

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay
by
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Seventh Draft
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A NOTE ON FORMATTING IN THIS SCRIPT

Two formats are employed in this draft. The first is the usual film script format. The second is a form of standard comic book script format. I have attempted to differentiate these by presenting the comics bits in 12-point Times. Each sequence of comics panels is further denoted by a separate, lettered slugline, thus: SEQUENCE A, SEQUENCE B, etc.

The standard abbreviations and notations used in comics script format are:

CAP = 'Caption'

SFX = 'Sound Effects'

OP = 'Off Panel' (like 'off screen,' i.e., the speaker is not in the frame)

(thought) = dialog presented in a "thought" balloon.

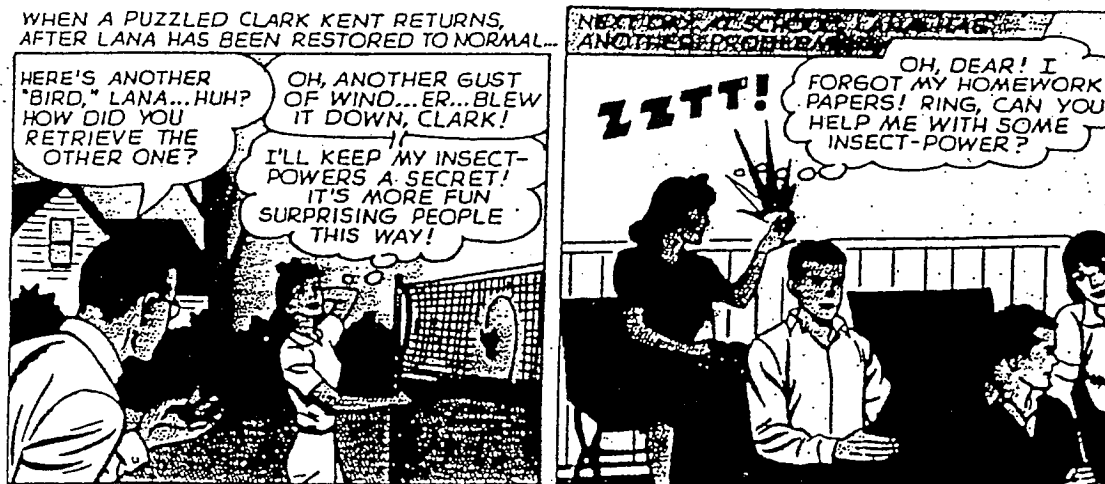
Sometimes dialog and captions are broken across two balloons or panels. This is notated with dashes, e.g.:

SUPERMAN: LOOK OUT, LOIS! THAT BROOCH YOU'RE
WEARING IS MADE OF--

SUPERMAN: --KRYPTONITE!!!

When dialog is used as a caption, it is placed into quotes.

Now, let's see this in action, using two panels from "The Insect Queen of Smallville," Superboy #124, October, 1965.



Here's how this would be scripted:

SEQUENCE A (2 panels)

Panel 1. Clark comes back with a new shuttlecock to find Lana casually bouncing the lost one up and down on her racquet.

CAP: WHEN A PUZZLED CLARK KENT RETURNS, AFTER LANA HAS BEEN RESTORED TO NORMAL...

CLARK: HERE'S ANOTHER "BIRD," LANA... HUH? HOW DID YOU RETRIEVE THE OTHER ONE?

LANA: OH, ANOTHER GUST OF WIND... ER... BLEW IT DOWN, CLARK!

LANA (thought): I'LL KEEP MY INSECT POWERS A SECRET! IT'S MORE FUN SURPRISING PEOPLE THIS WAY!

Panel 2. Lana sits at the back of her class, activating her alien insect-power ring. The other kids oblivious.

CAP: NEXT DAY, AT SCHOOL, LANA HAS ANOTHER PROBLEM...

LANA: OH, DEAR! I FORGOT MY HOMEWORK PAPERS! RING, CAN YOU HELP ME WITH SOME INSECT POWER?

SFX: ZZTT!

FADE IN:

FIRST PANEL

A penciled square, about 4" x 4". Corners ruled neat and true. Empty. Waiting to hold its own little piece of the story: The first piece.

A HAND

Enters the frame, clutching a pencil. It's the hand of the CARTOONIST. All we will ever see of him, more or less, is his middle-aged hand. An agile, workmanlike hand.

The Cartoonist begins to fill in the FIRST PANEL. His stroke is steady and bold, unhesitating. He has already seen, in his imagination, exactly what he is drawing. We watch it emerge in dark graphite lines:

A SINISTER PADLOCK

The evillest implement the mind of a locksmith ever devised. Welded to a pair of cruel handcuffs.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Did you ever think about that expression, somebody has "the key to your heart"?

CUT TO:

SEQUENCE A (3 panels)

Panel 1. The sinister padlock, fixed to a pair of nasty handcuffs.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

What does that say about the human heart?

Panel 2. A cutaway drawing of the padlock. A complex mechanism. Its pins and drivers and toothed cams seem to pulse like the works of a heart.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I've been thinking about where to begin my story. And I keep coming back to Harry Houdini and the Mirror Escape of 1904. It was one of Joe Kavalier's favorite Houdini stories.

CUT TO:

THE HAND

at work on a THIRD PANEL. An Edwardian gentleman, A REPORTER, standing on the grand state of the Hippodrome Theater. Holding the cuffs toward the audience.

CUT TO:

Panel 3. An Edwardian gentleman in a dinner jacket brandishes the cuffs with the evil lock. Behind him we glimpse a theater curtain, a proscenium.

AUDIENCE (OP):

BOOOOO! BOOOOO!

CUT TO:

INT. HIPPODROME THEATER - LONDON - 1904

Onstage. As the GENTLEMAN brandishes the cuffs, the audience BOOS gleefully. The Gentleman grins and passes the cuffs to HARRY HOUDINI.

CARTOONIST (V.O.):

This happened in 1904, at the Hippodrome Theater, in London. The Mirror newspaper had challenged Houdini to get out of these truly horrendous cuffs. And then invited a thousand people to watch.

Houdini eyes the handcuffs, leery.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

These cuffs featured a famous type of very nasty lock known as a Bramah. The first guy to pick the Bramah, in 1851, was A.C. Hobbs, the greatest lockpick of his age. It took him 44 hours.

Houdini brandishes the cuffs. The crowd cheers wildly.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Houdini had an hour at the most. And a thousand people watching.

The cuffs are snapped shut on Houdini's wrists. Houdini mugs, and scowls, and pretends to look worried. The Reporter twists the key six times.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And the Mirror Cuffs locked with a double Bramah lock, one Bramah nested inside the other. It was just not a lock somebody could ever get open in an hour.

INT. HIPPODROME STAGE - HOUDINI'S 'GHOST HOUSE' - DAY

The painted, curtained cabinet he uses to do his work. Houdini yanks the curtain aside with a foot. The crowd cheers more wildly than ever.

Stepping in, Houdini glances back, over his shoulder. Worried.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Just before he steps into the booth--his cabinet of mysteries, he called it--to start in on that impossible lock, Houdini looks over at his wife, Bess, who's standing there like always.

BESS HOUDINI stands to one side, elegant, petite, bird-like. But with an air of strength. Houdini's rock.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She was there with him from the early days, the crappy sideshows, the dime museums. She knows her husband's face. She can read him.

He steps into the cabinet, turns, looks right at Bess.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He's licked, and he knows it. The next time he steps out of the cabinet, he's going to be washed up. Ruined. She can see the fear in his eyes.

Bess, wearing a brave face.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I always wonder what it was like to be Mrs. Houdini.

SEQUENCE B (3 panels)

Panel 1. Bess Houdini's lovely face. Big and sad as a girl in a Lichtenstein.

BESS (thought):

WHAT DRIVES HIM TO IT?

Panel 2. Houdini sitting down inside the magic cabinet. The reporter holds a braided cord.

BESS (thought):

WHAT IF THE TRAP HE'S ALWAYS TRYING TO ESCAPE FROM IS REALLY--

Panel 3. Close up on Houdini's eyes. Staring at her from the shadows of the cabinet.

BESS (THOUGHT)

--MY LOVE?

Panel 3. The reporter jerks on the cord.

REPORTER

GOOD LUCK, MR. HOUDINI!!!

CUT TO:

INT. HIPPODROME STAGE - HOUDINI'S GHOST HOUSE - DAY

The curtain falls across the cabinet door. It says HOUDINI in golden letters.

CUT TO:

A FRAMED PORTRAIT

On a wallpapered wall. A bold-faced man with a radioactive gaze. HOUDINI (1879-1927)

INT. BERNARD KORNBLUM'S APARTMENT - PRAGUE, 1935

Pull back to reveal the portrait hanging over the bed of BERNARD KORNBLUM. Next to an engraving of old Jerusalem.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Joe Kavalier learned the art of escape, in the city of Prague, from a retired conjurer named Bernard Kornblum...

BERNARD KORNBLUM, elderly but vigorous, sits atop a packing crate in his shabby Josefov apartment, smoking a black cigarette. Drinking his glass of tea and reading a Yiddish newspaper. Perfectly at his ease.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...who claimed to have studied with Houdini as a young man. Kornblum taught that the first enemy of the escape artist was claustrophobia.

A faint SCRATCHING sound. A soft GRUNT. Kornblum consults his pocket watch; concerned.

KORNBLUM

Herr Kavalier?

JOE

(muffled, from the crate)
I am fine, sir.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

All escape artists suffer from it to one degree or another.

INT. INSIDE THE CRATE - CONTINUOUS

Darkness, JOE'S PULSE, his irregular BREATHING.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Joe's case was one of the worst that Kornblum had ever seen.

INT. KORNBLUM'S LODGINGS - CONTINUOUS

Kornblum stands up, folds his paper. Sighs. Stoops to unlatch the hasps of the crate.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

The first thing they had to accustom the boy to tight spaces. Then they could start on locks and chains.

He helps JOSEF (Joe) KAVALIER, a boy of 15, out of the crate. Joe takes heaving breaths, drenched in sweat, sobbing. Kornblum pours a shot of slivovitz, hands it to him. Puts an arm around his shoulders.

INT. KAVALIER APARTMENT - DAY

The Kavaliers sit at breakfast on a sunny spring morning. The two DOCTORS KAVALIER and THOMAS KAVALIER, 7. Joe bites into something, winces and cries out in pain.

CARTOONIST

Joe's parents paid for the lessons, but they didn't really understand them.

HERR DR. KAVALIER

What is it?

THOMAS

(admiring)

He has a wrench in his mouth.

Joe spits out something, a ting!

A tiny wrench lies on the edge of his plate.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Houdini always hid a wrench in his cheek.

The parents look at each other and shake their heads.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER

Houdini suffered from a sublimated terror of death and physical decay, which he expressed through suicidal acts of self-mutilation. Is this something we ought to be concerned about with you?

Joe rubs at his jaw, sheepish. He shakes his head.

INT. KAVALIER FLAT - BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

From the speaker of a gramophone floats the voice of Adelina Patti singing "Vissi d'arte." Opera posters on the wall.

Thomas lies on his bed, writing on a pad. Singing along in flawless Italian, his voice thin but clear and sweet. Joe sits on the other bed, tinkering with a lock. The aria ends.

JOE

So how's your opera coming?

THOMAS

I'm just to the part where Houdini crosses over to the land of the dead to visit his mother.

JOE

Sounds like hot stuff.

THOMAS
(deadpan)
It's quite brilliant. How is your
training coming? Are you becoming a
master of escape?:

Joe peers into the lock.

JOE
I am going to be a master of escape very
soon.

He blows into it, hard. A cloud of dust shoots back at him.
He coughs.

INT. KORNBLUM'S LODGINGS - ANOTHER LESSON

Kornblum winds Joe in chains.

Snaps the clasp of a giant Yale Dreadnought lock.

He helps Joe climb into a canvas sack. He ties up the canvas
sack. Stands away. The sack lurches, then tips over. A
loud CLANK.

JOE
Ouch!

Kornblum sits watching the heavy mailbag wriggling on the
floor in front of him. The locks UNSNAPS. Chains CLINK.

JOE (CONT'D)
(muffled)
I'm out.

KORNBLUM
Not yet, you aren't.

A RAZOR BLADE

pokes through the bag from the inside.

JOE'S HANDS

appear through the tear, and he rips open the sack. He
crawls through the hole and leaps to his feet, grinning.

Kornblum consults his watch. Nods.

KORNBLUM (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Six minutes. That is more than
acceptable. Admirable, even.

Joe is flushed with pleasure, exhilaration.

Kornblum reaches into his pocket and takes out a small rolled
bundle. Reluctance in his eyes, and also pride.

Joe unrolls the bundle. Finds a collection of picks.

KORNBLUM (CONT'D)
I made them myself. They will be reliable.

INT. KAVALIER FLAT - BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

The boys sit on Joe's bed in the room they share.

THOMAS
They're beautiful.

JOE
He made them himself.

THOMAS
Using his mental powers?

JOE
Using the gas ring on his stove and some old bicycle spokes. Real magicians don't believe in magic.

Thomas looks very disappointed to hear this.

JOE (CONT'D)
I wonder what my first stunt should be. As a professional, I mean.

THOMAS
What about the canvas bag?

JOE
"The canvas bag." That's old hat.

THOMAS
So, what else can you do?

There is nothing else. Joe frowns. Then he brightens.

ICE CUBES

float in a bathtub full of water, softly jingling. A dark shape quivers beneath, then bursts through. It's Joe, blue and shivering. He lets out a huge breath.

INT. KAVALIER APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Thomas sits on the toilet, with a stopwatch.

THOMAS
Three minutes and thirty-eight seconds.

JOE
Not long enough. It's going to take me at least four.

Joe climbs out--he's naked--and towels off. Shuddering.

THOMAS
I have some very bad news. There is a grave weakness in your scheme.

JOE
Which is?

THOMAS
Once you're in the bag, how do you get into the water?

JOE
You're going to push me.

THOMAS
You mean I get to be your assistant?

JOE
Not my assistant. My confederate.

Thomas beams.

EXT. PRAGUE - NIGHT

The boys, weighed down with gear, creep along a twisting, dark street. A car whips past. They freeze. Silence.

THOMAS
Excuse me. I want to go home.
(beat)
I know how annoying that must be. But I--

JOE
So go home.

Joe keeps walking. After a long moment, Thomas follows.

EXT. CHARLES BRIDGE - NIGHT

Joe stands, chained, on the bridge. Thomas's hands are shaking so hard he can hardly set the lock.

THOMAS
Someone will see us.

JOE
Then they can spread the word. The crowd tomorrow night will be even bigger.

THOMAS
Did you really invite every magician in Bohemia?

JOE
Every member of the Hofzinser Magic Club.
All two hundred and nine.

He steps into the sack, then pulls it up over his head.

JOE (CONT'D)
(muffled)
Tie it up.

EXT. CHARLES BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Joe, in the sack, waddles to the side of the bridge. Thomas helps him up onto the balustrade. The odd canvas bundle lies there a moment, as if in doubt. The wind is cold. The river below is black and swift.

JOE
(muffled)
Push, Tom.

THOMAS
No, no, it isn't safe. You'll drown.

JOE
Push, god damn it!

Thomas pushes. The sack plummets, hits, splashes. And disappears. Thomas peers over the railing, wondering.

THOMAS
Josef! Help!

Panicked, he scrambles onto the railing. Takes a deep breath and holds it. And JUMPS into the river.

EXT. IN THE RIVER MOLDAU - CONTINUOUS

Almost immediately Thomas begins to drown.

Joe pops up behind him. He's not doing much better.

They cling to one another. Joe tries to hold Thomas up. They're sinking, coughing, sputtering and thrashing.

A stout rope hits Joe smack in the face. He grabs it.

We see Kornblum standing on the bank, holding the other end of the rope.

KORNBLUM
Don't panic! Grab the rope!

He struggles to reel in the boys.

INT. A HOSPITAL WARD - NIGHT

Joe, in dry clothes, with his parents. His hand is bandaged, but he seems more or less fine.

HERR DR. KAVALIER
We are forever in your debt, Herr Kornblum.

KORNBLUM
On the contrary. I am forever in yours.
The first duty is not to endanger other
people with the act of escape. I failed
to teach this to your son. Of course
I'll return all the fees for the lessons.

HERR DR. KAVALIER
Nonsense. We won't hear of it.

JOE
Mother, when can I see Thomas?

INT. THE CHILDREN'S WARD - NIGHT

Joe and his parents stand by Thomas's bed. The boy lies
asleep. He is pale, his breathing congested.

HERR DR. KAVALIER
He has lost the hearing in his left ear.
Possibly the right as well.

Joe bows his head in shame. Tears on his face.

JOE
I'm sorry. I never meant--

FRAU DR. KAVALIER
I wish I understood what it is about us
that you feel you need so badly to
escape. In my opinion you have been
unusually fortunate in your choice of
parents.

JOE
It isn't you. I don't know what it is.
I... I just have a knack for it.

The parents look at each other. The father's expression more
forgiving than the mother's.

HERR DR. KAVALIER
It's not the worst kind of knack a young
man in these times could possess.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER
It doesn't matter. This adventure is
over. Give me those picks. Now.

Joe starts to argue, then nods. Reaches into his pocket.
Hands over the little roll of tools.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER (CONT'D)
No more escapes. Find a new hobby.

Joe hesitates, then nods.

INT. BOYS' BEDROOM - WEEKS LATER

Bad British swing plays over the radio. The opera posters are all gone from the walls.

Joe lies on his bed with pad and pencils and a movie magazine. He's copying a photo of Pola Negri posing at Cannes in a bathing suit.

In his version--crude but promising--there's no bathing suit.

Thomas looks in over his shoulder. Impressed.

THOMAS

Is it really like that?

JOE

I believe it really is.

A KNOCK. Herr Doktor K. sticks his head in.

HERR DR. KAVALIER

Boys.

They look up. They know what he's come to say.

JOE

Is he on?

HERR DR. KAVALIER

Yes, but you don't have to listen.

INT. KAVALIER FLAT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The four Kavaliers sit around a cathedral of a Siemens. The voice of Hitler, haranguing, rings out. The man is really on a tear.

Hitler's voice continues OVER:

SEQUENCE C (3 panels)

Panel 1. A map of central Europe, photocopied from an old atlas. Little pasted in flags poke up from Germany, Austria, Alsace. On the flags are drawn little steins of foamy beer.

CAP:

IN 1935 THERE WERE MILLIONS OF ETHNIC
GERMANS LIVING ALL AROUND CENTRAL
EUROPE.

THE CARTOONIST'S HAND

Holds scissors. He's cutting out another Beer Flag, drawn on a piece of thin card.

Panel 2. Hitler's head and shoulders and gesturing arm. Behind him a great dais, hung with swastikas.

HITLER:

SOMETHING THREATENING IN GERMAN.

CAP:

HITLER CLAIMED THESE GERMANS FOR
GERMANY, AND TOLD THEM TO SIT TIGHT--*Panel 3.* The map again, but zoomed in on Czechoslovakia.

CAP

--GERMANY WOULD COME TO THEM.

THE HAND

pastes a new flag onto eastern Czechoslovakia.

INT: BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Frau Doktor has now joined everyone else around the little
radio.

JOE

He's talking about Czechoslovakia.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER

No, he isn't.

THOMAS

He's talking about us!

FRAU DR. KAVALIER

Not us, darling. He's only talking about
the Sudeten. There are a lot of Germans
there.

HERR DR. KAVALIER

"Only the Sudeten." Good God. There are
a lot of Germans in Prague, too!

He gets up and snaps off the radio.

HERR DR. KAVALIER (CONT'D)

I can't stand the sound of that man's
voice.

INT. KAVALIER FLAT - BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

The boys lie side by side in their beds. Wide awake.

THOMAS

He talks a lot about Jews.

JOE

Always.

THOMAS

And he blames Jews for everything bad?

JOE

Everything.

A beat.

THOMAS
We're Jewish, aren't we?

Real fear in the question. Joe hears it, tries to think of the right answer.

JOE
We're Czechoslovakians.

INT. VAUDEVILLE HOUSE - DAY - 1935

A seedy house, half full. In the audience sit a still-young ETHEL KLAYMAN and her 12-year-old son SAMMY.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
Now we're going to cross the Atlantic, to Brooklyn, New York, and an entirely different kind of act.

ON THE STAGE

A small, powerful MAN, in tights and trunks, with "MM" on his chest. A title card or banner reads: THE MIGHTY MOLECULE. A stout plank laid across his shoulders. Three AUDIENCE MEMBERS are standing on it. A FAT WOMAN waits to climb the stepladder that leads up to the plank.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The Molecule was in town for the first time in nearly five years.

ON SAMMY'S FACE

Fear, wonder, pride, horror... as the audience CHEERS. Stuffing his face with popcorn.

Ethel is 44, a few strands of steel in her pinned-up black hair. She watches intently, too, but with a frown on her face.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Sammy had never seen his father's act before.

As Fat Woman mounts, we're on the Molecule's face. The strain. The sweat. The grin. He's probably a little too old for this. But he bears it, and slowly rises to his full height, with four big humans on his shoulders.

ON SAMMY'S FACE

No child has ever admired a man more. Awestruck.

INT. VAUDEVILLE HOUSE - DRESSING ROOM - DAY

The Molecule, in a towel, gets worked over by a burly masseur. Smoking a big cigar. A KNOCK.

MOLECULE
(Russian accent)
Come in.

The door opens. Ethel's there, shaking her head, smiling, disapproving but clearly happy to see him.

MOLECULE (CONT'D)
Where's my little partner?

Sammy steps out from behind his mother.

The Molecule stands up, arms spread wide. Sammy goes to him, as fast as he can. He walks with a crutch and there are braces on his legs. The Molecule picks him up and we go into a kind of slow motion as Sammy soars skyward in his father's arms, eyes closed, in ecstasy.

EXT. CONEY ISLAND - BOARDWALK - DAY

Ethel and the Molecule walking, with Sammy on his father's shoulders.

ETHEL
How long is the booking at the Warner?

Sammy listens for the answer to this question.

MOLECULE
Just a week.

Sammy's face creases a little.

MOLECULE (CONT'D)
But who knows? If the weekend gate is decent, they may extend the run.
(sounds hollow)
Anyway, even a week, it's enough to work on those broomstick legs, eh, partner?

INT. CLAY APARTMENT - DAY

Sammy sits in a chair, in his boxers and an undershirt. A crude "MM" drawn on the undershirt. The Molecule crouches beside him, gripping one of his frail legs. Ethel's watching from the doorway.

MOLECULE
Bend it. That's it. Bend it!

SAMMY
I'm bending it!

MOLECULE
Bend it more. Come on, partner. You must to be strong. Here is New York City. If you are weak they will eat you.

Sammy's face. The strain. The sweat. And then a grin. The Molecule cries out in mock pain and tumbles to one side as Sammy's leg kicks free. Sammy laughs in delight.

MOLECULE (CONT'D)
 Attaboy! Here. Now swing this.

Hands him a dumbbell.

MOLECULE (CONT'D)
 We don't forget the arms.

Sammy looks at the dumbbell, starts to curl it, watching his tiny arm muscles flex.

FADE TO:

A KAVALIER DRAWING OF A MUSCULAR MALE ARM

Vibrant line, suggestive shadow, true contour, hint of sensuality. An accomplished work.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 Four years after they first heard Hitler say the word "Sudetenland", the German Army invaded and occupied Czechoslovakia.

INT. STUDIO - PRAGUE ACADEMY OF FINE ART - 1939

A nude MALE MODEL, in the same pose but looking somehow less alive than in Joe's drawing.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 By this time Joe was enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts.

Joe, a young man now, sits at an easel, in a row of easels, in a room filled with easels. He is a good-looking kid: serious face, aesthete-slender but broad in the shoulders. An air of competence beyond his years.

On one wall of the classroom, isolated, hangs a portrait of Adolf Hitler.

AN INSTRUCTOR strolls the aisles, declaiming in Czech and pointing to various flaws in the STUDENTS' work.

Joe adds a ripple of shadow in the hollow of the model's throat.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 It took the new regime a month to find him there.

The studio door opens. A SCHOOL OFFICIAL enters. An apologetic, gentle man with thinning hair and a neat moustache. He consults a clipboard.

SCHOOL OFFICIAL

By special order of Reichsprotector Heydrich, the following students are hereby dismissed from further attendance at the State Academy of Fine Arts.

Silence as a dreadful certainty sinks in.

SCHOOL OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

Abzug, Renata. Einstein, Martin.
Glanzman, Gabrielle. Kavalier, Josef...

He names seven or eight more. The marked students look at each other. The other students look away. Then, in slow shock or with angry haste, the Jews gather their paintboxes and portfolios together and walk out.

Joe just keeps on drawing, his gaze intent on the nude.

SCHOOL OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

Herr Kavalier. Herr Kavalier!

Joe looks up, defiant.

INT. ACADEMY CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Policemen, with swastika armbands, wrestle Joe down the hall, punching and hitting him as he fights back.

I/E ACADEMY - CONTINUOUS

They throw him out the front door. He tumbles down the steps. His portfolio comes sailing after him. It hits the ground, pops open. Sheets of tag, vellum, paintings on board, all go flying. Land in puddles and mud.

Joe rises, face bloody. Slowly gathers his work.

CUT TO:

SEQUENCE D (8 panels)

Panel 1. The entrance to a Prague municipal park. A group of children, holding a soccer ball, stand in front of a sign that reads: JUDEN VERBOTEN.

CAP:

EXPULSION FROM STATE SCHOOLS IS
ONLY THE BEGINNING FOR THE JEWS OF
PRAGUE.

Panel 2. The children run and play. Except for one, Thomas, who has stayed behind, by the sign.

Panel 3. A prosperous couple on a train. They stand in the dining car. The waiter, frowning, points to a sign posted on the wall: JUDEN VERBOTEN.

CAP:

DINING CARS AND SLEEPING CARS ON
STATE RAILWAYS—

Panel 4. A woman laden with bags stands on the curb, looking up at a streetcar. The conductor blocks the doorway. Beside him, a sign: JUDEN VERBOTEN.

CAP: —STREETCARS, BANKS, POST OFFICES, ALL ARE PUT OFF LIMITS.

Panel 5. The Kavaliers' bedroom. Late at night. Frau Dr. Kavalier sits up in bed. Herr Dr. Kavalier stalks at the foot.

CAP: SOME TAKE COMFORT IN THE NOTION THAT IT CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS FOREVER—

CAP: OTHERS FIND THIS A CHILLING THOUGHT.

HERR DR. K: WE HAVE TO LEAVE. NOW.

Panel 6. The Emigration Office. A huge line of Jewish Praguers trails out the door, down the hall. At the end is Herr Dr. K.

CAP: BUT THE BARRIERS TO EMIGRATION ARE HIGH. AND THE PRICE IS VERY STEEP.

Panel 7. A pawn shop. Frau Dr. Kavalier is pawning her jewelry. Pained but dignified. The clerk leers.

FRAU DR. K: WAS HOPING FOR A LITTLE MORE. THESE SAPPHIRES ARE FLAWLESS. THEY'RE HEIRLOOMS...

CLERK: YOU DON'T LIKE MY OFFER, GO SOMEPLACE ELSE. YOU WON'T DO ANY BETTER. PRAGUE IS CHOKING ON JEWISH HEIRLOOMS.

Panel 8. In the bedroom again. The parents sit facing each other on the bed in dressing gowns. A small pile of cash between them. Frau Dr. Kavalier's head is buried in her hands.

HERR DR. K: THERE'S BARELY ENOUGH HERE FOR ONE OF US.

FRAU DR. K: THEN WE WILL SEND ONLY ONE OF US.

CUT TO:

INT. KAVALIER FLAT - FOYER - DAY

Joe comes thumping down the hallway with his valise. Thomas and Herr Doktor are waiting. Joe stops.

JOE
Where's Mother?

HERR DR. KAVALIER
She... went ahead. There's so much to do in the new place, it's filthy...

JOE
(upset)
She isn't going to say goodbye?

HERR DR. KAVALIER
You said goodbye last night.

JOE
We shook hands!

HERR DR. KAVALIER
She isn't much for goodbyes, your mother.

INT. PRAGUE - CENTRAL BAHNHOF - DAY

The platform is crowded. The Kavaliers struggle through the mass toward the train. It's crowded, too.

INT. BAHNHOF PLATFORM - DAY

Joe reaches the steps of the train. Turns to his father.

HERR DR. KAVALIER
Well! Here you are, then! Say hello to my little sister for me.

He starts to break up, but fights it back.

JOE
I will.

They look at each other. Start to move toward each other for an embrace. Stop. Shake hands.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER (O.S.)
Josef!

JOE
(delighted)
Mother!

She comes fighting her way upstream against the mass of people toward Joe. Takes him into her arms.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER
You have the money? The visa? Passport?

JOE
I have everything. All in order. I have all seventeen of the required stamps.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER
There's one more thing you'll need.

Draws him to one side. Studies his face. Looking at it for perhaps the last time. Presses something into his hand.

JOE
What is it?

THE SET OF PICKS

Joe looks down at them, confused.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER

This is going to be your greatest feat.

A SOLDIER pushes her.

SOLDIER

You're causing a traffic jam.

Joe gets shoved from behind, and then his parents and Thomas get pushed in the other direction.

Thomas, with his parents, turns to see what has become of Joe. Can't find him. He starts to hop up and down, trying to see over people's heads.

Joe is hopping up and down, too. They catch sight of each other over the sea of heads.

INT. KORNBLUM'S BUILDING - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Joe trudges up the stairs toward Kornblum's door. A group of SEVEN MEN are coming down. Each is a type of Jew of the time, a prosperous businessman, a tradesman, a beggar, a rabbi, a doctor, etc.

Joe takes the wall to make room for them. They are carrying on a whispered argument in a mishmash of German, Czech and Yiddish. Seven squabbling Jews from a Singer short story. Only the BEGGAR tips his hat.

Joe continues up to the door. Knocks.

Kornblum opens, expecting one of Seven, baffled to see Joe. Studies his tear-stained face.

KORNBLUM

(a bitter guess)

There was a problem with your papers.

JOE

Apparently I am missing one stamp.

Awkwardly Kornblum puts an arm around him.

INT. KORNBLUM'S FLAT - NIGHT

Kornblum sits Joe down in a chair. Joe takes out a cigarette. Kornblum lights it.

KORNBLUM

What did your parents say?

JOE

My parents! They pawned everything they had to put me on that train today.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

I can't tell them. It would break their hearts.

Reaches into his pants. Rummages around. Comes out with a fat battered billfold.

JOE (CONT'D)

I need your help. Your expertise.

He hands the billfold to Kornblum.

JOE (CONT'D)

My passage from Antwerp to New York City is already paid. I can give you all of this. It's enough for your expenses and you will have some left over, too. You need money.

KORNBLUM

Money is useful.

Kornblum peeks inside the billfold, raises an eyebrow.

KORNBLUM (CONT'D)

I can't get you to France. That's beyond my powers.

Joe looks crushed.

KORNBLUM (CONT'D)

But as it happens, I have just now been asked to help produce an escape from Prague.

Joe looks toward the door.

JOE

Those men? So many...!

KORNBLUM

Not them. A... friend... of theirs.

He hands back the billfold.

KORNBLUM (CONT'D)

I can get you to Vilna, in Lithuania. From there you will have to find your own way.

JOE

Lithuania?

KORNBLUM

I am afraid so.

EXT. PRAGUE STREET - NIGHT

Kornblum and Joe creep along. A truck full of soldiers rolls past and they duck into a doorway.

EXT. MORTUARY - NIGHT

A tiny storefront, its sign dimly lit.

JOE

It's a dead person?

Kornblum looks professionally Mysterious. He produces a pick, works the lock, and then he and Joe step inside.

INT. MORTUARY - WORKROOM - NIGHT

Old yellowing tiles and stainless steel. A single enormous coffin on a pair of trestles. Kornblum goes over to it and lifts the lid. Joe peers in.

JOE

It's a statue.

We get a glimpse of an impassive face, a powerful frame, the whole bulk gray and lifeless.

KORNBLUM

Possibly. Those seven men you saw, they believe it is something more. And so, they fear, do the Nazis. It seems Hitler and his friends take an interest in the occult.

JOE

The occult.

He's clueless. Has no idea what he's looking at.

KORNBLUM

It's a golem!

JOE

Is it? I saw the film.

INSERT

A film clip from *Der Golem*, Wegener, 1921. A man in a (pretty cool) Golem suit looms in a doorway.

BACK TO KORNBLUM AND JOE

KORNBLUM

The film! That's what you know about Golems!

JOE

It's a Jewish thing, isn't it?

KORNBLUM

(totally earnest)

This is the Golem of Prague! The great secret weapon of your great-great-grandfathers! Defender of the ghetto!

(MORE)

KORNBLUM (CONT'D)
 Protector of poor Jews of Prague! Shaped
 by the hands of the great Rabbi Judah
 Loew from the mud of the River Moldau!

JOE
 You're saying there really was a Golem?

KORNBLUM
 (totally dismissive)
 You know I don't believe in magic.

Joe studies the lifeless figure, runs his fingers over the
 clay forehead, still half believing. Sniffs.

JOE
 It does smell like the river.

Dialog continues OVER.

MONTAGE - PREPARING THE COFFIN

Kornblum and Joe sawing the lid a third of the way along,
 attaching extra hinges and a clasp to make a viewing panel
 by the head.

KORNBLUM (V.O.)
 As long as those gentlemen are pulling
 strings to let an enormous doll travel to
 Lithuania, I don't see any reason you
 can't tag along. There is room down at
 the bottom

They remove the lower end panel of the coffin with a crowbar.

JOE (V.O.)
 But if someone opens it? If they see?

They saw off the nails that hold it in place.

They tap the 'gaffed' panel back into place.

KORNBLUM (V.O.)
 They will see what we want them to see.

Kornblum goes to a wardrobe at the back of the workroom,
 starts to go through the clothes hanging there.

They wrestle the Golem in an enormous jacket and pants. Tie
 his tie.

Kornblum works with a makeup brush, the mortician's kit at
 his side.

KORNBLUM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 That's the only real magic I know.

INT. MORTUARY - WORKROOM - NIGHT

Now they test the whole thing: open the latch.

KORNBLUM

You see? We let them open this part to
look in. We invite them to do so.

He lifts the hinged panel cut from the lid. And there's the Golem's head and chest. Golem looks pretty much like a big dead guy, a touch of William Bendix. Kornblum lowers the lid, snaps the clasp.

EXT. MORTUARY - DAY

Early morning gray. A hearse rolls out of the alleyway behind the Mortuary. The teamster, in cap and coverall, is Bernard Kornblum.

A dignified-looking bum lies on sidewalk. He watches the hearse emerge. He looks up at Kornblum, who nods solemnly.

A BANGING, muffled but distinct, is coming from inside the hearse.

The bum is horrorstruck by the implication.

Kornblum shrugs apologetically.

KORNBLUM

It happens sometimes.

EXT. A BACK ALLEY - DAY

Kornblum hauls open the rear door of the hearse. Climbs in.

KORNBLUM

Are you out of your mind?

INT. HEARSE - CONTINUOUS

Joe's voice issues from the coffin.

JOE

(muffled)

I have to see my brother!

KORNBLUM

We can't afford any delays.

JOE

I have to see him! Sir! Sir, please!

He sounds a little panicked. Kornblum tries to remain steely. A beat.

KORNBLUM

Ten minutes.

He grabs a hammer, starts to pry open the gaffed panel.

EXT. GHETTO STREET - DAY

Children playing in a schoolyard. The hearse rolls into the street. It stops near the children. One of them is Thomas.

Thomas looks up and recognizes Kornblum. Kornblum nods slowly, then cocks his head toward the next corner. Thomas gets it. As the hearse rolls on, Thomas runs to the edge of the schoolyard, slips out, rounds the corner.

EXT. THE STREET - DAY

Thomas runs up to the hearse. Kornblum gestures toward the back of the wagon.

I/E THE HEARSE - DAY

Thomas climbs in. Sees the enormous coffin and a pile of blankets. Thomas looks confused, even a little worried.

Joe pops out of the blankets, making Karloffian noises. Thomas screams.

JOE

Thomas! No! It's me.

Thomas bursts into tears. Joe takes him into his arms.

THOMAS

You're supposed to be in Belgium!

INT. HEARSE - MOMENTS LATER

Thomas is gazing at the coffin nervously.

THOMAS

Is there really a dead person in there?

JOE

No, Tom. There is... a figure. A kind of statue... I will be crouched down by the legs.

THOMAS

Is there room for me? I'm very small for my age... It's quite freakish, really, how small I am... I could squeeze in by the head...

He stares at Joe, eyes pleading but without hope. Joe shakes his head, sadly, but strangely full of hope.

JOE

Thomas. I promise I'll send for you. I'll work hard, and make money. I will send for mother, and father. And you. Especially you. Next year we will all be standing on top of the Statue of Liberation.

THOMAS
(raising his arm)
Right on top of the sword? Do you swear?

JOE
I swear.
(smiling, in English)
Do we have a deal?

He holds out his hand. Thomas takes it. They shake. Thomas starts to climb out. Joe grabs him, pulls him to him, fiercely. Clutches Thomas, stroking his hair.

I/E HEARSE - CONTINUOUS

Thomas leaps from the back. Goes around to Kornblum.

THOMAS
Are you going to nail him inside it?

Kornblum nods.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
How will he get out?

KORNBLUM
Magic.

Kornblum tips his cap, then gives the reins a sharp tug. The hearse moves off. Thomas watches it go.

THOMAS
(to himself, in English)
We have a deal.

EXT. PRAGUE - CENTRAL BAHNHOF - NIGHT

Kornblum, as a mortician, supervises the loading of the coffin onto a train. It bears pasted labels reading HUMAN REMAINS in Russian, Polish, German, and English.

In a far corner of the platform stand the Seven Men. They watch in silence. Turn to each other, nod. Then they retreat into the shadows and disappear.

EXT. A FOREST IN POLAND - NIGHT

A locomotive hurtles through the winter twilight, past snow-covered trees, pulling boxcars.

INT. A BOXCAR - NIGHT

The big coffin lies among a variety of trunks and crates.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

SOLDIERS and CUSTOMS OFFICIALS wait on a windy platform.

INSERT TITLE:

POLAND-LITHUANIA BORDER

The train chugs groaning into the station. Stops. A pair of Red Army soldiers boards each car, followed by customs men.

INT. BOXCAR - NIGHT

TWO SOLDIERS enter the boxcar. They see the coffin, make directly for it. One speaks to the other in Russian. He goes to the coffin and looks around it.

SOLDIER 1

He must have been a big bastard.

SOLDIER 2

A giant.

One of them lifts the latch and they peer in.

SOLDIER 1

He's uglier than you, Volodya.

SOLDIER 2

Giants are always ugly.

SOLDIER 1

That's a fine suit. Get the axe.

INT. COFFIN - NIGHT

We can just make out Joe, stuffed down at the bottom of coffin, eyes wide with fear. Hears the soldiers talking

Joe gripped in panic, breathing hard.

SOLDIER 2 (O.S.)

Forget it. It smells like piss in there.

Darkness restored to the coffin. The latch SNAPS shut.

INT. BOXCAR - CONTINUOUS

They poke around the other crates, grab a few, heft them and climb down out of the car. They heave the door shut.

A CRACK of wood. The foot-panel of the coffin comes loose and falls off. Little by little, Joe shimmies out. He takes huge gulps of air, sobbing, hysterical.

INT. BOXCAR - CONTINUOUS

Joe, recovered, fits the panel back onto the coffin. He stands up, clutching a small rucksack. The train lurches GROANING.

EXT. BOXCAR - CONTINUOUS

The door slides open. The train is heaving slowly out of the station. Joe stands in the open doorway, getting his nerve up.

Leaps!

EXT. RAVINE - CONTINUOUS

Joe rolls down the side of the snowy embankment, into a ravine. Moans. Stands up shakily. Looks around.

He's in a weedy field that leads to some woods.

He takes off running, boots crunching in the snow. A tiny stick figure in a vast white expanse, headed for the distant trees.

CUT TO:

INT. CIRCUS SIDESHOW - SOMEWHERE IN THE STICKS - NIGHT

A BANNER reads THE MIGHTY MOLECULE and beneath this, STRONGEST JEW IN THE WORLD. A hick crowd watches as the Molecule sinks, inch by excruciating inch, under a plank loaded with seven farmhands and a small calf.

INT. BROOKLYN, NY - SAMMY'S BEDROOM - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Mighty Molecule posters and promo photos. Sammy watches himself in the mirror as he lifts a much larger dumbbell. He's 18 now, an intense fireplug with a sensitive-tough, John Garfield face, his upper body muscled, the braces gone. He lowers the dumbbell. Legs a little unsteady.

There's a knock. Ethel is standing there. Just looks at him, her expression grim.

SAMMY

What happened?

Tears well in her eyes and spill over.

ETHEL

Seven men and a cow.

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sammy watches his mother cry. Then he gets up and goes to her. Puts his arms around her.

After a moment she pulls free. The tears are gone.

ETHEL

He wasn't the best husband in the world.
But I'll miss that check every week.

SAMMY

I'll get a job. A real job.

EMPIRE NOVELTIES, INC. - OFFICES

A modest but thriving operation. STOCKCLERKS talk on the phone, taking orders. SHIPPING CLERKS pack boxes with items that are clearly labelled WHOOPEE CUSHION.

JOE KLAY's at a drawing board, dishevelled, forlorn. The work is not going well.

SHELDON ANAPOL, the owner of Empire Novelties, pokes his head out of his office, looking at Sammy.

ANAPOL

Klayman, where's my lizard?

KLAY holds up what he's drawn: a flattened squirrel.

ANAPOL (CONT'D)

And you ask me why I don't give you more art assignments around here. Just copy the one from the old ad. Here.

Tosses a comic book at Sammy. On the back cover a big ad reads Empire Novelties. Sammy turns it over. It's Detective Comics. He opens it. Stops at a panel of:

BATMAN AND ROBIN

Side by side. Batman's arm around Robin's shoulder.

A wistful look on Sammy's face.

KLAYMAN APARTMENT - DAY

Sammy lets himself in.

SAMMY

Ma?

ETHEL (O.S.)

In the kitchen.

SAMMY

Do we have any pictures of lizards in the house...

KLAYMAN APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Sammy as he walks in.

SAMMY

...or like any type of reptile --

Stops. Surprised. Curious. Faintly irritated.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Who's this guy?

Joe, bedraggled, sits at the table, a plate of stew in front of him. He eyes Sammy, curious and wary.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
To reach Brooklyn, New York Joe had crossed Siberia, Japan, the Pacific and the continental U.S. He had lost twenty-two pounds. He had no money left and no clear idea of where Brooklyn actually was.

JOE
I-- I am--

Ethel, overcome, grabs hold of Joe's cheeks and shakes his head fiercely from side to side.

ETHEL
He's my brother's son!

SAMMY
The one in Prague?

Ethel turns Joe's face to hers. Studies it. Tears in her iron eyes. Nods.

ETHEL
My brother Emil.

SAMMY
I thought there were two sons.

At this Joe's gaze hardens.

JOE
(fierce)
My brother is coming next.

Sammy nods, reaches out his hand and they shake.

SAMMY
Sam.

JOE
Josef.

SAMMY
"Yo-seff"?

JOE
(with an Americanish
accent)
You can call me Joe.

SAMMY

How did you get here? Where did you sail from?

He sits down at the table. Joe, looking somewhat reluctant, starts to fork up some of the mystery stew.

JOE

Nagasaki.

SAMMY

Nagasaki! What was that like? By the way, I wouldn't eat that if I were you.

Joe stops the fork just as its entering his mouth. Glances over at his aunt.

ETHEL

Don't listen to this smart aleck.

Joe tastes the stew. Puts down the fork.

JOE

To be the truth, the stomach is not so good, ever since when I was in Japan. I think perhaps I would most like to only have a little nap. I'm very tired.

SAMMY

Where is he going to sleep?

Ethel's visage is grim.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Ma, no. Oh, Jesus, you're kidding me.

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

City light coming in through the window. Joe and Sammy lie in the narrow bed, awkwardly side by side. Shadow of the fire escape on the bed. Sammy looks very unhappy with the situation.

JOE

Don't to worry. I am leaving the bed soon. I will find place to my self.

SAMMY

Oh, good, you have a plan.

JOE

Yes. I can start work tomorrow.

SAMMY

Tomorrow. That's very eager of you.

JOE

I need money. My mother, my father, my brother, I need a lot of money for them.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

I was given a chance, and I took it, and I left them there. Now I am here. And I want only to do one thing and that is keep my promise to them that I will work very hard and get a lot of money and take them out of there.

SAMMY

Huh. I, um, I'm sorry.

JOE

It's nothing you need to worry about.

SAMMY

Sure, I do! I worry about it! Look, I want to help you. What kind of work can you do?

JOE

I was hoping for some kind perhaps of commercial art. I can to draw. I attended the Academy of the Beaux-Arts.

Sammy gets up, excited, and turns on the light.

SAMMY

Yeah? You can draw?

JOE

Also magic tricks.

Sammy grabs a pad and some pencils and hands them to Joe.

SAMMY

Magic tricks I don't need so much. And forget about commercial art. Advertising, illustration... they don't hire guys like you and me.

Joe doesn't quite get it.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Those fields are pretty much restricted.

JOE

Meaning... Meaning no Jews?

Joe looks genuinely shocked.

SAMMY

Welcome to America. But there may be a possibility.

JOE

What is it?

SAMMY

Wait a minute. First let's see you draw.

JOE
What I should draw?

SAMMY
How about a lizard?

Joe quickly sketches a fine lizard.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Nice. Well, uh, Joe, this is actually...
kind of exciting. I may be able to get
you a job.

(points to desk)
You see that typewriter? That's mine.
I'm a writer.

Sounds phony even to him.

JOE
(skeptical)
Are you?

There's one honest way to answer this question, and it isn't:

SAMMY
Yes. Listen, I've been kicking around
this little idea lately... It's crazy,
but maybe you showing up... I think we
could really...

JOE
"Hit the big time!"

SAMMY
(amused)
Maybe.

JOE
I want to do this thing with the pencil
and typewriter. Please tell me what it
is.

Sammy grabs a copy of Action Comics and shoves it at Joe.

SAMMY
Ever hear of comic books?

INT. ANAPOL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Sammy stands in front of Anapol's desk. Joe's in a chair in
the corner, drawing on a large pad. There's a cot in the
corner and Anapol, huge in his undershirt, is shaving at a
little sink in the corner.

ANAPOL
Mr. Kavalier, I hope Mr. Klayman here
didn't indicate to you that I might have
some form of employment to toss your way.

Joe looks up at Sammy, confused. Sammy swallows. This is the moment of truth for him.

SAMMY

Yes, I did, Mr. Anapol. And the name is Clay, not Klayman.

ANAPOL

Clay. Is it still "Sammy?"

SAMMY

Actually, I'd prefer "Sam." Now, before you tell us to get lost, let me just ask you one question. One simple question. That's it. What have you got to lose?

Anapol sits down and takes a cigar from the box on his desk. Gets his cigar lit, then nods.

ANAPOL

Okay. So. Ask this one simple question of yours.

SAMMY

Why--

ANAPOL

He's an artist, your cousin?

SAMMY

Yeah. Now, tell me this. Why do they charge three times more for advertising space on the back cover of Action Comics than for any other comic book?

ANAPOL

This is about comic books.

SAMMY

Just bear with me.

ANAPOL

I'm supposed to say Superman.

SAMMY

A lot of kids are reading Superman, Mr. Anapol.

ANAPOL

Millions.

ON JOE

not listening. Lost in his drawing.

SEQUENCE E (1 panel)

Panel 1. A moonlit night in a twisted Prague lane. Bat flying across the moon. In the midst of it strides the Golem. Very UFA studios. Hasty and a little rough but evocative.

SAMMY (V.O.)

Think how much money we'd save if we had
a Superman of our own.

GOLEM:

THINK HOW MUCH MONEY WE'D SAVE IF
WE HAD A SUPERMAN OF OUR OWN!!!

INT. ANAPOL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

SAMMY

Think how many Amazing Midget Radios we
would sell!

ANAPOL

We?

SAMMY

You.

ANAPOL

I get myself a Superman of my own. Which
you will write, and that young man will
draw.

SAMMY

Yes, yes, and yes.

ANAPOL

No. I'm not a publisher, Mr. 'Clay.'
I'm in cheap novelties.

SAMMY

And novelties men are a cautious breed,
as a rule.

ANAPOL

That's right.

Joe looks up.

JOE

Comic books are novelty.

SAMMY

He's right. It's just like radio, Mr.
Anapol. RCA started NBC to sell RCA
radios. You aren't a publisher, but you
know publishers. You have contacts,
friends in the business.

ANAPOL

Let's say I lost control of my mental
faculties, became insane, and decided to
take a chance on this idea. What reason
do I have to believe you two can do it?

SAMMY

Well, I've read pretty much every comic book that has ever been published. And this guy really can draw.

He goes around to stand behind Joe, takes a look at his drawing. Impressed. He takes it from Joe and turns it to Anapol.

ANAPOL

That isn't...is that the Golem?

JOE

The golem is like Superman. Fighting for the poor and the weak peoples. Strong. Helpful.

SAMMY

Jewish.

Anapol grabs the drawing from Joe's hand.

ANAPOL

The Golem. That'll go over huge. Jewish folklore is a hot item in Nebraska.

Tosses the art into the trash. Then buttons his shirt.

ANAPOL (CONT'D)

The workroom is a mess, Mr. Clay. I'd like you to neaten it.

In shock, Joe and Sammy stumble out of the office.

INT. KLAYMAN APARTMENT - NIGHT

Joe and Sammy at the dinner table. Glum faced. Their mood not improved by what Ethel is ladling onto their plates. It's brown; there may be carrots involved.

Joe is trying to sketch but every time he makes room for the pad, Ethel puts something in the space. Finally she snatches the pad from him. Puts it on the sideboard.

ETHEL

So he'll go down to the HIAS agency on Monday. They help refugees get jobs. He can get work as a janitor if he has to.

Sammy looks at Joe. A janitor. Joe eyes the food queasily.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

At least you got that comic book nonsense over with.

She goes back into the kitchen. Sammy picks up a fork, toys with the food.

JOE
(whispers)
What is this stuff?

Sammy points to a jar of horseradish.

SAMMY
Well, that's horseradish. So this may be
pot roast.

They lift forkfuls but do not take a bite. Set their forks
down. Joe looks toward the kitchen, then eyes the drawing
pad. Picks it up. Starts to draw again.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Damn. I really thought he would go for
it, too.

JOE
You are throwing a towel?

SAMMY
It was a dumb idea.

JOE
It was not! I think your idea is a good
idea. And Anapol is not stupid. He was
interested--until he saw my drawing. The
fault was my fault. I can do better.

Shows Sammy what he's been drawing: a lithe figure in
tights, booted and gloved and masked. The quality of the
artwork is light-years beyond Superman.

SAMMY
Wow! That's-- wow. That's pretty good.

JOE
I have read three comic books now. I
think I'm starting to understand the
idea.

Ethel comes back in with a basket of rolls. Slams it down.
Do the rolls CHIME faintly, like metal Chinese balls?

ETHEL
Your parents will be delighted to hear
that.

SAMMY
(ignoring her)
You're saying we went in half-cocked
today?

JOE
Half...?

SAMMY
Not ready. Ill prepared.

JOE

I'm saying, just, let's work on it a little bit more.

Audible groans and snorts of disapproval from general direction of Ethel. Sam pointedly ignores them.

SAMMY

Okay.

Another snort.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

We'll work all weekend and go back in on Monday with a finished story.

JOE

No, with a whole book!

SAMMY

Great... but we'll need help. I know some guys. They live in this flop for cartoonists in Chelsea. Jerry Glovsky...

Loud groan. Sammy turns to her as if he has just remarked her presence.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

I take it you have an objection?

ETHEL

As a matter of fact, I have two objections. First, Jerry Glovsky's parents are first cousins. Second, I don't want you to waste another minute of your cousin's time with these garbagey magazines. Do you understand me, Sam?

SAMMY

No, and I never really have.

ETHEL

The jellied leg.

She pops up out of her chair.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

For some reason I always forget to put out the jellied leg.

The boys look at each other. Sammy picks up a roll, taps it against his plate. Definite CHIMING.

SAMMY

You have to get me out of this place.

EXT. CHELSEA - NEXT DAY

Joe and Sammy come up West Nineteenth toward an old red rowhouse. A dump.

SAMMY
There it is.

Joe and Sammy look up at the peeling rowhouse.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
It's even uglier on the inside.

He pauses, takes a deep breath, smooths down his hair.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Come on, let's go offer these guys a date with destiny.

Joe follows Sammy up the steps.

INT. CHELSEA ROWHOUSE - DAY

They reach the top landing. Sammy knocks. No answer. Knocks again. Nothing. Tries the knob. It's locked.

SAMMY
Shit! Where are they? There's seven or eight of them, somebody's got to be home.

JOE
With my tools I could be opening the lock. But I left them back in Brooklyn.

SAMMY
Tools? Are you a locksmith?

Joe crouches down to study the lock.

JOE
I was escape artist.

SAMMY
An escape artist? You mean... because you escaped from Prague?

JOE
That was my best trick. I was master of escape.

He stands up, shaking his head.

JOE (CONT'D)
But I can't do nothing without my tools.

SAMMY
God damn it! We have to get started right away, we got two days to do this whole book!

(MORE)

SAMMY (CONT'D)

They have everything we need. Tables,
paper, brushes...if we could just--
(looks around)
Joe?

Joe's gone. There's a loud iron GROAN. The whole building
shakes. Sammy runs down the stairs.

EXT. CHELSEA ROWHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Joe dangles from the bottom of the fire escape. As Sammy
watches, he swings, once, twice, and flips himself up, then
clammers, clanging, up to the fourth floor window. Throws it
open and without hesitation hurls himself in.

SAMMY

Look what he can do.

A SCREAM. Musical, female, from inside the apartment.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - JERRY GLOVSKY'S BEDROOM

As Joe falls onto the floor, she sits up, clutching the
covers to her.

JOE

I'm very sorry. The door was locked.

ROSA

Who are you? What is the matter with
you? Are you crazy?

She leaps to her feet, pulls her raincoat on, grabs her
clothes, and starts out of the room. Joe notices her purse,
lying on the floor.

JOE

Wait! Your bag!

She snatches the bag from him and as she does so a bunch of
fliers tumble out. He picks one up:

INSERT FLIER

"Rally for European Jewry!!! Union Square etc., etc."

JOE

You have not spelled Czechoslovakia
correct.

ROSA

Who are you?

JOE

I am a European Jewry.

Her look almost--almost--softens. Then she snatches the
flier from his hand and runs out.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - STAIRWELL

As Sammy climbs up the stairs, Rosa, wrapped in her raincoat, mortified, runs down. She fixes him with a haughty look that is belied by her fiery cheeks.

Sammy, wonderstruck, climbs to the landing. Joe stands sheepishly.

SAMMY
Who was that?

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - JERRY GLOVSKY'S BEDROOM

The bed is empty, disarranged.

SAMMY
This is Jerry's room. She must be
Jerry's girl. She was in the bed? Was
she... did you see her...?

Joe nods.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Wow.

Loses interest immediately. Claps him on the shoulder.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Well, we'd better get to work.

Joe's looking at the empty bed.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Joe?

JOE
(snaps out of it)
Right. Get to work.

SEQUENCE F (3 panels)

Panel 1. A balding, formerly hip guy who could be a comics artist or a professor of comic book studies. Tweed blazer. Probably looks a lot like the guy whose HAND is drawing our story.

CARTOONIST

AT THIS POINT IN THE HISTORY OF
SUPERHEROES, THE FIELD WAS PRETTY
MUCH WIDE OPEN.

Panel 2. A split panel. One half shows Batman in a typical pose on Gotham City rooftop. The other shows the Green Hornet-like Owl.

CAP

OWLS AND BATS WERE TAKEN--

Panel 3. Laid out a like an explanatory diagram. A hawk. A wolverine. A spider.

CAP:

BUT THE REST OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM
WAS STILL UP FOR GRABS.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - DAY

Sammy and Joe sprawl on a pair of ravaged old sofas, set at right angles to each other. Shoes off, ties loosened, hands behind head. Joe has a sketchpad propped on his legs and a pile of crumpled sheets beside him.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

They spent the first hour or so rejecting each other's suggestions.

SAMMY

Hawkman?

JOE

Spiderman?

SAMMY

The Wolverine?

A beat.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Why does it have to be an animal?

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - LATER

Joe and Sam are sitting up, smoking, silent. Intent. Tap-tap-tap goes Joe's pencil.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Nobody seems to agree on what happened next. Sammy always told interviewers that Joe's stories of his training with Kornblum and of the plight of his family had fired his imagination. But Joe claimed that they were just sitting there, smoking, not saying a word, when Sammy burst out:

SAMMY

The Master of Escape!

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS LIVING ROOM - DAY

Joe draws while Sammy types. Sammy reads aloud what he is typing--the captions and dialog that make up his panels.

We zoom in on Joe's hand as he draws.

SEQUENCE G (4 panels)

Panel 1. A heavy chain lies on the map of Europe. A giant padlock hangs from it. The Escapist wields an enormous key.

CAP:

TO ALL THOSE WHO TOIL IN THE
SHACKLES OF OPPRESSION, HE OFFERS
THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM!

Panel 2. A boy who looks a lot like Thomas Kavalier. Mopping the floor. Behind him a sign reads: RATVIA STATE ORPHANAGE.

BOY: GEE, BUT THIS IS A ROUGH LIFE FOR A KID!

CAP: HE ROAMS THE GLOBE, COMING TO THE AID OF THOSE WHO LANGUISH IN TYRANNY'S CHAINS. HE IS--

Panel 3. The Escapist stands, hands on hips, with sunrays streaming up behind him.

SAMMY AND JOE (V.O.)
The Escapist!

They break up laughing, OVER.

Panel 4. The Escapist's head and shoulders pop up from a floorboard by the boy.

BOY: WHAT TH--?

ESCAPIST: C'MON KID, LET'S GET YOU AND ALL YOUR LITTLE PALS OUT OF THIS ROTTEN RAZI ORPHANAGE AND BACK TO YOUR PARENTS.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - DAY

They're on their feet, stalking back and forth, excited.

SAMMY
He comes in the darkest hour... He watches from the shadows... Guided only by the light from--the light from--

JOE
His... Golden Key?

SAMMY
That's great!

JOE
Maybe something like this?

He hold up the sheet of board he's been drawing on. An acrobatic figure, in a dark costume and mask, graceful and strong, with a skeleton-key emblem on his chest.

SAMMY
Wow. Joe, that's beautiful.

JOE
He is here to free the world.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
A crippled refugee orphan who grows up to be a world-famous escape artist based in New York City.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - NIGHT

Sammy stands besides Joe's stool, watching him draw. He points, comments, kibitzes. Joe ignores him.

CARTOONIST

The Escapist was a self-portrait. Into it they put all of Sammy's native optimism and all of Joe's desperation to get his family out.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - LATER

A trail of crushed packs of cigarettes leads to a drawing table where Joe perches, sleeves rolled, ink-stained. Sammy sits on the couch, blearily watching Joe draw.

A loud KNOCK on the wall behind them. Sammy jumps out of his skin. Joe turns, eyebrow raised. The turn to see:

JERRY GLOVSKY, FRANK PANTALEONE, and MARTY GOLD. New York kids, toughs in neckties.

FRANK

Who the hell are you?

JERRY GLOVSKY

Klayman, what the hell are you doing here?

SAMMY

We have come to brighten your miserable little lives.

FRANK PANTALEONE

How the hell did you get in here?

JOE

Magic.

Jerry Glovsky picks up Joe's prototype of the Escapist.

JERRY GLOVSKY

Who did this? This is good.

(to Joe)

Was it you? I know it wasn't Klayman.

SAMMY

This is my cousin, he's just in from Japan. Gentlemen, I'm very glad you're here. How would you like to work for me?

General derision. Jerry slaps Sammy on the back of the head.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

At a guaranteed rate per page of seven dollars and fifty cents.

He cautions Joe with a look: Keep quiet. Joe is impressed, or maybe shocked.

JERRY GLOVSKY

Seven-fifty! Who's paying that kind of money?

SAMMY

Sheldon Anapol.

JERRY GLOVSKY

What? He's not even a publisher!

SAMMY

We need to present Anapol with a full sixty pages, plus the cover, by Monday. Joe and I have the lead story, but we need more. Now, here's the thing. Every character has to wear a mask. That's the gimmick. No evil Chinamen. Now cowboy shit.

FRANK

All masks. Good gimmick.

JERRY GLOVSKY

And Sheldon Anapol, who you have always until this moment described as the biggest skinflint in New York, will pay us seven dollars and fifty cents a page.

Sam eyes Joe.

SAMMY

Yup. Now. Feast an eye on our cover.

The guys all go over to take a look at Joe's cover, which not drawn but painted, in full gorgeous technicolors:

It shows the Escapist, in his dark blue union suit, and ADOLF HITLER. The latter is taking a haymaker square on the chin. His teeth are flying out of his mouth. A dazzling, beautiful, violent piece of work.

JERRY GLOVSKY

They'll never go for it. Bad idea.

SAMMY

Jerry, your pop has a brother over there!

JERRY GLOVSKY

Yeah... in Wiesbaden. It's not good.

SAMMY

And so far you're doing about it what?

Jerry has nothing to say to this.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

This is about making money, but it's more than that. Right, Joe?

JOE

Yes, but I am happy to begin with money.

JERRY GLOVSKY

I'm not saying I don't like the idea...
I'm just saying no publisher will ever go for it.

FRANK

We're not at war with Germany. It's in bad taste.

SAMMY

Bad taste. Do me a favor. You don't wanna be in on this, good. Stay out.

He looks around the squalor of Palooka Studios.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

You probably already have more work than you can handle, living in such splendor.

JERRY GLOVSKY

(to Frank and Marty)

He's employing sarcasm.

FRANK

I noticed that.

JERRY GLOVSKY

I'm not sure I could take being bossed around by this wiseass.

MARTY GOLD

Seven fifty. That's on the level? Okay, then you can count me in. You just have to tell me one thing. How's come if you're from Japan, you could be Sammy's cousin and look like such a Jew?

SAMMY

They have Jews in Japan.

JOE

Jujitsu.

MARTY GOLD

Good point.

SERIES OF SHOTS - PALOOKA STUDIOS

A) Boys at work, drawing, inking, filling in balloons with letters. Smoking, scratching, drinking coffee from paper cups. On the RADIO: another thrilling episode of SUPERMAN. The big heroic BARITONE of Bud Collyer.

B) Sammy hammers away at the student-sized Remington. Yanks a page out of the roller, hands it to Joe, perched at the drawing table beside him. Joe takes it, scans it, looks a little puzzled. Then nods.

C) Frank is in the empty bathtub, fully clothed, drawing, the drawing board laid across the lip of the tub.

D) Jerry Glovsky's bedroom. He's lying face down on the bed, at work on a page. He looks up. Raises an eyebrow. Joe's standing in the doorway.

JERRY GLOVSKY

Yeah?

JOE

The girl in your bed. Is she your...

He searches for the right word. Jerry's appalled.

JERRY GLOVSKY

Please! She's just an uptight West Side rich skirt. A limousine liberal. She takes painting classes at the Art Students League and tries real hard to act Bohemian.

(lights a cigarette)

Where are you from, anyway?

JOE

Bohemia.

JERRY GLOVSKY

She does a little nude modeling on the side. I got her over here by saying I needed a private session.

He points to a pad lying nearby. Joe goes to examine it.

JOE

That looks nothing like her.

He tears off the sheet, tosses it aside. Picks up a charcoal crayon and starts sketching.

FLASHBACK - EXT. JERRY'S BEDROOM

Joe crouches on the fire escape, peering in at Rosa in Jerry's bed.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

I have the drawing Joe made of what he saw, in my collection.

CUT TO:

INSERT

Joe Kavalier's sketch of Rosa. A kind of landscape of Rosa lying naked and asleep. Hasty but evocative.

CARTOONIST (V.O) (CONT'D)
I bought it from Jerry Glovsky just
before he died, for two hundred dollars.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - JERRY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joe's face as he peers in. Wonder. Then he leans in too far and tumbles into the room.

Rosa sits up and SCREAMS!

INT. PRESENT MOMENT - JERRY'S BEDROOM

Joe's putting the finishing touches on his sketch we just saw.

JOE

It was more or less like this.

Hands the pad to Jerry and walks out.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - MUCH LATER

We tour the ruins. Guys sleeping on couches, two in a bed, overflowing ashtrays, garbage and food everywhere.

Joe's at an easel, inking a page. Wide awake, rapt. Sammy's slumped in a chair beside him, barely awake. On a table nearby is the finished pile of comics pages.

Joe's brush stops. He holds it, poised. Sighs. Sits up. Sammy starts, waking himself.

SAMMY

Is that it? Is it done?

It's the splash page for the first Escapist story. A big, single panel, the Escapist kicking in the door on the Nazi hideout, through a hornet swarm of bullets.

JOE

Not quite.

In a bottom corner writes in two names: KAVALIER & CLAY.
Draws a neat box around them.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUDINI'S CABINET - HIPPODROME - LONDON - 1904

It's dark but there's enough light to see Houdini struggling. Thrashing, writhing, in near-silence, alone. The orchestra PLAYS outside.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Some people say that the long struggles in the cabinet were all sham. That Houdini would free himself in two seconds, then sit down in a chair and read the newspaper until he thought it was believably time to come out.

Houdini's hands. A pick works its way along his fingers, toward the lock. Fingers slip. The pick falls away.

Houdini's face: despair.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I don't believe that for a minute. Houdini was punishing himself for something.

Houdini takes a deep breath, lowers himself to the pick.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I don't know what faults or failings he was punishing himself for.

INT. HIPPODROME STAGE - SIMULTANEOUS

Bess watches the thrashing in the cabinet. Calmly smiling-- and dying inside.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

The only fault Bess saw in him was his need to punish himself. And she forgave him for that every time he performed.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE - 1939 - DAY

Sammy and Joe walk downtown. Joe carries four fat portfolios, two in each hand. He's struggling. Sammy has nothing but hurries to keep with Joe, hobbling a little.

SAMMY

How are you feeling?

JOE

I am feeling pretty good.
(looking up)
It's a beautiful morning.

He stops dead in his tracks.

JOE (CONT'D)
I am in New York City.

He sets the portfolios down. Slowly turns in place.

JOE (CONT'D)
New York City, U.S.A.

SAMMY
It just registered.

Joe crouches to pick up the portfolios again. Hoists them with a grunt.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Let me carry one.

JOE
I'm fine.

They stroll along, Joe taking in the sights of lower Fifth. They pass a newsstand. A Herald-Tribune headline sheet tacked to a board shouts A FRIGHTENING HITLER HEADLINE. Joe stops. Sammy stops, too. Reads the headline.

SAMMY
We kicked his ass this weekend, though.
Joe looks at him: he has had the same thought.

JOE
It felt good.

SAMMY
It's going to feel better when you get paid for doing it.

INT. ANAPOL'S OFFICE - DAY

Anapol at his desk, winding a set of chattering teeth. Winds and winds. Lets go of the key. Nothing. Pokes at the teeth. Nothing. Pokes again and they bite him, once. He jerks his finger away.

ANAPOL
Jesus!

Joe and Sammy struggle in with a bunch of portfolios. They open them, pull out stacks of finished pages.

ANAPOL (CONT'D)
What the hell is this? A comic book.
And when I said I had no desire to...

He sees Joe's amazing cover.

ANAPOL (CONT'D)
Is he hitting Hitler?

He flips through some of the other pages as Sam and Joe continue to pile up the pages. Reaches for the phone on his desk. Picks it up. Starts reading a page.

ANAPOL (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Get me Sid.

(to Sam)

You've got a knack for this, Clay. I'm not saying that's a good thing.

CUT TO:

SEQUENCE H (1 panel)

Panel 1. A row of mugshots. labelled JACK ASHKENAZY, GEORGE DEASEY, SID HARMATTAN.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Shelly Anapol called in three experts: Jack Ashkenazy, the owner of Eastern Color Offset, the third largest print jobber in New York and a creditor. George Deasey, a veteran pulps writer editor, the third meanest man in New York. And Sid Harmattan. His lawyer.

CUT TO:

INT. ANAPOL'S OFFICE - LATER

JACK ASHKENAZY, GEORGE DEASEY and SID HARMATTAN standing around. The pile of finished pages on the desk.

ANAPOL

Have a cigar.

He pushes the cigar box toward Joe and Sam. They take cigars from the box, sit back. Anapol lights them.

ANAPOL (CONT'D)

I'm not going to mince words. We like what we see here. Don't we, Mr. Deasey?

DEASEY

It's sophomoric drivel.

SAMMY

(insulted)

Meaning?

DEASEY

Meaning it ought to sell like hotcakes.

ANAPOL

We want to buy it. For the rights to the Escapist we'll pay you a hundred and fifty dollars.

Sammy and Joe exchange looks. This sounds like a lot of money. But Sammy tries to play it cool.

SAMMY

What else?

ANAPOL

The other characters, the backups, we'll pay eighty-five for the lot. That's just for the rights. We'll also take you both on, Sammy--pardon me, Mr. Clay as writer for seventy-five a week and Mr. Kavalier at six dollars a page. Plus we'll pay you twenty bucks for every cover. As for all your pals here, five dollars a page.

SAMMY

I promised them eight dollars a page.

Joe looks impressed by Sam's chutzpah.

ASHKENAZY

Eight dollars! That's crazy! I wouldn't pay eight dollars to John Steinback!

SAMMY

It's Steinbeck. And he only does words. We give you pictures, too.

Anapol remains calm.

ANAPOL

We'll go six.

DEASEY

And you have to come up with a new cover.

JOE

What? Sam--?

ANAPOL

This hitting Hitler, fighting Nazis thing, it makes us nervous. You can keep the Germans in the story if you don't call them Germans. But you'll have to change the cover. Not Hitler.

HARMATTAN

In forty years Mr. Anapol has never been successfully sued.

ANAPOL

Or torched by brownshirts, either.

On Joe. He's shocked.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Joe expected it would take ten to twelve thousand dollars to free his family.

(MORE)

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And he just had a feeling about the Escapist. He felt that it was going to be big. The last thing he wanted to do was kiss it all goodbye.

JOE

(quiet, firm)

I like the cover.

Everyone turns to him. He blows a huge cloud of cigar smoke.

SAMMY

Joe, think about it for a minute. It's just a name change and a new cover. We could do something as good.

Joe looks at him. Hard.

SEQUENCE I (4 panels)

Panel 1. The Escapist hoists Hitler into the air, by the collar of his high-necked uniform. Hitler squirms. This panel drawn in a Joe-ish style by the Cartoonist.

CAP

YES, IT HAD FELT GOOD TO KICK HITLER'S ASS.

Panel 2. Hitler pleads for his life.

CAP:

IT WOULD BE NICE TO DO IT ON A REGULAR BASIS.

HITLER:

BITTE, MEIN FREUND!

Panel 3. The Escapist pulls back his right arm for a swift haymaker to the Fuhrer's jaw.

SFX:

KRACK!

CAP:

THAT'S WHAT DID IT. THE IDEA WAS DECENT, THE ART AND WRITING ABOVE AVERAGE.

Panel 4. Like the cover. Hitler flies right out of the panel. The Escapist watches him go. Only the Escapist has no mask, and Joe's face.

CAP:

BUT WHAT MADE THE ESCAPIST WAS WHAT JOE PUT INTO THE CHARACTER.

CUT TO:

FANTASY SEQUENCE - HITLER'S BERLIN HQ - DAY

An office just like Adenoid Hynkel's in The Great Dictator. Joe pounds away at Hitler. Just punching the shit out of him. It's almost hard to watch, except that it's Hitler taking the beating.

CUT TO:

INT. ANAPOL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Joe's face, flushed with the memory of violence.

SAMMY

I'm just saying, think about it for a minute.

JOE

I do not need to think. I will not agree to the other cover, no matter.

Sammy looks at Joe. Joe stubs out his cigar. Not a trace of doubt.

SAMMY

That's it, then.

He gathers up the pages and hands half to Joe. They start to stuff them into their portfolios.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

The Escapist fights evil. Hitler is evil.

ANAPOL

Calm down, boys. Look... Jack, maybe we can push the page rate for the others up to six, nu? And eight for Mr. Kavalier. Come, Mr. Kavalier, eight dollars a page.

Without a word they tie the portfolios and walk out. Anapol looks at Ashkenazy, who shrugs.

INT. KRAMLER BUILDING - ELEVATOR

Joe and Sammy, going down. The operator is staring at their bulging portfolios. The boys don't say a word.

The elevator doors open. The OPERATOR steps back. Anapol's standing there, out of breath, tie askew.

ANAPOL

Long as I sell whoopee cushions, you can fight all the evil you want. Just keep me away from lawsuits, all right? Let's compromise.

INSERT

A COMIC BOOK

spinning toward us out of a black screen, getting bigger:
THE ESCAPIST #1. It's Joe's cover, but the swastika has only three legs, and there's a badge that reads--SEE THE ESCAPIST FIGHT ATTILA HAXOFF AND THE RAZI MENACE!!!

This cover is that of a comic book at a newsstand, on a corner up on the Grand Concourse. A gang of boys in anoraks crowd around it, gawping. What a punch!

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Joe at the drawing board, Sammy on his bed, legs crossed, typing. Ethel comes in, carrying a plate of sandwiches.

ETHEL

The time you're wasting on this garbage.

They don't answer, just keep on working. She stands there, frowning. Goes over to Joe. Takes something from her apron. It's a letter. Addressed to THOMAS KAVALIER. Battered, heavily marked up by postmarks and censors.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

Another one came back. I'm sorry.

Joe's pencil stops moving on the page. He glances at the letter for the briefest instant. Starts drawing again.

SPINNING COMIC: ISSUE NUMBER 2

The Escapist bursts out of a steel cage, at the bottom of the sea, with a U-boat lurking nearby.

ANOTHER SHOT - NEWSSTAND

Two boys and a little girl fork over one shiny Liberty dime.

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM

Sammy paces back and forth in front of Joe, narrating a story with wild gestures, while Joe draws, smoking.

COVERS

Piling up now--issues three, four, five, six...

ANOTHER SHOT - QUEENS STOOP

The two boys and a girl, huddled over their comic.

THE PAGE THEY'RE LOOKING AT

A sequence as the Escapist is lowered, upside down, in chains, into a glass tank of water.

ANOTHER SHOT - QUEENS BACK YARD

The girl and one boy lowering the other boy, upside down and tied to a chair, into a big wooden barrel.

INT. FLATBUSH APARTMENT - SAMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Late. Joe and Sammy in the narrow bed. Sammy's asleep, against the wall. Joe's beside the drawing table which is covered in finished and unfinished pages of work. Joe has a small pad on his knees. He's writing a letter.

JOE (V.O.)

Dear Thomas. Tonight I liberated Prague.

Reaches for the nearest comics page. Studies it.

SEQUENCE J (3 panels)

Panel 1. The Escapist slugs his way through a horde of black-coated SS troops.

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was my best trick yet.

Panel 2. The Escapist yanks on a cellar door. It buckles as he rips the door open in a shower of splinters.

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I am working very hard on these comic books...

Panel 3. A crowd of pale-faced children in ragged clothes comes pouring out of the door.

CUT TO:

INT. FLATBUSH AVENUE - SAMMY'S BEDROOM - PRESENT MOMENT

Joe's expression, wistful. Shakes his head, sets page down. Picks up the pad and starts writing again.

JOE (V.O.)

We are now selling over a million copies a month. I am making very good money and putting more than two thirds of it away. Thanks to certain economies.

Looks down at a snoring Sammy, who grunts, and yanks the covers away from Joe. Joe sighs, gets up. Tears the sheet from the pad.

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I don't know if the letters I write you find you or not.

EXT. FLATBUSH AVENUE - DAY

Dawn. A horse-drawn milkwagon rolls by. Joe walks down the deserted street. Stops to mail the letter.

JOE (V.O.)

But if this one does, I hope that you will take heart from it. I am keeping my promise to you.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - DAY

Joe, a solitary walker, headed toward Manhattan. He stops. Looks out toward the harbor. A great black ship in the distance, trailing gray plumes of smoke.

JOE (V.O.)

Sometimes I walk down to the great piers
and watch one of the big ships coming in.

EXT. CUNARD PIERS - DAY - LATER

Shouts, porters cries, the rumble of the ship. Joe watches as the France's gangplanks are lowered. The passengers begin to disembark.

Reunions: wild, sober, wailing. In the midst of it, a group of two dozen CHILDREN and their MINDERS.

JOE (V.O.)

If all these lucky families can be
reunited, so can ours.

Joe watches as a young boy moves among the crowd, tentative, alone.

The boy's eyes meet Joe's. Joe turns away.

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

In the meantime, please believe me, I
will continue to fight on your behalf.
And of course, on my own. And not only
in the make-believe pages of comic books.
Your loving brother, Josef.

Joe starts to leave, overhears someone speaking German.

It's a TALL NAZI, well-dressed, Swastika pin in his lapel. Joe glares at him. The man notices. He stares back, says something to his companions. They laugh. Joe frowns. He rushes the guy.

SEQUENCE K (7 panels)

Panel 1. The Iron Gauntlet stands in his riveted steam-driven armor, hands on hips. A big blazing Swastika filling the panel behind him.

GAUNTLET:

YOU DARE TO CHALLENGE DER ARYAN
MIGHT OF DER IRON GAUNTLET?

Panel 2. The Escapist launches himself into the air, starting a flip.

ESCAPIST:

I'D NEVER DREAM OF IT, RIVETS--

Panel 3. The Escapist completes the flip, landing a mid-air kick at the Gauntlet's head.

ESCAPIST:

--I JUST DON'T LIKE YOUR CHEESY
ACCENT!

SFX: KR-RACK!

GAUNTLET: VERDAMMT!

Panel 4. The Gauntlet flies toward us, shoulders slamming into the ground, limbs splayed. The Escapist, lighting on his feet, looks on grinning.

SFX: WHAMMMMM!

ESCAPIST: LOOKS LIKE THE IRON GAUNTLET HAS A GLASS JAW!

Panel 5. The Gauntlet hurtles toward us, now, mad as hell, at top speed, iron suit chugging like a panzer.

CAP: BUT THE IRON GAUNTLET IS NOT SO EASILY STOPPED!!!

GAUNTLET: FOOL! DER PANZER SUIT ENHANCES MEIN NATURAL REFLEXES EIN THOUSANDFOLD!

SFX: WHIRR-WHIRR-WHIRR

Panel 6. The Gauntlet has the Escapist in a headlock under one arm. His other arm is a steely blur as it punches the Escapist in the gut.

GAUNTLET: UND YOUR SOFT YANKEE HIDE IS NO MATCH FOR MEIN STEAM-DRIVEN FISTS!

SFX: THWAM! THWAM! THWAM!

GAUNTLET: LET'S SEE YOU ESCAPE FROM THIS, HA-HA!

ESCAPIST: OOF!

Panel 7. The Escapist face down on the ground, trying to get up. The Gauntlet stands by gloating.

GAUNTLET: YOU ARE WEAK, LIKE ALL YOUR KIND!

ESCAPIST (THOUGHT): OHHH... GOT TO GET UP... TO REMEMBER... NO MATTER WHAT HE DOES TO ME... IT'S NOTHING COMPARED TO THE PUNISHMENT SUFFERED BY THE INNOCENT PEOPLES OF EUROPE UNDER THE FIST OF TYRANNY!

CUT TO:

EXT. CUNARD PIERS - CONTINUOUS

Joe lies on the dock, bleeding. Breathing. Then he sits up, gingerly.

The Big German flexes his fingers, dabs at his split lip. Then turns back to his friends. They're pleased with him. They walk away.

ROSA (O.S.)
What did he do to you? Are you all
right?

Joe looks up. Rosa is one of the children's minders.

JOE
I--I'm fine. Thank you.

ROSA
Your nose! Oh, your poor nose. Ouch.
Look at you! Here.

She kneels down. Opens her purse. Takes out a handkerchief
and hands it to him. He hesitates.

JOE
I'll ruin it.

ROSA
It's a handkerchief! Take it!

The other minder, HOFFMAN, stout and middle-aged, comes over.
A little leery of Joe. She takes one of Joe's arms and nods
to Hoffman. He takes the other. They hoist Joe to his feet.

HOFFMAN
Is this a friend of yours, Miss Saks?

ROSA
(to Joe)
Have we met? Why do I--

JOE
No. I don't think so. I'm Joe Kavalier.

ROSA
Rosa Saks. This is my boss, Mr. Hoffman.

HOFFMAN
What happened? Who was that man?

JOE
I don't know.

HOFFMAN
What were you two fighting about?

JOE
I don't know. Something came over me.

HOFFMAN
Rosa, the children are all on the bus,
waiting. We really ought to go.

ROSA
Listen, do you need a ride?

EXT. VINTAGE 1933 BLUE BIRD SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Open to the elements, basically a flatbed truck with seats and a canvas roof. Painted on its side: TRANSATLANTIC RESCUE AGENCY, INC.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Two dozen kids jostle and bounce. Wide-eyed, chattering in German, Polish, French, and Yiddish. They are being addressed in a patois of the above by Mr. Hoffman.

HOFFMAN

When we reach the dormitory, bitte, keep your shoes--shoes--and socks on until your feet have been inspected by the nurse...

Joe and Rosa sit up front, together.

ROSA

We just bought our own boat. She's called the Ark of Miriam. Actually she's called the Haiphong but we're re-registering her. You have to see her, she cost a fortune. Mrs. Roosevelt has helped us arranged visas for a hundred and fifty more children, from all over Europe.

JOE

From Czechoslovakia?

ROSA

I think so. Yes. Do you--are there more of you, over there?

JOE

I have a little brother. Thomas. I promised I would bring him next.

Rosa: her heart is breaking. Just like that.

ROSA

You had to leave your family?

JOE

They sent me away.. I didn't want to go. I don't want to be here.

ROSA

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

He nods. She squeezes his arm. Warmly.

ROSA (CONT'D)

We'll get him out! I can do it! I'll talk to Mr. Hoffman. I'm sure he can arrange passage for Thomas.

JOE
Really?

ROSA
(lowers voice)
I have to ask you. Do you have any money? We need money desperately. If you offer him money, even a few hundred dollars...

JOE
I have some money.

An AWFUL SOUND, then a cry from the back of the bus.

KID
Oh, merde!

Rosa looks back, wilts.

ROSA
There's always a vomiter.

JOE
I was a vomiter.

HOFFMAN
Rosa! Hurry!

Screams and groans. Resigned, Rosa gets up.

ROSA
I guess vomit's my job.

She moves to the back of the bus. The VOMITER is sitting there, hysterical.

ROSA (CONT'D)
(perfect accent)
Francais? Oui? Ecoute, c'est pas grave.
Ca va aller.

Rosa hesitates a moment. There's nothing to clean with.

ROSA (CONT'D)
(to Hoffman, hopeless)
Do we have a sponge? A cloth?

A moment of hesitation, then she pulls her cashmere sweater right up over her head and, in bra and slip, uses it to wipe the poor kid's face. Whistles all around.

EXT. TRANSATLANTIC RESCUE AGENCY - DAY

A former Catholic school in Hell's Kitchen. A week later. Rosa is waiting on the front steps as Joe walks up. His face half healed, black and blue. They're both dressed in suits.

ROSA
Mr. Kavalier.

JOE
Miss Saks.

ROSA
Your look... better.

JOE
I look awful.

Rosa doesn't think so.

ROSA
Ready to brave the monkey house?

INT. TRANSATLANTIC RESCUE AGENCY - DORMITORY - DAY

Corridor full of children, running, crying, fighting. Nurses and matrons. Rosa leads Joe down the corridor. Joe notices the silver brooch on her lapel. A stylized Deco butterfly.

JOE
I like the pin.

ROSA
It's Tiffany. My father gave it to me.
It may bring us luck.

JOE
I'll need it.

ROSA
Just tell them your story the way you
told it to me. Mr. Hoffman is a complete
sweetheart. I know he'll listen.

He hands her a brooch. She pins it onto to the blouse.

JOE
And the other one? The Chairman?

ROSA
He's kind of a hard case. And he
absolutely hates me, so I won't say
anything. I don't want to ruin your
chances.

They stop at a big wooden door marked MR. HOFFMAN, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR. Rosa knocks.

HOFFMAN (O.S.)
Come in!

INT. HOFFMAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Hoffmann rises from his chair, as does a dark, ponderous MAN,
richly dressed, well-groomed.

ROSA

Joe Kavalier, you've met Mr. Hermann Hoffman, our executive director. And this--

(half a beat)

--is the chairman of the board of trustees, Mr. Siegfried Saks.

(the other half of the beat)

My father.

Joe is taken aback. Hands shaken all around. Saks notices that Rosa is wearing the pin. Tries not to look pleased but is pleased.

HOFFMAN

Please, sit down, Mr. Kavalier. We understand that you would like us to try to arrange for passage for your brother on the Ark of Miriam.

Hoffman lovingly gestures to a picture on the wall. A trim liner, its plimsoll colored bold red, on a bottle-green sea, under a heliotrope sky.

HOFFMAN (CONT'D)

We bought her from Cunard, who had her on a Haiphong-Shanghai run. The cost of purchasing and fitting her out for the transport of children has been very high. At this point we may not be able to underwrite passage for half the children we have arranged to bring over.

SAKS

"Underwrite." Mr. Kavalier, I used to be in the art business. Now I am in the bribery business. And my overhead is very high.

JOE

Mr. Hoffman, Mr. Saks... If I may... I would like to do what I can to help. I am making pretty good money. I can afford to pay for my brother and perhaps some of the other children, as well.

Hoffman and Saks exchange a look, amused, touched.

SAKS

(patronizing)

Mr. Kavalier. It's very generous of you to offer. But we--

ROSA

Listen to the boy! Take his money!

Saks is cowed. Hoffman too.

HOFFMAN

You say you are making good money?

JOE

Yes. I'm an artist. I, uh...

He reaches into the breast pocket of his jacket. Takes a folded comic book. Spreads it on the desk. It's Radio Comics.

HOFFMAN

It's a, what do you call it. A comic magazine. My son reads these!

Saks picks it up, flips through it, looks at the cover.

SAKS

"The Escapist." "Ten cents." Children buy these things?

JOE

We sold a million of that one.

The two older men exchange a look of surprise. Rosa is beaming, proud of Joe.

SAKS

I'm happy for your success, Mr. Kavalier, but tell me. We have space on Miriam for three hundred and twenty-four. Our people in Europe arranged for the transit of three hundred and twenty-four children. Should one of them be left behind to make room for your brother?

JOE

No, sir, of course not. But I--

ROSA

You can make room for his brother! The kid can sleep in a lifeboat, if he has to!

JOE

He is small for his age.

SAKS

They're all small, Mr. Kavalier.

Rosa fixes her father with a look. Fingers the pin in her lapel as if idly. Saks holds out for a moment longer, then crumbles. Turns to Joe.

SAKS (CONT'D)

I'm going to ask you a very personal question now, Mr. Kavalier.

JOE

Please.

SAKS

It comes out to about two thousand five hundred dollars per child. That's just an average. Sometimes it costs far more. At that price, how many children could you and the Escapist here afford to fund.

JOE

(thinks)

Three. Almost four. When does the boat sail?

SAKS

In December.

JOE

Three months. In that time I can pay for... twelve.

SAKS

Twelve!

HOFFMAN

Twelve is a lot.

ROSA

With the money you save you throw Donald a nice party for his bar mitzvah.

Saks is on the verge.

ROSA (CONT'D)

(to Joe)

The Plaza Hotel. An orchestra.

SAKS

A magician. The boy wants some fellow named Krieger.

JOE

Pop Krieger. The greatest living cup-and-ball man.

SAKS

More like arm-and-a-leg man.

JOE

I will do it for nothing.

SAKS

What will you do for nothing?

JOE

If you let take my brother onto the boat, I will make a magic show, for no money. Look.

He points to the Tiffany butterfly.

JOE (CONT'D)
(to Rosa)
May I?

Rosa nods, a little uncertain. Joe works the pin free, watching her eyes as he just misses touching her breast. Rosa sits very still.

JOE (CONT'D)
And, just to prove that Miss Saks is not in league with me, does one of you gentlemen have a cigarette case?

Saks hands over his cigarette case. Joe opens it, carefully tips out the cigarettes.

SAKS
Help yourself.

JOE
Thank you.

Joe lights a cigarette. Then he takes out his handkerchief and pins the brooch to it. Shows that it is securely pinned. Then quickly and neatly folds the handkerchief into quarters, then eighths. Stuffs the packet into the cigarette case. Tucks the case into his pocket. Takes it out again.

JOE (CONT'D)
No, you keep it.

Hands it to Saks.

JOE (CONT'D)
Open it first.

Saks opens it. Takes out the handkerchief. Unfolds it, opens it: the brooch is gone.

JOE (CONT'D)
May I?

He takes the handkerchief from Saks. Refolds the bundle, lays it on Rosa's chest. Gives it a pat. Unfolds it, pleat by pleat. Yanks the cloth away. The brooch is there, pinned to her shirt again. Everyone claps.

SAKS
Perhaps we can work something out.

INT. TRANSATLANTIC RESCUE AGENCY - CORRIDOR - DAY

Joe and Rosa come out of Hoffman's office. Shut the door. Regard each other. A little dazed.

JOE
So...

ROSA
That went well.

A beat. Then Rosa bubbles over and throws her arms around Joe's neck. He grabs hold of her.

ROSA (CONT'D)
I'm so happy for you!

JOE
Thank you!

They're bouncing up and down. They realize they're bouncing up and down. They stop. Joe lets go of her.

JOE (CONT'D)
Well. I have to get to work. I'm underneath the deadline.

ROSA
You're going to work now? It's almost six. Don't you eat?

JOE
I try to smoke instead.

ROSA
There's a little Cuban-Chinese lunch counter on Seventh.

Is she asking him out? Yes, she is. He wavers.

ROSA (CONT'D)
It couldn't hurt to celebrate just a tiny bit, Mr. Kavalier.

He's about to say yes.

JOE
No. I can't. I'd like to, but I... I have to work.

ROSA
Got it.

JOE
Maybe another time. I--

ROSA
No, no. I understand.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - NIGHT

Sammy lies on the couch, down and across it, with his legs thrown over the back and his head dangling over the front edge. He's editing a typescript with a red pencil, upside down. Smoking upside down, too, cigarette clutched in his cheek. Joe's at the drawing board.

SAMMY

They're adding two more titles. Deasey told me today. Monthlies.

JOE

I want to draw them.

SAMMY

Both of them?

JOE

All of them. I draw the whole book. Every story. And you write them.

SAMMY

I'm already writing a whole book, Joe. You want me to write two more?

JOE

What I want is money. You were right, Sam. We have hit it big. I'm very grateful to you. But I need more. I am going to have a very high overhead from now on.

Sammy takes the cigarette out of his mouth, reaches for an ashtray, and stubs it out. All upside down. Sighs.

SAMMY

I hope I have enough ideas for two more books.

JOE

Let's find out.

He pulls out a fresh sheet of paper. Sits, expectant. Like he's going to take a letter.

JOE (CONT'D)

Tell me an idea.

At last Sammy rolls over and sits up.

SAMMY

Okay...

(thinks)

Let's see. Huh. Who haven't we stolen from yet... Jules Verne! How about... a who's like a super-inventor. He comes up with all these amazing machines, and uses Yankee ingenuity to fight against tyranny. Like a robot spider that can spin a web across two skyscrapers to stop a bomber..

Joe has started nodding and now he starts to draw while Sammy continues talking, under.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

That character became known as E. Pluribus Hewnham, the Scientific American.

CUT TO:

INSERT

The cover of Triumph Comics #1. It depicts Mr. Hewnham, in a fancy bathyscaph, firing underwater death rays at a pack of U-Boats.

SEQUENCE L (1 panel)

Panel 1. A page-sized panel. Ranged across it, the Kavalier & Clay pantheon of demigods in longjohns, posed for a group portrait. Uninked pencil. The Escapist, front and center. The Monitor, the Four Freedoms, the Scientific American, Mr. Machine Gun, etc.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was the start of a pretty solid run of hits. A couple of misses, too.

CUT TO:

THE CARTOONIST'S HANDS - PRESENT MOMENT

One hand holds a sheet of letterhead. It depicts the same grouping of K & C heroes, over the words FROM THE DESK OF KAVALIER & CLAY. He's using it as a model for his drawing.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

But there was still something missing from the lineup.

JOE (V.O.)

These are all good ideas, but we need something better.

Sound of TYPING comes up, over.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - HOURS LATER

Sam types furiously. Joe's lying on the floor, stretching out his back.

JOE

The Escapist is a star. I feel we don't have a star in this group.

SAMMY

You don't think Mr. Machine Gun is a star?

A KNOCK. Sam stops typing. Voices down the hall, one voice a woman's. Joe looks at Sam: he knows who it is.

Rosa walks in. All dolled up. Wearing the butterfly brooch.

ROSA

Hello.

(to Joe)

You said I should drop by.

JOE

I did.

ROSA

But I came at a bad time.

JOE

Not at all.

SAMMY

Kind of, a little.

ROSA

Sammy?

SAMMY

Rosa?

They size each other up. Inconclusive results.

ROSA

Is this how you make them?

Rosa walks over to a table piled with pencilled pages. Leafs through them.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Who puts in the colors?

SAMMY

The lithographers.

She looks up from the work to Joe.

ROSA

You really are an artist.

SAMMY

I'm always telling him that. He won't believe it.

JOE

Oh, please!

ROSA

The reproductions don't do them justice. My father would love to see these.

(to Sam)

He's an art dealer. In fact, he's having a little dinner party tonight. That's why I came by. To invite you to come. I know it's short notice, but the party is for Dalí and he's hard to plan ahead for.

SAMMY

Dali as in Salvador, this is?

ROSA

My father sells his work. Can you come?
Sam, you come, too.

JOE

(wavering)

We have work.

Joe looks at Rosa. Looks her up and down. She looks pretty fabulous.

INT. UPPER WEST SIDE APARTMENT - DINING ROOM NIGHT

Grand West End Avenue flat. A long table laden with roast birds. Mostly rich Upper West Side Jews. Joe, Rosa and Sam. And a huge DIN.

At the far end of the table sits Dali, in a heavy canvas diving suit with a big brass helmet. A long hose connects his helmet to the NOISY AIR COMPRESSOR. Everyone at the table has to shout to be heard. Gala is beside him, talking to Joe in French. He is getting along well in French.

SAMMY

His French is better than his English.

ROSA

I love his English. I love the way he says "Manhattan."

SAMMY

(Ouspenskaya accent)

"Men-hetten."

They crack up. People look. They're both embarrassed.

ROSA

Solemn business, Surrealism.

SAMMY

Explain to me again why Dali is wearing a diving suit.

ROSA

It's one of those things where, you know, if you have to ask...

Suddenly a tremendous BRRRANNG! Everyone jumps.

Dali HURLS his wine glass into the air and it slams against a wall, shattering. He seizes up, then falls out of his chair, clutching at the air hose.

The compressor WHINES. Saks leaps up from the table and runs to see what has gone wrong.

SAKS

It's jammed!

He kicks at it, ineffectually.

Other guests have surrounded Dali. Gala is desperately trying to get the helmet off. Trying to twist one of the bolts between her fingers. She can't. Gives up. Another GUEST tries.

GUEST

It won't come off!

Sam looks at Joe, who is watching the struggle. Like a ranger watching a fire. A moment later he stands up and goes over to the fallen artist. He takes a pen knife from his pocket and calmly opens its screwdriver blade.

GALA DALI

Il devient bleu!

JOE

Excusez-moi, madame.

She looks up, nods. Gets out of his way. He kneels down beside Dali and starts to work on the bolt.

Rosa and Sam watch intently. Exchange a look.

Joe throws all his strength into it. A SNAP. And then Joe smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. SAKS DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dali is sitting up. Joe and the others heave the helmet off him with a POP. Dali gasps and chokes and weeps. Throws his arms around Joe. Brings Joe's face to his. Gives him three baisses on each cheek. Says something in a low voice.

INT. WEST END AVENUE - APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - NIGHT

Rosa is seeing them out. Sammy walks ahead of Rosa and Joe. The doorman opens the door and Sammy goes out. Joe lingers.

ROSA

You were so wonderful.

JOE

Not really.

ROSA

You saved his life!

JOE

I was just trying to impress you.

ROSA

Why would you want to do that?

It's like some kind of barometer drops. You can see the k... forming in the air between them.

Polite COUGH. Rosa glances over at the Doorman. He's watching the whole thing. Beyond him, out on the sidewalk, Sammy is watching, too.

JOE

Well. Okay. Thank you for inviting us--

ROSA

--thank you for coming--

Their lips brush, lingering just a fraction too long to pass as friendly. The doorman smiles.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Good night.

She gets back into the waiting elevator. The doors close.

EXT. UPPER WEST SIDE - NIGHT

Outside the building.

They're walking away. Joe's walking backwards. Regretting his departure.

SAMMY

We could have stayed.

JOE

I have work to do.

SAMMY

Hitler goes to parties, Joe. You can, too.

They arrive at the stairs down to the 92nd Street station.

JOE

You know what, Sam. You go ahead. I want to walk.

SAMMY

To Chelsea? It's seventy blocks! Do you want me to come with you? Or...? It's kind of a shlep for me.

JOE

I'll meet you at home.

EXT. WEST END AVENUE - NIGHT

Joe walks downtown, lost in thought.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

For the first time in months, Joe Kavalier felt hopeful. And somehow that feeling of hopefulness was all mixed up with her.

He sees a small knot of people gathered around a baluster outside an apartment house, in a pool of lamplight. All staring at something.

He comes up behind them.

JOE

What is it? Oh!

He sees: it's a huge green moth with swallowtails and eyespots.

MAN

Guy here says it's a luna.

OTHER MAN

That's right. A luna moth. I saw one once in Mount Morris Park when I was a kid.

CUT TO:

SEQUENCE M (14 panels)

Panel 1. The luna moth on the side of the building. Huge and mysterious.

CAP: IS IT A SIGN?

Panel 2. Joe's face, amazed, amused.

JOE: ROSA.

Panel 3. His fingers outspread, he reaches a hand toward the beating green heart on the tree.

CAP: THE IDEA COMES TO HIM THEN—

Panel 4. The moth fills most of the panel as it flaps into the sky. Joe in the b.g., down on the ground, gazing up.

CAP: —ON THE WINGS OF A MOTH.

SFX: FWUT-FWUT-FWUT

Panel 5. Joe's POV as the moth flits upward in a drunken spiral toward the moon. He's reaching upward, on tiptoe.

Panel 6. Joe rises up into the sky, trailing the moth. Grin on his face.

Panel 7. Joe and the moth fly around the cornice of the Flatiron Building.

JOE: WAIT FOR ME!

Panel 8. Joe has caught up to the moth—only it isn't a moth anymore. It's Rosa as Luna Moth, her great spooky green wings outspread, in a skintight costume. They hang in the sky, standing in the air, gazing at each other.

JOE: HI.

LUNA MOTH: HI

JOE: ROSA, I WANT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING.

LUNA MOTH: YOU HAVE TO CATCH ME FIRST.

Panel 9. She's off again, streaking skyward. Joe is left openmouthed. The city lies spread beneath them.

JOE: WAIT! HEY!

Panel 10. They soar over midtown, past the Empire State Building. Joe's gaining on her.

Panel 11. Over Chelsea now. Below them stands Palooka Studios. Joe catches hold of her slim ankle.

JOE: GOT YOU!

LUNA MOTH: AH!

Panel 12. They hang in the air over Palooka Studios. Joe has hold of her hands in his. She's looking him straight in the eye.

LUNA MOTH: SO, YOU GOT ME. WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO—

Panel 13. He kisses her on the lips, in the sky.

LUNA MOTH: -MFFF!

Panel 14. Her great wings enfold them both, filling the panel. The eyespot stares at us.

CUT TO:

AN EYESPOT

On a Luna Moth's wing. The wing is pictured in a plate in a lepidoptery textbook.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - NIGHT

The book is propped up beside Joe's drawing table. He's using it for reference as he draws a presentation sketch of his new character: Luna Moth. A lushly curved super-moth-gal in a very skimpy outfit. With Rosa's face and hair.

CUT TO:

INT. EMPIRE COMICS OFFICES - DAY

The presentation drawing is clutched in the hands of:

ASHKENAZY

Beauteeful. Look at those... those...

ANAPOL

They're called knockers.

Anapol and Deasey stand behind Ashkenazy, looking at the drawing.

ASHKENAZY

Look at them! Which one of you dreamed this up?

SAMMY

It was mostly Joe. I just added in the part about her being the Mistress of the Night.

ANAPOL

That mistress thing makes me nervous. The whole thing makes me nervous. Those are very large breasts, boys.

(to Deasey)

George, what do you think of this?

DEASEY

I think it's very difficult to fail at pornography.

Anapol looks at Ashkenazy. Ashkenazy nods. Anapol turns to Joe and Sam.

ANAPOL

Whatever you are planning to ask for this, cut it half, and we have a deal.

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE - BANK - DAY

A grand structure where wealthy New York Jews put their money. Joe waits outside, in a suit. A little nervous.

A cab pulls up. Rosa's inside. Joe opens the door for her and helps her out.

ROSA

Dobry den! Is that right?

JOE

Very good.

ROSA

You look nice. Are you ready?

JOE

You are kind to help me.

INT. BANK - MANAGER'S DESK - DAY

Rosa escorts Joe right up to the manager, MR. GREENE.

ROSA

Mr. Greene? I'm Rosa Saks. My father called you.

MR. GREENE

Yes, of course, Miss Greene. Nice to see you again. This must be Mr. Kavalier.

They shake hands.

ROSA

Mr. Greene, this gentleman would like to open an account with your bank.

SEQUENCE N (4 panels)

Panel 1. A big Joe Kavalier panel. Death and mayhem in full four-color lithography-dot splendor. Stukas, panzers, howitzers and battleships. Screaming Jerries everywhere. And in the center of it all, causing it all, the Escapist.

SFX:

BLAM!

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

The work that Joe did at this time can be broken down into two categories. There were the war stories--

Panel 2. A b&w version of the same panel, drawn by the Cartoonist. Only now the Escapist's head is the head of Joe Kavalier.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Joe put all of his rage and shame and guilt over leaving his family behind into those. Crazy, violent stuff. I love it.

Panel 3. Another Cartoonist panel, in b&w. Joe perched at his drawing table. A big comics page lies before him. His head and shoulders have already disappeared into the page. It's like he's climbing through a window.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But it's the Luna Moth work that still blows people's minds.

Panel 4. Prime Joe Kavalier panel, in full color, showing Luna Moth soaring through a strange Escher-meets-Winsor McKay nightscape. In one corner, through a rectangular portal, pokes the head, in B&W, of Joe Kavalier himself as drawn by the Cartoonist. Reaching toward Luna as she soars past.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

That's where he put his heart.

CUT TO:

INT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Early predawn.

Joe and Rosa lie in her bed, Rosa in his arms. They're whispering.

ROSA

It's almost light. You'd better go.

JOE

Okay.

He doesn't move. A beat. She rolls over on top of him.

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sammy in his bed. He's asleep, but only on one half of the narrow mattress. Uncovered, in his boxers. He rolls over and tugs on the covers. They come too easily. He reaches behind him, feels around. No one there.

He sits up, looks around. Switches on the light. Dead silence of predawn. He's alone.

Looks over at the corkboard above his desk. Among sketches, photos many other clipped panels from comics, is the panel of Batman and Robin, grinning, with their arms around each other.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

It's funny how quickly somebody can get used to sharing a bed.

EXT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - 1941 - DAY

The tallest building in the greatest city in the most blessed nation on earth.

INT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - ELEVATOR LOBBY

Anapol meets a group of MEN IN SUITS, among them TRACY BACON: tall, blond, beautiful. They all shake hands.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Anapol and the men ride up in the elevator.

ANAPOL

Let me tell you, gentlemen, five years ago, had you told me we would one day have half a floor in the Empire State Building! I still can't get used to the change.

MAN IN SUIT

What kind of gum was it you made?

ANAPOL

Onion.

The men look at each other.

TRACY BACON

No wonder times were hard!

Anapol's clearly nervous. He studies Bacon.

ANAPOL

You know, Mr. Bacon, you look like him.
Too bad they'll only hear your voice.

BACON

(kidding)

Sad, isn't it. All this wasted beauty.

INT. EMPIRE COMICS OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

They follow Anapol into the great Deco expanse of the new offices. A huge mural of the Escapist on the wall of the lobby. Secretaries come and go, production staff... it's a big operation. The guests look impressed.

ANAPOL

Let's start in the editorial offices,
then I'll take you into the studio.

INT. EMPIRE COMICS - STUDIO - SIMULTANEOUS

Joe is drawing; Sammy sits a few feet away, at a typewriter, banging away. He stops.

SAMMY

Hey, are you coming home for dinner?
Ma's going to be burning something.

JOE

No, I have to work. I have to finish
this Mr. Machine Gun crazy thing of
yours. Then start the Four Freedoms.

SAMMY

You can take two hours for dinner.

JOE

I'm already taking two hours. Maybe even
three.

A tad shifty as he says it.

SAMMY

Ah.

(beat)

What are you doing? Movie?

JOE

(weirdly evasive)

Maybe.

SAMMY

There's a new Cagney.

JOE

I love Cagney.

SAMMY

I know.

Raised voices, laughter.

Anapol enters the studio with Bacon and the executives.

Sammy ogles Bacon. Is he the most handsome man in New York City in 1941? Quite possibly. Their eyes meet. Bacon winks.

ANAPOL

Now, over here, we have the gentlemen actually responsible for the pictorial adventures of the Escapist, Mr. Kavalier, the artist, and Mr. Clay, the writer. Boys, these gentlemen are associated with the NBC Blue network. And this is Mr. Tracy Bacon. He's going to play the Escapist.

Bacon nods. He puts on a radio announcer voice:

BACON

"Armed with superb physical and mental training, a crack team of assistants, and ancient wisdom, he roams the globe, performing amazing feats--"

Sammy joins in for the finale.

SAMMY AND BACON

"And coming to the aid of those who languish in tyranny's chains!"

They crack up.

JOE

Our guy is going to be on the radio?

ANAPOL

I must have forgot to tell you. Things happen fast in the radio business.

The suits nod. Bacon walks over and takes a look at what Joe's drawing.

CUT TO:

SEQUENCE O (4 panels)

Panel 1. Two trains rushing toward each other. The Escapist is chained to the headlight of the first train.

Panel 2. The train with the Escapist fills the whole panel, barrelling right at us.

Panel 3. Now we can only see the great circular front end of train, the headlight, the struggling Escapist.

Panel 4. The Escapist's face, twisted in fear and concentration.

CUT TO:

BACON (O.S.)

Looks like I'm in a tight spot. How do I get out of it?

JOE

Better ask the writer.

SAMMY

I'm still trying to work that out, to tell you the truth.

BACON

Let me ask you something, Mr. Clay. Would you be willing to let me pick your brain a little bit? I'm having some trouble getting the character down. I wonder if you'd be willing to give me some help.

SAMMY

Well, thank you, I'm--I'm flattered, but I don't--

BACON

Excellent! We'll grab a drink at the St. Regis. I'm sure you have insights.

He flashes that incredible grin.

SAMMY

Insights....! I--I'd love to.

Joe looks at Sammy, puzzled: Are you flirting?

SAMMY (CONT'D)

But I can't. I have a dinner date, I'm already a little late.

Bacon checks his watch.

BACON

A dinner date at five on a Friday? Sounds swank.

SAMMY

You can't even begin to imagine. But I guess I have time for one drink.

Grabs his hat and starts after Bacon. Joe watches him go, looking a little bemused.

EXT. FLATBUSH - SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

Sammy and Bacon stumble up from the subway.

BACON
(looking around)
Where is the actual flat bush?

SAMMY
I can't believe I'm doing this.

BACON
You've clearly been drinking.

) They cross the street to Sammy's old building.

SAMMY
We're so late.

BACON
Are we? You hadn't mentioned it.

SAMMY
You hardly know me...

He unlocks the front door.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
...how can you presume to razz me?

Sammy pulls open the door. Bacon hesitates before going through. Odd expression on his face.

BACON
Maybe I know you better than you think.

They look at each other. Then Bacon goes in.

INT. APARTMENT HOUSE - HALL

Sammy starts unlock the apartment door; Ethel opens it.

ETHEL
Look who it is.

SAMMY
Sorry we're late.

ETHEL
Where's your cousin?

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

) The sabbath candles stand on the table, unlit.

SAMMY
He had to work. Here, Ma, I brought a friend. This is Mr. Tracy Bacon. He's going to play the Escapist, on the radio.

ETHEL
You're very good looking.

BACON

Thank you, Mrs. Clay.

ETHEL

The name is Klayman. Come, sit down.
The sunset was two hours ago.

SAMMY

(to Bacon)

Didn't I say she was going to be mad
about the whole sunset thing?

ETHEL

I'm glad your religion means nothing to
you. It's better your family should be
fighting and dying in Europe for
something that means nothing to you.

Sammy kisses her.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

You've been drinking?

SAMMY

I can have a drink if I want.

ETHEL

I have a bottle of slivovitz in the
buffet, it was your father's. You can
drink the whole thing. Get smashed.

SAMMY

(to Bacon)

I told you this would be fun.

INT. ETHEL'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Ethel, head covered, bows before the lit candles. Gathers
three armfuls of light.

ETHEL

Baruch ataw adonoy eloheynu melech
ha'olam...

Sammy glances at Bacon, coughs, then joins in.

ETHEL AND SAMMY

...asher kiddushanu b'mitzvosav,
vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel shabbes.

Now Bacon looks delighted but a little confused.

INT. ETHEL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ethel, Sammy and Bacon sit around the ruins of the meal.
Bacon sits back and wipes his mouth.

BACON

Whew! You know, that's the first
homecooked meal I've had in over a year.

Ethel is shocked by this.

ETHEL

Your family--

BACON

(lightly)

Oh, they're all dead! I live in a hotel--
the Mayflower. I get most of my meals
brought up.

ETHEL

That's very sad in my opinion.

BACON

Sometimes I feel the same way.

Wistful. A beat.

ETHEL

Did you leave room for my babka?

BACON

Is babka dessert?

SAMMY

An eternal question among my people.
There are some who argue it's actually a
kind of very small hassock.

Bacon rises and starts to gather the plates.

ETHEL

Please, don't--

Sammy rises.

SAMMY

Yeah, you're making me look bad.

INT. ETHEL'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Ethel washes, Sammy dries. Bacon peeks in.

BACON

This the way to the--

ETHEL

First left.

(beat)

He looks just like Josef draws him.

SAMMY

It's uncanny.

ETHEL
He's working again?

SAMMY
Yeah. He kills me. I think he's averaging twenty pages a day or something crazy like that. He's working for other publishers.

ETHEL
And the girl?

She hands him a plate; he dries it.

SAMMY
He likes her. Rosa is a nice girl. I was a little, I don't know, at first. But now--

ETHEL
Is that why he hasn't introduced me, because she's such a nice girl?

SAMMY
No. I don't why. I get the idea he thinks you might disapprove of his getting involved with a girl and stuff when his family is, you know, living under Hitler.

ETHEL
Why would he think that?

SAMMY
Because he disapproves of it himself.

ETHEL
And he's right to.

SAMMY
That's nuts! Ma! Everybody deserves to be happy. To meet someone nice. I'd like to meet someone nice like that.

ETHEL
I'd like it, too.

They work for a moment in silence.

ETHEL (CONT'D)
So, what kind of actor is your Mr. Bacon?

SAMMY
He seems very good. I think he'll do fine.

Ethel turns off the tap. Looks him straight in the eye, tenderly, just for an instant.

ETHEL
I'm sure he will.

Hands him a dish. Sammy stands there, stunned. Then she looks away. He starts to wipe the dish dry.

EXT. RADIO CITY - DAY

A taxi pulls up. Joe, Rosa and Sam get out. THE PRODUCER comes over to greet them.

PRODUCER
Hello, hello!
(to Rosa)
I'm the producer, Roger Stern. Come on in, we're just about ready to start the dress rehearsal.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Going up. They have it all to themselves.

PRODUCER
I think you're going to be delighted with our cast, boys. They've really brought the whole thing to life.

ROSA
So, who do they have playing Hitler?

Sammy glances at Joe. Joe looks at his shoes.

SAMMY
Well, they, uh, made one or two changes.

Rosa's confused. She looks at Sammy.

ROSA
But we're fighting the Nazis, right?

SAMMY
Or the dramatic equivalent.

OVER

A loud SCREAM.

OMAR (V.O.)
Miss Blossom, what is it?

INT. RADIO CITY - NBC BLUE STUDIO 23A - DAY

MISS Verna Kaye, as Plum Blossom, stands before a microphone. From her full red lips blooms the cry:

PLUM BLOSSOM
Indians!

GUNFIRE. The EFFECTS MAN works over two sheets of metal with a hammer. Guttural SHOUTS, sound of a SCUFFLE.

The ACTORS at their microphones speak their lines.

BIG AL

Well, looks like they got us, Omar.

INDIAN

Yeah, we get you good, paleface. Just like we got your boss.

Everyone gasps.

INDIAN (CONT'D)

That right, we capture him, hogtie him good. And tomorrow when the moon full, we tie him in the sacred knots of the Spider God, leave him to DIE!

More gasps. Organ SWELL.

ANNOUNCER

Tune in next time, when we'll hear the mighty Escapist say...

ESCAPIST

Oh, Christ, not the sacred goddamn knots of the Spider God again!

This line is spoken by Tracy Bacon. Everybody breaks up laughing.

DIRECTOR

All right, take five.

ON SAMMY AND BACON

Bacon sidles up to Sammy.

BACON

Hey. We'll be through here by nine. What are you doing for dinner?

SAMMY

Oh. I--I'd love to. But there's something I have to do. A job.

ON ROSA AND JOE

She whirls from the director to face Joe.

ROSA

Indians!

SAMMY

Yeah, it was what they...

ROSA
 (to the director)
 Excuse me- -

JOE
 Rosa- -

ROSA
 Joe? Aren't you horrified? As if the
 Poor Indians don't have enough trouble.
 (to the director)
 Who wrote that nonsense?

SAMMY
 I did. They weren't happy with the first
 Scripts. Tracy talked them into hiring
 me.

Tracy waves. Rosa turns to Joe.

ROSA
 And you knew about this? Joe, you have a
 real chance here to change people's
 minds, a lot of people. Maybe push this
 country an inch further into the fight
 where we belong.

JOE
 I want this radio show to succeed, Rosa.
 It will sell comic books, and I want to
 make money. The only people whose minds
 I want to change are the Nazis who can
 let my family leave there. I'm fighting
 my own little fight. In the comic books.

Anapol is shown in by the Producer. He's carrying a
 telegram.

ANAPOL
 Sorry I'm Late! Mr. Kavalier, this came
 for you just after you left.

Joe opens the telegram.

JOE
 The ship has sailed!

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The towers of midtown ablaze with light. Neon, streaming
 tail lights. Blurry at first, then coming into focus.

INT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - OBSERVATION DECK - NIGHT

Sammy with an official Army armband, peers through a pair of
 binoculars. Puts down the binoculars, picks up a clipboard.
 Makes a notation. A telephone RINGS. He Hurries out to the
 guard station and answers it.

SAMMY

Post 2. Quiet. Thunderstorm coming.
Otherwise nothing to report. Right.

Just as he hangs up, there's a BUMP. Sammy reaches for the phone again, freezes. Listens. DING. An elevator.

A pair of doors slide open, revealing Tracy Bacon in a dinner jacket. Holding two shopping bags.

BACON

Is this Men's Sportswear?

SAMMY

I knew I shouldn't have told you.

INT. OBSERVATION DECK - MOMENTS LATER

Bacon gazes out at the lights of New Jersey.

BACON

Wow, what a view! I thought this sounded like awfully dull work, but now--

SAMMY

Bacon, you can't--this is a U.S. Army facility.

BACON

Yikes. Then you absolutely do not want a Nazi spy like me hanging around. What was I thinking?

INT. OBSERVATION DECK - NIGHT

Bacon is laying out a full gourmet meal, silver and all, on a table in the bar.

BACON

Since you couldn't have dinner with me, I thought I'd bring it to you. To tell you the truth, I stole it. From Orson's hotel room.

SAMMY

Orson Welles?

BACON

I've done some Mercury Theater things with him.

Bacon starts lifting lids: game hens, asparagus--

BACON (CONT'D)

Look, there's even a baked Alaska.
Somewhat the worse for wear.

They sit down, and start to eat.

BACON (CONT'D)

So what do you do if one night you look out there, out those windows right there, and there's this whole squadron of Junkers flying in low over Brooklyn?

SAMMY

I pick up that phone over there and call the office downtown. After that...I don't know. I don't like to think about what happens next.

BACON

Seems like everyone I know is busy trying not to think about what happens next. At least you're really doing something. Making a contribution. I really...I admire you.

SAMMY

Me? You can't admire me!

BACON

(laughing)

Why not?

SAMMY

Because...because I'm not in the least admirable! You're so big and strong and ...and blond... I'm just this little...runt.

BACON

Oh, no. You're big. Grand, I'd say.

A loud RUMBLE. The glasses on the bar chime.

BACON (CONT'D)

Jeez. Thunder.

He gets up, goes to the windows. Sammy grabs his arm, steers him the other way.

SAMMY

This way. Storm's blowing in from the southeast.

They stand by the southeast windows. Watching a seething storm sail in. Thunder and lightning all around.

BACON

It seems to like us.

SAMMY

Yeah, we're it's favorite. Relax. They've been coming all month. They come all through the summer.

BACON

Yeah, but that stuff doesn't ever, you know. Hit the building.

SAMMY

Five or six times this year, so far.

BACON

Oh, my god.

SAMMY

They've recorded strokes that were more than twenty-two thousand amperes. Ten million volts.

BACON

Jesus.

SAMMY

Don't worry. The whole building acts like one gigantic--

Bacon pulls Sam toward him, kisses him on the lips. After a surprised moment, Sammy kisses back. Then he pulls away.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

--lightning rod.

BACON

I'm sorry.

SAMMY

That's all right.

BACON

I didn't mean to--wow, look at that.

OUT ON THE PROMENADE

Bright blue liquid fire flows along the railings. Static discharge. Sammy opens the door, reaches out his hand. Long blue sparks fork from his fingertips. Bacon sticks his hand out, too. Sparks dance between them.

We pull away from them, from the tall spire, out over the bay, across the ocean, from night to day, arriving:

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN - ARK OF MIRIAM - DAY

Somewhere off the coast of Portugal. The trim ship cuts through the calm seas, under sunny skies. Children everywhere, running, playing tag, rolling hoops.

Along her decks, through a hatch, down a long twisting stair below, to a corridor, an ATTENDANT struggles, carrying a crate marked RED CROSS. Backs into a cabin.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Children lie in bunks, reading, playing the violin. Thomas among them. When the attendant comes in, they rush him, tear open the crate. Chewing gum, candy bars.

CHILD

We must all learn to chew gum.

ANOTHER CHILD

You eat it, but you do not swallow it.

...and comic books. Thomas grabs a copy of Radio Comics. Fascinated. He settles back to read it.

The splash page shows Empire City, with the Statue of Liberation. Holding not a torch but an upraised sword.

Thomas is dazzled. A kid peers in over his shoulder.

KID

Hey, that's you!

Points at the box in one corner: KAVALIER & CLAY.

INT. UPPER WEST SIDE - APARTMENT

Joe shows Rosa around a nice, big apartment. Everywhere are piles of new stuff--packages, shopping bags from Macy's and Gimbels, toys, games, towels, sheets, dishes... Joe picks up an armful of books.

JOE

Look at these. "The American Boy's Little Library." "Forty volumes of essential reading for the American Boy."

ROSA

That's great, Joe. Joe, I--

Joe puts the books down. Picks up some socks.

JOE

Look at these! Genuine Ko-Z-Toes socks. Seventy five cents a pair!

ROSA

Joe. I have to tell you...

He runs to the kitchen.

ROSA (CONT'D)

...something.

Joe up a box of Wheaties.

JOE

Look, Wheaties!

She follows him to the kitchen. He puts his arms around her.
She leans back against him.

JOE (CONT'D)

There is a place for him at Collegiate,
thanks to your father. There is money,
spending money, in his bank account. In
the summer he can go to a Jewish camp in
the Catskill Mountains. And did you see
under Thomas's bed, there is the trundle
bed?

ROSA

A trundle bed, yeah, I saw it.

JOE

He is going to be able to invite home
some chum from school, if it is a Friday
or a Saturday night.

ROSA

That reminds me. Are you ready for
Donald's bar mitzvah?

JOE

I've been practicing for months. I'm
ready.

ROSA

Good, because my whole family--

A moan escapes Rosa. She steps back from Joe, covers her
mouth with her hand.

JOE

Are you all right?

ROSA

It's the paint. The fumes.

Joe goes to open a window.

JOE

Better?

ROSA

Yes. Joe, I--

JOE

I have something I want to show you.

He's holding up a ring of keys. He counts them off.

JOE (CONT'D)

This apartment. My aunt's. Palooka
Studios. The Empire offices.

ROSA

That's a lot of keys. To a lot of doors
in New York.

JOE

You know, I didn't want to get tied down
here. In New York. In America.

Rosa looks at him. What is he saying? Does he know? Should
she not even tell him at all?

ROSA

No, Joe, I know that. I know you didn't
want to get tied down.

JOE

The more keys you carry, the more locks
you wear.

ROSA

That's very profound.

JOE

But...what can I do? I like it here.

She smiles. Can't quite believe what she's hearing.

JOE (CONT'D)

And I think Thomas is going to like it
here, too.

ROSA

And do you think he's going to like me?

Joe kisses her. And pulls her down onto the bed.

JOE

He is going to love you.

ROSA

How can you be sure?

JOE

Because I love you.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUDINI'S CABINET - HIPPODROME - LONDON - 1904

The curtain shivers. Houdini's head emerges.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

After he'd been in the cabinet for
fifteen minutes, Houdini called to the
reporter from the London Mirror.

The crowd goes crazy with delight. But we can see from
Houdini's face that he's still cuffed.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He complains that his knees hurt. He wonders if the reporter will kindly bring him a cushion.

A groan from the crowd. While the reporter signals for a cushion to be brought, Houdini brings his cuffed wrists out of the cabinet and looks at them fiercely.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 What he really wants, of course, is to get a look at those cuffs in good light. Just to see, I guess, if he's really in as big of a fix as he's afraid he is.

The cushion is brought. The Reporter hands it to Houdini.

The CONDUCTOR signals to the ORCHESTRA.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 The orchestra started in on "Blue Danube" for the fifth time.

Bess blows him a kiss. Houdini catches it, retreats back into the cabinet. And Bess Houdini stands there, on stage. Watching, waiting, dying--smiling.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - DAY

Early morning Sammy and Bacon walk down by the river, laughing, arms around each other's shoulders.

BACON
 So I met with Frank Singe.

SAMMY
 Parnassus Pictures?

BACON
 They are interested in having me star in the serial.

SAMMY
 That's terrific! You're perfect.

BACON
 I'd have to move to Hollywood. At least for a while. And I'll be honest with you, kid. Once I get there, I think I'm going to want to stay.

SAMMY
 Uh huh.

BACON

Don't look hurt. I want to take you with me. I talked to Singe about hiring you to write the thing.

SAMMY

Writing for the movies! In Hollywood-- with you?

BACON

It was a thought.

They stop. Bacon sees something.

BACON (CONT'D)

Start walking. Don't run.

A gang of TOUGH BOYS is coming across the playground. Sammy lets go of Bacon.

FIRST TOUGH BOY

Let's fuck em up.

They come after Sammy and Bacon.

BACON

Now, run!

They take off, but they've run into a dead end street. When they're up against a chain-link fence, they turn, and the boys are on them, with chains and sticks. Sammy goes down right away in a spray of blood and teeth. Bacon manages to land a solid punch.

FIRST COP (O.S.)

Hey, you there!

TWO COPS stand at the end of the street.

The boys scatter. Bacon lands a farewell smack at the back of a BOY'S head.

BACON

Shitheads!

Bacon helps Sammy to his feet. Bacon's breathing hard, shuddering with anger and exertion.

Sammy turns to the cops, opening his arms wide in relief.

SAMMY

Thank God.

The cops close in. Their nightsticks drawn.

SECOND COP

Well, what do we got here?

INT. ARK OF MIRIAM - CABIN - NIGHT

All the other children are asleep, but Thomas Kavalier reads by the light of a pocket torch: Radio Comics.

The cabin hatch opens. Thomas looks up, startled, scrambles to hide the comic.

The attendant is there: silhouetted, still.

ATTENDANT

There is a U-Boat. We must evacuate.

An ALARM begins to sound.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

Don't worry, children. We are very near an island, one of the Canary Islands, and they will even escort us there. They just want to sink the ship, not us.

INT. PIERRE HOTEL - BALLROOM - DAY

Joe is onstage at the Saks bar mitzvah reception, holding a deck of cards. At the other end of a stage stands a vase filled with roses. Holds up the cards, fans them. Then he peels one from the deck. Raises his hand, lets fly.

The card whizzes through the air and neatly slices off the head of one rose. Then in succession eleven other cards fly in and decapitate the roses. Loud APPLAUSE. Saks leads it.

EXT. ARK OF MIRIAM - MID-ATLANTIC - DAY

Thomas, with two dozen other children, sits in a lifeboat, clutching the comic book in his hand as the boat is lowered from the davits into the sea.

EXT. U-BOAT CONNING TOWER

The evacuation is observed, through binoculars, by the COMMANDER of the U-Boat. LIEUTENANT by his side.

COMMANDER

They're nearly away. Arm the torpedoes.

The Lieutenant looks to the sky, frowns. The Commander looks, too. Sound of a RISING WIND.

COMMANDER (CONT'D)

Did we receive reports of a storm?

LIEUTENANT

It was not supposed to move so quickly.

The wind HOWLS louder.

INT. PIERRE BALLROOM - DAY

Joe and a volunteer from the audience--the DONALD SAKS, of course-- wheel onstage a large, gilded red box.

As Joe is about to step into it, we see a MAN enter the ballroom, an anxious look on his face. The man finds Mr. Saks, leans down to talk in his ear.

Onstage, Donald has sealed Joe inside his box.

INT. JOE'S BOX - DAY

A thin bar of light coming through a crack in the box lights Joe's face. We HEAR his steady breathing, and the creaking of the box's mechanism. And Mr. Saks's voice.

SAKS (O.S.)

...Ark of Miriam... sunk... by a German U-Boat. They don't know if anyone...

His voice fades as the sound of Joe's breathing, his HEARTBEAT, grows louder and louder.

Onstage, the Bar Mitzvah boy waits by the box, grinning a sickly grin. People shouting, swearing, calling out.

SAKS (CONT'D)

Somebody get him out of there, for God's sake. His brother was on the boat.

BAR MITZVAH BOY

He said he would knock when he was ready.

Two male GUESTS approach the box, feel it all over, then rip open the panel. Joe isn't there. They spin the box around, find a hidden hatch, open it. No Joe. One of the guests pokes in his head, looks around. Steps out of it.

GUEST

It's empty!

INT. THE TOMBS - DAY

Dawn. Sammy and Tracy lie in a cell, all torn up. On opposite sides of the room. A JAIL COP walks up to the cell and bangs on it with a stick. They start.

JAIL COP

All right, ladies. We can't hold you any more.

EXT. THE TOMBS - DAY

Dawn. Sam and Tracy stumble out, down the front steps. Both bleeding. Sam's front tooth is missing.

Sam's just looking straight ahead. Tracy studies him, his expression at once concerned and pleading. Sam ignores him.

Tracy puts a hand on Sam's shoulder, but Sam moves away.
Hears a NEWSBOY's cry.

NEWSBOY

He-rald! Extra! U-Boat sinks mercy ship!

SAMMY

Holy shit.

The newsboy is waving a Herald with a screaming headline.

NEWSBOY

Three hundred children sent to lifeboats in a storm at sea!

SAMMY

I need to get uptown.

EXT. WEST END AVENUE - APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

The cab pulls up just as Rosa is running up in her party dress. Tracy Bacon gets out of the cab, slowly, badly bruised.

BACON

Rosa! Could you give me a hand?

Bacon and Rosa ease him out.

SAMMY

Did you hear? Where is he?

ROSA

(out of breath

I don't know! Donald's party, he was doing an escape. The news came in. He just...disappeared.

Her face crumples. They fall into each other's arms.

SAMMY

Ow! God damn it!

ROSA

Why didn't you take him to the hospital?

BACON

He wouldn't go.

SAMMY

Just get me inside. I'll be fine.

Bacon watches Rosa help Sammy up the steps. They go in; Sammy doesn't look back. Bacon's eyes shine. Then he turns and gets back in the cab. It pulls away.

INT. JOE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

It's dim, deserted. The door opens, spilling light from the hall.

SAMMY

Joe?

They walk into the jolly chaos of the haunted apartment. Toys, books, games, socks, balls and bat.

ROSA

I want to try to clean you up.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Rosa brings a bowl of ice and a towel. She rolls the ice into the towel, lays it against Sam's face. He yelps.

ROSA

Sam, who did this to you?

SAMMY

The evil forces of the Iron Chain. Are you all right? You look a little green.

ROSA

I'm just tired. Oh, you lost a tooth.

She bursts into tears. Sam consoles her, wincing as he puts his arm around her. The ice tumbles out of the washcloth.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Sam, I'm pregnant.

Sammy takes this in.

SAMMY

Have you told him? No, you haven't.

She shakes her head.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Here, help me. I need to lie down.

They stand up and she helps him into his bedroom. She eases him onto the bare mattress, then climbs in beside him.

INT. JOE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATER

Sam and Rosa have fallen asleep, fully clothed, not touching.

A light falls across them from the hall.

Joe steps into the room. Stops. Looks around.

Joe studies the ruins of a possible life. Piles of books. Erector sets and tennis rackets. Comic books. Toys, games.

All the equipment necessary for an American boyhood that will never be.

He goes over and picks up a volume of "The American Boy's Little Library." A faint, wistful smile.

He grabs a duffel, gathers some clothes from a box and a suitcase. Comes over to the bed. Looks down at Rosa and Sammy lying there. Starts to say something, to wake them. Then lays something JANGLING between them.

INT. JOE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATER

Rosa sits up. A JANGLE, something tumbles to her lap. She picks it up. It's Joe's key ring. The keys CHIME.

Rosa climbs out of bed, waking Sammy. She goes to Joe's empty bed. There's a note. She picks it up, reads it.

SAMMY

What's it say?

ROSA

He's joining the Navy.

SAMMY

I thought he didn't have status--

ROSA

His Green Card came two weeks ago.

She sits back down on the bed.

ROSA (CONT'D)

"Please don't expect me to return. I don't plan to survive the war."

She crumples up the note, bites it, crumples it some more. Then tosses it aside. Furious tears. Sammy moves over next to her, wincing. Awkwardly he strokes her hair.

SAMMY

Tracy is going to Hollywood. He asked me to go with him.

ROSA

Are you going to do it? Are you going to leave me, too?

Sammy looks at the blood on his finger. Then at her.

EXT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - DAY

The Twentieth Century Limited, wreathed in steam.

Bacon approaches Sammy. They're both cut up, bruised. Bacon is carrying a suitcase and a bag. Sam is empty handed. When he sees Bacon, he looks away. Lights a cigarette. Bacon stops, sets down his bags. He knows what Sam has come to say.

BACON

Aw, Sam.

INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Sammy and Bacon sit opposite each other. Not talking. Not touching. Three feet of dead air between them.

SAMMY

I just can't do it. I'm not cut out for it. I don't want to be this way.

BACON

You don't have a choice.

SAMMY

I think I do.

Bacon gets up, comes to sit beside Sammy.

BACON

I don't believe that. There's nothing you can do about it.

He tries to take Sammy's hand. Sammy jerks it away.

SAMMY

Just watch me.

EXT. EAST RIVER - STEAM LINER - DAY

Dawn. Joe stands on the deck of a steamer, bound up toward the Sound, leaving the city behind him. He stares down into the water, churning and black as illustrator's ink.

A BRUSH

trailing a wake of black ink. Reveal that the Cartoonist is inking a swastika onto the tailfin of a Dornier cargo plane.

CUT TO:

SEQUENCE P (14 panels)

Panel 1. A big Dornier gleams in the sunshine. Luftwaffe markings. The bomb bay is open. Tiny bomblets are dropping from its belly. They trail down to an endless white expanse beneath.

CAP

AND SO FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A
THOUSAND YEARS, IT RAINS.

SFX:

ZWIZZZZZZ!

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

In 1938 Nazi Germany dropped 5,000
specially manufactured stakes from the
skies above Antarctica.

Panel 2. The bomb-shaped stakes fill the sky. Each is topped with an iron Swastika.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The markers fell over an area twice the size of Texas. The Germans claimed it all, even though it belonged to Norway. Then they conquered Norway.

Panel 3. Map of Antarctica. Showing German New Swabia and American Marie Byrd Land.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

All of a sudden, Germany bordered the United States.

Panel 4. A complex of buildings, buried in snow. American flag flies from a central flagpole.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Roosevelt decided to view this as a threat. The U.S. Navy sent forty-seven men and fifty-two dogs down to Little America, along with three thousand tons of equipment and prime Kansas beef, and one Curtiss airplane specially modified for cold weather.

Panel 5. In the radio shack. Joe Kavalier, in sailor's uniform, mans the radio.

SFX:

DIT-DIT-DAH-DIT-DAH-DAH-DIT

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Among the crew of the mission was an obscure Czech radio technician. He had volunteered for submarine service because he wanted to sink U-Boats.

Panel 6. The radio shack juts up into the Antarctic blank. Bristling with aerials. The lonely signal flutters out into the void.

SFX:

DIT-DIT-DAH-DAH-DAH-DIT-DAH

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The Navy in its wisdom sent him to the one place where there were not even any Germans.

Panel 7. The crew's quarters. Guys hang around playing cards, chess, sock hockey. Joe is off to one side, holding a stack of letters.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The radioman was liked by the others. But they didn't really know him.

SAILOR 1:

YOU EVER GOING TO READ THOSE LETTERS, DIT?

SAILOR 2:

THEY'RE FROM YOUR GIRL, AIN'T THEY?

Panel 8. The two sailors watch Joe as he tucks the stack of letters back into his footlocker.

SAILOR 2 (whisper): GUY NEVER EVEN OPENED THEM!

SAILOR 1 (whisper): HE SAID IT WOULD DISTRACT HIM FROM THE WAR.

SAILOR 2 (whisper): AIN'T THAT TH' IDEA?

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Mostly the radioman kept to himself.

Panel 9. Joe in the dog kennel. Huskies leaping all over him. While he grins.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Actually he seemed to prefer the company of the dogs.

Panel 10. Joe asleep in a pile of dogs.

CAP: ON THE ICE, MEN OFTEN BEGAN TO DO STRANGE THINGS--

CAP: --RADIOMAN FIRST CLASS KAVALIER STARTED SLEEPING WITH THE DOGS.

Panel 11. Close on Joe's face, framed by two huskies' heads. He opens one eye.

SFX: COUGH-COUGH

CAP: HE LIKED TO SLEEP AT THE BACK OF THE DOGTOWN, NEXT TO HIS FAVORITE DOG, OYSTER.

Panel 12. Joe is standing now, smelling the air. Dogs lie all around him. None stir. At the other end of the ice-tunnel, a door stands ajar. Light pours into the inky tunnel.

SFX: COUGH-COUGH-COUGH

CAP: THAT WAS WHAT SAVED HIS LIFE--

Panel 13. Joe's by the door, his face illuminated by the light from the doorway.

Panel 14. Joe staggers backward, crying out.

SFX YEAAAAGH!

Panel 15. The sleeping quarters. A Kirbyesque, two-page single panel. Filled with dead men, some tumbled from their cots, some with faces contorted.

CAP --WHEN A GAS LEAK FROM THE STOVE KILLED EVERY MAN AND DOG BUT HIM.

Panel 16. Joe on hands and knees on the ice. Retching. A tiny figure in a vastness of white.

CAP: HE WAS ALONE, IN THE LONELIEST PLACE IN THE WORLD.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He apprised HQ of the situation. They told him he would have to stay put till spring. His mother, his father, Rosa and Sam. The U.S. Navy. They were all far away. Nobody could help him. He was like Houdini, alone his cabinet on the stage of the Hippodrome.

Panel 17. Joe's back at his radio, listening in. He has a beard. He's smoking a cigar and building a house of cards.

WALTER WINCHELL:

GOOD EVENING MR. AND MRS. NORTH AMERICA AND ALL THE SHIPS AT SEA! LET'S GO TO PRESS.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

All he had was his radio. He listened to everything he could pull in. The news from Argentina. Hurling matches in New South Wales. Fibber McGee and Molly. moved into the radio shack for good.

Panel 18. Another day. Joe's beard is bushier, his hair long. He's reading a book called FLYING THE CURTISS-WRIGHT AT-32.

GERMAN VOICE

...AND NOW, A SPECIAL PROGRAM...

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

That was where he first heard of a special camp the Germans had built outside of Prague, called Terezin.

Panel 19. Joe, naked, does chin ups in the doorway of the radio shack. Beard like Rutherford B. Hayes.

SFX:

DIT-DIT-DAH-DIT

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was also how he found out about the survey team in New Swabia, eight hundred miles away. Two scientists and a doctor, Germans, under direct orders from Goering.

Panel 20. Joe shaves his face with a straight razor. Whiskers everywhere.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He dutifully radioed HQ to tell them there were Germans on the Ice.

Panel 21. Joe looks into the blade of the knife. It reflects his eye. In the pupil we see his parents and Thomas, posed as for a photo. Their expressions imploring.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Then he set about planning to kill them.

CUT TO:

INT. RABBI'S CHAMBERS - DAY

The book-lined office of a big-time Manhattan rabbi. Squeezed in to the area around his desk are Ethel, Siggy Saks, Mr. Hoffman, Mr. Anapol, and Jerry Glovsky: Ethel is standing with her arms folded, face set.

In the center stand Sammy, Rosa, and the RABBI. Sammy is dressed in a dark suit; Rosa, extremely pregnant, in a plain maternity dress, sea-green. The rabbi, handsome, well-to-do, is talking.

RABBI

...and in the sight of God. All right, Rosa.

He nods to her.

ROSA

Seven times?

Quickly, getting it over with, she begins to walk around Sammy in a tight circle.

RABBI

Not like that, you aren't running for a bus, dear. Slowly. Look at him. You have to look at your husband. That's it.

She slows down, and looks at Sammy, looks away. He averts his eyes, too. They just can't look at each other.

Then they do. Resolute. Terrified. Two people joining hands to leap from a high ledge onto the tiniest of cushions.

Now, their eyes locked, she goes around and around and around and around as the rabbi says:

RABBI (CONT'D)

This is how you tell this man that he is the center of your existence. That he is the one you have chosen to set above all others. The Holy One, baruch hashem, spends His time arranging marriages. He has chosen you for each other, He has circled you with His Pen. And that is the path you are now walking.

Sammy blinks. His eyes roll back and his eyelids flutter and he sinks to the floor. There is a CRASH. Ethel cries out.

RABBI (CONT'D)

Give him room, please.

The rabbi kneels beside Sammy, who sits up, and reaches into the hip pocket of his jacket. Brings out a cloth napkin enfolding the shattered pieces of a wine glass.

SAMMY

Oh, shit, I broke the glass.

ROSA

That's okay, Sam. You're supposed to break it. It's just a little early.

RABBI

A moment. I'll fetch another.

ETHEL

Rabbi, they're already married aren't they? Officially?

The rabbi nods.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

Maybe we ought to quit while we're ahead.

Sammy shakes out the napkin. A few last pieces of glass tumble to the carpet.

CUT TO:

INT. HIPPODROME THEATER - LONDON, 1904 - LATER

The curtain shakes, and Houdini steps out of the cabinet. The crowd's roar turns to a groan. Houdini is dishevelled, hair mussed, and still cuffed.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

After forty minutes in the cabinet with the double Bramah cuffs, Houdini came out for the second time. He was very hot in his tailcoat, he said. Would the gentleman from the Mirror consider undoing the cuffs long enough to remove his jacket?

The crowd begins to cheer as the Reporter considers the question.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But the Reporter was cagey. He understood what Houdini was really up to. He had seen the cuffs being locked. But he had never seen them being unlocked.

The Reporter shakes his head. The crowd jeered him.

Houdini shrugs, and then, boldly, grins. Awkwardly reaching into the pocket of his coat, Houdini withdraws a pen knife. He snaps it open, and then manages to get the handle lodged between his teeth.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

This was Bernard Kornblum's favorite part of the story, Joe always said.

(MORE)

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Kornblum admired Houdini for turning a
 setback into a grand bit of showmanship.

With the knife in his teeth, Houdini shrugs the jacket up
 over his head and then cuts it away from his arms. The crowd
 goes even crazier.

Bess isn't cheering; she looks at her watch.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He said it took genius to transform
 failure into art.

Basking in applause, Houdini steps back into the cabinet.

CUT TO:

SEQUENCE Q (21 panels)

Panel 1. Through binoculars. A bleak white expanse. Mountains jagged teeth in the b.g.
 The Curtiss a tiny cross against the sky. Trailing a plume of black smoke.

SFX: SPLUT-SPLUT-SPLUT

Panel 2. The Doctor's eyes, amphetamine wild, watching through the fur-trimmed hole of
 his parka's hood. Binoculars lowered.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I never got the whole story of what
 happened to the other two Germans. They
 were dead before Joe showed up. Joe
 thought the Doctor might have killed him.
 He had 72 empty packets of benzendrine in
 his pocket.

Panel 3. The plane hangs, listing to one side.

CAP: THE PLANE COUGHS ONE LAST TIME, THEN
 STALLS. FOR A MOMENT THE ONLY SOUND
 IS THE CHIMING OF THE GEOLOGIST'S
 BREATH AS IT FREEZES.

Panel 4. The plane plummets, in a dizzy spiral.

CAP: THEN WITH A SICKENING LURCH THE
 CURTISS DROPS, SLOW AS A COIN IN A
 GLASS OF WATER.

SFX: NYOWWWWWRRR

Panel 5. The Geologist's eyes, wide with shock and horror.

Panel 6. The Curtiss plows into a snowbank, kicking up tall plumes of ice and snow.

SFX: SPLAMM!

Panel 7. The plane rests, steaming and ticking, in the snow, a twisted wreck.

SFX: TIK-TIK-TIK-TIK

Panel 8. The hatch is flung open.

SFX:

WHAK!

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Joe spent the first one hundred miles
learning to fly an airplane. The next
four hundred he thought about the killing
he was going to do.

Panel 9. Joe dances stumbling across the snow toward the Geologist, arms held high,
smiling.

JOE:

HEY! HI! WHOO-HOO! I MADE IT! HELLO!

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He flew the next two hundred miles
through very heavy weather. So the last
one hundred miles he just spent being
grateful for his life.

Panel 10. The Geologist's face seems to melt. Tears in his eyes. His expression twisted
with uncertainty, hope, fear, doubt...

GEOLOGIST (thought):

AN AMERICAN BOY... WHO SPEAKS
GERMAN... HAS JUST FALLEN OUT OF THE
SKY.

Panel 11. The two men stand ten feet apart. The German levels a big Walther at Joe. Joe
pushes back his hood.

JOE:

I AM VERY GLAD TO BE HERE—

JOE:

—IT WAS A VERY DIFFICULT FLIGHT.

Panel 12. A bullet tears into Joe's shoulder. Spinning him around.

Panel 13. The Doctor, tears streaming down his cheeks, fires off his whole clip. The shots
go wide.

SFX:

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

Panel 14. Joe stands, grinning. A hole in the shoulder of his parka. Pulls out his gun,
holding it loosely.

DOCTOR (OP):

NO!

Panel 15. They grapple, their faces an inch apart.

DOCTOR:

YOU CAME TO KILL ME.

JOE:

YES, BUT I—

DOCTOR:

YOU SAID SO. YOU SENT A FUCKING
TELEGRAM!

SFX:

BLAM!

Panel 16. Joe is horrorstruck. The Doctor's face softer. Sad smile.

DOCTOR: YOU LIKE GENE KRUPA?

JOE: GENE KRUPA IS THE GREATEST.

Panel 17. The Doctor lies in a heap at Joe's feet. Joe gazes down sadly. Steam purls from the bullet hole.

Panel 18. Joe drags the body of the German through the snow toward the German camp, leaving a trail of blood.

CAP: JOE IS DETERMINED TO SAVE THE LIFE OF
THE MAN HE CROSSED 800 MILES OF ICE TO
KILL...

Panel 19. The trail of blood narrows as Joe trudges toward the Quonset hut.

CAP: ...IF THEY CAN JUST MAKE IT TO THE
STATION, THERE WILL BE FORCEPS,
NEEDLE AND THREAD, HEMOSTAT,
MORPHINE...

JOE: HANG ON. STAY ALIVE.

Panel 20. Joe's face. He's working very hard. His breath chimes in the air. Ice on his eyebrows.

SFX: TINK! TINK!

CAP: THE SMELL OF THE GERMAN'S BLOOD IN
THE SNOW IS LIKE A REPROACH TO JOE.
NOTHING THAT HAS HAPPENED TO HIM,
NOT EVEN THE DEATH OF HIS BROTHER...

Panel 21. Joe crouches by the body of the Doctor. Head in his hands. Breath billowing and freezing around his head.

CAP: ...HAS EVER BROKEN HIS HEART SO
TERRIBLY AS THE REALIZATION—

CAP: —THAT HE IS DRAGGING A CORPSE
BEHIND HIM.

SFX: TINK! TINK! TINK!

CUT TO:

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NEW YORK - 1945 - DAY

INSERT TITLE:

NEW YORK, 1945

A Saturday matinee. Screaming squirming kids all around,
throwing popcorn, etc.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

After he wrapped the first and only
Escapist serial Republic ever made, Tracy
Bacon enlisted in the Air Force.

In the midst of chaos Sammy sits rapt, watching the screen,
tears streaming down his cheeks. He looks thinner, more
rumpled, haggard. Real grief.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They sent him to the Pacific theater,
where he completed 17 missions as tail-
gunner in a B-17 before he was shot down
over New Guinea.

ON THE SCREEN

A scene from the Escapist serial starring Tracy Bacon. Tracy
Bacon flickers golden and beautiful on the screen.

INT. SAMMY AND ROSA'S APARTMENT - DAY

It's the one on West End Avenue that was supposed to be for
Joe and Thomas. Sammy walks in, jacket over his shoulder.
Wrung out.

ROSA (O.S.)

Sam? Is that you?

SAMMY

I have my doubts.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Rosa is feeding dinner to TOMMY CLAY, 3, and her father.
Siggy wears a smoking jacket but is unshaven. He's drinking
a martini. Sam walks in. Rosa takes one look at him. Her
tone contains bitterness and sympathy.

ROSA

Sam. You saw it again?

He ruffles Tommy's hair, sits down. She puts a plate in
front of him.

ROSA (CONT'D)

What does that make? Four times?

SAMMY

Only three. Hi, Tom.

TOMMY

Hi, Daddy.

SAKS

Hi, Daddy.

Sammy shoots Saks a look.

ROSA

Sam, Shelly called. Twice. Were you supposed to work today?

SAMMY

I don't work Saturday. I give fifty, sixty hours a week to Anapol, churning out that garbage month after month. So that you and Tommy and William Powell here can eat this fine cuisine. I'm entitled to have some time to myself.

SAKS

Listen, 'Daddy.' Do you think I want to take your charity? I spent every dime I had on that--

ROSA

Dad, we know.

(to Sammy)

Shelly said you're almost a full month behind on all your titles. Is that true?

Yes, it is.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Sammy.

(sits down)

Look, Sam. I know how you--ever since we heard about Tracy's plane. I know how it feels.

SAMMY

Yeah? Do you?

ROSA

At least you know what happened to him.

SAMMY

At least you have reason to keep hoping. At least you don't have to try to comfort yourself by writing chapter seventeen of "Trapped by the Plasma Men of Zandar VII."

He drops his fork, gets up and stomps out. She follows him. Tommy looks at Saks. Saks raises his glass.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rosa sits down on the sofa beside Sammy. Puts her arm around him.

ROSA

I guess I just wish--that we could comfort each other.

SAMMY

Like a little hobby we could share.

ROSA

Sam--

SAMMY

Don't tell me you aren't still hoping..

ROSA

No. Really. I'm not.

SAMMY

Liar.

SEQUENCE R (5 panels)

Panel 1. Joe lies in a bed in a military hospital.

CAP:

JOE SPENT NEARLY A YEAR AT
GUANTANAMO, RECOVERING FROM HIS
INJURIES.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

The Navy classified the disastrous
Antarctic mission. Removed all traces
from the official record. Even the fact
that Joe was still alive was classified.

Panel 2. Joe is packing his duffel. A nurse stands in the doorway. Holding a familiar stack of letters.

NURSE:

YOU'RE STILL HERE!

JOE:

MY PLANE IS IN TWO HOURS.

NURSE:

THESE CAME FOR YOU.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He had thought they were lost forever,
along with everything else.

Panel 3. Close on the topmost letter as Joe takes the stack from the Nurse. We can see that it's from Rosa Clay.

NURSE:

LETTERS FROM HOME, AND YOU NEVER
OPENED THEM?

Panel 4. Joe stuffs them into his duffel.

JOE:

THESE WEREN'T FROM MY HOME.

Panel 5. Joe flies in the belly of a cargo transport, alone. Staring at the letters.

CAP:

"--WHERE IS YOUR HOME, JOE?"

CUT TO:

INT. CZECHOSLOVAKIA - TRAIN - DAY

Joe, in uniform and Naval Cross, gazes out the window at the Czech countryside. Hearing voices from the past.

THOMAS (V.O.)

Is there room for me?

JOE (V.O.)

No, I'm sorry... I promise I'll send for you... I will send for mother, and father. And you. Especially you. We will all be safe and sound. I swear. Do we have a deal?

INT. TRAIN - DAY - LATER

Joe dozes as the train slows and pulls into a station. Joe wakes. Looks out at the station platform. The sign reads: TEREZIN/THERESIENSTADT. He reaches for his cane.

EXT. TEREZIN - DAY

A medieval fortress town. The last stop before Auschwitz.

Joe walks up to a gate, carrying his duffel. Leaning on his cane. Over the gate, ARBEIT MACHT FREI. TWO RED ARMY SOLDIERS guard the gate. They block his way. Implacable.

Joe reaches for his duffel. They lower their rifles at him but he puts his hands up. He's holding a cigar box in one hand, brandishing the cane in the other. He opens the box, slowly, one handed, with magician's flourish. We can almost smell how good they are.

EXT. TEREZIN STREETS - DAY

Joe wanders, alone, through the deserted streets. There's no one there, and nothing to see. Lots of rubbish, scraps of clothing. Empty buildings.

EXT. PRAGUE - DAY

The tall, crooked spires of the Old Town.

Joe carries his duffel along a winding street, with the Bahnhof in the background. A street we've seen before, on the night he left Prague.

EXT. PRAGUE STREET - DAY

He walks past the Academy of Fine Arts. It's boarded up and bullet-scarred. The streets around him, and the people he passes, look battered, worn down.

EXT. PRAGUE STREET - DAY

He stands outside Kornblum's building. It's nothing but a shattered facade. He keeps walking.

EXT. KAVALIER APARTMENT - DAY

Outside his old home. Joe gazing up. Lots of Red (Communist) flags in the windows.

INT. KAVALIER FLAT - BOYS' BEDROOM - DAY

Joe stands in the empty, vandalized wreck of his old room. There's nothing there. Now he sinks to his knees, falls back against a wall. Lets out a long, long sigh.

EXT. CHARLES BRIDGE - DAY

Evening coming on. Joe is standing by the rampart, looking down at the river. It's the very spot where he and Thomas once stood, when Thomas pushed Joe into the river.

Joe leans his cane against the side. Climbs up on the parapet. Stands there, watching the swift black water flowing under the bridge. He closes his eyes. Takes a deep breath. Steps forward.

RUSSIAN MP 1 (O.S.)

Hey! Hey you! Get down from there!

FOUR RUSSIAN MPS rush Joe, grab him and drag him down from the bridge. They shove and punch and slap him.

RUSSIAN MP 1 (CONT'D)

What's the matter with you!

They truss him up with his hands behind him.

RUSSIAN MP 1 (CONT'D)

Take him down to the station.

Joe tears free of their grasp for a moment.

JOE

Gentlemen, wait!

He reaches into his duffel. Brandishes another box of fine cigars. An MP grabs the box from him, and they drag him away. Leaving his cane behind.

As they hustle him down the street, they pass a ragged man, who sees Joe, recognizes him. It's the Jewish Beggar, from the secret Golem committee. He tips his hat.

INT. JAILHOUSE - LATER

The iron door slams shut on Joe, alone in the cell. Two happy Russian MPs walk off, puffing away. Their breast pockets crammed with cigars.

Joe limps back and forth across the cell a few times. Runs his hands along the wall. Stoops down to study the lock on the iron door. Sighs. Stands, looks up at:

A narrow rectangle of thick opaque glass in a corner of the ceiling. Lets in a shaft of watery light.

INT. JAILHOUSE - NIGHT

Joe lies on the cot, in the darkness. Awake. A sound. A SQUEAKING, SCRATCHING. He sits up. Looks up at the glass brick in the ceiling. The SQUEAKING stops. Resumes.

Joe stands up, drags the cot under the window. Stands on it. Touches the glass. A moment later there is a TINKLE and something sharp pokes through. The TIP of a thick drill bit.

The drill withdraws. Then there is a fainter Scratch, and a thin roll of PAPER slides down through the hole. Joe snatches it.

He unrolls the paper. It's an old handbill advertising a performance of KORNBLUM. Rolled inside it is a thin shaft of bent wire. A PICK.

Joe holds the pick, wondering. Turns over the handbill. An address is penciled boldly across the back.

Joe puts an eye to the hole but can see nothing. He climbs down, goes to the door. Kneels before the lock. Slides in the pick.

INT. JEWISH DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE HQ - FOYER - NIGHT

A once-glamorous private home. Now crowded with REFUGEES, AID WORKERS, children and adults. Joe walks in, uncertain, looking around at the chaos. Then amid all the faces he sees:

Kornblum. Much older, feebler, but still ruddy faced. They walk toward each other, slowly, and embrace.

INT. COMMONS ROOM - JDC HQ - NIGHT

They sit among groups of DPs playing cards, writing letters, arguing, talking.

Joe holds the pick. Toying with it.

JOE

Thank you for springing me. Again.

KORNBLUM

Force of habit. As the fact that I'm sitting here talking to you proves.

JOE

Where were you?

KORNBLUM

Treblinka.

Joe looks up. Something in the way Kornblum said it.

JOE

You escaped from Treblinka?

KORNBLUM

So what? Everyone in this room escaped. These people you see, they're all escape artists. Like me, like you. They all had the key.

Joe looks around at all the bone-thin, shattered men and women in their loose charity clothes.

They all turn toward him, staring, silent, looking at him. A surreal moment. Joe shakes his head to clear it.

The room is back to normal again, chatter and smoke.

JOE

What is the key?

KORNBLUM

What is the key? The key is dumb luck.
(beat)

A week later, and I would not have been here to help you. I'm going to Palestine.

JOE

Palestine? You're leaving Prague?

KORNBLUM

What is Prague to me now? What is there left of me here?

JOE

You're right.

KORNBLUM

Listen, my boy. I have to tell you. In the camp, in Auschwitz. I heard news. About your parents.

JOE

Yes. I heard it, too.

KORNBLUM

And your brother, the little boy? Thomas.

JOE

No. No.

A long beat. Joe continues to toy with the pick.

KORNBLUM

So, emigrate to Palestine. I don't know what's there in Palestine, exactly. Very few pigs, I imagine. But I think it will be an all right place to...

JOE

I don't want to emigrate, sir. I'm tired of escaping.

(beat)

I just want to go home.

INT. JDC HQ - CHILDREN'S DORMITORY - DAY

Shabby. The CHILDREN, thin, sickly, camp survivors, orphans, have all gathered around a couple of AID WORKERS. The workers are opening crates stamped J.D.C.

Joe stands in the doorway, watching as the workers hand out chocolate, wool socks, dried fruit, and comic books.

A BOY snatches an ESCAPIST comic book and retreats with it to his bunk. Joe watches as the boy settles in to read, a huge broken grin on his face.

Joe's face. Truly alight. He goes over to the boy.

JOE

What is that?

BOY

It's a story about Empire City, in the U.S.A. There are gangsters, and this man, with the extremely big muscles.

JOE

I used to live there. In New York. Empire City.

BOY

What was it like?

Joe sits down and takes a pen from his pocket. Sketches on the back of a scrap of paper. As he draws other CHILDREN gather around and press in to see.

Joe sketches a view of Broadway-- storefronts, marquees, the Daily News building-- down the middle of walks a tall, lumbering figure.

BOY 1

New York! Who's that walking there?

JOE

That's-- me.

BOY 2

You look like the Golem.

JOE

No, you're right. It isn't me. It's the Golem, when he went to New York.

Now one of the aid workers comes over to watch. An earnest young man, interested in Joe.

BOY 1
What did he do there?

JOE
He went to help some people.

BOY 2
He had the word truth written on his forehead.

JOE
Yes, he did. "Emet."

BOY 2
But then it got erased. The first letter. The aleph. And that left "Met." Death. So he died.

JOE
No, actually, it was just a blank there.
(touches his forehead)
No death. Nothing at all.

He holds up the sketch. It's a lively picture, filled with taxis and neon and steam. The Golem a great dark blot in the center. The kids exclaim.

AID WORKER
All right, children. It's time to get ready to go. Go and prepare your things. Clothes folded and stacked on the cots. See that your name tags are pinned to your duffels...

The children rise and file out.

JOE
Where are they going?

AID WORKER
Argentina.

Joe mouths the word: Argentina. And then he's all alone.

INT. JDC HQ - ADULT DORMITORY - NIGHT

Joe lies on a bunk in a crowded room. Seven other MEN. Joe is apart, scrunched up against the wall. Staring at:

The parcel of letters. He takes out a letter. It's from Rosa, of course. He slits it open and starts to read.

ROSA (V.O.)
Dear Joe. My heart is broken. I know you blame me for what happened, because I blame myself. If you had never met me, everything would have been different. I can't forgive myself, so I don't expect you to forgive me.

(MORE)

ROSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But it was cruel of you to leave the way you did. Oh, Joe, it was cruel to put that I shouldn't expect you to return. What happened to Thomas wasn't a punishment for loving me, Joe. You can't believe that. I understand that you want to kill those bastards. But please, Joe, I beg you. Don't die! Come back. Even if you never want to see me again, just come back in one piece. Love, Rosa.

Now he begins to tear open letters one after another, scanning them and tossing them aside, until at last a

SNAPSHOT

Falls out. Rosa and Sammy on their wedding day. Rosa is visibly pregnant.

Startled, he tears open another letter.

ANOTHER SNAPSHOT

A baby. - Staring right back at him. He tugs out the letter and read it.

ROSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Dear Joe. Our son was born on the third of July. He came all at once, in the middle of the night--we just made it to the hospital in time.

(beat)

I hope this letter finds you. I hope that you will be glad that we have named him Thomas. I can't help thinking he looks just like you.

Joe lets the letters fall all around him.

EXT. LE HAVRE - HARBOR - STEAMSHIP DOCKS - DAY

Joe, in uniform, with duffel, makes his way down the docks toward the great looming bulk of the transport. Baggage and cargo and materiel being loaded. The GRINDING of a derrick.

Crowds of exuberant U.S. soldiers and sailors all around, headed for home. The tide of men boarding the ship catches him up and carries him along. They are walking toward a covered gangway.

Joe gets shoved, and as he steadies himself he looks up at the sky. His eyes widen.

ON THE DERRICK

As its arm swings across the sky. It's loading a large wooden crate, roughly coffin-shaped.

Joe tries to stop, to see if it could possibly be the same crate. But the tide of jubilant men pushes him forward, under cover of the gangway.

He fights his way to the gangway's rail, and sticks his head out to see.

ON THE DERRICK

Too late. The crate has been lowered into the hold.

Joe is shoved along the rail, watching the derrick, wondering.

INT. TRANSPORT SHIP - STATEROOM - NIGHT

Marx Bros. crowded. At least nine other GUYS jammed in playing cards, smoking, reading, playing cornet, making a lot of noise.

Joe sits apart, scrunched against a bulkhead. Big sheets of paper spread all around him. He's drawing intently. He's an island of furious silence in a sea of joy.

Dozens of pages lie scattered around him. It's a comic book. Dark pencils. The panels filled with shadows. The layouts daring. Pages and pages and pages. He tosses another one on the pile.

We move in on the first panel of the page.

CUT TO:

SEQUENCE S (5 panels)

Panel 1. The Moldau river, shining in the moonlight. Needle-tip towers of Prague on the far shore. Three men walk along the shore. One carries shovels, one a lantern one pushes a big wheelbarrow. The man with the lantern is aged with a flowing beard. The other two are much younger. The style is dense with shadow, stylized as a woodcut.

RABBI LOEW: HERE. UNDER THIS WILLOW--

RABBI LOEW: --DIG!

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Joe hadn't given a lot of thought to the Golem in the years since they'd parted company. But when he saw the crate, he felt the stirring of something.

Panel 2. The shovels bite the dirt.

CAP: THE TWO YOUNG RABBIS PUT THEIR BACKS TO THE TASK.

YOUNG RABBI (thinks): HE SEEMS SO SURE. I ALMOST BELIEVE IT MYSELF!

SFX: SKFF! SKLRCH!

Panel 3. Old Rabbi Loew holds up a handful of thick clay. It glints in the moonlight.

RABBI LOEW

THE CLAY OF THE MOLDAU HAS ALWAYS
BEEN THE BEST FOR MAKING GOLEMS.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The Golem had been sent away from Prague
for its own protection, because nobody
believed anymore that it could save them.

Panel 4. The men head back, the wheelbarrow heaped high with clay. The wheels squeak.

SFX:

SKREEK! SKREEK! SKREEK!

CARTOONIST (CONT'D)

Now that seemed to Joe like a failure of
imagination. The Golem, the Escapist,
Superman. It was not that believing in
imaginary heroes could make them real.
They wouldn't save you. Nor could dumb
luck. But hope could save you,
sometimes, if you clung to it fiercely
enough.

Panel 5. In the Rabbi's quarters. The clay lies spread on a table. Rabbi Loew is in it up to his elbows. A great solemn head already sculpted.

CARTOONIST (CONT'D)

And without imagination, there could
never be any hope at all.

CUT TO:

INT. TRANSPORT SHIP - STATEROOM

A SOLDIER, tall, gawky, sneaks up behind Joe as he draws.
Looks over his shoulder. Joe registers that he's there.

JOHN WALTER NILSSEN (O.S.)

Hey. That's all right.

Joe doesn't look up. It's The other men watch, looking
amused.

ANOTHER SOLDIER

He don't talk, Nilssen. He just makes
pictures.

JOHN WALTER NILSSEN

I said, you're pretty good.

Joe keeps drawing.

JOE

Thanks.

JOHN WALTER NILSSEN

You have an excellent line. Must be a
professional.

Joe shakes his head.

JOE
This is just... personal.

JOHN WALTER NILSSEN
Smoke?

Joe looks up now. Nods. Almost smiles.

JOE
Thanks.
(holds out hand)
Joe Kavalier.

JOHN WALTER NILSSEN
John Walter Nilssen. So where's home?
New York?

JOE
That's what I'm coming to find out.

JOHN WALTER NILSSEN
(points to Joe's chest)
That's a Navy Cross, isn't it?

Joe shrugs. But Nilssen is impressed.

JOHN WALTER NILSSEN (CONT'D)
I tell you what, sailor.

Nilssen hands him a business card. Joe reads it.

JOHN WALTER NILSSEN (CONT'D)
Nilssen Billboard and Sign. That's my
dad. Say things don't work out in New
York. You ever make it out to Duluth, I
know he would give you a job.

JOE
Duluth.

JOHN WALTER NILSSEN
It's in Minnesota.

JOE
(trying it out)
Duluth, Minnesota.

JOHN WALTER NILSSEN
Swell town. Nice people.

Joe looks at the card. Puts it in his pocket.

JOE
Okay. Thanks.

He goes back to his drawing. The guys look at each other;
ONE GUY makes a 'koo-koo' face. They break up.

EXT. TRANSPORT SHIP - DAY

It sails up the Hudson River, past the grand spires of downtown. People line the shores, cheering and waving. The men on deck cheer and wave. Joe stands among them, silent, watching the city loom up.

EXT. WEST END AVENUE - APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Joe walks up to the building where he once hoped to live with Thomas. Takes a deep breath. Then freezes. The door opens. Sammy comes out, pushing an empty kiddy car. Then Rosa appears, carrying a small boy, TOMMY CLAY, 3. She sets him in the car.

TOMMY

Bye bye, Mommy!

Sammy bends down and puts his hands on the kiddy car. Rosa lays a hand on his shoulder

SAMMY

Ready, Tom?

TOMMY

Ready, Daddy!

SAMMY

Start er up.

Tommy turns an imaginary ignition key. Begins to make rumbling engine sounds. Sammy joins in and together they roar off up the block, scattering passersby. Rosa stands and watches them, waving. Then she turns and goes into the building, a smile on her face.

Joe's reaction: what was I thinking?

EXT. CLAY APARTMENT - BROOKLYN - DAY

Joe comes up out of the subway. The gates of Prospect Park behind him.

Ethel is standing on the front walk. Like she has been standing there since 1941. She walks quickly toward him. She takes him in her arms and just pretty much crushes the life out of him.

INT. CLAY APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ethel brings in tea and cookies on a tray. Sets it on the coffee table.

ETHEL

Don't worry, I bought the cookies.

Joe takes one. Munches it.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

When you called-- I--

As close as she can come to tears. Dangerously close.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

I can't understand why Sammy didn't tell me you were back.

JOE

He doesn't know. Nobody knows but you.

She looks at him. Surprised.

JOE (CONT'D)

I went to their building. And I saw them come out, the three of them. Sammy was pushing the boy in a small red vehicle.

ETHEL

He's going to kill them both...

JOE

They seemed to be having a good time. And Rosa touched Sammy... I don't know. It's hard to describe...

(touches her shoulder)

It was very... like a wife. I was not expecting that. I got some letters, a lot of letters, from Rosa. Two hundred and six letters.

ETHEL

Two hundred and six.

JOE

She told me that she and Sam were married. And she told me about the child.

ETHEL

Your son. His name is Thomas.

JOE

I know. Thomas Edison Clay.

ETHEL

He's a rotten kid, but I like him.

JOE

I was under the impression, from the letters, that this wedding they made... And I always thought Sammy...

Ethel raises an eyebrow. Joe coughs, and moves on.

JOE (CONT'D)

When I decided to come back to New York, I had this stupid idea there was going to be a place for me. Because one thing Rosa never told, not in any of the two hundred and six letters, was that she loves Sammy.

She takes hold of him, fiercely.

ETHEL

Listen. Listen to me. Go to them. Go there. See what you see.

She lets go of him.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

Have another cookie.

Dutifully he takes it.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

I have seen a lot of bad things. Believe me. When I was a girl. Terrible things that people can do to each other. And that makes me a callous person, Joe. Human beings do terrible things to one another. They always have, they always do, they always will.

JOE

Yes. This is true.

ETHEL

But here's what I say. Why dwell on it?

JOE

Five years ago, I would agree with you. Agreed. But what happened when you were a girl... Aunt, it was nothing to this. I don't think you know.

ETHEL

So I don't know. That doesn't make me wrong. You deserve to be happy, Josef. They killed your mother and your brother. And my brother. But you have another family. And they need you.

JOE

They have Sammy.

ETHEL

(like a sigh)

Sammy.

She puts down her tea cup.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

Sammy deserves to be happy, too.

JOE

Are you saying that he and Rosa--?

ETHEL

Don't ask me. I don't know anything.
Those two don't tell me anything. Go see
for yourself.

INT. ROSA AND SAMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

They're in bed. Sam is sitting up, writing on a legal pad with a pencil. Furiously. With a lot of eyebrow action. Almost like he's conducting a symphony. Rosa lies on her side, covertly watching him.

ROSA

What are you writing?

SAMMY

Crap..

"Crap."

ROSA

A beat. Sammy scratches out a last furious sentence.

SAMMY

Guy lands on a planet. It's paradise.
The aliens are beautiful and kindly.

ROSA

Uh huh.

SAMMY

There's just this one, big tower they
don't want the guy to go into. The one
where all the horrific shrieking is
coming from night after night. The
shrieking of a madman in bitter pain.

ROSA

So the guy goes into the tower.

SAMMY

Naturally.

ROSA

And?

SAMMY

It's God. He's the big insane alien.
All the other aliens are angels. We're
in heaven. God is a madman. He went mad
when He saw the universe He had made.

A beat.

ROSA

You say you hate it but you love it.

SAMMY

No, I don't say I hate comics. I love comics. I say I hate myself.

ROSA

Do you hate me?

SAMMY

Do I--? Come on. You know I-- Rosa, you know, you must know that I love you.

ROSA

Yeah. Just not. I know.

SAMMY

Just not--

ROSA

I love you, too.

SAMMY

Your father, on the other hand--

A soft RAPPING. Just barely audible.

ROSA

What was that?

SAMMY

The baby.

An unmistakable KNOCKING. Rosa gets up and starts pulling on her robe.

ROSA

I really hope that wasn't the baby.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Belting her robe, she goes to the door. As she passes TOMMY'S DOOR he begins to cry.

ROSA

(mutters)

That's the baby. Great.

She opens the door. Joe is standing there, in his uniform. Holding his duffel in one hand and a bunch of flowers in the other. He's been trying to think of what to say to her for most of the last two weeks.

JOE

I'm sorry.

ROSA.

(immediately)

I forgive you.

For a moment they can only look at each other. Rosa sees the cane. She takes a step toward him, to embrace him. Hesitates, eyes wide: is he badly injured?

JOE

I'm fine.

She takes him in her arms. He buries his face in her hair.

Sammy walks into the foyer, in his pajama bottoms and no top, carrying Tommy in his arms. Tommy is half-asleep, his head on Sammy's shoulder. Sees Joe standing there with Rosa in his arms.

SAMMY

Not really.

JOE

Sam.

Joe lets go of Rosa with one arm and Sammy steps into it, holding onto the boy. They all just stand there hugging each other.

Joe pulls back and looks at Tommy. Studies his face.

JOE (CONT'D)

Hello.

Tommy stays mum. Joe reaches over behind his ear.

JOE (CONT'D)

What's this?

He pulls out a Tootsie Pop. Sammy and Rosa exclaim... and Tommy bursts into tears. Everyone is embarrassed.

ROSA

Oh, my goodness! What a fuss.. All right. Come on, little man, back to bed.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sam, Rosa and Joe sit around the dinette, drinking coffee, smoking, eating cake. And saying nothing. Joe and Rosa keep making eye contact and then looking away. Then their eyes meet.

SAMMY

I'll leave you two alone.

Sammy stands up.

ROSA

No! Sit! Talk! Joe hasn't told us anything. "It was hot." "We didn't bathe." Joe, you haven't said anything about what happened!

SAMMY

He doesn't want to talk about it.

ROSA

Sammy! Joe, come on--

SAMMY

No, I know this guy. He doesn't want to talk about it. Joe, do you want to talk about what happened in the war?

JOE

Not particularly.

SAMMY

See, what did I tell you?

JOE

In any case, I am not allowed to. I could go to prison.

SAMMY

Wow. Now I am interested.

(to Joe)

I'm glad you're back.

Joe stands, and they embrace.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

I'll see you in the morning. I'm going to go lie down in Tommy's room.

ROSA

Sam, you don't have to do that!

He goes out. Joe and Rosa sit there.

ROSA (CONT'D)

I have pictured this moment a thousand different ways, but it never occurred to me that I would feel so embarrassed.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Outside Tommy's bedroom. Rosa opens the door. She and Joe peer in. Sammy and Tommy in bed together, snoring.

Joe's face. Touched by what he sees.

JOE

He calls him Daddy.

ROSA

Yes, Joe, he does. I've never said anything to him. He's too little.

She closes the door.

JOE
And I wasn't coming back.

ROSA
I never believed that.

They embrace again, more passionately this time. Rosa takes hold of his head and kisses it, kisses his cheeks, his ears--

ROSA (CONT'D)
I knew you'd come home.

Joe looks struck by these words. He goes a little slack in her arms. She notices and pulls away. It's an awkward moment.

ROSA (CONT'D)
I'll make up the couch for you.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The glow of Manhattan lies in bright bars across Joe, on the couch. Wide awake. BARE FEET on wooden floor. He sits up. We don't see who's there at first.

JOE
Hi.

It's Rosa. Standing there, in Sam's pajamas. Looking at him. Just kind of quietly marveling.

JOE (CONT'D)
What is it?

ROSA
Nothing. I'm sorry. Good night, Joe.

JOE
Good night, Rosa.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - DAY

Joe, Rosa, Tommy and Siggy. Siggy, in a three piece suit, is pushing Tommy on the swing. Rosa and Joe sit on a bench. Side by side, but with a foot of air between them.

JOE
Your father looks like an old man.

ROSA
(shocked, then)
I know. It's true.

JOE
He told me he lost everything he had.
When they sank the Miriam.

ROSA
Not everything. All of his money. Most
of his interest in life.

JOE
(looking at Siggy and Tom)
But not all.

ROSA
So there's one thing I have to ask you.

JOE
The letters.

ROSA
Did you get them?

JOE
I got them.

ROSA
Did you read them?

JOE
Yes, Rosa. I read them all. Two hundred
and six.

ROSA
You got them. You read them.

JOE
I counted them.

ROSA
Did you, by any chance, answer any of
them?

JOE
I'm sorry. You have a right to be angry.

ROSA
(angry)
I'm not angry. What right do I have to
be angry? You didn't do anything wrong.
You got out of Prague. You worked. You
went to war. We won the war. That you
never answered a single one of my letters
is a tiny thing compared to that.

She punches him on the arm. Hard.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Joe, why didn't you answer my letters?
One letter! One would have been enough!
Just to let me know you were alive? This
thing that you did during the war. This
secret thing you're not allowed to talk
about. Did they classify your mail?
Were you not allowed to answer it?

She is throwing him a rope. If he grabs onto it, the Escapist will get off scott free again.

JOE

No. The other men answered their mail. But I--I couldn't answer them. Because, I--didn't read them.

ROSA

You didn't--

JOE

Not until last week. I read them all at once. In one night. They're beautiful. They reminded me of you. So strongly. I don't think I ever regretted nothing more than I regret that I didn't read your letters while I was--where I was. Because if I had then I might not have--done what I did.

ROSA

I wrote you every week for four and half years, sometimes twice or even three times a week, and you didn't read them until last week?

JOE

On the boat coming over.

ROSA

Jesus!

Tommy and Siggy are watching from the swings. Siggy is now actually in a swing.

Rosa gets up, stalks off. Stands there, steaming. Joe comes up behind her. Lays a hand, tentative, on her shoulder. She brushes it off.

ROSA (CONT'D)

So, you killed somebody.

JOE

Yes.

ROSA

A lot of people?

JOE

Not as many as I had planned.

ROSA

And your plan not to survive the war? I guess that didn't work out either, huh?

(beat)

We tried to find out about you. My father tried. Even Eleanor Roosevelt.

(MORE)

ROSA (CONT'D)

The assistant secretary of the Navy is her son, and he wouldn't tell her what you were doing.

(beat)

You went off and did all the hard things and saw all the terrible stuff, and watched your comrades die, and all of it. The only thing I did was sit in that apartment with your son at my breast, not knowing if you were dead or alive.

JOE

That was not my intention.

ROSA

Well I didn't know that, did I? Because you never bothered to tell me what your intentions were. You just made your decision, without saying a word to anybody, and left!

Scowls at Joe. Then bursts out:

ROSA (CONT'D)

Oh, this is not at all the way I imagined it was going to be!

She shakes her head, fists clenched, furious with herself, with Joe...

TOMMY (O.S.)

Mommy, look what happened to Pop.

ROSA

(horror)

Oh my God!

ON THE SWINGS

Siggy is struggling to his feet. The swing jangles behind him. Rosa and Joe run to his side.

SAKS

I'm all right, I'm all right! I'm fine!

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - NIGHT

Four beds, two filled. Siggy's sitting up in his, cutting into lamb chop.

SAKS

I didn't know you could steam a lamb chop.

ROSA

Dad, don't die.

SAKS

I'm not going to die.

ROSA

Okay.

SAKS

Though if I did, there would be more room in the apartment. Which it looks as if you are going to need for this menage a trois you've all cooked up.

ROSA

(blushing)

For God's sake! Shut up, Dad. Jesus. He isn't staying.

SAKS

He just got here. He's leaving already?

ROSA

It's just a feeling I get from him. I don't think he really knows how to stay.

SAKS

Where is he now?

ROSA

I left him at home with Tommy.

Saks thinks about this.

SAKS

Interesting.

ROSA

Yeah, how about that?

SAKS

I'm sure they'll be fine.

INT. SAMMY AND ROSA'S APARTMENT - SIMULTANEOUS

Tommy is having lying in the middle of the hall, in his pajamas, crying for Mommy. Joe kneels beside him, holding a dish of ice cream.

JOE

Don't cry. Mommy will be home soon.
Come. Don't cry. Have some ice cream.
You said you like ice cream. Everyone
likes it. I like it. Please. Tommy.
Don't cry.

INT. APARTMENT - FOYER - LATER

Rosa runs in the front door, past Joe, to Tommy crying in the b.g. He's going at it hammer and tongs. Sammy, behind her, follows more slowly.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Rosa runs in to find Joe beside Tommy, his sleeves rolled, hair mussed, sweating.

ROSA
What happened? What is it?

JOE
(rattled)
It's nothing! He missed you. He wouldn't eat ice cream!

ROSA
Did you pick him up?

JOE
Well, I-- I wasn't sure he would like it.

ROSA
Did you try?

JOE
No, I--

She passes Tommy to Sam and the boy stops crying immediately. Sammy carries him into the kitchen.

ROSA
God damn it! What is the matter with you!

He doesn't know what to say. Glowers at her.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Why did you come back here? It's so obvious that you don't want to stay. That you're uncomfortable being around us.

JOE
Rosa, I'm sorry. You're right--

ROSA
God damn it, if you tell me one more time that you're sorry and I'm right...I don't need you to be sorry. You have enough to be sorry about already without being sorry about me or that boy.

Sammy peeks out from the kitchen, peeling a popsicle.

JOE
He isn't comfortable with me. He doesn't come to me. I can't comfort him.

ROSA
He doesn't know you.

JOE

And I don't know him!

ROSA

Yes, but he's a fucking child? What are you? Are you a man?

He turns, and walks down the hall. Rosa looks up at him. Tears in her eyes.

A moment later he reappears. Holding his duffel. Hat in hand. Looks at Sammy.

JOE

Is anyone still living at Palooka Studios?

ROSA

Great. Go ahead. Leave. You aren't supposed to be here, anyway, right?

She pushes him toward the door.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Go on, Houdini. You're free.

SAMMY

(gently)

Jerry Glovsky's there.

Joe nods, puts on his hat. And walks out.

ROSA

Is this how you imagined it?

EXT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - DAY

Joe looks up at the building. His gaze travels up the fire escape. In his mind he hears Rosa's scream, OVER.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - HALLWAY - DAY

Jerry Glovsky opens the door to Joe. His eyes go wide. Then he looks Joe over, stops at the duffel bag. Joe's gaze travels there, too.

He stoops to open the bag, takes out a box of cigars. Hands it to Jerry. Jerry opens, takes a long sniff.

JERRY GLOVSKY

It just so happens that your old room is free.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - NIGHT

Joe at his drawing table. Immersed in the page.

CUT TO:

SEQUENCE T (3 panels)

Panel 1. A Cartoonist panel. Joe at his drawing table, leaning forward, falling once more into the page as into a window.

CAP:

HE HAD FOUGHT A WAR IN THE COMICS.
AND MADE LOVE TO HIS GIRL IN THE
COMICS.

CAP:

--THIS TIME HE WAS TRYING TO GO HOME.

Panel 2. A Kavalier panel. The Golem crouches on the wall of the ghetto. Behind him spreads the lively chaos of a Friday market. Before him rise the spires of the Castle on the Hill.

CAP:

SOMETIMES THE GOLEM WOULD WATCH
THE CASTLE FOR HOURS, HOPING FOR A
GLIMPSE OF THE KING.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

He went back to the beginning, to the
mythic Prague of his ancestors, and
worked his way forward to the departure
of the Golem for New York City.

Panel 3. The Golem stands on the deck of a steamship, in an overcoat and hat, looking west.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Maybe he was hoping along the way to find
everything he had lost.

CUT TO:

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - HALLWAY - DAY

Sammy knocks on the door. Jerry Glovsky answers.

JERRY GLOVSKY

I hope you haven't come to take him away.
He pays for everything.

SAMMY

Hello, Jerry.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sammy follows Jerry. The place looks deserted.

JERRY GLOVSKY

It's been nice to have some company. The
last year or so, with everybody gone to
the war...it's been pretty dead. Hey, is
it true Anapol's going to cancel the
Escapist?

SAMMY

Yeah. It's true. The numbers are way off. I guess people look at heroes a little different than they used to.

JERRY GLOVSKY

Hey, I heard about Bacon. That's tough.

Sammy is brought up short.

SAMMY

Yeah, that was...

JERRY GLOVSKY

Yeah.

(beat)

You ask me, the guy's gone a little nutty. He's been drawing nonstop. Day and night.

Sam knocks.

JOE (O.S.)

I'm not here.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS BEDROOM - DAY

Joe sits at a drawing table. Pages everywhere, piles and piles, a miniature city of finished pages. Sam has to weave his way around the labyrinth to find Joe the minotaur at the center.

SAMMY

Jesus, Joe.

He picks up a page, studies it, puts it down. Picks up another. And another. More and more excitedly.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Holy shit, Joe, this is incredible. What is this?

JOE

Nothing. Just something. I started to working on it on the boat coming here. And for some reason I just can't seem to stop.

SAMMY

It looks like a comic book.

JOE

It is. The greatest one ever.

Sammy turns over pages. Dark, moody stuff, with no balloons.

SAMMY

Jesus, this is beautiful stuff, Joe.

JOE
Nobody will like it. Too dark.

SAMMY
It does seem dark.

JOE
Too dark for a comic book.

SAMMY
There are no words. Is there a script?

JOE
There is a script. It's in German.

SAMMY
That ought to go over big.

JOE
It's not to sell. It's... only for me.

SAMMY
Wow. Joe, I have to tell you, I'm very excited about this. This could be just what comics need. The old stuff, the superheroes, that's all dead now.

JOE
You want to publish this. You want us to work together again.

SAMMY
I don't know. I'm just talking off the top of my head. This is just so good. It makes me want to make something again. Something I can be a little bit proud of.
(pulling up short)
Yeah, sure. Submit something like this to Sheldon Anapol. Or any other publisher. Good luck.

Joe reaches toward Sammy.

JOE
Sammy... Sammy, I wish I--

SAMMY
Look, Joe. I just came to say. I don't know what's going to happen between you and Rosa, and with Tommy, and--and me. And all. But I just wanted to say that I'm glad you're back. And I, you know. I hope you'll stay.

Joe shakes his head.

JOE
I'm leaving tomorrow.

SAMMY
Tomorrow! Why? Where are you going?

JOE
Duluth, Minnesota.

SAMMY
What? Duluth!

JOE
Swell town. Nice people.

EXT. UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL - DAY

A taxi squeals up. Rosa leaps out of it and tears up the front steps.

INT. HOSPITAL - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Rosa comes running in.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rosa runs down the hall and into the room. The bed is empty. She stops, crumples.

ROSA
God damn it!

INT. VERBITSKY BROS. FUNERAL HOME - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Already crowded with people come for the ceremony. Joe walks in, in uniform again, carrying his duffel. Rosa sees him. Sam sees him too. Nobody moves for a second.

RABBI
You. Excuse me, are you a relative?

JOE
No. Yes. Sort of.

RABBI
We need a minyan. A tenth man. Would you feel comfortable?

JOE
Oh. No. No, Rabbi. I'm afraid I wouldn't.

RABBI
It's a big mitzvah. Especially at a funeral.

JOE
I'm sorry.

Sam and Rosa come over as the Rabbi walks away.

SAMMY
What did he say?

JOE
He wanted me to pray. Rosa. I'm so
sorry.

She nods. They look at each other. He should embrace her.
The moment passes.

ROSA
Duluth, Minnesota.

JOE
My train leaves Grand Central at five.

ROSA
Well, thank you for coming.

JOE
I always very much liked and had the
respect for your father.

ROSA
(choking up)
It was mutual.

Tommy comes over. Looks up.

TOMMY
Hi, Joe.

JOE
Hello, Tom.

After a long moment, Joe holds out his hand. The boy reaches
up. They shake very formally.

INT. FUNERAL CHAPEL - LATER

Joe sits beside Tommy in the front row as the Rabbi makes his
eulogy. Tommy is staring at the big coffin.

RABBI
...we all know how Siggy's last years
were darkened by the tragedy of the Ark
of Miriam.

Joe listens, looking amazed that he can listen. Then Tommy
tugs on his sleeve. Joe looks down.

TOMMY
(kind of loud)
Joe? Is Pop really in there?

Joe shushes him, but gently. Thinks about the right answer.
Then whispers:

JOE

Yes, Tom.

TOMMY

His body?

Joe shushes him again.

INT. ROSA AND SAMMY'S APARTMENT - LATER

The dining table laid out with mountains of Jewish soul food.
More arriving, along with lots of people.

Scissors snip an inch cut in a jacket lapel.

It's Sam's lapel. He and Rosa sit on low chairs. Ethel is
making the cut.

Joe walks in, a little shocked by the press of people.
Recoils. Then sees Ethel. Starts toward her.

Two people approach. A youngish couple, ANDREAS and

GABI. Gabi holds a fat baby. Andreas addresses Joe in
Czech.

ANDREAS

You are from Prague?

JOE

(taken aback)

Yes.

ANDREAS

So am I. Andreas Silberman. This is
Gabi. From Berlin.

JOE

Wie gehts?

GABI

Fine. How long have you been here?

JOE

A week. You?

GABI

Since 39. We met on the ship coming
over.

They're young and in love and happy.

JOE

Lucky us.

INT. SIGGY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Joe sits on the neatly made bed. With his duffel beside him.
Smoking. And staring at:

The photo of the Ark of Miriam that once hung in Hoffman's office.

He taps his ash. The muffled PARTY gets louder as the door opens.

ROSA

Joe?

She closes the door.

ROSA (CONT'D)

What's going on?

JOE

Oh! I-- Sorry. I was just feeling a little-- I don't know what the word is.

She sits down beside him. Still that foot of air.

ROSA

It's called mourning.

(beat)

You never got to have funeral. To sit shiva for them. To say Kaddish.

JOE

Rosa, it's like if they didn't even die. If they just... disappeared. Vanished into thin air.

(grim smile)

Magic.

ROSA

Do you know how to say the Mourner's Kaddish?

JOE

No. And I don't want to.

ROSA

Try it. I'll help you.

She takes his hand. He lets her hold it, awkwardly.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'may raboh.
B'olma divrah chirusay...

After a moment Joe joins in,

JOE

Tuskegee ballista doo ishkabbible hotsy-totsy whoopdeedoo...

Rosa stops, hurt--crushed.. Joe looks at her, almost daring her to care about him. Then he relents.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. It's too much. And it isn't even close to enough.

He stands up and picks up his duffel.

JOE (CONT'D)

I have to get to my train.

He starts to walk out, but Rosa stops him. She reaches into her pocket. Takes out her little nail scissors. Cuts his lapel. There is anger in the gesture, but also pity.

Joe fingers the cut. Looks at her. Walks out.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Joe rides down, alone, with the OPERATOR. They hit bottom, the Operator drags the door open, and Joe finds himself face to face with:

A pine box, twice the size of a normal coffin.

It's much more worn and battered than the last time we saw it, stained and pocked and covered all over with shipping labels, bills of lading, customs stamps of a dozen countries. But unmistakably the same.

A DELIVERYMAN with a dolly steps out from behind it.

JOE

What--what is this--for me?

DELIVERYMAN

Mr. Kavalier? Mr. Josef with a "f" Kavalier? That you?

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A KNOCK. Only Tommy hears it over the hubbub of the party. He weaves his way to the front door amid the legs of the adults. Opens the door to find Joe and the coffin standing there.

JOE

Hello again.

TOMMY

Is Pop in there now?

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

They have stood the box in a corner and they all stand looking at it.

Joe reaches for the latch on the 'show panel'. It has been sealed with a huge, wicked, familiar-looking lock.

SAMMY

A double Brahmah. I remember we used it once in an Escapist story.

JOE

Tough lock.

He tugs it, smacks it, lets it fall.

ROSA

Can you get it opened?

JOE

Probably not.

ROSA

You used to be so good with locks.

He gives her a look. Is this a challenge? He takes off his jacket and tosses it to Sammy.

ROSA (CONT'D)

What about your train? What about Duluth?

JOE

It can wait.

SAMMY

Do you know what's in there?

JOE

Yes, but it isn't possible.

INT. LIVING ROOM - HOURS LATER

Many of the guests are gone. Some look on. Others ignore Joe completely as, sleeves rolled, sweating, panting, he jams the tips of a shrimp fork into the lock. It's no use. He collapses. Lies back on the floor.

Sam lies down beside him. Smoking a cigarette. He passes it to Joe.

SAMMY

We'll call a locksmith in the morning.

Rosa's high heels, as she stands looking down at them.

ROSA

You're giving up! Come on! I want to see. I want to know what's in that box.

JOE

I'm sorry. It's just too hard.

ROSA

Move over.

Rosa stoops, takes off her shoe. Then takes aim. Raps the lock firmly with her shoe.

CLICK. The lock pops open.

SAMMY

You did it!

ROSA

Men always make everything so hard.

Joe backs away from the box now. The moment is here.

JOE

You open it.

Rosa kneels down. Everyone in the room is watching now.

As if she fears something awful, lifts the panel an inch. Tommy peers in from over Rosa's shoulder.

Ethel leans forward to see.

Then Rosa throws the lid open. Peers in. Dread turns to puzzlement.

TOMMY

(actually excited)

It's dirt. Mommy, it's dirt!

ETHEL

Some Litvak sent you a box full of dirt.

JOE

Mud. Mud taken from the banks of the Moldau river. In Prague.

Tommy plunges his hands into the flaky dust. Joe reaches to stop him, then lets him go. Looking at the dirt.

TOMMY

Whose dirt is it?

JOE

Five hundred years ago, in Prague, there was a rabbi, Rabbi Judah. He was very wise, and he made a... a man from this mud. And because he was so wise, he was able to bring this mud-man to life. It was called a Golem.

TOMMY

What did it do?

Joe takes him on his knee. Tommy settles against him.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

He smelled like cigarettes, and the oil he used in his hair, it was called Tres Flores.

JOE

There were some bad people, then, they wanted to hurt the Jews of Prague. The rabbi took all the wishes of the Jews of Prague. They wished to be safe. They wished for a safe place. A home. And Rabbi Judah, he took the wishes, and he made a magic spell out of them. And put life into the Golem. And then the Golem protected the Jews from trouble.

TOMMY

But why is it all splodgy now?

JOE

I don't know. Maybe because it missed the river where it was born. It had a long journey. It's far from home.

Beat. Now, at long last, holding his son on his lap and contemplating the ruin of the hopes of Prague's Jews, he begins to cry.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Every so often I'm someplace, on an airplane, the locker room at the Y, I catch a whiff of Tres Flores.

TOMMY

Now who protects us?

JOE

I don't know, Tom.

TOMMY

Can we make a new one?

Joe looks up at Sam.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

And all of a sudden it's all there: the scratchiness of his beard, the sound of his voice.

JOE

Maybe we could try.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

That sweltering afternoon when my father first began telling me his story.

He lowers the lid. And covers his face, and cries. Rosa comes and kneels beside him. She puts her arms around him and they rock back and forth, mother, father and son.

INT. TOMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rosa and Joe put Tommy to bed. Rosa tugs up the covers. Kisses Tommy's head. He's already asleep. She stands up with her hand on his hair. Joe's hand reaches for hers. Covers it for a moment.

JOE

What would happen if I didn't leave?

ROSA

What an interesting question.

They kiss.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sammy carries a suitcase out of the bedroom. He stops outside Tommy's room. Looks in and sees Rosa and Joe kissing. A pang. He sniffs. They turn.

ROSA

Sam? What are you--?

They come out of the room. Rosa closes the door.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Are you leaving? Are you sneaking out?

SAMMY

I didn't want to bother you.

ROSA

Were you ever planning on informing me of your intentions?

SAMMY

I intend to find a basement apartment in the Village, make comic books with Joe, and sleep with men. Until then I will be living at my mother's.

ROSA

Come to dinner tomorrow night. Come to dinner every night. Forever.

SAMMY

Okay.

ROSA

Promise.

SAMMY

I promise.

They look at each other, husband and wife.

ROSA

Wow. Sam...

They embrace. Part.

SAMMY

Hey.

He gives a little wave, then walks out.

EXT. WEST END AVENUE - APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Dusk. Sammy walks out of the building. Cars are going by. Honking. People are out in the streets, leaning out of apartment windows. A weird carnival air.

Joe comes running out after him.

SAMMY

It's all over.

(to DOORMAN)

Lem, it all over?

LEM THE DOORMAN

Yes, sir, Mr. Clay. They're saying on the radio that Japan surrendered.

FIRECRACKERS. More and more HORNS.

SAMMY

How about that?

They stand there for a moment, letting this sink in. Then, spontaneously, bubbling up with it, they hug. Hold onto each other for a long time. Finally they let go.

JOE

Sammy. I just want to say...thank you. For what you did. There must have been so many times that you wanted to--

SAMMY

Escape? Only like every day for the past four years.

JOE

But you stayed. I owe you a tremendous debt. I wish I can repay it somehow.

SAMMY

I didn't do it for you. I married Rosa because I didn't want to be a fairy.

JOE

That only explains why you married her. It doesn't explain why you stayed.

SAMMY

Fear. I did it all out of fear.

JOE

That is what I told them when they gave me the Navy Cross. Sammy. Let's do it, Sam. Let's do our own books. Dark. Serious. "Golem Comics." Let's publish them ourselves. I know it'll work.

SAMMY

Be serious. You know what it would cost to start up? Easily a hundred thousand. Even if I had that kind of money, I could never throw it away on--

JOE

I do. I have it. More.

Sam looks at him, astonished.

JOE (CONT'D)

I saved money. Rosa opened the account for me. For my mother and father, and the children on the Miriam. And to pay for my brother when he arrived. A lot of money. It has been compounding interest for almost five years.

SAMMY

Joe, you can't. Why would you ever want to go and--

JOE

For you, Sam. I will do it for you.

Sammy reaches into his pocket. Takes out his key ring
Tosses it to Joe.

Joe catches the keys. Holds them up.

SAMMY

Lobby door, front door, storage space. Oh, you got the keys to the Empire State Building there, too. And to Shelly Anapol's office. I've been smoking his cigars without his knowing it since 1942. I'll call you tomorrow.

He walks off, into the celebration on the streets. Fireworks explode over midtown.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Joe stands by the door, with his hand on knob. After a moment, he lifts the chain of the lock. Looks at it.

Joe slides the chain home. Smiles. Turns.

ROSA

How are you going to get out of this one?

Joe goes to her, and she ties him up in her arms.

CUT TO:

INT. HIPPODROME THEATER - LONDON, 1904 - DAY

The cabinet is still. The crowd hushed, the orchestra wearily sawing away.

INT. 'GHOST HOUSE'

Houdini sits in the dark, a wreck. Staring in desolation at the intact cuffs.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

After an hour, it was over. And Houdini had failed. The cuffs were beyond even his great powers.

With a sigh, he parts the curtain. A cry goes up from the crowd.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

In desperation, he called out to his wife. A simple glass of water!

They exchange a look. He's beat. She knows it.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I've got to think that at that moment, the thought crossed her mind: then let him fail. Let it all be over: the pain and punishment. The crushing anxiety.

Bess takes a deep breath. Then nods.

INT. HIPPODROME THEATER - BACKSTAGE

Bess, holding the glass, pleads with the Reporter.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Bess pleaded with the Reporter; if her husband failed the challenge it would only mean a story to the London Mirror. But to Houdini it would mean his career.

The Reporter, unsure, strokes his moustache. She's lovely; he watches her lips move.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Over the years, Bess's tears had saved them from dozens of creditors and sheriffs. Now she pleaded with the force of all those years of anxiety and fear.

At last the Reporter nods, his head slowly, doubtful.

INT. HIPPODROME STAGE - 'GHOST HOUSE'

Bess approaches with a glinting glass of water.

ON THE GLASS

as Houdini tips it back and swallows greedily.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Some people say the key was in the glass of water.

As he passes the empty glass back to her, Bess goes up on tiptoe, puts her arm around her husband's neck, and kisses him on the lips.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But Kornblum always claimed that she passed it to him with her kiss.

She pulls back and they look at each other. His face is crumpled with shame. She gazes at him, level and steady.

INT. HIPPODROME STAGE - LATER

Houdini leaps from the cabinet, swinging the cuffs over his head. Total pandemonium from the crowd. They rush the stage, grab Houdini, and raise him skyward. Carry him on their shoulders up the aisle and into the street. He's in tears, sobbing wildly.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

So the crowd thought Houdini had met the challenge of the Mirror cuffs.

As they're about to pass out of the theater, he looks back and sees Bess, weeping, on stage.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But Kornblum knew what Bess Houdini knew. There is only one thing, one force in the whole world that can open a pair of nested Bramah locks.

Bess kisses her fingers and, slowly, blows a kiss toward her husband, as he is carried off in triumph.

She walks off the stage. Lying on the boards, left behind, lie the sundered halves of the Bramah cuffs.

CUT TO:

SEQUENCE U (2 panels)

Panel 1. A freshly inked panel. The cracked lock lies on the boards of the theater.

Panel 2. Beside it lies the key, gleaming. Above this, in pencil, the words THE END.

THE CARTOONIST'S HAND

Applies a steady brush to the letters.

He sets down this page, and reaches for another. A splash page that shows Joe and Sam, posed with Rosa between them. The Golem, Thomas, Siggy, Anapol, Bacon, and a number of other characters are standing around them. Their poses echo those of the characters from the old Kavalier & Clay letterhead we saw. Across the top, in Second Coming type, the words THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAVALIER & CLAY.

In the bottom corner of the splash panel is the figure of a three-year-old boy in a kiddy car. Right beside this the Cartoonist inks in, freehand, with rapid, practiced strokes, a name: THOMAS CLAY KAVALIER. Paints a little box around it.

THE END.