

Goodbye Cruel World

FADE IN:

EXT. PACIFIC AVENUE - CHINATOWN - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Jammed with people bartering over oranges, water chestnuts and scrawny ducks. The CAMERA moves up along the storefront of a Chinese laundry and through the window of an upstairs loft.

INT. ZACK'S LOFT - DAY

Big, sparse and funky, the kind of room that once seated seventy opium smokers dreaming of happier days in China.

The furniture is decrepit: a few splitting rattan chairs, a rickety Mandarin wedding bed with erotic images carved along the canopy, bamboo curtains painted with once-beautiful faces, now peeling like a leprous scourge.

ZACK HOLLAND stands in the middle of the room, all alone. His face is pale. He's got a four-day beard. His hair is chopped haphazardly and dyed jet black. He hasn't slept in days. He's about to change all that.

He tosses a noose over an exposed beam that runs across the ceiling, ties one end around a radiator pipe, then steps up on a chair and slips the other end around his neck.

ZACK (V.O.)

I was at the end of my rope. I was
broke... I was living in a dump... my
last three girlfriends had left me...

Zack stands there for a second, contemplating the end. It doesn't really seem so bad. There's even the hint of a smile on his lips as he kicks the chair away.

It won't budge.

He kicks it again and again, then looks down to see that the legs are stuck between the cracks of the rotting floorboards.

ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I was a musician, a damn good one, too, but no one really cared about that. A hit song, that's all they wanted, the only thing that mattered. One hit song and they'll listen to everything you've ever done...

Zack loosens the rope, gets down off the chair, and moves it to a sturdier part of the floor. He climbs back up, reattaches the noose, steadies his nerves, and kicks the chair away again. This time it works.

For a split second.

The knot in the noose unravels and sends Zack sprawling to the floor.

ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Well, I didn't have a hit song. I'm not sure I really had one in me. Sure, I know what you're thinking, another self-involved musician with his pathetic tale of woe. But there's one thing I haven't mentioned. I was thirty years old. To be a thirty-year-old musician without a hit is like being a gigolo without a dick. You can only go so far...

Zack picks himself up and pulls a Boy Scout "Merit Badge Manual" from his shelf. He turns to the chapter on knot-making and carefully follows a diagram.

Zack reties the noose, gets back up on the chair, slings it around his neck, and gathers himself once more. He takes a deep breath, then kicks the chair away.

The noose holds.

ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So I decided to end it. It really wasn't so bad. I mean, sure, my neck hurt like hell and my lungs were about to explode, but all that crap about your life passing before your eyes and long tunnels and white lights? Forget it. You know what was in my mind? Pancakes. How I

should've splurged and gotten real maple syrup for my last meal instead of that Log Cabin shit. What was I thinking? I'm gonna save a buck or two at a time like this?

Zack's body swings at the end of the rope. His legs go limp. His eyes close. Suddenly, there is a loud CRACK, like the cracking of a neck.

It's not his neck. It's the overhead beam, cracking cleanly in half. Zack, the rope, and the beam crash to the floor. Zack stares at the ceiling in disbelief.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Fuck!

There's a KNOCK at the door. A VOICE calls from the hallway.

MATTHEW (O.S.)

Zack? -- Zack? -- C'mon, man, let's go!

Zack looks up from his pile of despair.

ZACK

Huh? What time is it?

MATTHEW (O.S.)

It's a quarter after. C'mon, will you? We're late, as usual.

Zack loosens the noose from around his neck and pushes the door open.

ZACK

Okay, okay, don't have a coronary.

MATTHEW enters and steps over the noose, the upended chair, and the broken beam. He glances around with little concern, as if he's seen all this before.

MATTHEW

Zack, I don't have this kind of trouble. Nobody I know has this kind of trouble.

ZACK

Just get my stuff, will you? I don't need any pep talks today.

Matthew is dashing in his Italian army pants, knitted tie, and maroon corduroy jacket from the fifties. He's got a tan, a forty-dollar haircut, a health club membership, and enjoys the good life...

MATTHEW

The passengers on the Titanic didn't have this kind of trouble.

The two of them grab a couple of instruments and some loose wires, and disappear down the hallway.

ZACK (V.O.)

That's typical of something Matthew would say. Of course he didn't have this kind of trouble. Matthew doesn't have any kind of trouble. His life is perfect. But I know

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ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

that deep down, he's searching for something. A nice, comfortable search. I always get the idea that if I ever find Shangri-la, Matthew will already be there with hot running water...

INT. DOWNTempo LOUNGE - NIGHT

Two SPOTLIGHTS illuminate Zack and Matthew, who are surrounded by synthesizers, samplers, and MIDI sequencers. Megawatts of SOUND pour from their keyboards and you'd swear a seven-piece band was playing.

ZACK (V.O.)

So we had this gig. Some new place that just opened and let us play for tips. That was better than the last club where we had to guarantee a minimum crowd and wound up owing the bastards ninety bucks for the pleasure of playing all night.

Creating an ethereal blend of Asian drone chords and African polyrhythms, these guys are good. Really good. So good they could be playing for twenty thousand screaming fans. Instead, they're playing to an anemic crowd of twenty.

ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Not that I'm complaining. Music was my life. Well, music and women. They go together hand in hand, like pestilence and plague, fever and flu, ham and Egg McMuffins.

A WOMAN IN THE AUDIENCE moves toward the stage. Her black hair is like a giant mane framing a classic Egyptian face.

ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But that's what it's all about. Taking chances. Finding a reason to go on. Meeting somebody who might inspire you to greater heights, somebody who might give you a new way of looking at things...

She glides toward Zack and begins a trance-like dance. It's a modernistic impression of Swan Lake. It's a dance of giving. A dance of sacrifice.

Matthew, not happy with this intrusion, begrudgingly plays a simple bass line. Zack, on the other hand, gets into it as his fingers manipulate her movements like remote control.

The number ends and the "swan" dies like nobody's business. The HOUSE LIGHTS come up and Matthew and Zack leave to a smattering of applause. The swan remains a lifeless heap on the stage floor. Zack turns back to her.

ZACK (CONT'D)

You think she's all right?

MATTHEW

No, I don't think she's all right. I don't think she's all right at all.

(pulling him away)

C'mon, let's go.

Zack glances around the club. It's a subterranean haunt with overhanging I-beams, exposed wires, and mismatched tables.

ZACK

This place is great, huh?

MATTHEW

(uncomfortable)

Yeah, if we were in Baghdad.

Zack notices two stunning DEATH ROCKERS in full white-face, black-lace regalia. He steers Matthew to an adjoining table.

ZACK

C'mon, let's sit down.

MATTHEW

I don't want to sit there.

ZACK

Are you crazy? Don't you see those two girls?

MATTHEW

That's why I don't want to sit there. Have you ever noticed that I already have a girlfriend?

ZACK

Who, Stephanie? Stephanie's not your girlfriend, she's your financial advisor.

MATTHEW

Maybe that's what you need.

Zack pulls out two chairs.

ZACK

Go on, go talk to them.

MATTHEW

Why me? You're the one who thinks they're so great.

ZACK

I don't know what to say. You know what to say.

MATTHEW

I know what to say but I'm not gonna say it to them.

ZACK

Believe me, we'd never forgive ourselves if we let them get away.

MATTHEW

Look, just go over there and ask them for a light.

ZACK

You can't use lame lines like that.
They're Death Rockers, for God's sake.

Looking around, Matthew diverts Zack's attention to the crumpled swan lying on the stage... still dead.

MATTHEW

If you're looking for Death Rock, try her.

ZACK

Maybe I should see if she's okay.

MATTHEW

Don't do it! She's trouble!

ZACK

I think something's wrong with her.

MATTHEW

The only thing wrong with her is if you go over there.

ZACK

What if she's really dead? They could hold us responsible.

MATTHEW

Don't be stupid. And don't go over there!

Zack heads for the stage. One of the Death Rockers slinks up behind Matthew.

DEATH ROCKER

(a squeaky voice)

Ya got a light?

Matthew ignores her.

DEATH ROCKER (CONT'D)

Me and my friend wuz wonderin' if you wuz busy or somethin'...

MATTHEW

Yeah, I'm busy. I'm busy watching my best friend ruin his life.

DEATH ROCKER

Cool!

Matthew shoots her a look.

DEATH ROCKER (CONT'D)

(backing off)

Well, thanks anyway...

ON THE STAGE

The swan feels Zack approach. She raises her tear-filled eyes and looks at him. He looks at her.

MATTHEW

looks at them looking at each other. He doesn't like what he sees.

ZACK AND THE SWAN

can't take their eyes off each other.

RUBY

That was the most beautiful music I've ever heard. I'm Ruby.

ZACK

Your dancing was incredible. I'm Zack.

RUBY

Zack. That's a nice name. DJ Zack.

ZACK

Yeah, that's the name of our group. DJ Zack and What's His Name.

Ruby leans up on her elbows.

RUBY

Look into my eyes, Zack. You can see for a thousand miles.

Zack looks into her eyes and is drawn in, deeper and deeper...

ZACK (V.O.)

That's all it took. I mean, what did she mean by that? Were her eyes the window to her soul? Were they the window to the world? Were they the window to some other dimension? I had to find out.

EXTREME CLOSEUP ON RUBY'S EYES

growing larger and larger still as we enter right through the LENS...the CORNEA... the RETINA... and into the IRIS...

ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

So we had a drink. Then we had another drink. Then Matthew came over and said we had to go.

The frame is bathed in an explosion of color, as if we were traveling into a KALEIDOSCOPE...

ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I asked for her number. She said she didn't really have a number, but she'd get in touch. I thought that was kind of odd...

... the cascading sounds of a SYNTHESIZER complement the rapidly changing colors...

ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Matthew thought everything about her was odd. He said if I went out with her, it would be the end of me. That's all I needed to hear. I saw her the next night.

... the music swells and reverberates as we speed madly through a RAINBOW, faster and faster...

ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We just talked and talked and talked. About music. About dance. About robbing the convenience store down the street.

... the rainbow transforms into the FLASHING RED AND ORANGE LIGHTS of a police cruiser...

ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I thought she was kidding. She wasn't.
For Ruby, it was just a lark, something
she'd always wanted to do.

EXT. MISSION STREET - NIGHT

Ruby and Zack race down the street, hop over a fence, and fall into each other's arms, crying with laughter.

ZACK (V.O.)

For me, my adrenaline was pumping, my heart was pounding, and my blood was boiling. All I wanted to do was get her into bed. But, no, she said, that was a special gift she wanted to save for later.

EXT. RUBY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Ruby kisses Zack good-night and disappears down the hallway.

ZACK (V.O.)

Later? Okay, later. I could wait. But my curiosity was piqued. What kind of a gift? Does she get all wrapped up in a big red ribbon? God, she must be hot. The next morning, when I told Matthew what happened, he completely flipped out. "You did what?" he kept repeating.

INT. ZACK'S LOFT - DAY

Matthew stares at Zack, wide-eyed and dumbfounded.

MATTHEW

You did what?

ZACK

It was no big deal, believe me. We got like twelve and a half bucks. I mailed it back to them this morning.

MATTHEW

Okay... Zack... I want you to listen to me. You're not gonna see her again, not ever, not even from across the street, you're not gonna talk to her, you're not gonna write to her, you're not gonna think about her, you're not gonna do anything even remotely connected to her, because if you do, I will never speak to you again. I want you to promise me that.

ZACK

Okay, okay, I promise.

INT. VESUVIO'S - NIGHT

Zack and Ruby burst through the doors of a Beat-era saloon. Ruby has an armful of roses and hands one out to each person at the bar.

ZACK (V.O.)

That night, Ruby and I hit all the hot spots in North Beach. Vesuvio's. Specs. Tosca. I never drank so much. We just laughed and laughed and laughed.

Ruby saves the last rose for herself. She plucks all the petals, tosses them into the air, and watches them float down over Zack's head. They look like angel dust.

ZACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

God, she was fun.

INT. ZACK'S LOFT - DAY

Zack opens his door to find the entire room filled with balloons, floor to ceiling and wall to wall.

A big sign reads: "HAPPY TUESDAY, LOVE RUBY."

He walks through in a daze, in a wonderland of pink, red and yellow.

ZACK (V.O.)

I couldn't wait to sleep with her.

EXT. RUBY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Zack again kisses Ruby good-night outside her door.

ZACK (V.O.)

But no, she said, not yet. It wasn't time.
Not yet. For the gift.

Zack watches as the door swings closed.

ZACK(V.O.) (CONT'D)

Oh, God, how I wanted that gift.

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