



UNIVERSAL CABLE PRODUCTIONS

Paradise Pictures

PILOT

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January 15th 2014

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TEASER

INT. HALLWAY / HOLTZ'S OFFICE - EXECUTIVE BUILDING - NIGHT

TOM KIRBY (late 30s) stands in the doorway of an office, facing his UNSEEN BOSS. Tom is the Head of Production at Paradise Pictures, a mid-size movie studio in 1946 Hollywood.

Silhouetted by moonlight, and in a tuxedo, Tom's almost handsome enough to be on the silver screen himself, but the competition from RKO, MGM and the rest have taken a toll.

To his UNSEEN BOSS, Tom says...

TOM

This is terrific news, Holtzie. You made a great decision. This is gonna change everything for us.

Tom shuts the door. He stands there for a beat, alone, relishing the moment. Then he walks the long hallway, finding RAY ABERDEEN (40s), who's flipping a coin while waiting. A big lug of a guy, Aberdeen is in charge of studio security.

TOM

He said yes to "Heart of Darkness."

ABERDEEN

No shit. Finally.

TOM

Only took him four years.

ABERDEEN

Well... congratulations.

TOM

If I screw this up, I'll be run out of town, Ray. I'll be repairing cars in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

ABERDEEN

You've never been to Indiana, Tom.

Aberdeen flips his coin in the air. Tom grabs it mid-toss.

TOM

Let's go pick up Braddock.

INT. TOM KIRBY'S PACKARD CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

Top down. Tom drives, Aberdeen in the passenger seat. It's NIGHTTIME HOLLYWOOD 1946. Passing the BROWN DERBY on Vine, the KNICKERBOCKER HOTEL on Ivar, up Beachwood Canyon, narrow roads.

Until pulling in front of an OPULENT MANSION. Revelers on the lawn, drinking champagne. One woman performs a striptease.

As Tom steps out of the car, he looks over at Aberdeen.

TOM

You can stay. This won't take long.

INT. OPULENT MANSION - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Tom Kirby enters. It's surreal and decadent in here. Onyx floors. A FOUNTAIN in the foyer, in which drunk and doped-up naked men and women, masks over their eyes, are having sex, oblivious to the man in the tuxedo walking through. On the staircase, a woman in a gold gown sniffs cocaine off a tray.

Hollywood Babylon, the twilight of the Golden Age.

INT. OPULENT MANSION - DEN - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Tom finds the actor BRADDOCK LOMAN (late 20s) on the floor in his Chinese-themed den, shirtless, wearing silk pajama pants. Braddock's a pretty boy, more Errol Flynn than Gary Cooper.

Braddock is talking with an intoxicated beautiful woman.

BRADDOCK

Tonight's the premiere for my picture "Axis Powers." It's a great picture. It's gonna be huge.

Tom sees Braddock is shooting up drugs -- morphine or heroin.

TOM

Is that why you missed work today, Braddock? Too busy celebrating?

Braddock looks up at Tom with a druggy smile.

BRADDOCK

That's a nice tuxedo, Tom.

TOM

We're making a new picture now. Remember that, Braddock? And you didn't come to the studio today.

BRADDOCK

Did you read the Variety review? They said "Axis Powers" is right up there with "Casablanca"... they said I'm gonna be the next Bogie. You sure look nice in that tuxedo, Tom.

Then Braddock glances at his gold watch, blinks a few times.

BRADDOCK
When is my car coming to get me?

TOM
I'll be taking you myself.

INT. TOM'S PACKARD CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT - LATER

Tom behind the wheel. Braddock Loman up front, in a hastily thrown-on tuxedo. Aberdeen sits silently in the back.

BRADDOCK
We gotta talk about my salary. When I signed that contract, seven years, sure it was good cash at the time, but nothing compared to what I should be making. After "Axis Powers," the game's gonna change...
(then he notices)
This isn't the way to Grauman's.

Tom pulls the car over on a quiet and dark street. He looks over at Braddock. Aberdeen still sits silently in the back.

TOM
When I found you, you were shining other men's shoes for a living.
(a beat, then)
The person you see when you look in the mirror? I made him. You know that, don't you? I've worked hard to make sure the camera loves you.

BRADDOCK
Tom, you know I'm grateful...

TOM
You cost me money today, Braddock, missing work the way you did.

BRADDOCK
Come on, I was blowing off steam.
It's a big day, give a guy a break --

Braddock cuts himself off as Aberdeen OPENS THE BACK DOOR and steps out onto the street. Braddock is suddenly nervous.

TOM
You got any idea how much Paradise Pictures means to me, Braddock?

BRADDOCK
We... we're gonna be late for the premiere.

TOM

The world, Braddock. It means the world to me. And what you did today was completely unacceptable. You're no Humphrey Bogart, and for the next five years, I own you. Say that, Braddock. Say I own you.

BRADDOCK

You... you own me, okay, Tom?

TOM

Now, get out of my car, please.

BRADDOCK

What?

TOM

You can walk from here. It's only three miles.

BRADDOCK

You're joking, Tom, right, this is --

Aberdeen opens the passenger door, grabs Braddock and **THROWS HIM ON THE STREET**. Scared, Braddock tries to crawl backward.

BRADDOCK

Tom, please --

TOM

Stay away from his face, Ray.

Aberdeen hauls Braddock to his feet and **PUNCHES** him in the stomach. Braddock crumples. Aberdeen **KICKS** him in the stomach and chest. Then kneels, tears off Braddock's shoes.

TOM

We'll get those shined for you, Braddock. Because, thanks to me, you don't do that anymore.

(a beat, then)

Make sure you clean yourself up on the way.

Aberdeen wipes his brow and climbs into the passenger seat. Tom drives off. His Packard disappearing in the dark night...

Coughing up blood, Braddock looks up, north, at the moonlit HOLLYWOODLAND SIGN. A **BLACK-AND-GRAY** CARD fills the screen:

"PARADISE PICTURES"

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE**EXT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATER - RED CARPET - NIGHT**

A premiere to end all premieres. Swirling spotlights. Red carpet. Limos. Fans. TWO DOZEN GORGEOUS WOMEN, in military blues and skirts, escorting guests. A TWO-STORIES-TALL POSTER for the war drama "AXIS POWERS" looms over everything.

ON THE POSTER -- BRADDOCK LOMAN and the actress ISABELLE YATES, soldier and Army nurse, are wrapped in a tight clench.

Tom finds Austrian director FREDDIE ZIEGLER (30s), handsome, mischievous smile. (Note: Freddie's English is excellent.)

FREDDIE

This premiere is something else...

TOM

We pulled out all the stops, 'cuz this picture deserves it, Freddie. And that's not just me talking.

Tom unfolds a VARIETY with the "Axis Powers" review. Reads:

TOM

"'Axis Powers,' the first movie Ziegler has directed for Paradise Pictures, is a grand slam. The studio should seize the Austrian's passport until he's ensured its place among the top shops in town."

FREDDIE

You Americans sure know how to make a guy feel welcome.

TOM

It's time to call the missus.

FREDDIE

Let's not spoil all the fun, Tom.
(then, realizing)
Wait a moment. Are you saying...?

TOM

Holtzie just signed off on "Heart of Darkness." The classic novel by Joseph Conrad. Our biggest movie ever... so big, Orson Welles himself couldn't figure out how to make it.

FREDDIE

I thought for sure you'd make a play for Curtiz or Huston --

TOM
Those fellas didn't just direct
"Axis Powers," Freddie.

FREDDIE
No, I guess they didn't.

TOM
I got Nate Reynolds on the script.
He'll have a draft soon. He's good.
You'll have plenty to work with.

Just then, Freddie's "MILITARY ESCORT" approaches. She's a
CUTE GIRL (20), if a bit plain. More than a little nervous.

CUTE GIRL
Mr. Ziegler? I'm supposed to
escort you into the theater now.

Freddie's pleasantly surprised. Turns to Tom with a grin.

FREDDIE
I'll give you my passport right now
if you want it, Tom.

Tom then notices someone in the crowd. He walks off...

EXT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATER - ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Tom approaches gossip maven HEDDA HOPPER, in a WIDE BRIM HAT.

TOM
Hedda. Funny, I specifically recall
not sending you an invitation.

HEDDA HOPPER
Oh, I don't need invitations, dear.
I just show up where I wanna go.

TOM
What's with the bullshit you're
writing about Isabelle? She's our
number one star, and you're making
up stories.

HEDDA HOPPER
You run a second-rate studio, Tom.
You should welcome all the stories
you get.

TOM
Second rate? Maybe we're not MGM
yet, but we're not far behind either.

Hedda nods up at the "Axis Powers" BANNER POSTER.

HEDDA HOPPER

You wanna be MGM? Try having your leading ladies at their own premieres. Or are you still pretending Isabelle's in Europe?

TOM

Isabelle went to help celebrate the Allies' triumph over evil.

HEDDA HOPPER

Three months ago. What kind of trouble this time? Drugs again? Or the drink? Still syphilis? Or is it just plain old man troubles?

TOM

You got a real active imagination, Hedda. An imagination like that? You oughtta consider writing for the pictures.

(starts off, then stops)

Come to think of it, I got a scoop you might be interested in.

HEDDA HOPPER

And what would that be?

TOM

Truman just announced on the radio... now that our soldiers are done defeating the Nazis, they're coming after you next.

Hedda glares at him. He grins and walks toward the theater. On the way in, Tom spots EILEEN MILLS, a studio publicist.

TOM

Eileen, hey, there you are. I got a job for the publicity department.

EILEEN MILLS

What can I do for you, Mr. Kirby?

TOM

Braddock Loman'll be arriving soon. But he'll be on foot and not looking his best... if you know what I mean.

A beat. And then Eileen Mills slowly nods, getting it.

EILEEN MILLS

I see. Would you like me to find him on the street, say a couple blocks away, before anyone sees him?

TOM
 What a great idea. And while
 you're at it, maybe clean him up,
 fix his shirt and jacket... find
 him a nice pair of shiny new shoes.

INT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATER - LOBBY - NIGHT - LATER

Cocktail hour. Sipping champagne, Tom moves through and notices, under a staircase, the Cute Girl who escorted Freddie Ziegler, flustered, fumbling with the neckline of her blouse.

TOM
 Tell me you didn't misunderstand
 the job description.

She looks at him and holds up a button. With her other hand, she's covering the skin exposed by her plunging décolletage.

CUTE GIRL
 What? Oh God no --

TOM
 I'm teasing you. What happened?

CUTE GIRL
 Stupid button. This is my first
 job out here and this happens --

TOM
 Lean your head forward.

Puzzled, she leans forward. Tom plucks a BOBBY PIN from her hair, takes the button and slides the pin through, attaching it to the blouse, then pops the button through its hole.

TOM
 Edith Head taught me that. So...
 what do they call you?

CUTE GIRL
 My name's Myrtle Dunleavy.

He looks at this fresh-faced 20-year-old. MYRTLE DUNLEAVY.

TOM
 That'll be the first thing you need
 to change.

MYRTLE
 But Myrtle's my grandmother's name.

TOM
 My point exactly. So where are you
 from, Myrtle Dunleavy?

MYRTLE
Salina, Kansas. I'm sorry, I
didn't catch your name, sir...

TOM
Tom Kirby. And I don't wanna admit
I'm old enough for you to call me sir.

MYRTLE
Did you work on tonight's picture?

TOM
I did. I'm the Head of Production
at the studio that made it.

MYRTLE
Does that mean you're in charge?

TOM
In a manner of speaking.

MYRTLE
In that case, Mr. Kirby, what else
do you think I should change?

TOM
Oh, I don't know if that's a --

MYRTLE
Please. I'm an actress. At least
I want to be. You can be honest.

TOM
All right...
(looks her up and down)
You got a nice face, but you're not
a pin-up. There are caterpillars
where your eyebrows oughtta be.
Teeth need to be straightened and
whitened. Hairline's a bit too
deep. And, I'm sorry to say, your
bust is nothing to write home about.

A beat as Myrtle absorbs all of that. Then, exhaling...

MYRTLE
You didn't have to be that honest.

TOM
Hey, you said you wanted me to --

MYRTLE
I'm just teasing you, Mr. Kirby. I
appreciate it. Honestly I do.

She smiles, letting him off the hook. Tom likes this girl.

OLD MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Tommy...

They turn to see STANLEY WHALON shuffling toward them. In his 60s, he looks 10 years older, in an ancient fraying tuxedo.

TOM

Stanley, what are you doing...?

Then Tom sees, behind Stanley... GRETCHEN WHALON (30s). Not a glamour girl, but very pretty with warm, intelligent eyes.

STANLEY

I call your office, and Olive never puts me through. But my niece here, now she gets a ticket. Look at that. I need a ticket just to see Tommy Kirby. Who would've guessed that?

TOM

Myrtle Dunleavy, this is --

MYRTLE

Stanley Whalon. "The Sheriff." I watched all your movies growing up. My mother liked you better than Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton.

STANLEY

Your mother has wonderful taste.

TOM

And this is Gretchen, Stanley's niece. The apple of his eye. She writes over at RKO. "Music Shop." "Star Player." "The Quiet Son." Am I forgetting anything? You know my memory's not so great.

GRETCHEN

Depends on the day, doesn't it?

TOM

You're right. I got a memory for some things.

GRETCHEN

And those are the things you should try and forget.

Their eyes meet. Gretchen breaks the gaze as Stanley says...

STANLEY

I heard about a picture you're making, Tommy. What was it called?

GRETCHEN

"The Funny Bone."

TOM

There's nothing in it for you, Stanley. I'm sorry.

STANLEY

I'll take anything you got.

TOM

What, you wanna play a bartender? Or the night clerk at a flea-bag motel? It's not right.

STANLEY

I don't mind, Tommy. I just wanna work.

TOM

Can't Miss RKO here help you out?

GRETCHEN

You know I don't have that kind of pull with Odlum.

STANLEY

(to Myrtle)

What was your favorite picture of mine, young lady?

MYRTLE

I always thought "The Jail House" was just lights out.

Stanley smiles, takes out THREE CIGARETTES, a box of matches. He juggles those cigarettes. Catches each one in his mouth. Then lights them, inhales, runs up the first three steps of the staircase AND LAUNCHES HIMSELF BACKWARD. A collective gasp as he... EXECUTES A PERFECT BACKFLIP, landing where he just stood. He exhales smoke and does a triumphant bow.

The old silent film star still has it. Amazed, Myrtle claps. Out of breath, Stanley straightens his jacket, looks at Tom.

STANLEY

When you first got to the studio, you loved when I did my tricks.

TOM

I still do, Stanley.

STANLEY

You know this doesn't last forever.
One day, you're gonna wake up and
you're gonna be me.

TOM

I'll be in touch, okay?
(starts off, but then...)
And I know this is all just a
temporary gig, Stanley. I'm just
trying to make a few decent pictures
before they drag me from the building.

STANLEY

They come with horses, Tommy.

INT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATER - MAIN THEATER - NIGHT - LATER

Houselights on. Tom enters with movie star CARY GRANT (42).

CARY GRANT

Tom, I'd be right as rain for
"Heart of Darkness." Surely you
remember "Gunga Din"...

TOM

This isn't the same thing, Cary.

CARY GRANT

If you say you're going after
Tyron Power, I swear I'll leave
this premiere immediately.

TOM

I got Charlie Sanders in my sights.

CARY GRANT

Oh, okay. I like Charlie just fine.

TOM

Glad you approve. By the way, I
heard "Notorious" turned out well.

CARY GRANT

It's Hitchcock, it turned out
bloody brilliant. We take it to
Cannes next month.

TOM

How hard did you fall for Ingrid
Bergman?

CARY GRANT

No harder than everyone else.

TOM

But did she fall for you?

CARY GRANT

She might've for Cary Grant. But with ol' Archibald Leach, she just wanted to be friends. ...You know, everyone thinks they want to be Cary Grant...

TOM

But no one really is, including you.

CARY GRANT

Isn't that the truth.

The lights dim. ON THE SCREEN -- snappy music as the PARADISE PICTURES LOGO appears. Tom claps Cary on the back.

TOM

I'm gonna head back to the studio.

CARY GRANT

And miss your own picture?

TOM

Gotta start working on the next one.

Tom heads out. He sees Braddock Loman entering, forcing smiles, shaking hands. He's cleaned up, with shiny new shoes.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - NIGHT - MINUTES LATER

Crowd's gone. Red carpet's disassembled. Spotlights now dark. Tom exits Grauman's, starts off in one direction, but notices something. Tom walks across the street and finds, tucked in the shadows, a CHRYSLER NEW YORKER. A sandy-haired kid, LUCAS (18), stands next to the car, keeping watch.

LUCAS

I'm sorry, Mr. Kirby, but Miss Yates insisted I bring her....

A window unrolls. And there, sitting in the backseat, is the beautiful movie star ISABELLE YATES (25). A scarf in her hair, she stares up at the TWO-STORIES TALL "AXIS POWERS" POSTER.

ISABELLE

Do they miss me, Tom?

TOM

Like crazy, Isabelle. But as soon as this is over, we're gonna get you back in fighting form, mister. For "Heart of Darkness."

ISABELLE
I like it when you call me "mister."

TOM
Did you hear what I just said?
We're finally gonna do this picture.

ISABELLE
That's nice, Tom. ...They don't
believe I'm in Europe, do they? I
read Hedda's column.

TOM
This will be over soon, okay? Then
you're back, that gorgeous face in
all the magazines, all the horny
boys across the country going to
bed every night thinking about you.

ISABELLE
If they knew, all those boys, they
wouldn't want a thing to do with me.

Tom leans in the car. Looks at her VERY PREGNANT STOMACH.

TOM
They're not gonna know, sweetheart.

EXT. PARADISE PICTURES STUDIO LOT - NIGHT - LATER

Tom parks his Packard and climbs out. The lot is dark and quiet. On the way to his office, Tom sees a SOUND STAGE DOOR cracked open. A sliver of light peeking out of the bottom.

INT. SOUND STAGE 1 - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Tom finds a small, stout man in his 60s, wearing a sharp suit, horn-rim glasses and shiny black shoes. A KLIEG LAMP on a tripod fills the empty, cavernous space with white light.

TOM
Holtzie.

This is JOSEPH "HOLTZIE" HOLTZ, founder of Paradise Pictures.

HOLTZ
Tom. I thought you'd be at the
premiere.

TOM
I came back to do some work. But I
thought you'd be at the premiere.
Sneaking in when the lights go
down, like you always do.

HOLTZ
I wasn't quite up for it tonight.

TOM
What're you doing in here, Holtzie?

HOLTZ
Being a nostalgic old fool, I suppose. This is where we shot our first picture, you know.

TOM
"Five Fugitives," right? First thing Stanley ever showed up in.

HOLTZ
He ripped every pair of pants we gave him on that picture. All his flips and falls and tumbles. He was a wild man.

TOM
He still is. Just with a helluva lot more gray hair now.

HOLTZ
That's going around, I'm afraid. I should get going. Blanche will be wondering where I am.

Holtz starts off, but Tom catches his arm.

TOM
You don't make a habit of walking around empty sound stages. Holtzie, c'mon, if you can't talk to me, who exactly are you supposed to talk to?

HOLTZ
Tom...

Holtz can't hide the sad look on his face. Tom realizes...

TOM
Something going's on with the studio, isn't it?

HOLTZ
There's a reason I greenlit "Heart of Darkness" tonight. It's my gift to you. For everything you've done for me and this studio --

TOM
Jesus Christ, no --

HOLTZ
I've made mistakes. Many many bad investments.

TOM
But we made so much money during the war...

HOLTZ
And I was greedy, trying to make more. Real estate. But... seems I have a knack for picking the wrong pony in every single race. I should've stuck with making movies. I used to know how to do that.

TOM
You taught me everything I know.

HOLTZ
No, I didn't, but that's nice of you to say.

TOM
Holtzie, forget "Heart of Darkness." We don't have to make it, if it's gonna mean --

HOLTZ
I appreciate that, Tom. But my problems cost a lot more than the price of that picture. If we're gonna go out, let's at least go out with a bang.

Holtz's heart is breaking. And Tom is reeling right now.

TOM
Who'd you sell us to?

HOLTZ
RKO. The paperwork will take six months. So we can make the movies we have in the pipeline, but then...

TOM
There won't be a Paradise Pictures anymore. And "Heart of Darkness" will be the last movie we finish.

Holtz gives Tom a defeated smile, then walks out. Off Tom, standing in the empty sound stage, processing this news...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWOEXT. PARADISE PICTURES LOT - THE NEXT MORNING

Brilliant Los Angeles sunshine as Tom parks his car. We see the studio lot in the daylight. A city unto itself. High fortress walls. A dozen sound stages. Hundreds of employees.

After last night's news, Tom notices everything this morning. The actresses and actors dressed as COWBOYS, FEMME FATALES, ROMANS, ROBBERS, BALLERINAS. The Costume Department, the Writers' Bungalows, the Studio Hospital, the Commissary --

POSTERS for their hits: "Rogues Gallery" (gangster pic), "Sing a Song for Sue" (musical), "Love Thy Neighbor" (romance). Tom arrives at the EXECUTIVE BUILDING. Waiting is his secretary OLIVE PRUITT (50s), a sparkplug in the mold of Thelma Ritter.

TOM

Good morning, beautiful.

OLIVE

It is for you. I heard about "Heart of Darkness." You must be pleased as punch.

TOM

If I wasn't wearing this suit, I'd be doing backflips right about now.
(onto business)
I got a busy day. Screening rushes with Mark at ten, hearing pitches from the story department at lunch. And I gotta switch my wardrobe meeting with Phoebe to three...

OLIVE

Wait, I gotta do actual work today?

TOM

Sorry to be a spoilsport, dear.

OLIVE

I tried reading that book, ya know. "Heart of Darkness."

TOM

What'd you think?

OLIVE

Meh.

TOM

Let's hope the picture turns out better than that.

OLIVE

Yeah, 'cuz you sink a ship that big,
you'll be heading straight to the
bottom of the ocean too.

Tom stops walking. She's struck a nerve, but doesn't know it.

TOM

That's not gonna happen, Olive.
We're gonna make a great picture.

OLIVE

Hey, I was just giving you a hard
time, Tom. I thought that's the
name of the game with us.

TOM

(a beat, then)
Sorry. It's just... I've been
wanting to make this picture for a
long time.

OLIVE

No one knows that better than me.
(studying him)
Everything okay, chief?

TOM

(forcing a smile)
Everything's terrific, Olive.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - PARADISE PICTURES - DAY

A young man, a kid really, sits alone in the dark theater,
watching "Stagecoach" on the big screen. He's captivated,
scribbling ideas in a notebook. This is WYATT OSBORNE (22).

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

You're not supposed to be in here.

Wyatt sits up, busted, as a Security Guard named CARL enters.
Carl flips on the lights and approaches Wyatt, who stands.

WYATT

I got permission from Mr. Kirby...

CARL THE SECURITY GUARD

Bullshit. You expect me to believe
Tom Kirby said some kid I've never
seen before can watch movies in --

TOM (O.S.)

His name's Wyatt Osborne. Works in
our cutting department. And I said
he could be here.

Wyatt and Carl the guard turn, stunned to see Tom entering.

CARL THE SECURITY GUARD
Mr. Kirby... I'm sorry, I was just --

TOM
You were just doing your job, Carl.
I shoulda had someone tell you.

Chastened, Carl nods, exits. A beat. Wyatt looks at Tom.

WYATT
You know who I am, sir?

TOM
I know everyone on this lot. But I
don't know why you're in my
screening room at nine o'clock in
the morning.

WYATT
I was watching "Stagecoach." You
know John Ford shot them riding
through Monument Valley three times?
Hard to tell unless you look close --

TOM
How often you do this, Wyatt? And
tell me the truth.

WYATT
Pretty much every morning.

TOM
Every morning?

WYATT
I get in at five so I can watch two
pictures before anyone's here. But
I overslept today, got in at six --

TOM
Whose pictures do you watch?

WYATT
John Ford's, Howard Hawks, Chaplin,
Cukor, Fritz Lang, Freddie Ziegler --

TOM
You're studying all of them.

WYATT
I wanna be a director, Mr. Kirby.
In fact, I wanna be a director
here... at Paradise Pictures.

A beat. This kid is self-assured. Tom respects that, but...

TOM

How about for today, Wyatt Osborne, you just focus on your duties in the cutting department.

WYATT

Yes sir. Hey... I heard Mr. Holtz finally greenlit "Heart of Darkness."

TOM

You really got your finger on the pulse, don't you?

WYATT

I don't know if this is okay, but I got something maybe you can look at. I was gonna ask Olive to give it to you, but since you're here...

Wyatt reaches into his satchel bag and pulls out a script: "HEART OF DARKNESS". He hands it to Tom, who's puzzled.

TOM

You wrote a script for "Heart of Darkness"? Why would you do that?

WYATT

I do some writing on the side --

TOM

No, I mean I have Nate Reynolds on this.

WYATT

You mean Nate Reynolds the novelist?

TOM

What are you talking about?

WYATT

Oh, nothing. Well, okay... word around the lot is Nate's been busy writing a novel and hasn't finished your script. Least not yet. So I took a shot myself, in case you ever got a chance to make it.

(starting out)

Anyways, see you around, Mr. Kirby.

TOM

One second.

(then)

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

You didn't oversleep today, did you?
You wanted me to find you here.

WYATT

Would I be in trouble if that was
the case?

TOM

No.

WYATT

Then, okay, yeah, that was the case.

Wyatt exits. And now Tom's concerned about his script for
"Heart of Darkness." He looks down at the one the kid wrote.

PRE-LAP: The DRONE OF AN AIRPLANE ENGINE...

EXT. METROPOLITAN AIRPORT - VAN NUYS - DAY

Tom looks up, squinting in the sunlight, watching a PIPER CUB
AIRPLANE banking into a graceful turn, heading back, LOUDER as
it touches down, decelerates and stops 20 yards from Tom. The
cockpit opens. Movie star CHARLIE SANDERS (30s) climbs out,
puckish grin, leather bomber's jacket, goggles on his head.

CHARLIE

You believe they wouldn't let me
fight the Krauts from the sky?
They let Jimmy and Clark.

TOM

Mighta ended that war a couple
years early.

Charlie Sanders smiles at that, tucking gloves in his pockets.

CHARLIE

So I heard old Holtzie finally gave
you the keys to the big car.

TOM

Whattaya say, wanna go for a spin?

Before Charlie answers, a YOUNG MAN exits the cockpit. Quiet.

CHARLIE

Don't be shy, Shayne. Tom's on the
level.

Charlie hooks an arm around SHAYNE's waist and kisses him.

CHARLIE

Why don't you go make me and Tom here
a coupla drinks? Scotch and rocks.

Shayne leaves them, makes his way to a nearby open hangar.

TOM

You and your little brother sure are familiar.

CHARLIE

Little brother. That's a good one. Sometimes my guy's so nice, I forget I'm all the way up there.

TOM

Sounds dangerous, Charlie.

CHARLIE

There are worse ways to die.

TOM

So... "Heart of Darkness." Before I talk to Harry Cohn about loaning you out, I wanna make sure you're still gung-ho on doing this.

CHARLIE

Why don't we get that drink first?

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR - DAY - A LITTLE BIT LATER

Tom and Charlie stand in the hangar, drinking their Scotches.

CHARLIE

That bastard Cohn came to my house this morning, screaming. Said there was no way in hell I was starring in "Heart of Darkness" for Tom Kirby at Paradise Pictures.

TOM

He wanted the rights to the book, but I won 'em off Orson Welles in a poker game five years ago.

CHARLIE

Shit. Well, I guess we'll get 'em next time, right?

TOM

No, we'll get 'em this time.

CHARLIE

What are you saying, Tom?

TOM

Tell me, straight up. You wanna do this picture with me, Charlie?

CHARLIE

I wanted to play the lead in this since I read that novel. But Cohn...

Tom takes a sip of his Scotch. He's already hatching a plan.

TOM

Let me worry about Harry Cohn.

EXT. PARADISE PICTURES LOT - DAY - LATER

Tom returns, parking his Packard on the lot. He sees Holtz climbing into the back of a Chrysler Crown Imperial Limousine. A nattily dressed DRIVER shuts Holtz's door, then gets behind the wheel. Tom approaches Holtz's open back window, leans in.

TOM

Hey Holtzie, I wanna get your permission on something.

HOLTZ

If you're asking for permission, then it must be something bad, Tom.

TOM

You tell me. I plan on pissing off Harry Cohn like no one's ever pissed him off before. You okay with that?

HOLTZ

You know, Harry Cohn and I came up in this business together. If you piss him off so much he has a heart attack? Make sure I don't miss that prick's funeral.

Tom grins. Holtz rolls up the window. His car drives away. A moment later, Tom turns and heads toward the Writers' Bungalows, to his next order of business. And off Tom...

INT. NATE REYNOLDS' OFFICE - DUSK - LATER

Screenwriter NATE REYNOLDS (40s) is hammering away on his typewriter when he sees, through his blinds, Tom approaching. Shit. Flustered, he scrambles to his feet, grabs his jacket --

EXT. WRITERS' BUNGALOWS / INT. NATE REYNOLDS' OFFICE

-- and opens the door, intercepting Tom. Nate acts surprised.

NATE REYNOLDS

Oh Tom, hey there...

TOM

You leaving, Nate?

NATE REYNOLDS
Just heading home. Long day.

TOM
I won't make it much longer, just
wanted a quick word. You heard
about "Heart of Darkness," yeah?

Tom pushes past Nate into the office. Nate, nervous, trails.

NATE REYNOLDS
It's all anyone can talk about.
Congratulations.

TOM
Thanks, but we haven't shot a single
page yet. Speaking of which...

NATE REYNOLDS
I'm about a week away on the script.

TOM
I'd love a sneak peek, Nate.

NATE REYNOLDS
It's still a work in progress.

Tom roots around various stacks of papers. He finds one
thick stack with a title page on top: "HEART OF DARKNESS".

TOM
Look at that. Here it is. C'mon,
lemme just see how you kick the
damn thing off. I'm like a horse
in the gate. Dying to start the
race here.

NATE REYNOLDS
It's really not ready yet...

But Tom lifts the title page anyway. And underneath he finds
TWO SCRIPT PAGES. But underneath those... he sees another
TITLE PAGE, with the title: "THE CRYING PARTY".

NATE REYNOLDS (CONT'D)
That there... that's nothing, Tom.

Tom turns more pages, hundreds of pages FILLED WITH PROSE.

TOM
It's not nothing. It's a novel. I
didn't wanna believe it...
(a long beat, and then)
Nate... I pay you two grand a week
and this is what you've been doing?

NATE REYNOLDS
Lemme explain --

TOM
Last time I saw you, you said you were halfway done... and didn't wanna show me until it was perfect. You've never said that to me before, but I trusted you, Nate, because you've also never lied to me before.

NATE REYNOLDS
I got writer's block, okay? It's an incredibly difficult adaptation. I thought I had time. I screwed up...

TOM
You've got no idea.

A beat. Then, calm, Tom picks up the novel and crosses to a sink in the corner of the office. Tom sets the novel in the sink, then... HE LIGHTS A MATCH. In shock, Nate cries out...

NATE REYNOLDS
JESUS, TOM, PLEASE, DON'T --

But Tom touches the match to the novel. IT GOES UP IN FLAMES.

NATE REYNOLDS (CONT'D)
That was three years of work...

TOM
Don't worry, Nate. You got all the time in the world to start a new one.

INT. TOM KIRBY'S OFFICE - NIGHT - LATER

Tom sits at his desk, poring over the script Wyatt Osborne wrote. A rap on the door, and then Aberdeen enters...

ABERDEEN
Tom...

TOM
Hey, you know Wyatt Osborne?

ABERDEEN
Little twerp works in cutting?

TOM
That's the one. He wrote a script. And I gotta say, it's not bad.

ABERDEEN

Tom, I'm sorry to interrupt your work... but we got a situation.

EXT. SEEDY HOLLYWOOD STREET - NIGHT - LATER

A low-rent street. Young men playing cards on a front stoop. A small shirtless boy running up and down the sidewalk.

Tom's Packard Convertible pulls up in front of a DILAPIDATED BUNGALOW. Tom and Aberdeen step out, head for the bungalow.

INT. HOLLYWOOD BUNGALOW - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

A SQUALID TABLEAUX. Stains on walls. Broken liquor bottles and sex paraphernalia on the floor. A few JUNIOR EXECS talk in whispers, but fall quiet the moment Tom and Aberdeen enter.

JUNIOR EXECUTIVE

He's in the bathroom. But we're going to get him out of here --

TOM

That son of a bitch isn't going anywhere. Where's the girl?

JUNIOR EXECUTIVE

She's in the bedroom, Mr. Kirby.

Tom walks through, looks into the filthy bathroom, sees...

FREDDIE ZIEGLER, the Austrian director, in slacks and a torn white undershirt. Face wet with perspiration and bloodied.

FREDDIE

Tom, thank goodness you're here, the silly girl locked herself in the bathroom...

Tom keeps moving, pushes his way into the only bedroom.

INT. HOLLYWOOD BUNGALOW - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Two studio-employed nurses are tending to someone on the bed. BRIGHT LIGHTS on in here. Seeing Tom, they part, revealing --

MYRTLE DUNLEAVY, the girl from Salina, Kansas, white with fear, makeup smeared, dress ripped, BRUISE over her left eye.

MYRTLE

Mr. Kirby... are you here to take me home?

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE**INT. HOLLYWOOD BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Time has passed. Aberdeen leads Tom through this seedy place.

ABERDEEN

The good news is the girl didn't call the cops.

TOM

You're sure?

ABERDEEN

Yep. She locked herself in the bedroom, dialed the front gate and asked for you.

TOM

And you were probably hoping for a good night's sleep.

ABERDEEN

Always hoping. But who else is gonna handle this. Holtzie?

TOM

If he saw something like this, he'd have another coronary. Doesn't have the stomach for this kinda stuff.

ABERDEEN

Sometimes I wish I didn't.

Tom kneels, sifts through the sex paraphernalia on the floor. Frayed ropes, a dildo. He picks up leather straps. Jesus.

TOM

How many women has Freddie brought here, Ray?

ABERDEEN

My guys have been pounding on doors. These neighbors have seen a lot of shit, heard a lot of strange noises.

TOM

Are they gonna talk?

ABERDEEN

They're not gonna say a word. I'll make shutting up worth their while.

TOM

And what about this place?

ABERDEEN

I'll do what I always do, boss.
I'll make it disappear.

INT. TOM KIRBY'S PACKARD CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT - LATER

Tom drives. Myrtle Dunleavy sits in the passenger seat. She's been cleaned up, face and hair washed, wearing a coat.

TOM

You hungry? Want something to eat?

MYRTLE

No thank you, Mr. Kirby.

TOM

Can I ask you something? Why didn't you call the police tonight?

MYRTLE

Because I don't know the police in this city. But I know Mr. Ziegler works for you, and you seemed like the kind of man who would help me.

TOM

I'm glad you called. I'm glad you let us take care of this, Myrtle.
(a long beat, and then)
Hey, what was your favorite picture when you were a kid?

She thinks about it for a moment. Then, with a soft smile...

MYRTLE

"Poor Little Rich Girl."

TOM

Shirley Temple.

MYRTLE

The movies always made me happy.

TOM

My folks hated 'em, but growing up they were all I cared about. Fatty Arbuckle. Douglas Fairbanks. Meant more to me than my own family.

MYRTLE

Where did you grow up?

TOM

A smaller town than you, sweetheart. And I left the first chance I got.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)
Couldn't wait to be a part of all
this.

Tom pulls in front of SCHWAB'S DRUGSTORE on Sunset Boulevard.

TOM
But the movies are just a dream.
Do you understand, Myrtle?
(a beat, then)
That's what we do here. We're a
dream machine. And when you start
making the dreams, you don't get to
dream them anymore. Is that
something you really wanna lose?

MYRTLE
I thought so... but I'm not so sure
anymore.

TOM
Maybe this isn't a place for a girl
from Salina, Kansas.

A moment passes, and then she begins to cry. Tom gives her
another moment, then pulls out a WAD OF CASH, hands it to her.

MYRTLE
What's this for?

TOM
A ticket home.

MYRTLE
But that's way more than --

TOM
Take all of it. Please.

She does, reluctant but grateful. Several hundred dollars.

MYRTLE
Can I ask you a favor?

TOM
Of course.

MYRTLE
Before I go home... can I visit the
studio lot? I've never been on
one... and I've always wanted to.

Tom doesn't think it's a great idea. But he forces a smile.

TOM
Come by whenever you'd like.

And as he resumes driving, PRE-LAP BEBOP JAZZ MUSIC...

INT. NIGHTCLUB AT THE DUNBAR HOTEL - NIGHT - LATER

A hopping, upscale JAZZ CLUB with an African-American crowd. In the day, hosted greats like Lena Horne, Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong. Tonight's stage is filled with a young group of musicians, fronted by the handsome ALDO BOYD (30) on the sax.

Tom enters as Aldo finishes a rousing solo. Aldo spots Tom.

INT. NIGHTCLUB AT THE DUNBAR HOTEL - PRIVATE TABLE - LATER

Tom and Aldo sit in the back of the dark club, with drinks.

ALDO

You're really gonna walk into the Dunbar Hotel and ask me to do that?

TOM

Aldo, you think I wanna ask you to do this?

ALDO

I don't care if you want to or not, you are asking, Tom.

(a beat, then)

You know in this very hotel, they held the first convention for the NAACP. Know what that stands for?

TOM

Of course I do.

ALDO

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

TOM

If I don't get Charlie Sanders, this picture's not gonna work.

ALDO

You know how badly I wish you were saying the same thing about me?

TOM

I wish I was, too, Aldo. But that's not the way it is. Maybe one day.

ALDO

I've been waiting a long time for "one day"...

(a beat, then)

(MORE)

ALDO (CONT'D)

So why don't you do this shit, Tom Konigsberg? Or what, a Jew won't get everyone all up in arms?

TOM

Not in the same way.

Aldo sips his drink. A new band takes the stage. Aldo closes his eyes as MORE BEBOP MUSIC fills the club. He loves it.

ALDO

You know, I'd play here every night if they let me. Wouldn't have to leave either. Sleep all day... perform until the sun comes up.

TOM

She's a fan of yours, you know.

Tom pulls out an issue of SILVER SCREEN MAGAZINE, the cover of which we don't quite see. Tom opens it and reads...

TOM (CONT'D)

"One of her favorite musicians is jazz player and actor Aldo Boyd. 'He's just divine,' she said."

ALDO

Bullshit, it doesn't say that.
(grabbing it, reading)
How do I know you didn't fake a whole magazine? Wouldn't put that kinda shit past Tom Kirby for one second.

TOM

Listen, you don't wanna do this, Aldo, I'm not gonna make you do it. This has nothing to do with your contract. I really am asking.

Aldo's torn. Takes another long sip of his drink. Then...

ALDO

I do this for you, Tom, then you're gonna give me a role bigger than I've ever had before.

And as the BEBOP MUSIC CONTINUES TO BLARE in the background...

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS FLATS - EARLY THE NEXT MORNING

Pink sun on the horizon.

Tom behind the wheel of his Packard Convertible. Driving through the neighborhood, past all the beautiful homes. Pulls in front of a modest-sized Spanish-style house.

EXT. GRETCHEN'S HOUSE - PATIO/SWIMMING POOL - MOMENTS LATER

A granite pool. Water shimmering in the dawn. And there's a person swimming laps in the water, graceful and effortless.

Tom comes around from the front. Kneels poolside as...

Gretchen Whalon emerges from the water. Hanging on the side. Smoothing her long wet hair. She's beautiful in the sunlight.

TOM

I wanna give Stanley a role in "The Funny Bone."

INT. GRETCHEN'S HOUSE - MORNING - LATER

Nice furniture and artwork. Tom's on the couch. Gretchen brings in coffee, hands a cup to Tom, then sits on a chair.

TOM

It's a small part, a nothing part, but it's the best I can do.

GRETCHEN

I get it.

TOM

Will your uncle?

GRETCHEN

Sure, and I appreciate it, Tom, I do. But's that's not why you're here at seven in the morning.

He takes a sip of his coffee, and then, with a wry grin...

TOM

I remember when you'd never wonder what I was doing with you at seven in the morning.

GRETCHEN

Tom...

TOM

C'mon. I can't give you a hard time? Listen... I got a script that needs a rewrite. It could use you, Miss RKO, it could really use you.

GRETCHEN

I told you I wasn't going to work under the table for you anymore.

TOM

Even though I can't give you a credit, I always make it worth your while.

GRETCHEN

I don't think it's a good idea. After what happened last year...

"Last year." A story there. One neither wants to dwell on.

TOM

Do it for Stanley. I give him the part, you help me with this script.

GRETCHEN

What's the picture? One of your romances? Or a melodrama --

TOM

It's "Heart of Darkness."

Now this gets Gretchen's attention. She looks over at Tom.

GRETCHEN

Nate Reynolds is on that.

TOM

Nate Reynolds doesn't work for me anymore. I know it's your favorite novel. I know you begged Odlum to keep the rights when Orson had them.

GRETCHEN

"Heart of Darkness." Tom Kirby, you're a bastard, do you know that?

EXT. MIRACLE MILE - DAY

Art Deco buildings and department stores. Ray Aberdeen's '42 BLACK PONTIAC TORPEDO roars down Wilshire Boulevard, down a side street. A quiet neighborhood dotted with orange trees. He stops at a brick house. A towering palm tree out front.

He climbs out of his car, circles to the back, to a side door.

INT. BRICK HOUSE - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Inside Aberdeen finds a half-lit photography studio. Soft glows and strategically placed silks. There are props and facade backdrops set against the walls. A GREASY-HAIRED PHOTOGRAPHER sets up a Kodak Retina I camera on a tripod.

GREASY PHOTOGRAPHER
You Aberdeen?

ABERDEEN
Lemme see the girl. I should
probably see her before --

GREASY PHOTOGRAPHER
(calls out)
RITA. Hey Rita, we got a visitor.

A moment later, a TALL, VOLUPTUOUS REDHEAD (early 20s)
enters. WE ONLY SEE HER FROM BEHIND, wearing a flimsy robe.

ABERDEEN
Jesus Christ, you look just like
the real deal.

GREASY PHOTOGRAPHER
She looks better than the real deal.

There's a KNOCK at the door. The Redhead disappears into a
back room. Aberdeen looks at the Greasy Photographer -- "*I
got this.*" He opens the door and finds Aldo Boyd out front.

ALDO
What are you doing here?

ABERDEEN
Tom wants me to supervise.

ALDO
That wasn't part of the deal.

ABERDEEN
I gotta make sure Tom gets what he
wants. And I also gotta make sure
I'm the only person walking outta
here with these photos.

ALDO
There's not gonna be any photos if
you don't leave right now.

ABERDEEN
Tom's not gonna like that.

ALDO
Yeah, well, sometimes we have to
accept the things we don't like.

Aberdeen steps closer to Aldo. Gets in his face. Tough. A
beat. Then Aldo smiles. A hard smile. Tough right back...

ALDO

I know people on the lot are scared of you, Aberdeen. But I'm sure as hell not. So get out of my face and walk out that door, or you and me are gonna have ourselves a situation. And I guarantee you Tom won't like that.

A lot of animosity here. A beat. Aberdeen puts his hands up.

ABERDEEN

You're lucky Tom needs you. Or we'd have a real problem on our hands.

Aberdeen turns and walks out the door.

EXT. SANTA MONICA BEACH - DAY

Gretchen and Stanley walk through the sand. The sun bright and yellow. Seagulls diving into the ocean like mad bombers.

GRETCHEN

You understand Tom can only do so much. It's not much of a part.

STANLEY

You think I just fell off the turnip truck? I know how it works.

She reaches in her handbag, and pulls out ONE SCRIPT PAGE.

STANLEY

My lines fit on a page?

(scanning)

Guess I'm the Ferris wheel operator.

(reading)

"Step up, ladies and lads, and hold on tight because the Ferris wheel will spin your life around."

Just then, a medium-sized RUBBER BALL bounces in their direction. A half-dozen children are playing nearby.

10-YEAR-OLD BOY

Hey mister, can you kick our ball back, please?

STANLEY

I can try.

Stanley collects the ball and sets it on the sand. He swings his leg back and attempts to kick it, but misses the ball on purpose and FLAILS THROUGH THE AIR, landing flat on his back.

The children erupt in laughter.

STANLEY

Oh dear. I was afraid that would happen.

Gretchen smiles as Stanley gathers himself, and swings his leg back even farther. He misses the ball again and takes an even more exaggerated tumble. The kids are now cracking up.

10-YEAR-OLD BOY

Doesn't that hurt?

Stanley stands, brushes himself off. With a gentle smile...

STANLEY

The trick is knowing how to fall.

INT. FILM ARCHIVE STORAGE ROOM - DAY

Wyatt Osborne is standing on a ladder, cataloguing CANISTERS OF FILM REELS on shelves. Tom enters the dark, dusty space.

TOM

Wyatt Osborne.

WYATT

Mr. Kirby. How you doing, sir?

TOM

Fine. Listen, I need all the reels for "The Runaway Man." Came out in --

WYATT

Forty-one. Coming right up.

Wyatt scrambles down the ladder, then loudly yanks it over to another set of shelves. Climbs up, quickly locates the reels.

WYATT

You want 'em sent over to the screening room -- ?

TOM

You found those fast.

WYATT

I know this place inside and out.

TOM

How many reels are in here?

WYATT

Ten-thousand, five-hundred and three, according to my last count.

TOM

Are you good at everything you do,
Wyatt?

WYATT

I try to be. That's the only way I
see getting where I wanna go.

TOM

Forget the reels, c'mere a second.

Wyatt climbs off the ladder, wipes his hands. Tom hands him
a script called "The Lazarus Doctrine." Wyatt's confused.

WYATT

What's this?

TOM

Your next assignment. It's a
thriller, a quickie B-picture.

WYATT

I don't understand --

TOM

You wrote a helluva script for
"Heart of Darkness." It needs some
work, but it's good. So, let's see
what you can do with this. Needs a
rewrite, and quick, 'cuz this thing
goes in front of cameras in two
weeks. Think you can handle that?

Wyatt's surprised, overwhelmed... but also eager as hell.

WYATT

I'll get cracking on it tonight.

TOM

I want you to get cracking on it
right now.

WYATT

But I still got all these reels to --

TOM

You don't work in the cutting
department anymore, Wyatt.

(then)

There's an empty office over at the
writers' bungalows. Used to belong
to Nate Reynolds. It's yours now.

Tom walks out. Once he's gone, Wyatt breaks into a huge grin.

EXT. CASA DEL MAR HOTEL - VERANDA - DUSK

Overlooking the Pacific at sunset. Palm trees sway in the breeze. Tom sips a whiskey, sitting with Freddie Ziegler.

FREDDIE

We had a few drinks, a few laughs.
Surely, you know how it goes.

TOM

Actually, I don't.

FREDDIE

We were having fun. We both knew why she called me. And then it went too far and she got frightened. She made it appear far worse than it was --

TOM

The girl had bruises on her face.

FREDDIE

I never claimed to be a choir boy.
Besides, you fixed this, right?

TOM

That's not the point, Freddie.

FREDDIE

Other studios, with this sort of thing, they deal with it and move on. I should be allowed my vices. I'm quite certain I've earned them.

Tom has heard enough. He grabs Freddie's wrist. Tight.

TOM

I don't give a shit how it works at other studios. At my studio, this doesn't fly. You got it? I need you to tell me this won't happen again.

FREDDIE

What happened was a mistake. But I cannot tell you it won't happen again. Now, let go of me, Tom.

TOM

Careful, Freddie.

FREDDIE

"Heart of Darkness" is your dream project and you know I'm going to deliver a first-class picture. What's more important than that?

A beat. Tom slowly lets go of Freddie's wrist. He stands.

TOM
 Nothing's bigger than the picture.
 But you're stubborn, Freddie. And
 I'm gonna have to teach you not to be
 so goddamn stubborn.

Tom drains his whiskey, bangs down the glass and walks out.

INT. STANLEY WHALON'S WEST HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT - NIGHT

The old silent film star paces in the half-dark, practicing his lines. He puts the page aside, tries it from memory.

STANLEY
 "Step up, ladies and lads, and hold
 on tight because the Ferris wheel
 will..."
 (glances at the page)
 "Will spin your life around."
 (frowns, tries it again)
 "Step up, ladies and lads, and hold
 on tight because the Ferris wheel
 will spin your life around."
 (looks at the script)
 "The wheel spins and spins and you
 don't know where you'll be when it
 stops."

Stanley puts the page down. A moment passes. He crosses to a cabinet and drags out a PORTABLE HOME MOVIE PROJECTOR. Then he roots around and finds an old COWBOY HAT, dusty and worn.

Stanley sets the projector up. He inserts two film reels and carefully threads the film along the wheels. Then he faces the projector to a bare white wall. Finally... Stanley presses a button. The movie projector begins to hum.

A GRAINY OLD SILENT FILM begins to flicker on the white wall. Stanley puts the cowboy hat on his head and sits on his sofa.

ON THE SCREEN -- the 35-year-old "Sheriff" wears that same cowboy hat, spurs and a big silver badge. He lassos a runaway horse, but the animal is strong, and the Sheriff realizes too late that one end of the lasso is tied to his own ankle. Soon, he's on the ground, dragged by the runaway horse.

Stanley smiles, entertained, happy watching his younger self.

INT. TOM KIRBY'S MANSION - NIGHT

Mediterranean-style. A huge place, filled with expensive furniture, pricey artwork. But it's too perfect-looking, like a museum exhibit, like no one really lives here.

A DOORBELL rings. Holding a fresh glass of whiskey, Tom makes his way to the front door, jacket and tie off. He's a little tipsy. He pulls open the door, and is happy to see... Gretchen standing there, wearing a long coat, self-conscious.

TOM

You came. I wasn't sure you would.

She enters. He shuts the door. Crosses to a table and finds Wyatt Osborne's "Heart of Darkness" script. Hands it to her.

TOM

I'm gonna need big parts for Isabelle Yates and Aldo Boyd, too.

GRETCHEN

(thinking)

She can be Kurtz's fiancée. I can beef that part up. And Aldo can play the guide taking Marlow up the river. I'll make sure that role has some meat on its bones.

TOM

And that, boys and girls, is the Miss RKO Midas touch I need on this picture.

(a beat, then)

Hey, how long's it been since you've been here?

GRETCHEN

It's been a year, Tom.

TOM

I miss you, sweetheart. I miss you like you wouldn't believe.

GRETCHEN

Tom Kirby, I believe you are drunk.

TOM

Then you won't be offended if I ask you to dance.

He makes his way to a phonograph. Puts a record on and sets the needle down. The Ink Spot's "The Gypsy" begins to play.

GRETCHEN

I really should be on my way.

TOM

C'mon. I might never get another chance.

He sets down his drink and steps closer to her. He takes one of her hands, and puts his other hand on her waist.

THE INK SPOTS (OVER THE PHONOGRAPH)
*BUT I'LL GO THERE AGAIN
 'CAUSE I WANT TO BELIEVE THE GYPSY
 THAT MY LOVER IS TRUE
 AND WILL COME BACK TO ME SOME DAY*

They sway to the slow, melodic tune for a few moments. She rests her head on his shoulder. It's comfortable and safe.

TOM
 I need to tell you something,
 Gretchen. Something I haven't told
 anyone else...
 (a long beat, and then)
 Holtzie's selling the studio to
 your bosses over at RKO.

She slowly moves her head from his shoulder and looks at him.

GRETCHEN
 What? I haven't heard that.

TOM
 They're keeping it under wraps. He
 gave me "Heart of Darkness" as a
 parting gift. It's my swan song.

GRETCHEN
 Oh my God, Tom, I'm so sorry...

TOM
 Here I thought we were getting
 closer to being one of the Big Five
 studios... but instead we're gonna
 be swallowed up by one of them.

GRETCHEN
 You gave that man everything, and
 this is how he repays you --

TOM
 Hey, it's not like that.

GRETCHEN
 Yes, it is, Tom. Don't forget, I
 was there. Holtzie sat back and
 watched as the studio consumed you.

TOM
 I let the studio consume me. Don't
 blame Holtzie for what happened to
 us ten years ago. Blame me.

GRETCHEN

I wish I could, but I don't. You wanted to be Irving Thalberg more than you wanted anything else. It hurt... but I understood.

TOM

Irving Thalberg. What an idea, huh?

GRETCHEN

Forget Irving Thalberg. You've done a pretty good job being Tom Kirby. And until this Holtzie news, everything's worked out the way it was supposed to. Don't you agree?

TOM

(a beat)

I'm not so sure I do.

A loaded moment. Tom leans in to kiss her. She closes her eyes. But... as their lips touch, Gretchen pulls away.

GRETCHEN

I... I have to go. I'll have some pages for you in a few days, okay? You should get some sleep, Tom.

Gretchen takes the "Heart of Darkness" script and walks out the front door. As the Ink Spots continue to croon for Tom...

EXT. PARADISE PICTURES LOT - THE NEXT MORNING

A gray blanket over the yellow sky. The lot is still quiet this early. A whistling JANITOR wheels his cart into Sound Stage 11, with a card outside that says "The Funny Bone."

INT. SOUND STAGE 11 - "THE FUNNY BONE" SET - MORNING

The sets are still under construction. They are a REPLICA OF AN OUTDOOR COUNTY FAIR, with dunk tank, kissing booth, vendors advertising funnel cake, a shooting gallery and Ferris wheel.

The Janitor notices something strange over at the Ferris wheel. He approaches the Ferris wheel, sees something hanging from one of the cars. It's a man hanging there.

Face frozen in death, a ROPE NOOSE around his broken neck. There's a note pinned to his coat. It says: "Off into the sunset." The dead man wears a dusty, worn cowboy hat.

The dead man is Stanley "The Sheriff" Whalon.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOURINT. TOM KIRBY'S OFFICE - DAY

Tom faces the picture window, looking over the subdued lot, at AMBULANCES and POLICE CARS. Ray Aberdeen sits quietly on the sofa. Tom turns to his secretary Olive, who's grief-stricken.

TOM

Holtzie knows? I haven't been able to get ahold of him.

OLIVE

Blanche said he's too crushed to talk. I didn't wanna push too hard, but Eileen's saying publicity needs something to give the papers.

TOM

Tell them this is the saddest day in the history of Paradise Pictures, and let's make sure they have access to all our material with Stanley.

Olive hands Tom a stack of BLACK-AND-WHITE STILLs of Stanley.

OLIVE

They're on that already, chief. They want you to pick one to send out.

Tom picks out a CLOSE-UP of "The Sheriff" balanced on the roof of a moving train. The photograph's 25 years old.

OLIVE

That's from "Saddle Up."
(voice cracking)
Jerk. Helped start this studio.
Never figured out how to leave it.

She wipes away a tear, exits. Now it's just Tom and Aberdeen.

ABERDEEN

Why'd he have to do this here? He could've pulled a Peg Entwistle and thrown himself off the "Hollywoodland" sign. Or Lou Tellegen, gold scissors in the chest.

TOM

That's enough, Ray. Show some goddamn respect.

ABERDEEN

C'mon, Tom, I didn't mean nothing --

TOM
You got the photos?

Chastened, Aberdeen stands, hands Tom a TAN ENVELOPE.

ABERDEEN
These are good. Real good. That hooker was the spitting image. But how you plan on getting through to Cohn?

TOM
He won't take my calls. So I'm gonna sit outside Columbia and follow that piece of shit 'til he talks to me.

ABERDEEN
After he sees those? He's gonna wanna talk to you.

Aberdeen starts out, but...

TOM
One more thing, Ray. I need you to pay a visit to Freddie Ziegler.

EXT. GOWER GULCH - DAY

Tom sits in his Packard, outside COLUMBIA STUDIOS. Watching the front gate as cars stream out and onto Sunset Boulevard. Finally, he sees a brand-new gleaming '46 red Chevrolet Sedan exiting the lot, driver at the wheel, HARRY COHN in the back.

EXT. MULHOLLAND DRIVE - DAY - LATER

The Chevrolet and the Packard, several car lengths between them, roar over the high, curvy road, heading west.

EXT. RKO RANCH - ENCINO - DAY - LATER

The Chevrolet pulls into the RKO RANCH, outside the Sepulveda Dam Basin -- 110 acres of sprawling backlot. The Chevrolet parks. The driver opens the door for Columbia Pictures President HARRY COHN (54). He's a severe-looking man.

A moment later, Tom's Packard pulls into the ranch. Tom steps out and follows Cohn as he makes his way to a FACADE TOWN.

It's a small town with a Main Street, blanketed in fake white chemical snow. Members of the art department tromp through, carrying a SIGN reading: "YOU ARE NOW IN BEDFORD FALLS".

Cohn approaches a middle-aged man with Italian features and thinning dark hair. This man is the director FRANK CAPRA (48).

HARRY COHN
What's the story, Frank?

Frank Capra turns around, surprised to see Harry Cohn.

FRANK CAPRA
Harry.
(a beat)
Well, see there's this angel who stops a guy from killing himself. The guy sees what life's like without him around. We got Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. It's sweet.

HARRY COHN
Eh. Stewart's washed up. So when you gonna come back to Columbia, Frank? You ain't made a picture as good as "It Happened One Night," and that one you made with me.

FRANK CAPRA
You didn't like "Mr. Smith Goes To Washington"?

TOM (O.S.)
I liked that one a bunch.

Harry Cohn and Frank Capra turn to see Tom approaching.

FRANK CAPRA
Tommy Boy.

TOM
It's good to see you, Frank.

They shake, warm and familiar. Then Tom turns to Harry Cohn.

TOM
You don't seem to know how to return a telephone call, Mr. Cohn.

HARRY COHN
Talking on the telephone... it makes my head hurt.

TOM
I want Charlie Sanders for my picture "Heart of Darkness."

HARRY COHN
And I want Betty Grable to give me a blowjob, but that's not gonna happen either. What's that little studio of yours called again? I always forget.

TOM

You won't after you see these.

Tom hands Harry the tan envelope. A beat. Then Cohn opens it, finds RACY PHOTOS of the Beautiful Redhead, a dead ringer for Rita Hayworth, IN BED WITH ALDO BOYD. NAKED, KISSING, TOUCHING. The photos are grainy, well manipulated.

TOM (CONT'D)

Now my eyesight's not so hot, but I'm pretty sure that's Rita Hayworth getting the screws put to her by a black man. Aldo Boyd, in fact.

HARRY COHN

You son of a bitch, this isn't her --

TOM

Rita's a big fan of Aldo's. Raved all about him in last month's issue of Silver Screen magazine.

Tom pulls out the issue of Silver Screen magazine, March 1946. The cover girl is... the beautiful RITA HAYWORTH.

HARRY COHN

You goddamn asshole --

Cohn tries to shove him, but Tom steps aside and grabs Cohn, SLAMS HIM against the facade of a pharmacy, holds him there.

TOM

You got a hard-on for Rita Hayworth the size of the Empire State Building. Your starlet, Gilda herself. The Love Goddess you made in your little laboratory.

(a beat)

I don't know if the broad in those photos is Rita Hayworth. But it sure does look a lot like her. And that is Aldo Boyd. So when I put those photos out into the world, they're gonna do some damage. You wanna find out how much?

A beat. Still being held there by Tom, Cohn snarls...

HARRY COHN

You want Charlie Sanders? You can have that fairy. Wait 'til your picture comes out and everyone knows your leading man likes to suck --

TOM

That comes out, Harry, I swear I'll find the biggest shovel I can and bury you so deep the devil himself won't be able to find your body.

Tom releases him. Cohn glares at Tom, then walks to his car.

FRANK CAPRA

You know Cohn's not gonna forget this.

TOM

Yeah, well, that's kinda the idea.

FRANK CAPRA

I heard about Stanley Whalon. Hell of a thing. I'm real sorry, Tommy.

TOM

Yeah. It's a wonderful fucking life, huh?

EXT. OCEANSIDE APARTMENT IN VENICE - DAY

Whistling a tune, the director Freddie Ziegler walks up his front steps, digs in his pocket for his keys and enters his apartment. His place is a stone's throw from the Pacific.

INT. OCEANSIDE APARTMENT IN VENICE - CONTINUOUS

Freddie enters and shuts the door. It's not until he turns around that he sees... Ray Aberdeen sitting on his couch.

Freddie tries to run out his front door, but Aberdeen catches his shoulder, yanks him... and RABBIT-PUNCHES him, which drops Freddie to the floor. In pain, he looks up at Aberdeen.

FREDDIE

What... what do you want with me?

Aberdeen hauls Freddie up and flings him across the room.

ABERDEEN

I just wanna hurt you a little bit.

PRE-LAP: THE SOUND OF TYPEWRITER KEYS CLACKING AWAY...

INT. WYATT OSBORNE'S OFFICE - DAY

Wyatt Osborne is in his new office, banging away on an Underwood typewriter. He stops and cracks his knuckles. Then he happens to glance out his window and sees... Myrtle Dunleavy walking by with Carl the Security Guard. Wyatt sits up and takes notice of this young woman. Who the heck is she?

A beat. Wyatt opens a drawer and finds, under some papers, a stashed BOTTLE OF BOURBON. He stares at it for a moment... then pulls it out. Takes a few, long slugs. He stashes the bottle back in the drawer, then stands, smoothing his hair.

EXT. PARADISE PICTURES LOT - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Carl the Security Guard is giving Myrtle a tour of the studio.

CARL THE SECURITY GUARD
Paradise Pictures makes an average
of twenty-five movies a year --

WYATT (O.S.)
When the studio started, we only
made gangster pics and westerns...

Wyatt approaches, hands shoved in his pockets. Grinning.

WYATT
But in the past decade, we expanded
to musicals, family flicks, dramas,
comedies, war thrillers. You name
it, we make it here.

CARL THE SECURITY GUARD
"We"?

WYATT
Don't worry, Carl, that means you
too.

CARL THE SECURITY GUARD
How nice of you to say.

WYATT
(to Myrtle)
I've never seen you on the lot
before, miss. You under contract
now? 'Cuz I'm one of the writers --

MYRTLE
Oh, no, I'm just visiting. Carl
was nice enough to give me a tour.

CARL THE SECURITY GUARD
In fact, we were just finishing up,
kid. So, if you don't mind...

WYATT
Oh, I don't mind at all.
(back to Myrtle)
So you're not under contract, huh?
Someone's gotta change that, and
fast.

CARL THE SECURITY GUARD
 (to himself)
 Oh Jesus --

WYATT
 Ya know, I'm about to walk around
 the lot myself, stretch my legs.
 You're more than welcome to tag
 along.

MYRTLE
 Oh, that's okay, I don't wanna
 overstay my welcome --

WYATT
 It'd be my pleasure. Really. I
 can't promise I'll be as charming as
 Carl here, but I'm not bad company.
 And I know every inch of this lot,
 so maybe you'll pick up a thing or
 two from me you didn't pick up the
 first time around.

A beat. She appraises this young guy. He seems genuine.

MYRTLE
 Well, um... sure. Why not?

WYATT
 Great. Isn't that great, Carl?

CARL THE SECURITY GUARD
 Just peachy.

Carl the Security Guard shakes his head and stalks off.

INT. TOM'S PACKARD CONVERTIBLE - EVENING

Night falls. Tom drives down the canyons, coming from Encino.

TOM (PRE-LAP)
 He was your uncle, but it's like he
 was mine, too. I was crazy about
 him.

INT. GRETCHEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

Tom hands Gretchen a flower bouquet. She's brokenhearted from Stanley's suicide, pulling from a deep reserve of strength.

GRETCHEN
 And he was crazy about you, Tom.

Tom steps in. Gretchen closes the front door, makes her way into the kitchen. Tom trails. She pours water into a vase.

TOM

I woulda made Stanley the lead if I could've. You know that.

GRETCHEN

He was unhappy for a long time. Missed being the man he was, and couldn't accept the man he'd become. Said his best years were in his rear-view mirror... and getting farther and farther away every single day.

Gretchen arranges the flowers. Then she turns back to Tom.

GRETCHEN

We're all going to miss him. But this is what he wanted, Tom. So we can't be upset with him for leaving us.

(a beat, then)

Now. You want to know if I'm still going to write "Heart of Darkness."

TOM

Well, I gotta get out of bed tomorrow morning and keep a studio up and running. So yeah, that's on my mind too.

A beat. Tom looks at her.

TOM

I need this, Gretchen. I need you.

GRETCHEN

That's what I'm afraid of.

EXT. PARADISE PICTURES LOT - "CITY STREETS" BACKLOT - NIGHT

Wyatt Osborne and Myrtle Dunleavy are walking around the studio... and they reach the "CITY STREETS" in the backlot.

There's a NIGHT MOVIE SHOOT under way with a full shooting crew. The streets have been transformed into a vibrant, bustling 1920s PARISIAN BOULEVARD. The set is impressive. They stand on the periphery, watching as actors rehearse.

MYRTLE

What is all this?

WYATT

Tonight, Paris. For a movie called "French Horn," a romantic drama.

MYRTLE
It's... just like being there.

WYATT
That's the magic of the movies. I love this street. Last week, it was New York. Two weeks ago... Buenos Aires. Next week, it'll be London.

Myrtle looks over at Wyatt. He's transfixed by the tableaux.

MYRTLE
You lied to me, Wyatt. You said you know every inch of this lot... but I think you know every centimeter.

WYATT
I've worked here since I was fifteen. Started as an office boy. Now I'm a writer. Before too long, I'm planning on being a director.

MYRTLE
Wow, you've got it all mapped out.

WYATT
Don't you? I mean, from where I'm standing, you were born to be in front of the camera.

MYRTLE
Oh, please, stop...

Myrtle blushes. She's about to respond, when they both see... FREDDIE ZIEGLER exiting the Studio Hospital. Freddie's arm is in a sling and there are bruises on his face.

Myrtle goes white, and immediately tries to turn around.

MYRTLE
Wyatt, why don't we go back to...

But Wyatt is distracted by Freddie Ziegler, one of his idols.

WYATT
Mr. Ziegler. Hi. My name's Wyatt Osborne. I work here at the studio. Don't mean to bug you, sir, but I wanted to say congratulations on "Heart of Darkness."

FREDDIE
Thank you, young man.

WYATT

What happened to your arm, if you don't mind me asking?

FREDDIE

Oh, just a little accident. They happen from time to time, I find.

Freddie Ziegler looks over at Myrtle. A beat, then he says...

FREDDIE

Hello, Myrtle.

WYATT

You two know each other?

MYRTLE

Just a little...

FREDDIE

Rubbish. We know each other quite well, don't we?

An awkward beat, and then Myrtle quickly covers, saying...

MYRTLE

I escorted Mr. Ziegler at the premiere for "Axis Powers" the other night. That must be what he means.
(a painful beat, and then)
Hello, Mr. Ziegler, how are you?

FREDDIE

Wonderful, Myrtle, thank you. I do hope you can say the same.

Another tense beat between Freddie and Myrtle, and then...

FREDDIE

Now, if you two will excuse me.

Freddie walks off. Wyatt watches him go, grinning, oblivious.

WYATT

Freddie Ziegler, huh? That man's gonna be one of the greats.

(then)

Hey, let's head to the prop department. I can show you how --

MYRTLE

I'm sorry, Wyatt, but I'm feeling a little tired all of a sudden.

(a beat)

I think I'd like to go home now.

EXT. GRETCHEN'S HOUSE / BEVERLY HILLS FLATS - NIGHT

Tom exits the house and makes his way to his parked Packard.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
I was wondering who was in there.
Shoulda known it'd be you, Tommy.

At the sound of this voice, Tom stops in his tracks. He slowly turns and sees a handsome man (late 30s) wearing an Army dress uniform. There's a green duffel bag at his feet.

This is DEAN MADDOX. And Tom is shocked to see him right now.

TOM
Dean...

DEAN
What's the matter? You look like
you've seen a ghost.

TOM
I thought you were...

DEAN
Still in Europe, keeping the peace?
No, the Army sent me to Washington,
D.C. And then, this morning, after
Stanley, they sent me home.

Tom takes a moment, lights a cigarette. Dean shakes his head.

DEAN (CONT'D)
You always did light a smoke when
you got caught doing some shit you
shouldn't have been doing.

TOM
I've got nothing to hide, Dean. I'm
just surprised to see you is all.

DEAN
You're surprised to see me? You got
any idea what it's like to come home
from the war... and see another man
walking out of your house?

TOM
It's not like that.

DEAN
Then what's it like?

TOM
I came to pay my respects to
Gretchen.

DEAN
You came to offer her a shoulder to
cry on?

Dean takes Tom's cigarette from him. Takes a long drag of it.

DEAN (CONT'D)
Well, that's my job, Tommy. She's
my wife, Tommy.
(a beat, and then)
I'm sorry the Germans didn't take
care of me over in France. Mighta
made things easier for you.

TOM
Gretchen and I are friends.
Nothing more.

DEAN
And you've been there for her as a
friend, that it?

TOM
Three years is an awful long time.

DEAN
You got no idea. But now that I'm
home, you're not gonna be able to
keep her company anymore.

TOM
I'm glad you're home, Dean. And
I'm sure Gretchen's gonna be over
the moon.

Tom takes his cigarette back. Takes a long drag. Exhales.

TOM (CONT'D)
But I gotta admit, I thought first
time I saw you, you'd be wearing
all those medals they gave you over
there.

A long, tense beat between the two men. And then Dean says...

DEAN
That's only in the pictures, Tommy.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING ON IVAR - THE NEXT MORNING**

A TAXI DRIVER throws a battered suitcase into his cab's trunk.

TAXI DRIVER

Where ya going this morning, miss?

Myrtle Dunleavy climbs into the back seat.

MYRTLE

Union Station, please.

EXT. FOREST LAWN MEMORIAL PARK - GLENDALE - DAY - LATER

The funeral service for Stanley "The Sheriff" Whalon. Two-hundred people. Hollywood luminaries. Holtz at the lectern.

HOLTZ

Back in the day, Stanley and I made a lotta pictures and we had a whole lotta fun.

CLOSE ON TOM, standing in the back with Aberdeen. He scans the crowd, sees Aldo Boyd, Freddie Ziegler, Wyatt Osborne, Braddock Loman, Charlie Sanders, Olive Pruitt, Frank Capra.

HOLTZ (CONT'D)

But the town was changing while we weren't looking. I didn't like it at first, but I learned to adjust.

BACK WITH TOM, still scanning the crowd. His eyes now finding, in the front, Gretchen Whalon and Dean Maddox.

HOLTZ (CONT'D)

Stanley, though, always thought he'd be jumping out of burning barns, getting thrown through plate-glass windows... or charming a pretty dame in a dusty old saloon.

(looking skyward)

Here's hoping you're doing all that right now, old friend.

WITH TOM AND ABERDEEN, as dirt is thrown on Stanley's casket.

ABERDEEN

We spend our whole lives acting like this shit ain't coming. But it is. For every single one of us.

TOM

They come with horses, Ray.

EXT. THE POLO LOUNGE AT THE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - DAY

A celebration of the life of Stanley "The Sheriff" Whalon. Everyone from the funeral is here, packing the back patio.

Tom finishes a conversation with the actor Braddock Loman.

BRADDOCK

I messed up, Tom, and I'm sorry. I owe you everything. ...You know, I woulda been spot on for "Heart of Darkness."

TOM

Nah, you'd have been wrong. But I got something for you. A Western. "Six Shooter." Starts in a week.

BRADDOCK

But that's filming in Arizona.

Tom pats Braddock on the back as he starts off...

TOM

Be sure to write.

Tom drifts through the large crowd and finds Charlie Sanders.

CHARLIE

How'd you do it, Tom? What'd you say to Cohn to get me off his leash?

TOM

I just asked him nicely.

Charlie laughs. Tom smiles, then turns serious. Quietly...

TOM

Listen, Cohn was making noise about outing you. You think he'd do that?

CHARLIE

Harry Cohn's a son of a bitch. He's liable to do anything.

TOM

Then I'm gonna need your help, Charlie.

CHARLIE

What's her name?

TOM

Isabelle Yates.

CHARLIE

Oh, I like ol' Isabelle. She's certifiable, but aren't we all? So, what, standard fall in love on set, tell the papers all about it?

TOM

If Cohn plays dirty, I'll need more than an on-set fling, Charlie. I'm gonna need a marriage, too.

Charlie drains his drink. Puts a hand on Tom's shoulder.

CHARLIE

Then I'm gonna need another drink.

Charlie walks off. Tom sees... Gretchen and Dean entering.

INT. UNION STATION - DAY

Myrtle Dunleavy walks along the terra cotta tiles, walking away from the counter, with the ticket home she just bought.

EXT. THE POLO LOUNGE AT THE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - DAY

Tom stands with Gretchen and Dean, reminiscing about Stanley.

GRETCHEN

Remember when Stanley would bring that ancient old horse to the lot. Always daring us to try and ride it.

DEAN

Strange Ranger.

TOM

Strange Ranger.

The three of them smile at the memory. But there's an awkward energy to this trio. Gretchen clears her throat.

GRETCHEN

If you gents will excuse me, I have to refill my drink.

She leaves. And now Tom Kirby and Dean Maddox are alone. Tom turns to him. Looks Dean right in the eye as he says...

TOM

C'mon, Dean, all that business in the past, whattaya say we bury it?

DEAN

Tell me the truth. You still think I stole her from you.

TOM

I think you always loved her. And when you got your chance, you took it. But that was a long time ago. I got the studio. You got the girl.

DEAN

I never wanted the studio.

TOM

Maybe not, but why don't you come back? I'll give you a job. Show you there's no hard feelings.

DEAN

Paradise Pictures might be the last place on Earth I wanna be, Tom.

TOM

You telling me you don't miss it?

DEAN

You have no idea what I saw over there. Puts things in perspective.

TOM

No one's said it was pretty.

DEAN

But you wouldn't know, would you?

TOM

I tried to go. I would've fought right alongside you if I could've.

DEAN

You say that. But I don't buy it. Instead, you got to sit back here, hang with my girl, and play make believe while the rest of us were off saving the world. But I'm back, Tommy. So remember this, the studio's all you got and it's all you're ever gonna have.

Tom takes that on the chin. These two men really don't like each other. And then, over Dean's shoulder, Tom spots...

Gretchen returning. Tom and Gretchen share a long and loaded look. So much history between them. She's imploring him to leave well enough alone. Tom doesn't want to hurt her, so...

TOM
 You know something, Dean...
 (a beat)
 You're absolutely right.

Tom walks past Gretchen, without a word, as she rejoins Dean.

EXT. PLATFORM - UNION STATION - DAY - LATER

Suitcase at her feet, Myrtle sits on a bench, watching trains.

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Where ya going?

Myrtle turns to see a pretty YOUNG WOMAN with a bright smile, about the same age as Myrtle. A black scarf covers her hair.

MYRTLE
 Kansas.

YOUNG WOMAN
 Hey, that's where Dorothy's from.

MYRTLE
 There's no place like home, right?

YOUNG WOMAN
 Do you... really want to go home?

MYRTLE
 I bought a ticket. But...

The woman appraises Myrtle. Recognizes a kindred spirit.

YOUNG WOMAN
 Where have you tested?

MYRTLE
 I never got that far. Have you?

YOUNG WOMAN
 Actually... I recently signed with
 Twentieth Century Fox.

MYRTLE
 Congratulations. That's wonderful.

YOUNG WOMAN
 It is. But still, I come here
 every once in a while. I need to.

MYRTLE
 Why's that?

YOUNG WOMAN

To remind myself I can leave any time I want. It's as easy as jumping on one of these trains.

MYRTLE

How close have you come to buying a ticket?

YOUNG WOMAN

Close. First, they made me change my hair. Then my name. Now they want me to fix my chin and my nose. And I thought, if they wanna change all these things, is it really me they wanted in the first place?

MYRTLE

But you're still here...

YOUNG WOMAN

I am. Because it is still me. Because they can change everything. But what's inside is mine. And it always will be. Least I hope so.

MYRTLE

I hope so too. By the way, my name's Myrtle.

The Young Woman reaches for her scarf and she pulls it off, revealing a BEAUTIFUL CURLY HEAD OF PEROXIDE BLONDE HAIR.

YOUNG WOMAN

Pleased to meet you. I'm Marilyn.

EXT. THE POLO LOUNGE AT THE BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - DAY

Tom finds Holtz at a table with a group of older Hollywood types. Legends from the silent era. They look up at Tom.

TOM

Holtzie, I need to talk to you.

HOLTZ

(to his table)
I'll just be a minute.

Tom leads Holtz away, until they're alone, in private.

TOM

Nice speech you gave about Stanley.

HOLTZ

Thank you.

TOM
But he's gone because he gave up.

HOLTZ
Tom, don't say that --

TOM
It's a hard thing to say, but it's true. You know it's true. But you and me, Holtzie... we're still here. And I'm not letting you give up. All of us at the studio, we breathe and we bleed for that place. And we'll lose everything if you sell.

HOLTZ
I gave you "Heart of Darkness."

TOM
That's not enough. Not by a long shot.

HOLTZ
If we try and save the studio... and don't? I'll be on the streets.

TOM
We've done a lot of great things together. We can do this too.

HOLTZ
How?

TOM
I don't know yet. Sell our film library, rent out our stages, peddle our stars to every studio in town. Shit, maybe you and me can turn "Heart of Darkness" into the most profitable movie ever made. But by hook or by crook, Holtzie, we're gonna keep making movies at Paradise Pictures. You got that?

Holtz just looks at Tom for a long moment. Then says...

HOLTZ
Don't forget who works for who, kid.

And then Holtz... smiles. A nice moment, interrupted by...

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Excuse me, Mr. Kirby? Tom Kirby?

Tom looks over at a WAITER, who's holding a telephone.

WAITER

You have a telephone call, sir.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS - NIGHT - LATER

Tom's Packard climbs the roads of the desolate canyons.

INT. SMALL HOUSE IN THE HOLLYWOOD HILLS - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tom shuts the door behind him. Laying on the bed is Isabelle Yates, gorgeous even now. A doctor has been in this room. The movie star is groggy as she recovers from giving birth. Tom sits on the side of the bed and he puts a hand on hers.

TOM

I told 'em to call me if it was early.

ISABELLE

And I told them not to. Tom, he's gone. Forever. That little boy.

TOM

You shoulda called me.

ISABELLE

I wanted to keep him...

TOM

Are you crazy? Toting around a little bastard baby? That'd do wonders for your career. You're emotional right now, mister --

ISABELLE

Don't you call me that.

TOM

We got a great thing going. That's why we went to all this trouble --

ISABELLE

Do you know why I didn't want you here? Because you never suffer.

TOM

You don't think I suffer?

ISABELLE

No, I don't. The rest of us, we make all the sacrifices. For you.

TOM

You got no idea what you're talking about.

ISABELLE
You think all this...

She motions at the room, at the LIGHTS OF THE CITY down below.

ISABELLE (CONT'D)
Is one of your pictures. But it's not. This is my life. And you don't get to decide everything --

TOM
You know what, Isabelle? It is a picture. It's all a big production.
(tugs at his jacket)
This is a costume.
(smacks the bed)
This is a set.
(points at her)
You're a character.
(jabs at his chest)
And so am I. In fact, I'm the main character. And if you want out, then get the hell out. Believe me, I won't have a problem finding someone else to play your part.

ISABELLE
He had your eyes, Tom.

A moment. And then Tom slowly stands. Calm now he says...

TOM
We're starting up a new picture. So you got a week to pull yourself together. Then we're calling the press. Telling 'em you've come back from your wonderful trip.

INT. SMALL HOUSE IN THE HILLS - ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Simmering, Tom finds Lucas the driver alone now.

TOM
Where's the nurse?

LUCAS
She went out for cigarettes.

Tom gives Lucas a handful of WHITE PILLS.

TOM
Seconals. Grind 'em into Isabelle's milk. I wanna make sure she spends the next few days fast asleep.

EXT. PARADISE PICTURES LOT - NIGHT - LATER

Tom wanders the empty "CITY STREETS" of the backlot. His empire, quiet and dark now. He sits on the stoop of a facade of a brownstone. Leans against the door. Closes his eyes.

EXT. PARADISE PICTURES LOT - EARLY THE NEXT MORNING

Tom's eyes flutter as the sun hits his face, waking him.

INT. PACKARD CONVERTIBLE - MORNING - LATER

Still in the clothes he slept in, a foggy-headed Tom drives south through the undeveloped outskirts of Los Angeles.

EXT. STREET / PARADISE PICTURES FRONT GATE - MORNING

Wyatt Osborne approaches the lot. He pauses on a street corner, discreetly takes a BOTTLE OF BOURBON from a pocket inside his jacket. About to uncap it, to start his day...

MYRTLE (O.S.)

Psst. Wyatt. I need your opinion on something.

He hides the bottle, turns. His eyes widen and his jaw drops.

WYATT

What the heck happened to you?

Reveal the "new and improved" Myrtle Dunleavy. Eyebrows plucked. Hair dyed and cut. Wearing make-up. Tight slacks. A form-fitting sweater. She does a twirl. Total knock-out.

MYRTLE

Well, what do you think?

WYATT

I think you don't look like yourself, Myrtle.

MYRTLE

Then it's a good thing my name's not Myrtle anymore.

WYATT

What are you talking about?

MYRTLE

Myrtle Dunleavy wasn't doing so hot in this town. But maybe this new girl can...

She extends a hand and demurely smiles as she says...

MYRTLE (CONT'D)
Lola Dupree. Pleased to meet you.

INT. PRIVATE ADOPTION CLINIC - INFANT WARD - MORNING

Tom and a NURSE SUPERVISOR look over the ward, filled with several babies in wooden cribs. Tom looks at ONE BABY BOY.

TOM
That's him, you're sure? The one that came from the movie star?

NURSE SUPERVISOR
Pick him up if you like.

Tom looks at his INFANT SON, who's blinking his eyes -- Tom's eyes -- crying, adapting to the bright new world around him.

NURSE SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)
Is he yours?

TOM
What makes you think that?

NURSE SUPERVISOR
It's just, sometimes people change their minds, that's all.

Tom walks to the crib. Reaches inside and lifts the crying baby boy out, awkwardly cradling him against his chest.

TOM
Hey there, fella. You're really turning loose the waterworks, huh?

The baby stops crying. Stares up at Tom with his wide eyes.

TOM (CONT'D)
What do you think you're looking at?

Tom looks at the baby boy. LOOKS RIGHT in those bright, wide eyes. And Tom's emotional right now, holding his baby boy.

NURSE SUPERVISOR
Sir...

TOM
(a long beat, and then)
Yeah?

NURSE SUPERVISOR
Would you like to take him home?

END OF PILOT