

The Scream
by
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FADE IN ON:

INT. HOLLYWOOD PENTHOUSE - DAY

Secluded and luxurious - on the 30th floor. A breeze flutters curtains at an open window. Movie posters grace the walls.

SUPER: CALIFORNIA, 1951

FOUR MEN sit around a table. A tape recorder sits nearby.

Two of the men wear designer suits; clearly they're the ones in charge:

RAOUL (40s) - a director's clapboard in his lap.

BROOKS (50s) - The producer: judging from his gold cigarette holder, and the shine from his shoes.

The two others seem... cut from a different cloth:

GARY (30s) - a handsome actor, with a chiseled chin.

WILHELM (aka, Willy) (30s) - a ratty dresser, but Gary's almost-twin. Faded bruises scream "stunt man." He sips tea, rough but genteel.

Brooks puffs his cigarette, then crosses his arms.

BROOKS

You're all aware why I called you here.

RAOUL

Sir, is it the "alligator" scene?

BROOKS

Damn right. That reptile bit ain't done yet. My bean-counters have been running over budget for a week. We've been stuck on that shot for three whole days!

Raoul clutches his clapboard like a shield.

RAOUL

That scene's pivotal to the plot.

GARY

We just have to get it right!

Brooks pins the actor with a glare.

BROOKS

Why the blazes do you care? You're not getting turned into alligator floss.

GARY

But it's my character who pushes him in!

Willy's anxious eyes dart around the table, afraid to challenge the assembled men.

WILLY

I've taken that dive ten times today. It's startin' to hurt.. A little. There's gotta be one shot we can use.

BROOKS

It's not the *visuals* screwing this up.
(to Gary)
You're the actor. You tell *me* what's wrong.

GARY

Er, the scream?

Brooks POUNDS the table. Everyone jumps.

BROOKS

Exactly! Gentlemen, prick your ears to this!

Brooks stabs the tape recorder. A sad SCREAM plays.

VOICE

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

It tapers away. Too boring to continue. A snarling Brooks shuts off the tape.

BROOKS

Who recorded this travesty?

GARY

(raises his hand)
It was me.

BROOKS

You call that acting?

GARY

I wasn't in the mood that day.

BROOKS

Well, we must replace it. Immediately.
Otherwise, I'm shutting down this
project. I've got better films to make.

A horrified Raoul jumps to his feet.

RAOUL

We'll come up with something, Sir!
(points to Gary)
Right now. Scream.

GARY

(sighs)
If you insist.

He draws a deep breath... lets out: a SQUEAK.

Awkward silence settles across the table. No-one wants to
be the first to speak.

WILLY

That was -

BROOKS

Pathetic.

Gary stink-eyes Brooks, actor's ego bruised.

GARY

I need to warm up my voice. What's my
motivation here?

BROOKS

You kidding? Our man's being gulleeted by
a huge-ass lizard. I need him to holler
like a man. Like this, okay?

Brooks breathes deep and gives it the college try.

BROOKS

GRRRAAAAGGGGGGH.

Brooks sounds like a grizzly bear choking on a bone. The
sound's abruptly cut off by his smoker's cough. The
producer turns bright red, nearly hacks up a lung.

RAOUL

Well, that was different.

BROOKS

You do it, Director Man!

Raoul smiles. Then HOWLS. Like a Baboon.

GARY

That's not in the script I read. There's
no role for Jane. Or Tarzan.

Willy spit-takes tea in Brooks' face. The producer stops
coughing, looks annoyed.

BROOKS

Why the hell are you here?

RAOUL

He's our stunt man. "Wilhelm the Great,"
they call him. He's the best.

WILLY

And - an expert in screams.

(beat)

It's my acting method. I scream when I
fall. That helps the authenticity.

The others look dubious. Brooks compares Willy and Gary -
face-to-face.

BROOKS

This film is running out of time. One of
you better squeeze a good scream outta
those lungs. In the next three minutes...
or else!

Brooks stabs RECORD on the tape player. He grabs Willy by
the collar and yanks the poor guy to his feet.

Gary and Raoul stand up, as well. Raoul points to Gary.

RAOUL

You're the actor. You go first!

GARY

Ahhhhhhhhh.

A tired performance. Willy's next.

WILLY

Grrrrrrr-arggggghh!

BROOKS

Too "heroic". Project more pain.

Brooks pokes Willy with his cigarette. The stunt man
emits a surprised YELP:

WILLY

Yow!

RAOUL

Closer. Not bad. Though too short.

GARY

I'm the actor. Listen to this: 00000000!

BROOKS

Too girly. Like you're on your period.
And surprised. I think Willy here's got
you beat.

Willy's eyes light up at the compliment.

WILLY

Hit me: that's what gets adrenaline
flowing. I can take it. I'll save the
film, and get this right!

Sadistically, Brooks takes the bait. He shoves Willy
several times. Closer and closer to the wall.

A jealous Gary competes with the stunt man's screams.

WILLY

Yiiiiiiiiiii!

GARY

Eeeeeeeek!

WILLY

Accccckkkk!

GARY

Yoowweeeee!

Willy's winning the shouting match. With every yell, he
grows more psyched.

WILLY

Golly! I've always wanted to be an actor.
Limousines, girls and no more falls.
Looks like I got what it takes. I'm gonna
be a star. Bigger and better than you!

An enraged Gary jumps in Willy's face.

GARY

You wanna get hit? That's fine!

He SOCKS Willy in the jaw. The stunt man stumbles back,
against the open window. Willy loses his balance, and
flails wildly. Then tumbles out of sight!

The others rush over and watch him fall.

WILLY (O.S.)
 IEEEEEEEEEEEE!

An unseen Willy hits the ground with a THUD. Dust PUFFS up into Gary, Raoul and Brooks' face.

Then silence. The men regard each other - guilt and fear in their eyes.

GARY
 He's a stunt guy. Maybe he survived.

RAOUL
 Thirty floors? Old Will's good for five.
 With a mattress landing. At best.

GARY
 Big deal. That's why we buy insurance.
 Wilhelm's a stunt man. He knew the risks.

GARY
 But I pushed him. That makes me a -

Raoul's eyes grow round.

RAOUL
 Don't say that on tape!

The director darts to the tape recorder, and hits "Stop." He reflects a moment and rewinds.

Brooks reaches out and selects "Play." Willy's final words on earth echo through tinny speakers.

WILLY (O.S.)
 IEEEEEEEEEEEE!

In other words - THE PERFECT SCREAM.

BROOKS
 (grins)
 Not so bad. Is it?

RAOUL
 It's perfect!

GARY
 Can we move on to the next scene, then?

BROOKS
 Gentlemen, consider your movie saved!

Brooks picks up Willy's tea, salutes his film comrades.

BROOKS

We will never speak of this again.
Instead, reflect on this: our stunt man
heroically sacrificed his life for this
scene. So let's use this recording
wisely. Secure his place in history.

Raoul and Gary CHEER, and high-five.

A final SUPER floats across the screen: "And so the
Wilhelm Scream was born!"

FINAL FADE OUT: