



Swimming Upstream
by Susan Merson

... a 10 page excerpt of the screenplay

INT.-1940'S FANTASY SOUNDSTAGE- DAY

On the high diving board is a glowing Esther Williams, posed a la pin up beauty. Click. A photograph. Then the image goes into motion. Her tiara shines, the colors are brighter than normal as she waves to the crowd and the violins swell. With a swift and graceful move she dives and the singers surround her with a wonderful whoop of sound. The colors change as she swoops toward the water below and somehow her graceful body morphs into young SAMANTHA SILVER, aglow and wrapped in her fantasy as she hits the water below.

INT. UNDERWATER JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER POOL-DAY

SAM, almost 18, tomboy tough, glides beneath the water, eyes open and hair streaming behind her. Look closely and you see the rhinestones gleaming on her underwater tiara. She comes up for air, bareheaded, and we hear the echoes of the pool, the tinny sound of HAVA NAGILA on the loudspeakers, the scream and whistle of the lifeguard. Then, down, down, down again into the green silence where she spins and dips ala Busby Berkeley. A waterlogged band toots away for her as she streaks around the pool. This is Sam's refuge and she glides like a happy dolphin, her arms overhead and swirling in her own underwater ballet.

Down and up. Her dream and her life. We see the banner with the legend: SWIM AT THE TOLEDO J. JOIN THE 1964-65 SWIM DEVILS! And down goes SAM again.

This time when she surfaces we see TOBY MARGOLIS, 68, in a wool suit and chunk heels. She wears oversized glasses on a string that rattle against her gold buttons. She yells towards the pool, trying to keep her shoes dry.

SAM dives again and we lose TOBY and then up again to hear her holler.

TOBY

Sam! I'm waiting for you! You're
ten minutes late already! Who's
gonna take my tickets? Sam! Sam!

And SAM dives again. She resurfaces to hear the whistle.

LIFEGUARD (VO)

Watch out, swimmers. Piddle fish
coming in!

A scream of delight and at least forty 7 year old kids jump in and head to the middle of the pool screaming. SAM resurfaces spitting and whipping her hair around.

TOBY shakes her head and finally gets SAM's eye. She points to her watch a few times and shakes her head. SAM shakes her head, rears up like a whale blowing it's top, gasping for air in the middle of the onslaught. TOBY flees to avoid the water.

INT MULTIPURPOSE ROOM-DAY

SAM, hair dripping, barely dressed and hung with winter coat and scarves, slips in the door of the Multi Purpose Room with her postcard notebook in hand. From the stage, TOBY glares as she clicks the carousel of slides for her travel lecture. SAM buried herself in counting ticket stubs and doing box office details. Meanwhile, TOBY is the perfect "Lady Of Charm".

TOBY

And so, fellow travelers, the
romance of Rodeo Drive awaits you!
Movie stars ready to sweep you off
your feet, poodles to lick your
face and corned beef to titillate
your tastebuds all on that same
fabulous avenue!

We scan those in attendance with SAM. There are 7 people, all wrapped in winter coats and galoshes, all over 80. Most asleep.

TOBY:

And don't forget those orange
groves. California is the orange
grove state!

ANGLE ON SAM who has her eyes closed, running her own movie.

EXT. ORANGE BLOSSOM POOL-DAY/FANTASY

A group of swimmers, including SAM in her tiara, smiling for the camera streak through a huge blue California pool, filled to the brim with oranges. The women circle, join hands, surface dive and reemerge to the strains of "CALIFORNIA, HERE I COME".

INT. MULTIPURPOSE ROOM-DAY

SAM, leaning against the doorjamb. Smiles dreamily.

ANGLE ON THE AUDIENCE

Though most of the audience is nodding off, there is one old woman speaking quietly to her companion, YETTA, who is not there.

TOBY

Mrs. Horowitz, Sha, already! Yetta didn't come with you to the travel series! Yetta died last month!

MRS. HOROWITZ answers belligerently.

MRS. HOWORWITZ

How do you know?

TOBY

Bring up the lights, Sam

TOBY turns back to the audience.

TOBY

And that brings your WINTER DOLDRUMS travel series to a close. Watch your mailboxes for the spring events, friends! Au revoir! Arriverderci and Shalom!

Scattered applause. The 7 file out dragging their newspapers and scarves. SAM pages through her notebook excitedly, looking for the perfect picture.

INT, DOORWAY-MULTIPURPOSE ROOM-DAY

TOBY approaches SAM with a jaundiced eye, rummaging in her purse for her checkbook. SAM starts to chatter as she hands TOBY her note.

SAM

That was great, Mrs. Margolis! But there are a few places you missed. Like this hot dog place called Tail O the Pup that actually looks like a hot dog, and my uncle told me about a donut place there that's made like an enormous doughnut. You might want to include them next time.

TOBY

Since when are you an expert?

SAM

My money is saved. I know every Hollywood landmark and I'm going to see everyone of them before my 18th birthday. Even going to swim in Esther Williams pool. She was almost my godmother. My uncle said.

TOBY just looks at her

TOBY

That so. She'd have probably done a better job then your own mother.

SAM

I won't be late again. A couple more weeks I'll have all the money I need and...

TOBY

And kindly tell that mother of yours that her sandwiches last week must have poisoned my entire audience!

SAM

I'm so sorry, Mrs. Margolis.

TOBY

There were 6 people here! And the ones that did make it were already dead! It's over. I'm moving to Palm Beach.

SAM

But, two more weeks..

TOBY

You get on with your dreams. And I'll get on with mine

SAM

But, Mrs. Margolis..

TOBY

There isn't a person on the planet who doesn't deserve a chance to find where they belong. Good luck, Tatehleh.

TOBY hands her a check.

TOBY

And comb your hair before you go out. It'll freeze.

INT. TOLEDO FEDERAL BANK-LATE AFTERNOON

SAM, icicles in her hair, confronts the TELLER over her bank book. The sand ash tray is laying on its side and strewn all over the floor of the bank.

SAM
That can't be right!

TELLER
Well, your Mother was in here earlier.

SAM
She make the car payment?

TELLER
She made a withdrawal.

SAM
But I took her off the account!

TELLER
She broke up with her boyfriend, she says. The car is going to be repossessed, she says and the broken ashtray over there costs \$29.50, so the manager says.

TELLER nods to the kicked mess of sandy ash tray on the floor. SAM is pissed.

EXT. SAM AND BILLIE'S HOUSE-LATE AFTERNOON

Sleet is now pelting a broken daffodil. A rusty Ford is in the driveway with a hand lettered sign on the door saying, "BILLIE' LUNCH WAGON- Dine with Class." We pan up from a rusted coke can and errant, matted waxed paper on the ground to the window where BILLIE SILVERMAN, (41), attractive, but past her peak, is throwing items in a bag and moving through the apartment like a tornado.

INT. BILLIE'S BEDROOM-LATE AFTERNOON

BILLIE is moving fast and ignores SAM as she storms in.

SAM
There've gotta be laws against people like you!

BILLIE
Comb your hair, for Chrissakes!
You're even scaring me.

SAM grabs the suitcase.

SAM
Give me my money!

BILLIE
Get your hands off me! I'll call
the police.

SAM
They'll come right over! You've
slept with everyone on the force.

BILLIE
Shut up wise guy!

INT. HALLWAY-SAME

Billie searches teapots, vodka bottles and cookie jars for
cash. She slams a full vodka bottle into her purse.

BILLIE
Where is my extra stash?

SAM
Ma! Be fair...

INT. SAM'S BEDROOM-SAME

Billie heads to Sam's dresser and opens the drawer. She
grabs a sock full of bills.

BILLIE
I'm your mother. What's yours is
mine til you're 18

SAM is all over her.

SAM
That's my escape money! I saved all
through school.

BILLIE
Big girls first! I am heading to
Acapulco. Bruce sent me a ticket.

SAM
That loser!?

BILLIE
He won. Big. In Vegas and is down
there setting up a business.
There's a plane in an hour and I'm
on it.

SAM

What about Grama?

BILLIE
You and Andre take care of her.
I've had enough. Now STOP!

SAM makes a grab for the bills.

BILLIE slugs her, hard.

They both stop. SAM sits back on the bed. It's never been this bad before.

BILLIE
(realizing what's she done) Sam!
Sammy. I'm sorry.

BILLIE begins to tear up but then goes back to her mission.

BILLIE
But this time I gotta leave here
for good.

SAM
Again.

BILLIE smiles crookedly.

BILLIE
There's gold in them thar hills.
Common baby. Let your mama have
another chance.

SAM says nothing, crushed.

INT. SAM'S ROOM-DAY

Angle on the window as BILLIE struggles toward the car with her bag and a can of beer. Her purse is open and as she flounces through the snow in her heels, a wad of cash flops onto the soggy ground. BILLIE drives off.

INT. MT. ZION HOME FOR THE AGED-EARLY EVENING

SAM, red eyed and tearful, is sitting on the plastic couch with LIL, (79), her chain smoking grandmother. There is a 78 record player and LIL has been listening to MONTOVANI movie themes.

LIL
Forget her, Sammy. She's been
pickled for the last five years

SAM

She's my mother. She's your daughter.

LIL

She's a piece of shit. Here, have a smoke.

SAM

Uncle Andre sent money. She tried to take that, too. Here's your share.

LIL

Keep it. I'm moving in with Morris Grubnick. We sleep together anyway, why double the rent?

SAM lights one of LIL's cigarettes.

SAM

I broke up with all my boyfriends. I was supposed to leave in two weeks.

LIL

Take a drag of your smoke and get tough.

SAM takes a drag but goes in a coughing fit.

LIL

How old are you?

SAM

18 in June.

Lil spits and then says

LIL

Go see Abie.

She whispers loudly to her.

LIL

You may not be a pauper.

SAM

How come?

LIL

Your father, despite his many bad qualities, had some decency. Go see Abe. He'll set you up.

SAM

Abe?

LIL

You think I would name a son Andre?
Go! Before your fahrshtinkina
mother gets out there.

LIL shoves some bills into SAM's pocket.

SAM

She's in Acapulco.

LIL

The cash will be gone in a week.

SAM

I just wish..

LIL

Wishes are fishes that drown. Get
Oeta here.

LIL hugs her.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION-NIGHT

Lugging her life with her and covered with snow hat and
scarves SAM swings her bag onto the curb narrowly missing a
drunk.

DRUNK

You look worse than me. Here, take
my beer.

DRUNK throws his brown bag at her and grabs her purse. The
beer drenches SAM. She's a mess.

SAM

Come back here, you creep!

DRUNK

Yeah! You get outta here before I
pee on ya!

And he's gone.