Hail, Cæsar!

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FADE IN SOUND

DISTANT, BEAUTIFUL VOICES

Male voices. A Gregorian chant.

Close on a rosary with a small silver cross attached. It is held in a man's lap next to a mouse-grey fedora. The light is dim.

We hear a panel sliding open, and more light wipes onto the rosary beads.

Wider on the man waiting in the confessional: middle-aged, tired, but ruggedly handsome.

Voice
Son, it is so late.

Man
Yeah, Father, work has just been crazy.

Voice
You work too hard.

Man
Nah, I'm just. . . keepin the place goin. Anyhow, bless me Father for I have sinned. It's been uh, twenty-four hours since my last confession. I, uh. . .

Voice
Yes my son.

Man
I lied to Connie. Uh, to my wife.

Voice
This is very serious.

Man
I know! I've told her, you know, that I quit smoking. And I'm trying, but. . . well, I snuck a couple cigarettes. . . Maybe three. . .

Voice

Yes.

Man

It's hard. . .

Voice

Yes, my son.

Man

—But I'm trying.

A clap of thunder.

HOUSE AT NIGHT

We are looking, through the rain-pelted windshield of a parked car, at a small Spanish-style bungalow. The two cars sitting in its driveway mark the period as being circa 1950.

A voice-over begins, authoritatively omniscient—or maybe it only sounds so because it is British-accented:

Voice-Over

It is 5:00 A.M. The sun is soon to rise. But for Eddie Mannix the day has already begun.

The rattle of driving rain does not quite cover the sound of drunken female laughter from inside the house. There are occasional flashes of lightning outside, and occasional flashes of strobe-light in the house's windows.

Inside our surveilling car, a wrist rolls over to show a watch face, streaked with the shadows of dripping rain: 5:00 o'clock.

. . . In a Packard luxury sedan he sits. . . and waits. . .

Our car's driver—the man we saw confessing—Eddie Mannix—looks up from his watch to the house.

Flash of lightning, crash of thunder, another bout of laughter from the house.

Eddie Mannix reaches for his door.

OUTSIDE

Eddie Mannix pulls down his hatbrim, turns up his collar, and digs his hands into his coat pockets as he strides through the rain.

The strobe light flashes inside the house. The laughter grows louder as we approach.

Eddie Mannix hesitates only momentarily at the front door. He tests the knob: unlocked; turns it, enters.

INTERIOR

On Eddie Mannix at the open door, rain dripping from his fedora, thunder crashing behind him. His eyes narrow in distaste.

In the living room a giggling blonde in a milkmaid's dirndl with ripped-open bodice bends over a butter-churn.

A man with his back to us is peering through a box camera.

Man
That's right, darlin', a little lower. . .

The girl, peeking out from under her curls, spots Eddie Mannix and freezes.

Gloria
Jesus Christ on a scooter! You again!

The photographer turns to face him: a tall weedy-looking man with a thin mustache. A sheen of sweat mottles his brow and upper lip.

Eddie
The vice boys are on the way, Falco. We have a right to Gloria's likeness. Gimme the negatives and things'll go easier.

Falco
You got it all wrong, Eddie. This is for private use.

Eddie Mannix strides over to the camera, pops its back, and pulls out a length of film.

. . . Hey!

We hear approaching sirens.

Falco reacts, bolts for the back of the house. We hear a door slam.

Gloria
Can't a girl take a few pichas, have a few laughs? Cheez, Eddie. What a old stick-in-the-mud!

She is giggling.

Whap! He slaps her.

She looks at him, stunned, then starts weeping.

He slaps her again.

Outside the sirens wind down and we hear car doors open.

Eddie
Now you listen to me. You were at a party, you had too much to drink, somebody brought you here, you don't remember who. You're going home now and your name is Mary Jo Hochstedder.

She blubbers:

Gloria
Okay, Eddie.

The front door opens and two uniformed cops enter.

Cop One
Hello, Mannix, saw your heap outside.

Cop Two
Got a call. Loud, disorderly. . .

He looks around and sniffs.

. . . Possible French postcard situation.

Eddie
Someone was pulling your leg. Mary Jo here was just at a costume party. It's not really her dirndl.

He fishes a wad from his pocket and peels off some bills.

. . . She wants to contribute something to your pension fund.
Sorry to drag you out in the rain.

Cop One
Well, say, no trouble at all.

Cop Two is looking hard at the girl.

Cop Two
Aren't you. . . Gloria Johans—

Gloria
No no, I'm Mary Jo Hogfucker—

Eddie
Hochstedder—look, Brian. . .

Eddie hesitates, looking at one of the cops who is smoking.

We hear, distantly but growing louder, a deep thumping sound.

Eddi
Can I, uh. . . bum a cigarette?

The thumping sound has grown closer: the tramp of many marching feet. A fanfare on ancient horns as we cut to:

THE OLD APPIAN WAY

The image is in brilliant Technicolor.

Cypress trees, regularly planted, stretch along either side of the road to the horizon. Down the road a Roman legion proceeds in formation, the sound of its thousands of marching feet bridging the cut.

Superimposed on the allee of trees the title of the movie fades in:

HAIL, CÆSAR!
A Tale Of The Christ

The same voice that started the movie now intones:

Voice-Over
Ancient Rome! Three years into the rule of Hadrian, Rome's

legions are masters of the world—the stomp of its sandals heard from the Iberian peninsula in the west through the halls of the great library of Alexandria in the east! As oppressed people everywhere writhe under the Roman lash. . .

The regularly formed legions in the van now give way to the slaves being whipped along in the rear.

. . . master and slave, freeman and vassal, are united in one compulsory worship! The emperor, Cæsar, is Godhead, lord of every man's body and spirit! For those who will not submit, the galleys, the arenas, even crucifixion await! But there is a new wind, blowing from the east, from the dusty streets of Bethlehem, that will soon challenge the vast house of Cæsar, that edifice wrought of brick and blood which now seems so secure!

A chariot rolls up into the foreground. Its driver is a muscular campaign-hardened man with Roman bangs. Beneath his copper breastplate he glistens with manly sweat. He wears a helmet topped by a bright red mohawk bristle, something like an upside-down floorwaxer. He is Autolochus Antoninus. He gazes off and smiles.

Another man gallops up on horseback and reins in next to him. This is Gracchus Gregorius, and he too wears the floorwaxing headwear of the Roman tribune.

Autolochus
There she is, Gracchus. And ah, what a beauty!

Gracchus
Aye, Autolochus! Rome! Suckled by a she-wolf and nurturing us her sons in turn.

Autolochus
Tonight I bathe in Caracalla, and wash away the dust of three hundred miles of Frankish road! To Rome! To Rome!

As he whips the chariot horses into motion we pan off to reveal the hilltop view of Rome before which the weary tribunes had halted.

Voice-Over
Yes, to Rome! Glorious center of Cæsar's rule!

A rutted rural road, somewhere in the provinces. A man in sandals and simple peasant garb and using a gnarled walking staff walks through rain, thunder and lightning.

. . . But far away, in Palestine. . .

We are panning off the image to reveal that we have been looking at a screen in a small screening room.

. . . another man is coming home. Saul, humble merchant of Tarsus, following the trade route from Damascus to Galilee, is about to be struck down by a vision.

The continued pan brings us onto the screening room's one occupant, Eddie Mannix, slumped in his seat. A sudden furtive look around, meaningless since he is alone, and he takes a burning cigarette from the ashtray next to him and sneaks a puff. He looks back at the screen, its flashes of lightning illuminating his face.

Saul *(off)*
(quavering)
What thing is this?

BACK LOT

Eddie Mannix strides across the great studio backlot where technicians mill and actors dressed in the wardrobe of different ages and genres lounge. His secretary Natalie follows at his elbow, struggling to keep up as she consults a notepad:

Natalie
—and Gloria Johanssen has been checked into Our Lady of Perpetual Rest to dry out. You have a 10:00 a.m. with Monsignor O'Reilly at the Wallace Beery Conference Room. He's bringing Lester Silkwood from the Legion of Catholic Decency and we've also invited Patriarch Vlassos for the Eastern view.

Eddie
They've read the script?

Natalie
Roger.

Eddie
Let's also invite a rabbi, and a Protestant padre of some sort so we can get everybody's two cents.

Natalie
Check.

Eddie
How's production on "Tin Star"?

Secrectary
Principal is on schedule but second unit has been idle in Gallup New Mexico for four days. Heavy rain.

Eddie
Forecast?

Natalie
Not good.

Eddie
Hnn. Send an insert truck and have 'em shoot driving plates for "Came the Rain."

Natalie
Check.

Eddie
"Neptune's Daughter" still behind?

Natalie
Yeah, director says the problem is DeeAnna and she's getting worse.

They are approaching an administration building.

Eddie
I know what it is. I'll drop in on her after my ten o'clock. *(pulls back his sleeve to look at his watch)* All right, let's call New York.

HIS OFFICE

Eddie is on the phone.

Voice
Nick Schenk's office.

Eddie
Hi Dorothy, Eddie Mannix. The old man in?

Voice
Hi Mr. Mannix, I'll check.

Eddie raises his voice:

Eddie
Natalie, I want the box office on "The Debonaires" and the preview numbers on "Blessed Event."

Into the phone:

—Yes, good morning Mr. Schenk. . . Very well, thank you. Proceeding. . . Proceeding. . . The script on "Merrily We Dance" is all set. Beardley Auberon did a draft that's extremely classy. Joan Van Vechten is set to play Dierdre, the problem is the male lead. . . No, Jack Hogarth is drying out at Cedars. . . Metro won't lend us Gable unless we give them the Haggerty Twins. . . Of course not, I agree. . . Swell idea but he's waiting out a divorce in Reno. . . Whuh—Hobie Doyle?! Do you really think so? After all he's—he's a dust actor! The man barely knows how to talk!. . . Yes, of course Mr. Schenk, I agree, but I don't know if Hobie Doyle, if he has the uh the uh the uh poise in a dinner jacket. . . Yes, we do need it by January. . . No I don't. That's very true. Let me talk to Laurence Laurentz, the director. It could work. Hobie is a very promising idea.

A BOULDER

It is a great big boulder.

A beard-stubbled cowboy rises from behind its cover to fire his six-shooter. He himself is immediately shot: he grimaces, releases his six-shooter which swivels around his trigger-finger as he staggers, and then drops.

The man who just shot him: Hobie Doyle, in white Western wear. Eyes narrowed, he gauges the effect of his shot, and then reacts to the sound of retreating hoofbeats.

The other bad men are racing off, firing wildly back in his direction.

Hobie adroitly twirls and holsters his gun.

Hobie
Whitey!

The white horse placidly cropping the grass several yards away flicks its ears and looks over. It nickers and shuffles to face away from Hobie as Hobie runs to it. He vaults its rump and man and animal are off.

Hobie riding. A mounted bad man falls in behind him—a bushwack. This pursuer begins to fire.

Hobie rocks forward on Whitey, low to his neck. He reaches down to grab the saddle, one hand on either side. He pushes himself up into a handstand atop the racing horse.

An oncoming treelimb hooks his knees and he swings up and around as his horse races on unridered. When he loops back around the treelimb his six-shooter is at the ready and he fires on the swing at the oncoming horseman. The bad man clutches his chest and falls from his horse as Hobie swings up again.

Hobie uses his upward inertia to gracefully execute a trapeze-artist dismount from the branch. His drop toward the ground is neatly intercepted by the bad man's galloping horse: Hobie plops into its saddle. He reins in the snorting beast and as it rears he fires his six-shooter into the air in an expression of pure brio. He then twirls and holsters his gun, calms the horse with a pat on the neck, and leaps aground. He claps dust from his yoked white shirt.

Megaphone Voice

And cut.

A man in sunglasses rises from a canvas chair next to a camera attended by men in creased hoist-up pants and white shirts and ties.

Director

Great, Hobie.

Hobie

I kin do the handstand smoother if ya gimme another shot atter.

An assistant trots up to Hobie with a small tin. Hobie takes it and loads a chew into one cheek.

Director

We've got four good ones Hobie, and Whitey is tired.

Hobie

Okay you're the bossman. If that's lunch ammo grab me a plate a beans.

Assistant

Hobie, the studio wants you to escort Carlotta Valdez to your

premier tonight.

Hobie
But she warn't in the pitcher.

Assistant
Well that's what they want.

Hobie
But she warn't in the pitcher.

Assistant
Well it's some publicity thing.

Hobie
Ah don't git it.

Assistant
Well the studio says you're bringing Carlotta Valdez. You're her escort.

Hobi
But she's Carlotta Valdez. Hit don't make sense. She warn't in the pitcher.

Assistant
Who was in the picture?

Hobie thinks.

Hobie
Whitey.

Assistant
Well Eddie Mannix says they're changing your image.

ROMANS

They sit, two or three togaed senators and their robed wives, with a couple of tribunes with bristle-helmets, on chairs carved of cedar and draped with fine silks, in the courtyard of a Roman villa. They tuck their legs in so that someone may enter:

A man in sunglasses wearing a white open-necked shirt.

He looks here and there. He raises a megaphone.

Man
All right kids, it's Rome, you're over at this guy's house for a revel, and here comes Antoninus. Lllots of energy!

Voice
Roll 'em.

A short, togaed extra holding a lyre lurks by a tabletop on which sit platters of succulent feastings, and one goblet. A furtive look around.

AC Voice
Camera speed.

Boom Voice
Sound speed.

The extra produces a cellophane packet from the folds of his toga. After another quick glance around he opens the packet's flap and taps its powdery contents into the goblet.

He hastily crumples the packet and exchanges a significant look with:

Another extra, holding a turkey leg nearby. This man is bald with fringe hair upcombed to make corner hair-vees.

The first extra is startled by:

Second A.D.
What're you doing at the table of viands?!

Extra
. . . Huh?

Second A.D.
You're supposed to be reclining, with the lyre!

Extra
Yeah, sorry, I uh—

Second A.D.
Recline with the lyre!

Extra
Yes sir.

Voice
We set there? Background set?

Second A.D.
Don't sit on the pediment! Recline! Relaxed, festive!

Extra
Yes sir.

Second A.D.
(projecting) Set! *(he narrows his eyes and points at the extra now reclining, hissing as he leaves)* I got my eye on you.

Voice
Fountain!

Water starts to gurgle as the courtyard fountain comes to life.

Voice
Background!

The extras talk amongst themselves in pantomime, displaying Roman gaiety and deep involvement in their silent conversations. Some sip at goblets, some nibble at rich comestibles. Occasionally a guest will tip his head back for a peal of silent laughter.

Our extra strums his lyre not in pantomime but sounding it, the same arpeggio, over and over again, separated by the same beat of silence.

Voice
And action!

Autolochus strides in. A seated senator rises to greet him.

Senator
Autolochus! I had heard rumors of your return to Rome!

We are close on the reclining extra with the lyre. Autolochus, standing before him, is only a pair of foreground feet in sandals with leather lace-ups twining the calves. The leather creaks as he talks:

Autolochus
More than rumors, noble Sestimus!

The reclining extra with the lyre looks steeply up at Autolochus. His point-of-view shows Autolochus mostly backlit; we see off the set and up into the greens.

Autolochus, with great aplomb, swipes the goblet from the table.

> . . . I see that you are the same worshipper of Bacchus. What gaiety! There is still truth in the adage, "What pleasures cannot be found in the villa of Sestimus Amydias, cannot be found in Rome!" *(brings the goblet to his lips but stops with a thought)* But seriously, there is talk that the senate will send our legions out again—and this time not on a short march to Gaul. What truth to these mutterings, Sestimus?

The reclining extra and the extra with the turkey leg exchange a worried look.

> Sestimus
> The matter is to be taken up in the Senate. It seems that there is unrest in Palestine.

> Autolochus
> Palestine! That backwater! They'll hardly be sending the Sixth Legion to that godforsaken patch of desert!

Hearty male laughter. Autolochus punctuates his laugh by raising the goblet to his lips.

But then—he is taken by another gust of laughter.

The two extras exchange a look. Our reclining extra hugs his lyre and worriedly arpeggiates.

When Autolochus's second access of laughter peters out he raises the goblet again—and now takes a long draught.

> Voice
> Holding for a dissolve. . . still laughing. . . holding. . . and. . . cut.

Autolochus lowers the goblet, panting, and wipes meadfoam from his mouth with an armful of sleeve.

The extras too relax.

The director enters: Sam Stampfel, of manly middle-age.

> Stampfel
> Fine, boys, that was fine. We'll move on to the brasier scene.

> Autolochus
> Yeah? Was I okay on What truth to these mutterings, I felt a

little—

Stampfel
Nah, fine, we move on. Brasier scene, twenty minutes.

Autolochus
Popping over to my dressing room. *(to A.D.)* Got the pages for the brasier scene?

The A.D. points to a spot on the page as he hands it over.

A.D.
They changed "passion" to "ardor."

Autolochus
What? I liked passion. It's strong. Passion.

The A.D. shrugs a What can I tell you? Autolochus wanders off, muttering:

Autolochus
Not so, Ursulina. . . my ardor is yet as warm as the embers of this brasier.

The extra with the lyre exchanges another look with the bald extra. He indicates with a jerk of the head that they should follow Autolochus, who is crossing the long dark expanse of soundstage toward a distant glowing exit sign, looking down at the script.

EXTERIOR

We are close on the short extra. His back is pressed against a beige stucco wall. He cautiously leans to one side, back scraping the wall, and cranes peeking around a corner.

His point-of-view: huge stucco soundstages range into the distance, a narrow street running between. The only person about is a small receding Autolochus Antoninus, his sandals scuffing the road and sword banging his thigh as he walks. He still looks at the script; we hear his distant muttering:

Autolochus
Such is my greeting after three months' sojourn in Gaul?. . . Not so, Ursulina. . . my ardor is yet as warm—

He stops momentarily, swaying a bit. He extends a hand to steady himself against the exterior wall of a soundstage. After a moment, he moves on, somewhat uncertainly.

The short extra draws his head back in. Next to him is the bald extra.

A STAR ON A DRESSING ROOM DOOR

A slow pull back reveals the name above the star: BAIRD WHITLOCK.

Muffled, from within, we hear Autolochus/Baird Whitlock:

Baird
Not so, Ursulina. My ardor is yet as warm as the embers of this brasier. . . The embers of this brasier. . . Goddamn, that's tough. Yet as warm as the embers of this brasier. . . Not so, Ursulina. . .

The continuing pull back reveals the two extras standing either side of the door. The bald one nods at the short one.

At the nod, the short extra knocks at the door.

. . . My ardor—yeah?

Short Extra
They're ready for you, Mr. Whitlock.

The two men stand tensed.

After a short beat of clomping inside, the door swings slowly up. Baird stands, swaying slightly, giving the two men a glassy stare.

Baird
(slurred)
Not so, Ursulina.

He pitches forward into the ready arms of the togaed men.

EDDIE MANNIX

We track with him as he strolls and speaks.

Eddie
Gentlemen, thank you all for coming. I know you have parishes, flocks and temples making enormous demands on your time. But I'm sure you appreciate also that great masses of

humanity look to pictures for information and uplift and, yes, entertainment.

Our lateral track with Eddie Mannix brings us across a foreground variety of the funny-shaped hats belonging to the small group assembled around a conference table.

. . . Now here at Capitol Pictures, as you know, an army of technicians and actors and top-notch artistic people are working hard to bring to the screen the story of the Christ. It's a swell story—a story told before, yes, but we like to flatter ourselves that it's never been told with this kind of distinction and panache.

Eastern Orthodox Patriarch
Perhaps, sir, you forget its telling in the holy Bible.

A wry smile from Eddie Mannix.

Eddie
Quite right, Padre. The Bible of course is terrific. But for millions of people, pictures will be their reference point for the story—the story's embodiment, *(groping)* the story's. . .

Minister
Realization.

Eddie points an aiming finger at him to second his choice of words.

Eddie
Realization.

Rabbi
You "realize," of course, that for we Jews, any visual depiction of the Godhead is most strictly prohibited.

Eddie
(grim)
Oh.

Rabbi
But of course, for us, the man Jesus Nazarene is not God.

Eddie
(brightening)
Ah-ha.

Minister

Who plays Christ?

Eddie

A kid we're all very excited about, Todd Hocheiser, wonderful young actor we found in Akron, Ohio in a nationwide talent hunt. But Hocheiser is seen only fleetingly, and with extreme taste; our story is told through the eyes of a Roman tribune, Autolochus Antoninus, an ordinary man skeptical at first but who comes to a grudging respect for this swell figure from the East. And Autolochus is played by. . .

He permits himself a satisfied smile.

. . . Baird Whitlock.

Murmurs of appreciation and one low that's-something whistle from the assembled.

Rabbi

Well he is certainly a great talent.

Eddi

Now Hail, Cæsar! is not just one of our prestige pictures; it is the prestige picture for our studio this year. We are devoting huge resources to its production in order to make it first-class in every respect. Gentlemen, it's our most expensive picture ever—and we don't want to send it to market except in the certainty that it will not offend any reasonable American, regardless of faith or creed. Now that's where you come in. You've read the script; I wanna know if the theological elements of the story are up to snuff.

Patriarch

I thought the chariot scene was fakey. How is he going to jump from one chariot to the other, going full speed?

A frozen beat as Eddie frames an answer.

Eddie

Uh-huh, well, we can look at that. But as for the, uh, religious aspect—does the depiction of Christ Jesus cut the mustard?

Priest

The nature of the Christ is not quite as simple as your photoplay would have it.

Eddie

How so, Father?

Father

Well, it is not the case simply that Christ is God, or God Christ.

Rabbi

You can say that again! The Nazarene was not God!

Patriarch

He was not not-God.

Rabbi

He was a man!

Minister

Part God.

Rabbi

Nossir!

Eddi

But Rabbi, we all have a little bit of God in us don't we?

Rabbi

Well. . .

Priest

It is the foundation of our belief that God is tri-partite.

Eddie

Father, son, Holy Ghost.

Priest

And Christ is most properly referred to as the Son of God. It is the son of God who takes the sins of the world upon himself so that the rest of God's children, we imperfect beings, through faith, may enter the kingdom of heaven.

Eddie

So God is. . . split?

Father

Yes.

Eddie nods.

. . . And no!

Eddie frowns.

Patriarch
There is unity in division.

Priest
And division in unity.

Eddie
Not sure I follow, Padre.

Rabbi
Young man, you don't follow for a very simple reason: these men are screwballs. *(to the others)* God has children? What, and a dog? A collie maybe? God doesn't have children. He's a bachelor. And very angry.

Minister
He used to be angry!

Rabbi
What, he got over it?

Priest
You worship the god of another age!

Minister
Who has no love!

Rabbi
Not true! He likes Jews.

Father
God loves everyone!

Minister
God is love.

Patriarch
God is who is.

Rabbi
This is special? Who isn't who is?

Priest
But how should god be rendered in a motion picture?

Rabbi
God is not in the motion picture!

Minister
Then who's Todd Hocheiser?

Eddie
Gentlemen, maybe we're biting off more than we can chew. We don't need to agree on the nature of the deity: if we can focus on the Christ, whatever his, uh, parentage. My question is: is our depiction fair?

Patriarch
I've seen worse.

Eddi
So I can put you in the plus column, Patriarch?

The Patriarch gives a musing nod. Eddie turns to the minister.

. . . Reverend?

Minister
There is nothing to offend a reasonable man.

Eddie
Father?

Father
The motion picture teleplay was respectful and exhibited tastefulness and class.

Rabbi
(barking)
Who made you an expert all of a sudden?

Eddie turns to the Rabbi.

Eddie
And what do you think, Rabbi?

The rabbi shrugs and affects mildness.

Rabbi
Eh. I haven't an opinion.

CONFERENCE ROOM DOOR

Eddie Mannix emerges, wiping sweat from his brow.

Natalie
How'd we do?

Eddie
We're good. I guess. What's up?

Natalie
Can't find Baird Whitlock. He left the set over an hour ago, said he was going to his dressing room but he isn't there.

Eddie
Out on a bender? Am I crazy, middle of the day?

Natalie
You're not crazy, but no. I checked the Til Two, Dan Tana's, Rusty Scupper. Not there.

Eddie
Home, maybe? Called his wife?

Natalie
Yep.

Eddie
What'd Laura say?

Natalie
He's not home, he's never home, he's a louse, try one of his chippies.

Eddie
Called that script girl, what's her name, Louella?

Natalie
Check.

Eddie
Any of the gal extras missing?

Natalie
Nope.

Eddie
Well. . . *(looks at his watch)* Gone an hour? We won't send out a search party yet.

BLACK

In black we hear rumbling truck-steady and the squeak of suspension and the rattle of chassis. A long beat.

We cut to an objective shot in the back of a truck. Baird Whitlock's head lolls in the foreground, waggling with the motion of the vehicle. His body—he is still in wardrobe; leather skirt and a breastplate over his white tunic—stretches away into the background: he is laid out, unconscious, on a paddy-wagon style bench. At the end of the bench in the background we see, cropped and soft, a goon in a double-breasted suit, his forearms on his knees, smoking.

THE STREET

Hollywood Boulevard. The truck roars by. Its paneled side says "Al's Linens."

STUDIO GATE

Hobie Doyle is pulling up in a chauffeured car.

The guard looks in the back window. He is surprised.

Guard
How ya doing, Hobie.

Hobie
Lo there, Scotty.

Guard
They got you shooting on the lot?

Hobie
Wul, Mr. Mannix pulled me off the Western says I'm doin a movie on a sound stage. They built a drawing room.

Guard
Ya don't say!

Hobie
Ain't lyin'.

UNDER WATER

We are following a bathing beauty in a bathing cap and a sequined mermaid suit. She swims free-armed but wriggle-tailed underwater, constrained by her fake nether-parts. From our underwater perspective we hear burbling music.

After a beat of her swimming solo, many bodies shoot down into the water, entering foreground and background in simultaneous headfirst dives, leaving bubble-trails. Many many bathing beauties. They blow air bubbles as they wave themselves back up toward the surface, smiling.

The mermaid goes up last.

Overhead, looking down: with our change in perspective the music now blares crystal clear.

In the tank below us the many, many bathing beauties fall into pinwheel-formation—like a starfish—which begins to spin. The center of the starfish is our mermaid.

Coverage of the girls in bathing caps, grinning as they swim.

Back to overhead on the pinwheel: the mermaid abandons her central position and heads for the side of the tank, pushing girls aside so that the spinning starfish starts to break apart.

Girl
Hey wuddya think yer doin?!

Male Voice
Cut the playback!

The music slows to sludge and stops.

Another Male Voice

Cut! Cut!

The mermaid has reached the edge of the tank, and now hooks her elbows over it and squalls:

Mermaid

Wardrobe!

CLOSE ON MERMAID

She is leaned back on a canvas chair, her face set in a grimace, a gurgle of effort building in her throat. Two men behind hold her in place, each with an arm looped over her shoulder and under an armpit.

After a long straining moment:

Mermaid

GAH!

With her cry there is a rubbery *thwop*-sound of suction giving way, and we cut to the reverse:

Two stagehands stagger back, holding the now freed bottom half of her scaly mermaid outfit. They tip it backfin-upward and a little water dribbles out.

The mermaid is now wearing scaly top-half of her outfit only. Coming from beneath it, below her waist, is a conventional Catalina swimsuit.

The mermaid feels tenderly at her stomach as an A.D. leans in.

A.D.

Gas again, ma'am?

Mermaid

MA'AM? MISS! Am I married?

A.D.

No miss.

Mermaid

No. Yeah, sure, gas again. *(Eddie approaches; she indicates him)* He knows what it is. Just gimme a minute.

Eddie

How are you , DeeAnna?

She peels off her bathing cap and shakes her hair out and looks sourly up at Eddie.

DeeAnna
How am I. Wet. And I don't think I'll fit in the fish-ass after this week.

Eddie
Well we should have the water ballet in the can after tomorrow; in the nightclub scene, wardrobe'll figure something out. Any more thoughts about who you might marry?

DeeAnna
Marry! Whatsa point? I had two marriages, and it just cost the studio a lotta money to bust'em up.

Eddie
Well those we had to have anulled, one was to a minor mob figure and the—

DeeAnna
Vince was not minor!

Eddie
—and Buddy Flynn was a bandleader with a long history of narcotic use.

DeeAnna
Okay they were both louses, yes, and that's what I'm sayin. A third louse ain't gonna do me no good.

Eddie
We've offered you some very suitable, clean young men.

DeeAnna
Saps! And swishes! You think if there was some good steady reliable man I wouldna grabbed him?

Eddie
Well, what about Ärne Seslum? He is the father, isn't he?

DeeAnna
Yeah yeah.

Eddie
The marriage doesn't have to last forever. But, DeeAnna,

having a child without a father would present a public relations problem for the studio. The aquatic pictures do very nicely for us, and—

DeeAnna
Yeah, f'you! So you strap on the fish-ass and marry Ärne Seslum! The man has Swedish meatballs in his braincase.

Eddie
The pictures do well for all of us. And it's a tribute to you: the public loves you because they know how innocent you are. Let me see if Ärne is open to it. You're sure he's the father?

DeeAnna
Yeah yeah. Absolutely. He's the father, yeah. Pretty sure.

Eddie has been nodding and making to withdraw. The last sentence gives him a hitch but DeeAnna, ready to resume, projects:

. . . Okay Maxie, bring my ass back!

COAST HIGHWAY

The "Al's Linen's" truck rattles by. We hear the crash of surf.

Up ahead, on the right side of the road is a weathered sign for "Rudy's Fish Shack—500 yards." Just before the sign is a turn-off to the left, onto an unpaved and rutted road. The truck makes the left turn.

DRAWING ROOM

People in formalwear lounge, chatting. A young woman in a sequined evening dress perches on the arm of a couch at the other end of the room chatting with an elderly man also formally attired and wearing a monocle.

Hobie Doyle enters stiffly in a tuxedo. He tugs at the collar of his shirt.

A distinguished-looking man, middle-aged, well dressed but not in wardrobe, hastens to greet Hobie. He is the director, Laurence Laurentz.

Laurence Laurentz
My dear boy, you look wonderful, how do you feel?

Hobie
Well this here collar is a little tight—

Laurence Laurentz
No no, nicely fit, looks a marvel, just takes a little getting used to. Now you enter here, Hobie, having just seen Biff's valise in the foyer—in spite of Allegra's claim that he hasn't been to the house.

Hobie
I'm sweet on Allegra.

Laurence Laurentz
Indeed you are.

Hobie
But I seen Biff's grip.

Laurence Laurentz
Indeed you have. And so here we find you haunted by unspoken suspicions.

Hobie
Haunted. By Biff's grip.

Laurence Laurentz
By his valise, yes, but then here is Dierdre *(indicates actress on couch, who examines Hobie like a veteran with no warmth for the rookie)*, harboring deep feelings for <u>you</u>, and sensing opportunity

Hobie
Dierdre.

Laurence Laurentz
Dierdre, yes. So at her importuning, you join her on the couch, and conversation ensues.

Hobie is concerned.

Hobie
So now she's gonna <u>importune</u>, Mr. Laurence?

Laurence Laurentz
Lau<u>rentz</u>.

Hobie
Oh, I'm sorry. She's gonna importune, Mr. Laurentz? Is that somethin I should, uh, be concerned about—

Laurence Laurentz
She'll simply ask you to join her on the couch, is all I mean to say, and conversation ensues.

Hobie
Okay, I gotcha.

Laurence Laurentz
Very good, very good, let's try one shall we?

Hobie
Sure, I'll give her a go.

Laurence Laurentz
Wonderful. Splendid. *(turns away, but turns back with a thought)* The only thing I would suggest is, before your first line, you respond to her line with a mirthless chuckle.

Hobie
A mirthless chuckle.

Laurence Laurentz
Yes, given your unspoken suspicions about Allegra, a mirthless chuckle.

Hobie
Okay, Mr. Laurence, I'll give it a—

Laurence Laurentz
Laurentz.

Hobie
Oh, gosh, I'm sorry, Mr. Laurentz. I'll give it a shot.

THROUGH FILM

A clapper-boy ID's and whacks a slate on "Merrily We Dance."

Laurence Laurentz's voice calls "Action!"

The assembled in the parlor come to life in a pantomime of civilized conviviality, chatting and laughing.

Hobie enters, a worried backward glance perhaps referring to the unseen grip.

Dierdre
Oh, Monty! Come join me on the divan!

Briefest who-me confusion from Hobie; with a quick recovery he manages a fairly casual saunter to the couch where he plants himself—not close to Dierdre. She slides over to close the gap between them, and she is now all warmth and sympathy. Her voice is musical and upper-crust:

Dierdre
Allegra's been delayed it seems; only four of us for dinner. But it makes things simpler for bridge, after all—why the pout?

Gazing at the floor, Hobie gives a loud short laugh that sounds like a Heimlich-expulsion. Slightest flinch from the actress. Hobie's grin abruptly drops, and, still gazing at the floor:

Hobie
Would that it were sooooo. . . simple.

A beat, the actress looking at him, Hobie looking at the floor.

The beat grows longer. . . longer. . .

Voice of Laurence Laurentz: "Cut!"

We cut to Laurence Laurentz sitting in his director's chair, mouth slightly open, staring without expression as he tries to frame his notes.

He abruptly rises and walks onto the set to join Hobie.

Laurence Laurentz
Very good—wonderful in fact. But let's try it a little differently this time—

Hobie
Sure.

Laurence Laurentz
—let's try, well let's see, first of all why don't we dispense with the mirthless chuckle.

Hobie

No mirthless chuckle.

Laurence Laurentz

No, no need, really—it was a bad idea, bad directorial—my fault, overthinking the thing.

Hobie

Well if you say so, but I'm happy to do another mirthless—maybe try her one more time—I mean if you want that chuckle I sure wanna give her to ya—

Laurence Laurentz

No no no, completely unnecessary under the circumstances, I think the audience can to that extent read your thoughts, and will assume your mirthlessness.

Hobie

Okay, you're the bossman, Mr. Laurence.

Laurence Laurentz

Laurentz.

Hobie

Oh, gosh, I'm sorry, Mr. Laurentz—

Laurence Laurentz

Also, let's try, this time, actually looking at Dierdre as we speak, looking into her eyes, and speaking our line with a certain. . . ruefulness.

Hobie nods agreement.

Hobie

Ruefulness, okay.

Laurence Laurentz

Yes. Because it's not so simple. Not so simple as she suggests.

Hobie

Okay.

Laurence Laurentz

Your feelings are not so simple.

Hobie

Nawsir. Okay.

Laurence Laurentz

Splendid.

THROUGH FILM

A clapper-boy ID's and whacks a slate on "Merrily We Dance" identifying the scene number and Take 2.

Laurence Laurentz's voice calls "Action!"

The assembled in the parlor come to life in a pantomime of civilized conviviality, chatting and laughing.

Hobie enters.

Dierdre

Oh, Monty! Come join me on the divan!

Smoothly this time, Hobie joins her on the sofa. When he sits he is still not close; she slides to him. The same music in her intonation:

Dierdre

Allegra's been delayed it seems; only four of us for dinner. But it makes things simpler for bridge, after all—why the pout?

Hobie looks at her, somewhat shifty-eyed, not comfortable with the eye contact.

Hobie

(rueful) Would that? *(slight beat; sad head-shake)* It were soooo. . . simple.

Voice of Laurence Laurentz: "Cut!"

Hobie looks hopefully to the approaching Laurence Laurentz. The director, feeling his look, puts on a smile.

Laurence Laurentz

Good, very good. Wonderful, in fact. Let's try, this time. . .

He balls a fist and brings it to his mouth and stares at the floor, thinking.

Hobie waits, gazing up at him.

At length:

Laurence Laurentz
All right, let's try this, your line, just say it as I say it, say your line exactly as I'm about to. Just as I'm about to do.

Hobie
Sure, okay.

Beat to focus attention, and then:

Laurence Laurentz
(rueful, and British-accented)
Would that it'were so simple.

Hobie
Would that ih twuuuuuuh, so simple.

Laurence Laurentz stares at him.

Laurence Laurentz
. . . My dear boy, why do you say that? Why do you say, "twuuuuuh"?

Hobie
Well you said, say it like I say it.

Laurence Laurentz
Yes but—

Hobie
Would that it twuuuuuuh, so simple.

Laurence Laurentz
Would that it'were so simple.

Hobie
Would that ih twuuuuuh, so simple.

Laurence Laurentz
Would that it'were so simple.

Hobie
Okay, I'm tryin to do that, Mr. Laurentz—

Laurence Laurentz
Laurence.

Hobie
I thought—um, a minute ago it was Laurentz—

Laurence Laurentz
We can use Christian names, my good dear boy, we're on the same squad. Laurence is fine—

Hobie
Okay, well—

Laurence Laurentz
—perfectly acceptable, just as I call you Hobie. So, "Would that it'were so simple." Trippingly.

Hobie
Would that it twuuuuh—

Laurence Laurentz
No no! You seem to be lingering, it's interminable—

Hobie
Oh gosh.

Laurence Laurentz
—I'm wondering when it'll end, the "were"—and we shouldn't have to wonder, should we, we should be marching right along to "so simple"—

Hobie
Would that ih. . . *(after hesitating, rushed)* twersasimple. Twersasimple.

Laurence Laurentz
Would that it were so simple. Not, "simple!" Just. . . *(relaxed)* simple.

Hobie
Simmmple. Simmmple. Gosh, I can't seem to cinch m'saddle up on this'n, Larry—

Laurence Laurentz
Laurence. Please. Good God, Christian names, yes, but not Larry.

FROM A HIGH BLUFF

Looking down into a hidden box-cove of the Pacific Ocean. The setting is rugged and secluded. Surf pounds into the teeth of jagged rocks just offshore. Nestled in the canyon just above the cove's tiny beach is a modernist octahedral beach house.

Small below us, the "Al's Linen's" truck is parked where the beach road ends just in front of the house. The goon from inside the truck now has Baird Whitlock in a fireman's carry, taking him to the house's front door.

We jump down close—the surf louder here—as the goon knocks. The knock brings furious dog-yapping from inside the house.

We are close on Baird's head upside-down against the big man's back. Just past them the door swings open, and as the big man steps in he turns to negotiate Baird's body through the doorway, Baird's sandaled legs sweeping toward us.

There are two men waiting inside. The closer one, who opened the door, is middle-aged, with stubble, and suspendered pants hanging beneath a paunch. He has sad eyes.

The deeper man is heavy-set, and in a cheap suit, not freshly pressed. Near him, a springer spaniel frantically spins in place yapping, excited to have visitors.

Heavy-Set Man
Quiet, Engels!

When the goon has passed with his Roman cargo the sad-eyed man swings the door toward us and it fills the lens as it closes.

EDDIE MANNIX'S OFFICE

On the other side of Eddie's desk is producer Walt Dubrow.

Dubrow
Stall?! For how long? What do I tell the director?

Eddie
That we're looking for him. But we don't want it in the gossip columns—Baird on a bender or in a love nest or wherever we

end up finding him. As far as the set is concerned it's business as usual. Tell the A.D. Baird is out briefly with a high ankle sprain.

Dubrow
Fine, but what do we shoot without him? We got the brasier scene up this afternoon.

Eddie
Could you get through it shooting around him?—maybe use his stunt double, Chunk Mulligan.

Dubrow
Chunk can't act.

Eddie
Get the writer to trim his speeches.

Dubrow
Well maybe, but then what? All we got left is the final scene—Autolochus's speech at the feet of the penitent thief.

Eddie grimaces.

Eddie
Uh-huh.

Dubrow
It's the emotional climax of the entire picture! We have to see that Autolochus has absorbed the message of the Christ!

Eddie
Yeah, I can see that.

Dubrow
We need Baird's star power, his charisma.

A wave of Eddie's hand communicates the ineffable:

Eddie
Sure, his emotional, uh—

Dubrow
This can't be faked! This is the heart and soul of the picture!

Eddie
I understand—

Dubrow
End of the movie, we can't give that speech to some—some Roman schmoe—

Eddie
Yeah, yeah I got it. But his benders can last a day or two—what does it cost to shut down?

Dubrow
Plenty. You know how big the picture is, we're on Stages 5 and 14, if we're carrying everybody in the last scene who's up on crucifixes that's three-forty an hour hardship pay eight hour minimum—

Eddie
Yeah yeah. *(his phone buzzes; he punches the button)* Not now.

Dubrow
Not to mention we lose Todd Hocheiser to Fox at the end of the week.

Eddie
Shoulda made him exclusive; who knew. *(another buzz from the phone)* Not now!

Natalie's Voice
It's Mr. Laurentz, Mr. Mannix! I can't stop him!

The door bursts open and Laurence Laurentz storms in. Natalie has trailed him to the door, where she hovers.

Eddie
It's all right, Natalie. Okay Walt, lemme know—

Laurence Laurentz
Mannix, I won't have it! For two decades the name "Laurence Laurentz" has <u>meant</u> something to the public!

Eddie
What's on your mind, uh. . . Laurence?

Laurence Laurentz
Hobie Doyle cannot act!

Eddie
He's one of the biggest movie stars in the world.

Laurence Laurentz
On horseback! But this is drama, Mannix—real drama, an adaptation of a Broadway smash! It requires the skills of a trained thespian, not a rodeo clown. I begged you for Lunt!

Natalie has been hesitant to put in:

Natalie
Mr. Mannix, I'm sorry but—you wanted me to make sure you didn't miss your lunch at the Imperial Gardens. You never told me who with.

Eddie
Right. *(looks at watch, grimaces)* Nuts. Look: no one wants to see Lunt. We're not recasting; this came from Mr. Schenk himself: it's Hobie Doyle. Is the boy game?

Laurence Laurentz
Oh, he's game. And gamey!

Eddie
If he's willing to work it's your job to help him. I'll have a talk with Hobie and take a look at what you've shot—but right now I've got a lunch.

BLACK

The pounding of surf fades up, the sound close but somewhat muffled by interior perspective.

We are fading up wide on Baird Whitlock, lying on his back, still unconscious. He lies on a patio chaise lounge made of thin plastic tubing stretched across an aluminum frame.

We are flat to the large glass sliding door before which the chaise has been placed, apparently having been pulled into the house from the beach. It is the room's only piece of furniture.

Outside is a narrow deck and then beach and then pounding surf.

A muffled *ding-dong* from elsewhere in the house. We hear the springer spaniel, stirred by

the bell to yapping.

With much plastic-squeaking Baird rolls onto his side and nestles his head into the chaise's tubing-upholstery. In his sleep he murmurs:

Baird
What truth to these mutterings, Sestimus. . .

He subsides to snoring.

A door-clunk from the next room.

MAIN ROOM

The sad-eyed man in suspenders is opening the front door to several visitors. The first visitor enters, murmured greetings, solemn handshake. He is followed by another man, another sober handshake. Then an elderly man in tweeds, clutching a pipe, the greeting for him especially deferential. Then a man with a briefcase; he sets it down so that he may greet by means of a manly hug. He picks up the briefcase, makes way for the next man.

A counter separates the entryway from a small kitchen. In it, the heavy-set man whom we saw when Baird was brought in, is carefully cutting the crusts off of finger sandwiches and stacking them on a platter.

As the dog yaps in a frenzy of delight at all the visitors, the man reacts without looking up:

Heavy-Set Man
Quiet, Engels!

It does nothing to quiet the dog.

IMPERIAL GARDENS

A gong stings the cut to the interior of this Chinese restaurant.

Arthur Fung, a grave-looking man in a dark suit and conservative tie, greets Eddie Mannix.

Arthur Fung
How pleasant to see you, Mr. Mannix, your table is right over here.

Eddie
Thank you, Arthur.

They splash through a curtain of beads to approach a booth at which another man sits, a drink with an umbrella before him, an ashtray and an Imperial Gardens matchbook next to it, a cigarette in hand. He rises to shake.

Man
How ya doing, Mannix.

Eddie
Mr. Cuddahy.

Cuddahy
Mix a hell of a mai-tai. I like this place.

The men seat themselves facing each other.

Eddie
Sorry to keep you hanging—it's a tough decision.

Cuddahy
Nothing to apologize for—we said the offer was on the table for a week.

Cuddahy has noted Eddie eyeing his cigarettes. He picks up the pack and offers with a hitch of the wrist that sends four cigarettes nosing out of the torn top of the foil.

Cuddahy
Go ahead.

Waving them away:

Eddie
Nah, I'm. . . I've been trying to. . .

Cuddahy
The deadline was tomorrow, but, frankly, we were surprised not to get a quick yes. I just wanted to see if there was some impediment we could help with, or if something in the offer isn't clear?

Eddie
The offer's very clear. And very generous.

Cuddahy
We want to make it easy for you to say yes. Look Mannix, we need a guy with your talents in management, problem-solving.

And you need to think about the future. Grumman is booming —it's reflected in the offer we made you. Everyone is riding in airplanes, and we're moving into jet airplanes. It's a new age, Mannix, and we're part of it; the industry you're in—what's the future there? What happens when everybody owns a television set? Will they still be going to pictures every week?

Eddie

Well, we—

Cuddahy

I don't mean to denigrate; I'm sure the picture business is pretty damned interesting. But it's also pretty frivolous, isn't it? Aviation is serious; serious business, serious people. You won't be babysitting a bunch of oddballs and misfits, shouldering a lot of crackpot problems from people who—

Eddie

Look, we have some kooks, sure—

Cuddahy

Course they're kooks, it's all make-believe! *(quick grimace and smile; he leans back)* I told myself I wasn't gonna badmouth the competition, and looka me. Sorry, Mannix, I'll stick to what we're about. Lemme show you something. *(digs in a pocket)* Ever heard of the Bikini atoll?

Eddie

What?

Cuddahy

It was a test site, couple a rocks in the South Pacific—till a few weeks ago. Then we blew the Aitch-erino. Not supposed to be telling you this.

He hands Eddie a picture.

Cuddahy

The real world. Hydrogen bomb. Fusion device.

Eddie

Armageddon.

Cuddahy

And Grumman was there. We had a—

He abruptly cuts himself off.

A Chinese woman in a red embroidered sheath dress is entering with a telephone. She plugs it in. As she leans in to set it on the table, Cuddahy swipes the picture from Eddie's hand where it was exposed to view.

Waitress
Call for you, Mr. Mannix.

Eddie
Thank you. . . Hello?. . . And he has it now?. . . No, have him stay on the set, I'll go to him. *(slams down the phone and rises)* Sorry, Cuddahy, work emergency. Still do work there, for the day anyway. *(grabs his hat, calls back over his shoulder)* You make a good case. I'll let you know.

MALIBU HOUSE

There is a dull *clunk* and we are close on Baird Whitlock, who opens his eyes.

Wider: Baird in his centurion's wardrobe reclining on chaise lounge against glass wall, roaring ocean outside.

The *clunk* has punctuated an ongoing machine-hum, which continues, cycling louder and softer, its loudest approach always punctuated by a *clunk.*

The lawn chair makes tacky noises as Baird disengages from it. He stiffly sits up. He gazes stupidly about, looking into the depth of the room: where am I?

He twists to look behind himself, lawn chair crackling, and does a modest take: there's the Pacific Ocean.

Another *clunk* and receding machine hum. Baird registers the noise, gets to his feet and walks to the door. It is closed. He reaches for the knob. He tries the knob. It turns. He goes through the door.

LIVING ROOM

The main room, in which we saw Baird being brought in and the mysterious men entering. It is now empty except for a middle-aged woman with a bandana tied Aunt-Jemimah style on her head. She is vacuuming. Each forward pass of the machine ends with its *clunk* against the wall.

Baird watches for a pass or two.

Finally, projecting over the machine:

Baird

Where am I?

The woman looks up, and shows no particular interest in Baird despite his breastplate and leather skirt. She turns off the vacuum.

Woman

You one of the Hollywood people?

Baird stares at her, considering all the possible answers. Finally:

Baird

. . . Maybe.

Woman

They're in there.

A jerk of her head indicates a hallway. She fires up the machine again, resumes vacuuming.

Baird looks down the hallway. From one of its rooms, muffled male laughter.

He goes cautiously down the hall, the vacuum sound fading away, male voices fading up.

One door is ajar.

Baird cautiously bumps it open further.

Another round of laughter is interrupted as the men inside turn to look at Baird in his Roman attire in the doorway. They are the men we saw entering earlier, joined by a few more. Most are seated. Several smoke cigarettes, someone smokes a cigar; the tweedy elderly man is sunk back in an easy chair smoking a pipe.

The springer spaniel leaps and twists and yaps, excited by the new arrival.

Heavy-Set Man

Quiet, Engels!

Again, this does nothing to quiet the dog. Baird looks from man to man. One man gestures him in.

Man
Please! Enter! All are welcome!

Baird cautiously enters. One man vacates a seat for him.

Second Man
Please!

Baird cautiously sits. His scabbard catches on the seat edge, prompting chuckles from some of the men.

One Man
Those things are a nuisance!

A nearby man leans over to help him adjust it. Baird sits back.

Baird
Thank you. Uh. . .

The men look to him, waiting for him to bring out his thought. The sad-eyed man, John Howard Hermann, who seems to be something of a leader, helps:

Hermann
Wondering where you are?

Baird
Yeah.

Second Man
Malibu.

Third Man
Trancas, actually.

Hermann
We'll have sandwiches in a minute. Tea?

The dog has subsided somewhat and now comes over to sniff at Baird's sword.

Baird
. . . Tea. Well. Okay. Okay. And. . . and. . .

Hermann
And what's going on?

Baird

Yeah.

Fourth Man

Well, we've just read the minutes and Tom was about to bring up new business.

Baird

So. . . I missed the minutes.

First Man

I wouldn't worry about it.

Second Man

They're usually pretty boring.

Baird

Uh-huh. And—what kind of meeting—exactly—

Hermann

Well it's not a "meeting," so much as a, a—what should we say?

Second Man

It's a—more of a, a study group.

Baird

And you're studying. . . ?

British Man

Oh, all sorts of jolly stuff.

Fifth Man

History.

Fourth Man

Economics.

First Man

Same thing, isn't it—history, economics?

Hermann

Don't you agree?

All are looking at Baird.

Baird
Well. . . I'm. . . I'm not really a student of history.

PLATTER OF FINGER SANDWICHES

Someone reaches in to take a sandwich off the offered platter.

Wider: Baird sits back with the finger sandwich. It is minutes later, and the respectful quiet has now given way to the relaxed clatter of people eating, laughing, having side-conversations.

Baird
Thank you. So man is. . . split?

Hermann
Well, man's functions are split. There's the little guy, the regular Joe, who works for a living. He's the body, uh. . body politic. Then there's the brain—the boss, the owner—

Man
The boss is not the brain! No, no! The boss is parasite!

Hermann
Well it's true that the boss doesn't work, but he has a function in the system—

Baird looks from man to man, as at a tennis match.

He controls the means of—

Man
—production, sure, but that's not a function, that's, that's—

Another Man
Parasitism! On the body! On the body politic! Of the regular Joe! It's—

A throat clearing.

Everyone instantly quiets. All look to the old man in tweeds who is just lowering his pipe. Having claimed the floor he now speaks with non-argumentative authority.

Professor Marcuse
Man is unitary—a simple economic agent. Man's institutions

are split, expressing contradictions that must be worked through. And they are worked through in a causative, predictable way: history is science. This is the essence of the dialectic.

Click! A sallow thin young man with heavy beard shadow has just snapped a picture of Baird and now lowers the camera. He smiles at Baird, turns and faces someone else in the room, and—Click!—takes a picture.

Hermann

See, if you understand economics, you can actually write down what will happen in the future, with as much confidence as you write down the history of the past. Because it's science. It's not make believe. Like Professor Marcuse says. There's no mystery.

Another Man

We don't believe in Santa Claus!

Hearty guffaws.

Click! The young man with the camera is edging around the group, trying to be unobtrusive, continuing to take pictures.

Hermann

Another finger sandwich? More tea?

Baird

But if I—sure, thank you—if I follow this, correctly, you—*(eye caught by man with camera)* Who's he?

Man

Mr. Smitrovich takes pictures for our newsletter.

The sallow young picture-snapper smiles at Baird.

Professor Marcuse

Our understanding of the true workings of history, give us access to the levers of power. Your studio, for instance, is a pure instrument of capitalism. As such it expresses the contradictions of capitalism, and can be enlisted to finance its own destruction.

Hermann

Which is exciting! It can be made to help the little guy, the regular Joe—

Man

The body politic!

Hermann

Shutup!—help the little guy, even though it's purpose is to exploit the little guy.

Baird

Okay, so you guys are for the little guy.

Hermann

Well—for the little guy, against—it doesn't matter, history will be what it will be, and we already know what it will be, but—yes, we're for the little guy, aren't you?

Baird

Are you joking? Me, for the little guy? Of course I'm for the little guy! Is this guy a comedian?

Man

And you would act. To help the little guy.

Baird

Act?

Another Man

Praxis.

Baird

What?

The Other Man

Act.

Baird

Yeah yeah, act yeah, but—sorry fellas, this is good stuff, but—I oughta get back to work, they must be goin nuts—can we cut it off and pick it up right here at the next study session?

The clatter subsides to quiet. Cautious looks are exchanged among the men.

Hermann, gazing at Baird and nodding, thinking, finally frames his opening:

Hermann

Okay, well, see: I'm afraid it's not that simple.

As we cut to a wide shot the same voice that narrated the sandal epic "Hail, Cæsar!" at the beginning of our movie returns—distinguished, British-accented, authoritative yet plummily comforting:

Voice-Over
And so Baird Whitlock found himself in the hands of Communists. . .

Hermann starts to silently explain to Baird. The scene of cozy bonhomie is framed by the elemental vastness of the ocean outside.

Meanwhile, far from the crashing surf of Malibu, Eddie Mannix is torn from his lunch with the Grumman man. . . .

CAPITOL LOT

A montage of Eddie, a tiny, solitary figure, striding through the canyons between enormous sand-colored soundstages.

The voice-over continues:

. . . to hurry back to the vastness of Capitol Pictures, whose tireless machinery clanks on, producing this week's ration of dreams for all the weary peoples of the world.

Closer on Eddie as he enters a little door at the corner of one soundstage. The light above the door is flashing red.

INSIDE

We have cut into high-ceilinged darkness and quiet.

A man posted at the door hisses at Eddie, entering:

Man
Hey numbskull, didn't you see the "rolling" li—Oh, I'm sorry Mr. Mannix. Can I help you find someone?

We have been hearing the distant, echoing voices of two actors, a hoarse-voiced man and a silken-voiced woman.

Their voices bump up full as we cut to the periphery of the scene being shot, around a great flickering brasier.

An actor in centurion's wardrobe identical to Baird's has one hand half-covering his face as the other arm stretches out as if to repel the gaze of a revealingly clad slave girl.

Ursulina
Autolochus! Why do you present yourself in my chambers in such humble fashion?

Chunk Mulligan
Do not look upon me, Ursulina. The fires of the brasier of Sestimus latterly burned my face, though the unguents of Arkimideus promise shortly to undo the damage.

In the foreground, Eddie leans in to Walt Dubrow, watching the scene, and whispers:

Eddie
Walt.

Dubrow
Oh! Eddie. Here.

He fishes a twice-folded paper from his pocket.

Eddie holds it up so that he may read it by the flickering gag-light that simulates brasier flames. Typewritten:

We have Baird Whitlock. If your movie studio wants him back, gather $100,000 and await the end of history. You will be called by The Committee.

Ursulina
. . . You know that my love is for you not for your station, and neither does it care for the transitory blemishes that now mark your visage. . .

Eddie gives a low whistle at the contents of the note.

Chunk Mulligan
And my ardor for you is yet as warm as the embersh of thish bra—goddamnit—this brazher. I'm sorry, goddamnit.

Voice
Cut!

OUTSIDE

Eddie and Walt emerge from the soundstage onto an exterior set with thick temple columns.

Dubrow
Somebody slipped it under my door some time after we broke this morning.

Eddie
Mention it to anyone?

Dubrow
Nope.

Eddie gazes, unseeing, down the row of columns as two workman tip the farthest one, striking it.

Eddie
Okay, let's keep it that way. *(realizes where he is)* We shot this out?

Dubrow
Chasing the money-lenders from the temple? Yeah, last Friday.

Eddie nods, thinking.

Eddie
. . . What do you think they mean, "the end of history"?

Walt answers with a beats-me shrug and headshake. Eddie gazes back down at the note and moseys off—but turns back with a bright finger-cock at Walt:

. . . Chunk sounded good in there!

EDDIE MANNIX OUTER OFFICE

Eddie bangs through a door that says:

Edward Mannix
Head of Physical Production

As he strides in:

Eddie
Natalie, could you please get me Stu Schwartz, Accounting?

INNER OFFICE

Eddie strides in as the phone on his desk buzzes:

Natalie's Voice
Stu Schwartz on two.

Eddie
Stu, how are you. I need some petty cash. . . Hundred thousand. I'm sorry, did I say "petty"?. . .

With the handset shoulder-clamped to his ear he stoops and pulls an attaché case from the legwell of his desk and places it on the desktop and pops the clasps and starts emptying it.

. . . Yeah, well it's a long story and I'll tell it to ya sometime. You have that much in the office?. . . How much space'll that take up?. . . Okay, this might do it. I'll be over in a minute. . . Yeah, I'll sign for it.

As soon as he disconnects the intercom buzzes and Natalie's voice comes through:

Natalie
Thora Thacker just came in, wonders if you have a moment.

Eddie winces.

Eddie
Thora Thacker. Tell her I'm stuck on a call. I'll leave through the patio.

THE LOT

Eddie is marching past the executive offices of the lot with his emptied attaché case when a tall red-haired woman arcs in to march alongside him. He winces.

Woman
Call didn't take so long, then.

Eddie
Yes—no—cut off, try later. What can I do for you, Thora?

Thora Thacker
I only wanted to talk to you as a courtesy before I run my story on Baird Whitlock.

Eddie
Yeah? What story?

Thora Thacker
The story. I have a credible source and I'm going to run it, and I think you know what story I mean

Eddie
I have no idea—there's nothing going on with Baird—I would know, wouldn't I?

Thora Thacker
Don't play dumb, Eddie, I'm talking about. . . *(dramatic pause, dramatic delivery)* "On Wings as Eagles."

This stops Eddie in his tracks. He stares at Thora, wide-eyed and shaken.

Finally:

Eddie
What?!

She gives him a knowing look and a confirming nod.

Thora Thacker
Running it tomorrow.

Eddie
First of all—first of all—first of all—there's nothing to that story. I've heard it, it's been around forever, and it's never been confirmed. And secondly—you can't print that! Even if you could print it you couldn't print it.

Thora Thacker
I am printing it. This is 1951!

Eddie
Thora, it's beneath you.

Thora Thacker
The facts are never beneath me.

Eddie
People don't want the facts, they want to believe. That's our great industry—mine, and yours too. They want to believe that Baird Whitlock is a great star, and a good man.

Thora Thacker
You're admitting he isn't.

Eddie
No. I'm saying he is, though it's beside the point. There's nothing to it, nothing to the gossip.

Thora Thacker
I AM NOT A GOSSIP COLUMNIST!

Eddie
No no, of course not—

Thora Thacker
Don't confuse me with my sister!

Eddi
Hardly. But look—do you have to run it tomorrow?

Thora Thacker
It's my entire column. I'm happy to talk to Baird for comment, but it'll have to be this afternoon.

Eddie
Baird is unavailable right now. Wait one day.

A chirping hoot from Thora.

Eddie grimaces and lowers his voice confidentially:

Thora, wait one day and I'll give you a true story for your column tomorrow. A little something—about Hobie Doyle.

Thora Thacker
My readers don't care about Hobie Doyle. He wears chaps.

Eddie
Do they care about Carlotta Valdez? They're sweet on each other. You should see the two of 'em together, peas in a pod.

Thora Thacker
Trade the story of my career for a puff piece on Hobie Doyle? I don't think so.

Eddie
You're not trading anything, you're waiting one day on a story that's years old. Give me a day I can let you talk to Baird and show you your story's the bunk—and if I'm wrong no skin off your nose, you run the column. In the meantime you have an exclusive—no one else knows about Hobie and Carlotta.

Thora eyes him suspiciously.

Thora Thacker
No one?

Eddie
You're it.

Eddie treats the deal as done in hopes that that will help make it so. He smiles at her.

Eddi
. . . What kind of name is Thora, anyway?

Thora Thacker
It's a name that nineteen million readers trust. Don't play games with them, Eddie.

Eddie
Not at all. Not at all.

DESK

Attaché case on top of the desk, bank-wrapped bills stacked inside.

The case's top is swung down. The two halves of the case do not quite meet: too much volume inside.

Straining pressure.

Stu Schwartz arching an eye behind horn-rimmed glasses.

Stu
Is that big enough?

Eddie still straining downward as he presses in the two clasps, til—*Snap! Snap!*—they shut.

THE LOT

Eddie Mannix walks through the campus opposite-ways from last time, the attaché case—packed to bulging—clamped under one arm.

A woman arcs in to walk and talk with him—a tall, red-haired woman, Thora Thacker it seems, except that her dress is different. Eddie, as when ambushed earlier, fights to conceal surprise and dismay.

Woman
Hello Eddie, I'd like to talk to you as a courtesy before I run tomorrow's story.

Eddie
Hello, Thessaly, I just saw—never mind, how're you doing? What's the story?

Thessaly Thacker
It's about Baird Whitlock.

Eddie
There is absolutely no truth to that story, believe me! And there never has been!

Thessaly Thacker
(puzzled)
Never?

Eddie
<u>Never</u>!

Thessaly Thacker
I'm talking about today.

Eddie
<u>And</u> <u>there's</u>—*(abrupt shift from heated to cagey)* What?

Thessaly Thacker
A little bird told me he disappeared from the set today.

Eddie
Oh! That. No no. Yes, he did have to take a break. Minor injury, high ankle sprain.

Thessaly Thacker
What did you think I meant?

Eddie
No, nothing. I saw your sister earlier, she was trying to dredge up an old story about Baird.

Thessaly Thacker
I'm sure she was. That cow. She couldn't find a new story if it were taped to her posterior.

Eddie
Well, she's—

Thessaly Thacker
High ankle sprain? That's the best you could come up with? We all know about the drinking jags and the womanizing and the trips to San Bernardino.

Eddie
Baird is a good family man. He has a high ankle sprain.

Young Man's Voice
Mr. Mannix!

A freckled youth of about eighteen in a cardigan sweater is riding a bicycle down the walkway toward Eddie. A high antenna off its back fender holds a Capitol Pictures pennant that snaps and flutters as he furiously pedals. He skids to a halt.

Eddie
What's up, Peanut?

Peanut
Natalie told me to find you PDQ: the committee is on the phone for you.

Eddie
Which com—good lord! Thessaly, I have to run.

Thessaly Thacker
If you do know where Baird is—let me talk to him.

Eddie Mannix is already hastening off.

Eddie
Sure—well, I'll—find out where he is, right away, Thessaly, I'm sure he'll—

He turns with a thought:

. . . Say, what kind of name is Thessaly, anyway?

Calling after him:

Thessaly Thacker
It's a name that twenty million readers trust. Don't play games with them, Eddie.

Eddie
No no.

He jogs off with the bulging attaché case clamped to his side, led by Peanut on his bicycle with its fluttering pennant.

EDDIE'S OUTER OFFICE

Eddie strides through the outer office.

Natalie
On two! And Hobie Doyle is in there.

Eddie
Right.

INNER OFFICE

Hobie, in dinner jacket, rises from the chair facing the desk.

Hobie
Lo, Mr. Mannix.

As he rushes around the desk to the phone and puts down attaché case:

Eddie
Thanks for coming, Hobie, one second. Mannix here, who—

Damn!

He looks at the handset he has picked up, shakes his head, cradles it. He hits a button on the phone.

. . . Hung up, Natalie. Tell me the second they call back.

Natalie

Yes sir.

Eddie looks darkly down at the attaché case.

Hobie

'Ts goin on there, Mr. Mannix, you look like you got an angry steer by the oysters'n're bein towed across the corral.

Eddie

Nah, it's—nothing. How's the first day on the picture? Getting comfortable?

Eddie is still looking down at the bulging attaché case.

He pushes experimentally down on the middle of its bulge. He pops the clasps. He redistributes the currency inside—blocked from Hobie's view by the case itself—as Hobie talks.

Hobie

Oh, I guess it's goin purt good, that Mr. Lau—er, Laurentz, he's an awful good man he's helpin me get through it, I give him all the credit in the world, me the new hand in the bunkhouse, they got me talkin a lot which takes a little gettin use to, talkin with the camera lookin at me but heck I enjoy.

Eddie

Good, that's fine.

Hobie

Usually on a picture I just say "Whitey!" or "Whoa, there," but this-here it's talkin an't's people listenin, threw me little at first but I think I got my leg up onner now.

Eddie has closed the case again and does the clasps. He assesses its shape as he talks to Hobie:

Eddie
Well that's fine. Laurence came in this morning to tell me how well you're doing, he's very impressed. You just continue to do whatever he says. He knows how to make a quality picture.

Hobie
Oh that is true, he will not quit on a take until it has quality—

The phone buzzes.

Eddie
Hang on, Hobie.

He punches the intercom button, one hand still holding the case closed.

That them?

Natalie
Sorry sir—no, do you want Mrs. Mannix on one?

He picks up.

Eddie
Hi hon. . . Oh, you know—busy. . . Uh-huh. . . Uh-huh. . . But I thought he asked to play infield. . . I see. . . Well maybe we should make him honor that commitment. . .

He has reopened the case and is rearranging the money again.

. . . Well that's true— Of course, you're right. Okay, okay, I'll call the coach. . . Sure. Love you too.

Hanging up.

Hobie
Mr. Mannix, should I run out'n get you a bigger grip? That'n looks a little snug.

Eddie looks up at Hobie and focuses on him for the first time. He leaves the case on the desk and sits down in his chair opposite Hobie, still appraising him.

Hobie returns the look, not sure what it means.

Finally:

Eddie
Hobie: there's a hundred thousand dollars in that attaché case. Ransom money. Baird Whitlock has been kidnapped.

Hobie stares, shocked. Eddie Mannix nods a grim confirmation.

Finally:

Hobie
Well, this is bad.

Eddie
Mmhm.

Hobie
Bad for movie stars ever'where. . .

Hobie shakes his head slowly in disbelief.

And you got no idea who's mixed up in this thang?

Eddie's mouth is a moue as he gives a wagging headshake.

Hobie nods.

. . . I would look at the extries.

Eddie
The extras. Why?

Hobie
Well you just never know about an extrie. They come'n go. Ever one else, I'm on the set, I look at the guy settin the 5K I think, "Why there's old Bud, settin the 5K." Script girl, wrangler, same thang. Extries, that's diffurnt. Not makin a blanket call here—there's good extries'n bad extries. All I'm sayin: you look at an extrie, you got no idea what he's thankin.

Eddie stares at Hobie, processing this.

The silence is broken by the buzz of his phone. Natalie's voice comes through the unit:

Natalie
He's back—line one.

Eddie
Hello!. . . Yes, I have it. . . Stage 8?. . . Right. Just leave it there? And when do I get Baird?. . . I'll do it right now.

He hangs up, looks at the case, looks at Hobie.

. . . Can I use your belt?

CLOSE SHOT: BURT GURNEY

The boyish dancing star grins into the camera, wearing sailor's suit and cap. He launches into "Swabbies!"—a song-and-dance number aboard a battleship—accompanied by a chorus of sailors.

The song plays, the dance develops. In the middle of it we cut away to:

CORNER OF THE SOUND STAGE

Here the blaring playback is less loud, more echoed. House lights are off: Eddie Mannix is dimly lit only by spill from the battleship set.

He gives cautious looks around as he hoists the attaché case, now secured around the middle by a shiny thin black belt.

Another careful look, and then he gingerly stows the attaché case behind an electrical box bearing the warning DANGER! HIGH VOLTAGE.

BACK TO THE SET

The song blares loud again and the dance continues.

It finishes with Burt Gurney returning to his first position to grin into the camera.

The grin holds. . .

Voice
. . . And. . . cut! We go again!

We cut behind the director seated on a canvas chair, onto the back of which his name is stitched: "Ärne Seslum." He is lowering his megaphone.

Burt Gurney walks up, boyishly cheerful.

Burt
Anything different, Mr. Seslum?

Ärne
Yah, no, mostly pretty good. We try for a little more distance on knee-slide at the end, up to swab-bucket?

Burt
Yeah, sure. Should I be trying to actually reach the bucket?

Ärne
Yah, then maybe you can point down at it, "Here is bucket!" and give cutesie smile.

Burt
Sure, okay. I'm happy to see the bucket?

Ärne
Yah sure, is your special bucket!

Assistant Director
All right kids, back to one!

Eddie Mannix is walking up, with a distracted glance back to the corner of the stage.

Eddie
'Lo Burt, Ärne.

Heading back to the set:

Burt
Hello, Mr. Mannix.

Eddie makes himself focus on the director.

Eddie
Ärne, I don't want to stick my nose in other people's business, but, uh, I understand you've been, uh, associating with DeeAnna Moran?

Ärne
Yah yah we associated.

Eddie
Yes, and she's—

Arne
But no more. No more. Don't you worry, Eddie Mannix.

Eddie
But Arne, you are aware that she's, uh—

Arne
This must not be in movie magazines, that we associated.

Eddie
No, of course not—

Ärne
My wife cannot read this.

Eddie
Your—excuse me?

Ärne
My wife. Let no one say Ärne Seslum is not family man.

Eddi
No. Yes. I see.

Ärne fishes out a wallet.

Ärne
Ilsa Pflug.

Eddie
Excuse me?

Ärne shows him a picture of himself and a plump woman with braids.

Ärne
Ilsa Pflug-Seslum. In Malmo.

Eddie
I was not aware of that.

Ärne
Yah, yah, two children.

Ärne flips past a picture of himself skiing to a picture of the family posed together in cable sweaters. Eddie looks at it thoughtfully.

Eddie
Well—a third on the way, apparently.

Ärne
DeeAnna associates with many. Do you have physical culture, Eddie Mannix? Do you ski?

Eddie
No, I, uh, never took it up. Seems like a lot of fun.

Ärne
. . . Yah, fresh air. *(thumps himself on chest)* DeeAnna will have baby? Good for her. You will figure it out, Eddie Mannix. Good man. I hug you.

He hugs him.

He releases him.

. . . No magazines!

Something on the set, past Eddie's shoulder, draws his look.

NO, no, no, don't swing your arms like hairy ape—

He walks out onto the stage to join Burt Gurney.

—This is not fat stupid people, this is Ärne Seslum picture!

BEACH HOUSE

We are in the main room looking at the mouth of the hallway as male laughter bursts in at the cut.

The men are emerging from the hall, Hermann and Baird in the lead, Baird with an arm draped companionably over Hermann's shoulder.

Baird
So I feel someone poking me and I wake up and it's Clark and he says—"Well, her keys weren't in there so I guess we're walkin'!" *(roar of laughter from the communists)* This was back before Gable was Gable.

Hermann
Oh!—thank you, Mrs. Heinz.

He hurries over to the cleaning woman who is now at the door, sourly buttoning her coat. He peels off some bills.

. . . Thank you, you're too good to us.

The woman takes the money, which does nothing to lessen her pruniness, and leaves.

The men are making themselves comfortable in the living room with its huge view of the crashing surf. It is now very late day; a big red sun hangs in view beyond the jagged rocks at the mouth of the cove.

Baird
We used to go to San Berdoo every weekend, Bob Stack would come sometimes, the Blue Grotto was still open—Sid Chasen was a busboy. *(taking in the dramatic view, the dramatic room)* Quite a place! Yours?

Hermann
Oh, gracious no. It belongs to a member of our study group. He couldn't be here this afternoon—he'll be sad to have missed you. He's a fan.

Baird
Uh-huh. . . *(seating himself, crossing his legs)* So I black out, wake up here and I'm thinking, Baird, you have got to stop doing this, but you're saying, actually, technically I've been. . . kidnapped.

More companionable laughter from the men. Hermann, also, smiles.

Hermann
Well, technically, yes.

Baird
And there's gonna be a ransom.

Another Man
I'd hardly call it "ransom."

Hermann indicates the speaker.

Hermann
Benedict there—that's Benedict de Bonaventure—wrote "The House of Ahasuaris."

A low whistle from Baird. Hermann nods.

. . . Yes. Enormous hit. Made the studio millions of dollars. Did you see any of those millions of dollars, Ben?

Benedict
I did not.

Hermann
Dutch over there—Dutch Zweistrong—wrote "All The Way To Uruguay"—

Dutch
(testily)
I wrote all the "All The Way" pictures.

Hermann
All successful. Especially "Uruguay." You see any of the profits, Dutch?

Dutch gives a short barking laugh. Hermann turns back to Baird.

. . . All of us here are writers. The pictures originated with us, they're our ideas, but they're owned by the studio. I'm not saying only writers are being exploited—I mean, look at yourself, Baird.

Baird
Oh, you know—the studio takes care of me.

Voice from back of room
What're you, a child?

Hermann
I think what Herschel's trying to say is—just because the studio owns the means of production, why should it be able to take the money—our money, the value created by our labor—and dole out what it pleases? That's not right. So—no. No, I wouldn't call it "ransom."

Dutch

Payback.

Voice from back of room

Partial payback.

Hermann

Now, until quite recently our study group had a narrow focus. We concentrated on getting communist content into motion pictures. Always in a sub rosa way, of course.

Baird

A what?

Hermann

And we've been pretty darn successful. You remember, in "Kerner's Corner"—the Town Hall scene, where the aldermen overturn the rotten election and make Gus the mayor?

Baird

(getting it; nodding)

Oh! Yeah. Uh-huh.

Hermann

I like to think we've changed a few minds. But then—well, Dr. Marcuse came down from Stanford, joined the study group. And started teaching us about direct action. Praxis. Action.

Faintly gesturing with his pipe:

Dr. Marcuse

We each pursue our own economic interest—we ourselves are not above the laws of history. But in pursuing our interest with vigor, we accelerate the dialectic, and hasten the end of history and the creation of the New Man.

Voice

Plus, we make a little dough.

Hermann

Shutup!

Baird

I see. Good. Good stuff. So. . . so—do I get a share of the ransom?

Chuckles around the room. Hermann permits himself a small smile.

Hermann
Well—no, Mr. Whitlock. You could hardly share in your own ransom. That would be unethical.

Baird
Well I don't know if that's fair, fellas! The whole set-up only works if I play along, right, if I don't let on I know who kidnapped me?

Hermann
Yes. That's right.

Baird
So what if I don't play along? I mean, I like you fellas, but what if I named names? Just told the truth?

The smiling faces around him harden.

Hermann, though, remains placid:

Hermann
. . . I don't think you'll do that, Mr. Whitlock.

Baird
Why not?

Hermann
Why start telling the truth? People shouldn't have to think about that. What if we told the truth about—"On Wings as Eagles"?

Baird instantly sobers.

He looks up at the men around him, their faces set.

He looks at Hermann, the one person still smiling.

SID SIEGELSTEIN'S OFFICE

Eddie Mannix arrives to lean against his doorjamb. The legal bullpen of rows of desks is at his back.

Eddie
Sid, we have to work something out for DeeAnna Moran.

Sid looks up from his paperwork.

Sid
She get married again?

Eddie
No, that's the problem. Having a child, not married.

A whistle from Sid.

Sid
Tough.

Eddie
Yeah. No father. Well, of course there is one, somewhere. . .

He waves airily. Sid nods.

Sid
But who knows. . .

Eddie
Exactly. So is there any way she—I'm just spitballing here—
any way she could adopt her own child?

Sid gazes at Eddie. His look drifts off.

Sid
Interesting. . . Not married. . .

Eddie
She disappears for a while, reappears—

Sid
Uh-huh.

Eddie
And she wants to share her blessings—adopt a child—

Sid
Sure, she's always yearned to be a mother. . .

Eddie

That's it.

Sid

Well I don't see why not. Nothing in California statute that prohibits adoption by one's own parent.

Eddie

Uh-huh.

Sid

This is new ground here. Technically, she'd have to give up the baby, in order to adopt it.

Eddie

Joe Silverman.

Natalie, with clipboard, is approaching from the background.

Sid

Joe Silverman, exactly. He's the foster father, for a few days. . . Is there even a time requirement? She hands the kid to Joe, he hands it back. . . I'll do some research. *(taps his desktop)* This is exciting.

Natalie

Mr. Mannix, it's five-thirty.

STUDIO LOT

It is very late day.

Eddie Mannix strides through the campus with Natalie trailing.

Natalie

—and asked all the assistant directors. One of them said that an extra in the courtyard-of-Sestimus-Amydias scene seemed jumpy.

Eddie

All right, get Walt the name of the the extra so he can bring him in and sweat him. Walt should tell him we won't press charges if he tells us where Baird's been taken.

Natalie
Check.

Eddie
If he plays dumb—or if the A.D.'s wrong and he is dumb—
have Walt find me.

Natalie
Check. Thessaly Thacker called, said you promised her an
interview with Baird today. Check that, it was Thora Thacker.

Eddie
No, it was Thessaly. Tell her he was at the doctor longer than
expected, she can see him on the set bright and early tomorrow.

Natalie
Check. And is that last part true?

Eddie
Let's hope so. That reminds me: I need a list of everyone who
worked on "On Wings as Eagles" who's still at the studio.

Natalie
"On Wings as Eagles"—that's a while ago, now. Aside from
Baird and the director it won't be a long list.

Eddie
Yeah—get it for me. That it?

Natalie
No, one more thing: a Mr. Cuddahy called, said you know him.

Eddie
Yeah yeah.

They are mounting a short set of steps leading to a long walkway with many doors spaced at regular intervals.

Natalie
Said it's urgent he see you one last time. Suggested same place,
seven this evening.

Eddie
What?! Why? Never mind. *(checks watch)* Okay.

He bangs through a door:

C. C. CALHOUN
EDITING

INSIDE

A heavy-set middle-aged woman is at work at a clattering upright moviola. She smokes; the room is full of layers of stale smoke.

Eddie
Hello CeeCee.

The woman spins around in her castored chair and the chair creaks as she tips her body back so as to aim her face at Eddie. She wears extremely thick glasses that make her eyes float hugely before her face.

The eyes blink.

Her voice is emphysemic:

CeeCee
Hello Eddie.

Eddie
Wanna lace up what you have on "Merrily We Dance"?

CeeCee
Just working on it now. Have a look.

She spins her chair back to the moviola and plays it briefly in reverse, music smearing backwards. By the time Eddie comes in and half-squats, hands on thighs, to look at the viewing box, the film has rolled back into the academy leader.

CeeCee
I threw on some temp music.

She has applied the hand brake and now releases it to let the movie play forward.

Glow from moviola screen underlights Eddie's face. A fanfare comes up.

On the screen, a card:

Laurence Laurentz

presents

Grease marks form a V on the print that indicates a fade down.

As waltz music comes up, an inverted V grease mark indicates a fade in on a shot of the dancing feet of many people, gowns swirling, tuxedoed legs debonairely stepping.

Supered on the shot:

Merrily We Dance!

Another fade-down mark.

A swell penthouse balcony with a view of a glittering New York skyline. A woman is gazing out, drink in hand.

Waltz music fans up and she turns to the man coming through the terrace door.

Woman
Not dancing?

The man embraces her.

Man
There'll be time enough to dance.

He kisses her. She returns the kiss, but then pushes away.

Allegra
We mustn't.

Man
Mustn't we?

Allegra
Monty is coming up from Philadelphia.

Man
There'll be time enough for Monty.

He grabs her again as if to kiss.

As Allegra draws back, her motion slows, and she very slowly opens her mouth, and we hear the beginnings of a basso "Nnnooo. . ." before she falls quiet and the ratcheting noise of the machine too falls quiet and we are looking at a frozen frame that slowly discolors at the center.

The discoloration starts to spread outward as the frame burns.

Eddie looks quizzically at the stalled picture.

A rasping voice:

Ceecee

Huh-reversh.

Eddie looks and reacts with a modest but definite take at:

CeeCee bent double in her chair, the side of her face pressed snugly to the moviola near the gearing for the sound roll. The side of her face is squushed quite flat against the machine and something cinches the folds of fat at her neck.

CeeCee

Hit. . . reversh.

Eddie looks helplessly about.

CeeCee

Silver switch. . . your right.

Eddie locates the switch and flips it.

The soundtrack immediately starts back up, in reverse.

The picture plays in reverse.

CeeCee has increasing play, such that she may now draw her head slowly away from the machine. The sound relays are feeding out the scarf around her neck.

When her scarf is completely free she hits the handbrake, stopping the machine.

CeeCee

Shouldn't wear scarves.

She flips the switch from reverse to forward, and the film plays forward again.

Man

There'll be time enough for Monty.

The burned-up frame goes flickering by at the beginning of Allegra's line:

Allegra
No! Think of Monty.

Man
(suavely)
Monty? Must we?

Over their renewed kiss a long pair of grease marks makes an X, indicating a dissove, to:

A parlor—the one we saw on the soundstage.

Hobie enters, looking very dashing in his tux.

Dierdre
Monty, come join me on the divan.

He does so, sitting into a brooding close shot.

Dierdre
Allegra's been delayed it seems; only four of us for dinner. But it makes things simpler for bridge, after all—why the pout?

A hold on Hobie as he frames a haunted answer.

Finally:

Hobie
It's. . . complicated.

IMPERIAL GARDENS

A gong stings the cut to pushing in to Arthur Fung as he gives a short bow.

Arthur Fung
How pleasant to see you again, Mr. Manni—

SPLASH!

Pushing through the curtain of beads to see Mr. Cuddahy, looking up from his booth, a drink with an umbrella in front of him.

Cuddahy
Thanks for coming back, Mannix.

Eddie
Sure.

Cuddahy
(chuckling)
You're taking us down to the wire, aren't ya?

Eddie
It's not a ploy—just a big decision—

Cuddahy
Absolutely! No foul. But the board was concerned when I couldn't give 'em a yes this afternoon, and they've authorized me to say this. You sign on, your term of contract is ten years.

Eddie gives a low whistle. Cuddahy nods.

. . . Yeah. You get it, right? That means your stock options are guaranteed to vest. You'd never have to work again, if you chose to retire. Think about it: lifetime employment. You wouldn't be a working stiff like you are now. Maybe you got a nicer house than the other schmoes who work at the studio—but ya still have the same uncertainty, same worries. This is something else again. Drink? *(notices Eddie's look)* Cigarette?

Eddie has been eying the pack which Cuddahy now proffers. Eddie hesitates, shakes his head.

Eddie
No, no I—I have to run, I, I should talk this over with my wife—

Cuddahy
Course you should. Talk it over, think about your family, let us know in the morning. Oh! *(grinning, produces two packages)* Now, if you think this is a bribe, you're absolutely right. Two kids, right, boy and a girl? They love this stuff. Used to be trains.

A SPANISH-STYLE HOME

Glowing in the early evening.

Reverse on its drive. Hobie Doyle leans against a parked limo with his arms folded, waiting,

gazing at the mansion. A long, still beat, and then he abruptly Sflffs a bunch of sunflower shells out of his mouth.

He gazes idly around.

He has a thought.

He opens the back door of the limo and takes out a length of rope.

He starts twirling, creating a nice big loop. He expertly tips his wrist to make the loop spin level with the ground at a height of half a foot.

Keeping it spinning, he hops in and out of the loop.

Voice

Hello Hobie.

Startled, he muffs a hop-out and the rope dies against his shins.

Hobie

Oh hello Carlotta.

Carlotta

Am I late?

He coils the rope so as to stow it and the limo driver circles to the back door and holds it open.

Hobie

Aw no it ain't nothin. Thanks an awful bunch for goin to this picture with me, I don't know if you like livestock but I think it's got moments I really do. You look var purty.

Carlotta

Well thank you, Hobie. I'm sure I'll like the picture—I like all of your pictures.

Hobie

Well I like yours too, they are just the craziest things. . .

His voice fades away as she and he sit into the limo.

. . . Is it hard to dance with all them bananas on your head?

BEDROOM

We hear a door opening and hallway light fans onto an adorable little girl asleep in bed.

Eddie has entered to look down at her and now stoops to adjust the doll she holds so that it is not squushed against her face. He rises to gaze down for another beat, then moves.

The opposite bed: an adorable little boy. Eddie eases the askew coonskin cap off of the boy, stands looking down.

Top of the boy's wardrobe. Baseball pennants are on the wall behind it. Eddie's hands enter to place a soaring airplane on a peg on a pedestal.

Top of the girl's wardrobe. Dolls are seated on it leaning against the wall. Eddie's hands enter to place a folded maroon uniform, and, on top of the uniform, a maroon cap with "Stewardess" stitched in gold.

KITCHEN

Eddie is at a plateful of dinner. His wife bustles about as he eats.

Mrs. Mannix
Little Eddie wanted me to tell you about his baseball game. They won.

Eddie
That's terrific.—Gosh, I never called the coach! Eddie played at shortstop?

Mrs. Mannix
Mm, and he did so well he wants to stay there now.

Eddie
Great, it took care of itself.

Mrs. Mannix
And Darlene did very well on her Spanish test.

Eddie
That's good, she was worried about that. Thanks for heating up the roast.

Mrs. Mannix
Warm glass of milk?

Eddie
No, thanks hon—coffee. Gotta run back to the studio, a few things to take care of.

Mrs. Mannix
Gee, another late night.

Eddie is ruminative:

Eddie
Mm. You know. . . Grumman improved their offer. Darned good money. And the hours wouldn't be crazy like this, either.

Mrs. Mannix
It's nice to be wanted.

Eddie
Yeah, sure, but—what do you think? They wanna know tomorrow.

Mrs. Mannix
I like the shorter hours. But what do you think, honey? You know best.

Nodding, chewing, thinking:

Eddie
Uh-huh. . . uh-huh. . .

Mrs. Mannix
. . . How's it going with the smoking, dear?

Eddie is startled out of his ruminations:

Eddie
Oh, you know. . .

EDDIE IN HIS PACKARD

Once again he is in his grey fedora. He drives, squinting against oncoming headlights.

The plummy-voiced narrator:

Voice-Over
The denizens of the great city make ready for nightlife—or for sleep. But Eddie Mannix will have neither. . .

BEACH HOUSE

Familiar shot from high on the bluff of the octahedral house, now glowing with internal light. The ocean is no more than glittering highlights caught from the moon.

Voice-Over
Even in westerly Malibu the sun has moved on, leaving the vast and tireless sea to heave itself blindly upon the shore.

INSIDE

We are in the living room which, it being night, offers no more view. Lights are on. Six of the writers sit playing at cards, smoking, seeking to make time pass.

A man circles the table dropping a pair of gloves next to each card-player—fingerless gloves with leather grips, as for golfing. The card-players little notice the deposit of gloves at each's place.

One man raps on the table to be hit by the dealer, and, though sound is somewhat pulled back to make room for the narrator, the knock pushes through. So does the fierce dog-yapping provoked by the knock.

Voice-Over
Baird Whitlock has become an acolyte of the communists, a convert to their cause, his belief compelled but not grudging—no more than was Saul's on the dusty road of long ago. . .

We cut to the heavy-set man, in an easy chair reading a newspaper. The glove-distributor is passing him, leaving a pair on the end table at his side.

The voice of the heavy-set man pushes through when he briefly lowers his paper to yell:

Heavy-Set Man
Quiet, Engels!

Voice-Over
He now seeks to learn more from the leader from the north. . .

Baird is sitting with Professor Marcuse, who is just finishing talking as their conversation mixes up. Baird nods vigorous agreement.

Baird
That's exactly what I was talking about—that's what happened when I went to Reno with Danny Kaye and he asked me to shave his back! Exact same thing! Because everyone thinks Danny is a jerk but he's not really a jerk, it's just the theory generating its own anti-theory. . .

Professor Marcuse's brow furrows as he tries to follow Baird's point.

. . . so there we are, me and Danny, and I'm wondering what the hell I'm doing with this razor and he says it's for a part in a Norman Taurog picture but Judy Canova is there and she knows Norman. . .

His voice mixes down.

Voice-Over
. . . and becomes ever more committed to the quest to hasten an end to history and bring on—the New Man.

GRAUMAN'S CHINESE

A lobby card for "Chaps in Chaparral," starring Hobart Doyle. When it is wiped by a foreground cross we cut wider:

The near-empty lobby. A distinguished gentleman and his wife are opening the theater door, the movie's soundtrack fanning up as they do so.

Voice-Over
In livelier precincts, the swells of Dreamland gather to inspect the completed weave of another piece of gossamer. . .

INSIDE

Hobie and Carlotta are watching the movie.

Voice-Over
. . . Another movie, another portion of balm for the ache of a toiling mankind.

Hobie leans over to Carlotta.

Hobie
Don't know bout this part, they only gimme one shot atter.

ONSCREEN

Hobie is just sitting down at a night campfire. Whitey grazes nearby. He picks up a guitar and sings, "Down Below El Paso Lies Juarez."

DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

Eddie Mannix pulls up in his Packard before an old L.A. office building. The street is deserted now, after hours, except for one car that stands out loudly on the dark street: a cream-colored luxury sedan. Its uniformed driver leans against the hood smoking.

INSIDE OFFICE BUILDING

A wooden stairway. On the risers are painted the names of the businesses on the second floor. Eddie Mannix trudges up the stairs in fedora and trenchcoat with collar turned up.

HALLWAY

A hallway lined by doors with transom windows. Lettering on the pebbled glass of each door identifies its tenant.

One office only shows light from inside:

JOSEPH SILVERMAN
SURETIES/BONDS/ESCROW

Eddie taps at the door.

It is swung open by Sid Sieglestein, the studio lawyer. An inner-office door, standing open, shows Joe Silverman sitting at his desk, mid-thirties and, like his office, low-rent but neat and utterly without character.

DeeAnna Moran sits across from him in a cream-colored dress that matches her car, and a hat and veil. She has a cigarette in one hand and with the other signs a document in multiple places as Joe, leaning across the desk, turns pages and points.

Sid
We just got started—I've been walking DeeAnna through this.

They are joining the two in the inner office, Sid talking to DeeAnna.

So Joseph has done—well just a whole lot of good work for us

in the past. Whenever we've needed a witness or a third party for, I don't know—a petition of grievance or alienation of affection.

DeeAnna is sneaking looks at Joe as she signs pages.

DeeAnna
And he's reliable?

The man shows no resentment of the question and indeed no affect at all:

Joe
I'm bonded, miss.

Sid
Joe is the most reliable human being on the planet, in our experience. When Chubby Cregar was intoxicated and hit a pedestrian on Gower, we had his vehicle title transferred to Joe's name and Joe did three months in the LA County lock-up.

DeeAnna
But you're off the sauce now?

Joe
I never touch it, miss. It was a legal fiction.

Eddie
That's exactly right. When the studio needs somebody who meets the legal standard of, uh—how did you put it, Sid?

Sid
Personhood.

Eddie
Yeah. Joe steps in and acts as the, uh. . . person.

DeeAnna
So you're a professional. . . person?

Joe
That's right, miss. And initial here, and here.

Sid
Joe will be the foster parent until such time as you adopt the child, which you can do as soon as Joe takes possession of it,

which he'll warrant he's done whenever you want him to.

DeeAnna
And he's reliable?

Joe
I'm bonded, miss.

Sid
The release papers you're signing are not public record. They'll remain sealed, as will Joe's custody affidavit, until 2015.

Joee takes the document and inserts its last page in an embosser and squeezes it.

DeeAnna
What happens then?

Sid
Well—they're—unsealed, if anyone cares at that point.

Eddie
Joe is also a notary public.

DeeAnna examines Joe who is tensed, squeezing with both hands.

DeeAnna
You must have strong forearms. Is it hard, squeezing like that?

Joe
It's part of the job.

STUDIO GATE

Scotty the guard leans out, tipping his cap, as the Packard pulls up.

Scotty
Late night, Mr. Mannix?

Eddie
Late night for both of us. Will you call Projection Seven and have'm lace up yesterday's dailies on "Hail, Cæsar!"

Scotty
Sure thing. Yesterday's.

Eddie
Yeah, didn't have time to see them last night.

SCREENING ROOM

Eddie Mannix sits slumped, hand cupped to forehead as light flickers onto him from the screen—the source of the pre-lapped dramatic underscoring. Natalie sits on his far side with her clipboard, waiting for Eddie's attention.

Onscreen: Baird Whitlock in his Roman tribune's wardrobe is on his knees, guzzling greedily from a water dipper being held for him by someone in a robe whose hip we are shooting past.

Baird releases the dipper, sated, and we widen out as he stands gasping a "thank you." We now hold the water-offerer's back full figure: he has perfectly arranged shoulder-length hair, slightly wavey.

Just as we realize who it might be, Baird—or rather Baird's character—is struck by him as well. He takes a staggering step back, in awe.

Close on Baird—his face displaying progressive waves of awe, puzzlement, hope, and ineffable wonder.

A flash frame and a slate for "Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Two."

Baird steps back into close shot again, now displaying waves of puzzlement, ineffable wonder, some awe, then back to ineffable wonder.

We hear an offscreen "Cut!" but before the flash frame Baird relaxes, his eyeline shifting as he calls out:

Baird
Wuddya think a that one, was that, uh, enough, awe, or. . .

Voice
Yeah, good, maybe a little more wonderment.

Baird
More, you mean more—

Flashframe.

"Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Three."

Baird steps back into frame in awe.

Baird
Hold it, sorry, wait a minute lemme do it again.

He steps forward then immediately steps back into frame in awe. A squinting bit of wonder.

Voice
Cut!

Baird
Was that, uh, I don't know. That one didn't really have a center.

Voice
Yeah, no, it was okay—

Flashframe.

"Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Four."

Baird steps back into frame his face oddly blank.

Baird
Hang on.

His eyes leave the eyeline. He looks down, arranges his features in an expression of unutterable awe, and then jerks his look back up to the eyeline, expression locked in place.

A long hold, expression steady: unutterable awe.

Finally, hissing out of his locked jaw as he maintains the look:

Baird
Howziss. Wuddya hink.

Voice
Yeah, okay, good, cut.

Back to Eddie, eyes on the screen throughout:

Eddie
Go ahead, I'm listening.

From Screen
Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Five.

Natalie
Walt talked to the extra, right guy, no info—doesn't know where they took Baird, but described the truck they put him in.

Baird From Screen
Was that, uh, was that—should I get to the wonderment faster?

Natalie
Walt found the truck and found the guy who borrowed it from the guy who owns it and is talking to him.

From Screen
Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Six.

Eddie nods, still looking at the screen.

Eddie
Walt's a problem-solver, he's a good man. What else?

Baird from Screen
Todd, you can—you just look like an imbecile mushed up against the camera, can you—Sam, Todd can step out I'll just take an eyeline at the corner of the matte box.

Natalie flips over a paper.

From Screen
Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Seven.

Natalie
PR just called in their report on Hobie Doyle premier: warm reception.

Baird from Screen
Was that—I'm sorry, did you see that, I felt like I had some spittle. Maybe Todd should step back in.

Eddie
Good. Okay. *(starts to rise, eyes still on the screen)* Not bad, have 'em use six. Is this six?

BROWN DERBY

We are on an orchestra playing "Every Now and Then."

Close on Carlotta who slams the tabletop laughing.

Close on Hobie, hunched forward very intent on what he is doing, his body jiggling.

Wider: he has a strand of spaghetti and is doing rope tricks with it.

Hobie
Watchis now. . . Gittin away. . .

He ropes a salt cellar.

. . . Oh looka there now. . .

His other hand, on the tablecloth, is starting to walk away on two fingers, affecting nonchalance.

Thinking it is out of range, the walking hand speeds up.

. . . Oh, she's a gittin away too. . .

He ropes his fingers, tripping his hand.

Carlotta, unable to talk from laughter, points at Hobie.

Hobie ropes her pointing finger, draws her hand in toward himself.

Carlotta laughs harder. She slaps Hobie's roping hand with her free hand.

He drops the spaghetti to slap her hand in return then plucks the whipping spaghetti-end out of the air in rhythm.

Hobie
This's why I never order it with meat sauce.

Carlotta
How'd you get into pictures, Hobie?

Hobie
Got roped into it! Aw, I'm just kiddin ya, I wrangled fer a while and then they saw I could say a line'r two'n I was Bad Clem or Deppity Number Two or the guy's buddy fer a coupla years'n then some'n heard me sing'n they made me the guy.

Carlotta
You're awfully cute.

Hobie
Aw heck, you ain't seen the half of it—I'll show ya cute, just second here—little souvenir from when I was rodeoin'. . .

He has lowered his head to his hand and he fiddles briefly at his mouth.

He raises his head again, beaming at Carlotta. He has no teeth. His gums, upper and lower, are hideously bare in his gaping maw.

Carlotta flinches, then laughs harder then ever.

Hobie is chuckling:

Hobie
Tell ya what I wuzh shteer-bushtin an I went down and the shteer went up'n m'teeth headed off fer Tucumcari.—Aww here, it's comin round again!

He hastily tucks his teeth back in and croons along with the orchestra which is just now arriving at the chorus:

. . . Every now and then. . .

Carlotta comes in on top:

Carlotta
Every now and then. . .

The two sing together but Hobie suddenly freezes, seeing something.

Long-lens point of view: a bulging attaché case bound around the middle by a shiny black belt. It rests beside a semi-circular booth in line with ours, half the throw of the restaurant away. Whoever has the case is hidden by his highbacked booth. His back is to us, as is apparent from the side of one leg, and one elbow that occasionally juts out as he eats.

Voice
Well now this is interesting.

Hobie's look turns up.

Thessaly Thacker is standing at his booth.

Thessaly Thacker
I didn't know you two were friends.

Hobie is distracted; his look keeps referring to the hidden man.

Hobie
Aw heck yeah, we—we just caught my picture, "Chaps in Chapparal," 'n I guess we're—

Carlotta
Yes, we're friends, we're—

Hobie
Well we're fixin' t'be friendly, tell you that.

Thessaly Thacker
That's good: "Fixin' To Be Friendly" can be my column heading.

Finger-quotes and an exaggerated impression of Hobie's accent set off the reference. Hobie, unoffended, nods.

Hobie
Well I guess at'd be okay.

Thessaly Thacker
Have a good evening.

As she moves off Hobie and Carlotta exchange a look: how did we do? But Hobie's look returns again to the mystery diner.

Hobie
I mentioned the name of m'picture, I think we're s'posed to do that.

His long-lens point of view: Thessaly Thacker has stopped to talk to the hidden man with the attaché case at his side.

Brief conversation. Thessaly tips her head back laughing at some pleasantry. Her brittle cackle carries faintly across the room. She moves on.

Voice
Well now this is interesting.

Hobie's look turns up.

It is—impossibly—Thessaly Thacker again. Or, no it isn't, it's Thora.

Thora Thacker
I thought I was getting an exclusive on this.

Hobie
What's that now, ma'am?

She is looking in the direction of her sister's exit.

Thora Thacker
I'd like to know what the hell is going on here.

Hobie
We, uhh. . . we just saw Chaps in Chapparal.

Carlotta
And Hobie and I are fixin t'<u>be</u> friendly!

Thora's baleful look swings onto her. It holds for a long moment.

And then a squint:

Thora Th cker
<u>What</u>.

Hobie
We're just, uh. . .

His eyes widen, his look off: the mystery man is getting up.

The man stands briefly outside the booth but turned mostly away from us, patting at his mouth with a napkin.

He angles more toward us.

It is Burt Gurney.

He finishes patting his mouth, tosses the napkin onto the table. His face, so boyish when singing Swabbies!, is now a hard mask, all business.

He stoops to pick up the attaché case. A brief look around the restaurant, and he heads off.

Hobie hastily shuffles himself out of the booth:

Hobie
Ah gotta go, I'm sorry. *(to Carlotta)* Have to catch one a <u>yer</u>

pictures next time—lookin ford to it!

EXTERIOR BROWN DERBY

Hobie is exiting. His car waits outside.

Hobie's head turns to track the passing-by vehicle of Burt Gurney.

Hobie calls to his driver:

Hobie
Toss me them keys, pard, I'm saddlin up.

EDDIE MANNIX'S OFFICE

Wide on Eddie behind his desk, half-in, half-out of a pool of desktop lamplight.

He sits hunched forward, forearms on knees.

A long still beat, and then a look over to his desk.

A desk insert: a letter, its copy to small to read. But we see the letterhead: The Grumman Corporation.

Back to Eddie, but our angle now swung around so that the desk does not hide his lower body.

The hands draped across his knees hold a rosary.

BLEARY MONTAGE

Lots of neon: "The Garden of Allah," "The Coconut Teaszer," chase lights around movie palace marquees. Dissolving in and out under the Hollywood Boulevard imagery is the same set-up of Hobie driving, squinting, eyes fixed on tail lights in front.

Also dissolving in and out:

EDDIE MANNIX WALKING

Not his purposeful daytime stride but a contemplative stroll, his hands clasped Churchillianly behind his back. He passes through the half-struck columns of the temple of the money-lenders; through the courtyard of Sestimus Amydias, its fountain now giving only spare, echoing drips; and finally through a set we have not yet seen: the road to Calvary, with its

long line of crucifixes looming empty.

The montage connecting the two men ends with a dissolve full up on Hobie, still driving, but no more city-lights reflected in his windshield. We are out, remote.

His point-of-view: tail lights of the car well ahead—the only car in sight. Its headlights briefly show us the Rudy's Fish Shack sign on the right. The car turns left.

Hobie slows as he approaches the turn.

HIGH FROM BLUFF

The octahedral house glows below. Burt's car is parked. Hobie's limousine eases up.

INSIDE

We are looking at the front door in full shot. It is the first time we have been in the house when there has been no interior noise, no yapping dog. Perfect quiet; we hear only the muffled pounding of surf.

The door clicks loudly, and slowly swings open.

Hobie enters, cautiously, looking around at the quiet as he walks toward the lens to stop in close shot, gaping now, surprised at what he sees.

Reverse on the living room. Baird Whitlock—alone, a small figure in the big room, still in Roman wardrobe, a copy of Soviet Life open on his lap, martini glass in hand—gapes at Hobie in mirroring surprise.

Finally:

Baird
Hobie Doyle. You're a communist too?

Hobie looks around, looks back at Baird.

A beat.

Hobie
So it's commies?

Baird
Y'ever been in this place? Pretty nice, huh? Just found out it's

Burt Gurney's!

Hobie is not really interested. He looks around a bit more, trying to make sense of it all.

Hobie
You here alone?

Baird
Everyone else went down to the beach.

Hobie
Well, all right pard: let's us head on back to town. You got Mr. Mannix worried sick.

OCEAN

The communist writers man either side of a longboat, gloves on, pulling hard at the oars.

Burt Gurney stands in the prow gazing forward, rather like George Washington crossing the Delaware but with a yapping dog in the crook of one arm.

Now his look turns to one side. He peers.

His point-of-view: his beach house is now coming into view from behind one of a pair of jagged rocks between us and shore.

Burt
Easy!

The writers row more slowly.

The house is centering up between the rocks.

Burt
Here!

The writers back-paddle to stop the boat.

Satisfied with the position, Burt Gurney looks at his watch.

The boat bobs in the waves.

A writer occasionally dips an oar for a short front- or back-stroke, keeping the boat in position.

The only sounds are slap of water against boat, and an occasional yap from the dog.

Long beat.

A huge roar. The seething hiss of angry water. Ocean surface just by the longboat roils mightily—and is breached. A huge black column rises, rises, rises from the sea.

The writers give voice to an awed "Oh. . ."

The column stops.

The roaring of great engines, and the angry hiss of water streaming from the column, gives way now to silence.

We hear the gentle chug of engines idling, and the faint *bleep. bleep. bleep.* of sonar. The waves slosh feebly against the imposing black column: the conning tower of a submarine.

The dog yaps at it.

We hear the metallic *screek-screek-screek* of a hatch being opened.

Burt Gurney hands his dog to one of the forward writers.

Burt

Take care of him.

He leaps from the longboat to grab brackets set in a vertical line on the sub: a ladder. Before he can climb it, though, writers' voices exclaim "Tell him!" "Give it to him!"

One Voice

Comrade!

Burt turns, twisting from the ladder to look back at the longboat.

Hermann is rising in front. A ripple of motion goes through the writers behind him: something is being passed forward.

Hermann

We. . . we feel very humbled. You are going to Moscow to serve in the vanguard and become Soviet Man. We stay behind—making no sacrifice, merely marking time in the decadent West.

Burt nods—acknowledging, not condemning.

Hermann

We—well, we. . .

The passed-forward object arrives at the man immediately behind Hermann who now gives Hermann a nudge. He turns to take the object, and turns back holding it out toward Burt.

It is the attaché case cinched by black belt.

Hermann

Our modest contribution to the Comintern.

With one hand anchoring him to the ladder, Burt extends the other and takes the case. He looks at it, nodding deep respect at what it represents. He looks up.

Burt

They will be pleased.

The dog, who has been whining and writhing in discontent in the arms of the writer in charge of him, breaks free and leaps yapping toward his master.

Burt reflexively drops the case to grab the arriving dog. It barks happily.

The case hits the water and dipsy-doodles down, down, down into murkiness.

The writers give voice to a dismayed "Oh. . ."

Burt Gurney is angled out from the ladder, gazing down at the spot where the case disappeared. A long looking beat.

A small arch of his eyebrow comments on life's unpredictability. He swings his body back in against the sub and climbs one-handed, holding his dog.

A man wearing a sable cap waits at the top. When Burt arrives the waiting man hands him a sable cap.

Burt puts it on and gazes down at the longboat.

Burt

Professor! Will you join me?

Near the back of the boat, Dr. Marcuse gestures faintly with his pipe.

Dr. Marcuse

No. I will work from within.

Burt nods agreement.

The man behind him has stooped to open the hatch. Both men disappear.

On the writers, watching.

The roar of engines, the seething hiss of water. The sub is descending.

The writers fight their oars to keep the longboat steady in the bucking sea.

The sub disappears. The sloshes diminish. The black sea rolls on in peace restored.

After a quiet beat:

Writer
Well, it's late. And I have revisions.

HOBIE AND BAIRD

They make the right turn from the beach access road to head south on the coast highway. Hobie hums the song from his movie as he drives; Baird gazes placidly out.

Baird is struck by a thought. He looks at his watch, winces.

Baird
Late. I am in the doghouse.

Hobie glances at him as Baird thinks.

. . . Know what, better forget my place. Drop me at the Beverly Hills Hotel—that okay?

Hobie
Sure.

Both men's look is drawn to an oncoming line of police vehicles—their rooflights spinning, their sirens wailing.

The cars whoosh past.

Baird turns to track them and Hobie checks out his rear-view.

The vehicles skid into a left turn at the Fish Shack sign.

Baird faces forward again.

A beat.

Baird

Huh!

FADE OUT

FADE IN SOUND: Morning birds, intermittent car-bys.

FADE IN PICTURE: Studio gate.

We are looking across a street—with little traffic at this very early hour—at the main gate. A cab pulls up, not turning into the gate but stopping curbside. Its passenger gets out on the far side.

The cab pulls away and we see the discharged passenger: Baird Whitlock. Still in breastplate and leather skirt, he saunters toward the walk-through side of the guard shack, whistling.

ROAD TO CALVARY

We track laterally with an assistant director who, intent on a clipboard, slowly walks past a foreground crucifix the occupant of which, facing away from us, is only in frame to the extent of his two crossed feet. The A.D., still studying his clipboard, slows to a halt just as we bring another crucifix into the foreground. Its occupant too is cropped above the ankles.

The A.D. has stopped to squint at the list on his clipboard, and he now looks up from it to the unseen man on the foreground crucifix.

A.D.

. . . Who're you?

Voice

Todd.

The A.D. looks down his list. He shakes his head, still unclear; he looks back up.

A.D.

Do you get a hot breakfast or a box breakfast?

Voice

. . . I don't know.

The A.D. rolls his eyes.

A.D.
Are you a principal or an extra?

Beat.

Then:

Voice
I think I'm a principal.

EDDIE'S OFFICE

Baird, in wardrobe, is in the chair in front of Eddie's desk with his legs crossed, relaxed—the picture of cheerfulness.

Baird
So I'm thinkin, What the hell! I've woken up in strange houses before but never withou a broad next to me!

Eddie is staring at him, not amused.

Eddie
(tight)
Uh-huh.

Baird, oblivious, thinks he has an audience.

Baird
These guys were pretty interesting, though. They've actually figured out the laws that dictate, well—<u>everything</u>, history, sociology, politics, morality. Everything. It's in a book somewhere.

Eddie
That right.

Baird
You're not gonna believe this, but it even explains the stuff we do here at the studio. 'Cause the studio is actually nothing more than an instrument of capitalism—

Eddie

Uh-huh.

Baird

—so it blindly follows these laws just like any other institution. The laws these guys've figured out. The studio makes pictures to serve the system, that's its function in serving the system, that's really what we're all up to, here.

Eddie

Is it.

Eddie is rising from behind his desk and coming around toward Baird, who prattles on.

Baird

Yeah, we're just confirming what they call the "status quo." *(chuckling)* I mean, we might tell ourselves we're "creating" something of artistic value, that there's some kinda spiritual dimension to the picture business, but what it is, is this fat cat Nick Schenk out in New York running a factory that makes these lollypops that pacify the—WHOOF!

Eddie has grabbed Baird by the breastplate and hauled him to his feet. He now slaps him, forehand and backhand: *Slap! Slap!*

Baird

What th—

Baird gapes, wide-eyed. Eddie pulls him chest-to-chest and holds him there so that he may stare straight into his eyes as the words pour out:

Eddie

Now you listen to me, buster: Nick Schenk and this studio have been good to you and to everyone else who works here. If I ever hear you badmouthing Mr. Schenk again it'll be the last thing you say before I have you tossed into jail for colluding in your own abduction.

Baird

But Eddie, I didn't—

Slap! Slap!

Eddie

Shaddup. You're gonna go out there and you're gonna finish

"HAIL, CÆSAR!" You're gonna give the speech at the feet of the penitent thief and you're gonna believe every word you say. *(Slap! Slap!)* You're gonna do it because you're an actor and that's what you do. Just like the director does what he does, and the writer and the script girl and the guy who claps the slate. You're gonna do it because the picture has worth and you have worth if you serve the picture and you're never gonna forget that again.

The manhandling and Eddie's harsh tone have brought Baird to tears. He blubbers:

Baird
Okay Eddie, I won't forget it.

Eddie releases his fistful of Romanwear with a shove that sends Baird staggering backward.

Eddie
You're damn right you won't. Not as long as I run this dump.

Baird nods, blubbering, as he retreats to the door.

Baird
Okay, Eddie. . .

Eddie reseats himself behind his desk. He stops Baird, who is reaching for the doorknob, with a sharp:

Eddie
Baird!

Baird turns, sniveling, his hand on the knob.

Eddie smiles, points at him, and gives a tight nod of the head:

Eddie
Go out there and be a star!

It heartens Baird. He wipes his eyes with some tunic-sleeve and even manages a tremulous smile back at Eddie and a return nod.

EDDIE WALKING

Across the campus. Natalie trots to catch up, arms full of a flower arrangement.

Natalie
Mr. Mannix! *(he turns, waits)* Since you're going to your car, thought you might want to take this.

Eddie
What is it?

Natalie
From DeeAnna Moran. Thank you, and she doesn't need to adopt her baby after all.

Eddie
Huh?

Natalie
She asked Joe Silverman out for dinner last night, I guess it went well, they drove to Palm Springs and were married at three this morning.

Eddie
Huh.

Natalie
Will you be gone long?—today's list to go through.

Leaving:

Eddie
Less than an hour, personal errand. *(looks at flowers he holds)* Nice arrangement.

Natalie
She charged it to the studio.

Eddie
Right.

As he turns back forward he takes not even a step before reacting with a "Gah!" to the arriving:

Thora Thacker
Just coming to see you.

Eddie
Good morning. Sorry about last night, Thora—didn't know

your sister would show up.

Thora Thacker
Well that's as may be, but I certainly learned my lesson. Whatever you say today, Eddie Mannix, my column tomorrow is about—"On Wings as Eagles."

Eddie
Thora, I wouldn't do that if I were you.

Thora smiles thinly.

Thora Thacker
I'm sure you wouldn't.

Eddie
No no, you don't understand. *(looks around)* Let's sit down.

SEATING AREA

Outside a building that says WARDROBE.

Thora and Eddie are seating themselves at a curved stone bench behind a stone table upon which Eddie puts the flowers.

Roman centurions emerge one at a time from the building behind, each cinching up the chin straps on his bristle-topped helmet or giving the bottom of his breastplate a tug to make it hang right or in some other way making ready. One centurion sits against the exterior wall lacing up his sandals' calf straps.

Eddie
I'm telling you not to run the column, Thora, for your own good.

A hoot from Thora.

Thora Thacker
I can judge my own interest. This will be the story of the year—and it so happens the Hearst Syndicate is looking to pick up a Hollywood column. Hearst is four million readers. And if I get them—Thessaly doesn't.

Eddie
And you think this'll cinch it for you.

Thora Thacker
You know it will. Baird Whitlock, your biggest star, got his first major part—in "On Wings as Eagles"—by engaging in sodomy with the picture's director, Laurence Laurentz.

She wears a smug smile, awaiting protestation.

Eddie only nods, equably.

Eddie
We've all heard the story. But here's something you haven't heard: your source is a communist. If you print it it'll be dismissed as a commie smear tactic—and you'll be dismissed as a commie stooge.

Her smile starts to fade.

. . . Burt Gurney has left the country and the cell he was part of has been smashed by the police. You might've thought he was credible because he's Mr. Laurentz's current. . . protegé, but—you don't want to be seen as Burt Gurney's mouthpiece after this.

Thora's look curdles.

A beat.

Thora Thacker
How did you know Burt was my source?

Eddie
Busy night last night. Talked to Laurence, put two and two together. *(rises, indicating flowers)* Well, no need to send this since I ran into you. It's by way of apology for Thessaly horning in last night. I do value our friendship, Thora—*(looks at watch)*—but I have to run.

CONFESSIONAL

Light wipes onto Eddie, rosary in hand.

Eddie
Bless me Father, for I have sinned.

Voice
How long since your last confession, my son?

Eddie
It's been, uh. . . *(looks at watch)* what, thirty hours?

Voice
It's too often, my son. You're really not that bad.

Eddie grimly shakes his head.

Eddie
I don't know, Father. I snuck another cigarette. Or two. I didn't make it home in time for dinner.

A sigh from the unseen priest.

. . . I struck a movie star in anger.

Voice
All right, my son. Five Hail Marys.

Eddie
Okay. Okay. Father. . .

Eddie is struggling.

Voice
Yes my son?

Eddie
May I ask you something, Father?

Father
Of course, my son.

Eddie
. . . If there's something that's easy. . . is that wrong?

Voice
Easy?

Eddie
Easy to do, easy to—an easy job—not a bad job, it's not bad. But then there's another job, that's. . . that's not so easy. In fact

it's hard. It's so hard, Father—sometimes I don't know if I can keep doing it. But it seems right. I don't know how to explain.

Silence.

Then:

Voice
God wants us to do what's right.

Eddie
Yeah. . . *(thinking, nodding)* Yeah, course He does.

Voice
The inner voice that tells you it's right—it comes from God, my son.

Eddie glances at his watch again.

Eddie
Yeah, got it.

Voice
It's His way of saying that—

Rising:

Eddie
Yeah yeah, I got it. Thanks.

CALVARY

Looking down on Autolochus, who is gazing up and off-camera, as we pull him through a crowd of Israelites. His face is transfigured in wonderment.

As he reaches the front of the crowd he sinks to his knees. The camera pulls up and away to frame him before three crucifixes on the mount.

Gracchus approaches from behind to touch him gently as he kneels.

Voice
Why on your knees before this Hebrew, Autolochus?

Baird rises turning his attention to, and placing a comradely hand on the shoulder of, his

friend Gracchus, familiar from our epic's first scene.

Autolochus
I encountered him before, Gracchus, beside the well of Jehosaphat. And what manner of man.

Gracchus doesn't understand:

Gracchus
He is a priest of the Israelites, despised even by the other priests.

Autolochus
No. On yesterday's march, punished by the dust of the road, I drank first at the well—drank before my men. I could not help myself, Gracchus; my thirst drove from me every thought of duty. And for such I received chastisement from Hippas.

Gracchus
Well I remember it.

Autolochus
But then this man stepped forward, and said that it was he who had bade me drink first—though in fact he had not; he had offered to all. He was roughly treated by Hippas, who did not think to be so impertinently addressed by a Hebrew.

Gracchus
And rightly!

Autolochus
No! No! This man knew. He stepped in to take blows that would have come to me. And I stood by, Gracchus. I stood by and saw the pain in his eyes. Pain but no reproach. For, from him I felt only goodness—through him only goodness—in him only goodness. The goodness of God.

Gracchus
You mean, the gods.

Autolochus gravely shakes his head.

Autolochus
I do not, friend Gracchus. This Hebrew is son of the one God, the God of this far-flung tribe. Who would have thought that

God's anointed would appear here, among these strange people. Who, Gracchus, would look to find divinity in this strange land. And yet here he is. Teaching not the faith of Rome, to be sure—not faith in the old gods. But a higher faith.

Gracchus, is willing to believe, but is confused.

Gracchus
Faith in what, Autolochus?

Autolochus
In the world beyond Rome, the world beyond this world. That is the tale this man tells, Gracchus, not like the old tales. A tale told in the light of life everlasting.

Gracchus's chin crimps as he juts his jaw, absorbing this message.

. . . A tale we can hear if we have but. . .

Autolochus is staring at Gracchus. His eyes slowly narrow to a squint. His jaw drops open as he stares. After a beat of fixed staring:

Autolochus
. . . if we have but what? Tale, have. . . ?

Director
CUT. Cut. Faith. Have but faith.

Baird
Not, um—

Director
No, they changed it.

Baird
Goddamnit. Sorry, I'll get it, don't worry.

Gracchus turns to face directly into the camera.

Gracchus
Could I get a pat down, I'm sweating like a pig

High on the Calvary set as the cast relaxes, the make-up people rush in, a script supervisor shows Baird the new pages.

Voice-Over
It is 8:00 am. The sun ascends. We are far from Rome. . .

EDDIE MANNIX AND NATALIE

They are striding across the lot, Natalie following Eddie with her notepad.

Voice-Over
. . . As the shadows of the San Gabriel Mountains retreat across the lot. . .

Natalie
Gloria Johanssen checked herself out of Perpetual Rest and showed up for work in good shape.

Voice-Over
. . . Eddie Mannix continues his work day. . .

Eddie
Fine.

Natalie
Still raining in Gallup, New Mexico and the "Tin Star" crew has shot all the plates we need for "Came the Rain."

Eddie
Then—just—shoot the "Tin Star" showdown in the weather and we'll retitle it. "Mud on a Tin Star." "Desert Squall." "Hold Back the Storm". . .

He momentarily casts about.

Voice-Over
. . . a day that has no beginning, has no end—for he is ever at work.

Eddie
. . . I dunno—bounce it off the writers.

Natalie
Check. Here's today's call list.

She hands a sheet forward. As he studies it:

Voice-Over
The stories begin. The stories end. But the work of Eddie Mannix will never end.

Eddie
Right. *(hands the sheet back)* Add a call to a Mr. Cuddahy at the Grumman Corporation.

Natalie
Long call, short?

Eddie
"Thanks but no thanks"—how long was that?

Natalie
Gotcha. Who do we call first?

They are approaching the administration building. Eddie pushes back a sleeve to look at his watch.

Eddie
New York first. Time to check in with Mr. Schenk.

As they head up the walk to the administration building, we pan off to the main gate behind which a soundstage wall displays paintings of the studio's upcoming product.

There are three huge paintings on the entrance wall. One is of Baird Whitlock in a chariot, a forward hand grabbing its frame for balance, the other arm cocked back, ready to lash the horses; a fierce expression on his face: "Hail, Cæsar!"

The second painting is of DeeAnna Moran with one hand on her hip, other arm raised, standing statuesquely before a pool full of bathing beauties: "Neptune's Daughter."

The third image is of waltzing couples, and the painter is just now finishing adding the name of the star, Hobart Doyle, under "Laurence Laurentz presents/Merrily We Dance!"

We tip up off the wall to the Capitol Pictures water tower. In the sky beyond, a sun, hidden by clouds, sends down golden beams.