

DUST

by
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based on the novel by
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FADE IN:

EXT. THE DESERT JUST NORTH OF ALAMOGORDO - NIGHT

Two lizards lick each other's neck in the foreground. Behind them, fading out them and the stars, a mushroom cloud rises fire orange, from the dark desert into the starry sky. The middle of the mushroom cloud glows white.

We zoom into the whiteness until we see fading into it THERESA, an adolescent black girl with blue eyes standing in a corner doorway in the French Quarter of New Orleans, on a rainy night. Theresa sings "Amazing Grace" a capella, as tourists passing in the drizzling rain drop change into a beer box at her feet.

MONTAGE (as Theresa continues to sing O.S.):

- 1) Slaves build pyramids in Egypt.
- 2) Moses leads his people through a red divided sea.
- 3) Genghis Khan's troops' horses stumble at the Kabul wall.
- 4) Black boys SLAVEY and excellent OLIVER stand dismounted back to back in a cloud of dust, flailing their swords against a thundering horde of Saracens on horseback.
- 5) Chinese spike down railroad tracks in the western United States of America, as Caucasians with rifles watch from horses' backs, also in desert north of Alamogordo.
- 6) A flying saucer swoops out of a starry sky and along the Great Wall of China.
- 7) Theresa, tied to a stake, burns in a bonfire.

O.S. Theresa stops singing.

THERESA
Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!

EXT. THE STARBOARD SIDE OF A SHIP SAILING - NIGHT

Captain AHAB, facing the sea in wind and rain, rails away as STARBUCK emerges from the lower decks and stops a few steps behind him. We see Ahab's mouth railing, but the wind and rain drown his sound, until he whispers.

AHAB
It's a wide, wide world and a deep unsounded sea.

The white whale bounds in the distance, as Starbuck turns away to return to the lower decks.

AHAB
Starbuck?

O.S. bagpipes pick up "Amazing Grace" where Theresa left off.

EXT. THE UNSOUNDED SEA TRANQUIL BENEATH CLEAR SKY - DAY

PIP floats alone at the surface, no whale or ship in sight.

EXT. BATTERY WAGNER ON MORRIS ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA - DAY

Black men, mostly on foot, but some on horseback, die under a barrage of fire while their white LEADER dies leading them on. All is silent until the leader speaks.

LEADER

Onward, 54th! Onward!

EXT. ANDERSONVILLE - DAY

Unarmed men in ragged gray uniforms pick corn out of shit and eat it, while armed men in dirty blue uniforms look on.

INT. A FIFTIES KITCHEN - DAY

JIMMY'S MOTHER and NORMA play Scrabble at the kitchen table. The sun streams through a window, lighting motes of dust.

INT. FORD THEATER - NIGHT

Abraham Lincoln's head, looking like the head of Captain Ahab, drops to his chest at the sound of the shot, as his wife sits beside him. His wife turns and rises enough to fall to cover his body. The bagpipes stop playing.

EXT. A DOORYARD - DAY

Lilacs bloom.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

The two lizards sit on an arm of a cross between two other crosses. On the other arm sits an alien like those in Close Encounters of the Third Kind, shaped much like the lizards, especially the eyes. But the alien glows white in front of an

orange sky behind, as the lizards sit green. The lizards and the alien quietly watch. No one else is on the crosses.

EXT. THE STATUE OF MARY DYER ON BEACON HILL - DAY

The camera looks up to Mary and the dome of the Massachusetts capitol beyond. The dome's gilding reflects the gray sky further up from Earth. A tree between is black and wet and nearly void of leaves.

The director's title shows as this scene fades.

INT. A FIFTIES BEDROOM - DAY

Norma sits on a side of the bed, her face in her hands as the sun shines through a window, lighting motes of dust.

NORMA

How bitter. How sweet.

EXT. THE LEVEE AT THE FRENCH QUARTER OF NEW ORLEANS - DAY

The rising sun brightens the spires of Saint Louis Cathedral as it dries the dew on the grass where four children sit.

Theresa sits between Slavey and excellent Oliver, as they gaze across the river. Theresa is in mid-adolescence, while Slavey and Oliver are in mid-elementary school. The PRES, also of the younger age, sits beside Slavey. Pres is the only Caucasian in the group.

PRES

They left me, alone in the Atlantic, Ishmael and Quequeg and Ahab, while they tried to kill whales. I felt so alone, more lonesome than I have ever been, in all this eternity. That's why I tried it again in the Pacific.

THERESA

Shh. Don't tell anyone.

PRES

Don't tell anyone what, Theresa?

THERESA

That we're from outer space.

OLIVER
Ah, you can tell them.

SLAVEY
Yeah. Nobody cares.

OLIVER
Yeah. Nobody'd believe us, anyway.

THERESA
That's why we can't tell them. They'd lock us up in a loony bin, or try to. The Ku Klux Klan, Hitler on the horizon, Stalin lurking in Lenin's shadow. We have some serious work to do this trip. Wouldn't that narrow our focus?

The children again gaze across the river, into the sunlight.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

BOB (the alien) and GEORGE and GRACIE (the lizards) giggle and snicker.

BOB (sounding like Bob Hope)
I think you two will find this interesting.

GRACIE (sounding like Gracie Allen)
Yeah, George. But maybe not very funny.

GEORGE (sounding like George Burns)
Sure, Gracie. Let's see what happens.

The alien and the lizards glance up at the sky. The sun shines through little wisps of clouds. The sky is blue.

EXT. BACK ON THE LEVEE - DAY

SLAVEY
So how'd it go in Pine Level? How does our story begin, this time?

THERESA
Hell, Slavey, you'd appreciate it! Anyway, here we go, still again!

The children gaze into the sun, then bow to listen to Theresa.

EXT. THE MUSHROOM CLOUD AGAIN ABOVE THE DESERT - NIGHT

The vacant white center fades to Theresa again, younger now.

EXT. A LOWER-MIDDLE-CLASS SMALLTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Theresa, now the age of the boys, walks through the white neighborhood, carrying her lunchbox and a couple of well worn books and a torn tablet on her way home from school. A white boy rides past her on his bicycle and punches her shoulder carrying the books and tablet. Theresa's lunchbox comes up so quickly that it knocks the boy from his bike. He sprawls on his back beneath the bike, like a dying roach.

A WHITE WOMAN rushes through the front screen door of the nearest house, but she stops with one foot still on the porch, her other on the first step, her mouth wide open.

WHITE WOMAN (shrieking)

What do you think you're doing?

THERESA (not shrieking)

Why do you all push around?

Theresa walks calmly on, while the boy and his mother gawk.

INT. THERESA'S LIVING/KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - DAY

THERESA'S MOTHER stares at Theresa with her mouth wide open and pulls two pine kitchen chairs together, face to face. With both of her hands, she puts Theresa into one of them. She takes off her apron and sits on the other.

THERESA'S MOTHER

What do you think you were doing? They might have done anything to you! They might have . . .
! Oh, Theresa!

The mother pulls her child from the other chair and holds her tight in her arms as her apron falls from her lap to the pine plank floor and her tears flow down Theresa's neck.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Theresa's mother's apron falls onto Bob's head.

MONTAGE (as Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture plays):

- 1) Russian serfs are working the, not their, land.
- 2) Russian aristocracy is having a ball in Petersburg.
- 3) Russian soldiers are starving to death.
- 4) French soldiers are freezing to death.
- 5) Horses are starving to death.
- 6) Russian soldiers are eating the horses.
- 7) Russian aristocracy wags its richness.
- 8) French aristocracy are eating cake at Versailles.
- 9) White men in white sheets are riding, in dust.

EXT. THE MUSHROOM CLOUD AGAIN, BURNING THE LIZARDS - DAY

INT. A BRICK HEARTH, SALAMANDERS IN ITS HOMEFIRE - NIGHT

Before the hearth, Theresa sleeps on a rag rug, beside a rocking chair. In the chair, an old man dozes with a shotgun in his lap, as the riders pass outside. We hear the horses and see the torchlight through windows.

EXT. AN 1812 RUSSIAN CAMP DETAINING FRENCH PRISONERS - DAY

The overture dies away. The ragged uniforms of the French and Russian are hardly distinguishable. A fat Russian GENERAL sits on a skinny white horse in the presence of his skinny white TROOPS and the skinny white prisoners. The sun is bright, while the ground is wet. Either way, all there is soaked. The general rears his head. The horse does not.

GENERAL

While they were strong, we did not spare ourselves, but now we can even spare them. They too are men. Eh, Lads? But after all is said and done, who asked them to come here? It serves them right, the bloody bastards!

TROOPS

Hurrah!

EXT. THE MEKONG DELTA - NIGHT

The flying saucer soars across the jungle as French and American and Vietnamese troops shoot with rifles and flail with swords and toss hand grenades as the jungle burns.

EXT. THE MOONWALK ON THE FRENCH QUARTER LEVEE - DAY

The sun is setting behind the cathedral. A black man plays a saxophone at the top of wooden steps down to the river. LEV, an old man in a heavy dark blue serge suit, sits on a bench on the boardwalk wet with rain. Lev's hair and beard are gray and long, and his hands are on his knees, as he gazes into the river. Pres sits beside him, and looks askance at him. Lev's eyes keep gazing into the river. The river is muddy.

PRES (quietly)
I'm from outer space.

LEV (quietly)
I'm the ghost of Leo Tolstoy.

PRES (looking up)
Why are you a ghost?

LEV (not looking up)
I didn't love my wife enough!

PRES
Maybe you can help us war against the clingons.

LEV
Will it help me find some peace?

A freighter passes moaning, the river above its waterline.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

BOB and GEORGE and GRACIE look askance to each other. The mushroom cloud is behind them, but the orange is closing into the white. Their eyes widen with the closing.

GEORGE AND GRACIE
When's the killing going to start?

BOB (bowing)
As soon as we stop interrupting!

INT. A MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

All the children are black. A white nun in her black and white habit stands at the front of the classroom, another at the back. Sunlight streams through large sash windows open wide. Theresa sits near the middle of the classroom.

FRONT NUN

Can any of you children tell me what the Declaration of Independence says are your unalienable rights.

Theresa raises her right hand slowly, without smiling.

FRONT NUN

Theresa, as usual.

THERESA

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

A boy sitting by a window near the back of the schoolroom spits out the window. Some of the children look, but none laugh. The back nun storms forward.

She cracks the boy's knuckles with a ruler. The boy now gazes out the window, not crying out or moving his hands from the desktop. The other children look away.

EXT. THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA - DAY

The flying saucer swoops across the alluvial plain of the Mississippi delta. Below, NORMA (a pretty young blonde) and JIMMY (a young sailor in a white uniform) are picnicking on a bank of the river, with a loaf of bread and a jug of wine. They kiss above the paraphernalia on their blanket.

INT. ANOTHER MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM, A FEW YEARS LATER - DAY

All the children here are also black. The WHITE TEACHER, in a short-sleeved white shirt, with his tie loose at his unbuttoned collar, sits silently sweating near the only window. The window is open hardly enough for a breeze to reach the teacher. Slavey sits near the middle of the class.

WHITE TEACHER

Alright, that's it. You don't have to wait for the bell. But hold up, Slavey. Just a minute.

The other boys and girls leave the room, as Slavey remains in his seat. The white teacher approaches, and Slavey sits up in his chair and grins at him. The white teacher looks down at Slavey, and now Slavey looks down. But the white man grins.

WHITE TEACHER

You're a smart kid, Slavey. President of your eighth-grade class, a lot of friends thinking you're as smart as you know you are. You've got a lot of potential.

Slavey shrugs and glances back toward the window.

WHITE TEACHER

Well? What do think you might do with all that potential?

Slavey shrugs again but this time looks up at the white man.

SLAVEY

I don't know? A lawyer maybe?

WHITE TEACHER

Oh, son. A nigger can't be a lawyer. How about something with your hands. How about maybe a carpenter, like Jesus's father.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

George elbows Gracie on the cross. Gracie frowns as Bob bows his head again. George and Gracie now bow theirs also.

INT. ANOTHER CLASSROOM, A FEW MORE YEARS LATER - DAY

All the children here are white. But, again, a nun in her black and white habit stands at the front of the classroom, another at the back. And, again, sunlight streams through large sash windows open wide. Pres sits near the middle of the classroom. He is now adolescent.

Norma, now adolescent and very blonde, sits by a window near the back of the schoolroom, gazing out the window. BEATRICE sits between her and Pres, blinking sidelong glances at Pres.

FRONT NUN

Who has done the assignment? Who has memorized the preamble to the Constitution? Beatrice?

Beatrice blinks at the nun but does not answer.

FRONT NUN

It is indeed spring, Beatrice. But you must pay attention, nevertheless.

The back nun smiles and glances at Norma, who is still gazing out the window. The back nun frowns and looks forward again.

EXT. BOURBON STREET - NIGHT

Slavey and Oliver tap dance in rain, a beer box at their feet. Norma stands across the street, beside the entrance to a strip joint. A very blonde woman in pasties and a g-string comes to the open door and hands Norma some money.

NORMA'S MOTHER

Get your books. Don't wake me up. I love you.

NORMA

I love you too, Mama. Thanks.

EXT. THE ATLANTIC OCEAN SOUTH OF GREENLAND - DAY

The flying saucer rises from the waves and swoops south to 8th Avenue and across Times Square, as a brunette girl and a sailor in a night blue uniform but white hat kiss.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Bob and George and Gracie all giggle now, above the flying saucer parked behind the cross. Now Gracie elbows George.

GRACIE

We have to start paying more attention. Just be quiet for a minute! Will you?

George kisses her, with a flick of his tongue, as Bob blinks. But then they scowl again, in the orange sky behind them. They focus forward.

EXT. THE MOONWALK ON THE LEVEE - DAY

The now adolescent Pres sits again beside the still old Lev.

LEV

My advice is that you don't marry that lovely child until you return from soldiering. I'm speaking from experience.

EXT. CHARTRES STREET IN FRONT OF ST. LOUIS CATHEDRAL - DAY

Norma and Beatrice sit on a bench, Jackson Square behind them full of azaleas. Beatrice has a book in her lap, and Norma takes it. She puts it back.

NORMA

They're sending my mom to a nuthouse.

BEATRICE

Oh, dear. Oh, Norma. I'm so sorry. I am so sorry. When my mom died Oh, Norma.

Beatrice's head sinks to Norma's shoulder, as they weep until Norma raises her bleached blonde head and touches Beatrice's cheek. As Beatrice lifts her head, Norma looks into her eyes.

NORMA

What do you think about marriage?

Beatrice looks into Norma's now somewhat smiling eyes and mostly stops her sobbing.

BEATRICE

I think. I hope it must be nice.

NORMA

How, Beatrice? I need to know!

BEATRICE

Well, it's pretty basic, I think. Kissing is lovely, and no job on Earth is more important than raising children, making sure people grow up being good for each other. And all that's very hard to do alone.

Norma's head is bowed now as she listens, but Beatrice suddenly looks down and up to her, into her pale blue eyes.

BEATRICE

Oh, Norma, I'm sorry. I didn't think, and my mom's dead, and my dad takes care of the money where your mom was working. What's wrong with me? I didn't think!

NORMA

Oh, Beatrice, that's okay. You're my friend, and I don't have many. And Mom says I should be a movie star. That's why she bleaches my hair. You know?

BEATRICE

Is that why you asked me about marriage?

NORMA

No. The social worker said I'll have to go to an orphanage, when Mom goes to the loony bin. I don't know Mom's relatives or have a husband. But I could get married. I'm sixteen.

BEATRICE

Oh, Norma . . . ! Do you remember my friend Slavey, in the public school?

NORMA

Yeah. Sweet guy! What happened to him? I don't remember when I saw him last.

BEATRICE

His dad took his family to Michigan for his ministry, and some white folks killed him, his dad, I mean. Slavey was writing to me, and I haven't heard from him since he told me what happened to his mom. I don't know what happened to Slavey.

Norma now starts, and finds Beatrice's eyes looking into hers.

BEATRICE

They killed his dad, and his mom couldn't support Slavey and his brother and sister well enough to satisfy the social workers. So the social workers sent the kids to foster homes, and then they put their mom in a loony bin. She couldn't handle losing her kids, too.

MONTAGE:

- 1) Stereotype white loony bin with a black woman in it.
- 2) Small but clean apartment with the black woman and black children in it with a white female social worker grimacing.
- 3) The stereotype loony bin with the woman in it still.

The sky above the church and Norma and Beatrice darkens, and rain begins lightly to fall. But Norma and Beatrice remain on the bench, holding hands.

NORMA (now sobbing wildly)
Oh, Beatrice. I am so sorry.

BEATRICE (weeping and smiling)
I know we're going to be alright.

The sun breaks through the clouds and rain a little.

EXT. THE BENCH ON THE MOONWALK ON THE LEVEE - DAY

Norma sits beside Jimmy in his white uniform. With her hands on the bench, she swings her feet in saddle shoes beneath the bench. The sailor's arms splay across the back of the bench, to his left and behind Norma as she leans forward like Lev. His spit-shined shoes outstretched, the sailor grins.

MONTAGE (as The Animals sing "Saint James Infirmary" O.S.):

- 1) Jimmy paints a battleship bulkhead gray at sea.
- 2) Norma looks out at the Mojave from a window of a bus.
- 3) A sign ahead of the bus announces San Diego's city limits.
- 4) Norma and Jimmy sit on a public bench on a Pacific beach.
- 5) Norma plays scrabble again with Jimmy's mom in her kitchen.
- 6) Jimmy drops his sea bag in their bedroom, and he grins.
- 7) Norma looks aside as Jimmy packs his sea bag.

INT. A CLASSIC FIFTIES DINER - DAY

Norma waits tables. She balances plates of burgers and fries on her arms, laughing and talking with everyone she serves. Her hands on her hips, she stands behind the counter, looking wistfully through the plate glass window to the street. Jimmy plays the pinball machine in a corner.

A new convertible car pulls up. Norma sees that the license plate is not of San Diego but of Los Angeles. A MAN in a porkpie hat and a double-breasted pin-striped suit emerges from

the convertible, its top up. He enters the diner and plops his hat on the little jukebox station on the counter in front of Norma, as he plops his butt on the stool there. He glances around the diner, for about a second.

NORMA

What can I getcha?

MAN

That guy there likes you.

NORMA

Which guy?

MAN

The sailor playing pinball.

NORMA

Sailors like every girl they see. That's why they're sailors, grabbing every breeze they can catch, then sailing on. It'd be nice if a flyboy would sail in here. Where are you sailing from?

MAN

I'm sailing from south of the border: "Mexico, land of beauty where gardenias grow." We've just finished filming a movie down there, just south of Tijuana. Now I'm flying back to Hollywood, to cut it up and put it out. I mean we're going to flower it out to the public. You want to be in movies?

Norma glances at Jimmy, who glances at Norma. Jimmy's hands are on the pinball machine, but the machine is waiting for a new game to begin. Jimmy does not feed it another nickel now.

NORMA

Yeah, sure. I'm a waitress, not a dreamer.

MAN

You're a dreamer. I'm going to say this quietly and quickly, so your boyfriend won't come over here and pick a fight, because I don't have time for that. You're young, and all young people dream, and not all young people are as beautiful as daylight.

You're young and as beautiful as daylight, and I saw you before I opened that door, like a camera lens clicking. I caught you smiling at that customer down there.

The man points a thumb at a customer at the end of the counter away from the pinball machine. Jimmy pulls a nickel from a pocket of his sailor suit and puts it into the machine, but he doesn't pull the knob. Norma turns a little away from the man, toward Jimmy, frowning. But the man speaks again.

MAN

Alright, here's the deal.

With one hand, he pulls his wallet, from an inside coat pocket. With the other, he moves his hat from the jukebox station onto the stool on Jimmy's side of him. He pulls a business card from the wallet, and after it a hundred-dollar bill, with the same hand. He lays the bill on the counter, and the business card atop it.

MAN

That's in case you don't do what I'm going to ask you to do. I'm flying high enough for one day, and so I'm going to land here for the night. Tomorrow, at 10:00 a.m., I'm going to come back here and park out front, and hope you'll be there. If you are, we'll fly to Hollywood together, and I'll make you a star.

Norma now looks into his eyes, and she finds him looking into hers, warmly. Her waitress scowl goes away as does his producer scowl, as he rises from the stool. Norma looks down at the card and the money, then up at the man.

MAN

If you're not here tomorrow, call me. Come see me, come to the city of angels, whatever you want. I shouldn't have said I'll make you a star. You're a star already. I can just see it. I can see it.

The man, his scowl returning, turns away and walks out of the diner, waiting until he's outside before returning the porkpie hat to his head. Norma watches the Los Angeles county license plate pull away, without seeing Jimmy walk to her from the pinball machine. Startled, she looks at him.

JIMMY
You'll never need painting.

INT. JIMMY'S MOTHER'S KITCHEN - DAY

The sun shines bright through yellow gingham curtains. Jimmy's mother is filling a flowery china sugar bowl, from a beige ceramic canister. Norma enters.

JIMMY'S MOTHER
Jimmy left early?

NORMA
Yeah. I miss him already. I'll be a little late tonight. I love you, Mama.

JIMMY'S MOTHER
I know. Jimmy told me.

Norma touches the back of her right hand to the back of the mother's left one, and she returns to Jimmy's bedroom for a large straw handbag. She tries to smile as she leaves the little house. But she cannot.

EXT. THE STREET IN FRONT OF THE DINER - DAY

The top of the convertible is down now, as Norma throws her straw bag into its backseat and rides away with the man. They ride the coastal highway, the sea on one side of the convertible, the mountains on the other, deserts beyond. Norma's sunny hair is blowing in the wind.

EXT. A HOUSE ON THE WESTERN EDGE OF MIDLAND, TEXAS - DAY

A red Studebaker sits in the drive, and people in their Sunday best stand and sit chatting on the porch of the small white clapboard house. QUINCY sits beside Beatrice on the porch swing. She, his mother, is plainly pregnant. She raises a hand to her eyes.

BEATRICE
Isn't that your pal HARRIMAN?

Pres also shades his eyes and looks into the afternoon sun at a dust cloud rising in the distance. So does Quincy, although his hand is hardly large enough to span his brow.

QUINCY

Yeah, that looks like Uncle Harry's car.

Beatrice hugs her first son, as the car emerges from the dust. Harriman steps from the car and onto the porch, and the chatter of the Texas neighbors stops long enough for howdies for Harriman, as he pats Pres on the back and bows to kiss Beatrice on a cheek and shake a hand of Quincy's.

BEATRICE

These are friends from our church.

Harriman grins and nods and salutes, then leans on a roof support framing the porch steps, the support furthest from the swing he faces. He folds his arms and smiles.

BEATRICE

You haven't eaten, have you Harry?

Harriman shrugs and shies, smiling away from Beatrice's look.

BEATRICE

Go inside. See what's left.

Pres opens the screen door and follows Harriman through it.

INT. THE KITCHEN OF THE LITTLE CLAPBOARD HOUSE - DAY

Pres opens the refrigerator, and Harriman peers into it.

PRES

Potluck. These Texas church folks cook up some mighty fine chow.

Pres hands Harriman a paper plate. Harriman picks up a serving spoon from the counter and fills much of the plate with potato salad. He adds some fried chicken.

HARRIMAN

I don't know about the chicken, but I sure wouldn't miss Beatrice's potato salad.

Pres hands Harriman a plastic fork and some paper napkins, and they walk on out the kitchen screen door.

EXT. THE BACK PORCH OF THE MIDLAND HOUSE - DAY

They sit at the top of the steps, between the azaleas blooming beside them. Harriman fills his mouth and chews awhile.

HARRIMAN

Been a while now, since you ditched that bomber in the Pacific and hung out with me at Yale! You ready to do some real work, some real Skull and Bones stuff?

PRES

You got something?

HARRIMAN

I got what you asked for!

PRES

What did I ask for?

Harriman fills his mouth again and chews and swallows.

HARRIMAN

We've found you a Russian functionary, and we've figured a way to get him out of Russia to meet you, and he talks like he might be as excited about the possibilities as I think you are. God, I hope you can pull this off.

PRES

Harriman, I think that's the most words in a row I've ever heard you say.

Harriman grins and fills his mouth again.

PRES

Okay! How do we do it? What's the next step?

HARRIMAN

Well, it has to be a secret. So, you're fired.

PRES (grinning)

But I was just getting good at this oil business!

HARRIMAN

Oh, you'll stay in the oil business for a while. But you'll be on your own, not just working for us. We're going to back you in your own oil

exploration company. So you can say you're exploring for mineral rights around Texas while you're actually gallivanting around the world, making all those friends you say you need. That is, if it's what you want, and if you can bear being away from Beatrice, or if she can bear not being with you. Beautiful azaleas.

PRES

Now that was a bunch of words. I'll try to keep the trips short. And it's necessary, something we cannot not do. Beatrice won't like it, but she'll understand. She understands.

HARRIMAN

You're a lucky soldier. We'll get it done this winter.

Harriman slaps Pres on a shoulder and fills his mouth again. The sun is setting on West Texas.

EXT. THE SIDEWALK BENEATH THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING - DAY

Norma, her hands on her knees, keeps air from a ventilation grate from blowing her skirt entirely up.

MONTAGE (black and white):

- 1) Norma's face smiles and laughs across a wide movie theatre silver screen.
- 2) Norma tosses a pitch at Yankee Stadium, to a batter who swings and misses.
- 3) Norma, frowning, leaves a room where a man sits weeping at a typewriter.

MONTAGE (in full color):

- 1) Norma is naked against a red background, like a valentine.
- 2) Norma, in black, kisses a cheek of FITS JR. in a suit behind a podium, as his wife looks on smiling, dressed pink in a pillbox hat. A title phrase from "Camelot" plays O.S.
- 3) The fire orange mushroom cloud of desert dust rises again.

INT. ANY STAGE IN ANY HUGE ROOM FULL OF PEOPLE - NIGHT

Norma stands before the gowned and tuxedoed grinning crowd. Her arms stretch wide open, and so does her mouth in a laugh few can

hardly imagine from themselves. Norma's white dress sparkles, like the disco ball above.

NORMA

I boffed the pres!

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Bob and George and Gracie are weeping.

INT. THE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Fits Jr., the president of the United States of America, sits behind the desk there. The French doors are open to the rose garden, and Swedish ivy flourishes on the mantel over America's main hearth. Advisors sit in permanent and temporary chairs. Each has a teacup. None is a woman.

FITS JR.

Is it serious? It better be, for all this!

HARRIMAN

Maybe less serious than Cuba and the Soviet Union, but it could undercut your credibility in all that. And most voters have a problem with adultery, or with admitting to it. Whatever.

FITS JR.

Alright, suggestions. No, everyone out. My back hurts. Never mind. Thanks.

The teacups and saucers rattle, and everyone scurries out, except ROBERT FITS. Robert sits on one of the chairs brought in extra for the meeting. He balances a teacup on one knee.

FITS JR.

We could get rid of her. We have that power.

ROBERT FITS

To stop that little blonde child? The power?

FITS JR.

Ah, so you like her. Maybe we could say it was you, and that she exaggerated. We could say you're tired of your wife, after having all those kids. Christ, my back hurts!

ROBERT FITS

Well, you'll think of something. You and Pops are smarter than I am. Maybe you can turn this into something political and remunerative, like Grampa turned bootlegging into unions. Well, you know I'll try to look aside and help, within my conscience. My conscience, my family values. What about Selma? Never mind! Good luck.

Robert rises from his chair and sets his cup and saucer on the presidential desk. He turns and leaves the office.

EXT. THE MOJAVE - DAY

Norma gazes from the bus, below the hovering saucer.

INT. A NIGHTCLUB IN EASTERN LOS ANGELES - DAY

The club is closed. HUFFA, a fat man, sits alone at a table, drinking. A sign over the bandstand welcomes people to El Dorado. Musical instruments sit idle on the low stage. A door opens, letting a little sunlight in. A goon walks to the wallowing Huffa. The goon scrapes out a chair. He sits.

HUFFA

How did you get in here?

GOON

The door was open, Huffa.

HUFFA

You know my name! Talk!

GOON

Business proposition. You know that movie star Norma Jean. We appreciate your arm-bending for the Teamsters here, and we know you're still stuck in this drug sludge here but would like to move on. We want you to do us a favor.

HUFFA

We? I should ask who? What's the favor?

GOON

Get her to kill herself.

Huffa looks into his drink, which looks like scotch after rocks have melted in it, nearly fire orange at the top but with dregs in the bottom. He does not offer a drink to the goon. But he does look at the goon.

HUFFA

First, why should she kill herself? Every red-blooded man on Earth is hot for her pants, and she must make a lot more money than I do, and honestly. And, second, if I did that, every red-blooded man on Earth would be out to off me, if they knew. You gotta be joking.

GOON

Why she might kill herself is that you'll tell her you'll kill her if she doesn't, like you break legs of union scabs. The rest is none of your business. Make up your mind.

HUFFA

What's in it for me?

GOON

No cash now, but we can open doors for a union executive, from Chicago to D.C. You could be president of the Teamsters, maybe of the United States someday, if you do this small job. Got other priorities?

HUFFA

I hear she's not as dumb as she looks.

GOON

Don't worry about it. You're a smart guy, and you can help yourself by telling her your name is Jimmy. You don't need to know why.

MONTAGE:

- 1) Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid dying.
- 2) Custer dying at the Little Bighorn.
- 3) Robert Fitts dying in the kitchen.
- 4) The bloody beach at Normandy.
- 5) The rocky beach at Big Sur.

MONTAGE:

- 1) Norma, in a taxi on Hollywood Boulevard, tells the driver to take her to Big Sur.
- 2) She lies on the beach at the base of the rocks and lets the waves roll over her.
- 3) Sopping wet, she makes a telephone call from a highway pay booth.
- 4) Still wet, she tells a taxi driver to take her to an address in Pasadena.
- 5) In the taxi, she tries to brush the sand from herself and to fluff her wet sunny hair.

EXT. THE CURB IN FRONT OF A LARGE PINK STUCCO HOUSE - DAY

Norma gets out of the taxi and hands the driver some money. She is now quite dry and fluffed and holds a box of candy to her breast. She looks across the lawn at the pink stucco building. She puts shoes on and walks to the door.

EXT. THE COURTYARD OF THE PINK STUCCO BUILDING - DAY

The courtyard is furnished with white wicker rocking chairs. Old women sit in most of them, and old men and younger men and women sit in most of the rest. Rosebushes border the courtyard, with some lilac bushes interspersed. Three Eucalyptus trees stand together at one corner. Norma's mother rocks beneath the trees. She is talking to herself.

As Norma walks to her mother, her mother looks up and stops talking to herself. Norma bows and kisses her mother and sits in the empty rocker beside her. She places the box of candy in her mother's lap.

NORMA

Hi, Mama. I'm sorry I haven't been here lately.

NORMA'S MOTHER

I know! Where was I for you?

NORMA

In my heart, Mama. Always.

MONTAGE: Norma and her mother chatter and eat the candy, until the sun deserts the courtyard.

EXT. AT THE CURB IN FRONT OF THE PINK STUCCO HOUSE - DUSK

Norma climbs into another taxi. She looks once more at the stucco house. She bows her blonde head.

NORMA
Hollywood.

INT. A MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Norma lies on the bed, gazing at a picture on the wall before her, a print of a painting of a Viking galleon sailing in fire orange light from the sun setting huge behind it.

On the stand at one side of the bed is a bottle of Jack Daniels. On the opposite stand is a bottle of pills.

Norma fills her mouth from the smaller bottle.

The screen fades out to white.

It fades back slowly.

EXT. AGAIN THE PORCH OF THE HOUSE IN MIDLAND - DAY

Theresa and Pres sit on the swing and gaze across West Texas as they did across the river, those decades ago.

PRES
Poor Norma. I thought she had I thought
she I thought

THERESA
I know. I love her, too. She'll be alright,
eventually. We know that.

The sky is very clear, and the sun is very bright, and Theresa and Pres sit silently a moment on the white wooden swing.

EXT. THE BOMB AGAIN - NIGHT

In the central white, Custer is shooting away at the Indians, as Wounded Knee is happening. The view is translucent, revealing both.

EXT. BACK ON THE MIDLAND PORCH - DAY

PRES

Yeah, well. Okay, tell me about the bus. It's been so long since we've talked. That little bus was so great in our infinity, and I wasn't there! Where does the time go, in our immortality?

THERESA

Oh, it wasn't all that big a deal, in time. I was Christmas shopping after work, and my feet hurt. I just sat down and wouldn't get up.

EXT. CALVARY - NIGHT

George opens his mouth, but Gracie touches it with a finger.

GRACIE

No, now pay attention.

EXT. A DOWNTOWN BUS STOP IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA - NIGHT

A bus stops, and Theresa boards it. She drops an FDR dime in the fare box and steps from the bus. She boards again at the back door and sits in a front seat of the colored section. Several of the white seats in front of her are empty.

The bus makes a few more stops, and all the seats in front of Theresa fill with white people. The bus stops in front of the Empire Theater, and Theresa looks out at the marquee. The film it names is On the Waterfront.

On the bus stop bench sits a man in a white suit and cowboy boots and hat. A guitar, in its case, leans against his end of the bench. He does not board the bus.

O.S., through the remainder of this scene, Hank Williams sings "Your Cheating Heart".

Another white man boards the bus and walks back to Theresa's seat. She is sitting on the aisle, and the man beside her at the window nudges her knees with his. She moves her knees aside to let him out, and she slides over to the open window.

The white man towers over her and glowers at her, as she looks out the window at the marquee and the cowboy. The white man looks forward to the DRIVER, whose eyes the inside rear view mirror reflect.

The driver slides out of his seat. With a pistol in a holster at his hip, he makes his way back to Theresa.

DRIVER

Are you going to get up?

THERESA

No.

DRIVER

I'll have you arrested!

THERESA

You may do that.

The driver turns without another word. He and his pistol make their way back to the front of the bus and out onto the street, where the driver drops a nickel into a pay telephone near Theresa's window, in front of the theatre.

DRIVER

Right. Whatever means necessary.

Most of the passengers remain in their seats until a patrol car arrives with two policemen in it. The policemen board the bus with pistols in their holsters and nightsticks in their hands. The driver and the glowering white man step aside.

POLICEMAN

Why didn't you give the man your seat?

THERESA

Why do you all push us around?

POLICEMAN

I don't know. But the law is the law.

Theresa rises from her seat and follows the policemen off the bus. The silent one opens a back door of the patrol car for her entry. The other steps into the front passenger seat.

INT. THE MONTGOMERY CITY JAIL - NIGHT

The policeman who has not spoken holds Theresa's hands to take her fingerprints. Still he does not speak, or look into Theresa's blue eyes.

THERESA

Can I call my family?

The policeman shrugs the question to a DESK OFFICER.

DESK OFFICER

Later. Don't cause any trouble.

THERESA

Can I have a drink of water?

No one answers. A female jailer takes Theresa's arm gently and leads her through a steel bar door and up a steel stairway. She leads her to a cell and opens that steel bar door. She peers into the darkness of the cell.

FEMALE JAILER

Would you rather not be by yourself?

THERESA

It doesn't matter much to me.

The female jailer slams shut the door to that cell, and Theresa follows her to another cell, with two women in it. The female jailer had slammed the door of the empty cell, but she closes this one closer to a clink.

The cell is furnished with steel shelves serving as bunks and a steel toilet with a steel sink above it. Theresa turns back to the bars between her and outside.

PRISONER

Is there anything I can do for you?

Theresa turns from the bars and looks at this prisoner, and at the other black woman with them there, sitting silent on her lower corner shelf. Theresa looks at the toilet and the sink above it, above which hangs on a hook a steel cup.

THERESA

Can you get me a drink of water?

The prisoner smiles and bows her head and rises from her shelf. She drips some water from the tap into the cup, shakes that water out, and drips some more. She hands it to Theresa.

THERESA

Thank you.

PRISONER
You're welcome.

The two of them sit on two of the steel shelves.

PRISONER
So what are you in here for? You look like a nice lady, like a Sunday school teacher or something! Not like us.

Theresa laughs and keeps herself from weeping.

THERESA
I wouldn't give up my seat on a bus.

PRISONER
Yeah, those bus drivers are pretty mean.

THERESA
So what are you in here for? Sunday school or not, you seem very nice! Thanks again.

PRISONER
That's a story you don't want to hear.

THERESA
Yes, I do. And we are here together.

PRISONER
Okay. My husband died. And I got hooked up with this jerk who beat me up. I got sick of it and went after him with a hatchet. I don't know what got into me.

THERESA
And here you are? How long?

PRISONER
Three months now. The jerk's trying to get me out. He's trying to drop the charges so I'll go back with him. But, screw him.

THERESA
Yeah, really! But what about you? Is anyone trying to help you, your family or anyone?

PRISONER

Nobody else knows I'm here! Hey, could you do me a favor? I know you're a good person, but could you do me a favor?

Theresa, still keeping from weeping, reaches from her shelf to the other and touches this other prisoner's knee, as the third prisoner stays quiet in her dark corner.

PRISONER

If I give you my brothers' telephone number, will you call them and tell them I'm here? I know you'll be out of here soon!

As Theresa nods, the female jailer returns and opens the cell.

FEMALE JAILER

Theresa. Telephone call.

She leads Theresa back down the stairs to a telephone on a table in a corner of the stairwell. Theresa sits and dials.

THERESA

Mama. I'm in jail! Is RAYMOND there? No, they haven't beaten me. I need to talk to Raymond. Raymond, call our friends.

Theresa listens a few seconds longer and smiles at the sound of the dial tone of Raymond's having hung up. She hangs up on the dial tone, and the female jailer leads her back to the cell. The prisoner is writing with a stub of a pencil on a scrap of paper. Theresa sits down on her shelf.

THERESA

He said he'd be right down and get me. He sold his Studebaker for the Scottsboro boys' defense fund. And that's the least of the reasons he can't just come and get me. We still don't have a car, and he is still a prince. Oh, well. Oh well.

The prisoner, mouth wide open, holding the scrap of paper in one hand, the pencil in her other, looks at Theresa. Theresa and the other prisoners sit silently together awhile, until the female jailer opens the door again, wider than the prisoner had dropped her jaw.

FEMALE JAILER

Your friends are here.

The female jailer leaves the door to the cell open as she leads Theresa down the stairway. The prisoner rushes from the cell and throws the scrap of paper down the stairs. Theresa picks it up at the bottom of the stairs. She looks back up the stairs and smiles. The prisoner returns to the cell.

Downstairs, some black and white people await Theresa. Theresa collects her purse and signs some paper, as Raymond rushes in. Raymond hugs her tight as though she were himself.

EXT. THE PORCH IN WEST TEXAS - DAY

THERESA

Poor Raymond. He loved that Studebaker. He sat in it in front of his barbershop, trying to impress me. He brought flowers in it to our house and gave them to Mama, when I wouldn't come to the door. I'm glad I married him.

PRES

Do you think we'll ever see them again, him and Beatrice. You know Beatrice made me buy our Studebaker when I told her about Raymond's. They could be in El Paso by now. He headed west. Seemed happy.

THERESA

Beatrice will guide him back by supertime, I guess. You know we have good friends here.

PRES

I know. So tell me more! What happened next?

THERESA

Well, everybody jumped into confab mode. Telephones were ringing all over black Montgomery. NIXON, my NAACP boss, saw this straight off as the perfect case. No one could fault my decency, since the nastiest thing I've done this trip is knocking that white boy off his bike and bragging about it. Raymond was sick from worrying about me being in jail, and the thought of my doing more sickened him more. But

he came around, because he knew we must. He agreed because he knew we had to. He's a very brave man. Such heart!

MONTAGE:

- 1) Black women mimeograph fliers asking for a bus boycott.
- 2) Black men and women and children run through neighborhoods dropping them on steps.
- 3) Black women meet in churches discussing the issue.
- 4) Black men meet in smoke-filled rooms shouting about the issue.
- 5) A headline on the front page of the Sunday Montgomery Adviser announces the progress.
- 6) White men meet in smoke-filled rooms shouting about the issue.
- 7) White women meet in churches discussing the issue.
- 8) Oliver watches from his kitchen window as a bus passes.
- 9) RACHEL, Oliver's wife, enters the kitchen.

EXT. OLIVER'S FRONT PORCH - DAY

Another bus passes with no black passengers and very few white passengers. Oliver and Rachel hold each other's hands.

RACHEL

There ain't no stoppin' us now.

EXT. THE MONTGOMERY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Theresa arrives for her court appearance and finds a crowd, some greeting her and some trying to shout her down. Nixon accompanies her, as do a WHITE GENTLEMAN and a WHITE LADY who were also among her friends at the jail. Raymond walks behind them, watching around while scowling.

WHITE GENTLEMAN

Just don't say anything inside.

WHITE LADY

Just be your lovely self, Theresa.

NIXON

Remember, we want a guilty verdict.

The white man nods, and Theresa turns and puts a hand of hers on a shoulder of Raymond's. She looks into Raymond's eyes and

keeps from weeping, and then she looks across her hand and Raymond's shoulder to the prisoner, standing in the crowd. The prisoner is waving, and now she shouts.

PRISONER

They've messed with the wrong one now!

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The largest black church in Montgomery has overflowed to the lawn and to the pavement of the street. People are shouting, and singing "We Shall Overcome".

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Oliver stands with both hands on the pulpit. He is speaking incoherently to the shouting in and outside the church, until one phrase rises through, loud and clear.

OLIVER

Until justice rolls down like water!

Theresa, sitting between her mother and Raymond in the front row, as all the crowd cheers, weeps.

EXT. A CENTRAL CITY STREET IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA - DAY

The sun rises, full of peace and warmth, to the street.

MONTAGE:

- 1) Children and their parents behind them sing "We Shall Overcome" as they stroll through the sunlit city street.
- 2) The children kneel to pray in the street, and their parents kneel to pray behind them.
- 3) Firemen let loose water on the children and parents from fire hoses, smashing them.
- 4) Policemen let loose dogs on the children and parents, without muzzles, tearing them.
- 5) Children and their parents are loaded into paddy wagons and hauled away, bruised.
- 6) Children and their parents huddle together in jail cells.
- 7) The sun sets orange on the wet street empty of people.

The sun rises, full of peace and warmth, to the street.

MONTAGE:

- 1) Children and their parents behind them sing "We Shall Overcome" as they stroll through the sunlit city street.
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- 4) Policemen let loose dogs on the children and parents, without muzzles, tearing them.
- 5) Children and their parents are loaded into paddy wagons and hauled away, bleeding.
- 6) Children and their parents huddle together in jail cells.
- 7) The sun sets orange on the wet street empty of people.

Another rosy fingered dawn approaches.

MONTAGE:

- 1) The sun rises clear on the families and police and firemen.
- 2) Tears flow down a fireman's face, his hand on his valve.
- 3) He lowers the nozzle as other firemen and police watch.
- 4) Other firemen drop their nozzles to the pavement.
- 5) Dogs look up at their handlers, shaking their heads.
- 6) The children kneel and pray and do not sing.
- 7) The functionaries load up their equipment.

EXT. THE PORCH ON THE EDGE OF MIDLAND - DAY

Theresa is looking into the floor of the porch as Lev looked into the muddy water of the Mississippi River. Pres puts a hand on her back and looks out to the wide Texas landscape. Two clouds of dust are rising in the distance, in opposite directions. They converge in front of the house.

THERESA

How are MIKHAIL and YASSER doing?

PRES

Mikhail has plans. Yasser, well.

Theresa nods without smiling, but she smiles when Quincy and BEN emerge from their school bus and Raymond and Beatrice emerge from the Studebaker.

Ben runs into his mother's arms, as Quincy takes a pat on the back from Raymond. Pres moves from the swing and sits at the top of the steps as Beatrice hands him their youngest son. Raymond replaces Pres on the swing, as Quincy takes his

schoolbooks into the house. Beatrice, her hands on her hips, smiles around at all of them.

BEATRICE

I'll start supper.

She follows Quincy, through the screen door, into the house. Pres looks back to his friends, and at his son and the sun. The sun is setting orange, as the picture fades to white.

EXT. A SIDEWALK CAFÉ ON MONTMARTRE - DAY

As the sun, clear in an afternoon, delights the dome of the basilica of the sacred heart, Pres and Mikhail drink tea.

MIKHAIL

I have a plan. I hope it doesn't offend you. I haven't forgotten your telling me you're a quiet man, or that you don't like subterfuge. But remember it's for our wives and children. And, remember, you did kill Fits Jr.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

George and Gracie and Bob neither speak nor move. The flying saucer sits idle and gray beneath them. The sky remains orange, glowing the cross more than anything else.

INT. THE WAR ROOM OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA - DAY

RICH ABYSS stands behind Fits Jr. People swarm around the room, pushing buttons on panels of lights. Yellow paper clacks from a machine into one of Fits Jr.'s hands, as his other hand grips an arm of his shaker rocker.

FITS JR.

Trinidad! Why did Eisenhower plan for Trinidad? He commanded Normandy, the most grand and successful military invasion ever, on barren beaches. Why would he plan such a small invasion into a city?

RICH ABYSS

Well, Mr. President, I have to admit that I concurred with Ike. World War II was a world war, and this is an operation to liberate one nation's people from the people Truman and

Churchill put in power, with later local complicity for Cuba from Ike, not to be political, Mr. President. President Eisenhower didn't wish for an invasion. He hoped for an insurgency. Arthur's table was round.

FITS JR.

Huh? Well, we have to be careful. The whole world is looking at me, and I need to be as good as Eisenhower, to lead our nation. We have to give.

Rich stands silent, as the yellow paper clacks through his president's hands. Fits Jr. glances fitfully at the paper.

RICH ABYSS

Normandy had a lot of air support.

FITS JR.

Not half our forces have yet hit the beach.

RICH ABYSS

Half the force that's hit the beach is dead.

FITS JR.

Ask what you can do for your country.

MONTAGE:

- 1) Normandy, people dying in the sand.
- 2) Bombers flying over Omaha Beach, bombs falling.
- 3) A man killing a cow, with a sledgehammer to its head.
- 4) Castro's troops at Fort Jackson, ours training.
- 5) Bay of Pigs, people dying in the sand.

EXT. A BENCH NEAR THE SMITHSONIAN AEROSPACE MUSEUM - DAY

RICH ABYSS

How did you get my name?

PRES

Rich, your name is public. You worked with De Gaulle for the Marshall Plan, and now you're working for the CIA. I'm a graduate of Skull and Bones. So I know more than the CIA does. And I'm from outer space.

RICH ABYSS

Outer space. So you know I managed the U2 project. That isn't quite outer space.

PRES

Not quite. But it's in the right direction, and I'm not kidding about being from outer space. I called you because I need your help.

RICH ABYSS

Outer space. Tell me about it. I'm in intelligence. Tell me something in.

PRES

Ask me about what you already know.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

GRACIE

Yeah, let's see what this guy knows!

GEORGE

Yeah, Rich Abyss! Interesting name!

EXT. BACK AT THE BENCH ON THE CAPITAL MALL - DAY

Rich looks up to the Capitol and down to the grass before him.

RICH ABYSS

Sometime in the second millennium before Christ, a pharaoh said he saw foul-smelling circles and disks in the sky. Do you know anything about that?

PRES

Must have been when Oliver was arriving. We've improved our emission systems since then. We're using more methane, and we've completely eliminated sulfur from the mix, thanks to modern technology. Well, Oliver's name was Moses for that mission.

Rich looks at the cherry trees and the obelisk for George Washington, and on to the memorial to honest Abe.

RICH ABYSS

Lyon, France. In the last quarter of the first millennium after Christ, some people said they saw a craft land and let three people out.

PRES

Yeah, Theresa told me about that. That was when Oliver and Slavey landed to be Orlando and Oliver at Roncesvalle. Theresa came along for the ride, because she was in between jobs and thought she'd take a little vacation. That's when she fell in love with France and asked Bob to let her be Joan of Arc. She told those people no one would believe them. Do you?

RICH ABYSS

You're a stone lunatic! What can I do for you?

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

George elbows Gracie, and Gracie giggles.

INT. THE CATTLEMEN'S CLUB IN SAN ANTONIO - DAY

Heads of dead cattle with long horns decorate the walls. Pres, DICKY, LINDEN, and CONUNDRUM sit in a corner banquette. All their hands are on rocks glasses, in remnants of lunch.

DICKY

Here's the deal, John! Would you like to be President of the United States?

CONDUNDRUM

It sounds crazy. Well, of course it sounds crazy. Well, it sounds crazy.

DICKY

Don't talk crazy. We're not goof-offs. We're important people in this world.

CONDUNDRUM

Alright. Let me be sure I've got this straight. Someone's going to assassinate Fits Jr., so Linden will be president. Then Linden's going to abstain from running against you, so you'll be president. Then you're going to make me look good, so I'll be president. What about the fact that I'm a Democrat, for Christ's sake?

LINDEN

Switch parties! Are you too proud for that? And Christ has nothing to do with it! Don't be maudlin.

PRES

So it's set. Linden, you'll talk Fits Jr. into visiting cow country. Conundrum, you'll set the parade route. Dicky, thanks for recruiting Conundrum.

CONUNDRUM

Texas is tough to govern, but this is a piece of cake.

DICKY

'at' a boy, John.

EXT. THE TORCH OF THE STATUE OF LIBERTY - DAY

Theresa appears as she sang in the doorway, then instantly becomes older. Oliver and Slavey appear as they danced in the rain, then instantly become older. Pres stands aside from them, looking like he did at the Cattlemen's club.

THERESA

I'm sorry.

OLIVER

So am I, but he hasn't kept his promises.

SLAVEY

And he could get all Earth blown into outer space, worrying about who's blinking.

THERESA

Yet many of his words are very good.

EXT. MONTMARTRE - DAY

MIKHAIL

Yes, I can find a crazy to do that.

EXT. THE BENCH NEAR THE AEROSPACE MUSEUM - DAY

PRES

Here, Mr. Abyss, is what you can do for us. We've got some people in place to put Fits Jr. into a parade route in Dallas. A KGB friend of mine is going to put someone in place to shoot at him, but that shooter isn't reliable. We need you to find a reliable operative to be sure he's shot. From the next window, at the same time. Can and will you do that?

RICH ABYSS

I can and shall.

The sun is setting orange over the capital mall.

EXT. THE FRONT OF THE TEXAS SCHOOLBOOK REPOSITORY - DAY

MONTAGE:

- 1) In a window of the repository, a dark-haired young white man sweats in a short-sleeved shirt and tie, looking like a Mormon missionary, with a rifle.
- 2) In a window next to that window, a light-haired young white man looks like a banker or an attorney in an air-conditioned office, with a rifle.
- 3) Fits Jr. passes in a Lincoln Continental convertible with the top down. His wife sits beside him in the back seat. Again the pink and pillbox hat.
- 4) Two shots sound in quick succession as we see both windows and the flames from the rifle barrels.
- 5) A bullet pierces Fits Jr.'s neck and hits Conundrum.
- 6) A bullet splatters Fits Jr.'s brain all over his wife.
- 7) The dark-haired man shoots again.
- 8) The bullet sparks the pavement behind the car.
- 9) Fits Jr.'s wife scrambles onto the trunk of the car, reaching for hands of secret service agents.

INT. THE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Fits Jr. sits at the desk, as a child peers from beneath it. The child salutes, and water floods through the French doors from the rose garden, like the Red Sea on the Egyptians. The scene fades to drizzling rain on the roses. Rose petals rise to the dreary sky.

EXT. THE NEW ORLEANS FRENCH QUARTER LEVEE - DAY

In drizzling rain, azalea blossoms fall on the river. As a freighter passes moaning, George and Gracie sit beside Bob, Gracie on his right, George on her left, facing the freighter. Leaning on George's left shoulder is the Mona Lisa. On Gracie's right is Munch's Scream. Monk's "Dream" plays O.S.

BOB

It's getting so I can't tell a rose from any other name.

INT. THE EL DORADO - DAY

Pres enters with sunlight behind him outside the door. Huffa sits at a table drinking dregs, as he did when the goon hired him to kill Norma. The club is more ragged than before, and no instruments are on the stage. Pres quietly pulls out a chair and sits.

PRES

Jimmy, want a job?

HUFFA

How did you get in here?

PRES

The door was open. Trash.

HUFFA

Trash is a matter of opinion.

PRES

Fine. Oliver Wendell Holmes said that trash isn't trash. He said it's just something in the wrong place.

HUFFA

Dirt. He said that about dirt, and he was a lawyer. Are you in the wrong place? Are you a trash lawyer? What do you want?

Huffa looks down into his rocks glass with no rocks. His eyes shift up to his eyebrows.

PRES

I have a proposition for you.

Huffa's eyes peer back down to the dregs in his glass.

PRES

Do you remember Norma Jean?

Huffa's eyes peer back toward his eyebrows.

PRES

It's the same sort of job, but better.

Huffa sighs and looks at the empty bandstand.

HUFFA

I'm listening.

PRES

I know your business. You've built a clientele in Dallas, out of losers who'll do anything to win but are such losers that they don't know what winning is, people like you. Do you understand?

HUFFA

I do my job. I'm getting into bigger unions next, to help better people who just do their jobs. Just tell me about the job and the money, and I'll do my job. Your philosophy is none of my business.

PRES

Well, it's pretty basic. Fits dead can't help your huffing and puffing. So, to save your butt and your legitimate business, we want you to find someone suicidal. In the strip club business, that could be easy for you.

HUFFA

I told you your philosophy is not my business. My business is my survival, like what that goon promised me for killing Norma Jean.

PRES

Right. So just find some sucker who's been stealing from your illegitimate business, the prostitution and drug dealing, someone with a family, like Norma Jean.

HUFFA

To kill himself? For what?

PRES

To save his family from your destruction, and all of our families from nuclear destruction, but my philosophy is none of your business.

HUFFA

I still don't get it, and I still don't care about your philosophy. So you're going to have to be more clear.

PRES

Suicide by police. Now listen.

INT. THE DALLAS FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - DAY

Police lead the young Mormon-looking shooter in shackles down a hallway, as journalists photograph the progression. A fat man in a white suit and hat breaks between reporters and shoots the shooter several times before police shoot the shooter shooting the shooter.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Gracie and George and Bob are placid, seated on the cross.

EXT. THE CAFÉ ON MONTMARTRE - DAY

PRES

So, Mikhail, what's your plan? You know your name is the name of the angel God asked to send Satan to hell.

MIKHAIL

I know. I'm not supposed to. Remember that Marx said that religion is the opiate of the people. But I do know, because I pay attention to all the world, and more because I love Raisa. I know you understand that, and so my plan begins with you. You have to get more global quickly.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Bob and George and Gracie still sit on the cross, placid.

EXT. THE VIA DOLOROSO - DAY

Pres and Yasser sit drinking tea at a table outside a little kiosk in the wall stones as the sun lights dust on the cobblestones, which magnifies into fireworks overhead, and then subsides to the dusty sparkle, beneath the clear sky sun. Yasser wears his checked headscarf, while Pres is hatless.

YASSER

You can't stop it. They've started it again, and it won't stop until they stop, and they won't stop. Their heritage is older and less fair than ours. Peace can't come from age-old greed. And I am not Odysseus. I'm at a loss.

MONTAGE:

- 1) Hector nods his plume to his wife and child in Troy.
- 2) Arrows fall silent on the walls of Troy.
- 3) Horses drag a bull dead around a Spanish bull ring.
- 4) Snow falls on the Trojan horse.
- 5) Achilles drags Hector dead beneath the walls of Troy.
- 6) The French are eating horses in the snow.
- 7) Odysseus arches the arrow to keeping his marriage.

PRES (O.S.)

I know. They won't willingly stop. Many of them believe God gave them the whole country, and many of them covet the country whether God gave it to them or not, and most of them will try to use religion as an excuse, but all of them is not a world majority, or even a majority in Canaan. They can be stopped.

YASSER (O.S.)

Who's going to stop them? The world majority or the majority in Canaan? Whatever the majority of the people, the majority of the power is with the weapons of the United States and the United Kingdom and Western Europe, and they've all promised to lend that power to Israel if we make any move to reclaim the land they've taken from us. And, by the way, why do you call the land Canaan, knowing as you must that most of the population is Palestinian?

PRES (O.S.)

I call it Canaan exactly because I regret that the superiority of weaponry has anything to do with it. I call it Canaan because the best deal

any of you is ever going to get is that you share it with no claims to superiority. And the only way you're going to get that deal is by saying so and behaving so. The western powers will respond well to that, if they can see it. We have to show it, you and I.

YASSER

Well, at least you don't call it the former British mandate, and you speak a worthy ideal. So, I think you may be a friend to anyone worthy of a friend, but I have to say again that people calling thievery religion would make that idealism our tombstone if we stood by it alone. Anyway, who are you, and how did you gain your references, those for this meeting.

PRES

I'll answer that in a moment, if you'll forgive a question in the meantime. Have you read Kipling's The Jungle Books?

INT. THE EL DORADO - NIGHT

A belly dancer dances on the bandstand, before a dismal crowd.

YASSER (O.S.)

Children's books. Books for children.

PRES (O.S.)

From a winner of the Nobel prize for literature. From an Englishman in India, while England treated India as England did Canaan when I was last born here on Earth. He wrote of war, and he wrote of Islamic subterfuge, and he wrote of reasons for both. And he wrote of how we all could just get along together.

PRES (O.S.)

Do you know what he called the "Master Words"?

YASSER (O.S.)

"We be of one blood, ye and I."

INT. NORMA'S AND JIMMY'S BEDROOM IN SAN DIEGO - NIGHT

Norma is sitting at the vanity, taking off her makeup as Jimmy lies on the bed, reading a hard-covered book.

EXT. BACK IN JERUSALEM - DAY

PRES

I am a friend. And I gained my references through other friends, and you do not stand alone. But I know you're right that the problem is horribly out of balance, and I know it will take some time and so I'm not asking much from you, not now. All I'm asking of you now is that you work toward the ideal as best you can, in the best ways you can find to do.

YASSER

I do that anyway. So I'll give you the promise, all on my side and asking nothing from you, about whom I know nothing beyond what I see and hear now. I will never produce an imbalance, never cause more Israeli eyes to be taken than Israelis take from my people. I don't have the power.

PRES

Then isn't it an empty promise?

YASSER

The promise is I'll do the best I can.

PRES

Then I believe it's a good one!

INT. BACK IN NORMA'S AND JIMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

JIMMY

Norma, what do you think of this? I read poetry a lot out there at sea, and this got my attention. I guess because I'm supposed to be military, while they make me salute anything that moves and paint anything that doesn't. Ah, never mind.

NORMA

No, Jimmy. You know I care. Tell me.

JIMMY

Okay: "One crowded hour of life is worth an age without a name." Alan Seeger, died in the first World War. Whadaya think?

NORMA

Sounds like Pete Seeger, singing about that Indian drowning drunk in a ditch at home, after helping to raise Old Glory at Iwo Jima.

JIMMY

Norma, sometimes I think you know too much! How did an Indian get the name Ira?

NORMA

Just be careful, Jimmy. Please.

INT. A HOTEL ROOM IN HARLEM - DAY

Theresa and Slavey and Oliver and Pres pace the room, sit down and stand up, look out the window.

SLAVEY

How'd you get in here.

PRES

I snuck in.

OLIVER

You're getting good at that.

PRES

It's my job.

THERESA

Enough. Oliver and Slavey, it's time for you to do your job. And, Oliver, I'm disappointed in you. What are you doing?

OLIVER

You know what I'm doing. I'm working for you.

THERESA

You should be working for Bob, and sometimes you don't act like it. Your screwing around on Rachel is going to screw up memories of what you've done and screw up what more memories of you could do. It's called legacy here, what

you're screwing up. You need to remember Rachel at the well. And the coat of many colors. You're acting like Fits Jr.

OLIVER

Oh, please!

THERESA

Oh, please?

OLIVER

Alright. I'm Sorry! But remember Siddhartha Gautama? He wasn't one of us, but he tried to be like the best of us, and he said that giving up sex was the hardest part for him! Look how beautiful these Earth women are, with all their softness and warmth, their grace! Just look at you, your onyx eyes, far-seeing.

Theresa's eyes turn from blue to brown, and she becomes much older as her eyes shine more and darken more. Oliver fattens like the Buddha, and Theresa dances like Shiva, for a few seconds. Then all returns to its former aspect, except Theresa's eyes. They now shine black, like onyx.

THERESA

But they're Earth women. And you're not an Earth man. And you're not right, in this.

OLIVER

Well, again, look at you. If I had come here as a woman, I'd have to be a lesbian.

THERESA

Oh, please! And it has nothing to do with that transvestite police pepper picker Pickens.

OLIVER

Alright. You're right. I'm sorry, and I know how sorry I am. It's time for Slavey and me to sing our swansongs anyway, like you said. Just let me try to make it right with that.

SLAVEY

But I'm going first.

THERESA

I know you'll do well, Slavey. Oliver, you've got two shots, as far as I see it. You have to sing two swansongs, one to a rainbow at the Lincoln Memorial, and one to all of Earth in the land of the Vikings. But yes, Slavey shall vacation in Valhalla first.

MONTAGE:

- 1) Buffalo Bob manipulating Howdy Doody.
- 2) The Alabama state police riding into the people trying to cross the bridge at Selma.
- 3) The statue in Saint Augustine of a servant leading Queen Isabella down a mountainside.
- 4) Women being dunked in Salem, Massachusetts.
- 5) The looting and conflagration in Detroit and Watts.
- 6) The little girl running naked down the road in Vietnam.
- 7) Rachel Corrie crushed in dust.

INT. THE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Linden and Oliver sit in Louis XVI chairs on opposite sides of the hearth. The French windows to the rose garden are open, and the Swedish ivy blooms purple on the mantle. No fire.

OLIVER
I just. Really.

LINDEN
No. Let me tell you why you're here.

Oliver breathes in deep and glances up. He nods, silently.

LINDEN
You're here because we're a nation at war. The war is within, and the war is without, and it is as real as anything and maybe more real than whatever you think, whatever my people or your people think, whatever anyone thinks. So, here's what your people and my people are going to do. We're going to make a consolidated gesture. For justice for all.

Oliver's head remains bowed where his nod has left it.

LINDEN

You are not going to march on the capitol of this nation. You are going to meet with your people, peacefully at the steps of the monument to one of my people, the predecessor of mine who first brought forth legislation specifying your people as having the same rights of citizenship in this nation as my people. Do you understand?

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

The cross falls back onto the flying saucer, kicking up a lot of dust, in slow motion. Bob and Gracie and George rise from the dust, laughing. They sit back down on the fallen cross.

EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

UNCLE REMUS sits on a three-legged stool and leans back against a rail fence, between a small white boy and a small white girl, both standing. The road is dry, a dusty way before them, and a briar patch is down the hill, below the road. Uncle Remus looks up to the children and down to the road, and below to the briar patch.

UNCLE REMUS

So Br'er Fox he tell Br'er Rabbit he qwine th'ow him into dat dere briar patch below, ef he do'n' do like Br'er Fox say he ought.

The children look down to the patch and back to Uncle Remus.

UNCLE REMUS

But Br'er Fox do'n' know dat Br'er Rabbit wa' bo'n an' raised in one o' dem briar patches. So, Br'er Rabbit, he say: "Please do'n' th'ow me into dat briar patch."
Br'er Rabbit, he lay low.

The children scowl down to the briar patch and smile now at Uncle Remus, who is smiling up at them.

INT. THE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

OLIVER

I understand.

The main door to the office opens, but the aide opening it remains outside. Excellent Oliver stands and grasps the offered

right hand of the also standing President of the United States. Oliver shakes the president's hand briefly and walks from the office.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Gracie and George and Bob are dancing on the flying saucer.

EXT. THE CAPITAL MALL BEFORE THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL - DAY

The mall is full of people shouting and singing, peacefully. Theresa and Slavey and Oliver and Pres stand aside from the throng and look up to the monument to President Lincoln, and down and across to the throng.

PRES (grinning)
Surveys say 40 thousand people might show up.

Theresa looks at Pres and her other partners and at the throng waving and singing like universal strength.

OLIVER (scowling)
A thousand for each day Bob conversed with the first clinton.

SLAVEY (grinning)
A thousand for each year you wandered in the same wilderness, Oliver.

THERESA (scowling)
A thousand for each decade between my burning and this white guy's emancipation proclamation.

PRES (placidly)
Well, you know I said, in my little book about how virtue is power, that Earth is made of ten thousand things. So, I could say that there are four persons here for each of those things, but look out there. They're a whole lot more than 40 thousand strong.

THERESA (shining)
And it's a rainbow. Even we aliens are here. I love Earth, this rainbow. This rainbow, after so much rain. Here, at least for a moment, this capital mall is greener than anything has ever grown on this planet, on any side of any hill.

The crowd sings "We Shall Overcome" and waves flowers and has a good time, as people stand and speak from the steps of the memorial. Oliver rises to the stage. The people quiet.

OLIVER

I have a dream.

A rainbow spans cherry blossoms and all the strong throng, as the huddled masses sing, the capitol in the distance. A dove flies from the blossoms to the rainbow, and across the fruited plain. She drops her olive branch in wind.

EXT. THE STUDEBAKER TRAVELING ACROSS WEST TEXAS - DAY

Lev drives, as he and Pres listen to the radio playing Hank Williams singing "Jambalaya". Pres pushes a button and finds Barbra Streisand singing "Happy Days Are Here Again". Lev pushes a button and finds Nina Simone singing "Sunday in Savannah". Pres pushes a button and finds Bob Dylan singing "Blowin' in the Wind". Lev pushes a button and finds Elvis singing "Peace in the Valley". The Studebaker's windows are wide open. The olive branch falls on its hood. Pres and Lev laugh out loud. The branch blows away. The sky is high.

EXT. BACK BEFORE ST. LOUIS CATHEDRAL - DAY

Presley keeps singing O.S., as Nina resumes "Sunday in Savannah" contretemps. Beatrice and Norma hold hands on the bench, as Theresa leans against the gate to Jackson Square and the azaleas, young again with her eyes blue as the sky. Oliver and Slavey lean against a pillar of the Cabildo, gazing toward the Presbytere. Now it is not raining in New Orleans.

EXT. A WEST TEXAS OIL FIELD - DAY

Lev and Pres play teeter-totter on an oil well pump, as the pump creaks awhile in the afternoon sun, before Lev and Pres interrupt it's sound, with their conversation. Pres is wearing a white Stetson, Lev a black one.

LEV

I love that movie, Giant.

PRES

Yeah, but you don't do metaphors.

LEV

I hope that's what metaphors are for, a Zen slap in the face.

PRES

Lev, I think you are the most professional person I've ever met, and I've met a lot of people.

LEV

That's a professing. Anyway, you said Beatrice says Ben's a fagot. You should have paid more attention to him. I hope he's gay, you know. How's Quincy?

Wind rises, blowing the brush and dust of the oil field. Pres and Lev have to speak more loudly. They hold onto their hats.

PRES

Both my sons are fine. But that's not what I wanted to talk with you about. Slavey and Oliver are going to get their butts killed pretty soon, and I think we should throw a wake for them before they go. I thought you might wish to join the party.

LEV

A going away party! And I know just the place!

PRES

Talk on, my friend. But no ballet, and nothing intellectual, if you please.

LEV

No problem. I found this great little bar in New Mexico. It's in a ghost town I visited a few years ago, while I was looking around to find some interesting ghosts to hang out with. A lot of interesting ghosts hang out in New Orleans, but I was trying to widen my horizons.

The pump creaks and clunks with the sun behind Lev's head when his head rises. Lev and Pres now have to shout, above the pump and rising wind. Lev is wearing pointed-toe Cossack boots. Pres's hat blows away. Lev tosses his.

LEV

We'll get 'em later. It's a gold-mining ghost-town, but it's in cattle country. And it's famous because BILLY THE KID used to hang out there, or hide out there, whatever. Some guy from Michigan owns it now. It was a drugstore, in the kid's days.

PRES

Wait a minute! Now it's a saloon, but it used to be a drugstore? What's up with that?

Lev rises and stands on his end of the pump. His gray beard and his Cossack sleeves blow in the wind.

PRES

Well, that's impressive, but history needs to be more impressive than that, to get these Earthlings' attention.

Lev plops back down on his end of the pump. Pres lurches a little and takes a tighter grip on his end.

LEV

It's a ghost town. I already told you that. Nothing there is the same as it was. This PENROD guy came out from Michigan because he was tired of being an electrical contractor but had made enough money at it to buy the drugstore, which wasn't even a drugstore by that time, and he turned it into a saloon. He calls it the White Oaks Saloon, because the name of the ghost town is White Oaks, and it used to have a pretty happy-go-lucky saloon named that, before the town went bust. It was a fancy establishment, even had a sign out front saying 'no scum allowed'. But that didn't stop Billy the Kid from going in there. It was also a whorehouse.

EXT. WHITE OAKS IN ITS BOOMTOWN DAYS - NIGHT

Floozies drape the balcony rail of the White Oaks Saloon.

PRES (O.S.)

Okay. New Mexico. Volcano cores. Whorehouse? What else?

LEV (O.S.)

The grass is brown, like here and on the Russian steppes, but it isn't flat. It's cattle country, and the name of the county seat is Carrizozo, Spanish for great grass. But the cattle have to do a little hill-climbing to get to all that great grass, and there's a plain of burnt dirt, called the valley of the fires, just outside Carrizozo. I thought some of your people might have done that in some sort of invasion. But White Oaks is up in the hills. Not in the valley.

EXT. THE VALLEY OF THE FIRES - DAY

The saucer sweeps down, scorching acres of Earth.

PRES (O.S.)

Is it near Roswell? We might have burned the valley accidentally! We have conventions in Roswell from time to time.

LEV (O.S.)

Phh! About eighty miles west. But that's not why I think it'd be a great place for a party for us. That Penrod character moved out there because he wanted to be a gold miner, but he still goes back to Michigan for fruit harvests, to work with the illegal aliens. Yeah, I thought you'd find that funny, but he has a Mexican wife named MARY. Together they throw a great party, and the drugstore has a big backroom. Sorry for the chuckle.

EXT. A MICHIGAN CHERRY ORCHARD - DAY

Mexicans of all ages climb ladders and gather the fruit.

PRES (O.S.)

Yeah, alright! A big backroom? What do they do there, deal drugs?

LEV (O.S.)

Maybe sometimes. But mostly, except for the pool table they put there, they don't use it other than for Saturday nights. Saturday nights, they have a big ball, with the best musicians from all around the county. They call it a dance, but it

reminds me a lot of old times in Petrograd.
Except that they wear Stetsons instead of plumes.
Their boots are almost as pointed.

EXT. BACK IN THE OILFIELD - DAY

Lev turns his face and looks across the vast Texas steppes.

LEV

The saloon still has the old drugstore counter,
like the one in the movie The Grapes of Wrath,
where the owner undersells the kids the candy
canes. Besides, the county's named for Abraham
Lincoln. Alright?

EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE IN NEW YORK CITY - DAY

A hatless young black man playing chess with an old white man in
a beret hands a small waxed paper packet to a black girl. She
hands back some money, and walks away without a word. Both men
focus on the game.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Bob and George and Gracie sit quietly with crowns of thorns on
their heads, and huge teardrops on all their cheeks.

EXT. A MUNICIPAL BENCH ON THE DETROIT RIVER - DAY

In the shadow of the Detroit Renaissance Center, Theresa and
Slavey and Oliver and Pres look across to Canada.

THERESA

You know, I bet Norma would like to come. We can
get her out of Heaven for that.

OLIVER

Yeah! And how about James Dean! He's dead, too!

THERESA

He'd be hitting on Norma or Lev. Not the right
focus.

SLAVEY

Yeah, and she's waiting for that sailor Jimmy.

OLIVER

And Lev is going back to his wife.

PRES
How about Billy the Kid?

THERESA
Does anyone know where in hell he is?

EXT. THE SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF THE WATTS TOWERS - DAY

Pres and GENE AUTRY lean against the fence.

GENE AUTRY
You want to do what with my DC3?

PRES
I want your gooney bird to fly some alien friends of mine to New Mexico for a wake. It seems to me to be a Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer kind of thing. By the way, how can you own a baseball team?

GENE AUTRY
Well sir, we pay the players very well. Better than that Roy Rogers character paid Trigger, stuffing his carcass and sticking it in a museum, not for Trigger but for him.

PRES
I know, Gene. You're the real king of the cowboys. You sing and know the happy trails of sky. I've always said so. You want to come?

GENE AUTRY
Nah. You go ahead. My plates too full already, without a bunch of aliens filling it.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Bob and George and Gracie still have the tears on their cheeks and the thorns on their heads, but now they have Emmett Kelly noses on their faces.

BOB
Happy trails, y'all!

INT. GENE'S DOUGLAS DC-3 AIRCRAFT FLYING - NIGHT

Pres pilots the craft as he and Theresa and Slavey and Oliver sing "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer", "Somewhere Over the Rainbow", and "All the Way". The stars fade into dawn.

THERESA

I'm on vacation! This is so great!

SLAVEY

Do you think Lev and Norma can find the way.

THERESA

They've already found the way. They're just not real sure of they're footing yet.

OLIVER

Lev'll have to pick her up off site. He doesn't think he's ready to go in quite yet.

THERESA

Yeah, well. They'll figure it out.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

GRACIE

Will you two shut up?

EXT. THE GRAVEL RUNWAY OF THE CARIZZOZO AIRPORT - DAY

The plane lands lurching, and the aliens emerge from it, laughing into the New Mexico sun. A small gray-haired man beckons to them from a doorway through some large plate glass windows of a small building otherwise of wood. The aliens jostle each other to the little man, who coughs.

INT. THE LITTLE TERMINAL BUILDING - DAY

The small man holds the door open with his right hand as the aliens enter the building. With his left hand, he covers his mouth as he coughs. Inside, he holds out his right to Pres.

COUGHING COLONEL

Jimmy Roberts, United States Marines, retired.
Can I get you all some coffee?

PRES

Pleased to meet you. Sure, I guess.

The others nod. All shake the colonel's hand, giving their first names. The colonel fills and hands around paper cups from an electric coffeemaker on top of a small refrigerator. He removes a quart carton of half and half from the refrigerator and sets it on top of the refrigerator beside a jar of sugar Norma might have had on her counter in San Diego. After he hands the coffee around, he gestures to the cream and sugar. The aliens follow the colonel's gesture.

COUGHING COLONEL
Help yourself.

All help themselves and share a spoon from a cup of water beside the sugar. The aliens look at each other and grin.

PRES
How's business? Who flies in here?

COUGHING COLONEL
I'm not sure you want to know.

PRES
I guess you must have flown in the Marines.

COUGHING COLONEL
Fighters.

PRES
Bombers.

Pres points to his chest but looks at the floor, not smiling. The colonel looks out the plate glass windows past the runway.

PRES
I was only in the Army Air Corps, World War II.

COUGHING COLONEL
I was in Korea. Had to leave because of this.

The colonel hits his chest with his right fist and coughs again. He takes a breath, deep but very slowly. He coughs again, and exhales as slowly. All glance, while no one speaks. It's an embarrassing moment. Pres reopens.

PRES

I'm not sure we planned this trip very well. It doesn't look like you have a rental car agency here. I feel stupid mentioning it. Any suggestions?

The coughing colonel's pale blue eyes look straight into Pres's, then around at the other aliens. He offers a smile of kindness to Theresa and nods to her understanding eyes. He starts to scratch his belly, but he scratches his head, instead. He looks out the windows, past the airstrip to the rolling grass.

COUGHING COLONEL

That pickup over there.

He indicates to his right with a thumb, while still looking forward across the airfield. The pickup is O.S.

COUGHING COLONEL

I don't use it much, because I've got the van out front. Fifty bucks a week, if you want it. Sorry I can't do better. Or

Pres pulls pocket cash and offers a hundred-dollar bill.

PRES

Appreciate it. That'll do fine. We'll bring it back in a few days.

The colonel accepts the money with a glance of respect and appreciation, again into Pres's eyes.

EXT. THE AIRFIELD - DAY

The aliens retrieve some luggage from the gooney bird and carry it to the pickup, where the colonel awaits them. They throw it into the bed.

COUGHING COLONEL

Real estate? Looking around? Thinking of staying?

MONTAGE:

- 1) Again the Mongol hordes at the wall in Kabul.
- 2) Chinese people carrying stones from the Great Wall.
- 3) The same people building homes of the stones.
- 4) The same people building a railroad across New Mexico.
- 5) The same people in an opium den in San Francisco.

- 6) Needles discarded beneath a park bench in Sweden.
- 7) The statue of the little mermaid.

PRES

Nah. Just a party with some friends. But I love the view.

COUGHING COLONEL

Yeah. Forever is a nice way to look.

The colonel hands Pres keys to the old Ford pickup. Pres steps onto the driver end of the seat, and Theresa swings onto the passenger end. Slavey and Oliver pile into the bed, and Slavey parks his butt in the wheel of a spare tire lying flat back there, while Oliver sits on the bed-bottom and leans his back on a side, crossing the ankles of his legs stretched out. All look up at the bright New Mexico sun.

COUGHING COLONEL

Y'all have fun now.

The aliens wave and head up the road past the valley of the fires, toward the vast tourist vista of Carrizozo.

EXT. THE CROSSROADS GIVING CARRIZOZO IT'S RAISON D'ETRE - DAY

The pickup pulls into the motel on one of the four corners. The sign in front of the motel says it's the four seasons.

INT. THE FRONT DESK OF THE MOTEL - DAY

Chimes hanging on the door chime as Pres enters the lobby. A distinguished-looking woman stands behind the desk, looking down at some paper. Pres walks to the desk and waits.

HER HONOR

Oh, I'm sorry! How can I help you?

PRES

Reservations. Under a bush, maybe in parks. Could be under Martin Luther, or maybe X. I'm sorry, too. I'm having fun. Ma'am.

Pres lowers his eyes, showing he sees his vacation isn't hers. Her honor grins nevertheless, brightening her large and light brown eyes beneath her short and dark blonde hair.

HER HONOR

We don't do reservations here. But we have rooms available. How many do you want?

PRES

Two, with two beds each. Is that possible?

HER HONOR

Of course! We even take credit cards!

Now Pres grins and hands her honor a BankAmerica Visa card.

PRES

I don't wish to offend you, but you seem to me to be too distinguished for what you're doing.

HER HONOR

I'm also the mayor. This is a small town.

PRES

Well, the view is lovely. Oh, we're here to meet with some friends, an old bearded guy and a thirty-something beautiful blonde. Can you tell me if they've checked in?

HER HONOR

Nine. You and your other friends are in ten and eleven. You're not going to sue me for giving you their room number, are you? They asked me to tell anyone who asks that they'd be in the bar across the street. I don't know why they called it a bar. It's a very nice restaurant. Very nice.

PRES

Yah hah! Not a chance! I mean of suing you, taking you to court. You know what I mean. I'm married. Thank you!

Her honor laughs him out the chiming door.

EXT. THE MOTEL'S GRAVEL PARKING LOT - DAY

Pres walks to the room doors, and the others join him from the pickup. Pres tosses a key to Oliver and opens one of the doors. Slavey opens the other door and turns back to Pres.

SLAVEY

Norma and Lev? Are they here yet?

PRES

They're in that bar across the street.

INT. OLIVER'S AND SLAVEY'S ROOM - DAY

Oliver and Slavey stash their stuff and check themselves in mirrors. They slap each other's back and head out the door.

INT. THERESA'S AND PRES'S ROOM - DAY

Slavey and Oliver stride in. Theresa is standing on the dresser, as Pres applauds and the others join in.

THERESA

I have a dream!

SLAVEY

Yubba dubba doo!

Theresa jumps down from the dresser, and they all head out.

EXT. THE INTERSECTION IN FRONT OF THE MOTEL - DAY

The four aliens stride across the motel parking lot to the entrance to the bar across the street, which also has a sign calling it four seasons, and a drive-up pickup window.

INT. THE FOUR SEASONS BAR AND RESTAURANT - DAY

Norma is standing at the jukebox, looking as though she lives there, chatting with about a half dozen natives, while Lev is at the bar, chatting with one man. It's quite a crowd and quite a mix for any time or place. The aliens enter.

Nearly everyone in the bar is in a Stetson hat, Caucasians in white Stetsons, Hispanics in black. Theresa and Slavey and Oliver sit in a banquette, all on one side to await the others' joining them, Theresa in the middle, Slavey outside. Pres's blue eyes glance around, and he strides to the bar, to Lev. He listens a moment.

LEV

So what do you think about the Israel/Palestine situation?

TREASURE HUNTER

I'm an American. That crap's been going on since Joshua fit the battle of Jericho. I can't do anything about world peace, or even worldwide economics. I just work the goods I find, into my pockets.

Pres taps the shoulder of Lev's away from the treasure hunter. Lev touches the nearest forearm of the treasure hunter and turns, to find Pres frowning at him in a brown study.

TREASURE HUNTER

No problem.

LEV

Oh, ho! You finally made it! Where in hell have you been?

PRES

Not in hell. We've been flying from Atlanta in a gooney bird.

Pres orders some beers and carries them to Norma Jean, who gives him a big tearful hug and accepts the same, and one of the bottles of beer. Pres carries the rest of the beer on to the banquette and places the bottles around to his alien friends. The other aliens are chatting, catching up on new times, but Pres doesn't sit. He leans against one of the benches and glares around the room. He returns to Lev and again listens before getting his attention. Several white hats tip to Pres as he approaches the bar. Pres responds with blinking eyes and frowns.

LEV

Not tomorrow.

TREASURE HUNTER

No problem.

Pres squeezes in between Lev and a WHITE HAT on his left.

WHITE HAT

Long time no see, Kemo Sabe.

Pres looks at the man and turns away to glare at Lev.

PRES

What in hell is going on here? I've never seen so many DEA agents in one place, ever.

LEV

Oh, they're not DEA agents, anymore. I thought you might want to know about this. This little bar or restaurant, or whatever the local Chamber of Commerce or chapter of the Masons wants to call it, is the main world club of drug enforcement defectors. When they wish to make more money, a might mess of them comes traipsing here. Opportunities abound you know, and this little place is a funnel. Didn't your Skull and Bones pals tell you that?

PRES

Lev, it isn't my specialty. And I was hoping for a vacation.

Lev now glares, straight back into Pres's glare, and shudders.

LEV

Well, it should be your specialty! Nothing is more disruptive of your mission here on Earth than the drugs these salivating suckers conjure up. Anyway, these salivating suckers don't like music. So we won't see them up the hill. Russia was never as bad as this.

Pres takes the hit. He nods and pat's Lev's old Slavic back. He returns to the banquette and now sits, but still he scowls.

THERESA

What's the matter, young fellow?

PRES

Oh, Lev reminded me of something. I'm going to get Manuel Noriega to give me a cigarette boat, and then I'm going to bury him beneath the Miami courthouse. Then I'm going to take some OPEC sheiks for rides in the boat. I guess I'm rambling. I don't know.

THERESA

Sounds like a plan to me. Just make sure you don't take Idi Amin or ol' Fidel for rides in it. Lev must have told you something good.

Norma interrupts the conversation by sliding Pres over as she glides grinning into the banquette. Lev sees and follows, leaving the treasure hunter, to slide Norma and Pres over.

LEV

Any room for an old Slav?

PRES

You're a pain in the butt!

LEV

Let me tell you a story.

PRES

Yeah, a story! The only story of yours I know about is more than a thousand pages long in fine print, in any language. We're here for a vacation, not to listen to some old Russian ghost sob about his sense of purgatory.

LEV

Well, this story isn't about purgatory. Or maybe it is, but it's about here, about the little ghost town where we're going. And I'll keep it as short as I can.

NORMA

I like stories. Although they all seem bitter sweet.

THERESA

Tell your story. I love your stories, long or short.

OLIVER AND SLAVEY

Story! Story! Story!

LEV

Okay! Okay! Okay!

The aliens and ghosts filter out the bar noise as Lev begins. They bow their heads to hear Lev's story.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Gracie and George and Bob play cards atop the flying saucer. Their tears and thorns and nose bulbs are gone, and a cribbage board sits beside them on the saucer, upside down. The board's pegs are scattered in and out of their little storage slot. Gracie and George and Bob look serious. The cross is the card table. No money, only cards.

LEV (O.S.)

Once upon a time, in a place not far away or long ago, lived a beautiful PRINCESS. She was beautiful as the sun, but she didn't know how beautiful she was, and so she wished to be a cowgirl. So, the first handsome COWBOY who came along and saw her beauty easily swept her off her feet and took her for his bride.

MONTAGE (as Gene Autry sings "Back in the Saddle Again" O.S.):

- 1) The princess's bright and shining face and blonde hair beneath a white Stetson, first as a young child and then in late adolescence.
- 2) A young blond cowboy watching the princess ride a bucking bronco. Then the young cowboy riding the range, then requesting her hand.
- 3) The cowboy riding the range, wiping sweat from his brow.
- 4) The princess washing dishes, wiping sweat from her brow.
- 5) The princess and the cowboy grinning at their CHILD in the princess's arms in a hospital bed, the cowboy in a Stetson, the princess not.
- 6) The front porch of their little unpainted clapboard house, as they sit in plastic chairs. The princess, her hat back on, holds the child.
- 7) The princess and the child in a grocery store, the child now near adolescence, as they and the grocers smile.
- 8) The cowboy still riding the range.

INT. THE BARROOM OF THE NEW WHITE OAKS SALOON - NIGHT

The princess stands beside a MEXICAN in a black Stetson, about the age of the cowboy. Lev strides, in a brown Stetson and his long hair and beard, to another side of the princess. He leans to kiss a cheek of hers.

MEXICAN

Watch it, now.

Lev leans back without kissing, and he looks at the Mexican.

INT. THE BALLROOM OF THE NEW WHITE OAKS SALOON - NIGHT

The princess dances with the Mexican, while the Cowboy and the child sit talking with others, men and women in one of the banquettes back there in the ballroom.

LEV (O.S.)

The cowgirl's husband thought little of this dancing, because he loved his lovely princess, and they could afford groceries, and had a lovely child. Life was right and easy, as it could be.

INT. THE BANQUETTE IN THE FOUR SEASONS BAR - DAY

Norma's blonde head is still bowed, as the aliens look at her with trepidation. Nevertheless, Lev continues his story.

LEV

So, while the neighbors weren't surprised when the cowgirl left her husband and her son to ride fences like a cowboy with the wild Mexican, the husband was devastated. He sat moping at home, staring out the screen door of their little house, wondering what to do. So, the moping turned to smoldering that threatened to combust.

Theresa bows her head, folds her hands together, and looks again at Norma. Norma, her head still bowed, does not move. But tears drip to her folded hands.

EXT. A LITTLE ADOBE HOME ON THE RANGE - DAY

INT. THE ONE ROOM OF THAT LITTLE HOUSE - DAY

The princess opens a pine wardrobe and finds it empty.

PRINCESS

I have nothing to wear. I have to go home and get some clothes.

MEXICAN

We could do the laundry. No, we'll buy you some clothes. Forget laundry.

PRINCESS

We could, but I have to go sooner or later. We have to finish this.

MEXICAN

I'll finish it. We'll finish it. I'll go get your clothes.

The princess smiles. She looks at the Mexican. Their mouths come together, lightly and warmly. They hug.

EXT. THE FRONT PORCH OF THE COWBOY'S HOUSE - DAY

The Mexican strides onto the porch and knocks on the screen door. Nearly immediately, the cowboy comes to the door, points a .38 magnum revolver at the Mexican's head, and shoots through the screen. The bullet enters the Mexican's right eye and exits the back of the left side of his neck. Blood spurts as he falls, his hat floating above him.

INT. A HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The Mexican lies in bed with bandages, IV's, etc.

INT. A JAIL CELL - DAY

The cowboy lies on a steel shelf, like Theresa's

INT. THE FOUR SEASONS BANQUETTE - DAY

Theresa unfolds her hands. She turns them up and open toward Norma, but without moving them closer to Norma's bowed head.

LEV

Of course the husband went to jail, but the wild Mexican didn't die. The husband was convicted of attempted murder, and the Mexican only lost an eye, and a lot of mobility. I guess, to this day, the husband remains immobilized in a prison cell for years, but the Mexican was walking with a cane within a few months. No, I'm not kidding.

Theresa moves her hands nearer to Norma, but Norma lifts her head. Tears flow down her face, but she smiles brightly.

NORMA

So then what happened?

Lev now lifts his head from his story and looks at Norma.

LEV

The last time I was up at the saloon, the princess was tending bar. She was wearing no Stetson, and her hair was cut in a pageboy haircut, a little like Jackie Fits used to wear, not cowboy-cut at all. But her Mexican was right there with her, sitting by the woodstove that heats the place.

NORMA

Yes. That's what I said. Bitter sweet.

Lev looks back down to the table, again into his river. But soon he slowly raises his eyes to the others. He sadly looks at Norma, then at Pres. All, except Lev and Norma, shake their heads. Lev looks at Norma again. He shakes his head.

LEV

That guy I was talking to at the bar told me he's a treasure hunter. He says there's drug money buried in these brown hills. He told me that the Lincoln County News has reported a person who died in prison but never turned over the money, and he said there are other events like that, that never hit a newspaper. He says he thinks some of the money might still be in the hills. He said that's why he's here.

Now Norma shakes her head and looks around at her friends. She wipes her right cheek with the back of her left hand. Then she looks at Lev again.

NORMA

What kind of treasure hunter is that? Aren't treasure hunters supposed to be looking for gold doubloons sunk to the bottom of the sea?

LEV

That's what I wondered. I could understand someone wishing something like that, for adventure. But I don't see how someone can want to hang around with a bunch of drug dealers just to find out where to dig up some money.

PRES

Theresa, sometimes I think you talk too much.

Theresa grins broadly, as her eyes change back to blue and back to brown, and her wrinkles go away and return. Slavey elbows her and grins, and Oliver frowns as Pres bows his head and shuts his mouth. Lev and Norma just sit quiet.

OLIVER

Neither do I understand. It seems to me that people might wish to have some reason to live, some kind of productive purpose for their lives.

SLAVEY

Or just for beauty, as Norma said.

THERESA

Yes. It's like religion. People try to make religion into ritual or rules and totally ignore the sense of their own hearts that the only reason to live is to make others happy, and that that's the way to find happiness for oneself. Bob told this world that in his second commandment, saying it's like the first one. But people ignore both commandments, by leaving out the second. But yes I talk too much. We all know all of this.

PRES

Yes. Sorry. I'm sorry, Norma, Lev.

Theresa pats Pres's hands, folded on the table.

THERESA

Anyway, being happy for one's neighbors beats the hell out of drugs. Does the treasure hunter have any kids?

LEV

No. He said he just travels around with his wife in a camper truck.

THERESA

Maybe he just likes to be alone with his wife.

LEV

He asked me to play golf with him tomorrow.

EXT. THE CARRIZOZO GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB - DAY

A golf ball bounces across a fairway amid the brown hills, touching subtitles saying, "Happy days are here again."

INT. THE FOUR SEASONS BANQUETTE - DAY

PRES

And no one's with him here! Are you going?

LEV

Hell, no! We've got better things to do than beat a pale ball across some pale grass. Tomorrow's Sunday, the jam session up at White Oaks, and we'd better get back to the motel and change, if we're going to the dance tonight.

The aliens and ghosts cheer up, but Norma frowns back from her cheer. But then she grins from all her face.

NORMA

I'm hungry! Can we eat first? I haven't been hungry since I made that stupid choice in '62. I can hardly wait to see if a ghost can enjoy a meal like I did when I was on Earth every day.

THERESA

It wasn't an entirely stupid choice. It was time for you to find new friends. So how do you like these other boys?

NORMA

Lev's a little ghastly. But I didn't know boys could be so much like girls. Do you guys think I'll ever see Jimmy again?

THERESA

You'll see him again.

Norma bows her head again but looks up quickly.

NORMA

Good. But I'm still hungry. What do they have here? Do they have a menu? Is it any good, Lev?

LEV

I know a better place, just up the street. A little Mexican diner, the only other restaurant in town.

NORMA

As long as I don't have to wait tables.

EXT. THE CROSSROADS - DAY

The aliens and ghosts cross to the motel and pile into the pickup, the girls in front with Pres driving again, the other boys in the back. Lev has a six pack of Coors in hand, and he hands cans to Slavey and Oliver, to pop as Pres drives into the town away from the crossroads. Pres parks diagonally at a two-step curb, in front of the tiny diner squeezed between two other storefronts. They all bound frowning from the pickup, but step grinning up the curb, to the diner.

INT. THE MEXICAN DINER - DAY

The diner is like the San Diego diner, except that there is more wood and less chrome and leather and that the windows to the street are at the front end of the counter and banquettes, not along the banquettes and parallel to the counter. The aliens and ghosts sit in a board banquette, eating.

Norma eats with her blue eyes wide open, chewing and swallowing tacos and cheese and chopped lettuce and beans, her fork and fingers shoveling it all into her unpainted mouth, never touching her napkin, until she finishes, grinning.

NORMA

Boy that was good.

PRES

I wish Beatrice were here. I wish I could tell her what this is all about. Well, she knows.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Gracie and George and Bob are lounging back against the cross, with the cards scattered like the cribbage pegs.

GRACIE

And well does Norma.

EXT. THE WINDING ROAD THROUGH RANGELAND UP TO WHITE OAKS - DAY

The aliens and ghosts, riding in the pickup truck, have changed into old-movie cowboy clothes, mother of pearl snap-closed shirts, Stetsons and boots, spurs, etc. Pres parks the truck in front of the saloon, and they all pile out. Lev tips his black Stetson to a cowboy departing on horseback. A hand-scrawled sign beside the saloon entrance says "No scum allowed". The ghosts and aliens enter, Lev in front with Norma at his back.

INT. THE FRONT ROOM OF THE WHITE OAKS SALOON - DAY

Lev swaggers, his spurs jingling. Penrod is playing poker with cowboys in the corner where the potbelly stove heats the place, using buffalo nickels for chips. Lev stops, his thumbs in front belt loops. Norma and the aliens stop behind him.

PENROD

Uh oh. Look what just blew into Dodge.

LEV

Gi' me a beer.

PENROD

You know where it is. Mary ain't got time for you.

LEV

I can't see the cooler! Where'd you get that bar?

PENROD

Oh, somewhere. I stole it from one of these empty old buildings. I got tired of having people sit on the bar instead of at the bar, and so I got a bar they could belly up to! Who are those beautiful women you've got with you?

Lev, his thumbs still in the belt loops, turns back to look at his entourage. Norma and the aliens wait silently, shadows in the sun setting behind them outside. Norma's bleached hair shines brilliant. Theresa's eyes shine dark and kind.

LEV

Friends. Norma and Theresa. The guys are competition, but not much competition. I think

they're city slickers. You know how that goes.
How are you, Mary?

Mary quietly sets an open can of Coors on the bar beside Lev.

MARY
What do your friends want?

NORMA AND THE ALIENS
The same.

MARY (smiling)
Easy to please.

NORMA (scowling)
Let me do it.

Norma walks around the end of the bar to the cooler and opens it. With her two cool hands, she scoops four cans of Coors out of the ice and sets them on the bar all at once. She pops the tops, two at a time.

NORMA
There you go, boys. You too, Theresa.

Mary wipes her hands on a towel, as though she has done the work herself. She smiles at Norma and Lev, as Lev and the aliens grab their beers from the bar. Norma looks around and sees only friends.

NORMA
How do we pay?

MARY
If you do it yourself, just leave the money on the cooler, a buck a beer. But Johnny'll be here any minute to tend that for the dance. Then we can relax and have a good time.

INT. THE BACK ROOM OF THE WHITE OAKS SALOON - NIGHT.

A pool table sits idle, a tipless cue stick lying on it, at the front end of the dancehall. CURTIS, with his band, his fiddle and bow in his hands, stands on a low plywood platform in a back corner, lit more than the rest of the room. A disco ball sits on a table in a banquette where no person sits.

CURTIS

I want you all to have a good time.

People, men and women and children, sit in all the other banquettes along a wall, and dance on the large space of concrete floor nothing else takes up. Lev throws his black hat on the floor, and he and Norma dance around it. Norma waves her white one, then places it beneath the black. Slavey and Oliver dance with women young and old.

Pres stands mostly idle talking here and there, and the evening dwindles into his mood. Then Lev and Norma take to the bandstand, where Lev borrows Curtis's violin and plays "The Way We Were", as Norma sings it. People go on home.

EXT. THE PICKUP ON THE WINDING ROAD BACK DOWN THE HILL - NIGHT

Pres again is driving, as Norma and Theresa ride beside him, pushing buttons on the radio. Slavey and Oliver and Lev sit in the back, shivering for the fun of it, beneath the stars.

EXT. THE FOUR SEASONS CROSSROADS - DAY

Stars fade, and the sun rises. A man in a white Stetson and cowboy boots with duct tape strapping the soles to the insoles walks into the crossroads, from the hills. His right hand holds a stick with a nail pointing from one end, with a beer can skewered on the nail. His left hand holds a large bag slung over that shoulder. Her honor emerges from the motel office. She squints at the man. The sun is behind him.

HER HONOR

Good morning, RABBIT.

RABBIT

Mornin', Mayor.

INT. THE MEXICAN DINER - DAY

NORMA

I'm gonna have to stop doing this! I guess?

LEV

I guess I don't think so! We ready to roll?

EXT. AGAIN THE WINDING ROAD UP TO WHITEOAKS - DAY

This time Lev is driving, with Pres in back with the women, Slavey and Oliver in front with Lev. In view of the saloon, but distant from the road, a brick mansion sits in the dust of the range. Lev parks the truck in front of the saloon, no horses tied up outside. It's Sunday.

INT. THE FRONT ROOM OF THE SALOON - DAY

The ghosts and aliens enter from the early afternoon sunlight and find some people sitting at tables, playing guitars, singing. The aliens and ghosts nod around at them and go to the cooler. Each grabs his or her own poison. They turn back around the bar. They lean and listen. The music stops.

PRES

Who owns that big brick house, some gold miner?

All the guitars are acoustic, and all the musicians wear Stetsons. GALE, a woman in a white Stetson, looking like she has been through many winds but weathers them well, replies.

GALE

Nobody knows. Just some of us live there. Maybe a ghost owns it. This is a ghost town. Maybe we own it! You know?

LEV

Maybe, Gale! Where's Penrod?

A HATLESS MAN with no guitar sits alone at the table where Penrod was playing poker, near the stove between the players and the ballroom. His not especially western clothes obviously need laundering. He sets down his beer.

HATLESS MAN

Looking for gold.

NORMA

Where's Mary?

GALE

Home. I guess. They trust us! What are you all doing up here on a Sunday afternoon? Well, Lev's a pretty good fiddler!

BREEZE, a woman in a black Stetson, who was not playing when the ghosts and aliens entered, bends now from her chair. She opens

a guitar case at her feet and pulls from it a guitar, much like Gale's but not as seasoned. Then she pulls some papers from the case, sorts through them, puts them back, face up. She looks down at the paper and begins to strum and sing "Puff the Magic Dragon". But she falters and returns the guitar to the case.

LEV

What happened to what's his name?

BREEZE

What's whose name?

LEV

The guy from El Paso, the guy who thought I insulted him by not riding his horse he said was outside here, after I came in and told him no horse was outside. It was the night Gilbert told me to leave Gwen alone, but I don't know if you remember that, Breeze. Weren't you with him, the guy from El Paso?

BREEZE

El Paso. He went back. I'm with Curtis now. You know Curtis, the bandleader last night. Curtis is teaching me music, because he loves me, and I love him. I'm writing a song about it, all of it. I love it up here in this ghost town. I'm happy here with my friends. Everyone here understands me.

Norma says not a word, and the saloon suddenly dims. The door to the road is still open, and the afternoon New Mexico sun has shined through it on everyone there, from the entrance of the ghosts and aliens to this moment. The cloud that darkens the door is a man in a black hat, limping on a cane. Behind him in the sunlight is a blonde woman in no hat, in sandals. The sun shines bright through her hair.

MEXICAN

Hey, Lev.

The Mexican stops his steps and replaces his right hand with his left on his cane. After patting a shoulder of Lev's, he switches his hands again and limps on back to the stove, where he sits on a chair alone beside it.

PRINCESS

Penrod asked us to come by and keep an eye on the place. Hey, Lev.

The princess also gives Lev a pat on the shoulder, and a hug from the arm of hers patting, and a kiss on his cheek on her side.

PRINCESS

Nice to see you again! Are these people friends of yours?

LEV

Yes. Very good friends! How are you doing, Gilbert?

MEXICAN

Good, thanks. Gwen takes good care of me.

An adolescent boy comes in from the sunlight, as Lev smiles.

CHILD

Hey, Lev.

LEV

Hey!

Lev, smiling, lightly touches a shoulder of the passing child.

LEV

Oh! How's HARLAN?

Lev looks around at everyone in the room, one at a time. No one seems to hear his question. Except the princess.

PRINCESS

He's still up there. Why don't you go get him. I haven't seen him in a couple of days. Go get him away from those chickens. Yes! Go!

LEV

Come on, y'all.

EXT. THE ROAD IN FRONT OF THE SALOON - DAY

Norma and the aliens follow Lev out into the afternoon sunlight. They climb into the pickup without a word, and Lev drives them further uphill. He drives them beyond the asphalt and onto

gravel and turns onto a dirt road with grass down its middle, going further up the mountain. At the top of the mountain, he stops the pickup and jumps out, and so do the others. Lev stares around and at the ramshackle ranch house there. Chickens pluck and cluck all around the yard. Little white clouds float about the sky.

LEV

Maybe he's in his shop.

Lev walks into a shed a few yards from the house, while a man in a black Stetson walks from the house with a big grin on his face, but an aura of just having been awakened, and no indication of surprise. Lev emerges from the shed.

HARLAN

I hope they don't kill any horses this year. I know how you feel about that. Who are your friends?

LEV

Theresa, Oliver and Slavey, Pres. Oh, and this is Norma. And this is Harlan.

Lev, smiling and waving around, returns attention to Harlan.

LEV

Harlan's the greatest saddle maker on Earth. Ask the chickens, but don't ask the power company. He does alright without electricity.

NORMA

You're showing us too many people too fast! Maybe that's why no one can remember the names of the characters in your books. What's that about killing horses?

HARLAN

It's a tourist attraction here. People care more about sports than they do about history. So, every year, we replicate the pony express with a race to White Oaks from Capitan, across the range.

LEV

And, most years, at least one horse is run to death. I've seen my share of cavalry charges,

and I feel sadder for the horses than for the humans, because the humans think it up.

NORMA

But you make saddles to ride them.

HARLAN

I think it's more comfortable for them.

NORMA

But why ride them? Why dominate them?

HARLAN

They're my friends. It's playing together. I'd give them a ride if I could. Anyway, I like to make saddles, and I think of that as reincarnating cattle, and I don't ride much, anymore. My kids do, but I don't.

THERESA

Where are your kids? They don't live up here, do they?

HARLAN

All Over. They've grown and gone their way.

LEV

But they follow in their father's footsteps.

HARLAN

Well, my son's a trainer. And my daughter's a jockey.

LEV

The winningest woman jockey in the world.

Norma looks quickly at Theresa, who is crouched with chickens pecking at her hands, and fluttering away.

NORMA

Can we see some of your saddles?

HARLAN

Sure, if you'd like. Come into my shop.

The aliens and ghosts follow Harlan into the shed.

INT. HARLAN'S SHOP - DAY

Harlan gestures around the small space, at saddles of many shapes and styles and different kinds of leather, as we see him speak but do not hear him. Some of the saddles are plain English, and some are intricately tooled American. One, unfinished on a rack, is smaller than the other saddles. It is plain English but died red and green. Norma touches it.

HARLAN

It's a gift, for a friend's daughter.

NORMA

Do you sell many of these gifts of yours?

HARLAN

Not many. But I get enough from one to last a while. I don't pay rent anymore.

Norma looks around and lightly touches a large tooled leather photograph album lying to a side of the workbench. She removes her hand and looks at Harlan.

NORMA

What's this book?

Slavey and Oliver, having seemed like accidental tourists here, now look at Norma and catch Harlan's pause. Harlan slowly picks up the book and opens it in the center of his workbench, and turns the pages and points to photographs, as again we see him speak, but do not hear him. The photographs are of him and Kim Novak. We hear bells and see sunlight.

Except Harlan, no one speaks here now, and Harlan closes the album and steps from the shed. The aliens and ghosts follow him out to the sunlight. All of them squint.

EXT. JUST OUTSIDE HARLAN'S SHOP - DAY

Theresa looks into a ceramic jar half full of something pasty, on a one-plank bench beside the entrance to the shop.

THERESA

What's this stuff?

HARLAN

It's what I glue the saddles with. I make it myself, out of sweet potatoes.

Harlan and the ghosts indulge in a little more conversation we don't hear, and some nods and smiles and pats on backs and hugs we certainly see, and they all pile into the pickup. This time, Theresa drives, with Harlan beside her, while all the others ride in the back. All wave farewell to the chickens, as they go back down the mountain.

INT. THE FRONT ROOM OF THE SALOON - DAY

Harlan and the aliens and ghosts listen to a little more of the drug music, as more conversation we don't hear carries the ghosts and aliens back out the door, after Lev shakes hands with Harlan.

HARLAN

Always a pleasure to see you again, sir.

EXT. THE FRONT OF THE SALOON - DAY

The hatless man follows the aliens and ghosts out to the sunlight and sits on a weathered one-plank bench on the side of the door away from the sign that says no scum is allowed. As the ghosts and aliens beginning to pile into the pickup turn back and see him, his dirty clothing turns into loose white apparel endemic to Mexico, and his dirty sneakers turn into huaraches. As the ghosts and aliens watch, his skin and hair darken as his irises turn from blue to yellow. A straw sombrero lies beside him on the bench. A pistol and bandoleer lie in its brim. The hatless man grins into the sun.

LEV

Son of a gun. It's Billy the Kid.

The aliens and Norma look askance at each other and the sun. Billy stops metamorphosing, looks to his paraphernalia beside him on the bench, and squints again into the sun. Lev shakes his hands beside him and looks at the Kid.

LEV

So, what's happening, man?

Billy stops squinting and grinning and bows his head like Lev. Clouds are forming in the New Mexico sky.

BILLY THE KID

Where in hell am I? I don't know either! I swear I don't know either, but it seems to me that a minute ago I was working for a homeless shelter in Boston, the cradle of liberty, accounting for money, just a minute ago. Now I'm back here. Oh, my God. Go figure.

PRES

Just make it quick. I'm sick of this crap.

Lightning strikes. Clouds quickly hide the sun. Rain falls.

BILLY THE KID

I felt in the arms of Santa Clara. But, yeah, yeah, yeah! Alright?

NORMA

Well, a little rain won't kill me. I'm already dead! You know?

The aliens squeeze into the cab of the truck. Pres, in the driver seat, starts the engine and the windshield wipers, but they leave the doors open. And Pres leaves a leg hanging out, and Theresa leaves both her knees outside the passenger door, as Slavey and Oliver huddle between. Norma and Lev perch on the hood, as Billy resumes his talk without moving himself or his paraphernalia. The rain falls harder from the dark sky. Lightning flashes. Thunder crashes.

BILLY THE KID

I went to work for that homeless shelter because I wanted to do something better than kill greedy ranchers. I wanted to do some good without killing, but I've found at that homeless shelter named for Francis of Assisi's girlfriend that there ain't no such thing as non-profit, that non-profit is homeless!

A steer's skull appears on the bench beside Billy's sombrero, no horns only holes where they once were.

BILLY THE KID

Everybody is trying to profit. There, it was the board of directors getting kickbacks from the renovation construction projects and passing on

some of their profit to the shelter's executive management. And they get away with it by buffaloping the front line of their disservice. That corruption's worse than the big dig, because it digs deeper. But maybe not as high as the United Nations.

Rain fills the sombrero's brim, rising above the bandoleer, splattering the skull.

BILLY THE KID

Yeah, "What I hear you saying." That's what they say, those mental health professionals calling themselves non-profit social workers, some kind of non-directive neo-Freudian baloney, I think. They don't hear what any of those poor people, you poor people, we poor people, are saying. They're just hearing what they wish to think. I mean, get real, you know! Lev, you know!

Lev smirks a little but does not answer with any words.

BILLY THE KID

They're trying to fit the poor into their own poverty, to fund their private success, their fame, whatever. Publish or perish, pride or avarice, all of them are trying to screw the rest of life, like those pedophile priests. Are you aliens?

Slavey now weeps, his right hand on Theresa's left shoulder.

SLAVEY

I'm so sick of being alien.

Theresa places an arm around Slavey's shoulders, with a kiss.

BILLY THE KID

And that city, the city of most of the pedophile priests, calls itself the cradle of liberty. Yeah, right, I'm repeating myself, after the people who called it a city on a hill, preaching Jesus's sermon on the mount, lowered the hill with bulldozers. Can we call union corruption a beacon, a flying saucer?

Theresa steps from the truck and stands in the pouring rain, pulling Slavey with her. She laughs, then giggles, then listens. Lev and Norma slip from the hood and stand.

BILLY THE KID

Yeah, y'all, I know about New Orleans and Huey Long taking those construction turnarounds to build those housing projects and Charity Hospital to let them go hell in a hand basket. Yeah, y'all. I know.

Pres shivers in his relatively warm seat in the pickup truck. He is not happy in his encampment, but he does not move. Oliver stays beside him, but apparently reluctantly.

BILLY THE KID

I've been dead for scores of years, and I'm still pissed. I know killing is wrong, but I still want to kill someone, something. If not kill, then what?

The mushroom cloud rises fire orange but murky beyond the range in the now dwindling rain, behind cows mooing on the now muddy range.

BILLY THE KID

Yeah, I'm sorry for eating cows, but both sides in the Lincoln County wars were trying to profit from that. For what?

George, or Gracie, drops from the sky beneath a parachute and perches on the crown of the soaked sombrero. She, or he, pat's a hand of Billy's, but Billy doesn't seem to notice.

BILLY THE KID

Oh, what the hell. Hell, I'm dead, and so I'm still rotting. But, at least I never, but maybe I did. For what?

Gracie or George scampers over the sombrero's brim and up to the crown of the skull. Whether George or Gracie, the lizard again has those crocodile tears in his or her eyes, in the midst of the drizzle.

BILLY THE KID

I know nobody cares!
In my hometown!

Drug music!

The rain dwindles a little more, as Billy bows his head. But thunder sounds again as Billy raises his head again.

BILLY THE KID

What pisses me off most about that homeless shelter is that the human resources director stuffs herself fat from bagels Starbuck donates, while she says she loves black people because they all have southern accents. Does anyone know who Starbuck is?

Pres now slides out of the truck.

PRES

He is the mate who fished me from the sea.

BILLY THE KID

Exactly, off Nantucket, Massachusetts, after the Puritans sailed into Boston's old harbor, ostensibly for religious freedom, and hanged Mary Dyer. They hanged Mary for not quaking from hers, on the land they'd reserved as a training ground for killing native Americans, for not quaking from theirs. No, you haven't had enough of this!

EXT. BOURBON STREET - NIGHT

Slavey and Oliver are tap dancing in the rain.

BILLY THE KID (O.S.)

How doesn't a human resources specialist know that African Americans are the most ultimately homeless people of all Earth, kidnapped from their homes to our southern colonies, for the venality of people such as that person, that so-called human resources specialist?

EXT. IN FRONT OF THE WHITE OAKS SALOON - DAY

Oliver now slips from the truck. The rain subsides to a drizzle, and the thunder fades away. Oliver and Slavey do not dance, and Theresa is no longer giggling.

BILLY THE KID

What pisses me off most on my home Earth is crap, what one of those psychologists or social workers or whatever told me when I told him I was crazy, at the oldest homeless shelter in New York City. That anti-social sucking sucker asked me why I though I was crazy, and I told him I didn't know anyone else on Earth who thought someone who ruins the career of a female intern in his care and doesn't know what is is, someone who can't preside over his own zipper, shouldn't preside over a nation. Is a cigar a cigar or a tower of trade?

Out of the rangeland rises a pyramid. The naked little Vietnamese girl runs down it in the rain, as its peak rises above the rest of it and grows an eye. The little girl lies down at the base of the pyramid and goes to sleep, amid scattered cow skulls and scrolls and books and computers.

BILLY THE KID

That shrink said that that's what politicians do. And then he said that what he heard me saying was that I resented other people's success. Well, granted, I was pretending to be homeless. Yeah, well pretending! Pretending?

In the drizzle, a young blonde woman in a windbreaker the color of the mushroom cloud stands between the brick mansion and a bulldozer. The bulldozer crushes her and drives into the house as the bricks fall onto the bulldozer. The young woman lies alone in mud behind the bulldozer.

BILLY THE KID

Do you know anyone who's found home?

PRES

Nonsense. We're out of here.

The aliens and ghosts listen no more to Billy the Kid. They leave him there in the now hardly misting rain, and they head back down the road to Carrizozo. Rain drips from barbed wire, along the way between the rangelands.

THERESA

He'll be alright. Someday, after he feels for the fish Francis and his brothers used to pay

their rent, as much as he does for the other cattle. Chattel, what the hell.

PRES

Theresa, this time I'm not sure you're right. Mies van der Rohe, what a name for someone who built a landmark for whiskey, in the home of he who vanquished Al Capone. How did Thomas Dewey n'er preside? God is in the details? Details of what? Architecture? What details? Whose?

THERESA

The Irish. Bonnie Billy was born with the name William Patrick McCarty. The twentieth century was the century of Irish strife. Of course, it started earlier, but the twentieth century was the century of complexity and most of its civil killing. Billy's hell, his confusion, is his part in the hypocrisy, people calling each other Christians but killing each other because they read the Bible differently, like Shiites killing Sunnis in the cradle of civilization, while potatoes could glue them all together.

SLAVEY

So, in his despair, he looks for blame. And he finds it in hypocrisy everywhere. He seeks the seeds and finds them everywhere, even in the best of places, in the best of intentions. Billy's hell is that he cannot die.

OLIVER

And so he seeds a new crusade himself, within himself while no one else will fight.

THERESA

And now he loves Sainte Claire. Yes, that's his hell.

PRES

Is that what you hear him saying?

THERESA

Yes, Fits Jr.'s fits.

The rain drips silently from the barbed wire.

INT. THE GOONEY BIRD - NIGHT

The aliens and ghosts crowd around the door to the cockpit, where Theresa copilots Pres. Ahead are many stars, and all the party silent looks to them. Constellations never less outline. Pisces fades into Aquarius.

PRES

Anybody know what drugs are for? Alcohol or any of that stuff Earthlings do to change their minds, or hearts? What's up with that?

OLIVER

Boredom.

SLAVY

It's for fun.

LEV

It's to be braver than usual.

NORMA

Or maybe to be kinder than usual.

PRES

Maybe to forgive ourselves our weaknesses?

THERESA

And so to forgive others'?

MONTAGE:

- 1) A church steeple (Notre Dame de Paris).
- 2) A mosque minaret (Hassan Tower, Rabat).
- 3) A capitol dome (Massachusetts, Boston).

EXT. THE FRONT OF A NASHVILLE HOMELESS SHELTER - NIGHT

The building is of gray concrete and neoclassical. Billy the Kid and Rabbit sit on the grand steps, with a more colored man sitting between them. The Grand Ole Opry is dark a few blocks away. The cowboy in white sits alone on its steps. His guitar is still in its case. He lights a joint.

BILLY THE KID

What I hear you saying is, can you spare any change until I can figure out how to turn water into wine, lead into gold, whatever.

RABBIT

No, I'm saying we should get an education, so we can turn words into wine or gold, words of promise ambiguous for all.

BILLY THE KID

That should be easy. Suckers are born every minute to play against each other. I love Marie Antoinette.

RABBIT

Yeah, me too, and Mary Queen of Scots, and Maud Gonne, and Welsh rabbit, and beer.

BILLY THE KID

I don't hear what you're saying! How about you, RODNEY?

RODNEY

You honkies are a mess. I came here from Watts, from those towers in the city of angels, after those white folks kicked my ass. I figured I couldn't make it in Hollywood or New York City, but might be able to make it in Nashville, as a country singer, like Charlie Pride. But I ain't got no pride, and so I'm doing day labor as a security guard, and sleeping here most nights, even if inside is full. I guarded Heather Clingon at the Grand Ole Opry last week. She said she'd just played the Apollo. Them politicians. Go figure.

RABBIT

I hear her saying she's just trying to get along.

BILLY THE KID

Yeah, right.

The three of them lean back on the concrete steps as other homeless around them begin to stir from their huddling. Some elbow each other and mutter. Some stand and shudder.

RODNEY

Dawn is coming soon.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

BOB

Now the plot is thickening. You two have served well, but watch what Slavey does now. He's finding his way from the labyrinth now. Then Oliver shall.

EXT. THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM - DAY

An old man sells Coca Cola from a cart on the cobblestones in front of an outdoor shoe store. Slavey slurps some Coca Cola.

SLAVEY

But democracy gives you more right than the Israelis. I mean to all this land, from here to Tel Aviv and back across the Jordan. I mean democracy, the right of the majority to rule. Muslims are the majority here, all across the land. So, isn't it your land?

COCA COLA SALESMAN

What about you? Your swarthy color is not the majority in your land. Do you think that all those people of your color, who are fighting and dying and being imprisoned as criminals in your country, merely for requesting the same rights as the majority, have no right to complain? No right to complain?

The sun shines bright in the dust motes on the cobblestones.

SLAVEY

I don't mean to meddle, but aren't you saying the Israelis have a right to take your land, your houses, whatever?

COCA COLA SALESMAN

I'm saying that I'm in Jerusalem selling Coca Cola, and my family needs no more than it gets from my selling this stuff your country likes to drink to rot its teeth and guts. I could tell these American tourists with their children what this stuff will do to their teeth and their children's teeth, but I'm sure they already know it, and it's not my job. So, with your permission I beg you to honor, I shall return to doing my job, to keep my family happy. However, I wish everyone well, and so I'll offer you a way

to better answer. I'll tell you how to find my brother.

Slavey doesn't answer, except by a nod and a sunlit scowl.

COCA COLA SALESMAN

He tends a garden, on the hill across the way. It's outside the Lions Gate, on the near side of the Mount of Olives, above the Garden of Gethsemane. It's a terraced garden, and it's called the prayer garden, because the Roman Catholic Church says Christ prayed there, for a little peace before his crucifixion. My brother is the gardener.

Slavey, still scowling, follows the salesman's upward gesture.

COCA COLA SALESMAN

It's about a fifteen-minute walk, leisurely in the weather we almost always have for such walks here. Sit beneath an olive tree, on the stones supporting one of the terraces, with a clear view of the sky and the walls of this city. If my brother is not too busy talking to other tourists, he will come to you and stand before you, gazing across the lower garden. If you ask him something, he will sit beside you and answer all your questions until you seem to him ready to leave. Then he will rise and drop on the walk his walking stick. Rise from the stones yourself and pick it up. Hand it to him with a little money. My brother sells answers. I sell Coca Cola.

Slavey kisses the old man's hand and nods farewell.

EXT. THE ROAD BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE MOUNT - DAY

Slavey negotiates traffic crossing the thoroughfare, as a young woman with a cell phone crosses the same thoroughfare, but toward the city. Horns honk and brakes screech as the young woman carries her conversation into the traffic. Slavey stops until he sees she's safe.

EXT. THE WINDING NARROW ROAD UP PAST THE GARDENS - DAY

A BOY leans against the stones that border the road and guard the gardens. He elbows himself with effort away from the wall and ambles to Slavey, who is ambling up the hill. He stands squarely in front of Slavey and looks into his eyes.

BOY

What do you want to see? Just here is the Garden of Gethsemane. I can show you there the oldest olive tree in all this land. It's huge, but just down there is the tomb of Mary, very beautiful and full of beautiful paintings, and very cool on this hot day.

SLAVEY

Let me see. I would very much like to see the Garden of Gethsemane, if only you will promise not to cut off an ear of mine. I have a use for both, if you can tell me the secrets of the place.

BOY

Not a chance, of either cutting off an ear of yours or telling you the secrets of the place. Think what either would do to my tip.

EXT. THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE - DAY

The boy gestures to a huge old olive tree, and Slavey looks carefully but wanders quickly around the outer path and back out the gate, as the boy follows.

BOY

And the tomb of Mary, just here. It's just a little back down, there across the road. Everyone wishes to see the tomb of Mary. Everyone knows who Mary is. You'll find it beautiful.

Slavey follows the boy back down to the entrance to the tomb, but he baulks at the dark coolness below the stone entrance.

SLAVEY

No. Maybe some other time. Thank you.

Slavey hands the boy a fistful of shekels. The boy accepts them and pats slavey on a sleeve of his T-shirt. Slavey smiles and

walks on up the hill, to the gate to the prayer garden. He looks at the gate, then through it. He enters.

Finding no humans there, he walks along the terrace graveled at the level of the gate. About halfway to the furthest end of the garden, he follows the Coca Cola salesman's instructions and sits on the stones beneath an olive tree and gazes up to the sky and down to the lower garden and across to the old city.

An OLD MAN, garbed more Afghan than Israeli or Palestinian, appears from the end of the garden Slavey has not traversed. The old man uses an unhewn tree limb as a walking stick, to help him walk in his rubber sandals. He stops before Slavey.

OLD MAN

I've been to the United States.

SLAVEY

Yeah, me too.

OLD MAN

I live up there now.

The old man waves his hand toward some houses on the hill above across the way. On balconies of the houses, clothes hang drying on lines. The old man sits on the stones, beside Slavey. He rests his hands and chin, on the tree branch.

OLD MAN

I know more about America than you do. You talk about democracy, about how the people have the right to rule, and you use that notion to excuse depriving others of the right to just live quietly. You say you care for common concern, but you care more about thinking your car is better than your neighbor's. If your neighbor disagrees, you call him stupid.

The sky is clear, as the Coca Cola salesman has promised.

SLAVEY

I don't own a car, and I'd like to ask you about you, about your view of things.

OLD MAN

Nice prelude. But I was telling you about me, about how I feel. You don't call your neighbors

stupid to their faces, but to other neighbors you also think are stupid. You do that because you think you're being smart, by fooling your neighbors, by being sneaky. Have you heard of the Kasbah?

SLAVEY

Yes. The mythical den of thieves.

OLD MAN

It's mythical, alright. But it's far from fictional. It's a presence, both cultural and geographical, wherein was founded the response of Islam to people like you. If you're wondering where I learned enough English grammar to use words like "wherein", the answer is Harvard University. I'm a Ph.D. in English literature, and I live up there.

Again the old man waves to laundry breezing the afternoon sun.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

Gracie and George are standing on the flying saucer, playing electric guitars. Each of them has a foot on the cross, propping the guitars they hold in their hands. Bob sits on the cross, patting along on bongo drums. O.S., Bob Dylan sings "It Ain't me, Babe".

OLD MAN (O.S.)

You, being an American, think I'm bitter being a Ph.D. and living in a house without electric or gas washing or drying machines. My family likes spending time washing, and my family likes the smell of the clothes drying on the line, and the feel of the air blowing through them. It's better than electric air-conditioning. It's always fresh.

Gracie and George and Bob are rocking it up pretty good, while Dylan's singing is arrhythmic and pale to their beat.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

And it's better than sitting around thinking up ways to lie and steal, like our people do in the Kasbah, like your people do everywhere. The Kasbah, and all the breaking of promises and

other lying at which Islamic people have become competent is nothing except retaliation against the silliness of western culture. The silliness of western culture.

Bob and George and Gracie drown Dylan in screeching feedback.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

Did I say silliness? Of course I said silliness! You Americans and Germans and French think, when your neighbors buy a Cadillac or Mercedes or Citroen, that they're picking on you if your only car is a Ford or a Volkswagen or a Renault or a Fiat. Ford built the car for all people, and "Volkswagen" means people's vehicle. People's vehicle?

George and Gracie break their guitars on the cross.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

Am I preaching? Of course I'm preaching! You people are so crazy that, when someone catches you in your silliness, shows you yourselves how crazy you are, you just think up some way to be stupider. And that's the whole reason for the problems here now between Islam and Judaism. You westerners, you Americans, you people. We nearly had it figured out.

EXT. THE PRAYER GARDEN - DAY

The music turns to Simon and Garfunkel singing "For Emily".

SLAVEY (quietly)

You mean because we supported the Zionists after World War II.

OLD MAN (noisily)

Zionists, schmionists! Are all you Americans totally deaf? You instigated the problem by teaching all those nice Semitic Jews who emigrated to New York to be like the rest of you people. After Joshua died of old age, the biggest problem we had here in this holy land was Europeans. You know!

EXT. THE HOLLYWOOD FREEWAY - DAY

Cars are smashing into each other, getting on and off. Everyone is talking on a cell phone. No one shakes a fist.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

Think about it! Joshua himself told the Israelites to cool it, to stop all that warring and greed and to start paying more attention to the Ten Commandments, and they did, mostly. From then on, things were relatively calm here, until the Romans started trying to take over everything and everybody. Colonization, you know. You must!

EXT. THE AMAZON RAIN FOREST - DAY

People are sitting beneath their shelter of sticks and leaves. They are placid as smokestacks smoke over the river. They are eating in the rain, nearly naked.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

I'm not a Ph.D., or a Muslim, for nothing! Sure, David and his baby-chopping temple-building son caused some problems, but it wasn't like Joshua's or Hitler's efforts at genocide. Romans tried to turn the whole wide world into Egypt, and everyone in it that wasn't Roman, and a lot of other Romans as well, into what Israel was in Egypt.

EXT. VIETNAM - DAY

The naked little girl runs and runs, down the dusty road.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

From then on, until this century, world history has been mostly Europeans fighting over the rest of the world. Thank Ala for Muhammad, coming along and giving us enough pride to resist all that crap, or enough unity, whatever. If Charles hadn't hammered back Suleiman at Tours, we might have world peace now. We might have world peace.

EXT. JAPAN - DAY

Enola Gay flies and drops her load.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

But, instead, we had to wait for inevitable economics to bankrupt the over-reaching nations, and that took until this century, the last of this millennium, after Christ. No, I'm not a Christian, but those Europeans claim to be, while they do all that coveting of their neighbors' Saabs. So what were you going to ask me? Do you remember?

EXT. THE PRAYER GARDEN - DAY

Slavey appears to be in a reverie, his head resting in his hands as the old man's rests on his. He blinks and looks up.

SLAVEY

Oh, you're right. I did almost forget. Thank you for reminding me. How do you feel about the Jews taking common ground to build a separate nation for themselves? I mean, true democracy gives them no right, since Muslims are more populous across the land than are Jews, don't you think?

OLD MAN

Don't I think? I already told you! They won the right to call it theirs. So, if they wish to call it theirs, they can. But it isn't theirs, and it isn't ours, or yours. The land, all Earth, a gift from God, belongs to all of us, to you and to me and to them. "This land is your land; this land is my land," says an American song. I don't care who calls it theirs, as long as we all can feel at home. I live up there, and that's my home. What were you thinking about? That's all!

The old man, having said all this without moving his chin from his hands on his stick, bows his forehead to his hands.

OLD MAN

Parfois, il ne faut pas cultiver notre jardin.

The old man rises from the stones and drops his stick to the gravel path of the terrace. Slavey rises from the stones and stoops to pick up the stick and rises to hand it back to the old

man. Slavey bows and walks from the garden, forgetting about the money, then.

INT. A NOT AT ALL LUXURIOUS HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Slavey sits on the bed, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. He looks at shekels beside his passport on the bed stand. Still frowning, he rises from the bed.

EXT. THE WINDING ROAD PAST THE GARDENS - DAY

This time walking down the hill, from his hotel on the Mount of Olives, Slavey turns into the prayer garden. A family is having a picnic on the terrace of the rocks where he spoke with the old man. The family members glance and look away.

SLAVEY

Have you seen the old man?

FATHER

What?

SLAVEY

Have you seen the gardener?

FATHER

No!

The father turns back to his family, and Slavey turns back to the gate. But, on his way out, Slavey stops at steps from the gravel terrace up to the grassy one where the family is having its picnic. He pulls a pile of shekels from his pocket and stacks them neatly on the stones beside the steps. He leaves the garden and walks on down to the tomb of Mary.

INT. THE TOMB OF MARY - DAY

Slavey descends into the darkness. A man in ceremonial vestments sits reading at a table in candlelight. The man does not look up as Slavey passes by and looks around at the renaissance paintings and older relics. Slavey finds a stone tomb with more candles than the others. He stands gravely.

He starts to leave, but he turns back and stands a while longer. He turns back and walks on out, as the man at the table looks up to him. Slavey nods, and the man nods back.

EXT. IN FRONT OF THE SPHINX - DAY

Slavey stands, his back to sphinx, his eyes looking across the SAND before hers. The wind blows sand in the sun.

SAND (sounding like Clint Eastwood)
My name is Ozymandius, king of kings.
Look on my works, ye mighty.
And despair.

Slavey brushes the sand from his eyes but stands where he is.

SAND (sounding like Meryl Streep)
Let them keep that land.
But let us have our homes.

INT. OLIVER'S PARSONAGE - DAY

Sunlight streams through dust motes by the windows of the Victorian house with Victorian furniture. Slavey's and Oliver's children sit politely and look out the windows, as sunlight beams in sparkling dust motes in the air. Slavey's and Oliver's wives share hors d'oeuvres.

SLAVEY
I'm sorry. Militancy is not the way.

OLIVER
Any means necessary is the way.

Slavey's and Oliver's wives gaze into each other's onyx eyes. The sun brightens the dust on the Victorian furniture.

INT. AN APARTMENT WITH A VIEW OF THE U. S. CAPITOL - NIGHT

A FAT MAN resembling a bulldog sits in women's clothing, on a big red modernist sofa, smoking a cigar. A THIN MAN in a dark blue pinstriped suit sits in a French provincial chair, smoking a cigarette.

FAT MAN
We'll get 'em. The fucking niggers. You heard those tapes. That's all they do is breed. You heard those bedsprings squeak. And he's a Baptist preacher.

THIN MAN

Certainly. Thank God you're our nation's top policeman. We have our contacts in the Ku Klux Klan and the Nation of Islam. We'll get 'em. Certainly.

FAT MAN

Have we talked about adopting?

EXT. THE FAÇADE OF THE APOLLO THEATRE - NIGHT

Cars and homeless people and other pedestrians, most of them Negroid but some of them Caucasoid, come and go as the marquee is incandescently alight with Slavey's name below a big black X. Some of the pedestrians enter, some in suits or gowns, some in rags.

INT. THE APOLLO THEATRE - NIGHT

Slavey's wife and daughters sit in the front row, as he stands at the podium. His hands are firm on the rails of the stand.

SLAVEY

In my visit to the holy land, I prayed among thousands in the mosque at Mecca, all bowing to God and brotherhood. In my visit to the holy land, I sat on a rock at the top of the Mount of Beatitudes, there also not alone. I sat among flowers above the mist above the Sea of Galilee, amid birds and bees.

EXT. KARN HATTIN - DAY

SLAVEY (O.S.)

Beside me, on another rock, sat two lizards necking in the sun, their tongues lightly flitting to each other's green and shining presences. So I did not feel alone at all, but where were all the Christians? Were they hiding under a bushel?

INT. THE APOLLO THEATRE - NIGHT

A MAN IN THE AUDIENCE stands. He pushes a man standing beside him to the floor, knocking over others and their chairs. Everyone in the theatre looks to see the disturbance.

MAN IN THE AUDIENCE

Get your hand out of my pocket.

The man on the floor rises and pulls a pistol as other men in the audience stand and pull pistols from their pockets and shotguns from their coats. The pistols pierce Slavey's body, as he falls from a shotgun blast into his heart. SLAVEY'S WIFE rushes to the stage, their daughters behind her. Slavey's wife covers Slavey with herself. Their daughters cover their mother.

SLAVEY'S WIFE

Oh, God. Oh, God.

All goes silent in this horribly messed up scene, utterly silent as all turns to shining white, then deepest black.

EXT. A JET PLANE ABOVE THE ATLANTIC - DAY

Oliver, in a window seat, gazes down to the silver cloud-tops and on down to the deep blue sea. His wife sits beside him, and his friend RALPH sits in the aisle seat.

RALPH

He was a sweet man.

OLIVER

Indeed he was, always.

All of them peer out the window of the jet aircraft, until Ralph breaks the silence from his aisle.

RALPH

Well, anyway, none of that colored time here. You've got work to do, and these are white folks who haven't done anything to us. Let's just stick to the schedule and get on home.

Rachel laughs and takes a hand of each of them. Oliver grins at his wife, and Ralph grins at both of them.

OLIVER

Alright, after I see the little mermaid.

EXT. THE STATUE OF THE LITTLE MERMAID IN COPENHAGEN - DAY

INT. THE CONCERT HALL IN STOCKHOLM - NIGHT

Both of Oliver's hands are firm on this worldwide stand.

OLIVER

I have a dream.

Oliver waits a moment, looks around at the formal setting and the people sitting formally, and goes on speaking.

OLIVER

I have a dream of Heaven, and it is not a large dream. It is a dream of small words and small people, but it is a dream of great spirit. It is a dream of friends of mine dead and friends of mine who shall live forever. I know that they shall live forever, for they are friends of yours as well as mine.

MONTAGE:

- 1) Theresa on the bus, approaching the theatre.
- 2) Ahab at the rail, with the whale in the distance.
- 3) Andersonville, men picking corn from shit.

OLIVER (O.S.)

I have a dream of a small woman, a small black woman sitting on a bus, sitting there in a small part of a big bus, a part of that bus set aside for small black women and small black men so that a great white whale trying to swallow that small place need not feel as small as it must feel in its paleness. Such small people in this large world are called a minority. What a large word for such small people.

EXT. A SCHOOL YARD WITH CHILDREN PLAYING IN IT - DAY

The children are of all colors, and they are playing together. All take turns pushing the merry-go-round, and all are laughing as rain begins to fall, while the sun shines on them.

OLIVER (O.S.)

I am educated in divinity, another large word for many small dreams. But I will not speak of the expansiveness of theology to you today. I am a meager member of a colorful minority of a great nation still writhing in the belly of the great white whale. And maybe that's right for democracy, but I will not quote such grand Greek words to you today in this small snowy nation

across the sea from there. Instead, I shall quote a white man for the smallness of his words and the grandness of his spirit and the simplicity of his soul, and I will quote two other great friends I know will live forever for the smallness of their words and the grandness of their spirit and the simplicity of their souls, the same. The white man was a rich white boy who, in the first of what we call world wars on Earth, drove an ambulance on soil foreign to him.

The children stop playing and sit on the edge of the merry go round. They listen primly in the sun and rain.

MONTAGE:

- 1) Ambulances shrieking through village and city streets.
- 2) The drenched mud trenches of World War I.
- 3) Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein.
- 4) Ambulances roaring along dusty rural roads.
- 5) Picadors bleeding a bull in an arena.
- 6) A dim space filled with many dirty people.
- 7) Ambulances lying quiet on their sides in mud amid dead.

OLIVER (O.S.)

People that Harvard boy's nation told him were friends of his caught him driving that ambulance trying to save lives, and they put him into a prison. I have been imprisoned, jailed many times though never for driving an ambulance, and I find striking that Harvard poet's description of his prison. His jailers did not throw him into a small box of steel bars and concrete, but into a large room full of many kinds of people. If you like big words, you might call it a microcosm. But the poet called it an enormous room.

MONTAGE:

- 1) The bronze statue of Isabella in St. Augustine, Florida.
- 2) Oliver in a small jail cell in St. Augustine, Florida.
- 3) Saint Augustine stealing a pear from a tree in Carthage.

OLIVER (O.S.)

But that white boy Harvard poet did not complain. His food must have been less and more rotten than mine in my cell in St. Augustine, and much less and more rotten than the pear Saint Augustine

confessed to stealing before his quest for purity. That Harvard white boy poet mentioned the stink and the sickness, and the rottenness and paucity of the food, but he did not complain.

INT. THERESA AND THE OTHERS IN THE CELL IN MONTGOMERY - NIGHT

INT. THE ENORMOUS DIM ROOM FULL OF MANY OTHERS IN FRANCE - DAY

OLIVER (O.S.)

Instead, in a little book he wrote about that large room, he wrote about the people there and not about how poor they were. For all persons, he wrote about the grandness of their spirit and the simplicity of their souls. And later he wrote only poems of love, with never one discouraging word. And, in one poem, he says the most important thing.

MONTAGE:

- 1) The children riding the merry go round in the rain.
- 2) The Whitehouse rose garden in a light drizzle.
- 3) The Arizona desert blooming after a rain.

INT. THE STOCKHOLM CONCERT HALL AND OLIVER'S HANDS - NIGHT

OLIVER

And so I'll quote this line of his to you:

Oliver pauses and looks straight at his respected audience.

OLIVER

"Nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands."

MONTAGE:

- 1) The statue of the little mermaid.
- 2) The statue of Queen Isabella.
- 3) Degas' petite danseuse.

INT. MAYA PLISETSKAYA ON STAGE AS THE DYING SWAN - NIGHT

OLIVER (O.S.)

That poem is not a song of war, or politics or stuff like that. It is the same song as the song of the wise king Solomon, who for all the

grandeur of his temple found most beautiful the small roe breast of his lover which he wished to feed among the lilies, and nothing has changed in the hearts of men and women, in the land of Solomon or anywhere else. For all the war in the Holy Land still, Tel Aviv has more bridal-gown shops per capita than has any other city on Earth.

Maya's tutu turns black, as do the swans around her.

OLIVER (O.S.)

So, when I think of that small woman black but comely on that bus in Alabama, I do not think of how much larger the bus was than she or how much larger the white whale was than she or how much larger the world where that bus might carry her was than she or how much larger the world of the white whale was than the world she might have traveled then and might travel now. Instead, I think that she was black, but comely. Then I forget that she is black.

Maya's tutu turns back to white, but not the other swans.

EXT. A STREET IN BETHLEHEM - DAY

Visible beyond the end of the street is the Church of the Nativity, with a procession of Franciscan friars approaching it. Nearer, huddled behind barbed wire and a row of television cameras, are male and female journalists and United Nations personnel. All these men and women wear flak vests and helmets, the difference being the color of the helmets, some olive green, some blue. On rooftops above the street and on a construction crane above the church, snipers wait. Still nearer, children play in the street, with sticks and stones. One child sits in a shot out car, pretending to drive. A gunshot sounds, and no one flinches. Some look around, but no one hides. Destruction is all around.

OLIVER (O.S.)

That is why we're here on Earth, to find each other comely. We are not here to kill each other or to covet each other's land, but to find each other comely and to propagate that comeliness in simple homes of honor for those homes and the homes of our neighbors. As I said, I won't argue

complexities or rationalizations of theology here today, but I will say that both the Bible and the Koran have enough words large and small to excuse anything we wish to do. So why not look into our own hearts first, and carry forth in our own small hands what we find best there.

MONTAGE:

- 1) People dead in mass graves in Germany
- 2) People dying of hunger in the Sudan.
- 3) People dying of cancer in the United States.
- 4) People dying of hunger in the Sudan.
- 5) People shot into mass graves in Iraq.

OLIVER (O.S.)

I, for one, suspect that what each, every one of us humans on earth, will find there is the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments and the first and second great commandments of Jesus Christ, without our having ever read the Torah or the Bible or the Koran. Call it inherent conscience, or some bigger set of words, if you wish. Or just call it love.

INT. AN ORPHANAGE IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND - DAY

OLIVER TWIST

Please, sir! Can I have some more?

The child holds up his bowl, and he receives a cornucopia of fruit and nuts and cracker jacks, as everyone in the austere gruel hall sings "Take Me Out to the Ballgame".

EXT. THE DIAMOND INSIDE YANKEE STADIUM - DAY

A player spits on an umpire and walks away.

EXT. A SIDEWALK OUTSIDE YANKEE STADIUM - DAY

Oliver Twist spits on a policeman and is cuffed.

OLIVER (O.S.)

Grand spirit, simple soul, small words. Here is my second quotation, and I know you all have heard this one before. Or so I hope.

EXT. AGAIN THE BUS IN MONTGOMERY - NIGHT

Theresa clutches her purse, as the policemen stand over her, with the white passenger and the driver behind them and glaring around them at her, as she gazes out of her window at the marquee of the theatre. Now three of her assailants have hands on pistols, as they await her response.

OLIVER (O.S.)

When that white whale bus driver threatened to have that small and black and comely woman imprisoned for simply refraining from giving up that small evening space on Earth to the white whale, she held in her small and black and comely hands her purse nearly depleted from buying Christmas gifts that first day of December, that year now lo those many years ago, and she said:

THERESA

You may do that.

OLIVER (O.S.)

Grand spirit, simple soul, small words! You may do what?

MONTAGE (in black and white):

- 1) The dogs and fire hoses in Birmingham.
- 2) The children being loaded into paddy wagons.
- 3) The police on horses charging onto the bridge at Selma.
- 4) Oliver being arrested at the statue of Queen Isabella.
- 5) The blind and white statue of justice.

OLIVER (O.S.)

You may arrest me. You may push us around. You may set your dogs on our children. You may send your cavalry to trample us as we peacefully try to cross a bridge to freedom. You may imprison us by the thousands and keep our voices out of the law. But there is one thing you may not do, and cannot do. At least and most one thing.

EXT. THE PORCH OF THERESA'S HOME IN MONTGOMERY - DAY

Theresa and Raymond hold hands on the swing, as a bouquet of flowers lies in her lap. The Studebaker sits idle at the curb. The windows of the house are open. A breeze blows lace curtains. The swing creaks a little. Just a little.

OLIVER (O.S.)

You cannot diminish the grandness of our spirit, the simplicity of our souls, our love. So, with those small words, with her small hands lightly clutching that nearly empty purse, that black and comely woman lit a light for all humanity, maybe even gave a bit of a tan to the white whale, to help him be a little normal. So, third quotation.

MONTAGE (in black and white):

- 1) The rioting in Detroit.
- 2) People at the Pentagon placing flowers in rifle barrels.
- 3) The rioting in Watts.
- 4) The hippies of Hashbury putting flowers in their hair.
- 5) The killing at Kent State.

OLIVER (O.S.)

I cannot imagine our movement without the peace of Mrs. Parks or the war of the Panthers. Both have been necessary, Mrs. Parks to show us the comeliness of her small hands, and the Panthers to show us the bloodiness of the alternative, the freezing rain spring showers should wash away. Another person black and comely preached the war much of his life, and late in that life of his on Earth was reconciled to peace, and was killed at once thereafter. Was he killed for reconciling, for seeking final peace? If not, for what?

MONTAGE:

- 1) The Sphinx.
- 2) The shotgun coming from beneath a coat.
- 3) Cardinal Law.

OLIVER (O.S.)

I suggest that he was killed, blown down and off this earth by bullets and shotgun blasts in Harlem, the capital of African America, for small words. Mr. Shabazz, after returning from a trip to Africa, during which he discovered that Islam in its homeland also had more room for brotherhood and sisterhood than what he'd been calling the Nation of Islam did in the United States of America, said so. So what did he say that was so bad, so unforgivable that he passed all seven-times-seven chances of redemption, of Christian forgiveness?

EXT. A PALESTINIAN HOUSING PROJECT IN GAZA - DAY

Rachel Corrie stands with a bullhorn, until a bulldozer buries her in dust. Friends of hers hurry to her and dig away some of the dust and hold her hands. One of them is wearing a yarmulke.

OLIVER (O.S.)

"By any means necessary" is what he said.

EXT. A PUBLIC THOROUGHFARE IN JERUSALEM - DAY

A bus stands blown apart. A dead child hangs from a window.

OLIVER (O.S.)

Grand spirit, simple soul, small words. Did anyone ask him what he meant by that? Did anyone look up in a dictionary what he meant by that? Did anyone consider, carefully in their hearts and minds, what might be necessary? My dear departed friend Mr. Shabazz did, all his short and happy life on Earth! He always asked, for all of us.

MONTAGE (in black and white):

- 1) Sacco writing a letter in a cell in Charlestown Prison.
- 2) Slavey reading Thus Sprach Zarathustra there.
- 3) Sacco and Vanzetti being executed, and Slavey.
- 4) Slavey being carried from the Apollo Theater.
- 5) Vanzetti standing speaking before another public hall.

OLIVER (O.S.)

How many humans know that that friend of ours, whether or not we recognize what a friend he was to all of us, spent more than half of a decade of his young life in the prison where Sacco and Vanzetti were executed for being called anarchists, charges as trumped up as the charges against them of crimes against the law, as trumped up as the charges against the Scottsboro boys? For burglary that he trumped up himself!

MONTAGE (in black and white):

- 1) The Scottsboro boys huddling in a corner of a boxcar.
- 2) White boys and girls having coitus in an opposite corner.
- 3) The Scottsboro boys being dragged from the boxcar.
- 4) The white boys and girls laughing as the black boys pass.

5) The Scottsboro boys huddling in a cell like Theresa's.

OLIVER (O.S.)

How many humans, for all their claims to identify humanity with compassion, know who Sacco and Vanzetti were or who the Scottsboro boys were? How many recognize the name Shabazz or know that he left behind a wife and daughters? How many honor those daughters' small roe breasts, in that falling freezing rain? How many honor their own hearts? How many, O Lord?

MONTAGE (in brilliant color):

- 1) Lepers in the streets of Delhi.
- 2) Police beating Mohandas Gandhi in the same street.
- 3) A Muslim assassinating Mohandas Gandhi.
- 4) Mother Teresa and Francis of Assisi aiding lepers.
- 5) Indira Gandhi living in the presidential palace.
- 6) Sikhs assassinating Indira Gandhi.
- 7) Lepers in the streets of Delhi.

OLIVER (O.S.)

What means are necessary? The peace of Gandhi in India before the internal strife that ended his life on this earth? The creation of a homeland for the survivors of Hitler's holocaust, the oppression of those whose homes were on that land before, the suicidal terror of their retaliation? The peace of Mrs. Parks or the war of the Panthers? What means are necessary?

MONTAGE (in brilliant color):

- 1) Oliver's house being bombed in Birmingham, his wife and their children running to the porch.
- 2) The bombs in Hiroshima, buildings blown and people burning.
- 3) The beach at Normandy.
- 4) The little girl running naked in Vietnam.
- 5) The beach at Bay of Pigs.
- 6) The bombs in Nagasaki, buildings blown and people burning.
- 7) Slavey's house being bombed in Detroit, his wife and children running to the porch.

OLIVER (O.S.)

Well, call me a romantic, but I keep wondering how Rome keeps rising and falling. The means necessary is that all of us admit what we find in

our hearts, and so carry it forth in each of our small hands through any rain hard or cold that falls on us, across the sands of Arabia and the mountains of America, from seat to shining sea, all over Earth, to Heaven

INT. THE CONCERT HALL IN STOCKHOLM - DAY

OLIVER

I have a dream of grand spirit and simple souls, a dream of small hands carrying water, like Rachel's at the well. I have a dream of spring rain raising lilies and orchids in the fields of battle, quenching the thirst for the silliness humanity calls things like glory and superiority. I have a dream of righteousness, clear and quenching as a mountain stream, humanity's first and last fair thirst. And when that dream comes true, and I say when, not if. When that small and simple dream comes true on Earth, justice. I am saying the two syllables of that simple word "justice". Freedom, justice for all,

Oliver now leans close to the microphone and fairly shouts, so that the feedback from the sixties sound system in the hall screams through in concert, while old men wince from their hearing aids.

OLIVER

shall roll down like water!

EXT. MONTGOMERY - DAY

The monument now there, designed by a young Korean woman, with the water rolling over the words with which Oliver ends that speech. The water rolls with its own light simple sound.

INT. THE HOTEL ROOM IN HARLEM - NIGHT

The aliens, including Slavey, sit quiet around the bed.

PRES

It's a horror show, this Earth. You could have said the most important thing. No one can take the color out of life.

THERESA

Oh, Pres, you know Bob could, if he wanted to.
You know how God loves him.

SLAVEY

Yeah, sure! But why would she want to?

OLIVER

Thanks for being my friends.

EXT. GRACELAND - DAY

The thin man who was speaking with the fat man in women's clothing sits beside a SKINNY MAN on a bench on the lawn. The thin man is again in a pinstriped suit, while the skinny man is in jeans and a short-sleeved white shirt, his shirttail out. Tourists enter through the gate and mull about.

THIN MAN

You can kill deer. You can kill him.

SKINNY MAN

More like a sitting duck, if you get him on that balcony. I can find a place in rifle distance. Lots of KKK live here.

THIN MAN

I'll make sure he's on the balcony. After that, you're on your own.

SKINNY MAN

I told you I have friends.

THIN MAN

Good luck.

The thin man and the skinny man do not shake hands. They rise from the bench and walk away in different directions.

EXT. A MOTEL - DAY

Oliver emerges from a room onto the balcony of the second floor of the two-story motel. Oliver is in a dark serge suit, tie tied neatly and his white cuffs showing as he places his hands on the rail of the balcony. Two other men emerge behind and stand beside him at the rail.

On Oliver's right is Ralph, in baggy dark gray trousers and a white short-sleeved shirt, his tie loose at his open collar. On Oliver's left is a man in a white turtleneck shirt, and an orange and brown plaid double-breasted suit. Oliver's hair is short and neatly trimmed, while Ralph's is a little longer and considerably less neat. The other man's hair is quite long and wooly, but trimmed like a hedge.

The three men stand a moment, no one speaking. Instead, as the other two men glance at Oliver, a gunshot rings. A small red spot appears on Oliver's forehead, and a large reddish mess appears on the white wall behind him, as he falls. The man in the turtleneck runs back into the motel room, as Ralph drops to his knees beside Oliver.

Ralph, with his left hand, lifts Oliver's head from the puddle of Oliver's blood. With his right hand, he covers Oliver's forehead, the entrance place of the bullet.

RALPH

Oh, God. Oh, God.

EXT. THE NANTAHALA RIVER, RUSHING OVER ROCKS - DAY

INT. A WOOLWORTH'S STORE IN CHRYSLER SQUARE - DAY

Theresa and Pres sit in a banquette backed to the lunch counter, low enough for service, and open to the store. Pres eats a banana split, while Theresa eats a chocolate sundae with marshmallow and nuts. Theresa licks her spoon.

PRES

Just you and me now, babe.

THERESA

You know, Slavey felt comfortable here in Detroit, with his family. That's what's sad about what we do.

PRES

Yeah, I know. That's why I felt so bad about Robert Fits. He had such a great family, even in Massachusetts.

THERESA

And he was a good guy himself, too. I don't know how he got into that family. How do you think he

came out of it? I mean, who do you think offed him.

PRES

Oh, Dicky. He didn't trust us to get him into the presidency, and he was afraid of all that Fits popularity, and he envied Robert's decency, because he lacked it.

THERESA

Do you know? Or do you suspect?

PRES

I strongly suspect. Look at the method, that crazy guy no one would listen to, straight out of our Remington manual for Robert's brother. My hunch is that Dicky got somebody to convince that poor guy that Fits Jr. was sincere in his support of Zionism, just as Strom Thurmond jumped Fits Jr.'s party because he thought Fits Jr. was sincere in his support of African American rights.

MONTAGE:

- 1) Pip floating alone in the Atlantic.
- 2) Pip serving Ahab in his Pequod cabin.
- 3) Pip serving Lincoln in the oval office.
- 4) Pres floating alone in the Pacific.

PRES

As Mr. Lincoln said, you can fool some of the people about any way you wish. That is, if you can fool yourself into wishing to. Plain old human paradox, I think.

THERESA

So how about the presidential succession? Is that bailiwick of yours on track?

PRES

No. Thank God. Dicky's quest for decency will trick the United States out of Linden's mess in Vietnam, but his paranoia will lead him into something stupid that'll put both himself and his party out of office, and he'll have to explain that to poor Conundrum, because he made that promise. My problem now is how to make

adjustments between then and when Mikhail is ready to finish off the Cold War. Mikhail still has years of climbing to do.

THERESA

I have some ideas, but it's your bailiwick.

PRES

Theresa, that isn't even funny, anymore.

THERESA

Okay. I met a guy right here in Michigan who can fill in after Dicky, if we can get him into the vice presidency on time. He's a grand affable football player from Grand Rapids, who loves a friend of mine's doughnuts. My friend the doughnut maker introduced him to me. And he's a United States senator. His name is GERRY.

PRES

Sounds positive. Sounds wonderful.

THERESA

But the best part is that he's clumsy. When he was playing football for Michigan State, he thought so much about what a quarterback does that he came to think too much about plans and not enough about his part in them.

PRES

That's more than positive. Whoever follows Dicky's paranoia can't be reelected, but he can be a grand catalyst. That's perfect.

THERESA

And I know you'll like him. Everybody does.

PRES

Okay, but we still need a few more years. Any more Aladdin's lamps in your basket of tricks?

THERESA

Yes, as a matter of fact, a peanut farmer from Georgia who graduated from Annapolis and is likely soon to be Georgia's governor. He loves his wife, and he is dedicated to peace, Annapolis or not, anywhere. And he belongs to the other

party, not to Dicky's. His name's JAMES, and he calls himself Jimmy.

PRES

So he'll help with women's rights, but the economic hit from women and Vietnam veterans suddenly looking for jobs besides housewifing and soldiering will cost him his job, and OPEC'll probably raise its head against Zionism by then. So he won't be reelected.

THERESA

Exactly. That'll put you on target for the vice presidency, for the eight years after. Is that enough time before you finish it off with your own presidency?

PRES

Theresa, that's why you're the boss!

THERESA

Roberta's the boss. I just love licking this cold sweet nutty stuff they have on Earth. Check this out.

Theresa shovels a spoonful of chocolate ice cream and marshmallow and nuts into her mouth. Then she licks the spoon with her lips, and her dark eyes open wide and bright. She dips the spoon into the sundae again and grins at Pres.

THERESA

People can be so happy here, if they wish.

O.S. Nina Simone is singing "Sunday in Savannah".

INT. THE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Dicky and KLINGMONGER sit in matching Louis VI chairs before the hearth. The Swedish ivy still blooms its blossoms on the mantle, but no fire is burning. The main door opens, and Pres enters the room. He stands between, but behind, the chairs. Neither Dicky nor Klingmonger look up.

PRES

Poker.

DICKY

What?

PRES

Poker! What's with the poker faces?

KLINGMONGER

Quagmire, in a word. But it isn't poker faces. We really don't know what we're going to do, because we don't know what's in our hands.

PRES

Which hands?

KLINGMONGER

Any of them. Vietnam, the Soviet Union. You name it.

PRES

What about China?

KLINGMONGER

What about China?

PRES

I mean, aren't they part of the problem, all those billions of people?

DICKY

China, Soviet Union, same thing.

KLINGMONGER

By God, that's crazy!

DICKY

What's crazy?

EXT. A ROCKY BEACH ON THE SOUTH CHINA SEA - DAY

Chinese sit beneath a pagoda above, as Little tin toy cars and trucks race on the sand, as G.I. Joe dolls shoot at them, as Barbie dolls watch.

KLINGMONGER (O.S.)

Billions of people living on a huge part of a continent while the world doesn't recognize that they or their part of the continent exists, while the united nations of the world call an island

off those billions of people's coast by the name that that huge piece of the continent has had for nearly all of history. Meanwhile, the most powerful piece of another continent is bogged down in a quagmire in a tiny nation in between, a nation whose name most of the populace of this powerful nation never knew until now, unless they read it from the bottoms of tin toys as children. No, that's Formosa, where the tin toys were made. Taiwan, not Vietnam. It's so confusing. What a quagmire.

DICKY (O.S.)

Yup, that about sums it up. Except that you didn't mention that the second-most-powerful nation on Earth, which is another huge piece of the continent you mentioned first, besides controlling much of the continent between the two continents, is taking sides with the billions, against our nation, as I said. China, Soviet Union, same thing.

INT. BACK IN THE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Dicky pushes a button on the mantle, beneath the Swedish ivy. A woman opens the main door to the office and stops quiet in the doorway. She folds her hands beneath her breasts and waits without a word.

DICKY

Can we get a fire in here?

The woman closes the door, and momentarily a spark sounds. Nearly immediately, gas ignites. Soon after, logs burn.

KLINGMONGER

Very nice. I love this country.

DICKY

What are you up to these days.

PRES

Not much. My House term is closing out soon, and Linden has suggested I run for the senate. I made a commitment to the Texas Republican committee to run, but exigencies can change. Do you have another suggestion, Mr. President?

DICKY

Didn't you make the suggestion? What about China?

KLINGMONGER

Yes, what about China? What can we do about China?

PRES

No! Going to the United Nations would be political suicide!

KLINGMONGER

Are you refusing your president?

INT. THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY - DAY

Pres sits central at the table for the United States, as the seated SPEAKER lands a gavel, somewhat lightly.

SPEAKER

Those in favor of admitting the citizens of the People's Republic of China to our body?

Hands and eyes rise, and the delegation of the island of Formosa rises with them and strides from the hall.

EXT. AN AIRLINER ABOVE THE PACIFIC - DAY

Pres and Beatrice fly first class, as Beatrice looks down to the silver cloud-tops.

EXT. A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE FORBIDDEN CITY - DAY

INT. A LARGE BUT AUSTERE ROOM IN THE FORBIDDEN CITY - DAY

Pres and MAO sit in unupholstered wooden chairs at an uncovered wooden table, the only furniture on the room's bare plank floor. Mao hands Pres a small red paperback edition of Quotations from Chairman Mao. Pres hands Mao a small green paperback edition of the Tao Te Ching. They drink tea from small porcelain cups.

MAO

I feel I know you. Thank you for visiting China. My greetings to your wife, and please accept my offer of the hospitality of our nation. Please

explore our country freely, however you wish.
You have my word.

EXT. THE BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE FORBIDDEN CITY - DAY

EXT. THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA - DAY

Pres and Beatrice sit atop the wall, on old Chinese bicycles. The wall is crumbling, and people are carrying stones from it, as people below the wall are building houses of the stones.

BEATRICE

I hope the Berlin wall falls so graciously.

PRES

No Ozymandius am I, I hope.

BEATRICE

I know.

EXT. THE SPHYNX, THE PYRAMIDS, THE SAND - DAY

INT. THE AUSTERE ROOM IN THE FORBIDDEN CITY - DAY

Pres and Mao sit drinking tea as they did before.

MAO

So you're going to be a spy.

Pres neither speaks nor looks at Mao. He sips his tea.

MAO

Good. You're a quiet man.

INT. THE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Pres sits in a Ming chair before the desk. Gerry sits behind the desk, the rose garden blooming beyond the French windows behind him. Gerry lifts a plate of doughnuts and leans to offer the doughnuts to Pres. Pres, of course, accepts.

PRES (His mouth full of doughnut)

Boy, these are good.

Gerry laughs loud with his mouth wide open. Then he grins, and then he straightens his wide football face. But light remains in his eyes as he speaks.

GERRY

Now listen.

Pres swallows what's left of his second doughnut. He looks at the plenty left on the plate. He smiles at Gerry and straightens his own face.

GERRY

I'm a quiet man. I'm a team player, and I know how to delegate authority and how to accept advice from my superiors in expertise, regardless of their rank. So I'm not going to meddle much in what you and Klingmonger do. But I think we need to devote some resources to Afghanistan. I think we have a powder keg there.

PRES

I agree! What's your view?

EXT. A WIDE OPEN FIELD OUTSIDE KABUL - DAY

Horsemen play Buzkashi, whipping each other over the goat. In fields beyond, poppies grow as Dorothy and the tin man and the lion and the scarecrow and Toto dance amid them.

GERRY (O.S.)

Dumping the monarchy was a stroke of genius, and not the doing as much as how it was done, fomenting rumors of a coup to prompt removal of the batteries from all the tanks in the country, except the palace guard brigade while the king was on vacation in Italy, then using those twelve tanks to take over the country. It's a good thing so few Americans can spell Afghanistan, or someone might have reported in the media that we trained the commander of that brigade here, in the good old U.S.A.

INT. BACK IN THE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

PRES

I thought that was kind of tidy, myself.

GERRY

And nobody was hurt either, although I heard one of the tanks put a pretty big hole in the bedroom

wall of the prince we spread the rumors about, and I heard his house was about two blocks from our embassy. I heard one Afghan soldier shot a foot of his own, but I suspect that that's a silly rumor. But, anyway, things seem to me to be backfiring there. And the Afghans I've met seem wonderfully gracious.

PRES

No question in my mind. Things are backfiring, and not for the people. Have you eaten any of the bread they bake there, in their little stone ovens hewn beneath their shops? It's as rich as these wonderful donuts from Grand Rapids, maybe more. May I?

GERRY

Of course!

Pres grabs another doughnut. He bites and chews and listens.

EXT. THE NEW YORK WORLD TRADE CENTER - DAY

Planes crash, the towers fall, and people flee the dust.

GERRY (O.S.)

And I didn't choose my words "powder keg" and "backfiring" lightly. Afghanistan is as hard to change as China, a circumstance I have no doubt you understand. But, at the same time, Afghanistan is more volatile or explosive, less civilized, more wild. Most Afghans didn't much care that they had a monarchy, and they care less who dumped it. So what we've done with our coup is to open an inroad for Soviet influence. We were providing military training aid, but mainly to train ourselves. You know I don't mean mainly for military coups. I hope.

PRES (O.S.)

To see how the trainees compare their equipment to ours.

EXT. RACHEL CORRIE LYING DEAD IN DUST, HER FRIENDS ABOVE - DAY

GERRY (O.S.)

Exactly. And their equipment is nearly all Soviet, because the Soviets have been providing them military materiel aid for years, while we've been restricting our aid to that training. Afghans are quite material people, and now Soviet influence dominates their government, the governance we let happen with our coup.

PRES (O.S.)

And that hotbed is between oil and the Indian subcontinent, as far as I can see and understand what you're saying, or what I hear you saying. And I hear you suggesting you have a solution, an answer in which all can work.

EXT. THE NAKED LITTLE GIRL RUNNING IN VIETNAM - DAY

GERRY (O.S.)

I knew you'd see the signifying fact, and so I'm asking you to work with Klingmonger. You're the expert, and Klingmonger understands that. Or I hope so.

INT. BACK IN THE OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Gerry grabs a donut for himself and now speaks while chewing.

GERRY

Boy! You're right! These are very good! I won't ask how you knew they're from Grand Rapids. Oh, by the way, I'm going to pardon Dicky, for whatever it's worth. That's a perk of the office I can't deny, or an honor to the office I have to accept, and it's diplomatically essential to continuing what he and you and Klingmonger have done. Klingmonger told me you helped him conceptualize the China card, and that's why I'm telling you what I'm going to do about Dicky, and why I accepted your request to direct central intelligence. I'm also appointing Klingmonger Secretary of State, so you can keep working well together.

EXT. VIETNAM, NAPALM BURNING JUNGLES - DAY

EXT. MISSISSIPPI, THE KKK BURNING OTHER HOMES - NIGHT

EXT. ALAMO PLAZA, THE SUN GROWING AZALEAS - DAY

Pres and Ben sit on a bench amid the azaleas before the adobe.

PRES

Why don't you tell your mom you're gay?

Ben starts and looks at his father. His face turns nearly as red as the azaleas, but his father's demeanor calms him. His face returns to nearer the color of the adobe.

BEN

How did you know I'm gay?

PRES

A friend of mine said something like that.

BEN

A friend? Do I know him?

PRES

No. He's an old friend. He's too free-spirited to have as a houseguest very easily, but he said I haven't paid enough attention to you. It was right after you blew up at me in Harvard Yard, while Quincy and his girlfriend and your mom were off looking for ice cream cones, about how you didn't want to go to a preppy school like Quincy, and all that. You might meet Lev someday, if you need him.

BEN

Don't worry about it, Dad. Thanks for telling me. But what about that church stuff.

PRES

Give her a chance. Oh, by the way, I wonder if you and Quincy would consider some possibilities for yourselves. After you get your degrees in political science and business administration. Maybe.

BEN

That sound long term! What is it?

PRES

Well, I was thinking you might be Governor of California and your brother Governor of Florida. But, if you don't want to.

BEN

One thing at a time, Dad. I gotta talk to Mom, first. But you know I can't be a Republican.

PRES

We have a huge diversity of friends.

BEN

Yeah. I love Aunt Theresa and Uncle Raymond. And Uncle Harry and his whole family are Democrat. We can do anything.

EXT. AN UPPER MIDDLE CLASS SUBURB OF HOUSTON - NIGHT

Magnolias line the street. Volvos are parked in drives, and bicycles lean on front steps. A Land Rover pulls into one of the drives, and Ben emerges from the driver side, Pres from the other side. They walk across the lawn to the front door.

INT. THE KITCHEN OF THE SUBURBAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Beatrice leans back against the sink, her arms folded beneath her breasts, in an apron. Ben and Pres enter, and Pres walks softly to Beatrice and kisses a cheek of hers. She smiles and kisses back, as Ben opens the refrigerator and closes it.

BEN

I'm gay!

BEATRICE

What's new?

She takes his nearest hand and kisses his nearest cheek.

EXT. SOUTHWESTERN AFGHANISTAN - DAY

Marijuana grows along the banks of the Helmand River, dividing the Margo desert from the Registan. Besides the sand, and larger rocks, no other life is visible, except some scorpions and a little girl squatting to pee. Her dress is pink.

EXT. A FARM IN FERTILE GEORGIA - DAY

Peanuts grow in fields, as a limousine stops in front of the white clapboard farmhouse. As Huffa emerges from the limousine, James steps out to the porch. James closes the screen door but stands just outside it. Huffa walks to the bottom of the steps. The path from the road is dust.

HUFFA (from beneath his hat brim)
Just thought I'd pay a friendly visit. I know you appreciate my union's endorsement. Just though I'd ask how much.

JAMES (wearing no hat)
I have no idea what you're talking about.

HUFFA
I'm talking about the vice presidency. You know how much I can help you. Hell, I already have helped you as much as I can from the outside, and that's a lot. So I just thought I'd pay you a friendly visit.

James turns around and walks back into the house, letting the screen door close on its spring. Huffa waits a moment and gets back into his limousine, opening and closing the back door himself. He trails away on the dusty Georgia road, past cotton fields beyond the peanuts.

INT. THE DINING ROOM OF THE GEORGIA GOVERNOR'S MANSION - NIGHT

A dinner party is in full swing, with James sitting at the head of the table and Pres and Beatrice nearer the other end, where James' wife sits dark and graceful and bright.

INT. THE BALLROOM OF THAT GEORGIA GOVERNOR'S MANSION - NIGHT

James stands talking with a group of people as a MAN NOT IN A TUXEDO approaches and bows his head briefly.

MAN NOT IN A TUXEDO
Smith. Teamsters. I hear you and Mr. Huffa are thinking of becoming a team to buck up the Fits legacy. Just thought to confirm.

JAMES
And they call me a peanut brain.

James strides away from the man and the group and sets his champagne flute on a waiter's tray, as Pres intercepts him. Beatrice stops, just within hearing distance.

PRES
Has he tried to contact you?

JAMES
He came to my mother's home!

PRES
I'm sorry. I'll do something.

James turns away and joins another group. Pres turns back to Beatrice and takes the hand she offers looking up at him.

BEATRICE
This is getting hard to bear.

INT. PRES'S OFFICE AT LANGLEY - DAY

As Pres sits at his desk alone, the door opens. His administrative ASSISTANT enters. She doesn't look happy.

ASSISTANT
I'm sorry. I don't know what to do. I have someone on the line saying he's Jimmy Huffa. Whoever he is, I don't know how he got through.

Pres swallows hard as his face turns paler than adobe.

PRES
It's okay, Mary. Put him through.

Mary hesitates but closes the door. The telephone rings, and Pres pushes the speaker button.

PRES
What can I do for you?

HUFFA
El Dorado, Wednesday, 2:00 p.m. You know I know something. Be there.

Huffa's hung up dial tone buzzes until Pres pushes the speaker button again. Pres sits a moment silently.

PRES

How can it ever end?

EXT. Los Angeles International Airport - DAY

INT. EL DORADO - DAY

Again the sun's light briefly follow's Pres through the front door, and darkness returns as he closes it to find Huffa sitting with his dregs of scotch whiskey, melted rocks. Again, Pres sits at Huffa's table.

HUFFA

You can get me on the ticket. I know a CIA director has connections bigger than his party, and I know that Republican klutz can't win. So, if you get me on the ticket, I'll be vice president. If you don't, you won't be anything.

PRES

Are you threatening to kill me?

HUFFA

I'm threatening to rat you out!

PRES

Listen. You have a choice. You may remember you told me that trash is a matter of opinion, relative to appropriateness, to being out of place.

HUFFA

What's your point?

PRES

My point is that my opinion is that you're trash. My opinion is that, as soon as I walk out that door, you'll follow me out and walk around back and climb into the dumpster with the trash waiting there. My opinion is that a trash truck will arrive a few minutes later, pick you up with that other trash, dump you in with some more, and crush you down, until you're dead. Then it'll take you to your rightful place.

HUFFA

I didn't know you had such a great sense of humor.

But, as quickly as Huffa says that, a drop of sweat appears on the bottom of his chin, and his hands begin sloshing the dregs in his glass, as his will seems to be not a factor. In a few seconds, his whole face is wet with sweat, and the glass collapses in his hand holding it, and the hand begins to bleed. The blood mixes with the spilled scotch.

HUFFA

Damn! I hate it when that happens!

PRES

Remember. As soon as I walk out that door. If you wait any longer, you'll have some other guests, and they won't be so nice to you. Also remember that you have a family, and know that life doesn't stop here for anyone, except you. You're right in your opinion, that I have connections. Some were your friends.

Huffa does not move as Pres rises from his chair. Pres gives Huffa a last look and walks out the door. He leaves the door open to the sunlight. Yet Huffa sits in shadows. Alone.

EXT. THE MOJAVE DESERT - DAY

Pres switches license plates on a car with a Hertz sticker on its back bumper. He has to wait for a bus to pass, before he pulls back onto the highway. Norma peers from a window of the bus.

EXT. A HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Pres pulls the Hertz car into a parking spot in front of a small stucco apartment house with azaleas beside the front steps. He gets out of the car and slowly makes the trek to the top of the steps. He pushes one of the bell buttons.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ben opens the door and finds his father with his head bowed.

BEN

Dad! What a surprise!

The hugs occur with the door open, and Ben steps back and grins wide open. In the grin, he looks at his Dad, but he quickly frowns, as he speaks.

BEN

I can't believe it! Oh, crap!

PRES

Crap, what? What did you forget?

Ben closes the door and walks to a telephone on the counter between the kitchen and the living room.

BEN

I forgot to tell you Quincy's got a problem.

PRES

Oh, crap! What kind of problem?

BEN

Oh, no big deal. He was arrested for drunk driving. I'm sorry, Dad.

PRES

How did he do that? Where is he now?

BEN

At home. He'll tell you. He's alright, but he wants to talk to you. He didn't know where you were, and he called here. He asked me if I knew where you were. As if you'd be here. But you are here. I'll be darned. I like that.

PRES

Me, too! Can I use your phone?

Ben pulls the cordless phone from its cradle and tosses it to his father, who is still standing at the door.

PRES

Where's CHET?

BEN

He's at work. He doesn't have bankers' hours like I do.

Pres pushes one button on the telephone, and answers quickly.

PRES
Quincy! What's up?

QUINCY (O.S.)
Thanks for calling, Dad. It's no big deal, but I'd like to talk with you about it, if you can find the time. Of course I'll understand if you're too busy. Where are you?

PRES
I'm at Ben's.

QUINCY (O.S.)
What are you doing at Ben's?

PRES
He's my son, too!

QUINCY (O.S.)
Yes. I know.

PRES
Tomorrow soon enough?

QUINCY (O.S.)
Sure. Thanks, Dad.

PRES
See you then.

Pres pushes the hang-up button and gestures to Ben that he's going to use the telephone again. He pushes another button.

BEATRICE (O.S.)
Ben?

PRES
No, me. I'm going to stop in Houston on my way home.

BEATRICE (O.S.)
What are you doing at Ben's?

PRES
It's a long story. I'll bore you with some of it when I get home. My meeting here went as I

expected, and I just thought I'd stop and see the son of my right hand.

BEATRICE (O.S.)

Well, you'd better straighten that other son out, but don't you give him the back of any hand.

PRES

I'll try. And I won't. I love you.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Pres and Ben and Chet dine. Ben and Chet both carry dishes back and forth from the kitchen. We see them eat and speak.

INT. A COMMERCIAL AIRCRAFT - DAY

Pres gazes from a window down at silver cloud-tops.

INT. QUINCY'S APARTMENT IN HOUSTON - DAY

The apartment is much more spacious than Ben's and Chet's, and much more modernly decorated. And we can see it's in a high rise, by seeing nothing but blue sky through the large plate glass windows. One similarity is a counter between the living room and the kitchen. A difference is that barstools are at Quincy's counter. Quincy opens the door with a wide wave.

QUINCY

Want a drink, Dad? Whoops, not the right question!

Pres sits on one of two white sofas, overstuffed but modern.

PRES

Alright, tell me the story. I see you're up for it. And I'd like a beer.

Quincy looks askance at his father, but he goes to the kitchen and sets a bottle of Bud on the counter. He returns from the kitchen and sets the beer on the coffee table in front of his father. He returns to the kitchen and returns with a beer of his own. He sits on the other white sofa.

QUINCY

I was drunk. I was driving. I was speeding. The police stopped me. I was alone and bailed

myself out with a credit card, after the four hours the police said it takes to get sober. I took a taxi home, because they impounded the car, and I tried to call you in the morning. Mom said you were in Los Angeles. I called my brother.

PRES

Anything else? You didn't hurt anybody?

QUINCY

No, I didn't hurt anybody.

PRES

Is it going to happen again?

QUINCY

No. It isn't.

PRES

Sounds simple! Why did you need so much to talk with me?

QUINCY

Great expectations. I want to be part of what you're doing.

PRES

Don't worry about it. Twice, a problem. Once, a fluke.

Quincy looks at his father, but then down at the coffee table.

PRES

Can I ask you another question?

QUINCY

It's what I hope you're here for!

PRES

What ever happened to that pretty Vassar girl Laura from Midland, the one you introduced us to at Harvard? We thought you were in love, and your mom was ready to start knitting booties and increasing our investment in photo albums. I remember your mom asking you about her a few times later, but your answers were short. All

that's years ago now, all of it, I guess. I guess we gave up. What happened?

QUINCY

She went back to Midland. She's the librarian for the high school now.

PRES

So you know what happened to her. I want to know more about you.

QUINCY

Oh, I guess I took your advice to heart. Well, it wasn't your advice, but some advice you said a friend of yours gave you, to get your feet wet before getting married. Okay, alright, I see your point.

PRES

What point?

QUINCY

You got your feet wet in the Pacific Ocean. I got mine wet in a drunk tank.

PRES

That wasn't my point, but I'm very happy that it's yours.

QUINCY

Was that a Skull and Bones friend? Have I met him?

PRES

No. Lev is far beyond Skull and Bones and hard to find from time to time. I guess you might meet him someday, if he thinks it'll do you some good. He advises me on how to behave in what many call polite society. I mean how to tread lightly among bigots and hypocrites. Thank God and your mom that you're not one of those. Anyway, I'm glad we had this conversation. You'll be alright. You are alright.

QUINCY

I'm going to call her. Laura.

PRES

Good. That'll please your mother.

EXT. CALVARY - DAY

GEORGE

When are we going to cut to the chase?

GRACIE

Oh, George! That was the chase!

BOB

Yes, and we're almost done.

EXT. THE MOONWALK ON THE NEW ORLEANS LEVEE - DAY

Lev sits again beside Pres. Now his bearded face is in his hands. His elbows on his knees, still he gazes into the river, as again a freighter passes. Now the river is below the freighter's waterline. But Lev speaks like a foghorn.

LEV

Children dying of cancer as entertainment. Churches calling themselves Christian using sickness to raise funds, rather than teaching the faith that could eliminate sickness, as Christ said. Women being goofy enough to swallow that crap, to think that liberation means being as goofy as men. What's this world coming to?

PRES

I know what you mean. Hell in a hand basket.

LEV

I pray to God that somehow someday we can all learn to appreciate ourselves and each other for whatever we are, and I don't see how we cannot, if we are honest and fair.

PRES

I know what you mean. That's all it takes.

Lev lifts his head and waves his hands and fairly screams, like a boson's whistle. He prances along the boardwalk and throws a dollar into the saxophone player's case. He does that while speaking.

LEV

But televisions advertise painkillers as a way to improve athletic performance, and the surest bets on the stock market are pharmaceutical companies. The surest bet for an African American to escape the illegal drugs of the ghettos is into sports, where he'll get more illegal drugs to improve his performance. And women, the most faithful of humans, watch soap operas the same way. The valley of the dolls, and pedophile priests. And communism!

PRES

What about communism? At least that's dead!

Lev stops screaming but doesn't sit down. He stands beside the saxophone player, his hands in the front pockets of his blue serge trousers. A straw boater has appeared on the back of his head, but again he speaks like a foghorn.

LEV

Communism wouldn't have a name, if people always shared. At the bottom of all of Marx and Lenin's rationalization is the simple and perfect ideal that we must love our neighbors as ourselves, to be happily at peace. But few men even love their wives, now after all those lessons. And so the soap operas.

Tourists rise from benches and circumvent Lev to leave him.

PRES (scowling)

Cleaning up clingons is a tough job.

LEV (in his ordinary voice)

I also pray I'm not a clingon. Do you think I'll ever see Sophia again? Our children!

PRES (smiling across the river)

Yes. Of course. And no you're not a clingon. You've learned your lessons well, and taught us, in exchange. Theresa and I are leaving tonight, and you can ride with us to Bob's conference center for our mission review with Slavey and Oliver, and Norma Jean will be there, too. If you meet us in front of the cathedral at nine, we'll give you a ride that far, and you can sit

in. You can ride the rest of the way to Heaven with Norma Jean. Meanwhile, you can say farewell to friends. That is, if you wish, any of it.

Lev returns to his seat beside Pres, but now he does not bow.

LEV (sailing his boater)
Thank God, almighty. I am free at last.

The leaving tourists turn and come back. They stand with the saxophone player and sing "We Shall Overcome". The sun is bright but setting, across the river. Behind the people.

EXT. THE CAFÉ DU MONDE IN NEW ORLEANS - DAY

The sun is still setting, over the Creole roofs of the French Quarter. Theresa and Pres, both now old and gray, sit outside eating beignets and drinking coffee, presumably with chicory. Across the street is the equestrian statue of Joan of Arc, glittering like gold and surrounded by crimson azaleas.

THERESA
You want to hear something weird?

PRES (laughing)
Everything you say is weird, Theresa! That's why we all love you so much! Yet you're so right, always!

THERESA (not laughing)
I met that human resources specialist Billy the Kid was talking about. She was staying at that little Creole guesthouse on Esplanade Avenue where I like to stay here now, during a hurricane a few years ago. She stuffed herself full of the bagels set out for breakfast, while she told me the house was an excellent example of Victorian architecture and excellently period-appointed. We were sitting in Louis XIV chairs.

PRES
So she's too ignorant to be a clingon?

THERESA
Yeah, I think so. She's like those people who killed Bob. She has no clue what she's doing,

but still I had to get away from her. I left her and walked down to the moonwalk in the wind and rain. I felt filthy after she confirmed what Billy said. I thought about our friend Claire. And you know how I love rain.

PRES

You must have felt like that before congress.

THERESA

You mean when that clinton sat me next to his wife, after his career of sticking cigars in young women's vaginas came to light, to pretend he appreciated what we try to do. What incredible hypocrisy, and then his wife pretending to be a soap opera wronged woman.

Pres manages not to snort into the coffee he's lifted to sip. He sips and sets down the cup and looks down into it. He looks up to Theresa.

PRES

So how do you think we've done this trip?

THERESA

Yes, that's the rub, of course. I don't know if that clinton's wife will be president. But, for now, I think at least, we're leaving Earth in good hands. I think Quincy's motive in the cradle of civilization might be too much in vindication of your being voted out of his office for pulling out of there to win the Cold War. But his heart is in the right place, and we can hope that clintonism won't succeed in voting him out as it did in voting out you and our friend Jimmy James. Or short sightedness, inability to see the long term of economics, etc. I guess it's not clintonism, more like that human resources specialist.

PRES

Yeah. That's the sadness. Earthlings don't care about what happens away from them. New Orleansans don't care what happens to people in Baghdad, because they don't see Iraqis as neighbors, cradle of their civilization or not.

If you felt that way, where would any of them be?
But how about the generality?

THERESA

Confusion still rules humanity. Proof is plain.

EXT. TIANENMEN SQUARE - DAY

The young man stands before the tank, stopped before him.

THERESA (O.S.)

A young man stands in front of a communist tank
in front of the Chinese capitol, and the Chinese
tank stops, a generation ago.

EXT. A GAZA NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

The bulldozer hulks over Rachel Corrie, crushed in dust.

THERESA (O.S.)

A young woman stands in front of a Zionist tank
in a neighborhood in Gaza, and the Israeli
bulldozer crushes her, in this season.

EXT. BACK AT THE CAFÉ DU MONDE - DAY

PRES

I shall always miss that house in Midland, and
I'm sorry you didn't have such peace and
happiness this trip. Well, you do have love, of
course. I hope it's consolation.

THERESA

Oh, my dear long-traveled friend, you know it's
all the consolation.

O.S. Louis Armstrong sings "What a Wonderful World".

We see Theresa and Pres talk on awhile, but we do not hear them.
We see the sun leaving the glittering statue of Jeanne d'Arc,
after the azaleas around it. We see Theresa and Pres rise and
hand in hand leave the Café du Monde, in the statue's shadow.
We see the quarter dim. We see the church.

EXT. A BENCH IN FRONT OF ST. LOUIS CATHEDRAL - NIGHT

Lev sits between Theresa and Pres, his head still bowed.

INT. THE NAVIGATION ROOM OF THE FLYING SAUCER - NIGHT

A young woman in seventeenth-century Scottish peasant garb stands at a complicated panel of lights and buttons. On her dress is a plastic nametag saying "Mary, Queen of Scots, Chief Engineer". Theresa and Pres and Lev appear gradually on a small circular platform in the center of the room.

EXT. A REPLICIA OF KARN HATTIN - DAY

The sun shines bright above the mist of the lake. Wild flowers bloom all over the hill, and a grove of olive trees shines darkly on the side away from the sea. Norma and Lev and Slavey and Oliver and Pres sit on rocks beneath three large old eucalyptus trees at the top of the hill. On another rock, the two lizards are making love, their tongues lightly flitting to each other's neck.

NORMA

Isn't that pretty. Isn't this all pretty.
Theresa once told me she doesn't understand
cathedrals and building funds. This is so much
more beautiful than hewn stone or molded gold.
But listen to how I'm talking. Where is Theresa?

One rock has no one sitting on it, but Theresa is nowhere in our sight.

SLAVEY (pointing)

Over there!

LEV (looking)

The flower?

OLIVER (glancing)

Just this side of it. Go and look.

PRES (to Norma)

Go over there and scoop up a handful of the soil
just this side of that little blue flower.

Norma rises and walks quietly to the flower. She kneels and scoops up eucalyptus seeds and grass, with nearly a handful of the dust that the topsoil has become in this bright spring sunlight. She rises again and peers into her upturned hand.

SLAVEY

Open your fingers just a little, and shake out
the seeds and the dust and blow out the grass and
see what's left.

Norma follows Slavey's instructions and finds in her hand just a
tiny shining polished black onyx reflecting Bob's sun.

NORMA

Oh, there she is!

She returns to her rock and sits again, holding Theresa in her
still upturned and open hand.

LEV

So where's Bob?

OLIVER

There.

Oliver points to the rock with the lizards on it.

NORMA

The lizards?

SLAVEY

No. The rock.

LEV

Good thing the lizards were there. We might have
sat on her.

Slavey and Oliver laugh out loud, and so does Lev. Hardly a
voice, but more a sweet mood, soothes from the rock.

BOB

You'd better not sit on my lizards.

NORMA

I never noticed lizards were so lovely.

BOB

Thanks. I made 'em myself. Well, let's get
started. I heard your conversation at the Café
du Monde, and I concur. So we don't need to
repeat any of that, but I would like to say that

freefalling out of that airplane as an eighty-year-old former president of the most free and powerful people on that earth was a nice touch.

PRES

Thanks, Bob. Even that yahoo Clingon was impressed.

BOB

I know. That's what he said: "I am mightily impressed." I wonder how impressed he'd be if he knew you're immortal and know it.

Pres bows his head, but Bob's rock glows up a little.

BOB

It's alright. You did a good job. All of you did well, excellently. Norma, you're a beauty, and Lev gave great advice to Mr. President in how to handle receptions, besides being a great barometer of the problems. But that's what troubles me most about your mission, that you all did well but accomplished little. What in hell is it going to take to get God's Earth people to love each other?

MONTAGE:

- 1) The introductory mushroom cloud.
- 2) Theresa burning at Rouen.
- 3) The bridge at Selma.

BOB

The fire next time won't be for a nineteen-year-old French girl or for six million Jews indiscriminately. It'll be for every liar on Earth, and now I don't know anyone on Earth whom that could exclude, and that clingon claiming to have presided over the land of the free while he couldn't preside over his own zipper, claiming to favor education and women's rights while he does that to a female intern, while admitting he doesn't know what is is?

Lightning strikes in the mist over the lake, and thunder rolls. Except the lizards', all the heads in the meeting are now bowed, and the eucalyptus trees bend in a breeze. But the sun still shines, and all calms quickly.

INT. RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL - NIGHT

HENNY Youngman and RODNEY Dangerfield stand side by side, with RICHARD Pryor between. The Rockettes dance behind, before the mushroom cloud.

HENNY

Take my wife, please!

RODNEY

I don't get no respect!

Richard dies of a heart attack, and the Rockettes kick him exploding into the mushroom cloud, which sucks the other two in as well.

EXT. BACK AT BOB'S CONFERENCE CENTER - DAY

BOB

Earthlings are a mess. I chose the Israelites to show I love humanity, by leading them out of Egypt to their former free nomadic life. How can anyone read the Bible and sell their souls for land, or pride? Well, enough.

THERESA

Enough? Are you quitting? Can we?

Now, Norma is weeping, and Theresa is burbling through tears rolling down from Norma's eyes to her hand holding Theresa. Theresa floats on the tears. But she hardly sparkles.

BOB

What's the matter, Kiddo?

NORMA

I'm so sad! I'm so sad!

BOB

Okay, Kiddo, just for you.

EXT. A DIRT ROAD IN IRAQ - DAY

A United States military convoy stops, with no other forces in sight. Soldiers rise above their vehicles and peer around through binoculars, as Iraqi forces appear over a rolling hill

and begin to rain fire upon the United States convey. A rocket-propelled grenade lands beneath a small utility vehicle in the convoy, tipping it on a side and throwing a uniformed YOUNG WOMAN from it, with her rifle. Her rifle in her right hand, the young woman lies unconscious on the ground, now a battlefield.

INT. AN IRAQI HOSPITAL - NIGHT

The young woman lies in a bed, plainly seriously injured. Other United States soldiers storm into the room, waving their weapons, automatic rifles, grenades, etc.

MALE SOLDIER

We're American soldiers, here to help.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm an American soldier, too.

EXT. AGAIN THE KARN HATTIN CONFERENCE CENTER - DAY

Now Norma is weeping harder than ever, as Theresa floats in her hand like Pip left alone by Ahab and his whaling crew.

BOB

So, kiddo, I'm going to leave the answer in the small and lovely hands of that child of West Virginia black lung coal mining country called almost heaven by a singer who killed himself flying a plane, maybe on drugs.

Norma looks up, and her tears begin to ebb. She listens.

BOB

That child joined an army for a promise of money to pay for her to become a kindergarten teacher, if she would do that maybe opposite duty for a while. Now, she's rightly called a hero on all sides, except one.

Norma's tears have ebbed, and Theresa lies again quiet in her hand, but Norma's eyes again show fear. Yet Bob goes on.

BOB

She has movie and book options, and the most trusted news network on Earth has said that now she'll care for nothing else. If that child of the leafy heights and diamond depths of West

Virginia becomes a kindergarten teacher, she may well become the last French corporal.

Norma's face shines in the bright spring sunlight.

EXT. A ONE-ROOM WHITE CLAPBOARD APPALACHIAN SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

INT. THE ONE ROOM OF THAT SCHOOL - DAY

The white young woman kneels between the children's desks. She picks up a crayon from the floor and places it on the desk of a black young man who seems uninterested. The child now beams down at his teacher, who beams back up at him. Slowly the mushroom cloud closes in around the two of them. It frames them in its center, now not only white. All fades dim, then brightens pale. To purple?

EXT. HEAVEN - DAY

A Viking galleon, its sail striped like Joseph's coat of many colors and full of wind, its oars swimming idle in the sea of silver clouds supporting it, wends through mist and light. Theresa mans the helm with Raymond's help, as Slavey and Oliver sit on opposite ends of the lower beam with their wives between them, as Norma and Jimmy dance on the deck with Lev and Sophia and their thirteen children, and Slavey's and Oliver's children. On the top beam, near the pinnacle of the mast flying the Jolly Roger, sit two young women: Rachel Corrie and Jessica Lynch, in the apparel we know them for.

The two young women beam at each other, as all the clothes of all the other people there keep changing colors, reflecting petals floating about them. Everyone is smiling and singing "Zippedy Doo Dah", with George and Gracie also there but dancing naked in their greenness. The Jolly Roger becomes the little mermaid, and then the tricolore, then like the sail, but streaming.

Pres is leaning over the rail, looking down into the clouds. Beatrice rises from the clouds, and Pres takes her reaching hand and helps her into the ship. They are too happy to join the throng, and so they stand at the rail, looking over the clouds, hand in hand.

Only Bob sits quietly, on the poop deck. She wears the headdress of a Sioux (Cheyenne Lakhota) chief, in a shadow,

bright. One by one, the feathers float up to join the petals,
in the light.

An American bald eagle, with an azalea crown and a rose in beak,
alights at the peak of the mast. However, beneath Bob's bonnet,
is a Dallas Cowboys football helmet.

The final titles show over this scene.

EXT. THE DUSTY ROAD IN VIETNAM - DAY

Soldiers in helmets, with rifles strapped to their shoulders,
pour water from their olive drab canteens, over the little naked
child, smiling.

FADE OUT