

Number Seven

Written by

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An Original Screenplay  
Based on a True Story

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INT. ART STUDIO - UNDETERMINED

ON AN UNFINISHED CANVAS

Two "stacked rectangles" occupy three fifths of a 5 x 4 foot canvas. The larger shape, a tobacco brown swath, weighs upon a slight rectangle of watery lotus green.

A pause. Contemplation of the untouched white space.

Suddenly a paint-speckled hand whisks wide strokes of sky blue obliterating the white.

ON A GRIZZLED CHIN

Pipe in mouth, a brief smug grin. Painter MARK ROTHKO (45), admires his latest work of art. He flips it over, scribbles something on a sticker affixed to the canvas.

FADE TO:

EXT. SANTA MONICA, CA - DAY

A picture-perfect view of the Pacific Ocean and beach.

SUPER: LOS ANGELES - 1987

ANGLE ON a VW BEETLE weaving through traffic. Top down, radio BLARING Bon Jovi's "Livin' On A Prayer".

DOUGLAS HIMMELFARB (35), beach tanned, six-foot-four, wind in his shaggy blonde mane, larger-than-life energy, drives with intent, his flip-flopped-foot heavy on the gas.

As a light turns red, he BRAKES. On the passenger seat, a pile of horticulture books slide to the floor, revealing a flyer that reads "ESTATE SALE TODAY".

Doug grabs a lit joint from the ashtray, INHALES a long drag.

INT./EXT. BENTLEY - SAME DAY

A CHAUFFEUR steers the stately sedan down the winding driveway of a Brentwood MONTEREY COLONIAL-STYLE MANSION.

Two primly attired SISTERS sit in the back seat. ELLA HIRSHFIELD (60), the more serious of the two, and RUTH HIRSHFIELD (58) who always parrots her older sister.

As the vehicle descends, we see an overgrown and disheveled garden through the window.

Electronic gates open, the Bentley turns right onto the hushed street.

EXT. AUCTION HOUSE - DAY

Doug parks in front of a pre-war stone front facade; Art Deco double doors flanked by identical signs on each window: "A.N. ABELL AUCTIONEERS SINCE 1916."

INT. AUCTION HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Doug enters the high-ceilinged warehouse, parts the waters through small groups of judgy BIDDERS who stare at the fish-out-of-water beachcomber. Doug reaches a corner where he overhears sisterly BICKERING.

ELLA

...The gardener was an idiot and scoundrel, I tell you.

RUTH

An idiot and a scoundrel he was.

Doug turns to them. He spots a brightly colored enameled PIN on Ruth's collar.

DOUG

(pleasantly to Ruth)  
Excuse me, but is that an Orchid?

RUTH

Why, yes it is.

DOUG

Cymbidium, I believe. It contrasts nicely with your eyes.

Ruth smiles warmly. Ella gazes, shrewdly assessing Doug for a moment, cuts it short.

ELLA

I'm sure this young man has better things to do than to chat up two old ladies.

DOUG

Not selling anything. Just commenting on--

RUTH

Well, I take it you know flowers.

DOUG

Know flowers? Why Madam, given the resources, I could turn the Sahara Desert into a Garden of Eden.

RUTH  
We have a garden!

Doug smiles adoringly as he extracts a dirt-stained business card from his shorts pocket. Ruth grabs it before Ella can pull her away from Doug, whose attention has turned to an open doorway.

INT. BARGAIN ROOM

Doug peers in, enters, spots a rack of paintings. He rummages through it until one catches his eye.

A STUFFY CURATOR (50s) in a three-piece suit, approaches Doug clutching a black leather-bound notebook.

CURATOR  
Excuse me, may I help you?

Doug points to the rack.

DOUG  
Yes, what are these?

CURATOR  
Paintings of *de minimus* value.

DOUG  
De minimus, huh?

CURATOR  
Assets of little or no value to the estate.

DOUG  
I know what it means.

Doug pulls out a 5 X 4 foot painting with signature "stacked" rectangles. He carefully discerns the post-modernist style. Doug realizes he's holding his breath, EXHALES quietly.

The alert Curator opens his notebook, his eyes scan the page.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
This must be a fake.

CURATOR  
(flatly)  
Maybe it's your lucky day.

As the curator walks away, Doug examines the frame. He notices a peeling, stained sticker on the back of the canvas. He discreetly removes the sticker, tucks it in his pocket.

INT. BIDDING ALCOVE

An AUCTIONEER(50s) glasses on the tip of his nose, BARKS prices in a room of mostly vacant seats. Ella and Ruth sit in the front row.

On an easel beside the Auctioneer rests the stacked rectangular painting.

AUCTIONEER  
Do I have fifty dollars?

Ella quietly lifts her hand.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)  
I have fifty dollars, fifty dollars. Do I have one-hundred dollars?

The Auctioneer looks around the room.

Doug, standing in the back, nods his head at the Auctioneer.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)  
I have one-hundred dollars from the gentleman in the back.

A surprised Ella turns around in her seat.

ELLA  
(to Ruth)  
It's that gardener.

RUTH  
The gardener! What should we do?

AUCTIONEER  
I have one-hundred dollars. One-hundred dollars going once...

Ella raises her hand showing two outstretched fingers.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)  
I have two-hundred from the lady in front.

The Auctioneer looks intently at Doug.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)  
Two-hundred going once... two hundred going twice...

Doug nods his head.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)  
Three-hundred dollars.

RUTH  
(to Ella)  
Now what?

ELLA  
Not worth the money. I just bid him  
up to teach him a lesson.

AUCTIONEER  
Going once... going twice... sold  
to the gentleman in the back.

The Auctioneer SLAMS the gavel.

FADE TO:

*EXT. STREET - DAY (FLASHBACK)*

*SUPER: CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND - 1962*

*A suburban neighborhood of brick homes. A garage sale's in progress with few buyers.*

*INT. GARAGE - DAY*

*Young Doug, (10), is a string bean with long blond hair. He eyes a painting of a flower field leaning against a wall. The elderly HOMEOWNER (70) watches him.*

HOMEOWNER (O.S.)  
You like that one, don't ya?

DOUG  
(pointing to the painting)  
Someday it'll be worth a lot.

HOMEOWNER  
Hmmh. What makes ya think that?

DOUG  
It's what happens to all beautiful  
things when they get old.

HOMEOWNER  
Well, okay then. How mucha got?

*Doug pulls out a wad of dollar bills from his pant pocket and hands it over.*

*The Homeowner glances at the money, and then back to Doug.*

HOMEOWNER (CONT'D)  
That's the best you can do?

Doug nods. Holds his breath, his blank expression does not betray his excitement.

An intense moment as the two stare at each other.

HOMEOWNER (CONT'D)  
Alright, you can have it.

Without a word, Doug leaves, painting in arms. A victorious grin spreads ear to ear.

EXT. HIMMELFARB HOME - BACKYARD NURSERY - MINUTES LATER

Doug crosses the yard on his way to the house, the painting under his arm. His MOM (40s), a tall, angry, rough-around-the-edges woman clinging to the 50's, spots Doug from the flower beds where she's knee deep in the dirt.

Doug's siblings STEVEN (13), a remorseless piss-ant and GARY (8) an innocent, help their clueless DAD (40s), pack flowers in boxes.

MOM  
What are you doing with that...  
thing?

Doug walks away, head down, pretends he didn't hear.

MOM (CONT'D)  
Give me that!

Mom SNATCHES the painting from Doug, throws it in the garbage can. Steven and Gary look on, grinning and CHUCKLING.

EXT. FOREST - LATER THAT DAY - FLASHBACK

A forest clearing as sunlight peeks through the treetops. All is quiet. An enraptured Doug wearing a plaid wool jacket lies daydreaming amongst the leaves staring past the treetops.

Distant VOICES with the rustling of footsteps grow louder, but a daydreaming Doug does not react.

Steven and dim-witted friends FRECKLES (13), and CREW CUT (13) close in.

STEVEN (O.S.)  
Hey, Wire! Where the heck are you?

Their voices bust Doug's trance-he glances nervously around.

FRECKLES (O.S.)  
He's over here!

Three boys wearing padded football jerseys appear.

STEVEN  
Told ya.

Doug grabs a bouquet of wildflowers lying next to him and tries to hide it under his jacket.

CREW CUT  
What's that, freak?

STEVEN  
Hey 'Wire', Mom wants you inside for dinner.

All three surround Doug, now shaking.

FRECKLES  
Awww, scared are you?

Crew Cut grabs the bouquet as Doug desperately tries to hold onto it in a futile tug-of-war.

CREW CUT  
Hey flowerboy!

FRECKLES  
What a spaz!

The flowers scatter to the ground as Crew Cut rips the bouquet out of Doug's hand.

The three Boys viciously pounce on Doug.

INT. DOUG'S BEDROOM - LATER - FLASHBACK

Paintings of various sizes plaster the walls.

Handwritten lined pages of poetry, small photos of other paintings and works of art cover a large bulletin board.

Doug FLOPS onto his bed, buries his head in a pillow.

Dad barges in.

DAD  
If you'd joined little league,  
you'd have some friends.

DOUG

*Dad, I hate little league. I hate  
basketball. I JUST WANNA BE LEFT  
ALONE!*

DAD

*Your love of art will take you  
nowhere. I can guarantee you that.*

*As Dad storms out, Doug looks over to the open doorway. Gary  
peeks in, shrugs, then walks away without saying a word.*

END FLASHBACKS.

FADE TO:

EXT./INT. HIRSHFIELD MANSION - LIVING ROOM (PRESENT DAY)

Ruth holds Doug's business card, pensively purses her lips.  
She glances around. No Ella in sight. She dials the phone.

DOUG(V.O.)

This is Doug's landscaping. Please  
leave your message.

RUTH

H-hello, this is Ruth Hirshfield  
from the auction house last  
Sunday...

REVERSE ANGLE FROM BEHIND RUTH

We can't hear the end of Ruth's message before she hangs up.

PAST RUTH'S SHOULDER

We see Ella walk in, startling Ruth.

ELLA

Who was that?

RUTH

Who dear?

ELLA

On the phone?

Ella tilts her head as she eyes Ruth.

ELLA (CONT'D)

Please, please tell me that wasn't  
who I think it was.

RUTH  
But he had such kind eyes.

ELLA  
Oh for heaven's sake, Ruthie!

INT. DOUG'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

The painting Doug's mother tossed in the garbage bin 25 years ago hangs on a wall.

We pull back: Doug's obsessive collecting has not abated. Antique treasures and collectibles rest on floating shelves. Modern art fills the walls. Potted orchids occupy the wall-to-wall carpet. A lone painting rests on an easel swathed in burlap.

Doug pulls on a pair of cruddy blue jeans and a Polo shirt.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Doug slips into flip-flops, grabs the car keys from a ceramic bowl on an antique shoe rack by the door, leaves.

INT./EXT. VW BEETLE - DAY

Doug's Beetle SPUTTERS past huge Brentwood mansions behind high fences.

EXT. GATE HIRSHFIELD MANSION - DAY

Doug drives up to a wrought iron gate, presses the intercom. The gate opens. He drives through. The long winding driveway gives way to sad tangled foliage, a faded photograph in black and white--stark contrast to the lush, technicolor gardens in high-end Brentwood. A challenge that Doug is up to.

EXT. FRONT ENTRANCE HIRSHFIELD MANSION

Doug's car WHEEZES to a stop.

Ella and Ruth stand at the front door steps, looking down.

Doug exits the car, a large note pad and small Crayola crayon box in hand.

DOUG  
What a lovely estate you have.

RUTH  
It used to be, Mr. Himmelfarb.

DOUG  
Call me Doug.

ELLA

This is just a waste of time if you  
ask me.

Suddenly, Doug's car engine COUGHS and WHEEZES, even after  
he'd shut it off earlier. The sisters draw back, alarmed.

THE GROUNDS - MOMENTS LATER

Doug, Ella and Ruth walk slowly, surveying the carnage. Doug  
points to a disheveled row of Ficus trees.

DOUG

Your Ficus trees are choking the  
life out of your garden...

Then Doug kicks up some vines with lavender and white flowers  
out of their path.

DOUG (CONT'D)

...and these Field Bindweeds are  
real garden thugs that need to be  
contained.

Ella maintains a watchful gaze on Doug as Ruth nervously  
watches her.

Doug holds up the oversized note pad and starts sketching on  
it with a black crayon, outlining the makings of the garden.

Doug takes out colorful crayons, fills in the outlines. In  
mere seconds, the crude drawing resembles a multi-colored  
pointilistic painting.

He holds it up to them.

DOUG (CONT'D)

This is what it could look like.

Ruth's jaw drops.

ELLA

Hmmf. It takes more than a piece of  
paper and some crayons to convince  
me, right Ruthie?

RUTH

Yes, more than paper and crayons...