

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay

by

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Based on his novel

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FADE IN:

On a luminous expanse of white, flecked with shadow: a million acres of ice; a sea of moonlit clouds seen from above; a fresh blank sheet of 11x17 Bristol board.

THE SHARP TIP OF A PENCIL enters the frame, a brand-new #2 Fabercastel. Held by the CARTOONIST, a man with violinist fingers and a New York accent. We only see his hands.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
People used to ask Joe Kavalier what the hell drawing comic books had to do with being an escape artist.

With a ruler he draws a 4x4 panel in the upper left corner of the page. He lays out the page, his line steady and sure. Four panels of varying size and proportions.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He would always reply: "Is same job. You make magic tricks inside of box."

The Cartoonist hesitates, pencil hovering. Then he begins to fill in the FIRST PANEL.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I've been thinking about the best way to start telling the story of Joe Kavalier and Sam Clay. And I keep coming back to Houdini's famous "Mirror Escape" of 1904. It was one of their favorites.

He draws a huge PADLOCK, welded to a pair of cruel handcuffs.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Sam Clay once told an interviewer, "You know the expression, 'the key to your heart'...?"

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "LOCK"

The padlock in cutaway. A complex mechanism. Its pins, drivers and toothed cams pulse like the works of a heart.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
...What does that say about your heart?"

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "HIPPODROME"

An Edwardian REPORTER stands on the stage of the Hippodrome Theater. Brandishing the cuffs with the evil lock to a packed house.

AUDIENCE (BALLOON)
BOOOO! BOOOOOO!

INT. HIPPODROME THEATER - LONDON - 1904 - LIVE ACTION

The audience BOOS. The Reporter passes the cuffs to HOUDINI.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
The London Daily Mirror once challenged
Houdini to escape from handcuffs that
featured a famous lock called a Bramah.

Now Houdini brandishes the cuffs. The crowd cheers wildly.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The first guy to crack a Bramah was the
great A.C. Hobbs, the Paganini of
lockpicks. Took him forty-four hours.
Houdini had one hour. Tops. And a thousand
people watching.

The cuffs are snapped onto Houdini's wrists. Houdini pretends
to look worried. The Reporter twists the key.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And these cuffs locked with a
double Bramah. One Bramah nested
inside the other. Believe me, not
even Houdini could pick this lock
in an hour.

INT. HIPPODROME STAGE - HOUDINI'S 'CABINET OF MYSTERIES'- DAY

The painted, curtained box in which Houdini does his magic.
He kicks the curtain aside. The crowd cheers more wildly than
ever. Stepping in, Houdini glances back, over his shoulder.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
Just before he steps into the box--
his cabinet of mysteries, he called
it-- 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 in Coney Island and on
the Midway in Chicago. She knows
her husband's face. She can read
him.

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

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He's screwed, and he knows it.

The Reporter jerks a cord and drops the cabinet's curtain,
painted with the word HOUDINI in golden letters.

INT. BERNARD KORNBLUM'S ROOM - PRAGUE, 1935

The gilded word HOUDINI on a THEATER POSTER, pinned to a
wallpapered wall. Advertising Houdini's Hippodrome show. We

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

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
Joe Kavalier learned the art of escape from
a retired magician, Bernard Kornblum.

BERNARD KORNBLUM, elderly but vigorous, sits on a crate in his shabby Josefov apartment, smoking a black cigarette. A glass of tea, a Yiddish newspaper. Perfectly at his ease.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He taught that the first enemy of the
escape artist was claustrophobia.

A SCRATCHING, a GRUNT. Kornblum consults his pocket watch.

KORNBLUM
Herr Kavalier?

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

INT. INSIDE THE CRATE - CONTINUOUS

Darkness, JOE'S PULSE, his irregular BREATHING.

INT. KORNBLUM'S LODGINGS - CONTINUOUS

Kornblum stands up, folds his paper. Sighs. Stoops to unlatch the hasps of the crate. He helps JOSEF (Joe) KAVALIER, a boy of 15, out of the crate. Joe takes heaving breaths, drenched in sweat, racked by sobs.

Kornblum pours a shot of slivovitz, hands it to him. Joe downs the slivovitz. Gasps.

INT. KAVALIER APARTMENT - DAY

The Kavaliers at breakfast on a sunny spring morning. The two DOCTORS KAVALIER read their newspapers. THOMAS KAVALIER, 7, sits at a piano, breezing through a Liszt rhapsody. Joe bites into something, winces and cries out in pain.

HERR DR. KAVALIER
What is it?

He takes hold of Joe's chin with one hand. Turns his face this way, that. Scrutinizing him.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
Kavalier's father was a prominent doctor.

THOMAS
He has a wrench in his mouth.

Joe spits. TING! A tiny wrench hits on the edge of his plate.

HERR DR. KAVALIER
What on earth?

Thomas stops his playing. Turns to his parents.

THOMAS
Houdini kept a wrench in his cheek.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER
Houdini suffered from a sublimated terror of death and physical decay, which he expressed through suicidal acts of self mutilation.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
Kavalier's mother was a psychoanalyst.

Joe rubs at his jaw, sheepish.

INT. KAVALIER FLAT - BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Thomas sits on the bed, playing a stirring melody on a chromatic harmonica. Heavy Strauss influence for a seven-year-old. Joe sits on the other bed, tinkering with a lock. Thomas stops. Looks up, expectant.

JOE
Not bad for a prodigy.

THOMAS
That's just the overture.

JOE
The overture for what?

THOMAS
My opera: The Master of Escape.

JOE
You're writing an opera about Houdini?

THOMAS
It's not about Houdini. It's about you.

Joe blows into the lock. Sends up a plume of dust. He coughs.

INT. KORNBLUM'S LODGINGS - ANOTHER LESSON - DAY

Kornblum yanks a piece of tape from Joe's mouth. He plucks a pair of wooden noseplugs from Joe's nostrils. Joe gasps for breath, heaving, desperate, grinning.

INT. KORNBLUM'S LODGINGS - ANOTHER LESSON - DAY

Joe stands, chained, as Kornblum snaps the clasp of a giant lock. Kornblum helps Joe climb into a canvas sack. He ties up the sack. The sack lurches, tips over. A loud CLANK.

JOE

Ouch!

Kornblum watches the heavy mailbag wriggle on the floor in front of him. The lock UNSNAPS. Chains CLINK.

JOE (CONT'D)

(muffled)

I'm out.

KORNBLUM

Not yet, you aren't.

A RAZOR BLADE pokes through the bag from inside. HANDS appear through the tear, rip it open. Joe crawls through the hole and leaps to his feet, grinning. Kornblum consults his watch.

KORNBLUM (CONT'D)

Six minutes. You aren't ready for the Hofzinser Club...

(off Joe's dismay)

...but that is more than acceptable.

JOE

Thank you, sir!

Kornblum takes a small rolled bundle from his pocket. Hands it to Joe. Joe unrolls it. Finds a collection of picks.

KORNBLUM

For you. They will be reliable.

INT. KAVALIER FLAT - BOYS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

The boys sit on Joe's bed, admiring the picks.

JOE

He made them himself.

THOMAS

Are they magic?

JOE

Magicians don't believe in magic.

THOMAS

They don't?

JOE

I need to plan my first public feat. I'm going to invite the entire Hofzinser Club. I have to be great.

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.

INT. KAVALIER APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Ice cubes JINGLE in a bathtub full of water. A dark shape beneath BURSTS through. It's Joe, blue, shivering. He lets out a huge breath. Thomas on the toilet, with a stopwatch.

THOMAS
Three minutes and thirty-eight seconds.

JOE
Not long enough.

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

THOMAS
I have found a grave weakness in your scheme. Once you're inside the canvas bag, how do you get into the water?

JOE
You're going to push me.

EXT. PRAGUE - NIGHT

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

THOMAS
Excuse me. I'm sorry. I want to go home. 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
Let them. It will be good publicity.

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

EXT. CHARLES BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Thomas helps Joe waddle up onto the parapet. The canvas bundle lies there a moment, as if in doubt. The wind is cold. The river is black and swift.

JOE
Push, Tom.

THOMAS
No, no! You'll drown.

JOE
Push, god damn it!

Thomas pushes. The sack plummets, hits, splashes. And disappears. Thomas peers over the railing, watching the water. Nothing. He fumbles with the stopwatch, and it slips out of his hands and falls into the water.

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

INT. A HOSPITAL CHILDREN'S WARD - NIGHT

Joe, in dry clothes, with Kornblum and his parents, stands by a bed where Thomas lies asleep. The boy is pale, his breathing congested.

KORNBLUM
Of course I will return all the fees for the lessons.

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

Joe seeks his mother's gaze but she looks away.

HERR DR. KAVALIER (CONT'D)
He almost died, Josef. He has lost the hearing in his right ear. The damage may be permanent.

Joe lowers his head. Ashamed.

HERR DR. KAVALIER (CONT'D)
The child had perfect pitch.

JOE
I know! I know!

He starts to cry. His mother watches him for an instant, but she can't hold out. She opens her arms to him.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER
I wish I understood what it is about us that you feel you need to escape.

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

KORNBLUM
Regrettably that is the truth.

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

FRAU DR. KAVALIER
Nevertheless. I want 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.

INT. BOYS' BEDROOM - A YEAR LATER

Light music plays over the radio. Opera posters gone. Joe
lies on his bed with pad and pencils and a movie magazine.
He's copying a photo of Greta Garbo posing in a bathing suit.
In his copy--crude but promising--there's no bathing suit.
Thomas looks in over his shoulder. Impressed.

THOMAS
Are they really like that?

JOE
As far as I can determine.

The music ends. SIGNAL TONES sound the hour.

NEWSREADER (V.O.)
*This is Czech Radio. At the annual rally of
the Nazi Party in Nuremberg, German Fuhrer
Adolf Hitler announced a program of laws
intended to clarify the status of Jews in
that country.*

HITLER'S VOICE comes on. The boys stare at each other.

HITLER (V.O.)
*The only way to deal with the problem is
legislative action...*

THOMAS
You know what I wish when I hear him?

HITLER (V.O.)
*...Should Jewish agitation continue, then
the problem must then be handed over by law
to the National-Socialist Party for a final
solution.*

THOMAS
That I was deaf in both ears.

Joe twists the tuning dial, stops at a flourish of piano:
James P. Johnson's orchestra playing "STEEPLECHASE RAG."

Joe: better? Thomas nods. Joe takes up his pencil. Thomas lies down beside him. Presses up close to his brother. We move through the window by Joe's bed. MUSIC CONTINUES OVER:

EXT. KAVALIER APARTMENT HOUSE - NIGHT

We pan right along the row of windows on the face of the building. In the next window, the Doctors Kavalier sit listening to Hitler on the radio. Grave expressions.

Keep moving, down one story, then all the way to the left, then pan right again. We're "reading" the building the way you read a page of comics. Every window is a panel.

People read newspapers. Play piano. Embrace. Dance. Eat. And listen to the radio. "Steeplechase Rag" mingles with Hitler's voice as we move to the bottom of the "page": the street. The "page" turns, "Steeplechase Rag" SWELLS, and we PAGE WIPE to:

INSERT COMICS PAGE - "ELEVATED TRAIN"

We zoom in on the top row of three panels. They form a triptych, a Coney Island street scene, seen from above. We are actually looking down through the gaps in the Elevated tracks, with each panel representing a "gap".

In the first and third panels: sailors, teenagers, a policeman, street vendors, con men. In the center panel a boy (SAMMY KLAYMAN) and a woman (ETHEL KLAYMAN). He's walking with a crutch, and pulling on her hand, dragging her.

SAMMY (BALLOON)
WE'RE GOING TO MISS IT!

ETHEL (BALLOON)
WITH ANY LUCK.

SAMMY (BALLOON)
COME ON, MA!

WIPE - "ELEVATED TRAIN"

With a ROAR a subway train, seen from above, rushes across the page, along the "track" of the panels as we WIPE TO:

EXT. ELEVATED TRACKS - BROOKLYN - 1935 - DAY - LIVE ACTION

The train ROARS past and we're looking down through the tracks, at the avenue. Sammy e boy and his mother as he drags her behind him. Making good time on his crutch.

We move down from the El to the level of the sidewalk. As we track mother and son, spires, billboards, flags rise up in front of them. A roller coaster. Coney Island.

INT. VAUDEVILLE HOUSE - DAY - 1935

A seedy house, half full. In the audience sit ETHEL KLAYMAN and her 12-year-old son SAMMY. Ethel is 44, a few strands of steel in her pinned-up black hair.

Onstage, 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 is 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.)

In twelve years Sam Klayman had never seen his father's act.

SAMMY'S FACE filled with fear, wonder, pride, horror... as the audience CHEERS. Stuffing his face with popcorn. Ethel watches intently, too, but with a frown.

THE MOLECULE'S FACE. Strain. 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.

SAMMY is awestruck. No child has ever admired a man more.

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 goes to him. He gets up and they embrace. Fiercely. She takes a step back, delighted to see him but permanently furious with him, too.

ETHEL

You're getting fat. You look like a sofa with a head.

The Molecule won't take the bait. Looking her up and down.

MOLECULE

And you look to me like one million dollars.

(beat)

Where's my little sidekick?

Sammy steps out from behind his mother. The Molecule opens his arms. Sammy gawks up at him, at the great half-naked bulk of him. Then he looks down at his spindly legs, his crutch.

EXT. CONEY ISLAND - BOARDWALK - DAY

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

ETHEL

How long is the booking this time?

MOLECULE

A week. But who knows. If the gate is decent, they may extend the run. Anyway, even a week, it's enough to work on these broomsticks, eh?

He gives one of Sammy's wasted legs a shake.

INT. KLAYMAN APARTMENT - DAY

Sammy in a chair, in boxers and undershirt. A crude "MM" on the shirt. The Molecule crouches beside him, gripping one of his legs. Ethel watches from the doorway.

MOLECULE

Bend it. That's it. Bend it! Come on, boy. Strong! Strong! Is New York City. If you are weak they 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! Now this. We don't forget the arms.

Hands him a dumbbell. Sammy starts to curl it, watching his tiny arm muscles flex. The Molecule beams.

MOLECULE (CONT'D)

Who is my little sidekick? Hah?

INT. STUDIO - PRAGUE ACADEMY OF FINE ART - 1939

A DRAWING OF A MUSCULAR MALE ARM. Vibrant line, suggestive shadow, hint of sensuality. Accomplished work.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Four years after Hitler announced the Nuremberg laws, he occupied Czechoslovakia, and used those laws to build a box around the Jews of Prague.

A NUDE MALE MODEL poses. Joe sits at an easel, in a room filled with easels. A serious, handsome face. Slender. An air of competence beyond his years.

AN INSTRUCTOR strolls the aisles, declaiming in Czech and pointing to various flaws in the STUDENTS' work. A SCHOOL OFFICIAL enters with a clipboard and two GESTAPO MEN.

SCHOOL OFFICIAL

By special order of Reichsprotektor Heydrich, the following students are hereby discharged from the State Academy of Fine
(MORE)

SCHOOL OFFICIAL (CONT'D)
Arts: Abzug, Renata. Einstein, Martin.
Glanzman, Anya. Kavalier, Josef...

It goes on. The other students look away. The named 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

The Gestapo men wrestle Joe down the hall, punching and hitting him. He fights back.

EXT. ACADEMY - CONTINUOUS

Joe tumbles down the steps. His portfolio sails after him, pops open. Sketches go flying. STUDENTS, FACULTY, stand on the steps, watching. Saying nothing. Some of them turn away. Joe rises, face bloody. Slowly gathers his work.

EXT. OLD TOWN - PRAGUE - NIGHT

A faded baroque mansion, in the rain. Discreet plaque beside the front door in Czech, German and French: HOFZINSER CLUB. Engraved with the symbol of a coin and a playing-card spade.

A decrepit BUTLER in seedy livery opens the door. The butler squints, suspicious. Dr. K removes his dripping hat.

HERR DR. KAVALIER
I'm looking for Herr Kornblum.

BUTLER
A popular fellow.

INT. HOFZINSER CLUB - FOYER - A MINUTE LATER

Dr. Kavalier waits by a cloakroom. Portraits of the great magicians of Central Europe frown down from the walls.

A door opens and we hear a whispered argument, someone shushing it. A group of SEVEN MEN hurry past. A diverse group, some old, some young, some well-to-do, one beggarly. Carrying on a whispered argument in a mishmash of Yiddish, German, Czech. The BEGGAR tips his hat to Dr. Kavalier.

INT. HOFZINSER CLUB - SMOKING ROOM - A MINUTE LATER

Ruined Hapsburg splendor. The butler makes his way through clouds of pipe and cigar smoke, past tables where dilapidated magicians play cards. Past an old necromancer putting on a private program for two old card-and-coin men.

The butler approaches a high leather chair by the fire. Leans down to murmur. Bernard Kornblum looks up from the chair,

across the room, at Dr. Kavalier. Raises an eyebrow. Guesses why the doctor has come.

INT. HOFZINER CLUB - STORAGE ROOM - A MINUTE LATER

They sit on two benches in the midst of fabulous magical detritus, cages, flammable hoops, a giant hat.

HERR DR. KAVALIER

I have a sister in New York, a nurse. But the Germans make it so difficult. We can't get the proper documents. We are trapped. Perhaps that is why I thought of you. With your expertise--

KORNBLUM

You are not the first, Herr Doktor, to come to me in these circumstances. In vain, I'm sorry to say.

A beat. Dr. Kavalier stands. Puts on his hat.

KORNBLUM (CONT'D)

As it happens, I have just declined a request to produce an interesting effect. An escape from Prague, to Vilna in Lithuania. But there might be room for a stowaway.

HERR DR. KAVALIER

A stowaway. One.

KORNBLUM

It will require skill. There is no way that a young child could manage it.

On Dr. Kavalier's face, as Kornblum's meaning sinks in.

HERR DR. KAVALIER

It will have to do.

He takes Kornblum's hand in both of his. They stand up and go to the door of the lumber room. Kornblum opens the door, sees if the coast is clear. The doctor turns.

HERR DR. KAVALIER (CONT'D)

Lithuania?

KORNBLUM

I'm a magician. Not a wizard.

INT. BOYS' BEDROOM - DAY

Thomas sits on his bed, rolling a pair of socks into a ball, watching Joe pack a tiny kit bag. Neither of them speaks. Thomas hands Joe a tight little pellet of socks.

THOMAS

Can you roll me into a little ball?

Joe stops packing. Puts down the kit bag. Takes hold of Thomas by the shoulders. Kneels down. Leans in. Puts his lips very close to his left ear.

JOE

I will send for you. I promise. I'll work hard, and make a lot of money. It's easy to make money there. Enough to arrange transit for all of you. I swear. Next year we'll all meet at the top of the Statue of Liberation. Right at the top of her sword.

He holds his right arm high. Thomas echoes the gesture.

THOMAS

Her sword!

INT. KAVALIER APARTMENT HOUSE - CELLAR - NIGHT

The Kavalier family creep past a huge furnace, mysterious pipes. Joe wears a coat and carries his kit.

HERR DR. KAVALIER

You have the money. Your documents. The letter from my sister.

JOE

I have everything.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER

Not quite.

She studies his face. She strokes his cheek. Then she presses something into his hand:

THE SET OF PICKS. Joe looks up, puzzled, moved.

A soft RAP on the cellar door. Joe turns to his parents and they take him in their arms, together. Thomas burrows in among them. They sway together. Then Herr Dr. Kavalier lets go. Joe's mother lets go. Only Thomas is left holding on.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER (CONT'D)

Thomas.

Slowly Thomas lets go of Joe, and steps away.

EXT. PRAGUE STREET - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Joe follows Kornblum into the alley. At the far end a truck full of soldiers rumbles past and they freeze, wait till it rolls on. Joe turns to look back at the cellar door.

THOMAS IN THE DOORWAY, brandishing an imaginary sword. Joe raises his own hand. Then Thomas is gone. The door SLAMS. Joe lowers his arm. Turns and follows Kornblum.

EXT. FALEDER MORTUARY - NIGHT

Joe and Kornblum stand in front of a Jewish funeral home.

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. FALEDER MORTUARY - WORKROOM - NIGHT

Cracked tile, stainless steel. One enormous coffin on trestles. Kornblum goes to it, lifts the lid. Joe peers in.

JOE
A statue?

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

KORNBLUM
Some people believe it is more. The Nazis have been turning the ghetto upside down searching for it.

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

KORNBLUM (CONT'D)
Come, surely you recognize the magical Golem of Prague! Secret weapon of your great-great grandfathers! Defender of the ghetto! Shaped by the hands of the great Rabbi Judah Loew from the mud of the River Moldau to protect the oppressed and avenge the innocent!

JOE
You're saying the Golem is real?

Kornblum's look: You know better than that. Joe studies the lifeless figure, runs his fingers over the clay forehead, still half believing. Sniffs.

JOE (CONT'D)
It does smell like the Moldau.

MONTAGE - PREPARING THE COFFIN

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

KORNBLUM (V.O.)
There will be room down at the bottom.

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

JOE (V.O.)
If someone opens it they will see me.

They saw off the nails that hold the end panel in place. They tap the 'gaffed' panel back into place.

KORNBLUM (V.O.)
They'll 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 into jacket and pants. Tie his tie.

Kornblum makes up the Golem, a mortician's kit at his side.

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

INT. MORTUARY - WORKROOM - NIGHT

Now they test the whole thing: open the latch.

KORNBLUM
We let them open this part to look in. We invite them to do so.

He lifts the hinged panel cut from the lid. The 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 alley. The teamster, in cap and coverall, is Bernard Kornblum.

EXT. PRAGUE - CENTRAL BAHNHOF - DAY

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 corner of the platform stand the SEVEN JEWS. They watch in silence. Turn to each other, nod. Retreat into the shadows. 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. FRONTIER 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.

He lifts the latch and they peer in. A beat.

SOLDIER 1 (CONT'D)
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

Joe, stuffed into the bottom of coffin, eyes wide with fear. Hears the soldiers talking. Gripped in panic, breathing hard.

SOLDIER 2 (O.S.)
Forget it. It stinks of piss in there.

Darkness restored to the coffin. The latch SNAPS shut.

EXT. BOXCAR - DAY

The soldiers climb down out of the car, heave the door shut.

INT. BOXCAR - DAY

A DRIP of yellow liquid from the bottom corner of the coffin. A puddle on the floor of the boxcar, under the coffin. DRIP. A lurch, an iron GROAN. The train begins to roll.

EXT. VILNIUS - STREET - DAY

Dawn. A canvas-covered truck rocks down a deserted medieval street away from the train station.

INT. TRUCK - COVERED BED - DAY

The coffin jolts and slides around in the bed. A CRACK of wood. The foot-panel of the coffin comes loose, falls off.

INT. TRUCK - CAB - DAY

DRIVER looks to COMRADE: what's that? His comrade shrugs.

INT. TRUCK BED - DAY

Joe shimmies out of the coffin. Takes huge sobbing gulps of air. Then he fits the panel into place. Just before he snaps it he peers in at the Golem.

JOE

So long.

He fits the panel back onto the coffin.

EXT. VILNIUS - STREET

He leaps down from the back of the truck. Looks around.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

So now he's in Lithuania. Germans on one side, Russians on the other.

INT. VILNIUS - JAPANESE CONSULATE OFFICE - DAY

A VISA good for travel to the Empire of Japan.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

He hears about this heroic Japanese diplomat who's giving Jews visas.

HANDS affix a photo of a bearded, sidelocked yeshiva bucher.

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

Mostly it's students, Chasids. Whole schools of them at a time.

CHIUNE SUGIHARA looks up from the photo to the young YESHIVA BUCHER. It's Joe, beard, sidelocks and all. He smiles an ingratiating smile.

INT. TRANS-SIBERIAN EXPRESS - CARRIAGE - DAY

CRAMMED with Chasids, praying, arguing, proposing and refuting theories of the universe. Smashed against a window, no longer in disguise, Joe looks out at the bleak landscape beyond the train. Sketching rapidly in a black sketchbook. We don't see the drawing. He flips a page and keeps sketching.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

After he gets on the Trans-Siberian railroad, I lose track of him.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - DAY - 1940

A Greyhound bus, vintage 1939, roars toward us. Hills in the background, Coit Tower.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

When people asked him how he got from Vilnius to Brooklyn, he used to say that he travelled by pencil.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DAY

Joe squeezed into a seat, sketching the view of San Francisco through the bus window.

EXT. LOST MIDWESTERN HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Dusk. Cornfields. The bus roars off into the blue distance.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
I've never been able to prove that he
passed through Salina, Kansas. And anyway
the timing's a little bit off.

We pull back from the highway, the bus dwindling into the evening, and reveal a ROADSIDE SIGN: "Salina, Kansas."

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But it makes a good story.

We glide across a rustling cornfield. In the distance a blaze of light. Trailers, kliegs, striped tents. A CALLIOPE swells.

INT. CIRCUS SIDESHOW - SALINA, KANSAS - NIGHT

A BANNER reads THE MIGHTY MOLECULE and beneath this, WORLD'S STRONGEST JEW. 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. PILES of comics and pulp magazines everywhere. A typewriter with an abandoned page. A title typed on the blanks sheet: DANGER PLANET!

Sammy lifts a heavy dumbbell. He's 18 now, an intense young man with a sensitive tough ghetto-boy face, his upper body muscled, the braces gone. A KNOCK.

ETHEL in the doorway, her expression grim.

SAMMY
What happened?

Tears well in Ethel's eyes and spill over.

ETHEL
Seven men and a cow.

Sammy watches his mother cry. Then goes to put his arms around her. After a moment she pulls free. Eyes dry. She takes Sam's pillow from the bed. Shakes the pillowcase free. Goes to his mirror and drapes it with the pillowcase.

ETHEL (CONT'D)
We'll miss that check every week.

INT. EMPIRE NOVELTIES, INC. - OFFICES - DAY

A run-down small-time concern. All the furniture third-hand.
All the clerks broken men.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Clay had a crummy job drawing ad copy for
Empire Novelties, Inc, in the Kramler
Building on West 25th.

Sammy's at a drawing board, dishevelled, frustrated. Torn
black ribbon pinned to his lapel. Struggling with a drawing.

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

Tough business, cheap novelties.

SHELDON ANAPOL, the owner of Empire Novelties, comes out of
his office, glowers at Sam. Half his face shaved, half foamy
with Barbasol. He sticks out his hand.

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

The owner, Sheldon Anapol, had been
struggling along since the Crash retailing
gags that weren't funny to people with no
sense of humor.

Sammy hands Anapol the drawing. Embarrassed. Anapol glances
at it--we don't see it yet. Anapol balls it up in his fist.

ANAPOL

Just copy the one from the last ad.

He grabs a comic book from a pile and tosses it at Sammy. On
the back, a big ad for EMPIRE NOVELTIES. Sammy turns the
comic over. It's Action Comics. He pages through. Stops at:

INSERT PANEL

A panel showing Superman leaping over a
tall building.

Sammy swallows. Takes heart. Summons his nerve.

SAMMY

Mr. Anapol--!

INT. ANAPOL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

SIMKOWITZ, a salesman, has his sample case open: rubber
dogshit, rubber flies, black soap. Incapable of smiling.

SALESMAN (O.S)

Mr. Anapol--if I may--

Anapol tosses the drawing into the trash. Goes over to a
sink, resumes shaving. As Sammy walks in, Simkowitz holds up
a set of Chattering Teeth. Anapol sees them in the mirror.

ANAPOL

Chattering Teeth are dead, Simkowitz.

SIMKOWITZ

Truer words have rarely been spoken, Mr. A,
but believe me, these teeth are different.

SAMMY

Mr. Anapol. I know I swore I'd never bring
it up again--

ANAPOL

On the head of your late grandmother,
Klayman, as I recall.

Grimly Simkowitz winds up the teeth.

SIMKOWITZ

It's funny, Mr. Anapol. It's as funny as
hell.

SAMMY

But think about it, boss--

ANAPOL

I am not a publisher, Klayman. I'm in
novelties. Novelties!

Simkowitz lays the teeth on Anapol's desk, lets go. Nothing.

SAMMY

You'll sell a lot of novelties! Look at
RCA. They started NBC to sell RCA radios.
So you aren't a publisher. You know people
in the business.

Simkowitz, smile dying, gives the teeth a poke.

ANAPOL

Let's say I lost control of my mental
faculties, became insane, and decided to
take a chance on this idea. Who is going to
draw these comic books? You?

He fishes Sammy's picture of the trash. CLACK of the teeth as
they bite him again! Anapol uncrumples the drawing. Holds it
up: it depicts a flattened squirrel.

The teeth start to chatter. Simkowitz looks relieved.

ANAPOL (CONT'D)

You can't even draw a goddamn lizard!

The windup jaws fly open. A windup BRONX CHEER and out pokes
a rubber tongue.

SIMKOWITZ

Funny, right?

INT. KLAYMAN APARTMENT - DAY

Sammy lets himself in. The mirror in the hallway is draped.

SAMMY

Ma?

ETHEL (O.S.)

In the kitchen.

SAMMY

Do we have any pictures of lizards...

INT. KLAYMAN APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A memorial candle burns in its glass on the kitchen counter.

SAMMY

...or like any type of reptile--

Stops. Surprised. Curious. Faintly irritated.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Who's that?

Joe sits at the table, a plate of stew in front of him. He eyes Sammy, wary. Ethel grabs Joe's cheeks and shakes his head from side to side. A black ribbon pinned to her lapel.

ETHEL

Josef. Your Uncle Emil's son.

Ethel studies Joe's face. Tears in her iron eyes.

SAMMY

I thought there were two sons.

JOE

I have a brother. He comes here too.

SAMMY

I'm so happy to hear that.

He plops down at the table.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Just what this place needs to class it up, ma, a bunch of greenhorns from Lower Slobbovia or wherever it is.

Joe hesitantly starts to fork up some of the mystery stew.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

I wouldn't eat that if I were you.

Joe stops the fork in midair. Glances over at his aunt. Tastes the stew. Puts down the fork.

JOE

To be the truth, the stomach is not so good. I think perhaps I would 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

Joe and Sammy lie in the narrow bed, squeezed together. Sammy holds himself very still, his pajamas buttoned to the throat.

JOE
Do not worry. Soon I will leave the bed.

SAMMY
Oh, you can bet on that.

JOE
Only first I am finding job. I need to make a lot of money. Quickly.

SAMMY
Aren't you the eager beaver.

Beat. Strangers trying to behave as if this is not strange.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
I, uh, I'm sorry about your family. Being stuck over there, I mean.

JOE
And I am sorry your father he is dead.

Another awkward beat.

SAMMY
You came on a boat?

JOE
In the boat. The train. The bus. Russia. Yokohama.

Sammy sits up in bed now, excited.

SAMMY
Yokohama!

ETHEL (O.S.)
Sammy! Sleep!

SAMMY
(whispers)
Yokohama! What was it like?

JOE
Here, I can to show you.

He takes out his black sketchbook, passes it to Sammy.

Sammy turns the first few pages: each page is a sequential image of a reindeer running across bleak tundra.

Sammy catches on: it's a flipbook. He flips the pages and the images begin to flow: Train pulling into a station at Vladivostock. Crowds pushing out of the train. As the flow grows smoother, we MORPH INTO:

INSERT JOE'S FLIPBOOK - ANIMATED - B&W

In neat, simple pen-and-ink we follow the course of the journey: Crowds board a ship at Vladivostock. Waves crash over the deck as Joe hangs over the rail. Flights of gulls. Passengers on deck, arriving in Yokohama harbor and then--

A blank page. The image of Yokohama is just gone.

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - SIMULTANEOUS - LIVE ACTION

Sammy looks up from the flyleaf. Joe takes the sketchbook. Turns it around, flips it over. Hands it back Sam who opens it and finds a Yokohama streetscene, crowded with people.

JOE
Yokohama.

Sam nods. He resumes his flipping and we move back into:

INSERT JOE'S FLIPBOOK - ANIMATED - B&W

The streets of Yokohama jammed with people. People stream up the gangplank of another ship. Dolphins arc across the Pacific Ocean. Joe stands alone on deck holding his sketchbook, sketching the dolphins, smoke from his cigarette rising into the sky. The ship enters the Golden Gate.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
I don't honestly know what was in that sketchbook. But I know that fifty years later, Sam Clay still remembered it like he had taken that journey himself.

Then we come to the end, a blank, and the beginning again.

SAMMY (V.O.)
Wow. I mean--wow!

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - SIMULTANEOUS - LIVE ACTION

Sammy reluctantly lets go of the sketchbook. Looking at Joe differently now.

SAMMY
Can you draw a lizard?

JOE

Yes. I am hope to find perhaps some kind of work doing the commercial art. Also I can to do magic tricks.

Sammy crawls out of bed. Switches on his lamp. Grabs a pencil and hands it to Joe.

SAMMY

Magic tricks I don't need. And forget commercial art. They don't hire Jews.

JOE

They don't?

SAMMY

Nah. but let me see your lizard.

Joe opens to the flyleaf, sketches a fine lizard.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Ever hear of comic books?

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Joe sprawls across Sammy's bed, drawing, surrounded by a pile of comic books: Superman, Batman, the Phantom. Sammy's on the floor, whispering, excited.

SAMMY

We work all weekend, we go in there Monday, we drop the first issue in Anapol's lap. A whole book. All we need is an idea.

ETHEL (O.S)

That's the last thing you need.

Sammy whirls around. Ethel and her scowl in the doorway. She's the one in the floral housecoat. Joe keeps drawing.

SAMMY

Go back to bed, Ma.

ETHEL

What is he doing? What have you been telling him?

SAMMY

Sheldon Anapol is looking to get into the comic book business.

JOE

They are selling like pancakes.

SAMMY

He asked me to come up with a character. Like Superman. He asked me to, you know, put something together.

JOE
Sixty-four pages. All new! All thrills!

ETHEL
(to Joe)
He's lying.

SAMMY
Ma, I swear. On Bubbie's head, I swear. The kid can really draw, Ma.

ETHEL
Let me see.

Joe looks up. A little doubtful, suddenly. Then slowly he turns his drawing around and holds it up.

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.

ETHEL (CONT'D)
The Golem?

JOE
Fighting for poor and weak peoples. Strong. Helpful. Like Superman.

ETHEL
I don't know beans about comic books. But I do know that Jewish folklore is not selling like pancakes.
(beat)
He will need a job, Sammy. A real job, for real money, doing real work. I don't want you to waste another minute of his time on those garbagey magazines. Do you understand me, Sam?

SAMMY
No, and I never really have.

Ethel snaps off the light. Moonlight falls through the venetian blinds. She closes the door.

JOE
Too much Jew?

SAMMY
A little too much Jew.

Joe pats his pocket, takes out a pack of cigarettes.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
She'll smell it.

JOE
If we to open the window?

SAMMY

It don't open. The witch of Endor put some kind of Hebrew hex on it.

Joe turns to the window. Studies it, feels around. Taps it. Pulls. Taps it again. With a soft creak it slides upward. He turns to Sammy. How about that?

EXT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

They lean out of the window, smoking. Talking in whispers.

SAMMY

One: who is he. Two: what does he do?
Flying's out. Superman flies. No flying, no bulletproof skin. No cape. And Batman--

JOE

He flies like the bat.

SAMMY

Batman doesn't fly.

JOE

But he is blind?

SAMMY

No, he only dresses like a bat. He has no batlike qualities at all. Animals. The, uh, the Fox. The Shark. Sharkman.

JOE

The Lion?

SAMMY

Lionman! He has, like, a super roar. It strikes fear.

JOE

It breaks the dishes.

SAMMY

The bad guys go deaf.

ETHEL (O.S.)

Sammy.

SAMMY

(lowers voice)

Look, forget animals. Everybody's going to be doing animals and guys who can fly.

JOE

If he can to make a thing burn? If he can shoot the fire, with his eyes!

SAMMY

His eyeballs would melt.

JOE
Ice? Electricity? Little metal balls?

SAMMY
No. No. It's irrelevant. Who is not the question. What is not the question.
(warming to the subject)
It doesn't matter if he's like an animal, if he can shoot flames or ice or death rays. Right now, see, there's a bandwagon and every little skinny guy like me in New York who believes there's life on Alpha Centauri and got the shit kicked out of him in school is out there right this minute trying to jump onto it!

ETHEL (O.S.)
Enough, Sammy.

Hastily Sammy stubs out his cigarette.

SAMMY
I have to get out of this place.

JOE
If I can get out of the Czechoslovakia, you can get out of here.

A beat. TRAFFIC sounds. Joe points to the FIRE ESCAPE.

JOE (CONT'D)
What's up there?

SAMMY
A broken neck. Or so I am told.
(beat)
The question... is why. Why does our guy do what he does?

JOE
To fight the crime, isn't it? The evil.

SAMMY
Well, yes. But that's all any of these guys do. How interesting is that? Only Batman... yeah. Batman's parents were killed by a criminal, right in front of his eyes, when he was just a little kid.

JOE
And he was driven mad. And that is why he puts on the bat's clothes!

ETHEL (O.S.)
Sammy! Don't make me come in there again.

Joe makes a decision: clambers out onto the fire escape.

JOE

Come on.

Joe reaches back to Sammy. Sammy looks to the door, then at Joe's hand. Then he lets Joe pull him through the window.

EXT. FLATBUSH ROOF - MOMENTS LATER

Sammy and Joe stand on the roof of the building. Night and Brooklyn all around. City lights. Moonlight. In the distance the towers of Manhattan. Joe's dazed. Maybe a little lost.

SAMMY

You're here. You pulled it off.

He gives Joe's shoulder a squeeze. Joe doesn't look so sure.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

You really know all that Houdini stuff?

JOE

I studied with Kornblum. Master of escape. Star of stage. Friend of Houdini.

SAM

My pop said he met Houdini, but I never believed it. He was in vaudeville. The "World's Strongest Jew." He died on the road in some hick town.

JOE

I am sorry.

SAMMY

He left when I was a little kid and never really came back. I hadn't seen him in years. What's your pop like?

JOE

He is good man. He is doctor. He is not the most strongest Jew in the world.

SAMMY

That's what they need over there. But then look at you, you got out. Maybe what they need is like a super-Kornblum. Hey.

Sammy starts to stride back and forth, in the grip of an idea. Joe sits on the cornice, lights a cigarette, watching.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

I always get a kick out of the fact that the first superhero Joe Kavalier tried to draw was the Golem.

SAMMY

Houdini. Houdini.

A comics thought balloon pops out of Sammy's head. Inside it appears the image of Houdini, opening a barred cell door. A crowd of people flowing past him to freedom.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Powers beyond those of ordinary men. His body trained to perfection. All kinds of gadgets and devices and tools. A team of crack assistants.

As Sammy talks, he gradually begins to flatten and intensify into a comics version of himself.

EXT. FLATBUSH ROOF - ANIMATED - CONTINUOUS

The city backdrop turns gaudy and jazzed. As Sammy paces, Houdini is transformed: skintight uniform. Mask.

SAMMY

He was a champion of truth, right? Exposing frauds. Rooting out charlatans and swindlers. We just take it a step farther. We put him in a costume.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Because in the old stories, you make a Golem with incantations. Words. Basically, you talk it into life.

SAMMY

Give him a secret identity. Somebody... weak. A kid with a limp. Walks with a crutch. But then he transforms himself--

Sammy pulls the balloon down over himself like a hoop. When he steps through it he's in the costume. The city behind him jumps and glitters. He tosses the balloon aside.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Transforms himself with the power of--the power of--

JOE (O.S.)

--his Golden Key!

SAMMY

Yes! Are you writing this down?

EXT. FLATBUSH AVENUE - LIVE ACTION - CONTINUOUS

Joe brandishes the thought balloon with a magician's flair.

JOE

I don't need to.

Now he steps into the balloon as into a canvas sack, into:

EXT. FLATBUSH ROOF - ANIMATED - CONTINUOUS

Joe stands up, holding a pencil. He goes over to Sammy and draws a big key insignia on his chest. Sammy looks down.

SAMMY
Nice touch.

JOE
Let me try it.

Animated Sam takes off the mask and hands it to Joe.

EXT. FLATBUSH ROOF - ANIMATED - MOMENTS LATER

In costume, Joe dashes across the rooftop, tumbling, leaping. Swinging from the iron cleats of the water tower.

SAMMY (V.O.)
To those who toil in the bonds of slavery
and, uh, the, the shackles of oppression,
he offers the hope of liberation and the
promise of freedom! He is--the Escapist!

Joe stands on top of the water tower, arms at his sides. But he's not Joe anymore, he is the Escapist, shining beacon of hope and liberation.

ESCAPIST
He is here to free the world!

SAMMY (O.S.)
Yes!

ESCAPIST
I have one question for you!

SAMMY (O.S.)
Ask me anything.

ESCAPIST
(Joe's voice)
What is the why?

EXT. FLATBUSH ROOF - LIVE ACTION - CONTINUOUS

Sammy looks up at Joe, who's perched on the water tower, holding on tight to the iron cleats.

SAMMY
Aw, nuts.

JOE
(trying it out)
"Nuts."

He likes the sound of it. And then they both crack up.

INT. ETHEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ethel hears LAUGHTER up on the roof. Sits up in bed. Turns on the light: it's two AM. She starts to get up. Stops herself. Picks up the picture on her night stand: a framed snapshot of Sammy and the Molecule on that day at Coney Island.

She hears them BANGING back down the fire escape. SHUSHING each other. A moment later the CLATTER of a typewriter. She puts the picture down. Switches off her lamp.

INT. KAVALIER KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sammy paces, talking while Joe draws. Ethel comes into the kitchen. Just stands there, watching Sammy and Joe.

SAMMY

Okay, then cut to the next panel. The window shatters into a million pieces. And the Escapist comes flying through. And the Nazi says: What the--!

Sammy's stops pacing. Turns to Joe.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

And then let me see what you've got.

Joe holds up a page. In the big fourth panel, the Escapist alights arms thrown back, his kick sending the Nazi flat on his face. The drawing a little crude, the details sparse.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

It's not bad. Still a little a bit, maybe, a little bit thin. But you're getting it.

ETHEL

How many pages do you have?

They're startled. Joe makes a show of counting them.

JOE

Five.

ETHEL

And you need to have sixty-four by Monday!

SAMMY

It pains me to say it, but she's right. We need horses. Arms.

(Off Joe's blank look.)
Guys.

JOE

Artists!

SAMMY

How about we just call them 'guys'.

EXT. WEST 19TH STREET - CHELSEA - NIGHT

Deserted street. Joe is carrying their portfolio.

SAMMY

This is it.

Joe and Sammy look up at a peeling rowhouse. A dump.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Palooka Studios. The Juilliard of two-bit cartoonists. Almost.

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

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Let's wake em up.

INT. CHELSEA ROWHOUSE - "PALOOKA STUDIOS" - DAY

They reach the top landing; Joe's carrying the portfolio. Sammy knocks. No answer. They go in to the apartment.

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

It's a pit. A hole. Twenty years of young male inhabitants crusted on. Easels, brushes, piles of tag and art board. Two big couches, each with a fully-clothed GUY crashed out on it.

SAMMY

Glovsky. Julie Glovsky.

Julie GLOVSKY half opens his eyes. Then the guy on the other couch: DAVY DOWD. New York kids, toughs in neckties.

JULIE GLOVSKY

Davy.

DAVY DOWD

Yeah, Jer?

JULIE GLOVSKY

I'm having another nightmare about Sam Klayman.

DAVY DOWD

Please stop bothering us, Klayman. We can't get you a job in cartooning. We don't even have jobs of our own.

Joe sets down the portfolio and starts to untie it.

SAMMY

You do now. At a guaranteed page rate of seven dollars and fifty cents.

Julie sits up.

JULIE GLOVSKY
What? Who's paying that kind of money?

SAMMY
Sheldon Anapol.

JULIE GLOVSKY
He's not a publisher!

FRANK PANTALEONE walks in, holding a cigarette, in shirt, tie and underpants. Ignores Joe. Starts looking through the pages in the portfolio. The most confident of the Guys.

SAMMY
Hey, Frank.

FRANK PANTALEONE
Who did this? This is good.
(to Joe)
Was it you? I know it wasn't Klayman.

SAMMY
This is my cousin, Joe. He's just in from Japan. He and I have a contract to present Anapol with a full book, plus the cover, by Monday. We got the lead story covered. But we need more.

JULIE 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.

SAMMY
Yup.

The Guys look at each other. Then they burst out laughing.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Fine, laugh. I see you already have more work than you can handle, living in such splendor.

He takes the pages from Frank. Starts tying up the portfolio.

DAVY DOWD
Seven fifty. Klayman, on the level?

SAMMY
Straight from Anapol's mouth.

DAVY DOWD
Then you can count me in. You just have to tell me one thing.
(to Joe)
How's come if you're from Japan, you're Klayman's cousin and a Jew?

SAMMY
They have Jews in Japan.

JOE
Jujitsu.

DAVY DOWD
Good point.

SERIES OF SHOTS - PALOOKA STUDIOS

A) Boys at work, drawing, inking, filling in balloons with letters. Smoking, drinking coffee from paper cups.

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. A HORN sounds.

Frank puts down the board. Throws open the window, leans out.

EXT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - SIMULTANEOUS

All the windows get thrown open. Sammy, Joe, Davy, Frank and Julie, each pokes his head out a window.

A long Hispano-Suiza rolls to a stop. The CHAUFFEUR comes around and opens the rear door. The Guys jeer as MARTY GOLD gets out. His head is bandaged.

A pretty girl--soon to be known to us as ROSA SAKS--gets out with him. Whistles and catcalls from the boys. She's solicitous of Marty: He's all right? He nods. They shake hands. He starts up the steps. A cloth bundle under his arm.

JULIE GLOVSKY
Some ambulance, Marty!

DAVY DOWD
Some nurse!

They laugh. Marty looks up, and winks, then walks into the building. Rosa looks up. Her eyes meet Joe's. The other Guys go back inside, but Joe lingers at the window.

Rosa takes out a cigarette.

ROSA
Got a light?

Joe starts to toss her a matchbook. Thinks better of it. Starts down the fire escape. At the bottommost level he tries to lower the ladder. Pushes it. It won't go. Joe leaps over the rail. Dangles. Then drops lightly to the street.

He holds a match to Rosa's cigarette. She looks impressed but tries to hide it.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Thank you.

She gets back into the car. It pulls away. Joe's face: wow. He turns back to the building. As he passes under the fire escape the ladder DROPS and bangs him on the head.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - MOMENTS LATER

As Joe walks in, the Guys are all gathered round Marty, pelting him with questions, talking all at once. We see now that he's quite badly bruised. Blood on his clothes.

MARTY GOLD

That's what I'm telling you! We decided to break up their stinkin' rally. Thirty of us from the Art Students League...

FRANK PANTALEONE

Thirty Bolsheviks...

MARTY GOLD

...against maybe five hundred fascists. Bundists, America Firsters--

DAVY DOWD

What's a Bundist?

JULIE GLOVSKY

It's what they call a Nazi uptown in Yorkville.

Joe's face, shocked by this. But Marty's exhilarated.

MARTY GOLD

And then that girl-- that Rosa--

JULIE GLOVSKY

Red Rosa!

MARTY GOLD

She walks right up to the biggest, most bullet-headed Fascist in the square, and she starts reciting a poem--

DAVY DOWD

A poem?

JULIE GLOVSKY

Oh, they hate that.

MARTY GOLD

--the Emma Lazarus thing on the Statue of Liberty.

Frank strikes a Statue of Liberty pose.

JULIE GLOVSKY
Give me your tired, your poor, your hungry
shnorrers yearning to eat free!

MARTY GOLD
Then they came after us so we had to run.
Obviously they caught me.

Marty looks down at himself. He's a mess.

MARTY GOLD (CONT'D)
But then her huge boat pulls up, right? And
she opens the door. I thought she was a
starving artist like the rest of us, but it
turns out she's loaded. Literally a
limousine liberal, I guess. I jump in, and
off we go. Otherwise, fellas, I really
think they would of killed me.

DAVY DOWD
Why was they so mad? Just because you're a
kike, Marty?

Marty pulls the bundle from under his arm. Grins.

MARTY GOLD
I took their flag.

He unfurls a red white and blue banner. A swastika, and the
words: ARYAN AMERICAN LEAGUE.

SAMMY
(off Joe's reaction)
Joe, it's okay. Don't worry about it. We're
okay. It's just a few nut cases.

MARTY GOLD
A few nutcases and Charles Lindbergh.

JOE
Charles Lindbergh is a Nazi?
(crushed)
It don't matter where you go in the world.
Every one is hating Jews.

MARTY GOLD
Well, not here.

FRANK PANTALEONE
Here we hate everybody equal.

Sammy looks at Joe, desperate to cheer him, revive him...

SAMMY
We tell them what's happening, Joe. Tell
them why the fight is our fight. How many
of them were there tonight, Marty?

MARTY GOLD
Maybe three thousand.

SAMMY
We're going to have a magazine, Joe. We can spread the message to hundreds of thousands of people. Millions!

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
People always assume the Escapist was basically a superhero version of Joe Kavalier. That the character came out of Kavalier's escape artist training.

SAMMY
The Escapist doesn't just fight evil, Joe. He fights Nazis!

FRANK PANTALEONE
You can't put politics in a comic book.

SAMMY
What politics, we're just telling a story. For all we know, see, Adolf Hitler is just, like, the puppet of a sinister organization. An ancient brotherhood of evil known as the Iron Chain.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
But Sam Clay had a superpower, too: as long as he kept talking, he could make you believe in his golems.

SAMMY
For thousands of years the shadowy Iron Chain has been attempting to enslave humanity under its banner of war and oppression...

Sammy's speech continues OVER:

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - MUCH LATER

Overflowing ashtrays, garbage and food everywhere. The place is trashed.

SAMMY (V.O.)
...but at every turn they have been foiled by a secret band of heroes...

Guys doze in chairs, snooze at their drawing tables...

SAMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Masters of escape... agents of liberation...the League of the Golden Key. And their latest and greatest champion...

...sprawl sacked out on couches...

SAMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The Escapist.

Joe's at an easel, painting with gouache. Wide awake, rapt.

Sammy slumps in a chair beside him, next to the finished pile of pages. Half asleep. Joe's brush stops. He blows on the paint. Admires his work a moment. Sammy sits up.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Is that it? Is it done?

He goes over and puts his hand on Joe's shoulder. Looks in. Joe puts an arm around his shoulders.

INSERT JOE'S COVER - "ISSUE NUMBER ONE"

Painted, gorgeous. THE ESCAPIST clocking ADOLF HITLER on the chin. Stunning hyperrealism.

We ZOOM into the page itself, past Hitler's knocked-out tooth like a comet with its trail of blood, past the upswinging fist of the Escapist, thorough the layer of paint to the pencils underneath, then bang up against the paper itself.

We SWING AROUND until the backs of the figures of Hitler and the Escapist are to us. It's like looking out from inside a diorama, framed by the borders of the page. Within the frame Sammy and Joe's faces, side by side, admire the radiant page.

JOE
Not quite done, no.

He reaches in with his brush and in a bottom corner he paints in two names in black. Draws a neat box around them. From our POV the letters are reversed. So we push right through the neat little box, past the names, out of the picture, swing around and there they are: KAVALIER & CLAY.

We PULL BACK from the signature box and now we're in:

INT. ANAPOL'S OFFICE - DAY - LIVE ACTION

Anapol's holding up the cover. Frowning.

ANAPOL
He's hitting Hitler?

Highly dubious. He starts to go through the other pages as Sam and Joe continue to pile up the pages.

ANAPOL (CONT'D)
They make two kinds of trash in this town, boys. The kind that gets towed on a barge out to Fresh Kills, and the kind that can pry loose a dime from the pocket of every simpleton and ten-year-old kid in America.
(beat)
(MORE)

ANAPOL (CONT'D)
 Maybe someday I'll be able to tell the
 difference.

Reaches for the phone on his desk.

ANAPOL (CONT'D)
 Get me Sid.

INT. ANAPOL'S OFFICE - LATER

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

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 Shelly Anapol called in the experts: Jack
 Ashkenazy, his brother in law, third
 biggest print jobber in New York. George
 Deasey, veteran editor. And Sid Harmattan,
 his lawyer.

ANAPOL
 Have a cigar.

He pushes the cigar box toward Joe and Sam. They look at it.
 Neither of them takes a cigar.

ANAPOL (CONT'D)
 I'm not going to mince words. We like it.
 Don't we, Mr. Deasey?

DEASEY
 It's drivel. It can't miss.

ASHKENAZY
 Every pulp publisher in New York is trying
 to jump onto this comics thing.

ANAPOL
 So. For the rights to the Escapist we'll
 pay you a one hundred and fifty.

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

SAMMY
 And?

ANAPOL
 The other characters, we'll pay...

ASHKENAZY
 Eighty-five for the lot.

ANAPOL
 We'll also take you both on, Sammy as
 writer for seventy-five a week and Mr.
 Kavalier at--Jack?

ASHKENAZY
 Six dollars a page.

ANAPOL
Plus for every cover we'll pay you--

ASHKENAZY
Twenty bucks.

ANAPOL
As for your pals, we'll go five dollars a page.

SAMMY
I promised them eight.

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

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

ANAPOL
We can do six.

DEASEY
And you come up with a new cover.

ANAPOL
(off Joe's reaction)
This hitting Hitler, fighting Nazis thing, it makes us nervous. You'll have to change the cover. No Hitler.

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

ANAPOL
Or torched by brown shirts, either.

JOE
I will not change the cover.

SAMMY
Joe. I know it's important to you. To us. It ought to be important to these gentlemen, too. But just think about it a minute. That's all I'm saying.

Joe looks at him. Hard. Face flushed.

JOE
The cover stays.

SAMMY
Gentleman, do you mind if I confer a moment with my partner?

Anapol looks helpless at Ashkenazy. What should he do?
Ashkenazy shrugs, shakes his head.

ANAPOL
We'll to go six and a quarter!

Ashkenazy slaps his forehead.

INT. EMPIRE NOVELTIES, INC. - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Joe stands, arms folded. Sammy's right up in his face.

SAMMY
You're gonna walk away from six and a quarter?

JOE
You heard him. Every publisher in New York is wanting this stuff. We can take it to some other Anapol.

SAMMY
Yeah, maybe we can. But it's no sure thing. It's not a hundred and fifty dollars, six twenty-five a page, sign on the dotted line.

JOE
When you look at the cover I made, Sam, tell me: what is in your brain?

SAMMY
What is in my brain? How much I'd like to give that Hitler a sock on the jaw.

JOE
That is what everyone in America will be in their brain when they see it. Everyone. Jew. Not Jew. And maybe this can help my family as much as money.

INT. ANAPOL'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Sammy gathers up the pages and hands half to Joe. They start to stuff them into their portfolios. Ashkenazy and Harmattan look bemused. Anapol's agitated. Deasey coolly smokes.

ANAPOL
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

Going down. The boys don't say a word. The elevator doors open. Anapol's standing there, out of breath, tie askew.

ANAPOL
Just keep me away from lawsuits, all right,
Klayman?

SAMMY
It's just "Clay." Sam Clay.

ANAPOL
Another blow against anti-Semitism!

He takes a pair of panatelas from his breast pocket.

ANAPOL (CONT'D)
Well, have a cigar, boys.

He lights their cigars. Pushes them together amid clouds of smoke. Joins their hands together, shakes them up and down.

A PLAQUE

affixed to a door: KAVALIER & CLAY. Official looking, but as the door swings open we see that's it's just:

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Joe at a makeshift drawing table. Sammy on the bed typing. Ethel comes in, carrying a plate of sandwiches. She sets them down beside Sammy. He eyes them. Whole sardines poke their little heads out of the sandwiches.

Ethel gives Sammy a warning look. Takes something from her apron. It's a letter. Addressed to THOMAS KAVALIER. Battered, heavily scarred by stamps and censors. She lays it on the table beside Joe.

ETHEL
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.

Ethel goes out. Sammy comes over, stands beside Joe. Doesn't know what to say. Joe ignores him. A beat. He studies Joe's cover drawing:

INSERT COVER - "ISSUE NUMBER TWO"

The Escapist tied to a torture rack, being lowered upside down into a shark tank by a masked Nazi supervillain.

SAMMY
He doesn't look upside down enough.

JOE
What are you talking about?

SAMMY
There would be a subtle difference.

JOE
Nonsense.

SAMMY
Look.

Sammy drops, turns an awkward handstand. Shaky.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
See? Look! Look!

He falls over onto Joe. Joe knocks over the lamp. Sammy tries to catch it, kicks over a pencil box, drops his typewriter into the sardine sandwiches. The lamp SHATTERS on the ground.

ETHEL
That's it. I want this out of my house.

SAMMY
I'm making a demonstration!

ETHEL
Go make it somewhere else!

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The GUYS go piling, excited, into the living room where:

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sammy is dragging on a rope, slung over ceiling fixture. From the other end of the rope dangles a chair, upside down. Tied to the chair is Julie Glovsky. An unhappy Julie Glovsky.

SAMMY
Look at the shoulders. I'm telling you.
Look at the hair. See? See?

Joe sits to one side, at a table. He nods, starts revising the sketch. Sammy eases Julie to the ground. The Guys applaud as Sammy unties him.

JULIE GLOVSKY
You owe me a quarter, Clay.

INSERT COVER - "ISSUE NUMBER 2" REVISED

The upside shark tank escape: Perfect. The sharks have uncountable teeth. So does the masked Nazi, bloodthirsty, black-clad, a black X taking the place of a swastika on his chest. THE LIVING DEATH TRAP OF KOMMANDANT X! PULL BACK to:

INT. A CANDY STORE - MAGAZINE RACK - BRONX - TWO MONTHS LATER

TWO BOYS huddle around the cover, revering it. They dig around in their pockets. One has four cents. One has a penny. Before they can be overwhelmed by sadness a GIRL--a tomboy--taps one boy on the shoulder. She holds out a nickel.

EXT. BRONX STOOP - FIVE MINUTES LATER

The kids huddle over the comic, admiring the cover. The girl looks at Boy 1. Nods toward Boy 2. Boy 1 nods. He gets it.

EXT. BRONX BACK YARD - MOMENTS LATER

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 writing a letter.

JOE (V.O.)
I want you to remember, never forget what I
whispered to you, Thomas. Into your good
ear. If you get this letter. If it finds
you.

Looks down at a snoring Sammy. Tears the sheet from the pad.

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
So far my letters have all come back.

EXT. FLATBUSH AVENUE - DAY

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

JOE (V.O.)
I'm thinking about you every minute I'm
awake. Every line I draw. Every dime I
earn. Working for the day I can go down to
the Cunard pier to meet the ship that
brings you, and mother, and father.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - DAY

Joe walks across the bridge toward Manhattan. He stops. Looks out toward the harbor. A great black ship in the distance, trailing gray plumes of smoke.

JOE (V.O.)
I know it sounds mad, but sometimes I go
down there, just to see.

EXT. CUNARD PIERS - DAY - LATER

Shouts, porters cries, the rumble of the ship. Joe watches as the France's gangplanks are lowered. Joe stands at the bottom

of the gangplank. As passengers debark, Joe tries to catch their eyes. He asks, polite, urgent:

JOE
Excuse me, are you from Prague?

The people coming off the boat shake their heads.

JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I know you won't be there. But I might see
a friend of the family. Somebody who saw
you a month ago.

Joe lets the people flood past him. All around, reunions take place: wild, sober, wailing.

A group of two dozen CHILDREN and their MINDERS. Joe watches the children. One of the boys raises a hand in greeting.

TALL NAZI (O.S.)
I am a Prager.

Filling the frame, a TALL NAZI, well-dressed, Swastika pin in his lapel. A greeting party of official GERMANS around him.

TALL NAZI (CONT'D)
Will I suit your purpose?

He takes a step closer to Joe.

TALL NAZI (CONT'D)
Or maybe you're here to carry my bags? I'm
a very generous tipper.

Joe rushes him, head down, and as he charges we MORPH INTO:

EXT. ZEPPELIN AIRFIELD - NAZI GERMANY - ANIMATED

(Note: this animated battle takes place within and among the panels of a vintage Kavalier comics page. The frames, balloons, captions form part of the landscape of the fight.)

The Escapist charges the formidable IRON GAUNTLET, mechanized wonder of the Wehrmacht. The Gauntlet stands in his riveted diesel-driven armor, hands on hips. A giant Zeppelin looms behind him.

GAUNTLET (BALLOON)
YOU DARE TO CHALLENGE DER ARYAN MIGHT OF
DER IRON GAUNTLET?

The Escapist lands a mid-air kick at the Gauntlet's head with a big red KR-RACK!

ESCAPIST (BALLOON)
I'D NEVER DREAM OF IT, RIVETS!

He grabs the Gauntlet's word balloon and yanks it down over his head like a stocking cap.

GAUNTLET (BALLOON)
 VERDAMMT!

A caption pops up: BUT THE IRON GAUNTLET IS NOT SO EASILY STOPPED!

The Gauntlet SMACKS the caption to one side. He REACHES OUT of the panel he's in and GRABS HOLD of another panel like he's hoisting a granite block. He HURLS the panel at the Escapist. (Of course inside the flying panel we can see the previous action, the kick, the big red KR-RACK!)

The Escapist dances aside. But then another panel comes hurtling toward him and smashes down on him. The bottom of the panel he's in splinters like cheap floorboard. The Escapist falls through into the next panel down. Lands, shaken. A ribbon of stars around his head.

The Gauntlet roars toward the hole in the bottom of the panel, iron suit CHUGGING like a panzer, going WHIRR-WHIRR-WHIRR. He leaps down through the hole and lands on top of the Escapist.

GAUNTLET (BALLOON) (CONT'D)
 YOUR SOFT YANKEE HIDE IS NO MATCH FOR MY
 DIESEL-DRIVEN FISTS!

He starts to POUND the Escapist but the Escapist grabs the Gauntlet's word balloon and holds it up like a shield. It shatters and LETTERS FLY everywhere.

The Escapist kicks him, rolls free, ducks around the "edge" of the panel, runs through the next panel and into the one after that. Now we're at the bottom right corner of the page. Nowhere to go.

The Escapist turns to fight but the Gauntlet jumps up and comes down on top of the last panel. Starts to jump up and down on it. CRUSHING it down smaller and smaller until the Escapist is curled up, trapped inside. The Gauntlet stops jumping and pounds this "box" with his fists. THWAM! THWAM! THWAM!

GAUNTLET (BALLOON) (CONT'D)
 LET'S SEE YOU "ESCAPE" FROM THIS, HA HA!

ESCAPIST (BALLOON)
 OOF!

At the last possible moment, just before the panel collapses on him, he takes a skeleton key from his boot, inserts it into the first "O" of OOF!. The panel pops open and he rolls into the NEXT PAGE, just as the panel collapses.

The next page is a full-page, single panel shot of the Gauntlet standing over the Escapist, who lies battered amid the shards of the broken panels and shattered balloons.

GAUNTLET (BALLOON)
YOU ARE WEAK, LIKE ALL YOUR KIND!

ESCAPIST (THOUGHT BALLOON)
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!

EXT. CUNARD PIERS - CONTINUOUS - LIVE ACTION

Joe lies on the dock, bloodied. He sits up, gingerly. The German flexes his fingers, dabs at his split lip. Turns back to his delighted friends. They walk away.

ROSA (O.S.)
Excuse me? Are you all right? Oh--

Joe looks up. They recognize each other.

JOE
I am fine. Thank you.

ROSA
Did he--were you--

HOFFMAN
Rosa!

She looks toward HERMANN HOFFMAN, a sad-faced portly Jew. Then back at Joe. Joe tries to get up, loses his footing. Rosa catches him. Steadies him. Helps him to his feet.

ROSA
I have no idea what you were fighting about, but it looked like you started it. Which is not too bright given that he had at least fifty pounds on you.

JOE
Agreed.

ROSA
Oh, for God's sake. Look at your nose.

She 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!

HOFFMAN
Do you know this man, Miss Saks?

ROSA
Do I know you, man?

JOE
No. I think you don't. Joe Kavalier.

ROSA
Rosa Saks. This is Mr. Hoffman, the
director of the T.R.A. My boss.

HOFFMAN
What happened? Who were you fighting?

JOE
I don't know.

Hoffman frowns at Rosa: why are you wasting your time here?

HOFFMAN
Rosa, the children are on the bus.

ROSA
(to Joe)
Keep the handkerchief.

Joe watches her go. Nice legs. He dabs at his bloody nose
with her handkerchief. Sniffs it. She turns back.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Could you use a lift anywhere?

EXT. VINTAGE 1933 BLUE BIRD SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Basically a flatbed truck with seats and a canvas roof. 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, keep your
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. She cost a fortune.

JOE
And you are going to use her to bring over
more children.

ROSA
Two hundred and fifty of them. We have
Eleanor Roosevelt herself helping us.

JOE
Children from Czechoslovakia?

ROSA
Is that where you're from?

JOE
I have a younger brother in Prague. His name is Thomas.

ROSA
Thomas. Oh. My heart just breaks. They're all so--

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
Apparently vomit's my job.

She moves to the back of the bus. The VOMITER's hysterical.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Francais? Oui? Écoute, c'est pas grave. Ça va aller.

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

ROSA (CONT'D)
I need a sponge. A cloth. Something!

She hesitates, then pulls her sweater right up over her head. In her bra and slip, she wipes the kid's face. Whistles all around. She ignores them. But she's blushing. She helps the kid to another seat. Flings her ruined sweater onto the mess.

The whistling continues. Joe gets up and goes back to her and puts his jacket around her shoulders.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Thank you.

EXT. CHELSEA - OUTSIDE PALOOKA STUDIOS - DAY

The bus idles in front of the rowhouse. Joe gets out, stands waving as the bus full of children pulls away. Rosa makes a

phone gesture. Joe nods, holding a slip of paper. Sammy walks up, sees Joe standing there and Rosa waving goodbye.

SAMMY

Was that the girl with the great big car?

JOE

Her name is Rosa Saks.

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

Just enough light to see Houdini struggling. Thrashing, writhing, in near-silence. The orchestra PLAYS outside.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Some people say that the bit in the cabinet was all sham. That Houdini would get free in two seconds, then sit in a chair reading the paper until it would seem plausible 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)

You can believe that if you want.

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

INT. HIPPODROME STAGE - SIMULTANEOUS

Bess watches, calmly smiling--but tugging nervously at the ribbon of her dress.

INT. KLAYMAN APARTMENT - SAMMY'S BEDROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Joe at the dresser mirror, knotting his tie. Sharp clothes.

SAMMY (O.S.)

Those are twenty-dollar shoes.

Sammy's on the bed, cross-legged, in front of a portable typewriter. He clacks out a line. Not looking up:

SAMMY (CONT'D)

I thought you were saving your dough.

Joe puts on his suit jacket. Frowns at his reflection.

JOE

It is the business expense.

Sammy looks up from the typewriter. Skeptical.

JOE (CONT'D)

What you are working on?

SAMMY

It's a locked room mystery. Only with no room. And no lock.

(beat)

And no mystery.

He tears out the sheet of paper. Crumples it up.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

So you're saying, you're not even a little bit interested, at all, in this rich, beautiful girl.

Joe takes his hat from the door.

JOE

Yes, I am not. And even if I was, I would not be. I have no time. I am on the mission.

SAMMY

Ten-dollar shoes, you're on a mission.

He throws the crumpled sheet of paper at the Joe as he goes out. Hits the door.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Twenty-dollar shoes, you're looking to get lucky.

EXT. TRANSATLANTIC RESCUE AGENCY - DAY

A former Catholic school in Hell's Kitchen. Rosa is waiting on the front steps as Joe hurries up.

ROSA

Mr. Kavalier.

JOE

Miss Saks! Sorry! I am late?

ROSA

Right on time. And looking a little better than you did the other night.

JOE

But I still look... bad?

ROSA

No! No, you look... Well, you look a little nervous.

JOE

Yes. I am. A little.

ROSA

That means you have high hopes. Please, Mr. Kavalier, don't get your hopes too high.

JOE
I'm sorry. I can't to help it.

ROSA
No. Neither can I.
(beat)
Okay. Let's 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 brooch on her lapel.

JOE
That's a lovely pin.

ROSA
It was my mother's. My father gave it to me when she died. The image is made from butterfly wings.

ROSA'S BROOCH

It depicts an exotic landscape, in intense, jeweled color. Palm trees, night sky, pyramids.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Which I guess looking at your face is sort of creepy.

JOE
I hope it is a good luck charm.

ROSA
Oh, it is.

EXT. TRANSATLANTIC RESCUE AGENCY - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Outside a door marked HERMANN HOFFMAN.

ROSA
Just tell them your story the way you told it to me. Mr. Hoffman is a complete sweetheart. If nothing else, he'll listen.

JOE
And the other one? The Chairman?

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

A 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.
Hoffman, our executive director.
And this--is the chairman of the
board of trustees, Mr. Siegfried
Saks. My father.

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

HOFFMAN
Please, sit down, Mr. Kavalier.

Joe takes a seat, stiff, uneasy.

HOFFMAN (CONT'D)
We understand that you would like us to try
to arrange for passage for your brother on
the Ark of Miriam.

JOE
That is true. Yes.

SAKS
We have space on our boat for two hundred
and fifty. Our people in Europe arranged
for the transit of two hundred and fifty
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! The kid can sleep in a
lifeboat, if he has to!

Saks glares at her. Joe's look says, please don't anger this man. Rosa blushes and puts a hand to her mouth.

SAKS
Please. I have been everywhere. State
Department. German consulate. Immigrant Aid
Society. I don't know if my family is alive
or dead, maybe they're sick, do they have
enough food to eat, nothing. My letters
come back and nobody reads them. Mr.
Hoffman, Mr. Saks. I am begging you.

Hoffman and Saks look at each other. It's sad. But they have heard it all before.

SAKS (CONT'D)

Mr. Kavalier. I'm very touched. Really.
But between what it cost to buy and outfit
the old bucket--

He points to a photograph on the wall. An old liner of the
1890s, in a photo from around the same time. A small plaque
reads: ARK OF MIRIAM.

SAKS (CONT'D)

--and our overhead, I can barely afford the
children we've already got. Between bribes,
provisioning, staff and insurance it costs
nearly a thousand dollars a kid. I'm sorry.

Joe sags, giving way a little. But Rosa's there:

ROSA

That's why Mr. Kavalier's going to help
pay. Isn't that right, Mr. Kavalier?

Joe's caught off guard. But then--

JOE

I--yes. I am working and saving money. I
could afford to give passage for other
children, besides Thomas. Three or four,
maybe more. A lot more, maybe.

HOFFMAN

What kind of work are you doing?

ROSA

Pop, this is the young man I was telling
you about. The artist.

SAKS

(no memory)
Oh, yes.

ROSA

The one who draws comic books.

JOE

But only to make money. In Prague--

SAKS

I love comic books! A pure expression of
the surrealist impulse, the naked dreaming
collective unconscious. The kind you only
find in the popular arts!

Rosa looks at Joe: Do I know the guy or what?

ROSA

He's an art dealer.

SAKS

Which one do you draw? Is it the Blue Beetle? Isis the Invincible?

JOE

The Escapist. Listen. Mr. Saks, Mr. Hoffman. I know there's no room. But my brother is not needing room.

ROSA

His brother's in Prague, Dad. He's thirteen years old. Just like Donald.

SAKS

The Escapist... Have I seen that one?

JOE

Is performing escape artist with super powers. Magician.

SAKS

Do you know anything about magic?

JOE

I have studied it in Prague.

ROSA

You know Donald wants a magician for his bar mitzvah, pops.

(to Joe, sudden doubt)

Can you do magic?

JOE

I--I'm not in practice.

ROSA

Do it. Do some magic now.

Joe looks around. Takes off his coat. Rolls up his sleeves. Sets his cigarette on a nearby ashtray. Points to Rosa's Tiffany butterfly.

JOE

May I?

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

JOE (CONT'D)

And, just to prove that Miss Saks is not in some cahoots with me, does one of you gentlemen have a cigarette case?

Saks hands over his cigarette case. Joe opens it, tips out the cigarettes. Takes out a handkerchief. His dialog continues, as patter, while he works the trick.

JOE (CONT'D)

Take Thomas on the ship, yes? Let me pay for seven, eight, ten other children, yes? And for no charge, I will throw in the magical bar mitzvah.

SAKS

You said you were out of practice.

Joe and pins the brooch to it. Shows that it is securely pinned. Then quickly and neatly folds the hankie into quarters, then eighths. Stuffs the packet into the cigarette case. Tucks the case into his pocket.

JOE

True. But you are out of money.

Hoffman's look: He has a point. Joe takes out the case again. Hands it to Saks.

JOE (CONT'D)

Here, you keep it.

(beat)

Better perhaps to 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.

Joe looks at Rosa: How was that? She looks pretty impressed.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - NIGHT

All the Guys are drawing, smoking. Radio plays Goodman quartets. Sammy's at the typewriter, agog.

SAMMY

You're trying to kill me, aren't you?

Joe sinks into a couch. State of shock.

JOE

I know. I know!

SAMMY

Five new titles a month! Joe, we're already pushing it doing two Escapist books. How could you tell Anapol we'd give him five new characters?

JOE
I'm sorry, Sam. I got carried off.

SAMMY
Away.

JOE
Totally carried away. But it is not your problem, all right? It is my problem. I will get somebody else to write them.

SAMMY
You'll what?

JOE
Well, Julie tells me yesterday he wants to write. He has ideas.
(not very hopeful)
Julie--what was this idea--?

Julie jumps to his feet, pounds his chest.

JULIE GLOVSKY
A super ape. Like King Kong, only clean cut. Gorilla Man.

DAVY DOWD
The Grey Gorilla.

MARTY GOLD
The Gibbon! Superchimp!

MARTY GOLD (CONT'D)
The Mandrill--

FRANK PANTALEONE
--and his amazing
multicolored wonder ass!

SAMMY
No. No way, forget that.

They shut up, taken aback by Sammy's heat.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
You shmucks can all sit your wonder asses down. Goddamn it, Joe. We're a team. Aren't we a team?

MARTY GOLD
Sacco and Vanzetti!

JULIE GLOVSKY
Leopold and Loeb!

JOE
Sure, Sam. Of course, but you said you can't do it.

SAMMY
I never said that! Look, Joe. I want to do what I can to help your brother. And the other kids, too. All right? But five more titles a month--

Joe looks up at Sammy. Needing him. Sammy sees it.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Get a pencil.

Joe pulls out a fresh sheet of Bristol. Picks up a pencil.
Sits, expectant. Like he's going to take a letter.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Okay, let's see. Who haven't we stolen from
yet... Huh. Jules Verne?

JOE
We must steal from Jules Verne.

SAMMY
Okay, how about a guy who's, like, a super-
inventor. He uses Yankee ingenuity to fight
tyranny. Like... a robot spider that can
spins a web across skyscrapers to stop
bombers.

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

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
That character was E. Pluribus Hewnham, the
Scientific American. It was the start of a
run of hits.

A PANTHEON OF DEMIGODS IN LONGJOHNS

posed for a group portrait. The Escapist, front and center.
The Monitor, the Four Freedoms, the Scientific American, Mr.
Machine Gun, many others. We pull back and reveal:

The mural's behind a reception desk in a fancy Deco office.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
Anapol sold his novelty business. Moved his
operation across town.

We move from the reception area, past rows of offices, into:

THE BULLPEN
Rows of drawing tables, each one occupied
by an artist--all of the Guys, and many
more. Hard at work drawing. FRANK hands a
finished page to a COPY BOY.

The copy boy carries the page to Julie, who's in a row of
guys laying down inks with brushes and pens. DAVY hands a
stack of finished pages to the Copy Boy, who struggles along
with them to a waiting MESSENGER.

EXT. THIRTY-FOURTH STREET - CONTINUOUS

The Messenger straps the pages to the back of his motorcycle.
Climbs on. Dons his helmet. Then roars off.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
The finished pages were carried down to
Iroquois Color down on Lafayette.

INT. IROQUOIS COLOR - CONTINUOUS

The messenger carries the pages over to a table of four
middle-aged ladies with their color charts and labels.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
Four middle-aged ladies choose the yellows
and reds for the exploding bombs and bloody
fangs.

FLASH of a Heidelberg offset camera. THUMP as THE ENGRAVER
turns the colored lens.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The engraver did the half-tone work...

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - CONTINUOUS

A truck labeled IROQUOIS COLOR drives away from the Iroquois
building.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
...then the plates went across town to the
printing plant on Tenth Avenue.

INT. PRINTING PLANT - CONTINUOUS

Huge machines manned by printers wearing folded newspaper
hats. The presses roll. The trimmer cuts. The staplers punch.

On the loading dock, SEABOARD NEWS trucks are loaded with
tied bundles of comics.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
From there the distributor shipped the
finished comics to every newsstand and
drugstore in America.

EXT. THIRTY-FOURTH STREET - CONTINUOUS

A truck dumps a bundle of comics on the curb. A NEWSDEALER
picks them up, cuts the string. Hands one to Sheldon Anapol.
It's Monitor Comics. Anapol gives him a dime. Then walks into
a gleaming chrome-and-black Deco lobby.

We tilt up and reveal, reaching for the sky like a killer
idea or a heroic act of self-delusion: the EMPIRE STATE,
tallest building in the greatest city in the most blessed
nation on earth. OFFICE SOUNDS come up OVER:

INT. EMPIRE COMICS - RECEPTION AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Anapol walks in, reading his comic book. He nods to the
SECRETARY. Goes into his office.

A moment later Rosa Saks walks in. All dolled up. Wearing the butterfly brooch. Nervous, as if she's dared herself.

SECRETARY

May I help you?

INT. EMPIRE COMICS - BULLPEN - DAY

Sam's pacing. Joe's on the floor, stretching his back.

SAMMY

...so then the Monitor uses the cobra like a lasso, right, and he ropes the Black Swami, right, gets him around the neck. He drags him down from the stage, right there in front of the president and J. Edgar Hoover and everybody else in the audience. And he rips off the Swami's turban--

JOE

--and underneath it he's a Nazi.

(beat)

Big deal.

SAMMY

What, all of a sudden you're tired of fighting Nazis? You want to give up?

JOE

No. No, Sam. I just want--

WHISTLES. Rosa walks up, drawing stares from all the Guys.

ROSA

Hello. You said I should drop by.

Joe scrambles to his feet, tucking in his shirt, smoothing down his hair. Sammy notes this alacrity.

JOE

I did.

ROSA

But I came at a bad time.

JOE

Not at all.

SAMMY

Kind of, a little.

ROSA

You must be Sammy. I'm Rosa Saks.

She looking around. The walls are plastered with sketches and concepts. Paper everywhere. She takes a step and--

SAMMY

Hey, watch it, sister!

Sammy scrambles to pull a stack of pages out from under her foot. She draws back.

ROSA
I'm so sorry! Oh, my. Can I have a look at those?

Sammy snatches the pages back. She looks at him, curiously, hand extended. He sees that he's acting a little weird.

SAMMY
You wouldn't like it.

ROSA
Well, I might.

Smiling, patient, hand held out toward Sam. St. Francis with a reluctant fawn. Sammy looks at Joe, making an appeal. Joe's expression: what's gotten into you? Sammy lets the pages go. She takes them and starts to flip through them.

Sammy looks like she's going through his underwear drawer.

ROSA (CONT'D)
"Monitor! Only you and your ironclad might can stop the diabolical scheme of Dr. Scalpel!"

Sammy can't stand it anymore. He grabs the pages back, covering with a joke:

SAMMY
How do I know you aren't working for National or Timely? They'd kill to get a look at this stuff.

He straightens the stack of pages, sets them on a table behind him. Inches closer to Joe. Rosa catches the drift.

ROSA
I'm sure they would. Because it's wonderful, Sam.

Sam's disarmed.

ROSA (CONT'D)
And Mr. Kavalier, you really are an artist!

SAMMY
That's what I'm always telling him.

ROSA
You have to bring him some of your work tonight. My father will love it.

JOE
Tonight?

ROSA
He's having a little dinner party. I know
it's short notice, but the party is for
Dali. Hard man to plan ahead for.

MARTY GOLD
And this would be Dali as in Salvador, I'm
just guessing.

ROSA
My father is the biggest dealer in
Surrealist art in New York. So, Mr.
Kavalier, can you come?

SAMMY
We have work.

Joe looks Rosa up and down, wavering. She looks fabulous.

JOE
We have work.

INT. APTHORP BUILDING - SAKS APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Crowded cocktail party. The guests a mixture of bohemians and
wealthy art lovers. And a huge DIN.

At one end of the room stands DALI, in a heavy canvas diving
suit with a big brass helmet. A long hose connects his helmet
to the NOISY AIR COMPRESSOR. Everyone has to shout to be
heard. GALA DALI is beside Dali, shouting at Joe in French.
Joe shouts back.

Sammy's standing all alone, holding a drink but not drinking.
Fidgety. Nervous smile. Nobody's talking to him. He's trying
to look like he doesn't care.

Rosa walks by. And she almost passes Sammy, just like
everybody else. But she stops.

SAMMY
Look at him. Guy fits right in. Speaking
French. Christ, I didn't even know Dali was
French.

ROSA
He isn't. He's Spanish.

SAMMY
See what I mean?

ROSA
But he lived in France. He's a refugee.
Most of the artists in this room are.
There's Max Ernst, right there. The Nazis
put a price on his head.

SAMMY
You're kidding. Max Ernst. Joe's crazy
about Max Ernst.

Sam watches MAX ERNST, big, fit, handsome, charming. Making
everyone around him laugh.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
What the hell am I doing here?

ROSA
Oh, come on--

SAMMY
Seriously. I mean, it was nice of you to
invite me, and all, Miss Saks. Thanks a
lot. But I-- I'm sure you guys will have
more fun without me.

Rosa's face: That's probably true.

ROSA
Well, if you really--

SAMMY
Tell Joe I said I'll see him later.

He turns. Goes to the hat stand. Rosa watches him. Can't help
feeling sorry.

ROSA
Mr. Clay! Sam.

She goes after him. Takes hold of his arm and pulls him
gently back.

ROSA (CONT'D)
You know what I bet? I bet there's not a
single person in this room that has more
imagination than you do.

SAMMY
Aw, go on.

ROSA
Your partner told me you're like an idea
machine. He's in awe of you.

SAMMY
He did?

ROSA
Actually what he said was that he was awful
of you, but I knew what he meant. He
said...he said you do your wildest dreaming
when you're wide awake.

Sammy blushes, looks away. His eyes meet Joe's, across the
room. Joe gives him a secret smile.

Sammy takes off his hat, hangs it back on the hook.

SAMMY

So, tell me why Dali's in a diving suit?

ROSA

Rapture of the deep? I don't know. I--

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. Gala is desperately trying to get the helmet off. Trying to twist one of the bolts between her fingers. Another GUEST starts to help her. They get all the bolts off. They pull on the helmet. Hard. Nothing. Saks helps. Nothing.

GUEST

It's stuck!

Sam looks at Joe, who is watching the struggle. Like a ranger watching a fire. A moment later he stands up.

GALA DALI

Il devient bleu!

JOE

Pardonnez-moi, madame.

She looks up, nods. Gets out of his way. He kneels down beside Dali. Studies the situation. The compressor. The hose. The panicked face behind the mask.

He takes a pen knife from his pocket and calmly opens its blade. Takes hold of the front of the suit, below the chestplate. Makes a long cut down toward the crotch.

Dali's eyes widen. A RUSH OF air is sucked into the suit. The helmet POPS OFF. Joe catches it, a midwife catching a baby.

Dali gasps and chokes. Throws his arms around Joe. Brings Joe's face to his. Gives him three baisses on each cheek.

DALI

I would please like the cigarette.

Joe shows him his empty palm. Brandishes it. Then works a quick feint--there's a Pall Mall. Dali raises an eyebrow. Takes the cigarette. Joe lights it.

DALI (CONT'D)

Merci.

Everyone crowds around Joe, slapping him in on the back, congratulating him. But Joe's gaze is fixed on Rosa. She's staring right back at him. The dashing ALEXANDER LIBERMAN, dashing comes up to Joe. Hands him a card.

ALEXANDER LIBERMAN

Siggy tells me you have talent. My name's Liberman. I just got hired as Art Director at Vogue. You ought show me your portfolio.

Joe takes the card, tucks it in his pocket without even noticing. Eyes still on Rosa. With a look that says he should follow, she turns and walks out of the room. Joe frees himself of his well-wishers and goes after her. Leaves Lieberman scratching his head.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

She has stopped in the hallway. They're a few inches apart.

ROSA

(Señor Wences accent)

I would please like the cigarette.

He takes one from the pack and hands it to her.

ROSA (CONT'D)

I don't get a magic trick?

JOE

For you I save the better material.

She likes that. Takes a chance.

ROSA

Hey. Listen. Would you like to see my hatchery? It's up in my bedroom.

JOE

Chickens?

ROSA

Moths. I raise Saturniidae. Silk moths. Robin moths, polyphemus moths. Lunas. Come on. I'll show you.

JOE

I-- Miss Saks. I'm sorry. I don't want to give wrong ideas.

ROSA

Please, Mr. Kavalier. I know you have other priorities. I know how hard you're working, and what you're working for. I don't want to distract you from that. Honestly. I'm glad my father takes an interest in you. Eleanor Roosevelt is a dear friend of his.

JOE
She is a powerful lady.

ROSA
Yes, she is. And she has an apartment right
around the corner from my father's gallery.

She's daring him, teasing him. It works.

JOE
I've always wanted to see a luna moth.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Joe follows her down a dark hall, into a dark room.

INT. ROSA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joe follows her in. A faint RUSTLING. Joe fans himself: it's hot. She goes around lighting candles.

JOE
Whew!

He notices a worktable with a picture in process: abstract, intensely colored, somewhere between Klimt and Delaunay. Leans in closer. The image has been assembled by collage from hundreds of bits of intense and subtle color.

JOE (CONT'D)
Are those--butterfly wings?

ROSA
Moths. I raise moths.

In the candlelight we see not emergence cages, screened boxes, vivaria, tools, etc. Also a dresser, wardrobe and bed. The walls hung with lots of the moth pictures.

ROSA (CONT'D)
It's something I've been trying lately, but I don't know. At the Art Students League they think its kind of bourgeois. Old lady art. Actually my mother had a picture like that when she was a girl, an Arabian city, at night, the night sky made of the wings Adonis blues... It's bad, I know.

JOE
It's good.

ROSA
Do you think so?

Joe goes to her work table and bends down. Looks into a vivarium. Inside cocoons hang from tiny hooks. One has opened, exposing a dewy adult. Rosa bends down beside him. Their faces loom pale as moons behind the glass.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Those are my Actias luna. They only live
for a week.

JOE
What do you do with them?

ROSA
Stand up very slowly.

He stands up, and looks down at himself. A variety of moths
festoos his clothes like tin ornaments on a Christmas tree.
They flit and flutter through the air. Audible RUSTLING.

ROSA (CONT'D)
I like to set them free.

He looks at her through the fluttering screen of moths. She
looks at him. The candlelight flickers. A great luna sails
past Joe--he reaches out his hand as if to catch it and it
flies off, transformed as it flaps into an animated moth.

Joe's face, amazed, amused, as it flaps out Rosa's window
into the sky.

A comics CAPTION pops up: THE IDEA COMES TO HIM THEN-- and we
MORPH INTO:

EXT. ROSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - ANIMATED

An animated Joe leans out the window in the b.g. as the moth
sails out flits upward in a drunken spiral toward the moon. A
new CAPTION: --ON THE WINGS OF A MOTH.

JOE (BALLOON)
Hey! Wait for me!

Joe takes the balloons, bends them, folds them into a pair of
wings. Attaches them to his back. Then he takes off into the
sky, trailing the moth. Grin on his face.

Joe and the moth fly around the turrets of the Apthorp
Building.

With the huge moon silhouetting them Joe catches 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 (BALLOON) (CONT'D)
HI.

LUNA MOTH (BALLOON)
HI.

JOE (BALLOON)
I WANT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING.

LUNA MOTH (BALLOON)
YOU HAVE TO CATCH ME FIRST.

She streaks skyward. Joe's left open-mouthed. The city lies spread beneath them.

JOE (BALLOON)
WAIT! HEY!

EXT. MIDTOWN - NIGHT - ANIMATED

Soaring over Times Square. Joe's gaining on her. She zips through a smoke ring blown by the Camel sign. Joe follows.

EXT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - NIGHT - ANIMATED

Over the Empire State Building now, Joe catches hold of her slim ankle.

JOE (BALLOON)
GOT YOU!

They hang in the air over the ESB. Joe has hold of her hands.

LUNA MOTH (BALLOON)
SO, MR. KAVALIER. YOU GOT ME. WHAT ARE YOU
GOING TO DO WITH ME?

Their faces close together. Eyes shut. Closer. Lips almost touching, extreme close up and we CUT TO:

INT. ROSA'S ROOM - NIGHT - LIVE ACTION

They're about to kiss. He opens his eyes. Startled to see:

THOMAS KAVALIER, now aged 13, standing in the doorway. A yellow star on his jacket. Taking quite an interest.

Joe pulls away from Rosa. She turns to the doorway and sees:

DONALD SAKS, 13, in pajamas and a little bed jacket. Taking quite an interest. He looks nothing at all like Thomas.

DONALD
Pop said things are getting too Surreal and
you have to put me to bed.

Joe and Rosa step apart, the spell broken. She shrugs, then turns and leads Donald out of the room.

INT. SAKS DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Sammy sits at the table, alone, running a finger around the rim of his empty wineglass. A MAN offers to fill it for him; he shakes his head.

INT. SAKS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Sammy creeps down the hall. Toward a door, ajar. Light flickering inside. He stops. Sees shadows moving. Nudges the door open with his toe.

TWO MEN NECKING. The man facing Sammy has his eyes shut. Sammy hangs in the doorway, wonderstruck. The man looks right at Sammy--keeps on kissing his friend. Sammy jumps back!

INT. SAKS DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sammy's back at the table. Draining a full glass of wine. Sets it down. His neighbor offers to refill. Sammy nods.

EXT. UPPER BROADWAY - NIGHT

Sam and Joe walk down Broadway. Side by side. Not talking. Past sawdust bars and taxi stands and nighthawk diners. SWING and car HORNS. Both thoughtful, but Sammy's manner is troubled and Joe's is buoyant. He's looking around at the city and the neon and the sky.

They come to the subway station at 72nd. Sammy starts to go down the steps but Joe lingers at the top.

SAMMY

You want to--?

JOE

No, that's fine--

Joe starts down. Sammy comes up. They're facing each other on the third step down. MEN IN HATS, SAILORS, OUT-OF-TOWNERS, WOMEN in ballgowns and stoles stream up and down the steps around them.

SAMMY

I mean, Brooklyn's kind of a shlep.

He gestures toward his legs.

JOE

I know. Too far.

SAMMY

I was thinking we could--

JOE

It's just such a beautiful night.

SAMMY

--I was thinking we could go get a little work done.

JOE

Work? You want to go to the Bullpen? Now?

SAMMY

Well, yeah. We still got to figure out that thing with the Saboteur. I felt like we were just about to make--

JOE

Oh. Right. The Saboteur.

SAMMY

--some kind of breakthrough. And--what? You don't-- You want to go back to the party?

JOE

Huh? No. No, Sam.

SAMMY

Because we coulda stayed. I told you I was willing--

JOE

No, Sam. No, I just--it's a beautiful night. And I live in New York City, USA. And I really want...I feel like I want...to walk.

SAMMY

Uh huh. Okay. Well, um, have a nice walk. I'm going to, I guess I'll go to the office. Okay?

JOE

Sure. You bet.

Sam clatters down the subway steps. Joe watches him go.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - NIGHT

Sammy rides, reading The Waste Land. Looks around. The car is almost deserted; old man at the other end. Sam puts Eliot away and takes out a copy of Detective Comics. Reads a page. Puts it down. Sighs. The loneliest guy in New York City.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE - NIGHT

Joe strolls home. Wonders of the prewar Manhattan skyline in the b.g. He looks down at his sleeve. A polyphemus moth clings there. He lifts his arm and it takes off into the sky.

JOE KAVALIER'S PRESENTATION SKETCH OF LUNA MOTH

A lushly curved super-moth-gal in a very skimpy outfit. With Rosa's face and hair. Reveal that:

INT. ANAPOL'S OFFICE - 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, gawking.

ASHKENAZY
Which one of you dreamed those up?

SAMMY
Joe.

ANAPOL
They make me nervous. George, what do you think?

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

Anapol looks at Ashkenazy, who nods.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JOE KAVALIER'S WAR COMICS"

Mayhem in full four-color lithography-dot splendor. Stukas, panzers, howitzers. Screaming Jerries everywhere. And in the center of it all, the Escapist.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
The work that Kavalier did in the year before Pearl Harbor can be broken down into two categories. There were the war stories--

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "WAR COMICS, CARTOONIST'S VERSION"

The same panel. Only now instead of the masked Escapist, it's Joe Kavalier in the middle of all that chaos.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
Into those Kavalier put all of his anger and shame and guilt over leaving his family behind.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "BREAKTHROUGH"

Joe perched at his drawing table in the Bullpen. A big comics page before him, bursting with psychedelic Luna Moth action.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
But it's the Luna Moth work people still get excited about.

And we MORPH INTO:

INT. EMPIRE COMICS - BULLPEN - ANIMATED

Joe leans in toward the page.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 They argue about the influence of Rosa's
 Dali connection. Expressionist cinema,
 Little Nemo, and so on

Joe's head and his head and shoulders disappear right into
 the biggest panel on the page. It's like he's climbing
 through a window.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But I'll tell you what I see when I look at
 it.

Luna Moth soars through a strange Escher-meets-Winsor McKay
 nightscape. In one corner, through a rectangular portal,
 pokes the head of Joe Kavalier. Reaching toward Luna as she
 takes motion and flight and soars past his hand.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 ...I see a man trying to win his way
 through to something he's never felt or
 tasted before.

INT. SAKS HISPANO-SUIZA - NIGHT - LIVE ACTION

ANGLE past the sleeping driver. In the back of the very big
 car Joe and Rosa neck passionately.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 I guess you could call it love poetry.
 Anyway, they sold a ton of it.

EXT. FLORIDA SWAMPLAND - DAY

Anapol, MRS. ANAPOL, and the two enormous ANAPOL daughters
 stand in front of enormous cardboard cutout of a house.
 Having their picture taken.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 Anapol's wife fulfilled a lifetime dream.

Pull back to reveal gates of PALM RIVER ESTATES. Nothing but
 sawgrass. And the big cutout house.

INSERT SOTHEBY'S CATALOG COVER

"ESCAPIST" AND RELATED MATERIALS - June 12, 2008

The glossy cover features a big picture of a painted molded-
 resin Escapist figure, chipped but handsome.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 They sold Escapist dolls, board games,
 goldpainted tin keys.

INSERT E-BAY PAGE

We scroll through dozens of hits under COLLECTIBLES>
 SUPERHERO> ESCAPIST. Mugs. Masks. Metal toys.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
It wasn't long before the big dogs came
sniffing around.

EXT. NBC STUDIOS - RADIO CITY - DAY

A taxi pulls up. Joe, Sam and Anapol get out. LARRY SNEED comes over to greet them.

LARRY SNEED
Hello, hello! Mr. Anapol, how are you?
(to Sammy and Joe)
Larry Sneed, assistant producer. Come on in,
we're just about ready to start.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Going up. Also possibly in the elevator, in the b.g., are AL JOLSON, BOB HOPE, JACK BENNY, EDGAR BERGEN AND CHARLIE MCCARTHY, FRED ALLEN and/or ARTURO TOSCANINI.

LARRY SNEED
I think you're going to be delighted with
our cast, boys. They've really brought the
thing to life.

SAMMY
So, who do you got playing Hitler?

Sneed glances at Anapol. Anapol looks at his shoes.

ANAPOL
Well, they, uh, made one or two changes.

SAMMY
But we're fighting the Nazis, right?

SNEED
Or the dramatic equivalent.

A loud SCREAM, OVER.

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. At the center as the Escapist stands TRACY BACON, blond, hunky, cornfed, pink and scrubbed. Shining. Great voice.

ESCAPIST
Well, Black Eagle, looks like you got me.

BLACK EAGLE
Yeah, we get you, paleface. Hogtied good.
And tomorrow when moon full, we tie you in
the sacred knots of the Spider God, leave
you to DIE!

More gasps. Organ SWELL.

ANNOUNCER
Tune in next time, when we'll hear the
Master of Elusion say...

ESCAPIST
Oh, Christ, not the sacred goddamn knots of
the Spider God again!

Everybody breaks up. Bacon tries to keep a straight face.

DIRECTOR
All right, take five!

JOE
(to Sam)
Indians?

SAMMY
(to Anapol)
Indians?

ANAPOL
So they don't want to get mixed up in
politics. Who can blame them?

The DIRECTOR comes over.

DIRECTOR
Mr. Anapol, how are you. Chuck Cobb. I'm
the head doctor in this loony bin.

ANAPOL
And here are two prize lunatics. Mr.
Kavalier, the artist, and Mr. Clay, the
writer.

Bacon's ears prick up when he hears the word "writer."

The door to the glassed-in control room opens and an ENGINEER
pokes his head out.

ENGINEER
Is there a Joe Kavalier here?

JOE
Hello. Yes. That's me.

ENGINEER

I have a call for you in the control room.
Lady says it's urgent.

Joe looks at Sammy, puzzled. The engineer ushers Joe into the booth. The door shuts and Sammy watches through the glass as Joe takes the receiver. Watches as Joe's face lights up.

BACON

Mr. Clay--?

Bacon is beaming down at Sam, who takes no notice.

BACON (CONT'D)

Sorry to bother you, but I, I can't believe it's you, I've read them all. Sam Clay!

SAMMY

Uh, yes. Hello. It's--

BACON

Tracy Bacon. I think at this point I'm probably the world's foremost authority on the Escapist, Clay. I'll bet I know more about him than you do. Go ahead, ask me anything. Who founded the Iron Chain? That would be Zardok the Implacable, tyrant of ancient Babylon. What was the name of the orphanage where Misterioso the magician rescued young Tom Mayflower, to train him in the ancient mystic ways of the League of the Golden Key: Grimshanks Home for Boys.

Sammy's not really paying attention to Bacon. Just watching Joe as Joe presses the receiver to his chest, transported by relief. Joe closes his eyes. Tears streaming down his face.

SAMMY

(automatic)
Grimshaw.

BACON

Nope, I'm pretty sure it was Grimshanks.

Sammy can't help it: he turns to look at Bacon. Wow. Is he the most handsome man in New York City in 1941? Quite possibly. Bacon stares back, straightfaced. Maybe a little too straightfaced.

SAMMY

Are you making fun of me?

BACON

Would it be a bad thing if I was?

Bacon looks around. Lowers his voice. Conspiratorial.

BACON (CONT'D)

The truth is--can I have a word with you?

Sammy looks back at Joe in the booth but Bacon's already dragging him into an adjacent studio.

INT. ANOTHER STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Bacon turns to Sammy. Sammy's taken aback. Uncomfortable.

BACON

I could use your help, Clay.

SAMMY

My help? I don't know anything about--

BACON

I'm in way over my head here. I'm no actor. I studied civil engineering in school. The only thing I ever escaped from was Chillicothe, Illinois. I still don't know how I even got this part. I've only been in New York for a month! You from here?

SAMMY

Brooklyn. Look, uh, Bacon, I seriously doubt there's any kind of help you could get from me.

BACON

Okay, forget that. Actually I don't really need help, this acting thing's a total racket, I still can't believe you get paid for it. No, the thing is, I'm just curious. Like I said, I read all your stories and it's just, you seem to know so much. All that stuff you put in them, about knots and locks, and ancient civilizations, and guns and airplanes, and Germans and the war. I mean, how do you know all that stuff?

SAMMY

Well, Joe--my partner, he does magic. He studied it back in Prague. So a lot of that stuff comes from him. But most of it--the rest of it--well, I don't really know anything. I just...sort of...

BACON

Fake it.

SAMMY

How about we call it "invention."

BACON

I'm in the same line myself. Only you've made a go of it, and I'm probably about to make a fool of myself on national radio. Now, listen. Let me stand you to a drink. In return you can supply a few tips on--invention--Brooklyn-style, to a big dumb hayseed from Muncie, Indiana.

SAMMY
Chillicothe, Illinois.

A beat, an awkward pause. Then Bacon grins.

BACON
So how'd I do?

SAMMY
You're still making fun of me, aren't you?

BACON
If I say no, will you let me buy you a drink?

SAMMY
Let me just--check on my partner, okay? I think maybe he--

Sammy goes back into 23A.

INT. RADIO CITY - NBC BLUE STUDIO 23A - CONTINUOUS

Anapol is chatting with Cobb. Otherwise the studio's deserted. Control room is empty.

ANAPOL
Your pal just literally ran out of here.

SAMMY
Did he say--?

ANAPOL
That boat of his. The Miriam. It sailed this morning.

SAMMY
That's great! So, but he--he just ran out of here.

ANAPOL
Literally.

SAMMY
He didn't say--

ANAPOL
I guess he and that girl of his are going to celebrate.

SAMMY
Oh. Yeah, I guess they probably are.

BACON
Good news?

Sammy nods, but a little uncertain. Then he turns to Bacon.

SAMMY
I guess I have time for an egg cream.

BACON
An "egg cream"?

INT. LONGCHAMPS RESTAURANT - MOMENTS LATER

A WAITRESS sets an egg cream in front of Bacon.

SAMMY
Milk. U-Bet syrup. Seltzer water.

Bacon takes a sip. Goes down like turpentine.

BACON
Mmm! A real New York treat, eh?
(to waitress)
Whisky, please.

The waitress leaves. Sammy checks his watch. Distracted.

SAMMY
Mr. Bacon, look. I can't really stay. I
probably shouldn't even have--

BACON
Got a date?

SAMMY
No.

BACON
Girlfriend?

SAMMY
No. I--actually, I'm a planespotter. Civil
Defense put in a station, up on the 86th
floor of the Empire State. That's where we
work. So I volunteered.

BACON
And what is it that you're, uh, spotting?

SAMMY
Enemy aircraft. You know. German planes.

BACON
But we're neutral. We're not in the fight.

SAMMY
Do you trust Hitler?

BACON
No, but I-- well. I guess I don't give
Hitler a whole lot of thought.

SAMMY
Wait till you get drafted. How old are you?

BACON

Twenty-four. But I come off much older,
don't I?

Sammy laughs. Can't help it.

SAMMY

Honestly? No.

BACON

That's because I'm really nineteen. Don't
tell anybody, all right?

The waitress sets down Bacon's drink. He picks it up suavely--
but doesn't taste it.

BACON (CONT'D)

You drink?

SAMMY

Not really.

BACON

No, neither do I. Isn't that funny. I can't
honestly stand the stuff. I don't know who
I'm trying to fool.

He puts the drink down. Sammy glances at his watch again.

BACON (CONT'D)

Time for the invasion?

SAMMY

Sorry.

BACON

You really think we're getting into the
war?

SAMMY

I'm already in it. Joe and I have been in
it for months. Trying to get people used to
the idea that sooner or later we are going
to have to fight Hitler.

BACON

I wish I knew how to be political like
that. I really admire that.

SAMMY

I'm not really--I'm not doing it for
politics. It's really Joe's fight, I guess.
I'm just tagging along. Trying to help out
where I can.

BACON

The faithful sidekick.

Sammy's reaction: that hits the mark. Sammy gets up and puts on his hat.

BACON (CONT'D)

Hey, no, I'm sorry, Clay. I was just shooting my mouth off.

SAMMY

Nothing to apologize for. I just really have to go. I don't show up, Hitler might decide to send in the Stukas. Good luck, Bacon. You're going to be a terrific Escapist. I mean, you look just like I, you know, imagined.

They shake hands.

BACON

So do you.

Sam leaves. Bacon picks up the drink, drains it in one long grateful swallow.

EXT. TRIBOROUGH BRIDGE - LATER

Twilight. The cab moves across the Bridge toward Queens. In the distance loom the ruins of the World's Fair.

JOE (V.O.)

We're celebrating in Queens?

INT. HISPANO-SUIZA - CONTINUOUS

Joe lies in Rosa's arms. She's stroking his hair. Maybe we've never seen him happier than at this moment.

ROSA

You said you wanted to go someplace special. This place is definitely that.

JOE

How did you hear about it?

ROSA

From Salvador Dali.

JOE

God help me.

EXT. NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIRGROUNDS - NIGHT

Outside the chained gates. The cab pulls away, leaving Rosa and Joe behind. A wasteland. Eerie sodium light.

JOE

I see you think I am cheap date.

ROSA

You can open it, can't you?

Joe goes to study the padlock. Takes out the roll of picks.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - MOMENTS LATER

The lock dangles, open, on its chain. They walk away from it, into the deserted fairgrounds in the eerie light.

ROSA
Everyone I know made fun of it. They said it was a middlebrow Coney Island. I made fun of it, too. But I came nine times. I guess I'm just an optimistic person. I believe in the future.

They stroll down a grand boulevard, past bare weedy lots.

ROSA (CONT'D)
This street was called Rainbow Avenue.

The Trylon and Perisphere loom. The Trylon partly dismantled. The pool under the Perisphere drained. They stop. Rosa points. The memory of the place comes alive in her face.

ROSA (CONT'D)
That was the Town of Tomorrow...

Each time Rosa names a pavilion or site, Joe looks, a life-size image of it springs up out of the ground, in pulsing, neon comic book form. It's Joe's comic-book vision of the Fair. Fairy jukeboxes, Flash Gordon jazz palaces. Overlaid, drawn on top of the reality.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Over there was the Star Pylon... the House of Jewels... That was the Electrified Farm... The future, Joe! I wish you could have seen it.

A sparkling Technicolor Fair all around them mind. Joe puts his arm around her waist.

JOE
I can.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - DUSK

Joe and Rosa come to the vast, peeling bulk of the Perisphere, and stand at the bottom of the ramp where the escalator was, at the edge of the drained mud puddle.

ROSA
There was this scale model of the city of the future inside. You sat in these little cars, and looked down on it. You just felt like you were soaring over it all in a zeppelin. At night. All the little buildings and streetlights would sort of light up and glow.

JOE
Come on. Come with me.

EXT. PERISPHERE - UNDERSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Joe has scaled a short service ladder that leads to a hatch in the bottom of the Perisphere.

Rosa looks up from the bottom of the ladder. He pries open the hatch with his knife. Disappears into the dark inside.

JOE
Holy cows.

Rosa grins, and starts up the ladder.

INT. THE PERISPHERE - NIGHT

They wander by the glow of their cigarette lighters. Hard to make anything out.

JOE
I think I just saw one of the rats of the future.

ROSA
Do not even say the word "rat," please. Oh. Hey. I found the lights.

A loud CLUNK and then a blaze of light. They're in the midst of the imagined world of the future, a scale model of gleaming cities and miniature elevated freeways.

Rosa flicks more switches, and the model comes to life, twinkling. The tiny cars begin to move. Rosa and Joe sit in the midst of it, their arms around each other, watching.

JOE
You know I heard about this. I was always sorry that I missed it.

ROSA
But that's the point, Joe. You didn't miss it. It's the future.

A rumble of THUNDER. Rosa moves closer.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Joe. I have something to tell you.

JOE
What?

ROSA
You love me.

A beat. He hesitates. Then he takes hold of her chin, looks her straight in the eye.

JOE
You love me, too.

Then they fall back into the artificial grass. Autogyros and rocket planes fly rings around them.

INT. WEST END AVENUE - SAKS APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Saks and Joe are walking through a vacant apartment.

SAKS
It's more than you need. Maybe more than you can afford.

JOE
I will manage. I'll be making a lot more money now.

SAKS
Maybe a four-room--

JOE
I need room for my parents.

SAKS
Oh. Yes, of course.

Joe runs his finger over a bare stretch of wall, a luminous expanse of white, flecked with shadow.

SAKS (CONT'D)
I'm sure Rosa will be only too happy to help you furnish it.

JOE'S POV: Faint images pulse along it--pavilions, fountains.

JOE
I can do it myself.

Joe takes a pencil from his pocket. Starts to draw what might be a rocket, or a tower.

SAKS
Hey! What the hell are you doing?

Joe keeps drawing, intense. Focused. Doesn't look up.

JOE
I'll take it.

INT. KLAYMAN APARTMENT - SAMMY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Joe is packing a suitcase. Sammy sits on the bed. About to be left behind. Ethel's in the doorway. She hands him a letter.

ETHEL
This came today. It's from your mother.

Joe pauses in his packing, but doesn't look around. She lays it on the bed beside him. He stops. Looks down at it. It's heavily tattooed with censors' marks, stamped with German eagles and swastikas. Brutalized. Joe picks it up and packs it, too.

Ethel looks at Sammy: a little shocked. Upset. Clears her throat. Tries to change the subject.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

I still want to meet this Rosa, Josef. When you come back to get the rest of your things, I want you to bring her.

SAMMY

You want Lady Saks of the Apthorp to come to this dump?

ETHEL

You'll tell her to come to Shabbes dinner on Friday.

SAMMY

Just because you don't approve is no reason to give her botulism.

ETHEL

Who says I don't approve? I'm happy for him. You ought to be happy be for him. You don't know what it's like.

Joe just keeps packing as they go on like he's not there.

SAMMY

Oh, and you do?

ETHEL

I came here on my own. Left my family to war and pogroms. Worked myself to the bone to bring my mother over. Met your father. Fell in love.

Sammy looks at Joe now as Joe snaps the valise shut.

SAMMY

You know, I think he is in love.

ETHEL

So let him be. Let him live his life. Here. An American life.

SAMMY

But he's going back. One day. Aren't you, Joe?

ETHEL

I never went back.

INT. KLAYMAN APARTMENT - FRONT HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Ethel hands Joe his coat. He bends down to kiss her cheek. She crushes him against her, fiercely. Then he goes out and she closes the door.

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Sammy, on the bed, alone. Picks up a comic book, leafs through it. Drops it. Takes out a pack of cigarettes. Puts one in his mouth. Tries to throw open the window. It's stuck. He throws the unlit cigarette at the wall.

EXT. BINOCULARS - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The towers of midtown ablaze with light. Neon, streaming tail lights. Blurry at first, then coming into sharp focus.

INT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - OBSERVATION DECK - NIGHT

Sammy peers through binoculars, lowers them, picks up a clipboard. Makes a notation. A telephone RINGS. He hurries out to the guard station and answers it.

SAMMY

M-4. No, sir. Yes, sir, I see the storm,
can't really miss it. Yes, sir. 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?

INT. OBSERVATION DECK - MOMENTS LATER

Bacon runs along the observation windows, making a circuit of the entire lounge. Exclaiming at the nighttime views. Sammy chugs along behind him.

BACON

Wow!

SAMMY

Bacon! Hey, you can't be up here!

Bacon stops running, turns to Sammy, face alight.

BACON

This is amazing, Clay. Aren't you amazed?

SAMMY

Well, yeah, sure, but--

BACON

I never came up here before, I don't know,
it seemed like kind of a hayseed thing to

(MORE)

BACON (CONT'D)
do. But damn! This is the tallest building
in the world! What is it, a thousand feet?

SAMMY
Twelve hundred and fifty. But--

BACON
--see, you do know things--

SAMMY
Bacon, you have to leave. This is a
government facility!

BACON
Yikes. Then you do not want a Nazi spy like
me hanging around. Relax, I won't stay. I
just brought you dinner. I figured you get
hungry up here. Are you hungry?

SAMMY
It does smell pretty good.

BACON
I'll stay five minutes, then I'll go.

INT. OBSERVATION DECK - NIGHT

Bacon lays out a full gourmet meal, silver and all, on a
table in the bar. Starts lifting lids: game hens, asparagus--

BACON
It's supposed to be Cornish game hen, but I
think they just went out and jumped a
couple of pigeons. Asparagus, Hollandaise
sauce, we better give that a stir. Mm.

SAMMY
Where did you get all this?

BACON
I brought it over from my hotel. I've been
living at the Mayflower for the past six
months.

Angle on Sam, as he registers the contradiction.

SAMMY
Six months?

BACON
Yeah, it's the life. Room service.
Bellhops. Look, there's even a baked
Alaska.

INT. OBSERVATION DECK - MOMENTS LATER

They're eating. Sammy's looking around, a little nervous.
Bacon chomps complacently.

BACON

Okay, so one night, you're scanning the skies. And then--there you see it. A gleam of moonlight on a wing. The glint of a propellor. Then another. Holy shit, Clay. It's a whole squadron of Junkers. Bellies filled with bombs. Coming in over Long Island. Engines droning. Payloads primed. Bearing down on Brooklyn, Manhattan. Here they come. Eight million lives in the balance. What do you do?

SAMMY

I pick up that phone over there and call the office downtown.

BACON

You... pick up... a phone.

SAMMY

I know.

BACON

I feel so much safer.

SAMMY

Shut up.

BACON

Reverse the charges, operator! Take that, Hitler!

A RUMBLE. The glasses on the bar chime.

BACON (CONT'D)

What the hell was that?

He gets up, goes to the windows. Sammy grabs his arm, steers him the other way.

SAMMY

They come in from the southeast.

INT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - OBSERVATION DECK - NIGHT

Sam and Bacon stand by the southeast windows and watch a seething storm sail in. Lightning and THUNDER.

BACON

Does it ever, you know. Hit the building?

SAMMY

The whole building acts like one big gigantic lightning rod.

A HUGE STRIKE hits the building. A SIZZLE, then an instant CRACK! Sammy jumps right out of skin.

BACON
Holy shit, Clay!
(turns to Sammy)
Do it again!

SAMMY
You're crazy.

BACON
Smell that smell? Ozone. It's like every
summer night I ever smelled when I was a
kid.

SAMMY
Back in Indiana.

BACON
Iowa. It makes me feel like I want to--wow,
look at that!

Out on the promenade blue fire--static discharge--flows along
the railings. Bacon goes to the door.

SAMMY
No! Bacon!

BACON
What? Look at that! Is that St. Elmo's
fire? Is that what that is?

SAMMY
I don't know. Bacon, come on--

BACON
I feel like I want to drink it. I want to
pour it on my head or something.

Bacon slides open the door.

SAMMY
What are you going to do?

BACON
I'm going to touch it!

Bacon sticks his hand out through the door, reaching for it.

SAMMY
You can't touch it-- you might--

Bacon's arm is enveloped in discharge. He watches it, his
face alight. Then he turns to Sam, and grins.

BACON
It tickles!

Sammy goes to the window and stands beside Bacon. Tentative.
Afraid. Reaches out. Sparks fork from his fingertips. Arcs
and billows dance between his hand and Bacon's.

EXT. APTHORP - DUSK - DAYS LATER

The Hispano-Suiza waits at the curb.

INT. HISPANO-SUIZA - CONTINUOUS

Rosa, in good sober clothes, holds a sheet of paper. Studying its contents, moving her lips: Memorizing what it says.

The door opens and Joe bursts in. He is spattered with paint, dishevelled.

JOE

Sorry.

ROSA

Oh, look at you, you're a mess.

(to driver)

Okay, Sid.

The car pulls away from the curb. She resumes her study of the sheet of paper.

JOE

What is this?

ROSA

I asked my father to write out the blessings. So I would know them.

Joe's touched, understands.

JOE

Don't worry, Rosa. She is going to love you.

EXT. FLATBUSH - SUBWAY STATION - NIGHT

Sammy and Bacon stumble up from the subway, and cross the street to Sammy's building. Sammy's carrying a paper sack.

BACON

(looking around)

Where is the actual flat bush?

SAMMY

Actually they move it around. It's on wheels. Come on, Bake, we're so late.

BACON

Are we? You hadn't mentioned it.

EXT. KAVALIER APARTMENT HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

EUGENE BEGLEITER sits on the front steps, reading a comic book: PHARAOH COMICS. Cheesy Egyptianish hero on the cover.

SAMMY

What are you reading, Eugene?

EUGENE BEGLEITER
Oh, hiya, Sam! I don't know, it's a new one.

Sammy glances at the cover.

SAMMY
The Pharaoh? What's he do?

EUGENE BEGLEITER
He has a stick that turns into a snake.
It's strictly from hunger.

A GANG OF FLATBUSH BOYS comes up the street.

FLATBUSH BOYS
Hiya, Sam...Hi, Mr. Clay...

SAMMY
Hey, fellas. Say hello to Tracy Bacon.

FLATBUSH BOYS
What do you know? What's up?

FIRST FLATBUSH BOY
We don't get a lot of bacon in this neighborhood.

Sammy winks at Bacon.

SAMMY
Here you go, fellas.

He dumps out the bag, and a big stack of Empire Comics slides out. The boys scramble to gather them up. Sammy grins, enjoying the spectacle. Showing off for Bacon a little bit.

INT. KLAYMAN APARTMENT - 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
They're coming. Ma, I hope you don't mind 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?

ETHEL
...I know 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. KLAYMAN 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.

ETHEL (CONT'D)
...asher kiddushanu b'mitzvosav, vitzivanu
l'hadlik ner shel shabbes.

Bacon looks delighted, even touched.

The front door OPENS. A moment later Joe and Rosa come in.

SAMMY
That's Rosa Saks. Rosa, my ma.

ROSA
Thank you for having me, Mrs. Klayman.

ETHEL

Please, come in, dear, how are you?

Ethel takes her coat, then takes Joe's, kissing him. She notices the LETTER poking out of Joe's pocket. Hungry to read it. But she turns to Rosa.

Looks her up and down. Hard to read her face.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

You missed the candles.

Rosa looks at Joe: did I pass? Joe nods.

INT. APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Rosa holds a silver cup and recites, dutiful and clear as a prize student:

ROSA

Baruch ataw adonai eloheynu melech hao'lam
asher yatzar et ha'adam b'haha uvara bo
nikavim, halulim halulim.

Rosa's eyes brim over. She wipes a tear away. She's very moved. Joe is moved. Bacon is moved. Sammy looks at Ethel.

ETHEL

That was... lovely, dear.

Sammy stifles a laugh. Ethel gives Rosa's hand a pat, turns to the kitchen.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

Maybe we should skip the rest.

She turns and goes into the kitchen.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

I hope she likes jellied leg.

ROSA

Did I do it wrong?

SAMMY

That was the prayer for after you visit the toilet.

Rosa claps a hand over her mouth.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

(calling after Ethel)

She likes it with extra jelly, Ma!

ROSA

I'm going to kill my father.

INT. KLAYMAN APARTMENT - DINING TABLE

Each of them with a great big piece of gefilte fish. Rosa eats hers with apparent relief. Ethel just stands by the table, not eating.

ROSA
The fish is very good, Mrs. Klayman.

ETHEL
Thank you.

ROSA
I can't believe I fell for the jellied leg routine.

ETHEL
That's the next course.
(beat)
Make sure to leave room for my babka.

BACON
Babka? Is that a dessert?

SAMMY
An eternal question among my people. There are some who argue it's actually a kind of very small hassock.

Bacon is just flat-out digging in to his food.

BACON
Mmm. You know, this is the first homecooked meal I've had in over a year.

SAMMY
I wish I could say that.

ETHEL
You don't have anyone to cook for you, Mr. Bacon?

BACON
No, Mrs. K. I live at the Mayflower Hotel. I mostly eat room service.

ETHEL
That's sad.

SAMMY
Sounds like heaven to me.

ETHEL
I wash your clothes. Your sheets. I feed you. Tell me, Mr. Mayflower, what's the difference between here and a hotel?

SAMMY
I don't know, but I sure hope there is one.

Rosa and Tracy enjoy the flying of mother-son sparks.

ROSA
Aren't you going to eat, Mrs. Klayman?

ETHEL
I'll eat later. Nu, Josef, what was in the letter?

Joe looks up, startled by the question.

ROSA
What letter? Joe? Did you get a letter from home?

ETHEL
It's bad news, isn't it?

JOE
No. No, not at all. My mother said... she says everything... is as good as can be expected.

ETHEL
So, may I see it?

JOE
What?

ETHEL
May I see the letter from your mother?

JOE
Of course. Yes. Only I left it at the office. Silly me.

Ethel bangs down her fork.

ETHEL
Oh, my God, what's happened to them?

JOE
Nothing! No! It's fine. They are fine. They are so happy about Thomas. They believe I can still find a way to bring them here also.

Ethel stares at him, doubting something in his tone.

ROSA
You will. And when they do get here, just imagine. They'll be so happy, Joe, so proud to see the life you've made. A nice place for them to live. A good job.

BACON
A beautiful girlfriend.

ETHEL

Well, the girlfriend is lovely. And I'm sure the apartment is very nice. But the job I'm not sure they'll be so happy.

ROSA

Well, they should be.

Sammy nods: darn right.

ROSA (CONT'D)

An illustrator can't really go much higher than Vogue magazine.

SAMMY

Vogue magazine. Vogue magazine?

Joe's face: Oh, shit.

Rosa can feel the pressure drop.

ROSA

Joe, you didn't tell Sam?

SAMMY

What's this? You--what are you saying? You're quitting?

JOE

I'm sorry, Sam. A friend of Rosa's father is the art director at Vogue. He is taking me off.

ROSA

On.

JOE

Taking me on. The money is better than at Empire. Much. The hours are regular. I will be home for dinner every night.

ETHEL

Well, that's important.

But her eyes are on Sam, who sits stunned.

SAMMY

You'll be selling girdles. Hats with stuffed birds on them. Is that what you call important? I'm shocked.

JOE

You're shocked.

SAMMY

I'm embarrassed on your behalf. What we've been doing, Joe, you and me--that's important. Underneath the death rays and the crazy escapes and the guys running

(MORE)

SAMMY (CONT'D)
 around in long underwear. We're making a serious point. We're trying to wake people up. Sound the alarm. You know that.

JOE
 I'll tell you what I know, Sam. It's all crap, that's what I know. Do you know it?
 (off Sam's shock)
 It's just--it's kid's stuff. Selling gum and whoopee cushions and X-ray spectacles. We could make it a hundred times worse than it is and the kids would still buy it! They don't see a message. They don't care about Hitler or fighting fascism. All these months we have been doing this, is America any closer to waking up? Do they care any more about what is happening to the Jews?

Sammy can't answer. Almost in tears.

SAMMY
 We're a team, Joe. We're supposed to be a team. I guess that doesn't mean anything to you.

JOE
 No. No, Sam. It really doesn't.

Sammy nods. Then he walks out. Goes into his bedroom. SLAMS the door. Joe looks at Ethel, Bacon. Embarrassed. He gets up. To Rosa:

JOE (CONT'D)
 Come on.

ROSA
 What?

JOE
 Let's go.

ROSA
 Joe, you're being rude.

But she gets up and goes after him. Joe comes back to Ethel with his coat on. Takes out the letter.

JOE
 I haven't read it. I'm afraid to. I don't want to read anything that might make me stop believing I can save them.

He hands the letter to Ethel and puts on his coat. A beat. She hands it back.

ETHEL
 I'm afraid to read it, too.

He puts the letter back in his pocket. Then he walks out.

ROSA

Thank you, Mrs. Klayman. It was wonderful.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry to miss the leg.

ETHEL

Here, let me wrap it for you--

She runs to the kitchen and starts to frantically wrap a plate in foil. Comes running out as the front door SLAMS.

She sags. Carries the plate to the table. Sits down beside Bacon. Tries to gather herself together: okay; she's fine. She smiles at Bacon. He smiles back.

BACON

Thank God. I've been trying to get you
alone all evening.

She laughs. For the first time, perhaps, in forty years. She peels back the foil on the plate. Pushes it toward him.

ETHEL

Eat.

EXT. FLATBUSH ROOF - LATER

Sammy sits on the roof, alone. Looking out at the towers of Manhattan. CLANGING of the fire escape. Bacon's head pokes up over the cornice.

BACON

You all right?

Sammy nods. Bacon climbs up over the cornice. He comes and stands beside Sam.

BACON (CONT'D)

You don't need the guy, Sam.

SAMMY

Don't I?

BACON

Heck no. You should come to Hollywood with me.

SAMMY

What are you talking about?

BACON

I met with some people from Parnassus Pictures. They're making an Escapist serial.

He takes a mask out of his pocket, ties it over his eyes.

BACON (CONT'D)

What do you think?

SAMMY
It's perfect.

BACON
I'd have to move to Hollywood.

SAMMY
I guess you would.

BACON
You should come, too.

SAMMY
To do what? Play your kid sidekick? The Escapist doesn't have one.

BACON
How about you play the hotshot young writer who gets hired to write the Escapist movie?

SAMMY
Very funny.

BACON
I am being totally sincere. I know that's hard to believe. But when I mentioned your name, they went for it. They like you.

He sits down beside Sammy.

BACON (CONT'D)
I'm not looking for a sidekick, Sam.

SAMMY
Yeah? Well I don't think I know how to play anything else.

BACON
I think you do.

A beat. Bacon pushes up his mask. Searches Sam's face. Sam breaks the moment.

SAMMY
How about an evil genius? Are you looking for one of those?

For an instant Bacon can't hide his disappointment, then:

BACON
I think you'd make a heck of an evil genius.
(beat)
Your ma says get down there and start drying.

INT. KLAYMAN APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Ethel washes, Sammy dries.

ETHEL
He looks just like Josef draws him.

SAMMY
It's uncanny.

She hands him a plate; he dries it.

ETHEL
And she is charming.

SAMMY
She is.
(realizing it)
I like her. She's a swell girl.

He puts away the dish in the cabinet.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
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
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, caught by surprise. She looks away. Discussion over. He starts to wipe the dish dry.

INT. EMPIRE COMICS - BULLPEN - NEXT DAY

Sammy sits at his desk, typing. Stops. Fidgets. Types. Stops. Looks over at Joe's empty stool, his abandoned artwook. Lights a cigarette. Types. Stops. Julie Glovsky walks up, carrying a laid-out page.

JULIE GLOVSKY
What's the matter with you?

SAMMY
I'm fine. Why are you bothering me?

JULIE GLOVSKY
Because that is my sole purpose in life.
Okay. Take a look. Work of genius.

Sammy takes the page. It's a layout for an Escapist story.
Julie is no Joe.

SAMMY

He has no weight. He's landing on the wrong
foot. This punch, the angle is all wrong.
Go do it again.

JULIE GLOVSKY

What do you want, a work of genius. It's
good enough for Anapol.

SAMMY

You know, you're right.

Sammy stubs out his cigarette. Rolls in a sheet of paper.
Types. Snatches it out.

Puts on his hat, grabs his coat. We follow him to the door of
Anapol's office. Anapol's settling a hat onto his own head.
Something weird about the hat. Hands him the paper.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Here's your line.

ANAPOL

"You can't quit, Clay, you're fired!"

Anapol lets go of the hat. Novelty snakes BOING everywhere.
Sammy walks out.

EXT. EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - DAY

Sammy steps out into a beautiful day. Takes a deep breath.
Lets it out. Smiles.

Hails a cab. Gets in.

CABBIE

Where to?

SAMMY

What's the fare to Hollywood, California?

CABBIE

Bridge or tunnel?

INT. MAYFLOWER HOTEL - LOBBY - LATER

It's a dump, actually. Tawdry people on tattered sofas. The
CLERK is studying his Racing Form as Sammy walks in.

SAMMY

Is this... is there another Mayflower
Hotel?

CLERK

Even God's not that cruel.

INT. MAYFLOWER HOTEL - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Sammy knocks on the door to 202. A moment later Bacon opens it. He's wearing a full-body Escapist costume. It's a little cheesy but he looks fabulous in it.

BACON
So, Evil Genius. You've discovered my secret.

SAMMY
I'm not sure that's really possible.

BACON
Oh, it is. I promise you.

He turns, slowly, flexing his muscles. Forget cheesy. He just looks fabulous.

BACON (CONT'D)
They just sent it over an hour ago by messenger. What do you think?

SAMMY
I-- You know what? if I was thinking, Bacon, I would not be standing here in your doorway.

Bacon comes closer, leans down.

BACON
No? Where would you be?

Sammy starts to kiss him, wants to kiss him, but he holds back. He looks up and down the corridor. Nervous. He pushes against Bacon, trying to drive him back into the room. But Bacon holds his ground. Their faces are an inch apart.

BACON (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. As Secretary of the League of the Golden Key, I'm afraid I can't admit you into the Secret Headquarters. Not until you take the League oath.

SAMMY
Damn it Tracy Bacon you--

BACON
Nope. Now, come on. Repeat after me. "I, Sam Clay--

Over the course of the next few lines inexorably Sammy drives Bacon back into the room and over to the bed.

SAMMY
"I Sam Clay..."

BACON
...do solemnly swear to struggle tirelessly
and without fear...

SAMMY
"...do solemnly swear to struggle
tirelessly and without fear..."

They have reached the bed. Sammy pulls off Bacon's glittery blue boots.

BACON
...for the freedom and liberation of my
fellow human beings...

Sammy tugs down the shiny blue tights, and then peels the blue tunic up over Bacon's head.

SAMMY
"...for the freedom and liberation of my
fellow human beings."

He reaches up to untie Bacon's mask. Bacon grabs his hand and stops him.

BACON
Especially myself.

SAMMY
Especially myself.

Sammy pulls the mask away, tosses it aside, and they kiss.

INT. JOE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Brush in hand, Joe kneels in front of the bedroom door. The bottom painted green and wavy. The top sky blue. He's painting in a big glamorous deco ship. The Statue of Liberation rises from her island, holding aloft her sword.

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN - DAY

Green sea, blue sky. The tubby old Ark of Miriam cuts through the waters.

On the deck, children run, play tag, roll hoops. A boy snatches at the airplane as it darts past. But misses.

A bald MINDER strides along the deck, carrying a crate marked RED CROSS. A suction-cup arrow hits him in the head. Stolidly he removes it.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Children in bunks, reading, playing the violin. Thomas among them. When the MINDER comes in, arrow stuck to his head, they rush him, tear open the crate. Chewing gum, candy bars...and comic books. Thomas grabs a copy of Radio Comics.

CHILD

We must all learn to chew gum.

ANOTHER CHILD

You eat it, but you do not swallow it.

Thomas settles back in his bunk to read it. The splash page shows Empire City, with the Statue of Liberation. Holding not a torch but an upraised sword.

A KID peers in over his shoulder. Points at the box in one corner: KAVALLIER & CLAY.

KID

Hey, that's you!

INT. UPPER WEST SIDE - APARTMENT - CORRIDOR - DAY

Rosa waits as Joe takes a ring of keys from his pocket. She looks excited. He throws open the door. Magician flourish.

ROSA

Oh, my God!

We follow them into:

INT. WEST SIDE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The whole apartment has been transformed. It's a miniature recreation, in paint and wood and canvas, of the World's Fair. Pavilions. Statues. Attractions. Part stage set, part mural, part installation. Cartoonish, but accurate. It's not finished yet. Cans of paint everywhere, rollers, dropcloths.

JOE

I hated for Thomas to miss it. It will be his future, too.

ROSA

It's incredible, Joe. It's wonderful.

She sits down a chair, looking pale. Ill.

ROSA (CONT'D)

It kind of--reeks of paint, though, don't you think?

Joe goes to open a window. TRAFFIC SOUNDS.

JOE

Better?

ROSA

(no)
Yes.

JOE

You have to see his bedroom. It's Futurama. In kitchen is the Trylon.

He picks up a book called This is the World's Fair!

JOE (CONT'D)
I have a book! Come on, come see.

INT. APARTMENT - THOMAS'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A big mural of the Futurama on the walls, city of the Future, fairgoers circling in their GM cars around the top. A small empty bed at the very center of it all. On the bed, a full selection of Escapist toys: pennants, games, figurines.

He picks up a metal music box painted like a steel crate. Turns the crank. It plays a stirring theme and then the Escapist pops out.

JOE
He has been accepted at Collegiate, thanks to your father. He has money in his bank account. In summer he goes to a Jewish camp in the Catkill Mountains. He can even have the bar mitzvah, like your brother.

Rosa shakes her head; the smell his really bothering her.

ROSA
Have you've been practicing?

JOE
The act is coming together very nice.

ROSA
You haven't even started, have you?

JOE
Don't to worry! Look, you see under there, is the trumble bed.

ROSA
A trumble bed, yeah, I see 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
You're a good brother, Joe. You've made everything--

The phone RINGS. Joe looks surprised.

JOE
I didn't know it was hookupped.

INT. JOE'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joe picks up the phone. Still holding the jack-in-the-box. Rosa follows him. Looking quite ill.

JOE
Hello? Yes? Oh, hello, Mr. Saks. She's
right here.

Hands Rosa the phone. But she hands it right back to him.

ROSA
Actually it's for you.
(beat)
Ship to shore.

SAKS (V.O.)
Stand by a minute, Joe. Operator?

OPERATOR (V.O.)
Stand by.

CRACKLE and WHISTLE of radio static.

INTERCUT JOE AND THOMAS

Thomas is in the radio room of the Ark of Miriam. Grinning.

THOMAS
Howdy!

JOE
Thomas!
(in Czech)
How are you? Where are you? How--

THOMAS
Please to speak only Cowboy. The name is
Tommy, pardner.

Laughter--we pull back to reveal that OTHER CHILDREN are
crowded into the radio room around Thomas, with more piling
in all the time. Eager faces, listening in.

JOE
Okay, Tex. And you call me Joe.

THOMAS
Joe! Joe, please how are you?

JOE
How are mother and father?

THOMAS
What?

JOE
What?

THOMAS
They send their love. Mother says--

JOE
I am well. I am getting everything--

THOMAS

I am sorry. You speak first.

JOE

I will wait. Go ahead, Tommy.

DEAD AIR, WHISTLES AND CREAKS. A boy pushes in close to Thomas.

A BOY

Tell him Mister Emanuel Rosenbaum says
Hello, America.

THOMAS

Mister Emanuel Rosenbaum says Hello,
America.

All the other kids chime in, at once, calling out in English that they say, Hello, America.

Joe hears their voices caroling through the line.

JOE

Thomas, where are you?

THOMAS

Three thousands six hundreds seventeen
kilometers from New York Manhattan. In
Cowboy this is two thousand two hundred
forty eight miles. In five days I will see
you at the Statue of Liberation. In the
sword. I am the one in the ten gallon hat.

Thomas raises his arm aloft. All the other children raise their arms, too, as the LINE IS LOST and:

JOE

Tommy? Thomas!

Nothing. Joe reluctantly hangs up.

JOE (CONT'D)

Two thousand two hundred and forty-eight
miles.

(off Rosa's look)

They lost the signal. But it was him. It
was him! He is coming. In five days.

He takes Rosa into his arms.

JOE (CONT'D)

I hope he is not too disappointed she is
holding only a torch.

Then he lets go of Rosa. Melancholy all at once.

ROSA

What is it? What, Joe?

JOE
Nothing. It's--nothing.

ROSA
It's Sam, isn't it? He should be here. He should see what you've done.

JOE
I didn't do anything, Rosa. It was Sam. None of this is happening if I don't have Sam.

INT. HIPPODROME - LONDON - 1904

The curtain shakes. 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 he's been in the cabinet for forty minutes, Houdini comes out. Saying, he's very hot in his tailcoat. Would the gentleman from the Mirror consider undoing the cuffs just long enough to let him take off the jacket?

The crowd cheers. Shouts of "YES!"

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 Reporter makes a show of considering the request.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But the Reporter's cagey. He gets what Houdini was really up to. He saw the cuffs being locked. But he never saw them being unlocked.

The Reporter shakes his head. The crowd jeers him. Houdini shrugs, and grins. Awkwardly reaching into the pocket of his coat, he 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 Kavalier's favorite part of the story, the way he turned 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. But Bess isn't cheering; she looks at her watch.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Joe Kavalier said it took genius to
transform failure into art.

Houdini basks in applause. Bess blows a kiss. Houdini catches it, retreats into the cabinet. And Bess Houdini stands there, on stage. Watching, waiting, dying--smiling.

INT. HOTEL TREVI- BALLROOM - NIGHT

A potted palm. Behind the potted palm, a vague brown shadow.

Joe strides past the palm dressed in Escapist-blue tie and tails. Shuffling and cutting a deck of cards over and over. Walking the room. Checking sight-lines. He moves a chair with his toe. Waiters come and go, setting up for the reception.

The room has been decorated with a Neptune's Kingdom theme. Mermaids, fishnets, tridents, starfish. At the far end, a big splashing scale-replica of the Trevi fountain.

Joe whirls, throws a playing card. It whizzes through the air and strikes the palm tree, slicing off a frond. As the frond falls away, reveal Donald Saks, in a brown three-piece suit.

Joe goes back to prepping the stage area. Ignores Donald.

DONALD
I saw you put a nine of hearts in that
centerpiece over there.

JOE
Did you? Is it there now?

Donald goes over to a table and pokes around in the flowers of the centerpiece. Takes out a Bicycle playing card. Turns it over. On the other side: no hearts but a caricature of Donald, drawn by Joe. Donald looks up from the card, grins.

DONALD
Can I be your assistant?

JOE
You know I work alone.

Donald nods. A solemn kid. A long beat. Joe sighs.

JOE (CONT'D)
You can help me with the escape, all right?
I'll need you to push me into the water.

Donald beams. Looks over at the burbling fountain. Splashing, bubbling as we CUT TO:

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN - ARK OF MIRIAM - NIGHT

The sea foams and bubbles around the prow of the Ark of Miriam as it cuts the waves.

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 Minder is there: silhouetted, still.

MINDER

There is a U-Boat.

An ALARM begins to sound, continues OVER:

EXT. ARK OF MIRIAM - MID-ATLANTIC - NIGHT

Thomas, with SAILORS and two dozen other children, sits in a lifeboat, clutching the comic book as the boat is lowered. Children cry or sit stony.

MINDER

Don't worry, children. We are only a few miles from land. They want to sink the ship, not us.

INT. TREVI BALLROOM - LATER

Joe hangs around outside the ballroom as the guests file in. A DIN from inside. Joe walks a half dollar over the back of one hand, in and out of his fingers. Pulls at his tie. Fidgety. Then he smiles as:

Rosa comes running up to him. They kiss. She takes a step back and looks at him.

ROSA

Butterflies?

He shakes his head as we SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL TREVI - MEN'S LOUNGE - SECONDS LATER

Joe bursts into the bathroom, scrabbles to a stall. Hangs over the toilet, waiting to vomit. Nothing. Closes his eyes. Controls his breathing. Okay.

EXT. U-BOAT CONNING TOWER - MID-ATLANTIC

The SIREN WAILS. The evacuation is observed, through binoculars, by the U-Boat COMMANDER. 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.

INT. HOTEL TREVI - MEN'S LOUNGE - NIGHT

Joe crouches on the lowered lid of a toilet in a stall. Curls himself into a tight little ball. Takes out a stopwatch. Sucks in a huge deep breath, seals his lips. Starts the clock.

MUFFLED VOICES, agitated, above a whisper. The bathroom door BANGS OPEN.

SAKS (O.S.)

They put them off. What do you mean they put them off?

HOFFMAN (O.S.)

That's what they do. They're only allowed to sink the ship, they don't want--

SAKS (O.S.)

So you're saying they--

HOFFMAN (O.S.)

--they don't--they aren't supposed to... they got them in the lifeboats. They were less than two miles from the Canary, from one of the Canary Islands. A storm came up and--

Angle on Joe's face, listening. Still holding his breath. As the scene plays he gets redder and redder until he start to turn blue. The stopwatch TICKS.

SAKS (O.S.)

But they're fine? The children are fine?

HOFFMAN (O.S.)

Oh, God!

Hoffman breaks into loud barking sobs. Saks murmurs some words of comfort, inaudible. INTERCUT between Joe listening in the stall and the two men trying to cope with the news.

SAKS

I have to cancel this thing, how can we--

HOFFMAN

You can't do that to Donald, Siggy, it's not his fault, he's--

SAKS

But how can we celebrate--

HOFFMAN

You and I will not be celebrating. Let the boy have five minutes of fun before the world ends.

They pull themselves together. Holding each other up. They start out of the bathroom.

HOFFMAN (CONT'D)
Siggy, what should we--the brother--

SAKS
Let's let him--We'll tell him after.

As the door shuts, Joe lets out all the air in his lungs in a big RUSH. He stops the stopwatch. Sits, gasping for air.

INT. TREVI HOTEL - BALLROOM - NIGHT

Now it's crowded with guests, CLINK of forks and glasses, a DRUM ROLL from the band. Joe is doing his show, pouring water into his cupped hand from a pitcher. A shower of dimes pours out the bottom. APPLAUSE.

Rosa watches, applauding, with her father and Donald. But she's looking very closely at Joe's face. Staring eyes, his manner ringing false.

JOE
Thank you. Now for finale. I will to present a special effect, very famous and popular in Prague where I am from. It is an escape.

Loud APPLAUSE.

JOE (CONT'D)
If my special assistant will please join me...

Donald leaps up and runs over to Joe. WILD APPLAUSE. Rosa smiles but we can see she's worried.

EXT. THIRD AVENUE - NIGHT

Tracy leads wide-eyed Sammy through the shadows under the Third Avenue El. Men everywhere, singly and in pairs. When they look at him, Sammy turns his head. Then looks back.

Bacon leads Sammy toward the door of a bar called The Lodge.

BACON
The headquarters of the League of the Golden Key.

INT. THE LODGE BAR - NIGHT

Dark, atmospheric. Handsome men, all dressed up, maybe a drag queen or two. A black singer on stage in the corner. Everyone stares at Bacon as they come in.

INT. TREVI HOTEL - BALLROOM - NIGHT

Rapt silence. Joe watches as Donald ties a knot in the rope around Joe's ankles. Joe's hands are already tied. Donald fumbles with the rope. Sweating. Exasperated.

JOE
It's all right.

INT. THE LODGE BAR - NIGHT

Applause as a singer finishes her song. Sammy and Bacon are in a booth at the back, side by side.

Sammy takes a long drink. Whoa. Looks around the room.

SAMMY
This is so strange.

BACON
Is it?

SAMMY
Yes.

BACON
I don't think so. It's great, Sam. It's the greatest thing ever.

SAMMY
Look at you. Look at them. They could all play somebody's secret identity. Before I met you. If I wanted to be around someone like you, I had to, y'know. Make you up.

A WHISTLE.

BACON
Oh, shit.

SOMEONE
RAID!

A squad of cops comes pouring in through the front door.

INT. TREVI HOTEL - BALLROOM - NIGHT

Beside the edge of the fountain. Joe steps into a canvas sack that Donald holds open for him. Donald pulls the sack up over Joe's head and Joe sinks down into it. Joe hands him the stopwatch.

JOE
Give me four minutes.

INT. THE LODGE BAR - NIGHT

A general melee is in progress. Cops are clubbing people, dragging them away in cuffs. A cop nabs Sammy, brutally.

COP
Come on, sister.

A tap on his shoulder. He turns. There stands Tracy Bacon, looming, grinning, wearing the blue mask of the Escapist. He hauls off and slugs the cop.

Five more cops jump him and Bacon brawls like a sailor, throwing punches, chairs, smashing and kicking. At last he goes down under a surge of nightsticks.

Sammy tries to pull a cop off of Bacon. Takes a smash to the face from a cop's elbow.

Sammy falls, and cops standing nearby beat him, too. Savage.

INT. TREVI BALLROOM - NIGHT

Joe's POV as the canvas sack closes around him.

INT. CANVAS SACK - CONTINUOUS

We HEAR Joe's steady breathing, his heartbeat. And the BURBLE of the water in the fountain.

EXT. TREVI BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

Donald stands by the sack, looking a little uncertain.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
Go ahead!

JOE
(muffled)
It's all right. Push me. Push me!

Donald glances toward Rosa, who shrugs, doubtful. And then Donald we pushes and the sack plunges into the fountain. A GASP from the audience, then applause and we CUT TO:

INT. CANVAS SACK - CONTINUOUS

WATER and Joe's HEARTBEAT and darkness.

EXT. TREVI BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

The entire room holds its breath with Joe, watching the water in the pool of the fountain. Donald waits by the side, checking the stopwatch. A beat. Another beat.

Rosa tries to wait it out. Really trying. Glances at her SIGGY who looks stricken. Rosa leaps to her feet.

ROSA
Get him out! Pull him out of there.

She hurries to the fountain.

DONALD

It's only been three and a half minutes.

ROSA

I don't care!

She pushes him aside and splashes right into the fountain. Tries to drag out the sack. Two male GUESTS plunge in with her and help. They heave the sack out of the water. It's a dead weight. It splashes onto the carpet.

Rosa unties the sack, pulls down the canvas. Joe's face is blue and she cries out and pushes on his chest and Joe coughs.

GUEST

Get a doctor!

EXT. HOTEL TREVI - BACK ALLEY - LATER

INTERNS load Joe on a stretcher into the back of an ambulance, slam the door. Rosa and Saks watch the ambulance pull away.

SAKS

Come on, we'll get a cab.

EXT. NEW YORK AVENUE - DAY

Dawn. Sam and Tracy stumble along. Both bleeding. Sam's just looking straight ahead. His front tooth missing. Tracy puts a hand on Sam's shoulder, but Sam moves away.

TRACY BACON

Sam. Sam, I'm sorry. I'm sorry!

Hears a NEWSBOY's cry.

NEWSBOY

He-rald! 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. POLYCLINIC HOSPITAL - NIGHT

The ambulance pulls into the ER bay. The interns jump out, go around to the back. The rear hatch gapes, ajar. And when they open it Joe is gone. The interns exchange a look. One of them

pokes his head in, climbs in, slides out. Holds up the letter from Joe's mother. Unopened.

INTERN
He forgot his mail.

EXT. WEST END AVENUE - APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

The cab pulls up just as Rosa arrives. Tracy Bacon gets out of the cab, slowly, badly bruised.

BACON
Rosa! Could you give me a hand?

ROSA
Jesus, oh, my, God, Sammy, what happened?
Were you fighting?

She and Bacon ease Sammy out of the taxi. He groans.

SAMMY
Did you hear? Where is he?

ROSA
I don't know! He disappeared, they took him to the hospital--Sam, he tried, I think he tried to drown himself, I--

She breaks down. Sammy takes her into his arms: it hurts.

SAMMY
Ow! God damn it!

ROSA
You need to go to the hospital!

BACON
He wouldn't. I tried.

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. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Dim, deserted. The door opens, spilling light from the hall.

SAMMY
Joe?

They walk into the festival chaos of the apartment. He switches on the light.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
It's the World's Fair.

He takes in the gaudy circus of it: It's finished. Spectacular. Toys, the games, the books and clothes piled everywhere, still in their packages and wrappings.

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

They walk from room to room, opening doors, turning on lights. Calling Joe's name.

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
Agents of the Iron Chain. Are you okay? 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.

SAMMY
I think 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. Looks around at Dali's Dream of Venus, mixed with Billy Rose's Aquacade: High Mermaid surrealism.

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. He kneels down and strokes Rosa's cheek, then pats Sammy softly on the top of his head. Lays down a note.

INT. JOE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATER

Rosa wakes. She picks up the note, reads it. Moved by it, but not to tears somehow, more to wonder or pity.

ROSA
Sam, wake up. Sam. We're at war.

She hands him the note. He's confused. He reads it.

SAMMY
Japan? What happened?

He goes over to a window, opens it up, pokes out his head. A frosty clear Sunday afternoon. Quiet. A few people in the street. He turns back into the room.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

(wondering)

We're at war with Japan. Joe's right, what he says there...

(turns back)

...we're bound to get into it with Germany now, too--hey. What--

Rosa's crying. Furious tears.

ROSA

I'm pregnant, Sam.

This sinks in with Sam.

SAMMY

You--you told Joe?

ROSA

I didn't want him to know. I don't want him to know. You can't tell him, Sam, swear to me.

SAMMY

Why? Why didn't you tell him? Because he might want you to get rid of it?

ROSA

No, Sam. Because he might have wanted me to keep it. To marry him. And I love him, Sam, you don't know how I love him. But I don't want a baby. I want to finish school. I want to have a career someday, making my art. I want to keep working for the agency. If we're at war, then there are going to be more refugees than ever. I felt trapped, Sam. And I didn't want to feel like I was trapping him.

SAMMY

Tell him, Rosa. Now, after what's happened. You have to tell him.

ROSA

No, Sam. Now he's going to enlist in the Navy and hunt U-boats and kill Germans and get his revenge.

She picks up the letter, glances at it.

ROSA (CONT'D)

"I do not plan to survive." Joe's gone, Sam. I lost him.

She puts her hands on her belly.

ROSA (CONT'D)
And his brother is dead, poor sweet little Thomas, that boy. And I-- here I am, planning to end the life of what might be the last member of his family.

Thin smile. Then she notices Sam's face. She reaches out, takes hold of his chin. Turns his face from side to side. Dried blood and cuts and purple flesh.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Jesus, Sam.

He pushes her hand away. He looks down at the bloodstains on his shirt. Then up at her. Grim.

SAMMY
I'll help you.

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. 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.

BACON
I don't understand. I mean, they dropped the charges, Sam, I know it was bad, but--

SAMMY
I can't do it anymore. I don't want to be this way.

BACON
You don't have a choice.

SAMMY
I think I do.

BACON
I don't believe that.

Bacon reaches for Sam's hand.

SAMMY
Something like you and me is not a question of choosing or not choosing. There's nothing you can do about it.

Sammy jerks his hand away.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
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. As he moves the city behind him fades to black and white, ink on paper. The Statue of Liberation looms in the b.g., clutching her sword.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER (V.O.)
My Dear Son. I write to thank you for
bringing us in this dark time the most
unlikely of all gifts: hope.

Joe stares down into the water, churning, black as illustrator's ink. The ink begins to coalesce, to form recognizable shapes: arms, faces, hands, hair. Under the following dialogue the tangle of bodies in the water grows clearer and more elaborate, twining like vines or seaweed.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We have just learned that you have made
arrangements to bring Thomas out of this
place of...

INSERT: White letters on black b.g.: CENSORED.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Your late father, as you know, suffered
from chronic optimism, but it is clear to
me that we...

INSERT TITLE: CENSORED

FRAU DR. KAVALIER (V.O.)
...and that the present state of affairs
will be as permanent as any of us shall
require. So, my darling, if you want make
your mother's happiness complete, this is
what you must do: forget us. Turn your face
away, toward that city of freedom and swing
music. Make a life for yourself there, a
real life, with Thomas. Turn your thoughts
from home.

The shape of a U-Boat moves through the sea of bodies. The lines of the bodies begin to thicken, to bleed together.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
In all likelihood this letter will not find
you but if you are reading this, then
please, Josef. Leave us behind.

Joe's ship is a white dot in a vast sea of blackness.

FRAU DR. KAVALIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I shall not write again unless I have news
 of which you cannot fairly be deprived.
 Until then you must know, dear one, that
 you are in my thoughts every instant of my
 waking life and in my (clinically quite
 uninteresting) dreams as well. Fondly,
 Mother

Black ink fills the screen as we pull back and DISSOLVE TO:

A wake of black ink trailed by a brush. The Cartoonist is
 inking one of the stripes of a fluttering American flag. PULL
 BACK and

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "ANTARCTICA"

A military installation, buried in snow. The U.S. flag flies
 from a central flagpole.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 This is where I really have to start
 piecing things together. All I have's a few
 photographs, some Navy records, a couple
 things I dug up on the Internet. I've heard
 there's some Signal Corps footage, but I've
 never been able to track that down. It's
 tough to find much information about
 Operation Haystack.

INSERT PHOTO - B&W

The Cartoonist holds an old 8x10 of the same installation.
 He's using it as reference for the panel he's drawing.

Beside him he has a stack of other reference photos, an open
 dossier with censored documents marked DECLASSIFIED and
 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 Haystack was only declassified a few years
 ago, and half the stuff in the files is
 blotted out. None of the men ever said much
 about what they did there. The official
 name was Naval Station SD-A2(R), but they
 called it the Kelvinator.

As we PUSH IN on the photograph, it flickers to life, in
 black and white.

EXT. KELVINATOR STATION - SIGNAL CORPS FOOTAGE - B&W

Worn film stock, intense whites and blacks.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 I know Joe originally enlisted in the
 submarine service, as a radio tech. All
 Signalman Kavalier wanted to do was sink U-
 Boats. Kill Germans, basically.

We zoom in on the radio shack jutting up into the Antarctic blank. Bristling with aerials. RADIO CHATTER OVER:

INT. KELVINATOR - RADIO SHACK - SIGNAL CORPS FOOTAGE - B&W

Joe Kavalier, in uniform, wearing a headset, mans a big Marconi CSR 9A. Taking down code in a pad.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
In its wisdom the Navy sent him to a place
where there weren't any Germans at all.

INT. KELVINATOR - CREW QUARTERS - SIGNAL CORPS FOOTAGE - B&W

Guys hang around playing cards, chess, sock hockey. We pan to Joe, to one side, shuffling through a deck of letters. The shot emphasizes his separateness from the other guys.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
The sailors thought he was a bit of a nut,
like all radiomen.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "ANTARCTICA"

Crew's quarters. Joe sits to one side, holding a stack of letters as we MORPH INTO:

INT. KELVINATOR STATION - CREW'S QUARTERS - ANIMATED

Joe on his bunk, shuffles through the deck of letters.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
The sailors thought he was a bit of
a nut, like all radiomen.

Two sailors bunks sit looking at him. One elbows the other.

SAILOR 1 (BALLOON)
AIN'T YA EVER GOING TO READ EM,
DIT?

SAILOR 2 (BALLOON)
THEY'RE FROM YOUR GAL, AIN'T THEY?

Joe shrugs, shakes his head. Then he replaces them carefully in his footlocker. Sailor 1 whispers to Sailor 2:

SAILOR 1 (BALLOON)
GUY NEVER EVEN OPENS THEM!

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - DAY - SIMULTANEOUS - LIVE ACTION

Rosa's hand, elegantly gloved, pulls open a mailbox door. She holds a letter, addressed to Joe Kavalier. Hesitates. Drops it in. So. There it is.

SAKS (O.S.)
Ready?

She turns. Her father's all dressed up. She nods. Vastly pregnant, in a plain maternity dress, sea-green.

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 Julie Glovsky. Ethel is standing with her arms folded, face set. In the center stand Sammy, Rosa, and the RABBI. Sammy in a dark suit. The rabbi, handsome, well-to-do, is talking.

RABBI
...and in the sight of God. Now, Rosa.

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, whom 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 should quit while we're ahead.

Rosa takes Sammy's hand, and they turn to face us and the future.

INSERT B&W PHOTOGRAPH - "WEDDING"

We PULL BACK to reveal that the picture's reprinted in a book, beside two other old snapshots, one of Sam and Joe, another of Sheldon Anapol.

INT. CARTOONIST'S STUDIO - DAY

The Cartoonist sets the book down beside his table. We see that he is drawing the wedding photo into a panel on a new page. He closes the book: THE ART OF JOE KAVALIER, by NATE RAYMOND. A slick coffee-table book.

The Cartoonist picks up the Kelvinator Dossier. Looks at another reference photo.

INSERT B&W PHOTO -

Signalman Joe Kavalier, bearded, poses at his Marconi set. We hear the sound of MORSE CODE transmissions as we DISSOLVE TO:

INT. KELVINATOR - RADIO SHACK - ANIMATED

Joe sits at his big Marconi, under the headset.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
Apparently Kavalier spent most of his time alone in the radio shack. He was supposed to be monitoring U-boat activity in the South Atlantic.

He's working the dials, teasing a signal down.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But he would listen to any voice, any signal he could bring in. I don't think he really knew what he was listening for.

STATIC, WHISTLING, then--

RADIO (BALLOON)
*GOOD EVENING, MR. AND MRS. NORTH AMERICA
 AND ALL THE SHIPS AT SEA. LET'S GO TO
 PRESS.*

INT. KELVINATOR - RADIO SHACK - ANIMATED - ANOTHER DAY

Joe does chin ups from a bar. Beard longer and shaggier.
 Listening to the Deutsche Rundfunk.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 He just had a feeling that radio was a way
 out of the box he was in.

RADIO (BALLOON)
*...OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS SAID THE
 MODEL CAMP AT THERESIENSTADT EXCEEDED THE
 GUIDELINES FOR HYGIENE...*

INT. KELVINATOR - RADIO SHACK - ANIMATED - ANOTHER DAY

Joe hunched over a pad, beard like Rutherford B. Hayes,
 taking down what he hears through his earpiece. MORSE CODE.
 Joe is eager, writing fast.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 Until the day the radio slipped him a key.
 A plaintext transmission, in German, from a
 German survey team, in Queen Maud Land, 800
 miles away.

MORSE CODE CONTINUES OVER:

EXT. GERMAN STATION "JOTUNHEIM" - ANIMATED - DAY

A pair of Binoculars look right at us. Reflecting ice
 mountains.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
 Okay, so here's the part where the
 documents and the photos pretty much give
 out completely.

They turn away, reveal a GERMAN SCIENTIST in parka scanning
 the horizon.

The Scientist fumbles to make a note with his pen in his
 gloved hand. In the b.g. Jotunheim: swastika flag flies.

INT. KELVINATOR STATION - C.O.'S OFFICE - ANIMATED

Joe hands a clipboard to his C.O. Poker-faced.

C.O. (BALLOON)
 ANYTHING TO REPORT?

JOE (BALLOON)
 JUST THE USUAL CHATTER, SIR.

INT. KELVINATOR STATION - SHOWER ROOM - ANIMATED

Joe shaves off his beard. Determined.

INT. KELVINATOR STATION - HANGAR - ANIMATED

The hangar door rolls open. Joe creeps in, alone.

Joe unzips a kit: wrench, flashlight, first aid kit. Lays everything out.

INT. WEST END AVENUE - APARTMENT - DAY - LIVE ACTION

An ANCIENT MOHEL unrolls his bundle of his steely implements on a white cloth spread across the dining table. The people we saw at the wedding gathered around.

Rosa clutches the baby tightly to her. Dread. Sammy looks a little green.

ROSA

I'm not ready. I change my mind.

SAMMY

So do I.

ETHEL

This has nothing to do with either of you.
You know that.

They look at each other. They know that.

The mohel spreads his instruments out. With a gnarled hand he smooths out the snowy white table cloth.

EXT. ANTARCTICA SKY - DAY - ANIMATED

The Curtiss a tiny cross against the sky. Trailing a plume of black smoke. Engine, SPUTTERING. Pull back to reveal the plane reflected twice the Scientist's binoculars.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

A leaky propane stove had killed the other men at the German station. By the time Joe showed up there was only poor shmuck left.

The Scientist lowers the binoculars, fear in his eyes.

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

Joe had spent the first hundred miles learning to fly an airplane.

The plane hangs, listing to one side. Coughs a last time. Stalls. Then silence. The only sound the CHIMING of the German's breath as it freezes.

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

The next four hundred he thought about the killing he was going to do.

The stalled plane plummets in a lazy spiral. Hits the ice. WHAM. Skids along, kicking up tall plumes of ice and snow. Then it PLOWS into a snowbank.

CARTOONIST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The last two hundred miles he flew in
weather so heavy was just grateful for his
life. For life itself.

The plane steams, TICKING. Battered but intact. The hatch is flung open. Joe struggles out. Falls over. Gets up. Then comes dancing and stumbling across the snow toward the Doctor, arms held high, smiling.

JOE (BALLOON)
HEY! HI! WHOO-HOO! HELLO!

The words in the balloon emerge like vapor and freeze, TINKLING like bells.

The Scientist watches, uncertain now. He takes out a big Walther and points it at Joe. Joe stops. Puts up his hands. Pushes back his hood. Frost rimes his eyebrows.

JOE (BALLOON)(CONT'D)
I AM VERY GLAD TO BE HERE. IT WAS A ROUGH
FLIGHT. I--

BLAM. A hole opens in Joe's shoulder. The bullet spins him. The letters B-L-A-M freeze and shatter and fall to the ground.

The Scientist fires off his whole clip, eyes squeezed shut. The shots go wide. When he's done, Joe stands there, grinning. He takes out his own gun, holding it loosely. No intention of shooting.

The Scientist charges Joe. They grapple, their faces an inch apart.

GERMAN SCIENTIST (BALLOON)
YOU CAME HERE TO KILL ME.

JOE (BALLOON)
I CHANGED MY MIND.

GUNSHOT. The Scientist's face goes soft. Joe holds him up, horrified.

SCIENTIST (BALLOON)
AN AMERICAN BOY... WHO SPEAKS PERFECT
GERMAN. FALLS OUT... OF THE SKY. AND I
SHOOT HIM.

He's fading.

SCIENTIST (BALLOON)(CONT'D)
YOU LIKE GENE KRUPA?

JOE (BALLOON)
KRUPA IS THE GREATEST.

The Scientist sinks into a heap at Joe's feet. Joe looks down at him. Tears freezing on his cheeks. Steam purls from the bullet hole in his shoulder.

EXT. GERMAN STATION "JOTUNHEIM" - LATER - ANIMATED

Joe drags the body of the German through the snow toward the German camp.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
Kavalier just spent four days crossing 800 miles of ice to kill this guy. Now all he wants is to save the poor bastard.

JOE (BALLOON)
HANG ON. STAY ALIVE.

A lettered CAPTION pops up at the bottom of the frame: IF THEY CAN JUST MAKE IT TO THE STATION, THERE WILL BE FORCEPS, NEEDLE AND THREAD, HEMOSTAT, MORPHINE--

Close on Joe's straining face. Ice on his eyebrows. The breath billows from his mouth. It SNOWS DOWN over the words of a new lettered CAPTION: EVEN THE DEATH OF HIS BROTHER DID NOT BREAK HIS HEART--

EXT. JOTUNHEIM - MOMENTS LATER - ANIMATED

Joe crouches by the body of the Scientist. Head in his hands. Breath billowing and freezing around his head. Snowing down to bury Joe, and the German.

A caption trails behind them, lettered in blood red ink, across the white page:--AS DEEPLY AS THE REALIZATION THAT HE IS DRAGGING A CORPSE BEHIND HIM. We DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ANTARCTICA - DAY - LIVE ACTION

The dead man at Joe's feet, at the end of a bloody trail of snow. Joe is wildly sobbing. We leave him in the midst of the vast expanse of whiteness, and DISSOLVE TO:

A MOVIE SCREEN. A scene from the Escapist serial starring Tracy Bacon. Tracy Bacon flickers golden and beautiful on the screen.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
After he wrapped the first and only Escapist serial, Tracy Bacon enlisted in the Air Force.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NEW YORK - 1945 - DAY

A Saturday matinee. Screaming squirming kids all around, throwing popcorn, etc.

INSERT TITLE: NEW YORK, 1945

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
They sent him to the Pacific, where his B-17 was shot down over New Guinea.

Sammy sits rapt, watching the screen, tears streaming down his cheeks. He looks thinner, rumped, haggard. Real grief.

INT. SAMMY AND ROSA'S APARTMENT - DAY

The one on West End Avenue. Then it was empty but filled with stuff; now it is furnished but with a certain spareness, as if the current occupants have not quite settled in. All traces of the "World's Fair" are gone.

Sammy walks in, jacket over his shoulder. Wrung out. On the wall, mounted silk moths in sober frames.

ROSA (O.S.)
Sam? Is that you?

SAMMY
No.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Rosa is feeding dinner to TOMMY CLAY, 3, and her father. Saks wears a smoking jacket but is unshaven. He's drinking a martini. Sam walks in. Rosa takes one look at him.

ROSA
Oh, Sam. You went again?

SAMMY
Hi, Tom.

TOMMY
Hi, Sammy.

SAKS
"Hi, Sammy."

Sammy shoots Saks a look. He sits down, ruffles Tommy's hair. Rosa puts a plate in front of him. He looks at it. Rosa turns away. Sammy looks at Tommy, makes a gagging face. Pushes his plate away. Lights a cigarette.

SAMMY
Thanks. I had a bite.

Tommy pushes his plate away.

TOMMY
Thanks. I had a bite.

Tommy climbs down from his chair. Pads out of the kitchen.

ROSA
Thanks a lot.

SAMMY
Sorry.

ROSA
Tell him to get back in here!

SAMMY
Tommy, get back in here.

Rosa glares at him. Sammy sighs. Adopts a paternal tone.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Thomas Edison Clay! Get your meager behind
in here this minute.

A beat. A PIANO; Tommy's works carefully through minor
scales.

SAKS
You command such respect.

Sammy stares balefully at Saks. Rosa sits down beside Sammy,.

ROSA
Sam, Shelly called. Twice. He said you were
supposed to work today.

SAMMY
I don't work Saturday. I give fifty, sixty
hours a week to Anapol so that you and
Tommy and Sidney Greenstreet here can eat
this fine cuisine. I'm entitled to have
some time to myself.

SAKS
Listen, you. Do you think I want your
charity? I spent every dime I had--

ROSA
Dad. We know.

Saks gets up, looking huffy. Stalks out. Rosa takes Sammy's
cigarettes from his pocket and lights one.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Shelly said you're almost a full month
behind on all your titles. Is that true?

Yes, it is.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Sammy. I know how you're feeling, but--

SAMMY
Yeah? Do you?

ROSA
(can't help saying it)
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 VI."

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. I know he's dead.

SAMMY
Liar.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "MILITARY HOSPITAL"

Joe lies in a bed on a ward. CAPTION reads: JOE SPENT NEARLY A YEAR RECOVERING FROM HIS INJURIES.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
The Navy classified the Antarctic mission. Covered the whole thing up, dropped charges against Joe for stealing the plane. Even the fact that Joe was still alive was classified.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "MILITARY HOSPITAL"

Joe packs his duffel. A nurse stands in the doorway. Holding a stack of letters.

NURSE (BALLOON)
LOOK WHAT CAME FOR YOU. JUST IN TIME.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
He had thought they were lost forever, along with everything else.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "MILITARY HOSPITAL"

Joe holds the letters. The top one is clearly from Rosa. The nurse looks on.

NURSE (BALLOON)
LETTERS FROM HOME, AND YOU NEVER OPENED
THEM?

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "MILITARY HOSPITAL"

Joe stuffs them into his duffel.

JOE (BALLOON)
THESE WEREN'T FROM MY HOME.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "CARGO PLANE"

Joe flies in the belly of a C-130, alone. Staring at the letters. CAPTION: "--WHERE IS YOUR HOME, JOE?"

INT. CZECHOSLOVAKIA - TRAIN - DAY - LIVE ACTION

Joe, in uniform and Naval Cross, gazes out the window at the Czech countryside. His eyes flutter, then close.

INT. COFFIN - NIGHT - ANIMATED

Darkness. MURKY VOICES talking. Joe's BREATHING. TOOLS SCRAPE against the coffin. A burst of light. The Golem lies there. Then its eyes SNAP OPEN.

INT. TRAIN - DAY - LATER - LIVE ACTION

Joe starts awake. Sits up. Looks around. The train is slowing. He looks out at the station platform. The sign reads: TEREZIN/THERESIENSTADT. He reaches for his cane.

EXT. TEREZIN STREETS - DAY

Joe wanders through the deserted streets. There's no one and nothing but rubbish, scraps of clothing, empty buildings.

He stops. Staring at a tangled bramble of thorns. Goes to look closer. He reaches into his pocket and takes out his pocket knife. Opens the blade.

Starts cutting at something but we can't see what. Cups it in his hand. Taps it gently. Then slips it with a magician's flourish into his pocket.

As he walks away, the GOLEM steps out from behind a barracks. Drawn in a heavy, stark style we haven't seen before. It stands there. Motionless.

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 flags in the windows to show the Praguers' gratitude to the Soviet liberators. We tilt up to the rooftop. The Golem is there.

Joe's face: what was that?

On the rooftop--there's nothing.

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 - DUSK

Evening coming on. The Golem crouches in the shadow of one of the arches of the bridge.

Joe stands by the rampart, looking down at the river. It's the spot where Thomas pushed Joe into the river. People come and go, tattered people, gray, thin.

RIFLE SHOT. Everyone on the bridge freezes. Another shot PINGS off the stone parapet. Everyone drops to the pavement.

Not Joe. He remains standing. His eyes search the buildings on the opposite shore. In a ruin he sees:

A SNIPER--tattered German uniform--taking aim.

Joe lights a cigarette. RUSSIAN SOLDIERS run up, start to exchange fire with the sniper. They knock Joe down.

RUSSIAN SOLDIER 1
Get down, are you crazy?

The sniper falls from the rooftop to the street, dead.

People get up and start to run away, streaming past Joe. Two SOLDIERS grab hold of him. Go through his pockets. Find his US Navy ID. Joe remains unruffled. Heedless.

RUSSIAN SOLDIER 2
He's an American!

RUSSIAN SOLDIER 1

Bring him.

They drag him away, leaving his cane behind. They pass a ragged man. It's the Beggar, from the secret Golem committee. He tips his hat to Joe. Joe doesn't know him.

INT. JAILHOUSE - LATER

The door CLANGS shut on Joe, alone in the cell. 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 awake. A SQUEAKING. He sits up. Looks up at the glass 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 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. Nothing. He climbs down, goes to the door. Kneels before the lock. Slides in the pick.

EXT. PRAGUE - WALDENSTEIN GARDENS - DAY

The trees are stumps. The benches have been harvested for burnable wood. Don't even look for a pigeon.

Kornblum sits on the embankment of a fountain, by a cement grotto. Older, thinner, feebler, but still elegant in an old-fashioned way. Looking to his left.

Joe approaches from his right. Stands there, watching him. Eyes welling over. After a moment, Kornblum turns. Rises to his feet, leaning on a cane. They take each other in. Then they come together and embrace.

INT. HOFZINSER CLUB - SMOKING ROOM - DAY

Now headquarters of the Jewish Distribution Committee. Crowded with REFUGEES, AID WORKERS, children, playing cards, writing letters, talking. Kornblum sits under his own portrait on the wall. Joe holds the pick. Toying with it.

JOE

In the train I dreamed about the Golem. I keep thinking about it.

KORNBLUM

Our old friend.

JOE

Do you think... do you think they made a mistake, sending it away?

KORNBLUM

A mistake? Why? Because if they hadn't, it might have come to life and magically saved your parents and all of the rest of the Jews of Prague?

Joe blushes. That's just what he meant.

KORNBLUM (CONT'D)

Maybe it was a mistake. But it saved your life.

JOE

Forgive me, sir, but this is not living. I'm a golem, going on dumb momentum. It means nothing. It's just force of habit.

KORNBLUM

That is your great gift. You're an escape artist. My sitting here talking to you is proof of the force of my own habit. Look around you. Look at these people. Every single one of them is an escape artist.

Joe looks around at all the bone-thin, shattered men and women in their loose charity clothes.

KORNBLUM (CONT'D)

Just because you don't know what life means, doesn't mean it means nothing. Conrad said, Swimming until you sink is not the same as drowning yourself.

Tears in Joe's eyes. A long beat. Joe continues to toy with the pick.

KORNBLUM (CONT'D)

Come with me to Palestine. I don't know what's there. Very few pigs, I imagine. But maybe you will be able--

JOE

I don't want to emigrate. I'm tired of escaping. I want to go home.

KORNBLUM

I wish I could help you do that.

JOE
You've already helped me so many times. I
can never begin to repay you.

KORNBLUM
Help somebody else, then!

JOE
I tried.

KORNBLUM
Oh, you tried, eh? And what? Failed?

JOE
Failed, yes.

KORNBLUM
Then I do not consider myself repaid.

Stands, a little wobbly. Joe helps him up.

INT. HOF SINZER CLUB - CORRIDOR - DAY

They walk past the door to a drawing room converted to a
nursery. MONITORS line CHILDREN up for some kind of
inspection. Joe and Kornblum look in, then keep walking.

At the front door of the old club, they stop. Shake hands.

KORNBLUM
The old cemetery is still there, you know.
Where they buried Rabbi Judah the golem
maker. It used to be a nice place to sit
and think about things. Maybe it still, is,
I don't know. Probably not.

EXT. PRAGUE - JEWISH CEMETERY - DAY

Joe walks amid the snaggletoothed headstones. Stops at the
elaborate grave of Rabbi Judah. Sits down on it. Curls up.
Closes his eyes. Sunshine on his face. A BIRD sings.

He opens his eyes. Takes out THE PARCEL OF LETTERS. Slits one
open and starts to read.

ROSA (V.O.)
Dear Joe. My heart is broken. I know you
blame me for what happened. I blame myself.
If you had never met me, everything might
have been different. I can't forgive
myself, so I don't expect you to forgive
me. But it was cruel of you to leave the
way you did. It was cruel to write 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
(MORE)

ROSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 see me again, just come back in one piece.
 Love, Rosa.

He tears 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.

He tears open another letter. Another SNAPSHOT. A baby. Staring back at him. He tugs out the letter and reads 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. I hope this letter finds you. I hope that you will be glad that we have named him Thomas.

Joe lets the letters fall all around him.

INT. HOFZINSER CLUB - CHILDREN'S DORMITORY - DAY

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 SMALL BOY snatches a SUPERMAN comic book and retreats with it to his bunk, a huge broken grin on his face.

Joe's face. Truly alight. He goes over to the boy.

JOE
 And what is that?

SMALL BOY
 It's a story. A story with pictures. They make them that way, in America.

Joe crouches down. Watching the boy's face.

SMALL BOY (CONT'D)
 There are gangsters, and a death ray, and this is Superman, and here he is with glasses on. An American soldier named Private Timothy McNutt, from Nebraska Lincoln gave me this. Along with a beautiful Hershey bar.

The boy fishes a small rucksack out from under his bunk. Tenderly draws out a battered, torn ESCAPIST comic book.

SMALL BOY (CONT'D)
 This story is my favorite.

He hands it to Joe: a sweet gaudy dream, a vision.

SMALL BOY (CONT'D)

It's like a Hershey bar you can read.

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.

Exuberant U.S. troops all around, headed for home. The tide of men 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.

The derrick's 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.

Too late. The crate has been lowered into the hold.

Joe is shoved along the rail, watching the derrick.

INT. TRANSPORT SHIP - STATEROOM - NIGHT

Marx Bros. crowded. At least nine GUYS 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.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Kavalier wanted to believe Kornblum, that life had meaning, even if he didn't understand it.

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.

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

But he was haunted by the Golem, by the idea that somehow if the Golem had stayed in Prague--if he had stayed with his family--things might have turned out better in the end.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JOE KAVALIER'S GOLEM NOVEL"

Night. The Alt-Neu Synagogue in the old Prague Ghetto. TWO BOYS crouch in the shadows nearby.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
In the end he was forced to resort to his
other great gift.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JOE KAVALLIER'S GOLEM NOVEL"

The first boy gestures to the other to come on. The second
boy grabs his friend, warning, pointing.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
He started to tell a story.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JOE KAVALLIER'S GOLEM NOVEL"

They duck down as a Gestapo staff car rolls past them.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JOE KAVALLIER'S GOLEM NOVEL"

At the synagogue door the first boy holds up a lockpick.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JOE KAVALLIER'S GOLEM NOVEL"

Shot, through the lock, of the peering faces of the two boys
as we MORPH INTO:

I/E. ALT-NEU SYNAGOGUE - NIGHT - ANIMATED

The boys creep into the shadowy synagogue. They climb a mad
Caligari staircase. They open the attic door.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
It was the story of two boys who tried to
save their people through a feat of
imagination.

INT. ATTIC - MOMENTS LATER - ANIMATED

In a flashlight beam, a fantastic jumble of pews,
candelabras, old books and Torahs.

At the back, a giant pile of books. The boys move toward it.

INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS - ANIMATED

The boys start to dig into the pile, tossing books aside.
They hit paydirt: the face of the Golem. Asleep, it seems.

The boys exchange a look: it's him.

INT. TRANSPORT SHIP - STATEROOM - LIVE ACTION

A SOLDIER, tall, gawky, sneaks up behind Joe as he draws.
Looks over his shoulder. Joe registers that he's there but
doesn't look up. The other men watch, looking amused.

WALTER NILSSEN (O.S.)
Hey. That's all right.

A SOLDIER
He don't talk, Nilssen.

WALTER NILSSEN
I said, you're pretty good.

JOE
Thanks.

WALTER NILSSEN
You must be a professional.

JOE
Not really.

WALTER NILSSEN
Smoke?

Joe looks up now. Nods. Almost smiles. Holds out his hand.

JOE
Joe Kavalier.

WALTER NILSSEN
Walter Nilssen. Where's home? New York?

JOE
That's what I'm coming to find out.

WALTER NILSSEN
I tell you what, sailor.

Nilssen hands him a business card.

WALTER NILSSEN (CONT'D)
Nilssen Billboard and Sign. My dad. Things
don't work out in New York, come to Duluth.
We'll give you a job.
(off Joe's blank look)
It's in Minnesota.

JOE
Duluth, Minnesota.

WALTER NILSSEN
Swell town. Nice people.

Joe puts the card in his pocket. Goes back to his drawing.
Walter looks at the other men; SOLDIER points to his
forehead: koo-koo.

EXT. TRANSPORT SHIP - DECK - DAY

It sails up the Hudson River, past the spires of downtown.
People line the shores, cheering, waving. The men on deck
cheer, wave. Joe stands, silent, watching the city loom up.

EXT. WEST END AVENUE - APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Joe walks up to the building. 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. We can't see his face.

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!

SAMMY
Start er up.

Tommy turns an imaginary ignition key. Begins to make rumbling sounds. Sammy joins in and they roar off up the block, scattering passersby. Rosa watches them, waving. Glances over her shoulder.

Joe ducks behind a potted juniper tree, panicked.

EXT. FLATBUSH APARTMENT HOUSE - DAY

Joe comes up out of the subway.

Ethel is standing on the front walk. Like she has been standing there since 1941. She just looks at him for a moment. Then slowly she begins to nod her head.

INT. FLATBUSH APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ethel brings in tea and cookies on a tray.

ETHEL
Don't worry, they're storebought.

Joe takes one. Munches it self-conscious while Ethel looks and looks at him. She would like to touch him but she doesn't. After a minute the tears well up.

He hands her a handkerchief. She's disgusted with herself.

ETHEL (CONT'D)
Ach. I'm sorry.

Hands him back the handkerchief.

ETHEL (CONT'D)
You went by them? You saw the baby?

JOE

I went to the building. Sammy was pushing the boy in a small red vehicle.

ETHEL

He's going to kill them both...

JOE

They seemed to be... Rosa touched Sammy... I don't know. It's hard to describe... it was very... like a wife. I was not expecting that.

ETHEL

What were you expecting?

JOE

Well, I was getting some letters, a lot of letters, from Rosa. In the war. Two hundreds and six letters.

ETHEL

Two hundred and six.

JOE

She told me she and Sam were married. And she told me about the child.

ETHEL

His name is Thomas.

JOE

I know. Thomas Edison Clay.

ETHEL

He's a rotten kid, but I like him.

JOE

I am having impression, from the letters of Rosa, that this wedding they made... I always thought Sam...

Ethel raises an eyebrow. Joe coughs, and moves on.

JOE (CONT'D)

...I don't know what I thought. I don't know why I am here. I don't know why I'm in New York. Why I am alive at all. When I was in Prague, I had this idea that if there is no place there for me, maybe there is a place for me here. A reason to be still alive when everybody else they died. Because one thing Rosa never told, not in any of the two hundreds and six letters, was that she loves Sammy.

ETHEL

Listen. Listen to me. Go to them. Go there. See what you see. Maybe it's not what you think.

JOE

What do you mean? Are you saying...?

ETHEL

I don't know. I don't know anything. Those two don't tell me anything.

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. Rosa lies on her side, covertly watching him.

ROSA

What are you working on?

SAMMY

I'm killing the Escapist.

She sits up. Shocked.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

The numbers have been off. Anapol's pulling the plug. I guess people look at heroes a little different than they used to. Anyway, you know as well as me the Escapist died the day Joe Kavalier quit working for Empire Comics.

Rosa can't argue with that. She lies back.

ROSA

How are you going to do it?

SAMMY

He's beat Kommandant X and the Gauntlet and the Saboteur. He's beat Hitler. The Iron Chain is on the ropes. So they tell him they're ready to surrender. But first he's going to pull off one last challenge. The Impossible Escape.

ROSA

What is the Impossible Escape?

SAMMY

That's what he wants to know. But they say he has to find it for himself. And if he pulls it off, that's it. They'll throw in the towel. So he travels the world searching. He goes to the jungles of Mexico...

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JULIE GLOVSKY'S ESCAPIST"

A dense thicket of vines as thick as firehoses. Thorns the size of swords. In the heart of it the Escapist struggles against a sinister salivating flower.

SAMMY (V.O.)
...where they have these giant carnivorous
thornbushes that will lick your bones clean
in a minute and a half.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JULIE GLOVSKY'S ESCAPIST"

The Escapist is trapped in a giant spider web.

SAMMY (V.O.)
...He throws himself into the web of a
giant spider in Borneo...

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JULIE GLOVSKY'S ESCAPIST"

A cutaway of the Escapist curled in a cage at the bottom of a tiny tunnel that cuts straight up through inky black. The tunnel runs to a hatch at the bottom of a lake. Evil fish swim past the hatch.

SAMMY (V.O.)
In China, he has himself imprisoned in the
dungeon of the Khans, a cave at the bottom
of a lake full of venomous fish.

INT. ROSA AND SAMMY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS - LIVE ACTION

She stops him.

ROSA
Venomous fish?

SAMMY (V.O.)
Marty Gold likes to draw fish.

Rosa nods.

ROSA
And so he escapes them all.

SAMMY
Every single one. And he comes home. And
there's an envelope waiting.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JULIE GLOVSKY'S ESCAPIST"

A MAILMAN hands the Escapist a parcel.. Addressed to the Escapist. Return address says THE IRON CHAIN.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JULIE GLOVSKY'S ESCAPIST"

The Escapist takes out an ESCAPIST COMIC BOOK. The cover screams THE IMPOSSIBLE ESCAPE.

SAMMY (V.O.)
 He's a little suspicious, but how dangerous
 can it be? It's only a comic book.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JULIE GLOVSKY'S ESCAPIST"

The Escapist's looking at the last page of the very story
 we've been following: we see the thornbush, the spiderweb,
 the fish, the mailman, the comic book--and the last panel:
 plain square box inside which the Escapist struggles,
 desperate, trapped.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "JULIE GLOVSKY'S ESCAPIST"

A plain square box inside which the Escapist struggles,
 desperate, trapped.

INT. ROSA AND SAMMY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sammy draws four sharp strokes on his legal pad. Turns it
 around. Holds it up. An empty box.

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.

She looks at him. Touches his cheek. Tenderly.

ROSA
 I hate myself, too.

SAMMY
 No, you don't. You just hate your life.
 There's a subtle distinction.

ROSA
 I'm not sure that's really true.

A soft RAPPING. Just barely audible.

ROSA (CONT'D)
 What was that?

SAMMY
 The baby.

Unmistakable KNOCKING. Rosa gets up and pulls 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
That's the baby.

She opens the door. Joe's there, in his uniform. Holding his duffel in one hand and a bunch of flowers in the other.

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, 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 lets go of Rosa with one arm and Sammy steps into it. They all just stand there hugging each other. Joe pulls back

Thick dark hair, dark eyes, fleshy mouth: Thomas Kavalier. It's unmistakable. Eerie.

JOE
Thomas.

Tears come to his eyes, in a flood, but he wipes them away.

ROSA
We call him Tommy.

TOMMY
(to Sam)
Who is that guy?

SAMMY
This is Joe, Tom.

TOMMY
Joe Kavalier.

SAMMY
That's right.

TOMMY
Can he really do magic?

Sam and Rosa turn to Joe. Can he?

JOE
Well, I was used to be able to, but...

He scratches at his chest with one hand, then leans forward, reaching toward the boy. Tommy ducks, a little bit.

JOE (CONT'D)
...sometimes you get rusted, I don't--say!
What's this?

He produces a Sugar Daddy from behind Tommy's ear. Sammy and Rosa exclaim, but Tommy accepts it solemnly.

TOMMY
Thank you.

JOE
You are welcome.

TOMMY
It was in your pocket.

Joe looks stricken: caught. Rosa ruffles Tommy's hair.

ROSA
(chiding)
Tommy!

TOMMY
It was!

JOE
I am rusted badly, I see.

SAMMY
Tough audience.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sam, Rosa and Joe at 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 puts down his cup.

SAMMY
I have to get up in the morning. I'll leave
you two...

ROSA
No! Sit! Talk! Joe hasn't told us anything.
"It was cold." "We didn't bathe." Joe, you
haven't said anything about what happened!

SAMMY
He doesn't want to talk about it.

ROSA
Oh, 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 in Kansas.

SAMMY
Wow. Now I am interested.

He stands. Puts a hand on Joe's shoulder. Joe takes his hand,
gives it a squeeze.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Hey. Listen. I'm glad you're back.

JOE
Thanks, Sam.

SAMMY
'Night.

He goes out. Rosa lights a cigarette. Exhales. Then it comes
over her with a a shudder.

ROSA
Oh, God, you're not dead. You aren't dead.

Joe gets up and goes to her. Crouches down beside her. She
buries her face in his neck. He strokes her hair, and kisses
it, and kisses her hands. Tender. Loving. He looks up.

Sam watches from the hall.

Joe lowers his hands, sits up. Rosa sits up, pulling herself
together. Joe looks again, but Sam is gone.

ROSA (CONT'D)
But if you aren't dead, then how come you
didn't answer any of my letters?

JOE
I'm sorry. No. I am. Thank you for them.
They meant some kind of a lot to me.

ROSA
You mean you got them?

JOE
Two hundreds and six. I read them all.

ROSA
Because you never--well, answered me.

JOE
Rosa...

ROSA
(angry)
I'm not angry.

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. He knows it.

JOE
The other men answered their letters.

ROSA
But not you.

JOE
I--I didn't read them.

ROSA
You didn't--

JOE
Not until last week. I read them all in one only day. And 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 there.

ROSA
Killed people.
(off his silence)
A lot of people?

JOE
Not as many as I had planned.

ROSA
So, you're saying, 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
In the Jewish cemetery in Prague.

ROSA
Wow. That's...

JOE
I'm sorry.

ROSA

No, no. I suppose there might be something kind of touching in that. You liked them?

JOE

I loved them.

(beat)

But there was one thing... you never was talking about in them. And so I was wondering.

ROSA

What? What, Joe?

JOE

The bugs. Your moths. You didn't never say what happened to your hatcheries.

ROSA

Oh, I gave that up.

(a little bitter)

I had my own larva to worry about.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Outside Tommy's bedroom. Rosa opens the door. She and Joe peer in. Tommy in bed, snoring. The "World of Tomorrow" murals and fixtures Joe painted are still there.

JOE

He calls Sammy Daddy?

ROSA

No. We've never said anything to him. But somehow he just never called him anything but Sam.

She closes the door.

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.

It's Tommy. Standing there, in his pajamas. Looking at Joe.

JOE

Hello, Tommy.

TOMMY

Hi.

Joe opens his mouth. Closes it. What can he say?

TOMMY (CONT'D)
There's a dead turtle in that couch
somewhere.

JOE
I appreciate the warning.

TOMMY
It's name was Shelly.

JOE
I get it.

Tommy nods turns and pads back into the dark hall.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Joe asleep on the couch.

A PIANO. It's Tommy, playing a series of arpeggios, building
to a crescendo.

Joe drifts for a moment. The tune chimes in his memory. He
smiles. Opens his eyes. Not where he expected to be. Bolts
up. Dislocated. Cobwebbed by the memory of his dream.

JOE
What's that?

Tommy sits with his back to Joe, on two stacked cushions.

TOMMY
They're called arpeggios. It means play it
like a harp in Italian.

Joe blinks, trying to shake off the dream, the memory.

JOE
You speak Italian.

TOMMY
Crescendo. Piano. Allegro con brio.

Sammy walks in. Holds his arms out to Tommy.

SAMMY
Come on, Toscanini. Mommy says time for me
to comb your hair.

TOMMY
I want that guy to do it.

Sammy lowers his arms. A little hurt. A little amused.

SAMMY
You up for that, Joe?

JOE
No, thank you.
(off Tommy's hard stare)
Or, okay.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Joe is holding the comb over Tommy's wet head.

JOE
Combing the hair. Let's see.

TOMMY
I want it in parts.

JOE
You want it in parts. How many parts?

TOMMY
Two.

JOE
Got it.

He starts to comb the boy's hair, tentative, gingerly. The boy fidgets and ducks the comb.

Rosa, passing the bathroom door, stops. Watches.

JOE (CONT'D)
Hold still.

Tommy stops fidgeting. Joe finishes combing. He kneels down. Puts his face beside the boy's. They look at each other in the mirror. Joe makes a face. The boy turns and throws his arms around Joe's neck. Sudden, abrupt.

Joe stands, freeing himself of the boy's embrace. Starts out of the bathroom. As he goes by Rosa he blushes, humiliated.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - DAY

Bright sunshine. Green grass. Blue Hudson. A row of mothers in Technicolor sweaters, pushing children on a row of Robert Moses swings. Rosa is one of them.

Joe stands off to one side, leaning on a fence, watching. Behind him sits Saks, reading his paper.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - EMBANKMENT - DAY

Joe and Rosa stand at the baluster together, looking down at Saks pushing Tommy around and around on a steel carousel.

JOE
Your father got old.

ROSA
I know.

JOE
You seem the same.

ROSA
Do I?

JOE
Well, no, but...

ROSA
So, you look at me, you see this West End Avenue matron, a wife, a mother, a perfect size 8, and you say, yep, that's the girl that I left behind.

JOE
No, Rosa.

ROSA
Maybe you're right. I am that girl. I'm just exactly what I was supposed to be. Having the life the world wants me to have.

JOE
Your life looks like the pretty nice life to me.

ROSA
You don't need to tell me that.

JOE
You have a nice place to live where there was never any bombs or Nazis, you have a beautiful son who has a father. You have Sam.

ROSA
Sammy is in hell, Joe. Okay? He lives in the pages of Empire Comics and at night he comes home to our bed and dies. He's just marking your place! And if you hadn't come back, if you really were dead, he would have kept on marking it for the rest of his life.

JOE
Maybe it's not my place, either.

ROSA
I guess that's what you need to decide, isn't it?

JOE
I guess so.

ROSA
No, you know what? I'll do you a favor. I'll decide for you. Okay? Go. Leave. Do it now. Don't make me wait anymore. I've been
(MORE)

ROSA (CONT'D)
waiting for you since the day I met you. I waited for you to fall in love with me, for you to answer my letters, I waited for you to come back home alive. I'm tired of it. I won't do it anymore.

She takes the keys from her purse and throws them at him.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Here. Get your things from the apartment and go. Leave the keys with the doorman.

Joe looks at her. Then he bends down and picks up the keys. Maybe he's waiting for her to relent. She doesn't. He turns and walks away. One of the mothers passes with a double-strollers. Stares at Rosa.

ROSA (CONT'D)
What are you looking at?

Rosa turns and almost stumbles over Tommy.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Oh! Tommy! What are you--

TOMMY
Mommy, look what happened to Pop.

ROSA
Oh my God!

Saks lies on the ground beside the spinning carousel.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS - HALLWAY - DAY

Sammy knocks on the door. A torn black ribbon pinned to his lapel. Julie Glovsky answers.

JULIE GLOVSKY
I hope you haven't come to take him away.
He pays for everything.

SAMMY
Hello, Julie.

INT. PALOOKA STUDIOS LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sammy follows Julie. The place is deserted, forlorn. The walls bare, drawing tables piled with boxes and junk.

JULIE GLOVSKY
It's been nice to have some company. It's kind of lonely around here with all the guys in the service, or--you know.

SAMMY
Shame about Marty.

JULIE GLOVSKY
Yeah. The little shkotz was tough. I still
can't quite believe...

SAMMY
Yeah.

They stop at a closed door.

JULIE GLOVSKY
You ask me, your pal's 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 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
I can't believe you came here. It took me a
day to track you down. I, uh, I have some
bad news.

He picks up a page, studies it.

JOE
What is the news?

SAMMY
Siggy Saks died. Heart attack.
(off Joe's look)
She's pretty upset. Anyway, funeral's
tomorrow. I thought you might want to come.

Sam picks up another page. And another. It's the Golem story.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Holy shit, Joe, this is incredible stuff.
What is this?

JOE
Nothing. Just something. I started to
working on it in the boat coming here. And
for some reason I can't seem to stop.

SAMMY
It looks like a comic book, only--

JOE
It is. The greatest one ever.

Sammy turns over pages. Dark, moody stuff, with no balloons.

SAMMY

These two boys. They find the--is that the Golem? It's Prague, right? And they try bring it back to life--to fight the Nazis. Is that right?

JOE

More or less.

SAMMY

So what happens?

JOE

I suppose they must fail.

SAMMY

I suppose they must.

JOE

I know it's too much dark. And too much Jew.

SAMMY

It'll be a tough sell. But it's beautiful stuff, Joe.

JOE

It's not to sell. I'm just trying to tell a story that means something to me. It doesn't have to mean something to somebody else.

He takes the pages from Sam and puts them away, covers them with papers. Then turns back and looks at Sammy. A beat.

SAMMY

Look, Joe. I don't know what happened between you and Rosa the other day. That is, I'm not sure what your plans are. But I just wanted to say--

JOE

I'm leaving tomorrow.

SAMMY

Tomorrow! Why? Where are you going?

JOE

Duluth, Minnesota.

SAMMY

What? Duluth!

JOE

Swell town. Nice people.

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. I wouldn't.

RABBI

It's a mitzvah.

JOE

I'm sure it is.

Rosa comes over as the Rabbi walks away, shaking his head.

SAMMY

Rosa. I'm so sorry.

She nods. 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

It was mutual.

Tommy comes over. Looks up.

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, and speaks up, too loud.

TOMMY
Is Pop really in there?

Joe shushes him, but gently. Thinks about the right answer. Then nods.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
His body?

Joe shushes him again.

INT. ROSA AND SAMMY'S APARTMENT - LATER

The dining table laid out with mountains of 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. Recoils from the press of people.

INT. SAKS'S BEDROOM - LATER

Joe sits on the neatly made bed under the photo of the Miriam that once hung in Hoffman's office. With his duffel beside him. Smoking. And staring at:

The ruins of Rosa's hatchery: empty cages. He stands up and goes to look through the wreckage.

The muffled PARTY gets louder as the door opens. Joe jumps.

ROSA
Joe?

She closes the door.

ROSA (CONT'D)
What's going on?

JOE
Oh! I-- Sorry. I was just feeling-- I don't
know what the word is.

She sits down beside him. Still that foot of air.

ROSA

It's called mourning. You never got to have a funeral. To sit shiva for them. To say Kaddish.

JOE

Rosa, it's like they didn't even die. They just... disappeared. Magic.

ROSA

Do you know how to say 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. The touch is familiar, welcome. He closes his eyes.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Yisgadal v'yiskadash sh'may raboh. B'olma divrah chirusay...

After a moment Joe joins in,

JOE

Tuskegee ballista ishkabbible hotsy-totsy whoopdeedoo...

Rosa stops. Joe smiles--only kidding--but the smile fades.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. It's too much. But not 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. One last try. He turns to her and it looks like they might be about to kiss. But instead she reaches into her pocket. Takes out her little nail scissors.

He takes her hand as if to push it away. She stares at him, her eyes filled with pleading. Urging him to accept this from her.

ROSA

You have to show your grief, Joe. The world is broken, Joe. It's torn. Don't pretend that it's not.

He takes his hand away. She holds out the scissors and 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.

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, familiar-looking lock.

SAMMY

A double Brahmah. 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?

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.

Rosa throws the lid open. Peeks. 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.

He looks up at Rosa, who looks puzzled for a moment. Then gets it. Sammy gets it, too.

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. They wanted to
hurt the Jews of Prague. The Jews 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 mushed up now?

JOE
I don't know. Maybe because it missed the
river where it was born. It's far from
home. It had a long journey.

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. Takes it away. Something's lying there.

It's a cocoon, knobby and tough.

INT. SAKS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rosa is clearing the junk out of her old emergence cage.

JOE
 I found it in Terezin. In some bushes.

ROSA
 It's beautiful. Might be a pavonia.

JOE
 Is it still... is there anybody home?

Carefully, with tweezers, Rosa lowers the cocoon onto a
 branch inside the cage.

ROSA
 I guess we'll have to find out.

She stands up, he pulls her to him. They kiss.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sammy carries a suitcase out of the bedroom. He stops outside Saks'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, get a lousy job writing copy, and sleep with men. Until then I will be living at my mother's.

ROSA
God. Sam...

They embrace, then part. They look at each other, husband and wife.

ROSA (CONT'D)
Come to dinner tomorrow night. Come to dinner every night. Forever. Promise.

SAMMY
I promise.

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.

(beat)

Listen. I might never be able to make sense out of what happened to me, Sam. Everything I lost. That I won't never get back. But if I can make sense, there is only one way. And it's because of you that I know how to do it.

SAMMY

You mean comics? That Golem story?

JOE

You really thought it was good?

SAMMY

I thought it was very exciting.

JOE

I'm glad. But it's missing something.

SAMMY

What's that?

JOE

The words. I can't tell a story without you, Sam.

SAMMY

Words and pictures.

JOE

Let us do it, Sam. Our own books. Dark. Serious. For grown ups. Let's publish them ourselves. I know it will work.

SAMMY

Get out of here! You know what it would cost to start up? Easily a hundred grand. Even if I had that kind of money--

JOE

I do. I have it. More.

Sam looks at him, astonished.

JOE (CONT'D)

I saved money. A lot of money. It has been compounding interest all this time.

Long beat. Sammy reaches into his pocket. Takes out his key ring. Tosses it to Joe. Joe catches the keys.

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.

Joe grins.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

Kavalier & Clay put out a lot of pages over the next twenty-five years.

SAMMY

See you in the funny papers.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

But they never did publish the Golem book, about the two boys who tried to save the world with their imaginations.

He walks off, into the celebration on the streets. Fireworks explode over midtown.

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

They had offers. But they always turned them down. They said that story was personal.

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.

INT. HIPPODROME THEATER - LONDON, 1904 - DAY

The cabinet is still. The crowd hushed, the orchestra wearily sawing away.

INT. 'CABINET OF MYSTERY'

Houdini sits in the dark, a wreck. Staring in desolation at the intact cuffs.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

After an hour, it was over. Houdini had failed.

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 have 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 - DAY

Bess, holding the glass, pleads with the Reporter.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)

But in the end, she did it.

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. Hands it to Houdini. He tips it back and swallows greedily.

CARTOONIST (V.O.)
Some people say the key was in the glass.

As he passes the empty glass back to her, Bess goes up on tiptoe and kisses her husband 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 Bernard 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.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "HIPPODROME"

A freshly inked panel. The cracked lock lies on the boards of the theater.

INSERT COMICS PANEL - "HIPPODROME"

Beside it lies the key, gleaming. Above this, in pencil, the words THE END.

INT. CARTOONIST'S STUDIO - DAY

THE CARTOONIST'S HAND applies a steady brush to the letters.

He sets down this page, and reaches for another. A splash page showing Joe and Sam, with Rosa between them. The Golem, Thomas, Ethel, Saks, Anapol, Bacon, and the others are standing around them. The poses echo those of the characters

from the mural in the Empire office. Across the top, 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.

FADE TO BLACK.

And then a great moth, blazing green, sails across the black screen, and out into the greater darkness of the world.

THE END