

Scorpion
by
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Original Screenplay

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INT. A DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A FAMILY sits down to dinner in a very Middle America home. We SEE the FATHER, the MOTHER, and a number of CHILDREN ranging from several LITTLE BOYS and LITTLE GIRLS to several TEENAGERS.

They pray over a nice dinner table in a dining room lined with books, professional certificates, all very upper middle class without being pretentious. In a corner are piled hockey sticks, helmets, skates, girls' cheerleader pompoms, and more signs of a very active school and community life.

Something about the LIGHT or the ANGLE or the BACKGROUND SILENCE tells us something is dreadfully wrong.

CUT TO:

Upstairs in a little girl's bedroom, a HAND pushes a DVD into a child's pink PLAYER. HAPPY DAYS music and video start to play with LAUGH TRACK and MUSIC.

A dreamy KAY MARTIN fondles MARILYN's dresses and stuffed animals.

BACK TO:

Downstairs, laughter and conversation fill the dining room as the family pass around bread, butter, dishes of steaming delicacies.

The mother looks a bit lush, holding a cocktail glass, and glowing a bit excessively behind her makeup - the only thing slightly out of kilter in this perfect family picture.

The TEENAGE SON makes a pleased announcement.

BILLY BORONOWSKY:

I had a talent scout come up to me
on the sidewalk yesterday and talk
to me about college hockey.

He gets a chorus of proud and pleased EXCLAMATIONS.

CUT TO:

Upstairs, a SHADOW moves through the house. We GLIMPSE a BASEBALL bat swinging in a very purposeful manner.

BACK TO:

The laughter and joking at the dinner table continue as pairs talk between each other, and the mother and father gently joke with one of the teenagers.

CUT TO:

The shadow strides toward the stairs, holding a GUN in one hand and a baseball bat in the other.

BACK TO:

As the family continue innocently talking and laughing, a MAN'S SHAPE emerges. We see his BACK, while they look toward him in horror.

The gun rises, and POPPING NOISES start.

We GLIMPSE the father's shocked face, as he drops a tureen of peas. The mother's face looks shocked as bullets begin to tear into her. A child tries to run from the table but falls. It is clear nobody will be spared.

The last thing we see is a baseball bat flashing through the air, left and right, as the air fills with red.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

It is an expensive, pleasant house in a suburb, with a large picture window overlooking hedges and a little front lawn.

The picture window is lit with a clean, soft light suggesting warmth and family harmony inside.

We HEAR faint POPPING NOISES, and spatters of blood and gore start to darken the window as glass breaks and the light inside dims.

CUT TO:

EXT. A RAINY COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

An old red CAR crawls through a DOWNPOUR on a glittering lonely blacktop in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by forest.

The headlights PROBE. The very car itself is dark and hunched, dreading something.

The car moves through patches of eerily twisting FOG that alternate with bursts of heavy RAIN.

The car is surrounded by a faint sound of 1990s rock music coming from its dash radio.

The lone MAN driving looks anxious. He grips the wheel with fatigue, as if he has been on the road a long time, both this road and the road of his life. He is erect, strong, about 50, with a lined face and short curly gray hair bordering on white.

We see a shiny, brass, almost golden spent 9 millimeter CARTRIDGE on the key chain that dangles, by a hole drilled through it, from the ignition. Also dangling from the key chain is a small pewter SCORPION.

The man presses a button on the radio, and it switches to a CD playing a pulsing Serbian folk tune. As he presses the button, we see on his thumb a TATOO of a GREEN SKULL AND CROSSBONES.

A GUN handle lurks deep in the shadows under the dash.

The car presses on along the dark road.

Rain beats down.

There are no lights along this stretch of black forest somewhere in the U.S.

A bent yellow sign with a twisting black arrow signals a curve ahead. The sign is full of bullet holes.

The driver is agitated. He jabs the radio button, and an ANNOUNCER reads news about local, small-town matters that mean little to an outsider.

He jabs the button once more, and the radio falls silent.

Fog roils as the rain has slowed down to a steady drumming.

He slows to a stop, and sits in the pouring down, belting rain, leaning slightly, tensely forward as if expecting someone or something.

The fog has a life of its own, seeming to be full of struggling shapes and glitters of light. It is a glimpse of some unknowable CHAOS or HELL and we just guess that he is having a flashback to WAR.

We HEAR VOICES screaming, yelling, cursing.

We hear memories of GUNFIRE. The man slams his palms over his temples and sits with his eyes closed, lips writhing in rage as he pushes the vision away.

EXT. A DINER IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE - NIGHT

A large blue NEON SIGN advises "DINER" along with other signs. It's a long, low diner of the old kind, almost a sixty foot Airstream with stainless steel sides and rhombus windows.

Rain beats down as we see warmth and light inside. The windows look a bit steamy.

Fog crawls around the bushes outside, while inside a young waitress moves about quickly, one minute with a pad and pencil. Now she waves a coffee pot. Now she smiles and stops to talk while holding a tray.

The old red car comes growling out of the fog and pulls off the road. It is parked in a row of cars belonging to other souls who dare to go abroad on a night like this. These include a van, a sheriff's patrol car, and others.

The man gets out, looking around guardedly, then slams the door and walks to the diner.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

The man enters the diner, with its brightness and warmth, and gives it a long looking-over.

A good number of people of all ages sit in booths, talking and eating. Two STATE TROOPERS sit over coffee in a far booth.

Empty booths have setups (napkins, silverware, coffee cup upside down on saucer, empty water glass) waiting.

The WAITRESS flies past with a smile and a pie plate.

WAITRESS:

Hi-ya. Grab any seat you can find.
I'll be right with you. Coffee?

MAN:

(accent, but working on
his English)
Coffee would be nice.

The man sits in a booth and pulls a newspaper to himself. As he sorts the pages and reads glimpses, he stares quietly around at the other diners.

The waitress stops with pad in one hand, coffee pot in the other.

WAITRESS:
Are you having dinner?

MAN:
I'm Ismail. Call me Ismail.

The waitress registers a brief startled look, but her expression stays on course, smiling and businesslike.

WAITRESS:
From the old country.

ISMAIL:
I hear there are lots of Albanians and Kosovars in this area. I lived near Pristina before the wars. Ever hear of it?

WAITRESS:
I was born here. I don't know anything about it. That was far away and long ago.

ISMAIL:
(sighing)
I love this country. I had a long drive today.

WAITRESS:
Your English is very good.

ISMAIL:
Thanks. I am a U.S. citizen.

He puts the keys with their attachments on the table. The tattoo is visible. The cartridge, keys, and scorpion rattle.

Her reaction is brief, veiled, and unknowable. She has gone from friendly to detached and efficient. His expression is coldly, darkly humorous.

WAITRESS:
Here is the menu, Sir. I'll be back with your coffee.

After dinner, a busboy takes the dishes away. Ismail lingers over coffee and the paper. He opens the classifieds and skims pages of fine print. He puts a pencil in his teeth. He rattles through the pages, then narrows down to one page, one column, and finally one item. He circles a box ad with the words CLINIC-REHAB, some language about various treatments including WAR/PTSD, an address, a phone number, and a name: DR. M. NIKOLIC.

The waitress arrives with more coffee. He shakes his head and holds his hand over the cup.

ISMAIL:

I would never sleep again. Can you make me a tall one to go? I have a long wait ahead. Tell me, where is Elm Street?

CUT TO:

EXT. DINER - NIGHT

From outside, the waitress can be SEEN waving her arms and giving directions. The rain is letting up, but the fog is thicker.

CUT TO:

EXT. OFFICE COMPLEX - NIGHT

The red car drives slowly through fog along a row of fancy office towers lit with space age street lights.

Ismail cranes his neck, looking at metallic numbers on marble fronts. Big glass doors with coach lights offer entry to various companies. Many windows are all around, most dark, a few with a dim glow of night lights.

An object is lying in the street ahead.

It starts raining again, hard.

The street glitters around the object, which is starting to look like a bundle of clothing.

As we draw near, we see a BODY lying in the road.

The nearby building has a sign, "CLINIC-REHAB" with "Dr. M. NIKOLIC" under that.

Ismail gets out, holding his gun, and strides toward the body. As he does so, he looks around carefully in all directions.

Ismail looks down on the body of a man in his 50s, well-dressed, with an expensive overcoat. A pair of gold wire-frame eyeglasses lie on the street. Ismail unlocks the safety and looks ready to unload the magazine into the body.

ISMAIL:
(venomously)
Drac.

His expression changes as he sees the gilded writing on the nearby briefcase: M. NIKOLIC.

ISMAIL:
(shocked)
Teufel.

He squats down, with one hand holding the gun up, ready to shoot and waving left and right, while with his other hand he opens the man's coat and pulls a billfold from his jacket.

ISMAIL:
(disappointed)
Son of a bitch.

The driver's license reads Momcilo Nikolic.

The picture matches that of the unconscious man.

Ismail rises. He puts the gun in his belt behind him, and walks over to the briefcase. Opening it, he empties it, and papers and a half-empty vodka bottle fall out.

ISMAIL:
Aw shit.

Nikolic moans.

ISMAIL:
Nice to meet you, Dr. Nikolic. In
the middle of the street at night.
In the rain.

Ismail picks up the briefcase, puts the papers in, opens the bottle, takes a long swig, and tosses it across the street so it shatters in the bushes.

Ismail helps Nikolic up and gets him walking. Effortfully, they stagger to the entrance of the clinic.

Ismail sits the Nikolic on the stoop, where Nikolic begins heaving his lunch and his alcohol.

Ismail returns to the still-running car and drives it into the shadows of a parking structure.

Then he goes back for Nikolic, who by now is on all fours, still puking loudly on the concrete.

ISMAIL:
You came to the right place, you
useless fuck. Your own clinic.

CUT TO:

INT. CLINIC - NIGHT

Ismail is in an office kitchenette, making coffee.

Nikolic sits on a couch, the kind shrinks put their patients on. He holds his head and moans.

ISMAIL:
Physician, heal thyself.

Ismail brings two cups of coffee into the counseling office and hands one to Nikolic.

ISMAIL:
I thought you were him. Looked like
you were dead.

NIKOLIC:
Drac.

ISMAIL:
I thought someone else did the
favor for me already. I was pissed.

NIKOLIC:
(still holding his head)
Thanks for not shooting me, Mr.--?

ISMAIL:
Ismail Wetterau.

NIKOLIC:
You are?

ISMAIL:
German. I converted. So did you.

NIKOLIC:
What do you know about me?

ISMAIL:
You are Serb, but you have a soul.

NIKOLIC:
(weakly)
I left it all behind long ago. I
just try to help those who can't.

ISMAIL:
Right. Like you leave it all behind
in a bottle of vodka. Do one a day?

NIKOLIC:
I try to keep my alcoholism
separate from that of my patients.

ISMAIL:
That's what I like - a man who is
honest with himself.

NIKOLIC:
I drink out of honesty. Most of my
patients drink because they are
dishonest with themselves.

ISMAIL:
I didn't come thousands of miles to
listen to bullshit. Maybe we can
help each other.

NIKOLIC:
I want no part --

Ismail lunges powerfully, takes the smaller man by the
shoulders, and throws him across the room.

ISMAIL:
(bellows)
You have no choice. None of us do.

He walks across the room, as Nikolic starts picking himself
up. He takes Nikolic by the necktie, lifts him up, and leads
him like a dog back to the couch. There, he tosses Nikolic
back into a sitting position.

NIKOLIC:
(blood running from his
nose)
I can help you with atoning, but I
will not help you with revenge.

Ismail trembles with rage as he pulls out his gun and aims it shakily at Nikolic. (MORE)

ISMAIL:

Atonement? I am only interested in justice.

NIKOLIC:

Put it away. For a thousand years, people in the Balkans have been clubbing and stabbing and shooting each other. At least, under the Turks, we lived in peace.

Nikolic rises and goes to the kitchenette. He ignores Ismail as he cleans himself up over the sink.

Ismail puts the gun away and sips his coffee.

NIKOLIC:

My stomach is empty. I just remembered my staff keeps chicken noodle soup up here in the cupboard. Want some?

ISMAIL:

I'll split that with you.

CUT TO:

INT. CLINIC - DAY

Daylight pours in to the room. Nikolic is curled up on the couch. Ismail has rolled up a jacket for a pillow, and is asleep on the carpeted floor, with the gun near his hand.

CUT TO:

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - DAY

Nikolic and Ismail are eating. The Chinese family hover around the first customers of the day.

NIKOLIC:

I was a country doctor in Serbia. Everything was normal and beautiful. Then, they started killing my Muslim neighbors... Everyting turned on its head. My wife and I divorced. She is Catholic and I am Orthodox.

NIKOLIC:(cont'd)

She is Croatian and I am Serb. We never knew we were irreconcilably different before Milosevic and his thugs took over. So I changed styles of medicine from body to mind, and here I am now, in this foreign land, treating anyone who suffered in Milosevic's war. Most of my patients are Albanian Muslims. I listen to their suffering all day long, and then, like the scapegoat, I take their burdens and burn them up with my own altar wine.

ISMAIL:

Altar vodka.

The two laugh as they eat.

ISMAIL:

I had heard of you as I seek this animal Drac Petrovic. You have been at least three places where I have gone looking. You must have some form of radar.

NIKOLIC:

I only have radar for the suffering. The Serbs murdered thousands of them. Ethnic cleansing. Rape, torture. The most vile and horrible things imaginable. Milosevic did the same things Hitler did. He put thugs in uniform. Hitler loosed the Milice on the French, murderers specially released from prison. Milosevic was a gangster in his own right, and his people found him - Scorpions.

ISMAIL:

Ah yes, Tigers, Scorpions, Caymans, all sorts of cowards in battle who bravely tortured women and children while drinking in the towns.

(sample ends - full screenplay available on request)