MANA

An Original Screenplay by

Jack Fincher
PROLOGUE:

In 1940, at the tender age of 24, Orson Weiles was lured to Hollywood by a struggling RKO Pictures with a contract befitting his formidable storytelling talents. He was given absolute creative autonomy, would suffer no oversight, and could make any movie, about any subject, with any collaborator he wished...

FADE IN:

1 EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - DAY

From a lanyard, hangs a rustic sign reading NORTH VERDE RANCH. The only sound is a distant WHINE, the only movement a boil of dust on the horizon. As the WHINE rises to a ROAR, the boil of dust grows until it becomes a car that flashes past the sign and sets the lanyard swinging. No sooner does it settle back down than a second car, following the first, siams by and starts it waggling again.

2 EXT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - DAY

The cars stop in front of a small sun-bleached house.

SUPERIMPOSE THE
LEGEND:

EXT. VICTORVILLE - GUEST RANCH - DAY - 1940

The occupants of both cars get out. The driver of the first is JOHN HOUSEMAN, a swart, officious young man already verging on middle age. His passenger is RITA ALEXANDER, a crisp young woman with an air of quiet competence. She fails in step behind him as they walk to the bungalow. The driver of the second car, a CHAUFFEUR, joins a NURSE in carefully removing from its back seat a FIGURE whose bottom half is encased in a huge plaster cast. Taking his arms on either side they slowly help him to the waiting bungalow. The cast figure reassuring them and himself...

FIGURE IN CAST

It's all right. I- I've got this.
I'm - I'm good.

He doesn't. He isn't.
INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - DAY

Efficient, HOUSEMAN fusses, feeling for dust. RITA opens windows and turns on a fan. The door slams open, the NURSE and CHAUFFEUR staggering through the frame with the FIGURE IN THE CAST, putting him to bed.

ANGLE FAVORING HOUSEMAN

Approaching the FIGURE in bed. The NURSE plumps his pillow.

HOUSEMAN

Here.

(wiping dust off hands)
Well, I've had them set you up out here, so you wouldn't feel quite so confined. The ladies will scandalize the neighborhood by occupying both bedrooms.

There is no response. He's adjusting to his new environs.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
I will be staying in town at a bucolic spa called, if you can believe it, The Shoulder Arms. I will do my editing there.

Still nothing from the Figure in the Cast.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
Now as you know, Fraulein Freda is not only a nurse and physical therapist, she studied nutrition back in the old country. Ja, liebes fraulein?

FRAULEIN FREDA
(speaking German)
Jawohl, Herr Houseman.

HOUSEMAN
It's a dry house, the owner of the ranch doesn't permit alcohol. But you're from Pennsylvania, you're no doubt used to it...
The figure in the cast struggles to get out of bed. The ladies scramble to stop him; it's futile. The CHAUFFEUR enters, lugging a small, heavy cabinet.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
Saved by the proverbial bell.
(to Chauffeur)
Set it here, please? Careful, careful...

The CHAUFFEUR does, putting the heavy cabinet down...

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
Thank you.

He sets it, then leaves. Houseman crosses to it...

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
Observe...

HOUSEMAN presses a button, and a hidden door springs open, revealing a dazzling array of miniature liquor bottles aligned in a row.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
Well, naturally you'll do your damndest to get at it. By the time you finish the first draft, which is to say ninety days, you should be a world-class sprinter.

Houseman snaps shut the cabinet.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
Rita? Come in here, will you?

RITA approaches the bed, her manner professional.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
This is Mrs. Alexander. She types a hundred perfect words a minute and takes dictation like a clairvoyant. Rita Alexander - Herman Mankiewicz.

RITA
(clipped British accent)
How do you do, Mister Mankiewicz.
MANK
That's a big question.

CLOSE UP OF MANK - OUR FIRST LOOK
The wrecked face of a 43-year-old alcoholic, a bloat of chalky flesh pocked by two eyes - like puckering wounds. But his gaze has an intelligent, devilish glint, he may be drunk...

HOUSEMAN
Well, since you like working nights -- Rita here runs on London time. Her husband is one of our bold lads in the RAF. Flies -- what is it, Rita? Spitfires?

RITA
Hurricanes.

MANK
My sympathy and prayers.

RITA
I beg your pardon?

MANK
Given the speed, climb, and turning radius of the Messerschmitt Bf 109...

RITA
I hope we won't need your sympathy, Mister Mankiewicz. We'll do the praying. And the fighting.

HOUSEMAN
I will meet with Orson weekly. Keep him to date on our progress. We're expecting great things. What is it a writer says? "Tell the story you know?"

When the phone rings. RITA answers...

MANK
I don't know that writer.
RITA
Hello. Yes...yes he's right here...

HOUSEMAN
Well, you should have everything. If I've forgotten, there's a clipboard.

She hands it to Houseman.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
(to Welles)
Yes? Hello?

RITA
They're getting him...

HOUSEMAN
Our wunderkind does have the gift of theatrical timing...

As he waits, they all do...

4  INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - DAY

HOUSEMAN
Orson, hello. We just got in. Oh?

He listens, GRUNTS, then passes the phone over to MANK.

ANGLE ON MANK

MANK
Hello?

WELLES (V.O.)
(that voice)
Mank! Houseman tells me we have you just where we want you.

MANK
Lucky me.

WELLES (V.O.)
How's the leg?

MANK
Thigh bone's connected to the hip bone.
WELLES (V.O.)
Excellent. Ready and willing to hunt the Great White Whale?

MANK
Just call me Ahab. I understand we've 90 days.

WELLES (V.O.)
Let's aim for sixty.

Mank cups the phone.

MANK
He's just cut a month.
(on phone)
I used to do it in five for you at The Mercury. This is leisurely.

WELLES (V.O.)
Sixty days and then we can noodle.

MANK
Nothing like a good noodle. Is the reason you lopped 30 days to run it past RKO legal?

Welles laughs his contagious baritone laugh.

WELLES (V.O.)
I thought I told you, Mank. I have final cut, final everything. There are no studio notes. We'll have no one but ourselves to blame.

MANK
Sixty days and a noodle.

WELLES (V.O.)
Gotta run...I'm doing tests for "Heart of Darkness."

MANK
Oh, little that, lesser Joe Conrad.

WELLES (V.O.)
If anyone should ask, tell 'em you're adapting.
MANK
Oh, you don't know this sun-bleached sewer yet, my friend.
Break wind at Hollywood and Vine and a producer in Santa Monica reports a ruptured main.

WELLES (V.O.)
No, I don't know this burgh, not yet. I'm toiling with you in spirit, Mank. And I don't hear any typing.

He hangs up. Mank gives Houseman the phone back.

MANK
No notes. And then he turned 24.

Mank lays back.

MANK (CONT'D)
Trapped.

INT. MANKIEWICZ HOME - WEEKS EARLIER - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

THE SCREEN IS BLACK.

SUPERIMPOSE THE LEGEND:

INT. MANKIEWICZ HOME - NIGHT - WEEKS EARLIER
A door BANGS open. Light spills in, illuminating a bedroom. MANK and his wife SARA are silhouetted in the doorway, his arm over her shoulder, she drags him to the bed.

MANK
(grunts)
Uh-uh.

SARA
Let me take off these clothes.

She starts doing that.

MANK
They let me go just as I'd achieved perfect equilibrium.
MANK (CONT'D)
I won't work with half the producers on the lot and the other half won't work with me.

SARA
What's this? A racing form?

MANK
Hmm, you stop reading, you stop learning.

SARA
Hold still. Lie back...

MANK
Hmm... cigarette please.

SARA
Hermie, if a match gets anywhere near your breath -- you'll burst into flames.

MANK
Even the dog's name is awful. Sounds like a Japanese houseboy. You mark my words, Sara, The Wizard of Oz is gonna sink that studio.

SARA
Sleep. You're driving to New York tomorrow.

MANK
(melancholy)
Remember when you used to take the train from back east? I'd sneak aboard in Albuquerque and climb into your compartment naked.

SARA
I also remember how I spent my honeymoon in Berlin, with hookers running up and down the stairs all night...

He laughs.
SARA (CONT'D)
...because my dashing
 correspondent couldn't afford a
 nice hotel...

MANK
Weren't those the days?

SARA (an old refrain)
Yeah, yeah, 'and the nights
weren't bad either.'

MANK
Schnutz?

SARA
For the last time, what?

MANK
What year is it?

SARA
Herman...

MANK
I should have done something by
now.

SARA
Hermie...

MANK
Give me a sign, oh Lord, I am as
your servant Moses -- though I
won't work half as cheap.

SARA
(kissing him)
Go to sleep, meshuggener.

She crosses to open the door. She turns off the light...

MANK
Schnutz?

SARA
Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat!!!???

MANK
Why do you put up with me?
She looks at his figure in the dark.

SAAR
(honestly)
I don't know.

She starts to close the door...

MANK
(out of the dark)
That bush in the front yard. If it catches fire tonight - you will let me know?

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT (1939) – NEXT DAY

A speeding convertible. MANK is a passenger in the front seat. A young man named TOMMY is driving. He is agitated, gesturing...

TOMMY
..I mean, you know all kinds of things -- iambic pentameter, the words of the great poets... What about the way she signed it, "Always, Ethel." Can you beat that? Not just, Ethel. "Always, Ethel."

MANK
Tommy, if we can find civilization by sundown, I hope to climb out of this crate and into a cold martini.

TOMMY
She's not the kind to use 'always' if she didn't mean it. If she meant just 'Ethel' she'd write just 'Ethel', not 'always.' Wouldn't you think?

MANK
The road, Tommy.

TOMMY
I know - you read it... see what I mean.
As TOMMY takes the letter from his pocket, the wind
snatches it and rips it down the side of the car. Lunging
to grab it, TOMMY loses control of the wheel.

EXT. CRASH SCENE - NIGHT

A play of headlights catches AMBULANCE ATTENDANTS laboring
to free MANK. TOMMY stands over them, woozy but unhurt.

TOMMY (V.O)
She loves me, don't you think?

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

CLOSE-UP OF MANK

Buried in hospital sheets, his head swathed in bandages.
Distantly he hears the SOUND of FOOTFAIJS. Turning his head
groggily, he peers down the corridor.

MANK'S POV

From a narcotic haze he sees - A SPECTER in black opera
cloak and shepherd's hat. As it reaches MANK it vanishes
(seating itself), then reappears as a disembodied face --
large, distorted, floating, moonlike.

WELLES
Mank? It's Orson Welles.

MANK
(etherized)
Of course it is.

WELLES
I think it's time we talked.

MANK
I'm all ears.

INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW (1940) - NIGHT

We see the result of some days (nights) work...a small stack
of notepads. And MANK is propped up in bed in his pajamas,
squinting into the darkness as he talks. HITA sits
scribbling on a pad.
MANK
(dictating)
Once a castle on a hill, now a memory of what once was... alone in his unfinished, already decaying pleasure palace... aloof, seldom visited, never photographed...
(thinking)
We see an OLD MAN in a robe, smoking a pipe, sitting alone by his pool, discarded pages scattered at his feet. Narrator: "...an emperor of newsprint continued to direct his failing empire... vainly attempting to sway, as he once did, the destinies of a nation which had long since ceased to listen to him - No. m-had ceased to trust him. "
(beat)
We see through the trees as an AIDE pushes this OLD MAN in a wheelchair across neatly groomed lawns...

Mank thinks, taking up a swatter, he takes casual aim at a housefly.

MANK (CONT'D)
Narrator: "There, last month - as it must to all men, death came to-
"
(Swat! The fly is swot)
Let's have that cuppa, Mrs. A.

Rita gets up to get their tea.

RITA
Oh... I know who it is, or who it's meant to be...

MANK
What makes you think it's meant to be anybody.
RITA
Oh come now. Everyone in the
English-speaking world will
recognize him instantly.
(returning with cups)

MANK
Exactly what he would say.

RITA
(serving)
Did you know the man?

MANK
Maybe -- I used to.

RITA
You wrote for one of his papers?

MANK
(ladling sugar)
Oh, no. Praise God. I met him
after he started bankrolling his
girlfriend's pictures.

RITA
(sipping hers straight)
You knew Marion Davies?

MANK
(shrugs)
If anyone did.

RITA
Really? What's she like?

MANK
Why is it when you scratch a prim,
starchy English schoolgirl, you
get a swooning moving-picture fan
who has forgotten all she ever
learned about the Battle of
Hastings?

RITA
(smiling)
Hastings: Fourteen, October, Ten-
sixty-six. 10 centigrade...
A FULL FRAME CLOSEUP OF A TELEGRAM -- CHARLIE: COME AT ONCE. THERE ARE MILLIONS TO BE MADE AND YOUR ONLY COMPETITION IS IDIOTS. -- MANK

THE TELEGRAM IS LOWERED, REVEALING

LEDERER'S POV

EXT. PARAMOUNT STUDIOS - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Tractors pull lights, men roll scenery, etc. CHARLES LEDERER, a frail young man, threads his way across the lot. SUPERIMPOSE THE

LEGEND:

EXT. PARAMOUNT LOT - DAY - 1930 (FLASHBACK)

LEDERER FLAGS DOWN A HURRYING PASSERBY, MIMES A QUESTION. THE PASSERBY INDICATES A DOOR, RUSHES ON.

INT. MEN'S ROOM

Beneath a stall LEDERER sees two hairy legs sticking out from a glorious pair of plaid boxer shorts at half mast.

LEDERER

Mank?

JOE MANKIEWICZ explodes out, jacking up his trousers. His florid looks might be MANK'S in better days. He charges the sink, washing his hands.

LEDERER (CONT'D)

Sorry. Somebody told me Mankiewicz was in here.

JOE

He is... I'm the "promising" brother, Joe.

LEDERER

I didn't know Herman had a brother.

JOE

Neither does anyone else. (drying his hands) Let me guess.
JOE (CONT'D)
"There are millions to be made and
your only competition is idiots,
stop."

LEDERER
How did you know?

JOE
I hate to tell you, anyone who can
rub three words together and make
a sentence gets one. C'mon...

MOVING WITH THEM down a hallway, up some stairs -- past a
pool of typing women that never avert their eyes... They
enter a door marked "GENIUS AT PLAY - KEEP OUT."

JOE (CONT'D)
It's after lunch, and we're on a
deadline - he may be busy...

LEDERER
Oh. I promise I won't be a bother.

JOE
Not exactly what I meant...

INT. WRITERS ROOM - DAY

A fool's paradise. Dominated by a conference table covered
with the lavish remains of a catered lunch and a disrupted
poker game. The WRITERS are NOISILY clustered around
something we cannot see. JOE points at LEDERER, then sits
down and picks up where he left off dictating to, this is
ture, a NUDE SECRETARY.

REVERSE ANGLE ON

The WRITERS are watching MANK flip a coin with comedian
EDDIE CANTOR. Among them, standing out of the way is
cinematographer SHELLY METCALF.

MANK
Come on! You know I'm gooderitt.

MANK nods grimly. CANTOR tosses it high in the air...And we
see young CHARLIE LEDERER has eased among them...

LEDERER
Feilas --
HECHT
Shhhhh -- these are high stakes...

CANTOR
Go on -
(catching coin, after a
beat, showing him...)
- Ooh! Tails! That's six!

MANK
Goddammit. Alright, double or
nothing. And this time, you banjo-
eyed sonofabitch, let it hit the
floor.

JOE
Banjo Eyes.

HECHT
(aside to LEDERER)
Mank once bet me a five spot to
see how long it would take a
falling leaf to hit the ground.
Had to go to management to cover
it.

LEDERER
For five bucks?

HECHT
(like he's from Mars)
Five thousand.

MANK
Come on, come on. Heads, you
bastard!

Cantor tosses the coin. As the coin strikes the floor --
the writers GROAN. MANK has lost again. CANTOR CLAPS,
CHORTLES, and skips out the door like a child. All the
SPECTATORS but LEDERER drift back to their poker game,
GRUMBLING. MANK notices him for the first time.

CANTOR
Oooh! Pleasure doing business with
you, gentlemen.
MANK
Hey Charlie! Yeah, you all remember the Algonquin cabin boy, Charlie Lederer -- a poor but somewhat talented magazine writer come west to join our merry band.
(to Charlie)
Well... you know almost everyone.

LEDERER
(with the greatest respect for each)
Mr. Kaufman...

KAUFMAN
George is fine, kid...

LEDERER
Mr. Perelman.

PERELMAN
Nice to meet you, son...

LEDERER
Do you prefer Sidney or S.J.?

MANK
Uh, he takes what he gets. Uh, the great Charles MacArthur...

MacArthur waves.

LEDERER
Good to see you again, Mr. MacArthur.

MANK
(motions at Shelly)
My resident jack of all trades... Shelly Metcalf.

SHELLY
Hey, kid.

LEDERER
Mr. Metcalf.
MANK
Oh, save the mister for the anointed... and last, not yet among them, my brother Joe...

JOE
...Have Cyclone say, "I don't mind the heat as much as I do the humanity."

MANK
And the one and only, Ben Hecht.

Hecht laughs.

HECHT
(to Charlie)
Have you been laid yet?

PERELMAN (O.S.)
Do you have to think about that?

The phone RINGS. Kaufman answers it:

KAUFMAN
Hello, yeah, right away...

Kaufman checks watch, hangs up.

KAUFMAN (CONT'D)
Seiznick, everyone. Five minutes.

They all jump up.

MANK
Well you've arrived in the well-known nick, Charlie. Just in time for a story conference with the great David O.

A general SCRAPING of chairs as the poker game breaks up.

PERELMAN
Once more unto the breach -

KAUFMAN
Breach hell, unto the wire -

MACART.GREEN
- without a net.
HECHT
(to a mystified LEDERER)
Keep your mouth shut, and watch us for your cue, OK?

LEDERER
Cue?

MANK finally notices the NUDE SECRETARY as all but JOE troop out.

MANK
What I wouldn't give to see that in a tight sweater.

JOE
(calling after him)
Herm? Can I use that?

INT. SELZNICK'S OFFICE

The WRITERS file in and take seats, helping themselves one after another to cigars from an elegant humidor. They engage in the ritual of clipping, lighting and savoring a fine Havana. SELZNICK is a large, ungainly man with a flashing smile. Beside him stands a whippet-thin man with wavy hair, polished military boots, and riding crop.

SELZNICK
Boys, come in. Ah, make yourselves at home. Now, you all know Joe Von Sternberg.

MANK
(pointing to HECHT, mouths)
He loved The Blue Angel.

Von Sternberg grunts.

SELZNICK
You wanted 72 hours, you got 72 hours, tell us what you have so far. Ben, whyn'tcha start.

HECHT removes his cigar, speaks, then puts it back—a signal for the next man to remove his cigar and take up the narrative. The effect is not unlike an invisible medicine ball being tossed—as all improvise with utmost gravity.
HECHT
Well, this was tough — David, in
the beginning we couldn't agree on
an approach...

SELZNICK
Really; and why was that?

HECHT
Well, we see — a different kind of
Paramount picture.

SELZNICK
Different how?

MACARTHUR
Frankenstein and The Wolfman, all
rolled into one, only --

SELZNICK
(stopping them)
I don't make cheap horror
pictures, Universal does...

MANK
This is different. This is about
something.

Selznick's skepticism fairly drips off of him.

SELZNICK
Okay...

MANK
Sidney...

PERELMAN
Imagine a mad scientist touring
the boonies, with a mechanical
freak he's..."fabricated."

SELZNICK
What does he mean, "fabricated?"

MANK
...and displays it to
superstitious hayseeds in a giant
silk-lined casket, for the price
of admission.
Selznick grunts.

KAUFMAN
...but every full moon, the monster awakens and raises unholy heil with the villagers.

MACARTHUR
Give it an Eastern European look, men in leather shorts, gals in tattered peasant blouses.

SELSNICK
Let me guess, they think it's the devil?

VON STERNBERG
Villagers always think it's the devil.

MACARTHUR
(undeterred)
And the scientist and his creation are forced to flee during a raging electrical storm -

PERELMAN
- flee from outraged peasants -

KAUFMAN
- who pursue them mit torches -

PERELMAN
- overturn their creaky wagon -

MANK
- and set fire to it.

A pregnant lull. MANK points his stogie at LEDERER.

MANK (CONT'D)
Tell him about the finale, Charlie.

LEDERER
(swallowing hard)
Oh, well...
LEDERER (CONT'D)
the rain turns to sleet, puts out the fire, and entombs the monster in solid ice...While nearby, an old priest weeps.

Selznick ever so slightly softens.

SELZNICK
Hmm! A weeping priest?

MANK
(puffing grandly)
Thunder, lightning, blood, fire, religion...

SELZNICK
All in one film?

MANK
...and...with an unseasonal thaw... a sequel.

SELZNICK
I thought you said this was about something, this was different.

They all turn to the sage, Ben Hecht.

HECHT
Plus, the ominous futility of man playing God -

KAUFMAN
- the Faustian bargain of life everlasting -

PERELMAN
- and the triumph of the human spirit over the beast incarnate in our far too solid flesh.

MANK
(flourishing cigar)
It's director-proof.

VON STERNBERG bristles.

SELZNICK
(to VON STERNBERG)
Joe?
VON STERNBERG

B picture.

SELZNICK

It's not for Joe...

(Shaking his head)

Boys, this is serious, we need your help. We've got to get people into theatres, but how?

A cathedral QUIET. Then:

MANK

Show movies in the streets?

14 EXT. PARAMOUNT LOT - DAY

MANK and LEDERER walking toward the gate.

MANK

You okay, Charlie? Taken care of this weekend?

LEDERER

I'm going to see my aunt.

MANK

Oh, that sounds like fun.

LEDERER

You obviously don't know my aunt. If you're not doing anything, come along.

MANK

(peeling off)
Careful, I just might...

LEDERER

Glendale Station at seven.

(calling after him)
Bring Sara if you like!

MANK

Who?

LEDERER

Sara. Isn't that your wife?
MANK
Oh. You mean "Poor Sara."
(turning to go)
No, she and the kids are back east.

EXT. GLENDALE STATION, LOS ANGELES - END OF DAY

LEDERER, carrying an overnight bag, paces the sidewalk, shooting glances at his wristwatch. Suddenly an UPROAR.

HIS POV

A gleaming white convertible glides into view, a COP clearing it's way. Matinee idol JOHN GILBERT is at the wheel. His paramour GRETA GARBO lounges beside him bestowing smiles on FANS who jog in their wake. MANK is draped over the seat back, splendidly drunk, throwing kisses to the uncaring multitude.

The Rolls inches to a stop and is surrounded by an ARMY of ADMIRERS. GILBERT and GARBO sign autographs as MANK half climbs, half falls to his feet. He carries not so much as a shaving kit. Wordlessly he kisses GARBO'S cheek. GARBO LAUGHS famously. GILBERT REVs, ROANS off.

LEDERER leads a weaving MANK toward their coach.

LEDERER
Herman... Herman.

And with that, like an exclamation point, he literally passes out onto a luggage cart. The Porter doesn't miss a beat, wheeling him to his train.

MANK
Charlie!

INT. A BARONIAL BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

MANK lies in state. A SCREAM propels him upright. He yawns, scratches, and then rises. Hung-over and unflapped.
INT. HALLWAY

MANK saunters into a world of gilt diptychs, Oriental
carpets, Gobelin tapestries, illuminated manuscripts, suits
of medieval armor, parchment shades... God's Own Prop Room.

EXT. GROUNDS

Tents dot the endless lawn. Servants ply the chosen. And
absurdly there is a huge stack of firewood resembling a
Viking funeral pyre, where a screaming woman threatened by
"Injuns," is enticingly tied atop, being filmed.

TWO MEN IN RIDING TOGS are sitting over refreshments under
a tent. The younger man is IRVING THALBERG, M.G.M.
production chief, who has the dark, fine-boned features of
a coiled and restless Valentino. Next to him is studio
head, LOUIS B. MAYER, a stumpy, otter-sleek ogre in silver
spectacles.

THALBERG
(seeing)
What is Mank doing here?

MAYER
Who?

THALBERG
Herman Mankiewicz.

MAYER
Do I know him?

THALBERG
He wrote one of our Lon Chaney's.

MAYER
Ahhhhh...

THALBERG
Mank!

MANK
Thalberg! The boy genius...

THALBERG
I am shocked to see you here.
MANK
(smiles)
I'd be shocked to see me here too, Irving... if only I knew where here was...

MAYER
You wrote one of our Lon Chaney's.

MANK
Among many.

MAYER
Pictures?

MANK
Writers.

THALBERG
At M-G-M, movies are a team sport, Mank.

MANK
Which may be why I'm at Paramount.

MAYER
Since when don't Paramount use writers by the truckload?

MANK
But all at once, not in relays. Helps spread the blame around.

THALBERG
You remember our chairman, Louis B. Mayer?

MANK
By reputation only...

MAYER
Long night?

MANK
A short one. Plagued by "spirits." Heil of a way to spend the sabbath, fellas.

MAYER
Here in support of a friend.
THALBERG
His leading lady is making a mid-career adjustment.

Mank sees SHELLY METCALF, the thin - erudite cameraman, is loading film.

MANK
Oh, I'm on my way over. Any notes from the oversight tent?

As he walks away...

MAYER
Who was that again?

THALBERG
Just a writer.

TRAVEL WITH MANK
As he strolls by all the machinations of movie-making, including MAKEUP ARTISTS putting warpaint on the faces of CAUCASIAN ACTORS playing Native Americans...the elaborate equipment of a real movie, with the MGM trademark...He approaches Shelly.

MANK
Slumming on Saturday, Mr. Metcalf?

SHELLY
(glad to see him)
Mank! No sir, helping out on E Camera -- it's a home movie -- but HIS idea of a home movie.

MARION (V.O.)
I know you.

Mank looks up and sees MAKEUP and HAIR PEOPLE clearing from the BLONDE ACTRESS on the top of the FUNERAL PYRE, MARION DAVIES.

MANK
Well, what's at stake here?

MARION
We met at John Gilbert's birthday. You're Herman mankiewicz.
MANK
Guilty. And I remember you - Miss Davies. Regaling us with stories about dodging trolley cars in Brooklyn...

She laughs...

MANK (CONT'D)
Your Flatbush was showing.

She laughs even louder.

MARLOON
Oh! You fractured Wally Beery's wrist Indian wrestling.

MANK
Admittedly, a lucky break.

MARLOON
Boy - was he surprised. You're stronger than you look.

MANK
And from what I understand, you're smarter.

She squints.

MARLOON
That was a compliment.

They smile at each other.

MANK
See what I mean?

MARLOON
You are interesting.

(whispers)
I need a favor but you're gonna have to promise you won't laugh.

MANK
Given the state of the world, a tail order.

MARLOON
You're gunna, I just know you are.
MANK
I have got such a hangover right now, there's just a fighting chance I won't.

MARLON
(whispers)
I'm being burned at the stake and I am dying for a ciggie-boo.

MANK LAUGHS, then winces.

MARLON (CONT'D)
Ha! There - God's punishing you.
Watch those stairs, they're treacherous.

MANK
(walking up)
Every moment of my life is treacherous.

MARLON grabs a cigarette out of his pack.

MANK (CONT'D)
Any last words?

MARLON
'Welcome to San Simeon.'

She puts it between her lips, MANK lights it. MARLON takes a deep draw, motions him to take it away.

MANK
(mouthful)
I've written worse.

MARLON
You've never seen it?

MANK
No, but George Bernard Shaw was right...

MARLON
How's that?

MANK
"It's what God might've built had he had the money..."
MARLON
Well, as they say in the Bronx, "make yourself to home," mister Mankiewicz. Or shall I call you Herman?

MANK
No, please, call me Mank.

LEDERER APPEARS.

MARLON
Good morning, Charles.

MANK
Charlie.

LEDERER
Aunt Marion... Mank.

MANK'S eyebrows REGISTER their relationship.

MARLON
Sleep well?

LEDERER
Until your rather dramatic "wake-up" call.

MARLON
This is all Pop's idea. He wants me ready "to take on the talkies."

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (V.O.)
First positions, please!

Everybody scatters. Mank and Lederer start to clear. Marion assumes her subservient position. The Native Americans ready to do their worst.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Riders ready! Rolling!

CAMERAMAN (V.O.)
Speed!

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Action!

We see FOUR RIDERS in buckskins, guns a-blazing, riding to save Marion.
Ahead of the riders, a CAMERA CAR films the riders. In the camera car is the DIRECTOR along with a MAN in his sixties of some substance, with a stillness, a confidence, a kind of elegance about him. WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST.

MAN1ON
Help! Please! Someone save me!

Once the riders arrive at the pyre to save the day:

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Cut!

MAN1ON
(calls)
Pops, this is Herman Mankiewicz but we're to call him Mank.

HEARST
(from the car)
Mankiewicz? Herman Mankiewicz? New York playwright and drama critic?

Mank approaching the car...

MANK
(bowing)
Turned humble screenwriter. Mr. Hearst.

HEARST
Why, no need to be humble Mister Mankiewicz, pictures that talk are the future. They're gonna need people who honor words to give them voice. There's a golden age coming when all the world will be a stage — and you, perhaps their Shakespeare.

MANK
Oh, I wouldn't have thought you'd be that keenly interested in the honoring of words.

Mank smiles. Marion laughs at the thought, a look and a sound that seldom greets HEARST'S ideas face to face.

HEARST
What's so funny?
MANK
I'm just surprised, that a vaunted muckraker like yourself sees Hollywood's future as such a shiny penny.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
(to the Driver)
Back to one...

The DRIVER, accommodating Mank and Hearst's conversation, starts very slowly rolling the car towards its initial position...Mank walking alongside, keeping pace with the car...

HEARST
Times are changing, Mr. Mankiewicz, and I'm not just referring to this Depression.

MANK
Oh, that bother.

HEARST
When all this is over, picture makers are gonna have to service this new entertainment. I intend to make pictures with the help of real literary minds.

MANK
I support that.

HEARST
Instead, what do most studios give us? Gangster flicks! Zanies!

MANK
Too true.

HEARST
Now, how many gangsters do Americans meet in a lifetime? How many families are like the Marx Brothers?

MANK
You mean besides my own?
HEARST

Ha! Very good.
(to AD)

Hearst whispers to the ASSISTANT DIRECTOR. As the camera
car with the crane carrying William Randolph Hearst drives
to its first position...

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

(through megaphone)
Miss Davies, Mr. Hearst would like
Mr. Mankiewicz seated to his left
at dinner.

MARION

(sharp inhale to man)
Oh. Pops likes you.

DISSOLVE TO:

19 INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW (1940) - MANK'S BED - NIGHT 19

FRAULEIN FREDA enters, a liniment bottle in one hand, a
letter in the other. The letter she hands to RITA, the
liniment she begins slapping on MANK'S arms. He is lying on
his back, editing pages which RITA proofreads.

MANK

Why is it, when Houseman edits
everyone ends up speaking like a
constipated Oxford don?

As RITA opens the letter, the phone RINGS. She answers.

RITA

Hello?...Yes he is, no, not at
all... please hold on.
(to MANK)
It's "Poor Sar-,", I'm sorry --
it's your wife.

She hands MANK the phone.

MANK

Schnutz.
SARA (V.O.)
I heard that... Hermie, Joe called four times in the last three days. He wants your number out there.

MANK
So give it to him.

SARA (V.O.)
(some disturbance)
Knock it off!
(to Mank)
The boys are remodeling. He seemed concerned about something. Is everything okay?

MANK
If I could swim, I'd be doing swimmingly. And don't mind Joe, he's a worrisome old woman in disguise.

SARA (V.O.)
Well, he wants to offer you work.

MANK
Baby Joe offering me? Well, if he calls again give him this number, Schnutz. I - I've got to run. Kiss the offspring.

MANK hangs up. FRAULEIN FREDa continues to knead his shoulders. MANK sees that RITA is reading her letter.

MANK (CONT'D)
(in a British accent)
I say, a letter from the gallant lieutenant?
(reverting to American)
Let us hope it makes more sense than the last. Fighters off the decks of aircraft carriers. Whoever had that idea...

FRAULEIN FREDa
Is not good?
MANK
Not good? German U-boats are starting to hunt in packs and a Stuka dive bomber can drop one down your stack from five hundred feet.

(to Rita)
What's our valiant laddie have to say for the cause?

RITA is still reading silently. Now, she wads the letter up, dropping it, and rising, leaves. MANK motions FRAULEIN FREDA to hand it to him.

FRAULEIN FREDA
It's not from her husband... His ship's been sunk off Norway... presumed lost at sea.

As Mank looks out at the desert...

MANK
(to himself)
Always the smartest guy in the room.

INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - NIGHT

We hear footsteps approaching. MANK'S bed shrouded in darkness. He lies unmoving as the front door eases open and RITA enters, her steps tentative.

RITA
You're right, of course. Aircraft carriers are a shitty idea. But I don't appreciate the callousness. I expect more of you.

Silence.

RITA (CONT'D)
(adamant, won't accept)
Presumed means they don't know. So, I choose to believe he is alive until s-

(drawn by his silence)
Mank?... Mank?.... Mister MANKIEWICZ!...
INSERT

MANK'S hand opens and a miniature scotch bottle rolls out of it, like the swirling glass snowball in Citizen Kane.

21

EXT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Houseman's taxi arrives, Houseman hurries inside.

22

INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - LATER THAT NIGHT

RITA and FRAULEIN FREDa hover over MANk as a DOCTOR is packing up to leave. HOUSEMAN arrives.

DOCTOR
He's all right. Just sleeping.

HOUSEMAN
Well, I shouldn't wonder. There's enough Seconal in those little bottles to bring down a bull elephant in heat.
(as others stare at him)
Young Orson doesn't believe in chance.

23

INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - NEXT DAY

CLOSE-UP, MANk

Framed against the pillow, MANk opens his eyes.

HIS POV

A homey, ranch-style tableau. RITA and HOUSEMAN sorting through pages.

MANk
(gazing at the ceiling)
Houseman, you sly thing. You slipped me a mickey.

HOUSEMAN
So we did. Though how you managed to reach it so early in your rehabilitation I cannot imagine. How was it - mother's milk?
MANK
On balance, better than nothing. I plan to use it as a nightcap.

RITA
As you Yanks say, he 'went out like a light.'

Grasping the bar over his bed, MANK pulls himself upright.

MANK
I couldn't have put it better myself, Mrs. A. Which may be why I write for the movies.

RITA
Will you stop? You write for the movies because you're super at it. Excuse me, you two. I've masses of typing to do.

RITA goes back to typing. The men exchange looks.

HOUSEMAN
(putting pages in order...)
76 pages...by the time she translates your red chicken scratches it will be less than forty - At this rate, you will never finish...

MANK
What I want to know is what you think of it?

HOUSEMAN
(after a beat)
Of course the writing is first-rate, but you know that. His lust for power, your exquisite evocation of his hunger for love from those who fear his worst side. But-

MANK
The dreaded, yet foreseeable BUT...

FRAULEIN FREDAB comes with MANK'S food tray. He digs in.
HOUSEMAN
You're asking a lot of a motion picture audience. All in all it's a bit of a jumble.

MANK
Did you say jumble or jungle?

HOUSEMAN
A hodgepodge of talky episodes. A collection of fragments that leap around in time, like Mexican jumping beans.

MANK
Welcome to my mind, Old Sock.

HOUSEMAN
The story is so scattered I'm afraid one will need a roadmap.

MANK
You mean it's a mess.

HOUSEMAN
Would you consider simplifying?

MANK
As Pascal once said, "if only I'd had more time I would have written a shorter letter."

HOUSEMAN
All I am saying is, no one can write like that.

MANK
But I can write like that Houseman. I have. The narrative is one big circle, like a cinnamon roll. Not a straight line pointing to the nearest exit. You cannot capture a man's entire life in two hours...all you can hope is to leave the impression of one.
HOUSEMAN
Nobody expects Shakespeare. People aren't spending their hard earned 25 cents to see Macbeth.

MANK
"Maestro the dog-faced boy" did Macbeth.

HOUSEMAN
"Voodoo Macbeth." Don't be fooled. He's a showman. A busker reveling in sleight of hand. Save yourself the trouble, be done in sixty days...

MANK
He'll get this. And the audience will, too. Stop worrying. Have a pickle.

HOUSEMAN
No thank you, I'm not hungry. Haven't been since we got here. (collecting pages) Cheerio. Write hard. Aim low.

HOUSEMAN leaves.

RITA gets her pad, comes to MANK'S bed.

MANK
Where were we, chief?

RITA
What are you going to do?

MANK
About what?

RITA
He's right you know. You won't be done 'til Christmas.

MANK
What?

RITA
You made a promise.
MANK
I did what?

RITA
60 days is two weeks from now.

He doesn't say anything...annoyed.

MANK
Where were we?

RITA
(consulting her notes)
Bernstein's speech...The young woman on the ferry boat.

MANK
Read it back, please.

As she reads:

24 EXT. FERRY BOAT DECK – DAY

The YOUNG WOMAN idling on the deck of a ferry, all in white. It is SARA.

RITA (V.O.)
A white dress she had on – and she was carrying a white parasol – and I only saw her for one second and she didn't see me at all – but I'll bet a month hasn't gone by since, that I haven't thought of that girl.

25 INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW – DAY

RITA looks up at MANK, smiles warmly.

RITA
A snapshot from the Mankiewicz family album?

MANK
You might say that.

RITA
It really is a gorgeous –
MANK
(overlapping)
- spot to get stuck.

Mank's lost momentum, thrown off by Houseman's admonitions.

RITA
Is Bernstein meant to be Louis Mayer?

MANK
If form follows function...

RITA
Mayer's the same pathetic sort of lap dog to our Charles Foster?

MANK
Oh, Bernstein's a far nicer character.

RITA
You don't much like Mayer.

His face gone to granite.

MANK
If I ever go to the electric chair, I'd like him to be sitting in my lap.

EXT. MGM ARCHES - WASHINGTON GATE - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE THE LEGEND:

EXT. MGM STUDIOS - DAY - 1933 (FLASHBACK)

MANK and his brother JOE stride toward MAYER'S office.

JOE
Seven-fifty a week? That's half what you make, Herman.

MANK
You're a junior writer, Joe.

JOE
So?
MANK
So you're only half the wit your big brother is. How many half-wits make that?

JOE
(sarcastic)
Ha! Herm. How do I look?

MANK
You look like you - fine.

JOE
What should I be expecting?

MANK
You're related to me. He already thinks you're a genius.

JOE
Enough...

MANK
The job will be yours if you can do two things. One. Don't roll your eyes. Two. Try not to fail asleep.

INT. MAYER'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

MAYER'S SECRETARY, and two other ASSISTANTS, sit busy at their desks, case-hardened to the RUCKUS seen through the open door to MAYER'S inner office.

MAYER (O.S.)
This isn't Gower Gulch. You want us to make a picture about a prostitute?

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Oh, what's wrong with that? My mother was nothing but a whore.

There is the SOUND of a CRASHING BLOW and JOHN GILBERT catapults through the doorway. MAYER charges out and hovers over him, fists balled, face contorted in a fury.
MAYER
You would talk about your own mother that way? The woman who gave you life? You ungrateful bastard! I oughta cut your balls off!

GILBERT
Do it, you fucking junk dealer!
I'll still be the better man.

MAYER decides he won't dirty himself by going any further... Gilbert walks away rubbing his chin... Mank brings Joe over...

MANK
L.B., this is my brother, Joe.

MAYER
Nice tameetcha Joseph, I'm Louis Mayer.

MANK
I can't tell you what this means to him, Louis.

Joe gives him a look.

A MAYER SECRETARY
They're all there Mr. Mayer...

MAYER
I'm on my way. Joe, walk with me.

He moves quickly along the hallway, Joe and Mank at his side.

MAYER (CONT'D)
My boy, there are three work rules at this studio. Rule number one. Ars Gratia Artis. Art for Art's sake.

A MAN passes by, giving L.B. an anxious wave...

MAYER (CONT'D)
(to employee)
How ya doing?
(to Joe)
MAYER (CONT'D)
One million dollars a year we spend on stories we never even film.

He slows to sign something thrust at him, then charges on.

MAYER (CONT'D)
Why not? I'll tell you. They don't make me cry. What makes me cry? Emotion. Where do I feel emotion?
here --
(he taps his forehead)
here --
(he taps his heart)
-- and here.
(he grabs his crotch)

They turn the corner, wheeling like Grand Prix racers.

MAYER (CONT'D)
Rule number two: You may have heard M-G-M has more stars than there are in the heavens. Do not believe this.

A woman walks by and gives a tentative wave...

MAYER (CONT'D)
Hi'ya -
(moving on)
We have only one star, that is Leo the Lion. Never forget that. Many stars have, and now they twinkle elsewhere. Rule number three -- People think M-G-M stands for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. It does not. It stands for Mayer's Ganza Mishpoka - Mayer's Whole Family. Never forget that. You got a problem, you come to poppa. This is a business where the buyer gets nothing for his money but a memory. What he bought still belongs to the man who sold it. That's the real magic of the movies and don't let anybody tell ya different.
WHEELING HURRIEDLY TOWARD A SOUND STAGE DOOR

Where a fearful AIDE waits to usher MAYER in.

MAYER stares at the floor a beat, gearing himself up, then looks up at the Aide and nods. He's worked himself up, his eyes gleam with tears. He makes his way inside. Mank and Joe follow.

INT. SOUND STAGE - DAY

The sound stage has bleachers and all the STARS in the heavens sit waiting for him, typifying Hollywood's most glamorous and powerful studio. The other members of the M-G-M family, the laborers, stand crowding the soundstage. Seeing him, there's an eruption of applause. Mank and Joe find space against a wall, fascinated.

THEIR PUJ

Mayer standing, head down with "humility," taking their applause. He lifts his hands as if to say, "It's too much..." When they've finished:

MAYER

I find myself in a horrendous position...And I come to all of you on bended knee...

He stops to let that resonate...the all powerful L.B. Mayer laid low...

MAYER (CONT'D)

We are suffering, as all Americans are, from our country's terrible economic woes. Good people -- everyday people can't afford to go to the movies, so even our pre-eminent dream-factory is in grave financial difficulty.

He bows his head at even the thought...

MAYER (CONT'D)

(raising his head, chin out, mock dignified)
MAYER (CONT'D)
I am asking everyone in the M-G-M family to take a painful step. I am asking to roll back salaries.

He looks at each and every face...

MAYER (CONT'D)
I don't want to, but for this hallowed place to continue to exist, I am forced to. I won't break up this family over something like money.

There, he's said what he had to...he stands still as if stricken to his core. Once they've digested that...

A MAN'S VOICE (OVER)
How long are you asking for?

MAYER
Shouldn't be long.

ANOTHER MAN
How much are you asking for?

MAYER
Half...

ANOTHER MAN
Half?

MAYER
Could be less...

ANOTHER MAN
Is everybody going to be "pitching in?" Are you, Mr. Mayer?

MAYER
Real families root for each other in the good times. Take care of each other in tough ones.

OLDER MAN
We're with you, L.B.

The Stars shine bright with that...but there's a lone VOICE...
YOUNGER MAN
You may be, Mister Barrymore -- but a fifty percent pay cut for grips and electricians?

The stars murmur looking with contempt at the young man.

MAYER
Eight weeks, my friends! Eight short weeks! As soon as FDR reopens the banks... you'll get back every penny! On that... you have the sacred word of L.B. Mayer.

ELDERLY FEMALE STAR
(easing to her feet)
Well, I vote yes.

MOVIE STAR #2
I do as well.

CHILD STAR
(leaping up, his muppet voice)
Me, too!

Which brings them to their feet CHEERING. And MAYER hurries out, as if unable to handle the torrent of emotion that engulfs him. MANK and JOE look at each other...

INT. SOUND STAGE - DAY

MAYER
(softly)
How'd I do, Ben?

BEN
It was great, Mr. Mayer.

MANK and JOE watch MAYER and his AIDE stride off.

MANK
(shakes his head)
Not even the most disgraceful thing I've ever seen...
The camera TRACKS through shadows toward MANK'S bed, amid muted ORGASTIC MOANS and urgent WHISPERs: "You like zat?" "Ummm...That's wonderful." "A little to zuh left, maybe." "Yeah." FRAULEIN FrEDEA is raking under MANK'S cast with a CHINESE BACK-SCRATCHER. MANK twists over just as RITA enters in a hurry.

RITA  
I've got to rush into town to get typewriter ribbon. Here are the morning's pages.

MANK  
Dreck. It's all dreck!

RITA  
Don't flagellate. At least you're writing again.

MANK  
(downcast)  
None of it sings. None of it. Not a note.

RITA  
(walking away)  
You're not writing an opera.

As she leaves: The PHONE RINGS.

FRAULEIN FrEDEA  
(answering)  
Hello?

MANK  
(to himself)  
But I am writing an opera.

FRAULEIN FrEDEA  
It's for you.

MANK answers the phone.

MANK  
Yeah?

JOE (V.O.)  
Herman it's Joe -
MANK
Hey, hey, kid...what's up?

JOE (V.O.)
Checking in. How are you getting around?

MANK
Gingerly.

JOE (V.O.)
Any rest?

MANK
Haven't seen a sunrise yet.

JOE (V.O.)
You've never seen a sunrise.

MANK
Sara said you wanted this number.

JOE (V.O.)
Just to hear your voice.

MANK
Oh, she said you had some work you wanted to talk about...

JOE (V.O.)
Ahhh, I was thinking about that old play, "The Wild Man of Borneo." The one you wrote in the Ice Age.

MANK
One never remembers one's disasters. It's considered gauche.

JOE (V.O.)
A play is never a disaster, till the movies say it is. I brought it to my people at the studio. We want W.C. Fields, and we want you to adapt...

MANK
Uh, I'm kind of on something right now.
JOE (V.O.)
I can get you paid for the play and the adaptation.

MANK
Sounds great... But I'll have to think about it.

JOE (V.O.)
You know how these things have their moment.

MANK
So this isn't an offer, it's a subtle ultimatum.

JOE (V.O.)
Nobody could ever tell you what to do.

MANK
Did Sara put you up to this?

JOE (V.O.)
Not at all. But I know how things are... I can tell by her voice.

MANK
How bad is that, baby brother?

JOE (V.O.)
How bad? I went to a party last night where Scott Fitzgerald referred to you as a "ruined man." That's how bad things can get.

MANK
(laughing)
That's good. I may use that.

JOE (V.O.)
Herman --

MANK
Please stop Joey, and just tell me what's on your mind.

JOE (V.O.)
I hear you're hunting dangerous game.
JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Word on the street is radio's
Golden Boy wants to go toe to toe
with Willie Hearst and you're
helping in the kitchen.

MANK
Oh? And...?

JOE (V.O.)
And? Herman, and?

MANK
How stupid of me. I thought I was
rejecting a humiliating handout
when all the time I was nixing a
respectable bribe.

JOE (V.O.)
And I'm sorry I ever cared.
The phone CLICKS DEAD in MANK'S ear and ours.

MANK
Oops.

He hangs it up. But he's rattled.

INT. SAN SIMEON - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

SUPERIMPOSE THE
LEGEND:

INT. SAN SIMEON ASSEMBLY ROOM - NIGHT - 1933 (FLASHBACK)

We crane from on high through a huge chandelier looking
over what was called The Assembly Room. A birthday cake
with sparklers (honoring the 4th of July) is being wheeled
to L.B. Mayer. The cake says "happy Birthday L.B." with
Lady Liberty on it. Mayer is standing before a large
gathering of people, studio moguls, most famously Irving
Thalberg and David O. Selznick, as well as stars like
Chaplin, Lombard, Garbo...The wives cluster, as do young
men looking for available prizes. Marion is in a gaggle of
actresses, and we see MANK straddling the two worlds. Sara
is protectively near MANK, who, for courage and solace,
grabs two drinks off a waiter's passing tray.
The cake arrives, the gathered singing 'Happy Birthday,' Mayer basking in the light of the sparklers...he tries to blow them out which isn't physically possible. The cake is taken away to be cut. There's the sound of a spoon tapping glass...host William Randolph Hearst commands the room...

HEARST
Marion and I are so pleased you could all come stay for the weekend. I hope the train ride wasn't too arduous.

Which they appreciatively chuckle at. Hearst, raising his glass...

HEARST (CONT'D)
And tonight we're celebrating our great friend's birthday in our little hillside home.
Charlie -

And with that, the room sings "Happy Birthday" to Mayer...

HEARST (CONT'D)
Louis, you should be joyous, you don't look a day over forty-eight.

MAYER
I feel thirty-five.

Great applause.

MAYER (CONT'D)
Mister Hearst, Marion, all of you, my heart is full to bursting. I can't express in words...

MANK
(to himself)
Please don't try.

MAYER
W.r., nothing is more precious to me than your friendship and sage advice. I am blessed to call you my friend. God bless William Randolph Hearst.

Everybody agrees...
MANK
("Tiny Tim")
God bless us everyone.

They affectionately applaud...

MANK (CONT'D)
A very happy birthday Louis. Our
country should be flattered that
you picked its birthdate as your
own. The rest of us have to be
satisfied with the one we happen
to be born on.

SARA
Mank --

MANK
(a mock toast)
Here's to your rich Canadian
imagination.

They all repeat "Rich Canadian imagination..." And all
applaud against a round of "hear hear's." Sara reaches over
to stop Mank going any further...

ANGLE ON MAYER
Cake mid-mouth, his expression stuck...when Hearst, as if
the comment has just reached him, roars his appreciation of
Mank... Thalberg makes sure the moment passes by
toasting...

THALBERG
Here's to banks re-opening!

Which is roundly cheered by one and all...

HEARST
(raising his glass)
And to freedom.

They echo him, "To Freedom." They drink their appreciation.

HEARST (CONT'D)
I believe you've met our
distinguished guest, Mr. Rexford
Tugwell. Now, Rex is special
assistant to President Roosevelt.
HEARST (CONT'D)
And we're all interested in what you might share with us.

There are incongruous chuckles at the mingled politics, and applause for the special assistant...

HEARST (CONT'D)
And...we all want to welcome the Thalbergs back from Irving's long convalescence in Europe.

More applause.

THALBERG
Thank you, W.R.

HEARST
Good to see you, Irving.

NORMA SHEARER THALBERG
Thank you, Mister Hearst.

HEARST
Norma.

And as the "ceremonial" part of the evening ends and starts to settle into...

CHARLIE CHAPLIN
(at the piano - suddenly tickling the ivories)
Anybody seen anything good lately...?

MARION
(enthusiastic)
I just saw 42nd Street.
(Brooklyn-ese)
It blew my wig.

MANK
You can take the girl out of Bed-Stuy...

HEARST
(to Marion)
When was that?
MARION
Over the weekend - you were in
D.C. I went to the pictures in
Santa Barbara.

HEARST
We have a fine screening room here
-

MAYER
A warner's picture -- why waste
money on that?

HEARST
Next time, I'll go with you.

MARION
Of course.
(going on)
I am bonkers about movietone News,
I love Lowell Thomas' voice...

ACTRESS #1
Oh! Is he single?

ACTRESS #2
I sat across from him at the Brown
Derby once. He bought me a drink.

ACTRESS #3
He didn't!

ACTRESS #2
Not - technically. But I made sure
to run into him in the parking lot
after. I asked him, "Do you need a
lift?"

ACTRESS #3
You didn't! What'd he say?

ACTRESS #2
I'll never tell.

She secretly smiles...which brings gales of laughter,
including marion's.

HEARST
(to no-one in particular)
There is a point to this dear?
MARION
Weil yes, they showed that Hitler giving a speech...kissing babies...He's (a shiver) creepers...

MANK
Lederhosen and suspenders, terrifying.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN
Oh, no. It's the moustache that's the horror...

HEARST
Don't be alarmed, marion. He won't be around for long. The Germans are a thoughtful, considerate people. Enough about Nazis. Irving, tell us about your travels. Where were you?

THALBERG
Uh, Berlin, in fact.

There's an audible groan.

THALBERG (CONT'D)
But it was quite interesting --

NORMA SHEARER THALBERG
Thugs in brown shirts goose-stepping past our hotel all night, screaming anti-Semitic slogans... I was terrified the whole time.

MARION
This Hitler sounds like an utter drip. Shouldn't the United States do something, Mr. Tugwell?

TUGWELL
We are weighing all options.

THALBERG
Can't last. Who in the world takes a lunatic like that seriously?
MANK
Well, the last time I looked,
fourty million Germans.

SARA
Sweetheart --

HEARST
(deep throughted laugh)
Mank, you are always so
wondrfully contrary!

MARION
(giggling, to build on
his joke)
"Chase and Sanborn's der coffee,
can forty million Nazis all be
wrong?"

Which falls flat, except to Mank who gives her the courtesy
of a shortie...

MANK
I just read they've opened their
first concentration camps and
started burning books. What's
next, movies?

SARA
(quietly)
Enough.

MAYER
Is that true, Irving?

THALBERG
Yes, L.B.

MAYER
Hitler Shmitler. You don't turn
your back on a market as big as
Germany.

(aside to THALBERG)

HEARST
What's a concentration camp?

What's a concentration camp?

Please, it's upsetting enough
Marion had to endure the man in
newsreel.
MARION
It was fascinating. Those people adore him.
   (self conscious)
I'm probably talking nonsense.

MANK
You're the first tonight that isn't.

Which causes Hearst to laugh, changing the conversation...

SELZNICK
Speaking of socialists, how about Upton Sinclair's new book?

HEARST
(overlapping)
No..

SELZNICK
He wants to turn private enterprise over to the state of California.

MAYER
There's one we won't be optioning -- eh Irving?

NORMA SHEARER THALBERG
Well, it's selling like crazy.

IRENE SELZNICK
Waiter Winchelli says Sinclair may run for governor next election.

MAYER
That rat Bolshevik belongs right up there with Hitler on the list of people not to be taken seriously.

MANK
There's a world of difference between Communism and Socialism.

MAYER
They both want something for nothing.
MANK
Like a work force for free?

THALBERG
...Half -- and only in the interim...

HEARST
I think it's safe to assume that none of us here would welcome a crusading Socialist as California's political savior. Certainly not FDR. Am I right, Rex?

TUGWELL
Off the record? The president says the man bears watching. Especially now that Republicans seem bent on running... (looks to Mayer) Frank Merriam again.

Others LAUGH derisively. MAYER GRUNTS.

THALBERG
Sinclair's run twice before and got what, two percent of the vote?

HEARST
(a genial put-down)
Good people: the man is an author.

Which brings sounds of accordance... all except for:

MANK
As was Thomas Jefferson.

HEARST
Come now, Mank - Upton Sinclair as Thomas Jefferson?

MANK
No, you're right. W.R. Jefferson never got Federal laws passed to ban oil monopolies, the railroad trusts, or cleaned up the stockyards.
THALBERG
He's an angry scribe - a provocateur.

MANK
Because he provokes thought.

THALBERG
You always side with the "writer", Mank. Poor souls surviving a depression on five grand a week.

MAYER
Commies.

THALBERG
L.B.'s not wrong.

MANK
Irving, you're a literate man. You know the difference between Communism and Socialism. In Socialism, everyone shares the wealth. In Communism, everyone shares the poverty.

THALBERG
Thank you, Mr. Mankiewicz --

MANK
Upton just wants you to apportion some of your Christmas bonus, Irving, to the people who clean your house.

HEARST
(enjoying)
Now that's why I always want Mank around!

MARION
Me too!

THALBERG
(scoffing)
"Upton," Mank? Nobody's asking to hear you sing "The Internationale."
MARILYN
What's that?

HEARST
The Communist National Anthem, darling.

MARILYN
(taking him literally)
I would. Do you sing?

MANK
No one should have to hear me sing. Isn't that right, Sara?

SARA
If at all possible.

MAYER
Well, as Republican State chairman-elect, I'm telling you: nothing's going to happen here. The people who count in California won't let it. All this talk is so much pissing in the wind.

MANK
Nicely put.

MRS. MAYER rouses herself to a fearful, nervous smile. Marion, wanting to redeem herself in the eyes of Hearst:

MARILYN
I heard Pops on the phone helping pick the president's cabinet, like casting a movie. They can stop a guy like Sinclair. Couldn't you, Pops?

A LEADEN SILENCE descends.

MARILYN (CONT'D)
Pardon. I don't know what I'm saying.

She stands unsteadily and leaves. Mank looks after her. He looks at Sara.

SARA
Go.
Mank leaves.

ANGLE ON SARA

Her expression warring between sad, uncertain and lost.

EXT. SAN SIMON GROUNDS - NIGHT

Mank follows...He sees marion stop on a grassy hill, piop herself down, and grope the base of a marble bench looking for something. Mank sits, and sees she's pulling out of all things, a radio-telephone, which sets her off on a geyser of giggles.

MARION

'Lo, Tokyo? London, you theah?
Ah, nerts!

MANK

What is that?

MARION

Aaahhhhhhh, Pops' radio-phones.
Nevah, evah be out of touch with your empire!

MANK

No, no, what's nerts?

MARION

Oh, nerts is Brooklynes for "nuts"...

MANK

Jeepers.

Which again breaks her up as she puts the phone back...She's found a half-drunk gin bottle. They sit on the bench.

MARION

What did I do that was so terrible? I guess I shouldn't have said that thing about the cabinet in front of Tugwell. But since when does anybody care what I have to say? Those things just pop out of my mouth. And the moment they do I feel like - like --
MANK
Like you got caught "Jambes en L'air..."

MARION
(gasps)
No!...well... Do you always just say whatever you think?

MANK
You're blushing.

MARION
Am not.

MANK
Are, too.

MARION
Am not...

MANK
Are, too. I can see it -- even in the dark...

MARION
Well, what I can tell you, Mank. Marion Douras went to convent school.

MANK
HEDDA? LOUELLA! Where's a gossip columnist around this castle when you need one?

They LAUGH together.

MARION
I hate shoptalk! I never know what's going on.
(confiding)
The one thing you nevah evah talk about is Upton Sinclair.

MANK
I noted. The moment he's mentioned the evening turns.

MARION
It's sort of a sore subject.
Mank pulls her to her feet.

MANK
Really? Do tell.

EXT. ANIMAL PARK - NIGHT

They walk a series of terraced stairwells -- passing wrought-iron fences, behind which scream all manner of primates.

MARION
I don't even know who this Mister Sinclair is...but he wrote about us for a book. I used to quote it word for word.

(closing her eyes)
"I saw our richest newspaper publisher keep his movie mistress in a private city of palaces and cathedrals, furnished with shiploads of junk imported from Europe, and surrounded by vast acres reserved for use by zebras and giraffes..."

(going on)
" -- telling in jest that he had spent six million dollars to make his lady's reputation, and using his newspapers to celebrate her change of hats..."

MANK
It must be hard to be on the receiving end of that.

Marion opens her eyes.

MARION
People think because you're on the cover of "Modern Screen," they know you.

Mank nods sympathetically. But she is a perennial optimist.

MARION (CONT'D)
Awww nerts, what do I have to complain about?
MARION (CONT'D)
I live in a fishbowl, but anything
I want is mine... (pause) If I
could I'd share with everyone, you
know that Mank. This "Upton"
doesn't know a thing about the
real...

The sound of the monkeys intrudes... she smiles...

MARION (CONT'D)
Nobody but nobody makes a monkey
out of William Randolph Hearst!

They wander off, giggling...

34 EXT. ANIMAL PARK - NIGHT 34

MANK
I understand why Mayer loathes
him.

MARION
Why?

MANK
Sinclair caught Louis with his
pants down.

MARION
(shivers)
Yikes.

MANK
He wrote that Mayer took a bribe
to look the other way so a rival
could buy M-G-M... It's
complicated.

MARION
Over my head?

MANK
Over mine. You'd need a degree in
larceny.

MARION
Isn't bribery a crime?
MANK
That's what Sinclair said. The little sausage might have gone to jail.

MARION
Jeepers.

MANK
Oh, the hypocrisy. "My Ganza Mishpoka." "My Mishpoka."

MARION
(giggles)
I don't speak a lot of Jewish...

MANK
Really. "My mishpoka." "My Family." Everything he does is for family. Except when it comes to selling his last name to a competitor in the middle of the night.

MARION
Wow, he would do that to his own studio?

MANK
He doesn't own MGM any more than Sam Goldwyn... They just run it for the money-boys back east.

(meaning elephants)
And jail is not something an animal like Mayer is likely to forget.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE ANIMAL PARK - NIGHT

They walk by the GIRAFFES.

MARION
Irving must be clean. He looks like he shaves three times a day.

MANK
Well, there's clean and there's clean. Irving bought one of Sinclair's novels.
MANK (CONT'D)
Sinclair demanded a guarantee that not one word could be changed, in writing, on the back of the purchase check.

MARION
(in mock horror)
He didn't want notes from Irving Thalberg?

MANK
When Thalberg refused, Sinclair took his money and ran off to Mexico, and financed a picture about the Russian Revolution.

(points to giraffes)
Now that's sticking the old neck out...

They arrive at a FORMAL GARDEN.

EXT. A FORMAL GARDEN - NIGHT

Full of statuary. MARION begins to dance. As MANK watches, she whirls about, faster and faster, until she comes out of it dizzy. MANK catches her.

MANK
Sorry...instinct.

MARION
My fault...I've been a little sixes and sevens recently...

(a pause)
Tell me something Mank, the truth...could you see me playing Elizabeth Barrett Browning? Or Marie Antoinette? Irving's bought 'em both, ya know --

(sotto voce)
Because of Pops. what'd'ya think, and... Honestly?

MANK
I see you more as Dulcinea.
MArlON  
Who?

MANK  
Dulcinea. From the Spanish for sweetness.

MArlON  
Ohhh?

MANK  
Her hair gold, her cheeks roses --

MArlON  
Nice!

MANK  
-- her lips coral, her neck alabaster, her bosom marble...

MArlON  
(giggling)  
Marble?! Maybe, once!

MANK  
- ivory her hands, and her whiteness snow.

MArlON  
You wrote that?

MANK  
No, a fella named Cervantes.  
(clears throat)  
"There are meters of accent/ And meters of Tone/ But the best of all meters/ Is to meet her alone."

MArlON  
Ah ha! A pome with a message!

They sit on a bench among the statues.

MANK  
That's just the first verse. The last: There are letters of accent/ And letters of tone/ But the best of all letters/ Is to let her alone.
MARION starts to LAUGH...

MANK (CONT'D)
(continuing; gently)
Now, those I wrote.

She looks at him. And tired as much as anything, she puts
her head on his shoulder. And Mank lets her keep it there.

DISSOLVE TO:

37 INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - THAT NIGHT

We see a good number of pages with scribbled notes all
crumpled on the floor. Rita has to avoid them so as not to
bother Mank. She bends to the wastebasket and seeing there
are two empty miniature bottles this time, she retrieves
them. As he sleeps the sleep of the dead...

38 INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW (1940) - DAY

The stack of notebooks has grown knee-high...Mank works in
bed, pages scattering, blown by a ceiling fan that clanks
from overuse. Mank, sweating, looks like he's been up all
night -- and he has -- although how much is usable may be
reflected by the number of wadded up pages...He's in
trouble. There's a knock on the door.

MANK
(scribbling)
Do come in.

And Rita comes in, bringing in with her the harsh light of
day. Mank, like a vampire, shields his eyes...

MANK (CONT'D)
Jesus! What is that?

RITA
Sunlight. It's nearly noon.

MANK
...Mother of God...where did the
night go?

RITA
Your support device is here.

MANK
Oh good, send it in.
RITA
(the bad news)
As is Mr. Houseman...
Rita is concerned about something beyond the usual...a
whiff of deception in the air...

RITA (CONT'D)
What would you like me to do?

MANK
Well, send him in too.

But first she motions to someone else. The resort's
handyman, SLIM, enters...surveying the room.

MANK (CONT'D)
(motioning)
Uh, put it over there, please...
The handyman moves a chair and ottoman, making space, and
shuffles back out...Rita clears the door. Houseman stops
dead in his tracks seeing Mank in flop sweat. Mank gathers
his pages.

MANK (CONT'D)
You're early...

Seeing Houseman's solemnity, he realizes there's serious
business...

HOUSEMAN
(quietly)
I thought we should talk...

Mank nods. Houseman slowly takes off his hat, and neatly
folds his coat.

MANK
Why are you wearing a coat?

HOUSEMAN
I always wear a coat.

MANK
Must be 108 degrees.

Houseman shifts to sit on the bed...trying to maintain his
dignity despite it sagging under him...When Slim returns,
wheeling a big wooden box, Fraulein FREDa trails him.
HOUSEMAN
We're at a Rubicon moment, Mank.

MANK
(listening)
Uh-huh --

HOUSEMAN
It's not the work, that's everything we'd hoped it would be.

MANK
(to Slim)
Enough room there?

SLIM
Ah, it should be...

And he starts, wielding a crowbar, loudly prying open the crate... Rita and Freda watch him work...

MANK
I'm sorry, John.

HOUSEMAN
(despairing)
You've only written ninety pages...

MANK
(correcting)
Ninety-one.

HOUSEMAN
And in my expert opinion, you're hardly out of the first act... I mean, how do you hope to be done in 14...?
(looks at watch)
... 16 days...? We gave him our solemn word we would deliver...

MANK
"We?"

HOUSEMAN
I don't think he is going to take it very well, not very well at all.
MANK
You said ninety days. Welles said sixty. I'm doing the very best I can.

But Houseman has a one track mind.

HOUSEMAN
We are surely to be axed.

The lid pops off, revealing a hanging maze of steel cable, pulleys, winches, bars, and ropes. Rita, Freda, and particularly Mank, look at it with wonder...Slim starts to take off a large board...

MANK
Not just yet...

Rita, Freda and Mank share a look. Houseman's oblivious.

HOUSEMAN
I've never been fired.

MANK
I've never not been fired.

HOUSEMAN
I don't get fired.

MANK
It's not as unpleasant as you might imagine. You worry too much, John. What do you do for pleasure?

The PHONE RINGS. Rita answers it...

RITA
Hello? Yes, he's here... It's Orson...

HOUSEMAN
(to Mank)
You talk?

Mank is about to take the phone...

RITA
(to Houseman)
He'd like to speak with Mr. Houseman.
HOUSEMAN

Me?

She nods yes. Houseman reluctantly takes the phone.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)

Orson.

He takes the phone around the corner... out of sight/earshot of Mank and the others... Mank, Rita and Freda watch the handyman with the apparatus.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)

I came early to see where we were with -- No. Not at all. Everything is going absolutely according to --

... he can barely finish a sentence without being interrupted...

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)

Well, that's difficult to say exactly. Ye-yes, I know the clock is -- And, as I've told you it's quite unique... In fact, I would venture to say one of the most -- Yes... well, it will absolutely need your marvelous --

Another interruption...

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)

-- he's on the mend --

And another...

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)

-- Working tirelessly --

And a final...

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)

Of course. When -- ? I'm on my way... Yes, hang on... he's right here...

He brings the phone back to Mank, he, Rita and Freda all share a look.
HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
He wants to see me right away.
Wouldn't tell me why --
   (giving him the phone)
- perhaps he will you.

MANK looks to the phone as HOUSEMAN leaves. Then...

MANK
Orson.

WELLES (V.O.)
Tell me what's up, Mank?

MANK
He's getting on my nerves.

WELLES (V.O.)
I sensed that. I told him I had to see him at once. Hopefully I can think of a reason before he gets here.

Welles laughs.

WELLES (V.O.)
I've finished my test for Heart of Darkness. I'm turning my full attention to our little project.

MANK
Let there be light.

WELLES (V.O.)
Tell me what to expect?

MANK
I thought you'd want to be surprised.

Welles laughs.

WELLES (V.O.)
Ha! You're always surprising.
That's why you were my only choice. No one else is Wankiewicz.

Mank motions to Slim. SLIM removes a plywood panel revealing two dozen or so quarts of premium scotch secured in straw for safety and stowed in a rack beneath it.
WELLES (V.O.)
I can almost hear the finish line.

MANK
Uh, we're about to turn a corner.

WELLES (V.O.)
Unto the breach!

And MANK hangs up, nods at SLIM as the others watch...

MANK
Slim, you may tote those lovely
highland beauties to the kitchen.
Fraulein Freda, empty the mickeys
and start replacing their contents
— raus schnell!
Slim...

As both FRAULEIN FREDa and SLIM start, MANK slips Slim a
ten-spot:

RITA
Thank you, Slim, you may go.

As SLIM leaves, MANK stares at RITA. FRAULEIN FREDa begins
collecting bottles for transport.

RITA (CONT'D)
Mister Mankiewicz, please don't
ask us to help you in this sad
deception.

MANK
My dear Mrs. Alexander. Charlie
Lederer and I went to a great deal
of trouble to engineer this sad
deception. My deadline is two
weeks away — and I intend to...

RITA
It could mean our jobs.

MANK
I do my best thinking before I
fall asleep. And I am sick and
tired of having my evenings end
with the abrupt sensation of being
struck on the head with a croquet
mailet.
RITA
A way of putting it.

MANK
I am not asking you to help.

RITA
You're not.

MANK
I am telling you.

RITA
I'm sorry. I won't be bullied. You'll have my resignation in the morning.

RITA turns on her heel and walks out the door. She turns.

RITA (CONT'D)
And I know Fraulein Freda's been sneaking you nightcaps from the cabinet. If she continues to cooperate in this cheap ruse I shall have no choice but to report the both of you.

MANK
(beat; grimly)
Fraulein Freda?

FRAULEIN FREDA
Ja, Herr Mank?

MANK
Please do as I instructed.

FRAULEIN FREDA
Ja, Herr Mank.

FRAULEIN FREDA trudges to the kitchen.

39
INT. KITCHEN - DAY

FRAULEIN FREDA is methodically pouring mickeys down the drain one bottle after another as RITA strides in angrily.

RITA
Freda, you mustn't let him intimidate you like that!
FRAULEIN FREDA
I am not intimidated Frau Alexander.

RITA
Then, why?

FRAULEIN FREDA
Herr Mank sponsored my family's entry into this country. He is responsible for us getting safely out of Germany...Legally and financially...

RITA
Really?

FRAULEIN FREDA
Our entire village he brought here.

RITA
Entire village?

FRAULEIN FREDA
Over a hundred people. Josef, Goebbels, the propaganda minister, will not allow his films to be shown in the Fatherland.

RITA
I di - I didn't realize.

FRAULEIN FREDA
He wrote a picture about the Nazis, which no studio anywhere will dare make.

(looking up)
I assume, if he wishes to drink, he is a grown man, a good man and should be treated as such. Nicht Wahr?

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

RITA comes out with two scotches. One she hands to MANK.
RITA
Here's to Mank-town. Or is it Mankville?

MANK
Dear Freda. WHAT'S GERMAN FOR BLABBERMOUTH?

RITA
(raising her glass)
Either you demonstrate you can handle this, Mankiewicz, or we will all end up getting sacked.

MANK
(raising his glass)
There's nothing like a vote of confidence from one's peers.

RITA
(a small smile)
To Mank-berg. Prosit!

MANK
(a big grin)
Mank-heim. Bottoms up.

EXT. M-G-M STUDIO - DAY - (FLASHBACK)
GRUBBY MEN mill about the gates, hustling small change.

SUPERIMPOSE THE LEGEND:

EXT. M-G-M STUDIOS - DAY - 1954 (FLASHBACK)
MANK walks toward the entrance. He pauses to light a cigarette, strikes the match against a MANK-FOR-GOVERNOR poster.

As he reaches the gate an UNSHAVEN MAN blocks his path.

C.C.
Hey! Mank? You remember me?

MANK
Oh. My God! Of course I remember you, C.C.

C.C. Starts to shake hands, thinks better of it.
C.C.
C.C. fer Central Castin'. How you been mank?

MANK
What happened?

C.C.
What happened? The Goddamned Depression happened. I ain't had so much as a walk-on since Tugboat Annie. Listen: I hate tuh, you know-

MANK pats his pockets, turns to the STUDIO GATE GUARD.

MANK
Uh- yeah. Ed? Lend me a buck?

ED scowls but does so reluctantly. Mank gives it to C.C. another PANHANDLER immediately drifts over to join them.

C.C.
Me an' Grady here been thinkin' a bummin' east tuh miam-uh.
(secretive,
   conspiratorial...)
I heard it from somebody who knows, the Hollywood studios are moving to Florida.

MANK
Who told you that?

C.C.
(nods his head, meaning studio)
Oh, I can't say, but somebody in the know...(whispers) In certain echelons, it's common knowledge.

MANK
People in "certain echelons" don't usually trust me with sensitive information. But the studios aren't moving anywhere. That's just company-town propaganda.
C.C.
Believe what you want. But...Say -
(indicating GRADY)
You think you could spare -

MANK
Uh, Ed?

C.C. (O.S.)
Bless you, Mank.

MANK glances again at the GATE GUARD. Shrugging, ED turns his pants pockets inside out. They are eloquently empty.

42
INT. M-G-M - COMMISSARY - DAY

MANK and JOE eating lunch.

JOE
The bastard reneged. You were there...Yes, he reinstated salaries - but he never gave back the money he promised.

MANK
Giant surprise.

JOE
Come on, Mank, we need guys like you to keep people like Mayer honest.

MANK
I'd refer you for that, to the power of prayer.

JOE
The Writers Guild doesn't have to hit the bricks for the twenty-five hundred-a-week guy. We're doing it for the two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar-a-weeker.

MANK
Joe: All the two-hundred-fifty-dollar-a-week writers I know, are getting twenty-five hundred.
MANK (CONT'D)
Stop crying for your just desserts they're liable to give them to you. Then we'll all be working for seventy-five bucks a week.

JOE
I don't know if you've ever walked a picket line...You might have to.

MANK
Dave Chasen'll cater. JUNIOR WRITERS ONLY PAID SEVEN HUNDRED FIFTY A WEEK! If that happens, you better run before real folk with real troubles stone you to death.

MANK signals for the check, gets it, gives it to JOE.

JOE
Hermie, the Guild's in its infancy, it needs you.

MANK
(getting up)
You're telling me. What writer failed to notice the Screen Writer's Guild needs an apostrophe. As Groucho always said: Never belong to any club that would have someone like you for a member.

Leaning over, MANK flips JOE'S tie into his coffee.

JOE
And look at him. The most miserable bastard on God's green earth.

MANK
I'd tell him you said that... only he'd think you were brown-nosing.

INT. THALBERG'S OFFICE - DAY
Mank enters, seeing Thalberg bending over his fireplace, batting smoke with a newspaper.
THALBÉRG
Close the door.

He does.

MANK
Aaaaahhhhhhh. Summer.

THALBÉRG crosses to his desk.

THALBÉRG
(into the intercom)
Inez? You're not to let the
Brothers Marx wait in my office,
ever. They've been grilling hot
dogs again.

Mank laughs.

THALBÉRG (CONT'D)
Sit down.

He takes a chair.

MANK
You wanted to see me?

THALBÉRG
Not that I care, but why aren't
you contributing to M-G-M's anti-
Sinclair fund...?

MANK
Well, call me old-fashioned,
Irving, but I don't like being
told which side of a fight I'm
already on.

THALBÉRG
How's it going to look if the GOP
chairman himself can't get
unanimous support from his own
studio?

MANK
You're serious.
THALBERG

(he is serious)
I was taught by my parents to be straightforward - to ask simply for what I want, and expect that I may have to elucidate my position.

MANK
I was encouraged by mine to use my imagination...but I taught myself to avoid the consequences.

Which even has Thalberg smile.

THALBERG
It's $10, m ank. You piss that away between hopeless bets.

Mank doesn't say anything.

THALBERG (CONT'D)
I hate to think what L.B. might do if he knew you were the only holdout.

MANK
(delighted)
...I am? And he doesn't?

THALBERG
...And we're not going to tell him. I could let you go for this.

MANK
It is... a hanging offense...

THALBERG
But I'm just going to add the appropriate amount to your gambling debt and forget we ever had this conversation.

MANK
You do that. And the brand-spanking new Writers Guild might find it verrrrry interesting. Not to mention the newspapers.
THALBERG
I'm not sure the guild intends to
cover "games of chance". And you
won't go to the press, because in
California that means Hearst.

MANK
(disappointed)
Irving, you are the shrewdest
executive in this town, why are
you acting like some dumb ward
heeler? You don't need my
donation. You don't need
anybody's. You have everything it
takes right here.

Mank gets up to go.

THALBERG
Meaning?

MANK
(he stops, turning)
Meaning, you can make the world
swear King Kong is ten stories
tall, and Mary Pickford a virgin
at forty - yet you can't convince
starving voters that a turncoat
Socialist is a menace to every
thing Californians hold dear?
You're barely trying.

And as he leaves THALBERG to think...

44
EXT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES (1934) - DAY 44

MANK and SHELLY stride out of the Biltmore bar to find:

The lot next door thronged with milling SPECTATORS. The
atmosphere is that of a church social. Workers folksily
hawk lemonade, cakes and cookies. On a flatbed truck
festooned with bunting, stands a stooped, graying FIGURE in
a tie and white dress shirt with sleeves rolled up.

UPTON SINCLAIR is speaking. The pince-nez glasses perched
on his nose give him a professorial air that this dry
platform and low, hypnotic monotone do nothing to dispel.
SINCLAIR
(reading his speech)
Millions of Californians -
(squints as it flaps)
Are being taxed out of their homes
yet the Depression is one of
abundance. Fruit rots on the
ground and vegetables are dumped
into the ocean because there are
no markets for them.

HEALER
Aimee Semple Macpherson says
you're a godless commie, Upton!

SINCLAIR
Too often, sir, the religion of
Jesus is used by the ruling
classes to keep themselves in
power and the poor ever poorer.

Mank, for the first time really hears him.

SINCLAIR (CONT'D)
And that, my friends, is a sin and
an error -- and I say with Thomas
Jefferson...

Mank smiles to himself at the echo of the reference.

SINCLAIR (CONT'D)
"...Truth has nothing to fear from
error where reason is left free to
combat it."

ANGLE ON MANK AND SHELLY

Listening. There is a SPATTERING OF APPLAUSE. In MANK'S
eyes glints a glimmer of interest. He glances around him.

MANK'S POV

A WOMAN WITH A BABY begins nursing it; a TOOTHLESS OLD MAN
yawns; SINCLAIR is in danger of losing their attention.
SINCLAIR (CONT'D)
(with a quiet passion)
My friends, income in this country is going to be redistributed by one of two methods: Legal enactment or violent revolution. We haven't much longer to exercise our choice. Thank you all for coming.

SUPPORTER
Tell us about Hollywood! Are the studios really moving to Florida like they've been sayin'?

SINCLAIR
(more animated)
Absurd, sir! If they were at all serious why have the brothers Warner just broken ground on an additional 100,000 square feet of sound stages... while M-G-M has the most contracts with stars in their history?

SINCLAIR jumps nimbly off his makeshift stage and vanishes into a crowd of WELL-WISHERS.

TWO-SHOT OF MANK AND SHELLY, FAVORING MANK

SHELLY
Well he might not get mayer's vote, but he gets mine.

SINCLAIR (O.S.)
Jobs will be here in California. Thank you all for coming!

MANK'S eyes are on the CANDIDATE. From his expression we can guess that SINCLAIR may get his vote too.

INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - DAY

MANK and TEAM are having a celebratory drink... MANK now sports a boot-cast and his crutches lean against the wall. Rita and Freda, never ones to waste a moment's time are busy boxing up interim drafts, along with discarding pages of useless ideas...
Houseman is sitting across from Mank, his hand on the script as if its very presence is fragile to the touch...

HOUSEMAN
Well, I have seen some miracles in my day. But I have --
(with some kind of awe)
Over two-hundred pages in thirteen days. I never would have thought it possible.

MANK
(lifting his glass)
To support devices.

RITA
(n her eyes dancing)
Support devices.

Fraulein Freda stifles an embarrassed titter. All drink honoring Mank, including Mank...mostly Mank.

HOUSEMAN
It's good, Mank. Damn good --

RITA
(with mischief, to MANK)
I have it on highest authority:
It's the best thing he's ever done.

An excuse for Mank to drink again. Houseman moves closer, private. Mank lights a cigarette.

HOUSEMAN
...As a moving picture it's more than good...I'm at a loss to even express...how wealth and influence can crush a man...It's Lear...the dark night of the soul...and I was completely mistaken, the shifting point of view is revolutionary. I never thought one could care so much about a sled...

MANK
It's kind of you to say...

Mank... waiting for the inevitable...
HOUSEMAN

But...

MANK

"But," again...

HOUSEMAN

It's 327 pages... An embarrassment of riches... When the Dogface Boy gets here, there will be plenty branches to prune.

MANK

"A far too long screenplay for the ages. ", John Houseman. I built him a watertight narrative and I suggest a destination. Now, where he takes it, that's his job...

Houseman becomes very quiet. He leans ever more forward, as if to reveal something at the core of his worries...

HOUSEMAN

I was looking to get you paid... I don't know if you were aware or not... you signed your rights to "the Mercury." You agreed not to take screen credit.

MANK

I needed the work.

HOUSEMAN

You may want to reconsider.

MANK

All I currently want is a real shower... a cocktail... and my Sara to wake up to.

HOUSEMAN

Are you certain?

MANK

It worked out.

Houseman digests that, still troubled...
HOUSEMAN
Mank, if I may be so bold. Why Hearst? Lord knows, outside his own blonde Betty Boop you were always his favorite dinner partner.

Mank gives it a moment's thought, looking into himself...

MANK
John, are you familiar with the parable of the organ grinder's monkey?

INT. MANK'S CAR — MORNING — (FLASHBACK)
SARA wearing a head scarf drives along Wilshire Boulevard.

SUPERIMPOSE THE LEGEND:

EXT. WILSHIRE BLVD — DAY — 1934 (FLASHBACK)
THE RADIO PLAYS, Mank — sits beside her, smoking a cigarette... He scans the Los Angeles Times.

INSERT. FIVE-COLUMN PHOTOGRAPH
A GANG OF ROBOS RIDE A FREIGHT CAR TO CAMERA.

MANK looks at the photograph a little longer maybe than he needs. Just then his eye catches a passing billboard. 'I EXPECT HALF THE UNEMPLOYED IN U.S. TO FLOCK TO CALIFORNIA IF I AM ELECTED' — UPTON SINCLAIR. DO YOU WANT THIS TO HAPPEN? THE CALIFORNIA CRUSADERS SAY DEFEAT SINCLAIR.

He looks to Sara to see if it caught her attention, but it didn't... He looks back to the NEWSPAPER considering.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BEACH — DAY
Mank, in an unfortunate swim suit, slathered with zinc, is wrestling an umbrella. SARA, sitting on a blanket near a portable radio plays music. Mank, making sure not a grain of sand touches him joins her. He lights another cigarette. MUSIC ON THE RADIO GIVES WAY TO A COMMERCIAL.
THERE'S THE SOUND OF SOMETHING PLOPPING INTO WATER. THEN A REFRESHING FIZZING SOUND..."THAT'S THE SOUND OF ALKA-SELTZER GOING TO WORK!" Mank fiddles with the radio's dial alights on a station:

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
- Today our roving reporter is visiting Mrs. Elsie Hammontree of Azuza. Elsie, would you mind telling the folks at home why you're voting republican.

ELSIE (V.O.)
Young man, I'm a widow and this little home may not be much, but it's all I have left - and I intend to protect it.

SARA
Poor old woman...

It captures both Mank and Sara's ATTENTION.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Mrs. Hammontree, would you mind telling the folks at home why you're voting for Frank Merriam?

ELSIE (V.O.)
Well, I'm voting for Frank Merriam because I wanna keep our way of life.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
You don't think a Democrat would protect you in these hard times?

MANK
I know that voice...

SARA
(a beat)
It is familiar.

MANK
(realizing)
That's Maude Anderson.
SARA
It is, Aunt Bertha from "Lonely Trails".

MANK
Well, she's no widow. And she's absurdly rich. That "poor old woman" has got enough oil wells south of El Segundo to buy us both, Schnutz.

Sara changes the radio channel.

MANK (CONT'D)
I'd know that whiskey gargle anywhere.

EXT. BIG DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY
MANK and SARA come out. She is overladen with packages, a fact he ignores as something else catches his attention.

MANK'S POV
It is C.C. He carries a VOTE FOR SINCLAIR sign and patrons streaming out of the store shun him like the plague.

TRAVEL WITH MANK

C.C.
Hey! Mank.

MANK
(approaching)
Well, well...Looks like you found work, C.C.

C.C.
Don't nose it around but - yeah, just in the knick...

Patting his pocket, he takes out a dollar repaying Mank.

MANK
Who's hiring?
C.C.
M-G-M. They cleaned out the
Washington and Culver gates like a
dose a Ex-Lax. Grady gets a
speakin' part. They told us come
dressed as we are...I don't know
who thought of it, but it keeps a
lot of us off the streets.

MANK
Don't forget to vote.

C.C.
(chuckles)
Okay.

INT. WRITER'S BUILDING - DAY

The writers are playing poker. SHELLY METCALF eases into
view watching them but he has something on his mind.

KAUFMAN
He's hopelessly confused with
Sinclair Lewis. So many hicks
think he wrote Elmer Gantry --
it's cost him the Dust Bowl vote.
I'm in.

MACARTHUR
Ah, poor sap... not only has he
got no money -- he's an idealist,
for Crissakes. Talk about
political handicaps. I'm out.

PERELMAN
Times says he'll lose by two-
hundred-thousand. It's amazing
what ten million bucks against him
bought. Raise.

HECHT
That's what he gets for
surrounding himself with amateurs.
They not only charge admission to
rallies, they pass a plate once
the suckers are inside. Cail.
PERELMAN
He's the most famous shiub after FDR, Hitler and Mussolini. That oughtta count for something...
Hiya, Shel. Sit in?

SHELLY shakes his head.

HECHT
The bookies know. Soon as ole Maude's radio spots started running the odds went from 7-5 for to 2-1 against.

MANK
Could you effete political snobs please shut up and play?

SHELLY
Mank, can I talk to you?

MANK
(studying his hand)
I'll see you guys and bump you two big ones.

SHELLY
It's important.

MANK
(tossing in his cards)
Now, Shelly? It better be. That's the first good hand I've had all day.

KAUFMAN
I didn't know he knew what a good hand looked like.

CUT TO:

INT. SCREENING ROOM (SOUNDTRACK UNDER) - DAY

MANK and SHELLY smoke and watch without expression.
INSERT. MOVIE SCREEN

A "NEWSREEL" IS RUNNING. AND WE SEE A NUMBER OF PEOPLE BEING "INTERVIEWED," AS TO THEIR FEELINGS ABOUT THE ELECTION WITH A NARRATION BY "YOUR ROVING REPORTER..." Some are reasonable Merriam supporters, others are claiming to be for Sinclair.

ROVING REPORTER (V.O.)
Would you mind telling us who you favor in this Fall's election?

MAN ON STREET (O.S.)
I'm going to vote for Frank Merriam...

ROVING REPORTER (V.O.)
Would you mind telling us your principle reason?

MAN ON STREET
Well, I want Merriam - Because I want a job - if you drive all the capital out of the country - who's gonna pay us?

ROVING REPORTER (V.O.)
So you think, erm - that Merriam would be safest for all of us?

MAN ON STREET
Absolutely - It's no time to trade horses in the middle of a stream...

ANOTHER INTERVIEW:

ROVING REPORTER (V.O.)
Mr. Butler, are you going to vote in the coming election?

MR. BUTLER
I most certainly am...

ROVING REPORTER (V.O.)
Who would you wish to vote for?
MR. BUTLER
I'm sure that I'm going to vote
for Mr. Sinclair...

ROVING REPORTER (V.O.)
you must have a good reason to vote
for Mr. Sinclair...

MR. BUTLER
Well, Mr. Sinclair got something
new - he got that "Epic Plan" -
and I feel as though it's time we
should try something new out
again... I need prosperity.

ANOTHER INTERVIEW:

MAN IN FRONT OF FENCE
Well, First of all, I'm an
American. And I believe that Mr.
Merriam will support all the
foundations and principles that
this country has stood for in the
past 150 years. I have a job now,
and I want to keep it. My wife and
I love California and we'd like to
stay. But, in case we should have
to leave, I'd like to have at
least a couple dollars.

MALE DIRECTOR (V.O.)
Cut!

AND WE SEE IN STOCK FOOTAGE IN A TRAIN YARD A NUMBER OF
"Bums" HOPPING OFF FREIGHT TRAINS...

AND THEN WE SEE THE FULL INTERVIEW OF ELsie HAMMONTREE
(MADE ANDERSON). "ELsie" SITS ON THE PORCH OF A SMALL,
NEAT FRAME HOUSE, ROCKING AND KNITTING. A MAN IN A SUIT
(THE ROVING REPORTER) HOLDS OUT A MICROPHONE TO HER.

ROVING REPORTER (V.O.)
Mrs. Hammontree, would you mind
telling the folks why you are
voting for Frank Merriam?

ELsie HAMMONTREE
(there's that distinctive
VOICE)
ELSIE HAMMONTREE (CONT'D)

Well, I'm voting Frank Merriam because I want to keep our way of life.

ROVING REPORTER (V.O.)

You don't believe a Democrat would protect your way of life?

ELSIE HAMMONTREE

Why, that man's a Socialist! I don't know much about politics—but I do know this: If Upton Sinclair wins this election, private ownership in California won't amount to a hill o' beans.

WIPE LEFT:

INSERT. MOVIE SCREEN - ANOTHER SEQUENCE

The ROVING REPORTER confronts a "BLUE COLLAR WORKER" in a rundown coastal neighborhood. It is C.C.'s pal, the other homeless man, GRADY.

GRADY

(bad accent)

Veil, vee need complete rejuvenation of our system.... So - I vote for comrade Upton, his system vork in Russia - Vy not here?

WIPE RIGHT:

INSERT. ANOTHER SEQUENCE - THROUGH A MOVIOLA

There is NO SOUND. On-screen is a moving version of the front-page photo in the Times. As the Moviola CLICKETY-CLICKS, BUMS ride into view atop a caravan of boxcars like a victorious invading army, smirking into the camera, waving hello to camera. At the end of it there is some out-negative footage of SHELLY directing the ROVING REPORTER.

51 INT. EDITING ROOM - DAY 51

MANK leans back from the Moviola. SHELLY stops cranking.
SHELLY
What'd'ya think?

MANK
Truthfully, Shelly, if the performances were any better, you'd be ashamed of yourself.

SHELLY pours them coffee.

SHELLY
Only half of them are actors...But it's got that raw newsreel feel, hasn't it?

MANK
But it isn't news and it isn't real.

SHELLY
I wasn't looking to have an ethical debate, Manky.

MANK
When did they cook these up?

SHELLY
At a meeting in production - they were passing around a pamphlet Sinclair wrote called "Ending Poverty in California."

MANK
(knowing)
"America's unemployed will invade the Golden State..."

SHELLY
Mayer was practically giddy to use it against him.

MANK
Yeah, I bet he was.

Mank's quiet, troubled.
MANK (CONT'D)
Well, it's enough to persuade me
that the writer is more of a
menace to an unsuspecting public
than a party hack...

SHELLY
Mank...

Shelly starts to hand him a mug and spills the steaming
coffee all over himself.

MANK
You okay?

SHELLY
Just nerves...

Shelly, embarrassed, tries to wipe himself off with
napkins.

MANK
If it's bothering you, Shelly, why
get involved?

SHELLY
They gave me a chance to direct.

Mank nods.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
You don't think anyone old enough
to vote is gonna buy this shit?

MANK
(shrugging)
Only the ones that believe King
Kong's ten stories tall or Mary
Pickford a virgin at forty.

INT. THALBERG'S OFFICE - DAY

THALBERG and an ART DIRECTOR stand pouring over sketches as
MANK walks in without fanfare. The TWO MEN look up at him.

THALBERG
Thanks, Cedric, these are fine.

The ART DIRECTOR leaves. THALBERG crosses to his desk.
MANK
I've just watched our Sinclair films.

THALBERG
Ah? what did you think?

MANK
Well, with all due respect to Shelly, King Kong they ain't. Though I do think footage of invading hobos has a certain xenophobic power - when front-paged in the Times and backed by those tacky billboards.

THALBERG sits down. He doesn't invite MANK to do likewise.

THALBERG
Shelly got a chance to direct and I canceled your twelve thousand dollar gambling debt. I'd call that a fair return on a one-minute lecture for uninspired studio chieftains.

MANK
Your director's been stricken with a bout of conscience.

THALBERG
I'm sure he'll tell me himself.

MANK
Don't do this, Irving...

THALBERG
(parasing)
When I was just a boy passing out Socialist leaflets in the Bronx, a couple Tammany goons came to show me the error of my ways. One of them crushed my testicles until I volunteered to distribute my wares into the East River. That's politics. I didn't invent it, I don't apologize for it.
MANK
Mayer's not paying for this. He never pays for anything.

Thalberg slightly smiles.

MANK (CONT'D)
Willie?

Thalberg smiles thinly again.

MANK (CONT'D)
Marion might be interested.

THALBERG
Well, you're gonna have to hurry. Mayer's over there now giving her the company kiss off.

MANK just stares.

THALBERG (CONT'D)
Oh. Haven't you heard? She's taking her playpen to Warner Brothers. Permanently.

MANK
Warner's?

THALBERG
I wouldn't let her do Marie Antoinette. Goldwyn's right for once: "A comedienne in that role is to laugh." Besides, her pictures haven't made a dime in a decade.

He shuffles papers on his desk, signifying dismissal. Mank, on his way out the door...

MANK
Congratulations, Irving.

THALBERG looks up.

THALBERG
I know what I am, Mank. When I come to work I don't consider it slumming.
THALBERG (CONT'D)
I don't use humor to keep myself above the fray and I always go to the mat for what I believe in. I haven't the time to do otherwise.
(a devastating smile)
But you, sir. How formidable people like you might be if they actually gave at the office.
(lowering his head)
Close the door.

EXT. M-G-M LOT - DAY
An impressive caravan winds slowly into view, a Levittown on wheels, it's MARION's lavish studio bungalow, fourteen prefabricated rooms neatly broken into sections for motorized transport across town.

CUT BACK AND
FORTh:

MAYER leaning into MARION's limo window giving MARION a bouquet of flowers and kissing her...The limo pulling away.

MANK cutting across a carefully manicured 'KEEP OFF the GRASS' lawn to intercept the limo as it corners.

MARION waving gaily to PHOTOGRAPHERS. The limo driving away.

INT. MARION'S LIMO - DAY
MARION is settling back when MANK yanks open the door and jumps in beside her, panting.

MARION
Mank! Are you okay?

MANK
(catching his breath)
No, that almost killed me. Where's Willie?

MARION
Cairo. I think.

MANK
Can you phone him?
MARION
I don't phone him - he phones me.

MANK
When's he due back?

MARION
After November 6.
    (a beat)
I'm joining him in Europe next week.

MANK
Marion, I need a favor. It's - just a little joke on Willie.

MARION
Sure, Mank, anything -

MANK
I want you to go back and tell Mayer, Willie wants the phony Sinclair films pulled.

MARION
Which phony Sinclair films?

MANK
There isn't time to explain, I just need you to tell him that...

MARION
Oh, I couldn't, not even as a joke.

MANK
Why not?

MARION
You know I don't lie.

MANK
And that's why he'd believe you. Marion, please, you're not in convent school anymore.

MARION
(struggling)
I'm sorry, I know it's silly but --
MANK
But what? Why not?

MARION
Promise you won't laugh.

MANK
I promise - I won't - laugh.

MARION
My exit.

MANK
What?

MARION
I already made my exit!

EXT. LIMO - DAY

It stops and MANK gets out.

INSERT - LIMO'S REAR WINDOW

MARION looks out at him, a quizzical cameo in oval glass.

WIDER ANGLE

MANK walks into the distance, slowing shaking his head, his shoulders convulsing with silent laughter.

Dissolve To:

EXT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - PATIO (1941) - DAY

INSERT. A THICK SCRIPT HITTING THE TABLE WITH A THUD

CHARLIE LEDERER has thrown it down. He and MANK have just finished breakfast. MANK sports a cane. He wears a floppy sun hat and a khaki windbreaker. RITA, with a pen, a note pad, and binoculars, is bird-watching.

RITA
	(calling out)
Manky!

MANK

Whatie?
RITA
It's an ash-throated flycatcher!

MANK
Congratulations. Best kind.

MANK looks at LEDErer, waits.

LEDErer
What can I say? She's my aunt.

MANK
Oh, it's not about her, it's about him.

LEDErer
Oh?

MANK
Or rather, it's him but it's not her.

LEDErer
It isn't? The lonely showgirl, trapped in a castle, doing jigsaw puzzles?

MANK
It's more - her as people who don't know her imagine her to be.

LEDErer
I see. It's her as they imagine her, but it's "him" as you knew him.

MANK
Damnit, Charlie -

LEDErer
You asked me out here. I was honored to come and read your latest. Is this a test?

MANK
A test? Of what?

LEDErer
Friendship? Loyalty?
MANK
Oh come now -

LEDERRR
- Or just your way of avoiding responsibility?

MANK
What do you mean?

LEDERRR
Are you hoping I might absolve you of such a personal betrayal? I won't give you that.

It honestly hadn't occurred to Mank.

MANK
(he thinks about that)
Are you going to say anything?

LEDERRR
I have to think about it.

MANK
Why?

LEDERRR
Because I haven't made up my mind how she might react.

MANK
What does instinct tell you?

LEDERRR
That it's mighty strong medicine for a lifetime of starry-eyed self absorption.
    (pause)
It's one of those cures that could be worse than the disease. But you of all people should know about that.

EXT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW ROAD - DAY

MANK'S POV

LEDERRR driving away in his deluxe coupe roadster.
TWO-SHOT, MANK AND RITA WATCHING HIM GO

RITA
He took the script. Will he show it to her?

MANK
I don't know.

RITA
Do you want him to?

MANK
I don't know.

EXT. TROCADERO NIGHTCLUB HOLLYWOOD-1934 FLASHBACK- NIGHT 58

SUPERIMPOSE THE LEGEND:

EXT. TROCADERO NIGHTCLUB - ELECTION EVE - NIGHT - 1934 (FLASHBACK)

There's a California mist in the air, and klieg lights bathe a nightclub on a wide boulevard...People arrive in expensive cars, dressed as if for a premiere...We find Mank and Sara arriving...Sara tugs self-consciously at the waist of her skirt, making an attempt, if she doesn't feel fashionable, to at least feel symmetrical.

They make their way through the crush of people inside...

INT. TROCADERO - NIGHT

The CLUB is jammed with MOVIELAND ELITE. A huge FRANK MERRIAM FOR GOVERNOR banner is draped above the ORCHESTRA, which plays for the FEW who fox-trot.

THE ROOM:

We find Mank and Sara behind a velvet cord queuing for their table.

MANK
(shrugs)
Sinclair's yesterday's fishwrap.
Never stood a chance...
SARA
Make up your mind. Are we home
licking our wounds, or are we here
making the best of it?

MANK
(kisses her forehead)
We're making the best of it.

MAITRE 'D
Good evening. Name?

SARA
Mankiewicz.

MAITRE 'D
I'm sorry, what was that?

SARA
(used to it)
M-a-n-k-i-e-w-i-c and outta no-
where... a "z."

MAITRE 'D
(consulting list)
Table fourteen.

SARA
Ends of the earth. A clean exit...

But Mank, having a moment's hubris...

MANK
(to Maitre'D)
Mankiewicz, Herman.

MAITRE'D
(re-consulting)
Oh. Terribly sorry, table one.
Right this way.

Sara gives Mank a look, "who are you?"...

SARA
(fake smile, reminding
him)
If you can't say something nice,
don't say anything at all.
The Maitre 'D leads them through busy tables with jeroboams of champagne and centerpieces designed to look like the state of California...On the BANDSTAND behind everything is a TOTE BOARD with a TELEPHONE. An EmCEE IN A TUX and a SCANTILY-CLAD SHOWGIRL, like a Round Card girl at a prize fight, are minding oversized numbers to post results. Not far from them is a RADIO ANNOUNCER doing a live SHOW. At their table, L.B. MAYER, THALBERG, and SELZNICK along with their wives. Mayer, taken by surprise, sees Mank, and graciously rises...

WIFE #1 (O.C.)
Sarah!

MAYER
Good grief! Look who's here! How about that? What a loyal friend you are! I never thought we would see Mank!

Mank, wearing a plastered smile, "holding his water," nods, takes his hat off. Sara smiles, seeing he's on his best behavior. Thalberg, equally shocked to see him:

THALBERG
(pleasantly, yet warily)
I'm surprised. I would have imagined you in pajamas by now...

Sara and Mank exchange "Hollywood kisses" with the wives, a swirl of inane comments that Mank endures with a smile.

WIFE #1
Mank, turns out we have the same dentist on Camden.

WIFE #2
Sara, we have to plan a day of shopping and catch up.

WIFE #3
Herman, I met your brother -- he's a chip off the old block. Quite handsome!

Mank smiles, still not saying anything, Sara shocked by his restraint.
MAYER
Please, sit.
He holds out chairs for them...

MAYER (CONT'D)
I can't tell you how much it means. I'm touched you would come.
Thank you for this...

And Mank smiles, as if holding his breath. They take their seats. He looks at Sara.

SARA
(shakes her head)
Why do I love you?

And to emphasize he pours himself a drink from a huge champagne bottle.

MANK
What's everyone else having?

As they laugh, Sara and Thalberg looking at him both for different reasons...

LAP DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. TROCADERO - NIGHT

Mank, two drinks at his elbow, silently watching: People dancing...A Man dressed as Uncle Sam on stilts walking between the tables...A Photographer taking various couples' pictures...The Radio Announcer doing his show...Mayer, Thalberg laughing at something, enjoying themselves immensely. There's a drum roll. The Emcee with the help of his partially clad helper puts up the most recent results...giving Sinclair's numbers first, and then Merriam's. Which brings a loud cheer. Mank stops a waiter, motioning, "two more." As he stews:

LAP DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. TROCADERO - TABLE - NIGHT

Everyone has moved to talk to one another...when Mank overhears Mayer, arm around Thalberg...
MAYER
What a great night. Great result.
Thalberg sees Mank is listening to them.

THALBERG
I'll drink to that.
And he does.

MAYER
(smug, to Thalberg – but
including Mank)
You see, if you just give people
what they need to know in an
"emotional" way, you can expect
they'll do the right thing.

MANK
I think what you mean, if you keep
telling people something untrue,
loud and long enough, they're apt
to believe it.

Thalberg hears him loud and clear...

THALBERG
That's not what he was saying.

SELZNICK
What's going on here? Are we
quoting Goebbels?

MANK
I'd like to debate that with L.B...

SELZNICK
I'd like to see that.

THALBERG
(trying to defuse...)
Mank -- have another...

MANK
It's early. Every vote counts.
Maybe the informed of California
were late leaving work... Last I
heard, Irving, it's still a
democracy.
THALBERG
Of the people...

MANK
"By the people."

MAYER
What are you two talking about?

MANK
(to hell with it)
I tell you what...how bout --
double or nothing?

MAYER
What's he saying?

SARA
Herman --

MAYER
You really will bet on anything.
Keep your money...I’m happy enough
just to nail that Utopian
sonofabitch to the wall.

Which has the ladies laugh, embarrassed...Mank looks into
his glass.

THALBERG
(sotto voce)
I told you. Your obligation was
cancelled, out of gratitude.

MAYER
(overhearing)
Wait a minute. What? He wants to
wager double or nothin' on a debt
he didn't even owe us?

SARA
Mank -- ?

MANK
It's a matter of principle, L.B.
You wouldn't understand.

MAYER
I understand plenty -- I'll take
that bet --
THALBERG
OK, Mank, you're on. Twenty-four grand or nothing.

SARA
Excuse me. I'm going to throw up...

She leaves...Mank looking after her...

LAP DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. TROCADERO - TABLE - NIGHT

We see the most recent posting of vote totals. Merriam still ahead by a healthy third. Mank, stewing looks around the room. A drunk man teeters, seems to right himself, and then falls over to his table's delight. Even the man on stilts has found a place to rest. Sara returns...

SARA
I needed some air...

Music cranks up...He takes her onto the dance floor.

MANK
Why do you love me?

Her answer is to put her head on his shoulder...There's chiming of spoon on glass...Mayer calling the room to attention...

MAYER
Excuse me, friends.
(clears throat)
The final incomplete count for tonight is: Upton Sinclair...
(looking up)
The lousy Bolshevik...

Mocking laughter and CATCALLS.

MAYER (CONT'D)
- Seven-hundred-twenty-eight-thousand-six hundred and fifty three. Frank Merriam the good Republican - nine-hundred -

There's a ROAR.
MAYER (CONT'D)
- NINE-HUNDRED-FOURTY-EIGHT-
THOUSAND-EIGHT HUNDRED AND
FOURTEEN!

Mayer raises his arms in triumph...

MAYER (CONT'D)
My friends!... My friends! Sing
with me. Everybody, up and sing!

MAYER begins to SING, "America the Beautiful." Others stand
and join them. Mank comes to the table to get Sara's
coat...

THALBERG
(toasts Mank)
It was a team effort. Thanks...

Mank doesn't dignify it with a response...grabbing Sara's
coat...

And while people sing they cross the room to leave...They
pass the maître 'D, who stops him...

MAITRE 'D
Mr. Mankiewicz, I'm so sorry to
bother you, but there's a
telephone call for you. Right back
this way...

He leads him to the phone...

MANK
(into phone, under the
SINGING)
Hello?

SHELLY (V.O.)
Mank? It's Shelly...

MANK
(whispers to Sara)
It's Shelly...

SHELLY (V.O.)
(siurred)
He lost, Mank.
MANK
Yeah, it's been a bad night.

SHELLY (V.O.)
It's my fault.

MANK
Easy fella, you only voted once.

SHELLY (V.O.)
He was just on the radio. He said the phony newsreels cost him the election.

MANK
That shows how naive he is. FDR cost him the election by staying on the sidelines.

(sheilding his listening ear)
Sleep it off.

SHELLY
I'm not at home.

MANK
Where are you? Let me call you a cab.

SHELLY (V.O.)
Nevermind...I'll take the Pasadena Freeway...Nobody'd be on it, election night.

The line has gone dead. Mank clicks the cradle on the phone to get the operator.

MANK
Hello? Hello? Normandie 4761...

(to Sara)
He's shit-faced.

It's answered immediately.

YOUNG WOMAN (V.O.)
Shell? Is that you?

MANK
It's Herman Mankiewicz. Where is he?
YOUNG WOMAN (V.O.)
I don't know. I'm so worried. He left here very upset -- and...
he's got a pistol with him.

MANK
Don't worry, Fay, I'll find him.

YOUNG WOMAN (V.O.)
Eve.

MANK
What?

YOUNG WOMAN (V.O.)
I'm Eve. Fay was his first.

MANK
I'll find him.

EXT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - PATIO (1941) - DAY

MANK and RITA are playing cribbage. Between moves they take
turns scanning the horizon with binoculars.

RITA
Is houseman coming back? I never thought I'd miss him.

MANK
(peering)
He and the wunderkind are cutting
the first draft. A form of
creative vivisection. Vital organs
are exposed, nothing is learned,
the patient dies on the table...
what have we here?

(adjusting the focus,
presupposing)

Why, it's a puffed-up, sharp-
tailed, red-ruffled magpie.

RITA
(riffling her bird book)
A whatie?
MANK'S POV (THROUGH THE BINOCULARS)

JOE approaching at high speed in a new car. A man on a mission. His face set, implacable.

EXT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - PATIO - DAY

Herman is pouring them drinks. The well-thumbed version of the script is on the table.

JOE
How do you like the Mojave?

MANK
God's answer for drunks and reprobates, a perfect place to dry out.

JOE
How's that working?

Handing a drink to Joe, taking one of his own...

MANK
It didn't take. Cheers.

JOE
Le' Chayim.

They drink.

JOE (CONT'D)
(a beat)
Why are you doing this, Herm?

MANK
Posterity.

JOE
Posterity my ass.

MANK
From the original Latin.

JOE
Don't patronize me, my Latin grades were better than yours...

MANK
(saluting with his glass)
"Bibamus, moriendum, Est."
He does.

JOE
I read your "little" script.

MANK
News travels fast.

JOE
Even without the title page you don't need to be Philip Marlowe to know who wrote it.

He absorbs that...

MANK
Have at it.

JOE
It's very... complicated...

MANK
(mock exit)
Well, thanks for coming out...

Joe looks at him...

JOE
Herman: This is me. You pick a fight with Willie -- you are finished. Mayer can't save you. Nobody can. Especially the boy genius from New York.

MANK
You're far too political, Joe.

JOE
Self preservation is not politics.

He studies his older brother...

JOE (CONT'D)
Him I get. But what did Marion ever do to deserve this?

MANK
(defensive)
It's not her! You know better than anyone: not all characters are headliners. Some are secondary.
JOE
Well, that's why I'm here. On behalf of the secondary characters.

Mank's quiet...

JOE (CONT'D)
I thought you'd want to know there's a rumor in town that you're out to get Hearst because they dropped you from L.B.'s payroll, that they didn't want you around anymore.

MANK
Don't believe everything you hear at Schwab's.

(rough)
Hey, you made yourself court jester.

Mank's still.

JOE (CONT'D)
Someone had to say it.

They look at each other.

JOE (CONT'D)
People are speculating Rosebud is W.R.'s pet name for Marion's genitalia... now I know you'd never stoop to that...

MANK
(smiling)
Only because I hadn't heard.

Joe laughs, and walking to his car...

MANK (CONT'D)
Charlie tells me you're up for Thalberg's old job.

JOE
Not anymore.
MANK
Did I bollix that?

JOE
Don't flatter yourself, Herman. I did it all alone.

MANK
Now, there's a first!

JOE
I "exposed myself" not entirely metaphorically in court.

MANK
Do tell.

JOE
Somebody was bitching about Mervyn LeRoy running over budget on Wizard of Oz.

MANK
- That goddamn movie again -

JOE
- And I said, 'LeRoy s'amuse.' I was then forced to spend the next twenty minutes having to explain that 'Le Roy' is 'Le Roi' -iu h r'wah- in French and means the King. Or to be specific, Francois the First and his royal habit of s'amus-ing himself by diddling all the ladies of his court...

MANK
You know, Pop was right. You should'a been a professor.

JOE
Nobody knew what the fuck I was talking about! They say I was passed over because I'm not a team player -

(beginning to break up)
But I know better. It was that GODDAMN FRENCH PUN THAT DID ME IN!
An awkward quiet...

**MANK**
I'm washed up, Joe, have been for years.

Joe looks at him, turns and gets into the car.

**JOE**
It's the best thing you've ever written.

He drives off. Herman watching him as his new car rockets away.

**ANGLE ON MANK**

**RITA**
(joining him)
A rare bird, that.

**MANK**
(turning away)
A Mankiewicz.

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**EXT. M-G-M BUILDING - ELECTION NIGHT (1934)**

**SUPERIMPOSE THE LEGEND:**

**EXT. MGM STUDIOS - ELECTION EVE - NIGHT - 1934 (FLASHBACK)**

A single light burning on the second floor.

**INT. SHELLEY'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

SHELLEY is finishing a bottle as Mank, his suit rumpled from the Trocadero, some confetti still in his hair, steps inside.

**MANK**
You can't do it that way.

**SHELLEY**
(not looking over)
Do what?
MANK
Kill yourself. I've tried, takes years.

Shelly's quiet...Mank pats his shoulder, comforting.

SHELLY
I was tired of doing inserts, and pick-up shots...

MANK
You're not the first person to trade integrity for a chance in "the big chair."

SHELLY
Thalberg said this was your idea...

MANK
Sometimes my asides are too clever by half. (shakes his head) Go home to Fay...

SHELLY
Eve...

MANK
Eve. Sorry...

Shelly's quiet, thoughtful.

SHELLY
(upset)
Look at what we did...we can't un-ring this bell.

MANK
We have to be vigilant.

SHELLY
In regards to?

MANK
People sitting in the dark, willingly checking their disbelief at the door. We have a huge responsibility.

After a beat, Shelly looking at his hands...
SHELLY
I got it.

MANK
Got what?

SHELLY
Parkinson's.

Mank stops. He can now see quite clearly Shelly's hands trembling.

MANK
(sighs)
No Shelly -- I'm so sorry.

SHELLY
First, you get the tremors, and your muscles begin to fail...pretty soon you can't get out of a chair -- and smiling, speaking -- everything goes...and it keeps going, til...

MANK
(helplessly)
You could always "produce."

Shelly lapses into CHUCKLES.

MANK (CONT'D)
Give me the gun, Shelly.

He hesitates, studies Mank idly, then slowly reaches into his back pocket and pulls out a .38 caliber revolver. Breaking open the cylinder, he shucks out all the rounds, handing them clumsily to MANK across the editing table.

SHELLY
Take 'em, Mank. Go on home, I'll be fine...

CUT TO:

INT. MANK'S AUTO - RUNBY - NIGHT

MANK at the wheel, sleepy-eyed, verging on exhaustion.
EXT. NUMBERED APARTMENT DOOR (SHELLY'S) - NIGHT

Knuckles rap on the door. It is opened by a worried YOUNG WOMAN, EVE.

EVE
Is he with you?

Mank shakes his head...

MANK
He, he wouldn't come -

EVE
Please tell me you got the gun?

MANK holds out a balled up handkerchief, the bullets inside. She takes them, looks:

EVE (CONT'D)
Oh my God!

MANK
What?

EVE
He had a whole box!

EXT. M-G-M BUILDING - NIGHT

SHELLY'S OFFICE WINDOW. A SHOT rings out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW (1941) - DAY

The SOUND of the bullet ECHOES through the years. MANK is lying in bed. RITA appears in the doorway.

RITA
Mank? You have another visitor.

MANK
Wha -

The CAMERA FOLLOWS as MANK gets up and stumbles to her side.
MANK'S POV

An immense limo idles outside. MARION leans forward in the back seat, smiling coquettishly.

71 EXT. DESERT OASIS - DAY

The limo is parked beneath a manzanita tree, b.g MANK and MARION sit on the ground upon a checkered table cloth. Hovering above them, the CHAUFFEUR produces a frosty, fuming bottle. He pours the foaming contents into their wine glasses. Then assumes position of parade-rest.

MARION
Drink it fast. in this heat it'll flash to sugar.

They drink.

MANK
Why the wine-and-dine, marion? Good cop, bad cop?

MARION
How do you mean, mank?

MANK
First Joe, now you.

MARION just shakes her head prettily.

MANK (CONT'D)
Can't you just tell me what's on your mind.

MARION
Well...I read the script.

MANK
Who hasn't?

MARION
It's very grand, mank. In its own way... and very much you. (wistfully)
I would have loved to play me...ten years ago.

MANK
It was never meant to be you...
MARION
For myself I don't care, Mank, really I don't. But I beg you:
Don't kick Pops when he's down.

MANK
Willie, down?

MARION
I haven't told a soul this but - I had to loan him a million dollars
just to save San Simeon.

MANK
You hocked your jewels?

MARION
Course not, just some real estate.
He bought me most of it anyway.

MANK
Willie sent you.

MARION
Didn't have to.

Mank stops.

MARION (CONT'D)
That surprises you? You're the
most observant man I know.

MANK
Then you deserve better.

Which makes her think...

MARION
That's very sweet... always wanted
better. Mama Rose too. She made
sure her daughters learned to sing
and dance. We were never gonna end
up in Brooklyn...I was only
sixteen when I was cast in "Stop!
Look! Listen!"

MANK
Some title.

She laughs.
MAN1ON
(here memory of it...)
Willie came to the show. Same seat every night. And all the other girls said to watch out, he was too old for me and too interested.

MANK
Come now, he wasn't your only admirer...

Marion smiles to herself: "please..."

MAN1ON
The thing you got sooooo right in your script was how lonely he'd been as a boy. When my own mother heard he was one of the richest men in America... she said, "Kick a little higher." (after a beat) He has always been so kind to me...

Mank doesn't say anything.

MAN1ON (CONT'D)
I love the old guy, Mank. maybe I didn't always. Back when he was my "Social Security." But now, there are things about us -- together -- that no one could possibly --

(coming out of it)
Am I persuading you at all?

And realizing the depth of her feeling...

MANK
I hope - if this gets made, you'll forgive me.

And what makes her unforgettable...

MAN1ON
And I hope - if it doesn't, you'll forgive me.

They clink glasses at that, agreeing.
INT. SYNAGOGUE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

SUPERPOSE THE
LEGEND:

INT. TEMPLE - WILSHIRE BLVD - DAY - 1936 (FLASHBACK)

A thronged funeral is in progress.

ANGLE ON PRESIDING RABBI

RABBI
He was a modest man. His name
never appeared on the marquee with
the great stars, the great
producers, the great directors who
worked alongside him.

ANOTHER ANGLE ON RABBI

RABBI (CONT'D)
- but he loved moving pictures
more than he loved anything. And
he left his impeccable taste, his
incredible attention to detail, on
every frame he touched.

CLOSE ANGLE ON MANK

Who glances to the far side of the congregation at --
MAYER and SELZNICK sitting with their WIVES.

ANGLE ON RABBI

RABBI (CONT'D)
It is not for us to say why he was
taken from us so unexpectedly.
Behind, he leaves his memory. The
memory of a great man, a talented
man, a man of unblemished
integrity -

A BIER SMOTHERED IN FLOWERS

RABBI (CONT'D)
- Irving G. Thalberg.
EXT. B'NAI B'RITH TEMPLE - DAY

The MOURNERS pour out. SELZNICK comes out alone, encounters MANK, on the curb smoking a cigarette.

SELZNICK
Mank! I haven't seen you since - what was it? - Jack Gilbert's funeral.

MANK
I haven't seen you since Sheily Metcalf's.

SELZNICK
Has it been that long? How you been, Mank?

MANK
Between pictures.

SELZNICK
I thought you were still at M-G-M.

MANK
I am.

After an awkward silence:

SELZNICK
Well, look. Come see me at International, let's work something out.

MANK
I did come to see you. You gave me the same invitation after Shelly's funeral. I couldn't get past your secretary's secretary.

SELZNICK
(uncomfortable)
Is that right? Good to see you, Mank.

At that moment, Mayer and his wife come down the steps to L.B.'s limo.
Mank watches Mayer, a handkerchief to his face covering his crippling "grief." He gets into the car with his wife, and as Mank watches, Mayer takes the handkerchief from his face, wipes his hands as if he was wiping something unpleasant away for good, and cracking the window tosses the handkerchief as the car drives away...

Mank's jaw muscles set, not unlike a tectonic plate sliding into eons of re-alignment.

INT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW (1941) - DAY

The phone rings.

RITA
Hello.

WELLES (V.O.)
Mank!

RITA
One moment please. Mank... Mank!
It's Orson. It's Orson?

MANK'S shaken awake by RITA, who holds out the phone to him. MANK MOANS, sits up in bed and takes the phone.

MANK
Hello.

WELLES (V.O.)
Mank? I've just finished your first draft and I must say, I'm pleased. And impressed!

MANK
(fishing for a cigarette)
Are you? Good news!

WELLES (V.O.)
It'll need work, of course. But there are no problems that can't be solved together.

MANK
(dryly)
Well I'm delighted to hear.
WELLES (V.O.)
Houseman's bringing you my notes. Think about 'em. Meantime, I'll run everything through my typewriter.

MANK
(lightening up)
Everything will thank you.

WELLES (V.O.)
I understand you're in touch with your Hollywood crowd?

MANK
Good old Houseman -

WELLES (V.O.)
- so perhaps you've heard. None of the theatre chains will touch us. It looks like RKO will have to sue for restraint of trade. They'll countersue, of course. If you own any part of that lovely home of yours it might be a good idea to put it in Poor Sara's name.

MANK expels a smoky SIGH.

WELLES (V.O.)
You still there, Mank?

MANK
Oh yes, where else would I be?

WELLES (V.O.)
I've saved the best for last. Guess who phoned with an offer to buy out RKO's investment and shelve the picture permanently.

MANK
Not Hearst?

WELLES (V.O.)
Mank, I'm surprised. Would Othello snoop on Desdemona when he has Iago?
MANK
Ahh Mayer. What did RKO say?

WELLES
No dice - for now. But they're on their uppers, whether they can hold out -

MANK
You'd better drive up.

WELLES (V.O.)
I plan to, just as soon as I'm done-

MANK
Today. If possible.

WELLES (V.O.)
Dear Jove, did I say something I shouldn't have? I hope you haven't lost your nerve.

MANK
Nerve's about all I've got left.

INT. SAN SIMEON, DINING HALL - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

SUPERIMPOSE THE
LEGEND:

INT. SAN SIMEON DINING HALL - NIGHT - 1937 (FLASHBACK)

A symphony of noise, a long table is filled with people dressed absurdly in CIRCUS COSTUMES, eating, drinking, all talking at once. At the middle of the table, reigning supreme, are HEARST, MARION. Sitting at Hearst's elbow, MAYER basks in reflected glory. Without Thalberg he has flourished.

HEARST
What a year you've had, Louis. How have you weathered it?

MAYER
Despite everything, the M-G-M ship, I'm happy to say, is full steam ahead.
MAYER (CONT'D)
We're on track with this recent slate -- for our most successful year ever.

And we hear OFF-STAGE some commotion...

HEARST
Well, that's great news...

A MAN (O.S.)
Would you like to go to a bungalow and lay down...?

MANK (O.S.)
I think I'd rather stay upright...

A MAN (O.S.)
Perhaps we could find you a costume...

MANK (O.S.)
Well, why would I need a cos...

Suddenly MANK, a cigarette in one hand, his hat in the other, as drunk as we've yet seen him, catapults inside...All heads turn...

MANK (CONT'D)
Hello everyone...Better late than ever...

Someone asks...

FEMALE PARTY-GOER ONE
Mank. Where's Sara?

Mank, correctively slurring...

MANK
Uh, caring for clan Mankiewicz.

MALE PARTY-GOER ONE
What train did you take?

MANK
Glendale...I - I missed my stop. Got a taxi from Morro Bay.

MAYER
(to Mank; for the enjoyment of everyone)
MAYER (CONT'D)
I'm confused, I thought the invitation called for "circus" attire, not "flea circus"...

MANK
I was cornered by a man who sold vacuum cleaners. A show of hands, who knows what a vacuum cleaner is?

HEARST
(overlaps)
Sir -

The room titters...And as Mank looks to see where he is meant to sit, we see W.R., very upset, nod his head imperceptibly to move Mank's plate...

HEARST (CONT'D)
Martin, would you set a place for Mr. Mankiewicz, somewhere where he might get some air...

And the Butler, with plate and napkin and silver in hand...

MARTIN
Would you follow me this way, sir...

Thirty feet away, Martin places his table setting...Another Server helps Mank to his seat. Mank looks at his unfamiliar seatmates in their absurd costumes.

HEARST
And offer him some coffee...

MAYER
(to the delight of the other guests)
Yeah. Mr. Monkeywitz could use some coffee...

Mank, oblivious, slips from a passing waiter a glass of wine he's been pouring for nearby guests. Mank's eyes meet Marion's, but she looks away. The guests all return to drinking and conversation. And Mank begins to eat his fish, silently swallowing.
HEARST
And how's Marie Antoinette coming together?

MAYER
Previews have been a struggle for general audiences. We made some trims, but I should've known... Versailles, all those costumes and wigs...you can't tell those stories without overhauling them for a modern audience...

HEARST
And how's the performance of your leading lady? The picture depends upon her.

MAYER
Norma put her heart and soul into it. I should have insisted she take some time...It's a lot to deal with a loss like that...

HEARST
Marion would have made it her own.

MAYER
Marion would have been perfection.

MANK
(mumbling to himself)
Marion Antoinette...Marionette...

MAYER
But it was Irving's picture. It takes a kind of patience to make "literary" pictures. I'm not interested in educating our customers. You want to send a message? Call Western Union.

(smiles)
"Let them get cake..." Who needs to see that?

Mank, prompted to say something, taps his glass with a cocktail fork...All ignore him...He takes up a hefty soup spoon and decapitates his glass into a thousand pieces...
MANK’S POV

EVERYONE - in costume a surreal caricature of Old Hollywood - falls deathly SILENT.

CUT TO:

INT. BUNGALOW – VICTORVILLE (1941) – DAY

MANK’S two year-old daughter JOHANNA bounces gaily off his bedside. RITA and SARA ease up behind them.

RITA
(to the little girl)
Johanna, come along now. I'll show you those horses we talked about.

She ushers her out, leaving MANK and SARA alone. SARA saunters around, touching things.

SARA
She's very pretty.

MANK
Also very bright, bull-headed, and British. Are you here to try your luck too, Schnutz?

SARA
At what?

MANK
Changing my mind.

SARA
I never had much success with that, herman. In the end, you'll do what you need to.

MANK
Charlie's been here, Joe's been, Marion's been. For one reason or another, all of them want me to walk away. You care to hear what I've decided?

SARA picks up a knick-knack, examines it, puts it down.
SAHÀ
Not really.

MANNK
After twenty years of connubial bliss, blind loyalty can get a little suffocating.

SAHÀ
Okay. Here goes. God knows I've rehearsed it enough...
(faces him)
I've raised your kids kosher and all but by myself. I've put up with your suicidal drinking, your compulsive gambling, your silly platonic affairs. You owe me, Herman. So: Joe says he can't promise but he thinks if you make nice with Mayer, you can have your old job back. Is that what you want me to say? I know what your answer will be -- so don't ask me to give you "Poor Sara's" Seal of Approval.

MANNK
(a rueful smile)
Why do you put up with me, Schnutz? My movie-star looks or my diplomat's charm?

SAHÀ
I suppose because being married to you, Herman, I'm never bored. Exhausted, yes. Exasperated, usually. But having devoted so much, I have to stick around to see how it all turns out. And whatever you decide... Please be mindful of those who care about you most.
(a beat)
I'm going riding. I haven't seen a horse's face in years...

SAHÀ turns and goes to the door, where she looks back.
SARA (CONT'D)
Oh, and one last thing, Herman.

ALTERNATING CLOSE-UPS OF SARA AND MANK
Who looks at her as if what she will say may save him.

SARA (CONT'D)
(burlesquing her Brooklyn accent)
I don't want nobody calling me "Poor Sara" no more.

INT. SAN SIMON - NIGHT (FLASHBACK - CONT'D)

ANGLE ON MANK
As he teeters to his feet and faces the COSTUMED CROWD.

MANK
I've got a great idea for a picture, Louis... A picture I just know you're gonna love. It's a modern-day version of Quixote.

ANGLE ON HEARST AND MARION
HEARST and MARION look at MANK, guarded but attentive. Following their lead, all of the GUESTS do likewise.

ANGLE ON MANK

MANK (CONT'D)
(swaying)
Now, I know none of you read, but you know what it's about: a deluded old nobleman who tilts at windmills. So how might we update this story? How about we make our Quixote a newspaperman! Who else could make a living tilting at windmills? But that's not enough -- no, he wants more than readership -- he wants more than adulation, he wants love.

MANK teeters, about to fall, then rights himself.
MANK (CONT'D)
So he runs for public office and
because he's notably rich, he
wins! No, no, wait a minute.
Notably Rich-and-Powerful can't
win over an audience unless
Notably Rich-and-Powerful sees the
error of his ways in the final
reel. Notably Rich-and-Powerful
and making no goddamn excuses for
it is only admirable in real life.
Isn't that right, Louis? So: What
do we do? Anybody?

MANK begins to move around the table, navigating from one
chair back to another, a spellbinding spieier when he's on.

MANK (CONT'D)
We give him ideals! Ideals that any
dirt-poor, Depression-weary
audience can identify with. Our
Quixote is against crooked trusts.
He's for the eight-hour work day.
Fair income tax. Better schools.
Why, he's even for government
ownership of railroads! And you
know what we call those people?

A VOICE (O.S.)
Communists!

A VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Anarchists!

TENSION-RELEASING LAUGHTER. MANK grins, doesn't join in.

MANK
No. Our Quixote he's a two-fisted
"muckraker." in fact, someone
predicts that he will one day win
the Presidency and bring about --
Get this -- a Socialist
revolution!

MAYER
What a bunch of bullshit.

MANK
Is it?
He points at Hearst.

MANK (CONT'D)
Tell him.

ANGLE ON HEARST
As everyone turns to look at him. At this moment HEARST could pass for an Eskimo bone carving of a leviathan.

MANK (CONT'D)
Tell him! Upton Sinclair used exactly those words to describe a young William Randolph Hearst!

A few people, feeling they're witnessing a brutal family argument, slowly move to stand under the arches. MARION puts a hand on HEARST'S arm protectively.

MAYER
You miserable bastard!

HEARST
Louis...

MANK
How do you do. Our Quixote, he hungers, he thirsts, he lusts for voters to love him -- love him enough to make him president. But they won't and they don't.

MANK looks around, as if defying his LISTENERS to dispute.

MANK (CONT'D)
How do you suppose that could happen? Could it be because in their hearts they know that he values power over people?

ANGLE ON HEARST
Who just shakes his head, a human metronome.

MANK (CONT'D)
Disillusioned in Congress he authors not one single piece of legislation in two terms!
MANK (CONT'D)
Can you believe that? That'll take some writing.

Mayer starts to say something angrily to Mank...Hearst puts his hand on Mayer's shoulder, stopping him as if to say, "Let him hang himself." MANK is walking again -- he may pass out should he stop.

MANK (CONT'D)
Placed in nomination for president, but too radical for the boys in the back -- His bid goes nowhere...but we're doing something, we're building sympathy!

MANK BELCHES again, LOUDLY. His stomach spasms. More people get up, leaving quietly. Those that are left are the loyalists, Hearst, Marion and Mayer.

MANK (CONT'D)
Rejected, he flees to Lotus Land, where his faithful troll, Sancho, has prepared a mythical kingdom...
Wait a minute -- I've forgotten the love interest!

MANK is fighting down the heaves now.

MANK (CONT'D)
Her name... Duicinea.

REACTION SHOT OF MARION

Who is silently spiking her drinking water.

MANK (CONT'D)
Funny -- adventurous -- smarter than she acts. She's a-- she's a showgirl, beneath his social stratum, but that's okay... because true love on the big screen, as we all know, is blind. And she? Yeah, she loves him too! So, he takes her away to his m-mythical kingdom.

(to Martin)
Can I get a bicarb?
One MESMERIZED GUEST goes for his pocket, catches himself. Mank picks up someone's wine glass and drains its contents.

MANK (CONT'D)
Now, along comes Nemesis. That's Greek for any guy in a black hat. Nemesis runs for governor and he's a shoo-in to win. Why? Because he's exactly what our Don used to be. An idealist. You get it? Not only that, Nemesis is the same guy who once predicted our Quixote would one day preside over a Socialist revolution. Our Quixote looks into the mirror of his youth and decides to break this glass, a maddening reminder of who he once was. Assisted by his faithful Sancho, and armed with all the black magic at his command he does just this. Destroying in the process not one man, but two...
Well, what'd'ya think, Louis? Hmm? You think it'll play?

And on that, MANK pitches forward and vomits...

MANK (CONT'D)
(wiping his mouth)
Don't worry, folks. The white wine came up with the fish.

A STAFF-MEMBER glides forward to silently supply MANK with a napkin...MARION glides from the room in tears. The remaining guests but MAYER rise and float away on an eddy of strained small talk.

MAYER
Who the fuck do you think you are, Mankiewicz? You're nuthin' but a court jester! And lem'me let you in on a little secret. Do you have any idea who pays half your salary? He pays half your fuckin' salary! (meaning Hearst) Him! You fuckin' INGRATE!

MANK stares at MAYER, who jabs a finger into his chest.
MAYER (CONT'D)
You didn't know that, did you? You wanna know why?

MANK cannot bring himself to speak.

MAYER (CONT'D)
Because he likes the way you talk.
Not the way you write. The way you talk. Don't that chap your ass!

CUT TO:

INT. BUNGALOW - VICTORVILLE - DAY (CONT'D)

WELLES, in safari suntans, lumbers through the front door. Houseman, loaded up with papers, follows close behind him.

WELLES
Rise and shine, hombre, Shoot-out at the OK corral.
(pulling up a chair)
Before we buckle down, I gather you have something to get off your chest.

MANK
As a matter of fact, I do.

WELLES
Frankly, I think what I said upset you. I know your health's not what it might be. And I understand that comes first...

MANK
Really?

WELLES
This studio fuss - this lawsuit - God only knows what pressure's yet to come - at your age you'd be justified in wanting out.

MANK
Uh, I'm forty three, but that's - very understanding.
WELLES
Mayer's buy-out was rejected, so the fat's only starting to hit the fire. Now, I talked to RKO and I'll tell you what they're ready to do. In recognition of the outstanding work you've done so far they're prepared to relieve you of the rewrite and still honor your full pay. Plus 10,000 dollars. How's that?

MANK
That's more than generous. But, I don't intend to walk.

WELLES
Alright. What's bothering you, then?

MANK
You're not going to like this, Orson. I want credit.

WELLES
Come again?

MANK
It's the best thing I've ever written.

WELLES
(a deadly pause)
Jack, get me some Cuban cigars.

HOUSEMAN
In Victorville?

WELLES
(his eyes on MANK)
Do what you can, Jack.

MANK
Oh, stay, Houseman. You'll miss the third-act complicator.

WELLES
(still watching MANK)
Get going, Jack. Muy Pronto.
HOUSEMAN
I believe that means right away.

79 INT. SAN SIMON - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK - CONT'D) 79
MANK faces HEARST, motionless in the great, shadowy, echoing chamber.

HEARST
Mank, mank...

MANK
What I said - was more in sorrow than in anger, Willie.

It's dead still. The two men alone in the room. HEARST crosses to MANK, and putting a fatherly hand on his shoulder, turns and guides him toward the exit.

HEARST
Are you familiar with the parable of the organ-grinder's monkey? Now, the organ-grinder's monkey is tiny in stature, and having been taken from the wild, he's naturally overwhelmed by the enormous world around him. But every morning, a sweet elderly woman dresses him in a fine suit of clothes. She fits him with a red velvet vest adorned with pearl buttons and a handsome red fez with a silk tassel...she slips on brocade shoes that curl at the toe...and he's paired with a fine gilt music box on an exquisite gold chain, fastened to his neck, and his neck alone. Whenever he ventures into the city to perform he thinks: what a powerful fellow I must be. Look how patiently everyone waits just to watch me dance.

MANK
(softening blow)
Wha- Willie -
Hearst grips Mank's shoulder a touch more.

HEARST
And wherever I go, he thinks...this music box must follow - and with it, this poor, downtrodden man. And if I chose not to dance, this sorry street peddler would starve...

As they reach the front door:

30 EXT. SAN SIMEON - NIGHT
HEARST as he eases MANK out.

HEARST
And every time I do decide to dance - every time - he must play. Whether he wishes to or not.
(pause)
You've had a bit too much to drink, Herman. I'll get Raymond to drive you to the station. Good bye.

MANK'S POV
As the door is shut firmly in his face.

31 INT. BUNGALOW - VICTORVILLE (1941) - DAY (CONT'D)
HOUSEMAN has gone. MANK and WELLES face each other across the coffee table like the wily poker players they are.

WELLES
Put aside gratitude, Mank - That you've done your best work was no accident...I removed any distraction...eliminated every excuse...your family, your cronies, liquor...I gave you a second chance...

MANK
And for that, I cannot thank you enough.
WELLES
But with credit for a risky
undertaking must go the weight of
real responsibility! Given your
current health, I wonder if you're
up to it?

MANK
And frankly, I wonder, too. But
we'll find out.

WELLES
You may never work in this town
again, Mank!

MANK can only LAUGH.

MANK
Orson, please...

WELLES
Then you force me to remind you:
We have a contract that you
understood and agreed to! If you
fight this, it will go to what
your new guild calls arbitration.
And you, my friend, will lose.
Script... money...And assuming
such a thing still exists in
Hollywood, the respect of those
who honor their word.

MANK
(beat)
How can I put this nicely? I may
be a loose cannon but you, my
friend, are an outsider -- They're
exasperated by me - and I've
earned it - but, you- a self-
anointed Savior hyphenate? They're
just waiting to loathe you.

WELLES sits in silence.

WELLES
Remind me never again to work with
a washed-up alcoholic.
MANK
Duly noted. Nelson Algren please copy.

Welles climbs to his feet and begins to stride around, a boiler about to blow.

WELLES
All right. No doubt you'll get your credit. But ask yourself: Who's producing this picture? Directing it? Starring in it?

Abruptly he stops, his seething gaze caught and fixed on

INSERT - MANK'S LIQUOR CABINET
Almost empty now. Rebuking his entire plan.

ANGLE ON WELLES
As he BELLOWS and seizes the cabinet in both hands, and with adrenaline-driven rage hoists it over his head and hurls it CRASHING against the fireplace. Purged, he looks upon it, his breath jetting forth in hard, rhythmic gasps.

MANK
(quickly jotting a note to himself)
That's just what we need when Susan leaves Kane. An act of purging violence.

Welles slows.

WELLES
(his eyes say: "perfect"
but his lips say)
May be.

They look at each other. Welles turns on his heel and blows out the door, leaving it open. We can see the people outside, some of the hands and help, have stopped, watching the famous wonder boy who gets into his limo and is driven off.
RITA (O.S.)
(distantly)
Mank! Mank, where are you? Mank, come quick!

32 EXT. VICTORVILLE BUNGALOW - DAY

MANK limps out on to the patio and RITA runs up in tears.

RITA
He's alive! Ian's alive!

MANK just stands there, RITA collapsing in his arms.

RITA (CONT'D)
He fetched up on the Orkneys!

MANK
Fetched up on the Orkneys?

RITA
(joyously)
The Orkney islands, you idiot! Oh, Mank, are you ever serious?

MANK
Only about something funny.

They stand holding each other as music SWELLS.

DISSOLVE TO:

36 INT. BILTMORE HOTEL - NIGHT

SUPERPOSE THE
LEGEND:

INT. BILTMORE HOTEL - FEBRUARY - NIGHT - 1942

The ballroom is packed with members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, uniformed to the wartime nines. As they BUZZ with excitement, an ANNOUNCER in white tie-and-tails tears open one of the infamous envelopes.

ANNOUNCER
- And the winner of the best original screenplay is:
  (reading)
Herman J. Mankiewicz -
The CROWD ROARS, all but drowning out his remaining words:

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
- and Orson Welles for Citizen Kane!

LONG SHOT

MALE ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
This is the first nomination and first win for Mr. Mankiewicz and Mr. Welles. Neither were able to attend tonight. Accepting for both is president of RKO Radio Pictures, Mr. George Schaefer.

As the ORCHESTRA RIFFS and an UNIDENTIFIED MAN IN FORMAL CLOTHES makes his way to the podium to accept the award:

34 EXT. RIO DE JANEIRO - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE THE LEGEND:

RIO DE JANEIRO - BRAZIL - 1942.

"IT'S ALL TRUE" - RADIO PRESS CONFERENCE

REPORTER #1 (V.O.)
Scuse me, Mr. Welles. Over here.

WELLES (V.O.)
Good morning, gentleman.

REPORTER #2 (V.O.)
Good morning, Mr. Welles. You missed a big night.

WELLES (V.O.)
Well, I was unable to attend the Academy Awards because I'm here in Rio, making a marvelous motion picture.

Laughter erupts from the crowd of REPORTERS.
REPORTER #3 (V.O.)
Mister Welles, Kane was nominated in nine categories, including best actor. Aren't you disappointed that it only won one Oscar?

For an instant WELLES considers saying something...only to reconsider, offering:

WELLES (V.O.)
Well, that, my good man, is Hollywood.

REPORTER #4 (V.O.)
Do you have anything you'd like to say to your co-author, Mr. Mankiewicz?

WELLES (V.O.)
I do have a brief message. You may tell him from me, "Mank, you can kiss my half."

SPLIT-SCREEN
CUT TO:

35 EXT. MANKIEWICZ HOUSE - NIGHT

MANK leans into a microphone, looking triumphant.

MANK (O.S.)
You ask me what my acceptance speech might have been?
(holding the Oscar)
Well here goes...I am very happy to accept this award in the manner in which this screenplay was written, which is to say, In the absence of Orson Welles. How's that?

REPORTER #2 (O.S.)
How come he shares credit?

MANK
(beat)
Well, that my friend, is the magic of the movies.
PHOTOGRAPHER (O.S.)
Hold up Oscar, Mank?
MANK thrusts it out overhead like a victorious boxer.

PHOTOGRAPHER (O.S.) (CONT')D
Big smile!
MANK beams. A blinding FLASH goes off. MANK does not flinch. This is his moment. It will never come again.

EPILOGUE:

Herman Mankiewicz would die 11 years later of complications from alcoholism. He would never work with Orson Welles nor write an original screenplay, or fight for screen credit again.

He confided in a friend, "I seem to have become more and more a rat in a trap of my own construction, a trap I regularly repair whenever there seems to be danger of an opening that will enable me to escape".

He was 55.

THE END.