

LANCELOT

It is but a benediction.

PERCIVAL

For what?

LANCELOT

The search for the Unholy Grail, my friend. I mean, here we are at the Unholy Round Table -- Sir Percival and the rather untidy Lancelot.

PERCIVAL

More like an Agatha Christie, all the suspects in one room?

LANCELOT

I'll drink to that.

He does.

Then a drunk Widok drops into a chair beside him.

WIDOK

What did you think of the shot today?

LANCELOT

(disoriented)

The shot?

WIDOK

The shot, the shot!

His loud voice gets everyone's attention.

WIDOK

(re: Margot)

Geneviève descending the staircase!

(re: Troy)

Your namesake collapsed on the marble floor, strewn with the shattered remains of the love token he had forced on her.

LANCELOT

I suppose I'm still a bit vague on what the film is about.

WIDOK

(to the table)

He wants to know what the film is about!

General hilarity.

LANCELOT

(to Percival)

You know I always wondered if Margot might have had an affair.

(MORE)

LANCELOT (CONT'D)

I mean, she had many opportunities in the
libertine world of the cinema.

(re: drunk Widok)

Take this clown for instance.

SHUTTER CLICK

INSERT: CLIP FROM AN ECCENTRIC EURO ART FILM. A FLASH of
Margot and Widok having sex in an abandoned castle.

LANCELOT

Doesn't seem her type. But what do I
know.

SHUTTER CLICK

BACK TO SCENE:

WIDOK

He wants to know what the film is about!

General hilarity. Janos responds from down the table in a
loud voice:

JANOS

The simple answer is that we are re-
contextualizing the disastrous love
triangle of King Arthur, Lancelot and
Guinevere that ultimately led to the
destruction of the great "Camelot".

As the table responds:

LANCELOT

(to Percival)

Perhaps *herr Director*? Professor Plum in
the Ballroom?

SHUTTER CLICK

INSERT: CLIP FROM ANOTHER EURO ART FILM, this one in a
DECAYED BALLROOM. COUPLES dance. Meanwhile, Margot and
Janos have sex on the floor under a chandelier.

Janos picks up where he left off, pontificating as he
makes love:

JANOS

A love triangle, yes, but we are not
making a romance! Absolutely not! No, our
story is about Betrayal.

As they climax -

SHUTTER CLICK

BACK TO SCENE:

Continuing on, the dining room restored, Janos holding court, the table focused on him.

JANOS

Betrayal and revenge, the destruction of a kingdom! *That* is what lies at the heart of our enterprise.

General murmur of agreement.

JANOS

When our "Arthur" realizes the betrayal, he is like an astronomer discovering an asteroid on a collision course with the Earth - it is that shattering a revelation... Even though sexual betrayal is in fact an inconsequential thing, a criss-crossing of wires. I mean after all, do we own another person?? Do we even own the offspring, accidental or otherwise, of those couplings?

WIDOK

No fucking way.

JANOS

And still we perceive sexual betrayal as having mythic import, and we respond accordingly.

Shouts of "*Here Here!*" from around the table; everyone drinks.

LANCELOT

(to Percival)

Probably not. He'd never stop talking long enough to have sex.

Percival nods.

JANOS

We lash out, we destroy -- we are Samson tearing down the temple.

MARGOT

But our take on *Camelot* is very different!

Wojciech Pirakowski grabs her hand, kisses it - something not lost on Lancelot.

WOJCIECH
So very different!

LANCELOT
(to Percival)
It's almost too easy to imagine
Pirakowski.

SHUTTER CLICK

INSERT: CLIP FROM ANOTHER ART FILM. The Dining Room
converted into a LIBRARY.

A FLASH of Margot and Wojciech having sex against the
shelves, dragging books down as they screw.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
Reverend Green in the Library?

SHUTTER CLICK

INSERT: ANOTHER ART FILM CLIP. Now the Dining Room's a
BILLIARD PARLOR.

A FLASH OF Margot and Troy having sex on the felt.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
Mr. White in the billiard room? Hell,
throw in Mrs. Peacock for good measure.

Yumiko materializes, turning the tryst into a FLASH of a
3-way.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
Colonel Mustard in the Conservatory?

SHUTTER CLICK

INSERT: ANOTHER CLIP. Now we're in a CONSERVATORY.

A FLASH OF Margot and Merlin having sex among the plants.

LANCELOT (V.O.)
There's some logic in that. After all,
he's the one who discovered her.

As Merlin and Margot climax.

SHUTTER CLICK

BACK TO SCENE:

THE DINING ROOM RESTORED.

Margot laughs at something Janos said to her, drawing Lancelot's attention.

LANCELOT
 (to Percival)
 Who do you think Miss Scarlet was
 fucking?

PERCIVAL
 How do you know it was one of them?

LANCELOT
 How do you know God is real?

PERCIVAL
 Faith.

LANCELOT
 Well, there you go.

Mirabelle takes center stage:

MIRABELLE
 (pouting)
 I wanna get back to the bunny rabbit
 movie.

TEX
 (guffaws; to the room)
 She likes those runny babbits!
 (to Mirabelle)
 I told you you'd like those runny
 babbits!

He busts a gasket, the table joins in. Mirabelle is mortified.

LANCELOT
 (to Percival)
 My father in law financed their little
 blockbuster. He typecast himself as the
 self-centered, tunnel-visioned bore.
 Truth to tell, I think he got rich
 precisely because of those same
 qualities.

MARGOT
 (to Janos)
 There's a TV in the production room isn't
 there?

JANOS
 Several.

MARGOT

Why don't you two go upstairs and watch your movie?

MIRABELLE

(to Tex)

Can we??

TEX

Alright, bella bella. Let's go.

He gets up, totters.

MIRABELLE

He's drunk.

MARGOT

That's so unusual.

Laughter. As they depart:

TEX

(over his shoulder)

Save my good Bourbon!

Mirabelle hustles Tex out of the room.

WIDOK

Now the fun begins!

General agreement, pouring of wine.

JANOS

(to Lancelot)

So Lancelot is Lancelot!

LANCELOT

What?

JANOS

In our film, our "Camelot" - we keep Lancelot 'Lancelot' because it means "servant", which is perfection itself, is it not?

LANCELOT

(expressionless)

Absolute perfection.

JANOS

Servant of history, of fate. Servant of the Uhr Woman. This is Troy.

Applause. Troy bows. Janos makes the rounds, bottle in hand, pouring at each stop.

JANOS

Other names, we transmute. Take Guinevere, who Margot is playing. In our narrative she becomes "Geneviève" which translates to "woman of the people", as in "the progenitor of the race."

He moves on to Wojciech.

JANOS

Arthur is an appropriate name because it means brave, courageous. But it is a weak name, so we have renamed our Arthur Zrobic Glupca. Polish, it means --

JANOS, WOJCIECH & WIDOK

"Made a fool"!

Laughter all around.

LANCELOT

(his anger on a slow boil)

I have a stupid question.

That gets attention.

JANOS

Ask! I tell my actors: there are no stupid questions.

Shouts of "*Here Here!*"

LANCELOT

Why would a Polish director come to New Orleans to make a film about the dissolution of a medieval English utopia?

MARGOT

(appalled)
God, Lance.

JANOS

No no no! This is not a foolish question.

JANOS

But think! THINK! What is New Orleans but a crucible?? Of history, of culture, people, music, ideas. A place of arrivals and departures. Fat Tuesday, Ash Wednesday --

(so fabulous)

Those funerals...

(MORE)

JANOS (CONT'D)

French, African, indigenous populations,
the white interloper. And the horrific
annual degradation of touristic voyeurism
that is Mardi Gras. My God! Where else
but in New Orleans *could* we tell our
story??

WIDOK

Except -

Everyone turns to him as he pours himself a shot of
Vodka.

WIDOK

- in Poland.

He throws back the shot.

JANOS

Yes yes! Because the history of here, and
the history of our homeland are a perfect
alignment.

MERLIN

And frankly, if I may be crass -

WIDOK

You are American. Be my guest.

Laughter, if not from Merlin.

MERLIN

If we want *distribution* in the States, it
has to be *set* somewhere in the States.

(to Lancelot)

We chose N'Orleans because it spells
"Exotic" for most Americans.

WIDOK

Distributors. Fuck 'em.

More laughter as Widok tosses back another shot of Vodka.

MERLIN

(shrugs)

Someone's got to be practical.

TROY

Fuckin' N'Orleans, man! Goddamn
birthplace of jazz!

Shouts of agreement.

TROY

Louis Armstrong! Professor fuckin'
Longhair!

YUMIKO

Mahalia Jackson!

JANOS

Don't forget Truman Capote, Lillian
Hellman, Tennessee Williams -

YUMIKO

Anne Rice!

TROY

I vanna suck your blood, baby.

He bores into her neck, Yumiko squeals in mock, sensual
pain.

JANOS

God yes. The music, the food -- the
stories!

LANCELOT

And the slavery, and the disasters -
Katrina for instance.

JANOS

Yes, the fucking disasters! But that is
exactly what makes Poland and New Orleans
twin crucibles.

WIDOK

But!

JANOS

But!

(serious)

Like any crucible, periodically they must
be purged. The hurricane is our metaphor
for purgation, our Katrina. Clarifying,
stripping away the excesses from that
thick history, the calcifications that
have built up over time.

LANCELOT

Some might disagree.

WIDOK

Such as??

LANCELOT

The people who lost their homes? Their
lives?

MARGOT

(lighten up)
Lance, come on.

JANOS

No, he's right.

JANOS

But our job, the job of art, is not only
creation and *homage*, but as well to strip
away the petrification of ideas and
presumptions that have fossilized over
time.

WIDOK

No!!

He slams his glass on the table, surprising everyone but
Janos.

WIDOK

We cannot be submerged by history!

JANOS

Therein lies asphyxiation.

WIDOK

(as he pours)
It's about survival.

He throws back another shot.

YUMIKO

(sigh)
And here I thought every story was a love
story.

Troy kisses her. Lucy coos.

JANOS

Christ, no. The Poles *survived*
subjugation under Russian, Prussian,
German overlords. We fought to preserve
our identity, and this is a direct line
to New Orleans! The list is like one long
soul crushing war -

WIDOK

After war after fucking war.

He tosses back another shot of Vodka.

JANOS

What's past is not past in this city. It is a haunted place, saturated with ghosts.

LANCELOT

I'll give that an "Amen."

He raises his glass in Margot's direction. She looks back, perplexed.

JANOS

It is our job to summon those ghosts! The persecutions, the scapegoats of history. It is precisely this madness that gives our story weight. Camelot fell from a sexual indiscretion. The marriage of Arthur and Guinevere was political. Lancelot was Arthur's right hand man, defender of his queen, and yet he fucked Guinevere. What, there wasn't any other cunt around??

WIDOK

There's always cunt.

Another shot of Vodka.

JANOS

In fucking Guinevere, he fucked Arthur, and in fucking Arthur, he fucked a kingdom. And so our "King Arthur" goes mad trying to will himself to obliterate the lovers.

SMASH CUT TO:

19

INT. JEWEL BOX THEATER - TIME UNKNOWN

ON SCREEN: AN UNEDITED CLIP. Wojciech in costume, A WIND MACHINE (including "rain") BLOWING SO HARD HE HAS TO FIGHT TO STAND UPRIGHT. A full on mad scene --

WOJCIECH

(as Zrobic Glupca)

Rage you cataracts and hurricanes, you sulfurous and thought-executing fires! And thou, all-shaking thunder, smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world, crack nature's moulds spill at once that which made ingrateful man!

JANOS (O.S.)
 (from the film)
 And -- action!

WOJCIECH
 (as Zrobic Glupca)
 Rage you cataracts and hurricanes - !

BACK TO:

20

INT. DINING ROOM, BELLE ISLE - EVENING

Everyone where we left them, Janos making the rounds.

JANOS
 Geneviève returns to her Cajun roots, to
 live out her life among her Francophone
 descendants, a priestess of Haitian
 Voodoo. Lancelot becomes an initiate of
 the Bhavana Order in the Monongahela.
Both embrace celibacy -

<p>LANCELOT (to Percival) Is he talking about you?</p>	<p>JANOS - leaving Glupca no choice but to walk into the hurricane as it crashes on the levee -</p>
--	---

JANOS
 - a modern day Lear swept into the
 stratosphere where he has a revelation
 moments before he's flung back to Earth,
 found 3 days later crucified on the
 splintered remains of a former slave
 dwelling on the estate of his forebears -

<p>LANCELOT This is insane...</p>	<p>JANOS - Belle Isle, which in the film we have rechristened <i>Belle Mort</i> --</p>
--	---

JANOS
 Beautiful Death.

Widok raises his glass of Vodka, weeping.

WIDOK
 Beautiful -
 (tosses back the shot)
 Death.

And with that - CLUNK - he passes out. A few of the others casually look over, unconcerned.

JANOS

Obviously, he is the new Christ, purified in the tempest.

LANCELOT
(dazed)
Wait.

JANOS
- purified in the tempest.

LANCELOT
No, wait, stop!

JANOS
Purified - !

LANCELOT

STOP!!

THE ROOM FREEZES IN TABLEAU, all but Lancelot and Percival.

Lancelot stands, dizzy, disoriented. And with him we get a few moments to really take in the debauchery of the room - everyone drunk and drinking, Widok passed out, Janos on his soapbox, Margot enthralled...

LANCELOT

What the hell is this? Who the fuck are these people???

He looks at Margot, moves to her, takes in her laughing face.

LANCELOT

Even the one I know, I don't know.

(to Percival, weary)

You must have -- must have had a moment like this, when you looked at your life and wondered how the hell you'd gotten where you were. - Maybe when you decided to become a man of the cloth?

LANCELOT
Some crossroads or whatever --

PERCIVAL
I think we all have those moments.

LANCELOT

No. I think just the opposite. I think maybe before the last breath, people have that moment. I think last words, or last intentions or whatever, are almost always "Wait, I meant to - "

(re: Janos)

(MORE)

LANCELOT (CONT'D)

Maybe he's right. A moment before
crucifixion -- a revelation.

He looks out the French doors. THE NIGHT IS TRANSFORMING
INTO BRILLIANT DAY.

LANCELOT

We just move along, don't we. Grow up. Do
things. Love, hate, get hurt, work, pray,
curse, forget -- *forget* most of all.

He moves to the door.

LANCELOT

Things acquire a life of their own, and
we live in the slipstream.

He opens the door, blinded by the daylight, and finds
himself -

21 EXT. STADIUM - FLASHBACK

- In the players entrance tunnel in a stadium. THE DIN OF
A CHEERING CROWD fills the air.

After a moment, as if in a trance, he walks towards the
field.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

I was twenty-one when I achieved my
single small immortality.

At the end of the tunnel, on the field, A PLAYER hurtles
past -

AND WE ARE SUDDENLY THRUST INTO HIS POV, running towards
the distant goal posts, the crowd in a frenzy.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

I'd caught an Alabama punt standing on
the back line of the end zone and ran it
out.

REVEAL: Lancelot (aged 21) sprinting down the field, the
opposing players in hopeless pursuit.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

I could feel every muscle, every tendon
and nerve working in absolute concert. A
perfect animal. A perfect machine.

Lancelot crosses the goal line and slams the football to
the ground. The CROWD ERUPTS. Then -

BACK IN THE TUNNEL: SILENCE.

Back with older Lancelot, Percival now by his side in the echoing emptiness.

LANCELOT

(amazed)

The clarity of it. The simplicity. The ball, the catch, the run, the touchdown, the cheers of the crowd. 'A' plus 'B' equals 'C', no ifs ands or buts.

(to Percival)

110 yards. Still on the record books as the longest punt return in history. The beauty is, it always will be. It's like running the mile in zero minutes.

BACK TO:

22

INT. DINING ROOM, BELLE ISLE - NIGHT

Lancelot gently closes the French door as BRILLIANT DAY TURNS BACK INTO DARK NIGHT.

LANCELOT

(to Percival)

There was no way I could know that, on the yardstick of my life, I was at the summit in that moment. A touchdown? That's it?

He takes in the frozen dining room tableau.

LANCELOT

The rest of it just a rabbit hole to this?

PERCIVAL

"I can't go on. I'll go on."
(off Lancelot's look)
Beckett. *Non possum ire, et ire.*

LANCELOT

Yes. Well, there are so many gods, aren't there?

THE ROOM SUDDENLY COMES BACK TO LIFE.

JANOS

Obviously, he is the new Christ, purified in the tempest!

People pound the table, cheer.

WOJCIECH

And thank you New Orleans: we have a real hurricane on the way!

Cheers all around. Widok comes to enough to say:

WIDOK

Beautiful...

He passes out again.

MARGOT

(really in it)

It's Fate. This city, destroyed, rebuilt then destroyed again, rebuilt again. We're in a seat of revelation. Without decimation there can be no revelation.

JANOS

Oh, I love this woman.

He kisses her hand.

WOJCIECH

Europe was wiped out by a microbe carried by a flea.

JANOS

The Native Americans were destroyed by a virus.

WOJCIECH

A hundred years ago, a hundred million people died of the flu.

JANOS

Was this inevitable?

He looks around the table, everyone thoughtfully drunk.

JANOS

Was Christ inevitable? Was Hitler? Is hatred of those who are not me inevitable?

He looks at Margot. Then at Lancelot.

JANOS

Is love inevitable?

Widok tries to come to, but it's too much effort and he passes back out.

JANOS
 (to Lancelot)
 You must ask yourself: can we change the
 past? No. But we can choose to create the
 future.

Everyone is awed.

Janos slides back into his chair, picks up a bottle, goes
 to pour, but only a single drop drips out.

JANOS
 Such sadness...

Lancelot looks around at the stuporous group. There are
 many many empty bottles.

LANCELOT
 (absently)
 I live among aliens.

After a few moments, he works at standing.

LANCELOT
 (re: the empty bottle)
 Allow me.

JANOS
 Thank you, my friend -- No! My host!
 (taking in Margot)
 Our hosts.

He raises his glass, and all follow suit. Lancelot could
 give a shit.

23 INT. FRONT HALL, BELLE ISLE - FOLLOWING

Lancelot, rather drunk, standing by THE OPEN CELLAR DOOR.

But he changes his mind, and instead goes up **THE STAIRS**.

He pauses at the 'weather station' - THE BAROMETER READS
 900 MILLIBARS. It's dropped. He taps the glass.

As he continues up, he sings Dylan's *Shelter from the
 Storm* (accapella and not brilliantly):

LANCELOT
*'Twas in another lifetime, one of toil
 and blood. When darkness was a virtue and
 the road was full of mud -*

He's up on **THE BALCONY LEVEL** now, heading for a room down the hall, the shifting light of a TV set flickering on the wall.

LANCELOT

*I came in from the wilderness, a creature
void of form -*

HE ARRIVES AT THE OPEN DOOR, looks in to see Mirabelle asleep on a couch, Tex passed out next to her.

LANCELOT

*"Come in" she said, "I'll give you
shelter from the storm".*

He goes into -

24 INT. SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The TV is on without sound. On it, A WEATHER FORECAST showing clouds swirling in the Atlantic.

Lancelot switches off the TV, picks up Mirabelle who puts her arms around his neck by instinct. Topsy, he falters, but manages to hold on -- for dear life.

25 INT. ENTRYWAY, BELLE ISLE - FOLLOWING

As Lancelot carries Mirabelle towards the open front door, we hear a soft burble of voices coming from the dining room.

26 EXT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - FOLLOWING

Lancelot carries Mirabelle towards the Carriage House.

27 INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - FOLLOWING

UPSTAIRS, MIRABELLE'S BEDROOM:

Lancelot lays Mirabelle down on her bed, brushes back her hair.

LANCELOT

(whisper)

Bella bella, Mirabelle.

He kisses her eyes, watches her sleep.

UPSTAIRS, MASTER BEDROOM:

Lancelot stands, taking in the room. The unmade bed, only one side slept in.

DOWNSTAIRS, MAIN ROOM:

Lancelot taking in the room. His desk, the documents and mess, the near empty bottle of Bourbon.

KITCHEN:

Lancelot stands by the sink, the bottle of Bourbon in hand.

After a few moments, he pours the contents down the drain.

When it's empty, he opens a cabinet, pulls out another bottle from among many, and proceeds to pour the contents down the drain.

Then more feverishly, he takes out bottle after bottle, emptying them all, as if exorcising a demon.

When the last is empty, he collapses to the floor, exhausted. For a moment, he sits in silence.

Then Mirabelle appears in the doorway.

MIRABELLE

Daddy?

Lancelot startles.

LANCELOT

What is it, honey bear?

MIRABELLE

I can't sleep.

Lancelot extends his arms.

LANCELOT

Come here, sweet girl.

Mirabelle goes to him, sits in his lap, holds him as he rocks her.

MIRABELLE

Are you ok, daddy?

Lancelot pulls his daughter close, holds her with all the strength of love he can summon - all the while wracked by deep, wrenching sobs.

We give this its due. Then -

28

INT. CHARTES-PONTCHARTRAIN CENTER - (THE PRESENT)

Lancelot gazes out the window at the cemetery. Percival sits in the chair, opposite.

LANCELOT

Margot was wrong. We do not merely "intersect". We are bound into the orbits of other human beings, and for that we are accountable... for wherever it might take us, whatever it might create.

(to Percival)

I think I was purifying myself for a quest.

PERCIVAL

For what?

LANCELOT

I don't know. Not the Holy Grail... The Unholy Grail?

PERCIVAL

What would that be?

LANCELOT

I don't know. A sin? Evil?

He moves back to the shattered mirror, crouches, starts to collect the shards into a mound.

LANCELOT

Though there really is no evil in our world anymore, is there. Terrible things happen, of course, but we label the perpetrators crazy, or misguided, narcissistic, gullible. It's not their fault. And we are not at fault. It is the system. And the systems grow more diabolical by the hour.

PERCIVAL

You've cut yourself.

LANCELOT

Have I.

He looks down. Blood drips onto the mirror fragments from a cut on his finger. He lets it drip.

LANCELOT

(a certainty)

We tumble into the orbits of other people without thinking, and for that we are accountable.

He goes to the sink, holds a rag to his cut. Turns to look at Percival.

LANCELOT

(half a smile)

Look at your face. Say it, go on.

PERCIVAL

Say what?

LANCELOT

"For Christ's sake Lance, what have you gone and done now?"

PERCIVAL

You've sinned.

LANCELOT

Have I. Or was that conflagration simply one more purification at the start of yet another quest?

29

INT. CARRIAGE HOUSE - NIGHT (1 YEAR AGO)

Seen from a distance, framed by the kitchen doorway, Lancelot weeps as he rocks Mirabelle in his lap.

LANCELOT (V.O.)

All I know is that overnight I became sober, clear-eyed and alert. Watchful as a tiger at a water hole.

AS WE FADE TO BLACK -

LANCELOT (V.O.)

Something was stirring.

- END PILOT -