

VERVE

TRUE * MERMAID STORY

Written by
Matthew Carnahan

IN BLACK

SOUNDS OF FUMBLING WITH SOUND EQUIPMENT

KEYBOARD TYPING...typetypetype...

"A TRUE STORY"

THEN THE CURSOR BACKSPACES AND ADDS:

"BASED ON A TRUE STORY"

BEAT, THEN BACKSPACE AND TYPING...typetypetype...

"INSPIRED BY A TRUE STORY"

ABRUPT BUMP TO PICTURE

The maker of this movie--me--MATTHEW CARNAHAN, sits in a chair. We're somewhere, but nowhere that really matters, or anywhere that is even a feelable place. We're just in the place where the chair is, and where I'm sitting in it. You can't really see me. I address the CAMERA:

REAL MATTHEW CARNAHAN
Hey. I'll be as quick as I can. I
want to tell you--

JUMP CUT

REAL MATTHEW CARNAHAN (CONT'D)
It's...
(exhale)
I'm gonna try that again--

JUMP CUT

REAL MATTHEW CARNAHAN (CONT'D)
--I just want you, the audience, to
know that this is a true story.
Which...yes, is unbelievable. And
some of which is also not true.

SMASH CUT

To the movie.

EXT. A WINDLESS, GLASSY DAY ON SANTA MONICA BAY

Hold on the Bay for a long time. A few pelicans glide through frame drafting off the water, a small pod of dolphins breach the otherwise unbroken surface.

It's so peaceful, then--

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
 (switch here to the actor
 playing Matthew Carnahan)
 Sorry, me again...this happened
 several years ago, so I'm going to
 set it in a kind of unspecified
 past. "A while ago." Or, "Some
 years ago--"

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (played by an actor in his 20s or 30s, we'll call him "MC") enters frame carrying a surfboard, wearing surf trunks--

We follow MC (the actor) closely as he looks out on the mediocre surf. He spies a surfable peak that's not too crowded...

MC picks his way over the rocks and then paddles out into the lineup.

RETURN TO SCENE

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
 I'm mostly Irish American, but my
 grandma and her people were Osage
 Indians from the rez in Oklahoma.

PICTURE OF NORMA TRUMBLY

On the rez, on her horse, pet raccoon nearby in the lower part of frame.

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
 I always wanted a pet raccoon like
 hers. My dad's parents were
 Bohemian alcoholics on the fringes
 of the California literary
 movement. My dad always told me
 John Steinbeck taught him to shoot
 a gun, but I have no idea if that's
 true or not.

FLASH

Of a red-haired KID lining up a shot with a .22 Winchester with the help of a MIDDLE-AGED MAN (STEINBECK). We hear a "pop" and see a small puff of powder smoke from the rifle, a tin can unmoving in the distance. The Middle-aged man vanishes, leaving the red-haired kid alone.

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
When I was nine my mom had a
psychotic break.

FLASH

Of a nine year-old school picture of MC.

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
I was on swim team.

FLASH

Of a "third place" ribbon.

BACK AT THE BEACH

Now MC catches a few waves.

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
And in this movie there's me...

FLASH - ME IN THE CHAIR

MATTHEW CARNAHAN
Me.
(indicates out in the
ether)
And an actor playing me.

FLASH -- THE ACTOR PLAYING "MATTHEW CARNAHAN" aka "MC"

Sitting in the makeup trailer.

ACTOR MATTHEW CARNAHAN (MC)
Oh, hey, are you filming me--

RESUME SCENE**ON THE WATER**

A couple of SHORTBOARD BROS start vibing MC in the water...

BRO
Move down, kook!

...and he paddles further down where the waves are shitty but the Bros leave him alone.

ANGLE

A small pod of dolphins move through the water in their hypnotic alpha state.

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
I wrote some plays, and made a couple movies, a few documentaries, and also made a claymation film of Sartre's Nausea in the style of Gumby and Pokey that got some attention on the festival circuit...

SMASH TO

LIBRARY THEATER, PARK CITY, UT

A small audience bundled in parkas watch--

CLAYMATION "SARTRE'S NAUSEA"

We see the scene he's describing, the terrible visual coming to light as MC quotes Sartre.

MC (V.O.)
"And someone might feel something scratching in his mouth. He goes to the mirror, opens his mouth: and his tongue is an enormous, live centipede, rubbing its legs together and scraping his palate."

NOW SEE the terrible centipede tongue...the nameless, faceless man tearing it out with his own hands...

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
 Not a ton of attention. But I got
 a fellowship to come to LA and
 write a screenplay for Universal on
 a small stipend, run by two great
 guys named Kevin and Ken, mentored
 by none other than the remarkable
 Steven Spielberg. It was called the
 Chesterfield Fellowship.

SMASH TO

STEVEN SPIELBERG
 Uh. Hello--

We see some "B Roll" of Universal Studios, Amblin
 Entertainment, real studio tour stuff.

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
 He told us it would be the one time
 in our lives to just write our id.

SMASH TO

STEVEN SPIELBERG
 (uncomfortable)
 This is your chance to write your
 id.
 (to director)
 Can I do that agai--

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
 Of course, no one did that except
 me and my friend Tim. I think that
 made an impression.

SMASH TO

STEVEN SPIELBERG
 No, I don't remember him.

SMASH TO

More footage, now a deeper layer of "inside" the studio.

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
 We had offices in a trailer behind
 Amblin Entertainment, Spielberg's
 studio.

(MORE)

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Sometimes he would have us over to
the main studio building and a
private chef would make us lunch.

TABLE SHOT

Of a beautiful meal.

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)

Well, maybe twice that happened.

TABLE SHOT -- NOW LESS FOOD

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)

It happened once.

EVEN LESS FOOD

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)

I was gone that day.

EMPTY TABLE

SMASH TO

STEVEN SPIELBERG

Right! The Chesterfield
Fellowship...I still don't remember
him.

RESUME BEACH SCENE

ANGLE

A school of tiny baitfish roll through, a few of them
bouncing off MC's board as they pass.

We're close on him in the water now and see him sigh deeply.
Either very contented or very discontented.

LATER

MC sits on the beach. He is tired, closes his eyes and lets
the sun dry him.

He opens his eyes a moment later, through LENS FLARE we see a
few more dolphins feathering through the water...

He closes his eyes again, another moment passes and he opens
his eyes again.

Through the glare, he sees a GIRL passing on the beach...she waves and he waves back, can't quite make her out through the glare and then she's gone.

INT. VENICE BUNGALOW -- NIGHT

MC sits at his computer. Almost no furniture. One chair and a rickety table. It really is just a shack with old plank floors. He sits and sits. He sighs deeply.

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
Writing is hard. I mean, not like
construction or bussing tables, but
still...hard.

MC is annoyed by Real Matthew Carnahan's VO. He puts on his headphones. Real Matthew Carnahan's voice becomes very dim.

MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)
Um...
(talking louder)
Anyway, I was saying that writing
is hard--

MC
Nope.

Finally, MC turns the music up really LOUD and we can't hear my VO any more. MC smiles at the camera and starts typing, the MUSIC blaring as--

INT./EXT. NEPTUNE'S NET -- DAY

A surfer/biker hangout on the Pacific Coast Highway.

MC gets off an old falling-apart not-quite-street-legal Yamaha motocross bike with a side surf rack holding his taped-up longboard, a not-very-cool bike next to all the big Harleys and fussy cafe racers, but it has a certain DIY appeal.

MC (V.O.)
My routine on a writing day was to
surf up around County Line
somewhere and then sit and write at
this restaurant called Neptune's
Net.

He finds a table and sits, takes out his laptop and begins the process of sitting and trying to write some more.

IN THE PARKING LOT

A gnarly phalanx of BIKERS pull in; bigger, tougher, wilder than any of the other bikers in the place. Their energy instantly fills the space. There is an aesthetic that unifies them...crazy knotted dreads, strange leathers that look ancient with grease and dirt and age, their look is uncombed and strangely unself-conscious next to all the artisanal denim-wearing posers.

Like pirates or genetically superior space aliens, they're terrifying, other-worldly and MC can't take his eyes off of them. They park their bikes and make their way inside...

The biggest, scariest, alpha-doggiest of all of them--imagine if Jason Momoa was a tatted-up biker from Fresno--catches MC staring and imitates his jaw-drop staring.

ALPHA BIKER

Boo!

MC instantly looks back down at his computer, blushing deeply. The bikers laugh and shove their way into the best table. Nobody fucks with them.

MC stares while trying not to be seen staring.

EXT. UNIVERSAL LOT -- DAY

A bunch of writers hanging out outside the Chesterfield offices. MC stands there, talking to his friend TIM, a New Yorker from the Chelsea Projects with an impossibly thick accent...Tim smokes a Marlboro Red, and tries to hide it from studio security. DYLAN, one of the other writers, comes out of the offices.

MC

Dylan, good job, man.

DYLAN

Oh, thanks Bro.

(beat)

Really?

MC

Yeah, yeah...yeah. It was awesome.

DYLAN

Really? Cause you ripped it apart
it in there, dude. I thought you
hated it.

MC

No! Totally didn't hate it. I
mean, we're all trying to get
better, right?

DYLAN

Oh, for sure. Word. Mad respect.
I will take every note and
seriously look at it.

MC

Okay, buddy...great job.

DYLAN

Means a lot, man. Thanks.
(to Tim about cig)
Gotta put that out, Timmy. No
smoking on the lot.

TIM

Fuck you, Dylan.

DYLAN

Ha! "New Yawk" dude!

He walks away. MC and Tim watch him go. He's so damn good-
looking, what an asshole.

MC

I dunno...why fucking write that
stupid shit?

TIM

He thinks he can sell it I guess.

MC

Seriously? Spielberg said to write
our id. How is the most derivative
action script in the history of
cinema writing your id?

TIM

Everybody's got a different id, MC.

MC

That's nobody's fucking id.
Nobody's id is a hack-shit piece of
action dreck written specifically
for Jason Statham.

TIM

Jason Statham is a handsome man.

MC

That's not the point at all--

TIM

Rugged.

MC

No, I know Jason Statham is--

TIM

You could do worse than land Jason
Statham in your movie.

MC

Not a lot worse.

TIM

Does his own stunts.

MC

He's not even an actor.

TIM

Shitload of street cred. Martial
arts...grew up on the wrong side of
the law--

MC

No, that's not even--fuckin'...you
read that or hear him say it in an
interview and you believe
it...like, you decide it's the
truth because some lazy
entertainment journalist doesn't
fact check. I know because I've
been that lazy entertainment
journalist before.

TIM
(unmoved)
He was ranked 12th in the world on
the ten meter platform.

MC
Well, that's probably true. I
mean, I think it must be true,
because why make up that you were a
good-but-not-great diver? Why even
admit you were a diver at all if
you're Jason Statham? Diving's a
total pussy sport.

SMASH TO

INT. JASON STATHAM'S BOXING GYM, LONDON -- DAY

JASON STATHAM, ripped and sweaty, turns from his heavy bag
and looks at us.

JASON STATHAM
Are you fucking serious, mate?
Have him come tell me that to my
face.

BLAM BLAM BLAM! He explodes on the heavy bag.

EXT. LEO CARILLO STATE BEACH - DAY

MC surfs a wave at Leo Carillo near the Rock. Doing okay,
not great. Carves a turn or two.

MC finishes a ride and turns to paddle back out. He looks
around. He has this feeling, hard to describe and certainly
hard to show, of not being alone in the water, even though
he's having a rare moment of being the only one surfing. It
gives him enough pause to get him out of the water.

MC (V.O.)
Sometimes you just feel something
in the water when, like, you just
know what's going on on the surface
is a very small part of what's
going on under--

He surfs in, then bellyboards the whitewater the rest of the way in. Something wraps around his leg, and he turns, freaked out, but there's nothing there. Probably just a kelp head.

MC (V.O.)

And you just can't explain how you know but you know. It's like this extra sense that sharks have called the Ampullae of Lorenzini, these special receptors that help them find their prey. Maybe humans have something like that that we just haven't discovered yet, because I swear I totally knew I wasn't alone. Maybe at this point I should mention I'm somewhat neurodivergent--on the spectrum--which sometimes has a side-effect of making me geek out about stuff.

He gets out of the water, the feeling still so strong.

Unzips his wetsuit and pulls off the sleeves. Peels the wetsuit down and wades back into the water to rinse off and slick his hair back. He dunks his head under and--

UNDERWATER

And we see his face, baptized, peaceful, eyes open, then

EMERGES

VOICE

Water's getting warmer.

MC turns, surprised...there was not a soul on this beach or in the water one second ago. How is this possible?

A GIRL stands there, she might be Pacific Islander or something--but in a way nothing he's ever seen before--in some sort of skinsuit, wet, shimmering, like an apparition. But she's there, and the water is dripping off her long hair. She's moving in circles, delighted by the feeling of the water and air on her.

GIRL

Soooo good...

MC is struck monosyllabic.

MC

Yuh...

She closes her eyes and turns in circles, which allows him to sneak a better look at her.

SLOW MOTION

The Girl turning.

Her age is hard to guess, she could be older or younger than him. Her long hair looks unkempt even if it wasn't wet. Is she rich, or homeless? Beautiful, or harsh? Wide-eyed anime beauty, or fucking E.T. face? There is definitely something remarkable about her, something he's never, ever seen before.

She moves around him, kind of circling him. Utterly unselfconscious.

MC (CONT'D)

So...were you surfing out there,
or...

Beat. Like she doesn't quite speak English. Then:

GIRL

Something to eat? Go away from
here?

MC feels like he's being punked. What the hell is going on here? He looks around.

MC

Yeah, okay. That'd be great.

GIRL

You have a towel or...something?

MC

Oh, yeah, sure...where's your car?

GIRL

Oh, it's way...
(gestures vaguely)
Away...

MC

Oh, cause...I mean, I can give you
a ride on my bike to Neptune's Net,
but I don't have an extra helmet,
so it's totally illegal--

GIRL

(scared?)

You're a biker?

MC

You mean like, a "biker?"...no, I
mean, yes, in that I ride a
motorcycle...

(rambling now)

...but it's more an economic issue--
I'm pretty broke, but like really
ambitious--and also you can get to
better surf spots sometimes... I'd
really like to get a car, but--

GIRL

(shutting him up)

Shh, stop. Let's go.

EXT./INT. NEPTUNE'S NET -- DAY

MC sits with Girl.

She still wears the odd skinsuit, and now wears his towel
around her waist. And somehow she looks dressed. And
stunning. She's eating a massive plate of food like a
Dickensian street urchin, shoving stuff in her mouth, chewing
carelessly, food spilling out.

GIRL

Aren't you starving?

MC

Yeah, surfing makes me super
hungry.

As if he was making a joke, Girl laughs uproariously. A few
heads turn. Then she seems to realize he was serious and she
nods back.

GIRL

(repeating)

Su-per hungry.

MC

For sure.

GIRL

I'm su-per hungry.

MC

Seems like it. I mean, not in a bad way.

GIRL

Not in a bad way. Just super hungry.

MC

Yeah.

GIRL

In a good way.

MC

(finally laughing)

I guess so, sure. Definitely.

GIRL

Definitely.

She's full-on staring at him now, locked in. She reaches out and touches his face, not sweetly or sexually, just with a degree of ravenous curiosity. He smiles and laughs reflexively.

GIRL (CONT'D)

(seriously)

Is that funny?

MC

Oh, um...no...it just...I guess it caught me off guard. In a way.

GIRL

Should I be sorry?

MC

Oh, no...no. It was nice. Really nice. Can I--

He gestures toward her face and she responds first warily, then with a shrug. MC reaches out slowly and very self-consciously touches her face.

For him it's a big moment, for her, hard to tell, but probably not a big moment.

MC (CONT'D)
You're freezing.

He holds on for a moment longer.

Outside, off PCH (Pacific Coast Highway), A HUGE SOUND as a bunch of bikers pull up on big, noisy hogs. MC turns around to see it's the gang of bikers from before. He turns back around to say something to Girl and she's gone.

The bikers bust in to the Net. Again, Alpha Biker leads the charge.

ALPHA BIKER
(to MC)
Surfer boy!

MC
Me? No, not really...I mean, I surf, but-but to call me "surfer boy" seems reducti--

ALPHA BIKER
"Butbutbut--"

The other bikers laugh. Alpha looks around and realizes the only table with space is MC's table.

ALPHA BIKER (CONT'D)
Mind if we sit?

With that, he sits directly across from MC. He makes the table look like a tiny joke. The other bikers fill in around him.

He also notices Girl's breakfast plate in front of him and appears almost to sniff it like a hound. Examines it.

ALPHA BIKER (CONT'D)
Someone here?

MC
I--

MC hesitates, instinctively cautious to tell him...

ALPHA BIKER
What's up?

MC
Umm...not much.

Alpha Biker looks at the guy next to him and laughs.

ALPHA BIKER
"Ummmmmm...Not much."

MC
(blurts out)
Why do you mock everything I say?

Alpha looks at him blankly.

ALPHA BIKER
(without guile)
I don't know. I really don't.

MC
It's fucked up. Hurtful.

ALPHA BIKER
Yeah...

MC
And scary.

One of his biker sidekicks, a dude with ruined prison tats,
and a strange scar-covering tat of AN EYE IN THE MIDDLE OF
HIS FOREHEAD speaks up:

RUINED PRISON TATS
He does that to me sometimes.

Another biker, acne scars:

ACNE SCARS
Me too.

ALPHA BIKER
It's a defensive thing. I want to
hurt before they have a chance to
hurt me.

MC
I hear that.

ALPHA BIKER
I've been hurt a lot. So I defend
myself by lashing out.
(MORE)

ALPHA BIKER (CONT'D)

I'll definitely do it again if you
give me an opening. Sorry brah.
I'm Bryce.

He reaches out his giant hand and shakes MC's. Something
about it. And waaay too strong.

MC

(wincing)

Aaah. You're freezing.

BRYCE

I run cold.

MC

Impossibly cold.

Bryce leans in, like he's going to say something funny or
private, just between the two of them:

BRYCE

(sotto)

I can smell her, Brah. You touched
her. Stay the fuck away or watch
as I remove your limbs.

MC

(can't believe he heard
right)

What?

Bryce returns to his public voice.

BRYCE

Fucking with you! Shoulda seen
your face! Ha!

Bryce turns back to his crew.

MC (V.O.)

So my first conversation with Bryce may not have gone exactly like that but it did go something like that...I may have condensed a little for dramatic purposes, but as I was constantly having to tell the other members of the Chesterfield Workshop, a true story is not necessarily an exact representation of reality...they kinda tore into my script for Black Circle Boys--

EXT./INT. CHESTERFIELD OFFICES, UNIVERSAL STUDIOS -- DAY

MC sits at the workshop table as they critique his script. The other writers are a bunch of pretty eclectic-looking people, in their 20s and 30s from all over the country. No one really has the Hollywood thing down yet except Dylan, who sits there in his shades texting instead of paying attention. One of the Chesterfield guys, KEVIN, sits at the head of the big conference table leading the workshop.

MC is totally in the hot seat.

A tall brunette wanna-be-Suicide-Girl with great ink, CAITLYN, critiques:

CAITLYN

...I guess, just, like, what bugs me is...is it a true story or fiction?

MC

Part of it happened to me, part of it is based on another true story that happened to someone else. And some of it is made up.

KEVIN

Maybe we shouldn't worry about those constructs today and just talk about the narrative.

DOUG

But it's his pitch. "True story."

MC

It's not a "pitch," it's a script.

THEO

Whatever, your hook--

MC

It's not a hook either.

CAITLYN

Otherwise you're just lying...

MC

It's just what it is...I'd just like to know if the scenes are working--

CAITLYN

Or are you just trying to be all meta--

MC

I'm not--I'm just trying to tell the story that feels the most true.

CAITLYN

"Feels the most true" just feels like a misdirect.

MC

Oh, so subjective is the opposite of objective?

DOUG

THEO

That's just you being a dick-- It's lying if it's only

MC

It's not lying, it's just a story I'm telling--

DYLAN

(still texting)

Are you open to making it supernatural?

MC

No, I'm not open to...what would that even mean?

CARL

(fake nice)

Ummmmmm. Just on the basis of the story, it doesn't totally resonate for me.

KEVIN

There you go. Tell me about that. Why isn't it resonating for you, Carl?

They comment on MOS as--

MC (V.O.)

Maybe coming from the New York theatre made some of the writers feel a natural enmity as film writers. Or my script really wasn't working. Or both. Plus I tore into Dylan's script because he was so damn good-looking and dated a movie star. And I just wanted to kill him.

KEVIN

Okay, maybe you guys can offer some constructive ways to get that first act engine firing in a different way, and MC can take them or discard them.

DOUG

Not enough dialogue. How do we know what Kyle is feeling?

CAITLYN

I think there's too much dialogue--

TIM

Aristotle, bitches.

KEVIN

(sighs)

Okay, Tim.

TIM

It's all about Aristotle. Unities of Time, Place and Action. And there's no dramatic reversal at the end of act two.

MC
You're right, Timbo. I gotta look
at the basics.

MC (V.O.)
And meanwhile I had to keep working
whatever jobs I could to pay the
rent in Venice.

INT. PASADENA HOUSE -- NIGHT

A really beautiful, grand old Craftsman house in Pasadena.
Horse pictures everywhere.

MC (V.O.)
I had been a personal chef when I
lived in Nantucket and a few other
times over the years...so I got a
gig chef-ing for a famous racehorse
breeder named Huell Bascombe, III,
out in Pasadena.

MC works in the kitchen, three or four burners going on a
sweet seven-burner Viking range that probably gets little use
otherwise.

He's doing a vinegar reduction for a *buerre blanc*, when HUELL
appears in the kitchen doorway, a hulking southerner in his
50s with a shock of white hair and a serious Pinot buzz, with
purple lips and teeth to match. He positively beams at MC,
strikes a pose.

HUELL
Caution: "artist" at work.

MC
(working the reduction,
trying to ignore him)
Ha. Yeah.

HUELL
I love watching a chef do his
thing.

MC
I'm not really a chef. Are they
about done with the appetizers?

HUELL
(big eye roll)
They inhaled them like the rabid
animals they are.

INT. DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

MC serves the dinner. The GUESTS ooh and ahh at the food.
Huell watches him like a raptor.

Huell dings his wine glass and opens his wine-stained mouth
to speak:

HUELL
Everyone...let us make a toast to
our handsome young chef and this
gorgeous creation...

They toast. MC winces a smile and a nod.

HUELL (CONT'D)
...Our handsome young chef who is
currently writing a feature film
script for none other than the
incredible Steven Spielberg!

MC
(dying)
Oh no, not really--

A DRUNKEN GUEST blurts out:

DRUNKEN GUEST
Then why's he working for you?

EXT./INT. OUTBUILDING -- LATER

Huell is now truly shitfaced, the guests are gone. He opens
the door to an office/guesthouse on his property.

They enter and Huell walks over to a liquid nitrogen holding
tank and opens the seal:

It HISSES as it depressurizes and he raises the handle,
revealing several long canisters.

HUELL
Semen...from my champion.

MC

Oh...wow.

HUELL

You know...

(beat)

...Horse cum.

MC

No, haha, I got it.

Huell glances at him; gauging whether this might be a good time to make his move. He weaves slightly in the half-light.

HUELL

Sixty thousand a pop.

MC

For the--

HUELL

For an insemination. My sire won the Preakness. I have 15 loads here...and a waiting list. Think about that.

MC

I don't really follow the whole horse thing, but I'm sure--

HUELL

No, of course you don't. You're an *ahhhhtist*.

MC

(weakly)

Haha.

HUELL

(off his discomfort)

I'm just yanking your chain, young man. I think it's wonderful that you're pursuing your dreams.

MC

Thanks. Huell.

HUELL
(moving too close)
I think it's beautiful.
Just...beautiful...

An uncomfortable beat as Huell makes googly-eyes at him, showing inappropriately maudlin emotion. MC digs deep.

MC
Did you want anything else? I took
out the trash and the food is all
labeled in the fridge.

HUELL
(pouty)
No, I guess you're done.

INT. MC'S HOUSE -- NEXT DAY

MC types away.

Typetypetype...typetypetypetypetypetype...type.

MC gets up and goes to the fridge. There's fuck-all in there; some moldy store-bought potato salad and some pickles and some off-brand sports drink.

He sets them on the table, cracks open the sports drink, drinks the whole thing in one giant swig, then opens the pickles and the potato salad, dips a pickle in the potato salad.

Takes a bite, pretty ravenous. The potato salad, being spoiled to the point of poisonous, causes him to barf a tiny pile of pickle, potato salad and blue sports drink.

Frustrated, he takes off his cut-offs and puts on pants. Sniffs his shirt, decides it's fine.

INT. CAA -- DAY

He waits in the outer office and a beautiful, Harvard-educated ASSISTANT brings him a coffee and a Diet Coke and a water.

MC
Wow, thanks Marisol.

MARISOL

No problem, Matthew. Do you want a snack while you wait? Jonathan's pretty bonkers today, so it might be a minute.

MC

Um, oh, yeah, that'd be great.

MARISOL

I know we have like a million Cliff Bars, some bagels left over from this morning...

MC

Oh, that'd be awesome.

MARISOL

Cliff Bar?

MC

Oh, uh, both!

MARISOL

You got it.

MC

And um, do you have any of those rolled up prosciutto and cheese things you had last time?

MARISOL

I think we might!

MC

Oh, that's great. Thank you so much, Marisol.

TIME CUT

MC sits in the waiting area with the remnants of an entire brunch in front of him, mostly already eaten.

Marisol comes out.

MARISOL

Jonathan can see you now.

INT. JONATHAN WICKLOW'S OFFICE, CAA

Now that he's sitting in the bright, sun-drenched office, MC can see his t-shirt should not have made the cut. It's filthy, and he looks and smells like a crazy person.

He sits across from JONATHAN WICKLOW, his agent. Fit, young, aggressive, clean, kind, not at all crazy. MC is aware of the Grand Canyon-sized gulf between writer and agent, neither able for a second to understand the other, both needing and resenting and jealous of the other. Nevertheless, he soldiers on.

JONATHAN

What's up? You're the one who showed up at my office.

MC

Well, yeah, partly...

JONATHAN

You okay?

MC

I'm ok. Just a little...I don't know. It's just been a little weird. Like in general. Lately. Something. My...brain or my imagination or just--

JONATHAN

Oh, "writer's block."

MC

No, not at all, kinda the opposite, sort of. Like, it just keeps coming all the time and I almost can't tell what's even, like, real--

MC looks back at Jonathan...he's not gonna get psychological counseling here. Pivots:

MC (CONT'D)

Anyway, I'm really hoping I can get something going with the Chesterfield script--

JONATHAN

That's not really the--

Marisol enters.

MARISOL
It's Guillermo.

She hands Jonathan a slip of paper. He reads it.

JONATHAN
Fuck.
(side-eyeing MC)
Tell him I'll call him right back.

She retreats.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
Look, MC, I will do my best to get
some action on Black Circle Boys.
I know they're looking for a writer
on this thing about a tiny man in a
suitcase at Imagine.
(MC is struck mute by
this)
So.
(it's his cue to leave)

MC
A tiny--

JONATHAN
--Tiny man in a suitcase. It's
called The Man in the Suitcase.

MC still can't muster a response.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
It's actually pretty cool.

They look at each other; MC realizing he's being invited to
fuck off.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
Call Marisol and set something. I
will feed you a real lunch, you
know. We should go out and get
hammered!
(Calling to Marisol, MC
dismissed)
Can you get Guillermo?

EXT. LEO CARILLO STATE BEACH/STAIRCASE -- DAY

MC sits in the lineup. Another cold, lonely surf session.

A small pod of dolphins thread by, just outside the lineup, slow and rhythmic as an oil derrick. MC watches them, as one wakes up and splashes its tail playfully...

Seemingly out of nowhere, GIRL paddles up on a battered, old-school longboard. She wears her weird, beautiful skinsuit.

GIRL

Hi.

MC

Oh...hi. Where did you--holy
shit....I totally didn't see you.

GIRL

Set coming.

She takes off on the wave, and moves like something you've never seen before (watch Belinda Baggs or Cassia surfing First Point); fully in an interactive state of play with the wave. She carves deeply, even on the longboard, cutting back and forth in a flowing, unbroken style...something extraordinary.

She kicks out with no effort at all and paddles back out to MC.

MC

That was--

GIRL

Paddle now.

MC

But there's no--

She gives him a shove and he starts paddling. A wave rises out of nowhere and picks him up and he rides it, almost embodying whatever she was just doing.

We are tight on MC's face (no master, just his face) as he carves turns and plays with the wave. It's not like anything that's ever happened for him before. All his usual struggle falls away, and for once in his life, he is the thing he's doing...

After riding the wave an unbelievably long time, he kicks out and starts paddling back to her.

She smiles.

GIRL
See?

MC
I don't even--

GIRL
I know.

MC
But--what just happened?

GIRL
What just happened. You surfed
that wave.

MC
Whoa. Yeah.

Girl laughs.

MC (CONT'D)
What's your name?

Girl laughs again, then takes off on a wave, slow-ripping down the line, until she kicks out about two hundred yards down, then disappears into the whitewater.

A long moment as the whitewater clears and she's just...not there.

MC just stares into the water. Nothing.

Where the fuck did she go?

SMASH TO

A SLIDE SHOW

Like, on a slide carousel projected on a wall...

MC (V.O.)
Since the beginning of humankind's
relationship with the sea, there
have been...sightings...encounters--

-several image of MANATEES

-KELP HEADS bobbing in the Pacific

-a sea lion in the surf

MC (V.O.)

--with animals, kelp, flotsam--

-a pod of DOLPHINS

MC (V.O.)

--that, in our lonely desire for
human--or at least relational--
connection, we have
anthropomorphized into something
else, call them mermaids, kelpies,
selkies, knøkken--

-SMASH TO GIRL looking at camera. Not a Manatee, not a Kelp
Head, not a dolphin. Something else entirely.

INT. VENICE BUNGALOW -- NIGHT

MC sits at his computer, trying to write...the sounds of the
night are loud--music, helicopters, gunshots--but he keeps
trying to bear down. Type type type, pause...type type,
pause...

MC (V.O.)

You might be wondering; how does a
struggling writer afford an okay
bungalow in Venice, one of the most
sought-after areas in Los Angeles?
It was tricky.

FLASH OF PHOTO OF TOM VINCENZO

A picture of TOM VINCENZO, (40s, angry hipster) pointing at
something--

MC (V.O.)

I made a deal with my landlord, Tom
Vincenzo, to do all the shit work
around our compound for a reduction
in my monthly rent--

MC HOLDING AN "AUGER" (AN ENORMOUS DRILL)

MC drills fence posts with the auger, it's beyond exhausting work. Tom Vincenzo stands over him, barking orders.

TOM VINCENZO
C'mon. I only have this thing
rented til five.

MC resumes, and suddenly he strikes a pipe in the ground and the auger seizes, hurling him against a wall.

FREEZE on MC striking the wall.

RESUME SCENE ON MC WRITING

MC (V.O.)
That's more or less how I could
afford the house in Venice...

OVER MUSIC, "MY DRUG BUDDY" BY THE LEMONHEADS

We see MC going about his life. Not a super-sexy music montage, but it is what it is:

- MC goes into the Quickmart
- MC comes out with some Gatorade and a 40 of shitty beer
- MC paddles out at Leo Carillo
- MC at the Chesterfield office around the writer's table. They argue over a script
- MC cooks for another Huell Bascombe, III dinner party
- MC smokes some weed
- MC sits at his desk writing...typetypetype pause, type type
- MC drops in those fucking fence posts for Tom Vincenzo, who stands glowering and mixing concrete
- MC sits on his crappy Yamaha and looks at the surf, trying to see if there's a wave worth riding...and suddenly, across the sand we see Bryce on his huge hog, and on the back, the surfer Girl holds on. Bryce stops the bike and Girl gets off. She starts to walk away, but Bryce grabs her roughly by the arm and spins her toward him.
- She strikes him hard across the face. Bryce jumps off the bike and moves on her roughly. She runs toward the water...

MC guns his little Yamaha and races down toward the beach.

It takes MC about 8 seconds to get from the overlook down on to the beach, where Bryce sits on his bike looking out at the Pacific.

MC dismounts at a run and the bike sputters over on its side. He runs at Bryce and shoves him as hard as he can, which does nothing.

Bryce just looks back at him, snapping out of some kind of reverie.

MC

Where is she? Where the fuck--

BRYCE

Where is who?

MC

You know who, you fucking asshole.
The girl, the one...the girl you
said you smelled...the girl you
just grabbed like you were gonna
hurt her--

BRYCE

Whoa.

MC

The girl you said--

BRYCE

What'd I say, Brah? What did I say
about her?

MC

You said you'd...make me watch you
remove my limbs--

BRYCE

Did I say that? What an asshole.
Didn't I say I was fucking with
you?

MC

(confused)

You did. But--

BRYCE

Huh. Which thing do you think was true? I see your limbs and they appear to be intact. Not--whatever you call it--

MC

BRYCE (CONT'D)

MC (CONT'D)

Oh, right. Prosthetic.

BRYCE

And you're the writer.

MC

How do you know--

BRYCE

Always with your little laptop.

MC

Okay. Right. You've seen me with the--

BRYCE

Up there typing away like yours is the only story--

MC

That seems--no, I'm not. I don't think mine is the only story. I'm just trying to write my--

MC stops himself, realizing how pretentious he's about to sound.

BRYCE

Write your what? Your masterpiece? The Great American Novel?

MC

(barely audible, hating himself)
My id.

BRYCE

Your...?

MC

BRYCE (CONT'D)

MC (CONT'D)

Yeah.

BRYCE

Well, it's worse than I thought.

MC

Why? Why is that so terrible?

BRYCE

It's so terrible because if you set out to write your id, starting out at that level of self-involvement, do you really think you'll ever actually be able to write your id without extinguishing it with your own narcissism?

MC

Well, yeah...maybe?

BRYCE

I mean, in a way that adds to any larger conversation.

MC stands there for a moment. Fuck. He's right. The big, Thor-looking Poseidon motherfucker is right.

MC

I don't know. I don't know.
You're fucking with my head.

(suddenly remembering)

Hey! Where the fuck is she?

BRYCE

That I can't tell you. She's wherever she went to. Not here. Definitely can't control that one.

MC

(gesturing around him)

She was here five seconds before and then she was gone and the only place she could have gone--

BRYCE

Is what?

MC

Is--fuckin--

MC casts about wildly.

BRYCE

Is where? Home? Back up to the road?

MC

There.

He points to the ocean. Bryce smiles.

BRYCE

(grinning)

Okay, Brah. Ya got me. She swam away.

MC realizes how ridiculous the whole thing sounds.

MC

Why do you say "like yours is the only story?" What the fuck is that supposed to mean?

BRYCE

There's a basic disrespect in the way guys like you go about your work.

MC

Guys like--

BRYCE

You sit in Neptune's Net, or you sit there at Starbucks or Soho House or some shit and you write in a bubble, like every semi-colon is so precious; but you don't actually ask, or imagine, that the rest of the world has a story, and that maybe that story--or those stories--might enrich your own. Instead of tunneling into your own "id," what if you opened your mind to the literally billions of stories of the people and the animals and the creatures around you? What do you think your little stories would look like then? Maybe they'd be filled with thunder and depth and universality.

MC finds himself gawking again: who the fuck is this guy?

BRYCE (CONT'D)

What?

MC

I don't...I think you might be right.

BRYCE

So?

MC

I don't even know. So...tell me a story.

BRYCE

You couldn't...you couldn't even handle--

MC

I couldn't handle your story? Because every semi-colon is so precious?

Bryce looks at him, amused.

BRYCE

Ha. I see what you did there. Okay.

MC

Okay, what?

BRYCE

I'll tell you a story. You think you're ready?

MC

A story or your story?

BRYCE

What does it matter?

MC

I want your story.

BRYCE

I'll tell you a story. You can call it my story if it makes you feel better.

MC
Okay. Your story.

SMASH TO

INT. CHESTERFIELD OFFICES, UNIVERSAL STUDIOS -- DAY

MC is doing his "pitch" for his next script. He's in the weeds:

MC
So...there's essentially a Sea Mother and a Sea Father...it's in all the mythology across pretty much every ocean culture, you've got the Selkies in Celtic mythology, the sirens in greek mythology, these crazy violin-playing Norwegian horse water-spirits called Nokken...anybody Heard of...Nokken?

He casts around, the beginnings of flop sweat forming...

MC (CONT'D)
Anyway, turns out Bryce is one of the sons of--like--Poseidon... there's actually a bunch of very powerful sea gods and goddesses, not just a couple, like thousands and thousands, with tens of thousands of offspring, and they-- anyway, like he's a prince basically, he's what they call a Triton, and his whole crew are Tritons! Sons of Poseidon. And Tritons are minor deities--just to like, use our earthly land-based lexicon--and you know, there's this amazing and very evolved heirarchy that's--well, never mind that part...but the ocean is so fucked up and polluted and warming and rising and since the food sources are going away the big ocean predators have started attacking the mer-people--

Caitlyn smirks at Dylan.

DYLAN

(to Caitlyn, "can you
believe it?")
He said "mer-people."

MC

(trying to ignore him)
So Bryce and his crew, they
essentially reject the ocean, they
reject the place that literally
spawned them, and they become
utterly machinal, they adopt the
ways of a biker gang...and like I
realized, I mean the protagonist-um-
--Michael--realizes that one of the
bikers with this scar on his
forehead and an eyeball tattooed
over it is actually Cyclops!...but
the fucked up thing is, eventually
they can't return to the water.
The ocean, like...rejects them.
And they're dying on the land! So
they're kind of these lost souls,
roaming the fucking PCH on these
big-ass old motorcycles--and you
can sort of tell they're not from
the land...their hair, and this
weird material everything they wear
is made of...and the way they--

KEVIN

(a little in the weeds
himself)
So is it about their attempt to
return to the sea, or--

MC

I don't know, not exactly, except
in the way that we all want to
return to some original place,
paradise, the Garden, the womb...
but even that makes it sound--fuck.

(breath)

It's really just...it's kind of
about how I--how the regular human
guy in the story--falls in love
with one of them--

DYLAN

One of the bikers?

MC

Oh, no, the--remember the Girl?

DYLAN

Oh, the mermaid. So it's "Splash."
 (looks for a fist bump,
 none out there)
 Love some "Splash!"

MC

(horrified, plowing on)
 No, it's not "Splash." It's way
 more--real--than that. It's not
 some masturbatory fantasy--and I
 told you, she's not a mermaid,
 she's a Nereid; mermaids are mortal
 and Nereids are minor deities like
 Tritons--

Dylan mimes pushing up his glasses...nerd!

CAITLYN

You're not pitching another "true"
 story, are you?

MC

I mean--

CAITLYN

A true mermaid story?

A laugh from the other writers.

KEVIN

Let's not get into the whole "true
 story" debate again.

DYLAN

I don't know, dude...why not make
 it more like "Splash?" "Splash"
 was awesome.

TIM

"Splash" was not awesome.

CAITLYN

Hey, if you could write another
 "Splash" you'd be rich.

MC

It was fine, okay, it was great,
but I don't want to write another
"Splash."

DYLAN

Oh, yeah, he wants to write his
"id" cause Steven told him to.

MC

Fuck you, Dylan.

DYLAN

How about fuck you and all your
artfilm bullshit. We're in
Hollywood now, not Oberlin.

MC

I didn't go to Oberlin--

DOUG

I did--

MC

--not that there's anything wrong
with Ober--

DYLAN

No, totally, I was just looking for
something artsy-fartsy--

KEVIN

Okay guys...

MC

(to Dylan)

Just because you've never had an
original idea in your life--

DYLAN

(hurt)

Everybody dug my Jason Statham
vehicle.

Nobody jumps in on that one.

MC

You mean "Die Hard" in an office
building?'...so...just "Die Hard?"
Not me.

CAITLYN
 (matter of fact)
 Yeah, it was just "Die Hard." But
bad.

TIM
 Yeah, that was terrible.

MC
 Thank you. Thank you.

He glances at Caitlyn, she looks back at him and some charge passes between them:

EXT. MALIBU COAST -- DAY/DUSK/NIGHT

--MC rides up PCH on the Yamaha

--MC sits on his bike looking over Staircase and lower County Line.

MC (V.O.)
 In just about every culture there
 is something like a mermaid myth.

-- MC surfs Staircase by himself. It's foggy and feels haunted.

-- Images of different mermaids, water nymphs, Selkies, Nokken, sirens. Even Daryl Hannah flopping in the bathtub in "Splash."

MC (V.O.)
 Apparently Daryl Hannah had been swimming "mermaid style" with her legs bound together since she was a child due to a fascination with Hans Christian Andersen's original "Little Mermaid" story, which is dark as fuck with a weird tacked-on Christian happy ending.

-- Some images from the original creepy Hans Christian Andersen Little Mermaid

-- MC trolling PCH on his shitty Yamaha. BMWs and Range Rovers honk and pass him.

MC (V.O.)

Often times these different mermaid
myths end in murder or madness or
with some ghost-sailor in a
terrible watery grave at the bottom
of the ocean, searching for his
lost love.

--MC carries his board down the beach at Leo.

--MC enters the coffee shop at Universal. Caitlyn is in line
and waves him forward. She says something that makes him
laugh.

--MC paddles for a wave at Zeros.

--A pod of dolphins move through the water, just outside the
lineup.

--the bobbing kelp heads look like curious long-haired girls
moving with the tide.

INT. VENICE BUNGALOW -- NIGHT

MC and Caitlyn have been drinking and smoking weed, and are
really loose and happy. They have a sweet ease together.

MC plays "Go You Chicken Fat Go" on an old record player.
It's an old exercise record, with Robert Preston giving
musical instructions for a bunch of different exercises.

ROBERT PRESTON

(singing)

Push ups
Every morning
Ten times!

MC

Do it!

CAITLYN

Fuck you Robert Preston!

ROBERT PRESTON

(singing)

Not just
Now and then

CAITLYN
What does that even mean?

ROBERT PRESTON
(singing)
Give that chicken fat
Back to the chickens
And don't be chicken again!

CAITLYN
He's fat-shaming chickens! Fucking
Music Man--

They try to do everything in the song. They have it cranked up super loud, and are laughing so hard they can't get their breath to do the exercises.

They pause only to take big hits off a bottle of wine and smoke a joint.

They wrestle over the wine bottle, laughing more, Caitlyn clearly dominating until MC finally flips her over and pins her down.

CAITLYN (CONT'D)
Ow, my pussy!

MC
(horrified)
Oh God I'm so sorry--

CAITLYN
(busting his chops)
Got you!

They both laugh uproariously; this is the funniest thing anybody's ever said.

INT. VENICE BUNGALOW -- NIGHT

Outside, Tom Vincenzo pounds on the door. MC sobers up immediately, terrified of his landlord.

INTERCUT AS NECESSARY

TOM VINCENZO
Hey, Matthew! What the hell is
going on? Is someone hurt?

CAITLYN

Yeah, he broke my pussy!

They lose it again.

TOM VINCENZO

What?!

MC

(mouths)

Did I?

CAITLYN

(mouths)

No!

MC

Nothing. Everything's fine.

TOM VINCENZO

It's too noisy, dude! I don't know what you're up to...but don't make me raise the rent on you...you're here because I'm a nice guy!

MC

No, that's really not true. I'm here because I do all your shit work and still pay rent--

CAITLYN

Yeah, dickhead!

TOM VINCENZO

What? Who is that?

CAITLYN

Fuck you, asshole!

MC

(trying to shush her)

No one!

TOM VINCENZO

I don't know who you are in there, but maybe you should go.

CAITLYN

Eat me, Tom!

MC
 (to Caitlyn)
 Hey, hey.
 (to Tom Vincenzo)
 Tom, why don't you back off and
 we'll talk later.

CAITLYN
 Yeah, Tom. Why don't you fuck off
 and never talk later?

MC
 Shhhh!

TOM VINCENZO
 No more disrespectful guests.

MC CAITLYN

TOM VINCENZO
 Yeah, really. When you have a dis--

MC
 You're not my dad, Tom.

TOM VINCENZO
 Don't make me be your dad.

Beat, as even Tom Vincenzo realizes that's weird.

MC
 What does that even...Jesus. Just,
 please. I'm trying to have private
 time in my home here.

TOM VINCENZO
 You have to earn that.

MC
 No, I'm a tenant.

TOM VINCENZO
 And it's my home! And you
 certainly want me to continue to
 look the other way, if you know
 what I mean--

MC
 That's bullshit, Tom!

CAITLYN
What the hell does that mean?

MC
Nothing.

TOM VINCENZO
It means you can go, rude guest!

MC
Go, chicken fat! Go!

CAITLYN
Go, chicken fart!

INT. MC'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Deep in the night. MC is asleep next to Caitlyn. They're both kind of passed out. POUNDING on the door.

MC looks at Caitlyn sleeping and goes to the door. Opens it.

MC
Look, Tom, I need you to back off--

He stops talking. In the moonlight of his porch, GIRL, wet and dressed only in her skinsuit. And...is that seaweed in her hair?

MC (CONT'D)
Oh, shit.

GIRL
Hi.

MC
How did you...oh my God...hi. You look...are you okay? I mean you look great, but, are you--

GIRL
I need to lie down. I'd like to lie down in your thing...your bed.

MC
Oh, shit. Shit. Okay.

GIRL
(sniffing?)
There's someone here...

MC
Well, actually--yes, and--

Girl walks in.

MC (CONT'D)
Um, ok...

INT. BEDROOM

MC enters the bedroom, where Caitlyn sleeps.

MC
Hey...Caitlyn...

Caitlyn stirs not at all.

MC (CONT'D)
You...can you...

He shakes her a little but she still doesn't wake, passed out from prodigious amounts of weed and wine.

He sees a glass of water by the bed. Picks it up and pours some on her head.

CAITLYN
Aaahh!
(looking around)
What the fuck! What the fuck?!

She's semi-awake, and MC has replaced the water on the bedside.

CAITLYN (CONT'D)
What happened?

MC
I don't know. No idea. Can
you...I really need to sleep.
Would you mind--I had an awesome
time--

CAITLYN
(just getting it)
Did you pour water on my head? And
now you're kicking me out?

MC
I mean...I wouldn't--

CAITLYN
Fuck you. Seriously?

EXT./INT. MC'S HOUSE, VENICE -- NIGHT

Caitlyn is leaving.

CAITLYN
Dude, you have some issues.

MC
I do. You're absolutely right.
I'm sorry.

Girl is doing what almost looks like Tai Chi in the small living room, but is not Tai Chi at all.

CAITLYN
Please don't tell me she's one of
the mer people.

MC just looks back at her.

MC
That makes it sound--

She shakes her head.

CAITLYN
Oh my god she is. Jesus, MC.

INSIDE the house, Girl watches Caitlyn go. Caitlyn turns to go and just catches sight of Girl at the window. She turns and looks at MC.

CAITLYN (CONT'D)
Whatever, Matthew.

GIRL
(flatly, mirroring)
Whatever, Matthew.

INT./EXT. VENICE BUNGALOW -- NIGHT

As MC turns away from watching Caitlyn drive away he turns back around to see Girl in his bed, sprawled out and sound asleep.

He watches her sleep. Looks closely at her. He looks behind her ears...gills?

MC

No gills...

He catches himself saying this. What the fuck is happening to him?

He realizes Girl is still in the weird skinsuit...he looks closely at it. Is it Spandex? Or some kind of strange synthetic? Or? He tries to lift it away from Girl's body so he can look at it but it appears to somehow be stuck to her skin...it seems impossible, but, really, it won't lift away from her skin.

He gets really close to Girl's breast, we think he's going to kiss it, but instead he gets his EYE right up close and tries to examine the fabric. He gets his glasses. No better. Sighs with frustration.

He carefully gets up and walks to the--

SECOND BEDROOM

Which is padlocked. He reaches up and over the door frame and finds a key to the padlock. Unlocks it and opens the door.

INT. SECOND BEDROOM

Is in fact a

GROW ROOM

Filled with marijuana plants in hydroponic grow vats in careful rows in various stages of growth. The lights are an amalgam of T5s and LED's, and large fans circulate the air in the room, causing the plants to move and sway with the oscillations .

He grabs a small hand-held microscope. Before leaving the room, he smiles a satisfied smile at the plants quietly humming along and quietly making money.

MC (V.O.)

Okay, so that's how else I paid for the bungalow in Venice near the beach. A modest grow operation.

(MORE)

MC (V.O.) (CONT'D)

People in Venice smoke a ton of weed. And this was before it was legal so like, it was very profitable and highly illegal. Tom Vincenzo took a percentage to let me run the grow op while he looked the other way. I developed a hybrid called Critical Purple Kandy Kush. Super Skull-fucky.

(beat)

I have a green thumb.

MC walks back to the bedroom, where Girl is still sprawled out sleeping. He takes the handheld microscope and clicks on the small light on it.

MC (V.O.)

The handheld microscope is used to check the trichome development in the buds before harvest. You want them moving into amber, but not too amber, in case you're wondering.

It illuminates Girl's skinsuit in an eerily beautiful way, and it shimmers like a dead calm midnight ocean.

He holds the scope near to the fabric. He looks like an insane jeweler, one eye winked shut, mouth agape.

MACRO -- THE "SKINSUIT"

Is beautiful under the 'scope as well...but, is it moving? Living? It appears to be a living thing, full of life and different organisms...it's impossible...it's clothing.

MC (V.O.)

There are moments in your life where you meet Mystery head-on with no padding, no plausible explanation, when the mysterious and even the miraculous is staring back at you, uninflected and perfect under a microscope.

MC

What the fuck? Jesus. That's impossible.

And Girl throws her arm around him and pulls him close.

GIRL

Yes. Yes, okay now.

MC

Yes, what?

GIRL

I don't know. I was asleep and you were on top of me.

MC

I wasn't. No. I was--

GIRL

You were over me. I thought you--

MC

No, I did, I do, I really. Um. I had my hand-held microscope--

She looks puzzled for a second, then--

GIRL

You already had sex tonight. With the angry girl.

MC

No, the angry girl and I were just, like, having fun and drinking and stuff--

GIRL

Why didn't you have sex?

MC

I don't know. She's really smart, and we laugh a lot. But maybe I've been, like, thinking a lot about...you, I guess.

GIRL

You're nervous. Are you afraid of me?

MC

I'm...not at all.

(beat)

Yeah, I guess I am. Totally.

GIRL
Are you afraid of Bryce?

MC
Uh, not...maybe?

GIRL
You should be afraid of Bryce. But not me. I won't hurt you. I like you. Bryce will hurt you, or kill you. Maybe hurt you badly and then slowly kill you. He's a very bad...person. Haha. He's a "person."

MC
Really? Because...really?
That's...that's terrible. I really enjoyed talking to Bryce.

GIRL
(not listening)
Terrible.

She cuddles into MC's shoulder. He's touched by this intimate gesture. Then she keeps cuddling, and he realizes that she's itching her head and neck on him, like a wild animal. And she's asleep again.

He looks at her. Yes, he is afraid. And fascinated. And excited. She whimpers in her sleep and twitches her hand to her cheek, like a beautiful sleeping hound. Still sleeping,

SHE GRABS HIS FACE

And she holds on hard.

Slides down his jaw to his neck and starts to throttle him.

Her grip is massively strong. MC gurgles and struggles, grabs her hands, his feet kick as he starts to grey out.

She lets go and pulls him close as he gasps for air. She wakes up and kisses him (or something much more elemental and terrifying), as he fights for consciousness through ecstasy--

MC
What the...stop...please...

He gasps, trying to get enough air to stay conscious, as she literally tears off his clothes and bites his neck, chest, arms...it is feral and weird and deeply animalistic--

SMASH TO

NEXT MORNING

MC wakes up, Girl is nowhere to be seen. Relief. And disappointment.

But he savors the moment to himself to take stock, breathing deeply and appreciating that simple act.

But something feels a little off; he reaches down and touches his chest, collar bone, and feels something rough/different on his skin.

BATHROOM

He looks in the mirror and there's an entire PATCH of beautiful luminescent material on his chest. He brushes it off but it moves not at all. So he goes to pull it off, it must have stuck somehow--

Nope.

Harder now.

MC (CONT'D)

Ow! Fuck.

And harder...

MC (CONT'D)

Agh, Jesus...

He gets a fingernail under it and really pulls...

He's bleeding now, just a little, and panicking.

He takes the knife part of some fingernail scissors and digs under the skinsuit material.

MC (CONT'D)

Gotcha.

And now he digs his fingers into the space he's created and tears the skinsuit off, along with all the flesh on his chest, revealing muscle and bone and stark sinew...

He SCREAMS as he holds a mass of living skinsuit torn from its host, and it's writhing like a beached stingray, and looks at his anatomy-book-chest stripped of flesh and he SCREAMS LOUDER, now sustained and anguished and--

HE WAKES UP

And rushes into the bathroom, looks at his chest. No skinsuit, no torn anatomy-book-flesh...but he is pretty banged up.

He looks around for Girl. She's not there.

INT. CHESTERFIELD OFFICES, UNIVERSAL STUDIOS -- DAY

MC sits at the table, almost unrecognizable. One eye is almost shut, shrouded by a nasty bruise, and many other hickies, bite marks and bruises are visible, even though he's tried to cover them up.

Caitlyn glowers at him. The rest of the group checks him out, enjoying the tension and enjoying watching him squirm.

Kevin, the moderator of the group, sits at the head of the table taking stock of the shit show. Sighs.

Ken, the other Chesterfield exec, appears at the door and he and Kevin exchange a look.

KEVIN

Hey MC, can we talk to you outside
for a second?

MC sighs deeply....fuuuuuuck.

EXT. UNIVERSAL LOT -- DAY

They're standing awkwardly around a teak table with a "palapa"-style umbrella.

KEN

Do you wanna--
(offering him a seat)
Like--

MC looks at it like it's the electric chair.

MC

No--I--

KEVIN
I guess we can just--

KEN
--Stand. Yeah.

MC
Yeah, ok. So...I feel like--

KEVIN (CONT'D)
So, yeah, we're just feeling
like...it's all just a
little...like, intense.

MC (CONT'D)
Yeah, no, I totally agree. It's
been--
(hands around his head as
if it's blowing up)
P-kchyooo!
(pitching now)
And, like, I just want you guys to
know, I am one hundred percent--

KEN
Yeah--

MC
--cool--

KEVIN
--and this story you pitched--

MC
I know! Crazy, right?

KEN
Yeah, but--

KEVIN
But like, actually crazy...just too
fucking weird and disjointed and--

MC
But it's true! It's totally true!

He catches himself hearing how weird that sounds:

MC (CONT'D)
--I mean, it's--a true story. In
its metaphorical way--

KEN
The mer people.

He and Kevin exchange a nervous glance.

MC

When you say it like that it just sounds--

KEVIN

How does it sound to you, MC?

MC

Okay, point taken. It sounds a little crazy.

(almost under his breath)

But it's true...I mean, yeah.

Kevin and Ken look at each other; decide something.

KEVIN

We think you should take a break from the workshop--

MC

What? No.

KEN

Yeah.

KEVIN

Indefinitely.

MC

No! Wait, what? No, please--it's--fuck, fuck! I'm writing my id! Like Steven said to!

KEVIN

Steven said to write your id, not live your id.

KEN

We heard about what happened last night. You can't just treat members of your peer group like that when you're working with them every day.

MC

But...no...it wasn't like...Caitlyn and I didn't...I like Caitlyn, a lot, but this was...you can't possibly understand what this was.

KEVIN
 (off MC's battered face)
 I have a pretty good idea.

MC
 No, no...she doesn't...she's an...
animal.
 (realizing how that
 sounds)
 I mean--an actual--

KEN
 Got it.

MC
 No, no! She's literally like a wild-
 -her clothes are like...organisms!
 (Again, he realizes how
 crazy he sounds.)
Fuck.

Yeah, none of this is helping.

KEN
 You need to clear out your stuff.

MC
 (defeated)
 Okay.
 (brightening)
 Can I still hand in a script at the
 end of the session? Because it's
 gonna be...so cool.

Ken and Kevin look at each other, loathe to pass up a chance
 at something just weird enough to maybe possibly be good:

KEVIN
 Yeah, okay. But we need you to
 keep some distance from the group
 and not disrupt them.

MC
 Okay. Boom. Done. "Pariah status."

INT. CHESTERFIELD OFFICES, UNIVERSAL STUDIOS -- DAY

MC enters the writers room and all conversation ceases.
Everyone watches as he goes and gets his laptop and notebook.
Sidles up to Caitlyn.

MC
Thanks a lot, Caitlyn. They're
kicking me out.

CAITLYN
(deadpan)
Oh, that's terrible.

MC
Hey, I'm sorry about what happened.
Really. I just had to--

CAITLYN
Please don't talk about the fucking
mer people.

Dylan snickers.

MC
What's so funny, douchebag?

DYLAN
Not you, dickhead. You're a fucking
tragedy.

MC
Fuck you, Dyldo.

DYLAN
Fuck you, Carnahan, you artsy-
fartsy piece of shit...I'ma be
working with Jerry Bruckheimer
while you're waiting on us at Spago
to raise money for your shit art
film...think you're better than the
rest of us with your crazy-ass
bullshit mermaid stor--

MC swings his laptop bag hard into the side of Dylan's head,
knocking him to the ground as Kevin and Ken re-enter.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Oh shit, I'm bleeding!

MC
No you're not.

KEVIN
That's it...you're out.

MC
No! He--

KEN
Get the fuck out. Out.

All the other writers look shocked. Tim laughs.

Dylan gets to his feet and rushes MC, knocking him to the ground and taking a couple of hard swings, but there's not much there. MC pushes him off and holds his hands up in a gesture of truce.

They both stand there a second, breathing hard. Dylan also holds his hands up in a truce gesture. MC relaxes a little, just as Dylan kicks him in the balls, hard. MC doubles over.

KEVIN
Hey!

CAITLYN
Dylan!

MC stands up and tries to muster a shred of dignity. No luck, dignity non-mustered. He picks up his laptop case and walks out.

INT. VENICE BUNGALOW -- LATER

MC walks up to the gate of his house. It's broken.

MC
No...

He pushes through the door, also broken and pushed in.

INSIDE

The house and straight to the grow room. Opens the door.

GROW ROOM

It's been completely stripped. Any plant that was growing is now gone, pulled without craft or care from the grow op. He runs around checking to see if any of the few remnants are salvageable.

MC

No no no no no no no...

MC sees the tiny handheld microscope sitting there. He sighs.

MC (CONT'D)

No.

INT. MC'S HOUSE -- LATER

He's lying face down on the bed. Finally gets up and grabs his keys...

EXT. PCH -- LATER

MC trolls PCH up around County Line on his Yamaha, board strapped.

NEAR LEO CARILLO

MC pulls into the lot. He watches as a small pod of dolphins thread their way northward.

Taking this as a sign, he parks his bike and starts suiting up.

He paddles out toward the rock, backing off a little when he sees the scrum of locals in the water eyeballing him. One of them hitches his head in an aggro nod:

HEAD-HITCH LOCAL

Move down, kook!

MC

You move down!

He immediately regrets it and starts paddling away.

HEAD-HITCH LOCAL

You wanna go, bitch?

MC
 (half-hearted)
You go.

Paddling away, MC sees something in the water...is it a jellyfish? More signs of sea life, this is good. He paddles closer to the glistening miracle to investigate....

It's a USED CONDOM drifting in a small pool of flotsam. He steers away from both the condom and the hostile locals.

WIDE SHOT

Of MC bobbing in the water alone.

MC (V.O.)
 And then, like some magic trick,
 she's just there, and...it's all so
 fucking beautiful.

IN THE WATER NOW

Girl is there. She has her weird longboard and skinsuit, and she paddles right up to him and pulls him off his board and under the water.

UNDERWATER

She kisses and bites him. But he's loving it.

MC (V.O.)
 ...Like the animals we both are
 finally meet one another and we're
 flowing together--

A small PUFF OF BLOOD in the water as we see him react to her bite, still totally into it. She rips at his wetsuit, which is all but impossible to pull off, but somehow she gets it down and forces him inside her. He looks utterly astonished; holy shit, he's fucking a mermaid in the ocean and it's awesome!

He tries to lift his head up for a breath but she won't let him. He keeps trying to get to the surface.

She doesn't like that, and this time her fangs are really visible as she bites his face, a manic grin spreading over her visage--she rips and tears at his face, the flesh and blood drifting haphazardly in the shore break.

We can see the mask of his face; teeth, gums, nose hole
exposed as if he's already a grinning skeleton in some pirate
story--

WHAM!

The kitchen door hits him squarely in the back and he opens
 his eyes in

NEPTUNE'S NET

Where he sits at his computer typing a version of the scene
 we just saw.

Fuck. The BUSBOY looks at him.

MC

Sorry.

BUSBOY

You're sorry?

MC

Um--

BUSBOY

Because I hit you with the kitchen
 door?

MC

Yeah but I--

BUSBOY

After they sat you where it's not
 even a seat because they knew you'd
 just sit and nurse a coke and a
 fish taco all day?

MC

Okay. Point taken.

BUSBOY

Little self-respect, Homes. This
 from a humble busboy.

MC

Right, yeah.

MC looks at the laptop and starts typing. A Waiter comes out
 of the kitchen and SLAM! Hits MC again.

MC (CONT'D)
 Fuckin...really?

WAITER
Disculpe, my brother. Might wanna
 inch a little further against the
 wall.

MC
 (twisting impossibly,
 quietly raging)
 Thank you. I'm good. I'm good.

MONTAGE

THE INK SPOTS -- "I DON'T WANT TO SET THE WORLD ON FIRE"

-- MC cleans up his grow room and plants a new crop of pot plants. He is meticulous and a little manic. He wields the hand-held microscope to check plant health and early signs of trichome development.

INK SPOTS
 I don't want to set the world on
 fire
 I just want to start a flame in
 your heart
 In my heart I have but one desire
 And that one is you
 No other will do...

--MC sits at his laptop, typing furiously

--He works in the compound's yard, weeding, with Tom Vincenzo watching him.

INK SPOTS (CONT'D)
 (spoken)
 Honey I love you too much
 I just want to start a great big
 flame
 Down in your heart
 You see, way down inside of me
 Darlin' I have only one desire
 And that one desire is you
 And I know, nobody else ain't gonna
 do...

-- MC trolls PCH on the Yamaha with his board. No sign of Girl or Bryce and the Bikers.

-- MC sits as Tim reads some pages. He finishes reading, puts the pages down and looks across at MC with a concerned expression.

INK SPOTS (CONT'D)

(singing)

I don't want to set the world on
fire

I just want to start a flame in
your heart...

-- MC at his gate with groceries. A SKETCH DUDE sidles up:

SKETCH DUDE

HeyyouTom?

MC

Huh?

SKETCH DUDE

You got some a that sweet Critical
Purple Kandy Kush?

MC pauses, brow furrowed.

MC

Tom?

SKETCH DUDE

Yeahyeah, Tom, bro!

MC nods his head in the direction of Tom's house.

INSIDE MC'S HOUSE

MC looks out from a slightly parted curtain at Sketch Dude at Tom's door, Tom answering the door, looking around, letting the guy in.

Seconds later the guy comes out stuffing a bag in his pocket...

MC

Mother. Fucker.

EXT. TOM VINCENZO'S

MC stands at Tom's door. Bangs on the door. Bangs harder.

TOM VINCENZO (O.C.)
I thought you only had two fifty...

He opens the door to see MC.

TOM VINCENZO (CONT'D)
What?

MC
Seriously?

TOM VINCENZO
What, Matthew? The fenceposts have
to set for another 24 hours.

MC
Are you fucking...you stole my weed
and you fucked my house up.

TOM VINCENZO
It's my house.

MC
You're a fucking asshole.

TOM VINCENZO
(so pleased)
What are you gonna do? Call the
police? This is for your theatrics
with that crazy prostitute the
other night--

MC
She was definitely not a prostitute--

TOM VINCENZO
And don't think you're not gonna
have to pay your rent or do your
work--

MC
Fucking asshole.

TOM VINCENZO
Because that's a hundred percent
non-negotiable--

MC
Jesus, who are you? You're a
fucking villain!

He walks away. Tom Vincenzo gleefully shouts after him:

TOM VINCENZO
(quoting Shakespeare,
delighted)
"I am a plain-dealing villain!"

MC's phone rings inside his house.

MC
Hello?

He listens for a moment...

MC (CONT'D)
Where?

EXT. FIRE-RAVAGED TUNA CANYON HILLS

MC, deep up in Tuna Canyon, pulls up on the whiny little Yamaha through a sea of massive Harleys and Triumphs and crazy customs that look like they're forged from some crazy sci-fi metal.

The entire landscape around them is blighted and burned-out from whatever most recent wildfire devastation has rolled through.

Tents and sun awnings and a kind of temporary village has been set up here. Dozens of fucking badass custom hogs out in the sun, some stripped for parts, some undergoing repair, most are the nicest and often pretty much the only possessions these guys have.

These guys and women are definitely of a tribe, though they are black, brown, indigenous-looking, weathered white, they almost all have these tentacle-like dreads, the slick eel-skin-like leathers with a strange trident insignia, the almost god-like, larger-than-life bearing.

There are about 50 of Bryce's crew, and he's clearly the leader or at least the Alpha Dog of this pack. As MC heads toward him, his minions push in tighter to Bryce in a protective phalanx.

BRYCE
Matthew Carnahan!

MC winces slightly at being so identified, puttering his way across the blighted hillside toward Bryce. He pulls up and steps off his bike.

MC
Hey.

Bryce just smirks. But his usual bravado is replaced by something different. Need. He needs something, which immediately puts MC into a more powerful place.

MC (CONT'D)
What's up?

BRYCE
I wanted you to see where we are.
How we're living.
(stepping back)
This is it

MC is unsure what Bryce is after with this.

MC
Um, yeah, it's super...rustic.

Bryce shakes his head.

BRYCE
Man, do you ever say anything
that's not bullshit?

MC doesn't have an answer for this.

MC (V.O.)
I felt like a yes would be bullshit
and a no would be bullshit.

Bryce sees it land on MC.

BRYCE
Sorry, man. I'm just super-stressed.

MC
Why? What's up?

BRYCE
It's...you totally wouldn't
understand--

MC
Try me.

BRYCE
No, it's--no fuckin way. Sorry I
wasted your time.

MC
I'm here. It was a pain in the ass
to get here. You asked me to come.
So...

BRYCE
Yeah, I know.
(beat)
We need to try to get to
Kaho'olawe.

MC
I don't know what that is.

Bryce is holding some kind of ball in his hand. He throws it from one hand to the other. And again. And again, but this time it splatters into CLAYMATION, a la Art Clokey (Gumby) claymation mixed with Leo Lionni ocean collage (Swimmy).

CLAYMATION OF THE STORY OF THE PEOPLE OF THE SEA

BRYCE (V.O.)
I told you the sea won't let us
back in. We used to be able to
move back and forth, to spend time
on land when the sea became too
dirty or dangerous. When we wanted
something, when we felt a certain
way.

First we see the People of the Sea, Claymation Bryce featured, getting off their motorcycles and entering the ocean and becoming mer people, not what we are used to when we think "mermaid," but something more animalistic than human.

BRYCE (V.O.)

But after a while, we spent too much time on land, we smelled and looked like the people of the land, and finally the Sea Mother and the Sea Father rejected us, they wouldn't let us return to the Great Mother Ocean...

The People of the Sea get off their bikes and wade into the water, but this time they kick and swim and stay human in form and make their way sputtering and defeated back to the land.

Claymation Bryce looks out at the Ocean and shakes his fists.

BRYCE (V.O.)

And now the only hope to return to the Great Mother is the true Sea Gate below Kaho'olawe. The Sea Gate recognizes the true People of the Sea.

Claymation of Maui, the massive Haleakala Volcano, the misty hills down to the ocean, and several miles off the coast, the empty island of Kaho'olawe.

BRYCE (V.O.)

Kaho'olawe is a *wahi puna*, a sacred place, the place born of the union between the earth father and sky mother, bedded on the Great Ocean.

We travel over the claymation landscape, over Maui and all the way to the sacred and tragic island of Kaho'olawe.

We see the bikers paddling traditional-but-badass canoes out into the ocean and at some point the canoes morph into schools of People of the Sea, porpoising through the surf, and through the surface and--

DOWN INTO THE OCEAN

Where they SWIM through MASSIVE GATES OF SEAWEED surrounded by THOUSANDS of SEA ANIMALS, TIGER SHARKS, TURTLES, WHALES...schools of SHIMMERING BAITFISH.

RESUME SCENE

MC

Whoa. So...

BRYCE

We have to get there, man. We're fucked if we don't get there. Soon. We're talking flights and canoes and a ton of logistics to get out there...

MC thinks for a minute.

MC

I have something.

BRYCE

That's great. I knew it.

MC

But you'd have to do something for me too.

BRYCE

Yeah?

PRE-LAP THE FOLLOWING OVER

TOM VINCENZO'S HOUSE -- MAGIC HOUR

MC (V.O. PRE-LAP)

There's this guy. He stole from me. You can have what he stole. You can have it all. But you have to tell him to leave me the fuck alone. Forever.

The entire "SPAWN OF POSEIDON" Biker Gang, led by Bryce, pull up outside Tom Vincenzo's house.

MUSIC -- LOVE BURNS by BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB

As they dismount from their hogs, the MUSIC RISES as the ROARING of the bikes subsides. The MUSIC BECOMES LOUDER AND LOUDER as Bryce and the Spawn approach the door...

EVEN LOUDER.

As Tom Vincenzo opens the door to check out the commotion...

STILL LOUDER.

Tom Vincenzo blanches as he sees the giant and terrifying Spawn of Poseidon in all their glory. Maybe the tentacle dreads are moving a little, like these guys are seething, writhing--

CRAZY FUCKING LOUD.

As Bryce politely shakes Tom Vincenzo's hand and for a second Tom looks relieved until Bryce violently **SHOVES** him back into the house and follows him inside.

MUSIC SMASHES TO A STOP.

And we hear Tom Vincenzo begging and pleading.

EXT. UNIVERSAL/AMBLIN STUDIOS -- DAY

BINOCULAR VIEW

POV through fancy military-style binoculars of the Chesterfield crew beginning to gather for the day. Dylan says something to Caitlyn and she laughs at his handsome face.

MC
Fucking face.

ON MC

MC looks through the binoculars at the whole Chesterfield scene, absolutely seething but outwardly cool.

MC gets off his Yamaha and strides toward the Chesterfield bungalow, a copy of **VARIETY** draped awkwardly over his arm like a waiter's towel...

He walks up and sees a surprised-looking Tim, Caitlyn, and then an even more-surprised Dylan, who first raises, then furrows his brow. Before anyone has time to say anything MC drops the **VARIETY** and raises his arm and fires a shot from a suppressed .22 (the assassin's choice!), taking a chunk of Dylan's cheek off, but otherwise not harming him.

DYLAN
Hey, fuck man!

Then MC aims more carefully and from a shorter distance and pierces one dreamy blue eye and then his forehead and Dylan goes down like someone cut his puppet strings.

JASON STATHAM runs in and curb-stomps Dylan.

JASON STATHAM
And your fuckin Jason Statham
vehicle sucked! Next time write
your id like Steven told you!

MC looks at the gun.

MC
Why would I use a silencer when I'm
doing a statement shooting? Why
would I even use a gun at all? I'm
totally anti-gun--

DYLAN
(sitting up, entire skull
ruined)
Because you're a fucking tool.

MC
Can I just have my fantasy--

JASON STATHAM
It is kinda shit, mate.

MC
Shut up, diver!

SMASH TO

MC sitting on his Yamaha with a pair of shitty binoculars.

EXT. UNIVERSAL/AMBLIN BACKLOT

And now we see MC near the LA River entrance to Amblin with a
pair of shitty binoculars watching the Chesterfielders...

POV SHITTY BINOCULARS

As they go about their business.

RESUME SCENE

He sighs and starts the bike, drives away...

EXT. MC'S HOUSE -- LATER

MC pulls up on the Yamaha and sees Tom Vincenzo out in the yard gardening. He sees MC and turns sheet-white, rushes inside his house. MC smiles and goes inside.

MC (V.O.)

It was worth the whole crop just to have Tom Vincenzo terrified of me.

INT. MC'S HOUSE -- LATER

MC sits at the table writing.

He types away; typetypetypetype....type type.

We see the words: "MC pulls up on the Yamaha and sees Tom Vincenzo out in the yard gardening. He sees MC and turns sheet-white, rushes inside his house."

EXT. "STAIRCASE" BEACH --DAY

MC and Girl lie on the beach, no one around. Their surfboards in the sand.

MUSIC: "SEA OF LOVE" (FEMALE COVER BY THEA)

They lie at the shore, the surf washing over them. MC looks in Girl's eyes, utterly smitten. She looks back at him with a level of curiosity and perhaps amusement.

SONG

Come with me my love
To the sea
The sea of love
I want to tell you
How much I love you.

MC wants to break through with her.

MC

Do you know what love is?

GIRL

I know what love is.

MC

What is it? To you.

GIRL
I know what love is.

MC
Okay.

Maybe for the first time, she seems transparent and somewhat vulnerable.

GIRL
It's when you go together.

MC
Where do you go?

GIRL
Everywhere.

He looks at her.

MC
Do you love me?

She looks at him for a long moment. She puzzles.

GIRL
We can't go everywhere.

MC
You mean, like, through the Gate?

GIRL
Through the Gate, to the Father,
the Mother, to the Great Below.

MC
Could you love me anyway?

GIRL
(simply saying it)
I could love you anyway.

SONG
Do you remember
When we met?
That's the day
I knew you were my pet
I want to tell you
How much I love you.

MC (V.O.)

I didn't know what was real. And I didn't care. She was a Nereid or mermaid or a woman or a Selkie or a piece of kelp, but whatever she was, I wanted to disappear into the ocean with her.

MC looks at Girl. Her eyes are closed and she's dozed off, having some kind of animal dreams, twitching and making strange vocalizations.

MC kicks his feet in the water, then kicks them together, mermaid (or nereid) style.

He waits for something to happen. Nothing does. He flippers his feet again.

SONG

Come with me my love
To the sea
The sea of love
I want to tell you
How much I love you.

INT. MC'S HOUSE -- LATER

MC is writing. He has a mostly-empty bottle of wine and some tortilla chips and hasn't moved from the spot in a while.
Typetypetype type...typetypetype--

Someone bangs on the door and MC leaps up, completely pulled out of his reverie--

MC

Who is it?

He hears the doorknob.

MC (CONT'D)

It's locked, you think I'm an idiot?

The door opens and Bryce stands there.

MC (CONT'D)

Fuck. How'd you do that?

BRYCE
I need your help.

MC
(gesturing toward Tom
Vincenzo's house)
Didn't I kinda already, like--

BRYCE
It's not enough. We got around 5K
for everything that was left. Plus
the guys smoked a ton.

MC
(under his breath)
Aw seriously?

BRYCE
I really appreciate it, but it's
not even gonna get two guys and
their bikes over--

MC
Five K? That was like 25K worth of
product there!

BRYCE
What can I say? It is what it is,
right?

MC
Well, I guess, but--

BRYCE
We need a bigger infusion of cash.

MC
Hey man. I hear you, but I'm
barely paying rent as it is. I
don't think I can help--

BRYCE
We need at least a hundred grand.

MC
(wrapping things up)
Wow, well, I wish I could help you--

BRYCE
Please, anything.

MC
Yeah, man, I don't have anything
like that. I don't even know
anyone who--

Something occurs to MC.

BRYCE
What?

MC
Fuck. Fuck. No. Goddamn it. I
don't even know--

BRYCE
Please. We need to get to the
gate.

MC
Oh, c'mon, man.

MC sighs and pours some more wine.

BRYCE
Hit me.

MC
Huh?

Nods to the wine. MC grabs a glass and pours the rest of the
wine for Bryce. They both sit down.

MC (CONT'D)
Okay, I know a guy, I work for him
sometimes. He deals in
horses...like, semen.

Bryce is tipping the wine down his throat and almost spit-
takes.

BRYCE
Say again?

MC
Horse cum.

SMASH TO

A BEAUTIFUL PORTRAIT

Of Huell Bascombe, III, standing next to his Sire, "Biscuits and Gravy."

SMASH TO

EXT. HUELL BASCOMBE, III HOUSE -- AFTERNOON

MC shows up with his chef's whites and knife roll. He looks out at CRIME SCENE TAPE.

MC
(sotto)
Fuckfuckfuckfuck.

MC walks toward the house...

SUPER SLOW MOTION

As he heads to the job, he side-eyes TWO DETECTIVES talking to a couple of UNIFORMS. And Huell Bascombe, III. They barely glance at him.

INT. HUELL BASCOMBE III HOUSE -- AFTERNOON

MC is grilling vegetables and prepping dinner...the female DETECTIVE (AUDREY BASCOMBE), 50s, a six-footer, enters with Huell. Huell looks at MC and grimaces.

HUELL BASCOMBE
Well, maybe it was bound happen.
My sire is very well-known.

AUDREY
Huge.

HUELL BASCOMBE
They took everything.

MC
What would everyt--

HUELL BASCOMBE
All the semen.
(conspiratorial)
These were pros.

AUDREY
(deadpan sarcastic)
Semen pros.

HUELL BASCOMBE
Haha. Matthew, this is Detective
Audrey Bascombe.

AUDREY
Hi.

HUELL BASCOMBE
Also my ex-wife.

That registers with MC.

AUDREY
Pretty amazing detective. Only took
me 17 years to figure out this one
was gay.

Huell throws up his arms dramatically.

HUELL BASCOMBE
What can I say? I'm a butch ole
cowboy. We're very lucky to have
Audrey's help on this.

MC
Any ideas who it might be?

AUDREY
Number one suspect is this guy...

MC almost reacts, thinking she's accusing him...

Audrey gestures to Huell.

HUELL BASCOMBE
I am likely to come out way ahead
on the insurance. But obviously I
would never--

AUDREY
(to Huell)
But I'm gonna keep an eye on you.

She winks at MC.

MC
Well, I hope you guys figure out
who did it. Really sorry.
(smiles nervously, nods)
I'm gonna prep if that's cool.

HUELL BASCOMBE
Thanks buddy. Don't tell Steven
Spielberg, he'll steal my story!

MC
Haha, okay.

Huell leaves, MC trying to look busy.

AUDREY
Matthew?

MC
(turns)
Yeah.

AUDREY
Can I ask you one thing?

MC
Of course!

AUDREY
When you drove up and saw police
and crime scene tape, you didn't
come over and ask what happened and
if everyone was okay.

MC
Uh--

AUDREY
That seems a little strange.

MC
No, but that's...I didn't want to
be--

She looks at him and smiles. Nods. Shrugs.

MC (CONT'D)
--like, intrusive?

AUDREY
Yeah, it's all good. As people
like to say. Personally, I fuckin
hate that expression. Because it
really never is. "All good."
(barely a beat)
When I worked Pacific Division?

MC

Um--

AUDREY

We got a call. "Bad smell, haven't seen him for several days blah blah blah."

MC

Whew, well--

She locks into his eyes. He's in for this, whatever it is.

AUDREY

So we head out...these are the ones you'd rather take a pass on, but we're the bottom of the roster and there's no way this one doesn't fall to us.

MC closes his eyes, hating this.

MC opens his eyes.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

And halfway up the stairs you can smell it. And it's so bad it's just almost wrapped around to good, the smell is so sweet and fecund it's almost an orchid, but it's an orchid with blood and bile and piss and shit and a million organisms looking to gobble it all up. You with me? My partner, Rhett Wickham--we all called him Wet Rectum--he stopped and he couldn't even go in. He just folded up on the stairs.

MC looks back at her, afraid, but leaning in.

She looks into his eyes; her eyes are brimming with tears.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

And you look, and your eyes adjust and there it is: a guy, a John Doe, in this case a man named Rudy J.

(MORE)

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Pincus, had hanged himself and over the days his neck stretched all the way so he was just standing flat-footed on the floor looking at us with a six foot long neck--

MC

Oh. Wow.

AUDREY

--and then you can make out more stuff. His face looks...not even like it's made of flesh anymore but something more...fungible. And he looks... joyful. And amazed. Like --

She keeps talking but we hear MC's VO...

MC (V.O.)

And that's the moment I surrendered everything; my old self, my ambition, my preconceptions, my love, my hatred, my personality, my belief that people couldn't see exactly who I was and what I was up to. My...fucking...id.

MC looks at Audrey, now they're both crying. She wins. And it just pours out of him:

MC

I told a guy named Bryce. I don't know his last name or if he even has one or if Bryce is his name at all. He has a group, a gang. Bikers. Spawn of Poseidon.

AUDREY

(smiling)

There you go, buddy.

INT. MC'S HOUSE -- NEXT DAY

MC is working on his script, typing away...typetypetype...type...typetypetypetypetypetype.

He stops, sighs.

EXT. LEO CARILLO BEACH

MC out in the water. Looking across the expanse of sand and out into the water and to the horizon.

No sign of Girl.

INT. MC'S HOUSE, BEDROOM -- NIGHT

MC asleep in his bed.

MC POV OF GIRL

He opens his eyes to see Girl sitting on the bed looking at him, hair glistening magically in the moonlight coming through the banana trees. It looks like she's underwater, her tentacle dreads drifting.

MC
(dreamily)
Hiii.

Then MC sees, over her shoulder, Bryce.

BRYCE
(mocking him)
Hiiiiii...
(then dead serious)
You fucking Judas.

MC
Oh, no, please...

MC glances down and sees Bryce is holding a gleaming TRIDENT, barbed and needle/razor sharp.

MC (CONT'D)
Please, man, please, I just--

Girl smiles and kind of shrugs, Bryce raises the trident and plunges it into MC's face and twists, and we hear his carotid squelch, then pump bright red arterial blood in rhythmic spurts--

BANG BANG BANG!

MC opens his eyes. He's asleep at his desk and someone is banging on the door.

VOICE

Matthew! Please, open up!

MC gets up, completely disoriented, and makes his way to the door. He peeks out and sees Detective Audrey Bascombe looking back at him.

AUDREY

I can see you looking at me through the peephole. C'mon.

He opens the door, completely disoriented. Audrey looks tired and a little disheveled.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

You're alive. Good.

She shuts the door, locks it, looks back out the peephole

MC

(feeling his body, still
in the dream a little)
I am, I think I actually am.

AUDREY

Well, you're in an assload of danger. You made some really fucked up friends. This guy, Bryce, aka Brent, aka Brock, aka Bill Reinhardt, aka Douglas Frieze, aka about a million other names. He's a fucking operator. Him and his cousin, beautiful girl, Salma, aka Sally, aka Salia, aka Stefanie...they're Romany.

MC

I don't know what--

AUDREY

Romany. Gypsies.

MC

Gypsies? Like with the scarves and the little carriages?

AUDREY

Well, yeah, like 100 years ago, sure.

MC

Sorry, I just, I didn't even think that was a thing.

AUDREY

They're like 50th generation scammers, con artists.

MC

That seems like a generalization.

AUDREY

Matthew, these people, these Romany, this family, this gang, they're criminals. They tend to run any number of scams until they run dry, then they either move to a new place or start a new scam...insurance fraud, home invasion, blackmail...

MC takes this in, the first wave of body blows hitting him as he begins to make a new reality.

MC

No...these guys are not--fuck, really?

AUDREY

They are. Whatever you can imagine, you can't imagine. The Spawn of Poseidon, these guys have bodies.

MC

Doesn't every--

AUDREY

They've killed people. More than a few. Just nothing we've been able to build a case on.

MC stops. Shocked.

MC

It doesn't make sense, Audrey. I'm sure these aren't the right...people.

AUDREY

These are them, buddy. Really sorry to say. I mean, these guys are fuckin good. They've even convinced people they're a lost tribe of mermaids, or whatever, mer people--

MC

(to himself)

Tritons and Nereids...

We watch his heart beginning to break.

AUDREY

Can you believe that shit?

She looks at him. Oh no.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

Oh, buddy, please tell me they didn't--

MC

...But like, her wetsuit was made of microorganisms...

AUDREY

(as if to a child)

It's okay, these guys are pros, Matthew. It's okay.

MC

She...loves--

AUDREY

(it's worse than she thought)

Oh...

MC

How do you know they're not a lost mermaid tribe?

Audrey walks him over to his desk and sits him down.

AUDREY

I can put a car on your house,
because these guys don't let go of
their grip on you until they've
wrung every drop--

MC

(shaking his head)
No, that's okay. They've
already...wrung every drop.

INT. MC'S HOUSE -- LATER

MC is curled up on the floor naked. Light from the moon
bathing him in blue. We can see eyes, open wide, feral,
wrecked.

REAL MATTHEW CARNAHAN (V.O.)

Hey, it's me again, I just wanted
to say--

But MC looks up at the CAMERA and with rage and grief and
violence SMASHES his hand over the lens--

SMASH TO

INT. MC'S HOUSE -- NEXT DAY

Tim sits at the one other chair in the house smoking a
cigarette. MC has put on some surf trunks and sat up, but is
essentially emotionally unchanged from the previous scene.

TIM

You gotta stop getting high, MC.

MC

It's not that. I swear.

TIM

Might be that.

MC

It's not, Timbo. She's...real.
Caitlyn met her!

TIM

Yeah, she told me.

MC

Yeah, they totally met!

TIM

She didn't mention she was a mermaid.

MC

Did she mention that she had seaweed in her hair? Did she mention her clothes were alive?

Tim just sits there, dragging off his Marlboro Red, not breaking eye contact with MC.

They sit there for a long moment, Tim smoking, MC perseverating.

MC (CONT'D)

I looked at them under a microscope!

TIM

After heroic doses of your crazy weed and Mezcal.

MC

You know what? Get the fuck--just go, man.

TIM

Finish your script, MC. That's what you have. You're a writer, and you're okay at it. And if you keep doing it you're gonna keep getting better. So just do that; chop wood and carry water. At the end of the day, that's all you got in the world, not mermaids and tritons and whatever--

MC

Nereids. And Nøkken. Selkies. Demi--

TIM

No. Just your imagination, brother.

(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

That's what you have, and maybe one
a these days they'll let you tell
the stories. So keep writing em
down--

MC

Get the fuck outta my house, man.

TIM

Finish it. Finish your story.

MC

There are more things in heaven and
Earth, Horatio--

TIM

Fuck your fuckin Shakespeare, man.
And that's a shitty quote that has
nothing to do with what we're
talking about. Just sit down and
fuckin type your movie that might
maybe entertain some motherfuckers
someday...

MC

Fuck you, Tim. Fuck off outta my
house.

TIM

You'll be all right.

Tim goes to the door.

MC

C'I bum a couple smokes?

INT. MC'S HOUSE -- LATER

He sits at his spot, writing some more; it feels like the
last bit of chi, like what's left of any life force, is
tapping out into the keyboard...tytypetype. Type.

MC is drifting...

SMASH TO

REAL MATTHEW CARNAHAN

Oh, hey.

(looking at notes)

(MORE)

REAL MATTHEW CARNAHAN (CONT'D)

The legal team wanted me to read this: "Blah blah blah not literally true but in a period of mental instability I may have thought some or much of this was true..."

(looks away from notes)

No. Just. Fuck you, legal. This is what it is. This is my true mermaid story.

SMASH TO**RESUME SCENE**

MC's eyes open at the sound of motorcycles.

THE SOUND OF MANY BIG BIKES

MC opens his door and in the moonlight, a few dozen bikes, the full compliment of SPAWN OF POSEIDON.

BRYCE sits on his hog, flanked by the other Tritons and Nereids and minor and demi-gods, Cyclops, (aka Ruined Prison Tats) with his forehead eyeball tattoo. The moon is huge and they're bathed in blue light, almost like they're underwater.

MC

Hey, man, I totally didn't--

BRYCE

I just wanted to thank you.

MC

Oh, I...cool. Thanks.

BRYCE

You don't have to thank me for thanking you.

GIRL wheels up a giant DUAL SPORT MOTORCYCLE, a real Mad Max ripper, with board rack and a beautiful, otherworldly 9'2" noserider nestled in it.

MC

(suddenly 10 years old)

What? No. It's beautiful.

(realizing what's up)

Are you...is everyone leaving?

Bryce just looks at him stoically.

BRYCE

Some of us are leaving. Thanks to
you we have enough money to get out
to the Kaho'olawe gate.

Girl steps up and looks at him. Studies his face.

MC looks back at her.

MC

You're not going, are you? You
can't.

She just looks back at him, unreadable.

MC (CONT'D)

You're going?

BRYCE

(to Girl)

Let's go.

She stands, frozen. He smiles at her.

MC

But. You love me.

GIRL

(reflexively)

I love you.

MC

I don't care who or what you are.
I love you.

She leans toward him, and he tenderly leans toward her, and
she savagely bites his lip and immediately draws blood.

MC (CONT'D)

Aah!

He backs away and she laughs without a trace of mirth.

She gets on Bryce's bike, and the Spawn of Poseidon roar away
into the night.

INT. MC'S HOUSE -- LATER

MC at his computer. He is face down on the keyboard, sound
asleep.

ACROSS THE SCREEN

A jumble of letters as his face presses the keyboard.

AUGHREWIO[HIOHAHIFOG[KFDSA.....

EXT. UNIVERSAL/AMBLIN -- NEXT DAY**SUPER WIDE**

MC pulls up on his amazing new bike to the guard gate. He exchanges a few words with the guard.

We watch him motor from the guard gate to the Chesterfield parking area, get off the bike, walk toward the building...

EXT./INT. CHESTERFIELD OFFICES

He enters, lip bandaged, the writers sitting around the table workshopping a script.

They look up at him like he's on fire.

He reaches into his backpack and pulls out a script and plops it in front of Ken and Kevin.

MC
Thanks you guys. I appreciate it.
Sorry for the drama. Truly.

He and Caitlyn make eye contact. Looking at her:

MC (CONT'D)
I'm really. Sorry.

EXT. PCH**SUPER DUPER WIDE**

MC and Caitlyn on the radical Mad Max bike, roaring down the PCH.

SMASH TO

Real Matthew Carnahan in the chair...

REAL MATTHEW CARNAHAN
They didn't really give me a
motorcycle.

RESUME SCENE

Same shot, but the bike switches to MC's old Yamaha, the sound going from the throaty basso profundo of the big dual sport to the whiny two-stroke...

EXT. LEO CARILLO BEACH

MC and Caitlyn walk along the beach at Leo. They're laughing and back into their easy way with one another. The ocean is alive with blues and greens, the kelp forests visible offshore.

MC
I can't believe he showed up at
Jason Statham's house.

CAITLYN
He literally filed a restraining
order against Dylan.

MC
Wow. Has Dylan moved on?

CAITLYN
Yep. Sandra Bullock vehicle.

MC
I literally imagine a vehicle
carrying Sandra Bullock around.
Like, a Ford Taurus.

They look at each other.

MC (CONT'D)
I owe you a pretty enormous
apology.

CAITLYN
Ya think? Pouring water on my head
and kicking me out of bed for a
mermaid? Actually, I've been with
way worse.

MC

I'm so very sorry. What a fucking lunatic.

CAITLYN

We're writers in Hollywood, MC.
We're not well people.

(beat)

I have no idea if I can get past that one, But I do like hanging out with you. You're fucking weird.

MC

I am. Thank you.

They're down by the water's edge. They pause to look out.
Start walking again.

CAITLYN

Are you gonna hold my hand or just be a douchebag?

MC

If those are my choices, I'm gonna go with the handhold.

Something catches his eye; the kelp heads bobbing in the surf like long-haired small-headed maidens...

CAITLYN

Good choice.

They walk, holding hands. He stops.

In the kelp beds, GIRL looks back at him, surrounded by kelp heads that look almost identical to her. But it's her, staring straight at him, unblinking. Caitlyn sees his attention out on the ocean.

CAITLYN (CONT'D)

What?

MC

Dolphin, I think. Or maybe a shark. Or a mer person!

He goes to fake-push her in the ocean. She evades him and laughs.

CAITLYN

Okay. So you went with douchebag
after all.

She shoves him partly into the water and they end up
wrestling and splashing each other, laughing as we--

PULL BACK

FURTHER AND FURTHER

And out to the vast and indifferent Pacific.

MUSIC

"SEA OF LOVE"

*

*