

RUSH

By
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EXT. CLOUDY SKY - GERMANY - DAY

Dark clouds passing overhead.

The bad weather that has hovered over the Eifel mountains, (in Germany), the past three days is on it's way out..

AN EYE FLICKERS - WIDE OPEN - STARING INTENTLY

A pupil dilates and contracts in the light. The eye stares. Blinks. Thinks.

Making evaluations..

EXT. CLOUDY SKY - GERMANY - DAY

The rain begins to subside, and the first rays of sunshine are breaking through.

CAPTION: "AUGUST 1st, 1976"

INT. FERRARI - DAY

The eye belongs to a 27 year old Formula 1 RACING DRIVER wearing a fireproof balaclava...

Highly intelligent, he also happens to be World Champion. His name is painted on the side of his Ferrari. NIKI LAUDA.

NIKI stares up at the clouds. His eyelids flicker. Thinking. Agonizing. Wrestling with an all important decision...

Is it going to carry on raining? Or become dry?

CAPTION: "NURBURGRING, GERMANY"

EXT. STARTING GRID - DAY

We widen to find ourselves on the starting grid of a major Grand Prix. All around us...

Engines ROAR into life as DRIVERS start their cars. An OFFICIAL walks through the cars holding aloft a sign, "One Minute"...

Deafening, angry thunder as engines rev impatiently.

A Ferrari MECHANIC rushes towards NIKI, and shouts in Italian above the noise, (we see sub-titles)...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MECHANIC

Mass usa slicks. Le vuoi cambiare anche tu?

(Mass is going on slicks. You want to change?)

NIKI looks in his wing-mirror back to see a red McLaren, white helmet, number 12, several rows behind him. A team of MECHANICS hastily changing the tyres to dry tyres - 'slicks'.

NIKI then looks over at the car in pole position beside him. Another McLaren, but with number 11, and a Union Jack...

NIKI

Has he changed?

MECHANIC

No, he's going on wets.

The car in pole position: JAMES HUNT, surrounded by TV crews, mechanics, girlfriends, hangers-on.

Clearly the rock star of F1.

NIKI's face: a stab of envy seeing a flash of his rival's glamorous long blonde hair disappearing into his balaclava, kissing 'bye' to a hot-looking GIRL..

NIKI stares, then...

NIKI

Be, allora usiamo anche noi quelli da bagnato.

(Then we go on wets, too.)

NIKI pulls down his visor...as he and HUNT's eyes meet for a split-second, eyes staring, then...

The ten-second board is held up.

NIKI selects second gear for the wet track and revs the engine. The dashboard needle climbs through 8000, 9000, 10000 RPM. The STARTER waves the flag. We're off!

NIKI's foot hits the floor - his engine screams, drowning out the roar of the 180,000 crowd.

NIKI's car is catapulted forward, the wheel-spin leaving livid black scars on the asphalt..

NIKI gets away first. A good start! But within seconds there's a McLaren car right behind him, breathing down his neck.

His nemesis. JAMES HUNT.

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But as the McLaren roars past, NIKI sees a white helmet. Number 12. It's not Hunt. It's MASS. On his bald, slick tyres.

NIKI curses under his breath. He screwed up. Made the wrong decision. Should have gone on slicks. He urgently needs to change tyres...

NIKI swerves angrily into the pits..

INT. PITS - DAY

Commentary from all the world's TV stations explaining the crazy, panicked situation as all the DRIVERS come into the pits to change to dry tyres.

The Ferrari team frantically work. Changing NIKI's tyres. Four men with air guns, two men with rapid-duty jacks. The same Italian MECHANIC appears, talks to NIKI in Italian..

MECHANIC

Hair visto? Ti aveto detto di usare le slicks!

(See? I told you to go on slicks!! You didn't take my advice...)

NIKI

Bullshit! Where's Hunt?

MECHANIC

There! He made the same mistake..

NIKI looks up to see his rival's black helmet also in the pits, then roar out of the pits, with new tyres on...

MECHANIC (cont'd)

Now he's ahead..!

NIKI

Thanks, asshole. I can see that..

NIKI screams at the MECHANICS, who are struggling with a hitch. The airguns make a high-pitched noise - not right..

NIKI (cont'd)

C'mon...!! What's GOING ON???

"Thump", new (slick) tyres hit the tarmac, engines scream, and our DRIVER roars out of the pits in pursuit, still cursing..

EXT. NUBURGRING - DAY

Archive TV commentary from the world's race COMMENTATORS stations informs us of the positions.

MASS leading, HUNT in 3rd, LAUDA in 20th...

INT. NIKI'S CAR - DAY

NIKI gives it everything he's got. Tearing through the gears, breaking as late as he can, engine screaming.

He flies over the take-off hump between Pflanzgarten and Swallowtail - passes one car after another. Into 13th place now. Pulling off outrageous manoeuvres.

NIKI's P.O.V: the world flies past in a blur. The steering wheel shakes. The car is right on the edge. Cannot be driven any harder.

NIKI approaches the Streckenteil Adenauer-Brucke section of the course...turns left at the Bergwerk corner. Crazy speed. And tight. Too tight. A mistake...

"Thump", his wheels come into contact with the kerb on the inside. NIKI tries to counter-steer, but is travelling at 155 mph. The car jerks horribly to the right..

"Crunch", hits the embankment, then "Bang", hits the barrier, and is thrown across the track..

Fire breaks out in the engine. NIKI's eyes widen in horror, with another car bearing down upon him...

NIKI

No...!

The oncoming car crashes head-on into our car, "Crash", a sickening, terrifying impact.

The car explodes. Seventy litres of burning high-octane gasoline, with NIKI strapped inside, unable to undo his seatbelt. Locked in a blast furnace.

NIKI screams as the flames engulf him. 800 degrees temperature. Trapped inside his car.

Burning smoke fills his helmet, scarring his lungs...

Pandemonium: commentary in different languages as panicked TV commentators helplessly describe what's happening..

NIKI's POV: he can just make out the barely recognizable figures of the other DRIVERS rushing towards NIKI..

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Their hands get burnt in the flames as they try unsuccessfully to undo NIKI's seatbelt..

Fire extinguishers blast at the car. Covering NIKI's helmet. Blurring his vision, as he cries out in agony..

Screaming voices. Panicked reactions. On the side of the car, the painted name 'Niki Lauda' blisters and melts.

Then sound fades. As NIKI blacks out - losing consciousness.

FADE TO BLACK:

Over this: the sound of a ringing phone...

INT. HOSPITAL A&E UNIT - (ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY) - DAY

We're in a busy hospital A&E unit. Noise. Crowds. A regular Saturday late afternoon. The phone continues to ring..

Finally, an attractive station NURSE in her 20's, run-off-her-feet, breathlessly picks up the phone.

NURSE
Emergency...

She covers her ears, straining to hear, listening to what is being said. Then her expression changes...

NURSE (cont'd)
Okay...we're standing by.

The NURSE hangs up...then calls out to her NURSE and DOCTOR colleagues...

NURSE (cont'd)
That was the race-track...! There's been an accident...! A driver's been injured and is on his way in...!

Instantly the atmosphere changes. A hive of activity as DOCTORS and NURSES prepare themselves for a major trauma...

All PATIENTS with minor injuries are cleared out of the way.

The NURSE rings upstairs to the operating theatres and consultant surgeons, telling them to stand by...

CAPTION: "SIX YEARS EARLIER"

Swing doors open, and a pair of shoeless, BARE FEET walks through and into the accident and emergency unit.

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Camera tilts up a pair of long legs in white racing overalls...to reveal a good-looking driver, JAMES HUNT, (mid 20's), tall, tanned, athletic, surfer long blonde hair...

A man about whom a word comes to mind one would rarely use to describe an Englishman...

SEXY.

There is blood coming from his nose, bruising to his lip and the formation (already) of a nasty black eye, but make no mistake. He is utterly gorgeous..

JAMES

I think the racetrack telephoned ahead that I was coming? Hunt? James Hunt..?

JAMES notices all the NURSES staring..

JAMES (cont'd)

What's the matter? No one seen a spot of blood before?

NURSE

Are you all right?

JAMES

Absolutely fine.

INT. A&E UNIT - DAY

The attractive NURSE is examining JAMES, checking for wounds, cuts and bruises...

NURSE

We all thought you'd been in an accident.

JAMES

I have. If you call a friendly disagreement with another driver an accident.

NURSE

What did you disagree about?

JAMES

None of your business. Ouch.

NURSE

Sorry.

JAMES

His wife.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NURSE

That's going to need a couple of stitches. It's a nasty cut.

JAMES

It was a nasty blow. Done with a bloody spanner.

NURSE

Why? What did you do?

JAMES

Nothing! Only what she begged me to do.

The NURSE opens JAMES's white driver's overalls...

NURSE

Which was..?

She examines him, testing his ribs for fractures, his chest..

JAMES looks up. Their eyes meet..

JAMES

Be happy to show you if you like.

INT. JAMES'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

'Crash', the door flies open as JAMES and the NURSE stumble through, mid-embrace, tearing at one another's clothes...

The apartment is basic. Cramped. Messy. Like that of a penniless student. Ashtrays filled with old joints. Empty beer cans. A toaster. A kettle. A stereo.

And a large mattress on the floor.

JAMES and the NURSE stand against the wall, still half-dressed, but already passionately making love...

JAMES (V/O)

I have a theory why women like racing drivers. It's not because they respect what we do...driving round and round in circles. Mostly they think that's pathetic. And they're probably right..

(a beat)

It's our closeness to death.

JAMES and the NURSE continue noisily, tirelessly making love in the shower...

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JAMES (V/O) (cont'd)
 The closer you are to death, the more
 alive you FEEL...the more alive you
 ARE. And they can see that in you.
 FEEL that in you. The way you live.
 Willing to risk everything. With no
 thought for tomorrow...as if each day
 is your last. It's a wonderful way to
 live...and the ONLY way to drive. The
 only way to get that tenth of a second
 on everyone else...

The lovemaking becomes more intense...

JAMES (V/O) (cont'd)
 To dare to be one step bolder...one
 step faster...

JAMES is covered in perspiration, out on the edge...

JAMES (V/O) (cont'd)
 Sure one step closer to death...

JAMES and the NURSE, both screaming as they approach orgasm...

JAMES (V/O) (cont'd)
 But one step closer to victory, too...

JAMES and the NURSE both climax together...and collapse on the
 bed. Exhausted.

EXT. CRYSTAL PALACE RACE TRACK - DAY

A grotty old race track in South London.

JAMES and the NURSE arrive at Crystal Palace race track in his
 battered old mini. They get out. She looks up, seeing the
 mechanics, the racing teams, the cars..

NURSE
 I've never been to a Grand Prix
 before.

JAMES
 It isn't a Grand Prix. It's Formula 3.

NURSE
 What's that?

JAMES
 A lower division. A stepping stone.
 Where wannabe's like me mess about in
 the hope of finding sponsors or being
 talent-spotted to race in Formula 1.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NURSE

B-but...

JAMES

Don't tell me. You only slept with me because you thought I was world champion. Well I will be one day...

JAMES leads the NURSE into...

INT. PITS - CRYSTAL PALACE - DAY

The pits where JAMES introduces her to his team...

JAMES

Everyone, this is Nursie. Nursie this is Doc our designer...

DOC

How do you do?

JAMES

Bubbles, our chief mechanic.

BUBBLES

How do you do?

NURSE

'Bubbles'?

JAMES

And le Patron - Alexander - Lord Hesketh.

HESKETH

How do you do?

NURSE

Fine thanks.

JAMES

Be nice to le Patron. He's the boss and pays all our wages.

HESKETH

Glass of champagne, Nursie?

NURSE

It's Gemma. No, thanks.

HESKETH

You sure? It's Krug. Clos de Mesnil.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NURSE

It's also ten in the morning.

HESKETH

Oh, dear. Superstar? You haven't brought us a bore, have you?

JAMES is next door, changing into his overalls. Plain, flimsy, very little, or no, sponsorship...

JAMES

Trust me. Nursie's anything BUT a bore..

With that, JAMES bends over the toilet cistern and is violently sick...

HESKETH

(false bravado)

Nothing to be worried about! Does it before every race! His way of dealing with the nerves.

(indicates champagne)

Nothing a good swig of this won't cure..!

JAMES emerges, wiping his mouth...

HESKETH (cont'd)

All right, Superstar?

JAMES

Never better, Patron.

HESKETH

Have a gargle with this.

JAMES takes a quick swig of the champagne...gargles, then spits it out, puts on his balaclava and black helmet...

He winks at the NURSE...speaking through the helmet...then hands her something...

JAMES

This is for you.

The NURSE looks down. A tiny ball of waxed cotton wool..

JAMES (cont'd)

For the ears...!

JAMES slips into the car. He hits the ignition, and a deafening high-pitched SCREAM as the engine starts...

EXT. STARTING GRID - CRYSTAL PALACE - DAY

JAMES takes his position on the grid. He notices that alongside him on the grid is a driver in a blue helmet, who's car is number 35..

On the side of car 35, painted markings, in the form of a signature, "Niki Lauda".

The start flag drops. JAMES's foot hits the floor. The cars roar off..

EXT. RACE TRACK - CRYSTAL PALACE - DAY

JAMES is neck and neck with NIKI. They go into a corner.

NIKI gets there first. Up ahead though, approaching the second bend...JAMES sees the tiniest, slimmest crack to overtake. No right-minded driver would risk it. Only a suicidal maniac.

Which just happens to describe JAMES perfectly..

JAMES goes for it. Wrecklessly. Selfishly. And forces NIKI to slam on his brakes to prevent a certain crash...

NIKI spins off...

JAMES carries on driving. Not a care in the world. But seconds later, he too has to hit the brakes, because..

Up ahead red "Stop" flags are being frantically waved. TRACK MARSHALS running onto the track.

EXT. RACE-TRACK - SAME TIME

BUBBLES is on the phone to the race marshals...

BUBBLES
Ambulance. Stalled on the track! Means
the race has to be stopped. And re-
started.

BUBBLES rolls his eyes, gets to his feet..

EXT. STARTING GRID - CRYSTAL PALACE - DAY

Sheer chaos as all the cars are getting back into their positions for the re-start...

JAMES is involved in a stand up row with DRIVER 35 in the blue helmet...(who speaks English with a thick Viennese accent)...

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Both MEN are still wearing their helmets...

BLUE HELMET
That was my line!

JAMES
Rubbish! I always had that corner.

BLUE HELMET
Bullshit. That move was total suicide.
What if I hadn't braked? We'd have
crashed.

JAMES
But we didn't, did we? Thanks to your
'survival' instincts...

JAMES makes chicken noises. BLUE HELMET lunges angrily...

BUBBLES
OK guys. Forget it..!

JAMES is pulled away by BUBBLES. BLUE HELMET is pulled away by
his MECHANICS...

JAMES gets into his car, turns to one of the MECHANICS..

JAMES
Who the hell is that, anyway?

BUBBLES
He's new. Some German guy.

MECHANIC
(corrects)
Austrian.

JAMES
Is there a difference?

JAMES looks over at BLUE HELMET...

JAMES (cont'd)
All bloody Goosesteppers.

EXT. STARTING GRID - CRYSTAL PALACE - DAY

The starting flag drops. JAMES's foot hits the deck. The race
is underway again.

JAMES gets off to a flyer, leaving BLUE HELMET for dead. JAMES
chuckles to himself in satisfaction...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

But then, on the flat, BLUE HELMET car suddenly comes out of nowhere. As if he has 50 bhp more. And overtakes JAMES. Brilliantly.

BLUE HELMET begins to pull away. Genius driving. And has the Englishman beaten.

JAMES knows it. He sees red mist...and in an act of do-or-die vengeful madness, JAMES goes into a corner far too fast...

...yanks his steering wheel. And outrageously rams BLUE HELMET...

An unforgivable act of unsportsmanlike vindictiveness.

BLUE HELMET and JAMES's cars both veer off...go into wild, lethal spins..but luckily for JAMES he ends up facing forwards.

JAMES is badly shaken, dizzy, but able to change gears, and continue driving...

BLUE HELMET's car, by contrast, has cruelly stalled...and now ends up facing THE WRONG WAY on the track...

BLUE HELMET looks up to see all the cars coming over a brow and heading towards him...

BLUE HELMET rips open his seat-belt, desperately tries to get out of his car, as one car shoots straight over the nose of his car.

BLUE HELMET bravely leaps out of his car and makes a desperate sprint for it as....

"SMASH", one of the oncoming cars crashes into his car, instantly reducing it to smithereens...

It would have killed him instantly.

"WHAM", another car narrowly misses him...

"SLAM", another car forces BLUE HELMET into a dive...

"CRASH", another car sends him into a perilous roll...

A horrendous pile up of F3 cars on the track.

The driver in the BLUE HELMET, battered, shaken, has had an unbelievably close escape. He furiously removes his helmet...

And now we see his face for the first time. Sharp-featured. Dark hair. NIKI LAUDA.

Blood run from his lips, his hands shaking...

EXT. CRYSTAL PALACE RACE TRACK - LATE AFTERNOON

JAMES is on the podium, having won. He's with the NURSE, and HESKETH and BUBBLES and his team, spraying them with champagne..

NIKI walks past the podium, holding his blue helmet, and shouts out, still incandescent...

NIKI
You're a lunatic! You shouldn't be
allowed in a car! You don't know what
you're doing!

JAMES mocks NIKI, and arrogantly sprays him with champagne.
NIKI gives him the finger. The NURSE watches NIKI go..

NURSE
Who was *that*?

JAMES
No one. Chippy little kraut. Bad
loser. Forget him.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIENNA SKYLINE - DAY

To establish: the Austrian capital...

OVER THIS: the sound of a German voice...

NIKI (V/O)
In my home town, Vienna, my family is
famous for one thing. Business. My
grandfather is a businessman, my
father, too...

INT. NIKI'S APARTMENT - DAY

NIKI is in front of a mirror, and dresses casually in a
jacket, and open necked shirt...

NIKI (V/O)
So it's normal that I approach
whatever I do like a business...

INT. RAIFEISENKASSE BANK - DAY

A large boardroom. NIKI is in conversation with several
Viennese LAWYERS and BANKERS...

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CONTINUED:

NIKI (V/O)
For me racing cars is a business like
any other business. It requires
investment and risk...

The BANKERS and LAWYERS nod in agreement. Hands shake. A deal
has been struck.

INT. RAIFEISENKASSE - BANK - DAY

NIKI is in a private room, as two and a half million Austrian
Schillings are counted out, and put into an attache case...

NIKI (V/O)
Forget what people tell you about
glamour and romance or heroism in
racing. This is all bullshit.
Something for amateurs and poets.

INT. NIKI'S CAR - DAY

NIKI is driving his car. Beside him, is the attache case on
his lap...

His car passes under a motorway sign reading "FLUGHAFEN".
(Airport)...

NIKI (V/O)
I am neither. I am a professional. A
businessman. A good businessman...

EXT. VIENNA AIRPORT - DAY

Planes taking off and landing. Taxiing to stands and
parking...

Among them, a private jet. A balding, blazered Englishman in
late middle-age (LOUIS STANLEY), owner of BRM racing,
disembarks onto the tarmac...

NIKI (V/O)
It just so happens that the business I
deal in is speed.

INT. VIENNA AIRPORT - CAFE

NIKI and his LAWYER sit with LOUIS STANLEY and his LAWYER in
an airport cafe. The attache case is in the middle..

Contracts are open on the table. NIKI is signing. LOUIS
STANLEY is counter-signing...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STANLEY

In return for your money, you will of course get a car, your own dedicated team of mechanics, and a place on the team. Plus fifty per cent of starting fees and bonuses for any World Championship events. It goes without saying, Regazzoni is the senior driver and you will defer to him at all times.

NIKI looks up...

NIKI

Why would I defer to him if I am paying his wages?

STANLEY and his LAWYERS' smiles fade..

STANLEY

Because Clay is a proven winner, one of the best drivers in the world and your team-mate. And because, quite honestly, he could teach you a thing or two...

NIKI stares. A polite smile.

NIKI

Whatever you say.

EXT. PARK LANE - LONDON - NIGHT

A smart hotel in London's Park Lane. To establish.

INT. AWARD CEREMONY - NIGHT

An awards ceremony is in progress. The room is thick with cigar and cigarette smoke. A presenter on stage, wearing black tie...

PRESENTER

And the winner of the British Guild of Motoring Writers award for the 'Most Promising Formula 3 Driver of the Year' is James Hunt...

A loud, boisterous cheer goes up at the Hesketh Racing table.

JAMES gets to his feet, shakes hands with HESKETH, and BUBBLES and skips up to the podium...

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CONTINUED:

JAMES
Thank you so much..!

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Afterwards: everyone is celebrating at a nightclub. The trophy is perched on a table beside bottles of champagne...

HESKETH
This is it, Superstar. One more season in Formula 3 then you'll be ready for Formula 2.

JAMES
You don't think I'm ready now?

HESKETH
Maybe. But I need to find you a car first. And a spare.

DOC
You could always ditch us, and do what the Goosestepper did.

'Pop', HESKETH opens a bottle of champagne...

DOC (cont'd)
Remember him? The German?

BUBBLES
(corrects)
Austrian.

JAMES
Yes, of course I remember.

JAMES chuckles to himself..

JAMES (cont'd)
How could I forget?

DOC
He's leapfrogged all this, and got himself a drive in Formula 1.

JAMES
What?

BUBBLES
Said he didn't want to risk his life with "a bunch of crazy amateurs and losers..."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES
Is that what he called us?

DOC
Charming!

HESKETH
(indignant)
Nothing wrong with being an amateur!

BUBBLES
If he was going to risk his life, he would only do so where the stakes made it worthwhile. On the big roulette table..

JAMES
But he never won a thing! Not a single bloody race. How did he get his drive?

BUBBLES
Took out a loan, apparently. And paid for it himself.

JAMES
What?

BUBBLES
A hundred and fifty grand!

HESKETH
Amateurs are what made this country great!

JAMES
A hundred and fifty grand..? Jesus..!

JAMES's face is ashen. Sick with envy.

JAMES (cont'd)
That's either an act of utter lunacy, or the ballsiest thing I ever heard.

EXT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - FRANCE - DAY

The PAUL RICARD circuit near Marseilles. Where all winter training and testing is done.

NIKI arrives. He goes to the reception, where an attractive WOMAN greets him...

RECEPTIONIST
Hi? Can I help you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKI
Niki Lauda. Here for Mr. Stanley. BRM?

RECEPTIONIST
Take a seat, please. I'll get someone
to come and collect you...

NIKI watches as she telephones the BRM workshops...

RECEPTIONIST (into phone) (cont'd)
Hi. Mr. Lord here for you?

NIKI
(correcting)
Lauda.

The RECEPTIONIST misunderstands and raises her voice...

RECEPTIONIST (INTO PHONE)
(louder, as instructed)
MR. LORD HERE TO SEE YOU.

She hangs up. NIKI stares. He decides against pointing out her mistake.

NIKI
Probably easier to call me Niki.

The RECEPTIONIST looks up.

NIKI (cont'd)
My first name.
(clears throat)
Niki.

A silence. The RECEPTIONIST continues with her work. NIKI watches her for a beat, then...

NIKI (cont'd)
You worked here long?

RECEPTIONIST
Six years.

NIKI
That long, and they didn't promote you
yet?

RECEPTIONIST
Actually, I am the track manager here.
Agnes Bonnet.

NIKI
(double-takes)
What?

(CONTINUED)

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TRACK MANAGER

You thought I was the receptionist?

(smiles)

She's on her lunch.

NIKI is thrown, humiliated, feels a total jerk. He is about to say something when the door opens, and...

Two other F1 DRIVERS walk in..

Glamorous, long-haired, fashionable - (in the JAMES HUNT mould), like rock stars, they talk effortlessly and flirt confidently with the TRACK MANAGER...

What are you doing answering the phones? New haircut! Like it. What have you done with the weather?

They make her laugh. And smile.

NIKI feels upstaged. Embarrassed. He gets to his feet. And goes to the car that has come to collect him.

But as he goes, (unseen by NIKI), the TRACK MANAGER watches him. Ignoring the other DRIVERS. Intrigued.

He's different. Intense. Tactful. Intelligent eyes.

Clearly she likes him, too.

EXT. BRM WORKSHOPS - DAY

The car pulls up outside the workshops. NIKI gets out of the car, and is greeted by LOUIS STANLEY, the other DRIVERS and the rest of the BRM team...

STANLEY

Niki, let me introduce you, Jean-Pierre Beltoise...

Ad-libbed handshakes and greetings with the other DRIVERS.

STANLEY (cont'd)

Clay Regazzoni..

The intimidating, muscular, moustachioed figure of CLAY REGAZZONI, the Swiss driver. NIKI and CLAY shake hands.

STANLEY (cont'd)

And your mechanics, reporting exclusively to you. As per contract...

NIKI shakes hands with his MECHANICS.

INT. BRM WORKSHOPS - DAY

NIKI stands in front of the BRM Formula 1 car. A red and white Marlboro sponsored car, number 21, with a tall air-intake duct just above the driver's helmet...

MECHANIC
There she is. The P160..

NIKI
Same as Regazzoni's?

MECHANIC
Identical in every detail.

NIKI
What's the weight?

MECHANIC
540 kilos.

NIKI
And the engine?

MECHANIC
190.

NIKI
That's crazy. Why so heavy..?

MECHANIC
We tried making it lighter, but it led to other problems..

NIKI looks up...

NIKI
What did you try to make it lighter?

EXT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - DAY

NIKI watches on the sidelines at the test track as CLAY REGAZZONI is time-testing his car....

NIKI walks over to where LOUIS STANLEY and several MECHANICS are doing the timings...

STANLEY
Two minutes six seconds.

NIKI
OK. Now put him in my car, and watch.
He'll go round under two minutes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STANLEY
Impossible.

NIKI shrugs, walks away. As he goes, he sees AGNES, the attractive TRACK MANAGER again. NIKI waves hi.

AGNES waves back. Smiles.

EXT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - DAY

REGAZZONI roars past the finishing line in NIKI's car. LOUIS STANLEY looks at the stop watch..

His expression changes.

INT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - DAY

STANLEY comes into the workshop where NIKI and his MECHANICS are in conversation, getting changed...

STANLEY
All right. What did you do to the car?

NIKI
That's information I will share with you under certain conditions only.

STANLEY stares, bracing himself..

STANLEY
Go on...

NIKI
Equal status with Regazzoni, a guaranteed place in the team, and a paid contract. For two years.

STANLEY
What about the deal we agreed? Your contribution?

NIKI
We rip up the contract. I don't pay you a cent.

STANLEY
It's outrageous. You're effectively a rookie. You've achieved nothing in Formula 1.

NIKI
Not yet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKI indicates the stop-watch...

NIKI (cont'd)
What time did he do in my car? He was
quicker wasn't he?

STANLEY stares...

NIKI (cont'd)
Did he go under two minutes?

STANLEY
(quiet)
One fifty-six.

NIKI turns, and goes.

EXT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - TWO WEEKS LATER - DAY

CLAY REGAZZONI emerges from testing his car. Still stunned by
the improved performance. Talking to his MECHANICS. In awe.

He removes his helmet, then stops.

In the distance he sees NIKI talking to the attractive TRACK
MANAGER.

INT. WORKSHOP - PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - DAY

NIKI is in the workshop, getting changed. He is about to go,
when he stops, and sees...

CLAY REGAZZONI standing in the workshop, looking at NIKI. CLAY
speaks English with an Italian accent..

REGAZZONI
You'll tell me it's none of my
business...but I still want to know.

NIKI
What?

REGAZZONI
If I was right in thinking you asked
the Track Manager out on a date
tonight?

NIKI immediately becomes defensive...

NIKI
It's none of your business.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REGAZZONI

Look...I'm not questioning your taste, she's a great girl. But if you want my advice...I'd let this one go.

NIKI

Why?

REGAZZONI

Recently she fell madly in love with a British Formula 3 driver, who has a reputation for two things. For being a crazy jerk in the car, and for going all night...and all day afterwards...and all night again in bed. He's an OK driver, but an immortal fuck, apparently. And they broke up two weeks ago. I don't know about you, but that's not an act I'd like to follow.

(shrugs)

But hey, if none of that bothers you...

NIKI is thrown.

NIKI

What's his name?

REGAZZONI

The driver? Hunt. James Hunt.

NIKI stares. Can hardly believe it.

REGAZZONI (cont'd)

See? You share information, I share information.

CLAY slaps NIKI on his back..

REGAZZONI (cont'd)

That's what team-mates are for.

NIKI

(quiet, defeated)

Thanks.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A restaurant in Marseilles. Through the window we can see AGNES, the attractive TRACK MANAGER sitting at a table alone. Waiting for NIKI.

Reverse angle to reveal:

INT. NIKI'S CAR - SAME TIME

NIKI is sitting in a car across the street. He stares at AGNES in the restaurant. Then starts his car, and drives off.

EXT. EASTON NESTON - HESKETH RACING HQ - DAY

Easton Neston. Set in 3,300 acres, one of England's great country houses, Hawksmoor's grandiose baroque masterpiece has been home to the Fermor-Hesketh family since 1700.

JAMES's mini drives up the gravel drive in his anything but grandiose Mini..

He is greeted by uniformed STAFF who take his tatty bags from his filthy car..

HESKETH warmly greets JAMES, and indicates the unsightly Mini to his staff...

HESKETH
Give that bloody thing a wash..

INT. EASTON NESTON - DAY

One of the MECHANICS runs into the workshop, which are among the converted stables on the estate...

MECHANIC
They're coming!

Everyone takes their places ready to spring a surprise, as HESKETH leads a blindfolded JAMES into the workshop...

HESKETH
Keep your eyes closed...! Wait for it...wait for it...

HESKETH removes JAMES's blindfold...

HESKETH (cont'd)
There! What do you say, Superstar?

JAMES opens his eyes to see a gorgeous Racing Car, plain white, no stickers...

JAMES
Wow! She's a beauty!

HESKETH
Isn't she just? The March 731.
Converted by the brilliant Doc...!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOC POSTLETHWAITE takes a modest bow...

HESKETH (cont'd)
I got together with the beancounters.
We did a little arithmetic, and since
it turns out that the economics of F1
are not so *significantly* different to
the economics of Formula 2...

BUBBLES clears his throat, dutifully bites his tongues..

HESKETH (cont'd)
I thought we might as well be messing
about losing money on the big stage
rather than scratching around in the
lower divisions.
(gestures)
This is it! We're joining the big
boys! Formula 1.

JAMES
Are you serious?

HESKETH
Never been more serious in my life!

JAMES slips into the cockpit...makes himself comfortable...

HESKETH (cont'd)
No sponsorship, Superstar! I hope you
approve.

JAMES
I do, Patron.

HESKETH
No corporations, condoms, or
cigarettes! Or any other vulgar
nonsense. Just plain white. With the
Union Jack.

JAMES spots his racing overalls...

JAMES
And racing overalls which read...
(reading)
"Sex. Breakfast of Champions."

Laughter...

HESKETH
I hope you approve.

JAMES
I do! So when did you decide this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HESKETH

Actually, I got the idea after what you said about the Austrian chap who bought his way in...

JAMES

Who? Lauda?

HESKETH

...rather than waste his time in Formula 3. I thought, "Bloody hell, he's right!"

JAMES

Good for the Goosestepper. So when do we start?

HESKETH

Two weeks. Belgium. You think you could be ready?

JAMES

Of course I'll be ready..

HESKETH

Good man. That's what I thought you'd say!

HESKETH pops champagne...

HESKETH (cont'd)

Those poor Belgians won't know what's hit them.

EXT. NIVELLES-BAULERS CIRCUIT (BELGIAN GRAND PRIX)- DAY

To establish: The Nivelles Baulers Circuit of the Belgian Grand Prix, close to Brussels. A notoriously 'hot' track - (quick) - with long straights and long, fast corners...

Testing is already underway...

EXT. NIVELLES-BAULERS CIRCUIT, BELGIUM - DAY

A helicopter comes in to land.

The Hesketh Racing Team makes a grand entrance at the Grand Prix with a retinue of BUTLERS, GIRLS, ROLLS' ROYCE's, oysters, champagne...

The Hesketh Team walk around in their own branded clothing. Alexander's jacket reads, "Le Patron"..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Commentators from various international TV STATIONS, and other Racing teams express their surprise, amusement, curiosity, (and frequently disapproval) at these new "arrivistes"...

Suddenly pandemonium breaks out. Something has happened. A bad accident on the track. During testing...

A bucket of cold water is thrown on the HESKETH RACING party. All smiles fade..

The sound of sirens. Ambulances rushing to the scene of the accident.

All the JOURNALISTS and TV CREWS rush off, too. Leaving HESKETH and JAMES alone...

EXT. NIVELLES-BAULERS CIRCUIT - BELGIUM - DAY

Ambulances arrive at the scene.

A car has crashed into (insecurely installed) Armco guard rails, passing right underneath...

It's a horrific accident. People SCREAM and look away. Even hardened medical professionals...

The DRIVER has been decapitated. His helmeted HEAD lies cleanly severed on the ground...

A goldfish-bowl of blood.

JAMES, HESKETH, BUBBLES arrive on the scene of the accident. But they are kept away, at a distance...

But are told what's happened. Their faces fall. Horrified.

INT. PITS - GRAND PRIX - DAY

JAMES, dressed in his overalls, is violently wretching. Sick with nerves.

The atmosphere is awful.

EXT. STARTING GRID - DAY

JAMES walks out onto the starting grid, towards his car as if in a trance. His first Formula 1 race.

He walks past another car on the 2nd row, then stops when he sees the name written on the side...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

It's "Niki Lauda", and there's NIKI in his distinctive red + white BRM. With his red helmet bearing his name.

JAMES
Terrible, no? The accident?

NIKI looks up...

NIKI
He made a mistake. Went into the corner too fast.

JAMES
C'mon, we all make mistakes. They should cancel the race.

NIKI
Why? No one came to see him anyway.

JAMES
So says the guy who paid for his own drive. How's that working out?

NIKI
Fine. How's it at the back?

JAMES
Not planning on being there for long.

NIKI
Look forward for you to show me the way today.

JAMES
'Be happy to.

JAMES walks off to his car, shaking his head..

JAMES (cont'd)
Asshole.

NIKI stares in the wing mirrors. Watches him go.

NIKI
Asshole.

EXT. RACING TRACK - DAY

The ten second board, then the starter's flag falls. The race is off. NIKI makes a perfect start. JAMES's foot hits the floor, his car surges forward...

INT. JAMES'S CAR - DAY

Shooting from inside JAMES's cockpit, JAMES drives full bore. On the edge. Automatically giving it 110%. (He knows no other way).

His car starts weaving through other drivers, and soon reaches LAUDA's distinctive car.

As they head into a straight...

NIKI tries to block JAMES, with one blocking manoeuvre after another. But JAMES is tenacious, and stays with him...

Corner after corner...NIKI manages to hold JAMES off.

Then...NIKI appears to make a tiny mistake, JAMES sees a miniscule gap...slams foot down, and goes for it.

JAMES squeezes through the tiny gap, and NIKI appears to let him go. Doesn't appear to defend it.

JAMES passes NIKI, and whoops to himself, imagining NIKI's humiliation..

What a loser! Didn't even defend it! Now JAMES can put clear daylight between them.

But instead of a gap developing between JAMES and NIKI, NIKI hugs close to him.

It's clear NIKI let JAMES through on purpose.

JAMES tries everything to shake NIKI off. But cannot! NIKI has become glue in human form.

It's a masterclass in vengeful and intimidating driving. Toying with JAMES. Torturing him.

JAMES gets more and more desperate. Keeps moving. Lurching from side to side. Trying to shake NIKI off...

EXT. HESKETH PITS - SAME TIME

BUBBLES, DOC and HESKETH are watching on monitors from the pits.

BUBBLES

What's he doing? He's panicking.
He's all over the bloody place..

INT. JAMES'S CAR - SAME TIME

JAMES turns too early for corners, losing his line. Mistiming breaking points and gear changes.

NIKI stays with him. Effortlessly. Squatting in JAMES's mirrors. Haunting him. Tormenting him.

His foot on JAMES's throat.

Finally, JAMES cracks under the pressure. Goes into a corner too fast. Spins off and crashes...

EXT. HESKETH PITS - SAME TIME

BUBBLES, DOC and HESKETH watch from the pits...

HESKETH
He's spun off, dammit..! Driving like
a bloody teenager...

BUBBLES
(quiet)
At least he's in one piece..

HESKETH's smile fades. Stands corrected.

EXT. PODIUM - AFTERWARDS

NIKI is in 2nd place on the podium, in muted celebrations out of respect for the dead driver..

Handshakes. No smiles. No champagne.

EXT. PITS - DAY

Meanwhile: JAMES's car is humiliatingly being brought back by a tow-truck...

EXT. RACE TRACK - DAY

Afterwards: NIKI and JAMES pass one another near the exit..

NIKI
Back to Formula Three, asshole. This
is for grown-ups. No room for you
here..

JAMES spins round, in disbelief..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES

What is the MATTER with you?

NIKI continues walking.

EXT. BAR - HOTEL - NIGHT

JAMES and BUBBLES sit together at a table in the corner. It's late. A frank post-mortem. Drinking and talking..

JAMES

But he's right. He humiliated me today. What do I need to do?

BUBBLES

Work. Learn proper race-craft. You're in with the best of the best now. It's no good just charging and being brave. It's like boxing. Having a good punch is not enough. You've got to match it with technique. Preparation. Professionalism. In all areas of your life.

JAMES

You're asking me to ease off on the late nights?

BUBBLES

And the booze. And the wacky backy. And the girls.

JAMES's expression. Horrified.

BUBBLES (cont'd)

At least date the same one for a year.
(a beat)
All right. Six months.

JAMES stares.

BUBBLES (cont'd)

And I'm going to start you doing some homework. And don't look like that! This is just a FRACTION of what Lauda will be doing.

EXT. EASTON NESTON - DAY

The grand Hesketh estate in the Northamptonshire countryside.

INT. HESKETH RACING WORKSHOPS - EASTON NESTON - DAY

JAMES walks into the workshop, eyes closed; jeans and t-shirt, bare feet..

JAMES

....almost straight along the Beau Rivage, some small turns. Long left into the Massenet corner, leading in to the short right of Casino corner. Straight until the sharp right of Mirabeau, into sharp left of the Loews corner, mind the guard rails...

VOICE

Stop..!

JAMES almost bumps into the source of the VOICE.

He opens his eyes to see an endless pair of legs, a drop-dead gorgeous figure, and the beautiful smiling face of SUZY MILLER, the most successful model of her generation...

JAMES

Hello.

SUZY

Hi.

JAMES

You're not Bubbles.

SUZY

No. He went to get Alexander, to tell him I was here. He said they'd be back shortly. I wanted to see the his new pride and joy...

SUZY indicates the car...

SUZY (cont'd)

...rhymes with 'toy' if you ask me. And I can't believe what I'm seeing.

JAMES

Why?

SUZY

It's just so tiny! For something that costs so much...it's so flimsy. There's no comfort. No protection. Nothing.

JAMES's face: his smile fades...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES

No. Just a little coffin, surrounded by high-octane fuel, being driven round at 170 miles per hour..

(becoming grave)

To all intents and purposes a bomb. On wheels.

SUZY

Why don't they make it safer?

JAMES

No one wants it to be. It's like saying why not make bullfighting safer? It's a blood sport. The risk of death turns people on. Without it, I guess, it'd be half the fun. Which is fine for the voyeurs, fine for TV, fine for everyone..

(a beat)

...except us drivers.

SUZY

And the people mad enough to love you.

JAMES

Right.

SUZY looks JAMES up and down. Sees the bare feet, the rock star good looks...

SUZY

You're James, aren't you?

JAMES

Yes.

SUZY

Thought so. You fit the description.

(shaking hands)

Suzy. Old friend of Alex's.

JAMES

What was the description?

SUZY

Mostly positive in terms of appearance. Negative only in terms of character.

JAMES

How kind.

SUZY

I've been told to avoid you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JAMES

By whom?

SUZY

Alexander. He says you're a bad boy.

JAMES

Was. Not any more. New me very professional. Very boring. Early to bed. Early to rise. All very monastic.

SUZY

Really?

JAMES

All I do now is work, practise and focus. All very tedious, but apparently the only way to win against the German..

(to himself)

...or should I say Austrian..

SUZY

Is that what you were doing when you came in?

JAMES

"Visualisation techniques". Memorizing the circuit, in this case Monaco, which is next up. Eyes closed, know your way round in your sleep...

(a beat)

I know, I know...personally I've always been a great believer in getting there on the day, putting the old foot down and playing chicken with everyone else.

SUZY laughs..

JAMES (cont'd)

But they don't want me to do that anymore...they want my body like a temple. My mind like a computer.

SUZY

And your soul? Your heart?

JAMES

What does that mean?

SUZY

You can't be so disciplined in all areas of your life, can you..?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JAMES

They want me to stop messing around, get married and settle down with the next nice girl I meet. They think it would be good for me.

SUZY

What do you think?

JAMES

Sounds bloody awful.

SUZY laughs again...

JAMES (cont'd)

But since they're right about most things, they're probably right about that, too.

JAMES looks at SUZY, and smiles...

JAMES (cont'd)

You don't fancy getting married, do you?

EXT/INT. BROMPTON ORATORY CHURCH - LONDON - DAY

The sound of ringing bells. A large church in the heart of London's Knightsbridge..

JAMES and SUZY, top hat and tails, flowing white wedding dress, both looking ravishing, stand at the altar of London's grandest Catholic church, which is packed to the rafters at the society wedding of the year...

Aristocracy, Formula One legends, models..

PRIEST

Do you Suzy Miller take James Simon Wallis Hunt to love and to honour, to cherish and to hold, until death do you part?

SUZY

I do.

PRIEST

You may kiss the bride..

JAMES and SUZY fall into a passionate, sexy embrace. Loud cheers go up in the church. The PRIEST raises an eyebrow at the sexiness and the cheers..

As the kiss continues...

EXT. BROMPTON ORATORY CHURCH - LONDON - DAY

Outside: on the steps of the Oratory; confetti, television, paparazzi, pandemonium as JAMES and SUZY emerge to loud cheers from church...

The bride and groom come down the steps, being congratulated, making their way to the waiting convoy of cars...

On his way: JAMES spots a serious-faced HESKETH and DOC POSTLETHWAITE in conversation with some Formula 1 types in the crowd..

SUZY is pulled away for photos with her FATHER. JAMES turns to BUBBLES, indicates HESKETH and DOC...

JAMES
What's going on there?

BUBBLES
Nothing. I don't want to ruin your day.

JAMES
Go on...

BUBBLES stares, then reluctantly...

BUBBLES
It seems your revenge against Niki might have to wait a little longer than you'd hoped.
(a beat)
He's just been signed by Ferrari.

JAMES stares in disbelief...

JAMES
What?

BUBBLES
I know.

JAMES
How? That's the best team in the world. Did he pay his way in there, too?

BUBBLES
Apparently old man Enzo took Regazzoni back and Regazzoni insisted they give Lauda a trial.
(shrugs)
Thinks he's a genius apparently.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BUBBLES (cont'd)
 Thinks he can help Ferrari create some
 kind of supercar.

HUNT stares, feeling sick. He is pulled away to pose in
 photographs with SUZY and her FAMILY.

JAMES finds a brave smile. But he's dying inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIONARO - NORTHERN ITALY - DAY

Maranello: FERRARI's state-of-the-art practise facilities and
 private test-track in Northern Italy.

Closed circuit television, with 10 cameras and a complex track
 timing system and computers....

ENZO FERRARI himself, the Commendatore, a formidable white-
 haired patriarch in Onassis dark glasses, reads newspapers,
 sitting by the race tracks, barely looking up as two red
 Ferrari 312 B3/74's roar round the track...

The two cars stop, and NIKI and CLAY REGAZZONI gets out. NIKI
 talks (in Italian) to the team of MECHANICS and ENZO himself,
 giving them feedback and criticism about the car...

NIKI
 The weight distribution doesn't feel
 consistent, and the fuel in the tanks
 keeps shifting on corners...maybe the
 fuel tanks should be moved completely?
 To balance things out more?

INT. PRESS CONFERENCE - DAY

A large press conference, with motoring JOURNALISTS and
 television CREWS from all over the world attending...

ENZO FERRARI gets to his feet and addresses the conference (in
 Italian) which is translated by a translator...

ENZO
 I am delighted to welcome back into
 the Ferrari family our good friend,
 Clay Regazzoni...and also to introduce
 a very special new talent, Niki Lauda
 who has suggested some exciting
 modifications to the car...not just to
 the engine...but to driving position,
 traction, suspension geometry, and
 handling..

EXT. MOTORWAY - DAY

A car drives fast on country roads...

INT. CAR - SAME TIME

CLAY REGAZZONI is driving, NIKI is in the passenger seat...

REGAZZONI

All that talk about the "Ferrari Family". It's bullshit. You get love from the Commendatore as long as you do what he wants. The minute you don't..

(mimes execution)

NIKI

That's fine. It's business. I understand that.

REGAZZONI

But it isn't just business, is it? What we do? C'mon. It's a vocation, no? Love. Which is why we're prepared to risk our lives for it.

NIKI

Not for me. If I thought I had more talent, or could earn money better somewhere else, I would do that. Straight away.

REGAZZONI

But with respect...how do you know you will make money here? You haven't yet.

NIKI

I will. Maybe not this year. But next.

REGAZZONI

Why next?

NIKI

I'll be number one driver then.

REGAZZONI stares in disbelief...

REGAZZONI

You know, are you ever NOT an asshole?

NIKI

Why am I an asshole? It's how it's going to be. You can't deal with that, then you're the asshole.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REGAZZONI

You talk like that to your own team-mate?

NIKI

C'mon, let's not get sentimental. We both know this is a business, dog eat dog, each man for himself.

REGAZZONI

No...not for all of us. For some of us drivers this is a shared passion. Similarly afflicted, crazy guys who love to race, and are prepared to risk their lives. Who look out for one another because you never know when your luck runs out. And some day you may count on other drivers to support you.

The car pulls up...

REGAZZONI (cont'd)

Just don't count on me.

REGAZZONI gets out of his car, and walks off.

He disappears through the front door, where he is warmly welcomed, and invited into a party.

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY

NIKI is left outside. He stares at the house, and can see (and hear music) people inside, enjoying the party.

He goes to the door, is about to ring the door bell, then hesitates. Loses his nerve, somehow...

NIKI walks round the side of the house, and peers in through the windows.

INSIDE: a very appealing looking bunch of people - young, good-looking, urbane, sexy GUESTS - all having a good time.

NIKI catches his own reflection in the glass of a window. Pale. Scrawny. Rat-like.

He walks round to the side of the house, where he peers over a wall to see a courtyard and a swimming pool..

More GUESTS having a great time. Sun-kissed, confident, wealthy Europeans..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

At the heart of things is REGAZZONI, surrounded by friends, telling a story. Everyone laughs.

NIKI turns and walks away..and walks round to the front of the house, again.

NIKI is about to walk out onto the main road outside, to hitch a ride, when...

The front door opens, and a beautiful dark-haired woman walks out. Brunette, dark tan, attractive - wearing a white dress...

The dark-haired woman gets into her car...

NIKI
Are you leaving?

MARLENE
Yes.

NIKI
Can you give me a lift to the nearest town? Anywhere with a train station.

MARLENE
Sure.

NIKI gets into her car. Sees the Spanish number plate on her car, and asks her...

NIKI
You're Spanish?

MARLENE
Austrian.

NIKI
Austrian? So why the Spanish number plate?

MARLENE
Because I live in Ibiza. Which is where I'm going now.

NIKI
To Ibiza? The whole way?

MARLENE
Yes. What about you?

NIKI
Maranello.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MARLENE

I'll take you. It's on the way. Saves me picking up a hitch-hiker. Which I was going to do anyway. We can split the driving. And the petrol costs. I'll do the first hour.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The car drives. NIKI can't help noticing a faint screeching noise in the engine. It's turning-over inconsistently. Gear changes are taking a bit too long to lock in..

NIKI

Since when do you live in Ibiza?

MARLENE

My family moved there eight years ago. You ever been?

NIKI

No.

MARLENE

You'd love it.

NIKI

I doubt it. Don't really like holidays. Or beaches.

A beat.

NIKI (cont'd)

Did you drive this car up the whole way, too?

MARLENE

Of course..

NIKI

You're lucky you're alive.

MARLENE

Why?

NIKI

Did you hear that noise when we accelerate?

MARLENE accelerates slightly. The car screeches on cue.

MARLENE

Yes?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKI

Alternator drive belt is loose. Not good. And these brakes...your foot goes all the way down. Means there's air in the system. Plus the gear changes don't sound right, like they're not sticking. And see the white smoke...?

NIKI motions to the rear view mirror, where white smoke trails the car.

NIKI (cont'd)

Oil in the cylinders which could cause the throttle to stick. Dangerous.

MARLENE

Anything else?

NIKI

No, apart from the rear brakes are imbalanced. The front wheel is flat, and the camber is way off, which explains why you're drifting so much.

MARLENE

Drifting? Are you mad? You don't know what you're talking about. The car is fine. And it just had a service a week ago.

NIKI

Not a good one.

MARLENE

A very good one. From a proper garage. It cost a fortune. This car is good as new. Relax.

EXT. MOTORWAY - HARD SHOULDER - DAY

The car has broken down. Bonnet up. NIKI has tried fixing it, but to no avail.

NIKI has a fan belt in his hand, but it's all but disintegrated under the heat of the over-worked engine.

White smoke pours from the engine, and NIKI's hands are covered in oil. He is pushing a pen into a large crack in the engine, slick with oil and grease.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKI

It's a broken belt. And a crack in the engine block. Nothing I can do here. The car needs a garage.

MARLENE

I'm sorry. You're not in a hurry, are you?

NIKI

No. As long as I'm back in Maranello by Monday morning.

NIKI walks out into the road. Sticks out his thumb...

MARLENE

So who are you anyway? And what were you doing outside the house? Please tell me you're a burglar..

NIKI

A *burglar*?

MARLENE

Pity. Nothing would have made me happier. I could have told you exactly where the safe is. And the combination. The owner of the house is...or WAS my boyfriend, and absolutely deserves to be burgled. I must have been mad! There is something very attractive about an older man when they behave like older men. But when they behave like frightened babies...it's pathetic. He would surround himself with young people, mainly girls, doing anything to feel unlike the one thing that actually made him interesting..

NIKI

Which is?

MARLENE

Being old, ugly and wise.

NIKI can't help smiling...

MARLENE (cont'd)

Think about it, have you ever met a young, good-looking man that isn't a total asshole?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NIKI
(laughing, thinking of HUNT)
No.

MARLENE
A good mind and lousy looks is almost
always a good indicator for a man. In
terms of professional success, and
usually as a lover, too...

MARLENE gets to her feet...

MARLENE (cont'd)
...but clearly not as a hitch-hiker.
C'mon, let me do this. Otherwise we'll
never get anywhere...

MARLENE indicates that NIKI should take a back seat, and
sticks out her arm...

Immediately a passing car screeches to a halt, then reverses
noisily to pull level. MARLENE smiles at NIKI...

MARLENE (cont'd)
Not bad, eh? Three seconds. Admit it,
you're impressed..!

MARLENE smiles flirtatiously at the handsome, young Italian
MEN driving the open-topped sports car..

MARLENE (cont'd)
Ciao, Regazzi...!

But the Italian MEN walk right past her, as if she's not
there, and instead ask, in faltering English...

ITALIAN MAN
Excuse me, Sir....is it possible...?
Are you Niki Lauda?

NIKI
Yes.

ITALIAN MAN
Oh, my God, Sir, it's an honour...
(blown away)
Do you need a ride?

NIKI
Yes, we do...

The ITALIAN MAN gestures to his car, as his friend loads
MARLENE's luggage inside...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ITALIAN MAN

Be my guest, please. But on one condition..

The second ITALIAN MAN whispers in the ear of the first ITALIAN MAN...

ITALIAN MAN (cont'd)

That you drive.

MARLENE stares, not understanding, as NIKI slowly, reluctantly gets into the car. He starts the engine.

MARLENE watches as the ITALIAN MEN strap themselves in with the seat-belts, tightening them...

MARLENE

Will someone please tell me? What is going on?

ITALIAN MAN

We want your friend Mr. Lauda to drive. To show us what he can do.

MARLENE

You never told me. What is your job?

ITALIAN MAN

You don't *know*? He's a Formula I driver. For Ferrari!

MARLENE

Him? Never. Impossible!

ITALIAN MAN

Why?

MARLENE

Look at him! He's so...quiet. And shy. And look how he dresses. Formula 1 drivers have long hair, and shirts open to here..

MARLENE indicates...

MARLENE (cont'd)

And look how he's driving? Like an old man.

NIKI is driving in the slow lane. Like a pensioner.

NIKI

I want to arrive in one piece! Driving fast increases the risk. Why do it? We're not in a hurry.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

NIKI (cont'd)
No one is paying me. Right now, with zero incentive or reward to take increased risk, I'd be a jerk to do so.

MARLENE looks at him with her dark green eyes...

MARLENE
Do it for me. Please...?

NIKI stares for a beat, then sighs, and...in a lightning double-declutch, and a dazzling racing gear-change...

"SLAM", his foot hits the floor, the engine screams, the rev counter flies to the right...

And the car catapults violently forward like the Starship Enterprise on warp-drive...

MARLENE is thrown back hard in her seat, "Jesus", her eyes widen in horror and amazement..

MARLENE (cont'd)
Oh, my God...

The ITALIAN MEN scream in excitement and delight, holding on in terror as NIKI, his heart not skipping a beat, takes the car right to the limit, to breaking point, in a way it's never been driven before...

NIKI overtakes everyone on the motorway, fearlessly weaving between cars at twice their speed..

We CLOSE on NIKI's eyes, remaining dead calm as his passengers scream all around him, as he accelerates through the other cars on the motorway...

His EYES remain calm, his WHEELS a blur of speed, and we...

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. RACE TRACK - MONACO - DAY

Calm EYES, and WHEELS moving in a blur of speed. We're in the middle of a Grand Prix, and NIKI is driving at the limit...

CAPTION: "1975".

Ahead of him: a familiar sight. The back of JAMES HUNT's Hesketh..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKI
(in German, we see sub-titles)
OK, pretty boy, time for another
lesson.

NIKI accelerates, trying to overtake. He's in a new car now, even faster than the B3 - the Ferrari 312T.

But JAMES manoeuvres to block him. They cruise round the easy left of the Massenet, James confidently timing his brake and gear changes. The preparation has paid off.

NIKI tries to ride in his slipstream the outpower him on the straight. But JAMES is wise to this, too, and sails round the Casino corner...blocking his path.

NIKI tries one more trick. Once again, JAMES is up to it, and fends him off, changing down effortlessly into the right right bend of the Mirabeau..

NIKI (cont'd)
Someone's been doing his homework...

But then, "Puff", a plume of smoke comes out of JAMES's engine. The engine has blown...

Immediately JAMES loses speed, and NIKI sails past, overtaking effortlessly.

NIKI looks back in the wing mirror to see JAMES getting out of his car, throwing off his gloves and helmet in fury...

EXT. RACE TRACK - DAY

NIKI wins at MONACO, then a quick-fire montage of wins..

BELGIUM, SWEDEN, FRANCE, USA..

In each case, NIKI stands on the podium, victory laurel around his neck, spraying everyone with a magnum of champagne...

Television commentary in various languages tells us: NIKI LAUDA has become world champion...

Watching from a distance, waving delightedly, is MARLENE, (now his girlfriend). NIKI waves back...

EXT. PRESS TENT - WATKINS GLEN - NEW YORK STATE - DAY

NIKI, newly crowned world champion, finishes doing interviews in several languages for TV, and walks out of the press tent...towards MARLENE...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

...when he passes JAMES, talking to a good-looking WOMAN, walking round in bare feet...

JAMES

Congratulations. Though with a car like that, you're in a different race to the rest of us...

NIKI

The quality of that car didn't come out of nowhere. A lot of hard work went into that car.

JAMES

Still, I like to think with an equally quick car, on a level playing field, I could beat you.

NIKI

Never. You might get lucky and win one race. Maybe two. But in the long run, over the course of a season, no chance.

JAMES

Why's that?

NIKI

Because you don't have what it takes. You're too busy having a good time. Which is nice. And why everyone likes you. But all that affection, all those smiles is also a sign of their disrespect! They don't fear you. Whereas compare that to me...

JAMES

Whom no one likes...

NIKI

Right..

JAMES

Not even his own team-mates..

NIKI

Right! Because I'm relentless. I don't screw up. I go to bed early. I look after myself, look after my car. And then, soon as the race is finished, I get on my plane and go home. Even if I win. You should go home more often, too. I heard you got married.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JAMES

I did.

NIKI

So where is she? What's her name?

JAMES

Suzy.

NIKI

You know I've never seen you with her
once...

NIKI turns to MARLENE, "Let's go". They walk past the good-looking WOMAN who is waiting for JAMES..

EXT. NIKI'S HOUSE - SALZBURG - NIGHT

To establish: NIKI's large, comfortable house in the countryside, close to Salzburg.

INT. BATHROOM - NIKI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

NIKI is in the bathroom, getting ready for bed. Washing his face. He calls out to MARLENE...

NIKI

So? What do you think? Is he as good
looking as everyone says?

MARLENE

Who? James?
(a beat)
Yes.

NIKI stares at his reflection in the mirror. Thin, unathletic, pale. Narrow shoulders. Rat features. White skin.

MARLENE (cont'd)

His wife is a model.

NIKI

So?

MARLENE

So she's always abroad. Probably they
should never have got married. How is
he as a driver?

NIKI

Good.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARLENE

You know you never mention any of the other drivers. He's the only one. You keep telling me he's an enemy. Are you sure he isn't something else..?

NIKI

What?

MARLENE

A friend?

NIKI stares at his reflection for a second.

NIKI

I don't have friends.

Then turns out the light. Blackout.

EXT. EASTON NESTON - DAY

JAMES drives up the long gravel driveway towards Easton Neston.

JAMES gets out of the car. Is greeted by staff...

INT. EASTON NESTON - WORKSHOP - DAY

JAMES walks into the workshops where BUBBLES HORSELY is busy doing something...

JAMES

Right, whatever it takes to beat Lauda, just say it, your word is my command. I'll do it. There are no lengths to which I will not go. And I mean it this time. I'll even give up the booze...

JAMES stops, noticing BUBBLES's expression...

JAMES (cont'd)

What's the matter?

Then JAMES notices what BUBBLES is doing. He's packing.

Then JAMES notices the lack of activity in the workshops. None of the usual mechanics, or engineers..

JAMES (cont'd)

Where *is* everyone?

BUBBLES looks up. Unsure how to break it to him.

INT. DRAWING-ROOM - EASTON NESTON - DAY

An old drawing-room. The open fire roars. But HESKETH is uncharacteristically quiet. Defeated..

HESKETH

Do you know what the date is today?
November 14th. Don't suppose you have
any idea of the significance of that
date?

JAMES

I'm assuming it refers to some animal
you are allowed or no longer allowed
to slaughter on your estate.

HESKETH

Actually it's the deadline for
securing sponsorship for the
forthcoming Formula 1 season..
(a beat)
And it elapsed at midnight last night.

JAMES

Right.

HESKETH

And we didn't attract any.

JAMES

So? We aren't looking for sponsorship.
Condoms, and so forth. Vulgar, right?

HESKETH

Right. Except we are. Or were. I've
made something of a miscalculation. Or
the beancounters have. The economics.
Formula 1. Reality thereof. Turns out
not like Formula 3 at all.

JAMES

What are you saying?

HESKETH

I'm saying it's over. The banks have
stepped in. Started laying everyone
off. Probably have to sell this place.
Fun while it lasted, would do it all
again and all that...

(ashen)

I daren't tell you the actual figures.

JAMES stares at a devastated HESKETH...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES

Christ.

INT. JAMES'S FLAT - LONDON - NIGHT

JAMES is on the phone, listening to his manager, (his BROTHER), give him what is obviously depressing news...

JAMES

Right...

(listens)

Right..

(listens)

What does that mean? "My reputation precedes me?" Their reputation precedes them, too...

(rolls eyes)

What about Lotus? Anyone. Ring them all and beg...! We can't afford to be proud. It's the end of November...

(listens)

I need a drive, Peter. Find me a drive.

JAMES hangs up. SUZY walks in. Sees his mood..

SUZY

Don't worry. Something will turn up.

JAMES opens a bottle of Scotch...

SUZY (cont'd)

But I doubt that'll help in the meantime.

JAMES pouts a glass, knocks it back...

SUZY (cont'd)

C'mon, why don't we go away for the week-end? Get some sun. Play some tennis?

JAMES carries on drinking..

SUZY (cont'd)

Talk to me, James. Don't make a stranger of me.

SUZY walks over to take the bottle away, but JAMES snatches it out of hand. SUZY recoils. That was dark. Scary.

SUZY (cont'd)

I can't watch this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SUZY picks up her coat, and bag..

SUZY (cont'd)
What happened to the person I met?

SUZY turns and walks out. JAMES carries on drinking.

INT. JAMES'S FLAT - FOLLOWING MORNING

The following morning. The phone rings. Piercing the darkness. JAMES wakes slowly, clearly the worse for wear..

Beside him in bed, a WOMAN who is clearly not SUZY. JAMES fumbles for the phone..

JAMES (INTO PHONE)
Hello?

JAMES is still half asleep, splitting headache, hung over, but then hears something on the phone that makes him sit up...

JAMES (INTO PHONE) (cont'd)
Who? McLaren?

JAMES is waking rapidly now..

JAMES (INTO PHONE) (cont'd)
Just get me in a room with them, Tim.
say anything. Today? Yes, I can do
today...
(checks watch)
I can be there any time. Where is it?

JAMES starts scribbling down the address. As he writes, we see a second WOMAN sitting up in the bed...(also not SUZY).

The two WOMEN set eyes on one another...

WOMAN 1
Who are you?

WOMAN 2
Who are you?

EXT. MCLAREN HQ - TO ESTABLISH

The headquarters of McLaren Racing in Colnbrook, Buckinghamshire.

A small, unassuming building on the Poyle Trading Estate. Bare brickwork surrounds a brash yellow facade, with the words 'McLaren Racing' in large white letters.

INT. MCLAREN HQ - BOARDROOM - DAY

A large boardroom. Team Director TEDDY MAYER (American, from Pennsylvania, short, lawyerly, 50's - hair turning grey) sits at the head of the table.

Next to him is Aussie Marlboro spokesman JOHN HOGAN and McLaren Team Manager and chief mechanic ALASTAIR CALDWELL.

The atmosphere is tense, uncomfortable...

MAYER

I'll come straight to the point, our lead driver, Emerson Fittipaldi, has decided to leave us for another team..

HOGAN

Bloody outrageous...

MAYER

...and we need a replacement. Quick. Thankfully a few hands have already gone up. People who, for one reason or another didn't sign contracts back in October.

CALDWELL

People like Jackie Ickx.

JAMES

I'm quicker than Jackie.

MAYER

Maybe. But he's consistent. Dependable. A team player. Sponsor friendly. Will deliver decent lap times, dress up nice. Say the right things.

JAMES

What do you want? A driver or a brushes salesman?

MAYER

I want to be successful.

JAMES

So do I. But I measure that in podiums and beating Niki Lauda.

MAYER

I've heard about this thing with Lauda.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CALDWELL

Everyone has..

MAYER

You really think you can beat him?
With due respect James, Niki's had
eight podium finishes, five wins,
you've had nothing --

JAMES

That's because I've been in the wrong
car. I beat him when the playing field
was level, in Formula 3. I'd beat him
again in a McLaren. It's the only car
out there as good as the Ferrari.
Which is why I leapt at it when I got
the call this morning....

JAMES looks around the room, blank faces.

JAMES (cont'd)

I need this drive, guys. Not just to
beat Lauda. But to stay alive. The
rush...the speed. The noise. The
danger. The terror. Is everything.
It's what keeps me going. Without it
I'm...dead.

(a beat)

Look, I'll even put on a suit, go to
sponsor's parties and say the right
thing. I promise. I just draw the line
at actually smoking Marlboros. Can't
stand them. I'll decant my own brand
into your box. Hope that's OK...I'm
just a Benson and Hedges man. Always
have been..

CUT TO:

EXT. AUSTRIAN ALPS - SALZBURG - DAY

The awesome Austrian Alps in the province of Salzburg. Over
this the sound of a ringing telephone.

INT. NIKI'S HOUSE - GYM - DAY

NIKI is being massaged by his guru WILLI DUNGL, a
bespectacled, school-teacherly nutritionist in his 50's...

NIKI answers the phone..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOGAN (V/O)
I don't know what you've done to upset
James Hunt, but he's after you.

NIKI
What?

INT. MCLAREN HQ - DAY

JOHN HOGAN is in his office. He speaks to NIKI on the
phone...(we intercut between the locations as necessary)..

HOGAN
He wants to beat you. But not just a
bit. It's like an obsession. He wants
to destroy you. What have you done to
him?

NIKI
Nothing.

HOGAN
Well, we were so impressed, we've
given him a ride.

NIKI
At McLaren?

HOGAN
Yes.

NIKI
In your new car?

HOGAN
Yes! Our very hot new car! He's taken
a fifth of what we paid Fittipaldi. A
pittance. He was so desperate, so
hungry to get you - he'd have taken it
for nothing!
(a beat)
So thank you.

"Click", NIKI hangs up. His masseur, WILLI looks up, notices..

WILLI
Oje. Was jetzt?
(Oh, dear. What now?)

NIKI
Jetzt?
(Now?)

NIKI stares...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKI (cont'd)
 Jetzt kommt der Krieg.
 (Now it's war.)

FADE TO BLACK:

Over this: we fade in the sound of BRAZILIAN MUSIC...

EXT. BRAZIL - DAY

Sao Paulo: various shots, to establish. A vast, sprawling metropolis..

COMMENTATOR
 ...welcome to Sao Paolo, Brazil. It's the opening race of the 1976 Formula 1 season, it's a glorious Sunday - 22 degrees..

EXT. INTERLAGOS - BRAZIL - TO ESTABLISH - DAY

The Autodromo de Interlagos. Crowds flood to the spectator stands. The pit lane stretches into the distance, filled with cars, drivers and mechanics, a mass of activity.

COMMENTATOR
 ...and the big news is that James Hunt has qualified fastest for the race, beating his rival, Niki Lauda, to pole by two hundredths of a second...

EXT. STARTING GRID - INTERLAGOS - DAY

The cars lined up on the starting grid. JAMES in pole position in his new McLaren M23 - red and white with the number 11 painted on its nose - next to NIKI in the front row.

JAMES goes up to NIKI, proudly indicates his gleaming red McLaren in pole...

JAMES
 New car.

NIKI
 I noticed.

JAMES
 Pole position.

NIKI
 I noticed that, too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES
Level playing field now, my friend.

NIKI
Let's see where we are at the end of
lap one.

JAMES smiles, walks back to his car...

NIKI (cont'd)
Let's see where we are in six races
time!!

INT. JAMES'S CAR - DAY

JAMES gets into his car. He looks over at NIKI. The two men's eyes meet...

CAPTION: "RACE 1, BRAZIL."

The starter's flag drops. Losing all his composure, forgetting everything...JAMES's foot slams down on the floor.

JAMES's wheels spin...furiously burning rubber...

NIKI smiles to himself, he and REGAZZONI both seize the advantage, and scream past, overtaking him.

INT. PITS - SAME TIME

TEDDY MAYER, ALASTAIR CALDWELL and JOHN HOGAN react in anger. Heads in hands, cursing, closing their eyes..

MAYER
Jesus Christ...

CALDWELL
C'mon, James..!

JAMES's car lurches forward. But any advantage he had in pole has already been lost.

CAPTION: "LAUDA WINS, 9 POINTS, HUNT 0 POINTS"

EXT. KYALAMI CIRCUIT - SOUTH AFRICA - DAY

The starter's flag drops. Engines scream. The cars roar off..

CAPTION: "RACE 2, SOUTH AFRICA."

INT. JAMES'S CAR - SOUTH AFRICA - DAY

JAMES is chasing NIKI hard, but cannot catch him...

The chequered flag waves...

NIKI's car roars past the finishing line first. JAMES's follows closely in second...

CAPTION: "LAUDA WINS, HUNT 2nd"

EXT. CALIFORNIA - LONG BEACH - DAY

The starter's flag drops...

CAPTION: "RACE 3, CALIFORNIA, USA."

JAMES crashes into some bales...

CAPTION: "HUNT CRASHES, LAUDA 2nd"

EXT. JARAMA, SPAIN - DAY

The chequered flag waves...

CAPTION: "RACE 4, SPAIN"

JAMES's car roars past the finishing line first. He's won!!!!

In the pits: TEDDY MAYER, ALASTAIR CALDWELL and JOHN HOGAN leap to their feet in delight. Punching the air. Victory..

CAPTION: "HUNT WINS..."

INT. PITS - DAY

But afterwards: a huge furore as several OFFICIALS and RIVAL TEAMS, and TV CREWS surround JAMES's car...

CAPTION: "...BUT IS THEN DISQUALIFIED".

Raised voices, HUNT furious, people almost coming to blows...

CAPTION: "LAUDA WINS"

NIKI stands on the podium. Victory garland around his neck. Champagne...

EXT. ZOLDER, BELGIUM - DAY

The starter's flag drops. Screaming engines..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAPTION: "RACE 5, BELGIUM"

INT. JAMES'S CAR - DAY

JAMES's car shakes violently, something is badly wrong, billowing black smoke fills our frame...

CAPTION: "LAUDA WINS. HUNT'S ENGINE BLOWS UP."

EXT. MONACO - DAY

The starter's flag drops: yachts, casinos, millionaires, helicopters, girls...

CAPTION: "RACE 6, MONACO"

INT. JAMES'S CAR - DAY

The car shakes violently, billowing black smoke fills our frame...

CAPTION: "LAUDA WINS. HUNT'S ENGINE BLOWS UP. AGAIN."

JAMES gets out of his car, removes his helmet in fury, and pushes angrily past oncoming FIREFIGHTERS and TRACK OFFICIALS, RACE STEWARDS etc..

EXT. MONACO - DAY

The victorious NIKI finishes giving interviews, the garland still around his neck.

CAPTION: "LAUDA 56 POINTS, HUNT 6"

NIKI, who is with MARLENE, walks through crowds, and bumps into JAMES, who is still arguing with French RACE STEWARDS, blaming debris on the track for the engine failure...

NIKI

So...six races in. How's it going so far?

JAMES

Like I said, if the playing field were level, I'd win.

NIKI

What are you talking about? What's not level? All the time the same bullshit excuse.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES

I won that race in Spain.

NIKI

In an illegal car.

JAMES

Illegal??!? The aerofoil was five eighths of an inch too long!! Something that doesn't have the slightest effect on car speed. A complaint registered by YOU. Now we've had to totally rebuild the car. A car that was beating you in testing week in week out. Which you've sabotaged. Which doesn't work anymore - has become a monster...

NIKI

At least it's a LEGAL monster.

JAMES

Oh, give it up...

NIKI

Let me tell you: two weeks before Spain, we put 20-inch rims on the rear wheels. We get an extra two-fifths of a second speed on each lap!! Almost half a second. But the Old Man tells me we can't use those rims, they make the car too wide. Against FIA rules. So we go back to 19-inch rims. You're telling me that 1.6cms makes no difference to car speed? Bullshit. You're just crookes.

JAMES

We're crooks? That's rich, coming from Ferrari! You're all mobsters, criminals. Funded by mafia money. Your Old Man even looks like a Don. This is an empire. And he controls it by criminal means.

NIKI

You've gone crazy. Sick in the head.
(tapping head)
No wonder she's had enough...

NIKI turns to MARLENE, speaks in German...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NIKI (cont'd)
Komm, den Trottel lassen wir alleine..
(*Let's go. Leave this jerk
alone.*)

NIKI and MARLENE go. JAMES is left staring. Not understanding.

INT. MCLAREN PITS - DAY

JAMES walks into the crowded MCLAREN pits. Sees TEDDY MAYER and ALASTAIR CALDWELL...

JAMES
Has anyone heard from Suzy? She was supposed to be here today.

CALDWELL nervously indicates the Sunday newspapers...

CALDWELL
We kept it from you. Didn't want to tell you before the race...

JAMES looks at the newspapers, then his expression changes.

Lurid headlines about SUZY HUNT in New York with RICHARD BURTON...

Pictures all over the front pages of RICHARD BURTON, ELIZABETH TAYLOR, SUZY and JAMES..

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

A jumbo jet roars down the runway and takes off...

INT. JUMBO JET - FIRST CLASS - DAY

JAMES sits alone in the first class section. Lost in thought. Visibly down.

For the first time we get a hint of his famous depressions...

EXT. MANHATTAN - DAY

The unmistakable skyline. Among the ten thousand craggy rooftops and skyscrapers...

A grand, five-star hotel overlooking Central Park in Manhattan's mid-town district...

EXT. HOTEL - MANHATTAN - DAY

A taxi pulls up. A huge collection of paparazzi SNAPPERS and Journalist HACKS is camped outside the hotel.

Immediately a surge of activity, "Here he is"...

A burst of flashlights and a volley of questions from the JOURNALISTS as JAMES gets out of the taxi and runs into the hotel. Clearly this is a big story...

INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

A large hotel suite. There are flowers everywhere. Newspapers are all over the table.

JAMES sits opposite SUZY. He sees an expensive gift; recently opened. A diamond necklace..

JAMES

That from him?

SUZY nods. Even the uninitiated eye can tell: it's worth a fortune.

JAMES (cont'd)

Nice.

SUZY

Why have you come here, James?

JAMES

To get you back.

SUZY

You don't want me back. And if it had been just the drinking, or the dope, or the infidelity, or the moods, who knows, I might have considered COMING back...but when it's all of them together?

JAMES

I'm terrible.

SUZY

No, you're not terrible. You're just...who you are...at this point in your life. And God help any woman that wants more.

JAMES indicates the silver necklace. The flowers..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES

Will he be able to give you more? He's hardly an angel himself.

SUZY

What's important is how it feels to me. And it feels like he adores me.

A flicker of darkness behind JAMES's eyes. Failure.

JAMES

Right.

He manages a brave smile. OVER THIS: the sound a ringing phone...

INT. JAMES'S HOTEL SUITE - DAY

The phone is answered by a deep, dark, sonorous Welsh baritone voice...scarred by alcohol and cigarettes...

BURTON (V/O)

Hello?

JAMES speaks into the phone..

JAMES

It's James Hunt.

BURTON (V/O)

Ah. I've been expecting you.

INT. BURTON'S HOTEL SUITE - LOMBARDY HOTEL - DAY

RICHARD BURTON, the world-famous actor, sits in his hotel room..(we don't see his face), just details. And that voice...

BURTON

You're ringing to throw down your hanky? Challenge me to a duel?

JAMES

No. I've spoken to Suzy. I understand the situation. Just wondering how we can sort this out?

BURTON

Funny. Had you down as many things. But not a pragmatist. Will you let her go?

(a beat)

Don't worry, I'll take care of the financial side. Least I can do.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BURTON (cont'd)
Having raided your larder. Plundered
your safe. Smash and grab, and so
forth..

JAMES notices a light flashing on his phone. It's the other
line...

JAMES
Will you excuse me a second?

JAMES switches lines...

JAMES (cont'd)
Hello?

INT. MCLAREN HQ - ENGLAND - DAY

It's ALASTAIR CALDWELL and TEDDY MAYER, speaking across the
conference room table, into a speaker-phone...

MAYER
James, Teddy. We've cracked it! The
oil coolers!

JAMES
Did you try moving them?

MAYER
We did. Half an inch. It fixes the
problem straight away! The rear
spoiler is the right size and it
doesn't upset the balance of the car.

JAMES
So we're back to the old car again?

MAYER
Yes! Jochen's been out in her all
morning. She goes like a rocket.
Plus the FIA are looking into
overruling the disqualification in
Spain, which would restore our points.
Things are looking up.

JAMES
Fantastic. I'm on the overnight
flight, be back in the morning.

"CLICK", JAMES switches lines again...

JAMES (cont'd)
Sorry, Richard. Where were we?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BURTON

We're done, aren't we? All
disappointingly amicable and
undramatic.

JAMES

What were you hoping for?

BURTON

I don't know. She's a beautiful woman.
We're a pair of hellraisers. Shouldn't
we have a punch up or something? In a
hotel lobby? Or an airport lounge?

(a beat)

Just for form's sake?

EXT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - FRANCE - DAY

The chequered flag waves as JAMES's car roars across the
finish line...

CAPTION: "FRANCE. HUNT WINS. LAUDA's ENGINE BLOWS UP"

INT. PITS - DAY

TEDDY MAYER, ALASTAIR CALDWELL and JOHN HOGAN jump out of
their seats in delight...cheering...

EXT. SWEDISH GRAND PRIX - DAY

The chequered flag waves again as JAMES's car roars across the
finish line...

CAPTION: "SWEDEN. HUNT WINS, LAUDA 3rd."

EXT. PODIUM - DAY

JAMES sprays champagne as NIKI watches from below him on the
podium..

NIKI's expression: not amused.

EXT. FIA HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A room full of sports and motoring JOURNALISTS, TV CREWS and
representatives of racing teams...

A blazer-wearing FIA OFFICIAL walks out and goes to a podium
with several microphones...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIA OFFICIAL

Following a full and exhaustive inquiry into the disqualification of driver James Hunt from the Spanish Grand Prix, it has been decided to overturn this disqualification...and to restore his victory, and reinstate his points..

INT. MCLAREN HQ - DAY

JAMES, TEDDY MAYER, ALASTAIR CALDWELL, and all the MECHANICS are watching on TV...

Huge celebrations. Cheering and whooping.

EXT. BRITISH GRAND PRIX - BRAND'S HATCH - DAY

The chequered flag waves AGAIN as JAMES's car roars across the finish line...

CAPTION: "BRAND'S HATCH. HUNT WINS. LAUDA 2nd."

EXT. PODIUM - BRAND'S HATCH - DAY

Afterwards: JAMES sprays champagne in front of TEDDY, ALASTAIR, all his team, and his delighted, cheering home supporters.

NIKI is watching from directly below him on the podium.

EXT. BRAND'S HATCH - PRESS TENT - DAY

A crowded PRESS room. In opposite corners of the room, JAMES and NIKI are giving interviews to different PRESS and TV journalists..

They are talking to JOURNALISTS...

JOURNALIST

...James, a few weeks ago, you were out of the running for this season completely, now you're right back in it. What's changed...?

JAMES stares across the room at NIKI...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES

A combination of having a brilliant team, justice being done re: Spain, and a bit of good luck here and there...

In the other corner: NIKI is doing his interviews in German, (we see sub-titles)...

JOURNALIST

Mathematically in theory it's now possible for Hunt to catch you. Are you worried?

NIKI also stares back across the room at JAMES...

NIKI

Worried? No. The fact is for him to overtake me, he'd have to win all the remaining races, and I'd have to lose them, and based on the way the past 18 months have been, I can't see that happening.

NIKI and JAMES's eyes meet, then NIKI finishes the interview, turns and walks out of the Press Tent...

...to join MARLENE who has been waiting for him...

EXT. VIENNESE REGISTRY OFFICE - DAY

To establish: the Viennese skyline.

INT. REGISTRY OFFICE - DAY

NIKI and MARLENE are getting married. In stark contrast to JAMES's wedding...

It's a small, intimate, private affair. Modest. Away from the cameras. A few friends and relatives.

NIKI and MARLENE kiss, sealing the vow..

EXT. AIRFIELD - DAY

A small aeroplane takes off...

INT. AEROPLANE - DAY

NIKI and MARLENE are in the plane. In the cockpit. Alone. NIKI allows her to fly for a moment...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARLENE laughs, cannot believe how exhilarating it is. NIKI takes over, they kiss, he flies, happy...

It's another side to him, completely. A man deeply in love.

EXT. IBIZA - DAY

NIKI and MARLENE in a pool. In Ibiza. Playing. Laughing. Honeymooning.

Then NIKI's expression changes. As if catching himself having a thought. His smile fades.

INT. BEDROOM - HOUSE - IBIZA - NIGHT

MARLENE is fast asleep. She wakes, to discover the bed is empty beside her...

MARLENE gets up.

INT. HOUSE - IBIZA - NIGHT

MARLENE walks through the house, looking for NIKI. Then finds him on a balcony...alone. Rehearsing corners...

MARLENE
What are you doing?

NIKI
Rehearsing corners. It's the Nurburgring next. The most dangerous track on the circuit.

MARLENE
Come to bed.

NIKI
I will.

MARLENE notices his mood. It's different.

MARLENE
Are you OK?

NIKI's eyes are closed. He continues rehearsing...

NIKI
That's why it's so dangerous.
Happiness. Why it's the enemy. It weakens you. Puts doubt in your mind. Because all of a sudden you have something to lose..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARLENE stares at him.

MARLENE
Happiness is not an enemy.

MARLENE turns, and goes..

And NIKI is left alone. Visualizing the corners. And we can tell from his expression, his mannerisms, he is struggling with something for the first time..

Ice-cold fear.

EXT. NURBURGRING - DAY

The notoriously difficult and treacherous German race track.

Testing is underway. A CAR (from one of the other teams) skids, and crashes badly.

AMBULANCES arrive. The Driver is badly hurt. Screaming.

His leg is crushed. Bone is sticking out. A brutal compound fracture. He is taken away.

The realities of daily life in Formula 1 in the 1970's.

In the pits, everyone is shaken. DRIVERS cross themselves. There but for the Grace of God.

NIKI's face: frightened.

EXT. NURBURGRING - DAY

Race-day. Huge crowds arrive at the Nurburgring...

And rain. Heavy rain falling.

EXT. NURBURGRING - DAY

JAMES arrives at the race track for the race, being driven by a member of the McLaren team, to find ALASTAIR CALDWELL waiting for them, a concerned look on his face...

CALDWELL
We've just been told, a driver's meeting has been called.

JAMES
Who by?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CALDWELL

Niki.

JAMES's face. Instantly suspicious.

JAMES

What's he up to now?

INT. MEETING ROOM - NURBURGRING RACE TRACK - DAY

About sixty people, (26 DRIVERS and all the different team REPRESENTATIVES), are assembled in the room, where a blazered FIA OFFICIAL and a member of the DRIVERS SAFETY COMMITTEE are sitting behind a table...

A buzz of anticipation and curiosity. What's going on? What is all this about? NIKI gets to his feet, raises his hands calling for silence...

NIKI

Ok...thank you. I called this meeting...because as we all know the Nurburgring is a race track from the Stone Ages, the most stupid, barbaric, outdated, dangerous track in the world. You've seen all of you the rain which has been falling this morning. Those of you with experience know the Ring needs perfect conditions to be even remotely acceptable in terms of risk. As you can see today is anything BUT perfect, so I called this meeting to take a vote to see if we postpone the race.

A ripple of astonished reactions among the drivers..

NIKI (cont'd)

There would be no change to the situation as far as points is concerned. The race would simply be cancelled.

TEDDY MAYER looks over at FERRARI representatives....

MAYER

This is bullshit...

Another DRIVER gets to his feet...

DRIVER

If the race is cancelled, none of us get our race fees...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKI

It's true. You leave without your fee,
but you might leave with your LIFE.

Another voice pierces the controversy...

VOICE

And you would effectively become world
champion.

It's JAMES, who is standing up...

JAMES

So I can see why this suits you just
fine.

NIKI

Why? There would be no points for me
to win...

JAMES

But there would be one race less where
I, or anyone else, could catch you.

Uproar in the room...

NIKI

Drivers...please...

ANOTHER DRIVER'S VOICE

Maybe it's just that you're
frightened?

Laughter among the DRIVERS...

NIKI

Which asshole said this?

Silence. No hand goes up. Someone is too frightened to admit
it.

NIKI (cont'd)

Yes, I am frightened. Always when I
race. But I am not crazy. I accept 20%
risk every time I get in my car that I
could die. But not one per cent more.

NIKI turns to face JAMES...

NIKI (cont'd)

And in terms of 'tactics' or wanting
to win the world championship, James,
I should remind you, I have the track
record here. I am the only person to
do this course in under 7 minutes.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NIKI (cont'd)
So actually it's to my ADVANTAGE to
race here today.

JAMES smiles, looks at the rest of the room...

JAMES
Then let's race.

A ripple of excitement and enthusiasm among the other
drivers...

JAMES (cont'd)
There's a hundred thousand Jerrys out
there who would never forgive us if we
didn't...and some of us need our race
fees!!

FIA OFFICIAL
All those in favour of cancelling the
race?

NIKI puts his hand up. One or two other racers, too...

FIA OFFICIAL (cont'd)
All those in favour of racing?

JAMES puts his hand up. Clearly the more popular, charismatic
figure among the DRIVERS, everyone else follows.

FIA OFFICIAL (cont'd)
Gentlemen, go start your engines.

A clear victory for JAMES. Everyone leaves the room. JAMES and
TEDDY MAYER give one another a discreet hi-five...

But we rack focus through the crowd to see NIKI staring at
JAMES accusingly...holding his gaze.

EXT. STARTING GD - DAY

"RRRROAAAR", an explosion of noise, as we widen and find
ourselves on the starting grid of the German Grand Prix.

An OFFICIAL walks through the cars holding aloft a sign, "One
Minute"...

Deafening, angry thunder, as cars rev their engines.

AN EYE FLICKERS - WIDE OPEN - STARING INTENTLY

A pupil dilates and contracts in the light. The eye stares.
Blinks. Thinks. Making evaluations..

EXT. CLOUDY SKY - GERMANY - DAY

The eye belongs to JAMES. He stares up at the clouds.

His eyelids flicker. Thinking. Agonizing. Wrestling with an all important decision...

Is it going to carry on raining? Or become dry?

ALASTAIR CALDWELL comes up to JAMES, and shouts above the noise...

CALDWELL

Jochen's going on slicks. You want to change?

JAMES looks in his wing-mirror back to his colleague, JOCHEN MASS's car, number 12, several rows behind him.

White helmet. A team of McLaren MECHANICS hastily changing the tyres to bald, dry tyres - ('slicks').

Then JAMES looks over at the car beside him to see his mortal rival - NIKI LAUDA in the Ferrari...

JAMES

Has Niki changed?

CALDWELL

No. He's going on wets.

NIKI's car: surrounded by Italian Ferrari MECHANICS.

JAMES

Then we go on wets, too.

JAMES pulls down his visor...as he and NIKI's eyes meet for a split-second, then...

The STARTER waves the flag. They're off!

JAMES's foot hits the floor - his engine screams at almost 9,000 rpms, drowning out the roar of the 180,000 crowd. The car is catapulted forward, the wheel-spin leaving livid black scars on the asphalt..

JAMES and NIKI both make good starts, and are neck and neck, but within seconds there's a McLaren right behind them, gaining fast.

JAMES realizes it's his team-mate, JOCHEN MASS in a white helmet. Number 12. On his slick tyres.

MASS was right to gamble on the track drying out. JAMES curses under his breath...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES (cont'd)
Scheisse...!

JAMES screwed up. Made the wrong decision. He urgently needs to change tyres. With barely one lap completed...

He swerves angrily into the pits..

INT. PITS - DAY

Commentary from all the world's TV stations explaining the crazy, panicked situation as JAMES comes into the pits to change to dry tyres.

The McLaren team frantically changes the tyres. Four men with air guns, two men with rapid-duty jacks.

ALASTAIR CALDWELL appears, talks to JAMES..

CALDWELL
See? I told you to go on slicks!! You didn't take my advice...

JAMES
Where's Niki?

CALDWELL
Right behind you! He made the same mistake..

JAMES looks in his mirror to see NIKI's red helmet behind him in the pits, then...

CALDWELL (cont'd)
And they're having problems!!

"Thump", new (slick) tyres hit the tarmac. JAMES gets the signal, 'Clear!'

CALDWELL (cont'd)
Go! Go!! Go!!

JAMES's foot hits the floor. He roars out, with new tyres...

EXT. NUBURGRING - DAY

Archive commentary: from the world's TV stations informs us that JAMES is in 3rd position..

INT. JAMES'S CAR - DAY

JAMES gives it everything he's got. Tearing through the gears, breaking as late as he can, engine screaming.

The world flies past in a blur. The steering wheel shakes. The car cannot be driven any harder. No thought for safety. No thought of failure..

Failure is unimaginable. Unconscionable.

He turns into the final straight, then stops when he sees something ahead.

Flags. Red flags. RACE MARSHALLS. Something has clearly happened. An accident..

The race is being stopped. JAMES brakes, slowing down. He pulls level with a uniformed MARSHALL..

JAMES
(immediately concerned)
Who is it?

MARSHALL
We don't know, yet. We just got the message. Accident. Bad one.

CUT TO:

INT. NIKI'S CAR - SAME TIME

Pandemonium: commentary in different languages as panicked TV commentators helplessly try to work out what's happening..

Burning smoke fills NIKI's helmet, scarring his lungs. He coughs desperately.

We can just make out the barely recognizable figures of the other DRIVERS rushing towards him, as their hands get burnt in the flames as they try unsuccessfully to undo his seatbelt...

Fire extinguishers blast at the car. Covering NIKI's helmet. Filling his lungs with chemicals, along with the smoke and fumes, blurring his vision, as he screams in agony..

Screaming voices. Panicked reactions. Then sound fades. As NIKI blacks out - losing consciousness.

FADE TO BLACK:

OVER THIS: the sound of helicopter blades...

EXT. MANNHEIM UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

NIKI's POV: the door to a helicopter opens, as it arrives at Mannheim University Hospital...

The sound of shouting voices. Hospital STAFF pull reach towards NIKI, pull his stretcher out.

NIKI's internal voice groans: cries out at the pain.

INT. MANNHEIM UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

"Crash, doors burst open and NIKI is rushed into emergency. Neon ceiling lights pass overhead...

The sound of difficult breathing.

His stretcher is surrounded by DOCTORS, talking urgently, making quick assessments..

NIKI's POV: fading in and out of consciousness.

Bursts of concerned, urgent, overlapping dialogue among the German DOCTORS which NIKI can barely make out..

INT. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - MANNHEIM HOSPITAL - DAY

Two narrow, barely open slits of light. NIKI's swollen eyelids.

NIKI's POV: as MARLENE stands beside the senior burns specialist PROFESSOR..

NIKI hears voices...

PROFESSOR

It's not the burns to his face that are the danger. It's the burns to his lungs. His blood oxygen level is currently...

NURSE

6.8.

PROFESSOR

Which is not enough to maintain life...

NIKI slips out of consciousness again...

INT. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - DAY

NIKI's P.O.V: he wakes up to feel someone touching his forehead and his hands with oil...and the sound of a WOMAN weeping...

PRIEST
...durch diese heilige Salbung helfe
dir der Herr in seinem reichen
Erbarmen, er stehe dir bei mit der
Kraft des Heiligen Geistes...

NIKI's eyes barely crack open, barely manage to focus to see an ELDERLY PRIEST is giving him the last rites in German..

MARLENE is crying hysterically somewhere in the room...

PRIEST (cont'd)
Der Herr der dich von Sunden befreit,
rette dich in seiner Gnade richte er
dich auf...

NIKI strains to move. A sense of excruciating pain. He's screaming without a voice.

He fights to open his eyes, give an indication...ANY indication of the fact that he is hearing this, and is alive and able to fight for life...

But to no avail. The PRIEST continues giving last rites. MARLENE continues to cry. The PRIEST touches NIKI's shoulder...

PRIEST (cont'd)
Goodbye my friend.

NIKI strains, wanting to be heard. Wanting to give them a sign. He's OK. He's still there...

But it's no use. The pain is too great. NIKI blacks out again...

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. CORRIDOR - HOSPITAL - DAY

The following morning: MARLENE has been sitting in the hospital all night supported by members of FAMILY and several FRIENDS.

Presently: the door to the intensive care unit opens and a DOCTOR comes out, beckoning her...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR
Frau Lauda? Bitte kommen Sie! He's
awake! It's incredible. Awake and
talking.

MARLENE scrambles to her feet...

DOCTOR (cont'd)
He opened his mouth, looked me in the
eye, and said, "Who won?"

MARLENE covers her mouth, laughs nervously, already in tears.
She and the DOCTOR rush into the intensive care unit.

EXT. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - DAY

Shooting through the window we see MARLENE approach NIKI's
bed, (NIKI still remains unseen), for an emotional reunion.

MARLENE sees the state NIKI is in, and freezes. She's
laughing, crying, wiping away tears of joy, compassion,
horror, shock. Everything at once.

One things for certain: their lives have changed forever.

OVER THIS: we pre-lap the sound of struggling, a man in
pain...

DOCTOR (V/O)
OK, can you sit? Is that OK?

NIKI (V/O)
(with extreme difficulty)
Yes.

DOCTOR (V/O)
Now, are you sure you want to do this
now?

NIKI (V/O)
Yes.

INT. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - DAY

A mirror is lowered down in front of NIKI's face. And now we
see him for the first time.

It's profoundly shocking: he looks like a grotesque animal.
His head and neck are swollen to three times the normal size.
He has no eyelids. His scalp is burned. Skin hangs off.

When NIKI speaks, it is as a barely audible whisper. Partly
out of his condition. Partly out of shock.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKI
I am a grown man. I have no time for
bullshit. So tell me straight. Will I
ever look normal again?

The DOCTOR can hardly bring himself to say...

DOCTOR
No.

NIKI stares. Unflinching.

DOCTOR (cont'd)
You'll have plastic surgery, of
course. To have your eye-lids
reconstructed. Your ear reconstructed.
Probably from rib cartilage. But your
appearance will never be the same.

NIKI
OK. Now give me some good news.

NIKI turns his head, barely manages to speak the words..

NIKI (cont'd)
When can I get back in my car?

The DOCTORS and NURSES laugh out loud. It's a good sign. Their
patient is showing remarkable spirit, equanimity and humour..

But MARLENE is not laughing.

And now the DOCTOR's smiles fade. Because they realize. He's
not joking. The man is barely alive. He's effectively a
walking burn wound. And he wants to get back in a car?

TELEVISION COVERAGE - FULL FRAME

The starter's flag drops. On television we see a Grand Prix
start.

NIKI watches the race on television, while beginning his rehab
in bed, recovering from an operation, screaming in pain as
bandages are changed..

ON TV: JAMES narrowly misses out on a podium, but still gains
on NIKI in his points total...

CAPTION: "AUSTRIA: HUNT 4th"

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY - (A WEEK LATER)

NIKI continues his rehab in the hospital, now out of bed...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ON TV: the starter's flag drops. Another Grand Prix starts. This time at Zandvoort, in the Netherlands..

NIKI watches the race on television as JAMES leads in his McLaren, driving the perfect race...

COMMENTATORS ON TV: talk about how HUNT is catching up with LAUDA on points...

It spurs NIKI on, through gritted teeth. An unimaginably painful oxygen tube forced down his throat, to try to heal the lungs..

NIKI
Aaarrggghhh...

The chequered flag. JAMES crosses the line in first position.

CAPTION: "HOLLAND, HUNT WINS."

The DOCTORS tell NIKI to stop with the oxygen tube. He's had more than enough pain. But NIKI waves them aside...

NIKI (cont'd)
Again!!

The DOCTOR nods. The oxygen tube is turned on again.

NIKI flinches in pain. Eyes streaming.

He watches as ON TV: JAMES is on the victory podium spraying champagne.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

NIKI continues his rehab, lying on the massage table, watching F1 racing on television as..

CAPTION: "CANADA, HUNT WINS"

NIKI is being massaged by WILLI DUNGL over the damaged areas, he stifles his screams of pain..

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

NIKI's voice, roaring in pain as his bandages are being changed. He watches on TV as:

The chequered flag waves. HUNT has won another Grand Prix.

CAPTION: "WATKINS GLEN, USA - HUNT WINS"

For the first time, JAMES has taken the lead in points.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKI stares at the TV: knowing it's now or never.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

NIKI screams in pain. MARLENE and the DOCTORS are deeply distressed, cannot bring themselves to watch, as...

We WIDEN to reveal what NIKI is doing. What has caused these unbearable screams of agony. And now we see...

With great difficulty NIKI has put his racing helmet on for the first time. Pressing into his open burn wounds...

He is almost unconscious with pain. His legs are weak. But he has done it. And he fights to find the words...

NIKI
I'm ready.

CUT TO:

EXT. MONZA - DAY

The Italian Grand Prix. JAMES and the MCLAREN TEAM arrive in the pits to see a vast commotion going on elsewhere...

JAMES
What's going on?

CALDWELL
Jesus...it's Niki. He's back.

JAMES
What?

CALDWELL
Insisting on driving apparently.

JAMES
What? I thought he was half dead.

CALDWELL
So did Ferrari. They replaced him already..

JAMES stares. Shaken. He goes out.

EXT. FERRARI PITS - DAY

JAMES pushes through the pit lanes, until he reaches the crowded FERRARI pits. He sees a racer in the background. The name LAUDA on his overalls...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES
(calling out)
Niki?

NIKI turns round. Sees JAMES across the crowds. JAMES sets eyes on him for the first time.

JAMES is visibly shocked by his appearance. His bandages are blood stained. He has no hair. Looks grotesque..

JAMES walks towards him.

JAMES (cont'd)
I'm so sorry. I feel terrible...

NIKI
Why? Shit happens.

JAMES
But that driver's meeting. Before the race. I swayed the room.

NIKI
Yes. You did.

JAMES
The race could have been prevented. I was responsible for you getting hurt.

NIKI
Maybe. But let me tell you, you're equally responsible for me getting better.

NIKI stares at JAMES, with ice-cold determination, then turns and goes. And in that moment...

JAMES is profoundly unsettled. Destabilised...

CAPTION: "MONZA, ITALY: LAUDA 4th. HUNT'S CAR SPINS OUT"

EXT. MONZA - DAY

The Italian crowds are ecstatic. Delirious. NIKI is a national hero. An honorary Italian.

NIKI accepts the cheers of the crowd.

TV commentary in different languages elaborates on how coming 4th just 5 weeks after that terrible accident is just an extraordinary, superhuman achievement...

CAPTION: "LAUDA 68 points. HUNT 65 points."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

One race to go.

CUT TO:

EXT. FUJI SPEEDWAY - JAPAN - DAY

Mount Fuji towers imperiously, dramatically above the Japanese race track, dominating the skyline on a clear day..

CAPTION: "FUJI SPEEDWAY. THE JAPANESE GRAND PRIX"

TV commentary (in different languages) sets the scene..

COMMENTATOR (V/O)

And so the season builds to a climax at the Japanese Grand Prix, and what a season! And what a climax!

EXT. FUJI SPEEDWAY - JAPAN - DAY

Television cameras and press photographers assemble at the race track for the biggest sporting event of the year...

COMMENTATOR (V/O)

Twenty-six drivers have turned up to compete, but all eyes will be on just two men. World Champion Niki Lauda and his challenger, James Hunt who are neck and neck, just three points separating the two men...

EXT. RACE TRACK - DAY

The testing. A Saturday morning. A bright, clear day. CARS race around this famously quick circuit, reaching top speeds of 180 mph...

COMMENTATOR (V/O)

In testing both experienced problems allowing Andretti to sneak in and take pole, with Hunt and Lauda in second and third place...adding to the drama. Both men will start the race side by side...

INT. HOTEL - JAPAN - PRESS CONFERENCE - DAY

A large room, packed to the rafters with members of the International Press..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES and NIKI sit at a long table, like prize-fighters, separated by members of the FIA and their racing teams...

JOURNALIST

How are you feeling, James?

JAMES

I feel great. The car is working well. Looking forward to tomorrow.

JOURNALIST

Do you think you can cope with the pressure?

JAMES

I've never really understood what that means. I love racing. I love competing. I love my job. I love my life. Maybe you should ask Niki. He's the World Champion. He's got everything to lose...

JOURNALIST

So, Mr Lauda? Are you feeling pressure?

NIKI

Do I look like I'm feeling pressure?

Laughter in the room...

NIKI (cont'd)

I am World Champion and on the verge of becoming World Champion again. Hunt has got himself into a fortunate position....with me being away...he scored some lucky points...and now has the opportunity to win. But I WILL be there tomorrow.

(laughter)

And I only need two points to win. He needs more.

JOURNALIST

Mr. Hunt?

JAMES

If Niki is being triki and getting a kiki out of being disrespectful, then fine. I'm flattered. The fact is momentum is with me. Confidence is with me. I fully expect the next press conference we all have to be with me as World Champion...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Brave words, and an almost convincing smile. But JAMES is clearly rattled. Distracted. Frightened.

And NIKI every JOURNALIST in the room knows it.

OVER THIS: the sound of a ringing phone...

INT. JAMES'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

JAMES sits alone in his hotel suite. The phone is picked up at the other end by a familiar voice...

JAMES

He's messing with my head, Bubbles.

INT. BUBBLES HORSELY'S HOUSE - DAY

BUBBLES is happy to hear from his former team-mate and protege...

BUBBLES

Yes, I saw on TV. What did you expect? That Niki would give you the championship lying down? Of course not. He's a fighter. And the toughest cookie I ever met. He's going to throw everything at you. And play every mind-trick in the book. And if I'd had an accident like his, and was in the position he's in, I'd be doing exactly the same. You've just got to go out there and beat him. You know how to. What are you? Five points behind?

JAMES

Three.

BUBBLES

So just finish ahead of him. And if I may offer one final piece of advice..

JAMES

Go on..

BUBBLES

Stop thinking of it as a curse to have been given a mortal enemy in life. It's a blessing. That man has transformed you. You were headed nowhere fast. We all were. A bunch of directionless amateurs, after nothing more than a good time. And now look at you.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BUBBLES (cont'd)

My advice would be for you to hold on tight to him. And not let go. He may have driven you half mad, but he's a gift from God.

JAMES

C'mon..

BUBBLES

It's true. How does the old Samurai saying go? "A wise man gets more from his enemies than a fool from his friends."

A knock at JAMES's hotel room door..

JAMES

I've got to go. Thanks, Bubbles.

JAMES hangs up, and goes to the door. He snaps it open to reveal..

Two gorgeous-looking BOAC Stewardesses standing outside. Smart blue blazers, short skirts, white gloves, blue caps..

STEWARDESS

Hi. We've come for the party?

JAMES

What party?

STEWARDESS

The party we were told was going on in room 2012.

Sure enough: on JAMES's door, the number 2012.

JAMES

This is a joke, right? Who sent you here?

STEWARDESS

A man. On the phone. He didn't give his name.

JAMES

This man. Did he speak with an accent?

STEWARDESS

Yes. German-type accent.

JAMES can't believe it. NIKI.

JAMES

I'm afraid it was a joke.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

STEWARDESS

Awww. Pity.

JAMES

Good night, ladies.

STEWARDESS

Not a quick drink? Nightcap?

JAMES

Any other night. But not tonight.

JAMES watches them go, then goes back into his hotel room. Then, after a moment...

JAMES snaps open the door. The STEWARDESSES are about to disappear into the elevator...

JAMES (cont'd)

Wait..! All right...maybe just one!

The STEWARDESSES turn, all smiles.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. TOKYO SKYLINE - DAWN

The following morning, day barely breaks. The skies are ominously dark over Tokyo. Thick, black clouds.

It's raining heavily...

INT. NIKI'S BEDROOM - HOTEL - DAY

NIKI wakes up and looks out of the window. Sees the heavy rain which is falling outside...

His expression changes.

INT. JAMES'S BEDROOM - HOTEL - DAY

JAMES wakes up. Flinches with pain at what appears to be a hangover. JAMES looks around, bleary-eyed.

He's in a room that looks like a bomb has hit it.

Two WOMEN are still fast asleep in the bed beside him. STEWARDESS uniforms discarded on the floor.

Memories are now flooding back. Then he remembers where he is. What DAY it is. Only the most important day of his life.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Christ. What's the matter with him? What has he done? JAMES leaps out of bed.

INT. NIKI'S ROOM - HOTEL - DAY

NIKI is being massaged by WILLI DUNGL in his hotel room in preparation for the race.

NIKI continues to stare out of the window. They speak in German. We see sub-titles..

NIKI
Kann den Berg nicht sehen.
(*can't see the mountain*)

DUNGL
Mmmm?

NIKI
It's a saying among the locals. If the mountain is visible in the morning, this is good luck.

NIKI'S POV: the view outside. Nothing but mist, dark skies and rain.

EXT. FUJI SPEEDWAY - DAY

DRIVERS and the TEAMS arrive at the race track. Among them we pick out the McLaren guys..

JAMES and TEDDY MAYER and ALASTAIR CALDWELL. Cheering fans. Photographers taking snaps...

EXT. FUJI SPEEDWAY - DAY

Inside the race track:

Puddles everywhere. The rain continues to fall. The circuit is covered in water...

SPECTATORS are huddled under umbrellas. TV CREWS struggle to keep expensive equipment dry...

An American VOICE comes over the tannoy...

TANNOY
All drivers to the control tower,
please. Immediately.

EXT/INT. CONTROL TOWER - DAY

JAMES walks into the control tower with TEDDY MAYER and ALASTAIR CALDWELL. JAMES stops when he sees:

A driver's meeting has been called. All the same participants as at the NURBURGRING driver's meeting are in a small room up ahead, talking animatedly...

JAMES
They're talking about cancelling the race.

JAMES's POV: he can see NIKI clearly remonstrating with the OFFICIALS about the conditions...

JAMES turns to TEDDY and ALASTAIR, backing off...

JAMES (cont'd)
I don't want any part of this. I'm not going to be responsible for turning the room...and making the race happen again.

MAYER looks at the driver's meeting, then at JAMES..

MAYER
Trust me there is no way this race is not going ahead. Whatever your position. There's too much at stake. The organisers have sold TV rights for a fortune all over the world. The media teams have been here over two weeks preparing for this finale. Everything is in place and the world is watching.

TEDDY can see that a vote is taking place in the room. Many of the drivers have their hands in the air, voting...

MAYER (cont'd)
The drivers can vote all they like. With this much money is at stake, the race goes ahead. Screw personal safety. And the tragedy is if someone dies...

JAMES
..so much the better, right?

A round of applause in the room, as the DRIVERS vote to cancel the race. The FIA OFFICIAL and the SAFETY COMMITTEE walk out to discuss it with their superiors..

JAMES walks off in disgust.

ARCHIVE TELEVISION FOOTAGE

NEWSCASTERS from all over the world, in several different languages, announce that a decision has been made..

The JAPANESE Grand Prix is definitely going ahead. The drivers have been called to the starting grid..

INT. PITS - MCLAREN - DAY

JAMES is violently sick. Has never been this nervous.

INT. PITS - VARIOUS - DAY

In the pits alongside JAMES...

A series of shots of the other DRIVERS...being sent out like lambs to the slaughter...

Visibly terrified, mouthing prayers, smoking last cigarettes, meditating, crossing themselves, hands shaking..

Finally we come to rest on NIKI, who's hands are shaking. We have never seen him like this before.

He struggles to compose himself out of sight of his Ferrari colleagues...

NIKI puts on his balaclava over his still-raw wounds, wincing with pain as he puts on his helmet..

EXT. STARTING GRID - DAY

JAMES is piggy-backed to his car by MECHANICS so his feet don't get soaked in the water pooling deep on the track.

INT. CAR - STARTING GRID - DAY

JAMES lowers himself into a car with puddles on the seat. He straps himself in.

JAMES
This is insane...

ALISTAIR CALDWELL approaches with a power-drill. Leans towards JAMES, with the screaming drill...

CALDWELL
Keep still...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES

What are you doing???

'ZZZZ", "ZZZZ", "ZZZZ", CALDWELL drill holes in JAMES's visor.

CALDWELL

To let the condensation out.

JAMES

But it will also let the water in.

CALDWELL

Not if you're leading.

CALDWELL stares at JAMES meaningfully...

CALDWELL (cont'd)

Trust me. This race is all about the start. Whoever's in front will see everything. Whoever's second...

JAMES and CALDWELL look at one another..

CALDWELL (cont'd)

Good luck.

They shake hands. JAMES's face: all business now. He starts the engine with a roar.

EXT. STARTING GRID - DAY

Over in NIKI's car, a Ferrari MECHANIC comes up to him..

MECHANIC

Hunt has hole in his visor. You want me to drill holes in yours?

NIKI

If you don't have eye-lids, you need a visor.

The MECHANIC stares in horror at his own stupidity, apologizes, then goes...

NIKI's engine starts with a loud roar. He looks over at JAMES. In that moment, JAMES turns to face NIKI..

ALL SOUND GOES SILENT...

...as JAMES and NIKI stare at one another. All around them, the world slows down. Comes to a standstill.

THEIR EYES MEET...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A connection between them. Unspoken realization of where they have both got to. What this moment means. For them both..

A final showdown. On equal terms. It's what they have been waiting for. Working towards. All this time.

NIKI raises his hand. In a gesture only JAMES sees. JAMES raises his in return. A private salute.

CHIVALRIC. FROM A BYGONE ERA.

And in that moment, enemies become brothers. Two men. In lethal conditions. Risking their lives. But with no alternative.

THE TEN SECOND FLAG IS RAISED..

The moment's truce is broken. They return to the task at hand. Being rivals. Enemies. To the death.

THE FLAG DROPS. THEY'RE OFF.

EXT. RACE - JAPANESE GRAND PRIX - DAY

HUNT's foot hits the floor. NIKI's foot hits the floor...

JAMES gets the better start. His car aquaplanes like crazy, skating over the water, totally out of control...

INT. MCLAREN PITS - DAY

CALDWELL and MAYER watch on TV MONITORS from the pits...

CALDWELL
Hold onto it, James..!

EXT. RACE - JAPANESE GRAND PRIX - DAY

Miraculously JAMES steadies the car...

The spray from his wheels creates a curtain of mist. The other cars are wrapped inside it...

But JAMES has a clear view ahead. He slams his foot down..

COMMENTATOR (V/O)
It's the perfect start for Hunt!

INT. NIKI'S CAR - SAME TIME

NIKI can see nothing. Surrounded by spray, water, noise.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Other cars are spinning all around him. It's chaos. But NIKI knows it's now or never. Everything or nothing.

He bravely accelerates into blindness...

COMMENTATOR (V/O)
But Lauda's car is right on his tail!
Barely visible in the spray..!

EXT. RACE - JAPANESE GRAND PRIX - DAY

JAMES goes to a corner, then his car twitches, aquaplanes again...badly...almost losing it completely...

COMMENTATOR (V/O)
Hunt turns too tightly! Aquaplanes badly! He almost lost his car right there...!

INT. EASTON NESTON - DAY

BUBBLES HORSELY, ALEXANDER HESKETH and a number of the characters from the Hesketh Racing days are all watching...

HESKETH
Concentrate, Superstar!

INT. JAMES'S CAR - DAY

We CLOSE on JAMES's eyes, in his helmet...

FLASH CUT TO:

A QUICKFIRE MONTAGE OF JAMES'S SHORTCOMINGS

As a driver, and as a man.

His F3 car spinning out of control...

His drunkenness...punching a fellow driver..

His Formula 1 car engine blowing up...

His failure as a husband. SUZY talking to him in New York...

INT. LAUDA'S CAR - SAME TIME

Back in the Japanese Grand Prix: NIKI capitalises on JAMES's lapse in concentration, and is gaining rapidly..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COMMENTATOR (V/O)

Lauda is gaining on Hunt! The two of them virtually neck and neck...!

NIKI makes a move to overtake JAMES...but JAMES's spray makes it impossible to see...

And NIKI can't blink his eyes...it's agony.

NIKI

Aaaarrgh! Meine Augen..!
(My eyes!)

NIKI continues driving. Giving it everything he's got, tearing through the gears, breaking as late as he can, engine screaming...

NIKI's P.O.V: the world flies past in a blur. The steering wheel shakes. The car cannot be driven any harder.

He approaches a corner...turns left. Crazy speed. And tight. Too tight. He immediately realizes his mistake...

FLASHBACK TO:

"Thump", his wheels come into contact with the kerb on the inside. "Crash", hits the embankment, then "Bang", hits the barrier, and is thrown across the track..

Fire breaks out in the engine. NIKI's eyes widen in horror, with another car bearing down upon him...

NIKI (cont'd)

No...!

The oncoming car crashes head-on into our car, "Crash", a sickening, terrifying impact.

The car explodes. Seventy litres of burning high-octane gasoline, with NIKI strapped inside, unable to undo his seatbelt. Locked in a blast furnace.

NIKI screams as the flames engulf him. 800 degrees temperature. Trapped inside his car. Burning smoke fills his helmet, scarring his lungs. He coughs desperately.

MARLENE's face: staring at NIKI. Kissing him tenderly.

Fire extinguishers blast at the car. Covering our DRIVER's helmet. Filling his lungs with chemicals, along with the smoke and fumes, blurring his vision, as he screams in agony..

Screaming voices. Panicked reactions. Then sound fades. As our DRIVER slams on the brakes - slowing the car down, down, down..

INT. HUNT'S CAR - DAY

MEANWHILE: JAMES races and races and races. Not daring to think. Not daring to look. In a trance. At the limit of what is possible...for his car. And for him as a human being.

The signs are held up as he races, and races...

Lap 23, Lap 39, Lap 51, Lap 62...

JAMES is exhausted, loses concentration, and then, horror of horrors...

He is suddenly overtaken by two CARS. One of them is DEPAILLER...James can see that. But the other...?

Unmistakably, even in the spray, JAMES can see the other drivers has a RED HELMET...

The realisation goes through JAMES like a knife.

It's NIKI.

JAMES's face: devastated. Feels sick. Screaming at his own mistake. That's it. He's lost it! After all this effort! NIKI's overtaken him!

And now JAMES has to contend with the terrible spray...

The chequered flag. JAMES roars past. Has finished in third place. But that is no consolation. As far as he's concerned..

JAMES has lost. Lost everything.

EXT. PITS - DAY

JAMES's car arrives in the pits. Devastated. Depressed. Where he is engulfed. JAMES gets out of his car, totally exhausted.

JAMES
I'm sorry...

But TEDDY MAYER is celebrating wildly. ALASTAIR CALDWELL, too. The world's media descends on JAMES...

MAYER
Sorry?? You did it!

JAMES
What??

MAYER
Did it, Champ!! You WON!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES

What about Niki?? He overtook me!!

MAYER

Niki?? You nuts? He withdrew!! Had a full blown panic attack on lap 2 and withdrew!! Old man Ferrari's gone nuts. Niki's already left. In his plane. Flown off.

(gestures)

You're Champion of the World, Kiddo!!

TEDDY MAYER takes JAMES's number '11' from the side of his car, and tears it in two, leaving number '1'.

JAMES's face: as the world's press begins to descend on him, and the biggest party of JAMES HUNT's life is about to begin..

He looks up. At that moment, magically, the sun breaks through the clouds, and the snowy peak of Mount Fuji is revealed...

FADE TO BLACK:

CAPTION: "SIX MONTHS LATER"

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

We're on the runway of an airport in Northern Italy. The tarmac shimmers in the heat.

Two stretch limousines pull up on the tarmac.

A still-drunk JAMES HUNT and several good-looking WOMEN, rowdy FRIENDS (and hangers-on) spill out of the limousines...

Quick, perfunctory passport customs checks, (oh, for the 70's again!), and they are waved through towards a row of private jets...

They cross the tarmac towards their waiting jet, passing other private jets, when JAMES stops. He's seen something. Someone familiar that has caught his eye.

JAMES sends his FRIENDS on ahead to their waiting jet, and walks over to another small, private JET...

JAMES

I heard you were spending more and more time in one of these...

A PILOT doing final checks. The figure turns. It's NIKI. His wounds have healed a little more, but it's still a painful sight...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIKI
Have you ever tried it?

JAMES
No.

NIKI
You should. It's why airlines get away with paying pilots so little money. They know once you've tasted it...that rush...you never want to stop.

NIKI indicates JAMES's friends...

NIKI (cont'd)
What brings you here?

JAMES
A party. With friends. A wedding.
(a beat)
At least I think it was a wedding. Might have been a birthday. I'm not sure. You been at Maranello?

NIKI
Sure. Pre-season testing.

JAMES
You're relentless.

NIKI
Thank you.

JAMES
I'm not sure I meant it as a compliment.

NIKI
Why? What's bad about relentlessness? It means you're a fighter, you never give up. In Italy, when I first signed with Ferrari, the fans were disappointed. Wanted a handsome Italian. They called me a rat. Because I look like one. They meant it as an insult. But I grew to like it. Rats are ugly, sure. And no one likes them. But they're intelligent. With a strong survival instinct.

JAMES
(can't help smiling)
Good for you, Niki.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NIKI

When do you start testing? Next week?

JAMES

Give me a break. I didn't just win the biggest thing of my life so I could get right back to work.

NIKI

Why? You don't think because you won once the job is done? The work has only just started! You need to prove it wasn't luck. To all the people who will always say you only won it because...

JAMES

Because what...? Because of your accident? Is that other people, Niki? Or you?

(a beat)

I won. On the all important day when it came down to it, we raced on equal terms. In two equally good cars. You bottled and I had the guts to see it through.

NIKI

It's true. You deserved that race. And believe me if I had to lose that title to anyone, I'm happy it was you. But that doesn't change the fact you have to win again.

JAMES

Why?

NIKI

Because that's what it means. To be a winner. It's a permanent condition. That never stops. Or goes away. It's with you always. Never leaves you alone. And each time you win, you have to do more and more to keep one step ahead. To make sure you're better. To leave nothing to chance.

JAMES

And that's winning? Sounds like losing to me. Some of life needs to be for pleasure, Niki. For fun. Otherwise you're not a winner, right? What's the use of having a million cups and medals if no one likes you, and you never enjoy it? How is that winning?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NIKI stares, momentarily thrown. The plane load of JAMES's friends call out...

FRIENDS
C'mon, James...!

JAMES smiles at NIKI...

JAMES
Listen, I've got to go. See you on
race day. Champ.

NIKI
You will. Champ.

JAMES goes. NIKI watches him, pulled into his plane by his laughing, beautiful FRIENDS...

Then NIKI turns, alone, and resumes his safety checks.

EXT. RUNWAY - AIRFIELD - DAY

JAMES's plane roars down the runway and takes off into the azure blue sky...

CAPTION 1:

"JAMES HUNT NEVER WON AGAIN. HE DIED PENNILESS IN 1993 OF A HEART ATTACK. AGED 45."

CAPTION 2:

"NIKI LAUDA WENT ON TO BECOME WORLD CHAMPION THE FOLLOWING YEAR. AND AGAIN IN 1983."

"HE NOW RUNS A SUCCESSFUL COMMERCIAL AIRLINE."

FADE TO BLACK

The End