

RUSH

By
Peter Morgan

December 6th, 2011

1 EXT. CLOUDY SKY - GERMANY - DAY 1

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..

2 AN EYE FLICKERS - WIDE OPEN - STARING INTENTLY 2

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

3 EXT. CLOUDY SKY - GERMANY - DAY 3

The first rays of sunshine break through. The voices of international TV commentators in different languages.

COMMENTATORS

...in places the track is still dangerously wet, but following a drivers meeting the decision has been taken. The race is going ahead...

4 INT. FERRARI - DAY 4

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 (V/O)

My grandfather always said history is cruel and reductive and no matter how long we live, or how much we achieve - we are remembered for very little. So make sure it's the right things.

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? Should he be using slicks or wets?

5 EXT. STARTING GRID - DAY 5

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

(CONTINUED)

Engines scream 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.

NIKI
*This is bullshit. We have no control
over our legacy. We cannot choose what
we are remembered for...*

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

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.

NIKI
*Otherwise I wouldn't be remembered for
my rivalry with this asshole. And the
1976 season.*

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

NIKI
What about Hunt? 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..

The Maclaren team is less than half the size of Ferrari's, but HUNT makes up for this with magnetism. 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, flirting with several hot-looking GIRLS..

NIKI
*I don't know why it became such a big
thing. We were just drivers. Busting
each other's balls. To me this is
perfectly normal. But other people saw
it differently.*
(MORE)

NIKI (cont'd)
That whatever it was between us went deeper. And changed us both somehow. Forever.

NIKI stares, then...

NIKI
Be, allora usiamo anche noi quelli da bagnato.
(Then we go on wets, too.)

The ten-second board is held up.

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

NIKI selects second gear for the wet track and revs the engine. The dashboard needle climbs through 8000, 9000, 10000 RPM.

NIKI
Maybe that explains the state of mind I was in. And why it happened. The other thing I'm remembered for.
(a beat)
On August 1st, that same year..

CAPTION: "AUGUST 1st, 1976".

The STARTER waves the flag. NIKI's foot hits the floor - his engine screams that deafening, stomach rearranging high-pitch scream, drowning out the roar of the 180,000 crowd.

NIKI's car is catapulted forward violently, 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 arch-rival. HUNT.

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. Ferrari's pit is right at one end...

6 INT. PITS - DAY

6

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.

It's chaos. A traffic jam of Formula 1 cars...

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, 'plugs in' his headset to the car..

MECHANIC

Hair visto? Ti aveto detto di usare le slicks!

(See? I told you to go on slicks!!)

NIKI

Bullshit. Where's Hunt?

MECHANIC

There!

NIKI looks up to see the name JAMES HUNT written on the black helmet roar out of the pits ahead, with new tyres on...

NIKI

C'mon...!!

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

NIKI

What's GOING ON???

"Thump", new (slick) tyres hit the tarmac, engines scream, and NIKI exit the pits in pursuit of HUNT. But the delay has cost him dear...

7 EXT. NUBURGRING - DAY

7

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

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

8 INT. NIKI'S CAR - DAY

8

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

(CONTINUED)

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..

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

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

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

(CONTINUED)

8 CONTINUED: (2)

8

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

FADE TO BLACK:

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

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

9

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

Okay...standing by!

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

NURSE

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: "EIGHTY-EIGHT RACES EARLIER"

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

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

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

Blood trickles from his nose, there is bruising to his lip and the formation (already) of a nasty black eye, but make no mistake. He rocks. Drop-dead gorgeous..

(CONTINUED)

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

JAMES notices all the NURSES staring..

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

NURSE
Are you all right?

JAMES
Absolutely fine.

The attractive NURSE is examining JAMES, opening his overalls,
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.

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?

10 CONTINUED:

10

JAMES

Nothing! Only what she begged me to do.

The NURSE notices bruising on JAMES's chest...

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.

11 INT. JAMES'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

11

'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 poor student. Ashtrays filled with half-smoked joints. Empty beer cans. A toaster. A kettle. A stereo. A cage containing two budgerigars.

A mattress on the floor.

Newspapers with headlines about the Dockers Strike, England's crumbling economy, Rolls Royce being bailed out by the government - subtle reminders of Britain in transition, leaving behind its strong, imperial past.

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...

JAMES (V/O)

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.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED:

11

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

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

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

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

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

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

12 EXT. CRYSTAL PALACE RACE TRACK - DAY

12

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
 You still haven't. This is Formula 3.

NURSE
 What's that?

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

JAMES leads the NURSE into...

13 THE PADDOCK - CRYSTAL PALACE - DAY

13

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

JAMES
Everyone, this is Nursie.

NURSIE
(correcting)
Gemma...

JAMES
Nursie, this is Doc our designer...

DOC
How do you do?

JAMES
Bubbles, our chief mechanic.

BUBBLES
How do you do?

JAMES
Le Patron - Alexander, Lord Hesketh.

HESKETH
How do you do?

NURSE
Fine, thanks. Blimey...is everyone in
Formula 3 this posh?

HESKETH
Glass of champagne, Nursie?

NURSE
It's Gemma. No, thanks.

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

NURSE
It's also ten in the morning.

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

JAMES strips off, changing into his racing overalls.

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

(CONTINUED)

The NURSE, meanwhile, drifts over to look at the car where BUBBLES is making last minute checks...

NURSE
That's the car?

BUBBLES
That's her. The Dastle Mk 9...with the Lotus twin-cam sixteen hundred engine. She's no beauty. But goes like the clappers.

An odd-looking car. A bit like a giant Go-kart, blue with yellow strips along the side and James's name in small letters. It looks small, dangerously fragile.

JAMES
Uuuurrrrrkkkkkkkggghghhhh.

The NURSE is shocked to hear a dreadful watery vomiting sound. She sees JAMES bent over behind the truck...

HESKETH
Nothing to be worried about! Does it before every race! Good sign, actually. Means he's stoked!

JAMES continues vomiting...

JAMES (V/O)
There's a lie that all drivers tell themselves. "Death is something that happens to other people." That's how you find the courage to get in the car in the first place...

JAMES emerges, wiping his mouth...

HESKETH
All right, Superstar?

JAMES
Never better, Patron.

JAMES (V/O)
Because bad things only happen to others, right?

HESKETH
Have a gargle with this.

JAMES takes a quick swig of the champagne...gargles, then swallows, puts on his balaclava...

JAMES (V/O)
Problem is deep down you know that's a lie. That it could happen to you at any moment.

HESKETH
Quick toke of this...

HESKETH passes over a joint, which JAMES inhales, taking a huge lungful from....

JAMES (V/O)
So how do you make that terror go away? Well, booze is good for that. And wacky baccy. But better than everything else is...sex.

JAMES goes to the NURSE...and kisses her full on the lips, then puts on his helmet, and athletically vaults into the car.

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

HESKETH
Ahhhh! What music! They could never have predicted it, those pioneers that invented the automobile that it would possess us like this, in our imaginations, our dreams. Nursie, men love women...but even more than that, men love CARS...

15 EXT. PADDOCK - CRYSTAL PALACE - DAY

15

JAMES notices another driver (NIKI LAUDA), his car already unloaded, (number 35) and mechanics working on it..

JAMES
Who's that?

DOC
He's new. Some German.

BUBBLES
(corrects)
Austrian.

JAMES
Is there a difference?

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

15

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

JAMES
All bloody Goosesteppers.

16 EXT. RACE TRACK - CRYSTAL PALACE - DAY

16

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. Daringly. Brilliantly. And forces NIKI to slam on his brakes to prevent a certain crash...

17 EXT. PITS - SAME TIME

17

HESKETH, BUBBLES, DOC and the NURSE watch from the sidelines...

BUBBLES
That move was suicide!

HESKETH
It was also quite brilliant!! God he's got balls!!

18 EXT. RACE TRACK - DAY

18

JAMES carries on driving. Flat out.

But on the flat, NIKI suddenly comes out of nowhere. As if his car has 50 bhp more.

And overtakes JAMES. NIKI begins to pull away. And has the Englishman beaten..

JAMES 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 shunts NIKI's car. An unforgivable act of unsportsmanlike vindictiveness.

NIKI and JAMES's cars both veer off...go into wild, lethal spins..but luckily for JAMES he ends up facing the right way...

(CONTINUED)

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

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

NIKI's eyes look up to see all the cars coming over a brow, like a herd of Wildebeest, heading towards him...

NIKI
Umgotteswillen...

NIKI rips open his seat-belt, is about to get out of his car, when one car shoots straight over the nose of his car.

NIKI ducks, then bravely leaps for cover, as....

"SMASH", one of the oncoming cars shunts into his car, (it would have killed him instantly).

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

"CRASH", another car forces NIKI into an evasive dive...

Cars scream past him on all sides as the race continues...

NIKI, battered, shaken, has had an unbelievably close escape. He rips off his helmet, furious...

And now we see NIKI LAUDA's face for the first time. Sharp-featured. Intelligent eyes. Dark hair. Protruding teeth.

Something unmistakably rat-like about him.

19 EXT. CRYSTAL PALACE RACE TRACK - LATE AFTERNOON

19

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
Hey...asshole! That was my line! I had that corner...

JAMES
You mean the one you spun out of? And finished facing the other way? I think that corner had you.

Laughter.

(CONTINUED)

NIKI
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 impeccable 'survival' instincts...

JAMES makes chicken noises...

NIKI
Fuck you! What's your name?

HESKETH
James Simon Wallis Hunt. Remember it, my little Jerry friend. Because one day he will be World Champion.

JAMES
Jawohl. Remember ze name. Very simple. "Hunt". It rhymes with....

"BEEEEEP", a car horn hoots nearby, blocking out JAMES's c-word insult...

JAMES
...a word that happens to describe you perfectly.

Laughter. NIKI gives JAMES the finger, "Screw you, asshole". The NURSE watches NIKI go..

NURSE
Who was *that*?

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

NIKI continues to walk off, middle finger raised..

To establish: the Austrian capital. OVER THIS: the sound of NIKI's voice...

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

21 INT. NIKI'S APARTMENT - DAY 21

NIKI is in front of a mirror, and dresses smartly in a jacket, and open necked shirt, evidently a little nervous...

NIKI (V/O)
So when they heard I wanted to race cars for a living, they had a few things to say...

22 INT. LAUDA GRANDFATHER HOUSE - NIGHT 22

A large, forbidding dining room. NIKI's FATHER and terrifying GRANDFATHER, are eating supper. GRANDFATHER shakes his head, clearly disapproves and barks in German...(we see subtitles)

GRANDFATHER
 Never! Racing is for playboys and dilettantes. Frivolous amateurs with nothing in their heads. The name 'Lauda' appears on the front pages, with politicians and economists, not on the back pages with...
 (gestures in contempt)
 ...footballers and skiers. If you want my money, you do as I say and follow me into my business..

NIKI stares at his GRANDFATHER..

NIKI (V/O)
It's in moments like this that you discover who you really are..

...and in a move that he knows will rupture the family for ever, NIKI gets to his feet..

NIKI
 Fine. Keep your money. Don't invest in me. But when I'm World Champion, and I have the trophy, and my name is not just on the back pages, but on the front too, you will regret it.

NIKI walks out, the old man's insults ringing in his ears...

GRANDFATHER
 You dare sit at my table and lecture me on what I will or won't regret? Get out! Impertinent wretch! Consider yourself disowned!

23 INT. RAIFEISENKASSE - BANK - DAY 23

NIKI is in a meeting with visibly concerned BANKERS and LAWYERS. They speak in German...

BANKER

Another loan? Herr Lauda, you still haven't repaid the other...

BANKER 2

Three..

BANKER

Totalling millions of Schillings. Plus your Grandfather called to inform us he will no longer be offering security.

NIKI

I know. There is no room for failure. I understand that.

NIKI (V/O)

But I was still a Lauda...

24 INT. NIKI'S CAR/ ROAD TO VIENNA AIRPORT - DAY 24

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)

...which meant I was still a businessman above everything else.

25 EXT. VIENNA AIRPORT - DAY 25

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.

26 INT. VIENNA AIRPORT - CAFE 26

NIKI sits with LOUIS STANLEY in an airport cafe.

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

(CONTINUED)

STANLEY

In return for your money you get a car, mechanics and a place on the team. Plus fifty per cent of starting fees and bonuses for podium finishes.

NIKI

Who's the number one driver?

STANLEY

Clay Regazzoni and you will defer to him at all times.

NIKI takes out his cheque book and pen. He looks up...

NIKI

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

NIKI writes the cheque. STANLEY's smile fades..

STANLEY

Because he's a proven winner at the highest level, a good guy, and someone who quite frankly, could teach you a thing or two.

NIKI ignores this, continues scrutinizing the contract...

NIKI

OK. There is one clause missing.

STANLEY

The one about mechanics' exclusivity? Sorry. We have a cardinal rule at BRM. All information is shared between ALL our drivers..

NIKI

And I made it perfectly clear that my mechanics work for me. No one else. This is something I cannot sign.

NIKI takes back the cheque. STANLEY stares...

STANLEY

All right. I'll have the lawyers amend it.

NIKI

While you're at it you can tell them to amend the clause for podium finishes. Podium is first THREE places, not just wins.

(CONTINUED)

NIKI puts the cheque in his attache case. Snaps it shut, taking it with him..

NIKI
You'll get the money on signature, as agreed. See you at winter testing.

NIKI gets to his feet, and leaves. STANLEY watches the attache case disappear.

STANLEY
If that little git drives half as well as he negotiates, we're going to be fine.

CUT TO:

27 OMITTED 27

28 INT. AWARD CEREMONY - NIGHT 28

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

PRESENTER
I'm delighted to say the winner of the British Guild of Motoring Writers award for the 'Most Promising Driver of the Year' is James Hunt...

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

JAMES turns to a (new/different) girlfriend beside him, gives her a lingering kiss on the lips, then gets to his feet, shakes hands with HESKETH, and BUBBLES and skips up to the podium...

JAMES
Thank you. My parents always wanted me to be a doctor, or stockbroker, and gave me a first class education...but to no avail. My brothers are the success stories. I get bored easily. I have a hot head, an inability to tolerate discipline. I fall out with people left and right. I'm quick to settle matters with my fists. The only creatures I've ever loved and treated well, are budgerigars. In any normal area of life, I'd be...or AM...a total liability. All I've got going for me is I'm quick in a car.

(CONTINUED)

A good-looking woman calls out..

WOMAN
That's not all!

Laughter.

JAMES
So thank you for acknowledging that.
And giving me this...
(indicating trophy)
I'm going to give it to my Dad, and
tell him to put it on the mantle-piece
and imagine it's a first class degree
in medicine.

29 INT. AWARDS CEREMONY - LATER

29

Afterwards: everyone is celebrating. Thanks to JAMES, every pretty woman in the club is around. The trophy is perched beside bottles of champagne...

HESKETH
Well done, Superstar. One more season
in F2 then I'll move you up. To the
big time.

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

HESKETH
You are! I'm not! I've got to find you
a car first. And the money. The
economics of Formula 1 are terrifying.

BUBBLES
Hurry up. You don't want him to do
what Lauda did.

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

BUBBLES (cont'd)
The Goosestepper. Remember him?

JAMES makes the chicken noises again..

BUBBLES
Said he no longer wanted to risk his
life with "a bunch of crazy amateurs
and losers..."

JAMES
Is that what he called us?

(CONTINUED)

DOC
Charming!

HESKETH
Nothing wrong with being an amateur!

BUBBLES
Said if he was going to risk his life,
he would only do so on the big
roulette table. Formula 1. So he got
himself a drive with BRM.

JAMES
What? How? He never won a thing! Not a
single bloody race.

HESKETH
Amateurs are what made this country
great.

BUBBLES
Took out a loan, apparently. Paid for
it himself.

HESKETH
"In war, as in lovemaking, amateurs
are invariably better than
professionals." Napoleon Bonaparte.

BUBBLES
A hundred and fifty grand!

JAMES
A hundred and fifty grand?

JAMES stares. Already sick with envy.

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

CUT TO:

30 INT/EXT. RECEPTION PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - FRANCE - DAY

30

The PAUL RICARD circuit near Marseilles in the South of
France. Where all winter training and testing is done.

NIKI arrives. An attractive woman (AGNES) greets him...

NIKI
Niki Lauda. Here for pre-season
testing. BRM?

(CONTINUED)

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

NIKI watches as she telephones the BRM workshops...

AGNES
Hi. There's someone here for you?

NIKI
(prompting)
Lauda.

AGNES
(misunderstanding, speaking
louder)
SOMEONE HERE TO SEE YOU.

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

AGNES
They'll be right here.

NIKI
Thank you.

A silence. The RECEPTIONIST continues with her work. NIKI
watches her, unsure what to say, (small-talk not his forte)...

NIKI
Worked here long?

AGNES
Excuse me?

NIKI
Just wondered if you've worked here
long?

AGNES
Almost eight years.

NIKI
That long? And they didn't promote you
yet?

AGNES
Yes, several times. I am the AGNES.
Agnes Bonnet. If you're looking for
the receptionist, she's on her lunch.

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

Two other F1 DRIVERS walk in..

(CONTINUED)

Glamorous, long-haired, tanned, fashionable - like rock stars, they talk effortlessly and flirt confidently with AGNES.

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

They make her laugh. And smile.

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

As he goes, (unseen by NIKI), AGNES watches him. Ignoring the other DRIVERS. Intrigued.

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

31 EXT. BRM WORKSHOPS - DAY

31

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

STANLEY

Niki, let me introduce you to our number 1 driver, Clay Regazzoni..and our number 2, Jean Pierre Beltoise..

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

STANLEY

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

REGAZZONI, BELTOISE and STANLEY exchange looks as NIKI shakes hands, ad-libbed greetings with his MECHANICS.

MECHANIC

You want to see the car?

32 INT/EXT. BRM WORKSHOPS - DAY

32

NIKI is led into the workshop to see 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?

(CONTINUED)

MECHANIC
Identical in every detail.

NIKI scrutinizes the car...

NIKI
She looks heavy. How much does she weigh?

MECHANIC
540 kilos.

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

MECHANIC
It's a 3 litre, V12 engine, that thing weighs 190k alone.

NIKI
What horsepower are you getting out of it?

MECHANIC
450.

NIKI
Not enough. Needs to be 500 and the engine needs to be 20k lighter.

MECHANIC
We already tried...

NIKI
Did you use magnesium parts?

The MECHANICS look at one another skeptically...

33 INT. BRM WORKSHOPS - NIGHT

33

Shooting from above:

The entire car has been stripped to a thousand pieces. Now spread all over the workshop floor.

NIKI's team of mechanics reluctantly work through the night making the adjustments which NIKI is suggesting...

NIKI
Any solid plate, strip it out...

More disbelieving, skeptical looks. The car is in pieces on the floor. NIKI brews coffee to keep people alert. Focused.

(CONTINUED)

NIKI

And when we've done that, we need to look at the aerodynamics. Front and rear wing..

More mutinous looks. "Who is this asshole?"

34 EXT. BRM WORKSHOPS - FIRST LIGHT

34

Daylight breaks over the race-track. The doors to the workshop open, and the MECHANICS and NIKI emerge - their work done.

NIKI goes to shake hands with the MECHANICS...

NIKI

OK. Thank you. Good night..

But they're exhausted. Refuse to shake hands with this nut.

35 EXT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - DAY

35

LATER: one of the BRM cars screams round the race-track...

NIKI watches on the sidelines as CLAY REGAZZONI is time-testing his car. He walks over to where LOUIS STANLEY and several MECHANICS are doing the timings...

NIKI

What was his time?

STANLEY

Two minutes six seconds.

NIKI

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

STANLEY

Six seconds faster? Impossible.

NIKI looks up to see AGNES, the attractive TRACK MANAGER again on the other side of the track.

NIKI waves hi. AGNES waves back. Smiles. NIKI raises his eyebrow. Surprised.

36 EXT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - DAY

36

REGAZZONI gets into NIKI's car.

37 EXT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - DAY 37

REGAZZONI races round the track at full speed.

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

His expression changes.

38 INT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - DAY 38

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

A guaranteed place in the team, and a paid contract on equal terms with Regazzoni for two years.

STANLEY

Are you crazy? Clay's a senior figure in Formula One...you're a rookie. The only reason we took you ON was because you were paying us.

NIKI

Well, as of now, if you want me to stay, we rip up the contract. I don't pay you a cent.

STANLEY

It's outrageous.

NIKI

Was he quicker in my car? He was, wasn't he?

STANLEY stares...

NIKI

Did he go under two minutes?

(CONTINUED)

STANLEY
(quiet)
One fifty-six.

NIKI
So have a think, work out your
priorities, and get back to me.

NIKI turns, and goes. STANLEY stares...

STANLEY
Not even my WIFE speaks to me like
that.

39 EXT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - DAY 39

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

He removes his helmet, then stops.

In the distance he sees NIKI talking to AGNES the attractive
TRACK MANAGER. They are clearly hitting it off..

40 INT. PAUL RICARD CIRCUIT - WORKSHOPS - LOCKER-ROOM - DAY 40

NIKI is in the showers, then getting changed for his date with
AGNES. He is about to go, when he stops, and sees...

CLAY REGAZZONI getting undressed, looking at NIKI. CLAY speaks
English with an Italian accent..

REGAZZONI
I know what you're going to say. That
it's none of my business...

NIKI
What?

REGAZZONI
If it's the Track Manager you're
taking on your date tonight?

NIKI immediately becomes defensive...

NIKI
It's none of your business.

REGAZZONI
Okay, but if you want my advice...I'd
let this one go. I'm not questioning
your taste. She's a great girl.
(MORE)

REGAZZONI (cont'd)

But Agnes's last boyfriend was a British Formula 2 driver, who has a reputation for two things. For being a suicidal jerk on the track, 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. I don't know about you, but that's not an act I'd like to follow.

(shrugs)

But if that doesn't bother you...

NIKI

What's his name? The driver?

REGAZZONI

Hunt. James Hunt.

NIKI stares. Can hardly believe it.

REGAZZONI

See? You share information, I share information.

CLAY slaps NIKI on his back, and goes into the showers..

REGAZZONI

That's what team-mates are for.

NIKI

(quiet/defeated)

Thanks.

41 EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

41

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:

42 INT. NIKI'S CAR/ MARSEILLES STREET - SAME TIME

42

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

FADE TO BLACK:

43 EXT. EASTON NESTON - HESKETH RACING HQ - DAY 43

Easton Neston. Set in 3,300 acres, one of England's great country houses. Home to the Fermor-Hesketh family since 1700.

JAMES and a new GIRLFRIEND drive up the gravel drive in his anything but grandiose Mini. It splutters to a stop, just in time.

They are greeted by uniformed STAFF who take his tatty bags from his filthy car.

44 INT. HESKETH RACING WORKSHOPS - EASTON NESTON - DAY 44

The Hesketh Racing workshops, situated in the converted stables on the estate. HESKETH leads a blindfolded JAMES in...

HESKETH
Keep them closed...! Wait for it, wait for it...

HESKETH removes JAMES's blindfold...

HESKETH
There! What do you say?

JAMES opens his eyes to see a gorgeous F1 racing car, plain white, no stickers...

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

DOC POSTLETHWAITE takes a modest bow. JAMES shakes hands with everyone, including his brother, (and manager), PETER..

JAMES
She is a beauty. But...haven't you made a mistake?

HESKETH
What?

JAMES
That's not a Formula 2 car. She's F1.

HESKETH
She is, Superstar. Why? Because I got together with the beancounters, and 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 tongue..

(CONTINUED)

HESKETH

So we thought if we were going to be messing about losing money we might as well be doing it with the big boys.

JAMES

Are you serious?

HESKETH

Never been more serious in my life!

JAMES embraces HESKETH in excitement, kisses him...

HESKETH

Actually, I got the idea after what you said about the Austrian chap who bought his way in rather than waste his time in the lower divisions. I thought, "Bloody hell, he's right!"

JAMES slips into the cockpit...

JAMES

Well done the Goosestepper!!

HESKETH

(indicates car)

No sponsorship, Superstar! I hope you approve.

JAMES

I do, Patron.

HESKETH

No vulgar logos for cigarettes, or condoms. Just plain white. With the Union Jack. And racing overalls which read...

HESKETH indicates JAMES's hanging racing overalls...

HESKETH

"Sex. Breakfast of Champions." Unless it's me, of course, in which case it's two kippers, porridge, boiled eggs, and half a dozen slices of toast...

Laughter.

JAMES

So when do we start?

HESKETH

Soon as you're ready.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
I'm ready now.

HESKETH
That's my boy!

HESKETH pops champagne...

HESKETH
They won't know what's hit them!

45 EXT. SPANISH GP - RACE TRACK -27 APRIL 1975- DAY

45

To establish: a Formula 1 race track on Grand Prix week-end..

A helicopter comes in to land.

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

A famous ex-champion TV REPORTER is there (Stirling Moss) providing skeptical commentary about Hesketh's debut...

STIRLING MOSS
...hard to tell whether Lord Hesketh
and his team of upper class
enthusiasts is bringing glamour to the
racing community, or just comedy...

They walk around in their own branded clothing. Alexander's jacket reads, "Le Patron". He speaks to MOSS.

Rolled eyes among other racing teams who express surprise, curiosity (and frequently disapproval) at these new arrivals..

STIRLING MOSS
It's certainly the first time I can
remember seeing a butler serving
caviar and oysters in the pits...

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

STIRLING MOSS
(holding ear-piece)
...reports are reaching me of a
serious accident that has just taken
place in qualifying....

All smiles fade. The party atmosphere changes in a flash. Panic breaks out.

The sound of sirens. Ambulances rushing to the scene of the accident. All the JOURNALISTS and TV CREWS rush off, too.

(CONTINUED)

45 CONTINUED:

45

HESKETH, BUBBLES and JAMES look at one another, put down their champagne glasses, and follow...

46 EXT. RACE TRACK - SPAIN - DAY

46

Mangled wreckage. A car has crashed into (badly installed) Armco guard rails, splitting the railing in two...

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

A goldfish-bowl of blood.

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

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

STIRLING MOSS

...it seems the driver...just twenty-six years old...was killed on impact...and the death toll in Formula 1 shows no sign of slowing down...

47 INT. HESKETH PITS - SPANISH GRAND PRIX - DAY

47

JAMES, dressed in his overalls, is violently retching. Sick with nerves. A TV plays in the pits...

COMMENTATOR

*...in the last five years alone
Formula 1 has lost Piers Courage, Jo Siffert, Peter Revson, Jochen Rindt, Francois Cevert, Roger Williamson...*

ON TV: quickfire clips of the terrible, violent deaths. BUBBLES hastily switches off the TV as JAMES walks past...

48 EXT. PADDOCK - DAY

48

JAMES walks out of the paddock, towards his car. Other DRIVERS gathered in concerned groups, talking...

DRIVER (O.S.)

It's terrible.

JAMES

They should cancel the race.

Then, a distinctive Austrian accent..

(CONTINUED)

NIKI
Why? No one came to see him anyway.
He made a mistake. Went into the
corner too fast.

JAMES
Is that right? So says the nobody who
had to pay for his own drive. How's
that working out, by the way?

NIKI
Fine. How's it at the back?

JAMES
Not planning on being there for long.

NIKI
Good. Look forward to you showing me
the way today.

JAMES
'Be happy to. I'll have you inside lap
one.

NIKI
Yeah right.

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

JAMES
Asshole.

NIKI walks to his car, putting on his helmet.

NIKI
Asshole.

49	OMITTED	49
50	OMITTED	50
51	OMITTED	51
52	OMITTED	52
53	OMITTED	53
54	OMITTED	54
55	OMITTED	55
56	OMITTED	56
57	OMITTED	57

48 CONTINUED: (2) 48

58 OMITTED 58

59 EXT. SPANISH GRAND PRIX PADDOCK/ PODIUM - DAY 59

NIKI is on the podium, spraying champagne. He is wearing the victor's garland...

Meanwhile: JAMES's car is embarrassingly being brought back by a tow-truck. NIKI watches from the podium..

His eyes meet JAMES's..

60 INT. BAR - HOTEL - NIGHT 60

JAMES and BUBBLES and PETER HUNT (JAMES's blazer-wearing manager and elder brother), sit together at a table in the corner. It's late. A frank post-mortem. Drinking and talking..

JAMES

Niki humiliated me today. He lapped me three times.

BUBBLES

He lapped Carlos Pace six times.

JAMES

That's supposed to console me? What do I need to do?

PETER

Grow up.

JAMES

Shut up, Moneyman. 'Didn't ask you..

BUBBLES

Your brother's right. You've got to change your attitude. We all do. And match it with a whole different mental approach. Professionalism. Maturity. Like Niki.

PETER

Bet he doesn't go out every night, drink and screw himself stupid.

JAMES

So speaks the jealous married man..

PETER

No. So speaks the manager who's wasting his time, making ten per cent of absolutely nothing.

(CONTINUED)

BUBBLES
You've just got to take it more seriously. Yourself more seriously.

PETER
Something he's never done.

JAMES
Don't patronize me, Pete...

BUBBLES
We need you to spend less time in bars and nightclubs...

PETER
Make that NO time...

BUBBLES
And more time with the mechanics, setting up the car. That's what Lauda does. 24 hours a day.

JAMES rolls his eyes...

BUBBLES
God knows there's nothing wrong with your talent. Or courage. It's purely a character issue right now.

JAMES
And the good news is I've got Sigmund Freud Horsely, failed driver par excellence, and a washed-up accountant to lecture me on it.

PETER
(closes eyes)
Jesus, James...

BUBBLES walks off. PETER HUNT walks off. JAMES calls out..

JAMES
Bubbles? I'm sorry..! I didn't mean that! Come back..!

61	OMITTED	61
62	OMITTED	62
63	OMITTED	63
64	OMITTED	64
65	OMITTED	65

(CONTINUED)

- 60 CONTINUED: (2) 60
- 66 OMITTED 66
- 67 EXT. EASTON NESTON - DAY 67
- 68 INT. HESKETH RACING WORKSHOPS - EASTON NESTON - DAY 68

The grand Hesketh estate in the Northamptonshire countryside.

JAMES is in the workshops, his hands and arms filthy, he's been working on the car - but now his eyes are closed. Memorizing tracks. Around him people are working on the car..

JAMES

....along the Beau Rivage, long left into Massenet, into the short right of Casino. Sharp right into Mirabeau, then sharp left into Loews, mind the guard rails...

VOICE

Is Alexander around..?

JAMES 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 the day.

JAMES

He was. Then went to the house to take a call. He'll be back shortly.

SUZY

Only he wanted to show off his pride and joy...

SUZY indicates the car...

SUZY

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

JAMES

Why?

SUZY

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

JAMES

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

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAMES (cont'd)
(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 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. Friend of Alex's.

JAMES
I know exactly.

In the background: one of the MECHANICS shows DOC a picture of SUZY from a tabloid newspaper. She's clearly the most famous model in Britain, and a star in her own right...

JAMES
What was the description?

SUZY
Mostly positive in terms of appearance. Negative only in terms of character. I've been told to avoid you.

JAMES
By whom?

SUZY
Alex. He says you're a bad boy.

JAMES

Was. Not any more. New me very professional. Early to bed. Early to rise. All very dull.

SUZY

Really?

JAMES

Round-the-clock work, practise and focus. Tedious, but apparently the only way to win against ze Goosestepper..

SUZY

Is that what you were doing when you came in?

JAMES

Visualization 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'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

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

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..?

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?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
Sounds bloody awful.

SUZY laughs again...

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

JAMES looks SUZY up and down...

JAMES
You don't fancy getting married, do you?

69 EXT. BROMPTON ORATORY CHURCH - LONDON - DAY 69

The sound of ringing bells. London's grandest Catholic church in the heart of Knightsbridge..

70 OMITTED 70

71 EXT. BROMPTON ORATORY CHURCH - DAY 71

JAMES and SUZY, top hat and tails, flowing white wedding dress, looking ravishing, emerge from the church.

JAMES and SUZY fall into a passionate, sexy embrace for the paparazzi cameras. Loud cheers go up, led by HESKETH and BUBBLES.

They make 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. Clearly a bigger star even than JAMES. JAMES turns to BUBBLES, indicates HESKETH...

JAMES
What's up?

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

BUBBLES stares, then reluctantly...

BUBBLES

It seems your revenge against the Goosestepper might have to wait a little longer than you'd hoped.

(a beat)

He's just been signed by Ferrari.

JAMES

WHAT??? But that's the best team in the world. They could have ANYONE. Did he pay his way in there, too?

BUBBLES

Apparently they took back Regazzoni and he insisted they give Lauda a trial. Thinks he's a genius. Setting up the cars...

JAMES stares...then is pulled away to pose in photographs with SUZY and her FAMILY.

72 EXT. FIORANO - NORTHERN ITALY - DAY

72

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

72A INT. FERRARI CONTROL ROOM

72A

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

72B EXT. FIORANO - TRACK SIDE

72B

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's roar round the track...

LUCA DI MONTEZEMOLO, the young, dynamic, aristocratic manager of the Scuderia, by contrast, watches eagle-eyed..

72C EXT. FIORANO - TRACKSIDE - LATER

72C

The two cars stop, and NIKI and CLAY REGAZZONI gets out. NIKI talks (in a mix of Italian and English) to his MECHANIC, giving them typically blunt feedback...

NIKI

It's terrible! Drives like a pig!

(CONTINUED)

MECHANIC
Sssshhh! You can't say that!

NIKI
Why not?

MECHANIC
It's a Ferrari!

NIKI
I've driven better milk floats. It understeers like crazy and the weight distribution is a disaster...

The MECHANIC gulps, then walks over to where the terrifying COMMENDATORE and LUCA DI MONTEZEMOLO are sitting, and passes on the information...

MECHANIC
He says the car is magnificent, a masterpiece, but he has suggestions for one or two minor refinements...

73 INT. FERRARI PRESS CONFERENCE - DAY

73

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

ENZO FERRARI and LUCA DI MONTEZEMOLO addresses the conference (in Italian) which is translated by a translator...

ENZO
We are happy to welcome back to the Ferrari family our good friend, Clay Regazzoni...and also to introduce, from Austria Niki Lauda..

A burst of flash photography. NIKI and REGAZZONI sit side by side.

74 EXT. ITALIAN COUNTRY ROADS - DAY

74

A car drives fast on country roads in Northern Italy...

75 INT. CAR - SAME TIME

75

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

REGAZZONI
"Ferrari Family". "Our good friend, Clay Regazzoni".
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

REGAZZONI (cont'd)
You're friend and family to the
Commendatore as long as you win. The
minute you don't..
(mimes execution)

NIKI
I understand. It's business. I would
be the same.

REGAZZONI
But it isn't just business, is it?
What we do? It's passion. Love. Which
is why we're prepared to risk our
lives for it.

NIKI
Not me. If I thought I had more talent
and could earn better money doing
something else, I would.

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

NIKI
Not yet. But I will.
(smiles)
If you can, I can.

REGAZZONI shakes his head, can't help smiling...

REGAZZONI
You know, are you ever NOT an asshole?

NIKI laughs...

NIKI
Why am I an asshole? You know by now
I'm both quicker than you and better
at setting up the car. You can't deal
with that, then you're the asshole.

REGAZZONI
Screw you.

REGAZZONI pulls up outside the house...

REGAZZONI (cont'd)
I brought you along today because you
seem like a lonely kind of guy. I
thought if I introduce you to some
nice people, it'd be good for you.
Forget it. Make your own friends.

75 CONTINUED: (2)

75

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

NIKI calls after him...

NIKI
I'm sorry. C'mon, Clay...

76 EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - NORTHERN ITALY - DAY

76

NIKI stares through the window. Inside: a very appealing looking bunch - young, good-looking, cool, sexy GUESTS - all having a good time..

By contrast: NIKI catches his own reflection in the glass reflection. Pale. Intense. The outsider.

Inside: REGAZZONI is surrounded by friends, telling a story. Everyone laughs.

NIKI watches. Then turns to walk away. As he goes, the front door opens...

And a beautiful dark-haired woman (MARLENE) emerges loading several BAGS into a car. Brunette, tan. Wearing a white dress.

NIKI
Are you leaving?

MARLENE
Yes.

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

MARLENE
Sure. Nearest town is half an hour's drive. Get in.

77 OMITTED

77

78 EXT. ROAD - DAY

78

The car drives. The radio plays. Marlene sings along. NIKI can't help noticing something. He turns down the music. MARLENE's smile fades..

MARLENE
What are you doing?

(CONTINUED)

NIKI
You hear that noise when you
accelerate?

MARLENE
No.

NIKI
Your drive belt is loose.

MARLENE
My what?

NIKI
Alternator. And when you brake, your
foot goes all the way down. Means
there's air in the system.

MARLENE
Anything else?

NIKI
No. Apart from the rear brakes are
imbalanced. The front right wheel is
flat, and it feels like a crack in the
engine block...which explains why
you're drifting so much.

MARLENE
How can you tell?

NIKI
My ass.

MARLENE
What?

NIKI
God gave me an OK mind, but a really
good ass, which can feel everything in
a car.

MARLENE
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.

79 EXT. MOTORWAY - HARD SHOULDER - DAY

79

White smoke pours from the engine. 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.

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

NIKI

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?

MARLENE breaks into GERMAN...(we see sub-titles)...

MARLENE

You're from Vienna, aren't you. We can speak German. How do you know Curd?

NIKI

Who's Curd?

MARLENE

Curd Jurgens. The actor. It's his house. He is, or was until yesterday, my boyfriend. I must have been mad! There is something very attractive about an older man when they behave like one. But when they behave like a frightened child..

MARLENE gets to her feet...

MARLENE

C'mon, let me do this. Otherwise we'll never get out of here. We're in Italy, after all.

MARLENE indicates that NIKI should take a back seat, hitches up her skirt, showing long, tanned legs..

(CONTINUED)

SSSCCREEEEEEEEEECCCCCHHHHHHH!!!!

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

MARLENE
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
Ciao, Regazzi...!

But the Italian MEN walk right past her, not seeing her, as if she's invisible, and stare at NIKI...

ITALIAN MAN
(in Italian)
Excuse me...are you Niki Lauda?

NIKI
Yes.

ITALIAN MAN
(in Italian)
Oh, my God...!!! I told you it was
him...!!!
(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...

ITALIAN MAN
An honour, please!!! But on one
condition..

The ITALIAN MAN whisper in NIKI's ear. MARLENE stares, not understanding, as NIKI protests, but then 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...giggling like schoolboys..

MARLENE
Will someone please tell me what's
going on?

MARLENE turns to NIKI...

(CONTINUED)

MARLENE

Who are you, anyway? What do you DO?

ITALIAN MAN

You don't *know*? He's a Formula I driver. Who just signed for Ferrari!

MARLENE

Him? Never. Impossible!

ITALIAN MAN

Why?

MARLENE

Formula 1 drivers have long hair, are sexy, have shirts open to here..

MARLENE indicates...

MARLENE

Anyway, look at the way he's driving!!
Like an old man!!

It's true. NIKI is driving in the slow lane. Like a pensioner.

NIKI

No need to drive fast. It only increases the percentage of risk. We're not in a hurry. No one is paying me. Right now, with zero incentive or reward, why would I drive fast?

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

MARLENE

(in German)
Because I'm asking you to.

NIKI

(in German)
And do you always get what you want?

MARLENE

(in German)
Usually.

NIKI stares, trying to resist...but cannot. He does a lightning double-declutch...

"SLAM", NIKI's foot hits the floor, the engine screams, the rev counter flies to the right...

And the open-topped sports car lurches into warp-drive...

(CONTINUED)

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

MARLENE
Oh, my God...!!

The ITALIAN MEN scream in excitement, holding on for dear life as NIKI, his heart not a beat over 60, takes the car 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:

80 EXT. USA GP - WATKINS GLEN - 5TH OCTOBER 1975 - TRACK - DAY 80

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..

81 EXT. PITS - DAY 81

MARLENE watches on TV in the pits as NIKI is engaged in an epic tussle with JAMES...

Commentators note the improvement in JAMES's technique, maturity and performance. 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. Taking the chequered flag.

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

82 EXT. FERRARI PITS/USA GP TRACK SIDE - DAY 82

NIKI's car pulls in, to be mobbed by jubilant MECHANICS as he gets out of his car, removing his helmet, embraced by a delighted LUCA DI MONTEZEMOLO...

(CONTINUED)

...then falling into a passionate kiss with MARLENE...

Champion of the World, he is immediately swallowed up by REPORTERS who are demanding interviews in Italian, German, English...

83 EXT. USA GP/PADDOCK - DAY

83

An impromptu party in the paddock area. The victor's garland still round his neck, proudly holding the FIA World Champion trophy, his hair matted with champagne, NIKI passes through the crowds, accepting everyone's congratulations..

He runs into JAMES, who's in bare feet as usual. MARLENE is pulled away to talk to someone else..

JAMES
Congratulations.

NIKI
Thank you.

JAMES
Though with a car like that, the rest of us never stood a chance...

NIKI
Maybe the fact the car is so good might have something to do with me.

JAMES
You're still in a Ferrari. And I'm still in a Hesketh. On equal terms, the way it was in Formula 3, I'd beat you, and you know it.

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

JAMES
Why's that?

NIKI
Because you're not serious. You're just a party guy. Which is why everyone likes you.

JAMES
Now try saying that and tell me you're not jealous.

(CONTINUED)

NIKI

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 go home. You should go home more often, too. I heard you got married.

JAMES

I did.

NIKI

So where is she?

JAMES

In New York. Working.

NIKI

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

NIKI turns to MARLENE, "Let's go"..

84 EXT. EASTON NESTON - DAY

84

JAMES's Mini roars furiously up the long gravel driveway towards Easton Neston. Screeches to a halt.

JAMES gets out of the car. Is greeted by staff, whom he uncharacteristically ignores, storming past...

85 INT. EASTON NESTON - WORKSHOP - DAY

85

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

(CONTINUED)

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...

JAMES stops, noticing BUBBLES's expression...

JAMES
What's the matter?

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

JAMES
What are you doing?

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

JAMES
Where *is* everyone?

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

86 INT. DRAWING-ROOM - EASTON NESTON - DAY

86

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

HESKETH
Do you know what the date is today?

JAMES
November 14th.

HESKETH
Do 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)
Which elapsed at midnight last night.
And we didn't attract any.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

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

HESKETH

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

JAMES

What are you saying?

HESKETH

I'm saying it's over, Superstar. The banks have stepped in. Read me the riot act. 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...

JAMES

Christ.

87 INT. JAMES'S FLAT - LONDON - NIGHT

87

JAMES is on the phone to his brother PETER, while playing Scale-electrix cars on a track alone, barefoot...

JAMES

I need a drive, Pete. Need you to find me a drive.

(listens)

What does that mean? "My reputation precedes me?"

"Crash", the electric toy car crashes...

JAMES

(listens)

Really? Is that what they said?

(a beat)

Did they at least say a "Quick arsehole?"

(listens)

Bollocks to Lotus. Find me someone else. I'll go mad otherwise.

"Click", JAMES hangs up. SUZY walks in. Sees his mood..

(CONTINUED)

SUZY

Don't worry. Something will turn up.

JAMES opens a bottle of Scotch, pours himself a drink...

SUZY

But I doubt that will help in the meantime.

JAMES knocks back the drink...

SUZY

Why don't we go away for the week-end?
Before I leave again for New York?

JAMES carries on drinking..

SUZY

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

JAMES doesn't react...

SUZY

I can't watch this.

SUZY picks up her coat, and bag..

JAMES

What were you hoping for? A well-adjusted knight in shining armour?

SUZY

No danger of that....

JAMES

Let me give you some advice.

SUZY

I'm all ears...

JAMES

Don't go to men who are willing to kill themselves driving in circles looking for normality.

SUZY

Well, I certainly didn't get that...

JAMES

Should have gone for one of my brothers.

SUZY
There goes that self-pity again.
How striking it is -

JAMES
What's that? Tell me..

SUZY
The gulf between appearance and
reality. Look at you, all sunshine
blonde beauty and smiles...yet the
reality is...a frightened, immature,
depressed, self-pitying child...

JAMES
At least there's SOMETHING behind the
facade.

SUZY
With a nasty temper..

JAMES
Fuck off to New York, dear. There must
be a moisturizer or eye shadow
somewhere that needs your vapid mush
to flog it.

SUZY
How quickly beauty can turn ugly.

JAMES
Agreed. Repellent.

SUZY stares...and goes. JAMES carries on drinking.

88 OMITTED 88

89 OMITTED 89

90 INT. JAMES'S FLAT - FOLLOWING MORNING 90

The following morning. The phone rings. Piercing the darkness.
JAMES, clearly the worse for wear, is talking to his beloved
budgies...

JAMES
Good girl...

A surprising vulnerability, and childlike innocence about
JAMES. He strokes the birds with real tenderness..

The phone continues ringing. JAMES picks it up...

JAMES (INTO PHONE)

Hello?

JAMES listens, then hears something on the phone that makes him sit up...

JAMES (INTO PHONE)

Who? McLaren?

JAMES is waking rapidly now..

JAMES (INTO PHONE)

Just get me in a room with them, Pete.
Say anything. Today? Yes, I can do
today.

(checks watch)

I can be there in an hour.

JAMES starts scribbling down the address.

91 EXT. MCLAREN HQ - TO ESTABLISH

91

The headquarters of McLaren Racing in Colnbrook, Bucks.

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.

92 INT. MCLAREN HQ - BOARDROOM - DAY

92

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 esteemed lead driver...

CALDWELL

Fitti-fucking-paldi..

MAYER

Has ditched us for another team at the last minute..

CALDWELL

In November. Fucking outrageous.

(CONTINUED)

MAYER

And we need a replacement. Asap.
Thankfully a few hands have already
gone up. Good people...

CALDWELL

Like Jackie Ickx.

JAMES

I'm quicker than Jackie.

MAYER

But he's consistent, dependable.
Sponsor friendly. He'll dress up nice.
Say the right things.

JAMES

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

MAYER

We want to be successful.

JAMES

So do I. But I measure that in podium
finishes and beating Niki Lauda not
being a show pony for sponsors.

MAYER

I've heard about this thing with
Lauda.

CALDWELL

(rolls eyes)
Everyone has..

MAYER

You really think you can beat him?
He's World Champion.

JAMES

I beat him in Formula 3.

CALDWELL

This season alone he's had eight
podiums, five wins, you've had what?

HOGAN

One.

JAMES

Only because I've been in the wrong
car. I beat him when the playing field
was level. I'd beat him again in a
McLaren.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

92 CONTINUED: (2)

92

JAMES (cont'd)

It's the only car out there as good as the Ferrari. Which is why I'm here, begging.

JAMES stares imploringly..

JAMES

I'll do whatever you ask. Even put on a suit, talk to sponsors and say the right thing. I promise.

(a beat)

Just give me the drive...

CALDWELL, HOGAN and MAYER look at one another...

93 OMITTED 93
 94 OMITTED 94
 95 OMITTED 95
 96 OMITTED 96
 97 OMITTED 97

98 EXT. SOUTH AFRICA GRAND PRIX - KYALAMI - 6TH MARCH 1976- DAY 98

Various shots, to establish. South Africa in the apartheid era. We notice black race FANS unable to get into the track..

CAPTION: "THE 1976 FORMULA 1 SEASON"

COMMENTATOR

...welcome to the Kyalami Racetrack where the big news is..

99 EXT. SOUTH AFRICA - KYALAMI RACE TRACK - DAY 99

Crowds flood to the spectator stands. The pit lane stretches into the distance, filled with cars, drivers and mechanics...

COMMENTATOR

...that Britain's James Hunt in his first race for McLaren has qualified fastest, beating Niki Lauda's Ferrari to pole by two hundredths of a second. In the crowds to watch the race none other than movie stars Richard Burton and Liz Taylor...

We pick out RICHARD BURTON and LIZ TAYLOR waving to screaming FANS.

100 EXT. STARTING GRID - KYALAMI - DAY

100

NIKI and JAMES's cars lined up in positions 1 and 2 on the starting grid. JAMES proudly indicates to NIKI...

JAMES

New car.

NIKI

I noticed.

JAMES

Pole position.

NIKI

I noticed that, too.

JAMES

Level playing field now, my ratty little friend.

NIKI

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

NIKI calls after JAMES as he walks to his car...

NIKI

Let's see where we are in six races time!!

JAMES turns, makes a ratty face at NIKI. Protruding teeth.

101 EXT. VIP GRANDSTAND - DAY

101

RICHARD BURTON and LIZ TAYLOR are shown into the VIP area of the paddock. They take their seats.

LIZ TAYLOR

(bored already)

Will this take very long?

An OFFICIAL introduces BURTON to various people - among them SUZY HUNT...

OFFICIAL

Richard Burton...Suzy Miller, also known as Mrs. James Hunt.

BURTON

Who?

There it is. The deep, dark, sonorous Welsh baritone voice...scarred by alcohol and cigarettes...

(CONTINUED)

101 CONTINUED:

101

SUZY
James Hunt. One of the racers.

BURTON
Forgive me. Richard.
(extending hand)
Also known as Mr. Elizabeth Taylor.

He indicates LIZ who is deeply bored..

LIZ TAYLOR
What does a girl have to do to get a
drink around here?

SUZY smiles. Their eyes meet. And no eyes are more beautiful
than SUZY's. An immediate connection between them.

Their hands hold a fraction too long as they shake...

102 OMITTED 102

103 OMITTED 103

104 EXT. RACE TRACK - DAY 104

NIKI's car roars past the finishing line first. JAMES closely
behind...

CAPTION: "SOUTH AFRICA. LAUDA WINS. HUNT SECOND."

104AEXT. PODIUM - KYALAMI - DAY 104A

JAMES and NIKI are on the podium together...

JAMES
My car wasn't right today. Next time
I'll have you..

NIKI
Yeah, yeah...

105 OMITTED 105

106 OMITTED 106

107 OMITTED 107

108 EXT. SPANISH GRAND PRIX - JARAMA, 2ND MAY 1976- DAY 108

JAMES's car takes the chequered flag, finishing first!!!

108AINT/EXT. MCLAREN PITS 108A

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

CAPTION: "RACE 3. SPAIN. HUNT WINS..."

108BEXT. SPANISH GRAND PRIX PODIUM/ PITLANE 108B

Afterwards: JAMES and NIKI are on the podium together...

JAMES

What did I tell you? Car fixed. Equal terms. You'd better get used to this.

JAMES walks off, to celebrate with the McLaren team...

NIKI stares darkly - threatened - watching JAMES go..

...then goes to talk to LUCA DE MONTEZEMOLO and the FERRARI team.

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

109 EXT. SPANISH GP PADDOCK/ PARC FERME- DAY 109

A huge furore as several OFFICIALS and FERRARI TEAM MEMBERS, and TV CREWS surround JAMES's car...

Raised voices debating the width of the car, HUNT furious, people almost coming to blows...

OFFICIAL

The car is too wide..

JAMES

Five *eighths* of an inch..!

OFFICIAL

Which makes it illegal! If you want to compete, you have to change it.

JAMES

What? You can't just 'change it'. That means rebuilding the car. Who lodged the complaint? It was Ferrari, wasn't it?

The two rival PIT CREWS, (McLaren and Ferrari), scream abuse at one another in Italian and English - a highly charged and explosive atmosphere....

CAPTION: "LAUDA GETS MAXIMUM POINTS"

(CONTINUED)

109 CONTINUED:

109

NIKI watches from the inside of the FERRARI TRAILER.

110 INT. MCLAREN WORKSHOP - NIGHT

110

The McLaren MECHANICS, supervised by Alastair Caldwell, are making adjustments to the car to make it 'legal'..

MAYER

...we have to move the wing forward.
To make it legal...

CALDWELL

But that'll have a knock-on effect on
the oil coolers..

JAMES watches - already fearing the worst - as the car is stripped down, effectively being rebuilt...

111 OMITTED

111

111AEXT. WATKINS GLEN 1976 - DAY

111A

"BANG", JAMES's car shudders violently, the wheels shake as the drive shaft snaps...

CAPTION: "RACE 4. LAUDA WINS. HUNT RETIRES."

111BEXT. MONACO GRAND PRIX 1976- DAY

111B

"BOOM", a loud explosion. A thick plume of black smoke billows from the engine...

JAMES

No! No! No!

CAPTION: "RACE 5. LAUDA WINS AGAIN. HUNT RETIRES."

111CEXT. BELGIUM GP 1976 - ZOLDER - DAY

111C

"CRASH" - JAMES spins out...and a tyre bounces along the track...JAMES's car has crashed into a wall...

JAMES

I can't stand it...

The tyre continues bouncing, people diving out of it's path, before the tyre finally smashes into a hot-dog stand...

CAPTION: "RACE 6. LAUDA WINS AGAIN. HUNT RETIRES."

(CONTINUED)

111CONTINUED: 111C

112 OMITTED 112

113 EXT. BELGIUM GRAND PRIX - ZOLDER - PITLANE - DAY 113

JAMES storms back into the pits, screaming at MAYER, CALDWELL and the MECHANICS...

JAMES
 What's happened? What have you DONE??
 The car's evil! It's undriveable..!

CAPTION: "LAUDA 56 POINTS, HUNT 6"

113AINT. PADDOCK/PRESS TENT - DAY 113A

Later: the victorious NIKI, wearing the garland, is all smiles, giving 'winner' interviews, surrounded by MARLENE and a delighted LUCA DI MONTEZEMOLO.

JAMES is also giving interviews, but in a total fury. Vibrating with anger. Still complaining about the disqualification. Complaining about a conspiracy. Complaining.

NIKI finishes talking to JOURNALISTS, and walks off, through crowds, and bumps into JAMES..

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

JAMES
 Fine! Just got a little problem with a bad loser rat and his team of Italian saboteurs who've destroyed my car.

NIKI
 What are you talking about?

JAMES
 I won that race in Spain. And you know it.

NIKI
 In an illegal car.

JAMES
 The aerofoil was five eighths of an inch too long!! Something that doesn't have the slightest effect on car speed. You complained. Now we've had to totally rebuild the car and it's become a monster.

(CONTINUED)

NIKI

At least it's a LEGAL monster.

JAMES

A car that was beating you week in week out, so you have to resort to this. Cheating.

NIKI

He drives in an illegal car and he calls ME the cheat? Let me tell you: two weeks before that race in Spain, we put 20-inch rims on the rear wheels. We get an extra half second speed on each lap!! But the Old Man tells me we can't use those rims, they make the car too wide. Against the rules. So we go back to 19-inch rims making the car slower again. Rules are rules. For all of us. You're just a bad loser who can't accept that.

(tapping head, to MARLENE)

Komm, he's crazy. Sick in the head.

NIKI turns to MARLENE, speaks in German...

NIKI

Den Trottel lassen wir alleine..

(*Let's go. Leave this jerk alone.*)

No wonder she left him...

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

114 INT/EXT. ZOLDER PADDOCK/ MCLAREN TRUCK - DAY

114

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

JAMES

Is there something I should know about Suzy? Where is she? Wasn't she 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.

(CONTINUED)

114 CONTINUED:

114

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. JAMES's face falls..

JAMES

Jesus.

115 EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

115

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

116 OMITTED

116

117 EXT. MANHATTAN - DAY

117

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...

118 EXT. HOTEL - MANHATTAN - DAY

118

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 the gauntlet of humiliation...

...into the hotel..

119 OMITTED

119

120 OMITTED

120

121 INT. HOTEL SUITE - DAY

121

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.

(CONTINUED)

SUZY

Why have you come here, James?

JAMES

To get you back.

SUZY

You don't want me back...you never wanted to be married in the first place. You did it because you hoped it might change you...settle you down... help with the racing. Not because you loved me. And who knows, if it had been just the drinking, or the dope, or the infidelity, or the moods...it might even have worked...but when it's all of them?

JAMES

I know. I'm terrible.

SUZY

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

JAMES

Will he be able to give you more? He has quite the bad boy reputation himself.

SUZY

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

A flicker behind JAMES's eyes. Failure.

JAMES

Right.

SUZY

He's aware of the delicacy of the situation, and how it looks. Having raided your larder. Plundered your safe. Smash and grab, and so forth. So he's assured me he'll take care of the financial side. And will be very generous.

JAMES manages a brave smile.

JAMES

Fine. I'll give him a call.

(CONTINUED)

121 CONTINUED: (2)

121

SUZY

No. His lawyers will contact you.

JAMES notices the vast unmade bed. Where, until recently, two people had slept.

121AEXT. HOTEL - MANHATTAN - DAY

121A

JAMES emerges from the hotel - into the storm of paparazzi again. He manages a brave smile...

JAMES

It's all very amicable. My wife has found herself a new backer...I mean lover...which makes her happy..

(laughter)

Mr. Burton has found a way of feeling young again...let's hope his pockets are deep...they'll need to be...

(laughter)

And I've found a way to be single again without it costing me a penny, which has to go down as the biggest win of my career.

Laughter from the JOURNALISTS who are hungrily writing down the copy. But JAMES's hollow smile fools no one...

122 INT. JUMBO JET - FIRST CLASS - DAY

122

JAMES sits alone in the first class section. A loser on the track, and a loser in love, too. Being played out in the full glare of publicity. On the front pages. Being read by everyone on the plane.

A STEWARDESS looks over, catches his eye. Smiles.

123 INT. JUMBO JET - WC - DAY

123

JAMES and the STEWARDESS fucking. Hard.

Nothing to do with pleasure. An analgesic - a way of blocking out the pain. JAMES catches his own reflection in the mirror. Teeth clenched. Eyes burning with anger and self-loathing...

OVER THIS: we fade in the ROAR of car engines...

123AINT. FRENCH GP 1976 - PAUL RICARD - 4TH JULY 1976

123A

JAMES's teeth still clenched. Eyes still burning with anger. Driving flat out. At the limit.

(CONTINUED)

123A CONTINUED:

123A

Suzy's words still ringing in his ears.

Make that beyond the limit. At the point of no return. The car shaking. Weaving recklessly through other cars...

Where death has become a real option.

Because he doesn't care anymore. Because it's all he deserves anyway...

And in that moment, in reaching his lowest point, JAMES has unwittingly stumbled on the one thing that gives him an advantage over everyone else...

The fact that he doesn't care. The fact that death has become an option. The fact that there is no risk he is not prepared to take...

So every corner is tighter, every braking point later, every gap is an opening, no matter how tiny...

124 EXT. FRENCH GRAND PRIX 1976 - PAUL RICARD - DAY 124

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

JAMES screams with released rage....

CAPTION: "RACE 7. HUNT WINS. LAUDA'S ENGINE BLOWS UP"

125 INT. MCLAREN PITS - PAUL RICARD - DAY 125

Afterwards: TEDDY MAYER, ALASTAIR CALDWELL and JOHN HOGAN celebrate in delight...cheering...

126 OMITTED 126

126A EXT. BRITISH GRAND PRIX - 18TH JULY 1976- DAY 126A

NIKI's car is pursued by JAMES's. They disappear behind a copse of trees. Out of sight.

When they re-emerge, JAMES is ahead of NIKI, having overtaken him - to the delight of the partisan crowd.

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

CAPTION: "RACE 8. HUNT WINS. LAUDA 2nd."

JAMES screams in catharsis and triumph. Teeth clenched. Eyes wide and staring with concentration.

(CONTINUED)

126A CONTINUED:

126A

We notice SCREAMING GIRL FANS cheering him now.

127 OMITTED

127

128 EXT. FIA HEADQUARTERS - DAY

128

A blazer-wearing FIA OFFICIAL addresses a room full of sports and motoring JOURNALISTS, TV CREWS, etc...

FIA OFFICIAL

Following an 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..

129 INT. MCLAREN HQ - BRANDS HATCH - DAY

129

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

Huge celebrations. Cheering and whooping. SCREAMING GIRLS.

130 OMITTED

130

131 EXT. BRAND'S HATCH - PRESS TENT - DAY

131

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

STIRLING MOSS

...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...?

Screaming GIRLS in the background, shouting "James, we love you." JAMES stares across the room at NIKI...

JAMES

A combination of factors, not all of which I'm prepared to discuss here. Justice being done re: the disqualification in Spain helps, and having my old car back of course...

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

(CONTINUED)

131 CONTINUED:

131

JOURNALIST

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

NIKI

Not at all. For him to catch me, he'd have to win all the remaining races, and I'd have to lose them. And pigs would have to fly.

Laughter among the confident GERMANS.

NIKI

Now if you'll excuse me, I have a private family matter to attend to.

NIKI takes MARLENE's hand, and leads her away.

132 EXT. VIENNESE REGISTRY OFFICE - DAY 132

To establish: the Viennese skyline.

133 INT. REGISTRY OFFICE - DAY 133

NIKI and MARLENE get married. In stark contrast to JAMES's wedding...it's a small, intimate affair. Modest. Not showy. Away from the cameras. Just them. And a witness from the pub.

134 EXT. AIRFIELD - DAY 134

A small aeroplane takes off...

135 INT. AEROPLANE - DAY 135

NIKI and an INSTRUCTOR are in the plane. In the cockpit. With MARLENE, who watches...

NIKI is learning to fly.

MARLENE watches as NIKI soaks up the instruction, asking questions, happy. It's another side to him, completely.

136 EXT. IBIZA - NIGHT 136

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

Then NIKI's expression changes. His smile fades.

137 INT. BEDROOM - HOUSE - IBIZA - NIGHT 137

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

138 INT. HOUSE - IBIZA - NIGHT 138

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

MARLENE
Come to bed.

MARLENE notices his mood. It's different.

MARLENE
What's the matter?

NIKI
It's the enemy, you know. Happiness.

NIKI looks up at MARLENE...

NIKI
It weakens you. Puts doubt in your mind. Because all of a sudden you have something to lose..

MARLENE stares at him.

MARLENE
When you call happiness an enemy, then it's too late.
(a beat)
Then you have lost already.

MARLENE turns, and goes..

NIKI is left alone. We can tell from his expression, he is struggling with something for the first time. Fear.

139 EXT. NURBURGRING - DAY 139

The notoriously difficult and treacherous German race track.

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

139AEXT. NURBURGRING - CRASH SITE - DAY 139A

AMBULANCES arrive. The Driver is badly hurt. Screaming in pain. His leg is crushed. Bone is sticking out. A brutal compound fracture. He is taken away.

139BINT/EXT. NURBURGRING PITLANE - DAY 139B

In the pits, everyone is shaken. JAMES, REGAZZONI, and other DRIVERS nervously talk among themselves as the Ambulance races past.

NIKI's face: visibly pale. More frightened than ever.

140 EXT. NURBURGRING - DAY 140

Race-day. Huge crowds arrive at the Nurburgring. And rain. Heavy rain falling.

Television commentary informs us about the Nurburgring's terrible reputation as a 'graveyard' track.

141 EXT. NURBURGRING - DAY 141

JAMES arrives at the race track, to find ALASTAIR CALDWELL waiting for him, a concerned look on his face...

CALDWELL

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

JAMES

Who by?

CALDWELL

Niki.

JAMES's face. Instantly suspicious.

142 INT. MEETING ROOM - NURBURGRING RACE TRACK - DAY 142

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...

(CONTINUED)

NIKI

Thank you. I called this meeting because as all drivers know the Nurburgring is a race track from the Stone Ages. The most stupid, barbaric, outdated, dangerous, track in the world. You've all seen 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 cancel the race.

A ripple of astonished reactions among the drivers..

NIKI

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 (GUY EDWARDS) gets to his feet...

EDWARDS

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

NIKI

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

Another voice pierces the controversy...

VOICE

It also means you would effectively win the championship.

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

JAMES

So I can see why this suits you just fine.

NIKI

Why? There would be no points for me either...

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

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

Uproar in the room...

BRETT LUNGER

James is right! This is just tactics!

ARTURO MERZARIO

Ferrari's dirty tricks! We've seen it before!

HARALD ERTL

Maybe it's just that he's frightened?

Laughter among the DRIVERS...

NIKI

Which asshole said this?

Silence. No hand goes up. No one has the courage to own up.

NIKI

Yes, I am frightened. Always a little bit when I race. I accept every time I get in my car there is 20% chance that I could die. But not one per cent more. And today, with the rain the risk IS more. How dare you accuse me of lack of courage? Let me remind you. I have the track record here. I am the only person in history to do the Ring in under 7 minutes. So actually it's to my ADVANTAGE to race here today. Because I'm quicker than all of you.

A stunned silence. One voice pierces the room...

JAMES

Fine. Then let's race!

It's JAMES who stares at NIKI: a ripple of excitement and enthusiasm among the other drivers...

JAMES

There's a hundred thousand fans out there who would never forgive us if we didn't.

MERZARIO

And some of us need our race fees!!

(CONTINUED)

FIA OFFICIAL
All those in favour of cancelling the
race?

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

FIA OFFICIAL
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
Gentlemen, start your engines!!

A clear victory for JAMES. He has swung the room.

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.

143 EXT. STARTING GRID - DAY

143

"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.

143AAN EYE FLICKERS - WIDE OPEN - STARING INTENTLY

143A

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

144 EXT. CLOUDY SKY - GERMANY - DAY

144

This time 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 - no time to plug his headset in...

(CONTINUED)

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...

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...

JAMES

Shit...!

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

He swerves angrily into the pits..

145 INT. PITS - DAY

145

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

Shut up! Where's Niki?

CALDWELL

Behind you! He made the same mistake!

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

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

CALDWELL

Go! Go!! Go!!

JAMES's foot hits the floor. He roars out, with new tyres, leaving NIKI behind him in the pits...

146 EXT. NUBURGRING - DAY

146

Archive commentary: from the world's TV stations informs us that JAMES roars up into 3rd position..

147 INT. JAMES'S CAR - DAY

147

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.

(CONTINUED)

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
What's up?

MARSHALL
Accident. Bad one.

JAMES
Who?

MARSHALL
We don't know yet.

148 INT. NIKI'S CAR - SAME TIME

148

NIKI'S POV: a continuation of the opening scene. Burning smoke fills NIKI'S helmet, burning his lungs. He cries out in agony.

NIKI
AAAAARRRRRGHGHGGHGH!!!!

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...

We notice it is the same DRIVERS that were critical of NIKI in the driver's meeting. HARALD ERTL, BRETT LUNGER, ARTURO MERZARIO, GUY EDWARDS...

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 horribly..

The sound of panicked TV COMMENTARY in different languages. Screaming voices. Panicked reactions.

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

FADE TO BLACK:

OVER THIS: the hypnotic sound of helicopter blades...

NIKI (V/O)
August 1st, 1976, I discovered comas exist for a reason.

149 EXT. MANNHEIM UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY 149

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.

NIKI (V/O)
Some things are better not remembered.

150 INT. MANNHEIM UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY 150

"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..

151 INT. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - MANNHEIM HOSPITAL - DAY 151

Two narrow, barely open slits of light. NIKI's swollen eyelids. NIKI's POV: barely making out MARLENE standing beside the senior burns specialist DOCTOR. NIKI hears voices...

DOCTOR
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.

DOCTOR
Which is not enough to maintain life...

NIKI slips out of consciousness again. MARLENE is distraught, in tears.

152 OMITTED 152

153 OMITTED 153

154 TELEVISION NEWS - FULL-FRAME 154

TV news: giving the latest information on NIKI's condition.

155 INT. JAMES'S APARTMENT - LONDON - NIGHT 155

JAMES sits watching the news on TV in his apartment, while feeding his budgerigars, (the collection has grown)..

He feels terrible. He goes to his desk, pulls out paper and pen...

JAMES tries to find the right words, tries to write, tries to put his feelings on paper, but words in general, and letters in particular have never been his thing...

JAMES scrunches up the pieces of paper, throws it away. The budgerigars, sensing his distress, flutter and peep..

156 INT. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - DAY 156

NIKI's P.O.V: feels 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..

The sound of MARLENE crying somewhere in the room.

PRIEST

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 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...

NIKI (V/O)

I'm here! Can't you tell? I'm here!

(CONTINUED)

156 CONTINUED:

156

NIKI screams inside. Wanting to be heard. Wanting to give them a sign. He's OK. He's still there. But it's no use.

NIKI blacks out again. The pain is too great.

FADE TO BLACK:

157 INT. CORRIDOR - HOSPITAL - DAY

157

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

Niki's MOTHER and FATHER. CLAY REGAZZONI.

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

DOCTOR

Frau Lauda? Bitte kommen Sie! He's awake! And just spoke!

MARLENE scrambles to her feet...

MARLENE

What did he say?

DOCTOR

"Tell the Priest to fuck off! I'm still alive!!"

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

158 EXT. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - DAY

158

Shooting through the window we see MARLENE approach NIKI's bed. She sees NIKI..

And gasps. Trying to control her expression. Not give away to him how horrified she is.

NIKI's face: is grotesque. His head has swollen to double it's size. The skin has burned off on his head, his eyes.

MARLENE bravely composes herself. Then, without displaying the shock she feels - she goes over and kisses him.

159 OMITTED

159

160 INT. NIKI'S HOSPITAL ROOM/TELEVISION COVERAGE FULL FRAME -DAY 160

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

NIKI watches the race on television, while beginning his rehab in bed, 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: "RACE 11. HUNT FINISHES 4th"

161 INT. HOSPITAL - DAY - (A WEEK LATER)

161

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

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 DOCTORS put a vacuum pump into his lungs. It's AGONY. JAMES leads, driving the perfect race...

YOUNG GERMAN DOCTOR

We need to vacuum the lungs. Without this, they can't heal. But it will hurt.

An unimaginably painful pump is forced down his burned lungs, to try to Hoover out the impurities..

COMMENTATORS ON TV: talk about how HUNT is catching up with LAUDA on points. It spurs NIKI on, through gritted teeth.

NIKI

Aaarrggghhh...

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

CAPTION: "RACE 12. HUNT WINS."

The DOCTORS tell NIKI he's had enough vacuum treatment. He's had more than enough pain. But NIKI waves them aside...

NIKI

Again!!

The DOCTOR nods. The vacuum is turned on again.

NIKI screams in agony. Eyes bulging. MARLENE and NIKI's family cannot bear to watch...

(CONTINUED)

161 CONTINUED:

161

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

162 INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

162

NIKI continues screaming in pain, watching the Canadian GP on TV as..

CAPTION: "RACE 13 CANADIAN GRAND PRIX. HUNT WINS AGAIN"

For the first time, JAMES has taken the lead in points. NIKI stares at the TV: his expression changes.

163 OMITTED

163

164 INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

164

NIKI screams again. MARLENE, NIKI's family and the DOCTORS are deeply distressed, cannot bring themselves to watch, as...

NIKI
Aaaaarrrrrggghghhhhh!!

We WIDEN to reveal what NIKI is doing. What has caused these unbearable, bloodcurdling screams of agony..

NIKI
I know what you're all thinking...

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

NIKI
But if you love me - all of you - you
won't say a word.

He is almost unconscious with pain. His legs are weak. But he has done it...

165 EXT. ITALIAN GRAND PRIX - MONZA - 12TH SEPT 1976 -DAY

165

The Italian Grand Prix. TELEVISION COMMENTARY sets the scene.

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.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
What about him?

CALDWELL
He's here! He's racing!

JAMES
What?? They said he was half-dead.

JAMES stares. Shaken.

166 EXT. MONZA PITLANE/ FERRARI PITS - DAY

166

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

JAMES
Niki?

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

JAMES reels, visibly horrified by his appearance. His bandages are blood stained. He has no hair. Looks grotesque..

NIKI sees the horror in JAMES's face. Sees the shock. The horror. And recognizes in that moment, this is how it's going to be - this is how people will respond to him - forever.

NIKI
Wow. It's that bad, huh?

JAMES opens his mouth. Tries to say something.

NIKI
In the hospital I told them to tell me straight, no bullshit - how bad it would be. My appearance. They said with time it'd be fine. But it won't. I can tell, seeing your reaction. I am going to spend the rest of my life with a face that frightens people.

NIKI stares at JAMES, at his rival's beauty, his blonde, tanned perfection. His matinee idol, movie star looks...

NIKI
That's a tough one to get used to.

JAMES
I wrote you a letter at the time. To apologize.

(a beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAMES (cont'd)
The driver's meeting in Germany?
Before the race? I swayed the room.

NIKI
Yes. You did.

JAMES
That race should never have gone
ahead.

NIKI
No.

JAMES
So in some ways...I feel responsible
for what happened. I'm sorry.

NIKI
Trust me, watching you win those
points and all those races while I was
in hospital fighting for my life...you
were equally responsible for getting
me better.

Ouch. That could have been meant generously. But in this case
it wasn't. It was a cold slap in the face.

NIKI turns and goes.

167 INT. MONZA GRAND PRIX - PRESS CONFERENCE - DAY

167

A packed press conference. The world's media. NIKI's accident
and recovery (as a story) has reached way beyond F1 race fans.
This is front page news around the globe..

NIKI walks out onto the podium - all eyes staring at him - the
sense of a ghoulish, voyeuristic freak show....

NIKI sits on the podium, in front of microphones, flanked on
both sides by FERRARI drivers and top brass. But no one wants
to talk to them. Everyone's here to talk to NIKI..

JAPANESE JOURNALIST
How are you feeling, Niki?

NIKI
Fine.

AMERICAN JOURNALIST
Can you confirm for us exactly which
procedures you have had? And the
expectations for your recovery?

(CONTINUED)

NIKI

Sure. I had a skin graft operation where they put half my right thigh in my face. It doesn't look too good but one unexpected advantage is it's impossible to perspire through a skin graft, so sweat will never run in my eyes again - which is good for a driver.

Laughter. At the back of the hall, JAMES HUNT creeps in, (unseen by anyone, disguised in a hat), to listen.

BRAZILIAN JOURNALIST

When they heard about your condition, Ferrari immediately hired another driver, Carlos Reutemann.

NIKI

Ja. Before even my first operation.

JAPANESE JOURNALIST

Is he your replacement now?

NIKI

No. Just another team-mate. Keen to make an impression. So let's see where Mr. Reutemann finishes today.

Laughter.

JAPANESE JOURNALIST

James Hunt and McLaren have caught up a lot while you were away.

NIKI

Yes.

(a beat)

Is there a question now? Or are you just trying to piss me off?

Laughter.

JAPANESE JOURNALIST

You think you can still win?

NIKI

Of course. I have the better car. I'm the better driver. But he's a clever guy and has used the time well while I was lying half-dead in hospital to win some points..

Laughter.

(CONTINUED)

BRITISH JOURNALIST
What did your wife say when she saw
your face?

NIKI
She said, "Sweetie, you don't need a
face to drive. Only a right foot."

Laughter.

BRITISH JOURNALIST
I'm being serious. Do you really think
your marriage can survive? With the
way you look now?

Silence. NIKI squints into the lights..

NIKI
And I'm being serious, too. Which
asshole said this? Jesus..

No one moves. NIKI, disgusted, rips off his microphone..

NIKI
Fuck you. Press conference over.

NIKI walks out. The Press Conference breaks up...

JAMES sees the REPORTER who asked the question, laughing with
his friends. JAMES watches as the REPORTER leaves...

168 INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE PRESS CONFERENCE - SAME TIME

168

JAMES goes after the REPORTER, and calls him..

JAMES
Hey..!

The REPORTER turns, recognizes JAMES..

JAMES
I've got something for you on that
last question...

The BRITISH JOURNALIST smiles, "Great, thanks James!" Pulls
out a tape recorder. JAMES takes him to one side, then...

"WHACK, WHACK, WHACK" - JAMES punches his lights out, then
takes the tape recorder, stuffs it into the JOURNALISTS mouth.

JAMES
Now go home to your wife and ask her
how YOU look!!

(CONTINUED)

168 CONTINUED:

168

"CRASH" a final, sickening blow splits the REPORTER's nose..

JAMES

Prick!

169 EXT. STARTING GRID - MONZA - DAY

169

JAMES walks out to his car. TV CREWS. Banks of PHOTOGRAPHERS. Commentators talk in different languages.

Everyone talking about NIKI's comeback.

NIKI is in his car. The MECHANICS are talking to him in Italian...

But NIKI hears nothing. He looks at the steering wheel, the shell of the car, the gear stick. And then we see..

His hands are shaking violently. He's utterly terrified.

The light turns green. They're off!

Other cars (including JAMES's), roar forward. But NIKI is frozen.

170 EXT. TRACK - DAY

170

NIKI's mind is a mess - terrified - he starts slowly...finding his courage..

COMMENTATORS point out it's madness. It was clearly too soon. Ferrari were right to hire a replacement. NIKI is a wreck..

NIKI suffers terrible flashbacks from his accident...

NIKI shakes himself out...gradually building up speed - ignoring the cars overtaking him all around him...

NIKI begins to accelerate. Gently at first. Then a bit more. Trusting himself. Gaining confidence..

Blocking out further flashbacks...

170AINT. HOSPITAL - DAY

170A

Watching NIKI from the hospital where he had his treatment is the DOCTOR who treated him...

170BEXT. TRACK - DAY 170B

COMMENTATORS look up. Notice NIKI's slow increase in speed. What's this? Maybe there's life in him yet...

NIKI changes gears smoothly. He begins to overtake. The old feelings come back..

170CEXT. PADDOCK/PITS - SAME TIME 170C

MARLENE watches from the pits. Can hardly bring herself to look...

170DEXT. TRACK - DAY 170D

COMMENTATORS begin to get excited. LAUDA has started to overtake the back-markers...

An incredible sequence. As NIKI gains more confidence, more speed, and begins to work his way through the field..

COMMENTATORS now buzzing with excitement. This is incredible, as NIKI overtakes first CARLOS REUTEMANN, the driver hired to replace him, then others, working his way through the field...

170EINT. JAMES'S CAR - SAME TIME 170E

JAMES sees NIKI coming up behind him. Cannot believe his eyes. JAMES move to block NIKI's path...

NIKI attacks fearlessly. Despite terrible pain. NIKI moves to overtake JAMES.

Utterly intimidated by NIKI's bravery, JAMES panics, and loses control of the car. He spins out..

COMMENTATORS cannot believe their eyes. HUNT's blown it! LAUDA's overtaken him!

It's a miracle. It defies belief. As NIKI crosses the line....

CAPTION: "RACE 15. NIKI 4th. JAMES RETIRED."

171 OMITTED 171

172 EXT. MONZA - DAY 172

The Italian crowds are ecstatic. Delirious. NIKI is a national hero. Lazarus back from the dead. Superhuman.

(CONTINUED)

172 CONTINUED:

172

TV commentary in different languages elaborates on what an extraordinary, superhuman achievement they have just seen...

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

STIRLING MOSS

What a race! What a man! What a season! Now it all boils down to the final race in Japan!

Hunt walks past, staring at a triumphant Niki.

172AINT. HOSPITAL - SAME TIME

172A

The DOCTOR in the hospital shakes his head, cannot believe what he has just witnessed...

172BEXT. PITS - SAME TIME

172B

The Ferrari Mechanics that had initially so disliked NIKI, are overwhelmed by what he has achieved...

172CEXT. TRACK - DAY

172C

A reluctant, modest NIKI carried on shoulders, surrounded by LUCA DI MONTEZEMOLO, MARLENE and the PRESS...

CUT TO:

173 EXT. FUJI SPEEDWAY - JAPAN - DAY

173

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

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

174 INT. JAMES'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

174

JAMES sits alone in his hotel suite. Speaking to an old, trusted friend at the other end...

JAMES (ON PHONE)

The man was in a coma. His doctors pronounced him dead!! Then he comes back and does THAT???

174AINT. BUBBLES HORSELY HOME - MORNING

174A

BUBBLES HORSLEY back at home in England. At a breakfast table..

BUBBLES (ON PHONE)

What did you expect? That Niki would give you the championship lying down? Of course not. He's a fighter. He's going to come at you with everything he's got. But you can do this. As a driver, you're his equal - better, maybe. And God knows you're quick and brave enough. You just..

JAMES (ON PHONE)

What?

BUBBLES (ON PHONE)

Need to find the respect for yourself to close out when it really matters. You don't much like yourself, James - that's the problem, therefore don't believe you deserve it.

174BINT. JAMES'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

174B

A knock at JAMES's hotel room door..

JAMES

I've got to go.

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 2109.

Sure enough: on JAMES's door, the number 2109.

JAMES

Who sent you here?

(CONTINUED)

STEWARDESS

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

JAMES

This man. Did he speak with an accent?

STEWARDESS

Yes. German accent.

JAMES can't believe it. NIKI.

JAMES

I'm afraid it was a joke..

STEWARDESS

(liking the look of JAMES)
Awwww. Pity.

JAMES

Sorry, ladies. Any other time. Not tonight.

JAMES closes the door. Goes back into his hotel room. Then, after a moment...

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

JAMES

Wait..!

175 EXT. TOKYO SKYLINE - DAWN

175

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

It's raining heavily...

176 INT. NIKI'S BEDROOM - HOTEL - DAY

176

NIKI wakes up and looks out of the window. Sees the heavy rain which is falling outside...

His expression changes.

177 INT. JAMES'S BEDROOM - HOTEL - DAY

177

JAMES wakes up. Flinches. JAMES looks around, bleary-eyed. Hungover.

He's in a room that looks like a bomb has hit it.

(CONTINUED)

177 CONTINUED:

177

The two STEWARDESSES are still asleep in the bed beside him. Uniforms discarded on the floor.

Memories are now flooding back. Jesus, what was he THINKING? JAMES leaps out of bed.

178 INT. NIKI'S ROOM - HOTEL - DAY

178

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
Can't see the mountain.

DUNGL
So?

NIKI
The locals here believe if you can see the mountain in the morning, it brings good luck.

NIKI'S POV: the view. Nothing but mist, dark skies and rain.

179 OMITTED

179

180 EXT. JAPANESE GRAND PRIX - FUJI SPEEDWAY - 24TH OCT 1976 -DAY 180

Inside the race track: puddles everywhere. The rain continues to fall. The circuit is covered in water...

DRIVERS and the TEAMS arrive at the race track. JAMES and TEDDY MAYER and ALASTAIR CALDWELL among them...

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.

JAMES looks at CALDWELL...

181 INT. CONTROL TOWER - MEETING ROOM - DAY

181

A driver's meeting has been called. All the DRIVERS are in a small room, arguing and remonstrating with FIA OFFICIALS and blazer-wearing POWERS THAT BE...

A Japanese official, (AKIYAMA), is trying to keep the peace...

AKIYAMA

One at a time! Gentlemen, please!

Local JAPANESE DRIVERS are complaining in Japanese, (we see sub-titles)...

TAKAHARA

You can't send us out in that! It's a death sentence!

HASEMI

You have to postpone the race!

181A INT. CONTROL TOWER - CORRIDOR OUTSIDE - SAME TIME

181A

JAMES, MAYER and CALDWELL arrive in a corridor outside the meeting room...

MAYER

Niki's talking to them about cancelling the race.

JAMES's POV: he can see NIKI, his wounds horribly visible, remonstrating with the JAPANESE OFFICIAL about the dangerous track conditions...

JAMES turns to TEDDY and ALASTAIR...

JAMES

I don't want any part of this. I'm not going to be responsible for turning the room again.

CALDWELL

But you have no option. You HAVE to race, James. It's your only shot. If you don't, Niki wins..

JAMES

I'm not voting against Niki again....or forcing fellow drivers to risk their lives. Sorry. World Championship or not...

JAMES raises his hands and walks off. CALDWELL shouts after him, "James, wait..!" Then MAYER reassures CALDWELL...

(CONTINUED)

181A CONTINUED:

181A

MAYER

Don't worry, this race is going ahead.
The TV rights have been sold all
around the world.

MAYER can see that a vote is taking place in the room. Many of the drivers have their hands in the air, voting...

The JAPANESE OFFICIAL is struggling to keep order in the room.

MAYER

The drivers can vote all they like.

A round of applause in the room, as the DRIVERS vote to cancel the race. But unseen by the DRIVERS..

The FIA OFFICIALS, TV NETWORK EXECUTIVES, and the blazered POWERS THAT BE are in dark, conspiratorial discussion..

...making the decision that the race goes ahead.

182 ARCHIVE TELEVISION FOOTAGE

182

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...

183 OMITTED

183

184 INT. PITS - VARIOUS - DAY

184

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..

Among them the JAPANESE DRIVERS. All laughter gone now. Realizing what they've got into. Risking their lives.

Finally we come to rest on NIKI. Strangely calm.

NIKI puts on his balaclava over his still-raw wounds, wincing with pain as he puts on his helmet..

185 EXT. JAPANESE GP - STARTING GRID - DAY 185

JAMES is piggy-backed to his car by MECHANICS so his feet don't get soaked in the water pooling deep on the track.

186 EXT. JAPANESE GP - STARTING GRID - DAY 186

JAMES lowers himself into a car with puddles on the seat. He straps himself in.

ALISTAIR CALDWELL approaches with a power-drill. Leans towards JAMES, with the screaming drill...

CALDWELL
Keep still...

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...

CALDWELL
Trust me. This race is all about the start. Whoever's in front will see everything. Whoever's second...

CALDWELL gestures, "Nothing"..

CALDWELL
Good luck.

They shake hands. JAMES starts the engine with a roar.

187 EXT. STARTING GRID - DAY 187

NIKI's engine replies with a loud roar. He looks over at JAMES. 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.

(CONTINUED)

187 CONTINUED:

187

THEIR EYES MEET...

A connection between them. Unspoken realization of where they have both got to. What this moment means. For them both..

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. Risking their lives.

THE TEN SECOND FLAG IS RAISED..

The moment's truce is broken. They return to the task at hand.

THE FLAG DROPS. THEY'RE OFF.

188 EXT. RACE - JAPANESE GRAND PRIX - DAY

188

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...

189 EXT. FUJI PIT WALL - DAY

189

CALDWELL and MAYER watch from the pit wall...

CALDWELL
Hold onto it, James..!

190 EXT. RACE - JAPANESE GRAND PRIX - DAY

190

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!

191 INT. NIKI'S CAR - SAME TIME

191

NIKI can see nothing. Surrounded by spray, water, noise.

(CONTINUED)

191 CONTINUED:

191

Other cars are spinning all around him. It's chaos. NIKI bravely accelerates into blindness...

COMMENTATOR (V/O)
But Lauda's car is right on his tail!
Barely visible in the spray..!

192 EXT. RACE - JAPANESE GRAND PRIX - DAY

192

JAMES goes to a corner, then his car twitches, aquaplanes again...badly...almost losing it completely...

COMMENTATOR (V/O)
Hunt turns too tightly! He almost lost his car right there...!

193 INT. EASTON NESTON - DAY

193

BUBBLES HORSLEY, ALEXANDER HESKETH and a number of the characters from the Hesketh Racing days are all watching...

HESKETH
Concentrate, Superstar!

194 INT. JAMES'S CAR - DAY

194

JAMES struggles to hold onto his car. He steadies it, maintaining the lead.

194A INT. NIKI'S CAR - SAME TIME

194A

JAMES's spray makes it impossible for NIKI to see. NIKI can't blink his eyes...it's agony.

Half-blind, NIKI tries to overtake. Gives it everything he's got, breaking as late as he can, tearing through the gears...

For NIKI the world flies past in a near-blind blur. The steering wheel shakes. The car cannot be driven any harder.

But the visibility is terrible. The spray tears into his scarred eyes. He is unable to see anything but...

MARLENE's beautiful face: staring at him. Smiling tenderly. Kissing him tenderly.

195 OMITTED

195

196 OMITTED

196

197 EXT. RACE TRACK - JAPAN - SAME TIME 197

JAMES continues to race flat out. Engine screaming. Foot to the floor. His car aquaplanes again...almost skidding out...

198 INT. HOTEL - MANHATTAN - SAME TIME 198

SUZY HUNT is watching on television as RICHARD BURTON talks in the background on the telephone...

SUZY
(urging him on)
Come on, James...

199 EXT. PITS - RACE TRACK - JAPAN - DAY 199

A sign is held up as JAMES races. Lap 39.

But there are problems with the car. One of the tyres...

CALDWELL
God! His front tyre! Look! It's completely frayed!

CALDWELL and TEDDY MAYER watch in horror from the pits and on TV. They can see the shaking car..

COMMENTATOR
Hunt's car has problems...it's shaking...the Englishman is definitely getting slower...

199AEXT. PITS - RACE TRACK - JAPAN - DAY 199A

ALASTAIR CALDWELL holds up a sign....

CHANGE TYRE

COMMENTATOR
...with just a few laps to go, McLaren are calling for Hunt to come into the pits to change tyres...

JAMES's car roars past the pits, refusing to stop...

COMMENTATOR
But Hunt is refusing! Simply ignoring his team's orders...! He's made the calculation that he can still hold onto the lead...!

199BINT. EASTON NESTON - SAME TIME

199B

HESKETH and BUBBLES cover their eyes. Can't look...

BUBBLES

James!! What are you doing???

HESKETH

I can't bear it!

199CINT. JAMES'S CAR - JAPAN GRAND PRIX - SAME TIME

199C

Suddenly, a Ferrari in JAMES'S wing mirror. Unmistakably, even in the spray, he can see the distinctive RED HELMET...

It's NIKI. JAMES'S blood runs cold...

JAMES

No! No! NO!!!!

JAMES tries to fend NIKI off. Swerves this way and that. But his wounded car is now running at seventy per cent at best...

...and disaster!!! NIKI OVERTAKES HIM...

JAMES screams in agony and frustration. He's lost it! And has no one to blame but himself! His own arrogance. And stubbornness. NIKI'S overtaken him!

THE CHEQUERED FLAG.

JAMES roars past. Has finished in third place. But that is no consolation. NIKI has beaten him. As far as he's concerned..

JAMES has lost. Lost everything.

200 EXT. PITS - DAY

200

JAMES'S car arrives in the pits. In a fury. At himself. For refusing to listen. What a disgrace. What shame. What a fool. But he is engulfed. JAMES gets out of his car, raging...

JAMES

I'm sorry!

But TEDDY MAYER is celebrating wildly. ALASTAIR CALDWELL, too. The world's media descends on JAMES...

MAYER

Sorry?? What are you talking about??
You did it!

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

What?

MAYER

You WON!!

JAMES

Rubbish!! What about Niki?? He overtook me!! I saw it!! A Ferrari with a red helmet..

MAYER

That wasn't Niki. That was Regazzoni.

JAMES

What???

MAYER

Niki withdrew. Said it was too dangerous, refused to drive!!
(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 he realizes. Then explodes with happiness.

200AINT. EASTON NESTON - DAY

200A

HESKETH and BUBBLES cheer in celebration...

HESKETH

He did it! He bloody well did it!

200BINT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

200B

A television plays in the Emergency Ward of the hospital. NURSIE catches sight of the victory, patients cheering and applauding...

NURSIE allows herself a smile.

200CINT. HOTEL - MANHATTAN - SAME TIME

200C

BURTON is at the door in tuxedo, waiting to go. SUZY, dressed glamorously, smiles.

SUZY

Well done, James..

Then turns the TV off. And follows BURTON out.

200EXT. JAPAN GRAND PRIX - DAY

200D

JAMES is embraced by CALDWELL and MAYER.

201 EXT. FUJI PADDOCK - HELICOPTER - SAME TIME

201

Across the race-track, the sound of helicopter blades turning. JAMES looks over to see...

NIKI in the helicopter with MARLENE and a PILOT. NIKI, now the ex-World Champion, looks over to see a triumphant JAMES surrounded by press, McLaren colleagues, etc

MARLENE

Are you OK?

NIKI turns, takes MARLENE's hand as he answers.

NIKI

Fine. It's just one race.

The helicopter lifts into the air, and flies off...

202 EXT. PADDOCK - SAME TIME

202

JAMES watches as the helicopter carrying NIKI flies away, then turns to see...

...the world's press begins to descend on him, and the biggest party of JAMES HUNT's life is about to begin..

In the background, the two JAPANESE DRIVERS are giving interviews again. They didn't just survive, MASAHIRO HASEMI got the fastest lap of the race, and NORITAKE TAKAHARA came 9th...

And at that moment, magically, the sun breaks through, and the snowy peak of Mount Fuji is finally revealed.

203 A QUICKFIRE MONTAGE

203

Of newspaper headlines, television talk shows, lucrative endorsements, TV commercials, sponsorship, public billboards.

JAMES's world championship victory has made him a rich man. His movie star looks make him an international STAR and marketing man's dream.

Girls, more girls, and even more girls.

(CONTINUED)

203 CONTINUED:

203

JAMES, dashing in a white suit, plays trumpet on the UK's most famous talk show...

FADE TO BLACK:

204 EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

204

We're on the runway of an airport in Northern Italy.

CAPTION: "THREE MONTHS LATER"

A stretch limousine pulls up on the tarmac.

A still-drunk JAMES HUNT and several good-looking WOMEN, rowdy FRIENDS (and hangers-on) spill out of the limo...

They cross the tarmac towards their waiting private jet, passing other jets, when JAMES stops.

He's seen something that has caught his eye.

JAMES sends his FRIENDS on ahead to their waiting jet, and walks over to a small private jet, (a Learjet 35)...

JAMES

I heard you were spending more and more time in one of these...

A hunched PILOT doing final checks. The figure turns. It's NIKI. His wounds have healed a little, but it's still a painful sight...

NIKI

Do you fly?

JAMES

No.

NIKI

You should try it. If something goes wrong up there, you're on the edge, but have to stay within the rules. Stick to regulations. Suppress the ego. It's good discipline for the racing.

JAMES

And there I was thinking you were about to wax lyrical about the romance of flight. I should have known better.

NIKI

What brings you here?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES indicates his rowdy, cool-looking friends..

JAMES

A friend's wedding. At least I think it was a wedding. Might have been a birthday. All a bit of a blur. How about you? Been at Fiorano?

NIKI

Pre-season testing.

JAMES

Already? In February? You're relentless.

NIKI

Thank you.

JAMES

I'm not sure I meant it as a compliment.

NIKI

But it is one. Relentlessness is good. Means you're a fighter. That you never give up. Behind my back I know some of you guys call me 'The Rat.' Because I look like one. It's meant as an insult. But I don't mind it. Rats are ugly, sure. And no one likes them. But they're intelligent. With a strong survival instinct.

JAMES can't help smiling. That's NIKI.

NIKI

So when do you start testing? Next week?

JAMES

Are you mad? I didn't just win the biggest thing of my life so I could get right back to work.

NIKI

Why? You need to. To prove 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? I won. On the all important day when it came down to it, we raced on equal terms in equally good cars.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAMES (cont'd)

You bottled and I had the guts to see it through.

NIKI

It's true. You won 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, no? It's a permanent condition. Never stops or goes away. It stays with you always.

JAMES

That's winning? Sounds like losing to me. Some of life needs to be for pleasure, Niki. What's the use of having a million cups and medals if you never have any fun? How is that winning?

The plane load of JAMES's friends call out..."C'mon, James!"

NIKI

You're right. I could learn from you. In hospital the toughest part of my treatment was the vacuum. Pumping the shit out of my lungs. It was agony. While doing it, I was watching television...you winning all those races...and I was cursing you.. "That bastard, Hunt", I would shout, "I hate that guy." one day the doctor said, "Mr. Lauda, may I offer one piece of advice? Stop thinking of it as a curse to have been given an enemy in life. It can be a blessing, too." I said, "Who are you, Confucius?" He said, "A wise man gets more from his enemies than a fool from his friends." And you know, he's right. Look at us. We were a pair of kids when we first met. Hotheaded jerks in Formula 3. Headed nowhere. Now we're both Champions of the world. Not bad.

JAMES

No, not bad.

(CONTINUED)

NIKI
So don't let me down now. I need you
busting my balls. Get back to work.

JAMES
I will, Niki. But I intend to enjoy
myself first. And so should you. You
think you can?

NIKI stares. A blank look..

JAMES
See you on race day, Champ.

NIKI
You will. Champ.

JAMES goes. NIKI watches him, pulled into his plane by his
laughing, cool FRIENDS. An unmistakable flicker of envy in his
eyes.

Then NIKI turns, alone, and resumes his safety checks.

205 EXT. RUNWAY - AIRFIELD - DAY

205

JAMES's plane roars down the runway and takes off into the
azure blue sky...

FADE TO BLACK:

**CAPTION: "JAMES RETURNED THE FOLLOWING SEASON, BUT WAS NEVER A
CHALLENGER AGAIN. HE RETIRED IN 1979. AFTER SHORT CAREERS IN
BROADCASTING AND BUDGIE BREEDING HE DIED OF A HEART ATTACK.
AGED 45."**

**CAPTION: "NIKI LAUDA WENT ON TO BECOME WORLD CHAMPION IN 1977.
AND AGAIN IN 1984. HE NOW RUNS A SUCCESSFUL COMMERCIAL
AIRLINE. HE STILL CLAIMS TO HAVE NO FRIENDS."**

The End