



AVARICE

An Original Screenplay

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FADE IN:

INT. TOLKOYA CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY (WASHINGTON D.C.)

A cavernous room dominated by a giant conference table. Playing on the large wall-mounted screen is A VIDEO OF AN ORCHESTRA PERFORMING RIMSKY-KORSAKOV'S "SCHEHERAZADE."

The music volume is low, almost like white noise in the background.

Visible through the room's glass panels, several people sit just outside, waiting for their job interviews. Inside, VASILI ROMANOV (early 40s, fit) sits across from MALENE YOUNG (28, Asian-American, ponytail, glasses).

Vasili looks over her resume and other documents as Malene stares up at the company logo and motto painted on a wall: "If you can't find it on Tolkoaya, it doesn't exist."

VASILI

Top of your class, I see. Your parents must be very proud.

MALENE

If they were alive, I'm sure they would be.

Vasili continues reading, not looking up.

VASILI

Parents are over-rated in my opinion, anyway. Your doctoral thesis on algorithms is... intriguing.

MALENE

Of course. Or else you'd be interviewing someone else. Right?

VASILI

And what gave you the idea of turning your psychology research into an algorithm?

MALENE

The challenge of figuring out the human mind. For instance, I found that subjects who typed their searches as complete sentences -- like "Who was the first President of the United States?" -- tend to ponder.

(MORE)

MALENE (CONT'D)

Thus, they are not good targets for ads that require snap decisions. And if you can --

Vasili looks up at her and smiles.

VASILI

Explain the mind with an algorithm, then you can influence it. But to what degree? Theory is one thing, putting it into practice, another.

Malene nods.

VASILI (CONT'D)

(laughs)

But that's what we do here, isn't it? Follow me. I'll introduce you to some of your colleagues.

He rises and heads to the door.

MALENE

So I'm hired?

VASILI

Yes. No-brainer there. For our psych division.

MALENE

You actually have a....dedicated psychology department?

Vasili puts his finger to his lips and winks conspiratorially.

VASILI

Shhh! They say they're dedicated, anyway. But for what I pay them, they'd better be. You'll be working directly under Olga, who works directly under me. You won't like her, but no one does, so don't worry about it.

He looks at Malene, waiting, then motions for her to come along, but her attention is on the orchestra on the screen. Vasili clears his throat and she turns to him.

MALENE

Sorry. "Scheherazade," right?

VASILI

Yes, one of my favorites.

MALENE
 Mine too. Surprised I know it?

VASILI
 Not really. But I'd be disappointed
 if you didn't.

She follows him out.

INT. TOLKOYA HALLWAY - DAY

Malene waits for an elevator. One arrives and she enters.

INT. TOLKOYA ELEVATOR - DAY

Once the elevator doors close, Malene celebrates with a squeal. The elevator descends one floor then stops. When the doors open, she composes herself.

SAMMY VIDAL (early 30's, slim, casually dressed) enters the elevator. They exchange a polite nod and smile. He hits a button and they start to descend. Silence, then...

SAMMY
 So do you --

MALENE
 (bursting with excitement)
 I start on Monday!

SAMMY
 (laughs)
 Oh, wow. Congrats.

MALENE
 Sorry, I'm just very excited.

SAMMY
 I can tell. And you should be. I'm
 Sammy. Sales and Retention.

They shake hands.

MALENE
 Malene.

SAMMY
 In...?

MALENE
 In...um, Research?

SAMMY

Malene in, um, Research. Nice to meet you. Welcome to the team.

They maintain eye contact and hold the handshake for a little too long and then the elevator doors open.

INT. TOLKOYA LOBBY - DAY

Before exiting the building, Malene stops by the front doors and looks up at the large company logo and motto painted on a wall: "If you can't find it on Tolkoya, it doesn't exist."

INT. TOLKOYA, VASILII'S OFFICE - DAY

The D.C. skyline is visible as Vasili and SERGEY SOKOLOV (slim, late 40s) stare down at Malene on the sidewalk.

SERGEY

And you're certain she can help you?

(off Vasili's nod)

Then you want me to clear her right away?

VASILII

Yes, and dig deep -- she's going to know some of our secrets. Actually, she's going to be creating some herself.

Sergey nods.

VASILII (CONT'D)

And security is tight for the shareholders meeting?

SERGEY

Of course.

VASILII

Only reason I ask is...

(his voice rising)

How the hell did those "Tolkoya-is spying-on-you-and-wants-to-put-a-chip-in-your-brain" protesters make it into the lobby yesterday?

SERGEY

A small lapse. It won't happen again.

VASILI
I heard some of your men beat them?

SERGEY
Yes, of course, but there were no
witnesses and they left no marks.

VASILI
Good. Thank you.

They watch as Malene gets on a city bus.

SERGEY
She takes the bus? Why don't you
give her a Mercedes SUV?

VASILI
Good idea.

They watch as the bus pulls away.

INT. SAMMY & MALENE'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY

SUPER: 4 YEARS LATER

A very upscale bedroom. Malene's sitting up in bed, texting.
Sammy, asleep next to her, wakes up and looks at her.

MALENE
Morning.

SAMMY
Morning. Nervous?

MALENE
About what?

SAMMY
I wish I knew.

MALENE
And I wish I could tell you.

SAMMY
Does it affect sales?

MALENE
Doesn't everything?

She keeps texting as Sammy looks on.

EXT. SAMMY & MALENE'S HOUSE - DAY

A huge McMansion in the suburbs. Malene's behind the wheel as Sammy hops in their Mercedes SUV before they drive off.

EXT./INT. MALENE'S SUV, WASHINGTON D.C. STREET - DAY

A LARGE BILLBOARD towers above a busy intersection. On it is the smiling-yet-stern face of ROBERT MACPHERSON (late 50s) and the words "MacPherson For President! Mac Gets It!"

Sammy and Malene pull up to the intersection and stop at a red light as A POLITICAL AD PLAYS ON THE RADIO.

MACPHERSON (V.O.)

...I get it. And that's why your,
and every vote, matters, now more
than ever. I'm Robert MacPherson
and I approved this message.

Sammy switches off the radio.

SAMMY

The only thing he gets is more
annoying.

MALENE

Hey, there's a good chance he's
gonna be our client.

SAMMY

Doesn't mean I have to like him,
just sell him.

A car pulls up next to them. Behind the wheel is MIRKO VAN ASPERN (mid-30s).

INT. MIRKO'S CAR - DAY

Mirko looks up at the MacPherson billboard and rolls his eyes. He takes a flask out from under the armrest. As he's about to take a swig, he changes his mind and puts it back. As he does...

HONK! The light has turned green and the driver behind him has honked his impatience. Mirko holds his hand up, flips him off and hits the gas.

He makes a call and holds the phone to his ear.

MIRKO

Hi, it's me.

MIRKO'S EX-WIFE
I know that, I have caller ID.

MIRKO
Right. Can I see Zoey this week-
end? Maybe take her to the zoo?

MIRKO'S EX-WIFE
Remember? I have sole custody. And
what about your drinking?

MIRKO
Oh, I don't anymore.

MIRKO'S EX-WIFE
I can smell it through the phone.
Call back when you're dry.

She hangs up. At the next red light, Mirko takes a swig from
the bottle.

INT. NATIONAL PRESS BUILDING - DAY

The offices of intNEWS. A large intNEWS LOGO is on a wall.
On his way to his cubicle, Mirko, carrying a Starbucks cup,
passes DANNY (45, graying hair) in his own cubicle.

DANNY
Another day of living the dream.

Mirko just grunts in response. He reaches his cubicle, takes
his jacket coat off and drops it onto the floor. As he powers
up his desktop computer, his boss, JARED VAUGHN (50s,
slightly overweight) steps up.

MIRKO
The MacPherson piece is coming.

JARED
So you've said.

MIRKO
It'll blow you away.

He pointedly blows then wipes some dust off a Pulitzer Prize
plaque hanging in his cubicle.

JARED
Yeah, you've certainly gotten your
mileage out of that, haven't you?

Mirko shrugs.

JARED (CONT'D)
When can I see a draft?

MIRKO
As soon as I have one. He still
won't meet with me. Thinks I'm
going to do a hatchet job on him.

Jared smirks.

JARED
Hmm, and why would he think that?

MIRKO
Because he's a lunatic?

JARED
Besides the point.

MIRKO
Look, he's speaking at the Tolkoya
annual shareholder meeting about
internet privacy, or some bullshit.
I'm gonna try to ambush him and see
if I can get him to make an ass of
himself. But you'll get your piece.
Scout's honor.

JARED
Right. Too bad you were never a
Scout. But I'm still holding you to
it.

Jared walks off. Mirko takes the lid of his Starbucks, takes
out his flask and pours some liquor into the cup.

EXT. WALTER E. WASHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

A SMALL GROUP OF PROTESTERS are yelling back and forth with a
SMALL GROUP OF MACPHERSON SUPPORTERS with COPS between them,
keeping them apart.

The protesters hold signs that read "Tolkoya No!",
"MacPherson-Fascist!", and "Privacy Now!" The MacPherson
supporters hold signs that read "Mac Gets It!" and American
flags.

A scuffle breaks out between the two groups and the Cops rush
in to intervene.

INT. WALTER E. WASHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

Think a Steve Jobs presentation. Projected on the huge screen that spans the length of the stage is "Tolkoya. The future is protecting your personal data."

In the roped off VIP area in front, Malene, OLGA ZHESTKIYA (early 50s, her hair in a half-perm and dyed blond, strong Russian accent), and ALFIE COLLINGS (late 30s) are among others in the front row. A few rows back behind the VIP, Sammy sits among other Tolkoya employees and shareholders. Further back, Mirko sits in the media section.

The LIGHTS DIM and "SCHEHERAZADE BEGINS TO PLAY OVER THE PA. Moments later, Vasili enters wearing a headset. Most of the crowd rises, applauds and cheers. Vasili smiles and takes in their accolades. The rest of the crowd stands up as well, one of the last being Mirko, rolling his eyes as he does.

Vasili holds his hand up and the MUSIC STOPS. The crowd sits.

VASILI

Thank you for that warm reception.
I'm guessing that was because of
what I've done for your portfolios,
rather for myself.

Some laughter from the crowd.

VASILI (CONT'D)

And yes, we've had a wonderful year
and the best is yet to come. But as
the saying and the song goes, "You
Ain't Seen Nothing Yet."

More applause. Mirko yawns, Malene beams, Olga remains expressionless, and Sammy cranes his neck, trying to get a view of his wife.

VASILI (CONT'D)

Now before we get to a bunch of
boring fiscal stuff that my
accountants -- and lawyers -- tell
me I'm obligated to tell you
about...

He puts his hand to his mouth, feigning a yawn. Some laughter in the crowd.

VASILI (CONT'D)

...and before I forget, I'd like to
recognize and announce and this
year's Tolkoya award for Most
Valuable Employee goes to...

He pretends to take out an envelope, open it and read what's inside. Some more laughs.

VASILY (CONT'D)
 ...Dr. Malene Young!

Malene looks shocked, Sammy looks shocked, Olga looks pissed. A MAN hustles in and hands Malene a bouquet of roses and a trophy.

VASILY (CONT'D)
 Malene, please stand up.

Embarrassed, she does and the audience applauds. Mirko eyes as she gives a quick nod of appreciation to the crowd and Vasili before sitting back down.

VASILY (CONT'D)
 Sorry, Malene, but there's no bonus for this, just the roses and trophy. I'm paying you well enough already.

More laughs from the audience.

VASILY (CONT'D)
 Okay, now let's crunch some numbers! And boy oh boy are they good!

A graph and a spreadsheet come up on the screen behind him. Not caring who sees him do it, Mirko takes out a flask and takes a swig. He offers it to the woman seated next to him, who scowls and shakes her head. Mirko shrugs and takes another pull.

INT. WALTER E. WASHINGTON CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

A chart on the screen is replaced by the "Tolkoya. The future is protecting your personal data" graphic.

VASILY
 ...and that, as they say, is that. And how and why have we've got here?

(MORE)