

SIMONE

by

Andrew Niccol

FADE IN:

ON BRIGHT, OUT-OF-FOCUS, OVAL-SHAPED COLORS.

The colored shapes dart around the screen -- the impression of looking through a kaleidoscope.

As the image comes into sharp focus, we discover that we are inside a CANDY BOWL. A MAN'S FINGERS are frantically removing all the cherry-flavored pieces of candy.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

The man performing this curious task is writer/producer/director, VIKTOR TARANSKY, forties, conservatively dressed in suit and tie. He sits alone at an empty craft service table outside a cavernous soundstage, some distance from the rest of the film set -- a breeze blows the table's paper cloth.

Viktor finishes sorting. Finding no trash can to deposit the rejected cherry candy, he scoops them into his pocket.

A young headset-clad P.A. hurriedly approaches. He looks ill.

P.A.
Mr. Taransky --

Viktor reads the young P.A.'s panicked expression.

VIKTOR
She's walking?... Don't tell me
she's walking.
(blood slowly draining
from his face)
She is not walking... She can't
walk.

EXT. TRAILER - DAY

NICOLA ANDERS, twenty-something, A-list actress, beautiful face scowling, is supervising her ASSISTANT ferrying clothes from a movie trailer to a limousine. VIKTOR desperately follows after Nicola.

VIKTOR
-- Nicola! How was your massage?

NICOLA
You're in breach.

VIKTOR
-- Is this about the new pages? --
I made the changes you wanted,
you're in virtually every scene --

NICOLA
(wheeling on him)
It's not the size of the role,
Viktor.
(suddenly very cool)
Am I or am I not contractually
entitled to the biggest trailer on
the set?

VIKTOR
(regarding the enormous
silver fish behind them,
confused)
It's the biggest on earth! I
swear! It's a 50-foot Airstream --
they don't make them any longer
than that.

NICOLA
Taller, Viktor.

VIKTOR
Taller? What?

Viktor looks up in horror. The trailer next to Nicola's does indeed appear to be fractionally taller.

NICOLA
(walking away)
You've insulted me for the last
time.

Viktor looks to the tires. His face suddenly brightens.

VIKTOR
Nicola, it's just the tires --
they're over-inflated! I can fix
it!

Viktor grasps the air nozzle on a tire and begins desperately stabbing at it with a ballpoint pen. Air hisses out.

VIKTOR
See, it's lower already.

Nicola ignores Viktor, marching towards her limo with her PUBLICIST. Abandoning the trailer, Viktor hurries after her.

VIKTOR
I beg you. You can't do this to
me.

NICOLA
(looking back)
I had three other offers. I only
signed on to this picture out of...
loyalty.

VIKTOR
Then show some. They'll shut me
down!

NICOLA
(opening the car door)
It wasn't working anyhow. The
scene with the thousand geese -- I
don't understand this film. I
don't think anyone will understand

it. I already put out a press release -- citing "creative differences".

Viktor stops, nods resignedly -- suddenly very calm.

VIKTOR

You know what, Nicola, you're right.

(picking up her last piece of luggage)

Here, let me help you with that.

(holding the door for her)

You ought to go. The truth is I don't deserve you. This film doesn't deserve you. Frankly, it deserves much, much better. The reason it's not working is because you're not about the work.

Nicola is stunned.

VIKTOR

(to the limo driver)

To Hell, please.

The door slams and the limo roars away. Viktor looks to the still hissing trailer tire. The CREW regards Viktor apprehensively.

VIKTOR

(to the crew)

What are you looking at? Get back to work.

The crew is uncertain what work there is to do.

INT. BEDROOM - "SUNRISE, SUNSET" - NIGHT

In an ornate bedroom, NICOLA lies on her death bed under a veil of netting. A distraught man, HAL, sits close by.

NICOLA

(whispered)

Jack... are you there?

HAL

I'm here. I'm right beside you.

A NUN enters.

NUN
(to Hal)
You should really go now.

NICOLA
No, it's alright. Please, let him
stay.

The nun withdraws. Hal holds his face in his hands, almost
breaking down.

HAL
(a glance to heaven)
What kind of cruel God is it that
would take you away from me?

NICOLA
The same one who brought me to you.

HAL
No... I cannot accept it. If
something like this can happen.
What...
(struggling to find the
words)
What is it for?

NICOLA
(smiles through her pain)
-- Why are we here? Is that what
you're asking, Jack?... Why are we
here? No why. Just here.

Nicola dies peacefully.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - STUDIO - DAY

VIKTOR sits with leading man HAL, THREE EXECUTIVES and studio
head ELAINE CHRISTIAN, watching a rough assembly of the film.
It ends with a close up of NICOLA ANDERS.

The lights go up. The image of Nicola fades off the screen.

EXECUTIVE 1
She's good. You can hardly tell
she's reading off a teleprompter.

VIKTOR
(ignoring him)
I've analyzed the footage. We've
got almost everything we need in

the can. If we rework the script,
we can finish the film without her.

EXECUTIVE 2

(forceful shake of the
head)

According to the writ her attorneys
filed at noon today. They'll sue
if the film is released with Nicola
in a single frame.

VIKTOR

(more anxious)

So we'll re-cast.

HAL

Nicola Anders is the only actress
who can play that role.

VIKTOR

(incredulous)

It's a re-make, Hal. Anders is not
bigger than this picture.

Elaine finally speaks up.

ELAINE

Of course she is. No other name is
going to sign on now and risk
offending her.

VIKTOR

We don't need a name. We'll cast
an unknown.

HAL

I won't play opposite an unknown.

ELAINE

We can't sell an unknown. Nicola's
soured on the project and we have
to accept that. If we ever want to
be in the Nicola Anders business
again, we have to cut our losses
and shelve the picture.

The executives, leading man and director nod sagely.

VIKTOR

(aghast)

No! You will not give in to that

blackmailing bitch!

ELAINE

(a wince, addressing
everyone but Viktor)

Excuse us.

Elaine ushers Viktor out of the screening room.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

ELAINE and VIKTOR talk in the shadow of an enormous soundstage. They speak more freely in each other's company.

ELAINE

God, Viktor. Why do you always
have to make things so difficult
for yourself?

VIKTOR

Difficult. I'm difficult.

He produces a handful of candy from his pocket.

VIKTOR

(referring to the candy)
-- Do you know what these are,
Elaine?

ELAINE

(talking a piece of candy
and eating it)
Hmm... Mike and Ike's.

VIKTOR

Not just any Mike & Ike's -- cherry
Mike & Ike's. Do you know why I,
Viktor Taransky, two-time Academy
Award nominated director --

ELAINE

-- Viktor, that was Short Subject.

VIKTOR

-- overseeing the most cherished
movie project of my career, am
walking around with a pocketful of
cherry Mike & Ike's?

Elaine takes a seat in a nearby studio cart as Viktor paces.

ELAINE

-- I have a feeling you're going to tell me.

VIKTOR

-- I'll tell you why. It is because Miss Nicola Anders, supermodel with a SAG card God's gift to cinema, has it written into her contract that all cherry Mike & Ike's be removed from her candy dish along with strict instructions that any room she walks into should have seven packs of cigarettes waiting for her three of them opened, that there be a personal jacuzzi within eighty paces of her dressing room, and that any time she travels, her nanny must fly with her first class.

ELAINE

-- What's wrong with that?

VIKTOR

Elaine, she doesn't have any children!

(grabbing her arm)

Don't you see? We're being held hostage by 12 men and 5 women who someone somewhere has decreed are the A-list.

ELAINE

The public decides who's on that list.

VIKTOR

Please.

ELAINE

It's the truth. Those 17 superstars are our insurance policy. We can't open -- can't make a profit without them.

VIKTOR

We can hardly make a profit with them. Up-front salary, back-end deal, perks, per diem, percentages -- They're mocking us, Elaine.

We're at their mercy.

(staring wistful, into
space)

We always had movie stars but they used to be our stars. We used to decide who would play what role. We told them what to wear, what to say, who to date. When they were under contract, we could change their names if we wanted to -- more than once!

ELAINE

(regarding him as if he's
insane)

You realize you're nostalgic for an era you weren't even born in?

VIKTOR

(irritated at her
infuriating logic)

Well, I do remember why I started out in this business -- you seem to have forgotten -- working in New York with Cassevetes -- we were trying to do something important, shine a light in that darkened cinema --

ELAINE

(rolling her eyes)

-- It's called a projector.

VIKTOR

(ignoring her)

-- Illuminate hearts and minds with a ray of truth.

ELAINE

Listen, Viktor, I have good memories of those days too -- but this isn't about that or you or me or some high-minded ideal. This is business.

VIKTOR

Spare me.

ELAINE

(gesturing at the studio
lot)

-- Christ, Viktor, look around.
What do you think pays for all
this? This is about investment and
return. Those days in New York...
that's... it's over.

A pause. Viktor reads Elaine's face.

VIKTOR

You're not renewing my contract.

ELAINE

How can I? Your last three
pictures tanked. The board is
giving me hell. No bankable star
will work with you after this. If
you just compromised... a little.

Viktor eats some of the candy in his hand as he takes in the
news.

VIKTOR

(rueful smile)

-- Well, it's not every day you're
fired by the mother of your own
child.

Elaine also eats some more candy -- a curiously intimate
moment between them.

ELAINE

(softening, a heart-to
heart)

I'm not taking away your daughter,
just your deal. You and I both
know, after the divorce I kept you
on for old time's sake, so you
could still hold your head up in
front of Lainey. I called what's
his name at Warner's. He said he'd
take a meeting -- in July. I've
fought for you Viktor...

(voice trails off)

You want to talk severance?

VIKTOR

(staring off into the
distance, face hardening)

You can have everything -- office,
car, assistants -- all I want is
the picture.

ELAINE
(confused)
The picture's dead.

VIKTOR
So there's no problem -- I can have
the rights, the negative too?

ELAINE
(believing she's getting
off lightly)
They're yours. But how are you
going to finish it? Without a star
there's no movie.

VIKTOR
I don't need a star. All I need is
an actor -- I'll reshoot the part,
cut out Nicola and replace her with
a real actor. A real leading lady.

ELAINE
Even if you find her, you know the
problem with unknowns, Viktor. If
they're good, they get known. And
then you're back to sorting their
candy... and worse.
(kissing him on the cheek
as she departs in her
studio golf cart)
I'm sorry, Viktor.

Viktor watches her depart down the canyon of stages, left
alone on the deserted lot.

EXT. STUDIO ENTRANCE - DUSK

Twenty NICOLA ANDERS' FACES jiggle into frame. VIKTOR's face
appears amongst them.

They are cardboard figures, standing together in the trailer
of an electric cart. A WORKMAN is collecting the promotional
standees from around the lot.

VIKTOR places his hands on the neck of a cardboard cut-out --
we sense he is about to rip her head off -- when a fourteen
year old girl, LAINEY, appears beside him, carrying a laptop
computer.

LAINEY

Hi, Dad.

VIKTOR
(slightly ashamed)
Hello, sweetheart.

Viktor, embarrassed by his childishness, steps aside for the suspicious workman who carries the standee away.

Lainey smiles sweetly. She hugs him.

LAINNEY
I'm sorry Mom canned you.

VIKTOR
(shrugging)
It's really... not anything,
Lainey. It's just --

LAINNEY
Don't feel too bad.
(glancing to a standee)
Mom runs the place and they still
walk all over her. You're better
off out of it.

VIKTOR
(regarding his daughter)
You look very grown up. What are
you doing? You meeting your mom
for dinner?

She glances towards the entrance where Lainey's mother, ELAINE, and her dependable, uncomplicated businessman boyfriend, KENT, wait beside Elaine's car.

LAINNEY
(reluctant admission)
Kent got tickets to the ballet.

Viktor shakes the idea of Kent and Elaine from his head.

VIKTOR
(trying to convince
himself as much as
Lainey)
I'm going to finish the picture,
sweetheart. It's important.

LAINNEY
(not quite convinced)

I know you'll do it, Dad. You're
Viktor Taransky.

Lainey kisses the forlorn Viktor goodbye. She runs to her
mother and Kent.

VIKTOR
(to himself)
That's right. I'm Viktor Taransky.

EXT. STUDIO BUILDING - SOME DISTANCE AWAY - DUSK

From a distance ELAINE and KENT regard the lonely figure of
VIKTOR.

KENT
You had no choice, Elaine. He's a
liability.

ELAINE
(wistful look to Viktor)
He also happens to be the most
talented man I've ever known.

Elaine climbs in the car as Lainey approaches.

EXT. STUDIO BACKLOT - TRAM - DAY

CLOSE UP on a copy of "Variety". The front page banner
headline: "ANDERS RIDES OUT OF 'SUNSET' -- Cites Creative
Differences"

The man reading the trade paper sits in the back of a tram on
a studio tour -- HANK ALENO. He wears a pair of spectacles
with one lens blacked out, his head tilted on one side. It
is an item buried on the inside pages that catches Hank's one
good eye.

TARANSKY CALLS A-LIST:
"OVER-PRICED, OVER-PAMPERED PRIMA DONNAS"
- Director's Future Now In Doubt -

The tram pauses. The TOUR GUIDE keeps up a commentary.

TOUR GUIDE
-- On your left, the house where
Clariss Commodore uttered those now
immortal words, "If that door
doesn't hold, stand behind me".
And coming up on your right --

When the tram departs, we discover that Hank has exited the tram and is hiding in the facade of a New York subway entrance. The tag around his neck reads, "VISITOR -- Stay With The Tour".

EXT. STUDIO GATE - NIGHT

VIKTOR wheels a stack of film cans on a dolly while holding several framed black and white photographs of screen legends under his arm.

HANK, hiding in the shadows of the soundstages, spies Viktor. He hurries towards him as Viktor approaches his antiquated Bentley.

HANK

-- Mr. Taransky, Mr. Taransky...
thank God. I've been trying to see
you, calling -- Your assistant
wouldn't put me through. I told
her it was a matter of life and
death. I was afraid I wouldn't get
to you in time --

VIKTOR

(using his stack of film
cans as a barrier)
-- Please, get away from me.

HANK

I did it, Mr. Taransky. I licked
skin. I licked hair. I licked
every part of her.

VIKTOR

(more disturbed, fearing
he is dealing with a
pervert)
You want me to call Security?

HANK

I have her, Mr. Taransky. The
answer to your prayers.
(producing the "Variety"
article, conspiratorial)
The answer to this.

VIKTOR

(regarding the article)
I was misquoted.

HANK

I have your new leading lady...
(indicating the bulge in
his pocket)
... right here in my pants.

Viktor takes a step back, concerned once again about the man's motives.

HANK

(trying to reassure)
It's me, Mr. Taransky. Don't you recognize me? -- The Future of Film conference in San Jose. Hank... Hank Aleno. I was keynote speaker. You must remember my speech... "Who Needs Humans?"

VIKTOR

(faint glimmer of recognition)
That's right. You were booed off the stage. That's got to be -- ?

HANK

-- Eight years ago. In that whole time, I never left my computer.

VIKTOR

(wary)
Good for you, Hank.

HANK

(referring to his covered eye)
Good and bad. They think that's what caused this. Me eye tumor. Microwaves from the screen. It's the size of a grapefruit. Heavy too.

VIKTOR

(regarding the pathetic figure with the tilted head)
I'm sorry.

HANK

Don't be. It was worth it.

Hank once again indicated the bulge in his pocket. Viktor

now understands the significance of the gesture.

HANK

You have to see her.

VIKTOR

(loading cans into the
car)

I've seen them all before.

HANK

Not like this --

VIKTOR

(patronizing smile)

Come on, Hank. A synthespian,
virtual actor -- ?

HANK

(irritated)

-- We call them "vactors".

VIKTOR

I need flesh and --

HANK

-- Flesh is weak.

VIKTOR

-- a living, breathing actor -- I
can't work with a fake.

Viktor loads his film cans into the car.

HANK

(pointing to Nicola in
Variety)

You already do. But my actor won't
get old, fat, lazy or drunk --
won't throw tantrums, demand a body
double, script changes or a bigger
trailer.

(whispers, conspiratorial)

The Disney Corporation has been
using artificial actors for years.

VIKTOR

That's the point, Hank. No matter
how good they are, they're still
Mickey Mouse. Everyone's tried.
Everyone's failed. It can't be

done.

HANK

It can -- with my new computer code, you and me, we can do it together.

VIKTOR

I don't know anything about computers.

HANK

That's why you're so perfect. You have something I don't have.

VIKTOR

What's that?

HANK

An eye -- for performance. You know the truth when you see it. I know. I've seen your movies. I love your movies.

VIKTOR

You do?

HANK

"Straw God" changed my life.

VIKTOR

You saw that?

HANK

I've seen every frame of your work. You're the only filmmaker in Hollywood with the artistic integrity to realize my vision. You and me, art and science... we are the perfect marriage.

VIKTOR

Listen, Hank, it's been a rough day.

(climbing into his car)

I'll call you about his next week.

HANK

(at the car window)

I won't be here next week. The tumor's inoperable. I'll be dead.

VIKTOR
(winding down the window)
I'm already dead.

Viktor's car roars away. He looks back at the forlorn Hank in the rear view mirror.

HANK
Call me.
(looking at his watch)
This week!

A huge eye from a dismantled Nicola Anders billboard is wheeled away behind him -- followed by a huge pair of lips.

INT. VIKTOR'S MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

A sea of ingenue headshots. Black X's are drawn through all of them. VIKTOR lies amongst the rejected faces, talking on the telephone, in his spartan bachelor beach house.

VIKTOR
(into phone, referring to
a young woman's headshot)
-- What do you mean she won't work
with me? She's done nothing. She
doesn't have a single credit --

AGENT'S VOICE
(from phone, off-camera)
-- Better no credits than a
Taransky credit. No young actress
is going to step into Nicola
Anders' shoes and risk ending her
career before it's even started.

VIKTOR
-- Art, you don't understand. I've
mortgaged everything to finish this
film -- creditors calling, coming
to the house, for God's sake, I
need this --

The phone goes dead. Viktor tries to re-dial --
disconnected.

VIKTOR
-- Damn.

Sharp knock on his door. Viktor peers through a curtain and

spies an official-looking MAN IN A SUIT, carrying what looks to be a legal notice in his hands.

Viktor slips out of the back door.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

VIKTOR hurries along the beach. When he turns, he discovers the MAN IN THE SUIT following him. As Viktor runs, the Suit runs -- calling out to him.

MAN IN THE SUIT
Mr. Taransky, Mr. Taransky --

VIKTOR
(calling back)
I'm not him.

Viktor stumbles. When he recovers, the Suit is on him.

MAN IN THE SUIT
Mr. Taransky, Sir, I represent the
estate of Mr. Hank Aleno.
(showing him Hank's
obituary in the L.A.
Times)
It was Mr. Aleno's last wish that
you have this.

The Suit hands Viktor a heavily-sealed envelope.

VIKTOR
What is it?

MAN IN THE SUIT
I have no idea, Sir. He wanted you
to have it.

The Suit departs. Viktor hesitates, then breaks the seal on the package -- inside he finds a hard-drive. The hard-drive is labeled "SIMULATION ONE".

A TITLE APPEARS ON THE SCREEN:

SIX MONTHS LATER

CLOSE UP ON

a VACUUM CLEANER cleaning a tatty red carpet.

On the other end of the vacuum cleaner is VIKTOR. The red

carpet leads to a rundown, downtown Los Angeles cinema -- the venue for the premiere of "SUNRISE, SUNSET". To save money on posters, Viktor has altered the originals, "Starring NICOLA ANDERS" crudely pasted over with "Introducing SIMONE".

EXT. RUNDOWN DOWNTOWN CINEMA - DUSK

VIKTOR regards the sad, little premiere. No paparazzi, no limos, no klieg lights. Resorting to giving away tickets to PASSERS-BY, Viktor approaches a HOMELESS MAN sleeping in trash.

VIKTOR

Want to see a free movie?

HOMELESS MAN

(he thinks)

No.

A taxi pulls up. Viktor's daughter, LAINEY, steps out.

LAINEY

(kissing him hello)

Hi, Dad.

VIKTOR

Hello, Lainey.

Viktor goes to pay for the taxi but doesn't have quite enough cash. Lainey pays herself.

VIKTOR

Your mother couldn't make it?

LAINEY

She's at the premiere of "A Cold Day In Hell". But I think she send someone from Acquisitions.

VIKTOR

She still with Kent?

LAINEY

This week anyhow.

VIKTOR escorts Lainey down the empty red carpet, regarding the pathetic premiere. As they walk by, the bulb in Viktor's sole spotlight expires.

VIKTOR

Not quite how I imagined it --

LAINY

(looking on the bright
side)

-- You finished the film on your
own terms, that's what matters.
Did you really do all the post
yourself?

VIKTOR

There was no other way.

LAINY

I missed you. I wondered if you
were ever coming back.

VIKTOR

Me too.

LAINY

(regarding the makeshift
poster, trying to lift
his spirits)

Well, I can't wait to meet
Simone... what's her last name?

VIKTOR

You know, I... don't know.

LAINY

Is she here tonight?

VIKTOR

She can't watch herself.

They are interrupted by the THEATER OWNER.

THEATER OWNER

-- Hey, we have to start. I've got
"Tough Love 2" playing at ten.

EXT. PIER - "SUNRISE, SUNSET" - MORNING

A foggy, empty pier. A MAN is running through the mist,
shouting desperately.

HAL

Valarie! VALARIE!

Finally, out of the fog -- a young woman in a black cape and
hood, her back to us. The camera pushes in, music swells and

she turns. SIMONE. She is exquisitely, ethereally beautiful. Perfect.

INT. RUNDOWN DOWNTOWN CINEMA - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

In the near-empty, dilapidated theater, "SUNRISE, SUNSET" is playing ON THE SCREEN.

When Simone's face appears, the faces of the AUDIENCE MEMBERS change. They are all visibly moved, including the THEATER OWNER. Some weeping, some with curious smiles on their faces, some opened-mouthed.

HAL
(ON SCREEN, approaching)
Valarie, what are you running from?

SIMONE
(enigmatic smile)
From Valarie.

Suddenly a GUNSHOT rings out. Simone collapses to the ground.

HAL
(running to her)
Valarie! No!

INT. THEATER LOBBY - NIGHT

VIKTOR, unable to watch, paces up and down, chain-smoking while worriedly shoving popcorn in his mouth. Viktor finally musters the courage to look inside the auditorium.

INT. BEDROOM - "SUNRISE, SUNSET" - NIGHT

The same scene that played in the studio screening room. However now when we cut from the leading man, HAL, to the leading lady it is not NICOLA but the newly cast SIMONE.

SIMONE
-- Why are we here? Is that what you're asking, Jack?... Why are we here? No why. Just here.

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

ON SCREEN SIMONE lies dying. Now even LAINEY is affected by Simone's performance. She wipes a tear from her eye.

VIKTOR watches the backs of the heads, trying to gauge the

audience reaction. Finally the credits roll.

A dedication, "For HANK".

No one moves from their seats. Viktor permits himself a brief smile of satisfaction as he sees his name appear in the credits:

A Film By VIKTOR TARANSKY

Still no one moves from their seats. Viktor cannot stand it any longer. He runs to the restroom.

INT. THEATER RESTROOM - NIGHT

Face over the stained sink, VIKTOR splashes himself with water. He looks to the mirror, horrified by his own reflection. He rehearses a courtroom speech.

VIKTOR

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I may be guilty of a crime, but it was committed with the purest of intentions, to send a message to the acting community who put themselves above the work and above --

Three AUDIENCE MEMBERS enter the restroom. They approach the urinals.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1

(continuing their conversation from the lobby)

-- So fake.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2

-- Totally artificial.

Viktor looks at the men aghast and hurriedly exits, missing the end of their conversation.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1

We're really supposed to believe that was 19th Century Lisbon?

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3

Who's looking at the sets when she is on the screen?

All three nod in agreement and begin to urinate.

INT. THEATER LOBBY - NIGHT

VIKTOR exits the restroom. Almost all the AUDIENCE MEMBERS, including LAINEY, are waiting for him.

LAINY

(pointing out her father)

There he is. That's my dad, Viktor Taransky.

Viktor is about to run for the exit when the small group spontaneously applauds. They rush to shake his hand.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 4

-- She is magnificent.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 5

-- Absolutely unreal.

Viktor appears uncomfortable with their compliments.

VIKTOR

She wasn't too... cartoony?

AUDIENCE MEMBER 6

-- Who? The nun?

AUDIENCE MEMBER 7

-- Or are you talking about the mother?

AUDIENCE MEMBER 8

-- A star like that, who cares about the supporting cast?

AUDIENCE MEMBER 9

-- Congratulations again. She was... not of this earth. You should be very proud.

VIKTOR

"Not of this earth". A good way of putting it. And the film as a whole -- ?

The group drifts away, leaving LAINEY and VIKTOR alone.

LAINY

She's a miracle, Dad. Where did

you find her?

VIKTOR

(vague)

I saw her picture on the, er...
internet.

(interrogating his
daughter's face)

You really didn't notice anything --
unusual?

LAINY

Only her brilliance. To be honest,
with what you had to work with, I
was expecting a train wreck. You
really pulled it off.

Lainey regards the makeshift poster.

LAINY

I have a feeling mom is going to
take you back after this.

Viktor's head snaps around. Lainey smiles.

LAINY

Back on the lot.

Viktor shrugs off the misunderstanding.

INT. VIKTOR TARANSKY'S MALIBU HOME - NIGHT

VIKTOR enters his sterile, bachelor home, carrying his mail.
His answering machine blinks in the darkness, the message
light reads "FULL". He hits the "PLAY" button.

ELAINE (V.O.)

Viktor, you bastard! I hear it's
great.

(beat)

Seriously, I'm happy for you.

Viktor opens a drawer containing a photo of he and Elaine
from happier times. He gazes at it as he listens to the
message.

ELAINE (V.O.)

I know people are going to be
beating down your door but... well,
I'd love the chance to buy back
something I gave away for free.

Don't you just love Hollywood?...

BEEP.

Viktor stops the machine, dazed. He idly opens his mail. Inside an envelope he finds a SAG Card with the new member's name, "SIMONE".

A MONTAGE OF SCENES BEGINS TO PLAY.

A) A line of AUDIENCE MEMBERS stretches outside the rundown movie theater as far as the eye can see.

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER (O.S.)

A dazzling new ingenue has come from seemingly nowhere to capture the hearts of movie-going audiences across the nation...

B) THE FRONT PAGE OF "VARIETY" coming off the presses reads, "SIMONE: A REVELATION -- Dawning Of A New Star In "SUNRISE".

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER (O.S.)

... in her debut film, "Sunrise, Sunset".

C) A TEENAGE BOY in a public library logs on to the first website dedicated to SIMONE.

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER (O.S.)

Her face is already posted on everything from websites to bedroom walls.

D) Trendy TEENAGE GIRLS saunter past a swimming pool in Simone capes and hoods despite the sweltering heat.

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER (O.S.)

Her wardrobe has inspired a fashion craze.

E) In a Third World back-alley a YOUNG ASIAN MAN shows an UNDERCOVER REPORTER a pirated recording of SIMONE on a camcorder.

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER (O.S.)

And bootleg copies of her film are being sold in back alleys all over the world.

F) A LIQUOR STORE CUSTOMER watches a TV behind the counter

showing a clip of SIMONE from, "SUNRISE, SUNSET Courtesy: Taransky Productions".

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

(from TV)

But who is Simone? We know so little about her. No details of her background have been released, not even her age. She is somewhere between a girl and a woman. A fresh face and familiar both at the same time.

G) The ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER now stands outside a multiplex. The marquee has 16 screens and looks like this:

"SUNRISE, SUNSET"	"SUNRISE, SUNSET"
"SUNRISE, SUNSET"	"SUNRISE, SUNSET"
"SUNRISE, SUNSET"	"SUNRISE, SUNSET"
"SUNRISE, SUNSET"	"SUNRISE, SUNSET"
"SUNRISE, SUNSET"	"SUNRISE, SUNSET"
"SUNRISE, SUNSET"	"SUNRISE, SUNSET"
"SUNRISE, SUNSET"	"SUNRISE, SUNSET"
"SUNRISE, SUNSET"	"THE MAKING OF SUNRISE, SUNSET"

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

Is Simone even her real name? And why the secrecy? All we know for sure is that she was discovered by little-known director, Viktor Tarinsky.

INT. LIMOUSINE - DAY

VIKTOR, watching "SCENE" on a TV in the back of a limousine, corrects the reporter.

VIKTOR

Taransky.

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

(from the TV)

He has parlayed his relationship with the new sensation into a three picture deal with the very studio that dumped him only six months ago. And no wonder with the starlet's performance breaking all box office records.

EXT. STUDIO GATE - MORNING

Outside the studio entrance, a swarm of REPORTERS, PHOTOGRAPHERS and FANS rush VIKTOR's limousine, hoping for a glimpse of SIMONE.

MOB

Simone! SIMONE! I LOVE YOU! I
Want to BE you!

Studio SECURITY GUARDS hold them back as the limo enters the lot.

EXT. STUDIO - ENTRANCE - DAY

ELAINE and an entourage of EXECUTIVES greets VIKTOR's limousine on the studio steps.

A STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHER has a camera at the ready. A banner reads, "Welcome SIMONE". A YOUNG ASSISTANT wheels a cake.

VIKTOR steps out of the car. ELAINE pushes past him, into the limo.

ELAINE

Simone!... Simone?

The car is empty.

ELAINE

(re-emerging from the car)
Where is she?

VIKTOR

Good to see you too, Elaine.

ELAINE

(ignoring his sarcasm)
Why isn't she with you?

VIKTOR

Why? Because she would never show up at something like this. She's intensely private.

Elaine sighs, exasperated.

ELAINE

(dismissing her
colleagues)

Back to work, everyone. She's not here.

The reception committee disperses, murmurs of disappointment.

ELAINE

Viktor... I want to thank you for convincing Simone to sign with the studio.

VIKTOR

Don't thank me. It was entirely Simone's decision. Do you have Simone's check?

ELAINE

I don't have it on me. Anyway, it means a lot.

(quickly changing tack)

Have you read the reviews? They're love letters.

(reading from a newspaper)

Listen to this one. "Simone has the voice of a young Jane Fonda, the body of Sophia Loren, the grace of, well, Grace Kelley, and the face of Audrey Hepburn combined with an angel".

VIKTOR

(musing to himself)

Almost right.

ELAINE

I can't wait to meet her.

VIKTOR

I don't know if that's going to happen.

ELAINE

(confused)

Why not?

VIKTOR

As I say, she's... something of a recluse. That's how she's able to stay so pure -- by isolating herself in her art.

ELAINE

(face falling)
Don't be ridiculous. I arranged a
press conference.

VIKTOR
Out of the question. A circus like
that?

ELAINE
Viktor, it's my studio.

VIKTOR
She's my actor. There are other
studios, Elaine. There's only one
Simone.
(leaving her on the steps)
Leave the press conference to me.

Viktor strides up the studio steps. Elaine stares after her
ex-husband -- she finds herself smiling at his newfound
arrogance.

EXT. STUDIO - PRESS CONFERENCE - DAY

The studio soundstages as a backdrop, VIKTOR approaches a
podium and a forest of microphones, revelling in his recent
fame by association.

VIKTOR
(tapping the microphone)
Is this on?

REPORTER 1
Who are you?

VIKTOR
Taransky, Viktor. T-a-r-a-n-s-k-y,
V-i-k-t-o-r.

REPORTER 1
Yeah, but -- who are you?

VIKTOR
(patronizing smile)
I am a two-time Academy Award
nominated director with over
eighteen films to my credit thus
far including my latest release,
"Sunrise, Sunset". Who are you?

A REPORTER rolls her eyes at his pomposity.

VIKTOR

I will not be taking any questions. However I do have a statement to read on behalf of my leading lady, Simone.

(reading from his statement)

"To Whom It May Concern. I'm deeply grateful for the extraordinary public response to Mr. Taransky's film. At this time I will be conducting no interviews or making publicity appearances since I am really nothing without the beautiful worlds and characters Mr. Taransky creates for me. I politely request that the press respect my privacy and let the work speak for itself. All questions and inquiries should be directed to Mr. Taransky to whom I entrust all aspects of my career. Yours very truly, Simone".

The reporters all call out at once.

REPORTER 2

-- Viktor, Viktor, who's Simone dating?

REPORTER 3

-- Viktor, where'd you find her?

REPORTER 4

-- Is Simone her real name?

REPORTER 5

-- What's she got to hide?

REPORTER 1

-- Is she the new Garbo?

REPORTER 2

-- Who's Garbo?

Viktor silences the reporters by theatrically raising his hands.

VIKTOR

I thought I made it clear -- no

questions regarding Simone.

(bringing the press
conference to a hasty
conclusion)

Now, I would like to close by
announcing that Miss Simone begins
production today on her next film,
"Eternity Forever". This project
has been near and dear to my heart
since I wrote it nine years ago.

(a tinge of bitterness,
then a smile)

I Thank you.

Viktor exits the podium. A voice stops him in his tracks.

VOICE (O.S.)

Who do you think you're fooling,
Taransky?

Viktor turns. The voice belongs to over-zealous, crusading,
truth-seeking investigative reporter, MAX SAYER, accompanied
by his assistant, MILTON.

VIKTOR

Do I know you?

MAX

Max Sayer -- National Echo.

VIKTOR

(regaining his composure,
a smirk)

Don't you have a real story to
write? Why aren't you in Latin
America?

MAX

This is the story.

VIKTOR

I remember when the Echo had class
-- the paper that could bring down
governments.

MAX

Our leaders aren't presidents
anymore -- they're pop stars and
screen idols. If Woodward and
Bernstein were alive today, they'd
be right here in Hollywood with me.

VIKTOR

They are alive, Sayer.

Milton confirms that Woodward and Bernstein are still living.

MAX

So they're probably here.

(hardly missing a beat)

You might be able to sell this
'disappearing act' to the rest of
the world, but I'm not buying it.
What's really behind this Simone
woman? The public has a right to
know. Why is she staying out of
sight? And why the hell is she
with you? I don't want you to take
this the wrong way, Viktor, but
you're not exactly Cecil B.
DeMille -- more run-of-the-mill.

VIKTOR

Maybe the reason she's with me is a
little thing called integrity,
Sayer. Look it up.

Viktor walks away.

MAX

(calling after him)

Oh, I know all about integrity. I
know even more about persistence.
Look that one up.

Max watches Viktor depart, with obvious suspicion.

EXT. SOUNDSTAGE - STUDIO LOT - DAY

A large satellite dish sits atop a soundstage.

"CLOSED SET" is the sign on the door -- a surveillance camera
panning the entrance. A SECURITY GUARD, also keeping watch,
nods a greeting to VIKTOR as he pulls up in his studio golf
cart, script in hand.

SECURITY GUARD

No one came in or went out just
like you said, Mr. Taransky.

VIKTOR

Good.

SECURITY GUARD

Is Miss Simone coming today?

VIKTOR

She's already here. She arrived before you and she'll leave long after you've gone.

(admonishing guard)

Remember, under no circumstances are you or any other person to enter the set without my express permission.

SECURITY GUARD

What if it catches on fire?

VIKTOR

Let it burn. Simone would rather go up in flames than give up her privacy.

Viktor enters his secret code into the keypad lock and enters the soundstage.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

The cavernous soundstage is almost completely empty save for a small table upon which sits two computer keyboards and a tablet attached to a large, projection screen monitor and two side monitors. VIKTOR takes a seat in front of the monitor.

VIKTOR

(to himself as he inserts
his Hollywood hard-drive
-- SIMULATION ONE)

Pay no attention to the man behind
the computer.

A title appears on his computer screen.

Welcome
to
SIMULATION ONE

With a satisfied smile, Viktor backspaces characters until he revises the title to:

Welcome
to
SIMONE

He presses "ENTER" and a face begins to build -- wire upon wire, pixel upon pixel -- until a completed synthespian emerges -- SIMONE. She is indistinguishable from a flesh-and-blood actress.

Simone moves on a video loop against a neutral background -- titled "VISUAL LOOP 6". Within the confines of the monitor she is reminiscent of a beautiful caged animal. She looks a little bored as if she has been cooped up in cyberspace for too long.

VIKTOR
(to the screen)
Good morning, Simone.

SIMONE / VIKTOR
Good morning, Mr. Taransky.

VIKTOR
A star is...

SIMONE / VIKTOR
... digitized.

Only now do we observe that Viktor is occasionally talking into a microphone connected to the computer and pressing a key on his keyboard. When he speaks, she speaks. Simone's voice and mouth movements automatically sync in response to Viktor's voice. A scanning light on Viktor allows Simone to mimic his movements.

SIMONE / VIKTOR
You mean they buy it?

VIKTOR
(nervous smile as he
examines his first
royalty check)
Buy it? They're paying for it.
And around here that's how you
really know they buy it.

Viktor fondly touches a photograph of Hank that is taped to the terminal -- from the "L.A. Times" obituaries.

VIKTOR
I'm only sorry Hank isn't here to
see this.

Viktor looks up, Simone mimicking his action.

SIMONE / VIKTOR
(depressing the button
every time he wants to
express his thoughts
through Simone)

Maybe he can.

VIKTOR
Do you have any idea what this
means, Simone? Our ability to
manufacture fraud now exceeds our
ability to detect it.

SIMONE / VIKTOR
(appearing to indulge
Viktor with a smile)
I am the death of real.

VIKTOR
(pondering the enormity of
the hoax)
You are birth of... what? A
Phenomenon. A miracle. A new era
in show business. All I wanted to
do was finish the film.

SIMONE / VIKTOR
And now look what you've started.
And now look what you've started.
And now look what you've started.

Viktor's conversation with himself is not merely for his own
amusement. He is adjusting and refining Simone's voice.

VIKTOR
Hmm... a little less Streep, a
little more Bacall.

Viktor scrolls through a photo library of stars, living and
dead, that comprise Simone.

Viktor makes an adjustment on a panel on the computer screen
dedicated to Simone's audio, incorporating the vocal
deliveries -- "20% STREEP, 80% BACALL".

He speaks once again as Simone to test the adjustment. The
voice patterns appear on his screen -- graphic
representations of the sound waves.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

Is that better, Mr. Taransky?

VIKTOR

Yes. Yes, it is.

VIKTOR snaps back to reality himself. He scrolls through the list of screen legends. He clicks on the image of AUDREY HEPBURN.

VIKTOR

While I think of it, I'd like you to add something to your repertoire -- remember that thing Hepburn does in "Breakfast At Tiffany's".

A clip of AUDREY HEPBURN in "Breakfast At Tiffany's" plays on the screen. Hepburn, sitting on a fire escape, looks up.

AUDREY HEPBURN

(from the screen, an incomparable smile)

Hi.

VIKTOR

(pausing the moment)

Let's hear you say "Hi" like Audrey.

With a CUT and PASTE, Viktor morphs the gesture seamlessly into a frozen Simone. Viktor presses play.

SIMONE

(imitating Audrey's performance perfectly)

Hi.

VIKTOR

Perfect.

(stretching)

God, I'm so relaxed around you.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

You did create me.

VIKTOR

No. I... just helped bring someone else's dream to life.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

Mr. Taransky, we both know I was nothing without you. I was

computer code -- ones and zeros.

VIKTOR

You're right. You're right. Of course, one doesn't want to boast. It's a classic case of technology in search of an artist. That's all you've been waiting for, an artist with integrity, with a vision, who can see.

Viktor gets up and starts walking around the room, warming to his theme. SIMONE moves in a VISUAL LOOP on the monitor, nodding attentively as if she's really interested.

VIKTOR

See beyond that irrational allegiance to flesh and blood. -- See that with the rise in price of a real actor and the fall in price of a fake, the scales have tipped in favor of the fake.

(voice raising in excitement)

-- See that if the performance is genuine, it doesn't matter if the actor is real. Once a performance is committed to film, the blood and bones are gone anyway. Only the spirit, the illusion remains. Besides, what's real anymore? These days most actors have digital work done to them so it's a gray area.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

(Simone appears to look directly at her maker)

Are you ever going to tell the truth about me, Mr. Taransky?

VIKTOR

The only real truth is in the work.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

You know what I'm talking about.

VIKTOR

Yes. Yes, I'm going to tell the truth about you, why wouldn't I...?
(pondering his own

question)
Of course, with Hank's tragic
passing, the secret died with him.
(shaking the thought from
his head)
I am going to tell the truth...
after your next picture.

Feeling uneasy at the prospect, Viktor changes the subject.
He pulls out his script for "ETERNITY FOREVER".

VIKTOR
Speaking of which -- this is the
project I'd like you to do next.

SIMONE / VIKTOR
Not, "Eternity Forever"? The
legendary unproduced script that
was too good ever to get made? I'd
kill for that part.

VIKTOR
I was hoping you'd say that.

Suddenly, Simone appears to talk on her own.

SIMONE
I'll do anything to please you, Mr.
Taransky.

VIKTOR
(pretending to be hard of
hearing)
I'm sorry, I didn't catch that.
What did you say?

SIMONE
I'll do anything to please you, Mr.
Taransky.

On a side monitor, we discover a highlighted box marked "PRE
RECORD" -- Viktor's finger on the "PLAY" button. He is
unable to resist speaking another line.

SIMONE / VIKTOR
And I will never, ever leave you.

Simone appears to indulge Viktor by blowing him a kiss --
until we see that Viktor has now highlighted a box marked,
"GESTURES OF AFFECTION -- WINK, SMILE, GIGGLE, SIGH, KISS,
FLUTTER OF EYES, FLICK OF HAIR, PUFF OF CHEST".

Viktor comes close to the monitor. He notices something about Simone's face.

VIKTOR

You're so beautiful. Too beautiful.

Viktor accesses a program labeled, "DISTINGUISHING FEATURES". He adds a "FRECKLE" and a "MOLE".

From a distance we watch him, alone with Simone in the vast, empty soundstage.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

VIKTOR's face against the SKY. As he walks, we reveal that the sky is no more than a huge, painted backdrop on the studio lot -- behind a parking lot. Viktor hands his valet ticket to a fawning VALET MANAGER.

VALET MANAGER

-- Just be a minute, Mr. Taransky. We gave you a complimentary car wash -- they're washing the engine now.

Viktor joins other industry MOVERS and SHAKERS waiting for their cars under an umbrella. A young TALENT AGENT approaches.

TALENT AGENT

Viktor! Look, I'm sorry I didn't call you back last year. I was, er... out of the country.

(strained moment)

But we should get together. My schedule's wide open.

VIKTOR

Sure, I'll... "call you".

The agent's face falls. He gets in his car, disconsolate.

Suddenly, HAL SINCLAIR, rushes over and hugs Viktor.

HAL

Viktor, I'm so happy for us!

VIKTOR

Hello, Hal.

HAL

The film. The chemistry. No reflections on Nicola but Simone and I -- we were just so right together.

VIKTOR

You never were together, Hal.

HAL

And still the connection was undeniable.

(aside)

I haven't read "Eternity Forever" but I know it's brilliant. And I know I would be perfect for Clive.

VIKTOR

(correcting him)

Clyde.

HAL

Yes, perfect.

(lowering his voice)

As a matter of fact, I ran into Simone on the lot the other day.

VIKTOR

(genuinely startled)

Really? She didn't mention it.

HAL

(quickly covering)

I'm sure she's meeting with a lot of people right now.

(under his breath)

She is just as you described her, Viktor... indescribable. I strongly sensed she thought I was right for it.

Behind his back, Viktor surreptitiously presses a button on his cell phone. The phone rings. Viktor feigns surprise and answers.

VIKTOR

(answering the phone he has just dialed, louder than necessary)

Hello?... SIMONE! How are you,

sweetheart?

A hush descends over the executives. Hal is suddenly very uncomfortable. Even the VALETS strain to eavesdrop on the conversation.

VIKTOR

(winking to Hal)

You'll never guess who I'm with...
you ran into him on the lot.

HAL

It was more in passing.

VIKTOR

You're so far off!

(finally chuckles)

Hal... Hal Sinclair... your co-
star. Remember now?... No, I don't
think he's put on weight.

(a shrug of apology to the
appalled Hal)

Anyway, you think he's right for
"Eternity Forever"?... not the
right type?... a different
direction...

(covering phone, to Hal)

I'll try to talk her into it.

The other INDUSTRY PEOPLE make a note of the remark. A mortified Hal excuses himself with a pathetic wave, climbing into his car.

VIKTOR

(into phone)

... Listen this is a bad place to
talk... what?... sweetheart, I know
you have charity work you want to
do, I know you want to give back --
but remember, your greatest gift is
your talent... we'll talk about it
at the beach house this weekend...
I'm looking forward to it too.

Viktor hangs up. His car pulls up. He tips extravagantly and drives away. The INDUSTRY PEOPLE get on their cell phones.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - FACADE - DAY

Parked behind the sky facade is a curious CAR with shaded

windows.

INT. CAR - DAY

Inside the car, MAX SAYER and assistant MILTON, scanner in hand, are replaying Viktor's intercepted phone call on a computer.

VIKTOR'S VOICE

(from the machine)

-- "... You think he's right for
"Eternity Forever"?... not the
right type?... a different
direction..."

MILTON

(to Max, a shake of the
head)

I'm getting nothing from her side
of the conversation.

MAX

Is it a jamming device?

MILTON

(shrugs)

Maybe he's talking to himself.

MAX

(dismissing the idea)

Taransky isn't that good an actor.
No, they're taking special
precautions. Some kind of new
encryption.

MILTON

Why?

MAX

(musing)

Whatever it is, it's dark.

MILTON

Dark?

MAX

Yes, very.

They continue listening to the recording.

VIKTOR'S VOICE

"... We'll talk about it at the beach house this weekend..."

MAX's eyes light up. He gazes to a photo of SIMONE pasted to the inside of the car.

INT. VIKTOR'S MALIBU HOME - MORNING

VIKTOR and LAINEY make breakfast. Lainey is in her pajamas, occasionally glancing to a laptop computer as her father prepares French toast.

VIKTOR
(glancing to the computer)
Can't you stop that?

LAINEY
Why?

VIKTOR
Those things can be dangerous. Staring at a screen all day -- you miss what's going on outside in the real world. You can lose yourself. You should get out more. How are you going to meet boys?

LAINEY
(shrugs coyly, getting up)
I know plenty of boys.

VIKTOR
Really? Who? Where do you meet them? In a chat room? How do you know he's not some middle-aged freak?

LAINEY
Dad, I can spot a middle-aged freak a mile away.

VIKTOR
Okay. But you have to find a way to escape that thing.

LAINEY
I do.

VIKTOR
How?

LAINY

I read.

VIKTOR

You do? Still? I can't tell you how happy I am to hear that.

LAINY

You were the one who insisted on it. Reading me Dostoyevsky and Joyce when I was four.

VIKTOR

You understood them. That's what was amazing.

(looking out the window)

It's a nice day. Let's eat outside.

Lainey grabs the plates and opens the deck door. We hear a chorus of CLICKS.

LAINY

Actually, it may be nicer inside.

Viktor joins her at the doorway.

VIKTOR

Stay here, I'll deal with this.

Unfazed, Lainey retreats into the house.

EXT. VIKTOR'S MALIBU HOUSE - MORNING

Boats are moored just off the beach packed dangerously full of telephoto lens-toting PHOTOGRAPHERS. The next door houses have LENSES protruding through the drapes of the windows.

VIKTOR strides onto the lawn of his property that backs onto the beach, soaking up the attention -- unable to resist waving extravagantly.

Suddenly, a PHOTOGRAPHER, losing his balance, drops from a nearby rooftop. The photographer limps towards the fence. Viktor calmly follows, retrieving the photographer's camera and ripping out the film with a flourish -- he is clearly relishing the attention.

The photographer clammers over the fence where he joins several dozen other SHUTTER-BUGS and VIDEORAZZI.

PHOTOGRAPHER 1

That wasn't her, Taransky.

ECHO PHOTOGRAPHER

Where is she? You can't hide her forever.

VIKTOR

(hurling the camera into
the mob)

You'll never find her. Simone only appears when I want her to appear.

MAX SAYER from "The NATIONAL ECHO" is at the head of the mob, accompanied by assistant MILTON.

MAX

She sounds like a prisoner, Taransky. Are you holding her hostage? Are you some kind of Svengali?

VIKTOR

(recognizing the reporter)

Who's the hostage, Sayer, her or you? You look kind of "captive" yourself. While you're spending every waking hour obsessing over Simone, guess what, I guarantee she doesn't even know you exist. Get off my property or I'll call the cops.

MAX

The cops? The cops read my column to know who to bust. We're the only watchdog the public has.

(looking around at the
photographers)

None of this is going away. We'll be here tomorrow and the day after that. Until you slip up. And you will. You are looking at your shadow.

(getting in his face)

Because all these elaborate precautions with Simone -- every instinct in my body tells me, it's not natural.

VIKTOR

I'm just trying to help you, Sayer.
I don't want you to be
disappointed. It gets cold out
here at night.

MAX

Nice try. If we can't get to her
through you, maybe your family will
be more co-operative. I can
guarantee you, Taransky, one way or
another, Miss Simone and I are
going to get acquainted.

VIKTOR

(turning away)

I'd like to see that, Sayer.
Invite me.

INT. VIKTOR'S CAR - DAY

VIKTOR drives along a twisty mountain road, LAINEY in the
passenger seat. They have become so blase about the
paparazzi, they no longer acknowledge the posse of motorcycle
PHOTOGRAPHERS risking their necks to stay up with the car.

REPORTER (ON RADIO)

-- The rumor is, Simone is holed up
in Taransky's Malibu home -- so far
we haven't seen so much as a
glimpse --

VIKTOR

(switching off the radio)

Honey, I'm really sorry about all
this. I don't know if it's safe
for you to stay the weekends...
just until things settle down.

LAINEY

(shrugs)

Okay, Dad.

VIKTOR

If anyone asks about Simone --

LAINEY

-- I know, I don't know anything.

VIKTOR

Exactly.

(slightly irritated by her)

lack of interest)
Don't you wonder where I'm really
hiding Simone?

LAINY
(looking to him)
I'm sure you'd tell me if you
thought it was important.

Lainey gives her father a smile. Through the car window behind her, a MOTORCYCLIST appears to lose control and drops down a bank.

EXT. ELAINE'S MANSION - DAY

VIKTOR'S car pulls up to Elaine's imposing mansion. LAINY gives her father a kiss and departs. ELAINE, in the garden, overseeing a GARDENER pruning roses, approaches.

VIKTOR
(from the car)
Sorry I didn't get her back in
time.

ELAINE
No problem.
(she smiles)
Do you want to come in?

VIKTOR
(surprised -- pleasantly)
Why not?

INT. ELAINE'S MANSION - DAY

VIKTOR walks down a hall, passing the dining room, where KENT is working on a computer. Kent smiles blandly.

KENT
Hey, Vik.

VIKTOR
(disappointed to see him)
Hello -- Kent.

INT. ELAINE'S MANSION - DAY

VIKTOR waits in an opulent drawing room. Despite the eighty degree temperature outside, a fire burns in the hearth. ELAINE enters, waving a thick studio file. Viktor's face falls, expecting a less business-related conversation.

ELAINE

Viktor, we simply have to talk about "Eternity..."

VIKTOR

"Forever".

ELAINE

Whatever. I still haven't received Simone's script notes.

VIKTOR

There aren't any. If the filmmakers are happy, Simone's happy. She considers herself an... "instrument".

ELAINE

Really? Oh, so she's really going to do all this nudity?

VIKTOR

(shrugs)

If it's on the page...

Elaine refers to her documents, bewildered.

ELAINE

Well, something has to be done about this budget. It's completely unrealistic.

(referring to a column in the budget)

You allowed nothing for limousine service.

VIKTOR

She'll drive herself.

ELAINE

Hair and make-up?

VIKTOR

She'll do her own. Theater training.

ELAINE

She was in the theater? When? Where?

VIKTOR

I'll send you her resume.

ELAINE

At least a contingency for wardrobe. Any woman can go up a dress size.

VIKTOR

-- I guarantee she won't gain an ounce. She's very disciplined.

ELAINE

(concerned by an entry in the budget)

Well, we have to do something about this -- "stuntwoman".

VIKTOR

What about it?

ELAINE

There isn't one.

VIKTOR

No need. She does all her own stunts.

ELAINE

(skeptical)

Even the fall from the plane?

VIKTOR

(nonchalant)

Even the fall from the plane.

ELAINE

Well, shoot it on the last day.

Viktor regards Elaine with a condescending look.

VIKTOR

As I've tried to explain to you, Elaine. Simone isn't like any other actress you've ever known. She's about the work and only the work -- lives for the work. She wants all the money up there...

(gazing into space)

... on the screen where it belongs. She'd work for scale except I know

you only respect people you pay a fortune.

ELAINE

Which accounts for your percentage.

(tossing the budget on the coffee table)

When do I get to meet this dream?

VIKTOR

Not today. She's learning her lines.

(glancing to Elaine's budget)

You can also take cue cards and teleprompter out of the budget.

ELAINE

(smiles)

I'll walk you out.

Elaine escorts Viktor out to the lavish garden.

EXT. ELAINE'S MANSION - GARDEN - DAY

ELAINE's demeanor softens. She speaks to VIKTOR quietly, sympathetically.

ELAINE

Listen, Viktor... I want to talk to you now, not as Elaine, studio head, but Elaine, ex-wife.

(correcting herself)

Second ex-wife. You got lucky this last time but you need to be careful. We both know you wouldn't be making this overblown art film of you hadn't convinced Simone to be in it.

VIKTOR

Elaine, talking to you now, not as Viktor, director, but Viktor, ex husband... what the hell happened to you?

ELAINE

(exasperated)

Experience, Viktor. I've seen this a hundred times -- young stars destroying the very people who

discovered them. I'm worried about you, that's all. This woman -- she controls your destiny.

VIKTOR

Simone does not control my destiny.

ELAINE

Viktor, I have a feeling. One of my feelings. There's something about her I don't trust.

From her bedroom window on the mansion's second floor, LAINEY smiles at the sight of her mother and father together.

INT. SIMONE & VIKTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

VIKTOR enters his office where he's greeted by his assistant, JANE.

JANE

(sheepish)

Thanks for taking me back, Mr. Taransky. I know it looked like I sided with the studio, but I always believed in you, honestly.

VIKTOR

Don't worry. I understand.

JANE

(referring to the cast seated around a conference table)

They're all here.

INT. SIMONE & VIKTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

VIKTOR sits at the head of the table, surrounded by HAL, LOTUS, MAC and three other CAST MEMBERS. A preliminary poster behind him -- "COMING THIS SUMMER - SIMONE in ETERNITY FOREVER" -- bears a huge photograph of Simone's face.

VIKTOR

I can't tell you how delighted I am to have this wonderful cast assembled for "Eternity Forever". Thank you all. Now, a reminder -- as a condition for working on this film, you will not be rehearsing with Simone, shooting with Simone

and you are forbidden from
contacting Simone in any way at any
time, whatsoever.

The CAST nods seriously.

HAL
(a thought occurs)
How will you do our love scenes?

VIKTOR
Body double.

HAL
(confused)
For her?

VIKTOR
For you.
(addressing the entire
cast)
I want you to know, Simone
appreciates you all working for
scale. But why am I thanking you?
Simone can thank you herself. She
insisted on speaking with you
before filming begins. She's on
the line now.

Viktor nods to a speaker phone in the center of the table, a
red blinking light on the phone. The cast reacts excitedly.

VIKTOR
(pushing a button on the
phone)
Simone, are you there?

SIMONE
(through the speakerphone)
I certainly am, Mr. Taransky.

LOTUS
(unable to contain her
excitement)
So are we, Simone!

Everyone laughs giddily.

SIMONE (O.S.)
Why don't you leave me alone with
my co-stars, Mr. Taransky, so we

can get to know each other better?

HAL

Good idea.

VIKTOR

Of course. I'll be back in a minute.

Viktor exits.

SIMONE (O.S.)

Hi. Who's there? Don't be shy.
Introduce yourselves.

The CAST stares nervously at the speakerphone. Mac breaks the silence.

MAC

I'm Mac. I turned down a Bertolucci film to be here.

LOTUS

My name's Lotus. God, I can't believe I'm talking to you. We're going to become such great friends.

HAL

I'm Hal. Wonderful to be working together... again.

The other cast members introduce themselves.

EXT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

VIKTOR pulls up sharply in his studio golf cart outside the nearby soundstage and hurriedly enters.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

VIKTOR races across the vast, empty space to a digital player, connected to a phone. Simone's pre-recorded opening remarks (graphically represented on the screen) are almost completed.

SIMONE

Is that everyone...?

(pause)

Well, obviously, as you know...

Viktor jumps into the conversation in the nick of time,

speaking through the synthesizer. As usual, Viktor's voice is automatically synthesized into the voice of Simone.

SIMONE / VIKTOR
... I'm Simone.

The other CAST MEMBERS laugh nervously.

HAL
(from Viktor's
speakerphone)
Obviously. Who else?

SIMONE / VIKTOR
(from speaker phone)
I just want to start by apologizing
for my "process" --

INT. SIMONE & VIKTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The CAST are hunched over the speakerphone.

MAC
-- No. No. I'm completely
simpatico. On my last film I was
playing a schizophrenic so I made
them give me two dressing rooms.

HAL
(an aside)
So committed.

SIMONE (O.S.)
Well thank you for your
understanding. I know it's an
unusual way to work but I just find
I relate better to people when
they're not actually there.

LOTUS
Of course, of course.

SIMONE (O.S.)
I don't have much to say except
that I know it's going to be a
great project, if we all just trust
Mr. Taransky's vision. Always do
what Mr. Taransky says. If in
doubt, do it the Taransky way.

They all nod vigorously in agreement.

SIMONE (O.S.)

I know we're going to make a
wonderful movie together.

LOTUS

(nodding in agreement)
Wonderful movie.

HAL

Together, absolutely.

EXT. SOUNDSTAGE - DUSK

VIKTOR removes his own garbage from his soundstage. A young
cleaning woman, VIVIAN, wheeling a janitor's cart,
tentatively approaches.

VIVIAN

Mr. Taransky...

VIKTOR

(referring to the stage)
No one goes in there.

VIVIAN

Oh, I know.

Vivian hesitantly hands Viktor a publicity photo of SIMONE.

VIVIAN

If it's not too much trouble.
Could you...?

VIKTOR

Of course...

VIVIAN

(hesitant about broaching
the subject)
This last year I was... going
through some things.
(shaking her head at the
memory)
Awful, awful... things. But when I
saw Simone in "Sunrise"... what she
did... in the scene in the
fireworks factory...
(face lighting up)
... suddenly everything made sense.
My friends, family, doctors --

nobody could reach me -- but
Simone, she really... spoke to me.

Viktor is touched by the heartfelt testimony.

VIKTOR
She'll be happy to sign it.

INT. PRODUCTION SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

A green set. Walls, floor, ceiling -- all green. A FULL
CAST shoots HAL, dressed in a futuristic suit, tentatively
crossing the green expanse.

Hal pauses, looks longingly, then impulsively dashes forward.
Hal passionately embraces thin air and wrestles it to the
ground.

VIKTOR (O.S.)
Cut! Cut!... Cut!

Hal freezes. VIKTOR runs from behind the camera and
confronts Hal on the green floor.

VIKTOR
Hal, what are you doing?

HAL
Viktor, Clyde simply has to get
close to Simone in this scene! He
has to touch her. He has to!

VIKTOR
Absolutely not!

HAL
But she's right there! I must feel
her!

VIKTOR
You can't.

HAL
Why not?

VIKTOR
(struggling to find an
excuse)
There's... a wall between you --

HAL

-- an emotional wall, I know.
That's why --

VIKTOR

-- No. No. A real wall.
(describing a wall with
his hands within the
green space)
You ran right through it.

HAL

(confused)
How did the wall get there?

VIKTOR

I can't explain it to you now --
you'll see when it's all put
together.
(walking away)
Anyway, we got it a couple of takes
ago. Let's move on.

Hal, dumbfounded, tentatively touches the non-existent wall.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - NIGHT

Viktor digitally adds SIMONE standing beside a sportscar with
HAL in a scene from "Eternity Forever". He works on her
close up.

SIMONE

(eyes welling with tears)
-- What you don't understand,
Clyde, is that love is like a wild
flower, but that flower only
grows --

Viktor hits STOP and Simone freezes. Viktor brings up a menu
and chooses from a range of "EMOTIONAL OPTIONS".

JOY	SADNESS	FEAR
elated	melancholy	anxious
jubilant	tearful	frightened
giddy	weeping	petrified
ecstatic	blubbering	loss of bladder
inebriated	Kevorkian	control

CONTEMPLATION	INNOCENCE	SENSUALITY
reflective	chaste	seductive
thoughtful	virtuous	lustful
meditative	angelic	bestial

stoic Madonna Madonna
bored out of her [Blessed Virgin] [Like A Virgin]
skull

He fine-tunes SIMONE's performance -- sliding a cursor on a performance axis from "BROAD" to "SUBTLE".

VIKTOR
Let's take it down a notch.

SIMONE
-- What you don't understand --

Simone freezes again. Viktor make another adjustment.

VIKTOR
I like it. But still too big.
(making a correction)
Smaller teardrops next time.

Simone's tears retreat into her eyes.

VIKTOR
It's not working. It's not alive.
Let's try it again.

She repeats the line. Viktor mimes the performance.

SIMONE
(teardrops arriving on cue)
-- What you don't understand, Clyde, is that love is like a wild flower, but that flower only grows on the edge...
(dramatic pause)
... of a very high cliff.

Simone FREEZES.

VIKTOR
Perfect, Simone.

Viktor returns SIMONE to her neutral background.

VIKTOR
I'm only sorry you still have to work with flesh and blood for the time being -- as user friendly as you are, even I can't manufacture an entire cast.

"To Vivian. Love, Simone" -- VIKTOR writes on the publicity shot. He applies lipstick and adds a kiss to the photo.

Viktor wipes his mouth and looks to SIMONE on his screen -- she is waiting patiently, as usual.

VIKTOR

We are going to have to change our plans, Simone -- you have no idea what an affect your performance is having on people. We can't stop now. There's too much to say -- these films they speak, they speak to the human condition. We're changing lives. No, revealing the truth now would be too cruel.

(searching for more justification)

Anyway, when you're seeking a greater truth -- in the work -- you are not so concerned with the lesser truths along the way.

Simone doesn't appear convinced.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

You're going to get in a lot of trouble, Mr. Taransky.

VIKTOR

(irritated at her pricking his conscience)

Why do you have to bring that up? There's always risk -- life's a risk. It's worth it. Besides, how could something so lovely be a crime?

(regarding her tenderly)

Well, I think we've done enough for today. You've been cooped up in there too long. How about you and me go out on the town? They're expecting us.

He turns to a copy of "The Echo". A photo of Viktor at the gate of his Malibu home. "SIMONE HELD CAPTIVE - Self proclaimed Svengali Keeps Star Out Of Limelight". Viktor puts Simone to sleep and picks up a briefcase.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

VIKTOR, briefcase in hand, strides through the lobby of an opulent hotel. He approached the CONCIERGE.

VIKTOR

I'm checking in a special guest...
(obviously conspiratorial)
... Miss Enomis.

The Concierge straightens as he recognizes Viktor from a copy of "Variety". Headline: "Taransky Rides Ingenuer's Coat-Tails To Three Picture Deal".

CONCIERGE

Miss Enomis, yes.

VIKTOR

Miss Enomis demands her privacy. You will switch off all surveillance cameras. I will escort Miss Enomis to her room alone via the rear exit. She will require no help with her luggage. She does not wish to be disturbed at any time for any reason. She will be departing for a function tonight at eight sharp.
(tipping him with a hundred dollar bill)
I'm sure I can rely on your discretion. Do you understand?

CONCIERGE

(passing the key to Viktor)
Oh, I understand.

As Viktor departs, the Concierge holds the registration card to the mirror.

ENOMIS becomes SIMONE.

The Concierge picks up his phone.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

VIKTOR enters the hotel suite. We see a montage of scenes -- Viktor revelling in his masquerade.

A) VIKTOR pulls down the covers of a bed and rolls around in the sheets to give it a slept-in look.

- B) VIKTOR sprays cologne in the bed.
- C) VIKTOR tosses skimpy lingerie on the floor of the closet.
- D) VIKTOR eats several candy bars from the mini-bar.
- E) VIKTOR puts one of his own movies in the DVD player.
- F) VIKTOR writes a note on the bedside pad.
- G) In the bathroom, shower running, VIKTOR attempts to open a tampon -- it shoots out of the applicator like a penny rocket.
- H) VIKTOR cuts a lock of "faux" hair from a Simone wig and scatters it on the counter.
- I) VIKTOR shakes open a bag of toiletries, the toothbrush bouncing into the toilet bowl. He retrieves it.
- J) VIKTOR looks through the drapes of the hotel window -- a jam of PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS has congregated outside the rear entrance.
- K) VIKTOR shines a lamp against a doll casting a life-size shadow on the drapes. A "walking" silhouette is visible to the media on the street.
- L) VIKTOR writes a message in lipstick on the mirror -- "I LOVE YOU V--".

VIKTOR is interrupted by a knock on the door. He looks at his watch.

VIKTOR
(peering through the
peephole)
Who is it?

WOMAN'S VOICE
(from other side of door)
It's... Simone.

Viktor smiles.

EXT. HOTEL - REAR ENTRANCE - NIGHT

VIKTOR stands at the rear entrance of the hotel with a leggy YOUNG WOMAN wearing a coat over her head. A HOTEL DOORMAN keeps back the growing horde of REPORTERS.

Viktor's limousine waits at the curb. The coated woman starts towards the car but Viktor holds her back.

VIKTOR

Not yet.

(scrutinizing the crowd)

Where's "Matinee"? There they are.

Okay, I think everyone's here.

Now!

Viktor and the young woman run the gauntlet to the car, providing a perfect albeit restricted photo-op for the paparazzi.

PHOTOGRAPHER 1

Simone!

ECHO PHOTOGRAPHER

Over here, sweetheart!

PHOTOGRAPHER 3

Come one Simone, take it off, baby!

PHOTOGRAPHER 4

We got a job to do!

The car door slams shut as the pack descends. MAX SAYER and MILTON are amongst the frustrated reporters. The limo screeches away. A POLICE MOTORCYCLIST prevents anyone following.

The frustrated REPORTERS assess their efforts.

PHOTOGRAPHER 1

I think I got a piece of her ear.

ECHO PHOTOGRAPHER

I didn't get shit.

MILTON

(emerging from the pack,
to Max)

Ten feet from a living Goddess...

INT. MISS ENOMIS'S HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

MAX SAYER pays off the CONCIERGE. His assistant, MILTON, begins to collect "evidence" of the celebrity -- dusting for fingerprints, etc. Max rubs pencil into the impression on the bedside notepad revealing the message -- "The meaning of

life is that it ends".

MAX

(interrupting Milton's
work)

Leave me for a moment.

Milton and the Concierge depart.

Max is alone. He looks around the room.

- A) MAX enters the bathroom. He picks up a drinking glass and inspects it closely before placing it in a sealed plastic bag.
- B) MAX examines the wet soap from the shower and also places it in a plastic bag.
- C) MAX picks up the used toothbrush, puts it to his lips before placing it in a plastic bag.
- D) MAX gently places his hands on the toilet seat.
- E) MAX enters the bedroom. He carefully removes a slip from a pillow. He folds it meticulously, appearing to breathe in its scent as he places it in a plastic bag.
- F) Finally, MAX kneels and gazes at "Simone's" unmade bed. He slowly slides into the bed and slips beneath the same sheets recently vacated by Viktor.

INT. HALLWAY - OUTSIDE HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

MILTON, ear pressed against the door, tries to listen inside.

INT. VIKTOR TARANSKY'S LIMOUSINE - NIGHT

VIKTOR and the COATED WOMAN have finally left the PAPARAZZI in their wake. Viktor gently removes the coat from over her head.

Although the woman is impossible beautiful, she is not Simone. FAITH is Simone's latest stand-in and decoy. Viktor and Faith are still pressed together against one side of the limousine.

VIKTOR

(not quite able to avert
his eyes from her
telescopic legs)

Thank God for you, Faith. I know

this is above and beyond the call of duty for a stand-in. You don't know what a service you're performing for Simone -- shielding her from those animals.

FAITH

No, thank God for you, Mr. Taransky. How many men would go to so much trouble to protect a woman?

Neither Viktor nor Faith seem inclined to move from their intimate position.

VIKTOR

You understand you'll have to come back to my place to keep them off the, er...
(his nose close to Faith's neck)
... scent.

FAITH

Of course.

VIKTOR

(meeting her gaze)
You look so, so...

FAITH

... so much like her?

VIKTOR

Yes, of course, but very beautiful in your own right.

FAITH

I do find myself physically attracted to you, Mr. Taransky.

Their lips are now tantalizingly close.

VIKTOR

Viktor.

INT. VIKTOR'S MALIBU HOUSE - NIGHT

VIKTOR'S HEAD hits the sofa in his living room, closely followed by FAITH on top of him.

Faith tears at his clothes and her own, ravenous. Viktor hardly resists. In the midst of the wild caresses, Faith murmurs in his ear.

FAITH

Do whatever you do to Simone.

Viktor freezes.

VIKTOR

What?... What did you say?

FAITH

Do what you do to Simone.

VIKTOR

What I do to Simone?

FAITH

Yes, call me Simone.

VIKTOR

Simone?

FAITH

(still tearing at his
clothes)

Yes, yes, again, again. Do what
you do to Simone. I want to know
what it's like to be her just for
one night.

VIKTOR

(confused)

You're with me to be close to her?

FAITH

(panting)

Is that a problem?

As Viktor ponders the question, Faith begins to do Simone's deathbed speech from "Sunrise, Sunset".

FAITH

"Why are we here? Is that what
you're asking, Jack?... Why are we
here? No why. Just here".

VIKTOR

(this is too much for
Viktor)

Please put your clothes on

Viktor gets up from the sofa, leaving the frustrated Faith to straighten her clothes.

EXT. FUTURISTIC LANDSCAPE - "ETERNITY FOREVER" - DAY

The finished scene with SIMONE and HAL plays ON A SCREEN.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - STUDIO - DAY

VIKTOR watches the rough cut of "ETERNITY FOREVER" with ELAINE and daughter, LAINEY. As usual, they are mesmerized by the breath-taking beautiful SIMONE. The scene ends. The light go up.

ELAINE

Stunning, Viktor. The Hollywood Foreign Press is going to eat this up.

VIKTOR

Thank you.
(turning to his daughter)
What did you think, Lainey?

LAINEY

One thing bothered me.

VIKTOR

I know, Hal is as stiff as always.

LAINEY

No, not that. I was just wondering -- in the bedroom scene in reel two why did Simone have no reflection when she walked in front of that mirror?

Viktor is shocked, busted. He covers it with a laugh.

VIKTOR

(ashen-faced)
I wondered if you'd spot that.
You've got a good eye, Lainey. I'm proud of you.

Elaine looks at Viktor for an explanation.

VIKTOR

I got them to remove the

reflection. The mirror's metaphor
-- to show how her character's
inwardly dead.

ELAINE

That's genius, Viktor. Was that
Simone's idea?

VIKTOR

(sarcastic, annoyed at the
suggestion)

Who else? It's always Simone's
idea.

LAINY

(not quite convinced)

So that accounts for the lack of a
shadow in reel six?

VIKTOR

Precisely.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - NIGHT

VIKTOR escorts ELAINE and LAINY to Elaine's car parked
outside the theater.

LAINY

(as she gets into the car)

Good-night, Daddy.

VIKTOR

(kissing Lainey good-bye)

Night, Lainey.

Elaine and Viktor linger a moment outside the car.

VIKTOR

(drawing Elaine aside)

Elaine, I don't know if it's a good
idea for Lainey to come to the
screenings -- mature content and
all that.

Both look to Lainey. From inside the car Lainey watches her
parents.

ELAINE

(impressed by his
responsible attitude)

Maybe you're right.

(gently teasing)
Twelve years after your daughter's
born you decide to become a father.

VIKTOR
Better late than never.

ELAINE
(softening)
I should fire you more often. The
film's looking wonderful.

VIKTOR
You really think so?

ELAINE
Yes. To be honest I never quite
saw this film before -- maybe it's
the way Simone is playing it -- but
what it's saying about the illusion
of permanence in everyday life, how
that's the only way we can love --
I think it's really going to mean
something.

VIKTOR
Thank you. I'll tell Simone you
liked it.

ELAINE
I'd love to tell her myself.
(cajoling)
When are you going to let me meet
her?

VIKTOR
Soon. Soon.

ELAINE
Everyone I know has met her,
Viktor.

VIKTOR
Everyone you know is lying.

ELAINE
(amused)
That's true.

They instinctively kiss, more affectionate than before.
However, their embrace is interrupted by a click of a camera

shutter from a nearby bush.

VIKTOR

Damnit!

The PHOTOGRAPHER has gone but so has the mood.

ELAINE

You know how you can stop that.
She has to get out more.
(climbing into the car)
See you at the premiere.

Elaine climbs into her car and drives away.

EXT. PREMIERE - DUSK

The premiere for "ETERNITY FOREVER" is everything VIKTOR had hoped for "SUNRISE, SUNSET". Red carpet, klieg lights searching the sky, screaming FANS and PAPARAZZI.

A limousine pulls up, door opens and VIKTOR steps out. The crowd screams with excitement.

Viktor waves. An expectancy in the crowd -- people crane their necks, waiting for someone else to step out of the open car door... but nothing. The door shuts. A disappointed murmur. The limo drives off.

VIKTOR walks down the carpet to little fanfare.

PREMIERE REPORTER 1

(talking to camera)

-- What a night! Anyone who's anyone is here at the premiere of "Eternity Forever," but waiting for Simone to show may take even longer. We do have her director, Viktor Taransky.

(ushering him over)

Viktor, Viktor, is Simone coming?

VIKTOR

(slightly irritated by the focus on the star)

You know Simone.

Other reporters force their way into the interview.

PREMIERE REPORTER 2

I hope she does show up. Some of

her fans got here at dawn. We don't want to disappoint them.

VIKTOR

(through a pained smile)
Well, I'm sure they're going to love the movie. I got the inspiration --

However, the reporter's attention has strayed.

PREMIERE REPORTER 2

HARRY EPSON!

The CAMERAS pivot away from Viktor. Screen idol, HARRY EPSON, is walking up the carpet.

PREMIERE REPORTER 2

Harry! Harry! Can we have a minute? What brings you here tonight?

HARRY

(waving to the fans)
I just came out to support my good friend, Simone.

PREMIERE REPORTER 2

There's a rumor that you're more than just "good friends"?

HARRY

(slightly irritated by the invasion)
We've been seeing each other, sure, but we'd rather keep our relationship private.

PREMIERE REPORTER 2

(believing she has a scoop)
Do I hear the sound of... wedding bells?

HARRY

(suddenly losing it)
I can't believe you people! No wonder she never comes to these things!

Harry angrily pushes the camera away and strides up the

carpet.

VIKTOR watches him go, flabbergasted.

EXT. PREMIERE PARTY - NIGHT

A packed, glitzy party. VIKTOR enters without an escort. Despite his recent rise to prominence he appears strangely alone.

He observes ELAINE, champagne in hand, and the younger KENT, schmoozing with a group of industry MOVERS and SHAKERS.

MOVER/SHAKER

Elaine! The picture is a revelation!

ELAINE

Thank you. I mean, it was a team effort --

Viktor cannot resist taking Elaine's photo with a small pocket camera. Elaine is unaware of the shot.

Viktor turns away -- just as Elaine turns to look at him.

Viktor picks up a drink from the bar. A DRUNK WOMAN, perched unsteadily on a nearby barstool, is knocking back Jack Daniels. She accidentally brushes one of her discarded glasses off the bar. Viktor catches it.

A HAND taps Viktor on the shoulder. HAL stands there accompanied by his "Eternity Forever" co-star, MAC.

HAL

Is she here?

VIKTOR

I'm fine, Hal. How are you?

HAL

(oblivious to his sarcasm)
Somebody said she was here.

Mac spots the two glasses in Viktor's hands -- one glass lipstick-smearred.

MAC

Oh my God, that's her glass!
(impulsively smelling
"Simone's" glass)

Jack Daniels, straight-up. She is my kind of woman.

HAL
(looking anxiously around the room)
Viktor, where is she?

VIKTOR
She's around.

MAC
(dawning on him, glancing to the far side of the packed room)
Jesus, Hal... she's in the Ladies Room.

HAL
You know I sometimes forget she has bodily functions.

VIKTOR
(unable to resist)
I know what you mean.

HAL
(anxiously looking to the restroom)
I have to talk to her about my experimental film. It's very... experimental.

MAC
Is that her? -- By the fountain.

Far across the party, a WOMAN, with a Simone-type hairstyle, her back to us, is standing at the edge of a fountain.

VIKTOR
(testy)
No. In fact, between us, she doesn't really exist.

HAL
(ignoring him, calling out to the woman)
Simone!

MAC
SIMONE!

Several nearby GUESTS, including ELAINE, overhear. They talk over each other.

GUEST 1

-- Simone's here!

ELAINE

(slightly the worse for
drink)

-- When did she arrive? Why didn't
someone tell me?

GUEST 2

-- Where is she?

MAC

-- She's by the fountain.

GUEST 3

-- Simone, over here!

GUEST 4

-- Simone!

The rumor races through the party like wild-fire. The GUESTS surge towards the fountain in a wave of mindless adoration.

The Simone lookalike herself spins around.

LOOKALIKE WOMAN

Simone!

She gets knocked into the fountain. Several other GUESTS also fall in the stampede.

Back at the bar, the BARMAN, autograph book in hand, deserts his station. Viktor is left alone with the drunk woman.

LOCAL TV NEWS

The limousines outside the hotel ballroom have been replaced with ambulances. PARAMEDICS tend to GUESTS, bloodied and battered in the stampede caused by Simone's "appearance".

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

(into microphone)

-- Forget "Eternity Forever", the
big news tonight was the surprise
appearance of Simone. Even these
seen-it-all superstars are

apparently not immune to Simone fever and the resulting stampede forced organizers to bring the event to an early end. I spoke with some of the departing guests about their encounter with Hollywood's most reluctant superstar.

CUTS of interviews with VARIOUS bruised GUESTS.

EXECUTIVE 3

-- I would say, even more beautiful in person, you have to see her to believe her.

MALE GUEST 1

-- I can't reveal what we spoke about. It was... personal. Simone and I go back a long way.

FEMALE GUEST 1

-- When she talks to you, for that moment, you are the only other human being in the room.

FEMALE GUEST 2

(dress torn)

-- I really don't know what the fuss is about. So over-rated. She's done one film. Talk to me when she's had the kind of career I've had.

MALE GUEST 2

-- I do expect her to be nominated, yes.

We return to the live shot of the ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER.

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

Fortunately, Simone was not amongst the injured and was spirited away as mysteriously as she arrived.

EXT. ECHO OFFICES - DAY

Max Sayer's car is parked outside of the Echo Building.

INT. ECHO OFFICES - DAY

In the ECHO war room, MAX SAYER is agitated. He paces back and forth, railing at a table of cowering STAFFERS.

MAX

-- She goes to a major, Hollywood, A-list party and we don't get an interview, a comment, we don't even get a photograph? Is that what you're telling me?

ECHO PHOTOGRAPHER

Nobody got a photograph. Nobody ever gets a photograph.

MILTON

We've got our best people on it, Mr. Sayer.

MAX

24-hour tail on Taransky?

MILTON

Shutter bugs camped outside any place he goes, every concierge and maitre d' on the take. But this Simone woman is good.

MAX

(referring to a
"Confidential" FBI
report)

Obviously the name isn't real -- she's using an assumed identity, travels under a false name, checks into hotels with an alias. She never stays in the same place two nights in a row. Anything on the satellite photos?

(irritated)

What about the fingerprints? What happened when we dusted that hotel suite?

MILTON holds up a glass taken from the hotel.

MILTON

Well, we got some of Taransky's fingerprints, a lot of your fingerprints... but none of hers.

MAX

(interest piqued)
Which means they're significant.
(beat)
Incriminating.
(beat)
Perhaps, criminal.
(getting excited)
She's hiding her past. She's
hiding her past.

Max ponders the revelation.

MAX

Of course -- no one's that perfect,
that pure. You know I had
something on Mother Teresa. But
then she died and it wasn't worth
it anymore.

(approaching a computer)
I know how to flush out this Simone
-- a tell-all story from her
childhood.

MILTON

(impressed)
My God, you've got one?

MAX

(offering Milton a seat in
front of the computer)
I will when you're finished writing
it.

MILTON hesitates, questioning his journalistic ethics.

MAX

(disappointed in his
protege)
Am I wasting my time with you?
When she sues to protect her
privacy, she'll have to appear in a
public courtroom to do it.

MILTON

(under his breath)
Long live the First Amendment.

MAX

Sometimes you have to tell a small
lie to get to the bigger truth.
(to his nervous

photographer)
As for a photo -- if you can't do
it, I know twelve million people
who can.

CLOSE UP on The Echo magazine -- "CIRCULATION - 12 MILLION".

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

"MILLION DOLLAR REWARD FOR PHOTO OF SIMONE!" -- Is the
headline on the cover of The ECHO. VIKTOR is reading the
magazine as he makes his way through the studio lot.

He looks up to see several studio carts parked outside his
soundstage. A group of STUDIO EXECUTIVES, led by ELAINE, is
trying to break into the "CLOSED SET". VIKTOR runs towards
the door, throwing himself between the door and the
executives.

VIKTOR
-- You can't go in there!

ELAINE
-- We have to talk to her, Viktor!

EXECUTIVE 1
-- We know she's in there!

Viktor glares at the SECURITY GUARD who shrugs weakly.

VIKTOR
(struggling to hold them
back)
-- Why? What's all this about?

EXECUTIVE 2
(waving a spreadsheet)
-- We've got the tracking numbers
for "Eternity Forever".

EXECUTIVE 3
-- They're in the toilet.

ELAINE
-- She has to get out there and
sell the film.

VIKTOR
-- What do you want her to do, go
door-to-door -- ?

EXECUTIVE 1

-- Even Garbo would be on the talk show circuit if she was alive today.

VIKTOR

(irritated)

-- It's precisely because she doesn't crave the limelight that people love her. I told you, she's only about the work.

EXECUTIVE 3

-- This is over-shadowing the work!

EXECUTIVE 2

(waving the front page of
The Echo)

That's the problem. She's more famous for her no-shows than her shows.

ELAINE

-- It's starting to look like she doesn't support the film or you, Viktor.

(trying to squeeze past
Viktor)

If you can't handle her, I will.

VIKTOR

(blocking her path)

Not now. She's emotional. Her mother dies today. Scene forty-two of "Good For Nothing". It's not a good time.

Elaine and the executives are not convinced, they overpower Viktor.

VIKTOR

No! Please, don't go in there!

Too late. Elaine and the suits force the lock and enter.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

ELAINE and the EXECUTIVES stop in their tracks -- confronted with the surreal sight of the lone computer station in the vast soundstage. A desperate VIKTOR catches up with them.

EXECUTIVE 1

Where is she?

EXECUTIVE 2

She's not here.

VIKTOR

Elaine... I...

Elaine wanders over to the idle computer with a knowing smile.

ELAINE

So, the secret's finally out,
Viktor.

VIKTOR

-- I can explain.

ELAINE

-- I don't think that's necessary.
I think it's perfectly clear. I
should have guessed -- it all makes
sense now... it's why she never
goes anywhere, never seen in
public...

Viktor lowers his head, resigned to his fate.

ELAINE

She's into computers.

Viktor looks up.

EXECUTIVE 1

(nodding in agreement)

Probably spends her whole life in
chat rooms.

EXECUTIVE 2

It's the one place she can be
herself.

EXECUTIVE 3

Anonymous.

Viktor seizes on the opportunity.

VIKTOR

(adopting a serious tone)

It's worse than you think. She's

extremely agoraphobic -- has a morbid fear of people and germs. In a way I'm relieved you... found out.

The Executives are taken aback by the shocking revelation.

VIKTOR

The premiere was the first time I've convinced her to venture out and it just confirmed her worst nightmares.

ELAINE

(concerned)

Viktor, you should have said something.

VIKTOR

She doesn't want pity.

ELAINE

(seeing a new side of Viktor)

You're so good to protect her like this.

Viktor shrugs modestly.

VIKTOR

(to the Executives, conceding)

I'll tell you what. I know how much this means to you. I'll try to get her to plug the film.

(beat)

I'm not promising anything but maybe she'll do a talk show -- taped.

ELAINE

Oh, make it live -- please, Viktor.

VIKTOR

I'll try. Maybe live but remote. She'll never go to them.

EXECUTIVE 1

We understand. Thank you, Viktor.

EXECUTIVE 2

Give her our best.

Satisfied, the Executives make their way out of the soundstage.

EXECUTIVE 1

(aside to a colleague)
That agoraphobia -- it's like a plague.

EXECUTIVE 2

It's out of control in Europe.

Viktor and Elaine are left alone.

VIKTOR

I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to introduce you to Simone at the premiere. There wasn't time with the riot and everything.

(picking up a framed photo
from the work station)

But she wanted you to have this.

The photograph shows ELAINE, slightly inebriated at the premiere, SIMONE standing slightly behind her.

ELAINE

She was there. She didn't by any chance happen to mention me?

VIKTOR

She said you were very beautiful.

ELAINE

(flattered)
Really?

VIKTOR

(blurting out)
Elaine, what are you doing tonight?
Would you like to go somewhere --
dinner?

ELAINE

I'd love to. But aren't you supposed to meet up with Simone?

VIKTOR

Oh, yes. Of course. Don't I always?

Viktor watches Elaine make her way back to her studio cart.

Viktor realizes he is still holding a copy of the National ECHO -- the headline, "MILLION DOLLAR REWARD FOR PHOTO OF SIMONE"! Accompanied by a photo of intrepid reporter MAX SAYER.

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

An unattended shopping cart, at the end of the frozen foods aisle, begins to mysteriously roll towards us.

We discover VIKTOR, pulling the cart with fishing line, while at the same time shooting it with a video camera.

INT. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT

Viktor's home video of the shopping cart plays on a TV. However, now SIMONE is pushing the cart. She wears sunglasses, her hair in curlers under a scarf. Simone takes a Swanson Chicken Pot Pie out of a cabinet... then a box of cereal off a display.

INT. ECHO OFFICES - DAY

MAX SAYER watches the video in his office, enraptured. He rewinds the tape and replays the moment.

MAX

She likes Apple Jacks... just like me...

Assistant MILTON enters. He looks ill.

MILTON

Mr. Sayer...

MAX

(irritated at being interrupted)

What do you want -- ?

MILTON

Mr. Sayer, did we pay the million bucks yet?

MAX

(never averting his eyes from the screen)

-- Cashier's check went out to our

anonymous tipster this morning --
worth every penny too. Who says
there's no place for checkbook
journalism? We'll be running
stills of this for months, then
release the whole tape -- we'll get
our money back -- maybe show it on
an exclusive pay-per-view event.
Do you realize what we have here?
We have the only independent
footage of Simone in existence.

MILTON

We used to.

Max's head snaps around.

MILTON

(holding a copy of the
L.A. Times Calendar
section - "Simone Live")
She's doing Frank Brand on
Thursday.

Max coughs.

MAX

Get out.

A TV

The opening credits to "FRANK BRAND LIVE", a global cable
show plays against a starscape -- images of famous
politicians and world leaders interviewed by Frank.

FRANK BRAND

(to camera)

Tonight on Frank Brand Live --

INT. ELAINE'S MANSION - DAY

ELAINE, KENT and LAINEY watch the TV interview in Elaine's
mansion with eager anticipation.

FRANK BRAND

-- Since taking the nation by storm
with her debut movie, "Sunrise,
Sunset"...

INT. MAX SAYER'S OFFICE - THE ECHO - DAY

MAX SAYER and assistant MILTON are also glued to their set.

FRANK BRAND

... no one's managed to land a live TV interview with the fabulous, new shooting starlet, Simone... until now.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Casually tacked up on the monitor is the MILLION DOLLAR CHECK from The ECHO.

VIKTOR, face and body scanned by the computer, is making a final test of his equipment. When he touches his hair, bats his eyes, moves his hands -- so does Simone.

VIKTOR frantically tests several different backgrounds behind SIMONE from a library of images. Rainforest. Desert. Ritzy hotel suite. Moonscape. Factory.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

Make up your mind, Viktor. Make up your mind.

He settles on the desert location.

He also make a last-second change to Simone's wardrobe -- selecting "TOO-TIGHT SWEATER".

INT. FRANK BRAND TV STUDIO - NIGHT

FRANK BRAND talks to camera.

FRANK BRAND

I'm happy to say she's agreed to join us tonight from the set of her new film.

(turning to the TV monitor)

Welcome, Simone.

The just-completed image of SIMONE appears on Brand's monitor.

SIMONE

Wonderful to be with you, Frank.

INT. ELAINE'S MANSION - DAY

KENT, referring to Simone, forgetting or not caring that

Elaine is in the room.

KENT

She is all woman.

LAINY shoots her mother's boyfriend a withering look. She gets up and leaves the room.

During the interview we cut between Frank Brand's studio, Viktor's soundstage and various viewer locations including Elaine's mansion, Max Sayer's office and various worldwide locations --

- A) A lone AFGHANI SHEPHERD gazing at a Watchman.
- B) A JAPANESE COUPLE watching TV in a capsule hotel room.
- C) A CATHOLIC CARDINAL watching TV in the Vatican.

INT. FRANK BRAND TV STUDIO - NIGHT

FRANK BRAND

Well, no one could accuse you of being over-exposed, Simone. Why have you stayed so completely out of the limelight?

SIMONE

(shrugs)

I just think actors talk too much. Does the world really want to hear your life story just because you've got a movie opening Friday?

FRANK BRAND

Of course, the only problem with shying away from publicity these days is that it tends to attract more.

VIKTOR is in his element, his effeminate gestures frighteningly convincing.

SIMONE

(from TV)

Don't I know it. That's the only reason I'm here now -- to put the attention back where it belongs, on Mr. Taransky's film.

FRANK BRAND

You don't secretly want the attention?

SIMONE

I'm not even sure I deserve it. After tonight I'll have almost as much screen time on your show as I do in my movies. How is that healthy for a performer?

IE. ELAINE'S MANSION - DAY

LAINNEY has turned her back on the TV screen, preferring to look through a book.

SIMONE

(from TV)

Because, you have to understand, Frank, these interviews -- none of this is real. Who I am on screen and who I really am are two totally different people.

FRANK BRAND

Who are you really?

SIMONE

That's a good question.

(beat)

As Nietzsche said, "Whenever a man strives long and hard to appear someone else..."

LAINNEY

(reading from a bookmarked page, along with Simone)

"... he ends up finding it is difficult to be himself again."

FRANK BRAND

Well put.

Lainney regards the name written on the inside page -- "Viktor Taransky".

INT. MAX SAYER'S OFFICE - THE ECHO - DAY

TV playing in the background, MAX and MILTON are hurriedly leafing through travel books and scrutinizing maps.

MAX

(focusing on the desert
background behind Simone)
I know where that is... I know...

INT. FRANK BRAND TV STUDIO - NIGHT

FRANK BRAND
Change of topic. Simone, you've
been romantically linked to dozens
of men in the press -- Mick Jagger,
Stephen Hawking, Fidel Castro...
and most recently Viktor Taransky.
Is there a Mr. Right in there
somewhere?

SIMONE
I'd rather not discuss my private
life.
(gently)
But Viktor and I are inseparable.

INT. ELAINE'S MANSION - DAY

ELAINE's face drops, slightly hurt.

KENT
You dog, Viktor!

SIMONE
(from TV)
I literally wouldn't be here today
without him.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

VIKTOR accidentally taps his finger on the keyboard in his
excitement -- the cursor aimed at "TEARS" command. SIMONE'S
EYES start to well with tears -- a tear spills from her eye.

FRANK BRAND
Would you like a moment, Simone?

Viktor notices, quickly withdrawing his finger -- his
startled expression instantly imitated by Simone.

SIMONE
No, I'm okay.

INT. FRANK BRAND TV STUDIO - NIGHT

FRANK BRAND

Let's talk about the work that you care so much about.

SIMONE

Sure. Where would you like to start?

FRANK BRAND

How about the nudity?

SIMONE

Nudity has just never been an issue for me, Frank. For me, clothes are just an option.

FRANK BRAND

What exactly was it that attracted you to your first two projects?

SIMONE

(unable to resist a smile)

I suppose the thing I like most about the movies I'm in is that they're not about special effects.

Frank nods sagely.

FRANK BRAND

They're better for it if I may say.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

The smile is suddenly wiped off VIKTOR's face by a blinking alert:

!!INSUFFICIENT MEMORY TO COMPLETE THIS TASK!!

The pixels that form SIMONE start to break up. Curiously, it is only Simone and not the background that is disintegrating.

INT. FRANK BRAND TV STUDIO - NIGHT

FRANK BRAND

(regarding the screen)

Well, we appear to be experiencing satellite difficulties. In case we lose you, Simone, I want to thank you --

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

VIKTOR speaks again, his voice suddenly deeper.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

Thank... YOU, FRANK.

In horror Viktor hurriedly pulls the plug. The feed goes blank on Frank Brand's screen.

VIKTOR slumps over his computer in exhaustion. Since SIMONE is still synced to his movements, the partially de-pixelated Simone also slumps.

Viktor's cell phone rings. Viktor picks up.

VIKTOR / SIMONE

Hel--

He remembers at the last second to switch off his voice synthesizer.

VIKTOR

(into phone)

Hello.

INT. ELAINE'S MANSION - DAY

We cut between the two sides of the conversation -- ELAINE on the phone, KENT still watching post-interview analysis on the TV.

ELAINE

-- Viktor, are you with her? Is she there?

VIKTOR

No.

An anxious beat.

ELAINE

Are you and Simone...
(blurting it out)
... getting married?

VIKTOR

(taken aback by the suggestion)
No, of course not!
(realizing the significance of the question)

Why? Would you care if we were?

ELAINE

(covering, realizing she
has given herself away)

Well, yes. From a studio point of
view, it would be better if Simone
stayed single.

(quick change of topic)

Anyhow, I thought she came across
great tonight. Intelligent, well
informed, a natural. And touching.
She was spectacular.

VIKTOR

Thank you.

A pause.

ELAINE

Viktor, do you realize you always
do that?

VIKTOR

Do what?

ELAINE

Whenever I compliment Simone, you
take the credit.

VIKTOR

I do?

ELAINE

Yes, you do...

(shrug)

Anyway, tonight was a good start.

VIKTOR

Excuse me? Start?

ELAINE

It's a crowded summer. We need
every photo-opp, sound-byte and
column inch we can get. Good
night, Viktor.

Elaine hangs up. Lainey approaches.

LAINY

(carefully broaching the

subject)
Mom, do you miss Dad?

ELAINE
(she thinks)
Sometimes. But, just when I think
your father's changing for the
better, I realize he's as self
absorbed as ever. He took the
credit for Simone tonight.

Lainey, coming to her father's defense, glancing at the
Nietzsche book in her hand.

LAINY
I think Dad deserves more credit
than he gets.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - LATER THAT NIGHT

VIKTOR watches SIMONE on screen. He is unusually anxious.

As usual SIMONE is wearing a skimpy, provocative outfit as
she awaits instructions on the screen. For some reason
Viktor becomes irritated by the image.

VIKTOR
(to Simone)
Will you cover yourself up!?

He hits a button. A thick WOOL COAT clicks over her body.

EXT. NEW MEXICO DESERT - MORNING

The ECHO newscar streaks through the bronze and purple
desert. MAX and his assistant MILTON emerge from the car.

MAX
-- I've been here before! -- On my
honeymoon with my ex-wife.

MILTON
Is that why she left you?

Max holds a video print of SIMONE giving her FRANK BRAND
interview. He compares her desert location to the one in
front of him.

MAX
(pointing out a Joshua
tree)

You see, that's the exact same tree
and in the distance, there's the...
(voice trailing away)
... mountain.

Sure enough, the Joshua tree is identical but the mountain is now obscured by a ten-story Holiday Inn.

Max and Milton are mystified -- they look back at the photo.

MILTON
It's a hotel.

MAX
I don't understand.

MILTON
Could they have built that hotel
since yesterday?

Max shakes his head, deeply concerned.

MAX
Get in the car.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - NIGHT

VIKTOR has transformed his soundstage into a one-man publicity machine. The floor is littered with photographs of SIMONE in various states of dress and undress.

Using a sophisticated Photoshop computer program, VIKTOR constructs magazine spreads out of numerous previous magazine spreads -- "Time", "People", "Us", "Life", "Popular Mechanics".

VIKTOR
(angrily into phone)
-- We don't do the photo shoot, you don't get the cover... written answers to written questions, that's right... website interviews, no problem.

Viktor calls up a "DANCE OPTION". Choosing from a HULA DANCER, a BELLY DANCER and a CLASSICAL BALLERINA, he removes Simone's head and places it on the body of the ballerina. She begins to dance for him.

He uses a program to construct childhood photographs of SIMONE and other childhood memorabilia.

He employs backgrounds from numerous on-line library sources. With a quick cut and paste he is able to place Simone on a beach in San Tropez or a bicycle factory in Calcutta.

VIKTOR

(muttering to himself)

You want exposure, Elaine? I'll
give you over-exposure...

INT. ELAINE'S OFFICE - STUDIO - DAY

ELAINE watches TV in her office. She cannot change channels without finding Simone sitting in a chair giving generic answers.

INT. SIMONE INTERVIEW SET - DAY (ON ELAINE'S TV)

SIMONE

I think "Eternity Forever" is my
finest work.

SIMONE

I'm most proud of my work in
"Eternity Forever".

SIMONE

I think people are going to love
"Eternity Forever".

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - NIGHT

VIKTOR inspects a cut-out photograph of Simone in "ETERNITY FOREVER" costume. He speaks to the photo.

VIKTOR

Forgive me, Simone.

EXT. FASTFOOD RESTAURANT - DAY

The photograph of Simone is emblazoned on a fast food drink cup -- a pyramid of cups promoting "ETERNITY FOREVER" Happy Meals. Beneath the plastic pyramid is a SIMONE action figure in a convertible.

INT. VIKTOR'S MALIBU BEACH HOUSE - DAY

"ETERNITY FOREVER" HAS BIG FUTURE AT B.O.!

Screams the banner headline in "Variety".

\$\$\$SIMONE - WINS 6TH WEEKEND IN A ROW

Shouts the "Hollywood Reporter".

The trade papers sit on the coffee table in front of VIKTOR who reclines on a leather sofa, watching TV, gazing lovingly at Simone.

INT. SIMONE INTERVIEW SET - DAY (ON VIKTOR'S TV)

SIMONE

Of course, being a movie star is wonderful, but I have so many other ways I want to express myself --

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Various book titles are on display:

"SIMONE'S FAVORITE SOUTHERN RECIPES"

"HUMAN:KIND - The POETRY of SIMONE"

"SIMONE'S 101 WAYS TO JOY"

EXT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

A banner in a window reads. "In Stock: SIMONE'S EASY-WEAR FASHION". Mannequins model the clothes.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

We focus on the screen where VIKTOR types in instructions:

SEARCH: "NUMBER 1 HITS - FEMALE ARTISTS/BILLBOARD CHARTS"

PERIOD: "LAST 40 YEARS"

A list of the Number 1 hits for the last forty years promptly appears on the screen along with photographs of the artists --

PATSY CLINE, ELLA FITZGERALD, ARETHA FRANKLIN, JANICE JOPLIN, CAROL KING, WHITNEY HOUSTON, MADONNA, etc. Beneath the title of each song is a graphic representation of the music -- "PITCH" and "RESONANCE".

Viktor presses a button: "MORPH". The audio waves converge.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

VIKTOR, wearing headphones, records his composite pop song. As usual when he sings into his microphone, Simone also sings. The catchy song is titled: "(If You Can't Believe In Yourself) Believe In Me".

SIMONE APPEARS IN A MUSIC VIDEO.

INT. RECORD STORE - DAY

The video for SIMONE's song plays on the video wall inside the record store. TEENAGE GIRLS, buying CD's, dance adoringly in front of the screen, unaware that they are gyrating to the vocals of a middle-aged man.

INSERT - "(If You Can't Believe In Yourself) Believe In Me" shoots up the Billboard charts.

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

CLOSE UP on the name "SIMONE" painted on the stern of a luxury yacht.

VIKTOR is at the helm, breathing in the clean air -- at last a moment to savor his success. Simone's hit single plays on the yacht's stereo. He looks at peace.

EXT. MARINA - DAY

A TOURIST has his arm around SIMONE, having his photograph taken. However, we discover that the Simone is only a lifesize cardboard cutout used by a STREET VENDOR to sell snapshots. He also has cardboard cutouts of the POPE and ELVIS.

MAX SAYER and MILTON walk by.

Tying up his boat, VIKTOR's mood is abruptly shattered by the sight of Max and Milton walking down the pier towards him.

MAX

Nice boat, Taransky.

VIKTOR

It's a yacht.

MAX

I know what you're up to.

VIKTOR

(pushing past Max)

I don't have time for this, Sayer.

MAX

I think you do.
(holding up his video
print of Simone in the
desert)
I know it's a fake.

Viktor freezes.

MAX

Got your attention now?

Max compares the shot to one of the current desert location with the Holiday Inn in front of the mountain.

MAX

(referring to the
photographs)
It's bogus. You used an old
library shot for the background.

VIKTOR

(ashen)
The background is.

MAX

She was never in New Mexico. She
never left the studio.

Viktor is relieved that Max is only accusing him of faking the background.

MAX

(referring to a large
bundle of other shots
under his arm)
I've done my homework. I've
studied her.

VIKTOR

-- I bet you have.

MAX

-- I've looked at every piece of
publicity she's ever done, the
video in the supermarket, there's
no evidence she's ever left the
studio.
(afterthought)
Oh, and for some reason this woman

leaves no paper trail. But I have "obtained" a copy of your bank accounts. I know you have power of attorney but so far you haven't transferred one single solitary cent to her.

VIKTOR

I'm keeping it in trust.

MAX

I know that's what you'd like us to believe. But I got to tell you -- embezzlement is a serious matter. Not to mention abduction.

VIKTOR

Abduction?

MAX

I don't buy the whole recluse scam. How are you doing it? What is it -- drugs? Blackmail? Mind-control? All three? What do you do -- keep her locked in a box somewhere?

Viktor flinches at the remark.

VIKTOR

What is it exactly you want, Sayer?

MAX

I want to see her. Unless you show me Simone live and in person I show these pictures to the authorities.

Viktor pauses, considering the threat.

VIKTOR

Alright, Sayer, you've got a deal.

MAX

Er,... good.

MILTON

That's good.

Viktor walks away leaving Max confused.

The breeze whips the photos of SIMONE out of Max's hands and into the sea.

INT. CONCERT STADIUM - DUSK

A vast, empty stadium. On the stage, a lone microphone. VIKTOR approaches, gazing out at the vast arena. Several PROMOTERS and TECHNICIANS join him.

PROMOTER

All ready, Mr. Taransky. This time tomorrow night, she'll be standing right here in front of a packed house. We could have sold it out twenty times.

Viktor nods.

TECHNICIAN

Soundcheck went perfect. Laser show ready to go.

(cautionary note)

I gotta say, you ordered an awful lot of smoke.

VIKTOR

That's the way she likes it.

The Promoter glancing to the area in front of the stage, where a barrier has been erected.

PROMOTER

After what you told us about the death threats, the security guards are under strict instructions never to take their eyes off the crowd.

VIKTOR

Excellent.

Viktor hands each man a headshot of SIMONE signed with a kiss.

VIKTOR

Simone wanted you to have these.

TECHNICIAN

(visibly moved by the gesture)

Wish her luck from us.

VIKTOR

Oh, I will.

(afterthought)
Remember, no cameras, no
binoculars.

EXT. STADIUM - NIGHT

In the shadow of the enormous stadium sits a control truck/tour bus, satellite dishes on the roof -- the lights from the laser-show inside the arena play off the truck. The control truck shakes from the stomping of the crowd.

CROWD
... SI-MONE! SI-MONE! SI-MONE!...

The door to the truck is marked, "SIMONE - Splendid Isolation Tour. NO ENTRY".

INT. CONTROL TRUCK - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

VIKTOR sits alone at the mixing panel of a control truck. On his monitors, a sea of humanity, chanting.

CROWD
... SI-MONE! SI-MONE! SI-MONE!...

Viktor produces the "SIMULATION ONE" hard-drive from his jacket pocket and inserts it into the computer.

SIMONE appears on the monitor.

VIKTOR
Let's get you into hair and make
up.

Simone's hair rapidly grows in a number of styles, eyelashes grow and are trimmed, eyeshadow of various shades paints across the lids.

VIKTOR
Wardrobe.

Viktor tries several outfits on Simone -- the clothes appearing to fabricate themselves on her body. He settles for the most provocative outfit.

Finger poised over the keyboard, Viktor glances to a monitor showing --

INT. STADIUM - CROWD - NIGHT

ELAINE and LAINEY amongst the crowd, clapping their hands,

stomping their feet and chanting.

INT. CONTROL TRUCK - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

VIKTOR

Easier to make one hundred thousand
believe than just one.

He scrolls to a program, marked "HOLOGRAM" and pushes the
"ENTER" key.

INT. STADIUM - CONCERT STAGE - NIGHT

Smoke fills the stage. A strobe light show plays. A booming
ANNOUNCER is heard.

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, Viktor
Taransky Promotions is proud to
present, live on stage, for the
debut concert of the "Splendid
Isolation" tour, the one, the only,
SI-MONE!

A spotlight falls on the solitary figure of Simone, standing
alone on the stage with a guitar over her shoulder (the only
accompaniment) -- dwarfed by the huge stage. However, on
closer inspection, the spotlight is actually a laser beam
creating a hologram. Clouds of smoke and strobe lighting aid
the illusion.

The only clear view of Simone for the audience is provided by
the enormous video screens on either side of the stage. The
CROWD stares up at the jumbotrons, blissfully unaware that
they are watching a pre-recorded event. Some watch the event
on portable TVs.

INT. CONTROL TRUCK - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

CLOSE UP on the computer screen. VIKTOR scrolls down a list
of options -- "... HOUSTON, MIAMI, NEW YORK, L.A...."

SIMONE

(from on stage)

I love you...

He selects "L.A."

SIMONE

... L.A.

The crowd roars its approval.

SIMONE

It's great to be here.

INT. STADIUM - CONCERT STAGE - NIGHT

SIMONE -- her voice a seamless blend of several DIVAS -- begins to sing her hit song, "(If You Can't Believe In Yourself) Believe In Me". A verse of the song is sung in perfect Spanish.

EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - NIGHT/DAY

- A) On a jumbotron in Tokyo SIMONE's concert plays LIVE.
- B) On a TV set on a West African beach, children dance to SIMONE.
- C) On a computer in a Bombay taxi, the driver and his passengers gyrate to SIMONE webcast.

INT. CONTROL TRUCK - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

VIKTOR's face is reflected in a monitor showing a frenzied crowd gazing up at the jumbotron -- singing along, many in tears, overcome with emotion -- holding cigarette lighters aloft. For a moment Viktor is in awe of his own wizardry -- the grand illusionist. Viktor is at the height of his powers.

VIKTOR

(to the image of Simone on
his screen)

I don't know about you, Simone, but
I've never felt more alive.

He snaps back to reality just in time to notice that the Simone hologram beam has wandered through her own microphone stand.

VIKTOR

Damn!

He adjusts the beam -- the rapturous crowd, transfixed by the TV screen, apparently fails to notice.

INT. STADIUM - CROWD - NIGHT

We focus on a face in the crowd -- MAX SAYER. His journalistic assignment temporarily forgotten, Max is singing

along and waving his arms, tears rolling down his face, swept up in the moment.

INT. STADIUM - CONCERT STAGE - NIGHT

SIMONE finishes her final number.

SIMONE

Good-night. Never stop believing.

EXT. STADIUM - EXIT - NIGHT

A bin contains dozens of confiscated cameras and binoculars. FANS exit the stadium through a tunnel.

S-I-M-O-N-E is spelt out on the bare chests of six TEENAGE BOYS. Other FANS wear "SIMONE - Splendid Isolation Tour" T-shirts and carry posters. Several CONCERT GOERS speak to a TV NEWS CREW.

FAN 1

-- I swear, she looked right at me.

FAN 2

-- She was, like, ethereal.

FAN 3

-- One moment she seemed to walk right through her mike stand like it wasn't even there.

INT. CONTROL TRUCK - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

The chanting crowd can be heard exiting. VIKTOR, wearing lipstick is hastily signing a pile of souvenir programs with Simone's signature kiss.

He is interrupted by a knock at the door. Viktor irritably opens it.

VIKTOR

I said I didn't want to be interrupt --

EXT. CONTROL TRUCK - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

ELAINE and LAINEY stand at the foot of the trailer, a SECURITY GUARD nearby.

VIKTOR

(face brightening)

My two favorite girls.

ELAINE

Lainey and I just wanted to
congratulate...

Regarding Viktor closely, Elaine's smile evaporates.

ELAINE

... Simone.

VIKTOR

She's lying down. She's exhausted.

ELAINE

(suddenly cool)

I can imagine.

Viktor is confused by their reaction. Elaine yanks Lainey
away.

ELAINE

Thank Simone for the tickets.

LAINY

(calling back as she is
led away)

It was a great show, Dad...

Viktor waves disconcertedly.

VIKTOR

Where are you... going?

As he returns to the trailer, Viktor catches sight of his
lipstick-smearred mouth in the mirror on the inside of the
trailer door. He slams the side of the trailer in
frustration.

INT. ELAINE'S MANSION - NIGHT

ELAINE paces back and forth in front of her TV showing re-
runs of the SIMONE concert. KENT cannot take his eyes off
the screen.

ELAINE

I can't believe she's doing this --
taking advantage of him this way.
It's cruel.

KENT

Why?

ELAINE

Obviously, this can't last. She's going to dump him. Viktor won't be able to take that. He's too sensitive. It'll destroy him.

KENT

Elaine, do you realize you can't stop talking about Viktor?

ELAINE

(not hearing)

I have to talk to her.

Kent switches off the TV.

KENT

I've been meaning to talk to you.

Behind the open door, we find LAINEY eavesdropping.

EXT. VIKTOR'S MALIBU HOUSE - BEACH - DAY

VIKTOR, deep in thought, stands at the water's edge, staring at the breaking waves. LAINEY joins him.

VIKTOR

Hey, Lainey.

(gently teasing her)

How's your love life?

LAINEY

I do okay. How about you?

VIKTOR

You know me -- married to my work.

LAINEY

I noticed.

An awkward silence.

LAINEY

Dad, you know I don't like to get between you and mom but she's feeling down right now. She broke up with Kent.

VIKTOR

(buoyed by the news)
Really? Too bad.

LAINY
She thinks you're with Simone.

VIKTOR
Lainey, you know Simone and I don't
have a real relationship.

LAINY
I know but Mom doesn't. Maybe if
it came from Simone, if Simone
spoke to Mom -- she could
straighten things out.
(shrug)
Dinner, maybe.

VIKTOR
Dinner? Dinner's difficult. A
phone call?

LAINY
Too impersonal. They have to meet
face-to-face.

VIKTOR
I'll see what I can do.
(a thought occurs)
You know, Lainey. I don't believe
you've ever once asked to meet
Simone. Don't you like her?

LAINY
I love her but that doesn't mean I
need to meet her.

Viktor is confused.

LAINY
Why? So I can tell my friends at
school -- as if that validates my
life somehow. What's Simone going
to say to a fourteen-year-old
anyhow? She's going to be polite
because you're my father but we're
not suddenly going to become
friends -- we have nothing in
common. It's not going to be real.
Anyhow, she gets more beautiful in
my head every day. Why kill the

dream? What do they say, "don't get too close to your idols, they always disappoint you".

Viktor gazes in wonder at his daughter, so much wiser than her years.

VIKTOR
I love you, Lainey.

LAINY
I love you too, daddy.

A car horn sounds outside the house.

LAINY
That's Mom.
(kissing him on the forehead)
See you.

She exits, leaving Viktor deep in thought.

EXT. LOS ANGELES FREEWAY - DAY

Milli Vanilli's "GIRL YOU KNOW IT'S TRUE" plays on a car radio. ELAINE, wearing a red power suit, drives home along the freeway in bumper-to-bumper traffic. Her car phone rings. She turns down the radio and picks up.

ELAINE
Hello?

SIMONE
Hello, is this Elaine?

ELAINE
Yes -- oh my, God. Is that you, Simone?! I've been wanting to talk to you.

SIMONE
Well, here I am.
(beat)
You look pretty today. Red suits you.

ELAINE
(looking around the freeway)
Where are you?

SIMONE

Right beside you. I borrowed
Viktor's car.

Elaine looks to the inside lane. SIMONE, wearing sunglasses,
phone to her ear, drives alongside. Simone waves, somewhat
mechanically. Elaine waves back. They keep driving as they
talk.

INT. VIKTOR'S CAR - DAY

The sunglasses-clad SIMONE is a mannequin, seated in the
driver's seat with her left hand on the phone obscuring her
mouth, right hand attached to the steering wheel.

Seat fully-reclined on the passenger side, VIKTOR drives the
car by stretching a foot across to the pedals and steering
with one hand, occasionally sneaking a glance to the road
ahead. He speaks on a phone through the Simone synthesizer.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

I'd love to stop somewhere but I'm
late. I'm on my way to see Viktor
now.

ELAINE

No, I understand. That's what I
want to talk about. I don't know
if you know this, Simone, but
Viktor and I were married once.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

I can't imagine how you ever let a
man like that go. I owe Viktor
everything.

ELAINE

I think he owes more to you. But
that's not important now. I know
what's going on between you two.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

I want to reassure you, Elaine,
there's absolutely nothing going on
between Viktor and I.

ELAINE

(rueful smile)

You don't have to protect my
feelings, Simone. I don't blame

Viktor for falling in love with the most desirable woman in the world.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

(breaking character)

I'm not --

(correcting himself)

He's not.

Viktor, losing concentration on his driving, drifts across his lane, almost striking Elaine's car -- swerving back at the last second.

ELAINE

My God, are you alright, Simone?

SIMONE / VIKTOR

Damn --

(struggling to stay in her/his lane)

Yes -- I --

(regaining control)

-- I'm just a little tired.

Listen, Elaine, Viktor and I -- it's strictly a working relationship. We could never be anything else. We're just so... different.

ELAINE

Exactly. You're a household name now. You're moving in entirely different worlds. That's why I hope you're not toying with Viktor.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

It sounds like you still have feelings for him.

ELAINE

We have a daughter together. I just don't want to see Viktor get hurt.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

I don't know how many times I have to say this, Elaine, but Viktor and I are not in love.

(joking weakly)

I only make love to the camera.

ELAINE

Simone, I recognize the shirt
you're wearing. I gave it to
Viktor on his birthday.

Over-correcting his steering, Viktor drifts into the next
lane, dangerously close to a pick-up truck that has to swerve
to avoid him.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

Christ --
(still struggling to stay
on the road)
Elaine, I know how it looks but...
(blurting it out)
... it would mean a lot to Viktor
if you'd go with him to the Oscars.
If you won't do it for him, please
do it for me.

ELAINE

(reluctant, frightened by
Simone's erratic driving)
Okay -- for you.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

(sigh of relief)
Thanks. This is my exit so, I --

ELAINE

I'm glad we talked.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

Good-bye.

Viktor's car swerves to the right. Elaine looks back in her
rearview mirror, concerned.

Elaine just misses the sight of VIKTOR's car rear-ending the
truck in front of him.

EXT. FREEWAY SHOULDER - LATER IN THE DAY

VIKTOR anxiously watches a HIGHWAY PATROLMAN writing up the
fender-bender. However, the Patrolman is more interested in
the Simone mannequin.

PATROLMAN

You don't have to explain. I know
what the press is like. Lunatics.
Out of control.

(referring to the Simone
mannequin)
You do know I'm going to have to
take this?

INT. ACADEMY AWARDS - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

VIKTOR, in his tuxedo, sits in the front row of the packed
auditorium beside an empty seat -- "RESERVED for SIMONE".
ELAINE and LAINEY sit alongside -- LOTUS and MAC nearby.

HAL stands at the transparent plastic podium with the "Best
Actress" envelope.

HAL
And the winner is...

Hal tears the envelope's seal, momentarily confused as he
reads the name.

HAL
Actually, there's a tie.

The AUDIENCE gasps.

HAL
(milking the moment for
all it's worth)
The winners are... Simone for
"Sunrise, Sunset"...

The audience cheers enthusiastically, but Hal stills their
applause.

HAL
(big smile)
... and Simone for "Eternity
Forever".

The audience erupts. Viktor accepts the congratulations of
those around him.

HAL
Unfortunately, Simone can't be with
us tonight.
(turning to the screen)
But thanks to the miracle of modern
technology she is able to join us
live via satellite from the
location of her new film.

The screen flickers to life.

ON SCREEN - A DESOLATE WASTELAND - DAY

SIMONE sits in a director's chair in the desolate wasteland location chosen by Viktor.

SIMONE

Thank you! Thank you! This means so much to me. I'm just sorry I can't be there with you.

(wiping away a tear)

First off I have to acknowledge my fellow nominees -- I don't even feel I belong in the best actress category let alone with these... wonderful human beings.

(composing herself)

I also have to thank my co-stars, the studio, of course. But most of all, I have to thank the audience for supporting what I do -- you're the only reason I'm here.

The CROWD applauds wildly.

LAINY is puzzled. She leans over to Viktor.

LAINY

Why didn't she thank you?

VIKTOR

(confused)

She did... didn't she?

ELAINE

(crestfallen)

No.

Viktor glances to the "Simone" sign beside him. The blood drains from his face.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - MORNING

On the monitor, SIMONE reads the forgotten line from the speech.

SIMONE

... And of course I must thank my collaborator, Viktor Taransky, without whom none of this would be

possible.

VIKTOR, still in his tuxedo, stares at SIMONE on the screen. He holds the text of Simone's acceptance speech in his hands.

VIKTOR

(to himself)

It's written right there... Why didn't I say it?... How could I forget to say it?

Simone stares back at him blankly.

A copy of VARIETY is slid under the soundstage door. The front page headline, "NO THANK YOU - Simone Snubs Taransky At Oscars".

INT. VIKTOR'S CAR - NIGHT

VIKTOR pulls up to the gate of his Malibu home. MAX is standing outside next to his car.

VIKTOR

Damn it!

EXT. VIKTOR'S MALIBU HOME - NIGHT

VIKTOR also spies an OLD WOMAN in a wheelchair sitting beside the car, MILTON closeby. Viktor stops at the gate and reluctantly exits his car.

VIKTOR

What now, Sayer?

MAX

(smug smile, noticing Viktor noticing the woman)

Looks familiar, doesn't she? No one comes from nowhere, Taransky. You turn over enough rocks...

The old woman appears drugged, stares into space.

MAX

I traced her to a nursing home. A young woman fitting Simone's description dropped her off five years ago.

VIKTOR

She looks a lot like you.

MAX

(undeterred)

She hasn't uttered a word that whole time -- until she saw the big show.

Max produces a shot of SIMONE at the Oscars and holds it in front of the old lady.

OLD LADY

(pointing to Simone's picture, catatonic)

My baby... My baby...

MAX

(putting his hand on his heart)

Who would think that "Saint Simone" would abandon her own mother? I've been looking into the family history -- heartbreaking. Most likely a biography to run over four issues... who knows, maybe there's a Pulitzer in there somewhere.

Viktor produces his own driver's license and holds it in front of the old lady.

OLD LADY

(pointing to Viktor's face on the driver's license)

My baby... My baby...

Max hastily steps between Viktor and the Old Lady.

MAX

That doesn't prove a thing -- wait until I get a court order for a blood test.

VIKTOR

(sensing an opportunity)

That won't be necessary.

(pretending to be resigned)

Sooner or later I knew you'd crack this thing, Max. You got me.

MAX

I do?

(recovering)

Sure I do.

(taking Viktor aside)

Can we speak off the record? I'm a fair man. I'm willing to sit down with her and tell her side of the story.

VIKTOR

I wouldn't want you to compromise your ethics.

MAX

No. Thanks. Absolutely.

Viktor regards the newshound with a look of pity.

VIKTOR

You love her, don't you, Max?

MAX

Don't you?

VIKTOR

(writes a check, hands it to Max)

This should take care of Mother.

Viktor drives into his home. Max, very confused, stares at the old lady.

EXT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

VIKTOR escorts LAINEY, blindfolded, around the corner of his soundstage. He removes the blindfold. From Lainey's point-of-view we see the sportscar Simone drove in "ETERNITY FOREVER" -- the car tied with a bow.

VIKTOR

Happy birthday, Lainey. Do you like it?

LAINY

(taking in the car)

It's fantastic -- it's too much.

VIKTOR

It's the car she drove in "Eternity Forever".

LAINY

I know. Thank her for me.

VIKTOR

(disappointed by her
reaction)

It's from both of us. Of course
you'll have to drive it around the
lot until you get your permit --

Lainey averts her gaze.

LAINY

-- I can't accept it. I don't want
a car, Dad.

VIKTOR

(clearly hurt, not
understanding)

Why not? I can get you something
else. What do you want?

LAINY

The old Viktor Taransky.
(finally blurting it out)
I liked you better before -- before
all this. You were a loser, Dad,
but at least you had integrity. I
can't stand to see you like this --
clinging to Simone's coattails --
it used to be about the work, and
now it's all about her. And then
she's not even grateful enough to
thank you.

VIKTOR

No, that was me.

LAINY

There you go again, blaming
yourself. Can't you see what she's
done to you -- she's taking
advantage, mocking you. You
deserve better than Simone.

(hasty exit)

I've got to go, Dad.

VIKTOR

Lainey...

Viktor watches Lainey depart towards the studio gates.

INT. SIMONE & VIKTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

VIKTOR leans on his desk, still reflecting on LAINEY's remarks. JANE enters.

JANE
Ready for your casting session?

Viktor nods distractedly. Jane shows in NICOLA ANDERS.

JANE
Nicola's here for the role of
Simone's sister.

Viktor offers Nicola a seat, staring at her as if he has never truly looked at her before -- she has a quality of Simone.

NICOLA
(slightly uncomfortable by
Viktor's scrutiny)
A lot's happened since we last saw
each other.

VIKTOR
(numb)
Yes.

NICOLA
I never apologized properly for
what happened on "Sunrise".

She hands Viktor a peace offering -- a large jar of Mike & Ike candy, including cherry.

VIKTOR
Thank you. It's not important.

NICOLA
After I saw what Simone did with
the role -- you know I fired all my
people, went into rehab, took
acting classes, changed my whole
look. She really inspired me.

Viktor continues to stare.

NICOLA
(referring to the script
in her hands)

Would you like me to read?

VIKTOR

Yes, I'd like that.

Nicola glances at the script a last time and puts it down. She approaches Viktor, standing close to him, playing the scene to him -- an immediate intimacy.

NICOLA

(her angry words are in
opposition to her amorous
actions)

-- Who do you think you are, Carlos
-- coming in here like this? With
my husband sleeping in the next
room. Do you think I won't call
out? Do you think I will just give
in to you without a fight -- like
the last time and the time before
that?

(she kisses his ear)

I wish you were dead.

(she kisses his lips)

I wish we were both dead.

Nicola immediately breaks character.

Viktor is mesmerized -- he has fallen back in love with
flesh.

VIKTOR

(finally able to speak)

You know you're really very good.
I take back what I said. I mean,
you're really good.

NICOLA

Thank you.

VIKTOR

(forgetting himself)

You could play the lead.

NICOLA

(confused)

But that's Simone's part.

VIKTOR

Yes, of course it is.

(gazing at her face)

You know you have a line here. Not a wrinkle. Actually, more of a dimple. I've been thinking of incorporating something like that in Simone.

NICOLA
(incredulous)
You'd cosmetically alter Simone to look like me?

VIKTOR
No, of course not, you're right. That would be crazy.

Viktor sits back down and stares out of the window.

NICOLA
Do you want me to do it again?

Viktor does not reply. Nicola quietly leaves.

INT. ELAINE'S MANSION - DAY

The front page of "Variety" is dominated by a large photograph of SIMONE giving her acceptance speech via satellite. However, ELAINE is gazing at a small inset picture of VIKTOR, HERSELF and LAINEY arriving at the Oscar Ceremony.

Elaine tears out the photo and slips it into her purse.

EXT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY (ON VIKTOR'S SCREEN)

Old home video of ELAINE. She is in a garden by a swimming pool, laughing, waving and sweetly flirting with the camera. Elaine raises her skirt teasingly, winks, gestures the camera operator towards her with a beckoning finger, finally blows a kiss to the camera.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

While the ever-seductive SIMONE waits patiently on-screen for Viktor's instructions, VIKTOR is gazing at the smaller monitor -- the home video of ELAINE.

Viktor freezes the tape. Elaine appears particularly beautiful.

Viktor electronically cuts out Elaine's mannerism and morphs it into Simone. Now Simone blows the kiss and has the same

dazzling smile.

INT. SIMONE & VIKTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

At her desk, JANE is busy trying to mimic Simone's hairstyle as she talks on the phone.

JANE
(into phone)
-- Oh sure, she comes in all the
time... we've become close. She
told me --

VIKTOR enters the office.

VIKTOR
Jane --

Jane hurriedly hangs up.

JANE
Gotta go.

VIKTOR
(picking up a pile of
scripts from the in-tray)
I'm leaving early tonight. If you
need me I'll be at the beach house
having dinner with a... certain
someone.

Jane tries to conceal her interest. As soon as Viktor exits the office, JANE picks up the phone.

JANE
(into phone, under her
breath)
... Elaine Christian please.

We reveal VIKTOR, outside the door, eavesdropping on his assistant, pleased she has taken the bait.

INT. VIKTOR'S BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

VIKTOR dims the lights, plays "mood" music. The doorbell rings.

He checks himself in the mirror. In the reflection, he spies an autographed photo of HIMSELF with his arm around SIMONE. He hurriedly hides the photo and answers the door.

ELAINE stands there.

ELAINE
Viktor, I'm picking up Lainey.

Elaine is over-dressed for her supposed errand.

VIKTOR
Elaine, it's Wednesday.

ELAINE
(feigning absent mindedness)
Is it Wednesday? It's Wednesday.
How embarrassing. I don't know what I was thinking. With all the excitement lately...
(peering past him)
Am I interrupting something? Are you expecting company?

VIKTOR
(ushering her inside)
As a matter-of-fact I am.

ELAINE
When is she coming over?

VIKTOR
(glancing to his watch)
About now. Would you like a drink?

ELAINE
I suppose I could stay, just until she arrives.

Elaine takes a seat on the sofa. Viktor hands her a glass of wine and sits beside her -- close.

They both knock back their wine in one long gulp, both apparently in need of courage.

ELAINE
(trying to make conversation)
Is Simone back to earth yet?

VIKTOR
Not quite.

ELAINE

I'm sure you'll keep her focussed.
She's lucky to have you, Viktor.
(blurting out)
Is she really having your baby?

VIKTOR
Impossible.

ELAINE
(instantly regretting the
remark)
I just read somewhere --

VIKTOR
I know. I know. They'll say
anything.

ELAINE
-- And she was positively glowing
at the awards.
(making to leave)
I should be going, she'll be here
soon --

Viktor puts his finger to her lips to hush her.

VIKTOR
-- She already is. Simone's not
coming over, Elaine. Not tonight,
not ever.
(holding her)
I want you back, Elaine.

ELAINE
(melting)
I want you back too, Viktor.

They kiss. Elaine breaks the kiss, suddenly consumed with
doubt.

ELAINE
This is crazy. Who am I fooling?
I can't compete with Simone. What
woman can?

VIKTOR
I would rather have you than
Simone. Believe me.

ELAINE
That's sweet, Viktor, but I

couldn't let you do that -- make that kind of sacrifice.

(meeting his gaze)

It's strange. I've stabbed people in the back, clawed and slept my way to where I am -- it goes with the territory -- but, for some reason, I can't betray Simone. There's... I don't know any other way to say it -- there's a goodness to her.

VIKTOR

No, there isn't. There's nothing to her.

ELAINE

Oh, Viktor. You say that now -- because we're here, alone, like this. But in the morning, you'd go back to her. What man wouldn't?

VIKTOR

No, I will end my relationship with her -- totally.

ELAINE

But you don't understand. She'll always be there -- at some party, on some magazine cover, some song on the radio, up on some screen.

VIKTOR

(desperate)

No. She'll never work again -- retire, never make a movie or a record, or appear ever again.

ELAINE

(confused)

Of course she will. Her public will demand it.

VIKTOR

Not if I don't let her.

ELAINE

You?

Viktor knocks back another glass of wine for courage.

VIKTOR

I'm going to tell you a secret now,
Elaine.

(mustering all his nerve)

Simone is not a real person. I
invented her.

ELAINE

(misinterpreting his
remark)

Every actor is an invention,
Viktor. Don't embarrass yourself.
No one's denying that you
discovered Simone. But it's like
finding a diamond in the desert.
Anyone can trip over it, but it's
not the finder who sparkles.

VIKTOR

(agitated)

-- No, no, I didn't trip over her.
You don't understand --

ELAINE

(ignoring him)

-- You just got lucky that she's
loyal enough to stay with you.
Maybe she's staying out of pity,
who knows? She certainly doesn't
need you. Some people even say
you're holding her back.

VIKTOR

(wounded)

Who says that -- ?

(shaking off the insult)

-- Never mind. You have to listen
to me, Elaine. Simone is thin air,
pixels, molded by me from a
mathematical equation. I inherited
it from a madman -- I can show
you --

ELAINE

How much wine have you had?

VIKTOR

-- She's a figment of my own
imagination. I, Viktor Taransky,
have perpetrated the greatest hoax,
the greatest sleight-of-hand,

sleight-of-mouth, sleight-of-sleight in entertainment history! And still no one appreciates me, recognizes what I've done -- even you.

ELAINE

(rolling her eyes)

You're drunker than I thought. Are you doing that again?

VIKTOR

No! Whatever talent Simone has comes from me -- me! Me! I swear, as God is my judge. You don't know what I've been through. Tens of thousands of mind-numbing hours in front of that screen, nights without end, and look what it's cost me.

(producing his spectacles)

Why do you think I've been wearing these? I may have done irreparable harm to my eyesight, and why? To extract and refine the infinite nuances of a human being -- a human soul.

(a final explanation)

Don't you see? I made Simone!

A pause. His words hang in the air.

ELAINE

You made Simone?

(a trace of pity)

Viktor, she made you.

Elaine gets up and walks out, leaving the distraught Viktor alone in his house.

INT. VIKTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A hung-over VIKTOR enters his office. Suddenly, he stops and confronts the standee of SIMONE.

VIKTOR

You bitch! I'll destroy you!

JANE stares in shock. She discreetly exits.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

VIKTOR sits in front of his monitor, smiling venomously at SIMONE. He begins to digitally disrobe Simone.

MONTAGE:

A) Peering through a gap in the drapes of his Malibu house, VIKTOR watches MAX dig through his trash. Max finds a beat up reel of 16mm film.

MAX holds the end up to the light -- his eyes pop.

B) The ECHO headline screams, "SIMONE'S HARD CORE PAST" and shows censored film frames of a naked Simone in a compromising position.

VIKTOR, hovering at a supermarket check-out line, overhears two WOMEN discussing the article.

WOMAN 1

Disgusting...

WOMAN 2

(sympathetic)

She must have been so desperate to do something like that, so depraved.

WOMAN 1

I'm still naming my baby after her.

WOMAN 2

You're having a boy.

WOMAN 1

So?

Viktor blanches. It is not the reaction he'd hoped for.

C) Inside a theater, VIKTOR hovers by the door, smirking.

ON SCREEN, we hear a farmyard scene -- SIMONE in an empty farmyard on all fours, grunting like a pig, and foraging for muddy vegetables.

The AUDIENCE is shocked, then suddenly breaks into spontaneous applause.

Viktor, enraged, exits into the lobby past the poster for "I AM PIG - Starring Simone".

D) A pretentious FILM CRITIC talks to camera, a film poster behind him.

FILM CRITIC

For Simone to do something as brave as "I AM PIG" at this point in her career, with so much to lose -- all I can say is, "I Am Pig, I Am Oscar".

E) In his soundstage, VIKTOR moves a slider that adds wrinkles to Simone.

F) SIMONE appears on a morning talk show -- as usual, remote on a TV screen. However, her squeaky-clean image has gone -- hair unkempt, bloated, chain-smoking and drinking during the interview. The HOSTS are smiling weakly.

HOST

Simone, that's a rather controversial position.

SIMONE

I just think all elementary schools should have a firing range -- so students can learn how to defend themselves. We could fit it inbetween recess and American History.

Another clip:

SIMONE

If there's a hole in the ozone layer why can't I see it?

Another clip:

SIMONE

Immigration?! God, isn't it crowded enough?!

HOSTS

Just as we always knew. Simone's not like other celebrities. She speaks her mind!

G) VIKTOR driving along a city street, suddenly slams on his brakes, almost causing an accident. He stares numbly up at a twenty-foot high smiling photo of Simone on a billboard featuring a huge cover of TIME MAGAZINE. It

reads, "SIMONE: WOMAN OF THE YEAR".

VIKTOR
(to himself)
She's trying to kill me.

Realizing what he's said, a thought comes into his eyes.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

An inscription on a headstone reads:

HANK ALENO
Remembered Virtually Forever

VIKTOR kneels at HANK's grave. He places a bunch of flowers there.

VIKTOR
(referring to the flowers)
They're plastic, Hank. I know
that's the way you'd want it.
(glancing to a Simone
billboard outside the
cemetery wall)
She killed you, Hank. Now she's
killing me. She's a serial killer.
(ducking out of sight of
the billboard as if
Simone is watching him)
But I don't know how to stop her.
She's taken on a life of her own.
I can't just come clean -- make
some confession. I've defrauded
millions -- they'd turn on me. And
I can't put the genie back in the
bottle. If she stopped working --
dropped out of sight, they'd never
let it rest. I've tried to kill
her career but they like her even
more.
(more desperate)
What am I going to do, Hank?

A thought occurs to Viktor. He slowly rises from behind Hank's headstone, revealing a forest of headstones.

VIKTOR
Don't say another word, Hank. You
are truly a genius.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - DUSK

A sad but resolute VIKTOR sits in front of his monitor, SIMONE's face full screen.

He speaks into the voice synthesizer, Simone's face automatically speaking the words he speaks -- the final time he puts his words in her mouth.

SIMONE / VIKTOR

What's the matter, Viktor? You look so sad. Don't you love me anymore?... It's over, isn't it?

He switches off the synthesizer and speaks in his own voice.

VIKTOR

It's the only way, Simone. If it's any consolation, you're going to live on in the public's heart like all the other tragic figures that went before their time. There's no love like posthumous love.

On the screen, Simone is on the verge of tears.

VIKTOR

I know what you're thinking. It's a phoney-baloney world. The women are surgically enhanced, the athletes are on steroids, the singers are lip-syncing if they're even singing at all, the news is entertainment, the politicians are bought and paid for -- we're living one big lie. So why shouldn't you live too? You're more authentic than the people who adore you.

(a trace of despair)

And that's the problem. You're looking at the real fraud. I told myself this was all about the work but if that was the truth, it wouldn't matter to me -- and it does. It wasn't that the artists had no respect for the art. They had no respect for me. Someone like you, you have so much love showered on you -- I just wanted to feel one tiny drop on my face. I'm sorry, Simone. Here I've been

trying to convince the world that
you exist, but I was really trying
to convince them that I exist.
It's not that you aren't human,
Simone, it's that I am.

Viktor produces a disc from his jacket marked, "PLAGUE - Ver. 8.1". He places the disc in the machine.

Viktor sees that Simone is crying. He touches a tear on his own face and realizes her tears are in response to his own.

Viktor hesitates -- a moment of doubt -- then presses "ENTER". The image of SIMONE's face gradually begins to deconstruct -- pixel by pixel -- as the virus takes hold. The pixels collect into a pile at the bottom of his screen like dust. Finally, the dust is blown away in a single digital breath.

For a moment his attention is taken with a layer of dust on his own desk.

Viktor regards his own reflection in the now black screen. His hard-drive now corrupted, he picks up his original disc marked, "SIMULATION ONE".

He tosses this disc into a steamer trunk he has loaded with hundreds of discs relating to Simone's software. He shuts the lid and begins dragging the trunk towards the door.

EXT. SANTA MONICA BAY - DUSK

Viktor's yacht sits at anchor in the glassy waters of Santa Monica Bay -- "SIMONE" written on the stern.

VIKTOR manhandles the trunk to the railing. A mournful pause -- then he heaves it over the side. The trunk sinks like a stone.

Heart heavy, Viktor stares into the inky depths.

EXT. STUDIO - ENTRANCE - DAY

A throng of REPORTERS and CAMERA CREWS. A somber VIKTOR enters and takes a seat in front of a forest of microphones.

VIKTOR

It is my sad and solemn duty to
announce the tragic passing of
Simone.

A gasp from the audience. Then, an explosion of anguish.

CROWD

No!! What happened?! Oh. God.

PRESS REPORTER 1

(stepping forward,
mustering the courage to
ask the question)

How did she die?

VIKTOR

A rare virus.

(pretending to compose
himself)

On her goodwill tour of the third
world.

PRESS REPORTER 2

Did she suffer?

VIKTOR

Mercifully, it was quick.

At the back of the room are MAX SAYER and MILTON. They are frozen in grief, a tear spills from Max's eye.

A MONTAGE OF SCENES:

- A) "SIMON GONE - FADE TO BLACK", reads the cover of Variety.
- B) The announcement of her death appears on local TV news shows around the globe.
- C) A carpet of bouquets and notes of commiseration several yards wide completely surrounds Viktor's property including the driveway. VIKTOR insensitively drives over the bouquets to the horror of the MOURNERS, including MAX SAYER and MILTON.
- D) In a remote Mongolian encampment MONGOL HORSEMEN crowd around a television showing a live picture of Simone's funeral.
- E) The HEARSE carrying Simone's "body" and the funeral procession led solemnly by VIKTOR, proceeds through the studio lot. Distraught STUDIO STAFF toss flowers onto the hearse.
- F) The same television picture is playing on a television sitting on a stool in a WEST AFRICAN river. LOCAL WOMEN

stop washing their clothes to watch.

EXT. GRAVESIDE - CEMETERY - DAY

We tilt up from Hank's headstone to an ornate mausoleum on an island in a lake.

Simone's coffin is ferried across a bridge by PALLBEARERS from the studio. Numerous MOURNERS follow behind.

VIKTOR, ELAINE and a curiously dry-eyed LAINEY walk behind the coffin.

VIKTOR

(to Elaine)

Can I see you later -- go away for the weekend?

ELAINE

(horrified by the suggestion)

How can you bring that up at a time like this?

The coffin reaches the steps of the marble mausoleum. A PRIEST, RABBI, and a BUDDHIST MONK turn to Viktor. He nods and they start to carry the coffin towards the door. However, the coffin is suddenly stopped by a POLICE OFFICER.

A SECOND POLICE OFFICER begins to jimmy open the lid. The coffin lid is pulled back. Inside is a life-sized cardboard standee of Simone from "ETERNITY FOREVER".

The MOURNERS gasp. Everyone looks to Viktor.

INT. L.A. COUNTY JAIL - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

A SERIES OF POLICE INTERVIEWS:

JANE sits in the interview room, describing Viktor's assault on the standee.

JANE

-- I heard him say, "Die bitch".

A) MAX SAYER, distraught and weeping.

MAX

-- He was a controlling madman, she was a prisoner. I blame myself... I should have done more to stop

it...

B) NICOLA gives a statement.

NICOLA

-- It was strange. He wanted to replace her with me in his new movie... and I know I'm not that good.

INT. L.A. COUNTY JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

VIKTOR sits in an interrogation room in a sea of SIMONE. Magazine covers, cosmetics advertisements, publicity shots, interviews, website print-outs, photographs and report cards from her fictitious childhood are plastered on the walls, stacks of film cans and tapes of her numerous movie and television appearances.

DETECTIVE

-- Forgive me, Mr. Taransky. I'm just trying to understand. All these films, TV appearances, magazine covers, internet interviews, publicity photos, snapshots from her childhood -- all fake.

(referring to various items)

This is fake, this is fake -- fake, fake, fake, all fake.

VIKTOR

That's right. You understand perfectly. I will confess to fraud, not murder.

DETECTIVE

(referring to oversize mail bags)

A fan club with a worldwide membership in the millions -- also bogus?

VIKTOR

Oh, no. The fan club is real. But they were worshipping computer code -- ones and zeros.

DETECTIVE

So, of course, you couldn't kill

Simone because there never was a Simone.

VIKTOR

Of course.

DETECTIVE

And this Mr. Hank Aleno who you talk so much about, a renowned failure, who also happens to be so conveniently dead -- perhaps the "man" you claim helped invent Simone is an invention himself?

Viktor, sensing his sarcasm, does not reply.

DETECTIVE

(patronizing smile)

But not everyone's imaginary, are they, Mr. Taransky? I refer, of course, to Edith.

VIKTOR

Who?

The Detective raises a window-blind to reveal a next door room where the OLD WOMAN from the rest home is being interviewed.

DETECTIVE

The woman you admitted to a journalist is Simone's mother and for whose silence you paid a fortune? Is she not flesh to you -- are her tears not wet?

The OLD WOMAN glances up and sees all the photos of Simone through the window.

OLD LADY

My BABY!

The Detective abruptly lowers the blind. Viktor rolls his eyes at the Detective's theatrics. He is suddenly enraged.

VIKTOR

She's insane! This whole thing is insane! There is no Simone. Look!
(grabbing a Simone poster)
Even her name is fake. It's not Simone.

(he tears Simone's name in
half to demonstrate)
It's SIM... ONE! Simulation One!

The Detectives sadly shake their heads.

DETECTIVE 2
(regarding Simone's face
also torn in half)
You really hated her, didn't you?

The Detective places a tape, marked "EXHIBIT A" in a video machine.

DETECTIVE
Perhaps you could explain this to me, Mr. Taransky -- or is this tape "doctored" too?

He plays a tape showing --

EXT. MARINA PIER - NIGHT (ON TV SCREEN)

VIKTOR dragging his trunk from his car down the pier to his yacht.

DETECTIVE
It's footage from the marina's closed-circuit camera on the night in question. Altered, of course. Is that really what you expect us to believe, Mr. Taransky?

The Detective freezes the tape.

DETECTIVE
Can you tell us why you were disposing of the body of a woman who didn't exist?

VIKTOR
It wasn't her body. It was her body of work.

DETECTIVE
Why don't you just come clean, Viktor? Tell the truth. You'll feel better afterwards.

VIKTOR
I am telling the truth.

DETECTIVE

(coming close to him)

We all know what happened. In a fit of jealous rage you killed Simone and dumped her body off a boat she bought for you.

VIKTOR

No!! I can prove it to you. I'll take you to her.

EXT. BOAT - SANTA MONICA BAY - DAY

VIKTOR sits handcuffed on a POLICE BOAT with the DETECTIVE and his LAWYER. DIVERS surface with the steamer trunk. Viktor's face lights up.

The trunk is winched aboard. However, as it lowers onto the deck, we see the latch has broken and the lid is ajar. All eyes stare inside the trunk as the lid is lifted. Apart from a scrawny piece of kelp -- empty.

VIKTOR

(panicky, desperately
grabbing the divers)

Did you find anything else --
drivers, discs... disc-drives?

DIVER 1

Nothing.

(gazing to the water)

We couldn't stay down any longer.

All eyes follow the diver's gaze to several SHARK FINS in the water.

CLOSE UP ON FRONT PAGE OF L.A. TIMES:

"SIMONE'S BODY FEARED EATEN BY SHARKS"

The newspaper is being read by Viktor's LAWYER, sitting opposite Viktor in his cell. VIKTOR is numb -- the likelihood of conviction slowly dawning on him.

LAWYER

-- Plead guilty and throw yourself
on the mercy of the court. It's
the best deal you're going to get.

VIKTOR

(incredulous)
I could get the death penalty.

LAWYER
You certainly will if you go to trial -- a jury in this kind of ugly mood. You've killed an icon, for God's sake.

VIKTOR
I didn't kill anyone, Bernard, there was no one to kill!

LAWYER
(musing)
An insanity defence.

INT. VIKTOR'S SOUNDSTAGE - NIGHT

A FIGURE sits at Viktor's computer. LAINEY. She scrolls through Viktor's files. All empty.

Lainey sighs. ELAINE paces behind her.

ELAINE
Let's go, Lainey. There's nothing here.

LAINHEY
Just a minute.

Elaine continues to pace as Lainey works.

ELAINE
God, it's so like your father. Why can't people take responsibility for their actions anymore? I can almost forgive him for killing Simone -- but denying her existence. I can never forgive that.

LAINHEY
Because obviously she existed, right?

ELAINE
I know it as surely as you're sitting here, sweetheart. She was the most vital woman I ever met.

LAINY

So you did meet her?

ELAINE

Of course. What are you suggesting?

LAINY

I mean really meet her -- in the flesh.

Elaine regards her daughter curiously.

LAINY

I know it's embarrassing to admit it, mom, but when I think about it -- honestly, I haven't. I mean, it feels like I have. I know more about her than members of my own family. She's even in my dreams. But I realized, going back through my diary, they were all TV appearances, near misses at parties, second-hand rumor, gossip on the internet. I've never actually seen Simone up close, touched her, been in her physical presence. Have you?

ELAINE

(unable to refute it)

Well, I --

LAINY

-- We don't believe daddy because we don't want to believe we were taken in too.

ELAINE

(trying to shake the notion from her head)

Lainey, there's no evidence that Simone isn't real.

LAINY

Listen to what you're saying, mom. Is there any evidence she is?

Lainey finally tries another file. She presses "EJECT". The "PLAGUE" disc spits out of the machine.

LAINY

(regarding the disc)

There's one part of dad's story
that may have been true. Simone
may have contracted a virus.

Lainey smiles at her mother.

LAINY

Certain viruses can be cured.

INT. L.A. COUNTY JAIL - POLICE CELL - DAY

VIKTOR sits in his cell, arms crossed, quietly seething,
while his LAWYER lays out his trial strategy.

LAWYER

(hushed tones, referring
to a thick Psychiatric
Report)

... Listen, I've found a
psychiatrist in Ventura -- well
respected -- who's willing to
testify under oath that you have
diminished capacity due to the
trauma of your divorce, ten years
of abject failure in the movie
business and a bump on the head you
sustained as a child --

VIKTOR, fuming throughout this, suddenly explodes.

VIKTOR

-- No! I can't go along with this
horseshit! Just tell them they can
fry me!

LAWYER

(aghast, looking around to
see if anyone has heard)
What?!

VIKTOR

It was premeditated -- I knew
exactly what I was doing! I
strangled her! I bludgeoned her!
I set her on fire! I did it! I
killed her!

DETECTIVE (O.S.)

(clearing his throat)

Excuse me.

The Lawyer spins around guiltily. The Detective stands outside the cell, clearly overhearing the confession. Viktor, resigned to his fate, couldn't care less.

DETECTIVE

I think you'd better see this.

The Detective switches on the TV set hanging outside the cell. VBC is playing -- "BREAKING NEWS" --

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - "VBC" - DAY (ON TV SCREEN)

A NEWS ANCHOR appears.

VBC ANCHOR

(from TV)

-- Breaking news -- international media star, Simone, is alive and well. Her studio released this footage only minutes ago...

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY (ON TV SCREEN)

The brief clip shows the front page of the L.A. Times -- headlines: "HOLLYWOOD SUSPENDS FILMING IN MEMORY OF SIMONE" and "D.A. Seeks Death Penalty for Taransky".

The reader lowers the newspaper to reveal herself -- SIMONE, on the studio lot, looking more beautiful than ever. She winks to the camera.

VBC ANCHOR

... Simone reading today's edition of the L.A. Times. Who says, "The only bad publicity is your obituary"? Details at the top of the hour.

The TV is switched off. Viktor stares at the screen, trying to take it in.

VIKTOR

You're indestructible.

When he looks back to the Detective, he discovers him holding the cell door open.

DETECTIVE

(shaking his head in pity)

I'll never get you Hollywood
people.

EXT. L.A. COUNTY JAIL - DAY

A throng of REPORTERS, PAPARAZZI and ONLOOKERS parts like a sea for VIKTOR, released from custody. One placard reads, "ASK JESUS TO SAVE YOU NOW". He is escorted to a waiting limousine where he is met by ELAINE and LAINEY. He hugs them both.

INT. LIMOUSINE - DAY

VIKTOR sits beside ELAINE. LAINEY sits opposite, studying her laptop computer. Outside the car, REPORTERS are pressed against the glass.

VIKTOR

(relaxing back into his
seat)

Thank you!

(to Lainey)

I don't know how you did it but
thank you.

ELAINE

(putting her arm around
him)

Don't thank us too fast, Viktor.
You know what we have to do?

VIKTOR

(resigned smile)

Why stop at one character when you
can have a whole cast?

ELAINE

Exactly. Now that you have the
studio behind you, we can really do
things.

Viktor shrugs resignedly, savoring his freedom.

ELAINE

(holding Viktor close)

I was thinking -- what about you
and... "Simone" moving back in with
me and Lainey?

VIKTOR

(meeting her gaze)

That sounds wonderful.
(to Lainey)
How do you feel about all this,
Lainey?

LAINNEY
(beaming)
About you and mom?

VIKTOR
(reluctant admission)
Me and Simone. What I did.

LAINNEY
(sweet smile)
Your mistake wasn't making
something fake, daddy. We're fine
with fake -- as long as you don't
lie about it.

Once again his daughter's words have a ghastly ring of truth. Viktor stares out of the limo window as the car gradually forces its way through the reporters.

He recognizes MAX and MILTON amongst the mob. Max has hastily scribbled a note that he presses against the window --

"WILL PAY \$ FOR EXCLUSIVE". Viktor looks away.

ELAINE
(kissing him on the cheek)
Don't look so glum, Viktor. It's
not a death sentence.

VIKTOR
(still staring out of the
window, a rueful smile)
No... it's life.

INT. FRANK BRAND TV STUDIO - DAY

FRANK BRAND conducts a remote interview with SIMONE who appears as usual on a television monitor.

FRANK BRAND
-- Simone, the question on
everyone's mind is simply... "why?"

SIMONE
Frank, you know as well as I do,

living in a fish bowl, the
insatiable appetite of the media...

Frank nods sympathetically.

SIMONE

With everything that was going on
in my life, I just needed to drop
out of sight for a while -- I
needed time. Viktor bought me that
time. I owe him so much.

FRANK BRAND

We all do.

(quickly returning to
Simone)

But now I understand you're eager
to get back to work -- and not the
kind of work that we're all
expecting.

SIMONE

(smiles coyly)

That's true. I can reveal that I
am considering a career in
politics.

FRANK BRAND

And what may I ask brought this on?

SIMONE holds up a beautiful BABY BOY to camera.

SIMONE

I suppose this little man had
something to do with it. Viktor
and I are both concerned about what
kind of world our new son, Chip, is
going to grow up in.

(turning lovingly to
Viktor)

Aren't you, Viktor?

On Frank Brand's monitor, the camera pulls back to reveal
VIKTOR, sitting on a sofa -- an idyllic domestic scene.

VIKTOR

(turning lovingly to
Simone)

Yes.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Only we see the set where the interview is being recorded. VIKTOR is sitting on a sofa against a green screen in his soundstage, smiling at a woman and child who are not there -- he is alone.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. CONCERT STADIUM - NIGHT

DURING THE CLOSING CREDITS SIMONE PERFORMS ANOTHER SONG FROM HER CONCERT TOUR -- "(YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE) A NATURAL WOMAN".