

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER & CLAY

Screenplay By

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**EXT. Bird's eye view of 1939 New York City with Empire State Building in sight.**

**EXT. Bus station.**

Bus pulls in and comes to a stop. A young man of about 19 looks out window of bus. He is Jewish, boyishly handsome with thick, black wavy hair.

**EXT. sidewalk outside of the bus station.**

The young man is walking out of bus station onto sidewalk. He wears a baggy tweed suit. He is carrying newspapers in the crook of his arm. It is night. He holds up his hand and a taxi stops in front of him. From his pocket, he pulls out a piece of paper and glances at it. He opens taxi door and gets in.

**EXT. New York apartment building sidewalk.**

Taxi stops along sidewalk. Young man gets out with his newspapers. Taxi leaves as he looks at the slip of paper. There is an address written on it. He looks up at the number on the building he is standing in front of. It is the same number. He closes his eyes.

**INT. A dark coffin like space.**

Dark with small amount of light, enough to see the upper body of the young man lying prostrate. He takes in a few deep breaths and looks to his side. We see a man, or what could be a corpse, lying beside the young man in the 'coffin.' Its face looks pale grey as if it is made out of clay.

**EXT. Back at the New York apartment building.**

We are back in front of the building where the young man is still standing. He opens his eyes, looks up at the door at the top of the stairs and begins to ascend.

**INT. apartment door in dark hallway.**

Young man knocks on door. The door opens almost immediately with a burst of interior light of a kitchen. A woman of about 40 in a bathrobe stands inside with a weary smile.

WOMAN:

(THICK NEW YORK ACCENT)

Josef?

The young man nods.

WOMAN:

Almost sobbing, the woman breaks into a larger grin. She hugs him.

You look just like your father.

**INT: Dark bedroom.**

We see someone lying in bed with his back facing us, blanket pulled almost over his head. The bedroom is dimly lit with a streetlight glow from between the venetian blinds of a window.

The door opens, and the fluorescent light from the kitchen sink brightens the room. The woman barges in and bangs the sleeping figure on the side of head with her left hand. She is holding a washrag in her right hand.

WOMAN:

(Her tone is more stern now)

Move over, Sammy. Make room. Your cousin is here.

She gives Sam a shove until he is pressed against the wall.

WOMAN:

This is Josef Kavalier, your Uncle Emil's son. He's just taken the bus here all the way from San Francisco.

Sammy sits up in bed, groaning. He is 17 years old, skinny, a little homely. He furrows his brow in confusion. He looks at the doorway.

SAM:

Who? Since when?

**SAM'S POV.**

The light silhouettes Josef at first and then the light is behind him. He leans against the doorway, newspapers still under the crook of his arm. Tired expression on his face.

SAM:

What's the matter with him? Is he sick?

The woman slaps across the top of the bed as if scattering dust away.

Sam spreads back out a few inches on the bed from the wall.

WOMAN:

What do you think? He can barely stand on his own two feet.

Standing up straight. Lighter tone.

There you are.

She turns to Josef.

WOMAN:

I want to tell you something.

She grabs Josef's ears with each hand and kisses each of his cheeks.

WOMAN:

You made it. All right? You're here.

JOSEF:

(Czech accent)

All Right.

Woman hands Josef a washrag. She turns off the light, leaves the room, and closes the door. The glow from the streetlight returns.

Josef takes a deep breath and slowly lets it out. He lets the newspapers and washrag fall with a thud to the floor. He takes off his jacket and puts it on the back of a chair. He takes off his trousers and shoes.

He lays on the bed and places his hands under his head because Sam has all the pillows. Josef clears his throat and lies still.

JOSEF:

As soon as I can fetch some money, I will find a lodging, and leave the bed.

SAM:

That would be nice. You speak good English.

JOSEF:

Thank you.

SAM:

Where'd you learn it?

JOSEF:

I'd prefer not to say.

SAM:

It's a secret?

JOSEF:

It is a personal matter.

SAM:

Can you tell me what you were doing in California? Or is that confidential information too?

JOSEF:

I was crossing over from Japan.

SAM:

(Lifts head.)

Japan! What were you doing there?

JOSEF:

Mostly I was suffering from the intestinal complaint. And I suffer still. Particular in the night.

Sam furrows his brow and moves a little closer to the wall.

JOSEF:

Tell me, Sam. How many examples must I have in my portfolio?

SAM:

What portfolio is that?

JOSEF:

My portfolio of drawings. To show your employer. Sadly, I am obligated to leave behind all of my work in Prague, but I can very quickly do much more that will be frightfully good.

SAM:

To show my boss? What are you talking about?

JOSEF:

Your mother suggested that you might to help me get a job in the company where you work. I am an artist, like you.

SAM:

(rolls his eyes)

An artist? My mother told you I was an artist?

MOTHER:

(Yelling from the other side of the bedroom door.)

Sammy, sleep.

JOSEF:

(Sniffs and whispers.)

I find I have smoked all my cigarettes. Perhaps you could?

SAM:

You know, I smoked my last one before bed. Hey, how'd you know I smoke? Do I smell?

**EXT. Fire escape from the window of Sam's bedroom. The blinds raise, the window opens and the boys gingerly extend their upper bodies out of the sash. There is a potted plant on the fire escape.**

They share a wrapped cigarette. They trade back and forth as they talk and smoke.

JOSEF:

So, you are commercial artist for the Empire  
Novelties Incorporated Company?

SAM:

She was talking through her hat.

JOSEF:

Sorry?

SAM:

Ethel. My mother. She was full of it.

JOSEF:

Full of...?

SAM:

I'm an inventory clerk. Sometimes they let  
me do pasteup for an ad. Or when they add a  
new item to the line, I get to do the  
illustration. For that, they pay me two  
dollars per.

JOSEF:

Ah.

Josef Kavalier exhales smoke.

She wrote a letter to my father. I remember  
she said you create designs of superb new  
inventions and devices.

SAM:

(Looks down and smirks.)

Guess what?

JOSEF:

She talked into her hat.

SAM:

(Knocks ashes from cigarette into the potted plant)

Can I ask you a question? What was with all the newspapers?

JOSEF:

They are your New York newspapers. I bought them at the Capitol Greyhound Terminal.

SAM:

How many?

JOSEF:

Eleven.

SAM:

(He counts all ten fingers.)

I'm missing one.

JOSEF:

Missing...?

SAM:

Starts recounting on hand.

Times, Herald-Tribune. World-Telegram,  
Journal- American, Sun.

He switches hands.

News, Post. Uh, Wall Street Journal. And the Brooklyn Eagle. And the Home News in the Bronx. What's eleven?

JOSEF:

The Woman's Daily Wearing.

SAM:

Women's Wear Daily?

JOSEF:

I didn't know it was like that. For the garments.

He laughed at himself

I was looking for something about Prague.

SAM:

The Jews.

Takes a drag on cigarette.

You know Jewish? Yiddish. You know it?

JOSEF:

No.

SAM:

That's too bad. We got four Jewish newspapers in New York. They'd probably have something.

JOSEF:

What about German newspapers?

SAM:

I don't know, but I'd imagine so. We certainly have a lot of Germans. They've been marching and having rallies all over town.

JOSEF:

I see.

SAM:

You're worried about your family?"

Josef does not reply.

SAM:

They couldn't get out?

JOSEF:

No. Not yet.

Sam throws cigarette butt into potted plant.

**INT. Sam's bedroom by the window.**

Sam and Josef slide back into room and are sitting on floor by window. They walk over to the bed and get in.

SAM:

You know, we're, uh, we've all been really worried... about Hitler... and the way he's treating the Jews and... and all that. When they, when you were... invaded... My mom was... we all...

He shakes his head, not sure what he is trying to say.

Here.

Sam sits up and tugs one of the pillows out from under the back of his head.

Josef lifts his head from the mattress and stuffs the pillow beneath it.

JOSEF:

Thank you.

Joseph's eyes close. He begins to breathe steady, then it turns to a slight rasp.

Sam lies awake, looking up at the ceiling. He bites his lip, deep in contemplation.