

ACE 44

Screenplay by Vladimir Alenikov and M.G.Crisci

Inspired by the book

Call Sign, White Lily by M.G.Crisci

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Ace44movie.com

Mathew G. Crisci
7113 Tatler Road
Carlsbad, CA 92011, USA
E-mail: mgcrisci@mgcrisci.com, mattcrisci@gmail.com
Skype: mathew.g.crisci
Tel: +1-760-390-2055 cell
+1-760-804-7360 office
Website: mgcrisci@mgcrisci.com, ace44movie.com

Vladimir Alenikov
Novocheryomushkinskaya 64 corpus 1 ap. 138
Moscow, Russia, 117420
E-mail: alenikov@yahoo.com, alenikov@list.ru
Skype: vladimir.alenikov
Tel: +7-915-283-4630 cell

+7-495-332-2257 office
Website: www.alenikov.com, ace44movie.com

EXT. SKATING POND. DAY.

TITLE:

MOSCOW, 1933

Two athletic, confident boys, LEV and IGOR, both about 12, squabble as they adjust their ice skates at the edge of a frozen pond.

They both smile at a pretty diminutive girl with long blonde hair, LILIA ZVANTSEVA, also about 12 years old, dressed in a red sweater with the number 44, waiting at the starting line.

Lev
See. She likes me more.

Igor
Dream on. We'll see who she likes
after I kick your butt.

Brown-haired Igor dismisses Lev's assumption.

Lev
Not a chance. I'm faster,
stronger.

Igor
See you at the finish line. I'll
be the one standing next to Lilia,
waiting for you.

Lilia grows increasingly impatient.

LILIA
Are you boys ready?

Lev and Igor smile and nod. The three skaters get set at

starting line, a colored string held by two boys about 10 feet apart.

The taller, blonde-haired Lev grinds his ice skate on the frozen pond to increase his speed off the line.

SFX: Children CHEERING in the background.

An OLDER BOY acts as the starter.

Starter
Ready. Set...(pauses)

Igor, dressed in a black sweater with a double zero, tries to crowd the starting line. The starter admonishes him.

Starter (CONT'D)
Igor, no cheating.

Lilia smirks and shakes her head.

Starter (v.O.)
Ready. Set. Go.

WHISTLE BLOWS.

Boys and girls stand CHEERING on opposite sides of the skaters.

Lev jumps in front, looks back at Lilia and Igor, and smiles confidently. About half way across the pond, Lev and Igor are skating neck and neck. Lilia is a few paces behind. CHEERS get louder.

Lev attempts to slow Igor by bumping him. He swerves out of the way, causing Lev to swing wide. Igor momentarily takes the lead.

The forgotten Lilia speeds by both boys.

The girls SCREAM their approval.

GIRLS
Lilia! Lilia! Lilia!

The cheers inspire Lilia to skate faster and faster...Lilia extends her lead. She reaches the finish line three lengths ahead of Lev and Igor.

STARTER (v.O.)
The winner - Lilia Zvantseva.

Lilia takes off her skating cap, shakes her long blonde hair in the breeze and walks toward the two boys huffing and puffing.

Lilia
Was that really the best you can
do?

Fade TO BLACK

INT. High School Entrance. DAY

Title:

School NO.1
Moscow, 1937

Int. Stage. DAY

An athletically-built woman with jet black hair and olive complexion, MAJOR MARINA RASKOVA, mid 30's, in full military dress, laden with medals, stands behind a stage curtain.

Int. school hall

THE PRINCIPAL, stern female, early 50's, proudly introduces Raskova.

Principal
Comrades, today we have a special
guest, Major Marina Raskova. The
Major is highly decorated member
of the Red Army and the first
woman pilot to fly across Russia.

LOUD APPLAUSE as Raskova appears from behind the curtain. She shakes hands with the principal, then begins to address the class.

RASKOVA

Good morning Comrades.

RASKOVA'S POV:

Children respond in unison.

Children
Good morning, Comrade Major.

Raskova
As you know, we are in a battle
for survival of the Russian way...

CHILDREN'S POV:

Raskova concludes her talk.

RASKOVA (CONT'D)
Defeating the Nazi's will require
men and women to work as partners.

LOUD APPLAUSE, especially from the girls.

RASKOVA (CONT'D)
Are there any questions?

Lilia Zvantseva, now 17, raises her hand.

LILIA
How can women be partners if we
can't fly planes in battle?

PRINCIPAL'S POV:

PAN: Surprised children. Dead SILENCE.

Principal interrupts.

Principal
Comrade Zvantseva. Sit....

Raskova waves off the principal.

RASKOVA
Comrade, flying in battle requires

special training.

LILIA
Comrade Major, with respect, I've
ALREADY trained 40 air force
pilots at the Taganka Club.

Raskova smiles.

RASKOVA
It's the first I've heard.

LILIA
Is that good or bad?

RASKOVA
Comrade, how old are you?

LILIA
Seventeen.

INT. classroom. LATER

The Major and Lilia sit across from each other, alone, in a
small classroom.

Raskova
Comrade, what's your name?

Lilia
Lilia.

Raskova
Why is flying so important?

Lilia
It's the future.

RASKOVA
I agree. But why in battle?

Lilia
To protect the Homeland.

RASKOVA
Do you really believe men will

trust you with their lives?

Lilia responds with unflinching confidence.

LILIA
My actions will speak for
themselves.

Raskova shakes her head at Lilia's controlled bravado, then heads for the door. She stops and turns.

Raskova
Lilia, you sound a lot like me not
so long ago.

Fade to black

EXT. sunny. Bitter cold LaNdscape.

TITLE:

OMSK, SIBERIA
ABOUT THE SAME TIME

Two blue eyes stare at a brown bear prowling a snow covered ridge. Smoke exhales from a man's mouth.

A second man whispers.

Man'S VOICE
Vladimir. Patience. Not just yet.

The bear stands and growls.

MaLE VOICE
Now!

SFX: ECHO of two rifle shots.

The bear falls and lays motionless. VLADIMIR SERGIN, early 20's, and his father, heavily-bearded MIKHAIL SERGIN, late 40's, assume he's dead.

Mikhail
Momma will be pleased. Stew for
the winter.

Mikhail takes his knife out and approaches the bear. The bear opens his eyes, growls and swings wildly. A bleeding Mikhail falls to the ground, his knife nearby.

Vladimir seizes the knife, furiously stabbing the bear until he is lifeless. He looks at his blood-soaked father.

VladIMIR
Let's get you home.

MIKHAIL
Looks much worse than it is. Let's skin the bear first. We don't want to disappoint mama.

The two men laugh, then begin to separate the meat from the hide. They pack the meat on their slide and cover it with the trimmed hides.

Mikhail cleans the knife blade, takes the sheath off his belt, inserts the knife, and presents it to his son.

MIKHAIL (CONT'D)
Happy birthday. You keep this for memories and emergencies.

The men hug warmly.

Fade to black

SFX: HEART BEATING. FASTER AND FASTER.

TITLE:

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
CAMBRIDGE
SPRING, 1938

EXT. RUNNING TRACK. BRIGHT SUN.

A tall, blonde sprinter, GREGORY MORTON, wearing an M.I.T. jersey with the number 44, races around the track. His two closest competitors, one in a Harvard jersey, the other in a Yale jersey, are less than one length behind.

As he reaches the halfway point, his cleat gets stuck in

the turf for an instant. He grimaces. The two runners pass.
Teammates SHOUT encouragement.

Teammates (V.O.)
Morton. Morton.

CLOSE UP: Morton's determined eyes open wide.

Morton regains his footing, and begins to run faster and faster. The three competitors are now inches apart as they get close to the finish line. Morton lunges, breaking the tape first.

Morton falls to the ground, grimacing in pain, holding his ankle.

His teammates cheer in victory as they help him hobble off the field.

An attractive woman, HANNAH EDWARDS, early 20's, approaches wearing a Yale sweatshirt.

HanNAH
Hey engineer, looks like you got
lucky...again.

Morton smiles, the couple embraces.

DISSOLVE TO:

TITLE: ACE 44

EXT. bitter, cold night

TITLE:

MOSCOW
WINTER, 1938

A window with the edges blanketed in snow.

Int. Doorway. Dimly lit hall

ELECTRIC BELL RINGS at an apartment door. A BOOMING male voice call out.

MILITCIA (V.0.)

Militcia, open up.

Frightened neighbors open their doors in a long dimly lit hall. The MILITCIA HEAD, imposing, tall, 40's, calls out a name. All the doors, but two, close.

NKVD head

Anatolyi Zvantsev! Anatolyi
Zvantsev!

A startled man, ANATOLYI ZVANTSEV, kindly, early 40's, walks out his door.

ANATOLYI

I am Anatolyi Zvantsev.

NKVD HEAD

You're under arrest!

The NKVD starts to drag him away.

ANATOLYI

Why me? I'm just a railroad
manager!

NKVD HEAD

You're a piece of shit!

Lilia hugs her father.

LILIA

Papa. Papa.

The NKVD officer tries to separate Lilia from her father. She clings tightly. The NKVD head slaps her in the face. Blood runs from her mouth. Lilia's mother, MARIA ZVANTSEVA, hugs her daughter.

Maria

This is all a terrible mistake!
I'm sure Comrade Stalin will
punish them.

Neighbors, SEMYON DEMIDOV, broad-chested, mid 50's, and his wife, MAYA, thin, 40's, watch the entire scene from the second open door.

Ext. Moments LATER. STREET

Anatolyi, dressed only a worn winter shirt and tattered pants, is thrown into the rear of a truck marked bread.

Tears stream down Lilia's face from a nearby window.

Fade TO BLACK

Ext. Overcast day. large dark cloud

TITLE:

OPERATION BARBAROSSA
EASTERN UKRAINE
JUNE 22, 1941

SFX: Soldiers begin marching. Footsteps get louder and louder. A shrill warning siren pierces the darkness.

Frenzied sights and sounds of war: ear-piercing ground fire, planes pounding targets, bombs exploding. Bursts of white light.

DISSOLVE TO:

RUMBLE of a plane engine gets louder and louder.

A Russian YAK fighter plane with the number 44 PIERCES the fog, alone.

A squadron of German Messerschmitts heads straight for the plane, guns blazing. The YAK nosedives.

Yak circles behind the German planes, starts firing from its 37 mm cannon and dual machine guns. One Messerschmitt, then two, explode in midair. A third is clipped on the wing, as a squadron of YAK's appear on the horizon.

INT. NAZI PILOT COCKPIT

PILOT, 30, radios in anger.

Nazi Squad leader

Outnumbered. Abort. Another day.

Ext. Battlefield in the sky

Remaining Messerschmitts disappear into dark cloud cover.

Ext. Russian airbase tarmac

The Russian pilot lands and exits the cockpit. She takes off HER cap, and shakes out her long blonde hair, revealing her strikingly beautiful features. She swaggers confidently down the tarmac to the OFFICER, a man, in his 20's. She smiles as she salutes.

LILIA

Captain Sergin, Lieutenant
Zvantseva reports mission
complete.

Fade to Black

Ext. military Base. WINDY Day

American flag flaps BRISKLY on a pole.

Title:

NORFOLK, VIRGINIA
FEBRUARY 23, 1943
Int. cluttered office

Naval Commander JOSEPH BRITTON, weathered face, southern drawl, late 40's, sits behind his desk talking to naval air squadron-leader, MAJOR GREGORY MORTON, handsome, confident, mid 30's.

britton

Major, you heard right! Hitler
wiped out eighty percent of the
Commie Air Force on that Eastern
push.

Morton is visibly upset.

BRITTON (CONT'D)

He also destroyed most of their rail lines and thousands of production facilities.

Morton

Sick bastard!

BRITTON

Agreed. That's why Roosevelt made the deal with Stalin.

MORTON

What deal?

Britton

We're gonna lend-lease a few thousand new P-thirty-nines to Russian specs.

MORTON

What's lend-lease?

Britton

It's what allies do to help allies. Build now, pay later. (pause) That's where you come in.

MORTON

What's all this got to do with me?

Britton stands up.

Britton

Somebody's gotta show their aces how to fly em. (pause) How many Yanks do you know can explain every detail of a that god damn plane in Russian?

Morton

How long do I have to train them?

BRITTON

Ten days.

Morton shakes his head in disbelief.

Britton stares in Morton's face.

BRITTON (CONT'D)

In case you missed it Major,
there's a fucking war going on.

MORTON

Yes, sir.

Britton stays in Morton's face.

BRITTON

Your mission is to show them how
to blow the shit out of those
arrogant Nazis.

MORTON

What about a training site and
airfield?

BRITTON

Ready and waiting. Elizabeth City.

MORTON

Elizabeth City! Nothing has
happened in that cow-town in
years.

BRITTON

Precisely. This is supposed to be
top secret. President Roosevelt
doesn't want the press to come
snooping.

MORTON

When do we start?

Britton looks at his watch and smiles.

BRITTON

About an hour ago.

Ext. Peaceful sunrise. country

Title:

MARCH 1, 1943

Unmarked dark green bus winds down a rural two-lane
blacktop road, passes a simple black and white sign:

ENTERING
ELIZABETH CITY, NORTH CAROLINA
POPULATION 2,269
EST. 1878

About 300 yards past the sign, the bus turns right and
chugs down a dusty country lane.

End of Sample