

Title: The Case of Emil Diesel

Author: Patricia Menton

Treatment By: LR

Mission Statement:

The Case of Emil Diesel is an intriguing story about the power and enduring legacy of art, best suited to a feature adaptation. As with any book, it requires some reshaping to translate successfully to the screen—thus the treatment below, which serves as an outline for a feature script, modifies the story in certain ways. As always, action needs to be condensed, characters combined or omitted, and the order of events rearranged for maximum dramatic impact—and to fit the structure and running time of a movie. It's important to remember a treatment is a tool used to sell the *idea* for a story to production companies and not a detailed retelling of the source material in its entirety. As such, characters and events are modified to work for this shortened format. However, when brought to life in full script format, much of the altered material can be expanded upon, bringing it more in line with the author's original vision.

Specifically, Hollywood feature producers will immediately compare this project to 2015's *Woman in Gold*, which covered very similar subject matter while benefiting from being a true story. To help *The Case of Emil Diesel* stand out from that movie, it's important to focus far more on Emil's life under the communist regime in East Germany and Max's efforts to smuggle the artworks out, rather than Max's modern day legal struggles to reclaim his inheritance. One of the potential failings of *Woman in Gold* was that the flashbacks to the Jewish family's persecution by the Nazis were more dramatically involving than the present-day story of court hearings and the relationship between Maria Altmann and her attorney. In *The Case of Emil Diesel*, Max's ownership battle with the museums provides an interesting way to bookend the story, but the bulk needs to take place in communist East Germany.

Similarly, by reshaping and adding some thriller elements to Max's escape with a portion of his father's art from the GDR, it will widen the project's appeal to producers looking for more commercial material.

Logline:

After Emil Diesel's vast private art collection is stolen by the communist authorities in East Germany, his son Maximilian fights for decades to reclaim his rightful inheritance.

Treatment:

ACT I

Close on an oil painting by the 19th Century Dutch artist, Schotel. It depicts a raging storm driving a sailing vessel towards a rocky shore—an image that encapsulates the story to come. A woman's fingers sweep across its ornate gilded frame.

Wider. More oil paintings of ships thrashing about on stormy seas. The same fingers delicately trace the edge of each frame. Then on to a white marble sculpture of the Madonna... a hand-painted Oriental vase... a bookcase filled with antique leather-bound books...

The fingers belong to ANNA SCHULMAN (20s), a young German reporter. MAXIMILIAN DIESEL (60s) winces each time her hand hovers near a piece from his vast collection of art and antiques.

It's 2014 and we're in Max's house on the outskirts of Boston—but the rooms are so crammed full of artwork it could just as easily pass for a European museum.

Anna is trying to interview Max and is puzzled by his reluctance to talk to her. His attorney set it up; he thought the publicity of a newspaper article would help Max's case against the German authorities. Max curtly explains that the case has been tied up in the courts since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany. He doubts anything will help him get his father's art collection back.

Anna is impressed by the size and scope of Max's collection. He has all this; why does he need the pieces that were stolen from his father 40 years ago? Again, Max doesn't answer. Anna absently runs her fingers along the elegant carvings on a beautiful Chinese cabinet. Max can take it no longer and gently—but firmly—removes her hand. Art, he explains, is to be revered. We are just caretakers of art passing through time. When we're gone, art will survive. Each piece tells our history. It is our gift to future generations. It is our legacy. And his father's collection is Max's legacy. Only his artworks can tell his father's story—the man he was, the man he wanted to become.

Anna nods. Her grandfather knew Max's father; she remembers hearing stories about him when she was a child. As she talks, we flashback to Amsterdam, 1940. A series of shots with Anna narrating in voiceover (V.O.) to fill in the gaps:

EMIL DIESEL and HANS SCHULMAN (20s) are key figures in the art community of Amsterdam when the Nazis invade in WWII. Emil is an art collector, Hans a dealer in rare books. As a German, Emil is drafted into the German army. In uniform, he's told of an impending raid on Jews in the city. He runs to his friend Hans to warn him.