



PATTERNS

written by

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based on the book

Serling: The Rise and Twilight of TV's Last Angry Man

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NOTE: SCENES IN ITALICS TELL THE ORIGIN OF THE TWILIGHT ZONE.

FADE IN.

The screen's divided in half: the top black, the bottom blue.

Nothing moves. Then -

SPLASH! White foam bursts from the blue as something crashes into the WATER.

EXT. BACKYARD SWIMMING POOL - NIGHT

A TYPEWRITER sinks beneath the surface. In SLOW MOTION, it thumps the concrete bottom: BOOM, BOOM-BOOM.

Through the disturbed waters, a face peers down. The slick, dark hair. The bushy eyebrows. The chiseled jaw. The restless, brilliant, questioning eyes. ROD SERLING, 33.

But Serling wears a troubled expression. He is a man at war with the world, and a man at war with himself.

Above his head lies a vast field of stars. He pulls a CIGARETTE from his pocket and places it to his lips.

INT. EXECUTIVE SUITE, CBS LOS ANGELES OFFICES - DAY

The tip of a CIGARETTE GLOWS ORANGE, smoked by an UNSEEN MAN who sits in the shadows. This is JAMES AUBREY, 41.

Superimpose the title, "CBS Los Angeles Offices - 1960."

HUBBELL ROBINSON

This isn't over - you can't get rid of me. I can see the future.

Opposite this patch of darkness, harsh sunlight glares onto a sweaty, desperate man. His forehead is high, with worn lines of worry beyond his years. He is HUBBELL ROBINSON, 55.

The room is in a state of transition. Boxes moving out, new ones coming in. With few furnishings, it feels vast.

HUBBELL ROBINSON (CONT'D)

Imagine: serious works of theater, original productions, delivered direct into the living rooms of America each night. A hit play on Broadway reaches at most half a million. We have the ability to reach a hundred times that.

(MORE)

HUBBELL ROBINSON (CONT'D)
 Rich or poor, all you need is a
 working set and culture -
 enriching, engaging, provocative -
 it's all yours, free of charge.

THE CURTAINS CLOSE, and the room darkens.

HUBBELL ROBINSON (CONT'D)
 And what'll you give 'em? Country
 bumpkins, constant shootouts,
 smiling bimbos with spilling
 bosoms? Meaningless nothing - is
 that what you think they want?!

KLIEG LIGHTS snap on. A harsh glare blinds Hubbell.

HUBBELL ROBINSON (CONT'D)
 We're more than just an excuse to
 fill the space between ads. *They*
 pay us - we don't pay them.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.)
 Anything else?

FACE HIDDEN IN DARKNESS, his voice is cold, matter-of-fact.

HUBBELL ROBINSON
 Thirteen years I've led programming
 at CBS. I gave America Lucille
 Ball, Lassie, Ed Sullivan.
 (beat)
 I gave you your career.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.)
 And now I'm the President.

Hubbell grows circumspect. It's inevitable.

HUBBELL ROBINSON
 We just won eight Emmys for crying
 out loud. *Playhouse 90*, the jewel
 of dramatic theater. *The Twilight*
Zone, breaking new ground.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.)
 I've cancelled *Playhouse 90*.

Hubbell is aghast. Meanwhile, a STAGEHAND sets a chair down
 behind him and guides the stunned man into it.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 As for *The Twilight Zone*...

The cigarette embers flare again. A TV CAMERA wheels right up
 into Hubbell's face.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
Smile for the cameras, Hubbell.

Two men in a vast, dark room. A gravelly voice intones:

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
The year is 1960. A battle is
brewing, a spiritual combat in the
least expected of places.

EXT. MGM BACKLOT - DAY

A woman runs. Her face is full of fear. She passes a pair of
fedora-wearing GANGSTERS, a PIONEER WOMAN, even an ASTRONAUT.

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
You might think this a war between
two armies: forces of light and
those of darkness.

The fiery-haired woman is MARGIE FLEMING, 28 - one of a
generation inspired by Kennedy's call to change the world.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Cars and cars, all stylish and expensive - but one garishly
tops them all: Rod's 1957 WHITE LINCOLN CONTINENTAL.

As he pulls into his space, he wears a big grin. That troubled
moment by the pool is from a different time in his life.

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
But the field at play today is both
geographically smaller and greater
in scope: a war over one man.

Ahead, a BUNGALOW. A SOUNDSTAGE. A SIGN: "Cayuga Productions."

INT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - LATER

Serling lights his CIGARETTE as his words continue, even
though HE HIMSELF ISN'T SPEAKING.

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
The stakes: one immortal soul. The
location: a four dollar hotel room.
But what Jackie Rhodes doesn't know
is that this roadside dive is
located in... *The Twilight Zone*.

Rod gives a sly wink.

ROD SERLING
Opener for Season Two - thoughts?

His voice was coming from a DICTAPHONE - a big, black contraption with a Bell telephone mic. He clicks it off -

And turns to three staff in the room with him. This is a place crammed with ART, STILLS, and PROPS from classic Season One *Twilight Zone* episodes - a space of endless imagination.

The first to speak is CHARLES BEAUMONT, 31, pounding away at a typewriter with a full ashtray beside him. He's got haunted, intense eyes - and a young artist's brash boldness.

CHARLES BEAUMONT

It needs work, Rod. Too airy, fluff
- what are you about? 'Cause that's
not illuminating anything.

ROD SERLING

(grinning)

Never satisfied, Chuck. Dick?

The next of the three is RICHARD MATHESON, 34. His friendly face and dark beard suggest a certain wisdom and patience. He leans back in his chair, thinking before he speaks.

RICHARD MATHESON

Conceptually, it's strong... but
I'm with him. Could be more direct.

ROD SERLING

Buck?

The third is producer BUCK HOUGHTON, 41, a lanky man with a salt-and-pepper crew cut and a hard-nosed, get-it-done attitude. SPREADSHEETS in hand, he doesn't look up.

BUCK HOUGHTON

Guys are right, needs another pass.
Then immediately into the pipeline.

ROD SERLING

Dick, Chuck, and Buck. The Three
Stooges better watch their back.

Serling grins, and the others give a quick chuckle.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)

How about *Howling Man*? You break
the reveal yet?

CHARLES BEAUMONT

Yeah! Genuine suspense as our hero
seizes the prisoner's leg and -
BAM, it's a hoof. A cloven hoof.
Heart palpitating, our man's body
chills. He knows.

(MORE)

CHARLES BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

Like Eve, like Faust, like so many
before him, wool's been pulled
tight over his eyes. He hasn't
freed an innocent man - he's
unleashed forces beyond his
control. The Devil walks among us
once more.

BUCK HOUGHTON

(sighing)

Cheery. Sponsors will love it.

ROD SERLING

It's a creepy little story. How
else is it supposed to end?

(smirks)

And if they really don't like it,
Hubbell'll talk sense into them.

BUCK HOUGHTON

He's late.

Suddenly, the door flings open. Margie rushes in, breathless.

ROD SERLING

Hey Margie, want an Emmy?

Before she can react, suddenly something's FLYING THROUGH THE
AIR, tossed by Serling. Caught off guard, Margie fumbles it,
and the GOLD OBJECT crashes to the floor. The Emmy?!?!
IT BREAKS INTO A DOZEN PIECES. She blinks. Everyone stares -

RICHARD MATHESON

Oh, God - is that...

Except for Beaumont, who smirks. Rod's in stitches laughing.

ROD SERLING

A nickel in Chinatown. They were
plum out of Emmys, so I had to
settle for an Oscar.

CHARLES BEAUMONT

You prick.

ROD SERLING

You should've heard the yelp Chuck
gave this morning.

Then Serling pulls out THE REAL DEAL.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)

Here's the lady you all want.

Their eyes go wide. Unlike Serling, they're Emmy virgins.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
Eh, it's all bullshit. Backslapping
until everyone's hunched over like
Igor over Frankenstein.

MARGIE FLEMING
Rod. Something awful is happening.

She darts across the room and flips on a SMALL TV SET.

The screen shows none other than Hubbell Robinson standing
before the cameras, taking a deep and weary breath.

HUBBELL ROBINSON
I'd like to take a brief moment to
address our CBS Family. With a
heavy heart... I have decided to
step down as Vice President...

A shudder ripples through the room. Rod turns away; it's too
horrible to watch. He paces with a MINOR LIMP - an old pain.

THE PHONE RINGS. Margie quickly answers - and grows pale.

MARGIE FLEMING
President Aubrey wants to see you.

INT. HALLWAY, CBS OFFICES - DAY

WORKERS are already removing HUBELL ROBINSON'S NAME PLAQUE.
Rod watches, growing angrier by the second.

INT. EXECUTIVE SUITE, CBS LOS ANGELES OFFICES - DAY

Darkness. Then embers glow. A LIT CIGARETTE.

A bulb shines, revealing a smoking man in white outline. A
KODAK SLIDE PROJECTOR. It throws its image onto the far wall:

It's a promotional still for a rural comedy. A dour old
farmer, rusty pitchfork in hand, keeps a watchful eye on his
pretty blonde daughter and her plunging neckline.

From the dark, a sound: a DOOR CLOSING. Serling steps into the
projection. Now the farmer's face hovers scowling above his.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.)
The twilight man himself.

Aubrey sounds charming - even friendly. But Rod's not fooled.
He has to keep professional, but he's livid about Hubbell.

ROD SERLING
Mr. President. Been a long time.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.)
What do you think?

ROD SERLING
I wouldn't fit in. Too Jewish.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.)
Compare and contrast.

NEXT SLIDE: new angle, new low-cut dress. Same friendly voice:

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Man to man, her "personality's" not
big enough. She's being recast.

Aubrey steps into the projector's light, and HE IS FINALLY
REVEALED: a sharply handsome 42, tall, built like a football
quarterback. But his eyes are relentless, focused.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
When I put this on the air, it'll
cost eight thousand an episode.

He advances, CLICKER in hand. But Rod holds his ground.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
Ratings will be twice as good as
Twilight Zone. Yours cost sixty a
piece. We need to fix this. Nothing
personal, just mathematics.

ROD SERLING
Nothing personal, Jim, but the math
worked for Hubbell.

JAMES AUBREY
And now he's in the bread line. The
Chairman promoted me because I know
what television can be, and this
network can be a ratings powerhouse
the likes of which the medium has
never seen.

Serling nods to the CBS "EYEBALL LOGO" hanging on the wall.

ROD SERLING
That's a trademark, not a mission
statement.

JAMES AUBREY
Eyeballs get us funding, not Emmys.
Listen, Rod. I'm not asking you.
I'm telling you. You nabbed Vera
Miles last season, and wardrobe put
the beauty in a frumpy petticoat.

ROD SERLING
Next time, she'll be a Mummy.

Rod smirks. Aubrey's unfazed. A CLICK as he skips to the NEXT SLIDE: a buxom woman cowering before a green-faced alien.

JAMES AUBREY
You can keep this slide. Put it
over your bed for inspiration -
"Broads, Bosoms, and Fun."

He winks, then clicks to ANOTHER SLIDE: a square-jawed hero facing off against a snarling werewolf.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
Too many weak-willed heroes.
Neurotic, morally compromised - not
enough white hats. Ever see that
movie, *The Wolf Man*?

ROD SERLING
The Wolf Man was the hero.

JAMES AUBREY
Never saw it, but it had a great
poster. Made me want to see it.

Aubrey CLICKS AGAIN: a *Twilight Zone* production still. A
dirty, grim-looking soldier with a WEIRD GLOW on his face.

Serling recognizes that image...

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
The Purple Testament, nineteenth
episode of your first season. A GI
gets the power to predict which of
his buddies will die next. So
what's he do?

CLICK: an ILLUSTRATION. A handsome soldier pushes his fellow
GI out of the way of a falling bomb.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
Does he change the fate of his
fellow soldiers? Race out into
battle, saving lives left and
right, a model U.S. fighting man?

He advances - supremely confident, imposing.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
No. He mopes about, feels sorry for
himself, then dies. Man's got no
integrity. People want *John Wayne*.

Suddenly, ROD FLIPS ON THE LIGHTS, banishing the image.

ROD SERLING
That's why it's called fate. Can't
alter it, just witness it - even
when he sees his own death. He
accepts it. That's true integrity.

Aubrey's eyes narrow, growing cold.

JAMES AUBREY
And who the hell wants to watch
that? Audiences want heroes. World
War II - I was there, taught Jimmy
Stewart to fly a B-25.

ROD SERLING
I was there, too.

JAMES AUBREY
My men smashed supply lines, broke
the war machine at Dresden. We did
things. What did you do?

ROD SERLING
(sarcastic)
I got blood on my boots.

At this, Aubrey's eyes light up, like a snake trapping its
prey. Firm and deliberate, he slides an ENVELOPE to Rod.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
What's this?

JAMES AUBREY
"In the Presence of Mine Enemies" -
the last episode of *Playhouse 90*. A
sad-sack Nazi learns a lesson.

ROD SERLING
I know it. I wrote it.

He points to the envelope in Rod's hands.

JAMES AUBREY
A survivor of Dachau.

Serling locks eyes with Aubrey.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
She wants to know how we could put a
human face on the Gestapo. When they
condemned her seven year-old brother
to the gas chambers, she saw their
faces. They weren't human.

Dead silence. Rod delicately places the envelope down.

ROD SERLING
The trouble is, they were human. If
we aren't vigilant against our own
prejudices, they could be us.

Aubrey SLAMS his desk.

JAMES AUBREY
Nazis don't learn lessons. They die.

ROD SERLING
It's not pro-Nazi. It's a story of
redemption, ethics. Isn't that the
point of *Playhouse 90*?

At this, Aubrey has to laugh.

JAMES AUBREY
You know what your problem is? You
don't think you need any of this...
but I see the kind of car you drive.

He opens a desk drawer and produces a SET OF PAPERS.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
Your new contract. The Chairman
likes your show - consider this the
first of many gifts.

The CBS Logo silently watches the two men.

EXT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - DUSK

A BONE-WHITE CLOCK - now 7:34, but its hands TICK on.

BZZZT. A MASSIVE FLY touches down on the face. It rubs its
forelimbs, its many eyes staring up at -

CAROL SERLING, 31. Raven hair. Bright, penetrating eyes. The
fly zips off her watch and out into the world - but she cannot.

Suddenly, she's not alone. Beaumont and Matheson walk up,
looking worried. Margie pokes her head out and waves them in.

MARGIE FLEMING
Bit longer, Carol! Hurry in, guys.

The three rush inside, leaving Carol alone once more.

INT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - MOMENTS LATER

Buck and Rod are deep in the contract. Neither's bothered to
turn on the lights, letting the setting sun fill the room
with Caravaggio-like long shadows.

And also like a painting, neither moves, both locked in the pages of legalese stuffed in their hands -

Until Margie bursts in with Beaumont and Matheson - this seems to be the spark that sets off the room.

ROD SERLING

Okay, Gremlins. I need your input.

BUCK HOUGHTON

Aubrey wants full creative control.
Sign off on every storyline.

CHARLES BEAUMONT

The hell with that!

BUCK HOUGHTON

Would also expand the show to an hour. More ad times, bigger budget.

RICHARD MATHESON

We could do more ambitious stories.

CHARLES BEAUMONT

You're brain-damaged if you think he should sign that contract.

With a BUZZ, the fly lands on the table. BEAUMONT SMASHES IT.

CHARLES BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

No other show has a deal like yours - creative control is the ultimate weapon. *That's* why Hubbell got canned - because you're the only writer who can still go nuclear.

A grim laugh from Rod - then he stops. Across the room: Carol.

ROD SERLING

Five more minutes, dear.

Margie hurries over to Carol as the debate continues.

RICHARD MATHESON

What's the alternative? We try to take on Aubrey?

ROD SERLING

We aren't writing *Leave it to Beaver*! There're enough of those schlock shows, "the world is a grand place except for no one to go to the big dance with me." For Chrissakes, we're here to speak the truth and dress it up all frightening and fun. *That's* our job. The rest is just distraction.

CHARLES BEAUMONT
 Damn straight! Forget that two-bit
 Caesar - he'll self-destruct in a
 year. Guys like him always do.

RICHARD MATHESON
 And how do you propose we speak
 truth if the mic's turned off now?

A heavy silence settles. Rod rubs his brow, troubled.

RICHARD MATHESON (CONT'D)
 There's talk about Aubrey. People
 don't cross him twice. We fight him
 now, and we - you will be fighting
 him 'til your dying breath.

Meanwhile, Margie explains the situation to Carol.

MARGIE FLEMING
 Sorry Carol - it won't happen
 again. It's just that Rod got this-

CAROL SERLING
 He promised the family a new
 refrigerator - I can't cook with
 rot, and the store closes in twenty
 minutes.

Across the room, Buck looks directly at Rod.

BUCK HOUGHTON
 I heard a story. A fellow producer,
 on a red-eye flying through a
 storm. Aubrey's asleep next to him.
 Then lightning hits the wing,
 blowing up one of the engines.
 Terrified he wakes him up - and
 Aubrey snaps: 'Don't wake me again
 unless all four are on fire.'

These words hang over Serling like a cloud.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Rising winds kick up dust. Rod and Carol walk hand-in-hand -

They're shocked: Hubbell Robinson struggles to open HIS CAR,
 arms cradling a HUGE CARDBOARD BOX filled with his things.

HUBBELL ROBINSON
 They wouldn't even let my secretary
 move the boxes.

ROD SERLING
 You need some help?

HUBBELL ROBINSON
 You have to fight him, Rod. That
 Aubrey is a Smiling Cobra.
 (to Carol)
 Your husband is the last angry man
 - the last guy in this whole
 industry with something to say.

ROD SERLING
 He offered me a contract, Hubbell.

Hubbell laughs.

HUBBELL ROBINSON
 Of course he did. More viewers,
 more money, all it costs you is...

A GUST OF WIND blows a PAGE out of Hubbell's box. He springs
 for it - and ends up spilling the contents of the whole thing.

CAROL SERLING
 Let me-

HUBBELL ROBINSON
 (interrupting)
 I've got it, Carol.

But he looks pathetic - and they're his friends. Both bend
 down to help him re-pack the box.

HUBBELL ROBINSON (CONT'D)
 It's a tightrope walk, this
 industry. You have to keep moving
 or you die. And I just fell off.

The wind GROWS LOUDER.

INT. SEARS APPLIANCE SHOWROOM - DAY

Among the glittering appliances, a YOUNG SALESMAN leans in -
 slick haircut, earnest suit.

YOUNG SALESMAN
 Best deal you'll ever have.

This startles Rod. His mind was on the contract.

YOUNG SALESMAN (CONT'D)
 Order on lay away, and you won't be
 making payments 'til January One. A
 hero to your family, for only \$399.

Seeing that Rod's distracted, Carol jumps in.

CAROL SERLING
I'm not worried about deals. My
husband has his own show.

ROD SERLING
A golden goose - until I lay an egg.

YOUNG SALESMAN
Well, if money's no object-

The Salesman saunters over to a SHINY CHROME FRIDGE, already
being looked over by A CLEAN-CUT MARRIED COUPLE.

YOUNG SALESMAN (CONT'D)
Lead-lined. Your food'll be safe,
no matter what the Soviets do.

CLEAN-CUT WIFE
Wow. It can really do that?!

YOUNG SALESMAN
All the '61 models are built to
withstand... *harsh conditions.*

With a serious nod, the Salesman "comforts" her.

Seeing this, Rod's had enough. Throwing open the main door,
he sticks his head inside the small white box.

ROD SERLING
Yeah Carol, I definitely think this
could hide us from them Ruskies.

He pulls his head back out and smiles at the other couple.
Not getting his sense of humor, they slowly back away, much
to the Salesman's chagrin. Even Carol's annoyed.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
Carol, buy three of whatever you
want. I'll be in the car.

EXT. STREETS OF LOS ANGELES - DAY

Bold colors and neon lights fill the boulevards. But trouble
simmers underneath the surface. The '60s are starting.

A storefront sign: "No Dogs or Mexicans Allowed." Another
sign: "Close the Missile Gap. Vote Kennedy."

In contrast, a BILLBOARD: *THE ALAMO* starring John Wayne. Rod
glares it.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

Superimpose the title, "Binghamton, New York - 1943."

ON THE MOVIE SCREEN - NEWSREEL FOOTAGE

A SERIES OF IMAGES: Light traffic on Main Street, U.S.A.
Teens gather at a soda fountain. Children ride a CAROUSEL.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
America was in a cocoon of peace.
But this was just a soft illusion.

MORE IMAGES: Hitler. Nazis on the march.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Yet our brave boys aren't soft.
Their names will echo in history.

NEXT IMAGES: Allied landings at North Africa. Paratroopers float through the air, hit the ground, then charge.

YOUNG ROD SERLING, 18, leans forward, utterly captivated. His face is handsome, boyish, naive - and full of ambition.

MEL LEVY (V.O.)
What are you gonna do, Serling?

INT. SMALL TOWN DINER - DAY

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW, it's Main Street, just like the newsreel. There's even a CAROUSEL, with whirling colors.

Inside, it's warm and homey. There's even those checkered tablecloths. Rod sits in the corner, sharing a PIE with -

MEL LEVY, 20, puffs a CIGARETTE. THICK-FRAME GLASSES and ARMY GREENS contrast with a perpetual mischievous grin.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
I'm gonna be the Jew that smokes
Hitler.

With smirk, Levy offers a FRESH CIGARETTE. Rod waves it off.

MEL LEVY
Two Jews with a life purpose?

YOUNG ROD SERLING
We'll 'chute straight into Berlin.

MEL LEVY
Aim for his head. He looks up,
postage stamp to the sky, and-

Levy CLAPS his hands.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
Boots on the ground win battles.
Boots to the neck win wars.

Levy laughs. But then Serling looks out the window...

Across the street, SERLING'S FATHER stacks cans outside his quaint little GROCERY STORE.

MEL LEVY

And what does your Pop say?

He stubs out his cigarette and snatches up a fork. DARK-RED CHERRY filling oozes out of the pie.

MEL LEVY (CONT'D)

Oh. Thought it was peach.

The BELL JANGLES at the door: an AFRICAN-AMERICAN MAN. The GREASY-APRONED OWNER glances up from the counter.

GREASY-APRONED OWNER

Closed.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN MAN

But the sign-

GREASY-APRONED OWNER

(interrupting curtly)

Closed. Sorry.

Seeing this, Rod rises up - but Levy grabs his sleeve.

MEL LEVY

(whispers)

The Klan nearly took city hall a few elections back. This isn't the battle you win.

As Levy pulls Young Rod back down -

EXT. OUTDOOR BOXING RING - NIGHT

WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! Rod the BOXER takes a flurry to the face. BOTH EYES BLACK, NOSE SPURTING BLOOD, he reels.

YOUNG TRAINEES in green Army fatigues whoop and holler. Levy's right by the ring, making the biggest noise as -

Rod redoubles his efforts, locking eyes with the enemy. He won't back down.

HE SWINGS -

EXT. FORT BENNING: COURTYARD - DAY

STARS. And below them...

Everything's red and green. CHRISTMAS tinsel. Wreaths. Young GIs dance with their girls. Sip punch. Smoke. Smile.

From the USO BANDSTAND, a SINGER with a warm, Georgia accent:

SINGER
To all the cute boys shipping out
to fight the Japs, this is for you.
Merry Christmas.

She launches into "White Christmas." Dancing resumes, as off in the background, the colorless barracks stand silent.

INT. FORT BENNING: BARRACKS - NIGHT

CLICK, CLICK, CLICK. The LIGHTER isn't working.

Surrounded by scores of empty bunks, Young Rod and his Father huddle over a CUPCAKE WITH A SINGLE UNLIT CANDLE. The younger man's now in UNIFORM, his nose still BANDAGED from the fight.

Finally, Rod's dad throws down the lighter in frustration.

SERLING'S FATHER
What'll you become by killing?
You're too young - and you're not
even going to Germany!

Rod picks up the lighter and, in one go, sparks the candle.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
I'm too old for cupcakes.

Fire reflects off the elder's worried eyes. Taking up the lighter, he leans back with a CIGARETTE.

SERLING'S FATHER
Well, Happy Birthday anyway.

He just can't get it to light. CLICK, CLICK, CLICK -

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF MANILA - NIGHT

WHITE TRACERS of anti-aircraft guns arc across the sky above a MISTY, DEVASTATED CITY. A CANAL encircles it like a moat.

Rifles in hand, SOLDIERS squat on a BOMBED-OUT CAROUSEL between blackened horses and broken mythical beasts. Nearby: ruins of a collapsed home. ONLY A SINGLE DOOR still stands.

Rod and Mel drink COFFEE, watching as an ARMY GRUNT pounds on a BOXY, BATTERED RADIO: BAM, BAM, BAM. RADIO STATIC BUZZES.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
We're paratroopers - why can't they
just drop us at the beachhead?

MEL LEVY
At Crete, the Germans dropped boys.
Brits used 'em for target practice.
Corpses floating to the ground.
(cupping his hands)
Fix it, don't fuck it!

The Grunt rolls his eyes as the others start chuckling.
Then suddenly the STATIC CLEARS - and the men snap silent.

EXAGGERATED ASIAN ACCENT (V.O.)
Oh no! They're hiding in the rice!

Waves of laughter roll over the troops - except Rod.

MEL LEVY
Lighten up, Rod.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
Leave it. Norm Corwin writes stuff
that means something. This makes me
wish I'd been killed already.

Mel laughs.

MEL LEVY
Corwin's the god of radio. But
that's not what they need. The
world's coming apart. They need
comfort food.

COUNTRY-BUMPKIN ACTOR (V.O.)
Freeze. Y'all oughta keep your
squinty-eyes peeled next time!

BZZT - AND THE RADIO SHORTS OUT. No one says a word. It's
like a death in the family.

Then... MUSIC? A long silhouette floats through the moonlight
fog like the offerings of a dream. It reaches the light -

A BOAT on the canal: FEMALE FILIPINO SINGERS, with colorful
costumes that sweep and ripple, and a SMALL BAND playing
their heart out with traditional instruments, smiling wide.

A familiar song in broken English: "BOOGIE WOOGIE BUGLE BOY."
The boat gently glides past an astonished Serling.

MEL LEVY
Things you see on termite patrol...

But now the lines of tracer fire descend as the Japanese artillery lowers its turrets -

FIRING LEVEL WITH THE GROUND.

*YOUNG ROD SERLING
GET DOWN!*

GIs dash for cover as WHITE METAL TEARS THE BOAT TO SHREDS.

The Filipinos splash into the water. Concrete dust from shattered canal walls leaves men choking.

Serling hits the ground. WHITE FLASHES race above his head. SPLASHING - SCREAMS - CRIES FOR HELP in a foreign tongue.

He looks. The water's DARK WITH BLOOD. One of the singers thrashes desperately but she's too injured to swim.

Her hands claw the air as they slip beneath the waves...

Then Rod yanks her up and cradles her in his arms.

*MEL LEVY (O.S.)
Rod! Where are you?*

Serling runs like a madman chased by nightmares. The barrage craters around him - the world itself is coming apart.

With terror in her eyes, the woman stares up at Serling -

THEN A MORTAR LANDS NEARBY. AN EXPLOSION -

INT. SERLING HOME: POOLSIDE LANAI - NIGHT

Rod stares at some NEW CONCEPT ART: a B-25 Bomber, wrecked in the empty desert. The image haunts him. Trauma from the war.

The office has many comforts: a PORTABLE TV sits by sliding glass doors. Beyond lap the blue-lit waters of a BACKYARD POOL. FOUR EMMYS line the mantle of a stone fireplace.

Sweat covers Rod's hand. He reaches for a cig. CARTON'S EMPTY. So instead, he picks up his DICTAPHONE MIC. CLICK.

*ROD SERLING
War spits out violence overhead and
the sandy graveyard swallows it up.*

CLICK. He stops. Those words have been a release.

*ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
Her name is King Nine, B-25, medium
bomber, Twelfth Air Force...*

INT. SERLING HOME: JODI'S ROOM - LATER

Jodi tosses and turns, breathing fast. Worried, Carol strokes her daughter's forehead, trying to calm her.

EXT. SERLING HOME: POOLSIDE LANAI - LATER

Carol winds her way past the pool. With the lights off, its glassy black surface reflects the stars and moon above.

Inside the lanai, she can see Rod's lost himself in his writing, circling the room, excitedly speaking into his Dictaphone, acting out each character like a one-man show.

INT. SERLING HOME: POOLSIDE LANAI - CONTINUOUS

Right here and now, all Rod's cares have faded away.

ROD SERLING
 (voice of a delirious man)
 I looked everywhere for them. None
 of them were there.
 (voice of an older doctor)
 It was an illusion-

Suddenly, Carol slides the glass doors open. Rod stops.

CAROL SERLING
 Jodi had another nightmare.

ROD SERLING
 Good, I'm rubbing off on her.

CAROL SERLING
 Funny guy. Dreams of ghosts, trying
 to eat her daddy - she's having
 trouble at school.

She spots the Dictaphone in his hand - and grabs it from him.

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
 Margie, remind my husband we need
 to interview private tutors.

Rod replies with a playful grin.

ROD SERLING
 Margie, note this for the divorce
 file.

CLICK. Carol smirks.

CAROL SERLING
 Which one are you working on?

ROD SERLING
A man awakes. His bomber crashed.
His crew vanished. No trace. Where
have they all gone?

CAROL SERLING
My notes are on the outline. You
see them?

ROD SERLING
Yeah. You're right about the ending.

He reaches for the outline - and AUBREY'S CONTRACT slides out
from under it.

CAROL SERLING
Is that it?

Carol quickly snatches it up and flips through.

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
Money's impressive. Can use it for
tutors. Why don't you just sign it?

ROD SERLING
New president wants a bit more
control over me.

CAROL SERLING
I'd like that.

She sticks out her tongue at him. He returns the gesture.
They're like a pair of little kids...

Then he gets serious.

ROD SERLING
Aubrey took down his predecessor. He
took down Hubbell. I'm not sure even
Chairman Paley is safe. You think I
can fight him? He can destroy me -
and that means destroying us.

CAROL SERLING
Well, you can't bury it under your
scripts. You have to make a choice.

She tosses him the contract. It almost seems to speak to him.

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
And you have to come to bed.

INT. SMALL TOWN MAIN STREET - DAY

THE CONTRACT'S SIGNED. Rod stares at his signature as walks.

This place looks just like his boyhood Binghampton. Soda fountain. Quaint little grocer's. All-American diner.

BUT NO ONE ELSE IS HERE. SERLING'S ALL ALONE.

This idyllic, American world holds something for him. Something he lost. Something he can't get back.

Then suddenly, A STOREFRONT SWINGS OPEN LIKE A DOOR. SET DRESSERS pour out. This isn't a real town, but a movie lot.

MAN WITH SILVER SPECTACLES (O.S.)
Lost, Mr. Serling?

Startled, he turns around - then tries to act casual.

ROD SERLING
Just looking for a light.

A MAN WITH SILVER SPECTACLES offers a LIGHTER'S GLOWING FLAME.

Rod sparks up his tobacco and takes a long, deep drag. It offers relief from his troubles, but only for a moment.

MAN WITH SILVER SPECTACLES
I hear you're stuck in a pit with a
Smiling Cobra.

ROD SERLING
Whose side are you on?

MAN WITH SILVER SPECTACLES
American Broadcasting.

He hands Rod a business card: "ABC." The man looks in either direction, then leans in.

MAN WITH SILVER SPECTACLES (CONT'D)
Let's just say, I have some rope. A
way out of the pit, if you will.

A long pause. This is a new option for Serling.

ROD SERLING
That's a serious offer?

MAN WITH SILVER SPECTACLES
Those are the only kind I make.

Another long pause.

MAN WITH SILVER SPECTACLES (CONT'D)
You don't have much time, Mr.
Serling. Leave the *Twilight Zone* to
the Cobra, and save yourself.

But this backfires. It clinches things in Rod's mind.

ROD SERLING
 You're right. I don't know how much
 time I have - to make any sort of
 difference. I'm not losing the Zone.

MAN WITH SILVER SPECTACLES
 All shows end eventually. Why does
 this one matter so much? Think
 about it.

He departs, but Serling's not worried. He has a renewed vigor
 in his step. He leaves the movie set and makes his way to -

EXT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - DAY

Margie's waiting outside as Rod walks up, Aubrey's contract
 in hand. He grins at her -

AND TOSSES THE CONTRACT INTO A TRASHCAN.

EXT. DESERT NEAR LONE PINE, CALIFORNIA - DAY

A B-25 BOMBER sits in the desert, dark against the hot sun.

And before it, a PILOT falls to his knees. His face is dirty
 and sweaty. His eyes betray a deep desperation.

PILOT
 Everything's a phantom. There's not
 a single thing that's real. Oh God,
 what's happening? Oh God, please
 let me in on it.

The pilot is an actor, and he's not alone in this bleak
 wasteland: a TV CREW films him. Nearby, Buck scans the
 horizon as Rod breathes deep, on edge. Then Buck whispers:

BUCK HOUGHTON
 We've got rain coming...

DIRECTOR
 Cut! Check the gate. Rod, your
 intro is up next!

Margie comes running up with a CRISP DRESS JACKET.

MARGIE FLEMING
 Freshly pressed!

She halts.

MARGIE FLEMING (CONT'D)
 Stop clenching your jaw like that.

ROD SERLING
 Can't help it. Nerves.
 (to the Director)
 Buzz, this is my first on-screen
 intro. Make me look good, or the
 ratings'll drop.

DIRECTOR
 (laughing)
 I'm counting on your handsome mug
 to make the ladies swoon.

Rod slips on the jacket and hits his mark. But before cameras
 can roll, a DUST CLOUD appears on the horizon. He squints.

A tinted MERCEDES roars across the desert, black and long,
 marking the entrance of an emperor. It brazenly drives
 through the set, SENDING CREW SCRAMBLING in all directions.

The car rides right up to Serling like it's about to run him
 over - but stops at the last minute. Aubrey jumps out.

A few people GASP, realizing it's the network president.
 Aubrey smiles politely - but keeps his cards close.

JAMES AUBREY
 I didn't approve the script.

Rod flashes a facetious grin as Aubrey advances towards him.

ROD SERLING
 We're ahead of schedule.

JAMES AUBREY
 The contract was in this show's
 best interests.

Aubrey says it flatly, matter-of-fact, but crew stop and
 turn. Some even PUT DOWN THE EQUIPMENT they're holding.

ROD SERLING
 With all due respect, I disagree.

Aubrey's a few feet away. The two men stare each other down.
 Margie moves to back him up, but Serling puts up his hand.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
 If you don't like it, cancel us.
 The Chairman would be thrilled to
 see us on another network.

JAMES AUBREY
 Paley?

And Aubrey stops directly in front of Rod, his powerful
 physique towering over him. Claspings Serling by the arm, he
 guides him in close enough to whisper:

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
 There are worse things I can do
 than cancel you.

There's something vacant about his eyes, devoid of empathy.
 His WEDDING RING presses hard against Serling's arm.

But Rod holds his ground.

ROD SERLING
 Long as I keep my show's integrity.

Aubrey cracks a smile, releasing Rod's arm.

JAMES AUBREY
 I'm not here to subsidize your high
 horse, Rod.

A nod to his DRIVER, who rushes to open the door for Aubrey.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
 I want the budget for Season Two on
 my desk an hour ago.

Aubrey gets in and the car drives off, the black speck
 disappearing over the now CLOUDY HORIZON.

Buck hurries to Rod's side.

BUCK HOUGHTON
 So are we packing up?

Radiating confidence, Rod adjusts his tie, steps in front of
 the cameras, and looks straight into the lens -

ROD SERLING
 No, we're rolling on Season Two.
 Margie, I'm ready to shoot.

INT. NEW GUINEA HOSPITAL - DAY

Young Rod wakes with a start.

*As his world comes into focus, he sees his BANDAGED WRIST. He
 recoils. His hospital gown rides up - a BANDAGED KNEE as well.*

*TRIUMPHANT MUSIC PLAYS IN THE BACKGROUND. The soft summer sun
 streams through the windows.*

MEL LEVY (O.S.)
 You finally decided to join the
 living.

Rod looks up to find Levy by his bedside, grinning as always.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
What happened?

MEL LEVY
They got the shrapnel out, but you
had a bad fever.

WOUNDED MEN rest in beds around him: amputees, the newly
blind, those with FACES TWISTED AND DEFORMED by combat.

But still, the men are smiling - something is happening.

THE MUSIC FADES as a broadcast begins. A VOICE from the
RADIO, dripping with gravitas, resounds through the room:

POWERFUL SPEAKER (V.O.)
Take a bow, G.I. Take a bow, little
guy. The rat is dead in the alley.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
Is that Norm Corwin?

MEL LEVY
Oh - you slept through it!

He lifts up a NEWSPAPER. The front page: "HITLER DEAD."

POWERFUL SPEAKER (V.O.)
The superman of tomorrow lies at the
feet of you common men of today.
This is it, kids! This is the day!

Then he realizes it. Every GI, no matter his pain, sits up
with rapt attention to the radio, tears in his eyes.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
It's over.

Rod's still a bit delirious. Levy shakes his head sadly.

MEL LEVY
It's never over.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
Mel... If I wrote something for the
guys, would you perform it?

EXT. BEACH IN THE PHILIPPINES - DAY

THE RAIN POUNDS, and so do the men. BANG! BANG! BANG! Huddled
beneath palm trees, they stomp their boots in rhythm.

THE OLD RADIO IS STILL DEAD, so this is the only music.

SOLDIERS
Levy! Levy!

The ROAR OF APPROACHING PLANES adds to the mix. In a harsh-clouded sky, a cargo squadron zooms over churning waves.

And up rises the star, Mel Levy. Water drips from the fronds above him. Someone uses a FLASHLIGHT like a spotlight.

MEL LEVY

Get the damn light out of my face!
Okay, as the skies are still empty,
today we're starting with a little
poetry. Sick of all the sponge
baths, Rod, what've you got?

YOUNG ROD SERLING

This'll rouse 'em.

Eyes alight with pride, he hands Levy a PIECE OF PAPER.

MEL LEVY

"We're tough and we know it. We're
good and we'll show it. There's
paraguys fighting this war."

DEAD SILENCE. Then a few snickers. Serling is crushed. Levy quietly hands him back the poem.

MEL LEVY (CONT'D)

Round of applause for the message
at least! Come on-

PLANES ZOOM OVERHEAD, cutting him off. The drops begin.
PARACHUTES pop open, drifting SEALED BOXES down to the sands.

A grunt knifes a box open, then frowns. JUST RIFLES.

Levy points. A SECOND WAVE OF PLANES is on its way.

MEL LEVY (CONT'D)

Scorecards, boys! Can't tell a Piper
Cub from a P-40 without a scorecard!

Whoops and hollers immediately erupt. Serling looks on with admiration and envy at how Levy gets the men all worked up.

MEL LEVY (CONT'D)

Chow call! Ham and eggs by airmail!
Ham and eggs and fried potatoes!

Tears of laughter pour down the men's faces.

MEL LEVY (CONT'D)

We got any Jews here? I ordered two
dozen knishes and one flying Rabbi!

This second wave's cargo doors open. Out drop the crates...
and the laughter slowly starts to die.

TERRIFIED SOLDIER
 There're no chutes! Why the hell
 are there no chutes?!

KA-BAM! The first crate CRASHES to the sand, too close for comfort. Then ANOTHER AND ANOTHER like thunder cracks.

Fox-holes, puddles, bushes - it's a mad scramble for cover.

Rod's limp slows him down. He dives as a crate EXPLODES mere feet from his body, sending CANTEENS FLYING LIKE SHRAPNEL.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
 Mel, get down!

But Levy stands, waving his arms in mad excitement.

MEL LEVY
 They're biscuit bombing us! Open up
 wide, boys, 'cuz it's raining chow-

WITH AN EAR-SPLITTING BOOM, WET SAND CLOUDS THE AIR. For a moment, all turns black.

Then the bombing finally stops. Coughing sand from his mouth, Serling springs to his feet and bolts toward Levy.

YOUNG ROD SERLING (O.S.)
 Mel? You can come out for air!

Rod stops in his tracks. The sand settles. Levy's black glasses rest half-buried, the LENSES CRACKED.

And Levy's body lies still - HIS HEAD IS MISSING.

The murderer is a DROPPED CRATE. It confronts Serling with bloodstained wood and edges splitting open.

CIGARETTES. A carton slides out to stop at Rod's boot. He reaches down... crushing the cardboard in a trembling hand.

His gaze drifts to a B-25 BOMBER, crossing the sky.

EXT. THE SKY - TWILIGHT

High in the heavens, PAPER FLUTTERS THROUGH THE AIR, twisting, turning on the winds...

INT. BOMBED-OUT STADIUM: DUGOUT - MOMENTS LATER

Pressing against a sooty brick wall, Rod RELOADS his rifle - angry, frustrated. Sweat drips down his neck.

He lifts a CIGARETTE to his lips and takes a drag. NEW HABIT.

A SQUAD-MATE gives him a nod. Rod nods back and pushes on.

EXT. RIZAL STADIUM: BALL-FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Slipping from the dugout, Serling spots a JAPANESE MORTARMAN standing at THIRD BASE:

The man's sweaty hands hold a long, rusty metal tube - a LAUNCHER into which he's loading a MORTAR ROCKET.

Abruptly, the Mortarman stops his work. His fearful eyes snap right to Serling, who's raising his rifle -

Then past him, as something in the sky catches his attention.

JAPANESE MORTARMAN
(in Japanese)
It's over.

ROD FIRES - and the CRACK ECHOES through the stadium. The Japanese Mortarman drops to the ground.

Serling approaches the fallen man carefully. BLOOD POOLS around the Japanese soldier's neck.

The dying man lets out a TERRIBLE, GAGGING COUGH that echoes just as Serling's shot had.

They lock eyes. There's no anger in the man's gaze, only a deep and profound fear.

SQUAD-MATE (O.S.)
That's Casey at the bat! Home run!

Rod doesn't turn around as his Squad-Mate comes running up, gear clanking as he does. Grinning, the Squad-Mate bends down to the bleeding-out Mortarman.

SQUAD-MATE (CONT'D)
What a clean shot... "You oughta
keep your eyes peeled next time!"

Referencing the racist radio show, he smirks at Rod.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
He spoke to me...

Rod's dumbfounded. The Squad-Mate turns back to the dugout.

SQUAD-MATE
Get Murphy! We'll make this rat
squeal on his pack.

The gagging quiets, and the Japanese man grows pale. His eyes slowly look to the skies above. Rod follows his gaze:

Overhead, an AMERICAN PLANE flies low, sprinkling LEAFLETS over the city - these are the papers seen in the sky earlier.

They drift like snowflakes on the wind, gently fluttering down to the brown grass of the ball-field.

One lands next to the Mortarman, who's now passed away. The leaflet contains a SINGLE SENTENCE IN JAPANESE.

Rod picks it up.

SQUAD-MATE (CONT'D)
Nevermind, Murph! The Jap's bit it.

YOUNG ROD SERLING
Wait!

He hands it to the approaching TRANSLATOR, a weary half-Asian.

YOUNG ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
What's this say?

With a southern drawl, the Translator scans the leaflet:

TRANSLATOR
"We are in possession of the most
destructive explosive ever devised
by man..."

SQUAD-MATE
Well?

TRANSLATOR
We dropped a bomb... I think we won.

SQUAD-MATE
Well, shit... What are you gonna do
now, Serling?

But Rod's deeply troubled. He killed a man on the day the war might be ending. What did this death mean?

INT. CHAIRMAN PALEY'S OFFICE - DAY

A MAN'S FACE, FROZEN IN FEAR. Black blood runs down his head.

JAMES AUBREY
"The tools of conquest do not
necessarily come with bombs and
explosions and fallout."

It's a PRODUCTION STILL from "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street." James Aubrey hands it to an older man in an unimaginative gray suit. The man shivers, and passes it -

Down a line of SPONSOR REPRESENTATIVES seated at a long, polished table. A jury, waiting to be swayed.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
 "There are weapons that are simply
 thoughts, attitudes, prejudices - to
 be found only in the minds of men."

The prosecutor: Aubrey. He stands, EPISODE SCRIPT in hand. He eyes each Rep in turn as the photo passes between them.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
 One flying saucer, and God-fearing,
 honest Americans turn on each other
 and riot. "The Monsters Are Due on
 Maple Street?" Is this about
 Communism, Rod? You don't think
 there are spies among us?

Across from him, Serling, playing defendant, leans back in his chair with confident defiance.

ROD SERLING
 I think it's about saucers.

At the head of the table, CHAIRMAN PALEY chuckles. He passes along the production still without even glancing at it.

Silver-haired, sharp-eyed, Paley's the only Chairman CBS has ever known - a fact on display in this cavernous office of his, full of photos of CBS's storied history. Here, he's the judge.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
 McCarthy's old news. Our little
 stories - strictly entertainment.
 You may even notice a few props
 there from *Forbidden Planet*.

Aubrey holds up ANOTHER STILL: a black family at dinner.

JAMES AUBREY
 "Big Tall Wish?" An all-negro cast.
 I don't have to remind you that the
 South is a very important market for
 us. It doesn't like to be mocked.

The GENERAL FOODS REP nervously takes the Maple Street photo.

GENERAL FOODS REP
 It's true. We have high hopes for
 Tang - John Glenn'll be drinking it
 on the Mercury mission. A sort of
 Space Age sweet tea for kids.

ROD SERLING
 A good counter for Cosmonaut
 Gagarin and the reds-in-training.
 (MORE)

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)

I'm glad to hear you're doing your part, inspiring all the good boys in fishbowl helmets, staring up at that white whale and drinking up for America.

With a reassuring grin, Rod takes the Maple Street still.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)

Truth is, we could do a Southern story. Cornbread. Cobbler. Sweet tea - or Tang, if you will.

(beat)

But that wasn't Maple Street. Or "Big Tall Wish." These places, I don't have to remind you, exist in the *Twilight Zone*.

With a flick of the wrist, Rod sends the still flying. It breezily lands on the table. The Reps seem reassured.

CHAIRMAN PALEY

Okay Jim, is there anything else?

If he's disappointed, Aubrey refuses to show it.

CHAIRMAN PALEY (CONT'D)

If I were you, I'd be more worried about that *Hillbillies* claptrap you're developing - I hear the South doesn't like to be mocked.

Beneath his smile, the Cobra simmers at his boss's attitude.

JAMES AUBREY

Maybe Rod is right, Mr. Paley, and people only see flying saucers.

Picking up "Maple Street", he faces the General Foods Rep.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)

But when Mom thinks about purchasing some Sanka coffee, what mood do you want her in? *The Beverly Hillbillies*, for all their foibles, are family. Maple Street just tore itself apart.

He lets that idea hang in the air. Rod shifts in his seat.

INT. CBS COMMISSARY - DAY

Pensive, Serling's barely touched his overcooked STEAK.

Every table is full, but no one says a word. All eyes are on a BIG TV SCREEN - and the angry man speaking on it. Black glasses and trim black hair, he sits before American flags.

SUPERIMPOSED ON THE TV: "FCC CHAIRMAN NEWTON MINOW"

FCC CHAIRMAN
Formula comedies, violence, and
endlessly, commercials. Keep your
eyes glued to your set and you will
observe a vast wasteland.

Rod sits at lunch with Margie, Beaumont, Matheson. Then Buck pulls up a chair. All he's got is a BOTTLED SODA. After checking who's nearby, he speaks in HUSHED tones.

BUCK HOUGHTON
General Foods is sticking. My rep
loved "Stop at Willoughby."

He takes a swig of his soda and screws up his face.

BUCK HOUGHTON (CONT'D)
Tastes like ash.

He chucks the drink in the trash as Margie gestures to the TV.

MARGIE FLEMING
He's gonna head the FCC? CBS needs
our Emmys now if they don't want
Washington putting on the heat.

CHARLES BEAUMONT
Yeah! CBS is the Tiffany network,
and sponsors want 24-karat gold -
not Aubrey's rusted tin.

FCC CHAIRMAN
There are a few bright exceptions.
"The Fred Astaire Show," Conrad's
"Victory." "The Twilight Zone" was
dramatic and moving.

Beaumont excitedly slaps Rod on the back.

THEN AUBREY MARCHES IN. The whole room holds its breath.

He buys a CARROT JUICE, flashing a smile to the crowd as if nothing could possibly be wrong.

FCC CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)
I did not come to Washington to
idly observe the squandering of the
public's airwaves. The FCC has the
power to renew - or not to renew -
every station's license-

AUBREY SWITCHES OFF THE TV. He's not frightened one bit. Instead, he responds like a coach rallying the team.

JAMES AUBREY
Cancel our license. Then explain to
America why they can't see Gunsmoke!

The crowd erupts into CHEERS. How much is real? How much because he's the boss? Unclear.

But Rod doesn't clap. He and Aubrey lock eyes across the room.

Finally, Aubrey leaves. People slowly break to chatter.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Just like that airplane story.

RICHARD MATHESON
Maybe we should ease up a little?
Chuck's got that death row story -
maybe we hold it 'til next season?

CHARLES BEAUMONT
The hell, Matheson? At least
"Shadow Play" fights for something
- how's your penny fortune-teller
play coming along?

RICHARD MATHESON
If mine were hot-button, I'd fall
on my sword instead.

But now Serling's eyes flash fire.

ROD SERLING
Nobody's story is getting cut.

He smacks his hand on the table, jolting the steak.

INT. PACIFIC DINING CAR - NIGHT

A CARVING KNIFE slices through the rich brown exterior to reach the juicy pink meat inside.

From a SILVER CART, a white-uniformed SERVER gently places a slice onto each plate of the Serling family: Rod, Carol, and their two daughters, 8 year-old JODI and 5 year-old NAN.

Tonight is dinner at one of LA's oldest landmarks, a 1920's railroad dining car converted into an upscale restaurant.

ROD SERLING
All the meat that's fit to eat!
Enjoy it, girls!

With a polite nod, the Server moves on.

CAROL SERLING
 (whisper)
 This is lovely. Thank you.

Rod smiles.

ROD SERLING
 So Jodi, how was your day?

JODI SERLING
 Fine.

Jodi quietly plays with her food, disinterested. Rod looks to Carol, who shakes her head - school's not going well.

MICHIGAN MAN (O.S.)
 (interrupting)
 Are you really you?

Startled, Serling looks up into the dazzled face of an eager young man and his circle-skirt wearing wife. Both 25, the MICHIGAN COUPLE are AFRICAN-AMERICAN.

ROD SERLING
 Last I checked.

MICHIGAN WOMAN
 We never miss an episode.

MICHIGAN MAN
 That one with the Hitch-Hiker - I
 couldn't sleep for a week.

Realizing they're fans, Rod breaks into a broad grin.

Suddenly, there's a flash of white as the Server anxiously positions himself between Rod's family and the couple.

SERVER
 I'm sorry, Mr. Serling. Are
 these... people bothering you?

Before Rod can answer, the Server starts ushering them away. Immediately Rod raises a hand to halt him.

ROD SERLING
 No! Always happy to speak with fans.

Flustered, the Server leaves once more.

MICHIGAN WOMAN
 Seeing you here, I feel like we're
 in the Zone.

Ever the showman, Rod can't resist rising to his feet. His daughters watch anxiously, unsure of what's going on.

ROD SERLING
Submitted for your approval: two
travelers, a long way from...

MICHIGAN MAN
Michigan - we fly back tomorrow.

ROD SERLING
Or so he thinks. For he's entered a
strange world, a prison without
bars. "Yes" means "I'll think about
it." "Let's lunch Friday" means
dinner Tuesday. "Just a few notes"
means "Change the whole thing."

The couple is clearly enchanted. Carol, however, is irked at
the unexpected interruption to family time.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
But it's too late to turn back.
This sweet, charming couple is a
long way from home, trapped, as
they've unwittingly flown straight
into... The Twilight Zone.

All the tables nearby erupt into IMPROMPTU APPLAUSE. The
Michigan pair is wowed.

Carol tugs Rod's sleeve. Time to sit down now.

MICHIGAN MAN
Can I trouble you for a picture?

The Michigan Man pulls out a camera and hands it to the
Server. The trio strikes a pose and the FLASH pops off.

A MURMURING CROWD circles the family. Carol smiles to their
confused daughters, trying her best to reassure them.

Then a MAN IN A SLICK SUIT glides through the people press,
striding right up to Serling.

MAN IN A SLICK SUIT
You've got a great voice, Mr.
Serling. A real presence.

He hands Rod a BUSINESS CARD. It's from "Chesterfield
Cigarettes." Serling beams, flattered.

MAN IN A SLICK SUIT (CONT'D)
Ever consider a spokesman gig?

EXT. STREETS OF CINCINNATI - DAY

A CAR TEARS DOWN THE ASPHALT.

Superimpose the title "Cincinnati, Ohio - 1950."

A sharp turn, and it screeches to a stop. Young Serling is no more: this is Rod as he looks in the present.

He hops out, hurries to the trunk - LIMPING. His war wound.

BOXES AND BOXES OF SCRIPTS fill the back - a treasure hoard of ideas. This is Rod's life.

Thinking fast, he selects his best material, tucks the pile under his arm, and slams the trunk shut.

EXT. WLW-AM OFFICES - DAY

Like a modern Tower of a Babel, the RADIO TOWER thrusts so obscenely high into the sky that it dwarfs the city.

JACK ZIMMERMAN stands in its shadow. 58, wrinkled and jowly like a basset hound, he's smoking a CIGARETTE down to a stub.

He watches as Rod comes huffing and puffing up the road, scripts under his arm, his limp putting a drag on his speed.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
Serling?

ROD SERLING
Yes, I-

JACK ZIMMERMAN
Come on.

He gives a sharp nod, and guides Rod into -

INT. WLW-AM OFFICES - DAY

DING - ELEVATOR doors part.

ROD SERLING
Sorry I'm late. Wife and I share a car. I brought my best material-

But Zimmerman's already halfway down the hall, moving with a purpose. Given Rod's limp, it's a struggle to keep up.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
Don't need it. Read your sample.

They pass by a SERIES OF BROADCAST STUDIOS, each separated from the hall by HEAVY GLASS. Actors speak into mics, MOS.

JACK ZIMMERMAN (CONT'D)
Why do you want to write for radio?

As Rod answers, Zimmerman slows beside one studio with an ACTRESS performing and a FOLEY ARTIST WITH CYMBALS waiting.

ROD SERLING
Arch Oboler, Orson Welles, Norm
Corwin - their voices opened minds,
their words shaped public opinion-

Zimmerman whips around.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
Well, you're too late.

Rod's crestfallen. The Foley Artist crashes the cymbals MOS in the sound-proof room.

JACK ZIMMERMAN (CONT'D)
Oboler and Welles went to film, and
Corwin's show got canceled.
Couldn't keep up with the times.

He takes off again.

JACK ZIMMERMAN (CONT'D)
Now it's all soaps, detectives, and
cowboys. You'd be writing hay-ride
comedies, family-friendly and full
o' laughs.

INT. WLW-AM OFFICES: STAFF WRITER'S BULLPEN - CONTINUOUS

Zimmerman whips through a cluster of desks, all with WRITERS frantically tapping away. Rod is falling behind.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
CBS ain't a public utility. It's a
machine, with one function.

With that, they reach -

INT. WLW-AM OFFICES: JACK ZIMMERMAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Zimmerman stops in the doorway. Rod's out of breath.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
Jewish, right?
(beat)
My dad came from Minsk, where they
used to slaughter us in the streets.
He was always spared because he was
funny. That's it. Not enlightening,
just funny. And the ones that
refused to play along...

ROD SERLING
*But fifty years later, even humor
 couldn't save you.*

*For the first time, Zimmerman really looks at Rod. And for the
 first time, Rod realizes how worn-down Zimmerman actually is.*

JACK ZIMMERMAN
So you still need to write?

ROD SERLING
Yes.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
Great. You start Monday.

Zimmerman plops down and starts going over scripts.

JACK ZIMMERMAN (CONT'D)
*Playing the game may not save your
 life, but it'll keep you your job.
 Even Da Vinci had a patron.*

EXT. CROSLEY PARK - DAY

*Idyllic America has returned. Hot dogs, lemonade, and packed
 bleachers - a youthful Rod and Carol among them.*

The colossal WLW RADIO TOWER dominates the horizon.

CAROL SERLING
*What about the one on the train?
 Did they take that?*

ROD SERLING
They didn't need my scripts.

The ballplayers take the field to hometown CHEERS.

CAROL SERLING
Try that one. I like it.

BALLPARK ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 (over loudspeakers)
*Ladies and gentleman, your team has
 a new name: the Cincinnati Redlegs!*

*A BIG, RED BANNER rises aloft, sporting the new name. Rod and
 Carol are both flabbergasted.*

ROD SERLING
What's wrong with the Reds?

A clean-cut SPECTATOR turns around in his seat, suspicious.

SPECTATOR
Cincinnati Reds? Sounds Commie.

Carol and Rod share an incredulous look.

ROD SERLING
You know "redlegs" is old slang for
white slaves.

The Spectator's taken aback. He breaks off the conversation as
Carol stifles a laugh. And Rod's more determined than ever.

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
A golden couple: a boy and a girl.
Pure, homebred, American.

INT. WLW-AM OFFICES: JACK ZIMMERMAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Rod faces Zimmerman, passionate, inspired.

ROD SERLING
Together, they ride the rails of
America, observing the ever
changing world.

He excitedly leans in -

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
They are not alone on this journey.
Against youth, age. Wisdom in the
form of kindly Abraham Goldschmidt.

Across the table, Zimmerman crosses his arms.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
But not all is as it seems. This is
no ordinary train. The children,
they are no longer of this world.

Zimmerman stares back at Serling with a raised eyebrow.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
What are you getting at?

ROD SERLING
The kids are both dead - ghosts,
killed in the war.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
In Korea? That's a bit topical...

ROD SERLING
Not Korea. Two. Spirits on a train
run by Abraham. Each week a new
story, a new place, a new time. A
new kind of ghost story.

Zimmerman's eyes dart nervously to the STATION MANAGER'S OFFICE and its FROSTED GLASS WINDOW.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
I'll see what he...

STATION MANAGER (O.S.)
Zimmerman! Where the hell are you?

Zimmerman sighs and lumbers to his feet.

INT. WLW-AM OFFICES: STAFF WRITER'S BULLPEN - NIGHT

BLURRED SHAPES. Behind frosted glass, the Station Manager is verbally destroying Zimmerman, his MUFFLED YELLS echoing throughout the building. Rod watches, transfixed.

He's working late with a FEW OTHER STAFF WRITERS, cold coffee and cigs all over their desks. RAIN PATTERS on the roof above.

ROD SERLING
Zimmerman missed another meeting?

The rest of the staff writers laugh.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
What?

WLW STAFF WRITER #1
He didn't miss it.

Rod looks confused.

WLW STAFF WRITER #2
The VP puts Zimmerman's name on the memos, then makes sure the secretaries don't actually give him a copy. And the Station Manager's none the wiser.

ROD SERLING
But... why?

WLW STAFF WRITER #1
He's old, he isn't wholesome...
(shrugs)
The VP just hates him.

ROD SERLING
Wholesome? What's that supposed to mean? You think this is funny?

WLW STAFF WRITER #2
(points to Writer #1)
His Hayrides are a hit. We're not so sure about yours.

Biting his tongue, Rod sits down to work - BUT THERE'S NO PAPER IN HIS TYPEWRITER. OR ANYWHERE.

ROD SERLING
Where's all the paper?

They laugh again. Zimmerman finally emerges - pale, red-eyed, and haggard - but chastened, Serling keeps his head down.

Then the PHONE RINGS. Rod picks it up.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
WLW. Rod Serling speaking.

A voice, husky and firm:

BLANCHE GAINES (V.O.)
Jot down this address. You're going to New York.

ROD SERLING
Excuse me? Who is this?

BLANCHE GAINES (V.O.)
Blanche Gaines, literary agent.

He scrambles. No paper - but a PHOTO of him and Carol in matching ANTIOCH COLLEGE SWEATERS, pinned to his wall.

It'll have to do. He turns it over and writes.

EXT. OFFICE HIGH-RISE, NEW YORK - NIGHT

It's Manhattan. The beating heart of a busy city. Rod waits in the shadow of a glittering tower.

BLANCHE GAINES steps out meet him: a spirited young woman. 20s. Red hat, red coat, red umbrella. Stylish as hell.

BLANCHE GAINES
Serling! Got passed one of your scripts. A little talky, little preachy, too many ideas instead of people - but you can spin a yarn.

INT. ART GALLERY, NEW YORK - NIGHT

Abstract expressionism. Pollock. De Kooning. Wild color. Bold experimentation. Rod and Blanche. He's inspired.

BLANCHE GAINES
The others may not know it, but radio is dying - fast. Fighting over a dwindling pool of ad money. No way it's taking chances.

INT. JAZZCLUB, NEW YORK - NIGHT

A BASSIST in blue light solos to hoots and hollers - we're at the cutting edge of the counter-culture. DRINKS in hand, Blanche and Rod push through the busy floor.

He glances around. The venue is small and dingy. The patrons' clothes are cheap and rag-tag.

ROD SERLING
So you're saying I should plan a
career crooning under gels?

Blanche throws him a sexy smile.

BLANCHE GAINES
Places exist with no rules, no
hierarchies. Where money leaves art
alone, uncertain of what to make of
it. There's room for newcomers -
for you to find your voice.

EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK - NIGHT

Above the pair, skyscrapers loom - dark and imposing.

ROD SERLING
How much does this Shangri-La pay?
I'm making less now than when I
worked at my college radio station.

BLANCHE GAINES
You'll make even less in this city.

Rod looks glum. She can see his reluctance. So she points.

BLANCHE GAINES (CONT'D)
Look.

A DEPARTMENT STORE ACROSS THE STREET, its windows chock full of new offerings. And tucked into the corner of one is...

A TELEVISION SET. Its soft white glow cuts through the rainy night. Most pedestrians pass it by but A YOUNG COUPLE watches, entranced.

BLANCHE GAINES (CONT'D)
Drama anthologies. Serious stories.
Live plays for an audience of
millions. Television.

He stares in wonder.

BLANCHE GAINES (CONT'D)
You know Brando, Newman, Dean?

He shakes his head. None of the names ring a bell.

BLANCHE GAINES (CONT'D)
You will. When you're ready to take
the plunge, send me something great.

She snaps out a BUSINESS CARD. Rod takes it, overwhelmed.

JACK ZIMMERMAN (V.O.)
Good news, he went for it.

INT. WLW-AM OFFICES: JACK ZIMMERMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

JACK ZIMMERMAN
Just a few changes. The kids are
related. No hint of sex. Also gotta
"kill the old Jew." His words.
Instead, there's Uncle Billy.

Jack looks tired, but genuinely pleased for Rod.

JACK ZIMMERMAN (CONT'D)
That whole dead-in-the-war thing has
to go, but otherwise, he thinks it's
a hit. A traveling family... Grapes
of Wrath without the desperation.

Rod is dumbstruck. His fingers tremble as he pulls out a
CIGARETTE and starts sucking in the nicotine.

JACK ZIMMERMAN (CONT'D)
Be happy. It's on the air. What
about Christmas stories?

Serling's eyes light up.

ROD SERLING
The North Pole - but the elves are
on strike. Santa's been hit by
shrapnel while flying over the
Middle East, and the toy shop's
been converted into a bomb factory-

Zimmerman puts his head in his hands, then stares up at the
mysterious Manager behind the glass.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
Look, just give me this week's
Hayride script.

INT. APARTMENT ON VICTORIA AVENUE - NIGHT

The cupboard opens, and it's all boxed and canned food. The
same food. TUNA. CREAM OF MUSHROOM. EGG NOODLES.

VOICES FROM THE RADIO fill this cozy one-bedroom:

COUNTRY GIRL (V.O.)
 Aww shucks, Jack. That shore is a
 lotta milk!

A LAUGH TRACK follows. Carol opens her second can of tuna,
 dumping the contents into a CASSEROLE DISH.

Rod stares out the OPEN WINDOW, Blanche's card in hand.

COUNTRY BOY (V.O.)
 I don't know when it's gonna stop!
 What we should we do, Uncle Billy?

EXAGGERATED COUNTRY BUMPKIN (V.O.)
 Maybe we should put a cork in it!

LAUGH TRACK. Carol slops cream of mushroom over the tuna.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
 We'll be back with more Midwest
 Hayride, only on WLW.

Rod switches the channel. A NEWS BROADCAST:

REPORTER (V.O.)
 It's the worst fighting since
 Inchon. The Koreans have pushed-

Angrily, he snaps the radio off. Carol looks up.

CAROL SERLING
 So New York pays writers what?

ROD SERLING
 By the script. Hundred or two each.

CAROL SERLING
 If the writer makes a sale. WLW
 pays a steady salary, and that
 barely heats this place as is.

She dumps the NOODLES into the casserole dish - and shivers.

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
 Close the window, unless you want
 the baby born blue with frost-bite.

ROD SERLING
 Sorry. Needed some air.

BLANCHE'S CARD FLUTTERS INTO THE COLD. HE SHUTS THE WINDOW.

INT. SET OF "EYE OF THE BEHOLDER" - DAY

DARK GLASS - a FILM CAMERA lens. A BANDAGED HEAD stares
 blindly into it, wrapped up like a mummy.

SURGICAL SCISSORS snip at the gauze as LATEX-GLOVED HANDS slowly unwrap the person buried within.

A HOSPITAL SET, eerily similar to the one Serling recovered in during the war. Rod watches off to the side, tense.

DOE-EYED ACTRESS
Mr. Serling?

Tugging at his sleeve is a beautiful, DOE-EYED ACTRESS with blonde hair and a Louisiana accent. They speak quietly.

ROD SERLING
Relax. We'll dub your voice over
with Maxine's in post.

DOE-EYED ACTRESS
I've been practicing...

Suddenly, she loses her accent. Her voice is older, huskier:

DOE-EYED ACTRESS (CONT'D)
And I think I can nail it.

Serling smiles warmly. He's impressed.

ROD SERLING
Okay, we'll give it a go.

And slowly, the final bandage layer comes off -

INT. SET OF "EYE OF THE BEHOLDER" - LATER

Latex hands lift the gauze: EYES - THE DOE-EYED ACTRESS.

Rod paces in the corner. Suddenly, his knee gives -

And he catches himself on a CHAIR.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.)
You okay, Rod?

He's right behind Serling, acting relaxed, jovial.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
Maybe a little blood on your boot?

The DOCTOR AND NURSES, faces hidden in shadow, peel off the last of the bandages - showing her full face.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
No frumpy petticoat there. I'm glad
you're taking my notes.

THE DOE-EYED ACTRESS SCREAMS.

ROD SERLING
It's about conformity, Jim. In her
world, she's the ugly one.

She springs from the chair. But Nurses wrestle her down as
one flips on the light switch -

And that's the cue for the DIMMER BOARD OPERATOR to slide the
fader, bringing up some LIGHTS RIGGED OVERHEAD.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
No change! No change!

ROD SERLING
The doctor is trying to help her.
Make her more like the others.

Now the Doctor and the Nurses can all be seen, their faces
HIDEOUS, PIG-LIKE MONSTROSITIES.

The classically beautiful actress struggles to flee.

JAMES AUBREY
In no world is she ugly.

He stares at her with an uncomfortably intense gaze.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Cut! We need some adjustments.

ROD SERLING
What brings you to our humble set?

JAMES AUBREY
General Foods isn't paying enough to
justify your current budget.

Just like that: delivered stone cold - disinterested, even.

ROD SERLING
It's the middle of the season.
We're already filming-

JAMES AUBREY
(interrupting)
I'm not approving any more
overages. Not up for discussion.

ROD SERLING
The hell it's not.

JAMES AUBREY

I know you see this as some personal affront, but I don't work for you, Rod, and inasmuch as it does concern you - I move resources around just like you do with the budgets for your episodes. The difference is, you go over budget, your producer complains, and you come to me. I go over budget, *CBS fails*.

Before Serling can respond, Cobra puts on his best smile and steps to meet the Doe-Eyed Actress.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)

James Aubrey, President.

Starstruck, her Southern belle accent snaps back and she offers a hand. He takes it.

DOE-EYED ACTRESS

(giggling)

Why, hello sir! Donna!

JAMES AUBREY

That's quite the Southern Belle charm you've got there. You're a country girl, aren't you?

ROD SERLING

And an amazing actress.

JAMES AUBREY

Well, I'm casting a new show about a country girl - a whole down-home country family, that up and moves to Beverly Hills - just like you.

As he walks off with her, Serling is left simmering.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)

Why don't you join me and some friends in Acapulco this weekend...

INT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - NIGHT

A LEFTOVER PIECE OF GAUZE lies on the ground. Drip, drip - RED INK stains it, falling from a LEAKING PEN.

It lies unnoticed on a table edge, right beside Rod. He's deep in a PHONE CALL.

Margie's got a RED PEN, too. Rod watches warily as she darts around the room, marking X's everywhere at Buck's command.

Papers tacked onto every inch of wall: scripts, concept art, photos. All covered in red ink. The whole room is bleeding.

ROD SERLING
Horseback riding for nightmares? I
thought it was trouble at school.
What happened to tutors?

Buck points to a script. Margie marks it with a pen - and, frustrated, Rod cups his hand over the phone receiver.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
(to Buck)
"Invaders" is already one dark set
- and the lead doesn't even talk!
(to Carol)
If that's what she needs, do it.
Gotta run. I'm being hacked away
over here and need to take
defensive measures.

Hanging up the call, Rod hurries to the DEFACED SCRIPT. He pointedly replaces it with a CLEAN COPY.

BUCK HOUGHTON
The dinosaurs for "Flight 33" are
gonna cost double what's budgeted.
I'm doing my best, but we're
pushing sixty-five an episode.

Margie moves to a DRAWING OF DINOSAURS, red pen ready. But Serling grabs the artwork away before she can, anger mounting.

ROD SERLING
Sixty-five thousand. When I started
out, I'd have made do with a
hundredth of that.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Rod, that was radio. We gotta show
a different monster, different
effect each week. It adds up. Hell,
even film stock adds up.

He angrily tosses a FILM CAN onto the table. It lands in the puddle of ink, SPLASHING RED ONTO ROD'S ARM.

ROD SERLING
Hey, watch out!

BUCK HOUGHTON
Can't even get a decent pen.

Rod mops up the ink with the gauze.

ROD SERLING
So what if we don't use film?

EXT. CBS TELEVISION CITY - DAY

Rod and Buck walk alone through cavernous, echoing sound-stages. Gray. Empty. Bulky video cameras collect dust.

BUCK HOUGHTON
CBS spent a truckload, then Aubrey
killed all the live video dramas.
TV's becoming unrecognizable.

ROD SERLING
So we travel back in time.

BUCK HOUGHTON
I don't know. Film looks sharper.

ROD SERLING
Our sharpness is in our ideas. Get
me an emergency meeting with Aubrey.

INT. GYM - DAY

Ever the fitness buff, a VERY TANNED Jim Aubrey pumps the BARBELLS as Rod stands beside him.

ROD SERLING
Shooting on video, we both save
money on film stock, and by using
your pre-existing facilities.

JAMES AUBREY
And if you still go over budget?

Aubrey's workout doesn't miss a beat.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
It won't be coming out of my pocket.

But Rod doesn't flinch.

ROD SERLING
If we go over, I'll cover the costs.

JAMES AUBREY
(nodding yes)
Go.

With that, Rod turns to leave -

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
Rod.

Suddenly, Aubrey's sitting up, workout stopped, a friendly smile on his face - he's switched on the charm.

ROD SERLING
Yeah, Jim?

JAMES AUBREY
My wife's auditioning for the show.
Don't let what we have...

ROD SERLING
If she's good, she's good.

JAMES AUBREY
Thanks.

He gives the slightest of nods, and goes back to working out.
Serling leaves Aubrey to himself. The man's ever a mystery.

INT. CANYON STABLES - DAY

A chain of hands: Carol, Jodi, Nan, in order of height.

STABLE HAND (O.S.)
Her name is "Highbeam."

Shadows drape over the big beast. THE HORSE SNORTS SHARPLY,
staring back with impenetrable, impatient black eyes.

Carol gives Jodi a big smile, but Jodi's knuckles go white.

INT. SET OF "LONG DISTANCE CALL" - NIGHT

TWO MONSTROUS SILHOUETTES, backlit by harsh lights, converge
on a SCARED BOY, 7, caught between them.

Standing at the edge of a POND, he clutches his TOY PHONE.

At set's edge, Rod bites his knuckle, watching...

SCARED BOY (O.S.)
She's calling to me. She wants me
to come to her!

The two "beasts" are bulky TV STUDIO CAMERAS, ridden by TWO
MEN, pushed by TWO MORE.

BOY'S FATHER (O.S.)
Grandma's dead, Billy! There's no
one on the line!

To Serling's right, a DIRECTOR studies the PLAYBACK MONITOR.

SCARED BOY (O.S.)
She's real! And I'm gonna join her!

With a SPLASH, the boy DIVES into the pool. His Father
springs after him. The cameras move in -

DIRECTOR
Cut! The shot's not working!

ROD SERLING
No, the moment's not working. We
need a rewrite.

From out of the darkness, Buck comes running up.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Well, Chuck's not here. Doctor's.
And anyway, you don't have time.

Buck points to the Boy.

BUCK HOUGHTON (CONT'D)
Child labor laws.

ROD SERLING
Alright, let's pick up tomorrow.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Tomorrow's a full day, and we can't
afford another.

A pause. The implication of that sinks in.

BUCK HOUGHTON (CONT'D)
We just gotta make do with it.

ROD SERLING
Give me a minute.

All eyes are on Serling as he steps off to dark corner, his
mind racing. Buck studies his watch.

But Serling tries to block that all out. He closes his eyes.

BUCK HOUGHTON
He has to jump into the pool. We
need time for him to dry off.

ROD SERLING
Don't show it. Do it with sound.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Is the line that important? You
already got Grandma's ghost.

Rod whips around.

ROD SERLING
But it's not about the ghost. It's
about the living, the boy, his
needs, a child's wonder at death.

Rod's eyes light up.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
I have it.

INT. TAPE MASTERING SUITE - NIGHT

SPLASH! A monitor shows the Father from "Long Distance Call" rushing to dive into the pond after his Boy. He leaps -

But the camera avoids the action. It's just done with SOUND.

Beaumont, looking strangely sick, shoots a look at Rod. This isn't how he wrote it.

On screen, the Father pleads:

BOY'S FATHER
If you really love him, let him
live. Give him back-

Chuck PAUSES the footage, and the actor's face judders, twitching with a twisted grimace, stuck between two moments.

Beaumont glares at Serling.

CHARLES BEAUMONT
You changed the line and sacrificed
the shot?

ROD SERLING
It wasn't sparking, Chuck. If you
were here-

CHARLES BEAUMONT
(interrupting)
Load me up one of Rod's episodes -
something shot on film!

The EDITOR ejects the SPOOL, the VIDEOTAPE narrow and uniformly black. Next he grabs a weightier SPOOL OF CELLULOID, checking the first frame against the light.

The image on the negative is CRISP AND SHARP.

He pops it in and throws some switches. The monitor comes alive with the hospital scene from "Eye of the Beholder."

THE SUPERIOR VISUAL QUALITY IS UNMISTAKABLE.

EDITOR
Both are great scripts, sir.

CHARLES BEAUMONT
But only one is great, right Rod?
Couldn't even stump for a real pond.

As Chuck's anger rises, Margie barges in.

MARGIE FLEMING
General Foods is dropping us.

ROD SERLING
How in the hell...

Margie flicks her eyes to Chuck. She takes a deep breath.

MARGIE FLEMING
A lot of whitewashing... but they
caught wind of Chuck's script. A
grandmother calling her grandson to
commit suicide... may have been too
much. They're a family brand.

Rod shoots Beaumont a look that could freeze blood.

CHARLES BEAUMONT
If we're not going to make
statements with our work, then
what's the damn point?

ROD SERLING
(enraged)
And what statement were you trying
to make with a dead grandma and a
suicidal seven-year old?

CHARLES BEAUMONT
The hell with you - coward!

Chuck storms out. Rod's eyes flash fire.

ROD SERLING
Coward!? Who do you think has to
pay for all this-

Rod rushes after - but his limp trips him up. He stumbles,
BANGING HIS KNEE AGAINST A TABLE.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
For Chrissakes!

Margie tries to help him, but he waves her away.

MARGIE FLEMING
Buck's putting out feelers, but...
we got the numbers for this episode.

ROD SERLING
How much did we save?

MARGIE FLEMING
We went over... a lot.

Rod grips his knee, RED SPREADING ACROSS HIS LIGHT-COLORED
PANTS - his war wound is bleeding, staining the fabric.

ROD SERLING
It's late. Go home, Margie.

INT. SERLING HOME: POOLSIDE LANAI - NIGHT

Sitting in his shorts, Rod pulls the gauze tight over a
BANDAGED KNEE. He leans back in his chair, exhausted -

A CIGARETTE in his mouth. He lifts up his DAD'S LIGHTER -

CAROL SERLING (O.S.)
Jodi loved her first lesson.

Rod turns to find Carol in the doorway, grinning brightly.

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
We've signed up for a year.

Ugh, more money - his whole body slumps.

ROD SERLING
Old mares for nightmares.

She spots the bloody knee, and frowns, concerned.

CAROL SERLING
Are you okay?

ROD SERLING
The old wound is bleeding.

CAROL SERLING
Let me get you some more gauze.

ROD SERLING
I'm fine. I just need to be alone.

Silence. His face is worn down. This is killing him.

CAROL SERLING
(softly)
Don't stay up too late.

As she leaves, Rod turns on his Dictaphone.

ROD SERLING
Margie, I want you to address a
letter to James Aubrey, Ted Ashley,
and all relevant parties...

INT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - THE NEXT MORNING

BUCK HOUGHTON
 "I, Rod Serling, hereby resign as
 executive producer of the *Twilight*
Zone..."

He holds a LETTER, Margie at his side. Red-struck pages still hang on the walls. The only sound is a BUZZING CEILING FAN.

Rod sits at his desk, clothes unchanged, face unshaven. He cycles through his ROLODEX - a man looking over his life. He passes a name: "Zimmerman, Jack." He keeps flipping.

MARGIE FLEMING
 No. No! We can solve this.

More cards: "Robinson, Hubbell."

MARGIE FLEMING (CONT'D)
 Maybe we can go back to the Cobra?

Buck snorts in derision - that's a dead end.

Another card: "Gaines, Blanche." He moves on.

BUCK HOUGHTON
 Why not give me a raise - I'll fund
 the fucking thing.

The Rolodex spins round - "Ashley, Ted" - and round -

SUDDENLY HE STOPS. He sits up, an idea forming.

ROD SERLING
 I need a minute. Alone.

Buck and Margie hurry out.

"CHESTERFIELD CIGARETTES." Rod stares at the card intensely.

INT. WKRC-TV: SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

A WOMAN IN MOURNING sits at her kitchen counter, her face hidden behind a BLACK VEIL.

WOMAN IN MOURNING
 I was lost.

She turns to the CAMERA, its dark glass watching silently as she puts a burning CIGARETTE to her lips.

WOMAN IN MOURNING (CONT'D)
 I was lonely. My family...

The woman takes a long drag - and COUGHS.

HOUSEWIFE
The war weighed on us.

But suddenly she flips back the black veil, letting her long, silky hair tumble out.

HOUSEWIFE (CONT'D)
And then I discovered Dr. Slater's
Cig-Er-Ator!

She pops some WEIRD-LOOKING CONTRAPTION onto the end of the smoke and takes a puff. It's like a breath of summer air.

Standing behind the camera, Rod glowers. He's so embarrassed, he wishes he could shoot himself.

Zimmerman leans in with a fatherly nudge and whispers:

JACK ZIMMERMAN
Nice copy. You're right - you do
have a future in television.

But Serling can't take it. He gets up and leaves, just as a CHARMING DOCTOR takes center stage.

CHARMING DOCTOR
Do you want to super-charge your
smoking experience? An extra bit of
pep, loosening joints and relieving
life's daily aches?

INT. APARTMENT ON VICTORIA AVENUE - 3 AM

Carol's asleep in bed, but Rod's still up CHAIN-SMOKING. He stares across the room at his TYPEWRITER - and the BOXES OF OLD SCRIPTS that Zimmerman rejected, now collecting dust.

INT. APARTMENT ON VICTORIA AVENUE - EARLY MORNING

The first blue light of dawn creeps from the window. Rod's eyes are red from exhaustion, but they beam with pride.

He types the last few words, hunting and pecking with two fingers - he still hasn't mastered proper typing.

Then Rod checks the time. Rising quickly, he binds the TELEPLAY with BRASS BRADS and pulls out a MANILA ENVELOPE.

EXT. WLW-AM OFFICES - MORNING

Rod finds Zimmerman sitting on the stoop, clicking his LIGHTER. It won't spark. The old man looks like he's got nothing left in him.

ROD SERLING
You been here all night?

JACK ZIMMERMAN
A secretary called me at midnight
about some other goddamn memo I lost
- pulled an all-nighter and I'm
still going to miss the deadline.

Rod offers his lighter - but Zimmerman's checking his WATCH.

JACK ZIMMERMAN (CONT'D)
Damn.

He stands too quickly, then rushes into the building.

INT. WLW-AM OFFICES: ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER

Zimmerman coughs - and holds onto the elevator railing.

ROD SERLING
You feeling okay?

JACK ZIMMERMAN
What's that?

He spots the manila envelope tucked under Serling's coat.

ROD SERLING
New Hayride.

He sighs. Somehow, Jack knows what it really is.

INT. WLW-AM OFFICES: MAIN FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

DING. The elevator doors part.

AN ANGRY YELL from behind the translucent glass: many blurred shapes of people this time. A meeting is underway.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
Rod?

ROD SERLING
Yes?

Zimmerman bites his lip, debating what to say. Finally -

JACK ZIMMERMAN
You know in the '30s, we broadcast
at 500 kilowatts. Signal was so
strong, coil mattresses could pick
it up. People complained they were
hearing voices in their bed...

STATION MANAGER (O.S.)
 Zimmerman!
 (beat)
 Where the hell is that old Jew?!

Zimmerman shuffles off, leaving Rod to ponder the story.

INT. WLW-AM OFFICES: STAFF WRITER'S BULLPEN - DAY

The other writers tap away, but ROD'S TYPEWRITER sits silent. Rod focuses on his manila envelope: "ATTN: BLANCHE GAINES"

The MAIL OUTBOX beckons. Then to the photo of him and Carol, Antioch sweaters, smiling. His leg jitters, his mind races.

Angry shadows shout behind the boss's glass doors -

And Rod grabs the photo, copies Blanche's New York address onto the envelope, and PLACES IT INTO THE OUTBOX -

A HORRIFYING SCREAM.

THE STATION MANAGER'S DOOR BURSTS OPEN, and TWO MEN carry Zimmerman out, clutching his chest. A HEART ATTACK.

WLW SECRETARY
 HELP! Call 911! He just collapsed!

At his office door, the Station Manager trembles.

STATION MANAGER
 I didn't - I didn't do anything...

Zimmerman looks up, his gaze meeting Rod's...

Then a coldness, as the light within is snuffed.

INT. DC-4 COMMERCIAL AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Rod's own reflection looks back at him, distorted in the glass like a Gremlin on the wing.

BLANCHE GAINES (V.O.)
 A soldier cries out in fear,
 alerting the enemy...

Resting beside him, a cheap-looking SUITCASE rattles. BUZZING from the plane's PROPELLERS permeates the cabin.

BLANCHE GAINES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 The whole platoon dead or wounded.

Outside, LIGHTNING FLASHES, illuminating the propellers. There's a strobe effect, making it seem like the blades are rotating in slow motion...

BLANCHE GAINES (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The question-

INT. 30 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA: NBC OFFICES - NIGHT

Blanche leans in with the confidence of a master storyteller. This is her moment to shine.

BLANCHE GAINES
Can a man's life be judged by a
single moment?

She sits with a pair of EXECUTIVES in a chamber of lush, dark wood and red velvet curtains.

The two men exchange impenetrable glances.

INT. 30 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA: WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LAUGHTER, from behind the pitch-black office door.

Sweat on his brow, Rod drums his suitcase, full of nervous, terrified energy. Meanwhile an NBC SECRETARY calmly types away. Without looking up -

NBC SECRETARY
You'll be fine.

But now the knob turns.

BLANCHE GAINES (O.S.)
He's right outside-

The door opens. Blanche and the Executives wait on the other side. Rod snatches up his suitcase and rushes over -

CRACK - colliding with a pillar, ROD'S SUITCASE EXPLODES. IT SENDS CLOTHES FLOWERING INTO THE AIR.

Shirts, socks, and underwear flutter in all directions as Serling watches helpless and horrified.

INT. A HOWARD JOHNSON'S RESTAURANT - THE NEXT MORNING

Golden light washes over the black booths as the morning regulars have their coffee and flapjacks. A PREGNANT Carol sits by herself, studying the MENU in her hand.

Outside, WLW's giant radio tower dominates the skyline.

Rod approaches the table, still in his meeting clothes, unshaven, suitcase barely held together. He takes a seat.

CAROL SERLING
How did New York go?

ROD SERLING
Hindenburg had it better.

He grimaces. It feels like the radio tower is watching him.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
I know I've got something solid
here in Cincinnati, but...

He takes a deep breath.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
Each day, every day: testimonials,
advertisements, hayride hijinks -
the station grinds at me, tears
away the meat of my being until I
come home nothing but mutilated
gristle. Sure, a few bits of
presidential paper fill out my
wallet, but at what price? What are
we worth to the world?

Carol looks up, but she says nothing. Total poker face.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
According to our bank statement,
seven-hundred dollars, between you,
me, and the bump. Seven-hundred
dollars is the value of three human
lives, that move around the world in
a fifteen-hundred dollar car. And I
can't live by that metric, Carol - I
can't just be meat in a machine.
Something inside will break.

A greasy-aproned WAITER comes over, a smile on his face.

CAROL SERLING
A little more time would be nice.

The waiter stops smiling and steps away. Rod fumbles for a
cigarette, but Carol places a hand on his arm.

ROD SERLING
I can't change the system of the
world - I can't even claim to
understand the whole thing. But I
know I have to get it out of me,
get it out there, or else...

His mind's on Zimmerman's death. Carol picks up the menu.

CAROL SERLING
Blanche called. They bought the script. We spoke, and we think it'd be a good idea to move to New York.

She winks over the menu. Realizing that he now has her blessing, Rod smiles. But then she gets serious.

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
We can cobble together six months. Then we starve.

INT. SET OF "THE OBSOLETE MAN" - DAY

A FASCIST CHANCELLOR grins, standing behind a towering podium. Below him, a condemned but unbowed LIBRARIAN is surrounded by EXTRAS IN NAZI-LIKE UNIFORMS. The set is otherwise sparse.

CHANCELLOR (O.S.)
Words, Mr. Wordsworth. That have no substance, no dimension, like air, like the wind. Like a vacuum, that you make believe have an existence.

The mood is bleak. Margie and Buck huddle together, coffee in hand, just like Rod and his squad years ago in Manila.

MARGIE FLEMING
Do you think he'll resign?

Buck stoically finishes HIS CUP - it's his only answer.

MARGIE FLEMING (CONT'D)
That's the end of the coffee.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Got a producing offer last week. One Step Beyond.

MARGIE FLEMING
You'd leave us that fast?

BUCK HOUGHTON
Without Rod, it's just another damn show - and I'm sick of doing those.

MARGIE FLEMING
Buck Houghton - too good for TV.

Buck chuckles sadly to himself.

BUCK HOUGHTON
It's moot anyway - Beyond was canceled this morning.

This gets her laughing, too. Then -

A PRODUCTION ASSISTANT hands Buck some DIAGRAMS. He sighs.

INT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - CONTINUOUS

Margie follows Buck into the room, diagrams in hand - and is astonished to find Rod TAKING DOWN all the red-marked papers.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Explosion for end of Obsolete Man.

Rod smiles as he moves - clean-shaven and with fresh clothes.

ROD SERLING
Whatever the director thinks is
classiest.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Class has a price.

Rod passes his desk and snatches up his CHECKBOOK. He twirls a red pen - the leaky one - seemingly reinvigorated.

ROD SERLING
Buck, great artists steal, and well
- I've taken your idea. I'm giving
myself a raise.

Margie spots the "Chesterfield Cigarettes" card by the phone.

MARGIE
You're hawking cigarettes?

Serling taps his OVERFLOWING ASHTRAY.

ROD SERLING
It's already in my blood.

She shoots a glance at Buck. Both are unsure. But Rod waves their concerns away even as he pulls down the final red pages.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
At the end of the show, an extra
little bumper after the next week
segment - but what it buys us...

The room is now CLEAN OF RED MARKS. Rod takes pen to check.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
Next season? We're shooting *film*.

And he scrawls "ROD SERLING" with the leaky red pen.

EXT. ABANDONED MOVIE LOT - DAY

Camera crew unload a truck of FILM CANS - lots of 'em. As Buck and Rod pass by, Serling grins with approval.

Their set is *massive* post-apocalypse of bombed-out ruins that evokes memories of Manila. This is what money can buy.

Rod nods to an actor in a LIGHT-COLORED UNIFORM -

Then reaches a FEISTY ACTRESS in DARK-COLORED ONE, with DARK HAIR to match. A MAKE-UP ARTIST applies shadows to her eyes.

FEISTY ACTRESS

Make me wretched. Make me hungry.
I'm the last woman on Earth.

ROD SERLING

Not too wretched. Last man still has
to think twice about shooting you.

BUCK HOUGHTON

Rod, this is Elizabeth -

But she's already giving him a big hug.

FEISTY ACTRESS

I know Rod!

ROD SERLING

(grinning)
She was in Patterns, the show that
put me in the big leagues.

FEISTY ACTRESS

Now look at you. This set - I could
swear the bomb dropped.

ROD SERLING

If we don't speak up, it just might.
Vietnam makes me nervous. I'm
organizing an anti-nuclear petition.

She hesitates and, looking around, lowers her voice.

FEISTY ACTRESS

I agree a hundred percent, but... I
mean, I'm just starting out. They
could label me a Commie.

ROD SERLING

They call me all sorts of names,
but people keep watching.

He winks and it bucks her up. She TWITCHES HER NOSE - a la *Bewitched* - and matches his troublemaker's grin.

FEISTY ACTRESS
Alright, I'll saddle up.

ROD SERLING
It's gonna be a hell of a ride.

Far off waits a SINGLE STANDING DOOR, the only remnant of a collapsed building. Like the fingers of a ghost, a gust of wind PUSHES THE DOOR OPEN, revealing the world beyond.

A MONTAGE FOLLOWS:

EXT. SERLING HOME: THE TENNIS COURT - DAY

A door opens as Carol brings out a TRAY OF LEMONADE.

On the court, Rod volleys with beautiful blonde TENNIS STARLET. His leg still troubles him, but he's smiling at her.

Carol sets down the tray, uncomfortable.

INT. SET OF "TO SERVE MAN" - DAY

A seven-foot-tall actor checks his teeth in a mirror, his alien make up on: A BULBOUS BALD CRANIUM.

A PROP ASSISTANT hurries by, carrying a BOOK and a PIECE OF PAPER. The paper reads, "To Serve Man."

INT. FILMING CHESTERFIELD CIGARETTE SPOT - DAY

Rod holds up a pack of CHESTERFIELD CIGARETTES and nods to the CAMERA.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Buck steps out to find an absurdly opulent car driving up: a PURPLE 1936 AUBURN BOAT-TAIL SPEEDSTER.

Its driver? Rod Serling. He hits the horn - which plays the theme to *Bridge on the River Kwai*. Buck can't believe it.

INT. SET OF "LITTLE GIRL LOST" - DAY

The camera shoots through DISTORTED GLASS at a weird, wondrous set designed like an alien dimension. A LITTLE GIRL and her DOG wander through a FLOOR OF THICK FOG.

Off to the side, Matheson and Rod watch. The Operator rotates the camera so that the world looks like it's UPSIDE DOWN.

INT. FACTORY - DAY

TWILIGHT ZONE LUNCH BOXES roll down an assembly line.

INT. SERLING HOME: POOLSIDE LANAI - DAY

Rod places a FIFTH EMMY on the shelf.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

TEEN GIRLS gather round, playing the TWILIGHT ZONE BOARD-GAME.

INT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - DAY

Rod holds up a NEWSPAPER to his team. It reads, "KENNEDY WARNS SOVIETS AGAINST 'TWILIGHT ZONE' WARS."

INT. SET OF "FIVE CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN EXIT" - DAY

The set is a giant, hollow cylinder. Its walls are plain and gray, rising up and up. Its inhabitants: an ARMY MAJOR, a CLOWN, a BALLERINA, a HOBO, and a SCOTTISH BAG-PIPER.

The Major bangs on the walls, trying to escape. It's futile.

Rod laughs as he gives the Tennis Starlet a tour of the set.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. SANTA MONICA PIER - DAY

A TWILIGHT ZONE POSTER - Rod signs with a tight scrawl.

ROD SERLING
There. I think the going rate for
that is five bucks - or a quarter a
Marilyn a piece.

The GIDDY FAN laughs. Then next in line. The QUEUE stretches from one end of the pier to the other. He shakes out his arm.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
This may take awhile - tennis elbow.

The crowd erupts into laughter.

Meanwhile, Carol waits with the girls, looking bored out of their skulls - until 6-year old Nan spots the PIER'S CAROUSEL.

NAN SERLING
I want to ride the horses like Jodi!

CAROL SERLING
That sounds like fun!

Carol taps Rod on the shoulder. Without looking up -

ROD SERLING
Just a few more minutes.

CAROL SERLING
I need some money for the girls.

ROD SERLING
(distracted)
Did I forget to mention? They have
a college fund now.

CAROL SERLING
No, for the rides.

He hands her a bill - it's a HUNDRED. What's she supposed to do with that?

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
Rod.

He finally looks up and shrugs, totally oblivious.

ROD SERLING
Buy yourself something nice.

INT. SANTA MONICA PIER: CAROUSEL - MOMENTS LATER

Carol rides the wooden ponies with her girls.

The world sweeps around her, and in moments, she glimpses Rod with his fans: laughing, taking pictures, signing autographs -

INT. SERLING HOME: FOYER - NIGHT

Rod stands alone, a silhouette in the door. A COLD WIND blows.

He steps into the light - hair mussed-up, top button undone. No one's there to greet him. His face is tinged with guilt.

ROD SERLING
I realized, we haven't had a date
night in a while. Had Margie pick
up movie tickets. *West Side Story*.

He holds up the TICKETS. Still no one comes.

INT. SERLING HOME: POOLSIDE LANAI - MOMENTS LATER

Rod stretches out in his chair, BEER in hand. He thinks for a moment, then checks his watch.

It's time. Rod hurries to a NEW, LARGE TV SET that now dominates the room. Switching it on, the glow fills his face.

Onscreen: a set resembling the DACHAU CONCENTRATION CAMP.

TV ROD SERLING (V.O.)
 All the Dachaus must remain standing. They are a monument to a time when some men decided to turn the Earth into a graveyard. And the moment we forget this, then we become the gravediggers. Something to dwell on and remember, not only in the Twilight Zone, but wherever men walk God's Earth.

He beams with pride. This is one of his best.

A new scene fades up: Rod in an EMPTY KITCHEN SET, reminiscent of the Cig-Er-Ator testimonial.

Alone in his lanai, Serling watches himself.

TV ROD SERLING
 As a writer, sometimes even I need a break. With Chesterfield Cigarettes, you get a cool, refreshing flavor without that ashy aftertaste.

TV Rod holds up the pack and flashes a grin. The Rod in the room, deeply disturbed, snaps off the television -

AND THE PHONE RINGS. It's Buck.

BUCK HOUGHTON (V.O.)
 Rod, what are you doing?

Atop the paper heap on Rod's desk: *West Side Story* tickets.

ROD SERLING
 Working. Got an idea for Season Four. Comedy episode: Shakespeare arrives in present day Hollywood-

BUCK HOUGHTON (V.O.)
 (interrupting)
 Shakespeare?
 (beat)
 You didn't talk to Aubrey? We lost Chesterfield.

Serling shoots up -

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY

Rod pushes through a mass of people, dodging golf carts and gear trucks, a man on a mission.

A SOUNDSTAGE towers ahead, its black doors shut. A RED LIGHT BLINKS ON AND OFF - "LIVE" - but Rod ignores the sign.

BANJO MUSIC wafts out as he throws open the door. He enters.

INT. THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES SOUNDSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Rod passes stacks of hay bales. Piles of scarecrows heaped up like corpses. Exaggerated ideas of the country, half-lit and strange. A BANJO PLAYER strums music.

And further up - a huge REAR PROJECTION screen.

There's a FLATBED TRUCK, packed for travellin': JETHRO's at the wheel, JED rides shotgun, GRANNY'S in the back -

And finally the Doe-Eyed Actress, from "Eye of the Beholder," playing Elly May.

By the camera, the HILLBILLIES PRODUCER gives a thumbs up.

HILLBILLIES PRODUCER
This is great guys. Just perfect.

Then, a voice from the darkness -

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.)
Granny should be grumpier. A sour-faced mother-in-law nightmare.

Her scowl grows over the top. The Producer says nothing.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Jed should be more confused by the big city. Just totally lost.

He obeys.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Donna, scoot to left. We don't want our star hiding behind the titles.

The Doe-Eyed Actress glares at him... but moves into position.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Now smile like a simple-minded country girl who's eager to please.

She forces herself to lose the hostility and grin as told.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
 Wider. We want to see all of those
 pearly-whites.

Aubrey sits in a FOLDING CHAIR, a CIGARETTE in hand, loving
 every second of this. Rod steps in front of him.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
 Well, you're an awful window.

ROD SERLING
 I thought we had a truce, Jim.

But Aubrey acts like he has no idea what Rod's talking about.

JAMES AUBREY
 How are the girls?

ROD SERLING
 You stole my cigarettes.

JAMES AUBREY
 I didn't steal anything.
 Chesterfield was unhappy. I offered
 them a better opportunity.

With a wave, Aubrey summons an assistant with a bulky, framed
 ONE SHEET: *Fair Exchange*, "brought to you by Chesterfield."

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
 New hour-long comedy, coming this
 fall. Heard of a wife-swap? This is
 a daughter-swap. You'll love it.

That's probably the creepiest possible way to pitch that
 show. Whatever human connection the two men had in that gym
 seems gone now. Rod can't fathom the person in front of him.

ROD SERLING
 A man stabs you in the front.

JAMES AUBREY
 A man keeps his woman content. Well
 fed.

ROD SERLING
 (realizing)
 General Foods - you got to them, too.

JAMES AUBREY
 Please. You can't talk about gas
 chambers in Dachau and drive a man
 insane, then expect, well...

He takes a drag of his *cigarette*.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
 Now *Fair Exchange*, it's funny. It
 makes people feel good about being
 American. And being American, well,
 that's a lifestyle. Something we
 can sell - with no ashy aftertaste.

ROD SERLING
 What'll the Chairman say about you
 swapping us out for the hillbillies?

JAMES AUBREY
 You lost your sponsor, not me.

Aubrey flicks his cigarette at the floor -

INT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - DAY

A BOX of "Chesterfield-Kings" hits the trash hard.

ROD SERLING
 From now on, nobody smokes those
 Benedict Arnolds!

CHARLES BEAUMONT
 Says the chimney.

He looks to Matheson for agreement, but the latter's deep in
 meditation on a blank page. Beaumont rolls his weary eyes -
 he seems strangely ill, almost like he's RAPIDLY AGING.

Meanwhile, Serling nods to Margie. He needs new smokes.

ROD SERLING
 Let's go find us a new brand.

INT. SET OF "I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC" - CONTINUOUS

Rod bursts into a vast, dark room, like the void of space.
 It's filled with CLUSTERS OF BODY PARTS: tables of eyes;
 tables of ears; and headless, armless mannequins.

As CREW take the black curtains down and switch the lights
 off, Margie hurries after Rod, an APPOINTMENT BOOK in her
 arms. Despite his limp, he marches with a purpose.

MARGIE FLEMING
 Carol called-

ROD SERLING
 Take a message. We're gonna show
 the Rod Serling name is still worth
 paying for.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Don't you mean *The Twilight Zone*?

He shoots a look at Buck, overseeing the breakdown of the EAR TABLE. But when Rod passes, he follows.

ROD SERLING
It's not Buck Houghton presenting the episodes. Margie, the personals.

MARGIE FLEMING
Antioch College wants you for a writing course.

ROD SERLING
Done. I'll whip those kids into such a frenzy they'll be throwing dollars at ad-men. What else?

MARGIE FLEMING
Arthur Jacobs called. He's got a book for you to adapt - something about a planet of talking monkeys.

ROD SERLING
Don't even have to ask. I work in Hollywood, all I know are primates.

Buck doesn't have to say anything.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
I don't see you putting money into the Zone. Plus car maintenance. Dictaphone repair. Private school. Goddamn riding lessons. It adds up.

Margie bites her lip: this one's more delicate.

MARGIE FLEMING
Schlitz Beer called. They'd like a meeting.

ROD SERLING
Great!

MARGIE FLEMING
It's... I know how you feel about the Chesterfield deal.

He throws his hands up, with a naughty grin -

ROD SERLING
What can I say - they want me. If it keeps the show on the air, do the Nazis need a sponsor?

But Margie still looks very uncomfortable. They reach the CIGARETTE VENDING MACHINE waiting at the end of the room.

MARGIE FLEMING
It's different this time.

Rod stops, dismayed. The machine ONLY SELLS CHESTERFIELDS.

Someone WHEELS A TABLE past him...

INT. NEW YORK SOUNDSTAGE - NIGHT

Rod's nearly mowed down by someone WHEELING A HEAVY TABLE over to its designated spot. The stage is a flurry of activity: false walls going up, props being placed -

As though a magic spell was coming into effect, the set is rapidly transforming into a corporate office.

Superimpose the title: "New York - 1955."

A YOUNG DIRECTOR stands in the center, barking orders.

YOUNG DIRECTOR
Twenty-four hours, people! Twenty-
four hours 'til we hit the air!
Serling! Where's your rewrites?

Rod clutches a PORTABLE TYPEWRITER, looking desperately for a place to set up shop. He passes Blanche Gaines at craft services, sipping COFFEE, then finally finds an open area -

Until a VIDEO CAMERA zooms through. The Director spins to the CAMERA OP and points sternly:

YOUNG DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
Too slow! We'll be live. You miss a
shot, the world sees it.

An ACTOR playing a senior executive hurries from the make-up chair. HIS RESEMBLANCE TO JACK ZIMMERMAN IS UNCANNY.

Rod commandeers that chair and puts the typewriter on his lap. His two fingers fly as fast as he can make them.

YOUNG DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
What about the ending?

Rod looks up. The Director's standing over him, anxious.

YOUNG DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
I'm getting heat from the brass. No
one's done this on TV before.

Rod's eyes flash youthful defiance. He's finally unchained:

ROD SERLING

It's my name on this show. If the
country hates it, it's all on me.
The ending stays.

YOUNG DIRECTOR

The whole country. Remember that.

He grabs the HOT PAGES from Serling and hurries off. Over at
craft services, Blanche gives Rod an approving nod.

"Zimmerman" quickly scans his new script, grins, then tosses
it aside. In the CONTROL BOOTH, the PRODUCER gestures.

PRODUCER

And in three... Two...

A smile spills across Rod's face. He's truly at home here.

PRODUCER (CONT'D)

One...

ALL COLOR DRAINS TO BLACK AND WHITE, and the rehearsal on set
transforms into -

INT. OFFICE IN NEW YORK CITY - CONTINUOUS (ON TV)

A BEER BOTTLE on a bare desk. It faces the broken, exhausted
senior executive. The older man addresses his JUNIOR COWORKER:

"ZIMMERMAN" ACTOR

The bigger the job the more
desperate you try to hang onto it.

INT. COUSIN FRANK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The broadcast plays live - it's THE NEXT NIGHT; Rod, Carol,
COUSIN FRANK, and FRANK'S WIFE gather around the TV to watch.
It's a cramped, worn-down house - far from any luxury.

"ZIMMERMAN" ACTOR (O.S.)

The larger the salary, the more
dependent you become upon it.

Rod's nervous as hell. He can barely sit.

"ZIMMERMAN" ACTOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

It means more than your pride.

ON THE TV SET, the two executives fade out.

TV ANNOUNCER

We'll be back in a moment with
"Patterns," by Rod Serling.

Rod has to get up, pace around. Carol takes his hand.

CAROL SERLING
It'll get people talking.

ROD SERLING
About banning me from a typewriter.

TV ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Our good cooks have a creamy tomato
soup with a very special goodness.
The secret? A delicious cheese flavor
that comes from Kraft's Cheez-Whiz.

Rod's jolted by this abrupt change in tone. He stares.

ON TV: a hand shovels spoonfuls of CHEEZ-WHIZ into a boiling
pot. PLEASANT MUSIC plays. The announcer's voice is soothing.

Suddenly, the TV BREAKS INTO STATIC. Frank springs into
action, pounding on the device to get it to work.

COUSIN FRANK
Sonovabitch! Never buying used.

CAROL SERLING
Oh, Frank! We're just glad we had a
working TV to watch it on.

COUSIN FRANK
But I've got to know what happens!

Dead silence - until an idea comes to Rod.

ROD SERLING
Grab your coats - we can still
catch the end.

INT. TELEVISION STORE IN ITHACA - NIGHT

AN ENDLESS VARIETY OF TV SETS. Now not just one in a window,
but a whole jam-packed store. A CROWD gathers - even the
SALES STAFF watch in rapt attention.

Rod and his party slip in. The BELL JANGLES. No one notices.

ON TV: A CORPORATE BOARDROOM. A white-haired COMPANY
PRESIDENT berates the sweating, cowed "Zimmerman" as the
Junior Coworker watches, indignation building in his face.

ROD SERLING
(whispers to Carol)
Here it comes.

"ZIMMERMAN" GRABS HIS CHEST - A HEART ATTACK.

GASPS in the TV store. Rod looks away, too anxious to watch.
No one makes a noise now; Serling can barely breathe. Then -

WOMAN IN THE CROWD
This is exactly how it is. My
husband's not home until nine, ten
most nights. It's destroying him.
The money's not worth it.

MAN IN THE CROWD
It's not the money. You're afraid
to be the one who goes home early.
Some other kid won't, and pretty
soon, he'll have your career. And
then who are you?

Suddenly, Carol looks up. A CLOCK on the wall: 8:53.

CAROL SERLING
(whispers)
Rod, the babysitter...

ROD SERLING
Just ten more minutes.

The crowd's discussion grows animated, and Rod basks in the
white glow of all the TVs.

EXT. HOUSE IN WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT - NIGHT

SNOW blankets suburban lawns, soft and serene. Tiny '50s
starter homes. A PETULANT BABYSITTER sulks on a front porch.

Then SCREECH! A BEAT-UP OLD CAR kicks up white - Rod still
can't afford anything nice. He and Carol rush out.

As they hurry over, they can hear the PHONE RINGING even from
outside. Rod grows anxious: good news or bad?

TEENAGE BABYSITTER
It's been non-stop. Every time I
get Jodi asleep, somebody calls and
wakes her up!

As Rod rushes into the house, Carol's left PAYING the Sitter.

CAROL SERLING
Here's some extra.

The Babysitter looks at the CASH in her hand - and scowls.

PETULANT BABYSITTER
I have my overtime rate.

CAROL SERLING
That's not how overtime works.

INT. HOUSE IN WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT - CONTINUOUS

As Carol continues her argument outside MOS, Rod hurries for the phone. The little place is as narrow and run-down as Cousin Frank's. Gray, old wallpaper. Small rooms.

RING. RING. RING. Rod snaps up the phone.

NBC EXECUTIVE (V.O.)
Sweetie?

ROD SERLING
You're making me blush.

NBC EXECUTIVE (V.O.)
Rod, Early reviews are unbelievable.
Calls are flooding the station - that
heart attack is the talk of the
country. Even demands we perform
"Patterns" again as a public service.

Carol storms inside, frustrated - then she sees Rod's expression. And in that moment, she knows.

NBC EXECUTIVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
No one's ever done a repeat
performance before. Your life is
never going to be the same.

INT. WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL - NIGHT

A TUXEDO'D PRESENTER at a white-cloth dais, ENVELOPE in hand.

PRESENTER
And the Emmy for the Best Original
Teleplay Writing goes to...

DRUMS ROLL. But the man is an image, live video projected onto a HUGE SCREEN cut in the shape of a MAP OF AMERICA.

It overlooks a banquet hall where HUNDREDS sit at long tables in the dark - including Rod and Carol, finely dressed.

Superimpose the title, "Waldorf-Astoria, New York - 1956."

PRESENTER (CONT'D)
Rod Serling, for "Patterns!" Here
he is in New York!

The banquet hall's LIGHTS COME UP to THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. Rod takes his bows. Carol's crying.

With his limp, Rod makes his way to an elegant stage. It sits beneath the "America" screen. His eyes are alive with wonder.

He reaches at the PODIUM, the applause still going... BUT NO ONE'S THERE to give him his Emmy.

ROD SERLING

Hello?

Slowly, the applause gives way to confusion. MURMURS. Now a LOW BUZZ - microphone feedback? Rod keeps a smile frozen on his face, unsure of what to do.

He looks to Carol. She's as perplexed as he is.

Abruptly, a PA dashes up and shoves the EMMY into Rod's hand.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen, Rod Serling!

Unsure of what else to do, the crowd applauds again. The band quickly plays Rod off with a ROUSING NUMBER.

INT. WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL: GREEN ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The PA hurriedly ushers Rod into a dimly lit chamber: green velvet curtains and clouds of cigarette smoke. The room's broken up into little cliques of MOVIE STARS AND PRODUCERS.

ROD SERLING

Wait, how do I get back?

But the PA's already gone. Rod looks around, lost...

There's Blanche, sitting ALONE AT THE BAR.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)

Blanche!

TED ASHLEY (O.S.)

Congratulations, Rod!

TED ASHLEY, 34, is smooth and cool - crisp hair, crisp suit, a pack of beautiful people in his aura.

One is the Man with Silver Spectacles, THE SAME MYSTERIOUS PERSON who tried to get Rod to leave the Zone for ABC.

TED ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Ted Ashley - Ashley-Steiner Agency.
Loved Patterns. That heart attack!

His glamorous posse all nod in agreement as Blanche breaks in.

BLANCHE GAINES

Rod! I'm so sorry - I tried to find
a producer to fix -

TED ASHLEY
 (interrupting)
 It's insulting they left you
 hanging there. I wouldn't have let
 that happen to my client.

BLANCHE GAINES
 Ted...

TED ASHLEY
 Not starting anything, Blanche. One
 of the perks of being with the big
 guys - you'll never be forgotten.

A TOAST - and Ted downs his DRINK.

TED ASHLEY (CONT'D)
 It's all moving West, anyway.
 Hollywood used to be worried about
 competing with TV. I've convinced
 them TV can be a part of Hollywood.

BLANCHE GAINES
 Why would any writer want that?

This jolts Rod. He turns back to Blanche. Maybe she's right.

TED ASHLEY
 Rod, right now your words are said
 by stage actors known in New York.
 Shouldn't they be said by movie
 stars known all over the world?

As he follows each volley of conversation, Rod's wheels turn.

BLANCHE GAINES
 That's enough, Ted.

TED ASHLEY
 We're just having a conversation...
 (to Rod)
 Though I'd love to fly you out for
 a tour.

ROD SERLING
 When?

Blanche is helpless. Rod's made his decision.

TED ASHLEY
 The plane's idling as we speak...

With an arm around Serling, Ted leans in like an old friend -
 even as he leads him away from Blanche and into the pack.

TED ASHLEY (CONT'D)
 So what's next?

ROD SERLING
*Something inspired by the murder of
 Emmett Till. Takes racism dead on.*

The eyes of the Silver Spectacled Man light up:

MAN WITH SILVER SPECTACLES
Racism? That's fun.

As the pack pulls Rod into its midst, Blanche is left behind.

INT. HOUSE IN WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT - NIGHT

*Carol closes the door on a WINTRY COLD. She's bundled up in a
 HEAVY COAT, her arms loaded with GROCERIES.*

Dropping them off in the kitchen, she spins around -

*And feeling excited, giddy, it's right to the CLOSET. Off
 with the coat - and underneath is a SEXY BLACK NUMBER.*

CAROL SERLING
Cousin Frank's watching Jodi.

But there's no response - the home is silent.

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
Where are you?

*She searches the whole house - not many rooms, so it goes
 quick. He's nowhere to be found, but -*

*In the middle of their bed, there's a TYPED LETTER: "Carol -
 big things are happening."*

She holds it her hands, motionless, trying not to cry.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL: STAGE - NIGHT

DARKNESS. Rod Serling emerges from the black.

*Illuminated in flashes, he passes through pools of STAGE
 LIGHTS led by a lanky PRODUCTION ASSISTANT.*

*Rod wears the finest tuxedo. He and the PA squeeze between a
 FAKE BRICK WALL and CLOSED VELVET CURTAINS. The PA gestures.*

EMMYS PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
*It's in this tiny little alley,
 between the brick and the velvet...*

ROD SERLING

What?

Rod's flustered. The PA stops.

EMMYS PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Here. Won't be long now.

He steps off as Rod practices different line readings.

ROD SERLING

Good evening. Good evening. Good-

EMMYS ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Welcome to the 14th Emmy Awards.

As the announcer begins, Rod lights up a CIGARETTE.

EMMYS ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And now from New York, Mr. Rod Serling, creator of last year's Emmy Award-winning program, The Twilight Zone.

THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. The PA points. Rod takes a deep drag.

He exhales as THE CURTAINS PART, revealing a huge hall packed with finely dressed luminaries at banquet tables.

ROD SERLING

Good evening.

But slowly, the applause gives way to confusion. Onstage beside Rod is a small table with ... a FROTHY MUG OF BEER?

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)

The Joseph Schlitz brewing company of Milwaukee takes real pleasure in bringing you tonight's exciting Emmy Awards program. Now let's have a friendly glass while we go to a real barn-dance.

A GIGANTIC POSTER OF SCHLITZ BEER stands behind him. Their cursive slogan reads, "Real Gusto!"

Rod lifts the mug, takes a sip -

AND SPOTS AUBREY, front and center, savoring every minute.

The stage lights dim, and the BIG MONITOR ONSTAGE begins playing a SCHLITZ BEER AD:

A fiddlin' barn dance. Laughter, beer, cheesy graphics - and of course, a jingle you can't get out of your head:

COUNTRY SINGERS

(singing)
 Get that real gusto that only
 Schlitz has got, from that creamy
 white crown to the very last drop...

Rod hurries off-stage, humiliated.

INT. WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL - LATER THAT NIGHT

Rod and Carol sit at a table in the audience. Carol takes his hand. He's tense. Another Emmy could redeem this night.

PRESENTER (O.S.)

And the Emmy for Outstanding Writing
 in the Field of Drama goes to...

The PA hurries up.

EMMYS PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Five minutes before your next spot.

CAROL SERLING

Go away! They're announcing his
 category.

PRESENTER (O.S.)

In New York, the winner: Reginald
 Rose, *The Defenders*.

It's a punch to the gut. Rod forces himself to clap, but tonight's been too much.

PRESENTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Accepting for Reginald Rose, in New
 York, is Robert Reed.

EMMYS PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

I'm sorry Mr. Serling, but all
 spokesmen need to be backstage now.

Onstage, the MAN ACCEPTING THE AWARD holds it aloft.

MAN ACCEPTING THE AWARD

Most of all, I'd like to thank James
 Aubrey, who had the guts to allow us
 to present controversial material
 for adults to watch. Hopefully this
 courage is contagious.

ROD SERLING

(snapping)
 I'm coming.

Furious, Rod follows the Assistant backstage - passing Buck,
 who's leaving the show early.

INT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - DAY

Buck stands before Rod - and Rod's enraged. Around them: BOXES, BOXES, EVERYWHERE. Margie directs Matheson and a WITHERED Beaumont as they pack up the whole office.

BUCK HOUGHTON
It's different this time.

ROD SERLING
Dammit, Buck. We almost have next year's budget. The beer pitch showed everyone the value of my brand. Now sponsors are taking our calls.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Yeah. I saw *Schlitz*.

ROD SERLING
Then you saw a man doing everything he could to save his show.

BUCK HOUGHTON
And where does the man end, and the show begin?

Rod won't look at him. He hunches over on a box, fuming.

RICHARD MATHESON
(being diplomatic)
So... who's the lucky girl?

BUCK HOUGHTON
Richard Boone Show.

At that, Serling explodes:

ROD SERLING
The cowboy from Aubrey's first hit show?! Stick the dagger a bit deeper next time and just kill me.

Buck gathers his HAT AND COAT.

BUCK HOUGHTON
It's not like that. It's a drama anthology. Like the old days. Boone's using his name for good. And you can, too - while it still means something.

CHARLES BEAUMONT
You're an embarrassment to invertebrates everywhere!

Ignoring him, Buck leaves.

CHARLES BEAUMONT (CONT'D)

Screw him.

He reaches to pack a HEAVY TYPEWRITER, but his wrinkled fingers fumble. Matheson hurries to grab it.

RICHARD MATHESON

Take it easy. I can handle the rest.

Margie starts to write on a box - then she turns to Rod.

MARGIE FLEMING

Longterm storage, or-

His eyes flash defiance.

ROD SERLING

We'll be back next season.

INT. HALLWAY IN ANTIOCH COLLEGE - DAY

But with no one around, Rod's exhausted. He fishes out a CIGARETTE. Only one left.

Superimpose the title, "Antioch College, Ohio - 1962."

He stands outside a wooden door, taking a deep breath, readying himself to face -

INT. CLASSROOM IN ANTIOCH COLLEGE - DAY

Young students fill every seat. Circle skirts. Greased hair. It's a world Rod's only passingly familiar with -

BUT THEY BURST INTO THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. He soaks it in.

INT. HOUSE IN YELLOW SPRINGS, OHIO - LATE AFTERNOON

After that class, Rod comes home with a spring in his step.

But his world has grown quite small. There's hardly room to move in this cramped cottage, and no vigor: everything feels like a quiet still life painting. But he doesn't notice.

ROD SERLING

Two thousand miles from LA and the
the show's still a hit. Be prepared
to fight off some enamored coeds.

No one's home. He grabs a BEER from the kitchen, then turns -

THE BLACK DICTAPHONE DOMINATES THE WHITE KITCHEN TABLE - like a black hole sucking the room into it.

Apprehensive, he presses PLAY.

CAROL SERLING (V.O.)
 Here we are in Antioch. I followed
 you again, like I followed you to
 New York, and then Hollywood. The
 bank account now has more than
 seven hundred in it - much more.
 But let's be honest, you still
 haven't found that great place. How
 long do you expect me to follow
 before you get there?

From within the tape, his girls laugh. Serling is stunned.

CAROL SERLING (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And now I'm speaking into this
 black box, my ideas side by side
 with yours, unsure if you'll even
 listen to this or just wipe over me
 with another great concept for one
 of your shows.

A sound outside the cottage: A CAR PULLING UP.

CAROL SERLING (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 (sighing)
 I don't know. I'm off to pick up
 Jodi from riding practice. At least
 they still have that here.

CLICK. The tape stops. The beer sweats in his hand.

A KNOCK at the door startles him. He spins, yanks it open -

ROD SERLING
 Carol-

BUT INSTEAD IT'S HUBBELL ROBINSON, looking younger than ever.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
 Hubbell?

HUBBELL ROBINSON
 (smiling)
 Back from the dead.

Serling steps to the side, bewildered, as Robinson enters.

HUBBELL ROBINSON (CONT'D)
 I begged the Cobra for my old job.

ROD SERLING
 Sounds humiliating.

Hubbell nods - more than Serling will ever know.

HUBBELL ROBINSON
I come bearing an olive branch.

ROD SERLING
If Aubrey's looking to tan me, I
know better wood for switches.

HUBBELL ROBINSON
We want *Twilight Zone* for midseason.

A wry smile crosses Rod's face - he won.

INT. EXECUTIVE SUITE, CBS LOS ANGELES OFFICES - DAY

And Rod's beaming even bigger, though Aubrey's poker face isn't giving him much satisfaction. Hubbell leans in:

HUBBELL ROBINSON
Fair Exchange is taking water fast.
We have an hour to kill and
sponsors are getting cold feet.

Serling spots the framed FAIR EXCHANGE POSTER from before - now banished to a corner. SOMEONE SMASHED THE GLASS. Aubrey?

ROD SERLING
I thought cigarettes helped keep
you warm.

Though Aubrey keeps his face an unreadable mask, Serling can detect the faintest glimmer in his eye of... self-doubt?

JAMES AUBREY
We need another season, Rod.

INT. SET OF TWILIGHT ZONE SEASON 4 OPENING - NIGHT

A FREE-STANDING WINDOW against a black backdrop. Rod SMASHES it with a HAMMER like a captain christening a ship.

Beside the CAMERA, a NEW PRODUCER gives Rod a thumbs up. It's the SAME SOUNDSTAGE as the Beverly Hillbillies opener - now a dark chamber full of PROPS FROM THE ZONE'S MOST ICONIC INTRO.

NEW PRODUCER
Season Four has begun. Buck doesn't
know what he's missing.

ROD SERLING
Just in time, too.

Rod checks his WATCH. He drops the hammer and strides for the STAGE DOOR. Margie follows with a CLIPBOARD.

MARGIE FLEMING

We need another take of your narration.

He points to a WHITE DOOR, still in its frame, standing by itself in the shadows. A reminder of Manila.

ROD SERLING

"You unlock this door with the key of imagination" - heard it, love it. I'm going to miss my flight.

He keeps walking, until Matheson intercepts him and Margie in front of a GIANT PLASTIC EYEBALL, its eyelid closed. This all feels like something out of a Dali-esque dream.

RICHARD MATHESON

Wait, you're leaving?

ROD SERLING

Got a plane to Antioch.

Rod keeps moving, as Matheson tags along.

RICHARD MATHESON

I'm stretching to fill that fifth act. I don't know about this hour.

Then he comes to Beaumont, sitting on a crate beneath a HUGE CLOCK, ticking rapidly: 11:51, nine minutes to midnight.

CHARLES BEAUMONT

It's insane, Rod. You get the premise, this guy walks through walls. Great. Twenty-four minutes, and the audience loves you for it. But after forty? "What else ya got?" Another ten minutes to kill while the actors sit around holding their dicks. An hour-

ROD SERLING

(interrupting)

Was necessary. I already gave you Shakespeare. You can make it work.

He leaves the two writers behind. He's almost at the door.

Margie grabs his arm, stopping him at a LIFE-SIZE WOODEN MANNEQUIN. It looks like a faceless man in free-fall.

MARGIE FLEMING

You have to stay. We need you.

ROD SERLING
 Sorry, Margie - it's not an option.
 A class of two hundred adoring fans
 await me - and they're the ones
 paying our bills.

He throws open the door. The shining white sun greets him.

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS - DAY

Sunlight shimmers on sparkling pools. Beautiful bodies and
 evergreen backyards, sprawling mansions in heavenly white.
 And the cars: Maseratis, Porsches, Lincoln Continentals...

INT. TOWN CAR - DAY (MOVING)

Rod beams, peering out the window. Ted Ashley leans over.

TED ASHLEY
 We're glad to have you onboard, Rod.

INT. CBS TELEVISION CITY: CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Serling closes the door. The room is grays upon grays.
 Sterile. Even Ted Ashley wears a plain gray suit, as does a
 white-haired man Rod's never seen before: the US STEEL REP.

TED ASHLEY
 Rod, Gordon Kurlock. Representative
 from United States Steel.

The Steel Rep gives a quick but vigorous shake, then sits
 down again. Rod slowly backs into a chair. There's a YELLOW
 LEGAL PAD waiting for him.

The US Steel Rep has a STACK OF PAPERS, covered in RED INK.

TED ASHLEY (CONT'D)
 Just a few notes.

US STEEL SPONSOR REP
 We've read your script and it's
 simply marvelous. This is exactly
 the kind of finely-honed drama US
 Steel wants to put its name behind.

Serling starts to breathe a little easier.

US STEEL SPONSOR REP (CONT'D)
 But word has gotten out to the press
 that the new script is based on the
 Emmett Till case?

ROD SERLING

The Emmett Till lynching. Remember we're talking about the murder of a fourteen year-old boy for the crime of looking at a white woman.

There's passion in his eyes. The Rep shifts uncomfortably.

US STEEL SPONSOR REP

As that may be, we've gotten over fifteen thousand letters of protest from the White Citizens Council. We need to play south of Mason-Dixon.

ROD SERLING

With given respect, who gives a piss what some middle class Klan thinks? Steel's steel - what's Tennessee going to build with instead? Lead?

US STEEL SPONSOR REP

The Chairmen of both the Senate and House Armed Services Committees are Georgians and staunch segregationists. I don't need to remind you how important the military is as buyer of steel.

Silence. Rod looks to Ted, who nods that Rod should pipe down.

Irritated, Serling snatches up a PEN and grabs the legal pad.

US STEEL SPONSOR REP (CONT'D)

Good. First of all, the dead man-

ROD SERLING

(interrupting)
Murder victim?

US STEEL SPONSOR REP

Yes. He can't be a negro.

ROD SERLING

How about an old Jew instead - or an Arab with a gun in the sun?

The Rep thinks for a moment.

US STEEL SPONSOR REP

Or a Jap?

The word catches Serling up. The Steel Rep shakes his head, suddenly hating the idea.

US STEEL SPONSOR REP (CONT'D)
 No, no, no. "Foreigner." Don't
 specify the country - and don't
 name the man, or people could guess
 the country. We don't want to
 single anyone out.

ROD SERLING
 So I'm supposed to build a drama
 about the murder of a Mr. N.O. Body?

US STEEL SPONSOR REP
 Work with us.

He flips the page.

US STEEL SPONSOR REP (CONT'D)
 Next, this can't be set in the
 South. The implication will be too
 strong. Somewhere else, like New
 England. Somewhere... neutral.

Now Rod's getting testy, like a schoolboy being disciplined.

ROD SERLING
 Why not Eskimos in Alaska? Or are
 the costumes too expensive?

Rod starts to get up - then Ted grabs his sleeve.

TED ASHLEY
 (softly)
 Saying something is better than
 saying nothing.

With a resigned sigh, Serling sits back down.

ROD SERLING
 New England. Gotcha.

US STEEL SPONSOR REP
 And lastly, there's the part where
 someone asks for a Coca-Cola.

ROD SERLING
 What's wrong with Coca-Cola?

US STEEL SPONSOR REP
 Southerners really like Coca-Cola.

ROD SERLING
 ...and?

US STEEL SPONSOR REP
 Southerners really like it. Or so
 I've been told. It locates us. The
 script. Keep it neutral.

INT. SERLING HOME: LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is big enough for echoes. The furniture, stylish. Rod and Carol are practically sinking into a plush sofa. The TELEVISION is large, state-of-the-art.

TV ANNOUNCER (V. O.)

(from the TV set)

This has been "Noon on Doomsday" by Rod Serling, a production of The United States Steel Hour.

ROD SERLING

A whodunit where the only mystery is the victim. It was like watching kids play Clue.

CAROL SERLING

I guess it said something.

ROD SERLING

Yeah - buy US Steel.

INT. HOLLYWOOD JEWISH DELI - DAY

Loads of fatty pastrami overwhelm the rye. Yum, yum, yum.

Rod and Ted Ashley share a shiny red leather booth.

TED ASHLEY

Over ten million eyeballs - it's a hit. What else you got?

As Ted takes a big, juicy bite... Rod stares, incredulous.

INT. CBS TELEVISION CITY: CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Serling sits across from a SPONSOR REP.

SPONSOR REP #1

We love it. It's like Mr. Smith Goes to Washington.

ROD SERLING

But...

SPONSOR REP #1

Well, we can't have the Senators talking about the tariff. That's a Republican issue.

ROD SERLING

Okay.

SPONSOR REP #1
And nothing about labor. That'd
suggest we're pro-Democrat.

ROD SERLING
So what exactly can Mr. Smith talk
about when he goes to Washington?

SPONSOR REP #1
You're a writer - make it up. Just
nothing controversial.

ROD SERLING
Well if it's not controversial, why
is Congress arguing about it?

INT. CBS TELEVISION CITY: CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Rod sits across from ANOTHER SPONSOR REP.

SPONSOR REP #2
It's fantastic. Just a few changes.
The line, "Got a match?"

ROD SERLING
He's lighting a cigarette.

SPONSOR REP #2
Yes, but we're Ronson lighters. We
don't sell matches. Can you make it
"Got a light?"

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Rod watches as a SET PAINTER creates New York for a BACKDROP.
Something seems amiss here, though...

ROD SERLING
The skyline's wrong.

SET PAINTER
What?

ROD SERLING
42nd and Lexington. Tall with a
spire? The Chrysler Building for
Chrissakes!

SET PAINTER
Oh. Ford's sponsoring this show.

INT. SET OF "THE BARD" - DAY

YET ANOTHER SPONSOR: a bald man chomping a CIGAR. But this time the "writer" across from him is an actor dressed as WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE. And the conference room, a set.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
If music be the food of love, play
on. Give me excess of it, that
surfeiting, the appetite may
sicken, and so die.

SUITED MAN WITH CIGAR
Oh, fine, fine, fine! Appetite
sickening! This is just fine. The
Shannon Food Company is paying this
kind of money to make people sick?

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
Enough!

He springs to his feet and storms off past -

Margie Fleming, who watches by the CAMERA with the other TV crew. Beside her is an empty spot... where Rod should be.

INT. CLASSROOM IN ANTIOCH COLLEGE - DAY

Serling stands SMOKING in the corner. The lights are off. The class watches as a BIG SCREEN plays the same episode.

SCHLUBBY WRITER (O.S.)
Don't you dig? I'm conjurin', baby,
I'm conjurin'!

The music indicates a comedic zinger. It's mugging for the camera like nobody's business.

ARROGANT STUDENT
(whispers)
He's gonna get Shakespeare to write
his scripts for him. That's the
twist - I'm telling you.

Rod shoots him a look. Ignoring it, the kid prods his friend.

ARROGANT STUDENT (CONT'D)
(whispers)
"Don't ya dig?" Is this how he
thinks we talk?

INT. CLASSROOM IN ANTIOCH COLLEGE - LATER

CREDITS ROLL on the episode.

ROD SERLING
Well class, what'd you take away?

ARROGANT STUDENT
What was with the music cues? Since
when is the Zone a sitcom?

This throws Rod off. He flips on the light - and is shocked
to find the whole class glaring at him like he's on trial.

ROD SERLING
There's a tightrope there, a
balancing act. Not everything can
be super-serious - sometimes you
need levity to get a point across.

ARROGANT STUDENT
Hillbillies is more subtle than
that.

ROD SERLING
That's all surface - let's talk
theme. As you saw, today's ad-men
would even butcher the Bard. At
best, commercials are a cleaver,
separating good drama into
unpalatable ground chuck - and
wielded by the networks with all
the grace of a drunk butcher.
You'll find no respect for words
from them - all they see is filler,
bridging time between soup ads.

ARROGANT STUDENT
Or Schlitz Beer?

A few gasps, a couple of snickers - Rod goes red.

Then, from the sea of hostile faces, a lone FANBOY STUDENT
rises to his feet.

FANBOY STUDENT
Get bent, Sam! "Quality of Mercy,"
"Invaders," "Time Enough at Last."
Prejudice. Xenophobia. Nuclear war.
Who else's talking about this stuff?
The FCC nailed it - TV is a "vast
wasteland," and this guy's the only
one with balls. Show some respect.

ARROGANT STUDENT
Up yours.

FANBOY STUDENT
(giving the finger)
You first.

ROD SERLING
 Okay, okay. Cut it. Instead of
 pissing about with us folks in TV
 land, why don't we go learn about a
 real artist? A documentary on Da
 Vinci's playing in town - extra
 credit to anyone who comes along.

EXT. PAY-PHONE ON THE ANTIOCH CAMPUS - MOMENTS LATER

Rod cradles the RECEIVER under his ear. IT'S RINGING. He's
 trying to get out to someone.

FANBOY STUDENT (O.S.)
The Purple Testament was the first
 episode I saw. Been a fan since.

Serling turns. Fanboy's right behind him. THE LINE GOES DEAD.

ROD SERLING
 Tell that to the head of CBS.

He hangs up the phone.

FANBOY STUDENT
 Well every other damn thing I see
 says how soldiers are brave. But
 yours is the only one that says it's
 human to be afraid. To accept how
 helpless you really are over there.

ROD SERLING
 (softly)
 That was just my experience.

FANBOY STUDENT
 Not just yours. My old man's
 organizing a screening with his
 veteran's group.

The Fanboy takes out a CIGARETTE and lights up - but he
 COUGHS on the first drag. New smoker.

ROD SERLING
 (genuinely moved)
 I'd be happy to help make that
 happen. Gimme his number next class.

FANBOY STUDENT
 Wow. That'd mean to world to us.

He offers Rod a FRESH CIGARETTE.

FANBOY STUDENT (CONT'D)
 Chesterfield?

Serling stares at it, too troubled to reply.

INT. MOVIE THEATER IN YELLOW SPRINGS, OHIO - NIGHT

The flickering light spills across Rod's troubled face. The small theater is packed. Rod's class fills the house.

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR (O.S.)
Whether it be the structure of
Man's primal emotions, or the
impossible idea of human-powered
flight, Da Vinci struggled against
mortal limitations...

A HAND on Rod's shoulder - he turns and finds the Arrogant Student's grinning face.

ARROGANT STUDENT
You're alright, you know?

Before Rod can respond, the Student's holding up a LITTLE WHITE TABLET in his palm.

ARROGANT STUDENT (CONT'D)
Peace offering, "ya dig?"

Serling pops the tablet into his mouth.

ROD SERLING
I'm hip, baby.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MOVIE THEATER IN YELLOW SPRINGS, OHIO - NIGHT

Now Rod's sweating. Whatever was in that tablet is having its effect. THE WALLS AROUND HIM SEEM TO PULSE LIKE A HEARTBEAT.

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR (O.S.)
Despite these achievements for many
powerful patrons, even in his final
moments Da Vinci remained skeptical
of the lasting impact of his work.

Onscreen, Da Vinci clutches his chest. THE WALLS STOP BEATING.

DA VINCI
Forgive me, Lord!

He collapses to his desk, throwing his papers into the air -
They come FLUTTERING OFF THE SCREEN and into the theater.

DA VINCI (CONT'D)
I've wasted my gifts.

Da Vinci looks up, his gaze meeting Rod's...

Then a coldness, as the light within is snuffed.

JAMES AUBREY (O.S.)
Man's got no integrity.

Where the Arrogant Student was, Aubrey now sits - his face like a mask, wild-eyed and grinning. He nods to Da Vinci.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
He mopes about, feels sorry for himself... then *dies*.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER IN YELLOW SPRINGS, OHIO - NIGHT

Terrified, Serling bursts from the theater onto Main Street. It's transforming from a quaint college town: the streets are EMPTY, the windows BROKEN - the drug is taking him elsewhere.

It's RAINING HARD.

ROD SERLING
Forgive me Lord, I've wasted my
gifts... I've wasted my gifts... oh
God, I've wasted my gifts...

He turns to find Carol suddenly there. AND PREGNANT.

PHANTOM CAROL SERLING
(rubbing her belly)
She's having nightmares.

BUZZING OVERHEAD. He looks up at the stark, pitiless sky to find CARGO PLANES ROLLING IN - the drop is about to begin...

ROD SERLING
We all think we're pushing forward,
backs to the wind, horses racing,
but we're all just stuck on a
Merry-Go-Round, every minute
praying to the one who turns the
machine to let us stay a little bit
longer before the ride ends...

Desperate for some comfort, Rod fumbles up a cigarette. Carol tosses him HIS DAD'S LIGHTER -

PHANTOM CAROL SERLING
It's from your family.

ROD SERLING
No, no, no - stay back!

CLICK, CLICK, CLICK - but the lighter won't ignite.

Rod stumbles, spilling cigarettes onto the asphalt. As he claws for them frantically -

CRATES BEGIN DROPPING ALL AROUND.

One cracks the asphalt at his feet, throwing wooden splinters into the air as -

A HEAD ROLLS OUT: MEL LEVY. He locks eyes with Serling.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)

Mel...

MEL LEVY

What are you gonna do, Serling?

In the middle of the road stands a SINGLE DOOR. The knob turns, and the door OPENS -

Beyond stands Young Rod Serling, looking back in wonder at his older self. The two Rod Serlings confront one another.

Young Rod raises his gun -

YOUNG ROD SERLING

You're too old for war.

ROD SERLING

Please, I need a bit more time. I can make it right.

YOUNG ROD SERLING

(in Japanese)

It's over.

Young Rod pulls the trigger -

EXT. HOUSE IN YELLOW SPRINGS, OHIO - NIGHT

BACK IN THE REAL WORLD, Carol opens the door to find Rod, delirious and sweating, mumbling to himself on the porch - he must have walked home from the theater.

ROD SERLING

I've wasted my talents, wasted my gifts...

CAROL SERLING

Rod?! What happened to you?

ROD SERLING

I love you, Carol.

His eyes fall on her WRIST-WATCH: 12:01.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
 Past midnight. Too late tuck the
 girls in, too late for a dinner
 with you, too late for-

CAROL SERLING
 (interrupting)
 You can tuck them in tomorrow night.

ROD SERLING
 I'm sorry for... everything.

She kisses him.

CAROL SERLING
 I love you, too. Now come inside
 and tell me what happened.

INT. CLASSROOM IN ANTIOCH COLLEGE - DAY

CHALK ON BLACKBOARD. His back to the class, Serling's writing something. Both he and they have come a long way, and the earlier tension is gone from the air.

ROD SERLING
 It's been a great year, though I
 think I'll stick to beer -
 mysterious tablets have a bit too
 much "real gusto" for me.

The class laughs heartily, impressed he can joke about it.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
 And if any of you've got some good
 pages, grab an envelope.

He steps back and taps the board. It bears THE NAME AND ADDRESS OF BLANCHE GAINES.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
 Blanche is your girl. If she could
 sell my early stuff, any of you lot
 should be golden.

He turns to face the class.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
 But if you've got sci-fi with a
 killer twist...

He nods to the Fanboy student.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
 I'm ready for fresh ideas.

The class cheers... THEN THE SOUND FADES OUT.

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
I came back to round five ready to
fight - even brought back the
producer of the pilot.

INT. SET OF "NIGHTMARE AT 20,000 FEET" - DAY

Serling, Matheson, and Beaumont watch on as the crew lights
the shot: a HORRIFIC GREMLIN on the WING OF THE PLANE.

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
But things were already too far
gone. Everything marches forward.

Beaumont starts to COUGH, MOS. The "Gremlin" turns its
grotesque costumed head to him -

AND HE COLLAPSES. Matheson grabs him as Rod rushes over.

ROD SERLING (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Some things faster than others.

INT. UCLA MEDICAL CENTER: HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

In the amber light of day's end, Matheson eases a FRAIL,
WRINKLED Beaumont onto the bed - Chuck looks about SEVENTY.

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
Something strange is happening to
Chuck, like something out of one of
our shows. He's aging at an
incredible rate.

Matheson passes a fearful Rod and Margie. He takes a seat at a
window side table, his eyes locking on the hazy, setting sun.

A NEUROLOGIST enters, CHARTS in hand. He shakes his head.

ROD SERLING (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The docs are at a loss, calling it
"a mysterious brain disease." I
don't know that that's medical.

Then the Doctor leaves. Rod and Margie chase after, arguing
the diagnosis MOS. Now only Matheson remains.

He nods to Beaumont - and sets a TYPEWRITER on the table.

Beaumont sits up, pulls out a CONTRABAND WHISKEY FLASK, takes
a swig, and starts spitting out ideas MOS as Matheson types.

ROD SERLING (V.O.) (CONT'D)
There's rumor someone's
ghostwriting his scripts. I don't
ask. I owe him that respect.

INT. EXECUTIVE SUITE, CBS LOS ANGELES OFFICES - DAY

BERT GRANET, a balding producer, listens as Aubrey speaks MOS.

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
 Halfway through, they stole our new
 producer away to another show. I
 had a few reasons he should stay.
 Aubrey had a quarter million.

Aubrey hands him a CONTRACT.

INT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - DAY

Serling shakes hands with Granet's replacement, a YOUNG PRODUCER, dark-haired and eager for the job.

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
 We got yet another guy in, hoping
 to revamp the show. He had ideas.

INT. CAYUGA PRODUCTIONS - DAY

The Young Producer has brought in A COUPLE NEW WRITERS, all with typewriters. Now Matheson can't find a seat.

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
 Brought in some newcomers to
 rewrite the scripts.

Grabbing a TELEPLAY from one of the writers, the Young Producer shows it to Matheson and gives the bad news MOS.

The ever-conciliatory Matheson's finally reached his limit. He seizes the script and RIPS IT IN HALF.

Thrusting a finger into the Young Producer's face, Matheson explodes MOS, then storms out of the stunned room.

ROD SERLING (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I've never seen Dick lose it like
 that. He decided he'd rather kill
 the script outright.

BUCK HOUGHTON (V.O.)
 Those things are gonna kill you.

EXT. GRIFFITH PARK - DAY

Sun-dappled trees. Dirt trails. Rod and Buck crest a hill.

ROD SERLING
 Since when are you Carol?

Buck shrugs. Rod lights up anyway.

Superimpose the title, "Griffith Park, Los Angeles - 1964."

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
The show needs a fresh start.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Heard there's interest at ABC. No
Aubrey. But you really want to?

MUSIC AND LAUGHTER waft their way. The path leads down to a bright red MERRY-GO-ROUND, families picnicking on the green grass, lines queuing up to enter the GRIFFITH PARK ZOO.

ROD SERLING
You know in '42 this park was a
holding center? Japanese-Americans
waiting to be sent to internment.

Buck takes in the park. Rod's eyes are restless.

BUCK HOUGHTON
Right... I'd forgotten...

ROD SERLING
The ghosts are still out there.

INT. WAITING AREA, CBS LOS ANGELES OFFICES - DAY

KEY ART FOR THE UPCOMING SEASON:

Comedies: *The Munsters*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Petticoat Junction*, *Gilligan's Island*, *Gomer Pyle*, *U.S.M.C.* - featuring that lovable country bumpkin. Westerns: *Rawhide*, *Gunsmoke*.

As Rod scans them, he realizes that his world has changed.

The door closes behind a STOUT YOUNG WRITER in thick black glasses, who's just leaving from a meeting.

He nods to AUBREY'S SECRETARY, then starts to go - until:

YOUNG WRITER
You're... you're Rod Serling!

He hurries up to Rod, who despite his weariness, grins.

ROD SERLING
That's what the checks say.

YOUNG WRITER
You have no idea what an
inspiration you are to me.

ROD SERLING
A fellow scribe? Get out while you
can.

YOUNG WRITER
Yeah, well, I just pitched a show
to President Aubrey.

ROD SERLING
And?

He can see from the man's face it didn't go too well. Serling
rises and gives him a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
Twilight Zone took two years until
they saw what it could be.

AUBREY'S SECRETARY
President Aubrey will see you now.

INT. EXECUTIVE SUITE, CBS LOS ANGELES OFFICES - MOMENTS LATER

Aubrey's got his feet up on the desk, absentmindedly fiddling
with his NEW CBS "EYEBALL" CUFFLINKS. Immediately, Rod spots
that AUBREY'S NO LONGER WEARING HIS WEDDING RING.

JAMES AUBREY
See the kind of dross you've stirred
up?

On his desk: the Young Writer's SERIES PROPOSAL.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
Kid should stick to cop shows.

He tosses the proposal in the trash. The page is open to a
piece of concept art, depicting THE STARSHIP ENTERPRISE.

ROD SERLING
I prefer to stand, ideally with a
blindfold and cigarette.

Aubrey chuckles.

JAMES AUBREY
Okay Rod, I'll keep it quick.
You're through.

Rod stays calm, comfortable in his fate.

ROD SERLING
I gave CBS my best.

This sets Aubrey off, as if he's addressing unseen critics.

JAMES AUBREY
 You gave CBS the best?! Our stock is
 at an all-time high. Even Paley sees
 it now. Number one network. *Beverly
 Hillbillies*, the number one show. We
 don't need your Emmys anymore, and
 you don't have any to give.

He rises to his feet, no longer able to hide his arrogance.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
 In a year, you'll be forgotten, a
 once-famed writer turned mediocre
 pitchman. Me, I'll always be the
 president who saved television.

And in that moment, Rod sees the true Aubrey: a frustrated
 man who feels his accomplishments have never been recognized.

ROD SERLING
 They'll remember you, Jim. I'm sure
 of it.

Grinning from ear-to-ear:

JAMES AUBREY
 Damn right they will!

Then he leans over, speaking right into Serling's ear.

JAMES AUBREY (CONT'D)
 But your name isn't complete shit.
 Gimme broads, gimme tits - gimme a
 Western. I'll put that on the air.

EXT. SERLING HOME - NIGHT

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS twinkle on the roof. Carol pulls out her
 keys. Under her arm: a *BIG WRAPPED GIFT*.

Superimpose the title, "Pacific Palisades - 1957."

INT. SERLING HOME: KITCHEN - NIGHT

*Setting the gift down, Carol pulls out a BIRTHDAY CANDLE and
 picks up a SILVER LIGHTER. The candle's wick blooms to FLAME -*

Then a SPLASH calls her attention out back.

EXT. SERLING HOME: POOL - NIGHT

*Carol finds Rod sitting by himself, legs dangling in the
 pool, the SCAR on his knee revealed. He stares at the
 TYPEWRITER he just threw in the water.*

CAROL SERLING
Girls in bed?

ROD SERLING
Dreaming of Santa.

CAROL SERLING
I should get myself a pool boy.

ROD SERLING
A wonderful fantasy. You should be
a writer.

She kicks off her flats. Her toes touch his in the water.

CAROL SERLING
You start a new script?

ROD SERLING
Started.

CAROL SERLING
What's it about?

ROD SERLING
The war. No surprise. A rework of
something I pitched in Cincinnati
way back when. But what's the point?
It'll be unrecognizable after the
next set of sponsor meetings.

Then the memories come back. The submerged typewriter almost
seems to stare back at him.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
What am I doing, Carol? Paddy
Chayefsky's left TV. Ed Murrow's on
his way out. Why am I still here?

CAROL SERLING
You're paying for the pool.

He laughs.

ROD SERLING
I'm paying for the pool.

They both look up at the night sky - A VAST FIELD OF STARS.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
Television's changing.

CAROL SERLING
Everything changes. Even the stars.

ROD SERLING
*But it's dying, like radio died.
 Sooner or later, it becomes about
 money and cheap formulas and-*

CAROL SERLING
(interrupting)
 Entertainment.

He looks at her.

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
*People don't tune in to have
 someone "menace their conscience."
 After a long work day, after
 fighting with angry spouses and
 indifferent kids, they just want to
 unwind and forget themselves for an
 hour. They want to be entertained.*

ROD SERLING
*So you're saying shut up and stump
 for a pool boy?*

CAROL SERLING
I'm saying you're a writer, Rod.

She puts an arm around him...

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
Write.

And gives him a SHOVE -

*But Rod's too fast for her. He slips out of her hold and SHE
 GOES TUMBLING IN. This gets him laughing as -*

*She pokes her bright eyes above the surface, then her chin,
 an impish smile adorning her lips. She has what she wanted.*

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
There you are.

*Then she lifts the typewriter to the edge of the pool, white
 foam pouring from the keys.*

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
This is shot.

ROD SERLING
*I never even learned how to
 properly type on that damn thing.*

CAROL SERLING
Follow me.

INT. SERLING HOME: KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

On the kitchen table: A CUPCAKE WITH A BURNT-OUT CANDLE. And beside it, the wrapped gift.

CAROL SERLING
Merry Christmas...

As she stands beside him, Rod unwraps it: THE DICTAPHONE.

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
And Happy Birthday.

INT. SERLING HOME: MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rod and Carol lie in bed: sweaty bodies, a mess of sheets. She sleeps soundly, but he cannot.

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
Submitted for your approval: the
story of a psychiatrist, Gillespie,
and his patient, Jensen.

INT. SERLING HOME: POOLSIDE LANAI - DAY

Newly installed on his desk, the big black Dictaphone almost seems to watch Rod as he paces, listening to its recording:

ROD SERLING (V.O.)
A most unusual arrangement, for
patient Jensen is no longer of this
world: a ghost, killed in the war.

He CLICKS it off, rubbing his eyes - this still won't fly.

He picks up a FRAMED PHOTO: the "Paraguys" - including Levy. There's a SCRAP OF PAPER tucked into the frame.

ROD SERLING
(reading aloud)
"We're tough and we know it. We're
good and we'll show it."

He grins to himself.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
What a piece of shit.
(beat)
I should submit it to the US Steel
Hour.

He sets it down, pacing more, trying to crack the story...

Then it hits him. He snatches up the Dictaphone mic. CLICK.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
Start over. Psych's Office. A man
sits in a chair - a seemingly
ordinary man. His psychiatrist
reviews his medical record.

Rod grows animated. He starts acting out the voice of
Gillespie with enthusiasm.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
Doctor: "It all seems good, Mr.
Jensen. There's nothing to explain
those terrible dreams."

Now he gives Jensen a voice:

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
Patient: "Pearl Harbor, Doc. I'm at
Pearl Harbor. I try to warn
everyone, but no one will listen."

He pauses again. He thinks.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
Ignore that. Instead: "Do you
believe in time travel, Doc?"

INT. HUBBELL ROBINSON'S OFFICE - DAY

A COMPLETED SCRIPT sits neat and center on Hubbell's desk.
Title page: "The Twilight Zone: The Time Element."

Hubbell rubs his temples, thinking. Across from him, Rod
stares up at the high walls:

KEY ART: General Electric Theater, Armstrong Circle Theater,
The United States Steel Hour, Westinghouse/Desilu Playhouse.

Sponsors, sponsors, sponsors. They look down him.

HUBBELL ROBINSON
The guy was dead the whole time?

ROD SERLING
A little twist at the end, keep you
thinking. That's what the hallmark
of this show could be.

Hubbell scratches his head.

HUBBELL ROBINSON
It's a weird little script - serious
dialogue, serious performances -
like a drama anthology. But it's
science-fiction like Captain Video
or one of those other kids shows.

Rod leans in, biting his lip, anxious.

HUBBELL ROBINSON (CONT'D)
In some other universe, it could be
on Playhouse 90.

ROD SERLING
Do you like it?

HUBBELL ROBINSON
I'll make some calls, but... I don't
know if people are ready for this...

INT. OFFICE OF DESI ARNAZ - DAY

Bert Granet desperately searches filing cabinet after filing cabinet, looking through DUSTY SCRIPTS. An I LOVE LUCY poster is mounted beside glamorous HEADSHOTS OF DESI ARNAZ.

Superimpose the title, "Desilu Offices - 1958."

THE FAMOUS CUBAN-ACCENT CALLS FROM THE OTHER ROOM.

DESI ARNAZ (O.S.)
I don't like it, Bert! It's too
silly. Too Ricky Ricardo.

A COMEDY SCRIPT flies through the door.

BERT GRANET
Got it. No Ricky. More drama.

DESI ARNAZ (O.S.)
But not dour. Our brand still has
to say, "Fun!"

BERT GRANET
So you want serious and fun.

DESI ARNAZ (O.S.)
Something that'll grab their
attention. Something new!

Granet stops on a script: "The Twilight Zone: The Time Element by Rod Serling."

INT. HUBBELL ROBINSON'S OFFICE - DAY

A working lunch: Hubbell digs into a big CAESAR SALAD.

Suddenly, his PHONE RINGS.

DESI ARNAZ (V.O.)
Hub, it's Desi. Tell me about this
Rod Serling script.

HUBBELL ROBINSON
Velvet Alley? It's all about how
the industry corrupts a man-

DESI ARNAZ (V.O.)
Jesus, no! I mean the sci-fi one,
"The Time Element."

HUBBELL ROBINSON
Oh! It was a bit out there for us.

DESI ARNAZ (V.O.)
Exactly. It's like nothing we've ever
seen. We want it for the Playhouse.

INT. CBS TELEVISION CITY: HALLWAYS - DAY

BAM! A DOOR SWINGS OPEN. Bert Granet in the lead, Rod right
behind. Moving everywhere: people, props, even Lassie the dog.

BERT GRANET
Did you catch it?

ROD SERLING
Bits - Jodi gave me the flu.

BERT GRANET
Well Westinghouse let most of it
through: the war, the guilt,
everything. Didn't feel heavy - all
part of the fun mystery.

They pass THREE ACTORS IN GORILLA MASKS, all with MUSICAL
INSTRUMENTS - Ernie Kovacs' Nairobi Trio.

BERT GRANET (CONT'D)
No, what got them going was the
twist ending.

ROD SERLING
The ending? That's the clincher!

BERT GRANET
Desi had to go on after and
"reassure" the audience it was all
a dream.

Bert comes to a BIG BROWN DOOR, with the CBS EYE LOGO.

BERT GRANET (CONT'D)
Made me blood promise our show would
never air anything like that again-

INT. CBS TELEVISION CITY: CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Granet throws open the door on a TABLE FULL OF EXECUTIVES, deep in discussion. They include Hubbell Robinson - and at the head, Chairman Paley.

BERT GRANET

So we won't.

Rod stands in the open doorway. All eyes are on him.

And that's when he sees the mock-up on the wall, in stylized lettering: "The Twilight Zone."

HUBBELL ROBINSON

Rod...

CHAIRMAN PALEY

Serling - let's make a show.

EXT. RIDING SCHOOL - DAY

THUNDERING HOOVES, FLYING MUD, FLARED NOSTRILS.

JODI'S HORSE "HIGHBEAM" gallops forward at a ferocious pace - but Jodi rides in complete control, hard lines of determination etched into her 12-year old face.

Leaning against a FENCE, Carol and Rod watch on: Carol on top of the world, Rod in deep focus - trying to find his way out from underneath it, a forgotten cigarette burning away.

BUZZING - Rod watches as A FLY searches for a place to land.

CAROL SERLING (O.S.)

Will you have a chance to eat?

Carol startles him, pulling his attention away from the fly.

ROD SERLING

Only my vegetables.

He stubs his cigarette out. She rolls her eyes.

CAROL SERLING

But you have a green-light?

ROD SERLING

All but officially. ABC's putting the contract together now.

BZZT. The fly touches down on the fence. It crawls towards his hand - its dark, shiny eyes watch him.

CAROL SERLING

And if it falls through?

Rod hesitates, uncertain - and the fly inches closer.

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
Whatever happens, you'll have a
casserole ready and waiting.

SMACK - and she crushes the fly with her bare hand.

CAROL SERLING (CONT'D)
Yuck - gross.

She brushes it onto the GROUND, grimacing in disgust. Rod lets out a laugh, relieved. Sometimes a fly is just a fly.

ROD SERLING
All I need is you.

CAROL SERLING
Save it for the divorce file.

And she smiles.

INT. ABC OFFICES: ELEVATOR LOBBY - NIGHT

Three in a row: Margie, Rod, Ted, all waiting for the elevator. Ted's looking up, counting the floor numbers with eager anticipation. Rod's looking down, lost in thought.

Outside the windows, a cool night falls over the city. The lobby's completely empty. ONLY ONE SOUND: the QUIET DINGS of the approaching elevator.

TED ASHLEY
Be an even bigger paycheck - ABC
really wants to pull ahead.

Serling says nothing, but Margie can guess his thoughts.

MARGIE FLEMING
What about creative?

TED ASHLEY
They've got a great vision for the
show... you'll love it.

DING - and the doors pop open. It's the Feisty Actress from the post-apocalyptic episode, but now BLONDE. She beams.

TED ASHLEY (CONT'D)
Congratulations - I heard the news.
(to Rod and Margie)
You didn't hear it from me, but Liz
is headlining a brand new show. Also
with a little supernatural flair.

ROD SERLING
Supernatural? I don't know anything
about that stuff.

FEISTY ACTRESS
I play a witch.

As they cross paths, the trio getting on the elevator as she gets off it, the actress leans in to Rod.

FEISTY ACTRESS (CONT'D)
You following the marches in
Montgomery? They need our support.

Rod's surprised. Ted shifts uncomfortably.

ROD SERLING
Now that you're a star, they won't
like you mouthing off about race
relations.

FEISTY ACTRESS
Oh, I've already got the order from
on high to keep my mouth shut. But
I learned from you.

She wriggles her nose in the famous *Bewitched* manner.

FEISTY ACTRESS (CONT'D)
So fuck 'em, right?

The doors shut - and Rod's beaming.

INT. ABC OFFICES: CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Rod leans back in his chair, a contented grin on his face.

He gazes through a window out at a BEAUTIFUL STARRY NIGHT.

Then SHHKT! A man CLOSES THE WINDOW CURTAINS, killing the view. It's the Man with Silver Spectacles - THE SAME ABC EXEC who years ago, tempted Rod to abandon *The Twilight Zone*.

Rod's at one end of a long conference table with Margie and Ted, SHOW PROPOSALS in their hands. At the other end, the NETWORK PRESIDENT and his EXECUTIVES, all smiles.

The Man with Silver Spectacles walks to an EASEL OF KEY ART.

NETWORK PRESIDENT
Aubrey may still have the rights to
"Twilight Zone," but we've got
something way better.

The Man with Silver Spectacles flips to a STYLIZED TITLE:
"Rod Serling Presents... Witches, Warlocks, and Werewolves."

NETWORK PRESIDENT (CONT'D)
Witches, Warlocks, and Werewolves.
 Each week, a creepy little tale
 from the mind of Rod Serling. It's
 like Halloween year-round - the
 kids are gonna love it.

TED ASHLEY
 They even got Karloff locked in for
 the pilot.

ROD SERLING
 Did you look over my proposal?

NETWORK PRESIDENT
 We did. It's very creative, if a
 little too moody...

Another flip of the easel: this time, it's a mock-up of Rod
 Serling as lord of a graveyard, more handsome than ever, with
 a BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN-style lady on his arm. She bears a
 striking resemblance to the Tennis Starlet.

NETWORK PRESIDENT (CONT'D)
 TV's sexier now.

Rod can only crack a smile. He understands.

ROD SERLING
 A bit of broads, bosoms and fun?

NETWORK PRESIDENT
 Now you're getting it.

TED ASHLEY
 Tell him about the budget.

NETWORK PRESIDENT
 With what we're prepared to give
 you, whatever vision you have in
 your head, we can put on TV.

Another flip of the easel: a STILL from "The Monsters Are Due
 on Maple Street" - a neighborhood rioting.

NETWORK PRESIDENT (CONT'D)
 No more compromises.

MAN WITH SILVER SPECTACLES
 You did an episode about Monsters
 on Maple Street?

He flips again - and it's a reworking of the still with
 WEREWOLVES AND ZOMBIES now prowling "Maple Street."

MAN WITH SILVER SPECTACLES (CONT'D)
 We can give you real monsters.

And Serling suddenly finds himself surrounded by smiling cobras - and he knows what he needs to do.

ROD SERLING
It's not *Witches, Warlocks, and*
Werewolves. It's *The Twilight Zone*.

With that, he rises to his feet.

ROD SERLING (CONT'D)
And it's time for me to leave.

And so he does. Stunned, Ted and Margie follow.

Silence. The executives all look to each other.

NETWORK PRESIDENT
Well, we got a half-hour to fill.
Any ideas?

EXT. ABC OFFICES - NIGHT

THE WINDS ARE PICKING UP. The streets are cold, without a soul in sight.

Ted swings open the glass doors. Margie follows, pulling her coat tight, shivering.

Then comes Rod. The chill doesn't bother him. His eyes drift up to the stars above. So many of them.

TED ASHLEY
Forget that dreck. Who need witches
and wolves when you've got Rod
Serling Presents?

Ted pats Rod on the back.

TED ASHLEY (CONT'D)
Advertisers are huffing at my door.
Your brand is just beginning.

Serling nods, hardly listening. He says nothing as Ted leaves.

The show is gone, but Rod's at peace with it.

As Margie walks to her car, her eyes begin to water. THE WIND GROWS LOUDER.

THEN BEHIND HER - A COUGH.

She turns. Rod's down the street, his dad's lighter in hand, ready to spark another smoke. He stops.

THE WIND CUTS OUT. TOTAL SILENCE, AS -

He winks.

CUT TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK: "The following year, CBS investigated James Aubrey for receiving kickbacks from producers. Chairman Paley fired him within the year."

OVER BLACK: "On May 3, 1975, Rod Serling suffered the first of a series of heart attacks. He died two months later, at the age of 50. He wrote 92 of the 156 episodes of *The Twilight Zone*."

OVER BLACK: "'He dreamed of much for us, and demanded much of himself, perhaps more than was possible for either in this time and place. But it is that quality of dreams and demands that makes the ones like Rod Serling rare ...and always irreplaceable.'

- Gene Roddenberry, *Eulogy for Rod Serling*"

THE END.