

**THE
AVIATOR**

WRITTEN BY JOHN LOGAN

"There is no great genius without some touch of madness."

- Seneca

THE AVIATOR by John Logan

EXT. SWAMP -- OUTSIDE HOUSTON DAY

We are slowly moving through a fetid swamp. Noxious vapors float above the foul, stagnant water. A dead rat floats by.

We become aware of a distant buzz ... An airplane engine? ... No, a swarm of mosquitoes. We push through the buzzing, writhing cloud of mosquitoes...

INT. VICTORIAN ROOM NIGHT

Out of darkness, hands...

Elegant hands, a woman's hands, a shimmering diamond ring catching the flickering gaslight. The hands dip into a large bowl of water. Wet now, the hands rise to meet naked flesh.

The **WOMAN** speaks, a too-genteel Southern lilt to her voice.

WOMAN

Q ... U ... A ... R ...

Her hands stroke the naked flesh before her, caressing and cleaning in equal measure. Her hands sensually move along arms, torso, legs...

WOMAN (CONT'D)

... A ... N ... T ...

The woman is kneeling before a standing **BOY**. He is naked. Nine years old. She is bathing him in the midst of an airless, ornate and darkly-panelled room. Oppressive silhouettes of late Victorian splendor in the shadows.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

... I ... N ... E.

The naked boy stands before her, used to the ritual.

BOY'S VOICE

Quarantine. Q ... U ... A ... R ...

The woman continues to bathe him, slowly stroking along his skin with her wet hands, the water trickling down his body. Unnaturally sensuous.

BOY'S VOICE (CONT'D)

... A ... N ... T ...

She continues to bathe him, studying every inch of his skin with her expressive hands, every pore. Her hands are microscopes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOY'S VOICE (CONT'D)

... I ... N ... E. Quarantine.

WOMAN

You know the cholera? You've seen the signs on the houses where the coloreds live?

BOY'S VOICE

Yes, mother.

WOMAN

You know the typhus?

BOY'S VOICE

Yes, mother.

WOMAN

You know what they can do to you?

BOY'S VOICE

Yes, mother.

WOMAN

You are not safe.

She continues to bathe him as we finally find his face in the darkness...

His expression is neutral. Calm.

He is Howard Robard Hughes, Jr.

HOWARD (V.O.)

Don't tell me I can't do it...!

Taking us to...

EXT. AIR FIELD DAY

HOWARD HUGHES, a vital and energetic 21, is striding past the propeller of a vintage World War I biplane. And then another. And another.

HOWARD

... Don't tell me it can't be done!

Title: HOLLYWOOD. 1927.

He is walking with his STUNT COORDINATOR and DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STUNT COORDINATOR

The gyro forces are too much. You send the planes into simultaneous barrel-rolls and--

HOWARD

It's the damn climax of the picture, Frank. You make it work! Decrease the vertical trajectory if you have to. A LeRhone rotary won't stall at 60 degrees. I've done it.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Howard, we're still short two cameras. We need to cut the sequence down to accommodate--

HOWARD

We're not cutting anything. I'll get the cameras. Set up for rehearsal in five.

The STUNT COORDINATOR and DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY veer off to a team of waiting filmmakers as Howard continues striding past the endless row of airplanes.

NOAH DIETRICH, 30's, catches up with Howard. Noah is a gruff-talking former real estate salesman and prize fighter. Currently a corporate accountant in desperate need of a corporation.

Howard's size strikes Noah first. Six foot three. Rail-thin. And then the looks. Dazzling. Movie star dazzling.

NOAH

Mr. Hughes, I'm Noah Dietrich, your office said--

HOWARD

Walk with me, Mr. Dietrich...

The voice. A bit louder than Noah expected. Flat, a slight Texan twang.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You're a man on the come. Read your resume and talked to your references. You know what I'm looking for?

NOAH

As I understand it you're looking for a second-in-command at Hughes Tool -- someone to help oversee the financial aspects of the business--

HOWARD

I'm looking for someone to run it and do a damn good job. There's really only one thing you gotta know: my folks are gone now so it's my money.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Now what I do with that money may seem crazy to those sonsofbitches in Houston -- I'm sure it does -- but it all makes good sense to me. You got that?

NOAH

Got it.

HOWARD

You made 5,200 dollars a year on your last job. I'll pay you 10,000.

NOAH

I guess I'll be working twice as hard.

HOWARD

You'll be working four times as hard. I just got you at half price. Welcome aboard, Mr. Dietrich.

Still walking, Howard shakes his hand. Noah can't believe it.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You're my voice, make 'em understand that. Some of those fine folks down there still call me "Junior." You tell them it's "Mr. Hughes" now.

NOAH

You bet ... So when do we go to Houston?

HOWARD

We're not. Cholera epidemic of 1913 -- two thousand dead. Whole place is nothing but pestilential swamp. Typhus, malaria, cholera, yellow fever, you name it, they got it.

Howard has passed the last airplane. He stops, turns. He takes it in. Smiles.

And we finally see it all.

A vast sea of airplanes. His airplanes. It is staggering.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You see that, Mr. Dietrich? You're looking at the largest private air force in the world ... What do you think of that now?

A beat as Noah takes in the world of airplanes.

NOAH

It's your money.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Howard laughs and strides off toward the waiting film crew, waving his hand in a circle above his head.

HOWARD
START 'EM UP!

And the airplanes roar to life as the propeller men send the props spinning.

Title: **HELL'S ANGELS. YEAR ONE.**

INT. AMBASSADOR HOTEL--COCOANUT GROVE NIGHTCLUB NIGHT

Howard enters the swirling heart of 1920's Hollywood nightlife. He is a scarecrow in a brown suit amidst a sea of tuxedos and silk.

A saucy vocalist croons the latest Gershwin Brothers' hit, "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise," as Howard makes his way through the throngs, looking for someone.

VOCALIST
"I'll build a stairway to Paradise, With a new step every day..."

Howard spots MGM titan **LOUIS B. MAYER** standing at the bar with a few of his **CRONIES**. Howard goes to him:

HOWARD
Hello, Mr. Mayer, I don't know if you remember me, my name's Howard Hughes and I wanted to talk to you--

MAYER
The airplane picture.

Howard very subtly turns his right ear toward Mayer so he can hear better, our first clue of Howard's hearing impairment:

HOWARD
HELL'S ANGELS, right. Listen, I'm in a helluva bind and need your help. I want to rent some cameras.

Meanwhile, a man watches them closely from a table. He is **JOHNNY MEYER**, a jovial, fast-talking Hollywood press agent, fixer and pimp.

MAYER
(amused)
All that oil money not enough to buy a few cameras?

HOWARD
Drill bits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAYER

Sorry?

HOWARD

My company makes drill bits. I already bought every camera I could but we're shooting our big dogfight scene this weekend and I need two more. You think MGM could help me out?

MAYER

MGM isn't usually in the practice of helping out the competition.

CRONY

How many cameras you have now?

HOWARD

Twenty four.

Mayer's cronies laugh.

MAYER

Jesus Christ! Look, Sonny--

HOWARD

Howard.

MAYER

Howard. Whoever you are. Here's my advice: you take your oil money and--

HOWARD

Drill ... bits.

MAYER

You put it in the bank.

HOWARD

Sir, I need--

MAYER

Because if you continue making this picture you know what you'll have? A movie no one will distribute and no one wants to see and no more oil money. Welcome to Hollywood.

He smiles.

HOWARD

(terse)

I'll be sure to remember that, Mr. Mayer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Mayer turns back to his cronies, satisfied. Howard spots Johnny Meyer and goes to him:

JOHNNY

Hiya, boss.

HOWARD

(shaking hands)

Johnny.

A beautiful WAITRESS glides up as Johnny lights a cigarette.

JOHNNY

Whiskey and soda but not too much soda. Hell, nix the soda.

HOWARD

Milk, please. In a bottle with the cap still on.

She glides off.

JOHNNY

Okay, Howard, what'd he say?

HOWARD

Sonofabitch won't part with a single goddamn camera.

JOHNNY

So make do with what you have.

HOWARD

What I have isn't enough, not for how I see it...

As Howard speaks he quietly reaches across the table and takes Johnny's cigarette, stubs it out in the ashtray. He is not even aware he is doing it. Johnny is too smart to protest.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

... My name depends on this picture. If it doesn't work, I'm back to Houston with my tail between my legs, making goddamn drill bits for the rest of my life.

JOHNNY

Couldn't you find a way to do it with the cameras you have? Just be creative.

As Howard speaks he takes a napkin and carefully cleans the table in front of the ashtray:

HOWARD

Johnny, you're a press agent, you're supposed to know all the little in's and out's of Hollywood. Do you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHNNY

Absolutely.

HOWARD

Good. Leave the big ideas to me.

He casually drops the now-soiled napkin on the floor as a beautiful CIGARETTE GIRL comes to the table, she leans forward, offering her wares:

CIGARETTE GIRL

Cigar, Cigarette, Sen-Sen?

Howard is instantly focused on her, the rest of the world does not exist.

HOWARD

I don't smoke -- but you could help me with something else.

CIGARETTE GIRL

Yeah?

HOWARD

You could show me what gives a beautiful woman like you pleasure.

Johnny almost chokes. The Cigarette Girl looks at Howard.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Say you're just standing there and I touch you ... Just with my fingertips ... Would you like that? ... I want to learn what pleases you. I want to learn everything about you ... Will you let me do that?

She looks at him.

CIGARETTE GIRL

I'm off in half an hour.

HOWARD

I'm in room 217.

She goes. Howard stands:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

(standing)

Johnny, get on the horn to Universal and Warners. I need two more cameras by Saturday. Rent 'em if you can. Steal 'em if you have to.

He goes. Johnny watches him cut through the crowd, dumbstruck.

INT. AIR FIELD -- COMMAND TENT NIGHT

A makeshift screening room.

Howard sits, slumped in a chair, watching dailies from HELL'S ANGELS. A handful of pilots and filmmakers sit around the tent as well.

They are watching some footage from the climactic dogfight sequence, planes soaring through the air. But the footage is curiously impotent, lacking excitement.

Howard watches the planes zooming about on the screen, sinking deeper into his chair.

HOWARD

Goddamn! ... Why the hell does it look so slow? This isn't what it was like up there ... They look like a bunch of goddamn models!

Howard stands and walks to the screen, a growing realization.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ...

STUNT COORDINATOR

Howard?

Howard stands at the screen. The flickering images of the planes wash over him as he explains:

HOWARD

Without something standing still behind the planes we got no idea how fast we're moving. We got no idea of relative motion! ... (he spins to an aide) ... Call over to UCLA. Get me the best meteorologist they got. Get him here in an hour.

He strides out of the Command Tent.

EXT.

AIR FIELD

NIGHT

Howard lopes, discontent, away from the Command Tent toward an illuminated area of the field.

Howard's personal plane -- a nifty Boeing Scout biplane -- is the center of a hive of activity. A team of his engineers are working on the plane.

GLENN ODEKIRK sees Howard approaching and goes to him. Glenn is a brilliant engineer with an innovative imagination. He is one of the few people Howard sees as a friend, not as an employee.

GLENN

Hey, you want the good news or the bad news?

HOWARD

Bad news, always.

They move to the plane, considering the engine in particular:

GLENN

We installed the 450 radial -- but the struts won't take the vibration. Minute we go contact the struts start cracking along the bias.

HOWARD

What's the good news?

GLENN

There isn't any.

HOWARD

Dammit, Odie, if the 450's too big figure something else out!

Howard circles the plane like a predator, Glenn following:

GLENN

We've done everything -- we've re-built her from top to toe. If we drain the fuel tank for a couple of runs she might make 180 mph.

HOWARD

I want minimum 200.

GLENN

Yeah, well I want a date with Theda Bara but that ain't gonna happen either.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

Don't be so sure ... Okay, okay, okay -- This is a simple engineering problem. We just gotta think it out...

Howard carefully examines the plane, taking special note of the struts connecting the upper and lower wings. As:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Machines are logical, Odie. They're science. That's the beauty of it. No emotion, no uncertainty, just science. We build it right and it flies fast, simple as that...

He completes his inspection and stands back, looking at the plane.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

So if the struts won't sustain the engine we need -- then we gotta get rid of the struts.

GLENN

Then the top wing falls off.

Howard considers the plane. His mind racing.

HOWARD

Then let it.

GLENN

What?

HOWARD

Who says we need a top wing?

Glenn looks at him. Curious.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Who says we need anything?

Glenn approaches, savoring the idea in his mind, excited by Howard's bold vision.

GLENN

A monoplane...

HOWARD

A cantilevered monoplane. They're doing it in France. To hell with the top wing and the struts--

GLENN

550 Whitney Wasp engine--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

100 octane fuel will give us a top horsepower of --
what?

GLENN

700.

HOWARD

Squeeze it to a thousand and we got the fastest plane
ever built.

They look at each other. Smiling.

Out of such moments are magnificent creatures born.

GLENN

You know, I just gotta say ... we've already spent over
200,000 dollars rebuilding this plane.

HOWARD

To hell with it ... (he smiles) ... Tear it up, Odie.

He strides off into the darkness.

Glenn watches him go.

Then he picks up a sledgehammer. His engineers watch, horrified.

Glenn swings the sledgehammer -- CRASH -- and annihilates the
struts on one side of the plane. The top wing immediately snaps
in two and falls.

INT. COMMAND TENT -- AIRFIELD NIGHT

A bookish and bespectacled man sits nervously. His hair shows
all the rumpled signs of a man roused from sleep.

He is **PROFESSOR FITZ**, a meteorologist. Howard is with him.

PROFESSOR FITZ

Well ... the, um, cumulonimbus formations you speak of
that look like...

HOWARD

Giant breasts full of milk. I want clouds, dammit.

PROFESSOR FITZ

Yes, clouds that look like, um, giant breasts full of
milk, cannot exactly be guaranteed for any particular
location. You might have to ... um ... wait.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

Then we'll wait ... (he stands, preparing to go) ...
Whatever they pay you at UCLA, I'm doubling it. You work
for me now. Find some clouds.

He begins to go. Immediately stops and returns. Repeating the
exact same words and gestures:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You work for me now. Find some clouds.

He strides out of the tent, completely unaware of the peculiar
repetition.

We hear his voice from outside the tent:

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

Find some clouds!

A pilot lounging in the command tent turns to Fitz.

PILOT

Welcome to HELL'S ANGELS.

EXT. AIR FIELD -- FRONT GATE DAY

Noah drives up to the Air Field. A sign hangs on the front gate:
"WAR POSTPONED. NO CLOUDS."

He glances at the sign and drives onto the air field.

EXT. AIR FIELD DAY

Howard is slowly moving around an early prototype of what will
become his astounding H-1 Racer plane. He feels along the
aerodynamic sides and engine cowling. His sensitive fingertips
take in every inch of the plane like a lover.

Glenn Odekirk is working with his team of engineers and
mechanics.

Everywhere else around the air field, idleness. The planes wait.
The pilots and mechanics play cards.

The sky is cloudless.

Title: **HELL'S ANGELS. YEAR TWO.**

Professor Fitz is following Howard as he moves around the plane.
Poor Professor Fitz is going mad. His hair flies out wildly in
all directions. It is, needless to say, the only thing flying.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GLENN

Wind resistance on the rivets?

HOWARD

I want her slippery.

Howard rises and stalks away, Noah following.

NOAH

Howard, there are serious tax consequences to incorporating in California--

HOWARD

Just take care of it, would ya?

Professor Fitz comes running up to Howard, bursting, waving weather charts.

PROFESSOR FITZ

Oakland! Clouds in Oakland!

HOWARD

You mean it this time?

PROFESSOR FITZ

YES! GODDAMN IT, YES! I PROMISE YOU CLOUDS IN OAKLAND!

Howard looks at him, amused.

HOWARD

No need to get all jittery now.

Howard turns to the aviators:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

OAKLAND! WE'RE GOING TO OAKLAND!

The air field springs to life, pilots running flat out for their planes.

Noah watches it all. Madness.

EXT. OAKLAND AIRFIELD DAY

Clouds, glorious clouds. Cumulonimbus clouds like giant breasts bursting with milk.

Imagine, if you can, forty planes filling the same air space. Stick your head in a hornet's nest and you might have some idea.

This is the climactic battle of HELL'S ANGELS in the making.

(CONTINUED)

PROFESSOR FITZ

(cracking up)

They move, Mr. Hughes! Clouds move! That's what they do!
They moooove!

HOWARD

It's costing me 5,271 dollars a day keeping these planes
on the ground. You find me some goddamn clouds!

Professor Fitz scurries off as Noah drives up. Noah climbs out
of his car and goes to Howard. Howard continues to carefully
feel along the plane.

NOAH

Nice day.

HOWARD

Very funny.

NOAH

I got a call from Houston. They're getting real nervous
about all this.

HOWARD

Then stop showing them the damn bills.

NOAH

That's illegal, Howard.

HOWARD

Shit no, maybe it's a little naughty.

NOAH

Hughes Tool is incorporated in Texas, they have to see
the bills.

Howard dips under the new cowling over the engine, feeling the
rivets connecting it to the plane:

HOWARD

Then incorporate a new division out here. Call it Hughes
Aircraft ... (to Glenn) ... Odie, do we need these
rivets on the cowling?

GLENN

Yeah, or the reverse thrust would rip it off.

HOWARD

They're gonna give me drag. Do something about that,
okay?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

... We've been to Chatsworth, Santa Cruz, Encino, San Diego, Riverside, Van Nuys and Bakersfield. It's been eight months! Where are the goddamn clouds?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The planes twist and spin, arcing through the clouds. The clouds giving a scale to the action. The planes zoom back and forth recklessly, shooting into view and disappearing again, exponentially increasing until the sky is an impossible jumble of planes. Forty engines roar as forty pilots try to avoid collision.

It is mayhem. It is poetry.

And in the midst of it all...

INT./EXT. CAMERA PLANE FOLLOWING

... is Howard.

He is in the camera plane, directing the action. He squawks into a handheld microphone -- radio control to the air field and to the other planes -- and flings instructions, pointing madly in various directions. All words are lost in the howl of the many engines. A cameraman cranks beside him.

Two planes zoom past -- almost clipping the camera plane -- Howard doesn't care.

We are inside the hornet's nest now. A beautiful order emerging from the chaos as the planes dogfight.

Our spirits soar with Howard. It is totally exhilarating.

INT. HOLLYWOOD NIGHTCLUB NIGHT

A great ice sculpture of a biplane and the words "HELL'S ANGELS" looms over a banquet table.

The HELL'S ANGELS wrap party. Johnny Meyer is gossiping with a starlet. Glenn Odekirk is drinking with his engineers. Professor Fitz and aviators and actors and filmmakers celebrate the long-awaited completion of the movie.

Howard stands a bit away from the festivities, watching, thinking. Noah stands talking to him.

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- Noah talking -- his lips jabbering out muffled words--

It is extremely startling. Noah's voice is strangely dim, echoing through a tunnel of insistent, droning white noise. We realize the depth of Howard's deafness.

Finally, Howard subtly turns his good right ear to Noah and forces himself to concentrate:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He watches the screen. Dogfighting footage. He picks up a phone to the projection booth:

HOWARD (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

Run reel ten. I think we're duplicating a shot ... And tell Jimmy I'd like ten chocolate chip cookies. Medium chips, none too close to the outside. Thanks... (hangs up, continues to Noah) ... Hate chocolate on my hands. Do you remember this shot from reel ten?

NOAH

No, I don't remember anything from reel ten. I don't know what reel ten is. I'm a businessman, Howard. So are you...

He sits. He speaks very seriously. Very gently.

NOAH (CONT'D)

This has been a great ride and we've had a hell of a lot of fun ... But you're losing 25,000 dollars a day doing this. Every day.

HOWARD

What are my options?

NOAH

I don't know that you have any. I'm afraid you gotta close it down and dig your way out ... I'm sorry, Howard. I truly am.

A long beat as Howard's movie flickers. He watches it, his dream.

Then the flickering stops. The dream gone. Darkness. The only sound is Howard's steady breathing.

PROJECTIONIST (V.O.)

Reel ten, Mr. Hughes.

Another reel starts up. Flickering light. More dogfighting action.

HOWARD

Mortgage Toolco. Every asset.

Noah looks at him. Prays he hasn't heard correctly.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You heard me.

NOAH

If you do that you could lose everything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HOWARD

I won't.

A beat.

NOAH

All right. I'll get into it.

HOWARD

Thanks.

Noah rises, leaves the room with the gait of a sleepwalker.

Howard sits, watching the movie. Then he feels something on the arms of his chair. Grease? Dirt? Dust? Imaginary? Real?

He looks at the arm of his chair:

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- the texture of the fabric of the arm of the chair.

He slowly raises his hands and holds them up like a surgeon after scrubbing. A disquieting image.

Then we hear the sound of a roaring crowd, taking us to...

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD EVENING

...The crowd roar is deafening. It is the biggest night in Hollywood. Ever.

The opening of HELL'S ANGELS.

An endless series of limousines slowly crawl up to the overwrought splendor of Grauman's Chinese, dispensing the elite to a blood red carpet. Masses of people fill the sidewalks. Savage klieg lights stab to the heavens.

We take in the barely controlled hysteria as we hear a RADIO ANNOUNCER:

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

... More than half a million good souls lining the curb of Hollywood Boulevard. Everyone is here tonight for the unveiling of HELL'S ANGELS, Howard Hughes' four million dollar epic. You heard me right, ladies and gentlemen, four million smackeros...

We sweep down to find the Radio Announcer coiled like a cobra behind a standing microphone on the red carpet at Grauman's, narrating the action.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

We can see Johnny Meyer on the red carpet as well, directing traffic patterns into the theater and glad-handing.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

... It is ... The Most Expensive Movie Ever Made!
Nothing five-and-dime for our Mr. Hughes ... (he sees Johnny Meyer waving to him) ... And now, ladies and gentlemen, I think -- Yes, yes -- I can just see Mr. Hughes' car arriving now...

Howard's limo pulls up, he emerges with **JEAN HARLOW**, the beautiful movie starlet.

He is utterly unprepared for the enormity of the response--

Blinding camera flashes -- the flashbulbs instantly ejected and replaced -- the shouted questions from reporters -- the harsh phosphorous glare of the klieg lights -- the great mob surging forward like a river dangerously close to cresting its banks.

The fans not only cheer and shout now, they scream.

A few desperate hands clutch forward through the throngs, past the rows of security guards, trying to touch, to feel, to be.

Howard sees the grasping hands, disquieting.

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- the grasping hands, the dirty nails -- the filth -- the screaming, gaping mouths of the fans--

Jean Harlow plays to the cameras with efficient grace.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

... Mr. Hughes escorts the lovely starlet Jean Harlow tonight. He discovered her for this picture and we think her platinum blonde locks and Hot-Jazz-Babydoll style are gonna make her a big star .. (he beckons to them)
... Mr. Hughes! How 'bout a word?

Howard escorts Jean toward the Radio Announcer. He is shocked to find that they are treading over a sea of ejected flashbulbs. The flashbulbs crunch under their feet as they move down the red carpet.

They arrive at the Radio Announcer:

RADIO ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Big night for you, Mr. Hughes!

Howard can't hear over the screaming crowd.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RADIO ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

(a little louder)

Big night for you tonight!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

Very big.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Tell us what it was like making this fabulous picture.

Howard either didn't hear or chooses not to respond.

HOWARD

Yes.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Yeah, um -- So, four million clams from your own pocket, nervous how the flick will fly?

HOWARD

Big night ... Enjoy the show.

He leads Jean toward the theater:

JEAN

Take it easy, cutie, the picture's gonna do great.

HOWARD

I'll tell you, if it doesn't, I'm gonna fly my plane out over the ocean and take a nose dive, straight down.

She laughs. He doesn't.

They go into the auditorium.

INT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE NIGHT

Needless to say, the unwashed masses aren't inside. The huge auditorium is crowded with tuxedos and gowns.

HELL'S ANGELS plays on the massive screen. The crowd loves it, oohing and aahing the aerial pyrotechnics on the screen.

Howard sits, nervous, with Jean.

HELL'S ANGELS ends. Howard slowly exhales.

The applause begins ... builds ... a cascading wave of applause. The audience stands. They face Howard. Applauding.

Howard sees Noah standing, applauding with a look of unbelievable relief. Howard smiles.

JEAN

Stand up, Slim, take a bow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Howard finally stands and waves a bit shyly. The crowd cheers for him. He smiles.

INT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE LATER

Howard strides with Jean through the lobby, toward the doors out. A few AIDES are following, scribbling in pads.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

... And reel four played way too long. Too many coughs. Get Harry and the team out of the party and get them over to the office -- I want to cut a few shots tonight -- And find Glenn Odekirk. Somebody write this down: flush rivets. You got that? Flush rivets.

AIDE

(scribbling in a pad)

"Flush rivets."

Howard sweeps through the doors and out of the lobby to--

EXT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE NIGHT

Howard strides from the theater and is met with half a million screams. Half a million cheers. The flashbulbs assault. The klieg lights swing in.

He stands, looks around at the sea of faces. The women. The promise. He smiles.

The thin young man from Houston, all of 24 years old, has arrived.

EXT. BEACH DAY

A movie crew is on a lunch break.

Then a whine from above ... growing into a roar from beyond the clouds...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A large Sikorsky Amphibian seaplane sweeps through the clouds. It is a dramatic if rather ungainly beast, all wing and convex hull. The Sikorsky makes a perfect landing on the beach. Thundering to a rolling stop.

The movie people watch, speechless, as Howard climbs from the Sikorsky like Apollo from his chariot. He strides across the beach.

He approaches a tall, lean WOMAN lounging on a deck chair under an umbrella, her long legs stretched out. She wears pants.

He stops before her.

HOWARD

I read in the magazines that you play golf.

The woman looks up at him.

WOMAN

On occasion.

HOWARD

How about nine holes?

A beat as she considers him.

WOMAN

Now, Mr. Hughes?

HOWARD

If it would be convenient, Miss Hepburn.

And KATHARINE HEPBURN smiles.

EXT. GOLF COURSE DAY

The golf ball sails straight down the fairway. It doesn't slice. It doesn't hook. It wouldn't dare. It's perfect.

Kate Hepburn insists on perfection.

There is a crisp, lean strength to Kate. She holds herself back. She controls. She is also exceedingly verbal, words pouring out of her in stream-of-consciousness flashes. She is maddening. She is magnificent.

Howard watches her ball sail over the fairway and land. Perfectly.

He lines up his shot. Swings. Very nice. But not perfect.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE

You're not extending enough on your follow through...

She speaks very quickly. And as if her perfect teeth are perpetually clenched together. Perhaps they open a few millimeters to allow her to eat.

She briskly takes off after her ball. He follows.

KATE (CONT'D)

Follow through is everything in golf. Just like life, don't you find? -- (she laughs for a millisecond) -- Saw your SCARFACE picture. Violent.

HOWARD

Realistic.

KATE

Movies are movies, Howard, not life. Now the stage is real. Real flesh-and-blood human beings right there in front of you, buster. Can't look away. Can't munch popcorn. That would be rude. You like the theater?

HOWARD

No.

KATE

I adore the theater. Only alive on stage. I'll teach you. We'll see some Ibsen. If the Republicans haven't outlawed him by now. You're not a Republican, are you? Couldn't abide that. How did you vote in '32?

HOWARD

I didn't.

KATE

You must. It's your Sacred Franchise!

She arrives at her ball. Lines up. Another perfect shot. Her ball bounces to the green.

He lines up. Another good shot that also bounces to the green.

She strides along. He follows.

KATE (CONT'D)

Heard you were wooing Ginger Rogers. What about that?

HOWARD

She's a friend.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE

Men can't be friends with women, Howard. They must possess them or leave them be. It's a primitive urge from the cave man days. It's all in Darwin. Hunt the flesh, kill the flesh, eat the flesh. That's the male sex all over.

HOWARD

(can't hear)

Excuse me?

KATE

Well, if you're deaf you must own up to it. Get a hearing aid. Or see my father. He's a urologist but it's all tied up inside the body, don't you find? I keep healthy. I take seven showers a day to keep clean. Also because I am what is so vulgarly referred to as "outdoorsy."

They move to the green.

KATE (CONT'D)

I'm not "outdoorsy." I'm athletic. I sweat. There it is. Now we both know the sordid truth. I sweat and you're deaf, aren't we a fine pair of misfits?

She lines up and putts. Perfectly. The ball rolls into the hole.

KATE (CONT'D)

Three.

Howard lines up. Putts. Misses the hole by an inch.

KATE (CONT'D)

(delighted)

Noble effort.

He taps the putt in.

KATE (CONT'D)

So I suppose you're wooing me now. Ah well.

She strides off to the next hole.

INT. H-1 AIRPLANE HANGER DAY

Howard's hand ... his fingertips ... slowly moving across a plain of shining metal.

He's reflected in the aluminum skin of the H-1, his amazing new racer place.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He runs his hand along the entire fuselage of the almost complete plane. Glenn and his team of engineers and mechanics wait nervously, watching Howard's hand.

Howard continues to move along the fuselage, his fingertips feeling the plane. Sensual. Then his fingertips undulate over a line of rivets on the fuselage. He doesn't like that.

JACK FRYE follows Howard as he inspects the plane.

Jack, 30's, is a landmark figure in commercial aviation. He is a former WWI ace and barnstormer. His sweet, round face disguises his passionate commitment to his cause. For he is also...

Title: **Jack Frye. President of TWA Airlines.**

JACK

... now we got a fleet of DC-3's. But they're completely underpowered for our routes. We got the long routes straight across the damn country, right? So I figure we gotta get into the design racket.

Howard completes his inspection, turns to Glenn and his engineers:

HOWARD

Not enough ... (the engineers wilt) ... The rivets have to be completely flush, every screw and joint countersunk. No wind resistance on the fuselage. She's gotta be clean, Odie.

Glenn returns to his engineers as Jack continues to Howard:

JACK

So anyway, we're looking to build a new plane.

HOWARD

What kinda plane?

JACK

Okay. The DC-3 has 21 daytime seats and 14 overnight berths. It has a ceiling of 7000 feet--

HOWARD

Something bigger.

JACK

Try 50 seats. With an ceiling of 12,000 feet.

HOWARD

No. 20,000 ... (Jack looks at him, stunned) ... What does 20,000 feet give you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACK

Less turbulence.

HOWARD

Right. 'Cause it's above the weather ... You want to fly above the weather.

JACK

Jesus...

HOWARD

Only one percent of the American population has ever set foot on a commercial airliner. Because they're scared to death. And they should be. 7,000 feet is bumpy as shit ... We build a plane that flies above the weather and we could get every man, woman and child in this country to feel safe up there ... The future is a plane with the ability to fly high and long ... Across the country ... Across the world.

Jack is transfixed by Howard's bold vision.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Now listen, I don't want to get into all this if your board doesn't have the balls for it. Will they support us?

JACK

I don't know. They're tight bastards.

HOWARD

What's your financial picture?

JACK

Not great.

HOWARD

Last year's deficit?

JACK

770,000.

HOWARD

What's it selling at?

JACK

Around eight dollars a share.

Howard considers.

HOWARD

I think I can do that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACK

Do what?

HOWARD

Buy it.

Jack stares at him.

JACK

You wanna buy the airline?

HOWARD

Sure, don't want a bunch of pencil-pushing accountants getting in the way of our plane. Gimme brass tacks now. What does controlling interest in TWA cost me?

JACK

Call it 15 million.

Howard whistles.

HOWARD

That's a chunk of change ... (checks his watch) ... Listen I gotta date. Call Noah Dietrich and have him start buying.

JACK

Howard -- hold on -- are you sure? You wanna maybe think about it for five minutes?

HOWARD

(smiles)

Hell, Jack, you wanna play with the toys, you gotta own the store.

He strides off. Jack watches him go, dumbstruck.

And Howard is on his way toward owning an airline.

INT. COCOANUT GROVE NIGHTCLUB NIGHT

An explosion of 1930's glamour.

A sea of tuxedos and shimmering dresses. The orchestra bounces something with a rolling swing edge. Dancers float around the dance floor in imperfect imitations of Fred and Ginger.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The MAITRE DE leads Howard and Kate to their table:

MAITRE DE
How goes the "aviation", Mr. Hughes?

HOWARD
Just fine, Pete.

MAITRE DE
I'm so glad.

He presents their table with a flourish, effortlessly pulling out Kate's chair and snapping his fingers to their waiter simultaneously. The Maitre De disappears and their WAITER instantly appears in his place.

WAITER
Good evening, Mr. Hughes. Madame ... The usual, Mr. Hughes?

HOWARD
Please.

WAITER
And may I recommend for the lady our Clementine soup followed by roast wild duck with currant glaze and poached pears in rose sauce, it's truly divine.

KATE
Ah -- that sounds fine.

The Waiter smiles and then crisply disappears. Kate, used to her fair share of attention, is actually speechless at the attention being paid to Howard.

He smiles, almost embarrassed.

KATE (CONT'D)
Your kind of joint, is it? Wouldn't have thought.

HOWARD
They're open late. I go to a hot dog stand on La Cienega too. They're open until four.

KATE
Are they? How grand.

A familiar face bobs through the crowd toward them: Johnny Meyer. A rather liquid **ERROL FLYNN** with him.

JOHNNY
Howard! Sonofagun!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They join Kate and Howard. Errol, every inch the dashing movie star, sashes in next to Kate. She heartily disapproves of them both.

HOWARD

Kate, this is Johnny Meyer, sorta my press agent.

JOHNNY

Pleased-ta-meet-ya-loved-ya-in-ALICE-ADAMS.

KATE

You're too kind.

HOWARD

And you know Errol, I'm sure.

ERROL

(kisses her hands)

Kate, Kate, Kate of the Clench-Jawed Hepburns. Enchanting as always. You should use Lux on your hands, by the way, I do.

JOHNNY

Kate -- (she is offended by his chummy familiarity) -- You and Howard ought to cook up a picture. Costar with Errol. I could sell that in spades.

KATE

Oh, I think not. Don't you read VARIETY, Mr. Meyer? I'm "Box Office Poison." I'm on the outs, the skids, the doldrums. Washed-up, day-old fish not worth the eating, so they tell me.

ERROL

Hell with 'em. Soulless pricks to a man ... (he sashes his gaze to Howard) ... Johnny tells me you're thinking about doing a Western, of all goddamn things.

HOWARD

Yeah, gonna call it THE OUTLAW--

JOHNNY

(to Kate)

And you know what it's about? S-E-X! It's all about S-E-X!

HOWARD

It's a Western.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERROL

(to Howard)

You can't have fornication in a Western. Isn't done, old boy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOHNNY

It's not real sex, it's movie sex.

The waiter appears and serves Kate's soup:

WAITER

Clementine soup for the lady ... (presents Howard's spartan meal with a flourish) ... New York cut steak, twelve peas, bottle of milk with the cap on.

The waiter goes. Howard carefully removes the cap from his milk as:

ERROL

Now, Howard, if you're talking about finally putting carnality on the silver screen, you must swear to let me sit in on the casting sessions...

As Errol speaks he casually reaches to Howard's plate and picks up a pea. Tosses it in his mouth.

Howard freezes, stares at his plate. Kate notices.

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- his plate -- the peas. All sound drops to a sense of his muffled deafness. To Howard there is something horrible about his plate now. It has been infected by Errol's touch.

Howard tears himself back to reality:

HOWARD

I have to go ... (he stands, offers his hand to Kate) ... If you'll excuse us, we have to be somewhere.

ERROL

You are somewhere, Howard.

HOWARD

Somewhere else.

Kate takes his hand and rises.

KATE

Charmed, gentlemen. Do help yourself to the poached pears, I hear they're divine.

Errol and Johnny are a little mystified as Howard leads her away.

Howard and Kate cut through the crowd:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE (CONT'D)

My hero ... God, all that Hollywood talk bores me silly. As if there aren't more important things in the world! Mussolini, for one. Where are we going, by the way?

HOWARD

Feel like a little adventure?

KATE

Do your worst, Mr. Hughes.

INT./EXT. SIKORSKY AMPHIBIAN NIGHT

Night flying. There is nothing like it.

The stars and the moon glimmer above and the lights of Los Angeles glimmer below. The whole world seems an ebony ribbon with no horizon. It is dangerous and utterly free.

Howard pilots the Sikorsky, Kate in the co-pilot's seat next to him. He soars down, swooping dangerously close over the roofs of some houses in the Hollywood Hills, buzzing them.

HOWARD

That's Mr. Mayer ... Do you know where Jack Warner lives?

She laughs. She is entranced. Alive. Her senses tingling with every new sensation.

Her eye is drawn to wheel ahead of her. There is something a bit peculiar about it. It is wrapped in cellophane. She touches the crinkly cellophane.

KATE

What's this on the steering wheel?

HOWARD

Cellophane ... If you had any idea of the crap people carry around on their hands.

KATE

What kind of "crap"?

HOWARD

You don't want to know ... Hold onto the wheel a bit. Get a feel for it. Don't worry, I've got the plane.

She takes the wheel ahead of her firmly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

(smiles)

Too hard ... Relax your hand ... (he shows her) ... You want to feel the vibration of the engine through your fingertips ... You feel that?

KATE

Yes.

HOWARD

That's good ... (he takes his hands off his wheel) ... She's all yours.

KATE

Golly ... (he stands) ... Where are you going?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

I think there's some milk back there. You just keep us steady.

He moves to the rear of the plane and searches for a bottle of milk as she flies the plane. He watches her. Smiles. She absolutely loves it. Total control.

KATE

Howard, there's a rather alarming mountain heading our way.

HOWARD

Pull back on the wheel a smidge.

She pulls back on the wheel and soars over some hills.

KATE

Golly!

He returns to his seat with a bottle of milk as:

HOWARD

I've never met someone who actually says "Golly." You want me to take over?

KATE

Just when I'm getting the hang of it?

He smiles as she pilots the plane.

He looks at her, then at the bottle of milk. A beat. Should he do it?

HOWARD

Want some milk?

KATE

Please.

He carefully brings the milk bottle to her lips. She drinks. A bit of milk trickles down her chin. He gently wipes it away.

They sit, content in silence, as they soar through the night.

EXT. WILSHIRE COUNTRY CLUB DAWN

The Sikorsky is coming in for a landing, quite improbably heading toward the fairways of the Wilshire Country Club.

CONTINUED:

The plane sweeps between some impossibly tight trees -- barely wide enough -- and rolls to a stop in the middle of a fairway. Houses can be seen in the distance at the edge of the fairway.

Howard and Kate emerge.

KATE

... Utterly smashing! We'll do it again. I'm free Wednesday. A little early for golf though, don't you think?

HOWARD

No, I live here. Would you like a drink?

KATE

Lead on.

Howard leads her toward his house, a lovely affair on the edge of the golf course. She glances back at the plane in the middle of the fairway:

KATE (CONT'D)

Now that makes for a challenging par four.

He laughs and helps Kate over some low shrubs to his backyard, the Sikorsky remains behind them as if it were a car casually parked in his driveway.

INT. MUIRFIELD -- LIVING ROOM DAWN

Howard's house, on Muirfield in Hancock Park, is refined. Too refined for Howard.

Howard prepares a drink for Kate. They have comfortably switched roles: he is talking and she is watching.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

... My "decorator" picked out the wall paper and such. I hate this room. Gives me the willies. Like I'm about to be swallowed up by the latest issue of Town and Country--

She strides across the room, without a word, and kisses him deeply. On her terms. He is surprised. Responds. She gently pulls her lips away, only inches from his:

KATE

What room do you like?

HOWARD

My study.

KATE

Take me there...

She kisses him again ... they kiss as he leads her through the house ... they float through the house, little kisses and embraces along the way...

HOWARD

You're the tallest woman I know...

KATE

And all sharp elbows and knees, beware...

They continue to kiss as they move through the house, flowing effortlessly around each other...

KATE (CONT'D)

Will you fly me to work tomorrow?

HOWARD

It is tomorrow.

They kiss their way into...

INT. MUIRFIELD -- DEN DAWN

... Howard's inner sanctum. The beating heart of the Muirfield house.

Dark, wood-paneled walls, film editing machines and banks of electronics equipment. A huge desk with several phones, all of which have amplifiers to help with this deafness. French doors open to the spacious backyard and, beyond that, the fairways of the Wilshire Country Club.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Howard and Kate swirl around each other, their passion building. She is confident and enjoys him. He finds a powerful release in her firm touch.

There is no hesitation, no games. It is passionate connection. It is honest.

His fingertips glide over her skin, imperceptibly taking us to...

INT. H-1 AIRPLANE HANGER DAY

... Howard's fingertips glide over the smooth, silver skin of the H-1.

Glenn and the engineers await his verdict. Incredibly tense.

He ducks down and continues to feel along the underside of the fuselage. His fingers glide slowly. He sweeps up again and completes his inspection, continuing to the tail of the racer.

He stands. Looks at the others. Smiles.

EXT. MARTIN FIELD DAY

A more unlikely location for a such an important moment in Howard's life would be hard to imagine.

Martin Field is a crude landing strip near Santa Ana. Paltry beet fields surround the air strip. There is no crowd. No glamour. In the distance, a few bored pilots tinker with ancient planes by a primitive quonset hut "terminal."

Three official timers and a few associates stand by a red flag planted in the ground at one end of the dirt runway. Another red flag and timer can be seen in the distance down the runway.

Title: **September 13, 1935. National Aeronautic Association Speed Trial.**

The H-1 defies the unimpressive surroundings. It shines in the sunlight, sleek and muscular in the exact perfect measure.

Howard walks with Glenn toward the plane:

GLENN

... Keep your eye on the fuel gauge -- we have a minimum of fuel to keep her weight down. Two runs. That's it. After that, you're flying on vapors and then you crash and then you die.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

Right.

GLENN

Just give her easy flying, don't worry about speed. And don't even think about the record today ... (they arrive at the plane) ... Honest to God, I wish you'd let someone else take her up -- you got 20 damn test pilots working for you--

HOWARD

Hell, why should I let someone else have all the fun?

Then, impulsively, he takes Glenn's brown fedora and puts it on his head.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

See ya in a bit.

And he climbs into the plane.

INT./EXT. H-1 DAY

Howard settles into the tight cockpit. He fastens his shoulder harnesses as he gazes at an amazing array of toggles and dials ahead of him on the control panel.

He has born to sit in a cockpit like this. He is completely at home in the mad jumble of leather and steel and dials and switches. The complexity delights him. The options.

He slowly puts his hand around the stick, finger by finger. Getting the feel for the stick. Feels good.

Then he flicks the engine start toggles and pushes ignition. The plane's engine thunders to life. An elegant cascade of power. Outside, Glenn listens to the engine, eyes closed. Then he gives Howard the thumbs-up.

Inside, Howard responds and starts the plane moving.

This is foreplay. The H-1 rolls down the dirt landing strip. Reaches the end. Turns in one smooth motion.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Howard sees the strip ahead of him. Plenty long enough. He glances to the red flags. Hanging listlessly. No wind. Fine. He will do it without any help from the wind.

Stasis. He waits. The engine prepares. He prepares.

And then the most gentle pressure on the foot pedals and stick...

... And the H-1 begins to move. Gaining speed. Howard puts more pressure on the stick and throttle. The foreplay is over. Time to let the cat out of the bag. More pressure on the stick. His feet dance over the floor pedals.

It happens so quickly we are unprepared.

The H-1 accelerates in a blinding silver flash -- engines singing -- and is suddenly airborne.

The three timers from the National Aeronautic Association are absolutely stunned as the H-1 zooms past them, knocking their hats off.

Glenn smiles. Howard's engineers and mechanics cheer.

Howard has never known acceleration like this! The cockpit is vibrating like mad. The needle falls off his compass. The world is shooting past him.

His puts his left hand on his right wrist, steadying his hand on the stick.

He banks the plane around, back toward the field, the earth rotating dramatically below him.

And he flies. Pure speed. He forces the stick. The engine rises to the challenge. His eyes dart over all the dials. He sees the red flags below. First run.

Zip -- and he is past them.

Below, the three timers click stopwatches.

Howard banks the plane again. Too sharply. The plane veers. He controls his energy. Levels out. Takes a breath. Zooms toward the red flags.

The air field nears. Howard plays the stick and throttle. The engine embraces his challenge. Second run.

Zip -- and he is past them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The stopwatches click.

Glenn breathes a sigh of relief.

But Howard is not done.

He takes the plane a little farther out this time. Banks around. He is comfortable now. Just getting the feel for the plane. Can't stop now. He knows what the plane likes. What gives it pleasure.

He very gently forces the stick and throttle a bit more -- the engine responds to him -- Is that a roar of protest? Or is it satisfaction? Give me some more? -- the whole world is vibrating madly now -- another dial needle falls from the control panel.

The stick is bucking in his hand now -- he uses both hands to steady it.

Third run.

The H-1 sweeps through the sky faster than any plane has ever flown.

Zip -- and he is past them.

The stopwatches click.

Howard smiles.

HOWARD

Good girl.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EXT. MARTIN FIELD FOLLOWING

The H-1 can be seen circling in the distance to return to the field, its engine roaring, as Glenn hurries to the clutch of timers:

TIMER
(stunned)
352 miles per hour...

Glenn turns to the other engineers:

GLENN
352!!

They cheer wildly--

Then--

Sudden silence.

Glenn spins, alarmed--

The incredible roar from the H-1 engine is now silent. It has died. Glenn sees the plane beginning to soar down to a beet field in the distance.

GLENN (CONT'D)
Oh God...

He sees the H-1 disappear into the beet field--

EXT. BEET FIELD FOLLOWING

The H-1 makes an emergency belly landing -- a thundering jolt -- earth and beets explode -- it tears through the beet field as it slides--

EXT. MARTIN FIELD FOLLOWING

Glenn and the engineers watch in stunned disbelief.

ENGINEER
Well, there goes our meal ticket.

GLENN
COME ON!

They race to waiting cars.

EXT. BEEF FIELD DAY

The cars tear through the beet field, following the trail cut by the H-1. They slam to a stop.

Glenn climbs out. Can't believe what he sees.

Howard is sitting calmly on the engine cowl of the H-1, making notes. His lucky fedora pushed back on his head.

HOWARD

How'd we do?

GLENN

352 on the last run.

Howard continues to make notes, doesn't look up.

HOWARD

She'll go faster.

Glenn and the engineers move to the ravaged plane. And to the fastest man on the planet.

INT. MUIRFIELD DAY

Howard limps in, excited.

HOWARD
Kate! Katie!

KATE (V.O.)
Upstairs!

He hobbles through the house quickly, up the stairs to...

INT. MUIRFIELD -- MASTER BEDROOM DAY

Kate is sitting on the bed reading a script, making notes, very much at home. Howard limps in.

KATE
Lord, what happened to you--?

HOWARD
Oh, nothing -- hard landing. Cut my foot. You'll--

KATE
Sit down, I'll take care of it. Tell me everything!

He sits and carefully removes his shredded shoe as she goes to the bathroom to get antiseptic and bandages.

HOWARD
You can't imagine what it was like, Katie! You can't imagine the speed -- she was fine, just fine!

KATE
(from bathroom)
What'd she make?

HOWARD
Oh ... around ... 352.

She emerges from the bathroom, stunned.

KATE
You did it.

HOWARD
Fastest man on the planet.

She races to him and kisses him, joyous--

KATE
Oh, well done! I'm so proud of you--!

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

She did it, baby.

KATE

Now let me see your foot -- Good God you're covered in blood!

HOWARD

No, that's beet juice. I crashed in a beet field.

She looks at his red, beet juice-covered foot for a beat. And then laughs. As does he. The absurdity of Howard's grand adventure killing them.

KATE

Here let me get you fixed up -- Heavens, what is this, electrical tape?

She begins trying to clean the small cut on the sole of his foot as:

HOWARD

Odie just sorta slammed it on -- wanted to get home to tell you.

KATE

I'm so proud of you -- this is going to sting a little bit -- (he winces as she cleans the wound) -- This is useless, come to the bathroom. And don't get beet juice on the carpet!

She helps him hop into...

INT. MUIRFIELD -- MASTER BATH FOLLOWING

KATE

Sit down.

He sits on the edge of the tub. She turns the tap and carefully cleans the beet juice off his foot.

HOWARD

Too hot!

KATE

Don't be a baby. Was the press there?

HOWARD

No, they're calling everyone.

She turns off the tap and begins cleaning his wound.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Should be on the wires by now ... (a beat) ... What is it?

A beat as she gently cleans his wound.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Kate?

She begins to carefully dress his wound, deep in thought.

KATE

I've been famous -- for better or worse -- for a long time now ... I wonder if you know what that really means.

HOWARD

I got my fair share of press on HELL'S ANGELS. I'm used to it.

KATE

Are you?

She stops dressing his wound. Considering whether to go on. She will. She sits back, leaning against a bathroom wall, looking at him deeply.

KATE (CONT'D)

Howard, we're not like everyone else. Too many sharp angles. Too many eccentricities. We have to be very careful not to let people in or they'll make us into freaks.

HOWARD

Katie, they can't get in here. We're safe.

KATE

They can always get in ... When my brother killed himself there were photographers at the funeral ... There's no decency to it.

She resumes dressing his wound.

A long beat. He is deep in thought.

HOWARD

(very quietly)

Look at me, Katie...

She stops dressing his wound and looks at him.

He is completely honest. Completely vulnerable.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Sometimes I feel like ... well, I get these ideas ... crazy ideas about things that may not really be there...

KATE

Howard...

HOWARD

... Sometimes I truly fear I'm losing my mind ... Do you understand? ... If I did, it would be like flying blind, with no compass, no window.

She takes his hand.

KATE

You taught me to fly, Howard. I'll take the wheel.

He holds her closely, desperately.

INT. JUAN TRIPPE'S OFFICE -- PAN AM DAY

A globe. The world. Juan Trippe's world.

We take in the globe as we hear a radio news report, there is a roaring crowd in the background of the radio report:

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

... Yes, young Howard Hughes has done it! -- Flown all the way around the entire world in three days and nineteen hours. Beating Wiley Post's record by almost half! American's Number One Aviation Hero is now the Fastest Man on the Planet...!

We discover the mammoth globe fills the center of Trippe's New York office. It deserves to. Pan Am is Tiffanys when everyone else in the game is Woolworths.

The familiar blue-and-white Pan Am logo looms behind...

Title: **Juan Trippe. President of Pan Am Airways.**

JUAN TRIPPE sits behind his desk, smoking a pipe, doing paperwork. The radio is on his desk.

Trippe is every inch the elite Yale graduate. He was born to wear tweed and he does. He is one of the true fathers of commercial aviation; the unquestioned overlord of Pan Am, America's only international airline.

He is brilliant, innovative and lethal. He will soon become Howard's absolute nemesis.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The radio report continues to declaim Howard's triumph. Trippe rather sourly turns it off. Click.

He continues to work in silence. Then an Executive enters. Trippe casts a baleful eye up at the interruption.

EXECUTIVE

You're not going to believe this. Just came over the wires ... Howard Hughes just bought control of TWA.

A beat as Trippe looks at him.

TRIPPE

I thought Mr. Hughes was flying around the world?

EXECUTIVE

Apparently he did while he was flying -- over the radio.

Trippe is impressed with Howard's panache. He thinks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TRIPPE

I've heard some ... disquieting rumors about Mr. Hughes. I'd certainly like to know everything there is to know about Mr. Hughes ... Attend to it. Thoroughly.

He returns to his paperwork.

EXT. PANTAGES THEATER NIGHT

A sudden attack of flashbulbs. A brutal machine gun assault.

Howard and Kate are trapped on the red carpet outside a movie premiere at the glorious Pantages. He endures the attack. She seems to enjoy it.

A cacophony of voices. Gossip hounds and fans and reporters and photographers:

VOICES

HOWARD! -- MISS HEPBURN! -- WHEN YA GONNA NAME THE DAY,
HOWARD?! -- WHAT ABOUT GINGER ROGERS?! -- HOWARD! --
MR. HUGHES!

He does his best to smile. To survive. He notes Kate posing, bending to the photographers slightly, giving them her best side, showing off her gown to the best advantage. Her eyes seem immune to the cruel flashes.

But the photographers aren't much interested in her. They point their cameras at Howard. Continuing to call questions to him.

He pulls at her arm a bit, wanting to go. She resists.

He waits for her performance to end.

One fact is glaringly obvious: they are all more interested in Howard than in her.

INT. PANTAGES THEATER -- LOBBY NIGHT

Finally through the doors, Howard escorts Kate through the lobby.

KATE

You know fame is supposed to be my turf.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She sees Louis B. Mayer standing with a pack of his MGM cronies. She pulls her arm away from Howard and floats to Mayer.

Howard stands for a moment, lost, watching her. She sparkles for Mayer.

Then a bewitching form floats past him, her voice purring:

AVA

Don't worry, Howard, she's just working the room...

AVA GARDNER is the most beautiful woman in the world. A siren. A tigress. Currently on the arm of a movie executive.

AVA (CONT'D)

It's her job, baby.

She winks to Howard and continues into the theater.

Howard watches Kate with Mayer and his cronies. They laugh. Glance in his direction. Kate is being very amusing about something.

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- Kate and Mayer -- laughing, open mouths, eyes looking at him -- his deafness is overpowering, he can't hear what they are saying.

His paranoia is extreme. It is unbearable. He escapes to the bathroom.

INT. PANTAGES THEATER -- MEN'S ROOM FOLLOWING

Howard goes to a row of shining sinks. He reaches into his jacket pocket and removes a small cake of lye soap. Carefully unwraps it. Then begins to wash his hands.

A toilet flushes in a stall behind him. He glances back in the mirror. An unusual amount of movement inside the stall. He continues to look in the mirror as he washes his hands, curious.

Then the stall door opens and a man lurches out of the stall awkwardly. He is on arm crutches. Polio.

Howard watches as the man jerks his way across the room, slowly nearing the sink next to him. Howard is trapped.

POLIO MAN

Hello.

HOWARD

Hello.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Howard watches as the man washes his hands, leaning forward on his arm crutches.

POLIO MAN

Could you reach me a towel?

Howard turns. A neat stack of white towels next to him.

He turns back to the man.

HOWARD

I can't really do that. I'm sorry.

The man looks at him. Okay. He jerks his way past Howard and dries his hands.

Howard looks away. Focusing on his washing his hands.

The man jerks his way out of the bathroom. Howard lets out a few deep breaths.

INT. PANTAGES -- LOBBY FOLLOWING

Howard emerges from the men's room. Kate is waiting.

KATE

I'm an idiot and I'm sorry.

HOWARD

(smiles)

Forget it--

KATE

I'm a vain, preening ass without a single redeeming feature.

HOWARD

That's not fair. You have very good teeth.

She laughs. He offers his arm to lead her into the auditorium.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Come on...

KATE

I have a better idea. Take me flying. Better yet, I'll take you flying.

HOWARD

Do your worst, Miss Hepburn.

They leave the theater. The flashbulbs explode again as they go.

INT. CAR -- FENWICK DAY

Something we have never seen in this story. Fall. Yellow and red leaves.

New England.

Howard and Kate are driving up the long drive to a huge house. It is Fenwick. The Hepburn's ancestral Connecticut manor and home to Kate's patrician Yankee clan.

KATE

Don't be so squirmy, Howard. You're going to get on famously with mother and father. And I'm almost sure they'll like you too. Once they get to know you.

He glances at her.

Ahead of them Howard can see the Hepburns cavorting about the huge lawn as they approach. Pedigree dogs run hither and yon. Servants scurry here and there. Other kinfolk, extended relations, play croquet enthusiastically.

The robust **MRS. HEPBURN** appears to be doing something like calisthenics. Or perhaps dancing. Howard's not quite sure.

The slightly more reserved **DR. HEPBURN** is painting on the porch.

Another **MAN** is happily filming everything with a home movie camera. He swings the camera toward the car as it approaches.

HOWARD

Who's that with the camera?

KATE

My ex-husband, Ludlow. Mother and father are mad about Luddy.

HOWARD

What the hell's he doing here?!

KATE

Oh, he's here all the time.

Howard stops the car and Kate leaps out...

EXT. FENWICK FOLLOWING

Kate floats from the car and embraces her parents, snapping into a heightened and arch persona appropriate to her family. Her usual role with them. **LUDLOW** films. Then he turns the camera to Howard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Howard climbs out of the car. Stands. Utterly lost.

KATE

Hepburns! Hepburns! Attention please! ... Everyone! This ... is Howard!

A huge Great Dane races up and leaps on Howard.

Welcome to Fenwick where all the blood is blue and all the jaws are clenched.

INT. FENWICK -- DINING ROOM NIGHT

Everyone is talking at once. And all very quickly.

The huge Great Dane has taken quite a shine to Howard. It sleeps across one of his feet under the table. Trapping him.

Dinner at the Hepburns is a thrilling experience, if you like juggling axes blindfolded.

MRS. HEPBURN

... We pay our devotion to the arts here. A colony we have created. Julian is a painter -- (Howard looks around, who the hell is Julian?) -- abstract of course. What the hell's the point of painting something real when you can just take a picture nowadays, don't you agree? Where do you stand on politics, Mr. Hughes?

HOWARD

Excuse me?

MRS. HEPBURN

We're all socialists here!

KATE

We are not.

MRS. HEPBURN

Yes, I've said it! Sacco and Vanzetti and all that! Now you've met Mr. Roosevelt, what make you of him?

The Great Dane beneath Howard grunts and rolls over. Trapping both feet. Howard winces.

LUDLOW

What are you sniggering at?

HOWARD

Excuse me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUDLOW

You just sniggered.

HOWARD

No, the dog. It's crushing my feet.

DR. HEPBURN

Don't you like dogs?

MRS. HEPBURN

Young man, I will not have sniggering at Mr. Roosevelt at my table. Please leave.

HOWARD

I wasn't.

LUDLOW

Katie, does it stick in your craw that Howard here gets more press than you do?

KATE

It's a blessed relief, I can tell you! Cameras out of my mug for once.

LUDLOW

What a shy creature you are.

They laugh.

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- all those talking faces -- the mountains of food, blood dripping from the too rare roast beef, the sickly and glistening steamed vegetables -- he hears an almost incomprehensible chatter of so many voices all talking at once--

He forces himself to concentrate, tears himself back to reality:

DR. HEPBURN

... that's the vulgar press, I'm sure. Read much, Mr. Hughes?

HOWARD

I try to stay up to snuff on the trade journals.

ANOTHER GUEST

Snuff?

MRS. HEPBURN

These would be flying magazines?

HOWARD

Sorry?

CONTINUED:

KATE

He's a little deaf.

MRS. HEPBURN

(louder)

You read flying magazines?

HOWARD

Trade journals on engineering. Aviation.

MRS. HEPBURN

We read books.

KATE

(apologizing for Howard)

Howard has to read the trade pieces because he's designing a new airplane.

LUDLOW

(not remotely interested)

Do tell.

At last, something he can talk about.

HOWARD

Well, it's pretty exciting actually. It's a spy plane for the Air Corps. A twin-engine plane with some really interesting design features, it has two booms at the back, which is--

MRS. HEPBURN

Luddy built a bird house once. You remember that, dear?

LUDLOW

A mere trifle, darling.

DR. HEPBURN

(conspiratorially to
Howard)

I'm a urologist.

MRS. HEPBURN

It was quite aesthetic really. Birds didn't care for it much, but the bats do.

HOWARD

I'll bet.

MRS. HEPBURN

Do speak up, dear.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

Nothing.

MRS. HEPBURN

Then why did you speak? I can't abide people who speak but have nothing to say.

Howard glances to Kate, she offers no assistance.

LUDLOW

Did you go to mechanic school to learn all this airplane guff?

HOWARD

No.

LUDLOW

Then how did you make all that money?

MRS. HEPBURN

We don't care about money here, Mr. Hughes.

HOWARD

(terse)

That's because you have it.

A beat. An actual moment of silence.

MRS. HEPBURN

Would you repeat that?

HOWARD

You don't care about money because you have it. And you've always had it. My father was dirt poor when I was born--

LUDLOW

Back in torrid Houston would this be?

HOWARD

Excuse me! -- (back to Mrs. Hepburn) -- I care about money, because I know what it takes out of a man to make it. Now if you'll excuse me, I have some "airplane guff" to take care of.

He tosses down his napkin, wrenches his feet from under the dog, and strides out of the room.

The Hepburns consider.

LUDLOW

Seems rather a highly strung chap.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE

You're a fine bunch of bullies, aren't you?

They continue eating. Howard is quickly forgotten by all.

DR. HEPBURN

Have you talked to Mr. Mayer about letting you do JANE EYRE?

KATE

Old cretin won't budge. Too "arty" don't you know. I'm convinced the man hasn't read anything longer than a Sunday "Katzenjammer Kids" in his life...

EXT. FENWICK -- FRONT LAWN NIGHT

A bit later. Howard stands on front lawn, deep in thought. He aimlessly kicks a croquet ball. It rolls through a hoop.

KATE'S VOICE

No fair kicking, you have to use the mallet.

She comes to him.

KATE

Really, though, you can't retire from the field of battle like that or they'll never respect you.

HOWARD

Katie ... I don't understand. You were like a different person in there.

KATE

They just expect me to be a certain way ... But there's only one real Kate. Your...Kate.

She kisses him and they head back toward the house.

INT. 7000 ROMAINE -- SCREENING ROOM DAY

Jane Russell, larger than life, is pressing in on us, her breasts threatening to devour us. Again and again. Dailies from THE OUTLAW.

Howard sits, drawing something we do not see on a pad. He occasionally glances up at the footage. His filmmaking team sit behind him. Glenn and some of his engineers sit before him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

... Edison used to say you never invented anything until there was a need for it -- well, there's a need for this. You know how many Allied ships we lost this year because of U-Boat attacks?

GLENN

No.

HOWARD

681 ships, just this year, so far. The Army needs a new plane to fly the troops over to Europe. Ships are always gonna be too vulnerable to the U-boats.

GLENN

You wanna build a troop carrier plane?

HOWARD

Stop thinking like an insect, Odie. Not just a plane to carry troops -- a plane to carry everything! The troops and the tanks and the jeeps and whatnot...

He pulls a folded-over headshot of a starlet from his jacket and hands it to Glenn.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Take a look -- other side.

Glenn flips the headshot over. And we see a pencil drawing Howard has done of a new plane. A gigantic flying boat.

We recognize it instantly. The Hercules. The Spruce Goose.

GLENN

Oh shit...

HOWARD

Say 200 feet from nose to tail. Wingspan around 300. It's gonna need around 24,000 horsepower--

GLENN

Oh shit!

HOWARD

This is just what Kaiser and the Army are looking for - - don't worry, they'll pay for it.

GLENN

Christ, Howard, what are you getting us into?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

So it's a big plane. That's why I'm calling it The Hercules. That's a swell name isn't it?

GLENN

How heavy do you imagine this thing is?

HOWARD

I'd say around 200 tons.

Glenn is staggered. A 200 ton plane?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I didn't say it was gonna be easy.

He finally completes what he has been drawing, he turns and shows it to the filmmaking team behind him. It is a very good engineering drawing of an underwire bra.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Rig up something like this, should give the proper uplift ratios while reducing the need for additional torque support on the front. I want smooth titties, gentlemen.

He turns back to Glenn with a smile:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

It's all engineering, isn't it, Odie?

Glenn considers Jane Russell's breasts on the screen.

GLENN

Howard, you really think they're gonna let you put out a whole movie just about tits?

HOWARD

Sure, who doesn't like tits?

Cut to--

INT. _____ MPA HEARING ROOM _____ DAY

Ten somber men in somber double-breasted suits.

Men who decidedly do not like tits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Title: Motion Picture Association Censorship Board.

Professor Fitz, Howard's meteorologist, sits nervously at a long table before the panel of somber men. He has no idea why he is here.

A number of large easels have been set up at the back of the room, facing the panel. The easels apparently contain huge posters or something. Covered in sheets.

A silent beat as the panel gazes at poor Professor Fitz.

Then Howard sweeps in and sits. Brisk.

HOWARD

Good afternoon, gentlemen. Sorry I'm late.

CHAIRMAN

Will the secretary record that Mr. Hughes has arrived and this session will now be called to order. I yield the floor to Mr. Breen.

JOSEPH BREEN, Hollywood's censorship czar stands.

BREEN

Mr. Hughes, members of the committee ... I have reviewed Mr. Hughes' photoplay entitled THE OUTLAW and can state categorically that I have never seen anything quite so unacceptable as the shots of the mammaries of the character named "Rio." Throughout almost half the picture the girl's mammaries, which are quite large and prominent, are shockingly uncovered. For this reason I have concluded that the picture appeals only to prurient interest and should be denied the Motion Picture Association's Seal of Approval.

He sits.

CHAIRMAN

Thank you, Mr. Breen ... Mr. Hughes you may address the committee.

HOWARD

(stands)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Breen ... Now the situation here seems to revolve around Miss Russell's "mammaries." Mr. Breen feels that they are too prominent. More prominent than other "mammaries" have been on the screen. With the help of my associate here I hope to dispel that notion...

CONTINUED:

He goes to the easels at the back of the room. Begins pulling off the sheets, one by one.

Each easel contains a huge, enlarged photograph of breasts and cleavage. Just breasts and cleavage. No heads.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Jean Harlow ... Ann Sheridan ... Irene Dunne ...
Claudette Colbert ... Rita Hayworth ... Betty Grable ...
and Jane Russell.

The panel members gape. Professor Fitz gapes.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Now all of these shots, save for Miss Russell, were enlarged from pictures that received Mr. Breen's Seal of Approval. As you have probably noticed by now, they all contain "mammaries." I will ask my associate to join me now...

Professor Fitz rises and walks to Howard and the mammaries, completely confused.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

May I introduce Dr. Ludlow Branson from Columbia University. He's a mathematician of some note. Dr. Branson will now demonstrate that, in fact, Miss Russell's "mammaries" are no more prominent than any of these other fine ladies.

He hands the stunned Professor Fitz a pair of calipers from his pocket.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You forgot your calipers, Doctor.

Howard returns to his seat. Professor Fitz improvises:

PROFESSOR FITZ

Well ... gentlemen ... ah ... You'll see that in, um, mammary exhibit number one the length of the actual, cleavage, if I may, is ... (he uses the calipers) ... Five inches and quarter ... Now if we go to, um, mammary exhibit number two we will find...

Professor Fitz proceeds gamely. Howard watches him. Smiles.

Then we hear Kate:

KATE (V.O.)

... don't you see how degrading this is for me?!

INT. MUIRFIELD -- HALLWAY NIGHT

The cover of HOLLYWOOD EXPOSE magazine, a sleazy rag showing a picture of Howard with various female movie stars. The bold cover title: THE MANY LOVES OF HOWARD HUGHES.

Howard is roaming, eating vanilla ice cream straight from the carton as Kate follows. She holds the magazine. Furious.

KATE

Don't you see how this demeans me?!

HOWARD

Since when do you care about the scandal rags?

KATE

Every time there's a picture of you with another woman it's like a slap in the face, don't you understand that?!

HOWARD

That's overstating it a bit, don't ya think?

QUICK FLASHES: a series of newspaper photos of Howard with other women. Starlets and movie stars.

KATE

(brandishing magazine)

Joan Crawford, Ginger Rogers, Linda Darnell, Joan Fontaine ... and now Bette Davis for God's sake!

HOWARD

They're Cracker Jack candy, honey. You know they don't mean anything--

KATE

Oh, very nice.

HOWARD

You're the one who said all men are predators. It's all in Darwin, remember?

He goes into the den, she follows...

INT. MUIRFIELD -- DEN FOLLOWING

KATE

And am I to expect this to continue after the wedding?

HOWARD

What's really bothering you? Is it the women or the publicity?

CONTINUED:

She finally explodes:

KATE
CAN'T YOU EAT ICE CREAM FROM A BOWL LIKE EVERYONE ELSE
IN THE WORLD?!

The phone on Howard's desk rings.

KATE (CONT'D)
Don't you dare.

He answers the phone. She is stunned.

HOWARD (ON PHONE)
Yeah? -- This isn't a good time, Odie ... What? ... (he
is now completely focused on the phone conversation) ...
For Christ sake we can't make the Hercules if we can't
get any aluminum. Wait... (he turns up the amplifier on
his phone so he can hear better) ... Yeah, I can hear
you now ... No -- you tell the War Production Board this
is an essential strategic operation and ... No ...

Kate steams.

HOWARD (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
... Look, if they're giving aluminum to Douglas and
Northrop and Boeing they sure as hell can give some to
Hughes Aircraft...

KATE
Don't set the ice cream--

He sets the messy ice cream carton on his desk. She knows it
will leave a ring. Intolerable.

HOWARD (ON PHONE)
... Meantime, we gotta think of something else. If we
can't get any aluminum we'll have to find another way
... Christ, I don't know, find some alloy that works as
well, you tell me ... Right...

He continues on the phone. She stalks out.

INT. _____ LARGE SEDAN -- MGM _____ DAY

Howard and Kate sit in the rear of a large sedan. Howard talks
to Glenn in the front seat. A large Cuban man we will come to
know as JORGE drives. They are driving through the MGM lot.

We watch Kate's face. Clouded. Sad. Deep in thought.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

...Dammit, Odie, if we can't get any aluminum we'll use wood.

GLENN

You can't make a 200 ton plane out of wood.

HOWARD

Why the hell not?! The damn thing's a flying boat. What did they used to make boats out of?! Think of the Hercules like a Spanish Galleon -- a goddamn flying Spanish Galleon!

They pull up to Kate's trailer. He kisses her cheek.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I love you honey ... (he continues to Glenn as she climbs out of the car) ... We just gotta find the right kind of wood -- something light but strong -- with the tensile properties to work with the Duramold bonding...

EXT. MGM LOT DAY

The sedan pulls away as Kate goes into her trailer...

INT. KATE'S TRAILER DAY

SPENCER TRACY is sitting comfortably rumped and relaxed in her trailer. He tosses her an apple. She catches it.

SPENCER TRACY

From my farm. If you like it I'll get you a bushel.

She takes a bite of the apple. Tears come to her eyes.

SPENCER TRACY (CONT'D)

Trouble with Mr. Hughes?

KATE

There's too much Howard Hughes in Howard Hughes. That's the trouble.

INT. HUGHES AIRCRAFT -- XF-11 HANGER NIGHT

The new plane is brilliantly illuminated.

It is Howard's new twin-engine reconnaissance plane. Even in this incomplete state the XF-11 is dramatic. Twin rear booms flanking a needle-nosed cockpit. 65 feet long with a wingspan of 101 feet. Extremely graceful lines, smooth surfaces and streamlined elegance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The hanger is empty but for Howard. He stands at the plane, working, arms thrust into the guts of the engine.

A radio plays Christmas carols.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACK (V.O.)

Beautiful...

Howard turns, Jack Frye has just entered the hanger with **ROBERT GROSS**, the dignified President of Lockheed. They are gazing at the new plane, dazzled.

Howard goes to them, cleaning his hands on a rag.

GROSS

(smiles)

Don't you even take Christmas off?

Gross offers his hand. Title: **Robert Gross. President of Lockheed Aircraft.**

HOWARD

(not shaking)

Sorry, got grease on my hands. Nice to see you, Bob.

He holds up his finger for them to be quiet. Then turns up the radio so they can't be overheard.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Take a look ... She's the XF-11 reconnaissance flier, spy plane really. Her top speed is 450 -- which means she can outrun anything they throw against her. After the Japs stole my H-1 design for their goddamn Zeros, I figured I needed to do 'em one better. Designed every inch of her myself.

GROSS

She's a looker.

HOWARD

Okay, what have you got for me?

Gross carries something covered in a cloth to a drafting table. He pulls off the cloth, revealing a model of an airplane. The Constellation.

If the XF-11 is a radical design, the airplane model before Howard is nothing short of revolutionary.

The plane's shape is dolphin-like, elegantly dipping down at the nose and then sloping up to the three vertical tail wings. Four engines.

Howard almost gasps.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Jiminy Cricket...

CONTINUED:

GROSS

Seating capacity for 60. Wingspan 123 feet. Four Double Cyclone engines. Her ceiling is 25,000 feet.

HOWARD

(studies the model)

Gross weight?

GROSS

86,000. Wing load to 41 pounds psi.

HOWARD

Less drag on the plane in thinner air, so at full mix you're looking at a top speed of -- (instantly does the math) -- around 340, giving her a range of about...

Howard stops. A stunning realization.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

3,000 miles.

He looks up at them. 3,000 miles. The magic number.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Cross country.

JACK

Non-stop.

Howard continues to look at them. 3,000 miles. The sacred number.

Then he looks more closely at Gross.

HOWARD

You have something on your suit.

GROSS

What?

HOWARD

(calm)

On your lapel, there's something on your lapel.

GROSS

(looking)

Where?

Howard hands him a handkerchief from his pocket.

HOWARD

Right there. Clean it off, would ya?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Gross cleans a speck of lint off his lapel. Offers the handkerchief back.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Throw it away ... (Gross moves to a nearby trash can)
... No, over there.

Gross tosses the handkerchief in a trash can a little further away.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

So what do you call her?

GROSS

The Constellation, but we can change that.

HOWARD

No, it's pretty.

Howard tucks his hands into his pockets and walks away, deep in thought.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I like her ... (he glances in the trash can where Gross threw the handkerchief, disquieted) ... What kind of deal can you give me? ... (he repeats the movement and words exactly, looking into the trash can again) ... What kind of deal can you give me?

GROSS

We'll give you the first 40 planes off the assembly line.

JACK

That'll give us about two years exclusivity with her.

HOWARD

More than that. United and American don't have the imagination for a plane like this.

JACK

Two years ahead of Juan Trippe then.

Howard considers. Finally turns back to them.

HOWARD

How much?

GROSS

450,000 each.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

18 million for the first forty ... Hell, TWA can't afford that. The damn airline is flat broke ... I guess I'll just have to pay for them myself ... (to Gross) ... Build 'em, Bob, and send the bill to Noah Dietrich. Thanks.

He strides out of the hanger quickly.

Jack and Gross look at each other.

In the blink of an eye Howard has just placed the largest commercial aircraft order in history.

JACK

Merry Christmas.

OMITTED

INT. _____ MUIRFIELD -- DEN _____ DAY

Howard is on the phone, highly amused:

HOWARD (ON PHONE)

... now don't get all hysterical, Noah, that's not good for you ... (smiles) ... Yeah, I know, I know, I should have told you but it just slipped my mind...

Kate enters. He is surprised to see her.

HOWARD (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

I'll get back to you, thanks ... (he hangs up) ... Hey, honey, what are you doing home?

KATE

(crisply)

You're not one for tears and neither am I, so best to come out with it directly: I've met someone. I've fallen in love and I'm moving out. If I could make it more gentle I would, but I can't, so there we both are.

HOWARD

(stunned)

What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE

Now let's be honest, this has all been a grand adventure but it couldn't possibly last. We're too alike you and I-

HOWARD

You met someone?

KATE

Someone more appropriate to me, I mean.

HOWARD

What does that mean -- "appropriate"?

KATE

Someone more attuned to my needs.

HOWARD

Stop acting, Katie. Look at me.

KATE

I'm not acting.

HOWARD

I wonder if you even know anymore.

KATE

Don't be unkind.

HOWARD

(standing, angry)

Fine -- you wanna go -- go on. Actresses are cheap in this town, darling, and I have a lot of money.

KATE

This is beneath you--

HOWARD

No, this is exactly me! You come in here out of the blue and tell me you're leaving just like that -- and you have the nerve to expect graciousness?!

KATE

I expect a little maturity. I expect you to face the situation like an adult who--

HOWARD

Don't talk down to me.

A tense beat.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Don't you ever talk down to me. You're a movie star.
Nothing more.

She looks at him. About to crumble. She will never let him see that. She turns and goes.

He stands.

EXT. _____ MUIRFIELD -- BACKYARD _____ NIGHT

4:00 am. Howard stands at a bonfire raging in the backyard. He is tossing armfuls of clothes into it. Gorgeous suits and shirts and shoes and hats go into the inferno.

He finishes throwing the clothes into the fire. He watches it, the red flame bathing his face.

Then he slowly slips off his jacket. Then shirt. Then everything.

INT. _____ NOAH'S HOUSE -- BEDROOM _____ NIGHT

Noah is fast asleep next to his WIFE. The phone by the bed rings. Again. Noah opens one eye, looks at the phone.

NOAH'S WIFE

Don't answer it.

Noah answers wearily:

NOAH (ON PHONE)

What is it, Howard?

Split-screen to Howard at home, he stands nude in his den as the bonfire continuing to rage in the backyard.

HOWARD (ON PHONE)

Hey, Noah, I need you to get over to the Penney's and buy me some new clothes.

NOAH (ON PHONE)

Penney's isn't open.

HOWARD (ON PHONE)

Oh, shit. All right, first thing tomorrow. I want two suits off the rack, one light and one dark. Three white shirts. And three white pairs of tennis shoes. Got that? No, wait, make it Woolworths. No, no, no, Penneys -- (he stops, suddenly suspicious) -- Noah, do you have a recorder? Are you recording this conversation?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NOAH (ON PHONE)

No...

HOWARD (ON PHONE)

Okay, I'm trusting you. Listen, I need those clothes first thing, thanks -- Wait! Wait! Wait! -- Did I say Penneys or Woolworth's?

NOAH (ON PHONE)

Penneys

HOWARD (ON PHONE)

Better make it Sears.

He hangs up. End split-screen.

Noah hangs up. Sighs.

INT MUIRFIELD -- DEN NIGHT

Howard stands and watches his clothes burn. We watch his face. Alone. Abandoned.

A lovely version of "Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams" begins.

VOCALIST

"When skies are cloudy and grey, They're only grey for a day, So wrap your troubles in dreams, And dream your troubles away..."

The song continues as we hear click-click-click -- taking us to...

INT. WAREHOUSE NIGHT

... Click-click-click. The click of high heels on cement.

FAITH DOMERGUE walks across the empty plain of a warehouse floor. The echoing warehouse appears to be vacant but for a single chair with a strong light next to it.

Howard sits in the chair, the bright light is focused on Faith so she cannot really see him. He remains hidden behind the light for the entire scene. We only watch her.

Faith is a beautiful brunette. She tries to appear older than her years, feigning a sophistication that is not natural for her.

HOWARD (V.O.)

You can stop there, if you please, Miss Domergue.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She stops. Trapped in the glare of the light.

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

Would you take off your heels, please?

She slips out of her shoes. Holds them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

Good. Would you turn around, please?

She slowly turns, trying to do it like she saw Rita Hayworth do in a movie once.

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

You know the kind of work it takes to be an actress? It takes hard work. Voice lessons and deportment lessons. And new makeup and wardrobe. It's just like going to school again.

A beat.

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

Would you wipe off your lipstick, please?

She takes a handkerchief from her purse and wipes off her dark red lipstick. It smears a bit.

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

And the rouge? Could you do something about that, please?

She licks the handkerchief and attempts to clean off the rouge. Does okay. Without the makeup she is even more attractive. More herself anyway.

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

Now you understand you'll be under contract to me, personally. You know what that means? You know what a contract is? It's a very serious thing. It's a legal document.

...She nods...

A beat.

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

How old are you, Miss Domergue?

FAITH

15.

A beat.

HOWARD (V.O.)

Holy mother of God.

"Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams" takes us to...

INT. COCOANUT GROVE NIGHT

We are amidst a sea of elegant shoes effortlessly swaying across a dance floor. All the shoes are formal, black.

"Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams" continues as we watch the all black shoes dancing.

Then a pair of white tennis shoes dances past.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Howard is dancing with Faith. He wears his plain dark suit from Sears. White shirt. White sneakers.

To our surprise, perhaps, Howard is a very good dancer.

They dance as we go to...

A bit later. Howard and Faith sit in a corner booth with Jack Frye and his wife, HELEN.

FAITH

(happily)

... Car picks me up every morning at eight and off I go. I'm getting my High School diploma. Howard thinks education is important. Then after classes I'm off for elocution and grooming and fittings...

JACK

(seeing someone)

Well, blow me down...

Juan Trippe is approaching the table.

Trippe wears nice suit. Except for a smattering of military uniforms, Trippe and Howard are the only men in the entire club not wearing tuxedos. They are worthy adversaries.

Trippe arrives at the table.

TRIPPE

(shaking hands)

Jack, Helen, hello.

JACK

Hello, Juan.

TRIPPE

How are you, Howard?

HOWARD

(shakes hands)

Good, thanks. This is Miss Domergue.

JACK

Sit down. Now what the hell are you doing out here?

TRIPPE

(pulling a chair to the booth)

Meeting with Douglas on the DC-4, our new plane. She's gonna be a pip ... (to Howard) ... How's the Constellation coming?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

Good. Great.

TRIPPE

How 'bout letting me steal a peek?

HOWARD

(smiles)

Don't think so.

TRIPPE

You know, I ought to be cross with you. You stole Ray Loewy from us.

HOWARD

He's doing our interior design.

TRIPPE

He was doing ours. What are your colors?

JACK

Stop fishing.

Trippe laughs.

HOWARD

Do you have buttons or zippers?

TRIPPE

Sorry?

HOWARD

On the drapes for the sleeping berths.

TRIPPE

Zippers.

HOWARD

Oh.

TRIPPE

Buttons?

HOWARD

Uh-huh.

Trippe considers this. Faith is rather mystified at the seriousness of all this.

TRIPPE

So I suppose you'll be expanding to Mexico.

CONTINUED:

JACK
Why do you say that?

TRIPPE
Your range is 3,000 miles. You'll expand from Los Angeles to Mexico. Maybe South America.

JACK
(smiles)
Hey, that's a good idea, anyone got a pen?

HOWARD
Or across the Atlantic.

A beat. Jack freezes. Trippe smiles.

TRIPPE
Too far.

HOWARD
New York to Newfoundland to Ireland to Paris.

TRIPPE
Well, Pan Am welcomes you. We're overbooked as it is. It's a great burden having to do it all. When's the Connie coming out?

HOWARD
Next year maybe. DC-4?

TRIPPE
Next year.

HOWARD
I look forward to her.

TRIPPE
And I to the Connie ... (he stands, and delivers a final knife thrust) ... I already ordered the next forty after you ... You know, I never knew you could dance. That was a rhumba, yes?

He smiles and leaves the table. Howard watches him go.

JACK
Good going, boss. You just gave him our entire postwar strategy.

HOWARD
He can't stop us.

CONTINUED:

JACK

He's Pan Am, Howard. He can stop anything ... (hailing passing waiter) ... Hey, fella, gimme the biggest scotch you got.

HOWARD

Excuse me.

He stands and makes his way through the club, deep in thought. He goes into the men's room...

INT. COCOANUT GROVE -- MEN'S ROOM NIGHT

The bathroom is empty. Howard moves to a sink, taking his little bar of lye soap from his pocket.

He begins washing his hands. Scrubbing his hands.

He looks into the mirror as he scours his hands. His hands move more quickly now. A certain urgency to the washing. And then almost violence. He does not look down.

His hands are raw now. His face almost passive as he looks at himself in the mirror.

One of his hands is bleeding now. The lye stings him. He stops, looks down.

A little bit of blood. He stares at it. Surprised.

He quickly rinses off his hands and puts the soap back in his pocket. Dries his hands with a towel, dabbing away the tiny bit of blood.

Then he goes to leave the bathroom. Reaches for the door--

Stops.

He stares at the doorknob.

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- the glistening gold doorknob.

His hands are clean now. He can't touch the doorknob. What to do?

He looks around.

HOWARD

Hello...?

No one else is in the bathroom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He looks at the doorknob again. Frustrated.

Then an idea. He shifts his position. Ready. He waits. He hums along with the music from the club.

Then a man sweeps into the bathroom. Howard nips out the open door.

INT. _____ COCOANUT GROVE _____ NIGHT

Howard returns to the table, all business:

HOWARD

All right, I want you to get in touch with Mr. Joyce and Mr. Berg. They're my boys in Washington. And set up a meeting with Jesse Jones, he's Secretary of Commerce, old golfing buddy--

JACK

Whoa, slow down--

HOWARD

We're gonna need terminals in Ireland and France and I want some tax breaks from them. If that shitheel thinks he owns the whole goddamn world he's got another think coming.

JACK

Pan Am owns Europe. But he's smart, we ought to think about Mexico.

HOWARD

(very firm)

To hell with Mexico. No one airline should have a monopoly on flying the Atlantic. That's just not fair!

Howard leans in. We have rarely seen him this intense.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

He owns Pan Am. He owns Congress. He owns the Civil Aeronautics Board. But he does not own the sky.

Howard notes his hand is bleeding again. Just a spot of blood. He presses it to his pant leg to stop the bleeding.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

We're in a street fight with that sonofabitch and I am not going to lose. I been fighting high hat, Ivy League pricks like him my whole life. And listen, fire Ray Loewy. He's spying for Trippe. That shitheel knew all about the buttons. Spies in my midst. 'Scuse me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

And Howard is up and gone, heading toward the bathroom again.

As we hear an amplified voice:

EMCEE (V.O.)
... pleased to bring you The Wonder Of Modern
Aviation...

INT. AIRPLANE HANGER EVENING

It's like a trade show. With one vendor.

An EMCEE stands before a microphone on a stage at one end of the hanger. A red velvet curtain emblazoned with "Hughes Aircraft" hangs across the stage, concealing something.

A gaggle of reporters wait.

As does the all-important delegation from the Air Corps. Seven men in uniform. Each is with a beautiful, younger woman.

These seven men will decide whether or not to fund the project.

EMCEE
... Not just a plane, ladies and gentlemen, a vast leap forward in aeronautic technology. But it's more than that. It's our humble gesture to the war effort, our chance to help out those brave men in uniform...

The Emcee continues to ballyhoo as we find Howard in a corner of the hanger, standing with Johnny Meyer.

Howard's eyes never leave the delegation from the Air Corps as he pulls a rumpled tie from his pocket and puts it on:

HOWARD
... and every bill comes to me. They don't pay for anything. Those men decide whether or not to fund the plane, so I need them real happy, do what it takes.

JOHNNY
You got it.

HOWARD
What about the girls?

JOHNNY
Let's put it this way ... I don't think the gentlemen from the Air Corps will have any trouble scoring tonight.

The Emcee continues:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EMCEE

... And now let me introduce you to the creator of this magnificent airplane. You know him as an aviator, an industrialist, an American hero. We here at Hughes Aircraft just know him as a patriot. Ladies and gentlemen ... Howard Hughes.

The crowd applauds. Howard joins the Emcee on the stage. He looks out over the sea of faces. Doesn't know quite what to say. Settles for:

HOWARD

Well, let's see her.

Gorgeous starlets emerge and slowly pull back the red curtain to reveal...

The Hercules.

History will come to know it as The Spruce Goose.

A huge silver model of the gigantic flying boat slowly revolves, a glowing Art Deco sign flashing "The Hercules" behind it. Gasps from the crowd. Flashbulbs. But Howard only has eyes for the Air Corps delegation. Are they impressed? Will they pay?

The Emcee leans into the microphone:

EMCEE

Imagine, if you dare, this beautiful lady towering over your head. And inside? 700 brave American soldiers! A dozen Sherman tanks! All winging their way over the Atlantic free from the threat of the U-boats prowling the icy waters below. Imagine a fleet of these planes...

He continues to extol the virtues of the Hercules.

Howard notes one of the women with one of the Air Corps officers. She puts her hand on his arm, whispers into his ear. He smiles.

Howard knows. They'll pay.

INT. MUIRFIELD -- DEN NIGHT

Howard sits at his desk, slowly flipping through a series of grainy black-and-white photos, shot through a telephoto lens. Surveillance photos.

The photos show Kate with Spencer Tracy. They are on a boat. The photos range from cozily domestic to romantic to erotic.

CONTINUED:

A large man sits across from Howard. He is a brooding Cuban man called **JORGE**, Howard's chief private investigator and enforcer. A sinister presence more than a man, Jorge takes care of all the ugly little details.

Howard completes flipping through the photos. Shuts his eyes. A long beat.

HOWARD

Where did you get them?

JORGE

From their photo lab. One of the technicians.

Howard opens his eyes. Cold, resolute fury.

EXT. SAN PEDRO PARK NIGHT

Dead of night. A car slowly pulls up to an isolated park overlooking the ocean. The car's headlights find Howard and Jorge standing at a fence, beyond the fence is a sheer drop to the roaring ocean below.

ROLAND SWEET, the editor of **HOLLYWOOD EXPOSE** magazine climbs from the car. He leaves the headlights on, illuminating the scene.

Sweet goes to them, offering his hand.

SWEET

Hello, Howard.

HOWARD

(not shaking)

Roland.

Sweet glances to the brooding Jorge. No introduction is made.

SWEET

So what can I do for you?

HOWARD

I want the pictures you have of Kate Hepburn and Spencer Tracy. All the negatives. And I want you to kill the story.

SWEET

Sorry, we're set to run next month.

HOWARD

I would take it as a personal favor if you wouldn't do that.

CONTINUED:

SWEET

He's a married man and he's a Catholic and they're both movie stars. Fair game all around.

Howard gazes at him. Doesn't say anything. Howard's cool eyes burn into Sweet. The silence grows. And grows. Ominous. Sweet glances to Jorge. The ocean roars below.

SWEET (CONT'D)

My office knows where I am, Howard.

HOWARD

I'm not going to kill you, Roland. I don't do that.

A beat.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

How much?

SWEET

Not for sale.

HOWARD

Now much?

SWEET

Not. For. Sale.

A beat. Jorge puts his hands into his coat pockets.

HOWARD

You ever cheat on your wife, Roland? ... You ever screw a colored girl? ... You ever steal anything? ... You ever hurt anyone?

A beat.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You ever go to a Communist party meeting, Roland?

Sweet blinks. A beat.

SWEET

TWA stock.

HOWARD

How much?

SWEET

50,000 shares.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

SWEET.

All right.

Howard turns without a word and strides off, Jorge with him.

Sweet remains frozen in the lights from his car.

HOWARD (V.O.)

What do you think about Trans World Airways...?

Taking us to...

INT. AVA'S MANSION -- BEDROOM EVENING

White orchids fill a luxurious bedroom.

A woman is bent over, brushing her long, raven hair. We do not see her face. Then she stands, tossing her head back, shaking her hair loose.

And we see her face. Ava Gardner. The one and only.

Howard sits across from her, feet up.

HOWARD

... Transcontinental and Western just doesn't fit anymore. Now that we're going international we need a name that reflects that.

AVA

Trans World is good. Kinda peppy.

HOWARD

TWA. Keep the same initials. That way we don't have to repaint the planes.

AVA

That's you, always pinching pennies ... Hand me my wrap.

He fetches her fur stole. Drapes it around her shoulders. Being this close is too much. The scent of her. The allure. He kisses her shoulders. Inhaling her.

She wriggles away.

AVA (CONT'D)

Knock it off.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

I have something for you.

He gets a white, cardboard box. Hands it to her. She is displeased.

AVA

What the hell is this?

HOWARD

It's a present. Open it up.

She opens the box. Inside is shredded newspaper.

AVA

Oh. A box of trash. You shouldn't have.

HOWARD

Keep looking.

She frowns and sorts through the newspaper. Feels something. She pulls out a necklace. A stunning necklace of diamonds and one gigantic sapphire. It is breathtaking.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

(eager)

It's a Kashmiri sapphire, best in the world. I had my boys all over the damn globe looking for this.

AVA

Why?

HOWARD

Because it matches your eyes.

She drops the necklace back into the box, hands it to him.

AVA

I'm not for sale.

HOWARD

For Christ sake, it's just a present--

AVA

(a flash of her famed
anger)

You can't buy me, so stop trying. Don't buy me anymore diamonds or sapphires or any other goddamn thing. You can buy me dinner. How about that?

HOWARD

Jesus, Ava--

CONTINUED:

AVA

How much are you willing to spend? What does a human being cost, Howard?

HOWARD

20,000 dollars.

She stops. Looks at him.

AVA

What?

HOWARD

A human being costs 20,000 dollars. Well, it might be more now.

AVA

What ... are ... you ... talking ... about?

HOWARD

A few years ago I was driving down Third. This man stepped out into the street. Or maybe I wasn't paying attention. I killed him with the car. It cost me 20,000 dollars to settle with his family. As I say, it might be more now.

He stands there. Like a lost little boy.

INT.

CHEVY

EVENING

Howard is cruising with Ava in one of his hideous Chevys. She is dressed to kill, her mink stole around her shoulders.

AVA

... It's bad enough I have to endure those filthy gym shoes of yours, but then I get all dolled up and we have to go out in this old jalopy without a hood!

HOWARD

Hey, Ava, will you marry me?

AVA

No, Howard.

HOWARD

Why not?

AVA

In the first place, I don't love you. In the second place, I'm still married. In the third place, you stink - - Jesus, it's like a goddamn canary flew into your shirt and died there!

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

I can get a new shirt.

AVA

Look, you got girls stashed all over town -- you got a damned harem just at the Bel Air -- why don't you marry one of your bungalow girls?

HOWARD

Those are employees, I can't marry an employee, how would that look?

Suddenly a car SLAMS into them -- into the passenger door -- Howard and Ava rock, not really injured, the Chevy stops -- then the car that hit them backs up and drives into them again -- SLAM -- and again -- SLAM.

Howard leaps out--

EXT. STREET FOLLOWING

Faith is plowing into them, demolishing the front of her sporty roadster. Demolishing the Chevy's passenger door.

Howard runs toward her--

HOWARD

Faith! What the hell--?!

He jumps back as Faith plows into the Chevy one last time. She attempts to back up again but her roadster dies, steam hissing from the engine.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Goddammit -- what the hell is this?!

FAITH

(dissolving)

What are you doing with her?

HOWARD

We're going to dinner, now get out of there--

FAITH

(wailing, a teenager)

Don't you love me anymore--?

HOWARD

'Course I do, little baby, you just have to--

Faith bawls.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Meanwhile, Ava is screaming through her window:

AVA
GET THAT CRAZY CUNT AWAY FROM ME!

Faith continues to wail. Ava continues to scream.

A crowd is beginning to form. Someone flashes a picture.
Howard tries to shield his face. Too late--

QUICK FLASHES: A series of ugly black and white shots of the crash -- Howard shielding his face -- Ava screaming -- Howard awkwardly trying to get Faith out of her car -- Howard angry at the photographer.

--The final photo burns into a tabloid cover...

INT. JUAN TRIPPE'S OFFICE -- PAN AM DAY

... The tabloid cover sits on Juan Trippe's desk. Trippe sits across from a nervous man.

He is **SENATOR RALPH OWEN BREWSTER.**

Title: **Senator Ralph Owen Brewster. Republican. Maine.**

BREWSTER
.. and Jack Frye's been lobbying everyone in town.
He's got the British and French ambassadors on board
now ... TWA's serious about going international.

Trippe slowly taps his pipe clean.

TRIPPE
Point, Mr. Hughes.

A beat. Trippe is thinking ten moves in advance.

TRIPPE (CONT'D)
Very well, I think it's time you introduced the
Community Airline Bill in the Senate.

BREWSTER
Is it done?

TRIPPE
My people are finishing it now. And I'll need you on
the Committee Investigating the National Defense.
Would you like to be chairman?

CONTINUED:

BREWSTER

(pleased)

Like Harry Truman.

TRIPPE

Perhaps you can be vice-president too one day. Good day, Senator Brewster.

Brewster sits. But apparently the royal audience is over. He awkwardly gets up and goes.

Trippe sits. Begins filling his pipe. Ten moves in advance.

INT. HUGHES AIRCRAFT -- HERCULES HANGER NIGHT

Howard walks through a fair representation of Hell. The Hercules hanger.

The harsh blue glare of acetylene torches and welding irons send horrifying shadows into the upper reaches of the chamber. The thunk and groan of heavily machinery echo like tourists' calls into the Grand Canyon. The hanger is 800 feet long.

Hundreds of workers labor in every corner of the massive hanger. Most of them swarming over...

The skeletal frame of the Hercules' fuselage. The combination of wood and plastic molding soars up, disappearing into the darkness of the top of the cathedral.

Howard is particularly intense -- in overdrive -- his mind racing, battling to keep up with the many, many pressures of his life. He flips through renderings for a new TWA logo as he walks, tossing aside those he doesn't like -- which is all of them.

An AIDE scurries behind and picks up the discarded renderings.

Jack Frye strides alongside Howard.

JACK

... If the Community Airline Bill becomes law we are finished, my friend. Pan Am will have a legal monopoly on international travel and--

HOWARD

How can they justify it? It's un-American.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACK

Senator Brewster is saying that domestic competition will kill expansion into the global market -- because the nationalized foreign carriers, like Air France and Lufthansa, can offer lower fares 'cause they don't have to compete, right? So, hey, let's get rid of all that messy competition and have a nationalized airline of our own. And, hey, why don't we make it Pan Am?

A very overtired Glenn Odekirk calls down to Howard from the top of a step unit alongside the plane:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GLENN

Howard, I need you up here.

Howard turns to the aide collecting up the TWA logo renderings:

HOWARD

We're Trans World Airways -- give me a goddamn globe or a circle or something round for Christ sake!

Howard climbs up the step unit toward Glenn, Jack following, as he continues to Jack with singular intensity:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

All right, we gotta go public with this. I'll talk to Hearst and see what kinda press he can give me. But sooner or later it's gonna come down to a vote in the Senate. So we gotta get some Senators on our side -- see who's up for reelection and start making campaign contributions--

JACK

You want me to bribe Senators?

HOWARD

I don't want 'em bribed, I want 'em bought. And put a team of investigators on Senator Brewster. I need to know everything there is about that shitbag. Where he goes, what he says, and who he screws. Get into it. Right now, Jack.

JACK

You got it.

Jack returns down the step unit.

Howard joins Glenn at the top of the steps and they enter...

INT. HERCULES HANGER -- FUSELAGE DAY 73

... The great, yawning chasm that is the hollow interior of the Hercules' fuselage under construction. Truly the belly of the beast.

Glenn leads Howard to a collection of huge blueprints.

HOWARD

What do you need?

GLENN

Left rear rudder and elevators.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Howard studies some blueprints, the bustling fuselage stretching out beyond him, seemingly forever, like a nightmare vision from a Bosch painting.

Howard makes some quick notes on the blueprints and then proceeds out of the fuselage as:

HOWARD

Those others are fine but have Simon and Pete get back to me on the power coupling relays, we got redundant systems here ... And listen, we gotta take another look at the wheel--

GLENN

Oh Jesus -- the damn wheel--

HOWARD

It doesn't feel right.

INT. HERCULES HANGER NIGHT

Back down on the hanger floor, Howard and Glenn move to a mammoth collection of prototype steering wheels for the Hercules. Every conceivable shape and size and material.

Howard patiently tries them out as Glenn melts down--

GLENN

Howard, we've tried every goddamn thing -- we've tried leather, we've tried plastic, we've tried metal, with ridges, without ridges, round, flat, square -- Christ almighty you have seen eight thousand goddamn wheels -- you gotta make a decision!

HOWARD

(trying out a wheel)

I don't know, this one's pretty close...

Howard stops, watching a CUSTODIAN sweeping up. Little dust tornadoes around his broom. The Custodian is tall and unnaturally emaciated, long stringy hair and a beard. He is looking at Howard evenly. It's a bit sinister.

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- the dust tornadoes swirling into the air -- the Custodian's even gaze -- the broom sending up more and more dust particles--

Howard tears himself back to reality:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

That man sweeping up. Does he work for me? I mean, have you seen him before?

CONTINUED:

GLENN

Name's Josh or something like that.

HOWARD

Why is he looking at me?

GLENN

I don't know.

Howard turns back to the wheels, continues trying various ones.

HOWARD

Fire him. And make sure they use damp brooms from now on. Respiratory diseases are expensive and I don't want a bunch of damn lawsuits...

GLENN

Okay. But can we at least proceed with the instrument panel we discussed? The tool shop is ready to go--

HOWARD

No, I wanna see the blueprints again--

GLENN

(cracking a bit)

You've seen all this stuff a hundred times -- it's just like the goddamn wheel -- you can't keep changing your mind -- we're eight goddamn months behind schedule as it is--!

HOWARD

It's all gotta be right -- it's got to feel right.

GLENN

Look, you gotta face it, the deadline is now totally unrealistic. At this rate the war will be over by the time she's done!

HOWARD

(calming)

Odie, take it easy ... I understand you're under a lot of pressure, but it's gonna do me no good if you crack up on me. Take a couple hours off...

His eyes dart to the Custodian again. The same even gaze at Howard.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

... Relax a little bit, take some time off. See your wife. Just be sure to show me all the blueprints. Show me all the blueprints. Show me all the blueprints. Show me all the blueprints...

CONTINUED:

Glenn looks at him. A half smile. Is this a joke?

HOWARD (CONT'D)

... Show me all the blueprints. Show me all the blueprints. Show me all the blueprints...

Howard's face. A terrible flash of fear in his eyes.

It has finally happened. He is going mad.

And he knows it. He can't stop himself.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

... Show me all the blueprints. Show me all the blueprints. Show me all the blueprints...

GLENN

(concerned)

Howard...?

Howard's face. Incredible fear. He know what's happening and he just can't stop it.

HOWARD

... Show me all the blueprints. Show me all the blueprints. Show me all the blueprints...

Howard, still repeating neurotically, backs away from Glenn and hurries out of the hanger.

INT. HOWARD'S CAR -- HUGHES AIRCRAFT NIGHT

Howard sits in his car, his hands clamped over his mouth.

He refuses to remove them, terrified of what might come out. We see the panic in his eyes. Finally he closes his eyes and prepares himself. He slowly removes his hands.

Silence. He opens his eyes. Prepares himself again, and dares to speak:

HOWARD

Quarantine. Q-U-A-R-A-N-T-I-N-E. Quarantine.

He has done it.

Not mad. Not yet.

EXT. HUGHES AIRCRAFT -- RUNWAY DAY

The XF-11. At last.

CONTINUED:

Howard gently caresses the foot pedals, hand levers and wheel.

Outside, the mighty XF-11 begins to roll.

Inside, smooth as silk. Stasis and calm as the world slowly rolls by outside.

HOWARD

She's goddamn spotless, Odie! No wiggle on the wheel or throttles.

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)

Take it easy, Howard...

HOWARD

Preparing for starboard turn 1-8-0.

He elegantly swings the plane around. Clean. The long runway stretches out before him.

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)

How does she sound, Howard?

HOWARD

She's whispering to me, buddy.

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)

All right. Make her sing.

Howard smiles and sets the plane in motion. She begins to zoom down the runway, gaining momentum.

She ROARS past Glenn and the others at the Command Post.

The XF-11 gracefully soars into the sky.

Inside, silk.

Howard laughs. Giddy.

HOWARD

Well, Odie, she can fly, congratulations.

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)

Retract landing gear and climb to 5,000 feet at a heading of due West 4-5.

HOWARD

Retracting landing gear and climbing to 5,000 feet at a heading of due West 4-5.

He switches the landing gear lever and climbs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

All of a sudden he is over the Pacific Ocean. In the blink of an eye the world has been left behind.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Jesus, she's fast!

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)
What's your airspeed, Howard?

HOWARD
2-9-2.

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)
Take her back to 2-0-0.

HOWARD
No ... goddamn ... way.

He pulls back on the wheel and the XF-11 streaks through the sky.

And is lost in the clouds.

An eternal moment as Howard soars. His dream. The world behind him, the heavens before him. Airborne. Clean. Free.

The glorious XF-11 responds to his every tiny cue, melting to his commands like butter. The insane power of the H-1 has been replaced with a serene calm.

An hour and forty five minutes later...

INT./EXT. XF-11 DAY

Howard is soaring over Los Angeles at 5,000 feet. Bliss.

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)
Howard, we gotta bring her home. Set course for port turn 1-8-0 and return to base. Descend to 4,000 feet.

HOWARD
Gimme ten more minutes.

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)
Negative, Howard. Bring her home.

HOWARD
Okay, setting course for--

And then it happens.

CONTINUED:

The plane SLAMS to the right. Dipping savagely. As if a giant were pulling it back and down by the right wing.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Christ--!

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)

(alert)

What is it, Howard?

HOWARD

The right wing just dipped -- Jesus Christ -- (he fights with the controls) -- I'm losing starboard engine.

The XF-11 begins to list dangerously to the right, losing altitude.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Increasing power to 2,800 rpm -- (no good) -- cutting back -- increasing starboard engine power only -- (no good) -- cutting back. I'm losing altitude.

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)

Check starboard engine indicator.

HOWARD

(confused)

Lights are green.

The XF-11 continues to soar down, tilting to the right.

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)

Are both starboard props turning?

HOWARD

Hold on.

He quickly releases his safety harness, stands forward in the listing cockpit to see -- the plane swerves to the right -- Howard scrambles to hold on -- fighting with the wheel -- sits back down.

Does not refasten his harness.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Looks like they are, Odie -- but she's pulling me back and starboard.

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)

(calming)

Howard, return to base. Repeat, return to base.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The XF-11 is losing altitude quickly. Soaring toward the ground. The altimeter arrow floats down past 3,500 feet ... 3,000 feet...

Howard jams his feet on the pedals, fights with the wheel.

HOWARD

I'm at full left rudder and full left aileron but she won't stay level--

The altimeter: 2,500 feet ... 2,000 feet...

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)

Howard, give us your position.

HOWARD

2,000 feet over -- Christ, I dunno, Beverly Hills -- 1,500 feet.

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)

Reduce engines to 1,000.

HOWARD

We're going down -- I'm gonna try for the Wilshire Country Club ninth hole. Oughta to be wide enough. You read me, Odie?

GLENN (V.O. ON RADIO)

Wilshire Country Club. Reduce engines to 1,000.

The plane is zooming toward the earth. The quiet residential streets of Beverly Hills flying up at Howard. Impossibly fast--

The G-forces of the fall are now pressing Howard back into his seat--

Beverly Hills zooms up--

With every ounce of strength in him, Howard fights to keep the nose of the plane up--

Then he sees it is too late--

HOWARD

I'm not going to make it, buddy.

The houses of Beverly Hills are zooming up at him--

At the very last moment he prepares himself for impact by throwing himself back and thrusting his feet forward -- slamming them onto the panels ahead of him as --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The XF-11 crashes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Most Beautiful Plane In The World slashes through a roof, slicing it off like a cake--

Howard's whole body snaps forward--

The right wing smashes into a corner of another house, exploding and tearing through a second floor bedroom in a ball of flame--

Howard's face smashes into the plexiglass cockpit dome, shards of plexiglass and metal slicing into him--

The remainder of the right wing tears through the corner of another house, demolishing it, and suddenly sending the plane on a ferocious roll, end-over-end--

Howard slams around the demolished cockpit--

The plane bounces and rolls violently -- severing a utility pole -- crashing through an alley--

Howard is thrown violently around the cockpit, slamming from control panel to seat to plexiglass dome--

The plane disintegrates into four flaming sections as it tears through the alley--

Flames explode around Howard in the fuselage--

The fuselage finally SLAMS to a stop in the alley--

Howard careens forward into the nose of the fuselage, his body grotesquely mangled--

But conscious.

Blood pours from his face -- flame rages around him -- fuel and oil everywhere -- his right hand catches fire -- he furiously tries to extinguish it by beating it on the sleeve of his jacket--

His jacket catches fire--

Still burning, he tries to pull himself up from the nose of the fuselage -- but his left foot is trapped in a chaos of twisting metal--

He pulls at his trapped left leg -- finally wrenches his leg free -- shattering his left ankle -- he claws and hauls himself up in the fuselage--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

For leverage he must grab onto the boiling rim of the cockpit bubble -- he does, searing both hands to the bone -- he hauls himself up -- shoving at the bubble with his shoulders -- it finally gives way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He pulls himself halfway out of the cockpit -- then can do nothing more. He collapses. It's over.

He lies there as the flames consume him -- his eyes open -- aware of everything--

Then a vision through the acrid black smoke and flames--

A man racing down the alley toward him, a MARINE.

The brave Marine fights through the flames and grabs Howard -- yanks him from the burning wreckage--

Pulls him away from the plane--

MARINE
IS THERE ANYONE ELSE INSIDE?!

Howard can't hear--

MARINE (CONT'D)
IS THERE ANYONE ELSE?!

Howard shakes his head and then grabs the Marine's collar, pulls himself forward toward the man's face until he is inches away--

Howard's face is mangled; a bloody, shredded mass of scorched tissue and bone.

With his last breath he gurgles through the blood streaming from his mouth:

HOWARD
I'm Howard Hughes. The aviator.

Then--

A PHOTOGRAPHER appears and flashes a picture -- FOOSH -- Howard writhes in agony, screaming --

He is captured in the harsh white explosion of the flashbulb. Dying.

OMITTED

INT. _____ HOSPITAL -- CORRIDOR _____ NIGHT

There has never been a death watch like this one.

The corridor outside Howard's room is filled. Jack Frye sits with his head down. Errol Flynn leans against a wall, chatting with Johnny Meyer. Glenn Odekirk sits with several of his engineers, furiously arguing over XF-11 blueprints. Ava sits, wearing dark glasses, pretending to read a magazine.

Noah is standing in a secluded corner with a DOCTOR:

DOCTOR

... He has burns on 78 percent of his body. Nine ribs are shattered -- not broken, shattered -- as are his nose, cheek, chin, left knee and left elbow. He has 60 lacerations on his face to the bone. His chest was crushed so his left lung has collapsed and his heart has shifted entirely to the right side of his chest cavity.

NOAH

Jesus God...

DOCTOR

He's getting blood transfusions now but--

NOAH

Whose blood?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR
Sorry?

NOAH
Whose blood?

DOCTOR
From our stock.

NOAH
Oh, he's not going to like that.

The doctor stares at Noah.

DOCTOR
Mr. Dietrich, I doubt he's ever going to like or disl
anything again. I'm terribly sorry.

The doctor moves away.

Noah stands for a moment and then goes to Howard's door. Take
breath. Enters...

INT. HOSPITAL -- HOWARD'S ROOM FOLLOWING

Noah stands and looks at the shattered body of what was once
Howard Hughes.

Howard lies in a coma inside his oxygen tent, connected to
chugging machines. He has been bandaged but the bloody horror
evident. A whisper of life all that remains.

Noah sinks into a chair, looks at him.

Then we hear:

HOWARD (V.O.)
Orange juice...

INT. HOSPITAL -- HOWARD'S ROOM DAY

Howard is sitting up in bed. Very weak. His face is almost
completely covered in bandages. Only his bloodshot right eye
a bit of his torn, swollen mouth are visible through the
shrouding.

Noah and Glenn sit with him.

Howard does not move a muscle because of the burns. His
collapsed lung makes it difficult to draw breath. He is heavi
sedated, almost incoherent.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

... not fresh from the kitchen...

A CHEF stands in a corner of the room preparing orange juice for Howard, slicing oranges and squeezing them.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Make 'em squeeze it here ... so I can see...

We note that even in his weakened state, Howard's voice is strangely louder now. His flat, Texan deaf-man's twang more pronounced. The accident has destroyed his already flawed hearing.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

... Orange juice has ... nutritional value ... Flies outside the window, though ... everyone likes citrus ... don't they just?

His bloodshot eye settles on Glenn:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Tell me.

GLENN

An oil seal ripped off the starboard rear propeller. When the pressure dropped, the prop reversed pitch. Do you understand me? ... (Howard nods) ... I hate to bother you now, but there's something else. You following me? ... (Howard nods) ... The Air Force canceled the contract on the Hercules.

This is a body blow. Howard takes it almost without shuddering.

GLENN (CONT'D)

The war's been over for a year. They say they don't need it anymore. I have to know what you want me to do? Should I release the staff?

HOWARD

How far ... from finishing?

GLENN

About six months.

HOWARD

No ... in money.

GLENN

7 million. Maybe more.

A beat.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

Build it.

Glenn and Noah exchange a glance.

NOAH

(gently)

Howard, there's something else ... A Constellation crashed in Reading, Pennsylvania. Civil Aeronautics Board grounded the whole fleet.

Howard stares at him. Then turns his gaze to a single vase of flowers in the room.

HOWARD

Juan Trippe sent me flowers.

NOAH

Where are all the others?

HOWARD

Had them taken out ... They attract aphids ... Aphids are awful things ... But I wanted to see these ones every day.

The chef brings a glass of orange juice to Howard's mouth, carefully inserting the straw through the hole in the bandages by his lips. Howard sucks through the straw as he glares at the flowers.

EXT. LOS ANGELES AIRPORT DAY

The magnificent Constellations are everything we have waited for. Sleek and aerodynamic and enormous.

And grounded.

Howard slowly limps with Noah and Jack Frye past a fleet of the idle planes. Bold red-and-white TWA colors on the Connies.

Howard is a skeleton. He has lost 35 pounds off his already lean frame. He is weak, walking with a cane, trying to focus.

It is soon apparent that his face will never be what it was. Plastic surgery has helped, but he has lost much of the natural elasticity on the left side of his face. His amazingly pure beauty is just gone, although a darker, more saturnine intensity gives his face a very commanding aspect.

He now sports a mustache to cover a scar above his lip.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

How long can they keep us grounded?

JACK

Until they finish their investigation of the Reading crash. That could be months.

NOAH

(to Jack)

Jesus -- you're already running a 14 million dollar deficit. How you gonna afford to have them out of service a week much less--?

HOWARD

When we go international, we'll make it up.

NOAH

Look, Brewster's C.A.B. bill just isn't going away. That bill passes and you've bought all these goddamn planes for nothing!

JACK

We're fighting the C.A.B. bill--

NOAH

(ignoring him, to Howard)

Meanwhile, how do you suggest we keep TWA flying? And don't just tell me to go to Toolco, we're still pumping every damn cent we have into the Hercules, which, I might add, the Air Force doesn't even want anymore...

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- Noah talking -- his words can barely be heard through the now ringing and whooshing torrent of white noise inside Howard's head.

Howard turns his good ear to Noah. It doesn't help much anymore. He forces himself to concentrate:

NOAH (CONT'D)

... it all comes down to this: you gotta choose. Do you want to be bankrupt by the big plane or by the big airline?

Howard seems about to implode. It is all too much right now. Then he takes several deep breaths. Fights for control.

A long beat as he looks at the Constellations. Then:

HOWARD

Go see Thomas Parkinson at the Equitable in New York. Get a loan against all the TWA equipment and capital. Use the planes as collateral.

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Hell, use the desks, and the pens and every damn thing we got. Try to get me 40 million.

NOAH

And if TWA defaults on the loan?

HOWARD

Then Juan Trippe buys us cheap.

INT. AVA'S MANSION -- LIVING ROOM DAY

Ava is raging. And few human beings can rage like Ava Gardner.

Howard, still standing unsteadily with his cane, watches as she stalks dangerously around her living room -- brandishing a small covert microphone and wires she has ripped from a wall--

AVA

UNDER MY BED?! -- YOU PUT A GODDAMN MICROPHONE UNDER MY BED--?!

HOWARD

Honey, listen to me--

AVA

What do you wanna hear?! You wanna hear me screwing Mickey Rooney -- that do it for you, Howard?! You wanna hear me screwing Sinatra?! You goddamn faggot -- screw them yourself if you're so interested--!

HOWARD

I'm concerned about you, baby, I just wanna make sure you're okay--

She goes to a window, tears open the drapes--

AVA

And who's in that car? That goddamn car is with me twenty-four hours a day--

HOWARD

It's there for your protection!

AVA

The only one I need protected from is you, you sick bastard! -- You don't own me, Howard -- I'm not one of your teenage whores and I'm not some damn airplane--!

HOWARD

(implores)

Look, I'm sorry, Ava, listen to me, I'll have them take all the bugs out. You just have to understand that ... that I need to know where you are.

CONTINUED:

AVA

Why?

HOWARD

Because I worry about you.

AVA

Bullshit ... (she stops) ... What do you mean all the bugs?

A beat.

AVA (CONT'D)

What do you mean all the bugs?

HOWARD

There's more.

AVA

How many?

HOWARD

Maybe ... twelve. And on the telephones.

She looks at him. Shocked and saddened in equal measure.

AVA

Oh Christ, Howard, on the telephone ... You listen to my phone calls?

HOWARD

Oh no, honey ... I just read the transcripts.

She looks at him.

Then very carefully picks up a large, marble ashtray.

She flings it at his head, he tries to duck but the ashtray slams into his forehead. Blood.

AVA

Get out of here ... You sad ... pathetic ... freak.

Howard goes.

EXT. AVA'S MANSION DAY

Howard walks to his car, mumbling to himself, dabbing at the blood on his head with a handkerchief.

Jorge, his Cuban enforcer, is waiting. Jorge holds a phone that extends from inside the car.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

Take out all the bugs .. except for the one on the bedroom phone.

JORGE

We got a problem at the house.

He hands Howard the phone.

INT. MUIRFIELD -- DEN DAY

And the assault begins. Increasing pressure on Howard:

He stands, extremely tense, on the verge of trauma. His den is being invaded. Total blitzkrieg as his inner sanctum is defiled.

A dozen FBI AGENTS and SENATE INVESTIGATORS are rifling through his files. He watches as the agents touch his belongings and move things out of the way. One sits at his desk. They are taking pictures of everything.

The following scenes are intercut with lurid color photos -- like the covers of old pulp novels. They are tawdry and sensational.

LURID PHOTO #1: HOTEL ROOM. Howard caught in bed with a starlet - - as if the photographer kicked in the door and flashed a picture--

INT. 7000 ROMAINE -- ACCOUNTING OFFICES DAY

Pressure. FBI agents and investigators are sorting through documents at 7000 Romaine and taking pictures. Accountants and secretaries stand about nervously.

Noah enters quickly.

NOAH

What the hell is this?

FBI AGENT

(handing him a warrant)

Federal warrant.

LURID PHOTO #2: HUGHES AIRCRAFT PARKING LOT. Howard having a ferocious argument with Glenn Odekirk -- as if shot secretly from across the parking lot--

EXT. MUIRFIELD DAY

89

Pressure. Howard watches through a window as more agents sort through his garbage. They haul things away and flash photos--

LURID PHOTO #3: MUIRFIELD. Howard seducing a starlet -- the photo shot through the window.

INT. MUIRFIELD -- DEN DAY

Pressure. Howard flipping through aviation blueprints, increasingly frenzied -- he can't tell the planes apart anymore -- they ebb and flow bizarrely in his mind -- he finally flings the blueprints in the air--

LURID PHOTO #4: STREET. Jorge smashing a tabloid photographer's camera -- Howard trying to restrain him -- a flurry of violence--

OMITTED

INT. MUIRFIELD NIGHT

Pressure. Howard is on a hall phone, his eyes never leaving a new team of agents tearing through his den and flashing photos of everything. Howard grows increasingly upset.

HOWARD (ON PHONE, TENSE)

... This is the tenth goddamn time they've been here! -- Noah, you gotta help -- they are touching things, you know what that means?!

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- the FBI Agents touching his things -- their fingertips -- their shoes trampling across the floor -- one agent is smoking, an ash falls to the carpet--

Howard just can't bear watching the invasion a moment longer. He drops the phone and hurries away.

The phone hangs at the end of the cord.

NOAH (V.O. ON PHONE)

Howard ... ? Howard ... ?

INT. MAYFLOWER HOTEL -- BREWSTER'S APARTMENT DAY

Senator Brewster is standing, looking over a table set for an elegant lunch for two in his palatial Washington apartment.

Title: **February 12, 1947. Mayflower Hotel, Washington DC.**

Brewster considers the settings for a moment. Then reaches forward and picks up one of the empty water glasses.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Brewster considers the settings for a moment. Then reaches forward and picks up one of the empty water glasses.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Puts a thumb print on it. Clearly visible as he holds it to the light. Smiles. Sets the water glass down.

A buzz from the front door.

Brewster walks through the apartment, meets Howard being escorted in by a MAID. Howard wears his dark suit. White shirt. No tie. White sneakers.

Howard is making a superhuman effort to appear "normal."

BREWSTER

Howard, hello.

He strides up, offering his hand. Howard forces himself to take Brewster's hand and shake firmly.

HOWARD

Owen, nice to see you again.

BREWSTER

(to maid)

Emma, you can set up lunch now ... (he ushers Howard into the living room) ... Come on in.

HOWARD

Really lovely room ... (checks the panoramic view from the window) ... View, too. That's nice.

BREWSTER

Sit down... (Howard sits on a sofa) ... Thanks for coming by. Just thought you and I should have a chance to talk privately. Away from the office.

HOWARD

I appreciate that, Owen.

A beat.

BREWSTER

So ... you're coming out pretty strong against the C.A.B bill.

HOWARD

You're coming on pretty strong for it.

BREWSTER

It's my bill, Howard, I sincerely believe America cannot afford more than one international carrier.

HOWARD

You think it's fair for one airline to have a monopoly on international travel?

CONTINUED:

BREWSTER

I think one airline can do it better without competition. All I'm thinking about is the needs of the American passenger.

Howard's eye is drawn to a painting on a wall. A llama in a Peruvian setting.

HOWARD

Now that's just beautiful. What is that, a yak? Some kinda yak?

BREWSTER

A llama. The wife picked it up when we were in Peru last year.

HOWARD

A llama, sonofagun, a real llama. In Peru?

BREWSTER

Yeah, last year.

Brewster doesn't like way the conversation is getting off-point. Thankfully, the maid enters:

MAID

Lunch is served, Senator.

BREWSTER

(standing)

Come on, let's have some lunch.

He leads Howard into the dining room as:

HOWARD

Did you actually see any llamas?

BREWSTER

No. My wife just liked the painting.

HOWARD

Hell of an interesting animal. Gotta read up on those. How do you spell it? Like Fernando Lamas?

Brewster ushers him into the dining room. Points him to a chair:

BREWSTER

No, no, the animal. It has two l's. Sit down, please...

Their lunch plates are covered with metal domes. The maid pulls them away. Brewster watches for Howard's reaction.

CONTINUED:

The plates are filled with Brook Trout and heaps of asparagus and Brussel sprouts. The trout is served with the head on. A glassy eye stares up at Howard.

BREWSTER (CONT'D)

It's Brook Trout. Hope you like fish.

HOWARD

Love it, thanks.

Brewster is disappointed. Howard forces himself to dig in. The maid pours water into their glasses. Howard has the glass Brewster smudged with his thumb print before.

BREWSTER

I know you're not a drinking man, so I hope water is fine.

Howard sees the thumb print. Takes the glass and drinks.

HOWARD

Thanks.

Brewster is disappointed that his childish game of psychological warfare is failing so miserably.

BREWSTER

All right, let's talk turkey ... My investigators have turned up a lot of dirt. It could be really embarrassing if this stuff got out. I'd like to save you that embarrassment.

HOWARD

That's very kind of you, Owen.

BREWSTER

My Committee has the power to hold public hearings. I'd like to spare you that.

HOWARD

Would you now?

Howard's sang froid is rather angering Brewster. A beat.

BREWSTER

You wanna go down in history was a war profiteer, Howard?

Howard stops eating. Looks at him.

HOWARD

What do you want?

CONTINUED:

BREWSTER

Agree to support my C.A.B. bill and I won't hold public hearings.

HOWARD

I can't do that, Owen. The C.A.B. would kill TWA.

BREWSTER

Sell TWA to Pan Am. You'll get a fair price.

At last. The deal.

Howard resumes eating, not looking at Brewster.

HOWARD

And then you won't go public?

BREWSTER

That's right. The investigation is closed and no one knows a thing. Better for everyone.

HOWARD

You know I'm still wondering one thing...

BREWSTER

What's that?

HOWARD

That picture of the llama you got last year. Where'd you sail from?

BREWSTER

We didn't. We flew.

HOWARD

Oh.

Brewster stares at him. Howard returns the stare evenly. Then, his voice low and cold:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You sure you wanna do this, Owen? You wanna go to war with me?

BREWSTER

It's not me, Howard -- it's the United States government.

Howard stands.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

Listen, tell Juan Trippe something for me ... Thank you for the flowers. And he can kiss my ass.

He goes. Brewster glowers.

INT. MAYFLOWER HOTEL -- CORRIDOR DAY

Howard moves down the corridor, away from Brewster's apartment. He rounds a corner, where he has left his cane, and almost instantly deflates. He leans against a wall, shaking dangerously, panting for breath. The effort of appearing "normal" for Brewster has totally exhausted him.

He can't control the tremors in his body. He finally implodes -- sinking down the wall.

Then we hear Howard's voice, whispering:

HOWARD (V.O.)

Someone tell me where I sleep...

Taking us to...

INT. 7000 ROMAINE -- SCREENING ROOM DAY

Stark desert landscapes. Clouds. Black and white.

Location footage from THE OUTLAW is being projected on the screen, the flickering light the only illumination.

HOWARD (V.O.)

Someone tell me where I sleep...

And we see him. He removes his shirt as he speaks and ranges around the screening room.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

... I-sleep-in-this-room/In-the-dark-in-this-room/I-have-a-place-that-I-sleep/Someone-tell-me-where-I-sleep/Will-someone-please-just-tell-me...

He drops his shirt as he wanders, more slowly now, like a windup toy running down. He notes the desert scenery being projected.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

...I-like-the-desert/Hot-there-in-the-desert/But-clean/Good clouds ... Real fine ... clouds ... Jesus ... I need to ... Will someone ... please...

The windup toy is done. Howard just stands there. Frozen.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I need to sleep No. No. No. ...I should drink something first.

He stands looking at a neat collection of milk bottles across the room. He mimes the action with his hands slowly as he describes it. He is unaware his hands are moving.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I'll walk over there and pick up a bottle of milk with my ... right hand ... and I'll take off the top with my ... left hand ... with two fingers ... of my left hand ... I'll take off the top and put it in my pocket ... my left pocket ...

His hands stop moving. He looks at the bottles of milk. He does not move.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

How long has it been here? It might be bad ... (he begins miming the action again, with exactly the same gestures he used a moment before) ... So if the milk is bad I shouldn't walk over there ... and pick up the bottle of milk with my ... right hand ...and take off the top with my ... left hand...

His mental loop is broken when the red light above the screening room door begins to flash. Someone is outside.

He goes to the door. He talks through the door, waging a terrible battle to sound sane.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Who is it?

Split-screen to:

Kate Hepburn, outside the screening room.

KATE

Howard, it's Kate. I need to see you.

Howard moans. Presses his hands against the screening room door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE (CONT'D)

Howard, do you hear me? I'm coming in.

She tries to open the door. It is locked.

KATE (CONT'D)

Unlock this door immediately.

HOWARD

I can't.

KATE

Did you say something?

HOWARD

(tormented)

I can't.

A beat.

KATE

You mean you won't.

Howard is dissolving, wanting more than anything in life to see her, touch her, hold her.

She is deeply concerned. Leans against the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE (CONT'D)

(softly)

Howard ... please let me see you.

HOWARD

I haven't shaved.

KATE

I don't care. Let me in.

HOWARD

I can hear you ... I could always hear you. Even in the cockpit, with the engines...

KATE

That's because I'm so goddamn loud.

He smiles. Tears coming to his eyes. He leans his whole body against the door, wanting to be closer.

KATE (CONT'D)

Howard, I came to thank you ... I found out what you did for Spence and me. Buying those awful pictures.

HOWARD

You love him.

KATE

He's everything I have.

HOWARD

I'm glad for you, Kate ... Katie.

Howard proceeds with great difficulty:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Go away now. Would you do that?

KATE

(tears)

Howard...

HOWARD

Go away, just for now, I'll see you soon. We'll go flying.

KATE

Please take me flying again ... I can take the wheel ... Howard? ... Are you there?

A long beat and then she turns and walks down the long corridor, devastated. He hears her footsteps echoing away...

CONTINUED:

On her half of the split-screen we see her walking away as...

Howard sinks to the floor. He holds his knees and rocks like a feral child. Inarticulate moans coming from deep within him...

She disappears around a corner, the hallway is empty. Howard is alone.

End Split-screen.

And Howard's journey into hell begins.

He never leaves the screening room. For months.

INT. SCREENING ROOM SEQUENCE DAY/NIGHT

A line of ants creeps across a plate of cookies.

We see don't see Howard. We see his hands.

He carefully removes a Kleenex from a box. And then another. And then another. And then a handful. He methodically wraps his hand in a wad of Kleenex and then uses the Kleenex to press the RECORD button on a tape recorder.

We watch the tape in the machine begin to spin.

Then we explore Howard's strange realm -- slowly coming to realize the depths of his descent -- as we hear an aural mosaic of various memos, ebbing and flowing:

HOWARD (V.O.)

Memo to All Staff ... There has been some confusion on the topic of my lunch. I will clarify. The employee delivering my lunch is to use no less than four Kleenex brand tissues to carry the bag into the screening room. He is to open the bag with his right hand and then hold the bag out to me at a forty five degree angle so I may reach into the bag without touching the paper..

Another memo is heard as the first continues...

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

...it doesn't take a genius to read a blueprint. Note the hydraulics for the right aileron shown on print number 2,187-B, it is out of alignment by almost an eighth of an inch. This lack of attention to detail is unacceptable...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

We see engine parts scattered about like corpses after a battle. We see brown paper bags and newspapers are stacked messily all around. We see grainy surveillance photos of Ava out on dates with other men...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Another memo is heard as the others continue...

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

... You must understand this is the most important thing in my life. When the milk bottles are delivered to the screening room, the employee with the bottles must wear a white shirt and no jacket. His cuffs must be completely buttoned and he must not wear a watch or jewelry or cologne of any kind. He must use no less than fifty Kleenex brand tissues to form a paddle. He will then use this Kleenex paddle to press the door light button...

We see mountains of discarded Kleenex. And boxes of Kleenex stacked in strange, geometric patterns. We see hundreds and hundreds of starlet headshots, haphazardly piled in chairs...

Another memo is heard as the others continue...

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

... I would like to remind the TWA board of directors that I own 78 percent of the airline, and the Finance Committee's recommendation to raise 20 million dollars in capitalization through the sale of common stock is contrary to my intentions at this time...

We see reels of movie film, some unspooled, the film stretching around the room like celluloid tendons. We see his clothes, discarded.

The "milk bottle" memo is heard again as the others continue...

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

... The employee with the milk bottles must press the button seven times exactly. When he has heard me repeat the words "Come in with the milk" ten times, with no variation, "Come in with the milk", ten times, he must then use his left hand to open the door and enter. He must not to look at me. He is to set the milk bottles down directly inside the door to the right, three feet away from the door. He is to use his left hand only...

We return to the ants, slowly creeping across the plate of cookies. Tenacious. Omnivorous. Unstoppable.

As all the memos, and hundreds more, now join together for versions of the final, all-important instruction:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

... If there is any variation of these instructions, even to the smallest degree, the entire process must be repeated from the beginning ... repeated from the beginning ... repeated from the beginning...

And we finally see Howard.

He stands, naked.

He stands in front of the screen. Silent images from HELL'S ANGELS are being projected. A dogfight scene. The planes twist and soar over his naked body.

The only sane order in this hellish place seems to be a neat row of empty milk bottles against one wall.

Howard slowly backs away from the screen. His whole psyche concentrating on a series of sounds ... syllables ... letters ... fighting to find order in chaos. It is painfully emotional. Every correct letter is a huge victory, every incorrect letter is a crushing defeat.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Q ... U ... A ... R ...

He slowly walks to the pristine row of empty milk bottles.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Q ... U ... A ...

He picks one up. Pees in it.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

... R ... A -- E -- A ... N ...

He finishes peeing. Carefully carries the bottle across the room to the opposite wall.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

... Q ... U ... E ... R ...

He sets the milk bottle down. We realize there is an endless line of the milk bottles on this side of the room. All filled with urine. Precisely ordered.

He looks at them. Trying not to weep. Concentrating intensely.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

... A ... R ... N ... T ... E ... E ... I ... N ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Then a red light reflects off the milk bottles. The door light. He goes to the door, talks through it.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Hello ... ?

Split-screen to:

A rather mystified Juan Trippe outside the screening room door. A chair has been placed in the hallway. Noah waits down the hall.

TRIPPE

Howard, it's Juan.

HOWARD

Oh, Juan, right, right. We had an appointment, I remember that -- Listen I got a hell of a cold here. Why don't you sit down out there? Don't wanna get you sick. Never forgive myself if I got you sick. You don't wanna get sick--

Howard clamps a hand over his mouth, fighting with himself.

Outside, Trippe sits.

TRIPPE

Okay, Howard, I'm sitting ... (he begins pulling documents from his briefcase) ... Now, I've brought all our accountings. Pan Am is trading at 13.66 a share. TWA is trading at 4.24. If we--

HOWARD

Come on, come on, come on, come on -- we both know I'm not going to sell TWA. You couldn't afford her anyway. Our domestic routes alone are worth more than twice Pan Am.

TRIPPE

Considering our stock is valued at three times yours, I find that a dubious claim, Howard.

Howard forces himself to concentrate, eyes shut.

HOWARD

I mean you have no domestic routes. You get TWA and you span the globe -- I'm not gonna sell, and you know I'm not going to sell -- Here's the point: Owen Brewster works for you.

Outside, Trippe prepares his pipe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TRIPPE

I didn't elect Senator Brewster. We can thank the vote of Maine for that.

HOWARD

If I appear at his hearings, it might get nasty for all of us.

TRIPPE

I think considerably more for you. While the good people of America lost sons at Anzio, you produced a dirty movie and built airplanes that don't fly.

Outside, Trippe lights his pipe.

HOWARD

Now that's just not fair. The XF-11 flew quite well for an hour and forty five minutes. I wish you'd been up there with me. It was very exciting.

Howard smiles gleefully. Take that, you sonofabitch. Then he notices a wisp of smoke from Trippe's pipe coming under the door. It is noxious, lethal. Howard backs away from the door.

TRIPPE

Be that as it may, you still have to answer for the Spruce Goose.

HOWARD

(calling from across the room)

It's called the Hercules -- and it'll fly goddammit!

TRIPPE

I hope it does. America should know what its \$13 million bought.

HOWARD

(calling from across the room)

I won't sell TWA!

Outside, Howard's distress is all too apparent to Trippe.

TRIPPE

I know...

He leans back, the cat with the canary. Howard cautiously moves back to the door as Trippe speaks:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TRIPPE (CONT'D)

I'm going to get it anyway. You're going to default on your loan from Equitable when Senator Brewster destroys your reputation and you can't raise additional capital for the airline. The hearings will also show Hughes Aircraft to be mismanaged and incompetent. It will go bankrupt. But you won't be insolvent. You'll still have Toolco ... Perhaps you'll go back to Houston and rebuild your empire. I rather hope you do. By that time Pan Am will have bought TWA and painted all those magnificent Connies blue and white. So, when you do return, it will be on a Pan Am plane.

Howard stands right at the door.

HOWARD

You seem to have me in a corner, buddy. Not a position in which I'm very comfortable.

TRIPPE

I think you'll be less comfortable at Senator Brewster's hearings. Very public, Howard. Lots of cameras and newsmen. I understand you're not particularly comfortable in crowds.

Trippe's droll understatement makes Howard smile.

TRIPPE (CONT'D)

Perhaps we should spare you that.

HOWARD

Thanks for your concern. I find that very moving ... It's been a real pleasure, Juan. Noah will take you back to the airport. Fly safe.

Outside, Trippe stands.

TRIPPE

Thank you, Howard. Take care of that cold.

HOWARD

I certainly will. Bye bye.

He thrusts his ear to the door, listening. Making sure Trippe is gone. He hears Trippe and Noah moving away.

End split-screen.

Howard leans against the door, panting. The exertion of talking with Trippe has absolutely exhausted him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Then he again moves to the HELL'S ANGELS footage on the screen.
The planes twists and fly over his naked body.

INT. _____ 7000 ROMAINE -- CORRIDOR _____ DAY

Noah and Juan Trippe head down the corridor to the elevator. A look approaching sympathy on Trippe's face.

TRIPPE

(quietly)

If you let him appear at the hearings the whole world will see what he's become ... People should remember him as he was.

Noah does not respond.

TRIPPE (CONT'D)

He'll get a subpoena in three days to appear in Washington.

Noah does not respond, but the pain to him of Howard's madness is clear in his eyes.

They move away and we remain in the hallway--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TIME LAPSE. Days and nights pass. Employees appear and disappear.

Finally...

INT. 7000 ROMAINE -- CORRIDOR NIGHT

The door to the screening room opens slightly. Howard peeks out. A few employees move about in the corridor.

He carefully steps from the screening room, standing in the doorway, not quite ready to leave his sanctuary. He has put on some clothes.

A FEMALE SECRETARY stops when she sees Howard. She is absolutely amazed, no one has actually seen Howard for months.

She is a bit frightened at his appearance.

SECRETARY

Mr. Hughes...?

HOWARD

(a whisper)

I don't have any shoes. Can you get me some shoes?

INT. MUIRFIELD NIGHT

Howard sits on the floor in his den, wearing only an old bathrobe. He is unshaven, his eyes red with exhaustion and spent tears.

He aimlessly sorts through a mountain of legal documents, trying to prepare himself for his upcoming appearance in Washington.

The doorbell rings. He pulls himself up and slowly moves through the silent house. He is fragile, moving unsteadily. He is a man made of straw, as if a wisp of air could blow him away.

He looks through the peephole and then pulls a wad of Kleenex from a waiting box. He uses the Kleenex to open the front door.

It is Ava. She looks at him, stunned. Recovers quickly.

AVA

How nice of you to dress for me ... Can I come in?

HOWARD

You can come in.

He nervously looks past her as she enters. He shuts the door behind her and locks it.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Thanks for coming.

AVA

I thought long and hard about it, I can tell you ...
(she pulls off her fur wrap, smiles) ... But, hell, no
one's bugged me for months now, guess I was feeling
lonely ... (offers him her wrap) ... Wanna hang this up?

He looks at her wrap. Doesn't move.

AVA (CONT'D)

Hang this up for me, Howard ... Go on, take it.

He quickly grabs a new wad of Kleenex and uses it to take her
stole and quickly hang it up in a hall closet.

AVA (CONT'D)

Now let's get a drink...

HOWARD

No, wait, wait, wait -- you can't move -- you're safe
here. You're in the germ free zone now, you understand?

Ava glances down, notes this area of the entry hall is marked
off by a square of black electrical tape on the floor.

AVA

I'll take my chances.

She steps over the tape and moves into the house.

HOWARD

No, no, honey, please...

Howard follows nervously as she strides through the airless,
darkened house to the living room. She notes all the windows are
taped shut with black electrical tape.

Even more, she cannot help noticing the mountains of Kleenex
discarded everywhere on the floor.

AVA

Love what you've done with the place ... (she pours
herself a drink) ... Kleenex carpet's a cute idea. Now
let me look at you.

She switches on a table lamp. He stands before her. Holding his
robe closed tightly.

AVA (CONT'D)

Drop the robe.

CONTINUED:

He removes the robe. He stands naked. She gazes over him.

AVA (CONT'D)

Okay, you need to eat for one ... and a shower might be in order ... (her eyes play over him a bit more, mischievous) ... Well, I always said they don't call it Hughes Tool for nothing.

He actually smiles.

AVA (CONT'D)

There's my boy. Get the robe, come on...

He picks up the robe. Looks at it. He seems to have forgotten how to put it on.

Ava goes to him and gently helps him--

AVA (CONT'D)

Put your arm through the hole -- right, good, all the way through -- okay, now the other...

She helps him put the robe on and then takes his hand and leads him toward the stairs...

INT. _____ MUIRFIELD -- MASTER BATHROOM _____ NIGHT

He stands. She shaves him.

AVA

When do you go to Washington?

HOWARD

A week. No, just under a week. I don't know the date today. But I have to be ... I have to be...

AVA

All right, take it easy.

A silent beat as she shaves him. His eyes are drawn to the sink, the running water, the soap.

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- the gleaming white porcelain sink, the tap water rinsing off the shining razor, the tiny beard hairs swirling down the drain--

AVA (CONT'D)

There's nothing there, Howard.

A silent pause as she shaves him.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

I see things.

AVA

I know, baby. Rinse your face off now.

She steps aside. He faces the sink. Slowly reaches forward. Stops.

AVA (CONT'D)

Put your hands in the water and wash off the soap. I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere.

HOWARD

Does it look clean to you?

AVA

Nothing's clean, Howard. But we do our best, right?

He slowly reaches forward and puts his hands into the running water. He carefully washes the soap off his face. A triumph. He looks at her.

AVA (CONT'D)

Great. Now I want you in the shower.

HOWARD

Don't go anywhere.

AVA

Hell, I'd soap you up myself but I know how frisky you get.

He smiles and steps toward the shower.

EXT. MUIRFIELD -- MASTER SUITE DAY

Howard stands unsteadily before a mirror, as presentable as Ava can make him. Clean, hair slicked down, nails cut, new suit.

AVA

What do you think?

HOWARD

I look all right...

AVA

You look great.

HOWARD

Will you marry me?

CONTINUED:

AVA

You're too crazy for me.

She looks at him tenderly in the mirror.

AVA (CONT'D)

I gotta go, baby.

HOWARD

Okay ... Thanks.

She kisses him gently.

AVA

You'd do it for me.

He nods. She goes. He stands for a moment, looking at himself in the mirror. Cosmetically at least, he has improved. But his eyes still reflect the chaos inside him.

INT. SENATE CAUCUS ROOM DAY

Barely controlled hysteria.

The Senate Caucus Room is jammed. 1,500 spectators and reporters are packed into a chamber built to handle 600. Hundreds more crowd the hallway outside.

Title: August 6, 1947. Brewster Senate Hearings. Day One.

The witness table holds a cluster of microphones from seven radio stations. Six newsreel cameras purr alongside an amazing new invention: a television camera. This was the first congressional hearing in history to be televised live.

Across from the witness table, Owen Brewster sits at a long dais with the rest of his committee.

Then a sound, growing from outside the chamber, a building rumble of excited voices. Brewster glances up from his notes to see Howard walking into the chamber with Noah. Howard wears a crisp new grey suit.

The photographers snap photos, a barrage of flashbulbs, an excited clamor from the spectators.

Howard ignores the press and spectators and goes to the witness table. Sits. Noah sits next to him, begins unloading two heavy briefcases full of documents.

Then blinding lights suddenly snap on, focused on Howard. They are the lights to assist the new TV camera.

CONTINUED:

The lights are so powerful that many of the reporters put on sunglasses. It is a surreal image as the reporters don the sunglasses and the cold eye of the TV camera gazes at Howard.

Howard looks almost robotic, flattened, unfocused.

Brewster knows he is going to slaughter him. He bangs a gavel for order.

BREWSTER

The committee will come to order. Mr. Hughes, will you raise your right hand and be sworn?

Howard stands, raises his right hand. Another barrage of flashbulbs. Howard's pupil's dilate and undilate furiously in the strobe-like flashes.

BREWSTER (CONT'D)

Do you solemnly swear that in the matter now pending before this committee, you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

HOWARD

I do.

He sits.

BREWSTER

Mr. Hughes, it is the intention of this committee--

NOAH

Mr. Hughes has a statement.

BREWSTER

Very well. Mr. Hughes, you may proceed.

Noah holds out a piece of paper to Howard. Howard glances at it. Glances away. He says nothing.

An awkward beat.

BREWSTER (CONT'D)

Mr. Hughes? You may proceed...

Noah is getting nervous. He offers the statement to Howard again. Howard won't take it. Then Howard looks off to the press, who stare back at him. At the cruel eye of the TV camera. Then Howard looks back to Brewster.

And his eyes begin to flicker with something we've seen before. Howard ignores the prepared statement.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

You know, I'm gonna attempt to be, um, honest here...

A beat. Noah is terrified of what Howard is going to say. Howard focuses, glaring at Brewster.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Senator Brewster, if you hadn't gone too far overboard, I might have been willing to take a certain shellacking in this publicity spree of yours. I might have been willing to sit back and take a certain amount of abuse simply because I am only a private citizen while you are a Senator with all sorts of powers -- But I think this goddamn circus has gone on long enough--

Brewster bangs his gavel--

BREWSTER

That's quite sufficient, Mr. Hughes--

HOWARD

(angry)

You have called me a liar, sir. In the press. You have called me a liar and a thief and a war profiteer--

BREWSTER

(banging gavel)

The witness will restrain his comments and--

Howard stands, a stunningly simple act that silences Brewster and rivets the entire room. He leans forward on the table, speaking with clipped, barely controlled anger:

HOWARD

Why not tell truth for once, Senator? Why not tell that this investigation was really born on the day that TWA first decided to fly to Europe? On the day when TWA first invaded Juan Trippe's territory. On the day when TWA first challenged the generally accepted theory that only Juan Trippe's great Pan American Airways had the sacred right to fly the Atlantic!

The bombshell explodes. The spectators love seeing Howard, still America's Aviation Hero, defending himself. The photographers flash pictures. Brewster bangs his gavel to no avail.

Howard continues to stand.

We sweep across the approving spectators and then sweep back to the next day...

CONTINUED:

Howard is sitting, leaning an elbow on the table, holding an amplifier earpiece to his ear to hear Brewster. Completely focused.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Title: Day Two.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

... and on February 12th of this year, in your suite at the Mayflower Hotel, did you or did you not tell me that if I would sell TWA to Pan Am this investigation would be called off?

BREWSTER

(shrill)

I did not.

HOWARD

How long have you known Juan Trippe?

BREWSTER

I have known Mr. Trippe for several years. But--

Noah slides Howard a piece of paper, he doesn't need to look at it.

HOWARD

Is it not true, Senator Brewster, that Juan Trippe donated 20,000 dollars to your last campaign and--?

BREWSTER

I have a personal friendship with Mr. Trippe that is -- um -- divorced from my duties as a Senator.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

Is it not true that you accept free tickets from Pan Am so you can circle the globe in support of your C.A.B. bill?

BREWSTER

It is not.

HOWARD

Who wrote that bill, Senator?

BREWSTER

I don't understand the purpose of--

HOWARD

Who actually wrote the C.A.B. bill? The actual words in the bill. Did you write them, Senator?

BREWSTER

Mr. Hughes, this is--

HOWARD

I have it here, maybe that will refresh your memory ... (Noah hands him a copy of the thick bill) ... Here we go. Bill S. 987 to amend the Civil Aeronautics Act. You introduced this bill into the Senate. Lotta words. You write all of them?

Brewster sputters.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You write any of them?

BREWSTER

Now see here, Mr. Hughes--

HOWARD

This entire bill was written by Pan Am executives and designed to give that airline a monopoly on international travel! And you've been flogging this bill on their behalf all around the world, have you not?!

BREWSTER

My duties take me to--

HOWARD

What in hell does a Senator from Maine need to visit Peru for?

BREWSTER

(flustered)

I was -- ah -- seeking outlets for our trade goods.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

They buy a lot of lobsters down there, do they?

BREWSTER

I--

HOWARD

How many times have you been to Mr. Trippe's office in New York in the last three months? ... (Brewster stops cold) ... Would you like me to tell you, Senator?

BREWSTER

(exploding)

This has gone on long enough -- Juan Trippe is a great American and his airline has advanced the cause of commercial aviation in this country for decades! Juan Trippe is a patriot! Juan Trippe isn't a man interested in making money!

Howard lets Brewster's absurd final words echo around the chamber. He leans back, smiles.

HOWARD

Well, I'm sure his stockholders will be happy to hear that.

Chuckles from the spectators.

We sweep over the spectators and sweep back to the next day...

Howard is leaning back, holding the amplifier earpiece to his ear. Noah is exhausted, the days of grueling testimony taking a toll. Howard is completely on top of his game.

The chamber is silent, the reporters and spectators straining to catch every word. This is really it.

Title: **Day Three.**

BREWSTER

Did you receive 43 million dollars to manufacture 100 XF-11 spy planes for the United States Air Force?

HOWARD

I did.

BREWSTER

How many functional planes were delivered to the United States Air Force?

HOWARD

None.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BREWSTER

Would you lean a little closer to the microphones, sir?

HOWARD

(leaning in)

None.

BREWSTER

Did you receive 13 million dollars from the United States Air Force to manufacture a prototype flying boat, know as The Hercules?

HOWARD

I did.

BREWSTER

Did you deliver that plane?

HOWARD

I did not.

BREWSTER

So, by your admission in this chamber you received 56 million dollars from the United States government for planes that you did not deliver.

HOWARD

That is correct.

Brewster thinks he has him. But can't help pushing the dagger in a bit.

BREWSTER

Well, excuse me for asking, Mr. Hughes, but where did all that money go?

HOWARD

It went into the planes. And a lot more.

BREWSTER

(leans back, satisfied)

More? ... Do tell, Mr. Hughes, what other larcenies have you committed?

HOWARD

I mean my money, sir.

Brewster is immediately alarmed, realizes he has stumbled badly. He has given Howard the opening he has been waiting for.

BREWSTER

Mr. Hughes, your personal finances are not the--

CONTINUED:

ANOTHER SENATOR

Let him speak.

Brewster glances at the other Senators. They stare back at him coldly. Brewster sees the waiting press and spectators.

BREWSTER

Proceed, Mr. Hughes.

HOWARD

(very quietly)

You see the thing is I care very much about aviation. It's been the great joy of my life. So I put my own money into these planes ... I've lost millions, Mr. Chairman. And I'll go on losing millions. It's just what I do.

The chamber is silent. Hanging on every word.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

And if I lost a lot of the government's money during the war, I hope folks will put that in perspective ... More than 60 other airplanes ordered from such firms as Boeing and Lockheed and Douglas and Northrop never saw action either. In all, more than 800 million dollars was spent during the war on planes that never flew. More than 6 billion on other weapons that were never delivered.

A beat. The coup de grace:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

And yet Hughes Aircraft -- with her 56 million -- is the only firm under investigation here today.

A tremor through the chamber.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I can't help but think that has a little more to do with TWA than with planes that didn't fly.

Brewster slumps.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I have only one more thing to say to this committee, and that's about the Hercules ... Now, I'm supposed to be many things which are not complimentary. I am supposed to be capricious. I have been called a playboy. I have even been called an eccentric. But I do not believe I have the reputation of being a liar ... I put the sweat of my life into this thing. My reputation is wrapped up in it.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

So believe me when I say that if the Hercules fails to fly, I will leave the country and I will not return. And I mean it.

Then Howard slowly stands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Now, Mr. Chairman ... you can subpoena me, you can arrest me, you can claim I've taken a run-out powder, but I've had enough of this nonsense. Good afternoon.

He turns and begins walking out. Noah is stunned. The spectators heartily approve. A smattering of applause.

Brewster sinks in his chair. It's over. Howard has won.

Howard continues to walk out of the chamber as the crowd applauds.

This image is exactly mirrored in...

INT. JUAN TRIPPE'S OFFICE -- PAN AM DAY

... the tiny black-and-white screen of Juan Trippe's new television set.

Trippe sits with a number of his EXECUTIVES.

Trippe sighs.

TRIPPE

Switch it off.

EXECUTIVE

But the hearings aren't--

TRIPPE

The hearings are over.

An executive turns off the TV.

Silence as Trippe slowly rises and wanders to his massive globe. He stares at the globe for a moment, clearly seeing the future.

TRIPPE (CONT'D)

The C.A.B. bill will be defeated in the Senate. TWA will begin flights from New York to Paris. And then on to Moscow to Japan to Hawaii to Los Angeles to New York.

He continues to look at the globe. The world. His world. Not anymore. Howard's world.

TRIPPE (CONT'D)

Fuck.

Then he turns back to his executives:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TRIPPE (CONT'D)

All right, gentlemen, I want everything we have on Eastern Airlines on my desk in one hour.

EXT. LONG BEACH HARBOR DAY

Like a great white leviathan, the Hercules bobs in the water far out in Long Beach Harbor. It is absurd. It is grandiose. It is magnificent.

Title: **November 2, 1947.**

And the harbor is jammed. Scores of reporters and thousands of spectators fill every inch along the piers. Hundreds of boats cruise the harbor. Planes circle overhead. Newsreel cameras film.

INT./EXT. HERCULES DAY 106

Howard, Glenn and Professor Fitz climb the stairs to the flight deck.

It is gleaming, busy and elegant. And, of course, huge.

A dozen engineers, technicians, navigators and radio operators are already at their complex instrument panels. Professor Fitz gazes around at everything.

HOWARD

Come up front, Professor...

Professor Fitz walks with Howard and Glenn to the forward stations. Glenn straps himself into the co-pilot's seat, switches on his units.

Howard settles into the pilot's seat as Professor Fitz nervously glances out one of the forward windows. The choppy waves of the harbor are very far below.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Why don't you strap yourself in right over there -- (points to an auxiliary engineer's station) -- should be able to see great.

Professor Fitz does so, struggling a bit with the restraint harness.

Howard makes a quick visual check of the complex instrument panel before him. It is a beautiful anarchy of dials, instruments and gauges. A series of four throttle levers to his right and an elegantly designed wheel ahead of him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He finally touches the sacred wheel. He smiles. It feels right.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Okay, Odie, let's power her up.

They flip various switches and the plane's eight propellers slowly begin to spin. An echoing, distant thrum from the massive props.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Advancing master throttles.

GLENN

Advancing master throttles.

Howard reaches to his side and gently pushes the four large throttle levers forward with his right hand as his left hand controls the wheel.

Outside:

The Hercules begins to move. Cheers from the thousands of spectators on shore.

Inside:

GLENN (CONT'D)

Veniers are in sequence.

HOWARD

Understood. Lower fifteen degrees of flaps.

GLENN

Lowering fifteen degrees of flaps ... (he glances to Howard) ... She's gotta hit 70 mph to have a chance.

Howard gently plays the throttle levers, his fingers undulating like a pianist, feeling them respond.

Outside:

The Hercules picks up speed. Splashing through the waves.

Inside:

Howard gently plays the throttles, enjoying the feel of the plane.

GLENN (CONT'D)

25 mph ... 30 ... 35 -- take it easy, Howard -- 40 mph.

CONTINUED:

The flight deck is rocking and bouncing now in the choppy waves. Professor Fitz holds on tightly.

Outside:

The Hercules picks up speed, crashing over the waves.

Inside:

The whole flight deck is jumping and vibrating now as the plane crashes through the waves.

HOWARD

Throttling back for starboard turn 1-8-0.

GLENN

Throttling back for starboard turn 1-8-0.

Howard slows the plane, gently turning her. A perfect turn, the great beast responding to his delicate touch on the controls.

Howard slows to a stop. The plane waits. The engines rumble obediently.

HOWARD

How does she sound, Odie?

GLENN

Sounds good.

Howard glances to Professor Fitz.

HOWARD

Professor, would you do me a favor? Would you look out that window there and tell me what the wind's doing?

Professor Fitz peers out the window, trying to gauge the wind. His eyes dart from the waves below to a bird flying above, anything to give him a sense of speed and direction.

PROFESSOR FITZ

I would say we have a ... 15 knot wind.

HOWARD

Would you call that a tailwind, Professor?

Professor Fitz looks at him.

PROFESSOR FITZ

I would, Mr. Hughes.

CONTINUED:

Howard glances to Glenn. Pokes his lucky fedora a little higher on his head.

HOWARD

Advancing master throttles.

GLENN

Advancing master throttles.

Howard gently folds his fingers around the throttles and applies pressure. The Hercules begins to move forward.

Picking up speed--

Outside:

The Hercules crashes through the waves--

Inside:

Howard forces the throttle levers a bit more, still gently controlling the wheel with his left hand.

HOWARD

Lemme hear it, Odie.

GLENN

25 mph ... 30 ... 35 ... 40 ...

Outside:

The Hercules is racing through the waves now--

Inside:

GLENN (CONT'D)

... 45 ... 50 ... 55 ...

The roar of the engines and vibrations of the plane echo through the wooden ship bizarrely. The wood creaking and moaning--

Outside:

The Hercules is zooming through the water, sending up great sprays of white foam--

Inside:

The roar is deafening. The whole ship is bouncing and shaking violently. The throttles vibrate slightly under Howard's firm right hand. His left hand is still gentle on the wheel. In complete control. His eyes totally focused ahead.

CONTINUED:

GLENN (CONT'D)

... 60 ... 65 ... 70 ... 75!

Now.

Howard gives a final caress to the throttles and--

Outside:

The Hercules leaves the water.

Inside:

The terrible bouncing and vibrations abruptly stop. Silence but for the distant roar of the engines.

A stunned moment of realization.

The Hercules is airborne.

Outside:

The Hercules flies.

Inside:

Howard lets out an enormous holler of joy. Soon the whole flight deck is roaring with cheers and laughter.

Outside:

The Hercules. The Spruce Goose. Howard's Pet Monster.

Soars.

INT. HANGER -- LONG BEACH DAY

The mighty Hercules is back in her berth.

She overlooks a celebration party. Mobs of friends and well-wishers. Johnny Meyer is talking with Ava. Jack Frye is conferring happily with TWA executives.

Howard stands with an arm around Professor Fitz, shaking hands and reliving the flight.

HOWARD

... Hell, I don't deserve the credit. All goes to Professor Fitz here, he made the wind blow right. Couldn't have done it without him ... Excuse me.

Howard sees Noah across the room. Goes to him.

CONTINUED:

NOAH

Congratulations. It was a hell of a flight.

HOWARD

Thanks. Now listen, I've been thinking about something. Something new -- now get ready: jet airplanes. You know anything about jets?

NOAH

(wary)

No ... but it sounds expensive.

HOWARD

Oh, it will be. I'll call you later.

He strides off. Noah watches him go, smiles. More adventures.

Howard snatches Ava away from Johnny Meyer:

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Excuse us, Johnny ... (he walks with her) ... Feel like going to Paris?

AVA

Now?

HOWARD

Couple months. TWA's starting up flights to Europe. Thought I might pilot the first one myself. Oughta be some fun.

AVA

Lots of good shopping in Paris.

HOWARD

I'll buy you anything you want.

AVA

(stops)

You can buy me dinner, how about that?

HOWARD

Dinner then. We got a date?

AVA

Okay, baby, you got a date.

He kisses her and then sees Glenn Odekirk across the room.

HOWARD

I'll be back in a second. Don't go anywhere.

CONTINUED:

AVA

Hey, are you really buying RKO?

HOWARD

You want me to?

He gives her a quick wink and goes toward Glenn. She watches him go, smiles.

Howard catches up with Glenn, walks with him.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Odie, I want to get started on jet technology. What do you know about it?

GLENN

Not a lot.

HOWARD

We need to start thinking about using that technology on commercial airliners. Now, Lockheed worked on the F- 80. Let's get Bob Gross on the phone and see if he can help us out.

GLENN

Now?

HOWARD

'Course now. We gotta get into it. Jets are gonna be the way of the future. The way of the future. The way of the future. The way of the future...

Glenn's face. Not wanting to believe.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

The way of the future. The way of the future. The way of the future. The way of the future...

Howard's face.

Panic. Fear. He is defenseless. It's finished.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

The way of the future. The way of the future. The way of the future...

Glenn quickly takes Howard's arm and pulls him through the party.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

The way of the future. The way of the future. The way of the future. The way of the future...

CONTINUED:

Glenn leads him to a bathroom.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
The way of the future. The way of the future...

Glenn quickly checks a bathroom, empty. Gently pushes Howard inside as Howard continues to repeat.

GLENN
(gently)
Stay here. I'll be right back. All right, Howard? Do you understand me?

HOWARD
(nods)
The way of the future. The way of the future...

Glenn shuts the bathroom door and hurries away.

INT. HANGER -- BATHROOM FOLLOWING

Howard stands in the filthy hanger bathroom, looking around.

HOWARD
The way of the future. The way of the future. The way of the future...

He goes to a filthy sink. Reaches out to wash his hands--

HOWARD'S POV -- EXTREME CLOSEUP -- the sink. It really is filthy this time. A foul, stained cauldron.

Howard stops. Hands suspended in midair.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
The way of the future. The way of the future. The way of the future...

He looks up at himself in the dingy mirror over the sink.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
The way of the future. The way of the future. The way of the future...

He sees his face in the mirror, and then the image changes...

IN THE MIRROR: A long, dark corridor...

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR DAY

... We are slowly moving down the long, dark hallway ... on either side of us there are many doors, all sealed with plywood nailed into place...

HOWARD (V.O.)

The way of the future. The way of the future...

We are inexorably moving toward the one open doorway at the end of the hall. As we reach the door we fade to...

INT. HOTEL ROOM DAY

Airless and dark. The flickering blue light from a TV set is the only illumination.

We see blackout drapes over all the windows, sealed with duct tape ... a hospital bed with thick layers of paper towels spread over it ... a collection of medicine bottles and syringes ... stacks and stacks of Kleenex boxes arranged in strange, geometric towers...

HOWARD (V.O.)

The way of the future. The way of the future...

We see a single reclining chair in front of the TV. A shadowy figure sits in the chair.

On the TV, the newsreel footage of Howard after the Hercules flight:

HOWARD (ON TV) (CONT'D)

Well, I'd say the airplane seems to be fairly successful. Ladies and gentlemen, you're looking at the way of the future...

We finally see the figure is sitting in the chair. We don't really see him well but get a sense ... a haunting sense ... of a thin, tall man wrapped in the robe. A beard and long hair.

We see shadows and images; contours and details illuminated by the flickering TV light.

It is Howard. 63 years old. Watching himself on TV.

OLD HOWARD

The way of the future. The way of the future...

INT. HANGER -- BATHROOM DAY

Howard stands, looking at himself in the mirror.

CONTINUED:

HOWARD

The way of the future. The way of the future...

In his eyes, he sees it all.

His future. Already written.

That future is the price he will have to pay for his triumphs.
Icarus into the sun. Prometheus on the rock.

Is the price too high?

In Howard's eyes, we get our answer. His answer. We see a
strange sort of acceptance. Of triumph.

Maybe even peace.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

The way of the future. The way of the future...

Fade to black.

The End.