

## **Hoax**

screenplay by William Wheeler

adapted from "The Hoax"  
by Clifford Irving

Mark Gordon Productions  
Stratus Films  
Revised First Draft  
3.0 3/21/05

INT. MCGRAW-HILL BUILDING - DAY

SHOES strike METAL STEPS as dozens of corporate-outfitted employees clatter down an emergency stairwell.

It appears they are taking part in a well-organized EVACUATION.

EXT. MCGRAW-HILL BUILDING - DAY

TITLE: November 13th, 1970

New York is bright and snow-covered. Scores of McGraw-Hill employees stand shivering on the sidewalk. They stare up toward the ROOF of their building, and whisper to each other.

A Bike Messenger asks a frazzled SECURITY GUARD if he can deliver to the upper floors.

SECURITY GUARD

Top four floors closed off. I don't know what's going on.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL BUILDING - DAY

Two muscled workmen wearing jumpsuits struggle to RIP UP the carpet lining this office corridor. Another workman hurriedly MOPS and SCRAPES the floorboards underneath.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

HAROLD MCGRAW'S (60's, tan) usual aura of well-bred austerity seems frayed today. He sits behind a steel desk in a small, stark office. The office has been completely stripped except for the desk and two metal chairs.

Sitting beside McGraw is a plump notary named ETHEL, who pulls a SURGICAL MASK over her mouth and double-checks her stamps and papers.

McGraw stares down the naked hallway toward a door marked "ROOF - EMERGENCY ACCESS ONLY". He adjusts his tie and glances at his watch.

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

A Guatemalan cleaning woman sprays Lysol onto a DOORKNOB. Wind gusts blow her hair. The door adjoins the roof of the building to an interior stairwell.

PAN OUT: over the ROOFTOP, covered in CHALKMARKS demarcating an impromptu HELIPAD. A workman paints final touches at the direction of BRAD SILBER (30's, owlsh), whose badge identifies him as an assistant editor at Life magazine.

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SILBER  
(exasperated)  
No dammit, I want an "N"! "N" for  
"North". That's a "W"...

AT THE ROOF'S EDGE

BEVERLY LOO (30's, Asian-American) paces back and forth in snow dust, her eyes scanning the New York skyline.

She turns to the man next to her in a pique.

BEVERLY  
It's 2:37 and my interns are freezing on  
the street, Clifford. Where the fuck is  
he?

CLIFFORD IRVING (late 30's, magnetic) is a tall man in casual clothes with a narrow, simmering gaze.

CLIFFORD  
He's coming.

The horizon is still.

Moments later, a speck in the distance becomes a small, black HELICOPTER. It moves steadily toward them.

Beverly nearly leaps with excitement. Her hair whips violently as she screams inaudible orders into a WALKIE-TALKIE. The chopper draws closer to the building.

It DESCENDS toward the roof.

POV FROM HELICOPTER: ...as Beverly, Brad and various workmen scurry in preparation like rats under a flashlight.

Cliff stands still as metal, arms folded, staring at the sky.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
(almost to himself)  
He keeps his promises.

INT. MCGRAW HILL - DAY

TITLE: Six months earlier

Several executives at McGraw-Hill sit around a desk.

Beverly flanks ALBERT VANDERKAMP, (40's, a stuffed animal) and his assistant MALIKA (20's, enormous Afro), who holds a clipboard and a copy of "Rules for a Radical". The current object of their affections is writer Clifford Irving.

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ALBERT

It was zesty. If it was wine, I'd call it fruity.

MALIKA

The book ambushed me. It cornered me. I didn't want to read it but then the book would say "read me" and so I did because I didn't want the book to be angry. It's an angry book.

ALBERT

But funny! Like in-my-shorts-my-wife-asking-what-I'm-laughing-at funny though it's smart too, which I'm convinced will help us in Germany. Regardless. Marry us and have our children. We're excited.

Beverly winks at Clifford, who tries not to smile.

CLOSE ON: A manuscript tucked under a woman's arm.

FAKE! The Biography of Elmer deHory, World's Greatest Art Forger

by Clifford Irving

Beverly stands in the hallway talking rapid-fire to Clifford as the door CLOSES.

BEVERLY

Harold's reading it this weekend, but that's a formality. You've waited, Cliff. You've watched less talented writers bypass you. But now - justice at last.

CLIFFORD

Is that a promise?

BEVERLY

Set your watch by it.

Clifford smiles as he pushes the button.

EXT. MCGRAW-HILL BUILDING - DAY

Cliff exits into a pedestrian sea of wide ties, sideburns and paisley flowered shirts. He passes a newsstand.

Several prominent magazines are displayed, including *Time*, *Life* and *Look*. On each cover is the face of the most famous man in the world: HOWARD HUGHES. The headlines reveal the press's itching curiosity about its subject.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

-*"The Seclusion of Power: Where is Howard Hughes?"*

-*"Anatomy of a Takeover - Why the Airlines Fear Hughes"*

Around the corner, Cliff leaps into the air, hugs a stranger and lets out a whoop of exhilaration.

INT. HERMAN'S SPORTING GOODS - DAY

A CHUBBY MAN in full SCUBA GEAR stares at himself in a store mirror. This is DICK SUSSKIND (40's, corpulent), a ruffled apology of a man. He is Cliff's friend and researcher.

A blank sales clerk stands as Cliff hunts through the racks.

CLIFFORD

Calls unreturned, They don't read your manuscript for months, then bam, overnight! Dick, can you hear me?

Dick nods. Cliff turns to the clerk.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

We're doing a vacation, a gentleman's celebration kind of thing. Do you have harpoons, the ones that shoot?

SALES CLERK

Yeah, most of them shoot.

CLIFFORD

(to the clerk re: Dick)

He looks like a sausage. Dick, can you breathe?

Dick mumbles something.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

(to the clerk)

I'll take the whole outfit. Scuba's our new religion. Consider me a regular account. And Len, I prefer monthly billing. Is the owner here?

CLOSE ON: A brisk HANDSHAKE between a florist and Cliff, who holds several BOUQUETS of ROSES...

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

(O.S.)

My great gratitude Matthew, I'll catch you back in exactly one week...

SWEEP PAN: past a RACK of high-end women's dresses...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

(O.S.)

All plastic-wrapped please Sharee, no creases. On the tab! But I'm taking your smile home for free.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

New Hope, a small riverside enclave in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, sprouts thick groves of trees that roll out beyond the windows of this cottage in the woods.

Cliff's wife EDITH (30's, pensive), a gawky but lovely German woman stands at the door. She suddenly sees Cliff SPRINTING toward her - and YELPS as he playfully tackles her, tossing her on the ground.

CLIFFORD

Dick! Call the police, there's a beautiful woman in front of my house! (he tickles her) What's the matter, Pear? You never seen a best-seller before? You didn't think I was going to do it, did you? You thought we were gonna be selling beads in Greenwich Village.

EDITH

You're too lazy to sell beads! Stop it...(laughing)...Cliff, they're taking the sofa!

From behind Edith, two congenial Repo Men carry a SOFA out of Cliff's house toward a truck. Cliff salutes them. The Repo Men shrug an apology.

EDITH (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I liked that sofa.

CLIFFORD

Ah, fuck that sofa. C'mere.

DOWN THE HILL

Edith opens her eyes as Clifford lays her new clothes out on the grass. Edith is dumbstruck. Clifford sprinkles rose petals on her head.

EDITH

You are so sweet...and so stupid. These dresses...so beautiful! I need bigger breasts to fill them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD

Your breasts are conversation pieces.  
They're even better than Dick's. I want  
you two getting used to luxury, you hear  
me?

Edith kisses Cliff's head and heads back up the hill.

DICK

Did you somehow get out of debt?

CLIFFORD

You kidding? They want my house. I got  
nothing.

DICK

Why do salesmen keep giving you things?

CLIFFORD

My ship is sailing, Dick. The vibration  
travels.

Cliff headlocks Dick, who tries to extricate himself as they  
head up to the house.

INT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE - EVENING

Cliff is ebullient. He wears a TUXEDO with tails. Edith  
pulls up his collar.

CLIFFORD

I've never been to one of these things,  
just tell me the truth.

EDITH

You are a beautiful man. I am sure you  
would to desert me.

CLIFFORD

"Will desert" you honey, the tense is-

EDITH

Don't correct the grammar of it.

Edith darkens.

CLIFFORD

Do you think I should bring up promotion?  
They've screwed up so many releases.  
(pause) What is it? Was I rude? I'm  
sorry I was rude.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDITH

You have screwed up some things, too.

Cliff looks at her.

CLIFFORD

I know. (pause) That's finished. I told you it was finished, it's finished.

EDITH

I didn't mean to bring her up. My feelings were hurt, it was...I am dumb.

Cliff kneels before Edith, who smiles.

CLIFFORD

You are not dumb. You are Cinderella. And I'm going to bring you home a shoe.

Cliff rises, and pulls down his tails.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Now if the mortgage guy calls-

EDITH

-I have the baseball disease. I know.

Cliff kisses her forehead.

CLIFFORD

"Lou Gehrig's" Disease, honey. Important detail.

EXT. PLAZA HOTEL - EVENING

A limousine idles in the circle. The epicenter of the city tonight is the Plaza Hotel, site of "Truman's Party", the Black and White Ball. Dozens of couples climb the stairway into the Hotel lobby. They all sport designer-crafted MASKS.

Beverly and Cliff approach the hotel entrance. Cliff struggles with his mask. It won't stay on. He puts his hand in his jacket and finds something, a NOTE.

"I'm in NYC for a few weeks. The door is unlocked. N."

Cliff stares at the note. He SMELLS it, momentarily tempted. He then crumples it and tosses it onto the red carpet.

INT. PLAZA BALLROOM - NIGHT

Cliff stands by himself, happily nursing a drink. The ballroom overflows with celebrity and power.

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CONTINUED:

A short, sallow-faced man, TRUMAN CAPOTE (40's, impish), dances with KATHERINE GRAHAM (40's, elegant) an aristocratic woman in her forties. Cliff eavesdrops on a conversation to his left between several women and NORMAN MAILER (40's, stocky), who has a few drinks in him.

MAILER

(a little too loud)

The Paris peace talks are meaningless.  
Why are we in Vietnam? Because Hunt  
sells oil and Howard Hughes sells planes.  
It isn't any more complicated than that.

Cliff walks up to Beverly who doesn't look happy to see him.

BEVERLY

Let's talk Monday, Cliff.

Cliff grabs her hand and pulls her into...

INT. COAT ROOM - NIGHT

BEVERLY downs a slug of white wine and leans back against a phalanx of mink coats. Cliff folds his hands.

CLIFFORD

I have something to get off my chest.  
Maybe I'm crazy but-

BEVERLY

Let me talk first.

Cliff holds up his hand, pausing for dramatic effect.

CLIFFORD

30,000 copies is a nice first run. The  
question is: (pause) why not be brave?

BEVERLY

Cliff...

CLIFFORD

100,000 helps this book impact the  
culture and we both know it. And isn't  
that the point, Bev? Isn't that what  
you're in this for? I know I am.

BEVERLY

We're not publishing the book.

CLIFFORD

Exactly. With 30,000 copies we might as  
well not publish the book, that's exactly  
my point. We need to-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BEVERLY

Brad Silber at Life hated it, Cliff.  
"Who cares about an obscure Spanish art  
forger" he said. He told Harold. And it  
was insane, it rolled like a snowball,  
one minute I'm talking jacket covers the  
next... (pause) I wanted to tell you  
Monday. I'm sorry.

Pause.

CLIFFORD

Fine, we'll do the New Yorker. The  
question is the size of the run-

BEVERLY

Cliff - there's no run. We're not  
publishing. (pause) And to just finish  
this...Harold told me...oh, damn. He told  
me to drop you from the roster.

Beverly puts her glass down.

CLIFFORD

I'll settle for 50,000 copies all right,  
I just think the book is best served by-

BEVERLY

Are you following my sentences? There is  
no book! They terminated your contract!  
The bomb has dropped and you are dead.  
It's over.

Cliff sways slightly, as if catching some terrible odor.

CLIFFORD

You said it was a formality.

BEVERLY

Apparently, I was mistaken.

Cliff folds into himself, like an sea plant.

CLIFFORD

If this was the news, Bev, then what am I  
doing here?

BEVERLY

Harold McGraw and Truman Capote are  
friends. He thought tonight would be a  
nice "parting gesture." (pause) I know  
it's awful, I just...if you have other  
ideas, my door is always open - Hi Brad!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Brad Silber, wearing a white mask, has wandered in with a tall 18 yr. old girl dressed as a canister of Napalm.

SILBER

Bev, this is Harmony - one word name. She dictated "The Onan Journals".

BEVERLY

Right! I loved the idea Harmony, are you planning on writing it down? (catching herself) uh...you know this probably isn't the best time...Cliff?

Cliff throws open the doors of the coat room. The vast ballroom is filled to capacity with masked dancers.

Cliff tears off his MASK and throws it on the floor.

Several party-goers GASP. On a BALCONY above, Capote, Katherine Graham, and several others become quiet, staring at the scene below.

Cliff stares at Beverly. He then walks toward the door.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - MORNING

Cliff sits, his tux still on. His eyes are red. His suitcase is open on the floor. He takes off his shoes and sits on the bed next to Edith who looks at him with compassion.

EDITH

I'm sorry, baby.

Clifford says nothing.

EDITH (cont'd)

The man at the bank said to send medical records or they will foreclose.

Clifford sighs and slowly starts packing.

INT. TWIN-ENGINE PLANE - NASSAU, BAHAMAS - DAY

Cliff and Dick stare out the window of the small CESSNA 150 as it putters over the blue water of the Bahamas.

EXT. BAR - BRITANNIA HOTEL - EVENING

CLOSE ON: A BROCHURE for the Britannia Hotel, on the bar. In very small lettering at the bottom of the brochure, we read: "A Hughes Consolidated Property"

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CONTINUED:

WIDER: In bamboo wicker chairs, Cliff and Dick sit across from each other, drinking. The ocean is moonlit, breaking in the background. Many empty glasses line the table's edge.

The outline of the Britannia Hotel shimmers behind them. Satellite dishes, antennae and harsh floodlights surround the penthouse, throwing shadows on the terraces below.

DICK

I'm gonna toast you yet again, for this chance to have a vacation and just be men. (pause) I know you're not feeling your best...but you'll bounce back...

Cliff is quiet. Dick sips his drink.

CLIFFORD

(drunken)

My lit professor at Cornell compared me to Hemingway. I wonder if Ernest ever got bumped by an 18 year old's masturbation journals. If a writer has something...truthful...to say these days...it's like shouting in a hurricane. (pause) Hell with it. Let's talk about you. Can we?

DICK

Sure.

CLIFFORD

I want to hear about your children's book, everything.

DICK

Well, uh...let's see. I'll finish this year for sure. Richard the Lion-Hearted is a great subject, but his main activities were war and sodomy. The war part works great because kids love war, but what do you do with the sodomy? I want it to be historically accurate.

CLIFFORD

And you'll make it so because you're a superb researcher and a fine writer.

Cliff's eyes glaze as he fades back to his own thoughts.

DICK

Don't wallow, Cliff. You'll bounce back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLIFFORD

I'll bounce like Evel Knievel's crunched bones on the pavement. I spent royalties I'm never going to get, Dick. The middle of my life is well at hand and I don't have a couch.

DICK

Think of it this way. Henry Miller was thirty-eight, he'd never published, and his wife left him for a lesbian.

CLIFFORD

That's kind of you to say. You're a good man, Dick.

Cliff pats his friend's hand.

DICK

Is it midnight yet? I gotta call Ginette.

Cliff gives him a look.

DICK (cont'd)

I don't want to hear it about her.

CLIFFORD

I want my friend to be treated well, that's all. Listen, you need a loan?

DICK

No! Well, yes, actually, but not from you, you stupid bastard, your house is going into foreclosure.

CLIFFORD

I'll write you a check...just hold on...

A drunken Cliff fumbles through his pockets. Dick stops him.

DICK

Stop, Cliff. Stop being the hero. Go to bed. Be careful the crazy billionaire doesn't scratch you with his Dracula fingernails, okay? I'll see you in the morning.

Cliff suddenly looks quite forlorn.

CLIFFORD

I thought I'd be a player on the world stage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Dick pats Cliff on the shoulder and walks away.

EXT. BRITANNIA HOTEL - LATER THAT NIGHT

A long line of cranky, recently-awakened, hotel guests sit outside on their luggage. Cliff walks unsteadily into the LOBBY, where angry guests argue with hotel staff members. Cliff collars a harried DESK CLERK (20's, sallow).

CLIFFORD

What is this?

DESK CLERK

An executive decision to close the facility for the weekend, sir. You're being relocated.

CLIFFORD

Howard Hughes wanted the pool to himself so he's kicking everyone out? At 1 A.M.?

Clifford laughs heartily. He watches the mass exodus of hotel guests as they battle over cabs and lawn space.

Cliff gives the clerk his key. He also pulls out a manuscript of his book, "Fake", and slips it to the desk clerk along with a twenty dollar bill.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

(with a drunken laugh)

You give Mr. Hughes this manuscript with my compliments. Tell him...it's from a kindred spirit.

Cliff staggers out, chuckling.

The Desk Clerk pockets the twenty and slips the manuscript into the TRASH CAN.

INT. GRIMY MOTEL - NIGHT

COBWEBS fill the corners of this tiny pension suite. Dick snores on a fold-out COT. A single burning bulb in the bathroom flickers light into the room. Out the window is the silhouette of the Britannia Hotel, completely DARK inside.

Clifford reads a copy of Look Magazine. On the cover is the face of the legendary recluse - HOWARD HUGHES. Cliff studies the familiar pictures inside: Hughes, the dashing pilot waving from a car in a ticker-tape parade; Hughes, the sullen squire of starlets in Hollywood.

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CONTINUED:

The article contains complete copies of HANDWRITTEN MEMOS, from Hughes to Robert Maheu, his top advisor.

CLIFFORD

(reading to himself)

"Denying personal contact to even his closest aides, Hughes' isolation begs the question: is he the loneliest man in the world? Or the smartest?"

Clifford looks up. He stares straight ahead, mouth open, struck by a notion.

He laughs out loud, considering. But he looks again at the article, thinking.

Through the pension window we see a single LIGHT appear on the top floor of the Britannia Hotel.

FADE TO WHITE:

INT. MCGRAW-HILL PUBLISHING - DAY

Clifford strides down the long corridor and ENTERS the publisher's offices, a look of deep confidence in his eyes.

He walks right past the RECEPTIONIST.

RECEPTIONIST

Excuse me. Excuse me!

He heads for Beverly's office. DANA (20's, skull-faced), Beverly's gate-keeper and assistant, glances up from her desk. At the sight of Cliff, she senses trouble. She rises to interrupt Clifford's focussed march.

DANA

Cliff, she's buried. She's really tied up.

CLIFFORD

Which is it, tied up or buried? She's in the conference room, right?

DANA

No.

The Receptionist convenes with Dana as Clifford continues down the hall, peeking in each window.

DANA (cont'd)

Get on the phone with security.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Clifford paces the grey, shag carpet up to the threshold of a large CONFERENCE ROOM where a meeting takes place.

He flings the door wide open. Beverly sits in the middle of eleven people. Everyone gazes at Clifford, none more so than Beverly.

BEVERLY

Clifford? I'm...in a staff meeting. Why are you here?

ON CLIFF'S FACE: as he prepares to answer...

EXT. WALKING BRIDGE - DAY

A sunny day by the river. Painters smoke pot and spackle their canvasses along the river bank. Clifford walks and lectures, animated, as Dick struggles to follow.

DICK

I understand - he kicked everyone out of his hotel, but I'm not following - how does that relate to your earth-shattering plan?

CLIFFORD

Dick, what's the most powerful force in the world?

DICK

Money.

CLIFFORD

The momentum created by the *human will*.

Clifford smiles as Dick puzzles.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL PUBLISHING - DAY

Embarrassed throat clearings rule the room as Clifford continues.

CLIFFORD

Bev, our personal history demanded I bring this to you first, staff meeting or no staff meeting.

BEVERLY

Bring what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD

Arrangements have been made for me to begin work on the most important book of the 20th century.

Cliff swallows at the pitiable looks he receives, losing his equilibrium for a moment.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

I'll be discussing its contents...during tonight's performance of "Paradise Now" at the Living Theater.

BEVERLY

During the performance? Cliff are you drunk?

Security guards enter the room and immediately grab Cliff. The guards begin to pull him out of the room.

CLIFFORD

You better be sure I'm bluffing Beverly, because Simon & Schuster already bought their tickets!

Beverly piques slightly at this. Clifford shakes off the guards to walk out of the room on his own.

EXT. WALKING BRIDGE - DAY

Dick shakes his head sadly, taking in Cliff's notion.

DICK

Cliff, this is normal, you're having a grandiose fantasy after a defeat, Richard the Lion-Hearted had the same problem when he returned to Saxony-

CLIFFORD

Forget Saxony. Follow closely. I give Bigfoot my manuscript...

INT. "THE LIVING THEATER" - NIGHT

The black-box theater is filled to bursting with Factory hipsters. Clifford sits in the middle seat, a free one beside him.

CLIFFORD

(O.S.)

Theoretically, he reads it.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD (cont'd)  
Theoretically, he writes me a note,  
praising it. I correspond back. I thank  
him. I make the proposition.

DICK  
(O.S.)  
What proposition?

A FLANNEL CLAD ACTOR sits under a spotlight.

FLANNEL CLAD ACTOR  
(getting gradually more  
agitated)  
I can't walk outside nude or pigs will  
arrest me. I can't walk nude outside. I  
can't walk nude outside!

Beverly Loo, pinched expression and grayish pantsuit, sneaks  
in to the seat next to Cliff.

BEVERLY  
(whispering)  
Where's Simon & Schuster?

Clifford never takes his eyes off the stage. He just hands  
Beverly an envelope containing three HANDWRITTEN MEMOS on  
YELLOW LEGAL PAPER. And a small flashlight.

The Flannel Clad Actor peels off all his clothes, flings them  
at the audience, and stands stark naked on the stage.

FLANNEL CLAD ACTOR  
I'm going to walk nude outside! I'm  
going to walk nude outside! I want  
paradise...NOW!

Beverly uses the flashlight to peruse the letters. She  
furrows, stupefied at what she sees. She looks at Cliff, who  
claps as the NOW NUDE ACTOR heads outside, for the street.

EXT. WALKING BRIDGE - DAY

Dick is walking ahead now, getting more excited. Edith has  
joined them, walking and talking. Cliff listens.

EDITH  
But he must have a woman. A romantic  
interest throughout his life, to give the  
story passion! Otherwise it is grumbling  
and numbers.

DICK  
They'll need proof. They'll need to see  
the man, talk to him on the phone.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - DAY

In the Look article, Cliff studies a HANDWRITTEN LETTER from Hughes to an executive in one of his companies. Cliff carefully copies Hughes' cursive style, one letter at a time, using the inset as his model.

CLIFFORD

(O.S.)

Hughes runs a billion dollar network of companies using handwritten memos as his only communication. Even his top people have no direct contact with him.

EDITH

(O.S.)

Right! Why should Clifford get special treatment?

Edith sets a fresh batch of magazines on Clifford's desk, all about HUGHES. She grabs his neck and kisses him. Clifford shoos her away.

Over Cliff's shoulder - we SCAN slowly over the LETTER:

*"I, Howard R. Hughes, authorize Clifford Irving to act as intermediary as to any arrangements regarding the publishing of my memoirs..."*

BACK TO THE WALKING BRIDGE

Dick turns to face Cliff, arms folded. Edith sits, cheerful.

DICK

That's fine, tell me my dick grew five inches last night, I'm still going to pull out a ruler. They'll find out eventually. What's the reward?

Cliff hops onto the side of the bridge.

CLIFFORD

I'm not thinking about a reward. I'm on the gallows. I just want to stay alive.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL PUBLISHING - NIGHT

Albert Vanderkamp sits puzzled in an office now crowded with several people, Beverly included. No one is used to being there at night. He looks at Cliff.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VANDERKAMP

Howard Hughes? Howard Hughes the  
billionaire?

BEVERLY

His exclusive, authorized autobiography.  
He wants Cliff to write it with him. And  
they want us to publish it.

Beverly's assistant Dana is in the room now, on the phone.  
The LETTERS have been wrapped in plastic.

DANA

(into the phone, softly)  
...handwriting analysis. As soon as  
possible. Can we bring them over right  
now?...

Albert looks at Clifford.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL PUBLISHING - DAY

Clifford watches another lawyer, in a room growing full of  
them, read the yellow memo.

CLOSE ON: *"...It is my intention to set the record straight  
about my life..."*

The hushed conference room is now a busy place. Beverly  
speaks delicately.

BEVERLY

With no way to contact him...how does Mr.  
Hughes propose we proceed?

CLIFFORD

I'm flying as blind as you are here, Bev.  
(pause) He refuses to go outdoors and  
will only initiate, never accept, phone  
calls. Those particular rumors are true.  
From what I gather, he'll provide a  
handwritten contract for legal purposes.  
And any questions...I'll pass on to him  
when he contacts me. I really don't know  
what else to say.

Vanderkamp squints at Clifford.

VANDERKAMP

Why you, Cliff? He could have any writer  
in the world do this for him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD

(wryly)

I don't know, Alfred. How do eccentric  
billionaires usually pick their  
biographers?

Beverly huddles with Albert while Dana talks on the phone.  
Dana hangs up. She is bursting with excitement.

DANA

Matching against the reprinted letters  
from Look magazine, Osborn & Co.'s  
preliminary opinion...is that the  
handwriting samples are *genuine*.

Clifford notes this. He picks up a magazine to page through  
as a fierce whispered debate goes on behind him.

BEVERLY

(O.S.)

...letting him out of this room without  
making an offer!

VANDERKAMP

(O.S.)

...know what we're dealing with here!

More whispers. Vanderkamp sighs. Beverly leans over Cliff;  
her manner is silky now, even flirtatious.

BEVERLY

Cliff, how much do you and Howard Hughes  
want for the rights to your book?  
Because we want to make a deal. Tonight.

Cliff puts his hands together and purses his lips as if about  
to deliver some difficult news...

INT. OLD SILVER MERCEDES - NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE - DAY

Cliff smiles as he drives. The radio plays Frank Sinatra.  
The Mercedes speeds up and passes another car as Sinatra  
sings "I've Got the World on a String..."

INT. CLIFF AND EDITH'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A fresh FISH is dropped into a frying pan. Edith yells  
toward the upstairs.

EDITH

I want to come, Clifford, it's not fair!  
I came up with half the ideas and I'm a  
better driver than you!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

UPSTAIRS

A SUITCASE is poised atop a table. Cliff runs in and out of the room, hastily packing a bag. Dick sits, stunned on the side of the bed.

CLIFFORD

(yelling down to Edith)

Sweetie, you need to protect our house  
and our possessions from bloodsucking  
usurers! You're guarding the nest!

DICK

Can I weigh in here? I think-

EDITH

(O.S.)

It's boring!

CLIFFORD

You can't think Dick, it's magic. A man  
walks in, he says something completely  
implausible, and for that exact reason,  
he is believed. It's an Aquarius  
phenomenon. It's very spiritual.

DICK

Lawyers aren't spiritual. Presumably,  
this will be news, right? Hughes hasn't  
talked to the press in fifteen years.  
When the publicity starts on this-

Cliff tosses unfolded clothes into his suitcase.

CLIFFORD

Three words. TWA shareholder lawsuit.  
Howard has a judgement of 137 million  
bucks waiting to hit him if he walks into  
any court of law. The book comes out, it  
doesn't matter - he can't sue.

DICK

He can still say it's a fake!

CLIFFORD

He doesn't say anything about anything!  
The guy sleeps on ripped-up Kleenex boxes  
and drinks his own piss. He's psychotic.

DICK

Have you heard of "Intertel"? He's got  
his own mini-C.I.A., this guy. And  
highly paid, ruthless advisors.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLIFFORD

The advisors don't know about the book because he's too paranoid to tell them. He'll never come out of hiding to denounce me because he's a lunatic hermit. And, follow closely now, I am the spokesman for the lunatic hermit, so the more outrageous I sound, the more convinced they are! Do you see how perfect this is? (pause) Dick, they offered half a million.

The air leaves Dick's body.

DICK

Half a million dollars?!

CLIFFORD

A hundred grand of it just for us! But it's all oral, their lawyers will jump all over it, which is why we leave tonight, right now. We need to become experts on this man's life. And if we get dirt that rings true, then the top guys will shove this deal right down the lawyers' throats.

Pause.

DICK

"We"?

EXT. CLIFF'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The back seat is crammed with notebooks, dozens of books about Howard Hughes, and Cliff's Underwood typewriter. Cliff jumps into the driver's seat.

A worried Dick paces alongside the passenger side of the car.

DICK

Not, not possible. The timing is wrong. Ginette has poison ivy. It spread to her ears. Poison ivy is painful, Cliff.

Cliff taps the steering wheel, impatient.

DICK (cont'd)

I mean - I'm desperate for money! My money problems make your money problems look like happy, smiling flowers. But Richard, it's close, children's books have a market...maybe.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK (cont'd)

(pause) I got married early, I admit it. Sexy hitchhikers, I get it, I get the scene. And it appeals, but I'm faithful. She has poison ivy! I'm clearly confused here.

CLIFF

Dick, you're circling the car and it's a metaphor for your life. Get in.

Dick hesitates...then climbs into the passenger seat. Cliff starts the engine. Edith walks out and hands him two children's LUNCH BOXES, obviously packed with loving care.

EDITH

(whispering)

No visits with special friends, right?

Cliff gets out of the car and pulls Edith aside.

CLIFFORD

(softly)

I'm not going to do anything to jeopardize what we've rebuilt. Okay?

EDITH

You just said to warn you when you get excited. You seem excited. (pause) I love you.

Edith turns and walks inside.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The banged up Mercedes glides along a highway. The skyline of Washington D.C. beckons in the distance.

INT. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

Security guards walk the labyrinthine rows of bookshelves, which extend down long corridors.

At an old metal table sits Dick, poring over a huge transcript the size of multiple phone books tied together.

DICK

Hughes' testimony at the Senate hearings from '47. We get his syntax, his figures of speech, it's perfect...

CLIFFORD

Perfect. (pause) Take a picture.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Cliff point with his eyes to an ALCOVE in the corner. A security guard walks by.

DICK

It's a government document, Cliff. You can't photograph it, it's a felony.

CLIFFORD

What do you want to do, memorize it?

DICK

I am not a C.I.A. agent. I'm a researcher. Okay?

Cliff stares at him.

IN AN ALCOVE

Dick lays the transcript on a counter as Cliff "stands guard". Dick fumbles with the camera. In a nervous rush, he begins to snap the camera while flipping pages...

INT. DARKROOM - DAY

In red light, Cliff dips a print into a tray of chemicals.

DICK

I've always had a dangerous side to me, Ginette has even commented on it, but to take down the L.O.C. God, the adrenaline!

Cliff lifts the print up to the light.

CLIFFORD

This is your leg. First picture - Dick's leg.

Dick looks at the print. He sits.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Clifford talks on the phone as Dick looks through a new set of pictures.

CLIFFORD

(into the phone)  
...and I'm working with Hughes Consolidated as an auditor of their business practices.

DICK

I got more than leg this time, baby.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Cliff shushes Dick, who numbers the pictures.

CLIFFORD  
(into the phone)  
This afternoon. Terrific.

EXT. GATED AIR FORCE COMPLEX - DAY

Cliff and Dick drive up to a the gates of a grayish military installation. It is double gated with ten Air Force guards manning the entrance.

DICK  
Air Force Acquisitions is a secure facility, it might as well be the goddam Pentagon!

CLIFFORD  
It's a place where military guys do business with civilian guys. Will you not look so dour, please?

An armed Air Force guard approaches the car.

DICK  
How can they let us in? I could be a Russian.

CLIFFORD  
We're expected! Be a buoyant Russian!

Clifford flashes the guard a smile.

INT. SMALL MILITARY OFFICE - DAY

DANIELS (30's, wrinkled head), a Sergeant-at-Arms, sits behind a small desk. A FAN blows. FILE CABINETS can be glimpsed in an anterior chamber.

DANIELS  
Records? What for, you don't know what the hell's going on in your own company?

CLIFFORD  
You don't understand, sir, we're auditors, evaluating Hughes Aircraft, at their request. We're here to listen. But I understand your confusion. It can be frustrating for us, sometimes.

Daniels glares at Clifford.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DANIELS

You want frustration? Call Hughes Aircraft and try to find out when your plane's gonna be ready. I seen decorated individuals sobbing like six year old girls after dealing with you people.

CLIFFORD

Please, go on. Dick takes careful notes. May I use your facilities?

Daniels throws a thumb toward the back of his office.

Dick looks at Cliff, alarmed. Cliff gives him a loaded look.

MOMENTS LATER

Daniels harangues Dick while Cliff tries stealthily to open file cabinets.

Cliff finds a government file on Hughes Aircraft. In it are balance sheets, acquisition files, notes of phone calls. He looks at Dick whose eyes never leave Daniels.

DANIELS

...and the young Floridian lady I had courted so assiduously started rust-pumping a salesman out of Tulsa.

Clifford shoves the FILE down the front of his pants.

DANIELS (cont'd)

Did I find that unjust? Hell, no. Love made no vow to protect my heart.

EXT. GATED AIR FORCE COMPLEX - LATER

The Air Force Guard, holding a rifle, approaches the Mercedes. Dick glances at Clifford's bulging pants.

AIR FORCE GUARD

Get out of the car, please. You, sir.

Clifford swallows. He gets out. The guard comes around and frisks him.

AIR FORCE GUARD (cont'd)

Step through the metal detector please.

Clifford does so. Dick accidentally HONKS the horn.

Cliff twitches. The files SLIDE down his pant leg...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Air Force Guard frisks Cliff...somehow missing the files.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Dick pulls the car over on a suburban street. He is shaking and sweating.

CLIFFORD

I don't know what the hell you're so upset about. I'm the one he would have shot.

DICK

Which wouldn't have been a bad outcome!

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - EARLY MORNING

They speed along an empty highway. Gaudy Nevada desert cliffs bump up against a sun-dappled white landscape.

Dick sips a beer. He sports a few days beard. Cliff offers him a bag of chips, the sun high in the sky.

INT. HIGHWAY RESTAURANT - DAY

Clifford sips coffee. Dick returns to the table. He momentarily ignores his pile of pancakes.

CLIFFORD

She alright?

DICK

Yeah! Yeah. (pause) Uh...we never discussed, a guess a monetary breakdown for my...work on this.

CLIFFORD

Put her on the phone, I'll negotiate directly.

DICK

That's not nice. I mean it.

CLIFFORD

I'm sorry.

Pause.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

Twenty percent of all monies received and credit as researcher. Fair?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK

Yeah. Yeah! Great!

CLIFFORD

Terrific. Who's next on the hit list?

Dick is relieved. He pulls A PHOTOGRAPH from one of their growing files:

Howard Hughes wears sunglasses outside a Las Vegas Hotel. Two men stand beside him, one a short, dapper man, the other an imposing crew-cut man in a suit.

DICK

Noah Dietrich. Hughes' right-hand man at ToolCo for 20 years. I don't know who the other guy is. My guess is this guy Dietrich is going to be very cagey.

Cliff glances at a PHONE BOOK someone left at the next table. Dick shrugs. Cliff begins paging through it.

INT. OSTENTATIOUS MANSION - NEVADA - DAY

NOAH DIETRICH (80's, shrivelled) a befuddled man wearing shorts and socks that don't match swings open the door to his desert mansion.

NOAH

Welcome to Nevada! Glad you called!  
You're the fellows writing the aviation  
book, right? You like Geranium tea?

Cliff and Dick share a smile.

INT. DIETRICH'S MANSION - MINUTES LATER

At a large kitchen table, Cliff and Dick sip geranium tea. Dietrich points to the cup of tea.

NOAH

It helps the bowels. Hey, you're a  
writer. (Cliff nods) I should show you  
something...wait a minute...

Dietrich putters into his office. He returns carrying a thick, weathered MANUSCRIPT. He hands it to Clifford.

NOAH (CONT'D) (cont'd)

That's an account of my years at ToolCo.  
You know ToolCo? Howard Hughes' company.

Dick spills his tea.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NOAH (cont'd)  
Be careful.

CLIFFORD  
(his eyes bulging at the book)  
Has anyone seen this?

NOAH  
Nobody's seen it, it's sensitive. I'll  
give you five hundred dollars to clean up  
the grammar 'cause I'm bad with spelling.

Cliff and Dick share a look.

CLIFFORD  
I...I'd have to read it first.

NOAH  
I can't let it out of the house. (pause)  
Why don't you read it here?

INT. DIETRICH'S OFFICE - DAY

At a dust-covered desk Cliff sits with the manuscript.  
Dietrich hovers in the doorway next to Dick.

CLIFFORD  
Uh...Mr. Dietrich, I read better alone.  
And Dick has an appointment to repair a  
window.

Cliff emphasizes the word window for Dick's benefit. He  
points with his eyes toward the open window in Dietrich's  
office. Dick looks at Cliff...then gets it.

DICK  
That window? Yes, it shattered. Yeah.

Cliff glares at him.

DICK (cont'd)  
I'll go repair it now.

Dietrich stares after Dick, then shrugs, leaving Cliff to  
read. He closes the door behind him.

MOMENTS LATER

Dick appears at the OPEN WINDOW. Cliff hands the manuscript  
off to him.

INT. COPY SHOP - DAY

An old-style, refrigerator size XEROX MACHINE. Dick lifts the lid, copying pages as fast as his arms can flip them into the holder.

INT. DIETRICH'S OFFICE - SHORTLY THEREAFTER

Dick sticks his head in the window, handing Cliff back the original manuscript.

EXT. DIETRICH'S FRONT FOYER - DAY

Noah stands disappointed at the door.

CLIFFORD

Sir, honesty is my policy: This is atrocious. It's unpublishable. Mangled verbiage, run-on sentences. I'm very, very sorry, but you benefit and I benefit: from honesty. God Bless.

Cliff shrugs, shakes his hand, and walks down to his car where Dick waits, fidgety.

NOAH

Seven hundred? And free tea!

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DAY

Speeding along through the desert are Cliff and Dick, smiling and laughing. Dick kisses the manuscript.

CLOSE ON: the letters of a TELEGRAM as the telegraph knocks them out...

HRH CONCERNED ABOUT SECRECY STOP FROM NOW ON HRH IS "OCTAVIO"  
STOP WANTS DECISION BY TUESDAY STOP WORRIED HE MAY LOSE  
INTEREST STOP WE ARE ON THE PRECIPICE LET'S NOT FALL STOP  
CLIFFORD

INT. MCGRAW-HILL - DAY

A spacious conference room. At its head sits HAROLD MCGRAW. A dozen different grim-visaged executives surround the table.

The TELEGRAM, along with a scribbled contract on yellow legal paper, is being passed around the table. At its far end sit Beverly Loo and Albert Vanderkamp.

BEVERLY

The whole thing fits with Hughes' previous business arrangements.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BEVERLY (cont'd)

If this is for real - and I think it is, this book will sell more copies than the Bible. Our competitors will kill to get it, and if they can't get it, they'll do anything to destroy it. I say we sign that contract immediately, and institute absolute, total secrecy.

VANDERKAMP

Total. Not even wives can know.

McGraw looks up.

BEVERLY

There should be compartmentalization of information.

VANDERKAMP

Like the C.I.A. does. Everyone knows what they need to know at the right time.

BEVERLY

So we'll know the subject is Howard Hughes-

VANDERKAMP

We shouldn't say the name.

BEVERLY

Sorry, right. From now on we refer to...the person I mentioned... as "Octavio". The book is "Project Octavio".

Beverly and Albert pause dramatically.

VANDERKAMP

That's the code name.

MCGRAW

(impatient)

It's a secret. I get it. (to his secretary) Get Ralph Graves on the phone. I want our journalist friends to weigh in on this before I sign Mr. Hughes' piece of paper.

INT. VEGAS HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Dick and Cliff sit on the balcony of their hotel room overlooking the Vegas strip, which sparkles as the sun sets.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A neon sign below announces "The Desert Inn". Dick pores over the Dietrich manuscript while Cliff stares at the lights. The television is on.

DICK

The Holy Grail: badly-spelled gossip from someone in the know. Amazing. Everybody hates the guy's guts, calls him cheap and everything else. But they're all in thrall to him. They can't shut up about him. They can't figure out if they admire him, hate him or just fear him.

CLIFFORD

He's Howard Hughes. Who the fuck are they?

Cliff picks up his wallet and keys.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

I'm edgy. I'm going out.

INT. HOTEL RECEPTION - NIGHT

Cliff picks up his messages. He looks at one in particular.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Dick snoozes on his bed. Cliff pulls the phone into the bathroom as he has a quiet, but animated discussion on the phone.

CLIFFORD

(whispering, into the phone)

How did you even get the number?

A FEMALE VOICE

(from the phone)

I told her I was a publisher. It was very deceptive of me. I'm a terrible person.

CLIFFORD

(into the phone)

Yes. You are. You need to stop calling me and I am not fucking joking, Nina.

Clifford hangs up the phone, decisively.

INT. STRIP CLUB, LAS VEGAS - NIGHT

Sequins and tan skin. Legs. Heels. Drinks sliding on trays. Clifford twirls the ice in his Scotch. He's drunk. A topless brunette encircles him with a scarf.

TOPLESS BRUNETTE

You like games of chance? You might win something for free.

Clifford eyes her with a deep sexual stare.

CLIFFORD

Sorry, darling. I'm reformed.

TOPLESS BRUNETTE

I get off at two.

With the scarf, The Brunette slowly pulls Cliff toward her. They are inches from each other. Cliff downs his Scotch and hands her the scarf.

He nearly stumbles as he walks out.

INT. DESERT INN HOTEL - LATER

The door to the room opens quietly. Cliff enters. He is dishevelled, hung-over and tired. Dick rises.

Cliff goes into the bathroom to wash his face.

DICK

Get this -(hands Cliff some pages) Full transcription of a phone call between Hughes and Frank McCullough from the Times. It refers to the head of Intertel, a Mormon named George Gordon Holmes, who I think might be the guy in that picture from the Pentagon docs. No one has that. I'd like some applause.

Cliff claps in the water. He starts brushing his teeth.

DICK (cont'd)

Where the hell have you been?

CLIFFORD

(brushing his teeth)

Not in bed with a stripper, I'm pretty sure, thank God.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK

I thought you wanted to stop fucking everything that moved. The fucking has caused you problems, Cliff.

Cliff exits the bathroom and looks at Dick.

CLIFFORD

Listen Dick - it took me a year to make things right with Edith. I'm restless. Keep an eye on me okay?

DICK

I always do. (pause) Hey Cliff? Ginette got hold of some kind of publishing contract and uh...I was thinking maybe we could talk about some sort of credit or maybe a little more money...for me.

Pause.

CLIFFORD

You're not happy with what we talked about?

DICK

No, no, no, I'm fine...I just...

The PHONE begins to RING. Dick answers it.

CLIFFORD

Don't answer that! Beverly thinks I'm working alone, it's very top secret, Dick!

DICK

(suddenly terrified, into the phone)

What? Hello? No Beverly, this isn't Cliff.

Cliff tries frantically to feed Dick lines.

CLIFFORD

(whispering)

Uh! Not her name, now the'll...ah, shit...tell her you're my- Dick...Dick!...you coordinate travel for the motel...

DICK

(into the phone)

Uh, because he's mentioned you and we've been kind of working on...nothing, a project, but I'm...(to Cliff) What do I say? uh...co-what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DICK (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
(into the phone)  
I'm his coauthor on "Project Octavio."  
Here, I'll let him tell you...

Cliff puts his head in his hands. Covering the mouthpiece,  
Dick hands Cliff the phone.

DICK (cont'd)  
(to Cliff)  
I didn't know what to say!

Furious, Cliff takes the phone.

BEVERLY  
(O.S., loud)  
Who was that, Clifford?

CLIFFORD  
(into the phone, casual)  
My...associate...I was intending to tell  
you-

BEVERLY  
(O.S., intent)  
You have to be in New York at 9 A.M.  
tomorrow. You're meeting Ralph Graves.  
He's the editor-in-chief of Life  
Magazine.

Cliff swallows.

BEVERLY (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
(O.S.)  
You and this whoever-the-fuck "associate"  
I should have known about will need to go  
over all your contacts with Octavio.  
"Life" knows a lot about him, so get your  
memory clear and be specific. Harold has  
sort of put this in "Life's" hands and I  
don't want to lose the deal because of  
their knee-jerk suspicions.

CLIFFORD  
(into the phone)  
Lose the deal?

BEVERLY  
(from the phone)  
Just tell them the truth.

Cliff stares at Dick, who is already panicking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CLIFF  
(into the phone)  
We'll be there.

INT. TAXI - MORNING

A New York street. The taxi moves slowly: protestors wander off the sidewalks into the street. On one corner burns A large EFFIGY of RICHARD NIXON. In the taxi next to Cliff, Dick has the look of a man headed to the electric chair.

CLIFF  
Dick? Are you calm?

DICK  
He gave me a prune. (as if trying to memorize this notion...) A prune.

CLIFF  
Dick, you need to visualize the Mediterranean or something because you're sweating like an animal.

Pause.

DICK  
It is damn nervy of these publishers to put us through this inquisition.

CLIFF  
Well you can't sit it out now. You're the "coauthor".

Dick rolls down the window.

CLIFF (cont'd)  
Dick - tell me you'll be fine. Say it.

DICK  
I'll be fine!

Dick's mouth opens into a terrible anxious YAWN.

INT. LIFE MAGAZINE PHOTO GALLERY - DAY

The most famous photographic moments of the century line the walls of this large gallery. The group stands before a photo of Neil Armstrong on the moon. RALPH GRAVES (50's, sinewy) points a photo out to Cliff. On hand as well are Dick, Beverly, Albert and Harold McGraw.

GRAVES  
History. Quite a responsibility.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Cliff says nothing. Dick shifts his weight.

GRAVES (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
The handwriting experts told us your  
letters from Mr. Hughes are authentic.  
(pause) No surprise there. Experts want  
to provide their employers with good  
news.

A dangerous pause.

DICK  
He gave me a prune.

GRAVES  
What?

DICK  
It was right...right...right...right...it  
was on the table and he just gave me a  
prune. Howard Hughes.

Cliff's eyes nearly pop out of his head. Graves stares at  
Dick. So do the others in the room.

CLIFF  
Dick's jumping ahead. It was a memorable  
moment for him. (turning to Graves)  
Anyway, Ralph how can we help?

DICK  
Nobody likes to be accused.

CLIFF  
(quietly)  
I don't think any accusations have been  
made here, Dick.

The group is growing more puzzled by Dick's manner.

DICK  
Are we going to look at pictures all day?  
(silence) If we're going to talk about  
Howard Hughes then let's do it. He gave  
me a prune on the beach in Nassau.

GRAVES  
I thought you met Hughes the first time  
in Mexico?

Silence. Cliff searches Dick's eyes, as if trying to  
hypnotize him. Dick is utterly lost - terrified.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Cliff turns to face the now hostile audience. Photos of world-reknowned figures shadow them.

CLIFF

This is about something else, isn't it  
Dick?

(calmly, to Graves)

Before we came in here, Dick and I had an  
argument. About credit and money. And  
you're still ticked off aren't you, Dick?

DICK

(his nervous energy finally  
finding outlet)

Yeah. I'm angry!

BEVERLY

What are you angry about?

Pause.

CLIFF

I told Dick to keep quiet to make it  
clear that his role was limited.

DICK

(improvising with true emotion)  
You had no right to do that.

CLIFF

We'll change our agreement. All right?  
All right, Dick?

Dick wavers with confusion and the group seems wary - they almost can't believe they're seeing this. Finally, Dick nods and sits down.

CLIFF (CONT'D) (cont'd)

(looking at Graves)

Here's what happened. We got a call from  
a man named...George Gordon Holmes,  
telling us to take a flight to Mexico  
City and wait for a call. So we get to  
this fleabag motel, you remember Dick?

Dick looks like he has no fucking idea where this is going.

DICK

The fleabag motel. Of course I do.

INT. MOTEL - NASSAU, BAHAMAS - FLASHBACK

Cliff reads *Look* magazine. The Britannia Hotel rises up outside the window. In the corners of the walls are COBWEBS, backlit by the bathroom light.

CLIFF

(O.S.)

Cobwebs - and no working lights except in the john.

INT. LIFE MAGAZINE PHOTO GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Graves face betrays nothing. He and the others listen. Cliff takes two steps forward, loosening up.

EXT. NASSAU AIRPORT - FLASHBACK

Cliff and Dick stand on a tarmac waiting to board the twin-engine CESSNA 150.

CLIFF

(O.S.)

The next day we find an envelope under our door, saying a pilot named Pedro was waiting to take us to Juchitan. We get there and he's flying this beat-up Cessna 150. Dick says, the guy invents airplanes, he can't do better than this?

INT. LIFE PHOTO GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Almost imperceptibly, we see the group, even Graves, start to imagine Cliff's descriptions...

CLIFFORD

(smiling broadly)

Now, our man Pedro is a patriot.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGE - DAY - FLASHBACK/CLIFF'S IMAGINATION

POV: from an AIRPLANE. The images below MORPH from the Bahamian coastline to a MEXICAN MOUNTAIN RANGE. Dick and Cliff sit in the back seat as the newly conjured PEDRO (20's, gaunt) buzzes the mountains, pointing down at villages.

CLIFF

(O.S.)

He swooped down to show us every hut, every telephone pole, and insisted we stop in Tehuantepec for their local specialty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BACK TO THE LIFE GALLERY

GRAVES

What specialty was that?

Cliff's eyes whir, inventing.

INT. SURF SHOP - FLASHBACK

Pudgy Dick stands bulging in his skin-tight wet-suit.

CLIFFORD

(O.S.)

Sausage. Chorizo sausage.

INT. VEGAS HOTEL ROOM - FLASHBACK

Sitting on the balcony, Dick points out to Cliff a passage out of Dietrich's misspelled MANUSCRIPT...

*"...rarely took vacations, but when he did, he usually booked a hotel called the Salina Cruz hidden in the mountains of Juchitan in Mexico..."*

CLIFF

(O.S.)

Next stop: a dirt runway in Juchitan. Holmes meets us, and he's sweating through this white blazer he's wearing. He drove us on this God-awful, pock-marked road to a hotel...what was it? The "Salina Cruz" it was called, I'm pretty sure. Then the guy vanishes. We wait three hours like idiots by the pool. Then our pal George pops back like he never left and took us back to his room. It faced a dirt road. Didn't even have an ocean view.

INT. LIFE PHOTO GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Graves has perked up, and now listens carefully.

EXT. SALINA CRUZ HOTEL - EVENING - CLIFF'S IMAGINATION

George Gordon Holmes, his back to us, walks Cliff and Dick to the door of Howard Hughes' small hotel suite. The room inside is completely bare with the exception of a bed.

CLIFF

(O.S.)

The room was bare. No, wait...

INT. PLAZA HOTEL - FLASHBACK

Cliff gazes at the party-goers, implacable in their black and white MASKS...

CLIFF

(O.S.)

There were masks. Small, carved African masks on the wall...

INT. HUGHES HOTEL ROOM - EVENING - CLIFF'S IMAGINATION

...where AFRICAN MASKS have magically appeared on the wall...

GRAVES

How did Howard look?

CLIFF

(O.S.)

He wore a green sweater. Gaunt, pale, his left hand was scarred...

EXT. PLAZA HOTEL - FLASHBACK

Cliff sits outside on the red-carpeted steps, his bow tie undone. Well dressed couples walk past him...

...as he CRIES, bitterly.

CLIFF

(O.S.)

He looked...like a beaten man.

INT. HUGHES' HOTEL ROOM - EVENING - CLIFF'S IMAGINATION

We scan through the room over the SHADOW of a man sitting on the side of a bed. The man holds a cellophane bag filled with FRUIT. We DO NOT see his FACE...

CLIFF

(O.S.)

He said something about the quality of Mexican soil, the virtues of organic food. Then he offered Dick a prune.

SLOW MOTION: as the man extends the bag, and Dick reaches in to remove a PRUNE...

INT. LIFE MAGAZINE PHOTO GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Without realizing it, the publishers have gathered in a semi-circle around Cliff, hanging on his every word.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFF

We talked business. Then Dick and I went home. (pause) I'm hungry.

Graves stares at Clifford.

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - DAY

The most desired seats at this U-shaped booth are the ones near Clifford Irving and Dick Susskind. Vanderkamp and Beverly strain to hear details from the table's periphery.

A WAITER stands at attention.

GRAVES

The '62 please, Bordeaux. And some Beluga, shall we gentlemen?

DICK

You know, Howard *hates* caviar.

Vanderkamp and the others perk up, transfixed.

GRAVES

Really?

DICK

He made a point of saying so.

CLIFFORD

I remember that. Such a non-sequitur.

DICK

It was. Because Cliff, he had just finished talking about-

CLIFFORD

The crash. The one in Beverly Hills.

DICK

Exactly. And he was saying how in Beverly Hills they eat caviar and he hated it and then he crashed his plane.

Pause.

DICK (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I like caviar. Just don't tell Howard, okay Ralph?

RALPH

No, no indeed. Uh...two-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD

Three maybe?

RALPH

Make it three...Beluga appetizers.

ONE HOUR LATER

Graves winces at the CHECK. Cliff tries not to smile as he watches Dick, now riffing comfortably to a rapt Beverly.

DICK

...and he said something so interesting. He said most people see business as business, which it is. But business has pleasure too, so in a sense it's both business and pleasure, such as in a tour-boat business, that kind of thing. So you have both.

Beverly is so fascinated, she puts her elbow in the butter dish.

DICK (CONT'D) (cont'd)

If it doesn't make sense, don't worry, it didn't to me at first either. It sinks in over time. That's his genius.

CLOSE ON: Harold McGraw's hand, signing his name to a CONTRACT scribbled on yellow legal paper.

CLOSE ON: a CHECK, from McGraw-Hill Publishing made out to CLIFFORD IRVING in the amount of 100,000.00.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL - DAY

An ACCOUNTANT, the ex-football player type, holds the CHECK.

ACCOUNTANT

It's going to take a little while to process the other one.

Cliff considers objecting, but doesn't. The accountant hands over the check.

EXT. CHASE MANHATTAN BANK - DAY

Clifford exits the bank, carrying several children's LUNCH BOXES.

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - DAY

Ralph Graves sits across from Harold McGraw. They stare at each other.

GRAVES

We'll do 275 for worldwide exclusive rights to serialize. (pause) That's a record, Harold.

McGraw leans in to respond to Graves.

MCGRAW

I'm wondering if it's *enough* of a record.

INT. MERCEDES - DAY

The banged-up Mercedes whizzes home along the Turnpike. Cliff smiles as he drives, a breeze blowing his hair.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(from the car speakers)

...President Nixon declined comment on the Justice Dept's. anti-trust division's decision to "inquire further" on the proposed acquisition of Air West by Hughes Consolidated. Spokesmen for Hughes Consolidated quickly condemned the delay as "a great disappointment to the American traveller"...

In the passenger seat is Dick. At his feet are the empty lunch boxes. He looks down on his lap - at a huge pile of MONEY, wrapped in stacks of hundreds.

CLIFFORD

(yelling over the wind)

Look Dick - the money makes this real. You can still back out, but you gotta tell me now.

DICK

No way. We're the goddam musketeers!

CLIFFORD

Good! And don't spend any money! Better to have it later in case we need it.

DICK

I agree completely.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - MORNING

Cliff opens the door, harpoon in hand.

The same movers that repossessed Cliff's COUCH bring two ARMOIRES, a TABLE, and set of CHAIRS into his living room. Cliff picks up one of the STACKS of CASH laying around and peels off a few bills for the movers.

DICK

What happened to cash conservation?

CLIFFORD

Furniture's an investment.

FRUIT BASKETS and two UNDERWOOD TYPEWRITERS wrapped in gift ribbons sit in the living room of the house.

EDITH

What is the fruit and typewriters?

CLIFFORD

McGraw-Hill wants to make sure Dick and I get our vitamins. They're very caring people, Edith.

Cliff glances at his black and white TV with the sound off. He sees RICHARD NIXON on the steps of Air Force One giving his patented "V-for-victory" wave.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Nixon still has that look like the least popular kid in school. His entire political philosophy is based on revenge. I want a smoking gun on this son of a bitch for the book. What's he doing on this merger thing, I thought he was in Howard's pocket?

DICK

Maybe he jumped out.

Dick takes another bite of his muffin.

CLIFFORD

(to Dick)

Alright, let's work. To the bulwarks, Dartagnon.

Dick moseys up toward the attic. Cliff follows after him. Edith tugs his sleeve.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDITH

When you have a minute Cliff...I have...a new series of paintings to show you.

Cliff gives her a quick kiss and continues upstairs.

CLIFFORD

Leave them out for me. We're Carpe Diem right now.

Edith quiets as Cliff disappears upstairs. She hugs herself and looks around at the empty living room.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - ATTIC - NIGHT

A lofty attic with two dusty desks. Legal pads full of notes and court transcripts lay strewn on the floor. Cliff walks and smokes while Dick takes notes.

CLIFFORD

We need texture, we need blood, we've got the standard biographical two plus two: He built the Spruce Goose, he made it with Ava Gardner-

DICK

When he bought RKO Pictures he went through a period where ate nothing but grilled cheese sandwiches for three months.

CLIFFORD

Exactly.

DICK

Nobody else has that.

CLIFFORD

Which is great and you're very talented. But what's the journey for this guy?

Pause.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

He's growing up.

DICK

He's learning the error of his ways.

CLIFFORD

He's realizing Commies are people too, he's examining his priorities-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK

He's at a crossroads.

CLIFFORD

He's in a crisis! I'm Howard Hughes and what does that mean? Who the fuck am I?

DICK

Where-do-I-go-from-here type thing.

CLIFFORD

We send him on a search for enlightenment To Peru, Africa maybe-

DICK

India!

CLIFFORD

India! He sees a guru in India! This icon of American capitalism, we stick him in an ashram, he's asking advice from Sri Ramakrishna do-si-do, oh my God they'll eat it up.

DICK

You think so?

CLIFFORD

They'll devour it! Are you kidding? That's when it becomes a vehicle.

DICK

Maybe Nepal. A vehicle for what?

CLIFFORD

What do you want to do? You want to stop a war? You want to validate pre-marital sex? You want to recommend Buddhism? We can impact the culture here!

DICK

I just want to make money and not get caught. (pause) We don't want to be implausible.

Cliff sits on his desk.

CLIFFORD

I handed them three yellow letters and they gave me five hundred grand. Is that plausible?

Dick raises his eyebrows.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - NIGHT

Bright Pennsylvania starlight outside. Dick closes the door behind him. Cliff looks around at Edith's PAINTINGS which she's placed around the living room.

One of a FEMALE FIGURE...gaunt, lonely, isolated around jagged shapes. In another, a MALE FIGURE holds the dismembered limbs of the FEMALE FIGURE in the painting.

CLIFFORD  
(irritated)  
Jesus. It never ends.

Cliff looks at his telephone. He rubs his forehead with the tension of a man fighting a very strong impulse.

He finally grabs his CAR KEYS and heads out.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. ST. REGIS HOTEL - EARLY MORNING

Cliff sits naked on the side of a bed. His eyes are bloodshot and pensive. The room is a mess, replete with room service trays and empty bottles of booze.

NINA VAN PALLANDT (25, regal), a strangely beautiful woman with empty blue eyes, lays wrapped in a sheet.

NINA  
I want to be a Pop Star.

She absently lights a cigarette.

NINA (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
I'm already on magazine covers. I just need a manager and some songs. Some razzle dazzle, like you with your fake book. What do you think?

Cliff closes his eyes. A terrible hangover, both mind and body, is setting in.

CLIFFORD  
I thought you were an actress.

NINA  
I'm a writer, too. I have many ideas for stories and movies but I'm too busy to write them down. (pause) How's your little "Pear"?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD

Don't call her that.

NINA

I'm sorry. I forgot you're a devoted husband. I think I forgot while you were screwing me.

Cliff starts getting dressed.

CLIFFORD

I don't feel well.

NINA

You've been fucking and drinking for eighteen hours, you're not supposed to feel well.

CLIFFORD

I don't mean physically. (pause)  
This...wasn't a good idea.

Cliff grabs his shoes and sidles toward the door.

NINA

(yelling after him)

I may need to get a new lover because  
your breast-beating gives me a headache!

The door slams.

INT. ATTIC - MORNING

Cliff sits in his chair, his forehead in his hand. He smokes and is miserable. Dick looks at him.

DICK

(imitating Clifford)

"Dick...my screwing around - it's  
immature...it hurts her, hurts my  
work...Edith is stability, she's my  
future..."

CLIFFORD

That's helpful, thank you.

DICK

And you told Nina about the book? Are  
you out of your fucking mind?

CLIFFORD

I've got the "I'm an asshole" part down,  
alright? I need assessment, here.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD (cont'd)  
I barely know what happened. It's late,  
the adrenaline's flowing, I see these  
paintings, this torrent of never-ending  
guilt, I can't win. So - whiskey and two  
parts Nina, my solution. I don't...I  
don't know what to do if Edith asks me  
where I went. Christ, I'm stupid.

Dick stares at Cliff sternly.

DICK  
Come clean.

CLIFFORD  
She'll leave me. For good.

DICK  
I don't know what to tell you.

Cliff gets up and puts a piece of tape on a picture of Hughes  
hanging on the corkboard.

CLIFFORD  
Let's just work.

INT. ATTIC - EVENING

Dick prepares a large reel-to-reel tape recorder and  
microphone sit on a separate table. He sits down in front of  
them with a notebook.

CLIFFORD  
Do we need to do it this way?

DICK  
It makes it sound real, like it's his  
words. Are you ready?

Cliff nods. Dick presses the button on the recorder. The  
reels begin to revolve slowly...

DICK (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
(into the tape recorder)  
Testing...yes...ahem...well...Mr. Hughes,  
where do you want to begin?

Cliff's voice drops and his inflections change as the  
character seeps into his bones.

CLIFF  
(as Hughes)  
They called my father Big Howard. Big  
Howard made his money leasing drill bits.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFF (cont'd)

He told me, "Sonny, this drill bit is your bread and butter. Don't ever let it get away from you." Big Howard died when I was eighteen. His bunch of Texas roughnecks wanted to sell the company and push me out of the picture.

Dick leans the microphone closer and takes notes.

CLIFF (CONT'D) (cont'd)

(as Hughes)

I don't like to be pushed. Now when two parties negotiate, you have a lion and a donkey. One party through bluster or leverage claims the upper hand right away. That's the lion. At eighteen I sued these men that wanted to sell my father's company. Blackmailed them. I attacked them every way I knew how. I learned how to be a lion.

Dick turns off the tape recorder. Cliff takes a sip of water.

DICK

Good stuff. How did your Pop die again?

CLIFFORD

Heart attack. Forty nine.

DICK

Young.

CLIFFORD

No, lucky. I had two grandfathers and a great grandfather all dead of heart attacks before they turned 45.

DICK

Wow. I never knew that.

Dick contemplates this.

CLIFFORD

Let's go late tonight.

EXT. DECK - NIGHT

With a flashlight, Cliff reads transcripts, studying the Hughes material. Edith peeks her head outside.

EDITH

You...you want to get into bed with me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Cliff looks at her.

CLIFFORD

Always. But...I gotta get through this stuff.

Edith nods and forces a smile.

EDITH

Okay. Good night.

Edith slides the door shut. Clifford keeps reading.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

A tiny lake, where Dads and their sons maneuver toy boats. Clifford sits on a bench. Beverly Loo strides up to Clifford and throws a MAGAZINE in his face.

BEVERLY

(enraged)

Read the women's rags lately?

Cliff looks at the magazine and sees the caption: "HUGHES REVEALED - EXCERPTS FROM AUTOBIOGRAPHY!"

BEVERLY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Excerpts from Howard Hughes' autobiography in *Ladies Home Journal* from the book by Robert Eaton! Life's lawyers are gnawing the flesh from my bones! Do you want to tell me Clifford just what the fuck is going on here?

Pulling the magazine from his head, Cliff stares at it, stunned.

CLIFFORD

Hey! Lower the rhetoric, all right, I don't know anything about this!

BEVERLY

This goddam Eaton supposedly has memos, the same handwritten memos you've got, so either you're selling this twice and using "Robert Eaton" as a pen name-

CLIFFORD

I won't even dignify that with a response!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BEVERLY

Or more likely your demigod lunatic friend is using two writers. Get it?

Cliff is speechless. Then he uses the pause to slip into an improvisation.

CLIFFORD

Howard wouldn't...(pause, a moment of doubt)...No, Howard wouldn't do that to me. This other book has to be a...there has to be some other explanation.

BEVERLY

That's the weather. Here's the top story. All the sharks at my company have is you. Which means they will sue your skinny ass for every cent of the advance plus damages for making false representations-

CLIFFORD

I made no false representations!

BEVERLY

-about an exclusive book you said you could deliver. Unless we can announce our book publicly and immediately. Hughes has to agree to that.

CLIFFORD

Do you think the ten years of seclusion and closed circuit security are because he likes public scrutiny? He'll send a B-52 to bomb your building!

BEVERLY

He is screwing you Clifford! He's screwing both of us! So whatever spell you can cast, do it or we're roadkill. Harold wants to announce on Monday.

CLIFFORD

Beverly, I have no idea whether or not he'll call me by Monday!

BEVERLY

For your sake sweetheart, I hope he does.

Beverly makes an about face, kicks a toy boat out of her path, and walks off out of the park.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Dick breathes heavily, trying to keep up with Cliff, who walks fast. They walk on the side of the Delaware River.

DICK

She said they'd sue both of us? I was specifically mentioned?

CLIFFORD

Yes! How could this son of a bitch have the same idea? I can't believe it.

DICK

Because I...Cliff I spent the money.

Cliff turns on Dick.

CLIFFORD

I told you we might have to give it back!

DICK

Well as my wife pointed out, percentage-wise there wasn't that much to spend in the first place. And...

CLIFF

Jesus, Dick!

DICK

You pay them back. Say Hughes didn't agree. I'll owe you the difference.

CLIFFORD

I can't! I'm down at least half of it myself.

Cliff stops to sit on a stump.

DICK

Then borrow. (pause) Cliff, this isn't a prank anymore. If they announce this in the papers then we've got *Howard fucking Hughes* coming after us. What about Intertel? They'll inject us with sodium pentothal, or...I don't know, kill us, or tie us up or something-

CLIFFORD

Howard won't come after us. His advisors might, but he won't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK

Really? Did he tell you that over breakfast this morning? (pause) What if this other book is the real thing, have you thought of that?

Dick sits on the sand. Cliff picks up a rock.

CLIFFORD

The question is: what would Howard do in a situation like this?

Cliff throws the rock as far as he can toward the ocean...

INT. ATTIC - DAY

Papers are scattered everywhere. Cliff skims through stacks of material, looking for a particular piece of information...

Suddenly, Cliff's eyes light up. He has found something.

CLIFFORD

Luce. Henry Luce!

INT. ATTIC - DAY

Licking the point of his pen, Cliff glances at the Hughes handwriting samples, preparing to forge a new letter.

Dick stands with a travel bag over his shoulder. He does a last check of pockets, passport, glasses. In his hand is a plane ticket to NASSAU, BAHAMAS.

Cliff stands up, exasperated.

CLIFFORD

You miss that plane and I'll rip off your mustache and make you eat it!

Dick circles briefly, checks one last time, and hustles downstairs, out the door and into a waiting TAXI.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - DAY

Standing in the kitchen, Cliff shadow boxes briefly. He jumps up and down.

MOMENTS LATER

CLIFFORD

(into the phone)

No, you're lucky he called. I want the meeting at 8:30 A.M.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD (cont'd)  
with everyone there, including Shelton  
Fisher (pause, Cliff listens) I know  
he's the Chairman of the Board, Beverly,  
I presume that's why Howard mentioned  
him.

Cliff punches the air with his fist.

INT. NEW YORK CITY CAB - DAY

Cliff sits in the back seat of a cab. He looks sharp, in a  
spiffy tweed jacket and newly shined shoes. He opens his  
CHECKBOOK. The balance in his account is eight hundred  
dollars. Cliff pulls out a pen to write a check. He takes a  
deep breath.

EXT. BARREN ROAD, NASSAU BAHAMAS - DAY

LONG SHOT: A rickety cab trundles along a deserted dirt  
road. Only mountains and ocean as far as the eye can see -  
with the exception of a tiny SHOP.

The cab pulls up next to the shop. Dick gets out of the  
cab. He fumbles in his pocket for something.

A LETTER.

He opens the door of a rusted MAILBOX and drops the letter  
inside. He then gets back into the cab, which drives off.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL OFFICES - DAY

Cliff checks his watch. He then walks toward the corner  
conference room. He passes an INTERN who carries a box with  
the MORNING MAIL.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The high priests of American publishing have gathered here.

Graves, McGraw, Beverly, Vanderkamp and Brad Silber are all  
present along with several lawyers. At the head of the table  
is SHELTON FISHER (60's, pot-bellied), Chairman of the Board  
of McGraw-Hill, and he is cranky today.

Cliff sits at the far end of the table. All eyes stare at  
him coldly.

GRAVES

Mr. Irving, it would appear that either  
you or your illustrious sponsor is  
jerking someone's chain. Let me assure  
you that chain will not be connected to  
Life Magazine.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRAVES (cont'd)

So why don't you begin by telling us who Robert Eaton is and why he's selling the book you're supposed to be writing?

Pause.

CLIFFORD

Shelton, have you received your mail today?

GRAVES

Excuse me?

CLIFFORD

Ralph, I was talking to Shelton. And as a side comment, watch your tone with me. I've been up for two nights negotiating with a stubborn billionaire and my quota for verbal abuse has been reached.

Graves is taken aback.

FISHER

Get the mail.

The mail boy brings in the mail. Fisher sorts through it.

GRAVES

Life Magazine has been known to have a slight impact on writer's careers, my friend. And we're not afraid of civil litigation.

CLIFFORD

That's the tone, Ralph, right there. Watch that.

Fisher finds the letter Dick sent. He handles it carefully, as if he's afraid to open it.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

While you're reading Shelton, assuming Howard wrote what he told me he was going to write, I'll summarize for the group.

Fisher starts to read the letter. His brow furrows as he reads.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Howard doesn't know who Eaton is. The book is a fake. But that doesn't really matter now.

Harold McGraw takes a sip of water.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
Because when he found out McGraw-Hill had sold the serialization rights to Life Magazine without his authorization, he became...what's the word? Apoplectic. Apparently Ralph, the owner of your wonderful magazine, Henry Luce, slept with one of Howard's wives.

GRAVES  
I'm sorry?

CLIFFORD  
He fucked Howard's wife Jean in 1952. Howard also called him a lackey for the Kennedys and a lousy golf player - is that about right Shelton?

FISHER  
It's postmarked from Nassau. He just rants about Luce. It's three pages about what a bastard Luce is...

GRAVES  
That...that is slander. And we are talking about a business agreement that will hold up in a court of law.

CLIFFORD  
We were talking about a business agreement. Not anymore.

Clifford pulls a check out of his pocket.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
I begged him to reconsider. I was unsuccessful. So at Howard's request, I am returning my \$100,000 advance to you.

Cliff's hand trembles as he lays the check on the table.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
Feel free to chase us around in court. In the meantime, we're going to find another publisher.

Fisher reads something like this in the letter.

FISHER  
Son, a contract means that book is the property of this company. It's ours.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CLIFFORD

Wrong. Thanks to my hours of pleading,  
it could be yours Shelton. You could  
announce it publicly within a week. He'll  
even let you keep Ralph involved.

Pause.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Provided you increase his advance to one  
million dollars and not a penny less.

Gasps arise from all sides of the table. Fisher stands up.

FISHER

(sputtering)

A million...

GRAVES

Give me that letter.

FISHER

A million dollars? A million goddam  
dollars?

MCGRAW

I think we should struggle to maintain an  
atmosphere of goodwill and trust here-

FISHER

Trust? He's a Texan copperhead!

Clifford gets up and starts walking toward the door.

FISHER (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Get back here! (Clifford pauses) Now  
you listen to me, boy. That is my book  
signed and sealed, and I am not paying  
any goddam million dollars for it. So  
Mr. Clifford Irving, you tell-

CLIFFORD

(exploding)

This is not Clifford Irving! This is  
Howard Hughes! Howard's mouth, Howard's  
words. One million dollars or we walk  
across the street to Doubleday.

Cliff opens the door to leave. As he's about to close it  
behind him, he tosses a last comment at Fisher.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
I will mention Shelton, that one of  
Howard's alternative ideas was to simply  
buy McGraw-Hill Publishing.

A soft noise escapes Harold McGraw's mouth.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
"I'll just keep the printing presses and  
get rid of the idiots." (pause) That's an  
exact quote.

Clifford closes the door behind him. Fisher looks at the  
letter. He then wilts into his chair.

EXT. EAST RIVER - DAY

Wearing jeans and carrying gallery brochures, Edith  
approaches Cliff who stares out into the river. Dick sits on  
a bench.

EDITH  
I don't understand Rothko. His work is  
just gray and nothing. All I see every  
day is gray and nothing, why would I  
choose to...why are the boys glum?

They are in fact, quite morose.

DICK  
In the midst of our brilliant scheme, we  
neglected to figure out how to cash a  
check made out to Howard Hughes.

EDITH  
Open a Swiss account in his name.

CLIFF  
You need social security numbers, it's  
traceable, even in Switzerland. Dick and  
I are too close to everything. Someone  
would get wind. It's ...trust me, we've  
been over everything.

All three of them stare out at the river for a little while.  
Edith thinks for a moment. Then she turns to Cliff.

EDITH  
It works if a woman deposits the check.

DICK  
The person that cashes the check has to  
open the account. Howard Hughes. A man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDITH

Tell the publishers he wants his checks written to his initials, "H.R. Hughes". Then, a fake passport, a fake name, Harriet Rhonda Hughes, Helga Rhinoceros Hughes, and...I can cash the check.

Pause.

DICK

Jesus, that could work.

CLIFF

Edith isn't going to Switzerland. (to Edith) You're not going to Switzerland.

EDITH

Why not? I'm smarter than you and braver than him. We can be...Bonnie and Clyde!

CLIFFORD

You're not doing it.

DICK

How else are we going to cash the check?

CLIFFORD

She's my wife, Dick!

DICK

I know that Cliff. (loaded) I've reminded you of that from time to time. (aside to Edith) When he's not good about calling, that kind of thing. (to Cliff) I don't see that we have a choice.

CLIFFORD

Edith and I should talk alone first.

EDITH

About what?

Cliff is deeply troubled. He leans over the railing, staring at the water. His jaw tightens. He stands and turns around.

CLIFFORD

(to Edith)

The...logistics. I guess.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - DAY

CLOSE ON: A PASSPORT, bearing a picture of Edith. Underneath the picture is the name "Helga Renata Hughes". In the fold of the passport is a CHECK, for ONE MILLION DOLLARS, made out to "H.R. Hughes".

Beside it is a copy of the NEW YORK TIMES, dateline Tuesday, October 17th, 1970. The front page HEADLINE reads:

AMIDST CONTROVERSY, MCGRAW-HILL TO PUBLISH  
HUGHES AUTOBIOGRAPHY

HUGHES LAWYER CALLS BOOK "COMPLETE FABRICATION"

Edith's bare foot peeks from under a blanket as she snoozes in bed. Cliff's side of the bed is empty.

INT. MEN'S ATHLETIC CLUB - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Fisher towels off while yelling into a phone that has been brought over to him.

FISHER

(into the phone)

Four telegrams, nine phone calls, and three "cease and desist" orders all filed before noon this morning. Chester Davis, Howard's personal lawyer, is threatening to fly to New York! I got yellow memos calling Henry Luce a flit! Would you call that a "good hand" Miss Loo?

INTERCUT: BEVERLY LOO'S OFFICE - DAY

Poor Beverly looks absolutely worn to the nub. She holds a can of cold soda to her forehead.

BEVERLY

(into the phone)

Sir, Hughes is writing this without the knowledge of his advisors, that's the point-

FISHER

Am I paying this man a million dollars for a book he's going to sue me for publishing?

EXT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

Edith tucks the PASSPORT, the CHECK, and THE NEWSPAPER into her purse.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She reaches up to adjust a BLACK WIG that sits precariously on her head. Wearing a loud red dress, she looks a little silly. She puts on a pair of large sunglasses and walks down the back stairs.

Cliff is on the phone with Beverly.

INTERCUT: with Beverly in her office, an anxious Alfred hovering over her.

BEVERLY

(into the phone)

We're not upset. At all. It's the king's men fighting for control of the kingdom. But...if you were concerned...maybe you could ask Howard to stop the...more vociferous denials?

CLIFFORD

No, I think you're right. No reason to be upset. Have a great morning.

Cliff hangs up the phone. Beverly sighs at her desk.

MINUTES LATER

In her Mata Hari get-up, Edith walks up the dirt driveway a heavy box. She lugs the box to the house and drops it on the floor of the front foyer. In her other hand she puzzles over a small card with only "Clifford" written on the envelope.

EDITH

My back is broken. What did you order?

Dick waves a copy of the NY Times in Cliff's face. His cheeks are red.

DICK

We're liars. Right there, page one, his lawyers calling us-

CLIFF

A lawyer calling me a liar is like a chef calling me a cook. We knew this was going to happen, what are you so-

DICK

My name is in the damn newspaper, Cliff. I mean...that's my name there!

CLIFFORD

A month ago you wanted more credit!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Edith notices the argument. She hesitates...then opens the envelope.

DICK

The BBC called my house this morning  
while Ginette was in the bath! (pause)  
We're both thinking we should scale back.

CLIFFORD

It's your job to reassure Ginette. What  
does she think will happen?

Edith stares at the quick note written on the card:

I still feel you...want more... N.

Her face vanishes.

DICK

She doesn't want me to get arrested or  
get kidnapped by...karate guys.

CLIFFORD

What are karate guys?

DICK

Hughes' goons, Ginette calls them karate  
guys, it's a dumb name....just - look.  
She, we, frankly feel like we need more  
money to justify the risk-

A PICTURE FRAME

whistles toward them, striking Cliff in the HEAD. Cliff  
wobbles, stunned, then falls down.

DICK (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Holy cow! You hit his head!

Edith rips off her wig.

EDITH

It's finished with her?

Edith grabs her clogs and a vase off the shelf and throws  
more at Cliff, who is pelted. A clog strikes Dick in the  
shoulder.

DICK

Ow! Hold on!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

EDITH

You dog! Dog to fuck that bitch! Oh  
Clifford, you are such a bastard...

Cliff holds his head, which is bleeding. Dick holds his  
head, ducking as he makes a run for the door.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Cliff stands up, holding a paper towel to his bleeding head.  
Edith sits smoking at the kitchen table.

CLIFFORD

Edith...she did this deliberately,  
maliciously, because I completely cut off  
communication! She wants this to  
separate us.

EDITH

Did you see her?

Cliff opens his mouth to protest.

EDITH (cont'd)

Don't say it. Don't say anything.

Clifford sighs.

CLIFFORD

Look, I don't want you to go to  
Switzerland. It could be dangerous. I  
don't care about the money.

EDITH

You never did. You care about power and  
being a famous man.

CLIFFORD

Edith, I'm begging you not to go. We'll  
work this out, we'll take a trip-

EDITH

Fuck you. It's my money too.

Edith picks up her suitcase, adjusts her wig, and slams the  
door behind her.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - MORNING

Cliff sits with an icepack on his head. Atop the  
refrigerator, Cliff notices the LUNCHBOX, the one Edith  
packed him for the road trip. He stares at it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOMENTS LATER

Cliff sits as he talks on the phone.

CLIFF  
(into the phone)

The message is: "Please at least let me know you're okay". Thank you.

Cliff places the phone back in its cradle. He notices the unmarked PACKAGE on the floor of the foyer. He pulls it toward him. The postmark is from LAS VEGAS, NEVADA.

MOMENTS LATER

With a kitchen knife, Cliff pries the box open. Inside are dozens of neatly stacked FILES in Manila folders. No note.

Cliff scans the content. It is in the form of a manuscript: freshly typed, double spaced pages. Cliff reads:

"...reason to believe that our loan to D. Nixon dated June, 1959 will be regarded favorably by the nominee and ensure renewal of all current Pentagon contracts..."

CLIFFORD  
(reading aloud, amazed)  
"\$405,000 was paid in cash out of Hughes Consolidated offshore accounts...?"

Cliff grabs another file, picks it up and starts reading:

"...Rebozo suggested \$50,000 in cash for '68 primary followed by an additional \$50,000 to redecorate the nominee's home. Acceptance was understood to mean that both TWA appeal and Air West matter would be given highest priority."

CLIFFORD (cont'd)  
Oh my God.

AN HOUR LATER

Dick pores through the files while Cliff hovers over him. Cliff's eyes are lit up with a kind of religious ecstasy.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)  
Do you see? Are you seeing?

DICK  
I cant believe what I'm seeing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLIFFORD

It's the end! Publish this, Nixon, the President, is impeached. Do you understand the power this gives us?

DICK

I don't want the power this gives us. Publish this - oceans of shit rain down on our heads. Journalists double-check it, if it's false, we're sued for libel. It also means someone, Hughes' advisors, Nixon's political enemies - God knows who - knows where you live. I say we forget we ever saw it.

Cliff leaps up.

CLIFFORD

This is like a Torah, sent down from God to make us part of history, and you want to forget it? It's postmarked from Nevada - Hughes country!

DICK

What are you saying?

Clifford jumps up onto the sofa.

CLIFFORD

He wants us to help him bust Nixon.  
(pause) He's with us, Dick! Howard is with us!

INT. BANK, ZURICH SWITZERLAND - DAY

Edith approaches a teller in the bank. She straightens her WIG, which is slightly crooked. She hands the CHECK for one million dollars to an impressed bank teller.

EDITH

I'd like to open an account. My name is Helga Hughes.

INT. ATTIC - DAY

Looking into a cracked mirror, Cliff pastes a FAKE MUSTACHE on to his face. He is beginning to slightly resemble the Howard Hughes in the photographs on the walls.

INT. ATTIC - DAYS LATER

Dick smokes a cigarette and pushes back a mop of hair from his brow. Empty food cartons litter the attic and all the ashtrays are full.

DICK

I don't understand - how did you know the Dillon Read hydraulic systems were faulty?

CLIFFORD

(as Hughes)

You're not listening Clifford, goddammit, I'd *made sure* they were faulty through a couple of well-placed bribes.

DICK

Then why didn't you just go to Defense with the information and get the contract?

CLIFFORD

(as Hughes)

I couldn't have handled the contract then. So instead of tattling on them, I fixed their planes. I intertwined our technologies and our operations. I ate that company from within, and they let me because they were hypnotized. That's the way Clifford: Your rival is powerful? Create a crisis for him. But instead of taking short-term advantage of it - save the day for him. Nothing confuses a man more than a kind gesture from his enemy. Nothing renders him more vulnerable.

Dick turns off the tape recorder.

DICK

I have to sleep.

CLIFFORD

(still as Hughes)

We have the whole rest of our lives to sleep, Clifford. (pause) Now: TWA...

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

Cliff and Dick sit on two metal folding chairs, witnessing the violent motion of the biggest newspaper in the world. They sit outside a small office. Dick is nervous.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK

But what are we here for?

CLIFFORD

I don't know, Beverly said it was important. Did Edith call you?

Harold McGraw walks out to meet them.

MCGRAW

Gentlemen.

McGraw's face is grim. Dick and Cliff exchange a look as they enter the small office. Fisher stands with his hands in his pockets. Ralph Graves is seated near the window.

FISHER

Clifford, I don't believe you've met Frank McCullough.

FRANK MCCULLOUGH (40's, angular) is a bald man with an intelligent gaze. He looks at Cliff. He doesn't smile.

FISHER (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I got a call about an hour ago from Chester Davis. According to him, at 2 P.M. our time, Howard Hughes will call to speak to an intermediary by telephone. As the journalist known to have spoken to Hughes most recently, we mutually agreed on Mr. McCullough to receive the call, because of his ability to identify Hughes by voice. Mr. McCullough has assured us, that for the moment, he will keep this off the record.

The color drains from Cliff's face.

FISHER (cont'd)

Mr. Davis also requested that Ralph Graves be present and in the room during the call. (pause) That one kind of surprised me Clifford, given Howard's representations of Life in your... alleged...communications with him.

Graves allows the barest trace of a smirk to cross his face. There is a long pause.

DICK

Excuse me, I have to use the rest room.

Dick LEAVES the ROOM. Cliff has been abandoned.

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED: (2))

CLIFFORD

Shelton, this is a Davis ambush. You know what the voice on the other end of that line is going to say.

FISHER

Mr. McCullough is here to make sure that voice belongs to the man in question.

MCCULLOUGH

I'm neutral here, Mr. Irving.

McCullough pulls his trouser legs up to sit down.

FISHER

Now we wait.

Cliff sits. His eyes dart around the room. For a moment, he considers the OPEN WINDOW.

DISSOLVE TO:

A CLOCK. The time is 1:58. The men all sit silent.

The PHONE RINGS. Cliff touches his chest. McCullough gets up and walks toward it. The PHONE keeps RINGING. McCullough picks up the receiver. Cliff stands up.

CLIFFORD

I'm not watching this charade. Find me in the lobby.

Clifford WALKS OUT. McGraw steps outside the office.

MCGRAW

Stay close, Clifford!

Cliff goes to the ELEVATOR. Shouts and activity permeate the floor behind him. He presses the button several times, vigorously. He is sweating.

The elevator is taking too long...

An "Emergency Exit" sign hangs above a nearby door. Keeping his pace steady, Cliff walks through it.

IN THE STAIRWELL

Cliff races down the stairs, leaping them two at a time.

He arrives at the bottom floor...and sees DICK pounding on a locked DOOR.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DICK

It says "exit" but it won't exit!

CLIFFORD

Dick...stay calm...

DICK

Howard Hughes. Dear God.

CLIFFORD

We have no reason to believe that was him, McCullough hasn't spoken to the man in twelve years - Breathe, Dick!

Dick shakes his ASTHMA INHALER. He takes several puffs.

DICK

There's an angry billionaire, chasing me, hating me!

CLIFFORD

You're hyperventilating! Let's just get out to the street...

Cliff and Dick run back up the stairs, tripping over each other, cursing, trying each door. They are all LOCKED. They keep running. Dick slows, sweating profusely.

DICK

I need a bathroom! I'll confess, I'll do anything, if they'll just let me use a bathroom.

Cliff finds an open door and drags Dick into a cubbyhole area in the fifth floor stairwell landing.

CLIFF

Hide in there. Piss your pants if you have to but do not move.

Cliff runs up two more flights to the main floor where he steps out into the hall and sees MCGRAW walking toward him. His expression is grim.

CLIFFORD

What happened?

MCGRAW

We don't know yet. Mr. McCullough asked us to leave the room.

CLIFFORD

I'll freshen up.

INT. MEN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Drenched in sweat, Cliff sits underneath the sink. He breathes fast. He holds onto the pipes under the sink, trying to pull it together.

INT. NEW YORK TIMES - DAY

Clifford walks in. Fisher and McGraw look as though someone has been shot. McCullough lights a cigarette.

He looks at Cliff, matter-of-fact and merciless.

MCCULLOUGH

The man I just spoke to was Howard Hughes. His speech patterns and inflections would be impossible to imitate. He told me he's never met you, and that your book is a fraud. A hoax.

Shelton Fisher turns and looks at Cliff with a terrible intensity. Cliff concentrates on not blinking his eyes.

MCCULLOUGH (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Mr. Irving?

CLIFFORD

I'm listening.

MCCULLOUGH

Now, knowing Howard, I don't find that to be conclusive. He's a very strange man. But considering the scarcity of proof you've provided - at the moment my best guess is that you're a charlatan.

Fisher turns and softly bores into Clifford.

FISHER

If there is a whiff of impropriety to this - if you have exaggerated or changed the slightest detail - I will prosecute you to the full extent of the law for grand larceny and mail fraud - unless you tell us now just exactly what the ballfuck is going on. Now.

A painful silence.

CLIFFORD

I...I...

ANGLE ON: A certain relief in Clifford's eyes...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

I have abused your trust. The book...the entire story...is false.

Fisher gasps. Beverly sits down slowly, on the floor.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

I lied to the entire world. And no matter what happens now, I am so...so goddam relieved.

ANGLE ON: Frank McCullough, waiting for an answer.

Clifford snaps out of his FANTASY REVERIE.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

I have off-the-record material on that two-faced prick that puts him in fucking jail. I'm going to tell Howard that unless he shows his ant-bitten face, I'm releasing it. I've had it.

Cliff storms toward the door.

FISHER

You got three days to produce both Howard Hughes and the manuscript or-

CLIFFORD

I wish I'd never met the son of a bitch!

INT. FIFTH FLOOR STAIRWELL - LATER

Dick sits sweating in the cubbyhole. Cliff walks slowly down the stairs. He sits down on the steps.

Dick looks at him.

EXT. PARK - DAY

A woman lays out topless. A man with dilated pupils rips pages from a magazine, sprinkling the pieces onto the woman. Dick and Cliff walk quickly through the park.

DICK

Grand larceny? Mail fraud? No way. This is too much, this is too much!

CLIFFORD

There's a move here, we're just not seeing it yet. Dick? Dick?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK  
I'm phoning Ginette.

MINUTES LATER

Dick steps out of a PHONE BOOTH. He is solemn. He walks up to Cliff, who sits on a park bench.

DICK (cont'd)  
It's over. (pause) I can't go to jail.  
With or without you...I'm telling them  
tomorrow that Howard pulled out of the  
deal. We'll give the money back. (pause)  
She felt very strongly about it, Cliff.

Cliff's eyes burn into Dick's.

CLIFFORD  
You're an honorable man. Now, you made a  
commitment to me Dick. You said you were  
in this to the end. Reaching a worldwide  
audience - taking down a corrupt  
president - that's the end. Not this.

DICK  
It's finished, Cliff. I'm sorry I  
disappointed you.

Cliff says nothing. His eyes are dark and bitter.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - NIGHT

The TAPE RECORDER. It is Cliff's voice, speaking as Hughes.

CLIFFORD  
(as Hughes, on tape)  
...create a crisis for him...save the  
day...nothing renders him more  
vulnerable...

Clifford lays on the floor in his bathrobe, staring at the ceiling. Listening.

INT. BAR - CLOSING TIME

Cliff sits several seats down from Dick. He concentrates on the bottom of his glass. He radiates resentment.

Dick is quite drunk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK

Hey. Hey. You're not talking to me?  
He's not talking to me. S'okay I'm used  
to it.

Cliff looks across the bar where two women return his gaze.  
They are dressed provocatively - clearly prostitutes. Cliff  
considers them for a moment. He turns back to his drink.

DICK (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Ginette didn't speak to me for hours when  
I got home. Mad at me for leaving crumbs  
on the couch...It's like there's one way,  
her way, whether it's where we eat  
dinner, or this...book thing. What to  
do, all that. (pause) I hate her  
sometimes.

A look of disquietude colors Dick's face.

DICK (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Marriage is complicated.

CLIFFORD

(coldly)

So's friendship.

Cliff gets up to go to the bathroom.

MINUTES LATER

Cliff walks back into the bar. He sees Dick sitting with the  
prostitutes, A FERAL GIRL (22, crazy eyes) and her chubby  
friend. Both are laughing. Cliff walks up to the table.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

C'mon, cowboy. Let's go.

DICK

I don't want to go.

CLIFFORD

Sure you do, you have to get home to-

Cliff stops talking. He stares at drunken Dick. Something  
has just occurred to him.

He sits down at the table.

CLIFF

(to the bartender)

Another double bourbon for my friend.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AN HOUR LATER

A bartender puts chairs on tables. Cliff pours part of his drink into Dick's glass.

DICK

War and sodomy. His two...his two  
favorite occupational hazards. Hazardous  
business, sodomy.

FERAL GIRL

So I hear.

They all laugh. Cliff makes eye contact with the FERAL GIRL.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - MORNING

Cliff has fallen asleep in a sitting position on his couch. He opens his eyes. The sun shines through the window.

The FERAL GIRL walks downstairs, shoes in her hand. She looks at Cliff, who rubs his eyes. Cliff considers - then pulls a hundred from his wallet and hands it to her.

The FERAL GIRL takes the money, puts her shoes on and leaves.

Dishevelled and in his underwear, Dick wanders downstairs in a daze. He sees an empty bottle of booze on the coffee table. It has LIPSTICK on it.

DICK

What did I do last night?

Cliff watches Dick. He says nothing.

DICK (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I smell...I smell like...Oh, no.

Immediately, Dick begins to cry. He sits down and his crying turns to desperate SOBBING.

DICK (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I didn't...I didn't...Oh, no. Oh, no.

Cliff sits beside Dick and EMBRACES him. Dick sobs, helpless, in Cliff's arms.

CLIFF

Dick? Listen to me...

Dick coughs and cries. He can't speak.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD

It was a mistake. A mistake you can make up to her. She's wanted security for a long time, hasn't she?

DICK

(crying)

Yes.

CLIFFORD

You can give her that. Listen - I promise I will make this work for all of us. I will fix this, do you hear me?

DICK

Yes.

CLIFFORD

(holding him)

There's a higher power, Dick. And he's on our side.

Cliff stares at the landscape outside his window as his friend convulses in his arms.

HOURS LATER

The Underwood crackles with life as Cliff pounds the keys, peeling out page after page.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL - DAY

MARION, Harold McGraw's porky secretary SPRINTS down the hall with a message. She pokes her head into Beverly's office.

MARION

(catching her breath)

A meeting...he's going to show up...here!

Beverly looks at Marion, baffled. Across the hall, Malika puts a RECORD onto a TURNTABLE. "I'm Waiting For My Man" by the Velvet Underground floods the halls during the following sequence...

INT. MCGRAW-HILL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A small ARMY has gathered around Harold McGraw. Beverly, Vanderkamp and Brad Silber stand attentive. Forty or more other employees all crowd into the room.

Silber presents a chair, suggesting McGraw stand on it to be heard better.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MCGRAW

I am not standing on a chair!

Silber backs off. McGraw clears his throat.

MCGRAW (CONT'D) (cont'd)

This is perhaps the most bizarre  
communique I have ever received. I have,  
nonetheless, received it - and I need  
your help implementing its requirements.

McGraw looks at Fisher, who purses his lips.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL - DAY

Clifford rides in an elevator with a security guard.

MCGRAW

(O.S.)

Tomorrow at 1 P.M. the top four floors of  
this building are to be evacuated.

The fourteenth floor. The guard LOCKS the elevator with a  
key. It remains open. Clifford stalks down the hall.

He passes the workmen, beginning their task of tearing up the  
carpet and washing the floors underneath.

MCGRAW (CONT'D) (cont'd)

(O.S.)

Before 1 P.M. all carpeting on the  
fourteenth floor is to be completely  
removed. The floors underneath are to be  
washed and waxed. Several brands of  
cleaners are specified...I'll read those  
off...

Clifford passes several open offices. Each office is being  
cleaned by teams of two.

MCGRAW (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

(O.S.)

All windows are to be covered with black  
fabric, a kind which does not accumulate  
dust. (pause) Does that apply to my  
windows as well, Mr. Irving?

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

You've rarely seen a bunch of more baffled individuals as the  
McGraw-Hill staff. We now see that CLIFFORD was in the  
meeting all along.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD

I'd cover them Harold, just to play it safe.

MCGRAW

Right. So Marion you can staple those or...maybe nails would be better? Regardless, we need that fabric up...

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

It's windy. Brad Silber holds a DIAGRAM, barking instructions to workers drawing chalk circles on the ROOFTOP.

MCGRAW

(O.S.)

Now friends, we will be working with our partners at Life on this. Mr. Silber has been charged with diagramming a...landing pad of sorts...have we checked this with the building's engineers?

Clifford watches Brad. The wind blows fiercely. Brad sticks the diagram in his back pocket.

CLIFFORD

(O.S.)

They did, Harold, and as long as the markings are correct, there shouldn't be any problem.

Cliff deftly PICKS the DIAGRAM From Silber's pocket. He walks quickly to a stone jutting, leans the paper against it, pulls out a pencil, and ERASES the North, South, East, West designations, changing Silber's diagram.

MCGRAW

(O.S.)

The utmost secrecy is to be observed. Any person even suspected of leaking this to the media will be terminated. So please, friends. Let's keep quiet.

Cliff then returns to the spot on the roof where Silber is working and hands the diagram back.

CLIFFORD

We might not want to let this fly off the building.

The humiliated Silber takes back the diagram.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
You copied that by hand from the  
original, right? No Xeroxes?

SILBER  
(irritated)  
I am fully aware of the restrictions and  
yes, I copied it by hand.

CLIFFORD  
Brad, I'm really sorry he's making this  
all so difficult.

Clifford walks off smiling as Silber curses under his breath  
and gets back to work...

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

Clifford and Beverly wait on the snow-covered roof, staring  
down at the crowd gathered below on the street.

BEVERLY  
(yelling)  
How did you convince Howard to meet with  
Harold?

CLIFFORD  
(yelling)  
I told him it meant a lot to me. (pause)  
I think he's starting to look on me...as  
a son.

Cliff turns and walks toward the door to the roof...

INT. THE STRIPPED OFFICE - DAY

Stepping into the stripped office containing Harold McGraw,  
Frank McCullough, and Ethel the masked stenographer.

Clifford hands Harold a thin ENVELOPE.

CLIFFORD  
First off, Harold - this is sensitive  
material that I'm still deciding whether  
or not to include in the book. I want  
you to put it somewhere very safe.

McGraw accepts the thick envelope.

MCGRAW  
Of course, Cliff.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Clifford then pulls out two thick envelopes and hands one each to Harold and Frank. He's noticeably nervous.

CLIFFORD  
 Alright, then. Our manuscript,  
 gentlemen. I hope you like it.

MCGRAW  
 (drily)  
 I hope to God I do too.

He pulls out the manuscript. The title page reads:

**"THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF HOWARD HUGHES"**  
**AS TOLD TO CLIFFORD IRVING**

EXT. ROOFTOP - FLASH TO THE OPENING

THE HELICOPTER hovers directly overhead.

It begins its descent toward the landing pad. It is twenty feet above the rooftop...

At the last second, it rises back up, switches direction, and starts flying away from the building.

BEVERLY  
 Where's he going? Where's he going?

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

Sitting next to the pilot is DICK, who bends expectantly over a PAPER BAG.

PILOT  
 We heading back?

Dick THROWS UP into the bag.

EXT. ROOF TOP - DAY

Beverly leans dangerously close to the edge of the building, as if trying to will the helicopter back.

BEVERLY  
 Come back! Wait!

Clifford storms over to Silber.

BEVERLY (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
 This is not happening! He was fifty  
 fucking feet from the building!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD

Let me see that diagram!

SILBER

The diagram was fine, it was exactly to-

CLIFFORD

Beverly, give me the original.

Beverly gives Cliff a folder. Cliff pulls out the original diagram. Silber hands Cliff his handwritten copy (the one Cliff secretly changed...)

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

(an improvised sputtering)

This...this compass is wrong! You've got North, West, South, East! Look!

Silber looks at the ROOFTOP DRAWING, and indeed we see in clockwise order, North, West, South, East.

SILBER

I wrote was on the damn page!

CLIFFORD

The man is an avionics genius, a pioneer, and the first sight he sees is a landing pad that a third-grader couldn't have fucked up! Of course he turned around!

Beverly looks over Silber's shoulder. Silber starts to tremble as he sees that on the ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS, the compass is correct. Beverly moves in on Silber.

BEVERLY

Pray that you die you sniveling twat, because when I report just how exquisitely you destroyed this opportunity - I promise that you will be flushed from this industry like a turd!

SILBER

I swear to Christ I wrote what was on that sheet of paper!

Clifford gently backs off as the representatives of McGraw-Hill and Life fight like rams smashing their heads together on a mountaintop.

The wind drowns out the sound of Beverly and Brad screaming at each other.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

From the rooftop door emerge Frank McCullough and Harold McGraw, whose feathery silver hair blows in the wind. They approach Clifford. McCullough's face is expressionless, McGraw seems worked up about something.

MCCULLOUGH

Visit or no visit...

SLOWLY IN: on Cliff, who listens.

MCCULLOUGH (cont'd)

Your book is genuine. There is no way your material could have come from anyone but Howard Hughes. The colloquialisms, the idiosyncratic philosophies; heck, you've got a near-perfect account of a talk I had with Howard that I never discussed with another living soul. (pause) Write it, then deny it. Typical Howard Hughes maneuver. Put you on one hell of a limb didn't he, Cliff?

McGraw HUGS Clifford, who accepts the gesture.

MCGRAW

It's...it's a masterpiece, Cliff.

FADE TO BLACK:

CLIFFORD

(O.S.)

I'm like Rasputin. They can't kill me.

INT. HOTEL BANQUET ROOM - DAY

At the back of this banquet hall is a PODIUM, behind which is displayed an enormous PHOTOGRAPH of a young HOWARD HUGHES. A mock-up dust cover flanks it. Guests flit by to gaze at it.

Sitting on the podium's edge in a new suit, is Clifford Irving. He receives handshakes, warm touches by admirers, wide-eyed awe. The same intelligentsia that spurned him at the Black and White Ball - here is feting him. And he's drinking it in.

Clifford finally steps up and takes his seat at the podium. The presentation is about to begin. Cliff sips a glass of champagne. His face falls slightly he overhears the conversations of several partygoers...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN WITH RED NECKTIE

It's authentic, no question. Only six men in the world know that much about high finance...

PUFFY MAN

...my pilot's license, and I'll tell you that whoever wrote that damn thing knows avionics better than Lindbergh. That Hughes is a hell of a man.

BEVERLY

(speaking to KATHERINE GRAHAM,  
the toast of Capote's ball...)  
But it makes sense that he would choose Cliff and not someone like Mailer, because then it would be Mailer's book and not Hughes'.

Cliff's smile starts to fade. Shelton Fisher leans over, referring up to the picture of Hughes.

FISHER

(to Cliff)  
Imagine what you or I could do with balls like his.

Fisher chuckles. Clifford grits his teeth.

MINUTES LATER

Harold McGraw finishes a short address to the standing-room-only crowd.

MCGRAW

There are claims from some corners that Mr. Irving has concocted this book from whole cloth. For those of us that have read it, we know that only a Shakespeare could have accomplished such a feat, and while Clifford is a fine man, he is no Shakespeare.

The crowd laughs at this. Clifford forces a smile.

MCGRAW (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Clifford Irving.

Clifford stands up. He gazes at the posh, bejeweled faces that applaud him. But the eyes of the audience look less at Cliff than at the giant image of Howard Hughes behind him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Cliff glances back, staring at Howard in a silent rage.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - NIGHT

The cottage's small TELEVISION shows images shake of Cliff, escorted by Fisher, trying to get into a cab.

CBS REPORTER

(on television)

Chester Davis is threatening civil action if the book is published. Why is he fighting so hard if the book is authentic?

ABC REPORTER

Cliff, does Howard have cancer of the liver?

CLIFFORD

Can I open the cab door please?

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Wearing a BATHROBE and SLIPPERS, Cliff stands on a chair putting BLACK FABRIC over his windows. He holds a Vodka bottle in one hand, a hammer in the other. Dick sits with a beer.

Cliff peers through the fabric at two or three news vans across the street, staking out his house.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

Vultures. It wouldn't surprise me if there were surveillance devices in my home right this second. Dick?

DICK

What? Sorry, I was thinking about something.

Cliff climbs down from the couch. He points the remote, changing the channel.

On this station: Cliff sits across from MIKE WALLACE (40's, unforgiving), who interviews him on "60 MINUTES."

CLIFFORD

(on TV)

The whole thing is so preposterous sometimes I don't believe it myself...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
You should have heard them today. These  
smug, sheltered aristocrats making me  
sound like his goddam typist. I was *this*  
close to telling them all, right on  
stage.

DICK  
What does Edith say about the money?

CLIFFORD  
I can't reach her. (pause) The check  
takes two weeks to clear and she's still  
furious at me.

WALLACE  
(on TV)  
How do you respond to accusations that  
you simply...made all this up?

Cliff stares at his own pseudo-sincere face on TV.

CLIFFORD  
(yelling at the TV)  
I just keep lying Mike!

Dick gets up and turns off the television. He stands  
awkwardly. Then clears his throat, speaking softly.

DICK  
Cliff... (pause) That night, at your  
house. Those...girls. You said they  
were acquaintances of yours, they came  
back with us for a nightcap, and the next  
thing you knew I was upstairs with one of  
them. Right?

CLIFF  
Yes.

Dick squeezes his hands together.

DICK  
You wouldn't have looked the other  
way...let me do that...just to separate  
Ginette and I...I mean, because of the  
book. You would never do something like  
that, would you?

Cliff looks at him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLIFFORD

Dick, I love you. I'd never do anything to undermine or hurt you. I want you to be strong. And happy.

Cliff swallows. Dick appears relieved. He gets up and puts on his jacket.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

You are happy, aren't you? About the money, the adventure...(he laughs), I mean, fair Dartagnon, look what we've wrought! They'll write books about us one day!

DICK

I think I'd prefer they didn't.

Cliff watches Dick trundle out to his car and then sits down on the floor.

EXT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - NIGHT

The deck is besotted with moonlight and the sounds of the stream. By the light of a kerosene lamp, Cliff types feverishly. He plays TAPES of himself talking as Hughes.

CLIFFORD

(from the tape, in his Hughes voice)

"...but when deceit and manipulation are employed in a higher quest, a quest for true influence, they become a necessary evil."

Cliff STOPS the TAPE. He consults his files and mutters to himself.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Possible, Howard. Very possible.

He pulls out a PILL BOTTLE, and pops a couple of them, washing them down with swig of Vodka. He types, another satisfying run, and then sits back, staring at the page.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

My best work. No one will ever know.  
(pause) Is that the test?

Cliff opens the UNMARKED BOX containing the material that was sent to he and Dick. He looks at the pages.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
What do I do with this shit, Howard?  
Your enemies could have sent this. What  
our move?

Cliff puts the papers next to the typewriter and takes  
another drink. He looks at the stars. Inside the TV drones.  
The flickering image is of a Calgon commercial...

CALGON COMMERCIAL  
(O.S., softly)  
Ancient Chinese Secret, huh?

EXT. DELAWARE RIVER - DAY

The walking bridge in New Hope. Nina stands on the bridge,  
the breeze blowing her hair. Cliff wears sunglasses and a  
hat as if trying not to be recognized.

NINA  
I saw your picture in the newspaper.  
You're very popular, Clifford.

CLIFFORD  
Thanks for the note. I came here to tell  
you to never contact me again. Got it?

NINA  
Is he telling the truth? Is he lying?  
It's a wonderful public melodrama.

CLIFFORD  
You knew she'd find it, didn't you?

NINA  
I always thought your attachment to the  
Pear was a little infantile. (pause) Why  
don't we be grown-ups?

She folds her arms, matter of fact.

CLIFFORD  
What do grown-ups do?

NINA  
They make deals. (pause) Here's mine.  
It's cynical and self-serving so I'm sure  
we'll be speaking the same language. I'm  
leaving Fredric.

Pause.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NINA (cont'd)

Everything is poised for my acting now. I have a new manager and I'm getting two covers in the U.S. next month.

CLIFFORD

What happened to the singing?

NINA

I'll get to it. The point is...there will be a film of your book, right? A good part for me. Hughes' wife? His mistress, maybe a movie star?

CLIFFORD

I get it. What exactly are you offering in this deal?

NINA

For years you told me you're suffocating in your marriage. That you can't stand not to see me. Well, now you can see me whenever you want. And I don't want to live with you anymore than you want to live with me. It's your fantasy Clifford. You want to make it with someone else, be my guest. No responsibilities. And no lies.

Clifford laughs.

CLIFFORD

You've got a real romantic streak.

NINA

You're not a romantic, Cliff. You calculate every move. You always have.

CLIFFORD

I poured my guts into this. My work on this book is the best I've ever done.

NINA

Congratulations. I don't give a shit. I want a part in the film.

CLIFFORD

You should have bought me flowers.

Cliff turns and traverses the bridge, heading for the small village on the other side.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

Cliff opens a WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM while he walks to the kitchen to pick up a RINGING phone.

CLIFFORD  
(into the phone)  
Yeah?

A MAN'S VOICE  
(into the phone)  
Where's your wife, Mr. Irving?

Clifford nearly drops the phone. He looks down at the telegram, which reads:

"BEING FOLLOWED STOP COULD BE INTERTEL STOP PROBLEM AT BANK  
BUT PRIZE IS SAFE STOP FLIGHT TOMORROW STOP I HATE YOU STOP  
EDITH"

CLIFFORD  
(into the phone, whispering)  
Who is this?

A MAN'S VOICE  
(into the phone)  
Someone gave you information you  
shouldn't have. Disregard that  
information Mr. Irving, or you will be  
underwater.

CLIFFORD  
(into the phone)  
Who do you speak for?

A MAN'S VOICE  
(into the phone)  
Your patron.

The line goes dead. The PHONE then RINGS again. Cliff yanks the CORD out of the phone. He takes a deep breath.

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

Standing in his bathrobe, Cliff holds the public phone to his ear as CARS whizz by on the street outside.

CLIFFORD  
(into the phone)  
Helga! Helga Renata Hughes! Room 1251!  
Does anyone there speak fucking  
English?... (pause) Then try her room  
again! (dial tone) Goddammit!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Cliff slams the phone booth with his fist.

EXT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - NIGHT

Dick sits in a car in Cliff's DRIVEWAY. He drinks a beer and sits, listening to the radio. His expression is somber.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

Cliff sits on the floor, rocking with anxiety. He's on the phone, whispering.

CLIFFORD  
(into the phone)  
To Zurich, Switzerland. Your first  
flight out.

He lifts a pill bottle to his mouth and swallows several pills with a beer. The TV emits WHITE STATIC in the background...which we enjoin...

INT. CLIFF'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

BLACKNESS. A phone RINGS.

Cliff turns on his bedroom light, squinting.

CLIFF  
(into the phone)  
Hello?

EDITH  
(staticky, O.S.)  
They tried to pull me into a car...

CLIFF  
(into the phone)  
Edith, where are you?

EDITH  
(staticky, O.S.)  
Airport. I sleep by the gendarme station.  
I am safe Clifford, but-

The phone cuts off.

CLIFF  
(into the phone)  
Edith? Edith?

A CREAK. The house settling, perhaps. Cliff gets up. In his pajamas, he enters the hallway. Nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He walks down the STAIRS.

Standing in his LIVING ROOM are THREE MEN. They wear crisp, short-sleeved white shirts.

Another man, thinner, watches the TV with the sound off.

Clifford RUNS back toward the bedroom.

The Careful Men leap up the stairs after him. One pulls a Beretta out of his pocket.

They catch up to Cliff, tackling him and taping his mouth.

He is dragged down the stairs toward his KITCHEN WINDOW, which faces the forest. As they struggle, they knock the television and the sound BLARES a commercial:

CHIFFON COMMERCIAL

*"It's not nice to fool...Mother Nature."*

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MINUTES LATER

The men walk Cliff toward a CAR parked on a dirt shoulder. The Men seat Cliff in the back. One of the men puts a SHEET over Cliff's head.

CLIFF'S POV, LOOKING DOWN: Asphalt. Metal steps. The sound of ROTORS. The LOW ROAR of an airplane in flight.

INT. BRITANNIA HOTEL, NASSAU BAHAMAS - NIGHT

The hotel is barren and deserted. No desk clerk, no bellboys, no guests.

The three Careful Men escort Clifford along the terrace by the pool. They pass a huge untouched BUFFET table. FLIES buzz around the ROTTING FOOD.

They proceed to an unmarked door, which opens to reveal a secret ELEVATOR. One of the men pulls out a key.

INSIDE THE ELEVATOR

Cliff and his escorts move slowly upward, stopping on the seventh floor.

FIRST CAREFUL MAN

Step out, please, Mr. Irving.

INT. CORNER SUITE, BRITANNIA HOTEL - MOMENTS LATER

At the center of the spacious suite stands GEORGE GORDON HOLMES (50's, imposing), a crewcut Mormon with deep lines in his forehead. He drinks ice water and stares out the window.

CLIFFORD

Where's Howard?

Holmes stirs his drink. He doesn't turn around.

HOLMES

You know Clifford, I've worked in various capacities for Mr. Hughes for nineteen years now, and never once have I referred to him by his first name.

He turns to face Clifford.

HOLMES (CONT'D) (cont'd)

You don't seem to abide such formalities.

CLIFFORD

He and I wrote a book together.

HOLMES

Assume for a moment that I know you didn't - and that it's not the topic of the evening.

CLIFFORD

What is?

Pause.

HOLMES

The world Mr. Hughes has created is vast. It covers many industries and many endeavors. There are fiefdoms and factions. Traitors and minor rebellions. You see Clifford, the men Mr. Hughes uses as his instruments in the world are often themselves the makers of history.

CLIFFORD

You mean Nixon.

HOLMES

Mr. Hughes wants to know if you included the information sent to you in the galleys of your book.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFFORD

Because it was leaked against his will  
and he wants to protect Nixon? Or  
because he's angry at Nixon and wants to  
punish him?

HOLMES

I'm not arrogant enough to speculate on  
Mr. Hughes' motives. We just want an  
answer to the question.

Clifford stares at the other two Careful Men, who stand by  
the door of the room.

CLIFFORD

Howard wants to bury Nixon because of the  
Air West merger. That's it, isn't it?

Pause.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Look, I don't know you and I don't know  
whether or not you speak for Howard.  
(pause) I'll just tell you this: nothing  
stops this book from being published  
exactly the way I wrote it.

The Careful Men stand up, threatening.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

Killing me won't kill the book. Nothing  
can kill the book.

Holmes sips his drink. He nods to the Careful Men, who sit  
back down.

HOLMES

You're refusing the request?

CLIFFORD

If he wants my help, he has to speak to  
me directly.

HOLMES

By the rules Mr. Hughes himself created,  
that can never happen.

CLIFFORD

Then you won't know what is or isn't in  
the Autobiography of Howard Hughes until  
the day it hits the stands.

Holmes stands up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HOLMES

Are you dictating terms to Howard Hughes?

CLIFFORD

I'm a messenger for Howard Hughes!

HOLMES

Why such a burning commitment to a man  
you don't know?

CLIFFORD

I do know him. I know his ambition...  
all the betrayals...feeling hounded...  
isolated. I know him.

He stares at Holmes.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

And I deserve to see him.

Holmes takes a step forward. He glances at the Careful Men.

HOLMES

Presidents have said the same thing to  
me. I will tell you what I told them.  
It's not a matter of getting through a  
door. There's no door to get through. (a  
dangerous pause) If though, Clifford,  
there were a door -

The two Careful Men rush Clifford, grabbing him...

HOLMES (cont'd)

-you would now be hearing the sound of it  
*closing.*

...forcing him out onto the balcony and THROWING HIM OFF.

Clifford silent, IN MID-AIR...

...until he lands five stories below in the heated POOL.

Gasping and holding his ribs, Clifford flails in the water.  
Other men pull him out.

MINUTES LATER

He is thrown, WET AND SOAKING, into the back seat of a car.  
One of the Careful Men holds Cliff's face against the seat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

HOLMES (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
(from the front seat)  
Mr. Hughes wants that information in the  
galleys.

CLIFFORD  
He hates Nixon as much as I do! I knew  
it!

Cliff laughs as he struggles with the Man sitting on his  
shoulders.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
I put the dirt in - Howard lets the book  
go forward, right?

HOLMES  
Chester Davis will never leave you alone,  
if that's your question-

CLIFFORD  
None of them can touch me except Howard.  
He'll stay silent? That's the deal?

Holmes says nothing.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
You're quiet. Quiet means "yes".

Holmes remains silent.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
What assurances do I have?

HOLMES  
Take it on faith, Clifford.

The man above him lifts something BLACK and strikes a blow on  
Clifford's head...

FADE TO:

EXT. MCGRAW-HILL - MORNING

Laying in the middle of the sidewalk is CLIFFORD. His  
bathrobe is tattered and dirty. Pedestrians step over and  
around him. Above him is the McGraw-Hill building.

Cliff lifts his head - pain - he touches his ribs - they hurt  
too. He looks around him, confused, and sees MARION and DANA  
a few feet away, eating hot dogs and talking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DANA

-someone from the Zurich District Attorney's office called and they said it couldn't have been Hughes that opened the account...it's going out on the AP wire. Beverly's crying in her office...

Cliff struggles to focus his eyes, listening in horror.

IN A PHONE BOOTH

A fist POUNDS on the glass. A large woman in a flower-print dress wants the bizarre man in the filthy bathrobe and a two-day old beard to hurry the hell up.

CLIFFORD

We want that chapter *in*, Harold.

INTERCUT: with Harold McGraw, in his office. McGraw frets as he looks over Cliff's chapter. It is entitled:

"Howard Hughes purchases the Presidency"

MCGRAW

We will face libel litigation initiated by the President of-

CLIFFORD

You'll win.

Cliff hangs up.

INT. LIFE MAGAZINE OFFICES - DAY

Ralph Graves stands looking out the window, holding a phone to his ear. He stares down at the Nixon chapter, which he holds in his hands.

GRAVES

I don't care who's being quoted, to put this out unsubstantiated is at best unwise and at worst unethical.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

McGraw talks to Graves on the phone while Fisher swings a TENNIS RACKET.

FISHER

Tell him if his man knew East from West we'd be substantiated up our wazoos.

Fisher takes the phone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FISHER (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
Ralph, you're an ass-rag for the Beltway  
Establishment and you always were.

MCGRAW  
Shelton!

EXT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - DAY

Clumps of reporters point cameras at Cliff as he trots in his bathrobe from the cab to his own front door.

The DIN of the reporters is muted - Cliff is distracted.  
It's as if he's hearing the conversation below in his head...

MCGRAW  
(O.S.)  
The account holder in Switzerland is a woman named Helga Hughes. They suspect she forged the endorsements. This has become sleazy and demeaning. I am a publisher, Shelton.

FISHER  
(O.S.)  
You're an employee, Harold. I don't give a damn what your name is. We paid for a book and we're going to print it. Roll the goddam presses.

Clifford reaches the door. He puts in his key.

EXT. WINDSWEPT DUNE, FOREIGN SHORES - DAY

An ocean breeze wafts through the broken windows of this phone booth. A hand dials a beaten-up rotary payphone.

AN UNFAMILIAR VOICE  
(into the phone)  
Do you want a powerful friend, Mr. Silber?

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - DAY

Edith sits in the kitchen, smoking a cigarette. Her suitcase is open on the floor. Cliff stares at her.

CLIFFORD  
Thank God...

EDITH  
Don't come closer.

INT. LIFE MAGAZINE - DAY

Brad Silber closes his office door. He straightens his tie. He presses a button on his phone and picks up the receiver.

SILBER  
(into the phone)  
I'm sending a summary of its contents.  
I'm...I'm doing this sir, because...I  
felt the President deserved a warning.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Edith doesn't look at Cliff. He's seated on the couch, picking lint off his pants. He is dishevelled and pensive.

EDITH  
It's a long plane ride from Zurich.

Clifford watches her, his eyes dark.

EDITH (cont'd)  
I am not beautiful or sexual enough for  
you. I always know this. But I thought:  
if I love him enough, if I bend, twist my  
spine, loving him...

CLIFFORD  
Sweetheart...please...

EDITH  
But my spine finally broke. So I'm  
leaving. And I am turning in all the  
money, the book money.

She takes a drag on her cigarette. Silence.

CLIFFORD  
But you've worked so hard. On the  
book...but more importantly, on us. We  
made progress, didn't we?

EDITH  
I thought we did.

CLIFFORD  
You taught me...what's steady...what's  
knowable...it's priceless. You're  
priceless. I'll do anything. Anything.

Clifford's eyes well but he blinks them back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EDITH

You're too talented a liar. Even now...I  
can't believe anything you say.

She kneels beside him.

EDITH (cont'd)

But I'll offer you something.  
One chance to tell me the truth about  
what happened with her. It won't save  
us. I'll be gone. But finally, after  
our years...you'll be clean. You'll see  
yourself as you are.

Edith looks at him soberly. Cliff eyes her. He seems to be  
weighing something, making a decision. He looks at her  
suitcase. He stares at her face. He knows what to do.

CLIFFORD

I saw her last month.

Clifford looks down...in shame?

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

We talked about the past. I was drunk.  
I went back to her apartment...I kissed  
her.

Edith's eyes well with angry tears. Cliff forces his lips to  
keep moving.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

-then something in me...just physically  
recoiled. I thought of your  
paintings...your pain...and I couldn't go  
through with it. I left her standing  
there and I ran out, down the stairs.  
(long pause) I'm a coward for not  
admitting that meeting. I understand  
you're leaving me. But that...I swear to  
God...is the truth.

She goes to Cliff and slaps him, twice, in the face. She  
then fiercely EMBRACES him, kissing his neck, holding onto  
him for dear life.

EDITH

I want to squeeze you and break all your  
bones. I hate you so much.

CLIFFORD

Let me...let me go outside. I think I'm  
coming down with something.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He looks back as he walks outside. At hers, the very face of love and trust.

ON THE DECK, OUTSIDE

Pale, Clifford gets on his knees and holds his ears as if keeping out the sound of his own thoughts.

INT. WEST WING, THE WHITE HOUSE - EVENING

We rest on a PHOTOGRAPH of Richard Milhous Nixon and his family. A MAID with a name tag DUSTS the photographs while a conversation takes place.

A THICK VOICE

(O.S.)

They ship on Tuesday. We know from our guy at Life that this shit about the loan is in the galleys.

A NASAL VOICE

(O.S.)

Explain the situation to Fisher. Talk about the country, what it means-

A THICK VOICE

(O.S.)

He doesn't give a shit, Bob. He's a Democrat. So unless you've arranged for Hughes to do a photo op in the Rose Garden tomorrow morning you have to warn the President. Write something for Wednesday night. (pause) He might have to address the nation.

A NASAL VOICE

(O.S.)

To say what?

A THICK VOICE

(O.S.)

To tell them Checkers had puppies, how the fuck should I know?

INT. SEASIDE BAR - NIGHT

Alone in a booth is Dick, who nurses a beer. In a tube top is the Feral Girl - who spots Dick, picks up her drink and plops herself down across from him.

Dick stares at her. He doesn't move or say anything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FERAL GIRL

You're broke? Why don't you ask your friend for another birthday present?

Dick looks at her. It dawns on him.

INT. ATTIC - DEEP NIGHT

Photos, articles, a model airplane, audiotape strewn like Christmas tinsel and dozens of CANDLES form the center of a bizarre SHRINE to Howard Hughes.

Strangely, at the center of the shrine, is a PHOTOGRAPH of Cliff and Edith, standing together. Both are younger, thinner, happier.

Cliff's eyes are like coals in his head. The fake mustache, the slicked back hair, the odd, halting movements. He holds a microphone.

Clifford (as Howard) speaks to the photograph of himself.

CLIFFORD

(as Hughes)

Human relationships are impossible.  
(long pause) Especially with females, Clifford. We try, of course to police ourselves so that they might be...happy, believing their happiness might become our own. But then we start to fear our own impulses. (pause) How do you make a billion without acting on impulse, Clifford? FDR let the Japs kill 2400 of our boys. He needed maximum flexibility in service to the higher aim, Clifford. No confessions. No relationships. Except to history. (pause) We're intertwined now, son, and I'm glad. It's for the best.

Cliff lifts the HARPOON GUN and fires it at his own PICTURE. The glass shatters as the harpoon STICKS, trembling in the wood wall.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - DEEP NIGHT

Wandering back through his living room, Cliff catches a glimpse of someone opening his front DOOR.

Dick bursts in, his lip quivering. He grabs Cliff by the shoulders and throws him up against the wall. Clifford still wears the mustache and walks with Hughes' limp...he alternates in voice between Clifford and "Howard".

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DICK

Twelve years, I did free research for you, I covered up your sleazy affairs, because I thought it was an investment, I thought there was someone in there. You paid her. You paid that hooker.

Dick THROWS Cliff to the ground.

DICK (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I confessed. Ginette is filing for divorce.

CLIFFORD

Dick....

Dick KICKS Cliff.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

She treated you like a clod! I saw it happening, Dick. She chopped you off at the knees.

DICK

That's what? Your opinion? You change my life because of your opinion?

CLIFFORD

(as Hughes)

I wanted this deal for you more than me, and dammit, we did it. We did it, Dick!

Cliff reaches behind the sofa and dumps a pile of MONEY at Dick's feet.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Two hundred thousand dollars in American currency. Yours.

Dick looks at the cash as if he expected himself to react differently. He is unmoved.

DICK

I can't believe I'm saying this...but I don't care. I just don't care. Cliff what are you dressed up for? Are you doing tapes?

Clifford indicates Dick should be quiet.

CLIFFORD

(as Hughes)

Sons of bitches got onto me. Intertel.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

Broke into my house, violated my civil rights. They kidnapped me, flew me to Nassau, threatened me. I told them our book goes forward, Dick. I was firm. Assurances were given. This "Howard Hughes" will not interfere.

DICK

"This" Howard Hughes...

Dick sizes Clifford up and realizes that something is wrong with him.

DICK (cont'd)

Cliff. Cliff Irving. Intertel kidnapped you and flew you to Nassau? On Friday night?

For a moment, the old Cliff seems to surface.

CLIFFORD

The karate guys. Remember? You were right. You were right, buddy. Yeah. Friday night.

DICK

I came here Friday night.

Clifford looks at him.

DICK (cont'd)

I needed lessons on how to lie to my wife and... you're the expert there. You were on the sofa, drinking vodka, taking pills, alone. I sat watching. I felt sorry for you.

CLIFFORD

You don't believe me? You of all people?

He pushes Dick toward the door in a sudden fury.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

Take your money and get the fuck out of here.

DICK

You took my family away from me, Cliff. Where am I supposed to go?

CLIFFORD

I took care of you like a brother.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DICK

No one took you to Nassau, Cliff. You're  
not that important.

Clifford's face flickers with doubt.

CLIFFORD

(pleading)

Take the money. Please, it's for you.  
Come on, Dick.

Dick gathers up his big frame. He brushes his jacket and heads for the door.

DICK

I'm not a clod.

He leaves.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - MORNING

Edith walks downstairs. Cliff has packed an overnight bag. A car waits for him outside.

CLIFFORD

With this press crush, it's better if we  
split up. I'll stay with Marty Ackerman  
through the release. (pause) Okay?

EDITH

Okay.

She offers a shy smile and walks back up the stairs. Cliff steps outside.

INT. WEST WING, THE WHITE HOUSE - AFTERNOON

The glint of polished wood. TALIA MERTON, (40's, buxom) presses a button on her phone.

TALIA

Mr. Chester Davis on line one for the  
Chief of Staff.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL PRINTING FACILITY - DAY

Shelton Fisher stands on a metal balcony overlooking dozens of PRINTING PRESSES.

"THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF HOWARD HUGHES" is being pressed. Thousands and thousands of copies are mechanically bound and placed by workers into boxes.

INT. ACKERMAN'S PARK AVE. APARTMENT - EVENING

A COCKTAIL PARTY.

It drizzles outside. Cliff watches the rain out the window. Several of the party-goers make half-hearted attempts to approach Cliff, but are frightened off by his manner.

ACKERMAN

(O.S.)

I want to know why the hell we weren't warned about this! Turn on the...Clara, turn on the television, they're going to-

Cliff turns to look at the television.

On the SCREEN, we see seven REPORTERS sitting in a semi-circle. They surround a small SPEAKER. The AP reporter, farthest to the left, addresses the speaker apparatus.

AP REPORTER

(on TV)

Having now answered the "trick" questions that have confirmed your identity, sir, we'll begin. Do you know Mr. Clifford Irving and have you collaborated with him on a book about your life?

Cliff's eyes widen...

CLIFF

No...

A GHOSTLY VOICE

(on TV, from the speaker)

I don't know the man and I never met him.

Cliff walks slowly toward the television.

CLIFF

You fucking...

A GHOSTLY VOICE

(on TV, from the speaker)

I am breaking my silence only because I understand that this book makes some outrageous allegations, and I didn't want innocent people, including prominent people, maligned by these concoctions.

The party-goers all stare at Clifford, who...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

...strides up to the television and KICKS IT IN. SPARKS fly everywhere, and there is a muffled POP as the tube explodes.

The Ghostly Voice can still be heard, emanating from the rubble of the wrecked machine.

AP REPORTER

(from the wrecked TV)

Can you comment on rumors of improper conduct by the President, supposedly detailed in-

A GHOSTLY VOICE

(from the wrecked TV)

Absolutely false. This man Clifford Irving has one hell of an imagination.

The voice grows dimmer, and slower as the television finally dies. Ackerman stares at Cliff. The party-goers move away from Cliff, as if he gives off a stench.

INT. CLIFF'S CAR - DAY

Racing along the New Jersey Turnpike, Cliff listens intently to the radio.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(from the radio)

...woman who opened the Swiss account under Hughes name has been identified as Edith Irving, wife of Clifford Irving...

Cliff's mind races, putting it together...

INT. ATTIC - FLASHBACK

Clifford as Hughes speaking to Dick into the tape recorder.

CLIFFORD

(as Hughes)

Your rival is powerful?

INT. CAR - FLASHBACK

Cliff and Dick laugh as Mercedes whizzes home along the Turnpike. Dick has the money at his feet.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(from the car speakers)

...President Nixon declined comment on the Justice Dept's.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RADIO ANNOUNCER (cont'd)  
anti-trust division's decision to delay a  
ruling on the proposed acquisition of Air  
West by Hughes Consolidated...

INT. ATTIC - FLASHBACK

Clifford as Hughes speaking to Dick into the tape recorder

CLIFFORD  
(as Hughes)  
Create a crisis for him.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

The N.Y. Times headline of Oct. 17th, 1970:

AMIDST CONTROVERSY, MCGRAW-HILL TO  
PUBLISH HUGHES AUTOBIOGRAPHY

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - FLASHBACK

Edith carries in the BOX OF FILES postmarked from NEVADA.

INT. BRITANNIA HOTEL - FLASHBACK

In the hotel suite, Holmes addresses Clifford...

HOLMES  
Mr. Hughes wants to know if you included  
the information sent to you in the  
galleys of your book.

INT. MUSTANG, THE OPEN ROAD - DAY

Clifford shakes his head, understanding.

RADIO ANNOUNCER  
(O.S., from the radio)  
Swiss authorities are seeking to have  
Mrs. Irving extradited for violating  
Swiss banking laws...

He guns the gas, racing home.

INT. ATTIC - FLASHBACK

Clifford speaks as Hughes to Dick into the tape recorder...

CLIFFORD  
(as Hughes)  
But instead of taking short-term  
advantage of it? Save the day for him.

INT. LIFE MAGAZINE OFFICES - FLASHBACK

Brad Silber picks up the telephone.

SILBER  
(into the telephone)  
...I thought the President deserved a  
warning...

INT. ATTIC - FLASHBACK

Clifford speaks as Hughes to Dick into the tape recorder.

CLIFFORD  
(as Hughes)  
Nothing confuses a man more than a kind  
gesture from his enemy...

INT. ACKERMAN'S PARK AVE. APARTMENT - FLASHBACK

Cliff stares at the tiny, talking box on the TV.

A GHOSTLY VOICE  
(on TV, from the speaker)  
...and I didn't want to see innocent  
people, including prominent people,  
maligned by these concoctions...

INT. CAR - DAY

Clifford shakes his head as he speeds down country roads.

RADIO ANOUNCER  
(from the radio)  
The Zurich district attorney has passed  
the pertinent information to his New York  
counterpart for possible indictments for  
mail fraud and grand larceny...

INT. ATTIC - FLASHBACK

Clifford speaks as Hughes to Dick into the tape recorder.

CLIFFORD  
(as Hughes)  
Nothing renders him more vulnerable...

INT. BACK SEAT OF CAR - FLASHBACK

Outside the Britannia, Clifford's held down in the car seat  
by a Careful Man. Holmes speaks into the rear view mirror...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOLMES

Take it on faith, Clifford.

His eyes meet Clifford's in the rear view mirror, then turn away.

EXT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - DAY

Strangely there are no reporters outside the house. Only trash and stray cables. They have beaten a hasty retreat. Cliff rushes up the driveway and into the house.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - DAY

Opening the door, Cliff nearly slips because the FLOOR...

...is covered with MONEY. Hundreds of bills, scattered everywhere, on the floor, in the kitchen, on the steps. Cliff looks around, gaping. He walks upstairs, nearly tripping on the bills lining the floor.

CLIFFORD

Edith?

IN THE BEDROOM

More currency, spread over the bed and the floor. Cliff opens Edith's closet. Her CLOTHES are GONE.

DOWNSTAIRS

In the kitchen, bills have been thrown into the sink, the refrigerator, the dishwasher, they are everywhere...

Cliff wanders into the living room in a daze. The TV is on. He looks at the images and recognizes a familiar face.

NINA stands next to a smiling man in sunglasses and a ponytail. She is giving a press conference.

NINA

(on TV)

Yes, the relationship was physical.

NBC REPORTER

And you can confirm that Mr. Irving in fact, did not meet with Mr. Hughes on the date in question?

NINA

He could not have met Howard Hughes in Nassau because he was with me in my Manhattan apartment.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NINA (cont'd)

When I learned about this lie, I had to speak out. As an artist, I felt it was wrong.

NBC REPORTER

What kind of art do you do, Miss Van Pallandt?

NINA

I'm a writer.

A HAND switches off the television.

GEORGE GORDON HOLMES, wearing a crisp white blazer, hands Cliff a drink. Bourbon.

HOLMES

I don't imbibe, but I thought you might be inclined.

Cliff doesn't look at Holmes, who sips a glass of ice water.

CLIFF

Nina.

HOLMES

Always the details that undo us.

CLIFF

Fifteen years, George. He couldn't have stayed quiet just a few more days?

HOLMES

You mustn't take it personally, Clifford. Trees don't take it personally when a forest is razed for lumber. They're part of a grand design.

CLIFF

I played it good for a while, didn't I?

HOLMES

You were tremendous, Clifford. Mr. Hughes commented on it.

CLIFF

Really?

HOLMES

Would I lie to you?

Holmes laughs long and hard. Cliff drinks his Bourbon.

## INT. MANHATTAN HOTEL - DAY

A mob of reporters has followed Clifford into a hotel where he will be remanded for questioning. He is escorted by police, representatives of the D.A.'s office, and his lawyer Marty Ackerman.

Amidst raucous shouting of questions, the group makes its way into a GLASS ELEVATOR. As the door closes, the mob of reporters smashes against the door.

Clifford winds up INSIDE the elevator.

Standing OUTSIDE the elevator looking in are EDITH and DICK, accompanied by their respective lawyers.

They both look at Clifford, separated by the glass. Cliff searches their eyes for signs of life - of recognition - of the shared joke of it all...but there is none.

Pressed against the front glass, Clifford's breath STEAMS the section of glass elevator closest to the reporters.

With his finger, Cliff writes letters backward on the steamed glass:

"X...A...O...H"

The reporters see. They are suddenly rendered completely SILENT. The elevator starts to ascend.

CLIFFORD

(O.S.)

I'll cooperate in exchange for leniency  
for Dick. And especially for Edith.

The elevator ascends.

Clifford looks down, a great sadness filling him, as Edith and Dick grow smaller below, finally disappearing completely.

## INT. MCGRAW-HILL PRINTING FACILITY - DAY

The presses are quiet. Thousands of boxes of books are stacked against the wall of the building.

Shelton Fisher gazes down at them from the metal balcony. He sighs, removes his hard hat, then walks down the spiral steps toward the floor.

INT. NASSAU COUNTY JAIL - DAY

Clifford runs his hands over the smooth, white bricks inside his CELL. Pasted to the wall is the cover of TIME MAGAZINE, dated January, 1972. On the cover is a painted portrait of Clifford Irving. He has been named "(Con) Man of the Year".

EXT. CRIMINAL COURTS BUILDING - DAY

With the statue of the Scales of Justice as a planned backdrop, Leonard Newman, the district attorney, addresses a group of reporters.

NEWMAN

Mr. Irving was sentenced to two and a half years imprisonment. Mr. Susskind six months imprisonment. In addition, they will be forced to pay full restitution to McGraw-Hill and the Internal Revenue Service totalling 1.8 million dollars. Mrs. Irving received a suspended sentence, but we have no control over what the Swiss authorities decide to do there.

NBC REPORTER

Are you happy with the outcome Mr. Newman?

NEWMAN

I'm not sure you're ever ecstatic when a bargain is reached but...

The SOUND of Newman's voice dims as we track away from him, past the jackets, purses and microphones to finally rest on a small TRANSISTOR RADIO attached to the belt of a CAMERA MAN.

CLOSE ON: The RADIO. Overwhelmed by the noise around it, the dim emissions can be heard only by us...

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(faintly, from the transistor radio)

In a surprise move, the Justice Department today approved the acquisition of Air West airlines by Hughes Consolidated. This on the heels of last week's Supreme Court decision to throw out the TWA shareholder's lawsuit against him, rescuing Mr. Hughes from 137 billion dollars in potential liabilities.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RADIO ANNOUNCER (cont'd)  
Mr. Hughes, as usual, had no comment on  
the ruling...In sports today, the  
Baltimore Colts prepared-

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NASSAU COUNTY JAIL - MORNING

TITLE: February 14th, 1974

GEOFF (30's, genial), a prison guard, moves his head slightly  
to the sounds of Otis Redding on the radio.

An array of OBJECTS are laid out on a table. A MANUSCRIPT  
copy of "The Autobiography of Howard Hughes", a WALLET (open  
to a PICTURE of Cliff and Dick chopping wood and laughing  
behind his house), a set of KEYS, and a WEDDING RING.

Geoff the Guard looks at Clifford Irving, whose entire  
physical presence is different. He is leaner. Lines have  
creased around his eyes.

GEOFF  
Pick up the items and step back behind  
the line.

Cliff looks at the objects laid before him.

CLIFFORD  
I don't want any of it.

Geoff is baffled. Clifford points to a PEN and pad of PAPER  
on Geoff's desk.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)  
Let's do a trade. Trade. Alright?

Geoff raises his eyebrows. He then shrugs, pockets the ring  
and hands Clifford the pen and pad. Cliff places them in a  
small DUFFEL BAG.

OUTSIDE

Cliff takes in the air. He glances around at the parking lot  
and beyond that, the rolling hills, and the sun. He begins  
to walk toward the BUS STOP about a quarter-mile up the road.  
His gait is slow and determined.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

A man in jeans with a clipboard walks past musty furniture  
toward a tower of BOXES. He turns to someone we don't see.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN WITH JEANS

That's them. Don't choke on the dust.

EXT. ABANDONED AIR STRIP - DAY

A bird's-eye view of an abandoned air strip next to a vast, empty hangar. Palm trees sway in the California sun.

There is a FIRE on the runway. We move slowly down toward the crackling flames...two or three men stand around the bonfire... closer now, we see the men feeding the fire by pulling items out of the BOXES.

CLOSER: The men throw copies of "The Autobiography of Howard Hughes" onto the raging bonfire. Thousands of copies feed the blaze. A song plays on a radio somewhere.

FRANK SINATRA

(from the radio...)

I've Got the World on a String...

Sitting on a Rainbow...

I've Got the String Around my Finger...

A small sign, now visible above the hangar, reads:

**HUGHES CONSOLIDATED**

Pages curl, blacken and disappear into the FLAMES, which climb higher and higher into the SKY.

CUT TO BLACK: