

HAIL, CÆSAR!

Written by

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WHITE SHOOTING: October 13th, 2014
BLUE REVISION: January 5th, 2015

FADE IN SOUND

INT. CONFESSIONAL - NIGHT

DISTANT, BEAUTIFUL VOICES

Male voices. A Gregorian chant.

We fade in on a crucifix in the apse of the church: a suffering Christ.

We cut to a close shot of a small silver cross on a rosary. The rosary is held in a man's lap next to a mouse-grey fedora. The light is dim.

As we hear a panel sliding, more light wipes onto the rosary beads.

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

VOICE

Son, it is so late.

MAN

Yeah, Father, work has just been...

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 promised her I'd quit smoking. She thinks it's bad for me. And I'm trying, but... well, I snuck a couple of cigarettes... Maybe three.

VOICE

Yes.

MAN

It's hard.

VOICE

Yes, my son.

MAN

—But I'm trying.

A clap of thunder.

EXT. SPANISH HOUSE - NIGHT

HOUSE AT NIGHT

We are looking, through the rain-pelted windshield of a parked car, at a small, Spanish-style bungalow. The rattle of driving rain does not quite cover the sound of drunken female laughter. There are occasional flashes of lightning outside, and occasional flashes of strobe light in the windows of the house.

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

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.

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

VOICE-OVER (CONT'D)

The movie studio for which he works manufactures stories—each its own daylight drama, or moonlit dream.

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

Eddie Mannix reaches for his door.

OUTSIDE

Eddie Mannix emerges from his car—a Packard marking the period as circa 1950. Eddie pulls down his hat brim, turns up his collar, and digs hands into 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.

VOICE-OVER (CONT'D)

But the work of Eddie Mannix cares
not for day or night... and cares
little for his rest.

INT. SPANISH HOUSE - NIGHT

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 overloaded 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 giggling girl sees Eddie Mannix and stops churning.

GLORIA

Oh, fer—ecce homo! You, here?!

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

EDDIE

The studio has a right to Gloria's
likeness, Falco. Gimme the
negatives and things'll go easier.

FALCO

You got it all wrong, Eddie! This
is f'private use!

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

FALCO (CONT'D)

Hey!

We hear approaching sirens. Falco reacts, bolting for the back door.

GLORIA

Can't a girl take a few pitchas,
have a few laughs? Cheez, Eddie,
what a old stick-in-the-mud!

She giggles.

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
Scheinbrotte.

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, 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 DeLamour?

GLORIA
No no, I'm Mary Jo... somethin'.

EDDIE
Scheinbrotte. Look, Brian...

Eddie hesitates, looking at one of the cops who is smoking.
We hear, distantly but growing louder, a deep thumping sound.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
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:

EXT. THE OLD APPIAN WAY - DAY

Down the road a Roman legion marches in brilliant
Technicolor, the sound of its stamping feet bridging the cut.
Cypress trees, regularly planted, stretch along either side
of the road to the horizon. The title of the movie fades into
superimposition:

HAIL, CÆSAR!
A Tale Of The Christ

The same voice that started the movie now intones:

VOICE-OVER
Ancient Rome! Twelve years into the
rule of Tiberius, 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!
(MORE)

VOICE-OVER (CONT'D)

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 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!

EXT. PALESTINE - NIGHT

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

VOICE-OVER
 But far away, in Palestine...

INT. SCREENING ROOM - DAY

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

VOICE-OVER
 ... another man is coming home.
 Saul, humble merchant of Tarsus, is
 about to be struck down by a
 vision.

The continued pan brings us onto the screening room's one occupant, Eddie Mannix. After a quick furtive look around—meaningless since he is alone—he takes a cigarette from the ashtray next to him and sneaks a puff.

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

EXT. CAPITOL BACKLOT - DAY

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 DeLamour 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 "Tucumcari!"?

NATALIE
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
"Jonah's Daughter" still behind?

NATALIE
Yes, director says the problem is
DeeAnna and she's getting worse.

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.

INT. EDDIE'S OFFICE - DAY

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 on "Blessed Event." Can you also—

Hastily into the phone:

EDDIE (CONT'D)

—Yes, good morning Mr. Schenk... Very well, thank you. Proceeding... Proceeding... "Merrily We Dance" starts shooting today. Beardley Auberon gave us a draft that's extremely classy. Joan Van Vechten is playing Dierdre, but we need a male lead and we need him now... No, Jack Hogarth is drying out at Cedars... Metro won't lend us Gable unless we give them the Comiskey 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 someone pronto... 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.

EXT. WESTERN LANDSCAPE

A BOULDER

It is a great big boulder.

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

He who just shot him: Hobie Doyle, in white Western wear. Eyes narrowed, he gauges the effect of his shot, 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 he 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 tree limb hooks his knees and he swings up and around as his horse races on unridered. When he loops back around the tree limb 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.

DIRECTOR

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

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

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.

HOBIE

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 you're escorting Carlotta Valdez. Guess they're changing your image.

INT. COURTYARD OF SESTIMUS AMYDIAS - DAY

ROMANS

They sit in the courtyard of a Roman villa—several togaed senators and their robed wives—on chairs carved of cedar and draped with fine silks.

Incongruous entrance: a man in sunglasses wearing a white open-necked shirt.

He looks here and there. He raises a megaphone.

1ST A.D.

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

VOICE

Roll 'em.

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

A.C. 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:

1ST A.D.

What're you doing at the table of viands?!

EXTRA

... Huh?

1ST A.D.

You're supposed to be reclining,
with the lyre!

EXTRA

Yeah, sorry, I uh—

1ST A.D.

Recline with the lyre!

EXTRA

Yes, sir.

VOICE

We set there? Background set?

1ST A.D.

Don't sit on the pediment! Recline!
Relaxed, festive!

EXTRA

Yes sir.

1ST A.D.

(projecting)

Set!

*(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 (CONT'D)

Background!

The extras talk among 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 tips 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.

DIRECTOR

And action!

Autolochus strides in. A 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 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 ends his laugh and raises the goblet to his lips.

Just before drinking—he is taken by another gust of laughter.

The two extras exchange a look. The 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.

DIRECTOR

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 Script Supervisor)
Got the pages for the brasier
scene?

The Script Supervisor points to a spot on the page as he hands it over.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

They changed "passion" to "ardor."

AUTOLOCHUS

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

The Script Supervisor shrugs a what-can-I-tell-you? Autolochus wanders off, muttering:

AUTOLOCHUS (CONT'D)

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, as he examines his script, is crossing the long dark expanse of soundstage, toward a distant glowing exit sign.

EXT. CAPITOL BACKLOT - DAY

Outside now, the short extra cautiously leans and cranes to peek around a soundstage corner. The bald extra is next to him.

His point-of-view: huge stucco soundstages range into the distance. 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. He extends a hand to steady himself against the exterior wall of a soundstage. After a moment, he moves on, somewhat uncertainly.

EXT. BAIRD'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

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 thish
brasier... Goddamn, that's tough.
Yet as warm as the embersh of this
brasier... Not so, Urshulina...

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.

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, giving the two men a glassy stare.

BAIRD

(slurred)
Not so, Ursulina—

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

INT. CAPITOL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Eddie Mannix strolls and speaks. His audience is a four-person convocation of clergy sporting different hats, caps, robes, beards.

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. 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.

(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

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 the Minister, saluting 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

(dismayed)

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 from the assembled and one low "that's-something" whistle.

RABBI

Well, he is certainly a great talent.

EDDIE

Now Hail, Cæsar! is a prestige picture, our biggest release of the year, and we are devoting huge resources to its production in order to make it first-class in every respect. Gentlemen, given its enormous expense, 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!

EDDIE
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?

PRIEST
Yes.

Eddie nods.
... And no!

Eddie frowns.

PATRIARCH
There is unity in division.

MINISTER
And division in unity.

EDDIE
Not sure I follow, Padre.

RABBI

Young man, you don't follow for a very simple reason: these man 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.

PRIEST

He used to be angry!

RABBI

What, he got over it?

MINISTER

You worship the god of another age!

PRIEST

Who has no love!

RABBI

Not true! He likes Jews.

MINISTER

God loves everyone!

PRIEST

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 is Todd Hocheiser?

EDDIE

Gentlemen, maybe we're biting off more than we can chew.

(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

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.

EDDIE

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?

PRIEST

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

RABBI

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.

EXT. CONFERENCE ROOM DOOR - DAY

Eddie Mannix emerges, dabbing at sweat.

NATALIE

How'd we do?

EDDIE

Mm. 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. No soap.

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—Francie?

NATALIE

Check.

EDDIE

Any of the gals missing from the set?

NATALIE

Nope.

EDDIE

Well...

(looks at his watch)

Gone an hour? We won't worry yet.

INT. LINEN TRUCK - DAY

BLACK

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.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BLVD - DAY

THE STREET

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

EXT. STUDIO GATE - DAY

Hobie Doyle is pulling up in a chauffeured car. The guard looks in the back window and is surprised to see the Western star.

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 soundstage. They built a drawing room.

GUARD

Ya don't say.

INT. STAGE / TANK - DAY

UNDER WATER

A bathing beauty in a sequined mermaid suit swims free-armed but wriggle-tailed, 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 to join the mermaid, entering foreground and background in headfirst dives that leave bubble-trails. The beauties swim loops and then wave themselves back up toward the surface, smiling.

But the mermaid remains. She approaches a foreground sunken treasure chest. Atop its gold coins sits a silver crown which the mermaid seems to recognize as her own. She reaches for it, smiling-but as she does so a shadow travels over her, near-to-deep. And then great jaws hinge closed behind her, capturing her-and the lens-in the black belly of a whale.

We linger in black. Water surface slowly emerges from the black: we are high above the water now, looking straight down. With our change in perspective the music now blares undistorted.

In the tank below us the bathing beauties spin in a formation that goes through constant kaleidoscopic change. In the center of the circle formed by the beauties a dark shape begins to resolve itself: something is surfacing amid the girls.

It is the whale. As it breaches amid the swimmers its blowhole, directly beneath the lens, spouts. Jetting water rises toward us.

Something else is rising, borne up by the jetting water: a sundae-cup coach of sorts. In it rides the mermaid, triumphantly ascending.

Her ascent ends high, high, high above the tank. The spouting water recedes but her sundae cup remains magically suspended in air.

She opens the cup's gate-door and looks down at the water, far, far below. As a drum roll builds she prepares to dive.

And does dive.

She splashes into the water and is lost from view. A suspenseful hold, on nothing.

And now she emerges from the water, rising again, now on a pedestal and now wearing her silver crown, recovered in what offscreen neptunian rite who can say.

The mermaid is proud of herself, proud of her crown, proud of her bathing-beauty minions-but then pride evaporates. Some internal struggle. She seems to be getting angry.

She yanks off the crown and tosses it away, squalling:

MERMAID

Wardrobe!

The music slows to sludge and stops.

The mermaid flops into the water and splashes awkwardly toward the side of the tank, her fluke spanking the surface as cowed bathing beauties make way and an off-mike voice yells "Cut!"

INT. STAGE - DAY

CLOSE ON MERMAID

A minute later: 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:

A stagehand staggers back, holding the now freed bottom half of her scaly mermaid outfit. He tips 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. She feels tenderly at her stomach as an assistant director enters.

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)
 Ask him, he knows. Okay, scram.

EDDIE

How are you, DeeAnna?

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 have a gown for you that's more... forgiving. Um... any more thoughts about who you might marry?

DEEANNA

HAH! Ain't doin' that again! I had two marriages, and it just cost the studio a lotta money to bust'em up.

EDDIE

Well we had to have those annulled— one was to a minor mob figure and—

DEEANNA

Vince was not minor!

EDDIE

And Buddy Flynn was a bandleader with a long history of narcotic use.

DEEANNA

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

EDDIE

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

DEEANNA

Pretty boys, sap, and swishes! You think if there was some good steady reliable man I wouldna grabbed him?

EDDIE

Well, what about Årne 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

So you strap on the fish-ass and marry Årne Seslum!

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 Årne is open to, um... matrimony. 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 pause but DeeAnna, ready to get back to work, projects:

... Okay Maxie, bring me my ass back!

EXT. COAST HIGHWAY - DAY

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.

INT. STAGE / DRAWING ROOM - DAY

People in formal-wear lounge, chatting.

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

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 coldly examines
Hobie—a veteran with no
patience for the rookies)*

... harboring deep feelings for
you, 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

(troubled)

So now she's gonna importune, Mr. Laurence?

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

Laurentz.

HOBIE

Oh, I'm sorry. She's gonna importune? 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!"

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

Hobie enters, an uneasy backward glance referring perhaps 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 (CONT'D)
 It seems Allegra's a no-show, which
 is simply a bore, but I can partner
 you in bridge.
(reacting to him)
 Why the pout?

Gazing at the floor, Hobie gives a short loud laugh that sounds like a Heimlich-expulsion. A 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 into 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—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!"

Those 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 (CONT'D)

It seems Allegra's a no-show, which is simply a bore, but I can partner you in bridge.

(reacting to him)

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 (CONT'D)

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 twuuuuuh, 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 twuuuuuh, 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. Laurence is fine—

HOBIE

Okay.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

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

HOBIE

Would that it twuuuh—

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

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)
 simmple.

HOBIE

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

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

Larry! Good God, Christian names,
 yes, but not Larry.

EXT./INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

FROM A HIGH BLUFF

We are looking down into a hidden box cove of the Pacific Ocean, 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.

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 the two men 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 one at the door is middle-aged, with sad eyes: He is John Howard Herman.

The deeper man in the room 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.

MAN

Quiet, Engels!

When the goon has passed with his Roman cargo the sad-eyed John Howard Herman swings the door toward us, filling the lens.

INT. EDDIE'S OFFICE - DAY

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!

(MORE)

DUBROW (CONT'D)

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—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 meant something to the public!

EDDIE

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

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

Hobie Doyle cannot act!

EDDIE

Hobart Doyle is 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 butt 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 needs help 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.

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

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 in a storeroom, the chaise being the room's only piece of furniture.

A muffled *ding-dong* from the front of 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.

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

MAIN ROOM

The sad-eyed man, John Howard Herman is opening the front door to several visitors. The first visitor enters: murmured greetings, solemn handshake. Another man, another sober handshake.

Then an elderly man in tweeds clutching his 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 hug. He picks up the briefcase, makes way for the next man.

A counter separates the entryway from a small kitchen. In it, the man we saw shushing the dog 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:

MAN
Quiet, Engels!

INT. IMPERIAL GARDENS - DAY

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 his 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 top of the foil.

CUDDAHY (CONT'D)

Go ahead.

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. Lockheed 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.

(MORE)

CUDDAHY (CONT'D)

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 of rocks in the South Pacific—till a few weeks ago. Then we blew the Aitcherino. Not supposed to be telling you this.

(hands Eddie a picture)

The real world. Hydrogen bomb. Fusion device.

EDDIE

Armageddon.

CUDDAHY

And Lockheed was there. We had a—

He cuts himself off. A splash of the bead curtain.

WAITRESS

Call for you, Mr. Mannix.

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

EDDIE

Thank you... Hello?... And he has it now?... No, have him stay on set, I'll go to him.

(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

(*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.

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

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 the beach chaise. The sound of 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: out the window is 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.

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

LIVING ROOM

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

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.

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 all turn to look at the Roman-attired man in the doorway. Most of the interrupted party are seated; there are a couple of overflow standees; several men smoke cigarettes, one 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.

DOG SHUSHER

Quiet, Engels!

Again, this does nothing to quiet the dog. Baird looks from man to man. John Howard Herman, the man who greeted the other arrivals at the door, the apparent host, waves Baird in.

HERMAN

Please! Enter! All are welcome!

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

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

HERMAN (CONT'D)

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. Herman helps:

HERMAN
Wondering where you are?

BAIRD
Yeah.

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

HERMAN
Malibu. We'll have sandwiches in a minute. Tea?

BAIRD
... Tea. Well. Okay. Okay. And... and—

HERMAN
And what's going on?

BAIRD
Yeah.

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

BAIRD
So... I missed the minutes.

HERMAN
I wouldn't worry about it.

THIRD MAN
They're usually pretty boring.

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

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

BENEDICT
It's a—more of a, a study group.

BAIRD
And you're studying... ?

HERMAN
Oh, all sorts of jolly stuff.

THIRD MAN
History.

DUTCH
Economics.

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

HERMAN
Don't you agree?

All are looking at Baird.

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

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

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?

HERMAN
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—

SECOND MAN
The boss is not the brain!

ANGRY MAN
No no! The boss is parasite!

HERMAN

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—

SECOND MAN

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

ANGRY 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.

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. A sickly smile at Baird and
then he turns to face someone else in the room
and—click!—takes a picture.

HERMAN

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.

THIRD MAN

We don't believe in Santa Claus!

Hearty guffaws.

Click! The photographer is edging around the group, continuing his picture-taking.

HERMAN

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?

SECOND MAN

Mr. Smitrovich takes pictures for our newsletter.

The sallow picture-snapper smiles again at Baird.

MARCUSE

Our understanding of the true workings of history gives 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.

HERMAN

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

ANGRY MAN

The body politic!

HERMAN

Shutup!—help the little guy, even though its purpose is to exploit the little guy.

BAIRD

Okay, so you guys are for the little guy.

HERMAN

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?

FOURTH MAN

And you would act. To help the little guy.

BAIRD

Act?

FOURTH MAN

Praxis.

BAIRD

What?

FOURTH 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.

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

HERMAN

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

As we cut wide on the room, 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...

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

VOICE-OVER (CONT'D)

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

EXT. CAPITOL LOT / H.C. STAGE - DAY

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

VOICE-OVER

... hurries 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 the small door of a soundstage. The light above the door is flashing red.

INT. H.C. STAGE - DAY

INSIDE

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 slavegirl.

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

Eddie!

He fishes a twice-folded paper from his pocket.

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

*We have your movie star.
Gather \$100,000 and await
instructions.
Who are We?
The Future.*

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!

EXT. H.C. TEMPLE SET - DAY

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 workmen
 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
 Future"?

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!

INT. EDDIE'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Eddie bangs through a door that says:

*EDWARD MANNIX
 HEAD OF PHYSICAL PRODUCTION*

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 on 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.

As soon as he disconnects, Natalie edges into the office.

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.

EXT. CAPITOL LOT - DAY

As Eddie marches past the executive offices with his emptied attaché case, a tall red-haired woman arcs in to march alongside him. He winces.

WOMAN

Call didn't take so long, then.

EDDIE

Yes—no—fast talker. What can I do for you, Thora?

THORA THACKER

Well, I'll be fast too. I only wanted to notify you as a courtesy that I'm running 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. And you wouldn't want to, 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!

EDDIE
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 tomorrow's column. 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.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

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.

As he starts to trot off, his gesture takes in the entire studio:

EDDIE

Nobody's playing games here.

INT. STUDIO ACCOUNTING OFFICE - DAY

DESK

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

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

Straining pressure.

Stu Schwartz arches an eye behind horn-rimmed glasses.

STU

Is that big enough?

Eddie strains downward as he presses the two clasps, inward, until—*snap! snap!*—they catch.

EXT. CAPITOL LOT - DAY

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

A woman arcs in to walk 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'm notifying you as a courtesy before I run tomorrow's story.

EDDIE

Hello, Thessaly, I just saw—never mind, what's up? What's the story?

THESSALY THACKER

It's about Baird Whitlock.

EDDIE

There is absolutely no truth to that old story, believe me!

THESSALY THACKER

(*puzzled*)
Old?

EDDIE

Old! Stale! Rotten! And—

THESSALY THACKER

I'm talking about today.

EDDIE

And there's—
(*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 mean?

EDDIE
No, nothing. I saw your sister earlier, she was trying to resurrect some old gossip 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 in a cardigan sweater is bicycling up the walkway. As he furiously pedals, a Capitol Pictures pennant snaps and flutters from a high antenna off the back fender. He skids to a halt, close.

EDDIE
What's up, Peanut?

PEANUT
Natalie told me to find you PDQ! I know it sounds screwy but she said someone's calling from the future!

EDDIE
The—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—

(turns with a thought)

Say, what kind of name is Thessaly, anyway?

THESSALY THACKER

It's a name that twenty million readers trust. They want the truth, Eddie.

On his hasty retreat:

EDDIE

Truth, yes! We're gonna give it to 'm!.

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

INT. EDDIE'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

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

'T's goin' on there, Mr. Mannix, looks like you're expectin' rain.

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 buldge. 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.

(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

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.
*(punches the intercom
 button)*
 That them?

NATALIE'S VOICE

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

He deflates; picks up the phone.

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.

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

He hangs 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. A long, appraising look.

Hobie returns the look, not sure what it means.

Finally:

EDDIE

Hobie: there's a hundred thousand dollars in that attaché case.

(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Ransom money. Baird Whitlock has
been kidnapped.

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

Finally:

HOBIE
Well, this is bad. Bad for movie
stars ever'where.

Eddie's mouth forms a moue of agreement.

HOBIE (CONT'D)
And you got no idea who's mixed up
in this thang?

Eddie gives a wagging headshake.

HOBIE (CONT'D)
I would look at the extries.

EDDIE
The extras. Why?

HOBIE
Well you just never know about an
extrie. They come'n go. Everyone
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, contemplating.

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

NATALIE'S VOICE
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?

INT. WATERFRONT BAR - DAY

We are coming off the lettering on the side of a boat which identifies it as "The Swingin' Dinghy."

Our move reveals that behind the boat which is suspended by two chains like a lifeboat is a backbar in the middle of which is a clock, just now striking twelve. We move down off the clock to find a bartender looking up at it. A dishrag is draped over his shoulder, a well-chewed cigar stub is planted in his mouth.

BARTENDER

The Swingin' Dinghy is closin',
folks. Time for me to clean up,
time for you to clear out.

He moves to get a broom. On his move we widen out to show the bar's clientele: about a dozen sailors and their dates, five or six young women. The boat of which this establishment is namesake is a quarter-size model hanging over the bar.

The girls are mounting the stairs to leave the cellar bar. One turns back with a farewell:

GIRL

So long, fellas! See ya in eight
months!

The morose sailors all gaze up at the departing girls. The bartender asks one sailor:

BARTENDER

Eight months?

He is addressing a sailor whose glum look stays on the exiting girls. The look lingers on the door after it closes behind them. The sailor sighs.

SAILOR

Yeah—we're shippin' out in the
mawnin.

Another sailor, seated on the stool of a piano near the stairs, is also looking glum.

SAILOR 2

Golly: eight months without a dame.

The lead sailor, equally downcast, is played by Burt Gurney.

BURT
Can ya beat it.

BARTENDER
(gruff)
Yer gonna have to beat it.

Visible through a high window--well which gives onto the sidewalk are the gams of a girl who has stopped to adjust the seam of one stocking.

Burt, gazing yearningly up at the legs, starts to sing:

BURT
Oh, we're headin' out to sea...

The production number "No Dames!" begins.

INT. CORNER OF THE SOUND STAGE - DAY

The song has developed and the dance begun, but here, off the set, the blaring playback is echoing and not as loud. Eddie Mannix enters the stage. He is dimly lit only by spill from the bar set, house lights turned off for shooting.

Eddie gives cautious looks around as he hoists the attaché case, now secured around its middle by a shiny black belt. He gingerly stows the attaché case behind an electrical box bearing the warning, DANGER! HIGH VOLTAGE.

INT. WATERFRONT BAR

BACK TO THE SET

The song finishes with Burt being ass-bounced and the bartender bellowing:

BARTENDER
Now cut that out! This ain't that
kind of place!

The general pandemonium of the dancing sailors is arrested by a voice through a megaphone:

VOICE
And... cut! Yah, okay. Okay.

We cut behind the director seated on a canvas chair onto the back of which his name is stitched: "Årne Seslum."

VOICE (CONT'D)

Come here, Burt Gurney. We go again.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

All right, kids, back to one!

Burt Gurney walks up, boyishly cheerful, and is joined by the Bartender.

BURT

Anything different, Mr. Seslum?

ÄRNE

Yah yah yah, no no no, mostly pretty good. But this time, don't put dishrag on bartender's head. You're the star of the picture, Burt Gurney. Who cares about the bartender, you are the star.

The Bartender grumbles, walking away:

BARTENDER

That's my whole character, the slow burn.

BURT

(genuine)

Gosh, Mr. Seslum, I don't mind, if he wants me to—

ÄRNE

It is decided!

Eddie Mannix walks up.

EDDIE

Lo, Burt.

Brightly, before heading back to the set:

BURT

Hello, Mr. Mannix!

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—

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

EDDIE
But Ärne, you are aware that she's,
uh—

ÄRNE
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 fishes out a wallet.

ÄRNE
Ilsa Pflug.

EDDIE
Ilsa...?

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 flips through, showing more pictures: himself skiing;
the family posed together in cable sweaters.

ÄRNE
Yah, yah, two children.

EDDIE
(sotto)
Third on the way, apparently.

ÄRNE
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)

Air in—

(he sucks in)

Out—

(he blows out)

Lungs. Breathe.

(takes back the wallet)

I no more associate with DeeAnna Moran—it is decided!

EDDIE

Uh-huh—

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

ÄRNE

NO, no, no, don't swing your arms like hairy ape! This is not fat stupid people, this is Ärne Seslum production!

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

Raucous male laughter hits the cut. The men are emerging from the hall into the main room, Baird and Herman in the lead, Baird's arm draped companionably over Herman'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'!"

Roaring laughter from the Communists.

BAIRD (CONT'D)

This was back before Gable was Gable.

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

Baird is lost in misty reminiscence:

BAIRD (CONT'D)

We used to go to San Berdoo every weekend, Bob Stack would come sometimes, the Blue Grotto was still open—Dave Chasen was a busboy...

(the dramatic view finally registers)

Quite a place! Yours?

HERMAN

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, that's swell. So I black out, wake up here and I'm thinking, Baird, you have got to stop doing this!

(laughter)

But you're saying, actually, technically I've been... kidnapped.

Again, agreeable laughter from the Communists. Herman smiles as well.

HERMAN

Well, technically, yes.

BAIRD

And there's gonna be a ransom.

BENEDICT

I'd hardly call it "ransom."

Herman indicates the speaker.

HERMAN

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

A low whistle from Baird. Herman nods.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

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

BENEDICT

I did not.

HERMAN

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

DUTCH

(testy)

I wrote all the "All The Way"
pictures.

HERMAN

All successful. You see any of the
profits, Dutch?

Dutch gives a short barking laugh.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

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.

ANGRY MAN

What're you, a child?

HERMAN

*(apology for the bad
manners)*

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.

FOURTH MAN

Partial payback.

HERMAN

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. 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.

HERMAN

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.

ANGRY MAN

Plus, we make a little dough.

HERMAN

Shutup! We're not even talking about money; we're talking about economics.

BAIRD

Uh-huh. Sure. Good. Good stuff. So—do I get a share of the ransom?

Chuckles all around. Herman gives a weak smile.

HERMAN

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?

HERMAN

Yes. That's right.

BAIRD

So what if I don't play along? What if I named names?

The smiling faces around him harden.

Baird, committed, plows on:

BAIRD (CONT'D)

... Just... told the truth?

The alienation is palpable. Herman alone seems unruffled:

HERMAN

I don't think you'll do that, Mr. Whitlock. 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 Herman, the one person still smiling.

INT. SID SIEGELSTEIN'S OFFICE - DAY

Eddie Mannix arrives to lean against his door jamb. The legal bullpen, 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 understanding.

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... As a single...

EDDIE

Mm, 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, to a third... party—

EDDIE
Joe Silverman.

Natalie, with clipboard, approaches from the background.

SID
Joe Silverman, exactly. He's the
foster father for a few days. 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.

EXT. CAPITOL LOT / EDITING ROOM - DAY

It is a 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—check the
other extras.

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

Uh-huh, get it for me. That it?

NATALIE

One more thing: a Mr. Cuddahy called, said you know him.

EDDIE

Yeah yeah.

They are mounting a set of steps leading to a long walkway with many doors spaced at short and 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*)
Tell him I'll be there.

INT. EDITING ROOM - DAY

He bangs through a door:

C. C. CALHOUN
EDITING

INSIDE

A stout middle-aged woman is at work at a clattering upright moviola. A cigarette plumes in one hand. The room is layered with stale smoke.

EDDIE

Hello, C.C.

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. Her thinkc glasses make her eyes float hugely before her face.

The eyes blink.

Her voice is emphysemic:

C.C.

Hello, Eddie.

EDDIE

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

C.C.

Just working on it now. I'll slap
on a little music.

C.C. brakes the picture, rolls to a trim bin, pulls track from a pin, flanges it on the side of the moviola and then lays it under a sound head. She snaps down the head and rolls the movie forward.

Eddie leans in to look at the picture cube. Glow from the moviola screen underlights Eddie's face.

A fanfare. On the screen, a card:

LAURENCE LAURENTZ PRESENTS

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

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

Supered on the shot:

MERRILY WE DANCE!

Another fade-down mark.

Lateral track on the feet of a man and a woman, crossing a city sidewalk. The man's feet hurry out of frame as we hear him call "Taxi!"

The woman's feet continue on to bring into frame, when she reaches the curb, the bottom of a cab door being opened for her by the man.

As she climbs into the cab we match cut into:

The back of the cab. The pretty young woman slides over so that a caddish looking young man can sit in as well. The cab starts into motion.

CAD

Back to your place?

ALLEGRA

Oh, what a bore. I rather thought we might go to Lake Onondega for the weekend, just the two of us.

CAD

Don't have my valise—I left it in your foyer.

ALLEGRA

(sly)
You'll get by without a change.

CAD

(wolf)
Suits me. If you don't mind skipping out on your own party, Allegra.

ALLEGRA

Suits me.

CAD

(meaningful)
And skipping out on Monty.

ALLEGRA

(smile)
That suits me as well.

The man laughs.

CAD

Poor Monty.

ALLEGRA

What Monty doesn't know...

CAD

... won't hurt Monty.

SWELL APARTMENT INTERIOR

Lateral track on a pair of feet: a man walking down a hallway. As he enters a foyer he comes up short, feet turned halfway toward a valise that has been left under a table. After a considering beat he proceeds on, and we pan his feet to a door which he opens.

A match cut around the other side of the door onto the person entering, who is now revealed to be—Hobie Doyle. We are now in the scene we saw being shot.

DIERDRE

Oh Monty! Come join me on the
divaaaaa...

As Dierdre beckons Monty her motion slows, and her slowing speech becomes basso before lapsing to quiet and the ratcheting noise of the machine also 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:

C.C.

Reversh.

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

C.C. 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 squashed flat against the machine and something cinches the folds of fat at her neck. She is being strangled.

C.C. (CONT'D)

Reversh.

Eddie looks helplessly at the machine.

C.C. (CONT'D)

Reversh.

Eddie casts frantically about, locates the forward/reverse switch, flips it.

The soundtrack grinds into motion, in reverse. The picture plays likewise.

As the sound relays feed out her scarf, C.C. has increasing play such that she may slowly draw her head away from the machine.

When she is completely free she hits the handbrake, stopping the film.

C.C. (CONT'D)
Shouldn't wear scarves.

She sucks greedily at a cigarette. She flips the reverse switch and the film rolls forward again.

Hobie once again enters, looking very dashing in his tux.

DIERDRE
Oh Monty! Come join me on the
divan.

The discolored frame flashes by and Monty sits into a brooding close shot on the divan.

DIERDRE (CONT'D)
It seems Allegra's a no-show, which
is simply a bore, but I can partner
you in bridge.
(reacting to him)
Why the pout?

A hold on Hobie as he frames a haunted answer.

Finally:

HOBIE
It's... complicated.

INT. IMPERIAL GARDENS - DAY

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! A push 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 after your term. Think about it: lifetime employment; you wouldn't be a glorified working stiff like you are now. And you'll be running a business, not a circus. Drink?

(notices Eddie's look)

Cigarette?

Cuddahy proffers the pack which Eddie has been eyeing. 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.

EXT. A SPANISH-STYLE HOME - EVENING

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. 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.

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

She plants her purse on her head as she demonstrates a rhumba move:

CARLOTTA

Oh no, anyone can do it, is all
inna hips anna-lips anna-eyes anna-
thighs!

She finishes with a kick and a head-tip that launches the purse backwards off her head to be grabbed by one hand behind her back.

INT. MANNIX'S KIDS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

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

Eddie looks down at her, smiles, stoops to adjust the doll she holds 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" stiched in gold.

INT. MANNIX'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Eddie is at a plateful of dinner. His wife bustles 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... Lockheed 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...

MRS. MANNIX

How's it going with the smoking, dear?

Eddie is startled out of his ruminations:

EDDIE
Oh, you know...

INT. EDDIE'S PACKARD - NIGHT

EDDIE IN HIS PACKARD

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...

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Familiar shot from high on the bluff down on 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. 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 their places.

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. He now seeks to learn
more from the leader from the
north...

Baird is indeed sitting with Professor Marcuse, who is just finishing talking as their conversation mixes up, with Baird nodding vigorous concurrence.

VOICE-OVER (CONT'D)

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

BAIRD

Herb—Herb!—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 I'm thinking—who benefits? Also, I gotta tell ya, 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 and she says Danny's not doing a Norman Taurog picture—he just wants you to shave his back! And that's who benefits!

INT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE - NIGHT

A LOBBY CARD

It is for "Lazy Ol' Moon," starring Hobie Doyle. When it is wiped by a foreground cross we cut wider:

The near-empty lobby of a grand theater. A latecoming gentleman and his wife are opening the auditorium door to enter, the movie's soundtrack fanning up as they do so.

VOICE-OVER

In livelier precincts, the swells of Dreamland gather to inspect the complicated 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 in to Carlotta.

HOBIE

Don't know 'bout this part, they
only gimme one shot at the song.

ONSCREEN

EXT. BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT

It is evening. A pretty young woman converses through a
cookhouse window with a grizzled old man in the yard. The
man—Curly—wears the union suit and the bent-back hatbrim of
a Western sidekick.

Someone offscreen is lazily chording a guitar.

CURLY

It wasn't my fault you saw me take
the pie off the sill Miz McGraw.

WOMAN

Not your fault! Whose fault was it,
Curly?

CURLY

Why, that crazy full moon! Two
weeks ago you'd a never seen me
take it!

Laughter from the audience as Curly stomps over to the man
playing guitar: Hobie, relaxing on a tipped-back chair on the
bunkhouse porch.

CURLY (CONT'D)

Durn that moon! What good is she
anyhow! Wish there never was no
moon! Wish there warn't no bossy
old women!

HOBIE

Don't blame that moon, Curly. She
can't do nothin' but shine!

The guitar intro has ended and Hobie launches into the first verse of "Lazy Ol' Moon." He looks up at the moon, occasionally looks back to the pretty woman in the window who listens, smiling.

As the verse ends we cut to Curly elsewhere in the yard, looking angrily down at something off:

CURLY

Durn you! You turned Curly Strimlin
over to the authorities for the
last time!

We cut over his shoulder: he is addressing a reflection of the moon in a watering trough. He now dives in with hands outstretched as if to throttle the reflection.

Hobie sings on. Curly sits up in the trough sputtering and looks around, stymied and irate.

CURLY (CONT'D)

Durn! Where'd she go?!

Roaring laughter from the audience.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES OFFICE BUILDINGS - NIGHT

Eddie Mannix pulls up in his Packard. It is late night; the street is deserted except for one swank parked car, a cream-colored luxury sedan, that stands out on this less-than-swank street. The car's uniformed driver leans against the hood smoking.

INT. INSIDE OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

A wooden stairway. On the risers are painted the names of the building's business tenants. Eddie Mannix trudges up the stairs in fedora and trenchcoat with collar turned up.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

It is lined by doors with transom windows. Lettering on the pebbled glass of each office door identifies its occupant.

One office only shows light from inside:

JOSEPH SILVERMAN
SURETIES/BONDS/ESCROW

INT. JOE SILVERMAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Eddie taps at the door.

It is opened 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 outside, and a black 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 taking DeeAnna through this.

They are joining the two in the inner office, Sid now addressing 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 sneaks 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 six 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.

DEEANNA
And he's reliable?

JOE
I'm bonded, miss.

SID
The release papers you're signing are not public record. All these documents remain sealed until the year two thousand and fifteen.

Joe takes the document and slides its last page into an embosser and squeezes.

DEEANNA
No one the wiser?

SID
No one the wiser. No fans, no court officials—not even a notary public.

EDDIE

Joe himself is the notary.

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.

EXT. STUDIO GATE - NIGHT

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, thanks Scotty.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT

Eddie Mannix sits slumped, hand cupped to forehead, light flickering onto him from the screen. Natalie sits on his far side with her clipboard, waiting for his attention.

EXT. WELL OF JEHOSEPHAT SET - DAY

Onscreen: we pull Baird Whitlock, in his Roman tribune's wardrobe, as he marches angrily up a line of parched and dusty slaves clamoring for water. Baird curses and exclaims "Romans before slaves!" as he bats aside those waiting.

As he reaches the front of the line our pull back has brought into frame the man giving out water with a dipper. This man, whom we see only from behind, wears a simple robe and has perfectly arranged shoulder-length blond hair, slightly wavy.

Baird/Autolochus—once more exclaiming “Roman's before slaves!”—intercepts the dipper which the blond man is handing to a slave. Autolochus is about to drink himself when he takes in the countenance of the blond water-giver. Something in the man's face and manner strikes Autolochus mightily. He takes a staggering step backward, 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 with the dipper 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—

“Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Three.”

Baird steps back into frame in awe.

BAIRD (CONT'D)

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—

“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 (CONT'D)

Howziss. Wuddya hink.

VOICE

Yeah, okay, cut.

Eddie, watching. His eyes stay 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 mused up against the camera, can you—Sam, Todd can step out, I'll just take an eyeline at the corner of the matte box. I'll hand the dipper back to, uh, to, uh, camera guy.

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?

INT. BROWN DERBY - NIGHT

An orchestra plays "Every Now and Then."

Carlotta laughs, across a table from:

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.

HOBIE (CONT'D)

Oh looka there now!

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

Thinking itself safely out of range, the walking hand starts to walk faster.

HOBIE (CONT'D)

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

He ropes the walking fingers, tripping his hand.

Carlotta, unable to talk from laughter, points at Hobie. Hobie ropes the pointing finger, draws her hand toward him. She slaps at his 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 (CONT'D)

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.

Carlotta is aghast—and then amused, more than ever. Hobie chuckles as she laughs:

HOBIE (CONT'D)

Tell ya what, I wuzh shteer-brushtin an I went down and the shteer went up'n m'teeth headed off fer easht Texash—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, half the throw of the restaurant away. Whoever has the case is hidden by his high-backed booth. His back is to us: the side of one leg juts out as does one elbow, active as he eats.

VOICE

Well now, this is interesting.

Hobie's look turns up: Thessaly Thacker stands at his booth.

THESSALY THACKER

I didn't know you two were friends.

Hobie is distracted, his look shifting between her and the hidden man.

HOBIE

Aw heck yeah, we—we just caught my picture, "Lazy Ol' Moon," '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
headline.

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 keeps returning 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. Brief conversation. Thessaly tips her head back laughing at some pleasantry. Her cackle carries across the room.

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 off at her cackling sister.

THORA THACKER
I'd like to know what the hell is
going on here.

HOBIE
We, uhh... like I said, we just saw
"Lazy Ol' Moon"—

CARLOTTA
And Hobie and I are fixin t'be
friendly!

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

THORA THACKER

What?

HOBIE

We're just, uh...

His eyes widen: the mystery man is getting up. The man stands briefly outside the booth but is 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 performing, is now a hard mask.

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

Hobie hastily shuffles himself out of his booth:

HOBIE (CONT'D)

Ah gotta skedaddle. So sorry!

(to Carlotta)

Have to catch one a yer pictures next time—lookin' ford to it!

EXT. BROWN DERBY - NIGHT

Hobie exits the club just in time to see the passing-by vehicle of Burt Gurney.

Hobie hurries to his car and driver waiting curbside.

HOBIE

Toss me them keys, pard—I'm takin' the car!

INT. EDDIE'S OFFICE

Wide on Eddie behind his desk, half-in, half-out of a pool of desktop lamplight. He sits hunched, forearms on knees.

An insert: on the desk is a letter, its copy too small to read. But we see its letterhead: Lockheed.

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.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD / INT. HOBIE'S CAR - NIGHT

BLEARY MONTAGE

Lots of neon: "The Garden of Allah," restaurants, clubs, chase lights around movie-theater 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 of him.

Also dissolving in and out:

EXT. H.C. SETS - NIGHT

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, its long line of crucifixes looming empty.

The montage which connects 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.

EXT. PCH - NIGHT

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.

EXT. MALIBU HOUSE - NIGHT

HIGH FROM BLUFF

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

INSIDE - NIGHT

For the first time the house has no interior noise, no yapping dog. We hear only the muffled pounding of surf.

The front door clicks, and creaks 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 is 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. He 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.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - NIGHT

The Communist writers man both sides 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.

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

BURT

Easy...

The writers row more slowly as the house centers up between the rocks.

BURT (CONT'D)

Here!

The writers back-paddle to stop the boat. It settles so as to show the house perfectly centered between the two snaggle-rocks.

Satisfied with the boat's position, Burt Gurney looks about: the vast and empty sea.

He looks at his watch: midnight.

A writer occasionally dips an oar for a short front- or back-stroke, keeping the boat in position. The boat dips and bobs, water slapping on wood. An occasional yap from the dog.

Long beat.

A huge roar. Seething 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 rising.

The roaring of great engines, and the angry hiss of water streaming from the column, subsides to... near-silence. Just the gentle chug of idling engines and the faint bleep. bleep. bleep. of sonar.

Waves slosh feebly against the imposing black column: the conning tower of a submarine.

The metallic screek-screek-screek of a hatch being opened. The sound moves the dog to more yapping.

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

BURT (CONT'D)

Take care of him.

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

HERMAN'S VOICE

Comrade!

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

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

HERMAN

Comrade: we salute you! You are going to Moscow to become Soviet Man and help forge the future. We stay behind, continuing to serve in our disguise as capitalist handmaidens.

Looks around, uncertain, and gets encouraging nods from the other writers.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

But the money should go to the cause, not to the servants of the cause.

A chorus of 'hear, hear's from the writers as he gropes for a finish.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

We—well, we...

The passed-forward object arrives at the man immediately behind Herman who now gives Herman 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.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Our modest contribution to the Comintern.

He tosses it, and Burt, with one hand anchoring him to the ladder, one-handedly catches. He looks at the case, nodding deep appreciation for what it represents.

He looks up.

BURT

They will be pleased.

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

Burt reflexively drops the case to grab the arriving dog.

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

The writers give a unison dismayed "Oh..."

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

Finally, a small arch of his eyebrow—his only comment on life's unpredictability. He swings his body back in against the sub and climbs one-handed, holding the 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 (CONT'D)

Professor! Will you join me?

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

MARCUSE

No. I will work from within.

Burt nods concession. The man behind Burt stoops to open the hatch and both men climb in.

On the writers, watching.

The roar of engines, the seething hiss of water. The sub descends.

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.

INT. HOBIE'S CAR - NIGHT

HOBIE AND BAIRD

In Hobie's car they make the right turn from the beach access road to head south on the coast highway. Hobie hums "Lazy Ol' Moon" 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.

BAIRD (CONT'D)

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

HOBIE

Sure.

Both men look, attention drawn by sirens: an oncoming line of police vehicles, their rooflights spinning.

The cars whoosh past.

Baird turns to track them and Hobie looks in 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.

EXT. STUDIO GATE - MORNING

FADE IN PICTURE: Studio gate.

We are looking across the street at the main gate. There is little traffic at this early hour. A cab pulls up and stops curbside. Its passenger gets out.

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

EXT. ROAD TO CAVALRY - DAY

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 in frame only 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 we see only from the ankles down.

The A.D. now looks up from the list on his clipboard 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.

INT. EDDIE'S OFFICE - DAY

Baird, in wardrobe, is in the chair in front of Eddie's desk with his legs crossed, hands clasped behind his head, the picture of cheerfulness.

BAIRD
 So I'm thinkin', "What the hell!
 I've woken up in strange houses
 before but never without a broad
 next to me!"

Eddie glares.

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—everything, history,
 sociology, politics, morality.
 Everything. It's all in a book
 called "Kapital."

EDDIE
 That right.

BAIRD
 Uh-huh. With a K. And you're not
 gonna believe this, but it even
 explains the stuff we do here at
 the studio. Because 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 that these guys've figured
 out. The studio makes pictures to
 serve the system, that's its
 function, that's really what we're
 all up to, here.

EDDIE
 Is it.

Eddie rises from behind his desk and advances on Baird, who
 prattles on.

BAIRD

Yeah, we're just confirming what they call the "status quo." 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 to 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 (CONT'D)

What th—

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 that speech at the feet of the penitent thief and you're gonna believe every word you say.

Slap! Slap!

EDDIE (CONT'D)

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.

(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

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.

BAIRD

(blubbing)

Okay Eddie, I won't forget it.

The manhandling and Eddie's harsh tone have brought Baird to tears. 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, whimpering, as he retreats to the door.

BAIRD

Okay, Eddie.

Eddie reseats himself behind his desk. Baird is reaching for the doorknob but Eddie stops him with a sharp:

EDDIE

Baird!

Baird turns, sniveling, his hand on the knob.

Eddie smiles, points at him, and gives a tight nod:

EDDIE (CONT'D)

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.

EXT. CAPITOL LOT - DAY

EDDIE WALKING

He walks purposefully across the lot. Natalie is deep behind trotting to catch up, arms full of a flower arrangement.

NATALIE

Mr. Mannix!

He turns, waits.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

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.

EDDIE

Less than an hour, personal errand.
*(down at the flowers he
holds)*
Nice arrangement.

NATALIE

She charged it to the studio.

EDDIE

Right.

He turns from her to proceed but immediately stops with a
surprised "Gah!"

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.

EXT. SEATING AREA - DAY

Thora and Eddie seat themselves at a curved stone bench beneath a stone table upon which Eddie puts the flowers.

Behind them is a building that says WARDROBE. A Roman centurion sits against its exterior wall lacing up his sandals' calf straps. Others emerge from the building one at a time, each cinching up the chin strap on his bristle-topped helmet or giving the bottom of his breastplate a tug or in some other way making ready.

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.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

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... protégé, 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

Talked to Laurence late last night, 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'm late for something important.

INT. CONFESSIONAL - DAY

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, twenty-seven 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. And I, uh... I struck a movie star in anger.

A sigh from the unseen priest.

VOICE

All right. 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—

EDDIE

(rising)

Yeah yeah, I got it.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Autolochus is gazing up and off-camera as we pull him through a crowd of Israelites, his face 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, familiar from our epic's first scene, approaches.

GRACCHUS

Why on your knees before this
Hebrew, Autolochus?

Baird rises, turning his attention to his friend and placing
a comradely hand on his shoulder.

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 sought
to drink first at the well—before
the slaves in my charge, whose
thirst was greater than my own.

GRACCHUS

(uncomprehending)
A Roman drinks before a slave.

AUTOLOCHUS

This man was giving water to all.
He saw no Romans, no slaves. He saw
only men—weak men—and gave
succour. He saw suffering, which he
sought to ease. He saw sin, and
gave love.

GRACCHUS

"Love," Autolochus?

AUTOLOCHUS

He saw my own sin, and greed, and
thirst, Gracchus. But in his eyes
I saw no shadow of reproach. I saw
only light. The light of God.

GRACCHUS

You mean, of 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. And why shouldn't God's anointed appear here, among these strange people, in this strange place? Here, Gracchus, in this sundrenched land. Why should he not take this form—the form of an ordinary man? A man bringing us not the old truths, but a new one.

Gracchus, is willing to believe, but is confused.

GRACCHUS

A new truth?

AUTOLOCHUS

A truth beyond the truth that we can see. A truth beyond this world, a truth told not in words but in light.

Gracchus's chin crimps as he juts his jaw, absorbing this message.

A truth we can see 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 (CONT'D)

... if we have but—but—

DIRECTOR

CUT. Cut. Faith. Have but faith.

BAIRD

Faith! Faith? Not, um—

DIRECTOR

No, they changed it.

BAIRD

Goddamnit. Sorry, I'll get it, don't worry.

GRACCHUS

Could I get a pat down, I'm sweating like a pig.

EXT. CAPITOL LOT - DAY

EDDIE MANNIX AND NATALIE

They stride across the lot, Natalie following Eddie with her notepad as at the beginning of the movie.

NATALIE

Gloria DeLamour checked herself out of Our Lady of Perpetual Rest and showed up for work in good shape.

EDDIE

Nn.

NATALIE

Still raining in Gallup, New Mexico, and the "Tucumcari!" crew has shot all the plates we need for "Came the Rain."

EDDIE

Then—just shoot the showdown in the weather and we'll retitle it "Tucumcari Tempest" "Desert Squall" "Hold Back the Storm"...

He momentarily casts about.

VOICE-OVER

The stories begin. The stories end.

EDDIE

I dunno—bounce it off the writers.

VOICE-OVER

So it has been.

NATALIE

Check. Here's today's call list.

She hands a sheet forward. He studies it, hands it back.

EDDIE

Add a call to a Mr. Cuddahy at the Lockheed Corporation.

NATALIE

Long call, short?

EDDIE

"Thanks but no thanks"—how long was that?

VOICE-OVER
But the story of Eddie Mannix—

NATALIE
Check. Who do we call first?

VOICE-OVER
—will never end.

Eddie pushes back a sleeve to look at his watch.

EDDIE
New York first. Time to check in
with Mr. Schenk.

VOICE-OVER
For his is a tale written... in
light everlasting.

As they head up the walk to the administration building we
boom up to bring into view the skyline of the lot beyond. In
the middle distance is the Capitol Pictures water tower, one
word painted on its face: BEHOLD.

A slanting sun, hidden by clouds, sends down golden beams.