

'MARIA'

Written by

Steven Knight

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, 36 AVENUE GEORGES MANDEL

We find Ferruccio the DOCTOR and three policemen greeting paramedics carrying a stretcher. As we move closer we see a body lying dead on the floor. The apartment is beautiful, exquisitely made.

The body lying dead on the floor is MARIA CALLAS.

1      **Caption: September 16, 1977**      1

We hear the introduction to Verdi's '*Ave Maria*,' from OTELLO.  
(1)

Then THE VOICE begins to sing...

OPENING SEQUENCE.

2      INT. EMPTY SPACE      2

We see MARIA CALLAS staring into camera and singing. There is no background for context. The screen is purely the face of Maria singing...

The VOICE should be the thing. An entity of its own.

We stay with the image and the song for thirty seconds. Then we begin to intercut flickering images, highlighting the impossible glamour of her life...

3      INT. LA SCALA OPERA STAGE, MILAN - NIGHT      3

Maria performs La Traviata. The music from the stage is mute, but we feel the power of Maria's performance.

4      INT. EMPTY SPACE      4

We cut back to Maria singing into camera, inviting us into her head as she sings. This image becomes a kind of visual chorus. We stay with her. Then...

5      EXT. ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON - NIGHT      5

We see Maria, first on stage singing Norma, then, leaving the Opera house where flowers are being thrown, camera bulbs pop and fizz and an adoring crowd reach out to her as she ducks into a waiting car.

- 6 INT. EMPTY SPACE 6
- We cut back to Maria singing. We stay with her for a few moments...
- 7 INT. METROPOLITAN OPERA STAGE, NEW YORK - NIGHT 7
- We see Maria taking a rapturous ovation after a performance. There is a packed house of elegantly dressed opera lovers who are beguiled by her singing.
- A theatre manager enters stage and hands Maria a bouquet of flowers...
- 8 INT. EMPTY SPACE 8
- Maria continues to sing, but as we join, she closes her eyes. We stay with her...
- 9 INT. LA FENICE THEATRE, VENICE - DAY 9
- Again, we see Maria performing, this time from high up in the auditorium and across the heads of an adoring audience... She now sings Tosca.
- A **montage** of quick, muted images:
- We see intercuts that feature moments of glory from Maria's illustrious career in opera. Some will be of Maria on stage performing, and some will show her taking huge ovations all over the world. Will also see Maria leaving or arriving at Opera venues, restaurants, boats, planes, etc. Reflecting the adulation and press attention she received.
- 10 INT. EMPTY SPACE 10
- ...We rejoin Maria as the song ends and there is a rapturous ovation here too. We wait for the orchestra which plays out the Aria. Then there is silence.
- Maria looks into camera and walks, leaving an empty frame.
- Cut to black.
- 11 EXT. COURTYARD - DAWN 11
- (What follows is an actual event but we should realize it in a surreal setting.)

We are in an unidentified brick courtyard of an Italianate villa in Milan. The sun is rising. The courtyard door opens and a shaft of morning light enters and is then shut out.

Through the wooden courtyard door walks Maria Callas. She is pushing a wheeled clothes rack on which hang a dozen Opera costumes, fabulously designed dresses.

She pushes the rack toward an unlit bonfire which has been built from wooden pallets and also boxes, shoes, wigs, cases of cosmetics, Opera programs and other memorabilia.

We come close to Maria as she begins to take the stage costumes off the rack and place them on the bonfire.

The costumes have brown cardboard labels with handwritten labels. We identify costumes for La Traviata, Tosca, Anna Bolena, Norma and others.

The costumes are exquisite but Maria lays them on the bonfire as if they were of no importance.

Soon the rack is empty, all of the gorgeous dresses are placed in a pile on the bonfire.

Maria peers at them and then goes to a corner in the courtyard and finds a metal can.

The can is labelled '*Benzina*'.

Maria removes the cap and pours the gasoline onto the bonfire and the dresses. She shows no emotion. She empties the can and puts it aside.

She then finds a box of matches. She takes a moment. Then she strikes the match...

Maria drops the match onto the bonfire and immediately flames billow...

We now move around Maria as the flames rage and smoke pours into the morning sky.

Maria moves back from the flames and leans back against the brick wall of the courtyard. She lights a cigarette and looks up to the sky as she blows smoke.

We see her resolution and her beauty through the smoke...

Out of the flames, we hear a blackbird singing loudly...

Then a clapperboard enters shot with the movie title '*MARIA*'. The board snaps shut.

12 EXT. 36 AVE. GEORGES MANDEL, MARIA'S APARTMENT - DAY 12

We are face on to Maria's Paris apartment at dawn. A blackbird is singing in a Plane tree near to the apartment.

*Caption. One week earlier.*

Fade out and up...

13 INT. BEDROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT 13

Maria is sleeping in her bed in an elegantly decorated and furnished bedroom. The window is open but the curtain is closed so the curtain billows in the breeze.

The breeze also brings with it the sound of the blackbird in full voice, singing its dawn chorus.

Maria wakes and hears the song.

Down below, Paris is waking up and the bird sings, oblivious. After a moment...

She listens to the singing some more and we might see an idea enter her mind which she considers. The idea appears to please her as the singing continues.

Then the singing stops and the blackbird flies away. In that moment, she appears to make a decision.

14 INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - DAY 14

Maria emerges from the bedroom and two small dogs yap and come to greet her. A black and white TV plays an old French movie (*Le Cercle Rouge*)...

She smiles and walks imperiously between her two adoring pets...

MARIA

Ninety nine percent of your  
devotion is about food. One  
percent is about love.

The room has beautiful views over Paris and is exquisitely furnished. As Maria enters with her dogs, we see her devoted butler FERRUCCIO struggling to move a grand piano from its place by the window.

Ferruccio is in his fifties, smartly dressed but a little disheveled by his efforts. As Maria passes...

MARIA (CONT'D)  
How is your spine, Ferruccio?

As he struggles...

FERRUCCIO  
As fragile as a twig, the doctor  
said.

MARIA  
So be careful. And when I ask you  
to do something, you should  
occasionally tell me 'no'.

FERRUCCIO  
I am careful...

He straightens as she passes and speaks softly...

FERRUCCIO (CONT'D)  
(amused)  
...that's why I don't dare to tell  
you no.

Maria breezes by with the dogs following. Ferruccio applies  
himself once more to shifting the piano...

15 INT. KITCHEN, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - DAY

15

Maria enters and finds her housemaid BRUNA, cooking a large  
omelette for breakfast. Bruna has worked for Maria for twenty  
three years and they have an amused formality born of years  
spent together. Maria sets about the task of feeding the  
dogs. She has a clear bag of loose meat in the fridge and  
divides the meat into two on plates with mathematical  
precision.

As she does this...

MARIA  
I slept until two. And then he  
came to my bed...

Bruna whisks her eggs with increased vigor...

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I said in a clear voice, 'I know  
you are dead'...

BRUNA  
And he went away?

MARIA

And he went away. Which is unlike him.

Bruna half smiles...

BRUNA

Perhaps when men are dead they become, more manageable.

MARIA

Perhaps...

Maria places the two plates of meat down and the dogs begin to feed.

BRUNA

Anyway, madam, a doctor is coming today. At eleven. Ferruccio made the appointment for you.

Maria takes a moment then speaks with an agenda...

MARIA

I cannot see the doctor today. I will be busy.

BRUNA

You can tell him about the visions you are having and no doubt he will change your medication.

Bruna carefully pours the omelette into the pan as she registers...

MARIA

I am perfectly happy with my medication and its effects.

Bruna looks to Maria and perhaps hears something different in her voice...

MARIA (CONT'D)

I am happy with the theatre behind my eyes. Doctors are prone to label revelation as illness when in fact it is simply a form of sanity they don't understand.

Bruna raises a hand.

BRUNA

Madam, if I may ask, you will be busy doing what?

Maria straightens and prepares to get to business...

MARIA

Bruna. I want you to listen.

Bruna shrugs. Maria takes a deep breath, then exhales and adds...

MARIA (CONT'D)

And I want you to be honest.

Bruna takes the pan off the heat and turns to Maria. Maria suddenly bursts into Casta Diva, from Norma, by Bellini. (2)

Bruna doesn't flinch. This is not unusual. The dogs look up at Maria briefly. Maria sings with force...

16 INT. LIVING ROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - DAY 16

Ferruccio is pushing the piano into position near the fireplace. As the singing issues from the kitchen he reacts, with just a flicker among the exertion...

17 INT. KITCHEN, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - DAY 17

Maria sings and her voice fills the kitchen. Brunna listens without expression, shaking the pan with the omelette gently to stop it burning. The two dogs eat. The neighbor down below bangs on the ceiling to complain. Maria completes the sequence and her voice echoes. Silence.

Maria folds her arms.

MARIA

So?

Bruna turns to snip chives onto the omelette with scissors and responds...

BRUNA

(flatly)

It was magnificent.

MARIA

Thank you.

Maria turns to leave. For the first time, Brunna registers concern...



18 INT. LIVING ROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - DAY 18

Maria walks back out of the kitchen into the living room.  
Ferruccio gestures at the piano...

FERRUCCIO

How is that for a position for the  
piano, Madam?

Maria peers at the piano as she walks...

MARIA

It's still not right, but I'm nice.  
So leave it...

As she walks by...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Oh, there is a television camera  
crew coming to interview me in  
about an hour. Perhaps hide the  
ashtrays.

She walks on to the bedroom and we stay with Ferruccio for a  
moment. The news is from nowhere but his devotion to Maria is  
tangible.

19 INT. BEDROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - DAY 19

Maria returns to the bedroom. On our return we might notice  
a large Greek Orthodox icon of the Black Madonna hanging on  
the wall. Maria pays it no attention as she walks toward the  
door of a large dressing room.

20 INT. LARGE DRESSING ROOM WITH WALK IN WARDROBES - DAY 20

The space is filled with beauty and elegance. Clothes from  
all the finest French designers hang beside treasured  
costumes from various operas.

The walls are lined with photos which she displays only in  
this private space. We don't dwell on any of them but we  
incidentally see images of Maria with Jack Kennedy, Winston  
Churchill, Marilyn Monroe, and most prominently, Aristotle  
Onassis, along with other celebrities and world leaders. The  
photos cover the walls and stretch out into the darkness at  
the other end of the space.

Maria pays no attention to the photos and heads for a small  
cupboard which she unlocks.

Inside the mirrored cupboard, there is an array of pill bottles. We don't identify them but there are uppers and downers and painkillers and steroids.

She selects a bottle and we come close to read the label. The pills are *Mandrax*. She pours four into her palm and grabs a bottle of water left there for the purpose, and swallows all four in one swallow.

21 INT. BEDROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - DAY

21

Maria sits down at the dressing table mirror and flicks a switch. Lightbulbs fringe the mirror as in a theatre dressing room.

She looks at herself and the array of cosmetics spread before her.

From a drawer, Maria takes a pair of seriously powerful glasses. The lenses are noticeably thick. She puts them on and peers at herself. We might assume that she doesn't care to wear these glasses in front of people, even at home.

With her glasses on, she scans the various creams and gels...

She picks up a gel and reads the label. Then there is a knock on the door and Maria sighs...

FERRUCCIO

May I come in, madam?

MARIA

Only if you must.

Maria removes the glasses and Ferruccio enters. He is holding a small notebook and a pencil. He sits beside Maria and we might infer that this is a morning routine. Maria begins to apply makeup to her eyes. Ferruccio has his pencil hovering over the notepad...

FERRUCCIO

What did you take?

Maria deliberately misunderstands...

MARIA

(busy)

I took liberties. All my life. And the world took liberties with me.

FERRUCCIO

You know what I mean, madam.

Ferruccio waits for Maria to answer the actual question...

MARIA

This morning I took only Mandrax.

Ferruccio writes down 'Mandrax'. We come close and see that the book is in fact a diary which serves as a medical record. He is filling in today's date.

FERRUCCIO

How many?

MARIA

Two.

We come close as Ferruccio writes 'FOUR'.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I need to go somewhere and I want Mandrax to accompany me.

FERRUCCIO

Mandrax is not a reliable companion if you are going out. I will drive you. Where are you going?

MARIA

I will walk and I won't tell you where I'm going because you'll laugh.

A pause. Ferruccio peers at Maria's reflection...

FERRUCCIO

What did Bruna say about your singing?

MARIA

(defensive, busy with her eyes)  
She said it was magnificent.

FERRUCCIO

She is a housemaid.

MARIA

And housemaids of course cannot know about opera?

FERRUCCIO

They are not qualified to judge it.

Maria shrugs and works on her eyes. Ferruccio peers at her, closes his notebook and surmises...

FERRUCCIO (CONT'D)  
I know where you're going.

MARIA  
She said 'magnificent'. Before it  
was just 'excellent'. So...

FERRUCCIO  
And so 'magnificent' means you have  
decided to try...

MARIA  
On the word of a housemaid, yes.

Ferruccio reacts, accustomed to oddness. He dares...

FERRUCCIO  
Madam, this television film crew.  
Is it real?

MARIA  
I'd like you to move the piano  
closer to the window.

Maria lays her cosmetics down.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
And as of this morning, what is  
real and what is not real is my  
business.

Ferruccio stands and bows gently...

FERRUCCIO  
Yes, Madam...

He turns to leave...

MARIA  
Oh! And I won't be here for the  
doctor's appointment you made  
without my permission...

FERRUCCIO  
(concerned)  
Madam, you must...

MARIA  
Don't cancel him. Have them look  
at your back. You are becoming a  
little crooked.

Ferruccio sighs.

FERRUCCIO

Yes, madam.

Ferruccio is about to leave and Maria hands him a full ashtray.

MARIA

In case the film crew are real.

Ferruccio leaves with the ashtray. Maria peers in the mirror for a moment and we see her find resolve.

A clapper board enters shot. It is marked 'ACT 1-LA DIVA.'

23

INT. BEDROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - DAY

23

We guess what follows is hallucination as Maria kisses a smartly dressed man in a dark suit on both cheeks in the French style. We will learn that this man is MANDRAX...

(THE IDENTITY OF MANDRAX COULD CHANGE THROUGH THE STORY BUT FOR NOW I WILL SIMPLY IDENTIFY HIM AS A HANDSOME FRENCHMAN IN A DARK SUIT.)

Mandrax is accompanied by a cameraman who will hoist his camera onto his shoulder when the 'interview' begins.

MANDRAX

Madam Callas, my name is Mandrax. I would like to walk with you through your life.

MARIA

A *handsome* interrogator gets the most honest answers.

MANDRAX

Should I call you Maria or La Callas?

MARIA

Either is perfectly fine.

MANDRAX

I prefer La Callas...

MARIA

Then that is perfectly fine...

MANDRAX

Unless, of course, you feel you are a victim of that identity?

MARIA

A lot has been written about me, a lot of unfair things. Stories that are pure fabrication...

MANDRAX

Shall we sit?

Mandrax raises his hand and looks to the cameraman and hisses...

MANDRAX (CONT'D)

(urgently)

OK, roll...

CAMERAMAN

Rolling.

Maria half smiles as the camera begins to roll...

MARIA

You see, I am quite rebellious by nature...

The cameraman begins to walk around Maria, like a predator stalking prey. Maria could get unnerved but doesn't.

MANDRAX

I heard a story once that you burned all your dresses...

MARIA

What dresses?

MANDRAX

Your old theatre costumes...

Maria smiles, lights a cigarette...

MARIA

That is true. Bravo. This will be worthwhile. I burnt all my theatre dresses just before I left Milan...

MANDRAX

May I ask why?

Maria smiles sweetly...

MARIA

No. You may not.

Mandrax accepts...

MANDRAX

When did you last perform on stage?...

MARIA

Why don't you be more persistent with your questions. I burnt my dresses because they belong to the past. And in answer to your less interesting question, I last performed four and a half years ago.

She blows smoke. The cameraman appears in the mirror reflection...

MANDRAX

You will never perform again?

MARIA

No.

MANDRAX

Tell me how it felt to be on stage?

MARIA

An exaltation, an intoxication. Sometimes I thought the stage itself would burn...

MANDRAX

And on bad days?

MARIA

Well, there are two sides. One says 'you must fight', and the other says 'you are awful and you should be ashamed'.

Maria checks her watch.

MARIA (CONT'D)

But I'm afraid audiences expect miracles. And I can no longer perform miracles.

MANDRAX

Perhaps we could speak a little about your life away from the stage...

MARIA

There is no life away from the stage. The stage is in my mind...

Mandrax is about to speak but Maria gets to her feet...

MARIA (CONT'D)

But now I'm afraid I have to go...

Mandrax looks astonished and glances at the cameraman...

MANDRAX

Go?

MARIA

Yes.

MANDRAX

We were promised three hours...

MARIA

Then come with me...

Mandrax appears flustered, excited...

MANDRAX

Come with you where?

Maria peers into Mandrax's eyes...

MARIA

*'Come with me'* said the Diva and  
there was really no need to ask  
where.

Mandrax gets to his feet...

MANDRAX

Then I will come with you, wherever  
you're going...

Maria selects a beautiful coat...

MARIA

Walk with me across Paris. My  
butler says Mandrax is a very  
unreliable companion, but I think  
we are a perfect combination.

She smiles sweetly again...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Don't you?

Suddenly an orchestral version of 'Brindisi' ('The Drinking Song') from La Traviata.



25 EXT. LIBRAIRIE LAMARTINE, RUE DE LONGCHAMP, PARIS - DAY 25

We are on the corner of the street where a pedestrian crossing stretches like a piano keyboard to the beautiful canopied frontage of Librairie Lamartine.

The sun is shining, the music is glorious and Maria and Mandrax walk side by side across the crossing with the fizz of life *and the narcotic* overflowing.

(The cameraman is always in the distance, filming, and sometimes we cut to his point of view.)

As they walk, the people walking by dance as they walk, each one as nimble as a ballet dancer. A street vendor twirls behind his barrel of coals, families walk hand in hand in long lines along the pavement.

MARIA

You see, when I am with you and your camera, Mandrax, I don't have to perform because everyone else is performing.

Suddenly the pedestrians, the passers by, the people of Paris form a huge chorus, *singing fiercely as Maria observes*.

We are close to their passionate faces until just as quickly they are gone. And Maria is ALONE as life goes on all around.

She looks around for a moment and then accepts. She walks on...

EXT. THEATRE DES CHAMPS ELYSEES

Through autumn leaves Maria walks alone toward the grand entrance of the theater. We might sense she is heading for an ordeal or a moment of truth. The autumn leaves reflect her time of life...

28 INT. BARE STAGE, THÉÂTRE DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES, PARIS - DAY 28

There is a single grand piano on the stage and a man sitting at the keyboard. We will learn that this is JEFFREY TATE. He is in his early thirties, a conductor and pianist with a diffident, almost shy manner.

He sits on the stage and we sense he has been here all alone for a long time. He checks his watch and allows himself a small sigh.

Then he hears footsteps. He prepares for a big moment. Maria appears and hesitates at the edge of the stage as if afraid to walk further. She is more nervous than we have seen her...

MARIA

I'm late.

Jeffrey smiles...

JEFFREY

(as if it excuses)

You are Maria Callas. You are not late, everyone else is early.

Maria looks out into the empty auditorium and immediately turns and walks back into the wings...

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

(quickly)

Maria...

Maria has gone into the darkness. Jeffrey is about to go after her but has a better idea. He sits down at the piano and begins to play "O mio babbino caro" from Gianni Schicchi by Giacomo Puccini. (3)

He plays while glancing into the wings.

After a moment, Maria re-emerges.

MARIA

You are casting breadcrumbs out for me as if I were a blackbird and this stage a bird table.

JEFFREY

Hmm?

MARIA

It won't work, of course.

Jeffrey continues to play. Maria sighs. She steps forward, deeper onto the stage. The music continues...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Although I sang for Bruna this morning and she said I was magnificent.

Jeffrey continues to play...

Jeffrey plays on. Maria glances at the dark auditorium as if looking at a dangerous assailant. Jeffrey continues to play...

He nods with purpose as if preparing a singer to begin. Maria stretches her body and takes some sharp breaths. It seems she is going to sing. Jeffrey plays a flourish and waits.

Maria doesn't sing. Jeffrey stops playing and the last note echoes in the empty theatre.

Maria nods gently...

A pause. Jeffrey peers at her...

JEFFREY

Who is Bruna?

Maria is lost in thought...

Maria looks at Jeffrey and defies as she confesses...

MARIA

Bruna is my housekeeper. She was making an omelette. She makes magnificent omelettes. She knows little about opera except what she has learned from me and what she has learned from me is...

A pause.

MARIA (CONT'D)

...to always be complimentary. So. I am here on the word of an obedient housemaid...

Jeffrey questions silently...

MARIA (CONT'D)

You know, blackbirds have a song that if you buy a recording, on the label it just says, '*Blackbird Song*'.

A pause.

MARIA (CONT'D)

There must be a song which is just called '*Human Song*'.

A pause.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I would like to sing it before I  
stop.

JEFFREY  
(softly)  
Stop?

Maria doesn't elaborate. Jeffrey gets to his feet and comes closer to Maria.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)  
Maria. You said you would come here  
and at least find out if you still  
have a voice.

Maria looks away...

JEFFREY (CONT'D)  
I am not a répétiteur. I'm not here  
to teach you and I couldn't teach  
you anyway.

A pause.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)  
But if I hear, I will know.

He gestures at the piano...

JEFFREY (CONT'D)  
Puccini will know.

MARIA  
Puccini is dead and he may be glad  
that he is.

Jeffrey and Maria smile.

JEFFREY  
Why don't we just sit on the  
proscenium as if it was the edge of  
the future?

Jeffrey offers his hand and they walk down stage and sit on the edge of the stage with their feet dangling over the orchestra pit. They stare out into the darkness.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)  
What song do you want to sing?

MARIA  
A love song.

JEFFREY

And who are you in love with?

MARIA

Guess. Ugly and dead.

JEFFREY

Mr. Onassis, still?

MARIA

He comes to my bed every night.

Maria looks around the auditorium.

MARIA (CONT'D)

He won't leave me alone. But I love sending him away.

A pause.

JEFFREY

When did you last perform?

MARIA

Long time ago. It made me sick. I got a hernia. I got purple legs...

She begins to laugh...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Everything swelled up except my ego.

She begins to laugh out loud and Jeffrey laughs with her...

MARIA (CONT'D)

I was in Japan. And all these Japanese doctors said, 'What is this thing?', and my people said 'Well, this is La Divina, La Prima Donna', and they are saying, 'But then why does she look like a purple frog?'.

They both laugh and then Maria takes the deep breath she takes when she remembers that the world is hell.

MARIA (CONT'D)

So I came back to Paris. And I sit in my apartment and I look out of the window and say 'so tick tick tick, the brute is dead, my voice has gone, what do I do now?'.

Jeffrey gets to his feet and offers his hand...

JEFFREY

I have my car. I'll drive you back  
to your prison cell on Avenue  
Georges Mandel if that's what you  
want.

Maria looks ahead into the darkness...

MARIA

Bruna is my mother and my sister  
and my daughter and my maid.  
Ferruccio is my father and my son  
and my brother and my butler.

She looks to Jeffrey...

MARIA (CONT'D)

It is a terribly crowded apartment.  
I don't want to go just yet.

Jeffrey takes a moment.

JEFFREY

OK, so I have an idea.

A pause.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

You're evidently mad about  
something, or scared or bitter or  
whatever it is, so don't sing...

A pause.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

...shout. Shout so loud even  
Puccini can hear.

He half smiles...

JEFFREY (CONT'D)

So loud ugly, dead Onassis can  
hear.

Jeffrey waits a moment, then walks back to the piano and sits  
down. Once again, he begins to play the introduction to the  
aria. Maria remains seated above the pits. Jeffrey plays on.

At that moment, a young girl, seven years old, appears from  
the darkness at the back of the auditorium. She trots down  
the aisle toward the front.

When Maria sees her, she takes a sharp intake of breath, a shock, a wonder, a joy that is also frightening. The little girl takes a seat at the front of the auditorium and looks up at Maria, waiting. (We will learn who this imaginary little girl is soon.)

Maria's breath shudders. She makes a decision and at last she gets to her feet, turns and walks toward the piano...

At the correct cue, she begins to sing "O mio babbino caro".

Her voice is strong to the untutored ear but we come to Jeffrey as she sings and we see that his reaction is equivocal. Maria's range is not what it once was and there is a soreness about her voice which to the non-purist makes it feel more human.

At one point, Jeffrey flinches just a tiny bit but we are reading the truth in his face. Maria sings with her back to the auditorium deliberately. She stares at Jeffrey's face as she sings and Jeffrey feels the spotlight on him.

Finally Maria stops singing and Jeffrey stops playing. Maria dares to turn to look out into the auditorium and the child has gone.

There is silence. Maria waits.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)  
That was Maria singing.

A pause.

JEFFREY (CONT'D)  
I want to hear La Callas.

Maria turns and walks away quickly across the stage. Jeffrey calls out...

JEFFREY (CONT'D)  
It will not happen in one day.  
Puccini and I will be here  
tomorrow, same time!

Maria walks.

EXT. TREE LINED AVENUE WITH COLUMNS

Again, Maria walks alone through autumn leaves, between lines of trees among the bone-white glory of Paris, the buildings the color of gravestones.

We catch Maria up and find she is resolved to continue...

33

INT. LIVING ROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - DAY

33

Ferruccio is waiting and someone else is sitting in a chair near to the piano (we will learn this man is DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU). After a moment, Maria enters inside.

Ferruccio speaks dispassionately...

FERRUCCIO

Madam. I asked the doctor to wait  
for you.

Maria gathers herself and looks to the doctor with horror. He turns and looks grave as he peers at the drenched trembling Maria.

FERRUCCIO (CONT'D)

Doctor Fontainebleau, Maria Callas.

Water drips from her as she forces a smile.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU

I am a huge admirer of your work.

Maria nods, sweeps hair from her face.

MARIA

How is my Butler's back?

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU

There is no cure for it other than  
'stop moving pianos'.

A pause.

FERRUCCIO

Madam, I showed him the diary. The  
medicines that you are taking every  
day.

Maria protects herself by pumping herself up and speaking primly...

MARIA

(prim)

I have a strange feeling that  
sharing intimate medical  
information is against the law.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU

Madam Callas...

A pause.



DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU (CONT'D)  
I need to have a conversation with  
you about life and death.

Maria slowly sits.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU (CONT'D)  
About sanity and insanity.

He gestures at Ferruccio to leave. Ferruccio gets up and  
takes his coat...

MARIA  
The piano is in the perfect place,  
thank you.

Ferruccio bows acceptance and walks to the kitchen. Maria  
looks to the doctor...

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
Madame, please.

34 INT. KITCHEN, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - DAY

34

Bruna is waiting in the kitchen as Ferruccio enters. The two  
dogs are sleeping in a basket. As Ferruccio enters, we see  
his true emotion and he is suddenly overcome. He wipes his  
eyes as he looks out of the window. Bruna puts her hand on  
his shoulder...

BRUNA  
I'm going to cook and she will be  
better.

FERRUCCIO  
She hasn't eaten for three days.

BRUNA  
Last time, she didn't eat for four  
days, so... we're still okay.

FERRUCCIO  
Yeah, but then you're going to  
prepare it, and she'll give it to  
the dogs, as usual.

We hear muffled voices from the living room as Bruna and  
Ferruccio share a deep emotion in silence.

35 INT. HALF-LIT DRESSING ROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS 35

We spend some time surveying the photographs of Maria with a dazzling array of world leaders and celebrities. There are shots of Maria on Onassis's yacht and on the beach at the Lido in Venice. We dwell mostly on Onassis and Maria.

The door opens and Maria enters. She is trembling a little and is in a hurry. She closes the door and turns on the light. She puts on her thick-lens glasses then unlocks her pill cabinet.

With shaking hands, she begins to pour approximately half of the contents of each bottle into her hand. She then hides the pills in the pockets of her clothes which are hanging. She then puts the half-empty bottles back into the cabinet.

She works quickly and pills spill onto the floor. We watch her work in the reflections of photographs of Jack Kennedy and Monroe.

Then there is a knock at the door.

FERRUCCIO (OOV)

Madam.

Instantly, loudly...

MARIA

Leave me alone!!!!

She steps back and treads on her glasses and breaks them. She has a white shirt wrapped in her hands. She yells again...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Leave me alone!!

36 INT. BEDROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS 36

Ferruccio is standing outside the dressing room door, head bowed, lips pursed. He speaks softly...

FERRUCCIO

Madam, I have made coffee...

We hear Maria banging her fist on the wall...

FERRUCCIO (CONT'D)

Madam, also there is a message for you. From the pianist...

37 INT. DRESSING ROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS 37

Maria is holding the white shirt in her hands as she listens.

FERRUCCIO (OOV)  
He said no matter what else  
happens, you must go to see him  
again tomorrow. He said he heard  
hope in your voice.

38 INT. BEDROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS 38

Ferruccio addresses the door, smothering emotion.

FERRUCCIO  
I thought that might be a good  
thing. I thought that might make  
you happy.

At last, the door opens and Maria has composed herself a little. She has her broken glasses in her hand.

MARIA  
The medicine cabinet is unlocked.  
You can throw it all away...

FERRUCCIO  
That isn't what the doctor said we  
should do...

MARIA  
Was he even a doctor?

FERRUCCIO  
He is a specialist, madam.

MARIA  
And what does he specialize in?

FERRUCCIO  
Blood, Madam. That is why he took a  
sample of your blood.

Maria pushes past Ferruccio to the dressing table.

FERRUCCIO (CONT'D)  
But he said even before the results  
of the test we should get your  
medication under control.

MARIA  
It is under control. It is under my  
control. Doctors hate that.

As she walks, she grabs a handful of her hair and tugs at it, runs her fingers through it...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Book me an appointment with a  
hairstylist who doesn't speak.

She sits down at her dresser...

She opens a drawer and finds a second pair of thick-lens glasses. She turns to Ferruccio...

MARIA (CONT'D)

And when I write my autobiography,  
I will title it, '*The day Ferruccio  
Saved My Life*'.

Ferruccio reacts. After a moment...

FERRUCCIO

And what day was that, Madam?

MARIA

Every day. Every single day. That  
is why I hate you. I fall into a  
river and you always fish me out.

Ferruccio bows gently.

FERRUCCIO

Yes, madam.

She puts her thick-lens glasses on and looks at Ferruccio in the reflection.

MARIA

Book me a table at the cafe where  
the waiters know who I am. I am in  
the mood for adulation.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM/DRESSING TABLE

As Maria sits almost still as a statue, Bruna brushes and untangles her hair. After a while Maria slowly turns to look at her reflection in the mirror. She is honest in her assessment...

41

EXT. RESTAURANT, LA MAISON DU CADRE, PARIS - EVENING

41

There are tables outside on the pavement, and in wide, Maria arrives and is greeted by the Maître d' (who we will meet later). She takes a seat alone.

We come to her table as a waiter arrives with a glass of champagne and a menu.

Maria scans the menu even though she is unable to read it.

The waiter bows and walks, leaving a menu. Maria sips her champagne and looks out across to the front of the Hôtel Lancaster, which is opposite. She then slips her glasses from her pocket and quickly scans the menu. Suddenly...

MEMBER OF PUBLIC

Madam Callas?

She looks up, whips the glasses off. A middle aged AMERICAN MAN is smiling at her...

AMERICAN MAN

I just wanted to say that once in New York you broke my heart...

A pause. Maria smiles.

MARIA

Which Aria?

The man has no intention of being cruel but continues...

AMERICAN MAN.

No, no, you broke my heart because I bought two tickets and you failed to appear.

Maria reacts. The man shrugs and smiles...

AMERICAN MAN

They said you were unwell. C'est la vie...

Maria reacts...

MARIA

Then I was unwell...

AMERICAN MAN

It's OK, no hard feelings...

MARIA

I was unwell...

AMERICAN MAN

Madam, it's OK, I forgot about it until I just saw you...

Maria yells...

MARIA

People always said I was faking,  
but I was never faking!...

AMERICAN MAN

Madam, it's OK. I didn't mean...

MARIA

You have no idea of the pain to  
pull music through your belly, out  
your poor mouth... No idea!

The waiter arrives and glares at the man as if he has done something wrong...

WAITER

Madam...

The man steps away and Maria catches her breath. He rejoins his wife, amused at Maria's outburst.

WAITER (CONT'D)

Madam, perhaps we can find you a  
seat inside.

Maria watches the man and his wife walk away.

MARIA

(mocking herself)

I am not hungry. I come to  
restaurants to be adored.

She looks away and squints into the distance. We look through her eyes and see an out-of-focus image of the Hôtel Lancaster across the street. *Then her vision magically focuses.*

She sees Aristotle Onassis walking into the Hôtel Lancaster. He is well dressed, late fifties, a man of business who reflects his bluntness in the way he walks. He is UGLY but carries his ugliness with arrogance..

Maria leaves her champagne and hurries toward the hotel. The waiter watches her go with concern...

42

EXT. DORCHESTER HOTEL, LONDON - NIGHT

42

*As Maria hurries toward the lobby, we see that the hotel is now transformed into the Dorchester and the doormen wear the uniforms of the grand London hotel. She enters through a revolving door...*

43 INT. ELEGANT, LAVISH BALLROOM, DORCHESTER HOTEL - NIGHT 43

A jazz band plays and smoke swirls in the ultra smart hotel ballroom.

The ballroom is occupied by smartly dressed society people who have gathered post-theatre to drink and take cocaine and be seen doing it. The music is fast and the dance floor is jiving.

*The ballroom has been decorated with one thousand pink roses. This will play...*

Through the smoke and faces, we see a door open at the far end of the ballroom. Maria enters and looks across the ballroom, looking for someone.

She angles her head. She sees a table where people are drinking and laughing and where there is an empty chair...

She removes her headscarf and her dark glasses and shakes out her hair. She looks younger. She is herself but she has changed and years have slipped away. She looks stunningly beautiful as she walks through the ballroom and swirls the smoke.

She walks to the table and sits in the empty chair. There is a man in his forties pouring champagne as Maria takes her seat. This is GIOVANNI BATTISTA MENECHINI (her husband at this time). He is not surprised by her arrival...

BATTISTA MENECHINI

Maria, where have you been?

Maria looks around, slowly becoming herself as she was, forgetting that this is an illusion. She speaks softly...

MARIA

I think you know.

Battista hands her the glass of champagne...

BATTISTA MENECHINI

Tonight, everyone wants to worship you...

A silver haired man in a tuxedo suddenly crouches before her...

TUXEDO MAN

May I say that tonight you defined Violetta forever. You are Violetta.

A younger man leans across the older man and hands Maria a rose...

YOUNG MAN

My English no good. Flower says  
it. Magnificent Traviata...

Maria takes the flower. As she does, across the table and beyond Maria's husband, we see Aristotle Onassis approaching. We approach the table with him and Maria turns and looks up. Onassis smiles...

ONASSIS

Excuse me. Madam Callas. There is  
someone who is just dying to meet  
you and I wondered if you would  
make his day, his week, his month,  
his year, his life...

Onassis is a whirlwind. Before Maria can speak, Onassis takes her hand and leans across to Battista...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)

Excuse me Sir, may I borrow your  
wife just for a few moments...

BATTISTA MENECHINI

I think there is a queue...

Onassis smiles...

ONASSIS

I don't queue...

We will learn that Aristotle Onassis has a way of getting his way before people even know that it is happening. He gently helps Maria to her feet. He kisses her hand.

ONASSIS (CONT'D)

Come.

Onassis has begun his capture of Maria.

44

INT. DANCE FLOOR, BALLROOM, DORCHESTER HOTEL - NIGHT

44

Maria is led across the ballroom by Onassis. Heads turn and people offer up small fast applause for Maria as she passes. People call out 'Brava'...

A VOICE

Madam Callas, you were magnificent  
tonight.



Instantly, Maria and Onassis begin a dialogue which will last for years...

MARIA  
Who are you?

ONASSIS  
Aristotle Onassis. This is my party. Thrown in your honor. If you want to count them, I got a thousand pink roses just for you...

Maria looks around at the roses displayed all around the room. Onassis stops and turns...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)  
I was told it was a smart thing to do, to associate myself with the *Prima Donna Assoluta*.

They walk on...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)  
So this party was kind of a business strategy but then I fell in love.

MARIA  
With opera?

ONASSIS  
No.

They stop for a passing gaggle of weary dancers. He leads her a few more paces to an empty table where a bottle of vintage champagne sits on ice.

Onassis begins to untwist and uncork the champagne...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)  
I fell in love with you.

Maria half smiles, not sure how to take Onassis...

The champagne cork pops...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)  
I'm ugly, but I'm rich. I'm Greek but I'm from Argentina. I'm married but it's 1959. So...

He has poured two glasses of champagne and offers one to Maria. He raises a toast...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)  
To falling in love through  
binoculars...

He holds up a pair of Opera glasses, which he stole...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)  
I watched you through these...

Maria sips champagne and is amused...

MARIA  
You love me and yet you have never  
set eyes on me before tonight...

ONASSIS  
Now I am offended. We met. In  
Venice. At the film festival. But I  
guess there were a lot of movie  
stars, so you forgot the little  
ugly guy.

Maria laughs...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)  
Well, I didn't forget you. Do you  
want to dance?

MARIA  
I should get back to my husband.

ONASSIS  
You will never go back to your  
husband.

Onassis lights a cigar on a candle...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)  
Sometimes this thing happens. This  
thing that is happening right now.

Maria laughs...

MARIA  
And what is it that is happening?

ONASSIS  
A decision is made. Not by anyone.  
It's just how it's going to be.

Maria darkens a little...

MARIA

I'm sorry Mr. Onassis, am I meant to be feeling something?

ONASSIS

Yes. For the first time in your life.

She peers at him through his smoke...

MARIA

Well. There is a point where self confidence becomes a kind of insanity...

ONASSIS

Oh, I crossed that border long, long ago...

Maria is amused...

Onassis at last pauses. He peers at Maria.

ONASSIS (CONT'D)

Look, I don't mean to be abrupt...

MARIA

I think I can confidently say you are being abrupt. 'Abrupt' might not even be a strong enough word.

They both see Battista Meneghini approaching across the dance floor. Onassis sees him coming and speaks quickly...

ONASSIS

But there is a ship. My ship. Called the '*Christina*'. It is sailing from Monte Carlo to Greece on July 21st. I'd love you to be on board.

Battista Meneghini suddenly arrives and Onassis instantly gets to his feet and grabs Battista Meneghini's hand with a grin and pumps it...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)

I got it. There's a lot of people want a piece of her. My time is up. I got it.

Maria gets to her feet. Onassis squashes out his cigarette and speaks casually...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)  
 But I was just telling your wife  
 I've arranged a cruise out of Monte  
 Carlo and I've invited the most  
 illustrious people...

Maria is about to speak but Onassis speaks over her...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)  
 And I told her it would be an  
 absolute honor if you and your wife  
 would join me on board...

Battista Meneghini is evidently impressed and looks to  
 Maria...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)  
 And guess what your wife said.

A pause. They both look to Maria...

MARIA  
 I said 'yes, why not?'

Maria looks to Onassis. He angles his head and smiles.  
 Suddenly...

45 INT. CAFÉ, PLACE DU TROCADÉRO

45

...We are inside the café where Maria ordered champagne  
 earlier. She is sitting at a candlelit table. Mandrax is  
 sitting opposite her and there is a microphone on the table  
 between them.

It is as if we have joined her in the middle of an interview  
 (even though we guess this is hallucination).

MARIA  
 (repeats)  
 I said 'yes, why not?'

She finishes a glass of champagne...

MARIA (CONT'D)  
 ...And my husband agreed.

A pause.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
 There is a very common theory that  
 if you ask for something, it means  
 you want it.

A pause. Maria pushes her hair from her face...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Well that isn't true. I didn't want to go on his yacht because I knew where the yacht would take me. And it took me there. To the place I didn't want to go. But when I got there, I stayed.

*Now we see Maria sitting alone from the point of view of the Maître d'.*

The café is deserted and closed apart from Maria and the Maître d' and a waiter. The Maître d' looks concerned and we see that Maria is speaking softly to herself.

He turns to the waiter who enters from the kitchen. The Maître d' asks a silent question and the waiter nods once. The Maître d' approaches Maria and speaks softly...

MAÎTRE D'

Madam Callas, my son has called your apartment and someone is on their way to fetch you.

Maria nods gently but doesn't hear...

MARIA

Could I have another glass of champagne?

The Maître d' nods to the waiter who pours a glass. He brings it to the table. Maria looks around the café...

MARIA (CONT'D)

I know you might think my behavior is unusual but I am actually working. I am writing something...

The Maître d' is evidently a fan and is honored to be with Maria...

MAÎTRE D'

What are you writing?

Maria takes a moment...

MARIA

An autobiography. An Aria. A Third Act. 'The Human Song'. Something along those lines.

MAÎTRE D'  
I didn't know you wrote.

MARIA  
Neither did I...

A pause.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I don't use a pen. I use myself. It  
seems the part of me that dreams is  
taking the wheel of the ship and  
taking the ship to a safe harbor.

She sees incomprehension on the Maître d's face and half  
smiles...

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Why are you kind to me?

A pause. The Maître d' gets up and goes behind the bar.  
There is a record player where the café plays music for  
customers. The Maître d' searches a cupboard filled with  
records and selects one.

MAITRE D'  
Because you're kind to us with  
this...

He puts the record on the player. It's "Ebben! Ne Andro  
Lontana" From "La Wally" by Catalani. (4)

He puts the needle on the record and we hear the overture of  
Act One. Maria reacts and looks out into the dark street.

MARIA  
I never listen to my own records.  
Please turn it off...

The Maître d' imagines it is a slight thing and smiles...

MAÎTRE D'  
This is my café, Madam. And this is  
what I listen to when I am alone...

MARIA  
You are not alone.

Maria gets to her feet, goes to the record player and removes  
the needle.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I cannot listen to my own records.

A pause.

MAÎTRE D'

Why not?

Maria takes a moment. Headlights flood the cafe. Maria looks up and sees Ferruccio getting out of his car outside.

MARIA

Because they are perfect.

A pause.

MARIA (CONT'D)

A song should never be perfect. It should be performed in that moment differently to every other time. That is why--

Ferruccio knocks on the door. The Maître d' takes a moment then goes to the door and unlocks it. Ferruccio hovers in the doorway.

FERRUCCIO

Whenever you are ready, Madam.

Maria walks by Ferruccio and we see her get into the car and slam the door.

46 INT. FERRUCCIO'S CAR, PARIS - NIGHT

46

"Ebben! Ne Andro Lontana" continues from the previous scene and then ends. Ferruccio is in the driver's seat and Maria is in the back but Ferruccio doesn't yet drive.

Ferruccio dares...

FERRUCCIO

Doctor Fontainebleau called. He said the results of your blood tests have arrived.

Maria stares out of the window...

FERRUCCIO (CONT'D)

He said you must call him in the morning.

A pause. They drive on. Finally...

MARIA

He said I '*must*' call him?

Ferruccio hesitates, thrown by the question...

FERRUCCIO  
I think. Yes. He may have said you  
*should* call him.

MARIA  
Or perhaps he said I *can* call him  
if I wish...

FERRUCCIO  
He just wants you to call him,  
Madam...

MARIA  
You don't remember the word he  
used, which would decide whether I  
sleep tonight or not. You are  
getting old. And more and more  
crooked.

Ferruccio absorbs the comments. After a moment...

FERRUCCIO  
But you will call him, Madam. Yes?

Maria is silent.

MARIA (SOFTLY)  
Please...

47 INT. BEDROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - NIGHT 47

The TV is playing an American Western in the darkened room.  
We see Maria walk past the TV, a sleepless silhouette. She  
disappears and then crosses in front of the screen again,  
eating ice cream.

48 INT. LIVING ROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - NIGHT 48

We see a record spinning on a record player. It's from Il  
Trovatore- "D'amor sull'ali Ali rosee" by Verdi. (5)

Maria sits beside the record player, imagining herself  
singing. Briefly we glimpse Maria on stage and the score  
changes...

49 INT. DRESSING ROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - NIGHT 49

A purer and earlier version of "D'amor sull'ali Ali rosee"  
takes over as score.



The dressing room door opens and Maria enters. She begins to search through the pockets of her hanging clothes to find pills. "D'amor sull'ali Ali rosee" stops abruptly.

She finds her pockets have been emptied.

MARIA

Bruna!

She falls to her hands and knees and begins to search for the pills she dropped. She finds none. Then she unlocks her cabinet and opens the door.

The door to the cabinet emits light and also sound. Maria hears herself and Yakinthi when they were young, singing the song 'Why I Smoke Cocaine'.

The sound appears to be coming through the wall of the apartment. Maria registers fury at the sound. She shoves the clothes on hangers back along the rail to expose the wall. She puts her ear to the wall. She hears the song being sung.

Then she looks at the hanging clothes that she shoved.

There is a GREY NAZI GERMAN SS UNIFORM on the hanger as the singing gets louder. She goes to the door and pulls it open...

50 EXT. NARROW CRAMPED STREET IN BRIGHT SUN AND DARK SHADE - 50 DAY

Suddenly we are viewing Maria's memory in black and white.

We are in a narrow side street which has brightly colored washing hanging to dry on lines strung across the street. The shadows of the buildings are divided by brilliant sunlight coming through the open alleyways.

We hear the Prelude from La Traviata, Act III. By Verdi. (6)

Through the bars of light, we see a woman in her late forties hurrying between and under the lines of washing. We will learn this is LITSA CALLAS, Maria's mother. She is leading TWO OVERWEIGHT MIDDLE AGED GERMAN SS OFFICERS in full Nazi German uniforms. The soldiers are laughing and calling out to each other and their voices echo against the walls.

The music swells...

In a doorway, we see a GREEK WOMAN peer down the street as Litsa opens the street door of an apartment block and shows the two soldiers inside. The woman observing looks scandalized...

51 INT. APARTMENT BLOCK, ATHENS - DAY

51

The stairs are narrow and dark and winding but brilliant light enters through small windows. Litsa leads the giggling, out of breath, fat soldiers upstairs and they complain in German about how many flights they are walking up.

*(The way they move, their large gestures, should remind us of opera.)*

They stop to take a swig of Schnapps from a hip flask with a Swastika emblem. Litsa urges them on...

52 INT. LIVING ROOM, SMALL APARTMENT, ATHENS - DAY

52

The place is untidy and cramped as Litsa leads the soldiers inside. They comment in German on the smell. Then Litsa leads them into a tiny kitchen...

53 INT. KITCHEN, SMALL APARTMENT, ATHENS - DAY

53

The small kitchen is functional with cured meats hanging and a large painting of the Madonna on the wall, along with many rosaries.

There are also a young woman and a girl in the kitchen. They are looking out of the window at lines of washing. One is tall and slim and we should realize this is Yakinthi Callas at twenty three.

The other is short and a little overweight. This is MARIA AT SEVENTEEN.

*(This is the only time in our story when Maria will be played by someone else.)*

The door opens and the two fat German soldiers are ushered in by Litsa. Maria and Yakinthi turn with sour, resentful expressions. The two soldiers take off their berets and peer at the girls.

Music ends.

We hear the noise of the street. Litsa claps her hands and speaks in broken English.

LITSA

My daughters. They sing...

The drunken German soldiers look the sisters up and down. Litsa introduces as if on stage.

LITSA (CONT'D)  
 (broken english)  
 They will perform for you a funny  
 song and is called 'Why I Smoke  
 Cocaine'.

The two German soldiers burst out laughing, sharing another swig of schnapps. Litsa instructs her daughters...

LITSA (CONT'D)  
 (Sing the song for the men).

The girls are tired and a little scared but they obey their mother. Maria counts 'one, two, three' in Greek and the girls begin to sing a popular 1930s Greek folk song 'Why I Smoke Cocaine' by Roza Eskenazi.

As the song begins...

54 INT. LIVING ROOM, SMALL APARTMENT, ATHENS - DAY 54

The door to the living room opens and MARIA AS A WOMAN enters from the stairs. She hears the singing through the wall.

*(We will realize that Maria is witnessing a memory from her life as if she were present in it. She is listening to it through the thin walls of the apartment where she grew up)...*

55 INT. KITCHEN, SMALL APARTMENT, ATHENS - DAY 55

As the girls sing, they also dance and twirl with tired choreography. They mimic smoking as they dance cutely. The German soldiers stare as they share the Schnapps. Yakinthi sings well.

Maria sings beautifully...

56 INT. LIVING ROOM, SMALL APARTMENT, ATHENS - DAY 56

Maria listens to the song through the wall and reacts. The song is funny and bright but Maria raises her face to the ceiling to listen with an air of despair...

57 INT. KITCHEN, SMALL APARTMENT, ATHENS - DAY 57

Maria and Yakinthi stop singing and the two soldiers applaud and laugh loudly and one of them whistles. Another shouts 'Brava!' Yakinthi curtsies but Maria doesn't.

Maria stares at her mother as the applause dies. Litsa curtseys too and looks to the soldiers...

LITSA  
That will be ten drachma.

The older of the soldiers peers at Yakinthi...

SOLDIER 2  
That one can dance.

He looks to Maria...

SOLDIER 2 (CONT'D)  
But that one. She can sing.

A pause. He looks to Litsa as he hands her a ten drachma note. Then he asks softly...

SOLDIER 2 (CONT'D)  
What else do they do?...

58 INT. LIVING ROOM, SMALL APARTMENT, ATHENS - DAY 58

Maria is listening, looking up at the ceiling as a muffled negotiation begins next door. Maria takes a breath and breathes heavily as if enduring pain or exhaustion...

We hear the overture of 'Norma' begin to play again...

60 INT. LIVING ROOM/SET, SMALL APARTMENT, ATHENS - DAY 60

We are with Maria as a woman as she sits motionless with her head now bowed. The kitchen door opens and the two soldiers emerge, one holding the hand of Yakinthi and the other holding the hand of Maria.

Maria as an adult looks up to see young Maria pass and young Maria looks at her. Their eyes lock and their hands briefly touch as Maria *then* is led away from Maria *now*.

61 INT BEDROOM, SMALL APARTMENT, ATHEN - DAY 61

The room is lit by candlelight. Maria leads the soldier inside and we anticipate the inevitable. Maria unfastens her top button...

GERMAN SOLDIER  
No.

A pause. The soldier half smiles...

GERMAN SOLDIER (CONT'D)  
Not that. Just sing.

Maria is startled. We guess she lives a routine where this is unheard of.

Maria takes a moment. She then begins "L'amour est un oiseau rebelle" / Habanera, from Carmen, Act 1 by Bizet. (7)

She sings beautifully and her voice fills the room. The soldier is a little drunk and instantly becomes emotional. As the song continues, he reaches into his pocket and we expect him to produce Schnapps.

Instead he brings out a photo of his wife and two daughters and peers at it. He wipes a tear.

We stay with this scene for a few moments as the beauty of Maria's singing tames the beast and makes the soldier cry.

62 INT. LIVING ROOM, SMALL APARTMENT, ATHENS - DAY 62

We find Maria Now standing with her forehead leant against the door as she listens to her younger self singing. A tear drops.

Impossibly, Bruna enters the room and pulls open a curtain...

63 INT. BEDROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - MORNING 63

Curtains are pulled back by Bruna and brilliant light floods in. Maria blinks awake as the light hits her face.

BRUNA  
Did you sleep, madam?

MARIA  
One hour. Just now. I spent it with my sister. Which was part of the plan...

BRUNA  
What plan?

MARIA  
...Until you woke me up.

Bruna finds some clothes strewn on the floor, the dressing room door is open. There is a grey jacket which Bruna picks up (it looks a little like the German uniform jacket). She takes the clothes back into the dressing room...

MARIA (CONT'D)

How am I to sleep when Ferruccio  
has taken all of my pills...

BRUNA

Ferruccio has gone for coffee and  
croissants.

MARIA

Where is my medication?

BRUNA

Doctor Fontainebleau said we should  
keep them in the kitchen.

MARIA

Even the ones I hid? You went  
through my pockets...

BRUNA

(busy)

Also, you are going to call the  
doctor today.

Maria gets out of bed and goes to the dressing table. She  
puts on her thick glasses and peers at herself (with Bruna,  
there is no vanity).

MARIA

No. Today, I have an appointment.

Bruna turns to her...

MARIA (CONT'D)

...With Bellini.

BRUNA

You can still call the doctor.

Bruna continues to tidy...

MARIA

Has a package arrived for me?

Maria peers at the dressing room. Bruna appears to have her  
suspicions...

BRUNA

Yes. A parcel from Athens. From  
your sister, Yakinthi...

MARIA

Good.

Maria immediately gets out of bed and enters the living room.  
Bruna watches, deeply uneasy...

64 INT. LIVING ROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - MORNING 64

Maria is tearing open a padded envelope. She quickly sees that the parcel contains a good supply of Mandrax and some other tablets.

Bruna emerges from the bedroom and Maria hides the contents away...

Maria takes the package toward the bedroom...

65 EXT. BRIGHT BLEACHED SUNLIGHT, PALAIS DE TOKYO - DAY 65

Maria and Mandrax walk in front of the bone-white columns of the Palais. Again, there is a lone cameraman who doesn't speak.

MANDRAX

OK, here is great. It looks great.  
It looks La Callas. Greek. Grand.  
Sad. Framed by the past.

Maria stands in a spot and the cameraman puts his camera to his shoulder...

MANDRAX (CONT'D)

Now, am I calling you Maria or La Callas today?

MARIA

Today, Maria.

MANDRAX

(to cameraman)

OK, OK, roll.

(to Maria)

Maria, I understand you are looking to make something of a comeback.

MARIA

Not really, no. I have no intention of performing on stage.

MANDRAX

I understood you were seeking to find your voice again...

MARIA

I am seeking something I lost.

MANDRAX

And why do you want to sing again?

Some autumn leaves begin to blow across the shot...

MARIA

Because music is so enormous it  
envelops you in a state of  
torture...

Mandrax laughs...

MANDRAX

That is a reason?

MARIA

Music is born of misery. Of  
suffering. Happiness never produced  
a beautiful melody. It seems, music  
is born of distress. And poverty.

MANDRAX

And you were born very poor.

A pause.

MARIA

Yes. I used to sing for money.

The blowing leaves get thicker...

MARIA (CONT'D)

I just realized last night, that is  
where it all began...

27 EXT. BRASSERIE DU MEXIQUE, PLACE DE MEXICO, PARIS - DAY 27

Maria and Mandrax walk toward the restaurant, where shutters  
are being raised and awnings are being unfurled. They  
approach a large window.

*We should notice that in the reflection in the window, Maria  
is alone.*

Maria peers inside...

MANDRAX

Do you want coffee?



MARIA

No. I want courage. I want courage to be able to go into this Mexican restaurant and order a plate of fajitas with cream and salsa.

Mandrax looks away and peers down the street...

MANDRAX

Why courage?...

MARIA

Because the smell when I walk by here each morning with my dogs reminds me of the day I finally told my mother to fuck off...

Maria is overcome by emotion but Mandrax laughs...

MANDRAX

You should write a whole chapter about it in your autobiography.

Maria laughs...

MANDRAX (CONT'D)

You must call it *'How I Finally Told My Mother to Fuck Off Forever in a Restaurant in Mexico'*.

The cameraman comes close from nowhere and the lens studies Maria as she becomes sad...

MARIA

It wasn't a restaurant in Mexico. I asked Bruna to cook for her because Bruna can cook anything. And my mother can ruin anything.

EXT. CATHEDRAL IN THE RAIN

Maria is walking in heavy rain with an umbrella raised. She hears "Coro a bocca chiusa" from Madame Butterfly, by Puccini. Then she sees that A FULL ORCHESTRA is assembled on the stone steps of the Cathedral, playing the score in the rain.

Then Mandrax approaches her quickly under his umbrella, and he speaks with anxious insistence...

MANDRAX

This is the part of the film where you are expected to sing, Maria...

(MORE)

## MANDRAX (CONT'D)

So fucking sing. La Callas is expected to sing. No excuses. No diva-imagined sickness. Not like Rome, not like Covent Garden, not like New York... Fucking sing!

## MARIA

I will sing when I am ready to sing.

Mandrax is a little stunned and walks. Then as light magically fades, Japanese ladies carrying lanterns approach Maria in the rain and Maria herself is transformed.

Now she is wearing her costume from Madame Butterfly which drips in the rain. The violins of the orchestra drip as the music plays.

Then it is daylight again. The orchestra and the lanterns are gone and Maria is left among the autumn leaves. She walks on to her appointment...

Maria **must** endure.

66 INT. BARE STAGE, THÉÂTRE DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES, PARIS - DAY 66

Jeffrey Tate closes the lid of the piano, pulls on his coat and prepares to leave. He turns and walks toward the wings but then hears a clatter of footsteps and Maria runs toward him...

Maria snatches off her coat and prepares. Jeffrey walks back to the piano. He is invigorated too. There is a spotlight trained onto the stage...

## JEFFREY

OK, I had some thoughts overnight...

## MARIA

So did I...

## JEFFREY

La Callas needs a spotlight.

Maria comes to the piano.

## JEFFREY (CONT'D)

I asked one of the lighting guys. He is up there.

Jeffrey calls out in French...

JEFFREY (CONT'D)  
Hey, Pierre? Are you still up  
there?

A silhouette steps into the light and calls back...

PIERRE  
Bonjour, madame.

MARIA  
Bonjour.

*(This technician, seen only as a silhouette, will play later.)* Jeffrey is fizzing with anticipation...

JEFFREY  
Only La Callas would make a French  
theatre technician miss lunch.

Jeffrey comes to Maria...

JEFFREY (CONT'D)  
But it's just you and me and the  
piano...

MARIA  
And sweet Pierre...

JEFFREY  
No, I asked Pierre to give us the  
light and then go away. This is  
private. But also...

He gestures out at the empty auditorium...

JEFFREY (CONT'D)  
This is wherever the hell you want  
it to be. New York, Covent Garden,  
La Scala...

Maria is on to it immediately...

MARIA  
Venice. Venice, 1949. I was fat,  
beautiful fat...

JEFFREY  
You were never fat...

MARIA  
I was. I arrived by Gondola and  
thought I would sink it.

JEFFREY

Venice '49, you were Elvira. *I puritani*. Someone got sick and you learned it in one week...

MARIA

So it began. Yes. You know 'I puritani?'

JEFFREY

Do I know 'I puritani'?

Maria suddenly chirrup...

MARIA

*Toi, toi, toi...*

(This is the magic spell Opera singers utter before curtain up to dispel bad luck.)

Jeffrey goes to the piano and sits. He opens the lid and prepares.

INT. VENICE OPERA HOUSE-

Maria looks up and suddenly we are inside the Venice Opera House with every seat filled. Maria around and we see that the stage is now set for a full performance of '*I puritani*'. The orchestra pit has a full orchestra. The conductor prepares and then begins.

Maria stands and prepares. Again she is herself but she is altered. In 1949, Maria was heavy and we might find a way to reflect that. The fact that so many years have passed mean nothing. Maria is Maria always...

Maria begins to sing and she is at the height of her powers.

It's "*Qui la voce sua suave*". (9)

We watch her perform and feel the power of it. For a while, we are an audience at the opera.

We live this moment and feel the triumph, see Maria exalted. There is a thunderous ovation and we see the crowd on its feet.

Then we reach the top of the auditorium and return to reality. The ovation ends in an echo. There is a figure standing in the shadows watching from a hidden position.

We will learn that this is PIERRE. We will also learn that he will be a Judas. For now, he simply listens and watches.

We come around to the stage...

67 INT. BARE STAGE, THÉÂTRE DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES, PARIS - DAY 67

Maria is still breathing heavily and has her eyes closed, absorbing the imagined applause. In truth, there is only Jeffrey applauding and his applause is meaningfully restrained.

Maria opens her eyes. She waits a moment then dares to turn. Jeffrey is on his feet. After a moment..

JEFFREY

I just felt La Callas in this room.  
We need to keep trying.

Maria turns and walks...

MARIA

Not today.

68 EXT. PONT DE L'ALMA, PARIS - DAY 68

The bridge is busy and boats of all kinds glide beneath on the Seine. Maria finds a place in the middle of the arch of the bridge and looks down into the water.

She watches the boats drift beneath. On one particular boat, a little girl of seven looks up at Maria and waves. Maria comes out of her introspection and smiles and waves back.

Mandrax comes to her and stands by her side.

MARIA

You never really explained, what is  
the name of the film you are  
making?

MANDRAX

It's called, '*La Callas: The Last Days*'.

Maria reacts. She seems satisfied with the answer and not concerned.

MARIA

In that case, roll camera.

The cameraman enters shot, filming. The boat with the little girl passes under the bridge. Maria turns and crosses the road to the other side of the bridge and Mandrax and the camera follow.

Maria waits on the other side for the boat with the little girl to emerge. The little girl is now busy playing and Maria peers at her. After a moment...

MANDRAX

Your child would have been that age  
by now.

Maria continues to watch the boat move away down the Seine.

MANDRAX (CONT'D)

Your baby. The one he wouldn't  
allow you to have. It's true, isn't  
it? He made you pregnant then he  
wouldn't allow you to have a  
baby...

Maria has no expression as the little girl disappears inside the cabin of the boat. She is deep in reflective thought...

MARIA

Just now, I was in Venice.

She looks to Mandrax as if she is beginning to realize something important...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Before him. Before love.

A pause.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Slowly, slowly, I am looking back  
at my life and seeing the truth.

69 EXT. MEDITERRANEAN OCEAN - SUNSET

69

In a vast wide, we see the sun bleeding into the dark ocean and see Onassis's yacht 'Christina' cruising elegantly through the calm water.

Over the idyllic ocean scene, we hear someone violently throwing up...

70 EXT. DECK, CHRISTINA - SUNSET

70

The opulent dark wood and gold deck furniture is bathed in soft sunset light. We hear music and laughter and voices coming from below deck. There is a lone figure on the deck and he is throwing up.

As he wipes his mouth, we see it is Battista Meneghini. He looks almost green as the boat gently sways. Maria emerges from below deck with a cigarette and a glass of champagne...

Battista Meneghini grunts and looks to the setting sun.

He takes some breaths and Maria puts her hand on his shoulder as if he were a friend...

MARIA

I won at roulette...

BATTISTA MENECHINI

Perhaps he let you win...

MARIA

You can't cheat at roulette...

BATTISTA MENECHINI

Everyone can cheat at everything.  
Especially these people.

MARIA

What 'people'?

Battista Meneghini doesn't answer and takes some more breaths. Maria smokes and looks out to the ocean and closes her eyes, bathing in the light. Battista Meneghini looks to her...

BATTISTA MENECHINI

He doesn't even try to hide his  
desire for you...

Maria throws her cigarette into the ocean.

MARIA

I spoke to Winston Churchill...

BATTISTA MENECHINI

The girl from Athens...

MARIA

For a Prima Donna, pleasure is  
unavoidable.

BATTISTA MENECHINI

Are you quoting that bastard?

Maria turns to Battista Meneghini.

MARIA

No. I am saying out loud my own thoughts. It is a new thing. Out loud.

Maria turns and walks. Battista Meneghini watches her go then leans over the rail and throws up again...

71 INT. BELOW DECK, CHRISTINA - SUNSET

71

A four-piece band plays swing. Illustrious guests play roulette and blackjack in clouds of smoke. At the far end of the space, there is a large coffee table flanked by sofas, and in a cloud of cigar smoke, we see the figure of Winston Churchill.

Onassis is spinning the roulette wheel, playing croupier, and the metal ball clatters, deciding people's fate. He sees Maria returning. The ball lands on zero 36 and there is laughter and applause. He announces...

An assistant distributes winnings and Onassis spins the wheel again and lets loose the metal ball. He leaves the wheel spinning and joins Maria near to the bar...

He takes her hand and leads her through the smoke and the crowds. Many eyes follow them and Onassis is utterly oblivious. Maria has made a decision and decides to be oblivious too...

72 INT. CORRIDOR, BELOW DECK, CHRISTINA - SUNSET

72

Every space aboard is intimate and heightened. The dark wood and brass still glow rose-colored in the sunset coming in through port holes, where seawater splashes.

Onassis leads Maria by the hand. The interior makes people whisper...

73 INT. ONASSIS'S MASTER BEDROOM, BELOW DECK, CHRISTINA - SUNSET

73

A palace of secrets and desire. The bedroom is large and lit by low lights. A candle burns. We should sense that Onassis prepared this room as a spider would weave a web.

There is an El Greco on the wall and a lapis lazuli fireplace where a fire burns.

Onassis enters and ushers Maria inside. He walks to a cabinet near to the bed and opens the door.



Inside, there is a sixteen-inch high marble carving of the God Hermes, with winged feet.

OSNASSIS

Here, look, the herald of the Gods.  
Hermes. Hermes is my God. Hermes  
is myself.

Maria steps closer. She peers at the statue, lit by a flickering candle...

ONASSIS

It dates from the second century  
BC...

MARIA

A rare beauty...

ONASSIS

I have no consideration for beauty.  
I myself am ugly and I am loyal to  
my tribe...

Maria smiles. Onassis touches her face gently then gestures at the bed...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)

You represent the opposite tribe.

She laughs...

MARIA

I am not a long-time member of the  
tribe. I used to be in your  
tribe...

ONASSIS

I would have loved you then...

MARIA

No. I was unlovable. Ask my mother.

Maria looks away and steps away...

ONASSIS

Hermes is a busy God. He is the  
protector of travelers, merchants,  
orators, and thieves.

MARIA

And you are all of those things...

ONASSIS

I am a merchant. My ships travel  
the world. I use oratory to get  
what I want. If it doesn't work, I  
steal it.

A pause. Onassis takes the statue of Hermes down from the  
cabinet and they both peer at it. He speaks with reverence in  
a whisper...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)

This statue. Priceless. Matchless.

Maria reacts. He looks to her and puts his finger to his  
lips.

ONASSIS (CONT'D)

I had it stolen to order from a  
museum in Athens. No one knows I  
have it. Only those who come into  
this room know I have it...

MARIA

So, your wife...

Onassis puts his finger to his lips again...

ONASSIS

If I want something, I steal it.

Maria gestures to the bed...

MARIA

And you think this would be theft?

She shakes her head...

MARIA (CONT'D)

You think right now I belong to my  
husband, and after we sleep  
together, I would belong to you?

She looks to the statue of the God...

MARIA (CONT'D)

To be a possession inside a cabinet  
is not my ambition.

Maria turns and walks and Onassis watches her go.

We return to Maria and Mandrax on the bridge.

MANDRAX

Why do you think Aristotle Onassis  
didn't marry you?

Instantly...

MARIA

Because he knew he could not  
control me.

She looks down the length of the river...

MARIA (CONT'D)

And it wasn't that he wouldn't  
allow me to have a baby...

MANDRAX

Wait. Important truth. Mark it...

From the point of view of the camera in the cameraman's hand,  
we see a clapper board with the words '*Act 2. Important  
Truth*' written on it in chalk. The board claps and is  
removed.

MANDRAX (CONT'D)

Go on.

Maria peers directly into camera...

MARIA

I did not marry Aristotle Onassis  
because he wanted someone he could  
control. I didn't have a baby  
because my body declined the  
invitation to make another self.

A pause.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Because my body knew I was a tiger.

A pause. They both stare down the River Seine...

She is alone now. The light is fading and she is staring down  
the length of the Seine. She appears to be resolved. She  
pulls up her collar and walks toward the right bank.

76

INT. STAIRCASE, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - EVENING

76

Heavy breathing. Ferruccio is walking up the stairs to  
Maria's apartment. He is carrying a rectangular box and he  
feels his years as he climbs.

As he reaches a landing, he can hear a recording of Maria singing '*Sempre Libera*', a Violetta aria from *La Traviata*.

(10)

Ferruccio is deeply puzzled and speeds up. We cut around and as he climbs, the music gets louder.

By the time he reaches a second landing, it is obvious that the music *is being played very loudly*.

Ferruccio begins to hurry. As he does, he passes an elderly couple who are standing in a doorway and looking up at the source of the noise. As Ferruccio passes...

OLD MAN

Mr. Ferruccio even my wife has  
complained and she is deaf.

Ferruccio hurries some more...

77

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - EVENING

77

The music is blaring at full volume from a record player. There are other recordings of Maria Callas waiting to be played near the record player. Maria herself stands motionless, listening intently.

Ferruccio enters and Maria doesn't hear. He goes to the record player and lowers the volume. Maria turns...

MARIA

What are you doing?...

FERRUCCIO

Preventing a visit from the  
Gendarmerie...

MARIA

Opera at this volume is bad luck.  
Opera at this volume is American  
radio. Toi, toi, toi...

Maria takes the needle from the record. Ferruccio puts the box down on a table...

FERRUCCIO

Madam. You never listen to  
recordings of yourself.

MARIA

Today, on a bridge, I made a  
decision...

At that moment, Bruna emerges from the kitchen with the two dogs under her arms. She greets Ferruccio and explains...

BRUNA

The dogs were afraid of the loud noise.

She lets the dogs run. Maria looks to the box Ferruccio bought...

MARIA

Did you buy what I asked for?

FERRUCCIO

Yes.

MARIA

Unwrap it, please.

Ferruccio begins to open the box...

FERRUCCIO

What decision, Madam?

MARIA

If I am to become La Callas, I need to listen to La Callas.

Ferruccio pulls a large cassette tape recorder from the box. Maria goes to it and examines it...

MARIA (CONT'D)

I must record myself and then compare myself to my past voice.

She unravels the plug of the cassette player. Maria plugs the cassette recorder into the wall...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Did you buy tapes?

Ferruccio hands her a pack of cassettes. He is fussing...

FERRUCCIO

Madame, today you said you would call the doctor. Did you call the doctor?

Maria turns to Bruna...

MARIA

Bruna, I don't know these machines...

Bruna steps up and puts a cassette into the player...

FERRUCCIO  
Madam, did you call Doctor  
Fontainebleau...

Bruna presses play and record...

BRUNA  
Now it is recording, Madam.

The cassette reels turn slowly. Ferruccio looks to Bruna.

MARIA  
Tomorrow, Bruna, you will come with  
me and operate the machine.

She turns and walks...

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Ferruccio, your obsession with  
doctors means I would prefer it if  
you stayed here and cleaned the  
car.

Maria is about to walk then looks at the piano.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
And I think the piano would be  
better beneath the other window.

Ferruccio dares...

FERRUCCIO  
Better for *what*, Madam?

Maria meets Ferruccio's stare...

MARIA  
Better for my purpose.

She disappears into her bedroom.

79

INT. VAST AND IMPOSSIBLY GLAMOROUS SPACE - EVENING

79

Noise, smoke, music, glamor.

We are in a place that is an amalgamation of the Ritz, the  
Dorchester, and any number of hotel banqueting suites from  
around the world.

The space is filled with beautiful people and the single piano has been replaced by a string orchestra and a 50-person chorus.

As Maria enters and walks past Ferruccio, everyone stands and applauds and yells...

VOICES

Brava! Brava! Prima Donna  
Assoluta.

Paparazzi emerge from nowhere (stylized and like skinny shadows) and flashbulbs pop. Maria absorbs the applause as Bruna joins her.

**CUT TO:**

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, 36 AVENUE GEORGES MANDEL

Maria and Mandrax are drinking Champagne and smoking. They are almost drunk, almost intimate. Mandrax dares to ask...

MANDRAX

Why be with such a brute like  
Onasis?"

MARIA

Because with him I could be a girl  
again...

We cut back to...

79

INT. VAST AND IMPOSSIBLY GLAMOROUS SPACE - EVENING

79

The music plays "Va, Pensiero" from Nabucco by Verdi. (11)

A man whose face we need not see (PRINCE RAINIER) approaches and takes Maria's hand.

*Maria begins to dance through the glamor of her whole life.  
And as it begins, her dance partner whispers in her ear...*

As she spins, we spin with her. And as she spins, her outfits change and we see her in a range of couture.

The man she is dancing with changes too. In the spin, we see the ballroom and recognize certain people. We see the German soldier who wept, sitting alone at a table, peering at a photograph.

We see Onassis standing and staring.

Mandrax is with his cameraman and is filming. We cut to the cameraman's footage of Maria dancing.

Then, in the spin, we see Maria's mother standing in rags with her hand held out as if begging. Beside her, the other German soldier spins a coin.

Suddenly she is dancing with German soldier who wept...

Then she is dancing with her sister Yakinthi...

She spins and then she is in the arms of Onassis...

She turns away and, as if it were all within the choreography, the chorus enters singing "Va, Pensiero" in full display. Maria sings too.

Maria vows to devote her life to pleasure and freedom.

She has a glass of champagne in her hand, a smile on her face, the room totally under her control.

The ballroom is now on its feet.

Maria continues to sing along with the chorus and completes the song. The room goes wild and cries of 'Brava!' fill the room. The sound of adulation continues then ends and echoes...

77

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - EVENING

77

Ferruccio and Bruna are moving the piano once again. After a moment of shifting...

FERRUCCIO

Did you give her pills today.

Bruna looks away...

BRUNA

No.

Ferruccio knows Maria well and looks to the bedroom where she headed.

FERRUCCIO

So who did?

BRUNA

There was a package from Yakinthi.

Ferruccio sighs. He silently suggests they begin the business of moving the piano. They begin to push it...



FERRUCCIO

I find carrying out simple instructions a great comfort. As if things were normal again.

BRUNA

(pushing)

When were they ever normal?

FERRUCCIO

I think there was one day, once, in 1964...

They both laugh...

BRUNA

It was a dull day, I imagine.

Ferruccio reacts to pain in his back and stops.

They make one last effort and the piano arrives under the second window.

Then Maria bursts back out from her bedroom wearing a magnificent coat over a quickly gathered outfit which is hurried and incongruous but looks sensational...

MARIA

Good. The piano is much better there. Both of you. Put on nicer clothes...

She smiles as Bruna and Ferruccio react...

MARIA (CONT'D)

We are going to celebrate my life...

78

INT. GEORGE CINQ HOTEL, PARIS - EVENING

78

The bar of the George Cinq is quiet and discreet with a pianist playing mellow music. A few people drink cocktails with people they should not be with.

Ferruccio enters first and looks all around.

He looks back to Maria and Bruna who are approaching the double doors. Maria walks quickly with her head held high. She walks past Ferruccio into the bar.

MARIA

I believe I am expected...

FERRUCCIO  
I don't believe you are, Madam...

MARIA  
Well, I believe I am and belief is  
all that matters...

Maria sweeps by. Suddenly...

82 INT. KING COLE BAR, ST. REGIS HOTEL, NEW YORK - NIGHT 82

*(What follows is a fictional encounter that may have happened. The King Cole bar was Jackie Kennedy's favorite bar in New York.)*

We are faced with the famous King Cole mural which dominates the cocktail bar. An image of a King on his throne with courtiers.

The place is hired for a private party for guests who attended the Madison Square Garden event. We see the cream of New York society drinking cocktails.

As we join, Onassis and Maria enter. Onassis takes two glasses of champagne and hands one to Maria.

ONASSIS  
Look there, on the wall, that King,  
that's me, right?

Maria sips as they step into the party...

MARIA  
Is President Kennedy here?

ONASSIS  
He's probably up in the Gossamer  
suite fucking Marilyn Monroe, but  
his wife will be here, sure enough.

MARIA  
Why would you know that?

Onassis scans the crowd...

ONASSIS  
How do you like the places I take  
you to?

MARIA  
I like the painting on the wall...

ONASSIS

How do you like it, little Athens girl...

MARIA

Please don't drink too much...

ONASSIS

Oh baby, that bird has flown. You might even say thank you sometimes. I just took you to the birthday party for the President of the fucking...

Interrupting...

A VOICE

Oh my God, it's her...

Maria turns. A FEMALE PARTYGOER takes Maria's hand gently.

PARTYGOER

Maria Callas. Oh my. I saw you at the Met and oh my God...

Onassis steps in, speaks with a laugh, trying to dominate...

ONASSIS

She is a Goddess...

PARTYGOER

She had me in tears and my husband saying 'OK, I get it'...

ONASSIS

She is a bird. A songbird. I open the doors of the cage but she doesn't want to fly away...

The partygoer squints at Onassis...

PARTYGOER

Excuse me, who are you?

Onassis's eyes die in his face and he looks away. (We might guess having Maria as the center of attention is something that regularly bothers him.) He speaks evenly to Maria...

ONASSIS

Explain to this sweet lady that I am the richest man in the fucking room...

He sees a face in the crowd...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)

Hey, look. The luckiest man alive  
and it's his birthday...

MARIA

Why is he lucky?

Onassis turns to walk away...

ONASSIS

Have you seen his wife. Man...

Maria and the lady are left in an awkward silence. Maria  
watches Onassis crossing the room...

PARTYGOER

My dream is to see you perform in  
the amphitheater in Athens...

Maria sees Onassis breaking into a circle of people around  
President Kennedy, almost invisible behind the tall Secret  
Service agents.

PARTYGOER (CONT'D)

I'm told the acoustics are better  
than anything in any modern  
theatre...

Onassis manages to get a handshake from JFK.

PARTYGOER (CONT'D)

Do you have any plans to tour the  
States?

At last, Maria turns to Onassis...

MARIA

No. I...

She sees Onassis talking intently to JFK, who moves on to  
shake other hands. Onassis stays talking with a beautiful  
YOUNG WOMAN in the President's staff. The Woman gives him a  
very friendly hug.

MARIA (CONT'D)

...I have had some issues with my  
voice lately...

PARTYGOER

Maybe the songbird should leave the  
cage occasionally...

Maria takes a moment...

MARIA

That is exactly what I intend to do.

Maria walks away and out of the room. Suddenly...

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE:

We see Marilyn Monroe on stage at Madison Square Garden, singing a sultry, seductive rendition of 'Happy Birthday' to John F. Kennedy.

In the footage, we also see JFK listening to her.

The auditorium of the Garden is in darkness but we find Maria and Onassis sitting in prime seats. They have a full view of Monroe and the President. Onassis stares at Monroe as she seduces. Maria glances at him.

The song ends and there is rapturous applause. Maria speaks softly to Onassis...

MARIA (CONT'D)

It is interesting the effect you can have even if you don't have a real voice...

ONASSIS

(applauding)

No one cares about her voice. Just as no one cares about your body.

Maria stops applauding...

83

INT. BREAKFAST ROOM, ST. REGIS HOTEL - NEXT MORNING

83

Bright sunlight fills the room and reflects off glass and silver. The hotel is ornate to an undignified degree, but the sunlight makes it majestic.

We find Maria sitting alone at a table by the window. New York City is visible through net curtains. She is sipping coffee, from a lavish and untouched French breakfast. Then two heavy-looking guys in black suits enter (starkly black against the sunlight).

They check out the room and decide that frail Maria poses no threat. We realize they are the Secret Service. Then eight more Agents fill the room and the hallway, creating a path to the Hotel's service entrance. Until one of them turns to the elevator lounge and nods: ALL CLEAR.

Maria is not impressed and knows exactly who is going to walk in. She takes a sip of coffee and prepares to leave -- as JFK enters the room and heads for the exit. But he immediately notices Maria and stops. He walks to her table. The agents talk into their radios and keep a safe, private distance.

JFK  
Maria Callas, yes?

Maria half smiles.

MARIA  
Yes.

JFK takes Maria's hand and squeezes it...

JFK  
May I sit?

He pulls a chair and sits in front of her. JFK is a steam train, he is always going in a particular direction and is not diverted. He hurries things along and is restless and genuinely curious...

JFK (CONT'D)  
I hear you were born in the US?

MARIA  
I was. New York.

JFK (FAST)  
Welcome home.

MARIA  
Thank you.

JFK  
Would you sing for us in the White House?

MARIA  
I don't think the White House would like my voice right now.

A beat. JFK pours himself water, grabs a slice of lemon from Maria's dish, drops it in, sips, a man who operates alone and for himself alone.

JFK  
So Onassis is your whatever...

MARIA (AMUSED)  
Yes, he is my whatever...

JFK

The father you never had...

MARIA

How do you know I never had a father?...

JFK

The CIA has seventeen thousand college graduates with listening devices finding things out. You look great, by the way.

MARIA

Thank you. You look tired.

JFK

Never too tired for beauty... Your husband invited Jackie and me to take a cruise on his yacht.

MARIA

As you know, he is not my husband, he is my 'whatever'.

JFK

Well, last night he called you 'his wife'.

MARIA

Maybe he's about to propose. Ari would look funny on one knee.

JFK smiles. He likes her.

JFK

It would be great fun to sail away with you... Mr. Onassis said he has an El Greco painting on his yacht that he would like my wife to see...

MARIA

In the bedroom, yes.

JFK

You seem quite sad.

A beat.

MARIA

Last night, just before he fell to sleep, Ari told me he loved me.

(MORE)

MARIA (CONT'D)

Considering where I know he had  
been until four am, don't you find  
THAT quite sad?

JFK

Where was he last night?

MARIA

Where is Jackie?

JFK

Inside her own circle.

Maria stands.

MARIA

Well, I don't have all those people  
with devices finding things out but  
I do know that you and I belong to  
a small, small group of lucky  
angels. We go wherever we want in  
the world but we can never, ever  
get away.

She smiles...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Doesn't make us friends though.

Maria walks. The bodyguards watch her go.

80

INT. CAR, PARIS - NIGHT

80

We are with Bruna, Ferruccio and Maria in Ferruccio's car.  
He is driving. Maria and Bruna are in the back seats. Maria  
looks out at the wet streets of Paris. She tries to make  
small talk...

MARIA

Where to now?

A pause.

Bruna looks out of the window and we see a tear in her eye.

They drive on...

BRUNA

We are tired, Madam.

Ferruccio looks in the rearview...



BRUNA (CONT'D)  
And we are worried.

81 INT. LIVING ROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - NIGHT

81

The room is in half darkness. A gentle breeze blows the net curtains and we hear talking and laughter and footsteps approaching.

Then we see Doctor Fontainebleau waiting in the half light. He prepares. The door is unlocked and Maria enters with Bruna and Ferruccio. She freezes when she sees the Doctor. She turns sharply to Ferruccio.

MARIA  
What is he doing here?

FERRUCCIO  
I invited him. I left a key.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
I have news that can't wait.

MARIA  
No...

FERRUCCIO  
Bruna and I will... we'll take the dogs out.

BRUNA  
Yes. Yes, we will.

FERRUCCIO  
And then we will return.

Maria looks away. Ferruccio speaks to the doctor...

FERRUCCIO (CONT'D)  
Apparently, tonight we had a little bit of a party, Doctor.

MARIA  
(laughing)  
Oh goodness, the gravity of it all.

Ferruccio and Bruna turn to leave...

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Always people disappoint me.  
Always...

Ferruccio and Bruna have gone and we hear their footsteps disappear.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
Please, Madam Callas, take a  
seat...

MARIA  
I just had a wonderful evening.

A pause. At last, Maria sits...

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Do you know Opera?

DOCTOR  
Of course...

MARIA  
In La Traviata, Violetta is  
diagnosed with tuberculosis.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
It is not tuberculosis...

A pause.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU (CONT'D)  
It is not anything with one name.

Maria looks to her record player and her record collection.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU (CONT'D)  
Your blood tells a story...

MARIA  
(half amused)  
My autobiography written in  
blood...

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
As well as the Mandrax and the  
various sedatives and stimulants,  
you are taking the steroid  
Prednisone...

Maria is amused...

MARIA  
To combat my body's attempts to  
turn me into a frog...

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
...and now your liver is beginning  
to fail. It is no longer taking out  
all the trash.

A pause...

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU (CONT'D)  
Your heart is failing too...

MARIA  
My poor heart.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
Your system is very frail.

Maria nods gently.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU (CONT'D)  
Your wonderful Ferruccio tells me  
you are planning to try again to  
sing.

MARIA  
My wonderful Ferruccio is very free  
with all my secrets...

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
In my opinion, the extra stress  
this will cause to your body, the  
medications you will probably need  
to get through each day, they will  
kill if you keep pushing yourself  
to sing.

A pause...

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU (CONT'D)  
And I say that as someone who would  
dearly love to see you perform  
again.

Maria takes a moment. She then takes control.

MARIA  
But you see, Doctor, I am not  
intending to perform again.

A pause.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
Not for you or for anyone else.

The doctor peers at her...

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
Then why are you rehearsing?...

MARIA  
My mother made me sing. Onassis  
forbade me from singing. Now, I  
will sing for myself.

Doctor Fontainebleau peers at Maria and sees that she has  
made a decision and is resolved...

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
Your beautiful life, Maria...

MARIA  
Played before my eyes.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
Meaning what?

MARIA  
Meaning now, finally, I am in  
control of the end.

A pause.

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
Madam Callas, I am...

A pause...

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU (CONT'D)  
...begging you. To see reason...

MARIA  
My life is opera. There is no  
reason in opera...

DOCTOR FONTAINEBLEAU  
Your voice will *not* return. Your  
voice is in heaven. And on a  
million records...

Maria interrupts...

MARIA  
Get out.

A pause. Doctor Fontainebleau gets to his feet. He  
contemplates further advice but sees it is pointless. He lets  
himself out and Maria is alone.

A clapperboard enters the shot. It is marked 'ACT 3-CURTAIN  
CALL'.

109 EXT. BRASSERIE DU MEXIQUE, PLACE DE MEXICO, PARIS - EVENING 109

It is early and there is only one customer. It is Yakinthi. The waiter brings her a glass of champagne...

Yakinthi looks out into the street...

Maria approaches the restaurant. Yakinthi watches as she comes to the door and hesitates. She fights an urge to turn back and then enters.

We walk with Maria through the door. As she walks she quotes a line that Violetta sings in La Traviata...

She pushes open a door and enters the restaurant. Yakinthi waits and Maria approaches the table. Yakinthi is accustomed to assessing her sister's moods. Maria doesn't smile...

MARIA

It took a great deal of effort for me to enter this restaurant. I had to say a magic spell.

Yakinthi sips champagne...

YAKINTHI

Since I sent you the medication, I have been regretting it.

MARIA

I have no regrets. How do I look?

YAKINTHI

Too thin.

MARIA

Yes. A lot of me has been taken away...

YAKINTHI

Maria, I am in Paris and I love Paris. I am happy. My life is floating on like a tight ship. I don't want to be sunk. Your message said you 'needed' me. But I am not going to give you any more medication. I'm not.

MARIA

I don't need medication anymore. It has served its purpose. Thank you.

A pause. Yakinthi looks troubled. The waiter arrives with another glass of champagne and two menus.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I suggested this restaurant because  
it reminds me of her.

YAKINTHI

Of who?

Maria looks at Yakinthi as if the answer were obvious...

MARIA

The last time I saw Mama, she asked  
me for money. She said 'I brought  
you into this world to take care of  
me'. She also told me I was fat and  
unlovable. Wonderful memories.

Yakinthi reacts wearily...

YAKINTHI

The time has passed Maria. You just  
close the door...

MARIA

I will end this with the  
beginning...

Maria lifts her glass of champagne as a toast...

MARIA (CONT'D)

To memories shared only by you and  
I.

YAKINTHI

You close the door.

MARIA

The German soldiers won't leave me  
alone...

YAKINTHI

Sometimes, when you were crying, I  
let you rest and took your place so  
you could rest... I live my life  
looking this way...

Yakinthi puts her hands to the side of her eyes like  
blinkers, looking straight ahead...

MARIA

And I live my life looking back,  
writing an autobiography.

YAKINTHI

If you want to write your  
autobiography then you will have to  
do it without my help.

MARIA

My story is writing itself before  
my eyes...

She reaches out and squeezes Yakinthi's hand...

MARIA (CONT'D)

I'm not even sure if you are real.

YAKINTHI

You are hurting my arm, Maria.  
(in Greek)  
That hurts, Maria. Stop.

Maria lets go and looks away...

MARIA

(in Greek)  
I have visions...

YAKINTHI

(in Greek)  
You have visions? Then see a  
doctor. You are a doll.

MARIA

I saw a doctor.

Maria looks to Yakinthi as she reacts. Yakinthi sips the  
last sip of her champagne.

YAKINTHI

OK, enough. You have a driver  
waiting for you. I have no debt I  
need to pay to you. My advice is do  
not write anything about your  
life...

Yakinthi gets to her feet...

YAKINTHI (CONT'D)

...But if you do...

Yakinthi pulls on her jacket...

YAKINTHI (CONT'D)

...be kind to yourself. Because I was there with you in Athens and I know that whatever your faults, whatever you have done wrong, you are really not to blame, baby. You're really not to blame.

Maria peers at Yakinthi. She half smiles...

Maria fights emotion.

A pause.

MARIA

Thank you.

Maria stands and after a moment, Maria and Yakinthi hold each other. Maria holds Yakinthi tight and for the first time, we see tears in her eyes...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Sometimes I think what happened is just in my head...

YAKINTHI

Close those doors, little sister...

Maria pulls back and peers at Yakinthi...

MARIA

I can't. It's the only way the music gets in...

Yakinthi dries Maria's tears with her thumb.

YAKINTHI

Fuck music! Baby, you are fifty three years old. You have never been free. Forget the music.

She squeezes Maria's hands...

YAKINTHI (CONT'D)

Live.

INT. BARE STAGE, THÉÂTRE DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES, PARIS - DAY

Jeffrey Tate is pacing back and forth on the stage. The curtain is already down and the stage is protected. He checks his watch. Maria arrives with Bruna, and Jeffrey is astonished...



JEFFREY  
My God. You are on time.

MARIA  
Of course. My audience awaits.  
Filled with hate.

Maria takes the cassette player and sets it on a small table away from the piano.

JEFFREY  
What hate?

Maria is brimming with certainty.

MARIA  
I am going to sing the '*mad scene*'  
from Anna Bolena.

Jeffrey appears to know the significance and smiles. Maria patrols the stage as if it belongs to her now. She recalls...

MARIA (CONT'D)  
I performed it at La Scala. The  
people of Milan hated me...

EXT. LA SCALA - NIGHT

In a brief, furious flashback, we see a mob outside La Scala as a limousine containing Maria cruises toward the stage door. A bottle is thrown and smashes...

INT. DES CHAMPS ELYSEE, THEATRE

Maria is recalling and using the fury to fire her emotions as she patrols the stage. Bruna is finding a cassette and putting it into the tape recorder.

MARIA  
I had cancelled and cancelled and  
spilt my fury on poor innocents...

EXT. LA SCALA - NIGHT

Maria emerges from the limousine and the mob begins to yell and boo. Flash bulbs pop. Maria pulls herself free of Ferruccio who has her arm and walks alone toward the stage door...

INT. DE CHAMPS ELYSEE, THEATRE

Maria paces, takes deep breaths, becoming Anna Bolena...

MARIA

There were armed police to protect  
me...

EXT. LA SCALA - NIGHT

As Maria is bundled into the theatre, uniformed police use batons to keep an angry crowd at bay. Eggs and flour are thrown and the flour clouds in the spotlights and headlights...

INT. THÉÂTRE DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES, PARIS - DAY

Maria takes deep breaths as she stares up at the darkness above. Jeffrey sits at the piano...

JEFFREY

But then you sang.

Maria is pumping herself full of anger...

MARIA

My fury at being judged. My fury at  
the press. My fury at my mother  
and at the world. Bruna. Quickly.  
Now. Begin...

Bruna takes the cue and presses play and record. Maria turns to Jeffrey, a demon filled with song. Jeffrey hurries to the piano and begins to play the accompaniment...

INT. THÉÂTRE DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES, PARIS - DAY

We move up to the back of the auditorium where Pierre is a silhouette. We then see the shadow of RONALD hiding. Ronald is late twenties and smartly dressed. He is staring intently at the stage. We come close as he too presses 'play and record' on his own recording machine. The curtain continues to rise...

INT. LA SCALA THEATRE, MILAN - NIGHT

The curtain rises on a bear pit. The home of Opera is filled with people but rather than applauding, they are booing and yelling and hissing.

We come around and see Maria is ready for them, the ferocious tiger waiting to attack. The music is played by a full orchestra and Maria paces back and forth, staring venom into the crowd...

Maria sings the mad scene, "Piangete voi?" from Anna Bolena by Donizetti. (12)

MARIA

*'Ah, my fate is sealed, if the one  
who accuses me is the one who  
condemns me. Ah! I will succumb to  
the power, of such tyrannical law.  
But after my death, I will one day  
be exculpated and absolved'...*

The crowd are beginning to fall silent, overwhelmed by Maria's emotion...

MARIA (CONT'D)

*Be silent! Cease! There lacks,  
alas, there lacks only the blood of  
Anna to complete the crime. And it  
will be spilt!*

As in reality, the baying mob is transformed into an adoring audience and the crowd goes wild. We hear cheering and applause and yells of 'Brava! Brava!'

(This is the ovation we heard in the opening sequence.)

We come close to Maria as she absorbs the adulation (perhaps her finest hour)...

Maria bows once then straightens.

Suddenly...

INT. THÉÂTRE DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES, PARIS - DAY

Bruna presses stop on the tape machine. The ovation ends. The theatre is empty once more. We come around and the stage is once again bare.

Jeffrey is at the piano and Bruna beside the tape recorder. We come to Maria and she lowers her head. Bruna looks to Jeffrey who looks a little upset.

*The performance which was a triumph in 1957 was not so here.*

Maria knows it.

She turns to Jeffrey and assesses his face quickly...

BRUNA (QUICKLY)  
Madam, you were magnificent...

MARIA  
Oh, God.

BRUNA  
Let's go home. Love is at home.

Bruna begins to lead Maria toward the side of the stage.  
Jeffrey grabs his jacket and goes with them...

EXT. THÉÂTRE DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES, PARIS - DAY

Maria, Bruna and Jeffrey emerge from the theatre. Maria takes a big breath of air which appears to restore her. They step out into sunlight.

But as they appear, the journalist, Ronald approaches.

RONALD  
Madam Callas!

He trots toward Maria and they all imagine he is just another fan or well-wisher. However, as he arrives, he takes out a cassette...

RONALD (CONT'D)  
I write a music column for Le Figaro newspaper...

Jeffrey begins to guess...

RONALD (CONT'D)  
And for reasons connected to the duty of journalists, I was in the theatre just now...

Instantly, Jeffrey makes a grab for the cassette, but Ronald steps back...

RONALD (CONT'D)  
I heard you perform the mad scene from Anna Bolena. And frankly, Madam Callas, it was pretty not great.

A pause. Maria reacts.

RONALD (CONT'D)  
It was pretty terrible in fact.

Jeffrey goes to grab Ronald but Jeffrey is a slight man and Ronald is bigger. Ronald pushes him away.

RONALD (CONT'D)

There are rumors going around that you plan to make a comeback. Would you care to give me a comment on your progress, bearing in mind what I just heard and recorded?

Maria looks away. (In the background, we see a photographer with a paparazzi camera hiding behind a column.) A car pulls up out of shot. Jeffrey confronts the journalist...

JEFFREY

Why the fuck would you print this?

RONALD

Because she is Maria Callas. She is who she is. Because people want to know...

Suddenly Maria flies at Ronald and grabs him and spins him around. She is furious and Ronald crouches and shields as she spins him around by his collar and his hair.

But the second she attacks, the photographer steps out from the shadows and begins firing off shots of Maria attacking. Jeffrey sees and grabs Maria and pulls her away from Ronald. He straightens and laughs...

RONALD (CONT'D)

Go ahead, Madam Callas. You always had a reputation for having a terrible temper. The photos will sell the story all over the world.

FERRUCCIO

You have to leave us alone.

Maria gathers her breath, registers the horror of what has happened. A car door slams. Ronald gets his breath and takes out his notebook...

RONALD

Now, Madam Callas, why don't you calm down and give me your side of the story?

FERRUCCIO

You have to leave us alone.

A pause.

RONALD

Our readers want to know. What the hell happened to you? What a tragedy...

Maria reacts. At that moment Ferruccio steps into shot. He steps past Maria and stands in front of Ronald. He

Ferruccio grabs Ronald. He turns and bows to Maria...

FERRUCCIO

I cleaned the car as you instructed, Madam, and I am ready to take you home.

100 EXT. TROCADÉRO / INT. CAR - DAY

100

Ferruccio drives. Bruna is in the passenger seat. Maria is in the back. She looks out at the columns and butter-colored facades of the Trocadéro monument. She then takes the cassette from the tape recorder and hands it to Bruna.

MARIA

Play it.

BRUNA

Madam, please...

MARIA

Play it. I want to know.

Bruna looks to Ferruccio who nods once. Bruna puts the cassette in the player and presses play.

We now hear the 'mad scene' as it was actually performed by Maria. In reality, the performance is deeply flawed and reflective of illness.

As the music plays, Maria stares out of the window.

She sees her mother leading two German soldiers. She leads them to a place where young Yakinthi and young Maria are waiting...

Maria closes her eyes. The music continues...

103 EXT. STREET, PARIS - DAY

103

Maria is running and catches up with Mandrax in an alley. Mandrax is lighting a cigarette which he gives to Maria. They are both breathless, like fugitives...

Maria smokes and sighs with relief on the nicotine. They look like delinquents as they share a cigarette...

MARIA

I'm guessing the film you are making is almost over.

He nods and takes the cigarette and adds casually...

MANDRAX

Did I tell you I've fallen in love with you?

MARIA

That happens a lot.

Mandrax laughs and hands back the cigarette. She takes a drag.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Just before the final scene, there's something you should know.

A pause.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Record this.

MANDRAX

I have no equipment.

MARIA

Then remember this. Because no one else knows.

A pause. She sweeps wet hair from her face...

MARIA (CONT'D)

When he was dying in Paris, I went to him.

A pause. She remembers the enormity...

MARIA (CONT'D)

Oh yeah, and it was raining then too...

In the small hours of the morning, we see Maria hurrying, hidden in a headscarf, toward the entrance of the hospital. Rain is pouring..

Fade out and up...

Maria disappears inside. Thunder rumbles...

105 INT. CORRIDOR, HOSPITAL, PARIS - DAY

105

We see Maria hurrying, consulting a handwritten message which is giving her directions around the hospital. The place is silent, everyone sleeping.

Rain pours down the marbled windows. Lightning flashes.

Maria turns a corner and sees two heavy-looking security guards in dark suits guarding a private ward. Maria hurries to them...

They immediately straighten...

The guards consult. The second guard opens the door to the ward.

106 INT. ARISTOTLE ONASSIS'S PRIVATE WARD, HOSPITAL - DAY

106

Onassis is lying in an inclined bed attached to drips and monitors. The eerie beeps of intensive care punctuate the silence and red lights glow.

Rain pours down the windows and lightning flashes and thunder rumbles.

Onassis is weak but when he sees Maria, he tries to sit up. She comes to him and he extends his hand which she takes. He tries out one word...

ONASSIS  
(softly)  
I love you.

The monitors beep. Maria smiles.

MARIA  
Is that it? Should I go now?

Onassis smiles too.

ONASSIS  
I have some things to say. Number  
one, I still hate Opera.

They both laugh but Onassis is dying so his chest hurts...



MARIA

You don't need to talk too much  
because I know most things.

ONASSIS

Oh, you know most things? OK. You  
never lacked confidence. Are you  
happy?

MARIA

Well, I just learned in the  
newspapers that Frank Sinatra earns  
ten times what I earn.

He smiles...

ONASSIS

You're poor...

MARIA

Always.

ONASSIS

I wish you could sing right here,  
right now...

MARIA

I'd wake the whole of Paris.

ONASSIS

Oh, they'd forgive you.

Maria looks around at the monitors which beep without pity as  
rain pours...

ONASSIS (CONT'D)

You know, I think I will go to  
Athens. My spirit will find a chair  
on the harbor and watch the ships.

MARIA

And who will you be waiting for?

ONASSIS

I thought you knew most things.

Maria nods, finds the statement ironic...

MARIA

I only found out you married her  
from a newspaper.

For the first time, Onassis looks pained.

ONASSIS

Sometimes you get married because  
you have a free day.

Maria half smiles, accepts and doesn't accept...

MARIA

Well, that morning that I found  
out, I checked my heart and it  
wasn't broken.

A pause for pain in both their hearts...

MARIA (CONT'D)

You hurt my pride though.

ONASSIS

Well, I guess that's something,  
right?

They both laugh.

ONASSIS (CONT'D)

So when it's your turn, will you  
come to Athens and see me?

MARIA

I will have other business there,  
but yes.

ONASSIS

So I will make sure I have two  
canvas chairs.

MARIA

Yes.

After a moment, Maria leans in and kisses Onassis gently on  
the cheek.

ONASSIS

I should never have tried to stop  
you singing.

MARIA

That is correct.

ONASSIS

I always loved you.

MARIA

That is also correct.

Then the door opens and one of the guards leans in...

GUARD

Mr. Onassis. Your wife is here.

Maria gets to her feet...

ONASSIS

Athens, Maria. You and me... only.

Maria leaves...

107

EXT. STREET, PARIS IN THE RAIN - DAY

107

We're back to the same place we meet Mandrax before the hospital.

MANDRAX

How was he?

MARIA

We are Greek. Death is our familiar companion.

MANDRAX

Why did you visit him?

MARIA

Because he asked me to.

MANDRAX

Did you see Jackie?

MARIA

I left through the back door. Even in death, I was the secret.

Maria is about to cry.

MANDRAX

Yes, but the man *wanted* you. Jackie was his wife. But you -- you were his life.

Mandrax smiles, and Maria suddenly realizes he's right. Then she keeps walking down the hallway, her emotions conquered...

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, 36 AVENUE GEORGES MANDEL

Maria is sitting alone listening to a recording of her music but her voice is absent.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM

Maria, Bruna and Ferruccio are playing cards. All formality is discarded. They play like a family and tease and joke...

FERRUCCIO  
Eight.

MARIA  
Nine.

FERRUCCIO  
You always win.

MARIA  
She cheats.

BRUNA  
No!

FERRUCCIO  
Yes, you do.

BRUNA  
No, no, no.

MARIA  
She is the sphinx, that one.

FERRUCCIO  
Yes.

BRUNA  
(chuckles)  
No.

MARIA  
I hope you always stay together.

FERRUCCIO  
What?

MARIA  
When I'm gone. I hope you always stay together. You're very good together. Good people.

FERRUCCIO  
If she keeps winning, it's going to be difficult.

MARIA

I don't know if I'm going to be...  
staying.

108 INT. LIVING ROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

108

Bruna and Ferruccio are once again moving the piano. This time back to the position under the first window.

When it is in place, Bruna goes to the bedroom door and knocks.

BRUNA

Madam. We have moved the piano  
again. Come and see.

There is no response. Bruna looks to Ferruccio...

BRUNA (CONT'D)

Madam. It is gone midday. Are you  
OK?

Ferruccio and Bruna now look concerned. Ferruccio comes to the door and knocks harder...

FERRUCCIO

Madam, please.

Still no response.

BRUNA

Madam, we will buy all of your  
favorite food. Oysters and salt  
beef and those silly chocolates...

FERRUCCIO

Tonight, we will sit down together  
and we will eat.

MARIA (O.S.)

Leave me alone.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM

Maria is lying in bed almost consumed by despair.

FERRUCCIO (O.S.)

So, we are going to the grocery,  
madam, to take what we need and we  
will be back soon.

A clapper board enters shot. It is marked 'AN ENDING:  
ASCENT'

117 INT. APARTMENT 36, AVENUE GEORGES MANDEL - EARLY EVENING 117

Maria wakes and surveys her bedroom, where Greek sculpture and religious icons remind her of her childhood and of the love of her life.

INT. ATHENS BEDROOM

In a brief black and white flashback Maria sits by a piano and touches the hand of her younger self, and we sense it is a goodbye.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, 36 AVENUE GEORGES MANDEL

**Maria sings and her singing is PERFECTION. La Callas has returned at last.**

Her living room is filled with a full orchestra which plays in two lines of hard backed chairs...

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, DRESSING ROOM

Onassis stands and sips Champagne as he listens to Maria singing...

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, 36 AVENUE GEORGES MANDEL

Maria continues to sing, her voice soaring but the orchestra is now gone.

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN

Mandrax stands at the window listening to Maria singing...

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, 36 AVENUE GEORGES MANDEL

As her voice soars we approach the open doors that lead to a balcony...

EXT. MARIA'S APARTMENT

We now hear Maria's voice from the street and see that a crowd of passers by and neighbors has begun to gather....

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, 36 AVENUE GEORGES MANDEL

The orchestra have returned and Maria's voice has never been more exquisite. Maria feels the return of her soul and weeps...

INT. MARIA'S APARTMENT, DRESSING ROOM

Onassis smokes a cigar and feels the beauty of Maria's voice and his love for her.

In the kitchen Mandrax listens too as the song reaches its climax.

In the street Bruna and Ferruccio have returned from the store and stop when they hear Maria singing.

Back in the apartment, Maria completes the song and completes her life. She falls to her knees, death circling her.

When the music ends, Maria dies. She is in the place we found her at the opening of the movie.

Then Bruna and Ferruccio enter, carrying groceries, a collection of all the things Maria loves and which she will never eat. They see Maria on the floor and know that she is dead, and even may believe that this is what she wanted.

After a moment Ferruccio walks to the phone and makes a call...

FERRUCCIO

Doctor Fontainbleu. Maria Callas  
has died.

As Ferruccio puts down the phone, Maria's dog laments her loss in her own voice.

118 INT. LIVING ROOM, MARIA'S APARTMENT, PARIS - EVENING 118

We are back at the scene that opened the movie with paramedics, police and the doctor around Maria's body. Bruna and Ferruccio walk to the door. Ferruccio puts his arm around Bruna and they contemplate a future without Maria.

*We hear a reprise of 'Vissi d'Arte' as orchestral instrumental.*

## ARCHIVE FOOTAGE

We now see archive footage of Maria's life, her glories, her personal times, her happy times with Onassis, the only man she ever loved. And even in the footage we see that Maria was the only woman that he ever loved.

Cut to black.

THE END