

BARTON FINK

Screenplay

By

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FADE IN:

ON BARTON FINK

He is a bespectacled man in his thirties, hale but somewhat bookish. He stands, tuxedoed, in the wings of a theater, looking out at the stage, listening intently to end of a performance.

In the shadows behind him an old stagehand leans against a flat, expressionlessly smoking a cigarette, one hand on a thick rope that hangs from the ceiling.

The voices of the performing actors echo in from the offscreen stage:

ACTOR

I'm blowin' out of here, blowin' for good. I'm kissin' it all goodbye, these four stinkin' walls, the six flights up, the el that roars by at three A.M. like a castiron wind. Kiss 'em goodbye for me, Maury! I'll miss 'em - like hell I will!

ACTRESS

Dreaming again!

ACTOR

Not this time, Lil! I'm awake now, awake for the first time in years. Uncle Dave said it: Daylight is a dream if you've lived with your eyes closed. Well my eyes are open now! I see that choir, and I know they're dressed in rags! But we're part of that choir, both of us - yeah, and you, Maury, and Uncle Dave too!

MAURY

The sun's coming up, kid. They'll be hawking the fish down on Fulton Street.

ACTOR

Let 'em hawk. Let 'em sing their hearts out.

MAURY

That's it, kid. Take that ruined choir. Make it sing!

ACTOR

So long, Maury.

MAURY

So long.

We hear a door open and close, then approaching footsteps. A tall, dark actor in a used tweed suit and carrying a beat-up valise passes in front of Barton: From offscreen stage:

MAURY

We'll hear from that kid. And I don't mean a postcard.

The actor sets the valise down and then stands waiting in the shadows behind Barton.

An older man in work clothes - not wardrobe - passes in front of Barton from the other direction, pauses at the edge of the stage and cups his hands to his mouth.

OLDER MAN

FISH! FRESH FISH!

As the man walks back off the screen:

LILY

Let's spit on our hands and get to work. It's late, Maury.

MAURY

Not any more Lil...

Barton mouths the last line in sync with the offscreen actor:

MAURY

...It's early.

With this the stagehand behind Barton furiously pulls the

rope hand-over-hand and we hear thunderous applause and shouts of "Bravo!"

As the stagehand finishes bringing the curtain down, somewhat muting the applause, the backstage actor trots out of frame toward the stage.

The stagehand pulls on an adjacent rope, bringing the curtain back up and unmuting the applause.

Barton Fink seems dazed. He has been joined by two other men, both dressed in tuxedos, both beaming toward the stage.

BARTON'S POV

Looking across a tenement set at the backs of the cast as the curtain rises on the enthusiastic house. The actors take their bows and the cry of "Author, Author" goes up from the crowd.

The actors turn to smile at Barton in the wings.

BARTON

He hesitates, unable to take it all in.

He is gently nudged toward the stage by the two tuxedoed gentlemen.

As he exits toward the stage the applause is deafening.

TRACKING SHOT

Pushing a maitre 'd who looks back over his shoulder as he leads the way through the restaurant.

MAITRE 'D

Your table is ready, Monsieur Fink...
several members of your party have
already arrived...

REVERSE

Pulling Barton

FINK

Is Garland Stanford here?

MAITRE 'D

He called to say he'd be a few minutes
late... Ah, here we are...

TRACKING IN

Toward a large semi-circular booth. Three guests, two me and a woman in evening wear, are rising and beaming at Barton. A fat middle-aged man, one of the tuxedoed gentlemen we saw backstage, is moving out to let Barton slide in.

MAN

Barton, Barton, so glad you could make it. You know Richard St. Claire...

Barton nods and looks at the woman.

MAN

...and Poppy Carnahan. We're drinking champagne, dear boy, in honor of the occasion. Have you seen the Herald?

Barton looks sullenly at his champagne glass as the fat man fills it.

BARTON

Not yet.

MAN

Well, I don't want to embarrass you but Caven could hardly contain himself. But more important, Richard and Poppy here loved the play.

POPPY

Loved it! What power!

RICHARD

Yeah, it was a corker.

BARTON

Thanks, Richard, but I know for a fact the only fish you've ever seen were tacked to a the wall of the yacht club.

RICHARD

Ouch!

MAN

Bravo! Nevertheless, we were all devastated.

POPPY

Weeping! Copius tears! What did the Herald say?

MAN

I happen to have it with me.

BARTON

Please Derek -

POPPY

Do read it, do!

DEREK

"Bare Ruined Choirs: Triumph of the Common Man. The star of the Bare Ruined Choirs was not seen on the stage of the Belasco last night - though the thespians involved all acquitted themselves admirably. The find of the evening was the author of this drama about simple folk - fish mongers, in fact - whose brute struggle for existence cannot quite quell their longing for something higher. The playwright finds nobility in the most squalid corners and poetry in the most callused speech. A tough new voice in the American theater has arrived, and the owner of that voice is named... Barton Fink."

BARTON

They'll be wrapping fish in it in the morning so I guess it's not a total waste.

POPPY

Cynic!

DEREK

Well we can enjoy your success, Barton, even if you can't.

BARTON

Don't get me wrong - I'm glad it'll do well for you, Derek.

DEREK

Don't worry about me, dear boy - I want you to celebrate.

BARTON

All right, but I can't start listening to the critics, and I can't kid myself about my own work. A writer writes from his gut, and his gut tells him what's good and what's... merely adequate.

POPPY

Well I don't pretend to be a critic, but Lord, I have a gut, and it tells me it was simply marvelous.

RICHARD

And a charming gut it is.

POPPY

You dog!

RICHARD

(baying)

Aaa-woooooooooo!

Barton turns to look for the source of an insistent jingling. We swish pan off him to find a busboy marching through the restaurant displaying a page sign, bell attached, with Barton's name on it.

TRACKING IN TOWARD A BAR

A distinguished fifty-year-old gentleman in evening clothes is nursing a martini, watching Barton approach.

PULLING BARTON

As he draws near.

BARTON

I thought you were going to join us. Jesus, Garland, you left me alone with those people.

GARLAND

Don't panic, I'll join you in a minute. What's you think of Richard and Poppy?

Barton scowls

BARTON

The play was marvelous. She wept, copiously. Millions of dollars and no sense.

Garland smiles, then draws Barton close.

GARLAND

We have to talk a little business. I've just been on the phone to Los Angeles. Barton, Capitol Pictures wants to put you under contract. They've offered you a thousand dollars a week. I think I can get them to go as high as two.

BARTON

To do what?

GARLAND

What do you do for a living?

BARTON

I'm not sure anymore. I guess I try to make a difference.

GARLAND

Fair enough. No pressure here, Barton, because I respect you, but let me point out a couple of things. One, here you make a difference to five hundred fifty people a night - if the show sells out. Eighty five million people go to the pictures every week.

BARTON

To see pap.

GARLAND

Yes, generally, to see pap. However, point number two: A brief tenure in Hollywood could support you through the writing of any number of plays.

BARTON

I don't know, Garland; my place is here right now. I feel I'm on the brink of success-

GARLAND

I'd say you're already enjoying some.

Barton leans earnestly forward.

BARTON

No, Garland, don't you see? Not the kind of success where the critics fawn over you or the producers like Derek make a lot of money. No, a real success - the success we've been dreaming about - the creation of a new, living theater of, about, and for the common man! If I ran off to Hollywood now I'd be making money, going to parties, meeting the big shots, sure, but I'd be cutting myself off from the wellspring of that success, from the common man.

He leans back and chuckles ruefully.

BARTON

...I guess I'm sprouting off again. But I am certain of this, Garland: I'm capable of more good work. Maybe better work than I did in Choirs. It just doesn't seem to me that Los Angeles is the place to lead the life of mind.

GARLAND

Okay Barton, you're the artist, I'm just the ten percenter. You decide what you want and I'll make it happen. I'm only asking that your decision be informed by a little realism - if I can use that word and Hollywood in the same breath.

Barton glumly lights a cigarette and gazes out across the floor.

Garland studies him.

GARLAND

...Look, they love you, kid - everybody does. You see Caven's review in the Herald?

BARTON

No, what did it say?

GARLAND

Take my copy. You're the toast of Broadway and you have the opportunity to redeem that for a little cash - strike that, a lot of cash.

Garland looks at Barton for a reaction, but gets none.

GARLAND

...The common man'll still be here when you get back. What the hell, they might even have one or two of 'em out in Hollywood.

Absently:

BARTON

...That's a rationalization, Garland.

Garland smiles gently.

GARLAND

Barton, it was a joke.

We hear a distant rumble. It builds slowly and we cut to:

A GREAT WAVE

Crushing against the Pacific shore.

The roar of the surf slips away as we dissolve to:

HOTEL LOBBY

A high wide shot from the front door, looking down across wilting potted palms, brass cuspidors turning green, ratty wing chairs; the fading decor is deco-gone-to-seed.

Amber light, afternoon turning to evening, slopes in from behind us, washing the derelict lobby with golden highlights.

Barton Fink enters frame from beneath the camera and stops in the middle foreground to look across the lobby.

We are framed on his back, his coat and hat. The lobby is empty. There is a suspended beat as Barton takes it in.

Barton moves toward the front desk.

THE REVERSE

As Barton stops at the empty desk. He hits a small silver bell next to the register. Its ring-out goes on and on without losing volume.

After a long beat there is a dull scuffle of shoes on stairs. Barton, puzzled, looks around the empty lobby, then down at the floor behind the front desk.

A TRAP DOOR

It swings open and a young man in a faded maroon uniform, holding a shoebrush and a shoe - not one of his own - climbs up from the basement.

He closes the trap door, steps up to the desk and sticks his finger out to touch the small silver bell, finally muting it.

The lobby is now silent again.

CLERK

Welcome to the Hotel Earle. May I help you, sir?

BARTON

I'm checking in. Barton Fink.

The clerk flips through cards on the desk.

CLERK

F-I-N-K. Fink, Barton. That must be you, huh?

BARTON

Must be.

CLERK

Okay then, everything seems to be in order. Everything seems to be in order.

He is turning to a register around for Barton to sign.

CLERK

...Are you a tranz or a rez?

BARTON

Excuse me?

CLERK

Transient or resident?

BARTON

I don't know... I mean, I'll be here, uh, indefinitely.

CLERK

Rez. That'll be twenty-five fifty a week payable in advance. Checkout time is twelve sharp, only you can forget that on account you're a rez. If you need anything, anything at all, you dial zero on your personal in-room telephone and talk to me. My name is Chet.

BARTON

Well, I'm going to be working here, mostly at night; I'm a writer. Do you have room service?

CLERK

Kitchen closes at eight but I'm the night clerk. I can always ring out for sandwiches.

The clerk is scribbling something on the back of an index card.

CLERK

...Though we provide privacy for the residential guest, we are also a full service hotel including complimentary shoe shine. My name is Chet.

He pushes a room key across the counter on top of the index card.

Barton looks at the card.

On it: "CHET!" Barton looks back up at the clerk. They regard each other for a beat.

CLERK

...Okay

BARTON

Huh?

The clerk.

CLERK

Okey-dokey, go ahead.

BARTON

What -

CLERK

Don't you wanna go to your room?!

Barton stares at him.

BARTON

...What number is it?

The clerk stares back.

CLERK

...Six-oh-five. I forgot to tell
you.

As Barton stoops to pick up his two small bags:

CLERK

...Those your only bags?

BARTON

The others are being sent.

The clerk leans over the desk to call after him:

CLERK

I'll keep an eye out for them. I'll
keep my eyes peeled, Mr. Fink.

Barton is walking to the elevator.

ELEVATOR

Barton enters and sets down his bags.

An aged man with white stubble, wearing a greasy maroon
uniform, sits on a stool facing the call panel. He does not
acknowledge Barton's presence.

After a beat:

BARTON

...Six, please.

The elevator man gets slowly to his feet. As he pushes the
door closed:

ELEVATOR MAN

Next stop: Six.

SIXTH-FLOOR HALLWAY

Barton walks slowly toward us, examining the numbers on the doors.

The long, straight hallway is carpeted with an old stained forest green carpet. The wallpaper shows faded yellowing palm trees. Barton sticks his key in the lock of a door midway down the hall.

HIS ROOM

As Barton enters.

The room is small and cheaply furnished. There is a lumpy bed with a worn yellow coverlet, an old secretary table, and a wooden luggage stand.

As Barton crosses the room we follow to reveal a sink and wash basin, a house telephone on a rickety night stand, and a window with yellowing sheers looking on an air shaft.

Barton throws his valise onto the bed where it sinks, jittering. He shrugs off his jacket.

Pips of sweat stand out on Barton's brow. The room is hot.

He walks across the room, switches on an oscillating fan and struggles to throw open the window. After he strains at it for a moment, it slides open with a great wrenching sound.

Barton picks up his Underwood and places it on the secretary table. He gives the machine a casually affectionate pat.

Next to the typewriter are a few sheets of house stationary: "THE HOTEL EARLE: A DAY OR A LIFETIME."

We pan up to a picture in a cheap wooden frame on the wall above the desk. A bathing beauty sits on the beach under a cobalt blue sky. One hand shields her eyes from the sun as she looks out at a crashing surf.

The sound of the surf mixes up.

BARTON

Looking at the picture

TRACKING IN ON THE PICTURE

The surf mixes up louder. We hear a gull cry.

The sound snaps off with the ring of a telephone.

THE HOUSE PHONE

On the nightstand next to the bed. With a groan of bedsprings Barton sits into frame and picks up the telephone.

VOICE

How d'ya like your room!

BARTON

...Who is this?

VOICE

Chet!

BARTON

...Who?

VOICE

Chet! From downstairs!

Barton wearily rubs the bridge of his nose.

VOICE

...How d'ya like your room!

A PILLOW

As Barton's head drops down into frame against it.

He reaches over and turns off the bedside light.

He lies back and closes his eyes.

A long beat.

We hear a faint hum, growing louder.

Barton opens his eyes.

HIS POV

A naked, peeling ceiling. The hum - a mosquito, perhaps - stops.

BARTON

His eyes move this way and that. After a silent beat, he shuts them again.

After another silent beat, we hear - muffled, probably from an adjacent room - a brief, dying laugh. It is sighing and weary, like the end of a laughing fit, almost a sob.

Silence again.

We hear the rising mosquito hum.

FADE OUT

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Barton Fink is ushered into a large, light office by an obsequious middle-aged man in a sagging suit.

There are mosquito bites on Barton's face.

REVERSE

From behind a huge white desk, a burly man in an expensive suit gets to his feet and strides across the room.

MAN

Is that him?! Barton Fink?! Lemme put my arms around this guy!

He bear-hugs Barton.

MAN

...How the hell are ya? Good trip?

He separates without waiting for an answer.

MAN

My name is Jack Lipnik. I run this dump. You know that - you read the papers.

Lipnik is lumbering back to his desk.

MAN

Lou treating you all right? Got everything you need? What the hell's the matter with your face? What the hell's the matter with his face, Lou?

BARTON

It's not as bad as it looks; just a mosquito in my room -

LIPNIK

Place okay?

To Lou:

LIPNIK

...Where did we put him?

BARTON

I'm at the Earle.

LIPNIK

Never heard of it. Let's move him to the Grand, or the Wilshire, or hell, he can stay at my place.

BARTON

Thanks, but I wanted a place that was less...

LIPNIK

Less Hollywood? Sure, say it, it's not a dirty word. Sat whatever the hell you want. The writer is king here at Capitol Pictures. You don't believe me, take a look at your paycheck at the end of every week - that's what we think of the writer.

(to Lou)

...so what kind of pictures does he like?

LOU

Mr. Fink hasn't given a preference, Mr. Lipnik.

LIPNIK

How's about it, Bart?

BARTON

To be honest, I don't go to the pictures much, Mr. Lipnik -

LIPNIK

That's okay, that's okay, that's okay - that's just fine. You probably

just walked in here thinking that was going to be a handicap, thinking we wanted people who knew something about the medium, maybe even thinking there was all kind of technical mumbo-jumbo to learn. You were dead wrong. We're only interested in one thing: Can you tell a story, Bart? Can you make us laugh, can you make us cry, can you make us wanna break out in joyous song? Is that more than one thing? Okay. The point is, I run this dump and I don't know the technical mumbo-jumbo. Why do I run it? I've got horse-sense, goddamnit. Showmanship. And also, and I hope Lou told you this, I bigger and meaner than any other kike in this town. Did you tell him that, Lou? And I don't mean my dick's bigger than yours, it's not a sexual thing - although, you're the writer, you would know more about that. Coffee?

BARTON

...Yes, thank you.

LIPNIK

Lou.

Lou immediately rises and leaves. Lipnik's tone becomes confidential:

LIPNIK

...He used to have shares in the company. An ownership interest. Got bought out in the twenties - muscled out according to some. Hell, according to me. So we keep him around, he's got a family. Poor schmuck. He's sensitive, don't mention the old days. Oh hell, say whatever you want. Look, barring a preference, Bart, we're gonna put you to work on a wrestling picture. Wallace Beery. I say this because they tell me you know the poetry of the street. That would rule out westerns, pirate pictures, screwball, Bible, Roman...

He rises and starts pacing.

LIPNIK

But look, I'm not one of these guys thinks poetic has gotta be fruity. We're together on that, aren't we? I mean I'm from New York myself - well, Minsk if you wanna go way back, which we won't if you don't mind and I ain't askin'. Now people're gonna tell you, wrestling. Wallace Beery, it's a B picture. You tell them, bullshit. We don't make B pictures here at Capitol. Let's put a stop to that rumor right now.

Lou enters with coffee.

LIPNIK

...Thanks Lou. Join us. Join us. Talking about the Wallace Beery picture.

LOU

Excellent picture.

LIPNIK

We got a treatment on it yet?

LOU

No, not yet Jack. We just bought the story. Saturday Evening Post.

LIPNIK

Okay, the hell with the story. Wallace Beery is a wrestler. I wanna know his hopes, his dreams. Naturally, he'll have to get mixed up with a bad element. And a romantic interest. You know the drill. Romantic interest, or else a young kid. An orphan. What do you think, Lou? Wally a little too old for a romantic interest? Look at me, a writer in the room and I'm askin' Lou what the goddamn story should be!

After a robust laugh, he beams at Barton.

LIPNIK

...Well Bart, which is it? Orphan? Dame?

BARTON

...Both maybe?

There is a disappointed silence. Lipnik looks at Lou. Lou clears his throat.

LOU

...Maybe we should do a treatment.

LIPNIK

Ah, hell, let Bart take a crack at it. He'll get into the swing of things or I don't know writers. Let's make it a dame, Bart, keep it simple. We don't gotta tackle the world our first time out. The important thing is we all have that Barton Fink feeling, but since you're Barton Fink I'm assuming you have it in spades. Seriously Bart, I like you. We're off to a good start. Dammit, if all our writers were like you I wouldn't have to get so goddamn involved. I'd like to see something by the end of the week.

Lou is getting to his feet and signaling for Barton to do likewise.

LIPNIK

...Heard about your show, by the way. My man in New York saw it. Tells me it was pretty damn powerful. Pretty damn moving. A little fruity, he said, but I guess you know what you're doing. Thank you for your heart. We need more heart in pictures. We're all expecting great things.

TRACKING SHOT

We are in the sixth-floor hallway of the Earle, late at night. A pair of shoes sits before each door. Faintly, from one of the rooms, we can hear the clack. clack. clack. of a typewriter.

It grows louder as we track forward.

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT - TYPEWRITER

Close on the typing so that we see only each letter as it is typed, without context.

One by one the letters clack on: a-u-d-i-b-l-e. After a short beat, a period strikes.

BARTON

Elbows on his desk, he looks down at what he has just written. He rolls the paper up a few lines, looks some more.

THE PAGE

It says:

FADE IN:

A TENEMENT BUILDING

On Manhattan's Lower East Side. Early morning traffic is audible.

BARTON

After a beat he rolls the sheet back into place.

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT

The letter-strike area. It is lined up to the last period, which is struck over by a comma. The words "as is" are typed in and we cut back to -

BARTON

- as he continues typing. He stops after several more characters and looks.

Silence.

Breaking the silence, muffled laughter from an adjacent room. A man's laughter. It is weary, solitary, mirthless.

Barton looks up at the wall directly in front of him.

HIS POV

The picture of the girl on the beach.

BARTON

Staring, as the end-of-the-tether laughing continues. Barton

looks back down at his typewriter as if to resume work, but the sound is too insistent to ignore.

WIDE SHOT

The room, Barton sitting at his desk, staring at the wall.

The laughter.

Barton pushes his chair back, goes to the door, opens it and looks out.

HIS POV

The empty hallway, a pair of shoes before each door. At the end of the hall a dim red bulb burns over the door to the staircase, punctuating the sick yellow glow of the line of wall sconces.

The laughter, though still faint, is more resonant in the empty hall.

Perhaps its quality has changed, or perhaps simply because it is so insistent, the laughter now might be taken for weeping.

Barton pauses, trying to interpret the sound. He slowly withdraws into his room.

HIS ROOM

Barton looks down at his typewriter for a beat. The laughter/weeping continues.

He walks over to his bed, sits down and picks up the house phone.

BARTON

Hello... Chet? This is Barton Fink in room 605. Yes, there's uh, there's someone in the room next door to mine, 604, and he's uh... He's uh... making a lot of... noise.

After a beat:

BARTON

...Thank you.

He cradles the phone. The laughter continues for a moment or two, then abruptly stops with the muffled sound of the

telephone ringing next door.

Barton looks at the wall.

The muffled sound of a man talking.

The sound of the earpiece being pronged.

Muffled footsteps next door.

The sound of the neighbor's door opening and shutting.

Footsteps approaching the hall.

A hard, present knock at Barton's door.

Barton hesitates for a beat, then rises to go get the door.

ON THE DOOR

As Barton opens it. Standing in the hall is a large man - a very large man - in short sleeves, suspenders, and loosened tie. His face is slightly flushed, with the beginnings of sweat.

MAN

Did you... Somebody just complained...

Hastily:

BARTON

No, I didn't - I mean, I did call down, not to complain exactly, I was just concerned that you might - not that it's my business, but that you might be in some kind of... distress. You see, I was trying to work, and it's, well, it was difficult -

MAN

Yeah. I'm damn sorry, if I bothered you. The damn walls here, well, I just apologize like hell...

He sticks his hand out.

MAN

...My name's Charlie Meadows. I guess we're neighbors...

Without reaching for the hand.

BARTON

Barton Fink.

Unfazed, Charlie Meadows unpockets a flask.

CHARLIE

Neighbor, I'd feel better about the damned inconvenience if you'd let me buy you a drink.

BARTON

That's all right, really, thank you.

CHARLIE

All right, hell, you trying to work and me carrying on in there. Look, the liquor's good, wuddya say?

As he enters:

CHARLIE

... You got a glass? It's the least I can do.

BARTON

Okay... a quick one, sure...

He gets two glasses from the wash basin. Charlie sits down on the edge of the bed and uncorks his flask.

CHARLIE

Yeah, just a nip. I feel like hell, all the carryings-on next door.

BARTON

That's okay, I assure you. It's just that I was trying to work -

CHARLIE

What kind of work do you do, Barton, if you don't mind my asking?

BARTON

Well, I'm a writer, actually.

CHARLIE

You don't say. That's a tough racket. My hat's off to anyone who can make a go of it. Damned interesting work, I'd imagine.

BARTON

Can be. Not easy, but -

CHARLIE

Damned difficult, I'd imagine.

As he hands Charlie a glass:

BARTON

And what's your line, Mr. Meadows?

CHARLIE

Hell no! Call me Charlie. Well Barton, you might say I sell peace of mind. Insurance is my game - door-to-door, human contact, still the only way to move merchandise.

He fills a glass with whiskey and swaps it for the empty glass.

CHARLIE

...In spite of what you might think from tonight, I'm pretty good at it.

BARTON

Doesn't surprise me at all.

CHARLIE

Hell yes. Because I believe in it. Fire, theft, and casualty are not things that only happen to other people - that's what I tell 'em. Writing doesn't work out, you might want to look into it. Providing for basic human need - a fella could do worse.

BARTON

Thanks, I'll keep it in mind.

CHARLIE

What kind of scribbler are you - newspaperman did you say?

BARTON

No, I'm actually writing for the pictures now -

CHARLIE

Pictures! Jesus!

He guffaws.

CHARLIE

...I'm sorry, brother, I was just sitting here thinking I was talking to some ambitious youngster, eager to make good. Hell, you've got it made! Writing for pictures! Beating out that competition! And me being patronizing!

He gestures toward his face:

CHARLIE

...Is the egg showing or what?!

BARTON

That's okay; actually I am just starting out in the movies - though I was pretty well established in New York, some renown there,

CHARLIE

Oh, it's an exciting time then. I'm not the best-read mug on the planet, so I guess it's no surprise I didn't recognize your name. Jesus, I feel like a heel.

For the first time Barton smiles.

BARTON

That's okay, Charlie. I'm a playwright. My shows've only played New York. Last one got a hell of a write-up in the Herald. I guess that's why they wanted me here.

CHARLIE

Hell, why not? Everyone wants quality. What kind of venue, that is to say, thematically, uh...

BARTON

What do I write about?

Charlie laughs.

CHARLIE

Caught me trying to be fancy! Yeah, that's it, Bart.

BARTON

Well, that's a good question. Strange as it may seem, Charlie, I guess I write about people like you. The average working stiff. The common man.

CHARLIE

Well ain't that a kick in the head!

BARTON

Yeah, I guess it is. But in a way, that's exactly the point. There's a few people in New York - hopefully our numbers are growing - who feel we have an opportunity now to forge something real out of everyday experience, create a theater for the masses that's based on a few simple truths - not on some shopworn abstractions about drama that doesn't hold true today, if they ever did...

He gazes at Charlie.

BARTON

...I don't guess this means much to you.

CHARLIE

Hell, I could tell you some stories-

BARTON

And that's the point, that we all have stories. The hopes and dreams of the common man are as noble as those of any king. It's the stuff of life - why shouldn't it be the stuff of theater? Goddamnit, why should that be a hard pill to swallow? Don't call it new theater, Charlie; call it real theater. Call it our theater.

CHARLIE

I can see you feel pretty strongly about it.

BARTON

Well, I don't mean to get up on my high horse, but why shouldn't we look at ourselves up there? Who cares about the Fifth Earl of Bastrop and Lady Higginbottom and - and - and who killed Nigel Grinch-Gibbons?

CHARLIE

I can feel my butt getting sore already.

BARTON

Exactly, Charlie! You understand what I'm saying - a lot more than some of these literary types. Because you're a real man!

CHARLIE

And I could tell you some stories -

BARTON

Sure you could! And yet many writers do everything in their power to insulate themselves from the common man - from where they live, from where they trade, from where they fight and love and converse and - and - and... so naturally their work suffers, and regresses into empty formalism and - well, I'm spouting off again, but to put it in your language, the theater becomes as phony as a three dollar bill.

CHARLIE

Yeah, I guess that's tragedy right there.

BARTON

Frequently played, seldom remarked.

Charlie laughs.

CHARLIE

Whatever that means.

Barton smiles with him.

BARTON

You're all right, Charlie. I'm glad you stopped by. I'm sorry if - well

I know I sometimes run on.

CHARLIE

Hell no! Jesus, I'm the kind of guy, I'll let you know if I'm bored. I find it all pretty damned interesting. I'm the kind schmoe who's generally interested in the other guy's point of view.

BARTON

Well, we've got something in common then.

Charlie is getting to his feet and walking to the door.

CHARLIE

Well Christ, if there's any way I can contribute, or help, or whatever-

Barton chuckles and extends his hand.

BARTON

Sure, sure Charlie, you can help by just being yourself.

CHARLIE

Well, I can tell you some stories -

He pumps Barton's hand, then turns and pauses in the doorway.

CHARLIE

...And look, I'm sorry as hell about the interruption. Too much revelry late at night, you forget there are other people in the world.

BARTON

See you, Charlie.

Charlie closes the door and is gone.

Barton goes back to his desk and sits.

Muffled, we can hear the door of the adjacent room opening and closing.

Barton looks at the wall.

HIS POV

The bathing beauty.

From offscreen we hear a sticky, adhesive-giving-way sound.

BARTON

He looks around to the opposite -
bed - wall.

HIS POV

The wallpaper is lightly sheened with moisture from the heat.

One swath of wallpaper is just finishing sagging away from the wall. About three feet of the wall, where it meets the ceiling, is exposed.

The strip of wallpaper, its glue apparently melted, sags and nods above the bed. It glistens yellow, like a fleshy tropical flower.

BACK TO BARTON

He goes over to the bed and steps up onto it. He smooths the wallpaper back up against the wall.

He looks at his hand.

HIS HAND

Sticky with tacky yellow wall sweat.

He wipes it onto his shirt.

We hear a faint mosquito hum.

Barton looks around.

FADE OUT

A TYPEWRITER Whirring at high speed. The keys strike too quickly for us to make out the words.

SLOW TRACK IN

On Barton, sitting on a couch in an office anteroom, staring blankly. Distant phones ring. Barton's eyes are tired and bloodshot.

HIS POV

A gargoyle secretary sits typing a document.

The office door opens in the background and a short middle-aged man in a dark suit emerges.

To his secretary:

EXECUTIVE

I'm eating on the lot today -

He notices Barton.

EXECUTIVE

...Who's he?

The secretary looks over from her typing to consult a slip of paper on her desk.

SECRETARY

Barton Fink, Mr. Geisler.

GEISLER

More please.

BARTON

I'm a writer, Mr. Geisler. Ted Okum said I should drop by morning to see you about the -

GEISLER

Ever act?

BARTON

...Huh? No, I'm -

GEISLER

We need Indians for a Norman Steele western.

BARTON

I'm a writer. Ted O -

GEISLER

Think about it, Fink. Writers come and go; we always need Indians.

BARTON

I'm a writer. Ted Okum said you're producing this Wallace Beery picture I'm working on.

GEISLER

What!?! Ted Okum doesn't know shit. They've assigned me enough pictures for a goddamn year. What Ted Okum doesn't know you could almost squeeze into the Hollywood Bowl.

BARTON

Then who should I talk to?

Geisler gives a hostile stare. Without looking at her, he addresses the secretary:

GEISLER

Get me Lou Breeze.

He perches on the edge of the desk, an open hand out toward the secretary, as he glares wordlessly at Barton.

After a moment:

SECRETARY

Is he in for Mr. Geisler?

She puts the phone in Geisler's hand.

GEISLER

Lou? How's Lipnik's ass smell this morning?... Yeah?... Yeah?... Okay, the reason I'm calling, I got a writer here, Fink, all screwy. Says I'm producing that Wallace Beery wrestling picture - what'm I, the goddamn janitor around here?... Yeah, well who'd you get that from?... Yeah, well tell Lipnik he can kiss my dimpled ass... Shit! No, alright... No, no, all right.

Without looking he reaches the phone back. The secretary takes it and cradles it.

GEISLER

...Okay kid, let's chow.

COMMISSARY

Barton and Geisler sit eating in a semicircular booth. Geisler speaks through a mouthful of food:

GEISLER

Don't worry about it. It's just a B

picture. I bring it in on budget,
they'll book it without even screening
it. Life is too short.

BARTON

But Lipnik said he wanted to look at
the script, see something by the end
of the week.

GEISLER

Sure he did. And he forgot about it
before your ass left his sofa.

BARTON

Okay. I'm just having trouble getting
started. It's funny, I'm blocked up.
I feel like I need some kind of
indication of... what's expected -

GEISLER

Wallace Beery. Wrestling picture.
What do you need, a road map?

Geisler chews on his cottage cheese and stares at Barton.

GEISLER

...Look, you're confused? You need
guidance? Talk to another writer.

BARTON

Who?

Geisler rises and throws his napkin onto his plate.

GEISLER

Jesus, throw a rock in here, you'll
hit one. And do me a favor, Fink:
Throw it hard.

COMMISSARY MEN'S ROOM

Barton stands at a urinal.

He stares at the wall in front of him as he pees. After a
moment, he cocks his head, listening.

We hear a throat clearing, as if by a tenor preparing for a
difficult passage. It is followed by the gurgling ruck of
vomit.

Barton buttons his pants and turns to face the stalls.

There is more businesslike throat clearing.

Barton stoops.

HIS POV

We boom down to show the blue serge pants and well-polished shoes of the stall's kneeling occupant.

A white handkerchief has been spread on the floor to protect the trouser knees.

The toilet flushes. The man rises, picks up his handkerchief up off the floor and gives it a smart flap.

BARTON

He quickly straightens and goes to the sink. He starts washing his hands. We hear the stall door being unlatched.

Barton glances over his shoulder.

HIS POV

The stall door opening.

BARTON

Quickly, self-consciously, he looks back down at his hands.

HIS POV

His hands writhing under the running water. We hear footsteps approaching.

BARTON

Forcing himself to look at his hands. We hear the man reach the adjacent sink and turn on the tap.

Barton can't help glancing up.

THE MAN

A dapper little man in a neat blue serge suit. He has warm brown eyes, a patrician nose, and a salt-and-pepper mustache. He smiles pleasantly at Barton.

BARTON

He gives a nervous smile - more like a tic - and looks back down at his hands. We hear the man gargling water and spitting into the sink.

After a moment, Barton looks up again.

THE MAN

Reacting to Barton's look as he washes his hands. This time, a curt nod accompanies his pleasant smile.

BARTON

Looks back down, then up again.

THE MAN

Extends a dripping hand.

MAN

Bill Mayhew. Sorry about the odor.

His speech is softly accented, from the South.

BARTON

Barton Fink.

They shake, then return to their ablutions.

We hold on Barton as we hear Mayhew's faucet being turned off and his foot-steps receding. For some reason, Barton's eyes are widening.

BARTON

...Jesus. W.P.!

The dapper little man stops and turns.

MAYHEW

I beg your pardon?

BARTON

W.P. Mayhew? The writer?

MAYHEW

Just Bill, please.

Barton stands with his back to the sink, facing the little man, his hands dripping onto the floor. There is a short pause. Barton is strangely agitated, his voice halting but urgent.

BARTON

Bill!...

Mayhew cocks his head with a politely patient smile. Finally Barton brings out:

BARTON

...You're the finest novelist of our time.

Mayhew leans against a stall.

MAYHEW

Why thank you, son, how kind. Bein' occupied here in the worship of Mammon, I haven't had the chance yet to see your play -

He smiles at Barton's surprise.

MAYHEW

...Yes, Mistuh Fink, some of the news reaches us in Hollywood.

He is taking out a flask and unscrewing its lid.

BARTON

Sir, I'm flattered that you even recognize my name. My God, I had no idea you were in Hollywood.

MAYHEW

All of us undomesticated writers eventually make their way out here to the Great Salt Lick. Mebbe that's why I allus have such a powerful thrust.

He clears his throat, takes a swig from the flask, and waves it at Barton.

MAYHEW

...A little social lubricant, Mistuh Fink?

BARTON

It's still a little early for me.

MAYHEW

So be it.

He knocks back some more.

BARTON

...Bill, if I'm imposing you should say so, I know you're very busy - I just, uh... I just wonder if I could ask you a favor... That is to say, uh... have you ever written a wrestling picture?

Mayhew eyes him appraisingly, and at length clears his throat.

MAYHEW

...You are drippin', suh.

Barton looks down at his hands, then pulls a rough brown paper towel from a dispenser.

Mayhew sighs:

MAYHEW

...Mistuh Fink, they have not invented a genre of picture that Bill Mayhew has not, at one time or othuh, been invited to essay. I have taken my stabs at the wrastlin' form, as I have stabbed at so many others, and with as little success. I gather that you are a fresh-man here, eager for an upperclassman's council. However, just at the moment...

He waves his flask.

MAYHEW

...I have drinkin' to do. Why don't you stop at my bungalow, which is numbah fifteen, later on this afternoon...

He turns to leave.

MAYHEW

...and we will discuss wrastlin' scenarios and other things lit'rary.

THE NUMBER "15"

We are close on brass numerals tacked up on a white door.

Muted, from inside, we hear Mayhew's voice - enraged, bellowing. We hear things breaking. Softer, we hear a woman's voice, its tone placating.

REVERSE TRACKING SLOWLY IN

On Barton, standing in front of the door.

The noise abates for a moment. We hear the woman's voice again.

Barton hesitates, listening; he thinks, decides, knocks.

With this the woman's voice stops, and Mayhew starts wailing again.

The door cracks open.

The woman looks as if she has been crying.

WOMAN

...Can I help you?

BARTON

I'm sorry, I... My name is Fink...
Uh, Bill asked me to drop by this
afternoon. Is he in?

WOMAN

Mr. Mayhew is indisposed at the
moment-

From inside, we hear Mayhew's wail.

MAYHEW

HONEY!! WHERE'S M'HONEY!!

The woman glances uncomfortably over her shoulder and steps outside, closing the door behind her.

WOMAN

Mr. Fink, I'm Audrey Taylor, Mr.
Mayhew's personal secretary. I know
this all must sound horrid. I really
do apologize...

Through the door Mayhew is still wailing piteously.

BARTON

Is, uh... Is he okay?

AUDREY

He will be... When he can't write,
he drinks.

MAYHEW

WHERE ARE YOU, DAMMIT! WHERE'S
M'HONEY!!

She brushes a wisp of hair out of her eyes.

AUDREY

I am sorry, it's so embarrassing.

BARTON

How about you? Will you be alright?

AUDREY

I'll be fine... Are you a writer, Mr
Fink?

BARTON

Yes I am. I'm working on a wres -
please call me Barton.

Audrey reaches out and touches Barton's hand.

AUDREY

I'll tell Bill you dropped by. I'm
sure he'll want to reschedule your
appointment.

BARTON

Perhaps you and I could get together
at some point also. -I'm sorry if
that sounds abrupt. I just... I don't
know anyone here in this town.

Audrey smiles at him.

AUDREY

Perhaps the three of us, Mr. Fink.

BARTON

Please, Barton.

AUDREY

Barton. You see, Barton, I'm not
just Bill's secretary - Bill and I
are... I love. We-

MAYHEW'S VOICE

M'HONEY!! WHERE'S M'HONEY!!

Audrey glances back as we hear the sound of shattering dishes and heavy footsteps.

BARTON

I see.

AUDREY

...I know this must look... funny.

BARTON

No, no -

Hurriedly:

AUDREY

We need each other. We give each other... the things we need -

VOICE

M'HONEY!!... bastard-ass sons of bitches... the water's lappin' up...
M'HONEY!!

AUDREY

I'm sorry, Mr. Fink. Please don't judge us. Please...

Flustered, she backs away and closes the door.

CLOSE ON A SMALL WRAPPED PACKAGE

Hand-printed on the package is the message:

"Hope these will turn the trick, Mr. Fink. - Chet!"

The wrapping is torn away and the small box is opened.

Two thumbtacks are taken out.

BARTON'S HOTEL ROOM

Late at night. The swath of wallpaper behind the bed has sagged away from the wall again, and has been joined by the swath next to it.

Barton enters frame and steps up onto the bed.

He smooths up the first swath and pushes in a thumbtack near the top.

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT

On the tack. As Barton applies pressure to push it in, tacky yellow goo oozes out of the puncture hole and beads around the tack.

ON BARTON

Smoothing up the second swath.

As he pushes in the second tack he pauses, listening.

Muffled, through the wall, we can hear a woman moaning.

After a motionless beat, Barton eases his ear against the wall.

CLOSE ON BARTON

As his ear meets the wall.

The woman's moaning continues. We hear the creaking of bedsprings and her partner, incongruously giggling.

Barton grimaces, gets down off the bed and crosses to the secretary, where he sits. He stares at the paper in the carriage.

HIS POV

The blank part of the page around the key-strike area, under the metal prongs that hold the paper down.

We begin to hear moaning again.

BACK TO BARTON

Still looking; sweating.

HIS POV

Tracking in on the paper, losing the prongs from frame so that we are looking at the pure unblemished white of the page.

The moaning is cut short by two sharp knocks.

THE DOOR

As it swings open. Charlie Meadows leans in, smiling.

CHARLIE

Howdy, neighbor.

BARTON

Charlie. How are you.

CHARLIE

Jesus, I hope I'm not interrupting you again. I heard you walking around in here. Figured I'd drop by.

BARTON

Yeah, come in Charlie. Hadn't really gotten started yet - what happened to your ear?

- for Charlie's left ear is plugged with cotton wadding. As he enters:

CHARLIE

Oh, yeah. An ear infection, chronic thing. Goes away for a while, but it always comes back. Gotta put cotton in it to staunch the flow of pus. Don't worry, it's not contagious.

BARTON

Seen a doctor?

Charlie gives a dismissive wave.

CHARLIE

Ah, doctors. What's he gonna tell me? Can't trade my head in for a new one.

BARTON

No, I guess you're stuck with the one you've got. Have a seat.

Charlie perches on the corner of the bed.

CHARLIE

Thanks, I'd invite you over to my place, but it's a goddamn mess. You married, Bart?

BARTON

Nope.

CHARLIE

I myself have yet to be lassoed.

He takes his flask out.

CHARLIE

...Got a sweetheart?

BARTON

No... I guess it's something about my work. I get so worked up over it, I don't know; I don't really have a lot of attention left over, so it would be a little unfair...

CHARLIE

Yeah, the ladies do ask for attention. In my experience, they pretend to give it, but it's generally a smoke-screen for demanding it back - with interest. How about family, Bart? How're you fixed in that department?

Barton smiles.

BARTON

My folks live in Brooklyn, with my uncle.

CHARLIE

Mine have passed on. It's just the three of us now...

He taps himself on the head, chuckling.

CHARLIE

...What's the expression - me myself and I.

BARTON

Sure, that's tough, but in a sense, we're all alone in this world aren't we Charlie? I'm often surrounded by family and friends, but...

He shrugs.

CHARLIE

Mm... You're no stranger to loneliness, then. I guess I got no beef; especially where the dames are

concerned. In my line of work I get opportunities galore - always on the wing, you know what I'm saying. I could tell stories to curl your hair - but it looks like you've already heard 'em!

He laughs at his reference to Barton's curly hair, and pulls a dog-eared photograph from his wallet. As he hands it to Barton:

CHARLIE

...That's me in Kansas City, plying my trade.

THE PHOTO

Charlie smiles and waves with one foot up on the running board of a 1939 roadster. A battered leather briefcase dangles from one hand.

CHARLIE

...It was taken by one of my policy holders. They're more than just customers to me, Barton. They really appreciate what I have to offer them. Ya see, her hubby was out of town at the time -

BARTON

You know, in a way, I envy you Charlie. Your daily routine - you know what's expected. You know the drill. My job is to plumb the depths, so to speak, dredge something up from inside, something honest. There's no road map for that territory...

He looks from Charlie to the Underwood.

BARTON

...and exploring it can be painful. The kind of pain most people don't know anything about.

He looks back at Charlie.

BARTON

...This must be boring you.

CHARLIE

Not at all. It's damned interesting.

BARTON

Yeah...

He gives a sad chuckle.

BARTON

...Probably sounds a little grand coming from someone who's writing a wrestling picture for Wallace Beery.

CHARLIE

Beery! You got no beef there! He's good. Hell of an actor - though, for my money, you can't beat Jack Oakie. A stitch, Oakie. Funny stuff, funny stuff. But don't get me wrong - Beery, a wrestling picture, that could be a pip. Wrestled some myself back in school. I guess you know the basic moves.

BARTON

Nope, never watched any. I'm not that interested in the act itself -

CHARLIE

Okay, but hell, you should know what it is. I can show you in about thirty seconds.

He is getting down on his hands and knees.

CHARLIE

...You're a little out of your weight class, but just for purposes of demonstration -

BARTON

That's all right, really -

CHARLIE

Not a bit of it, compadre! Easiest thing in the world! You just get down on your knees to my left, slap your right hand here...

He indicated his own right bicep.

CHARLIE

...and your left hand here.

He indicated his left bicep.

Barton hesitates.

CHARLIE

...You can do it, champ!

Barton complies.

CHARLIE

...All right now, when I say "Ready... wrestle!" you try and pin me, and I try and pin you. That's the whole game. Got it?

BARTON

...Yeah, okay.

CHARLIE

Ready... wrestle!

With one clean move Charlie flips Barton onto his back, his head and shoulders hitting with a thump. Charlie pins Barton's shoulders with his own upper body.

But before the move even seems completed Charlie is standing again, offering his hand down to Barton.

CHARLIE

Damn, there I go again. We're gonna wake the downstairs neighbors. I didn't hurt ya, did I?

Barton seems dazed, but not put out.

BARTON

It's okay, it's okay.

CHARLIE

Well, that's all that wrestling is. Except usually there's more grunting and squirming before the pin. Well, it's your first time. And you're out of your weight class.

Barton has propped himself up and is painfully massaging the back of his head. This registers on Charlie.

CHARLIE

...Jesus, I did hurt you!

He clomps hurriedly away.

CHARLIE

...I'm just a big, clumsy lug. I
sure do apologize.

We hear water running, and Charlie reenters with a wet towel.

Barton accepts the towel and presses it to his head.

CHARLIE

...You sure you're okay?

Barton gets to his feet.

BARTON

I'm fine, Charlie. Really I am.
Actually, it's been helpful, but I
guess I should get back to work.

Charlie looks at him with some concern, then turns and heads
for the door.

CHARLIE

Well, it wasn't fair of me to do
that. I'm pretty well endowed
physically.

He opens the door.

CHARLIE

...Don't feel bad, though. I wouldn't
be much of a match for you at mental
gymnastics. Gimme a holler if you
need anything.

The door closes.

Barton crosses to the secretary and sits down, rubbing the
back of his head. He rolls up the carriage and looks at the
page in the typewriter.

HIS POV

The page.

FADE IN:

A TENEMENT BUILDING

On Manhattan's Lower East Side. Early morning traffic is audible, as is the cry fishmongers.

BACK TO BARTON

He rubs the back of his head, wincing, as he stares at the page.

His gaze drifts up.

HIS POV

The bathing beauty.

BARTON

Looking at the picture. He presses the heels of his hands against his ears.

HIS POV

The bathing beauty. Faint, but building, is the sound of the surf.

BARTON

Head cocked. The surf is mixing into another liquid sound. Barton looks sharply around.

THE BATHROOM

Barton enters.

The sink, which Charlie apparently left running when he wet Barton's towel, is overflowing. Water spills onto the tile floor.

Barton hurriedly shuts off the tap, rolls up one sleeve and reaches into the sink.

As his hand emerges, holding something, we hear the unclogged sink gulp water.

BARTON'S HAND

Holding a dripping wad of cotton.

BARTON

After a brief, puzzled look he realizes where the cotton

came from - and convulsively flips it away.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

ON THE TITLE PAGE OF A BOOK:

"NEBUCHADNEZZAR

BY

W.P. Mayhew"

A hand enters with pen to inscribe: "To Barton -

May this little entertainment divert you in your sojourn
among the Philistines. - Bill"

The book is closed and picked up.

WIDER

As-thoomp!-the heavy volume is deposited across the table,
in front of Barton, by Mayhew.

Barton, Mayhew, and Audrey are seated around a picnic table.
It is one of a few tables littering the lot of a small stucco
open-air hamburger stand.

It is peaceful early evening. The last of the sunlight slopes
down through palm trees. Barton, Mayhew, and Audrey are the
only customers at the stand.

Mayhew's black Ford stands alone at the edge of the lot.

Mayhew leans back in his chair.

MAYHEW

If I close m'eyes I can almost smell
the live oak.

AUDREY

That's hamburger grease, Bill.

MAYHEW

Well, m'olfactory's turnin' womanish
on me - lyin' and deceitful...

His eyes still closed, he waves a limp hand gently in the
breeze.

MAYHEW

...Still, I must say. I haven't felt peace like this since the grand productive days. Don't you find it so, Barton? Ain't writin' peace?

BARTON

Well... actually, no Bill...

Barton looks nervously at Audrey before continuing.

BARTON

...No, I've always found that writing comes from a great inner pain. Maybe it's a pain that comes from a realization that one must do something for one's fellow man - to help somehow to ease his suffering. Maybe it's a personal pain. At any rate, I don't believe good work is possible without it.

MAYHEW

Mmm. Wal, me, I just enjoy maikn' things up. Yessir. Escape... It's when I can't write, can't escape m'self, that I want to tear m'head off and run screamin' down the street with m'balls in a fruitpickers pail. Mm...

He sighs and reaches for a bottle of Wild Turkey.

MAYHEW

...This'll sometimes help.

AUDREY

That doesn't help anything, Bill.

BARTON

That's true, Bill. I've never found it to help my writing.

Mayhew is becoming testy:

MAYHEW

Your writing? Son, have you ever heard the story of Soloman's mammy-

Audrey, anticipating, jumps hastily in. She taps the book on the table.

AUDREY

You should read this, Barton. I think it's Bill's finest, or among his finest anyway.

Mayhew looks at her narrowly.

MAYHEW

So now I'm s'posed to roll over like an ol' bitch dog gettin' ger belly scratched.

AUDREY

Bill -

BARTON

Look, maybe it's none of my business, but a man with your talent - don't you think your first obligation would be to your gift? Shouldn't you be doing whatever you have to do to work again?

MAYHEW

And what would that be, son?

BARTON

I don't know exactly. But I do know what you're doing with that drink. You're cutting yourself off from your gift, and from me and Audrey, and from your fellow man, and from everything your art is about.

MAYHEW

No son, thisahere moonshine's got nothin' to do with shuttin' folks out. No, I'm usin' it to build somethin'.

BARTON

What's that?

MAYHEW

I'm buildin' a levee. Gulp by gulp, brick by brick. Raisin' up a levee to keep that ragin' river of manure from lappin' at m'door.

AUDREY

Maybe you better too, Barton. Before

you get buried under his manure.

Mayhew chuckles.

MAYHEW

M'honey pretends to be impatient with me, Barton, but she'll put up with anything.

AUDREY

Not anything, Bill. Don't test me.

BARTON

You're lucky she puts up with as much as she does.

Mayhew is getting to his feet.

MAYHEW

Am I? Maybe to a schoolboy's eye. People who know about the human heart, though, mebbe they'd say, Bill over here, he gives his honey love, and she pays him back with pity - the basest coin there is.

AUDREY

Stop it, Bill!

He wanders over to a corner of the lot between two palm trees, still clutching his bottle, his back to Barton and Audrey, and urinates into the grass.

He is singing - loudly - "Old Black Joe."

Audrey walks over to him.

BARTON

Watching her go.

HIS POV

Audrey touches Mayhew's elbow. He looks at her, stops singing, she murmurs something, and he bellows:

MAYHEW

The truth, m'honey, is a tart that does not bear scrutiny.

She touches him again, murmuring, and he lashes out at her,

knocking her to the ground.

MAYHEW

Breach my levee at your peril!

BARTON

He rises.

AUDREY

Coming back to Barton.

MAYHEW

Stumbling off down the dusty road, muttering to himself and waving his bottle of Wild Turkey.

AUDREY

Let him go.

BARTON

That son of a bitch... Don't get me wrong, he's a fine writer.

He looks down the road. Mayhew is a small lone figure, weaving in the dust.

MAYHEW

I'll jus' walk on down to the Pacific, and from there I'll... improvise.

BARTON

Are you all right?

We hear distant bellowing:

MAYHEW

Silent upon a hill in Darien!

Audrey bursts into tears. Barton puts his arms around her and she leans into him.

BARTON

Audrey, you can't put up with this.

Gradually, she collects herself, wiping her tears.

AUDREY

...Oh Barton, I feel so... sorry for him!

BARTON

What?! He's a son of a bitch!

AUDREY

No, sometimes he just... well, he thinks about Estelle. His wife still lives in Fayetteville. She's... disturbed.

BARTON

Really?...

He considers this for a moment, but his anger returns.

BARTON

...Well that doesn't excuse his behavior.

AUDREY

He'll wander back when he's sober and apologize. He always does.

BARTON

Okay, but that doesn't excuse his -

AUDREY

Barton. Empathy requires... understanding.

BARTON

What. What don't I understand?

Audrey gazes at him.

MAYHEW

He is very distant now, weaving but somehow dignified in his light summer suit. "Old Black Joe" floats back to us in the twilight.

FADE OUT

BARTON'S HOTEL ROOM

From a high angle, booming down on Barton.

The room is dark. Barton lies fully clothed, stretched out on the bed, asleep. The hum of the mosquito fades up in the stillness.

Suddenly Barton slaps his cheek. His eyes open, but he remains still. The hum fades up again. Barton reaches over and turns on the bedside lamp. His eyes shift this way and that as he waits, listening.

The hum fades down to silence.

Barton's eyes shift.

HIS POV

The typewriter sits on the secretary, a piece of paper rolled halfway through the carriage.

THE TYPEWRITER

Barton enters frame and sits down in front of the typewriter.

HIS POV

Next to the typewriter are several crumpled pieces of paper. The page in the carriage reads:

FADE IN:

A TENEMENT HOTEL

On the Lower East Side. We can faintly hear the cry of the fishmongers. It is too early for us to hear traffic; later, perhaps, we will.

BACK TO BARTON

Looking down at the page.

CLOSE ON BARTON'S FEET

Swinging in the legwell.

One foot idly swings over to nudge a pair of nicely shined shoes from where they rest, under the secretary, into the legwell.

We hear typing start.

THE PAGE

A new paragraph being started: "A large man..."

BARTON'S FEET

As he slides them into the shoes.

THE PAGE

"A large man in tights..."

The typing stops.

BARTON

Looking quizzically at the page. What's wrong?

HIS FEET

Sliding back and forth - swimming - in his shoes, which are several sizes too large.

We hear a knock at the door.

BARTON

He rises and answers the door.

Charlie stands smiling in the doorway, holding a pair of nicely shined shoes.

CHARLIE

I hope these are your shoes.

BARTON

Hi, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Because that would mean they gave you mine.

BARTON

Yeah, as a matter of fact they did.
Come on in.

The two stocking-footed men go into the room and Barton reaches under the secretary for Charlie's shoes.

CHARLIE

Jesus, what a day I've had. Ever had one of those days?

BARTON

Seems like nothing but, lately.

Charlie perches on the edge of the bed.

CHARLIE

Jesus, what a day. Felt like I couldn't've sold ice water in the Sahara. Jesus. Okay, so you don't want insurance, so okay, that's your loss. But God, people can be rude. Feel like I have to talk to a normal person like just to restore a little of my...

BARTON

Well, my pleasure. I could use a little lift myself.

CHARLIE

A little lift, yeah...

Smiling, he takes out his flask.

CHARLIE

...Good thing they bottle it, huh pal?

He takes a glass from the bedstand and, as he pours Barton a shot:

CHARLIE

...Did I say rude? People can be goddamn cruel. Especially some of their housewives. Okay, so I've got a weight problem. That's my cross to bear. I dunno...

BARTON

Well it's... it's a defense mechanism.

CHARLIE

Defense against what? Insurance? Something they need? Something they should be thanking me for offering? A little peace of mind?...

He shakes his head.

CHARLIE

...Finally decided to knock off early, take your advice. Went to see a doctor about this.

He indicates his ear, still stuffed with cotton.

CHARLIE

...He told me it was an ear infection. Ten dollars, please. I said, hell, I told YOU my ear was infected. Why don't YOU give ME ten dollars? Well, THAT led to an argument...

He gives a rueful chuckle.

CHARLIE

...Listen to me belly-achin'. As if my problems amounted to a hill of beans. How goes the life of the mind?

BARTON

Well, it's been better. I can't seem to get going on this thing. That one idea, the one that lets you get started - I still haven't gotten it. Maybe I only had one idea in me - my play. Maybe once that was done, I was done being a writer. Christ, I feel like a fraud, sitting here staring at this paper.

CHARLIE

Those two love-birds next door drivin' you nuts?

Barton looks at him curiously.

BARTON

How did you know about that?

CHARLIE

Know about it? I can practically see how they're doin' it. Brother, I wish I had a piece of that.

BARTON

Yeah, but -

CHARLIE

Seems like I hear everything that goes on in this dump. Pipes or somethin'. I'm just glad I don't have to ply MY trade in the wee-wee hours.

He laughs.

CHARLIE

...Ah, you'll lick this picture business, believe me. You've got a head on your shoulders. What is it they say? Where there's a head, there's a hope?

BARTON

Where there's life there's hope.

Charlie laughs.

CHARLIE

That proves you really are a writer!

Barton smiles.

BARTON

And there's hope for you too, Charlie. Tomorrow I bet you sell a half-dozen policies.

CHARLIE

Thanks, brother. But the fact is, I gotta pull up stakes temporarily.

BARTON

You're leaving?

CHARLIE

In a few days. Out to your stompin' grounds as a matter of fact - New York City. Things have gotten all balled up at the Head Office.

BARTON

I'm truly sorry to hear that, Charlie. I'll miss you.

CHARLIE

Well hell, buddy, don't pull a long face! This is still home for me - I keep my room, and I'll be back sooner or later...

Barton rises and walks over to his writing table.

CHARLIE

...And - mark my words - by the time I get back you're picture'll be

finished. I know it.

Barton scribbles on a notepad and turns to hand it to Charlie.

BARTON

New York can be pretty cruel to strangers, Charlie. If you need a home-cooked meal you just look up Morris and Lillian Fink. They live on Fulton Street with my uncle Dave.

We hear a tacky, tearing sound.

Barton looks toward the door.

Charlie rises and walks over to the stand next to where Barton sits.

The two staring men form an odd, motionless tableau - the slight, bespectacled man seated; the big man standing in a hunch with his hands on his thighs; their heads close together.

THEIR POV

A swath of wallpaper in the entryway has pulled away from the wall. It sags and nods.

CHARLIE

(off)
Christ!

THE TWO MEN

Frozen, looking.

CHARLIE

...Your room does that too?

BARTON

I guess the heat's sweating off the wallpaper.

CHARLIE

What a dump...

He heads for the door and Barton follows.

CHARLIE

...I guess it seems pathetic to a guy like you.

BARTON

Well...

CHARLIE

Well it's pathetic, isn't it? I mean to a guy from New York.

BARTON

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

This kind of heat. It's pathetic.

BARTON

Well, I guess you pick your poison.

CHARLIE

So they say.

BARTON

Don't pick up and leave without saying goodbye.

CHARLIE

Course not, compadre. You'll see me again.

Barton closes the door.

He goes back to the desk, sits, and stares at the typewriter. After a beat he tips back in his chair and looks up at the ceiling.

We hear a loud thump.

HIS POV

The ceiling - a white, seamless space.

As we track in the thumping continues - slowly, rhythmically, progressively louder - the effect, it seems, of odd doings upstairs.

LOOKING DOWN ON BARTON

From a high angle, tipped back in his chair, staring at the ceiling.

We track slowly down toward him. The thumping continues, growing louder, sharper.

HIS POV

Moving in on the ceiling. We close in on an unblemished area and cease to have any sense of movement.

With a blur something huge and dark sweeps across the frame to land with a deafening crash, and an instant later it is gone, having left a huge black "T" stamped into the white ceiling.

We are pulling back from the white, past the metal prongs of the key-strike area on a typewriter. More letters appear rapid-fire, growing smaller as the pull back continues. The thumping becomes the clacking of the typewriter.

BEN GEISLER

Is emerging from his office. As he enters the secretary stops typing, glances down at a slip of paper, and murmurs tonelessly, without looking up:

SECRETARY

Barton Fink.

GEISLER

Yeah. Fink. Come in.

The clack of the typewriter resumes as Barton rises.

GEISLER'S OFFICE

The two men enter.

This office is considerably smaller than Lipnik's, done in grays and black. There are pictures on the wall of Geisler with various celebrities.

Geisler sits behind his desk.

GEISLER

Wuddya got for me - what the hell happened to your face?

BARTON

Nothing. It's just a mosquito bite.

GEISLER

Like hell it is; there are no mosquitos in Los Angeles. Mosquitos breed in swamps - this is a desert

town. Wuddya got for me?

BARTON

Well I...

GEISLER

On the Beery picture! Where are we?
Wuddya got?

BARTON

Well, to tell you the truth, I'm
having some trouble getting started-

GEISLER

Getting STARTED! Christ Jesus!
Started?! You mean you don't have
ANYthing?!

BARTON

Well not much.

Geisler leaps to his feet and paces.

GEISLER

What do you think this is? HAMLET?
GONE WITH THE WIND? RUGGLES OF RED
GAP? It's a goddamn B picture! Big
men in tights! You know the drill!

BARTON

I'm afraid I don't really understand
that genre. maybe that's the prob-

GEISLER

Understand shit! I though you were
gonna consult another writer on this!

BARTON

Well, I've talked to Bill Mayhew-

GEISLER

Bill Mayhew! Some help! The guy's a
souse!

BARTON

He's a great writer -

GEISLER

A souse!

BARTON

You don't understand. He's in pain,
because he can't write-

GEISLER

Souse! Souse! He manages to write
his name on the back of his paycheck
every week!

BARTON

But... I thought no one cared about
this picture.

GEISLER

You thought! Where'd you get THAT
from? You thought! I don't know
what the hell you said to Lipnik,
but the sonofabitch LIKES you! You
understand that, Fink? He LIKES you!
He's taken an interest. NEVER make
Lipnik like you. NEVER!

Some puzzlement shows through Barton's weariness.

BARTON

I don't understand-

GEISLER

Are you deaf, he LIKES you! He's
taken an interest! What the hell did
you say to him?

BARTON

I didn't say anything-

GEISLER

Well he's taken an interest! That
means he'll make your life hell,
which I could care less about, but
since I drew the short straw to
supervise this turkey, he's gonna be
all over me too! Fat-assed sonofabitch
called me yesterday to ask how it's
going - don't worry, I covered for
you. Told him you were making progress
and we were all very excited. I told
him it was great, so now MY ass is
on the line. He wants you to tell
him all about it tomorrow.

BARTON

I can't write anything by tomorrow.

GEISLER

Who said write? Jesus, Jack can't read. You gotta TELL it to him-tell him SOMETHing for Chrissake.

BARTON

Well what do I tell him?

Geisler rubs a temple, studies Barton for a beat, then picks up a telephone.

GEISLER

Projection...

As he waits, Geisler gives Barton a withering stare. It continues throughout the phone conversation.

GEISLER

... Jerry? Ben Geisler here. Any of the screening rooms free this afternoon?... Good, book it for me. A writer named Fink is gonna come in and you're gonna show him wrestling pictures... I don't give a shit which ones! WRESTLING pictures! Wait a minute- isn't Victor Sjoderberg shooting one now?... Show him some of the dailies on that.

He slams down the phone.

GEISLER

...This ought to give you some ideas.

He jots an address on a piece of paper and hands it to Barton.

GEISLER

...Eight-fifteen tomorrow morning at Lipnik's house. Ideas. Broad strokes. Don't cross me, Fink.

SCREEN

Black-and-white footage. A middle-aged man with a clapstick enters and shouts:

CLAPPER

DEVIL ON THE CANVAS, twelve baker take one.

Clap! The clapper withdraws. The angle is on a corner of the ring, where an old corner man stands behind his charge, a huge man in tights who is a little too flabby to be a real athlete. His hair is plastered against his bullet skull and he has a small mustache.

VOICE

Action.

The wrestler rises from his stool and heads toward center ring and the camera. He affects a German accent:

WRESTLER

I will destroy him!

He passes the camera.

VOICE

Cut.

Flash frames.

The clapper enters again.

CLAPPER

Twelve baker take two.

Clap! He exits.

The wrestler moves toward the camera.

WRESTLER

I will destroy him!

VOICE

Cut.

The clapper enters

CLAPPER

Twelve baker take three.

Clap!

WRESTLER

I will destroy him!

SLOW TRACK IN ON BARTON

Seated alone in a dark screening room, the shaft of the projection beam flickering over his left shoulder.

As we creep in closer:

WRESTLER

(off)

I will destroy him!... I will destroy
him!... I will destroy him!... I
will destroy him!...

Another off-microphone, distant voice from the screen:

VOICE

Okay, take five...

THE SCREEN

A jerky pan, interrupted by flash frames. The wrestler is
standing in a corner joking with a makeup girl who pats down
his face as he smokes a cigarette.

A cut in the film and another clapstick enters.

CLAPPER

Twelve charlie take one-

ON THE CLAP:

BACK TO BARTON

Staring at the screen, dull, wan, and forlorn.

VOICE

(off)

Action.

THE SCREEN

The angle is low - canvas level. We hold for a brief moment
on the empty canvas before two wrestlers crash down into
frame.

The German is underneath, on his back, pinned by the other
man.

The referee enters, cropped at the knees, and throws counting
fingers down into frame.

REFEREE

One... two...

WRESTLER

AAAAHHHH!!

The German bucks and throws his opponent out of frame.

VOICE

Cut.

CLAPPER

Twelve charlie take two.

Crash.

REFEREE

One... two...

WRESTLER

AAAAHHHH!!

BARTON

Glazed.

WRESTLER

(off)

AAAAAAHHHHHH!!... AAAAAHHHHHH!!...

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHH!!...

PAGE IN TYPEWRITER

The screaming drops out abruptly at cut. We hear only the sound of heavy footfalls on carpet.

Below the opening paragraph, two new words have been added to the typescript:

"Orphan?"

"Dame?"

The foot falls continue.

THE HOTEL ROOM

Night. Barton paces frantically back and forth.

He looks at his watch.

HIS POV

It is 12:30.

CLOSE ON THE PHONE

It is lifted out of the cradle.

BARTON

Hello, Chet, it's Barton Fink in
605. Can you try a number for me in
Hollywood... Slausen 6-4304.

We pull back to frame in Barton as we hear his call ring
through. Barton sweats.

BARTON

Pick it up... Pick it up. Pick it-

AUDREY

Hello.

BARTON

Audrey, listen, I need help. I know
it's late and I shouldn't be calling
you like this - believe me I wouldn't
have if I could see any other
alternative, but I - I'm sorry -
listen, how are you - I'm sorry. You
doing okay?

AUDREY

...Who is this?

BARTON

Barton. I'm sorry, it's Barton Fink.

Through the phone, in the background, we hear Mayhew's drunken
bellowing.

MAYHEW

Sons of bitches! Drown 'em all!

We hear various objects dropping or being thrown to the floor.

AUDREY

Barton, I'm afraid it's not a good
time-

MAYHEW

Drown all those rascals...

BARTON

I'm sorry, I just feel like -I know
I shouldn't ask, I just need some

kind of help, I just, I have a
deadline tomorrow-

MAYHEW

I said drown 'em all! Who is that?

There is more clatter.

Audrey's voice is hushed, close to the phone:

AUDREY

All right Barton, I'll see if I can
slip away-

MAYHEW

Who is that?! Gaddamn voices come
into the house... sons of bitches...

BARTON

If you could, I'd -

AUDREY

If I can. He gets jealous; he-

MAYHEW

Goddamn voices... DROWN 'EM!

BARTON

I need help, Audrey.

AUDREY

I'll try to slip out. If he quiets
down, passes out... I'm afraid he
thinks - well, he said you were a
buffoon, Barton. He becomes
irrational-

MAYHEW

Hesh up! Be still now! DROWN 'EM!
DROWN 'EM! DROWN -

WIDE ON THE ROOM

Later. It is quiet. We are craning down toward the bed, where
Barton lies stretched out, his head buried beneath a pillow
as if to blot out the world.

The track reveals the wristwatch on Barton's dangled arm:
1:30.

THE HALLWAY

At the end of the dimly lit corridor a red light blinks on over the elevator, with a faint bell.

BACK TO BARTON

With two violent and simultaneous motions he whips the pillow off his head and throws out his other wrist to look at his watch.

There is a knock at the door.

Barton swings his feet off the bed.

THE DOORWAY

Barton opens the door to Audrey.

AUDREY

Hello, Barton.

BARTON

Audrey, thank you for coming. Thank you. I'm sorry to be such a... such a... Thank you.

They enter the main room, where Audrey perches on the edge of the bed.

AUDREY

Now that's all right, Barton. Everything'll be all right.

BARTON

Yes. Thank you. How's Bill?

AUDREY

Oh, he's... he drifted off. He'll sleep for a while now. What is it you have to do, exactly?

Barton paces.

BARTON

Well I have to come up with - an outline, I'd guess you call it. The story. The whole goddamn story. Soup to nuts. Three acts. The whole goddamn-

AUDREY

It's alright, Barton. You don't have

to write actual scenes?

BARTON

No, but the whole goddamn - Audrey? Have you ever had to read any of Bill's wrestling scenarios?

Audrey laughs.

AUDREY

Yes, I'm afraid I have.

BARTON

What are they like? What are they about?

AUDREY

Well, usually, they're... simply morality tales. There's a good wrestler, and a bad wrestler whom he confronts at the end. In between, the good wrestler has a love interest or a child he has to protect. Bill would usually make the good wrestler a backwoods type, or a convict. And sometimes, instead of a waif, he'd have the wrestler protecting an idiot manchild. The studio always hated that. Oh, some of the scripts were so... spirited!

She laughs - then stops, realizing that she has laughed. She looks at Barton.

AUDREY

...Barton.

She shakes her head.

AUDREY

...Look, it's really just a formula. You don't have to type your soul into it. We'll invent some names and a new setting. I'll help you and it won't take any time at all. I did it for Bill so many times -

Barton's pacing comes up short.

BARTON

Did what for Bill?

Guardedly:

AUDREY

Well... THIS.

BARTON

You wrote his scripts for him?

AUDREY

Well, the basic ideas were frequently his-

BARTON

You wrote Bill's scripts! Jesus Christ, you wrote his - what about before that?

AUDREY

Before what?

BARTON

Before Bill came to Hollywood.

Audrey is clearly reluctant to travel this path.

AUDREY

Well, Bill was ALWAYS the author, so to speak-

BARTON

What do you mean so to speak?! Audrey, how long have you been his... secretary?

AUDREY

Barton, I think we should concentrate on OUR little project-

BARTON

I want to know how many of Bill's books you wrote!

AUDREY

Barton!

BARTON

I want to know!

AUDREY

Barton, honestly, only the last couple-

BARTON

Hah!

AUDREY

And my input was mostly... EDITORIAL,
really, when he'd been drinking-

BARTON

I'll bet. Jesus - "The grand
productive days." What a goddamn
phony.

He resumes pacing.

BARTON

...W.P. Mayhew. William Goddamn
Phony Mayhew. All his guff about
escape. Hah! I'LL say he escaped!

Barton sighs and looks at his watch.

BARTON

...Well, we don't have much time.

He sits down next to Audrey. Audrey's tone is gentle.

AUDREY

It'll be fine... Don't judge him,
Barton. Don't condescend to him...

She strokes Barton's hair.

AUDREY

...It's not as simple as you think.
I helped Bill most by appreciating
him, by understanding him. We all
need understanding, Barton. Even
you, tonight, it's all you really
need...

She kisses him.

As Barton tentatively responds, we are panning away.

We frame up on the door to the bathroom and track in toward
the sink. We can hear the creak of bedsprings and Audrey and
Barton's breath, becoming labored.

The continuing track brings us up to and over the lid of the
sink to frame up its drain, a perfect black circle in the

porcelain white. We track up to the drain and are enveloped by it as the sound of lovemaking mixes into the groaning of pipes.

BLACK

FADE IN:

BARTON

The hum of a mosquito brings us out of the black and we are looking down at Barton, in bed, asleep. It is dawn.

Barton's eyes snap open.

HIS POV

The white ceiling. A humming black speck flits across the white.

BARTON

Slowly, cautiously, he props himself up, his look following the sound of the mosquito.

His gaze travels down and to one side and is arrested as the hum stops.

HIS POV

Audrey lies facing away on her side of the bed, half covered by a blanket.

BARTON

Gingerly, he reaches over and draws the blanket down Audrey's back.

HIS POV

The alabaster white of Audrey's back.

The mosquito is feeding on it.

EXTREME CLOSE ON BARTON'S EYES

Looking.

EXTREME CLOSE ON THE MOSQUITO

Swelling with blood.

WIDER

As Barton's hand comes through frame and slaps Audrey's back.

She doesn't react.

Barton draws his hand away. Audrey's back is smeared with blood.

ON BARTON

He looks at his hand.

HIS POV

His hand is dripping with blood. Too much blood.

BACK TO BARTON

Eyes wide, he looks down at the bed.

HIS POV

Blood seeps up into the sheet beneath the curve of Audrey's back.

BARTON

He pulls Audrey's shoulder.

AUDREY

She rolls onto her back. Her eyes are wide and lifeless.

Her stomach is nothing but blood. The top sheet, drawn to her waist is drenched red and clings to her body.

BARTON

He screams.

He screams again.

We hear rapid and heavy footfalls next door, a door opening and closing, and then a loud banging on Barton's door.

Barton's head spins towards the door. He is momentarily frozen.

Another knock.

Barton leaps to his feet and hurries to the door.

THE DOORWAY

Over Barton's shoulder as he cracks the door.

Charlie stands in the hall in his boxer shorts and a sleeveless tee.

CHARLIE

Are you all right?

Barton stares dumbly for a moment.

CHARLIE

...Can I come in?

BARTON

No!... I'm fine. Thank you.

CHARLIE

Are you sure -

BARTON

No... no...

Barton is nodding as he shuts the door in Charlie's face.

He walks back into the room.

HIS POV

Audrey's corpse, in long shot, face up on the bed.

BARTON

He walks toward the bed, wheels before he reaches it, and starts back toward the door.

He stops short and turns back again to the room. He averts his eyes - as it happens, toward the secretary.

He walks stiffly over and sits, his back to Audrey.

CLOSE ON BARTON

As he sits in. He stares emptily down at the desk, in shock, totally shut down. Behind him, we can see Audrey on the bed.

He stares for a long beat.

Strange, involuntary noises come from his throat. He is not in control.

Becoming aware of the noise he is making, he stops.

He lurches to his feet.

THE DOORWAY

As Barton enters, opens the door, and sticks his head out.

HALLWAY

Barton peers out to see if the coast is clear.

HIS POV

The long hallway.

In the deep background, Chet, the night clerk, is stooping in front of a door to pick up a pair of shoes. Next to him is a castored shoe caddy.

All of the doorways between us and Chet are empty of shoes.

CHET

Close on him as, mid-stoop, he looks up.

CHET'S POV

Up the long hall. In the deep background a door is closing.

CHET

He pauses, then straightens up and puts the shoes on the shoe caddy. It squeaks as he pushes it on down the hall.

BARTON'S ROOM

Barton stands at the door, listening to a very faint squeak. Eventually it becomes inaudible.

He cracks the door again, looks out, and exits.

HALLWAY

Barton goes to Charlie's room and knocks.

Footfalls end as the door is cracked open.

CHARLIE

Barton. Are you all right?

BARTON

No... Can I come in?

CHARLIE

Why don't we go to your room-

BARTON

Charlie, I'm in trouble. You've gotta help me.

Once again he is breathing hard.

Charlie steps out into the hall and shuts the door behind him.

CHARLIE

Get a grip on yourself, brother.
Whatever the problem is, we'll sort it out.

BARTON

Charlie, I'm in trouble - something horrible's happened - I've gotta call the police...

Charlie leads him towards his room.

BARTON

...Will you stay with me till they get here?

CHARLIE

Don't worry about it, Barton. We can sort it-

He is pushing Barton's door open, but Barton grabs an elbow to stop him.

BARTON

Before you go in - I didn't do this.
I don't know how it happened, but I didn't... I want you to know that...

Charlie looks into his eyes. For a moment the two men stare at each other - Charlie's look inquisitive, Barton's supplicating.

Finally, Charlie nods.

CHARLIE

Okay.

He turns and pushes open the door.

BARTON'S ROOM

The two men enter.

Barton lingers by the door. Charlie walks into the foreground to look off toward the bed.

His eyes widen and he screams.

He turns and disappears into the bathroom. We hear vomiting, then the flush of a toilet.

CHARLIE

Jesus... Jesus... Jesus have mercy...

His reaction has not encouraged Barton, who is more and more agitated.

Charlie emerges from the bathroom, sweating.

CHARLIE

...Jesus, Barton, what the hell is this? What're we gonna do?

BARTON

I've gotta call the police - or you could call for me -

CHARLIE

Hold on -

BARTON

You gotta believe me -

CHARLIE

Hold on -

BARTON

I didn't do this, I did NOT do this-

CHARLIE

Hold on. Stop. Take a deep breath. Tell me what happened.

BARTON

I don't know! I woke up, she was...
God, you gotta believe me!

Charlie, in spite of himself, is sneaking horrified glances back into the room.

CHARLIE

I believe you, brother, but this don't look good.

BARTON

We gotta call the police -

CHARLIE

Hold on. I said hold on, so hold on.

BARTON

Yeah.

CHARLIE

What do you think happened?

BARTON

I don't know! Maybe it was her...
boyfriend. I passed out. I don't
know. Won't the police be able to -

CHARLIE

Stop with the police! Wake up, friend!
This does not look good! They hang
people for this!

BARTON

But I didn't do it - don't you believe
me?

CHARLIE

I believe you - I KNOW you. But why
should the police?

Barton gives him a dumb stare.

CHARLIE

...Did you... Barton, between you
and me, did you have sexual
intercourse?

Barton stares at Charlie. He swallows.

Charlie shakes his head.

CHARLIE

Jesus... They can tell that...

BARTON

They GOTTA believe me, Charlie! They gotta have mercy!

CHARLIE

You're in pictures, Barton. Even if you got cleared eventually, this would ruin you.

He turns and starts toward the bed.

CHARLIE

...Wait in the bathroom.

BATHROOM

Later. Barton, still in his underwear, sits leaning against the wall, staring glassily at his feet.

From the other room we hear the creak of bedsprings and the sounds of bed clothes being torn off.

Finally there is a last creak of bedsprings and the sound of Charlie grunting under great weight.

We hear heavy footsteps approaching.

Barton looks up through the open bathroom door.

HIS POV

Charlie is groping for the front doorknob, cradling the sheetswaddled body in his arms.

BACK TO BARTON

His neck goes rubbery. His eyes roll up. His head lolls back to hit the wall.

BLACK

Slap! Slap!

We are low on Charlie, who is following through on a slap and backing away, having aroused Barton. Charlie is now wearing pants but is still in his sleeveless tee, which has blood flecks across the belly.

CHARLIE

You passed out.

Barton looks groggily up.

BARTON

...Uh-huh... Where's Audrey?

CHARLIE

She's dead, Barton! If that was her name.

TRACKING IN ON BARTON

He stares at Charlie.

CHARLIE

(off)

Barton, listen to me. You gotta act like nothing's happened. Put this totally out of your head. I know that's hard, but your play from here on out is just to go about business as usual. Give us some time to sort this out...

Barton looks at his watch.

THE WATCH

7:45.

CHARLIE

(off)

...Just put it out of you head...

TRACKING

Toward a pool set in a grand yard with shaped hedges and statuary set amid palms trees.

Sunlight glitters angrily off the water; we are approaching Jack Lipnik who sits poolside in a white deck chair.

LIPNIK

Bart! So happy to see ya!

REVERSE

Pulling Barton, who is being escorted by Lou Breeze.

Barton is haggard, sunken eyes squinting against too much sun.

LIPNIK

Sit! Talk! Relax for a minute, then talk! Drink?

As Barton sits:

BARTON

Yeah... rye whiskey?

LIPNIK

Boy! You writers! Work hard, play hard! That's what I hear, anyway...

He laughs, then barks at Lou Breeze.

LIPNIK

... Lou.

Lou exits.

LIPNIK

Anyway. Ben Geisler tells me things're going along great. Thinks we've got a real winner in this one. And let me tell you something, I'm counting on it. I've taken an interest. Not to interfere, mind you - hardly seems necessary in your case. A writer - a storyteller - of your stature. Givitta me in bold strokes, Bart. Gimme the broad outlines. I'm sitting in the audience, the lights go down, Capitol logo comes up... you're on!

He beams expectantly at Barton. Barton licks his parched lips.

BARTON

Yeah, okay... well... we fade in...

Lipnik is nodding, already involved in the story.

BARTON

...It's a tenement building. On the Lower East Side...

LIPNIK

Great! He's poor, this wrestler!
He's had to struggle!

BARTON

And then... well...

Barton looks back out at the pool, his eyes closed to slits against the sun. He looks back at Lipnik.

BARTON

...Can I be honest, Mr. Lipnik?

LIPNIK

CAN you? You damn well better be. Jesus, if I hadn't been honest in my business dealings - well, of course, you can't always be honest, not with the sharks swimming around this town - but if you're a writer, you don't think about those things - if I'd been totally honest, I wouldn't be within a mile of this pool - unless I was cleaning it. But that's no reason for you not to be. Honest, I mean. Not cleaning the pool.

Lou has entered with a drink, which he sets next to Barton. Lou sits.

Barton looks around, takes the drink, sips at it greedily, but must finally take the plunge.

BARTON

Well... to be honest, I'm never really comfortable discussing a work in progress. I've got it all worked out in my head, but sometimes if you force it out in words - prematurely - the wrong words - well, your meaning changes, and it changes your own mind, and you never get it back - so I'd just as soon not talk about it.

Lipnik stares at him. His smile has disappeared. There is a long beat.

Lou Breeze clears his throat. He apparently feels obliged to fill the silence.

LOU

...Mr. Fink. Never mind me. Never

mind how long I've been in pictures.
Mr. Lipnik has been in pictures just
about since they were invented. HE
practically invented them.

Lipnik has turned to look curiously at Lou.

LOU

...Now I think if he's interested in
what one of his contract employees
is doing while he draws pay, I think
that employee ought to tell him, if
he wants to stay an employee. Right
now the contents of your head are
the property of Capitol Pictures, so
if I were you I would speak up. And
pretty goddamn fast.

Lou looks at Barton, expectantly. Lipnik continues to stare
at Lou.

There is a long silence, terribly heavy.

Finally, Lipnik explodes - at Lou.

LIPNIK

You lousy sonofabitch! You're telling
this man - this ARTIST - what to
do?!

Lou Breeze is stunned.

LOU

Mr. Lipnik, I -

LIPNIK

This man creates for a living! He
puts food on your table and on mine!
THANK him for it! Thank him, you
ungrateful sonofabitch! Thank him or
YOU'RE fired!

Barton is staring, aghast.

BARTON

Mr. Lipnik, that's not really necessar-

Lipnik, still staring at Lou, gives no sign of hearing Barton.
He rises and points.

LIPNIK

Get down on your knees, you sonofabitch! Get down on your knees and kiss this man's feet!

LOU

Mr. Lipnik, please -

BARTON

I - Mr. Lipnik -

LIPNIK

KISS THIS MAN'S FEET!!

Lou, aghast, looks at Barton.

Barton, aghast, can only return the same stunned look.

Lipnik snarls at Lou:

LIPNIK

...Okay, get out of here. You're fired, you understand me? Get out of my sight.

Lou gets stiffly to his feet and stumbles away.

BARTON

Mr. Lipnik, I -

LIPNIK

I apologize, Barton.

BARTON

No no, Mr. Breeze has actually been a great help -

LIPNIK

You don't have to cover for him. It's noble of you, but these things happen in business.

BARTON

Mr. Lipnik, I really would feel much better if you could reconsider -

LIPNIK

Ah, forget it, kid. I want you to pull this out of your head. If that sonofabitch wouldn't apologize to you, goddammit, I will. I respect your artistry and your methods, and

if you can't fill us in yet, well
hell, we should be kissing your feet
for your fine efforts.

He gets down on his knees in front of Barton.

LIPNIK

...You know in the old country we
were taught, as very young children,
that there's no shame in supplicatin'
yourself when you respect someone.

Barton stares, horrified, at Lipnik, on the ground at his
feet.

LIPNIK

...On behalf of Capitol Pictures,
the administration, and all a the
stockholders, please accept this as
a symbol of our apology and respect.

BARTON'S POV

Lipnik kisses his shoe and looks up at him.

Behind Lipnik the pool glitters.

BARTON'S ROOM

The cut has a hard musical sting. Out of the sting comes a
loud but distorted thumping noise.

We are looking down, high angle, form one corner of the room.
We are presented with a motionless tableau: Barton sits,
hunched, in the far corner, elbows on knees, staring at the
bed in front of him. He wears only trousers and a T-shirt
and his body and face glisten with sweat. The bed's sheets
have been stripped and the ratty gray mattress has an enormous
rust-red stain in the middle.

After a beat, in the foreground, the only motion in the scene:
A bead of tacky yellow wall-sweat dribbles down the near
wall.

Silence, then the thumping repeats, resolving itself to a
knock at the door.

Barton rises slowly and crosses to the door.

THE DOOR

Barton opens it to Charlie, who is dressed in a baggy suit, his hair slicked back, a tan fedora pushed back on his head. It is the first time we have seen him well turned out.

A battered briefcase is on the floor next to him. He holds a parcel in his left hand, about one foot square, wrapped in brown paper and tied up with twine.

CHARLIE

Barton. Can I come in?

Barton stands back from the door and Charlie picks up his briefcase and enters.

THE ROOM

As the two men enter.

BARTON

Jesus... You're leaving.

CHARLIE

Have to, old timer. Just for a while.

Barton sounds desperate:

BARTON

Jesus, Charlie, I...

CHARLIE

Everything's okay, believe me. I know it's rough mentally, but everything's taken care of.

BARTON

Charlie! I've got no one else here! You're the only person I know in Los Angeles...

He starts weeping

BARTON

...that I can talk to.

Charlie, also disturbed and unhappy, wraps both arms around Barton.

Barton sobs unashamedly into his shoulder. Charlie is somber.

CHARLIE

It's okay... It's okay...

BARTON

Charlie, I feel like I'm going crazy
- like I'm losing my mind. I don't
know what to do... I didn't do it,
believe me. I'm sure of that, Charlie.
I just...

His breath comes in short gasping heaves.

BARTON

...I just don't know what... to do-

CHARLIE

You gotta get a grip on, brother.
You gotta just carry on - just for a
few days, till I get back. Try and
stay here, keep your door locked.
Don't talk to anyone. We just gotta
keep our heads and we'll figure it
out.

BARTON

Yeah, but Charlie -

CHARLIE

Dammit, don't argue with me. You
asked me to believe you - well I do.
Now don't argue with me.

He looks at Barton for a beat.

CHARLIE

...Look, pal - can you do something
for me?

Charlie hands him his parcel.

CHARLIE

...Keep this for me, till I get back.

Barton, snuffling, accepts the package.

CHARLIE

...It's just personal stuff. I don't
wanna drag it with me, but I don't
trust 'em downstairs, and I'd like
to think it's in good hands.

Still snuffling:

BARTON

Sure, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Funny, huh, when everything that's important to a guy, everything he wants to keep from a lifetime - when he can fit it into a little box like that. I guess... I guess it's kind of pathetic.

Wallowing in self-pity:

BARTON

It's more than I've got.

CHARLIE

Well, keep it for me. Maybe it'll bring you good luck. Yeah, it'll help you finish your script. You'll think about me...

He thumps his chest.

CHARLIE

...Make me your wrestler. Then you'll lick that story of yours.

Barton is tearfully sincere:

BARTON

Thanks, Charlie.

Charlie solemnly thrusts out his hand.

CHARLIE

Yeah, well, see you soon, friend. You're gonna be fine.

Barton shakes. As they walk to the door:

BARTON

You'll be back?

CHARLIE

Don't worry about that, compadre. I'll be back.

Barton shuts the door behind Charlie, locks it, and turns around.

HIS POV

The room. The bed. The blood-stained mattress.

Barton walks across the room and sits carefully at the edge of the bed, avoiding the rust-colored stain. For a long beat, he sits still, but something is building inside.

Finally, when we hear the distant ding of the elevator arriving for Charlie, it erupts:

Barton sobs, with the unself-conscious grief of an abandoned child.

HIGH WIDE SHOT

Barton weeping, alone on the bed, next to the rust-colored stain.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

BATHING BEAUTY

With the fade in, the sound of the surf mixes up.

We pan down the picture to discover that a snapshot has been tucked into a corner of the picture frame: it is the snap of Charlie, smiling and waving, with his foot up on the running board of the 1939 Ford roadster.

BARTON

Sitting at the desk, staring at the picture. From his glazed eyes and the way his mouth hangs open, we may assume he has been staring at the picture for some time.

He notices something on the desk and picks it up.

HIS POV

The Holy Bible - Placed by the Gideons.

Barton opens it, randomly, to the Book of Daniel. The text is set in ornately Gothic type.

"5. And the king, Nebuchadnezzar, answered and said to the Chaldeans, I recall not my dream; if ye will not make known unto me my dream, and its interpretation, ye shall be cut in pieces, and of your tents shall be made a dunghill."

BARTON

Staring at the passage. His mouth hangs open.

THE BIBLE

Barton riffles to the first page.

In bold type at the top:

"THE BOOK OF GENESIS"

Underneath, in the same ornately Gothic type:

"Chapter One 1. Fade in on a tenement building on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Faint traffic noise is audible; 2. As is the cry of fishmongers."

BARTON

Squinting at the page through bloodshot eyes.

His mouth hangs open.

BARTON'S ROOM - DAY

At the cut the harsh clackety-clack of typing bangs in. Sunlight burns against the sheers of Barton's window, making it a painfully bright patch in the room which itself remains fairly dim.

Barton sits at the secretary, typing furiously.

He finishes a page, yanks it out of the carriage, and places it face-down on a short stack of face-down pages.

He feeds in a blank sheet and resumes his rapid typing. He is sweating, unshaven, and more haggard even than when we left him the previous night.

The telephone rings. After several rings Barton stops typing and answers it, absently, still looking at his work. His voice is hoarse.

BARTON

Hello... Chet... Who?...

He puts the receiver down on the desk, leans over the typewriter, and examines something he has just written.

He picks the phone back up and listens for a beat.

BARTON

... No, don't send them up here.
I'll be right down.

ELEVATOR

A small oscillating fan whirs up in a corner of the elevator.

We pan down to Barton, who is riding down with Pete, the old elevator operator. Barton's voice is hoarse with fatigue.

BARTON

...You read the Bible, Pete?

PETE

Holy Bible?

BARTON

Yeah.

PETE

I think so... Anyway, I've heard about it.

Barton nods.

They ride for a beat.

LOBBY

Late afternoon sun slants in from one side. The lobby has the same golden ambiance as when first we saw it.

Barton is walking toward two wing chairs in the shadows, from which two men in suits are rising. One is tall, the other short.

POLICEMAN

Fink?

BARTON

Yeah.

POLICEMAN #2

Detective Mastrionotti.

POLICEMAN #1

Detective Deutsch.

MASTRIONOTTI
L.A.P.D.

BARTON
Uh-huh.

All three sit in ancient maroon swing chairs. Mastrionotti perches on the edge of his chair; Deutsch slumps back in the shadows, studying Barton.

DEUTSCH
Got a couple questions to ask ya.

MASTRIONOTTI
What do you do, Fink?

Still hoarse:

BARTON
I write.

DEUTSCH
Oh yeah? What kind of write?

BARTON
Well as a matter of fact, I write for the pictures.

MASTRIONOTTI
Big fuckin' deal.

DEUTSCH
You want my partner to kiss your ass?

MASTRIONOTTI
Would that be good enough for ya?

BARTON
No, I - I didn't mean to sound -

DEUTSCH
What DID you mean?

BARTON
I - I've got respect for - for working guys, like you -

MASTRIONOTTI
Jesus! Ain't that a load off! You live in 605?

BARTON

Yeah.

DEUTSCH

How long you been up there, Fink?

BARTON

A week, eight, nine days -

MASTRIONOTTI

Is this multiple choice?

BARTON

Nine days - Tuesday -

DEUTSCH

You know this slob?

He is holding a small black-and-white photograph out toward Barton.

There is a long beat as Barton studies the picture.

BARTON

...Yeah, he... he lives next door to me.

MASTRIONOTTI

That's right, Fink, he lives next door to you.

DEUTSCH

Ever talk to him?

BARTON

...Once or twice. His name is Charlie Meadows.

MASTRIONOTTI

Yeah, and I'm Buck Rogers.

DEUTSCH

His name is Mundt. Karl Mundt.

MASTRIONOTTI

Also known as Madman Mundt.

DEUTSCH

He's a little funny in the head.

BARTON

What did... What did he -

MASTRIONOTTI

Funny. As in, he likes to ventilate people with a shotgun and then cut their heads off.

DEUTSCH

Yeah, he's funny that way.

BARTON

I...

MASTRIONOTTI

Started in Kansas City. Couple of housewives.

DEUTSCH

Couple of days ago we see the same M.O. out in Los Feliz.

MASTRIONOTTI

Doctor. Ear, nose and throat man,.

DEUTSCH

All of which he's now missin'.

MASTRIONOTTI

Well, some of his throat was there.

DEUTSCH

Physician, heal thyself.

MASTRIONOTTI

Good luck with no fuckin' head.

DEUTSCH

Anyway.

MASTRIONOTTI

Hollywood precinct finds another stiff yesterday. Not too far from here. This one's better looking than the doc.

DEUTSCH

Female caucasian, thirty years old. Nice tits. No head. You ever see Mundt with anyone meets that description?

MASTRIONOTTI

But, you know, with the head still on.

BARTON

...No. I never saw him with anyone else.

DEUTSCH

So. You talked to Mundt, what about?

BARTON

Nothing, really. Said he was in the insurance business.

Deutsch indicates Mastrionotti.

DEUTSCH

Yeah, and he's Buck Rogers.

MASTRIONOTTI

No reputable company would hire a guy like that.

BARTON

Well that's what he said.

DEUTSCH

What else?

BARTON

He... I'm trying to think... Nothing, really... He... He said he liked Jack Oakie pictures.

Mastrionotti looks at Deutsch. Deutsch looks at Mastrionotti. After a beat, Mastrionotti looks back at Barton.

MASTRIONOTTI

Ya know, Fink, ordinarily we say anything you might remember could be helpful. But I'll be frank with you: That is not helpful.

DEUTSCH

Ya see how he's not writing it down?

MASTRIONOTTI

Fink. That's a Jewish name, isn't it?

BARTON

Yeah.

Mastrionotti gets to his feet, looking around the lobby.

MASTRIONOTTI

Yeah, I didn't think this dump was restricted.

He digs in his pocket.

MASTRIONOTTI

...Mundt has disappeared. I don't think he'll be back. But...

He hands Barton a card.

MASTRIONOTTI

...give me a call if you see him. Or if you remember something that isn't totally idiotic.

BARTON'S ROOM

We are tracking toward the paper-wrapped parcel that sits on the nightstand next to Barton's bed.

Barton enters and picks it up. He holds it for a beat, looking at it, then brings it over to the secretary and sits.

He shakes it.

No sound; whatever is inside is well packed.

Barton holds it up to his ear and listens for a long beat, as if it were a seashell and he is listening for the surf.

Finally he puts it on his desk, beneath the picture of the bathing beauty, and starts typing, quickly and steadily.

DISSOLVE

THROUGH TO:

REVERSE

Some time later; Barton still types. He is face to us; beyond him we can see the bed with its rust-colored stain.

The phone rings. Barton ignores it. It continues to ring.

Barton rises and exits frame; we hold on to the bed in the background. We hear Barton's footsteps on the bathroom tile as the phone continues ringing.

Barton sits back into frame stuffing cotton into each ear. He resumes typing.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Barton typing. The desk trembles under the working of the typewriter. Charlie's parcel chatters.

Barton takes a finished page out of the carriage and places it face down on the growing stack to his right. He feeds in a new page. We hear the muted ding of the elevator down the hall. Barton resumes typing.

We hear a knock on Barton's door. Barton does not react, apparently not hearing.

THE DOORWAY

We are close on the bottom of the door. Someone in the hallway is sliding a note beneath the door; then his shadow disappears and his footsteps recede.

The note is a printed message headed: "While You Were Out..." Underneath are the printed words: "You were called by" and, handwritten in the space following: "Mr. Ben Geisler."

Handwritten below, in the message space:

"Thank you. Lipnik loved your meeting. Keep up the good work."

Barton's offscreen typing continues steadily.

FADE OUT

HALLWAY

A perfectly symmetrical wide low angle shot of the empty hall. Shoes are set put in front of each door except for one in the middle background.

At the cut in we hear faint, regular typing.

We hold for a beat. There is no motion. The long, empty hall. The distant typing.

We hold.

The typing stops. There is a beat of quiet.

It is broken by the sound of a door opening. It is the shoeless door in the middle background.

A hand reaches out to place a pair of shoes in the doorway.

The hand withdraws.

The door closes.

A short beat of silence.

The distant typing resumes.

The long empty hall. The distant typing.

FADE OUT

OVER THE BLACK

We hear the distant sound of a woman's voice, tinny and indistinct.

WOMAN

Just a minute and I'll connect you...

FADE IN:

CLOSE ON BARTON

His eyes are red-rimmed and wild. He sits on the edge of his bed holding the phone to his ear.

His voice is unnaturally loud:

BARTON

Hello? Operator! I can't... Oh!

He stops, reaches up, takes a cotton wad out of his ear.

We hear various clicks and clacks as the telephone lines switch, and then a distant ring. The phone rings three or four times before it is answered by a groggy voice.

VOICE

...Hello.

BARTON

Garland, it's me.

GARLAND

Barton? What time is it? Are you all right?

BARTON

Yeah, I'm fine, Garland - I have to talk to you. I'm calling long distance.

GARLAND

Okay.

Muffled, we hear Garland speaking to someone else.

GARLAND

...It's Barton. Calling long distance.

Back into the receiver:

GARLAND

...What is it Barton? Are you okay?

BARTON

I'm fine, Garland, but I have to talk with you.

GARLAND

Go ahead, son.

BARTON

It's about what I'm writing, Garland. It's really... I think it's really big.

GARLAND

What do you mean, Barton?

BARTON

Not big in the sense of large - although it's that too. I mean important. This may be the most IMPORTANT work I've done.

GARLAND

Well, I'm... glad to hear that -

BARTON

Very important, Garland. I just thought you should know that. Whatever happens.

GARLAND

...That's fine.

BARTON

Have you read the Bible, Garland?

GARLAND

...Barton, is everything okay?

BARTON

Yes... Isn't it?

GARLAND

Well, I'm just asking. You sound a little -

Guardedly:

BARTON

Sound a little what?

GARLAND

Well, you just... sound a little-

Bitterly:

BARTON

Thanks, Garland. Thanks for all the encouragement.

He slams down the phone.

OVER HIS SHOULDER

A one-quarter shot on Barton from behind as he picks up the cotton wad and sticks it back in his right ear.

He resumes typing, furiously.

After a beat he mutters, still typing.

BARTON

...Nitwit.

THE BATHING BEAUTY

Later. We hear typing and the roar of the surf.'

CLOSE ON TYPEWRITER

We are extremely close on the key-strike area. As we cut in Barton is typing:

"p-o-s-t-c-a-r-d-."

The carriage returns a couple of times and "T-H-E-E-N-D" is typed in.

The paper is ripped out of the carriage.

CLOSE ON A STACK OF PAGES

Lying face down on the desk; the last page is added, face down, to the pile. The pile is picked up, its edges are straightened with a couple of thumps against the desktop, and then the pile is replaced on the desk, face up. The title page reads:

"THE BURLYMAN
Motion Picture Scenario
By
Barton Fink"

Barton's right hand enters frame to deposit a small cotton wad on top of the script.

Barton's left hand enters to deposit another small cotton wad on top of the script.

We hear Barton walk away. We hear bath water run.

THE BATHING BEAUTY

Still looking out to sea.

USO HALL

We are booming down to the dance floor as a raucous band plays an up-tempo number.

BARTON

Dancing animatedly, almost maniacally, his fingers jabbing the air.

The hall is crowded, but Barton is one of few men not in uniform.

USO GIRL

Giggling, dancing opposite Barton.

GIRL

You're cute!

BARTON

Caught up in his dancing, oblivious to the girl.

A white uniformed arm reaches in to tap Barton on the shoulder.

SAILOR

'Scuse me, buddy, mind if I cut in?

Barton glares at him.

BARTON

This is MY dance, sailor!

SAILOR

C'mon buddy, I'm shipping out tomorrow.

For some reason, Barton is angry.

BARTON

I'm a writer! Celebrating the completion of something GOOD! Do you understand that, sailor? I'm a WRITER!

His bellowing has drawn onlookers' attention.

VOICES

Step aside, four-eyes! Let someone else spin the dame! Give the navy a dance! Hey, Four-F, take a hike!

Barton turns furiously against the crowd.

BARTON

I'm a writer, you monsters! I CREATE!
He points at his head.

BARTON

...This is my uniform!

He taps his skull.

BARTON

...THIS is how I serve the common

man! THIS is where I -

WHAPP! An infantry man tags Barton's chin on the button. Bodies surge. The crowd gasps. The band blares nightmarishly on.

HOTEL HALLWAY

Quiet at the cut.

After a beat, there is a faint ding at the end of the hall and, as the elevator door opens, we faintly hear:

PETE

This stop: six.

Barton, disheveled, emerges and stumbles wearily down the hall. He stops in front of his door, takes his key out, and enters the room.

BARTON'S POV

Mastrionotti is sitting on the edge of the bed reading Barton's manuscript.

Deutsch stands in front of the desk staring at the bathing beauty.

MASTRIONOTTI

Mother: What is to become of him.

Father: We'll be hearing from that crazy wrestler. And I don't mean a postcard. Fade out. The end.

He looks up at Barton.

MASTRIONOTTI

...I thought you said you were a writer.

DEUTSCH

I dunno, Duke. I kinda liked it.

BARTON

Keep your filthy eyes off that.

Deutsch turns toward Barton and throws a folded newspaper at him.

DEUTSCH

You made morning papers, Fink.

Barton opens the paper. A headline reads: Writer Found Headless in Chavez Ravine. The story has two pictures - a studio publicity portrait of Mayhew, and a photograph of the crime scene: two plainclothes detectives stare down into a gully as a uniformed cop restrains a pair of leashed dogs.

MASTRIONOTTI

Second one of your friends to end up dead.

DEUTSCH

You didn't tell us you knew the dame.

With a jerk of his thumb, Mastrionotti indicates the bloodstained bed.

MASTRIONOTTI

Sixth floor too high for you, Fink?

DEUTSCH

Give you nose bleeds?

Barton crosses the room and sits at the foot of the bed, staring at the newspaper.

DEUTSCH

Just tell me one thing, Fink: Where'd you put their heads?

Distractedly:

BARTON

Charlie... Charlie's back...

MASTRIONOTTI

No kidding, bright boy - we smelt Mundt all over this. Was he the idea man?

DEUTSCH

Tell us where the heads are, maybe they'll go easy on you.

MASTRIONOTTI

Only fry you once.

Barton rubs his temples.

BARTON

Could you come back later? It's

just... too hot... My head is killing me.

DEUTSCH

All right, forget the heads. Where's Mundt, Fink?

MASTRIONOTTI

He teach you to do it?

DEUTSCH

You two have some sick sex thing?

BARTON

Sex?! He's a MAN! We WRESTLED!

MASTRIONOTTI

You're a sick fuck, Fink.

DEUTSCH

All right, moron, you're under arrest.

Barton seems oblivious to the two men.

BARTON

Charlie's back. It's hot... He's back.

Down the hall we hear the ding of the arriving elevator.

Mastrionotti cocks his head with a quizzical look.

He rises and walks slowly out into the hall. Deutsch watches him go.

HIS POV

Mastrionotti in the hallway in full shot, framed by the door, still looking puzzled.

MASTRIONOTTI

...Fred...

Deutsch stands and pushes his suit coat back past the gun on his hip, revealing a pair of handcuffs on his belt. He unhitches the cuffs and slips one around Barton's right wrist and the other around a loop in the wrought iron footboard of the bed.

DEUTSCH

Sit tight, Fink.

THE HALLWAY

As Deutsch joins Mastrionotti.

DEUTSCH

Why's it so goddamn hot out here?

MASTRIONOTTI

...Fred...

Deutsch looks where Mastrionotti is looking.

THE WALL

Tacky yellow fluid streams down. The walls are pouring sweat.

The hallway is quiet.

MASTRIONOTTI AND DEUTSCH

They look at each other. They look down the hall.

THEIR POV

The elevator stands open at the far end of the empty hall.

For a long beat, nothing.

Finally Pete, the elevator man, emerges.

At this distance, he is a small figure, stumbling this way and that, his hands pressed against the sides of his head.

He turns to face Mastrionotti and Deutsch and takes a few steps forward, still clutching his head.

MASTRIONOTTI AND DEUTSCH

Watching.

PETE

He takes on last step, then collapses.

As he pitches forward his hands fall away from his head. His head separates from his neck, hits the floor, and rolls away from his body with a dull irregular trundle sound.

MASTRIONOTTI AND DEUTSCH

Wide-eyed, they look at each other, then back down the hall.

All is quiet.

THE HALLWAY

Smoke is beginning to drift into the far end of the hall.

We hear a muted rumble.

MASTRIONOTTI AND DEUTSCH

Mastrionotti tugs at his tie. He slowly unholsters his gun. Deutsch slowly, hypnotically, follows suit.

DEUTSCH

... Show yourself, Mundt!

More quiet.

THE HALLWAY

More smoke.

LOW STEEP ANGLE ON ELEVATOR DOOR

The crack where the floor of the elevator meets that of the hall.

It flickers with red light from below. Bottom-lit smoke sifts up.

CLOSE ON MASTRIONOTTI

Standing in the foreground, gun at ready. Sweat pours down his face.

Behind him, Deutsch stands nervously in the light-spill from Barton's doorway.

The rumble and crackle of fire grows louder.

THE HALLWAY

More smoke.

PATCH OF WALL

Sweating.

A swath of wallpaper sags away from the top of the wall,

exposing glistening lath underneath.

With a light airy pop, the lathwork catches on fire.

MASTRIONOTTI AND DEUTSCH

Sweating.

DEUTSCH

...Mundt!

THEIR POV

The hallway. Its end-facing-wall slowly spreads flame from where the wallpaper droops.

LOW STEEP ANGLE ON ELEVATOR DOOR

More red bottom-lit smoke seeps up from the crack between elevator and hallway floors.

With a groan of tension relieved cables and a swaying of the elevator door, a pair of feet crosses the threshold into the doorway.

JUMPING BACK

Wide on the hallway. Charlie Meadows has emerged from the elevator and is hellishly backlit by the flame.

His suit coat hangs open. His hat is pushed back on his head. From his right hand his briefcase dangles.

He stands motionless, facing us. There is something monumental in his posture, shoulders thrown back.

MASTRIONOTTI

Tensed. Behind him, Deutsch gulps.

MASTRIONOTTI

There's a boy, Mundt. Put the policy case down and your mitts in the air.

CHARLIE

He leans slowly down to put the briefcase on the floor.

CLOSE ON MASTRIONOTTI

Relax. He murmurs:

MASTRIONOTTI
He's complying.

BACK TO CHARLIE

He straightens up from the briefcase, a sawed-off shotgun in his hands.

BOOM! The shotgun spits fire.

Mastrionotti's face is peppered by buckshot and he is blown back down the hallway into Deutsch.

Bellowing fills the hallway over the roar of the fire:

CHARLIE
LOOK UPON ME! LOOK UPON ME! I'LL
SHOW YOU THE LIFE OF THE MIND!!

THE HALLWAY

The fire starts racing down the hallway.

CLOSE STEEP ANGLE ON PATCH OF WALL

Fire races along the wall-sweat goopus.

TRACK IN ON DEUTSCH

His eyes widen at Charlie and the approaching fire; his gun dangles forgotten from his right hand.

HIS POV

Charlie is charging down the hallway, holding his shotgun loosely in front of his chest, in double-time position. The fire races along with him.

He is bellowing:

CHARLIE
LOOK UPON ME! I'LL SHOW YOU THE LIFE
OF THE MIND! I'LL SHOW YOU THE LIFE
OF THE MIND!

DEUTSCH

Terrified, he turns and runs.

REVERSE PULLING DEUTSCH

As he runs down the flaming hallway, pursued by flames, smoke, and Karl Mundt - who, also on the run, levels his shotgun.

BOOM!

PUSHING DEUTSCH

His legs and feet spout blood, paddle futilely at the air, then come down in a twisting wobble, like a car on blown tires, and pitch him helplessly to the floor.

PULLING CHARLIE

He slows to a trot and cracks open the shotgun.

PUSHING DEUTSCH

Weeping and dragging himself forward on his elbows.

PULLING CHARLIE

He slows to a walk.

BARTON'S ROOM

Barton strains at his handcuffs.

HIS POV

Through the open doorway we see Charlie pass, pushing two shells into his shotgun.

PULLING DEUTSCH

Charlie looms behind him and - THWACK - snaps the shotgun closed.

Deutsch rolls over to rest on his elbows, facing Charlie.

Charlie primes the shotgun - CLACK.

He presses both barrels against the bridge of Deutsch's nose.

CHARLIE

Heil Hitler.

DEUTSCH

Screams.

CHARLIE

Tightens a finger over both triggers. He squeezes.

BLAM!

TRACK IN ON BARTON

He flinches.

The gunshot echoes away.

Barton strains at the handcuffs.

We hear Charlie's footsteps approach - slowly, heavily.

THE DOORWAY

Charlie, walking down the hall, glances in and seems mildly surprised to see Barton. The set of his jaw relaxes. His expression softens. He pushes his hat farther back on his head.

CHARLIE

Barton!

He shakes his head and whistles.

CHARLIE

...Brother, is it hot.

He walks into the room.

BARTON'S ROOM

As Charlie wearily enters.

CHARLIE

How you been, buddy?

He props the shotgun in a corner and sits facing Barton, who stared at him.

CHARLIE

...Don't look at me like that, neighbor. It's just me - Charlie.

BARTON

I hear it's Mundt. Madman Mundt.

Charlie reaches a flask from his pocket.

CHARLIE

Jesus, people can be cruel...

He takes a long draught from his flask, then gives a haunted stare.

CHARLIE

...if it's not my build, it's my personality.

Charlie is perspiring heavily. The fire rumbles in the hallway.

CHARLIE

...They say I'm a madman, Barton, but I'm not mad at anyone. Honest I'm not. Most guys I just feel sorry for. Yeah. It tears me up inside, to think about what they're going through. How trapped they are. I understand it. I feel for 'em. So I try and help them out...

He reached up to loosen his tie and pop his collar button.

CHARLIE

...Jesus. Yeah. I know what it feels like, when things get all balled up at the head office. It puts you through hell, Barton. So I help people out. I just wish someone would do as much for me...

He stares miserably down at his feet.

CHARLIE

...Jesus it's hot. Sometimes it gets so hot, I wanna crawl right out of my skin.

Self-pity:

BARTON

But Charlie - why me? Why -

CHARLIE

Because you DON'T LISTEN!

A tacky yellow fluid is dripping from Charlie's left ear and running down his cheek.

CHARLIE

...Jesus, I'm dripping again.

He pulls some cotton from his pocket and plugs his ear.

CHARLIE

...C'mon Barton, you think you know about pain? You think I made your life hell? Take a look around this dump. You're just a tourist with a typewriter, Barton. I live here. Don't you understand that...

His voice is becoming choked.

CHARLIE

...And you come into MY home... And you complain that I'M making too... much... noise.

He looks up at Barton.

There is a long silence.

Finally:

BARTON

...I'm sorry.

Wearily:

CHARLIE

Don't be.

He rises to his feet and kneels in front of Barton at the foot of the bed.

The two men regard each other.

Charlie grabs two bars of the footboard frame, still staring at Barton. His muscles tighten, though nothing moves. His neck fans with effort. All of his muscles tense. His face is a reddening grimace.

With a shriek of protest, the metal gives. The bar to which Barton is handcuffed had come loose at the top and Barton slides the cuff off it, free.

Charlie gets to his feet.

CHARLIE

I'm getting off the merry-go-round.

He takes his shotgun and walks to the door.

CHARLIE

...I'll be next door if you need me.

A thought stops him at the door and he turns to face Barton.
Behind him the hallway blazes.

CHARLIE

...Oh, I dropped in on your folks.
And Uncle Dave?

He smiles. Barton looks at him dumbly.

CHARLIE

...Good people. By the way, that
package I gave you? I lied. It isn't
mine.

He leaves.

Barton rises, picks up Charlie's parcel, and his script.

THE HALLWAY

As Barton emerges. Flames lick the walls, causing the
wallpaper to run with the tack glue sap. Smoke fills the
hallway. Barton looks down the hall.

HIS POV

Charlie stands in front of the door to his room, his briefcase
dangling from one hand, his other hand fumbling in his pocket
for his key.

With his hat pushed back on his head and his shoulders slumped
with fatigue, he could be any drummer returning to any hotel
after a long hard day on the road.

He opens the door and goes into his room.

BACK TO BARTON

He turns and walks up the hallway, his script in one hand,
the parcel in the other.

A horrible moaning sound - almost human - can be heard under
the roar of the fire.

BLACKNESS

STUDIO HALLWAY

We are tracking laterally across the lobby of an executive building. From offscreen we hear:

BARTON

Fink! Morris or Lillian Fink! Eighty-five Fulton Street!

Filtered through phone:

OPERATOR

I understand that, sir -

BARTON

Or Uncle Dave!

Our track has brought Barton into frame in the foreground, unshaven, unkempt, bellowing into the telephone. In a hallway in the background, a secretary gestures for Barton to hurry up.

OPERATOR

I understand that, sir, but there's still no answer. Shall I check for trouble on the line?

Barton slams down the phone.

LIPNIK'S OFFICE

Barton enters, still clinging on to Charlie's parcel.

Lou Breeze stands in one corner censoriously watching Barton. Lipnik is at the far end of the room, gazing out the window.

LIPNIK

Fink.

BARTON

Mr. Lipnik.

LIPNIK

Colonel Lipnik, if you don't mind.

He turns to face Barton and we see that he is wearing a smartly pressed uniform with a lot of fruit salad on the chest.

LIPNIK
...Siddown.

Barton takes a seat facing Lipnik's desk.

LIPNIK
...I was commissioned yesterday in the Army Reserve. Henry Morgenthau arranged it. He's a dear friend.

BARTON
Congratulations.

LIPNIK
Actually it hasn't officially gone through yet. Had wardrobe whip this up. You gotta pull teeth to get anything done in this town. I can understand a little red tape in peacetime, but now it's all-out warfare against the Japs. Little yellow bastards. They'd love to see me sit this one out.

BARTON
Yes sir, they -

LIPNIK
Anyway, I had Lou read your script for me.

He taps distastefully at the script on his desk, which has a slightly charred title page.

LIPNIK
...I gotta tell you, Fink. It won't wash.

BARTON
With all due respect, sir, I think it's the best work I've done.

LIPNIK
Don't gas me, Fink. If you're opinion mattered, then I guess I'd resign and let YOU run the the studio. It doesn't and you won't, and the lunatics are not going to run THIS particular asylum. So let's put a stop to THAT rumor right now.

Listlessly:

BARTON

Yes sir.

LIPNIK

I had to call Beery this morning, let him know we were pushing the picture back. After all I'd told him about quality, about that Barton Fink feeling. How disappointed we were. Wally was heartbroken. The man was devastated. He was - well, I didn't actually call him, Lou did. But that's a fair description, isn't it Lou?

LOU

Yes, Colonel.

LIPNIK

Hell, I could take you through it step by step, explain why your story stinks, but I won't insult your intelligence. Well all right, first of all: This is a wrestling picture; the audience wants to see action, drama, wrestling, and plenty of it. They don't wanna see a guy wrestling with his soul - well, all right, a little bit, for the critics - but you make it the carrot that wags the dog. Too much of it and they head for exits and I don't blame 'em. There's plenty of poetry right inside that ring, Fink. Look at "Hell Ten Feet Square".

LOU

"Blood, Sweat, and Canvas".

LIPNIK

Look at "Blood, Sweat, and Canvas". These are big movies, Fink. About big men, in tights - both physically and mentally. But especially physically. We don't put Wallace Beery in some fruity movie about suffering - I thought we were together on that.

BARTON

I'm sorry if I let you down.

LIPNIK

You didn't let ME down. Or even Lou. We don't live or die by what you scribble, Fink. You let Ben Geisler down. He liked you. Trusted you. And that's why he's gone. Fired. That guy had a heart as big as the outdoors, and you fucked him. He tried to convince me to fire you too, but that would be too easy. No, you're under contract and you're gonna stay that way. Anything you write will be the property of Capitol Pictures. And Capitol Pictures will not produce anything you write. Not until you grow up a little. You ain't no writer, Fink - you're a goddamn write-off.

BARTON

I tried to show you something beautiful. Something about all of US -

This sets Lipnik off:

LIPNIK

You arrogant sonofabitch! You think you're the only writer who can give me that Barton Fink feeling?! I got twenty writers under contract that I can ask for a Finktype thing from. You swell-headed hypocrite! You just don't get it, do you? You think the whole world revolves inside whatever rattles inside that little kike head of yours. Get him outta my sight, Lou. Make sure he stays in town, though; he's still under contract. I want you in town, Fink, and outta my sight. Now get lost. There's a war on.

THE SURF

Crashing against the Pacific shore.

THE BEACH

At midday, almost deserted. In the distance we see Barton walking.

The paper-wrapped parcel swings from the twine in his left hand.

BARTON

He walks a few more paces and sits down on the sand, looking out to see. His gaze shifts to one side.

HIS POV

Down the beach, a bathing beauty walks along the edge of the water. She looks much like the picture on the wall in Barton's hotel room.

BARTON

He stares, transfixed, at the woman.

THE WOMAN

Very beautiful, backlit by the sun, approaching.

BARTON

Following her with his eyes.

THE WOMAN

Her eyes meet Barton's. She says something, but her voice is lost in the crash of the surf.

Barton cups a hand to his ear.

BEAUTY

I said it's a beautiful day...

BARTON

Yes... It is...

BEAUTY

What's in the box?

Barton shrugs and shakes his head.

BARTON

I don't know.

BEAUTY

Isn't it yours?

BARTON

I... I don't know...

She nods and sits down on the sand several paces away from him, facing the water but looking back over her shoulder at Barton.

BARTON

...You're very beautiful. Are you in pictures?

She laughs.

BEAUTY

Don't be silly.

She turns away to look out at the sea.

WIDER

Facing the ocean. Barton sits in the middle foreground, back to us, the box in the sand next to him.

The bathing beauty sits, back to us, in the middle background. The surf pounds.

The sun sparkles off the water.

THE END