



ELEPHANT & CASTLE

Screenplay by Samuel Garza Bernstein

The British Independent Film Festival awarded *Elephant & Castle* a Best Unproduced Screenplay Commendation and the London Independent Film Awards named it Best Original Screenplay.

A beloved British television star takes a detour that transforms his beliefs about morality, love, sex, and violence. The soap opera melodrama of his work coexists peacefully with his otherwise cool, detached view of the world. But when his elderly mother's living situation takes a vicious turn, his new female costar—a young woman with a notorious criminal past—opens the door to a solution.

For 40 years, CHARLES FARROW has been one of the stars of *Elephant & Castle*, a gritty soap in the style of *EastEnders* and *Corrie*. He started on the show as a 13-year-old scene stealer and is now one of the country's favourite television dads, celebrated for his sensitivity and emotional depth.

Yet his private life is quite the opposite. Charles is a disengaged, amused observer, who avoids close emotional ties, preferring to immerse himself in his work. He's also gay—a fact he doesn't exactly hide—though it isn't public knowledge. If he wants to indulge his taste for slightly kinky sexual situations, he blithely pays for it with men he trusts, offering them respect and affection.

When the network hires NATALIE MILLER, an infamous reality television star, to play his long-lost daughter on the show, Charles expects little from her. Even the network admits it's just a publicity stunt. The character is a prostitute, and the story of the reunited father and daughter unfolds with an eye to heartbreak and murder.

And murder is the whole point. For Natalie's notoriety is linked, not to her recent stint on a *Big Brother* knock-off, but to the screaming headlines she generated over a decade earlier when, at age nine, she stabbed her stepfather to death. Was it justifiable? Self defence? No one knows for sure.

Charles finds Natalie fascinating—not the least of which because she turns out to be a remarkably talented actress—and their friendship grows surprisingly deep. Meanwhile, Charles' aging mother HELEN is showing signs of senility and physical decline. Her nominal carer, Charles' erratic sister TRISH, is increasingly given to violent outbursts and emotional cruelty. He struggles to make everyone happy. But when Charles insists that Helen's and Trish's *Grey Gardens*-like living arrangement must end, his sister threatens all-out war.

His bond with Natalie grows as they become increasingly comfortable showing one another their true selves. On a chat show, she cries with seemingly genuine remorse about having taken a human life when she was a child, but casually tells Charles afterwards she wasn't sorry then and isn't sorry now. When Charles feels forced to come out of the closet, he maintains a public face of emotionalism, even some anguish, yet with Natalie, he reveals a ruthless pragmatism.

As the narrative builds to its explosive climax, both on the show and in real life, everything Charles and Natalie do and say, on and off-screen, is completely sincere, completely believable. Especially to themselves. Issues of 'right' and 'wrong' become totally beside the point—to them—and ultimately, perhaps to us all.