

hughes

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first draft

HUGHES

FADE IN:

1 BLACK SCREEN

1

White letters form the word

HUGHES

The word stays there. Lingers. Lingers. Until.....

2 EXT. SANTA MONICA AIRPORT. SUPER- SANTA MONICA, 1958

2

We begin with a HELICOPTER SHOT and slowly descend.

As we get closer and closer to a fleet of slick H-1 airplanes, we see HOWARD HUGHES- dressed in aviator regalia - and a reporter, a handsome young man from TIME Magazine. This is FRANK McCULLOCH.

HUGHES

Anyway, Frank, this was the first two-row engine Pratt & Whitney built and it has a very small diameter in relation to what we had before that. It has a metal fuselage with a butt joint, flush rivets....

FRANK

Yes sir. But my readers want to get beyond the specifications of the... the..

HUGHES

The H-1.

FRANK

They want to read about your last crash.

HUGHES

You underestimate your readers' intelligence.

(pauses)

You know, that was my thirteenth.

FRANK

Thirteenth crash?

HUGHES

That's interesting. That's interesting. Look, you must understand-

FROM THE DISTANCE- A man in a suit is jogging over. This is JACQUES. Howard waves at him and continues on with his conversation with Frank.

HUGHES

...More's been written about me than any other man, save for a few presidents.

FRANK

You're close, anyway.

HUGHES

Maybe Churchill. Maybe. There are no secrets about me. No mystery. A businessman cannot survive without a little mystery. So I'm done with the press. You're it. My last interview. The next thing I want written about me is my obituary.

The PRODUCER is very close.

HUGHES

Lookit this little fella. Jacques' his name. He has a French film I want to buy. Some little heist caper. This producer thinks, okay, he's negotiating with the world's richest man. People like me can make people like him rich.

FRANK

Seems fair.

HUGHES

Fair? Fuck fair. Frank, I didn't become Howard Hughes making other schmucks rich.

The producer arrives. Out of breath. Stretches out his hand.

PRODUCER

Mr. Hughes, it's a pleasure.

Hughes looks down. He does not shake hands.

HUGHES

Jacques, this is Frank McCulloch. Time Magazine. Speak freely in front of him.
(to Frank)
Off the record, eh?

PRODUCER

Bonjour, M. McCulloch

HUGHES

Okay, Jacques, I want your movie. I want to distribute it and I want the remake rights.

PRODUCER

Oui, oui. My team has some figures that we would like to-

HUGHES
(pulls a blank check from his
coat pocket)
Here's a blank check. Fill it in.

Hughes hands it over. The producer is both shocked and delighted.

PRODUCER
Merci, M. Hughes!

HUGHES
Whatever you think's fair.

JACQUES
(quite stunned)
Yes. I thank you. I thank you very much.

The producer turns to walk away. Beaming.

HUGHES
Ah, Jacques. Just one thing.

PRODUCER
Yes, M. Hughes.

HUGHES
There is only so much money in that account.
You write a figure beyond it, the check will
bounce and the deal's off.

The producer's smile disappears from his face.

HUGHES
Come, Frank.

As Frank and Hughes walk away.

FRANK
How much money is in that account?

HUGHES
A half million. But, he'll write a check for
six grand. If he's got a pair, seven.

FRANK
Why so low?

HUGHES
He's not interested in money, Frank. He's
interested in being in business with Howard
Hughes.

FRANK

You must let that be on the record, Mr. Hughes.
If you don't, my editor will have my balls.

HUGHES

(stops, hands on hips)
Burger? I know a great place in Phoenix.

CUT TO:

On the other side of the airfield. Jacques gets ready to fill in the check. His hand is shaking as he writes out:

"Seven Thousand Dollars."

The camera PUSHES IN slowly to the signature block: "HOWARD R. HUGHES."

3 CREDITS:

3

Over documentary footage and newspaper clippings of the self-imposed exile and seclusion of Howard Hughes.

4 BLACK SCREEN: INSERT- YELLOW LETTERS: IBIZA, SPAIN. 1967

4

Edith, a very pretty blonde of about thirty, is in bed. The blankets are down low at the small of her back. She wakes up gently. Her eyes search the room.

EDITH

Clifford?

Out on the terrace of what is obviously a small studio, we see CLIFF Irving (CLIFF) in his bathrobe. Tall, handsome, late thirties.

CLIFF

Right here. Haven't left you, darling.

The blonde shuffles around. Closes her eyes.

EDITH

J'espere que non.

Cliff looks up to a large estate up the hill from him.

CLIFF

I feel like Nick in "The Great Gatsby," always having to wake up and look from his dump to Jay Gatsby's mansion. It's depressing.

EDITH

(in accented English)

At least Nick had a better view than Gatsby.

CLIFF starts to get dressed.

CLIFF
I love optimists.

The blonde sits up.

EDITH
Who lives there?

CLIFF
Elmyr de something. He's an art dealer.
Everybody says he's richer than God. You know,
maybe we should pay him a visit. Be neighborly.

EDITH
*Lorsque nous serons maries, tu ne seras plus
aussi libre.*

5 EXT. PATIO OF ELMYR DE HORY

5

Cliff, Edith, and ELMYR, a small man with a monocle, drink coffee.
Splashing through the pool is a handsome, fit, naked young man (MAX).

ELMYR
Right now? I would say Matisse.

CLIFF
Really? I would think Picasso.

EDITH
Elmyr's right. Any person educated on the value
of modern art knows it is Matisse.

ELMYR
Picasso is more famous, more notorious -but
Matisse is the object of fancy for the serious
art buyer. His work has the greater longevity.
(to Edith)
Are you a student of the modern art?

EDITH
By necessity. I am an artist myself. Abstracts
and such.

ELMYR
I would feel privileged to admire your work
someday soon.

Max gets out of the pool. Still naked, he walks past Elmyr, tapping
Elmyr's shoulder along the way. Elmyr looks at him as he leaves.

ELMYR (cont'd)
My bodyguard, Max. He's very good.

6 INT. FOYER. DE HORY MANSION

6

Elmyr, Cliff, and Edith stand in front of a fireplace, which is roaring with flames. Above the mantle is a Picasso.

CLIFF

One day, I hope to afford such a painting.

De Hory pats Cliff on the back and then removes the painting.

ELMYR

My gift.

CLIFF

Pardon me?

ELMYR

My gift for you.

CLIFF

I am simply... It's... no... I can't. It would be egregiously inappropriate-my sense of indebtedness would be (too much)

EDITH

Elmyr, this painting must be worth close to one million dollars.

ELMYR

I didn't ask you to be indebted, Mr. Irving.

CLIFF

Still, I couldn't.

ELMYR

(A mite angry now)
Are you refusing my friendship?

CLIFF

Certainly not.

ELMYR

Let me show you how important this...

With that, De Hory throws the painting into the fire. Cliff is shocked, Edith aghast. The camera moves in as the masterpiece goes up in flames.

FLASH-CUT: A CLOSE-UP OF SOME WHIRRING MACHINERY.

It is not possible to make out what the machine is, but it is metallic and shiny and noisy. We will see this FLASHCUT, where indicated, through the first half of the script.

7 INSERT- NEW YORK CITY, 1970.

7

INSERT- A book cover : "Fake! The Exploits of the Art Forger Elmyr de Hory." Now, we PULL BACK to reveal.

8 INT. BOOK STORE (SCRIBNERS). DAY.

8

Cliff sits at a table with a huge stack of his book next to him. Next to him is a sign: "MEET AUTHOR CLIFF IRVING" Behind him is a blow-up of the book's cover. There are a few people milling about. Nobody seems to be getting books signed. Next to Cliff is the manager.

MANAGER

Mr. Irving, what do you think? Shall we close up shop early?

CLIFF

Things will pick up once people get off work.

MANAGER

(stuffy)

Yes sir. I am sure that's the case.

An older lady picks up the book, leafs through it, and puts it down.

9 INT. MCGRAW-HILL OFFICES. DAY

9

Cliff sits on a coach in the waiting room, looking at his watch. He is dressed in a JACKET and a turtleneck. A secretary types away. He catches the attention of the secretary who smiles at him.

CLIFF

Still here.

SECRETARY

Well, you're wonderful company.

CLIFF

Can you check again? It's been over an hour.

SECRETARY

I called a few minutes ago. She'll be out soon.

CLIFF

Because my appointment was for three o'clock.

SECRETARY

It's been crazy. Do you want another coffee?

CLIFF

No. I've had three cups already. If you could just tell Bev that I may have to leave soon.

BEVERLY (OS)

Oh, don't leave us stranded.

In walks Beverly Loo, an attractive Asian woman. Cliff gets up.

BEVERLY
I'm sorry. It's just mayhem around here.

Cliff looks around the very quiet offices.

10 INT. BEVERLY LOO'S OFFICE. DAY.

10

Small, cramped, typical editor's office. Books and papers everywhere. There seems to be an uncomfortable silence between them. Cliff is shifting in his seat.

CLIFF
So....

BEVERLY
So.

CLIFF
Thank you for seeing me.

BEVERLY
Sure. I'm glad you called. There are things to talk about.

CLIFF
Things?

BEVERLY
We need to talk about your future here at McGraw-Hill.

CLIFF
Great. I was hoping we could start talking about the next deal.
(he wiggles his fingers)
My brain is telling my friends to get to work.

BEVERLY
You sure you want to fly solo on this? None of the other authors come here without an agent.

CLIFF
I think we can trust each other at this point.

Bev starts tapping her pencil.

BEVERLY
That's true. We can trust each other. Which is why I have to tell you that "Fake" just hasn't cut it. I approved the book against the will of others and it just isn't cutting it.

CLIFF
You have to give "Fake" some breathing room. Word of mouth. I've seen it before.

BEVERLY
 Cliff. Look, I just-
 (she pushed forward a piece of
 paper)
 There it is, Cliff. It's the best I can do.
 It's a four book deal. All the fighting's
 already been done. By me. This is what the boys
 will go for. Not a penny more.

CLIFF looks at the paper. Disappointed.

BEVERLY
 ... And it has to be fiction, Cliff. Novels.
 The non-fiction thing just hasn't worked.

11 FLASH CUT - OF THE MYSTERY MACHINE

11

EXT. LA TIERRA RESTAURANT. DAY

Five people lounge around a restaurant table on a patio. Cliff, Edith, Susskind, Elmyr De Hory, his bodyguard "Max," and RICHARD SUSSKIND, a rotund, Pancho Villa-type buddy of Cliff's.

ELMYR
 How does it work, Cliff? Do we get paid?

CLIFF
 Maybe. If the film makes some money.

ELMYR
 (cynical)
 Good, because there seems to be no cause for
 hope that we should see cash from our book.

CLIFF
 It's the suits in New York, Elmyr. They're
 eating up the profits of "Fake." I suppose we
 could take them to court.

ELMYR
 Aaaaaaah. Court rooms and I are oil and water.
 The money will come from the film. You know
 this Mr. Orson?

MAX
 Orson Welles, Elmyr. He's very famous.

ELMYR
 He's not famous. I have never heard of him.

SUSSKIND
 He made a movie called "Citizen Kane." I hear
 its marvelous.

CLIFF

It was about Randolph Hearst. It was a - what you call a roman a clef.

SUSSKIND

Originally, they wanted it to be about Howard Hughes.

MAX

Maybe they were afraid he'd sue.

CLIFF

I sent him a copy of "Fake," you know.

ELMYR

Why wouldn't Welles already have a copy of it?

CLIFF

Hughes. I sent it to Howard Hughes. I mean, I don't know if he got it, but I sent it to him at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas. The scuttlebutt is that that is where he lives.

EDITH

Whatever made you do that?

CLIFF

I dunno. I just admire him, I guess. My old man knew him way back when.

MAX

(giggling)

Maybe he'll invite you for Christmas dinner.

CLIFF

(ignoring Max)

Look at a man like that, at what he has accomplished and you say to yourself, My God, he's part of the same species as me. What makes him succeed and the rest of us do what we do? I refuse to think for a second that it's luck.

12 INT. ART GALLERY. DAY

12

The same crew of people (but in different clothes) and a couple of HIPPIE-types wander about, looking at the art work. These are Edith's paintings. The group stands in front of one abstract.

EDITH

It is an absolute embarrassment.

CLIFF

Why do you say such a thing?

MAX

It's really very... it's very arty, Edith.

EDITH

Not the art, the light. The light is terrible.

ELMYR

(leaning in)

I must agree. The light is wrong, very wrong.
Let's go see if we can talk to the manager.

EDITH

No, no. It's just Ibiza. Nobody will buy them
anyway. When we get them to the States, there
we may have some business.

CLIFF

What do you think, Elmyr, can we sell these?

ELMYR

Easier if they had the signature of Matisse.

CLIFF

Now, I ask you, Elmyr, from a purely aesthetic
point of view, Matisse does not hold a candle
to Edith. Her paintings are simply delightful.

EDITH

Come on, Cliff. Don't embarrass me with
comparisons to Matisse and I won't embarrass
you with comparisons to Hemingway.

The group laughs.

ELMYR

Tell me Cliff, do you know the difference
between a Bentley and a Rolls Royce?

CLIFF

I never thought about it.

ELMYR

The answer is the little lady in front. That's
all. But a Rolls Royce is a Rolls Royce.

13 FLASH CUT- MYSTERY MACHINE

13

14 INT. CLIFF'S HOUSE. NIGHT. SUPER- DEC. 10, 1972.

14

The lights come on as Cliff and Edith (wearing same clothes as seen
prior) enter. Edith bends to pick up the mail. Her eyes open wide.

EDITH

Look, Clifford.

(hands him the envelope)

Do you think it's a joke of some kind?

CLIFF looks it over. He looks up to Edith with a faint smile.

15 FLASH CUT- MYSTERY MACHINE

15

16 INT. PHONE BOOTH-IBIZA

16

Cliff is crammed in the phone booth, phone cradled in his ear.

CLIFF

It's the most incredible thing, Beverly. I mean, it's very out of the blue.

BEVERLY (O.S.)

You're sure about this? You're sure it's him?

CLIFF

As sure as I can be. Look, Bev, some wheels are beginning to turn in my head. I'm in the middle of the novel now and when I'm done with it, maybe this is-

BEVERLY

The novel? Are you serious? Forget the novel. Get your head on straight When can you get here?

CLIFF

To New York, you mean? I dunno. Maybe a week.

BEVERLY

Good. I want to talk this over with McGraw and Weber, but I'm sure they'll want to meet.

CLIFF

Well, maybe it would help to give the novel a rest. I can come back to it with a fresh eye.

BEVERLY

Atta, boy Cliff. Get on over here.

17 INT. MCGRAW-HILL OFFICES. DAY.

17

Cliff, carrying a small suitcase maneuvers through the offices of McGraw-Hill. He takes a left, a right, a left. It seems as though he knows his way about.

18 SUPER: FEB. 10, 1972. MCGRAW-HILL OFFICES, NEW YORK

18

Cliff comes upon a door that reads "EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE."

19 INT. EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE ROOM.

19

Cliff enters the ornate room. Around a large circular table sit Beverly, chairman, HAROLD MCGRAW, and general counsel, TED WEBER.

BEVERLY
Hi, Cliff. Welcome to New York.

CLIFF
Hi guys. It's been a while.

MCGRAW
Sit down, Cliff. You still have your luggage?

CLIFF
(sits)
Just came from the airport.

BEVERLY
It must be quite depressing having to come here
from Ibiza.

(TO THE OTHERS)
Cliff and his wife Edith have a lovely place.
I was a houseguest once.

CLIFF
Anytime any of you want to make a trip to the
Mediterranean.

MCGRAW
Anything to get out of the city. Beverly tells
us you have something. A "bombshell" I think
she called it.

CLIFF
You haven't told them?

BEVERLY
I thought I'd let it be your show.

Cliff pulls several documents from his jacket pocket. All the
participants lean forward, trying to read the documents.

CLIFF
I, like most people, have always been
interested in Howard Hughes. Trouble is -

WEBER
The man's in exile. Nobody knows where he is.

MCGRAW
Read in Newsweek he might even be dead.

CLIFF
Yes, I heard the same things. Well, I sent him
a copy of my book....

A beat as Cliff realizes the brass don't know what he is talking about.

CLIFF
"Fake". You guys published it. Anyway, I
included with it a small note. I sent it to

him at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas. A few weeks ago, Edith goes to get the mail and, lo and behold, a letter from Hughes.

MCGRAW

You don't say? Is that what you have there?

CLIFF

Indeed. Well, let me just read you this part (beat) He did love "Fake" by the way, (beat) anyway, here is what he writes. There's a lot of yadda-yadda-yadda, then.. "I would hate to think what other biographers might have done to him-" he means Elmyr de Hory- "but it seems to me that you have portrayed your man with great consideration and sympathy.... For reasons you may readily understand, that has impressed me... I do remember your father and I was sorry to learn of his passing.

BEVERLY

My.

MCGRAW

He seems to have left some kind of door open.

Cliff pushes forward the letter. McGraw starts to examine it.

CLIFF

That's what I thought as well, Mr. McGraw. And that is exactly what I put to him.... which brings us (pulls out a longer letter) to this.

WEBER

Is that also from Hughes?

CLIFF

"It would not suit me to die without having certain misconceptions cleared up and without having stated the truth about my life." Now let me skip down and... "I would be grateful if you would let me know when and how you'd undertake the writing of the biography you proposed."

Cliff puts the letter down.

CLIFF

I propose that McGraw-Hill allow me to write the authorized biography of Howard Hughes. With his complete cooperation. Of course, I'd have to put aside "The Man in the Mink Collar."

MCGRAW

Pardon me. The man in what?

BEVERLY

That's Cliff's new novel.

CLIFF

I'll be in town for a few days. If you want to think about as I shop it around ...

MCGRAW

Let's knock off the crap. You're not going to shop it around and we're not going to lose it. So let's all make nice and you tell us what you want. I assume he wants a piece of the action.

CLIFF

Gordon has presented me with an offer.

WEBER

Gordon?

CLIFF

George Gordon Holmes. Gordo. He's a fella Hughes has me dealing with. Anyway, I am quite certain that if I go back to him with anything less than what he wants then Hughes is history.

MCGRAW

(resigned)

Let's hear the damage.

CLIFF

Three hundred thousand.

MCGRAW

Each?

CLIFF

No, of course not. That covers us both.

WEBER

That's a great deal of money, Mr. Irving.

CLIFF

Like I said, I can shop it around.

MCGRAW

Is there anything else?

CLIFF

He wants to ensure there is no publicity about the project until one month before it's release. Furthermore, his share of the money is to be given to me and I will be responsible.

WEBER

Simply impossible. There is no way we can guarantee he received the money. It's imprudent business.

CLIFF
It's his privacy.

WEBER
And it's our money.
(to McGraw)
I don't like it. How do we know he won't
disappear once he's gotten paid? This is no
ordinary man. He's not even an ordinary nut.

MCGRAW
Will he stipulate to receiving the money in
thirds? Signing, completion, and publication?

CLIFF
If I can arrange that, do we have a deal?

MCGRAW
Yes.

WEBER
Harry!

MCGRAW
When this company is called Weber-Hill, than
you can make the decisions. If we can't trust
you, Cliff, who can we trust?

20 FLASH CUT- MYSTERY MACHINE

20

INT. BUCKINGHAM HOTEL. NIGHT.

Cliff is asleep in bed. The phone RINGS. Cliff reaches over to it.

CLIFF
Hello?

VOICE
There will be a ticket waiting for you at the
American Express Office at Rockefeller Center.
Your flight leaves in the early afternoon, so
get there no later than ten.

CLIFF
Where am I going?

VOICE
Does that matter?

CLIFF
The tickets are arranged as we agreed.

VOICE
As agreed, Cliff.

21 EXT. NYC. DAY.

21

Cliff and Beverly, well-bundled, work their way through the city.

CLIFF

I really appreciate this, Bev. It's good to have a friend along.

BEVERLY

Well, I'm honored you asked me to join you. It's like the start of a great adventure.

CLIFF

You said it.

22 INT. AMERICAN EXPRESS OFFICE.

22

Beverly and Cliff walk in. They shake the cold from themselves. Cliff walks up to the clerk.

CLIFF

Hi. Do you have something for "Irving?"

The clerk searches and pulls out an envelope.

CLERK

I need to see an ID, sir.

Cliff takes out an ID.

CLERK

Can I see another, please?

Cliff smiles to Beverly who returns the smile. Cliff hands him a driver's license. The Clerk looks it over.

CLERK

Your social security number?

CLIFF

049-68-4048.

The clerk hands him the small envelope.

CLERK

Sorry. Instructions of the individual making the reservation. (beat) Are you James Bond?

Cliff smiles in acknowledgment of the joke and takes the package.

CLERK (cont'd)

That will be \$1,450, sir.

Cliff has a look of honest bemusement on his face. Beverly laughs.

BEVERLY
Well, maybe things are tight for The Man.
(pulling out credit card)
We'll take care of it.

Cliff looks over the tickets. Then Beverly notices something...

BEVERLY (cont'd)
Two tickets, Cliff?

CLIFF
(grinning)
You ever heard of Oaxaca, Mexico?

23 FLASH CUT- MYSTERY MACHINE

23

24 INT. OAXACA HOTEL ROOM. DAY. MEXICO. FEB. 13, 1971.

24

Cliff is in bed with a knockout blonde woman, NINA VAN PALLANDT. They are making love. It's passionate. Hot. Man and mistress hot. Nina starts going down on Cliff. Now, his body shakes. Nina teasingly stops and crawls up his chest, nibbling.

NINA
A penny for your thoughts.

CLIFF
I love to fuck in the morning.

There is a KNOCK at the door.

CLIFF
Shit.

NINA
Don't - just - wait.

CLIFF
I have to get it.

NINA
It's probably just the maid.
(yelling out)
Please come back later!!

VOICE
Mr. Irving!

Cliff rolls out of bed as the KNOCKING continues. He wraps a towel around his waist. Nina is still exposed.

CLIFF
Nina! C'mon, it's one of Howard's men.

Cliff pulls the sheets over her and then opens the door and discovers a well dressed blonde man. He will come to be known as....

PEDRO

Mr. Irving. Good morning. I am Pedro.

Cliff looks him over. He's confused.

PEDRO

It's a *nom de plume*.

CLIFF

Of course. Come in. I just need to get dressed.

PEDRO walks in and sits on the bed, oblivious to Nina.

CLIFF

Are you with Mr. Hughes?

PEDRO

I'm with Octavio.

NINA

Octavio?

(laughs)

How positively silly.

CLIFF

Pedro, this is my good friend, Nina Van Pallandt. Nina's a singer. Very big in Europe.

PEDRO

(paranoid)

She's not coming is she?

NINA

(bored)

I'm going to take in the sights.

25 INT. BUICK. DAY

13

25

Pedro and Cliff travel along the dilapidated highway. It's hotter than hell in the car. Cliff wears a jacket and turtleneck.

26 INT. BUICK. DAY

26

The two men still in the car. Cliff has the window open. Elbow sticking out. His jacket is off. They pass a sign. "Mt. Alban- 70k.

DISSOLVE TO:

27 EXT. HIGHWAY.

27

The Buick takes a right turn at a sign that reads "Mt. Alban."

DISSOLVE TO:

28 EXT. MOUNTAIN TOP. DAY.

28

The car comes to a stop among what looks like ancient ruins. Pedro gets out of the car and opens Cliff's door..

PEDRO
These are the ruins of (the..)

CLIFF
Zapotec civilization. I know.

Pedro points in the direction of a YELLOW VOLKSWAGON. We can barely make out the image of a man in the back.

CLIFF
Is that him?

PEDRO
That is the man.

CLIFF
Can I get my stuff?

PEDRO
I don't think that you are going to need it.
But go ahead.

Cliff reaches into the vehicle and takes out his brief case. We follow Cliff as he slowly moves to the Volkswagon.

29 FLASH CUT- MYSTERY MACHINE

29

30 EXT. TOP OF MOUNT ALBAN.

30

CLIFF arrives at the Volkswagon. Inside, he see a tall, frail, long-haired old man. It's HOWARD HUGHES. Cliff's eyes open with wonder, almost as if he has seen a live T-Rex. Hughes does not notice him. Cliff KNOCKS but there is no movement from Hughes. Cliff opens the door and gets in. Now, Hughes is startled. He leaps away from Cliff.

HUGHES
Jesus, man!

CLIFF
(genuine)
I'm sorry, I knocked on the window.

HUGHES
Haaaaah. I have a bum ear. That's why I like these enclosed places. Everybody thinks that's crazy. But it's not. It's logical.
(beat)
You Irving?

CLIFF
Yes sir. Clifford Irving.

He reaches out his hand. Hughes looks down at it. Cliff withdraws his hand. He should know better.

CLIFF

I want you to know sir that this is a great honor and a privilege that I will not-

HUGHES

Did your editors agree to my terms?

Cliff nervously starts to take the contract out of his briefcase.

CLIFF

They did. They sent a contract with me.

HUGHES

Put it away.

CLIFF

Put it away?

HUGHES

I haven't decided yet.

CLIFF

You haven't de-...Mr. Hughes, I've come a long way and put in tremendous effort.

HUGHES

Let's start with that. Why the tremendous effort?

CLIFF

Tremendous effort, right, see..

HUGHES

Look, Irving, let's cut this bullshit where you repeat everything I say. I may be deaf but I'm not that fucking deaf. Understand?

CLIFF

I understand. Yes. One hundred percent.

HUGHES

Good. I just want to know why so much elbow grease has been put in to do a book about me? In the end, will the people care? Will they buy the book? Does any son of a bitch out there really give a damn about some old aviator?

CLIFF

Oh, I think so. Most certainly.

(beat)

It's simple, really. To most people you are this great riddle-

HUGHES
A mystery!

CLIFF
A mystery. Even better. You are nowhere, but
you are everywhere. Nobody sees you, but you
influence so much....

Cliff begins to giggle

HUGHES
What's so funny?

CLIFF
It strikes me that I'm describing God.

Hughes leans forward.

HUGHES
Have you ever seen us in the same room?

Cliff looks at him. Is he being toyed with?

CLIFF
Look, I have come across the world to-

HUGHES
Bullshit. You came from New York City. That's
not across the world. Remember, You're talking
to a man who knows the meaning of across the
world. And you came with a blonde who is not
your wife. Your suffering has been limited.

A blonde? How does he know this?

HUGHES
Pedro will deliver you to me in the morning.
You can go now.

Cliff opens the door in a bit of a huff.

CLIFF
Fine. Tomorrow, then.

Cliff walks away, but the CAMERA stays on Hughes as he begins to
drift... drift... into sleep... then... BAM!

CLIFF (VO)
MR. HUGHES!

Hughes is startled AWAKE... again. There is Cliff at the door.

HUGHES
What? What is it, man!!!?

CLIFF

I just have to ask you... If you don't mind my saying so, this car is pure junk. Why not a Rolls-Royce or something more becoming to your status?

HUGHES

Damn, Irving, who do I have to impress?

31 EXT. MEXICAN AIR SPACE. DAY- INSERT- FEBRUARY 14, 1971. 31

A Propeller plane zooms through the air and makes a harried descent. The pilot is either incompetent or a daredevil.

32 EXT. SMALL AIR FIELD. DAY 32

The same plane lands. It taxis up to a Limo. We see that the pilot is Pedro. Cliff, wearing a new TURTLENECK, sits next to him barfing. From the passenger side of the limo emerges a tall, elegant man. This is GEORGE GORDON HOLMES. Cliff emerges from the plane, looking pale as hell. Holmes walks up to him hand extended.

HOLMES

Mr. Irving, welcome to Tehuantepec. I'm George Gordon Holmes. Good to meet you face to face.

Cliff is still too dazed to speak.

33 INT. LIMO. BACKSEAT. DAY. 33

Howard and Cliff sit close to one another. Howard is dressed in a robe. Next to him there is a carton of milk. Cliff looks faint.

HOWARD

Good flight?

CLIFF

I was waiting for Pedro to scream "Tora, Tora, Tora".

Hughes laughs.

HOWARD

Very good. Very good. Very God damn funny. So!

CLIFF

So.

HOWARD

What is it that you want to talk about in this book of yours? "Ours" I suppose I should say.

CLIFF

Everything. Naturally, I'll do my research as such. But you'll have to take the lead in determining what makes it into the book. I

would hope that you wouldn't hold back. We get to see the real Hughes we know and love.

HOWARD

Look Irving, let's understand this. You can have my true character or you can have my reputation. You can't have both. It doesn't work that way.

(leans forward)

Stop the car, Pedro!

The car screeches to a halt. Hughes brings the window down. On the side of the road is a female peasant selling bananas. Hughes puts out one finger and the peasant gives him one piece of fruit. At this point, Holmes has come around to pay her. Hughes rolls the window.

HOWARD

If they've found a way to poison this banana then, by God, they deserve to kill me.

He starts to unpeel the fruit as the car begins to move.

HOWARD

You like bananas, Cliff?

CLIFF

Bananas are okay.

Howard takes a bite.

HOWARD

Shit, it's not ripe.

He opens the window and throws the banana out the window.

HOWARD

Pedro! Back up and get our money back. They're selling us defective fruit, the bastards.

The car backs up. Cliff doesn't know whether to be amused or shocked.

HOWARD

How's that blonde of yours?

CLIFF

Nina?

HOWARD

Pretty woman. Saw a photo of her. I'll bet she just sucks you until your eyes water, eh?

CLIFF

(blase)

She's fun. You know, it's not as sinister as you think. Edith knows all about Nina. It's just the way we've chosen to live. Nothing happens when we're on the island, at home, but

when we're on the road.... anyway we have an understanding.

HOWARD

Well, you don't have to explain the joy of infidelity to me, Irving.

CLIFF

I love Edith. I love my wife. And I must-

HOWARD

Jesus, Irving, why in Christ hell would you think I give a rat's ass about your marriage?

Now the car has come to a stop. We hear Holmes's door opening and then a muffled argument in Spanish from outside.

CLIFF

And you, Howard? Any female companionship?

HOWARD

I've had enough to fit most lifetimes. The truth is, when I first left, I would hire young ladies for that purpose.

CLIFF

Is that right? You paid women to come to your house for sex?

HOWARD

I paid them to leave my house.

We hear Holmes getting into the car.

HOWARD

Did you get the money back?

HOLMES (OS)

Yes sir, I convinced her it was best for customer relations.

HOWARD

Good work, Gordon. Okay, Pedro, Let's get some real bananas.

EXT. RAIN FOREST. DAY.

The limo drives over rough terrain into the rain forest. It rests under a banana tree.

INT. LIMO. DAY.

CLIFF

Howard, I appreciate the tour, but I would really like to discuss the contract.

HOWARD
Not until I've had my banana.

34 EXT. TOP OF BANANA TREE. DAY

34

Cliff climbing and reaching for a bundle of bananas.

35 INT. MCGRAW-HILL CONFERENCE ROOM-

35

In the room are CLIFF, MCGRAW, and BEVERLY. There is wild LAUGHTER, especially from Cliff, who is in mid-story:

CLIFF
Next thing I know, I'm up the tree. Felt like Roddy McDowell in that.. in that... What's that Charlton Heston film?

MCGRAW
Planet of the Apes?

CLIFF
Exactly. It was like "Planet of the Apes".

MCGRAW
(laughing hard)
Oh... Jesus! I can just picture you. I hope you weren't in the turtleneck.

BEVERLY
Oh, this is a book unto itself. It's gotta go in the forward-

CLIFF
Who'd believe it?

MCGRAW
Well Mr. Irving, how about it then. Where are the fruits of the fruit?

Out of his briefcase, Cliff pulls a document. He picks it up gingerly and passes it around. Each editor looks at it as if it were the Holy Grail. A bunch of "Oh mys." It gets to McGraw who holds it up.

MCGRAW
Oh, My.

We move in on the paper, a contract, and close in on the signature at the bottom: "H.R. HUGHES"

36 INT. BARBETTAS RESTAURANT. DAY I : APRIL 13, 1971.

36

An Italian joint. Packed, but the tables are spread far apart. At one of the corner tables sits Beverly, Cliff, and an elegant looking man named RALPH GRAVES, editor of LIFE Magazine. They are all eating.

RALPH

I always know I'm going to hear something exciting when I am invited here. The seats here are just far enough apart to prevent eavesdropping.

BEVERLY

That seems to be the whole point of this place.

RALPH

(to Cliff)

Your name seems, don't take this as an insult please, vaguely familiar.

BEVERLY

Cliff has written some books for us. He just published a book called "Fake"

RALPH

Ah, about the Picasso man.

CLIFF

Elmyr's more a Matisse man. Orson Welles is making a documentary about he and I. More Elmyr of course, but I was interviewed quite a bit for the picture.

RALPH

I like Welles, he makes good pictures.

BEVERLY

Ralph, let me ask you. As a journalist, who is the kind of person that you most want to get?

RALPH

For an interview? The person who won't talk, I suppose. The person cloaked in secrecy.

BEVERLY

Okay. Good. And who, *right now*, will not talk.

RALPH

It's a "he" you say, so that knocks out Garbo. I suppose there's Charlie Chaplin, but there's talk of bringing him in for the Oscars.

BEVERLY

You're thinking small, Ralph.

RALPH

One of the famous Nazis? Mengele?

BEVERLY

Bigger.

RALPH
J.D. Salinger?

BEVERLY
You're going backwards.

RALPH
Well, there's only one person. But that is impossible. We've had the best-
(He sees Cliff smile)
By God. Howard Hughes?

BEVERLY
Before we go one step further, we must agree that not one word, even if we do not come to an agreement, leaves the room. Part of our deal with Octavio (is absolute ...)

RALPH
Octavio?

CLIFF
Octavio. It's a *nom de plume*...

BEVERLY
Is *absolute* secrecy.

RALPH
Of Course, Bev. Life Magazine is famous for its discretion. Remember the Khrushchev papers?

BEVERLY
Which is why I came to you first.

RALPH
(smiles)
So, Hughes?

BEVERLY
Hughes. Howard Hughes. It's amazing, but Cliff here has done it.

RALPH
My God. Have you met him, Cliff? What's he like? Are all the stories true? The fingernails, the germ phobias-

BEVERLY
That'll cost you a quarter of a million, Ralph.

RALPH
A quarter...
(drops his fork, feigns
surrender)
I'll never get it past Donovan.

BEVERLY

Tell Headley that it buys him three 5000 word installments of the McGraw-Hill "authorized biography" of Howard Hughes. He's a businessman, afterall. It'll make sense to him.

Ralph takes a bite of his penne. Then another. And another.

RALPH

Hughes...

CLIFF

Octavio.

RALPH

Octavio is a nut. What if he ends up not authorizing it? What if, excuse me on this Cliff, the whole thing is a big bust?

BEVERLY

We'd be delighted to include a clause which returns your cash if Cliff can't deliver or if Octavio refuses to authorize it.

Beverly pulls out her briefcase. From it comes the Hughes contracts.

BEVERLY

Cliff got these for us last week.

Ralph looks them over. Astonished.

RALPH

A quarter of a million. Three installments-ten thousand words each. Not five. I want world magazine and newspaper serialization rights.

BEVERLY lifts up her wine. They clink glasses. It's a deal.

CLIFF

To Project Octavio.

37 INT. LIFE MAGAZINE HALLWAYS. NIGHT.

37

Cliff is walking with FRANK McCULLOCH, thirteen years older, heavier, his head either bald or shaved. The hallways are bright and empty.

FRANK

Ralph Graves asked me to give you access to our Hughes archives. Obviously there is some material there that we had to set aside.

CLIFF

Not a problem. I'm just grateful for the research. Sometimes the old man forgets things.

38 INT. ARCHIVE ROOM. DAY.

38

Set along two tables are files and files and files.

FRANK
There you have it.

CLIFF
It's a real mother lode.

FRANK
A lot of it's mine. I was on the Hughes beat for years. I suppose I could put together one hell of a biography myself. It wouldn't be authorized, though. Hell of a coup, Cliff. Hell of a fucking coup.

CLIFF
Thanks.

Frank goes dour and silent.

CLIFF (cont'd)
What's wrong?

FRANK
It just struck me that that's that.

CLIFF
What's that?

FRANK
You took it away from me, Cliff. Hughes was my goal. But you took it away. I'll never be the one who sucked him back in. That's gone for good now.

CLIFF
I'm sorry about that.

FRANK
Hell, Cliff, don't be sorry for chrissakes. We're all in the business of getting the story. You were the better man this time out. That's all. Just don't fuck it up.

CLIFF
How does one fuck up the life story of Howard Hughes?

FRANK
Good point. Now, you know, you can't actually leave with anything.

39 EXT. WASHINGTON, DC. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

39

Richard Susskind, wearing a long overcoat, hurries up the steps of the Library of Congress. We hear a telephone conversation he had with Cliff in VO. Before the conversation we hear a few rings.

SUSSKIND

Yeah?

CLIFF

Dick, it's Cliff.

SUSSKIND

Cliff? Where the hell are you?

CLIFF

I'm locked in the archive vault at Life. I need your help and your discretion.

SUSSKIND

What's her name?

40 INT. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. RESEARCH AREA

40

We see Susskind chatting with a librarian as the VO continues.

CLIFF

Not this time. Dick, I bagged the giant. I'm writing the authorized biography of Howard Hughes.

SUSSKIND

Authorized?

41 INT. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. RESEARCH AREA.

41

Susskind sits at a research table. In front of him is a mountain of papers and books. The VO continues.

CLIFF

I could not talk to you about it earlier. The Man has me bound and gagged.

SUSSKIND

There was a rumor on the island that you were on to something gigantic. Something like this.

CLIFF

I need you my friend. I can trust nobody else. I've convinced McGraw-Hill to give you ten thousand dollars to be my research assistant.

SUSSKIND

Ten thousand is very generous. (beat) What do you want me to do?

42 INT. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS HALLWAYS. DAY

42

Susskind appears to be leaving. It is clear that he is carrying several documents and books under his coat.

CLIFF

I need you to research the hell out of Hughes.
Begin at the Library of Congress in Washington.
I need you to get me whatever you can.

43 MONTAGE- INTERCUT WITH IMAGES OF THE MYSTERY MACHINE

43

Hughes and Cliff meet in various locations (specifically: 1. Puerto Rico, in the back of yet another car. 2. Nassau, Bahamas in a hotel room. 3. In a mansion in an unknown location. 4. The Beverly Hills Holiday Inn.). We hear no dialogue, but we see photographic and news reel footage of what the two men must be talking about-

Richard Nixon.... Atomic bomb testing, ...Howard's flight around the world planes crashing...Hughes having sex with starlet after starlet.... a clip from "The Outlaw"....Another plane crashing...Glossy stills of Kate Hepburn....Congressional sub-committees, et al.

44 FLASH CUT- MYSTERY MACHINE

44

45 EXT. PRIVATE POOL. CATHEDRAL CITY. DAY.

45

Cliff is soaking up some rays. Next to him is Susskind.

CLIFF

For once I'd say we haven't got a lot done.

SUSSKIND

Not with this weather.

CLIFF

We'll make up for it tonight. Howard said he'd meet me at my hotel between ten and midnight. You just need to be out of there by nine or so.

SUSSKIND

Well, we have a lot of ground to cover. But if we start by seven we should be fine.

Now, a heavy older woman, PEGGY enters. Next to her is a man named STANLEY MEYER, well dressed in a Palm Springs old money way.

PEGGY

Cliff. I'd like you to meet somebody.

CLIFF

(shielding eyes)

Hi.

PEGGY

This is my son-in-law Stanley Meyer.

CLIFF

I think we've met before, at a party or something.

STANLEY

Could be. I go to a lot of parties.

PEGGY

Stanley's in the movie business. He was the producer of "Dragnet." With Jack Webb. Now he's in the book business.

STANLEY

Just getting my beak wet I'd say.

PEGGY

I told Stanley that you were an author with a big New York house. He just came right over.

STANLEY

All the way from Los Angeles, actually.

CLIFF

I feel honored.

STANLEY

Just out of curiosity (what house would..)

CLIFF

McGraw-Hill. Sit down, Stanley. This is Dick Susskind. Dick's my research assistant.

STANLEY

(ignoring Susskind)

McGraw-Hill is very impressive.

Stanley sits down on the edge of Susskind's lounge chair.

STANLEY (cont'd)

I was hoping that I could talk to you about the possibility of you and I-

CLIFF

I don't have an agent. Don't really need one.

STANLEY

That's okay. I'm not an agent.

PEGGY

I'll leave you boys alone. Stanley, do you want something to drink?

STANLEY

An iced tea would be nice. With lots of sugar.

PEGGY

Are you boys okay?

CLIFF

We're fine.

Peggy leaves.

STANLEY

I have a friend who has written a book about his employment experiences with a very famous man, well I won't be coy, with Howard Hughes.

Cliff stiffens up a bit. He and Susskind exchange looks.

STANLEY (cont'd)

Anyway, Noah-

CLIFF

Noah Dietrich?

STANLEY

You know him?

CLIFF

No. But, Noah Dietrich's very famous. He was Hughes' right hand. He's writing a book is he?

STANLEY

You bet. He was collaborating with a fella named Jim Phelan outta Vegas. You know Jim?

Cliff shakes his head.

STANLEY (cont'd)

Anyway, the manuscript was completed and it's just, well, it's just not up to snuff at all.

CLIFF

You need a rewrite.

STANLEY

Not even that. A polish, I'd say. You'd get a nice chunk of the advance, half the royalties. We can put together a splendid deal for you.

CLIFF

(pointing to bag)

Is that the manuscript?

Stanley takes it out of his bag. Sheets of paper. Cliff sits up and sifts through it. He hands some papers over to Susskind.

CLIFF (cont'd)

Well, this is something. But, look, Stanley, I'm going to tell you something. But, it's code one- Fort Knox- security, though.

STANLEY

There's nobody you can trust more than me.

SUSSKIND
Cliff, really-

CLIFF
It's okay, Dick. Stanley is Peg's son-in-law.
(to Meyer)
You see, I'm working, I should say Dick and I
are working, on a book about the four richest
men in the world. Hughes is one of them.

STANLEY
My, that is a coincidence. Look, Read what we
have, I'll leave it with you-

CLIFF
I'm sorry, Stan.
(pushes book back to Stan)
It just wouldn't be right. If I decided not to
do the book who knows what kind of
misunderstandings are in store for us.

Stan sadly puts the book back in the bag.

STANLEY
I understand. Gee, you don't think that your
book could hurt the chances of our book.

CLIFF
Well, I won't tell anybody if you don't. I'm
hoping we can both keep a secret.

46 FLASH CUT-MYSTERY MACHINE

46

47 INT. PALM SPRINGS HOTEL ROOM. NIGHT.

47

Cliff and Susskind are sitting on their beds looking over notes.

CLIFF
I think I'm going to get into the Spruce Goose.

SUSSKIND
Aren't you scared he's gonna get touchy about
that. It wasn't exactly a rousing success.

CLIFF
Well, that's the whole point. Jesus, Dick,
we're writing a book about Howard Hughes not
putting up a billboard. He's got to be seen as
a human being. People want to know he makes
mistakes, just like they do.

SUSSKIND
I'm just saying we want the guy to stay on our
side.

CLIFF
Point taken.

There is a KNOCK. Cliff looks over at the clock. It reads 9:15.

CLIFF
Did you order room service?

SUSSKIND
Nope.

Cliff gets up and walks to the door. He opens it. Shockingly, there stands Howard Hughes. Howard scurries in.

HUGHES
Don't just leave me out there, man.

Susskind stands up. He has a look of shock on his face. He gulps. Howard looks him over. Cliff is quite taken aback. What to do?

CLIFF
Howard, this is my researcher Dick Susskind.

Howard gives him a look over. He pulls a small bag out of his jacket pocket and holds it open for Susskind.

HUGHES
Organic prune?

DISSOLVE TO:

48 EXT. PALOMBO HOTEL BALCONY. DAY- TWO WEEKS LATER

48

Cliff stands, smoking a pipe, over-looking the blue pool. Tourists are swimming. Cliff seems concentrated. Behind him is a small glass table with a tape-recorder on it. He looks at his watch.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PALOMBO HOTEL BALCONY. NIGHT

Cliff is still there. The pool below him now reflects the huge word 'CASINO.' A couple of midnight swimmers breaststroke through the word.

HUGHES (OS)
Okay. I'm ready.

Cliff is startled. He turns around and finds Hughes.

HUGHES
Sorry, I thought maybe I'd need a nap.

Hughes sits down. So does CLIFF.

CLIFF
Pleasant dreams?

HUGHES

Aw hell, Cliff. They're never pleasant.

CLIFF

We were talking about Kate. You said she was your favorite.

HUGHES

I almost married her, though. The press scared her away. We could've made some kids. Can you imagine the kind of kids Howard Hughes and Kate Hepburn would've created? She was very clean. Bathed three times a day.

CLIFF

Where did you first meet her?

Hughes takes a sip of milk and his eyes begin to wander.

CLIFF

Howard?

HOWARD

Cliff, how much material do you have?

CLIFF

I think we're just about there, Howard. But, I really want to get through some of the material on the women in your life. It would give housewives a reason to buy the book.

HOWARD

Cliff, McGraw-Hill should really be licking their balls over our book by now.

CLIFF

It's powerhouse stuff, Howard.

HOWARD

That's why we're going to withhold it.

CLIFF

Withhold it? Howard, are you quite mad?

Howard stares at Cliff. He doesn't need to answer that question.

CLIFF

Why would we do such a thing?

HOWARD

For more money, Cliff. More money.

CLIFF

More money? Howard, this is the most money that McGraw-Hill's paid since the MacArthur memoirs.

HOWARD

Aw, hell, Cliff. After Life pays them off, all the book clubs - they're already in the black. They'll pay and they'll pay well. One million. You tell them to bring it up to one million!

CLIFF

Howard, we have a contract. If anything, you understand contracts. I have my...my...my goodwill with McGraw-Hill to consider.

HOWARD

Contracts? Goodwill? Jesus! No wonder you're nothing more than a thirty thousand a year nobody. I'll tell you what. You wanna give them goodwill, we'll give the bastards goodwill.

INT. HARRY MCGRAW'S OFFICE. DAY. INSERT. SEPT. 12, 1971

A fist pounds violently on a table.

MCGRAW(VO)

NO!!!!

The camera pulls back to reveal Harry McGraw standing behind his desk, his face red, veins ready to burst. Also in the room is Beverly, standing against a wall. Ted Weber sits on a couch in the back. Cliff sits calmly in a plush chair.

MCGRAW

This, Mr. Irving, will NOT stand. It will not.

WEBER

It's exactly the problem we were anticipating.

MCGRAW

Thanks for the insight Nostrodamus, but right now let's concentrate on the issue at hand.

BEVERLY

There's no issue. We have a contract.

WEBER

A contract. Are you kidding me? A contract? It means *nothing* to Hughes.

BEVERLY

It will mean something once he's in court.

WEBER

And who is going to serve him? James Bond?

CLIFF

I agree. A lawsuit is not practical. In any case his argument is understandable. He thought he owned the international rights to the book.

MCGRAW

(pointing to Cliff)

YOU TELL THIS ARROGANT PRICK THAT HE HAS FINALLY, ONCE AND FOR ALL, FUCKED WITH THE WRONG HUMAN BEING! YOU TELL HIM-

CLIFF

Harry, I will tell him no such thing. There's one thing we all know. A Hughes book will bring in dramatically more than the million he wants.

MCGRAW

You don't understand, Cliff. There is a principle involved here. A God damn principle.

CLIFF

Which is why Hughes is sweetening the pot.

WEBER

Sweetening the pot, how?

CLIFF pulls out from a box by his side, bundles and bundles of paper. Slams them on the desk of Harry McGraw.

CLIFF

This is no longer the authorized *biography* of Howard Hughes. It's "The Autobiography of Howard Hughes".

WEBER

My God.

Cliff pulls out an envelope from his pocket. He hands it to McGraw who is looking at all the papers. Stunned.

CLIFF

Here is the check you cut to Howard. If you do not meet his terms then he asks that you please tear it up.

(stands)

If you care to read the manuscript, than you can do so this evening at my hotel room.

49 INT. ELYSIAN HOTEL SUITE. DAY.

49

Cliff is pacing the room. In the suite is McGraw, Ralph, and Beverly. Every person reading is in rapt attention.

RALPH

Wow.

Cliff stops his pace.

CLIFF

What? What?

RALPH

This stuff with Nixon it's just incredible.
This alone is going to sell books. This part's
definitely going into the magazine.

DISSOLVE TO:

50 INT. SAME ROOM. NEXT DAY. SEPT. 14, 1971.

50

The gang has been there all night. Their ties are loosened, cups of
coffee everywhere, manuscript pages all over the place.

BEVERLY

Even the boring parts, (beat) no offense there,
Cliff, even those are convincing. Hughes
yapping on and on about planes is just so-

CLIFF

It's just so Hughes. I know what you mean.

MCGRAW

You're going to knock Capote and Mailer off
their high perches. It's the fastest thousand
pages I've ever read. We'll have to clean up
the language, of course, but.. Geez it's good.
It's the best writing you've ever done.

CLIFF

Thanks, Harry.

MCGRAW

It's a shame that Hughes will get all the
credit for it.

CLIFF

Yeah, now I know how the horse feels when the
jockey gets the trophy.

BEVERLY

Who gets to keep the original draft? I mean,
this is classic... I assume these are all of
Hughes' original scrawlings? His notes to you?

CLIFF

They are and, as far as I am concerned, it's
yours. I love this project but enough's enough.

MCGRAW

Which brings us to the issue of the money.
Hughes really pulled the rug from under us.

CLIFF

Look, you don't have to give me an answer now. Hughes has given me until the 30th.

WEBER

Look, we can't collapse entirely in front of Hughes. We need some victory, even if it's Pyrrhic. Tell him \$750,000.

CLIFF

He might be insulted. You're not knocking it down a few bucks. You're talking \$250,000.

MCGRAW

True, but we have to understand Hughes' motivation. Why is he doing this? To get richer by one tenth of one percent? No. It's ego. Hughes wants to be the highest paid writer in history. Well, tell him he's got it.

51 INT. TED WEBER'S OFFICE. DAY NYC. SEPT. 22, 1971.

51

The office is immaculate. Weber is behind his desk. Cliff sits before him.

WEBER

You win, Cliff.

Weber hands over two checks. Cliff looks them over.

CLIFF

Thank you, Ted. The man will be very happy.

WEBER

I would think so.

CLIFF

And thanks for my check. Every bit helps.

WEBER

You know, from the numbers we've crunched, we think you are personally going to clear \$2 million. Do you have any clue how many writers are going to clear two mill for one book?

CLIFF

I dunno. Capote? Suzanne?

WEBER

From one book? If Moses were collecting royalties from The Bible he wouldn't be pocketing \$2 million.

CLIFF

(not caring, re-examines checks)

Huh-huh. There's one problem here, a small one.

WEBER

Oh?

CLIFF

The man doesn't want any checks written out to Howard Hughes. He insists on "H.R. Hughes."
(hands back check)

Is it a big problem?

CLOSE ON CHECK- which we see is for the amount of \$275,000.

52 FLASH CUT- MYSTERY MACHINE

52

53 EXT. PRIVATE AIRPORT. DAY INSERT- MIAMI. DEC. 3, 1971.

53

A plane is on a tarmac. At the bottom of the ramp is a Cadillac sedan. Cliff is the only one who gets off the plane.

54 INT. CADILLAC. DAY.

54

Holmes is driving and Cliff is sitting on the passenger side. He is wearing a black blindfold.

CLIFF

Is this really necessary?

HOLMES

I'm afraid so. The man is in a high state.

55 EXT. MANSION GATES. DAY

55

The Cadillac drives through the gates. It is now dusk.

56 INT. MANSION. DAY

56

Cliff, still blindfolded, walks through the house. He is being assisted by a young blonde man. Holmes leads the way.

57 FLASH CUT- MYSTERY MACHINE

57

58 INT. BEDROOM. DAY.

58

Hughes lies in bed. Next to him projector reels spin. We see the flicker of images on Hughes' face but not the screen. The bedroom door opens. Cliff and Gordon enter. Gordon takes off the blindfold.

CLIFF

Hello, Howard.

Howard weakly takes off the oxygen mask. He points to a seat next to his bed. Cliff nods.

HUGHES

You look on edge, Cliff.

CLIFF
I'm not on edge, but I'm tired. I was hoping
we could get right into it.

HUGHES
You in a hurry? You got lunch with the Pope or
something?

CLIFF
(smiling)
I don't deal with lackeys.

HUGHES
(pointing to the screen)
Ever see this one? Best damn movie ever made.

CLIFF
I've seen it. I saw it in Times square.

HUGHES
You want a good piece of gossip?

CLIFF
Can I share it with anybody?

HUGHES
Of course not.

CLIFF
Then it's not gossip. It's a secret.

HUGHES
That feller up there? I've got something on
him. Something big. If I get back in the movie
business, that bastard's mine.
(beat)
Do you have my money?

CLIFF
I have a check for \$325,000 in my pocket.

Hughes coughs and reaches for a glass of lemonade by his bed.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Good. That's all for now.

CLIFF
Howard, I just went through two hours of cloak
and dagger to get here. What is so-

But Hughes is asleep. Gordon pats Cliff on the shoulder. Cliff gets up.

59 INT. MANSION DINING ROOM. DAY.

59

Cliff is at the main table eating. He is wearing his blindfold. Holmes
is next to him.

HOLMES

Sorry about the blindfold, Cliff. The man fell asleep before he could change instructions.

CLIFF

It's okay. Something to tell the grand kids.

(beat)

This is interesting ice cream. What is it?

HOLMES

Banana nut. It's from Baskin Robbins.

CLIFF

What is that? An ice cream franchise?

HOLMES

The biggest, I think. I've got a funny story about Baskin Robbins and Howard. A few years ago, when we were in Vegas, The Man discovered, I don't know how, this Banana Nut ice cream. He flipped for it. Demanded it with every meal. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, and evening snack. For twenty three days - Banana nut. Always one and a half scoops per serving. Well, on that twenty-third day, we realized we were starting to run low. So we went down to the Baskin Robbins and behold: no more Banana Nut.

CLIFF

Who had to tell Howard the bad news?

HOLMES

Nobody wanted to. Of course, it would have fallen to me. That was not going to happen. I called the head cheese of Baskin Robbins and told him our predicament. Well, turns out that Banana nut had been rotated out. Seems it wasn't as popular with the rest of the country as it was with Howard. So I said to the fella, how many gallons would it take for us to commission you to make to make it worth your while? Man says 200. So I told him, fine 200 it is, but we need them right away. The next day, two huge Baskin Robbins trucks travel the desert for five hours and arrive at the Desert Inn. They had to move food out to make room for the ice cream. Anyway, Howard knows nothing of this. We simply brought him up his scoop and a half. He takes a bite, looks at me and says, "Gordo, Hell's bells let's go back to vanilla."

(beat)

Right now, you're on gallon four.

60 INT. HUGHES' BEDROOM. NIGHT.

60

Hughes in the same position. He's watching a movie. Cliff and Gordon walk in. Gordon takes the blindfold off. Instead of sitting down, Cliff goes and stands in front of the screen. We are OTS of Cliff.

CLIFF

Did you get a good nap, Howard?

HUGHES

You are in the way of the movie, Cliff.

Cliff says nothing. He will not move. His arms are folded in defiance.

HUGHES (cont'd)

The manuscript is approved. Now, get out of the fucking way.

61 FLASH CUT- MYSTERY MACHINE

61

62 EXT. BEACH. ST. CROIX. DAY. DEC. 11, 1971

62

Cliff is at a phone booth on the beach, the phone cradled under his chin. He is wearing an Aloha shirt and shorts. He is holding a copy of the local newspaper. We can see the headline: MEGA-BILLIONAIRE TO TELL ALL! We hear a RING then a pick-up.

BEVERLY

Loo.

CLIFF

Bev. It's Cliff. This is great! It even made the front page here in St. Croix.

BEVERLY

It made the front pages on every paper in the free world. We've never had a splash like this. It's incredible. We're on our way.

CLIFF

That's great. It's just so wonderful.

BEVERLY

It's like there's no more Vietnam War. The phone's been ringing off the hook. Every paper wants to know who Cliff Irving is.

CLIFF

They're gonna find out. I'll tell you that.

BEVERLY

But, there's a problem. I was hoping maybe your Gordon Holmes could handle it.

CLIFF

What is it?

BEVERLY
Hughes has denied the authenticity of the book.

CLIFF
(mild panic)
Hughes has denied.... Hughes himself?

BEVERLY
Well, of course not Hughes himself. His Tool Company. The Hughes Tool Company.

CLIFF
(LAUGHS)
ToolCo? C'mon, Bev. Of course they've denied it. They know nothing about it. Nothing. Do you think Howard sent a memo to his employees telling them he was working on his autobiography? (beat) Is this a problem?

BEVERLY
No. But, if Howard could issue some statement that the book is true blue it'd (make our)

CLIFF
Say no more, Beverly. I'll call Gordo now.

BEVERLY
I guess the publicity doesn't hurt. It's going to keep us in the news for the next month or so. Listen, could you get up to New York? Who knows what'll come of this.

CLIFF
I should be there in two days. Can you defend the fort until then?

BEVERLY
Bye-bye, Cliff.

Cliff smiles and hangs up the phone. He now dials a series of numbers. We hear RINGING and then the voice of Holmes.

HOLMES
Holmes, here.

CLIFF
Gordo, it's Cliff.

HOLMES
(sounding cold and gruff)
Yes, Cliff. What can I do for you?

CLIFF
I just got off with my editor. We have to nip this nonsense coming from the Tool Company.

HOLMES

Look, the old man's not well at all. I'll take care of my problems and you take care of your problems.

We hear Holmes HANGING UP the phone. Cliff simply stares at the phone in disbelief. Cliff hangs up the phone and starts walking in the direction of the beach.

63 INT. HOTEL BALLROOM. DAY

63

There is an "Announcement Party" in progress. A bunch of people in suits, reporters, and photographers are in attendance. On the wall are huge blow-ups of photos representing the life of Howard Hughes. Cliff is at a podium, speaking to a rapt crowd. He holds a glass of wine in his hand.

CLIFF

And, finally, to Howard...

There are mutterings of "To Howard" from the crowd

CLIFF

who likes to say, "Confusion to our enemies"

The crowd cheers its approval as Cliff steps from the podium. As he descends into the crowd, reporters and photographers flock around him, throwing out questions

CLIFF (cont'd)

Please, one at a time

A hand comes on Cliff's shoulder. It is Ralph Graves.

CLIFF

(to reporters)

Please excuse me for a second.

He moves away from the crowd with Ralph.

CLIFF

What's going on Ralph? You look dour.

RALPH

Oh, no. Not at all. What a splash. I always expected something, but not quite this.

CLIFF

Yes, it's something. A real pisser.

RALPH

Look, Cliff. I realize that this is moment in the sun time for you-

CLIFF

You too, Ralph, you too. You guys had the balls to believe in me.

RALPH

Yes, we did. And we paid a great deal of money for that belief. So, Cliff, I am begging you here. You simply can not speak to the press. We don't know what we're going to take from the book, but we can't let anybody scoop us.

CLIFF

I never thought about that. You know, I'm a reporter and I felt obligated to my peers.

RALPH

Lose that feeling of obligation.

DISSOLVE TO:

64

A few minutes later. Frank is standing by a blow-up of Jane Russell. Cliff walks up to him.

64

CLIFF

I was on the set of "The Outlaw."

FRANK

Oh, hi Cliff.

CLIFF

Howard invented the brassiere, you know. Just for her.

FRANK

I know. What a beauty, huh?

CLIFF

He spoke about you quite a bit. The Man really likes you. There's real respect there.

FRANK

Not enough to give me what he gave you.

CLIFF

I was as surprised as you must be, but stranger things have happened.

FRANK

Not much

(beat)

Aw hell, I didn't mean that. I guess I'm just jealous.

CLIFF

Well, I understand where you're coming from. But if you could have been a fly on the wall. Jesus, everything was Frank this and Frank that. More than once he called you the best damn journalist he knew.

FRANK

Did he talk about the other fellas on the beat? Hansaker, Phelan, any of those guys?

CLIFF

Not by name. You were the only one by name. You know, he probably didn't pick you for this assignment because he knew you wouldn't gloss over things. Howard has his own spin.

FRANK

And how about you, Cliff? You don't seem like the kind of fella who'd gloss over things.

CLIFF

When the fact becomes legend, print the legend.

FRANK

I like that. You make that up?

CLIFF

It just hit me. I should write it down before I forget it. So, between us, do you think this Hughes Tool denial is going to be a stink?

FRANK

Nah. I'd be shocked with anything less from them. These guys have more internal secrets than the Nixon White House.

(beat)

There are some amazing God damn stories about Howard, you know. Amazing. But you know what they say, truth is stranger than fiction.

CLIFF

That's because fiction has to be logical.

65 INT. FRANK'S OFFICE. NYC DEC. 16, 1971

65

Frank McCulloch is in his office, working, typing. There's something frantic going on. The cigarette is now one long row of ashes. A knock on the door and his secretary Helen puts her head in.

HELEN

Mr. McCulloch?

FRANK

(not looking up)

I'm busy Helen-

HELEN

Your wife wants to know if you're home for dinner.

FRANK

Am I going to be home for dinner?

HELEN

You're having drinks with Rockefeller at 7:00.

FRANK

So what does that tell you?

Helen closes the door. The phone rings. Rings. Rings.

FRANK

Helen!!!!!!

NO answer. Frank picks up the phone.

FRANK

McCulloch!

PHELAN'S (VO)

Frank? Picking up your own line these days?

FRANK

(Stops working)

Jim Phelan! Goddamn! Haven't heard from you -

PHELAN (VO)

Must be years.

FRANK

Years, right. What's going on?

PHELAN (VO)

That's my question for you, Frank.

FRANK
(realization)
The Hughes thing.

PHELAN
I mean, if it's all legit then good for you,
good for you!

FRANK
What do you mean if it's all legit?

A Knock on the door and Helen pokes her head in

HELEN
Mr. McCulloch?

FRANK
Helen, I'm on the phone here for Chrissakes.

HELEN
There's a Mr. Davis here to see you.

FRANK
Davis? I don't think I know a Davis. Does he
have an appointment?

PHELAN'S VOICE
(eager)
Chet Davis? Is that Chet Davis?

HELEN
No sir. But, he assured me you'd
see him.

FRANK
What was that, Jim?

PHELAN
Ask her if it's Chester Davis.

FRANK
(to Helen)
Chester Davis?

HELEN
I think, yes, that's what he said.

FRANK
(to Phelan)
Who the fuck's Chet Davis?

PHELAN
C'mon, Frank, how long you been off the beat?

FRANK
Aw shit! I'll-

PHELAN
Yeah, call me back. You got my-

Frank hangs up the phone

FRANK

Okay. Bring Mr. Davis in.

Helen leaves the room and in walks CHESTER DAVIS. Thin. Regal. Bureaucratic. Perfect suit. He carries a briefcase.

CHESTER

Thanks for seeing me, Mr. McCulloch. I'm Chester Davis. I represent-

FRANK

Howard Hughes. I didn't make the connection instantly. Sit down.

CHESTER

Quite a little coup you have going here.

FRANK

Well, the real congrats are due upstairs. Time and Life are just sisters. Actually, we compete pretty strenuously.

(beat)

Howard just defines "You can run, but you can't hide." Huh?

CHESTER

Hmmm. Howard figured you weren't involved.

FRANK

Involved?

CHESTER

You were the last reporter to interview Howard Hughes. Formally or informally. 1958 I think.

FRANK

I didn't really close that one. We were at the Santa Monica Airport. Howard asked me if I want a burger and-

CHESTER

He flew you to Arizona. Mr. Hughes told me the story. Good story. You should have printed it.

FRANK

It was off-the-record.

CHESTER

Oh. pity. Tell me, do you think you would recognize Mr. Hughes' voice if you heard it?

FRANK

Sure. It's a hard one to forget.
(Hughes imitation)

"I didn't become Howard Hughes making other schmucks rich!"

CHESTER
That's very good. You must do that for the Man sometime. May I use your phone?

FRANK
Go right ahead.

Chester dials a number.

OPERATOR
Operator 1070

CHESTER
I'd like to charge this call to the following American Express Number: 19097475638.

OPERATOR
Right away.

THE PHONE RINGS

FRANK
(Smiling)
Don't want us to get the number, Mr. Davis?

CHESTER
No. I do not.

A voice comes on the other end. Strong Texas Drawl. Static.

VOICE
Yup.

CHESTER
I got him sir. But, could I trouble you to call here. The connection's pretty bad.

Frank mouths "Howard?" Chester nods.

VOICE
Oh, very well.

Chester and Frank stare at one another the Phone RINGS.

FRANK
Do you want to pick it up?

CHESTER
Please.

Frank takes the phone

FRANK
He-hello?

VOICE
Frank? Howard Hughes here!

FRANK
(instant recognition)
Yessir. Yessir....

Frank starts to scramble for a pen and paper.

VOICE
Frank. Frank. Stop scrambling. This isn't going to be a formal interview.

FRANK
Do you mind if I tape record? For my records?

VOICE
No, not this one. Let's do it like we always did. We'll talk it through, off the record.

FRANK
Okay, Howard. Whatever you say.

VOICE
Good. I want to talk to you about the book by this fellow.. what's the name?

FRANK
Clifford Irving.

VOICE
You betcha. That's who I wanted to talk about. Bottom line, Frank... I have no clue who Clifford Irving is. Guy could drop to his knees and lick my balls and I wouldn't know him. I certainly didn't write a goddamn book with him. Publish it and I'll have your nuts squeezed so tight (you'll be...)

FRANK
Wow. Howard, this is off-the-record? Even the general denial is off the record?

CHESTER
(gesticulating madly)
Whoa. Tell him to go on the record, that I'm telling him to go on the record.

FRANK
Howard, Chester
(to Chester)
He's hung up.

Chester nods. He spies a bottle of whiskey behind Frank. He simply walks behind Frank and pours some of the liquor into a glass cup. He takes a shot and then calmly gets himself together.

CHESTER

Well, you've heard it from The Man. He trusts you, Frank. Now slam it all shut, will you?

FRANK

(still stunned)

I'll talk with my people.

Chester gets up. Starts to leave.

CHESTER

You don't want any more conversations with me.

Chester leaves.

66 INT. OFFICE OF HAROLD MCGRAW.

66

Cliff looks calmly out the window. Smoking a pipe. Ralph Graves paces behind him. Frank sits on a coach. McGraw at his desk.

RALPH

Son of a bitch! "You don't want anymore conversations with me"?

FRANK

That is what the guy said.

CLIFF

It is simply not possible, Frank. Howard doesn't just get on the phone with people like that. Are you sure it was really Hughes?

MCGRAW

That seems like a fair question, Frank.

CLIFF

Somebody could be taking you for a ride.

FRANK

That may be, but, I don't think so. I know him. I've talked to him often enough before.

CLIFF

Yes, but that was many years ago. It must have been a faker. Howard would not do this to me. we've been through too much.

FRANK

Well I can't be absolutely sure, of course. Except, well, dammit, I know it was Hughes.

CLIFF

You know it was Hughes.

(To Ralph)

This is the type of nonsense I have to deal with. Embittered, jealous people. It stinks

to high heaven. I work hard for you. I get you the un-gettable, and now you accuse me-

MCGRAW

There are no accusations here. Right, Frank?

FRANK

I didn't say I believed Hughes, just that I am pretty sure it was him.

CLIFF

Because my word is important to me.

FRANK

Don't get me wrong, Cliff. I'm sure your manuscript is the pure thing.

CLIFF

Thank you.

FRANK

You know what happened? His advisors probably came to him, pissed off that he had done the book and convinced him that it would only add to his legal problems. He has to recant.

CLIFF

Shit. I really trusted the old man.

FRANK

Well, you may have really done him damage.

CLIFF

"Damage"? What are you talking about.

RALPH

You mean the O'Callaghan mess?

CLIFF

The O'what mess?

FRANK

Mike O'Callaghan. He's the Governor of Nevada. Imagine his mindset right now. The largest investor in the state- Howard Hughes refuses to go before the gaming commission because he claims to be too ill, too feeble. The state actually allows him to send in his fingerprints on a sworn affidavit. Now, Governor Mike picks up the paper and reads how this sick old man is traveling the whole world to meet Cliff Irving.

RALPH

He's ready to blow Hughes' casino licenses right to hell. Cliff, Frank and I had an idea.

MCGRAW

Which you can veto if you want...

FRANK
But, we think it may help things along.

CLIFF
What is it?

RALPH
Let Frank come over, read the book, ask you some questions. After you, Frank's the nation's top journalistic expert on Hughes. If we can say that he gave you the once over-

CLIFF
Fine, let's do it.

67 INT. CLIFF'S HOTEL ROOM.

67

Frank is pacing. A very calm Cliff is sipping some wine as he sits on a couch. The bed is strewn with manuscript pages.

FRANK
What was this blindfold? A handkerchief, a scarf, what?

CLIFF
Well, Frank for the life of me ... It was black. I know that. Maybe a kotex.

FRANK
Was it pinned or tied?

CLIFF
Jesus, I can't remember that. Is that important?

FRANK
Yes, it might be.

CLIFF
Well, I just don't remember.
(checking watch)
We've been at this for a while. Do you mind if I take a walk, get some air?

FRANK
That's be fine, Cliff. I can just read more while you're out.

Cliff puts on his scarf and jacket.

CLIFF
I won't be long.

Frank pats his hand on the manuscript.

FRANK
Take your time. Howard and I have a lot of catching up to do.

68 INT. LIFE MAGAZINE BOARD ROOM. DAY. DEC. 17, 1971.

68

A board meeting is in place. Ralph Graves sits at the head of the table. The rest of the room is filled with other editors and reporters.

RALPH

And, Ranan, what's the political cartoon going to be about?

RANAN

I think maybe we need to do something about the withdrawal from Vietnam. Something about not finishing the job.

RALPH

Okay, but let's not over-intellectualize it. And make sure it's witty. David, what can we do about the cover?

MANESS

We're talking to Brando's people about-

EDITOR

Brando? I thought he was (long gone from the-)

MANESS

He's playing the lead in this film about the Italian mob. It's based on "The Godfather." Big book and (I think that we ought to-)

There is a knock on the door and Frank sticks his head in.

FRANK

Excuse me, folks. Ralph?

Ralph looks around the table and nods. He gets up.

69 INT. LIFE MAGAZINE HALLWAYS. DAY

69

Ralph is leaned up against the wall, his arms crossed.

FRANK

I'm sorry, but you told me to get with you as soon as I had something.

Frank hands him a piece of paper.

RALPH

How'd it go with Cliff last night?

FRANK

(edgy)
Just read.

Ralph begins to do so.

FRANK (cont'd)

It's an affidavit, Ralph. I thought I'd go the extra step and make it official.

RALPH

(reading from paper)

"I am convinced beyond reasonable doubt as to the authenticity of the Howard Hughes autobiography. The conviction is based upon my long-standing personal familiarity with Howard Hughes, my readings of the manuscript, and my interviews with Clifford Irving. My belief in the authenticity is not shaken by denials of that story, nor is my belief shaken by the denials of the man which I believe to be Howard Hughes. Such actions are perfectly consistent with the Hughes I know."

(puts paper down)

Okay. What really makes you so sure?

FRANK

Last night, I'm reading the manuscript. I mean, I was done questioning Cliff and he goes out for a walk, so I'm just reading. Nice and quiet, right? Well, I come across this passage of Hughes describing a clandestine off-the-record meeting with a journalist. Boom! It dawns on me that I am that journalist. It was stuff that could only have come from Hughes.

RALPH

Wow. That's great. Just great. And nobody would question your assessment. If Osborne and Osborne come down on our side we are golden.

FRANK

Osborne the handwriting analysts?

RALPH

If they say the letters are real we're in business. They call them fake and it's back to writing obituaries for the Palookaville News.

FRANK

They won't call them fake. This is real, Ralph.

70 INT. AUDITORIUM. DAY - NYC. DEC. 22, 1971

70

It's a small auditorium. Ralph, McCulloch, and McGraw sit quietly. Into frame walks Cliff who sits down next to the men.

CLIFF

Gentlemen.

MCGRAW

Cliff.

RALPH

Thanks for coming.

CLIFF

Not a problem. You sure these guys are okay?
I just don't want to be screwed by some
bureaucratic incompetence.

FRANK

Osborne and Osborne has been around since
1905. They're the best.

CLIFF

I'll know very soon if they're the best.

MCGRAW

(to off-screen character)

We're ready now.

The camera pans over to a man in a bow tie, standing in front of a
screen. This is Paul Osborne. Standing next to him is a like looking
man. This is his brother Russell.

PAUL

First we'd like to thank you for this
opportunity.

RUSSELL

Very, very much.

PAUL

A part of history

RUSSELL

And we appreciate it.

PAUL

You asked us to determine whether or not the
handwriting in these alleged letters from
Howard Hughes to Mr. Irving are genuine. We
have come to a conclusion.

RUSSELL

The day we were given the assignment, I
personally flew to Nevada to examine genuine
examples of Howard Hughes' signature...

PAUL

And handwriting. Dating as far back as 1938.

RALPH

And where did you get them?

RUSSELL

Well, Mr. McCulloch called the chairman of the Gaming Control Board, who then gave us access to recent letters written by Hughes.

PAUL

Yes. In spite of the prodigious quantity of writing contained in the questioned documents, careful study has failed to reveal any features which lend debate to the common identity of all the specimens and questioned signatures and continuous writing. The speed, freedom, and carelessness with which both the specimen and the questioned writing is revealed by the quality of the ink lines, the smooth loops and strokes in the writing. For example it can be seen that many of the beginning and ending strokes come to a fine tapered point, indicating that the writing instrument was in motion as it came onto and lifted off the surface of the paper...

RALPH

Well, gents, with all due respect, I have no idea whatsoever what you are talking about.

RUSSELL

It's very simple. As a practical matter, based on our years and years-

RUSSELL

And years-

PAUL

That's right, "and" years of experience, we say it is impossible that anybody other than Howard Hughes could have written this letter. It's not even a million to one shot. Impossible.

MCGRAW

Impossible?

PAUL

Impossible.

RALPH

"Impossible" is good.

MCGRAW

That's it then. They are officially out of arguments.

FRANK

There's always "Nah-nah-na-nah-nah."

CLIFF

Well, gentlemen. Who gets to call Mr. Davis on my behalf and tell him to go straight to hell?

71 INT. MCGRAW'S OFFICE. DAY

71

McGraw, Frank, and Cliff lounge in the office. Very relaxed.

MCGRAW

Frank, I'm going to let it be you. You're the first person who was in contact with the little prick.

(into microphone)

Get me Chet Davis on the phone.

CLIFF

This is swell of you guys. I appreciate the support. Most authors wouldn't get this.

MCGRAW

We protect our people, Cliff. We stand by them.

FRANK

The establishment is always trying to tear the press down, Cliff. And you know why? Because it's our job to keep them honest.

CLIFF

I'm still so shellshocked by this whole business.

SECRETARY'S VOICE

Mr. Davis on two.

MCGRAW

Chester! Harry McGraw, here. How are you?

DAVIS

I'm about to find out how I am.

MCGRAW

Then that's bad news for you, Chester. I have Frank McCulloch here with me. You know him?

DAVIS

Of course, how are you Frank?

FRANK

We just got the results of the handwriting analysts on Hughes' letters to Cliff Irving. Osborne and Osborne, you know them?

DAVIS

My firm has used them, sure.

FRANK

Well, the bad news is that those letters are one hundred percent grade-A Hughes.

DAVIS

Bullshit. I don't believe it.

Cliff could not look more smug as he listens.

FRANK

It's true. I was there for the report. Those guys do not make mistakes.

DAVIS

Tell that to Dreyfuss.

MCGRAW

I believe the words they used were that it was 'impossible' that these letters came from anybody but Hughes. Impossible.

DAVIS

I think I should tell you guys that we've hired outside counsel to launch an injunction against your piece of fiction there.

MCGRAW

Launch away, Chester. We have your boss' signatures, his handwritten letters, our money has gone into his account, and the contents of the book are so far universally uncontroverted.

DAVIS

Alleged, alleged, alleged. Everything you said is alleged.

(beat)

I sure would like a crack at those letters and, of course, the book.

FRANK

I'm sure you would.

DAVIS

Christ Almighty. What am I doing here? Shoveling smoke? I am telling you guys you have been duped. Right now, the Man's physicians, his security agents, his Mormons are swearing out affidavits that he was in bed in Nassau when your guy was supposedly meeting him around the world.

MCGRAW

Affidavits from Hughes' team? That's like Bonnie being Clyde's alibi.

DAVIS

Here's a story for you guys to consider. A couple of years ago we were based in Las Vegas. Everyday the boss would read the paper. Once he comes across an article about nuclear testing in the Nevada desert. Well, you can imagine his... his feelings about such a thing. Howard Hughes and nuclear radiation are not good bedfellows. So he calls the Governor. Laxalt says to him, 'Nothing I can do about it, Lemme call Nixon.' So Laxalt calls the White House. Don't ask me how, but Nixon agrees to meet with Howard. So, Laxalt tells the boss, "Good news. The President has agreed to meet with you. He says next Tuesday's good for him." The boss says, good, Tuesday is good for me too. So, I say. Great, I'll fuel up the plane. Well, Howard Hughes says to me, Oh no. You don't get it. He has to come see me. I'm staying here."

(beat)

Howard Hughes would rather have atomic bombs dropped on him than fly to meet with the President of the United States. Now you tell me, Mr. McGraw, why would he skip all over the planet to spill his beans to *Clifford Irving*?

MCGRAW

You know, Mr. Davis, it just struck me that we have no evidence whatsoever, none, that you really represent Hughes. Cliff says you should take a lie detector test.

DAVIS

Something I am sure he'd never consider for himself, Mr. McGraw.

72 INT. POLYGRAPH ROOM. DAY

72

Cliff sits hooked to a polygraph machine. He seems irritated and uncomfortable. Into the room walks the Polygraph scientist RUDY CAPUTO. Frank follows him. Rudy turns to Frank.

RUDY

If you don't mind, a third party can screw with the subject's concentration.

FRANK

No problem. Go get 'em, Cliff.

Frank leaves the room.

RUDY

Sorry for the delay, Mr. Irving. I had to work out the bill between McGraw and Life.

CLIFF
 Whatever, I need to be out of here ASAP.
 (looks at watch)
 Thirty minutes tops.

RUDY
 I understand.

CLIFF
 Because I have a plane to catch to Spain.

RUDY
 Let's get to it then.

Rudy begins to whistle "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head" over:

73 CLOSE- POLYGRAPH MACHINE

73

Which we see from several angles. With each progressive angle, we get closer and closer. The following is thus OFF-SCREEN dialogue:

RUDY
 Is your name Clifford Irving?

CLIFF
 More or less.

RUDY
 More or less?

CLIFF
 It's my professional name.

RUDY
 Okay. Is your professional name Clifford Irving?

CLIFF
 Clifford Irving, right.

RUDY
 "Yes" or "No."

CLIFF
 I just want to make sure we're on the same page. How long is this going to take?

RUDY
 I have just a few of questions.

CLIFF
 Because I have to catch a plane to Spain tonight.

We get CLOSER and CLOSER on the polygraph. Now it should hit us:

The infamous **MYSTERY MACHINE** is a polygraph machine:

RUDY

Did you first met Hughes in Oaxaca, Mexico?

CLIFF

No, at Mount Alban...

RUDY

You first meet Howard Hughes at Mount Alban?

CLIFF

Yes.

And now it is clear that all the previous shots of the 'Mystery Machine" simply preceeded CLIFF'S' POV as told on the Polygraph.

DISSOLVE TO:

74 SAME SHOT-LATER.

74

RUDY

Did you witness Howard Hughes signing his contract?

CLIFF

Yes.

75 INT. OUTSIDE POLYGRAPH OFFICE.

75

Frank waits, pacing in front of the frosted glass. From behind the glass, we see Cliff being unstrapped and then literally bolting from his seat and coming out of the office.

FRANK

Hey, Cliff. How'd it go?

CLIFF

Ask Detective Friday. I've gotta go.

(beat)

And you're never getting me on one of those things again.

And before we know it, Cliff is out of there. Rudy walks out, looking over the paperwork.

FRANK

Well?

RUDY

I got into as much as I could with him. It really was not enough time.

FRANK

Well, we had what we had.

RUDY

Some stuff he was very solid on. In particular, all the meetings he had with McGraw-Hill and

Life, the bureaucratic stuff. But the machine also demonstrated some real nervousness.

FRANK

What do you mean?

RUDY

I asked if he'd kept any of the \$650,000 intended for Hughes and he seemed to fudge on the answer. He said he wasn't sure if the cash went to Hughes or somebody who worked for him.

FRANK

Well, he's never admitted any doubt to us.

RUDY

Right. See what I'm talking about?

FRANK

Are you saying that he's lying?

RUDY

Before you call a man a liar, you had better be sure. He's got inconsistencies, but there is no conclusive evidence he's lying. He may have just been edgy about missing his flight.

FRANK

What do you need to make it conclusive, then?

RUDY

Thirty more minutes.

76 INT. MCGRAW'S OFFICE. DAY.

76

McGraw, Frank, and Ralph sit around a coffee table.

MCGRAW

I don't get it. What exactly did the guy say? Is Cliff lying or not lying?

FRANK

It was inconclusive. Look, the truth is Cliff may be full of shit when it comes to how he obtained the story, all the places he went. That type of stuff. It doesn't jive with me.

RALPH

Nor me, frankly. It's too 007.

FRANK

But, I'm certain the book itself is genuine. I will never get over reading that absolutely accurate passage about me.

MCGRAW

There certainly is a mountain of evidence to back Cliff. Three experts have now confirmed Hughes wrote the letters and, most importantly, the damn checks cleared his account.

RALPH

Have we fingerprinted the letters?

MCGRAW

We tried. There are just too many prints.

There is a knock on the door. McGraw's secretary EVELYN enters.

EVELYN

Mr. McGraw, Chester Davis on line one.

McGraw presses a button on the SPEAKER PHONE.

MCGRAW

Chester? How are you?

CHESTER

So. (beat) How do you feel about that polygraph?

MCGRAW

We feel just fine as a matter of fact.

CHESTER

Hmmm-mmm. And is Mr. Irving still there?

MCGRAW

He's back in Ibiza for the holidays.

CHESTER

I think you may want him back in town.

77 INT. CLIFF HOUSEHOLD DAY.

77

PLEASE NOTE: The Cliff we have seen up to now is the Cliff as seen through his own eyes. Now, we get to see the real Cliff. Not as well dressed, not as refined, not as confident.

Cliff is playing with his son Ned. There is a knock on the door. We hear Edith opening the door and greeting somebody. She comes into the living room.

EDITH

There's a telegram for you.

Cliff reaches for it and tears it open. He begins to read.

CLIFF

Well, we certainly have started something.
It seems Howard has called a press conference.

78 INT. KENNEDY AIRPORT-INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL- NIGHT

78

CLOSE- PLACARD that reads "Cliff Irving"

Pull back to reveal JOHN GOLDMAN of the Los Angeles Times holding the placard. A stream of individuals comes out of customs, including CLIFF. He walks right up to Goldman.

CLIFF

I wasn't expecting a car.

GOLDMAN

I'm not a car. I'm John Goldman. LA Times.

CLIFF

Ah, Mr. Goldman. I've been reading your stuff.
(smiles)

Well, this reportorial endurance has to be rewarded

79 INT. BAR. MID-TOWN MANHATTAN.

79

Cliff and Goldman sit in a back booth. Several glasses are in front of them. The ashtray is overflowing. A cloud of smoke lingers in the air around them. They both have cigs imbedded in their mouths.

CLIFF

It was called "Pottsy".

Goldman is writing.

GOLDMAN

"Pottsy"? How's that spelled? With an "I-E"?

CLIFF

No, no. "P-O-T-T-S-Y". It ran for something like seven years in the Sunday News. You know, my dad may have been a cartoonist, but what I remember about him was this obsession with cops. That character Pottsy was a cop. We had this six room apartment on West End Avenue. It was jammed with billies and nightsticks and shields and helmets and uniforms. Some of the uniforms dated back three hundred years.

GOLDMAN

Wow, that is obsession.

CLIFF

Well, my grandfather Abraham was a cop. I guess that's where it came from. (beat) My dad was always pushing me to go Hollywood. He had this image of me, I think, sitting beside a swimming pool under the palm trees, directing or producing movies.

GOLDMAN

It looks like the glamour's there, anyway,

CLIFF

So, John... we've been here for hours and you haven't brought up Howard.

GOLDMAN

Well, I thought we'd work up to it.

CLIFF

I feel pretty worked up.

GOLDMAN

Okay, there's this press conference tomorrow. Hughes must be pretty serious. He hasn't talked with the press since-

CLIFF

1958. With Frank McCulloch. Do you know Frank?

GOLDMAN

Yeah, I know Frank. We all know Frank.

CLIFF

Good man, Frank. He read the manuscript. Gave it his seal of approval.

GOLDMAN

It's what I hear. To be honest, I think Frank's reputation is your ace in the hole with the boys. So, what are you thinking about the press conference?

CLIFF

Not much. I mean, I'm shocked he's doing it - if it's really him - because we know how reclusive he is. But, the truth is what it is. Listen, I was thinking...

Cliff puts his briefcase on the table and pulls out some paper.

CLIFF

If we agree that this is off-the-record, I'd like to get your thoughts on this.

GOLDMAN

Sure.

Cliff pushes the paperwork to Goldman.

CLIFF

I've been working on the Forward to the book. You know, my experiences with Hughes. My editors haven't even read it and I'd kind of like to have a professional eye give it a peek.

GOLDMAN
I'd be honored.

CLIFF
I think it's fun.

Goldman starts to read it. He is absolutely engrossed.

GOLDMAN
You met Hughes on the set of "The Outlaw"?

CLIFF
I was nine. That's a Jane Russell film. Howard pretty much invented the brassiere for her.

Goldman continues to read.

GOLDMAN
This is good stuff with you in the rain forest.

CLIFF
You think it's well-written? That's what most concerns me most. I know the material's great.

GOLDMAN
Not bad, Cliff. Really. Not bad at all.

Cliff gets up.

CLIFF
That means something coming from you. I need to give my attorney a buzz. I'm staying with him and he expected me a couple of hours ago.

GOLDMAN
(engrossed)
Sure, no problem.

We dolly behind Cliff as he walks into

80 INT. BATHROOM. NIGHT

80

and takes a leak. Then he goes to the phone that is in the mens room. He dials. On the other end we hear his attorney MARTY ACKERMAN.

MARTY
Hello.

CLIFF
Marty, it's me.

MARTY
Cliff, where are you? Was your plane delayed?

CLIFF
I'm here. I'm at some joint having drinks with John Goldman.

MARTY

The guy from the LA Times? Are you nuts?

CLIFF

He's okay, Marty. I think I've got him won over.

In the BG, a man walks in and takes a leak. He's staring at Cliff.

MARTY

Nobody is OK, Cliff. To these guys, you are only a story if you're a fraud. That's it.

CLIFF

I'll be careful. But, really, I know what I'm doing. Hughes is coming out with all his guns-

MARTY

Tell me about it.

CLIFF

And I need to ingratiate myself to these guys. I'm going to feed Goldman something, make him indebted to me.

MARTY

Goddamn, Cliff. This is about the shittiest idea I've ever heardright behind invading Russia in winter.

CLIFF

That's a good one, Marty. I'm gonna steal it.

Cliff hangs up. The man who was peeing taps him on the shoulder.

CLIFF

Yes?

MAN

Mr. Irving, can I have your autograph?

81 INT. RESTAURANT. SAME BOOTH. SAME TIME.

81

Goldman is still reading when Cliff sits down.

GOLDMAN

It's damn good, Cliff. Damn good.

CLIFF

It's quite a yarn, as they say.

GOLDMAN

Almost unbelievable.

CLIFF

Almost. (BEAT) Listen, John. You know the term "Deep background"?

82 INT. MCGRAW'S OFFICE. DAY

82

McGraw is on the phone, his back to us. Cliff is facing the camera. McGraw is holding a copy of the Los Angeles Times in his hands.

MCGRAW

I'm looking at it right now, Ralph.

RALPH (VO)

I'm not hearing any urgency in your voice.

MCGRAW

C'mon, it's fabulous publicity.

RALPH (VO)

Fabulous for you! It kills me! Now we can't use the revelations about Nixon. We've been scooped by the Los Angeles Times who, I might add, did not pay one penny for these rights. And Jesus, who the hell knows what Hughes will reveal in this press conference tomorrow.

MCGRAW

I understand, Ralph. If you want to maybe withdraw from (the book than we can-)

RALPH

Look, don't get funny with me here, okay? We had an agreement about publicity and don't tell me that Irving had nothing to do with this.

MCGRAW

Well, I for one can't point an accusing finger at him. However, I'll talk with him.

RALPH

Please do that.

Ralph hangs up.

MCGRAW

Okay Cliff, raise your right hand.

Cliff does so.

MCGRAW (cont'd)

I Cliff Irving, solemnly swear, that in an effort to protect the testicles of one Harold McGraw, I will not utter one word to the press without consent of McGraw-Hill. So help me God.

CLIFF
You got it, boss

INT. PARTY. NIGHT

Cliff is surrounded by a flock of admirers at what looks like an upscale party.

GUEST ONE
Do you think he has any chance at all?

CLIFF
I think McCarthy is some kind of joke. But you have to admire a man who gets into the race by calling all his opponents a "bunch of losers". Me I'm more Muskie. I hope he gets in.

GUEST TWO
And what about this space shuttle that Nixon is proposing?

CLIFF
He's a better fiction writer than I am. Now, say, doesn't anybody care about the important things like, uh, how the hell the Cowboys think they have a shot in hell of beating Miami?

As everybody giggles with appreciation, the party HOST walks past. Cliff grabs him by the arm.

CLIFF (cont'd)
Excuse me? Can you direct me to your phone? I need to make a quick call.

83 INT. HALL- PARTY. NIGHT/ CLIFF'S HOUSE-IBIZA. DAY.

83

Cliff is on the phone in a hallway. In the BG we hear the cocktail party. On the other end is Edith, who is in Ibiza. We INTERCUT.

CLIFF (cont'd)
How is Nedsky?

EDITH
He's almost over the flu, I think. He had a full lunch.

CLIFF
Great, great. Can I speak to him?

EDITH
He's napping now. And Barnaby's playing nicely.

CLIFF
(beat)
Edith baby, I'm scared.

EDITH

Yeah, I know.

CLIFF

You can have many opponents in this world.
About the worst one to have is Howard Hughes.

EDITH

I can't believe he's doing this conference.

CLIFF

If it's him.

EDITH

Now, listen, Cliff, I want you to know... are
you listening to me?

CLIFF

I'm right here.

EDITH

Your whole life, everything you have ever done,
has been designed for you to say, 'I've been in
a tougher scrape than this.'

CLIFF

(laughs nervously)

Two ex-wives will do that to you.

EDITH

He's coming after you with a pistol. You just
hit back with a cannon. That's all. You've come
too far.

CLIFF

We've come too far.

EDITH

That's right. Are you having a good time? It
sounds like you're at a bar.

CLIFF

A party, actually.

EDITH

Any pretty girls?

CLIFF

Nah. These days, my mind is just full of Edith.

84 INT. SHERATON-UNIVERSAL HOTEL, HOLLYWOOD. DAY

84

We are in a makeshift news conference room. Tables are arranged in a semi-circle around a small rectangular table. This is where it seems Hughes will sit. Around the semi circle sit JAMES BACON of the HEARST newspapers, GENE HANDSHAKER of the AP, GOODWIN HILL of the NY Times, MARVIN MILES of the LA Times, ROY NEAL of NBC (moderator), VERNON SCOTT

of UPI, and WAYNE THOMIS of the Chicago Tribune. Poking in his head is RICHARD HANNAH, HUGHES' PR Man. The reporters are chatting when they see Hannah.

HANNAH

Just a couple of more minutes, guys. The Man'll be with you soon.

MILES

It's been "soon" for a while.

HANNAH

He's just finishing up a movie.
"Funeral in Berlin."

MILES

Michael Caine's company is better than ours.

An aide walks up to Hannah and whispers in his ear.

HANNAH

Okay, the moment of truth has arrived.

Hannah leaves the room.

HANDEAKER

I haven't seen The Man in twenty years.

NEAL

The last time he did anything it was with Time.

HANDEAKER

Frank McCulloch. Out on a tarmac somewhere.

HILL

It was always out on a fucking tarmac.

NEAL

You think maybe we're being taken for a ride here? Maybe it'll be an imposter.

SCOTT

How do we tell? He's supposed to be....
different. Very different.

NEAL

We should ask him some trap questions. Test him. Since I'm moderating I'll start it off. And gents, For God's sake just in case it's him, let's steer away from questions about the women, especially Jean Peters.

SCOTT

Exactly. Let's remember why we're here.

The door opens and in walks Hannah. He is carrying a

85 PHONE AND VOICEBOX

85

which he puts down on Hughes' table.

NEAL

What's going on here, Dick?

Hannah says nothing. He dials. We hear ringing. A voice, slow and haggard, comes through the speaker. It sounds like Hughes.

HANNAH

Gentleman, Howard Hughes.

HUGHES

Gentlemen.

All the men greet him back, all looking stunned.

NEAL

Good afternoon, Mr. Hughes.

HUGHES

Good afternoon to you.

NEAL

One question all of us have from the outset is, where are you speaking from right now sir?

HUGHES

Paradise Island. Nassau seems to be a more widely known name. I notice accoutrements here that say it is Paradise Island. But in truth, New Providence is the main Island here in this group, and Paradise island, which used to be called Hog Island, is a part of that group. Which is where I am.

HILL

Mr. Hughes, we just want to be sure, you know, that it's you who we are talking to. We thought we'd ask some identifying questions-

HUGHES

Fair enough.

HILL

During your development of the Constellation airplane, you were assisted at some points by a professional pilot whose last name was Martin. Do you remember what his first name was?

HUGHES

I don't think I can help you with this Martin. I don't think I remember Mr. Martin.

THOMIS

I would like to take your memory back a ways to the times of your flights in 1937 and 1938, and ask you--the man who assisted you in setting up a good deal of this, particularly with the times and the FAA, was a man who was an executive with AVCO and I'm wondering if you remember his name?

HUGHES

No.

The reporters are starting to look one another over. Hannah is starting to shuffle his feet nervously.

MILES

I'd like to ask you one identification question. I'm sure that you can answer very quickly. At the time of your 'round-the-world flight when you-- just before you took off from Floyd Bennett Field, a superstitious woman placed a traditional good luck charm on your airplane. I'd like to know if you recall what it was, and where she put it?

HUGHES

No, I don't recall, and it certainly happened without my knowledge.

HANDSAKER

(whispering to Thomis)

This ain't Hughes. He hasn't gotten a single identification question right.

MILES

(in response to Hughes)

You spoke of it in a speech to the Washington Press Club when you returned. You said that a woman placed a wad of gum on the tail.

HUGHES

Well, I want to be completely honest with you. I don't remember that.

BACON

(now, a bit skeptical)

Can you tell us, Howard, anything about the Constellation? The Lockheed plane?

HUGHES

Yes, of course. I remember clearly the plywood cockpit and this feature that I am discussing -- oh, and another thing there that would be clearly remembered by everyone who worked on

that cockpit, was my continual complaints about the width, vertically-

DISSOLVE: FIVE MINUTES LATER

HUGHES

I was concerned with the visibility, and there was an everlasting struggle between the engineers of Lockheed who wanted better aerodynamic qualities-

DISSOLVE- A FEW MINUTES LATER

Hughes still yapping. The reporters stare at their watches..

HUGHES

When I came back I discovered that they had taken the dimensions that I had ...

HANDSICKER

(whispering to Thomis)

That's Howard alright.

THOMIS

You betcha.

HUGHES

... This clear glass was clamped, which, of course, cut down the vertical arc of visibility or width of visibility appreciably.

THOMIS

Mr. Hughes, we haven't seen you in fifteen years? Are you going to come out of exile?

HUGHES

I'm rapidly planning to come out of it. I am not going to continue being quite as reclusive, as you call it, as I have been because it apparently has attracted so much attention that I have just got to live a somewhat modified life in order not to be an oddity.

NEAL

Well then, I guess we're all convinced, Howard, that you are indeed, Howard.

HUGHES

Thank you.

NEAL

So Howard, talk to us about your autobiography, about Clifford Irving.

HUGHES

I only wish I was still in the movie business, because I don't remember any script as wild or as stretching the imagination as this yarn has

turned out to be. I'm not talking about the biography itself, because I have never read it. I don't know what's in it. But this episode is just so fantastic that it taxes your imagination to believe that a thing like this could happen. As for Clifford Irving, I don't know him. I never saw him. I have never even heard of him until a matter of days ago when this thing came to my attention.

86 INT. MCGRAW-HILL EXECUTIVE OFFICES

86

Cliff, wearing a blue blazer and turtleneck, and McGraw sit in front of an octagonal table. Around the table are three journalists: John Goldman (LA Times) Doug Robinson (New York times) and James Norman (AP)

GOLDMAN

How can you be so sure, Cliff?

CLIFF

That was not Howard Hughes talking. Although, the voice was an excellent forgery of what Hughes' voice sounded some years ago.

GOLDMAN

NBC sent the tape off for voice analysis-

ROBINSON

They compared it to his hearing before the Congress in 1938. They said the voice matched.

CLIFF

Even experts can be fooled.

ROBINSON

C'mon, give us something, Cliff. Something that he said that might have been off.

CLIFF

Well, the chap on the phone said that he had a beard and Howard does not have a beard. Also, Howard is lighter than the weight range given on the phone. In any case, whoever that was had more strength than Howard actually has. Howard would have taken several rests.

NORMAN

That all seems pretty circumstantial.

CLIFF

I'll tell you guys when I knew he was full of hooey. The phone Hughes explained that 30 years ago he crashed his H-1 plane because of a clogged fuel line. But the truth, and this is what Howard told me, is that Howard was forced to make a wheels-up landing because he pushed the aircraft too fast and froze it's engine.

GOLDMAN

Who was that on the phone then?

CLIFF

I don't have a clue. Look, my book is completely authentic, which is why so many people are worried, but for me it's a dead soldier. I just want to get on and finish my novel so I can take my wife to Java in the spring. Hopefully, what we can do now is put it all to rest. Let's do it, Harry.

McGraw nods.

CLIFF

Boys, have your photographers come in.

NORMAN gets up and walks to the door. Three photographers enter.

CLIFF

I've shown you almost ever piece of proof attesting to the authenticity of our book.

(holds up sheaths of paper)

Now, the coup de grace.

McGraw lifts up two checks in his right hand. Both of them are endorsed with Hughes signatures'.

Camera flashes.

We move in CLOSER and CLOSER on to the signature of 'H.R. HUGHES'

Now, we pull back and we see a photo of McGraw holding the CHECKS. WE PULL FURTHER BACK and see that the photo is on the front page of the New York Times. We pull back further to reveal

87 INT. RALPH' HOUSE. DAY

87

Ralph is holding the paper and pacing in the kitchen. His kids are at the table eating breakfast. His wife is drinking coffee.

RALPH

Harold... How did you expect me to react?! We just talked about this didn't we?... I know that your integrity has been challenged...I know that.....But you have a responsibility to protect the interests of Life Magazine in respect to this piece! Every thing you say to the press diminishes what we can print. Don't forget that we wanted Cliff to write a sidebar about his experiences!.. Look, Harold, I understand that you have to protect the honor of McGraw-Hill...Yes, I know, your father's company. But, dammit, Harold, I must insist, not one word to the press... No, I do not want to pull out... I don't want to hear this shit about other publications creaming to get the

story.....Okay, I have your word on that? Not one more word to the press?... Thank you.

Ralph hangs up the phone.

GRAVE'S WIFE

Are you done with the front page, honey?

88 CLOSE ON- FULL SCREEN IMAGE OF LIZA MINELLI

88

RALPH (VO)

Does anybody really want to see this? Do they want to get it in the mail?

89 INT. PHOTO ROOM. LIFE MAGAZINE. DAY

89

Ralph is examining a slide through a magnifier. Behind him is a young photo assistant.

RALPH

We're not talking Catherine Deneuve, here.

PHOTO ASSISTANT.

You have all the Judy Garland fans, for starters. And everybody seems to love the movie.

RALPH

You know (beat) I just don't know. (beat) We have Brando coming up on the cover. This'll be overkill. See if they want it over at Time.

The door opens and a young intern sticks his head in.

INTERN

Mr. Graves, I'm sorry to interrupt. You have a call on line four.

RALPH

Have you seen this movie "Cabaret"?

INTERN

Uh, no. But my mom has. She loved it.

RALPH

Hmmm.

INTERN

Sir, what should I do about the call?

RALPH

Not now. Could you take a message?

INTERN

It's that fellow from CBS, Mike Wallace.

RALPH

Is that right? Will you two please excuse me?

The photo assistant and intern leave. Ralph picks up the line.

RALPH (cont'd)

Graves here.

90 INT. FRANK'S OFFICE. DAY

90

Ralph is in a gander. He is leaning over Frank's desk yelling into the speakerphone. Frank sits back. On the other end is McGraw.

RALPH

THIS IS HOW YOU DEFINE NO TALKING TO THE PRESS?

MCGRAW (VO)

Sorry about that, Ralph. Mike Wallace just beat me to the phone. I am looking at my call sheet right now. You are right at the top.

RALPH

Great, I feel like a million bucks.

MCGRAW

What do you want me to do? Pull the interview? I'll do that if you want.

FRANK

That'll just make matters worse. Like we were hiding something.

RALPH

This Wallace is one mean prick. This is a pit bull. He's looking for... something. This is not somebody you want delivering your eulogy.

MCGRAW

Agreed. So what do you want me to do?

RALPH

I want Cliff to be ready for this sonuvabitch. And we want to get him ready.

91 INT. EMPTY OFFICE. DAY

91

Cliff sits quietly, very calm, in the middle of the unfurnished room. Frank reading from some notes is circling him like a vulture.

FRANK

Mr. Irving, you mean to say..

CLIFF

I don't think he's going to begin any question that way. That's too much of a cliché.

FRANK

Cliff, let's not get caught up in the trivial. Just pretend like I'm Wallace.

CLIFF

Okay, shoot.

FRANK

Mr. Irving, you say that you have over one hundred hours in interviews with Mr. Hughes.

CLIFF

(slight pause, then..)

Yes.

FRANK

No.No.No. The "Yes" has to come BANG! Right away. Don't think about the answer, hit it as reflex. Nobody has to think about the truth. And for God's sake, eyeball the man. You ever seen Mike Wallace work?

CLIFF

No. I don't watch television.

FRANK

Well, it's not a pretty picture, I'll tell you that. Okay, Mr. Irving, why in the world would a man as wealthy as Howard Hughes want to be paid for this book?

CLIFF

I dunno. You'll have to ask him.

FRANK

Bullshit, Cliff! The whole world sees that as a non answer! They know nobody's going to get to Hughes. You must have discussed it with Hughes.

CLIFF

We did, actually.

FRANK

Good. So, again...

93 INT. LIVING ROOM. MARTY ACKERMAN'S. DAY

93

The room is crowded with cables, lights, and cameras. Cliff, casually dressed, sits with MIKE WALLACE of "60 Minutes." Surrounding them is his team, the gang from Life, McGraw-Hill, and MARTY ACKERMAN, an avuncular-type attorney. We are in mid-interview. Cliff seems very composed.

WALLACE

What I find difficult to understand is why Howard Hughes wants money. After all, he has two or three, or six billion dollars.

CLIFF

Well, the actual figures of his holdings, as he told it to me, is \$2.3 billion. But, it's more

than that. The man's life story is worth something to him. Howard Hughes did not get to be a billionaire by giving things away for nothing. He has a certain pride. He feels, "I'm worth this much and that's what I want."

94 INT. VIDEO VAN. DAY

94

CREW MEMBERS watch the interview unfold on a bank of three monitors

CREW MEMBER 1
I'm telling you, he's full of shit.

CREW MEMBER 2
Irving or Hughes?

95 INT. ACKERMAN'S APARTMENT

95

Back to the scene of the interview

WALLACE
If he's such a sick man what in the world is he flying around the Western Hemisphere-and meeting you in all of these assorted place for?

CLIFF
Who said he was such a sick man?

WALLACE
Well, what was the necessity of traveling? If he's in that kind of shape, why couldn't you simply come to Nassau, to the Britannia Hotel, go upstairs and that's it?

96 INT. MCGRAW-HILL EXECUTIVE SUITES

96

Where a host of people are watching the interview. Harold McGraw leans forward in his seat.

MCGRAW
C'mon, Cliff. Cool. Calm. Collected.

CLIFF
(on TV Screen)
At the very beginning the specific arrangement between Mr. Hughes and myself was this: He said to me, "None of my people in my organization know about this. And none of them are going to know." The man who represents Howard in Nevada, Chester Davis has never met Howard Hughes in his life and never will

WALLACE
Because?

97 INT. NY HOTEL ROOM. NIGHT.

97

Chester Davis sits in his room, a room service tray by his side, watching the program.

CLIFF (ON TV)	DAVIS
Because Mr. Hughes doesn't want to	(To himself)
meet him.	Bastard

WALLACE
I don't think he likes Davis, from reading your book.

CLIFF
..... Maybe he's a good lawyer.

98 INT.ACKERMAN'S APARTMENT- REAL TIME

98

Ackerman and Ralph stand behind the cameras. .

RALPH
(whispering to Ackerman)
Cliff gave him a copy of the manuscript?

ACKERMAN
It was a condition of the interview
The cameras PUSHES IN on Wallace and Cliff.

WALLACE
One hears the stories that he's, you know, with long hair and long fingernails.

CLIFF
This is nonsense.

WALLACE
When you last saw him, what did he look like?

CLIFF
Hughes is almost as tall as I am, six--three.

WALLACE
Weighs?

CLIFF
Under a hundred and forty pounds.

WALLACE
Is he a good looking man, still?

CLIFF
He has the good looks of a man who once was extremely handsome and has dignity in his face.

WALLACE
Does he wear a beard?

CLIFF
Not a real one.

WALLACE
Not a real one?

CLIFF
What I mean is he has on occasion worn false
beards and false mustaches and wigs.

WALLACE
With you?

CLIFF
Mike, I said there's a James Bond setup here
that's out of the worst possible detective
novel you could ever read.

WALLACE
He wears beards and wigs and disguises?

CLIFF
When I met him the second time in Puerto Rico,
he had suddenly grown a full head of hair. And
I said, "What's that?" He said "Oh, it's a wig.
I bought it at the five-and-dime. It cost me
nine ninety-five." He said, "I have to watch
out." He says: "There are people always looking
for me. And there's a price on my head."

WALLACE
Have you tried to be in touch with him since?
Have you tried to tell him, "Mr. Hughes, come
forward and say this"?

CLIFF
I've said, "Howard, speak up. Get, you know,
call off the dogs." I've written him a letter
to the only address that I have at the moment
that I know is valid. I presume he will
surface. I don't know why he hasn't surfaced.
It distresses me. And I don't mean on my own
account. We have the proof, that's no problem.

WALLACE
There's no doubt in your mind that he's alive?

CLIFF
No, I assume he's alive.

99 INT. MCGRAW-HILL OFFICES

99

Same as before. Though we now pull back to reveal, Cliff pacing. On the television, Wallace is IN STUDIO talking directly to his audience.

WALLACE (ON TV)

Is the autobiography genuine? I can only say that it is laced with detail that one would think that only Howard Hughes could know.

We go to commercial. The TV is turned off. Every eye turns to McGraw.

MCGRAW

Is it my imagination or did Mike Wallace himself just give us his stamp of endorsement?

100 INT. TED WEBER'S OUTER OFFICE. DAY

100

Weber arrives for work, shaking snow off of himself. His secretary EDNA is pouring some coffee.

WEBER

By God, Edna, what mastermind decided New York had to be the center of the world? Why couldn't it be Miami or Honolulu?

Edna hands him his coffee.

EDNA

Sounds like a vacation is in the works for you and yours, Mr. Weber.

WEBER

Not now, it's not.

EDNA

Don't forget your 1:00 with Mr. Braverman at Barverman and Simpson. And there's a message from the IRS in Washington. His name's Mr. Walters. He says it's important.

WEBER

Ring him for me, would you, Edna?

101 INT. WEBER'S OFFICE. DAY

101

Weber moves behind his desk. Edith buzzes him.

EDNA (VO)

That's Mr. Walters on two.

WEBER

Ted Weber here!

WALTERS

Hi, It's Johnnie M. Walters.

WEBER

If it's an audit lemme know now.

WALTERS

No. No. That we'd just spring on you. Look, we received a certified letter here from a fella named Chester Davis-

WEBER

Aw, geez.

WALTERS

Says Howard Hughes isn't going to pay taxes on \$750,000 you guys say you gave him. They claim they never got the money. This has to do with that book, right?

WEBER

Yup. Look, tell them to prove it.

WALTERS

I'm sorry. The truth is you guys'll have to demonstrate Hughes actually received the money.

WEBER

I told them we needed somebody to witness Hughes signing the contracts.

WALTERS

You know, I saw that photo of Harry McGraw with the two checks. Your money was deposited in the Swiss Credit Bank. I'd go right to them and find out just what the hell is going on.

WEBER

Okay, then. Thanks.

Weber hangs up the line.

WEBER (cont'd)

Edna. Get me McCulloch. He'll need a visa to Switzerland, help make the arrangements

INT. ZURICH AIRPORT. DAY

Frank comes out of the gate, carrying a small bag. It's going to be a short trip. He searches and finds a man bearing a sign with his name on it. He approaches the man, who looks very dignified and well-dressed.

FRANK

Hi. I'm Frank McCulloch. Are you my driver?

MAST
No, sir. I am Dr.Mast.

FRANK
Dr. Mast? Well, this is a surprise. I was expecting to see you in town this afternoon.

MAST
I thought it best if we met here.

INT. AIRPORT RESTAURANT. DAY

Frank and Dr. Mast eat. Outside, planes take off and land.

FRANK
Thank you for seeing me, I know it's unusual.

Frank takes out a note pad

DR. MAST
Which is why I ask you not to take notes.

FRANK
This is not for publication. It's an internal investigation.

DR., MAST
Pens make me nervous.

Frank puts the pen away.

FRANK
As you wish sir. Now, what can you tell me about the Hughes account.

DR. MAST
I can tell you nothing about the Hughes account.

FRANK
Pardon me?

DR. MAST
There are rules, sir. Rules and... and...

FRANK
(defeated)
Regulations?

DR. MAST
That is exactly correct. Regulations. The privacy connected with one of our accounts is held with the same esteem as a confessional. Our minimum deposit is 26,000 francs. Our clients receive no interest at all. In fact, they must pay for the privilege of our secrecy. This is law. It was formed in 1934 to

assist Jews who were hiding their accounts from the Nazis. A bank manager who violates the secrecy can spend a half year in prison.

FRANK

And that's it. This is what you send me home with? A lecture on Swiss banking laws?

DR. MAST

You must respect our traditions and our laws.

FRANK

(Frank stands, Angry.)

Why did you have me come all this way if you were going to give me nothing?

DR. MAST

Perhaps our language barrier intervened.

Frank nods and starts to move away.

DR. MAST

Mr. McCulloch.

Frank turns around.

DR MAST

As a matter of... good faith, I wish to tell you that McGraw-Hill's money did not go into the account of a Howard R. Hughes, owner of the Hughes Tool Company of Houston, U.S.A. Nor was account number 320496 ever held by him.

Frank sits down. Actually, he plops down.

FRANK

Pardon me?

DR MAST

I am at great risk here.

FRANK

I assure you that I will not reveal you as my source. You have the word of Time Magazine. How much is in the account now?

DR. MAST

Of the \$650,000 deposited, roughly \$10,000.

FRANK

And who actually owns that account?

DR. MAST

That is all I can tell you. It is forbidden for Swiss banks to reveal any information unless there is evidence to believe a crime or fraud may have been committed.

MCGRAW

But that seems to be pretty clear, here

DR. MAST

Than I suggest you ask the local Swiss authorities to launch an investigation.

102INT. HALLWAY. SWISS BANK.

102

FRANK and DETECTIVE CORPORAL LACK, walk down A beautiful, marble floor. We hear the crisp click-clack of their heels on the floor. They come to a door and LACK knocks. He is beckoned in.

103INT. CONFERENCE ROOM. SWISS CREDIT BANK. DAY

103

This is a sparse room. One woman FRAU SCHAFFNER, very much the bureaucrat, sits quietly. Also in the room is DR. MAST. Sitting in the corner of the room is a man dressed all in black. This is PELOQUIN.

DR. MAST (FRENCH)

Corporal Lack, so good to see you.

LACK (FRENCH)

A pleasure as always. This is Frank McCulloch. He represents the interests of Time-Life.

PELOQUIN

If you don't mind, my French is rusty.

DR. MAST (ENGLISH)

Ah, that is most rude of me. Please allow me to introduce Frau Schaffner, in charge of customer withdrawals. This is Mr. Felix Holz, our cashier at our number one window.

FRANK (TO PELOQUIN)

And you are?

DR. MAST

Mr. Pelonquin works for Intertel. The President, in fact.

FRANK

Intertel? The detective agency?

PELOQUIN

Mr. Hughes asked me to assist you in resolving this matter. He wants to ensure that the American government gets all the tax dollars owed them. Do you mind if I start?

FRANK

(almost amused)

Please, by all means.

Pelonquin towers over Frau Schaffner. He hands her photostats of the checks, blown up from the newspaper.

PELOQUIN

Do you recognize these checks?

She looks them over and nods.

PELOQUIN (cont'd)

I ask you now, under penalty of obstruction of justice, were these checks in fact... endorsed in your presence by H.R. Hughes??

SCHAFFNER

Yes. They were.

PELOQUIN

Before your very eyes? You saw a passport to confirm it was indeed Hughes endorsing the check?

SCHAFFNER

Oui. Of course. You think I am lying?

PELOQUIN

You are telling me that Howard Hughes, the most famous exile since Napoleon, walked in here and deposited and then immediately withdrew over \$500,000? Personally?

From a purse, Schaffner pulls out a piece of paper.

SCHAFFNER

No, sir. That is not what we are telling you.

The paper is pushed forward. The four men gather around it. The camera pushes in where the document reads: "DEPOSITOR". Next to it we see the hand written name: "Helga R. Hughes."

104 INT. HAROLD MCGRAW'S APARTMENT. DAY

104

McGraw, Ralph, Frank, and Beverly sit in the living room, fidgeting, looking at their watches. Ted Weber is pacing.

WEBER

I have to be in court in...

(looks at watch)

Jesus, I should have been there by now.

MCGRAW

Imagine the balls on this old prick, trying to get an injunction on the book.

RALPH

And article.

WEBER

We should be okay, legally. No court wants to give the finger to the First Amendment.

RALPH

What do you mean "legally okay."

WEBER

I mean that unless Cliff has some pretty fucking good answers it may all be specious.

There is a distant KNOCK on the door.

FRANK

Cliff will have good answers. He has to.

We hear the door being opened, some pleasantries exchanged, a series of footsteps and then CLIFF and his attorney Marty Ackerman appear.

CLIFF

Hey, folks. What's going on? Why couldn't we meet at the office?

MCGRAW

This is something nobody can get wind off.

WEBER

You said it. Nobody.

MARTY

What is it?

WEBER

It's a fucking disaster is what it is. The God damn Hindenburg!

BEVERLY

I'm sure we'll get to the bottom of it.

WEBER

H.R. Hughes is a woman. A god damn woman!

CLIFF

What? Have you lost your mind? A woman?

FRANK

The Swiss bank spilled the beans. Just like that. H.R. Hughes is Helga R. Hughes.

Cliff sits down slowly. He appears in shock.

CLIFF

Jesus Christ. You guys are putting me on, right? The Swiss banks would never give up that information. They're too secretive.

FRANK

The Swiss authorities have issued an arrest warrant for Helga R. Hughes. They say her passport was forged.

RALPH

Do you have any clue what Newsweek is going to do when this leaks. They're gonna throw a gala celebration is what.

FRANK

My sources tell me that Lurch

CLIFF

Who the fuck is Lurch?

FRANK

Sorry, Detective Peloquin... he's already met with Katherine Graham. or maybe they just talked. But there was some communication there.

BEVERLY

You have to help us sort through this, Cliff.

MARTY

Maybe you'd best keep your mouth shut.

CLIFF

Why? I have nothing to hide.

MCGRAW

Cliff, level with us. We need to know the truth. Did you give the checks to Hughes?

CLIFF

Hughes himself. Yes. Into his hands.

WEBER

Boy, somebody is big-time full of shit.

CLIFF

(very thoughtfully)

I see three possibilities. One, all along I've been dealing with a phoney.

RALPH

Dealing with a phoney? Are you kidding me? That's not an option. A phoney? A phoney? Have you ever heard the term "laughing stock"?

CLIFF

I'm not saying it was a phoney, Ralph. It's just a possibility. A remote, remote one. It would be pretty elaborate ruse. Besides, I saw the guy. I know it was Hughes. The second possibility is that Hughes used some 'loyal

servant' to deposit and withdraw the cash.
(beat) The third I know is impossible.

WEBER

What is it?

CLIFF

The third possibility is that I'm the hoaxer.

FRANK

Well, we know that's not true. The evidence supporting the book is too gigantic.

MCGRAW

We still have to get to the bottom of this. Ted's supposed to be in court in an hour fighting Hughes' attempted injunction of our book and I don't know what to do. I just don't.

WEBER

Until this is cleared up, we have no choice...

MCGRAW

...And Marty, I assume you haven't heard it yet, but apparently, the Swiss police want Edith in Switzerland for questioning.

CLIFF

What! Now, they-they're going after my wife!

MCGRAW

They think from the description that the bank clerk gave them that she might be Helga.

CLIFF

She might be...? Have you people lost... Jesus... You know what? I'm going to fucking sue everybody! Everybody!

ACKERMAN

Okay, Cliff. It's time shut up.

CLIFF

I will not shut up.

(beat, lowers his head)

Look guys, I'm sorry. But I can't allow these people to...to... go after me by slicing up my family. I won't have it. (beat) I'm going home.

WEBER

At a time like this? We need you here. Now.

CLIFF

My wife needs me more than you guys do.

105 INT. NEW YORK SUPREME COURT. NEW YORK CITY.

105

The gallery is filled with JOURNALISTS. At the plaintiff table stands the Howard Hughes' team with CHESTER DAVIS. At the other table is TED WEBER. He is shuffling some papers. An ASSISTANT walks up to him.

ASSISTANT

He got on the plane, sir. We had him followed.

WEBER

That S.O.B. I'll be damned. He really left?

From the front of the courtroom.

BAILIFF

ALL RISE! The superior court of New York is now in session. The Honorable Judge Gregory Drummond presiding.

The judge takes his seat and gets right into action.

JUDGE

Very well. In the matter of Rosemont Enterprises, Inc., plaintiff, against McGraw-Hill Book Company, McGraw-Hill, Inc., Time, Incorporated, Dell Publishing Company, Inc., Cliff Irving, John Does one through three, defendants.

(beat)

You've left out my Uncle Joe in Florida.

There is some polite laughter.

JUDGE (cont'd)

Mr. Davis, it is never the disposition of this court or any other to grant a press injunction

WEBER

Your honor, this issue is moot for now.

JUDGE

Pardon me?

WEBER

McGraw-Hill is voluntarily suspending publication of Mr. Hughes' autobiography.

106 INT. AIRPLANE. NIGHT.

106

Cliff sleeps on the plane. Floating in and around him, is a montage.

1. Newspaper headlines from around the world.

2. Various editors barking orders to their reporters (in various languages): "Find this woman," "Cherchez la femme.."

3. A young Johnny Carson doing a routine about Howard and Helga.
4. A porno theatre in times square putting up a billboard for a film called "Howard and Helga."
5. Political cartoons about the affair.

107INT. RALPH'S OFFICE. DAY

107

Ralph stares out the window looking at the skyline. He is holding a newspaper in his hand. Frank enters.

FRANK

Boss.

Ralph lifts up the paper. It is a copy of the Jerusalem Post.

RALPH

Somebody sent me this. It's a review of a book Cliff wrote about the 6-day war. Quote: "The events in the book never occurred at all except in someone's vivid imagination."

(beat)

You still believe him?

FRANK

I believe the autobiography is genuine.

RALPH

You sure?

There is no response from Frank

RALPH (cont'd)

Frank, get on a plane to Ibiza. Do it now. And do what you do best. Come back with the truth.

108INT. PLANE. DAY

108

As it lands in Ibiza. Through Cliff's window, we see all the press assembled, ready to pounce. Cliff turns to the man next to him.

CLIFF

Again, I must deal with this.

The other passenger leans over to look out the window.

PASSENGER

You must be an important man.

(beat)

Dick Eder. New York Times.

CLIFF leans back in his chair and smiles a small, triumphant smile.

109 EXT. TARMAC. DAY.

109

The plane stands behind Cliff as he addresses the throng of reporters. He has his arm around Edith. The two children are next to him.

CLIFF

This is bullshit. If anybody, and I mean anybody, accuses my wife of being this Helga Hughes, they'd best be prepared to go to court.

REPORTER ONE

The Swiss authorities say that Helga Hughes is a woman with long dark hair.

CLIFF

(points at Edith's blonde hair)

See, they should prepare their script better.

REPORTER TWO

Cliff, if the book is real, why is there so much effort to kill it. What's the reason?

CLIFF

There are probably 2 billion reasons behind attempts to stop this book, and all are green and have a rectangular shape.

REPORTER THREE

There are reports that Hughes has offered you \$5 million not to publish your book.

CLIFF

(laughs)

That is not true. Unfortunately.

REPORTER FIVE

Are you returning to New York anytime soon?

CLIFF

I will remain here until I am called back to New York for what I consider a valid reason.

REPORTER SIX

And what are you going to do now, Cliff?

CLIFF

We're going to celebrate the successful completion of my book. You're all invited.

110 INT. CLIFF'S HOUSE. DAY

110

A remarkable scene. Several reporters, Cliff, Edith, and, of course, Elmyr, are having what appears to be a cocktail party. Cliff speaks jovially throughout, just enjoying the hell out of his new celebrity.

CLIFF
 (to reporter)
 Do you really think I'd involve my family in
 such an enterprise? My wife, my kids, whom I
 love?

111INT. AIRPLANE. NIGHT.

111

Frank reads SWISS POLICE DOCUMENTS while the other passengers sleep.

112INT. CLIFF'S HOUSE. SAME AS EARLIER

112

As the party continues. We are now with Edith as she chats with another reporter. Cliff sits next to her enjoying his wine.

EDITH
 Listen, if I'd taken that \$650,000, do you
 think I'd be sitting here with this man? I
 tell you the whole thing is a frame-up, just
 like in the time of the Gestapo.

113EXT. AIRPORT. AFTERNOON.

113

Frank walks up to a taxi cab in front of the airport.

DRIVER
 Where you go, Mister?

FRANK
 Take me to the American writer on the hill.

114INT. CLIFF'S LIVING ROOM. EVENING

114

ELMYR is entertaining a group of the journalists.

ELMYR
 Listen gents, I have seen that handwriting. It
 would take a genius to forge it and Cliff, dear
 boy, is no genius at anything.

There is a KNOCK on the door. Edith opens the door and yells out...

EDITH (cont'd)
 Hello! I'm Helga Hughes.

FRANK
 I'm Frank McCulloch.

CLIFF
 Frank, my friend. Welcome! You're just in time.

DISSOLVE TO:

EDITH is serving drinks and snacks. The CAMERA pushes through the crowd into the DINING AREA where, around the table, a POKER game is going on. At the table are CLIFF, FRANK, ELMYR, and Susskind.

FRANK

A pair of Aces bets five bucks.

ELMYR

That's enough for me.

Elmyr folds.

SUSSKIND

Aaaah, I'm out. I can't even beat your board, Frank. What did I do to deserve the ungodly cards I have been getting?

CLIFF

You know what, Frank? I'm going to raise you. I'm going to raise you your five bucks.

Frank smiles. He observes Cliff's open cards and then his own.

FRANK

I have two aces. You have a four, five, seven, and eight. There is only one possible way for you to beat me and that's if you have a six. Then nothing I have underneath wins.

CLIFF

Exactly.

FRANK

So, you are either bluffing or you are not.

CLIFF

I think that you should raise me and find out.

FRANK

I think I will. I raise you twenty dollars.

SUSSKIND

I love it!

CLIFF

You know, Frank. For your lack of trust, I raise you back another twenty.

Frank stares at Cliff. Cliff's face is rock still. Now Frank notices something. Cliff is playing with his

GOLD WEDDING BAND

spinning it around his index finger

FRANK

Okay, Cliff, I believe you. I fold.

Everybody laughs as Cliff brings in all the chips.

FRANK (cont'd)
Can I see your card, Cliff?

CLIFF
You sure you want to see it?

FRANK
Quite sure.

Cliff turns over a card and it is a JACK. Everybody laughs.

FRANK (cont'd)
Good play, Cliff. Good play.

SUSSKIND
(a near guffaw)
Good play.

ELMYR
You've never played with Ibiza's most notorious bluffer. You can't believe a word he says. His game is so figured out, there isn't a house without a Cliff Irving IOU.

FRANK
Well, somebody has to be the game chump.

115 EXT. IBIZA BASKET BALL COURT. DAWN

115

Cliff is shooting some hoops on his own. It's impressive, athletic, almost violent. We stay on him as boom-boom-boom, ball after ball is slam-dunked. In the BG, Frank moves to the court

FRANK
Hey, Cliff.

Cliff is distracted and misses an easy lay up. The ball dribbles over to Frank's feet. He picks it up and throws it to Cliff.

CLIFF
Thanks. You wanna play a quick one on one?

FRANK
Nah.

CLIFF
100 bucks a point. I'll spot you five.

FRANK
I think you have enough of our money.

Cliff does another lay up. BAM! In it goes.

CLIFF
I'll never have enough of your money.

FRANK

Listen, Cliff, I'm heading back today. The boys are pretty pissed off. I mean, look, you and I, we both know, I mean we know that the book's for real. But, with this Helga thing- well, they figure some funny business is up.

CLIFF

I agree, Frank. Some funny business is up. But not from me and certainly not from Edith.

FRANK

Graves just called me and said that Life and McGraw-Hill have asked the DA and the Feds to check into this whole thing, open up a grand jury. That sort of thing.

CLIFF

Jesus. My own people. *Et tu Harry McGraw?*

FRANK

Well, look at it positively, Cliff. A Grand jury will exonerate you.

CLIFF

I thought something was up. Marty Ackerman telegraphed me and said something was up. I figured it had to do with "Fake," but I guess not.

Cliff bounces the ball at the free-throw line.

CLIFF (cont'd)

Everybody wants a piece of my ass. I know just how Howard feels.

The ball hits the backboard and bounces beyond Cliff, down the court. Cliff hunches over, breathing hard. Frank pats him on the back.

FRANK

See you in New York, Let's nail these fuckers.

116 INT. KENNEDY AIRPORT GATE. DAY.

116

Cliff stands amongst a throng of 100 reporters. Edith is by his side. So are his two young boys.

REPORTER SIX

Mr. Irving-

CLIFF

(pointing to throat)

I have laryngitis. This has been... the most....horrid...experience....of my life.I

will have no comment until I get my voice back
and my wits and get 24 hours of rest.

REPORTER SEVEN

Did you personally hand Mr. Hughes a check for
\$275,000

CLIFF

Yes.

REPORTER EIGHT

And what did he say?

CLIFF

"Thank you."

REPORTER NINE

How do you respond to Mr. Hughes' written
affidavit that he has never....

But Cliff has moved on past the crowd of reporters.

117 INT. LOCAL BAR. NIGHT

117

Frank and a few other patrons are watching a basketball game on
television. Everybody seems to be cheering and into it, except for
Frank, who is nursing a beer. In from the cold comes John Goldman,
knocking snow from his jacket as he does. Goldman walks up to the
bartender who points out Frank. Goldman approaches Frank and sits next
to him.

FRANK

Good game going on, huh?

GOLDMAN

Lakers got the longest winning streak ever
going.

FRANK

I wasn't talking about basketball.

GOLDMAN

Oh. Yeah. Look, I was wondering-

FRANK

Look, John, I like your stuff. As a reporter,
I've got to admire you. But, for the time
being, I'm really a corporate-type. I can't
shoot the shit with you.

GOLDMAN

I understand.

FRANK

Do you want a drink?

GOLDMAN

No. Thanks I... I want to give you a heads up. I'm going with a story that we have found Cliff Irving's alibi.

FRANK

What?

GOLDMAN

His exoneration. That should make you happy. I've got a mole who says you believe old Cliff.

FRANK

Off the record?

GOLDMAN

Completely.

FRANK

There's stuff in there about Hughes and me..... It could only have come from Howard. It sure as shit didn't come from me. In any case, the handwriting, all that stuff. It's pretty solid. Besides, you've met Cliff. He's no criminal mastermind.

GOLDMAN

Just a nice guy who discovered some gold.

FRANK

So, what do you have?

GOLDMAN

Okay, follow me. In his affidavit, Cliff talks about a fella named George Gordon Holmes. The middle man. Whatever you want to call it. Problem is, surprise-surprise, nobody can find this Holmes. You know what I think?

FRANK

Tell me.

GOLDMAN

I think Cliff is holding out on us. He knows exactly who the guy is- but he's an honorable journalist and he won't give up his source.

Goldman slams his briefcase on the table. He clicks it open and pulls out some photos. Frank looks them over.

GOLDMAN (cont'd)

That's John Meier. Up until recently, he was Hughes' ecological guru.

FRANK

Okay. So?

GOLDMAN

Cliff writes in his affidavit that he once met Holmes at the corner of Sunset and Sweetzer.

FRANK

I remember that. I'm not following.

GOLDMAN

John Meier's office is on Sunset and Sweetzer.

FRANK

(looking over photos)

He fits Cliff's description perfectly.

GOLDMAN

(leans into Frank)

Let's go to Cliff. You're the only one with the access. We ask him about - No, we tell him we know all about Meier. Once he confirms, Cliff and the book are saved. So are Life and McGraw-Hill.

FRANK

(continues to look at photo)

I'll be a son of a bitch.

118 EXT. DOORSTEP- ACKERMAN'S TOWNHOUSE. NIGHT

118

Frank and John Goldman ring the doorbell. The door is open and we see Mrs. Ackerman.

FRANK (cont'd)

Mrs. Ackerman?

MRS. ACKERMAN

Yes?

FRANK

I'm Frank McCulloch with Time-Life. This is John Goldman with the Los Angeles Times-

MRS. ACKERMAN

They're down in the basement with Marty. But they asked not to be disturbed.

She begins to close the door.

GOLDMAN

Please, just...tell Cliff we know about Meier.

MRS. ACKERMAN

Meier what?

FRANK

Just Meier. We'd appreciate if you'd tell him now.

119 INT. BASEMENT KITCHEN. ACKERMAN'S HOUSE.

119

Cliff and Ackerman are each munching on a sandwich.

CLIFF

This is the epitome of times that try men's souls, Marty. I've got this LeGros situation-

MRS. ACKERMAN (OS)

Cliff?

CLIFF

Yup?

MRS. ACKERMAN

Frank McCulloch is here with some young fellow from the Los Angeles Times.

ACKERMAN

C'mon, for Chrissakes, we're seeing nobody now!

MRS. ACKERMAN

He says to tell you that they know about Meier.

Cliff's face goes ashen.

MRS. ACKERMAN (cont'd)

Cliff?

CLIFF

I-I heard you. Would, uh, you be a dear and ask them to just wait in the living room?

MRS. ACKERMAN

Certainly.

ACKERMAN

What's going on here, Cliff? You look like the whole world just collapsed underneath you.

CLIFF

(burying his head)

If they know about Meyer, they know everything.

ACKERMAN

Everything? What do you mean by that? Who the fuck is Meyer?

CLIFF

I think I need to meet with the DA.

120 INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

120

Frank and John Goldman pace as they wait for Cliff. After a few seconds, Cliff and Ackerman enter.

ACKERMAN
Gentlemen, how are you?

FRANK
Hey, Mr. Ackerman.

ACKERMAN
I regret to inform you that I am no longer the attorney for Cliff Irving. As my last act, I advised him not to chat with you guys, but-

CLIFF
I think I owe it you. Especially you, Frank.

ACKERMAN
If you'll excuse me.

Ackerman leaves.

CLIFF
Well.

GOLDMAN
What's the story ?

CLIFF
How did you guys ever figure it out about Meyer?

GOLDMAN
A little detective work.

CLIFF
Aw hell, I suppose it doesn't really matter. If you know, you know. You guys may have guessed it already, or maybe you did not, but Edith is Helga Hughes. Edith is Helga.

FRANK
Christ, Cliff.

121INT. SWISS BANK. DAY- FLASHBACK

121

Edith, dressed to the hilt and looking gorgeous in her all black outfit walks down the marble hallways. We hear the clickity-clack of her heels on the marble floor. She is approaching the camera. We hear Cliff in VO-

CLIFF
She wore a black wig, wore sunglasses, she must have looked fantastic.

122 CLOSE- HAND HOLDING PASSPORT- FLASHBACK CON'T

122

CLIFF

We took Edith's passport. I altered some of the digits, changed the name to Helga Hughes and pasted a photo of Edith with her wig.

Edith walks up to a window. She hands a check to Felix Holz who examines it and the passport.

CLIFF (cont'd)

Piece of cake.

123 INT. SAME BANK.DAY

123

Edith, dressed the same way, marches down the hallway, carrying a bag.

CLIFF

A few days later she simply returned...

Edith comes to a window that says "Withdrawals" atop it. Frau Schaffner is there.

CLIFF (cont'd)

And withdrew cash. She did it in Francs and not dollars, so she wouldn't draw attention.

124 CLOSE- MONEY PUT INTO BAG.

124

DISSOLVE TO:

125 EXT. ZURICH BUSINESS DISTRICT. DAY SUPER: MAY 27, 1971

125

Edith, in full costume, crosses the street and walks into another bank.

CLIFF

And she deposited it in a bank across the street. She used the name Hanne Rosenkrantz- that was her ex-husbands' wife. She'd somehow gotten her ID.

126 INT. MARTY ACKERMAN'S LIVING ROOM. SAME TIME

126

FRANK

Oh, boy. Boy oh boy.

(beat)

How much of the money's left?

CLIFF

A lot.

FRANK

A lot?

CLIFF

We took about \$150,000 to Ibiza. I brought another \$50,000 here. The rest's in the bank.

FRANK

What I don't get Cliff is why didn't you go yourself. You said yourself that you loved Edith too much to put her through this type of-

CLIFF

Enterprise? Truth is, my German and French are terrible. It'd never work. What are those? Are those photos?

FRANK

These are photos of Meier. John thought that your physical description of Holmes matched Meier. He's very close to Hughes, a former ecologist. He's running for the United States Senate in New Mexico.

CLIFF

Meyer's running for senate? Meyer?

Cliff starts looking at the photos.

CLIFF (cont'd)

I don't see him here.

Frank leans over and points to the photo.

FRANK

It says it on the name tag. John Meier. See.

Cliff looks at them again. A look of sad realization.

CLIFF

Frank, can you and I maybe take a walk? Sorry, John, it's Time-Life business.

GOLDMAN

No problem.

12 EXT. NYC. NIGHT

127

Cliff has his hands deep into his pockets. He's shivering.

FRANK

I don't know how the boys will take this.

CLIFF

Look, Frank, I don't have an attorney right now-

FRANK

Marty just abandoning you was pretty unprofessional if you ask me.

CLIFF

Well, He's not a criminal attorney. He's okay, Marty. A good man. He used to run the Saturday Evening Post, you know.

FRANK

I didn't know.

CLIFF

I'm afraid he feels a bit deceived. In any case, I'm flying solo now. Maybe my big confession in front of you guys was a mistake.

FRANK

Well, better now than *after* publication.

CLIFF

I'm going to see the district attorney in the morning. I'm going to come clean on this whole money issue. Could you ask John to hold off a day? Until I speak with the DA?

FRANK

I'm sure that he'll agree.

CLIFF

There's something else.

FRANK

It gets better?

CLIFF

Frank, my book is 100% genuine (but)

FRANK

I know it's genuine. That's why this Helga thing has thrown me for a loop.

CLIFF

The truth is *Hughes* asked me to make the phoney deposits. This is off-the-record, right?

FRANK

Off-the-record is the story of my life.

CLIFF

Hughes had no place to put the money because he didn't want his aides to know about the book. I gave him the checks, he endorsed them, and we agreed to have Edith deposit them. He was giving me 100K for the effort. We were going to be hush-hush on the taxes.

(beat)

ToO bad this is off-the-record, huh?

FRANK
(slapping his forehead)
Jesus.

Frank spots a phone booth and races into it. He starts to dial. Cliff opens up the doors.

CLIFF
What are you doing?

FRANK (INTO PHONE)
C'mon...c'mon...
(to Cliff)
Graves wrote you a little testimonial in tomorrow's Life Magazine. I'm sorry, Cliff, but I gotta pull off a pretty big cliché here.
(into phone)
Great. I'm glad you answered. Look, have you started the run for tomorrow's issue....hmm-hmm. Okay look, I'm Frank McCulloch. Do you know who I am? Good.
(shrugs to Cliff)
Stop the presses.

128 INT. RALPHS' OFFICE. DAY

128

Frank is sitting on a couch, ringing his hands. Ralph is pacing.

RALPH
Fuck - fuck - fuck.

FRANK
Ralph-

RALPH
I've spent the whole morning staring at the phone, waiting for Headley Donovan to call and make a testicle sandwich outta my balls. Do you know how much it costs to stop the presses?

FRANK
I'm sure it's expensive.

RALPH
So expensive I have no clue how expensive.

FRANK
Well, the new cover and the new article you wrote will sell the hell out of this issue.
(beat)
It was the right thing to do, Ralph.

At that moment, Ralph's phone rings.

129 EXT. PRESS CONFERENCE-FOLEY SQUARE. DAY

129

Cliff stands before reporters with his new attorney MAURRY NESSON.

NESSON
One at a time, please.

REPORTER TEN
What is your name.

NESSON
M-A-U-R-R-Y N-E-S-S-O-N. I will be happy to
take your questions.

REPORTER TWELVE
What happened in there, Maurry?

NESSON
Mr. Irving wanted to tell the district
attorney's office- and did tell them was that
his wife actually opened the account in
Switzerland. It was opened in H.R. Hughes'
name. Mr. Irving came to tell them that Mrs.
Irving opened the account. Mr. Irving wants to
make sure that you understand that she also
voluntarily told the Swiss authorities of this.

REPORTER THIRTEEN
Are you prepared to call the book a fraud.

NESSON
Certainly not. This book is authentic.

There are some groans and "C'mons" from the reporters.

REPORTER ELEVEN
How do you feel about the fact that there will
be not one but two Grand jury's, one federal
and one state, convening next week?

NESSON
I feel fine. My client will be vindicated.

130 EXT. MCGRAW-HILL BUILDING. DAY

130

McGraw reads a prepared statement before a flock of reporters.

MCGRAW
We are stunned at today's developments. Until
this moment, we had no indication Mr. Irving
was implicated. However, today's developments
leave unresolved the source of the information
in the manuscript. Myself and my editors have
always been impressed with the apparent
authenticity of the manuscript.

131 EXT. FOLEY SQUARE. DAY.

131

Another press conference. U.S. Attorney WHITNEY SEYMOUR and New York DA
FRANK S. HOGAN before the reporters.

SEYMOUR

The United States government and Mr. Hogan here with the New York DA's office have agreed to conduct a joint investigation into this matter, looking into state and federal violations.

REPORTER FIFTEEN

Have you issued any subpoenas yet?

HOGAN

We have issued over 100 subpoenas...

REPORTER SEVENTEEN

Is Howard Hughes one of those people?

SEYMOUR

We haven't gone far enough into the investigation to know if we'll really need him.

REPORTER SIXTEEN

There is a rumor that Mr. Irving has been granted immunity in exchange for waiving his Fifth Amendment rights before the Grand Jury.

SEYMOUR

Mr. Irving has made no such agreement with us.

REPORTER FIFTEEN

Other than the money situation, are you investigating the validity of the book itself?

HOGAN

We will get to the bottom of everything.

132 INT. GRAND JURY. DAY.

132

Cliff sits in a witness chair. AS Seymour paces in front of him. There are twenty-three people, making up the Grand Jury, looking on. We are in mid-inquiry...

CLIFF

I'll take the Fifth on that one.

Seymour looks over at the judge.

SEYMOUR

(pleadingly)

Your honor-

JUDGE

That is Mr. Irving's privilege.

SEYMOUR

Mr. Irving, would you submit to this grand jury a sample of your handwriting?

CLIFF

I am invoking my fifth amendment privilege.

SEYMOUR

Wouldn't a sample of your handwriting exonerate you?

CLIFF

I again invoke my Fifth amendment privilege.

- 133 INT. CAFETERIA. FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER.

133

Cliff and Edith are each having a coffee and cake.

EDITH

I told them, 'No way.' No handwriting samples.

CLIFF

"No Way." Is that what you actually said?

EDITH

It's not what I said said. What I said was what Maurry told us to say-

CLIFF

About the Fifth amendment.

EDITH

No, that thing about how a wife doesn't have to testify against her husband.

CLIFF

You just stick to your guns. There is not a damn thing that they can do, you know.

A waitress named Eleanor walks up to the table.

ELEANOR

Mr. Irving?

CLIFF

Yes, ma'am.

ELEANOR

May I have your autograph?

Cliff takes a napkin from the napkin holder. He looks at her name tag. He begins to inscribe. We move CLOSE ON. "To Eleanor, Very truly, Clifford Irving."

134 INT. INTERROGATION ROOM. DAY.

134

Susskind sits quietly as he is being hammered by a FRANK HOGAN.

HOGAN

Come on Mr. Susskind! A PRUNE? A FUCKING PRUNE?
THIS IS WHAT YOU ARE TELLING US.

SUSSKIND

Yes.

HOGAN

Look! You have big charges pending against you!
Big! Years in jail, Dick. Mail fraud. It's a
\$1,000 fine and five years for each mailing.

SUSSKIND

Five years? C'mon. For mail fraud?

HOGAN

Look, Dick. You are a high profile case. *High profile.* It means when I convict you and you'd better fucking believe you'll be convicted - we're going for the biggest sentence possible.

SUSSKIND

So-so-so what do you want from me?

HOGAN

(leans forward)

The truth may make those mail fraud charges a distant memory.

135 EXT. FOLEY SQUARE STEPS. DAY

135

Now NINA VAN PALLANDT is on the steps, having her photo taken by a zillion reporters. There is a big-time POP-POP-POP to the FLASHBULBS. Whenever she is not speaking, NINA makes it a point to pose before the cameras. By her side is her manager JOHN MARSHALL.

NINA

I really am flabbergasted. I can't understand the whole thing.

REPORTER TWENTY

What happened then in Mexico?

NINA

We did what all tourists do. We went sight-seeing and spent a couple of days on the beach. We were never apart for three and a half days.

REPORTER EIGHTEEN

So, you're saying that Cliff is lying?

MARSHALL

We are saying that the time elements that Mr. Irving is talking about do not agree with hers.

REPORTER TWENTY-ONE

Nina, do you love, Cliff?

NINA

No. But he loves me. He asked me to marry him.
I'm sure that's why he thought I'd stand by him.

MARSHALL

(looking at watch)
Time to go. Thank you all.

Nina waves to the reporters as she ascends the steps, basking in her fifteen minutes.

136 MONTAGE-

136

Of grand jury witnesses going up the stairs of the courthouse, each identified by a SUPER: Robert Mahue-former Hughes aide; Peter Mahue, Robert's son; John Meier; Stanley Meier; Marty Ackerman; Mrs. Ackerman; Richard Susskind; all the gang from McGraw-Hill and Time-Life; Max, et al.

137 INT. BAHAMIAN CAPITAL. DAY

137

Two American POSTAL INSPECTORS sit in an office that is very, well, white. Everything is white. The windows are open and we see the lush exterior. Behind a desk dressed all in white, is a black man, some government official.

INSPECTOR ONE

How do we go about doing such a thing?

INSPECTOR TWO

People have tried this for fifteen years,
nobody has been able to serve him.

OFFICIAL

And you plan to fly Mr. Hughes all the way back
to New York to appear before a Grand Jury?

INSPECTOR ONE

We're going to impanel a grand jury in the
Virgin islands.

INSPECTOR TWO

Maybe Puerto Rico. But we need your help. Do
you have any ideas?

The official passes over some papers to the two Inspectors.

OFFICIAL

These are some of Mr. Hughes' Mormons. They
seem to have work permit problems. Perhaps...
(huge smile)
A raid is in order.

138 INT. HOTEL LOBBY. DAY

138

Twenty Bahamian police burst through the doors, led by the Official and the two postal Inspectors.

139 INT. STAIRWELL. DAY

139

Police race up the stairs.

140 INT. ELEVATOR. DAY

140

It's packed with police, our OFFICIAL and the INSPECTORS. The door opens and everybody pours out. At the same time, other police come from out of the stairwell. Everybody races toward the huge doors that are the entry to the Hughes apartment. The Official bangs on the door.

OFFICIAL

Police! Open up.

They hear nothing. Within seconds, the official takes out his weapon and fires out the lock. The whole mass of people burst in and discover...

SHEER EMPTINESS

Everything has been cleared out.

141 EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN. DAY.

141

Ten eastern Lockheed jets in flight.

142 EXT. PHELAN HOME. DAWN.

142

We follow JIM PHELAN a lanky fifty year old man down the pathway to his house and down the driveway. He is wearing his pajamas. He picks up two newspapers. One is the LOS ANGELES TIMES and the other is THE NEW YORK TIMES. He whistles as he walks into the house.

143 INT. PHELAN KITCHEN. DAY.

143

Phelan is at the breakfast table, drinking coffee and orange juice. His wife is cooking behind him. He reads the new York Times. We are on this little slice of life when we go

CLOSE-NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

on yet another leak in the Hughes case. Now, we pull back, way back, and we are out of that newspaper story:

144 INT. PHELAN KITCHEN. SAME TIME.

144

Phelan literally jumps out of his seat.

PHELAN

BINGO!

145 INT. FRANK'S OFFICE. DAY

145

Frank stands by the window, looking out, looking almost... defeated.
His secretary buzzes him.

SECRETARY (OS)

Mr. McCulloch. That's James Phelan on three.

FRANK

Would you tell him that... Never mind.
(pops up speaker)
Jim?

PHELAN (OS)

Frank. You ready to put the nail in the coffin?

146 INT. TED WEBER'S OFFICE. DAY

146

Weber is at his desk. With him is Beverly Loo. Edna walks in with an envelope.

BEVERLY

Managua.

WEBER

Do we know where he's staying?

BEVERLY

Some hotel. They've sealed off the entire
Penthouse for him. It took ten chartered jets
to move all of his stuff from the Bahamas.

EDNA

This just came for you. It looks like something
from Osborne and Osborne.

BEVERLY

Why don't you open it?

Weber tears it open. Reads. His head collapses.

BEV (cont'd)

What's wrong, Ted?

WEBER

Osborne and Osborne have reneged. They now say
that the letters are mere "clever forgeries."

There is silence in the room. REAL SILENCE. Then...

EDNA

Well, at least they are clever forgeries.

The phone rings. Edna makes a move for it. But Weber beats her to it.

WEBER

Ted Weber... Yes, Frank ..who... hmmm...hmmm...
I see.... I guess you'd best tell him to get on
a plane.

147 INT. NESSON'S OFFICE. DAY

147

Cliff is nervously pacing. Nesson sits calmly behind his desk, nursing a scotch. Edith sits on a couch. She is watching The Tonight Show, There is the Announcement that NINA VAN PALLANDT will be a guest.

NESSON

Do you think that they'll let her sing?

EDITH

She'll sing. She's not going to talk. She's too stupid to talk.

Cliff walks over to the television and turns it off. He kisses Edith gently.

NESSON

It's just "suspicion of fraud and forgery." it could be worse.

CLIFF

..See, there is no way that I'm going to let the Swiss get their hands on Edith.

NESSON

They can try and extradite her.

CLIFF

Let them try. Edith's just a victim in all this.

NESSON

It's my advice to not let them "try" to extradite her. Because they will "try" and they will succeed.

CLIFF

So, I just feed Edith to them? No. No way!

NESSON

Nobody's going to feed Edith to anybody.

(beat)

You can protect her. You can be chivalrous.

The phone rings.

CLIFF

You mean make a deal? With the DA? I can't-

NESSON

(picking up phone)

Yes, you can. (beat) Nesson here.

FRANK (VO)
Mr. Nesson, it's Frank McCulloch-

Nesson mouths "McCulloch" to Cliff. Cliff moves to the phone.

NESSON
How are you, Frank?

FRANK (VO)
I'm fine. Tired. Is Cliff there?

CLIFF
(taking phone)
Yeah, Frank.

FRANK
Cliff, you know a Jim Phelan?

CLIFF
Uh, no. I don't think so.

FRANK
He's a journalist. Big time Hughes fella. He wrote a book about Hughes. Wrote it with Noah Dietrich, Hughes' right hand. Didn't You say you were once approached by some fella to write a book with Dietrich?

CLIFF
Yes. Yes, I was. I turned him down. What happened to the book?

FRANK
Never got published. But, Jim's on a plane right now. We're going to lay his manuscript alongside yours and read them together.

There is a tremendously long pause.

FRANK (cont'd)
Cliff?

CLIFF
Woooooow.

Cliff hangs up the phone and stares down at Nesson and begins to laugh.

148EXT. TIME-LIFE BUILDING. DAY- 7:00AM

148

LONG DISTANCE shot of Jim Phelan, wearing a coonskin cap and a large overcoat, sitting on his luggage waiting for the building to open. People bound for work walk past him. Eventually, Frank walks past him, takes out a pass key and unlocks the front door. Phelan gets up and walks to Frank, who only now recognizes him. There is a hug usually reserved for old combat vets. They enter the building together.

149INT. FRANK'S OFFICE. DAY.

149

Both men are seated. In front of Phelan sits a huge pile of papers.

PHELAN

So, the wire comes in from AP. I was at the Sun-

FRANK

Vegas Sun?

PHELAN

Yup. I'm sitting there on December 7th with Hank Greenspun, the editor over there. The copy kid's dancing it up he was so excited. I asked him if the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor again.

FRANK

Thirty year anniversary.

PHELAN

Yup. We look at it and our jaws drop. The autobiography of *Howard Hughes*? By *Cliff Irving*. I mean, who the hell is Cliff Irving?

FRANK

What did Hank say?

PHELAN

Hank said, "I'll bet this book's a fake. If not, I'll kiss your ass 100 times on the Vegas Strip.

FRANK

Looks like you may be lowering your pants.

PHELAN

Ah, fuck that bullshit.

FRANK

So, let's get to it. How exactly did you figure this book is a phoney?

PHELAN

Well, I was reading my morning New York Times. They printed an excerpt from Cliff Irving's book in which Hughes describes catching his old PR man Perry Leiber with Hedda Hopper. Article also says that Perry Leiber now believed the book was genuine 'cause he never told anybody that story. Well, bullshit. He told me that story and it was in my book. Only place it has ever appeared.

FRANK

Well, I must say, that's pretty indicting.
(beat) Tell me, Jim, In your book, do you have

a story in there about how Hughes had an off-the record meeting with a journalist? Something to do with buying a French film for pennies?

PHELAN

Nope. Not that I can recall. Why do you ask?

The phone rings. Frank picks it up.

FRANK

McCulloch....uh...huh...Good.

(hangs up)

They're ready for you, Jim.

150 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM. MCGRAW-HILL.

150

Gorgeous room. Massive. The New York skyline is breathtaking. The center of the room is occupied by a long oak table. On the one end-our end- is James Phelan. He's wearing a suit and A coonskin cap. He's smoking a cigarette, but is calm as hell. Relaxed. Amused even. In front of him are a stack of PAPERS, yellowing and somewhat dusty. On the other end of the table are some dour looking bureaucrats. The worst of the bunch is a younger man with glasses, looking uptight and anxious. He is the editor-in-chief, ROBERT STEWART. In front of him sits a stack of papers much taller than Phelan's ... and much neater.

ROBERT STEWART

Good afternoon, Mr. Phelan. Thank you for coming here. I'm Robert Stewart, editor-in-

PHELAN

I know who you are. I'm sure you want to get to the bottom of this fine mess as much as do I, so why don't we get down to the business of kicking it in it's ass. If you send me that pile of junk, we can dispose of it shortly.

ROBERT

Well, see, we have a problem. We have a confidentiality agreement with Mr. Hughes which forbids us from showing you the manuscript.

PHELAN

Confidentiality agreement with Hughes, you say?

(beat)

Well, boys, I don't know whether or not to be amused or insulted by your stance.

(beat)

Here's what we'll do. I don't need to see that pile of shit down there 'cause I already know what's in it. I'm gonna give you some incidents from Hughes' life and you tell me if it's in your book.

Robert Stewart confers with his cronies and then

STEWART

Proceed.

PHELAN

Is there a passage there about how Hughes hired Noah Dietrich?

Stewart pulls out a page from the manuscript.

STEWART

Okay.

PHELAN

I have the same thing right here. Does it talk about how Hughes asked him about the inner workings of a combustion engine, about how battleships determine the distance to a target?

CRONIE

That proves nothing. It just means that Hughes and Dietrich remember things the same way.

PHELAN

If you say so. How 'bout the Billy Dove story?

STEWART

Billy Dove?

The crony starts going through the document and pulls out a sheet.

STEWART

Okay.

PHELAN

He's a fella who sued Howard Hughes for false arrest. Here, read my version.

STEWART

Like we said before. Hughes and Dietrich lived the same history. It makes sense there should be some parallels. nevertheless, go on.

DISSOLVE TO:

151 HALF AN HOUR LATER:

151

Everybody in the room is hot. Tired. Not getting anywhere.

STEWART

It's the same thing, Mr. Phelan. I'd be shocked if these parallels didn't exist.

PHELAN starts to collect his stuff.

PHELAN

Well, print your book. Noah Dietrich didn't make me rich. Maybe you boys will.

CRONY 2

Are you threatening us?

Phelan stops. His eyes light up.

PHELAN

Uh- any chance that there's a passage in there about the Spruce Goose. About how the hangar crew came to calling it, the "Jesus Christ."

STEWART

I remember that one.
(LOOKS THROUGH PAPERS)
Here it is.

PHELAN

"When people walk in the hanger for the first time they are overwhelmed. They stand there with their mouths open and tilt their heads back until they are looking way up there at the top of the plane. Then they say, "Jeeeeesus Chriiiiist!"

STEWART

Okay. So what? Same as before. It simply means-

PHELAN

Gentleman, you now have yourselves a problem. Noah didn't know that story. Nor did Hughes.
(feeling triumphant)
I knew that story. Got it from one of the crew. Why Hughes wasn't anywhere near that hangar for fifteen years.

Stewart gets on the phone.

STEWART

(into phone)

I think you'd better have Mr. McGraw come down.

Stewart lowers the phone. Gulps.

PHELAN

So, how is business. Otherwise?

STEWART

We're going to get by.

Phelan taps his manuscript.

PHELAN

There's more, you know.

STEWART

(solemn)

I know.

The door bursts open. In walks McGraw. Phelan gets up to shake his hand, but McGraw blusters past him.

MCGRAW

How do we know you didn't steal from OUR book?

Phelan chuckles, pulls out an envelope, and puts it on the table.

PHELAN

That's my airline bill.

152 EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET. DAY

152

Phelan's at a phone booth. We hear Frank in VOICE-OVER.

PHELAN

We got him, Frank. The prick stole my manuscript. They should call it "Son of Fake."

FRANK

I know. They just called. You must feel good.

PHELAN

I love that I was able to take a stake through this thing. Here's the Hughes organization with all its money, the federal and state government, Life, McGraw-Hill, and I did it.

FRANK

You sure did.

PHELAN

So, what're you going to do?

FRANK

Life is putting out a statement calling the book a hoax.

PHELAN

Ouch.

FRANK

It's going to be the cover story of Time.

PHELAN

You gonna give the old boy some credit?

FRANK

You sure blew the whole thing wide open. (beat) There are still things we haven't figured out. Like, the handwriting. Cliff and Edith's writing samples yielded nothing.

PHELAN

Yeah, that's a curiosity.

FRANK

And how did he get the manuscript. Was it ever out of your sight?

PHELAN

Nope. Except for this fella who was a go-between for a spell. Meyer was the name.

FRANK

Meier? John Meier?

PHELAN

Nope. Not John. Stanley. Stanley Meyer.

FRANK

Stanley?

PHELAN

You ever heard of him?

Frank chuckles, repeating the name "Stanley" to himself.

15 EXT. CENTRAL PARK. DAY

153

Cliff and Edith walk arm in arm, Maurry Nesson is alongside them.

MAURRY

I think I can make a deal for Edith, but you may just have to take your licks.

CLIFF

Jail time, huh? What's the damage going to be?

MAURRY

Enough to give the public their money's worth.

CLIFF

What did the DA say to you?

MAURRY

He doesn't want to leave it at just the phoney deposits. He wants the whole nine yards. He wants to be the son of a bitch who gets you to crack wide open. He said 'If Irving still claims he met with Hughes I'll hand him his balls.'

Edith is starting to get weepy.

CLIFF

You tell him ... Irving won't say he met with Howard Hughes. Cliff Irving made it all up.

Maurry is in slight shock. Cliff begins to move Edith away.

CLIFF (cont'd)

Excuse us for a second, Maurry.

Cliff and Edith move away, a small snow flurry begins.

EDITH

You don't have to do this. You don't have to stand alone.

CLIFF

(wiping away her tear)

In the end you are the mother of our children.

EDITH

You know, some people will believe you and some won't. But neither side can disagree that you did something amazing. Nobody can ever call Cliff Irving "mediocre". Not anymore.

CLIFF

I kind of miss mediocrity. I always knew where I stood.

154 INT. COURTROOM. DAY

154

There is a massive crowd to watch Cliff and Edith make their pleas. We are clearly in mid-session.

JUDGE

Just to be clear, Mr. Irving, could you explain to the court what you are charged with?

CLIFF

(barely audible)

It was that I conspired to convince the McGraw-Hill Book Co. that I was in communications with Howard Hughes when, in fact, I was not.

JUDGE

That's right. Now, I don't know what the sentence will be or if there will even be a sentence. I will listen to anything the government has to say and anything Mr. Irving has to say.

(to Cliff)

I do not make any promises to you. Sentencing will take place on June 16th.

155 INT. TIME LIFE-EXECUTIVE SUITE-DAY

155

Cliff sits at one end of a long table, thumbing through a copy of Time Magazine. On the other end of the table is a large EASLE with a canvas on it, the backside facing us. After a few seconds, the door bursts open and in walks Ralph Graves. Ralph walks the length of the room and takes his position at the other end of the table. He grabs the canvas and spins it around. We see a crude painting of CLIFF.

RALPH

Not the best likeness, but it's going to be our next cover under the banner headline: Con Man

of the Year. Look closely Cliff, do you recognize the signature?

Cliff leans forward, squinting.

RALPH (cont'd)

Ironically enough, you've probably never seen it before. It is the signature of your friend Elmyr de Hory.

CLIFF

Is that why you called me here? To tell me Time is going to put the screws to me?

RALPH

The court has asked us for our guidance before they decide your fate. Howard Hughes probably won't even bother with it. You're a mosquito he's successfully squashed. McGraw-Hill? All they want is their money back, which I understand you'll be able to partially accomodate. But we? We're pissed off. Really fucking pissed. There isn't a soul here that doesn't want to see you writing lisencc plates instead of books. And you know why? It's not because of the money. We ended up not paying a cent for your book. in fact, our special issue on your bimbo Nina sold through the roof. It's not because you made us a laughing stock. Once in a while, every magazine and newspaper has to eat crow. That's part of the territory.

Cliff sits back, respectful but apathetic as well.

RALPH (cont'd)

It's not even that you thought so little of us that you believed you could get away with it. Every petty purse-snatcher thinks he can get away with it. It is that you are arrogant. Arrogant in your preposterous notion that somehow you matter. You think you have changed the order of things, that the world has altered it's raison d'etre because Cliff Irving exists. You think you matter because you attached yourself- like a blood-sucking leech, to somebody who does matter. Well, guess what? You have as much affect on this Earth as some stray cat in upper Mongolia. When you die, your epitaph will be simple and to the point. Clifford Irving. He Fucked Up.

CLIFF

You know, Ralph, McGraw-Hill and Life Magazine are two of the biggest media giants ever to have roamed the Earth. You personally are the editor in chief of the most famous magazine in the world. You have at your disposal hundreds of millions of dollars, a regiment of attorneys and editors and investigative reporters. What do I

have? A little place in Ibiza and my ten fingers. Yet, I pulled off the hoax of the century and you fell for the hoax of the century. Now, I ask you? Who here fucked up?

Cliff gets up and starts putting on his coat.

CLIFF (cont'd)

Hell, I'm going to be on the cover of Time Magazine. When are you going to be?

RALPH

Well, I'm not going to jail, Cliff.

CLIFF

Jail. Yes. Well, the truth is this. I'm going to miss my boy's bar-mitzvah and I'm going to hone up my chess game. And when I get out, I'm going to be more famous than ever and I'm going to sell a million copies of my book on this whole affair. And you want to talk about irony? You are going to serialize it in Time Magazine.

RALPH

And why on Earth would I do such a thing?

CLIFF

(smiling)

Because you don't want it to be in Newsweek.

Ralph stares at Cliff, digesting this latest statement.

RALPH

Let's get together for lunch when you're out.

156 EXT. WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT. PIER. DAY

156

It's a beautiful summer day. Cliff is throwing bread to some ducks. We linger on him until Frank walks up the pier and takes a position behind Cliff. Frank is dressed more casually than we have ever seen him.

CLOSE- DUCKS

as they converge on the bread, fighting like hell for it.

CLIFF

They all fight like hell for that one crumb.

FRANK

How you doing, Cliff?

CLIFF

I'm doing A-Okay, Frank.

FRANK

Any hints as to the sentence?

CLIFF

Well, I didn't kill anybody, you know. On the other hand, my lease on this place ends today.

FRANK

Funny. I always took you to be an optimist.

CLIFF

A realist, Frank.

(beat)

If I hadn't gone the extra step, if I hadn't said it was an autobiography. Ah, that's how all the great ones buy it. Napoleon. Patton. Thomas More. They take it one step too far. (beat) What are you going to do now, Frank? Now that you're big man on campus.

FRANK

I'm resigning from Time. I'm going to start an educational magazine in California.

CLIFF

No shit?

FRANK

I'm calling it "Learning Today." (beat) Let me ask you. That time when Stanley Meyer asked you to rewrite the Phelan book.....

CLIFF

Yeah, Dick and I took the book, we had it photocopied. It was a gift from God.

FRANK

More like a gift from Satan, I'd say.

CLIFF

Don't judge Satan. We haven't heard his side of the story yet. (beat) That night, when you and Goldman came over and said you knew all about Meier...

FRANK

You thought we were talking about Stanley.

CLIFF

Yup. I figured I was a goner. I was going to tell you everything until I looked at the photos and realized we were talking about two different Meyers. Then I did the fanciest backtracking I could. Geez. Screwed by a simple homonym.

FRANK

Odder things have happened.

CLIFF

Not much.

FRANK

You know, Cliff, everything else I get. The Phelan book, Helga Hughes, probably Elmyr De Hory helped you with the handwriting..

CLIFF

I never said that.

Cliff- ever so gingerly - plays with his wedding band.

FRANK

No, you never did. What I want to know - what I have to know- is how did you know about me and my off-the-record conversation with Hughes?

CLIFF

You liked that, huh?

FRANK

It was very convincing.

CLIFF

You gave me the information.

FRANK

I did?

CLIFF

When you let me into the Time-Life archives. You'd written it down in your notes. You circled it and wrote "Off the record."

FRANK

Son of a bitch.

CLIFF

(sadly)

Edith's probably going to leave me.

FRANK

Sorry to hear it. Really.

CLIFF

Well, there are other Ediths.

(beat)

Frank, you liked the book, right? It was a pretty damn good piece of work after all's said and done.

Frank smiles and shrugs. Then he shakes his head sadly.

FRANK

Aw Cliff. You broke my heart.

157 MONTAGE-

157

Of "Whatever Happened To"s of the various characters. We SUPERIMPOSE these texts over documentary footage and/or photos of the real characters. We begin with footage of CLIFF being interviewed in the Orson Welles' film "F For Fake" talking about Elmyr....

CLIFF

All the world loves to see the experts and the establishment made a fool of. And anyone likes to feel that those who set themselves up as experts are really as gullible as anyone else .

SUPER:

Cliff Irving was sentenced to 2.5 years in prison. He served seventeen months. His latest novel "The Spring" is soon to be a major motion picture.

And so on.....

FADE OUT.