

MAXBECKER

Written by

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1 EXT. HOLLYWOOD STUDIO, LATE 1940'S - DAY 1 *

NO SOUND

The lot lays relatively empty except for a worker walking here or there.

One man bangs on the

LONE DOOR of STUDIO D.

The door opens and someone pulls the man, MAX BECKER (35), quickly inside. The door slams... *

2 INT. STUDIO D - DAY 2

...inside all hell has broken loose. The man looks on at the catastrophe and covers his ears to the deafening cacophony.

He saunters toward the soundstage but quickens his pace as he sees...

THE DIRECTOR (50ish) *

ripping a script to shreds and throwing the pieces at

SLOANE BECKER (35) *

the writer, a handsome, brassy woman who with each lash of her tongue of steel receives more paper in her face.

FAITH FULLER DUVALL (late 30s) *

the beautiful star, sits on set -- a battlefield set-up -- smoking a cigarette watching the argument with an amused grin.

MAX BECKER

producer, and husband to Sloane, pulls a script girl aside and whispers in her ear. She hands a megaphone to Max and quickly runs off the set. *

MAX *

Cut! CUT!! *

The studio settles into silence as Max immediately makes them aware of his presence. *

He turns to the Director and Sloane. *

(CONTINUED)

MAX (CONT'D) (cont'd) *

So, what exactly is the problem *

this time? *

DIRECTOR SLOANE *

How am I to work with this This hack wouldn't know a

piece of filth that is brilliant script if he had

supposed to pass for a Shakespeare writing for him!

script?

MAX (CONT'D) (cont'd) *

(To the Director) *

This is very simple. Either work it *

out or get off the lot.

DIRECTOR *

You can't talk to me like that, Max *

Becker. Producer or not, I deserve *

respect. *

Max saunters off. *

DIRECTOR (cont'd)

I'll go to Ginsberg!

Max waves his hand as if to say "Go ahead."

The director gathers his belongings. *

Faith walks toward her dressing room, smoking another *

cigarette, nervously. *

FAITH *

I'll be in my dressing room waiting *

for the next hack. You know, Max, *

all these changes could drive a *

girl to drink. *

Max gently takes her hand. *

MAX *

But you won't. *

She smiles at him and nods determinedly. *

The script girl rushes up to Max. She whispers in his ear. *

Max nods and picks up the megaphone. *

He looks across the studio at the props table hidden in the *

shadows and motions to *

(CONTINUED)

BARTHOLOMEW "BARTY" THORNBERRY (40ish) *

the props man, aspiring director, who walks out from behind
the table and through the crowd. *

Max looks right at the old director as he hands Barty the
megaphone. *

MAX (CONT'D) (cont'd) *
(Grinning) *
So Barty, how do you feel about *
moving from behind the table to *
behind the camera? *

Barty's jaw drops. *

Sloane joins her husband, a united front, as the Director
storms past them... *

DIRECTOR *
(Shouting) *
I'll go to Dunne! *

...and out of the studio. *

SLOANE *
Barty? *

Max nods. *

SLOANE (cont'd) *
You got approval? *

Max smiles. *

SLOANE (cont'd) *
You are a genius. *

The cast and crew stare at Max, Sloane, and Barty. Max leans
into Barty's ear. *

MAX *
(Whispering) *
You do know how to use that thing, *
don't you? *

Barty nods, then grins. He puts the megaphone to his mouth... *

BARTY *
Everyone take 20! Back on set at
11:30! *

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: (3)

2

The crowd disperses.

*

DISSOLVE TO:

3 SPINNING PAPERS OVER THE SOUND OF RAPID TYPING...

3

*

The spinning stops and the newspaper reads:

*

LOS ANGELES DAILY SCOOP, FEBRUARY 28th, 1947

*

"DOWN THE RED CARPET" BY MADGE MILFORD.

*

DISSOLVE TO:

*

4 INT. LOS ANGELES DAILY SCOOP - DAY

4

*

MADGE MILFORD, 50ish, handsome and smartly dressed -- including the most fashionable hat of the day -- stands smoking a cigarette. She periodically leans over her terrified assistant as she dictates her column.

*

*

*

*

MADGE (V.O.)

*

...and looking toward that night of nights in our little burg of celestial mortals, could the new dynamic duo of Max Becker and Barty Thornberry ...

*

*

*

*

*

*

DISSOLVE TO:

*

5 EXT. LOS ANGELES SHRINE AUDITORIUM - LATE AFTERNOON

5

*

Paparazzi's camera bulbs FLASH as MAX and SLOANE, stunningly dressed, wave and walk down the red carpet. Barty, a bit ruffled, follows behind grinning sheepishly and waving shyly.

*

*

*

MADGE

*

...sweep up the competition for their kingdom of GOTHAM-DUNNE-GINSBERG? Without a doubt! They are on the rise from where I sit and I sit pretty high up...

*

*

*

*

*

*

DISSOLVE TO:

*

6 SPINNING PAPERS OVER THE SOUND OF RAPID TYPING... 6

The spinning stops and the newspaper reads: *

HOLLYWOOD HERALD, MARCH 3rd, 1947 *

"INSIDE THE SILVER SCREEN" BY EMMALOUANNA GRAYSON *

DISSOLVE TO: *

7 INT. HOLLYWOOD HERALD OFFICES - DAY 7 *

EMMALOUANNA GRAYSON, 30ish, bubbly and smartly coiffed, sits *

typing at a small Remington. *

EMMALOUANNA (V.O.)

SECRET PASSION OF LYDIA

revealed...a triumph. Faith Fuller

shines in this brilliant concoction

of war and lascivious love but...

DISSOLVE TO:

8 INT. LOS ANGELES SHRINE AUDITORIUM - EVENING 8 *

A young male star reads off the envelope with a grin. The *

crowd jumps to its feet and applauds thunderously as FAITH *

rises from her seat and ascends the stage. She accepts her *

award, a tear sliding down her cheek and smiles at... *

MAX and Barty sitting in a nearby row. *

EMMALOUANNA *

...the true stars are Max Becker,

producer and Barty Thornberry, *

director. Saving not only a studio

but a star from burning out. And I

have it on good authority that..." *

DISSOLVE TO:

9 SPINNING PAPERS OVER THE SOUND OF RAPID TYPING... 9 *

Again, the spinning stops and the newspaper reads: *

TINSELTOWN TRIBUNE, MARCH 15th, 1947

(CONTINUED)

"MAX BECKER, MAN ABOUT TOWN" BY RILEY LYDECKER

DISSOLVE TO: *

10 EXT. GDG, MAIN ENTRANCE - DAY 10 *

RILEY LYDECKER, 50ish, graying yet distinguished, talks on the phone at the guard booth. He yells over the din of the studio noise. *

LYDECKER (V.O.) *

...revealed in an interview that some big changes can be expected after the upcoming brouhaha in Tinseltown. Unwilling to clarify that comment, Irwin "Daddy" Dunne, did say... *

DISSOLVE TO:

11 INT. LOS ANGELES SHRINE AUDITORIUM - EVENING 11 *

MALCOLM GINSBERG (30), a thin, uptight man, hovers protectively over IRWIN DUNNE (60), a fatherly, silver-haired man, as they stand in the back of the auditorium. Dunne nods graciously to passersby. A few stop to chat, offering congratulatory hand shakes to both Dunne and Malcolm. With each acknowledgement, the latter puffs up more. *

LYDECKER *

...and I quote, "With GDG's reemergence as a powerful presence, thanks to Ginsberg, Becker and Thornberry, rest assured that more responsibility will be heaped on all the parties involved." *

FADE TO: *

12 INT. ACADEMY AWARDS POST PARTY -- LATER THAT EVENING 12 *

Men in penguin suits and elaborately froufroued women mill about amongst the linen covered tables. At the center of the fray stands

A TABLE COVERED WITH LITTLE GOLDEN MEN.

(CONTINUED)

The statuettes themselves almost hide the two men sitting at the table.

IRWIN DUNNE

sits back in his chair drinking a glass of whiskey. He holds court, *but without much pleasure*, as the elegant peasants pay homage to him and his holdings, *and* *
*
*

MALCOLM GINSBERG

sits in *silent* support, *drinking a club soda.* *

ROSEN and LEONARD

Two other men, generic black suits, stony faces, *lean against a wall behind Dunne.* *
*

A man approaches.

MAN

Congratulations Dunne! Where is your young hero?

He shakes Dunne's hand and saunters on to the next table.

MALCOLM

Where *did* he go? He should be here with us.

DUNNE

Let him bask in his glory. He earned it.

Rosen and Leonard nod in agreement.

Giddy women and equally silly men dance and make complete spectacles of themselves. *
*

Dunne surveys the room and sighs. *

DUNNE (cont'd)

Before this *tedious* evening ends, let Becker and Thornberry know *they should* be in my office first thing tomorrow morning. *
*
*

MALCOLM

Of course.
(Pause)
They earned it.

(CONTINUED)

Dunne gulps down his remaining whiskey and smiles. He grabs a passing waiter to refill the drink.

MALCOLM (cont'd)

That's bad for your blood pressure,
Mr. Dunne.

DUNNE

So is making movies.

He pats Malcolm on the shoulder. *

Dunne scans the room and his eyes rest upon... *

MAX BECKER

standing humbly amidst a gaggle of admirers. Sloane stands with him, playing the queen, and Barty looks trapped among his own small crowd. *

Sloane whispers in her husband's ear. Max looks up. Walking towards him are

MADGE MILFORD, RILEY LYDECKER and EMMALOUANNA GRAYSON aka THE HOLLYWOOD THREE.

Sloane quietly slips away.

The crowd parts as the Hollywood Three take center stage in front of Max and Barty. Air-kisses all around. *

MADGE

I knew it. I knew it all along. I predicted it, you know. That you both would win.

Sloane has returned with champagne and slips in next to Max. She smiles at Madge, gritting her teeth.

MADGE (cont'd)

And you too, of course, Mrs. Becker.

Sloane smiles back derisively.

MAX

Your column has been the talk of the studio for the past two weeks.

(CONTINUED)

MADGE

Of course it has. Why, I said to Riley the day after the premier --

LYDECKER

(Cutting her off)
Really, Madge. Must you take credit for everything?

EMMALOUANNA

Of course she must. Haven't you heard? She's God's right ear.

LYDECKER

I guess that makes you MY left, dear. Really though, to all of you, laurels well earned.

*
*
*
*

EMMALOUANNA

Why, I don't think I've written a review that glowing since--

LYDECKER

(Cutting him off)
Thespis uttered the first words of Sophocles' first tragedy. Enough.

Lydecker focuses on Becker.

LYDECKER (cont'd)

We see a great future ahead of you, young man.

Max locks eyes with Lydecker.

*

LYDECKER (cont'd)

Beyond anything you could have imagined. Are you ready for Olympus?

MAX

One step at a time. This was one movie.

Lydecker laughs out loud. Madge and Emmalouanna join in.

LYDECKER

He's modest too.

Madge and Emmalouanna turn their hawklike gaze toward Barty.

*

(CONTINUED)

MADGE
Don't forget Baxter, Riley.
Don't forget Baxter.

EMMALOUANNA
Baxter, too. Baxter too!
Mustn't forget him, Ry!

Lydecker turns to Barty. *

LYDECKER (CONT'D) (cont'd) *

How could I? You too have great
things before you, Mr. Thornberry.

Madge whispers in his ear.

LYDECKER (cont'd)
Don't you have a son?

Barty looks at Max. *

BARTY
(Whispering) *

How did they know that? I need a
drink. *

Emmalouanna grins flirtatiously, having overheard. *

EMMALOUANNA
We know everything.

LYDECKER
You work on getting him out here.
The two of you could be
unstoppable.

BARTY *

But he's a playwright --

MADGE *

Broadway, bah! What do they know?
Barty, darling, haven't you learned
since you left New York that we've
perfected the art form here in
Tinsel Town?

Lydecker leans in towards Max.

LYDECKER
Take advantage of what we offer
you.

MAX *

What is that?

(CONTINUED)

Lydecker shrugs.

LYDECKER

A kingdom? Or perhaps just advice.

The three turn on their heels and disappear into the crowd.
Madge calls back over her shoulder.

MADGE

Read my column in the morning!
Predictions, predictions, predict--

LYDECKER

(Cutting her off.)
Really, Madge! Enough.

Barty breathes out a sigh of relief. *

BARTY *

Do they always talk like that?

Sloane laughs.

SLOANE

They're the press. *

BARTY *

So?

SLOANE

So...they make careers.

Max still watches the Hollywood Three working the crowd.

MAX

And break them.

Barty looks after the Hollywood Three, then eyes Max's still full champagne glass. *

BARTY *

Are you going to drink that?

Max hands him the glass. Barty downs it. *

CUT TO:

13 INT. DUNNE'S OFFICE, GDG -- MORNING 13 *

Dunne stands staring out the window, silently smoking a cigar.

DUNNE

Will one of you say something?

He turns to face

MALCOLM, hand to his mouth, consternation written all over his face, *

Barty looking down at his hands, absentmindedly wringing a handkerchief, and *

MAX, staring sternly, trying to keep the smile from creeping across his face. *

ROSEN stands stoically off to the side.

Malcolm walks over to Dunne.

MALCOLM

I wish you'd warned me. Told me last night.

Dunne waves him off.

DUNNE

I wanted you to enjoy last night. Next year's awards, well, you'll be sitting in my seat.

Malcolm turns and stares out the window.

Barty looks up from the now rumpled handkerchief. *

BARTY *

I don't know how this studio is going to get along without you.

Dunne chuckles under his breath. He turns and looks at Max.

DUNNE

Well?

Max stands and goes to the door. He opens it up.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

(to Barty and Rosen)

Come on. We've got movies to make.

*

Barty walks out the door, Rosen following. Nodding to Dunne, almost a genuflection, Max closes the door behind him.

*

Dunne, next to Malcolm, stares out the window. Malcolm reaches over and removes the cigar from Dunne's mouth.

MALCOLM

That's bad for your heart, sir.

Dunne pats Malcolm's shoulder.

DUNNE

So are nagging assistants, son.

Dunne smiles proudly at Malcolm.

FADE TO BLACK.

*

14

SPINNING PAPERS OVER THE SOUND OF RAPID TYPING...

14

The spinning stops and the newspaper reads:

*

HOLLYWOOD HERALD, MARCH 26th, 1947

"DUNNE DONE!" BY EMMALOUANNA GRAYSON

*

DISSOLVE TO:

*

15

INT. HOLLYWOOD HERALD OFFICES - DAY

15

Emmalouanna again types at her Remington, only now she smokes a cigarette and wears a hat.

*

*

EMMALOUANNA (V.O.)

...like a shock of cold water, industry king, Irwin Dunne announces his retirement at the end of the year. Horrors! What will Hollywood do...

DISSOLVE TO:

16 INT. STUDIO - DAY 16 *

Dunne peruses the set with Malcolm who agrees vigorously at Dunne's every word. Max, sitting in a chair, advises the minions. *

EMMALOUANNA *

...pass the torch on to that silent *

"yes-man." Or, and remember you *

heard it hear first... *

A gaffer adjusts a light, the beam falling on Max as if from the heavens... *

EMMALOUANNA (V.O.) (CONT'D) *

...will a certain savior fill the *

big shoes at GDG..." *

DISSOLVE TO:

17 SPINNING PAPERS OVER THE SOUND OF RAPID TYPING... 17 *

The spinning stops and the newspaper reads: *

TINSELTOWN TRIBUNE, MARCH 26th, 1947 *

"GDG TO GGB OR PERHAPS GBG?" BY RILEY LYDECKER *

DISSOLVE TO: *

18 INT. GDG, OUTSIDE DUNNE'S OFFICE - DAY 18 *

Lydecker sits on the secretary's desk, using her phone, as she desperately attempts to work around him. *

LYDECKER (V.O.) *

...in an exclusive, and inclusive, *

interview with the heart of GDG, the *

studio has no comment... *

DISSOLVE TO: *

19 INT. STUDIO D - DAY 19 *

Barty, megaphone raised to mouth, gives an order. Ginsberg grabs the megaphone away from Barty and contradicts the order. *

(CONTINUED)

Cast and crew stand still, unsure. Barty hangs his head, abashed.

Max approaches and returns Barty's megaphone. He nods at him with an encouraging smile. He then puts his arm around Malcolm's shoulder and walks him to the exit...

LYDECKER

...about who Dunne's successor will be. With the recent success on Oscar night, it's our bet that if Ginsberg thinks he'll have an easy take over, he's got another think coming...

DISSOLVE TO:

20 SPINNING PAPERS OVER THE SOUND OF RAPID TYPING... 20

Again, the spinning stops and the newspaper reads:

LOS ANGELES DAILY SCOOP, EARLY EDITION, MARCH 26th, 1947

"FILAMENTAL FATHER FLIES, GINSBERG GAINS?" BY MADGE MILFORD

DISSOLVE TO:

21 INT. LOS ANGELES DAILY SCOOP - DAY 21

Madge, again perfectly coiffed with an even more elaborate hat than the first, leans over a new assistant dictating...

MADGE (V.O.)

...and did you hear the latest cyclone to hit our filamental firmament? Daddy Dunne will retire at the end of the year. And unlike some who speculate unduly...

DISSOLVE TO:

22 INT. COCKTAIL PARTY - EVENING 22

Dunne introduces Malcolm to a series of distinguished men. Each simpler and ingratiate themselves to Malcolm.

(CONTINUED)

MADGE

...my sources inform me that
Ginsberg's coronation is set. But
from where I sit...

Suddenly Max and Sloane enter the room. All eyes turn and
bodies immediately swamp the couple. Malcolm watches on in
dismay...

MADGE

...if Dunne's got the guts, Becker
is the man. And remember, I sit
pretty high up...

CUT TO:

INT. SLOANE BECKER'S OFFICE -- EARLY AFTERNOON

CLICKING typewriters TAP at a furious pace.

Stretched up on a desk, a pair of very feminine feet in very
high-heels move in time with the sound. The feet are
attached to a pair of very long, very lean, very nyloned
legs. Beyond that...

WHITE PAGES cover the face as Sloane's voice is heard reading
aloud.

SLOANE

(Mimicking a young child)
"Look, Daddy. Teacher says every
time a bell rings an angel gets his
wings."

A PUFF OF SMOKE curls up and over the pages.

SLOANE (cont'd)

(Lowering her voice to a
mock male pitch)
"That's right, ZuZu. That's right.
Atta boy, Clarence."

A LARGE SHAPE fills the doorway, throwing a SHADOW across the
desk, the legs and the pages.

Sloane, CACKLING, throws down the script onto her desk.

SLOANE (cont'd)

Who writes this schlock?

(CONTINUED)

Sloane returns to a normal sitting position, her legs disappearing underneath the desk. She lights another cigarette and grins at the man standing in front of her. *

He closes the door, and with one swift gesture pulls a cord at the window. The shades ZIP down blocking the office off from the staring eyes of the writers in the exterior.

They kiss -- deeply, passionately... *

As the kiss continues, Sloane reaches behind her feeling around on the desk knocking items to the floor as she does so. Max swipes the desk clean. Leaning Sloane back, he kisses down her neck, along the neckline of her shirt, towards her cleavage. *

Sloane strains her neck around Max's advances. She reaches a stretch further and... *

...suddenly, they are both sprawled on the floor. She grabs the morning's papers and wields them triumphantly. *

MAX *

What are you doing?

Sloane stands and adjusts her clothes.

SLOANE

Have you looked at these?

Max glances at the pages Sloane waves in front of his face and shrugs. *

SLOANE (cont'd)

Don't you see?

Max takes the papers from her. He skims through each, tossing them on the floor one by one. He grabs Sloane again and pulls her down next to him.

MAX

Fabulous! Who cares?

He nibbles on her ear.

Sloane gives in to her husband's seduction.

SLOANE

They're predicting...more. *

Max begins to unbutton Sloane's blouse.

(CONTINUED)

MAX
(whispering)
I got more...

*

She nibbles back, going lower and lower...

*

SLOANE
(Also whispering)
One success keeps us in the game...

*

MAX
Uh-huh...

*

SLOANE
But we have to keep playing if...

*

*

MAX
Mmmhmmm...

SLOANE
...we want to...

*

He lifts his head.

*

MAX
(Breathless)
Want to...

*

*

SLOANE
...win.

*

MAX
(Almost ecstatic)
What do we win?

*

*

INTERCUT TO:

*

Three or four of Sloane's young writers crowd around her door...listening. They look at each other, shrug their shoulders and shake their heads.

An EXPLOSIVE SCREAM sends the writers reeling backwards.

They scatter and scamper back to their desks and immediately begin typing, sniggering to themselves...

*

25

RESUME. SLOANE BECKER'S OFFICE - EARLY AFTERNOON

25

*

Sloane hops up on the desk, crossing her legs and lighting a cigarette simultaneously.

SLOANE

You should talk to Gothenberg.

She looks down at

MAX, spent, staring up at the ceiling. He slowly turns his head to gaze at his wife.

MAX

Why isn't this enough for you?

She blows a puff of smoke into the air and watches as it curls toward the ceiling.

SLOANE

Why is it enough for you?

Max stands, zipping his pants. He walks behind the desk and stares out the window.

MAX

I want to make movies, Sloane. I want to read a story and know exactly which writer could make the words leap off the page, which director will visualize it to its greatest possible potential and which star will become that character deep down in their soul. I want to be on the set or on location and watch the machine working smoothly -- or to oil out the kinks when needed. And after all that, I want to watch the perfection I've created, give birth to \$\$\$.

*

*
*
*
*

He turns and looks at his wife.

MAX (cont'd)

I can't do that sitting behind a desk.

Sloane stubs out her cigarette in the overflowing ashtray.

(CONTINUED)

SLOANE

Do you really think Ginsberg's going to let you keep that kind of control? The kind of control Dunne's given you?

MAX

What would you have me do?

Sloane shrugs.

SLOANE

I thought you could talk to Gothenberg.

Max loses it.

MAX

So you want me to betray Dunne. The one man who gave me a shot, who gave us a shot. The one man who believed enough in me to let my vision thrive.

Sloane remains seated.

SLOANE

Don't look at it as a betrayal. You're merely pointing out the options. As any good producer would do.

Max shakes his head.

MAX

I won't do it.

Sloane walks to him, taking his hand in hers. She looks into his eyes.

SLOANE

For me. Will you do it for me?

MAX

(Beginning to melt)
Why is this so important?

SLOANE

Because you deserve it. And I need to be able to...
(Pause, a far away look in
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SLOANE (cont'd)

her eyes)

...go back to what I was before..

*
*

Max looks at her, confused.

MAX

(Gently)

And what was that?

*

SLOANE

A woman...

*

MAX

What do you mean?

*
*

SLOANE

I haven't been a woman since...

*
*

Sloane absentmindedly runs a hand over her flat belly.

*

Max tenderly touches that hand.

*

MAX

You are a woman.

*
*

Shaking herself out of her contemplation, she picks up the phone and hands it to Max.

SLOANE

Nevermind. It's not important.
Just talk to Gothenberg. That's
all I ask.

*
*

He puts the phone down, shaking his head.

SLOANE (cont'd)

You know I'm right.

She indicates the papers on the desk.

SLOANE (cont'd)

You know they're right.

She gently touches his arm.

*

SLOANE (cont'd)

I need you to do this.

*
*

Max looks down at the papers, at the words written about him,
about his future.

(CONTINUED)

MAX
I'll think about it.

CUT TO:

FACE of FAITH FULLER DUVALL

a single tear slowly draws a path down her cheek...

Barty

looks down at the scene through the camera lens, perched high up on a lift.

BARTY
CUT! The lights all wrong. I need no shadows and more diffusion. She has to look like an angel.

A series of gaffers scurry around to fix the lighting.

Max saunters over to talk with Barty.

Faith lays on a bed. Her head, encircled by an elaborately curled wig, rests on a pillow. She sits up looking clammy, shaking ever so slightly. She tries to stand but immediately sits back down.

Her dresser runs over to her.

MILLIE
Miss Faith, are you alright?

Max observes out of the corner of his eye.

FAITH
I'm fine. I'll be fine.

Max approaches. He takes Faith's arm and walks her toward her dressing room.

MAX
I've got her, Millie.
(Whispering to Faith)
You're doing great.

(CONTINUED)

FAITH
(Whispering)
I need a drink.

MAX
I know it's hard, but --

She shakes her head.

FAITH
(Cutting him off)
No, Max, I really need a drink.
(Starting to cry)
I can't do this.

Putting his arm around her, he hands her a cigarette.

MAX
This is a tough scene. It's almost
over. You're stronger than you
think, Faith Fuller.

She looks at him, terrified, and takes the cigarette.

A script girl runs up to Max.

SCRIPT GIRL
Mr. Becker, there was a small
explosion over at A. They can't
find Mr. Ginsberg anywhere.

He nods at her, then turns to Faith.

MAX
You can do it.

They lock eyes. She smiles reluctantly and nods her head.

Max turns on his heels and follows the script girl.

CUT TO:

27 INT. GDG, BECKER'S OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUSLY

27

The office appears to be empty, but the desk chair faces the
window.

A KNOCK at the door.

Dunne enters followed by Malcolm.

(CONTINUED)

DUNNE

Max?

The chair swivels.

SLOANE

Max isn't here right now.

She smiles at the two men. Dunne grins back. Malcolm grimaces.

MALCOLM

Standing in for your husband? Don't you have scripts to write?

Dunne raises his eyebrows at Malcolm. Sloane smiles derisively.

SLOANE

That's what the staff is for. Besides, Max is attending to a small skirmish over on Lot A.

She points out the picture window.

SLOANE (cont'd)

That's your territory, I believe?

Malcolm and Dunne look out at

Lot A -- an outside lot set up to look like the desert. Flames shoot out of a small shack. Actors dressed as "cowboys" and "Indians" stand back. Max in the center of the melee appears to be calming down a young woman who looks slightly singed. A remorseful "cowboy" dressed all in white looks on.

MALCOLM

(Taken aback)

I'll just go see if I can be of service.

Sloane watches him leave.

DUNNE

A bit hard on him, weren't you?

SLOANE

Just defending myself.

(CONTINUED)

DUNNE

He's over compensating. He'll calm down.

SLOANE

Of course he will.

Sloane smiles flirtatiously at Dunne. He shakes his head, chuckling.

DUNNE

You are a piece of work.

SLOANE

Thank you.

Silence.

Sloane looks back out the window...

Outside, Malcolm has arrived. He says something to Max. Max responds, then shrugs his shoulder. He leaves Malcolm to finish his job.

Sloane turns back to Dunne.

SLOANE (CONT'D) (cont'd)

You do know it won't be the same here without you.

Dunne puts his arm around her.

SLOANE (cont'd)

Thank you for everything. For me. For Max. It means a lot, the trust you've placed in him.

DUNNE

He earned it.

Sloane leans up and kisses his cheek. Dunne blushes.

Dunne turns and walks toward the door.

DUNNE (CONT'D)

Enough of this silliness, young lady. Your husband seems to have everything under control. And we have movies to make.

He saunters out the door just as Max enters.

(CONTINUED)

DUNNE (cont'd)

Keep up the good work, Becker!

Max watches him go. He turns back to Sloane and notices she's watching Dunne as well.

MAX

What are you up to?

SLOANE

Nothing.

MAX

I know that look, Sloane Becker.
It usually means that --

SLOANE

(Cutting him off)
Nothing. It means nothing.

Max kisses her.

MAX

You know, we haven't spent much
time together since the awards.
(Whispering in her ear)
So, what are you doing tonight?

Sloane grins.

SLOANE

We have plans.

He turns to her.

MAX

(Suspiciously)
What plans?

SLOANE

A small party. Inner circle. You
know. The Selznick's invited us
weeks ago. I know I told you this.

MAX

Sloane, this is the third party
this week. Enough is enough.

She wiggles up to him.

(CONTINUED)

SLOANE

Please? We'll just stay for twenty
minutes. And then, I promise...

She licks her lips and whispers in his ear -- what can only
be imagined by the wide eyes and ear to ear grin on Max's
face.

MAX

You do know how to get around me,
don't you?

She looks at him seductively. Max grins at her.

SLOANE

Party's at 9.

DISSOLVE TO:

Decadence abounds, not only in decor and dress, but in
activity as well.

A wet bar with every kind of booze imaginable...

Clumps of people huddled in groups smoking crudely made
joints, creating the smoky haze that permeates the room...

A solo pianist plays flamboyantly as couples dance
evocatively...

In the midst of the melee, Max and Sloane, with drinks in
hand, dance together....

MAX

(Whispering in her ear)
I think it's been twenty minutes.

A starlet dances by...

STARLET

Mr. Becker, I'm not sure if you
remember me...

Max nods at her and smiles.

(CONTINUED)

STARLET (cont'd)

I'm Paige Dunne, Irwin's niece. I
had a small part in that western
you did last year.

*

MAX

Of course. How are you?

PAIGE

I'd love to come by and meet with
you.

*

Paige's partner dances her away.

*

Max drops the facade.

MAX

I've had enough, Sloane. Why is
this important?

SLOANE

You never know who might be here.

MAX

Nobody's here.

Sloane takes his hand, leading him to the bar.

SLOANE

(Winking at the barkeep)
Another one, hot stuff.
(To Max, grinning)
You're here, aren't you?

Max, bored, leans against the bar, crunching on an ice cube.
He surveys the room. Suddenly, he stands up straight and
stares right at

BEN "BUGSY" SIEGEL

a very large, very tall man with thick black hair and piercing
blue eyes.

He downs his drink and slams it on the bar.

MAX

I'll take another.

Sloane looks up at him.

(CONTINUED)

SLOANE
That's the spirit.

Max grabs her arm and turns her around.

MAX
Look...

Sloane looks and sees

LOWELL GOTHENBERG

a tubby, balding man in his mid 60s, in excessively elegant attire standing with Bugsy. Two or three starlets coo all over Gothenberg, rubbing his bald head, flirting.

SLOANE
How fortuitous. Mr. Lowell
Gothenberg.

Max does a double take.

MAX
I hadn't seen him. I was referring
to the other gentleman.
(Whispering)
That's Bugsy Siegel.

Sloane takes his arm and guides him through the dancers.

SLOANE
Well, let's go introduce ourselves.

MAX
Are you crazy?

Sloane grins at him.

She taps Gothenberg on the shoulder.

SLOANE
Mr. Gothenberg?

The man turns. His face lights up when he sees Max and Sloane.

GOTHENBERG
Why it's the Beckers!

He kisses Sloane's cheek, shakes Max's hand.

(CONTINUED)

GOTHENBERG (CONT'D)

What a real pleasure? Hey, Ben. I want you to meet some people.

Turning from the starlet he's hitting on, Bugsy looks right at Sloane. A large silly grin revealing all his teeth spreads across his face.

BUGSY

I wanna dance with you. *

Sloane laughs at his response.

GOTHENBERG

Ben, this is Sloane and Max Becker.

Bugsy stares at Max. *

BUGSY

I wanna dance with your wife. *

Okay?

(Then staring intently)

Don't I know you? *

Max shakes his head apprehensively, unable to speak. Sloane squeezes his arm.

GOTHENBERG

Max is a producer at my studio.

A light bulb goes off over Bugsy's head.

BUGSY

Yeah, you're that LYDIA guy. Loved that flick. *

He extends his hand, shaking Max's right and left. Then leaning in close...

BUGSY (CONT'D)

Hey, you think you could hook me up with that doll, Faith? *

(With a knowing look) *

She's got class, not like the dames from the old neighborhood. *

MAX

(Smiling uneasily)

I would, but she's married.

Ben bursts into laughter.

(CONTINUED)

BUGSY

So am I -- for all intents and
purposes, ya know.

(Turning to Sloane)

Let's dance, doll.

*
*
*

Before Sloane can protest, Buggy dances her onto the floor.

As she is being twirled away, Sloane gives Max an
encouraging, urging nod.

*
*

Gothenberg chuckles at Buggy's forward nature.

GOTHENBERG

You two came out of the same
neighborhood.

(Thinking aloud)

That's what I like about you
Becker, you're old school. Do
whatever it takes.

*

MAX

I didn't know you were associated
with that...organization.

*

GOTHENBERG

Occasionally he helps me out if I
have trouble with the unions.

*

Looking at his empty glass, Gothenberg heads toward the bar.

GOTHENBERG (CONT'D)

I need a fresh one. How about you?

(Turning to the starlets)

Go mingle, girls. Uncle Lowell's
busy now.

The girls pout and disperse.

Max follows Gothenberg submissively.

GOTHENBERG (CONT'D)

We've never had an opportunity to
talk. Really impressive work with
Prod. #1303. Certainly pulled me
out of a jam.

He pulls a handkerchief out and wipes off his bald head,
where beads of sweat have started to appear.

(CONTINUED)

GOTHENBERG (cont'd)

That Dunne. Quite a fellow. And Ginsberg, too. You're all quite a team, aren't you?

Max takes a deep breath and then begins.

MAX

Well, that dynamic could change once Dunne retires.

Gothenberg looks intrigued.

GOTHENBERG

How do you mean? *

MAX

There's just some concern about Malcolm's handling of the studio without Dunne's guidance. *

Gothenberg shakes him off.

GOTHENBERG

I leave those matters to Dunne. He knows best. *

Max nods emphatically in agreement...

MAX

Absolutely.

Bugsy whirls Sloane by the two men. She raises her eyebrows questioningly at Max. Max surreptitiously waves her on.

MAX (CONT'D)

I'm not sure, though, how clearly he's thinking right now. After all, Malcolm is like a son to him.

The wheels begin to spin in Gothenberg's head, and a storm cloud passes across his eyes.

CUT TO:

A cozy yet fashionable lounge and restaurant in Beverly Hills where the Movie Elite congregate. The patio tables, the prime location where one can see and "be seen," are full.

(CONTINUED)

Max and Sloane lunch at a table out in the sun.

People stop and schmooze with the couple, then walk on by.
Max seems preoccupied. *

SLOANE
You've been awfully quiet since
last night. *

Max doesn't respond. *

SLOANE (cont'd)
You never did tell me what
happened. *

MAX
We talked. *

SLOANE
About what? *

Max flings his napkin on the table. *

MAX
My background, the studio, Malcolm,
Dunne. You know...the usual. *

Sloane stands to avoid an argument. *

SLOANE
Get the bill, darling. I have to
go to the powder room. This
California sun is making me
absolutely shiny. *

She saunters off. He buries his head in his hands. *

A shadow falls across the table. *

MAX
Sloane, I'm not in the mood to
discuss it right now. *

He looks up, but it isn't Sloane. *

BUGSY pulls out a chair and sits down. *

BUGSY
How's it goin' *Beckenstein*? *

Max's mouth drops slightly. Taking a deep breath... *

(CONTINUED)

MAX

Ben.

BUGSY

Trouble in paradise? That's some wife you've got. She's quite a talker.

Max, concerned by this remark, glowers at Bugsy.

MAX

Did you want something?

BUGSY

Just surprised you weren't more friendly like last night that's all.

MAX

I wasn't sure you recognized me.

Bugsy laughs a deep booming laugh. He punches Max on the shoulder.

BUGSY

Still a laugh riot, you are.

(Pause)

So, you went legit, huh? You always were a smart cookie. Lansky hated to see you go.

MAX

Why should he care? He still had you.

BUGSY

Still does.

MAX

I know.

Bugsy stands.

BUGSY

Well, just wanted to say hello...from the old neighborhood.

Max nods. Bugsy turns to go.

MAX

Ben...I like my life.

(CONTINUED)

BUGSY

Do ya?

MAX

I'm not interested in going back.

Bugsy just shrugs.

BUGSY

None of my business. As long as you don't get in my way, I won't get in yours.

He saunters off down the street.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE OSCAR - SIMULTANEOUSLY

In juxtaposition to the bright, casual patio atmosphere, the interior is very "loungy." Dark red velvet booths, dark carpeting, lots of candles, a small stage for a small jazz band which plays around the clock.

In the center circular booth, **Barty** Thornberry sits with a very intense looking young man, FRANCIS "FRANK" THORNBERRY, **Barty's** son. Their conversation is very intimate and ardent.

Barty looks up, distracted by movement at the door.

SLOANE enters and heads toward the ladies room. **Barty** looks down and away as she walks by, but...

FRANK catches her attention. Albeit a brooding young man, he is quite handsome. She stares at Frank and bumps right into...

SLOANE

Excuse me, I'm so sorry.

RILEY LYDECKER, grinning down at her, looking very like a vulture.

LYDECKER

Why, Mrs. Becker? Have you met Mr. Thornberry?

Sloane stares down Lydecker.

(CONTINUED)

SLOANE

I've known **Barty** for years. *

Lydecker CLUCKS to himself.

LYDECKER

No. Mr. Frank Thornberry. Just arrived from the Great White Way.

Sloane stares at Frank, her mouth open. Then she notices **Barty**, who slowly looks up into her face and grins sheepishly. *

SLOANE

Barty. I didn't even see you. *

Lydecker slips into the booth next to Frank and smiles dismissively at Sloane.

LYDECKER

If you'll excuse us, we were right in the middle of something.

Sloane gives **Barty** a hard stare. He looks away, uncomfortable. *

SLOANE

Of course.

Sloane recovering from her shock turns on the charm.

SLOANE (cont'd)

Barty, dear, you must bring your boy by the studio. I hear he's something of a writer. I'd love to show him around our humble offices. *

(to Frank)

If you'd like to see them that is.

Frank doesn't smile, but nods eagerly.

Sloane leaves the trio behind circling around the restaurant and heading back towards the patio. **Staring out the window she sees Bugsy leaving their table. She catches Max's eye and gives him a questioning look. He stares hard at her.** *

Sloane then inclines her head towards the booth behind her. *

Max follows with his eyes seeing **Barty** with LYDECKER... *

DISSOLVE TO:

31 INT. BECKER HOME - EARLY EVENING 31 *

A RUSTLING OF PAPER fills the large parlor. *

MAX sits alone by the window, vehemently turning the pages of the Late Edition. *

A CLACK, a CREAK, a JANGLING of keys, are followed by the echoing of rapid CLICKING heels on the wood floor.

Sloane walks by the parlor and to the great staircase.

She stops...and slowly turns to face Max.

SLOANE

How did you beat me home? *

Max continues to RUSTLE his paper, not looking up.

Sloane removes her shoes, one at a time.

SLOANE (CONT'D)

Max, you've been in a foul mood
ever since we left the party last
night. What happened? *

He throws the papers down.

MAX

You tell me. *

SLOANE

I don't know what you're talking
about. *

MAX

Bugsy seems very impressed with
you. *

Silence. *

SLOANE

What did he say?

Max bends to retrieve the papers. He meticulously organizes them as he speaks.

MAX

What did you do? *

(CONTINUED)

Sloane suddenly laughs. She walks over to Max and sits on his lap. *

SLOANE *

Don't tell me you're jealous. You know me. I flirt. I kept him busy for you. It was perfectly innocent. *

Max pushes Sloane off his lap. *

MAX *

Nothing about Ben is innocent. Remember I know this man. *

Sloane walks towards the staircase. *

SLOANE *

I just wanted him away from Gothenberg long enough for you to -- *

MAX *

(Cutting her off) Damn you. *

SLOANE *

What?

MAX *

DAMN YOU! AND DAMN ME! We were happy. Everything was perfect. This isn't right. I have a bad feeling. If anyone should ever find out...

Sloane slumps onto the bottom step.

SLOANE *

(Almost a whisper) For how long?

MAX *

What?

SLOANE *

Everything was perfect, for how long?

MAX *

It doesn't matter. It was perfect now.

(CONTINUED)

Sloane lays her head on her arms.

SLOANE

Now means nothing. A fleeting moment to love or hate or tolerate or fear...and then it's changed. And then where are you? Nowhere. You've got to keep fighting, no matter what it takes, because what you have now, at this moment, will be gone in the next. Just like...

*

*

Max moves towards her. She pulls away.

*

SLOANE (cont'd)

You men think you're the only ones who have to fight. Well, you're wrong. I've been fighting every day of my life. And I always seem to be fighting men...my father, the church, the doctors. I never thought I would be fighting you.

*

*

*

*

MAX

Sloane...

SLOANE

No! Don't you understand? I did this for you. Everything I do is for you. The one thing I wanted for me...I can't accomplish. But you, you never have been willing to see what you are truly capable of. Well, I see it. Others see it. Don't fight me. Not now. Not after everything I've sacrificed. See yourself. Please just see yourself as I see you.

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

Max kneels at her feet.

MAX

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Sloane looks at him with reddened eyes.

SLOANE

Don't you see? We're too smart to let the now be enough.

*

Max kisses her forehead.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

Okay.

Sloane nods at him.

MAX (cont'd)

Go on up to bed.

*

He helps her stand, picking up her shoes for her.

She slowly ascends the staircase...

*

SLOANE

Aren't you coming?

*

MAX

I have a meeting with
Gothenberg...and Dunne tonight.

*

*

Sloane stares at him, a bit of hope shining in her eye.

*

SLOANE

I didn't sleep with him.

*

*

MAX

I know.

*

*

CUT TO:

Barty and Frank sit on the set.

*

BARTY

I just wish I could be sure that
this was the right move for you.

*

He puts his arm around Frank protectively.

BARTY (cont'd)

This is not an easy town.

*

Frank laughs lovingly at his father's concern.

FRANK

Neither is New York.

*

Barty sighs.

*

(CONTINUED)

BARTY

I don't know. We did alright there. Even after your mother...

He can't finish and begins to pace.

BARTY (CONT'D)

Francis, how can I protect you when I'm not in control?

FRANK

Dad, look at where you are. From the WPA Theatre to an Academy award. And I did fine with just you. I turned out fine. How can you say you're not in control?

Barty smiles at his son but shakes his head.

BARTY

There are so many powers at work here. The least of which are not those loquacious liliths.

(Frustrated)

How do they do it?

FRANK

They're not prophetic.

BARTY

Probably not, but they are manipulative. You're out here, aren't you?

FRANK

Yes, but --

BARTY

(Cutting him off)

So, which came first? The chicken or the egg? Did they get the idea from a leak in some studio heads office, or was it the other way around?

Frank shrugs.

FRANK

Why does it matter?

(CONTINUED)

From out of the shadows, Max interrupts the father-son parley, surprising them both.

MAX

Exactly. Why does it matter?

BARTY

I didn't think anyone else was here.

MAX

Bax, you worry too much...and think too much. Enjoy this. Your success.

(Smiling at Frank)

Your son.

Max claps Barty on the shoulder.

MAX (cont'd)

Go home. Spend some time with Frank. We've got a lot of work to do next week, and the next, ad infinitum...

Barty nods wearily. He and Frank walk out of the building.

MAX (cont'd)

(Yelling after them)

Hey Frank! Don't let your dad read the papers anymore. I need my director to be brilliant not bothered.

Frank waves to him as the door closes.

Max looks around, alone. He wanders around the sound stage, touching cameras, lights, set pieces.

He picks up a prop knife, scrutinizing the light as it bounces off the blade...

DISSOLVE TO:

MAX

I'm not sure how clearly he's thinking right now. After all, Malcolm is like a son to him.

(CONTINUED)

The wheels begin to spin in Gothenberg's head, and a storm cloud passes across his eyes...

GOTHENBERG

You're there every day, not me.
What are your concerns?

MAX

I hate to speak out of turn, sir.

Gothenberg waves him off.

GOTHENBERG

My concern is GDG's best interest.

Max nods and begins...

MAX

Well, sir...

BACK TO: *

Somewhere distant, a clock CHIMES the hour.

MAX

"I go, and it is done. The bell invites me. Hear it not Duncan, for it is a knell that summons thee to heaven or to hell..."

*

Max puts the prop *knife* back down.

*

MAX (cont'd)

Gotta love Shakespeare.

He turns the lights out as he walks out the door...

BLACK OUT.

Title card: CAMEL NEWS CARAVAN

*

SWAYZE (V.O.)
 "Now, let's go hopscotching the
 world for headlines..."

CUT TO:

36 INT. SOUNDSTAGE - EVENING 36

John Cameron Swayze sits at a microphone behind a desk.

SWAYZE
 "That's the story, folks. Glad we
 could get together."

PULL BACK TO
 REVEAL:

37 INT. GDG, DUNNE'S PRIVATE SCREENING ROOM -- EVENING 37

Gothenberg, Dunne, a secretary and two young men huddle
 around one of the first television sets.

GOTHENBERG
 It's sheer genius.

SECRETARY
 It's bizarre. What is it called
 again?

GOTHENBERG
 A television, toots. It's the wave
 of the future.
 (To the two young men)
 Okay, take it away.

The two men exit lugging the set. Dunne nods at the
 secretary and she too exits, shaking her head in disbelief.

DUNNE
 I don't know, Lowell. It's not
 proven yet.

Gothenberg chews aggressively on his cigar. He stares at
 Dunne, then looks to the back of the room. A silent Bugsy
 stands there.

(CONTINUED)

GOTHENBERG

Sure, it's a risk. But I know I'm
right about this. Why the cold
feet?

*
*
*

Dunne looks concerned.

*

DUNNE

Malcolm takes over at the end of
this year. Too big a risk for the
new kid in town.

*
*
*

Doubt crosses Gothenberg's face, then he takes hold of his
cigar and stubs it out.

GOTHENBERG

If you don't think he can handle
it...What about Becker?

*
*

Bugsy moves forward.

*

BUGSY

Yeah, what about 'im? Good man
that Becker.

*

Dunne glowers derisively at Bugsy. Gothenberg gives Bugsy a
"not now" shake of the head.

*

DUNNE

Becker is a great producer. He
can't do what he's best at behind a
desk, running a company.

Gothenberg walks around the room, looking at publicity stills
framed on the walls.

GOTHENBERG

Yes, well, you know best.

Dunne watches Gothenberg for a minute, contemplating his next
words.

DUNNE

Something on your mind, Lowell?

GOTHENBERG

Not at all.

*

(CONTINUED)

DUNNE

You've always trusted my day to day decisions about running the company.

Gothenberg turns to look at him. He grabs his cold cigar and begins to chew on it again.

GOTHENBERG

I've heard some things about this Ginsberg kid. That perhaps he might not be able to cut it...without your guidance that is.

Dunne stands and pats him on the shoulder, reassuringly.

DUNNE

Don't listen to those vultures in the papers. They don't sit where I sit, no matter what they think.

Gothenberg shakes off his hand.

GOTHENBERG

I've never listened to those hacks once in my life. I've heard these things from...other sources. I'm just not sure your thinking clearly on this.

Dunne pulls back and looks at Gothenberg, then glances at **Bugsy** again over his shoulder. He puffs on his cigar, and blows the smoke out angrily. *

DUNNE

I've run this company for almost 20 years. You've never had any complaints. How dare you disrespect me like this?

Bugsy takes a step toward him. *

BUGSY

You sayin' Mr. G's threatenin' you? *

Dunne turns on the man.

DUNNE

Why is he here Lowell? Don't try to strong arm me.

(CONTINUED)

GOTHENBERG

I'm not trying to strong arm you.
I'm merely looking out for the best
interests of GDG.

Dunne blows smoke in Gothenberg's direction.

DUNNE

I think I know GDG's best interests
a little better than you. I'm here
everyday.

GOTHENBERG

(His ire up)

Then why did it take some young,
unknown producer to come and save
your ass when the company was on
the brink of financial ruin?

Dunne and Ginsberg are now almost chest to chest, a "my **cock** *
is larger than yours" stalemate.

Ben watches pleased as Gothenberg tells it like it is.

DUNNE

So, what, I should put Becker in
charge of the studio?

GOTHENBERG

Maybe.

DUNNE

Are you going to override my
decision?

GOTHENBERG

Perhaps.

Bugsy moves closer, his hand inside his jacket, just in case.

Dunne turns on him.

DUNNE

(Turning to **Bugsy**)

Not another move, **Mr. Siegel**. I
know **Mr. Lansky**, you're boss. I'm
sure he'd be interested to know
that your attentions are not
primarily focused on the desert
city.

*
*
*

(CONTINUED)

Bugsy rushes toward him, gun positioned on Dunne. *

BUGSY *

You threatenin' me? *

Dunne's face has begun to turn red. Suddenly, he grabs his left arm and winces in pain. *

DUNNE

You are out of line.

(He gasps for breath)

Max Becker is...

Gothenberg pushes away Bugsy's gun arm, and without warning...

BANG! The gun goes off.

A look of horror passes across Dunne's face as he slumps to the floor. *

Gothenberg and Bugsy stare at one another, confused. *

BUGSY *

What happened? *

He looks around the room. He sees *

A BULLET HOLE in a photo on the wall. *

GOTHENBERG *

Get out of here! *

BUGSY *

Look the bullet didn't even hit him! *

GOTHENBERG *

Bugsy, you can't be found here! *

Get out. *

Bugsy rushes out the door colliding with Max who stands in the door, horror struck. *

CUT TO: *

An uncharacteristic storm is in progress, torrential rain and lightning. *

(CONTINUED)

A very classy, but understated car silently rolls onto the lot. A solitary light shines from a top floor window.

A very distinguished, tall man, in his mid 50's lithely steps out of the car. *

DUVALL (50ish) *

rival producer yet longtime friend of Dunne's. Also, he is the husband of Faith Fuller Duvall. He runs to the door, attempting to dodge rain pellets, and knocks.

No answer.

He knocks again.

Still no answer.

He bangs repetitively on the door...

CUT TO:

A crotchety janitor, SAM -- a bit tipsy, as he periodically takes sips out of a small flask -- very slowly approaches the door. *

SAM *

(Mumbling)

Sweep, sweep, sweep.

Rub-a-dub-dub in the deep.

Storm is brewing; rats are chewing.

What you've sown, you'll reap.

(Knock)

Knock, knock, knock!

Hickory, dickory, dock.

God's asleep; the world should

weep. The Devil's on the clock.

(Banging)

BANG, BANG, BANG!

Clickety, clackety, clang.

Daddy's done; the race begun...

And who'll be next to hang?

Sam opens the door. *

Duvall storms into the building.

(CONTINUED)

DUVALL

Jesus, man. What took you so damned long?

SAM

Busy, busy, busy. Sweep, sweep, sweep.

Sam frowns at Duvall. Duvall leans in to the man and takes a good sniff.

DUVALL

"Drink, drink, drink" more like it. Where's Dunne, old man?

Sam looks up to the ceiling.

DUVALL (cont'd)

I don't have time for guessing games. I have an appointment with him.

SAM

(Surly)

They're up there, Mr. Duvall.

Duvall gives him a stern but confused stare, then heads off towards the staircase.

SAM (cont'd)

You're late, though.

CUT TO:

INT. GDG, DUNNE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Duvall gently opens the door. He surveys the room.

GOTHENBERG paces back and forth...

Barty stands by the bar, refilling a whiskey glass and drinking it down...

GINSBERG sits on the sofa, glassy eyed and rigid...

SLOANE leans against Dunne's desk, a stony look on her face, smoking a cigarette...

SHATTERED GLASS lies under the photo hit by the bullet...

(CONTINUED)

DUVALL

Where's Dunne?

Ginsberg looks up at Duvall, eyes red.

MALCOLM

He's --

He abruptly gets up and leaves the room. *

Duvall looks back at the others. He looks around Sloane, still leaning against the desk...

A man sits in Dunne's chair, staring out the window. The man turns around, remorse on his face.... *

MAX and Duvall face off...

CUT TO:

41 INT. BEVERLY HILLS FUNERAL PARLOR - MORNING

41

Except for the setting, one would think we were back at the Academy Awards. Another major schmooze fest with all the major players present. Max and Sloane direct the guests towards the refreshments. Gothenberg, Barty and Frank, Duvall and Faith, Rosen and Leonard are scattered throughout the crowd. Malcolm stands with the family, including the young starlet, Paige Dunne. *

The crowd parts like the Red Sea to make way for the "Hollywood 3." Duvall catches Malcolm's eye, then looks towards Max. Malcolm follows his gaze. *

The Hollywood 3 are making their condolences to Max, but there is a little something more. A congratulatory pat on the back, a wink of the eye, a knowing smile...

Duvall quietly slips out the front door. Malcolm follows... *

CUT TO:

42 EXT. BEVERLY HILLS FUNERAL PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

42

Duvall stands in the shade of a palm tree, smoking a cigarette. Ginsberg walks up and stands in the shade next to him.

Silence.

(CONTINUED)

DUVALL
What do you think about what's
going on in there?

MALCOLM
A farce.

Duvall nods.

DUVALL
So, what do you plan to do? *

MALCOLM
What do you mean?

DUVALL
Gothenberg's given Becker your job. *
How long do you think you'll last
there under that management?

Malcolm runs his fingers through his hair and sighs.

MALCOLM
I don't know.

DUVALL
I suggest leaving before you are
asked to leave.

Malcolm laughs.

MALCOLM
And where do you suggest I go?

Duvall walks out into the sun... *

CUT TO: *

The studio is beginning to come alive.

Rosen stands outside the gates smoking a cigarette, talking
with the gate guard...

GUARD
(Scratching his head)
Just can't believe it's business as
usual.

(CONTINUED)

Rosen shrugs.

GUARD (cont'd)
You know, I've been here at this
studio as long as Dunne.

Rosen stubs out his cigarette.

ROSEN
That's Hollywood for you. People
come and go.

GUARD
That storm was something, though.

ROSEN
Certainly unusual for this part of
the country.

GUARD
Kinda freaky that it happened on
the very night when Dunne...well
you know. Hey, did you hear that
Bugsy... *

He stops as a car approaches the gate to exit. Rosen steps
back to let the car through. He looks in the window.

DUVALL and MALCOLM

fill the front seat. A few boxes fill the back.

ROSEN
(To Malcolm)
So I guess the rumors are true.

Malcolm just nods.

MALCOLM
What are you doing? *

ROSEN
(Shrugs it off)
It's a job. Makes no difference to
me. Dunne, Becker, you...no
offence. *

MALCOLM
None taken.

Rosen pats the car.

(CONTINUED)

ROSEN

Good luck. Watch your back.

Rosen gives Duvall a conspiratorial nod as they drive through. The guard shakes his head.

GUARD

Dunne raised that kid from a pup.

Rosen walks onto the lot.

ROSEN

Yeah, well, back to business. Good day.

DISSOLVE TO: *

44

I/E. GDG STUDIOS - DAY/NIGHT/DAY

44

MAX walks out of his office nodding at his secretary... *

SECRETARY

(On the telephone)

...Mr. Becker is available tomorrow at 11 a.m., if that works for... *

He passes the writer's office where young FRANK Thornberry vigorously pounds at his typewriter, SLOANE reading over his shoulder... *

SLOANE

"...you never know when fate will step in and offer you a hand instead of a kick." That's good, Frank. That's very... *

...out of the dim hallway lighting, MAX bursts onto the bright, sunny commons lawn between buildings; extras roam about in costume, script girls and assistant directors rush in and out of buildings... *

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

(To an extra)

...good job on that last scene. I'll talk to Mr. Becker about getting you a bigger part on your next... *

...as the sun begins to set, a cameraman up on a lift shouts down to his crew hidden behind a fence... *

(CONTINUED)

CAMERAMAN

...SHOT READY IN TEN. WE'RE ON A
ROLL NOW. LET'S KEEP THE
MOMENTUM...

...MAX observes as the cameraman climbs down from the lift to
have a conversation with ROSS on the outside lot set up as a
battlefield, the actors lounge about in military costumes
smoking, gabbing, waiting...

SOLDIER

...going to be a great movie. Max
Becker is a genius. He's a man
of...

...the door to Studio D closes quietly behind MAX. From the
shadows, he observes Barty intimately talking with FAITH,
placing her head at a certain angle, then rushing to his
chair ready for...

BARTY

ACTION!!

...MAX emerges into the night sky, starless yet reflecting
the Hollywood lights. Employees saunter to their cars,
chatting gayly yet wearily...

BARTY (CONT'D)

...and CUT!

...MAX walks back into his office and sits staring out the
window, watching as the sun comes up...

SECRETARY

(Over a P.A. System)

To all employees: Keeping with
tradition, Mr. Dunne's Sunday
softball games will continue!
Please come by...chicken soup and
apple pie for all!

...and as the employees enjoy themselves, playing a rowdy
game of softball on an empty lot, hovering over picnic tables
covered with food and drink...

DISSOLVE TO:

45 INT. GDG, BECKER'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

45

Max wanders around the room reflecting on the objects still remaining from Dunne's days. Photographs, awards, furniture. In fact, the office hasn't changed since Dunne's death.

The sound of angry voices can be heard outside the door. Max shakes himself out of his reverie.

SECRETARY (O.S.)
You can't just go barging in to Mr.
Becker's office.

SLOANE (O.S.)
What is my name?

SECRETARY (O.S.)
Why, it's Sloane Becker, Mrs.
Becker. *

SLOANE (O.S.) *
And what does the name on that door *
say? *

Sloane opens the door and walks in. She turns back and *
stares out the door. *

SECRETARY (O.S.)
It says --

SLOANE *
(Finishing her sentence
for her)
Becker. *

She slams the door and turns to face her husband.

SLOANE (cont'd)
Perhaps you should talk to your
secretary.

Max continues to stare out the window... *

SLOANE (cont'd) *
Max? Did you hear me? *

He turns to look at her. *

MAX
Hhmm? *

(CONTINUED)

Sloane raises her eyebrows at him, then looks around the room. *

SLOANE

Getting a lot of work done, I see?

The desk is immaculate. *

Max looks nervously down at his feet.

MAX

I feel like I'm in someone else's office. Sloane, I think we went too far. Why was Bugsy here that night? *

(Pointing at the picture with the bullet hole)

Where did that come from? What have I done? *

Sloane sits on the sofa and lights a cigarette. She scrutinizes her husband for a long moment, blowing out a long stream of smoke. *

SLOANE

You did what you had to do. Irwin Dunne was a very sick man. He had a heart attack. *

Max slumps into his chair, shaking his head and mumbling. *

MAX

God forgive me. *

Sloane stands and walks over to the desk. *

SLOANE

Max, this subject is closed. You've been walking around like a zombie. It's time to return to the living. *

Max nods submissively.

SLOANE (cont'd)

Did you read Frank's script? *

Max nods again. He slowly pulls open a drawer and retrieves a dog-eared script. *

(CONTINUED)

MAX

It's the best script I've read in years.

Sloane gives a slight start as if slapped, then forces a smile.

SLOANE

I agree. So what are we going to do about it?

MAX

I've already put it on the schedule. Lew Lipton starts shooting in two weeks.

SLOANE

Why not Barty?

Max's brow furrows, thinking...

MAX

I'm not sure that's such a good idea...to have Barty working with his son.

Sloane raises her eyebrows and puts out her cigarette.

SLOANE

You sound like a jealous lover, not the head of a studio.

CUT TO:

Barty bursts in on Max talking on the phone...

MAX

(Looking up at his troubled face) ...I'm sorry, Jack. Can I call you back?

He hangs up the phone.

MAX (cont'd)

How is it to be working with your son? This is going to be --

(CONTINUED)

BARTY

(Frantic)

Did you get my messages? I've been
leaving you messages.

Max tries to speak but Barty keeps on...

BARTY (cont'd)

They won't load in the set. I've
been stalled for three days. We're
losing money. You have to do
something!

MAX

I'm working on it, Barty.

BARTY

Working on it...

Suddenly Frank, Faith and Sloane barge in to the office.

Max sighs.

FRANK

She's completely rewritten the
character.

SLOANE

Max. You and I agreed that Faith's
character needed to reflect the
actress's age...

Sloane looks over at Faith...

FAITH

I am not a matron. I am an
ingenue.

SLOANE

(Under her breath)

Not anymore you're not.

Faith slumps onto the sofa, fuming. Barty resumes his
worrying.

BARTY

Script changes won't matter if we
have no set to shoot on. I was
here first, Max, and --

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

It's not just the age. You've
turned this sensitive woman into
a...a...a man! Her motivation
doesn't make sense!

Sloane lights a cigarette and glowers at Frank.

SLOANE

What would you know about women and
their motivations, young one?

Frank starts at Sloane...

FRANK

I don't care if you are a woman...

...but Barty holds him back. Max stands...

MAX

CUT! The changes stay. You may
not see it now, but it makes the
story more like life.

FRANK

(Under his breath)
Whose life?

MAX

(Ignoring Frank.)
Faith, you're an actress. This is
your chance to show the world that
you're more than just a pair of
legs and...

BARTY

What about my problem?

Max picks up the phone.

MAX

I'll take care of it. If every one
would please leave, I have to make
a phone call.

Everyone leaves. Max closes his door. He looks at the phone
again, sighs, then dials.

(CONTINUED)

MAX (cont'd) *
Ben, Max Becker. I need a favor... *

CUT TO: *

INT. STUDIO D - DAY

Frank paces the floor. Faith silently smokes a cigarette and sips water from a cup. Next to her, Barty drinks coffee. The three stare at *

THE EMPTY SOUNDSTAGE *

except for the cameras and lights. *

The crew all sit around as well. *

Suddenly, the load-in doors open and men start moving in elaborate set pieces. *

Max saunters onto the soundstage. The whole crew cheers. *

Faith looks up at Max. He pats her shoulder. She pulls away. Barty whispers in Faith's ear. She nods and smiles. Barty follows Max over to a corner, all eyes follow them. *

MAX *
What's wrong with Faith? *

BARTY *
Don't worry about it. She's just *
feeling neglected. I'll take care *
of her now. *

Max looks away. *

MAX *
She's not... *

BARTY *
No. She's still sober. *

Barty looks around at his set being loaded in. *

BARTY (cont'd) *
You did it. How did...? What did *
you...? *

Max smiles wanly. *

(CONTINUED)

MAX

Let's just say I made a call to a friend from the old neighborhood.

Confused, Barty starts to speak then stops.

A stream of excited chatter has erupted outside. People are running up and down the hallways, whispering, rustling papers. Max grabs a newspaper out of an excited stagehand's hand. He blanches...

CUT TO:

48 SPINNING PAPERS OVER THE SOUND OF RAPID TYPING...

48

The spinning papers stop and the newspaper reads:

HOLLYWOOD HERALD, JUNE 22nd, 1947

"BUGS DIES, SIEGEL NOT BUNNY!" BY EMMALOUANNA GRAYSON

DISSOLVE TO:

49 INT. SIEGEL HOLLYWOOD HOME - EVENING

49

Through the open front window of a house, Bugsy can be seen lounging on a chintz sofa reading the evening papers. Another man converses with him.

Suddenly a barrage of bullets shatters the downstairs window and riddles Bugsy's body...

EMMALOUANNA (V.O.)

Residents of the gambling desert village can sleep easier at night. Bugsy Siegel is dead. I guess he got his in the end as did the rampant rumors about his association with a certain studio...

DISSOLVE TO:

50 EXT. SUNSET BOULEVARD - DAY

50

Max, in the back of a chauffeur driven car, reads the newspaper.

(CONTINUED)

CHAUFFEUR

Always seem to be reading these days, sir.

*
*
*

MAX

Mmmhhhhmmm. Seems to be a lot to keep up with...

*
*
*

Headline: HUAC HOVERS OVER HOLLYWOOD

Max shakes his head as he reads the article.

MAX (cont'd)

(To himself)

What now?

*
*
*

Max looks up from the paper and out the window just as they pass an unobtrusive outside cafe, then back at the paper.

*

MAX (cont'd)

Stop the car!

The driver slams on the brakes.

Max slowly turns around, his eyes land on...

Barty sitting with two gentleman deep in conversation. Max does a double take and sees that the two men are...

*

MALCOLM GINSBERG and DUVALL.

MAX (CONT'D) (cont'd)

(Under his breath)

What is he up to?

*

CUT TO:

Max briskly enters the soundstage, with newspaper still in hand. The place is a buzz...

COSTUMER

They're digging into everyone's past. Things that no one is supposed to know.

PROPS MAN

Yeah the bureau's supposedly in on it.

(CONTINUED)

Max stops a passing script girl. *

MAX
What's going on?

SCRIPT GIRL *
They're all in a snit about this *
HUAC stuff. *

MAX
Enough to stop production?

She shrugs and points at a group of men in dark suits. *

SCRIPT GIRL *
They seemed official. Flashed *
badges and everything. *

She saunters off. *

Two young actresses sit smoking cigarettes.

ACTRESS #1
Supposedly, he's afraid they'll
find out about his work with the
WPA Theatre in the 30s.

ACTRESS #2
He surely looked nervous.

ACTRESS #1 *
Oh that's nothing. Barty *
Thornberry always looks nervous. *

Max eavesdrops behind a large set piece. He glances down at
the paper. *

A HAND reaches out and TAPS Max on the shoulder. Max slowly
turns to face *

An FBI AGENT. *

FBI AGENT *
Mr. Becker? *

Max offers his hand to shake. *

MAX *
Yes. I'm Max Becker. *

The agent ignores the hand. *

(CONTINUED)

FBI AGENT

Is there some place we can talk privately? We have some questions to ask you about Barty Thornberry.

*
*
*
*

DISSOLVE TO:

52 SPINNING PAPERS OVER THE SOUND OF RAPID TYPING... 52

The spinning paper stops and the headline reads:

TINSELTOWN TRIBUNE, NOVEMBER 25, 1947

"BIG BOYS BLACKLIST BAD BOYS" by Riley Lydecker

*
*

DISSOLVE TO:

53 INT. CAUCUS ROOM OF THE OLD OFFICE BUILDING, HUAC HEARINGS DAY 53

Chairman J. Parnell Thomas and other US Representatives sit at a table grilling Barty THORNBERRY who continually and adamantly shakes his head at their persecuting questions, refusing to speak. The further they proceed, the weaker Barty becomes until he has completely broken down. In the crowded room, many suits watch on in dismay and disgust. Amongst the men sits Max Becker...

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

LYDECKER (V.O.)

Studio Heads are all on the defensive. Protecting their own...interests that is. One by one the rank and file are taking the stands. Ten have already refused to testify, and what do they get? Well, I think the headline says it all...

*
*
*
*
*
*
*

FADE TO:

54 INT. GDG, BARTY'S OFFICE - MORNING 54

Barty sits alone in his office. Opened boxes, half full, lay about the room. Unfaded squares of wall paper dot the walls where pictures have been removed.

*
*
*

He lays his head down on the desk, defeated.

Becker stands in the door, watching.

MAX

Barty?

Barty looks up.

BARTY

I thought we were friends.

Max nods his head meekly.

BARTY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Max, I'm not a communist.

Max leans against the door jamb.

MAX

This is the motion picture
business, Barty. You know it
doesn't matter what the truth
actually is, just what it looks
like.

BARTY

There's a blood bath going on. I
didn't think you'd be part of it.

Max offers his hands up in submission.

MAX

It was either you or the studio.

BARTY

I see, the good of the many over
the good of the one.

MAX

I saved Frank for you. Gothenberg
wanted him gone too. Being your
son and all. I did what I could.
Doesn't that count for something?

Barty picks up a photo of Max, Sloane and Barty at Max and
Sloane's wedding.

BARTY

Doesn't this count for something?

MAX

It's not personal. It's business.

(CONTINUED)

BARTY

At one time, that was a distinction
that you disdained.

Barty's teary eyes stare into Max's. Max almost loses his
composure, then he abruptly leaves...

CUT TO:

55 INT. GDG HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS

55

Max walks slowly down the hallway, not paying attention to
where he's going. He collides with

a furious FRANK.

MAX

Frank...

BACK TO:

56 RESUME. BARTY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

56

Barty stares dumbfounded at the door. Then, the tears start
to fall. He sobs, taking sips out of the flask between
breaths. He looks at his Academy Award. Reaching under some
papers, he pulls out a revolver...

BACK TO:

57 RESUME. GDG HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS

57

Frank stares at Max but doesn't speak.

MAX

My hands were tied. I have a
studio to run.

FRANK

My father said you were
different...

BACK TO:

58 RESUME. BARTY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 58 *

Barty walks to the window, revolver and Oscar in tow. Wiping the tears from his face, he stares out into the bright sunlight, people milling about on the ground. He turns away and raises the gun...

BACK TO: *

59 RESUME. GDG HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS 59 *

FRANK *

...He was so proud when he brought me out here. Couldn't wait for me to meet you. He called you a great man. A man who takes risks. Do you know what I see? *

A GUN SHOT followed by a loud CRASH, and then SCREAMING and FRANTIC SHOUTING interrupt him. *

Frank looks at Max and they both rush down the hall towards... *

BACK TO: *

60 RESUME. BARTY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 60 *

The door bursts open.

There is a GAPING HOLE in the WINDOW. A gentle breeze blows at the papers on the desk.

They slowly walk to the window and look down... *

On the ground below, a crowd of people has gathered around the BROKEN AND BLOODY BODY of Barty THORNBERRY. Laying next to him, a GUN and his OSCAR, perfectly intact. *

Frank chokes a sob in his throat. *

MAX

(With regret)

Frank, I'm so -- *

Frank slowly turns to Max, a tear tracing a path down his cheek. *

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

I see an executioner.

Frank brushes past the crowd of people who have gathered at the door. He stops only for a moment to look at

SLOANE.

Her eyes, welling with tears, she silently pleads with him. He merely shakes his head and storms past.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GDG, MAIN ENTRANCE - LATE MORNING

Becker drives onto the lot. The gate guard reads the paper. On the front of the paper is a quarter page photograph of...

BARTY THORNBERRY.

Max averts his eyes and continues driving.

As he drives through the lot, everywhere he looks people are reading the paper. The photograph staring at him with accusing eyes wherever he turns.

He becomes increasingly more agitated. He turns into his parking space and hits the curb with a jolt. He slams the car door and begins to walk toward Studio D.

Passing two young employees, he grabs the paper out of one of their hands and proceeds to rip it to shreds. He then grabs the other's megaphone. He turns out towards the open lot -- full of workers, actors, etc.

MAX

(Yelling into the megaphone)

ANYONE caught with a newspaper of any kind will be dismissed immediately! And I guarantee that they will never work in this town again!

He throws the megaphone at the kid's feet and storms into Studio D, leaving behind the stunned and silent who quickly run to the nearest garbage cans to toss out their papers...

CUT TO:

62

INT. STUDIO D - CONTINUOUS

62

Faith sits stubbornly in a chair, a set piece. She smokes a cigarette, the ashes falling on the chair burning tiny little holes into it. The props mistress runs around her, trying to catch the ashes before they fall.

...Sloane leans over the prop table with FRANK. They go over the script, but there is a coldness between them. The door slams, and SLOANE looks up...

*
*
*

Faith rises from her chair and storms over toward the door...

FAITH

This lighting makes me look like a crone and this monologue makes me sound like a bitch. I thought we were reviving my career, not choking it to death.

MAX leans against the door, wiping his brow. He looks pale and sick...

MAX

Not now, Faith.

Faith HARRUMPHS back to her seat.

Sloane, concerned, slowly walks toward him. Frank follows, out of Max's sight line.

*

Max comes to Sloane, feebly, breathing heavily. Just as he reaches her, Frank steps to the side. Max looks at him and sees...

*

BARTY THORNBERRY toasting him with his Oscar...

*

MAX (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Wha-, what ar--? You're suppo...

*

Sloane frowns at Max, then turns and looks at...

*

FRANK staring stonily, megaphone in hand...

*

SLOANE

Max, it's Frank.

*

Max catches his breath.

*

(CONTINUED)

MAX

I thought...I --

Sloane maneuvers Max away from everyone.

SLOANE

(Whispering)

Get it together.

MAX

I'm fine.

SLOANE

(With just a touch of
sarcasm)

Well, you certainly look fine.

Sloane pours him a cup of water from a pitcher. She forces it into his hand.

SLOANE (CONT'D)

Drink this. Barty was a good friend and a good director. But he didn't have it. If not now, this would have happened eventually.

MAX

He just looked so much like Barty.

Sloane looks over at Frank who converses with Faith, occasionally staring over at Max and Sloane.

SLOANE

He's very different from Barty.
He's also very angry right now.
Tread carefully with him.

Max wanders around the studio -- running his hand over the props, camera, equipment...

MAX

Let's go back.

SLOANE

What?

MAX

Back to New York. Start over again.

Sloane doesn't respond. She's too dumbstruck.

(CONTINUED)

MAX (cont'd)

Suddenly, this doesn't seem important. What does this mean? Can you tell me? I've forgotten what I'm doing this for. Maybe if I could just go back to the beginning. Maybe back to radio. Something simple.

SLOANE

It was never simple, Max.

MAX

Maybe not, but I knew what it meant.

SLOANE

We moved out here to start over again. To find meaning, as you put it. You can't keep running just because it gets complicated.

MAX

I keep running because innocent people keep dying.

*

Sloane winces. Max reaches out to comfort her but she pulls away.

*

*

MAX (cont'd)

I didn't mean the baby.

*

*

Sloane shakes her head.

*

SLOANE

Don't!

*

(Pause)

*

Did you pull the trigger?

Max shakes his head.

MAX

Where do you get it?

SLOANE

What?

MAX

The strength. The hardness. The heartlessness.

Sloane walks away from her husband.

SLOANE

Someone's got to be that way. Until you completely step up to the plate, then the job falls on me.

MAX

I just don't think I can do this anymore.

She turns on him.

SLOANE

You don't have a choice. No more running away. This is all yours. You have to run it. And you will.

Max nods weakly, watching Sloane as she leaves.

CUT TO: *

INT. SLOANE BECKER'S OFFICE - LATE EVENING

Hunched over a typewriter, Sloane TAPS furiously. A cigarette burns in the overflowing ash tray and another in between her lips. She sings silently to herself... *

SLOANE

"I'll get by as long as I have you. Though there'll be rain and darkness too. I'll not complain..." *

Sam empties the garbage can in the exterior writers' office. He begins to sing along with Sloane. *

SLOANE (cont'd)

SAM

"...I'll laugh it through. Oh but fear may come to me that's true..." "..."I'll laugh it through. Oh but fear may come to me that's true..." *

Sloane stops typing. Sam pokes his head around her door. *

SAM

"...but what care I. Say I'll get by..." *

Sloane grins at him. *

(CONTINUED)

SLOANE

He's at home. Probably wondering where I am...or not.

Sam takes out his flask and takes a sip. He offers it to Sloane.

SAM

Love is a two way street.

She takes it and drinks.

SLOANE

Yes it is, but it's only uphill one way.

She walks out the door.

FADE TO BLACK:

The SOUND OF A PROJECTOR as the film winds itself out.

FADE IN:

INT. GDG, BECKER'S PRIVATE SCREENING ROOM

The lights come up.

Max stands in the back of the room and surveys his silent minions.

MAX

Well, folks?

No one speaks. They all squirm silently.

FRANK starts to speak, then stops himself. Then...

FRANK

(Pointedly at Sloane)

It's flat. The story just doesn't go anywhere.

SLOANE

It's your script.

Max puts his hand on her arm, silencing her.

MAX

I agree. So what are we going to do about it?

From the back of the room...

ROSEN

Shelve it.

MAX

We can't shelve it. Release date is in three weeks.

Rosen, sitting off to the side, continues.

ROSEN

Duvall's first picture with the new studio, Fountainhead Pictures, comes out the end of next week.

MAX

And?

ROSEN

Hear it's pretty good. They've also got a big publicity stunt planned. A new star.

MAX

Who is it?

ROSEN

Dunne's niece.

A universal "OH" resounds through the room.

MAX

We're definitely not shelving it. Maybe the name of Faith Fuller will pull us through.

He turns to Frank.

MAX (cont'd)

Frank, I want to meet with you and Sloane in my office in ten minutes.

Frank just nods.

FRANK

I agree with Rosen. Shelve it.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

There's a reason why I'm running
the studio, not Rosen.

*
*
*

CUT TO:

*

*

The marquee reads

ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN Starring CARY GRANT and PAIGE DUNNE, a
FOUNTAINHEAD PICTURES PRODUCTION.

*

Throngs of people saunter out of the theatre into the
afternoon sunlight. They squint at the light with grins on
their faces.

WOMAN

Why can't my husband be like that?
So romantic.

HUSBAND

Are you going on about that Grant
again? Let's talk about Paige
Dunne...hubba, hubba...

ANOTHER WOMAN

These movie companies need to make
more like that. That GDG place
keeps making those depressing
flicks.

As the crowd thins out, Max stands alone under the marquee.
He watches the people spread out into the street, then slowly
saunters off himself.

*

Three distinct figures step out from the shadows. They wear
sunglasses and watch with bemused grins on their faces.

Riley takes off his glasses, to get a better look.

LYDECKER

Well?

MADGE

I must say, I truly thought his run
would last longer than this. Why,
it hasn't even been a year yet.

*

(CONTINUED)

EMMALOUANNA

You two are being a bit bleak,
aren't you? I mean really, one
success by Duvall.

*

Madge and Riley glower at Emmalouanna.

LYDECKER

Duvall's success is merely another
thorn in the side.

MADGE

Have you learned nothing, child?
We only have power as long as they
listen to us.

EMMALOUANNA FINALLY NODS IN
UNDERSTANDING.MADGE

Thornberry's suicide speaks words,
without us.

*
*
*
*

EMMALOUANNA

Well, we better go write while
they're still listening.

Madge takes no notice of her, but continues her conversation
with Lydecker.

MADGE

Becker's whole career depends upon
Frank now. Do you think he'll go?

LYDECKER

Most definitely. With a little
help.

EMMALOUANNA

Who's help? Oh, please. The
public's not here. Please stop
talking in riddles.

Madge adjusts her hat and lights up a cigarette.

*

MADGE

I'd say we have some writing to do,
wouldn't you?

Lydecker puts his glasses back on.

(CONTINUED)

LYDECKER

Really, Madge. Must you always point out the obvious.

MADGE

Really, Riley. Must you always have the last word.

Madge saunters off down the street. Lydecker and Emmalouanna following behind.

CUT TO:

The set is once more at a stand still. Faith paces back and forth, haranguing Sloane.

FAITH

I tell you he's not coming in. He called me last night.

SLOANE

Faith, you need to calm down.

FAITH

I need a drink. Your husband is ruining this studio. And ruining me.

SLOANE

My husband has had nothing but your best interests at heart...from the first day he met you.

Faith flicks her ashes at Sloane.

FAITH

And you hate that, don't you?

Max enters and the cast and crew swamp him with questions.

MAX

What's going on?

SLOANE

Apparently, Frank isn't here.

Max looks around.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

Where is he?

Sloane shrugs her shoulder. Max looks at Faith. She just smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. DUVALL'S OFFICE - MORNING

Frank sits across from Duvall. Ginsberg leans against the desk.

DUVALL

You'll be in breach of contract.

FRANK

At this point I don't care. He destroyed my father. She destroyed my movie, with his help. I can't stay there.

MALCOLM

Couldn't we have him write under another name? At least until we get the legalities worked out.

Malcolm looks at Duvall.

Silence.

DUVALL

Frank, could you give us a moment.

Frank nods and exits.

DUVALL (cont'd)

This could be difficult. And expensive. We're just getting our feet on the ground.

MALCOLM

ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN is a smash. It's raking in huge amounts at the box office.

Duvall considers for a moment.

DUVALL

You think we should do this.

(CONTINUED)

MALCOLM

I don't know if we should, but I want to.

Duvall nods.

DUVALL

In a way I admire him. A man with the survival instinct, that's what it takes to make it here. What a shame for it to go to waste. It's distasteful to me to have to take him down.

MALCOLM

But you are going to take him down?

DUVALL

If he doesn't get me first...

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO D - MORNING

Max and Sloane sit on the now empty set.

SLOANE

Do you think he'll come back?

Max shrugs.

MAX

Doubtful.

SLOANE

What are you going to do?

MAX

Let him go. He's useless to me here.

SLOANE

Max, I don't think that's a good idea.

He kisses his wife.

MAX

You worry too much.

(CONTINUED)

Sloane walks over to the director's chair. *

SLOANE *

It's going to look bad. Letting
Barty's son go without a fight. It
almost makes you look... *

MAX *

What? Guilty? *

Sloane nods. *

MAX (cont'd) *

I'm not guilty. I didn't pull the
trigger, you said so yourself. *

SLOANE *

Max, people are starting to talk.
The rumors about this studio,
Dunne's death, your association
with Bugsy, Barty's suicide-- *

MAX *

(Cutting her off) *

Since when do you listen to gossip? *

SLOANE *

(Stubbornly) *

I don't listen to gossip. But
others do. And all gossip begins
with a truth. *

From across the room there is a SMASH. Max and Sloane jump
apart. They look towards the noise. *

Faith stands there, a broken mug of coffee at her feet.
Coffee stains spattered at the hem of her robe. *

FAITH *

Oh dear. Clumsy me! So sorry.
Didn't mean to interrupt. *

MAX *

What are you doing here? I broke
everyone for lunch. *

FAITH *

I'm on lunch. I just needed a
little coffee with my cigarettes.
On my way back to my room. Carry
on, carry on. *

(CONTINUED)

She SWISHES off the set.

*

Max and Sloane stare off after her.

*

SLOANE

*

We'll have to do something about her. Soon.

*

*

MAX

*

I'm more concerned about her husband right now.

*

*

SLOANE

*

Never underestimate the power of a woman.

*

*

(Pause)

*

Especially an actress.

*

Max chuckles at his wife.

*

MAX

*

I'll leave Fabulous Faith to you.

*

SLOANE

*

Oh goody!

*

Max suddenly stands.

*

SLOANE (cont'd)

*

Where are you going?

*

MAX

*

To the Three. I need information about Duvall.

*

*

Sloane lights a cigarette and watches as her husband leaves the studio.

*

*

SLOANE

*

I think I know how Dr. Frankenstein felt.

*

*

She sighs to herself...

*

CUT TO:

*

Faith sits on the bed in a negligee.

*

(CONTINUED)

She turns at the MUFFLED sound of a door down below. She stretches out on the bed, catlike. *

Duvall opens the bedroom door and drops his briefcase when he sees his wife, provocatively propped on the bed. *

DUVALL
What's the matter? *

FAITH
It's going to hell over there. *
That's what's the matter. I want *
out. *

DUVALL
Faith...

FAITH
They're ruining my career. You
don't want that to happen, do you?

DUVALL
Just a little while longer.

She stops the act and slumps on the bed, a mess of tears.

FAITH
You don't know what's going on *
there. I don't know if Dunne's *
death was an accident. And Barty. *
And did you know that Max's name *
isn't really Becker? I think they *
might kill me. *

Duvall goes to his wife. He gently touches her shoulder.

DUVALL
You're tired. You're imagining *
things. Max Becker is not going to *
kill you. *

She looks up at him through reddened eyes.

FAITH
How do you know? *

DUVALL
Because you are a huge money maker *
for GDG. And money means success. *
And Max wants success. *
(He kisses her...briefly)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DUVALL (cont'd)
Please, my love, just a little
longer.

Faith wipes away her tears, and nods in agreement.

FAITH
And then when I'm out we'll --

DUVALL
Yes, yes, of course.

FAITH
You promise?

Duvall walks over to the window.

DUVALL
Yes. Whatever you want.

Faith comes up behind him and puts her arms around him, squeezing him tightly.

FAITH
I just know it will make everything
better.

Duvall stares out the window, uncomfortable in her grasp.

CUT TO:

The Hollywood Three sip martinis at the center table in complete silence. They look up in unison as Becker approaches the table.

LYDECKER
Sit down.

Max joins them.

EMMALOUANNA
Would you like a martini?

He shakes his head.

LYDECKER
You're on shaky ground, young
Becker.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

I know.

LYDECKER

Do you? *

MADGE

Fountainhead's first picture has
certainly given GDG a run for its
money. *

Max locks eyes with her.

MAX

Why do you say that?

MADGE

Why else would you call us?

Max looks away.

MAX

So what do I do?

LYDECKER

You have to keep Duvall and
Ginsberg from getting Frank
Thornberry for one.

MAX

Do they want him?

The three shake their heads in unison.

LYDECKER

They'll be trying to tempt him
away. Now that Barty's out of the
picture. *

EMMALOUANNA

Another mistake on your part, Maxy.

Again, Max locks eyes with his accuser.

MAX

What do yo mean?

EMMALOUANNA

Not standing by your friend in the
face of adversity. *

(CONTINUED)

She giggles at Max's distress.

He buries his head in his hands.

MAX

I never meant for him to die. Good
God, it was the government. I
didn't do anything that the other
studios didn't do.

*
*
*
*

Emmalouanna pats his head.

LYDECKER

No time for regrets now. How are
you going to keep Frank?

MAX

I'm not. He's more trouble than
he's worth. It's better to cut my
losses. I've got other directors.

*
*
*

Riley and Madge smile at each other.

MADGE

Do you think that's wise?

*

Max smiles derisively at her.

MAX

You question the man destined for
Olympus?

*
*

Madge sits back, silent, her arms crossed over her chest.

LYDECKER

No need for sarcasm. We're just
trying to help.

Max laughs.

MAX

Of course you are.

Max gets up.

Lydecker places a menacing hand on Max's arm.

LYDECKER

I'd be careful if I were you. Past
lives have a funny way of
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LYDECKER (cont'd)
resurfacing at the most inopportune
moments.

MAX
What do you know?

Madge leans toward him, sipping her martini.

MADGE
Let's just say, we know who you're
childhood playmates were, Mr...
Beckenstein.

Max pulls his arm away from Lydecker.

MADGE (cont'd)
And if we know, well, who's to say
Duvall doesn't? Remember, Max,
it's survival of the fittest here.
No one knows that better than you.

MAX
If there's nothing else, you've
been a big help. *

Max turns to leave.

Emmalouanna whispers something in Madge's ear. She in turn
whispers in Riley's. *

LYDECKER
Becker! One last thing.

Max turns back.

LYDECKER (cont'd)
There are rumors.

MADGE
Just rumors, right now.

LYDECKER
Gothenberg is considering making a
move into television, selling off
his film division to the highest
bidder.

Max laughs at them.

MAX
Yes. I heard that *rumor* too. I
even saw his ingenious little box
(MORE) *

(CONTINUED) *

MAX (cont'd)

once. It'll never happen. How can anyone possibly make money from television? I would think even you three would dismiss that.

*

He walks out of the cafe, still laughing.

LYDECKER

It's going to be bad.

Madge and Emmalouanna nod in agreement. Then all three return to their martinis.

CUT TO:

*

Faith sits alone at the bar. There is a glass of bourbon and a glass of club soda in front of her. She looks from one to the other. Then downs the entire glass of club soda.

FAITH

Another.

The bartender refills the club soda. Faith looks at him.

FAITH (cont'd)

Where's Devlin?

BARTENDER

He hasn't been here in over a year.

FAITH

Neither have I.

Sloane walks into the bar. She sees Faith sitting alone. She sits next to her.

FAITH (CONT'D)

You. What are you doing here?

Sloane nods to the bartender.

SLOANE

Bourbon.

The bartender nods.

SLOANE (cont'd)

I'd always hoped we could be friends.

(CONTINUED)

FAITH

Hah!

The bartender returns with Sloane's bourbon. She looks at it but doesn't drink. She notices Faith's untouched glass.

SLOANE

Why buy it if you're not going to drink it?

FAITH

Leave me alone.

Sloane shakes her head.

SLOANE

You were such an inspiration for me. I wrote so many great characters, all for you. And as you grew, my characters grew.

Faith looks at her.

FAITH

It's not going to work. I'm not a man.

Sloane takes a sip of her drink.

SLOANE

I know. That's why I'd hoped we could be friends. It's hard being a woman alone in a boys club.

Faith laughs.

FAITH

And they say Hollywood's the one place where we can be on top.
(She looks at her drink)
My husband can tell you, I've never been on top.

She laughs at her joke. Then picks up the drink and looks closely at it.

FAITH (cont'd)

Do you want children, Sloane?

(CONTINUED)

SLOANE

(Distant)

I never really thought about it. I
mean, I can't have...Max and my
scripts are my children.

*
*
*
*

A look of acknowledgement passes across Faith's face.

*

FAITH

Well I want children.

*
*

Sloane nods her head.

Faith downs the bourbon. She grimaces.

FAITH (cont'd)

I'd forgotten how good that tastes.

SLOANE

How long has it been?

FAITH

Eighteen months.

SLOANE

I never knew it was a problem.

FAITH

It wasn't...for me.
(She looks at Sloane's
drink.)
Just for Duvall.

Sloane pushes her drink over to Faith.

SLOANE

I'm not really a bourbon drinker.

Faith downs the drink.

FAITH

If it weren't for him, I wouldn't
be where I am today.

SLOANE

Where's that?

FAITH

In the heavens. Didn't you know?
I'm a star.

(CONTINUED)

Sloane laughs.

SLOANE
Yes, actually I'd heard that.

FAITH
Barkeep, another.

He does it.

FAITH (cont'd)
A pretty face and not much else.
That's what I have. You'd think
that would have been enough, but I
was eighteen, never been kissed and
in Nebraska. So, I came here. The
one place where a pretty face was
worth a million bucks. And he
found me, and he made me. Now I
have what thousands of little girls
dream of. I'm their role model.
And do you know what I want?

*

Sloane shakes her head.

FAITH (cont'd)
I want to be a housewife in
Nebraska with three children.

Sloane reaches towards her, but Faith pulls away.

SLOANE
You have a wonderful husband.
There's plenty of time for children
still.

FAITH
(Laughing, on the verge of
hysteria)
What do you know? If I wanted an
annulment, a judge would grant it.
My marriage has never been
consummated. I go to sleep every
night wondering: is it me, is he
impotent, or...

She looks up at Sloane, daggers in her eyes.

FAITH (cont'd)
...does he just not like women?
This...

(CONTINUED)

Holding up her drink...

FAITH (cont'd)

...was my only passion. And I gave it up for him. Well, no more.

She drinks it down.

FAITH (cont'd)

Do you know about that? Sacrifice?

Sloane nods.

SLOANE

More than you know.

Standing, wobbling a bit, she places her hand on Sloane's shoulder.

FAITH

Well, there you go. Just like girlfriends, sharing all our dirty little secrets.

She stumbles to the door.

FAITH (cont'd)

Perhaps you can share yours with me sometime, Mrs. Becker.

She leaves.

Sloane lights a cigarette and stares at Faith's empty glass. A tear starts to fall but she quickly wipes it away.

She looks to the end of the bar and sees a woman, shabbily dressed, face almost completely hidden by a large floppy hat. She has been there the entire time.

SLOANE

(Sighing, what's done is done.)

Barkeep, a martini for the lady at the end of the bar.

Sloane puts money down and leaves.

As she sips on the martini, the woman looks up...

(CONTINUED)

It is MADGE MILFORD...

DISSOLVE TO:

72 SPINNING PAPERS OVER THE SOUND OF RAPID TYPING... 72

The spinning paper stops and the headline reads: *

LOS ANGELES DAILY SCOOP, OCTOBER 1st, 1947

"FAITH-FULL OF JACK...DANIELS REVEALS ALL" BY MADGE MILFORD *

DISSOLVE TO: *

73 INT. AN UPSCALE GAY BROTHEL, L.A. - LATE EVENING 73 *

A lovely transvestite sings on a stage. In the audience, well-dressed Hollywood insiders watch with rapt attention. A drunk Errol Flynn sits at one table with two transvestites. James Whale stands at the side of the stage ogling the performer. From a back hallway, Duvall emerges. He hands a young man a large wad of cash, then pushes his way through the crowd... *

MADGE (V.O.) *

...and I want it noted that I never write gossip. So for those of you who have been speculating about Duvall's marital relations...a little truth serum in the form of an entire bottle of bourbon had the little wife confirming all your dirty thoughts. ... *

DISSOLVE TO: *

74 INT. DUVALL'S OFFICE - DAY 74 *

Ginsberg reads over a script. Duvall reads over his shoulder. He leans over and points something out in the script. As he does so, his hand lightly brushes Ginsberg's hand... *

MADGE (V.O.) *

Perhaps now we know why he snapped up the handsome Ginsberg so quickly...I can see the graves (MORE) *

(CONTINUED)

MADGE (V.O.) (cont'd)
being dug from where I sit, and
remember I sit pretty high up..."

CUT TO:

Duvall sits quietly at the table drinking coffee, staring into space. The newspaper is open in front of him.

Faith shuffles in, still in her bathrobe. She pours herself a cup of coffee.

DUVALL
Don't you have work today?

FAITH
I have a touch of the flu. I
called in sick.

Duvall nods his head. Faith looks at the papers. She sees MADGE'S COLUMN and it doesn't take long...

She looks at Duvall, fear in her eyes.

He rinses his coffee cup in the sink.

Faith looks around the room.

A SUITCASE waits by the door.

FAITH (cont'd)
Are you going somewhere?

He shakes his head.

DUVALL
You'd better get dressed. Palm
Desert is at least two hours away,
and I have to be back for meetings
this afternoon.

FAITH
(Panicked)
Please, don't send me back there.
I can't go back there... I'll, I'll
be...in breach of contract.

DUVALL
No. You have an out for illness.

(CONTINUED)

Faith slams her coffee cup on the table.

FAITH

You're the one that's ill!

Duvall stands by the door.

DUVALL

(No emotion)

Get dressed, Faith.

CUT TO:

Sloane paces the floor. Becker walks in and closes the door. He smiles at his wife. Sloane looks concerned.

SLOANE

I didn't think he'd send her away.

MAX

It's okay.

SLOANE

It's okay?!? We've lost our
director and now our leading
actress. We're in production.
What are --

*

MAX

(Cutting her off)

These are all things I have to
worry about as the head of the
studio. You my beautiful little
scribe need to worry about your
scribbling.

He kisses her head.

SLOANE

You're awfully calm.

MAX

We needed to get rid of her, I knew
that. I've had Caroline Laredo on
hold. She steps in tomorrow.

*

SLOANE

What's happened to you?

(CONTINUED)

MAX

I'm enjoying my job. Problem solving. And I'm quite good at it. And thanks to my very smart wife, she not only got rid of one problem, but possibly two.

Max smiles to himself.

*

CUT TO:

77 INT. DUVALL PICTURES, DUVALL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

77

Ginsberg and Rosen lean over some paperwork.

ROSEN

Three films in production now. They'll get finished. Two more are slated to go into production before the end of the year.

Duvall enters. Malcolm and Rosen stop and stare.

MALCOLM

Everything okay?

Duvall looks briefly down at the floor, then back at the two men.

DUVALL

Faith is back in detox, and we have work to do.

ROSEN

Aren't you worried about the repercussions?

DUVALL

Rosen, you can't believe everything you read?

(Pause)

Shall we continue?

The two men nod.

ROSEN

Becker doesn't know it yet, but the films not yet in production are about to get cancelled.

*

(CONTINUED)

MALCOLM

Are you sure?

ROSEN

Saw the memo from Gothenberg myself. The rumors are about to become reality. Gothenberg is definitely moving into television.

Duvall steps back.

DUVALL

What's he doing with the properties he already owns?

ROSEN

Some will be adapted for television. The rest go up to the highest bidder -- as a group.

MALCOLM

So, he's basically selling off GDG, the movie company.

Rosen nods.

DUVALL

What about Thornberry's script?

ROSEN

Already in production.

There is a knock at the door. Duvall opens it a crack. He nods his head. He closes the door. He nods to the other two. They quickly straighten up the papers and put them away.

Frank Thornberry enters.

DUVALL

Welcome Frank. Have a seat.

Frank sees Rosen, nods his head in recognition.

FRANK

I'll stand, thank you.

MALCOLM

How's your new office? Everything all right?

(CONTINUED)

Frank nods. He looks from one man to the other.

DUVALL
What can we do for you?

FRANK
I need your help.

MALCOLM
Your script?

Frank nods.

FRANK
Can I have some water?

Duvall gets it for him.

DUVALL
It's already in production, there's
nothing we can do.

Frank sits and gulps down the water.

FRANK
I looked over my contract. They
own all properties written by me
while under contract at GDG.

*

Duvall nods.

DUVALL
That's standard.

FRANK
What if I told you that I didn't
write that script while under
contract at GDG?

Duvall, Ginsberg and Rosen all look at each other.

CUT TO:

Becker reaches for the door, but it won't open. He tugs at
it. He reaches into his pocket, takes out his keys and
unlocks the door.

*

Opening the door wide, he sees an empty, dark set...

(CONTINUED)

MAX

Hello!

His voice ECHOES.

He closes the door, turns and determinedly walks across the lot.

CUT TO:

INT. GDG, BECKER'S OFFICE - IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING

Becker storms through the door. His secretary stands there nervously holding a stack of messages. Gothenberg, Rosen and Sloane are all there. *

MAX

What the hell is going on?

GOTHENBERG

Now, Max. Calm down. We have a little problem.

MAX

Why is my set dark?

ROSEN

We've been shut down.

GOTHENBERG

Only temporarily. It seems that Frank has put in a complaint to the union.

SLOANE

He claims he didn't write BLIND AMBITION while under contract.

Max looks at her. She falters.

SLOANE (cont'd)

He gave me the script. I just assumed...

Max glowers at her. *

ROSEN

He's working at Fountainhead. Duvall's lawyers are in the mix I'm sure. *

(CONTINUED)

Gothenberg takes out a cigar and begins to chew on it.

GOTHENBERG

Very sticky situation. Very sticky indeed.

He opens the door.

GOTHENBERG (cont'd)

Rosen, Sloane, would you excuse us for a moment? There are some issues I've been wanting to discuss with Max.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE OSCAR - AFTERNOON

Max sits at the bar, downing a whiskey and soda.

Duvall enters and slowly approaches.

BARTENDER AT CAFE OSCAR

Hey, Mr. Duvall. The usual?

*

Duvall nods and slips onto the stool next to Max.

*

Max and Duvall don't look at each other. They sip their drinks in silence.

DUVALL

I'm here. What now?

MAX

You shut me down.

DUVALL

Correction, the union shut you down.

Max slams his drink down on the bar.

MAX

Dammit Duvall! What the hell are you doing?

Duvall shakes his head.

DUVALL

It's all part of the game.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

You have Frank. I let him go. I practically gave him to you.

DUVALL

So, I should thank you? Fine. Thank you Mr. Becker.

Max stands.

MAX

Don't screw with me? You don't want to do that.

DUVALL

Perhaps not, but I'm not an old man with a heart condition. Or a drunk. As for my personal life, well...

(Shrugging his shoulders)

...it's an open book.

Becker stares hard at Duvall.

MAX

I don't know what you mean, but I suggest you keep your hands within the confines of your own studio. Leave mine alone.

He throws a fifty on the bar.

MAX (cont'd)

Bartender, Mr. Duvall's drink is on me.

CUT TO:

81 INT. GDG, SLOANE BECKER'S OFFICE - EVENING

81

The outer office is empty and dark. Sloane sits alone at her typewriter. She looks at a blank page of paper. She begins to type, then stops. She rips out the page and crumples it up, throwing it on the floor.

She starts over. Repeat of above.

She picks up a script...

CLOSE UP

(CONTINUED)

TITLE: BLIND AMBITION

BY: Frank Thornberry

Sloane thumbs through the script, then throws it down. She picks up her Oscar and paces the room.

She turns off the lights and walks out, carrying her Oscar.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO D - IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING

The set is dark, except for a solitary ghost light in the middle of the floor. *

Sloane slowly walks in, the Oscar clutched in her arms. *

In the shadows, Becker and ANITA, another writer, watch.

ANITA

(Whispering)

Every night since they stopped production on BLIND AMBITION. She sends us home early.

Sloane walks to the center of the room, the light putting her in partial silhouette.

SLOANE

Fools! This is all they see. Their blinded by the "LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION." They don't understand. I am the mother, the creator. Without my words, there would be no story. Without the story, there would be no characters. You directors, you actors, you PRODUCERS...you merely mold what I give birth to. ARE YOU LISTENING TO MY WORDS? Without me, you would be nothing! All of you would be nothing! Without me...

She sits on the set, rocking back and forth, the Oscar cradled in her arms like a baby. She begins to hum "I'll Get By." *

Max turns to Anita. *

(CONTINUED)

MAX
(Whispering)
Why didn't you come to me sooner?

ANITA
(Whispering)
I only followed her for the first
time last night.

*

Max nods.

MAX
(Whispering)
Thanks, Anita. You can go now.

She leaves quietly.

SLOANE
Why did this happen? We did
everything right, darling. We
worked. We charmed them. We
outsmarted them. And now...

She slowly begins to rip the pages off the script and throw
them on the ground around her.

Max walks out of the shadows.

MAX
Sloane?

She turns and looks at him. She smiles vacantly.

SLOANE
Hello, darling.

MAX
I was wondering if you had the
rewrites on the next Mickey and
Molly installment.

SLOANE
I told you. Anita's doing those.
I'm doing the rewrites on BLIND
AMBITION.

Max walks very slowly towards her.

MAX
Sloane, we don't need rewrites on
BLIND AMBITION.

(CONTINUED)

SLOANE

I know Frank is good, but he's still young. He needs my guidance.

Max takes Sloane's hand.

MAX

Sloane, BLIND AMBITION is shut down. Remember?

Sloane stares at him, her face turning to rage.

SLOANE

And I suppose that's my fault? You've been waiting to blame me for that fiasco, haven't you, Mr. Studio Head? Just like you blamed me when I lost the baby. All my fault. When are you going to take responsibility for your mistakes?

*
*
*

MAX

I'm trying. Sloane, I think you should take a break. You've been under a lot of pressure since I took over at GDG.

SLOANE

Are you trying to get rid of me?

MAX

I would never get rid of you. You're my anchor. I just think you need a break.

Sloane walks toward the door.

SLOANE

So that's it. I'm next. Just like Dunne; just like Barty. I put you where you are now. I believed in you, when you didn't believe in yourself. You want me to take a break. Over my dead body. How's that for a challenge?

*

She storms out the door.

CUT TO:

83

INT. DUVALL PICTURES, DUVALL'S OFFICE - DAY

83

Gothenberg, Duvall and Malcolm stand around smoking cigars and drinking champagne. They appear jovial.

DUVALL

Onward and upward, heh Gothenberg?

Gothenberg chuckles.

GOTHENBERG

I know you all think I'm crazy, but I'm telling you television is the wave of the future.

Malcolm shakes his head.

MALCOLM

Yes, but films will never become obsolete.

GOTHENBERG

You never know. Why go out when you can stay in?

DUVALL

This is a celebration! Let's not get morbid, here.

They all laugh.

GOTHENBERG

Now I have your word that you'll absorb as many of GDG's film employees as you can.

DUVALL

Absolutely. Anyone that wants to stay in film will have a job here. With all these new properties we're going to need all the help we can get.

Gothenberg slaps him on the back.

GOTHENBERG

Going from a one horse carriage to a steam engine, aren't you. Well, you're the right man for the job.

(CONTINUED)

MALCOLM

Who's going to run the studio now
that its going to television?

Gothenberg chews on his cigar.

GOTHENBERG

Well, there's this visionary who
worked his way up over at RCA.
We're in final negotiations right
now.

MALCOLM

What about...

He stops himself.

GOTHENBERG

(Shaking his head)

Smart man, **Becker**. He'll stay on
for the transition. Maybe longer.
Says he wants to give television a
try.

*

DUVALL

He could do it.

GOTHENBERG

Max Becker could do anything, if he
sets his mind to it.

Gothenberg puts down his champagne.

GOTHENBERG (cont'd)

Well, gentlemen. It's been
lucrative doing business with you.
See you on the set.

He walks out the door.

MALCOLM

Do you think he'll make it?

DUVALL

Gothenberg will always have money.
Therefore he'll always make it.

MALCOLM

I meant Becker.

Duvall stares out the window.

(CONTINUED)

DUVALL

As long as he has Sloane to pull
him up by the bootstraps. Heart or
no heart, that woman is worth her
weight in gold.

*

MALCOLM

Why do you say that?

DUVALL

Because she loves him.

CUT TO:

INT. GDG, BECKER'S OFFICE - DAY

Becker walks into his office and slumps down on the sofa.

Then he buzzes his secretary, Nancy.

*

MAX

Would you have Sloane come in for a
minute?

*

*

She walks in and hands him a message and some papers.

*

NANCY

Mrs. Becker stopped by early this
morning. I don't think she's here
right now.

*

MAX

Thank you.

Nancy leaves.

Max looks at the papers. It is a teleplay written by Sloane
Becker. He reads through it and begins to smile.

MAX (cont'd)

Remarkable. How does she do it?

He then reads the message.

SLOANE (V.O.)

...hope you like the script.
Television is actually quite fun.
Reminds me of...radio. Remember?
Back in the day? Then, you carried
me. Glad I could return the favor.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

84

CONTINUED:

84

SLOANE (V.O.) (cont'd)
I've gone to S.B. All my love and
passion forever, Mrs. Max Becker.

Max crumples the message.

CUT TO:

85

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - DAY

85

Sloane's car traveling rapidly over the twisting and turning road that overlooks the ocean from high up.

86

INT. SLOANE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

86

Sloane's high-heeled, stocking clad foot pushes the gas pedal down slowly, then with more aggression.

She drives the speeding car with skill and dexterity, while smoking her telltale cigarette. Her face is stern but streaked with tears.

The car gives a slight jolt, as if it went over a rock, and Sloane's Oscar falls from the passenger seat to the floor of the car.

Sloane gives a SQUEAL. She reaches down trying to grab the precious trophy.

Her foot slips and instead of slowing down, she hits the gas pedal.

The car swerves, she tries to correct it, but it's too late. The car crashes into the guard rail...

...Sloane reaches the trophy and grasps it to her just as the car goes over the cliff...

FADE TO:

87

EXT. GDG - LATE EVENING

87

The lot lays empty. A single automobile sits idle in the parking lot outside the main building.

A solitary light shines from the second floor...

88 INT. GDG, WRITERS' OFFICE - LATE EVENING 88

The outer office lays dark, but...

...light spills out from under the door and through the window shades of Sloane's office.

Down the hall, **Sam the janitor** mops the floor and hums quietly to himself. The tell-tale flask pokes out of his pocket. *

As he gets closer to Sloane's office, he begins to sing to himself, "I'll Get By."

He opens the door...

89 INT. SLOANE BECKER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 89

...Max quietly and tenderly places Sloane's things in boxes.

He looks up at the open door and sees **Sam** standing there, taking a swig from his flask. *

The men stare at each other. Then...

Max returns to his packing. **Sam** resumes his singing and reaches for the trash can -- *

MAX
Please don't.

Sam puts the can down. He mops the floor. *

Max picks up an old ROCK which held down some papers. He starts to laugh...

MAX (CONT'D)
Do you know what this is?

Sam begins to hum again, just staring at him. *

MAX (CONT'D)
She was so superstitious. That Irish thing. It's a piece of the Blarney Stone...or so she claimed. Brought her luck. Kept her grounded...

The laughter has turned into quiet sobbing.

(CONTINUED)

MAX (CONT'D)
She should have had this with her.

The sobs suddenly cease, and he places the rock into the box.

MAX (CONT'D)
Why are you singing that song?

SAM
Speech is free, song repartee,
cures ennui...

He takes a swig from his flask, then offers it to Max. Max just shakes his head.

MAX
That was her favorite.

SAM
Yeah, I know.

Max stares at the man. He stares back.

SAM (CONT'D)
So, that it, bub? You givin' up on her?

Max stops his packing for a moment.

MAX
She's dead.

Sam waggles his finger menacingly in front of Max's face.

SAM
She never the hell gave up on you.

Max resumes his packing.

MAX
Listen, I'll empty the garbage in here. You move along now.

Sam picks up his mops.

SAM
Remember the dream that scares you
in sleep. Reach out for the hand
though it appears weak. Close your
mind to the pain, tender lips mouth
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAM (cont'd)
 the will...You're destined for
 greatness, Line up for the kill.

*
*

The two men face off. Max looks away.

MAX
 (Whispering)
 I can't, not without her...

Sam shrugs...then exits, singing.

*

FADE TO BLACK.

SPINNING PAPERS OVER THE SOUND OF RAPID TYPING...

HOLLYWOOD HERALD, MARCH 25th, 1948

"DOWN THE RED CARPET" BY EMMALOUANNA GRAYSON

LOS ANGELES DAILY SCOOP, MARCH 25th, 1948

"INSIDE THE SILVER SCREEN" BY MADGE MILFORD

TINSELTOWN TRIBUNE, MARCH 25th, 1948

"GDT, THE NEW REGIME" BY RILEY LYDECKER

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ACADEMY AWARDS - EVENING

The Hollywood Three have gathered in the press room and are all talking, like a musical trio, on separate phones.

EMMALOUANNA (V.O.)
 ...and here we are again.
 Little Oscar is ready to rear
 his golden head and bestow
 the highest honors he knows
 how...

LYDECKER (V.O.)
 ...in an exclusive interview,
 the always humble Duvall
 refused to comment on the
 predicted success this
 evening of what is surely to
 become a new regime...

*

CUT TO:

Men in penguin suits and elaborately froufroued women mill about amongst the linen covered tables. At the center of the fray stands

A TABLE COVERED WITH LITTLE GOLDEN MEN.

(CONTINUED)

The statuettes themselves almost hide the two men sitting at the table...

DUVALL and GINSBERG, smiling and smoking cigars.

MADGE (V.O.)
 ...BLIND AMBITION has made Frank Thornberry the star we always new he could be. And in this film survives the legacy of not one but two of our late greats...

EMMALOUANNA (V.O.)
 And my instincts tell me that we've got a new King in town, in the shape of Duvall, with crown princes prepared to sweep...

*

CUT TO:

A crowded dance floor, couples twirling exuberantly. They move around the floor in a circle...

FRANK and PAIGE

*

dance by, staring into each others' eyes lovingly. They stop in the middle of the floor and kiss -- oblivious to the others around them...

MADGE
 Baxter Thornberry and Sloane Becker. They will be greatly missed. But from where I sit, the new triumvirate of D-G-T are positioned very well to rule the roost...and I sit pretty high up...

LYDECKER
 ...a new regime which includes so many connections to a tragic but brilliant past. Frank Thornberry and rising starlet, Paige Dunne, daughter of the late Irwin Dunne are set to be married. And the business goes on...

*

*

CUT TO:

The Three hang up their phones simultaneously.

CUT TO:

*

NO SOUND

The lot lays relatively empty except for a worker walking here or there.

One man stands outside the

LONE DOOR of STUDIO D.

(CONTINUED)

Max opens the door and lets it close silently behind him.

Massive changes have taken place. No longer a film set, the studio has been modified for television. A teleplay is in the process of being shot. Three young actors stand on the set rehearsing with a young director.

Max stands amidst the fray, as the younger, energetic new world of television engulfs him...

BLACK OUT.

THE END.