

An Analysis of David Lynch's *Inland Empire*

By Kyle Foley

The safest thing we can say regarding what *Inland Empire* is about is that it concerns an actress who becomes heavily absorbed in her character. In order to say anything more than that we first have to do a superficial analysis where we get clear on the most important details and after that we will do a much deeper analysis. Before we do that however we have to point out that there have already been two rather able, amateur commentators on this film: Fred Palakton and Jeremy Blackman. They have done some very important work in making the film understandable, in particular Palakton has done a great job transcribing a lot of the dialogue. Unfortunately, too often these two jump to conclusions based on too little evidence and for this reason I feel that it is necessary to add a more cautious interpretation of this film. For those who are still slightly unclear about what happens in the film I have made a scene by scene list of the film's most important events at the end of this essay.

The main character is Nikki played by Laura Dern who is to act in a film called *On High in Blue Tomorrows* and her character in that film is named Sue. The film is a remake of a Polish Gypsy Tale called 47. The film was never completed because the lead actors were murdered. On a superficial level we need not say anything more regarding Sue/Nikki since we will deal with her in more depth in the deep analysis.

Sue's costar in the film is Devon who plays Billy Side in *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. After the first hour of the film, Billy only appears in one other scene. Since the first hour of the film is relatively straightforward Billy/Devon is a rather easy character to understand. The film is mainly about Nikki/Sue and her relationship to her husband and the actors that starred in the first rendition of the film. *On High in Blue Tomorrows* is set in the South and Sue and Billy have southern accents.

Another main character who is very hard to pin down is referred to as Lost Girl in the credits. Commentators have disagreed about which character this is. For the moment we are just going to say the most certain things about Lost Girl and hold off on the more controversial items until the deep analysis. The facts are that she is watching much of the movie *Inland Empire* not *On High in Blue Tomorrows* on a tv. At first we might assume that this room is located in Poland since the first scene of the movie is set in Poland and the second scene where we see Lost Girl might even take place in the same room as the first scene but the evidence is not conclusive. In any case, towards the end of the movie we learn that Lost Girl is stuck in a room which is part of the set for *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, though the interior of the room changes midway through the movie. Eventually, Nikki/Sue liberates Lost Girl from her room and Lost Girl goes home to her husband who is played by the same actor that Nikki is married to.

The fourth main character is Pietrok Krol who is married to Nikki. He is a very wealthy and powerful man, speaks with a Polish accent and in one scene his Polish parents visit Nikki. What is confusing about Pietrok is that he has a doppelganger, Smithy. Smithy is Sue's husband in the film *On High in Blue Tomorrows* and is also the husband that Lost Girl returns to after her liberation. We know that he is enormously jealous since in one of the scenes Sue says to Billy: "I think my husband knows about us, he'll kill us both." Although these lines are stated during the filming of *On High in Blue Tomorrows* Nikki forgets what she's doing and says "Damn, this sounds like lines from our script." We also know that Smithy is infertile and he is abusive but we do not know if this is true of Pietrok. We can infer that the home where the prostitutes and Nikki hang out is Smithy's home since when Lost Girl leaves her prison and goes home to Smithy, the boy she hugs is credited as Smithy's son. Furthermore, Devon/Billy refers to Smithy's home early in the film. The location of this home changes throughout the film. In real life it is located behind the studio in Los Angeles. In the film *On High in Blue Tomorrows* it is located in the South and when Sue and Smithy are in their backyard it does appear to be in the South. Sue once said: "The Phantom's done gone and disappeared. This is the kind of shit I'm talking about. He was a marine from North Carolina. He had a sister with one leg." That might mean that this house is located in North Carolina but not necessarily. Other times when we look out of the window the home is located in Poland.

Another important figure is the character who is credited as the Phantom. He appears in Old Poland as a well-dressed, successful figure. There is a scene of him beating a woman, who is almost certainly Lost Girl, in what is probably his living room. In the present day he lives next to Smithy's home and appears to be a shaggy redneck.

[1]



Sue refers to him as 'Krimp'. He also has a lightbulb in his mouth for unknown reasons. Towards the end of the film he is guarding the room of Lost Girl, probably keeping her imprisoned. Sue will ultimately shoot him dead, liberating Lost Girl. The Phantom makes another important appearance. In the third scene of the movie he appears in a wealthy room, speaking Polish with a character credited as Janek. They have the following important dialogue:

JANEK You are looking for something?

THE PHANTOM Yes...

JANEK You are looking to go in?

THE PHANTOM Yes.

JANEK An opening?

THE PHANTOM I look for an opening. Do you understand?

JANEK Yes, I understand.

THE PHANTOM Do you understand I look for an opening?

JANEK Yes. I understand completely.

THE PHANTOM Good. Good that you understand. That's good! You understand!

Blackman interprets the scene as follows: "Janek sits serene and majestic as if on a throne. In their cryptic conversation, the Phantom appears to be pleading a case to him. Janek is clearly the authority. So what is Janek? A deity of some kind? God, even? We don't really know. Maybe he is also reincarnated (notice the difference in clothes and demeanor). Perhaps he holds a trans-life grudge against the Phantom and wants to see him pursued by Smithy. In the end, Janek's role is unclear, because there are many viable possibilities." For now, I will simply delay interpretation of this scene until we come to the deep analysis.

The final important character is Doris Side, Billy Side's wife. She stabs Sue on Hollywood Boulevard most likely because of her affair with Billy and which seems to be a scene from *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. In another scene she has the following dialogue with a detective:

DETECTIVE HUTCHINSON Take a seat. What's this all about?

DORIS I've been hypnotized or something.

HUTCHINSON Hypnotized?

DORIS I've got a...I'm gonna kill someone.

HUTCHINSON Oh yeah? Who ya gonna kill?

DORIS I don't know.

HUTCHINSON Who hypnotized you?

DORIS I saw him looking at me once...when I looked around the bar. He then moved his hands and he said I would know who it was.

HUTCHINSON How are you gonna kill this person?

DORIS With a screwdriver.

The person who hypnotized her is the Phantom. We know this from this scene where the Phantom is clearly hypnotizing someone which takes place after Sue declares her love to Billy Side in his mansion:

[2]



There has been disagreement among commentators as to whether or not Doris reappears in Old Poland. I believe she does not and we will examine this evidence in the deep analysis.

DEEP ANALYSIS

Is the whole film a dream or only a part and if only a part then which part?

There is strong evidence that beginning with the blue scene where Nikki and Devon make love for the first time the entire film is a dream. Several commentators believe that the scene where Nikki dies on Hollywood Boulevard which turns out to be a scene in *On High in Blue Tomorrows* is in fact real life but there are problems with this reading. Because we will refer to this scene several times we will call it the 'blue scene'. If we believe that the scene where Nikki is stabbed by Doris and the director yells "Cut!" is part of reality then if we want to avoid contradiction we must believe that what follows immediately thereafter is also reality since there appears to be no break in spacetime. Nikki then finds a gun in a hotel room, shoots the Phantom who experiences no wounds from the bullets and whose face turns into her own. I cannot believe that that scene is part of reality and yet I have not seen any commentator pick up on this fact.

It seems reasonable to believe that the scene where Sue shows up at Billy Side's mansion and declares her love to him in front of his wife is a real shooting of the scene in the film *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. But if we believe that then, if we want to be consistent, we must believe that all the action after roughly minute 55 is a dream except for this one scene. It makes more sense to believe that this scene also belongs to fantasy.

The character that Nikki portrays in the declaration of love scene appears to be not the same character that she plays in the scene early in the movie in particular the one with her sunglasses on where she rejects Billy's offer to begin an affair with him, seen below:

[3]



We must now examine the evidence to assess whether or not the whole film is a dream. Unfortunately the evidence that all of the film is a dream is not conclusive. If the whole film is a dream then that explains why the first two scenes occur. In the first scene we see a John hiring a prostitute in Poland and in the second scene we see the Phantom asking Janek to give him an opening. These scenes are connected to the scenes after the dream clearly begins. So if the pre-blue scene is reality then we can't explain why these two early scenes which clearly belong to the dream part of the film exist during the real part of the film. We also cannot explain why Nikki is visited by a strange woman early in the film that has psychic powers. It is debatable whether or not psychics live in real life yet Nikki is visited by someone who knows that she has obtained a role and what the film is about. We also can't explain why Dora meets with Detective Hutchinson and confesses that she wants to kill someone and reveals that a screwdriver has punctured her stomach when this fact too clearly belongs to the dream part of the film. Fortunately, we do not need to decide on one reading or another in order to enjoy the film. I lean more towards the interpretation that the whole film is a dream though admittedly the pre-blue scenes with certain exceptions definitely feel like reality.

Who is the lost girl and what is her purpose?

Both Blackman and Palakton agree that the Lost Girl is in a sense Nikki/Sue's other half and I agree with them. The question is in what sense is she the second half of Nikki/Sue? In the first scene with Nikki she is visited by a strange visitor who speaks in probably a Polish accent and has advance information on Nikki's future. She says the following: "A little girl went out to play. Lost in the marketplace. As if half-born. Then: not through the market-place, you see that, don't you? But through the alley, behind the marketplace... this is the way to the palace. But. It isn't something you remember."

We can either dismiss those words as simply the ramblings of a demented person or they can explain other scenes in the movie. Palakton explains this scene as follows: "There are two marketplaces, one is Hollywood, the other is prostitution. Nikki is lost in the first, Sue is lost in the second. Both are half-born, needing the other half. It is not through either marketplace they will find redemption, but through the alley, behind the studio or the street, that they will perform their mission of killing the Phantom, and it is by that route they will reach the palace, the mansion at the end. Nikki owes an unpaid bill, the killing of her husband for which she must repent by this mission." Jeremy Blackman writes: "'Half-born' can only mean a limited number of things. Actually, it can only mean one thing—that Sue was half-born. I suppose you could say something convoluted, like it's a kind of metaphor for the Sue/Nikki relationship, but that doesn't really stand up. Let's stick with conclusions that are corroborated by evidence in the film,

like this one—Sue really was half-born. Well, then, what does that mean? When we say that Sue is half-born, we're saying there's another half that was not born. We can reasonably assume that this other half, having not been born, is "on the other side," as the "Polish Poem" theme song tells us. Wait, whose theme song is that? That song belongs to Lost Girl, who is in fact the unborn half who watches the born half through her purgatory television. When we see Sue actually merge into Lost Girl in that climactic scene, (Blackman is talking about the scene shown in image 7 pasted below) it's clear that the two have a pretty significant spiritual connection."

I agree more with Blackman in that Lost Girl is Nikki's other half which explain why Nikki kisses her at the end then disappears. Furthermore, I think it's also plausible that actors feel as though they are split personalities and that the characters that they portray are in a sense part of them. But I also agree with Palakton in that "It is not through either marketplace they will find redemption, but through the alley, behind the studio or the street, that they will perform their mission of killing the Phantom." But we have to ask ourselves why is it not through the market place but through the alley, behind the marketplace that is the way to the palace, provided we consider palace to be a metaphor for success? On the one hand, we have the evidence that 'AXXoNN' is written above the door above Smithy's home behind the studio in the alley. Unfortunately, I have not been able to understand what this obviously intended symbol means. Now if we take seriously the idea that the marketplace refers to Hollywood then that would mean that Hollywood or acting is not the road to success. It's hard to believe that David Lynch, a director of films, would believe something like that. Alternatively, we could interpret the key scene where Nikki/Sue dies on Hollywood Blvd, followed by the director yelling "Cut!" followed again by Nikki going backstage behind the studio through the alley into Smithy's home to kill the Phantom as the way to the palace. This to me seems to be the most plausible interpretation although admittedly the evidence is not conclusive.

Now that we have good evidence that Lost Girl is Nikki's second half we have to determine in what sense. A plausible explanation is that Nikki imagines the Lost Girl to be the real life character that *On High in Blue Tomorrows* and 47 is based on. Nikki is simply investing enormous amounts of emotional resources into the understanding of her character. Both of Laura Dern's parents were method actors though I still have not heard Laura Dern herself state that she is a method actor. In any case, it appears that Nikki has decided to not only imagine the life of Sue, she has also decided to try to imagine the life of the polish character that *On High in Blue Tomorrows* is a remake of. This still does not explain why Lost Girl seems to be in a type of prison throughout much of the movie and why she appears to be watching much of *Inland Empire* on tv.

Why is Lost Girl in a type of prison?

The only explanation I can come up with is again that this film is about an actress who takes identification with character to the extreme. We have to keep in mind that after Nikki kisses Lost Girl, Nikki disappears and reappears later in a room looking very much lost and confused as seen below:

[4]



It could be that what Lynch is saying is that while a person's life is being cinematized that they are hijacked, possessed or imprisoned until the filming is over. An alternative explanation is that Lost Girl was the lead actress in the Polish film that was never finished. And again since this film appears to be about taking acting to the extreme, she cannot even function as a real person unless she is acting in a role. For example, Kiera Knightley has said: "I live for those two minutes between cut." I personally find that to be a sad state of affairs but perhaps some actors are so enthralled with the process that they feel more alive playing a role than they do as real people. So Nikki and Lost Girl represent two halves: when one is acting the other is lost and confused.

Is this woman Lost Girl?

[5]



Palakton is unsure if the woman above is credited but I agree with Blackman that it is Lost Girl. The credits give us great evidence as to who is playing who in this film since they credit the actors in order of appearance. If the woman in the image above were making a first appearance in the film then she would be credited but she is not. We can either believe that Lynch refused to credit an actress who has a very important role or that she is one of the Polish actresses already credited. The only Polish actress that has been credited at this point in the movie is Lost Girl. Admittedly, the woman appears different from Lost Girl but if we look at another scene where we know the actress is Karolina Gruszka we can see that this woman is capable of a wide range of appearances. For example, the following images could all very well be Karolina Gruszka:

[6] - At the seance



[7]



[8]



[9]



[10]



[11]



Palakton and Blackman believe that this woman is the Phantom's wife. I find this difficult to believe. Let's look at the dialogue she has with the Phantom:

THE PHANTOM I almost didn't recognize you.
LOST GIRL You startled me.
THE PHANTOM Strange...to find you on the street.
LOST GIRL You seem upset...Are you?
THE PHANTOM Should I be?
LOST GIRL No, but...
THE PHANTOM So I shouldn't be?
LOST GIRL No...but still you seem so...
THE PHANTOM I think you don't recognize me...my manner...
LOST GIRL That's true. You seem different.
THE PHANTOM You too. I'm used to seeing you in our home...not on the street...at night.
LOST GIRL Me too.
THE PHANTOM There was a murder...
LOST GIRL How awful. Where?
THE PHANTOM Just down the way. I think...you knew the person.
LOST GIRL Who was it?
THE PHANTOM Don't know the name...but I have seen you with this person.
LOST GIRL You have?
THE PHANTOM I have. I think...I've seen the two of you together.
LOST GIRL That's awful.

This does not seem to be what a husband would say to his wife even if they were estranged. Before we continue however we have to get clear on whether or not Lost Girl is a prostitute. Although it's not obvious, I think she is. In the very first scene where the characters faces are grayed out there is prostitution going on. Again, if we look at the credits we can assume that these actors are uncredited or they are who the credits say they are. Since the prostitute says 'where am I? I'm afraid' and since Sue later repeats this line later in the film and since Lost Girl is Nikki's other half, it seems reasonable that Lost Girl is the prostitute in the beginning of the film. Who then is the John that solicits her services? The problem here is the first man to be credited is Janek and the second is the Phantom. It would make more sense if the Phantom were the John rather than Janek since being a John is consistent with the Phantom's rather malevolent character. On the other hand, we have to confront the fact that the Phantom says 'our home' implying that he shares a home with Lost Girl. Let's now look at the other key dialogue that the Phantom has with Lost Girl:

LOST GIRL I didn't mean anything by that. I just asked a question.
THE PHANTOM Why did you ask if it means nothing? Whatever you want is that it?
LOST GIRL No. Whatever you want?
THE PHANTOM Oh...now it's me.
LOST GIRL Always you.
THE PHANTOM You can lie to me, but don't lie to yourself. So sly...
LOST GIRL Don't push me.
THE PHANTOM I'll push you to hell.
LOST GIRL Stop it!

I think a more plausible explanation of their relationship is that he is some sort of pimp but she is his favorite employee and that occasionally they have quasi romantic relations. A very perverse situation. This would explain why they share a home but also explain why they do not talk to each other like man and wife.

What actually happens in Old Poland?

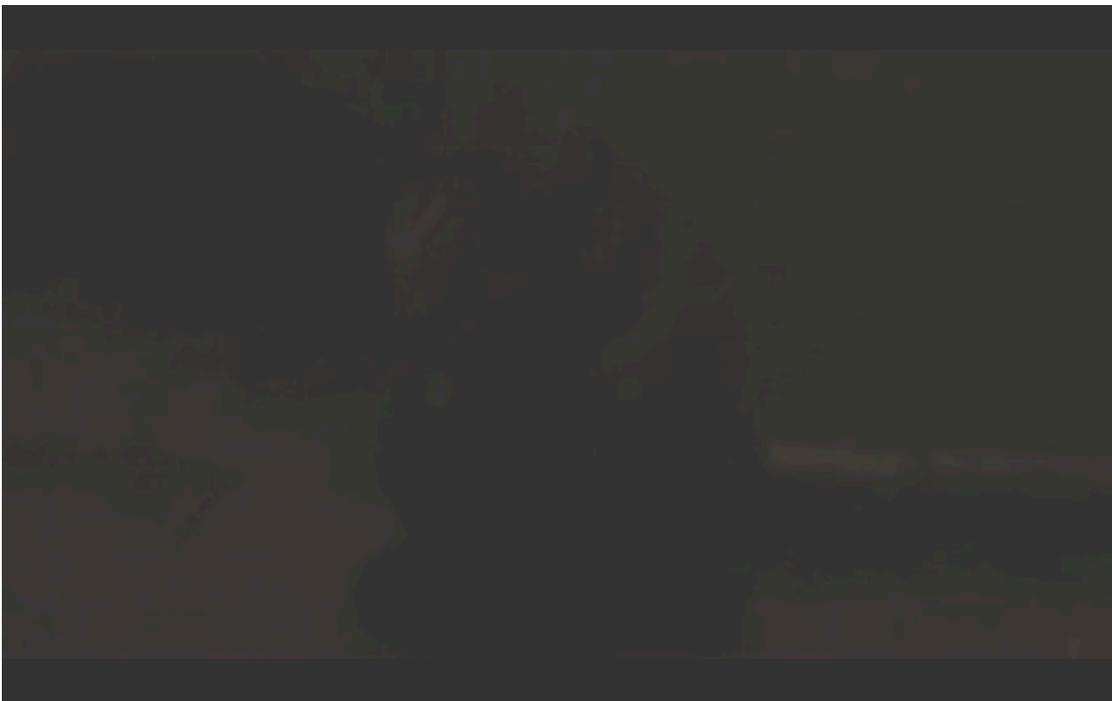
[12]



[13]



[14]



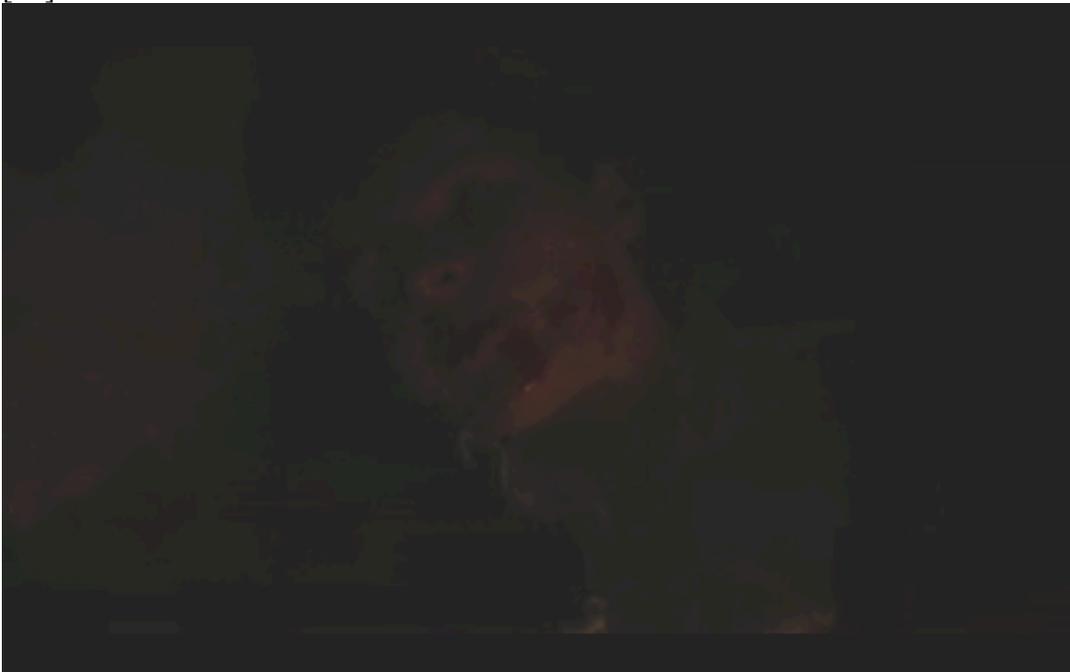
[15]



[16]



[18]



The facts that need to be explained regarding Old Poland are the following: who is murdered and by whom? When a woman says to Piotrek: "I'm not who you think I am! I'll never let you have her!" who is she talking about and who actually says these lines? Who walks up the steps with the screwdriver as seen in image 12? Who is the woman

that screams immediately thereafter? And when Piotrek is seen lying dead on the floor in image 16, who killed him? When the Phantom says he witnessed a murder, which murder did he witness? Let's first ask ourselves what facts are we must reluctant to give up and try to fit our theory so that it is consistent with those facts.

1. Actors do not appear in Lynch's films without being credited.
2. Lynch does not have American actors speaking Polish.
3. Native Polish speakers claim tentatively that the voice which says: "I'm not who you think I am! I'll never let you have her" is the same voice which speaks Lost Girl's lines.

As far as who is the actor that appears in images 12-15 and 18, whoever it is I am less certain of who it is than I am of facts 1-3. Now Blackman believes that the woman in image 15 is Julia Ormond and that Julia Ormond is lying dead on the floor in image 18. I think this is false, though I once believed it was true. If we believe that then we have to deny fact 3 and we have to believe that there is an uncredited Polish voice actor speaking Ormond's Polish lines. Seeing as there is no shortage of Polish actors out there I think if David Lynch wanted Doris Side to have a Polish counterpart then he would have hired a Polish Actress. Second, we only get one good look at Lost Girl's back when we are certain that it is Lost Girl and that is here

[17]



As you can see it is not implausible that the back in image 15 is the same as the back in image 17 since they both have the same hair length. Further, the actress in image 15 clearly speaks Polish so it is not at all out of the question that the back belongs to Lost Girl. Now, it's quite clear that Lost Girl wants to kill Piotrek's paramour provided it is Lost Girl in image 15 since she says "I'll never let you have her." Both Blackman and Palakton believe that the woman in image 12 (climbing up the stairs) is Lost Girl. I had a tough time believing it since she wears a pony tail and Lost Girl does not wear a pony tail but as we have already seen, Lost Girl deliberately takes on a wide range of appearances. We then hear a scream and then see image 13 and 14 which is practically impossible to see in the movie and I was only able to see the image by taking screenshots and using the contrast tools of Photoshop. We do not know who this woman is but we do

know the no new actress is credited at this point in the film. It is not out of the question that it is Lost Girl.

Here is where we now have to try to make inferences based on almost no evidence. It is not absolutely necessary that the person screaming is the same person who is seen lying dead on the floor in image 18. Again, no new actress is credited. Blackman believes that it is the face of Julia Ormond but I do not believe that Julia Ormond even plays a role in Old Poland since she probably does not speak Polish. I think Lost Girl kills a woman who never appears on screen and for this reason Lynch is not obligated to credit the murdered. When Lost Girl says "I'll never let you have her", the woman she is referring to is the woman she kills.

However there are problems with this interpretation. We now have to explain why if it is in fact Lost Girl in image 18 she is seen moments later walking down the street. To explain that fact we have to believe that the following scene happens before the preceding scene. After all, Lynch is certainly not the type to stick to an orderly account of time. When the Phantom says that he witnessed a murder we are now forced to believe that it is the murder by Lost Girl of Piotrek's illicit lover. Fortunately, the Phantom never mentions the gender of the person so we can believe that he is referring to a female without contradiction. On the other hand, he does say 'I've seen you with this person' and while what he probably means is 'I've seen you with this person romantically' it is also possible that he means something else. It is very difficult to interpret these events but so far we have not been forced to believe anything deeply contradictory.

It thus remains to determine who kills Lost Girl. Perhaps, Piotrek killed her since she killed his lover. And as far as who kills Piotrek, perhaps it was the Phantom since he has some perverted attachment to Lost Girl. Thus, after an enormous amount of flip-flopping and changing my mind on this issue I have decided that the chronology of what happens in Old Poland is as follows:

1. Lost Girl walks up the steps with a screwdriver.
2. We hear the scream of a woman and these are the screams of Piotrek's paramour whose image is never shown and is never credited and has no speaking part and represents the woman referred to when Lost Girl says: 'I'll never let you have her.'
3. We see an image of Lost Girl with her head in her hands in deep grief.
4. The Phantom witnesses this murder.
5. Lost Girl meets the Phantom and they discuss events 1-3 albeit in very indirect terms.
6. Piotrek learns that Lost Girl has killed his lover, so he then kills Lost Girl.
7. We are shown an image of Lost Girl's back which is designed to help us infer that the back of the same woman is the woman lying dead on the floor which is image 18.
8. The Phantom learns that Piotrek has killed Lost Girl, a woman that he was involved with so he kills Piotrek.
9. Image 16, Piotrek dead on the floor.

In the movie the order of the scenes that we are shown are: 1,2,3,7,5,9 (4,6,8 are not shown)

So that the reader is aware of alternative explanations I here quote Blackman's interpretation: "The Phantom lookalike kills the Smithy lookalike. This is probably the most clear-cut case. The motive is certainly there, just as it is for the contemporary Smithy. He has been cheated, and he wants to exterminate the illegitimate lover. He even does some cryptic bragging when he meets Lost Girl in the street. Judging by the shot of the dead Smithy lookalike, it appears to have been a gunshot wound to the head. Lost Girl, however, doesn't quite understand that her husband killed her lover. She assumes that his wife—the Doris Side lookalike—killed him, for all the reasons one might imagine. And so, screwdriver in hand, Lost Girl takes misguided revenge—killing a woman who probably did nothing wrong, and who just lost her husband. Not good. It's also probable that Lost Girl eventually figured this out and took her own life."

Why is Piotrek looking for the Phantom?

One advantage of believing that the Phantom killed Piotrek is that it explains the following scene at minute 1:54 where Piotrek is seen driving through Modern Poland with Janek. Piotrek finds Gordy with whom he used to work with in the circus:

PIOTREK Gordy!
GORDY What do you want?
PIOTREK Where is he?
GORDY What's the point? Are you blind? He's gone!
PIOTREK Everybody?
GORDY Why should I answer your stupid questions? You're nothing! You've done nothing!
PIOTREK Where did he go?
GORDY No idea. He talked...mumbled something about Inland Empire.

We can now understand that Piotrek is looking for the Phantom because Piotrek was killed by him earlier. Another good question is why is Janek escorting Piotrek around since it is Janek that appears to allow the Phantom to have his 'opening' early in the film. To that question I have no answer.

What if the evidence for who killed whom is inconclusive?

As you can see rational people cannot come to an agreement based on the evidence at their disposal as to who killed whom in Old Poland. For that reason we have to interpret the film without being able to fully understand what happened. If we decide that it is simply too hard to figure out what happened is there still a moral to be drawn from these events? I think there is. Remember that the director, Kingsley, tells us that both of the leads of 47 were murdered. This is simply more evidence that the actress, Nikki, is bound and determined to play her role even under circumstances which a normal actor might shrink from.

Who is referred to at the Seance?

Piotrek after he failed to find the Phantom at Gordy's is then escorted to a Seance. Three new actors make their first appearance and they are all credited. The woman however is not credited which means she has already appeared early in the film. She is probably Lost Girl. And again we have evidence that Karolina Grubszka is intended to look very different throughout the film. They have the following dialogue:

LOST GIRL There's someone there...I have to tell you...There's someone...
MAREK Do you recognize her?
PIOTREK I don't see her...
MAREK You understand she sent for you?
LOST GIRL I don't know where I am...
MAREK I hear her now...
JANEK Do you see her?
PIOTREK No.
DAREK It was...red...
MAREK You work for someone?
PIOTREK Yes.
MAREK This is the one who she spoke of.
PIOTREK The one I work for.
MAREK So...you understand.
FRANCISZEK The horse was taken...to the well...
DAREK Take the pistol...
JANEK Let's go!
FRANCISZEK Right away! It's after midnight!

When they say 'you work for someone' they are probably referring to the Phantom since Nikki/Sue says elsewhere in the film: "Fucker went to some Eastern European shithole. With the fucking circus. Can you fucking believe that? That circus. Talk about carnies. Carnies, gypsies, con men, you name it. A real fucking ball of shit. There was this guy they had working there. He'd start talking. You know, real regular. Talking up the crowd. ... It was a funny name...they was called "Krimp". And Krimp is the Phantom's contemporary embodiment. When Janek says 'do you see her' he is probably referring to Lost Girl.

Blackman has pointed out a detail in this scene that needs to be discussed: "Notice how Smithy enters the room. Janek is pulling him in by his sleeve. This is the kind of thing that should stand out. Notice how forceful Janek is during the rest of the scene, too. He encourages Smithy to see Lost Girl and escorts him out (still holding his sleeve) when they need to leave. So if the spirit of Lost Girl (from her purgatory, we assume) "sent for" Smithy, and Janek brings Smithy into the seance, we can reasonably conclude that Janek went out and fetched Smithy. Janek also brings Smithy to see the man in the tin shack, sitting with Smithy in the back of the car and standing by during the conversation. That backwoods meeting leads Smithy to *Inland Empire*. Let's take score, then. Janek finds Smithy, brings him to the seance, encourages spiritual connection, helps him take the Phantom-killing gun, rushes him out, brings him to a crucial meeting, and ultimately leads him to *Inland Empire*. So yes. Janek is a crucial figure. The only question is whether he is of the human world or the spirit world."

I admit that Janek is a crucial figure and that Lynch intended something significant with him but I do not believe Lynch has given us enough evidence with which to make a sound judgment. Yes, one could say that perhaps Janek regrets his decision to have given the Phantom an opening early in the film, though, if he really is a demigod, it's hard to imagine that he did not know that something bad would result from it. So because he regrets his early decision he is now trying to use Piotrek to right one of his wrongs. But again, I think there is simply too little evidence with which to draw a firm conclusion.

Why does Nikki kill the Phantom?

We now have established all the facts we need with which to justify an interpretation of this film. The key event we need to explain now is the climax. But before we do this we should ask ourselves why is it that the Phantom has Lost Girl imprisoned and why in Hollywood near a studio? To answer this we need to separate fantasy from reality. Did the events in Poland occur in real life or was it part of 47? We know that the leads to the film were killed in real life so is the murder we witness in Old Poland a scene in a movie or real life? I think what Lynch is getting at is how actors become so absorbed in their characters that the events in a movie seem real to them. I think Lynch has deliberately intended the lines between fiction and reality to be blurred. I have already presented evidence that the whole movie is Nikki's dream. So when we ask why the Phantom has Lost Girl imprisoned this is because Nikki sees the Phantom as nothing more than the embodiment of evil. This would explain why the Phantom pleads with Janek to give him an opening. Nikki has cooked up this fantastic scheme where demigods have maliciously interfered in human affairs and it is her acting that is going to set things right again.

At first glance, this might seem farfetched but on closer inspection I think not. We have to remember that actors, especially method actors, have a tenuous grasp on reality and often have an inflated view of their own importance and the significance of cinema. Back when I was writing poetry daily I viewed poetry as the be-all-and-end-all of life but now I believe that my current fascination, logic, fulfills that role. So for an actor to view their acting as a sort of elixir that can banish evil I think on inspection holds up to analysis. Nikki believes that a malicious demigod has imprisoned her other half, the character whose role she is playing. It is only when she is able to perform the amazing climatic scene where she is killed by Doris that she believes that she has accomplished something so amazing that she is now ready to rid the world of evil and kill the Phantom, a character who never existed in real life but only in Nikki's imagination.

This interpretation of the film has largely been corroborated by two other commentators. Patrick Meany writes: "We see Nikki getting lost in the role, and gradually becoming unable to distinguish the fiction from the reality. However, this is not an original reality, she is going down a path that has previously killed someone." And Michael Warren writes: "*Inland Empire* is about the creative process of making a film itself. ... In the process of acting the part of Sue Blue, Nikki risks losing her own identity while channeling her character and could lose grip on reality itself if she is not careful. ... Lynch represents literally on screen the abstract mental processes that an actress goes through to lose herself in her part."

Art is an antidote against evil

We can now pause here and ask ourselves whether or not Nikki's aspirations to make the world better through acting are a pipe dream. I honestly don't think they are and I think the thesis that good art makes the world good is quite sound. Imagine living in Stalinist Russia where good art was effectively banned or if you lived in the segregationist South where positive portrayals of blacks by white artists were simply not produced, or, to give a precise example, imagine being alive when *Birth of a Nation* was popular. If you live in a society where some wrong is being perpetrated and the artists ignore this wrong and instead produce fluff or, in the case of *Birth of a Nation*, outright lies then this is a desperate state of affairs. On the other hand, if wrongs are not ignored but artists instead draw attention to this fact then there is reason to be hopeful. We can reason that if those who have an impulse to communicate artistically, that is to say, in an indirect manner, are aware of the current sins then we are justified in believing that those who prefer to take direct action are also aware of the sins and will soon work on eradicating them. Whether we care to admit it or not, as we watch films or read books we do imitate the acts of those characters that we believe to be laudable. Unlike the preachers who tells us bluntly how we should behave, the artists prefer the indirect approach. And it is this thought that the actors use to justify their profession. That is essentially my main explanation for what happens in the film and what it is about. Let's now see what isolated details this theory can explain.

Why does the movie end on a positive note?

We have to admit that the end of the movie is rather positive: all the characters come out and do a rather live, upbeat dance. I see nothing wrong this. The movie ends with the liberation of Lost Girl and her return to her family. Nikki has killed the Phantom, the embodiment of evil, and apparently has done this through her amazing acting.

Why does Sue have two distinct characters?

First, there is the Sue that talks in a rather sweet voice, is polite and well-mannered as in this image:

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When she talks to Mr K, on the other hand, she is decidedly crude, vulgar and admits she screwed a few guys for drinks and says that it was 'no big deal'. One possible explanation for this fact which admittedly is not a good one is that Nikki is not sure how to interpret the character of Susan. Just as there is more than one way to skin a cat, so too are there more than one way to interpret a role and she hasn't decided yet which one to go with. For instance, when Sue shows up at Billy Side's mansion and declares her love to him and Doris is there she appears to take on the cruder version of Sue. Also when the second visitor visits Sue, the cruder version also asserts itself. This could be the reason why Sue sees a doppelganger of herself on Hollywood Blvd. She literally looks at herself though one of the two halves disappears.

Another interpretation could be that Hollywood has a tendency to divide the self into two halves: your true self and a pretentious self that you present to the world which you

believe will make you popular provided the pretense dupes enough people. Another reason could be that the proper, polite self usually only appears when she is interacting with non-family members or when she has lost control. So around Pietrok/Smithy she sometimes acts crudely but around Billy and with the Polish circus crew she is well-mannered. On the other hand, when she loses control her vulgar self arises because this is what she really is which explains why the cruder self asserts itself during the scene where she declares her love to Billy in front of Doris. However, the problem with that interpretation is that it is doubtful that such a crude, vulgar woman would be capable of acting in such a polite way.

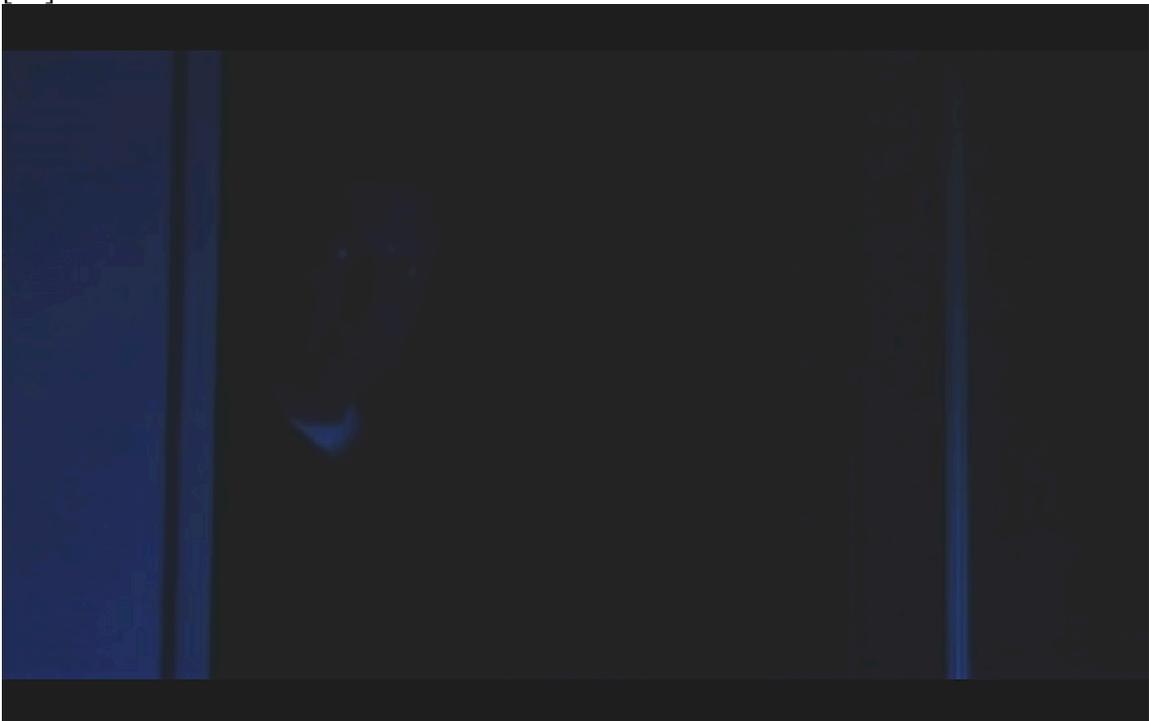
Why is Nikki's real life husband Polish?

Is it just a coincidence that Nikki's real life husband is Polish and she is starring in a remake of a Polish film? It is my belief that the whole film is Nikki's dream. In real life her husband is probably not Polish but since she is so heavily obsessed with the production of this Polish remake she imagines herself to have a Polish husband. One other curious detail is that when she first meets Pietrok's parents she says she doesn't understand what they're saying. Pietrok then says that she probably understands more than she lets on. She then changes her story and admits she understands Polish but does not speak it. Again, this seems to be too coincidental that an American actress would speak a rather obscure language and also act in a film where that obscure language plays a part. It is more likely that Nikki is imagining herself to understand Polish so as to get more in character.

What is the film's connection to adultery?

It is clear that Sue and Billy have an adulterous affair in the film. Nikki and Devon also have an offscreen romance, though it is important to point out that the lines between fact and fiction are blurred here. They seem to be carrying on their affair in Smithy's home (though that point is debatable). If you look at image 21, the bed appears to be the same bed that we see later in Smithy's home. Let's ask ourselves if that makes sense. On the one hand, if you're going to have an adulterous affair then you need to consummate the act as quickly as possible before you start hesitating about whether or not it is the right thing to do. So if you're going to have an affair with your costar and you want to accomplish it before they start having doubts then it would be rational to get it done as close to the set as possible and Smithy's on set home would be a logical place to accomplish such a deed. On the other hand, you don't want to get caught by coworkers who might be lurking around and it might even simply be too creepy to consummate such a deed in such a location.

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Plus, Devon repeatedly calls Nikki Sue and speaks with his southern accent. And this happens in spite of the fact that Nikki has an enormously jealous husband. Is it a coincidence that Nikki's character has an enormously jealous husband to match the real life jealousy of her Pietrok? For example, in the following scene Sue says: "Something's happened. I think my husband knows about you. About us. He'll kill you. And me." And earlier in the film Pietrok takes Devon aside and tells him how important his bond to his wife is. I do not believe that Nikki's real life husband is all that jealous and possessive. If you're a jealous guy then one of the last types of people you want to marry is an actress. Instead I believe that Nikki is trying to imagine what it would be like to have such a jealous husband in yet another attempt to further understand her character better.

Did Sue Blue really occasionally prostitute herself?

It is hard to imagine that the sweet character in image 3 occasionally prostituted herself on the side. No commentator I have seen has questioned the reality of Sue Blue's occasional prostitution and although I reluctantly believe she did, I still am uneasy about believing this. One alternative explanation is that it's not part of Sue Blue's character in *On High in Blue Tomorrows* nor in the Polish gypsy tale but Sue is just imagining herself to be a prostitute to get more in touch with understanding the adulterous lifestyle. However, I admit that the evidence is not conclusive.

Do the characters reincarnate themselves?

Blackman writes: "I've been slightly skeptical of this multiple reincarnation theory since the moment it occurred to me, but it persists, it swallows up any other theory I can apply to the situation." I think for any fact that reincarnation explains, there is an alternative, more plausible explanation. Briefly, what the reincarnation hypothesis explains is why Pietrok, the Phantom and Lost Girl appear in both Old Poland and contemporary times and if you believe that Doris appears in Old Poland then reincarnation also explains that. Reincarnation also explains the dialogue between Janek and the Phantom early in the movie where it seems that they are in some sort of heaven and the Phantom is asking Janek, a demigod, if he can enter into human affairs again.

Admittedly, there is a lot going for the reincarnation hypothesis but I do not think the evidence is conclusive. I think the best explanation of the scene between Janek and the Phantom is that Nikki's imagination cooks up some wild scenario where supernatural forces are conspiring to bring down those closest to her and she, with her amazing acting abilities, is going to overcome them. We have to keep in mind that the most important scene in the whole movie is where Nikki/Sue dies on Hollywood Blvd and she is applauded for her amazing performance. Shortly thereafter she wanders backstage and kills the Phantom, apparently because her amazing acting performance has endowed her with a miraculous blast of strength and courage. The reincarnation hypothesis does not seem to explain that scene. We can explain the fact that the same characters are

appearing in two different times because Nikki is using characters from her own experience to get more in touch with her role and because Nikki believes she will understand her role better if she tries to get in touch with the feelings of the characters in 47.

Did Sue Blue really die on Hollywood Blvd in *On High in Blue Tomorrows*?

It seems strange that a film which obviously takes place in the South and whose protagonist is a lowly servant without much financial resources would encounter one of the most important events in her life, her death, on Hollywood Blvd, a place of obvious symbolism. A better interpretation is that Nikki, for obvious reasons, feels a certain connection with Hollywood, the question is what is the nature of that connection? Blackman writes: "The obvious interpretation is that *INLAND EMPIRE*, like *Mulholland Drive*, is a disapproving comment on Hollywood. I think that's close but slightly misleading. For example, if you believe that the movie is real, that there really is a curse, and that Nikki and Devon are simply swallowed up by their movie, you might be led to believe that Lynch is commenting disapprovingly on the movies—that they can swallow up their actors. Besides being an incoherent point, it strikes me as something Lynch wouldn't say." Unfortunately, I cannot buy Blackman's alternative explanation: "What if Lynch were commenting on Hollywood, but his point is precisely the opposite? Remember what is real and what is not. In our non-Lynch reality, Hollywood productions are real, and movies are, in a sense, fake. In *INLAND EMPIRE*, the Hollywood production is fake (the Nikki Grace fantasy), and the movie—its characters and story—is real."

We have to recall that Nikki/Sue literally spits up blood on the Hollywood stars. Again, it is very tempting to interpret that as the shallowness and superficiality of Hollywood eats up your soul, or that Hollywood stars are so repulsive that they cause you to vomit blood. But in light of the fact that this is about an actress who takes acting to a whole new level and gets amazingly absorbed in her character, I think what Lynch is saying is how this highly draining process takes an enormous toll on the actors to the point where it causes them to spit up blood. (I also want to point out that the one star that they focus on in the movie is the star of Dorothy Lamour. I looked up her bio and didn't find anything of significance so I guess her star was chosen since Dorothy is a variation on Doris.)

Why is the subtitle of the film 'A woman in trouble'?

The reason why Nikki is in trouble is that she takes identification with a rather troubled character way too far. It seems that she is willing to wreck her marriage in order to understand the adulterous feelings of her character and furthermore she believes that her husband is even capable of murder if she discovers her adultery. Even if the whole movie is a dream which I believe it is, the fact that she is dreaming these thoughts says something about her real life character. An alternative interpretation which I also find attractive is that the woman in trouble is Lost Girl. She is in trouble because she is an actress without a role and this is an actress who is so in love with acting that she literally dies unless she is able to act.

Why are lines spoken twice or several times?

Both Sue and Lost Girl both say 'Look at me and tell me if you've known me before', 'Where am I? I'm afraid'. I think this is explained by the fact that these are both lines from the Polish remake as well as lines from *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. On the other hand, the lines 'Where am I? I'm afraid' are spoken at times which are probably not scenes from either 47 or *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. For example, the women in image 22 are probably the same actresses in image 23.

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Why are the two times 9:45 and after Midnight repeated several times?

We know for a fact that the murder of the Phantom in the present occurs after midnight since Lynch tells us what time it is before the Phantom is murdered. Our evidence that at least one of the murders occurred at 9:45 in Old Poland is not conclusive but plausible. A man on the street asks Piotrek what time it is and he responds that it is 9:45. It's probably the case that at the moment he is asked that the murder goes down.

Blackman has an alternative explanation that deserves to be considered: "Old Poland = 9:45 *Inland Empire* = after midnight. I recorded each appearance of these times in the film. Let's look at the evidence and see if everything lines up. In Old Poland, a passerby asks Smithy what time it is. His answer? 9:45. Pretty straightforward. When Sue is wandering through the dark network of halls near the end of the film, a clock on the wall reads 12:13—after midnight. Again, straightforward. After Smithy slowly takes the gun from the Polish medium, one of them yells at him, "Right away! It's after midnight!" While this scene is in New Poland and not *Inland Empire*, that's fine, because New Poland is chronologically concurrent with *Inland Empire*. We are dealing with the second set of lives (the reincarnations), whereas the first set of lives originated in Old Poland. Visitor #2, (I think Blackman means Visitor #1) when she visits Nikki Grace (and attempts to cut through the fantasy), says, "I suppose if it was 9:45, I'd think it was after midnight!" She's basically telling Sue that she's confused about whose life she's actually living. Recall that it's a frequently abrasive conversation. You could also say that 9:45 is

a time before murders, while “after midnight” is a time of great urgency and impending conflict. Note that both instances of “after midnight” occur near the retrieval of the pistol (one by Smithy, and the other by Sue)."

How is the theme of spousal abuse connected to the main theme of this movie?

There is quite a lot of violence perpetrated by men against women in this movie. The Phantom abuses Lost Girl. Piotrek/Smithy beats Sue. And Sue recounts several instances of abuse by men in her past to Mr K such as: "When I get mad, I really get mad. I gouged a man's out when I was fifteen once. He was trying to rape me. ... Seen a guy come at me with a crowbar once. Guess he figured I was two-timing him. I was coming home, we were shackled up at the time." So it's clear that masculine violence on women is a key theme in this movie but why should that be a key theme in a movie where the main theme appears to be an actress becoming too enmeshed with her character? One possible interpretation that does not appear all that outrageous is that playing deeply, disturbed roles of characters who experience violence or perpetrate violence is enormously risky to one's sanity and in fact are taken by actors who already have a few screws loose. Just imagine if you were Bruno Ganz playing Hitler or Ralph Fiennes playing the SS officer in *Schindler's List*. For example, when Fiennes was asked: "You've said that when you play a part like that, that it costs you something, that you make some payment. What was it? And talk about how you did that." He responded with: "It's hard to put into words the sort of imaginative quest that you go on. Every actor will have a different idea about what their method is, what their approach is, but I think it's probably a good building block to look for that thing in yourself that might do what your character is doing or thinking or feeling." I think it would be exceedingly difficult to look for that thing in yourself that might do what an SS officer does. So I think the reason why spousal abuse is a theme in this movie is to highlight the fact that we're dealing with an actress who not only gets deeply involved in her character but that she is willing to get deeply involved in an abused character which is not an easy thing to do.

Why does the homeless Japanese girl narrate the story of Niko?

After Nikki/Sue dies on Hollywood Blvd one of the homeless girls rambles on without being asked about her friend Niko who has fallen on hard times and is doing drugs and turning tricks but when she puts on her wig she looks like a movie star and is so stunning that even girls fall in love with her. However, she has a hole in her vagina wall and she knows her time is almost up. She has a pet monkey that screams like someone in a horror movie. First, although we later see the director yell 'Cut!' and learn that this is a scene from *On High in Blue Tomorrows* I have already provided evidence that this probably not a scene from *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. We should observe the fact that that this anecdote occurs right at the moment that Nikki is experiencing a lot of pain. I also think it is no coincidence that the Niko sounds like Nikki. Niko's struggle bares some semblance to Nikki's. In spite of Niko's hard-core struggles and problems she is still capable of putting on that wig and performing a show so that even women fall in love with her which is essentially what actors can do no matter how difficult their personal problems are. As far as Niko's time almost being up, it must be pointed out that actors have a very short shelf-life in Hollywood and after a certain age, probably 35, especially for women, it is very hard to get roles. It is tempting to read some significance into the pet monkey, the most human-like animal, who screams like he's in a horror film but I cannot see any significance in that. We should also point out that Piotrek earlier says he has a way with animals and that line is repeated here but I do not understand its meaning. Patrick Meahy has an interpretation of this event which deserves to be considered: "Niko's story is the ultimate Hollywood dejection tale, she falls to the status of hooker, is abused some more, and ultimately loses that which is essentially female. Yet, when she puts on a blond wig, she can still pretend she's a star."

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Those are essentially all the details that I am capable of explaining. There are a host of details that were obviously intended which I cannot explain but I think the reader should be aware of in case an explanation is found.

What is the point of the rabbits?

As other commentators have pointed out, the rabbits were originally a short 45 minute movie produced back in 2002 and placed on Lynch's website. It is very difficult to connect them to main theme of the movie. The only thing that I can really get from them is they contribute to the film's sense of absurdity. After all, the company that produced *Inland Empire* was called Absurda. It's possible that during the seance the characters turn into the rabbits (for example, the red lamp in the background stays put) but even if they do there is no clear reason why this happens. One commentator said he met Lynch and asked him about this scene and he said 'pay attention to the fact that only the man enters and exits.' One could interpret that as a critique of the patriarchy we live in but I think this film is very far from a critique of patriarchy. It is also possible that one of the rabbits turns into Janek in the film's second scene but again even if that is the case I don't see what the explanation for that is. Palakton has done what I find to be an implausible interpretation of one of the dialogues of the rabbits and I will reproduce it here for the reader to consider even though I do not agree with it: "'I'm going to find out one day": Doris, Sue's rival, will find out about the affair one day. "Where was I?", Piotrek has no idea if he is alive or dead. "This isn't the way it was": the re-telling of the story is going to go differently this time, which provokes laughter. Yes, this time things won't go according to the Phantom's plans, and he'll be destroyed. "It was the man in the green coat", this is Piotrek when Nikki runs into Smitty's house: Piotrek is under the power of the Phantom, if not the Phantom in disguise. "It had something to do with the telling of time": how the Lost Girl knew that Piotrek was dead, and that she had killed him. "It was red": the color associated with the Phantom. This may also connect with Sue's lamp, mentioned as an heirloom in one of Sue's deleted monologues, the device itself carrying the spirit of the Phantom, and the curse."

What is the point of the red lamp?

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Lynch is obviously getting at something with this red lamp. This could explain why the Phantom has a lightbulb in his mouth. I have not been able to detect any significance with this red lamp. It also seems that the red lamp has a significance in *Mullholland Drive*, that was one of the clues that Lynch told us to watch out for in the DVD insert but again I cannot figure out what it is. Perhaps prostitution is linked with the red light due to the name Red Light District but I don't see that connection being emphasized in this movie. Palakton has thankfully transcribed one of the deleted scenes for us where Sue talks to Mr K:

I got a lamp. I keep it by my bed. It's my sister's bed, but the lamp is mine. Same damn lamp's always been with me. It's my sister's bed, but my lamp. I won't go anywhere without that lamp. It's a lamp from my family. On my momma's side. She was the one who changed it to the red shade it's got now. It was a floral pattern one before. I seen a

picture of it. It had that floral pattern shade. Picture was black and white, so I couldn't see the actual color of it. Picture was *really* weird. It had a...man's hairy arm on the edge of the picture. It was sorta coming in on the side. I asked my momma...if that was my daddy's arm in the picture. She said, no, dear, that ain't your daddy there. I asked, who is it then? She said, it's none of your business. Why wouldn't she just tell me it was my daddy? I would have forgotten all about it. This way, I keep wondering who the *fuck* it was hanging around our house. It could have been anybody. Sorta makes you wonder.

What is the significance of red, green and blue?

Lynch is doing something with the colors red and green and to a lesser extent blue in this movie but I have not been able to detect a pattern. One important fact is that Nikki finds the gun which she uses to kill the phantom on top of a green cloth. The most positive moment of the movie, that is to say, when Lost Girl is liberated is followed by a blue light.

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Another important instance of blue would be the blue scene where Nikki and Devon carry out their affair. There are numerous other conspicuous instances of color in the film but again I cannot detect any meaning to them.

Why does Piotrek go to Poland to look for the Phantom?

If this movie is all about Nikki overcoming the very embodiment of evil with her acting, then why does Piotrek make a special trip to Poland to search for the Phantom?

Why does Laura Dern's real life mother play a role in the movie?

Michael Warren has caught one very important detail: "In a funny scene, Laura Dern's real-life mother Diane Ladd hosts the show and intimates that Devon's womanizing reputation and Nikki's close proximity to him throughout the shoot could threaten Nikki's marriage. Nikki deflects, not feeling any special attraction for Devon and rather insulted by the implication." This detail really seems to be too coincidental to have no significance. Yet I cannot find any meaning in it.

Why does AXXoNN appear three times in the movie?

AXXoNN appears in the beginning of the movie where a voice tells us that it's the longest running radio show in history. Some commentators think that life itself is the longest running radio show in history so AXXoNN has something to do with life but I find this implausible. The name appears again in the back alley above a door leading to Smithy's home and it is mostly that incident where the film takes a very drastic narrative turn and becomes highly surreal. And then AXXoNN appears on Hollywood Blvd above

another door but I see no significance to any of this though Lynch is obviously getting at something here.

Why is the movie called Inland Empire?

Inland Empire in real life is just the metropolitan area east of Los Angeles. In the film Gordy says that the Phantom left Poland and mumbled something about Inland Empire but I doubt that refers to the area east of Los Angeles. Apparently, the way Lynch came up with the name of the movie was someone else mentioned Inland Empire, presumably the real life metropolitan area and he said that that's a great name for the movie.

A scene by scene account of what factually happens

Although our biases force us to select which facts to include and which facts to ignore, nonetheless, I have tried as much as possible to make a list here of the most important events in the film.

2 min

A John and a prostitute meet in a hotel room. It's probably Lost Girl and the Phantom but this cannot be known with certainty. The prostitute eventually says 'where am I? I'm afraid,' which Sue will later repeat on Hollywood Blvd.

4 min - Rabbits' home

Cheers as the male rabbit enters. Lost girl watching the rabbits. I don't understand this scene so I won't comment.

7 min - A mansion (in Polish)

The phantom pleads with Janek to give him an opening. Rabbit man in the background.

9 min - Nikki's estate.

A visitor shows up at Nikki's estate. She's very awkward in her movements. She has an Eastern European, probably Polish accent. She has advance information that Nikki has got a role and that the movie she plays in involves murder and marriage. Nikki denies that murder is involved. The visitor mentions the unpaid bill and says actions do have consequences. Nikki's husband will later warn Devon that actions have consequences and Nikki/Sue will be greeted by a second visitor in the movie who says there is a bill that needs paid. The visitor also says that 'If it were 9:45 it would be after midnight.'

18 min - Nikki's Estate, the next day

Nikki is with two girlfriends. She gets the role. Ecstatic. Piotrek looks on from above menacingly.

19 min - Directors' studio

Kingsley, the director, says the film is a starmaker. He says that the script has what it takes to send Nikki back to the top. He says that we're happy to have Nikki on board.

21 min - On television

Laura Dern's real life mother playing Marilyn hosts Nikki and Devon on a gossip show. Marilyn asks her if she will be able to be true to hubby. She asks Devon if his devilish mind is scheming. Marilyn says she will be watching and will be reporting on everything she finds out.

23 min - Backstage

Devon is revolted by the tv appearance. His entourage tells him that Nikki is off-limits, since her husband is the most powerful guy around and that he knows everything. Devon says that Nikki is not her style, which puts his entourage at ease. One of his entourage says 'you gotta admit though she has a nice ass.'

24 min - Next Day at the studio

Devon mentions Smithy for the first time. He says the house is Smithy's house which they're building for the set. The director and his assistant show up. They rehearse the scene where Devon arrives at Smithy's house and Sue is looking out the window. Billy said some things last night. He wants to apologize. Sue asks if they were the truth. Sue starts to cry. She asks him to look in the other room. Some commentators believe that what Sue asks Billy to look at is a dead body but I don't believe this. The assistant sees someone in the background. Devon goes to take a look and doesn't find anyone though he hears footsteps. We later learn that that person is Nikki/Sue. The director confesses that the script is a remake of a polish, gypsy folktale. The producers knew this but withheld the information. The two leads were murdered. It had a German title 47.

34 min - Nikki's home

Pietrok's parents show up who are polish. Nikki says she doesn't understand Polish. Peter then says that she probably knows more than she lets on. She then admits that she understands Polish but does not speak it.

35 min - Dora and the policeman

Dora meets with a policeman. She says she's been hypnotized. She doesn't say who but we know from elsewhere that it is the Phantom. She says she's gonna kill someone. She saw him by the bar. He said that she would know who it was. She has a screwdriver in her stomach. It's not clear if this scene occurs after Dora stabs Sue or not. Perhaps she stabbed herself out of guilt after she stabbed Sue but we cannot know this with certainty.

37 min - On set - Billy Side's mansion

Billy and Sue are acting in the movie. She has a husband and Billy has a wife and two kids. He says he's never had this feeling. All she sees from this is blue tomorrows. She says that she cannot afford to have an affair.

39 min - Offset. Freddy, Nikki and Devon.

Freddy says he loves animals. Freddy bums some money off of both actors. In my opinion this scene could have been deleted since I see no point to it.

39 min - Make up room.

Nikki is having her make-up removed or put on. The director says that Devon is fascinated about Smithy and wants to know who is playing Smithy. This scene as well probably could have been deleted.

42 min - Nikki's estate

She asks her servants where everyone went. A servant says they've taken Mr Berg upstairs.

43 min - Peter and Devon

Peter says to Devon:

Now, sometimes people don't say exactly what they mean. And you have been guilty of this all evening. Now, I'll tell you something. And I will mean everything I say. My wife is not a free agent. I don't allow her that. The bonds of marriage are real bonds. The vows we take, we honour, and enforce them. For ourselves, by ourselves, and if necessary, they're enforced for us. Either way, she is bound. Do you understand this? There are consequences to one's actions. And there would, be certain, consequences for wrong actions. Dark, they would be. And inescapable. Why instigate a need to suffer?

Some commentators believe that Devon is speaking in Billy's accent but I don't believe that is the case.

45 min - On set

The director shouts instructions through a bullhorn. The employees are having difficulties getting things done. This scene also could probably have been deleted.

46 min - Billy Side's mansion

Sue says she's leaving for the gym and asks Billy if he needs anything. Billy insists that she stay since he is so lonely. She relents. He asks her if she would like to stay for dinner. Romantic music. The director calls cut. He berates his staff for not following the script.

51 min - Devon and Nikki off set

Devon asks her out to dinner after the shoot using a southern accent. She responds in character agreeing.

52 min - Acting out parts of On High in Blue Tomorrows

Romantic music. Billy and Sue kissing. She says she's going to fall in love with him. After the director yells cut the music continues.

53 min - On set

Sue says she's afraid that her husband knows about us and that he will kill us. Nikki breaks character and says this sounds like dialogue from our script and she keeps her southern accent. Nikki realizes that she's confused reality with acting. Eerie music.

55 min - Devon and the Producer

The producer assures Devon that the stories around the film are all rumors and there is no evidence to suggest that the movie is cursed. Devon is skeptical of this.

56 min - Nikki with Devon in Smithy's home

Nikki and Devon are making love. Peter is in the background and looks on. The scene almost certainly belongs to fantasy otherwise Peter would have interrupted them. Nikki and Devon have the following dialogue:

NIKKI Oh, remember — remember I told you about this thing that happened? It's a story that happened yesterday, but I know it's tomorrow.

DEVON That doesn't make sense.

NIKKI It was that scene that we did yesterday, when I'm getting groceries for you with your car. And it was in that alley, and I parked the car. There's always parking there. So there I am.

DEVON What?

DEVON Sue, damn.

NIKKI It's a scene we did yesterday. You weren't in it. That one when I'm in the alley. I'm going to get groceries for you with your car, and I park there 'cause there's always parking. You know the one. I see this writing on metal. And I start remembering

something. I'm remembering...and... this whole thing starts flooding in, this whole memory. I start to remember. And I don't know. I don't know what it is.

NIKKI It's me. Devon, it's me. Nikki!

DEVON That don' make any sense. What is this, Sue?

1:00 - back alley, behind the set

Sue is carrying groceries. She sees the sign AXXoNN above a door. She enters. Very dark. Location shifts abruptly and she now approaches the set from the outside and witnesses the scene that took place at minute 24. Devon chases after her and she runs into Smithy's home. She tries to communicate to Devon and screams at him from the other side of the window and although he looks through the window to Smithy's home, he cannot see her.

1:05 - Smithy's home but now located in the South

She can see the yard of the southern home now from the window of the hotel room. She now opens the door and she is now in a different location in the South or maybe Inland Empire since Sue lives next to Krimp and Gordy said at 1:54 that Krimp left Poland and mumbled something about Inland Empire. She walks around very cautiously. She explores the house, sees a green lamp, she's wearing green and the beds are green. Smithy appears out of nowhere in the bed, turns out the light. He doesn't talk to her. Now there is focus on a red light. She sees a faded, unreal image of Billy.

1:08 - prostitutes appear in the living room of Smithy's home

One of the prostitutes says: "Look at us and tell us if you've known us before." This line is repeated twice in the movie. Once Nikki says it two women in the backyard of Smithy's home at 1:37 and another time Lost Girl says it while walking the streets in Old Poland at 2:07. The Prostitutes acknowledge Nikki only one time but they rarely interact with her. They talk about a guy that they admire rather strongly. One of them thought this guy was the one. They then say:

SANDI In the future...

DORI: ...you will be dreaming...

LORI: ...in a kind of sleep...

TERRI: ...when you open your eyes...

LANNI: ...someone familiar will be there.

Palakton interprets this as: "This, I think, can only be a reference to what will take place at the end of the movie, after a sort of long dream has ended, and Sue will come across the hotel room with the Lost Girl, the woman she once was in a past life." And I happen to think he is right.

1:11 min - Old Poland

Some of the American prostitutes are there. Nikki as well. One says: "This is the street." And asks her if she wants to see. It's just down the way. What they're probably referring to is where the murder took place. Image of record player and a woman crying. The voices are very hard to hear. Nikki still rather bewildered.

1:14 - Nikki with the prostitutes in the living room of Smithy's home

Dark. They look out the window but this time what is outside the room is Old Poland rather than the South. They smile a lot.

1:15 - Smithy's home

Nikki is calm in a white trash home, fixing eggs. This is her sweet persona. She tells her husband that breakfast is ready. She begins to throw up. Some commentators believe

that she throws up because she's having a miscarriage. This would mean that she's unfaithful since Piotrek admits he cannot father children.

1:16 - Smithy's home, another day

Nikki enters the southern home with groceries. Mellow music begins to play. Close up of a watch. Nikki puts it on. She burns some silk with a cigarette. The watch hands begin to spin. She looks into the hole of the silk garment that she has burned with a cigarette and on the other side of the hole we find ourselves in old Poland.

1:17 - Old Poland - Phantom's home

Violent scene between the Phantom and Lost Girl. They have the following dialogue:

LOST GIRL I didn't mean anything by that. I just asked a question.

THE PHANTOM Why did you ask if it means nothing? Whatever you want is that it?

LOST GIRL No. Whatever you want?

THE PHANTOM Oh...now it's me.

LOST GIRL Always you.

THE PHANTOM You can lie to me, but don't lie to yourself. So sly...

He pushes her.

LOST GIRL Don't push me.

THE PHANTOM I'll push you to hell.

LOST GIRL Stop it!

1:19 min - Old Poland - Smithy and Lost Girl

LOST GIRL I can't give you children. I know that...Are you listening to me?

PIOTREK I'm going out now.

LOST GIRL I'm not who you think I am! I'll never let you have her! Never...

1:19 min - Old Poland - Phantom's home

More violence between the Phantom and Lost Girl.

1:19 min - Old Poland - On the street

Smithy on the street in Poland perhaps looking for the woman mentioned at 1:19. Someone asks him the time. It's 9:45pm

1:20 - Lost Girl in her room.

The Lost Girl watches Smithy on television standing in the street.

1:20:30 min - The Rabbits.

Red. Two female rabbits in the room. They don't say anything.

1:21 - Sue at the Psychiatrist

Sue meets the psychiatrist for the first time. She says:

I don't really understand what I'm doing here. That's one hell of a fucking climb getting up here. So I was told you can help me. I guess I'll just tell you the thing. I'm just gonna catch my breath. There was this man...I once knew. His name was...it doesn't matter what his name was. A lot of guys change. They don't change, but they reveal. In time, they reveal what they really are. You know what I mean? It's an old story. Well, this guy...he revealed something. Looking back on it...all along it was being revealed. He was planning something. Planning something with me in mind. When I get mad, I really get mad. I gouged a man's out when I was fifteen once. He was trying to rape me. I mean, the fucker had it out. He was pushing my legs apart. I got a finger in his eye socket. Pretty quick, rape was a long way off his mind. He was crying and screaming like

a baby. "What a fucking man you are," I said. There was goo. But he could still see me with the one eye...see me coming at him...grabbing his nuts and tearing at 'em. He seen that, all right, and felt it, too. He was screamin' and wailin' like a little baby, sittin' in the corner and crying...moaning and hugging his nuts till the ambulance come. The ambulance guys...they say, "What the fuck happened here?" I say, "He come to a reaping what he been sowing, that's what." They say, "Fucker been sowing some kind of heavy shit."

1:26 - In Smithy's home with the prostitutes

Green, mellow music, Nikki somewhat calm. The whores are on the floor. They talk about the break up of a relationship. One of them thought the guy was the one. Nikki doesn't interact with them but listens. One assures another that with tits like hers there is always a chance. One of them says that her tits are going to bring them in like flynn and then she exposes them. They dance to the song 'Do the locomotion'.

1:29 - Smithy's home in the South

Sue is eating dinner with Smithy. Sue and Smithy argue about money. She says she's pregnant. He reacts with sarcasm. He's not very happy about it. It's possible that he's not happy about it because he doesn't believe it's his since he knows for a fact that he cannot have children which he tells us at 2:18

1:32 - Rabbits receive a phone call.

Green. The male rabbit picks up the phone. Canned laughter. Camera goes through the hole in the silk again.

1:33 - Sue and Mr K

Sue says:

Seen a guy come at me with a crowbar once. Guess he figured I was two-timing him. I was coming home, we were shacked up at the time. He was waiting for me in the half-light. Waiting for me to come home. Guess he had worked himself into some kind of frenzy. I open the fucking door...and I see this fucking shape burst out of the chair...and a crowbar going up. I scream, and turn. Fucking crowbar comes down, smashing in that fucking door, cheap piece of shit. It just splinters into a thousand pieces, like it was glass, shit flying everywhere. I don't take this kind of behavior. I see what this fucker was up to. BAM! I kick him in the nuts so hard he go crawling up inside his brain for a refuge. He goes down like a two dollar whore. Crying and shit, telling me he's done nothing but love me and bullshit.

MR K Were you in fact seeing another man?

SUE I screwed a couple guys for drinks, no big deal. This one guy was kinda cute. Fucker had a dick like a rhinoceros. He'd fuck the shit out of you, I tell you what. He'd buy me a couple of drinks after. We'd talk, he'd tell me about the town he grew up in. All the little girls he fucked. There was a chemical factory in this town, and he'd tell me it was putting so much shit in the air you couldn't think straight. It got to a lot of the people. There was a lot of crazy shit going on there. People having weird dreams, seeing things that wasn't there. This one time, this one little girl. She was staring off at something one time. Starts screaming. The people hanging round come to her and ask what's wrong, and uh, she says she sees the end of the world. All fire and smoke and blood running. You know, like they say, the wailing and the gnashing of the teeth.

1:37 - Backyard of Smithy's home.

Sue now takes on her sweet persona and asks some girls if "you've known me before." They say "yes we will do that." Pietrok sprays ketchup on his shirt. In the ketchup Sue sees Lost Girl. Some commentators believe that the ketchup reminds Sue of the blood from the time when Lost Girl was killed in Old Poland.

1:39 - Old Poland

Lost Girl walks up the staircase with a screwdriver. Woman screaming. Camera shows a repeat of Lost Girl's back that we saw at minute 1:19. An American asks who she is. Close up of a dead woman on the floor which is probably Lost Girl, though commentators disagree on this point.

1:40 - Old Poland on the street.

Lost Girl and Phantom have the following dialogue:

THE PHANTOM I almost didn't recognize you.

LOST GIRL You startled me.

THE PHANTOM Strange...to find you on the street.

LOST GIRL You seem upset...Are you?

THE PHANTOM Should I be?

LOST GIRL No, but...

THE PHANTOM So I shouldn't be?

LOST GIRL No...but still you seem so...

THE PHANTOM I think you don't recognize me...my manner...

LOST GIRL That's true. You seem different.

THE PHANTOM You too. I'm used to seeing you in our home...not on the street...at night.

LOST GIRL Me too.

THE PHANTOM There was a murder...

LOST GIRL How awful. Where?

THE PHANTOM Just down the way. I think...you knew the person.

LOST GIRL Who was it?

THE PHANTOM Don't know the name...but I have seen you with this person.

LOST GIRL You have?

THE PHANTOM I have. I think...I've seen the two of you together.

LOST GIRL That's awful.

1:43 - Image of Pietrok dead, lying on the floor.

1:43 - Lost Girl watching tv.

1:43 - Backyard of Smithy's home in the South.

The poles arrive at Smithy's home. Smithy welcomes them. Sue asks who they are. They fight each other, asks for his hammer. One says there is no toilet paper, asks Smithy where it is. Smithy says they're a group that plays in traveling shows. Smithy will take care of the animals since he is good with animals.

1:46 min - Sue and Mr K

SUE Fucker went to some Eastern European shithole. With the fucking circus. Can you fucking believe that? That circus. Talk about carnies. Carnies, gypsies, con men, you name it. A real fucking ball of shit. There was this guy they had working there. (an image of him) He'd start talking. You know, real regular. Talking up the crowd. They'd start listening. Pushing in closer. He did some sort of thing on people. They all called him "the Phantom". He got into a barroom fight one night. All the bar was arrested. A lot of them fucking circus clowns. So when they take them all down to the station? Guess what? The Phantom's done gone and disappeared. This is the kind of shit I'm talking about. He was a marine from North Carolina. He had a sister with one leg. She had a sorta car stick for the other one. She killed three kids in the first grade. This is the kind of shit...Fucking funny. People. They all got their own peculiarities. Their own way of living.

1:49 - the prostitutes in Smithy's home

Listening to some weird psychedelic music. They're all bored. The only thing I think this scene accomplishes is a sense of absurdity.

1:50 - Billy Side's mansion

Sue has a key to Billy Side's home since she works there. She lets herself in. Billy's wife, Dora, asks her what she's doing. Sue thought Billy's wife was gone. Billy arrives. Sue says something is wrong, bad wrong. Sue asks Billy if he loves her. Billy pretends not to know. Sue declares her love. Billy's wife slaps her. Sue turns real fierce. Powerful emotions. She insists that she loves him.

1:53 - The Phantom hypnotizes Doris.

1:54 - Modern Poland

Pietrok in a car. He asks Gordy: 'Where is he?' This probably refers to the Phantom. Gordy says that he left and mumbled something about Inland Empire.

1:55

Clown face. Nikki runs from afar and then we see her face as a clown which is the same face we see after she kills the Phantom. Nikki wakes up, frightened.

1:57 - Smithy's home

A visitor arrives to talk to Sue. The visitor says there is a bill that needs paid. Sue says alright. The visitor asks if she knows the neighbor next door and says his name is Krimp.

1:59 - next door of Smithy's home

Sue approaches Krimp who is played by the same actor as the Phantom. She grabs a screwdriver. Krimp has a lightbulb in his mouth. Krimp disappears.

2:01 - Modern Poland

Piotrek arrives and the following dialogue occurs.

LOST GIRL There's someone there...I have to tell you...There's someone...

MAREK Do you recognize her?

PIOTREK I don't see her...

MAREK You understand she sent for you?

LOST GIRL I don't know where I am...

MAREK I hear her now...

JANEK Do you see her?

PIOTREK No.

DAREK It was...red...

MAREK You work for someone?

PIOTREK Yes.

MAREK This is the one who she spoke of.

PIOTREK The one I work for.

MAREK So...you understand.

FRANCISZEK The horse was taken...to the well...

DAREK Take the pistol...

JANEK Let's go!

FRANCISZEK Right away! It's after midnight!

It is understood that he is probably assigned the task of killing the Phantom.

2:04 - rabbits

The following dialogue occurs.

I'm going to find out one day.

It was red.

man: where was I?

this isn't the way it was. (laughter)

(green lamp)

Male radio: It was the man in the green coat.

Female radio: It had something to do with the telling of time.

2:05 - Nikki in the rain.

Nikki experiences a lot of torment and screams. This is probably due to the trauma actresses experience while getting emersed in malevolent characters.

2:08 - Hollywood Blvd

Nikki says I'm a whore. Where am i? I'm afraid. Rock n roll. Sue sees a doppelgänger of herself. Several shots of the prostitutes. They laugh. Penderecki music. Dora Side walking in the distance. Nikki runs from her. Close-ups of the prostitutes.

2:10 - Old Poland

Lost Girl says: Look at me and tell me if you've known me before. She is a prostitute here.

2:12 - Hollywood boulevard

Nikki believes that Dora is going to kill her. She flees into a burlesque club. She thinks Dora is going to kill her. Red lamp in the background. Also a green lamp. Mostly red. Green exit sign.

2:15 - psychiatrist

Sue says the following:

It was a funny name...they was called "Krimp". There was this man I once knew. I'm trying to tell you so you'll understand how it went. The thing is, I don't know what was before or after. I don't know what happened first. And it's kinda laid a mind-fuck on me. My husband...he's fucking hiding something. He was acting all fucking weird one night before he left...he was talking this foreign talk...and telling loud fucking stories...

2:18 - Southern home

Sue is being beat by her husband. He says he cannot have children. He's probably beating her because she is pregnant and he believes that the child is not his. The scene probably happened shortly after the scene at 1:29

2:19 - psychiatrist.

SUE Like this, his face all red. His eyes bugging out. I figured one day I'd wake up and figure out just what yesterday was all about. I'm not too keen about thinking about tomorrow. Today's slipping by. I guess after my son died...I went into a bad time...when I was watching everything go round me while I was standing in the middle. Watching it...like in a dark theater, before they bring the lights up. I'm sitting there...wondering, how can this be?

As she says this she has a screwdriver.

Mr K says the following:

Hello? Yeah? She's still here. I don't think it will be too much longer. Yeah. The horse to the well. Yeah. Huh? Yeah. He's around here someplace. That's for sure. Czerwone time.

2:21 - Nikki flees from the psychiatrist. Back alley. Green. Backstage of the set.

2:22 - Hollywood Boulevard

The prostitutes ask her where she went. She says someone's there. She talks to them. She starts snapping her fingers. She has a screwdriver. Doris comes up and stabs her with a screwdriver. Drops the screwdriver on the star of Dorothy Lamour. Camera focuses on the green light. Sue dies next to the homeless couple. They discuss whether or not there is a bus to Pomona. Her friend is named Niko. Niko has a blonde wig which she wears at parties. She does drugs and turns tricks now. She looks like a movie star. She has a hole in her vagina wall. The bystander tells her to be quiet about that. She knows that time has run out. She has a pet monkey. The monkey can scream like in a horror movie. Nikki spits up blood on the sidewalk, directly on one of the stars. The black woman says no more blue tomorrows as she dies.

2:34 - Movie Set

Nikki takes a while to rise. Everyone applauds for Nikki. She's wearing a red shirt. Assistants attend to her and try to clean her up. Penderecki still playing in the background. She doesn't respond when the director says she was wonderful.

2:35 - The lost girl

Lost Girl is now watching Nikki Grace as she moves through backstage.

2:37 - Theater

Sue sees herself talking to the psychiatrist on the movie screen. Red light in the background. She sees the psychiatrist in the background and sees herself walk up the stairs.

2:44 - In the bed room, green lights, green blankets. Gun is on the green shirt. More green lighting. Sees room 47. The Phantom comes up and Nikki shoots him. He stops but is not wounded. His face turns into hers. She shoots some more times then he dies.

2:46 - Rabbits

Door opens to the rabbits' home but no one enters.

2:48 - The Lost Girl

Music turns positive. The lost girl sees herself on TV. Nikki enters, kisses her. Lost girl leaves room 47, somewhat happy.

2:50 - In the southern home

The lost girl comes home, embraces Pietrok, happy. They are lovers, probably married. Another large bluelight.

2:52 - Nikki

Nikki is confused. Staring, doing nothing. Pigtailed.

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