



The Woman-Chaser

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START HERE

Using the thumb and forefinger of the right hand, get a little slack and pull the film through this little thingama-jig. Clamp here. Leave a small loop so it won't flutter, and then go up over this, down under this, around this, and then tight around the big one. (It has to fit tight on the sound drum). Then under this, over this, under this again, around this, and down. Insert the feeder in the lower reel and you are almost ready. Turn on the sound and let it warm up. See the tiny red light? Now out with the houselights and flip the toggle switch to ON. If the sound is loud enough the incidental slithering of the film won't bother you a bit. ...

Richard Hudson pressed the counter in his hand one more time before he took a look at ft. 873. That was a lot of iron to pass one spot in fifteen minutes. And more passed the other way going toward Hollywood. 927. The Los Angeles Transit Company bus stopped at the corner every fourteen minutes discharging an average of six passengers, taking on five. Across the street on the other corner a streetcar stopped every seven minutes, and three men and one woman and one child got aboard, while two women and one child dismounted. That was the average for the location. Richard Hudson had been checking it for two days.

A beautiful average and a wonderful location. And yet, the used car dealer across the street sat on his big fat keister smoking cigarettes and gurgling Coca-Colas all day long

when he had thirty-five unsold automobiles glaring under the California sun.

With an impatient movement of his fingers Richard noosed his rep tie and slid across the hot leather seat of his 1940 Continental convertible (a very clean car) and climbed out on the sidewalk side. It had been very warm for May sitting in the direct rays of the sun and he blotted his face with an Irish linen handkerchief, jerked his jacket down in back. He was wearing a new black silk suit, and it was well wrinkled. One day's wear and the suit was ready for the cleaners, but it gave Richard an air of prosperity, and at the moment he was prosperous.

Richard Hudson was about to steal a used car lot and every automobile on it.

At the corner he waited for the green light before crossing the busy street. In San Francisco he would have dashed across, dodging between cars, but in Los Angeles, to cross against a red light means a ticket for jaywalking and/or sudden death. This was Crenshaw Boulevard; 873 cars one way and 927 cars the other way every fifteen minutes.

Upon reaching the lot Richard walked slowly around a vintage Buick, eyeing it critically and kicking the tires. Such obvious shopping tactics should have roused the owner from his lethargy, but he didn't even look up from his comic book. A lazy mixed-up skid. Richard was forced to go to him.

"You selling used cars today?" Richard asked, smiling down at the heavy man in the chair.

"Yes, sir. See anything you like?"

"Yeah," Richard mused, I like all thirty-five."

"Can't make up your mind, huh?" The owner wiped his sweating neck with the back of his hand, leaned his chair back comfortably against the wall of the small stucco office building.

Richard broadened his thin smile. "Yeah," he said, "I can make up my mind. Can you?"

"What do you mean?" The dealer was beginning to get suspicious of Richard's manner, and he got uneasily to his feet.

"I mean all thirty-five. You own them all. You have a lease on the lot with three more years to run and you aren't doing worth a damn. You should have hung onto the two apartment houses you owned in St Louis."

"Now wait a minute, Mr.—"

"Don't get excited, Mr. Ehlers." Richard handed the dealer his card. "My name is Richard Hudson and my business is used cars. I'll take all of these heaps off your hands and buy your lease. You don't want to work anyway. Why not retire permanently and enjoy the sun at the beach instead of sitting on a Crenshaw used car lot?"

“You've got a point mere; Mr. Hudson, wasn't it?” Mr. Ehlers reached out a soft white hand for Richard to shake.

“Richard Hudson is right. Chief representative of Honest Hal Parker, San Francisco. And I'll give you seventeen thousand, five for the cars on the lot as they stand, including the lease. Final price. No dickering.”

Mr. Ehlers looked blankly across the white gravel of the lot, at the flapping, fading bunting strung on wires above the shiny merchandise, and performed some slow mental arithmetic. Richard could have done it for him a lot quicker. At midnight the night before, Richard had gone through the lot with THE BOOK, and his offer was exactly \$300 below list on every car, not counting two pre-WWII models Mr. Ehlers would probably have thrown in for nothing anyway.

Ehlers lit a filter-tipped cigarette and Richard perceived the trembling of his fingers. The price was very right for a slipping business and Ehlers knew it. But when a person offers good money for something it is the nature of man to want more than was offered.

“What about my lease?” Ehlers asked timidly.

“I said I'd take that too.”

“You didn't mention what you'd pay me for my lease.”

“That's right,” Richard lit a cigarette, but his hands did not tremble. “I'll give you nothing for the lease,” he said in a flat, even voice, “but I'll take over your burden of the \$250 a month payments. Now just what in the hell would you do with an empty parking lot?”

“It cost me a lot of dough:—”

“I'm not you!” Richard reminded the dealer sharply. “Is it a deal or isn't it?”

Mr. Ehlers sat down wearily in his chair, pressed the fingers of his right hand against his forehead, cradled his right elbow in the palm of his left hand. A few moments later a notebook came out of his shirt pocket and he started figuring with a ballpoint pen. After five minutes of figuring with the pen and notebook a beautiful smile creased his round perspiring face.

“I figure it at about \$150 off list on each car, and you've made me a fair price, Mr. Hudson. I'll take it!”

Richard could hardly believe his ears. Ehlers was wrong, dead wrong, but so what? The deal was merely that much easier to wrap in a package.

“You've made a deal then, Mr. Ehlers. How about meeting me at my lawyers at three this afternoon. O'Keeffe and Cullinan. The Redstone Building. And bring your papers.”

“That's pretty fast!” The fat dealer marveled.

“You bet it is!” Richard laughed. “I don't want you to change your mind.”

“Don't worry. I'll be there.”

They shook hands. Richard returned to his car, drove to the Fig Hotel where he had been staying the past six weeks. He was in exceptionally good spirits, well-pleased with himself. Honest Hal would be happy with the transaction and the low price, and Richard was glad the search was over. Now he could get back to selling used cars.

In his hotel room Richard raised a glass of scotch and tap water to his reflection in the mirror above the chest of drawers.

“To me!” He said happily.

EXPOSITION

That was the beginning. It is also a flashback and narrative hook. This much about writing I have learned from the movies. Also, I don't want to fool anybody, including myself. Especially myself. I believe now, that I should have remained Richard Hudson, Used Car Dealer, and I should never have become Richard Hudson, Writer-Director-Producer. At least I think I know this, but I do not really know. Thereby this story, or narrative, or notebook, or whatever it turns out to be. Somewhere along the way I may discover the exact point, or the turning point perhaps, or the error, if it was an error that I made, or someone else made, or just exactly what it was that happened to me.

I have the time. God knows I have the time. If it were possible I would put down every thought, every word of conversation, every minute of every day that followed this beginning. But I cannot. Not only is my memory too faulty for total recall, I would soon be bogged down in the insignificant. Instead, I intend to put on paper the sequence of events, some in order, some out of order. I shall include some of the people involved, and somewhere during this journey from backward to forward in time I may find myself. However, I doubt this very much. But in any case it will be an interesting journey. Long or short.

A movie is ninety minutes long, six short reels in time. This is something I learned in Hollywood. An insane rule, I know, but there it is; let no man tear it asunder.

This is not a story about used cars, and it isn't altogether about movies or the making of movies, although it has something of each. Mostly it is about people, and of and about me. Already I sense that I am breaking some cardinal rule of writing.

If I continue in this vein how will I be able to establish a strong reader-identification? The average reader has a tendency to identify himself with a lead character and to project himself into the story and actually live the story through the thoughts, emotions and actions of the lead character. Poor reader. I am the reader and I dread the thought of going through it all again, and at the same time I welcome and relish the opportunity. Perhaps I am a masochist?

This is what I learned about a story at Mammoth Studios: A likeable and sympathetic hero, one who affords a good measure of viewer-identification, and around whom the story revolves, is faced with the necessity of solving a serious and urgent problem which affects his vital interests. The hero makes an effort to solve his problem, but this only succeeds in making matters worse. (This is me all right.) The hero's efforts all lead to a series of increasingly harder complications. Each new complication is related to the original problem. (This isn't me, or is it?) Anyway, there is an integrated series of complications which build up in intensity until a definite point or crisis is reached. It is here that the reader cannot possibly understand how the hero can possibly succeed. But now the hero makes one last and heroic attempt to resolve his difficulties, and in every case it must be his own individual efforts that solve the dilemma(s). Under no circumstances can he accept any form of outside aid to make things easier for him.

As I think things over, maybe this is a conventional story after all. But not really, because it is too personal. It happened to me and therefore it is important to me, if not to anybody else. But everything a man does affects somebody else directly or indirectly. So my story should be important to everybody. Some of my story is too personal to write in the first person, and some of it is too personal to write in the third person. Most of it is too personal to write at all.

But the decision is mine. If nothing else, Richard Hudson has always made his own decisions. Right or wrong, they were his own. Maybe I am on the right track after all. Six months ago I would never have admitted, not even to myself, that I ever made a wrong decision.

FLASHBACK

The actual purchase of George Ehler's used car lot by Richard Hudson went back several months; it was not a quick business deal, by any means. For ten years Richard Hudson had been the star used car salesman for Honest Hal Parker in San Francisco. Honest Hal had gotten so big in San Francisco he wanted to expand his empire. He trusted Richard, and he had faith in the ability of Richard to the tune of a transfer of \$40,000 to a Los Angeles bank, and his blessing in the establishment of an Honest Hal used car lot in Los Angeles.

The distance between San Francisco and Los Angeles is approximately 447 miles, but the people who live and work in the two cities are as different as lox and cream cheese. This difference is well-known to the dealers in the necessity of life in California: the used automobile.

Example: The driver of a laundry truck in San Francisco makes \$75 a week. His counterpart in Los Angeles considers himself fortunate if he makes \$60 a week. A clerk in San Francisco with simple filing and typing duties can easily command a \$65 weekly

salary. Her sister in Los Angeles will only take home \$40 a week. Why is this? Union now in San Francisco. In Los Angeles, the unions lag behind. Perhaps this explanation is an oversimplification. Maybe it costs more to live in San Francisco and the employers must pay more to get employees. Maybe it costs less to live in Los Angeles, but I doubt it I only know that these are the facts insofar as salaries are concerned. A cursory comparison of the classified advertisements in the San Francisco *Chronicle* with those of the Los Angeles *Times* will graphically show the difference in salary for the same types of work in the two California cities.

This difference in salaries has always been the same, even during the years of the Great Depression. Those who *were* working during the thirties made more money per week in San Francisco than those who *were* working in Los Angeles. These are the facts; the why is a question of economics or something that is not important to this chronicle. Except for the business of used cars. In San Francisco it is nice to own a used car. In Los Angeles it is necessary to own an automobile of some kind whether you want one or not.

A man in San Francisco who walks onto a used car lot may walk away from it. He must be sold an automobile. In Los Angeles, a man who walks onto a used car lot will drive away. He is already sold on buying some kind of transportation before he puts his tired feet on the gravel of the lot. It is only necessary for the salesman to determine his financial status and sell him an automobile slightly above his means.

As far as Richard Hudson was concerned there were no exceptions to these rules. Practically, there are bound to be some exceptions. But by not recognizing any exceptions, Richard Hudson was a used car salesman in the \$1,000 per month class. His salary varied but slightly. There were bad months when he made but \$850, but on the other hand there were months when he made as much as \$1,500. It is a question of values. It is the American way of life. Once the American way of life is reasoned out and thoroughly understood, the achievement of success in any given field becomes a matter of the *desire* of the man concerned.

I find that it is almost impossible to write in the third person, if that is what I have been doing. Damn it all, anyway! Everything concerning myself is personal, and that is the way I am taking it. What gives me the right to state categorically that *any* man can become successful? (Even though I know it is true.)

The trouble with the American people is their credulity. Or is it idealism? Take the Hungarians. Big Deal! THE BID FOR FREEDOM. ESCAPE. RED CROSS. FREEDOM FUNDS. Millions of Americans, with tears in their eyes, donated millions of dollars for the BRAVERY, the SACRIFICES, the NOBLENES of the Hungarians in their bid for FREEDOM. The gates were opened, the safeguards ignored, the McCarran Act forgotten. Six months later the same American who donated five bucks from his \$65 weekly paycheck is working for some Hungarian who readily grasped the American way of life.

We see things and we do not see things. We say one thing and we do another. General Mac Arthur said, "There is no security, there is only opportunity." He was right, of course. And yet the man who stated this basic truth clung to the security of the U.S. Army until he was kicked out. But why should I go on?

As a used car salesman I saw the world through a pair of dark glasses. They were necessary to protect my eyes from the rays of the hot California sun as I twisted arms on the used car lots of Los Angeles and San Francisco. But the lenses were purple, not rose-colored. To the really successful used car salesman there are only two types of people: Insiders and Feebs. Feebs are the feeble-minded, and Insiders are those who are wise to themselves and to things as the way they are. A simple uncomplicated distinction, but a true one nonetheless.

When a man knows the truth it is no longer necessary to search for it. As I see things now, in retrospect, the only thing the matter with me was my compassion for others. I felt sorry for the Feebs, and that was fatal. Down inside myself, in some hidden pocket of a fold in my heart, compassion lay for the poor ignorant slob. It was too bad.

When I made the move from San Francisco to Los Angeles I was being kicked upstairs, as the saying goes. I was at the top as a used car salesman. There are only so many hours in a day, and one salesman, no matter how good he is, can only sell so many cars in one day. My earning capacity as a salesman had been reached. It was necessary to either become a partner with Honest Hal Parker or leave him altogether and establish my own business. Honest Hal wanted it both ways so he took the road in the middle. Sensing my restlessness, Insider Hal handed me a golden deal on a platter.

For several months Honest Hal had wanted to expand. He too, was aware of the American way of life. An outlet and inlet was needed in Los Angeles to get rid of the cars that didn't move in San Francisco due to the discrimination that comes with the heavier paycheck of the San Franciscans—I've explained that—and to replace cars that were needed for his big lot. And a new big lot in Los Angeles would enhance Honest Hal's prestige.

By establishing a new lot in Los Angeles with a trustworthy hot-shot in command, namely me, Richard Hudson, these birds could be stoned.

My commissions would roll in from *all* cars sold instead of only those I sold myself. Hal would make more money. I would make more money. And the clincher for me was that it was Hal's dough that was going into the expansion. Not mine. Not a penny of mine. If everything went wrong, if every nickel was lost due to my lack of acumen, business sense, stupidity, or if things just didn't work out as they were planned, I was still way ahead of the game. I could still sell used cars. And if things did work out, I would, in time, make enough money to buy a partnership with Honest Hal. Or if I *really* made money, I could cut Honest Hal's throat and take the entire pie. Is not this the American Way?

DISSOLVE

The search for a likely location for an Honest Hal used car lot in Los Angeles was not as difficult as I had thought it would be. Los Angeles was my hometown; I had been born and reared there, and I knew my way around. A stranger who moves to Los Angeles as an adult will never learn the city like a native. Although many of the streets are numbered, many are named instead, and between the two systems, a stranger becomes confused and discouraged. Take 41st Street as an example. Next to 41st Street is 41st Drive and next to 41st Drive is 41st Place. If you were counting blocks from 9th Street to 60th Street your count would be wrong, and besides, 60th Street is actually Slauson Avenue to the native, although there is a 60th Street on the map.

San Francisco had been my home for ten years, and except for infrequent visits to Los Angeles to see Mother, the city had changed a great deal, even for me. About 200 families move into Los Angeles daily to stay permanently, and this migration has caused a fantastic outward growth. The resettlement, divided about equally between Negroes and Others, has caused the Negro section, as I used to know it, to become a mere suburb of the current Negro community. It was impossible for 500,000 Negroes to live in one small area, and they now have a city within a city extending from downtown all the way to Long Beach, and on either side of Central Avenue as far in each direction as they have been able to buy or rent.

Los Angeles is such a lousy city to live in it is a wonder to me why anybody would want to live there. But on the other hand, I moved back to make money and I suppose that is the reason everybody makes the move. There couldn't possibly be any other reason.

Another peculiarity is that no matter where a man lives in Los Angeles, he is required to drive at least twenty miles to get to work. If you live in Montebello you work in Inglewood. If you live in Inglewood your job is in Burbank. If you live in Burbank you work in Watts. And so on. Why Angelenos select a residence at least twenty miles away from their employment has always been a mystery. However, it is a well-known fact. The great masses of people moving in from the Dust Bowl and other areas of the United States have to live somewhere. So the project house came into being following World War II. These projects are a blight on the face of Southern California. Orange groves were torn down, desert land beyond Van Nuys was cleared and row on row of houses appeared from nowhere like peas in a pod. The Feeps moving in from elsewhere can buy one of these excellent \$6,000 houses for \$15,000.

Of course, by the time the Feep pays mortgage interest, assessments, loan charges, closing costs, etc., and finally pays off the house twenty years later, it has cost him \$30,000 for his \$6,000 house, which is then worth \$1,500 due to the rundown condition of the neighborhood.

But this influx of migrant Feebs, in addition to the people already there, makes good business for used car dealers. The man who got along wonderfully in Ogden, Utah with a one-family car, now finds that he needs the car every day to drive twenty miles to work. His wife also needs a car to drive six miles to the shopping center, or fifteen miles to pay the light bill. The son has to have an automobile to drive to high school. His sister-in-law, who made the move to Los Angeles also, and shares the third bedroom with the youngest daughter, and who hopes to land a husband at the Hollywood Friendship Club for those who are over thirty-five years of age, needs a car to take an out-of-work plumber she met at this wonderful meeting place out to show him a good time at a drive-in movie.

Two-and-one-half automobiles per capita in Los Angeles. That is the official ratio. I checked it with the Chamber of Commerce. The single street of iron, Figueroa Avenue, which met the used car requirements of Los Angeles for many years, is just another used car center today. There are many others. Crenshaw Boulevard, an unpaved street twenty-five years ago, is one of the largest used car selling areas in the world today. Crenshaw Boulevard makes Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco resemble a small neighborhood parking lot. In every section of Los Angeles there were small and large used car centers and I investigated them all before concentrating my search to Crenshaw Boulevard. Figueroa Avenue no longer had the volume of traffic I wanted to move cars. The Los Angeles branch office of the Triple A Finance Company, which handles all of Honest Hal's credit business in San Francisco, opened their files to my investigations. More research unearthed Mr. George Ehler's unhappy situation; personal investigation confirmed my findings; and when I made my indecent offer, he grabbed it.

That evening I called Honest Hal in San Francisco and told him we were in business.

"Already," Hal asked sarcastically over the 'phone. "After six weeks without a single call I was beginning to think you were on a vacation."

"I suppose I should have called you," I said, "but I wanted to wait until I was set."

"Do you need any help, Richard? I could send Don down for a couple of weeks—"

"Look, Hal," I replied belligerently, "we discussed all that. The deal was for me to run things in my own way, hire local people. When I need any help, I'll ask for it!"

"Okay, Richard, it's your baby. Sounds like you've made a good start, but keep in touch with me for Christ's sake. Don't wait six weeks before you call me again even if it's just to say, 'Hello.'"

"Okay, Hal. I'll drop you a line as soon as I find an apartment and get settled. I'm still staying at a hotel."

"Which hotel?"

"The Fig, but I'll probably move out tomorrow. So long, Hal."

That afternoon, after concluding the deal with Ehlers at my lawyers' office, I had

promised to meet him for a drink at the 222 Club. Ehlers wanted to celebrate, and I sympathized with him, although he could have made a better deal than the one I gave him by merely lifting his telephone off the hook. The only trouble was that Ehlers was a Feeb and didn't know where to call. I didn't care about seeing him again. He was a bore. And besides, I wanted to see Mother.

Although I digress a lot I actually have a one-track mind once I have set myself a task, and I hadn't even called Mother during my six weeks stay. Much harder work lay ahead of me in getting the new lot under full scale operation and I didn't want to get sidetracked into anything else. But now that I was committed to Los Angeles residence for at least a few years I wanted to see Mother.

She was wonderful.

ALEXANDRA HOROTSOFF HUDSON BLAKE STEINBERG

I didn't know how old Mother was at this time, and I still don't know. It isn't important. In order for her to be my mother she was bound to be older than me, and I was then thirty. But Mother didn't look thirty; in a flattering fight she could easily pass for twenty-five. Alexandra was a retired ballerina and still worked four hours a day, seven days a week, at the *barre* in her basement rehearsal hall.

Her figure was the most remarkable I have ever seen for any woman of any age. Tall for a woman, with long slim legs, she was topped with the firm proud bust of a coloratura soprano. A narrow waist, flat, truly feminine hips, and a white, unblemished skin made her the most beautiful woman in the world. In a vague way, she wasn't quite bright, but in my opinion, her vagueness added to her beauty.

Certainly I am prejudiced. Why not? A man's mother is: always the most beautiful woman in the world. But more often than not, she is beautiful for what she has done for him. Homecooking, the biased admiration of his small achievements, and generous portions of daily love, including lavish endearments, strengthen a man's belief in the beauty of his mother. But my mother never did a damned thing for me. I never expected her to do anything for me. She was beautiful because she was beautiful and she had scrapbooks full of newspaper clippings to prove it.

Her pale face was narrow, and perhaps her eyes were set a mite too close together, but her waistlength hair was usually knotted in an enormous bun on the nape of her long white neck, and male attention was usually diverted from her blue eyes. I can remember, with amusement, the startling effect she created at parties when for one reason or another all of the attention was not concentrated upon her beauty. She would rise grandly to her feet, grasp a hairpin in each hand, make a quick movement with her arms, and the enormous mass of coal-colored hair would cascade down her back completely hiding her narrow waist. This little feminine display centered the attention on Mother

immediately and brought gasps of admiration from all of the men present. In the 1930's, other women at the same party, with their short bobbed hair, feather cuts, and short permanents, never fully appreciated this display of Mother's crowning glory.

Mother's nose was overly large, but then it was thin enough to minimize the size. Her lips were full, generous, sensuous, and never painted off-stage. She bit them into redness instead. Most of the time Mother wore a pair of slanted, blue-tinted prescription glasses, and they successfully diminished the slight defection of her close-set eyes. But most striking, the absence of make-up on a clownwhite face gave Mother an appearance of clean phthisic beauty I have never seen any other woman equal.

I loved Alexandra as much as I could love anything or anybody, and I suppose she loved me, in her absent-minded way. Her way would have to be effortless, because except for her dairy stint of dancing—which did everything for her figure and nothing for her mind—Mother did absolutely nothing.

Alexandra slept from eight p.m. to eight a.m., twelve restful hours every night. For breakfast she ate a head of lettuce which fortified her legs for dancing until noon in her basement studio. Lunch, for Mother, consisted of a cup of clear soup and a cup of hot tea. For dinner she ate a small steak with all of the fat trimmed away, a small boiled potato and a green salad with a dash of lemon juice. She was ravenous most of the time and it gave a kind of wild look to her eyes that showed behind the tinted glasses. Only when it was absolutely necessary did she ever leave the house; she filled her waking hours by painting insipid watercolors of food, by reading true love story magazines, and by listening to the radio.

I shall never understand how she managed to find and marry and divorce my father, an instructor of romance languages at the University of Chicago. And I do not know the circumstances surrounding her marriage to my first stepfather, Harry Blake. Harry Blake was a very good friend of mine when I was growing up and one of the world's worst songwriters. But he taught me how to play chopsticks, and he played a damned fine piano and I missed him around the house when he committed suicide.

My new stepfather was Leo Steinberg, an ex-movie director, thirty-seven years of age, and if it ever embarrassed him when I called him Pop he never gave any indication that it did. But more about Pop later.

DISSOLVE TO:

The House of Lumpy Grits occupied a full acre of expensive ground in an area containing mostly hotel-apartments and a large, sprawling shopping center. At one time a favorite residential neighborhood, when large houses were in style, and before the California stucco period, Mother's dilapidated three-story house was the only reminder of the spendthrift twenties when taxes did not have the meaning that they have today. The other homes that once poked their badly designed eaves at the sun were gone, sold

to realtors, and this old section of Los Angeles, on the mythical boundary between Los Angeles and Hollywood, had taken on a new glittering life. But Mother doggedly hung on, refusing all offers for the house out of apathy, or reluctance to change, or perhaps sentimental reasons for dear old Harry Blake. There it squatted, its flaking, scaling exterior a mute reminder of the thousands of hot sunny days it had suffered. A small, square, cracking concrete swimming pool, half full of trash and debris, hadn't been filled in two decades. There was a four-car garage with empty servant's quarters above, and behind the house there was a huge greenhouse with all of the glass windows broken. This monster nestled, if nestled can be applied to such a monstrosity, in a full acre of dried, parched jungle, enclosed by an ivy-choked brick wall, ten feet high all of the way around.

I loved the place because of boyhood memories. A boy of twelve couldn't ask for a better yard to play Tarzan of the Apes, and a young teenager could find a dozen secret crannies to sneak a forbidden cigarette and drift quietly down the river with Huckleberry Finn.

Long ago Mother and I had laughingly christened the house as The House of Lumpy Grits, because its purchase had been made possible by the popularity of the only hit-song ever written by Harry Blake. The lyrics of this unspeakably rotten song are engraved forever upon my mind, because it took Harry three months to write it, pounding on the grand piano in the music room and singing at the top of his nastily nasal voice. *Lumpy Grits* was on the Grand Ole Opry radio program for twenty-four straight weeks, warbled by one overalled singer or another in a plaintive, mournful manner, and evidently it sent the rural-ist Feebs. In turn, juke box popularity brought it to The Ten Top Tunes radio show for one week only when it became Number Ten in the overall poll of hit songs for the week. A rendition by Lupe Runoz, a calypso singer employed by Ten Top Tunes, and the horrid arrangement of the Ten Top Tunes orchestra finished off *Lumpy Grits*, and it disappeared like any other popular song. But *Lumpy Grits* fitfully lingers on, and Mother still gets a royalty check—every three months—for approximately \$1.35. The melody, without the lyrics, isn't too bad. How could it be?

Harry stole the tune from a dozen New Orleans blues numbers, a measure at a time, and blended them beautifully. Because such a hodge-podge could become popular, and roll blithely off the lips of children and grown-ups alike, I include the lyrics here as Americana. Not a single tear to either one of my eyes does it bring. Harry Blake, old songwriter, you broke *many* a heart with this one, and wherever you are, you left your mark upon us!

LUMPY GRITS*

By Harry Blake

(Indignantly)

Lumpy Grits!

Ain't nothing to serve no hongry man!

Lumpy Grits!

Ain't nothing to serve no hongry man!

And when I saw your grits,

I turned around and ran!

(Sadly, with feeling)

I love gravy,

With my grits and eggs.

I love gravy,

With my grits and eggs.

But when I ate your gravy, I used my longest legs.

(Sotto voce)

I bought you a 'lectric stove

And a 'lectric frying pan.

Yet you went ahead and served me-

Lumpy Grits to a hongry man!

Lumpy Grits! Lumpy Grits! Lumpy

Grits!

Is something no good man can stand!

(Bitterly, with much feeling)

Goin' to the Ho-tel

To get grits for my inner man!

Goin' to the Ho-tel

*To get grits for my inner man!
An' if the Ho-tel won't feed me,
I'll go where someone can....*

(Gradually fading away to heartrending, sobbing whisper)

*Lumpy Grits... Lumpy Grits...
Lumpy Grits... Lumpy Grits...*

And that is the song that bought the house that Mother now lives in. I believe I have already mentioned it, but it won't hurt anything to put it down again: Harry Blake died by Ms own hand, probably because he could never again scale the heights reached by the epic Lumpy Grits.

** Lumpy Grits has been reprinted with the permission of the M. N. Norton Music Pub. Corp.*

FADEOUT

A round-faced, sweet, chubby, adorable, cute, gay-voiced, bright-eyed teenager of not more than sixteen and not less than sixteen opened the door to The House of Lumpy Grits in answer to my ring. A single bead of perspiration lay in the delicious hollow above her short, full upper lip. Her white forehead was also perspiring, and her short-cropped jet hair curled damply about tiny pink ears.

This sweet little girl shook her head and smiled. "I've been skipping rope!"

"Well," I said, "isn't that nice? Now who are you, and why do you skip here?"

"I live here," she laughed happily. "My name is Becky Steinberg."

I remembered then. Leo Steinberg had a daughter; I knew that much, and this was she. I had never seen her before; she was supposed to be in an expensive private school in New Jersey.

"Do you know who I am?" I asked Becky. "I'm your big brother, Richard." I grinned disarmingly. She was bound to know about me, but she could hardly have thought of me as her brother. I was only seven years younger than her father, and to a girl of sixteen, thirty is near-senility. Becky's dark eyes widened and her face flushed prettily.

"Come in, come in," she stammered. "I don't think Daddy's expecting you—"

"I wasn't expecting you," I cut in, "but now that we're both here I expect a brotherly kiss."

The color in Becky's round cheeks deepened to tomato. I grasped her elbows lightly, kissed her O of a mouth, and ran my tongue experimentally between her white, parted teeth. Becky spluttered, jerked away from me fiercely, and ran down the hall.

"Daddy! Daddy!" She called out loudly as she ran. I laughed and closed the door gently behind me.

LEO STEINBERG

One of the first things anyone noticed about Leo Steinberg was the tonsure encircling his pale bald head. It was a thin black-and-white fringe and every other hair was black, or if you prefer, every other hair was white. Any normal man, not even a vain man, would have done something about this hirsute horror. There was very little hair anyway, and a single bottle of Colorback would have lasted Leo for years.

Leo was an ex-wonder boy insofar as movies were concerned. In my opinion, and I do not stand alone, his contribution to the movies was enormous. An exceptional movie never sets the world on fire because a new movie starts this coming Friday with a larger cast, and now tells for the first time a story that could never be told before. But Leo's movies were exceptional, even the last one, which took him out of the business altogether and into enforced retirement. You can lose money, but not *too* much money on a movie....

I suppose this is as good a time as any to state that I am a movie fan. I *like* movies, all kinds of movies. The big ones, the little ones, the westerns, love stories, tragedies, spectacles, all of them. I like movies in CinemaScope, Todd-AO, 16 mm, 8mm, and in 3-D. I like the successes, the stinkers, and the in-betweens. Of course, I am unhappy when a movie is lousy, and I am glad when a movie is good. But I *like* movies.

When I entered the living room Leo was watching television and Becky was standing behind his chair. Leo turned the set off immediately and shook hands with me warmly, genuinely glad to see me.

"My son!" Leo said proudly, feigning strong emotion in the little game we played. "You are home! Home at last!"

"Hi, Pop," I said. "How in hell are you?" I removed my hand from his and carefully counted the fingers. "What's with my little sister, Becky? I thought she was going to school in New Jersey."

"Private schools cost money, Richard." Leo shrugged elaborately. "And I'm broke. Here, she can ride the bus to Hollywood High for fifteen cents."

“That's true enough. How do you like California, Becky?”

“All right I guess.” She blushed prettily.

“Hollywood High is different from a convent anyway.” I turned to Leo. “Where's Mother?”

“In bed. It's after eight o'clock.”

“Sure, sure,” I said, remembering. “But just this once, I believe I'll wake her.”

I climbed the stairs to the second floor, pushed open the door to Mother's bedroom, and let the light from the hallway fall across her bed instead of flipping the bedroom wall-switch. The opened door and sudden light didn't wake her. She lay quietly in the center of a large double-bed, a black eye-mask guarding her eyes, crescent-shaped pieces of adhesive plaster on each temple, and a large triangle of adhesive filling the space between her lower lip and her heart-shaped chin. The portions of her face not bidden by adhesive plaster were shiny with cold cream. A piece of gauze was looped tightly beneath her chin and the cords were tied in a lovely bow across the top of her head. Her hands were on top of the covers and deep inside a pair of rubber gloves. I knew that the inside of the gloves contained great globs of cold cream. So Mother took good care of herself—why not?

I sat down on the edge of the bed, leaned over and kissed Mother lightly on the lips. Out of a sound sleep Mother wrapped her arms hard about my head and kissed back fiercely. I jerked away, laughing, and Mother sat up quickly in bed exposing her large, unencumbered, firm jutting breasts. They had never known the touch of a brassiere. Leo was a fortunate man. Using the heels of her palms Mother raised her sleepmask and blinked at me in the dim light.

“It's sonny boy, Mother dear,” I said. “Your own little darling boy.”

“I thought it was Leo,” Mother replied through her teem. She loosened the bow on top of her head so that she could speak better. “What brings you home in the middle of the night?”

“It's only eight-thirty. I didn't want to wake you, but thought I'd better. It's been a long time, Sweetie.”

“Almost two years, you damned expatriate. How do I look, Richard?” Mother straightened her back and pulled her shoulders back. Her bare white breasts stood forth proudly, the dark nipples canting up toward the ceiling.

“Just wonderful, Mother dear. Wonderful! You really are taking care of yourself.” I said admiringly. It was what she wanted me to say.

“I'm trying anyway.” Mother smiled coyly and looked at me through lowered lashes. “Did you know that your mother was fifty-one last week?” She was lying, of course.

“No, I didn't I thought my mother was fifty-three.”

“Let's change the subject.” Mother scooted under the covers, pulled the sheets up to her chin. “What is my baby doing in Los Angeles? Why did they run you out of San Francisco? Where are you staying? Tell me.”

“I'm down here for good, starting a new agency for Honest Hal. Right now I'm staying at the Fig Hotel, but I'm going to get an apartment as soon as I can find one.”

“Why don't you stay with us, Angel Pants?”

“I don't know.”

I hadn't thought about the possibility, but why not? Certainly there was room enough. Of course, with an apartment of my own I could have a girl in to spend the night once in awhile. But I could do the same thing at home if I wanted to—Mother was in bed asleep by eight every night Leo wouldn't give a damn, and I didn't care what Becky thought. Why not?

“I'm used to having my own place, Mother dear. And all of my furniture and my hi-fi is in storage in San Francisco....” I hesitated.

Mother pursed her lips thoughtfully. “How about the old servant's quarters over the garage? We just have Leona now, and she doesn't sleep in. She married again and lives with her new husband down on 39th Street. The apartment is too small anyway for a couple, but it would be fine for you. A large living room, bedroom and kitchenette. There's a refrigerator in the kitchenette for your Schweppes and fee cubes.”

“I remember what if s Eke.” I thought it over. “I could have the place redecorated, I suppose. Okay, Mother dear, I'll send for my furniture.”

“Good! It's nice to have you home again. Now kiss me good night and close the door on your way out. It's late and I have to let my sleep.”

I pulled her sleepmask down, kissed her lightly, and closed the door quietly behind me. No man in the world ever had a mother as wonderful as mine. She is the greatest.

At the foot of the stairs Leo greeted me with an opened bottle of beer. He had sent Becky to bed and we went into his study to talk. The beer was cold, and I enjoyed talking to Leo more than I've ever enjoyed talking to anybody. Why? Maybe it is because Leo lets the other person do most of the talking? But he listens, he really knows how to listen. And when Leo talks, he doesn't need many words. A lift of the shoulder, a slight rise of eyebrow, an expressive gesture with the hand, a slow and meaningful nod, a carefully raised forefinger; this was the way Leo talked, and his gestures and body movements were always punctuated with carefully chosen words. It was a pleasure to talk to Leo. And it was easy to see why he was a great director.

Lubricating my discourse with two quarts of beer I told Leo about my adventures in the search for a used car lot, and about closing the deal with Ehlers.

Then you're in Los Angeles to stay?” Leo pursed his lips.

"If everything works out all right. And how can I fail?"

"Then stay here with us, Richard. It will help me out."

"Mother already asked me, Leo. I should have mentioned it. She said I could have the garage apartment, and it will suit my needs very well. But I appreciate your second to the invitation."

"It will make me very happy to have you," Leo said simply.

"No time like the present then. If you don't mind, I'll telephone the moving company in San Francisco right now and have them ship my furniture down." I reached for the phone on the desk.

Leo spread his fingers and examined them. "The telephone is not connected, Richard. I couldn't afford it any longer." He said quietly.

I could hardly believe it, but there was no tone—"But you've got to have a telephone! The studio—"

"No!" Leo broke in sharply. "They didn't call me for *months!* And they will never call me. Neither will any other studio call me. I'm broke, Richard. I'm down to my last Roualt, and I can go no further." Leo lifted his chin and looked at the single painting on the wall; a painted clown done in opaque reds and yellows, with a white face, blocked in by thick gobs of black. The light above the painting, in combination with the desk lamp, gave the picture an effect of stained glass.

"This is an original Roualt, isn't it, Pop?"

"Of course." Leo shrugged. "And all I have left."

"Well, you certainly aren't broke then. Isn't an original Roualt worth about a hundred thousand dollars?"

"Worth is relative." Leo said as I got up to look at the painting. He sat down at his desk and smiled sadly. The light above the painting made his bald head shine. He spread his hands flat on the desk and closed his eyes. "As a symbol, Richard, that clown represents my life. It is my life. When I say it is all I have left, I don't just mean that the other paintings are gone; I mean that this painted clown represents the sum of my artistic endeavors, my contribution to the motion picture, my final paycheck.

"My painting is like the framed one-dollar bill businessmen hang on their office wall—a symbolic treatment of the first dollar they ever made for themselves. You've seen framed one-dollar bills?"

"Of course," I said.

"Except that—" Leo hesitated, shrugged his shoulders and held them in an elevated position, "my clown symbolizes the last dollar I'll ever make at what I do best."

We were both silent for a moment. This kind of talk I could understand, and it got under

my skin. For the first time in many months I didn't know what to say and I had difficulty in swallowing.

"I suppose," Leo dropped his shoulders, looked fondly at his painting, "if I tried hard enough, let certain dealers know that it was for sale, I could get a hundred thousand. Maybe more. Eventually. The intrinsic value of any painting is whatever anyone is willing or able to pay. But actually, by a single phone call," Leo smiled wryly, "if I had a telephone, a man in Pasadena would drive over here immediately with a check for thirty thousand in his hand made out to cash."

A man with a more practical mind than mine, I suppose, would have said, "There's a hell of a lot of difference between a framed one-dollar bill and a framed thirty-thousand dollar bill!" But I knew exactly what Leo meant and I was all for him. This was real integrity, artistic integrity, the only kind that means anything.

I sat down in the deep leather chair next to the desk and lit a cigarette. "Mother has money," I said. "Jesus! A damned telephone!"

Leo smiled wearily, repeated his elaborate shrug. "You know Alexandra as well, if not better, than I do, Richard. She pays the taxes on the house because it is her house. But she figures, and rightly so, that the upkeep is my responsibility. I am now at the point where I must economize. The telephone has been disconnected, my car is gone, and I buy the groceries myself. Becky is here to stay, and Leona.... I owe her two months back wages. I don't know why she doesn't quit." It was agony for Leo to say these things and he turned his head and eyes away from me. "That's why I wanted you to stay with us, Richard. I am selfish. I need you. A few dollars from you-..." The top of Leo's head turned a delicate rose.

"You knew my address in San Francisco, Pop. Why didn't you let me know?"

Leo shook his head and raised his left hand with a gesture that explained everything—frustration, pride, embarrassment, shame.

I took out my checkbook and ballpoint pen. "Look, Pop," I said without hesitation. "I paid two hundred a month for my apartment in San Francisco, and I'd have to pay the same here in L.A. So I'll give you the same." I made out a check payable to Leo. "Here is a thousand bucks for the first five months in advance. Take it. It will help you get even for awhile. As your eldest son," I grinned at him, patted his shoulder friendly, "I consider it a privilege to help you around the house. We're a family aren't we?"

Leo accepted the check with trembling fingers, folded it three times, and dropped it into his shirt pocket. We both got to our feet. Leo embraced me hard, kissed me on the cheek. His eyes were wet. I looked over Leo's shoulder at the white face of the clown. The clown was Leo all right, every wavering, tragic line, and as far as I was concerned, he would never have to sell his painting for a lousy thirty thousand bucks. I made a decision on that, right then and there.

What a sentimental slob I was!

MONTAGE

I was busy for the next few weeks and I put in some mighty long days. Liaison was established between the Triple A Finance Company in the person of Mr. Raymond Moore, the assistant manager, and we set up some standard contracts based on the material I had brought down with me from San Francisco. I contacted jobbers and did some buying, ensuring an even flow of cars to the new Honest Hal lot. A large neon sign, which I designed myself, was constructed, and the glowing honest face of Honest Hal, in blue and red tubing, smiled down on Crenshaw Boulevard from a vantage point atop a fifty-foot pole.

To improve the looks of the lot I had two truck-loads of white gravel dumped and spread on the lot, and new red-and-blue triangular flags of bunting strung from the wires above the cars. Then I dug into an advertising campaign, doing copy and layout work myself to ensure that it was correct, catchy and colorful. I wrote several radio spots, but I was especially proud of one singing commercial which I had aired over three radio stations at irregular intervals. This commercial really dragged in the Feebs:

First Girl: *Well, honestly... !*

Second Girl: *Did you ever...?*

Third Girl: *Why I never...!*

All Girls: *Bargains! Honest Hal has Got 'em!*

All Girls: (singing) *For an honest steal,*

For an honest Deal,

See Honest Hal....

See Honest Hal. ...

Announcer: The glittering new used car emporium on Crenshaw Boulevard, ladies and gentlemen, under the exclusive management of Honest Hal Parker, California's top automobile dealer, offers you honest transportation at honest prices. Only volume sales can keep prices so low, and Honest Hal passes his profits on to you! Honest Hal will give you the best trade-in allowance in town, and his cars are the cleanest, in tip-top mechanical condition, and guaranteed! And remember, there is never a down payment required at Honest Hal's!

All girls: (singing) *For an honest steal,*
For an honest deal,
See Honest Hal....
See Honest Hal....

I sent a record of this commercial, and a dozen color photographs of the new lot to Honest Hal (including the new sign with Hal's smiling map) and received a glowing, ecstatic letter of praise from the old thief.

The advertising was all true, of course. No down payment was needed—if you owned your own furniture outright, or something else equally valuable. A second mortgage was arranged by the Triple-A Finance Company to cover the down payment with your furniture as security. And every car *was* guaranteed, for an entire *month*, or *1,000 miles*, whichever came first. And the cars were in tip-top mechanical condition; put into that condition by an on-the-premises Negro mechanic I hired called Graphite Sam. I had promised him a swift kick in the ass if any car was turned in before it had completed 1,000 miles. Yes-siree, Bob, them cars at Honest Hal's glittering new used car emporium were in *tip-top* condition!

I hired three salesmen, drifters and drunks, but the best I could get at the time. I needed somebody, and I planned to fire them later. For the one serious-minded hotshot car salesman in ten there are nine drifter types who prefer to receive their commission money at the end of each day instead of waiting until Saturday. Whiskey is an occupational hazard of the used car industry.

But I sorely needed a completely trustworthy office-type. After a Feeb is sold on a car on the lot by a salesman wearing dark glasses, the real take begins in the office. The buyer is sized up, his credit rating is examined, and his gullibility is tested on the spot. If it is possible to add the fine in the next higher column of the insurance table without the buyer being aware of it, this is done in front of his eyes. The extra dollar or so is added to the monthly payment and is kicked back, of course, to the dealer. If it is possible, and it is almost always possible, a small charge for handling and delivery of the car is added to the total. This modest charge of five dollars for handling and delivery pays for the services of the salesman who drives the buyer's choice from its place in the line all of the way to the door of the lot office where the keys to the car are ceremoniously deposited into the buyer's impatient hand.

Until I could find the right man, I handled these administrative details myself. But I don't like this kind of work. Attention to detail, sitting at a desk with pencil and paper and columns of figures bores me. I like the selling end, the excitement of fisherman and hooked fish. My forte is the quick cash deal with the minimum of paper-work. But if nothing else, I am a businessman, and I am an idea man. Old Honest Hal, sitting in his

stocking feet in his \$4,000-per-annum suite in the Parkman Towers in San Francisco, could have searched the world without finding a better man than me to start a new lot in Los Angeles. Except for one little thing:

I was bored. The excitement of having a large sum of money to play around with wore off quickly. The lot was established, my contacts were made, and the money was rolling in according to my predicted estimates. I enjoyed the \$2,000 a month rolling in, but I banked most of it.

My expenses were small for my income. Ten years on an open lot in San Francisco had not only tanned my face; it had brought me a moderate fortune. In a checking account I kept a modest sum of \$2,000 in order to avoid check charges. I had a savings account of \$6,000, and \$20,000 worth of U.S. Savings Bonds buried away in a lock-box at the First National. I paid taxes every year on a pair of empty lots in Sausalito which were worth \$1,500 apiece, and my 1940 Lincoln Continental, with its built-up engine, was a bonus gift from Honest Hal. By investing my money in stocks I could have made more money, but who can you trust these days? The simple truth: No one. With wheeler-dealers travelling around the country buying up proxies and selling off good companies for their own personal gains, a man who buys stock is a damned fool.

I knew how to spend money and I spent it. But I didn't know how to get rid of money. There's a difference. When I first began to get a few wads of the folding stuff I spent a lot of it. On girls in San Francisco. I soon found out however, that it was much cheaper and healthier to pay out twenty or fifty bucks for a call girl than it was to invest in a so-called decent girl who didn't always pan out after a considerable expenditure. Emotional entanglements are avoided, and one experienced call girl is worth ten amateurs looking for a husband.

My small apartment above the garage behind The House of Lumpy Grits was beautifully furnished with Herman Miller furniture and Henry Miller watercolors. My closet was jammed with clothes. My hi-fi was rigged by an expert and there were four speakers in various corners of the apartment. My record collection had been purchased intact from the estate of a Stockton, California music critic who had lost all in a divorce and drowned himself in Lake Tahoe.

I didn't own many books, however. But the books I owned were books I read, and I read them again and again. *Ulysses*, *The Trial*, *Practical Clinical Psychiatry*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Self Analysis*, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*; and the collected poetry of Dylan Thomas, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were my favorites. I was also fortunate enough to own a complete set of the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs which I had purchased from a soured science fiction fan in San Francisco for only ten bucks. My favorite writer was F. Scott Fitzgerald, but not because of *The Great Gatsby* or *Tender is the Night*. I thought Fitzgerald was great because of the Pat Hobby—Screenwriter stories which had appeared in *Esquire*. And I must have read Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* at least a dozen times. For lighter reading I purchased paperback books for two-bits at drugstores, just

like everybody else in America.

Almost every night before I fell asleep I watched the Late, Late movie on television, and when I slept I slept like a rock. In my way, I believe I was a moderate man, all of the way around, and I was contented with my lot. Except for one little thing:

I was bored.

My head was crammed with facts and figures, many of them useful. I knew the value, almost to the penny, of used cars dating from 1932 to the forward looking, sweptback anythings. And I also knew, to the penny, how much more than the value I could obtain from anybody foolish enough to shop on my used car lot.

Everything connected with the business was too easy and I was tired of it. I caught myself yawning as I filled in the papers with customers and asked the routine questions. I was due for a change, maybe a rest. After all, wasn't I now in the same position as Honest Hal?

All Honest Hal did for his take was to visit the lot once a day, scare the hell out of everybody by growling and moaning, and then he was off someplace in his little red Jaguar. His earnings were made for him by a capable manager. I needed a capable manager so that I could do the same. And I found him in the person of: MASTER SERGEANT WILLIAM CONAN HARRIS, U. S. ARMY, (RETIRED).

Anytime an employer hires an ex-serviceman who has completed eight to ten years of service in any branch of the Armed Forces, and has quit for one reason or another, the employer is making a mistake. The new employee will be too independent, for one thing, and sooner or later the man will reenlist to complete his twenty years of service for retirement. While it is perfectly reasonable to hire a man who has completed only one enlistment, in most instances, the man who has done two hitches or more is a bad bet for any employer. He has too much time in the service to really give it up, and ten times out of ten he will return to the safe warm womb of service life. No employer in the United States today can offer the deal that the Armed Forces offers. At the completion of twenty years of active duty a Master Sergeant or Navy Chief can retire with a pension of \$156 a month for the rest of his natural life. To meet this retirement plan a civilian employer would have to put approximately \$5,000 a year into a trust fund for every one of his employees. Times are not *that* good!

However, any employer who fails to hire a retired Master Sergeant or Navy Chief who has completed the required twenty years is making a grave mistake. I mean retired enlisted men, of course. A retired officer is a different matter. Within five minutes a retired officer will attempt to tell you how to run your business. The fact that he doesn't know what he is talking about doesn't deter him at all; he believes he knows all there is to know about management. For some reason, no American male ever quite gets over having been an officer.

But a retired Master Sergeant is an uncut jewel, and I was lucky enough to hire one. I

liked Bill Harris from the moment he stepped into my office. For two weeks I had run a carefully worded advertisement in the Los Angeles *Times*, and as a consequence I had interviewed and dismissed some mighty weird cats. Bill was different from his entrance, and on through his interview. Although the door was open, he knocked, and when I told him to come in he took his hat off without waiting to be told. And he said “yes, sir” and “no, sir” naturally, without obsequious deference.

I had brought a stack of the various office forms with me we had used in San Francisco, and I handed Bill a job application to fill in. It was a routine one-page form, but it covered a lot of territory. While Bill waited silently for me to talk to him I examined his completed form.

He was thirty-eight, married, the father of two children, and owned his own home in Fullerton (within the twenty-mile commuting distance). He had retired from the Army as a Master Sergeant, duty: first sergeant of infantry, and had been retired for three months.

Bill had never held a civilian job of any kind, having served twenty continuous years in the Army after graduating from high school in Santa Maria, California. During his twenty years he had managed to pick up approximately two years of college credits at various Army posts through college extension courses. His references included a major stationed in Japan, a captain in Europe, and a bird colonel at Fort Benning, Georgia. The lower half of the form, which provided space for the listing of previous employment, was blank. Bill's signature was noteworthy. Although the form only required first name, middle initial, the last name, Bill had signed his full name—William Conan Harris—in a freewinging backhand scrawl, and he had underlined it to boot. When a man signs his full *middle* name it can mean only one thing: Narcissism. So what?

I gave Bill a little test. After digging into my pocket for some change, I tossed some coins on the desk. “How about getting us a couple of Cokes out of the machine, Bill?”

“Yes, sir, Mr. Hudson,” He replied. He used his own dimes, ignoring my change on the desk. After working the machine, he handed me an open bottle before he sat down with his own. Respectful independence. What more can an employer desire?

Bill didn't have much hair, and he owned a well-developed paunch. His round face was unlined and closely shaved. He wore a constant smile with a fixed expression of happiness. His face, with its secret, knowing, covering smile, was a reflection of and on every commanding officer he had ever served. He had done their work for them, and he had received no credit, but he *knew*, and that was enough for him. There were hundreds like him in the Army, a not-so-secret society of non-commissioned officers who actually ran the Army year after year, watching tolerantly as the Reserve officers entered, served a couple of years, and departed in disgust with the system. As Bill once remarked when we were driving to Long Beach, “Captains come and go, but the first sergeant stays forever.”

A man like Bill Harris was blessed with a single virtue, and it was the only character trait the Army required from its professional soldiers: Loyalty.

“Do you know how to run an office, Bill?”

“Yes, sir. I was a sergeant-major for three years, and a first sergeant for—”

“Okay, then,” I cut him off. “The office will be your baby. Hire yourself a good typist.” I tapped the folder containing the office forms and blank contracts. “Read these. I’ll explain the interview techniques to you, and the office will be your sole responsibility. I’ll work the lot, along with the other salesmen, and when we bring a man or a woman through that door they’ll be sold on an automobile. When they’re turned over to you, all you have to do is keep them that way through the questioning and their signature on the dotted line. There are a lot of little tricks, and many of the buyers will be liars with rotten credit ratings, but these people you will have to spot and refuse. Do so diplomatically, but don’t let a bad one get through. The way the Triple A Finance Company and I have it set up, I’m stuck for all repossesses. So naturally, I don’t like to get any. Never give credit to a house painter, to a migrant agricultural worker or to any used car salesman. Otherwise, except for these arbitrary rules, if they have a job of any kind, use your own judgment. Think you can handle it?”

“Yes, sir.” Bill nodded without hesitation.

“Fine. State your salary.”

“I thought you would do that,” Bill said worriedly, his set smile fading.

“No, Bill,” I said kindly, “that isn’t the American way. You are out of the Army now, and the time has come to decide what you’re worth. If you want more than I can pay, I’ll be sorry to see you go. I want you to work for me, but I think that any employer who sets a salary in this kind of business is wrong. You’ll get no forty-hour work week from me. If you want time off, you’ll have to work it out for yourself. Right now, I’m closed on Sundays, but the situation may change. If so, you’ll have to be here.”

Bill set his lips grimly. “All right, Mr. Hudson. I want \$400 a month. At the end of three months I’ll want a raise. But I won’t ask for it. If you don’t give it to me of your own accord, I’ll quit.”

“Fair enough,” I said. “Take off your coat and let’s get to work.”

RIPPLE

Four weeks later I raised Bill’s salary to \$600 a month. If he had asked for more I would have given it to him. But he didn’t. I had forestalled him indefinitely by giving him such an unexpected raise. Bill was elated, of course, and I also added to his happiness by letting him put one of his ideas into effect. He wanted to give away free hot-dogs at

noon from a stand in the center of the lot. He had a grill set up, hired a kid to serve them, and as a consequence we got a hell of a lot of free publicity in the newspapers and a three percent increase in the turnover of old iron.

The office was a well-oiled machine. In one second flat Bill could put his fingers on any desired paper in the files. His weekly reports to Honest Hal, which I signed, were models of economy, accuracy and reportage. He had hired an old lady who typed about eighty words a minute, and she worked like a slave all day. When the typing was slack, Bill had her sweep the floor. He hired and fired salesmen until he had three of the best on the Boulevard. If he had started to give them a little close-order drill I wouldn't have been surprised. He became so adept at adding little extras to the contracts I had to slow him down.

It was my daily practice to arrive at the lot at eight a.m., check the previous day's business, and then at nine, lecture my salesmen on salesmanship, techniques, and prices. Bill would arrive at nine-thirty and I outlined what I wanted him to accomplish during the day, briefed him on the merchandise I wanted to push, and then we had coffee. If I didn't have anything else to do I spent the remainder of the morning on the lot, selling the tough ones, and adding the commissions to my monthly take. At noon I ate a hot-dog from my own stand, drank a Coke, and hit the highways to Long Beach, San Pedro, Pasadena, Ontario and other nearby communities on buying sprees for myself and the San Francisco lot. I tried to keep at least seventy-five cars on my lot at all times, and my business was so good I had to keep buying almost every day. I used the lemons sent down from San Francisco as trading material. Not only did I sell to individual buyers, I did a nice business with other dealers. Although I didn't make as much on dealer sales, it was possible to sell in lots of five and ten cars, and it kept me from getting stuck with lemons on my inventory.

I took Bill on a few buying excursions and I gradually turned over some of the contacts to him. He was such a glutton for work I couldn't understand it. It came to me one day that this was the first time in his life that the poor bastard had ever earned any money, and he couldn't get over it.

I must get on with the story. As I stated in the beginning, this is mostly about myself and the movies. I enjoy putting down all of it in detail, every single thing, every scrap of conversation. But it is not relevant. There are no complications here. I am a competent, perhaps a brilliant, used car salesman, but to embroider this narrative with my successes in this lucrative business makes for dull reading.

Just one more little detour, and then back on the track. Bill and Ray Moore, (the Asst. Mgr. for Triple A) had cooked up a little plan to get rid of some Triple A repossesses. It was all right with me, and I told Bill to go ahead. A finance company is hard put to get rid of repossessed cars. But the twenty didn't move, they were a hard-ridden bunch, without a single plum. It was the first day of August and the sun was beating down on my head unreasonably. But it melted through and gave me an idea, I left the sun, entered

the air-conditioned office and sat on Bill's desk. The perspiration was rolling down my face, and my sport shirt was soaked through.

"Ah, me," Bill sighed with mock sympathy through his secret, knowing smile, "it's a pity that some people do not have administrative ability. I wouldn't trade places with you, Chief, for half your dough."

"Never mind the pity," I said. "Lift the telephone, Cool One, and call a costume company."

Bui opened the telephone book and riffled through the yellow pages. "Any company in particular?"

"One that rents Santa Claus suits, complete with beards."

"What sizes?"

"The sizes worn by Evans, Cartwell and Jody-boy, our three star salesmen."

"You shouldn't do it, Chief," Bill said seriously, reading my mind. "It's the middle of August. Those guys will melt out there."

It's the first of August, and they'll wear the suits every damned day until I tell them to take them off. What is more unusual than Santa Claus selling used cars in August?"

"You've got me for the moment."

"Nothing. Honest Hal is now Santa Claus in the middle of summer, bringing the good people of the City of Angels goodies in the form of repos. *Your* repossesses," I added.

"Now, get the suits and get our buddy boys into them. Take a half-page in the *News* and write some decent copy for a change. I don't want those repos on the lot by Saturday!"

Bill was dialing as I started for the door. At the doorway I turned and flashed him my most disarming smile. "By the way, Cool One," I said softly, "you will inform our white-bearded salesmen that the Santy Claus suits are *your* idea."

"What a bastard I work for," Bill said bitterly. But he smiled beautifully as he said it, and I knew he would also take the blame with the same covering smile. How wonderful it must be to have the advantage of a military training!

I got into my convertible and drove to the beach.

BACKGROUND

This period of my life should have been a happy one, and I suppose it was, in a weird, unrealistic way. Wasn't I making money hand over fist, as the saying goes? And isn't the making of money the reason for existence? Isn't it?

I was beset with gloomy spells where I was really down, all the way down to the spaelean depths, complete with self-directed stalactites of dissatisfaction. Under. But at

these times I never felt sorry for Richard Hudson; it didn't work that way. I was sorry that things were the way they were, and for the people and the way they lived. And when I thought of people, the damned foolish people, and their prosperity that wasn't prosperity at all, the pit of my stomach ached. Their prosperity was something other than prosperity. But what? Why? I was a walking allegory looking for the hidden meaning in the life of others. Sometimes a wave of pity would hit me when I screwed some aircraft mechanic out of his money for a used car. But I did it. And at the same time I felt absolutely no pity for my three salesmen sweltering in Santa Clans suits beneath the August sun. I laughed instead; in their phoney, white cotton beards they were a very funny sight.

I tried to kid myself into believing I was at least enjoying my new found home life.

Dinner with the family. Mother eating her small steak with tiny delicate bites, starving to death, and chewing each mouthful until it became water.

Becky eating corn flakes, Ritz crackers, spinach and tomato soup, a true confessions magazine propped in front of her against a vase containing imitation corn flowers.

Leo eating sparingly, but trying hard, and topping off his meagre repast of mush, soft-boiled eggs and orange juice with an eight-ounce glassful of Pepto-Bismol.

There was nothing wrong with my appetite. I ate more than the whole crew put together. I devoured sirloin steaks, baked potatoes, broccoli spears, great salads smothered in olive oil and stinking of bleu cheese, large chunks of garlic bread, and entire apple pies prepared by the black hands of Leona who loved to see me eat.

The dinner conversation was wonderful. I discoursed freely about art, literature, smog, television, traffic problems, the excellence of my steak, my new record album of *Waiting for Godot*, and gradually led up to the movies. Sooner or later I got to movies, and when Leo grabbed the conversational ball, goaded into talking at last I listened and looked, looking for meaning in a drooping shoulder, lifted eyebrow, raised forefinger and twitching cheek. His gestures were punctuated with words of movie wisdom, and when he explained a particular scene he acted it out with calm deliberation. He had the ability to masterfully change his voice, his facial expressions, and he could project a character equally well in the throes of death or laughter. But when he really got going good, Mother would break in sharply: "Don't get too emotional now, Leo. It isn't good for you."

The spell broken, Becky would say, "I think Rock Hudson is dreamy."

And I would tell Leo: "You really should be an actor, Pop. You really *should*, Pop! I mean it. Honest to God, you ought to talk to them down there. Jesus! I wish to hell I could do half the things you can do with your voice. There isn't another actor out there who can touch you, Pop. I mean it".

"Hush, Richard, dear," Mother said softly. "You know that Leo is a director. You're

embarrassing him.”

Leo would raise his narrow shoulders high, hold them there for a long moment, and then let them drop. His thin lips would curl into such a tender, melancholy smile it would damn near break my heart. I couldn't stand it, and I would have to leave the table and finish my coffee and pie in the living room.

“James Dean isn't really dead, you know,” Becky said shrilly, to no one in particular.

After dinner, Mother and I would sit together on the couch in the living room. Leo would enter his study and sit beneath his Roualt clown, which more and more he seemed to resemble. Sitting there like that, in semi-darkness, he seemed wise beyond eternity, with the accumulated wisdom of every Jew who ever died since time began. The telephone was within easy reach of his hand, connected once again, but it never rang for Leo; the bell tolled only for me.

While Mother and I talked together, in remembrance of things past, Becky would do her homework and sing television cigarette commercials. Her favorite was “Flavor, filter, flip-top box,” and she sang it over and over again until I was half-crazy with irritation. She knew them all. It is remarkable that the girl could know so many cigarette commercials when she didn't even smoke.

“I was thinking about Harry today,” Mother, confided.

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

“He was one of my favorite stepfathers,” I said.

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

“He could have left a note, you know.” Mother pursed her lips disapprovingly.

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

“He probably couldn't think of anything to say that rhymed,” I defended the dead songwriter.

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

“He was a good man. Harry,” Mother sighed, remembering.

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

“He sure did hate lumpy grits,” I said.

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

“I liked the way he played the piano, but I could never dance to him.”

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

“*Lumpy Grits* wasn't exactly ballet music, Mother dear.”

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

"I mean other things."

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

"He made me a kite once," I said.

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

"Oh, he was good with his hands all right," Mother agreed.

"Flavor, filter, flip-top box," I said.

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

"I think I'll run off to bed now."

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

"Good night, Mother dear." And I kissed her good night.

Flavor, filter, flip-top box.

I helped Becky with her homework, checking it for accuracy. "Didn't you learn anything at the New Jersey school except how to play with yourself?" I asked her bluntly, after correcting three wrong algebra problems in a row.

"We didn't," she blushed primly. "It wasn't allowed."

"Okay." I handed back her papers. "You probably won't get more than a B on this, but it's more than you deserve."

"Thanks anyway, then." Becky kissed me impulsively and leaped nimbly away from me to avoid being goosed. "You need a shave," she informed me. "You always need a shave." And then she departed for her room to watch the portable television set I had given to her for her seventeenth birthday.

A fine, normal, typical American family. A famous father, only thirty-seven years old, but already washed-up, and living in the past. A beautiful mother, who could have been famous, but who gave up a career to dance for herself in a mirror. A successful businessman for a son, living in the meaningless void of day-to-day business. And a sexy, dim-witted daughter, who would probably attend U.C.L.A. for an entire semester before she married a creep of some kind with sideburns and a sports car.

But it was the only family life I had known in more than ten years, and I had a vague sense of contentment. I realized how lonely I must have been in my San Francisco apartment. The mere surface appearance of family life had some satisfaction. But if I allowed myself to think about our way of life and our tensions together, even for a second, I could sense impending disaster. So I didn't think about it.

Mother was gone. Becky was gone. Leona had finished the dishes and had departed for home and her unemployed husband. I made a cup of instant coffee in the kitchen and took it into Leo's study.

“How about a nice fresh cup of coffee, Pop?”

He wagged his head, smiled wanly. “No thanks, Son.”

“Well, good night, Pop.” I left the house, and stumbled across the shaggy back garden to my garage apartment, wondering how much longer Leo would sit like that, deep into the night, night after night, day after day. What could I say to him? What could anybody say to him except, “We need you at the studio. We have a new picture for you.”

I drank four ounces of gin and hit the sack.

GO TO BLACK

It may have been this night or another—it doesn't really matter—because it was during this restless period I have just outlined that the inevitable happened: *l'apetite affaire* Becky Steinberg.

I had seen it coming for several weeks, and it wasn't really inevitable; I could have avoided easily the culmination of the affair. But I didn't, and the reason I didn't merely indicates the disturbed state of my restlessness during this transition period when my subconscious was searching for something—something, I knew not what...

At first our involvement, if I can call it that, was merely the Big Brother—Little Sister bit. Becky occasionally requested fraternal advice.

“How do you like my hair fixed this way?”

“It makes you look older, kid.”

“Anything wrong with looking older?”

“Nope. Not at your age.”

And then:

“I bought this new cashmere sweater at Bullock's today. How does it look on me?”

“The color you mean? Blue is blue, and it looks well on you.”

“No, no, not the color...”

“All right, then.” I grinned. “You've got breasts beneath that sweater—if they're real.”

“Oh, you!” She changed colors like a chameleon, but she was pleased. As she left the room she looked coyly over her shoulder. “They're real, all right!” And when I laughed, she fled in confusion.

These were early signs, and they increased gradually. Almost every time we passed each other she managed to brush against me, or touch me in some way. I could have discouraged this schoolgirl crush, and it would have been a relatively simple matter to do so in the beginning. But I was playing “house” pretending that ours was a normal

American family, and that this was the way all families lived. I spoiled Becky. I gave her an extra ten dollars a week in addition to the five-dollar allowance her father gave her. Not wanting to embarrass Leo, I told Becky to keep her mouth shut about the extra money if she wanted the allowance continued. She did. But that was a shared secret between us and one secret leads invariably to another. She eventually got around to asking me about boys, but before I told her anything I pumped her to see how much she had found out on her own.

Little Becky was a wealth of misinformation.

Small wonder that every year in these United States the illegitimate birth rate goes up instead of down. Becky's knowledge of sex matters was an appallingly erroneous compilation of speculation (from girl-talk at the convent), innocuous advice on kissing and dating (learned from newspaper columns and articles in 'teen magazines, written by fuddy-duddy matrons), plus a very few red-hot particles of truly advanced items she had picked up from a hardened Hollywood High girl friend who had been attending too many Drive-in (passion pit) movies. I have known married women of ten years standing who haven't learned some of these spicy tidbits Becky had learned so innocently from her aberrant girl friend. And without making an issue out of it, I advised Becky to drop her friendship with this girl.

Becky was reluctant to ask her father about these (to her) burning questions, so she turned to me instead. The estranged years she had spent in the convent away from her father had erected a barrier between them. She considered Leo a brooding, forbidding stranger. If we had been a true brother and sister instead of the amused, mocking, non-related type, she probably wouldn't have come to me either. Looking back, and disregarding any consideration of the ethics involved, I believe it would have been a wiser move on my part if I had sent Becky to Mother for the answers to her eager questions. But as I said, this was the first taste of family life I had ever known, and I was more than a little flattered that Becky was not afraid to come to me with her frank inquiries.

Fortunately, everything worked out all right, but if Operation Becky had turned out messily, developing into a courtroom case of statutory rape, I would have been hard-put to prove my innocence in answering questions slammed into me by a well-briefed district attorney:

“Did you or did you not—” The D.A. glances toward the jury to see if they are listening “—give your stepsister an allowance of ten dollars a week without the knowledge of her father?”

“Why, ah, yes, sir, I did, but—”

“Just answer the questions, Mr. Hudson. What did you hope to gain by this weekly philanthropic gift?”

“Nothing, sir. I just thought that a young lady attending high school needed more than

five dollars a week for spending money.”

“I see. But you didn't find it expedient to tell her father about your weekly donation?”

“No, sir.”

“Why?”

“I just didn't, that's all.” I mutter lamely. (It would have been impossible for me to describe the state of Leo's financial affairs in an open courtroom.)

“I have a sworn statement here to offer into evidence from Rebecca Steinberg.” The D.A. holds up a thick sheaf of legal-sized papers for the judge and jury to see before he hands it to the clerk. “In this statement, Miss Steinberg claims that you, her brother—”

“Step-brother by marriage only!” I remind him sharply.

“Her step-brother—gave her a demonstration, utilizing the handle of a broom... a demonstration on how to put on and remove a contraceptive device; to wit, a condom! Is this statement true?”

“Yes, sir. It's true.”

“I'm truly bewildered, Mr. Hudson. Why did you provide your sister—”

“Step-sister by marriage,” I break in wearily.

“A girl who had just turned seventeen; an *unmarried* teenaged girl attending high school, with this type of demonstration?”

“I didn't want her to get into trouble, that's why.”

The D.A. raises his eyebrows incredulously. “It looks to me as if you were trying to get her *into* trouble!”

“I'm telling the simple truth,” I say indignantly. “Admittedly, I don't know what is right and what is wrong for every young girl to know, but I know something about young men. And teenaged boys rarely learn the basic knowledge about contraceptives until they're taught about them during venereal disease lectures in the Army. And as a precautionary measure—there was no other motive—I thought Becky should know about such things to protect herself. Just in case—”

“You also admit, then, that you explained to this young girl—the various venereal diseases? To a young teenaged girl?”

“Yes, sir. The schools don't teach them anything about it, and Becky is a big girl—”

“And if they're big enough,” the D.A. directs his gaze sympathetically toward the jury Foreman, an unemployed truck-driver with three teenaged daughters, “they're old enough for you! Is that right?”

“No, sir. It is not.”

And then the DA pulls the clincher. “I have a receipted bill, and a cancelled check

bearing your signature. The sum is seventy-five dollars. This evidence, in black and white, indicates that you paid Dr. Rums D. Featherstone, a gynecologist who practices, in Venice, California, this sum of money to perform a minor operation on the person of Miss Steinberg. You directed Dr. Featherstone to pierce this young lady's hymen with a scalpel, and—" he pauses for dramatic effect "you also requested that this young virgin: —at the time—be fitted with a contraceptive device commonly called a diaphragm! Is this evidence true or untrue?"

"It's true all right, but I only wanted to prevent her from getting into trouble with some thoughtless, teenaged boy."

"I see!" His face turns white with righteous rage. "So that you could get her into trouble yourself without danger!"

This weird scene isn't too far-fetched. I realize that a courtroom scene like this imaginary one *could* have happened—although it didn't—and yet I honestly believed that I was only being practical at the time. I had no designs on the girl; such thoughts never entered my mind. But if Becky had reported the sequence of these truthful events, and the resultant aftermath, to the District Attorney, there isn't a jury alive that wouldn't have convicted me of statutory rape....

I had been sound asleep, for either hours or minutes, I couldn't tell, when I felt the persistent pressure of a bare, shivering body against mine.

I opened my eyes, blinking in the inky darkness, still partly asleep. The uninvited stranger in my bed was feminine; this much was obvious, even with the lights out I had spent the night in bed with women before. A warm, well-rounded body next to mine was no novelty, but I had always selected my own companions. Few women, however, have ever said that I was inhospitable, I wasn't afraid; I was puzzled.

"Excuse me, Madame," I said softly, without moving, "but am I in the wrong bed perchance?"

Becky giggled. Her delighted, nervous gurgle was unmistakable.

In a jumbled mish-mash, all of the frank talk, the advice, including the business with Dr. Featherstone, of course, meshed through my mind with a dawning, unwilling comprehension. This clandestine visit was really my fault, not Becky's. I should have realized that her cat-like curiosity would cause her to come to my bed eventually. And now that she was in my bed (as though I had schemed and masterfully planned a deliberate assignation), how could I handle the situation diplomatically; without making an indignant issue out of it; without magnifying the event out of its true proportions?

Completely awake now, I reached up and switched on the headboard reading lamp.

Becky giggled girlishly again, and covered her head with the sheet. "We don't need the light, do we?" Her shaky soprano was slightly muffled.

I raised myself on my elbows. Becky's black silk nightgown and scarlet dressing-gown

lay crumpled on the seat of the leather bedside chair. Her red satin mules, damp from the wet night grass separating my garage apartment from the big house, were beside the door to the down stairwell. I tried to reach across her huddled body to get the robe.

“All right, Becky,” I said calmly, “the joke's over. Get into your things and run back to the house before Leo finds out about this little escapade.”

“Oh, no you don't!” She sat up boldly, a trifle desperately, in bed. She dug the fingers of both hands into the matted hair on my chest and pushed me down again.

“Ouch!” I grinned, without resisting, and she released her grip.

“Daddy's finally gone to bed,” she said excitedly, “and he's asleep! I've waited a long time for this chance, and I'd never get up enough nerve to do it again. So you've got to go through with it, Richard! You've *got* to!”

“Go through with what?” I wet my lips as I looked at her. Her face was flushed feverishly; the delicate pinkness of her skin extended from her neck to her well-shaped breasts. Her breasts weren't full by any means, not yet; another year would be needed for complete maturity, but they were round and firm, with tender rose-colored nipples.

“Go ahead and look.” She said in a defiant whisper, tossing her black hair, ignoring my question. “I don't care. I want you to see for yourself that they're real.”

She was a paradox, this girl. I had underestimated her, thinking that I knew her well, but this charming, naive combination of innocence and boldness fascinated me. Her red, inexpertly painted lips parted in a wet, provocative smile—undoubtedly practiced to perfection in a mirror. The smile was effective, too, but she spoiled the effect by batting her long, false eyelashes like an oldtime silent movie queen—and the left eyelash was slightly askew.

I had to laugh; I couldn't help myself.

“Go ahead and laugh,” she said grimly, “laugh all you want.” She managed to maintain her set, provocative smile. “But you started it, and now you're going to finish it! Brother, dear!” She added sternly.

“Finish what?”

“You're going to make love to me, and I'm not leaving till you do!” She said determinedly.

“Suppose I don't want to?”

“Oh, you want to, all right,” she said firmly. “I know!”

“All right.” I sighed. “You win. But let me get up and smoke a cigarette first.” I was stalling for time, but she sensed it.

“I'll get you the cigarette!” She scrambled out of bed, and turned on the bright floorlamp. She shook a cigarette loose from the package on the end-table. I would have

been less than human if I turned my eyes away from her creamy, nubile body. Her legs were long, and beautifully tapered down to her small bare feet. Her stomach was narrow with just the suggestion of a bulge at the navel, and her hips were wide and soft enough to avoid the unappealing boyish look so many young girls seem to have nowadays. As she lit the cigarette with the table lighter, tilting her small head to one side, and closing one eye against the smoke, the dormant juices stirred inside me—for the first time since I had discovered her beside me.

Yes, I did want to make love to her. And why not? Why in the hell shouldn't it be me? If I didn't, who would? Becky didn't have an adult, or physical need for love-making; she was merely curious; she wanted to find out for herself what it was all about.

Becky was a girl of average intelligence, not feeble-minded by any means, but she wasn't too bright about people. And if it wasn't me it would soon be someone else, some unskilled but fast-talking high school boy who would make out with her by working the word "love" into his pitch. An involvement of the kind would be sticky, unnecessarily emotional, especially for an impressionable girl like Becky. No, I didn't want her to become involved in any shabby, back-seat affair with some excitable, immature male....

But if I was to be the one—and I had already made up my mind—I had to manage it bluntly, brutally, in fact. No tenderness, no subtlety, no shaded nuances or romance. I knew it would diminish my pleasure if I refused to be gentle and patient with her, but I didn't want her following me around like a dog afterwards either. I had to knock all notions of romance out of her head, once and for all. I hadn't had a girl since San Francisco—and although I wanted Becky, I only wanted her once!

"Never mind the damned cigarette!" I said roughly.

Startled by the gruffness in my voice, Becky dropped the cigarette into the ashtray. I kicked the covers down to the foot of the bed. Her dark eyes widened in sudden panic, and she made an audible gulping sound in her throat. My feet hit the floor, and I grabbed her thin wrist jerking her onto the bed. I was more than brutal, savage really; I didn't even go through the preliminary of kissing the dumbfounded girl. The penetration was swiftly accomplished; the act itself hastily concluded. The cigarette Becky had lighted for me was still smouldering when I plucked it out of the ashtray and put it between my parched lips.

"Okay, Becky," I said flatly, with an indifferent yawn. "You'd better get dressed and hustle back to the house before Leo finds out you're over here."

I watched her out of the corner of my eye as she got up timidly, and quickly donned her nightgown. She slipped into her robe, and buttoned it with trembling fingers. Her lower lip quivered and her dark eyes were bright and shiny, on the near-verge of tears. She held onto the door for support as she dug her toes into the damp satin mules she had kicked off at the stairwell.

"Thanks for the party, kid," I said callously. "And any night you feel like you want it,

come on over. Just be careful that no one sees you.”

She made a strangling noise, and fled down the stairs, without a backward glance.

Becky never came back again. But then, I never expected her back. After that experience, “romance” was a dirty word to Becky. In fact, she studiously avoided brushing against me after that. We were still friends, of course; she wanted to be certain that I would continue to slip her the extra ten bucks every week. But the former intimacy was gone, and so was her schoolgirl crush....

Justification on my part, or rationalization? It doesn't make any real difference, because a man can look at these things either way. But I solved Becky's problem and mine—at the time—and I saved the girl from an emotional and physical involvement with another male of *any* age for a long, long time!

WIPE

MORE BACKGROUND

Almost every idea I had ever had in my life leaped out of my head full-blown and ready to be put into effect. But not my idea for the movie. This idea inched out, creeping into my conscious mind, darted back in fear, and then edged out again, getting bolder all of the time. My idea for the movie was like a column of surprises, each surprise camouflaged behind its own little tree. We relish these little surprises in our daily lives. If we were denied surprises we would all fold up into cataleptic balls and bounce only once on our way to our graves.

I was driving down Wilshire when the red signal flashed, following so quickly upon the yellow I had to jam on my brakes to stop in time. Squeal! Stop. Two inches short of the pedestrians' white line. A woman, blowsy, engulfed in a snotgreen housecoat, with light frizzy hair, and well over 180 pounds, gathered a play of children about her billowing corduroy skirts. One, two, three, five of them altogether. All of them were yard-sized, tow-haired, with noses running in unison. The woman maintained a whining tirade, strident and nerve-racking. “Scootie!” It sounded like, “Take aholt of Bubber's hand! Stay close to me crossing the street! Melvin! Melvin! (shrilly delivered indeed) I said to wait! Now!” Still threatening loud admonitions and dire punishments she shooed the brood across the intersection. The five children all held hands and completely encircled the woman. Here and there a grubby hand clung like death to the corduroy of her housecoat.

They all made it to the other side without trouble and then crowded like a mother hen and chicks through the double-door of a supermarket. She would need, I added quickly

in my head, about \$47.85 worth of groceries for the weekend. Her husband, undoubtedly a stupid bastard, worked at Douglas. To support such a family he would have to work two shifts. To love such a family he would have to work three shifts. They would live in a project house, three bedrooms, but much too small. He would owe approximately twenty-seven more years of payments on the mortgage. At home he would be unable to sleep, rest, watch television, or even go to the bathroom comfortably. The children would all love him, and attempt to crawl into his lap. He would cuff them surlily out of the way, down his beer, and be grateful when it was time to go to work again at the plant. After eight hours at home with five brats, the strident wife, and the pile of bills on the Sears and Roebuck coffee table, the sound of riveting would be soothing to him.

Make a movie about this, my subconscious mind hinted. This is America. This is Mr. and Mrs. America. This is Mr. and Mrs. United States and the American way of life. Here is the new bourgeois with a home-freezer in every garage next to the cut-rate do-it-yourself work-bench with the brand new power-saw, power-vise, and power-Band-aids. Well?

And then there were the Toastmasters.

I had joined one of the Toastmaster clubs in San Francisco and I was in full accord with its principles. There are no—isms in Toastmasters. Each club consists of a membership of thirty determined men, in various occupations, who gather together once a week at a luncheon or dinner meeting for the purpose of learning how to speak better. It is a practical organization. The man who is unable to talk to his fellow-American today is unable to eat. The better a man can speak, the better he can eat. It isn't what you say; it is how you say it. A simple, straightforward proposition. All of us are born with a tongue, but how many of us know how to use it effectively?

In the glove compartment of my car I carried a booklet listing all of the Toastmasters Clubs in the United States and their meeting places. It was a handy booklet to have. When I got the opportunity I dropped into a meeting, knowing that I would be welcomed as another Toastmaster in good standing. There were more than a dozen such clubs in Los Angeles; the thirty-member limit of each club and the dire need of ambitious men to make more money will increase the membership of Toastmaster's International a thousandfold in the next decade.

My day had been a dull one, and at five o'clock I had called the Sergeant-At-Arms of a Telephone Company Toastmaster's Club and asked him if I could attend their evening meeting. His friendly welcome chased away the cares of the day, and with my TM button on my lapel I entered the dining room of the Robert Fulton Hotel promptly at 7:30 p.m.

There were twenty members present and three guests, counting myself. After the brief invocation I was introduced to the club by the Sergeant-At-Arms, along with two aspirants for membership. Unlike many clubs, prospective Toastmasters are allowed to

attend two meetings as guests before making up their minds—to join or not to join. Those who do not join sink back into the faceless mass and the chances are excellent that they will never be heard from again, at least in the competitive world of money-makers.

With the arrival of tired salmon croquettes and Lyonnaise potatoes, the table topic began. Each one of us present was allowed one full minute to express our opinions, pro or contra, on the question of admitting a larger quota of immigrants into the United States. The members of this club were all employees of the Telephone Company, secure in their jobs, and the majority of the one-minute speakers were *far* the admission of more immigrants. In the majority opinion, 30,000 more people a year meant 30,000 more telephone installations. At the time, as I recall, I could not see how the running away from various countries could speed the freedom of the countries left behind. A minute passes quickly, and the chairman, a sonorous-voiced classified salesman, banged the gavel for me to sit down.

Three speeches were scheduled, and the first speaker was a bright young man making his initial speech to the club. This was called the “Ice-breaker speech” and the speaker was quite nervous and ill at ease. As I listened to his pitiful five-minute autobiographical account of his last days at Manual Arts High School; his prowess with the tennis racket in the Exposition Park yearly tournaments, and his brilliant decision *to* join the National Guard to avoid military service, I was touched. But I didn't know why.

Here was a young man who knew exactly where he was going. He was understandably nervous; it was his first speech. But the slight quaver in his voice would disappear with more practice. Within a few years he would be making \$10,000 a year; he would be buying a house in San Fernando Valley; he would own a Beagle hound, and would undoubtedly have a pretty wife and two children; and planned children at that, so the wife wouldn't have to carry her babies in the hot summer. What was wrong then? I mean—what the hell?—here was the ideal American boy, an Eagle Scout, no less, and I was feeling sorry for him and everybody in the dining room. Looking around the U-table set-up I could see this boy in ten years, fifteen years, with a fine position in one of the best corporations to work for in the United States. He was off on the road to security with a flying start and smart enough to realize it. A pension plan, prompt and steady advancement, a chance to buy stock, and eventually, if he kept his shoes shined and developed the ability to get along with other people—which is all any corporation asks of their executives—he would be a top executive at the policy-making level. At fifty he would be keeping an eye out for promising youngsters like he was today so that the entire process could begin again. I didn't know! I just didn't *know*/ By the time he had finished his speech my heart seemed to be twice as large as it should have been and I could feel the heat of sudden tears behind my eyes.

Quickly, I left my seat, supped a five-dollar bill to the Sergeant-At-Arms, and excused myself. By the time I reached my car in the parking lot I was blubbering. These men

were prisoners! And yet they were unaware of their plight because they were also their own jailers! A feeling of revulsion and terror swept through me. I sat in my car, hanging onto the steering wheel for dear life, and I let the salty tears flow. It was the first time I had cried like that since reaching manhood. It was the waste, I thought, the foolish waste, the dullness of their lives, the daily repetition of meaningless tasks, the stupidity of such an existence, and underlying everything—all of my thoughts were jumbled together—they didn't *know*! They knew instead that they had a good deal...

Our lives are so short and there is so little time for creativeness, and yet we waste our precious time, letting it dribble through our fingers like dry sand. But that was it. Creativeness. To create something. Anything. I pulled myself together, wiped my streaming eyes with my handkerchief. One thing. That was it. One little thing. And then, maybe two things. But above all, ONE THING! This was it. One creative accomplishment could wipe away the useless days and tie up in a single package our reason for being here, our reason for existence.

And I think then, at that very moment, I knew what I was going to do, but my thoughts were still hazy and I wasn't positive until the day I danced with Mother.

DISSOLVE TO:

I was looking for Mother, on some domestic errand concerning the house. I knew that she was in the basement rehearsal room, and I whistled as I descended the stairs so she would know that someone was coming. (Sometimes dancers, in performing various-exercises, assume undignified or ungraceful positions, and I wanted to warn her.)

Mother's basement rehearsal hall was enormous, almost sixty-by-sixty feet in area, and for a basement room it had an unusually high ceiling. The floor was inlaid mahogany, and was kept in a high state of polish. An electric polisher sat in one corner, and Mother polished the floor herself. One entire wall was mirrored from the floor to the ceiling. Along the opposite wall there was a room-length exercise *bane*. Near the single doorway by the stairwell down from the living room, there was an upright piano, a huge Stromberg-Carlson hi-fi console, and a rack containing approximately 2,000 records, both LPs and ancient 78's. Four straight-backed Monterey chairs, painted a delicate beige, completed the furnishings.

Mother, her long black hair flowing down her back in a wild mane, and wearing a single-piece, white, form-fitting costume, stood in the third position in the center of the room. With her bright flushed face, perfect figure, and beaded upper lip, and the fine film of perspiration rolling down each temple, Mother didn't look more than eighteen years old. At the foot of the stairs I stopped and admired her beauty. On her pointes Mother skimmed across the floor, grasped both my hands and kissed me on the nose.

"You've come to dance with me!" Mother shouted gaily. "Come on!" She dragged me to the console, pushed a button for the record player and the heavy opening bars of

Bartok's *Miraculous Mandarin* jolted out of all five speakers and punched me in the solar plexus.

“All right. Why not!” I said, and the excitement in my voice surprised me. I kicked off my loafers, tossed my sport jacket, shirt and undershirt on a chair, and attempted a couple of low-key elevations. After a pretty fair four *en fair* I fled to the far end of the room, squealing like a schoolboy on the last day of school. I was almost out of breath already, and I leaned against the wall, looking sardonically at myself in the mirror.

Two hundred pounds, the beginnings of a paunch, big size-eleven feet, more enormous yet in red-yellow-and-blue cashmere argyles, thick, hairy arms and basket-ball-player hands, a mat of blue-black chest hair; a sunburned grinning face, and a headful of dark unruly hair, badly in need of cutting. Some dancer! I laughed wildly. In the face of all maternal arguments I had quit taking ballet lessons when I turned fourteen and fell in love with baseball. The hell with it! I assumed an *attitude* and met Mother's charming *pas de Bourne* with outstretched arms and fingers.

The music from the suite of *The Miraculous Mandarin* can best be described as treacherous, and it fits the weird tale that goes with it beautifully. One of my favorite ballets, I remembered most of the tale as we danced. A young girl is used as a decoy by a band of forest thieves. She lures the victims into the forest and the thieves destroy them. But the Mandarin doesn't go for that crap. He goes for the girl, however, and she flees from his rapacious desires. The robbers get to him finally, choke him, run a sword through his guts, hang him to a tree, but he still won't join his ancestors until they cut him down and the girl takes him into her arms. The girl has broken down completely, cowed to submissiveness by his fierce devotion. When she kisses him at last, his wounds bleed, and he kicks off... The End. A wonderful story for a ballet.

I had listened to the music many times. I knew it for a savage, erotic, fierce succession of half-tones, with an odd waltz-beat coming through from time to time, like the faraway sound of a radio in another room. The coda always brought to mind an evil memory of my childhood when I saw, or drought I saw, a double image of a man in a dressing-room backstage at some theatre squash a lighted cigar out on the tip of a woman's breast. This terrible, half-lit scene stands out sharply in my mind, and whether I saw such a thing or merely dreamed it I do not know. But it could have happened, and it seems real enough when I think about it I was backstage at many different theatres with Mother when I was a child. No matter.

And so we danced, my Mother and me, a half-remembered dream in my mind, a well-remembered story floating hazily on my conscious mind, and my reluctant well-padded body coaxing almost forgotten dance sequences out of a pair of big and clumsy feet.

But I danced. And Mother danced. The longer I danced the better I became, and Christ almighty if I didn't become the Miraculous Mandarin himself, the damndest Chinaman anybody ever saw! I chased, I pursued, I made impossible leaps and came down as

lightly as a wind-wafted cigarette paper. The things I accomplished were almost impossible for a man so long out of training. As the music swelled, yelled, jangled, soared to a half-tone above legal octave limits, and then dipped down to a foolish, single tootling oboe, I, me, Richard Hudson, pranced, cavorted, darted, turned, glided, bent, stretched, and did a mad *jouette* on one leg until I almost lost my reason. I even managed an *entrechat* and crossed my feet four times before I landed painfully on a big toe. Mother appeared to be having the time of her life, keeping well ahead of me, teasing, but all the same, her lips were set in a grim line, even though her eyes were sparkling with a wild merriment. She was an elusive white shadow beckoning me on with long pale arms, gracefully pirouetting away, forward, to the side, her flying feet like butterflies in an imaginative *state de danses*. And mad Jack came tumbling after, loving every crazy moment of it.

Any balletomane in the world would have shelled out twenty bucks without a murmur to see the Steinburg-Hudson *divertissement* of *The Miraculous Mandarin*, and it was worth a hell of a lot more.

At last at long, long last—the score ran for twenty-five minutes—the music ended with a fruity belch, and I was done—timed O so beautifully by Mother dear—and I held her lush body in my arms. She kissed me then, a sloppy tongue-tangling kiss, and yet so sweet and innocent my throat tightened with pain. Exhausted, I fell in my tracks to a prone position, my arms spread, my heavy, rasping breathing echoing in the enormous room.

“*Premier danseur noble!*” Mother hissed. She stood above me, still fresh and ready to continue, with only a quickened rise and fall of her bosom to show for her exertions. I looked at her through red cobwebs, and then I heard applause. Two hands smacking hard together like an overpaid clacque's. I got to all fours—I couldn't stand—and looked Wearily toward the doorway. There was Leo; tears were coursing down his cheeks. He sniffled and smiled.

“It was so beautiful!” He said it over and over, “so beautiful, so beautiful, so beautiful....”

Mother tossed a floor-length terrycloth robe about her shoulders, and impatiently shook her black mane. “Don't get so emotional, Leo,” she said fretfully. “Why don't you take a Miltown, for Christ's sake!”

I dropped to my belly again, and in a moment I was asleep, flying tip-toe through an endless field of snowy, goldflecked clouds, following a darting, jetblack neutron into the sun....

CUT TO:

The next morning I did not go to the lot I drove to Exposition Park, descended to the

cool basement of the Los Angeles Museum, and spent a couple of quiet hours looking at Egyptian mummies. It was pleasant there, and except for the bored guard, I had the place to myself. There is something about mummies that comforts-a man.

The time for fooling around was over. The time had come for me to create something, and at the same time, it was up to me to show the American people where they were headed before it was too late. I do not believe that I had a messianic complex or mad obsession. But perhaps I did. It does not make any real difference now. My primary desire was to create something with my own mind and hands. Firmly interlocked with this desire was the knowledge that nothing is truly creative unless it means something. Unless an art form contains a message or a universal truth it is meaningless.

As an artist I was limited as to what I could do. Painting, sculpture, music, architecture, the writing of a novel—all of these art forms take years of apprenticeship. And I didn't have time for any such apprenticeship; I had wasted too much of my life already.

But I knew I could write and direct a movie! (Italics mine.)

I *knew* it. For several months in 1953 I had been an active member of a little theatre group in Marin County, and I had directed a three-act play. I had performed as an actor in several plays. As a requirement for *Playwriting I* at Los Angeles Junior College I had written a one-act play, and received an A-minus for my effort. And certainly, I knew what movies were all about! I had seen thousands; well, hundreds, anyway.

Leo would help me. Hell, yes! I would talk to Leo.

Driving down Vermont toward home I began to chicken out. Just talking to Leo was not enough; I had to have an idea, something concrete I could present to him, a story line at least. And it had to be the type of story that would appeal to him. Reaching home, I parked, climbed the stairs to my apartment.

In my tiny kitchenette I reached for the jar with the stars on top, filled a teaspoon with thousands of tiny flavor buds, and made myself a cup of coffee with hot water from the kitchen tap. The telephone rang. It was Bill Harris.

“Our three salesmen quit,” Bill informed me.

“Why?” I was genuinely surprised.

They didn't cotton to those Santa Claus suits.”

“Hire salesmen who *will* wear the suits.”

“If I do, they won't be worth a damn, Richard. It's pretty hot, but I think the main reason the boys quit was because they didn't like being laughed at.”

“I'm not interested in their reasons. I have other things on my mind. I hired you to keep things going when I wasn't there, and that's what I want you to do. And if you can't handle it, I'll get some one who can!”

“Yes, *sir!*”

“Wait a minute, Bill. I didn't mean what I said. Just do the best you can and it'll be good enough for me. But the Santa Claus suits are a good idea and I want them worn by our salesmen.”

“I'll see what I can do. There are other salesmen.”

“Fine, Bill. I know I can depend on you. I won't be down for a couple of days. Anything comes up sign my name. Okay?”

“Sure. You need any help? H you're in trouble or anything—”

“No. Nothing like that. Sorry I blew up at you.”

I racked the receiver. That was that. Bill could handle things by himself for awhile. At least I was paying him a salary high enough to prevent him from stealing from me.

The apartment was too warm, and I turned on the air conditioner. Before sitting down with a tablet and pencil I put on some LP's and let June Christy sing to me. Within a few minutes it was pleasant in my living room. My apartment was well-shielded from street noises. Christy's voice was sweet and husky, and the coffee was strong. The atmosphere was conducive to creative thinking, and the summer day passed swiftly. By the time Leona shouted up the stairs that dinner was ready, I had an entire movie outlined in my mind, including the title; “The Man Who Got Away.”

During dinner I was quiet for a change; it was difficult for me to suppress my inner excitement. The dinner was excellent—pork chops, grits, pork chop cream gravy, and an abundant salad of lettuce, tomato, and avocado—but I couldn't eat much. Leona was disappointed in my appetite, and her mouth was poked out.

“You sick, Mr. Richard? First time I ever seen you pass up my pork chops.”

“I had pork chops for lunch,” I lied.

Mumbling to herself, Leona took my barely-touched plate into the kitchen. Leona was never sassy to me like she was to the rest of the family. I not only paid her salary; I had granted her “carrying” privileges. Leona was from Anniston, Alabama, and she expected to take a few things home from time to time. Negroes never steal; they *carry* things away with them when they go home.

Now that dinner was over I was so keyed up I couldn't sit still. I left the table and fixed a gin and tonic. Mother and Becky lingered over their dinner, and Leo was unbearably long in finishing his glass of Pepto-Bismol. Three drinks later, Mother went to bed, and Becky left for the movies with three teenagers in a hot rod. After Leo retreated to his study I mixed another drink I didn't want I drank it slowly, putting my thoughts in order, and then I bearded Leo in his den. I do not believe that I have ever been unduly sensitive, but I was afraid of being laughed at. This is a real fear, and I do not believe I could have taken it from Leo. The great respect I had for Leo frightened me, because if

he had laughed at me, or even snickered, I would have killed him. No. I wouldn't have killed him, but I would have wanted to, and that was worse.

“Pop,” I began, using a flanking attack, “what would you say the minimum cost is for producing a movie? I don't mean a color job now, or wide screen; I mean a plain old ordinary black-and-white movie. The very cheapest.”

“That depends on many things, Richard,” Leo said slowly. “Stars, story, location, a lot of things.”

“Without stars. Using nobodies.”

“Well,” Leo shrugged, “even without stars there's an actor's equity minimum. Ninety a week for speaking parts, I believe, and I would have to know the size of the cast. A director, even the worst you could find, should get \$10,000 unless the studio is crazy. And stories run high, even rotten stories. Let's say you bought a magazine story, for instance. This story could cost as little as two-hundred and fifty bucks. You would then have to pay a writer for a treatment another for the scenario, maybe another to doctor the script and yet another writer to put in some extra dialogue. To find a single writer capable of doing all of this, you would have to have Ben Hecht. And if you paid Ben Hecht for the scenario your movie would no longer be in the cheap class. I can't give you a snap answer to your question, Richard.”

“How much without the directors fee and the writers s fee? How much excluding them? And a small cast—say four or five principals and some extras, forty at the most.”

“What about locations, Richard? There were only a handful of actors in *The African Queen*, but when you count in the trip to Africa and the technical costs, a lot of money went down the river with that little boat.”

“The location is right here in California. San Francisco and Los Angeles. Most of the movie is a chase down Highway one-oh-one.”

“That would help considerably. In a chase every studio has a lot of stock film on hand; scenic views, stretches of beach, towns and so-on down the coast. By filling with stock shots, the movie could be well-padded almost for free. But before I could give you an estimate, I would have to see the script. And the *stars*? One name star could kill a small budget. Why do you ask, anyway?”

“No, I mean without stars.”

“I don't really know, Richard.” Leo shrugged. “I'd have to see the script.”

“Suppose I give it to you briefly, the story, I mean.” I sat down at Leo's desk and lit a cigarette. Although I had the story outlined in my head, it was difficult to put into words. But I tried.

“The title first,” I began. “*The Man Who Got Away*.”

“I like the title,” Leo nodded.

“All right, here's the plot. Roughly, anyway.” I ran my fingers through my hair, trying to think of a good lead Pop sat quietly in his chair, listening with half-closed eyes, and gently stroking his pointed chin with thumb and forefinger.

The title is the clue to the whole damned movie. As far as the theme is concerned the movie is about Mr. America, Mr. Average American. The guy who has the job that's too good to quit, and yet a job where he can never go any higher. Most of the jobs in the United States fall into that category. The hero is a truck driver and he only makes ninety bucks a week, and to make that much he has to put in overtime.

“In the first part of the film his unhappiness is established, but he doesn't know he's unhappy. He's married to a sloppy broad; he lives in a project house, and has three children. His job is the dullest job imaginable. One day he drives his truck from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and the next day he drives it back. Deadly. Twelve hours each way. The worst possible existence for anybody.

“Every fourth day the hero gets a day off, but he doesn't know what to do with it. The camera picks up his miserable home life—the bratty kids, the sloppy wife, television, the hero mowing the lawn, that kind of stuff. He is always glad to get back to his truck; at least he is alone in the cab. Of course, he feels guilty about wanting to be in his truck. But we show his mounting dissatisfaction. I have a wonderful scene in mind. He and his family are watching a comedy on television. The camera pans, first on his laughing wife, back to the funny comedian on the set, then on the laughing, oldest daughter, back to the comedian, then to the two smaller children who are also laughing. Then the camera catches the hero. He is scowling. The camera dollies back for a group portrait. Everybody is laughing crazily except the hero.”

Leo smiled. He was interested. That could be a very effective scene if it was properly handled.”

“Right. That's the beginning. Then the first complication. The next day is supposed to be his day off, but the dispatcher asks him to take another run that's scheduled for another driver who is sick. The hero has already put in three twelve-hour days, and he refuses the run. He's tired and he wants his day off. But after a few hours at home in the kind of atmosphere it has, he calls the dispatcher and tells him he's changed his mind. He feels guilty about taking the run, but he justifies it to his wife by saying he needs the extra money. But the guy is really worn out, and the average moviegoer will recognize the foreshadowing. You know.”

“I know,” Leo nodded.

The rest of the picture is down the highway. Atmosphere. Truck stops. Coffee. Messages on the blackboards. A weary, half-assed, unsuccessful flirtation with a waitress. These are all tired defeated men—the drivers, the swampers, hitchhikers. There are the frustrations of the occupation, blowouts, vapor locks, weigh-in stations. A little bit of all of it is shown to more or less set the mood. Do you see it?”

“Montage effect.”

“Not exactly. At a much slower pace, a dull dragging pace. The second half of the movie is so fast, the first part will have to be that much slower by contrast. The hero's inner tension builds—a near fist fight, his disposition gets surlier, he buys a pint and takes a few drinks. This would really tip off the audience and get them interested in what comes next. And then it happens. Bang!

“He is very tired and has had no sleep at all for twenty-four hours. And he's taken a few drinks. He's wheeling down the road like an automaton. He's driven the route so many times he doesn't even have to think about it. A child darts out on the highway in front of his truck. A little girl out picking wild flowers. That's as touching as hell, and she has her dog with her, a puppy. Bang! He runs over the little girl and squashes her flat. This scene could be sadder than a son-of-a-bitch. The driver gets out of his truck, sees that the little girl is dead, and then he panics. He gets back in the cab and roars off down the highway.

“Okay. Here he was, a nobody. But now, all of a sudden, he's the most important man in California! The entire state is interested in him. He's *done* something! The highway patrol is alerted, and the police of every town he has to pass through on the way to Los Angeles. The idea of deserting his big truck doesn't occur to him; the truck is his real home, you see. Radio stations are broadcasting; there are interruptions on television, everybody is interested in the mad dog. Roadblocks are erected and he ploughs right through them. He has this enormous monster of a semi-and nothing can stop him. A highway patrol car gets after him but he forces it off the road and the two patrolmen are killed. Now they are *really* after him! His route is plotted, the entire highway is cleared all of the way to Los Angeles. He is all alone on Highway one-oh-one—a good place to work in some symbolism—a man against the world.

“But down in Santa Barbara they are getting ready for the poor bastard. The people are working like mad at an old junk-yard dragging old wrecks out and piling them on the highway to make a king-sized roadblock. Will they have it ready in time? Back and forth our camera goes—the driver's white and frightened face, the frenzied workers —boy oh boy! The police are lined up with rifles, machine guns; an enormous crowd has gathered to watch the kill. Tottering old men, rich old ladies; the principal even declares a holiday so the school kids can be in on it. A regular Roman holiday!

“And here he comes, barreling down the highway to his doom. He doesn't know why he can't stop; he only knows he has to keep driving. And there is the roadblock ahead of him, hundreds of cars piled up across the four-lane highway, and a steep wall on each side. He can't go around or under it so he crashes into it. His truck tips over and catches fire. He catches on fire. He's burning. He stumbles blindly from the cab, a human torch. There is one good Samaritan in the crowd, and he rushes out and tries to throw an overcoat over the hero to put out the fire. The vicious crowd turns savagely on the Samaritan and knock the hell out of him. The police empty their pistols, rifles and machine guns into the burning body of the truck driver. It's all over.

"The final scene. The poor guy who tried to help the track driver gets to his feet. His mouth is bleeding where someone hit him, and he's a trifle dazed. He asks one of the policemen, 'Why did everybody turn on me? What did I do wrong, anyway?' The policeman is very serious. 'You tried to help him. That's why.'"

"Well, that's the end, Pop." My face was perspiring, and I dabbed at it with my handkerchief.

"That's the end?"

"That's the end."

Leo looked at the floor. He nodded his head up and down and his eyes were closed tight. He was attempting to visualize what I had told him, I supposed.

"Well," I asked nervously, "will it make a movie, Pop?"

"Yes, Richard," Leo answered sincerely, looking me frankly in the eyes, "it would make a movie."

"Then how much would it cost? Rock bottom."

"You're going to write the scenario?"

"Yes. And direct it I want you to produce it, Leo. You're the producer and you can handle all the dough, the details, paper work. It's a chance for you to get back on top again, Pop."

"Let me sleep on it, do some figuring with a pencil. We'll talk some more in the morning. All right?"

"Tomorrow morning." Without another word I left him sitting there and returned to my apartment I had him hooked and I knew it.

I knew it!

DISSOLVE.

At the first click of the alarm the next morning I caught it before it began to ring. A moment later I was out of bed and into the shower. After I shaved I slipped into gray Daks, a madras shirt and loafers, and prepared breakfast. A big slab of fried Swift's premium ham and a four-egg omelet, fluffed with plenty of whipping cream, three English muffins and four cups of coffee fortified me for the day. After breakfast I dumped the dirty frying pan and dishes into the sink for Leona. Although I was anxious to talk to Leo I waited until nine a.m. before I went over to the house.

Leo had never left his study. Crumpled sheets of lined foolscap littered the floor. Leo was sitting at his desk studying a column of figures and sipping hot coffee. A pile of empty dishes on a tray indicated that he had eaten breakfast for a change.

“Jesus, Pop,” I greeted him. “Did you stay up all night?”

Leo raised his right arm with the same gesture a fullback uses when he signals for a free catch.

“Sit down, Richard.” I sat down in the leather chair beside the desk. “Listen to me for a few moments.” Leo spoke slowly, choosing his words with maddening deliberation. “In these United States, Richard, there lives a nation of moviegoers. They have been conditioned to movies —from the time they were able to clasp a dime in grubby fingers and walk unassisted to the corner theatre on Saturday mornings. As they are they all become experts on the movies. Sooner or later, but mostly sooner, they leave a Class B picture and say to themselves, 'That was a lousy movie; I could write a better movie than that myself.' But they're kidding themselves, Richard. They can't. I know.

“A lot of these people who think they are experts because they've seen a few hundred movies make their way out here to Hollywood. They give up good jobs in Peoria and the East Texas oilfields. They want to write movies. None of them have ever written anything except a letter to their parents asking for money, and yet they think they're writers. Now tell me: do you know what a movie is?”

“Of course I do. It's a three-act play without dialogue.”

“Very good. Now tell me the difference between movement and action.”

“Movement is just a bunch of crap; walking back and forth while talking, lighting a cigarette, opening a window and so on. Action shows the story instead of merely telling it; action moves the story ahead visually. In a perfectly done movie no dialogue would be needed. If it was my birthday, and you presented me with a birthday cake, I wouldn't need the words, 'Happy Birthday' in green icing to tell me it was my birthday cake.”

“You surprise me, Richard,” Leo said warmly, “A great many directors don't know that much.”

“You don't have to worry about me, Pop. I'm not from Peoria or East Texas. I was raised out here and I know damned well I can write and direct a movie.”

“What's the function of a director?”

“You may not agree with me here, Pop. I think it's the business of the director to put the story on the screen as the author wrote it, and to abstain from cuteness. When three or four writers work together on a script it is invariably lousy. When one writer writes a script, with minimum interference, he comes up with something good once in a while. Most movies are botched by too many people with too many ideas. What do you think of Piomkin as a director, Pop?”

“One of the few artists we have.”

“Right.” I grinned broadly. “You just proved my point. When a person attends a Piomkin movie, he spends more time looking for the little tricks than he does at the story. That's

the trouble with Piomkin; the story is subjugated to his artistry. He is, in effect, telling the moviegoer, 'Never mind the story; look how clever I am!'"

Leo nodded. "I've noticed that in Piomkin. But people like his movies."

"No," I disagreed. "The *critics* like his movies. Sure, they make money on account of the build-up, the raving reviews, and because they're different. But they don't make as much as they should because people go to a movie to see a story. The best director, in my opinion, is the director the public doesn't know, the guy with the ability to put a story on the screen. Honestly, no frills or trick photography, and with enough artistic integrity and ability to faithfully interpret the script. It's simple; if nobody tampers with it a good script makes a good movie."

"Fair enough, Richard. But what about acting? Do you think you can do your movie with nobodies?"

"To do my movie it has to be done with nobodies. I want to do away with the movie personality for once. When people see James Stewart, they see James Stewart, regardless of the character he's portraying. Whether he's a ballplayer, a doctor, anything, he's still James Stewart. It kills the story. I want a real truck driver and a real housewife. If I can get actors nobody knows they'll believe in the characters as they see them on the screen."

"I like it Richard. We could make a movie that way, if we had the money." Leo handed me the piece of paper with the figures on it. "This is rough as hell."

I didn't look at the figures; I looked at Leo. "I have a lot of theories, Pop, and maybe I'm one of those Peoria moviegoers at that and think I know more than I really do. But I'm counting on you to keep me on the right film track. Because when I don't know, you *do* know."

Hiding my apprehension, I dropped my eyes to the column of figures. They weren't so bad.

Title: The Man Who Got Away"

Producer: Leo Steinberg

Director: Richard Hudson

Writer: Richard Hudson

Principals: ?

Est days of Production: 28

Story: 0

Continuity: 0

Director: 0

Producer: 0
Principals: \$2,000
Extras: 5,050
Bits: \$3,000
TOTAL: \$10,050.00

Director's Staff: \$4,000
Cameramen & Assts.: \$20,000
Sets, etc \$20,000—7
Wardrobe, men & women: 7
Make-up: 7
Props: 7
Location: \$18,000—7
Sound Recording: \$14,000
Stock shots: 0
Negative film: \$7,000
Positive film: \$2,250
Developing and Printing: \$10,000
Tides \$4,000
Insurance: \$10,000
Casting, (including screen tests): \$2,000
Cutting, editing, projection: \$12,000
Music: ?
Social Security: 7
TOTAL: \$122,250
Ag. TOTAL: \$132,300
STUDIO OVERHEAD: ????

“I know how to work from a budget,” Leo said as I examined the figures, “but preparing one is a different matter. I broke down every section as well as I could, pared it to the

bone, and put down the closest round figure. Hidden costs, or exact costs rather, will bring the aggregate to about \$200,000. A lot of money to you and me, Richard, but practically nothing for a studio. Take a look at the salary for the principals.... I'm ashamed. Only one thousand apiece for a month's work. No actor would work for that ____”

“You're wrong there, Pop. For a chance at a starring role, there are plenty of actors who would work for nothing. Leave it to me. After all, this is a good story, and it could make the right man.”

“What about music? Oy!” Leo rocked his head comically. “The music alone could run as high as \$25,000.”

I grinned. “You're forgetting something, Pop. Mother owns *Lumpy Grits* outright. Without the lyrics it's a damned good tune. I'll hire some son-of-a-bitch with a guitar for ten bucks a day, and fill where I need music with *Lumpy Grits*.”

“It's a solution maybe,” Leo agreed.

“If your budget is anywhere near being accurate, Pop, we can do it. I can dig up sixty thousand, twenty thousand of it in Honest Hal's dough. As long as he gets his checks every month, he won't investigate what I'm doing with the working capital in the bank down here.”

I looked at the Roualt clown on the wall. “Right up there, Leo,” I said softly, “is a clown worth thirty thousand on the hoof.”

“My clown?”

“Your clown. What the hell, Pop, you'll get it back! With ninety thousand dollars and a story you can talk to THE MAN at Mammoth. THE MAN isn't against independent producers on his lot I've checked. Three independents are using his stages now. All you have to do is to talk THE MAN into putting up the rest of the dough we need and loan us some contract people he's paying anyway, whether they're working or not.”

“That's all I have to do?” Leo smiled.

“That's all,” I said firmly.—

“I've got to see the script Richard.”

“Never mind the script. I'll write the script. Can we do it?”

“We can do it.”

“Call THE MAN!” I handed Leo the telephone. He reached for it tentatively, and then withdrew his hand.

“THE MAN should really call me first Richard.”

“I know that Leo, but he doesn't know we have a story. If you and I do this movie, Pop, we can split twenty-five percent off the top. One third apiece, and another third for

Mammoth. With a budget as low as we've set it, we're bound to make money. And if we pull it off, and you know damned well we can, you can name your own contract at Mammoth or any other studio in Hollywood. Or we can make another movie on our own with the profits. This is opportunity, Leo. It's knocking on that bald head of yours! Call THE MAN!"

"It's crazy!"

"I know."

"Give me the 'phone," Leo said determinedly.

SYNOPSIS

There are several phases a movie script must pass through before it is completed, and the first phase is the synopsis. Story department readers leaf through magazines, novels, originals and submitted ideas daily in the search for material. Promising stories are condensed to synopses and routed to producers. Producers hate to read anything, but they will read synopses if they are not too taxing. If a synopsis takes their fancy, producers request a treatment. A treatment is longer, tells something about each character in the story, and tentatively outlines a couple of major scenes. If the treatment passes the producer's scrutiny, he requests a shooting script (temporary), and a writer is hired, or a contract writer goes to work.

Three writers later, ten shooting scripts (temporary) later, and a movie is sometimes made. This movie that is made will bear little resemblance to the original one-page synopsis which started the cycle in the first place.

The ideal synopsis is the shortest synopsis possible if it is to be read. A two- or three-page synopsis hasn't got a chance. My synopsis for *The Man Who Got Away* was only one paragraph.

THE MAN WHO GOT AWAY

Original: From Richard Hudson

Synopsis: From Richard Hudson

A truck-driver driving from San Francisco to Los Angeles runs over and kills a child. He tries to get away. He doesn't.

THE END

Poor old Leo almost blew his top when he read it. He was less than an hour away from

his appointment with THE MAN at Mammoth Studios when I handed him the neatly-typed page. The way I figured it, the less THE MAN had to question, the more leeway Leo would have for his arguments. But Leo didn't see it that way.

"For three days now you tell me you're working on the story and then you hand me this!" Leo's bald head was a fiery red, and his hands were trembling.

"Take it easy, Pop," I said calmly. "Be sensible. You enter THE MAN'S office with a treatment and he'll tell you to leave it so he can read it later. A nice quiet brush-off. This is one very short pungent paragraph and he will have to read it in your presence. He will be forced to ask questions, and then you've got him. You *sell* the story. We aren't beggars, for Christ's sake, we're putting up our own dough and your personal reputation as a movie maker. Hell buy the idea because it's cheap. He won't expect much, and he won't have to invest much to do you the favor you're entitled to. You've made a lot of money for Mammoth in your time."

"And I've lost them plenty, too," Leo said bitterly.

"Don't remind THE MAN of that. Come on, let's go." I drove Leo to Mammoth Studios in Culver City, and dropped him at the gate.

For the next two hours I was miserable, nursing self-doubts. The front I had put on for Leo had disappeared at the gate to the studio. I sat in a Chinese restaurant two blocks away from Mammoth drinking hot tea and chain-smoking king-sized cigarettes. If we were in instead of out, my real troubles would begin. I was jettisoning everything I had worked for, and worked for hard, during the last ten years. My entire savings, and Honest Hal's dough, too. If the movie failed, I would not only be black-balled in the used-car business, I might end up in jail.

Self-doubt is the worst thing that can happen to a man. It tightens the stomach muscles, freezes the intellect. But worst of all it causes men to stay in dead-end jobs all of their lives because they are afraid to try anything else, afraid of failure, afraid to lose their stupid security. Afraid, period.

I remembered an advertisement that had appeared in all of the national magazines several years ago. Every time I happened to see it in a magazine it made me sick to my stomach.

A large Detroit automobile factory ran a photograph of three generations of a family at work. In the photo on a full page, the smiling faces of a grandfather, a father and a son gaped vacantly at each other, standing beside a machine of some kind in the factory. All of the men were in overalls, including the grandfather. Sixty years of employment in the same factory were represented by the three men, and not one of them had managed to get out of overalls. Three generations on the assembly line. It was one of the most pitiful photographs I have ever looked at; three smiling failures completely unaware of their plight! Instead of being ashamed, the automobile company was evidently proud of its three faithful workers; it proved their automobile was a good one, I supposed. But all the

photograph meant to me, or to any other thinking American, was that these assembly-line workers were doing the same thing, day after day, and were too stupid to realize that they were throwing their lives down the drain. It was hard to believe that the youngest worker couldn't see himself in thirty more years when he looked at his grandfather....

When I thought about this photograph, my confidence returned to me in force. If Mammoth Studios turned Leo down, I would take my movie elsewhere! There were other studios, and I could get more money, some way. One way or another, my movie would be produced!

My message was important! It had to be brought to the attention of the public! And once the movie was released, it would be easy to tie up the loose ends. I would ease Hal's dough back into the bank first and he would never know the difference. The movie would make some money, even if it was only used as the second half of a double feature. If we kept on schedule, cut every corner possible, I might even make a few dollars, fifty thousand or so. When Leo walked into the cafe, I was contemplating a very rosy future.

"We are in," Leo announced triumphantly. "THE MAN bought all of it. You to write and direct, me to produce. Mammoth will put up facilities and staff in lieu of cash, which is even better than I expected. We even have offices assigned to us and the name is being painted on the doors now. Elgee Productions!"

"Elgee?" I asked vacantly. "What's that?"

"My own concoction," Leo grinned. "L. G. Lumpy Grits! It will be our own little secret, Mr. Director. Let us eat. I want the most mixed-up concoction this Chinaman can prepare. Damn the ulcers, full speed ahead!"

I laughed so wildly, a patron at a nearby table was startled into dropping his fork.

MISS LAURA HARMON

There were twenty different film scripts on my desk, each of them bound in a blue manuscript cover. All of the manuscripts had been money-makers for Mammoth, and I had read them all, looking for a basic approach, trying to learn how to write a script for my own movie. After a week of reading and study I still didn't know how to begin.

If I could only get started I knew it would be easy. But how could I get started...?

Laura Harmon didn't help matters. She was a tall, heavily-breasted young woman of twenty-four or—six, with strong white teeth, a dazzling smile, and fine ash-blonde hair hanging to her shoulders. The fuzzy sweaters she wore to the office each day were always two sizes too small-for her, and she had the disconcerting habit of leaning periodically over my desk. For three days in a row, when Laura bent over my desk to ask a question, I shoved my chair back automatically. But on the fourth day I moved it forward instead and my chest almost made contact with those large breasts.

Laura had been assigned to me as a personal secretary, but she was evidently under the impression she could learn something from me about screenwriting. But after a few days in the same small office, looking at her, smelling her, and bored with old scenarios, I was tempted to teach her something I knew very well.

Laura backed away from the near-contact, smiling. "I was going out for coffee, Mr. Hudson," she said uneasily, "and I wanted to ask you if it was all right. That is, unless you want to dictate now."

In four days she must have asked me twenty times if I wanted to dictate anything. My negative answers never seemed to register. I looked at her insolently, slowly, and approvingly. She was a bit hippy. Under my scrutiny Laura wilted, retreating into a natural state of feminine inferiority women affect when they don't know what else to do.

I had worked too hard since my arrival in Los Angeles. Except for the single, highly unsatisfactory episode with Becky, there had been little time in my schedule for women. And once I became embarked in full-scale work on my movie, there would be even less time. Hurriedly, I made up my mind.

"Let's go to the beach, Laura."

"Do you want to look for locations, Mr. Hudson?" A bright, intelligent question.

"Not exactly. I have my locations pretty well in mind. We'll just take the afternoon off and go swimming."

"I'll have to stop at my apartment for my suit...."

"Fine."

We picked up Laura's suit and the other accessories women consider necessary for an afternoon at the beach, and drove to Laguna. I felt guilty about not working, or at least for not attempting to work, but I consoled myself with the thought that a day off and a little sex play would ease my inner tension. On the drive to the beach, with the top down, my worries about the script gradually deserted me.

When Laura came out of our rented cabana in a white one-piece bathing suit, all extraneous thoughts not concerning the task at hand were dissipated into the ocean breezes. Why shouldn't a woman be a little hippy?

It was my turn to change. I entered the narrow cabana and slipped into my trunks. Laura's clothes were scattered carelessly along the small bench against the wall and it was necessary to hang them up before I could sit down to remove my shoes. On an impulse, I squeezed Laura's panties, brassiere and slip into a small silky ball and buried my face into the softness, inhaling deeply of her delicious female fragrance. I had to laugh at myself. When a man starts doing weird things like that, he needs a woman in the worst way. In sudden disgust, I tossed her underthings on the floor, left the cabana and joined Laura at the water's edge.

I grabbed Laura's hand and dragged her, squealing, into the cold purple water, and ducked her viciously beneath an incoming wave. We had a good time in the surf. Although the water was freezing at first, we got used to it, and both of us were exhilarated by the combination of holiday, sun and surf.

We whiled away the afternoon, baking in the sun or plunging into the surf. At five a cool wind came up and we took turns in the cabana again, showering and changing back into our clothes. The long afternoon had made me ravenous.

“Could you eat a horse, Laura?”

“No,” she replied seriously, “but I can eat a small Shetland pony.”

“Let's drive to the Hangover House instead, and settle for a prime sirloin.”

“That would be wonderful! Laura's face brightened, then fell. “But my hair!” She wailed. “It looks terrible!”

“The steak won't mind. Come on.”

It was a bad time of the day for driving. The beach road was crowded and I crawled through all of the popular beaches—Long Beach, Venice, Ocean Park, Santa Monica — before the traffic thinned out on 101. It was almost seven when we were seated at a table on the glass-enclosed loggia of Hangover House. The sun had disappeared, and instead of the usual view of the surf pounding against the rocks, we could only hear its crashing roar below us. We dived into our salads hungrily before finishing our martinis. And we made an elaborate joke of dividing the butter equally between us while we waited for the steaks. Away from the office, Laura had turned out to be good company. I was beginning to like her.

The steaks were excellent, medium rare, and we consumed them in respectful silence, not talking until after the arrival of coffee and brandy.

“You seem a little too well-educated and intelligent, Laura,” I said, “to be a writer's secretary. With a degree from Stanford, it seems you could do better.”

“It's a start, Mr. Hudson.”

“Richard.”

“Richard. But I hope to be a writer myself some day. I've done a few things already—at college—and a job with the studio, almost any kind of job connected with the movies, seemed like a good place to begin. And I can learn so much from writers like you! You don't know how glad I was to get out of that typing pool! For the last three months I've been typing contracts, contracts, contracts. It's the most boring work in the world.”

“I can imagine.”

“I'm really anxious to start work on the script I read the synopsis you wrote, and there seems to be so much *leeway*! I mean,” Laura peered at me anxiously, “it's a good story

and all, I suppose, but there seems to be a million possibilities. It seems that way to me, I mean,” she finished lamely.

“I don't work like other writers,” I replied cryptically. “Let's dance.”

It was best to get Laura off the subject of the movie. On the dance floor, with her well-cushioned breasts pressing hard against my chest, I wondered why this woman who was so obviously a woman wanted to be so intelligent. Women are made for bed, and men are made for war. Life would be so simple if both sexes could only remember these basic facts of life.

The table had been cleared by the time the music stopped. Over Laura's protest I ordered two double-scotch-and-sodas. I grabbed the conversational ball and pumped Laura with my practiced interviewer's technique.

She had been president of the Drama Club, a member of the college debating team, and she had acted in a dozen plays. Two of her one-act plays had been produced at Stanford, and in the graduation year-book she had been classified as: The all-around type, with teeth. Most likely to have her name on a theatre marquee.”

Very interesting, if true.

We had another for the road, and I paid the tab; a stiff one. We climbed into the Continental and at Malibu I took the cut-off for the Hollywood Hills and a well-remembered parking place. I cut the lights, and we could see the lights of Hollywood winking far below us.

Without a word I kissed Laura's full lips and she responded gallantly. It wasn't exactly a kiss; it was more like a saliva test. Then I met resistance; she pushed me away. Slightly miffed, but not impatient, I switched on the radio, watched Laura out of the corner of my eye. Music came in solidly, with a thick, pulsating boom from the bass. I lit a cigarette, tossed it away quickly.

Slowly and deliberately, Laura was slipping her tight sweater over her head. She folded it neatly, placed it on the seat. She leaned forward, unfastened her brassiere at the back, removed it, and folded it over the sweater. With her eyes closed, Laura leaned her head back against the seat, and dropped her arms listlessly. Her melon-shaped breasts loomed clearly in the yellow light from the radio dial.

I turned toward her eagerly—

“Just one minute, Richard,” Laura said quietly. The sharpness in her voice halted my mouth two inches from hers. My fingers trembled over her breasts.

“Before you get started,” she stated matter of factly, “Id better explain the rules.”

“Yeah,” I whispered huskily.

“Number one,” she recited, “you can kiss me, but not too wet I don't like it. Two, you can fondle my breasts if you like, but that is all. When you're ready, just tell me, and

I'll... I'll relieve you."

"You'll what?"

"I'll *relieve* you. You know what I mean. I'm a virgin, whether you believe it or not, and I intend to stay that way. On the other hand I owe you some kind of a good time for the afternoon on the beach, the steak, and the drinks. But I *don't* owe you my virginity."

She was so calm, so schoolteacherish with her damned, preposterous rules that all of the desire I had kindled disappeared completely. I was more amused than angered. I could picture her at some college Lover's Lane, outlining these same rules to a panting, eager sophomore who had just blown his month's allowance on an evening's entertainment.

I laughed boisterously, moved back to my side of the seat, and ran my fingers through my hair.

"So you're one of those fellatio experts," I laughed.

"What's that?"

"There's something wrong with your thinking," I told her seriously. "You majored in dramatics and minored in the humanities. It should have been the other way around."

"I don't understand." She was genuinely surprised. "I've never had any objections before from anybody...."

"Don't worry about it, Laura. It's just that I'm not one of your schoolboy dates, that's all. I'll take you home." I started the car, and Laura hastily donned her bra and sweater.

"One more thing," I said, as I fought the wheel down the winding road, "you'd better get a few medical texts and check the way you're heading. You're laying in a big stock of emotional grief for yourself."

When I parked in front of her apartment house, a narrow three-story structure in pink stucco, I reached over into the back seat, retrieved Laura's swimming things and handed them to her.

"Good night, Laura."

"Don't you want to kiss me good night?" Her lips were trembling and tears were very close behind her eyes.

"No thanks," I said grimly. "I kiss too wetly." I pulled the door shut and drove away. In my rear-view mirror I could see her watching the car, a forlorn figure with wet towel, bathing suit and beach bag clutched to her waist.

Tension gradually built inside my stomach as I drove directly home. After a lukewarm shower and change to pajamas I roamed my small apartment restlessly. Bored, I picked up a copy of T. S. Eliot's "Collected Poetry" and idly flipped the pages. I read sections from *Ash Wednesday*:

And I who am here dissembled
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd.

These lines strangely excited me. Putting *Night on Bald Mountain* on the turntable, and after twisting up the volume, I turned to the beginning of the poem and began to read it aloud. I had to raise my voice against the weight of the stereo speakers until I was almost screaming the embittered lines. By the time I reached the end of the poem my eyes were streaming with self-pity, and my heart was full of compassionate love for Laura. Poor, poor, misguided young woman. I turned off the player and in the abrupt silence hurriedly pulled slacks on over my pyjama trousers. I was so choked with super-charged emotion my throat made funny noises and it was impossible to check the copious flow of tears.

I drove straight to Laura's apartment house, ignoring the red lights that blocked my way, driving mechanically. I parked, and locked the car before climbing the two flights to Laura's apartment. A trifle dazed, uncertain of myself, with no plausible or planned purpose in mind, I scratched apprehensively at her door.

The door was opened almost immediately. Laura, fresh and warmly pink from a long shower, her damp head wrapped turban-fashion in a white towel, and holding her robe closed with her left hand, stared at me with an expression of bewildered amazement on her pretty face.

I was still weeping helplessly, self-induced tears, yes, but they were real tears all the same. The combination of music and poetry had unlocked a hidden spring. And what can equal the tragedy of a strong man's tears? A moment later Laura was crying too, with sympathetic empathy. We clung to each other, desperately; Laura pulled me inside, and kicked the door closed. As I staggered weakly to the clean-smelling, pull-down Murphy bed, Laura ripped the thin silk pyjama jacket from my back, scraping my flesh with her sharp, impatient fingernails.

Her warm, soft mouth opened as I kissed her and she bit gently into my lower lip; caressed it soothingly with her tongue. Our breaths and tongues met and mingled. With our mouths locked together we fell back on the bed. Then I was on my back and Laura was kissing me all over as she tugged my belt loose with practiced hands. Her restless tongue, hot and hard, licked beneath my neck, at my armpit, stabbed wetly into my ear. Her trembling fingers danced like feathertips as they searched my body, exploring, tantalizing me until I wanted her with an urgency that could no longer be suppressed. Her nails raked cruelly across my shoulders, and she uttered incomprehensible animal sounds. Waves of feeling washed over me; she moaned, shuddered, and held me tighter —

“Dearest, dearest!” She cried happily (but unpractically for the moment). “Again, again, again!”

This woman was a virgin? I thought with genuine inner amusement Laura had merely proven the great value of a college education, that was all. The obscure tricks she knew couldn't be learned from books, but I didn't really care.

It may be fun to know, but it's even more fun to be fooled.

DISSOLVE

The next morning I was back in my own apartment and quite rational again. After getting a large breakfast under my belt I called Mammoth Studios and had the switchboard put me through to Mr. Knowles, the personnel manager.

“This is Richard Hudson,” I told him. “Elgee Productions.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Your office assigned a secretary to me, a Miss Laura Harmon.”

“Yes, sir. A very competent woman.”

“I agree,” I said, “for typing maybe, but I'm afraid she isn't quite the type to work with a writer. She doesn't grasp the problems. I'm sending her back, and I recommend her for the typing pool. At any rate, I won't need a secretary for several days anyway. I'm going to work at home. But I'll let you know, Mr. Knowles.”

“Fine, Mr. Hudson, and I'm very sorry about Miss Harmon. But you never can tell how these girls will work out until you give them an opportunity. I knew she was inexperienced, but she has a fine background, and—”

“I feel the same way you do, Mr. Knowles. Everybody is entitled to at least one chance, but Miss Harmon just doesn't have the personality to work with writers. I'm certain you can find her a suitable typing assignment. She's a very capable typist.”

“Thank you, Mr. Hudson. I wish some of the other people here at the studio took as much interest in personnel problems as you do.” His voice sounded sincere, so I let it pass.

I racked the telephone, shrugged, and made another pot of coffee.

WIPE TO:

During my high school senior year I grabbed the lead in the senior play. The fact that I was handsome had nothing to do with my getting the part; it was Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and I had to work like hell to win the lead. I knew my lines backward and forward, and each piece of stage business was engraved on my mind with blueprint

accuracy. And yet, when opening night rolled around, I cowered in my dressing room with a dry mouth and sweat rolling down my back. I couldn't go on. I knew it!

Miss Hartwell, our English teacher, who also doubled as the director for school plays, and who acted as our Drama Club adviser, found me there. She was an old maid, but she was all business when it came to playacting and English composition, and she knew more about people than anyone I have ever met.

She squeezed my sweaty hand. "It looks like our leading man has a slight case of stage fright." She smiled kindly, but there was no sympathy in her voice.

"I can't go out there tonight Miss Hartwell. I don't care what you call it I simply can't face that stupid bunch of parents!"

"Stage fright is a wonderful thing, Richard," Miss Hartwell said simply, "as long as you can control it. And you can. The reason actors get stage fright, professionals as well as amateurs, is because they're afraid they will not be as good as they think they are. Now let that sink in."

I let this statement sink in.

"But I *am* as good as I think I am," I said with conviction.

"Of course you are."

And I was, in the senior play, anyway.

But the writing of a scenario was a different matter.

For two days I had been holed up in a small suite in the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. The windows were closed and the Venetian blinds were tightly shut. In the electric brilliance it could have been any hour of the day or night.

A new IBM electric typewriter sat on a typing table in the center of the sitting room humming away, ready to go, but still untouched by my fingers. There was a new tape-recorder on the coffee table, loaded and ready with a full hour tape, but I hadn't even coughed into the microphone. If I wanted to dictate, all I had to do was push a button and start talking.

But I couldn't get started. I didn't know how to start. Maybe I wasn't as capable as I thought I was, but Leo expected a script and I had to produce one. A fresh sheet of paper was in the typewriter and the story was in my mind. I knew what I wanted and still I couldn't get started. I was beginning to get panicky. There was a knock on the door. A reprieve!

"Come in," I shouted friendly.

"It's me," Bill Harris announced as he entered the door. He looked quizzically at the typewriter and tape recorder.

"How did you find me, Bill?"

"Your mother told me where you were.

"You must have really snowed her to find out. I told her not to tell anybody."

"I did," he admitted with a smile, "but it's important, Richard, or I wouldn't have bothered you."

"What I'm doing is more important." My voice lacked conviction.

"What are you doing, anyway? I haven't seen you in over a week. Things are really going to hell down at the lot I wouldn't bother you with anything minor, but I just don't know enough about what I'm doing to run around half-cocked. The damned cars aren't moving; the two salesmen finally hired to wear the Santa Claus suits couldn't sell newspapers if the headlines declared war on England."

"I know, I know," I said wearily.

"We need some new cars too. I thought at first I'd buy up some iron from Tone in Fullerton, but he's too sharp for me. I bought three '46 Fords from Barefoot Pete in Santa Monica, and when they were delivered Graphite Sam blew his top. One had a cracked block, and another had a hole the size of a dime in the gas tank. I feel like a damned fool."

"Anybody who deals with Barefoot Pete *is* a damned fool," I grinned.

"You used to buy from him—"

"That's different," I snapped. "I know the son-of-a-bitch!"

"Well, I know him now," Bill said sadly. "But I still got stuck. What are you doing, Richard? If you don't want to tell me, okay. But problems are stacking up on me and business is off thirty-two percent this week."

"Take some notes." As Bill got his notebook and pencil ready I thought fast. When it came to used cars I knew what I was doing. There was no mental block here. When it came to used cars I could talk all day and all night and still have fresh ideas.

"Call Fred McCullers in Pasadena," I said. "He's a jobber and he's in the telephone book. Tell him you're working for me and that I need some creampuffs. He won't cheat you and he owes me a couple of favors. Get out on the lot yourself, Bill, and sell some cars. I know you can do it; let the clerk write contracts. If you're out there watching the salesmen, they'll produce, and if they don't, fire them and hire others. But the Santa Claus suits will be worn.

"Now, let's move the cars. Take a full page ad in the morning and evening papers and list new, rock-bottom prices. Cut down to exactly one hundred bucks profit on every car on the lot except the real creampuffs. Get rid of them. At that price all you have to do is get good credit risks; the selling will take care of itself. At those margins you can't take a chance on getting any repossess. Feel better?"

"A whole lot better." Bill's smile had returned.

"How much dough in the bank?"

"About forty-four thousand. Something like that."

"Withdraw a certified check made out to me for forty thousand, and bring it to me here." I had already turned over twenty thousand in bonds to Leo, and Leo had sold his Roualt for \$35,000. I had been reluctant to take \$40,000 out of the Honest Hal account, but talking to Bill had restored some of my confidence.

"That's a lot of money, Richard."

"Sure it is. You'll be short on capital, but hold up payment on your deliveries from McCullers for another week. You should have enough in by then to pay him. And then keep a week behind. Cut Honest Hal's take by fifty percent. Write in your next report that we're planning a big new campaign, and we need the cash to buy a lot of new stock from a lot that's closing down in San Diego. Tell him anything, but make it good."

"Suppose he phones me and asks me about the campaign?"

"Think of a gimmick, for Christ's sake! You've got to do something for your six hundred a month!" I looked at the blank page in the typewriter in front of me for a moment and then I smiled.

"Don't mind me, Bill," I said winningly. "I need your help, and I wouldn't ask you to do anything I didn't think you could do. Cover up all this cash business in the books some way. Work out something. If you need help, get a high school mathematics teacher to juggle the figures for you. For a hundred dollar bill a math teacher will do anything."

"Okay, Richard." Bill made another note in his little book.

"Pour us a drink, Bill." Harris filled two glasses with ice, added generous portions of scotch. I sipped my drink, walked about the room aimlessly, and then sat down.

"I'm not on any secret project, Bill. The entire world will know about it soon enough, but right now, I don't want Hal to find out that I'm using his money. I'm writing a movie, and when I get it written I'm going to direct it."

"I'll be goddamned!" Bill exploded admiringly. "I'd never get to know you if I worked for you for a hundred years!"

"I'm out of my field all right," I confessed, "and I can't get started. Have you ever been in that situation? I have the story in my mind, the characters, everything. But I've been in this room for two days and I haven't written a single word. Not a word." I drained my glass, poured more scotch over what remained of the ice.

"That stuff won't help, Richard." Bill said seriously. "I don't even have a conception of what you're doing. And I wouldn't know how to begin either. But I know this much about writing. You have to write *something*. Anything. In the service I've written a hell

of a lot of words. Nothing creative, nothing literary, nothing fancy, but communication—getting over ideas to others. When a captain of infantry tells you he wants to board a man out of the service, for instance, the first sergeant has to do the paper work. And the writing has to be effective, Richard, because the captain wants the man the hell out.

“It's up to the topkick to write up the facts in such a way that the board doesn't bounce—the paper work has to get by a lot of lawyers in uniform. I don't know how many three-six-eight and three-six-nine boards I've written, but I've never had one bounce on me. It's hard work. You have to sit there filling paper in a convincing way. The first board I wrote almost drove me crazy, but the guy was bounced out of the service. And I didn't have a damned thing to go on except that the captain didn't like the man.”

“What's the secret, Bill?”

“Rewriting. First, one word at a time. After you get enough pages done, you have something to read. If you can read it you can revise it. If you revise it enough times, you come up with something pretty good. All writing is like that; it couldn't be any other way. So if you know what your story is, go ahead and put it down as best you can. You can always revise the lousy draft. And you aren't going to get a perfect script the first time.”

Bill finished his drink, got to his feet. “I'd better get going.”

“Okay. Get me that check before you do anything else, Bill. And keep things going down at the lot for me.”

“I'm on your side Richard. I don't know how you got into this movie business, but if anybody can come out on top, you can.”

“Thanks, Bill.”

In his bumbling way, Bill had hit my ego square in the middle. Fear had kept me from writing, just like the time I had stage fright in high school I wanted and expected a masterpiece with my first draft. A perfect script I could toss on Leo's desk carelessly; a scenario so pure he would be unable to make any suggestions for improvement. I sat down at the typewriter, indented five spaces, and began to write.

One word at a time, one after the other, in script format. And it was far from a masterpiece. But gradually it began to take shape and form, roughly moulded, and with plenty of dangling loose ends. But here and there I had a strong scene, solid bits of dialogue, along with the weak scenes and stupid lines I could eliminate later. My first completed scenario was as rough as an unbarked tree on the rollers to the planing room.

When a man begins to write it is like discovering words for the first time. Each word as it appears on paper takes on a fresh meaning, a literal meaning that is often unnoticed when dropped from the lips in careless conversation. I had a good command of language; I worked with the spoken language every day. To convey spoken ideas is very simple. If you don't know the exact words, a gesture will sometimes take the place of the

word you need, and the listener will get the gist of your idea. But on paper, the exact word is needed, and I meant to get through...

The next ten hours were the most gratifying hours, and the hardest hours I ever worked. I remember Bin bringing the check, and I remember calling room service and eating sandwiches and drinking many pots of coffee. But I don't recall the passage of time.

But ten hours after first talking to Bill I had a rough draft of a movie script. There were 148 numbered scenes, in sequence, and reading through them, they told a story. Most of the scenes were sketchy, and there was much too much dialogue. But my characters shone through the way I wanted them to, and I had something to work on.

I was proud of the people I had created on paper. They were composites of every buyer who had bought used cars from me during ten years of meeting the public on gravel lots. I had them!

I didn't worry too much about the rewriting. Within a few days I would have a script good enough to make pictures from, and wasn't I the director? In the final form, a movie is not a script, it is pictures, and it has to be seen to be believed. A script is merely a guide for the director, and the director, after all, was me.

I crawled into bed and slept for fourteen hours.

RIPPLE

The best I can say for my completed scenario is that it was beautifully typed and was colorfully bound in a bright yellow manuscript cover. The public stenographer at the Biltmore Hotel had done a wonderful job. But it was the best I could do at the time, and Leo was very happy when I tossed the script on his desk.

"There's too much dialogue," he said as he riffled hurriedly through the pages.

"I know," I said.

"Some of these directions are meaningless."

"I know."

"This set you have here for the cafe scene would cost more than the entire picture."

"I know."

"Then let's get to work."

For the next three days we worked in Leo's study. Sometimes it was possible for me to force down a sandwich, but I subsisted mostly on coffee. Leo devoured tranquilizers like peanuts. But we worked and worked hard. Action was substituted for mere movement, and pregnant pauses for dialogue. Leo did most of the talking and I did the rewriting, scribbling with a soft No. 2 pencil, sitting at his desk. But I only made changes after he

convinced me with irrefutable logic that the changes suggested were absolutely necessary.

When we finished our collaboration, it was a scenario any writer would be proud to have written. I was overjoyed, but sobered with apprehension and fear that THE MAN would not okay it for production. His okay was required. The completed scenario had been mimeographed at the studio, and fifty-nine scripts were locked in my desk at the studio. The single outstanding copy was in THE MAN'S office. We waited for either the "O.K." in blue grease pencil on the cover, or the "X" in red grease pencil. If we got an "O.K." we would start casting; if the red "X" criss-crossed the cover, we could start all over again...

We waited. One day.

"What do you think, Richard?" Leo asked, cracking his knuckles.

"I think THE MAN will buy it! I *really* do." I said this so convincingly I almost believed it myself.

We waited. Second day.

"Damn it, Leo, he could read the script in a half-hour. What's the delay?"

"Now take it easy, Son. He may have a few suggestions, but I don't think he'll turn it down."

"What do you think, Leo? The script is good, isn't it?"

"I'm not worried. Hell be crazy about it."

We waited. Third day.

Instead of going to the studio we stayed at home, leaving word at our office where we were. Sitting around the cramped bungalow offices we had been assigned to all day long was getting on our nerves. But we hovered over the telephone in Leo's study, waiting, waiting, waiting. Periodically, my eyes kept returning to the empty space on the wall where Leo's Roualt had been. A guilty feeling would fill my stomach, and I would look at Leo with sudden compassion. He too, would be looking at the empty wall which had held his clown.

It did not console me that Leo had only put up \$35,000 to my \$60,000; I only felt worse. If everything was lost, I could start all over again. Leo couldn't.

Regardless of script, we had been committed, and THE MAN held the reins. It was THE MAN'S final decision that mattered. If he so desired he could give the script to a Mammoth writer, assign his own director and producer, and produce the movie as a Mammoth Production instead of an Elgee Production. This was the concession Leo had to make when he made the original deal. It was not unreasonable in view of my inexperience, and the amount of money we were investing compared to the studio's... but thinking about it could give me ulcers. If THE MAN did take over, we would get our

money back, and men some, but that was not the idea, mine or Leo's. We wanted to make the movie ourselves; otherwise there was no point to knocking ourselves out in the first place.

A successful movie would assure Leo a place in the movie industry again, and I would... what would it do for me? I didn't think that far ahead. I was merely a man with a message, a man with something to say, and I knew that I could say it better than anyone else. And my message was *The Man Who Got Away!*

Why not get down to the damned nerve! I did not care about my money, Honest Hal's money, Leo's money, the studio's money, or anything else. If it was money I was interested in, I could have made all I wanted on my used car lot...

The telephone rang and both of us reached for it Leo won, listened for a moment, and then handed the telephone to me.

"Richard, darling," a tearful voice queried. "I've got to see you right away!" It was Laura Harmon, and her voice was tense with suppressed excitement.

"Get the hell off the line," I said angrily, "and don't call again. I'm expecting an important call." I racked the telephone.

"Who was it, Richard?"

"Laura Harmon, that sex-starved secretary I told you about."

Leo nodded. We waited. One minute later the telephone rang and I let Leo take the call, thinking it was Laura again.

"Get rid of her," I said.

"Yes," Leo said strongly, "this is Mr. Steinberg." He put his hand over the mouthpiece. "THE MAN," he said to me, and then he talked into the telephone, "yes, sir... yes, sir... yes, sir."

A thin smile played about the corners of Leo's lips as he hung up, following the short conversation. "THE MAN wants to see us, Richard, both of us."

"Then let's go."

I had been my own man too long, and I didn't like myself very well during the next few minutes. Visiting the office of THE MAN was like being called to the principal's office at school, when you didn't know the reason. Fear, dread, and apprehension all mixed together, when there is not a valid reason.

We only waited in the outer office for two or three minutes, and then THE MAN'S secretary, an old white-haired man of about sixty-five, jerked his thumb for us to enter the inner sanctum. We waited at the massive door for the secretary to push a button under his desk to release the door-lock. Two years before an actor had forced his way into THE MAN'S office and fired three wild shots before he had been overpowered. The

door-lock mechanism had been installed to prevent recurrences of similar events. Leo preceded me through the door, and it hissed shut behind me automatically.

As I surveyed the room, my confidence returned, and all apprehension left me. The room was lavish enough, much as I had pictured a famous movie executive's office in my mind. But it was in poor taste; the furniture was massive, the colors clashed, and the panelled walls, painted, a stark white, gave an antiseptic look to the large room. It was as though a hospital dispensary was turned into a living room, with everything changed except the white walls. There were several framed black-and-white drawings on the walls, either Matisse or James Thurber, it is hard to tell. But my eyes fell on a copy of *Newsweek* on the coffee table near the white-brick fireplace. I read *Time*. A vocabulary of only 20,000 words is required to read *Newsweek*, but the *Time* reader needs a vocabulary of 25,000 words. A little thing, maybe. But on such minutiae rest the standards of culture in the United States, and in this one qualification, at least, Richard Hudson was a notch above THE MAN.

THE MAN did not rise to greet us. He sat behind his desk like a benign Buddha, impassive, fat, ancient, and completely hairless. His head was completely bald, and as brown as the rest of his face. Great dewlaps dangled on both sides of his round face. I have never seen him standing, and his shoulders were so narrow and his head was so large I do not know, and I cannot guess at his height. Perhaps he was a cripple; I do not know. But then, there are thousands of people in the United States who do not know that the late F.D.R. was a cripple.

A stack of movie scripts was piled neatly on a corner of his enormous white desk. One of them was mine. I knew that much. I sat down, without being asked, in a red, womb chair and pulled out my cigarettes.

"I would rather you didn't smoke." Although THE MAN'S voice was encompassed with suet, there was a sharp edge to his statement I returned my pack to my coat pocket and met Leo's reproving look with a soft smile. He had warned me about smoking, but I had forgotten.

"Did you hear the story about the director who took a vacation in Miami?" THE MAN asked flatly, addressing his question to no one in particular.

Leo, who was standing by the wall examining one of the framed drawings, answered for both of us. "No, sir," he said respectfully, "we didn't."

"Well, I think it goes something like this," THE MAN began, which is no way to begin a story. "The director flew to Miami one day ahead of his wife, leaving her to close their home in Beverly Hills. He checked into this year's hotel in Miami, and after being shown to his suite by the bellboy, he asked the bellboy to send up a little entertainment. Five minutes later a beautiful blonde arrived and the director asked her, 'How much?' Her price was one hundred dollars and the director was indignant 'One hundred dollars!' he said. 'I've never paid more than ten dollars in my life!' With that he dismissed the

blonde. Well, the next day his wife arrived and they went down to the beach. Pretty soon the beautiful blonde whore came along. She stopped, looked at the director, and then at his wife, and said; 'See what you get for ten dollars!'"

THE MAN laughed heartily at his joke, if that is what it was, coughed up a big glob of phlegm, and spat into a piece of Kleenex. He examined the phlegm before tossing the wadded piece of tissue into a white leather wastebasket. Leo also laughed heartily, slapping his leg with exuberant amusement in an almost hysterical manner.

"That's rich," Leo exclaimed, "That's rich." He repeated the tag aloud. "See what you get for ten dollars! I'll have to remember that one!"

I didn't laugh. I wanted to laugh and I hated myself for wanting to laugh, but I couldn't although I thought it would please THE MAN. The joke was not only stupid; it was pointless.

"What about the script?" I asked dryly, when the laughter had subsided.

THE MAN shifted his head in my direction and fixed me with a cold eye. It was almost a full minute before he spoke, and his voice was icy.

"I liked it, Hudson." He shifted his eyes to Leo. "Stop by the comptroller's office when you leave, Leo. He has the budget for your production."

We were dismissed. I was suspicious and I didn't like the way THE MAN had handled the situation. It was too simple. Leo and I sat down on a bench in the patio, and he was angry with me.

"Couldn't you laugh?" Leo asked me seriously, "THE MAN expected you to laugh at his joke."

"The joke wasn't funny."

"What the hell has that got to do with it? He's the head of the studio, for Christ's sake! I guess you still don't understand, Richard." Leo had cooled off some. "The joke was his way of telling us that we were in. Like an allegory. THE MAN is never blunt; he always uses an indirect approach, no matter what he does. It was very rude of you to ask about the script that way."

"Rude? I'm a businessman. We were sent for to talk about the script. He kept us sweating blood for three days—"

"That's the way he is."

"And I am the way I am."

"Forget it, Richard. We're in business, so you might as well get with Milo and start casting. He's been assigned to us fulltime, and you might as well put him to work."

DISSOLVE

Milo Linder was a good man to have around. I had had lunch with him a couple of times in the studio commissary, and we got along well together. He was the type of man who could adapt himself to any director he happened to work with and that accounted for his popularity. Although it was doubtful whether he would ever become a full-fledged director, he was one of the best assistant directors at Mammoth Studios, and I was lucky Leo had managed to snag him for my picture.

So far, my time had been occupied with the script, but now that work was to begin on the production, Milo would be both my right and left hand man. He knew all of the shortcuts, and everybody at the studio. Only twenty-four, he had been at Mammoth for five years, and he had assistant director credits in more than fifty movies.

Milo Linder and I were closeted in my bungalow office with a copy of the budget, and the final version of the shooting script Milo nervously patted the sharp spikes of his crewcut, and smiled ruefully. We had been discussing the movie for two hours, and Milo was enthusiastic about the script, but worried about the low budget.

“That budget is murder, Richard.”

“Not really. All we have to do is find the right principals, teach them how to act, and we'll be okay.”

“That won't be easy. The truck-driver has got to be perfect or the whole picture will fall flat.”

“I know that. But the extras are provided for, and the bits. So all we need is our lead.”

“How about using Fred Bartell for the lead,” Milo mused. “He's on contract.”

“I don't know him.”

“He's an atmosphere extra. I'll bet he's been in a thousand movies, at least, and he's never spoken a line.”

“The name doesn't ring a bell.”

“You've seen him, I know. He's the guy who stands there, or sits there in a scene, and never says anything. If you need five tough guys to sit in a car waiting to blast somebody coming out of a building, he's one of the five guys in the car. If some criminals are waiting to be tried by a judge in a courtroom scene, he's waiting to be tried and he always looks guilty. He stands by elevators, he eats lunch in restaurants. In westerns, he is the guy at the end of the bar drinking rye. Once in awhile he carries the rope at a lynching.”

“I've never heard of the bastard.”

“Nobody has, but you've seen him a thousand times. His face is sad, heavily lined, and his eyes can brim with tears at the snap of a director's fingers. On top of that he's a big

son-of-a-bitch, just right for a truck driver.”

“How come he never has any lines then? Maybe he's deaf and dumb?”

“I forgot,” Milo shook his head and snorted. “He lisps. I'd forgotten about that. But we can use him as an atmosphere extra, anyway. In the cafe scene we can have him eat a hamburger. He looks like a truck-driver. It is always reassuring to an audience to see a familiar face or two in a low-budget movie.”

“Put him down then. We'll use him.”

And so it went. We discussed and covered the contract talent, and budding starlets, the extras, bit players, examining photograph after photograph, brought to the office from Casting by messenger girls wearing Wedgewood blue uniforms. Milo's retentive memory was remarkable. We sat in comfortable chairs in dark projection rooms while five-minute screen tests of aspiring actors and actresses chased each other across the screen. The screen tests were on hand, and not on the budget; my only cost was the projectionist. It was discouraging to see so many untalented would-be actors and actresses, but I had to look. And I found the needed waitress for the cafe scene, so the time was not a total loss.

The minor roles, including the three children for the truck driver's family, were found among the photographs and the screen tests on file. They were all contract talent, and if they fitted the parts I had in mind, I relied on Milo's judgment for their ability to do the parts.

Three days of casting and it was completed except for the truck-driver and his wife. We were stuck; the truck-driver, my protagonist, had to be perfect. Once an actor was found, I could then select a wife to fit him from anyone of a thousand housewives in the United States. But where could I find the defeated, cynical, sensitive face I needed....?

Luckily, Milo Linder had a good memory.

CHET WILSON

Early one morning, just as the sun was coming up, Milo and I started out for Ojai Valley. Driving up the coast I asked Milo for details on this so-called actor he had dredged out of his memory.

“Actually, I don't know a damned thing about him, Richard. Even the way I happened to see him was an accident. I went to Santa Barbara a couple of years ago with Teddy Friedman to a sneak preview of *The Outrider*—”

“I remember it. Written by Jack Dover, produced by Teddy Friedman, directed by David Moore. Starred Buzz Canyon, Mary Marshman, and Pretty Boy, the Wonder Horse.”

“That's right I don't know how you do it—”

“It's a gift. Go on.”

“Anyway, the preview didn't start until 11:30, following the last regular show, so we decided to take in a play at the Lobero Theatre. It was a community theatre thing, but it was something to do. Did you know that Santa Barbara, with only 45,000 population, has seven active theatre groups and a fulltime drama critic on the newspaper?”

“No,” I said. “Get to the play.”

“The play was a real weirdie; something in middle-English. Needless to say, we didn't have any trouble in getting seats to see a play in middle-English. Well, this guy, Chet Wilson, was playing the lead. No kidding, even in that medieval dialogue you could understand every thing he said. He had perfect enunciation and his face was as expressive as a caricature in iron filings. The play itself was nothing, some morality thing about witches and mountains, and the rest of the cast was half-assed. They do a lot of weird stuff in Santa Barbara anyway, and they don't give a damn whether they make any money or not. Believe it or not, Richard, some of these groups even do Saroyan.”

“That's hard to believe.”

“It's a fact. Mr. Friedman was excited about Wilson and wanted to talk to him, but right after the play we had to hustle back to the movie theatre for the preview. The next day I made a call from the studio to the director of the play. All he could tell me was that Wilson had been in a hell of a lot of community plays in Santa Barbara and Ojai, and that he had a job watering an orange grove in Ojai.”

“If he was as good as you say, how come Friedman didn't give him a screen test?”

“I don't know. If nothing else the guy has a great potential. I told Mr. Friedman what I found out, but he said he had thought it over, and he had the idea that Wilson looked good because the rest of the cast was so lousy.”

“Maybe he had a point there.”

“I don't think so, but it doesn't pay to argue with Mr. Friedman.” Milo continued earnestly. “If Chet Wilson fits your conception of the role, and I think he does, at least he'll work cheap.”

“Hell damned well have to—you've got the contracts with you haven't you, Milo?”

“Sure.”

“I think he'll grab it. A star in his first picture; how many actors get that kind of break? But the money isn't it I've got to get the right man, and I can't quite picture him in my mind. Except for a bitterly twisted mouth, the rest of the face is a complete blank.”

Milo laughed. “If Wilson is still watering orange trees for a living, and if he still has the acting ability I saw on the stage two years ago, he'll have a bitterly twisted month all right.”

When I reached the cut-off I turned away from 101 and took the narrow, winding road to Ojai. The road resembled an unstrung typewriter ribbon wadded and tossed on top of dirty brown foothills. It was desolate country. The bare foothills were covered with the twisted, blackened tendrils of manzanita, leftover chaparral of a year-old forest fire.

Ojai Valley was like a blast furnace, and at the first beer joint I came to on the narrow, dusty street, I pulled in fast, like a policeman going off-duty. It was much cooler in the dark barroom; there were a couple of overhead fans going, and someone had sprinkled water on the sawdust covered floor. The first beer sank in like a blotter, and when I ordered the second round I asked the bartender if he knew Chet Wilson.

“The actor? Sure, I know him. I saw him last month in *The Beautiful People*.”

“See!” Milo laughed gaily. “I told you they did Saroyan!”

“Where can I find him?” I asked the bartender.

“Today's Tuesday, isn't it? He goes to art classes on Wednesday mornings, so I suppose he's at the grove today. But he might be hard to find though. Mrs. Larson bought him a horse and he rides it all over hell and gone.”

“We'll look for him. Where's the grove?”

“What do you fellows want Chet for, anyway?”

“His aunt in Glendale died,” I said, “and left him a million dollars.”

“He can sure use it,” the bartender said.

“Where's the grove,” I asked impatiently, as Milo laughed.

The directions were a bit complicated, but after a few wrong turns on sandy back roads we came to an orange grove covering about fifty acres. I parked the car well off the road under a tree. The irrigation ditches paralleling the trees were filling slowly with chocolate water and I knew that somebody had to be nearby in order to watch it. Milo remained in the car and I walked upstream, following the main ditch. In less than two hundred yards I spotted a horseman through the trees.

“Hey, Wilson,” I shouted. “Over here! I want to talk to you!”

Wilson sat his mount well, and I studied him as he approached. He was letting the horse pick its way through the torn-up, freshly-ploughed earth. Wilson was a thin, cadaverous man of about twenty-eight or —nine, and deeply tanned by the sun. His face was seamed and lined and an enormous hooked nose dominated his narrow face. He could have passed himself off as a Texan any day in the week. His mouth was so narrow it resembled a quick slash in a piece of saddle leather. The deep, tragic lines running from the thin wings of his preposterous nose to the corners of his twisted mouth made an almost perfect triangle. When he reined the bay horse to a halt on the opposite side of the three-foot irrigation ditch I looked directly into his eyes. They were a deep cobalt blue, but looked darker because of his lampblack brows. I was excited—it was a real

discovery.

“You're Chet Wilson, aren't you?”

He cocked his head and spat. Wilson had an instinctive way of cocking his head as though he wanted to hear something he could take as an insult. He nodded curtly.

“I'm Richard Hudson from Mammoth Studios, and I want you to read for me.”

Watching me insolently from under his dark brows, Wilson removed a sack of Bull Durham from his blue work-shirt pocket and slowly rolled a thin cigarette. He puffed hungrily on the thin weed after lighting it with a kitchen match, and then flipped the spent cigarette into the muddy water of the ditch.

“*Should I compare you to a f—— turd,*” he began, and he added his own Anglo-Saxon adjectives as he went along, making the Shakespearean sonnet into an evil parody of a love song. The idea of love and tenderness was made obscene by his rich, baritone voice. The underlying bitterness in his throat reminded me of rusty razor blades. His perfect reading was a combination of the ludicrous and the tragic and I found myself grinning, and oddly touched at the same time.

“Climb down off your high horse,” I said when he had finished reciting the sonnet—his way—“I want to see how tall you are out of the saddle.”

“Want to hear anything else?” He asked rudely. “*Richard the Third, Hamlet, King Lear,* it don't make a damn to me. I know them all.”

“No,” I said. “You'll do. I've got a part for you.”

“What part? I've been thinking about giving up acting altogether.”

“How long have you been thinking about it?”

“Ten years.” He laughed then, a rusty unused laughter, thick and pure.

“Think again then. You've got the starring role in *The Man Who Got Away*, an Elgee Production.”

“A movie?”

“That's right.”

Wilson dismounted, dropped the reins on the ground, waded through the ditch, and looked me squarely in the eyes. “Now just who in the hell are you, anyway?” He asked belligerently.

“The writer and the director,” I said blandly, “and you're the lead. Come on. I've got the contract in the car.”

Wilson followed me dumbly through the grove to the car, and I told Milo to dig out the contract. While Milo looked through his briefcase, I turned to Wilson. His body was shaking like a man with malaria, and his hands were trembling uncontrollably.

“You'd better sit down, boy,” I said.

Wilson sank to the ground, his legs crossed beneath him, and buried his face in his large, quivering hands. He sobbed once, wrenching the agonized sound up from deep in his body. A moment later his trembling lessened, and he shook his head back and forth, then tried his lips for a smile. It was more sneer than smile, but he meant the grimace as a smile.

“I knew it would happen like this, Mr. Hudson,” Wilson said softly, with his rich, vibrant voice. “A man all alone, riding around on a horse in the mountains, gets some pretty screwy ideas. But I guess they weren't so screwy after all.

“My entire life has been spent in preparation for this very moment and now that it's here I can't believe it. It's too... unreal. I've always had this dream—a producer would come backstage after one of these lousy community plays and offer me a contract or it would happen like this—somebody would find me like you did. And it actually happened. Kind of shook me up for a minute. But you don't have to worry; I'll play your part for you, Mr. Hudson! I'll *be* the part, I don't care what it is! I'm the best actor in the world!”

“Sure you are.” I patted him on the shoulder. “That's why I came for you.” I shoved contract and pen into his eager hands and he signed his name without reading a word. I had to turn my head away. The beauty of his ugly, tragic face filled me with silent wonderment.

For a moment there, just for a moment, I felt like God.

MRS. MILDRED CURRY SHANTZ

Milo Linder and I were shopping for an actress.

The Farmer's Market in Los Angeles splits the difference between Fairfax Avenue and the old Hollywood Star's Baseball Park. It is a low, sprawling shopping area where a person can buy anything from a sack of Mexican jumping beans to a TV dinner for a child of five. Years ago, during the Great Depression, it was possible to actually obtain bargains at the Farmer's Market. No more. Small-time Japanese truck farmers from the Valley, and city residents on relief who grew a few tomatoes in their backyards, offered their produce for sale at cut-rate prices. But today, the shopping area is a highly-commercialized center, with smart shops and stupid ones, huge parking lots, and any and all types of merchandise is for sale at today's prices.

The Farmer's Market was a likely place to shop for an actress who didn't know she could act—an American housewife to furnish the motivating force to my truck-driver hero, Chet Wilson.

Milo and I separated. He was searching under household wares, soap, and sundries, and I had stationed myself by the batteries of cash registers at the grocery check-out

counters. There were at least thirty of the jangling cash registers, and I wandered from one to another as I examined the parade of housewives. A motley bunch, to say the least. In all shapes and sizes, determined women pushed metal carts loaded with children and groceries through the check stands where their purchases were toted to clanging bells. Long curling tapes erupted from the registers. It was a sight to make a man sick to his stomach.

For every one of these housewives, a man sweated somewhere to make the cash to buy these enormous baskets of groceries. In return for his labors he was fed a caloric horror consisting of fried hamburger, frozen peas, frozen chopped spinach, frozen peach pie, and instant coffee—that is—if his wife felt up to such wonderful culinary preparation. If she did not, he would feast on a commercial TV dinner: a dab of turkey meat, a small scoop of sage-saturated bread dressing, another dab of mealy, lumpy mashed potatoes, and thirty-seven large green peas. This tempting, appetizing delight would taste of aluminum foil, would be served on an aluminum plate, and would also be topped by the inevitable instant coffee. After a million cups of instant coffee, you cannot tell the difference.

These lovely ladies, these dazzling American beauties in shorts and halters, their gorgeous locks frozen stiff with home waves costing \$1.75 per box, would prepare these delectable meals with loving care in houses smelling of baby pee on expensive pastel stoves which only added a few pennies a month to the cost of the house payments.

Yes, for his labors, the American male eats well, sires a family of three children, and lives in a \$14,000 project house. And there were the marvelous creatures he slaved for, these brainless wonders standing in line repeating to each other with maddening accuracy what they all had seen and listened to on television the night before. In slacks, in shorts, in bermudas, in pedal pushers, they pushed their carts through the lines, accepting blindly the totals on the cash registers, and paying off with a smile...

After an hour I had enough. I felt smothered, and I resolved to select the next woman through the gate who had a bill of \$49.00. It was easier that way; instead of looking at the women I could look at the cash register instead. Why I picked forty-nine as the magic number I do not know, perhaps because it was an uneven number. I never examine my motives too closely. I didn't have to wait much longer, at any rate.

This housewife was perfect. She was obviously tired, and harried by a four-year-old, red-haired little boy at the end of a leash. As the weary checker punched keys without looking at the register and shoved the grocery items to a pimply-faced stacker who was piling the stuff into a paper sack, the red-haired little monster took a swipe at a pyramid of canned milk cans and knocked them clattering to the floor. None of the women in the line, including the mother, paid any attention to this savage display of bad manners. Children must not be inhibited, don't you know. A tired old gentleman in a white smock patiently began to restack the pyramid, one can at a time.

The mother jerked the child through the turnstile and paid her tab. The total was \$49.63, close enough for me. The housewife was somewhat different from the others in that she wore a flowered dress, instead of pants of some kind. Her dusty blonde hair was in curlers and her regular features were unmarred by beauty. She had one redeeming feature, a large front tooth made of solid, gleaming gold.

She sighed as she looked at the brimming cardboard box full of groceries and the sack beside it with celery balanced precariously atop two dozen eggs. As she reached for the sack, the child made two tight running circles around her legs and imprisoned her in the leash. She sighed again.

I left my place at the wall, hefted the heavy cardboard box to my shoulder and gave her my disarming smile.

“Lead the way to your vehicle, Madame,” I said courteously, “and I shall follow.”

“Oh, thank you!” She flashed her golden smile. Wonderful! I followed the housewife and child to her parking place in the lot, and deposited the groceries on the front seat of her three-year-old Plymouth. Surreptitiously, I took a look at the registration slip on the steering column. Frank Shantz. I noted the Van Nuys address in my mind.

Turning toward the woman, I took the sackful of groceries she was carrying away from her and placed it next to the box. While she unharnessed the child I waited, eyeing her critically. The boy climbed noisily into the back seat, and the woman fumbled in her purse, handed me a dime, and smiled kindly.

“God bless you, Madame,” I said, and I pocketed the dime. I left the parking lot, returned to the store and looked for Milo. As far as I was concerned, the search for a leading lady was over.

That evening Milo and I called on Mr. and Mrs. Frank Shantz at their Van Nuys home. Every house on the block looked alike with the exception of color and the care of the lawns. Next door to the Shantz's residence a sprinkler hissed, and three doors down a man clipped the edges of his lawn with manual clippers under the direction of his wife who shouted to him from their porch. This suburb of Van Nuys was the three-bedroom-den section, a step above the two-bedroom-den section, and way above the two-bedroom-no-den section.

“This may not be as easy as you think,” Milo said as I parked the car.

“Don't worry about it. Just let me do all the talking,” I said. Milo looked very businesslike in a blue gabardine suit, with his alligator briefcase under his arm. I was slightly concerned that Mr. Shantz might take him for an insurance salesman.

A man of about forty, with thin brown hair, and a mole on his left cheek, opened the door to my ringing. He looked at us suspiciously with pale blue eyes.

“Yes?” His voice was high and querulous.

“Are you Mr. Frank Shantz?” I asked politely. “*The* Mr. Shantz, who sells air conditioners at Sears?”

“Why, yes. Yes, I am. Are you fellows police officers?”

“No,” I said. “Are you expecting police?”

“No. Of course not!” He laughed nervously. “I’ve been watching *Dragnet* and you look quite a bit like Sergeant Friday. Of course, you’re a lot bigger than him.”

We all three laughed at this statement. “No, Mr. Shantz,” I grinned. “We certainly aren’t police officers. We’re from Mammoth Studios and we want to talk to your wife.”

“Did she win a prize? I guess it’s about time she won. She’s always sending in these crossword puzzles and things in the newspaper.”

“You might say it’s some kind of a prize. We’d like to talk to her if she’s home.”

“Sure. Come in. Come in.”

We entered the living room, and after I brushed some of the toys from an overstuffed chair I sat down. Ado sat on the couch, the briefcase across his knees. Mr. Shantz shouted for his wife to come out of the kitchen. We had a minute or so to wait for Mildred Shantz to heed her husband’s call, and while we waited we watched the television commercial—a man with a tattoo on his hand telling of the virtues of a certain cigarette. Mildred entered the room, quite flustered at the prospect of visitors, fluffing her short hair with fluttering fingers.

I got to my feet quickly, signaled Milo to do the same, and introduced myself. “Good evening, Mrs. Shantz. My name is Richard Hudson, and this is my associate, Mr. Linder. We are from Mammoth Studios and we want to give you a screen test tomorrow.”

“A screen test? You mean, for the movies?”

“That’s right. We have a particular part in mind for you, and if the screen test is all right, you’ll be offered a contract.”

Mildred sank weakly into a chair and fixed me with big, blue unseeing eyes, a frozen smile upon her lips.

“You won that puzzle test, honey,” her husband said cheerily, “and these gentlemen are going to put you in the movies.”

“Not exactly, Mr. Shantz,” I explained. “I’m directing a new movie, and your wife is merely one of the candidates for the part I have in mind.”

“You must have the wrong person, Mr. Hudson,” Mildred said seriously. “I’ve never done any acting at all, not even in high school. Somebody must have given you the wrong Mildred Shantz,” she finished weakly.

“No. There’s no mistake. I’ve had talent scouts watching you for a long time, and this morning, I took a look at you personally because of the many favorable reports. You

should remember me—I was the man who carried your groceries for you this morning at the Farmer's Market. Remember?”

“Oh, no!” Mildred squealed, flushing to the roots of her dusty blonde hair. “And I tipped you with a dime!” She covered her face with her hands, then peeped coyly through her fingers at me. It was all the change I had left,” she faltered. “I always tip a quarter.”

This was a lie of course. Her bill had been \$49.63; therefore she had at the very least thirty-seven cents in change left. Like most women, she was merely a cheap tipper.

“Do you want your dime back?” I smiled.

“No, no! You keep it!” This statement embarrassed her more than ever. “I don't know what I'm saying, I'm so excited. In the movies! *Me!* I can't believe it.”

“It's true, however,” I said. “Mr. Under has an appointment card for you which will pass you through the gate.” I jerked my head at Milo and he handed Mrs. Shantz the appointment slip. “We'll expect you at the studio for make-up at seven a.m. tomorrow morning. Don't dress yourself up, or do any home make-up—we'll take care of that end at the studio. Is seven too early for you? Can you make it all right?”

Mildred turned helplessly to her husband; there was a wild, desperate look on her face, and her mouth had dropped open.

“She'll be there, Mr. Hudson,” Shantz stated firmly, “with bells on. Even if I have to stay home from work and take care of the kids myself. But I won't. I'll call my sister right away, and she'll be over here in five minutes flat.”

Milo edged toward the door. I shook hands with Mr. Shantz, patted Mildred on the shoulder reassuringly. “Now don't worry about the test, Mrs. Shantz,” I said. “The best thing for you to do is go to bed now and get a good night's sleep.”

“Sleep!” She exclaimed humorously. “I won't be able to sleep for a week!”

“Good night then. I'll see you in the morning.”

The typical American couple waved to us from their front porch as we drove away. Neither one of them was really surprised—or astonished. They had accepted Milo And myself as representing Mammoth Studios without question. Why? Because that is the way these things happen in the movies. That is why. This time it had merely happened to them.

That's all.

MONTAGE

I do not wish to minimize the role of the director in the production of a movie, because to do so would minimize my contribution as the director of *The Man Who Got Away*.

However, I now believe that almost anyone who has seen a couple of hundred movies, and who is furnished with the capable assistance that I had—Milo Linder, Leo Steinberg, and the production facilities and staff of a large studio, such as Mammoth, can direct a movie.

I do not say that anyone can direct a great movie, but almost anyone can, under the same circumstances that I had, direct a movie good enough to be distributed. And the chances are 50-50 that the movie will break even, no matter who directs it.

What bothered me most was the sense of unreality in what I was doing. I felt as though I was an unreal person creating a reality that might become unreal if I didn't keep my eyes open every single second. The solemn deference paid to me on the set by assistants, cameramen, and people who drifted in and out from nowhere (I never discovered what half of the people were doing or why) added to my sense of unreality. I was the director—it said so on my canvas chair—but the director of What? And I knew that all of the frantic activity surrounding me had been directly caused by my initial idea for a movie, expressed extemporaneously to Leo Steinberg in his study.

A director is not an electrician; an electrician can pin his job down exactly. He furnishes light where it is required, and he knows exactly what he is doing. The cables in a movie studio may be heavier, and the lights a little brighter, but the electrician performs a task pertaining to electricity. If the electrician works in a movie studio or wires a housing project, his job is essentially the same.

I was working in the abstract with non-objective viewpoints toward a certain objective that was a nebulous idea. I was supposed to create something, and therefore I was in the middle, surrounded by technicians who knew what they were doing. Exactly. Once in awhile I would catch myself thinking about the differences, and then it would take great mental effort on my part to force such thoughts out of my mind. I was confused enough already; why add to my confusion by thinking about the unreality?

But unreality or not I had a schedule to go by. The schedule provided for every single minute once the shooting began and I had to adhere to it. The schedule was my lifeline to reality.

No matter how angry I was or dissatisfied with a scene, the budget did not allow for expensive retakes, tantrums, or kicking Mrs. Shantz in the teeth. The schedule was too tight for such indulgences. In the making of a low-budget movie, the comptroller's word is law.

My use of film was limited to three takes of each scene. I had to rehearse the scene, and then a take; one more take to print, and then the last take as a cover in case the first two were no good. If all three were no good—tough. The scene was lost. And Leo assured me several times that there was no room in the budget for any retakes.

If there were any faults in the movie they were mine. The cameramen, grips, sound technicians, make-up men, sweepers, painters, everyone in fact, in the technical end,

were experts at their jobs. They had all served apprenticeships, they were paid up in their union dues, and all of them were aware of the budget restrictions, and what had to be done. They helped me in every way they could, and I appreciated their help.

I had three weeks. That was all. Three weeks. A week on location, including two days in San Francisco, one day in Santa Barbara for background fills, and two days for all the highway scenes. The final scene of the crash into the pile of wrecked cars on the highway, which climaxed the movie, was supposed to be shot in Santa Barbara, but was changed to Burbank instead.

The remaining two-week period was spent on Sound Stage F, which wasn't quite large enough, but was used anyway. The sets were built while I was on location and were ready when I returned. Without a break, after the final location scene in Burbank was completed, the company moved to the Mammoth lot to shoot the beginning of the movie.

We finished on time due to Leo's genius for organization.

I didn't get much sleep. After a day of shooting, I watched the rushes from the day before. I then studied the script for the next day's shooting, discussing with Milo methods of getting the best out of Chet Wilson, Mildred Shantz, the bits and extras.

By midnight I was ready to talk interpretation with Chet. For two or more hours I would lecture Chet in his hotel room about the hero's personality and characterization. Chet would then go over his lines with me, if any, for the next day's scenes, and I would drive the poor bastard nuts in order to get a shaded nuance of a single word. I almost drove Chet crazy.

But my coaching produced the desired results. Chet was irritable, impatient, haggard, charged with emotion, fatigued, and he tossed his cookies two or three times a day. Wonderful! Just right for my truck driving hero.

The scenes with Mildred almost drove me crazy. I was forced to turn her over to the Mammoth chief dramatic coach, an old lady from Lithuania, who had the patience of Job. The old girl accomplished a miracle with Mildred, teaching her how to say one word at a time, in the manner one would feed a parakeet a seed at a time from the lips.

Mildred became bored, tired, disgusted, and developed a passionate hatred for Chet Wilson because he was so good. All of this came over in her "acting" and was exactly what I wanted.

During the night, while I tossed fitfully on my cot in my bungalow office, little fairies in the forms of technicians made the sets ready for the next day. When I stepped through the doors of Sound Stage F, the properties were ready, the set was clean, the lighting plans had been worked out, the cameras were ready, the boom man was ready and the sound man was ready to mix the sound. The actors were in make-up, and the script girl had turned to the right page in my scenario. This was at seven a.m.

I rehearsed the scene a couple of times, told Milo when I was ready, and he shouted “Roll ‘em” and “Action.” The man slapped the blackboard in front of the camera and the actors went through the scene as we had rehearsed it. Once the sound of “Action” went through the set I was committed, and I could only bite my fingernails, which I did. The scene was shot again after I pointed out things that were done wrong the first time, and then was shot once more for a covering take. It isn't hard to be a director. Not at all.

The entire crew, but especially Tommy Allison, the director of photography, thought I was the greatest director in the world. I adopted almost every suggestion Allison offered me—he, at least, knew what he was doing with the cameras.

It was one thing for me to have sat alone in a hotel room and put on paper: *TAKE 47—LONG SHOT Across the street from San Francisco truck lot. Semi- swings wide and enters the gate, stopping at Dispatch Office. Hero dismounts from cab.*

It was something else to put this scene on film. There are a hundred ways to accomplish the same thing.

“Mr. Hudson,” Allison would say, “I've taken the liberty to change this a little. Instead of taking a long shot from across the street, let's take a medium from the dispatcher's sliding window as Chet pulls through the gate. This will help to emphasize the size and height of the truck. When Chet climbs out of the cab and we shoot up at him, it'll make the semi look like a damned monster. Okay?”

“Okay.”

I was the man who made the decisions. And I made them quickly. Allison's plan was better than mine and yet it achieved the same end. When I didn't agree with him, we did it my way, and he never argued with me. I was the director.

There was a rather touching scene with Mildred and Chet; an attempt by both of them to make love to each other before Chet left on his run to Los Angeles. All love between the truck-driver and his wife had disappeared years before, and their attempt to find it again in a halfhearted way, and their failure to do so, had to be shown to establish the pathos and futility of their lives. Mildred couldn't get it, and I had to get sloppy with her.

I took her into the dressing room, made love to her, patted her well-padded buttocks, told her how wonderful she was, kissed her and listened enraptured as she repeated her lines parrot-like, exactly as they had been fed to her by the dramatic coach. After she was sufficiently excited I ran her out on the set and shot the scene fast. The scene was as perfect as I could ever hope to get it.

The cafe scenes were the best in the movie; Mildred wasn't in any of them. Here I dealt with professional actors, and Chet Wilson, who had not lied to me—he was the best actor in the world. If there is such an animal as a creative actor Chet Wilson is a creative actor. He created the part of the truck-driver from somewhere deep within himself and the remainder of the cast was inspired by his performance.

This is all a panoramic mish-mash, I know, but so was the three weeks of filming my picture. My original script sequence was not followed one, two, three; the picture was filmed according to Leo's schedule. Scene 14 could just as easily follow Scene 92, in fact it did. The movie was according to plan, location, and did not follow the strict continuity in numerical sequence.

The cafe scene, however, where Chet made a fumbling, amateurish attempt to date the waitress, was so moving and so well done, and so tender, that when Chet had finished talking to the girl and fled from the cafe with the tears streaming down his face, everybody on the set, including myself, gave him a round of applause that lasted for three full minutes.

Notwithstanding the end results—I shall never forget the three wonderful weeks I spent as a director.

I wish I could.

FADE TO:

There were four of us sitting in the dim projection room; Leo, Chet, Milo, and me—anyone could have picked me out by my heavy breathing. My movie—two hours and thirty-three minutes of unfinished film—had been put together in what I hoped would be some kind of sequence. Except for the dialogue there were no sound effects or music, and the titling hadn't been done either. It was just a movie in the raw state, but the shooting was completed and the four of us were having a little private preview before the editing.

“How about THE MAN,” I asked Leo, “is he coming or not?”

“No.” Leo shrugged. “He prefers to see the completed version. Movies in the rough make him stay awake at night worrying.”

“The hell with him,” I said, and I pressed the button on the floor to signal the projectionist. The film unrolled before us on the screen. Although I had a clipboard, pocket flashlight, and a ballpoint pen with me, and fully intended to take-notes, I never got around to it during the first showing. I was too fascinated. For the first time in my life I had created something, and here it was, frozen in time before my eyes. The movie could not be changed or taken away from me. It could be shortened, but no rearrangement of scenes could change my basic story. My paper characters were flesh-and-blood, real live people, and what they said and did upon the screen could only be repeated exactly the same every time it was shown in a darkened room. And the first time through, I loved every minute of the 153 minutes.

The camera faded back from the silent crowd surrounding the smouldering body of Chet Wilson and the screen suddenly became a large white rectangle. The projectionist flipped the houselights on and the movie was over.

Leo looked at me for a long moment. “How in the hell,” he asked admiringly, his eyebrows raised, “did you ever get the expressions on the faces of that mob in the crash scene?”

Milo and I both laughed conspiratorially.

“It wasn't easy, Leo,” I admitted. “It cost Milo twenty-five bucks out of his own pocket that wasn't on the budget.”

“And for once I don't want the money back,” Milo said virtuously, “That scene was worth every penny.”

“Allison and I worked it out,” I explained further to Leo. “We told the extras that there would be a slight delay in the shooting, and that we had provided some entertainment for them in the interim. Allison had the camera set up across the way—they didn't know he was shooting—and shot their faces with a zoom lens in a slow pan. Have you ever heard of Zelda?”

“Wow!” Milo laughed.

“She's a stripper from the Trinidad Club. She did her disrobement act among the piled up wrecks, and while the crowd watched we captured their faces.”

“It certainly worked.” Leo shook his head. “I've got to hand it to you, Richard. Every face held a different reaction. Lust greed, indignation, sheer joy, and yet they all managed to have a wet shiny brightness in their eyes, regardless of facial expression.”

“Actually,” I said seriously, “their faces would probably look the same way if they were really watching a body on fire.”

“No doubt at all.” Leo turned to Milo, clapped him on the shoulder. “And you got stuck for Zelda's fee?”

“It was only twenty-five bucks.” Milo said modestly. “It was worth that much for me to see her dance—”

“You'll get it back.” Leo pursed his lips. “Now Richard, your real work begins. I know the saying is old, but it still holds true: Movies are made on the cutting room floor. You've got your work to be cut out for you, and you're the one who has to make the decisions.”

“I know, I know,” I said impatiently. “Do you want to see it again?”

“I do!” Chet Wilson explained. “It's the last chance I'll have to see it all before you get busy with the scissors.” Chet was like a small boy seeing his first movie. I couldn't blame him. During the shooting I hadn't allowed him to see any of the rushes.

Milo and Leo begged off, but Chet and I had the movie shown in its entirety three more times. With the second run-through I began to make notes for editing.

The film did not excite me any longer; I was critical instead. For years I had watched

movies with a critical eye, and in my second and subsequent viewings I managed to get my impersonal detachment back again. The pacing was way off. My original plan to pace the first half of the movie slow, and the second half fast, had been a good idea. But by not following the script sequence in the shooting the pacing had gotten away from me. Here and there it was much too erratic for good continuity and it was not possible to retake any scenes over again, so I had to cut. And cut I did.

Tom Ruggerio, a grizzled veteran of the movies, and the film editor for my movie, confirmed most of my convictions. We worked all day in the cramped editing room, minutely examining film and cutting ruthlessly. We patched in likely stock highway scenes, and chopped them out again. Ruggerio discovered a perfect shot of a police car going over a cliff, and patched it in expertly. I had taken the chase shot of Chet forcing the police car off the road, but Tom Ruggerio pieced in the car going over the cliff so skillfully it was impossible to determine any break in the continuity. Ruggerio was good at his work and I was critical enough to make him work.

It was too bad.

When I finished the editing the movie had perfect pacing, excitement, realism and beauty; but it was only sixty-three minutes long.

Tom and I had the completed film run off in the projection room—it was a work of art, and it contained my message in addition to being a good show. All the movie needed was guitar music, the titling, and the sound effects.

“What do you think, Ruggerio?” I asked the old man.

“Well, Mr. Hudson, as it is, the movie is about as good as we can make it. With the sound effects and music dubbed in it will be a little masterpiece and I've never seen anything quite like it before. Unfortunately, we have to put back twenty-seven more minutes of film. Three minutes can be taken in titling, but the other twenty-four will have to be just plain old padding.”

Can we pad twenty-four minutes and still maintain the pace I've set, the mood and so on?”

“Nope. As a matter of fact it would be better if we superimposed the titling and credits over the opening scene where Wilson pulls into San Francisco with the truck. But there's no choice. We've got to put in at least twenty-seven more minutes of film.”

“Why do we?”

“You know that as well as I do, Mr. Hudson. A movie is ninety minutes long. It can be longer, but exhibitors insist on at least an hour and a half. Six full reels. That's the business.”

“But unnecessary padding will *ruin* my movie?”

“Not really. We can stretch the hell out of that chase down the highway. I've got stock

stuff we haven't even looked at yet, reel after reel of it. Scenic views, wild flowers, traffic jams, all kinds of stuff, and we can fit it in fine. I remember a western once where I stretched a desert chase out twenty-five minutes with long shots of different guys on horseback. Nobody knew the difference. People like chases.”

“*The Man Who Got Away* isn't a western.”

“Yeah, but he doesn't really get away either. It's the same thing as a big chase—”

“God damn it, NO!” I shouted angrily. “As far as I'm concerned my movie will run as it is, twenty-seven minutes short! Period. I'm not going to ruin my movie because of some stupid ruling that it has to be ninety minutes long. That's just like adding three more plates to the last supper, or an extra wing to the Pentagon.”

“That's up to you, Mr. Hudson, If you can get it by THE MAN, it doesn't make a damn to me. But you can't I wish you could. Right now, we've got something mighty fine in this movie of yours, and when we pad it out it will be just another movie. But that's the way it is. You can't fight the system.”

“All right, Ruggerio. Will you back me up in this thing? Will you go *to* THE MAN with me and insist that the movie should be left as is, at sixty-three minutes?”

“Nope. I'll tell him the truth if he asks me. The movie is too short. It's supposed to be ninety minutes long.”

“I think that you are a son-of-a-bitch, Ruggerio. You tell me one thing, and yet you'll tell THE MAN another—”

“I'm not telling any lies, Mr. Hudson. I've been working at Mammoth Studios for fourteen years, and that's the way things are. A movie is ninety minutes long.”

“How would you like an upper lip full of front teeth?”

“I wouldn't like it, Mr. Hudson. But that wouldn't change anything either. If you want to take a swing at me, go ahead. But a movie is still ninety minutes long.”

“Mine won't be. Is that understood?”

“Yes, sir.”

“All right. Attend to the titling and credits, the way I gave them to you, and keep your damned mouth shut over the length of my movie. Superimpose the tiding over the opening scene. I'll have the music and sound effects put in myself.”

“You're the director, Mr. Hudson.”

“You are damned right I am!”

CROSSFADE:

This is not a journal. There are not exact dates and the continuity is far from being

constant—by any means. But it is my story, and what I have to put down here now is somehow relevant, although it pains me deeply to write it. In a way, this bare exposition throws a dark cloud over my manhood. Not exactly, once the explanation is heard and believed. But at the time, I worried enough about my manhood to talk to Leo about it. His glib explanation has never been fully accepted, but it sounded reasonable at the time and I accepted his version and went ahead with my work.

Laura Harmon had tried to telephone me many times, but I hadn't talked to her except that one time in Leo's study when I told her to get off the telephone. It was my practice, and a wise one, once I got underway with my movie, not to accept any unscreened telephone calls. I didn't want to be bothered.

During the shooting I slept in motels on location, and during the studio schedule I slept on a leather couch in my office. This is not a common practice for a director. Most directors look upon their work as a regular job, and leave their work when they leave the gate in the evening. Not me. When I am working I am so intent upon what I am doing I have to be as close to my work as possible. When I first began to sell used cars in San Francisco I slept in a trailer at the back of the lot for almost a year. When I looked out of the trailer window at night and observed the row upon row of shiny unsold merchandise, it drove me wild with desire to get rid of them. Some of my best sales gimmicks came to me in the night when I studied the rows of automobiles.

In time, I outgrew this intensity of purpose. If I directed movies long enough I suppose I could eventually take them in stride too. In San Francisco I moved to an apartment befitting my increased income. But I also realize that my income would not have increased as quickly as it did if my intensity of single-minded purpose had not been as intense.

I am still skirting the subject, I notice, avoiding it.

To state it baldly, all desire for women, any woman, including Laura, left me abruptly the moment I got involved with the writing of my screenplay. Only recently has my desire returned, and now that I am not... but once again, I get ahead of myself.

After I began work on my movie I did not want to speak to Laura because to speak to her would have led to a rendezvous, and a rendezvous would have led to a romp in the hay, and I would have been inadequate. There it is. Bluntly.

And yet I caught myself, when every thought should have been directed solely on my movie, thinking about what happened to my desire—and would it ever return? and why did it actually repel me to think of getting into bed with a woman? and if my sexual ability was lost forever, what good was I now or forever? Stupid? Sure it was. But these thoughts were interfering with my work and I couldn't allow that to happen. So I spoke to Leo about it.

For two weeks I hadn't been near The House of Lumpy Grits. But at midnight, with a sudden decision I left the studio and drove home, cornering Leo in his study. Leo was

still awake, as usual, and was bent over some small models of the sets that were then under construction on Sound Stage F at the studio.

After a few minutes of discussing the sets with Leo, I blurted out my secret thoughts. His reaction to my deep-seated fears startled me, and filled me with a sudden, unreasoning anger. He laughed. The laugh was a thin, wailing type of laughter I had never heard him use before. Although it was difficult to suppress my embarrassment and chagrin, I forced a loose, comical smile, and said: "I don't think it's funny, Pop."

"Of course it isn't," Leo wiped his streaming eyes with a violet-saturated handkerchief, and then sank weakly into his swivel chair.

"All of us, Richard," Leo began seriously, "men, I mean, because I don't know anything about women, have two drives deep within us. One is a sex drive, and the other is called the aggressive drive. These two drives are so closely meshed it is quite impossible to separate them. There is a little bit of pain in all types of love, and there is a little love in all types of pain. Do you agree?"

"Yes. So far, anyway."

This is very elementary psychology, but you'd be surprised at the number of people who don't know these things."

"Well, I know something about psychology, Leo," I said impatiently. "I'd be a hell of a salesman if I didn't."

"Right. But we're talking about you. For perhaps the first time in your life you find yourself deep in the throes of intense creative endeavor. Your desire to make good is so great that your aggressive drive has completely supplanted your sexual drive. This is not unusual. And it is perfectly normal. Painters, novelists, sculptors"—Leo laughed—"and perhaps for the first time in the history of Hollywood, a combination writer-director, obtain their satisfaction, or whatever you want to call it, from their creative activity.

"A novelist finds release in the writing of his book, a painter in painting, and so on. But the sex loss is a temporary loss. When the painter completes his painting, or in your case, when the movie is finally over and done with, your natural sex drive will return in full force. Your aggressive drive will give up the ghost, and you'll probably go on a wild orgy of some kind."

I smiled ruefully. "You make it sound too simple."

"That's the way it is. Believe me."

"Do you know Lewis Carroll, Leo, as well as you know psychology?"

"Better." Leo smiled.

"Then what happens if he doesn't find any?" I paraphrased the tale of the bread-and-butterflies.

“He dies of course,” Leo picked up the dialogue.

“Does it happen often?”

“It always happens,” Leo finished sternly.

After this talk with Leo I returned to the studio and slept like a stone right up until 5:30 a.m. the next morning. And I refused to allow my mind to dwell on sex again until the movie was over.

The movie, my movie, was much more important.

LAP DISSOLVE

“Are you ready?”

Flaps Heartwell nodded vigorously. He was a Negro guitar player, currently performing nightly at the Pam-panga Club in Watts. I had hired him to play the music for my movie.

“Yes, *sir*, Mr. Hudson. The juice is buzzin' in the box!” He meant his electric guitar and amplifier.

There was a slight sound in the rear of the studio as a metal chair was moved across the floor. I turned on the sound and angrily shouted, “Shut up, back there!”

The six superfluous musicians, three with beards and three without, shifted nervously in their metal chairs, and eyed one another apprehensively. We had been forced to hire them as standby musicians although they contributed nothing; they didn't even have to take their instruments out of the cases to earn their daily wages. Such is the power of union. Every time I looked at them, and thought about the useless expenditure of funds from the meagre budget, I got sore.

“Just a second, Haps,” I said.

I walked across the thickly carpeted floor and looked at the freeloading musicians. It would have given me great pleasure to knock their heads together.

“Before we start recording,” I said ominously, “I want to impress upon you just how tough I can get I was forced to hire you, even though I'm only using a guitar for the b.g. But one peep out of any of you during the recording and I'll sue your local for sabotage. I don't even want to hear a whisper. And if you think I'm going to pay you for sneaking out for coffee, or smoking cigarettes on my time, you are crazy. Anybody who absents himself from this studio for as long as ten minutes will be docked an hour's pay. Understood?”

Two of the men with spade beards nodded; the other four grinned sheepishly. I wanted to pitch into this nonproductive sextet with both fists flying. With all of the stumbling blocks in the way, it is a wonder that any art at all is ever produced in the United States.

I returned to Flaps Heartwell, parted him gently upon his thin shoulder. Lighting a cigarette, I placed it between his lips.

“Okay, Flaps,” I said softly, “you’ve got the tune down fine, and I think you know all the cues. But once again; during the opening, play as mean and lowdown as you can, just the way we rehearsed it. And if you do everything right the ending will come out exactly even with the first line of dialogue spoken by the dispatcher. How do you like *Lumpy Grits*?”

“I like it Mr. Hudson. I’ve had it in my repertoire for years. It’s a mighty fine number.”

“How many times have you seen the movie now?”

“Five times. It’s good, Mr. Hudson.”

“Thank you. Would you like to see it cold again before we start?”

“No, sir. I’m ready to play.”

“Do you want another dry run?”

“No, sir, Mr. Hudson. I’m ready. Fm ready!”

“How about questions? Do you have any questions at all. Any at all?”

“No, sir. The movie damned near broke my heart.”

“Well, play that way then, Raps. When the movie starts I’ll be in the booth and I’ll give you the finger, like this. You bang it out hard. Then through the rest of the movie you add the parts of *Lumpy Grits* like we rehearsed it. Forget me, forget the other people in here, and everything else except what you see on the screen. Just play like you’re all alone on a mountain back in Tennessee, playing for yourself. If you feel like humming parts of the song while you play, go ahead. I liked the way you did that last time.”

“I didn’t mean to start hummin’, Mr. Hudson. Sometimes I hum that way because I can’t help it.”

That’s all right, Flaps. I liked it. You are a true artist, Flaps, and I’m depending on you. We’re only going to do this once and we’re not breaking it up because I want the music to be spontaneous where it’s needed. Did you notice, on the last runthrough, your name sitting up there all by itself in a separate frame? *Music by Flaps Heartwell.*”

“I almos’ fainted when I seen that, Mr. Hudson.”

The way you play when the movie starts will depend upon whether it stays there or not. Are you ready? Really ready?”

“Yes, sir. I’m ready.” By this time, Flaps’ forehead was perspiring freely.

“That’s the way I work, Flaps. Where credit is due, I give it. You deserve the credit for this music and I’m giving it to you. Millions of people all over the world are going to see your name on that screen. And when this movie is released you’re going to have a

towsack full of mail from people you never heard of.”

“It sure is an awful responsibility...” Flaps gulped. It was difficult for him to swallow.

“When the film starts, Flaps, you're on your own. I want to make that clear, and I won't be able to help you. You'll just have to watch and play, watch and play, and the emotion you feel—” I thumped his guitar, “let it come out of this!”

“I'm ready! Gosh darn it, Mr. Hudson. I've done told you a hundred times I was ready!”

Flaps was so upset he was about to burst into tears. This was fine with me. This was the way I wanted him to be. Without another word I gravely shook hands with him and entered the control booth where the sound engineer was waiting. Flaps stood alone in the center of the studio, one foot on a chair, sweat glistening on his black face, the guitar trembling in his large hands. His eyes were glued on the white screen, he wet his lips with a pink tongue, and then he rolled his eyes wildly in my direction.

“Okay,” I said to engineer and projectionist. “Now.” I pointed my forefinger at Flaps.

The screen suddenly filled with an enormous truck hurtling toward the audience of one, Flaps Heartwell, and angry guitar strings exploded in the control room. The music was vicious, savage, frightening, and barely under control. In other words, the music was perfect. The run-through was performed without a hitch and there was no necessity for any redubbing whatsoever.

The emotional effect the music produced in the completed movie was similar to wiring a Jackson Pollack painting for sound, if such a thing could be accomplished.

I cannot describe the music any better than that.

For his performance Flaps Heartwell received twenty bucks. The six musicians who did nothing received eight dollars an hour. The total for the sextet was \$394.70. Luckily for me, Flaps didn't belong to a union.

FADE TO:

Three days after the recording session I entered Leo's office and plunked four cans of film down on his desk. I managed a good front but my insides were quivering with apprehension.

“Let's have the studio preview tonight Leo. For a change I think *The Man Who Got Away* should be previewed in a drive-in.”

Leo looked at the four cans, raised his eyebrows quizzically, tapped the can with the end of a pencil. “Where are the other two reels?”

“It just so happened that I didn't need six reels.” I smiled. “Sixty-three minutes were all I needed.” This important tid-bit of information had been withheld from Leo until music, titling and sound had been dubbed.

Leo wagged his head. "I was under the impression that you would have trouble cutting to ninety minutes—but sixty-three..."

"I realize that it's a bit unorthodox, Pop, but I had to cut, that's all there is to it I'm sorry, but that's the way it'll have to be."

"You don't think that maybe you can add, say one more reel? Another fifteen minutes?"

"No. Nothing. I couldn't add another fifteen seconds. The movie is perfect as it is. I'll stake my reputation on it."

"What about mine?"

"I'll stake yours too."

Again, Leo tapped the top can with a pencil. "THE MAN has to see this, you know, before there can be any preview."

"Take it to him." I said simply. "It's ready."

Leo gnawed on his lower lip for a long moment. "I am worried about this, Richard. Really worried. I didn't have an inkling you were cutting so drastically. You should have told me. Maybe I could have helped you; it isn't too late anyway. Suppose we—"

"Don't worry about it Pop. I'll take full responsibility."

"As the producer *I've* already assumed full responsibility. Before I can show this to THE MAN I want to see it."

"I want you to see it Pop."

After lunch, Leo and I saw the movie together, just the two of us, sitting in comfortable overstuffed chairs in the tiny Producer's Theatre next to Sound Stage A. Every time I saw my movie I liked it better. When it was over and the houselights were on, Leo looked pensively at the lobe of his right ear.

"This isn't just another movie, Richard."

"I know it isn't."

"It will make people angry."

"That's right."

"There will be letters."

"Bound to be."

"That little girl... the tire marks across her white dress..."

"Too bad it isn't in color."

"That little girl is very disturbing."

"You're putting it mildly."

“The music frightened me.”

“Good, isn't it?”

“Are we really honest, Richard? Is that bloodthirsty mob the American people?”

“For Christ's sake, Leo!”

“The ending then... there isn't any real answer.”

“Do you have the real answer? Does anybody? What the hell is the matter with you? We've gone over all of this before.”

“The movie isn't cynical, Richard. It's bitter.”

“Right. If that's the way you want to put it.”

“I don't believe in my heart, Richard,” Leo thumped his pigeon chest with an open palm, “that the world is really like this. And yet your movie makes me believe it! Who did this to you? Why are you so unhappy?”

“Hell, I'm not unhappy, Pop. I'm the happiest man in the world.”

Leo sighed wearily and shook his head slowly back and forth.

DISSOLVE

KING OF THE MOUNTAIN

A By-Play in One Act

Scene: The office of THE MAN, Mammoth Studios, Culver City, California. Time: Day or night. Without windows, with air-conditioning, and under brilliant electric illumination, who can tell the exact time? THE MAN is seated behind his huge, white desk; he wears a red linen sports jacket and a yellow sports shirt, open at the neck, exposing a sheaf of dirty-white chest hair at the V. On one corner of the great expanse of desk a milk-glass vase holds a dozen American Beauty roses. On the opposite corner of the desk, there is a stack of brightly-bound manuscripts. LEO STEINBERG, wearing white trousers and a navy-blue jacket with brass buttons, is seated at the left of the desk. His eyes stare at the floor. By the bar, twenty feet away from the desk, RICHARD HUDSON shakes ice in a tall glass. His cold eyes shift back and forth from LEO to THE MAN, warily. Periodically he checks the zipper on his fly. It always seems to surprise him when he finds the zipper secured at the top of the fly. RICHARD'S plain charcoal suit, white shirt, maroon knit tie and plain black shoes are in sharp contrast to the yachting costume worn by Steinberg, and the sports apparel affected by THE MAN.

THE MAN: (*After an awkward silence*) Mr. Steinberg told me that he didn't believe you would go along with my plan. But I can only believe that you really don't understand it. If you will please refrain from any more outbursts until I have completed, in detail, my plans for *The Man Who Got Away*, I am certain you'll see things my way.

RICHARD: Are you on *his* side or mine, Leo?

LEO: Can't you listen? For once in your life, listen!

RICHARD: (*Pours whiskey over his glassful of ice, recaps the bottle, and sets it on the bar.*) I'm listening.

THE MAN: My plan is not an idle whim or spur of the moment decision, Mr. Hudson. The inroads of television on the motion picture industry have been disastrous. Other studios have fought back by selling their movie backlogs, and producing their own series. Mammoth Studios can also make movies for television. The only reason I have held off so long as I have is I wanted the right format. Unwittingly, perhaps, your movie is the right picture to start the series. The Mammoth Hour will be a seasonal series of thirteen one-hour filmed shows, and it will start with *The Man Who Got Away*. The entire series will attack inequities in the American way of life through adequate documentation. I plan to document through dramatization the entire range of public problems. Segregation, taxation, unions, any and all problems of the day affecting the American people. Your movie may well be a classic that can be brought back every five years on television and reach another appreciative audience.

LEO: It's a grand plan, Richard.

THE MAN: Mr. Steinberg has agreed to be the executive producer of the series, and will have a free rein. Nepotism is not unheard of in Hollywood, Mr. Hudson, and I am certain that your stepfather will allow you to direct some of the better scripts at \$1,500 a show.

LEO: You'll have your choice, Richard!

RICHARD: I'm still listening.

THE MAN: I am positive that the combination of the Steinberg name, along with this initial movie, will secure the top Trendex rating for The Mammoth Hour as soon as it is launched. Your movie contains all of the elements I was looking for in a pilot film. A shocker! It's controversial, and it will cause angry comment, letters, and editorials. You'll be the most talked about writer-director in television. (Pause.) Now tell me again that you object.

RICHARD: How long is The Mammoth Hour going to be? One hour or ninety minutes?

THE MAN: One hour.

RICHARD: All right. I've listened to you; how about hearing my side?

THE MAN: Of course.

RICHARD: *The Man Who Got Away* is exactly sixty-three minutes long. It's as tight as a new goatskin bongo. In a one-hour television drama there is first the announcer. One minute. He announces the host. The host informs the audience that he is from Hollywood, that this is the first of a series, and of course he'll have to say something about the show the audience is going to see, something about the cast, and something about the entire forthcoming series. The announcer and the host, at the minimum, will consume four minutes. Then there will be the commercial. Two or three more minutes lost. The rest of the hour will be broken up three more times for commercials, not counting a one minute station break at the half-hour. And then the end. More host, telling the audience about next week's show,, with a scene or two thrown in from the next show as a teaser.

THE MAN: You exaggerate, Mr. Hudson.

RICHARD: No, I don't. An that would be left of my movie would be about forty minutes, cut up in such small segments it would take a genius to follow the continuity in his head from one commercial to the next. My movie is like a giant snowball going down hill, getting larger all of the time with suspense and danger until it explodes. A single break in the continuity and the effect is gone!

THE MAN: Mr. Steinberg says that it can be done.

RICHARD: No. Anymore cutting and the movie would be as silly as cutting a condensed Reader's Digest novel.

THE MAN: I believe you are concerned more with your message than the dramatic effect. On television your movie will reach fifty million people.

RICHARD: But who could follow it? What more could be cut that wouldn't completely ruin it? Are you against me in this, Leo?

LEO: Part of what you say is true, Richard. There will be a host, and commercials, but I will be the host, and I am positive that the movie can be cut in many places without the complete loss of continuity. Almost all of the long shots can be taken out, and they should be. Long shots are not good for television, and with your okay on each cut—

RICHARD: I won't okay anything! Evidently not a damned thing I've said the past few weeks has sunk into your pointed head! This isn't an ordinary movie or a dismembered television program. It is a movie! M-O-V-I-E! It was designed for a movie theatre, with a full audience in attendance. If it is projected in a theatre it'll tear the guts right out of the audience and spill them in the aisles. But it can't do that on television, chopped up with deodorant and sanitary pad commercials!

THE MAN: Exactly! (*The sharpness in THE MAN'S voice causes RICHARD to pause with another angry word on his lips.*) Do you think you're lecturing to a roomful of students? This series has been in the works for a long time. Studies have been made of every angle. On Leo's faith in your ability I took a chance, and it has paid off. Not only

do I have a pilot film for The Mammoth Hour on television, I have a new star in Chet Wilson. Wilson alone, will repay the studio many times over for my fiscal investment in the years to come. You had better wake up, Hudson. I'm in this chair to make money for Mammoth Studios, and for no other reason. Your piddling little one-hour movie would scare moviegoers to death in a movie theatre. It *has* to be broken up to destroy the realism! But there will be enough realism left for an artistic triumph. These are the facts. The simple facts.

LEO: Don't you think you're being a little unreasonable, Richard?

RICHARD: Not you, Pop? I can understand this stupid son-of-a-bitch. He's only concerned with making money, but you, Leo... You!

LEO: You're only thinking about yourself. Try and understand my side. This is my opportunity. After your show there will be twelve more, and I'll have complete control over the stories, casting and direction. Don't you realize the wonderful things we'll be able to do together?

THE MAN: (*Slams his fist down hard on his desk.*) That's enough, Mr. Steinberg! You're excused, Hudson!

RICHARD: (*Angrily.*) What do you mean, excused? I own a third of this movie and Leo owns another. Where does that leave you?

THE MAN: With two thirds.

RICHARD: (*Turning to Leo.*) Is that true?

LEO (*With an elaborate shrug.*) It was part of the deal. In return for my rights I was given a seven-year contract and the new series. In my place, you would have done the same.

RICHARD: (*Quietly.*) I'll never sink low enough to be in your place. (*RICHARD throws his glass of ice and whiskey against the white wall of the office, and runs toward the door as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.)

One bright summer's day when I was fourteen years of age I pedaled my bicycle to Bimmi Baths for a swim. This was long before the Palomar burned down, and Bimmi was a block or so down from the dance hall right off Vermont Avenue. Bimmi boasted of four separate swimming pools, three with hot water of different temperatures and one outside pool of cold water. I liked to go to Bimmi in the summertime, all by myself, and plunge from very hot to slightly cooler than that, to the lukewarm, and then to the cold. It was a good way to kill a summer's day.

Leaping recklessly into the inside, lukewarm pool I splashed water on a swimmer who turned out to be a girl named Frances—I never learned her last name.

“You rat,” she announced with a smile, rubbing water from her eyes.

“I’m sorry,” I said mockingly. “How dad I splash you— like this?” And I splashed more water into the girl’s face. She splashed back, and for the next hour and a half we had a good time playing in the water. Racing each other, holding our breaths underwater, and diving from the three-foot springboard. When it came to diving I really showed off for my newly-found girl friend by performing a half-gainer with a full twist, a dive I had never been able to do before.

We moved outside to the cold water pool, and after a couple of turns in icy water we stretched out on the tiles and sunned and smoked. Frances was a good-looking female with a small, almost delicate figure, short shapely legs, and a pretty—I hate to use the term—elfin face. Her eyebrows had been plucked away, the painted eyebrows washed away by the water, and her underarms had been depilated. A snug, white rubber swimming cap completely covered her hair. I was inquisitive.

“I’ve been trying to figure out what color your hair is,” I said, bending over her face.

Frances smiled, and looked at me boldly with frank blue eyes. She was lying flat on her back, and I was on my side in a half-reclining, half-sitting position.

“Where?” She said lazily.

At fourteen, I certainly knew “dirty talk” when I heard it I blushed, and blushing made me angry with myself. I thought Frances to be fourteen or fifteen, and no boy likes a girl to take the initiative at that age. At the same time I was excited by her offhand comment. Who could tell? Maybe this could lead to something? Boy-like, I tossed Frances into the pool because I couldn’t think of a snappy comeback.

When we had had enough swimming and left the pool for our respective dressing rooms, I had a date to meet Frances outside for a hamburger and a Coke.

It didn’t take me long to dress; I was barefooted, I didn’t wear underwear in the summertime, and my outer garments consisted of yellow, bell-bottomed corduroy trousers and a well-worn Tee shirt. At fourteen I was a husky kid, bronzed by the California sun, and tight black curls fell down beautifully over my forehead. A black fuzzy growth had sprouted on my chin, and I shaved once a week whether I needed it or not.

All-in-all, with my pants leg rolled up to my knee to avoid the bicycle sprocket, and with a fairly new bicycle, I pictured myself as a quite romantic figure, and a damned good catch for Frances. When Frances came out of the dressing room I planned to ride her on the handlebars up the street to the White Cabin where Cokes and hamburgers were only five cents apiece. One advantage to the Depression; if you had a quarter in your pocket it would buy something; and this was California before sales-tax, and I had a quarter...

Frances appeared under the archway and the little bubbles in my head disintegrated. Frances wasn’t a teenage girl; she was a woman of twenty-one or—two, dressed to kill

in silk stockings, high heels, a tailored knee-length suit, and a tiny pink hat with a veil. Her eyebrows were now thickly pencilled arching curves of solid black, and her lips were painted with tantalizing Tangee. For a long horrible moment we stared at each other, our minds refusing to believe what our eyes perceived. Her chin dropped and so did mine.

What Frances expected me to be I do not know. Maybe she had figured me for a young man about town with a low-slung convertible, I do not know. I only knew that I was shocked into a dead silence by the appearance of this adult when I had been expecting a teenage girl!

Now that I am older I realize that Frances carried the situation off very well indeed. She let me down as gently as possible. She excused herself sweetly, stating it was much later than she had thought, and that she had to run. Maybe I would accept a rain check on our date—for another time perhaps.

I nodded dumbly and Frances topped away toward the bus stop on her high heels, leaving me standing there, a barefooted young boy with too much cheek and a bicycle.

Okay. I learned something. In one terrible moment I realized that I had reached a point of no return. In a pair of swimming trunks I was a man in the eyes of a woman.

From that moment my childhood was over. I began to dress the part, act the part, and I moved into the adult world with its adult bedrooms.

But when I fled blindly from the office of THE MAN, almost in tears, I knew that I was still a child in an adult world, although I was thirty-one, and not fourteen. I had acted my part well. I had fooled Leo and I had fooled myself, but THE MAN and Leo Steinberg were adults, something I would never be. I didn't want to be an adult—I didn't want to lose my dream. Reality stinks. The dream is better; it makes the living worthwhile.

I can put it another way.

People like THE MAN and Leo Steinberg feed on men like me. They borrow our dreams for their own ends because they are too grown-up to have any dreams of their own. Like getting rid of a moth...

A moth will follow light. By turning out all of the lights in a house and by switching on a new one closer to the door each time as you switch off the light behind, you can lead a moth right out the front door. As the moth flaps out the front door to the porch light you slam the door behind it and the moth is outside. When the porch light is switched off the moth is out in the cold and cannot understand what happened to all of the pretty lights.

This is what THE MAN and Leo had done to me. As each door opened, I went through it blindly, following my dream. And now I was outside, a child in an adult world. They had my dream, and I had nothing.

The realization that I was as much a Feeb as any used car buyer I had ever dealt with did nothing for my morale. I had been taken just like any clown who believes in the basic

goodness of his fellowmen. In my childlike thoughts I had built Leo into some kind of a tin god. To suddenly discover that he was merely another opportunist nauseated me.

It did not make me feel any better to confirm again what I already knew about people. Such knowledge had been confirmed too many times. Too many times.

I was out and there was no way to compromise. If I had only known—I mean, if my story had been planned from the beginning as a one-hour television show, there would have been a different ending; a different story. I could have written the story in three acts, with a logical cliff-hanging suspense motif built into the end of the first two acts. Although the overly long commercials would still have affected the continuity, there could have been enough interest generated to keep itchy fingers away from the dial until the next act. I would have seen to that.

But the way my movie was in its completed form it was a run-away express train that couldn't allow for any stops or side trips. How utterly stupid of THE MAN not to see this!

Liquor helps. There may be some who will disagree. Let them. I know. Liquor helps. I had a drink at the first bar I came to after I left the studios. I drank my way through the long hot afternoon, sitting in a booth in the dark interior of a quiet saloon on Normandie. I didn't slug it down; that would have made me sick. I drank methodically, holding the scotch for a long time in my mouth before swallowing, and gradually the pain in my heart began to disappear. My lips had a pleasant numbness and I raised my voice when I talked to the bartender. When I raised my voice I could hear better.

Night fell. I changed bars and picked up a female companion; an aged blonde old enough to be my mother. She had two front teeth missing and I was fascinated by her smile.

“Smile for me, baby,” I kept telling her, and she would scream with shrill, shrieking peals of laughter. O, it was great fun.

Somewhere along the way we picked up a Chief Petty Officer, U. S. Navy. He and the blonde got along very well together and he wanted her for his very own. In an elaborate ceremony I sold her to him for fifty cents and four safety matches. It was all very funny. The woman shrieked with laughter, gasping for breath. The couple disappeared into the night. In an alley, I was very sick. Walking slowly for eight blocks in the cool night air cleared my head. I found my way back, on foot, to the dragon's mouth entrance of the Hong Kong Club. The bartender refused to sell me another drink. On general principles I put up a mild protest, but I didn't really want another drink. The only reason I had returned was because a parking stub in my pocket indicated that my car was parked in the Hong Kong Club's lot.

“You come back tomorrow, Mr. Hudson,” the bartender humored me, “and I'll sell you all you want. But I think you've had enough for one night.”

“All right,” I handed him my parking stub. “Get somebody to drive me home then. If I'm too drunk to drink, I'm too drunk to drive.”

Smiling, the bartender nodded approvingly, and had one of the bus-boys drive me home to The House of Lumpy Grits. I gave the bus-boy a five dollar bill for cab fare back to the Hong Club, and climbed the stairs to my apartment.

Five minutes under a cold shower cleared my head. Without dressing I stood shivering in my tiny kitchen and downed three cups of instant coffee. Several layers of drunkenness had been peeled away. I felt mildly exhilarated, light, strong—and angry. In a sudden brilliant decision I made up my mind to punch Leo in the nose. The plans for my movie wouldn't be altered, but I would feel better.

I dressed with extreme care. Leo was, after all was said and done, a genius, and if he was to be punched in the nose it should be done respectfully and correctly. I slipped into a base of nylon underwear, black silk socks, garters, and inserted my big feet into patent leather pumps with black silk bows. This was the first time I had ever had the nerve to wear the patent leather dancing pumps. I had to paw through my shirts for ten minutes before I could find the white dress shirt with ruffles. Thirty dollars worth of shirt, and I had never worn it. My fingers coped bravely with my onyx studs, and I managed them all right, but I couldn't tie the black bow tie. I settled for a black clip-on tie instead. I hoped that Leo would not notice this discourtesy. Fully dressed in my black mohair tuxedo, with my sunglasses on my nose, hiding my red-rimmed eyes, I surveyed myself in the full length mirror. Very handsome. And I could stand perfectly straight without wavering, well, hardly wavering. I tried my voice for sound.

“Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party,” I said to my reflection in the mirror.

“Righto, Mr. Hudson,” I replied thickly.

There were some bad moments stumbling across the tangled growth of back garden before I reached the back door of the house and let myself in with my key. The house was dark and I flipped on lights in every room I passed through as I made my way to Leo's study. His study was dark, and I pressed the wall switch. It seemed strange not to find Leo at his desk, but he wasn't there. But on the wall, mocking me, in blacks and reds, translucent whites and yellows, was Roualt's *clown*, Leo's clown, staring down at me with sad, sad eyes.

“He couldn't wait!” I thought. “He couldn't wait to get his damned clown back! He couldn't wait to get back his artistic symbol!”

I hated the painting. Leo had bought the painting back to prove his mastery over me and THE MAN. No other reason. And I had nothing. Nothing! Without thinking any more about it I snatched a bronze letter-opener from the desk and slashed the clown across his heart I slashed the painting diagonally from top to bottom. I slashed the other diagonal and the canvas shredded into tatters; chunks of flaky paint fluttered to the floor. I tore

the mount from the wall and banged it on the desk. The heavy frame wouldn't break, but the canvas was ruined forever. I dropped the frame to the floor, Leo's foul soul, and left the house.

Thinking of nothing, I sat in the front seat of my car, bent over the steering wheel, attempting to make my mind a complete blank. I couldn't do it. Drooping gloops of Duco-red anger drooled past my eyes. I started the car, I drove directly to Mammoth Studios; I did not pass Go, and I didn't collect two hundred dollars. But I was going to win the Monopoly game my own way.

The night man at the gate didn't know me, but he let me in when I showed him my studio pass.

I parked in my reserved space in front of the bungalow office and carefully locked my car, reflecting that on the morrow another director would probably have the reserved space, the small office. When I inserted my key in the lock on the office door, the inside light switched on. I entered. Standing in the center of the room, Laura Harmon waited for me. Evidently she had been asleep on the leather couch. There were deep creases on her left cheek. Her eyelids were swollen and I could see the pink membrane of her eyelids all of the way around her large red-veined eyes. Her thick hair was twisted and tangled. She wore no make-up, except for a trace of slightly smeared lipstick. Mrs. Witch, meet The Devil.

“What are you doing in my office?” I asked coldly.

“I wanted to see you, Richard—”

“Okay. You've seen me. Now get out.”

“Not until I've talked to you!” She said defiantly, holding her back stiff and thrusting out her great breasts. I shrugged indifferently.

“Go ahead and talk then.” I went directly to the file cabinet, and throughout her little speech I pulled out all of the mimeographed copies of *The Man Who Got Away* scripts and piled them on the desk. The scripts would make an excellent fire, I decided.

“I'm going to talk and you're going to listen,” Laura said, much in the manner of Bette Davis. “You've managed to keep away from me and avoid every decent effort I've made to talk to you. But this time you're going to listen to me!”

“I'm listening,” I said flippantly. “Talk fast, I'm leaving in a minute.”

“You aren't going anywhere!” Laura's voice was almost hysterical with anger. “I'm pregnant!”

“Yeah. Go on,” I said. Emptying a large wastebasket onto the floor, I stacked scripts inside it as neatly as possible.

“You have to marry me, Richard!”

“No.” I informed her.

“I’ve been going crazy. I couldn’t see you, I couldn’t get you on the telephone. I even wrote you a letter—”

“We get a lot of crank letters at the studio. You ought to know that, working in the typing pool.”

“It’s true, Richard! You don’t seem to understand. I’m going to have a baby... *our* baby, Richard!”

“Yours, you mean.” I laughed. “Look, Laura, it’s nice to talk to you and all that, but I have to go now—”

“You have to do something, Richard! If you won’t marry me, maybe you can... I don’t know what to do. I’ve been going crazy ever since I found out I don’t know where to turn.”

“If you don’t want it, get rid of it.”

“That takes money, Richard, a great deal of money, and I don’t know where to go, who to see. You’ve got to help me, Richard!” She began to cry.

“All right.”

The timing was terrible on Laura’s part. At another time, another place, I would have handled the situation quite differently; given her a check, or I might have sent her to a doctor I know in Stockton. If she had wanted to keep the baby, I would have paid the bills, and maybe I would have set up a little monthly allowance for child support. I don’t know exactly how I would have handled it. But this way... she picked a bad time.

As I straightened up, I brought my fist up hard. My fist caught Laura squarely in the soft part of her rounded belly and sank in wrist deep. Her breath whooshed audibly as it left her lungs. She bent over forward, almost falling, took two short backward steps and then sat down hard upon the floor. I lifted her to the couch, straightened her legs. Laura clutched her stomach with both hands and slowly began to breathe again. Tears of pain and anger flowed down her swollen cheeks.

“Breathing okay now?” I asked. Laura nodded her chin tremulously. “You’ll be all right now, kid. That ought to do it for you. There’ll be a couple of bad days, I suppose, but they can’t be helped. The next time you get layed, you’d better use some kind of precautions. I may not be around to help you.”

Shouldering the wastebasket full of scenarios I left the office. I stopped by Sound Stage F on my way to the film library to pick up a gallon of inflammable paint thinner. The film library, a small one-story building, was securely locked with a hasp and a Yale lock. I left the thinner and wastebasket by the door and returned to Stage F for a crowbar. Two or three minutes later I had the hasp pried off and the door open. Inside, I scattered the scripts in a messy pile by the librarian’s desk. I tore open a few cans of film and let the

film uncoil on top of the paper. Somewhere in this library, in four cans, my movie was filed away, but it would take too long to find it. It was much easier to burn the entire library.

Pouring liberal portions of thinner over the pile of paper and film, I made a trail of thinner to the doorway, tossed the empty can back into the room. Flipping my Zippo I attempted to light the trail of liquid thinner, but I couldn't get it going. I lighted the pile of paper without any trouble. The flames licked at the legs of the librarian's desk, the film smouldered and gave off a foul, acrid odor. Closing the door on the flames I returned to my office.

Laura was still in the same position on the couch, flat on her back, clutching her stomach, her eyes fixed on the ceiling.

“Do you want me to drive you home, Laura? Or do you want to stay here?”

“Don't touch me!”

“I wouldn't touch you for anything.” I laughed. “I offered you a ride home. Do you want to go or not?”

“I don't want anything from you!” Laura said huskily. “You're going to burn in Hell, Richard Hudson!”

“Then I'll be seeing you. Does the overhead light bother you? The studio has a campaign, you know, to save on electricity.”

Laura turned her head away from me toward the wall. I switched off the light, closed the door gently, and got into my car. The fire would have anywhere from two to four hours, I thought, before it was discovered. And by that time, help would be too late.

As I drove out the gate I bade a cheery good night to the gatekeeper. Poor bastard. I doubt very much if he made more than a dollar an hour on his rotten job. Like most corporations and the U. S. Government, Mammoth Studios was penny-wise and dollar foolish.

A few, just a few, well-paid guards would have saved Mammoth Studios a great amount of money...

WIPE

A telephone was ringing. A jangling, irritating, persistent, intermittent ringing that would not stop. I tried to ignore it by pulling the pillow over my head, but the noise came through the pillow, piercing my inner ears with sharp copper sounds. I opened my eyes, and tossed the pillow to one side. The telephone was a foot away from my head on the bedside stand.

“Good morning, Mr. Hudson,” a female voice said cheerfully, as I picked up the

receiver, "it's eight o'clock."

"I believe you." I racked the receiver.

The roaring, crackling pains behind my forehead were at full volume. The back of my neck ached, and the tattoo needles behind my eyes were torturing me. Quite a normal hangover. I would have been disappointed without it.

There was a gasping snorting snore, followed by a creak of springs as the body beside me turned sideways. I groaned inwardly, but I didn't turn and look because I knew who it was. Unfortunately, I never blank out completely, no matter how much I drink. We were in a double-room at the Biltmore, and I lay facing the polished mahogany dresser. The snoring woman's dark blue uniform was draped neatly over a red-and-white candy-striped chair. Her navy blue bonnet, with the streaming ribbons on it, and her battered tambourine were both on top of the dresser. But I didn't need the sight of this confirming evidence. It had been a hard-fought campaign against this seasoned soul saver, but I remembered winning the battle even though I had lost the war. In addition to my sick headache I now had an accompanying feeling of revulsion as I remembered the events of my busy night.

After leaving the studio I had driven into downtown L. A. and checked into the Biltmore, pausing only once on the drive to buy a bottle of scotch in order to have some luggage.

My solitary company was terrible. Unable to drink alone I left the hotel and headed for one of the Hill Street bars on the other side of Pershing Square. By accident I happened to select a fairy hangout, but that didn't bother me. It wasn't that I wanted contact companionship, male, female, or in between; I just wanted to be near people instead of being alone. Never before had I felt so alone. I took an entire booth to myself, but no one bothered me. I was still wearing my tailored dinner jacket, and if my outward expression was as grim as my inner thoughts, I must have presented an unapproachably forbidding appearance. Except for a few surreptitious glances in my direction when I first entered, the gay ones avoided my eyes following the negative appraisal.

Two very young, importuning private soldiers sitting at the bar looked at me wonderingly for a moment, put their close-cropped heads together for a consultation, but they didn't join me either. I was mildly disappointed by their abrupt departure. My mood was meanness, and I had hoped, in a way, that they would come over to my booth with a proposition. I would have had an excuse to bang their shaven heads together, and I sorely needed something to do; if not action, at least movement. Movement is always preferable to inaction.

A pale young man with overly long blond hair, wearing a flowered vest beneath a pink sport coat, joined the colored piano player on the tiny elevated stage at the far end of the bar. His voice was sweet and high, a contra-tenor (although he probably considered himself an alto), and he sang into the microphone. *My Buddy*. The song, as it came over

the cagily placed P. A. system speakers, drifting pure and incredibly high through the sentimentally silenced room, reminded me of *my* good old buddy—good old backstabbing Leo Steinberg. I signaled the waiter, ordered another drink, and gave him five dollars for the singer.

“Tell the boy to sing it again.”

“Yes, sir. It's a very popular song here.”

Listening to the song again in connection with Leo gave me a sardonic, bitter-sweet feeling of satisfaction. Perhaps, I thought, he would enjoy a recording of this buddy song as an artistic replacement for his damned Roualt... and at this moment the woman with the tambourine intruded upon my vengeful thoughts by shoving it in front of my face.

She was a woman in her late forties, short and hefty, plain-faced, freckled, and her well-tailored blue uniform was freshly pressed and immaculate. Her heavy eyebrows were solidly gray, and two strands of dark gray hair, one on each side of her high white forehead, were barely visible beneath her blue bonnet. There was a kindly, unfeigned smile on her bowed, unpainted lips. A blunt, nastily worded refusal or a graciously given donation were one and the same to this woman, I felt. From her manner, and she didn't say a word because her smile begged for her, I assumed that she would take either yes or no for an answer with true humility.

There was a one-dollar bill and some change on the table. I dropped the uncounted sum into her tambourine.

“Thank you, sir. And God bless you.” Her voice was deep and husky. It took many years of singing and sin-shouting on street corners to develop a voice so deep and strong.

“Just a minute, Captain,” I said.

“Yes, sir?”

“I want to give you some more money. But you'll have to wait until the waiter gets me some change.”

I beckoned to the waiter, handed him a twenty, and asked for one-dollar bills.

“Don't stand there, Captain,” I said smilingly. “I cant get up in this booth for you, and besides, your feet hurt—”

“I don't think I'd better sit down.” She hesitated for a brief moment, and then sat down across from me with a deep sigh. “My feet *are* tired, and for just a minute—” Her voice trailed away in a husky whisper.

“How long have you been doing this?” I asked politely.

“Almost twenty-five years now. But my husband had more than thirty years of service before he died.”

This remark appeared to be innocent enough on the surface, but I was suspicious; and

although I could see how unreasonable my suspicions were I couldn't help having them. Why should she tell me indirectly that she was a widow? She had given me this unasked for information almost automatically, when I had merely asked an indifferent question to have someone to talk to for a couple of minutes. Why hadn't I ever suspected Leo, the way I suspected this poor, innocent woman for no reason at all? And then I had to know; I had to know if this woman had her price, just like everybody else in the world I had ever known. Like Leo, the one man in the world I had respected for incorruptible integrity! I had to make the test, and then I would truly know, once and for all. And if it were true I could learn—somehow—to live with it, to adjust to it for the remainder of my life. The nasty mood that I was in, in combination with the liquor I had put away that day, influenced my evil decision, but it certainly wasn't a valid excuse...

The waiter returned, and I gave him one of the bills as a tip.

“Would you like a cold drink, Captain?” I suggested.

“Oh, no! But thanks—”

“Bring the officer a Coke, and another one of these for me.”

Flustered, she started to slide out of the booth, but I stopped her by quickly dropping another bill into the tambourine. “I've got a deal for you. You don't collect more than a dollar every five minutes as you make your rounds, do you?”

“No, sir. Not nearly that much.”

“All right, then. Keep your seat and be company for awhile. And every five minutes I'll add another dollar to your collection.” I smiled, my boyishly winning smile.

“I shouldn't—”

“You're collecting for a worthy cause, aren't you?”

“Yes, sir, but it isn't that, Mr.—”

“Hudson. You may call me Mr. Hudson, but I'd rather you didn't tell me your name.”

“We aren't supposed to—” I dropped another dollar in the tambourine. “I could get into trouble, sitting down in a bar this way, Mr. Hudson, but I can stay for a few minutes, I guess.” She smiled. “And my feet *do* hurt me.”

“Of course they do,” I said soothingly.

Now that I had a project in mind I nursed my drinks, spacing them to keep a sharp edge, but without drinking too much to dull it I drew the woman out, encouraging her to talk about herself and her work, adding bills to the growing pile at untimed intervals. She had no children; she had spent five years in London, two in Hong Kong; and of all the places she had been stationed she liked Los Angeles best—because of the climate and all. And she hoped they would never send her back to Chicago again, even though that was her home town...

When the singles had all been transferred from my hand to her tambourine, she walked back to the hotel with me. I had more money in my room, I told her, and she came willingly enough when I promised to give her another twenty dollars.

There weren't many people in the lobby at this time of the night, but the few who were there didn't give us a curious glance. In Los Angeles the unusual is commonplace; not even the sight of a huge man wearing a dinner jacket, accompanied by a short woman in a Salvation Army uniform could raise a single eyebrow.

Once we were inside my room, she began to show a few signs of nervousness, but despite her obvious jumpiness I could perceive that she intended to remain until I gave her the promised money. I poured two stiff drinks in toothbrush glasses, and held one out to her.

"No thanks, Mr. Hudson." She shook her head, gnawed worriedly at her lower lip.

"You've had a drink before, haven't you?"

"Of course—it isn't that, Mr. Hudson. After all, I'm forty-seven years old—"

"Then have one with me, one for the road," I held out my glass again. "I'll consider you rude and impolite if you don't join me. And I won't give you the other twenty until you do."

"Good night, then, Mr. Hudson." Her plain face flushed, and she started for the door, but at the door she turned. "But I want to thank you for the money you have already given me. Thank you very much."

"That's quite all right, Captain," I said coldly, narrowing my eyes. "Good night"

She fumbled with the chain lock for fully twenty seconds before she turned around again.

"Would you mind," she said timidly, examining the un-patterned pink carpet, and avoiding my eyes, "putting a little water in mine, Mr. Hudson?"

"Of course." I grinned, but I didn't laugh. "If that's the way you like it."

After two more drinks apiece my patience was wearing thin and I propositioned her. After a summer stock exhibition of righteous indignation, we had an unduly prolonged bargaining session; and she settled for \$150 in cash. The smallness of the sum was the only part about the acceptance that surprised me; I had no feelings of triumph, I would have gone higher, much higher. I had more than \$400 in my wallet, and I could have had a check cashed for more money at the desk if I had needed it.

Her inhibitions left her one by one as she removed the various pieces of her uniform. Her body didn't go with her middle-aged face and long gray hair. Her plumpness was not that of a mature woman; it was more like that of a young fourteen-year-old girl who loves mashed potatoes and has never lost her baby fat. This illusion was heightened by the scattering of rusty freckles on her white shoulders, and the clean milky whiteness of

her skin.

I undressed and sat down on the edge of the bed to kick off my pumps. My head reeled, but I watched Louise —she wanted me to call her by this name—pour two more drinks and add water to them, as she stood by the dresser. As she quacked away, loquacious with excitement and the unaccustomed liquor, she now reminded me of a tame white duck that was trying to tell me something, but I couldn't follow the gist of the monologue. And then we were both sitting side by side on the bed, the bottle on the floor between us. Her voice was a steady trade wind from the East; a muddy trickle of water that eventually turns into the Mississippi River if it runs long enough, and it began to sink into my consciousness that she was telling me the story of her life. Except that she was confessing to me—all of the little things she had done, the bad things; the sins of pride, of disliking someone and being unable to overcome it—and her monotonous, husky voice droned on and on. She had been bad with the innocent naughtiness of a four-year-old child who snooped through a mother's purse when the mother wasn't looking. All at once I knew I couldn't go through with it. Making love to Louise would be the same thing as owning a sport-car. The analogy was a good one—I had once owned an MG in San Francisco. I had enjoyed driving it while I was driving, but I was always a little ashamed of having such a small car.

Unwilling, mentally and physically, to possess this little woman, now that I had proven a needlessly proven point, I kept refilling her glass instead to keep her talking. Half asleep I tried to smoke, and the cigarette would drop from my numb fingers to the carpet, but I out-last-ed her somehow.

“I'm sleepy,” she said in mid-sentence, and she fell backwards, snoring before her head reached the mattress. I had tugged her into a more comfortable position, and before going to sleep myself I had had enough presence of mind to call the desk and leave an eight o'clock call.

And now, using raw courage, I swung my feet to the floor. Louise was another stone added to my guilty load. The recollection that I hadn't made love to her physically was no consolation to me; it is the intent that counts. I was as guilty as a burglar captured inside a store before he has filled his bag—and with this good woman I didn't even have the excuse of telling myself that if it wasn't me it would have been someone else.

I groaned with pain. Inadvertently, I had shaken my head remorsefully, and it almost fell off. With my eyes barely opened and squinting against the brilliant sunlight streaming in through the window, I made my way into the bathroom, shoved an index finger down my throat, and tickled. After the deluge I washed my face in cold water, gasping for breath, my burning eyes starting from their sockets. I got under the needle shower of icy water. For fifteen minutes I alternated from water as hot as I could stand it to water as cold as it would get. Massaging the back of my neck under the hot water the pain in my head gradually left. I knew that as long as I stayed under the shower I would feel all right, but the moment I left it the pain would return. To think is difficult when standing

beneath a hot waterfall, and it is doubly hard to think with a hangover. I switched abruptly to cold, stuck it out as long as I could, turned off the tap and briskly towed myself. Shivering and cursing I struggled into my clothes.

My headache returned full force. To pull on my clammy socks was disgusting, but I was dressed again. As I combed my hair I looked closely at my face in the mirror above the dresser. Not the face of a failure, surely. Some dark stubble on the meaty chin, and red-rimmed eyes, but it wasn't a beaten face. I had plenty of fight left in me.

My military companion of the night slept on. Her mouth was open, and her long, tangled gray hair straggled out on the pillow. Uncovered, flat on her back, with her short fat legs spread apart, she didn't look as attractive as I had remembered. For a moment, but only for a moment, I thought about picking up the money I had paid her for an unrendered service. Trustingly, the innocent woman had left all of the bills in her tambourine. But it was only money, and I had enough reasons for feeling sorry for myself without adding another one to my back. But no man can afford the luxury of self-pity—not when he has work to do!

I left the room, feeling conspicuous in my tux, and waited in the corridor for the elevator.

“Straight down to the barber shop,” I ordered. The elevator operator accepted two crumpled one-dollar bills and dropped directly to the basement, by-passing five floors.

I was shaved, enjoyed three hot towels, but skipped the massage I really wanted. My head wasn't in any shape for rough handling. After I turned in my key at the desk and paid my bill, I waited outside for my car to be brought around. I tipped the boy who brought my car a dollar, circled Pershing Square, and headed for Crenshaw Boulevard and my used car lot. The movies were not for me, Richard Hudson. My kind of artistry was salesmanship, the selling of used cars. Somehow I had gotten reality mixed up with a dream, a bad dream. Now that the dream was all over I had to get back to work, sell cars, and as many of them as possible so I could get even again, get Honest Hal even again. Old Hal would be mighty sad about the loss of forty thousand bucks! I laughed at a sudden thought. The film library was insured and I'd get every cent of my money back!

All I had lost in the struggle was the integrity of my self-expression. And what did that mean? Words. I could express myself much better as a salesman.

I turned into the alley behind the lot and parked beside the small maintenance shed where Graphite Sam kept his paint and tools. After locking the car I climbed over the chain and walked between the rows of cars toward the stucco office. The two salesmen were standing outside the office flipping quarters. One was wearing the red jacket to his costume, but not the beard. The other salesman wore the tasseled red cap, the red pants and boots, but sported a blue plaid sport shirt instead of the Santa Claus jacket. He, too, was minus the white beard.

“Bill,” I screamed angrily. “Come out here!”

The screen door flew open and Bill came running out of the office, a worried expression on his round face. When he saw me, he smiled. I wiped the smile off in a hurry with my first question, "Are these men supposed to be salesmen?"

"Sure, Richard. They're working for us."

"Not any more. Tell them to turn in their suits and head for the showers. Pay 'em off!" I brushed by Bill and entered the office. The walls were covered with several charts and graphs prepared by Bill during my absence. There was a chart on fuel and oil consumption, a chart on employee relationships, a bar graph and legend concerning the number of cars bought and sold, and many others. I studied the sales chart closely. Bill Harris had learned how to make charts and graphs while he was in the Army, I supposed. With nothing else to do, the peacetime army attends management schools and the soldiers work like hell keeping up charts instead of doing any real work. Eyewash. All of it. When Bill reentered the office with the two Santa Claus costumes draped over his arm, I was boiling with anger.

"Did you pay them off?"

They didn't have any dough coming."

"I thought as much. Where's the typist?"

"I had to let her go, Richard. There wasn't enough doing to keep her busy."

"I see. What have you been doing? How many cars have you sold this morning?"

"Well, none. Yet."

"How many yesterday?"

"Two."

"The day before?"

"Two."

"I've been looking at your charts. You haven't done a goddamned thing all the time I was gone."

"I've tried, Richard," Bill said earnestly. "Really tried. But everything seems to go wrong. I can't seem to find any decent salesmen and the ads don't seem to pull anybody in any more. I've wanted to call you several times, but you said not to bother you, and"—"

"Never mind. You're fired. Get out."

"You mean I'm fired? Just like that?"

"That's right. Get off my lot."

"Okay." Bill's set secret smile returned. "I guess the only difference between the Army and civilian life is that in the Army you take any job they give you, and in civilian life

you take any job you can get.”

“I don't want to listen to any of your cheap enlisted man philosophy either,” I said angrily. “Just get out!”

“There's one advantage to civilian life—I don't have to take any crap!”

The slight movement of Bill's right shoulder telegraphed his punch, and I caught him in the crotch with my knee by moving in fast. Bill doubled over and screamed sharply. Picking up the marble base of the pen holder on the desk, I shook the two pens loose, and hit Bill squarely between the eyes as he started to unwind from his crouched position. Blood spurted brightly from his slashed forehead and nose. I dropped the pen holder to the floor, spun Bill around with one movement and threw him through the screen door. He landed sprawling on the gravel of the lot I leaned in the doorway, breathing heavily from the sudden exertion, looking down at him.

“Get off my lot,” I said through my teeth.

Bill got slowly to his feet straightened to a half-crouch, and took about ten steps away from the office, clutching his groin with both hands. His smile was a painful grimace.

“There are other ways, Mr. Hudson,” he said bravely. “I still happen to have Hal Parker's telephone number. He might be interested in a little transaction of forty thousand dollars!”

I started for Bill with my fists doubled, but he hobbled swiftly away from me to the curb and climbed into his parked car. When he rolled up the windows and locked the doors from inside I was forced to laugh. He put his head over the steering wheel and remained that way for several minutes. Until he drove away I watched him from the doorway, and then I reentered the office. I felt sorry for Bill Harris, and yet I was happy for him, in a way. He had discovered that loyalty was not enough. Loyalty may be fine for the Army, but it has no place in the outside world. Bill would have a few bad nights after he called Honest Hal, but eventually his guilty feeling would disappear and he would become a responsible citizen. Responsible to himself, the way all of us are. I didn't worry about his telephone call to San Francisco; I knew how to handle Honest Hal...

Stripping off my tuxedo I changed into a Santa Claus costume. I adjusted the cotton beard under my chin, donned the red cap with its white tassel and settled my sunglasses over my nose. A Santa Claus outfit is not becoming, but it is a much better costume for selling used cars than a tuxedo. I picked up a cowbell from the small table beneath the window and sallied forth into the world of my used car lot, swinging the bell merrily back and forth. I resolved to sell the first person who stepped on my lot an automobile whether I lost money or not. In my mind I set a goal of ten cars for the day...

And then I heard the siren.

I didn't have to be told that the siren was for me. I knew it. Instinctively. I didn't attempt to run away. Instead I felt a welcome sense of relief combined with a feeling of dark

depression and failure. I walked to the curb and waited. Unwilling tears rolled down my cheeks and were quickly absorbed by the white cotton beard.

The police car stopped, and the policeman sitting next to the driver got out of the sedan and held the door open for me without a word. Leo Steinberg and Laura Harmon were in the back seat of the car. Leo refused to look at me, but Laura stared at me defiantly, her lips set in a tight, grim line. Twice I rang the cowbell.

“God rest you merry gentlemen!” I exclaimed. “Ho, ho, ho,” I laughed, deep in my chest. Then I climbed into the front seat of the police car.

MUSIC: SNEAK IN

LONG SHOT—FINAL TAKE

The police car sounds its siren again. As the volume of the siren increases the north and south bound automobiles pull over reluctantly to their respective curbs and stop. The black-and-white police car, containing two uniformed policemen, Leo Steinberg, Laura Harmon, and Richard Hudson, leaves the curb, makes an illegal U-turn and heads south. The volume of the siren decreases gradually as the police car disappears from view. Slowly, the heavy traffic begins to flow again on Crenshaw Boulevard, 873 cars one way every fifteen minutes; 927 the other way every fifteen minutes, toward Hollywood.

SUPERIMPOSE: “The End”

MUSIC:

UP FULL FOR CREDITS

Written, Produced, and Directed

By

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