FADE IN SOUND

INT. CONFESSIONAL - NIGHT

DISTANT, BEAUTIFUL VOICES

Male voices. A Gregorian chant.

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

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

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

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

VOICE
Son, it is so late.

MAN
Yeah, Father, work has just been...

VOICE
You work too hard.

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

VOICE
Yes my son.

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

VOICE
This is very serious.

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

MAN
It’s hard.

VOICE
Yes, my son.

MAN
—But I’m trying.

A clap of thunder.

EXT. SPANISH HOUSE - NIGHT

HOUSE AT NIGHT

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

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

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

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

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

VOICE-OVER (CONT’D)
The movie studio for which he works manufactures stories—each its own daylit drama, or moonlit dream.

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

Eddie Mannix reaches for his door.
OUTSIDE

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

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

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

VOICE-OVER (CONT’D)

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

INT. SPANISH HOUSE - NIGHT

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

In the living room a giggling blonde in a milkmaid’s dirndl with overloaded bodice bends over a butter-churn.

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

MAN
That’s right, darlin’, a little lower...

The giggling girl sees Eddie Mannix and stops churning.

GLORIA
Oh, fer—ecce homo! You, here?!

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

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

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

Eddie Mannix strides to the camera, pops its back, and pulls out a length of film.
FALCO (CONT’D)

Hey!

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

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

She giggles.

Whap! He slaps her.

She looks at him, stunned, then starts weeping.

He slaps her again.

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

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

She blubbers:

GLORIA
Okay, Eddie.

The front door opens and two uniformed cops enter.

COP ONE
Hello, Mannix, saw your heap outside.

COP TWO
Got a call. Loud, disorderly...

He looks around, sniffs.

... Possible French postcard situation.

EDDIE
Someone was pulling your leg. Mary Jo here was just at a costume party. It’s not really her dirndl.
He fishes a wad from his pocket and peels off some bills.

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

COP ONE
Well, say, no trouble at all.

Cop Two is looking hard at the girl.

COP TWO
Aren’t you Gloria DeLamour?

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

EDDIE
Scheinbrotte. Look, Brian...

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

EDDIE (CONT’D)
Can I, uh... bum a cigarette?

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

EXT. THE OLD APPIAN WAY - DAY

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

HAIL, CESAR!
A Tale Of The Christ

The same voice that started the movie now intones:

VOICE-OVER
Ancient Rome! Twelve years into the rule of Tiberius, Rome’s legions are masters of the world, the stomp of its sandals heard from the Iberian peninsula in the west through the halls of the great library of Alexandria in the east! (MORE)
As oppressed people everywhere writhe under the Roman lash...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As he whips the chariot horses into motion we pan off to reveal the hilltop view of Rome before which the weary tribunes had halted.
VOICE-OVER
Yes, to Rome! Glorious center of Cæsar’s rule!

EXT. PALESTINE - NIGHT

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

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

INT. SCREENING ROOM - DAY

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

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

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

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

EXT. CAPITOL BACKLOT - DAY

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

NATALIE
—and Gloria DeLamour has been checked into Our Lady of Perpetual Rest to dry out. You have a 10:00 A.M. with Monsignor O’Reilly at the Wallace Beery Conference Room. He’s bringing Lester Silkwood from the Legion of Catholic Decency and we’ve also invited Patriarch Vlassos for the Eastern view.
EDDIE
They’ve read the script?

NATALIE
Roger.

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

NATALIE
Check.

EDDIE
How’s production on “Tucumcari!”?

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

EDDIE
Forecast?

NATALIE
Not good.

EDDIE
Hnn. Send an insert truck and have ’em shoot driving plates for “Came the Rain.”

NATALIE
Check.

EDDIE
“Jonah's Daughter” still behind?

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

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

INT. EDDIE’S OFFICE - DAY

Eddie is on the phone.
VOICE
Nick Schenk’s office.

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

VOICE
Hi, Mr. Mannix, I’ll check.

Eddie raises his voice:

EDDIE
Natalie, I want the box office on “The Debonaires” and on “Blessed Event.” Can you also——

Hastily into the phone:

EDDIE (CONT’D)
—Yes, good morning Mr. Schenk... Very well, thank you. Proceeding... Proceeding... “Merrily We Dance” starts shooting today. Beardsley Auberon gave us a draft that’s extremely classy. Joan Van Vechten is playing Dierdre, but we need a male lead and we need him now... No, Jack Hogarth is drying out at Cedars... Metro won’t lend us Gable unless we give them the Comiskey Twins... Of course not, I agree... Swell idea but he’s waiting out a divorce in Reno... Whuh—Hobie Doyle?! Do you really think so? After all he’s—he’s a dust actor! The man barely knows how to... talk!... Yes, of course, Mr. Schenk, I agree, but I don’t know if Hobie Doyle, if he has the uh the uh the uh poise in a dinner jacket... Yes, we do need someone pronto... No I don’t. That’s very true. Let me talk to Laurence Laurentz, the director. It could work. Hobie is a very promising idea.

EXT. WESTERN LANDSCAPE

A BOULDER

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

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

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

Hobie adroitly twirls and holsters his gun.

HOBIE
Whitey!

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

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

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

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

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

MEGAPHONE VOICE
And cut.

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

DIRECTOR
Great, Hobie.
HOBIE
I kin do the handstand smoother if ya gimme another shot atter.

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

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

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

ASSISTANT
Hobie, the studio wants you to escort Carlotta Valdez to your premier tonight.

HOBIE
But she warn’t in the pitcher.

ASSISTANT
Well that’s what they want.

HOBIE
But she warn’t in the pitcher.

ASSISTANT
Well, it’s some publicity thing.

HOBIE
Ah don’t git it.

ASSISTANT
Well, the studio says you’re bringing Carlotta Valdez. You’re her escort.

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

ASSISTANT
Who was in the picture?

Hobie thinks.

HOBIE
Whitey.
Well Eddie Mannix says you're escorting Carlotta Valdez. Guess they're changing your image.

INT. COURTYARD OF SESTIMUS AMYDIAS - DAY

ROMANS

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

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

He looks here and there. He raises a megaphone.

1ST A.D.
All right, kids, it’s Rome, you’re over at this guy’s house for a revel, and here comes Antoninus. Llllots of energy!

VOICE
Roll ‘em.

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

A.C. VOICE
Camera speed.

BOOM VOICE
Sound speed.

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

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

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

The first extra is startled by:

1ST A.D.
What’re you doing at the table of viands?!
EXTRA
... Huh?

1ST A.D.
You’re supposed to be reclining, with the lyre!

EXTRA
Yeah, sorry, I uh—

1ST A.D.
Recline with the lyre!

EXTRA
Yes, sir.

VOICE
We set there? Background set?

1ST A.D.
Don’t sit on the pediment! Recline! Relaxed, festive!

EXTRA
Yes sir.

1ST A.D.
(projecting)
Set!

(narrows his eyes and points at the extra now reclining, hissing as he leaves)

I got my eye on you.

VOICE
Fountain!

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

VOICE (CONT’D)
Background!

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

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

Autolochus strides in. A senator rises to greet him.

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

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

AUTOLOCHUS
More than rumors, noble Sestimus!

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

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

I see that you are the same worshipper of Bacchus. What gaiety! There is still truth in the adage, “What pleasures cannot be found in the villa of Sestimus Amydias, cannot be found in Rome!”

(brings the goblet to his lips but stops with a thought)

But seriously. There is talk that the Senate will send our legions out again—and this time not on a short march to Gaul. What truth to these mutterings, Sestimus?

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

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

AUTOLOCHUS
Palestine! That backwater! They’ll hardly be sending the Sixth Legion to that godforsaken patch of desert!
Hearty male laughter. Autolochus ends his laugh and raises the goblet to his lips.

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

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

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

DIRECTOR
Holding for a dissolve... still laughing... holding... and... cut.

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

The extras too relax.

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

STAMPFEL
Fine, boys, that was fine. We’ll move on to the brasier scene.

AUTOLOCHUS
Yeah? Was I okay on “What truth to these mutterings?” I felt a little—

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

AUTOLOCHUS
Popping over to my dressing room. (to Script Supervisor)
Got the pages for the brasier scene?

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

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
They changed “passion” to “ardor.”

AUTOLOCHUS

The Script Supervisor shrugs a what-can-I-tell-you? Autolochus wanders off, muttering:
AUTOLOCHUS (CONT’D)
Not so, Ursulina... My ardor is yet as warm as the embers of this brasier...

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

EXT. CAPITOL BACKLOT - DAY

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

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

AUTOLOCHUS
Such is my greeting after three months’ sojourn in Gaul?... Not so, Ursulina... My ardor is yet as warm-

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

EXT. BAIRD’S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

A STAR ON A DRESSING ROOM DOOR

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

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

BAIRD
Not so, Ursulina. My ardor is yet as warm as the embers of this brasier... The embers of thish brasier... Goddamn, that’s tough. Yet as warm as the embers of this brasier... Not so, Urshulina...

The continuing pull back reveals the two extras standing either side of the door. The bald one nods at the short one.
At the nod, the short extra knocks.

SHORT EXTRA
They’re ready for you, Mr. Whitlock.

The two men stand tensed.

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

BAIRD
(slurred)
Not so, Ursulina——

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

INT. CAPITOL CONFERENCE ROOM – DAY

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

EDDIE
Gentlemen, thank you all for coming. I know you have parishes, flocks and temples making enormous demands on your time. But I’m sure you appreciate also that great masses of humanity look to pictures for information and uplift and, yes, entertainment. Now here at Capitol Pictures, as you know, an army of technicians and actors and top-notch artistic people are working hard to bring to the screen the story of the Christ. It’s a swell story—a story told before, yes, but we like to flatter ourselves that it’s never been told with this kind of distinction and panache.

EASTERN ORTHODOX PATRIARCH
Perhaps, sir, you forget its telling in the holy Bible.

A wry smile from Eddie Mannix.

EDDIE
Quite right, Padre. The Bible of course is terrific.

(MORE)
EDDIE (CONT'D)
But for millions of people,
pictures will be their reference
point for the story—the story’s
embodiment...
(groping)
the story’s...

MINISTER
Realization.

Eddie points an aiming finger at the Minister, saluting his
choice of words.

EDDIE
Realization.

RABBI
You “realize,” of course, that for
we Jews, any visual depiction of
the Godhead is most strictly
prohibited.

EDDIE
(dismayed)
Oh.

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

EDDIE
(brightening)
Ah-ha.

MINISTER
Who plays Christ?

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

He permits himself a satisfied smile.
... Baird Whitlock.
Murmurs of appreciation from the assembled and one low “that’s-something” whistle.

RABBI
Well, he is certainly a great talent.

EDDIE
Now Hail, Cæsar! is a prestige picture, our biggest release of the year, and we are devoting huge resources to its production in order to make it first-class in every respect. Gentlemen, given its enormous expense, we don’t want to send it to market except in the certainty that it will not offend any reasonable American, regardless of faith or creed. Now that’s where you come in. You’ve read the script; I wanna know if the theological elements of the story are up to snuff.

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

A frozen beat as Eddie frames an answer.

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

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

EDDIE
How so, Father?

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

RABBI
You can say that again! The Nazarene was not God!
PATRIARCH
He was not not-God.

RABBI
He was a man!

MINISTER
Part God.

RABBI
Nossir!

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

RABBI
Well...

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

EDDIE
Father, Son, Holy Ghost.

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

EDDIE
So God is... split?

PRIEST
Yes.

Eddie nods.

... And no!

Eddie frowns.

PATRIARCH
There is unity in division.

MINISTER
And division in unity.

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

PRIEST
He used to be angry!

RABBI
What, he got over it?

MINISTER
You worship the god of another age!

PRIEST
Who has no love!

RABBI
Not true! He likes Jews.

MINISTER
God loves everyone!

PRIEST
God is love.

PATRIARCH
God is who is.

RABBI
This is special? Who isn’t who is?

PRIEST
But how should God be rendered in a motion picture?

RABBI
God is not in the motion picture!

MINISTER
Then who is Todd Hocheiser?

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

PATRIARCH
I’ve seen worse.

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

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

... Reverend?

MINISTER
There is nothing to offend a reasonable man.

EDDIE
Father?

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

RABBI
Who made you an expert all of a sudden?

Eddie turns to the Rabbi.

EDDIE
... And what do you think, Rabbi?

The rabbi shrugs and affects mildness.

RABBI
Eh. I haven’t an opinion.

EXT. CONFERENCE ROOM DOOR – DAY
Eddie Mannix emerges, dabbing at sweat.

NATALIE
How’d we do?
EDDIE
Mm. What’s up?

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

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

NATALIE
You’re not crazy, but no. I checked the Til Two, Dan Tana’s, Rusty Scupper. No soap.

EDDIE
Home, maybe? Called his wife?

NATALIE
Yep.

EDDIE
What’d Laura say?

NATALIE
He’s not home, he’s never home, he’s a louse, try one of his chippies.

EDDIE
Called that script girl, what’s her name—Francie?

NATALIE
Check.

EDDIE
Any of the gals missing from the set?

NATALIE
Nope.

EDDIE
Well... (looks at his watch)
Gone an hour? We won’t worry yet.
INT. LINEN TRUCK - DAY

BLACK

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

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BLVD - DAY

THE STREET

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

EXT. STUDIO GATE - DAY

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

GUARD
How ya doing, Hobie.

HOBIE
Lo there, Scotty.

GUARD
They got you shooting on the lot?

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

GUARD
Ya don't say.

INT. STAGE / TANK - DAY

UNDER WATER

A bathing beauty in a sequined mermaid suit swims free-armed but wriggle-tailed, constrained by her fake nether-parts. From our underwater perspective we hear burbling music.
After a beat of her swimming solo many bodies shoot down into the water to join the mermaid, entering foreground and background in headfirst dives that leave bubble-trails. The beauties swim loops and then wave themselves back up toward the surface, smiling.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And does dive.

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

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

The mermaid is proud of herself, proud of her crown, proud of her bathing-beauty minions—but then pride evaporates. Some internal struggle. She seems to be getting angry.
She yanks off the crown and tosses it away, squalling:

MERMAID
Wardrobe!

The music slows to sludge and stops.

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

INT. STAGE - DAY

CLOSE ON MERMAID

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

After a long straining moment:

MERMAID
GAH!

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

A stagehand staggers back, holding the now freed bottom half of her scaly mermaid outfit. He tips it backfin-upward and a little water dribbles out.

The mermaid is now wearing scaly top-half of her outfit only. Coming from beneath it, below her waist, is a conventional Catalina swimsuit. She feels tenderly at her stomach as an assistant director enters.

A.D.
Gas again, ma’am?

MERMAID
MA’AM? MISS? Am I married?

A.D.
No miss.
MERMAID
No. Yeah, sure, gas again.
(Eddie approaches; she indicates him)
Ask him, he knows. Okay, scram.

EDDIE
How are you, DeeAnna?

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

EDDIE
Well, we should have the water ballet in the can after tomorrow; in the nightclub scene wardrobe’ll have a gown for you that’s more... forgiving. Um... any more thoughts about who you might marry?

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

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

DEEANNA
Vince was not minor!

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

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

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

DEEANNA
Pretty boys, sap, and swishes! You think if there was some good steady reliable man I wouldn’t grabbed him?
EDDIE
Well, what about Ärne Seslum? He is
the father, isn’t he?

DEEANNA
Yeah yeah.

EDDIE
The marriage doesn’t have to last
forever. But, DeeAnna, having a
child without a father would
present a public relations problem
for the studio. The aquatic
pictures do very nicely for us,
and—

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

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

DEEANNA
Yeah yeah. Absolutely. He’s the
father, yeah. Pretty sure.

Eddie has been nodding and making to withdraw. The last
sentence gives him pause but DeeAnna, ready to get back to
work, projects:

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

EXT. COAST HIGHWAY - DAY

The “Al’s Linen’s” truck rattles by. We hear the crash of
surf.

Up ahead, on the right side of the road is a weathered sign
for “Rudy’s Fish Shack—500 yards.” Just before the sign is a
turn-off to the left, onto an unpaved and rutted road. The
truck makes the left turn.
INT. STAGE / DRAWING ROOM - DAY

People in formal-wear lounge, chatting.

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

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

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
My dear boy, you look wonderful, how do you feel?

HOBIE
Well this here collar is a little tight.

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

HOBIE
I’m sweet on Allegra.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Indeed you are.

HOBIE
But I seen Biff’s grip.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Indeed you have. And so here we find you haunted by unspoken suspicions.

HOBIE
Haunted. By Biff’s grip.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
By his valise, yes, but then here is Dierdre,

(indicates actress on couch who coldly examines Hobie—a veteran with no patience for the rookies)

... harboring deep feelings for you, and sensing opportunity.
Dierdre.

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

Hobie is concerned.

(troubled)
So now she’s gonna importune, Mr. Laurence?

Lau rentz.

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

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

Okay, I gotcha.

Very good, very good, let’s try one shall we?

Sure, I’ll give her a go.

Wonderful, splendid.

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

A mirthless chuckle.

Yes, given your unspoken suspicions about Allegra, a mirthless chuckle.
HOBIE
Okay, Mr. Laurence, I’ll give it a——

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Laurentz.

HOBIE
Oh, gosh, I’m sorry, Mr. Laurentz.
I’ll give it a shot.

THROUGH FILM

A clapper-boy ID’s and whacks a slate on “Merrily We Dance.”

Laurence Laurentz’s voice calls “Action!”

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

Hobie enters, an uneasy backward glance referring perhaps to the unseen grip.

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

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

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

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

HOBIE
Would that it were sooooo...
simple.

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

The beat grows longer... longer...

Voice of Laurence Laurentz: “Cut!”
We cut to Laurence Laurentz sitting in his director’s chair, mouth slightly open, staring without expression as he tries to frame his notes.

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

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Very good—wonderful in fact. But let’s try it a little differently this time—

HOBIE
Sure.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
—let’s try, well let’s see, first of all why don’t we dispense with the mirthless chuckle.

HOBIE
No mirthless chuckle.

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

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

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

HOBIE
Okay, you’re the bossman, Mr. Laurence.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Laurentz.

HOBIE
Oh, gosh, I’m sorry, Mr. Laurentz—
LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Also, let’s try, this time, actually looking at Dierdre as we speak, looking into her eyes, and speaking our line with a certain... ruefulness.

Hobie nods agreement.

HOBIE
Ruefulness, okay.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Yes. Because it’s not so simple. Not so simple as she suggests.

HOBIE
Okay.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Your feelings are not so simple.

HOBIE
Nawsir. Okay.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Splendid.

THROUGH FILM
A clapper-boy ID’s and whacks a slate on “Merrily We Dance” identifying the scene number and Take 2.

Laurence Laurentz’s voice calls “Action!”

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

Hobie enters.

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

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

DIERDRE (CONT’D)
It seems Allegra’s a no-show, which is simply a bore, but I can partner you in bridge. (reacting to him)
Why the pout?
Hobie looks at her, somewhat shifty-eyed, not comfortable with the eye contact.

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

Voice of Laurence Laurentz: “Cut!”

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

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
   Good, very good. Wonderful, in fact. Let’s try, this time...

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

Hobie waits, gazing up at him.

At length:

LAURENCE LAURENTZ (CONT’D)
   All right, let’s try this, your line, just say it as I say it, say your line exactly as I’m about to. Just as I’m about to do.

HOBIE
   Sure, okay.

Beat to focus attention, and then:

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
   (rueful, and British- accented)
   Would that it were so simple.

HOBIE
   Would that ih twuuuuuuuh, so simple.

Laurence Laurentz stares at him.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
   My dear boy, why do you say that—why do you say, “twuuuuuh”?

HOBIE
   Well you said, say it like I say it.
LAURENCE LAURENTZ

Yes but——

HOBIE

Would that it twuuuuuuuh, so simple.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

Would that it’were so simple.

HOBIE

Would that ih twuuuuuh, so simple.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

Would that it’were so simple.

HOBIE

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

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

Laurence.

HOBIE

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

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

We can use Christian names, my good
dear boy. Laurence is fine——

HOBIE

Okay.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

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

HOBIE

Would that it twuuuuuh——

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

You seem to be lingering, it’s
interminable——

HOBIE

Oh gosh.

LAURENCE LAURENTZ

—I’m wondering when it’ll end, the
"were,” and we shouldn’t have to
wonder, should we, we should be
marching right along to “so
simple”!
HOBIE
Would that it were so simple. Not “simple!” Just...
(relaxed)
simple.

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

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

EXT./INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

FROM A HIGH BLUFF

We are looking down into a hidden box cove of the Pacific Ocean, rugged and secluded. Surf pounds into the teeth of jagged rocks just offshore. Nestled in the canyon just above the cove’s tiny beach is a modernist octahedral beach house.

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

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

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

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

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

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

INT. EDDIE’S OFFICE - DAY

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

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

EDDIE
That we’re looking for him. But we don’t want it in the gossip columns—Baird on a bender or in a love nest or wherever we end up finding him. As far as the set is concerned it’s business as usual. Tell the A.D. Baird is out briefly with a high ankle sprain.

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

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

DUBROW
Chunk can’t act.

EDDIE
Get the writer to trim his speeches.

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

Eddie grimaces.

EDDIE
Uh-huh.

DUBROW
It’s the emotional climax of the entire picture!

(MORE)
DUBROW (CONT'D)
We have to see that Autolochus has absorbed the message of the Christ!

EDDIE
Yeah, I can see that.

DUBROW
We need Baird’s star power, his charisma.

A wave of Eddie’s hand communicates the ineffable:

EDDIE
Sure, his emotional, uh—

DUBROW
This can’t be faked! This is the heart and soul of the picture!

EDDIE
I understand—

DUBROW
End of the movie, we can’t give that speech to some—some—some Roman schmoe!

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

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

EDDIE
Yeah yeah.

(his phone buzzes; he punches the button)
Not now.

DUBROW
—not to mention we lose Todd Hocheiser to Fox at the end of the week.
EDDIE
Shoulda made him exclusive; who knew.

(another buzz from the phone)

Not now!

NATALIE’S VOICE
It’s Mr. Laurentz, Mr. Mannix! I can’t stop him!

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

EDDIE
It’s all right, Natalie. Okay Walt, lemme know——

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Mannix, I won’t have it! For two decades the name “Laurence Laurentz” has meant something to the public!

EDDIE
What’s on your mind, uh... Laurence?

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Hobie Doyle cannot act!

EDDIE
Hobart Doyle is one of the biggest movie stars in the world.

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

Natalie has been hesitant to butt in:

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

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

LAURENCE LAURENTZ
Oh, he’s game. And gamey!

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

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

BLACK

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

We are fading up wide on Baird Whitlock, lying on his back,
still unconscious. He lies on a patio chaise lounge made of
thin plastic tubing stretched across an aluminum frame. We
are in a storeroom, the chaise being the room’s only piece of
furniture.

A muffled ding-dong from the front of the house. We hear the
springer spaniel, stirred by the bell to yapping.

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

BAIRD
What truth to these mutterings,
Sestimus...

He subsides to snoring.

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

MAIN ROOM

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

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

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

MAN
Quiet, Engels!

INT. IMPERIAL GARDENS - DAY

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

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

ARTHUR FUNG
How pleasant to see you, Mr. Mannix, your table is right over here.

EDDIE
Thank you, Arthur.

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

MAN
How ya doing, Mannix.

EDDIE
Mr. Cuddahy.

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

The men seat themselves facing each other.

EDDIE
Sorry to keep you hanging—it’s a tough decision.
CUDDAHY
Nothing to apologize for—we said the offer was on the table for a week.

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

CUDDAHY (CONT’D)
Go ahead.

EDDIE
Nah, I’m... I’ve been trying to...

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

EDDIE
The offer’s very clear. And very generous.

CUDDAHY
We want to make it easy for you to say yes. Look Mannix, we need a guy with your talents in management, problem-solving. And you need to think about the future. Lockheed is booming—it’s reflected in the offer we made you. Everyone is riding in airplanes, and we’re moving into jet airplanes. It’s a new age, Mannix, and we’re part of it; the industry you’re in—what’s the future there? What happens when everybody owns a television set? Will they still be going to pictures every week?

EDDIE
Well, we—

CUDDAHY
I don’t mean to denigrate; I’m sure the picture business is pretty damned interesting. But it’s also pretty frivolous, isn’t it? Aviation is serious; serious business, serious people.

(MORE)
CUDDAHY (CONT'D)
You won’t be babysitting a bunch of oddballs and misfits, shouldering a lot of crackpot problems from people who—

EDDIE
Look, we have some kooks, sure—

CUDDAHY
Course they’re kooks, it’s all make-believe!

(quick grimace and smile; he leans back)
I told myself I wasn’t gonna badmouth the competition, and looka me. Sorry, Mannix, I’ll stick to what we’re about. Lemme show you something.

(digs in a pocket)
Ever heard of the Bikini Atoll?

EDDIE
What?

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

(hands Eddie a picture)
The real world. Hydrogen bomb. Fusion device.

EDDIE
Armageddon.

CUDDAHY
And Lockheed was there. We had a—

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

WAITRESS
Call for you, Mr. Mannix.

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

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

(MORE)
EDDIE (CONT'D)
(slams down the phone and rises)
Sorry, Cuddahy, work emergency.
Still do work there, for the day anyway.
(grabs his hat, calls back over his shoulder)
You make a good case. I'll let you know.

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

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

Wider: Baird in his centurion's wardrobe reclining on the beach chaise. The sound of ocean outside.

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

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

He twists to look behind himself, lawn chair crackling, and does a modest take: out the window is the Pacific Ocean.

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

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

LIVING ROOM

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

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

WOMAN
You one of the Hollywood people?
Baird stares at her, considering all the possible answers. Finally:

BAIRD
... Maybe.

WOMAN
They’re in there.

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

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

He goes cautiously down the hall, the vacuum sound fading away, male voices fading up. One door is ajar. Baird cautiously bumps it open further.

Another round of laughter is interrupted as all turn to look at the Roman-attired man in the doorway. Most of the interrupted party are seated; there are a couple of overflow standees; several men smoke cigarettes, one smokes a cigar; the tweedy elderly man is sunk back in an easy chair smoking a pipe.

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

DOG SHUSHER
Quiet, Engels!

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

HERMAN
Please! Enter! All are welcome!

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

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

HERMAN (CONT’D)
Those things are a nuisance!

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

BAIRD
Thank you. Uh...
The men look to him, waiting for him to bring out his thought. Herman helps:

HERMAN
Wondering where you are?

BAIRD
Yeah.

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

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

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

HERMAN
And what’s going on?

BAIRD
Yeah.

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

BAIRD
So... I missed the minutes.

HERMAN
I wouldn’t worry about it.

THIRD MAN
They’re usually pretty boring.

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

HERMAN
Well it’s not a “meeting,” so much as a, a—what should we say?

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

BAIRD
And you’re studying...?
HERMAN
Oh, all sorts of jolly stuff.

THIRD MAN
History.

DUTCH
Economics.

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

HERMAN
Don’t you agree?

All are looking at Baird.

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

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

PLATTER OF FINGER SANDWICHES

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

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

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

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

SECOND MAN
The boss is not the brain!

ANGRY MAN
No no! The boss is parasite!
HERMAN
Well, it’s true that the boss
doesn’t work, but he has a function
in the system——

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

He controls the means of——

SECOND MAN
——production, sure, but that’s not
a function, that’s, that’s——

ANGRY MAN
Parasitism! On the body! On the
body politic! Of the regular Joe!
It’s——

A throat clearing.

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

MARCUSE
Man is unitary—a simple economic
agent. Man’s institutions are
split, expressing contradictions
that must be worked through. And
they are worked through in a
causative, predictable way: history
is science. This is the essence of
the dialectic.

Click! A sallow thin young man with heavy beard shadow has
just snapped a picture of Baird. A sickly smile at Baird and
then he turns to face someone else in the room
and——click!——takes a picture.

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

THIRD MAN
We don’t believe in Santa Claus!

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

**HERMAN**
Another finger sandwich? More tea?

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

**SECOND MAN**
Mr. Smitrovich takes pictures for our newsletter.

The sallow picture-snapper smiles again at Baird.

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

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

**ANGRY MAN**
The body politic!

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

**BAIRD**
Okay, so you guys are for the little guy.

**HERMAN**
Well—for the little guy, against—it doesn’t matter, history will be what it will be, and we already know what it will be, but—yes, we’re for the little guy, aren’t you?
BAIRD
Are you joking? Me, for the little
guy? Of course I’m for the little
guy! Is this guy a comedian?

FOURTH MAN
And you would *act*. To *help* the
little guy.

BAIRD
Act?

FOURTH MAN
Praxis.

BAIRD
What?

FOURTH MAN
Act.

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

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

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

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

As we cut wide on the room, the same voice that narrated the
sandal epic “Hail, Cæsar!” at the beginning of our movie
returns, distinguished, British-accented, authoritative yet
plummily comforting:

VOICE-OVER
And so Baird Whitlock found himself
in the hands of Communists...

Herman starts to silently explain things to Baird. The scene
of cozy bonhomie is framed by the elemental vastness of the
ocean outside.
VOICE-OVER (CONT’D)
Meanwhile, far from the crashing surf of Malibu, Eddie Mannix, torn from his lunch with the Lockheed man...

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

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

VOICE-OVER
... hurries back to the vastness of Capitol Pictures, whose tireless machinery clunks on, producing this week’s ration of dreams for all the weary peoples of the world.

Closer on Eddie as he enters the small door of a soundstage. The light above the door is flashing red.

INT. H.C. STAGE - DAY

INSIDE

High-ceilinged darkness and quiet. A man posted at the door hisses at Eddie, entering:

MAN
Hey, numbskull, didn’t you see the “rolling” li—Oh, I’m sorry Mr. Mannix. Can I help you find someone?

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

Their voices bump up full as we cut to the periphery of the scene being shot around a great flickering brasier. An actor in centurion’s wardrobe identical to Baird’s has one hand half-covering his face as the other arm stretches out as if to repel the gaze of a revealingly clad slavegirl.

URSULINA
Autolochus! Why do you present yourself in my chambers in such humble fashion?
CHUNK MULLIGAN
Do not look upon me, Ursulina. The fires of the brasier of Sestimus latterly burned my face, though the unguents of Arkimideus promise shortly to undo the damage.

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

EDDIE
Walt.

DUBROW
Eddie!

He fishes a twice-folded paper from his pocket.

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

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

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

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

CHUNK MULLIGAN
And my ardor for you is yet as warm as the embersh of thish bra—goddamnit—this brazher. I’m sorry, goddamnit.

VOICE
Cut!

EXT. H.C. TEMPLE SET - DAY

OUTSIDE

Eddie and Walt emerge from the soundstage onto an exterior set with thick temple columns.
DUBROW
Somebody slipped it under my door
some time after we broke this
morning.

EDDIE
Mention it to anyone?

DUBROW
Nope.

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

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

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

Eddie nods, thinking.

EDDIE
What do you think they mean, “The
Future”?

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

... Chunk sounded good in there!

INT. EDDIE’S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Eddie bangs through a door that says:

EDWARD MANNIX
HEAD OF PHYSICAL PRODUCTION

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

INNER OFFICE

Eddie strides in as the phone on his desk buzzes:
NATALIE’S VOICE
Stu Schwartz on two.

EDDIE
Stu, how are you. I need some petty cash... Hundred thousand. I’m sorry, did I say “petty”?...

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

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

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

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

Eddie winces.

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

EXT. CAPITOL LOT - DAY

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

WOMAN
Call didn’t take so long, then.

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

THORA THACKER
Well, I’ll be fast too. I only wanted to notify you as a courtesy that I’m running my story on Baird Whitlock.
EDDIE
Yeah? What story?

THORA THACKER
The story. I have a credible source and I’m going to run it, and I think you know what story I mean.

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

THORA THACKER
Don’t play dumb, Eddie, I’m talking about...
    (dramatic pause, dramatic delivery)
    “On Wings as Eagles.”

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

Finally:

EDDIE
What?!

She gives him a knowing look and a confirming nod.

THORA THACKER
Running it tomorrow.

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

THORA THACKER
The facts are never beneath me.

EDDIE
People don’t want the facts, they want to believe. That’s our great industry—mine, and yours too. They want to believe that Baird Whitlock is a great star, and a good man.
THORA THACKER
You’re admitting he isn’t.

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

THORA THACKER
I AM NOT A GOSSIP COLUMNIST!

EDDIE
No no, of course not——

THORA THACKER
Don’t confuse me with my sister!

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

THORA THACKER
It’s my entire column. I’m happy to talk to Baird for comment, but it’ll have to be this afternoon.

EDDIE
Baird is unavailable right now. Wait one day.

A chirping hoot from Thora.

Eddie grimaces and lowers his voice confidentially:

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

THORA THACKER
My readers don’t care about Hobie Doyle. He wears chaps.

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

THORA THACKER
Trade the story of my career for a puff piece on Hobie Doyle? I don’t think so.
EDDIE
You’re not trading anything, you’re waiting one day on a story that’s years old. Give me a day, I can let you talk to Baird and show you your story’s the bunk. And if I’m wrong, no skin off your nose, you run the column. In the meantime you have an exclusive—no one else knows about Hobie and Carlotta.

Thora eyes him suspiciously.

THORA THACKER
No one?

EDDIE
You’re it.

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

EDDIE (CONT’D)
What kind of name is Thora, anyway?

THORA THACKER
It’s a name that nineteen million readers trust. Don’t play games with them, Eddie.

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

EDDIE
Nobody's playing games here.

INT. STUDIO ACCOUNTING OFFICE - DAY

DESK

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

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

Straining pressure.

Stu Schwartz arches an eye behind horn-rimmed glasses.

STU
Is that big enough?
Eddie strains downward as he presses the two clasps, inward, until—snap! snap!—they catch.

EXT. CAPITOL LOT - DAY

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

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

WOMAN
Hello Eddie, I'm notifying you as a courtesy before I run tomorrow’s story.

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

THESSALY THACKER
It’s about Baird Whitlock.

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

THESSALY THACKER
(old)
(puzzled)

EDDIE
Old! Stale! Rotten! And—

THESSALY THACKER
I’m talking about today.

EDDIE
And there’s—

(abrupt shift from heated to cagey)

What?

THESSALY THACKER
A little bird told me he disappeared from the set today.

EDDIE
Oh! That. No no. Yes, he did have to take a break. Minor injury, high ankle sprain.
THESSALY THACKER
What did you think I mean?

EDDIE
No, nothing. I saw your sister earlier, she was trying to resurrect some old gossip about Baird.

THESSALY THACKER
I’m sure she was. That cow. She couldn’t find a new story if it were taped to her posterior.

EDDIE
Well, she’s—

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

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

YOUNG MAN’S VOICE
Mr. Mannix!

A freckled youth in a cardigan sweater is bicycling up the walkway. As he furiously pedals, a Capitol Pictures pennant snaps and flutters from a high antenna off the back fender. He skids to a halt, close.

EDDIE
What’s up, Peanut?

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

EDDIE
The—good lord! Thessaly, I have to run.

THESSALY THACKER
If you do know where Baird is, let me talk to him.

Eddie Mannix is already hastening off.
EDDIE
Sure—well, I’ll—find out where he is, right away, Thessaly, I’m sure he’ll—
(turns with a thought)
Say, what kind of name is Thessaly, anyway?

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

On his hasty retreat:

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

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

INT. EDDIE’S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Eddie strides through the outer office.

NATALIE
On two! And Hobie Doyle is in there.

EDDIE
Right.

INNER OFFICE

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

HOBIE
Lo, Mr. Mannix.

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

EDDIE
Thanks for coming, Hobie, one second. Mannix here, who—Damn!

He looks at the handset he has picked up, shakes his head, cradles it. He hits a button on the phone.
... Hung up, Natalie. Tell me the second they call back.

NATALIE
Yes, sir.

Eddie looks darkly down at the attaché case.

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

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

Eddie is still looking down at the bulging attaché case. He pushes experimentally down on the middle of its buldge. He pops the clasps. He redistributes the currency inside—blocked from Hobie’s view by the case itself—as Hobie talks.

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

EDDIE
Good, that’s fine.

HOBIE
Usually on a picture I just say “Whitey!” Or “Whoa, there,” but this—here it’s talkin’ an’t’s people listenin’, threw me little at first but I think I got my leg up onner now.

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

EDDIE
Well that’s fine. Laurence came in this morning to tell me how well you’re doing, he’s very impressed.

(MORE)
You just continue to do whatever he says. He knows how to make a quality picture.

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

The phone buzzes.

EDDIE
Hang on, Hobie.  
(punches the intercom button)
That them?

NATALIE’S VOICE
Sorry, sir—no, do you want Mrs. Mannix on one?

He deflates; picks up the phone.

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

He has reopened the case and is rearranging the money.

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

He hangs up.

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

Eddie looks up at Hobie and focuses on him for the first time. A long, appraising look.

Hobie returns the look, not sure what it means.

Finally:

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

(MORE)
Ransom money. Baird Whitlock has been kidnapped. Hobie stares, shocked. Eddie Mannix nods a grim confirmation. Finally:

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

Eddie’s mouth forms a moue of agreement.

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

Eddie gives a wagging headshake.

HOBIE (CONT’D)
I would look at the entries.

EDDIE
The extras. Why?

HOBIE
Well you just never know about an entry. They come’n go. Everyone else, I’m on the set, I look at the guy settin’ the 5K I think, “Why there’s old Bud, settin the 5K.” Script girl, wrangler, same thang. Entries, that’s diffuhrnt. Not makin’ a blanket call here—there’s good entries’n bad entries. All I’m sayin: you look at an entry, you got no idea what he’s thankin’.

Eddie stares at Hobie, contemplating.

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

NATALIE’S VOICE
He’s back—line one.

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

He hangs up, looks at the case, looks at Hobie.
Can I use your belt?

INT. WATERFRONT BAR - DAY

We are coming off the lettering on the side of a boat which identifies it as “The Swingin’ Dinghy.”

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

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

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

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

GIRL
So long, fellas! See ya in eight months!

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

BARTENDER
Eight months?

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

SAILOR
Yeah—we’re shippin’ out in the mawnin.

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

SAILOR 2
Golly: eight months without a dame.

The lead sailor, equally downcast, is played by Burt Gurney.
BURT
Can ya beat it.

BARTENDER
(gruff)
Yer gonna have to beat it.

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

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

BURT
Oh, we’re headin’ out to sea...

The production number “No Dames!” begins.

INT. CORNER OF THE SOUND STAGE – DAY

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

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

INT. WATERFRONT BAR

BACK TO THE SET

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

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

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

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

We cut behind the director seated on a canvas chair onto the back of which his name is stitched: “Årne Seslum.”
VOICE (CONT’D)
Come here, Burt Gurney. We go again.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
All right, kids, back to one!

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

BURT
Anything different, Mr. Seslum?

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

The Bartender grumbles, walking away:

BARTENDER
That’s my whole character, the slow burn.

BURT
(genuine)
Gosh, Mr. Seslum, I don’t mind, if he wants me to—

ÄRNE
It is decided!

Eddie Mannix walks up.

EDDIE
Lo, Burt.

Brightly, before heading back to the set:

BURT
Hello, Mr. Mannix!

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

ÄRNE
Yah yah we associated.
EDDIE
Yes, and she’s—

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

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

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

EDDIE
No, of course not—

ÄRNE
My wife cannot read this.

EDDIE
Your—excuse me?

Ärne fishes out a wallet.

ÄRNE
Ilsa Pflug.

EDDIE
Ilsa...?

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

ÄRNE
Ilsa Pflug-Seslum. In Malmo.

EDDIE
I was not aware of that.

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

ÄRNE
Yah, yah, two children.

EDDIE
(sotto)
Third on the way, apparently.

ÄRNE
Do you have physical culture, Eddie Mannix? Do you ski?
EDDIE
No, I, uh, never took it up. Seems like a lot of fun.

ÄRNE
Yah, fresh air.
(thumps himself on chest)
Air in—
   (he sucks in)
Out—
   (he blows out)
Lungs. Breathe.
(takes back the wallet)
I no more associate with DeeAnna Moran—it is decided!

EDDIE
Uh-huh—

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

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

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - DAY

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

BAIRD
So I feel someone poking me and I wake up and it’s Clark and he says, “Well, her keys weren’t in there so I guess we’re walkin’!”

Roaring laughter from the Communists.

BAIRD (CONT’D)
This was back before Gable was Gable.

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

Baird is lost in misty reminiscence:
BAIRD (CONT’D)
We used to go to San Berdoo every weekend, Bob Stack would come sometimes, the Blue Grotto was still open—Dave Chasen was a busboy...

(the dramatic view finally registers)
Quite a place! Yours?

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

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

(laughter)
But you’re saying, actually, technically I’ve been... kidnapped.

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

HERMAN
Well, technically, yes.

BAIRD
And there’s gonna be a ransom.

BENEDICT
I’d hardly call it “ransom.”

Herman indicates the speaker.

HERMAN
Benedict there—that’s Benedict de Bonaventure—wrote “The House of Ahasuaris.”

A low whistle from Baird. Herman nods.

HERMAN (CONT’D)
Yes. Enormous hit, made the studio millions of dollars. Did you see any of those millions of dollars, Ben?
BENEDICT
I did not.

HERMAN
Dutch over there—Dutch Zweistrong—wrote “All The Way To Uruguay.”

DUTCH
(testy)
I wrote all the “All The Way” pictures.

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

Dutch gives a short barking laugh.

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

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

ANGRY MAN
What’re you, a child?

HERMAN
(apology for the bad manners)
I think what Herschel’s trying to say is, just because the studio owns the means of production, why should it be able to take the money—our money, the value created by our labor—and dole out what it pleases? That’s not right. So—no. No, I wouldn’t call it “ransom.”

DUTCH
Payback.

FOURTH MAN
Partial payback.
HERMAN
Now, until quite recently our study group had a narrow focus. We concentrated on getting Communist content into motion pictures—always in a sub rosa way, of course. And we’ve been pretty darn successful. You remember, in “Kerner’s Corner”—the Town Hall scene, where the aldermen overturn the rotten election and make Gus the mayor?

BAIRD
(getting it, nodding)
Oh! Yeah. Uh-huh.

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

Faintly gesturing with his pipe:

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

ANGRY MAN
Plus, we make a little dough.

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

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

Chuckles all around. Herman gives a weak smile.

HERMAN
Well—no, Mr. Whitlock. You could hardly share in your own ransom. That would be unethical.
BAIRD
Well, I don’t know if that’s fair, fellas! The whole set-up only works if I play along, right, if I don’t let on I know who kidnapped me?

HERMAN
Yes. That’s right.

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

The smiling faces around him harden.

Baird, committed, plows on:

BAIRD (CONT’D)
... Just... told the truth?

The alienation is palpable. Herman alone seems unruffled:

HERMAN
I don’t think you’ll do that, Mr. Whitlock. What if we told the truth, about—“On Wings as Eagles?”

Baird instantly sobers.

He looks up at the men around him, their faces set. He looks at Herman, the one person still smiling.

INT. SID SIEGELSTEIN’S OFFICE - DAY

Eddie Mannix arrives to lean against his door jamb. The legal bullpen, rows of decks, is at his back.

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

Sid looks up from his paperwork.

SID
She get married again?

EDDIE
No, that’s the problem. Having a child, not married.

A whistle from Sid.
SID
Tough.

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

He waves airily. Sid nods understanding.

SID
But who knows...

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

Sid gazes at Eddie. His look drifts off.

SID
Interesting... As a single...

EDDIE
Mm, she disappears for a while, reappears—

SID
Uh-huh.

EDDIE
—and she wants to share her blessings—adopt a child.

SID
Sure, she’s always yearned to be a mother...

EDDIE
That’s it.

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

EDDIE
Uh-huh.

SID
This is new ground here. Technically, she’d have to give up the baby, in order to adopt it, to a third... party—
EDDIE
Joe Silverman.

Natalie, with clipboard, approaches from the background.

SID
Joe Silverman, exactly. He’s the foster father for a few days. She hands the kid to Joe, he hands it back... I’ll do some research. (taps his desktop)
This is exciting.

NATALIE
Mr. Mannix, it’s five-thirty.

EXT. CAPITOL LOT / EDITING ROOM - DAY

It is a very late day. Eddie Mannix strides through the campus with Natalie trailing.

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

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

NATALIE
Check.

EDDIE
If he plays dumb—or if the A.D.’s wrong and he is dumb—check the other extras.

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

EDDIE
No, it was Thessaly. Tell her he was at the doctor longer than expected, she can see him on the set bright and early tomorrow.
NATALIE
Check. And is that last part true?

EDDIE
Let’s hope so. That reminds me: I need a list of everyone who worked on “On Wings as Eagles” who’s still at the studio.

NATALIE
“On Wings as Eagles”—that’s a while ago, now. Aside from Baird and the director it won’t be a long list.

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

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

EDDIE
Yeah yeah.

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

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

EDDIE
(checks watch)
Tell him I’ll be there.

INT. EDITING ROOM - DAY

He bangs through a door:

C. C. CALHOUN
EDITING

INSIDE

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

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

The eyes blink.

Her voice is emphysemic:

C.C.
Hello, Eddie.

EDDIE
Wanna lace up what you have on “Merrily We Dance”?

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

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

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

A fanfare. On the screen, a card:

LAURENCE LAURENTZ PRESENTS

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

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

Supered on the shot:

MERRILY WE DANCE!

Another fade-down mark.

Lateral track on the feet of a man and a woman, crossing a city sidewalk. The man’s feet hurry out of frame as we hear him call “Taxi!”
The woman's feet continue on to bring into frame, when she reaches the curb, the bottom of a cab door being opened for her by the man.

As she climbs into the cab we match cut into:

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

    CAD
    Back to your place?

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

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

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

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

    ALLEGRA
    Suits me.

    CAD
    (meaningful)
    And skipping out on Monty.

    ALLEGRA
    (smile)
    That suits me as well.

The man laughs.

    CAD
    Poor Monty.

    ALLEGRA
    What Monty doesn't know...

    CAD
    ... won't hurt Monty.
SWELL APARTMENT INTERIOR

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

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

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

As Dierdre beckons Monty her motion slows, and her slowing speech becomes basso before lapsing to quiet and the ratcheting noise of the machine also falls quiet and we are looking at a frozen frame that slowly discolors at the center.

The discoloration starts to spread outward as the frame burns.

Eddie looks quizzically at the stalled picture.

A rasping voice:

C.C.
Reversh.

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

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

C.C. (CONT’D)
Reversh.

Eddie looks helplessly at the machine.

C.C. (CONT’D)
Reversh.

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

The soundtrack grinds into motion, in reverse. The picture plays likewise.
As the sound relays feed out her scarf, C.C. has increasing play such that she may slowly draw her head away from the machine.

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

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

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

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

    DIERDRE
    Oh Monty! Come join me on the divan.

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

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

A hold on Hobie as he frames a haunted answer.

Finally:

    HOBIE
    It’s... complicated.

INT. IMPERIAL GARDENS – DAY

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

    ARTHUR FUNG
    How pleasant to see you again, Mr. Manni—

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

    CUDDAHY
    Thanks for coming back, Mannix.
EDDIE
Sure.

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

EDDIE
It’s not a ploy—just a big decision.

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

Eddie gives a low whistle. Cuddahy nods.

Yeah. You get it, right? That means your stock options are guaranteed to vest. You’d never have to work again if you chose to retire after your term. Think about it: lifetime employment; you wouldn’t be a glorified working stiff like you are now. And you’ll be running a business, not a circus. Drink?

(notices Eddie’s look)
Cigarette?

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

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

CUDDAHY
Course you should. Talk it over, think about your family, let us know in the morning. Oh!

(grinning, produces two packages)
Now, if you think this is a bribe, you’re absolutely right. Two kids, right, boy and a girl? They love this stuff. Used to be trains.
EXT. A SPANISH-STYLE HOME - EVENING

Glowing in the early evening.

Reverse on its drive. Hobie Doyle leans against a parked limo with his arms folded, waiting, gazing at the mansion. A long, still beat, and then he abruptly sflffs a bunch of sunflower shells out of his mouth.

He gazes idly around.

He has a thought.

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

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

VOICE
Hello Hobie.

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

HOBIE
Oh hello Carlotta.

CARLOTTA
Am I late?

He coils the rope.

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

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

HOBIE
Well I like yours too, they are just the craziest things. Is it hard to dance with all them bananas on your head?
She plants her purse on her head as she demonstrates a rhumba move:

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

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

INT. MANNIX’S KIDS’ BEDROOM - NIGHT

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

Eddie looks down at her, smiles, stoops to adjust the doll she holds against her face. He rises to gaze down for another beat, then moves.

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

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

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

INT. MANNIX’S KITCHEN - NIGHT

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

    MRS. MANNIX
    Little Eddie wanted me to tell you about his baseball game. They won.

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

    MRS. MANNIX
    Mm, and he did so well he wants to stay there now.
EDDIE
Great, it took care of itself.

MRS. MANNIX
And Darlene did very well on her Spanish test.

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

MRS. MANNIX
Warm glass of milk?

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

MRS. MANNIX
Gee, another late night.

Eddie is ruminative:

EDDIE
Mm. You know... Lockheed improved their offer. Darned good money. And the hours wouldn’t be crazy like this, either.

MRS. MANNIX
It’s nice to be wanted.

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

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

Nodding, chewing, thinking:

EDDIE
Uh-huh...

MRS. MANNIX
How’s it going with the smoking, dear?

Eddie is startled out of his ruminations:
EDDIE
Oh, you know...

INT. EDDIE’S PACKARD - NIGHT
EDDIE IN HIS PACKARD
He drives, squinting against oncoming headlights.
The plummy-voiced narrator:

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

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT
Familiar shot from high on the bluff down on the octahedral house, now glowing with internal light. The ocean is no more than glittering highlights caught from the moon.

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

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

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

VOICE-OVER
Baird Whitlock has become an acolyte of the Communists, a convert to their cause, his belief compelled but not grudging—no more than was Saul’s on the dusty road of long ago. He now seeks to learn more from the leader from the north...
Baird is indeed sitting with Professor Marcuse, who is just finishing talking as their conversation mixes up, with Baird nodding vigorous concurrence.

VOICE-OVER (CONT’D)
... and becomes ever more committed to the quest to hasten an end to history and bring on—the New Man!

BAIRD
Herb—Herb!—That’s exactly what I was talking about, that’s what happened when I went to Reno with Danny Kaye and he asked me to shave his back! Exact same thing! Because I’m thinking—who benefits? Also, I gotta tell ya, everyone thinks Danny is a jerk but he’s not really a jerk, it’s just the theory generating its own anti-theory...

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

... So there we are, me and Danny, and I’m wondering what the hell I’m doing with this razor and he says it’s for a part in a Norman Taurog picture but Judy Canova is there and she knows Norman and she says Danny’s not doing a Norman Taurog picture—he just wants you to shave his back! And that’s who benefits!

INT. GRAUMAN’S CHINESE - NIGHT

A LOBBY CARD

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

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

VOICE-OVER
In livelier precincts, the swells of Dreamland gather to inspect the complicated weave of another piece of gossamer...
INSIDE

Hobie and Carlotta are watching the movie.

VOICE-OVER
... Another movie, another portion of balm for the ache of a toiling mankind.

Hobie leans in to Carlotta.

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

ONSCREEN

EXT. BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT

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

Someone offscreen is lazily chording a guitar.

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

WOMAN
Not your fault! Whose fault was it, Curly?

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

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

CURLY (CONT’D)
Durn that moon! What good is she anyhow! Wish there never was no moon! Wish there warn’t no bossy old women!

HOBIE
Don’t blame that moon, Curly. She can’t do nothin’ but shine!
The guitar intro has ended and Hobie launches into the first verse of "Lazy Ol' Moon." He looks up at the moon, occasionally looks back to the pretty woman in the window who listens, smiling.

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

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

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

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

   CURLY (CONT’D)
   Durn! Where'd she go?!

Roaring laughter from the audience.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES OFFICE BUILDINGS - NIGHT

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

INT. INSIDE OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

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

INT. OFFICE BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

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

One office only shows light from inside:

   JOSEPH SILVERMAN
   SURETIES/BONDS/ESCROW
INT. JOE SILVERMAN’S OFFICE - NIGHT

Eddie taps at the door.

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

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

SID
We just got started—I’ve been taking DeeAnna through this.

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

... So Joseph has done—well, just a whole lot of good work for us in the past. Whenever we’ve needed a witness or a third party for, I don’t know—a petition of grievance or alienation of affection.

DeeAnna sneaks looks at Joe as she signs pages.

DEEANNA
And he’s reliable?

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

JOE
I’m bonded, miss.

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

DEEANNA
But you’re off the sauce now?
JOE
I never touch it, miss. It was a legal fiction.

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

SID
Personhood.

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

DEEANNA
So you’re a professional—person?

JOE
That’s right, miss. And initial here, and here.

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

DEEANNA
And he’s reliable?

JOE
I’m bonded, miss.

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

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

DEEANNA
No one the wiser?

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

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

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

JOE
It’s part of the job.

EXT. STUDIO GATE - NIGHT

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

SCOTTY
Late night, Mr. Mannix?

EDDIE
Late night for both of us. Will you call Projection Seven and have’m lace up yesterday’s dailies on “Hail, Cæsar!”

SCOTTY
Sure thing. Yesterday’s.

EDDIE
Yeah, thanks Scotty.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT

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

EXT. WELL OF JEHOSAPHAT SET - DAY

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

As he reaches the front of the line our pull back has brought into frame the man giving out water with a dipper. This man, whom we see only from behind, wears a simple robe and has perfectly arranged shoulder-length blond hair, slightly wavy.
Baird/Autolochus—once more exclaiming “Roman's before slaves!”—intercepts the dipper which the blond man is handing to a slave. Autolochus is about to drink himself when he takes in the countenance of the blond water-giver. Something in the man’s face and manner strikes Autolochus mightily. He takes a staggering step backward, in awe.

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

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

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

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

BAIRD
Wuddya think a that one, was that, uh, enough, awe, or—

VOICE
Yeah, good, maybe a little more wonderment.

BAIRD
More, you mean more—

“Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Three.”

Baird steps back into frame in awe.

BAIRD (CONT’D)
Hold it, sorry, wait a minute, lemme do it again.

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

VOICE
Cut!

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

VOICE
Yeah, no, it was—

“Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Four.”
Baird steps back into frame his face oddly blank.

BAIRD
Hang on.

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

A long hold, expression steady: unutterable awe.

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

BAIRD (CONT’D)
Howziss. Wuddya hink.

VOICE
Yeah, okay, cut.

Eddie, watching. His eyes stay on the screen throughout:

EDDIE
Go ahead, I’m listening.

From screen: “Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Five.”

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

BAIRD
(from screen)
Was that, uh, was that—should I get to the wonderment faster?

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

From screen: “Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Six.”

Eddie nods, still looking at the screen.

EDDIE
Walt’s a problem-solver, he’s a good man. What else?
BAIRD
(from screen)
Todd, you can—you just look like
an imbecile mushed up against the
camera, can you—Sam, Todd can step
out, I’ll just take an eyeliner at
the corner of the matte box. I'll
hand the dipper back to, uh, to,
uh, camera guy.

From screen: “Hail Cæsar, Twenty-Seven Baker Seven.”

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

BAIRD
(from screen)
Was that—I’m sorry, did you see
that, I felt like I had some
spittle. Maybe Todd should step
back in.

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

INT. BROWN DERBY – NIGHT
An orchestra plays “Every Now and Then.”

Carlotta laughs, across a table from:

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

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

HOBIE
Watchis now... Gittin’ away...

He ropes a salt cellar.

HOBIE (CONT’D)
Oh looka there now!

His other hand, on the tablecloth, is starting to walk away
on two fingers, affecting nonchalance.
Thinking itself safely out of range, the walking hand starts
to walk faster.

    HOBIE (CONT’D)
    ... Oh, she’s a gittin’ away too!

He ropes the walking fingers, tripping his hand.

Carlotta, unable to talk from laughter, points at Hobie.
Hobie ropes the pointing finger, draws her hand toward him.
She slaps at his hand with her free hand. He drops the
spaghetti to slap her hand in return then plucks the whipping
spaghetti-end out of the air in rhythm.

    HOBIE (CONT’D)
    This’s why I never order it with
    meat sauce.

    CARLOTTA
    How’d you get into pictures, Hobie?

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

    CARLOTTA
    You’re awfully cute.

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

He has lowered his head to his hand and he fiddles briefly at
his mouth. He raises his head again, beaming at Carlotta.

He has no teeth. His gums, upper and lower, are hideously
bare.

Carlotta is aghast—and then amused, more than ever. Hobie
chuckles as she laughs:
HOBIE (CONT’D)
Tell ya what, I wuzh shteer-brushtin an I went down and the shteer went up’n m’teeth headed off fer easht Texash——Aww here, it’s comin’ round again!

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

Every now and then...

Carlotta comes in on top:

CARLOTTA
Every now and then...

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

Long-lens point of view: a bulging attaché case bound around the middle by a shiny black belt. It rests beside a semi-circular booth, half the throw of the restaurant away. Whoever has the case is hidden by his high-backed booth. His back is to us: the side of one leg juts out as does one elbow, active as he eats.

VOICE
Well now, this is interesting.

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

THESSALY THACKER
I didn’t know you two were friends.

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

HOBIE
Aw heck yeah, we—we just caught my picture, “Lazy Ol' Moon,” ’n I guess we’re—

CARLOTTA
Yes, we’re friends, we’re—

HOBIE
Well we’re fixin’ t’be friendly, tell you that.
THESSALY THACKER
That’s good: “Fixin’ To Be Friendly” can be my column headline.

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

HOBIE
Well I guess at’d be okay.

THESSALY THACKER
Have a good evening.

As she moves off Hobie and Carlotta exchange a look: how did we do? But Hobie’s look keeps returning to the mystery diner.

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

His long-lens point of view: Thessaly Thacker has stopped to talk to the hidden man with the attaché case. Brief conversation. Thessaly tips her head back laughing at some pleasantry. Her cackle carries across the room.

VOICE
Well now, this is interesting.

Hobie’s look turns up: it is—impossibly—Thessaly Thacker again. Or, no it isn’t, it’s Thora.

THORA THACKER
I thought I was getting an exclusive on this.

HOBIE
What’s that now, ma’am?

She is looking off at her cackling sister.

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

HOBIE
We, uhh... like I said, we just saw “Lazy Ol’ Moon”—

CARLOTTA
And Hobie and I are fixin t’be friendly!
Thora’s baleful look swings onto her. It holds for a long moment. Then a squint:

THORA THACKER

What?

HOBIE

We’re just, uh...

His eyes widen: the mystery man is getting up. The man stands briefly outside the booth but is turned mostly away from us, patting at his mouth with a napkin. He angles more toward us.

It is Burt Gurney.

He finishes patting his mouth, tosses the napkin onto the table. His face, so boyish when performing, is now a hard mask.

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

Hobie hastily shuffles himself out of his booth:

HOBIE (CONT’D)

Ah gotta skedaddle. So sorry!
(to Carlotta)

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

EXT. BROWN DERBY – NIGHT

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

Hobie hurries to his car and driver waiting curbside.

HOBIE

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

INT. EDDIE’S OFFICE

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

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

Back to Eddie, but our angle now swung around so that the desk does not hide his lower body.
The hands draped across his knees hold a rosary.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD / INT. HOBIE’S CAR – NIGHT

BLEARY MONTAGE

Lots of neon: “The Garden of Allah,” restaurants, clubs, chase lights around movie-theater marquees. Dissolving in and out under the Hollywood Boulevard imagery is the same set-up of Hobie driving, squinting, eyes fixed on tail lights in front of him.

Also dissolving in and out:

EXT. H.C. SETS – NIGHT

EDDIE MANNIX WALKING

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

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

EXT. PCH – NIGHT

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

Hobie slows as he approaches the turn.

EXT. MALIBU HOUSE – NIGHT

HIGH FROM BLUFF

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

INSIDE – NIGHT

For the first time the house has no interior noise, no yapping dog. We hear only the muffled pounding of surf.
The front door clicks, and creaks open.

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

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

Finally:

    BAIRD
    Hobie Doyle? You’re a Communist too?

Hobie looks around, looks back at Baird.

A beat.

    HOBIE
    So it’s Commies.

    BAIRD
    Y’ever been in this place? Pretty nice, huh? Just found out it’s Burt Gurney’s!

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

    HOBIE
    You here alone?

    BAIRD
    Everyone else went down to the beach.

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

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - NIGHT

The Communist writers man both sides of a longboat, gloves on, pulling hard at the oars.

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

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

BURT
Easy...

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

BURT (CONT’D)
Here!

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

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

He looks at his watch: midnight.

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

Long beat.

A huge roar. Seething water. Ocean surface just by the longboat roils mightily—and is breached.

A huge black column rises, rises, rises from the sea.

The writers give voice to an awed “Oh...”

The column stops rising.

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

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

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

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

BURT (CONT’D)
Take care of him.
He leaps from the longboat to the sub, grabbing brackets set in a vertical line up its side: a ladder. Before he can climb, though, writers’ voices exclaim “Tell him!” “Give it to him!” “Give the speech!”

HERMAN’S VOICE
Comrade!

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

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

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

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

HERMAN (CONT’D)
But the money should go to the cause, not to the servants of the cause.

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

HERMAN (CONT’D)
We—well, we...

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

It is the attaché case cinched by black belt.

HERMAN (CONT’D)
Our modest contribution to the Comintern.

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

He looks up.

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

Burt reflexively drops the case to grab the arriving dog.

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

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

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

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

A man wearing a sable cap waits at the top. When Burt arrives the waiting man hands him a sable cap. Burt puts it on and gazes down at the longboat.

BURT (CONT’D)

Professor! Will you join me?

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

MARCUSE

No. I will work from within.

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

On the writers, watching.

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

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

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

After a quiet beat:

WRITER

Well, it’s late. And I have revisions.
INT. HOBIE’S CAR - NIGHT

HOBIE AND BAIRD

In Hobie’s car they make the right turn from the beach access road to head south on the coast highway. Hobie hums “Lazy Ol’ Moon” as he drives; Baird gazes placidly out.

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

BAIRD
Late. I am in the doghouse.

Hobie glances at him as Baird thinks.

BAIRD (CONT’D)
Know what, better forget my place.
Drop me at the Beverly Hills Hotel—that okay?

HOBIE
Sure.

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

The cars whoosh past.

Baird turns to track them and Hobie looks in his rear-view.

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

Baird faces forward again.

A beat.

BAIRD
Huh!

FADE OUT

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

EXT. STUDIO GATE - MORNING

FADE IN PICTURE: Studio gate.

We are looking across the street at the main gate. There is little traffic at this early hour. A cab pulls up and stops curbside. Its passenger gets out.
The cab pulls away and we see the discharged passenger: Baird Whitlock. Still in breastplate and leather skirt, he saunters toward the walk-through by the guard shack, whistling.

EXT. ROAD TO CAVALRY - DAY

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

The A.D. now looks up from the list on his clipboard to the unseen man on the foreground crucifix.

A.D.
Who’re you?

VOICE
Todd.

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

A.D.
Do you get a hot breakfast or a box breakfast?

VOICE
I don’t know.

The A.D. rolls his eyes.

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

Beat. Then:

VOICE
I think I’m a principal.

INT. EDDIE’S OFFICE - DAY

Baird, in wardrobe, is in the chair in front of Eddie’s desk with his legs crossed, hands clasped behind his head, the picture of cheerfulness.
So I’m thinkin’, “What the hell! I’ve woken up in strange houses before but never without a broad next to me!”

Eddie glares.

(tight)
Uh-huh.

Baird, oblivious, thinks he has an audience.

These guys were pretty interesting, though. They’ve actually figured out the laws that dictate, well—everything, history, sociology, politics, morality. Everything. It’s all in a book called “Kapital.”

That right.

Uh-huh. With a K. And you’re not gonna believe this, but it even explains the stuff we do here at the studio. Because the studio is actually nothing more than an instrument of capitalism!

Uh-huh.

So it blindly follows these laws just like any other institution, the laws that these guys’ve figured out. The studio makes pictures to serve the system, that’s its function, that’s really what we’re all up to, here.

Is it.

Eddie rises from behind his desk and advances on Baird, who prattles on.
BAIRD
Yeah, we’re just confirming what
they call the “status quo.” I mean,
we might tell ourselves we’re
“creating” something of artistic
value, that there’s some kinda
spiritual dimension to the picture
business, but what it is, is this
fat cat Nick Schenk out in New York
running a factory that makes these
lollypops to pacify the——WHOOF!

Eddie has grabbed Baird by the breastplate and hauled him to
his feet. He now slaps him, forehand and backhand: Slap!
Slap!

BAIRD (CONT’D)
What th——

Eddie pulls him chest-to-chest and holds him there so that he
may stare straight into his eyes as the words pour out:

EDDIE
Now you listen to me, buster: Nick
Schenk and this studio have been
good to you and to everyone else
who works here. If I ever hear you
badmouthing Mr. Schenk again it’ll
be the last thing you say before I
have you tossed into jail for
colluding in your own abduction.

BAIRD
But Eddie, I didn’t——

Slap! Slap!

EDDIE
Shaddup. You’re gonna go out there
and you’re gonna finish “HAIL,
CÆSAR!” You’re gonna give that
speech at the feet of the penitent
thief and you’re gonna believe
every word you say.

Slap! Slap!

EDDIE (CONT’D)
You’re gonna do it because you’re
an actor and that’s what you do.
Just like the director does what he
does, and the writer and the script
girl and the guy who claps the
slate.

(MORE)
EDDIE (CONT’D)
You’re gonna do it because the picture has worth and you have worth if you serve the picture and you’re never gonna forget that again.

BAIRD
(blubbering)
Okay Eddie, I won’t forget it.

The manhandling and Eddie’s harsh tone have brought Baird to tears. Eddie releases his fistful of Romanwear with a shove that sends Baird staggering backward.

EDDIE
You’re damn right you won’t. Not as long as I run this dump.

Baird nods, whimpering, as he retreats to the door.

BAIRD
Okay, Eddie.

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

EDDIE
Baird!

Baird turns, sniveling, his hand on the knob.

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

EDDIE (CONT’D)
Go out there and be a star!

It heartens Baird. He wipes his eyes with some tunic-sleeve and even manages a tremulous smile back at Eddie and a return nod.

EXT. CAPITOL LOT - DAY

EDDIE WALKING

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

NATALIE
Mr. Mannix!

He turns, waits.
NATALIE (CONT’D)
Since you’re going to your car, thought you might want to take this.

EDDIE
What is it?

NATALIE
From DeeAnna Moran. Thank you, and she doesn’t need to adopt her baby after all.

EDDIE
Huh?

NATALIE
She asked Joe Silverman out for dinner last night, I guess it went well, they drove to Palm Springs and were married at three this morning.

EDDIE
Huh.

NATALIE
Will you be gone long? Today’s list to go through.

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

NATALIE
She charged it to the studio.

EDDIE
Right.

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

THORA THACKER
Just coming to see you.

EDDIE
Good morning. Sorry about last night, Thora—didn’t know your sister would show up.
THORA THACKER
Well, that’s as may be, but I certainly learned my lesson.
Whatever you say today, Eddie Mannix, my column tomorrow is about—"On Wings as Eagles."

EDDIE
Thora, I wouldn’t do that if I were you.

Thora smiles thinly.

THORA THACKER
I’m sure you wouldn’t.

EDDIE
No no, you don’t understand.
(looks around)
Let’s sit down.

EXT. SEATING AREA - DAY

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

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

EDDIE
I’m telling you not to run the column, Thora, for your own good.

A hoot from Thora.

THORA THACKER
I can judge my own interest. This will be the story of the year—and it so happens the Hearst Syndicate is looking to pick up a Hollywood column. Hearst is four million readers. And if I get them—Thessaly doesn’t.

EDDIE
And you think this’ll cinch it for you.
THORA THACKER
You know it will! Baird Whitlock, your biggest star, got his first major part—in “On Wings as Eagles”—by engaging in sodomy with the picture’s director, Laurence Laurentz.

She wears a smug smile, awaiting protestation.

Eddie only nods, equably.

EDDIE
We’ve all heard the story. But here’s something you haven’t heard: your source is a Communist. If you print it, it’ll be dismissed as a Commie smear tactic—and you’ll be dismissed as a Commie stooge.

Her smile starts to fade.

EDDIE (CONT’D)
Burt Gurney has left the country and the cell he was part of has been smashed by the police. You might’ve thought he was credible because he’s Mr. Laurentz’s current... protegé, but—you don’t want to be seen as Burt Gurney’s mouthpiece after this.

Thora’s look curdles.

A beat.

THORA THACKER
How did you know Burt was my source?

EDDIE
Talked to Laurence late last night, put two and two together.

(rises, indicating flowers)
Well, no need to send this since I ran into you. It’s by way of apology for Thessaly horning in last night. I do value our friendship, Thora—

(looks at watch)
—but I’m late for something important.
INT. CONFESSIONAL - DAY

Light wipes onto Eddie, rosary in hand.

EDDIE
Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

VOICE
How long since your last confession, my son?

EDDIE
It’s been, uh...
(looks at watch)
What, twenty-seven hours?

VOICE
It’s too often, my son. You’re really not that bad.

Eddie grimly shakes his head.

EDDIE
I don’t know, Father. I snuck another cigarette. Or two. I didn’t make it home in time for dinner. And I, uh... I struck a movie star in anger.

A sigh from the unseen priest.

VOICE
All right. Five Hail Marys.

EDDIE
Okay. Okay. Father...

Eddie is struggling.

VOICE
Yes my son?

EDDIE
May I ask you something, Father?

FATHER
Of course, my son.

EDDIE
If there’s something that’s easy... is that wrong?
VOICE
Easy?

EDDIE
Easy to do, easy to—an easy job—not a bad job, it’s not bad. But then there’s another job, that’s... that’s not so easy. In fact it’s hard. It’s so hard, Father, sometimes I don’t know if I can keep doing it. But it seems right. I don’t know how to explain.

Silence.

Then:

VOICE
God wants us to do what’s right.

EDDIE
Yeah...
(thinking, nodding)
Yeah, course He does.

VOICE
The inner voice that tells you it’s right—it comes from God, my son.

Eddie glances at his watch again.

EDDIE
Yeah, got it.

VOICE
It’s His way of saying that—

EDDIE
(rising)
Yeah yeah, I got it.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Autolochus is gazing up and off-camera as we pull him through a crowd of Israelites, his face transfigured in wonderment. As he reaches the front of the crowd he sinks to his knees. The camera pulls up and away to frame him before three crucifixes on the mount.

Gracchus, familiar from our epic’s first scene, approaches.
GRACCHUS
Why on your knees before this Hebrew, Autolochus?

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

AUTOLOCHUS
I encountered him before, Gracchus, beside the well of Jehosaphat. And what manner of man!

Gracchus doesn’t understand:

GRACCHUS
He is a priest of the Israelites, despised even by the other priests.

AUTOLOCHUS
No. On yesterday’s march, punished by the dust of the road, I sought to drink first at the well—before the slaves in my charge, whose thirst was greater than my own.

GRACCHUS
(uncomprehending)
A Roman drinks before a slave.

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

GRACCHUS
“Love,” Autolochus?

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

GRACCHUS
You mean, of the gods.

Autolochus gravely shakes his head.
AUTOLOCHUS
I do not, friend Gracchus. This Hebrew is son of the one God, the God of this far-flung tribe. And why shouldn't God's anointed appear here, among these strange people, in this strange place? Here, Gracchus, in this sun-drenched land. Why should he not take this form—the form of an ordinary man? A man bringing us not the old truths, but a new one.

Gracchus, is willing to believe, but is confused.

GRACCHUS
A new truth?

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

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

A truth we can see if we have but...

Autolochus is staring at Gracchus. His eyes slowly narrow to a squint. His jaw drops open as he stares. After a beat of fixed staring:

AUTOLOCHUS (CONT’D)
... if we have but—but—

DIRECTOR
CUT. Cut. Faith. Have but faith.

BAIRD
Faith! Faith? Not, um—

DIRECTOR
No, they changed it.

BAIRD
Goddamnit. Sorry, I’ll get it, don’t worry.

GRACCHUS
Could I get a pat down, I’m sweating like a pig.
EXT. CAPITOL LOT - DAY

EDDIE MANNIX AND NATALIE

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

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

EDDIE
Nn.

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

EDDIE
Then—just shoot the showdown in the weather and we’ll retitle it “Tucumcari Tempest” “Desert Squall” “Hold Back the Storm”...

He momentarily casts about.

VOICE-OVER
The stories begin. The stories end.

EDDIE
I dunno—bounce it off the writers.

VOICE-OVER
So it has been.

NATALIE
Check. Here’s today’s call list.

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

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

NATALIE
Long call, short?

EDDIE
“Thanks but no thanks”—how long was that?
VOICE-OVER
But the story of Eddie Mannix—

NATALIE
Check. Who do we call first?

VOICE-OVER
—will never end.

Eddie pushes back a sleeve to look at his watch.

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

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

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

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