

STUCK WITH ESMERALDA

a screenplay by

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INT. PRIVATE JET, IN FLIGHT - DAY

Luxurious. HONEY, mid 30s, is sprawled on a lounge, covered in white faux fur and little dogs, her face behind a rhinestone sleep mask. She snores unattractively.

DANIEL, 40s, handsome but tired, eyes her, annoyed, then returns to his keypad:

COMPUTER SCREEN

We can write that clause right in on Tarah's desktop. Dynamite work Gordy. What a deal!!!

A NEW WINDOW

COMPUTER SCREEN (CONT'D)

Memo to Writers - JERK SQUAD DOES TIJUANA. Still too limp, guys. Give me more gangs, more prostitutes, more mariachis. *Comprende??*

BRANDON, middle schooler, sticks his head up from the seat in front.

BRANDON

How can a blind person fall in love? They can't see if the girl's hot.

(No response)

Does The Snore Machine have to be there? I don't want her in the audience.

(another try)

Helen Keller never got married. How could she?

DANIEL

(doesn't look up)

Hope you're not putting that in the speech.

BRANDON

Ah, so you were listening. My friends all laugh at her.

DANIEL

That's not very nice; she was a great lady.

BRANDON

Not her - your stupid Honey. No offense, they think she's a freak. Glad she's not my real mom.

DANIEL
Hey shhh, you'll hurt her feelings.

BRANDON
Vampires don't have feelings.
(Daniel is back to
typing)
You really, really coming?

No response. BRANDON slumps back into his seat.

DANIEL
With her hands? Helen Keller learned
sign language.

BRANDON
You don't really get my question.

DANIEL
I said I'd come.

BRANDON
Believe it when I see it.

DANIEL sets aside his laptop and goes to BRANDON's side.

DANIEL
Soon as this deal's signed - and
that means this morning . . .

BRANDON
Always some big deal. Working while
pretending to be on ski weekends
doesn't count.

DANIEL
This time I mean it. For real,
Brandon. After today it's you and
me, buddy. Nothing but quality time.
Blood oath.
(nicks his thumb with
his teeth)

BRANDON
That only worked when I was a kid.

DANIEL
Hey, I'm bleeding here.

BRANDON
I still don't want that thing at
Fall Round-Up.

DANIEL

She'll get one of her headaches.
Even if I have to give it to her.
(Brandon laughs)
Babe, she'll never come between us.
Promise.

The PILOT's VOICE cuts in overhead.

PILOT

Okay guys, buckle up.

EXT. ESMERALDA'S BUILDING - DAY

The PRIVATE JET we just left is passing high above a GIANT BILLBOARD:

"JERK SQUAD IV - JOHNNY, JACKSON AND JULIO DO VEGAS"

Stereotypes fully exploited. The image overpowers the dinky, run down apartment building under it. At a third floor bathroom window, ESMERALDA, late 20s is in front of the mirror.

INT. APARTMENT BATHROOM - DAY

Tiny, cheerless. ESMERALDA is a beauty hidden by a maid's uniform. She's looking at a small picture frame.

ROLY (O.S.)

Apurese por favor, Esmeralda.

She jumps and drops the frame. It shatters: a photo of TWO YOUNG GIRLS with their GRANDMOTHER in Guatemala. ESMERALDA picks up the pieces as CLARITA, early 30s, opens the door.

ESMERALDA

Look what he made me do.

CLARITA

Oh no! I think I have another frame.
Pay no attention, Esme. You know he
he's just a big mouth.

ESMERALDA

He knows English.

CLARITA

Not very well. The *bruto* should
know better than to make you nervous
today.

ROLY

(pokes head in)

My English is *perfecto*. But I don't think my sister-in-law should get her hopes up. Immigration always says no.

CLARITA

They have to say yes sometime.

ROLY

Not when she waits till the last minute.

CLARITA

The letter went to the wrong address.

ROLY

Worry about where to put two more children and another *abuela*.

ESMERALDA

I'll get my own ugly apartment.

ROLY

That reminds me. The rent was due yesterday - and the day before.

CLARITA

Give her some privacy, Roly, please. Always so *desagradable*.

He exits.

ROLY (O.S.)

If she wants to get to *el bus* early, then she better get downstairs now.

CLARITA

I don't know why I ever married him.

ESMERALDA

I still have to ask Maggie if she'll let me. Mornings there are always so crazy. And then two buses.

CLARITA

Maggie's a mother too. And you listen to me. I had a vision last night. Everything good is coming. Plus, a man for you, Esme. Handsome.

Clarita crosses herself and "blesses" ESMERALDA, as they kiss goodbye at the door.

ESMERALDA

Really?

CLARITA

Don't you worry. The Virgin is hard
at work.

Indeed, there's a fresh candle on the Virgin's altar.

EXT. URBAN L.A. - DAY

LATINOS and OTHER HUDDLED MASSES on their way to work, MAIDS,
NANNIES, CONSTRUCTION WORKERS, VALET DRIVERS, BUS BOYS,
GARDENERS, on foot, bikes, buses, beat-up cars and trucks.
ESMERALDA stands among them on a crowded bus.

EXT. SANTA MONICA AIRPORT - DAY

DANIEL's plane is on the tarmac. The PILOT, mid 30s, helps
JIMMY, a chauffeur in his 40s, load up a high-end SUV. HONEY
and her dogs are already inside, she's texting obliviously.
DANIEL hands the PILOT some folded bills.

PILOT

What's this?

DANIEL

You undercharged me last month -
says my accountant.

PILOT

For real?

DANIEL

Hey, I might be a Hollywood bastard,
but I'm an honest one.

HONEY

Can we make it snappy, Armando is
already on his way to Shangri-la.

BRANDON enters the car.

BRANDON

Call it what you want, it's still
just a house. Ewe, Daisy pooped again.

HONEY

Bad, bad, doggie. But sooooo cute!

INT. DARK GARAGE - DAY

A covered vintage Alfa, as a GLOVED HAND uncovers the polished
dashboard, slips a plane ticket sleeve into the glove
compartment, covers the car again.

Now it uncovers the gas tank lid, pours something in.

EXT. BEL AIR, BELLAGIO & SUNSET BUS STOP - DAY

ESMERALDA and a load of NANNIES & MAIDS emerge from the bus and start their long stretch up Bellagio Drive as GARDENERS chug up in their trucks.

A CAR speeds down passed them. ESMERALDA double takes, thinks she recognizes the driver.

INT. SHANGRI-LA (A BEL AIR MANSION) - DAY

A tacky, over-the-top palace complete with a fake HONEY Warhol in the main room. ESMERALDA is following MAGGIE, a short, Philippine House Manager in her 60s, amidst bustling STAFF.

MAGGIE

(barking orders to
staff)

No! You know Miss Richards hates
that color!

SERVANT GIRL

But this is what she ordered.

MAGGIE

She does that - then she'll blame
you. Replace them before she sees!

SERVANT GIRL

Thank you, Maggie.

ESMERALDA

The post office made a mistake with
my letter. I'll work overtime.
Late. Tonight.

MAGGIE

She won't believe a word of it.

ESMERALDA

I have to go. Or else . . .

MAGGIE

. . . you'll lose your chance again?
Always the same story, Esmeralda.

A Vietnamese MANICURIST, a Thai MASSEUSE and an Italian MAKEUP ARTIST hurry by.

MANICURIST

Pray she's not here yet.

MAGGIE

No, but the plane landed. Start the salt bath already.

ESMERALDA

You don't understand, Maggie. This is an emergency appointment. Last chance.

MAGGIE

How long has it been, Esmeralda?

ESMERALDA

One year, five months, three weeks, four . . .

MAGGIE

Stop. Look, I told you when you started that they are never wrong. Whatever they say, you say "yes, ma'am, yes, sir." You never correct them. You say . . .

ESMERALDA

"I misunderstood, my hearing's not so good." It's always "my fault."

MAGGIE

That's our golden rule. Good, you still know it.

ESMERALDA

So what are you telling me? You won't let me go?

MAGGIE

Hurry up Sandy, the masseuse is already upstairs. All I'm saying is we'll ask her, and if she says no, you drop it. Understood?

INT. SUV, TRAVELING - DAY

DANIEL is on his phone, sitting up front with JIMMY. BRANDON is with HONEY and the dogs are in the back.

DANIEL

(on phone)

Fan-frigging-tastic! Did you give Gordy those numbers? No, I know, he's not returning mine neither.

HONEY

Looks like I'll have to go shopping for you again.

BRANDON

No thanks.

DANIEL

What financing meeting, Tarah? First I hear of it. Today?! You gotta be kidding. What about my . . .

HONEY

I can't believe you go to school in that.

BRANDON

It's my uniform.

DANIEL

Wait a minute. Postponed? Who by? Himself?

HONEY

Ugh, so drab. I'm going go bring that up with them.

BRANDON

Don't you dare. I don't want . . .

DANIEL

I've been texting all morning. Honey, did you get a call from Gordy about a finance meeting this morning?

HONEY

Oh, maybe I forgot about it.

BRANDON

Phew, Zelda farted again!

HONEY

Flying upsets her.

BRANDON

Dogs don't like vegan food.

DANIEL

With the head of the studio? What the hell's going on? All hell's breaking loose!

(to Honey)

That was kinda important.

HONEY

Armando had a panic attack, threw me off.

BRANDON

And you don't need to talk to my school.

HONEY

You're very opinionated. Like father like son.

Back to texting.

INT. SHANGRI-LA - DAY

ARMANDO, a Puerto Rican hair & make-over "star to the stars," has arrived at the entry hall and saunters up the grand stair dramatically.

ARMANDO

Where is she? Where's my enchantress?

MAGGIE

Her majesty just pulled in.

ARMANDO

(screaming it)

Isn't it a gorgeous day for hair extensions?!

MAGGIE

If you say so.

EXT. SHANGRI-LA, ENTRY CIRCLE - DAY

MAGGIE and other STAFF pour out. ESMERALDA is already helping HONEY who is handing off coats, purses and tote bags.

HONEY

I'll need the Crystal Room ready - after the hair. Armando is a stress factory.

MAGGIE

He's upstairs already.

(beat)

We have a favor to ask.

HONEY

We?

The SUV drives off with BRANDON. DANIEL sees ESMERALDA bent over to pick up some things from the floor. This is the first time he's really seen her ass. She notices.

BRANDON

Bye, Dad.

DANIEL
Where the hell's the sedan?

HONEY
I kind of dinged it.

DANIEL
You mean wrecked it again?

HONEY
It's in the shop.

DANIEL
Maggie, call the SUV back.

HONEY
Brandon will be late for school.

DANIEL
Okay, what about the town car?

MAGGIE
Picking up her acupuncturist.

HONEY
He has a hard time driving up
Bellagio.
(beat)
Maggie, you were saying?

MAGGIE
Esmeralda needs to take some of her
morning off. Immigration papers.

ESMERALDA
For my children.

HONEY
Of course. Not a problem. We
actually have too much help today.

MAGGIE
Really?

ESMERALDA
I'll just walk down to Sunset.

HONEY
Don't be silly, Imelda, Daniel can
drop you off down there.

ESMERALDA
Esmera . . .