Mr. Hughes

or

"An Honest-to-God American Shit"

screenplay by
David Koepp

story by
Brian De Palma & David Koepp

July 4, 1998

EXT IBIZA FERRY DUSK

As the sun sets, a ferry boat approaches the harbor of a sleepy Mediterranean island. The white tops of the villas and cafes are visible, a cathedral spire rises up from the Old Town. Looks like around fifty thousand people live here year round, maybe double that in season.

IBIZA, SPAIN
December, 1970

ON THE FERRY,

a man sits on a bench under the cover of a long wooden canopy, reading ***Newsweek*** magazine. There's a picture of a man on the cover, hat pulled low over his eyes as he avoids the camera. The headline next to him reads "The Case of the Invisible Billionaire."

CLIFFORD IRVING, the reader, is a good-looking man around forty years old, prone to turtlenecks and cigarettes, comes off like Paris but there's Brooklyn underneath. He's engrossed in the article. He turns a page greedily.

Suddenly, Irving looks up sharply, staring straight ahead, eyes bright, mouth slightly open. His face is of a man in a Moment, a moment creative people have once or twice in their whole lives, if they're lucky. He has a Big Idea.

The fluorescent tubes just above him BUZZ and flicker to life. He looks up. One by one, the two dozen lights in the interior of the ferry boat burst on as a FERRY WORKER flicks the switches. Irving laughs.

CUT TO:

EXT IRVING HOME NIGHT

Irving, carrying a suitcase, walks along a dirt road toward a house at the top. This seems like a great place to live, a writer's retreat. He reaches the gate of a beautiful old *finca*, a large former farmhouse converted into a residence.

He shoves it open. The gate SQUEAKS loudly. A monkey sitting in the window of the house hears the gate and SQUAWKS. It leaps out the window and bounds towards him.

IRVING
Hey, Eugen, how are you, Buddy?

As the monkey scampers up onto his shoulder, the front door of the house bursts open and two young boys, NEDSKY (5) and BARNABY (3) hurtle toward him.

(CONTINUED)

Odds are most of this story is true. . .
but only Howard knows for sure.

CONTINUED:

NEDSKY
DADDY! DADDY!

BARNABY
(bellowing toward the house)
MOMMY DADDY'S HOME MOMMY HE'S HOME MOMMY!

They hit him like a ton of bricks.

INT IRVING HOME NIGHT

Irving struggles into the house carrying his suitcase, two children, and monkey. Laughing, they all collapse on the sofa. As the kids berate him for a surprise, Irving notices EDITH, his wife, standing in a doorway across the room. She's in her mid-thirties, tall, German-looking, beautiful blonde hair and freckled face. She's also royally pissed off.

IRVING
Hi!
(no answer, just a Teutonic glare)
I've got a Big Idea.
(still nothing)
You want to hear my Big Idea?

She turns and stomps upstairs. Irving sighs. This is not an unfamiliar situation. He drags himself out from under the kids and opens his suitcase.

IRVING (cont'd)
In the suitcase, guys. There's two presents for each of you.

The kids CHEER and start hurling his clothes out as they search for the presents. Irving drags himself to the gallows, upstairs.

INT BEDROOM NIGHT

Irving comes to the door of their bedroom. Edith stands in the middle of the floor, ready to fight.

IRVING
I thought you said you were going to pick me up at the ferry. I had to walk the whole way.

She holds up a letter and reads from it, her voice trembling with rage.

CONTINUED:

EDITH
"Darling, I heard through the grapevine that you were in London last month."

IRVING
(recognizes this)
Ah, fuck.

EDITH
"You bastard, I know we agreed not to see each other, but you could have called me at least."

IRVING
That letter was in my private desk. What were you doing-

EDITH
(loud)
"I'll be coming to Ibiza in January. Do you think I could pop up to the studio and that you could spare a minute to see me?"

She crumples the letter and hurls it at him, going off into a burst of German cursing as she lights a cigarette.

IRVING
I guess you don't want to hear my Big Idea.

EDITH
That *bitch!* She tells me to my *face* that it's over, you swear to me it's only platonic or some such bullshit, and the whole time you-

IRVING
It *is* platonic, all she said was she wants to-

EDITH
LIAR! If I see her on the street in Ibiza, I cut her face with a razor. If she comes up to your studio, I kill her.

IRVING
I *didn't* see her in London! I didn't even call her. That's the whole point, isn't it?! It's over.
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

IRVING (cont'd)
She's not even asking for anything in her letter. Read it, for Christ's sakes, all she wants to do is say hello! Is that so godawful? It's a perfectly innocent letter. If you could read it without being prejudiced and without hating her guts, you could see that.

EDITH
Cliff, you are a magnificent liar. But I'm not a fool. I'm not one of your mindless sluts you lay because you're bored with your wife, your children, your house, your work, your life.

He winces. She's right. After a long pause:

IRVING
Can we please make up now?

EDITH
No.

She picks up a vase of flowers and SMASHES it on the tile floor at his feet. A chunk of glass flies up and hits him in the cheek. He cries out as it draws blood.

EDITH (cont'd)
Now we can make up.

Holding his handkerchief to the cut in his cheek, he crosses to the telephone, picks it up, and dials.

EDITH (cont'd)
Who are you calling?

IRVING
Dick. I want him to come over right away.

EDITH
No! I don't want a house full of people again, not tonight.

IRVING
Who said a house full of people, I just have to talk to Dick.

EDITH
Why?!

CONTINUED: (3)

IRVING
I told you. *I have a Big Idea.*

CUT TO:

INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

The front door opens and DICK SUSKIND, fortyish, bearlike, stands in the doorway.

IRVING
A friendly face, thank God.

He grabs him and hauls him into the house, closing the door behind him.

DICK
I love you too. Hi, Edith.

Edith, still pissed off, nods to him while she serves dinner to the kids. They're eating at a large table on the terrace, French doors thrown open to let in the night air.

IRVING
Whatever you're writing, you've got to drop it right away.

DICK
You said something about dinner?

LATER, ON THE TERRACE,

dinner is over. Dick and Irving are sitting at the table. Edith clears away the plates while Nedsky and Barnaby chase each other, screaming. Dick is finishing the *Newsweek* article Irving read on the ferry.

DICK
Fascinating. So what?

IRVING
What are you working on right now?

DICK
You know, that biography of Richard the Lion Hearted for kids.

IRVING
Still?

DICK
Yeah, I can't figure out how to get around the fact that Richard was gay.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK (cont'd)
How do you explain blowjobs to a ten year old? You know, tastefully.

IRVING
Sounds like a real winner, Dick.

DICK
Fuck you, I don't see your name in the New York *Times.*

IRVING
This is exactly my point. My last book sold about twenty-six copies -- yours, you *wish* it had. We're talented men, dedicated artists, and what have we got to show for it? Rented houses, maxed out credit cards. Why has there never been a Howard Hughes biography?

DICK
Huh?

IRVING
It's a crazy train of thought, you've gotta try to stay with it. Why doesn't anybody write a book about Hughes?

DICK
Nobody can get close to him. Nobody even knows where he is. He's probably dead.
(the DOORBELL rings)
That's Elmyr. I told him I'd be here, he's got a Van Gogh he did for me.

Behind them, Edith opens the door and admits ELMYR DE HORY, a man in his sixties with an overcoat draped over his shoulders. He's carrying a canvas and has TWO YOUNG WOMEN and a YOUNG MAN with him.

IRVING
I owe McGraw-Hill two more books. Suppose I went to them and said I'd met Hughes and he'd commissioned me to write his biography. His *authorized* biography, understand. How much do you think they'd pay for that?

CONTINUED: (2)

DICK
A fortune. How are you gonna get Hughes to agree?

IRVING
Well, that's the crazy part.

Elmyr arrives on the patio with his friends, who are all talking at once. Dick keeps staring at Irving, who is grinning madly.

ELMYR
Hello Clifford, you know Ramon and Angelika and her sister don't you? Richard, there you are, I've been carrying this painting around with me since lunch, I looked like a fool all day, I thought I was meeting you for coffee what do you think? I find it rather good.

Elmyr turns the canvas around to reveal a perfect reproduction of a Van Gogh. Dick is completely distracted, staring at Irving, still absorbing the gist of his idea.

ELMYR (cont'd)
You know how long this took me? One hour. *Less!* And I defy you to find a single expert between here and Madrid who can tell the difference. Experts. *Hah!* They are only experts because they tell us so. Is this any more beautiful if an expert authenticates it? Any less beautiful if I tell them it is not Van Gogh but De Hory? *Absolutely not!*

Kisses and greetings are exchanged, glasses of wine are poured, cigarettes are lit as Elmyr, Ramon, Angelika, and Angelika's sister make themselves at home. The doorbell rings again, just as Edith is coming out onto the terrace.

ELMYR (cont'd)
Ah! I hope you don't mind, I told Mami Lanus and the rest of that lot to come by and bring us some decent wine.

Edith glowers and marches back for the door. Irving is holding the canvas, admiring the painting.

CONTINUED: (3)

IRVING
Superb, Elmyr.
(looks at Dick)
Who would have thought a fake could be so beautiful?

LATER,

Nedsky and Barnaby are asleep on the couch. There are fifteen or twenty people in the house and on the terrace.

Dick and Irving are huddled off in a corner. Irving keeps his voice down, selling like crazy.

IRVING
Even if Hughes is still alive, which he probably isn't, he'd never bother to deny the book. What does he care? And if he *did* deny it, we just say he's lying, he's crazy, that's what everybody thinks anyway. And he can never come back to the States to prove us wrong or he'll be subpoenaed in the TWA case!

DICK
Suppose he does show up?

IRVING
Then I look him in the eye and say "You're not the real Howard Hughes!"

DICK
Suppose he proves he is?

IRVING
Then I say "Help! I've been duped! I've been taken in by Max!"

DICK
Who's Max?

IRVING
Max? You don't know Max? Max is a con man. He's one of Howard's doubles. He looks like Hughes, he speaks like Hughes, he knows all about Hughes, and the son of a bitch tricked me! I hate Max! We must find him and punish him!

DICK
This *is* a big idea.

CONTINUED:

IRVING
It's an enormous idea.

DICK
McGraw-Hill... They're the most conservative publisher in New York. You think they'll ~~believe it?~~ buy it?

IRVING
An authorized Howard Hughes biography? They'll be *desperate* to believe it. All they'll see is the numbers.

DICK
How much you think they'll pay for something like that?

IRVING
I can tell you, they won't get off cheap. Howard is one hell of a dealmaker.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM,

there is a bitter argument going on in Spanish. Edith sighs and looks around. She has a houseful of people.

IRVING

refills Dick's glass, moving in for the kill.

DICK
Of course, ethically... you know, morally, that is, this is, uh... well it's a bit on the dodgy side, isn't it?

IRVING
Yes, I admit, it gets a zero for honesty. But for balls? And ingenuity? Ten out of ten. It's a gorgeous hoax. A caper, a scam. Fully in keeping with a notorious literary tradition. We're forty years old, Dick. What have we ever done that even approaches this in scale or originality? What's the quote? "The first forty years is text..."

DICK
"The rest is commentary."

CONTINUED: (2)

IRVING
And we'll make a fucking fortune. You research it. I write it. You get twenty percent of everything. It's not even six o'clock in New York. I'm going to call my editor right now. Are you in?

Dick thinks. Dick blinks. Dick drinks his drink.

DICK
Yep.

CUT TO:

INT BEVERLY LOO'S OFFICE DUSK

The sun sets over the Manhattan skyline, seen through the office window of BEVERLY LOO, Asian-American, hair piled to a dizzying height. She's reading, eating a pile of sprouts, and drinking a Tab.

VOICE (o.s.)
Clifford Irving on three!

BEVERLY
Tell him I'm out.

The phone on her desk starts to RING.

VOICE (o.s.)
Already put him through!

Beverly GROANS and picks up the line.

BEVERLY
(like ice)
Hello Clifford. Fine. Uh huh. Yeah. Listen, I have a half a dozen people in my office, is there-
(listens)
Yeah? Really. Really. *Really.* Clifford, excuse me for a second, uh, no offense, but why on earth would Howard Hughes be interested in *you?*

INT IRVING HOME NIGHT

The party has grown even bigger. Dick and Irving are in a study just off the living room. Irving's on the phone.

CONTINUED:

IRVING
That's the interesting part, seems he got a hold of a copy of "Fake!" and just loved it. Really went on about it, it was a little embarrassing.

BEVERLY (o.s.)
The book about the art forger?

IRVING
Exactly. He said in his letter he thought I handled a biography of an infamous character with... what were his words? Let me find his letter.

He rustles papers on his desk, mimes holding a letter in the air in front of him. Dick slumps in his chair and covers his face.

IRVING (cont'd)
Here it is, "exceptional sensitivity and insight into the mind of a maverick." Anyway, he says he's been looking for a biographer and wants to get together to talk about it.

Edith appears in the doorway to the study, furious, and goes into a rant in German. Irving puts a finger in his free ear to silence her.

IRVING (cont'd)
What I'm asking is, would McGraw-Hill be interested in a book like that?

INT BEVERLY LOO'S OFFICE DUSK

BEVERLY
Extremely interested.

IRVING (o.s.)
Well, I thought so. Now, I'm going to need an advance...

BEVERLY
Why?

INT IRVING HOME NIGHT

Edith continues to rant in German, holding an overflowing ashtray in one hand, waving it all around. Irving spins in his desk chair, turning his back on her.

CONTINUED:

IRVING
Beverly, I can't very well ask him to fly to Ibiza, can I? He wants to meet on his turf.

BEVERLY (o.s.)
And where is that?

IRVING
(stalling)
Huh?

BEVERLY (o.s.)
Where is "his turf?" Where does Howard Hughes hang out these days?

IRVING
Well, he didn't say where he was.

BEVERLY (o.s.)
Then how do you know where to go?

IRVING
He wants to meet me --

Edith dumps the ashtray in Irving's lap and storms out.

IRVING (cont'd)
-- somewhere very far away from here. He wants me to meet me in...

His mind's a blank. He looks at Dick, appealing.

DICK
Mexico.

IRVING
Mexico. City. He wants to meet me in Mexico City, on the nineteenth. Eleven o'clock at night. A car is supposed to pick me up at a hotel and take me to a remote airstrip, where a pilot will be waiting to fly me to a location he will not disclose.

That was good. Dick gives him a thumbs up.

IRVING (cont'd)
I'll need about five thousand U.S. for airfare to Mexico, preliminary research, that sort of thing.

INT BEVERLY LOO'S OFFICE NIGHT

BEVERLY
You've got it. I'll send enough to get you to Mexico and then come directly to New York to discuss it. Oh, and Clifford -- why don't you bring Hughes's letter with you when you come?

INT IRVING HOME NIGHT

CLIFF
Of course I will. Bye.

He hangs up the phone and stands, sending cigarette ashes billowing into the air.

DICK
I think Edith is upset.

CLIFF
No, Edith is irritated. *Upset* is if she finds out I'm bringing Nina to Mexico with me.

CUT TO:

EXT MEXICO CITY DAY

A thick brown haze hangs over the sprawl of

MEXICO CITY

EXT EL CAMINO HOTEL DAY

Irving is at a table in an outdoor restaurant, pages of yellow legal paper on the table all around him. He has the copy of *Newsweek* open to the Howard Hughes article. In a box on one side of the page is a sample of a letter handwritten by Hughes. Irving is copying the writing style carefully.

NINA VAN PALLANDT, a beautiful Danish woman in her late thirties wearing a huge pair of sunglasses, sits next to him. A BAND plays on the other side of the cantina, bad versions of current showtunes.

NINA
(draping herself over Irving)
For God's sake, Clifford, how long are you going to spend on those things?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

IRVING
It's kind of fun. Reminds me of when I used to help my father letter his comics.

NINA
You're hopelessly boring. Let's go for a swim.

IRVING
Don't rush me. Forgery takes time, you know, people study it for years. It's a *profession.*

NINA
So go get a professional.

IRVING
I can't tell a soul about this. And you can't either. You were never here, understand?

NINA
I won't say a word to anyone except Edith.

IRVING
That's not funny. I'm a Jew married to a German, I'm taking my life in my hands as it is.
(points to the cut on his face, almost healed)
Look at this. She cut me with a razor when she found the letter you sent me. Ah!

He tears up a sheet of paper and starts over.

NINA
Why are you using that ridiculous paper? A man worth two billion dollars would just dictate a letter to his secretary.

IRVING
No, he hand writes everything on yellow legal paper. Read it.

He tosses her the copy of *Newsweek,* which she completely disregards. She sighs, bored, and looks at the band.

NINA
I can sing better than that cow.

CONTINUED: (2)

Irving keeps working, ignoring her.

NINA (cont'd)
The music business is so phony, I detest it. Did I tell you I got a new manager? You won't like him. *I* don't like him, but he's working hard. If only I could get a little exposure. I did a few television guest spots in London and some charity things and I might be cutting a record in the spring, but OH FOR GOD'S SAKE STOP THAT YOU'RE DRIVING ME INSANE!

She grabs the page he's working on and tears it to bits. He looks at her. She puts her arms around him and kisses him, passionately. On stage, the SINGER launches into a version of "What Kind of Fool Am I," in English with a thick Mexican accent.

NINA (cont'd)
I can't take it any more!

She bolts to her feet and stalks to the stage. Irving watches, amused, as she says a few words to the singer and BANDLEADER. She's charming enough, all smiles and flirty eyes, and they invite her onto the bandstand.

Irving stops to watch. The band starts over and Nina begins the song. She's good. As he listens to the lyrics of the song, his smile fades.

A brilliant FLASH stuns him. A KID stands next to him, holding out a Polaroid he just took.

KID
One dollar!

Irving gives the kid a buck and gets the picture. He watches as his face comes up. In the picture, he looks scared shitless, his face covered in sweat.

CUT TO:

EXT MCGRAW-HILL BUILDING - MANHATTAN DAY

The McGraw-Hill building stands in the middle of midtown

INT ELEVATOR DAY

Irving, dressed in a suit but still sweating, stands in an elevator, a slim file folder held under one arm. He's nervous as hell. The elevator BINGS as it slows. He takes a deep breath, composes himself, manages to change his face into that of the assured and worldly writer. The doors open.

INT MCGRAW-HILL OFFICES DAY

Irving steps off the elevator in the busy offices of the McGraw-Hill Trade Book Division.

THE 20th FLOOR

He walks past a dozen SECRETARY desks and to an office against the far wall. He knocks on the door.

IN THE OFFICE,

Beverly Loo looks up from her desk. She's no warmer in person than she was on the phone.

IRVING
Beverly!

BEVERLY
Clifford, how are you.
(pro forma)
How was your trip.

IRVING
You can't imagine. Just the meeting itself is an incredible story, Hughes has got to be the most-

BEVERLY
No, no, no, don't sit down. I'd like you to come upstairs and meet Albert Leventhal, the head of our Trade Book Division, and a few gentlemen from our legal department.

IRVING
(rattled)
O....kay.

He follows her out, and across the floor toward the elevators again.

BEVERLY
Did you bring the letter with you?

CONTINUED:

IRVING
Yes, right here, I've got the original letter I received as well as a proposed contract Hughes drew up for me while we were together in Mexico.

BEVERLY
(a plastic smile)
Well, that's just great. Mr. Leventhal's very curious about all this.

She JABS the elevator button with a two inch red fingernail.

INT ALBERT LEVENTHAL'S OFFICE DAY

ALBERT LEVENTHAL, sixtyish, wears a suit, tie, and glasses that make John Mitchell look like a radical. He sits behind an enormous desk, flanked by four MEN IN SUITS WITH GRAY FACES. Two of them have their hands tucked primly in their laps. Leventhal has several pages of rumpled legal paper covered with spidery handwriting spread out in front of him and is staring at Irving and Beverly, who are seated in guest chairs opposite his desk.

THE 38th FLOOR

Irving is finishing an account of his "meeting" with Hughes.

IRVING
We talked another hour or so, then ate breakfast and went for a swim in the Pacific. It was fucking freezing. When we got back on his plane, he pulled out a file folder and gave me this.

He opens his own file folder and pulls out six more pages of handwriting on yellow legal paper.

IRVING (cont'd)
It's a proposed contract for the book deal. He signed it right in front of me. He said if I could get you to agree to his terms, he was in, but he would only deal through me. We shook hands -- well, not literally, he doesn't shake hands with anyone -- and he flew me back to Mexico City. That was it.

CONTINUED:

They all stare at him for a long moment. Finally:

LEVENTHAL
Fascinating. What I do not understand, however, is why a man like Howard Hughes, who's avoided publicity all his life, should suddenly want to have his biography written. And with all due respect to you as a --
(an unfortunate pause)
-- writer, why he should choose *Clifford Irving* to work with him.

IRVING
I couldn't agree more. Imagine my surprise when I got his letter.

LEVENTHAL
Um hm.

He studies the letter carefully, then slides it over to the Gray-Faced Man next to him. He uses a pen to push the letter, not touching it with his fingers. Irving notices.

LEVENTHAL (cont'd)
May I see the "contract?"

IRVING
Of course. It's your money.

No one laughs. Irving holds the six pages out to Leventhal, who nods to him to set it down on the desk. Irving does. Leventhal uses the pen to slide it forward and examine it. There is a long pause while he scans the document. Reaching a certain paragraph, he looks up sharply.

LEVENTHAL
A million dollars.

GRAY-FACED MAN 1
A million dollars?

BEVERLY
That's ridiculous.

IRVING
My fee is a hundred thousand, it comes out of that.

LEVENTHAL
He wants a million dollars.

CONTINUED: (2)

GRAY-FACED MAN 1
He wants a million dollars?

IRVING
Let me just say, in Howard's defense-

LEVENTHAL
We won't pay it.

BEVERLY
It's ridiculous.

IRVING
Howard Hughes is the most elusive, secretive, compelling figure of our time. And he knows it. This is not a typical situation where we sit around and wonder who's going to buy our book -- in this case, the question is who *won't?*

LEVENTHAL
We won't pay a penny over five hundred thousand.

Irving has to bite his lip to keep from crying out for joy.

GRAY-FACED MAN 1
And he has to sign the document again, in front of a notary.

IRVING
I doubt that either of those terms will be acceptable to him. In the Nevada case, all he had to do to get out of a fifty million dollar lawsuit was appear before a judge and sign a slip of paper and he left the country instead. And as for the million, well... he was adamant.

LEVENTHAL
I'm sure you'll talk him into it. After all, you have a relationship. Can you get a hold of him?

Irving stares at Leventhal, his principal adversary. He can tell Leventhal still doesn't believe him.

IRVING
I was given a phone number. It's only good until --
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

IRVING (cont'd)
(checks his watch)
-- nine o'clock tonight. I'll try.

LEVENTHAL
In the meantime --

He picks up the contract carefully, barely pinching the upper corner, and hands it to Gray-Faced Man 1.

LEVENTHAL (cont'd)
I'd like you to meet Mr. Farley and Mr. Brown, of Farley & Brown. They're handwriting and fingerprint experts.

The two men at the end of the table, Farley and Brown, pull their hands from their laps. They're wearing surgical gloves. Concealing his panic, Irving nods an awkward hello to them.

LEVENTHAL (cont'd)
I've asked them to take a look at the letter Hughes wrote you, to verify its authenticity, and with your permission, I'd like them to examine this contract as well. A pure formality, I'm sure you understand.

IRVING
Of course.

Gray Faced Man 1 hands the documents carefully to Gray Faced Man 2, who also takes them by the corner, passing them down to Farley and Brown.

LEVENTHAL
It's to protect you as much as anything.

Gray Faced Man 2 passes the documents to Farley and Brown, who reach out to accept them with their gloved hands. But Irving reaches in and intercepts the papers.

IRVING
That's great, thanks. If you'll tell me where your offices are, I'll be happy to drop them off in the morning. I just need to discuss all this with my partner, Mr. Suskind, first. You understand.

While he talks, he elaborately smooths and handles the papers, smearing his fingerprints everywhere. The faces of Farley and Brown fall.

CONTINUED: (4)

LEVENTHAL
First thing in the morning, then?

IRVING
You have my word.

CUT TO:

INT CHELSEA HOTEL NIGHT

Irving is bent over the desk in a small room in the Chelsea Hotel. He has that same Hughes handwriting sample from the magazine spread out in front of him. To one side are the pages of yellow legal paper he's already forged; to the other is a blank legal pad on which he is re-doing them all.

Dick Suskind paces nervously in the background, pouring himself a drink from a bottle of bourbon.

DICK
They're gonna know.

IRVING
You're breaking my concentration. Go walk around the block.

DICK
These are experts. Handwriting *experts.*

IRVING
Experts always say what they think their clients want to hear. And McGraw-Hill wants to hear that they've got the Next Big Book.

DICK
You can't give 'em different letters the very next day! They'll see the difference!

IRVING
I can do better than these. Why should I show them anything less than my best work? I have a relationship with McGraw-Hill, they *deserve* my best.

CUT TO:

INT MCGRAW-HILL OFFICES DAY

The elevator doors open on Beverly Loo's face.

BEVERLY
Harold McGraw wants to see you right away.

INT OFFICE CORRIDOR DAY

Beverly leads Irving down a long corridor, toward a pair of ominous-looking doors at the end. FACES peer out of office doorways as he passes. Everybody seems eager for a glimpse of him.

THE 66th FLOOR

The big doors at the end swing open.

INT HAROLD MCGRAW'S OFFICE DAY

HAROLD McGRAW, fiftyish, quiet and powerful, stands behind his desk, at the far side of a cavernous office. Farley and Brown are on either side of him, hands clasped behind their backs. The "contract" and phony letter from Hughes are spread out very carefully across McGraw's desk like evidence.

Irving steps in, followed by Beverly. McGraw steps out from behind his desk.

MCGRAW
Clifford Irving.
(long pause)
It is a profound pleasure to finally meet you.

Irving smiles. Beverly smiles. Farley and Brown smile. McGraw throws an arm around Irving's shoulder and brings him over to the sofa.

MCGRAW (cont'd)
I'm always telling Beverly, I need to meet more of our writers, especially the good ones. It's too easy to let myself become isolated, stuck up here in the ivory tower, cut off from the reason I got into this business in the first place. *Writers.* I love writers. Love to read them, talk to them, listen to them. Sit down. Would you like something to drink?

CONTINUED:

IRVING
Uh, an espresso?

MCGRAW
(to Beverly)
Espresso. Two. Go.

BEVERLY
Right away.

She leans down and whispers in Irving's ear as she heads for the door.

BEVERLY (cont'd)
Congratulations!

IRVING
I take it Mr. Hughes' handwriting passed inspection?

MCGRAW
(laughs, too hard)
Flying colors.

MR. FARLEY
We calculate a one in four hundred thousand chance --

MR. BROWN
Or greater.

MR. FARLEY
-- that these documents were written by anyone other than Howard Robard Hughes.

MR. BROWN
Junior.

MR. FARLEY
We find near-perfect orthographic similarity in ninety-two percent of the document, which falls well within acceptable limits for hand tremor. We also found flawless individuation in the occluded Ps.

MR. BROWN
And the distended Rs.

MR. FARLEY
And the distended Rs.

CONTINUED: (2)

MCGRAW
God bless occluded Ps and distended Rs. I'm no gambler, but I'll take one in four hundred thousand any day.

MR. BROWN
Or greater.

IRVING
What about notarizing the contract? Mr. Leventhal was worried that --

MCGRAW
Oh, hell, Leventhal's an old woman, he gets *paid* to worry, leave him to me. Sure, it's got some cockeyed language in it, but sometimes when two simple people write a contract the intent is clearer and it's even harder to challenge. It'll stand up in court. You saw him sign it, right?

IRVING
With my own eyes.

MCGRAW
That's good enough for me. Now -- did you make a call last night?

IRVING
I did.

MCGRAW
Well, don't keep me in suspense. What does Mr. Hughes have to say to our offer of five hundred thousand dollars?

IRVING
Mr. Hughes says we have a deal.

McGraw draws a long breath, deeply satisfied.

MCGRAW
Then I only have one question. Who do I make the check out to?

A frown crosses Irving's face. Actually, he hadn't thought of that one.

CUT TO:

EXT MCGRAW-HILL BUILDING DAY

Irving walks down the street, on top of the world. Dick is beside him, staring at a check he holds in his hands.

DICK
Who the hell is "H.R. Hughes?"

IRVING
I have absolutely no idea.

DICK
How are we supposed to cash this?

IRVING
Dick, please, it took a miracle to get them to tear up the one made out to "Howard Hughes" and bring me that one. At least with the initials we've got a little room to play.

DICK
(waving the check)
This is useless to us!

IRVING
For God's sake, you're holding a hundred thousand dollar advance in your hand, show a little respect, will you?

DICK
Yeah, it's a hundred thousand dollars, and we can't touch a penny of it! We can look at it. We can hang it on our wall. But *WHO THE HELL IS GOING TO CASH THIS?!*

CUT TO:

INT IRVING HOME DAY

Edith Irving stares at her husband.

EDITH
"Helga Hughes?"

IRVING
A wig, a little extra makeup...

EDITH
They'll still know me at our bank.

CONTINUED:

IRVING
A Swiss bank, a numbered account...

EDITH
What about my passport?

IRVING
A pair of scissors, a little glue...

EDITH
It'll look suspicious.

IRVING
They're Swiss. They *like* suspicious money.

IN A PHOTO BOOTH,

a camera FLASHES and takes a picture of Edith, wearing a black wig and heavy makeup. She looks completely different.

ON A TABLE TOP,

the new picture of "Helga Hughes" is pasted over the old one of Edith.

A rubber eraser goes back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, obliterating Edith's name, which is handwritten in her German passport.

A steady hand writes "Helga Hughes" in its place.

INT SWISS BANK DAY

Edith, dressed up as Helga Hughes, strides confidently across the lobby of an impressive Swiss bank. She steps up to the window of a PASTY-FACED TELLER and slides the check across.

EDITH
(in German)
I'd like to open an account.

The Teller takes a look at the amount on the check and gets some color in his cheeks.

TELLER
(German)
Only too happy to help, Madam.

CUT TO:

INT CLIFF'S STUDIO DAY

Typewriter keys stand idle. Dick Suskind's voice drones in the background.

DICK (o.s.)
Howard Robard Hughes, Jr., born in Houston, Texas to Howard and Allene Hughes on Christmas Eve, 1905.

A stack of white paper lies unmolested on a desktop.

DICK (cont'd)
Only child, born into privilege, the heir to a fortune his father made by inventing a multi-headed drill bit used for boring through rock formations to get to oil deposits.

Irving sits back in his work chair, feet on his desk in his brightly-lit attic studio in Ibiza. His eyelids are drooping. There's a bottle of Coke in his hand that's listing perilously to one side.

DICK (cont'd)
Howard's father was rarely home, he screwed around on his wife a lot. Junior was very close to his mother, who passed away when he was sixteen.

Dick sits on the sofa, a mountain of research material assembled in front of him.

DICK (cont'd)
His father died just three years later, and Howard sued to get control of the Hughes Tool Company even though he was under twenty-one. The family allowed it, provided Hughes marry Ella Rice, a Houston society woman they thought would be a stabilizing influence on the young --

The Coke bottle slips from Irving's hand and hits the wood floor with a THUD. He wakes up, with a start.

DICK (cont'd)
-- a stabilizing influence on the young --

IRVING
Oh my God, are you still talking?

CONTINUED:

DICK
(getting irritated)
-- a stabilizing influence on the young --

IRVING
Fuck, we actually have to *write* this thing now, don't we?

DICK
-- on the young man. Just before 1924 Hughes was given control of his own affairs and used --

IRVING
Stop, stop, stop, please, I'm begging you...

DICK
-- his newfound independence to convince his relatives to sell him their shares of the company, a buyout that cost him --

IRVING
You're boring me to death, I read all that shit too, it's criminally dull.

DICK
-- $325,000, which at the time, was the total cash reserves of the company.

IRVING
Dick, I mean it, I'm going to hit you with a shovel if you don't shut up. Forget all that business stuff, it's like reading stereo instructions. This is a love story.

DICK
What are you talking about? This has to look like a serious biography.

IRVING
Oh, yeah? Have you seen our royalty deal? We want to sell a few books, believe me. It's a *love* story. Who did Howard love?

DICK
His money.

CONTINUED: (2)

IRVING
What else?

DICK
His airplanes.

IRVING
Who else? We need somebody they can cast, we want to sell the movie rights to this thing.

DICK
His mother.

IRVING
Great, Dick, very sexy. What about all those movie stars he was with? Did he love any of 'em?

DICK
Yeah, the one from silent movies, Billie somebody. Billie Dove.

IRVING
My God, no wonder you're doing children's books. People *hate* silent movies. Did he love anyone who could talk?

DICK
Katharine Hepburn.

IRVING
Yes! First good idea we've had all day!

DICK
It's not an "idea"...

IRVING
I was desperately in love with Katharine Hepburn!

DICK
You were?

IRVING
Huh?

DICK
You said "I" was in love with Katharine Hepburn.

CONTINUED: (3)

IRVING
Yes! I did! Second good idea! I just figured out how we're going to do this.

He picks up a tape recorder and sits in a chair opposite Dick.

IRVING (cont'd)
Howard insists the whole book be in question and answer format. I'm Hughes, you're me. You ask me questions, I answer, we type it up, easiest half a million we ever made.

He pushes the record button on the tape recorder and sits back. He has a different look on his face. A Howard Hughes kind of look.

IRVING (cont'd)
(slight Texas accent)
Hello, Clifford.

DICK
Huh?

IRVING
(impatient)
You're me, I'm him.

DICK
Oh. Uh... Hello, Mr. Hughes. May I call you Howard?

IRVING
You know, I've heard Mr. Hughes for so many years, I kinda got used to it, if you don't mind.

Dick frowns. Irving breaks character, shrugs.

IRVING (cont'd)
(as Irving)
Just came out of my mouth. Do what he says.

DICK
All right, Mr. Hughes. What were we talking about again?

IRVING
The subject was love, Clifford.

CONTINUED: (4)

DICK
Right. Katharine Hepburn. When did you meet her?

IRVING
It was on the set of a picture she was shooting.
(as Irving)
What was it called?

DICK
(checks his notes)
"Sylvia Scarlett."

IRVING
(as Hughes)
It was on the set of "Sylvia Scarlett." Cary Grant, good friend of mine, he was in the picture with her, they were shooting out at Trancas Beach

CUT TO:

EXT TRANCAS BEACH DAY

IRVING (v.o.)
George Cukor was directing. The man was a nasty old queen, even then. Anyhow, he told them both to invite somebody interesting for lunch. Cary asked me.

A film company shoots on the rolling dunes of Trancas Beach.

Hollywood, 1935

The cameras are rolling when the SOUND MAN signals to the director, gesturing frantically to his headphones. A few seconds later, we hear what he does -- the loud DRONE of an approaching airplane. GEORGE CUKOR, the director, stands up, annoyed as hell, and scans the skies. A Boeing Scout appears suddenly, descending from the clouds over the sparkling sea.

Cukor gestures for the cameras to cut, trying to shout over the ROAR of the engine. The airplane THUNDERS right over their heads, just a hundred feet off the ground, and comes in for a landing in a meadow just beyond the beach.

Cukor turns to CARY GRANT, who's standing beside him.

CONTINUED:

CUKOR
Knows how to make an entrance, doesn't he?

OVER AT THE TRAILERS,

KATHARINE HEPBURN, slim, beautiful, noble, ahead of her time in Gabardine slacks and a white Brooks Brothers shirt, opens the door of her trailer and comes out.

Hearing the sound, she climbs a dune and stands overlooking the meadow as the Boeing rolls to a stop in the meadow.

DOWN IN THE MEADOW,

HOWARD HUGHES climbs out of the airplane. Tall, thin, thirty, dark eyes, leather flight jacket. Women don't stand a chance. His eyes are drawn up to the dune, where he sees Kate standing there, hands on her hips, feet planted wide apart, wild red hair flipping in the breeze.

He's not the only one who knows about entrances.

EXT BEACH DAY

A sumptuous picnic lunch has been laid out on a blanket on the beach. Cukor, Grant, and Kate lounge around the blanket. Hughes is slightly to one side, staring down at something in his lap while the others talk.

KATE
Profit?! I don't think it made a hundred thousand dollars outside of New York. It was damned good, though, Mr. Agee called it a "symphony of emotion."
(faux modest, joking)
"And Miss Hepburn played all the solos."

GRANT
Why did Warner's kill it?

KATE
Why do you expect? Jack Warner can't recognize a human emotion unless it sits in his lap and wriggles.

They laugh. Kate darts a look at Hughes. He shows no response, just staring down at whatever's in his lap. She strains for a look. It's a note pad.

CONTINUED:

CUKOR
Warner only hates you because you wear pants.

KATE
Imagine, George, the very thing you like most in a person.

CUKOR
It's not the pants, dear, it's what's in them.

KATE
I'm sorry, George, was that repartee? Would you like me to summon a writer for you?

CUKOR
I simply have no idea why they call you "Katharine of Arrogance."

KATE
I *detest* that unfair label, and I won't have my friends waving it in front of me!

CUKOR
Calm down, *I've* never called you that.

GRANT
Neither have I.

KATE
I should hope not.

CUKOR
We just call you "that horrid Yankee cunt."

She throws a napkin at his face. There is much laughter, but still not a word from Hughes, who just stares down at his note pad. Kate frowns and leans over to Grant, lowering her voice.

KATE
Cary, I thought we agreed only to bring *interesting* people to lunch.

While Grant whispers back, we drift over to Hughes and get a look at his notepad. He's working on an incredibly detailed sketch of an airplane.

CONTINUED: (2)

Frustrated with it, he glances up, momentarily catches eyes with Kate. He blinks, as if noticing her for the first time. She flips her hair, looks away.

He smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT BEL AIR GOLF COURSE DAY

THWIK! Kate tees off on the seventh hole of the Bel Air Golf Course. THREE OLDER MEN, Hollywood power types, stand to the side. One of them lets out a respectful whistle as they squint off into the horizon, following the path of the ball.

OLDER MAN 1
Let me win this hole and I'll extend your contract, Kate.

KATE
(also staring)
Cancel my contract, Adolph, and I'll let you win the whole round.

There is some polite laughter, but the tensions are real.

OLDER MAN 2
(also staring after the ball)
I think I lost it.

A ROAR rises up suddenly from the nearby trees.

OLDER MAN 1
What in God's name is that?

OLDER MAN 2
An airplane?

OLDER MAN 1
It can't be an airplane.

OLDER MAN 2
(it's louder now)
It *is* an airplane.

OLDER MAN 1
Over the Bel Air Country Club? That's not possible.

A Boeing Scout zooms out from behind a row of trees and buzzes their heads. They duck. Kate's jaw drops.

CONTINUED:

It is not a familiar expression for her, and she catches it before anyone else notices.

The plane circles around and comes in for a landing. As other GOLFERS come running to gape and the club MANAGERS race out of the clubhouse, the Scout settles in for a landing on the narrow fairway, its wings nearly touching the branches of the trees on either side.

It rolls to a bumpy stop not fifty yards from them.

OLDER MAN 2
Good *God!*

OLDER MAN 1
There must have been some sort of emergency! Out of gas or engine failure or something!

OLDER MAN 2
Do you think they're all right?!

The door nearest the cockpit falls open with a BANG and Howard Hughes steps out, a bag of golf clubs slung over his shoulder.

He waves cheerily to Kate and the others as he walks toward them. Behind him, the Club Managers are racing toward him, SHOUTING angrily. Hughes gives them a cheery wave too.

OLDER MAN 1
Who *is* that maniac?!

KATE
That, Adolph, is Howard Hughes.

OLDER MAN 1
Hughes? Are you serious? Do you know him?

KATE
(a salacious smile)
Not nearly well enough.

Hughes reaches the group.

HUGHES
Afternoon, gentlemen. Miss Hepburn. Mind if I join you?

OLDER MAN 1
Mr. Hughes, with all due respect, this is simply not something one can do!

CONTINUED: (2)

HUGHES
(didn't hear him)
How's that?

OLDER MAN 1
(louder)
I said this has got to be against the law!

HUGHES
Oh, I think the club will allow a fivesome just this once.

He drops his bag and pulls out a club.

HUGHES (cont'd)
(to Kate)
Play a three wood on this, lay up before the bunker?

KATE
One could. I drove past it.

Hughes doesn't respond to that, just tees up and drives, sending a ball screaming over the heads of the approaching Club Managers. They hit the dirt as Hughes watches his ball sail off into the distance.

CUT TO:

EXT EIGHTEENTH GREEN DAY

A ball rolls into the cup on the eighteenth green. Hughes has just sunk a long putt, and the round is over. The Older Men grumble their goodbyes from the other side of the green and head off to the clubhouse to discuss the outrageous Mr. Hughes. Kate stands beside him.

KATE
Very nice. I'm so glad you-

HUGHES
(cutting her off)
Say, did you drive yourself here today?

KATE
Yes.

HUGHES
I wonder if I might ask you for a ride home.

CONTINUED:

He gestures to the airplane, which is visible in the distance. A CROWD OF MEN stands around it, arguing with each other. A golf ball BANGS off the fuselage as a foursome tries to play past it.

HUGHES (cont'd)
They've made these fairways a bit too short for takeoff.

KATE
How annoying of them. I'd be happy to give you a ride.

HUGHES
How's that?

KATE
Yes. I will give you a ride.

He nods and starts off to the parking lot. She watches him. Is he a dullard, or charming? It's the second meeting, and they still haven't had anything approaching a normal conversation.

EXT PARKING LOT DAY

Kate's car starts up in the parking lot. Kate is behind the wheel, Hughes in the passenger seat. The engine ROARS, not in good tune.

KATE
(raising her voice)
Sorry about the noise! I'm afraid the motor's in desperate need of something or other!

For the first time, Hughes brightens.

HUGHES
Oh, a little engine noise makes me feel right at home, like I'm in a cockpit. Tune-up's all she really wants. Dirty valves, makes the engine work too hard, and these Packards love to complain. I'd be happy to blow 'em out for you myself, stop off at my place in Hancock Park.

KATE
I had no idea you were so mechanically inclined.

CONTINUED:

HUGHES
Always loved engines. Had my father buy a Stutz for me when I was fourteen just so I could take it apart and put it back together again. By the time I got through with it I'll be damned if it didn't run better. Slow up a second.

Leaving the parking lot, she slows as she passes a truck with HUGHES AIRCRAFT painted on the side. There are a half dozen WORKERS in the truck. Hughes leans out the window and shouts to them.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Eighth fairway! Bit of a rumpus with the manager, you might have to write him a check! Don't be stingy, I'm a member here!

They wave back and continue on toward the airplane in the distance. Hughes settles back into his seat. Kate lowers her voice, an experiment.

KATE
Mr. Hughes, do you by any chance have trouble with your hearing?

HUGHES
How's that?

She smiles in sympathetic understanding and raises her voice again.

KATE
I said you're becoming much more clear to me.

HUGHES
Nothing complicated about me. On the whole, I'd rather be in the air than on the ground. Can't say any of the rest really matters.

CUT TO:

INT MAKEUP ROOM DAY

A MAKEUP ARTIST carefully does Kate's face in a makeup room at the studio. ROSE, Kate's factotum, comes through the door carrying an enormous bouquet of white roses.

CONTINUED:

ROSE
Why won't you just have dinner with the poor man?

Kate leans over and smells the roses.

KATE
Because, Rose, Mr. Hughes is a *desirable* gentleman.

ROSE
Well, that makes sense.

KATE
When I finally do accept one of his invitations, we want him to have a certain feeling of accomplishment.

ROSE
I don't understand that at all.

KATE
Of course you don't, Rose. You're Rose.

CUT TO:

INT THEATRE NIGHT

Kate is on stage, Jane in a production of "Jane Eyre." A legend:

Chicago, six weeks later

It's the last scene of the play. A sitting room. ROCHESTER, tapping his way across the cabin with his cane, moves right past Jane on his way to the fireplace. MRS. FAIRFAX picks up the dishes from his dinner.

MRS. FAIRFAX
Do you want to see her so much, sir?

ROCHESTER
See Jane? God no. Even if I could. And to have her see me -- a blind, helpless hulk. No. Do you think I want her pity? I'd just like to know she's safe. Not hungry-cold-friendless.

MRS. FAIRFAX
You're not eating much.

CONTINUED:

ROCHESTER
I've had enough. You may take the tray.

Mrs. Fairfax takes the tray and leaves. As Rochester crosses the room, Jane falls in behind him, walking in step with him. He hears, stops, listens intently. Knows someone is there.

JANE
Mr. Rochester, sir.

ROCHESTER
Then I am losing my mind! Dear God, haven't you punished me enough?

As the play goes on, we find Hughes sitting third row center.

JANE (o.s.)
That's not very courteous. Even if I were a ghost, you could be hospitable!

ROCHESTER (o.s.)
Jane, it isn't you? Alive?!

Closer to Hughes, we find him looking down into his lap again, not really paying attention to the play. He probably can't hear it anyway. But what's he looking at?

JANE (o.s.)
Yes, sir. It's truly Jane.

ROCHESTER (o.s.)
"Truly Jane!" That sounds like Jane!

Hughes has a sheaf of weather maps in his lap. The audience around him bursts into applause. Hughes hears it, looks up, and begins clapping as well.

CUT TO:

INT HOTEL CORRIDOR NIGHT

Kate, followed by Rose, hurries down the corridor of a lavish hotel. Rose is burdened with flowers and bottles of champagne. Kate sorts through a stack of telegrams she's received.

KATE
This one's darling, it's from Cary. Send him a telegram, will you?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE (cont'd)
"Cary, thank you so much for your kind words and my deepest sympathies on the death of your picture. Better you than me. All my love, Kate."
Oh, and my brother and his wife are coming tomorrow night, get them the house seats, will you? And I don't want to be disturbed before eleven in the morning from now on, Rose, this is a very draining play and if I-

She stops, having just opened the door to her suite.

IN THE SUITE,

bouquets of flowers take up every available inch of table space, and some are even stacked in the corners. Kate wanders in, stunned. Rose stands in the doorway, smiling.

KATE
Good Lord. I had no idea Chicago theatergoers were so -- responsive.

She leans over and smells a particularly beautiful bouquet.

ROSE
They're from Mr. Hughes.

KATE
What... *all* of them?

ROSE
(nods)
He flew in this afternoon. Wanted to see you before he goes off on his round-the-world flight tomorrow. He's taken a suite just down the hall.

Kate finds a table on which several expensive pieces of jewelry have been laid out for her. There's an enormous ring, a diamond necklace, a pair of stunning earrings. Kate picks up the necklace and regards it disdainfully, infuriated.

KATE
Has he?

INT HUGHES' SUITE NIGHT

A telephone rings. Hughes picks it up. He's in a similar suite.

CONTINUED:

HUGHES
Hello?

KATE (O.S.)
Darling. I'm back.

Her tone is oddly coquettish, completely unlike her.

HUGHES
Well, hello.

KATE (o.s.)
I found what you left. You're horrible.

HUGHES
I'd like to be.

KATE (o.s.)
I'm down the hall. Come see me. Don't make me wait.

She hangs up. Hughes, grinning like a man about to get laid, adjusts his coat and tie in the mirror and heads out the door.

INT HOTEL CORRIDOR NIGHT

Hughes hurries down the corridor, looking left and right, making sure he's not seen going into her room. He reaches her door and knocks. The door is unlocked, resting on the latch.

KATE (o.s.)
It's open!

Hughes pushes the door open, a wolfish smile on his face.

The smile freezes. He stares in disbelief.

Kate is standing in the middle of the room, completely naked. Hands on hips. Diverse patches of red hair flaming.

KATE (cont'd)
Where would you like me to lie down?

Hughes is utterly speechless. Behind him, a BELLBOY stops in the hallway, pushing a dinner table, jaw hanging open. Hughes bolts into the room and SLAMS the door shut behind him.

CONTINUED:

HUGHES
Have you lost your mind?!

KATE
The bed? The floor? The sofa, then. Please, Mr. Hughes, I await your instructions.

HUGHES
What in the name of Christ are you talking about?!

KATE
(picks up the jewels)
I'm bought and paid for, aren't I? I think the least I can do is be accommodating.

HUGHES
Kate, for God's sake, put on your clothes!

KATE
"Put on your clothes?!" You're a very contradictory gentleman. You see, *these* do not say "Put on your clothes!"

She hurls the jewels at him, then starts ripping the flowers out of their vases and throwing them into a pile on the floor.

KATE (cont'd)
These do not say "Put on your clothes," either! What *these* things do is make a rather unsubtle demand that I REMOVE my clothes. They say "Mr. Hughes, the great industrialist, has arrived to collect a bill that is slightly overdue. He is prepared to commence sexual activity. Lie back, and open wide your portals of commerce! Thank you for your cooperation!"

She has worked her way through the flowers, which are now in a giant pile in the middle of the floor. She's standing just a few feet from Hughes, cheeks flushed, nostrils flaring.

CONTINUED: (2)

HUGHES
I think I'll step out and come back after you've had a chance to get dressed.

KATE
I'm *perfectly* capable of having this conversation naked!

HUGHES
You're -- you don't even -- just because a man gives a woman a gift -- a few gifts -- if a woman -- when a woman --

KATE
I am overwhelmed by your semantic flair.

HUGHES
I'm not Jewish!

KATE
Se*man*tic, you Texas twit.

HUGHES
Damn it, you're taking this all the wrong way.

KATE
And what is the right way?

HUGHES
Tomorrow morning I'm climbing into an experimental aircraft, alone, and I'm going up there, higher than anybody's ever flown, *faster* than anybody's ever flown -- I may not come down alive, and I thought to myself, what's the one memory I can take with me? What's the one thing I can hold in my mind when I'm sitting up there in that cockpit, one thing that can keep me warm in the freezing cold... well, damn it, all I could think of was you. I just wanted -- ah, forget it. If I was wrong, I was wrong, I'm sorry.

KATE
(melting)
You weren't... *so* wrong.

CONTINUED: (3)

He grabs her and kisses her. She shoves him away, thinks, then grabs him by the tie and pulls him to her. She kisses him back.

She falls backwards, into the pile of flowers, pulling him down on top of her. They kiss, furiously. After a moment, she pushes him back.

KATE (cont'd)
Ambition before love, Howard. Don't ever forget I said that.

HUGHES
Stop talking, for once.

KATE
I don't need you, I don't need anyone. I'm going to be the most famous woman in the world.

He keeps kissing her.

KATE (cont'd)
(murmurs)
Ambition before love.

HUGHES
Is there a difference?

She laughs, throws her arms back over her head. Her fingers fall on the diamond necklace. She loops her fingers through it, holds it up to the light while he kisses her neck passionately.

KATE
Maybe I'll keep just this one...

CUT TO:

BLACK AND WHITE NEWSREEL FOOTAGE

blasts onto the screen. It's a shot of an airplane bouncing to a stop on a New York runway.

ANNOUNCER
Earlier this week, millionaire aviator Howard Hughes shattered Wiley Post's record for a round-the-world plane flight, circumnavigating the globe in just three and a half days!

Hughes steps out of the airplane and waves to a CROWD that has gathered to greet him at the edge of the runway.

CONTINUED:

ANNOUNCER (cont'd)
Hughes has set the stage for intercontinental air travel, which he predicts will be available to the general public by the end of the decade!

The image cuts to a ticker tape parade in Manhattan. Hughes sits on the back of an open car, waving shyly to the assembled throng.

ANNOUNCER (cont'd)
Hughes was given a hero's welcome in New York, where the ticker tape parade the city threw for him was bigger than that given for Charles Lindbergh, generating three tons more trash!

The image cuts to a shot of Hughes and Kate as they come out of a building and are immediately mobbed by FANS and PHOTOGRAPHERS.

ANNOUNCER (cont'd)
After the parade, Hughes went directly to the apartment of film star Katharine Hepburn, the other half of America's most celebrated lovebirds!

IN A SCREENING ROOM,

Katharine Hepburn watches the newsreel, alone. She's strangely emotional, tears in her eyes. It's a hard emotion to read.

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
But La Hepburn had better move quick if she wants to hear wedding bells! The Fastest Man Alive is now also the most eligible and *famous* man alive!

CUT TO:

EXT MUIRFIELD DAY

A grand old house stands back from the palm trees on a wide Los Angeles street. From inside the house, a phone RINGS.

Muirfield
Hughes' Los Angeles estate

CONTINUED:

ANGELA, a small woman dressed in a neat housekeeping dress stands on the front step. The door is opened by BEATRICE DOWLER, a severe woman with a seen-it-all look.

BEATRICE
You're Angela?

ANGELA
Yes, ma'am.

Beatrice gives her a long look of assessment. Angela looks positively frail.

BEATRICE
You'll never last the week. But let's go through the motions.

INT MUIRFIELD DAY

In the grand living room, Beatrice closes two sizable windows that have been flung open to the spring day.

BEATRICE
Miss Hepburn craves fresh air and prefers the windows open whenever possible. Mr. Hughes demands they be closed at all times and the curtains drawn. You will often be caught in the middle of this debate.

She starts up the central staircase. Angela follows. From somewhere in the distance, there is a periodic SMASHING sound. Angela looks around for it, can't find where it's coming from. And that phone is still RINGING.

BEATRICE (cont'd)
You'll be one of eight indoor servants. When I'm not here, you'll answer to Mr. Hughes' valet, but under no circumstances should you respond to requests from either of the chauffeurs or any of the garden staff. Your primary responsibility is to assist the laundress.

ANGELA
Is there a great deal of laundry? I was told it's just the two of them.

Beatrice laughs hollowly.

INT BEDROOM DAY

Beatrice throws open the doors of a gargantuan closet, revealing rows and rows of slacks and crisp white shirts. From another room, the phone keeps RINGING.

BEATRICE
Miss Hepburn takes an average of six showers a day, changing clothes after each. Mr. Hughes will go through four or five shirts and a half dozen pairs of chinos per day as well. All clothes must be hand washed and pressed.

INT DINING ROOM DAY

Downstairs, that SMASHING sound comes again, regularly, a bit louder. Beatrice opens a large cabinet in one wall of the dining room, revealing a spectacular display of china and table linens.

BEATRICE
Each meal here is semi-formal, we require damask table linen and use of the monogrammed napkins. All linens must be hand washed and pressed. Your working day will run an average of ten hours. If the laundress should release you early, you'll help with preparations for that evening's entertainment. Each dinner party is ranked with an A, a B, or a C. "A" list guests dine off the Haviland and crystal, which you'll find here. The "B" list is given the rose-pattern American china and the cut-glass goblets.
(with obvious disdain)
The "C" list --

INT KITCHEN DAY

Beatrice sweeps into the kitchen, Angela following dizzily in her wake. The phone, which had stopped, begins RINGING again.

BEATRICE
-- is composed primarily of Mr. Hughes' "aviator" friends --
(lowers her voice to a whisper)
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

BEATRICE (cont'd)
-- as well as Lucky Luciano and Bugsy Siegel, on occasion, which you will keep to yourself.

She opens a huge cabinet, revealing stacks and stacks of porcelain and cheap glassware.

BEATRICE (cont'd)
Service for this group can be found here. After C list plates and glasses are used --

She opens a side door on the kitchen, revealing the motor court.

IN THE MOTOR COURT,

two KITCHEN SERVANTS wearing gloves and protective eyewear SMASH a stack of dirty plates and glasses on the driveway, then sweep it up and shovel it into boxes and bags.

BEATRICE
They are retired. Do you have any questions?

INT UPSTAIRS STUDY DAY

Kate watches the smashing of the plates and glasses through the window of an upstairs study. Hughes is huddled in a chair in the corner in a robe, a blanket around his shoulders, sketching on a pad. A phone next to him RINGS throughout the scene. He ignores it. Kate, agitated, stubs out a cigarette and lights another.

HUGHES
For God's sake, will you stop filling the air with poison?

KATE
Between the smashing plates and that *God damn phone* --
(picks it up)
Call back later!
(hangs up)
-- if I don't smoke I really will go out of my mind, I promise you I will.

The phone begins to RING again.

HUGHES
What's bothering you?

KATE
Mother Carey's Chickens.

CONTINUED:

HUGHES
What?

KATE
MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKENS! It's a screenplay. At least I think it's a screenplay, it was hard for me to read, I couldn't stop vomiting. Paramount sent it over. It's an insult.
(picks up the phone)
I said later!
(hangs up)
Do you think I should do it, or tell them to go straight to hell? Tell me honestly, you know how I value your opinion.

The phone begins to RING.

HUGHES
I think you should do it.

KATE
Oh, what do you know. "Mother Carey's Chickens." I'd rather buy out my contract.

HUGHES
You're lucky to have that contract. Your last few pictures haven't exactly set the box office on fire.

KATE
You're a monstrous human being. I don't need you to remind me of the state of my career. I read Variety. I know they're calling me box office poison. "Box office poison," I'd cry, if I wasn't laughing so hard.

He gets up and embraces her. She is tearful.

KATE (cont'd)
I want to go home.

HUGHES
You are home.

KATE
I want to go back east. I want to see my family. I don't care if I never work in pictures again.

CONTINUED: (2)

HUGHES
That's no way to talk.

KATE
Will you come with me? I want them to meet you. You'll love them. They'll love you. We'll stay at Fenwick, we'll golf every day and swim naked in the Sound every night and say the hell with everyone in Hollywood. *Hollywood!* It's a dozen frogs in a jar all trying to get on top of one another. Say you'll come with me, Howard, tell me you will.

HUGHES
It's that important to you?

She nods, eyes shining with tears. Hughes turns and goes to the still-ringing phone. Finally, he picks it up.

HUGHES (cont'd)
(into phone)
Have the twin engine amphibian ready by six o'clock.

He hangs up the phone and smiles at her. She throws herself into his arms.

KATE
Oh, Howard... Howard...

HUGHES
I just hope that was someone from the office.

CUT TO:

EXT CONNECTICUT SHORE DAY

A seaplane touches down on the gentle waves of Long Island Sound. A large, rambling Connecticut farmhouse stands tall on the shore, nestled in a beautiful fortress of coastal oak trees.

Fenwick
The Hepburn family summer home

The plane taxis toward the shore.

INT FENWICK - KITCHEN DAY

An enormous family kitchen is the heart of the house, and the site of constant activity. Right now a meal of sorts is going on -- Hughes sits at one end of the table, Kate beside him. DR. THOMAS HEPBURN, Kate's father, is there, as well as Kate's mother, KATHARINE. Various SISTERS, BROTHER, NIECES and NEPHEWS, and FAMILY FRIENDS stream in and out of the kitchen, grabbing food and drink, all talking at once. It seems to be, basically, lunch time. Or so. Schedules don't seem terribly important here.

KATE
(introducing Hughes around)
...my brother Tom and his wife Mary, our dear friend Sarah Pease, Sarah, stop eating, if that's possible, I'm introducing you to Howard, and of course mother -- didn't you just meet mother? -- Mother, please, stop going back and forth, you're confusing poor Howard. Good Lord, think of the names he has to keep straight.

LUDLOW STEVENS, a slightly effeminate man of thirty or so, hurries into the room, carrying a movie camera.

LUDDY
I just bought an entire case of moving picture film from a man in the city for five dollars, but I'm afraid it's of nefarious origin.

KATE
Luddy! I *knew* I was forgetting someone!

There is much greeting of the very popular "Luddy."

LUDDY
"Fell off a truck" I believe is the expression they use to describe merchandise such as this. I'm probably going to get us all thrown in jail.

Kate throws her arms around Luddy and drags him over to Hughes.

KATE
Luddy, this is Howard Hughes.

CONTINUED:

LUDDY
Oh, it is not.

KATE
Ludlow Stevens, Howard Hughes.

They shake hands, each somewhat dubious of the other.

HUGHES
How do you do?

KATE
Luddy is our dear, sweet ex.

HUGHES
I beg your pardon?

KATE
Our ex. Sweet. Dear. Luddy.

HUGHES
Who's ex what?

KATE
My ex. Husband. Disastrous marriage.

LUDDY
The worst.

KATE
Didn't I ever mention that?

HUGHES
Must have slipped your mind.

LUDDY
Easy to do. It was mercifully brief.

MRS. HEPBURN
We all still feel rather proprietary about Luddy. He's one of the family.

Luddy finishes loading his camera and starts filming Hughes.

MRS. HEPBURN (cont'd)
You'll get used to him.

HUGHES
Uh huh.

CONTINUED: (2)

He looks around. What in God's name have I gotten into here?

KATE
Philip, please, observe if you must, but if you're going to scribble, do it in secret. I feel like I'm giving an interview.

She's talking to PHILIP BARRY, a man never seen without a pen and cigarette in the same hand. He's scribbling into a note pad at the kitchen table.

BARRY
Just ignore me, Tracy. You're good at that.

HUGHES
Tracy?

KATE
I beg your pardon?

HUGHES
He called you Tracy.

KATE
Not again? I don't even notice any more. *Please* don't give my character that ridiculous name. Howard, this is Philip Barry, an old family friend, he has an idea for a marvelous new play which I am not allowed to read, and which he is apparently stealing from our mouths whenever we open them. Shall I speak more slowly, Philip?

BARRY
Please. And spell the larger words, if you could.

KATE
(an idea)
GOLF! G-O-L-F!

As one, they all rise up from the table with a great CHEER of approval. Hughes just watches. For the first (and perhaps last) time in his life, he is *not* the center of the scene.

CUT TO:

EXT GOLF COURSE DAY

Kate, Hughes, Dr. Hepburn, and Philip Barry are on a golf course. Luddy is with them, circling with his movie camera. Hughes is attempting to line up a shot, but Luddy keeps getting in his way.

HUGHES
Excuse me.

LUDDY
Sorry.

He whirls around to point the camera at Kate, who responds by graciously striking a hammy pose. Luddy shoots her, increasingly close, until they fall against each other, laughing. She gives him a big kiss, half cheek, half lips. This further distracts and irritates Hughes.

HUGHES
Stop it, damn it. I can't concentrate.

Luddy swings back to film Hughes again.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Just put the camera away for a bit, will you please, Mr. -- Luddy?

Dr. Hepburn leans in close to Hughes.

DR. HEPBURN
Look, Howard, Luddy has been taking pictures of all of us years before you joined us, and he will be taking them long after you have left. He's part of this family. Now. Go ahead. Drive. You'll never reach the green with that seven iron, by the way.

Infuriated, Hughes turns to the ball with the club he's got and gives it a colossal WHACK. It lands on the green and rolls three feet from the pin.

Hughes jams his club into his bag and stalks off. Philip Barry, leaning against a tree, chuckles to himself and keeps writing in his notebook.

CUT TO:

INT KITCHEN NIGHT

Night has fallen, and a raucous dinner is taking place in the kitchen. A dozen family members are crammed around the table. Hughes is wedged in at the corner. Across from him, Mrs. Hepburn is grilling him while three or four side conversations flare and rage.

MRS. HEPBURN
Surely you're not of the somewhat -- pardon me for being blunt -- the somewhat *backward* opinion that birth control is not a fit subject for public discussion?

HUGHES
I didn't say that at all, I believe I just said that in the interests of propriety-

MRS. HEPBURN
"In the interests of propriety," Mr. Hughes, the subject of birth control has been swept under the rug, exposing women to reproductive tyranny and to myriad infectious diseases brought home by philandering husbands.

Hughes strains to hear, but he is losing her words under the general din at the table.

MRS. HEPBURN (cont'd)
(her voice fading in and out to Hughes)
Meanwhile, through social taboo, they have been prevented from reaching for the one thing that might give a tiny bit of control of their lives back to them. A condom.

Hughes rubs his head, his bad hearing really plaguing him now. He attempts a response just to get out of the conversation.

HUGHES
Well, all of this is really something best left to a man and... maybe, uh... a church, to, uh...

CONTINUED:

MRS. HEPBURN
(loudly)
Good Lord, Mr. Hughes, you're a conservative!

All conversations cease. Everyone looks at Hughes. Those are strong words at this table. Hughes looks around at the unfriendly faces. He is not accustomed to this position.

HUGHES
Excuse me. I've got to make a phone call.

He leaves the room. There is a moment of tense silence. Mrs. Hepburn looks at Kate, who shrugs.

KATE
It doesn't do any good to get mad at him, Mother. He can't hear what you're saying anyhow.

At one end of the table, Philip Barry continues to take notes. Looking closer at his page, we see it's a page of dialogue, a page of script.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT THEATRE - BACKSTAGE NIGHT

Barry's page of dialogue dissolves into a printed page torn from a play, one of dozens pasted onto a large board backstage in a theatre. Up at the top of the board, we see the title of the play -- "THE PHILADELPHIA STORY."

The play is underway onstage. Kate plays the lead, a character named Tracy.

IN THE AUDIENCE,

the house is packed, and the audience is loving it. They laugh uproariously every time Kate's character opens her mouth.

Hughes sits third row center, watching the action onstage.

FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW,

the play looks like it's set within the walls of Fenwick. All the characters we just met seem to be represented on stage, the clothes and settings are remarkably similar. But to Howard, it's almost impossible to hear -- the actors' words are barely a murmur to him.

CONTINUED:

The mumbling silence is punctuated only by the sharp laughter of the audience around him.

Hughes looks around the theatre. They love the show. They love her.

The audience bursts into applause.

Hughes looks back at the stage, sees Kate taking her bow. His eyes shine proudly. He leads the standing ovation.

BACKSTAGE,

there is much backslapping and popping of champagne corks after the performance. Hughes, carrying an envelope with Kate's name on the front, makes his way to a door with a star on it and knocks.

KATE (o.s.)
Come in!

He pushes the door open.

IN THE DRESSING ROOM,

Kate turns away from her mirror, where she's removing makeup.

KATE
Howard!

HUGHES
It's a hit. A huge hit.

KATE
Do you think so? Do you really, really think so? You're not just trying to soften the blow?

He smiles and shakes his head.

HUGHES
You have to play Tracy in the film version, Kate. And believe me, there *will* be a film version.

KATE
Hollywood will never let me. They despise me out there, Howard. All they do is sit around and think of clever ways to mock me. This role was *written* for me, this role *is* me, if I don't play it... it's too painful to think about.

CONTINUED:

He holds the envelope out to her.

KATE (cont'd)
What's this?

HUGHES
Open it.

She does. There's a three page document inside. She flips through it, confused.

KATE
I don't understand.

HUGHES
Yes, you do.

KATE
You own the film rights to the play?

HUGHES
Read again.

KATE
I own the film rights?!

HUGHES
Any idea who can play Tracy? It's your decision.

She leaps to her feet and throws her arms around him.

KATE
Oh, Howard... Howard, Howard... thank you... thank you so much...

She covers him with kisses.

HUGHES
Consider it a wedding present.

She stops covering him with kisses.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Will you, Kate?
(no answer)
I've got to know where I stand.

She crosses away from him. Draws a deep breath.

KATE
Howard. The day you landed -- after the flight around the world.
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

KATE (cont'd)
When you couldn't get to my apartment, because the crowds were mobbing you. The ticker tape parade, the magazine covers... do you remember all that?

HUGHES
How could I forget?

KATE
Do you know what I became on that day? I became "Howard Hughes' girlfriend." I knew something that day. I should have told you before, but I couldn't.
(holds up the envelope)
This is the most beautiful thing anyone's ever done for me. But I can't accept it. I can't marry you. I am a woman. I am myself. I am not someone's girlfriend. Ambition before love. Remember?

Hughes looks at her. He is crushed.

CUT TO:

INT CLIFF'S STUDIO DAY

Clifford Irving sits slumped in his chair, having just finished telling Hughes' Hepburn story to Dick, his interviewer.

IRVING
(as Hughes)
I never loved anyone again. Not really. Not like Kate.

Long pause. Dick is impressed.

DICK
That was beautiful, Cliff.

IRVING
(coming out of character)
Not good enough.

DICK
I thought it was very moving.

IRVING
No. I don't have his voice. I just don't... have him yet. It's not true.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK
Actually, it's quite accurate. She got the rights to "The Philadelphia Story," she went on to star in the movie, it was a big hit, it revitalized her career.

IRVING
Facts and figures, names and dates, I'm telling you *I don't have him yet.*

DICK
That's because we're doing this all wrong. We started in the middle. You write a biography, you start with the day a guy was born, and work forward. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10. That's how peoples' lives go, that's how you do it.

IRVING
You have the imagination of a bowl of oatmeal.

DICK
We need more information.

IRVING
That I agree with. We need *new* information. Not this --
(flips the books around)
-- crap that everybody's read a million times.

DICK
What about life?

IRVING
Kind of a broad question there, Dick.

DICK
No, *Life* magazine. They're serializing this book, aren't they? Maybe they'll let us into their files. You know, let us see the reporters' notes, the juicy stuff they couldn't publish.

Irving looks at him for a long moment, then puts an arm around Dick and pulls him close in a rough and friendly way.

CONTINUED: (2)

IRVING
Well, you're just a big brilliant huggable bear, aren't you?

DICK
Yes, Clifford, I am.

IRVING
I want to ask you a very important question. What's the most expensive New York hotel we can get McGraw-Hill to pay for?

CUT TO:

EXT PLAZA HOTEL NIGHT

Nighttime in New York, and the Plaza is all dressed up in lights.

INT PLAZA SUITE NIGHT

A BELLMAN opens the door of a magnificent suite. TWO MORE BELLMEN come in carrying suitcases, boxes of books, two typewriters. It seems like too much luggage for just two guys, and it is -- Nina Van Pallandt sweeps through the door, draped in a floor length fur coat which might even be real. She surveys the room.

NINA
I love it.
(to Irving)
Don't you just love it?

IRVING
Yes. Howard will feel comfortable here.

Dick pokes his head into the bedroom, then looks out again.

DICK
Where do I sleep?

IRVING
Washington.

DICK
Huh?

IRVING
I need you to get down to the Library of Congress right away.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

IRVING (cont'd)
They should have a transcript of Hughes's Senate testimony in '47. It's just what we need, we'll get his speech patterns, the kind of language he uses, everything. Check out the transcript and bring it back here.

DICK
They don't let you check that kind of stuff out of the Library of Congress.

IRVING
Dick, you're starting to irritate me. We're at work on a masterpiece, and you're talking about *library rules?* Do you think Michelangelo stopped painting the ceiling every day at five o'clock because the Sistine Chapel was *closing?*
(shakes him)
What have they done to you?! Where is your self-esteem?! *BE AN ARTIST,* God damn it! Get down there and *STEAL!*

CUT TO:

EXT LIBRARY OF CONGRESS DAY

Dick walks past a throng of VIETNAM PROTESTERS and into the imposing Library of Congress in Washington.

INT LIBRARY OF CONGRESS DAY

Dick walks past a SECURITY GUARD at the front doors. PATRONS pass by him, but the Guard barely notices them.

INT TIME-LIFE BUILDING DAY

Irving is led down a corridor in the Time-Life building (there's a big sign on the wall) by a nervous TIME-LIFE LIBRARIAN. The Librarian does not approve of this.

TIME-LIFE GUY
Our rules are very strict about reporters' notes. Only employees of the magazine are supposed to see them.

IRVING
Then I really appreciate what you're doing.

CONTINUED:

TIME-LIFE GUY
I'm only doing what I was told. You may take notes and nothing more, is that clear? You may gather impressions, but I will not have unattributed quotes and reporters' impressions turning up in whatever it is you're writing. This is the Time-Life corporation, please remember that.

INT LIBRARY OF CONGRESS - STACKS DAY

Deep in the bowels of the Library of Congress, there are stacks and stacks of leather-bound transcript books, two hundred years of government hearings. Dick wanders through the stacks, referring to a slip of paper in his hand.

He finds a series of books that match the numbers on the paper. He climbs a ladder, leans out as far as he can, and selects Volume 40 of "Senate Arms Sub-Committee Hearings Jan.-March, 1947."

INT TIME-LIFE RESEARCH AREA DAY

The Time-Life Guy leads Irving into the research area. Stacks of files are everywhere, some have been laid out on a table in a corner. A sign on the wall says "TIME-LIFE EMPLOYEES ONLY!"

TIME-LIFE GUY
You have one hour.

IRVING
An hour?

TIME-LIFE GUY
I was told to give you access. You have it, for one hour. I'll be back at two fifteen.
(heads for the door)
Notes only!

IRVING
You have my word.

The Guy leaves. Irving waits a second, then opens his briefcase and pulls out a camera with a small tripod.

INT STACKS DAY

Buried in the stacks of the Library of Congress, Dick is hunched over a desk, MUMBLING into a tape recorder as fast as he can as he reads from the open transcript book in front of him. The words blur together.

Overwhelmed, he flips ahead in the book, to see how much testimony there is. It is, literally, thousands of pages. He SNAPS off the tape recorder and drops it on the table, rubbing his head.

He looks around. There's no one anywhere near him.

He closes the book. He stands. He pulls out the waistband of his pants and shoves the book in, to see if it'll fit.

It does. He shifts it around to the back, tucks it in, and puts his jacket on over it. You'd never know.

INT TIME-LIFE RESEARCH AREA DAY

Irving works fast, snapping pictures and turning the pages in the Time-Life files. It's a treasure-trove of handwritten notes, rough drafts of articles, photographs.

INT LIBRARY OF CONGRESS DAY

Dick walks casually toward the front door of the Library of Congress. The same Guard is there, letting people pass in front of him without incident.

But suddenly the Guard seems to wake up, just as Dick approaches. He stretches, eyes Dick, who seems quite nervous.

GUARD
Could you open your briefcase please, sir?

DICK
(dying inside)
Uh... sure.

He puts his briefcase on a table and opens it. The Guard searches it. Dick sweats. The Guard gives him back the briefcase.

GUARD
Could you turn around, please?

Dick's eyes widen.

CONTINUED:

DICK
So, uh... are you open on Saturdays?

GUARD
Hours are on the wall behind me. Turn around please, hold your arms out to your sides.

Dick complies. The Guard frisks him. Just as the Guard starts to wrap his hands around Dick's back, to where the book makes a big fat bulge in the back of his shirt --

-- the book drops down, *through* Dick's waistband, and falls into the seat of his pants. The Guard concludes the frisk.

GUARD (cont'd)
Have a nice day.

Dick nods, badly shaken, and waddles out the door of the building with a heavy load in his pants.

INT TIME-LIFE BUILDING DAY

A clock on the wall in the Time-Life building says it's two o'clock. Irving walks out of the research area, past the nervous Time-Life Guy.

IRVING
Thank you so much, you've been an enormous help.

TIME-LIFE GUY
You still have another fifteen minutes.

IRVING
I think I've got the picture.

HANDS POUND AWAY

on the keyboard of a manual typewriter.

TYPEWRITER KEYS

strike a page; the words pour out.

A SHEET OF PAPER

is ripped out of the typewriter's roller and placed on top of a huge stack of other typewritten pages.

INT HOTEL SUITE NIGHT

Nina Van Pallandt reclines on the sofa in the living room of the Plaza suite, reading the transcript so far. Dick and Irving hover nearby, nervous authors awaiting her pronouncement. She finishes the last page and sets it on top of the stack. She sits back. They look at her. She looks at them. Finally:

NINA
You don't have him.

DICK
What?!

IRVING
I *knew* it!

NINA
Oh, I think it's all right, it's... it's fine.

DICK
It's *fine?!*

NINA
I'm afraid it's just a trifle... dull.

DICK
It's DULL?! We're all going to jail for a dull book?!

NINA
You have a *major* problem with your main character. It's not your fault. I just don't think he's an interesting person.

IRVING
He's Howard Fucking Hughes!

NINA
Well, yes, I'm perfectly aware of that, but what did he ever do? And I'm sorry, this heartbreaking romance with Katharine Hepburn is rather unimpressive. Is that the best Rosebud you boys could come up with? My *father* had a crush on Katharine Hepburn, nobody's writing books about him.

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

NINA (cont'd)
Besides, everyone knows why she didn't marry Hughes, she was in love with John Ford.

IRVING
She was NOT! She was in love with me!

DICK
Him.

IRVING
Right!

NINA
The truth is, Hughes was basically a loser.

Dick GROANS and collapses onto the sofa, pulling a pillow over his head. Furious, Irving gets up and grabs his jacket.

IRVING
I gotta get some air.

NINA
Don't be offended, you asked my opinion and I'm giving it to you. Look at him now, he's an old fart with a fat wallet. The only reason the press goes nuts every time he flies off for a vacation in the Bahamas is because of the two billion dollars. Without the money, what is he? He has no talent. I wish the press would pay a little of that attention to me. At least I have something to offer. The problem is, the right people haven't seen me.

IRVING
I know it's difficult, but could we drop the subject of your career for just two more minutes?

NINA
There's no need to be unpleasant. If you want us to care about the man, he has to have done something other than spend his father's money, fly a few airplanes, and try to screw starlets.

CONTINUED: (2)

IRVING
Spend his father's money? He quadrupled the size of the company in the first five years! Made it a hundred times bigger by the time he was fifty! The man was a genius! Retractable landing gear, high altitude flying, radar guided missiles -- he invented *all* that! He practically designed modern commercial aviation!

NINA
Well, then you should put that in your little book.

DICK
We didn't?

NINA
And you don't have nearly enough characters. How could this ever be a movie without more characters? Who helped him? Who was his right hand man? Men like that always have a right hand man.

DICK
Noah Dietrich.

NINA
Put him in. Put him in! Must I think of everything? Which reminds me, who am I supposed to play in this?

IRVING
She's right, Dick.

NINA
I assume Hepburn.

IRVING
There's no supporting cast.

NINA
Because if you think I'm playing the mother, you're insane.

Irving settles into a comfortable armchair and turns on a tape recorder.

CONTINUED: (3)

IRVING
Ask me about Noah Dietrich.

NINA
What are you doing?

DICK
Watch, it gets weirder.
(to Irving)
When did you first meet Noah, Mr. Hughes?

IRVING
(as Hughes)
When I first came to Hollywood. Nineteen years old. Both parents dead. Forced into an arranged marriage as the price of taking over my father's company.

NINA
You sound a bit like that cartoon chicken.

IRVING
Now I had to find somebody to run it.

NINA
Foghorn Something.

IRVING
Noah walked in. Sat down in my life for the next thirty-five years.

CUT TO:

INT HOTEL CORRIDOR DAY

NOAH DIETRICH, a short, powerfully-built man of thirty-six dressed in a natty suit and round wire rimmed glasses, walks down the corridor of an expensive hotel, looking for a room number.

Ambassador Hotel
Los Angeles, 1925

BELLMEN and VALETS stream past Dietrich, carrying boxes, packages, clear cases with fresh hothouse flowers inside. Dietrich follows them to a pair of gargantuan doors at the end of the hall. The doors are flung open, revealing --

INT HOTEL SUITES DAY

-- the expansive Los Angeles hotel suites of Howard Robard Hughes, Jr. Dietrich pokes his head in as the package-bearers stream past him.

ELLA RICE HUGHES, a beautiful dark-eyed woman of twenty-one, stands in the middle of the suites, removing her gloves. She wears a flowing chiffon gown.

ELLA
The Brooks Brothers bags go in Mr. Hughes' bedroom, over there, the boxes can be left in mine, the gardenias go in vases in the bedrooms, please leave the orchids in the containers and I'll place them around the room myself.

Two enormous doors that lead to a bedroom jerk open. A tall, dark, tousle-haired nineteen year old in a sharply cut linen suit steps out. He's carrying a plate and napkin, which he forces on one of the Bellmen.

HUGHES
Take this back to the chef, it's the most ineptly prepared sandwich I've ever seen. Tomato slices are to be no thicker than a quarter of an inch, the lettuce is to be shredded *on the bias*, and the bread itself should be cut into precise triangles. I can write this down, if -- no, better yet, tell him to bring everything and come up here, right away. I'll show him how it's done myself.

BELLMAN
Yes, sir!

He bolts out. Hughes turns immediately to Dietrich, hand extended.

HUGHES
If it's two o'clock, you're Noah Dietrich.

Dietrich shakes, a bit surprised.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Relax, I'm the right guy, even if I am only nineteen.

CONTINUED:

DIETRICH
How do you do, Mr. Hughes.

HUGHES
I see you've met Mrs. Hughes.

DIETRICH
Actually, I haven't. Pleasure to meet you, ma'am. Been doing a bit of shopping?

ELLA
I have to do something to fill my time in this city.

Hughes smiles stiffly. There is no warmth between them.

HUGHES
Could Mr. Dietrich and I be alone?

At the moment he says the words, there are eleven other people in the room. Six seconds later, they're all gone -- ten of them into the hallway, Mrs. Hughes into her bedroom.

Hughes gestures and Dietrich sits. Hughes stands, hands on hips, looking him up and down.

HUGHES (cont'd)
You're an attorney?

DIETRICH
No, sir, I'm-

HUGHES
Good, I don't trust lawyers. I've met a couple dozen of 'em for this job, I'm still washing my hands. An executive?

DIETRICH
No, actually, I-

HUGHES
Good, I don't want a career executive. They're too soft. Same with stockbrokers. I want somebody who won't be afraid to go out into an oil field and sink his hands into the black earth if I ask him to. What are you, then?

CONTINUED: (2)

DIETRICH
An accountant, Mr. Hughes. I've been a partner at Smith, Dobson, Smith since '21.

HUGHES
(unimpressed)
Uh huh. Before that?

DIETRICH
Junior partner.

HUGHES
Before that?

DIETRICH
Before I was an accountant? A student. Studied business and engineering.

HUGHES
Before that?

DIETRICH
Well, uh... I was a...
(low)
a prizefighter, actually.

HUGHES
A what?

DIETRICH
A prizefighter, sir.

Hughes brightens and pulls a chair up next to Dietrich's.

HUGHES
No kidding?

DIETRICH
For a few years, before the war.

HUGHES
Where?

DIETRICH
All up and down the east coast. I was part of a traveling card, few years after bareknuckle was outlawed. You could still make a living at it, though. If you didn't mind getting beaten in the head for your paycheck.

CONTINUED: (3)

HUGHES
Working for me might be a bit like that.

DIETRICH
What exactly does the job entail?

HUGHES
Running ToolCo. Hughes Tool Company, Houston. We lease oil drill bits. You'd be in charge of research, development, manufacturing, distribution, and all financial matters.

DIETRICH
If you don't mind me saying so, Mr. Hughes, what would that leave for you?

HUGHES
Good Christ, nothing, I hope. *Drill bits?* Are you joking? Couldn't interest me less. I'm going to work in pictures. I'm going to be the biggest film producer this town has ever seen. They're already talking about me, and I haven't spent a dime yet. Ben Hecht, you know that screenwriter fella? Runs around calling me "the sucker with the money." Have you heard that one?

DIETRICH
I don't really move in those circles, Mr. Hughes.

HUGHES
Good for you.
(scoffs)
A *screenwriter.* Hah! I'd step on him, if I could see him.
(squints at Dietrich)
Could you tell me how a battleship finds its target?

DIETRICH
A battleship?

HUGHES
That's right.

CONTINUED: (4)

DIETRICH
It's a matter of triangulation, I believe.

HUGHES
Could you explain for me the principles of the internal combustion engine?

There's a knock at the door. Hughes gets up to answer it, gesturing to Noah to keep talking.

DIETRICH
Uh... well, there's a few different kinds. In your standard Otto-cycle engine, for example, the chemical energy released by burning fuel drives a piston back and forth in a fixed cylinder.

Hughes opens the door. A breathless CHEF stands in the hallway, wheeling a table with bread, meat, tomatoes, and lettuce on it. Hughes drags him in, gestures to Noah again -- go on.

DIETRICH (cont'd)
The outer face of the piston's attached to a crankshaft by a connecting rod, and the crankshaft converts the back and forth motion of the piston into whatever kind of motion the machine needs -- rotary, on an automobile, for example. The wheel turns.

Hughes picks up a cleaver and SMACKS it through a head of lettuce, gesturing to the Chef to look at it.

HUGHES
See what I mean? See what I'm talking about? You try.

He gives the cleaver to the chef and turns back to Noah.

HUGHES (cont'd)
You'd like this job, Mr. Dietrich. The company would be yours to run. You'd rarely see me, if at all. I'm a very hands-off kind of guy.

DIETRICH
(watching the Chef)
I can see that.

CONTINUED: (5)

HUGHES
No, no, no, no, no, no, you're holding the cleaver too far back on the handle, that's the problem.

Hughes takes the cleaver from the Chef. He tosses it back and forth from hand to hand, looking at Dietrich, thinking.

HUGHES (cont'd)
A fighter, huh? That I can use. I need you to get on a train to Houston, right away.

He tosses the cleaver high in the air, end over end.

HUGHES (cont'd)
And take Mrs. Hughes with you.

He catches the cleaver by the handle and brings it down hard, right through the center of a tomato.

HUGHES (cont'd)
I'm staying in Hollywood.

CUT TO:

EXT AIRFIELD DAY

An early model Ford pulls to a stop at the edge of an airfield in Santa Monica. Noah Dietrich climbs out, burdened with a stack of file folders and carefully arranged papers. He stops, staring at the airfield. He adjusts his glasses, disbelieving.

DIETRICH
The *real* war wasn't this big.

The airfield is covered, end to end, with vintage airplanes, all circa World War I, some taking off, some landing. Equipment trucks are parked everywhere, a FILM CREW stands around waiting for something to happen, PILOTS climb in and out of their aircraft. Whatever they're doing, it's expensive (and not just for them).

Two years later
The set of Hell's Angels

Dietrich turns to the nearest CREW MEMBER.

DIETRICH (cont'd)
Where is he?

CONTINUED:

The Crew Member gestures to where Hughes is in an argument with a group of Pilots. Dietrich heads over, shuddering at the massive and ongoing expenditure all around him. He comes up behind Hughes, who is ranting to PAUL MANTZ, a pilot.

HUGHES
The scene is a strafing raid, Paul. Do you know how they did that?

MANTZ
Yes, I do, Mr. Hughes, I was in several. Were you?

HUGHES
You don't have to wave your bona fides in my face, I'm just trying to make a point here. A pilot on a strafing run gets as close to the ground as possible.
(sees Dietrich)
Noah, glad you're here, hang on a second.
(back to Mantz)
If I don't see the ground and the plane in the same shot, it's a cheat, it won't look real. He's gotta dive straight down, then pull up about two hundred feet over the runway.

MANTZ
It's a suicide run. Dive lower than a thousand feet and the plane'll crash.

HUGHES
That's ridiculous, any good flier could do it.

MANTZ
Yeah, well, not one of my fliers.

Pause. Everybody looks at Hughes. It's a standoff.

HUGHES
Fine, I'll do it myself.

He grabs the leather helmet from Mantz' hands and stalks across the airfield, toward a Thomas Morse Scout parked at the far end of the runway. Dietrich, aghast, struggles to keep up with him.

CONTINUED: (2)

DIETRICH
You're not going to fly one of these planes yourself, are you?

HUGHES
Got no choice, you heard what Mantz said. And he actually fought in Europe. It's a miracle we won the war.

DIETRICH
Howard, I think this is a very bad idea.

HUGHES
No, it's terrific, I've got the shot all worked out in my head.

Passing an elevated platform with several movie cameras mounted on it, Hughes SHOUTS to the CAMERA OPERATORS.

HUGHES (cont'd)
When I dip my wings, start rolling!

The Operators nod and wave their acknowledgement. Hughes keeps walking toward the plane. Dietrich struggles to keep up.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Look around, Noah, it's inspiring, isn't it? We've got Spodes, SE-5s, Sopwith Camels, even a couple Fokkers. I'm telling you, this picture's no *Swell Hogan,* we're gonna make *Wings* look like a two-reeler. Oh, by the way, I need you to transfer another million from ToolCo into the film accounts, right away.

DIETRICH
What for, the picture's almost finished!

HUGHES
Weeeelllll, not quite finished. I want to turn it into a talkie.

DIETRICH
Now?!

HUGHES
Have you been to the picture's lately?

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (3)

HUGHES (cont'd)
Silent movies are dead, they're playing to empty houses. Sound, sound, SOUND, the whole country's gone crazy for talkies.

DIETRICH
You've already spent over two million dollars, how much is *this* going to cost?!

HUGHES
Oh, and we've got to get rid of Greta. Recast. Reshoot all her scenes.

DIETRICH
What's wrong with Greta?! She's beautiful!

HUGHES
She's Swedish, how's she gonna say dialogue? I can't make out a word she says, and I'm standing right next to her. I found somebody new. Harlow, Jean Harlow. Gorgeous woman. Sexy voice. Fully armed in the bomb department, if you know what I mean.

He makes a "big breast" gesture.

DIETRICH
Howard, stop.
(pulls him to a stop)
This is not a joke. ToolCo is not a money tree. If you keep up this reckless Hollywood spending you're going to kill your father's company.

HUGHES
(furious)
It's not my father's company, it's mine. And you're not the only one who looks at the books. In the three years since I took over, we took profits up from $2.2 to $8.4 million dollars a year, so don't try telling me I'm broke, because I'm not. It's my money, Noah. Just get it for me.

He starts to climb into the plane.

CONTINUED: (4)

DIETRICH
Fine. But it's my responsibility to tell you that for this film to make a profit, to even get your money back, it's going to have to be the biggest picture of all time, bar none.

Hughes breaks into an enormous smile, reaches down, and grabs Dietrich by the cheeks.

HUGHES
Now you're getting it, Kiddo!

AN AIRPLANE ENGINE

spits and sputters as the Thomas Morse Scout ROARS to life. Hughes, in the cockpit, gives a thumbs-up and taxis out onto the runway.

AT THE EDGE OF THE RUNWAY,

Dietrich joins Paul Mantz, the film crew, and the other Pilots as they watch the boss take off. Whispered bets are made, money is exchanged. Dietrich drops his face into his hands.

IN THE SKY OVER SANTA MONICA,

Hughes takes the open cockpit plane up to a height of two thousand feet. He looks down, at the assembled crew below. He dips his wings.

ON THE CAMERA PLATFORM,

the cameras start to turn.

IN THE COCKPIT,

Hughes pushes the stick forward, nosing the plane over into a dive.

ON THE GROUND,

money is exchanged furiously as final bets are made.

IN THE COCKPIT,

the ground approaches, fast. Hughes holds the plane in the dive.

ON THE GROUND,

Mantz narrates.

CONTINUED:

MANTZ
That's about twelve hundred feet.

The plane continues to dive.

MANTZ (cont'd)
Eleven hundred. A thousand, he better pull up soon!

IN THE COCKPIT,

Hughes keeps the stick shoved forward. The plane is diving so fast the wings ROAR as they cut through the air. The ground below becomes enormous and inevitable. Hughes yanks back on the stick as hard as he can.

Nothing happens. The plane continues to dive.

ON THE GROUND,

DIETRICH
When's he gonna pull back?!

MANTZ
He's trying.

IN THE COCKPIT,

Hughes's helmet flies off his head. He pulls his legs out and braces them on the dashboard, more leverage to pull back on the stick. Still, the plane continues to dive. Three hundred feet, two hundred, one hundred, he's close enough to read the expressions on the faces of the crowd staring up at him.

At the last second, the nose of the plane edges up, barely, and the plane levels out just enough to prevent a vertical impact. The left wing touches the runway first, it folds up like paper. The propellers SCREECH as they dig into the asphalt. The plane comes to a violent stop.

ON THE GROUND,

the entire crew flinches. A cloud of dust blows up around the wreck. Silence for a moment.

CREW MEMBER
Damn. We just lost our meal ticket.

AT THE CRASH SITE,

the Crew Members race over, led by Noah Dietrich, into the cloud of whirling dust.

CONTINUED:

They find the wrecked cockpit and a leather flight jacket, they see blood dripping down the side of the plane -- but Hughes is gone.

DIETRICH
Where the hell is he?!

A GROAN comes from behind them. They turn. Hughes is leaning against the wall of a hangar, his clothes torn, blood streaming down his face.

HUGHES
Gonna need a seven iron to get over the bunker.

He collapses, unconscious.

CUT TO:

INT HOSPITAL ROOM DAY

Hughes awakens in a hospital room. His head is heavily bandaged. The first thing he sees is the setting sun, out the window. He turns. Dietrich is in a chair beside him, going over documents. He looks exhausted.

HUGHES
(weakly)
Get me back to the set. We're losing the light.

DIETRICH
Hello there. You've been out almost twenty-four hours.

HUGHES
(struggling to sit up)
Twenty-four hours? We didn't *shoot* today?

DIETRICH
Lay down. You've got a major concussion. There's a crack in your skull from the top of your head to right above your eyes. You're supposed to stay in this room for a week, with the blinds closed. The doctors said you could still lose sight in your right eye.

Hughes sits up, swings his legs out of bed.

HUGHES
What's my sight compared to my art?

CONTINUED:

But he's too weak to get up. He sags back into bed.

DIETRICH
Your art. Yes, of course.

Hughes looks at him, a long pause.

HUGHES
You don't have a great deal of respect for me, do you, Noah?

DIETRICH
Of course I do.

HUGHES
Speak honestly. You're the only one who does.

DIETRICH
(considers)
I respect you, Howard. I don't... admire some of the things you do.

HUGHES
Such as?

DIETRICH
The way you treat Mrs. Hughes, for example. Keeping her in Houston while you... would *cavort* be the word? While you cavort with actresses. The poor woman sends three cables a day, begging to join you out here.

HUGHES
I answer them.

DIETRICH
Occasionally. In the negative.
(pulls his chair closer)
Howard, all great men -- and you *do* have a remarkable opportunity to be a great man -- all great men have clearly, sharply defined goals.

HUGHES
So do I. I intend to be the greatest golfer in the world, the finest film producer in Hollywood, the greatest pilot in the world, and the richest man in the world.

CONTINUED: (2)

DIETRICH
What if you're the second greatest? The second finest? The third richest? What then?

HUGHES
Then you'll tell them I died trying.
(closes his eyes)
Get word to the crew. Call time tomorrow is six a.m. I'm finishing this picture by the end of the year.

CUT TO:

EXT CHINESE THEATRE NIGHT

It is a spectacular scene outside Grauman's Chinese Theatre, where *Hell's Angels* is having its premiere. One could say they don't do premieres like this anymore, but the truth is they really only did them like this once. Tonight. The marquee is massive, lit up with the title of the film and Howard Hughes' name -- in equal size.

Two and a half years later

There are THOUSANDS OF FANS, three hundred klieg lights, their columns of light shooting straight up into the air, three hundred fifty POLICEMEN, a hundred U.S. MARINES to keep the throng at bay. The skies over the theatre are full too, jammed with a squadron of vintage fighter planes that trail ribbons of multi-colored smoke behind them. A giant arrow has been painted across the sky, pointing down at the theatre. Wow.

INT THEATRE NIGHT

On a movie screen, we see a bit of the film. A German zeppelin is on a night bombing run over England. Four British biplanes have been sent up to deal with it and are in a serious dogfight with the zeppelin's escort planes.

The battle goes on, climaxing in a suicide run by one of the biplanes, which dives straight through the middle of the zeppelin, nearly cutting it in half and causing it to burst into flame.

The flaming zeppelin drops thousands of feet to the ground, meeting its end in a gigantic ball of flame. Even by today's standards, the sequence is spectacular. When it reaches its climax, the silhouettes of hundreds of MOVIEGOERS leap to their feet in front of the screen, CLAPPING and CHEERING wildly.

IN THE AUDIENCE,

a gray-haired STUDIO EXECUTIVE turns to another EXECUTIVE.

EXECUTIVE 1
(shouting over the cheering)
Do you think it'll make money?

EXECUTIVE 2
I think it'll make *all* the money.

Over the cheering, there are cries of "Hughes! Hughes!" The Executives sigh, depressed.

EXECUTIVE 1
Just what this town needs. A genius.

CUT TO:

INT HUGHES OFFICES - CORRIDOR DAY

The smoked glass windows of a pair of office doors have the names of two corporations painted on them -- "HUGHES TOOL COMPANY, LOS ANGELES OFFICE" is on top, just below is "THE CADDO COMPANY, FILM PRODUCERS." A MESSENGER bursts through the doors and into the reception area.

IN THE RECEPTION AREA,

the phones are ringing constantly. The Messenger races in and gives the envelope to a RECEPTIONIST.

MESSENGER
Urgent message for Mr. Dietrich!

The Receptionist takes the envelope while fielding calls.

RECEPTIONIST
I'm sorry, Mr. Hughes is unavailable, can you hold?
(another line)
Caddo Film Company. I'm sorry, Mr. Hughes is unavailable, can you hold?

She sees a harried SECRETARY walking by and flags her down.

RECEPTIONIST (cont'd)
Urgent message for Mr. Dietrich!

Caroline takes the envelope and continues back, toward a door with NOAH DIETRICH, PRESIDENT written on it.

IN NOAH'S OFFICE,

Noah is on the phone as well.

DIETRICH
I'm not lying to you. I'm not lying to you. *I'm not lying to you!* I haven't heard a word in three months, for all I know he's dead. I didn't say that.

CAROLINE
Mr. Die-

DIETRICH
(holds up a hand, silencing her)
It makes *your* business hard to run? What do you think it does to *mine?* He's the God damn chairman!
(to Caroline)
Sorry.

CAROLINE
(holding up the envelope)
Urgent message for you!

Dietrich takes the envelope and opens it, still talking into the phone.

DIETRICH
When I hear something from Howard, you'll hear something from me.

He hangs up and reads the note, still ranting to Caroline.

DIETRICH (cont'd)
You know, if I would have listened to Mrs. Dietrich, I'd have my own accounting firm by now. A dozen clients, nobody too crazy, just a nice steady --
(reading)
They found him.

CAROLINE
They found him?!

Dietrich bolts to his feet, grabs his coat and hat, and heads for the door, still reading as he walks.

CONTINUED:

DIETRICH
Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Get me on the next flight to Fort Worth.

CAROLINE
Texas? What's he been doing in Texas?

CUT TO:

EXT AIRPORT RUNWAY DAY

Hughes, dressed in the uniform of an American Airlines copilot, unloads bags from the belly of a big Fokker trimotor, the predominant commercial aircraft of the day. REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS swarm all around him, snapping his picture and shouting questions at him. Hughes seems annoyed by all the attention.

REPORTER
Why'd you do it, Howard? Why go to work for American Airlines?

HUGHES
Wanted to learn about the aviation business.

REPORTER
How come? Are you making a picture?

HUGHES
Always making a picture or two.

REPORTER 2
Did your co-workers know who you were?

HUGHES
Not till you fellas told 'em, thank you very much.

REPORTER 3
How much money did they pay you?

HUGHES
Started at $115 a month as a baggage handler, got raised to $250 as a copilot just last month. Sweetest money I ever earned in my life.

A long car pulls up near the plane. Noah climbs out, sees his boss, and shakes his head, laughing. You've got to admire it.

CONTINUED:

Hughes looks up and waves, heads over to the car. The Reporters and Photographers follow, shouting more questions.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Sorry, fellas. Not trying to be high hat or anything, but I've got a company to run. Couple of 'em, as a matter of fact.

He climbs into the car, which immediately pulls away. The Reporters turn to the PILOT of the plane Hughes was just on.

REPORTER 1
How 'bout it, Captain? Was he any good?

PILOT
That man has the makings of a first-class airline pilot.

IN THE CAR,

Hughes unzips his flight bag and digs around for something.

DIETRICH
Howard. Howard, Howard, where do I begin?

HUGHES
Wouldn't happen to have a cheese sandwich, would you? I'm starving.

DIETRICH
You wanted *Hell's Angels* to be the biggest film of all time. It is. You wanted to be the biggest producer in Hollywood. You are. What did you do this for?

HUGHES
Oh, hell, movies are easy, Noah, the more you spend the more you make. Where's the challenge? You can't even fill up a decent workday with movies. What's the date?

DIETRICH
December 2nd.

HUGHES
December 2nd, 1932. Write that down.

CONTINUED:

He pulls half a dozen notebooks out of his flight bag and drops them in Dietrich's lap.

DIETRICH
Why?

HUGHES
It's historic. Today's the first day of business for the Hughes Aircraft Company.

Dietrich flips through the notebooks. Every page is covered, front and back, with notes, diagrams, quotes, columns of numbers -- and sketches of airplane designs.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT AIRPLANE HANGAR DAY

A big hangar in Glendale. Hughes stands in the middle of the vast empty floor. Grouped around him are Dietrich, GLENN ODEKIRK, and RICHARD PALMER, young aircraft designers, not even thirty yet.

HUGHES
There's one thing airline passengers care about, and one thing only. Speed. They're not interested in food, champagne's okay, but if we get them to New York a couple hours faster than the other guy, we will revolutionize aviation.
(to the designers)
I want you to build me the fastest airplane in the world. First we'll break that French bastard's land speed record. Then we'll break our *own* record. We'll be a household name before we sell a single airplane.

While Hughes talks, he gestures to the airplane he sees one day occupying the empty space in front of him.

HUGHES (cont'd)
The first plane we make'll be a single engine, single passenger speed job.

As he talks, WORKERS appear, starting to assemble the imaginary plane in the middle of the once-empty factory floor.

CONTINUED:

HUGHES (cont'd)
Airspeed is everything. I want to fly at 20,000 feet, or more, get up there and let the jet stream do some of the work. Cut wind resistance to zero. Flush all the rivets. Bring in precision welders to make her totally seamless.

Sparks fly as WELDERS go to work on the emerging frame of the airplane.

HUGHES (cont'd)
I don't want fixed landing gear -- that's yesterday's airplane. We're gonna power the gear so the plane can retract it right up into the belly. Airspeed. Zero resistance. Write those words down, they're our Two Commandments.

Workers under the plane, which is up on blocks now, watch as the landing gear are mechanically retracted into the airplane. Nobody thought of that before.

HUGHES (cont'd)
The official name is the H-1. I call her the *Silver Bullet.*

Hughes walks into the middle of the floor, running his hands along the surface of the sleek, red-and-silver airplane that only he can see.

HUGHES (cont'd)
And I'm going to test her myself.
(turns to the designers)
You've got one year.

EXT AIRFIELD NIGHT

The propeller kicks to life on the finished Silver Bullet, now parked on an airfield in Burbank. It's the middle of the night.

Three years later

A delegation from the NAA (National Aeronautics Administration) stands at the edge of the runway. Glenn Odekirk, with them, looks at a TIMEKEEPER'S watch. He goes to the cockpit window of the plane. Hughes, strapped in the pilot's seat with a leather helmet on his head, slides it open.

CONTINUED:

ODEKIRK
It's 2:14 a.m. Get to New York by lunch and you'll make us all famous.

HUGHES
(grins)
Well, one of us, anyway.

Noah Dietrich hurries up to the window.

DIETRICH
Don't forget this.

He hands Hughes a battered fedora. Hughes smiles and puts it on over his flying cap. Odekirk gives him a thumbs up. Hughes returns it, takes a deep breath, savors the moment.

HUGHES
Take a breath, gentlemen. Smell the fuel? The smoke? Feel that engine? My God, is there anything finer?

MOMENTS LATER,

the plane's engine SCREAMS as Hughes taxis down the runway and lifts off, into the night sky over Los Angeles.

CUT TO:

EXT OVER THE GRAND CANYON NIGHT

The middle of the night. The Silver Bullet flies on, high above the great black chasm of the Grand Canyon.

INT COCKPIT NIGHT

Hughes has an oxygen mask on, but he seems to be getting dizzy. He blinks, can't focus on the instruments in front of him. His head lolls off to the side, his eyes flutter.

He sits up abruptly, realizes what's going on. He pulls the oxygen mask off, shakes the hose, sucks at it desperately. He's not getting anything.

He shakes his head, fighting off unconsciousness. Frantic, he yanks at the hose, hard. A soft HISS comes from it and a few whispers of oxygen come out. He breathes them in, deeply. He thinks more clearly. Something's blocking the hose. He pulls it up to his mouth and gnaws at the hose with his teeth, chewing it off halfway. Now the HISS is louder.

CONTINUED:

He bends over to the chewed-off hose and sucks it for oxygen. More comes. He squints. He can focus on the instruments again.

He puts a hand to his head, a ferocious headache. He picks up the radio.

HUGHES
Uh, this is H-1, Hughes Aircraft test flight to area ground crew, come in, over.

VOICE (o.s.)
You've got Tucson tower, H-1, go ahead, over.

HUGHES
Thank you, Tucson -- bit of a problem with my oxygen up here, getting a little light headed, followed by some particularly nasty headaches. Any advice, over?

There's a long pause, then the Voice returns.

VOICE (o.s.)
H-1, we've got a guy down here suggests screaming, over.

HUGHES
Say again, Tucson?

VOICE (o.s.)
You heard right, H-1, advice was to scream, as loud as you can. It should temporarily relieve the pressure, over.

Hughes SCREAMS, long and loud. Sure enough, the pain seems to lessen. He keys the mic again.

HUGHES
Good advice, Tucson.

VOICE (o.s.)
Keep screaming all the way to New York, Mr. Hughes. Everybody's praying for you down-

The radio abruptly CRACKLES and goes out, accompanied by a rather alarming burst of sparks from his console.

CONTINUED: (2)

Hughes sucks more air, then SCREAMS again before keying the mic again.

HUGHES
Say again, Tucson? Come in, Tucson, I may be having some radio trouble up here. Come in, Tucson.

Hughes drops the mic in disgust. He SCREAMS.

IN THE NIGHT SKY,

the Silver Bullet flies on, disappearing into a cloud bank.

CUT TO:

EXT NEWARK AIRPORT DAY

As the sun shines down on the Newark airport, we're close on the headline of a New York newspaper:

AVIATION HERO FEARED DEAD!
Oxygen Gives Out, Radio Contact Lost

An excited NAA GUY knocks the paper right out of the hands of the REPORTER who's reading it and SHOUTS in our face.

NAA GUY
Army Air Corps saw him in the skies over Pennsylvania!

REPORTER
When!?

NAA GUY
Half an hour ago, he could be here any-

A great HUE AND CRY rises up from the edge of the runway nearby, REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS run in all directions, pointing up at the sky, we look up there too --

-- just as the *Silver Bullet* comes streaking down out of the clouds at three hundred eighty miles an hour. It drops hard and fast, and at the moment its rubber wheels strike the runway

A MAN WITH A STOPWATCH

clicks the "stop" button and turns to an official NAA TIMER standing next to him with a clipboard.

CONTINUED:

STOPWATCH GUY
Seven hours and twenty-eight minutes.

The NAA Timer shakes his head in admiration and duly notes the new record.

NAA TIMER
Lindbergh's gonna *hate* this guy.

They watch as Hughes taxis to a halt and flips open the cockpit door. The assembled gentlemen of the press go nuts, crowding around, shouting questions, flashing photographs.

NAA TIMER (cont'd)
Get used to that face. I think the newspapers just fell in love with it.

THE NEW YORK *TIMES*

spins out at us, a screamer headline over a shot of Hughes looking daring and adventurous:

HUGHES SMASHES OWN SPEED RECORD

(Following scenes play fast, tumbling one over another.)

INT LOCKHEED OFFICES DAY

In a corporate board room, blueprints and schematics for a fleet of passenger airplanes are spread out all over the floor. Hughes, barefoot, dressed in a frayed white shirt, chinos, and a fedora, crawls around the floor on his hands and knees, inspecting every inch of the plans.

Anxious LOCKHEED EXECUTIVES stand around, not quite sure what to make of him. Finally he sits, cross-legged, eating a cheese sandwich.

HUGHES
I like 'em. Build eighteen of 'em, and send the bill to the Hughes Tool Company in Houston.

The Executives gasp and look at each other. ROBERT GROSS is the head of the company.

GROSS
Mr. Hughes, you understand that will come to approximately --
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

GROSS (cont'd)
(reading a slip of paper thrust at him by an accountant)
-- eighteen million dollars.

HUGHES
I can add. I didn't buy TWA so it could be a third-rate airline. Build 'em, Bob.

THE NEW YORK *TIMES*

spins out at us again, over a photograph of a businesslike, suit-and-tie wearing Hughes:

"MR. HUGHES' AIRLINE" IS WORLD'S LARGEST

INT HUGHES AIRCRAFT FACTORY FLOOR DAY

Hughes walks briskly across the floor of the now-bustling Hughes Aircraft facility, watching cockpit shells roll off the assembly line. Noah Dietrich follows behind him, carrying documents which apparently require signature, but every time he stops, Hughes starts walking again.

HUGHES
For God's sake, Noah, keep up! Haven't you heard there's a war on?!

THE LOS ANGELES *TIMES*

has a picture of Hughes too, in this one he looks stern and warlike. The headline announces:

HUGHES AIRCRAFT LANDS $43 MILLION BOMBER CONTRACT
Becomes Largest U.S. Military Supplier

INT A SOUNDSTAGE DAY

It's the set of a movie western. A buxom woman in tight-fitting clothes reclines in a pile of hay. Hughes leaps out of the director's chair.

HUGHES
Cut! Cut!

The actress, JANE RUSSELL, sits up, irritated.

JANE RUSSELL
What is it now?

CONTINUED:

HUGHES
We're not getting enough production out of Jane's breasts. WARDROBE!

A nervous WARDROBE MISTRESS appears at his side.

HUGHES (cont'd)
This is terrible! Every time she moves I can see the outline of her bra!

WARDROBE MISTRESS
Well, sir, I'm afraid Miss Russell is too, ah, full-figured to wear no brassiere at all...

HUGHES
I know that! Don't talk to me about breasts, I know all about breasts! This is really just a very simple engineering problem.
(shouts)
Somebody get me a pencil and drawing board!

DAILY *VARIETY*

has its own headline, this one over a photo of a rakish, devilish Hughes:

"THE OUTLAW" OUTLAWED!
Hughes Picture Condemned by Church,
Sets Box Office Records Anyway

THE SATURDAY EVENING *POST*

appears, a glamorous shot of Hughes on its cover. Its headline:

CAN ANYTHING STOP
THE LUCKIEST MAN ON EARTH?

CUT TO:

EXT LAKE MEAD DAY

The frantic pace of the preceding scenes is abruptly halted by a shot of the smooth, glistening surface of a desert lake. It's so beautiful it's ominous.

LAKE MEAD
May 16, 1943

CONTINUED:

A low RUMBLING sound grows louder. The nose of a huge aircraft, a twin-prop Sikorsky amphibian, pushes into frame.

Noah Dietrich, dressed in a business suit as always, watches from a dock as the plane takes off across the gentle waves.

INT COCKPIT DAY

The plane soars over Lake Mead. Hughes is in the pilot's seat, wearing his lucky fedora. CECO CLINE and C.W. VON ROSENBERG, dressed in the uniforms of Civil Aeronautics Agency fliers, make up the rest of the flight crew. Hughes engineers Glenn Odekirk and RICHARD FELT are in the rear of the cockpit.

Cline and Von Rosenberg mutter a conversation under the constant DRONE of the motors. Hughes stares out the window, eyes fixed strangely on something on the horizon.

Odekirk, in back, notices. He unbuckles himself and moves forward, puts a hand on Hughes' shoulder. Hughes jumps at the touch.

ODEKIRK
You all right, Boss?

Hughes looks up at him, fear in his eyes, as if he's never seen Odekirk before in his life.

HUGHES
Fine. I'm fine.

He turns, looks back out the windshield. Odekirk looks over at Cline and Von Rosenberg. They've noticed.

CLINE
Everything okay with your man?

ODEKIRK
Of course.

They stretch, look around him. Hughes is wiping sweat from his face.

CLINE
Maybe I should take her down this time.

CONTINUED:

ODEKIRK
Hey, Howard's captained the shakedown flights for all twenty modifications of the Sikorsky, that's over four thousand wet landings he's made in this bird alone. We're in good hands.

FROM THE SKY,

the nose of the airplane tips down as Hughes starts to bring it in for a water landing. It draws closer to the water.

IN THE COCKPIT,

Hughes brings it lower and lower. Everything's going fine. Couldn't be more routine.

ON THE SURFACE OF THE LAKE,

the plane touches down lightly. Water sprays up as her pontoons meet the waves. Smooth.

IN THE COCKPIT,

Hughes throttles back.

HUGHES
Braking now.

He stretches out his foot and touches the brake pedal.

ON THE SURFACE OF THE LAKE,

the tail of the aircraft abruptly flips up, pushing the nose of the plane straight down into the water at eighty miles an hour.

IN THE COCKPIT,

the men SHOUT as the plane bounces wildly, cartwheeling across the waves. The SHRIEK of tearing metal is deafening. Hughes fights desperately to regain control of the airplane, but a jolt throws him sideways, BANGING his head off the cockpit window, hard. Blood streams down his face.

ON THE SURFACE OF THE LAKE,

the abrupt force of the water tears metal from the fuselage violently.

CONTINUED:

The left propeller digs into the waves and is ripped off its mounting. Still spinning, it tears through the skin of the plane and enters the cockpit.

IN THE COCKPIT,

the propeller SHRIEKS as it penetrates the cabin, still spinning. It slices through Richard Felt's head, SLAMS sideways into Ceco Cline, and RIPS through the opposite side of the aircraft, opening an enormous hole. Cline is sucked out the hole, disappearing into the dark blue waters of Lake Mead.

The plane comes to a halt and begins to fill with water. There is pandemonium in the cockpit.

Hughes, Von Rosenberg, and Odekirk are trapped in the plane as the water rises around them. They've got about thirty seconds to get out. Odekirk grabs Felt and pushes him up, through a hole in the roof.

He turns to Von Rosenberg, who is unconscious, and starts struggling to lift him through the roof as well. The plane continues to fill with water. While he struggles, Odekirk sees Hughes, still sitting at the controls, staring ahead blankly, his face covered with blood.

ODEKIRK
HOWARD, GET OUT!

Hughes mumbles incoherently and stays where he is.

ODEKIRK (cont'd)
GET OUT, GOD DAMN IT, OR YOU'LL DROWN!

Odekirk shoves Von Rosenberg up through the hole in the ceiling. Through the windshield, he can see the nose of the plane dive down for the last time. Water completely obliterates the horizon. They're sinking.

Odekirk grabs Hughes, wrestles him out of the seat, and swims up with him, through the now-submerged cockpit.

ON THE SURFACE OF THE LAKE,

Odekirk breaks the surface with Hughes and struggles to keep all four survivors afloat, grabbing hold of whatever floating debris he can find.

In the distance, a rescue boat approaches, its SIREN WAILING.

CUT TO:

EXT DOCK DUSK

Hughes sits on a dock at the shore of the Lake, staring into the setting sun. His face is caked with blood. Several ambulances are parked on the service road behind him, as well as two coroners' wagons. POLICEMEN and PARAMEDICS do their grim work.

Noah Dietrich sits beside Hughes.

HUGHES
I have to be the one to notify Dick's wife. I'm the one who killed him.

DIETRICH
(shakes his head)
The ground crew forgot to load the tail ballast. No pilot could have made a water landing without tail ballast, it's impossible.

HUGHES
It's the captain's job to check the plane, tip to tail, before takeoff. I didn't do it today.

DIETRICH
(pause)
You didn't?

HUGHES
You've got to keep this out of the papers.

DIETRICH
Why didn't you check the plane?

Hughes starts to drop his head into his hands, but stops, noticing his hands are covered in blood.

HUGHES
Some of this is Dick's blood.

DIETRICH
You should go with the ambulance, let the doctors have a look at you.

HUGHES
No! Don't let them take me to a hospital, Noah. No doctors, no more X-rays.

CONTINUED:

DIETRICH
Howard, your face is-

HUGHES
It'll heal. We'll just stretch the skin so it covers the cut and wrap some gauze around it. You can do it, I'll help you. If I set foot in a hospital they'll put me in a locked ward, they'll never let me out.

DIETRICH
Why would they do that?

Hughes looks away for a long moment, deciding whether or not to confide in Dietrich. Finally, he looks back. His voice is filled with shame and anguish.

HUGHES
I woke up this morning, 4 a.m., I didn't know where I was. I didn't know *who* I was. It wasn't the first time. I... Christ, I think I'm cracking up.

Dietrich just stares at him, no idea what to say. He puts an arm around him, awkwardly. Hughes seems to collapse against him. Dietrich is very uncomfortable with this talk.

DIETRICH
You're just -- you're under a lot of stress, that's all it is. You've taken a few knocks to the head over the years, anyone would feel... You need a good long vacation. That's all it is.

HUGHES
You think I'm going crazy, Noah?

Noah doesn't answer. Behind them, one of the ambulances hits its SIREN and tears away, down the service road.

HUGHES (cont'd)
From now on I test every one of our planes, *alone*. This will never happen again.

CUT TO:

INT COCKPIT DAY

Hughes is alone in the cockpit of the XF-11, an experimental reconnaissance plane. The plane is going down, whirling out of control.

Three years later
1946

Hughes is crouched on the pilot seat, desperately attempting to adjust the right engine. But it has no effect. He jams the throttle forward, trying to increase the speed. Still nothing. He looks out the window.

The heavily populated West side of Los Angeles lies below.

EXT WILSHIRE BOULEVARD DAY

PEDESTRIANS on Wilshire Boulevard hear a high-pitched WHINING sound and look up into the sky as the XF-11 passes overhead, at a height of just eight hundred feet.

They GASP and point.

INT COCKPIT DAY

Hughes is fighting madly for control, but it's a losing battle. Up ahead, he sees the open green fairways of the Los Angeles Country Club and fights back on the stick, trying to make it that far.

But the plane is falling too quickly. The residential area of Beverly Hills fills his windshield. He spots an alley that runs between two rows of houses. He steers for it.

The plane continues to drop, so fast that Hughes is thrust forward, into the Plexiglas dome of the cockpit.

His lucky fedora flies off his head. He braces his feet on the dashboard, ready for impact.

EXT BEVERLY HILLS CRASH SITE DAY

The right wing and landing gear crash into the corner of a house and are torn from the plane.

IN THE COCKPIT,

Hughes is thrown forward violently.

IN THE ALLEY,

the plane flips onto its side and rolls, end over end, down the alley.

IN THE COCKPIT,

Hughes is battered and cut by shards of metal and Plexiglas as the XF-11 breaks into four pieces. Flame engulfs the wreckage.

The plane comes to a stop. Fuel sprays everywhere in the cockpit, some onto Hughes, where it immediately catches fire. Blood spurts from his nose, his ears, and his mouth. Desperate, weakened, he bats at the flames that cover his body, putting some out, not so lucky with others.

He looks up. The Plexiglas canopy traps him inside the wreckage, and in a few seconds he will burn to death.

He stands, as much as he can, and pushes up on the Plexiglas. It moves, but not enough.

IN THE ALLEY,

WILLIAM DURKIN, a burly Marine Sergeant, sprints into the alley, having heard and seen the crash.

DURKIN
HEY! ANYBODY IN THERE?!

He hears a weak POUNDING from inside the wreck and lunges forward, into the flames. With a mighty effort, he manages to hurl the Plexiglas bubble off the wreckage.

A tower of flame and black smoke immediately rises out of the wreckage. Durkin is singed, but he stays with it. He recognizes a human form, grabs it. He hauls Hughes out of the burning plane.

When they are ten feet from the wreckage, it EXPLODES. Durkin may not know it, but he has just saved the life of the richest man in the world. As Durkin lays Hughes on the grass and begins SHOUTING for help, the sound drains out of the scene, replaced by RADIO HISS and the solemn voice of a radio announcer:

CONTINUED:

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
This is a KRLA radio special report. Millionaire aviator and film producer Howard Hughes was critically injured an hour ago when the plane he was testing crashed into a Beverly Hills neighborhood.

The Announcer overlaps as we cut to:

INT HOSPITAL CORRIDOR DAY

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
Hughes is not expected to live.

Noah Dietrich hurries down a hospital corridor, checking rooms against a number written on a slip of paper. He carries a shopping bag in one hand. As he continues down the hallway, consumed with worry, people scurry past him -- REPORTERS, DOCTORS, NURSES, beautiful young WOMEN dressed in black. Noah gives up checking the room number on the paper and just follows them instead.

The scene is eerily familiar to him. He passes one hand across his brow, his eyes tearing up. He remembers:

THE AMBASSADOR HOTEL,

twenty years ago. A younger Noah hurries down a corridor there too, following a parade of Bellmen and Valets, going to his first meeting with Hughes.

IN THE HOSPITAL,

Noah wipes away tears as he reaches the doors that lead to the intensive care unit. There must be fifty people outside that door, twenty Reporters, a dozen Weeping Actresses in black. Noah spots Cary Grant, goes to him.

DIETRICH
Is he going to make it?

GRANT
I don't know, they won't let anybody in. You try.

Dietrich makes his way through the crowd and reaches the door to the ICU. He has an urgent, whispered conference with a hospital SECURITY MAN at the door and is admitted.

INT ICU DAY

The activity in here is even more frantic. In a bed at the far end of the unit, an oxygen tent has been placed over a bed where half a dozen DOCTORS and NURSES are at work on Hughes, who lies within.

Dietrich stands off to the side, talking in hushed tones with a SURGEON.

SURGEON
He's got third degree burns on 78% of his body. Eight or nine ribs are fractured, so is his nose, his left knee, and his left elbow. He's got dozens of cuts everywhere, the worst is on his scalp, it's been sliced wide. His left lung is punctured, collapsed, we're going to try to drain it in a few minutes, as soon as this transfusion's finished and the morphine kicks in.

DIETRICH
Is he going to die?

SURGEON
Maybe.
(pause)
Probably.

DIETRICH
Is he conscious?

SURGEON
Hell, yes. He made us get him a pencil and paper about ten minutes ago, he's been scribbling something while we work on him.

DIETRICH
Can I talk to him?

INSIDE THE OXYGEN TENT,

Dietrich steps through a seam in the oxygen tent and stands beside Hughes' bed. He looks down at his boss. He looks awful. Dietrich suppresses his natural reaction, forces a smile.

DIETRICH
We've got to stop meeting like this.

CONTINUED:

Hughes looks up at him, attempts a smile at the lame joke. Weak, he beckons to Dietrich to lean down next to him. Dietrich does. Hughes grasps with his left hand, Dietrich tries to take it, but it's horribly burned, so he pulls away.

HUGHES
(barely audible)
I know why it happened. The right four blades of the propeller reversed, pulled the plane down. Get out a press release...

DIETRICH
Okay, okay.

HUGHES
Thank God it was only me in there.

DIETRICH
We'll worry about that later.

HUGHES
Only me that's gonna die. I can live with that.

DIETRICH
You're not going to die. You're a tough Texas son of a bitch, if anybody can pull out of this, it's you.

Hughes tugs at a notepad by his side, shoving it toward Dietrich.

DIETRICH (cont'd)
What's this?

HUGHES
Girls.

Dietrich picks it up and looks at it. There is a scribbled column of about twenty names.

HUGHES (cont'd)
You have to take care of the girls, Noah. Presents. Flowers. Birthdays.

DIETRICH
Howard, for God's sake, *they're* worried about *you* right now.
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

DIETRICH (cont'd)
You should see the crowd outside that door, it's like Central Casting.

HUGHES
Johnny Meyer... help you. He knows what they like. I'm counting on you. No pain.
(looks at his horribly burned hand)
How come no pain?

DIETRICH
It's the morphine.

HUGHES
(alarmed)
No. No drugs!

DIETRICH
They had to, you'd be in agony without it.

HUGHES
No drugs!
(thrashing)
No drugs!

DIETRICH
Stop that! Don't do that!

HUGHES
Whatever they want to give me, you cut it in half! A third! Don't let 'em give me drugs!

DIETRICH
Howard, I'm sure the doctors would never let you-

HUGHES
I know *me,* I know what I'll do! No drugs, Noah. Promise me! You promise me!

DIETRICH
I'll keep an eye on it. I promise.

HUGHES
Give me a fighting chance against this dope...

He's getting sleepy, on the verge of passing out. The doctors and nurses return. Hughes looks back up at Noah, his eyes cloudy.

CONTINUED: (3)

HUGHES (cont'd)
Twenty years. You're the only one that's stuck with me.

Despite the burns, Hughes grabs Noah's hand and squeezes it as tightly as he can. The drugs allow it.

DIETRICH
Do you remember once I told you that all great men have a goal?
(Hughes nods, weakening)
I've got one for you now. *Live*, Howard. I want you to live.

Hughes smiles as he drifts off into a drug-induced sleep.

HUGHES
Is that all? That's your trouble, Noah... you don't aim high.

Hughes is asleep. Noah reaches down, into the shopping bag he brought, and pulls out Hughes' lucky fedora, which is as badly burned as its owner. He places it next to Howard's hand, where it will remain until he awakens.

CUT TO:

INT PLAZA SUITE NIGHT

Back in the Plaza Hotel (present day), Nina finishes reading a typewritten page and sets it on top of the growing stack of manuscript. Dick and Irving look to her for a response, warily this time.

She wipes away tears. Irving leaps to his feet.

IRVING
AH-*HAH!*

DICK
Was that a tear?! Are you crying?! Is she crying?!

NINA
(emotional)
What happens next? Does he become addicted to drugs? Is he going insane?

IRVING
You're hooked! Admit it!

CONTINUED:

NINA
It's much better. It's *so* much better.
(checks her watch)
I'm late.

She goes to a mirror and starts touching up her makeup.

DICK
You liked it? Tell the truth, you really liked it?

NINA
Yes, Dick, I just said I did. Don't be pathetic. I know it's painful for you both, but we'll have to talk about it later.
(kisses Irving)
I'm meeting my manager for drinks. Don't wait up.

She leaves. Irving collapses into a chair, drained. Dick paces, thrilled.

DICK
My God, I feel fantastic, I feel so good, I've got so much energy, I'm *hungry,* I feel like I could eat a horse! We're doing good work here, we're doing *really* good work. For the first time in my life, I feel like... I don't feel like a hack.

IRVING
Shit.

DICK
"Shit?"

IRVING
The story has emotion, Dick. True emotion.

DICK
(puzzled)
That's... good.

IRVING
It's more than good. It's rare.

DICK
I'm not following this depressing tone you've got here.

CONTINUED: (2)

IRVING
We undersold the book.

DICK
Undersold it?! They're giving us half a million dollars.

IRVING
We have to renegotiate the deal.

DICK
What's the matter with you? Fuck you, what are talking about? *Fuck* you!

IRVING
Dick, Dick, show a chutzpah.

DICK
Oh Jesus, I'm having palpitations. You're not going to be satisfied until I grab my chest, are you?

Irving grabs a yellow legal pad, sits down at the desk, and starts writing.

IRVING
Audacity! "Toujours l'audace," that was Napoleon's motto, and look how far it got him.

DICK
Yeah, all the way to Waterloo.

CUT TO:

INT HAROLD MCGRAW'S OFFICE DAY

Harold McGraw, Albert Leventhal, Beverly Loo, and two of the Gray-Faced Men seen earlier sit on one side of a conference table in McGraw's office. Dick and Irving sit on the other. Dick is the color of a Kleenex.

LEVENTHAL
This is totally unacceptable.

IRVING
I don't know what to say. I'm every bit as outraged as you are. You really have no idea what it's like to deal with this man.

CONTINUED:

LEVENTHAL
We have a signed contract.

IRVING
I know that. But he claims he didn't know the five hundred thousand included serialization rights to *Life* magazine. He hates Henry Luce, it goes back to a bad review *Time* gave *The Outlaw.* He's not rational on this point. He wants his million dollars. I worked on him for a few days, I got him down as low as eight fifty, but... well, you've read his letter.

He gestures to yet another handwritten note on yellow legal paper that sits in front of them.

IRVING (cont'd)
If you don't agree to his terms, he's authorized me to take the book to another publisher.

He shrugs, "what more can a man do?" There is a long pause, very tense. Beverly Loo clears her throat.

BEVERLY
(hopefully)
We do love the book so far.

DICK
(brightens)
Thank you, Bever-

Harold McGraw sits forward.

MCGRAW
Let's cut through the chatter. How do we know you're not taking a rake-off from Hughes?

IRVING
That's a vicious accusation.

MCGRAW
Yes, it is.

IRVING
You don't realize what hell I'm going through with that ancient prick.
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

IRVING (cont'd)
He's taking my hide off, and when I try to argue with him, he just shuts off his hearing aid and smiles at me like he's won a God damn battle.

BEVERLY
I didn't know Hughes wore a hearing aid.

IRVING
There's a lot you don't know. Now, to top it off, you accuse me of being a crook.

BEVERLY
He didn't say *that*.

IRVING
In so many words! Well, I won't take it. These aren't *my* demands, they're Howard's! I'm just reporting this to you, when I say something's "not negotiable," I'm not giving you *my* position, I'm giving you his! I'm trying to write a book, that's all, just do a job of work, and I'm getting screamed at from both sides! You know what, the hell with it, I'm sick of this middleman bullshit. I quit.

He gets up and heads for the door.

MCGRAW
Now, wait a minute. I've got an idea. Hughes is obviously irrational. If we give him his million today, who's to say he won't ask for three tomorrow? What if you were to cut off contact with him, right now, forget about the authorized biography, and instead you write a personal memoir. "My conversations with Howard." It's *your* book, not his. Use what you've got so far, we'll publish it, and we'd leave your fee unchanged. One hundred thousand dollars.

Irving turns and looks at him, shocked and appalled.

CONTINUED: (3)

IRVING
That is totally, nakedly unethical. Howard would sue me up, down, and sideways, but aside from that, it's *wrong.* I have no intention of violating my most dearly-held values, for you or for anyone. I won't do it. Let's get out of here, Dick.

Crushed, Dick gets up from the sofa and walks toward Irving. As they both approach the door:

MCGRAW
Tell him we'll go to seven fifty.

Dick misses a step, almost falls. Irving puts a steadying hand on his arm.

INT MCGRAW-HILL CORRIDOR DAY

Beverly Loo walks Dick and Irving across the crowded office, to the elevators, one arm hooked through each of theirs, very much the peacemaker.

BEVERLY
I really can't tell you how beautiful this book is. It'll be a privilege for me to edit. Oh, one thing, we all thought -- as you move on in the interviews, try to really focus on what happened to Howard after the Beverly Hills crash. That's when he became a recluse, that's the period everyone's interested in.

IRVING
Yeah, we're already well into the fifties, he's giving us a lot of great stuff.

Dick looks at him -- really?

BEVERLY
That's terrific, really, great. Because without that period, with just what you've got so far -- I mean, this could have been written in a library.

Irving laughs heartily.

CUT TO:

EXT NEW YORK STREET DAY

Dick and Irving leave the McGraw-Hill building.

DICK
"Great stuff?" What great stuff do we have from the fifties?

IRVING
I was vamping.

DICK
We don't have shit from the fifties.

They pass a MAN IN A GRAY SUIT, sitting on the edge of a fountain reading a newspaper.

IRVING
I didn't hear you jumping in to save our ass.

DICK
Or the sixties...

IRVING
We'll find it.

DICK
Where? His life's a big black hole after 1950.

They keep talking. As they cross the street, the Man in the Gray Suit stands, drops his newspaper in the trash, and follows them.

Hmmm...

CUT TO:

BLACK AND WHITE NEWSREEL FOOTAGE

hits the screen, the "News on the March!" logo and its distinctive MUSIC. A dramatic ANNOUNCER asks the question on everyone's lips:

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
Where is Howard Hughes?!

A clip shows Hughes, seated next to a lawyer at a table filled with microphones. A SENATE GALLERY sits behind him.

CONTINUED:

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
Ten years ago today, the millionaire industrialist captivated the nation, first with a cat and mouse game to avoid a federal subpoena, then with his defiant testimony before the Senate Arms Committee!

In the clip, SENATOR OWEN BREWSTER, a balding, bespectacled bulldog, berates Hughes:

BREWSTER
Mr. Hughes, yesterday this committee asked that you bring Mr. John Meyer in for questioning today, now did you do so?

HUGHES
No, sir, I didn't.

BREWSTER
Well, will you bring him in this afternoon?

Hughes confers with his lawyer for a moment, then replies:

HUGHES
No, sir, I don't believe I'll do that either.

As the Gallery erupts in cheers and laughter, the Announcer continues.

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
Hughes boldly defended his company's record as this country's largest manufacturer of war materiel, including the Hercules, nicknamed the Spruce Goose, the largest air transport ever built, at a cost of some $16 million to taxpayers, *which had never even flown!*

Hughes testifies, animated.

HUGHES
I've sunk five years of my life into that airplane, I've got my whole reputation wrapped up in it, and I tell you, if the Hercules won't fly, I'll leave this country for good, and I mean it!

CONTINUED: (2)

He is very convincing, and the crowd loves him. The image changes to a shot of the Spruce Goose, a mammoth, eight-engined amphibian transport plane, as it taxis across the waters of the Long Beach harbor.

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
Just three short months later, true to his word, Howard Hughes himself sat down behind the stick of the Spruce Goose --

Hughes, in the pilot's seat of the giant airplane, runs a pre-flight check-off.

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
-- and to the shock and amazement of the assembled press corps --

The massive aircraft, with a camera boat speeding alongside, zips across the harbor, still on the water.

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
-- Howard Hughes made good on his promise!

A REPORTER in the plane, heard over a radio, goes crazy.

REPORTER
Mr. Hughes is opening all eight throttles! We're hitting seventy knots... eighty knots... ninety knots... My God, we're flying!

It's only seventy feet high, and it doesn't stay up for more than a mile, but a point is made. The Spruce Goose flies. Even the REPORTERS on the dock burst into cheers.

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
Hughes' popularity shot through the roof. In less than a week, over a hundred Hughes for President clubs had formed in our major cities! But the Hercules was docked, disassembled, and put in a warehouse for good.

A shot of Hughes, walking away from the docked aircraft, toward a waiting car.

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
And Hughes himself, the mystery man who has confounded the public for years --

CONTINUED: (3)

Hughes climbs into the car and it drives away in a cloud of dust.

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
-- has not been seen in public since. Howard Hughes... *where are you?!*

IN A SCREENING ROOM,

the film runs out of the projector and the screen turns white, revealing the silhouettes of Dick and Irving sitting in a screening room. They hit a switch and the lights come on.

Irving turns and looks at Dick.

IRVING
That's all you found?

DICK
That's it.

Irving looks at the blank screen. Back at Dick.

IRVING
Well, that's fuck-all, Dick.

DICK
Certainly is.

Silence. Depression.

IRVING
Oh, hell, it's only --
(checks the date on the film box)
-- *twenty years* we gotta make up.

Dick opens an extremely slim file folder and hands an eight by ten photograph to Irving. It's Hughes, approximately fifty years old.

DICK
This is the last known photograph of him. Taken some time in the fifties. I found out he grew the moustache to cover a scar on his upper lip that he got in the Beverly Hills crash.

IRVING
No kidding? That's a very helpful bit of research, I can do a whole fucking *chapter* on that.

CONTINUED:

DICK
Cliff, as far as friends go, you're not a wealthy man. You can't afford to take me for granted.

It's the deepest thing Dick has ever said, and it couldn't be more true. Irving looks at him.

IRVING
(sincerely)
You're right. I apologize.

He gets up and heads for the door.

DICK
Where are you going?

Irving shoves the door open and heads out into the blinding daylight.

IRVING
To get a-

INT BAR DAY

A BARTENDER finishes Irving's sentence.

BARTENDER
-bourbon and water.

He sets a glass in front of Irving, who takes it and drinks deeply. A man comes in and sits down on the stool next to him. A little closer than Irving would like. He looks at him. It's The Man in the Gray Suit, the one we saw earlier. He turns and stares at Irving pointedly.

IRVING
(uncomfortable)
How are ya.

The Man in the Gray Suit says nothing. As his character name would indicate, The Man wears a plain gray suit. He has a buzz haircut, black horn-rimmed glasses. He is emotionless, ageless too. He could be thirty-five or sixty, you could make a case for either one.

The Man in the Gray Suit pulls a manila envelope from out of his jacket and puts it on the bar between them.

MAN IN GRAY SUIT
You're interested in photographs of a man.

CONTINUED:

Irving stares at him, uncomprehending. Then he figures it out.

IRVING
Oh. I get it. Look, Snowflake, I'm straight, okay? No offense, what you do with it is your business, but...

MAN IN GRAY SUIT
You're interested in photographs of Mr. Hughes.

Irving practically falls off his stool. The Man in the Gray Suit slides the manila envelope closer to him.

MAN IN GRAY SUIT (cont'd)
Recent photographs.

Too stunned to do anything else, Irving picks up the envelope. He undoes the clasp and slides a photograph out. His eyes widen. We only see the picture from the back, barely an outline visible to us. But what Irving sees floors him.

IRVING
Holy *shit.* What happened to him?

The Man in the Gray Suit snatches the photograph back and slides it into the envelope.

MAN IN GRAY SUIT
That, as they say on TV, is the sixty-four dollar question.

He puts the envelope back in his pocket and gets up to leave.

IRVING
Wait a minute, sit down, where are you going?

MAN IN GRAY SUIT
Central Park. Six o'clock, under the statue of Jose de San Martin. Don't bring Dick, he strikes me as weak.

He heads for the door.

IRVING
Who *are* you?

CONTINUED: (2)

MAN IN GRAY SUIT
Call me Mr. Green.

CUT TO:

EXT CENTRAL PARK DAY

Jose de San Martin led rebellions which liberated Argentina, Chile, and Peru from Spanish control in the first half of the eighteenth century. There's a huge statue of him on Central Park South, sitting on a horse. It was a gift from the people of the City of Buenos Aires. It was very nice of them to think of us. I've often wondered if they shipped it all the way up from Argentina or had it made here.

Anyhoo... Mr. Green sits on a park bench under the statue. Irving approaches, sweaty and irritated, and sits next to him.

MR. GREEN
You're lucky I'm still here.

IRVING
Why didn't you just say at the top of Sixth Avenue? It took me half an hour to find this statue, who the fuck is this guy?

MR. GREEN
(a perfect Spanish accent)
Jose de San Martin, libertador de Argentina, Chile, y Peru.

IRVING
You're rather a creepy fellow, Mr. Green.

MR. GREEN
I work inside the Hughes organization. Forty-eight hours ago, I became aware of a so-called autobiography of Mr. Hughes that was in the works at McGraw-Hill.

IRVING
I don't know what you're talking about.

MR. GREEN
Can we skip ahead a few pages, past the pro forma lies and denials?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A long pause.

IRVING
I still don't know what you're talking about, but I'm listening.

MR. GREEN
Hughes isn't aware of your book yet. Only I am.

IRVING
What do you do for him?

MR. GREEN
That depends on what needs to be done.

IRVING
And... what do you think should be done about this?

MR. GREEN
There are two possible courses of action. The first involves the authorities. Humiliation, criminal charges, prison, etc.

IRVING
I like the second one already.

MR. GREEN
The second involves a percentage.

IRVING
Of what?

MR. GREEN
Seven hundred fifty thousand dollars.

Irving sighs, depressed.

IRVING
I assume that's for you. What would I get?

MR. GREEN
My silence on this matter.

IRVING
Anything else?

MR. GREEN
My input.

CONTINUED: (2)

IRVING
Into the book?

MR. GREEN
You could use it. I've read your manuscript.

IRVING
You *read* it?!

MR. GREEN
As much as I could stand.

IRVING
Christ almighty, I'm in a spy movie...

He puts a cigarette in his mouth, doesn't light it.

MR. GREEN
I find it excessively sentimental.

IRVING
People like sentiment, Mr. Green.

MR. GREEN
People like the truth even more. There's a side of Hughes you haven't touched. You couldn't, no one has any idea.

IRVING
Except you.

MR. GREEN
And a few others.

IRVING
(puts a cigarette in his mouth, doesn't light it)
And you're willing to tell me about it?

MR. GREEN
In explicit detail.

IRVING
Why would you sell Hughes out like this?

MR. GREEN
Because it just might be the only way to save him.

CONTINUED: (3)

Irving pulls a notebook from his coat pocket.

IRVING
That's intriguing. What do you mean?

MR. GREEN
Shortly after he recovered from the Beverly Hills crash, Mr. Hughes called me to Muirfield in the middle of the night.

He notices the unlit cigarette dangling from Irving's lips.

MR. GREEN (cont'd)
Light that or put it away. It makes you look cheap.

Irving laughs and shakes his head, can't believe this guy. He strikes a match. From the flame --

CUT TO:

INT MUIRFIELD NIGHT

-- we see more flames, ROARING in the fireplace in the living room at Muirfield, Hughes' Los Angeles estate, last seen by us when Katharine Hepburn was living there.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
He was in the middle of what I can only describe as a purge. Everything from his former life, anything with a trace of sentimental value, memories of his parents, his wife, of Katharine Hepburn and a dozen other lovers -- it was all being eliminated.

A bundle of letters, yellowed with age and bound around the middle with a red ribbon, are tossed onto the fire and begin to burn.

Hughes, in his mid-forties, moustached, stands in front of the fireplace, a wild look in his eyes. Mr. Green stands beside him, definitely younger, but same style gray suit, same haircut, same glasses. No slave to fashion.

MR. GREEN
Sir, it's none of my business, but these seem to be *personal* letters, wouldn't you like to save just a few, for posterity?

CONTINUED:

HUGHES
No!

MR. GREEN
Perhaps just the ones from your mother...

HUGHES
Absolutely not! If I die, how do I know who'll get a hold of these? Who knows to what use they'll be put!

He dumps another batch of letters on the fire, the flames blaze, lighting the room. Hughes turns and regards the furniture, the exquisite furnishings.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Everything has to go.

AS HUGHES TALKS,

we see WORKMEN pull cotton shrouds over the sofa, the chairs, the massive dining room table.

HUGHES (v.o.)
Cover the furniture. Change all the locks, there's to be only one key, and it goes in my pocket. Get some packing crates, box up all of this stuff.

The Workmen place vases, lamps, a lifetime's worth of memorabilia into packing crates and HAMMER the lids shut.

HUGHES (v.o.)
Everything. Everything. *Everything goes.*

BACK IN FRONT OF THE FIRE,

Mr. Green looks at Hughes.

MR. GREEN
Where shall I put it all, sir?

HUGHES
Seven thousand Romaine.

EXT CENTRAL PARK DAY

Irving looks at Mr. Green.

CONTINUED:

IRVING
Seven thousand Romaine, that was his headquarters?

MR. GREEN
"Bunker" is a better word.

EXT 7000 ROMAINE DAY

A truck is parked in front of a squat Art Deco building in the middle of industrial Hollywood. TWO WORKMEN carry a crate to an unmarked door and ring a bell.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
It's an unmarked building in the middle of Hollywood, you could drive past it a thousand times and never notice it.

The door opens from the inside, seemingly of its own accord, just enough for the Workmen with the crate to slip inside.

INT 7000 ROMAINE DAY

The Workmen carry the crate down a long corridor. They pass a large, open room that's jammed with communications equipment -- switchboards, short wave radio setups, three or four OPERATORS in gray suits similar to Mr. Green's. In fact, throughout this section, there are *always* a few Men in Gray Suits lurking around Hughes, shadows with minds of their own.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
It's the nerve center of the Hughes organization. He's got the most sophisticated communications hardware on the planet in there. Any executive in any Hughes company can reach any other executive at any time by going through the Romaine switchboard. But that's not what Howard used it for.

The Workmen continue down the hall with the crate, toward a large storage room at the other end. We linger, going into the communications room and overhearing an Operator on a headset.

CONTINUED:

OPERATOR
Good afternoon, ma'am, Mr. Hughes asked me to give you a call and let you know we have a part in a picture he's considering you for, and he wonders if it would be possible for him to drop by and discuss it with you in person, say around midnight?

While the Operator works out the details with whatever actress he's got on the line, Mr. Green elaborates:

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
Howard used it to keep track of the girls. It was around this time that he threw himself into running RKO, the studio he'd bought. To him, it was basically a whorehouse.

INT SCREENING ROOM DAY

Hughes sits in a screening room, watching a black-and-white film.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
The way it usually worked was this:

Hughes turns to Mr. Green, who stands beside him, ever at the ready, hands clasped in front of him.

HUGHES
I'm interested in the girl sitting at the third table from the left top part of the screen.

Mr. Green looks up at the screen. The girl at the third table is quite beautiful.

MR. GREEN
Right away, sir.

INT ROMAINE - SWITCHBOARD DAY

An OPERATOR answers the phone at the Romaine switchboard.

OPERATOR
Operations.

INT PROJECTIONIST'S BOOTH DAY

Mr. Green is on the phone in the projectionist's booth while the film still plays.

CONTINUED:

MR. GREEN
We've got a fish on the line. Call Paramount, I need to speak to the extras casting director for a picture called "Funny You Should Say That."

OPERATOR (o.s.)
Right away, sir.

INT RKO OFFICE DAY

THE GIRL AT THE THIRD TABLE, in real life a dark-haired, busty twenty year old, eagerly signs her name in various places on a contract pointed out for her by Mr. Green.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
He'd sign them to a seven year contract.

Finished signing, the Girl at the Third Table looks up, flushed with excitement.

GIRL AT 3RD TABLE
When do I get to actually meet him?

MR. GREEN
Very soon, ma'am.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
He'd have a number of pictures taken.

INT PHOTO STUDIO DAY

The Girl at the Third Table poses for cheesecake shots. She's wearing a tight sweater.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
Primarily featuring the bustline.

The PHOTOGRAPHER turns her so she's in profile. She's got a great figure.

INT GIRL'S APARTMENT DAY

The Girl at the Third Table moves into a studio apartment in Westwood, thrilled at her good fortune.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
He'd put them up in an apartment.

EXT GIRL'S APARTMENT NIGHT

Night has fallen. In an upstairs window, the Girl can be seen looking out at the city. She's eating something. Across the street, a SEDAN is parked with two GRAY-SUITED MEN inside. One of them has a pair of binoculars, the other has a notebook.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
Then we'd watch them. And I mean we *watched* them.

BINOCULAR MAN
Looks like a chocolate bar. Can't make out the label -- wait! Hershey's.

Notebook Man records this vital information.

INT ROMAINE - HUGHES' OFFICE DAY

Hughes sits behind a cheap metal desk in his otherwise-barren office at 7000 Romaine. He's reading from a stack of scribbled reports.

HUGHES
Terry Moore's eating too many hot fudge sundaes. Get someone out there to tell her she's going to ruin her figure and her career.

MR. GREEN
Yes, sir.

HUGHES
(from another report)
Is this true? Pat De Cicco spent the night in Elizabeth Taylor's apartment on Tuesday?

MR. GREEN
Yes, sir, I'm afraid it is.

HUGHES
God damn it, I sent him to keep her from screwing that stuntman so he does it himself?! And what's this I hear, one of our drivers is fucking Anita Ekberg?! What kind of show are you running here, Jeff?

Ah hah! Mr. Green's first name is Jeff!

CONTINUED:

MR. GREEN
I'm sorry, sir, but the young women tend to become... well, a bit restless when they haven't worked for a few years.

HUGHES
I want you to fire all the drivers and replace them with homosexuals immediately.

MR. GREEN
Uh, I'm afraid it's going to be difficult to find fifty admitted homosexuals, that's not the sort of thing people tend to make public...

HUGHES
Then get more guys like that fella we have, the tall one, Bill, what do they call what he is? A Muslim?

MR. GREEN
A Mormon, sir.

HUGHES
Right. Bill told me Mormons don't drink, smoke, or, you know, what have you. Get Mormons. And tell the new drivers, now this is very important, make a note of this, tell them if they've got one of the girls in the car and they come to some kind of obstruction in the road -- a bump, a pothole, whatever it is -- they're to slow down to a speed of two miles per hour. No more. Any faster than that and the jarring motion of the car, you see, it can tear at the muscles that hold up the breasts. That's extremely important.

MR. GREEN
I understand.

EXT CENTRAL PARK DAY

Irving is writing frantically.

CONTINUED:

MR. GREEN
At one point, a movie magazine estimated Mr. Hughes had a hundred and sixty-four actresses stashed in apartments around town. They weren't far off.

IRVING
How many got parts in his movies?

MR. GREEN
A few. If they... got along with him. But if they rejected him...

INT SOUND STAGE DAY

Hughes is off in a corner of a sound stage, talking to JANE GREER. He has his seductive voice on.

HUGHES
Come on, Jane. When are we having dinner?

JANE GREER
We're not having dinner. I'm not *available,* Howard.

HUGHES
You're not happy.

JANE GREER
I *am* happy. I'm married. I have a child.

HUGHES
What does that have to do with being happy? Down deep inside, you're not a happy person.

JANE GREER
How would you know?

HUGHES
I can see it in your face. It shows up on screen. It's going to ruin your career. Let me fly you to Las Vegas for dinner.

JANE GREER
Howard, please. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I'm just not interested in you that way.

CONTINUED:

Hughes looks at her for a long moment, fury building inside.

HUGHES
Enjoy this picture, baby, it's your last. As long as I own this studio, you won't work.

He turns and walks away, leaving her shocked.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
And so she didn't.

INT SCREENING ROOM DAY

Hughes is slumped in his usual seat in the screening room, watching the black-and-white screen test of a beautiful, dark-haired ACTRESS. (Oh, hell, they're *all* beautiful, and most of them are dark-haired. I'll stop saying it.)

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
There was one role Hughes insisted they all test for. The picture was called *Sunny.*

HUGHES
She's harsh, she's much too abrasive.
(watches some more)
No, she's wrong, she's completely wrong, you're not getting it at all.

A frustrated CASTING DIRECTOR sits beside him.

CASTING DIRECTOR
If I could just read the script, I'd have a much better idea of what you're looking for.

HUGHES
The script is up here.
(taps the side of his head)
I can't possibly write it until I find the right girl. Can't you understand that?

CASTING DIRECTOR
Yes, yes, of course I *understand,* I'm just saying...

HUGHES
(gets up and leaves)
Put the test on the reel. Keep looking.

CONTINUED:

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
He saved every single test, but never found anyone who was good enough to play Sunny. Whoever she was. The picture was never made.

EXT CENTRAL PARK DUSK

The sun is setting over Central Park.

MR. GREEN
It all reached its craziest at the end of 1956. The Old Man decided he wanted to greet the New Year by dining at midnight with three women, none of whom were to know about the other two. This night was extremely important to Mr. Hughes. Later I realized, it was the end of his romantic career, and he knew it. He wanted to go out with a bang. I was in charge of The Operation. We picked the Beverly Hills Hotel.

INT B.H. HOTEL - DINING ROOM NIGHT

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
Jean Peters was set up in the hotel dining room.

JEAN PETERS, dressed elegantly for the evening, sits at a table festooned with gardenias. Champagne chills in an ice bucket.

INT B.H. HOTEL - POLO LOUNGE NIGHT

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
Susan Hayward was given the center court table in the Polo Lounge.

SUSAN HAYWARD sits down at a prime table in the Polo Lounge. A MAN IN A GRAY SUIT appears, gives her a nosegay of roses and a jewelry box from Cartier.

SUSAN HAYWARD
For me?

MAN IN GRAY SUIT
With Mr. Hughes' kindest thoughts.

She opens it. It's an emerald bracelet.

CONTINUED:

SUSAN HAYWARD
Oh, it's stunning!

MAN IN GRAY SUIT
He'll be here any moment.

She slips the bracelet onto her wrist, delighted.

INT B.H. HOTEL - BUNGALOW NIGHT

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
Yvonne Shubert, who wasn't more than seventeen at the time, was placed in a strategically located bungalow.

YVONNE SHUBERT, a gorgeous teenager in a chiffon and silk gown, sits at a table in a bungalow, surrounded by candles and yellow roses.

IN THE DINING ROOM,

Hughes, in tuxedo and tails, sits down at Jean Peters' table.

HUGHES
Sorry I'm a bit late.

JEAN PETERS
Not at all, darling. I ordered you a drink.

HUGHES
Thank you.

A WAITER appears with martinis. Hughes gazes deep into Jean's eyes, pretends to be swept away.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Oh, my God. If only you could see what I see.
(she blushes)
Why don't we drink a toast to-

He raises his glass, but Mr. Green appears.

MR. GREEN
I'm terribly sorry to interrupt, Mr. Hughes, but Mr. Dietrich is on the phone from Houston. He says it's urgent.

Hughes sighs, pretending to be irritated.

CONTINUED:

HUGHES
I'm sorry, Jean. Go ahead with your cocktail. I'll be back as soon as I can.

He gets up and follows Mr. Green out of the room. As they pass the doorway, a man dressed as a BUSBOY speaks into a walkie-talkie.

BUSBOY
Snowball is rolling, repeat, snowball is rolling.

IN THE POLO LOUNGE,

Hughes sits down at Susan Hayward's table. She leans across and gives him a kiss.

SUSAN HAYWARD
I love it. I adore it. You're the most generous man in the world.

Hughes stops, staring into her eyes, pretending to swoon.

HUGHES
Oh, my God. If only you could see what I see.
(she's flattered)
Waiter! A bottle of Dom Perignon, right away.

Other PATRONS in the Polo Lounge notice the famous couple, nudge each other.

SUSAN HAYWARD
Let's make this an absolutely *insane* night, what do you say? Let's really give them something to talk about.

Hughes takes her hand and is leaning in to say something charming when Mr. Green appears between them. Hughes notices him.

HUGHES
I don't want to be disturbed tonight.

MR. GREEN
I'm awfully sorry, sir, it's Mr. Odekirk, calling from the plant.

HUGHES
You've *got* to be joking.

CONTINUED:

MR. GREEN
He says it's urgent, sir.

HUGHES
Forget it. Tell him to deal with it himself.

He turns back to his date. Mr. Green is thrown by this one.

MR. GREEN
Uh... Mr. Hughes, I really-

HUGHES
Damn it, all right.
(to Hayward, as he gets up)
I'm so sorry. Three minutes, I promise.

OUT ON THE HOTEL GROUNDS,

Hughes, flanked by Mr. Green, who WHISPERS orders into a walkie-talkie, *runs* across the grounds of the Beverly Hills Hotel. He nearly slips as he turns to run up the walk to one of the bungalows, catches himself, smooths his hair, and opens the door. A BINOCULAR MAN watches it all.

IN THE BUNGALOW,

Hughes sits opposite Yvonne Shubert. He looks into her eyes, pretending to be in her thrall.

HUGHES
Oh, my God. If I only I could-
(catches himself)
Sorry, if only *you* could see what I see now.

She is overwhelmed by him.

YVONNE SHUBERT
Oh, Howard...

IN THE DINING ROOM,

Hughes, now back with Jean Peters, gives the Waiter his dinner order.

HUGHES
Sirloin steak, medium well, green peas, and a salad.

IN THE POLO LOUNGE,

a BUSBOY sets a plate of food on the table in front of Hughes.

BUSBOY
...and for you the stroganoff with asparagus.

HUGHES
(puzzled)
I didn't order this.

Susan Hayward looks up. Oops, wrong table.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Sorry, right, yes I did, yes I did.

Mr. Green appears.

MR. GREEN
I really can't apologize enough, sir, but I'm afraid it's Mr. Odekirk again.

HUGHES
Oh, for God's sake. Can't any of you see I'm trying to have an evening out with Miss Hayward?

MR. GREEN
He promises it's the last call.

HUGHES
(to Hayward)
You go ahead, don't let it get cold. I'll be back in a jig.

He turns and follows Mr. Green out of the Polo Lounge. Hayward watches them go, suspicious. She grabs her mink coat and follows them, at a discreet distance.

As she leaves the Polo Lounge, the Phony Busboy notices and mutters frantically into his walkie-talkie. She breezes past him.

IN THE LOBBY,

Hayward makes her way across the large central lobby of the hotel. Ahead of her, Hughes and Mr. Green are just stepping into the dining room.

CONTINUED:

When she's halfway there, a Gray-Suited Man steps up in front of her, a panicky look on his face.

GRAY-SUITED MAN
May I help you, Miss Hayward?

SUSAN HAYWARD
Just looking for the ladies' room.

GRAY-SUITED MAN
I believe it's the other way, ma'am!

But she continues on toward the dining room. As she reaches the doorway, two more Gray-Suited Men appear from nowhere, breathless.

GRAY-SUITED MAN 2
Anything I can do for you, Miss Hayward?

SUSAN HAYWARD
You can get out of my way.

GRAY-SUITED MAN 3
Miss Hayward! Miss Hayward!

They pull out their walkie-talkies as she goes into the dining room.

IN THE DINING ROOM,

Hughes is just being escorted back to Jean Peters' table by Mr. Green when the sound of frantic, squawking VOICES comes from the walkie-talkie Mr. Green has hidden in his jacket.

JEAN PETERS
What is that?

MR. GREEN
I'm sorry, ma'am?

HUGHES
Thank you, Jeff, you can go.

JEAN PETERS
Inside your jacket, what is that sound?

MR. GREEN
I don't, uh, I, I...

She tugs his jacket open, revealing the radio, which BLARES out a sentence.

CONTINUED:

VOICE (o.s.)
Fire in the hole! Fire in the hole!

JEAN PETERS
There's a fire somewhere?

SUSAN HAYWARD (o.s.)
There's going to be.

Peters looks up. Susan Hayward is standing over their table.

SUSAN HAYWARD (cont'd)
Hello, Jean. You're date number two, aren't you? Well, I'm date number one.

They both look at Hughes, who shrugs like a little boy and holds out his wrists, as if to be handcuffed.

Jean Peters figures it out, gets to her feet, and slaps Hughes lightly on the cheek, a symbolic gesture more than anything else. She stalks out of the restaurant.

Susan Hayward, tougher than Jean, *really* slaps him across the other cheek before walking out herself.

IN THE BUNGALOW,

the clock strikes midnight, finding Hughes in the passionate embrace of an unsuspecting Yvonne Shubert.

HUGHES
Yvonne, Yvonne... you're the only one.

As they kiss:

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
The saddest part, to me, was that Jean Peters actually forgave him. A year later, she *married* the son of a bitch. But he didn't do it for love.

EXT CENTRAL PARK NIGHT

Irving is enraptured, barely notices night has fallen on Central Park. There's a chill in the air, Mr. Green's words come out of his mouth in puffs of steam.

CONTINUED:

MR. GREEN
By the mid-fifties Howard wasn't just an eccentric anymore, he was losing control, and he knew it.

IRVING
Why?

Mr. Green looks around, to make sure they're alone.

MR. GREEN
Syphilis.

IRVING
Howard Hughes had *syphilis?*

MR. GREEN
Not had. Has. When he contracted it, there was no cure. And you know what happens in the later stages of syphilis. You know what part of the body it goes after.

Irving shakes his head no. Mr. Green taps the side of his own head.

MR. GREEN (cont'd)
Hughes was convinced a wife was the only person who could keep him out of a mental institution. Before they got married, he made Jean Peters promise she'd never let him be committed. She agreed, and they moved into separate bungalows in the Beverly Hills Hotel. It was the beginning of the end.

INT B.H. HOTEL - BUNGALOW DAY

Hughes, now in his fifties, is in bed, giving orders to Mr. Green. Aside from the bed, which is nothing more than a mattress on a frame, the bedroom is barren. The hotel furniture has all been shoved up against the wall in a pile that blocks the windows.

HUGHES
It's extremely important to me that nobody ever goes into any room, closet, cabinet, drawer, bathroom, or any other area used to store any of the things which are for me -- that's food, equipment, magazines, paper supplies, Kleenex -- no matter what.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HUGHES (cont'd)
It is equally important nobody ever opens any door, cabinet or closet used to store my things, even for one-thousandth of an inch, for one-thousandth of a second. I don't want the possibility of dust or insects or anything of that nature entering here. We're going to create a germ-free environment, Jeff.

MR. GREEN
Yes, sir.

HUGHES
Germs are death. My parents were killed by germs when they were relatively young, I do not intend to let this happen to me.

MR. GREEN
No, sir.

HUGHES
My mother scrubbed everything in the kitchen, not just the pots and pans, but the meat, the potatoes, the vegetables, everything. Scalding water. Still wasn't enough to save her life.

NEAR THE CLOSET,

Hughes stands before an unopened box of Kleenex, a knife in hand. He demonstrates to Mr. Green while he talks.

HUGHES
I don't want anyone touching my clothes directly with their hands. When clothes are to be brought to me, here's what they're to do. Take a brand new knife, never used, and use it to open the slot on a box of Kleenex. After the box is open, take the little tag and the first piece of Kleenex and destroy them. Now, using two fingers of the left hand and two fingers of the right hand, take each piece of Kleenex out of the box and place it on an opened newspaper, like this. Repeat this until approximately fifty sheets are stacked. You will then have a paddle for one hand. They're to follow the same procedure for the other hand.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

HUGHES (cont'd)
The thing to be careful of during the operation is not to breathe on the Kleenex, understand?

EXT CENTRAL PARK NIGHT

MR. GREEN
Understand? Howard himself didn't have the faintest idea why he was doing it. He was compelled.

INT B.H. HOTEL - BUNGALOW NIGHT

The middle of the night. Hughes, looking maniacal, stands in front of Mr. Green in the bungalow. He holds an envelope in his hands.

HUGHES
Take this envelope to your room and study its contents for forty-eight hours. You are to read the instructions contained within in exactly this manner: Study them for two hours. Rest for two hours. Study them for two hours. Rest for two hours. Study them for two hours. Rest for two hours. Study them for two hours --

MR. GREEN
Mr. Hughes, I-

Hughes grabs him by the shoulders and SHOUTS.

HUGHES
These instructions shall remain in force as long as you shall live!

INT MR. GREEN'S ROOM NIGHT

In his own room at the hotel, Mr. Green opens the envelope and pulls out a single piece of typing paper. There's only one sentence on it, centered in the middle.

HUGHES (v.o.)
(as Mr. Green reads)
"Do not convey, communicate, or telephone any message from me to anyone else unless I repeat that message ten times."

Mr. Green lowers the paper, distraught.

INT HUGHES' BUNGALOW DAY

Two days later. Hughes is pacing, wild, lecturing Mr. Green.

HUGHES
Let me give you an example of what I mean. If I come to you and tell you to call so-and-so and say such-and-such, put your hands behind your back and count with your fingers. If I only tell you to do it nine times, then don't do it. When I have spoken it, letter perfect, ten times, then do it. Understand?

MR. GREEN
Yes, sir.

HUGHES
Now, then. Get Noah Dietrich and bring him to the spare bungalow. Get Noah Dietrich and bring him to the spare bungalow. Get Noah Dietrich and bring him to the spare bungalow. Get Noah Dietrich and...

While Hughes goes on and Mr. Green obediently counts on his fingers, we dissolve to --

INT SPARE BUNGALOW NIGHT

-- the spare bungalow. The middle of the night, of course. Noah Dietrich, now in his mid-fifties, comes through the front door. It's completely dark inside.

DIETRICH
Howard? Are you here?

A light switches on on the other side of the room. It's a desk lamp, turned up so it's shining right in Dietrich's eyes. He winces.

DIETRICH (cont'd)
What's going on?

HUGHES
(from within the light)
Stand between the chalk marks, please.

DIETRICH
What? Turn on the lights, will you?

CONTINUED:

The shadowy form of Hughes, seated behind a desk, reaches out and directs the lamp beam down at the floor. Noah looks down. The carpet has been torn up, revealing a bare wood floor underneath. Two chalk lines have been drawn on the floor, eighteen inches apart, five feet from the front of the desk.

HUGHES
Stand between the chalk marks, please.

Reluctantly, Dietrich does so. Hughes tilts the light back up, into his employee's eyes.

DIETRICH
This is ridiculous, Howard.

He squints off to the side, where Mr. Green stands in the shadows.

DIETRICH (cont'd)
Jeff? Is that you? What's this all about?

HUGHES
I'm asking the questions around here. What is the precise net worth of the Hughes Tool Company, as of close of business today?

DIETRICH
Howard, may we please sit down and talk like two norm-

HUGHES
The *exact* net worth, as of five p.m. today, Eastern Standard Time!

DIETRICH
I won't answer that.

HUGHES
The company is in disarray. You're to leave for Houston at once. Remain there for a period of three years. Do everything you can to inflate the profits.

DIETRICH
Howard, Mary and I just bought a house out here.

CONTINUED: (2)

HUGHES
Sell it!

DIETRICH
(thinks)
Fine. I'll go. On one condition. I want a capital gains guarantee, signed and delivered to me within eight hours. I want a piece of the company, Howard. I deserve it.

HUGHES
You're holding a gun to my head! You'll be provided for, don't worry.

DIETRICH
I've been living on your promises for thirty years. I want a guarantee.

HUGHES
Nobody holds a gun to my head!

DIETRICH
Then forget it. I'm through as of this moment. Don't call me again. From now on, you can reach me through my attorneys.

HUGHES
Noah, wait!

DIETRICH
Mr. Hughes, you're an honest-to-God American shit.

He heads for the door. Behind the light, the silhouette of Hughes looks to be sobbing.

HUGHES
Please, Noah. I can't live without you.

DIETRICH
That's the first time in thirty-two years you paid me a compliment.

He leaves, the door CLICKING shut softly behind him. Behind the light, Hughes collapses onto the desk, sobbing into his arms. Mr. Green goes to him, tentatively reaches a hand out to put it on Hughes' back, to comfort him.

But Mr. Green's not that kind of guy, and the hand never makes it there.

CONTINUED: (3)

MR. GREEN
Sir... Sir, Mrs. Hughes has been asking to see you for over a week now.

HUGHES
No!

MR. GREEN
It might be just the thing you need. For a few minutes, just to have someone to talk-

HUGHES
Absolutely not! It's impossible.

He sits up, abruptly, wipes his face.

HUGHES (cont'd)
We're leaving this place at dawn.

MR. GREEN
Where are we going, sir?

CUT TO:

EXT NOSSECK'S SCREENING ROOM DAWN

Just before sunup, several black cars pull up in front of a screening room in West Hollywood.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
Noah Dietrich was his last tie to reality. When that was cut, Howard was completely adrift.

Mr. Green and several other Men in Gray Suits climb out, check the street up and down for other cars, then help Hughes out of the back.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
Maybe he realized it. Maybe he was smart enough to create his own asylum. He said to take him to his favorite screening room.

INT NOSSECK'S SCREENING ROOM DAY

A white leather recliner is placed down front and center, a TV table placed beside it. Ten individual stacks of Hershey's chocolate bars are set up on the tray. Six unopened boxes of Kleenex are stacked beside the table.

CONTINUED:

Hughes settles into the chair. A film begins on screen, *Blood and Sand.* Hughes watches, his eyes dull and expressionless. Mr. Green stands beside him for a long time, waiting for Hughes to speak, but he doesn't. Finally:

MR. GREEN
Is there anything else you need?
(no answer)
Do you have instructions for-

HUGHES
(whips around)
As long as I'm here, don't speak to me unless I ask you a question or make a comment. Each morning and each evening you will bring me a fresh bag of halved pecans, ten Hershey bars, and a quart of milk. When I ask you a question that requires a yes or no answer, do not speak. Just nod your head for yes or shake your head back and forth for no. Sometimes I will need to present you with more complicated questions. In that case I will use a number fourteen grease pencil and write the question on one of my yellow legal pads. Once that is done, do not speak, just write the answer on a yellow pad of your own. This is the last word you will hear from me.

He goes back to watching the movie.

MR. GREEN (v.o.)
And it was, for five months. Jean Peters never knew where he was. Once in a while, he'd make up a story for us to tell her, but none of them were the truth.

AT ONE MONTH,

Hughes looks haggard. The light from the screen still plays off his face.

AT TWO MONTHS,

he really looks like hell. His clothes (the same ones) are a mess, filthy and fraying. He crawls around on the floor while a movie plays on screen -- always, a movie plays.

CONTINUED:

He arranges empty Kleenex boxes carefully, like soldiers on parade. He HUMS softly to himself, an atonal version of a thirties hit. We don't quite recognize it.

AT THREE MONTHS,

two Men in Gray Suits wipe up a suspicious-looking puddle at the base of one wall. One of them sniffs the rag he's using, makes a disgusted face. They look at Hughes, who is writing frantically on a yellow pad. He holds it up to them. They read:

The bathroom is in the lobby.
And as you know, I cannot touch the door handle.

AT FIVE MONTHS,

Hughes is completely naked, still in his white leather recliner, staring at the screen. Mr. Green, who has taken to watching the movies from a seat nearby, is startled by the sudden sound of his boss's voice.

HUGHES
I'd like you to get a message to Mrs. Hughes.

Mr. Green looks at him. Hughes' eyes are big, sad and red-rimmed. Mr. Green nods vehemently, only too glad. He finds a yellow legal pad and pen and moves closer to Hughes.

HUGHES (cont'd)
Ready?
(Mr. Green nods again)
Darling, I just came to sorta -- if this is what the chinaman go for I don't understand it. I think the same effect could be achieved much better by asking your wife to hit you over the head with a heavy book. Maybe the camphor spoiled it, and maybe that is why they put it in -- so the old folk won't grow to like it.

Mr. Green looks at him. This makes no sense, of course, but the way he's speaking it is so incredibly heartfelt. So desperate. Fighting back emotion, the first we've ever seen from him, Mr. Green faithfully takes dictation.

HUGHES (cont'd)
I know it must be late. I tried to stand up and I feel awfully shaky. Lloyd says it is only 7:30 p.m.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

HUGHES (cont'd)
but I feel as if I've been out for a week. Anyway, since it is this early I am sure I should have no trouble navigating long before the navigator's time check. I will stay conscious long enough to receive a reply from you. I wish you would send me a nice bulletin, include particularly how you feel, how you like the show. After I receive your reply, I will give in to nature's forces for a while longer, and call you the minute I feel better. Obviously it was not a cold but emanated from the same system that has been the source of all my recent troubles. I send my love and please let me know if everything is all right and did you send Rennie the flowers. Love again, Howard.

Mr. Green, who stopped writing long ago, turns his head away, to hide from Hughes the fact that he himself is crying.

EXT CENTRAL PARK NIGHT

Mr. Green's voice falters as he nears the end of his story.

MR. GREEN
Of course, the businesses all fell apart. TWA stockholders sued him for mismanagement, five hundred million, you know all that. That's when he went into hiding. Vegas first, then... elsewhere.

IRVING
How is he now?

MR. GREEN
The drugs are worse than ever. Codeine, Ritalin, Valium, Seconal, Librium. He can shake them off for a few days, but he always goes back. They make sure of it, that Mormon Mafia he's got around him. All these guys that were drivers and gofers ten years ago, they're vice-presidents now. They're robbing him blind. I can't stand to see it, that's why I'm here.

CONTINUED:

IRVING
Why come to me? You could sell this story to any publisher in the world.

MR. GREEN
A disgruntled employee, with no corroborating evidence? No respectable house would touch it. But *you* -- they think you're talking directly to The Man Himself. It's ironic, isn't it, a liar being the only one they'll believe?

CUT TO:

INT PLAZA SUITE NIGHT

Dick sits opposite Irving in their suite at the Plaza. Irving has just told him the story and Dick's jaw is on the floor.

DICK
What do we do?

A long pause, while Irving thinks.

IRVING
We don't use it.

DICK
What about Mr. Green?

IRVING
Fuck him.

DICK
He'll call.

IRVING
Don't answer it.

DICK
He'll come to the door.

IRVING
Don't answer it! This is supposed to be Howard Hughes' authorized autobiography, right? Do you actually think he would allow that stuff to be written about him in his own book?

CONTINUED:

DICK
But what if the guy's right? What if this really is the only way to get Hughes away from the people around him?

IRVING
I don't believe it. It's a lie, it's all lies. Howard is bigger than drugs, or madness, those are human weaknesses, those happen to ordinary men, not to Howard Hughes. Not *our* Howard Hughes. The man is a myth, he's a hero for our times. "Billionaire aviator playboy," that's enduring, that's a story I believe. "Junkie?" "Syphilitic?" We haven't killed ourselves for eight months for that. No. *No!* I don't believe it, I refuse it, I won't fucking have it. "When it's a choice between the man and the myth..."

DICK
"Print the myth."

IRVING
We're gonna print a myth that lasts forever. Howard deserves it.

CUT TO:

INT PLAZA SUITE NIGHT

The middle of the night. Irving, exhausted, is asleep in bed, but there's a light on across the room. Moving over toward it, we find Nina Van Pallandt, in a bathrobe, sitting in an armchair. There is an end table on her right, a foot-high stack of manuscript sitting on it.

She's reading the last page. And she's sobbing. She finishes, sets the page down, and wipes her face, composing herself.

She looks over at Irving, sleeping so peacefully, finally. She gets up and walks over to him, gazing upon him almost reverently. She undoes her robe and lets it fall from her shoulders. She's naked underneath. She slips under the covers and slides up next to him. He stirs.

She runs her hands over his body, ending up at his face, which she turns toward her. She kisses him deeply. He awakens, looks at her.

CONTINUED:

IRVING
Finished?
(she nods)
If only I could have found out who Sunny was. I really would have had something.

NINA
Clifford, it's one of the most beautiful things I've ever read in my life.

Powerfully aroused, she begins to make love to him.

That must be some book.

OUTSIDE THE HOTEL,

a man stands in the shadows, staring up at the light that burns in the window of the hotel room. It's Mr. Green. The light switches out, and Mr. Green turns away, to a nearby pay phone.

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a dime, and drops it in the slot. He dials a number. After a moment:

MR. GREEN
It's Jeff. I need to talk to the lawyers.

CUT TO:

A LOCAL NEW YORK NEWS ANNOUNCER

reads the news.

ANNOUNCER
McGraw-Hill book publishers announced today that on March 2nd they will publish the autobiography of billionaire Howard Hughes, written in collaboration with novelist Clifford Irving. The book, which is appropriately titled *The Autobiography of Howard Hughes*, is expected to be an instant best-seller, and McGraw-Hill is planning an initial press run of two hundred thousand copies.

ANOTHER NEWS ANNOUNCER

comes on screen.

CONTINUED:

ANNOUNCER
And in New York, the publishing world is buzzing over an announcement today by the McGraw-Hill company that they intend to publish *The Autobiography of Howard Hughes,* an intimate portrait of the reclusive billionaire's life. *Life* magazine will serialize the book in its coming issues before it is released in its entirety in three months' time. Wall Street reacted to the news immediately, boosting McGraw-Hill's stock two and a quarter points on moderate to heavy trading of...

BUT WALTER CRONKITE HIMSELF

tosses a wet blanket over the previous announcers with a stern report of his own.

CRONKITE
(actual)
Just one day after the McGraw-Hill company electrified the book world by announcing its upcoming publication of *The Autobiography of Howard Hughes,* the Hughes Tool Company issued a sobering reply on behalf of Hughes himself.

CARL BYOIR

is interviewed at his desk. A legend says "Carl Byoir, Hughes spokesman."

BYOIR
There is no such book. Or, if there is, it is entirely fraudulent. We have never heard of Mr. Irving, we have certainly never entered into any agreement with him, and we believe that McGraw-Hill and Time-Life are either the perpetrators or the victims of major fraud.

DONALD WILSON,

another man at a desk, fires back. A legend says "Donald Wilson, Time-Life spokesman."

CONTINUED:

WILSON
We're absolutely positive it's authentic. Look, we're dealing with one of the world's largest and most respected publishers. And, you know, we're not exactly a movie magazine. This is Time, Inc. and McGraw-Hill talking. We've checked this thing out. We have proof. We're not sure why Mr. Hughes has decided to deny his own book, but we're not the least bit concerned about it.

CUT TO:

INT HAROLD MCGRAW'S OFFICE DAY

Not concerned? They're fucking *panicked.* A dozen people are gathered around Harold McGraw's conference table -- McGraw, Albert Leventhal, various LAWYERS. Beverly Loo sits on one side of Irving, Dick is on the other. Irving's manuscript sits in the middle of the table.

BEVERLY
Let me just say, first of all, we love the book. We're not upset about this denial at all.

LEVENTHAL
I'm upset! It's my name on the press release and my phone's rung over a hundred times today! I've never had so many telephone calls in my life!

Irving notices Harold McGraw is staring at him silently. He returns the gaze. McGraw's face looks like it's on Rushmore. ROBERT STEWART, a youngish man in an expensive suit, speaks up.

STEWART
Relax, Albert. This is the best publicity we could ever get.

LEVENTHAL
You only have to sell them, Bob, for you this is a dream. I have to defend them in court, and for me it's a God damned nightmare!

STEWART
I think we should have a press conference.
(to Irving)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEWART (cont'd)
Every newspaper and TV station wants a statement from you. Some of them think you don't even exist! We'll schedule it for tomorrow.

BEVERLY
(to Irving)
I love the book.

LEVENTHAL
I think that's a terrible mistake. For every question he answers, there'll be a dozen he'll have to duck. And if he tells the whole story of his interviews with Hughes, what's *Life* going to print? That's their angle.

DICK
(quickly)
I don't want to. Do a press conference.

LEVENTHAL
No one's asking you to, Mr. -- uh, Dick.

BEVERLY
(still to Irving)
I *adore* the book.

Feeling something, Irving looks down. Beverly has slid her hand onto his thigh. She looks up at him meaningfully.

Harold McGraw finally sits forward.

MCGRAW
It *is* true, isn't it?

Everyone is quiet. They all look at Irving.

IRVING
What?

MCGRAW
(gestures to the manuscript)
That.

Irving looks him in the eye.

IRVING
Every word of it.

CONTINUED: (2)

MCGRAW
Then why did Hughes deny it?

IRVING
Well, let's look at this very carefully. First of all, Howard Hughes hasn't denied anything. His *representatives*, who may or may not know anything about the book in the first place, they're the ones doing the talking. And they're not saying Howard Hughes never met Clifford Irving, they're saying *we* never met Clifford Irving. And they haven't. Secondly, think about this -- the way things stand now, Howard gets everything. He reveals his deepest thoughts, he gets his life in print the way he wants it, and he takes no responsibility for it. Pretty shrewd, and this is hands down the shrewdest man I have ever met in my life.

A long pause while they all think.

LEVENTHAL
Maybe he *should* do a press conference.

CUT TO:

A TELEVISION SCREEN,

where we see Irving seated in an armchair in front of a fireplace. A very youthful MIKE WALLACE sits across from him.

MIKE WALLACE
(all Wallace's side is actual)
Why exactly would Howard Hughes deny the very book he helped write?

IRVING
Mike, I tell you, I wish I knew. Let me just say it is one hundred percent in keeping with the kind of unpredictable behavior I've come to expect from him.

MIKE WALLACE
What does Hughes look like?

CONTINUED:

IRVING
He's a tall man, almost as tall as me. He was once devastatingly good looking, you can tell, but he's been ill and it's taken its toll.

MIKE WALLACE
Does he wear facial hair?

IRVING
Occasionally. Not his own.

MIKE WALLACE
(laughs)
What do you mean by that?

IRVING
I mean, at some of our meetings, he wore a wig and a false beard.

MIKE WALLACE
Really?

IRVING
Mike, I am telling you, there is a James Bond aspect to this story, when it all comes out, that would put any spy novel to shame.

DOWN IN THE CONTROL VAN,

which is parked on Fifty-Ninth Street, the CREW MEMBERS watching the screen JEER and throw paper at Irving's image.

CREW MEMBERS
Liar! Liar! Fake!

INT HAROLD MCGRAW'S OFFICE NIGHT

In Harold McGraw's office, which is starting to resemble a war room, Harold McGraw, Albert Leventhal, Beverly Loo, and Robert Stewart are watching Irving on "60 Minutes."

BEVERLY
He's believable. I think he's totally believable.

STEWART
I think Hughes is just playing a huge joke at everybody's expense. It's absolutely in character. He's a devil.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEWART (cont'd)
He knows we've got the contract and the cancelled checks and he's just sitting back laughing like hell.

LEVENTHAL
If he's even alive.

MCGRAW
(to Stewart)
What do we do?

STEWART
Go on the offensive.

ON A TELEVISION SCREEN,

a very sweaty Harold McGraw sits behind his desk, holding two cancelled checks in front of a TV camera.

MCGRAW
-- where you can very clearly see Mr. Hughes' endorsement right here on the back, "H.R. Hughes." Our handwriting experts have compared this signature to other, previously validated ones, and they've assured us there is no chance whatsoever that it's the work of a forger.

VOICE (o.s.)
Would you stake your reputation on that, Mr. McGraw?

MCGRAW
Of course I would.

He wipes his brow. He's literally pouring sweat.

INT SOUNDPROOF ROOM DAY

Irving is hooked up to a polygraph machine. The POLYGRAPH OPERATOR is a humorless man in his fifties.

POLYGRAPH OPERATOR
Is your name Clifford Irving?

IRVING
Yes, it is.

POLYGRAPH OPERATOR
Are you forty-one years old?

IRVING
Yes, I am.

CONTINUED:

POLYGRAPH OPERATOR
Have you ever met Howard Hughes?

IRVING
Yes, I have.

The needles flutter, barely.

POLYGRAPH OPERATOR
Did you collaborate with him on an autobiography?

IRVING
Yes, I did.

BEHIND A TWO-WAY MIRROR,

a TECHNICIAN reading the printout looks up at Harold McGraw.

TECHNICIAN
Cool customer. Could go either way.

CUT TO:

INT BANQUET ROOM DAY

A large hotel banquet room is jammed with BOOKSELLERS and the EXECUTIVE BRASS from McGraw-Hill and Time-Life. Irving wanders through it in a daze, drinking heavily from a bourbon on the rocks. He is surrounded by WELL-WISHERS and eager Booksellers who pump him with questions, but he can't even hear them under the loud CHATTER of the crowd.

He looks up. All along the walls, giant posterboard replicas of the book's jacket have been hung. The cover is simple, a white background with bold black letters -- *The Autobiography of Howard Hughes, Introduction and Commentary by Clifford Irving.*

Irving wipes sweat from his brow, drinks some more. Looking across the room, he happens to catch eyes with Dick, who is similarly surrounded. Dick winks. He, of all people, is cool.

LATER,

everyone is seated at banquet tables. Harold McGraw, at the center table with Irving and the other central players at the company, has risen from his chair and is standing in a spotlight, microphone in hand.

CONTINUED:

MCGRAW
Only Howard Hughes knows why he's apparently chosen to keep this book a secret from even his closest associates. But we are one hundred percent confident of its authenticity. And just to prove it, we have upped the first printing to half a million copies!
(applause)
I have had the privilege of reading this manuscript. And I know that it would take a Shakespeare to invent such a work. And as much as I admire our author, Clifford Irving...
(turns to Irving)
Cliff, you are no Shakespeare.

There's a lot of laughter. But it pisses Irving off. A WAITER delivers another drink and he gets right at it. While McGraw goes on, Irving drinks. And stews. He's unraveling.

MCGRAW (cont'd)
I can also announce that today we were named a Book-of-the-Month Club main selection, for which they paid the largest advance price in their history!
(more applause)
And one hour ago we closed a $400,000 deal with Dell for reprint rights, and *that's* a record!
(wild applause)
Ladies and gentlemen, Clifford Irving!

Irving bolts out of his chair, drink in hand, and lurches over to McGraw, who slaps him on the back and gives him the microphone. Irving looks around, doesn't say anything for a moment.

IRVING
I saw a cartoon in the *New Yorker* the other day. A worker in an office building saw a man falling past his window. "How's it goin', fella?" he asked. The man who was falling said "So far so good!"
(laughter)
That's about how I feel these days. So far so good. But the sidewalk's down there waiting, isn't it?

CONTINUED: (2)

Irving has a sip of his bourbon. Dick darts a look at him -- don't lose it.

IRVING (cont'd)
I think the reason we're all so obsessed with Howard Hughes is because we want to be him. Christ, I wish I were. The women, the money, the craziness everyone just has to put up with... Howard Hughes is everybody's dream, the universe with us at the center. He's a fantasy.

He drinks again. He's drifting, getting into a dangerous area. There is some MUTTERING in the crowd. Irving looks at them, really sizing them up.

IRVING (cont'd)
Clueless straights chasing a buck. Can't you see what an ego trip you're on? You know why you believed us? First, because you wanted to. Now, because you *have* to.
(the muttering gets louder)
Look at you out there, you're scared shitless, but you're clinging to this belief, in *me*, of all things, I'm like a *religion* for you now, the First Church of Clifford Irving, because you *can't* be wrong about this, you're the Establishment, man, nobody can pull one over on you, no one would dare try, the very *idea* just shakes your world to the core. Well, *we* did! Stand up, Dick, take a bow from these shitheads!
(screaming)
WE'VE NEVER MET HOWARD HUGHES IN OUR WHOLE FUCKING LIVES!

The muttering in the audience explodes into a torrent of furious SHOUTING, but abruptly we cut back in time two minutes earlier, to Harold McGraw as he says:

MCGRAW
Ladies and gentlemen, Clifford Irving!

Enthusiastic applause as Irving rises smilingly from his chair, walks to McGraw, and politely accepts a pat on the back and the microphone. He looks out at the crowd.

CONTINUED: (3)

IRVING
Thank you. There are several people in this room whom I'd like to thank for their invaluable help on this extraordinary project...

CUT TO:

INT PLAZA SUITE DAY?

The door to Irving's bedroom in the Plaza suite bursts open, flooding light into the room. Irving, who was asleep, struggles to sit up in bed, wincing from the light.

DICK
Hughes just called a press conference.

He goes to the TV, turns it on, and starts flicking the channels, searching for news.

IRVING
Wha?

DICK
Hughes! Himself! Just called a press conference in L.A.!

IRVING
(swallows)
He... he did?

Dick's voice continues over as --

INT HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - L.A. DAY

-- JOURNALISTS and PHONE COMPANY GUYS set up their equipment in a hotel conference room in L.A.

DICK (v.o.)
He's gonna call in by phone. He invited six journalists, a bunch of reporters he knew personally in the forties and fifties.

SIX SLIGHTLY OLDER JOURNALISTS take their seats behind a table. Technicians string cables across the floor, hooking up tape recorders and microphones.

DICK (v.o.)
He says he wants to talk about "this man Irving."

LATER, IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM,

the reel to reel tape recorders sit waiting. So do the Journalists. No one speaks. One looks at his watch. Another clears his throat.

Finally, a phone that has been placed on a table in front of them RINGS. They look at each other. It RINGS again. They hadn't quite agreed who was going to answer it. It RINGS a third time and two Technicians both lunge for it.

The First answers.

TECHNICIAN
Hello?
(swallows)
Just a moment, please.

He sets the phone in a cradle in a large box and flicks a switch on a big speaker. SOUND GUYS thrust microphones up in front of the speaker.

TECHNICIAN (cont'd)
(to the Journalists)
It's, uh...

He gestures -- you know, *him.*

A VOICE comes from the box, an older man's voice, cracked, but still full of strength and impatience.

VOICE
Hello?

FRANK McCULLOUGH, one of the journalists, sits forward.

MCCULLOUGH
Mr. Hughes?

VOICE
Who is this?

MCCULLOUGH
It's Frank McCullough, Los Angeles Daily News Syndicate.

VOICE
Why, hello, Frank! What's with this Mr. Hughes crap?

There are some astonished grins in the room.

CONTINUED:

MCCULLOUGH
Sorry, Howard. But, uh, you know, it's been a few years.

VOICE
Certainly has. Last time I saw you was... gosh, was it '49? Outside the Cocoanut Grove. Good Lord, you were drunk.

Now there is laughter. McCullough covers his microphone and turns to the others.

MCCULLOUGH
It's him. It's definitely him, I'd know that voice anywhere.
(uncovers mic)
Thanks a lot for telling everybody, Howard. Is it okay if I get right to the point?

VOICE
Please do, because the fact of this matter is I've never met this fella Clifford Irving, I never even *heard* of him until a few days ago, and this whole thing just taxes the imagination in the most incredible way... I only wish I were still in the picture business, because this would make one whale of a movie!

MCCULLOUGH
I agree. Howard, I'd like to ask a few questions, just so we can make sure that it really is you. Is that all right?

VOICE
And I understand somebody's out there cashing checks that are made out to me, and I intend to get to the bottom of *that* in a hurry and prosecute it to the full extent of the law.

MCCULLOUGH
(reading from a sheet)
In the 1940s, you developed a special process to lighten the weight of reconnaissance aircraft. What was-

CONTINUED: (2)

VOICE
You're talking about Duroform, yeah. But originally I intended it to-

CUT TO:

INT PLAZA SUITE NIGHT

While a news report of the press conference plays on the television in the background, Irving talks on the phone, pacing frantically. It's a two line phone, so while he talks, the other line rings. Continually.

IRVING
It wasn't him. I'm telling you, Harold, that was not the voice of the man I met! I don't know! I don't know! I don't have any idea!

He walks past the bathroom door. Dick is on his knees, throwing up into the toilet.

IRVING (cont'd)
What the hell do the police want to talk to *me* for?!

The doorbell RINGS. Dick sits up, falls back against the bathroom door, wiping his face with a towel.

DICK
I'm dying... I'm dying...

There is a POUNDING on the door. Irving goes to open it.

IRVING
Or, you know, uh, Harold, there, uh, there may be, uh, a much more sinister explanation for all this. What if the man I met was an imposter? What if I am the victim of a gigantic hoax? If the police want to help, if they want to do something, they should be out there looking for *him!*

Having opened the door, he stops in mid-sentence. Edith, his wife, stands in the hallway. She looks exhausted, her cheeks are tear-stained.

EDITH
The Swiss police just issued a warrant for my arrest.

CONTINUED:

IRVING
(into phone)
I'll call you back.

He hangs up and pulls Edith into the room.

IRVING (cont'd)
What are you talking about?

EDITH
They showed my picture on the news, in a story about you. Someone at the bank recognized it. They want to charge me with forging a passport!

IRVING
Where are the kids?

EDITH
At my mother's. The TV people were surrounding the house, I couldn't get you on the phone, I had to get out of the country.

Dick, who heard this, turns back to the toilet and throws up again. Both lines of the phone start ringing. The doorbell RINGS again.

IRVING
I think it's time to call a lawyer.

CUT TO:

ON A TELEVISION SCREEN,

MIKE DOUGLAS introduces a guest on his show.

MIKE DOUGLAS
(actual)
... a woman, a singer, a talented entertainer who also happens to be right at the center of the Clifford Irving controversy that is raging around the country right now... please welcome Nina Von Pallandt!

Nina comes onstage, to great applause. She blows a kiss to Mike and takes the microphone center stage. The ORCHESTRA begins to play. Nina begins to sing.

NINA
"What kind of fool am I?"

INT POLICE STATION DAY

A black and white television plays in the corner of a dingy holding room in a New York police station. Nina continues the song. Edith reaches out and SNAPS it off.

She and Irving are alone in the room. Through glass windows behind them, they can see Dick, who is being interrogated by POLICE DETECTIVES.

They're alone. No one says anything for a long moment. Finally:

IRVING
I never wanted you to be involved in this.

She makes a disgusted sound and waves him off -- don't even bother. Irving, consumed with guilt now, just shakes his head.

IRVING (cont'd)
I'm sorry. I don't know what's wrong with me.

EDITH
You're defective.

IRVING
I know.

EDITH
No. Seriously. There is something wrong with your personality. You're full of contempt. For everyone, everyone around you. You cheat on me, you cheat your publisher, you want to cheat the whole world. Getting away with it, it's like a drug for you. You're still twelve years old, you're the little boy from Brooklyn trying to sneak onto the subway. The candy isn't sweet enough unless it's stolen.

She goes to the window and looks out, smokes a cigarette.

EDITH (cont'd)
We'll wait till I get out of prison before we make it final. One thing at a time for the kids. The kids. *Shit.*

CONTINUED:

He looks up, surprised and hurt.

IRVING
Did you just tell me-

A UNIFORMED COP opens a door, cutting him off.

COP
Mrs. Irving.

EDITH
Good bye, Clifford.

She goes out the door and is led into the interrogation room beyond. Irving, left alone, drops his head into his hands. Someone walks into the room, comes around, stands in front of him.

Irving looks up. It's Harold McGraw. His arms dangle at his sides. He appears capable of physical violence.

IRVING
I never noticed before how big your hands are.

MCGRAW
You know, you've got a lot in common with Howard.

Irving gives him a puzzled look -- how's that?

MCGRAW (cont'd)
Mr. Irving, you're an honest-to-God American shit.

THE COVER OF TIME MAGAZINE,

features a portrait of Irving under the headline "CON MAN OF THE YEAR." (In smaller print below, it reads "Portrait of Irving by Elmyr De Hory.")

CUT TO:

INT PRISON CELL NIGHT

Nighttime in a federal penitentiary.

Six months later

Irving, incarcerated, is asleep on his bunk. He has grown a beard. There is a SQUEAKING sound from somewhere in the cell. Irving awakens, squints into the darkness.

CONTINUED:

The door to his cell is hanging open. That's weird. He sits up. As he swings his legs out of bed, he notices --

-- a MAN sitting in a chair next to him. After he gets over his initial shock, Irving stares at the man. He's in his late sixties, thin and frail, bearded.

IRVING
Who are you?

The Man says nothing, just stares at him, a mischievous look in his eyes. Irving looks over at the cell door again. Two MEN IN GRAY SUITS lurk nearby, hands clasped in front of them.

He looks back at the Man.

IRVING (cont'd)
Oh, my God.

HOWARD HUGHES holds a small baggie out to Irving.

HOWARD HUGHES
Organic prune?

Stunned, Irving reaches out and takes a prune. He chews, dumbfounded.

HOWARD HUGHES (cont'd)
So I finally read this magnum opus of yours.

IRVING
How did you get in here?

HOWARD HUGHES
Getting *into* a prison isn't really the tricky part, is it?

IRVING
I guess not.

HOWARD HUGHES
The book's a pip. Real page-turner. Just the kind of inspirational story this country needs.

IRVING
Thank you.

HOWARD HUGHES
I mean it, a real pip.

CONTINUED: (2)

Hughes just stares at him. Irving is uncomfortable.

IRVING
I'm glad to see you looking well. I'd heard some things...

HUGHES
(waves it off)
Aches and pains, aches and pains. I can't complain any more'n anybody else my age.

IRVING
Why did you come?

HUGHES
Wanted to get a look at you. Ask you why you did it, maybe. Why did you, Kiddo? Other than the money.

IRVING
I've had a lot of time to think about that lately. I don't know. I turned forty. My books weren't selling, the wife, the kids... Jesus, I hate to think I'm such a cliche.

HUGHES
Most men are. "Quiet desperation" and all.

IRVING
(shrugs)
I had a Big Idea. How many of those does a man get in his life? I just wanted to do something... grand. Something that would live on.

HUGHES
I can understand that.

IRVING
Can you tell me one thing? That movie you never made. *Sunny.* Who was Sunny?

HOWARD HUGHES
(thinks)
Sunny? Can't say I remember a picture called *Sunny.*
(smiles)
My mother used to call me Sonny, though. Nickname. Sonny Boy.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

HOWARD HUGHES (cont'd)
She died when I was sixteen. Did you know that?

IRVING
Yes.

HOWARD HUGHES
Sixteen year old boy. Can you imagine such a thing? You should have put that in your book.

IRVING
I did.

HOWARD HUGHES
You really should have put that in.

IRVING
(pause)
Yes. I guess I should have.

Hughes stands, tosses the empty bag of prunes in a trash can, and heads out the door.

HOWARD HUGHES
Other than that, it's a fine piece of writing. Damn near a work of art. Best thing *you* ever wrote, by a mile.

A Gray-Suited Man closes the cell door. Hughes looks back at Irving one more time.

HOWARD HUGHES (cont'd)
It's a shame nobody'll ever read it. But I guess that's *your* story.

He turns and walks away down the prison corridor.

Behind him, the bars frame Clifford Irving, who stays where he is.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT BLACK BOX DAY OR NIGHT

A white leather recliner sits in the middle of the floor in a darkened room. Helped by ultra-conservative FACELESS AIDES, Howard Hughes settles back into it.

AIDE 1
Look at you, Mr. Hughes, you're exhausted.

CONTINUED:

AIDE 2
I don't think we'll be planning any more expeditions like *that,* will we?

AIDE 1
We certainly won't.

HOWARD HUGHES
Tell the projectionist to put on the reel.

AIDE 1
The reel?

HOWARD HUGHES
That's right.

Aide 1 looks at Aide 2 for permission. Aide 2 shrugs and nods him toward the projection booth at the back of the room.

AIDE 1
Yes, sir.

AIDE 2
We have some things for you to sign in a few minutes, sir, but let's get comfortable first. Here you are.

Hughes looks down. The Aide is holding a large blue Valium capsule and a glass of water.

HUGHES
Thank you, Richard.

Hughes takes it obediently.

AIDE 2
Almost done.

He holds out another pill. Hughes takes that as well. In front of him, a white projector light hits a movie screen. An old black-and-white focus leader comes on.

AIDE 2 (cont'd)
Let's see if we can find a vein today.

He rolls up Hughes' sleeve and ties a rubber tubing around his upper arm, preparing to give him an injection.

Hughes ignores him, watching the screen.

ON SCREEN,

a beautiful, dark-haired ACTRESS with an ample bosom comes on screen. The set is simple, it's a screen test.

ACTRESS
I'm not sure what you want me to do.

IN THE ROOM,

Hughes hears his own voice, from many years ago, giving the Actress direction.

Aide 2 can't find a vein, he's SLAPPING Hughes' forearm to pop one up.

ON SCREEN,

the Actress poses, she turns this way and that.

IN THE ROOM,

Hughes' eyes begin to mist up.

HUGHES
Sixteen years old...

AIDE 2
Ah ha! Here we are.

ON SCREEN,

the faces of the Actresses parade by. They *all* tried out for the role -- Jane Greer, Susan Hayward, Jean Peters, Yvonne Shubert, even Kate read once.

IN THE ROOM,

tears are rolling down Hughes' cheeks.

The needle goes in.

His eyes turn cloudy, his head falls back against the recliner's headrest.

A legend comes on screen:

Brittania Hotel, the Bahamas
1971

Hughes gets high as the light from the screen plays across his face. *While we watch him,* he seems to age. He cheeks hollow out. His hair gets whiter and longer.

CONTINUED:

Legends drift by on screen, dissolving one over the other, telling us we're in different places, but the shot and the surroundings remain unchanged. Hughes stays in the recliner. A movie plays. Always, a movie plays.

Managua, Nicaragua

Vancouver

Back in Managua

A Faceless Aide hands Hughes a few more pills.

HOWARD HUGHES
Thank you, Richard.

AIDE 4
It's Stephen, sir.

The legends continue. Hughes keeps deteriorating.

London

Acapulco, 1976

Hughes is an ancient, emaciated figure, shrunken into the chair. Wild white hair, filthy beard, fingernails six inches long. Finally, his eyes close. Suddenly --

EXT IN THE SKY DAY

A private jet SCREAMS through the clouds, right in front of us.

INT PRIVATE JET DAY

Hughes' waiflike figure is on a stretcher in the back of the private plane. Half a dozen HUGHES AIDES are clustered around him, they seem frantic, one of them has a stethoscope and is searching for a pulse or heartbeat. Most of their words are lost under the DRONE of the plane's engines, but we make out one exchange:

DOCTOR
You people should have gotten him to a hospital in the States weeks ago!

AIDE 2
He seemed fine to us.

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR
It's criminal! How could the richest man in the world die from *malnutrition*?!

On the opposite side of the plane, YOUNG HOWARD HUGHES, dressed in a sharp forties suit, sits on the empty sofa, watching them as they work on him.

But they're just not that interesting. He turns and looks toward the front of the plane. He notices the cockpit door is hanging open.

He gets up and walks toward it.

IN THE COCKPIT,

he looks around. There's no flight crew. His lucky fedora, in fine shape, sits on the empty captain's seat.

Hughes grins. He slips into the chair and puts the fedora on his head.

He touches the controls of the airplane. He pulls back on the stick. The nose of the plane tilts up. He pushes down on the throttle. The engines SCREAM powerfully in response.

Hughes' eyes dance with life as the plane climbs at a steep angle, up into the heavens.

He takes a deep, contented breath.

HUGHES
My God, is there anything finer?

IN THE BLUE,

the jet climbs up to where the sky turns to stars.

FADE OUT.