

Projector

By

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SCENE 1: INT. DARK SPACE. TIME UNKNOWN

The sound of whirring film-reel cuts through the black.

CAMERAMAN'S VOICE

Speed.

(Beat)

DIRECTOR'S VOICE

And action.

FADE IN:

SCENE 2: INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

The room is dingy and unkempt, littered with nerdy trinkets and photographs. A variety of film posters paint the walls; four stand out amongst them, in a row above his desk: 'Venetian Blind (Written and Directed by Christopher Kaufman)', 'Super-Ego (Written by Phillip Hornby & Christopher Kaufman)', and 'Exit (Written by Phillip Hornby and Christopher Kaufman)'. The fourth hangs from the wall half asunder, only "Attack of the" visible from its bold title.

CHRISTOPHER (28), is slouched heavily on the bed, playing catch with the wall. His hair is messy, and complexion pale, but behind his thin-rimmed glasses, his eyes burn bright with focus.

A laptop sits abandoned: a script for a film titled 'Hard Liquor (working title)', is open. A copy of Charles Dicken's *A Christmas Carol* lays next to it with pages marked. His phone lights up: 'Phillip'. A picture of the two of them appears on the screen. Reveal: Phillip is the main actor on the Venetian Blind poster. Christopher throws the ball a final time and answers.

CHRISTOPHER

(Bored)

What?

PHILLIP

(Slurred)

Yo, what are you doing *right* now?

CHRISTOPHER

Your mum.

(Sighs)

Working, obviously.

He walks over to his desk and slumps into the chair.

(CONTINUED)

PHILLIP

So, pretending to be Jack
Nicholson again?

Christopher clicks onto the main page of his script as Phillip speaks, it reads: "All play and no work makes Christopher a **failure**", repeated.

CHRISTOPHER

(Scoffing)

Of course not.

Christopher quickly erases the page, leaving it blank.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

This is the real world, Phil.
Deadlines, advances and trying
hard *not* paint the walls with my
brains.

PHILLIP

Well I've found brushes *do* tend
to cover more surface area.

Christopher sighs and quickly pulls out a painkiller packet, switching Phillip to loud speaker. He pours weed from the packet and starts to roll a joint.

PHILLIP (CONT'D)

Anyway, we're er- There's a
get-together tonight. The VB crew
are all here.

(Mumbled)

Minus one.

Christopher glances over at some of his pictures, focusing on one of him and his friends at a wrap party, and then back to his blank screen. He bows his head and sighs.

PHILLIP

I promise: It's not one of those:
"let's get the cast back ten
years on when their fat and
hooked on crack"-type deals,
primarily because I'm more of an
opium person. I just thought-

CHRISTOPHER

(Defeated)

I can't. Deep-throating a
twelve-gauge aside: I *do* have to
get this done.

The rowdy sounds from Phillip's end of the phone muffles.

PHILLIP

Look, man, I- If you need
help- Someone to proof read, or
even just to bounce ideas off, I-

Christopher groans.

CHRISTOPHER

(Frustrated)

I'm doing this on my own,
Phillip!

(Beat)

CHRISTOPHER

Phil?

PHILLIP

(Bitterly)

Happy birthday, Chris.

The line goes dead.

Christopher stares down at his phone, but quickly averts his eyes. Returning to his now rolled joint.

He goes to light it, but is interrupted by three deafening bell tolls. Christopher is startled, the joint still poised between his lips. He looks over at the clock mounted on the wall; it falling to the floor on the final toll. He picks it up and rattles it in his hands.

Muffled voices suddenly rise from outside his bedroom. He throws the clock aside and puts his ear to the door, accidentally knocking over his bin, spilling scraps of crumpled paper, energy drinks, and a ripped up poster onto the floor.

MUFFLED VOICE

Any second now.

Christopher opens the door tentatively. Reveal: the room is void of colour, ostensibly ripped right out of a 1940s noir film. Three men are playing poker at a table in the center. The glow of a TV in the background supplies ample lighting. It plays the opening movie credits.

LESLEY (30), a tall and handsome young man, sits in the centre.

LESLEY

(Looking down at cards)

About time you got here. Thought
we'd have to-

Christopher turns back, slams the door and braces himself against it: eyes wide. He looks at the Venetian Blind poster.

(CONTINUED)

LESLEY
(Muffled)
That was rude!

Christopher stares between the door, and his blank computer screen for a moment. He tucks the joint behind his ear, exhales and enters slowly.

CUT TO:

SCENE 3: INT. ROOM. NIGHT

Christopher (now black and white himself) moves cautiously to a chair opposite Lesley.

LESLEY
Took your time.

CHRISTOPHER
Erm-

LESLEY
Now, I'm sure you have a
few questions about all...

Lesley waves his arms.

CHRISTOPHER
(Voice cracks)
Yup!

Lesley snorts.

Christopher puts the joint in his mouth, his hands shaking. He wipes his forehead.

CHRISTOPHER
Do- Do you have a-

Lesley flicks on his lighter. Christopher goes to grab it, but Lesley retracts it and stretches out his hand.

Christopher raises an eyebrow and gives the joint over, pushing his falling glasses onto the bridge of his nose.

CHRISTOPHER
(Nervous)
Bit- Bit out of character, isn't
it?

Lesley lightly tokes the joint.

LESLEY
Just because the film stops,
doesn't mean we do.

(CONTINUED)

Christopher chuckles nervously. Lesley continues to smoke. Christopher's eyes follow the joint.

CHRISTOPHER

So er, can I-

Christopher leans forward, but Lesley avoids him.

LESLEY

You haven't *earned* it.

Lesley crushes the joint into an ashtray. Christopher's jaw drops and he freezes momentarily, before falling back into his chair: arms crossed and glaring. He looks around the room and back at Lesley.

CHRISTOPHER

So you really are-

LESLEY

Yup.

CHRISTOPHER

And this really is-

LESLEY

I can't attest to whether or not you're crazy. But you are the writer.

CHRISTOPHER

(Shakily)

Right.

Christopher grins.

CHRISTOPHER

(Chuckling)

So I'm like- I'm like *God* to you, huh?

The POKER PLAYER to Lesley's right laughs. Christopher scowls at him.

LESLEY

No offense, but- you aren't exactly *awe-inspiring* are you? Maybe if you hit the gym a bit, got a tan, sorted out your hair-

Christopher raises a hand.

CHRISTOPHER

(Sarcastically)

I'm a writer, Lesley. We don't hit the gym *a bit*.

LESLEY
Hollywood writers tend to-

CHRISTOPHER
(Indignant)
I'm not a Hollywood writer.

LESLEY
Evidently not. I can't imagine
Woody Allen spends his birthdays
alone. Is it not a wee bit
stifling?

CHRISTOPHER
(Sternly)
I made a commitment. I don't have
time to celebrate.

LESLEY
And how's *that* treating you?

Christopher shifts in his chair awkwardly.

CHRISTOPHER
I mean, not- Well, I have an
idea.

Lesley proffers a guiding hand.

CHRISTOPHER
It's a, er- Well, it's a dramatic
comedy about an alcoholic who's
about to go cold-turkey on
Christmas Eve.

Lesley rolls his eyes, bored.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
(Clears his throat)
The Christmas ghosts are each
represented by bottles of hard
liquor. He drinks, he
hallucinates, he-

Lesley coughs hard, interrupting Christopher's pitch. He
wipes the sweat from his brows.

LESLEY
Remember that idea you and Phil
had?

Christopher shrugs.

Lesley nods at one of the POKER PLAYERS, who gets up and
carries the TV over to them. Lesley changes the channel to
a lo-fi clip of TV Christopher and TV Phillip conversing
as they throw a ball back and forth that changes in nature
between cuts.

TV PHILLIP

So this guy's going through all these rooms at a party, trying to find his ex-girlfriend?

TV CHRISTOPHER

And in each room he meets different characters, but they're all played by the same actors.

TV PHILLIP

Clever. Got a name?

TV CHRISTOPHER

Nah. But what I need is a good opening. A real mood setter.

They continue to play catch in a moment of silence.

TV PHILLIP

Ok! The guy walks into the party, and right after the door closes, bam! A dog splatters onto the pavement behind him and the title comes up: 'The Great Party'.

TV Christopher raises his eyebrows approvingly.

TV CHRISTOPHER

Oh that's good.

Lesley pauses on a shot of TV Phillip's face, and gives Christopher a knowing smirk. Christopher is silent, looking away from him.

LESLEY

What about your debut? Attack of the Deadly something-

CHRISTOPHER

(Sharply)

Don't you dare, Lesley.

Lesley switches the channel and a b-movie-style title appears, that reads: *'Attack of the Deadly Gust'*.

LESLEY

This might help loosen your cogs.

Christopher slams his hands on the table. The TV flicks off. Christopher is breathing heavily. He closes his eyes and composes a faint smile.

CHRISTOPHER

If you wanna loosen my cogs, then give me some weed.

(CONTINUED)

Lesley's bright demeanour collapses. The silence is split by another deafening bell toll, and Lesley looks at his pocket watch.

LESLEY
(Smugly)
Well, here's looking at you, kid.

CHRISTOPHER
Where am I-

The door opens, now behind Lesley. Christopher moves slowly towards it. Lesley stops him momentarily and hands him a revolver. Christopher surveys it, his face white. He stuffs it clumsily into his waistband and leaves the room.

CUT TO:

SCENE 4: INT. COUPLE'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Clothes litter the floor like cadavers. A TV sits in the corner: an exact mirror of the current scene. A latex mask and a torn cape hang from a wardrobe. Christopher's eyes widen and an image of the *Super-Ego* poster flashes before him. The sound of arguing is heard from behind the door. He panics and quickly jumps behind the bed.

SEAN (27) a bespectacled man with a military build and
MARIA (24), a shapely woman with wild, dark hair burst in.

MARIA
Leave me alone, Sean!

SEAN
Maria, you're over-reacting! I-

Maria throws her bag down on the bed and begins stuffing clothes into it. Christopher lays flat on the other side.

SEAN (CONT'D)
I'm a *superhero*, damn it! I just-

Maria goes to walk away, but he grabs her by the arms and their eyes meet; Maria's are wild, while Sean's are gentle.

SEAN
I'm out there for *you*, I- I'm out there for *everyone*. To keep you safe from all the bad shit.

He holds one of her hands in his, and they stare deeply into each other, their faces getting closer. She pushes him away.

(CONTINUED)

MARIA
(With conviction)
I can't! It's too- You're fucked
up, Sean!

Her voice breaks and she sobs, struggling to speak. Sean goes to hug her again, but she retreats.

MARIA
Get out!

Sean steps back.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Get the fuck out!

Maria shoves Sean out the door and slams it behind him. Sobbing, she leans back against it. Christopher stands up, sheepishly.

CHRISTOPHER
In the script, didn't *he* stay and
you leave?

MARIA
(exasperatedly)
Jesus, what're you doing here?

CHRISTOPHER
Well.

Christopher chuckles and steps forward.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
Either I got so stoned I'm now
stuck in some vivid THC-induced
coma.

Maria sighs.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
Or aliens.

Maria turns away and continues to pack her clothes. Christopher looks around the room, awkwardly.

CHRISTOPHER
So, er-

Maria is now frantic, slamming around and breathing heavily.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)
Hey, are you-

Maria turns to him, scowling.

MARIA

You know, everything was going peachy until you fucked it all up!

Christopher is taken aback.

CHRISTOPHER

You mean Sean? Hey, he's the one one who lied to you. I just-

MARIA

(Sarcastically)

Yeah, you just *tapped* away at a keyboard!

Christopher moves forward past a mirror, but back-tracks. He sees the film crew reflected in the background: the director pacing back and forth. He touches the glass and it ripples. The crew disappear.

CHRISTOPHER

Hhat's-

MARIA

(Flustered)

I mean- I just- What's with your depression-obsession?

Christopher turns back to Maria, her eyes inflamed.

CHRISTOPHER

Huh?

MARIA

Everything you write is just a series of low-notes, just- always culminating into one big downer!

CHRISTOPHER

Not always-it's just-

Christopher sighs and composes himself.

CHRISTOPHER (CONT'D)

Look. I got hurt and I didn't know how to deal. So I wrote about it. Just so I could to try and- you know, you move on.

(beat)

I'm sorry.

Maria exhales and smiles softly.

MARIA

You've watched too many Woody Allen films.

CHRISTOPHER
(sarcastically)
Maybe one or two.

Maria concedes with a sigh and sits down on the bed. She removes a hash-pipe from her pocket.

MARIA
Wanna hit this?

CHRISTOPHER
God, yes.

Christopher sits next to Maria, and they begin to smoke in a HAZY MONTAGE.

MARIA
(Softly)
So, the one that hurt you: what did she think of the film?

Christopher stares blankly into space, ostensibly in a trance.

SCENE 5: INT. DARK SPACE. TIME UNKNOWN

The silhouette of an unspecified woman is dancing against a blank backdrop. Superimposed film-reel bleeds onto the scene as it falls apart like a degrading movie projector.

CHRISTOPHER
(Off-Screen)
Let's just say, she demanded I remove her dedication from the credits.

MARIA
(Off-Screen)
Bitches.

SCENE 6: INT. COUPLE'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Christopher and Maria glance at each other and share a laugh.

MARIA
But you know why she was mad, right?

CHRISTOPHER
Because I aired our personal life in front of the world?

(CONTINUED)

MARIA

It's because you lied to her.

Christopher raises an eyebrow.

MARIA (CONT'D)

It wasn't a film about moving on. You needed a distraction from the real world, so you bled yourself dry into this ham-fisted, exposition-heavy *nothing* piece.

CHRISTOPHER

(Defeated)

There's nothing wrong with a bit of *conversation*.

Maria grabs Sean's mask and puts it on, chuckling petulantly.

MARIA

Writing doesn't come with some great weight- some great responsibility.

CHRISTOPHER

I know, I just-

MARIA

I don't see you going out there kicking arse in tight lycra!

Christopher chuckles.

MARIA (CONT'D)

(Sincere)

And it's no reason to lock people out.

Christopher's smile fades and he looks away, his head falling into his hand.

Maria pulls off the mask, placing it on his lap. Christopher smiles slightly, looking back at her.

CHRISTOPHER

Good use of symbolism.

The door suddenly bursts open and Sean enters, enraged.

SEAN

I won't let you end it like-

He stops mid-word, spotting Christopher.

SEAN
What's *he* doing here?

Maria steps in front of Sean, but he pushes round her, looking accusingly between the two.

SEAN
(Appauled)
Are you taking *pot*?!

MARIA
You don't *take* pot, you *smoke* it.

Maria draws a square shape with her fingers.

SEAN
(To Christopher)
Hollywood! You're the reason
we're in this mess!

Christopher surrenders with his hands. Sean advances on him, fists poised. Christopher withdraws the revolver from his waistband and points it at larger man. Sean freezes and backs away.

CHRISTOPHER
(Shaking)
Hey, now! I- I *created* you! I- I
can just as easily-

The bell tolls again. Christopher shifts awkwardly around them, gun renaming raised. At the door he opens his mouth to speak, but nothing comes out. He leaves.

CUT TO:

SCENE 7: INT. LOUNGE. NIGHT

Christopher quickly shuts the door behind him. He now stands in a murky lounge, thick with smoke. The coffee table is littered with cannabis paraphernalia. MIKE (23), a disheveled stoner is sat on a sofa, smoking and fixated on a TV, which is showing a man with a bag over his head being dragged along the floor. Next to the TV is a door with a bright red X painted on it, bearing a striking resemblance to the *Exit* movie poster. Mike turns to Christopher, smiling stupidly, his eyes glazed over.

MIKE
(Coughing)
Hollywood!

Christopher puts the gun behind his back again.

(CONTINUED)

CHRISTOPHER
Why does everyone keep saying
that?

MIKE
Maybe a bit *too* generous.

Christopher glares at Mike.

CHRISTOPHER
(Irritated)
Okay. So what are you doing,
then?

Mike takes a long, hard hit from a bong.

MIKE
Livin' the dream!

He blows out a large cloud of smoke.

CHRISTOPHER
(Sarcastically)
Productive.

Mike raises his eyebrows.

MIKE
You're the reason I'm stuck here.

He gestures to the door with a pipe in his hand.

CHRISTOPHER
(Snorting)
It's like you *completely* missed
the point of your own film.

Mike shrugs and grunts stupidly, waving a make-shift
bottle bong at Christopher, like a neanderthal wielding
fire for the first time. Christopher hesitantly reaches
for it.

CHRISTOPHER
You guys aren't gonna try and
talk me through my problems, are
you?

MIKE
Nope.

CHRISTOPHER
(Shrugging)
Bless.

Christopher takes the bong and then a seat, automatically
hitting it. A bright ring burns onto his face. As he
exhales everything slows down and the room becomes darker,

(CONTINUED)

but vibrant. He licks his lips, which are now cracked and dry. The sound of a guitar jack penetrating an amplifier reverberates off the walls and all sound plummets to a fuzzy drone. Christopher shifts sluggishly in his seat and looks over at the pot-heads. Mike turns to look at him with a wide grin, now sporting sunglasses embossed with cartoonish skulls. He is sunken deeply into the sofa, hooded, toking his gun-shaped pipe. Whispers overwhelm Christopher, some distinguishable.

PHANTOM WHISPER #1

(Concerned)

Do you not think it's a bit too meta?

PHANTOM WHISPER #2

(Bored)

I don't think this line works.

PHANTOM WHISPER #3

(Irritated)

What's the point of this scene?

Christopher turns away, putting the bong down, looking pale. The silhouettes of a film crew surround the room as the space around Christopher becomes increasingly claustrophobic. He closes his eyes at a snail's pace. The guitar jack cracks a second time, and normalcy is restored. Christopher exhales slowly.

CHRISTOPHER

(Shakily)

So- So what are you watching?

MIKE

The end of the film.

CHRISTOPHER

(Swallowing hard)

Any good?

MIKE

Bit up itself.

(beat)

'S your turn to change the channel.

Christopher hesitantly takes the remote and picks it up.

CHRISTOPHER

How about, er- How about something funny?

He changes the channel and *Attack of the Deadly Gust* comes on.

(CONTINUED)

MIKE

Ha! Fucking classic!

Christopher tries to change the channel, but they're all the same.

MIKE

(Assertively)

Mate!

CHRISTOPHER

It's too embarrassing!

MIKE

(Childishly)

Ah, you're no fun anymore.

Christopher goes to say something when suddenly there is a knock at the door. The TV switches off suddenly. They freeze, heads snapping towards the door. Christopher turns to face Mike, who looks as shocked as he does.

MIKE

(Paranoid)

That's never happened before!

There is a louder bang at the door and they quickly move away from it.

MIKE

(Whispered, to Christopher)

Is that the pigs?!

CHRISTOPHER

What? No.

MIKE

(Shaking)

Then what is it?

CHRISTOPHER

I dunno!

MIKE

How do you not know?

Christopher gestures at the door widely.

CHRISTOPHER

(Voice cracking)

It was- It's just a metaphor! I-
It's about growing up and-

MIKE

(Stern)

What're you trying to say?

CHRISTOPHER
(Flabbergasted)
You're such a-

The lights die, leaving Christopher suddenly alone in the dark.

CHRISTOPHER
Mike?

Silence.

The sound of the door creaking open slithers into the room.

Christopher's breathing increases, cutting through the cold silence. He yelps when the TV suddenly reawakens, showing the room from the TV's POV, dimly lit as it just was, with Christopher standing alone. He moves closer to get a better look. A darkly-clad figure creeps into the room through the open door. Christopher quickly pulls out his gun again pointing it into the darkness, but sees nothing. He turns back to the TV and sees the figure right behind him, its long arms outstretched. He pivots on the spot and fires.

Christopher's doppelganger flashes in front of him, with what appears to be a film projector birthing from its face. Film reel spirals sinisterly from its mouth, which oozes with ink; its eyes glowing tungsten projector bulbs. Christopher fires and the bullet strikes the assailant in the head, splattering his blood against the wall. A dim light flickers on and Christopher drops with his gun. His eyes well up, fixed on his mirror-self, now human and bleeding from a hole in its head.

Suddenly and Mike is behind him and throws a bag over his head, just as the bell tolls again. The lights go out and Christopher tries to struggle. On the TV, Christopher is seen being dragged out of the room by the man. The door shuts behind them.

CUT TO:

SCENE 8: INT. ROOM. NIGHT

Christopher is shoved into a chair and the bag is pulled from his head. He is in a blank room with a projector running next to him. Lesley is standing over him.

CHRISTOPHER
(Strained)
Fucking- Let me go!

Christopher violently struggles against his chains, but can't break free.

(CONTINUED)

Lesley puts his hand on Christopher's shoulder, trying to calm him.

LESLEY
We're just trying to help.

CHRISTOPHER
Bullshit! You f-

Lesley smacks Chris across the face, then sighs heavily.

LESLEY
We're not here to hurt you,
Christ.

CHRISTOPHER
(Gruffly)
Then why did you tie me down?

Lesley stands back up, a mournful look in his eye. Taking a DVD from his pocket, and loads its into the projector, his hand hesitating before hitting play.

LESLEY
We didn't.

He throws the case in front of him, then disappears into darkness.

The DVD reads, "*Attack of the Deadly Gust*". - Written and Directed by Christopher Kaufman".

Christopher struggles against his chains as the film starts.

MONTAGE

Christopher watches his first film. He continues to struggle, but is unable to quell his goofy grin and begins to laugh hysterically at all the ridiculous dialogue, crazy moments and cheap special effects; the chains becoming looser as he does. His lips tremble, and he cries through a wide grin, stifling the tears with his palms, as they finally come free.

The film ends and his bedroom door is projected onto the wall. Christopher walks over to it, but turns back mid-step. The projector fades and is replaced with a computer monitor, illuminated by the blank page of his arid script. He smiles and pushes through the door.

CUT TO:

SCENE 9: INT. BEDROOM. DAY

Christopher clumsily stumbles into his room, everything is how he left it. He notices his turned-over bin and quickly clears it up. He slumps back into his seat, his phone is on one side and the box of weed is on the other. His hand hovers over the weed for a second before pushing it off the table into the bin. He makes a call. The phone clicks.

CHRISTOPHER

Hey Phil, I just had this idea
for a film.

Pause.

PHILLIP

I'm listening.

Christopher smiles.

DIRECTOR

(off screen)

And cut.

Christopher's face drops.

The Camera pulls out, revealing the camera and crew filming Christopher. The Director walks forward and shakes Christopher's hand, clearly pleased.

The camera continues: revealing the bedroom to be nothing but a cheap set, in an empty space.

CUT TO BLACK:

THE END