

SHELL GAME

an original screenplay by
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FIRST FIFTEEN PAGES

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INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Red. Orangey, fiery, blinding red that coagulates and distils itself into a shiny, spreading lake of blood red. We pull back to see the lake spread out from the shattered head of a man lying very dead on the dirty concrete floor.

The dead man is dressed in an expensive suit and overcoat. Beside him on the floor is an open briefcase, lined in black velvet, and a handgun.

A ball of flames explodes out of an internal doorway nearby.

CAPRICORN (35), imperfectly handsome, battered in a leather suit-style jacket, looks into the camera.

CAPRICORN
It's okay. Trust me.

CUT TO BLACK

TITLE CARD, WHITE ON BLACK: TWO YEARS LATER

EXT. CITY OF PARIS, FRANCE - MORNING

FADE IN

Classic boulevards of French Gothic architecture radiate in all directions.

CAPTION: THE CITY OF PARIS, FRANCE

INT. ACQUARIUS'S BEDROOM, PARIS - DAY

Gossamer curtains blow in the breeze from the open tall windows of a classic Haussmann apartment. Street sounds from below waft across the parquet floor to the French antique bed, where ACQUARIUS (45), elegant, precise and American, wakes.

Freeze frame.

CAPTION: ACQUARIUS

Action resumes.

She throws back the covers to reveal a silk nightgown and walks barefoot to the window. She parts the curtains and steps out onto the wrought iron balcony to survey the postcard-worthy street below.

EXT. SUBURBS OF WEXFORD TOWN, IRELAND - MORNING

An irregular lattice of housing estates overlays a blanket of verdant green.

CAPTION: SUBURBS OF WEXFORD TOWN, IRELAND

A repeating pattern of nondescript, semi-detached houses lines the road. One of them in particular, well, isn't very particular.

INT. LIBRA'S BEDROOM, WEXFORD - DAY

The thoughtfully chosen Ikea furniture lends a budget modernist look. Morning light leaks through the curtained windows. An alarm buzzes.

In the bed BRIAN (48), greying and genial, turns it off. Lying beside him is LIBRA (46), English, domesticated, content. She rolls over and snuggles into him.

Freeze frame.

CAPTION: LIBRA

Action resumes.

LIBRA
Five more minutes. Just for some
of this.

He puts his arms around her.

BRIAN
For this, I think I can spare ten.

LIBRA
Well, if you can spare ten...

BRIAN
Mmmmm...

They begin to kiss.

INT. ACQUARIUS'S BATHROOM, PARIS - DAY

Acquarius, body wrapped in a thick towel, bends her head to wrap a matching towel around her hair. We see she has a healed burn stretching from her left ear, down her neck to her shoulder. She opens an expensive jar of eye-cream and looks in the mirror as she dabs it on serenely.

INT. LIBRA'S BATHROOM, WEXFORD - DAY

Libra, body wrapped in a good-value towel, bends her head to wrap a mis-matched towel around her hair. She opens a jar of affordable eye-cream and dabs it on hastily.

FLASHBACK

INT. GRUBBY PUBLIC BATHROOM - DAY

Acquarius, hair awry and with a large bruise on her cheekbone, uses a dagger to rip a clean section of cloth towel from the wall-mounted dispenser.

She limps over to the sink, where Libra has her arm out of her shirt and is rinsing a nasty, bleeding gash on her bicep.

Acquarius wraps the towel around the wound. Libra nods to Acquarius's limp.

LIBRA

Can you make it to the rendezvous?

ACQUARIUS

It's not that far. Can you arm wrestle?

LIBRA

Best out of three?

They both grin exhaustedly.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. ACQUARIUS'S BEDROOM, PARIS - DAY

Acquarius is now dressed, her long hair worn down, covering her burn scars. She slides her foot into a hand-made Italian leather riding boot and zips it up.

INT. LIBRA'S HALLWAY, WEXFORD - DAY

Libra clatters down the stairs, wearing blue trousers and a patterned blouse, carrying a suit-jacket.

INT. LIBRA'S KITCHEN, WEXFORD - DAY

Brian, dressed in a suit and tie, is at the island speed-buttering toast, one slice already in his own mouth.

Libra comes in, shrugging on her jacket on as he pushes the plate of toast towards her. She sees the espresso coffee pot on the hob.

LIBRA

Thanks. Do we have time for coffee?

BRIAN

We're both going to be late anyway.

They both grin.

LIBRA & BRIAN

Worth it.

She gets out two cups. From the ceiling above comes a loud thump. They both glance up, but otherwise ignore it.

LIBRA

I'll drop your jacket in to the dry-cleaners if you leave it out.

BRIAN

Great, thanks. Oh and tell them there's a button coming loose on it, too.

LIBRA

I'll mend the button.

BRIAN

Sure you're leaving it in anyway.

LIBRA

I want do it.

She kisses him.

Upstairs there is the sound of a slammed door. They glance up again, then pretend it never happened.

LIBRA (CONT'D)

Are you bringing the car in again today?

BRIAN

Yeah, and this time I'm going to stand over him until he fixes it properly.

LIBRA

Shall I pick you up on the way home?

BRIAN

No need, either it'll be fixed or I'll be under arrest for having strangled him. I'll text if I need bail money.

LIBRA

I'll have the credit card ready.

Footsteps clump down the stairs. They studiously ignore them, but the atmosphere tenses.

LIBRA (CONT'D)

Are you going to pay him again?

BRIAN

I am not!

HOLLY (13), stomps in - grumpy and girlie in a school uniform and white trainers tied with pale pink shoelaces. She is scrolling through her phone and doesn't look up.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Morning love.

HOLLY

Why didn't you wake me up?

Brian and Libra glance at each other and suppress grins.

LIBRA
Morning Holly.

Holly grunts at her.

BRIAN
Holly!

HOLLY
What?
(grudging)
Good Morning Susan.

Brian hands Holly a pale pink lunchbox and she kisses him on the cheek.

HOLLY (CONT'D)
Thanks.

She steals a piece of toast from Libra's plate. Libra lets it go.

LIBRA
I can give you a lift if you like.

Holly's phone sounds a Pure Bell message notification and she starts tapping out a reply.

HOLLY
You're not my mother.

LIBRA
But I am a car owner and it is raining.

HOLLY
Tch.

She stomps out. Brian looks at Libra and goes into the hall after her.

INT. LIBRA'S HALLWAY, WEXFORD - DAY

Brian catches Holly at the front door, where she is pulling on a pale pink bobble hat decorated with diamanté crystals.

BRIAN
Holly.

HOLLY
What?

BRIAN
The same "what" we talked about last night and last week and the month before that.
(MORE)

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Oh my god, are you losing your memory?

(feels her forehead)

Do you have a temperature?

Holly rolls her eyes at him.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Listen. I didn't think I'd ever be happy again when your Mam died. But I am. Very happy. And if you'd let yourself, you could be too. Trust me.

HOLLY

But she--

BRIAN

Is the only one of the two of you making any kind of an effort. So far.

Holly pouts.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

You can start small. Not so small that nobody notices. C'mon. For me.

A beat.

HOLLY

(calls to kitchen)

'Bye Susan. Thanks for the toast.

Brian smiles and kisses her on the forehead.

BRIAN

And now build up gradually.

The Pure Bell notification sounds again. Holly glances at the screen, gives her father a grin and goes out, slamming the door.

INT. LIBRA'S KITCHEN, WEXFORD - DAY

Libra sips her coffee, and she and Brian exchange half-grins as he comes back in.

BRIAN

Anyway, it might be worth your while skipping Pilates tonight, because somebody has basketball practice.

LIBRA

Are you collecting?

BRIAN

Not only is somebody else
collecting, they are also taking
her back to their house and feeding
her.

LIBRA

So we get to...

BRIAN

Eat anything we want. Even --

LIBRA

-- Fish!

BRIAN

Will you make your bouillabaisse?

LIBRA

Is that a special request?

BRIAN

It is. And a bottle of whatever
you say is good that I don't
appreciate.

LIBRA

I'll appreciate it for both of us.
You can appreciate some of that
beer you have hidden in the back
of the fridge.

BRIAN

You know me so well.

He kisses her.

EXT. CAFÉ - PARIS

Acquarius sits at a small table, sipping a cup of coffee,
a camel cashmere coat over her silk blouse. Two teenagers
in red tracksuits pass by. Acquarius watches them go.

FLASHBACK

EXT. CITY OF LISBON, PORTUGAL - DAY

The city climbs in steep hills, stepping haphazardly up
from the blue curve of the harbour.

EXT. HOTEL DA CICADO, LISBON - DAY

Seen from a high angle, the Hotel ad Cicado is an expensive
hotel, with neoclassical columns framing the entrance. Two
women in red tracksuits come out the door and walk down
the street.

A liveried DOORMAN closes the passenger door of a limousine
and the car glides off.

The Doorman steps back into position beside the elaborate topiary in huge urns flanking the door.

INT. HOTEL PALÁCIO, FOURTH FLOOR BEDROOM - DAY

An ornate desk has been pushed under the open window. Acquarius is bent low over a high precision rifle, eye to the scope, the barrel just lifting the lace curtain and angled down. Beside her is Libra, also with a rifle nudging the curtain.

Both are dressed in black jumpsuits and have their hair pinned up under black baseball caps turned backwards. Acquarius's visible left ear and neck are un-scarred.

LIBRA

You want left or right?

ACQUARIUS

Left. On my mark.

INT. HOTEL DA CICADO, LOBBY - DAY (FLASHBACK, CONT'D)

Two middle-aged MEN approach the door, flanked by three bodyguards. The FIRST BODYGUARD puts a protective arm out and they stop. The SECOND BODYGUARD advances to the doors and peers out.

He knocks on the glass and signals to the Doorman, who in turn raises a finger for their limousine.

The limousine pulls up and the First Bodyguard steps back to allow the two men to go through the doors.

INT. HOTEL PALÁCIO, BEDROOM - DAY

Acquarius and Libra squint down their rifle sights.

ACQUARIUS

After four... Four.

They both fire simultaneously.

EXT. HOTEL DA CICADO - DAY

The two men go down like sacks of potatoes, near identical red holes in their foreheads. The Doorman dives for cover.

The bodyguards immediately look around for the source of the shots but the Second Bodyguard has already identified the Hotel Palácio, opposite, as the source.

And he sees the only open window - on the fourth floor.

SECOND BODYGUARD

(in German, subtitled)

That window up there!

INT. HOTEL PALÁCIO, FOURTH FLOOR BEDROOM - DAY

Acquarius and Libra are up. They dismantle their rifles and put them in double-width tennis racket cases that have been specially adapted.

They turn their baseball caps around and we see they both say "POLÍCIA". We now see that their jumpsuits also have POLÍCIA on the back.

EXT. HOTEL DA CICADO - DAY

The First Bodyguard bends over the bodies of his charges as the Second and Third Bodyguards race towards the Hotel Palácio.

The Doorman points two POLICEMEN to the window across the road. The Policemen race over, shouting into their walkie-talkies.

INT. HOTEL PALÁCIO, FOURTH FLOOR CORRIDOR - DAY

Acquarius and Libra walk out of the room at an even, unrushed pace to the Housekeeping storeroom at the end of the corridor.

INT. HOTEL PALÁCIO, FOURTH FLOOR, HOUSEKEEPING STOREROOM - DAY

Shelves are stacked with towels and linens, leaving barely enough room for a narrow window. Acquarius passes Libra her racket case and keeps watch as Libra pushes both of them out the window.

INT. HOTEL PALÁCIO, FOURTH FLOOR CORRIDOR - DAY

Libra and Acquarius walk at the same even pace from the Storeroom along the corridor to the lifts. They look at the displays - both lifts are coming up, but the left-hand one is just reaching their floor. They calmly press themselves back against the doors of the other one.

The left-hand lift pings and the doors open. Armed Policemen, all dressed in black jumpsuits with POLÍCIA on the back flood out.

Acquarius and Libra step away from the other lift doors and join the pack as they surge down the corridor to the shooter room and fan out at both sides of the door.

Pressed against the wall, Libra pulls out a walkie-talkie and listens.

LIBRA

OK.

She taps Libra on the arm.

LIBRA (CONT'D)
 (in Portuguese,
 subtitled)
 They want the two of us on the
 roof.

They both turn and stride to the stairwell door.

A YOUNG POLICEMAN at the door watches them go, frowning.
 He turns to a SECOND POLICEMAN.

YOUNG POLICEMAN
 (in Portuguese,
 subtitled)
 Do you know them?

The Second Policeman shrugs and turns his attention back
 to his CHIEF.

The Chief signals. A THIRD POLICEMAN kicks down the door.
 They peer in and find the room empty except for two shell
 casings to prove it's the right room. The Young Policeman
 swallows nervously.

YOUNG POLICEMAN (CONT'D)
 (in Portuguese,
 subtitled)
 Sir.

INT. HOTEL PALÁCIO, STAIRWELL - DAY

Acquarius and Libra speed down the stairs. The door at the
 bottom of the stairwell clangs open and more police swarm
 up the stairs. A door above them clangs open too, the police
 from the shooting room.

The pair don't miss a beat, but turn and go back up a half
 flight of stairs to the Third Floor door and go through.

INT. HOTEL PALÁCIO, THIRD FLOOR CORRIDOR - DAY

Acquarius leads Libra at an unhurried pace.

ACQUARIUS
 Different layout on this floor.

They hear a walkie-talkie crackle, and turn a corner to
 see a LONE POLICEMAN listening to--

CHIEF
 (on walkie-talkie,
 in Portuguese,
 subtitled)
 ...wearing police uniforms.

Acquarius and Libra keep walking towards him at the same
 pace.

He sees them and raises his gun.

LONE POLICEMAN
 (in Portuguese,
 subtitled)
 What station are you--

But Libra is on him, hand fastened around his gun wrist, she elbows him in the jaw. The Policeman drops his walkie-talkie and Acquarius kicks it clear.

Libra bangs the Policeman's arm against the wall until he drops that too. Again, Acquarius kicks it clear.

Libra goes to elbow him in the jaw again but the Policeman reaches up to grab her wrist before she can and suddenly there is a handcuff on Libra's wrist.

Libra stares at her wrist as the Policeman punches her in the stomach. Libra doubles over and the Policeman swiftly locks the other end of the handcuffs to his own wrist, just as Acquarius presses the man's own gun barrel pressed to his head.

LONE POLICEMAN (CONT'D)
 (in Portuguese,
 subtitled)
 Dead or alive, you'll have to take
 me with you.

Libra, realising she is caught, looks at Acquarius.

LIBRA
 Just go.

The walkie-talkie on the ground crackles again.

CHIEF
 (in Portuguese,
 subtitled)
 First floor clear. All units report.

Acquarius slams the Policeman against the wall by the throat.

ACQUARIUS
 (in English)
 If I shoot you through the hand
 your bones will shatter, and I can
 squeeze the pulverised remains
 through this handcuff. It'll hurt.
 A lot.

The Policeman pales. Acquarius puts the muzzle of the gun against the man's hand and immediately--

LONE POLICEMAN
 Okay! Okay!

With his free hand he pulls a key out of his top pocket.

Acquarius takes the key and clubs him on the side of the head.

He goes down and Libra holds up his wrist while she unlocks the handcuffs.

LIBRA

Thanks.

ACQUARIUS

Rule number one.

They drag the Policeman into the Housekeeper's Store on this floor and shut the door.

LIBRA

I thought that was rule number two.

ACQUARIUS

Not in my rulebook.

They stride down the corridor and turn another corner. Coming towards them are two MEN in blue tracksuits, with US flags on the breast.

ACQUARIUS (CONT'D)

(to the two men)

Everything's under control Sirs,
please return to your room.

The two men nod and hurry on. As soon as they have gone around the corner, Acquarius and Libra, still walking, rip off their caps and boiler suits - the seams are velcro -to reveal matching red tracksuits, with the EU flag on the breast.

They pause at a laundry chute to push down the uniforms, walkie-talkie and gun, then continue at the same pace. A CHAMBERMAID, coming out of an open room, looks at them suspiciously.

Ahead of them, the lift doors open and four Policemen rush out, eyes darting to take in the scene. They run right past them and Acquarius and Libra continue to the open lift.

The Chambermaid stops one of the Policeman and points to the lift, our pair now inside, the doors just closing.

FOURTH POLICEMAN

(in Portuguese,
subtitled)

Stop! Stop now!

He and the other Policemen all run towards the lift, raising their guns.

Acquarius and Libra press themselves against the sides of the lift and the doors close just as the Policemen get to it.

INT. HOTEL PALÁCIO, LIFT - DAY

Acquarius and Libra immediately strip off their red tracksuits and turn them inside out to transform them into blue tracksuits with US insignia on the breast. They put them back on and both un-pin their hair so it cascades down, just as the lift doors open.

INT. HOTEL PALÁCIO, LOBBY - DAY - DAY

The doors open to reveal Acquarius and Libra, looking cool and relaxed. They step out into a throng of people in tennis whites, blue US and red EU tracksuits. A banner strung over the lifts proclaims "WELCOME AMERICAN-EUROPEAN TENNIS LEAGUE".

Policemen run into the lobby from the stairwell door and look around helplessly. The second lift opens and more policemen stream out, equally flummoxed by the sheer number of red tracksuits.

Acquarius and Libra calmly walk across the lobby and out of the hotel.

EXT. HOTEL PALÁCIO - DAY

The two come out the revolving doors, ignoring the ambulance and police cars. They turn down the side of the hotel.

EXT. STREET AT SIDE OF HOTEL PALÁCIO - DAY

The pair walk calmly down the street, which is lined with open dumpsters. Barely pausing, they reach into one and pull out the racket cases they dumped out the window earlier. They loop them over their shoulders and keep walking.

EXT. LISBON STREET - DAY

This street has fewer people in tracksuits, but there are still a lot of them. Acquarius and Libra walk into the stream of pedestrians and blend right in.

A tram is idling at a stop and the pair step on.

INT. LISBON TRAM - DAY

Acquarius and Libra strap-hang as the tram moves off, watching out the window as two Policemen stop a couple in red tracksuits. The tram leaves them behind.

A beat.

ACQUARIUS
So I'm thinking of getting bangs.

LIBRA

A fringe?

ACQUARIUS

Yeah, bangs.

LIBRA

Why are they called bangs?

ACQUARIUS

Why is it called a fringe?

LIBRA

Because it's a fringe of hair. It makes sense.

ACQUARIUS

Oh yeah, it does. Well I'm thinking of getting them. It.

LIBRA

Yeah, it'd look good on you. And I'm going to google that bangs thing.

ACQUARIUS

Yeah, me too.

On the street a police car screams past, siren wailing.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. CAFÉ - PARIS

Acquarius sits very still at her table. A man sits at the next table, facing slightly away from her. It's Capricorn, the man from the burning warehouse. He's wearing the same leather suit-style jacket, all cleaned up but still handsome. And now missing two fingers on his left hand.

Freeze frame.

CAPTION: CAPRICORN

Action resumes.

They sit for a few moments, neither acknowledging the other.

ACQUARIUS

Did you find her?

CAPRICORN

Stop asking me. When I find her, I'll tell you.

ACQUARIUS

As soon as you find her.

CAPRICORN

You'll be the first to know. After
the Belgians.

This satisfies her. They sit in silence for a few seconds,
still not looking at each other.

Capricorn places a tightly rolled piece of paper, about
the size of a cigarette, on Acquarius's table. Still without
looking at him, she takes it and unrolls it. Through the
back of the paper we see it has a photograph and lines of
text, but we can't see details.

ACQUARIUS

Public example or behind closed
doors?

CAPRICORN

Public example.

ACQUARIUS

Mmm. It's a two-hander.

CAPRICORN

You can have Gemini or Virgo.

ACQUARIUS

Gemini.

CAPRICORN

Nobody wants Virgo.

Acquarius clicks a gold lighter and sets light to the roll
of paper, dropping it in the saucer to burn.

ACQUARIUS

He's slow and you can hear him
coming a mile away.

CAPRICORN

The Russians like that. They call
him The Thunder.

Still not looking at each other, they both grin.

ACQUARIUS

I want Gemini. I trust Gemini.

He knows. He nods. They both finish their coffee in silence.

Acquarius stands and takes a step towards the door. She
stops, still not looking at him.

ACQUARIUS (CONT'D)

I have the rest of the morning
free.

Capricorn looks at her. She walks out. He sips his coffee.