

THE HUMAN COMEDY

From the novel by

William Saroyan

THE SOUND OF CICADAS

FADE IN

A 1941 WALTHAM WRISTWATCH

in the MOONLIGHT, as the seconds hand sweeps toward 11:00.
A *THROAT CLEARS* OFFSCREEN...

A MAN'S LIPS

as he moistens them with his tongue...and...

A BUGLE'S MOUTHPIECE

rises up into frame and presses against the lips...and we...

CUT TO:

EXT. U.S. ARMY CAMP - NORTH CAROLINA - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

as "TAPS" plays its haunting C Major triad signalling
"lights out" and the LIGHTS wink out in the WINDOWS of
a dozen BARRACKS.

INT. BARRACKS - SAME

as the LIGHTS GO OUT on

MARCUS MACAULEY (20)

a handsome young man lying on the bottom bunk of one of
a dozen BUNK BEDS.

He's been reading a letter from home and now must angle
it to catch the MOONLIGHT fighting through the window
nearest his bunk.

Satisfied, he grins.

It's a gentle, wise, secret grin which seems to say Yes
to all things.

He folds the letter, tucks it back into its envelope, and
slides it under his pillow as the final note of "TAPS"
fades away into the night.

MARCUS

Homer got a job.

The CREAK of the wooden slats of the upper bunk...and...

TOBEY GEORGE (19)

- a RED-HEADED young PRIVATE - leans over the edge of the upper bunk, looks (upside down) at Marcus, and asks:

TOBEY

Homer...the youngest one?

MARCUS

No. The *youngest* one's Ulysses.
How the heck is *he* gonna get a job?

TOBEY

What's *he* like?

MARCUS

Ulysses? He's...well...he's *four*.

CUT TO:

ULYSSES MACAULEY (AGE 4)

- a wide-eyed wonder of a little boy, dressed in overalls with one busted shoulder strap and leaning over to stare at
A GOPHER

peeking out from its hole.

For an instant, these two round-eyed creatures stare at one another before the smallest of the two suddenly disappears back down his hole. Something is wrong.

And Ulysses looks down at the ground all around him. It is *trembling*...we are

EXT. MACAULEY HOME - BACKYARD - DUSK

and Ulysses turns his back on the gopher-hole, the old TWO-STORY SHINGLED HOUSE, the WALNUT TREE and the CHICKEN COOP, and starts to run - to squeeze through a gap in the backyard FENCE - and to dash as fast as his short little legs can carry him across

EXT. VACANT LOT - CONTINUOUS

And Ulysses speeds across this weed-infested, junky, wonderfully empty field as the CAMERA PULLS BACK and CRANES UP to reveal

EXT. ITHACA, CALIFORNIA - DUSK

a small town of ROW CROPS, VINEYARDS and ORCHARDS in the heart of California's Central Valley. And, in the distance...

A FREIGHT TRAIN

is coming. We can hear its WHISTLE before we

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILROAD CROSSING - MOMENTS LATER

as Ulysses arrives, breathless and just in time. Here, the ground is positively *shaking*.

Ulysses waves at the ENGINEER in the speeding LOCOMOTIVE, but the man ignores him.

And, as the BOXCARS and FLATCARS roar by, Ulysses waves to the STOKER...the BRAKEMAN...the CARMAN...and to a HOBO riding for free. But none of them wave back...until

A BLACK MAN

appears, leaning over the side of a GONDOLA CAR, and *singing*.

BLACK MAN

Weep no more, my lady / O weep no more today / We will sing one song for the old Kentucky home / For the old Kentucky home far away!

And Ulysses waves to him, and he waves back. And he SHOUTS over the clatter and roar of the train:

BLACK MAN (CONT'D)

GOIN' HOME, BOY! GOIN' BACK WHERE I BELONG!

And long before Ulysses can make sense out of this statement, the freight train has passed. Its CABOOSE is already disappearing in the distance as Ulysses smiles.

It's a gentle, wise, secret smile which seems to say Yes to all things.

CUT TO:

EXT. MACAULEY HOME - BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

as Ulysses squeezes through the gap in the fence and runs across the backyard - trips and falls, picks himself up and moves to stand next to his mother

MRS MACAULEY (40)

a beautiful, if life-worn, widow. She is throwing feed to the CHICKENS in the coop as Ulysses sidles up next to her.

ULYSSES

Where's Marcus?

Mrs Macauley musters a patient smile. This isn't the first time for the following litany:

MRS MACAULEY

Marcus has gone away from Ithaca.

ULYSSES

Why?

MRS MACAULEY

Marcus is in the Army.

ULYSSES

When is he coming home?

MRS MACAULEY

When the war is over.

ULYSSES

Tomorrow?

MRS MACAULEY

No. Not tomorrow. And we don't know when. We're waiting.

ULYSSES

If we wait...will my father come home like Marcus too?

This catches Mrs Macauley off guard.

MRS MACAULEY

No, Ulysses. Your father will not come home the way he used to. He won't...walk down the street...and climb the steps...and cross the porch and come into the house the way he used to.

ULYSSES

Why?

And Mrs Macauley sets aside her bag of chicken feed and hikes up her apron and lowers herself down to look at her little son eye to eye and on his own level:

MRS MACAULEY

Because every life ends...

And Mrs Macauley, bound and determined to continue to tell her son the truth until he can comprehend it, states simply:

MRS MACAULEY (CONT'D)

Your father's *life* ended two years ago. But he is *with* us, still. Because you and I and Marcus and Homer and your sister Bess remember him. His *goodness* is with us, because it is in you...and in Marcus...and in Homer...and in Bess. *Goodness* never ends.

Ulysses blinks at this information...then:

ULYSSES

Where is Homer?

MRS MACAULEY

Homer is working. He found himself a job, after school. He will be home after midnight, when you are in bed asleep.

ULYSSES

Why is Homer working?

MRS MACAULEY

He is working because Marcus is in the Army and we must have money... to buy food and clothing and pay rent...and to give to others.

ULYSSES

Who?

MRS MACAULEY

The poor.

ULYSSES

Who're the poor?

MRS MACAULEY

Everybody. You must remember
always to give - of everything
you have. And the more you give,
the more you will *have* to give.

And Ulysses blinks a couple of times, then moves to
the chicken coop and starts looking for something.

And Mrs. Macauley lifts her bag of feed and scatters it
for the birds...and glances at the BACK PORCH where
MATTHEW MACAULEY (AGE 47)

- her dead husband, in the prime of his life - stands
smiling at her...

A tug on her apron pulls her attention to Ulysses,
holding up a fresh CHICKEN EGG.

And we CUT WIDE as Mrs Macauley accepts her son's
solemn offering...to REVEAL that there is, in fact, NO
ONE standing, smiling, on the back porch...and...

THE SOUND OF *SINGING*

PRE-LAPS our

WIPE TO:

HOMER MACAULEY (AGE 14)

on the seat of a second-hand bicycle and wearing a
POSTAL TELEGRAPH MESSENGER'S COAT which is far too big
and a MESSENGER'S CAP which is far too small, and
SINGING at the top of his lungs a ridiculous operatic
song of his own invention as he races along

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK

and past a VINEYARD.

Homer is the very picture of reckless youthful
exuberance, and his own comic opera is practically
bursting from his chest as he powers down the dirt
road...looks up at the dusky sky...and sees

THREE AIRPLANES

flying overhead...

And he promptly runs off the road and into a ditch.

It's an accident that would send a grown man to the hospital. But Homer is a boy and, though momentarily dazed, considers his fall as a source of amusement rather than a corporeal concern.

He looks to his bicycle - upside down with its front wheel still spinning - and asks it:

HOMER

Are *you* okay?

He scrambles to his feet and rights the bike and gives it a once-over as

A DOG

barking furiously, emerges from a VINEYARD ROW and makes a vicious bee-line for him.

And Homer jumps back on the bicycle and pedals away, with the dog in hot pursuit. And Homer turns and barks back at the dog and *LAUGHS* with sheer delight.

Homer Macauley, age 14, is out of school for the day and heading for the first shift of his first job.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

As the dog tires of the chase and slows to a trot, Homer puts his hand out and slaps a SIGN as he passes it:

Ithaca, California
East, West - Home Is Best
Welcome, Stranger

A CONVOY OF U.S. ARMY TRUCKS

turns a corner and heads out of town.

And Homer stops pedalling and salutes

THE SOLDIERS

as they pass by...and many of them return his salute.

CUT TO:

A CLOCK

as it clicks to 7:02. It is displayed in the WINDOW of

EXT./INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - NIGHT

as Homer jumps off his bicycle, leans it against the wall and enters the old telegraph office to see SPANGLER (36)

- the kind-looking manager of the telegraph office - counting the words of a telegram form which has just been handed to him by

A NERVOUS YOUNG MAN (20)

fidgeting at the counter.

SPANGLER

Fourteen words, collect.

The Young Man hesitates...*coughs*...

SPANGLER (CONT'D)

Little short of money?

YOUNG MAN

A little...but my mother'll send me enough to get home on. How long'll it take the telegram to get to her?

SPANGLER

It's pretty late in the East. And it's not easy to raise money late at night, but I'll rush it through.

While Homer watches, Spangler reaches into his own pockets, pulls out a handful of COINS and a single piece of CURRENCY which he hands to the Young Man.

YOUNG MAN

What's this?

SPANGLER

It's nothing. It's just in case. You can pay me back when your mother sends the money.

The Young Man is amazed. Embarrassed.

YOUNG MAN

Thanks...uhm...*thanks*...

He turns and hurries past Homer and out of the office, and Homer watches as Spangler hands the telegram form to

WILLIAM GROGAN (67)

- the aged night-shift telegraph operator sporting an old-fashioned green eye-shade cap.

SPANGLER

Send it paid, Willie.

And Spangler drops presses a lever on the CASH REGISTER - *CHUH-CHING!* - and drops a couple of coins in the tray.

And Grogan puts his hand around the TELEGRAPH KEY or "bug" and rattles off the telegram, letter by letter: *DASH DASH, DIT DASH DIT, DIT DIT DIT...* as the CAMERA SCANS the HANDWRITTEN POSTAL TELEGRAPH FORM

MRS. MARGARET STRICKMAN
1874 BIDDLE STREET
YORK, PENNSYLVANIA

DEAR MA. PLEASE TELEGRAPH THIRTY DOLLARS. WANT TO COME HOME. AM FINE.
EVERYTHING O.K.

JOHN

Spangler leans against the inside edge of the counter and watches Homer watching Grogan.

SPANGLER

So. Remind me. Why do you want to be a messenger?

Homer is momentarily caught off guard, then:

HOMER

Because I'll get to visit a lot of people...and go to a lot of places.

SPANGLER

Yeah. How did you sleep last night?

HOMER

Fine.

SPANGLER

Did you sleep a little at school today?

HOMER

A little.

SPANGLER

What subject?

HOMER

Ancient history.

SPANGLER

What about sports? What about not being able to take part in them on account of having this job?

HOMER

We have a physical education period every day.

SPANGLER

Is that so? I used to run the 220 low hurdles when I went to Ithaca High. Valley Champion. You really want this job?

HOMER

I'm going to be the best messenger this office ever had.

It is a simple statement of fact, and Spangler can't help but smile.

SPANGLER

Okay. Just don't kill yourself. Get there swiftly, but don't go too fast. Be polite to everybody, take your hat off in elevators, and - above all things - don't lose a telegram.

HOMER

Yes, sir.

SPANGLER

How old are you?

HOMER

Sixteen.

SPANGLER

Yeah. You said that yesterday. We're not supposed to hire a boy unless he's sixteen. How old are you?

HOMER

Fourteen.

SPANGLER

Well...so...you'll be sixteen in two years. What are you going to do with the fifteen dollars a week?

HOMER

Give it to my mother.

SPANGLER

All right. From now on you're part of this outfit. Watch things. Listen carefully. Keep your eyes and ears open. You know where Chatterton's Bakery is? Here's a quarter. Go get me two day-old pies - apple and cocoanut cream.

HOMER

Yes, sir!

And Homer catches the quarter that Spangler tosses to him and dashes out of the office. Spangler looks to Grogan.

SPANGLER

What do you think of him?

GROGAN

He's a good boy.

SPANGLER

I think he is. Poor family. No father. Brother in the Army. Mother works in the packing-house in the summer. Sister goes to Sate College. He's a coupla years under-age, that's all -

GROGAN

I'm a couple over-age. We'll get along.

Spangler nods and heads for the door...

SPANGLER

If you want me, I'll be at Corbett's. Share the pies between you -

...but stops cold as Homer reenters, breathlessly, bearing two wrapped-up PIES. Spangler is stunned.

SPANGLER (CONT'D)

What's your name again?

HOMER

Homer Macauley.

SPANGLER

Homer Macauley, you're just the boy this office needs. You're probably the fastest-moving thing in the San Joaquin Valley!

Spangler claps Homer on the shoulder, then exits.

GROGAN

All right, boy. The pies.

Homer places the pies on Grogan's desktop.

GROGAN (CONT'D)

Homer Macauley, my name is William Grogan. I am sixty-seven years old, an old-time telegrapher - one of the last - I am hungry...and...

Grogan breaks the cocoanut cream into four pieces.

GROGAN (CONT'D)

...from now on, you and I are friends.

Grogan offers Homer a chunk of pie, and bites into his own. He speaks around the food:

GROGAN (CONT'D)

I shall, on occasion, ask you to run an errand for me. In the event of drunkenness, I shall expect from you a depth of understanding one may not expect from men past the age of twelve. *How old are you?*

HOMER

Fourteen. But I've got a pretty good understanding.

GROGAN

I'll take your word for it. Every night I shall count on you to see that I shall be able to perform my duties.

(Pause)

A splash of cold water in the face if I do not respond when shaken. This is to be followed by a cup of hot black coffee from Corbett's.

HOMER

Yes, sir. Cold water and coffee.

GROGAN

Do you think this world is going to
be a better place after the war?

Homer thinks for a moment, then his answer is almost
obliterated by the sudden *RATTLING* of the TELEGRAPH BOX.

HOMER

Yes, sir.

Grogan licks his finger and selects a blank POSTAL
TELEGRAPH FORM from a pile, inserts it into his
typewriter, and begins to type the incoming message.

GROGAN

Do you like cocoanut cream?

HOMER

Yes, sir.

And, as Grogan types, he looks at Homer - considers him
for a moment, as though to size him up or to take a
mental snapshot of his youth and innocence.

Then Grogan removes the telegram from the typewriter,
separates the original from its carbon copy, files the
carbon copy...and hands the original to Homer.

And, while Homer dutifully folds the telegram, puts it in
an envelope, seals the envelope, tucks it into his
cap...and exits...

Grogan opens a desk drawer and removes a BOTTLE OF WHISKEY
...and takes a long drink.

WIPE TO:

HOMER'S FACE

- his eyes searching for something - as a POOR RESIDENTIAL
NEIGHBORHOOD glides by in the BACKGROUND. We are

EXT. G STREET - NIGHT

and Homer is coasting down the night-lit street and
checking for the right address - No. 1129. He finds it. He
swings his leg over the back of his bike and brakes to a
stop and leans his machine against a picket fence.

EXT. SANDOVAL HOUSE - SAME

On the porch, Homer squares his shoulders, grins to himself, and knocks on the door. He waits. Clears his throat.

In the distance, the SOUND of a TRAIN WHISTLE seems only to make the relative silence of G Street more complete.

And the door opens smoothly on its hinges to reveal

MRS SANDOVAL (40)

- a large, beautiful Mexican woman standing in the warm backlight of her home.

Homer touches the brim of his cap and is about to speak -

MRS SANDOVAL

You...have a telegram?

HOMER

Yes, ma'am.

MRS SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

For who is it?

HOMER

Mrs Rosa Sandoval, 1129 G Street.

He extends the telegram toward the woman, but she declines his offer.

HOMER (CONT'D)

Are you Mrs Sandoval?

MRS SANDOVAL

Please! Come in! I cannot read English.

And Homer steps just inside the door.

MRS SANDOVAL

(CONT'D) Please...how does the telegram read?

HOMER

Ma'am?

MRS SANDOVAL

Please! Open the telegram! Read to me the telegram.

HOMER

Yes, ma'am.

And Homer opens the envelope...and we see it in stark black and white. The CAMERA SILENTLY READS:

MRS ROSA SANDOVAL
1129 G STREET
ITHACA, CALIFORNIA

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR SON PVT JUAN DOMINGO SANDOVAL WAS KILLED IN ACTION IN THE PHILIPPINES 19 MAR 42 CONFIRMING LETTER FOLLOWS.

J A ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

MRS SANDOVAL

Who sends the telegram? My son,
Juan Domingo?

Homer looks up at Mrs Sandoval. *Now what the hell is he supposed to do?*

HOMER

No, ma'am. It's...from the
Secretary of War.

MRS SANDOVAL

The Secretary of -

The word remains unsaid. She studies Homer's eyes. And Homer does the best he can:

HOMER

Maybe it's a mistake. Everybody makes a mistake, Mrs Sandoval. Maybe it wasn't your son. Maybe it was somebody else. The telegram says it was Juan Domingo, but maybe the telegram is wrong.

Suddenly, it is as though she cannot hear him.

MRS SANDOVAL

Oh, do not have fear. Come.
Inside. Come inside. I will bring
you candy.

And Mrs Sandoval takes Homer by the arm and leads him...

INT. SANDOVAL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

...to a table in the center of this small room.

MRS SANDOVAL

Sit! Please! All boys like candy
very much. I will bring you candy.

And she disappears into another room, and Homer scarcely has time to register his confusion and discomfort before she is back, bearing a CANDY BOX.

MRS SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

You would not bring me a bad
telegram. You are a good boy -
like my Juanito when he was
little. Eat this candy. It is
cactus. I make it for my Juanito
when he come home. But *you* eat.
You...are my boy...too...

And her *SOB* is so sudden, so profound, that Homer startles. And Mrs Sandoval hugs herself - as though to hold herself in - as though weeping were a disgrace.

And Homer is off the chair and standing, awkwardly - not knowing whether to stay or go - when Mrs Sandoval grabs him, envelopes him in her arms and pulls him to her breast, inadvertently knocking Homer's too-small hat to the floor.

MRS SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

My little boy! *My little boy!*

Homer toughs it out until she releases him and:

MRS SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

Come...sit down. Please.
Here...let me look at you...

Suddenly, Homer feels sick to his stomach, and we

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

as Homer struggles to untangle the handlebars of his bike from the picket fence...*and pauses to retch his guts out in the weeds.* He pulls a kerchief from his back pocket and wipes his lips and we

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Homer pedals his bike as fast as he can - so fast that his tears streak down his cheeks at an angle.

EXT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Homer brakes. As he dismounts - throws his leg over the back of his bike - he murmurs a fragment of a thought:

HOMER

(A murmur)

...otherwise, I'm as good as
dead myself...

The light of a STREET LAMP illuminates his face, and he catches his own REFLECTION in the front window of the office. He stares at himself for a moment. He has stopped crying. He wipes the tears from his cheeks, and enters

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Grogan is slumped forward - the side of his face resting on his desk.

And the telegraph box is *RATTLING*.

Homer rushes to the old man's side...then gently shakes him by the shoulders.

HOMER

Mr. Grogan! They're calling you!
Wake up! *Wake up!*

Nothing. Homer races to the ceramic WATER JAR and fills a paper cup from its spigot and balances it back to the desk ...but hesitates to follow his instructions. He sets the cup down and shakes Grogan again.

HOMER (CONT'D)

MR. GROGAN! THERE'S A TELEGRAM!
THEY'RE CALLING YOU!

Nothing. So Homer douses the old man right in the kisser - empties the cup of water into Grogan's face.

And Grogan blinks...sits up with a start...looks at Homer... then at the telegraph box...and *click-clicks* the bug to answer the call as:

GROGAN

That's right! Now, quick! Black
coffee! Hurry!

And Homer dashes out of the office and we follow him - IN
A SINGLE TAKE across

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

- where he dodges a couple of late-night automobiles -
and pushes his way into

INT. CORBETT'S BAR - CONTINUOUS

- where a couple of REGULARS, a few odd LOCALS, and a cadre
of SOLDIERS are drinking underneath framed BOXING PHOTOS and
POSTERS advertising "YOUNG CORBETT III" and where

CORBETT (AGE 36)

AKA Raffaele "Ralph" Giordano - the former welterweight
boxing champion of the world - is the proprietor.

HOMER

MR. CORBETT! I NEED A CUP OF
COFFEE! *RIGHT NOW!*

For an instant, the patrons freeze at the sight of the
14-year-old in the ill-fitting messenger uniform
demanding a cup of jo...then they burst out *LAUGHING*.

VARIOUS

*Haw, haw! Y'hear that? Get a load
o' that! The Macauley boy? Didya
ever? Hey, Homer!*

But Homer stands his ground and stares intently
into Corbett's broken-nosed face.

HOMER

It's for Mr. Grogan.

And Corbett grabs a cup and fills it from a pot behind the
bar while the patrons watch, and Homer digs into his pocket,
but Corbett waves him away as he sets the coffee on the bar.

CORBETT (CONT'D)

'ats okay! No charge, boy!

HOMER

Thanks!

Homer grips the cup with both hands and heads for the -

CORBETT

Hey! Somebody get the door!

And TWO PATRONS almost collide trying to get to it first.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Homer balances the steaming cup of brew all the way into

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

where Grogan is click-clicking the "bug" but struggling to stay awake. He brightens as his bleary eyes focus on Homer, standing in front of him with a cup of coffee.

GROGAN

That's right, boy. Don't worry...

Grogan takes the cup and moves it to his lips and slurps at the steaming hot java.

GROGAN (CONT'D)

Don't be afraid. That's exactly right.

HOMER

Is it...an important telegram?

GROGAN

No. It is most *unimportant*. Business. The accumulating of money. It's a night letter. You won't have to deliver it tonight. *Most unimportant...*

(Pause)

But *very* important for me to receive it.

He takes another pull at the coffee, and Homer is amazed that anyone could drink anything so hot.

And Grogan is suddenly, fully awake - almost miraculously his old self again as he proclaims:

GROGAN (CONT'D)

They've been wanting to retire me for years. Wanting to put in machines. Multiplexes...Teletypes. Machines instead of human beings!

Grogan looks at Homer for an moment, and confides:

GROGAN (CONT'D)

I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I didn't have this job. I've worked all my life...

HOMER

Yes, sir.

GROGAN

I know I can count on you to help me, Homer.

Grogan licks his finger and selects a blank postal telegraph form and slips it into the typewriter.

GROGAN (CONT'D)

You've *already* helped me. You've come to work...just in time.

Grogan signals for the telegrapher at the other end to continue, and as the telegraph box commences to *RATTLE* and Grogan proceeds to type the incoming message, he declares:

GROGAN (CONT'D)

Trying to put me out of a job! I was the fastest telegrapher in the world. Faster than Wolinsky, sending and receiving both - *and no mistakes*. Willie Grogan! Telegraph operators all over the world know that name. And I...

Grogan pauses and smiles at Homer and corrects himself:

GROGAN (CONT'D)

...*you* and I...*are still alive*.

The SOUND of A CLOCK CHIMING MIDNIGHT PRE-LAPS our

CUT TO:

INT. MACAULEY HOME - PARLOR - NIGHT

as Homer opens the front door and closes it soundlessly and enters the parlor...and is surprised to see Mrs Macauley sitting in her rocking chair under the light of a single lamp and knitting from a RED CROSS KNITTING BASKET.

Homer just stands there for a moment...while the CLOCK CHIMES...then:

HOMER

Everything's all right, Ma. I don't want you to sit up this way every night. Everything's all right.

MRS MACAULEY

I know.

And Homer collapses into an old overstuffed chair. He waits a moment, then:

HOMER

I had to deliver a telegram to a lady over on G Street. The telegram was from the Secretary of War. Her son is dead. But she wouldn't believe it. She made me eat candy - made out of cactus. She hugged me and said I was her boy. And it made me feel sick.

(Pause)

I never saw anybody hurt that way before.

(Pause)

When I got back to the office, the old telegraph operator was drunk.

Homer looks for a reaction, but Mrs Macauley is simply listening. Carefully.

HOMER (CONT'D)

If he doesn't do his work, they'll put him on a pension. I got him sober all right...and everything was okay. But...everything...has changed...

And Homer Macauley is momentarily rendered helpless in his confusion.

MRS MACAULEY

If...if it makes you feel *lonely*, Homer...

She waits. Homer nods. Yeah. *Lonely*...

MRS MACAULEY (CONT'D)

...it is because *nothing* has changed. It is only that you are becoming aware of the world in which you...have been a child.

And Mrs Macauley's smile makes her candor - her unvarnished honesty...somehow...bearable. And Homer asserts simply:

HOMER

I don't know *what's* happening - or *why*...but...no matter what, don't let anything hurt *you* that way...

Mrs Macauley smiles...then:

MRS MACAULEY

What did you have for supper?

HOMER

Pie. Apple and cocoanut cream. The manager of the office paid for them. He's the greatest guy I ever met.

MRS MACAULEY

I'll send Bess with a supper for you tomorrow night.

HOMER

You don't have to go to the trouble.

Homer rises. He takes a deep breath and lets it go.

HOMER (CONT'D)

This job...is the best thing that ever happened to me, Ma. But it sure makes school seem...silly.

MRS MACAULEY

I will be here, waiting for you every night -

HOMER

No. Ma -

MRS MACAULEY

- but you do not need to come in and talk to me unless you wish to.

And Homer looks down at his mother and knows that, no matter how much things have changed, arguing with her is pointless.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Dear Homer: You are now the man of the Macauley family of Ithaca...

So Homer leans over and kisses her on the cheek.

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

...so everything of mine at home
is yours - to give to Ulysses when
you no longer want them.

CUT TO:

INT. BARRACKS - NORTH CAROLINA - NIGHT

Marcus is lying in his bunk, writing this letter by
the light of a FLASHLIGHT.

MARCUS (V.O.)

My books, my phonograph, my
records, my clothes when you're
ready to fit into them, my
microscope, my fishing tackle...

EXT. WOODED TRAIL - NORTH CAROLINA - DAY

Marcus and Tobey - both wearing full combat gear and
carrying their rifles chest high - are running (double
time) in cadence with the 40 OTHER MEN of their platoon.

MARCUS (V.O.)

The money I made last year at the
packing-house I have given to Ma.
It's not nearly enough and soon
Ma and Bess will be thinking of
going to work.

Tobey and a lot of the other guys are straining -
covered with sweat.

Marcus is gritting his teeth, determined to tough it out...

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

I cannot ask you not to allow them
to go to work - but I am hoping
that you yourself won't allow it.

EXT. CLEARING - NORTH CAROLINA - DAY

as Marcus, Tobey, and the rest of the platoon collapse in
exhaustion - "take five" - wretch, drink from their
canteens, try to catch their breath. Marcus and Tobey
find a tree to lean against.

TOBEY

So...what're...mornings like?

Out of breath, Marcus looks over at his friend and laughs at his curiosity.

MARCUS

Mornings? Well...Homer's always up first...

CUT TO:

AN ALARM CLOCK

as it *CLICKS* 7:00 AM and HOMER'S HAND swats it just before it starts to ring.

We are

INT. MACAULEY HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

And Homer reaches under his bed and pulls out a mail-order copy of

THE CHARLES ATLAS BODYBUILDING COURSE

and an ELASTIC STRETCHER. He turns to LESSON 7 and commences with a deep breathing exercise.

ULYSSES (O.C.)

What's that?

Sure enough, Ulysses is awake, wearing his nightshirt, kneeling on the edge of his bed and watching Homer's every move. And Homer does his best to answer questions while breathing deeply...lifting his legs straight up from the bed...stretching the elastic across his chest...

HOMER

Exercises.

ULYSSES

What for?

HOMER

Muscle.

ULYSSES

Gonna be the strongest man in the world?

HOMER

Nah.

ULYSSES

What are you gonna be, then?

HOMER

Go back to sleep.

Ulysses dutifully get back under his covers.

ULYSSES

Gonna go to school?

HOMER

Yup.

ULYSSES

Gonna learn somethin'?

HOMER

I'm going to run the 220
low hurdles.

ULYSSES

Why?

HOMER

Because everybody born in this
town runs the 220 low hurdles.
It's the big race. The manager of
the telegraph office ran the 220
low hurdles when he went to Ithaca
High. He was Valley Champion.

ULYSSES

What's Valley Champion?

HOMER

That's the best.

ULYSSES

You gonna be the best?

HOMER

I'm gonna try. *Now go back to
sleep.*

Ulysses hunkers down under his blanket.

And Homer, feeling slightly guilty for his growing
impatience with his little brother, starts to get dressed.

ULYSSES

Tomorrow...no...yesterday I saw
the train.

Homer grins.

HOMER

How was it?

ULYSSES

There was a black man, waved.

HOMER

Did you wave back?

ULYSSES

First I waved first. Then he waved first, then I waved. Then he waved. He said, "Goin' home!" Where is he going?

HOMER

I don't know. Everybody's got a different home. Some East, some West, some North, some South.

ULYSSES

Is West the best?

HOMER

I don't know. I haven't been anywhere else.

ULYSSES

Are you going?

HOMER

Some day.

ULYSSES

Where?

HOMER

New York. That's East. After New York, London. After London, Paris. Then Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Moscow, Stockholm. Some day I'm going to all the great cities of the world.

ULYSSES

Gonna come back?

HOMER

Sure.

ULYSSES

Gonna be glad?

HOMER

Sure. Glad to see Ma and Marcus and Bess. Gonna to be glad to see you. Mr. Spangler, Mr. Grogan and Mary Arena next door, the old gang - Auggie, Enoch, Shag, Nickie, Alf...even little old Lionel.

ULYSSES

Don't go. Homer, *don't go!*

HOMER

I'm not going *now*. I'm just going to school.

ULYSSES

Don't ever go. Papa went, and he won't come back not-like-he-used-to. Marcus went...don't you go too, Homer.

Once again Homer's annoyance at Ulysses's incessant questions melts away, and he reassures his little brother:

HOMER

It's going to be a long time before I go. But right now it's time for you to go.

ULYSSES

Where?

HOMER

Back to sleep.

ULYSSES

Why does he say, "Weep no more, weep no more"?

HOMER

Who?

ULYSSES

The black man on the train.

HOMER

It's a song.

INT. MACAULEY HOME - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Homer enters and sits down at the BREAKFAST TABLE where Mrs Macauley and

BESS (17)

- Homer's older sister - are waiting for him.

HOMER

Sorry. I'm running late.

And the three Macauleys lace their fingers together and bow their heads for a moment...then lift them, and begin to eat - OATMEAL, TOAST, and fresh squeezed ORANGE JUICE.

BESS

What prayer did you say?

HOMER

The same one we always say.

BESS

(Teasing)

I'll bet you don't even know what you're saying.

Is everyone out to exasperate Homer today?

But rather than rise to his sister's bait, Homer decides to end it before it even gets started:

HOMER

I do, too. And you know as well as I do what it means. You're just trying to mix me up. Well don't worry. You can. I guess anybody can mix me up right now, but it doesn't make any difference, because I believe in what I'm praying for. Everybody does, don't they, Ma?

MRS MACAULEY

Of course they do.

HOMER

(To Bess)

You see? Are you satisfied?

And the BACK SCREEN DOOR opens and

MARY ARENA (17)

- the beautiful girl next-door - enters with a bowl of something.

Homer gets up and offers his chair.

MARY

Oh, no, Homer. Sit down. You go ahead. I just had breakfast with my father, but thanks. I brought some stewed dried peaches, Mrs. Macauley.

MRS MACAULEY

Thank you, Mary. How *is* your father?

MARY

Fine. He just won't stop. First thing this morning - "Any letters? Any letters from Marcus yet?"

BESS

We'll get another one soon.

Bess gets up and takes her bowl to the sink.

BESS (CONT'D)

Now, come on, Mary, or we'll be late to class.

MARY

Oh...all right....

Mrs Macauley looks a question to Marcus's sweetheart.

MARY (CONT'D)

I'm getting sick and tired of college, Mrs Macauley. It's just like high school. I'd rather just...find myself a job somewhere.

MARY

So would I.

MRS MACAULEY

Nonsense. You're children. Your father has a good job, Mary.

HOMER

And so do I -

MARY

I know. But it just doesn't seem right to be going to *school* when Marcus is in the Army and the whole world is gouging each other's eyes out. I wish I was man - so I could be in the Army with Marcus...

Dumbfounded by Mary's statement, Homer looks at his mother...at Mary...and back again.

And then Bess breaks the awkward SILENCE by taking Mary's arm and pulling her along, toward the back screen door...

BESS

C'mon, Mary.

...and out.

The screen door *SLAMS*, and bounces open, and settles. A moment passes, then:

HOMER

What about *that*, Ma?

MRS MACAULEY

Its perfectly natural...for a couple of girls...to want to get out and flap their wings.

HOMER

No. I don't mean that! I mean *Mary*. She -

MRS MACAULEY

Mary is a sweet, unaffected, childlike girl. The most childlike girl I've ever known, and I'm *glad* Marcus is in love with her.

HOMER

No! It's...she doesn't understand ...what this war...

But he can't finish his thought.

He looks at his mother. His mother holds his gaze, and they share an unspoken moment of candid dread for the unspoken possibility that Marcus...

HOMER (CONT'D)

I've got to go.

And Homer gets up, kisses his mother on the forehead, and is out the door. And...

ULYSSES

is standing behind in Homer's empty chair - standing there, very small in his nightshirt. When did he toddle in?

He looks up at his mother, as a small animal looks up at a creature of its own kind which is its greatest delight and comfort. And we

CUT TO:

EXT. SAN BENITO AVENUE - MOMENTS LATER

as Homer - dressed for and heading for school - brakes his bike to a sudden skidding stop, lays it on its side, and runs to

A PICKET FENCE

The fence is old and rotten with no evident purpose other than to ornament a VACANT LOT full of weeds.

Starting at the base and moving up, Homer measures its height by "walking" his hand up a picket - counting the number of tip-of-thumb to tip-of-little finger spans - and when he stops, there is still a good twelve inches left.

The fence is considerably above his waist.

Hmmm...

He looks beyond the fence - at the weed-infested lot...then walks ten paces away from the fence, to stand almost across the street.

He takes a deep breath...then runs toward the fence as fast as he can...executes a picture-perfect hurdle...but catches the top of the picket with his foot - knocking over the rotted fence *and falling face-first into the weeds* and we

CUT TO:

EXT. MEADOW - NORTH CAROLINA - DAY

as Marcus and Tobey - in full combat gear - crawl on their stomachs through the grass and

A DRILL INSTRUCTOR

walks INTO FRAME and *SHOUTS* at them (MOS)

MARCUS (V.O.)

My Army pay goes to Ma, except for a few dollars that I must have, but this money is not enough.

INT. MESS HALL - NORTH CAROLINA - DAY

Marcus is writing his letter as Tobey - bearing a TRAY piled with food - flops down on the bench beside him.

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

It is not easy for me to hope for so much from you, when I myself did not begin to work until I was nineteen, but somehow I believe that you will be able to do what I could not do.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - ITHACA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

MISS HICKS (60)

- the ancient teacher of Ancient History - is writing something on the BLACKBOARD.

Homer - his elbow on his desk and his chin resting on his hand - is gazing dreamily at something OFFSCREEN...

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

I don't know how you're going to be able to keep our family together and go to high school at the same time.

The MORNING SUN is streaming through the windows and causing a virtual HALO of light to form around the golden-haired

HELEN ELIOT

- the unspeakably beautiful, yet snobbish, object of Homer's affections - now rising up from her front-row desk...and turning to face the class...and reading aloud from their Ancient History textbook (MOS)

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

I miss you, of course, and think about you all the time. I am happy, and even though I have never believed in wars, I am proud to be serving my country which, to me, is Ithaca.

Helen Eliot looks up and smiles...at *someone over Homer's shoulder*.

And Homer turns to see

HUBERT ACKLEY III

- an impossibly perfect and well-groomed boy sitting behind Homer - *who smiles back at Helen.*

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

I do not recognize any enemy which is human, for no human being can be my enemy.

Homer scowls at Hubert...and Hubert scowls right back at Homer.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. TRACK FIELD - ITHACA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

as Hubert's scowl turns into a supercilious grin directed at Homer.

MARCUS (V.O.

CONT'D) Whoever he is, whatever color he is, however mistaken he may be in what he believes...

Hubert is decked out in his track clothes and - along with THREE OTHER BOYS - is taking his place in the lanes for the 220 low hurdles while Homer, wearing his school clothes, watches grimly from the bleachers.

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

...he is my friend, not my enemy, for he is no different from myself.

And then Hubert throws a smile at Helen Eliot, and it's more than Homer can bear.

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

I do not feel like a hero...

Homer jumps to his feet, *and runs to the empty FIFTH LANE...*

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

I do not feel patriotic either, for I have always loved my country.

...and assumes the starting position just as

COACH BYFIELD

- an overweight former athlete - lifts his PISTOL in the air...and *FIRES* (MOS)

And they're off!

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

I would rather I were not in the
Army. I would rather there were no
War...

And although Homer is wearing the wrong kind of shoes, the
wrong kind of clothes, has barely practiced *and simply
isn't supposed to be there....*

He takes the first hurdle slightly ahead of Hubert Ackley
III...

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

...but as I *am* in the Army and
there *is* a War, I have long
since made up my mind...

...as Coach Byfield shouts at Homer...waves his arms...
shakes his head...and starts to run on a course that will
intercept Homer as he comes around the curve of the track.

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

...to be the best soldier it
is possible for me to be.

And Homer is running neck and neck with Hubert.

The two boys have left the other three far behind as
they round the curve *and Byfield steps directly into
Homer's lane...and waves his arms...*

MARCUS (V.O.

CONT'D) I have no idea what is
ahead, but whatever it is I am
humbly ready for it.

...and Homer hurdles - straight at Coach Byfield.

And the instant before the collision we

CUT TO:

ULYSSES

sitting on a chair and staring.

SPANGLER (O.C.)

Dinner? With your...now wait a
minute!

We are

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - AFTERNOON

While Grogan busies himself filing sent telegrams, Ulysses - sitting in a chair across the desk from Spangler - watches, fascinated as the manager of the telegraph office negotiates with someone on the telephone:

SPANGLER

I *promised*? When did I promise to go out to dinner with your parents? Uh huh...mm hmm...

Spangler rolls his eyes and looks to Ulysses as though to say, "Can you believe this?"

SPANGLER (CONT'D)

Okay, take it easy. Every time you call me "darling" I want to - uh huh...seven o'clock sharp? What do you mean - "sharp"...?

And Spangler lifts a framed PHOTOGRAPH from his desktop and turns it around so that Ulysses can see

A PHOTOGRAPH OF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN (30S)

Ulysses stares at the photo as

SPANGLER (CONT'D)

I see. What do you mean, "evening clothes"? I'm wearing the same clothes I wear day and evening both...uh huh...okay. All right. Well...sure I do. Okay. Good-bye.

And Spangler hangs up the receiver. He looks to Grogan, who only shakes his head and turns away...and to Ulysses...

SPANGLER

(Affecting a woman's falsetto)
"You *do* love me, don't you? You *know* you do!"

But Ulysses's expression of innocent curiosity has not changed. Spangler checks his watch as

HOMER

enters, limping.

And Ulysses's face splits into a silly grin.

ULYSSES

Hi, Homer!

HOMER

Mr. Spangler, I'm sorry I'm late -
Ulysses, what are you doing here?

SPANGLER

It's all right, Homer. So...
Ulysses, eh? That explains it!
Your bother Ulysses! The little
fellow just wandered in and took
a seat while I was on the phone.
Fearless, is what he is. And a
very good listener.

Spangler watches Homer limp over to the delivery desk.

SPANGLER (CONT'D)

Is everything all right?

HOMER

Yes, sir.

SPANGLER

Okay, then. A few telegrams have
piled up, and a few calls. Take
the calls first, then deliver
the telegrams.

HOMER

Yes, sir. Right away. I'm awfully
sorry I'm late...

Homer bites his lip and considers the problem of Ulysses.

SPANGLER

It's okay. We'll mind your
brother. You go ahead.

ULYSSES

You go ahead, Homer!

EXT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

as Homer limps over to his bike, jumps aboard and pedals
off, grimacing in pain...

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - SAME

Spangler leads Ulysses to Grogan's desk.

SPANGLER

Willie, I'm going over to Corbett's for a drink. I'm having dinner with Diana's parents tonight, and feel the need for a little... fortification.

Grogan nods approvingly.

GROGAN

Ulysses and I'll keep the place running. Won't we?

Ulysses nods.

And the CALL BOX *RINGS* and starts printing out its message on ticker tape.

Spangler reads the tape:

SPANGLER

Ithaca Wine. When Homer comes back, you two keep him here until we get the regular call from Sunripe Raisin. He's beat Western Union there twice in two days. How many did he get yesterday?

GROGAN

Sixty-seven.

SPANGLER Sixty-seven. If he can make it again, we just might have a good month after all.

Spangler grabs his jacket.

SPANGLER (CONT'D)

One drink, and I'll be right back.

But the call box *RINGS* again - and Grogan cocks his ear toward the pattern of *DITS* and *DASHES*.

GROGAN

That's Sunripe Raisin now!

SPANGLER (CONT'D)

Aw, hell. I'll take the call. I'll get there first myself!

And Spangler jerks open the door and

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

sprints up the street - weaving through pedestrians like a wide receiver.

He's in the middle of the SECOND BLOCK when he sees

A GIRL (19)

- a shy, lonely-looking girl - tired, sweet, hushed and wonderful - standing on the corner - at the

EXT. BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS

And, without clowning, and with no premeditation, Spangler pauses in his mad dash...

And kisses her on the cheek.

SPANGLER

You...are the loveliest woman
in the world.

And he runs on, looking across the street to see

THE WESTERN UNION MESSENGER (18)

- a fiercely determined kid careening around the corner on his bicycle and heading for their common goal:

EXT. SUNRIPE RAISIN ASSOCIATION - CONTINUOUS

- housed in a BRICK BUILDING at the next corner.

Spangler and the Western Union Messenger lock eyes...and Spangler pours it on as the Messenger stand-up-pedals.

The race is on...and Spangler narrowly misses being creamed by a car as he dashes across the street.

It's going to be close...

And, just as the Messenger pushes himself toward the front of the building, Spangler grabs a LIGHT POLE with one hand and slingshots himself around and through the front door.

INT. SUNRIPE RAISIN ASSOCIATION - OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Spangler bursts through the office door and announces:

SPANGLER
POSTAL TELEGRAPH!

MRS BROCKINGTON (50s)

looks up from behind her desk at the 36 year-old Spangler,
struggling to catch his breath without doubling over.

MRS BROCKINGTON

Tom?

SPANGLER

Once a messenger, always a
messenger, Mrs Brockington.

And the Western Union Messenger enters - also winded.

MRS BROCKINGTON

Well, Harry, you've been
beaten again.

And she hands a BUNDLE of TELEGRAMS to Spangler.

MRS BROCKINGTON

(CONT'D) One hundred and twenty-
nine night letters. All paid.

Spangler separates out a handful and offers them to
the Western Union Messenger.

SPANGLER

Here, Harry. Just so you don't go
back to the office empty-handed.

And the Messenger, utterly confused by Spangler's
generosity, looks at the handful of telegrams...and back
to Spangler...and we

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - MOMENTS LATER

as Spangler, walks back down the street with a
self-satisfied spring in his step.

He pauses at the corner - by the bus stop where he
kissed that girl scarcely 5 minutes ago.

He considers the spot long enough to relive the moment,
then continues on, WHISTLING the first few bars of

RAY NOBLE'S "THE VERY THOUGHT OF YOU"

And the song itself - as recorded by BING CROSBY -

JUKE BOX

*The very thought of you / And I
forget to do / The little
ordinary things / That everyone
ought to do...*

- PRE-LAPS our

CUT TO:

INT. CORBETT'S BAR - MOMENTS LATER

where we discover that the song is issuing from a JUKE BOX against the wall, and beneath the framed photos of Corbett's glory days in the ring.

JUKE BOX

*I'm living in a kind of daydream
/ I'm happy as a king and foolish
/ Though it may seem to me /
That's everything...*

THREE SOLDIERS

a fat one, and his two companions, are nursing beers at a table...

JUKE BOX

*The mere idea of you / The
longing here for you / You'll
never know / How slow the moments
go / Till I'm near to you / I see
your face in every flower / Your
eyes in stars above...*

A COUPLE OF REGULARS

are nursing their sorrows at the bar...

JUKE BOX

*It's just the thought of you / The
very thought of you...my love.*

SPANGLER

is holding up a whiskey and soda to the light and admiring it before bringing it to his lips and savoring its flavor.

As the gently swinging INSTRUMENTAL fills in, Corbett leans on the bar across from Spangler.

SPANGLER

How is it, Ralph?

CORBETT

Not bad, not good. Soldiers with not a lotta time and not very much money. I buy 'em three to their one, and when they're broke and ready to go, I give 'em their money back.

SPANGLER

Can you afford to do that?

CORBETT

No. But what's the diff? I don't think I'm cut out to be a bartender, Tom.

The former pugilist leans in and lowers his voice:

CORBETT (CONT'D)

Last night I'm tendin' bar, tryin' to get along, and a wise guy calls out to me, "Hey, screwball! Gimme another drink!" Now I can't hit the guy on account of I been in the ring. I grab him like this -

He grabs Spangler by both lapels with one ham-sized fist.

CORBETT (CONT'D)

"You're talkin' to Young Corbett," I say. "If I slap you, you'll die, and I don't want nobody to die in my place. Now get out, and don't ever set foot in this joint again."

And Corbett lets go of Spangler's jacket. His hands are trembling. Corbett nods at them.

CORBETT (CONT'D)

You see that? They was shakin' all night. I don't mind tellin' you, I was scared, Tom. Me. Young Corbett. I'm gettin' scared. Afraid of losin' my head and murderin' somebody some night. Maybe I oughta close the place. Me. Afraid. What d'you make of it?

SPANGLER

Only children are fearless,
Ralph. You're an adult.
Nowadays...we're all scared.

Spangler smiles at the retired boxer.

SPANGLER (CONT'D)

And what's a bar but a place where
adults go...to try to do something
...about all the fear in the world?

Corbett nods; it's a lot for the old prizefighter to
think about.

Bing Crosby has started up again and the Three Soldiers
are singing along - in their beer-soaked euphoria:

SOLDIERS/JUKE BOX

*The mere idea of you / The
longing here for you / You'll
never know / How slow the moments
go / Till I'm near to you / I see
your face in every flower / Your
eyes in stars above...*

And Spangler raises his voice to be heard above the singing:

SPANGLER

Maybe...you've just got too big
a heart to be a bartender.

SOLDIERS/JUKE BOX

*It's just the thought of you / The
very thought of you...my love.*

CUT TO:

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Spangler enters to see Homer and Ulysses at the delivery
desk. Homer is folding telegrams and putting them in
envelopes, and Ulysses is watching with quiet admiration
and Grogan is typing an incoming message.

HOMER

Did you get Sunripe Raisin, Mr.
Spangler?

SPANGLER

I surely did. One hundred and
twenty-nine give or take a handful.

Spangler pulls the bundle of telegrams from his jacket pocket and sets it down on Grogan's desk.

HOMER

How'd you get there first?

SPANGLER

I ran.

HOMER

You beat Western Union to Sunripe Raisin *running*?

SPANGLER

Nothing to it. Now whaddaya say you take Ulysses home.

HOMER

Yes, sir. We got a call from Guggenheim's - that's down our way. So I'll hike Ulysses home, go to Guggenheim's, then Ithaca Wine, then Foley's. I'll be back in no time.

SPANGLER

(Grinning)

I know you will.

CUT TO:

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING

electrifies the horizon.

EXT. STREET - DUSK

Ulysses - grinning like a...well, like a 4-year-old - rides on the handlebars of Homer's bike as Homer pedals through the growing gloom and the threat of rain.

A THUNDERCLAP *BOOMS* in the distance and Homer reassures his brother:

HOMER

It's just thunder. It doesn't scare you, does it?

But Ulysses seems unfazed.

ULYSSES

No. Sing it again, Homer!

And Homer affects a deep baritone and sings:

HOMER

*Weep no more, my lady / O weep no
more today / We will sing one song
for the old Kentucky home / For
the old Kentucky home far away!*

ULYSSES

Again!

But Homer brakes to a halt in front of

EXT. MACAULEY HOME - DUSK

HOMER

There's no time right now,
we're already home!

He lifts Ulysses off the bike and sets him on his feet.

ULYSSES

Gotta go to work?

HOMER

That's right. But I'll be home
tonight. Go on in!

ULYSSES

Okay!

And Ulysses turns and runs up the front-porch steps and,
one hand on the front door knob, he turns and watches his
brother Homer pedal off down the street.

A THUNDERCLAP splits the moment in two.

A BOLT OF LIGHTNING rips the sky in half.

But Ulysses does not flinch.

He simply looks skyward...as it begins to RAIN...and

THE INTRO TO TOMMY DORSEY'S "I'LL BE SEEING YOU"

provides a swinging PRE-LAP for our

DISSOLVE TO:

TWO U.S. ARMY SOLDIERS & TWO LOCAL GIRLS

dancing close to the music from the JUKE BOX. We are

INT. "THE DIVE BOMBER" BAR - NORTH CAROLINA - NIGHT

A typical near-base saloon patronized by U.S. ARMY
SOLDIERS and LOCAL GIRLS.

And, as Dorsey's haunting MUTED TRUMPET plays the melody...
we discover Marcus, sitting at the bar and working on
his letter to Homer and nursing a half-empty beer.

As FRANK SINATRA'S young voice begins to issue from the
JUKE BOX...Tobey sits on the stool beside him.

JUKE BOX

*I'll be seeing you / In all the old
familiar places / That this heart
of mine embraces all day through...*

TOBEY

Well, I guess we're on our way.
Letter to Homer?

Marcus nods.

MARCUS

It's a long one.

JUKE BOX

*In that small cafe / The park
across the way / The children's
carousel / The chestnut trees /
The wishing well...*

MARCUS

What do you think about, Tobey?
What do you want to go back to?

Tobey thinks about it for a moment.

JUKE BOX

*I'll be seeing you in every lovely
summer's day / In everything
that's light and gay / I'll always
think of you that way...*

TOBEY

Anything, I guess. I don't have a
family.

BESS (CONT'D)

*I'll find you in the morning sun /
And when the night is new / I'll
be looking at the moon... / But
I'll be seeing you.*

And it's all INSTRUMENTAL from here.

TOBEY

I haven't got a girl like Mary
waiting for me. A sister like
Bess. Brothers like you have. A
mother...

And Tobey leans in and explains, confidentially:

TOBEY (CONT'D)

Hell, I didn't even know kids *had*
mothers and fathers - until I
went to school and heard the
other kids talk about 'em.

Marcus looks at his friend as if to say, *How is
that possible?* Tobey just shrugs.

TOBEY (CONT'D)

So whatever I go home to, it'll be
a place, but it won't be people.

(Pause)

I'd like to think I could come
back to Ithaca, with you.

MARCUS

And you will.

And the two friends look at one another and nod. They
might have no idea of what lies ahead for them, but here
and now they have made a pact.

MARCUS

I think about my father.

TOBEY

Matthew Macauley.

MARCUS

That's right. If you saw him on
the street you'd think he was a
nobody. Worked in the vineyards.
Plain, ordinary, everyday work
and never made any more money
than we needed. Ever. But he
saved money...for months...

Marcus takes a long pull from his beer.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

...to make a down-payment on a grand piano. My mother wanted it for Bess. It took him five years to pay for it. There are men like that in this world, Tobey.

Tobey nods. He starts to say something, but thinks better of it.

MARCUS

What. Come on. I've been telling you *everything*. You know just about as much about my life as I do. You can't hold out on *me* now -

TOBEY

Tell me about Bess.

Marcus considers his friend for a long moment...then he reaches into his pocket and pulls out

A SMALL SNAPSHOT OF BESS

Marcus looks at it...places it on the bar...and slides it over to Tobey.

And Tobey picks it up and stares at it for a moment.

A THUNDERCLAP somewhere outside - in the distance - and we

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

A HEAVY RAIN is falling over Ithaca as Bess and Mary, wearing RAINCOATS and GALOSHES and bearing Homer's supper, dash across the street and pass

EXT. OWL DRUG STORE - CONTINUOUS

A MAN

standing in the doorway, gives them half a WOLF-WHISTLE.

MAN

Hiya, pretty! What gives?

Bess ignores him and moves closer to Mary as they continue up the street and

THE THREE SOLDIERS

- whom we first met drinking beer and singing at Corbett's
- are horsing around in the rain, laughing uncontrollably, and heading straight for the girls.

When they catch sight of Bess and Mary, they come to an immediate and worshipful stop.

Bess is wary. Mary is entranced.

MARY

Soldiers, Bess...

The girls stop under the shelter of the awning at

EXT. ARA'S MARKET

- a humble fresh market and general store, closed or the evening.

FAT

- the largest of the three Soldiers - steps forward...and bows...and addresses the girls with mock formality.

FAT

American girls, we of the great
Democratic Army, your humble
servants, we soldiers - here today
and, we hope, here tomorrow -
thank you.

Bess and Mary exchange a glance.

BESS

For what?

FAT

For the very thought of you. The
mere idea of you.

Fat grins foolishly and, with a sweeping gesture:

FAT (CONT'D)

Permit me to present my comrades:
This...is Texas. He's from New
Jersey.

TEXAS

touches the visor of his cap.

FAT (CONT'D)

This...is Horse. He's from Texas.

HORSE

nods and grins.

FAT (CONT'D)

And I...am known as Fat. I'm from
hunger. And now, more than
anything else, I hunger for the
companionship of beautiful
American girls. How about it?

BESS

We...uhm...we're running an errand
- and then...

MARY

We're going to the Kinema.

FAT

To the Kinema!

Fat looks to his companions who nod enthusiastically.

FAT (CONT'D)

May we - soldiers - here today and
gone tomorrow - accompany you,
American Girls, to the Kinema?

Uh-oh.

Bess and Mary are only seventeen years old. Fat registers their hesitation and, warming to his own alcohol-inspired euphoric eloquence, he continues:

FAT (CONT'D)

Tomorrow we return to our barracks -
to the awful but necessary business
of war. To...the holy work...of
destroying the microbe in man which
seeks to crush freedom of choice...
and freedom of spirit. But tonight
...we are...your brothers - your
sweethearts, even - far from our
own firesides. And we are lonely.

Mary looks to Bess and asks the obvious question:

MARY

Has he...been drinking?

BESS

I...*think* so...

FAT

Yes! Although happy and proud, we are lonely! For Ithaca is not our native land. From the side streets of Chicago, in that sweet state of Illinois, I have waddled into this costume of the American soldier. Restore me to that city and that sweet state tonight - in memory. And restore my brothers - each to his good place. Consider with generous hearts our humble petition, for we are of one family ...the human...and, except for war...we might never meet.

MARY

Is he *crazy*?

BESS

No...just...lonely. Let's go to the movie with them.

Mary considers the option. She *wants* to...but...

MARY

Are you sure?

Bess nods.

MARY (CONT'D)

All right. But *you* tell them.

MARY

(To Fat)

All right. But first I've got to take my brother his supper. He works at the telegraph office -

And Fat seizes on the word - on the *idea* -

FAT

Telegraph?

And he turns to his pals...and we

CUT TO:

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

as Bess and Mary enter, followed by the boisterous three-man squad. Grogan looks up from his desk as

TEXAS

How much does it cost to send
a telegram to New Jersey?

FAT

Not nearly as much as it's worth!

BESS

You must be Mr. Grogan.

GROGAN

(To Bess)

I am.

(To Texas)

Twenty five words for fifty cents,
plus a small tax, but don't count
the address or the signature.

BESS

I'm Homer Macauley's sister Bess.
I've brought his supper.

TEXAS

Fifty cents? That's not bad!

GROGAN

Pleased to meet you, Miss Macauley.
I'll see that Homer gets it.

MARY

And these...boys...want to
send telegrams.

HORSE

How much to San Antonio?

Grogan slides blank postal telegraph forms across
the counter.

GROGAN

Half as much as to New Jersey.

Fat is already filling out his form. Texas and Horse
look at one another and grin and we

INTERCUT:

TEXAS'S TELEGRAM

DEAR MA. HOW ARE YOU? I AM FINE. I GOT YOUR LETTER AND THE BOX OF DRIED FIGS. DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING. SO LONG. LOVE.

BERNARD

INT. KINEMA THEATER - LATER

Texas is sitting beside Mary, their faces flickering in the light reflected from the MOVIE SCREEN as the corny, hyper-dramatic NEWSREEL NARRATION fills the theater:

NEWSREEL (O.C.)

Unprecedented in the annals of the United States was the inauguration of Mr. Roosevelt to his third term. He took office to face the most critical period of our nation's history...

And...on Mary's other side...Horse is debating whether or not to put his arm around Bess...

ROOSEVELT (O.C.)

To us there has come a time, in the midst of swift happenings, to pause for a moment and take stock - to recall what our place in history has been, and to rediscover what we are and what we may be.

HORSE'S TELEGRAM

HELLO MA. JUST WANT TO SAY HELLO FROM ITHACA IN SUNNY CALIFORNIA. ONLY ITS RAINING. HA HA. GIVE MY REGARDS TO EVERYBODY. TELL JOE HE CAN HAVE MY GUN AND SHELLS. DON'T FORGET TO WRITE. LOVE.

QUENTIN

And Bess is staring intently at the screen as:

ROOSEVELT (O.C.)

A nation, like a person, has something deeper, something more permanent, something larger than the sum of all its parts...

And Fat is happily devouring a bag of POPCORN...

FAT'S TELEGRAM

MY DARLING, I LOVE YOU, I MISS YOU, I THINK OF YOU
ALWAYS. KEEP WRITING. KEEP STUDYING. KEEP WAITING.
KEEP BELIEVING. DON'T FORGET ME. DON'T EVER FORGET ME
BECAUSE I AM THE ONE WHO WILL NEVER FORGET YOU.

NORMAN

And Fat looks at Bess and smiles gratefully and offers
his popcorn.

But Bess is transfixed by the image on the screen:

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

captured by the NEWSREEL FOOTAGE of his 3rd
INAUGURAL ADDRESS:

ROOSEVELT

*It is the spirit - the faith - of
America. It is the product of
centuries. It was born in the
multitudes of those who came from
many lands - some of high degree,
but mostly plain people, who
sought here, early and late, to
find freedom more freely.*

And we are ON BESS'S FACE as:

MARCUS (V.O.)

It's yours.

TOBEY (V.O.)

What?

BACK TO:

INT. "THE DIVE BOMBER" BAR - NORTH CAROLINA - NIGHT

Tobey is looks from the SNAPSHOT OF BESS to Marcus.

MARCUS

Take it. Keep it. Stick it in our
helmet liner.

And Marcus folds up his as-yet-unfinished letter to
Homer and, without looking at his friend, says simply:

MARCUS (CONT'D)

But whatever you do, make sure
that every breath you take from
now on...will be to keep you alive
until you get to Ithaca and meet
her. In person.

Marcus drains his beer and gets up. He slaps a couple of
coins on the bar and leaves - leaves Tobey, sitting at
the bar and staring at the snapshot.

EXT. "THE DIVE BOMBER" BAR - MOMENTS LATER

It is raining as Marcus steps outside.

He puts on his garrison cap, folds up the collar of
his olive drab jacket, and walks OUT OF FRAME. And we

CUT TO:

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - NIGHT

as Homer - soaking wet and limping - enters and checks
the delivery desk as Grogan finishes typing an incoming
telegram.

GROGAN

Your sister Bess brought
your supper.

HOMER

She did?

Grogan nods to the BOX on his desk, tucks the typed
telegram into an envelope, then pulls his bottle of
whiskey from a drawer.

HOMER (CONT'D)

I was going to get us two pies...

Homer opens the box and looks at the contents.

HOMER (CONT'D)

There's plenty here. Will you
share it with me?

GROGAN

I'm not hungry.

And Grogan takes a long swig.

HOMER

Maybe...if you start to eat a little, your appetite will improve.

GROGAN

No. Thanks very much. You know... we've got raincoats...

HOMER

I know. But I got caught in the rain. I'll just...take a bite of this sandwich...then I'll deliver the telegram.

He takes a bite of his sandwich. He chews for a moment, then:

HOMER (CONT'D)

What...kind of a telegram is it?

Grogan just looks at him.

So, it's going to be another one of *those*.

Homer swallows, then:

GROGAN

Your sister was with another girl - a very pretty girl.

HOMER

That's Mary. Our neighbor. She's Marcus's girl. My brother - in the Army. They're going to be married after the War.

GROGAN

They were with three soldiers who sent telegrams.

Grogan registers Homer's surprise and nods toward the HOOK on which DISPATCHED TELEGRAMS are hung.

And Homer pulls them off the hook and reads them....

Then he looks to the old man.

HOMER

If these men die...they don't... just die for nothing...do they?

Grogan considers the sodden young messenger, and takes a good long pull from his bottle.

GROGAN

I don't know the answer to that question, my boy. I'm not even sure there *is* an answer.

(Pause)

It's a young question, and I'm an old man.

But Homer isn't prepared to take "No" for an answer. So he just nods, holds Grogan's gaze...and waits. Finally:

GROGAN (CONT'D)

Nothing...is for *nothing* - least of all dying. I think...just as a man's conscience struggles with the opposites in his own nature... mischief and good struggle in the whole body of the living - in the whole world. And that's when we have a war. But the *good*...endures forever. And the evil is driven away every time.

Grogan sighs...and frowns. He pulls a slip of PAPER from his vest pocket.

GROGAN (CONT'D)

Nobody dies for nothing. They die seeking grace...will you...run an errand for me? To the drug store?

HOMER

Yes, sir.

And Homer takes the slip of paper, reads it, nods at Grogan, and rushes - limping - out of the office.

And Grogan sits alone in the telegraph office.

He looks around with a strange affection for everything, mixed with a kind of loving fury.

Slowly, he clutches his chest...stiffens...and waits...for the attack to pass.

He waits.

And waits.

Until Homer bursts through the door.

The young man hands Grogan a SMALL BOX.

GROGAN

Water.

And Grogan shakes THREE PILLS out of the box and into his hand while Homer fills a paper cup with water from the ceramic water jar.

Grogan tosses the pills into his mouth, takes the cup and drinks them down.

GROGAN (CONT'D)

Thank you. Thank you, my boy.

HOMER

Yes, sir.

Homer stares at the old man for a moment, then lifts the telegram envelope from Grogan's desk...opens it...withdraws the telegram...reads it...then takes up a fresh envelope...tucks the telegram inside...seals it...and limps out.

After a moment, Grogan lifts himself out of his chair...goes to the door...opens it...

EXT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

...and watches Homer pushing away on his bicycle against the wind and the rain.

Inside the office the telegraph box begins to *RATTLE*, but Grogan pays it no mind.

The TELEPHONE *RINGS*...but Grogan doesn't turn back into the office until it has rung seven times.

And as he reenters, we

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

It's a large house, a fine house, and its windows are ablaze with light.

The rain has stopped. The MOON is shining and everything is...glistening.

As Homer climbs off his bicycle, he can hear MUSIC coming from inside. He climbs the front-porch steps and stands, listening, at the front door. Inside, a phonograph is playing:

TINO ROSSI'S "CHANSON POUR MA BRUNE"

Homer moves his finger toward the DOORBELL...then lets it drop.

He sits down on the front-porch steps. After a long moment, he gets up and presses the doorbell.

A YOUNG WOMAN (20)

opens the door...

And Homer turns and runs - down the front-porch steps to his bicycle.

YOUNG WOMAN

Wait! What's the matter?

And Homer stops. He has a job to do. He climbs the steps and approaches the Young Woman. And sees

INT. HOUSE - SAME

A short HALLWAY. The music is so goofily cheerful...

HOMER

I'm sorry. I've got a telegram.
For Mrs. Claudia Beaufrere.

YOUNG WOMAN

Of course you do! It's her
birthday!

She turns and call out:

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

MOTHER! HERE'S A TELEGRAM!

MRS BEAUFRERE (45)

appears in the hallway.

MRS BEAUFRERE

It's from Alan, I'm sure! Come in,
young man! You must have a piece
of my birthday cake!

HOMER

No. Thank you, ma'am. I've got to
go back to -

MRS BEAUFRERE

Nonsense! Not until you've had a
piece of cake and a glass of punch!

And she takes Homer gently by he arm and tugs him into

INT. HOUSE - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

A DOZEN GUESTS

are laughing, chatting, eating and drinking around a table
laden with CAKE and SANDWICHES and PUNCH...or dancing to
the music from the phonograph.

Mrs Beaufrere hands Homer a glass of punch, locks eyes
with him...and smiles. The telegram is still unopened in
her other hand.

And Homer sets the glass of punch on the table, turns,
and walks back into the hallway and out the front door.

MRS BEAUFRERE

Why...what...

Mrs Beaufrere follows him into the hallway...

MRS BEAUFRERE (CONT'D)

Please. Wait...

And there is something so urgent and plaintive in the
woman's voice, that Homer stops in spite of himself.

He is standing in the open doorway as he turns and
watches Mrs Beaufrere open the envelope...and read its
contents as Tino Rossi hits a sustained, ridiculously
high, warbling NOTE (a high B-flat).

And she looks up - into Homer's eyes.

With all his might, Homer tries to hold the woman's gaze
- to withstand the misery there as, from the other room:

YOUNG WOMAN (O.C.)

Mother...?

SMASHCUT TO:

EXT. KINEMA THEATER - NIGHT

as the doors open and the theater empties its patrons
onto the street.

Bess looks to Mary, then turns to Fat.

BESS

Well, we need to go home now.

Fat looks to Texas and Horse...then:

FAT

Thank you, American girls.

And - easily and innocently - he kisses Bess.

And then he kisses Mary.

The girls look at one another - *this is all right, isn't it?*

HORSE

What about us? We're in the Army,
too!

And Horse steps forward, and Bess and Mary allow him to kiss them. Then Texas clears his throat...and follows suit.

Bess smiles at the Three Soldiers...then:

BESS

Come on, Mary.

And Bess and Mary turn away and hurry down the street.

The Three Soldiers stand there - frozen in tableau for an instant - then Horse gives Texas a shove; Texas shoves Fat.

TEXAS

Woooo-eeee! How you talk, boy! Old
Senator Fat from the University of
Chicago!

HORSE

You surely got the gift, Fat!

FAT

Wait'll I get to Congress!

TEXAS

Yippee-aye-ay! Waaa-hooo!

And the Three Soldiers, LAUGHING, punching one another, turn and head up the street as Homer pedals past them.

And we FOLLOW HOMER...and

CUT TO:

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

as Homer enters and checks the delivery desk. All clear.

Then Homer catches Grogan watching him. And Homer knows that *Grogan* knows that he has just delivered the news of the death of Mrs Beaufrere's son.

Without saying a word, Homer sits in the chair across from Grogan, and a silent moment passes between them. Then, rather than addressing the issue at hand, Grogan asks:

GROGAN

So. What's the matter with your leg, boy?

HOMER

It's nothing. I guess...I twisted a ligament or something.

Homer sits in the chair across the desk from Grogan.

HOMER (CONT'D)

I was running the 220 low-hurdles. The coach - Mr. Byfield - never did like me, I guess. And I...well, I decided to run at the last minute. And I was in first place when he came out and tried to stop me. I saw him coming. I guess I could've stopped if I'd wanted to, but I *didn't* want to. So I hurdled anyway - and we both fell down.

Homer pauses and stretches his leg. He looks at Grogan.

HOMER (CONT'D)

The other guys stopped running on account of the interference. A guy named Hubert Ackley the Third made 'em stop. He's a guy I never used to like. Rich family, good manners ...and...the girl I like likes *him*. Helen Eliot. But Ackley stopped the race. And after Byfield and I got up off the ground, we all started to run again, fair and square. But then...I *didn't* want to beat Ackley.

Homer considers the irony for a moment, then:

HOMER (CONT'D)

I knew something was wrong with my leg...and...the truth is, the only reason I wanted to run the race in the *first* place was because Mr. *Spangler* ran that race when he went to Ithaca High. He was Valley Champion...and I...aw, it's all confused. Everything changed out there....

Homer takes a deep breath and lets it go.

HOMER (CONT'D)

I guess...I'll rub some liniment on it tonight...

The old telegraph operator considers the young messenger... then:

GROGAN

You've changed. You've changed since you came to work - what... three days ago...?

HOMER

Yeah.

Homer nods. And then, just because it's Mr. Grogan, Homer admits it:

HOMER (CONT'D)

I guess I have changed...maybe... it was time. I didn't know *anything* before I got this job. I guess I was in a...well, a sort of happy...*daydream*. Everybody says I'm the smartest guy at Ithaca High, even people who don't like me. But I'm just as backward as anybody in a lot of things - important things. And I don't like the way things are. I just...want them to be better.

(Pause)

How can any man ever really get it all straight - so that it all comes out even and makes sense? Everything's so sad or mixed up...and wrong. And now I don't care if Helen Eliot doesn't like me. I wish she did, but if she doesn't, that's okay.

Homer flexes his leg again, then speaks of it as if it weren't his own:

HOMER (CONT'D)

Yeah. Something's the matter with it.

He looks up at the clock.

HOMER (CONT'D)

It's five after twelve. I guess I'll go home. Tomorrow's Saturday.

Homer rises and looks directly at Grogan.

HOMER (CONT'D)

Saturdays used to be my best days....

And Homer lifts the supper box that Bess brought, then:

HOMER (CONT'D)

Are you sure you wouldn't like a sandwich now?

GROGAN

Well...come to think of it, yes. I would.

Homer takes a sandwich out of the box and hands it to Grogan.

GROGAN (CONT'D)

Please thank your mother for me.

HOMER

Aw, it's nothing.

GROGAN

No. It *is* something. Please. Thank her.

And Homer manages a smile. And a nod.

HOMER

Yes, sir.

SPANGLER (V.O. PRE-LAP) "You *do* love me, don't you? You *know* you do!"

CUT TO:

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

as Spangler, fresh from dinner and Corbett's, and a little under the influence, enters the office and beams at Grogan - who is just finishing his sandwich.

GROGAN

Tom?

SPANGLER

Willie, what would you think of a woman who tells you like this: "You *do* love me, don't you? You *know* you do!"

GROGAN

I don't know what I'd think.

Spangler sits at his own desk and rubs his face as if to rub away his inebriation, then:

SPANGLER

What do you think of the new messenger?

And Grogan looks at Spangler and tells it like it is:

GROGAN

He's the best I've ever seen.

A CRASH OF THUNDER

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING

PRE-LAPS our

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Homer is pedalling fast down a street so dark that he must squint to see ahead of him.

A SUDDEN WIND GUST

nearly topples him. And then he turns to see

A POSTAL TELEGRAPH MESSENGER

pedalling his bike furiously in the same direction, but on the opposite side of the street.

The Messenger looks just like Homer.

And he is pulling away...moving faster now...and Homer pours it on, but

COACH BYFIELD

is standing in Homer's way - standing in the middle of the street and waving his arms - and Homer swerves to avoid him, and nearly collides with the Messenger.

And the Messenger looks at him. It is Homer, himself, but his face is utterly passive. Blank. Devoid of the sheer, unfettered determination that qualifies Homer Macauley.

And, suddenly, the Messenger slams his bike into Homer's.

Homer starts to careen off the side of the road, but manages to right himself...and to pedal - standing up in spite of the searing pain in his leg - faster than he has ever pedalled before.

HOMER

No! Wait! DON'T GO THERE! STAY AWAY! *LEAVE THEM ALONE!*

CUT TO:

HOMER

- eyes clamped shut, his face contorted in pain - shouting:

HOMER

LEAVE ITHACA ALONE!

- and sobbing. Crying in his sleep. We are

INT. MACAULEY HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

And Ulysses - wearing his nightshirt - is standing in the MOONLIGHT, standing at Homer's bedside and staring at his brother who is crying out and sobbing in his sleep.

After a moment, Ulysses turns...and walks OUT OF FRAME.

CUT TO:

INT. MACAULEY HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

as Mrs Macauley sets a spoon and a bowl of steaming hot oatmeal on the kitchen table.

Homer enters. Mrs Macauley throws a fleeting glance in his direction before turning away to commence squeezing oranges for his juice.

And when Homer speaks, there is a depth and gravity to his tone that we haven't heard before.

HOMER

I didn't want to sleep this late.
It's almost nine-thirty. What
happened to the alarm clock?

MRS MACAULEY

You're working hard. You need
rest, too -

HOMER

I'm not working so hard. Besides,
tomorrow's Sunday.

Homer sits, laces his fingers together, closes his eyes and recites his morning prayer - to himself - and Mrs Macauley stops squeezing the juice for a moment to regard her son.

She turns toward the counter just before he opens his eyes and lifts his spoon and pauses to study the shiny utensil...

HOMER (CONT'D)

Ma?

But Mrs Macauley doesn't turn around. She continues to squeeze the juice from the oranges.

MRS MACAULEY

Yes, Homer?

And Homer confesses, unburdens himself:

HOMER

I didn't talk to you last night
when I came home from work because
I couldn't. Because...well...all
of a sudden, on the way home, I
started to cry.

Homer looks to his mother for a response; but having filled one glass with juice, she simply starts on another.

HOMER (CONT'D)

You know I never cried when I was little. Even *Ulysses* never cries because - well, what's the use?

(Pause)

But I just couldn't help it. So... I couldn't come straight home. I just kept riding. I rode across town - past a house where some people had been having a birthday party and...the house was dark.

(Pause)

I took those people a telegram. Earlier.

Mrs Macauley pauses. But rather than turning around, she begins slicing more oranges to squeeze for their juice.

HOMER (CONT'D)

And...I just rode - all around the streets - and I really...saw Ithaca last night, Ma.

(Pause)

I know all of the people here. And I don't want anything to happen to them.

(Pause)

I thought a fellow would never cry when he got to be grown up...but... that's when you start finding out about things...and almost everything a *man* finds out is bad...or sad - *why is that, Ma?*

And Mrs Macauley turns and places a glass of fresh orange juice beside Homer's untasted oatmeal.

MRS MACAULEY

I can't tell you. Because I don't know. No one can tell you. Each man...and each woman...finds out in his...or her...own way.

It's a painful admission for this widowed mother, but she sits across from her son and tells him her dearest truth:

MRS MACAULEY (CONT'D)

But I do know this: That the world waits to be made-over every morning by each and every human being who inhabits it.

Homer stares at his mother for a moment...then:

HOMER

Why did I cry on the way home
last night?

Mrs Macauley measures her words carefully:

MRS MACAULEY

If a man...has not wept at the
world's pain...he is only half
a man.

Homer looks down at his uneaten oatmeal. And Mrs Macauley
waits until he lifts his eyes to hers...

MRS MACAULEY (CONT'D)

There will always be pain in the
world, Homer. And a good man...
will seek to take the pain out
of things.

But before Homer can respond, Ulysses enters the room with
LIONEL (AGE 10)

- a simple boy, and Ulysses's best friend.

MRS MACAULEY

Hello, Lionel.

LIONEL

Mrs Macauley? Ulysses and me have
already been to Mr. Henderson's
apricot tree with Auggie, Enoch,
Shag, Nickie and Alf. But the
apricots aren't ripe.

MRS MACAULEY

Of course they're not. It's only
almost April.

LIONEL

Well, they're gonna play football
now and Ulysses is too small, and
Ulysses and me, we're partners, and
I want to ask permission to take
Ulysses to he pubalic liberry.

MRS MACAULEY

Of course. Would you boys like a
drink of juice before you go?

Both boys nod, and Mrs Macauley hands them each a glass, and
they drink thirstily...hand the glasses back...and are gone.

Homer has tucked in to his oatmeal by now. He looks up as the screen door *SLAMS*, and bounces open, and settles.

HOMER

Was Marcus like Ulysses when he was little?

MRS MACAULEY

How do you mean?

HOMER

Interested in everything. Doesn't say much, but always gets a kick out of everything. Likes everybody, and everybody likes him. Fearless.

MRS MACAULEY

Ulysses is like his father... except...

HOMER

What...

MRS MACAULEY

No *man*...is fearless.

Homer considers this.

He listens to the SOUNDS of the neighborhood gang playing football in the vacant lot next door...then:

HOMER

I wish...I could be like Ulysses.

MRS MACAULEY

He came to me last night. He woke me up and brought me to your room.

HOMER

What? Why?

MRS MACAULEY

Because you were crying in your *sleep* last night, too.

HOMER

I had...a bad dream...

Homer gets up from the table, collects his bowl and juice glass, and moves to the kitchen sink.

MRS MACAULEY

Homer...what's the matter with
your leg?

HOMER

Nothing. I took a little spill...

He looks out through the kitchen window where

EXT. VACANT LOT - HOMER'S POV

AUGGIE, ENOCH, SHAG, NICKIE & ALF (AGES 11-13)

- the neighborhood gang - are playing football.

INT. MACAULEY HOME - KITCHEN - SAME

Homer looks down at the sink...the kitchen counter...then:

HOMER

You know, Ma...I guess you're
just about the most wonderful
person anybody could ever know.

And as Mrs. Macauley opens her mouth to respond to her son's
utterly unexpected expression of love and appreciation,
Homer clatters his place setting into the sink and turns on
the water and starts to wash the bowl and glass.

MRS MACAULEY

Homer -

But she is interrupted by the SOUND the football game and

HOMER

There goes Auggie! Another
touchdown.

Homer places his bowl on the drying rack, shuts off
the water, and announces:

HOMER (CONT'D)

No more games for me.

Indeed, to Mrs Macauley, Homer seems...suddenly...grown up
as he dries his hands on a dish towel and turns to her:

HOMER (CONT'D)

I'm going to the telegraph
office. I told them I would come
down just in case they need me.

And Homer starts to go -

MRS MACAULEY

Son...

HOMER

Oh! Mr. Grogan - he's the night telegraph operator - he ate one of the sandwiches you sent yesterday with Bess, and he told me to thank you. So, thanks, Ma, for Mr. Grogan.

And Homer is out the back door, and gone. And Mrs Macauley remains seated at the kitchen table for a moment. Then she rises and moves to the window in time to see:

EXT. MACAULEY HOME - MRS MACAULEY'S POV

Homer bounces his bike a coupla times to check the air in the tires...then climbs aboard and pedals away.

INT. MACAULEY HOME - KITCHEN - SAME

Mrs Macauley's second son has become a young man. And as the bitter sweetness of this event begins to register...

VOICE (O.C.)

Katey?

...Mrs. Macauley turns to look at the chair that Homer occupied scarcely a moment ago...to see:

MATTHEW MACAULEY

sitting where Homer sat and studying the same spoon that Homer studied.

After a moment, the long-dead Matthew Macauley looks up, and locks eyes with his wife...and smiles - a smile which says Yes to all things.

And Mrs Macauley looks at him as though it is the most natural thing in the world that he should be sitting there.

MRS MACAULEY

Yes, Matthew?

MATTHEW MACAULEY

Katey...

MRS MACAULEY

Yes?

There is something that Matthew Macauley needs to tell his wife, but it is hard to say it out loud and he hesitates...

MATTHEW MACAULEY

Katey...

But Mrs Macauley shakes her head. She will not hear it.

MRS MACAULEY

No. Please, Matthew...*no*...

And she turns to empty the dishes drying in the dish-rack, and to hide the tears that are welling in her eyes, and we

CUT TO:

MARCUS'S FACE

his eyes fixed in a thousand-yard stare

TOBEY (O.C.)

Marcus?

We are

INT. TROOP TRAIN - NIGHT

And Marcus is staring out the window, his face frozen by what might very well be a premonition - the realization that, wherever they're going, *he's not going to make it back.*

TOBEY (O.C.)

Marcus?

Slowly, Marcus turns to look at Tobey...and...

THE SOUNDS OF THE TRAIN

fill in - the rhythmic *CLACKETY-CLACK*, the LAUGHTER and SHOUTING and SINGING of their fellow SOLDIERS.

Marcus looks down at the unfinished letter to Homer on his lap...at the pen in his own hand.

TOBEY

Marcus? Are you okay?

Marcus blinks a couple of times and focuses on Tobey.

MARCUS

Yeah.

TOBEY

So...Ulysses. What's he like?

And Marcus looks at his friend...makes a decision...and there is something like an urgency in his voice as he says:

MARCUS

Let me tell you. Let me tell you about Ulysses...

And we

CUT TO:

EXT. VACANT LOT - DAY

Auggie, Enoch, Shag, Nickie & Alf are playing football as Ulysses and Lionel walk past them and up the street. Lionel is on a mission - he is, after all, heading for the "pubalic liberry."

Ulysses is tagging along right behind him. But the sight of a PEBBLE on the sidewalk makes him smile before kicking it, sending it skittering along the concrete.

And then the CAMERA moves - around Ulysses...and spirals UP to REVEAL

AN EGG

held aloft in Ulysses's hand. Unaccountably, the little boy is carrying an egg - held high above his head - while he walks.

And then Homer pedals past him.

ULYSSES

Hi, Homer!

And Homer turns his head and grins at his fearless little brother...swerves to avoid a PEDESTRIAN...then turns a corner and disappears.

And Ulysses smiles to himself and catches up with Lionel and says out loud and to no one in particular:

ULYSSES (CONT'D)

Homer's goin' to work!

CUT TO:

HOMER

whose face is grim. Confused. We are

INT. THE BETHEL ROOMS - LOBBY - AFTERNOON

The AFTERNOON SUN is slanting through a WINDOW, illuminating DUST MOTES suspended in the motionless air of the small open foyer of this run-down little hotel.

A long, narrow FLIGHT OF STAIRS offers to lead him up...to a dimly lighted landing.

This place is too creepy...too...*sad* for words, and Homer's face betrays his discomfort...and something like *fear*.

But he swallows it down, takes a deep breath, and looks at the address on the telegram envelope in his hand:

DOLLY HAWTHORNE
THE BETHEL ROOMS
215 EYE STREET
ITHACA, CALIFORNIA

And Homer starts to climb the stairs.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Homer enters the hallway from the top of the stairs, turns and stares down a row of closed DOORS.

On a small table against the wall a SIGN is propped up behind a BELL. The sign reads: RING

As Homer approaches it, he can make out the SOUNDS of a PHONOGRAPH...A WOMAN'S VOICE, LAUGHING...A MAN'S VOICE...

Suddenly a door opens and

A MAN (40s)

exits one of the rooms. He holds his jacket in his hand as he turns back and says, into the room:

MAN

So...thanks...I'll see ya...

He nods, closes the door, puts on his jacket and buckles his belt as he hurries past Homer and down the stairs.

Homer presses the bell...and the door that the Man just closed now opens again and

GIRL'S VOICE (O.C.)

Okay! In a minute!

And the door closes...and Homer waits.

And when the door opens again...

A GIRL (20)

steps out into the hallway. She's very pretty, but her makeup is smudged and there's too much of it to begin with.

HOMER

Telegram for Dolly Hawthorne.

GIRL

She's out just now. Can I sign for it?

HOMER

Yes, ma'am.

And the Girl looks at Homer and has an idea.

GIRL

Wait just a minute, will ya?

Homer nods and she runs back into her room.

ANOTHER MAN (30s)

has made it to the top of the stairs. He and Homer exchange a glance.

Then the Girl opens her door and starts to come out, but sees the Man and stops.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Uhm...boy? Would come in here, a minute, please...?

And Homer looks at the Man - who raises an eyebrow - then walks to the

INT. THE GIRL'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

And the Girl closes the door behind Homer. The room is small, cloying, and the bed is unmade.

An unfamiliar, pungent smell makes Homer wrinkle his nose.

GIRL

Would you mail this letter for me?

She hands Homer an ENVELOPE, then gently lifts his chin up with her finger and looks straight into his eyes.

GIRL (CONT'D)

It's very important. It's to my sister. Take it to the Post Office - airmail, special delivery, registered. There's money in the letter. My sister needs money. I haven't got any stamps...

She looks to the door. She can't afford to leave right now.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Will you do this for me?

HOMER

Yes, ma'am.

GIRL

Here's a dollar. Put the letter in your hat. Don't let anybody see it. Don't tell anybody about it.

HOMER

I won't tell anybody. I'll take it straight to the Post Office. I'll do it right now. I'll bring you your change -

GIRL

No.

And the Girl shakes her head emphatically.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Don't come back.

And the Girl looks directly into Homer's eyes for a moment before we

CUT TO:

INT. THE BETHEL ROOMS - STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

as Homer hustles down toward the Lobby and comes face to face with

DOLLY HAWTHORNE

Telegram for me? Dolly Hawthorne?

DOLLY HAWTHORNE (50s)

is an enormous handsomely dressed woman with a beatific smile.

HOMER

Yes, ma'am. I left it upstairs.

DOLLY HAWTHORNE

That's a good boy! You're a new messenger, aren't you?

HOMER

Yes, ma'am.

DOLLY HAWTHORNE

I know *all* the boys. Western Union and Postal Telegraph - *Felix* is the day messenger, isn't he?

HOMER

Yes, ma'am.

DOLLY HAWTHORNE

Here.

And she hands Homer a small stack of CALLING CARDS.

HOMER

What's...what are these for?

DOLLY HAWTHORNE

You visit a lot of people...and go to a lot of places.

Dolly tries to gauge whether or not Homer understands, then:

DOLLY HAWTHORNE

Just leave a card wherever you go. Wherever there are traveling people...soldiers...sailors. With this War going on, we've got to make our boys happy.

And Dolly Hawthorne pinches Homer on the cheek as she sweeps past him and up the stairs.

DOLLY HAWTHORNE (CONT'D)
 Because they could be alive today
 ...and dead tomorrow!

CUT TO:

A DEAD FACE

with a blank expression and a complexion like wax.

AUGGIE (O.C.)
 Nah...he can't be...

We are

EXT. OWL DRUG STORE - DUSK

And a CROWD OF IDLERS and PASSERS-BY - including Auggie, Enoch, Shag, Nickie and Alf - have gathered in front of the drugstore WINDOW to stare at the new display:

MR MECHANO

- a man standing motionless between two EASELS. A SIGN on one of the easels proclaims:

MR. MECHANO
THE MACHINE MAN - HALF MACHINE, HALF HUMAN
MORE DEAD THAN ALIVE
\$50 IF YOU CAN MAKE HIM SMILE!
\$500 IF YOU CAN MAKE HIM LAUGH!

Suddenly, he moves - like a piece of machinery - and the Crowd *GASPS*.

Auggie - standing right up front with his bundle of NEWSPAPERS for sale under his arm - declares:

AUGGIE
 It's a machine!

ENOCH
 I don't think so, Auggie.

SHAG
 No. Auggie's right. It's a robot,
 I'm tellin' ya!

NICKIE
 Watch! Lookit him!

ALF

I don't know...

And Mr. Mechano is indeed robot-like as he lifts a CARDBOARD SIGN from a PILE on a small TABLE in front of him...and places it on the other easel.

**Don't drag yourself around half dead. Enjoy life.
Take Dr. Bradford's Tonic and feel like a new man!**

And then Mr. Mechano lifts a pointer from the table and proceeds to point at each word.

LIONEL

It's a man.

Lionel has squeezed to the front of the crowd, and has dragged Ulysses there by the hand.

And Ulysses is *entranced*.

AUGGIE

Aw, whadda you know, Lionel!

And Mr Mechano removes the SIGN...and selects another...and we

CUT TO:

TOBEY

staring out of a PORTHOLE. We are

INT. TROOPSHIP - NIGHT

in a CARGO-HOLD that has been converted into a BARRACKS of three-tiered "PIPE-BERTHS" for the SOLDIERS.

Tobey turns away from the porthole and navigates his way through the berths to find Marcus, writing his letter to Homer by the light of a FLASHLIGHT

MARCUS

You feel okay?

TOBEY

Yeah. I'm okay.

And Tobey swings himself up into his berth.

He lies there for a moment, accustoming himself to the movement of the ship...then reaches into his pocket and withdraws the snapshot of Bess while, below him...

Marcus, concerned about his friend, is staring up at Tobey's bunk. He puts pen to paper and picks up where he left of:

MARCUS (V.O.)

...therefore, this may be my last letter to you for some time. I hope it is not the last of all. My friend here is an orphan. I think it's strange that of all the guys here *he* should become my friend. His name is Tobey George, and I have told him all about Ithaca and our family.

EXT. OWL DRUG STORE - NIGHT

MARCUS (V.O.)

Some day, I will bring him to Ithaca...

Mr. Mechano lifts the sign we first saw and places it on the easel.

And Lionel has seen enough.

LIONEL

Come on, Ulysses. Let's go. We've seen him go through all the cards *three times!* Let's go home. It's dark.

Lionel takes Ulysses hand, but Ulysses pulls it back, so mesmerized is he by the wonder of Mr Mechano.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

I'm going, Ulysses!

And Lionel walks away.

And we PULL BACK to REVEAL that Ulysses is all alone - the last one left.

And Mr Mechano *stops moving.*

And the STREET LIGHTS of Ithaca flicker on.

And Ulysses turns to look at them. And when he turns back...

Mr Mechano is looking right a him.

And a swift and fierce terror seizes Ulysses, and he starts to run.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Ulysses runs. He has no idea where he is, or where he is going; and when he stops for a moment, breathing hard and almost crying...he pants:

ULYSSES

*Papa...Mama...Marcus...Bess...
Homer...*

He looks around...and his sense of his world is scattered by the *fear* of the horror that might be catching up to him.

And he starts to run again. Then stops when he hears:

VOICE (O.C.)

*JAPANESE ISLANDS POINT WAY FOR
NORTHERN OFFENSIVE!*

And he runs around a corner to see

AUGGIE

standing on another corner, a block away, hawking his papers to PASSERSBY.

AUGGIE

AMERICANS STRIKE HARD IN MINDANAO!

And Ulysses runs with all his might to the newsboy and hugs him so forcefully that it almost knocks Auggie down.

AUGGIE

Ulysses! What's the matter? What are you crying about?

But Ulysses is incapable of speech.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

Are you scared? There's nothing to be scared of...

And Ulysses starts to hiccup through his sobs.

AUGGIE (CONT'D)

C'mon. We'll go to Homer.

ULYSSES

(Hiccup)

Homer?

AUGGIE

Sure. The telegraph office is just around the corner!

EXT. MACAULEY HOME - BACKYARD - NIGHT

PIANO MUSIC

is coming from the house. Bess must be practicing.

Mrs Macauley is in the backyard by the chicken coop and the walnut tree.

She is pulling CLOTHES off the CLOTHESLINE as Homer, with Ulysses riding on the handlebars, pedals across the vacant lot, lifts Ulysses to the ground and the two boys squeeze through the gap in the fence.

Ulysses runs to the chicken coop.

HOMER

He got lost, Ma. Auggie found him and brought him to the telegraph office. He shouldn't have been out so late. I think...I think something...scared him.

Mrs Macauley sets aside the laundry and kneels down beside her little boy.

MRS MACAULEY

Ulysses...?

And Ulysses turns his tear-stained face to her...and smiles.

HOMER

Careful. There's...uh...there's a busted egg in his pocket.

And Mrs Macauley wraps her arms around Ulysses and hugs him tight.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I don't know why it has taken me so long to write this letter, Homer.

The SOUND OF CHICKS *CHIRPING* PRE-LAPS:

MONTAGE

THE CHICKEN COOP

now filled with ADOLESCENT CHICKENS...

MARCUS (V.O.
CONT'D) It has actually been
eight weeks since I first
learned about your job at the
old Postal Telegraph Office.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Homer rides his bicycle past

AN APRICOT TREE

filled with Auggie, Enoch, Shag, Nickie and Alf - picking
apricots and knocking them lose while Ulysses and Lionel run
around the base of the tree and pick up the ripe fruit.

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)
I guess I have just been taking my
time, and there is just a lot to say.

EXT. RAILROAD CROSSING - DAY

as Ulysses arrives, breathless and just in time...to wave
at the ENGINEER...the STOKER...the BRAKEMAN...the
CARMAN...and to a HOBO riding for free.

MARCUS (V.O.
CONT'D) We are heading toward
something that we have been
preparing for, and I am terribly
afraid - I must tell you this.

INT. ITHACA PARLOR LECTURE CLUB - DUSK

On the STAGE, a horse-faced, dried out old battle-ax of a
WOMAN with pince-nez is addressing a roomful of wonderful,
plump vague, MIDDLE-AGED LADIES...as Homer comes running up
the center aisle to deliver a telegram to her.

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)
But I know that when the time
comes I will do what is expected
of me, and maybe even more than is
expected of me...

The old hag is obviously thrilled by such a dramatic delivery and, while Homer looks uncomfortably at the audience of Middle-Aged Ladies - all smiling at him - she digs A QUARTER from her purse and hands it to him.

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

But I want you to know I will be obeying no command other than the command of my own heart.

EXT. OWL DRUG STORE - DUSK

Homer drops the quarter into the cup of A LEGLESS MAN selling pencils on the sidewalk beneath the window where Mr Mechano once scared Ulysses.

Now the window is filled with SUMMERTIME DECORATIONS.

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

I am glad that I am the Macauley who is in the War, for it would be a pity and a mistake if it were you. I can write to you what I would never say in person. You are the best of the Macauleys.

INT. CLASSROOM - ITHACA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Homer is sitting with his elbow on his desk and his chin resting on his hand as

THE SCHOOL BELL RINGS (MOS)

(We see the clapper vibrating furiously against the metal bell.)

And the CLASS rises up all of a sudden. The Students CHEER and race out of the room.

And Homer watches Hubert Ackley III walk out with Helen Eliot...

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

You must go on being the best. You must live, in the years of your life, forever. You are what we are fighting the War for. Yes, you. My brother.

Homer rises from behind his desk, and smiles at Miss Hicks.

And the ancient teacher of Ancient History smiles somewhat sadly back at Homer, lifts an eraser and erases from the BLACKBOARD the words:

HAVE A HAPPY SUMMER

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Homer pedals down the street toward the Postal Telegraph Office.

MARCUS (V.O. CONT'D)

How could I ever tell you such things if we were together?

And now it is Homer who is reading the letter.

HOMER (V.O.)

You would jump me and wrestle with me and call me a fool, but even so everything I have said is true.

END MONTAGE

We are

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - NIGHT

and Homer is sitting across the desk from Mr. Grogan, and reading directly from Marcus's letter:

HOMER

"Now I will write your name here, to remind you: Homer Macauley. That's who you are."

Homer looks up at Mr. Grogan. And the old man takes a long pull from his bottle of whiskey. Then Homer continues:

HOMER (CONT'D)

"I miss you very much. I can't wait until I see you again. When that happens, I will let you wrestle me to the floor in the parlor in front of Ma and Bess and Ulysses and maybe Mary even - I'll let you do that because I will be so glad to see you again. God bless you. So long. Your brother, Marcus."

And Homer's hands are trembling as he fits the letter back into its envelope. He bites his lip to hold back his tears, then looks to Mr. Grogan.

HOMER (CONT'D)

If my brother is killed in this stupid war...I'll spit at the world. I'll hate it forever. I won't be good. I'll be the worst of them all. The worst that ever lived.

And then the tears come. He sniffs. Once. Wipes his eyes with the back of his hand.

GROGAN

No. You be grateful for yourself, Homer. You be *thankful*. That's what your brother's trying to tell you, boy...

There is an edge to Mr. Grogan's voice that Homer hasn't heard before.

HOMER

Mr. Grogan...are you drunk?

GROGAN

Yes, I am. I feel a lot better when I'm drunk. I'm telling you something that I might not tell you *unless* I were drunk.

And Grogan zeros-in on Homer with alcohol-fueled intensity and a good deal of genuine love:

GROGAN (CONT'D)

Your goodness...is yours to protect and to spread around - for me...and for everybody else in the world. Be thankful that you're a man who will be trusted by total strangers. They'll know that you won't betray them or hurt them - that you'll see something in them that everyone else has failed to see. You are a *man*, Homer, fourteen years old. Who made you such a man, I don't know. But it's true. *Know* that it's true...and be grateful for yourself. Do you understand?

And Homer just looks at his old friend...and, slowly nods.

GROGAN (O.C.)

Now it's late...it's...my goodness,
it's half-past midnight...

And we are ON HOMER'S FACE as we hear

THE SOUND OF A TRAIN BRAKING which PRE-LAPS our

CUT TO:

EXT. ITHACA TRAIN STATION - LATE AFTERNOON

as the SANTA FE PASSENGER TRAIN comes to a complete stop,
lets off steam...and...

NINE PASSENGERS

step off the train and onto the PLATFORM. Two of them are
SOLDIERS

SOLDIER ONE

JUST LET ME LOOK AT IT!

SOLDIER TWO

LOOK AT IT? *HELL!*

And he drops to his knees and kisses the wooden platform.

SOLDIER ONE

What day is today?

SOLDIER TWO

Sunday.

SOLDIER ONE

Sunday...supper...*at home.*

And Soldier One hauls Soldier Two to his feet, and
together they run - into the station and toward home as

A THIRD SOLDIER

steps down from the train.

And we might only see him from the waist down, because he
has a severe limp - his left leg is stiff as a board (it
might even be a prosthetic) - and his face is unimportant.

He limps away...toward town...and we

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - DUSK

Homer, Ulysses, Bess and Mary are strolling down the street on this hot summer evening. They pass the LINE in front of

EXT. KINEMA THEATER - DUSK

Homer and Ulysses spy Lionel, standing in line.

BESS

Hello, Lionel. Going to see the movie?

LIONEL

Haven't got any money.

HOMER

Then what are you standing in line for?

LIONEL

Me and Auggie and Enoch and Shag and Nickie and Alf came out to the courthouse park to talk to the criminals, but then they chased me away. I didn't know where to go.

HOMER

Well, do you want to see the movie?

Homer digs for some change in his pocket.

LIONEL

No.

MARY

Come on with us. We're only taking a walk around. The sun's going down...

ULYSSES

Come on with us, Lionel.

LIONEL

Okay!

And he joins them. After a moment of walking:

LIONEL (CONT'D)

Thanks. I sure was getting tired of standing there.

Homer laughs at the little boy's goofiness and looks across the street at

EXT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - DUSK

HOMER

That's where I work. That's where
I've worked almost six months now.

Bess, Mary, Ulysses and Lionel all look to the Postal Telegraph Office...

HOMER (CONT'D)

Seems more like a hundred years...

Homer squints at the window across the street.

HOMER (CONT'D)

Wait a minute...I think
that's...I didn't know Mr. Grogan
was working today...

(Grinning)

Wait here a minute, will ya? I'll
be right back.

And Homer dashes across the street. Bess calls after him:

BESS

Homer...?

And Ulysses moves to follow him, but Lionel holds him back.

LIONEL

No, Ulysses. Homer said to wait
here...

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - DUSK

The telegraph box is *RATTLING* a message as Homer enters.

But Grogan is slumped, motionless, on the desk.

HOMER

Mr. Grogan! MR. GROGAN!

Homer shakes him, but there is no response.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DUSK

Homer runs toward Bess, Mary, Ulysses and Lionel.

HOMER

Mr. Grogan's not feeling good.
I've got to go back and take care
of him. You...go along home.

And so *clear* is Homer - so *intentional* - that Bess can
only reply:

BESS

All right, Homer...

CUT TO:

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - SAME

We are ON GROGAN'S LIFELESS FACE as *SPLASH!* Homer throws
a paper cup of water into it.

And the old man's eyelids twitch and, ever so slowly,
begin to open.

The telegraph box is still *RATTLING* a message that no one
is receiving.

As Grogan's eyes struggle to focus:

HOMER

It's me, Mr. Grogan...I didn't
know you were working today or I
would've come down - like I always
do...on Sundays.

And Grogan tries to shake the confusion from his head.

He reaches out and tap-taps the telegraph key - interrupting
the incoming message for a moment...licks his forefinger and
selects a telegram blank...inserts it into the typewriter...
signals for the telegrapher at the other end to continue...

Homer nods.

The old man's gonna be okay.

HOMER (CONT'D)

I'll hurry...and get the coffee...

And, as Grogan begins to type the incoming message,
Homer dashes out of the office and we

CUT TO:

INT. CORBETT'S BAR - MOMENTS LATER

as the old pugilist shakes his head.

CORBETT

I'm cookin' a fresh pot right now,
Homer. Be just a minute -

HOMER

You don't have *any*?

CORBETT

Nope. Fresh out -

HOMER

(Forcefully)

I'm going back to the office for
a minute, then coming back here -

CORBETT

Okay! Okay, Homer. I'll have it
ready for you -

But Homer is gone.

INT. POSTAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE - SAME

Grogan is sitting stock still in his chair and
staring straight ahead.

But the telegraph box is still *RATTLING* - the message
is still coming over the wire.

HOMER

Mr. Grogan! *They're still sending!*

Homer grabs the old man by the shoulders and shakes him.

HOMER (CONT'D)

You're not getting it! Stop them,
Mr. Grogan! You've gotta tell them
to wait a minute.

But Grogan is non-responsive.

HOMER (CONT'D)

There'll be coffee in a minute.
Corbett's making a fresh - *you're
not getting the telegram...*

But Grogan just stares at the half-typed telegram still in the typewriter.

HOMER (CONT'D)

Just...*I'll be right back!*

And Homer dashes out again.

And we PUSH IN on Grogan...

And we PUSH IN on the half-typed telegram...

MRS KATE MACAULEY
2226 SANTA CLARA AVENUE
ITHACA, CALIFORNIA

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS
DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR SON MARCUS

And Mr. Grogan tries to get up from his chair.

But he cannot. He clutches his chest - clutches at his own heart...and falls forward to rest upon the typewriter.

And Homer Macauley comes walking back into the office - a cup of hot coffee trembling in his hand.

And the telegraph box STOPS its *RATTLING*.

HOMER (CONT'D)

Mr. Grogan...what's the matter...?

Homer sets down the coffee cup and lifts Grogan up, off the typewriter...

And Homer sees the half-typed telegram. But his expression does not change.

He looks from the message to the face of the old man.

HOMER (CONT'D)

Mr. Grogan...

AUGGIE (O.C.)

What's the matter, Homer? What's wrong with the old man?

Homer turns to see Auggie, standing just inside the door, a bundle of unsold newspapers under his arm.

HOMER

He's dead.

AUGGIE

Aw, you're crazy -

HOMER

(Almost furious)

No. *He's dead.*

Auggie moves in to look at Grogan - sitting up, propped against the back of his chair - his face fixed by death. And Auggie reads the half-typed telegram still in the typewriter...

AUGGIE

It's not finished, Homer. Maybe your brother is only hurt...or -

HOMER

No. Mr. Grogan heard the rest of the message. He didn't type it out...but he *heard* it.

And Homer steps away from Auggie and Mr. Grogan. He looks around the telegraph office...

SPANGLER (O.C.)

Homer...?

Spangler is standing in the open door.

And, as Homer sits in the chair across from Grogan, there are no tears in his eyes. He stares straight ahead at nothing as:

AUGGIE

Mr. Spangler! Somethin's happened!
It's Mr. Grogan! Homer says he's
dead!

Spangler moves to Grogan's side leans over...and gently lifts the old man out of the chair...and carries him to the couch at the back of the office.

And the telegraph box starts to *RATTLE*.

SPANGLER

I'll just...stop that...

Spangler moves to Grogan's desk...sits in Grogan's chair... taps out a "standby" and "postpone"...

Then Spangler sees the half-typed telegram in the typewriter. He looks across the desk at Homer.

Auggie, utterly confused, stands there in the middle of the SILENCE. Finally:

AUGGIE

What...uh...what should...I...

But he trails off as Homer rises...and removes the unfinished telegram from the typewriter.

He separates the original from its carbon copy...files the carbon copy in its proper place...folds the original and slips it into an envelope.

And then he takes his Postal Telegraph uniform coat from its hook...puts it on...tucks the envelope in the pocket...and puts on his Postal Telegraph hat.

Spangler watches all of this in silence, then:

SPANGLER

Auggie. Telephone Dr. Nelson -
1133. Tell him to come right down.

AUGGIE

Okay. Yes, sir.

SPANGLER

Then call Harry Burke, the
telegraph operator. Tell him to
come down, too.

Auggie heads for the telephone, and Spangler rises and puts his arm around Homer.

SPANGLER (CONT'D)

Come on, Homer.

EXT. DOWNTOWN ITHACA - DUSK

The sun is going down; the sky is turning red; the town is darkening as, in SILENCE, Homer and Spangler head past the KINEMA.

Spangler's arm is still around the shoulders of the young man in the ill-fitting messenger's uniform.

VARIOUS (O.C.)

HEY, HOMER! IT'S HOMER! HIYA,
HOMER! YOU SEEN AUGGIE?

ENOCH, SHAG, NICKIE & ALF

are careening around the corner. The gang stop as Homer greets them - acknowledges them - but keeps walking:

HOMER

Enoch...Shag...Nickie...Alf...

There is something different about Homer, and all that the gang can do is stand there and watch him move on.

And Homer draws a deep breath and asks Spangler:

HOMER (CONT'D)

What's a man supposed to do?

Spangler lets the question linger in the Indian summer air.

HOMER (CONT'D)

I don't know who to hate. I just don't know. What can I do about it?

(Pause)

What can I say? How does a man go on living...?

Homer scoffs out his frustration:

HOMER (CONT'D)

I don't know anybody to hate.

As though seeking a candidate, Homer looks around the street - at the PEOPLE of Ithaca strolling downtown on a Sunday evening...

HOMER (CONT'D)

Nothing...like this...has ever happened to me before. When my father died it was different. He had lived a good life. He had raised a good family. We were sad because he was dead, but we weren't sore.

Homer stops walking and turns to Spangler:

HOMER (CONT'D)

Now I'm sore and I haven't got anybody to be sore at. Who's the enemy? Do you know?

Spangler looks around...looks down the street at

THE COURTHOUSE PARK

- the swath of green leading to the modest, yet stately
COURTHOUSE...

SPANGLER

It isn't people.

Spangler holds Homer's gaze for a moment, then continues to walk, toward the Courthouse Park, and Homer falls in step with him.

SPANGLER (CONT'D)

The people of the world are like
...one person. If you hate people
...it's only yourself that
you hate.

(Pause)

And, Homer, I have to believe that
your brother - that Marcus - isn't
really gone. He's in you...in your
little brother -

HOMER

No.

Homer stops dead in his tracks and challenges Spangler
man-to-man:

HOMER (CONT'D)

That isn't good enough. I want to
see him. I want to...*smell* him. I
want to hear his voice, hear him
laughing, and have fights with him.
No. Everything's different now.
Something good has gone out of...
everything...and this place...
everything in Ithaca has changed...
because my brother isn't going
to look at anything anymore.

Homer pauses.

HOMER (CONT'D)

My brother is dead.

And Homer spits - viciously - onto the ground.

Spangler nods. He looks away and his gaze comes to rest on

AN IRON STAKE

stuck in the ground. We are

EXT. COURTHOUSE PARK - DUSK

SPANGLER

Okay. I'm not gonna to try to
comfort you. Because I can't.
But...try to remember...that the
best part of a good man stays. It
stays forever. Homer?

Homer looks at Spangler.

SPANGLER (CONT'D)

Are you any good at horseshoes?

Homer looks at the iron stake and we REVEAL, through his
eyes, another stake, 40 feet away...

HOMER

No, sir. Not very.

SPANGLER

Neither am I. You wanna pitch a
game before it's too dark?

CUT TO:

THE IRON STAKE

as a HORSESHOE *CLANGS* into it, spins and settles. A
ringer. And we CUT WIDE to REVEAL

EXT. COURTHOUSE PARK - HORSESHOE PIT - MOMENTS LATER

It's really too dark now for a game, but Spangler pitches
another one...and the two men walk from one end of the pit
to the other...and Homer takes up the horseshoes...

He swings once...twice...and releases on the third, and
the horseshoe flies...true and straight...*CLANK*...only to
glance off the stake and land in the dirt.

But Homer is startled to see

A SOLDIER

standing there, leaning against the low fence at the end
of the pit.

Spangler follows Homer's gaze, squints through the twilight at the man who Homer is now approaching...

HOMER

Do I know you?

But the Soldier does not reply.

And we do not see his face. Darkness has fallen and it is important that this man is anonymous.

He is just another soldier. His name is unimportant. His face is unimportant.

HOMER (CONT'D)

Would you care to pitch a game? You can take my place. It's a little dark -

SOLDIER

No. Thanks. You go ahead. I'll just watch.

HOMER

I don't think I've seen you before. Is this...is Ithaca your town?

SOLDIER

Yes. And I'm here. To stay.

HOMER

You mean, you don't have to go back?

SOLDIER

No. They've sent me home. For good. Just got off the train a coupla hours ago. Been walking around...just...looking at everything...

HOMER

Well...you should go home. Your family -

SOLDIER

I will. Little my little. Right now...I just can't believe I'm really here. So, I'll walk around some more...and then I'll go home.

The Soldier nods to Homer there, in the darkness, turns, and walks away - *limps* away - for one of his legs is stiff as a board. It might even be a prosthetic.

Homer and Spangler watch the young man limp away.

HOMER

I thought I knew that man...

Homer looks up at Spangler.

HOMER (CONT'D)

I don't feel like pitching
any more, Mr. Spangler.

SPANGLER

All right, Homer.

HOMER

What am I going to tell them?
They're waiting for me at home.
How am I going to look at them?
They'll know the minute they
see me...

Spangler places a comforting hand on Homer's shoulder.

SPANGLER

If you want to wait
awhile...I'll sit with you.

Homer looks at Spangler...looks at the ground...and nods...

CUT TO:

INT. MACAULEY HOME - PARLOR - NIGHT

Bess is sitting at the piano, staring at a piece of SHEET
MUSIC and trying out the CHORDS while Mary looks on...

MARY

That's it! That's right!

...and Mrs Macauley sits, knitting from her RED CROSS
basket...and Ulysses lies on the rug looking at the
pictures in Homer's Charles Atlas body-building booklet.
And Bess begins to play "I'LL BE SEEING YOU" tentatively
at first. Then she makes a mistake.

BESS

Oh, no!

MARY

Start again...

And she does.

ULYSSES

Where is Homer?

MRS MACAULEY

He'll be home soon.

And the CAMERA starts to pull back...away from the parlor...
and through the open FRONT DOOR...and we are

EXT. MACAULEY HOME - CONTINUOUS

and the CAMERA is still pulling back...to REVEAL...

THE SOLDIER

listening to the piano music, sitting on the steps leading
up to the front-porch, his bad leg held straight...

INT. MACAULEY HOME - PARLOR - SAME

Bess plays...Mary daydreams...Mrs Macauley continues to
knit...and Ulysses looks at the pictures on the final
page of the body-building booklet.

Suddenly Ulysses frowns at something.

He gets up off the floor and moves to the open front door.

And Bess ends with a slow arpeggio, smiles up at
Mary...and notices Ulysses - standing in the open front
door and *pointing* at something.

MRS MACAULEY

That was beautiful, Bess...

But Bess has joined Ulysses.

BESS

Ma...somebody's...there's a man
sitting on our front-porch steps.

Mrs Macauley stops knitting. Her heart might have skipped
a beat...but we would never know it.

MRS MACAULEY

Well...

She lifts her knitting and continues as though there
is nothing to be afraid of.

MRS MACAULEY (CONT'D)

Go on out to him, Bess, and ask
him in - whoever he is...

EXT. MACAULEY HOME - FRONT PORCH - SAME

We are ON BESS as she steps out onto the front-porch
and asks:

BESS

Won't...won't you come in.

Without getting up, the Soldier turns to look up at her.

And so it is that we do not see his face, because it
is unimportant right now.

BESS (CONT'D)

My mother would like you to come in.

And we are ON BESS as, quietly:

SOLDIER (O.C.)

Bess.

BESS

How...do you know my name? Who are
you?

SOLDIER (O.C.)

I don't know who I am.

BESS

Do you know my brother Marcus?

SOLDIER (O.C.)

Yes.

BESS

Where is he? Why...hasn't he come
home...with you?

And the Soldier stands - with some difficulty - and
faces Bess (faces away from us). He reaches into the
pocket of his Class A uniform and withdraws A RING.

SOLDIER

Bess. Your brother Marcus...sent
you this.

Bess reaches out and takes the ring. And her voice is
small when she asks:

BESS

Is Marcus dead?

And then she sees

HOMER

walking down the street and toward the house.

And rather than hear the Soldier's answer, Bess dashes past him, down the front-porch steps and to her brother.

BESS (CONT'D)

Homer! He's come from Marcus!
They were friends!

And we are ON HOMER as he looks up and sees the Soldier for the second time that night, but this time he says:

HOMER

Tobey?

And the Soldier limps down a few steps to the street - to stand in the HALO of the STREET LAMP. He is, of course:

TOBEY GEORGE

And Bess doesn't know what to do. So she runs up the front-porch steps and into the house.

HOMER (CONT'D)

I thought I knew you when we
talked in the park.

And Homer offers Tobey his hand. The soldier takes it. And Homer waits a moment before he says:

HOMER (CONT'D)

The telegram came this afternoon.
I have it. In my pocket. Here.

And Homer pulls the telegram from his pocket.

Homer and Tobey stare at one another for a moment...then Homer looks up to see his mother -

MRS MACAULEY

standing on the front-porch and looking down...at...

THE TELEGRAM

in Homer's hand.

Homer waits...until his mother's eyes meet his own...

And Homer tears the telegram into pieces.

And, as Bess and Mary appear at the open door, Homer puts the pieces back into his pocket.

Ulysses comes running down the front-porch steps and pauses to look up at Tobey.

Then the youngest Macauley takes the soldier by the hand.

HOMER

C'mon. Come on in.

And Homer and Ulysses lead Tobey up the front-porch steps. They stop in front of Mrs Macauley.

HOMER (CONT'D)

The soldier's come home, ma.

And Mrs Macauley looks at her two remaining sons, one on each side of the soldier named Tobey.

She wipes the tears from her eyes...and smiles. It is a smile which says Yes to all things.

MRS MACAULEY

Won't you please come in? And let us show you...around the house?

And Tobey and his two brothers move into the warmth and light of home.

THE END