

HOLLYWOOD SIGN

Screenplay by

Les Carpenter and Sean Gates

Story by Les Carpenter

EXT. HOLLYWOOD SIGN ATOP MOUNT LEE - MORNING

Looking up the rolling, scrubby contours of the Hollywood Hills toward the iconic sign curving along the ridge, rising above the thick haze of the valley. The camera climbing up, pushing in on the O in HOLLY, and through it to a woman jogging on the road behind the chainlink fence. THE ACTRESS, Deana. She's the only person around.

She's a pretty brunette, chocolate brown eyes, hair in a ponytail, earbuds and tracksuit, sleeves pushed up her arms, the jacket half-zipped over a sweaty workout top. She stops for a breather, paces around a little, laces her fingers in the fence and looks out across the valley, the urban sprawl of Los Angeles in the murky distance, the cluster of downtown skyscrapers like iron filings under a magnet's pull, glass and steel glinting faintly in the morning sun.

She looks wistfully into the distance, falters, head lowering, one hand to her eyes, then rejoining the other still in the fence, rattling the links as she loses a scream of frustration.

THE ACTRESS
JUST SHOW ME A SIGN!

THE WRITER (O.S.)
I'd say that's a pretty big sign.

The actress turns, a little surprised, maybe a little embarrassed, pulling the earbuds out. Behind her we now see a man sitting on a ledge, writing in his journal, a courier bag beside him. THE WRITER, Shawn. Late 30's, jeans, boots, a pea coat; navy blue wool with two rows of buttons with anchors on them down the front, collar turned up against the morning chill -- or what they consider a chill in LA. He needs a shave and his hair could use a comb, but he doesn't look like a drifter. It's more like his mind is just on things other than grooming.

THE ACTRESS
Oh my gosh, you must think I'm nuts. I didn't even see you there.

THE WRITER
Hey, you're not the first struggling artist to come up here looking for a little magic.

THE ACTRESS
Until you see what's behind it.

THE WRITER

A road?

THE ACTRESS

It's an illusion. There isn't enough magic to go around. You took one look at me and knew I was an actress? Midwestern girls swarm here like moths to a flame, don't we?

THE WRITER

Hey, take it easy. It was a shot in the dark, you look sorta familiar. I'm just saying, there's good and bad everywhere. It's all about what you focus on. You gotta stay positive.

THE ACTRESS

What positive? In a couple weeks I'll be thirty, that's geriatric in Hollywood years, especially for a woman. I just blew a pretty big audition. And don't get me started on LA men. I'm not 19 anymore. If I wanted to wait tables for the rest of my life I could've stayed in Indiana.

THE WRITER

You know the difference between Indiana and Los Angeles?

THE ACTRESS

Air quality? Traffic?

THE WRITER

Point taken. But if you stayed in Indiana, you'd be sure your dreams wouldn't come to pass. Out here, there's always a chance. That's got to be better, right?

THE ACTRESS

Is it, though? If I'm fooling myself? If I just came out here a naive little girl expecting glamor and fortune? I know why my dad calls it La-la land.

THE WRITER

Sure, it's got lots of funny names. Southland, Shakeytown.
(MORE)

THE WRITER (CONT'D)

The Big Orange...Tinseltown, how 1936 is THAT? But that's because it inspires people. Like that sign.

THE ACTRESS

What about you? You're up here, what, watching the sunrise through that soup down there?

THE WRITER

I'm a writer. I come up here to think, to get a little peace. And observe.

THE ACTRESS

You're a writer?

THE WRITER

Writer-director is the dream. Daydreamer is the reality.

THE ACTRESS

A writer who doesn't write?

THE WRITER

I write. Just not professionally. So far.

THE ACTRESS

It's not paying the bills.

THE WRITER

I admit it's been hard selling this stuff, yeah. But I think I've got the one.

THE ACTRESS

(sniffs)

You're just chasing the dream-carrot, too. La-la land.

THE WRITER

I prefer "City of Angels," myself.

THE ACTRESS

You're no different from me. Where are you from? Nebraska? Mississippi? Pennsylvania?

THE WRITER

Actually, I was born down there.
(indicates the city below)
(MORE)

THE WRITER (CONT'D)

Down the 101 almost in foul-ball
range of Dodger Stadium, in fact.

THE ACTRESS

So you never even left this city?

THE WRITER

Joined the Navy, saw the world.
Well, a lot of ocean and some
colorful ports of call.

(flourishes his hand to
indicate the sign)

But that old siren song kept
calling me home.

THE ACTRESS

You could have gone anywhere and
you came back to LA?

THE WRITER

I spent so many nights standing
watch on the fantail of that old
tin can...you haven't seen the
night sky if you haven't seen it at
sea. No light pollution. It's
like an endless flow of jewels
scattered across velvet eternity.
And the way the sea glows green at
night in the ship's wake where the
screws churn up the plankton.
Wonderland by night.

THE ACTRESS

Okay, you're a writer.

THE WRITER

Between the sea and the heavens, my
mind would wander across
realities... characters come out of
the dark and speak to me, their
faces, their voices, but I have to
guess their names. They show me
their lives, lives that might have
been, action and adventure, comedy,
horror, and I pass the time
drifting through their world.
Sometimes I wouldn't know if I was
dreaming them or they were dreaming
me. Even now a song comes on the
radio and I can visualize with
crystal clarity the moment it
describes.

(a beat)

(MORE)

THE WRITER (CONT'D)

Come on, we've met, right? I'm sure I know you.

THE ACTRESS

Well, I've had a few bit parts. Not really anything memorable.

THE WRITER

Circus Burger! You were the girl who was way too happy about the Three-Ring Slider Pack in the Super Bowl ad.

THE ACTRESS

Nobody has EVER been happy about the Three-Ring Slider Pack.

THE WRITER

Well, that's probably true.
(finger snap)
You were the runaway that murdered her stepfather in that episode of Wilmington PD. The one that Jeremy Renner guest-starred in.

THE ACTRESS

I'd remember meeting Jeremy Renner.

THE WRITER

I got it! You were the lead sorority sister in Night of the Living Slime.

THE ACTRESS

Is that even a real movie?

THE WRITER

It must be, I saw it...

THE ACTRESS

These roles weren't what I dreamed of when I was a kid.

THE WRITER

That doesn't mean they weren't meaningful to somebody.

THE ACTRESS

I wanted magic and I got the endless clown-hanky in career form.

THE WRITER

I loved all of them. You ever hear the expression "Earth without art is just EH?"

THE ACTRESS

That's cute.

THE WRITER

Well, it's true. They may not have been the roles you wanted but as long as you're sharing your gifts, you're bringing a little joy to somebody's world. How can that be a bad thing?

THE ACTRESS

That's true. What about you, have you written many scripts?

THE WRITER

Oh, about thirty. This one, I've got a big name producer looking at it. I'm just trying to get the dialogue right. Would you...?

THE ACTRESS

What's that?

THE WRITER

It's not exactly Shakespeare in the park, but I'd be honored if you'd help me do a read-through and make sure it's working.

THE ACTRESS

I guess I'm not going anywhere anyway.

THE WRITER

Hey, you never know. Here, let's get off the road anyway.

(extends a hand, pulls her
a little way up the hill
with him)

You read the lead role. Say, you can sing and dance, right?

THE ACTRESS

Not at 7am, I can't.

Pulls a script out of the messenger bag, hands it to her. She opens the script, rolling pages back, and scans the page in front of her.

THE ACTRESS (CONT'D)

Deana?

THE WRITER

That's the one, the lead role.

THE ACTRESS

That's my name!

THE WRITER

Well, what do you know? Must be a sign.

THE ACTRESS

So what's it about?

THE WRITER

It's about the way paths cross when they're meant to. About how nothing in life is really random.

THE ACTRESS

So it's about life.

THE WRITER

Everything's about life. Writers don't make things up. We collect stuff and assemble it.

THE ACTRESS

Performers do, too.

THE WRITER

It's like found object art.

THE ACTRESS

All art is found object art. Ready?

THE WRITER

Sure. So this first scene is where they meet, on a flight from LAX to Dulles. So, scene: Interior, Airline at 35,000 feet. Night. Plane experiences turbulence as it passes through a storm. Seatbelt sign illuminates, Deana, a flight attendant, making her way back to her jump seat as the leading man comes out of the Head -- Uh, that's restroom for you civilians -- headed back to his seat.

(MORE)

THE WRITER (CONT'D)

The plane jumps violently, knocking Deana into my arms, uh, I mean his arms, you know, sort of an impromptu pirouette, and both of them fall into a seat in the last row that is, fortunately, unoccupied.

THE ACTRESS

(reading the role of Deana)

Oh my God! Geez, I'm so sorry... are you okay?

THE WRITER

(as leading man)

I am now. Air travel is something I just can't get used to. I'm a sailor, I prefer the ocean.

THE ACTRESS

(as Deana)

Oh no, now I get seasick at the slightest wave. That constant bobbing up and down? Forget it. Turbulence just a kick in the butt. No biggie.

THE WRITER

(leading man)

Well today I think it kicked in the right direction. Not bad for a first dance.

THE ACTRESS

(looking her script)

Okay, that was a pretty cheesy line.

THE WRITER

Yeah it was. But that's the way it happened--happens sometimes.

She regards him a little skeptically as he flips through the pages.

THE WRITER (CONT'D)

All right, let's move onto a different section. This was the first date.

THE ACTRESS

Location, Jurassic Putt-putt? You gotta be kidding me. Real big spender, huh?

THE WRITER

Hey, I could've taken her anywhere, a fancy dinner, a night dancing at some club... National Harbor, or the casino in Glen Burnie. But then I'd have had to share her with the crowds, and who can talk? Here it was just the two of us getting to know each other under the moonlight and the churning of the windmill.

THE ACTRESS

I get it, it's cute. It actually sounds fun.

THE WRITER

(Leading man)

LOOK OUT FOR THE PREHISTORIC SPIDERS COVERING THE HOLE!!!

The actress jumps, breaking character -- or not, since the character is supposed to startle, too.

THE ACTRESS

Cheese and crackers, warn me next time!

THE WRITER

(laughing)

I'm sorry.

THE ACTRESS

Okay, where was I?

She pantomimes putting.

THE ACTRESS (CONT'D)

Look, I'm terrible at this, I've never played minigolf in my life.

THE WRITER

Never played...? Well I'm glad to give you a new experience. I mean I know it isn't champagne and caviar on a rooftop or anything.

(MORE)

THE WRITER (CONT'D)

But they don't have a fourteen-foot
plaster T-Rex at your five-star
steakhouse, so...

THE ACTRESS

No, that's certainly true.

She fake swings again, an imaginary ball missing the hole.

THE ACTRESS (CONT'D)

No no...dangit! That was supposed
to bounce the other way...

THE WRITER

Here, let me help you.

Walks behind her, reaches around her waist to grip the
imaginary club, his hands over hers, guiding a smooth putting
motion.

THE WRITER (CONT'D)

The main thing is to keep your eye
on the prize.

THE ACTRESS

You mean the ball.

THE WRITER

I mean the prize.

He looks at her and lets go of the imaginary club as she
follows through with her swing.

THE ACTRESS

Hey! I got it!

THE WRITER

I knew you had it in you.

THE ACTRESS

I do.

THE WRITER

Okay, just one more scene and I'll
let you go. I know it's early but
she likes to dance, and there's
nobody around. Do you mind?

THE ACTRESS

(looking around for
somebody to bail her out)
I suppose.

THE WRITER

Great, okay. Let's go back down to the road.

Walking down the paths.

THE WRITER (CONT'D)

So this is the last memory.

(a beat)

Last scene together.

THE ACTRESS

The last memory?

THE WRITER

All he wants is one last dance with her. Um, can I see your phone? You have spotify? This is their song.

He selects an instrumental version of "Wonderland by Night," as she slips her earbuds back in, and he hands her back her phone.

THE WRITER (CONT'D)

(leading man)

Sweetheart... can we have one last dance...?

The actress closes her eyes, swaying as the music starts. Extends her hands to an imaginary partner and begins the dance.

The writer stands back, forming his hands into the classic director's viewfinder to frame the scene as she dances into it. The camera angle making it appear she's dancing across the top of the Hollywood sign.

Time and space seem to stand still as the music plays, carrying her through the frame and along the hillside, letting go of her imaginary partner, now a solo dance that is as much ballet as waltz, as the camera pushes into a closeup on her face. Something comes over her, a wave of sadness, and a tear rolls down her cheek... and the music stops.

THE ACTRESS

How was that?

She opens her eyes, and the writer is gone. The messenger bag and script remains.

THE PRODUCER (O.S.)

Stunning. Simply stunning.

THE ACTRESS

What?

She turns, sees a middle-aged man, a light jacket and slacks, a small dog on a leash, a Yorkie or a Westie. Cairn. Something in a terrier.

THE ACTRESS (CONT'D)

Where'd he go?

THE PRODUCER

Who?

THE ACTRESS

The writer who was just here. Hey, you're--

THE PRODUCER

Frank Kaplan.

THE ACTRESS (CONT'D)

--Frank Kaplan!

THE PRODUCER

You're the girl from the Circus Burger Three-Ring Slider Pack ad, right? Last year's superbowl. You really sold the heck out of that crummy box of meat.

THE ACTRESS

Um...yeah...sorry about that.

THE PRODUCER

What I just saw was better than the last week of auditions we sat through. You look like her.

THE ACTRESS

Who?

THE PRODUCER

Deana, the flight attendant. That's the role I'm trying to fill. I see you found my bag, I must've forgotten it.

THE ACTRESS

Your bag?

THE PRODUCER

Yeah, the script you were just reading is my next project. It's a true story, the writer was a sailor. His last station was the Navy Yard back in DC. His fiancée was a flight attendant.

(MORE)

THE PRODUCER (CONT'D)

They were flying back to LA after he got out, and he ended up thwarting a hijacking.

THE ACTRESS

He did that?

THE PRODUCER

Saved everybody. Cost him his life. You want to come in, meet the director? He's about pulling his hair out looking for the right girl.

THE ACTRESS

I...sure, I'd love to.

The Producer gives her his card.

THE PRODUCER

Great, call my office, we'll set it up. You know, I don't know how I managed to forget this bag. I heard a scream, came up to make sure everything was okay. Made me meet you. It must've been a sign.

The actress lifts her eyes heavenwards and mouths a silent "thank you."

The camera pulls back through one of the O's in WOOD as Deana and Kaplan walk down Mount Lee Drive, talking.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: HOLLYWOOD SIGN