

The

HOAX

**Screenplay by
WILLIAM WHEELER**

GRAINY B/W STOCK FOOTAGE: A thin, mustached man in tails waltzes a beautiful woman around a ballroom floor.

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: October 20th, 1971

New York is bright. Scores of McGraw-Hill employees stand 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 his executive secretary, MARION, who pulls a SURGICAL MASK over her mouth and double-checks her notary 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, owlish), whose badge identifies him as an assistant editor at Life magazine.

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

AT THE ROOF'S EDGE

Andrea Tate (30's, frenetic) paces back and forth, her eyes scanning the New York skyline.

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

ANDREA
Clifford, it's 2:37 and my interns are
stranded 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.

Andrea 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 Andrea, 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 - CONFERENCE ROOM

TITLE: Four months earlier

Several executives at McGraw-Hill sit around a desk.

Andrea 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.

Albert points playfully at Clifford.

ALBERT

"Fake"! Malika, Clifford's the author of "Fake" the book about the...goddammit I'm blanking the art something, the artist-

CLIFFORD

Art forger. Elmyr DeHory was his name. He forged Matisses, Picassos...

ALBERT

Right! Forgery as art form. Provocative. Yeah. I wish to bejesus that thing had sold more copies.

Clifford shares a glance with Andrea.

CLIFFORD

Me too.

ALBERT

Regardless! The new one. Fiction. "Rudnick's Problem".

Silence. Then Albert leans in, confidentially.

ALBERT (cont'd)

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

Andrea and Clifford are pleased.

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.

Andrea winks at Clifford, who tries not to smile.

INT. CORRIDOR - MINUTES LATER

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

"Rudnick's Problem"

by Clifford Irving

Andrea walks through the halls of the publishing house talking rapid-fire to Clifford, who struggles to match her stride.

ANDREA

Brad Silber at Life is reading it right now for serialization rights. Harold McGraw himself is 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. They're going to push this one hard. They're going to bet the bank.

CLIFFORD

Is that a promise?

ANDREA

Set your watch by it.

CLIFFORD

I don't own a watch.

ANDREA

Buy one. Trust me, you can afford it.

Clifford smiles as he pushes the button.

EXT. MCGRAW-HILL BUILDING - DAY

Cliff exits the building and walks past a line of benches. New Yorkers sit reading. They wear wide ties, sideburns and paisley flowered shirts.

Among the magazines clutched by readers on the bench are, *Life* and *Newsweek*. 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. The *Newsweek* headline stands out.

- "The Case of the Invisible Billionaire"

Another business magazine reads:

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

Past the benches, Cliff leaps into the air, hugs a stranger and lets out a whoop of exhilaration as we tilt up to see the McGraw-Hill Building in all its green hulking splendor.

INT. SPORTING GOODS STORE - DAY

A CHUBBY MAN in full SCUBA GEAR stares at himself in a store mirror. This is DICK SUSSKIND (40's, corpulent), a rumpled 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 you for six months, they're indifferent. Then overnight...God! 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. Set me up as a regular account, I prefer monthly billing, and I'll be picking out a thousand dollars in new equipment sometime next week, so watch the stock.
(pause) Is the owner here?

EXT. CAR DEALERSHIP - DAY

ANGLE ON: The sleek hood ornament on a '65 Mercedes with Cliff behind the wheel. A harried salesman holds a clipboard for Cliff to sign. Dick sits behind the wheel of his beat up Chevy, scuba gear and presents tied to the roof.

SALESMAN

See the thing is Mr. Irving, we don't normally do "24 hour trials"...I'm just worried about-

CLIFFORD

You're a prick, Robert. You played me like a harp. Whitewalls! Leather! Is this guy a salesman? (sigh) Now when my accountant brings the check by, should he talk to you directly?

Robert purses his lips. Clifford signs.

SCENE 10 OMITTED

EXT. 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

I did not think of 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 nods to them and the Repo Men nod back.

EDITH (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I liked that sofa.

CLIFFORD

Ah, fuck that sofa. C'mere.

DOWN THE HILL

Edith opens her eyes to see the NEW MERCEDES, rose petals sprinkled inside. She is dumbstruck.

EDITH

You are so sweet and so stupid. I don't even...why do you spend on this for me?

CLIFFORD

I love you and you deserve it and it befits your station, both of your stations (referring to Dick) as soon to be a couple of well-to-do V.I.P's.

Edith steps into the car.

DICK

You're broke. Why do salesmen keep giving you things?

CLIFFORD

My ship is sailing, Dick. The vibration travels.

Edith honks the horn.

SCENE A12 OMITTED

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. You are not this perfect person.

Edith darkens. Cliff looks at her.

CLIFFORD

Honey, that's finished. I told you it was finished, it's finished.

EDITH
I know. I just wish I could kill her
many times.

An awkward silence. Cliff puts his hand on Edith's shoulder
and she lets it stay. He then rises, pulling down his tails.

CLIFFORD
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.

SCENE 13 OMITTED

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

Flowing drapes and opulent chandeliers. This is "Truman's
Party", the Black and White Ball. Dozens of couples dance.
They all sport designer-crafted MASKS.

Cliff stands by himself, happily nursing a drink. He adjusts
his mask. It won't stay on. The ballroom overflows with
celebrity and power. 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 as he passes by.

CAPOTE
The Paris peace talks are a lovely
charade, but we're in Vietnam because
Hunt sells oil and Howard Hughes sells
choppers. It isn't terribly complicated.

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

ANDREA
Let's talk Monday, Cliff.

Cliff grabs her hand and pulls her into...

INT. COAT ROOM - NIGHT

Andrea downs a slug of white wine and leans back against a
phalanx of mink coats.

CLIFFORD

Listen, don't get mad at me, but we cannot do 30,000 copies. You do a small run, it sends a message.

ANDREA

We're not publishing the book.

CLIFFORD

Exactly. With 30,000 copies we're not really publishing the book, we're playing games.

ANDREA

Brad Silber at Life hated it, Cliff. "It's a third rate Philip Roth knock-off" he said. He told Harold. And it was awful, it rolled like a snowball. (pause) I wanted to tell you Monday. I'm sorry.

Pause.

CLIFFORD

Fine, we'll do the New Yorker.

ANDREA

Cliff, you're not listening. McGraw-Hill is not publishing your book. The bomb has dropped. It's over.

Cliff sways slightly, as if catching some terrible odor.

CLIFFORD

You said it was a formality.

ANDREA

Apparently, I was mistaken. Look, if you have other ideas - my door is always open.

Cliff stands, stunned.

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".

ANDREA

Right! I loved the idea Harmony, are you planning on writing it down?

(MORE)

ANDREA (cont'd)
(catching herself) uh...you know this
probably isn't the best time...Cliff?

Cliff stares at her, then stalks out.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

Cliff tears off his MASK. The masked guests don't notice. Clifford makes his way through the throng toward the door. As he approaches the entrance, a REGAL COUPLE enters.

Cliff sees the woman and stops walking. The woman, NINA VAN PALLANDT (30's, rapturous) catches sight of Clifford. She nearly trips on the top step when she sees him.

There is a secret between them.

Her husband is greeted by a fellow wealthy foreigner with whom he speaks in German. Nina stands, staring at Cliff. Cliff stares back at her, wistful longing in his eyes.

Nina breaks the stare, turning her attention back to her husband and his companion. Cliff considers; then heads for the exit.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - MORNING

Cliff sits, his tux still on. His eyes are red. It appears he hasn't slept. He takes off his shoes and sits on the bed next to Edith who is sleeping.

He watches her sleep for a little while then curls up next to her. She embraces him.

EDITH
They are potatoes, all of them. Potato people. And you are a brilliant, strong man who will have all his dreams. All of them.

She kisses his neck and he sighs.

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. Dick holds a mini-bottle of Vodka that he pours in orange juice. He eats peanuts.

DICK
God, I love peanuts. I'm gonna toast you and your money yet again, for this chance to have a vacation and just be men.
(MORE)

DICK (cont'd)
It's great. I know you're not feeling
your best...

Cliff pages through a British celebrity tabloid. He stops at
a certain page. Smiling at him from a half-page piece about
the Black and White Ball is NINA - social gadfly and
successful folk singer - on the arm of Fredric.

DICK (cont'd)
We all have our trials. But you'll
bounce back.

Cliff closes the magazine.

CLIFFORD
I'll bounce. Like Evel Knievel, the way
his crunched bones bounce all over the
pavement.

DICK
You have good bones, Cliff.

Clifford rubs his face and turns to Dick.

CLIFFORD
Enough. I want to talk about my friend.
Tell me about your children's book.

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 struggles to smile.

DICK
Cliff, you're obsessing.

CLIFFORD
You're right. I have blue sky, my best
friend. Everything that matters. Topic
dead. Let's toast to it.

They share an awkward toast.

EXT. BAR - BRITANNIA BEACH HOTEL - EVENING

CLOSE ON: The hand of Clifford Irving, as he writes his room number and signature on a restaurant check. The top of the check identifies the resort as the "Brittania Beach Hotel; and in very small lettering beneath this we read: **"A Hughes Industries Property"**

WIDER: In bamboo wicker chairs, Cliff and Dick sit across from each other, drinking. The ocean is moonlit, breaking in the background. Cliff is somewhat drunk and somewhat loud.

CLIFFORD

I'm bumped by this adolescent coffee boy.
My lit professor at Cornell compared me
to Hemingway, for Chrissakes! You don't
write for fads. You write for history.
I swear to God, I know I'm not perfect,
but when people break promises,
Dick...promises should be held sacred.

Cliff sips his drink.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

The middle of my life is at hand and I
don't have a dining room table.

DICK

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

CLIFFORD

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

Cliff pats his friend's hand.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

You need a loan?

DICK

Of course I do.

Cliff pulls out his checkbook and fumbles with it.

DICK (cont'd)

No, no! Not from you, you stupid
bastard, your house is going into
foreclosure.

CLIFFORD

I'm post-dating it.

Dick gently takes the pen away from Cliff.

DICK

Cliff - stop being the hero. Go to bed.

Cliff glances up. A trio of smiling musicians play on the small stage in the outdoor hotel restaurant.

CLIFFORD

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

Dick pats Cliff on the shoulder and walks away.

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

EXT. BRITANNIA BEACH 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. Dick wanders, gazing at the strange spectacle. 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 watches the mass exodus of hotel guests as they battle over cabs and lawn space. He walks up to Dick.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

That's power.

Dick nods. They wander outside into the night breeze.

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.

He sits down with a copy of Newsweek 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 (whom we recognize from the b/w footage from earlier); Hughes, the sullen squire of starlets in Hollywood.

Clifford tosses the magazine on the table and drops onto his bed.

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

CLIFFORD

(O.S.)

Tom Mix and Pancho Villa. A tale of the prairie.

FADE TO WHITE:

SCENE A21 OMITTED

INT. MCGRAW-HILL PUBLISHING - DAY

Cliff sits waiting on a bright orange chair outside Andrea's office.

CLIFFORD

(continuing his muttering)

Friendship on the prairie. Friendship and bravery and gunplay on the prairie.

Cliff glances at a clock on the wall.

FORTY MINUTES LATER

Cliff taps his fingers. He is angry. DANA (20's, fish-eyed) sticks her skull head out Andrea's door.

DANA

Mr. Clifford? Andrea's running late so she said we should just go ahead and start without her.

CLIFFORD

"Mr. Clifford?" Wait...I'm meeting with you?

Dana nods, unsure. Cliff reddens. He controls himself while considering this indignity.

He gets up and strides down the hall, past the offices. Dana gets on the phone with security. Cliff paces the grey, shag carpet right into...

A MEETING of six people that Andrea sits at the center of.

ANDREA

Hi, Cliff I'm sorry, I'm in a last-minute conference here, is there-

CLIFFORD

Excuse me, everyone, but Andrea, our personal history demanded I bring this to you first.

Cliff smiles bravely into the vague contempt of the men and women in the room who glance away, embarrassed.

ANDREA

Bring what?

CLIFFORD

I am working on the most important book of the 20th century. (awkward pause) It is unprecedented. I'll be discussing its contents tomorrow...at 9:00 A.M. (completely improvising)...at Nathan's Bowling Alley in Queens.

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

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

You better be sure I don't have anything Andrea, because Simon & Schuster is already coming!

Andrea piques slightly at this.

INT. BAR - DAY

Cliff and Dick huddle in a corner booth, brain storming.

DICK

Of the century? Couldn't you have said "decade"? And why a bowling alley?

CLIFFORD

Stop parsing it and make a damn contribution here. Now just cut loose, first thing to mind, War, a sweeping war riddle historical epic something...

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - DAY

The two men sit in a kind of exhausted silence on the floor.
Edith brings out two iced teas.

EDITH
Picasso. Everyone loves Picasso.

DICK
Charlemagne? A history of agriculture?
Give me a clue here.

CLIFFORD
I'm being self-destructive.

DICK
I gotta call Barbara.

Dick gets up to make his call. Edith sits beside Cliff.

CLIFFORD
I'm burning bridges, Edith.

EDITH
They never appreciated you there. I need
lunch.

CLIFFORD
I'm having a breakdown.

EDITH
Clifford, my gallery show in three weeks.
I cannot help with the drama now,
darling.

Clifford sighs and rubs his face. He sits back on the sofa.
Then he sees it: The NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE with HOWARD HUGHES on
the cover. He grabs it, staring at Hughes' picture.

Cliff's eyes alight with a man struck by epiphany.

CLIFFORD
Dick!

SCENE 23 OMITTED

SCENE 24 OMITTED

INT. NATHAN'S BOWLING ALLEY - DAY

With great trepidation, Andrea trades her expensive pumps for
strange smelling bowling shoes. She walks toward Clifford,
muttering curses under her breath.

ANDREA
What is it. What's the book.

CLIFFORD
Wait...

Clifford rolls a STRIKE.

ANDREA
Where's Simon and Schuster, Tolstoy?

Clifford pulls an envelope from his jacket and hands it to her. Andrea looks at it. She opens it and pulls out three handwritten LETTERS on yellow legal paper.

EXT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE BACKDOOR/DRIVEWAY - DAY

Rolling hills. Cliff stands staring at Dick, who seems baffled.

DICK
How?

CLIFF
No one knows where he is. I show up,
I've seen him. I've seen the Snowman.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE LIBRARY - NIGHT

Fingers paging through NEWSWEEK. Cliff finds the article he's looking for. He begins to read intently. We see Cliff's book on his desk. We see a piece of its title: "FAKE! The Story of Elmyr DeHory, the Greatest Art Forger of Our Time"

CLIFFORD
(O.S.)
I send my DeHory book. He reads it. A
positive portrayal of a complex man. Oh
my God, I get a response!
Correspondence. Personal connection.
Sparks fly.

MINUTES LATER

Cliff pulls out a yellow legal tablet and a pen. He studies the handwritten memos sent by Howard Hughes...

OMITTED

INT. MCGRAW-HILL PUBLISHING - MORNING

CLOSE ON: A pair of BOWLING SHOES on Andrea's feet as she whisks Clifford down the corridor...

INT. MCGRAW-HILL PUBLISHING - OFFICE - LATER

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

VANDERKAMP

Howard Hughes? Howard Hughes the
billionaire?

ANDREA

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

Andrea'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. NEW HOPE COTTAGE LIBRARY - NIGHT

In the Newsweek article, Cliff studies a HANDWRITTEN LETTER from Hughes to an executive in one of his companies.

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.

Cliff carefully copies Hughes' cursive style, one letter at a time, using the inset as his model.

LATER

Crumpled sheets of paper on the floor. Cliff tries to keep his pen flowing on the page.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

(O.S.)

Elmyr told me once that in forging
handwriting, the key is to be bold, keep
your pen on the paper.

Edith looks at the latest attempt, holds it against the
NewsWeek article and shakes her head, no it doesn't look
right yet.

LATER

Edith sits with Clifford, looking over the forged letters.
She reads them aloud, and Cliff listens.

EDITH

(reading aloud, in halting
English)

*"...It would not suit me to die without
having certain misconceptions cleared up
and without having stated the truth about
my life..."*

Cliff joins in and they read the rest in unison.

CLIFFORD AND EDITH

(in unison, Edith reading,
Cliff from memory)

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

The two of them burst out laughing.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE BACK DOOR/DRIVEWAY - DAY

Dick turns to face Cliff, arms folded.

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 a picnic table.

CLIFFORD

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

INT. MCGRAW-HILL PUBLISHING - DAY

The hushed conference room is now a busy place. Several lawyers talk in a corner. We hear snatches of whispered conversations.

ANDREA

So taking you at your word - and with no contact...how does...Mr. Hughes propose we proceed?

CLIFFORD

I...look, this is all very strange. I'm just getting the lay of the land myself. (pause) From what I can gather so far, he refuses to go outdoors and will only initiate, never accept, phone calls. Those particular rumors seem to be true. But he did say he'd 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.

Dana picks up a ringing phone.

VANDERKAMP

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

CLIFFORD

Albert, I have absolutely no idea. It's the strangest thing that's ever happened to me.

Andrea huddles with Albert while Dana talks on the phone. Dana hangs up.

DANA

Matching against the reprinted letters from Newsweek magazine...Osborn Associates preliminary opinion is that the handwriting samples are *genuine*.

Cliff notes this. He turns to page through a magazine as a fierce whispered debate goes on behind him.

ANDREA

(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. Andrea turns to Clifford; suddenly her manner is silky, even flirtatious.

ANDREA

Cliff? Did you and Howard happen to
discuss how much you both wanted?
Because we'd like to make a deal. Today.

The growing batch of lawyers and executives now stand staring hopefully at him.

CLIFFORD

We did, Andrea. We did discuss that.

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; the Mercedes speeds up and passes another car.

INT. CLIFF AND EDITH'S KITCHEN - DAY

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

EDITH

I want to come, Clifford, it's not fair!
Howard had many women, you need...how you
say... a woman's perspective! And I'm a
better driver than you, you crash
everything.

INT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE - BEDROOM/LIBRARY

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?

EDITH

(O.S.)

Nest! Hah! In Ibiza we had a nest.
Here we have a smelly barn.

Cliff tosses unfolded clothes into his suitcase.

DICK

I think that-

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.

EDITH

(O.S.)

In Ibiza I had friends, beautiful beach!

CLIFFORD

(yelling downstairs)

How the hell am I supposed to get us back to Ibiza with no money? Huh? (to Dick re: Edith) There's no logic.

DICK

What I'm saying is when the publicity starts in on this what's to prevent this guy from suing our asses off?

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 uses ripped-up Kleenex boxes for slippers and drinks his own piss. He's psychotic.

DICK

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

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

A half a million?

CLIFFORD

Four hundred grand for Howard and a hundred grand for us!

DICK

Oh, I thought you meant a half a million just for us.

CLIFFORD

Schmuck, it's all for us! There is no Howard Hughes! (pause) Are you paying attention, Dick?

DICK

Yeah...yeah.

CLIFFORD

The problem is 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 - DAY

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

Absolutely not possible. I'm sorry. It's a grand gesture, okay? It's bold. I admire that. But the timing is wrong, Barbara has poison ivy. It spread to her ears...

Cliff rubs his brow. He's waiting for this to run its course.

DICK (cont'd)

Look, I'd like to have more money, but I have my own work. The Richard piece is very close to consummation. Fine, couple guys "hitting the road", hitchhikers...sexual connotations...I married early, okay? (pause). But I refuse. It flies in the face of the choices I've made for my life and...and...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 them packed lunches, 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 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.

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 jewel thief. I'm a researcher.

CLIFFORD

You own twenty five percent of this thing. You want it to be good?

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. D.C. HOTEL BATHROOM - DAY

Cliff opens a roll of unspooled film and holds it up against the bathroom light.

DICK

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

Cliff squints at the negatives.

CLIFFORD

You took a picture of your leg. Maybe
your ankle - I can't tell.

Dick looks at it.

DICK

It's my ankle.

SCENE 38 OMITTED

INT. PENTAGON, WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY

Uniformed officers and well-dressed civilians walk
purposefully in different directions down an august corridor.

Cliff takes Dick by the arm. Several two, three and even a
four star general pass them.

DICK

There's a whole security apparatus here.
It's a secure facility!

CLIFFORD

We need the information in portable form.
Just look comfortable, be buoyant.

They spot a sign: AIR FORCE EXECUTIVE SUB-CORRIDOR:
"ACQUISITIONS". Dick makes an effort to look natural as they
head down the sub-corridor.

DICK

How can they just let a person walk in?
What if I'm a Russian?

CLIFFORD

Be a buoyant Russian.

INT. SMALL 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

To be honest Sergeant, no we don't. Mr. Hughes doesn't like to share information. It's very frustrating.

Daniels glares at Clifford.

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

Could my associate use your facilities, Lieutenant?

DANIELS

(to Dick)

What's the matter, you don't know how to ask to pee?

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

MOMENTS LATER

Cliff engages Daniels in loud conversation while Dick tries stealthily to open file cabinets.

Dick finds a government file on Hughes Aircraft. In it are voluminous acquisition and financial records. He looks at Cliff whose eyes never leave Daniels.

DANIELS (cont'd)

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

Cliff nods at Daniels - then purposefully tucks his shirt into his PANTS. Taking the cue, Dick 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.

Dick re-zips his fly.

THE CORRIDOR ENTRANCE

A line at the back exit. Security guards check bags. Cliff
and Dick approach the counter. Dick sweats.

DICK
(whispering fiercely)
No. No. I'm not doing it!

Dick is right at the counter. Cliff nudges him forward.

AT THE COUNTER: Dick's bag is checked and he starts to go.

But he is asked to remove his jacket. Dick swallows. He
complies. Cliff's brow knits as the guard puts his hand on
Dick's butt and works his way around to the front...

The FILE slides down Dick's right pant leg just in time...

Dick limps out the front door, holding the file up with his
right foot.

SCENE 42 OMITTED

SCENE 43 OMITTED

EXT. PENTAGON ENTRANCE - DAY

Cliff stands behind Dick who rubs his chest nervously as he
looks over the material.

CLIFFORD
It's palpitations, Dick. It's a fight
or flight response, like a false signal
to the body as if there were a cheetah or
an animal of some kind in pursuit.

Dick leans back and breathes through his nose.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)
You *liked* the adrenaline before.

DICK
Please stop talking, I'm trying to
normalize my pulse!

INT. D.C. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Dick has recovered somewhat. Sitting on his bed, he pulls out A PHOTOGRAPH from the file:

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 30 years. I don't know who the other guy is. My guess is this guy Dietrich is going to be very cagey.

Dick nods solemnly. Cliff takes the file out of his hand. He picks up the phone.

CLIFFORD

(into the phone)

Hi, could I have information in Las Vegas Nevada for a Mr. Noah Dietrich?

Dick listens.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - EARLY MORNING

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

CLIFFORD

(O.S.)

Mr. Dietrich? I'm Clifford Irving. My partner and I are writing a book on aviation. We-

INT. OSTENTATIOUS MANSION - NEVADA - DAY

NOAH DIETRICH (80's, shrivelled) a befuddled man wearing shorts and socks that don't match holds a PHONE to his ear.

NOAH

(into the phone, to Cliff)

Great! C'mon over!

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - EARLY MORNING

The car speeds along. Dick sips a beer and chuckles. He sports a few days beard. Cliff offers him a bag of chips, the sun high in the sky.

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
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.

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.

INT. DIETRICH MANSION - INDOOR POOL - 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.

MICRO-CLOSE ON: the keys of a TELEGRAPH as it taps out a message...

**HRH MOODY AND CONCERNED ABOUT SECRECY STOP MUST HAVE DECISION
NOW OR GAME IS LOST CLIFFORD**

A worker tears the telegram out of the telegraph and walks down the corridor to

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 Andrea Tate and Albert Vanderkamp.

ANDREA
The whole thing fits with Hughes' previous business arrangements. 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.

VANDERKAMP (cont'd)
Within reason.

ANDREA
There should be compartmentalization of information.

VANDERKAMP

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

ANDREA

So we'll know the subject is Howard
Hughes-

VANDERKAMP

We shouldn't say the name.

ANDREA

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

Andrea 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.

EXT. LAS VEGAS HOTEL - NIGHT

Cliff carries the suitcases, Dick carries the books as they
head into the lobby of their hotel.

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.
A neon sign below announces "The Desert Inn". Dick pores over
the Dietrich manuscript.

A porter slips a message under the door. Cliff walks over
and picks it up.

CLOSE ON: A message: "Nina - The St. Regis Hotel" followed
by a phone number.

Cliff considers the message. He then puts on his jacket.

DICK

It's amazing. Everybody hates Howard's guts, calls him cheap and everything else. But they're still in thrall. They can't shut up about him.

CLIFFORD

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

Cliff picks up his key and heads for the door.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

I'm going for a walk.

SCENE 55 OMITTED

SCENE 56 OMITTED

EXT. LAS VEGAS PAYPHONE - NIGHT

Clifford holds the phone to his head, exasperated.

There is a long phone silence.

NINA

(O.S.)

What's the temperature there?

CLIFFORD

(into the phone)

87 below zero.

Pause.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

You said you were with Fredric, never call again and I didn't.

' INTERCUT: with NINA, sitting in her room at the St. Regis Hotel in New York.

NINA

(sarcastic)

I'm a "stupid celebrity", I say a lot of stupid things, you know?

CLIFFORD

There's a conversation here I wish we could have had before I recommitted to my wife, but we didn't. You didn't. Goodbye.

Clifford hangs up the phone.

INT. VEGAS BAR - NIGHT

As close as one to get to a local watering hole. Cliff sits on a corner stool, sipping Scotch, and dutifully reading an Encyclopedia size Senate transcription. He rubs his eyes.

Across the bar, an ANGULAR BEAUTY sits and orders. They make eye contact. She smiles. Clifford stares at her. She stops smiling and gives him a smoldering stare back.

He forces his head back down to his reading.

OMITTED

INT. DESERT INN HOTEL - MORNING

Dick eats a big chicken liver omelette while reading. Clifford lies in his clothes, waking up with a headache.

Cliff groans a little.

DICK

(referring to Cliff)

The creature moves! - Listen to this. From the Dietrich manuscript. There's a full transcription of a phone call between Hughes and Frank McCullough from Time magazine. 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. We're in uncharted territory here.

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

DICK (cont'd)

Where were you, out so late?

CLIFFORD

Nina called me from New York last night.

DICK

Oh great, here we go.

Cliff exits the bathroom and looks at Dick.

CLIFFORD

Listen Dick - it took me a year to make things right with Edith. Keep an eye on me, alright?

DICK

It's my second profession. (pause) Hey Cliff? Barbara 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! Andrea thinks I'm working alone, it's very top secret, Dick!

DICK

(suddenly terrified, into the phone)

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

Cliff tries frantically to feed Dick lines.

CLIFFORD

(whispering)
No! Not her name, now she'll...ah, shit...tell her you're my- Dick...Dick!...you coordinate travel for the hotel...

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?

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.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MCGRAW HILL - ANDREA'S OFFICE - DAY

A highly annoyed Andrea, brushing her teeth in her office as
she talks to Clifford.

ANDREA
Who was that, Clifford?

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

ANDREA
You have to be in New York at 9 A.M.
Monday morning. You're meeting Ralph
Graves. He's the editor-in-chief of Life
Magazine.

Cliff swallows.

ANDREA (CONT'D) (cont'd)
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?

ANDREA
Just tell them the truth.

Cliff stares at Dick, who is already panicking.

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, Andrea, Albert and Harold McGraw.

GRAVES
History. Quite a responsibility.

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.

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!

ANDREA

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
flea-bag motel, you remember Dick?

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

DICK

The flea-bag motel. Of course I do.

INT. MOTEL - NASSAU, BAHAMAS - FLASHBACK

Cliff reads *Newsweek* magazine. The Britannia Beach 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.

SCENE 63 OMITTED

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

Cliff and Dick sit in their seats on the small CESSNA 150 as it putters over the blue water of the Bahamas.

CLIFF

(O.S.)

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

SWISH PAN: to an IMAGINARY toothless pilot named Pedro, who grins at Cliff and Dick. The quality of the image CHANGES - we are now in the world of Cliff's IMAGINATION.

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 the AIRPLANE. But instead of the Bahamas, the plane wobbles over a MEXICAN MOUNTAIN RANGE.

Dick and Cliff listen as the newly conjured PEDRO (20's, gaunt) chatters about the village below.

CLIFF

(O.S.)

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

BACK TO THE LIFE GALLERY

GRAVES

What specialty was that?

Cliff's eyes whirl, inventing.

INT. SPORTING GOODS STORE - 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 remote hotel in the mountains Juchitan called the Salina Cruz..."

CLIFF

(O.S.)

Next stop: a dirt runway in Juchitan.

EXT. DIRT RUNWAY - DAY - CLIFFORD'S IMAGINATION

GEORGE GORDON HOLMES (50's, imposing) walks to meet Cliff and Dick as they get off the plane.

CLIFFORD

(O.S.)

Holmes meets us, and he's sweating through this white blazer he's wearing.

INT. LIFE PHOTO GALLERY - CONTINUOUS

Graves has perked up, and now listens carefully.

CLIFFORD

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...

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.)

Then our pal George pops back like he never left and took us back to Howard's room. It faced a dirt road. Didn't even have an ocean view. The room was bare. No, wait...

INT. BALLROOM - 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...

SCENE 73 OMITTED

INT. BALLROOM - FLASHBACK

Cliff watches, his eyes burning with shame and resentment, his broken mask in hand, as Nina breaks their "secret" stare and turns back to Fredric, her rich and handsome husband.

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.

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 Andrea strain to hear details from the table's periphery.

A WAITER stands at attention.

GRAVES
The LaTour please, '61. 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-

CLIFFORD
Three maybe?

RALPH
Make it three...Beluga appetizers.

Cliff tries not to smile as he watches Dick, now riffing comfortably to a rapt Andrea.

ANDREA
Did you get a sense of his business acumen?

DICK
Funny you should ask Andrea, because Howard 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 enterprise, that kind of thing. So you have both.

Andrea 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.

Andrea nods. Clifford struggles to keep a straight face.

SCENE 77 OMITTED

INT. MCGRAW-HILL - DAY

Harold McGraw, lawyers standing behind him, signs his name to a formal contract between "McGraw-Hill Book Company" and "H.R. Hughes".

He then signs his name to a CHECK made out to "CLIFFORD IRVING" in the amount of \$100,000.00.

INT. ACCOUNTANT'S OFFICE - DAY

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

ACCOUNTANT
This is your check for writing services.
The second check, for Mr.
Hughes...or...Octavio, sorry...is going
to take a little longer to process. I
understand you're authorized to receive
Mr. Hughes' payment?

CLIFFORD
Yes I am. And don't wait too long.

The accountant hands over Clifford's check.

SCENE 79 OMITTED

SCENE 80 OMITTED

INT. MERCEDES - DAY

The 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. hold-up in approving
the acquisition of Air West by Hughes
Consolidated. Spokesmen for Hughes
condemned the delay as "a delay not for
us, but for the American traveller"...

In the passenger seat is Dick. At his feet is the satchel. 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.

SCENE 82 OMITTED

INT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE - BARN - NIGHT

Two dusty desks. Legal pads and court transcripts lay strewn on the floor. Two large FRUIT BASKETS sit unopened. Pinned to them are notes of congratulations from McGraw-Hill. Cliff 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-

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? Validate pre-
marital sex? You want to recommend
Buddhism? You want to critique a sitting
President who's a war criminal? 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. He catches sight of Edith pacing around outside. She looks perturbed.

CLIFFORD

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

Dick raises his eyebrows.

OMITTED

INT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE - EDITH'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Clifford quietly enters. He walks toward Edith, watching her. She now sits quietly in front of a series of paintings.

CLIFFORD

Hey. You've been working?

EDITH

I've been doing good work.

He looks around at Edith's PAINTINGS.

They are colorful still lifes. But they have been DEFACED. Some with paint splattered on them, some cut with knives, and one with the word "SLUT" written across it.

CLIFFORD

Pear, what the-...why did you do this?
What is it?

Edith gets up and we can see she's been crying. As she spits her words at Cliff, she flecks PAINT on him from her paint brush.

EDITH

(mocking him)

"What is it?"..."What's the matter?"..."I'm late for dinner tonight, baby"..."she's dead to me"..."don't cry"..."see you soon, baby"..."see you soon, baby"!

Edith THROWS the paint brush at Cliff.

CLIFFORD
What the hell is the matter with you?

EDITH
I'm all alone in this fucking country and
my husband's a cheater!

Edith bursts into tears and stalks out.

EDITH (cont'd)
I'm sorry...I'm sorry...

She stalks out of the room. Cliff daubs at the paint on his shirt.

CLIFFORD
(irritated)
Jesus Christ. It never ends.

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

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Dick takes a last slug of ale. Clifford sips his drink slowly.

DICK
I'm heading home. You want to walk out
with me?

CLIFFORD
You go. I'm going to sit a little bit.

Dick claps Cliff on the shoulder and leaves the bar. Cliff feels inside his jacket pocket. He finds something.

He pulls out the MESSAGE Nina left him: "Nina at The St. Regis" followed by a phone number. He looks up at the payphone in the back of the bar.

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 is languorous and beautiful, wrapped in a sheet, looking at a music magazine.

NINA
You remember my friend Laura? From
Ibiza? A little dull?

CLIFFORD

I think so.

NINA

She's training to be a nurse. Very sincerely, she's trying to find meaning, you know? But our group in Ibiza - they're so taken with her altruism they're tripping over themselves to invite her to dinner. And, I swear this is true, her social schedule is so busy now - that she wants to drop the nursing!

CLIFFORD

That's not true. You made that up.

They laugh.

NINA

I'm the liar? You're writing a fake book about the most famous man in the world and I'm the liar. Okay.

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

CLIFFORD

I gotta get back.

NINA

No. The clock's broken.

She embraces him and kisses his neck. Cliff is quiet for a while.

CLIFFORD

Just to confirm: He's still rich. And you're still not gonna leave him.

NINA

I want to, but no I'm not going to.

Cliff looks at her.

NINA (cont'd)

I'm shallow, Cliff. All my motives are shallow. My great desire is to be an American movie star. Besides, why does it bother you? Brecht, Hemingway - they all had mistresses.

CLIFFORD

The lying gives me a headache if you want to know the truth.

NINA

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

Clifford sighs.

NINA (cont'd)

Sorry. It was really bad I called you. I know it.

CLIFFORD

I can't go through this whole thing again. I can't do it to her. I can't.

NINA

You won't have to.

Cliff gathers his shoes and prepares to leave.

NINA (cont'd)

Cliff, why are you wasting your talent on a fake book?

Cliff gives her a rueful smile as he walks toward the door.

CLIFFORD

To get your attention, big shot.

INT. BARN OFFICE - MORNING

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

DICK

(imitating Clifford)

"Dick...there's no future with Nina...it weakens me, hurts my work...Edith is stability, she's my rock..."

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? It's the "what do I do now"
part I need help with. I don't know what
to do if Edith asks me where I went.

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. BARN OFFICE - 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.

DICK
You ready?

Clifford gathers himself, taking a deep breath, staring at
the wall.

CLIFFORD
Turn it on.

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

DICK
(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. 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. Their chess table sits in the corner. 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.

INT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

At the kitchen table, Cliff reads transcripts, studying the Hughes material. Edith wanders in.

She's quiet a while before she speaks.

EDITH

I paint about it, it's my way...to let go. (pause) You...you want to get into bed with me?

Cliff doesn't make eye contact.

CLIFFORD

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

Edith nods and forces a smile.

EDITH

Okay. Good night my darling.

Edith touches his shoulder, then leaves the room. Clifford keeps reading.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

A tiny lake, where Dads and their sons maneuver toy boats. Clifford sits on a bench. He looks at this watch, waiting for someone. Suddenly, Andrea Tate strides up to Clifford.

ANDREA

(enraged)

Read the women's rags lately?

She throws a MAGAZINE in his face. Cliff looks at the magazine and sees the caption: "HUGHES REVEALED - EXCERPTS FROM AUTOBIOGRAPHY!"

ANDREA (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!

ANDREA

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!

ANDREA

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.

ANDREA

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!

ANDREA

-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!

ANDREA

He is screwing you Clifford! He's screwing both of us!

(MORE)

ANDREA (cont'd)
So whatever spell you can cast, do it or
we're roadkill. Harold wants to announce
on Monday.

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

ANDREA
For your sake sweetheart, I hope he does.

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

EXT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Dick breathes heavily, trying to keep up with Cliff, who
paces along his driveway.

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
We needed quality cookware! You know
what a great cook Barbara is. And before
you know it we were renovating the
kitchen...

CLIFF
Jesus, Dick!

DICK
Well there wasn't that much percentage-
wise to begin with! You pay them back.
Say Hughes didn't agree. I'll owe you
the difference.

CLIFFORD
I can't! The house, the furniture, debt.
I'm down most 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.

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?

Cliff picks up a rock as they arrive at the entrance to the barn office.

CLIFFORD

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

DICK

Buy an airline?

CLIFFORD

Change the subject.

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

INT. BARN OFFICE - DAY

Papers are scattered everywhere. Dick mutters as he reaches deep into a messy pile of papers. 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!

Dick looks at Cliff, who grabs a yellow legal pad and sits down at his desk, preparing to write. Dick sits.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

Dick, it's time you had a holiday.

Dick stands up, baffled. Cliff picks up the phone and dials.

DICK
I just had a holiday.

CLIFFORD
(into the phone)
Dana, get Beverly right this second.

EXT. BARN OFFICE - DAY

Cliff places a FOLDER safely in Dick's travel bag as he waltzes him toward a waiting TAXI.

Dick does a last check of pockets: passport, wallet. He is very unsettled.

DICK
I...

Cliff gives him a firm stare.

DICK (cont'd)
Oh good God.

Dick gets into the taxi, Cliff claps the back of it, sending it off.

SCENE 93 OMITTED

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Dick sits mushed into his seat. He wipes sweat from his brow. He holds a ticket to NASSAU, BAHAMAS in his hand.

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 \$2,400 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 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, Andrea, 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. 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.

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 that check on the table.

CLIFFORD (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.

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, fella. 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.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I will mention Shelton, that one of Howard's alternative ideas was to simply buy a controlling interest in 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.

INT. ACCOUNTANT'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON: A CHECK made out to "HOWARD HUGHES" in the amount of "One million dollars" is handed to Clifford.

The chastened accountant looks at Clifford. Clifford puts the check in his wallet.

EXT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE DRIVEWAY - DAY

Wearing jeans and carrying brochures, Edith arrives home from an afternoon in the city. Cliff and Dick brood, sitting in lawn furniture outside the cottage.

EDITH

Why are the boys glum?

They are in fact, quite morose.

CLIFFORD

I cannot believe this.

DICK

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

EDITH

Open a Swiss account in his name yourselves.

CLIFF

We were going to. But we found out you need social security numbers, it's traceable, even in Switzerland...trust me, we've been over everything.

EDITH

What if a woman deposits the check?

DICK

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

EDITH

Tell the publishers he changed his mind, 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.

CLIFFORD

(to Edith)

You're not going to Switzerland.

DICK

I think it's a good idea. 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.

EDITH

Come on, baby. We can be...Bonnie and Clyde!

Cliff looks at Edith's eyes. She's happy. He hesitates, troubled. Then his eyes harden.

SCENE A99 OMITTED

INT. BARN OFFICE - NIGHT

Edith sits happily besides Cliff. They carefully cut out a new passport photo of Edith and place it atop an old one. They then begin stencilling a new name: "Helga Renata Hughes".

The NEW CHECK sits on the desk. Now the One Million Dollars is made out to "H.R. Hughes".

Edith tousles Cliff's hair, she's delighted at being part of the con.

SCENE 99 OMITTED

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - DAY

Fisher juggles telegrams and fumbles with his Gazpacho soup while yelling into a phone that has been brought to his table.

FISHER

(into the phone, quoting the newspaper)

I received four telegrams, nine phone calls, and had three "cease and desist" orders 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 Tate?

INTERCUT: ANDREA TATE'S OFFICE - DAY

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

ANDREA
(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?

INT./EXT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE FOYER/LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Edith tucks the PASSPORT and the CHECK into her purse. 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 outside.

Cliff is on the phone with Andrea.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MCGRAW-HILL - ANDREA'S OFFICE - DAY

Andrea in her office, an anxious Albert hovering over her.

ANDREA
(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. Andrea sighs at her desk.

A104 EXT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE - FRONT DRIVEWAY - MINUTES LATER

In her Mata Hari get-up, Edith walks up the dirt driveway a heavy box. She pauses, seeing a white wisp near a rock. She pulls a sealed CARD from under the rock. It is addressed to no one. Puzzled, she lugs the box to the house and

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE FOYER/LIBRARY/DINING ROOM

Wearing her Mata Hari get-up, Edith pulls into the house a heavy box.

EDITH

My back is broken. What did you order?

Dick waves a copy of a morning newspaper in Cliff's face, dateline October 7th, 1971. His cheeks are red. He reads the newspaper aloud.

DICK

"...Amidst controversy, McGraw-Hill to publish Hughes autobiography...Hughes lawyer calls book a "complete fabrication...". 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! Barbara's very concerned.

CLIFFORD

It's your job to reassure Barbara! Besides, a month ago you wanted more credit.

Edith opens her mouth to intervene. Then she sees a small white wisp of paper poking from the lower hinge of the door. Edith pulls it out of the hinge. It's a note. She reads it.

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

Her face vanishes.

DICK

Hughes henchmen are ex-CIA! Trained in martial arts!

CLIFFORD

Good! I hope they drop-kick some sense into you!

A PICTURE FRAME

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

DICK

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!

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 - DAY

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 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

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

EDITH

Fuck you. It's my money too.

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

SCENE 106 OMITTED

SCENE 107 OMITTED

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cliff sits in the living room. He looks at the unmarked package on the floor and pulls it toward him.

Then he notices: The postmark is from LAS VEGAS, NEVADA. With a letter opener, 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 Mr. Hughes' 1956 loan of \$205,000 to Donald Nixon, Richard Nixon's brother..."

CLIFFORD
(reading aloud, amazed)
"...will be regarded favorably. This effectively places VP at our disposal to secure current and future Pentagon contracts..."

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

CLIFFORD (cont'd)
Oh my God...

--- INT. BARN OFFICE - AN HOUR LATER

Dick listens wide-eyed while Cliff hovers over him, reading aloud. Cliff's eyes are lit up with a kind of religious ecstasy.

CLIFFORD
Listen! Listen to this!
"...Rebozo accepted \$100,000 in cash to redecorate the nominee's home. Acceptance was understood to mean that our TWA appeal and the Air West matter would be given highest priority" Are you hearing this?!

DICK
I can't believe what I'm hearing.

CLIFFORD

Money laundering! Bribery! It's the end! Publish this and 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 his writing desk.

CLIFFORD

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

GRAINY B/W STOCK FOOTAGE: Pilot Howard Hughes, scarf flying behind him ascends higher in his plane, smiling as his wings touch the clouds...

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

(subtitled, in German)
I'd like to open an account. My name is Helga Hughes.

INT. BARN OFFICE - 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. BARN OFFICE - DAYS LATER

Dick smokes a cigarette and pushes back a mop of hair from his brow. Empty food cartons litter the barn office and all the ashtrays are full. The office has changed. Posters from Howard Hughes movies are hung on the walls. Glossies from old screen magazines featuring Hughes with famous actresses of the day are tacked atop them.

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? Find an opportunity. 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. The PHONE RINGS.

SCENE A113 OMITTED

INT. TIME/LIFE BUILDING - SMALL OFFICE

Dick and Cliff are curious as they enter the Time/Life offices. Cliff spots Harold McGraw's grim face. The room is still and quiet. Andrea sits in the corner.

CLIFFORD

Keep the noise down guys, you'll wake the neighbors.

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 bathroom.

Dick LEAVES the ROOM. Cliff has been abandoned.

CLIFFORD

Shelton, this is an 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.

INT. TIME/LIFE BUILDING - SMALL OFFICE

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.

INT. TIME/LIFE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

McGraw steps outside the office.

MCGRAW

Stay close, Clifford!

Cliff goes to the ELEVATOR. 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.

INT. TIME LIFE BUILDING - 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.

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

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

INT. TIME/LIFE BUILDING - STAIRWELL

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 to piss! I'll confess, I'll do anything, if they'll just let me use a toilet.

INT. TIME/LIFE BUILDING - 5TH FLOOR STAIRWELL

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.

SCENE 116 OMITTED

SCENE A117 OMITTED

SCENE 117 OMITTED

INT. TIME/LIFE BUILDING - SMALL OFFICE

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

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: Soft, dreamy diffused light. A certain relief in Clifford's eyes...

CLIFFORD (cont'd)
I have abused your trust. The book...the
entire story...is false.

Fisher gasps. Andrea 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, sharp cold
fluorescents stinging him.

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.

INT./EXT. CAR - DAY

Dick and Cliff drive a rural road toward town.

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?

DICK
Pull over!

Cliff stops the car abruptly. Dick gets out.

DICK (cont'd)
I'm phoning Barbara.

Dick walks to a PHONE BOOTH across from the TRAIN STATION.

MINUTES LATER

Dick steps out of the phone booth. He is solemn. He walks up to Cliff, who sits on the train station steps.

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.

Dick walks up the steps.

DICK (cont'd)
I'll take the train back.

Cliff says nothing. His eyes are dark and bitter.

SCENE 122 OMITTED

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Cliff enters the bar. He sees Dick, who looks at him hopefully. Clifford purposefully passes Dick and sits at the other end of the bar. He orders a drink, radiating resentment.

Dick is quite drunk.

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)

I have this friend. Lenny. Married guy.
Wife leads him around by the nose.
Gets...gets mad at him for leaving crumbs
on the couch, won't talk to him for days.
Money...any plans he may have...she's the
one...she's the one that decides.
Lenny...he just absorbs it. But he hates
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.

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 LIVING ROOM/LIBRARY - MORNING

Cliff sits on the couch, awake. The early morning sun shines through the window. Cliff holds the TAPE RECORDER. He listens to his own voice, speaking as Hughes.

CLIFFORD

(as Hughes, on tape)

...create a crisis for him...save the day...nothing renders him more vulnerable...

Cliff switches the recorder off and closes his eyes. The FERAL GIRL walks downstairs, shoes in her hand. She looks at Cliff. Cliff 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.

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.

INT. BARN OFFICE - HOURS LATER

A pale and distraught Dick nonetheless highlights passages, rips pages from books, brings them over to the typewriter...)

-Dick quotes their taped transcripts as Cliff listens.

-They play rapid-fire speed chess

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

INT. MCGRAW-HILL - DAY

MARION, Harold McGraw's refined but panicked secretary SPRINTS down the hall with a message. She pokes her head into Andrea's office.

MARION
(catching her breath)
A meeting...Mr. Octavio...he's going to
show up...here!

Andrea looks at Marion, baffled.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A small ARMY has gathered around Harold McGraw. Andrea, 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.

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.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL BUILDING - 14TH FLOOR - DAY

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
(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.
(MORE)

MCGRAW (cont'd)
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.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

You've rarely seen a bunch of more baffled individuals as the
McGraw-Hill staff.

MCGRAW
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?

We now see that CLIFFORD was in the meeting all along.

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

MCGRAW
Fair enough. 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?

Marion jots notes. A chorus of mumbles: no one knows if
they've checked. Harold wipes his brow. Cliff watches.

INT. THE STRIPPED OFFICE - DAY

Cliff steps into the stripped office prepared for Harold
McGraw, Frank McCullough and Marion with the stenography
machine.

Clifford hands Harold a thin ENVELOPE.

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

McGraw accepts the thick envelope.

MCGRAW
Of course, Cliff.

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"

Introduction and Commentary by Clifford Irving

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

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

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

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.

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.

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 Howard's making this all so difficult.

Clifford walks away from Silber and over to Andrea who watches the horizon.

ANDREA
(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.

A black speck can be seen on the horizon. Andrea squints.
Is that him?

INT. STRIPPED OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Harold McGraw and Frank McCullough furiously flip through the pages of the book.

SCENE 133 OMITTED

SCENE 134 OMITTED

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.

ANDREA
Where's he going? Where's he going?
This is not happening!

Andrea nearly flies off the edge, trying to will the helicopter back.

ANDREA (cont'd)
He was fifty fucking feet from the
building!

Marion, Harold's secretary, sticks her head out the rooftop door.

MARION
(shouting across)
Everyone? Harold needs to see you. Right
away.

Andrea and Brad look at each other, terrified. Clifford
draws a breath and heads for the door.

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.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL - DAY

Andrea, Clifford and Brad walk quickly down the hall,
bickering.

CLIFFORD
Let me see that diagram!

SILBER
The diagram was fine, it was exactly to-

CLIFFORD
Andrea, give me the original.

Andrea gives Cliff a folder as she walks. 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!

The three of them stop walking. Silber looks at the ROOFTOP
DRAWING, and indeed we see in clockwise order, North, West,
South, East.

SILBER
I wrote what 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!

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

ANDREA

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!

Frank McCullough opens the door of the Stripped Office. Everyone is quiet. He stands in the doorway, staring at Clifford.

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?

Andrea and Brad stand, stunned. Harold McGraw walks out and takes Cliff by the shoulders.

MCGRAW

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

McGraw HUGS Clifford, who accepts the gesture. McGraw then turns to Andrea. There is general happiness. Cliff wanders a few feet away.

CLIFFORD

(to himself)

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

SCENE A138 OMITTED

INT. HOTEL BANQUET ROOM - DAY

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

Sitting on the stage 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.

Harold McGraw taps the microphone to draw the group's attention. He delivers 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. Fisher leans over to Clifford, pointing to the photo of Hughes.

FISHER

(to Cliff)

Imagine what you or I could do with balls like his.

Fisher chuckles. Clifford grits his teeth.

MCGRAW

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.

Cliff glances back, staring at Howard.

SCENE 139 OMITTED

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - NIGHT

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.

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

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

CLIFFORD

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 changes the channel.

On this station: Cliff sits across from an interviewer who grills him on an investigative journalism program.

THE INTERVIEWER

(on TV)

How do you respond to accusations that you simply...made all this up?

Cliff listens to his own responses as he stares at his own pseudo-sincere face on TV.

CLIFFORD

(yelling at the TV)

I just keep lying, pal!

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.

CLIFF

Yes.

Dick squeezes his hands together.

DICK

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

Cliff looks at him.

CLIFFORD

I know how much your marriage means to you. And I would never, ever do anything that I didn't feel was best for you.

Dick smiles and appears deeply relieved. He laughs and opens a beer. Cliff looks at Dick.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

The barn is besotted with moonlight. 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.

Cliff puts the papers next to the typewriter and takes another drink. He looks at the stars.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

A sunlit day in the park. An out of the way outcropping of trees and rocks.

Nearby, a young man, pupils dilated and clearly tripping, tears up small pieces of newspaper and drops them onto the chest of his braided, topless female companion, who giggles uncontrollably.

Cliff and Nina arrive at the same time. No one says anything for a while.

NINA

I saw your picture in the newspaper.
You're very popular, Clifford. Is he
telling the truth? Is he lying? It's a
wonderful public melodrama.

CLIFFORD

You knew she'd find the note, didn't you?

NINA

Oh God, she found the note? I'm...that's
awful, I'm sorry.

CLIFFORD

Why don't I believe you?

NINA

Because you're cynical and I'm
mysterious.

(she laughs, then stops)
Sit down with me.

Cliff doesn't sit down.

NINA (cont'd)

I'm leaving Fredric.

She considers her own statement.

NINA (cont'd)

I just...he couldn't support my dreams
and my dreams are very important to me.
The possibilities are really great for my
acting now. "The next Monroe" my manager
says, though I don't believe him. I'm
getting two covers in the U.S. next month
but who cares, right?

Clifford says nothing.

NINA (cont'd)

I'm ready to be with you, Cliff.

CLIFFORD

Your timing is interesting. (ALTERNATE:
I bet you are.)

NINA

We can share the adventure. You're in the public eye, I'm going to be, more and more. We can...support each other. There are special problems this kind of notoriety brings and-

CLIFFORD

And you'll hold my hand while we're interviewed together on the Dick Cavett Show? That's generous, thank you.

NINA

I'm finally doing what you wanted! And you're suspicious? This is what you did - you pursued me, you called me-

CLIFFORD

I was in love with you! I wasn't looking for a fresh photo op!

Nina looks at him.

NINA

That's an amazing accusation. You are good with words. All our time together...and this is how you sum it up. Unbelievable.

Nina gathers her things and begins walking away. She calls over her shoulder as she goes.

NINA (cont'd)

Cliff, I forgot to tell you, we share a common talent! Our last time together at the hotel? I faked it.

Clifford laughs to himself.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

Cliff walks into his home. He sits, refreshed. He notices a WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM in the mail slot. The phone starts to ring. Cliff reads the telegram as 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!

Cliff slams the phone booth with his fist.

EXT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE BARN - NIGHT

Dick sits in a car in Cliff's DRIVEWAY. He drinks a beer and listens to the radio. He gets out of the car and paces a bit, muttering to himself, as if mustering the courage to go in.

INT. BARN OFFICE - NIGHT - 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/LIVING ROOM - 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. Our visual world changes: ordinary objects seem menacing, angles are strange, contrasts are sharp.

CLIFF
(into the phone)
Edith? Edith?

A CREAK. The house settling, perhaps. Cliff gets up. He throws on a bathrobe and enters the hallway. Nothing.

He walks down the STAIRS.

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

One of the men 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 BEACH 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.

OMITTED

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.

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 his dog isn't doing tricks anymore. On TWA. On the Air West merger. On anything. That's it, isn't it?

Holmes says nothing.

CLIFFORD (CONT'D) (cont'd)

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 our book until the day it hits the stands.

Holmes stands up.

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...I
know what it is to feel 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 Careful Men below fish him out. They are curiously
gentle, and supply Clifford with warm towels.

MINUTES LATER

Clifford is placed, a towel on his shoulder, into the back
seat of a car. Clifford grabs his ribs, in pain. One
Careful Man holds each of Clifford's arms.

HOLMES (CONT'D) (cont'd)
(from the front seat)
Mr. Hughes wants that information in the
book.

CLIFFORD

He despises Nixon as much as I do! I
knew it!

Cliff struggles with the Men holding him.

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.

Holmes WINKS at Clifford in the back seat. Clifford starts
to laugh.

As the Careful Man above him lifts something BLACK and
strikes a blow to Clifford's head...

FADE TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MORNING

Clifford walks, disoriented along a road near his house. He
is in his bathrobe. He pauses, looking for familiar
landmarks. He sees his cottage ahead and breaks into a jog.

INT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE - DOWNSTAIRS - MORNING

Splashing water on his face, Cliff throws on some clothes and
rushes out the door.

INT. MCGRAW-HILL - LATER

Harold McGraw sits paralyzed at his desk. Cliff leans forward in his chair, staring.

CLIFFORD

I want that chapter *in*, Harold.

Harold frets as he looks over Cliff's chapter, the one he had been handed at the gala. It is entitled:

"How Howard Hughes purchased Richard Nixon"

MCGRAW

We will face libel litigation initiated by the President of-

CLIFFORD

You'll win.

Harold's phone rings.

MCGRAW

Give me a moment, Cliff. (answering)
Hello?

IN THE CORRIDOR

Clifford walks out down the hall. Staffers shrink slightly at his haggard face and darting eyes. He speaks to no one, heading for the door. But a conversation catches his attention. Dana gossips urgently with another secretary.

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. Andrea's crying in her office...Shelton's talking to Harold right now...

Dana looks up and sees Clifford. She is shocked into silence. Clifford steps up the pace of his exit. He practically runs for the door.

SCENE 156 OMITTED

OMITTED

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

Unethical? The President took cash bribes, what are we on a boy scout camping trip?

Fisher takes the phone from Harold. We hear the sound of Graves speaking sharply back to Fisher.

FISHER (CONT'D) (cont'd)

(into the phone)

I know what the word "alleged" means! I also know what the word "Harper's" means, and I'll get them on the other line right now unless you locate your backbone damn quick!

Fisher slams the phone down.

MCGRAW

Shelton!

FISHER

Goddam journalists.

EXT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - DAY

Clumps of reporters point cameras at Cliff as he trots 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.

(MORE)

MCGRAW (cont'd)
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. BRITANNIA BEACH HOTEL - DAY

An ocean breeze wafts through the open air hotel bar and
restaurant. The same one Cliff and Dick where Cliff and Dick
ate dinner together. One of the CAREFUL MEN is brought a
tropical drink as he sits by the phone.

 FIRST CAREFUL MAN
 (into the phone)
Provide the material today Mr. Silber.
Your help will be very well received.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - DAY

Clifford sits brooding in the living room. The sound of KEYS
in the door. Cliff immediately leaps up at the possibility
of an intruder.

Edith enters the house. Cliff stares at her.

 CLIFFORD
Thank God...

Edith ignores him and heads right for the stairs.

 EDITH
I'm not staying.

Clifford goes toward her.

 EDITH (cont'd)
No!

Cliff pauses.

INT. LIFE MAGAZINE - DAY

Brad Silber closes his office door and straightens his tie.
A bead of sweat trickles down his face as he talks on the
phone.

SILBER
(into the phone)
I'm doing this sir because I felt the
President deserved a warning...yes, of
course, absolutely no one...it'll arrive
by messenger in one hour.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE KITCHEN/DINING ROOM/FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Edith sits on the other side of the room. Cliff is
dishevelled and pensive. He moves toward her, but Edith
flinches at his touch.

CLIFFORD
Baby...just to talk...please!

He tries to hold her, but Edith runs for the stairs. They
scuffle briefly as he tries to hold her, calm her, and she
violently pulls away from him. The suitcase opens, the
clothes spilling.

Edith sits on the stairs.

EDITH
Stay there or I go now. You stay there!

Clifford sits and watches her, his eyes dark.

EDITH (cont'd)
I think a long time on the plane. I am
not beautiful or sexual enough for you.
I always know this. But I thought: if I
love him more, if I bend my spine, loving
him...

CLIFFORD
Sweetheart...please...

EDITH
But you made me broken. I will leave.
First I turn in the money, the book
money, to the police.

She takes a drag on her cigarette. Silence.

CLIFFORD
But you've worked so hard. On the
book...on us. We made progress, didn't
we?

EDITH
No. No.

CLIFFORD

You taught me...what's steady...what's knowable...it's priceless. You're priceless. I'll do anything.

Clifford's eyes well but he blinks them back.

EDITH

What a good liar. Your baby tears...I can't believe anything you say.

She leans in toward him.

EDITH (cont'd)

But I give you something. I let you tell me the truth about what happened with her. Not to save us. I disappear. But finally, after our years...you will be clean. You will 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...

FLASH TO: INT. ST. REGIS HOTEL - NIGHT

Clifford making love to Nina in the bed at the St. Regis, their limbs thrashing.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)

(O.S.)

...I kissed her.

He holds Nina's head for a moment and KISSES her mouth...

INT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE - FOYER/DINING ROOM

Edith's eyes well with angry tears. Cliff forces his lips to keep moving.

CLIFFORD

-then something in me...just physically recoiled. I thought of your paintings...

FLASH TO: INT. COTTAGE - FLASHBACK - DAY

Dick cries, completely helpless, after the prostitutes have left. Cliff watches him.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)
(O.S.)
The intensity of your suffering...

FLASH TO: INT. TIME/LIFE BUILDING - FLASHBACK - DAY

Cliff runs frantically down the stairs, banging on the locked exit door below...

CLIFFORD (cont'd)
(O.S.)
I left her standing there and I ran out,
down the stairs.

BACK TO THE COTTAGE

CLIFFORD (cont'd)
I'm a coward for not admitting that
meeting. I understand you're leaving me.
But that...I swear to God...is the truth.

A long silence.

Then Edith goes to Cliff and slaps him, twice, in the face.
She fiercely EMBRACES him, 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.

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.

SOUND: of PLANES, a low rattle first but then an ear
shattering ROAR...

INT. BARN OFFICE - 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.

SCENE 166 OMITTED

INT. LOCAL 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.

FERAL GIRL

You're broke? Why don't you ask your
friend for another birthday present?

Dick looks at her. It dawns on him.

SCENE 168 OMITTED

INT. BARN OFFICE - DEEP NIGHT

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".

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 could lose my family.

CLIFFORD

Always the Cassandra, always-

DICK

Cliff, I confessed.

CLIFFORD

(as Hughes)

You need your freedom. Only a clod would fail to see that.

Dick KICKS Cliff.

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 don't care. I just don't care. Why
are you dressed like that?

Clifford indicates Dick should be quiet.

CLIFFORD
(as Hughes)
Sons of bitches got onto me. Intertel.
Broke into my house, violated my civil
rights. They kidnapped me, flew me to
Nassau, threatened me.

Cliff storms out of the barn, ranting as he walks in the
yard. Dick listens, following Cliff outside talks to no one.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)
(walking)
I told them our book goes forward. I was
firm. Assurances were given. This
"Howard Hughes" will not interfere.

DICK
(to himself)
"This" Howard Hughes...?

Cliff walks into the cottage and sits down. Dick follows him
inside. He 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
Ex-CIA henchmen. Martial arts!
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.
(MORE)

DICK (cont'd)
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.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A sleepy Edith has awakened and listens to the commotion
downstairs. She hears Dick and Cliff yelling at each other.

DICK
(O.S.)
You took my family away from me, Cliff.
Where am I supposed to go?

CLIFFORD
(O.S.)
I took care of you like a brother.

Edith sighs and puts her head on the pillow.

BACK DOWNSTAIRS

Dick shakes his head. Clifford's face flickers with doubt.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)
(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. And no one took you to
Nassau, Cliff. You're not that
important.

Dick leaves the house.

UPSTAIRS

Edith lies awake in bed.

DOWNSTAIRS

Sounds of men rising from their seats.

A THICK VOICE

(O.S.)

And prepare something for the President
if this breaks early, if he has to
address the nation.

A NASAL VOICE

(O.S.)

To say what?

A THICK VOICE

(O.S.)

That Checkers had puppies. How the fuck
should I know?

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 toward him.

EDITH (cont'd)

I'll hold your hand for the photographers
if you want. Stand by you.

Cliff embraces her.

CLIFFORD

No. Just...stay. Stay. Okay?

Edith nods. 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

Sir? Chester Davis, Howard Hughes'
attorney on line one.

Talia leans forward curious as we

MOVE TOWARD: The office of her boss, his door ajar.

A THICK VOICE
(O.S., into the phone)
Okay...you're sure?...what time will he
be on?...well I can't thank you enough
Chester. We owe you one.

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. MCGRAW-HILL - EVENING

CLOSE ON: A TELEVISION. Seven reporters sit around in a semi-circle. At the center of the circle is a SPEAKER BOX.

WIDEN TO REVEAL: Andrea, Harold and Vanderkamp huddled around a small TV. Their faces are ashen.

INT. ACKERMAN'S PARK AVE. APARTMENT - EVENING

A COCKTAIL PARTY. Guests mill around, whispering and commenting about the man in the corner.

From that corner - Clifford gazes out the window.

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 the seven REPORTERS sitting in a semi-circle, and the small SPEAKER BOX. 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 only wish I were still in the movie business, because I don't remember any script as wild or as stretching the imagination as this yarn has turned out to. The truth is I don't know the man and I never met him.

Cliff walks slowly toward the television.

CLIFF

You fucking bastard...

INT. MCGRAW HILL - CONTINUOUS

Harold sits humiliated. Andrea smokes a cigarette and looks out the window as the Hughes press conference plays behind her.

A GHOSTLY VOICE

(on TV, from the speaker)

I am breaking my silence only because I understand that this book makes some outrageous allegations...

ANDREA

(quietly)

Clifford lied. He just lied.

She seems calmed by saying this aloud.

BACK TO ACKERMAN'S PARTY

And Clifford's face, dawning.

A GHOSTLY VOICE

(on TV, from the speaker)

...and I didn't want innocent people, including prominent people, maligned by these concoctions.

The party-goers all stare at Clifford, who...

...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.

EXT. ACKERMAN'S PARK AVE. APARTMENT - MINUTES LATER

Cliff runs outside only to be assaulted by reporters. He
makes his way towards his car, reeling.

AP REPORTER
Clifford! Why did your wife open a Swiss
bank account under Howard Hughes' name?

Clifford is stopped in his tracks by this.

CBS REPORTER
Why do the Swiss authorities want to
extradite her for violating Swiss banking
laws, Clifford? Do you still claim an
association with Howard Hughes?

Cliff rushes into his car, guns the gas and peels out down
the street.

INT. CLIFF'S CAR - NIGHT

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...The Zurich district attorney has
passed the pertinent information to his
New York counterpart for possible
indictments for mail fraud and grand
larceny...

CLIFFORD
Goddammit!

Cliff presses the gas harder.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE LIVING ROOM/LIBRARY/STUDIO - NIGHT

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. The TV is on.

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...

INT. CLIFF'S COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM

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 looks down.

NINA

He could not have met Howard Hughes in Nassau because he was with me at the St. Regis hotel.

NBC REPORTER

Did he confide in you regarding the book?

Pause.

NINA

No. I knew nothing about it. I'm completely flabbergasted by...all of this attention.

NBC REPORTER

What do you do, Miss Van Pallandt?

NINA

I'm an actress.

A HAND switches off the television.

GEORGE GORDON HOLMES, wearing a crisp white blazer, stands at the window looking out at the countryside.

HOLMES

My good gracious, this is a beautiful part of the country. All that green. Such abundance.

Cliff stares straight ahead. Holmes walks over and hands Cliff a drink. Bourbon.

HOLMES (cont'd)

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.

Pause.

CLIFFORD

Could I run it past you, George?

HOLMES

Certainly, Clifford. That's what I'm here for.

Holmes stares at Clifford, a realization slowly dawning on him.

CLIFFORD
He'd lost control of Nixon, hadn't he?
He needed something.

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. hold-up in approving the acquisition of Air West by Hughes Consolidated. Spokesmen for Hughes condemned the delay...

BACK TO THE NEW HOPE COTTAGE - PRESENT

Holmes listens patiently. Cliff continues talking, looking straight ahead.

CLIFFORD
He opens one of the four disinfected newspapers he reads each day...

INT. BARN OFFICE - FLASHBACK

Clifford as Hughes speaking to Dick into the tape recorder.

CLIFFORD
(as Hughes)
Your rival is powerful? Find an opportunity.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - FLASHBACK

A red faced, worried Dick holds up the newspaper headline for Clifford to see. Which we ZOOM in on:

AMIDST CONTROVERSY, MCGRAW-HILL TO
PUBLISH HUGHES AUTOBIOGRAPHY

BACK TO NEW HOPE COTTAGE - PRESENT

Clifford sits up, animated.

CLIFFORD
And there we were. He hardly needed to do anything...just a little push...

INT. BARN OFFICE - FLASHBACK

Clifford as Hughes speaking to Dick into the tape recorder

CLIFFORD
(as Hughes)
Create a crisis for him.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - FLASHBACK

With a kitchen knife, Cliff pries the box open. Inside are dozens of neatly stacked FILES in Manila folders. He begins poring over the explosive documents, amazed.

CLOSE ON: the NEVADA POSTMARK on the opened cardboard box...

INT. BLACK CAR - BAHAMAS - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Clifford grabs his ribs, in pain. One Careful Man holds each of Clifford's arms.

CLIFFORD
(O.S.)
A harder push, just to be sure.

HOLMES
(from the front seat)
Mr. Hughes wants that information in the book.

BACK TO NEW HOPE COTTAGE

Clifford gets up now, disoriented, slipping on the money, pacing as he talks.

CLIFFORD
But now he's got Nixon terrified!

Holmes watches Clifford from his seated position.

INT. WEST WING, THE WHITE HOUSE - FLASHBACK

Gleaming black shoes and the hems of well-tailored suits under mahogany tables...

A NASAL VOICE
(O.S.)
The Chief thinks this is...authentic?

A THICK VOICE
(O.S.)
There's concern about that.

INT. BARN OFFICE - 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.

BACK TO NEW HOPE COTTAGE - PRESENT

Clifford stops for a moment.

CLIFFORD (cont'd)
I'm not angry, George.

INT. ACKERMAN'S PARK AVE. APARTMENT - FLASHBACK

Cliff stares in shock at the tiny, talking box on the TV.

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....

BACK TO NEW HOPE COTTAGE - PRESENT

Holmes rises and walks to Clifford.

CLIFFORD
In his position I might have done the
same thing.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - FLASHBACK

Dick convulses, crying in his Clifford's arms. Clifford's
eyes are distant.

INT. NEW HOPE COTTAGE - FLASHBACK

Edith embraces Clifford fiercely, tears streaming down her
face.

BACK TO NEW HOPE COTTAGE - PRESENT

Clifford turns to Holmes.

CLIFFORD
It's just that...I thought we were
partners, Howard and I.

INT. BARN OFFICE - 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.

EXT. BRITTANIA HOTEL - FLASHBACK

Clifford is pulled out of the swimming pool and given warm
towels.

INT. BLACK CAR - FLASHBACK

Clifford's held down in the car seat by a Careful Man.
Holmes speaks, firm and gracious, into the rear view
mirror...

CLIFFORD
(O.S.)
Nothing renders him more vulnerable.

HOLMES
Take it on faith, Clifford.

He WINKS at Clifford in the rear view mirror.

BACK TO NEW HOPE COTTAGE

Cliff sits back down, utterly worn. Holmes places a
compassionate hand on Cliff's shoulder.

HOLMES (cont'd)
You mustn't take it personally, Clifford.
Just as the trees mustn't take it
personally when a forest is razed for
lumber. They're part of a grand design.

Pause.

CLIFF
I played it good for a while, didn't I?

HOLMES
You were tremendous, Clifford. Mr.
Hughes commented on it.

Clifford is touched at this.

CLIFF
Really?

HOLMES
Would I lie to you?

Holmes winks at Clifford. Clifford musters a smile.

EXT. COURTHOUSE STEPS - DAY

A mob of reporters follows Clifford down the courthouse steps toward an unmarked police car. 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 the SEDAN. As the door closes, the reporters push in toward the car door.

Clifford strains to look past them.

OUTSIDE he sees EDITH and DICK, accompanied by their respective lawyers, standing a few feet away, waiting for their cars.

They both look at Clifford, separated by the window glass. Cliff searches their eyes for signs of life - of recognition - of the shared joke of it all...but there is none.

Clifford's breath STEAMS the car window. Edith disappears into the fog. Cliff catches Dick's eye and gives him their familiar salute. Dick, with wry sadness, salutes back.

With his finger, Cliff writes letters backward on the steamed glass:

"X...A...O...H"

The reporters see. They are suddenly rendered completely SPEECHLESS. Cliff speaks to the man in the front seat.

CLIFFORD
I'll cooperate in exchange for leniency
for Dick. And especially for Edith.

The man in the front seat nods. Clifford sits back in his seat as New York moves silently in the window behind him.

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.

OMITTED

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 pay full restitution to McGraw-Hill and the Internal Revenue Service totalling 1.3 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 toward 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.

(MORE)

RADIO ANNOUNCER (cont'd)
This on the heels of last week's Supreme Court decision to throw out the TWA shareholder's lawsuit against him made it a good week for the eccentric billionaire, rescuing Mr. Hughes from 137 million dollars in potential liabilities...

We pass the TRANSISTOR RADIO and follow the cord connected to the CAMERA MAN'S CAMERA, past the feet of crewmen, reporters and gawkers and finally up into a NEWS VAN, where a bored sound guy watches the news on television.

TELEVISION REPORTER
...the break-in was at the Democratic National Headquarters, situated at the Watergate Hotel. The White House had no comment.

On the television is the actual footage of the CUBAN BURGLARS being brought into the police station.

SLOWLY IN: on the TV images, the burglars' surprised confused faces, as the image breaks up into STATIC...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DANBURY FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION - DAY

Clifford runs his hands over the smooth, white bricks inside his CELL. Pasted to the wall is the cover of TIME MAGAZINE, dated February 21st, 1972. On the cover is Clifford Irving.

He has been named "(Con) Man of the Year".

Clifford pulls out a small piece of white TAPE he's been saving in his pocket. He straightens it - then places the tape over the word "CON". It now reads: Clifford Irving: Man of the Year

Clifford smiles as he stares at the image.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DANBURY FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION - DAY

Clifford's has a small desk and a slight growth of beard. He writes with a child's pencil in a composition book. He shakes his hand, which is cramped, then returns to the careful business of writing with the tiny implement.

DISSOLVE TO:

SOTCK FOOTAGE: of Richard Nixon, having resigned in disgrace, leaving the White House for the last time, waving his "V" for victory sign as he boards the helicopter.

SCENE 198 OMITTED

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.

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 small sign, now visible above the hangar, reads:

HUGHES INDUSTRIES

Pages curl, blacken and disappear into the FLAMES, which climb higher and higher into the SKY.

CUT TO BLACK:

GRAINY B/W STOCK FOOTAGE: A thin, mustached man in tails waltzes a beautiful woman around a ballroom floor.

SCENE 202 OMITTED

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Autumn. The air is cool and the streets are empty. CLIFFORD IRVING, his hair a bit grayer, his demeanor quiet, walks with a note pad. He pauses occasionally to take notes.

TITLE: :FOUR YEARS LATER

He passes a local book store. Something in the window catches his eye. He stops, staring in.

Inside, DICK SUSKIND sits surrounded by a group of small children. He reads from a hard-bound copy of "Richard the Lion-Hearted" - written by Richard Suskind". He regales the children, and they laugh appreciatively.

Cliff lingers, smiling at the sight.

Inside, Dick gets the feeling of being looked at. He glances out the window.

No one there. Dick puzzles for a moment, then returns to reading.

OUTSIDE

Clifford pockets his notebook, smelling the air. He crosses the street.

CUT TO BLACK: