

# **JAX**

An Original Screenplay

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**BLACK.**

THEN shadows and light dancing on wet streets. The sound of cars.

A moment, then an American female voice (over) with traces of the Carolinas: breathy, husky, sensuous and slow. Her tone is low, almost like confession.

We watch the shiny streets and listen. This is it:

JAX

It was never gonna be easy for momma and me,  
living the way we did back then . . .

Pause

Back in the day, as I'd so often heard her  
call it, after Papa died.

Pause

And I had always known that something  
terrible would happen to me - a premonition -  
of something so bad it would change my life.  
And it did: and it left me with fears and  
demons that stayed with me for years.

Pause

It's only now I can tell the truth. Now that  
time has passed and another event has changed  
my life yet again.

Pause

And even though, momma is now long dead, I  
knew she was 'there' to help me when I needed  
her most - to give me strength and courage.

Pause

In a moment, every fragment of my former  
life, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, fitted  
together and finally my picture was complete.

Pause

My name is Jacqueline, like Jackie K, but  
everyone always called me Jax.

And this is my story . . .

1. EXT. LAFAYETTE / LOUISIANA / USA. NIGHT.

1.

**Head-up:** Christmas 1991.

Shantytown, almost a ghetto, cars up on blocks. It's rough, it's dark and it looks dangerous. We move slowly across a suburban street, into a darkened garden and the deck of an old wooden house.

Several dogs howl in the distance, car horns beep, the ubiquitous sounds of televisions and radios.

We see a bathroom window, the glass dripping wet with condensation on the inside. Down to a narrow gap into which we move.

**CONTINUOUS**

2. INT. OLD WOODEN HOUSE/BATHROOM / NIGHT.

2.

We see the vague image of JAX, a teenage girl, her features obscured completely by wisps of steam. She is taking a bath in an old fashioned free standing cast iron tub. In the background a radio plays FM: Tamla Motown, familiar. The atmosphere is peaceful and relaxed. She hums to the music.

Out of nowhere, the shadows of a man moving slowly; quiet with clandestine and deliberate footfalls. The click of the bathroom door. The squeak of outdoor shoes on bathroom tiles, intrusive, and unwelcome.

ROY KIPLER, a thick southern drawl, accentuated by drink and tobacco. A dead scarecrow walking.

KIPLER

Smells sweet in here, honey.

We hear Jax take a sharp intake of breath. Her voice trembles.

JAX

What do you want uncle Roy?

KIPLER

Why, I've come to see you Jax?

JAX

Please - please go away.

His tone rises, an edge of menace and implied threat.

KIPLER

*But this is my house Jax, my house.*

JAX

Where's moma?

KIPLER

I don't rightly know. But what I do know is  
that it's just you and me.

We see an old leather jacket thrown down onto the bathroom tiles. The  
footfalls advance in the swirling mist of condensation.

We can't clearly see her or him, just voices and suggestion.

JAX

Go away.

We hear the urgent sound of sloshing bath water, the start of a struggle. And  
then she screams out loud.

JAX (Cont'd)

No please don't - no

The sound of more sloshing water.

JAX (Cont'd)

MOMA!

The sloshing water becomes more accentuated the more she struggles.

KIPLER

Ain't no use you hollerin' Jax. Moma's as  
drunk as a skunk.

**BEHIND:** the commotion, we catch sight of a large bathroom mirror. In  
reflection, we see a woman creep in, holding an old golf iron with both hands  
like a pickaxe. Her eyes shine with anger.

Cautiously, she advances. Jax continues to struggle, in the mist, as the  
foamy bathwater slops noisily over the side of the tub onto the shiny floor  
tiles.

Then: the woman behind swings the golf iron and catches the side of Kipler's head.

A cascade of blood hits the mirror as he spins down to the floor.

MOTHER

Except I didn't drink your poison hooch.

She grabs hold of a huge towel and scoops Jax out of the tub, simultaneously wrapping it around her.

MOTHER (Cont'd)

Come here baby.

Jax's bare feet are skidding and sliding around on the wet floor tiles.

We focus on her feet; small, toes curling, shiny with water.

She is shaking with fear. Her mother cuddles hold of her.

MOTHER (Cont'd)

You're okay, I'm here now. It's okay.

Jax clutches hold of her mother like there is no tomorrow.

Kipler is sprawled across the bathroom floor, leaking blood into the spilt foamy bath water.

A pathetic, dead scarecrow.

MOTHER (Cont'd/OS)

He won't touch you no more baby. But I had to see for myself Jax. Just what he was.

We see image of the tub, Jax and her mother frozen like a photograph, slowly dissolves into black and white.

Then the distinctive CLICK of a camera's shutter.

CLICK: That image dissolves into a crime scene, a cordoned off Police Line.

CLICK: A newspaper headline: "Mother convicted. Second degree murder".

CLICK: A teenage girl receiving a High School Prize, a silver plated statuette of a swimmer. The arc of a diver. Significant.

CLICK: THE NEW YORK TIMES, Theatre Review. Off Broadway. A photograph of JACQUELINE DONOVITCH - JAX. Caption: "Charlotte actress plays three different roles in Broadway show. An Italian spoof."  
*'La Reincarnazione del dotter Grimaldi.'*

'Astonishing!' 'Convincing!' 'Donovitch is tremendous.'

CLICK: From still to motion; we move along a high diving board and see:

### 3. INT. LONDON AQUATICS CENTRE / SWIMMING POOL / DAY

3.

**HEAD-UP:** London, current time.

Naked adult feet and ankles pad along the diving board; shiny red toenails. They come to the edge of board; it bends slightly with the weight.

We see Jax, her face. Now early forties, a gym toned, athletic figure.

WE HEAR her heart pound; her breaths rise and fall. The creak of the springs as she stretches in preparation to dive. This is gutsy.

We can feel her tension and anticipation. Almost taste her fear.

We stare down to the pool below. It looks like a paperback, shimmering blue and dangerously far below her.

SHE SPRINGS off the board, a perfect dive, through the air and ... then ...

### 4. INT. UNDERWATER / SWIMMING POOL / LONDON DAY

4.

She's underwater. Jax swims confidently up to the surface, a strong front crawl. She gasps for air.

Then she powers through the water, her face in a snarl of ANGUISH. We FEEL she is fighting the demons that haunt her.

Jax, her face says it all. It always does; her expression, her eyes.

FLASHBACKS: *to the night in Lafayette, the old iron bath tub, her mother and the golf club. Blood. Fear. The pathetic, dead scarecrow. Her mother's face.*

She fights the images, we can feel it. THEN: she thrashes over to the edge and she's out of the water in one fluid movement.

She's panting, hands on her knees. Finally, she looks up, her eyes shine.

And we know exactly what she is thinking.