



MANN/LOGAN PROJECT

by

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Harry Slidell is a private investigator. He's a fixer. He makes bad things -- like speeding tickets, extortion, and messy suicides -- go away. He fixes anything and everything. His historical antecedents are Fred Otash in the 1960s and Eddie Mannix and Howard Stickling in the 1940s.

Harry spent five years working in the Homicide bureau of a mostly corrupt LAPD. Then he decided, like everybody in Los Angeles, to move up in life. Now, he has Sunset Investigations and moves in a world of elegance, celebrities and power brokers...

800/444-1111

INT. NIELSEN HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Peter Nielsen was once handsome.

Not anymore. He's dead.

We hang above his body. He is splayed like an open flower below us. Early 50's. A bullet hole in his expressionless face.

Around the living room of this Mediterranean mansion we see the signs of struggle.

TIM DOWLING, an MGM junior executive in his 20's, is nervous. He stands at a front window, peeking through curtains, watching, waiting for somebody.

The maid who discovered the body, a formidable black woman named LORELEI FULLER, is in an adjoining room with another MGM junior executive.

EXT. NIELSEN HOUSE - BEVERLY HILLS - EARLY MORNING

The Beverly Hills flats. Long, straight streets. Exclusive homes. Palm trees tower to vertigo.

It is October 17, 1938.

Outside the Nielsen house, a wiry man is waiting at the curb. He is PAT CROFT. Holds a black valise and wears, ~~strangely~~, rubber surgical gloves.

A sleek V-12 Lincoln coupe drives up.

And HARRY SLIDELL climbs out.

Harry runs Sunset Investigations, a detective agency. He is not just good at his job. He's the best there is. When people want to know or not to know -- as in they want something or someone to go away -- Harry is who the town goes to in 1938.

He pulls on rubber gloves as they move to the front door.

HARRY
You ever met Nielsen?

PAT
Nope.

HARRY
Her?

PAT
No.

Harry scopes the front door.

HARRY

L.B. says she was at the beach place...
(skeptical glance to Pat,
then observes)
...No forced entry.

They go in.

INT. NIELSEN HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Harry and Pat move into the living room. Harry stops and first visually scans the room like a professional homicide detective. Then he moves through it, constantly in motion; a ballet of observation.

All of this is clipped, rapid:

HARRY

(to Tim Dowling)
Hey! Come on ...
(he holds his hands up
like a surgeon, Dowling
obeys...meaning
fingerprints)

DOWLING

Okay, okay, thank God you're here,
Harry...

HARRY

(disregards him, to Pat)
We have a struggle by all appearances--

PAT

Or something meant to look like a
struggle.

HARRY

Stage-managed?

PAT

Set decoration.

HARRY

We're looking for a set decorator?

DOWLING

She was at the beach house--

HARRY

(continuing to move
around)
(MORE)

HARRY (cont'd)
So they tell me ... Well, it wasn't
robbery.

DOWLING
How can you tell?

HARRY
(points to Oscar statue on
the mantle)
Who would leave that? ...
(to Pat)
... His or hers?

PAT
(know this by heart)
His. Produced FOLLOW THE BAND. '33. Her
first big one.

HARRY
Take care of the maid ...
(Pat goes to talk to the
maid, Harry continues
around the room)
... When did you get the call?

DOWLING
An hour ago. She comes in like every
Monday and there he is. She called
Howard who called Eddie Mannix who
called L.B. who told me to wait for
you. He's at the beach house with
Ruthie.

HARRY
"Ruthie"?

DOWLING
Miss Ettis.

HARRY
(finally moves to the
body)
Single gunshot to the head ... And no
gun ... Pat, there a gun over there?

PAT
(with Maid)
No gun.

HARRY
What do you make of that, Tim?

DOWLING
Uh...

3004/M/8

HARRY
I wonder what Ruthie did with the gun?

DOWLING
(anxious)
Harry, please--!

Harry lifts a corner of the body, checks the back of the head. We see a second, larger messier hole and a broken window pane behind Nielsen.

HARRY
Exit wound. Bullet's somewhere in
Beverly Hills... Pat.

Pat leaves the maid and returns to Harry. Pat leans close as he whispers:

PAT
(re: maid)
Buggy, but she'll go for the long
green.

HARRY
Sweep the house. Make it fast.

Pat disappears, taking his black valise with him, as Harry sits with the maid:

HARRY
What's your name, honey?

LORELEI
Lorelei Fuller.

HARRY
(turns on the charm)
Miss Fuller, my name is Harry Slidell.
I'm a friend of the family. I know this
has been an awful thing for you. So I'm
going to have this gentleman drive you
home and I'd like you not to talk to
anyone about any of this, all right? --

(snaps off two hundred
dollar bills)
-- Maybe you'd like to go to the
pictures. You like the movies?

LORELEI
(pleased with the money)
Sure.

HARRY

Okay. You go to the movies and go out to dinner and then go to the movies again and make sure not to talk to anybody, okay? ...

(hustles her out)

... I'll come and see you and we'll have a long talk. You got your purse? Good. Go to the pictures, Miss Fuller, and you'll feel better. That's why we make them.

He hands her off to the other MGM executive, who leads her out the door.

INT. NIELSEN HOME - CLOSET - EARLY MORNING

Pat sweeps Peter Nielsen's closet, quickly flipping through the suits. Finds an envelope with pornographic prints on a shelf. And a .32 revolver in a box. Tosses them into the black valise.

INT. NIELSEN HOME - STUDY - EARLY MORNING

Harry quickly looks through Nielsen's desk. Finds marijuana.

PAT (O.S.)
Boss ... Upstairs.

INT. NIELSEN HOUSE -- BEDROOM EARLY MORNING

Tim Dowling stands nervously in the doorway. Pat shows Harry an ornate box.

Inside the box: glass syringes, needles, a rubber strap, 1/4 and 1/2 gram vials of morphine.

HARRY
(to Dowling)
You know he was a morphine shooter?

DOWLING
No!

HARRY
(torturing him)
Maybe she was.

DOWLING
No, no, no, I know, she didn't...

PAT
It gets better. Check the flowers.

Pat puts the ornate box of drugs into his valise as Harry goes to a vase of roses on the dresser. Reads the card.

HARRY

"Darling Ruth. You understand last night was only a comedy. Forgive me. Peter." ... You kidding me?

PAT

I know.

Harry pockets the card and then hands the entire vase of flowers to Dowling:

HARRY

For your wife or girlfriend ...
(to Pat)
... What else?

PAT

Dexedrine and Seconals in the bathroom.

HARRY

Leave 'em. This is Hollywood.

They go.

INT. NIELSEN HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM EARLY MORNING

Harry and Pat move through, Dowling following.

HARRY

Gimme the bag ... Straighten up, would ya?
(to Dowling)
Wait outside.

Dowling goes. Pat hands the valise to Harry and then moves to straighten up the room, removing signs of a struggle.

Harry pulls the .32 revolver from the valise. Glances around. Sees a big planter in the hallway. Goes to it. Fires one shot into the dirt. Digs out the bullet, pockets it.

Then he kneels by the body. Quickly checks the inside pockets of the suit jacket. Discovers Nielsen's wallet in the left breast pocket, suggesting he was right-handed.

Harry presses the gun into Nielsen's right hand. Puts the card from the flowers -- now the official "suicide note" -- on the fireplace mantel, leaning against the Oscar.

HARRY

Go to the office and get Buzz working on Nielsen -- have him start with Charlie in Records at the Hollywood station. Then he goes downtown. Full work up. I'll be there after I see Mayer.

PAT

Don't forget we got the thing over at Paramount at three.

Pat takes the black valise and goes. Harry looks around the room one last time. He is satisfied.

He goes to the front hall, where Dowling is waiting.

DOWLING

What happens now?

HARRY

What you always do when there's a crime. You call the police.

EXT. NIELSEN HOUSE - MORNING - LATER

Kids on their way to school.

Harry is leaning on his car, smoking a cigarette, waiting.

An unmarked sedan and a black-and-white police car pull up. A plain clothes Detective -- a big man named DARREN MILLER -- climbs out, along with a crime scene Photographer and a few other Cops.

Harry knows all of them, he rises and moves with them as they unload gear and move toward the house:

HARRY

Thanks for coming, Darren, how's Jill? Listen, this is a family tragedy. We oughta keep it out of the papers for a few days ...

(slips the Photographer a fifty)

... Can I get a full set, Charlie? ...

(back to Darren)

... And allow the lady the dignity of grieving in private. She deserves that doesn't she? Sure she does.

(slips Darren a hundred)

... Take Jill out for a steak at the Derby. Tell Randolph I sent you.

(MORE)

HARRY (cont'd)
Lemme show you what we've got inside.
Suicide.

DARREN
(smiles)
You leave us anything this time?

They both laugh uproariously.

HARRY
Dexedrine and Seconals in the bathroom.

They go into the house.

EXT. MGM GATES - DAY

Culver City. A streetcar clangs down Washington Boulevard.

Harry drives up to the stately front gates of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios.

HARRY
(to Guard)
Morning, Don. Whattaya got at Santa Anita?

GUARD
(raising gate)
Damsel's good as gold.

HARRY
Put me down for a C.

GUARD
You got it.

Harry drives onto the lot.

EXT. MGM LOT - DAY

It resembles nothing so much as a Medieval city. Ruled by warlords. Safe behind impenetrable walls. Self-contained. Gossipy. Restaurants, barbershops, gyms, beauty salons. A bustling village. A microstate.

Welcome to MGM in 1938.

Top of the game. Putting out a movie a week. Quality. Style. Success.

All the other studios combined do a third of Metro's cash flow. Metro's a killer.

800#//Mg

Harry swings his car into a spot by the Administration Building. CLARK GABLE is getting out of his car, a couple spots down from Harry. They play poker together four times a month.

GABLE
Hey, Harry...

HARRY
I took care of the speeding ticket. He cast it yet?

GABLE
Now it's fucking Bette Davis, if Warners lets her go.

Although we don't know it yet, they are talking about casting Scarlett for GONE WITH THE WIND.

GABLE
Thanks for handling that. See ya Thursday. Where we playin'?

HARRY
At Goldwyn's. Bring cash.

They move off in separate directions.

Harry heads toward the imposing Administration Building. The domain of L.B. Mayer.

He is about to enter the Administration Building. MARGIE, Mayer's too pretty secretary, having a smoke at an open window, calls down:

MARGIE
Harry, you looking for him?

HARRY
Yeah.

MARGIE
Andy Hardy Square.

HARRY
You look like Rapunzel up there.

MARGIE
You gonna be my prince?

He smiles. But stops...

An unusual sight, even for a movie studio...

A troop of little people. Dozens of them. All dressed in outlandish costumes and bold Technicolor makeup. They are the Munchkins from THE WIZARD OF OZ.

Harry watches them march past. He glances back up to Margie. She explains:

MARGIE
For the new picture ... They're all over-sexed.

Harry laughs and moves off, cutting through the scores of Munchkins. Harry knows everyone.

EXT. MGM LOT - ANDY HARDY SQUARE - DAY

A typical American town square. Completely fake. A backlot set.

L.B. MAYER is posing awkwardly before a collection of women -- extras -- in house dresses and aprons. A banner above: "MGM SALUTES MOTHERHOOD."

Harry stands to the side, watching.

A newsreel camera hums as Mayer acts, reading from cue cards:

MAYER
... "Everything that happens here on the lot, a mother would be proud of. I would like to introduce you now to the mother of Mickey Rooney, that exciting MGM firecracker" ...

(he moves awkwardly to one of the extras)
... "Mrs. Rooney, would you tell us what it is like to be the mother of such a talented young firecracker" -- hold it, why do I say "firecracker" twice? Which genius wrote this?! ...

(he sees Harry)
... Cut! Keep them here.

He goes to Harry. They walk away from the set.

HARRY
That really Mickey Rooney's mother?

MAYER
That pervert doesn't have a mother. He's banging Lana Turner now. Lives to give me a coronary. They all do. Let's get some air conditioning.

INT. MGM - MAYER'S OFFICE - DAY

Mayer's office is enormous and all white. Everything is white. It is an extremely luxurious void.

Mayer enters with Harry and marches to his desk. Mayer is a histrionic, driven, faux avuncular man in his 50's. Smart as hell. He is the highest paid executive on the planet.

MAYER

... I loan him Gable and this is how he thanks me! "Just cast the girl," I tell him. How hard is it to cast the fucking girl? You could cast the girl, I could cast the girl. It's the girl! ... But Bette Davis with that pug face he wants in Technicolor?! ... Sit down.

Mayer climbs onto the dais that contains his mammoth white desk and sits. Settles in.

A beat.

MAYER

Tell me.

HARRY

She killed him.

MAYER

Tell me something else.

HARRY

She's a good shot.

MAYER

(presses intercom button)

Margie, call Dr. Virgil, the man in here is giving me a coronary ... Harry, Ruth Ettis did not kill her husband.

HARRY

How do you know?

MAYER

She told me.

HARRY

You think actresses don't lie? You ever met an actress?

800#//M

MAYER

Harry, listen to me. We've handled drunks, gamblers, dope fiends, fairies, wife beaters, hookers, you tell me, we been there ... This is not like that ... This is different.

HARRY

How's that?

MAYER

She didn't do it.

HARRY

Because she told you.

MAYER

Because she's Ruth Ettis.

A beat.

MAYER

I want you to find out who killed him.

HARRY

L.B., I got four cases on the lot already. Two at Paramount. A couple at Warners. Some surveillance work for Howard. I got no time and no manpower for this.

MAYER

Double your retainer ... You get results you get a bonus.

HARRY

How much?

MAYER

Call it ten grand.

Harry whistles.

A beat.

HARRY

Why's this so important?

MAYER

(deeply)

Someone is trying to hurt my Ruth ... I don't like to see women hurt. That much of a human being I am ... Please, help her.

8000/11/15

HARRY
Scary thing is I can't tell if you're
acting or not.

MAYER
You think I can?

A beat.

HARRY
All right ... When can I see her?

MAYER
After a decent period of mourning.

HARRY
How decent?

MAYER
36 hours decent ... She's in production
on a new picture with Gene.

HARRY
You're all heart.

MAYER
Release schedule waits for no one ...
While you're here, go say hello to
Judy, she's got a little thank you
gift. Over on 25.

HARRY
(stands)
Could Margie draw up some paper on the
retainer and bonus, send it by the
office?

MAYER
You don't trust me?!

HARRY
... Said the movie producer.

Harry moves to go. Mayer stops him with:

MAYER
Harry, one little thing ... If it turns
out that Ruth did do it, which she
didn't, but if she did ... No one will
ever know ... Do we understand?

HARRY
Deeply.

300/M/19

He goes.

Mayer watches him go. Then picks up his white telephone and begins to dial.

INT. MGM - SOUNDSTAGE 25 - DAY

It is, quite simply, OZ.

Harry watches as the huge Technicolor camera crane rises and Dorothy and Toto are surrounded by scores of Munchkins singing "Ding, Dong, the Witch is Dead!" to playback.

Harry has to smile.

Even he must admit it is sort of magical.

Then one of the Munchkins trips -- falls -- the director, calls "Cut" -- the camera crane pulls back -- the set is invaded by an army of technicians and Munchkin wranglers.

JUDY GARLAND sees Harry, giggles, waves, shoos away her makeup man. She is a breathy, desperate, excited, damaged teenager. She lives as if she is racing against time, galloping awkwardly to keep up.

Judy flutters to Harry, words tumbling out of her, and drags him away:

JUDY

Gosh, Harry! You should have told me --
I look so fat in this thing -- Do you
think? No, I don't want to know! --
Aren't those midgets a scream? Kinda
grabby some of them, if you know what I
mean, but better than that goddamn lion
always upstaging me! Those old
vaudeville guys are the worst--!

HARRY

Take a breath, Judy.

She laughs. He is genuinely fond of her, feels protective of her. She has a mighty crush on him.

JUDY

Come to my dressing room, I got
something for you -- Not the first time
you've heard that, I'm sure!

He laughs as she leads him into her dressing room, a little trailer set up in a corner of the soundstage...

INT. JUDY'S TRAILER - DAY

Judy's trailer is decorated as befits a 17-year-old. Movie star pictures, paper flowers, lots of perfume, record player, etc. School work on the vanity.

A few identical copies of her Dorothy costume hang on a rack.

JUDY

... Sit down -- Ugh, look at that dress. I wear the same dress for the whole picture! The whole picture! -- Honestly, does it make me look fat?

HARRY

Judy, calm down ...

(she laughs, giggles,
takes a breath)

... You taking care of yourself?

JUDY

Scout's honor.

HARRY

Seriously ... How's it been?

A beat. Something seems to settle deep inside her. She stops performing. Her sudden, raw emotion is wrenching.

JUDY

It's been hard ... you know? ...

(pauses)

... I'm not going back in there again.

HARRY

I know.

JUDY

You saw things no one should see ...

HARRY

(quietly)

I saw a little girl in a bad spot,
that's all I saw. You got through it
okay. That's what counts ... You
sleeping?

JUDY

Yes.

HARRY

You eating?

JUDY

Not a lot. They don't like it when I eat ... I sneak malts.

HARRY

If you have problems, you know you can call me. If anyone pressures you, or tries to give you anything to lose weight, pep pills. You call me. Day or night ... You don't want to get like that again.

A beat.

She takes his hand.

JUDY

Thanks Harry...

For the first time in the picture, Harry doesn't know what to say. He's a little awkward. She wipes away her tears and stands. Performing again.

JUDY

(she's embarrassed)

-- Anyhow, I made this for you.

(she gets something from a drawer)

I know it's stupid but I made it myself-

She hands him a knitted pot holder.

JUDY

They had me doing that to occupy my hands ... You don't even cook! Maybe you'll have a wife someday and she'll appreciate it -- skinny little blonde, like that Lana Turner person -- I was thinking about you when I made it ... I made it for you. To say thank you.

HARRY

(touched)

It's great, I appreciate it.

JUDY

You save my life and I give you a pot holder. Great deal, huh?

He laughs.

She laughs as well. Sweet. A kid.

EXT. SUNSET INVESTIGATIONS - DAY

Sunset Boulevard.

The pulsing jugular of Movieland. The best restaurants, nightclubs, offices, cafes and shops.

Harry's black Lincoln is parked in front of a two story Streamline office building.

INT. SUNSET INVESTIGATIONS OFFICE - DAY

Harry sweeps in. Sunset Investigations takes up the right half of the building. Desks, meetings rooms, a few private offices. Thick carpets. Good paint.

The ring of phones. The distant chatter of a police radio. Muted voices.

Harry makes his way toward his private office.

FRONT DESK SECRETARY
(handing him a stack of
messages)
Nick Schenck called twice.

HARRY
(flipping through
messages)
Gimme ten minutes then get Schenck and Zanuck. In that order, thanks.

He goes to a series of big bulletin boards with ~~case~~ updates: maps, photographs, note cards, etc. Quickly scans them.

HARRY
(calls to an Operative)
Louie, did you update the Cooper divorce?

LOUIE
(calls back)
New one to the left. Times and locations. They like screwing in Burbank.

HARRY
Who doesn't... You get pictures?

LOUIE
Yeah.

Harry takes a card from the board, scrawls something new, moves toward his private office:

HARRY
(as he passes Louie)
Hey, I hear it's Bette Davis now.

LOUIE
No!

Harry smiles, continues on, still scrawling on the card. He goes into his office.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Spacious office. Nice view of the flats below the hills. Comfortable steel and leather modern furniture.

Pat Croft is waiting with two other investigators:

BUZZ HELLERMAN, a slender researcher and accountant in his early 20's. Bookish; smart.

CLAY KANDELL, a large former cowboy and stuntman gone to seed, drinks too much, leaning toward fat. Provides real muscle when needed.

HARRY
It's Bette Davis now.

PAT
...as a seventeen-year-old Southern Belle? And virgin?

HARRY
That's why they call it acting ...
Buzz, what did downtown have on Peter Nielsen?

BUZZ
(consults notes)
Not much. A few misdemeanor arrests. He was hot for a while when he discovered Ruth Ettis. Produced her early films, including FOLLOW THE BAND. Twenty years older than her. No one seems to understand why she married him.

PAT
She owed him.

HARRY
Not enough. Is he Svengali?

CLAY
Who?

3000#//M
3

PAT
Svengali. Barrymore played him for
Warners in '31.

HARRY
He discovers Ruth, makes her famous.
Then, all of a sudden she's hot and
he's not. I've seen this movie before.

BUZZ
'Cause of her, he has an office at
Metro -- but nothing to do.

PAT
No scripts. No meetings. Dust gathers.

HARRY
He goes in. The phone does not ring.
Tumbleweeds. He ages.

PAT
Sees her walking past below, busy, at
work, happy.

HARRY
So he starts with a little nip, then a
little sniff, before you know it he's
shooting a grand-a-week of morphine
into his arm in that Mojave desert of
an office ... Does she still love him
anyway?

PAT
Only in the pictures.

A beat.

HARRY
I half-believe he did kill himself --
and I made that up.

BUZZ
Aside from the morphine he's clean. No
priors. No police. No paper at all.

HARRY
Trouble I have is why anyone in this
town would go to the trouble of
murdering a has-been like him ... Clay,
tail on Ruth Ettis. I'll get Jack to
spell you ...

(to Pat)
... You and I'll run down the drugs.
(MORE)

300H/M/S

HARRY (cont'd)
For all we know this could be simple: a
drug delivery gone bad like William
Desmond Taylor.

PAT
Yeah, that was simple.

HARRY
(seriously)
It is possible, somewhere in the land
of make believe that she didn't kill
him ... Which means there is a man with
a gun out there ... Let's go to work.

EXT. BUNGALOW PORCH - BUNKER HILL - DAY

Downtown. The mean streets of Bunker Hill. Decaying Victorian mansions, now rooming houses. Bungalows. Tenements.

Harry and Pat, the only white people in sight, are on the porch of Lorelei Fuller's bungalow. Harry's fancy car is attracting some attention from the kids on the street.

Lorelei sits, fanning herself, pretending to be discreet but loving the gossip and the attention.

LORELEI
... She was never anything but a proper lady, not all the days I knew her.

HARRY
How long did you work for the Nielsens?

LORELEI
Just under a year.

PAT
What happened to the maid before you?

LORELEI
Housekeeper ... Maybe she talked too much.

HARRY
You know he used morphine?

LORELEI
Mm-hm ...
(Harry waits for more)
... Bad stuff, you ask me ...
(Harry waits for more)
... A shortcut to the mortuary. And that man had a habit, a mile wide and deep.

PAT
Where'd he get it?

LORELEI
How would I know?

HARRY
(smiles)
Lorelei, I'm guessing there's precious little went on in that house you did not know ...
(he snaps out some bills)
... You're a smart lady with an eye to the main chance, am I right?

LORELEI
Listen, Miss Ruth and I used to talk, you know? She and me would sit in the kitchen and talk, woman to woman. She said: Woman's got to take care of herself ... Well, she didn't need that four-flushing husband of her's for nothing. And I do mean nothing.

HARRY
You trying to tell me they didn't sleep together?

LORELEI
Her with that old thing?

HARRY
She have a boyfriend? ... Girlfriend?

LORELEI
I ain't telling you nothing to hurt her. She's a good girl!

HARRY
Okay. Good for you. What about him? You know where he got his drugs?

She waits. Stares at him. Harry, amused, peels off a few bills.

LORELEI
Hollywood Park. Fella over there. Couple times he sent me. I shoulda quit right then, but I got mouths to feed, you understand.

PAT
What's the guy's name?

LORELEI
We wasn't formally introduced.

HARRY
What did he look like?

LORELEI
Thin, pencil mustache, not much hair --
loud taste in sport coats.

PAT
(whispers to Harry)
Joey Sica. Used to work Crenshaw.

Harry notes the kids in the street getting a little too interested in his car. This proves a convenient excuse:

HARRY
Pat, ya mind? ...
(Pat goes to shoo the kids away)
... One more thing. Miss Ettis ever use drugs? ... Come on ... I'm working to protect her.

A beat.

LORELEI
You know what old needle marks look like? Ones that haven't been used for a long time, but you can still see the scars? You know what those look like?

HARRY
Yeah.

LORELEI
Well, so do I.

EXT. STREET - BUNKER HILL - DAY

Harry joins Pat at the car. They climb in:

HARRY
Pull Louie off the Cooper divorce and send him to Hollywood Park. He lives there until Joey Sica shows.

PAT
What about you?

HARRY
It's about time I met Ruth Ettis.

They roar off. The kids cheer the car's powerful engine.

INT. MGM - SOUNDSTAGE 12 - DAY

RUTH ETTIS is a shimmering blond.

She is dancing on an ocean liner set with her frequent co-star GENE WILSON, a slender and elegant gentleman. Together they are the edge of perfection: every graceful step minutely choreographed.

Lovely Gershwin-like dance music is heard on playback.

Harry watches. He steps aside as the massive Technicolor camera rig sweeps silently past.

He studies Ruth closely. There is something indisputably breathtaking about her. Something deep. Star quality.

Ruth and Gene complete the dance ... ending in a slow and sinuous dip ... they hold the pose for a beat ... two ... three...

Then reality nastily replaces the dream. The director yells cut. A bell rings. The music ends. Lights snap to normal. Everyone talks. Someone opens the giant doors to the outside. Sunlight stabs in. The set is invaded by technicians.

Later...

Ruth is sitting at a makeup table on the side of the set, getting touched up.

Harry is behind her, watching unobserved.

RUTH
(to makeup man)
That's nice ... Just a little more lip
...
(he picks up a lipstick,
she corrects him)
... No, I use Egyptian Three for night
scenes.

MAKEUP MAN
Sorry, Miss Ettis.

The makeup man gets the correct lipstick color, takes a tiny brush and delicately, surgically, paints some on her lips.

Harry is fascinated by the minutiae of this work -- and the fullness of her lips. He does not notice that Ruth is now watching him in the reflection of her mirror.

He glances up. He's caught.

He smiles and approaches, snapping out a business card.

HARRY

Miss Ettis, how do you do? My name's Harry Slidell, Sunset Investigations.

RUTH

You're the one who thinks I killed my husband.

The makeup man gapes. Harry is, for once, at a loss for words.

RUTH

Give us a second, Ross ...
(the makeup man goes)
... Isn't that right?

HARRY

Miss Ettis, I think nothing of the kind, and I would like to express my sincere regret at your loss.

RUTH
I didn't know "sincere" was in your repertoire.

HARRY
Only when necessary.

RUTH
And is this your standard line when interviewing grieving widows of murdered husbands?

HARRY
Nothing standard about this.

RUTH
How so, Mr. Slidell? I'm fascinated.

HARRY
In my experience, most grieving widows aren't singing and dancing a day after their husbands are shot in the face.

RUTH
From which we can deduce what precisely?

HARRY

Either he's not dead, or you're not
grieving.

A beat as she studies him. He's fresh. She likes that. He's not intimidating by her stardom. She likes that even more.

RUTH

Let's walk, Mr. Slidell, I have to keep
my legs warmed up.

Later...

Ruth and Harry are walking around the perimeter of the set. She is taking a cigarette from a case.

RUTH

I could pretend to be broken-hearted.
But I'm not that good an actress ...
(he lights her cigarette)
... My husband and I were good friends
for many years. But not recently.

HARRY

Why not?

RUTH

He resented my success and blamed me
for his lack of same. He felt he made
me, which he did, and I rejected him,
which I didn't ... So he took my money
and bought a lot of drugs.

300K/MG

HARRY

You ever use drugs?

RUTH

Of course not.

HARRY

But he did?

RUTH

Dutifully working his way through an
entire pharmacy.

HARRY

Can I ask why you married him?

RUTH

I knew no better.

She stops. Looks at him seriously.

RUTH

Let me be honest with you and you can do with it what you will ... Once upon a time I almost loved my husband. Without him there would be no "Ruth Ettis." Someone murdered him, in my living room, in my home, and that terrifies me ... Peter Nielsen wasn't a saint, but he didn't deserve that.

HARRY

No one does.

RUTH

I don't agree with you there ... There's plenty deserve a good killing.

They continue walking in silence. He is strategic. Allows her to take the lead in conversation.

RUTH

You like the set? It's meant to be an ocean liner.

HARRY

Being a detective, I deduced that ...
(she smiles)
... What's the picture?

She leads him onto the set: a splendid MGM version of the deck of a luxurious ocean liner.

RUTH

It's called BROADWAY BABIES. Sort of a remake of FOLLOW THE BAND, only in color this time. Gene's a small town hoofer with big dreams, I'm the bored debutante with money to make them come true. Hijinks ensue.

They duck under the huge Technicolor camera crane.

HARRY

Have you done a lot of Technicolor?

RUTH

Only a couple. The lights are hell, everything melts, including Gene's toup, which is a bother ... Funniest thing is we have to be really careful with the camera. We only have the one. WIZARD OF OZ has two and Selznick has the other four.

(MORE)

RUTH (cont'd)
There's only seven in the world, you
know ... Camera has a better contract
than I do.

HARRY
By the way, I hear it's gonna be Bette
Davis.

RUTH
It's Jean Arthur. Take it to the bank.

She continues strolling. Again, he lets her take the lead.
Letting her talk. Letting her expose herself.

RUTH
I've met you before, Mr. Slidell.

HARRY
Is that so?

RUTH
Right after I came over from RKO. I was
at Mr. Mayer's Christmas party and you
were there with a buxom redhead who
giggled. I noticed she drank a lot and
you drank very little, which seemed
calculated on your part. I thought it
likely you might take advantage of her
... And whenever I saw you on the lot
after that I wondered, did he, or
didn't he?

HARRY
I don't remember.

RUTH
You might pretend to, for gallantry's
sake.

HARRY
I'm not very gallant.

RUTH
Of course you are. You're riding to my
rescue, aren't you?

An Assistant calls to Ruth:

ASSISTANT
They need you for touch ups, Miss
Ettis.

RUTH
So are you working for MGM or for me?

HARRY

Both.

RUTH

It's the same job. Find out who killed my husband.

HARRY

You mean find someone other than you.

RUTH

I'll say it flat out then: it wasn't me
... Is that what you want to hear?

HARRY

That's what I want to believe.

RUTH

Then believe it ... If I were going to kill that fucker I would have used an axe.

She turns, begins walking away.

HARRY

By the way ... The redhead. I did.

RUTH

(without turning)
I know.

He watches her go. Smiles. Wow. It is like he has been hit by a freight train.

EXT. MGM - SOUNDSTAGE 12 - DAY

Harry nips through the soundstage doors as they slide shut. Harry's operative Clay Kandell, the ex-stuntman, is waiting unobtrusively nearby, tailing Ruth.

HARRY

They're going for another take, call Pat, have him meet me at the Makeup department lickety-split.

Clay goes off toward a nearby phone booth. Harry strides away.

INT. MGM - SOUNDSTAGE 25 - DAY

The Munchkinland set.

It is between shots and the Munchkins are waiting, being touched up and fussed over. They are spread all over the soundstage: napping; playing cards; rehearsing dance moves.

ART MUIR is a striking little person dressed in a bold Munchkin costume. He is sitting in a cast chair, smoking a cigarette and reading the Wall Street Journal.

A HANDSOME MAN in a stylish suit settles into an unoccupied chair next to Muir. He has dark hair and is a little vain about it, combing it more than necessary, fighting a losing battle against thinning.

A beat as the Handsome Man looks over all the Munchkins.

HANDSOME MAN

Quite a spectacle, isn't it? ... I hear this is the largest collection of your people in history.

ART
(a glance)
You mean Irish?

The Handsome Man smiles handsomely.

HANDSOME MAN

Do you mind if I converse with you for a moment?

ART
"Converse" away.

HANDSOME MAN

I know you from your union work ...
You're currently chairman of the Class C division actors. Otherwise known as the extras.

ART
Atmosphere players.

HANDSOME MAN

Semantics should not bedevil us, Mr. Muir.

The Handsome Man has an unusual way with vocabulary. It is as if he learns words from the dictionary in an effort to sound more educated -- which, in fact, he does.

HANDSOME MAN
I represent certain individuals whose interests coincide with yours ... Let me explain.
(MORE)

HANDSOME MAN (cont'd)
Under the current Screen Actors Guild contract Class C players pay full union dues and yet under SAG bylaws are ineligible to vote in union matters.

ART
That's right...

HANDSOME MAN
There are six thousand of you Class C players and about two thousand of them, Class A players ... Now you all pay dues, all of you work hard, but they are the only ones who can vote.

ART
Right...

HANDSOME MAN
But does this not sound to you like taxation without representation?

ART
Who the hell are you?

HANDSOME MAN
I am your very best friend ... So while Clark Gable and those fly gigolo movie star motherfuckers are raking in thousands of dollars a week, you're treated like slaves, you have no voice ... Is that fair?

ART
We got a contact with SAG.

HANDSOME MAN
Contracts are paper ... Paper tears.

The words linger in the air. Art is getting a sense of the menace that hangs around this man.

HANDSOME MAN
I would like to imagine a new union. A union specifically for you extras. A union that gives you a voice, gives you a chance to strike, gives you decent benefits for your family ... What does the Screen Actors Guild give you? No voice, no respect. Nothing.

ART

So you want us to walk out? Leave SAG and try to negotiate an independent contract with the studios?

HANDSOME MAN

That's right.

ART

You're a chump, chump. We're faceless. That's why we're extras! They would replace us in a minute ... Why in hell would the studios negotiate with us?

HANDSOME MAN

Because you will be part of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.

Bang. There it is. Art suddenly gets the picture.

ART

This is some IATSE takeover. You're from Willie Bioff's mob.

HANDSOME MAN

(smiles)

No, he's Chicago, I'm New York ... But we know each other.

ART

Jesus Christ...

The Handsome Man meticulously combs his hair:

HANDSOME MAN

Mr. Muir ... I shall emancipate you whether you like it or not. I see it as a patriotic duty ... Marching together, alongside the brotherhood of IATSE, I know we can accomplish great things ...

(he carefully smooths down his hair)

... Work with me and you will be rich and celebrated. Work against me and you will be stuffed in an oil drum floating in Long Beach harbor. I present these alternatives for your rumination.

He pockets his comb and turns to Muir. His gaze is absolutely chilling.

A long beat as Muir looks at him.

800H/M/80

Then:

ART
Fuck SAG. Let's make some money.

He offers his hand. The Handsome Man takes it, shakes:

HANDSOME MAN
Benjamin Siegel.

All the color drains from Art's face, very very quickly.

ART
Bugsy Siegel...?

SIEGEL
You can call me Ben or Benny or you can
call me mister.

ART
You bet.

SIEGEL
I'm new to town, I wonder if you'd like
to have dinner? Show me some of the LA
hot spots for pussy.

ART
Ah ... We're shooting late tonight.
Some dancing thing. All hours, you
know.

SIEGEL
Next time, then. I'll be in touch.

He stands and looks around the magnificent Munchkinland set
for a moment, savoring it. Dreamland.

SIEGEL
And they say we sell narcotics.

He winks to Muir and goes.

Muir cannot even breathe.

EXT. MGM LOT - WESTERN STREET - AFTERNOON

Backlot. Western street. Cowboy B-movie in production.

Harry and Pat are talking to SETH McKINNEY, an older makeup
man who is busy sorting through his kit. He is terse.

MCKINNEY
... I only did her for a couple pictures.

PAT
She change makeup guys a lot?

MCKINNEY
Word is she does.

HARRY
You ever cover up bruises? ...
(McKinney doesn't respond)
... Talk to us or Mr. Mayer tells you to talk to us ... Did you cover up bruises?

MCKINNEY
Once.

PAT
Bad?

MCKINNEY
Yeah.

PAT
Real bad?

MCKINNEY
Yeah.

PAT
Arms?

MCKINNEY
Yeah.

PAT
Face?

MCKINNEY
Yeah.

HARRY
Then what happened?

MCKINNEY
Couple of days later, I got canned. You figure it out ... Keep me out of it, okay? I got a kid in college.

He goes to the set. Harry and Pat walk away:

800# / M/S

PAT

How did you know she had a new makeup guy?

HARRY

New guy didn't know her lip color ...
Her Academy Award husband beat her.

PAT

Makeup guy sees it, covers it up, she doesn't want anyone to know, he gets fired, she gets a new guy, it's a pattern.

HARRY

He was demented. He actually hit her in the face -- risked her career.

PAT

You know what we call that, boss?

HARRY

We call that a motive.

They walk off.

EXT. MGM - SOUNDSTAGE 12 - NIGHT

It's night. Not many people around.

Harry is with JACK SHAW, an athletic young operative, former USC wide receiver and LA cop. They are standing side by side, leaning against a wall, smoking, watching the soundstage.

A silent beat.

HARRY

Didn't go out for dinner?

JACK

They brought it in.

HARRY

What?

JACK

Something from Chasen's and a thermos of coffee.

A beat.

HARRY

So I hear it's Jean Arthur now.

JACK

No tits.

HARRY

Nonetheless.

A beat. Harry checks his watch.

HARRY

Stay out of sight.

He flicks his cigarette away and goes into the soundstage.

INT. MGM - SOUNDSTAGE 12 - NIGHT

The ocean liner set.

But it's a ghost ship now. Bald work lights illuminate the empty set strangely. Playback of the Gershwin-like song.

Ruth is alone, going through the exact same choreography of the dance we saw earlier. She wears pants now, comfortable rehearsal clothes.

Harry watches.

It is an arresting and lonely sight: a woman dancing alone with a phantom partner.

She comes to the end of the dance. The playback ends.

Ruth bends over from the waist, exhausted, panting for air. Harry sees that she is literally dripping with sweat, it catches the light. This is really tough work.

Ruth finally straightens up.

RUTH

Let's try it again.

There is a Sound Man in a corner of the soundstage, at a playback console.

Ruth moves into her starting position for the dance. The playback begins. Intro music. Then she sees Harry, shields her eyes to look.

RUTH

Willie, hold it, hold it ...

(the playback stops)

... Take five, would you? Get some air.

SOUND MAN

Okay, Ruthie.

He goes.

Harry moves to the set.

HARRY
Looks effortless on screen.

RUTH
That's the magic. You got a smoke? ...
(he gets her a cigarette)
... Gene's the genius, a natural
dancer. Not me.

HARRY
You do this all the time?

RUTH
What?

HARRY
Work alone.

RUTH
Every number ...
(he lights her cigarette)
... I have to work by myself to keep up
with him. So every night when we're
shooting a dance, I work late.

HARRY
Or what? He replaces you? You're Gene-
and-Ruth, come on.

RUTH
We're Gene-and-Ruth until he's Gene-and-
Rita, or Gene-and-Judy. I'm only as
good as my last number and I hear I
ain't as young as I used to be.

HARRY
Tough gig.

RUTH
Beats keyhole peeping.

He smiles.

HARRY
You wanna walk?

EXT. MGM LOT - NIGHT

Harry and Ruth are taking a stroll around the almost-deserted lot. She now wears a light sweater against the chill.

RUTH
You're pretty smart.

HARRY
What about?

RUTH
My working late. You want to know if I have an alibi.

HARRY
Wouldn't hurt if you did.

RUTH
When I rehearse late I usually sleep in my dressing room here on the lot. But Peter was killed on a Sunday night. I was at the beach house all day.

HARRY
Doing what?

RUTH
Building sand castles.

HARRY
Witnesses?

RUTH
Only the dolphins.

A beat as they walk in silence.

RUTH
Or maybe I was building castles in the air...

HARRY
You do that too?

RUTH
Oh yes ... Yes indeed ... When I was a kid I imagined this whole life for myself ... I live in a yellow house on a ranch out in the middle of the prairie, no one for miles, and I have a brave husband who protects me from the Indians ... I even had a name for the ranch, "The Alhambra."

She smiles, a little embarrassed.

3004/MG

RUTH
Thus dreamed the little girl from
Abilene.

HARRY
Did her dream come true?

RUTH
Oh, in every detail.

They walk in silence for a beat.

RUTH
You want to watch me rehearse?

HARRY
It's late. You should go home.

RUTH
Home?

They walk away.

EXT. MGM - SOUNDSTAGE 12 - NIGHT

Jack Shaw watches from hiding as Harry says goodnight to Ruth and she goes back into the soundstage.

Harry goes to Jack.

HARRY
Go home, I'll take over.

JACK
Night, Harry.

He goes. Harry finds a comfortable perch. Lights a cigarette. And waits and watches.

INT./EXT. HARRY'S CAR - NIGHT

Very late. Harry is in his car, following a sporty coupe. Not many other cars around this late, so he must stay distant.

The two cars cruise through nocturnal LA.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Harry pulls over and watches as the sporty coupe parks at a lovely Malibu beach house. Right on the water. Perfect location.

He watches as Ruth climbs out of the coupe and goes into the house.

EXT. BEACH - OUTSIDE BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Harry walks along the surf, checking out the back of the beach house.

He sees Ruth moving around within, brightly illuminated through the panoramic windows. She moves through the house, turning on every light. Goes back to the front door, re-checks that it's locked. Goes to the living room and sits. She folds into herself. Weeping.

Safe in the darkness by the ocean, he stands and watches her. It is voyeuristic. Then he turns his back to her and scans the beach, watching that no one else is there. It is strangely romantic.

He is protecting her.

EXT. VENICE BOARDWALK - NIGHT

The Venice boardwalk is tawdry, on the edge of dangerous.

The high-spirited calliope from the Santa Monica pier serenades the neon-bright tattoo parlors and shady dives.

Above one peeling, arched colonnade are the windows of Pat Croft's second story apartment. We see him moving around within.

INT. PAT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Surprisingly, the main room of the apartment is almost completely empty.

No furniture. No pictures. Just a wooden floor. A phonograph. A stack of records. And an entire wall of mirrors.

Everything else -- clothes, furniture, books, dishes, food, hot plate, ice box -- is crammed into the tiny bedroom next door.

Pat is sitting on the floor, pulling on a special pair of shoes. He stands, removes his shirt, puts on a record. Then poses in front of the wall of mirrors. Waits.

Benny Goodman's hit 1936 recording of "The Glory of Love" begins to play.

And Pat begins to tap dance.

VOCALS

"You've got to give a little, take a little,

(MORE)

VOCALS (cont'd)

And let your poor heart break a little,
That's the story of, that's the glory
of love..."

Pat is tap dancing like crazy and is soon covered with sweat.

He is a good tap dancer.

This is all deeply disturbing.

EXT. VENICE BOARDWALK - NIGHT

From the boardwalk below, we see Pat dancing like a maniac through his windows. Couldn't be happier.

We fade to...

EXT. HOLLYWOOD PARK RACETRACK - DAY

One of those sun-baked Los Angeles days.

Everything shimmers and wilts.

Hollywood Park is crowded today. Horses zoom past ~~the~~ Thundering hooves. Colorful pennants and silks. Touts and gamblers, suburban families and hoodlums, shoulder to shoulder.

JOEY SICA is a nasty piece of work, much as Lorelei Fuller described him: "Thin, pencil mustache, not much hair -- loud taste in sport coats."

Sica is in the stands, circulating through the crowd, doing business.

Then he sees Harry, moving purposefully toward him.

To him, Harry looks like one thing and one thing only: a cop.

Sica tries to avoid Harry, moving in another direction, going quickly up the steps of the stands now. But then he sees Pat Croft and Clay Kandell moving down to intercept him, trying to trap him--

Panic. He bolts--

Harry, Pat and Clay take off after him--

It is a hair-raising chase--

Sica cuts laterally down across the seats -- dangerously leaping from tier to tier -- zig-zagging -- pushing people aside -- tripping, falling, lurching up, racing on--

Harry and his men follow at top speed, trying to trap Sica between them--

Sica makes it to the edge of the stands, he vaults over and takes off around the edge of the track--

Harry yells for Pat and Clay to go another way then vaults over the edge of the stands after Sica--

Harry sprints -- he gains--

HARRY

Joey! Stop running! We're not the police!

Sica races through a door, going into the stadium--

INT. HOLLYWOOD PARK - TACK ROOM - DAY

Sica tears through a tack room--

Harry is right behind him--

Sica speeds past astonished jockeys and trainers, blasts through a door--

INT. HOLLYWOOD PARK - CORRIDORS/STAIRS - DAY

Sica races down a series of corridors, weaving back and forth at breakneck speed, bolting up and down stairs, slamming people aside--

Harry is behind him, gaining now--

HARRY

Goddammit! We're not the police!

Sica runs on, slams through a set of exit crash doors--

EXT. HOLLYWOOD PARK - PARKING LOT - DAY

Sica emerges into the blinding sunlight--

Clay Kandell is waiting.

He thrusts out one enormous arm--

SLAM.

Sica's insane momentum is stopped dead by a fist to the neck. He flies up dramatically, seems to linger for a moment in the air, and then falls flat on his back. Bam.

Harry catches up, gives Sica a quick kick.

HARRY

(panting for air)

You -- piece of shit -- Tore my goddamn jacket -- This is a two hundred dollar jacket you piece of shit.

Then Pat Croft roars up in a big sedan. Clay hauls Sica to his feet. This is all very efficient, they've done this before.

SICA

You taking me in?

HARRY

I told you, we're not the police ...
Although in a little while, you're sure as hell gonna wish we were.

Clay throws Sica into the sedan. He and Harry climb in. They roar off.

INT. SEDAN - DAY

Sica is in the back seat with Clay, who is roughly sorting through Sica's pockets, pulling out the contents. Harry sits up front with Pat.

SICA

I got protection, you cocksuckers. I got protection. Jack Dragna'll cut your head off you touch me.

Clay hands what he has pulled from Sica's pockets to Harry. Several paper bindles of drugs and a bag of rolled joints.

HARRY

Joey, Joey, Joey ... When you're being chased you're supposed to dump the drugs, you simple-minded wop.

SICA

You ever heard of Mr. Johnny Rosselli, you cocksucker? He shove a sawed-off in your mouth you touch me.

HARRY

(ignoring him, to Pat)
You believe this? ... Goddamn two hundred dollar sport coat...

SICA

Listen to me, you cocksucker! You stop this car or I swear I'll have--!

HARRY
Clay.

Clay suddenly raises a leg and STOMPS Sica's chest. Sica recoils. The whole car shakes. Clay STOMPS again. Sica screams. In the confines of the car it is even more brutal.

EXT. MULHOLLAND - CLIFF - DAY

A deserted cliff, high on Mulholland. Twisting road. Panoramic view.

The big sedan slows to 10 miles per hour. Harry nods. Clay opens the door next to Sica. Sica wonders what's going on. Then Clay cocks a leg and kicks Sica right out of the car--

Sica goes flying and then tumbling down a hillside for about 50 yards and lands on the dirt road that snakes down the hill. The car pulls up.

Harry and Pat get out. Go to Sica. Sica is bleeding and bruised. Whimpering.

Harry kneels by Sica. They're at the edge of a much bigger drop.

HARRY
Okay, Joey, pay attention ... You sold drugs to Peter Nielsen. Where did they came from?

SICA
She'll kill me...

Harry and Pat exchange a glance.

HARRY
Who'll kill you?

SICA
I can't. She'll kill me.

HARRY
Jesus, what the hell do you think I'm going to do?! I just threw you down a mountain! You tell me what I want to know right now or I'm going to break your legs, toss you off this cliff and the coyotes will eat you, I promise they will.

Sica stares at him. In his mind there is no doubt whatsoever that Harry is telling the truth.

800#//W//

SICA

It was Bess Francis. She arranged everything with Nielsen. She supplies the drugs. I only deliver ... I don't know anything...

HARRY

The night he died. Know anything about that?

SICA

(crying)

No...

Harry stands. Looks down at Sica.

HARRY

My name is Harry Slidell. You ask Jack Dragna about me. And Johnny Rosselli ... Then you leave my town.

He and Pat go back to the car.

They drive off. A cloud of dust.

INT./EXT. HARRY'S CAR - SUNSET BOULEVARD - DAY

Harry and Pat are cruising down the glittering Strip.

PAT

Seems like all roads eventually lead to Little Bess.

HARRY

It's a one-industry town, my friend. And that industry is sex.

He pulls over before an impressively ornate Art Deco building, all salmon and silver...

EXT. ART DECO BUILDING - DAY

They climb out of the car, greeting the hulking German Doorman/Bouncer as they breeze into the building:

HARRY

Fritzie Holleman, in the flesh! Thought they had you dead-bang on that Mann act thing?

DOORMAN/BOUNCER

(German accent)

Couldn't make it shtick, I vas too shmart for dem.

HARRY
Yeah, you're shmart all right.

PAT
(re: car, slipping him
cash)
Keep it out front, Adolph.

They sweep into the building.

INT. BROTHEL - PARLOR - DAY

The parlor of this elite brothel is decorated in what you might call early-LOST HORIZON: Hollywood chinoiserie that drips Shangri-La.

The Hostess, a tall beauty, greets Harry and Pat as they enter.

HARRY
(peck on the cheek as he
slips her money)
Evening, Irene. How're the kids?

HOSTESS
Little one's croupy. Big one's got the mumps.

PAT
We'll send a card. We gotta see her.

HOSTESS
(to Harry)
When you gonna get a little cap for
your monkey?

HARRY
It's important.

HOSTESS
I'll buzz you through.

Harry and Pat go into an elevator.

INT. BORDELLO - BESS'S OFFICE - DAY

Harry and Pat move through a long, dark room. The lamps are covered with fabric; the bulbs dim and infrequent. The ceiling is low.

They hear BESS FRANCIS before they see her. They hear her wheezing.

3004/MG

They finally get close enough to see her. Bess in a sinister figure: obese and chair-bound, rasping and sucking on cigarettes. Vice personified.

BESS

Harry Slidell ... You don't come by often enough. You don't like pussy any more?

HARRY

I've turned queer.

Bess laughs, a hideous rasping sound.

BESS

Hey, Pat, give us a kiss.

PAT

Business before pleasure.

HARRY

We're here about the late Peter Nielsen. Turns out he was a morphine addict. Got his drugs from Joey Sica, who works for you.

8000+//M

PAT

Leading to speculation Byzantine.

BESS

I peddle flesh, not dope.

PAT

And you're sweating more than usual.

BESS

Whatever this Joey Sica told you about drugs is a lie. Which he'll take to his grave.

HARRY

Look, I don't give a shit if you skip down the halls of Hollywood High handing out happy dust -- I'm only interested in Nielsen's murder. Was he a client?

She lights another cigarette. She has long, red fingernails.

BESS

Yeah, he liked the ladies.

PAT

Anyone special?

BESS
All my girls are special.

PAT
Any of them around the night he died?

BESS
No.

PAT
Maybe someone there to make a delivery
of what it is you don't purvey?

BESS
I told you -- no.

PAT
Maybe the delivery went bad?

BESS
No.

HARRY
Okay ... How often did he come in?

BESS
(smiles)
He came in when he came in, when he
wanted upmarket ... He liked other
kinda joints too, you know...

HARRY
Yeah?
(no response)
Tell me.

Nothing. Harry looks at her. And it's Harry, the homicide
investigator, who knows how to pressure a witness on the edge
into coming across.

HARRY
C'mon, Bess. Let's go. We talk about
this, and I don't make a phone call
about your sidelines.

Bess looks into Harry's eyes. Decides.

BESS
You know No Man's Land? That
unincorporated patch of land out by
Wilmington?

HARRY
Yeah. No cops. Nothing.

BESS

There was a club out there Peter used to go to ... He liked rough trade.

HARRY

What went on?

BESS

Sex shows. Smokers. You name it.

(beat)

They used to call it "Calcutta."

HARRY

What about her? You know anything about her?

BESS

The movie star?

HARRY

Yeah, the movie star.

BESS

No ... She's a mystery ... But whatever she told you about Peter Nielsen is a lie. Whatever she told you about herself is a lie ... She is a professional liar, an actress ... They can't help themselves.

She smiles.

EXT. "CALCUTTA" - EVENING

Harry and Pat drive into a hellish landscape.

Unincorporated land outside Wilmington, west of Long Beach. A slum. A city of garbage. Huge mountains of yellow sulfur from an abandoned mining operation. Strange and surreal.

Corrugated iron shacks. Derelict train cars filled with hobos and drifters.

Harry and Pat cruise past an illegal abattoir. Starving cows in hellish pens. Hanging carcasses. Clouds of flies. A butcher in a blood-stained apron glares at them across barbed wire as they dive past.

PAT

Just like Bel Air.

Harry smiles and pulls over.

They climb out near the largest structure. A makeshift dog fighting arena. Tiers of wooden benches and fences around a deep pit.

A TRAINER works his vicious dog in the pit. Other dogs snarl and bark from cages in the back of a truck.

Three of the Trainer's SONS, all young Yugoslavian men, are drinking beer. They watch Harry and Pat approach.

HARRY

(looks at the dog)

Nice dog. What's its name. Fido?

TRAINER

You gotta come back 'round ten for the action.

HARRY

Maybe you can help me out.

TRAINER

Mister, I'm working.

HARRY

I'll be quick. You know anything about a club around here? Used to be around here. Sex shows. Some girls.

YUGOSLAV MAN 1
We got no time for cops.

HARRY

I'm not a cop.

TRAINER

Don't care who the fuck you are.

HARRY

This club - is it still running?

The Trainer says something in Yugoslavian to his sons.

Two of them move toward Harry and Pat, menacing.

YUGOSLAV MAN 1
You deaf or something? My papa said beat it.

HARRY

Take it easy, pal.

YUGOSLAV MAN 2
Get back in your damn car.

300//M/30

HARRY
I just want to know--

Without warning--

Yugoslav Man 1 swings his beer bottle at Harry's face -- Harry jerks aside, his reflexes keen -- the bottle SMASHES on his shoulder--

Harry responds like lightning -- he PUNCHES Man 1 in the face -- again -- then SLAMS him in the gut -- Portuguese Man 1 doubles over, falls to his knees, puking--

Pat surprises us with this quick viciousness. He JABS Yugoslav Man 2 in the throat -- Man 2 recoils, clutching his neck -- Pat snatches up a piece of wood and SLAMS him across the face -- Man 2 falls, moaning--

Harry spins back toward the pit--

Pulling his gun--

Good thing. The Trainer was about to release his sharling dog. He sees the gun. Stops. Restrains the dog.

HARRY
Don't think I wouldn't.

TRAINER
I don't ... The club's closed down.
Used to be over there ... Yellow walls.

Harry hands the gun to Pat.

HARRY
Keep an eye on Fido.

He goes.

EXT. ABANDONED CLUB -- EVENING

Harry moves toward an abandoned club. One story. Yellow walls. Decaying marquee. Creepy.

He pulls aside some wooden boards from the door and goes in...

INT. ABANDONED CLUB - EVENING

It is eerie in the dusk light.

Harry moves through the empty club. A bar. Rows of seats. A small stage with curtains framing it. Sordid.

Squatters have left filth and garbage. Used needles and broken glass. Pools of fetid muck. Graffiti in Spanish.

He steps up on the stage. Past the stage there are a few rooms and offices.

He looks around, getting a feel for the place.

Then he stops.

Notices something...

Through a broken window he sees a green light in the distance, glowing in the evening sky...

It is a neon sign on the highway, far over the hills. Perhaps advertising a hotel or roadhouse...

"THE ALHAMBRA."

Harry stares at it.

He shuts his eyes.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

The Nielsen's beach house.

Moonlight. Crashing waves. Lovely.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Ruth in the living room, cutting out items about herself from newspapers and magazines, pasting them into a scrapbook.

All the lights are on. A radio plays music.

The doorbell rings. She jumps, jittery. She goes to answer it. Looks through the peephole. Unlocks a series of locks. Opens the door. Harry is waiting and impatient.

HARRY
We have to talk.

He barges past her, goes into the living room, she follows:

RUTH
You're very fresh, I must say. But since you're here, can I get you...?

800#//M/S

But he has already gone to the bar, is pouring himself a drink. He is clipped and angry:

HARRY

I'm about the only person in this whole goddamn city who doesn't think you murdered your husband. So if you want my help, start dealing from the top of the deck.

RUTH

What do you expect me to--?

HARRY

(relentless)

Your husband beat you. He did it a lot and he did it hard. This gives you one solid motive. He was a junkie. But then so were you. Way back when. You still got the needle tracks. But the kicker is the murder had nothing to do with drugs. Which means it had to do with something else. Which brings us back to you. Maybe it goes like this: he hit you, but too hard this time, he's out of control, he's going to ruin your face, so you shoot him, self-defense, who can blame you, but you panic and high-tail it, perhaps knowing full well MGM would cover it up, which brings us to me, and you, and now ... How's that work for you, Mrs. Nielsen?

He takes a long drink. She is speechless.

HARRY

There's only one problem with that.
It's not true.

RUTH

How do you know?

HARRY

Because if you killed him you wouldn't be scared, and you are ... Every light in the place is on. You got three locks on the door, two of them new, and all the windows are shut and locked -- at the beach. Plus you've got a gun upstairs in the bedside table and another one in that drawer by the radio.

RUTH
You broke into my house?

HARRY
Yeah. You know who killed him, don't you?

RUTH
I have no--

HARRY
Stop lying to me!

RUTH
I'm not--

He suddenly grabs her.

HARRY
You've got to tell me the truth! You want me to protect you? Then you do one thing. From right now. Never, ever, lie to me again. Starting right now or I walk off.

She dissolves. A long beat. He holds her.

HARRY
Who killed him, Ruth?

RUTH
I don't know his name...

HARRY
Who is he?

She gently pulls away. Runs her hand through the newspaper clippings, letting them slip through her fingers.

RUTH
I still keep a scrapbook ... Isn't that pathetic? ... I cut out all her reviews and press notices. Everything she does...
(lets some clippings fall)
... My favorite movie star.

A beat.

HARRY
He was killed by your blackmailer, wasn't he?

She looks at him. Stunned.

300/M/30

HARRY

I've been to Calcutta. I saw the sign
for The Alhambra ... Just like you did
when you were there.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Harry and Ruth walk along the deserted highway. Two lane
blacktop. No houses. A street lamp in the distance.

HARRY

When did it start?

RUTH

Someone left a note in my dressing
room. Couple months ago. Used my old
name -- my real name -- Brenda Gomey.
Threatened to expose me.

HARRY

How did you communicate with him?

RUTH

Personal ads in the studio newspaper,
that's what he wanted.

HARRY

What happened then?

RUTH

Peter and I agreed to pay.

HARRY

How much?

RUTH

Five thousand.

HARRY

Too small. He was coming back.

RUTH

That's what Peter thought ... The night
he was killed was the night of the
payoff. Peter insisted it take place at
our house. He was very angry.

HARRY

You're the income, doll. Scandal puts
you out of business? He's on the
street.

(beat)

You really were here at the beach?

8000H/M/

RUTH
That's right.

HARRY
Your husband's set to make the payoff.
The blackmailer shows up. It blows up
between them.

RUTH
Maybe. I don't know.

HARRY
Who else knew about you?

RUTH
It was a long time ago. I was a
teenager . . . You wouldn't recognize
Brenda Gomey, believe me.

HARRY
What about clients?

RUTH
You're a hole. They don't look at you.

HARRY
Who ran you? You have a madam?

RUTH
Woman named Rosalinda Quinn. She got me
into it.

HARRY
Did she recruit you?

RUTH
No, this friend of mine from home
introduced me. She was all right, as
those things go.

HARRY
Why'd you meet her?

A beat. She is unsentimental and unashamed.

RUTH
I was starving. That's what happens
when you have no money in 1932. I had
come out here and made the rounds of
the studios like everyone else. No
takers. . . . So I started going to
parties. Went on "dates." Then I met
Rosalind . . . To me, I'm having dates
and men are giving me tips.

(MORE)

RUTH (cont'd)
I didn't think of myself as "a pro."
(beat)

One night I black out. Maybe I was drugged. And I wake up and there's a party going on ... there's lights and people ... and I am the party ... I pass out and wake up ... I don't know where I am. Don't know if it's been one night or a week.

She walks a few feet.

RUTH
I feel I'm sliding down. I meet Peter. He saved me ... He took me in his hand and he lifted me up ... Just him ... Dyed my hair. Gave me little extra parts at first and then featured roles. Then ... Ruth Ettis.

They have reached the house again. They enter.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - NIGHT

Harry and Ruth move into the living room.

She lights his cigarette for him as:

HARRY
Rosalinda Quinn was forced out of the high-end market by a woman named Bess Francis. Bess partnered with people out of Chicago to help her. This was back when I was on the force ... We always thought Rosalinda had been killed.

RUTH
You think she's behind the blackmail?

HARRY
Say she's still alive and she's at the movies one day and say she's watching your latest picture...

RUTH
And she recognizes me...

A long beat.

She slowly moves around the room. He watches her.

She finally moves very close to him.

RUTH
Will she be back?

HARRY
Yes.

RUTH
Are you sure?

HARRY
Blackmail's like that. You have to end it.

Then a song comes over the radio. A romantic ballad.

She hums along for a moment. To divert her attention, to maintain balance. He watches her. She looks at him deeply. She drops the diversion, drops the tune.

RUTH
Can you end it?

HARRY
(certain)
Yes.

She kisses him. Long and deep. He responds.

The song continues as they cling together, soon they are making love. Passionate and honest.

And we fade to...

EXT. VENICE BOARDWALK - NIGHT

Pat Croft sits at the open window of his apartment, watching the bustle of people on the boardwalk below.

He notices a handsome young man looking right back at him. Clean cut, blond, very all-American. GUY ENRIGHT.

Guy moves closer. Looks up. Cruising. Pat plays along. Finally Pat tosses down his key.

INT. PAT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Guy enters. He is surprised at the lack of any furniture.

GUY
Where's the furniture...?

PAT
In the other room.

800/MSW

Guy moves around the room, getting a feel for his environment: is it safe here? How far will this go? Pat counters, gradually closing in, predatory.

GUY
I'm Guy Enright.

PAT
Stage name.

GUY
So obvious? ... Waiting for the big break, you know how it goes ... Mostly I do extra work. Only we're "atmosphere players" now ... What's with the mirrors?

Pat has backed him into the wall of mirrors.

PAT
I tap dance.

Pat is very close.

Then--

Pat suddenly sends an elbow slamming up into his face --
CRACK! -- Guy's head snaps back -- blood flows--

Guy looks at Pat, stunned. Blood streaming from his nose.

PAT
Way I figure it you're a rent boy and somebody paid you to get close, and I figure it's a fat broad in a chair who smokes too much. How's that float your boat?

Guy turns to look at himself in the mirrors.

GUY
Oh my God...

PAT
She wants the inside skinny, right? ... Wants to know if we're going to rat her drug dealing to the cops.

GUY
You broke my nose...

Guy look at himself. It hurts like hell. He smiles. Does he like it?

Turns back to Pat:

GUY
I can play it any way you want.

Pat laughs and throws him at the door. He misses. Enright crashes into the wall.

PAT
Get the fuck out of here. Tell that fat bitch to get more imaginative.

Guy goes.

Pat smiles.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Lovely morning outside the window. Curtains swaying in the gentle breeze. Roar of the surf.

Ruth is still asleep. Harry is in bed but awake, looking at her. She's exquisite. Her skin's like gold against the white sheets.

He leans close, studies her forearm. Can just make out old needle tracks. He kisses her forearm gently. One of her long legs has emerged from the sheets. He carefully repositions himself. Studies behind her knee. More old needle tracks. She was a real doper.

He gently runs his fingers along the tracks behind her knee. She moans. He does it again. She moans again. He smiles. The sound charms him. Even touches him.

He repositions himself. Gently tucks her in. Looks at her for a moment.

She wakes. Smiles at him. He kisses her neck.

RUTH
Mmmmm ... Stop it ... I have to go to work ...

She kisses him deeply, pulls him to her.

EXT. MGM LOT - DAY

Outside the MGM newspaper office, Pat leans against a wall and reads the daily MGM paper. Little puff pieces, filming updates, columns and personal ads.

Early advertising art for THE WIZARD OF OZ is featured on the front page today.

Harry breezes out of the newspaper office, highly energized, Pat walks with him:

HARRY

Don't pretend you can read. How's this sound? ...

(reads from a receipt
slip)

... "Dear Friend, I want to complete our business. Money is ready. Brenda." I'm running it for the next month.

PAT

You think he'll go for it?

HARRY

If this is really about money. If it's about something else, who knows? ... By the way, I pulled Clay and Jack off the case ...

(this surprises Pat)

... We work it alone for a while. Don't file any more reports.

They walk in silence for a beat.

Pat stops.

PAT

You sure about this?

HARRY

About what?

PAT

Her.

HARRY

Hell if I know ... You want out?

PAT

Not ever.

That resolved, they continue walking.

PAT

I heard Jean Arthur blew her screen test, it's looking like Paulette Goddard.

Harry whistles. Paulette Goddard. Sweet.

EXT. RESTAURANT - WILSHIRE BOULEVARD - DAY

Harry's car is parked before a seedy Booze-and-Steak joint.

INT. DARK RESTAURANT - WILSHIRE BOULEVARD

Red leather booths. Tired clientele.

Harry and Pat are at the bar where HANK MILLBURN, an old broken-down Vice cop with a face like a road map, is drinking his lunch.

HANK

... Those was two nasty whores. Like two scorpions in a bottle.

HARRY

From Homicide we speculated that Bess had Rosalinda Quinn killed -- how'd you make it from Vice?

HANK

Bess has us on the payroll ... But we didn't do the Rosalinda Quinn thing.

HARRY

Who did?

HANK

Jack Dragna. Bess agreed to run narcotics from her houses -- if he helped her push out Rosalinda ... I don't think they killed her.

HARRY

Know where she is?

HANK

Last I heard, south of Ensenada. But this was awhile ago.

HARRY

(slipping him money)
Thanks, Hank. How's the family?

HANK

The wife got diabetes now, cut off her goddamn foot.

HARRY

I'll come by ... Thanks a million, buddy.

BOOK/MEET

He and Pat start to go. They pass the blonde CASHIER.

CASHIER
Harry, telephone.

She hands him the phone.

HARRY
(on phone)
Yeah...? Okay.

He hangs up and redials.

Intercut with:

Tim Dowling, the junior MGM executive we met at the opening of the story, in his small office.

DOWLING
(on phone)
Harry ... He needs you.

HARRY
(on phone)
You get Nielsen's blood off your loafers yet?

DOWLING
(on phone)
Harry, please. He's over at the Culver.

HARRY
(on phone)
Okay. Got it.

He hangs up. Turns to Pat:

HARRY
... Get back to the office. Send Jack down to Ensenada. Tell him he doesn't come home until he finds her.

They go.

EXT. CULVER THEATRE - DAY

Just down the street from Metro, the Culver Theatre.

It's an afternoon matinee of MGM's new movie TEST PILOT. Kids flow into the theatre.

Harry joins them.

INT. CULVER THEATRE - AUDITORIUM - DAY

Harry enters. The light from a movie projector flickers.

A trailer for MGM's IDIOT'S DELIGHT is playing.

Harry sees Mayer. Goes to him. Sits.

HARRY

What are you doing here?

MAYER

I come to see how my trailers play.

(shushes him)

Shhhh...

Mayer watches the trailer. Harry waits. The trailer ends.

MOVIEONE NEWS begins. The newsreel shows lines of Spanish Republican forces crossing the border into France. They've just lost the Spanish Civil War to Franco.

Mayer has no interest in the news, he turns sideways to Harry. The images play on the screen behind their faces.

MAYER

All right. How's it going? How's our case coming?

HARRY

Early days yet.

MAYER

Isn't she a pistol?

HARRY

Truly is.

MAYER

Don't fall in love with her. Actresses are like lightbulbs: they screw good, but sooner or later they're gonna burn out on you. Your heart, give to someone else.

HARRY

Sage advice. Now what can I do for you?

On the movie screen: the newsreel now shows the German invasion of Czechoslovakia ... Stuka dive bombers ... the violence of Kristalnacht. 1938. The world out there is igniting.

Although the images of war are disturbing to us, Mayer doesn't pay any attention to them.

MAYER

Need you to make a delivery for me. Ben Siegel's helping us out with a labor situation.

HARRY

(surprised)

Bugsy Siegel?

MAYER

"Bugsy" is a name you should get out of the practice of saying ... You know him?

HARRY

By reputation.

MAYER

Mr. Siegel represents certain union members vital to our industry. These members go on strike, we stop making movies ... So he offers me what he calls "strike insurance." We pay up, they don't strike, movies get made, small raises happen, everyone's happy. And what does this service cost us? \$50,000 a year.



HARRY

Extortion? -- Why do you wanna pay this guy?

MAYER

Harry, if Ben Siegel didn't exist, we'd want to invent him ... Christ, you know what the Reds running the unions would costs us?!

HARRY

(smiles)

You want me to make the payoff.

MAYER

He's down at Agua Caliente this weekend. Take a drive, swim in the pool, give the man an envelope ... Take Ruthie along. She's been working so hard ... You two are keeping company, yes?

Harry gazes at him. The fucker knows everything.

MAYER
She's a very nice lady.

Harry does not rise to the bait.

HARRY
(stands)
Where do I get the cash?

MAYER
Margie has it waiting ... Enjoy the
weekend, it's on us.

HARRY
I gotta tell you, L.B. ... I'm
surprised you're dealing with Siegel.
Willie Bioff and the other Chicago
union guys, yeah they're thugs ... But
Siegel? Ben Siegel is a real fucking
gangster.

MAYER
He may be a gangster, but he's our
gangster.

INT./EXT. HARRY'S CAR - DESERT - DAY

The remorseless desert.

Blazing heat. Arid landscape. Sporadic cactus. Everything
parched. Mexico, beyond Tijuana.

Harry and Ruth cruise along an isolated highway.

HARRY
... First piece of casting that made
sense to me. Not that I read the book.

RUTH
He won't let her do it.

HARRY
Who?

RUTH
Paulette Goddard is married to Charlie
Chaplin. No chance he'll let her play
Scarlett.

HARRY
I don't follow. Could make her a real
star.

RUTH

That's the point. He's not about to become Mr. Paulette Goddard ... She's busy anyway, he's going to use her in THE GREAT DICTATOR.

HARRY

The Hitler one?

RUTH

Mm ... I don't know that I'd want to see a movie like that.

HARRY

You're gonna see a lot more like that, believe me.

RUTH

Oh yeah?

HARRY

Every read a newspaper? Manchuria, Czechoslovakia, Spain ... The world's going to hell out there.

He sees something ahead.

HARRY

Here it is.

Appearing ahead of them ... rising from the desert ... like a wondrous mirage ... or something from Korda's THE THIEF OF BAGDAD...

The magnificent resort of Agua Caliente. Hotel. Casino. Spa. Golf course. Horse track. Gardens. Pools.

Paradise in the midst of Hell.

EXT. AGUA CALIENTE - GARDENS - DAY

Just outside the wall ... tarantulas are fighting to the death on the dry, baking sand.

Just inside the wall ... bubbling fountains, lush lawns, elaborate gardens, dazzling pools ... pyrotechnic explosions of luxurious, cascading water.

Harry and Ruth, nicely dressed in weekend-away clothes, stroll through one of the many beautiful gardens.

INT. AGUA CALIENTE - VILLA - DAY

They make love in their villa.

INT. AGUA CALIENTE - NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Harry and Ruth, dressed in evening clothes, are moving to the dance floor. A dance orchestra plays. Scores of other wonderfully-dressed guests dance, mingle and promenade.

HARRY
I'm a little nervous about this...

RUTH
You don't dance?

HARRY
Not with Ruth Ettis for Christ sake!

RUTH
Then think of me as Brenda Gomey ...
(he smiles)
... I'll be gentle.

He laughs. She offers her arms. He takes her in his arms. They begin to move. He does okay. She helps him, makes him look good. That's her job.

As they dance he scans the crowd over her shoulder. Always watching. That's his job.

He sees a darkly handsome man weaving through the crowd. A player in every sense. Sleek mobster JOHNNY ROSSELLI.

HARRY
Here comes business.

RUTH
What?

HARRY
Johnny Rosselli.

Johnny Rosselli joins JACK DRAGNA at a table. Dragna is a big, Italian bruiser. He's messy around the edges. Wears an out of date suit and yellowed white shirt. Powerful and scary.

Also at the table is Dragna's enforcer, FRANKIE RIO, a tall, nasty-looking killer. Resembles Basil Rathbone. His lungs have been ruined by mustard gas in WWI so he can only whisper, which is unnerving.

RUTH
Who's Basil Rathbone?

HARRY
Right hand of the fat guy, Jack Dragna.

Harry sees Ben Siegel cutting through the room, leaving a wake of stares and whispers.

HARRY

Ruthie ... Ben Siegel's come in. Want to get this over with.

RUTH

You know him?

HARRY

No.

RUTH

Come on, I'll introduce you...

Harry is surprised. She enjoys his surprise. She pulls him from the dance floor:

RUTH

I know him through Jean Harlow ...
(they reach Siegel)
... Ben?

SIEGEL

Ruth! How are you, darling? ...
(kisses her)
... You look luminescent.

RUTH

Ben, let me introduce you to Harry Slidell.

SIEGEL

(offers his hand)
Mr. Louis Mayer says you're okay.

Harry shakes and subtly gives him an envelope from his jacket.

HARRY

Pleasure doing business with you.

SIEGEL

Thanks ...
(to Ruth)
... Save me a dance.

Siegel goes to join the other mobsters as Harry leads Ruth back to the dance floor:

HARRY

"Luminescent?"

RUTH
He practices words from the dictionary.
Likes to sound educated.

HARRY
That's endearing, in a blood-splattered psychopath kind of way.

They dance.

We go to Siegel and his cohorts.

They are already deep into it. Intense conflict. Jack Dragna is furious. Frankie Rio is seething. Johnny Rosselli is placating. Siegel is calm, cold.

DRAGNA
(hotly, to Rosselli)
... Look, Johnny, this Jew walks around like he owns the fucking city, he's been here two weeks, a tourist, snapping pictures of movie stars, getting blow jobs in Echo Park, like all the other tourists--

ROSSELLI
(the peacekeeper)
Jack ... Ben's here representing partners of ours - Meyer Lansky, Frank Costello, Luciano -- you got to understand that--

DRAGNA
You think I'm gonna stand for this yid walking in here and messing with our thing? We been running it here for twenty years!

RIO
This is California, Bugsy. --
(Siegel lets it go)
-- We kick the gong around here, you follow?!

ROSSELLI
(calming)
Come on, come on -- let the man talk.
He comes from our friends in New York.
Hear what he's got to say.

DRAGNA
Fuck Meyer Lansky! This is LA. Welcome to LA and fuck Meyer Lansky.
(MORE)

DRAGNA (cont'd)

That's what all I got to say. You got something to say to me?

A beat.

The others wait for some response for Siegel.

Siegel carefully smooths his hair.

Finally.

Sub-zero.

SIEGEL

Here's how it goes. Lansky and Luciano talk to Frank Nitti, talk to Paul Ricca, talk to Longy Zwillman, talk to Moe Dalitz, talk to Kansas City, talk to Detroit, talk to Cleveland, talk to me, talk to Johnny here. And now I'm talking to you...

(beat)

You work for me now or you don't work at all. I got the unions. I got the studios. I got the book. I got the wire. You got nothing. You're out of date. You know what you are? You are one of those big dinosaur statues sinking into the ooze at the LaBrea Tar Pits, you fat fuck. You ever seen them? That's you, Jack. You are yesterday's newspaper wrapping fish ... So have another grappa you wop, dago, Mickey Mouse motherfucker, and get down on your knees and kiss my pinkie ring because I am your new fucking Pope.

A stunned beat.

Just then a Middle Aged Woman nervously comes up to Frankie Rio:

WOMAN

I really hate to interrupt, um, but could I have your autograph, Mr. Rathbone?

SIEGEL

Give the lady your signature.

WOMAN

Oh my! And could you make it out to "Bill and Mary Ellen"?

SIEGEL
"Bill and Mary Ellen" got that? And use
your best penmanship, Basil.

Frankie Rio autographs a menu as:

WOMAN
I'm Mary Ellen.

SIEGEL
Of course you are, dear. And you look
lovely tonight.

Rio gives her the menu.

WOMAN
Thank you so much!

She goes.

Siegel slowly pushes back his chair and stands. All are on
edge. Ready for anything. Guns handy.

SIEGEL
Jack ... Frankie ... I hope we can put
our differences aside and work together
from now on ... I want you both to
remember something ... And think about
this now for it is the one immutable
rule of our profession: don't fuck with
making money.

He smiles and goes.

Dragna immediately launches into Rosselli -- an irate stream
of non-stop Italian.

INT. AGUA CALIENTE - VILLA - NIGHT

Harry and Ruth have just made love. She is still in bed. He
stands, wrapped in a towel, smoking a cigarette and gazing
out the window.

Outside the window he sees a harsh desert moonscape,
bizarrely illuminated by the lurid neon from Agua Caliente.

RUTH
Why did you leave the police?

HARRY
I look bad in blue.

She smiles.

A beat.

RUTH
You like your job?

HARRY
What do you mean?

RUTH
What you do for the studios?

HARRY
Beats being a cop.

RUTH
How so?

He flicks his cigarette out the window. Stretches.

HARRY
I play poker with Clark Gable once a week, and when I go to talk to someone with a problem -- it's on their lawn and they've been playing polo all morning. I'm not digging up a bloated corpse that's been in the heat for two weeks off Alvarado.

He goes to her, kisses her. Smiles.

HARRY
And I like the money. And I don't like breaking a sweat. It's not worth it.

RUTH
Except when it is.

He thinks a moment.

HARRY
I worked a few cases that were worth it.

(beat)
But then I caught two bad ones. Some terrible things happened ... for which there would never be relief for the families ... And a Pasadena rich kid bought his way out. Two like that, I had it.

RUTH
Anything worth breaking a sweat for anymore?

HARRY
Only one thing. You.

Ruth is struck by his answer.

A beat.

Ruth doesn't know what to say...

The phone rings. Loud and jarring. She jumps.

HARRY
(answers phone)
Hello ... Tim? Tim, slow down ...
(Tim Dowling, the MGM
exec, is on the other
end)
... Okay, okay ...
(Harry is alert)
... When?! Is she all right?! ...
Listen, get Pat Croft to call Darren
Miller at Hollywood Division, you got
that? Darren Miller ... Yeah, I told
you, right away. Have a car waiting.

He hangs up, immediately begins to dress:

HARRY
I gotta get back. I'm sorry, Ruthie.

He hurries into the bathroom.

She remains in bed.

She hears a coyote howling out in the desert. The sound
bothers her. Predators beyond the neon.

INT. HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

BAM -- Harry bursts through a set of double doors, taking
charge, pushing past waiting reporters -- this is all
lightning fast--

HARRY
Later, guys, you'll get it all later --
Gimme ten minutes -- Don't phone
anything in yet, promise me -- Ten
minutes, guys--

He sweeps past the cops restraining the reporters -- Pat
Croft is hurrying toward him--

HARRY
Where is she?

PAT
This way.

They pass by some more cops and round a corner--

INT. HOSPITAL - OTHER CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Detective Darren Miller, who we met at the opening of the story, is waiting with some of his guys.

HARRY
Thanks for coming, Darren, gimme five minutes, okay--?

DARREN
This is a real problem, Harry, I can't.

HARRY
Five minutes, please!

He hurries down the corridor with Pat:

PAT
The guy's over here -- he's busted up, but who knows? I got a doctor waiting--

They go to a waiting Doctor, outside an operating theatre. As he talks to the Doctor, Harry glances through the window into the operating theatre, bloody surgery in progress.

HARRY
How's he doing?

DOCTOR
Well, both legs are broken, there might be spinal injuries and internal hemorrhaging as well but it's entirely too early to gauge the extent of--

HARRY
(interrupts)
Is he going to live? -- Is he going to live? Answer the fucking question.

DOCTOR
I would think so.

HARRY
(to Pat)
Where is she? --
(Pat points)
-- Stay with him.

Harry hurries down to another door in the corridor.

He pauses for a beat. Gets his breath. Smooths his suit. Calmly enters.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Judy Garland is sitting in a chair, hunched over, sobbing. She has a tiny bruise on her forehead and is disheveled. Otherwise fine.

Tim Dowling is with her. He moves aside when Harry goes to her. A couple of studio nurses are on standby.

Harry holds her.

HARRY

It's okay, baby, it's okay ... Shhhh...

She looks up at him. Huge pupils. Stoned.

JUDY

(whispers)

Harry, don't let them hear ... I had a malted tonight and ... at that place on Fairfax you took me to, remember? A malted and a patty melt...

300//M

HARRY

That's okay, you take it easy ...

(he beckons to one of the nurses)

... Gimme two seconds and I'll be right back, Judy, promise, two seconds.

The nurse comforts Judy as Harry nods for Dowling to come outside--

INT. HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

--Harry buttonholes Dowling right outside the door:

HARRY

What happened?

DOWLING

She was way the hell up Beachwood Canyon, stoned or something, on the way down she hit this guy walking his dog.

HARRY

Any witnesses?

DOWLING

No. She was alone. Neighbor heard her screaming, called the police. One of the cops called me.

Harry sees Detective Miller heading in their direction, calls:

HARRY

One more minute! ...

(Darren halfway returns to his men, impatient, Harry continues quickly to Dowling)

... Here's the play: You two were on a date. You were driving. You panicked and left the scene. You'll take the fall. If he lives, you lose your license for a couple years. If he dies, it's involuntary manslaughter, you do three to five, when you come out you got a job at MGM for life. You understand? For life. You get at least one picture a year to produce. Yes or no?

DOWLING

Can I think about it?

Detective Miller is heading toward them again.

HARRY

No, you cannot think about it! What's it gonna be? One picture a year. Yes or no, right now.

DOWLING

Yes.

Harry instantly turns Dowling to Detective Miller:

HARRY

Darren, this is Tim Dowling, he's got something to tell you -- he's scared, take it easy on him, buddy -- I'll go feed the wolves.

He heads back toward the reporters. As he passes Pat:

HARRY

What the hell was she doing up Beachwood? --

(a sudden idea)
(MORE)

HARRY (cont'd)

-- Do you have an MGM directory in your car? Get it!

He goes to talk to the reporters.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Later.

A nurse sits across the room.

Judy is in the bed now. Harry sits next to her, comforting, whispering to her. She looks up at him with big, wide eyes.

HARRY

... Tim was driving, you remember that?
... You went out for dinner and then he decided to take a drive ... It was dark
... You were coming down the hill and the man came out of nowhere. Tim tried to stop but it was too late. You remember that? ... See, honey, it wasn't your fault.

JUDY

None of that's true.

HARRY

Of course it is.

A difficult beat.

JUDY

Is it really?

HARRY

Honey, of course.

A beat.

JUDY

I tried to call out, Tim couldn't stop in time. It was so awful...

She begins to sob. By now, she believes it. If she's lucky.

Pat enters. Harry nods to one of the nurses, who moves to help Judy. Harry goes to Pat. Pat has an MGM phone directory.

PAT

(shows him a page)

1214 Crescent Terrace, Beachwood Canyon.

300MM

Harry looks up at him.

Cold, resolute fury.

EXT. STREET - BEACHWOOD CANYON - MORNING

One of those treacherously steep streets. The HOLLYWOODLAND sign is huge, dramatically poised right above. Great view.

DR. VIRGIL, a slickster MGM doctor in a Savile Row suit, is leaving his Modernist house. He locks the front door and then goes to his car in the driveway. He carries a doctor's bag.

He starts unlocking his car. Harry approaches from behind.

HARRY
Doctor Virgil?

VIRGIL
(turning)
Yes...?

WHAM!

Harry SLAMS him across the face with a blackjack, breaking his jaw -- Virgil recoils, smashing into his car, breaking glass -- Harry SLAMS him again with the blackjack, slicing along his ear -- Virgil recoils -- Harry SLAMS him again, lower, breaking ribs--

Virgil falls to his knees.

HARRY
You hear me? ...
(Virgil moans, nods his head)
... You ever give Judy Garland drugs again I'll kill you ... I mean diet pills, I mean vitamins, I mean B-12, I mean anything. I don't care what those pimps at MGM tell you, she is off limits ... Your life is too short to deal with me ... You understand?

Virgil moans, nods.

Harry SLAMS him again.

Harry goes.

Virgil collapses. Above, the HOLLYWOODLAND sign catches the morning light. It's spectacular.

And we fade to...

EXT. TROCADERO - SUNSET BOULEVARD - NIGHT

The Cafe Trocadero, smack at the heart of the Sunset Strip, is Hollywood's favorite supper club. The green neon sign glows. The curb valet is busy. Magnificent cars glide up, dispensing the elite.

Traffic is almost bumper-to-bumper tonight. The Strip hops.

INT. TROCADERO - NIGHT

And inside, the joint is jumping.

Celebrities negotiate the treacherous currents of fame, table-hopping, gossiping, seeing and being seen. Beautiful women flirt with studio execs at the bar.

Harry and Ruth sit at a secluded table. They are studying a personal ad from the MGM daily newspaper.

HARRY
(incredulous)
Sonja Henie...?

RUTH
"Dear Brenda, Be at Sonja Henie's party next week. I'll see you there." -- Do you think this is really it?

HARRY
He picked a party so there'll be lots of people around. He's not stupid ... Can you get us an invitation?

RUTH
It's a Christmas thing, she throws it every year. Everyone will be there.

She suddenly clutches his hand, surprising him with her desperation.

RUTH
You have to find him ... I can't...

HARRY
It's okay, honey ... You're hurting my hand, Ruthie.

She releases his hand. He looks at her. Her tension is painful.

Her eyes jump nervously to the bar. Men are looking back at her: the movie star. An object. A sex fantasy.

800MM/DO

He can tell the staring men are making her anxious.

HARRY

You wanna go? Get something at home?

She nods. He signals for the waiter as he stands. Takes her arm.

EXT. TROCADERO - SUNSET BOULEVARD - NIGHT

Later.

Harry and Ruth are at the curb, waiting for the valet to return with their car. Because of the heavy traffic on the Strip, it is taking a while.

HARRY

... And we have a lead on Rosalinda Quinn. We're tracking...

He trails to silence...

She glances up at him...

Then follows his gaze to...

Ben Siegel has just arrived at the valet. He is helping his date out of the car...

His date is Judy Garland.

Judy is dressed up for her night out. She looks very grown up -- but still all of seventeen.

HARRY

Excuse me...

Harry quickly goes to them, barely keeping his temper in check.

HARRY

Ben, evening -- Judy, go say hi to Ruth, would ya?

JUDY

Harry! It's so good to see you--

HARRY

Go talk to Ruth.

Judy, a little mystified, goes to Ruth.

SIEGEL
(starts to get pissed)
Okay, Harry from MGM, what's this...?

HARRY
What do you think this is? The junior prom?! She is seventeen years old. She does not need you.

SIEGEL
(riles)
Hey -- Mr. Mayer's fucking messenger boy -- you gonna tell me--

Harry gets right in his face:

HARRY
I know who you are and don't give a damn. She's a kid. Keep your fucking hands off her--

SIEGEL
This is the first I'm hearing she's seventeen! I got all the broads in this town chasing me, you think I need her? - - But you do not shoot off your mouth to me...

Siegel continues to speak angrily but...

Sound fades away as...

Harry becomes aware of a lot of things happening ~~all~~ at once ... his cop's instincts do not fail him ... time seems to slow as he notices...

Judy begins walking back toward them...

A Hudson and a black Chrysler sedan U-turn on Sunset, heading back toward the Trocadero...

Siegel's hands are fists, might take a swing...

Judy closer now, she is getting upset...

The two cars, switching lanes, closer, slowing down, the traffic is almost bumper-to-bumper...

Ruth taking a step, calling Judy, beginning to follow her toward them...

The Hudson going past. Then both cars suddenly stop in the middle of Sunset, the doors fly open...

Siegel's eyes flit to the Hudson, the Chrysler...

Then...

Harry dives -- covering Judy as--

An explosion of action--

Two men emerge from the Hudson, lead by Frankie Rio --
Frankie has pistols, the other guy has a shotgun. From the
Chrysler come two guys with Thompson submachine guns--

Siegel ducks for cover, pulling a .45 Colt automatic--

BLAM!BLAM!BLAM!BLAM!BLAM!

The submachine guns open up -- spraying rounds
indiscriminately -- shattering the front glass of the
Trocadero -- one of the valets is shot, he contorts back--

The car behind Siegel turns into a sieve. He fires back at
the biggest threat: the Thompsons--

All at incredibly close range--

Harry rolls off Judy, pulling an automatic, sees that Ruth is
safe, hidden behind a concrete bus stop bench--

He sees the shotgun trying to maneuver on Siegel's exposed
left flank--

HARRY
(to Judy)
Stay down!

Harry rises to one knee and fires--

The shotgunner is hit -- he spins toward Harry -- empties
both barrels -- BOOM!BOOM!

A well-dressed customer, standing there frozen in shock
behind Harry, is torn apart by the shotgun--

Harry fires two rounds -- takes out the shotgunner--

Siegel moves into the street, firing steadily, firing rounds
at the black sedan, firing rounds at the Thompson shooters,
hitting one, who retreats toward the Chrysler--

Harry fires at the second machine gunner -- sees Ruth has
pulled Judy to her, is holding her tight, relatively safe
behind the concrete bench--

The retreating machine gunner still fires --
BLAM!BLAM!BLAM!BLAM! -- bullets trace patterns across buildings and cars--

Harry is moving across Sunset Boulevard now -- into traffic -- all the cars have either ground to a halt or are panicking, backing up, crashing into each other, slamming bumpers, trying to get away from the murderous fire--

Harry and Siegel have their adversaries in a crossfire as they weave through the cars on Sunset Boulevard, jumping aside, climbing over them, firing--

The retreating machine gunner has fired his magazine dry -- he slams in a second stick magazine--

But Siegel has walked right up to him -- shoots him in the head--

The other machine gunner is trying to line up on Siegel -- fires -- controlled three shot bursts -- BLAM!BLAM!BLAM!-- BLAM!BLAM!BLAM!

Siegel weaves through cars -- moving in on his prey

Thompson rounds slice into cars, shattering glass, hitting some guy inside--

Harry fires -- the Thompson gunner opens up on him

Siegel fires. The Thompson gunner is hit. But he's not down--

Harry's pistol's slide is locked back -- empty--

SIEGEL (O.S.)

Harry!

Harry catches Siegel's back-up gun, a .380 Colt, Siegel threw him--

Snaps off one shot--

Kills the second machine gunner--

Frankie Rio, meanwhile, has outflanked Siegel's position, fires his .38 revolver -- BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! -- Siegel is hit above the collar bone, blood sprays, he returns fire--

Harry moves between cars--

Harry fires -- the bullets just miss Frankie--

Frankie returns fire. But he realizes his hit attempt has gone wrong. His eyes dart for an escape route.

He empties his pistol for cover -- bullets slice around Harry and Siegel -- and he then takes off, running at top speed, jumping into the already moving Hudson. Siegel takes careful aim and fires. No good. The Hudson weaves through traffic, disappears down Sunset Boulevard, gone.

HARRY
You all right?

SIEGEL
Yeah.

Harry hurries back to Judy and Ruth at the Trocadero. He snatches them both up from behind the bench:

HARRY
Come on, right now. We walk away.

He hurries them away -- a photographer approaches -- flashes a picture -- without breaking stride Harry grabs the camera and yanks it away -- smashes it against a wall, it shatters--

He disappears around a corner with Ruth and Judy.

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - DAY

Then and now, one of the joys of Los Angeles: the great pink palace that is the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Harry breezes to the Doorman, subtly slips him some cash and gets an envelope in return:

DOORMAN
Lovely day, Mr. Slidell.

HARRY
Aren't they all?

He goes into the hotel.

INT. BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - POLO LOUNGE - DAY

Harry is tucking the envelope into his jacket as he enters.

Lunch. Busy. Business at every table.

Harry maneuvers through the restaurant. Knows everyone. Makes his way to a prominent corner table. Johnny Rosselli, the darkly handsome gangster from Agua Caliente, is waiting.

ROSSELLI
(shakes)
You're looking good, amigo! You play tennis?

HARRY
(sits)
Clean living ...
(to waiter)
... Seven and seven, Stanley, thanks
... You already ordered?

ROSSELLI
Dover sole. Day in, day out ... So, I
hear he's looking at Joan Crawford for
Scarlett now! Joan Crawford?

HARRY
What happened to Paulette Goddard?

ROSSELLI
Chaplin won't let her do it. Limey
prick ...
(Harry's drink arrives)
... Cheers.

HARRY
Cheers ...
(to waiter)
... Dover sole's good for me too,
Stanley, thanks.

A long beat as he lights a cigarette and studies Rosselli.
They lean in, talking more privately:

HARRY
So ... What the hell was that?

ROSSELLI
Not good.

HARRY
Pal, it's a lot worse than not good.

ROSSELLI
I know.

HARRY
My employers tell me this is not what
they pay you for. Judy Garland was
there. Ruth Ettis was there. Gary
Cooper was inside ... Number one rule
of Hollywood: Don't shoot the movie
stars.

ROSSELLI
I said I know ... And your employers
are going to keep on payin'.

HARRY

Yeah. But they may not keep paying through you, Johnny ... Only through the grace of God and Mr. Hearst was this kept out of the papers.

ROSELLI

Jack Dragna's nuts, anyway. Suddenly Ben Siegel waltzes in giving him orders?

HARRY

Dragna's your headache ... My employers pay you for a service: keep everything copacetic so we all keep getting rich for the rest of time.

ROSELLI

I'll take care of it ... You got my word.

A beat.

HARRY

Help me with something else? ... A blackmail racket being run on movie stars.

ROSELLI

Which stars?

HARRY

Doesn't matter.

ROSELLI

You would like me to look into it?

HARRY

Very much. But quietly.

The Maitre D' comes to the table.

MAITRE D'

Telephone, Mr. Slidell.

HARRY

Thanks, Alan ...

(rising)

... Excuse me, Johnny.

He breezes away. Rosselli watches him go, thinking.

INT. POLO LOUNGE -- PHONE BOOTH - DAY

Harry picks up the waiting phone:

HARRY
(on phone)
Hello?

PAT (V.O.)
(on phone)
Boss, found her. I got the call from Mexico.

HARRY
(on phone)
We leave in ten minutes.

He hangs up and goes, excited.

INT./EXT. MEXICAN ROAD - HARRY'S CAR - SUNSET

Harry and Pat drive down a dirt road paralleling a cliff edge over the Pacific. We're in the country outside Ensenada.

We come across a row of low buildings in the weeds set back from the road at the edge of the cliff. The ocean beyond is surreal and clean and infinite. The buildings are painted bright colors. It's the red light zone.

Harry pulls down to the row of buildings. Two Mexicans look over an oil drum fire. Mongrel dogs wander. A vaquero on horseback rides through.

Harry sees Jack Shaw, his young operative, waiting with a couple of Mexican Judiciales. Jack slips them some cash and they leave in an old Ford.

Harry pulls over. Another car stops behind his.

EXT. MEXICAN ROAD - SUNSET

Harry and Pat climb out. Clay emerges from the second car. Clay gets a shotgun from the trunk, hides it under his coat.

JACK
(nods to a building)
That's the place. I didn't go in.

They check and prepare weapons with military precision as:

HARRY
Through the door, we got no idea ...
(to Clay)
... You hear anything wrong, come in
fast.

Clay moves to cover the back of the central building.

The others cautiously move toward it. Harry nods to Jack. Jack takes up position, ready to charge in if needed.

After a last gun check, Harry and Pat carefully enter the building...

INT. BROTHEL - SUNSET

A shabby six-crib brothel painted bright orange. The cribs are more like pens, with rough cots for beds and straw on the floor. A couple pens are occupied with whores serving Mexican refinery workers.

Harry and Pat have to stoop to pass through the doorway.

A Teenage Mexican Girl sits at an old school desk inside the door, she is reading a Hollywood movie star magazine.

HARRY
Excuse me. We're looking for Rosalinda Quinn.

GIRL
Que?

PAT
Where is she?

GIRL
No habla Yankee.

PAT
You're doing pretty good on the
magazine.

Then -- a woman's voice -- from deeper in the brothel.

WOMAN'S VOICE
You want Rosalinda?

They peer into the darkness. Can just make out the contours of an OLD MEXICAN WOMAN standing at the back of the room.

HARRY
That's right.

MEXICAN WOMAN
She's dead.

HARRY
That's a shame. I have some money for
her.

A beat.

MEXICAN WOMAN
Follow me.

They follow her into a small backroom...

INT. BROTHEL - BACKROOM - SUNSET

She opens the shutters to let in some light. The crimson sunset glow fills the small room--

--Suddenly illuminating hundreds of saints and icons that line the walls and ceiling. Pressed and pounded tin, mirrored and painted gold. Like an Eastern Orthodox church. Oppressive.

The light also illuminates...

ROSALINDA QUINN.

She is a mannish woman in her 60's. Sitting by a radio. Most of her face is hideously scarred, the flesh burned off. She is completely blind. Braille Bible in her lap.

MEXICAN WOMAN
Hey, mommacita. They are here for you.

ROSALINDA
You here to kill me?

HARRY
What?

ROSALINDA
You here to kill me?

HARRY
I want to talk to you, ma'am. I'm a private investigator out of LA. My name is Harry Slidell.

MEXICAN WOMAN
You said you had money.

Harry peels off some bills, sets them on one of the many altars. Notes syringes, needles and drug paraphernalia next to it.

ROSALINDA

You're from LA?

HARRY

That's right.

ROSALINDA

You're here to kill me.

HARRY

No, we're not.

ROSALINDA

You know the Book of Lamentations?

HARRY

Not so well anymore. Pat?

PAT

Sorry.

ROSALINDA

"How doth the city sit solitary, a widow ... Jerusalem hath most grievously sinned."

HARRY

I'm sure it hath. But I need a little information. About one of your girls. A long time ago.

ROSALINDA

Yeah ...

She fades to silence. Harry and Pat exchange a glance. It is becoming clear that Rosalinda is not quite all there. Perhaps stoned. Perhaps mad.

HARRY

Her name was Brenda. She was from Texas. Thin, long dark hair, had a skinful of hop most of the time ... That ring any bells?

ROSALINDA

No ... There were so many that...

She fades to silence again.

300044/MW/3

HARRY

You have any idea what happened to this girl?

ROSALINDA

No.

HARRY

You keep up with anyone from the old game?

ROSALINDA

No.

MEXICAN WOMAN

Mister. She don't know nothing about nothing. She sits here and listens to her radio. That's all.

HARRY

She bring anything with her? From LA?

MEXICAN WOMAN

Her old trunk.

HARRY

Where is it?

MEXICAN WOMAN

I will get it.

HARRY

Bring it out back.

She goes.

HARRY

(re: her face)

Who did that to you? Burned you?

ROSALINDA

Jack Dragna.

HARRY

The good old days ... Thank you for your time, ma'am.

He nods to Pat. They go.

EXT. MEXICAN BROTHEL - FRONT - LATE AFTERNOON

Harry and Pat emerge from the brothel. Jack goes to them. They meet up with Clay.

300//M/S

PAT
Scratch Rosalinda.

HARRY
Main event is back in LA. ... You guys stay here.

As they wait by the cars, Harry moves around to the rear of the building. He wants to search alone.

EXT. MEXICAN BROTHEL, REAR - HARRY - SUNSET (LATER)

Amid some garbage and an old icebox, Harry has been searching through Rosalinda's trunk. Right on the edge of the cliff, the ocean is spectacular beyond.

On the bottom, past the clothes and documents, Harry finds rotting photographs in an envelope. Family pictures and pornography.

Harry sorts through the photos...

Black and white. Garish. Lurid. Young women. Mostly posing alone. But also 1930s bondage, sex with anonymous men.

Time dissolve...

Harry flips through.

Then he stops.

He stares at one.

It is a teenage Ruth Ettis half naked, half in lingerie. She is trying to act sexy. The expression is fake on her young face.

Harry looks at the photo.

Then folds it up and puts it into his jacket. There are no more of her.

He lights a cigarette. Tosses the burning match into the trunk.

The trunk erupts in flames as Harry walks away.

EXT. MEXICAN ROAD - SUNSET

The two cars drive north away from the red light zone as the blazing sun sinks into the sea and we go to...

EXT. SONJA HENIE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Ice skates slicing across a frozen pond. Whoosh.

Falling snow. Christmas Carols. A winter wonderland.

Dreamland.

Sonja Henie's annual Christmas party is a triumph of special effects over nature. The night is LA sultry but industrial coolers and ice machines keep a pond frozen for skating in the backyard. Fake snow floats through the air. Some of the guests play along, dressing in warm sweaters and winter gear.

It is a surreal sight: graceful ice skating among the towering palms.

Harry and Ruth circulate. They try to appear normal, yet both are alert. Eyes always watching. Who is he? Which one is the blackmailer? The killer?

They see a lot of people they know...

Siegel is chatting with Cary Grant...

L.B. Mayer is ice skating with Margie, his too pretty secretary...

More movie stars ... Bette Davis ... Mickey Rooney ... Katharine Hepburn ... Clark Gable...

Seth McKinney, Ruth's old makeup man, is getting punch...

Clay and Jack, Harry's operatives, are blending, keeping an eye out...

Harry and Ruth wander past the ice rink. He senses her anxiety.

HARRY

You all right?

RUTH

I'll be fine.

Later...

Harry and Ruth are chatting with L.B. Mayer and Margie when movie tycoon JACK WARNER approaches:

MAYER

There he is, the guy who's going to wreck the industry, kill foreign sales anyway ... Hiya, Jack.

WARNER
L.B....

MAYER
Why you gotta make that movie? It's upsetting. Who wants to buy a ticket to get upset?

(to Harry and Ruth)
CONFESSTION OF A NAZI SPY Jack Warner's making! A movie about brown shirts in America.

WARNER
Hi Ruth. You believe this guy? ... You know what's happening in the world?

MAYER
How you gonna collect foreign sales out of Germany on a movie like that?

WARNER
I'm not. I closed all my theatres there. I ended the distribution deals. I don't want their goddamned money!

Harry and Ruth slip away. Mayer and Warner continue hotly:

MAYER
Twenty-one percent of our income comes from foreign sales. You think Italy, Spain or Norway and Sweden are gonna take that picture? It's bad for all of us.

WARNER
L.B., I'm making this picture and then guess what? I got four more anti-Nazi movies right behind it.

MAYER
Wake up, Jack ... Joe Breen and the censor board will never pass your picture.

WARNER
You wake up, Lou. Look around you. The world's on fire.

INT. SONJA HENIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Pat Croft is covering the inside of the house. He perches like a falcon, eyes scanning for prey. He is surprised to see Guy Enright, the hustler who tried to pick him up earlier.

PAT

Hey, atmosphere person, what're you doing here?

GUY

(indicates an older gentleman across the room)

Old movie director. Good for my career
... You did break my nose you know.

PAT

You learn something?

GUY

Watch out for tap dancers.

Guy goes to his older gentleman. Pat's attention is almost immediately drawn away because...

... Across the room, Judy Garland is getting emotional and a little loud with Ben Siegel, starting to make a scene...

JUDY

But why? I thought you liked me...!

SIEGEL

Come on, of course I like you. But you're a kid...

JUDY

(bawling)

You said I was chic...!

Harry and Ruth have entered, he immediately goes to defuse the situation:

HARRY

You okay, honey--?

JUDY

(in hysterics)

I don't want you to see me like--

HARRY

Take it easy ... Ruthie, help me out here?

RUTH

Come on, baby...

She pulls the sobbing Judy away, up the stairs.

300 ft/M

SIEGEL
Movie stars.

HARRY
Brother, you said a mouthful.

Pat Croft, meanwhile, is watching something else. Through the windows, Pat sees L.B. Mayer outside, talking closely with Seth McKinney, Ruth's old makeup man. What, Pat wonders, are they talking about so intently?

INT. SONJA HENIE'S HOUSE -- BATHROOM NIGHT

Ruth is drying Judy's eyes, cleaning her up.

They are alone in the master bathroom.

RUTH
... There, that's better. You are such a pretty girl.

JUDY
Yeah, who wants to be noticed ... You ever feel like that? That you have to have everyone looking at you or you'll die?

RUTH
Just the opposite. Most of the time I want to disappear ...
(looks through makeup drawers)
... Let's see what Sonja's got for us. You trust me with the war paint?

Judy smiles. Ruth puts fresh makeup on Judy as:

JUDY
Then why don't you?

RUTH
Why don't I what?

JUDY
Disappear.

RUTH
If it were only that easy ... The past keeps catching up.

JUDY
If I were you I would run away with Harry. Never make another movie. Get fat somewhere. Like Illinois.

RUTH
(smiles)
You think Harry would like that?

JUDY
He'd be crazy not to.

RUTH
(Judy purses her lips,
Ruth applies lipstick)
I don't think so. Take the tiger out of
the jungle and what is he? ...
(makeup is done)
... There, good as new. Want to go
back?

JUDY
Sure.

But Judy doesn't move. She's thinking about something.

RUTH
What is it, honey?

Judy looks at Ruth deeply, so old for her years.

JUDY
Let me tell you about Harry ... He's a
good man in a bad job doing bad things
... You can save him.

She kisses Ruth on the cheek and then goes.

Ruth remains in the bathroom, a bit floored.

EXT. SONJA HENIE'S HOUSE -- BACKYARD - NIGHT

Later...

Judy is ice skating with Clark Gable.

The party is almost over.

Harry stands with Ruth. She is deep in thought, about many
things.

HARRY
Maybe he got scared off.

RUTH
It's never going to be over.

HARRY
Don't say that...

300# M/S

RUTH
You don't know.

The depth of her emotion disturbs him. He leads her away.

EXT. SONJA HENIE'S STREET - NIGHT

A quiet street in the Holmby Hills neighborhood. Cars from the party are parked up and down the street. Some are pulling away.

Harry and Ruth go to his car, the top is down. He opens the door for her. She gets in. And then she jumps--

There is something in the driver's seat.

A canister of movie film and a note.

Harry looks around. But anyone could have left it at any time.

He is about to climb into the car when--

A big Cadillac four door pulls up across the street. Harry turns, his hand instinctively settling on his gun.

Ben Siegel peeks out the back window.

SIEGEL
Come on for a ride with me.

HARRY
What?

SIEGEL
Get in.

HARRY
I have to take Ruth home.

Siegel beckons to Harry. Harry crosses the street to him. Leans in.

SIEGEL
(whispers)
You wanted Johnny to find out a thing
... You ask the thing, the thing gets
done.

Harry returns to Ruth:

HARRY
You okay to drive? --
(she is)
-- Be there soon as I can.

He gets into the car with Siegel. The Cadillac roars off.

Ruth sits for a moment. Someone laughs down the street. It echoes. She turns. No one there. She begins to cry.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - NIGHT

We are a block away from the famed intersection of Hollywood and Vine. An inconspicuous row of shops and buildings. There is a movie theater with a glowing neon sign down the street.

The big sedan roars to the curb right in front of a barbershop.

Harry and Siegel file out quickly, marching purposefully into the barbershop building.

With them are Siegel's muscle: MICKEY COHEN and ~~PEEDE~~ SCANLON. They carry axe handles and tire chains.

INT. BARBERSHOP BUILDING - STAIRS - NIGHT

They hustle up the stairs. To the rooms above the barbershop.

Harry and Siegel lead from the front--

They burst through a doorway--

INT. BARBERSHOP BUILDING - OFFICES - NIGHT

Jack Dragna's suite of offices. Drab and unglamorous. Desks. Money counting machines. Safes. Stacks of bills. Horse race wires. Radios. Teletypes.

A poker game in progress. Jack Dragna is there. So is Frankie Rio. Three others.

They are caught completely by surprise--

Harry, Siegel and the guys entering swinging -- axe handles and tire chains slamming into arms, heads, legs in wide arcs -- tearing them to pieces--

Dragna tries to escape to another office -- but he is fat and slow -- Siegel pistol-whips him down--

Frankie Rio tries to pull a gun -- Harry cracks him across the face with the axe handle -- Frankie flies awkwardly across a desk--

Mickey Cohen pursues and continues beating Frankie mercilessly with a tire chain -- Siegel finally stops him.

The other guys are subdued.

Harry grabs Dragna and SLAMS him brutally against a wall--

HARRY

You're gonna blackmail my clients?! --
(SLAM)

You?!

(SLAM)

-- What do you got?

DRAGNA

(spits out blood)

Fuck you! -- Louis Mayer's two-bit
piece of ass--

SIEGEL

(interrupts)

Watch it, Jack! Tell the man what he
wants to know.

DRAGNA

Fuck you too!

Siegel turns -- pulls a pistol -- coldly shoots Frankie Rio in the head -- BANG -- blood and brains splatter

Harry doesn't blink an eye.

Dragna is stunned. The world just turned very real.

SIEGEL

Tell the man what he wants to know.

HARRY

What do you have?

DRAGNA

Film -- I got a film--

HARRY

What else?

DRAGNA

Nothing!

SIEGEL

What else?

DRAGNA

Nothing! -- And it ain't mine. It's
from a guy.

HARRY

What guy?

DRAGNA

This guy. Degenerate gambler into us
couple a grand. Got behind. Frankie was
leaning on him. He traded not to get
fucked-up. Said we could make a lot of
money off a movie star ... He got the,
you know, the thing they use to make
the pictures from.

HARRY

The negative?

DRAGNA

Yeah, yeah, he got the negative.

SIEGEL

So you were gonna extort movie stars?
You obsolete moron. You gonna kill the
geese that lay the golden eggs?! What
were you thinking?!

HARRY

Gimme the film ...

(Dragna starts to unlock a
desk, hesitates)

... Gimme the goddamn film!

300MM/MS

Dragna unlocks a desk. Removes a 16mm film can. Gives it to Harry.

HARRY

The guy's name. What is it?

DRAGNA

Kurt Graff.

SIEGEL

Where'd he get the film?

DRAGNA

I don't know.

HARRY

Did you watch it?

DRAGNA

No. I got no projector.

HARRY
Do you know who's in it?

DRAGNA
Yeah I know who's in it.

HARRY
You tell anybody?

DRAGNA
No.

HARRY
You tell anybody?!

Dragna suddenly understands. He looks at Harry. Smiles.

DRAGNA
You know what...? I get it...

SIEGEL
Watch it, Jack.

DRAGNA
(to Harry)
You fell for her, didn't you?
(laughs; to Siegel)
... He's in love with her or something
... How's that, huh? Look at him ...
(back to Harry)
... Well, she's not your little wife
Lily. She's a whore sucking any cock
that's got twenty bucks. A whore who
makes dirty movies--

Harry -- always cool, so in control -- blows.

Too fast to know what's happening, Harry grabs a heavy glass ashtray off the desk and SLAMS it across Dragna's face -- many bones break--

Dragna bounces, face first, against the wall, blood splatters-

As he's coming off the wall, Harry moves in--

SLAMS him with the heavy ashtray again--

Dragna's blood spills on Harry's shirt -- Harry hits him again--

Siegel lets it go on. His eyes coldly tally the assault like a cash register adding up indebtedness for the future.

Then Siegel pulls Harry off him.

SIEGEL
Harry ... Harry ...

Harry looks up at him. Blood trickling down his face. Eyes still lost.

SIEGEL
You should excuse yourself.

HARRY
What?

SIEGEL
You should excuse yourself. Now.

A beat.

Harry walks away. He does not turn back.

Siegel watches him.

We stay on Harry's face. Behind him we see Siegel turn to Dragna -- BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! -- fires three rounds into his head.

Harry has left the office...

INT. BARBERSHOP BUILDING - STAIRS - NIGHT

... He goes down the stairs.

Stops.

Gets his breath, collects himself. Notices there is blood on his shoe. Realizes it is dripping from his face. He cleans himself with a handkerchief from his breast pocket.

The weight of this transgression shadows his face. He crossed over the line. He knows it.

He finishes wiping the blood away. Realizes he cannot put the stained handkerchief back into his pocket. Tosses it away.

He continues down the stairs.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - ALMOST DAWN

It is almost dawn. The first hints of pale light are visible outside, glimmering on the waves.

Ruth sits on a sofa, tense and distant. Preparing herself emotionally.

A portable home movie projector has been set up, the 16 millimeter film from the blackmailer has been threaded and is ready to run. A portable movie screen has been set up across from them.

Harry has the note that was with the canister of film. He offers it to her. She shakes her head.

Harry opens the note and reads:

HARRY

"Dear Brenda ... \$50,000 for the negative. Eight o'clock. Tomorrow night. Selznick Lot. Stage 16."

He's going for the real money this time ... You have any idea why he wants to meet on the Selznick lot?

She shakes her head.

HARRY

And you don't know anyone named Kurt Graff?

She shakes her head.

A long beat.

HARRY

We don't have to watch this.

RUTH

I know what it is.

HARRY

Let's forget it then.

A long beat.

She flips the switch.

The projector hums.

Flickering light.

On the screen, a grainy old stag film. Silent. One camera set up. Harsh lighting. A bed on a stage. We see the curtains from the small stage of the club from before.

A girl enters the frame. She is thin. Has long, dark hair. Maybe all of 17. Brenda Gomey. Young Ruth Ettis.

She is listening to whomever is running the camera, following instructions. Her eyes are vacant. She's not stoned. She's empty.

Brenda climbs onto the bed and three men enter the frame. They start undressing. Brenda talks to whomever is running the camera. She listens and then begins to undress. She doesn't pretend to be amorous. She obeys. You know she doesn't want to be there.

Harry can't watch anymore.

He turns away, watches Ruth.

Ruth looks wounded. Can't stop watching. The flickering lights plays over her face:

RUTH
Rosalinda called them "circuses" ...
Orgies, lesbian shows, stags, smokers
... Poor Brenda...

We stay on Ruth's face.

Harry switches the projector off.

The harsh light from the projector is replaced by the soft light of dawn that is now beginning to fill the room.

RUTH
It's like ... Like I lost a sister.
Like I had a sister who died when she
was 17. In an accident or something ...
I see her again ... And I think about
all the things she dreamt about ...
what her life might have been.

Tears begin to fall down her cheeks, but she is not sobbing. The trauma is so deep.

Harry sits next to her. She folds into him.

HARRY
Did your husband know about the film?

RUTH
No ... But he knew everything else.

HARRY
... Ruth, why did you let him beat up
on you?

RUTH
What could I do?

HARRY
You could walk out the door ... Didn't
you know you could do that?

RUTH
No.

HARRY
You didn't?

A long beat.

She stands. Lost. Moves across the room. Lights a cigarette.
Trying to recapture her adult sense of "Ruth Ettis."

RUTH
Maybe Ruth Ettis could have walked out
the door ... Brenda? Where would she
go?

HARRY
It's all over.

RUTH
You think so?

HARRY
I know so.

He kisses her.

RUTH
... I ... I don't know where I am
anymore ...

He holds her very closely.

HARRY
Right here, baby ... Right here with
me.

EXT. BEACH - DAWN - MORNING

Harry and Ruth sit on the beach. He holds her, protecting
her.

The dawn is majestic.

Time dissolve...

Later...

They are still together. She is asleep in his arms. He is
still holding her. The tide is closer. She is safe.

He looks over the ocean. Seems to come to some irrevocable decision.

And we fade to...

INT. SUNSET INVESTIGATIONS OFFICE - DAY

Harry enters. He is preoccupied.

There are a few Christmas lights hanging around the office now.

It is December 10, 1938.

FRONT DESK SECRETARY

(hands him a stack of
messages)

Morning, Mr. Slidell. I have a lot of
calls here ... Mr. Warner and Mr.
Rosselli...

HARRY

Tell Pat I'm in.

He moves through the office. Ignoring the big bulletin boards of case updates and the greetings from other operatives.

He passes Buzz Hellerman's desk. Buzz is exhausted, surrounded by mountains of research:

BUZZ

I got nothing on Kurt Graff yet. Might be an alias or stage name. I'll keep at it.

Harry goes into his office.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Harry sits at his desk, aimlessly flips through his messages.

He stops. Looks at a framed picture on his desk. Young Harry with his father. His father wears an old LAPD uniform. Cop and son.

Harry gazes at the picture.

Then Pat enters, sits.

PAT

Top o' the morning.

He pulls a revolver wrapped in an oil-stained cloth from his coat, hands it to Harry.

HARRY
Where'd you get it?

PAT
Some spick gangster down San Pedro.
It's untraceable.

Harry carefully checks the gun. Opens the chamber. Loads the bullets. Pat watches.

PAT
What's the play?

HARRY
Meet me outside the Selznick lot.
Quarter to eight tonight.

PAT
You have the money?

HARRY
I will have it.

PAT
What about her?

HARRY
She's working.

A beat as Pat watches Harry load in the last bullet.

PAT
You really gonna do this?

Harry looks up at him.

Then snaps the chamber closed.

EXT. LA NOCTURNE - DAY/EVENING

A dreamy nocturne as day becomes evening in Los Angeles.

Streetlights come on along the long streets of the Beverly Hills flats ... commuters start clogging the main roads ... Sunset Boulevard is a parking lot ... the HOLLYWOODLAND sign glows orange in the sunset ... businesses are letting out, long lines for buses on Wilshire ... Christmas decorations twinkle with light ... the neon movie palace marquees flare to life...

The sun is sinking over the ocean...

INT. BEACH HOUSE - EVENING

The nocturne continues...

Harry and Ruth are having a quiet dinner.

A long beat.

RUTH

Should I get a Christmas tree?

HARRY

Look nice by the window.

A beat.

RUTH

Help me pick it out?

HARRY

You bet.

RUTH

This weekend.

HARRY

You bet.

A beat.

HARRY

What're you filming tonight?

RUTH

The Central Park set. Gene has some lines, he's wooing me, I ignore him ... I always ignore him until he dances.

HARRY

Want me to come by ... when I'm done?

RUTH

Don't want to talk in front of everyone ... Let's meet here later. Just the two of us. Okay?

A beat as they eat.

She sets down her fork.

RUTH

Thank you.

3004/MSC

HARRY

Sure.

RUTH

I love you.

HARRY

Me too, you know. Me too.

He rises and goes around the table to her.

Leans down and kisses her deeply.

INT./EXT. HARRY'S CAR - EVENING/NIGHT

The nocturne continues...

Harry drives alone through twilight LA to the Selznick lot. No freeways then. Pacific Coast Highway to Santa Monica to Culver City.

Parts of the city seem hauntingly deserted; Los Angeles in 1938, on the cusp of the modern metropolis.

INT./EXT. HARRY'S CAR - SELZNICK LOT - NIGHT

Harry slows as he nears the Selznick International lot on Washington Boulevard. He sees the glow of Kleig Lights from the Selznick backlot. Night shoot.

Pat is waiting outside the Selznick gates.

EXT. SELZNICK LOT - NIGHT

A troop of bedraggled Confederate soldiers march past. Extras.

Harry and Pat walk through the Selznick lot. It's surprisingly busy. Lots of technicians and extras about.

PAT

GONE WITH THE WIND.

HARRY

Hm?

PAT

GONE WITH THE WIND must be shooting tonight. Quite a trick considering they don't have a leading lady ... Guess it's second unit ... Did Ruth ever test for it?

HARRY
I never asked.

They continue through the lot, following the long row of mammoth soundstages toward number 16. They are leaving the action behind. Less and less people around now.

They reach the last soundstage.

It is number 12.

There is no number 16.

PAT
Where the hell is it? ... Stage 16,
right?

HARRY
That's what the note said.

Two Selznick technicians are walking past.

HARRY
Hey, where would I find Stage 16?

TECHNICIAN 1
There is no Stage 16.

TECHNICIAN 2
No, that's one of the old ones ... It's
a standing set now. On the backlot.

HARRY
Thanks, pal.

He and Pat move off.

EXT. BACKLOT -- STANDING SETS - NIGHT

This part of the sprawling Selznick backlot seems abandoned, in disrepair. Old standing sets, tilting and listing. Piles of rotting flats. Weeds.

Harry and Pat move past a decaying ARABIAN NIGHTS set. Fake Orient. Crumbling minarets and domes. It is eerie. Too many dark corners and strange angles.

All this is set to burn. From a distance it will look like Atlanta in flames.

The lights from the night shoot not too far away illuminate the sky.

They are surprised by a voice...

300MM/50

VOICE

Hi, Pat.

Guy Enright steps from the darkness. He is dressed and made up as a Southern planter gone to seed. An extra for GONE WITH THE WIND.

GUY

You gonna dance for me?

PAT

Jesus...

HARRY

You know him?!

PAT

Yeah. Works for Bess Francis.

GUY

Not tonight I don't. Tonight I work for David O. Selznick ... And for myself. Name's Guy Enright.

HARRY

I know all about you and Jack Dragna.

GUY

I'm in hock to the fat dago. Big noise. You brought the money?

HARRY

How's Bess into this?

GUY

She's not. This is entirely a Guy Enright Production. That's my professional name ... Got a smoke, Pat? ... Back in Abilene I was Kurt Graff.

HARRY

Abilene? ... You knew Ruth from home.

Pat lights a cigarette for Guy, hands it to him.

GUY

Correction, I knew Brenda. I never met Ruth.

HARRY

You were the boyfriend introduced her to Rosalinda Quinn.

800#//M3

GUY
That's right ... And so here we are.

HARRY
There is the small matter of someone putting a bullet into Peter Nielsen.

GUY
Not me ... It was probably Brenda. She was always a treacherous little cunt.

Harry goes very cold. He keeps it inside.

HARRY
Where's the film?

GUY
Let's see the money.

HARRY
Where's the negative?

GUY
(being clever)
Nearby.

Harry removes his hand from his coat. He holds the handgun Pat gave him earlier.

HARRY
Don't fuck with me.

Guy starts to panic.

GUY
Come on ... What is this?!

HARRY
The film?

GUY
There. Over there ... Behind that pillar.

Pat goes behind a decaying pillar, picks up a canister of film. Opens it. Unspools the film a bit, looks at a few frames. Nods to Harry.

A beat.

Then Harry raises the gun, aims at Guy's forehead. The hammer is cocked back.

Harry is close to doing it. Very close.

But doesn't.

Harry slowly advances on Guy. He is low and lethal, lowers the gun.

HARRY

You need to forget Brenda ... You need to forget Ruth ... You need to get out of town because you're never going to make it as an actor and you're getting too old to be a good hustler ... LA is done with you.

He stops right in front of Guy.

Guy is absolutely terrified.

Harry steps even closer.

HARRY

Your fat dago friend is dead because of you. So what do you think happens to you? ... They're not going to find his body because it's all chopped up by now and tuna bait off Catalina ... This is what happens to people who fuck with movie stars.

Thunk -- Guy jumps -- Harry has dropped an envelope at his feet.

Harry turns and goes. Pat follows.

Guy kneels and rips open the envelope -- bills fly out. The envelope is stuffed with money. He begins to hurriedly collect the ones that flew out and scattered around.

EXT. BACKLOT - NIGHT

Harry and Pat are heading through the backlot.

They are nearing where the filming is taking place. Enormous camera cranes, lighting rigs, multiple camera platforms, fire trucks. An army of filmmaking.

Harry is deep in thought.

PAT

I'm sorry I didn't tell you about him
... I had no idea...

HARRY

Talk about it later.

PAT
I'll tell you, though, I don't make him
for a killer.

They stop by a camera platform for a second as Harry lights a cigarette. Pat knows the Cameraman:

PAT
Hey, Sammy, what's going on tonight?

CAMERAMAN
Burning Atlanta once they finish
hookin' up the pyrotechnics.

PAT
GONE WITH THE WIND at last!

CAMERAMAN
(adjusting the camera)
Yeah. We're burning all these old sets
so we only got one chance to get it ...
All seven Technicolor cameras in town.
Selznick borrowed them from everybody.

PAT
So who's playing Scarlett??

CAMERAMAN
Stunt doubles tonight, buddy.

PAT
Good luck to ya, Sammy.

Harry and Pat continue on.

Sure enough, we now see that the area being prepped for
filming looks like the Atlanta Depot from GONE WITH THE WIND.
Big warehouses and railroad cars. All about to burn.

PAT
You wanna stay and watch?

HARRY
No...

He suddenly stops.

It is like he has been punched in the gut.

HARRY
(under his breath)
"All seven Technicolor cameras..."

PAT

What?

HARRY

Go home, Pat. I'll call you. Go home.

He races back the way they came.

Pat watches him go, mystified.

EXT. BACKLOT - STANDING SETS - NIGHT

Harry races to the old standing sets--

He slams through a phony door--

He sees--

Ruth. Standing. She turns her head, looks at him over her shoulder.

Guy Enright's face. Tears streaming.

He is kneeling.

Ruth is behind him. Holding a gun to the back of his head.

Harry stops.

He is gentle. Doesn't want to startle her into firing.

HARRY

Ruth ... Easy ... Take it easy ... This
isn't the way. I got the negative.

She looks at Harry.

BLAM!

She fires. The front of Guy's head flies off. Blood sprays.
He falls.

HARRY

JESUS CHRIST!

RUTH

You were supposed to kill him...

HARRY

Jesus Christ...

He moves to her:

HARRY
It was over -- he was gone!

Ruth rails at Harry about Guy...

RUTH
After all we went through -- in those rooms -- Well I made it and he didn't. Tough fucking luck, them's the breaks. Then he turns on me? Fuck him.
(to Guy's body)
Fuck you. You pitiful flop!

Harry grabs the gun. He steers her away from the body. He makes her look at him.

HARRY
From the minute you met me. You used me to track him down, didn't you...?
(pause)
And before that you killed your husband. Why? Did he hit you one time too many...? Did he start to go for the face?

She looks at him.

FOOSH!

The sounds of explosions. Incendiaries. A scorching wall of flame erupts. They're shooting.

Ruth looks at him. Her eyes are as open and available as they've ever been. They're lit by the warmth of the fire. Parts of the standing sets begin to collapse in flames. A massive conflagration. Harry stares at her.

HARRY
Get out of there. Go home. Don't talk to anyone. Don't stop.

She goes.

He picks up the gun, pockets it. Goes to the body. Pulls out Guy's wallet and the envelope of money. Pockets them.

He looks around. Sees an incendiary charge of oakum and propane near a high wall.

Harry drags Guy's body to the incendiary charge. The dead weight is awkward. He scoops up some of the oily oakum and covers Guy's face and hands with it. Then puts Guy's face right on top of the incendiary charge. Grisly work.

Harry quickly goes. Turns to see:

The incendiary charge goes off. Guy's head explodes. He is completely incinerated.

The flames shoot up the high wall.

A world of fire.

EXT. BACKLOT - DAY

The Burning of Atlanta.

The cameras film. A stunt double for Clark Gable leads a horse and wagon past the blaze. The huge Atlanta Depot warehouses -- actually the old soundstages and sets -- burn in the distance.

The whole sky glows red... Harry is walking to us, lit by the red fire. Even his eyes seem aflame.

Then the fire transforms into the sudden flare of a single match...

INT. MGM - MAYER'S OFFICE - DAY

... Harry lights a cigarette, shakes out the match.

MAYER

He was blackmailing her husband?

HARRY

Yeah ... This guy threatened to expose Nielsen as a junkie. He was there that night to get the payoff. Nielsen starting acting tough, had a gun. Things got out of hand ... Bang.

MAYER

And the guy?

HARRY

I put him on a train. He won't be back.

Mayer goes to the bar to pour a glass of orange juice.

MAYER

What these people won't do ...
(offers Harry some juice)
... You want some?

HARRY

No.

MAYER

Funny thing is, Ruthie's pictures aren't doing so well anymore. My geniuses over in marketing tell me people think she's old-fashioned ... Probably won't pick up her contract next year, then team Gene up with Judy.

HARRY

What does Ruth do then?

Mayer says nothing. Looks at Harry.

MAYER

You getting sentimental on me?

HARRY

Maybe.

MAYER

Too late for that.

Mayer walks to a large window. Gazes down at the lot. A glimpse behind the jovial mask.

MAYER

You know what I see down there, my friend? It's a river of money. And it flows through here every single day. Day in. Day out. And it flows wide and it flows deep ... Actors come and go, producers come and go, even studio heads come and go ... But the river of money goes on forever. It is incapable of weeping for those left behind.

He turns to Harry.

MAYER

MGM ... Paramount ... Warners ... U.S. Steel ... Ford ... General Electric ... Same river.

(pause)

Who are we to weep?

He goes to his desk and sits.

MAYER

Lana Turner's knocked up. I need someone to take her down to the clinic in Tijuana, nice and quiet. You take care of that for me? ... We still in business?

A beat.

We study Harry's face.

MAYER

We still in business, Harry?

HARRY

We're still in business.

MAYER

Great. She's over on 14 today. Why
don't you go by? Don't flirt with her,
though, she'll jump you.

HARRY

(rises)

Right.

MAYER

Did you hear -- he finally cast
Scarlett! Some British gal named Vivien
Leigh.

HARRY

Vivien who?

MAYER

Exactly! ... See you around, Harry
Slidell.

Harry goes.

EXT. MGM LOT - DAY

Harry walks through the lot. In his own world.

One of those long, straight roads between soundstages. Like
walking through a canyon.

Then he sees Ruth.

Walking toward him.

Closer and closer.

She stops.

Waits for him to reach her.

We watch Harry. He covered for her. He fixed everything.

He stops.

RUTH

So?

HARRY

You're safe. No one other than me ...
You gonna kill me too?

RUTH

Don't.

The look in her eyes says love, deep and abiding. She reaches for him.

HARRY

Stop it. You're not that good an actress.

RUTH

When can I see you? ... I want to see you again...

A beat.

Ice.

HARRY

You see me on the lot, baby? Keep walking.

He continues on.

RUTH

Please...

He keeps on walking.

RUTH

Please, Harry...

She stands there.

He leaves her behind.

Like she doesn't exist.

He continues on.

Pat Croft joins him. Falls into step. They walk together.

PAT

Vivien Leigh. I want to kill myself ...
A hundred famous stars in Hollywood and he casts an unknown.

(MORE)

PAT (cont'd)

Movies need movie stars. That's how you know they're movies and not real life.

Harry smiles. He's feeling a bit better. The swagger is coming back.

PAT

Listen, Louie's going nuts on the Cooper divorce.

HARRY

I'll take care of it ...

(Pat lights his cigarette)

The Paramount thing, what's it been, three months? Come on, life is short and he is too fucking rich...

Harry sees someone he knows off screen. He and Pat veer off:

HARRY

Hey, Annette, how come you didn't call me back? What are you, shy?

He and Pat walk out of the frame...

And we pull back...

We see the busy lot...

The river of money...

Dreamland...

We continue up...

Past the towering soundstages...

Past the giant palm trees...

To the perfect blue sky.

We hear the opening notes of "Over the Rainbow."

DW/M/008

The End.