

USA Films Presents

The Barber Movie

(tentative title)

AKA:

**"The Men Who
Wasn't There"**

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Black.

Voice-Over

Yeah, I worked in a barber shop. But I never considered myself a barber. . .

A barber pole. We track back from it.

. . . I stumbled into it--well, married into it more precisely. .

A shopkeeper's bell is triggered by an opening door. We pull back and down from the bell to reveal the scalp and then the customer himself entering a barbershop in slow motion.

. . . It wasn't my establishment. Like the fella says, I only work here. . .

We track in on a mirror shelf holding pomade, aftershave, hair tonic, a whisk brush.

. . . The dump was two hundred feet square, with five chairs, or stations as we call 'em, even though there were only two of us working. . .

We track in on a big man in a barber's smock scissoring with one hand across a lock of hair being pulled taut between two fingers of the other hand. The scissor hand holds a cigarette, pluming smoke. In slow motion, he laughs and chats.

. . . Frank Raffo, my brother-in-law, was the principal barber. And man, could he talk. . .

Another man in a barber's smock, is running an electric clippers across a child's head. A cigarette plumes between his lips.

. . . Now maybe if you're eleven or twelve years old, Frank's got an interesting point-of-view, but sometimes it got on my nerves. Not that I'd complain, mind you. Like I said, he was the principal barber. Frank's father, Carmine, had worked the heads up in Santa Rosa for thirty-five years until his ticker stopped in the middle of a Junior Flat Top. He left the shop to Frankie free and clear. And that seemed

to satisfy all of Frank's ambitions: cutting the hair and
chewing the fat. Me, I don't talk much. . .

He plucks the cigarette from his mouth and taps its ash into a tray.

. . . I just cut the hair. . . That was it, man. . . That was it.
For a while. . . In the summer of 1949.

LATE IN THE DAY

The barbershop is empty of customers. Late afternoon sun slants in through the front window. The two barbers—the narrator and his brother-in-law—sit in two of the barber chairs, idly reading magazines.

Frank

Says here that the Russians exploded an A-bomb and
there's not a damn thing we can do about it.

Ed

Uh-huh.

Frank

How d'ya like them apples?

Beat.

Frank

. . . Ed?

Ed

Huh?

Frank

Russians exploded an A-bomb.

Ed

Yeah.

Frank

(shaking his head)

Jesus. . .

Voice-Over

Now, being a barber is a lot like being a barman or a soda-jerk; there's not much to it once you've learned the basic moves. For the kids there's the Butch, or the Heinie. . .

We cut to the haircuts as they are respectively ticked off:

. . . The Flat Top, the Ivy, the Crew, the Vanguard, the Junior Contour and, occasionally, the Executive Contour. Adults get variations on the same, along with the Duck Butt, the Timberline. . .

He trims the fringe around a balding head.

. . . and something we call the Alpine Rope Toss.

He snips one lonely strand of hair and drapes it carefully across a bald pate.

. . . I lived in a little bungalow on Napa Street. The place was okay, I guess; it had a picket fence, an electric ice box, and a garbage grinder built into the sink. You might say I had it made.

We float slowly toward a white bungalow on a quiet street as a black coupe pulls into the driveway.

. . . Oh yeah. There was one other thing:

We track in through a bedroom door to discover a woman putting on a girdle.

. . . Doris kept the books at Nirdlinger's, a small department store on Main Street. Unlike me Doris liked the work, accounting; she liked knowing where everything stood. And she got a 10% employee discount on whatever she wanted—nylon stockings. . .

Close on her legs as she rolls up a stocking and fastens it to the garter tag.

. . . make-up, and perfume. . .

Close on an atomiser misting her bosom with Jungle Gardenia by Tuvache.

. . . She wore a lot of perfume.

Doris in a flounce dress is setting coasters out on a coffee table.

... Doris's boss, Big Dave Brewster, was married to Ann Nirdlinger, the department store heiress. Tonight they were coming over for dinner--as Doris said, we were "entertaining"...

Ed sits on the living room davenport in an uncomfortable suit, smoking a cigarette.

... Me, I don't like entertaining.

The doorbell rings.

THE DOOR

Ed swings it open to reveal a large man in a suit and his birdlike wife.

Big Dave

How ya doin', Ed?

Ed

Okay. Take your coat, Ann?

DINNER TABLE

The two couples are in the middle of the meal.

Dave

Japs had us pinned down on Buna for something like six weeks. Well I gotta tell ya. I thought we had it tough, but Jesus, we had supply. They were eating grubs, nuts, thistles. When we finally up and bust off the beach we found Arnie Bragg, kid missing on recon; the Japs had eaten the son-of-a-bitch if you'll pardon the, uh... And this was a scrawny, pimply kid too, nothin' to write home about, I mean I never would've, ya know, so what do I say honey? When I don't like dinner, what do I say?

Ann smiles wanly.

... I say Jesus, honey, Arnie Bragg--again?!

He roars with laughter.

Ed gives an acknowledging smile.

Dave
... Arnie Bragg--again?!

He dries his eyes with the corner of a napkin.

... Were you in the service, Ed?

Ed
No Dave, I wasn't.

Doris
Ed was 4F on account of his fallen arches.

Dave
Mm, that's tough.

THE FRONT PORCH

It is twilight. Ed stands alone on the porch watching the sun go down. Crickets chirp. From inside the house we hear laughter and clattering dishes.

Voice-Over
... Yeah... I guess Doris liked all that he-man stuff.
Sometimes I had the feeling that she and Big Dave were a
lot closer than they let on...

He turns and looks through the screen door into the house.

Across the dim living room, through a portico, we can see a sliver of the brightly lit kitchen. Big Dave, wearing a frilly apron, stands at the counter drying dishes. His broad back heaves with laughter while Doris, just hidden by the wall, chats away as she hands him dishes.

... The signs were all there plain enough--not that I was gonna prance about it, mind you. It's a free country.

We hear them laughing. Footsteps approach the front porch.

With the squeak of the screen door Big Dave emerges.

Dave
Holding down the porch area?

Ed gives a half-grin of wry acknowledgment. Big Dave relaxes, forearms against the porch railing, and gazes out at the front lawn.

... That's quite a wife you got there.

Ed
Mm.

Dave
She's a rare one.

Ed
How's business, Dave?

Dave
Couldn't be better. These're boom times in retailing. We're opening another store, Big Dave's Annex, there on Garson. This is strictly haberdashery—casual wear, pyjamas, ladies foundations and undergarments. Matter of fact, I'm thinking of making Doris the comptroller. How're things at the, uh, the barber shop?

Ed
All right, I guess.

Dave
... Fine. Fine. Well, you might want to drop by the Annex when we open up, update your suit—'course you're in the smock all day.

He chuckles.

... Say, where do you get those things anyway?

Ed
Specialty store down in Sacramento.

Dave

Uh-huh.

There is a silence. At length, gazing out at the lawn, Big Dave clears his throat.

STAINED GLASS INTERIOR

Voice-Over

Doris and I went to church once a week. . .

We are tilting down a long stained-glass window depicting the resurrection of Christ

. . . usually Tuesday night. . .

Faintly in the background we hear an amplified voice:

Voice

I . . . seven. . .

Ed sits at a long table, staring at the window, a lit cigarette in his mouth.

. . . Bee. . . four. . .

Voice-Over

Doris wasn't big on divine worship. . .

Doris is concentrating on six bingo cards spread out on the table in front of her; before Ed there is only one.

. . . and I doubt if she believed in life everlasting; she'd most likely tell you that our reward is on this earth and bingo is probably the extent of it. . .

Still focused on her cards, Doris mutters to Ed without looking up:

Doris

Watch your card, honey.

Announcer

I . . . sixteen. . .

Ed continues to gaze off at the window, smoke pluming from his cigarette.

Voice-Over

I wasn't crazy about the game, but, I dunno, it made her happy, and I found the setting peaceful.

Announcer

Gee. . . nine. . .

Doris sucks in her breath.

Doris

Jesus, bingo—BINGO!

THE BARBERSHOP

Sun slants in through the big window at the end of the day. Ed is sweeping the trimmings, staring intently down at the floor, a cigarette dangling from his lip. Frank sits on one of the vinyl waiting chairs, talking at Ed's back.

Frank

--so you tie your own flies, Ed. I mean, if you're really serious. You tie your own flies, you do a—I know it's maticless, I know, people say, hey, you can buy flies at the store—but you can buy your fish at the store, Ed, you see what I'm saying?

Ed

Uh-huh.

Frank

The point is there's a certain art to the process. The point is not merely to provide, and let me point out, these fish are not as dumb as you might think.

Ed

Uh-huh.

Frank

Sportsmanship! That's my point. June fly, Ed? Mosquito? Which of these? Well, what fish do you seek?

Ed

Yeah.

Frank

Sure, go to the store. Go there, describe to the man where you will be fishing, and for what, and the weather conditions, sun, no sun, whatnot, and so forth, and then you might as well have the man go ahead and sell you the goddamn FISH, Ed. My point is, this is a man who knows nothing no matter how much you tell him, so sell him the goddamn FISH, Ed.

During this soliloquy the stillness of the tableau has been broken only by Ed's slow sweeping of the floor. But now a black-suited figure materializes in the street, approaching the barbershop, less and less obscured by the late-day sunlight striking the store's plate-glass window.

The bell over the front door jangles and the swarthy middle-aged man walks in. He is nattily dressed—perhaps a little too formally for this small town—and sports a pencil mustache and an oddly shaped haircut.

Man

Okay boys, which of you gets the privilege?

Frank

We're just closing, friend.

Man

Oh happy days! I wish I was doing well enough to turn away business! More power to ya, brother! The public be damned!

Frank

Hey, what's your problem, friend! This is a business establishment with posted hours—

Ed cuts in with a jerk of the head.

Ed

I'll take care of him. Go ahead, Frank.

Frank looks sourly at the stranger.

Ed

Have a seat, Mister.

Frank

... You sure, Eddy?

Ed

Yeah, yeah--go home.

As Frank leaves:

Frank

In your ear, mister.

The stranger chuckles.

Stranger

Oh, those fiery mediteraneans. Say! Not so fast there, brother--

Ed has switched on the clippers but the stranger waves him back; he lifts off a toupe.

... Pretty good, huh? Fools even the experts. 100% human hair, handcrafted by Jacques of San Francisco and I'd hate to have to tell you what I paid for it.

Ed

Uh-huh.

Stranger

Yes, it's a nice rug. I'm paying it down on the installment plan. . .

Ed starts to trim the stranger's fringe.

... A lot of folks live with the pate exposed. They say the dames think it's sexy. But for my money it's just not good grooming--and grooming, my friend, is probably the most important thing in business--after personality, of course--

He twists around in his seat offering his hand.

--Creighton Tolliver, pleased to know ya.

Ed

Ed Crane. What uh, what brings you to Santa Rosa?

Creighton

A goose, friend. I was chasing a wild goose. Ed, have you ever heard of venture capital?

Ed

Uh--

Creighton

Well, its the wildest goose there is. Risk money. Very speculative. Except, Ed, in certain situations it's not, see? I thought I had a prospect here. Well, I make the haul up and this lousy so-and-so tells me his situation has changed--all his capital's gonna be tied up in expansion plans of his own. Thank you, mother! Pop goes another bubble! It's only the biggest business opportunity since Henry Ford and I can't seem to interest a soul!

Ed

That right.

Creighton

It's called dry-cleaning. You heard me right, brother, "dry cleaning"--wash without water, no suds, no tumble, no stress on the clothes. It's all done with chemicals, friend, and your garments end up crisp and fresh. And here's the capper: No shrinkage.

Ed

Huh.

Creighton

That's right! Dry Cleaning--remember the name. It's going to revolutionize the laundry industry, and those that get in early are gonna bear the fruit away. All I need is ten thousand to open my first store, then I use its cash flow to finance another, and so on--leap-frog, bootstrap myself a whole chain. Well, me and a partner. Cleanliness, friend. There's money in it. There's a future. There's room to grow. . . Say, that's looking pretty good. Let's see it with the hairpiece on. . .

BATHROOM DOORWAY

It is evening. Ed leans against the bathroom doorjamb, hands thrust into his pockets, a cigarette between his lips pluming smoke, as he gazes contemplatively off.

Voice-Over
Dry-cleaning. . .

The reverse shows Doris soaking in the tub, reading a magazine.

. . . Was I crazy to be thinking about it? Was he a huckster,
or opportunity, the real McCoy?

Ed takes the cigarette from his mouth, exhales.

. . . My first instinct was, no, no, the whole idea was nuts.
But maybe that was the instinct that kept me locked up in
the barbershop, nose against the exit, afraid to try turning
the knob. What if I could get the money?

Doris
Honey?

Ed
Mm.

Doris
Shave my legs, will ya?

She lifts one leg and rests the heel on the rim of the tub.

Ed saunters over, perches on the rim, cigarette back in his mouth curling smoke. He picks up a bar of soap; starts soaping the leg.

He sets down the soap and picks up a safety razor.

As we watch the razor take long slow strokes along the lather, dark bits of hair flecking the white foam:

Voice-Over
. . . It was clean. No water. Chemicals.

He shakes the razor in the tub. Shavings float away across the soap-slicked water.

Doris
(absently, as she reads)
Gimme a drag.

Ed pulls the cigarette from his mouth between two fingers, uses the two fingers to flip it over, and holds it for Doris as she sucks.

He brings the cigarette, now marked with lipstick, back to his own mouth.

Doris
(absently)
Love ya, honey.

A DOOR

With a number on it: 14A. We hear a voice muffled through the door, breaking into laughter.

A hand enters to knock.

Voice
Yeah, come in.

The door swings open to show the stranger, in his shirtsleeves, sitting on the bed, talking on the phone. A tray of room-service dishes sits near him.

The stranger is bald; his hairpiece sits on the pillow next to him.

Creighton
(into the phone)
Okay. . . yeah. I'll see you tomorrow.

He hangs up, looks quizzically at Ed.

. . . Oh, I thought you were the porter. . . Can I help you?

Ed stands awkwardly by the door.

Ed

... I'm, uh, Ed.

The stranger gives him a quizzical smile.

... Ed Crane. Remember? Today?

Creighton
Sorry, friend, I, uh, you got me at a disadvantage.

Ed
I'm, uh, I'm—the barber.

Creighton
Jesus! The barber!

He slaps his knee.

... I'll be a sonofagun. Why didn't you say so?
'Course—the barber.

Ed nods, with a trace of a forced smile.

... Didn't recognize you without the smock. Did I—
damn—did I leave something at the shop?

Ed
No... I might be interested in that, uh, business
proposition—

The stranger, surprised, quickly picks up his hairpiece and starts arranging it on his head.

Creighton
You got the dough?!

Ed
I can get it, yeah.

Creighton
Come in, come in, siddown over there. Coffee?

Ed
No. I—tell me—

Creighton

Sure.

Ed

What's involved, aside from putting up the money?
What're you looking for the partner to do?

Creighton

Do? Hell, nothing. Well, you'll want to keep tabs on your investment of course, the day-to-day running of the business. But I'm looking for a silent partner. I've done the research, I've contacted the venders, the deal is set—I'm just looking for venture capital, friend. Disappear if you want, check in whenever you like—I want the dough; I don't take attendance.

Ed

And how do we share—

Creighton

50-50, straight down the line. You and me. Finance and expertise. So—you've got dough then do ya?

Ed

I'll have it in a week.

Creighton

Well, I'll be damned. The barber! And I thought this trip was a bust. Well. . .

He reaches for a bottle of bonded whiskey on the night stand and hands Ed a glass.

. . . it just goes to show—when one door slams shut, another one opens. Here's to ya, uh. . .

Ed

Ed.

They both knock back the whiskey. Creighton leans back and stares at Ed under heavy-lidded eyes, a faint smile on his lips, his hairpiece slightly askew.

Ed stares back. After a beat, without taking his eyes off Ed, Creighton reaches up and loosens his tie. An almost imperceptible wink from his left eye.

Ed
... Was that a pass?

Creighton
(hoarsely)
Maybe...

Ed
You're out of line, Mister.

Creighton throws up his hands apologetically.

Creighton
No problem!

Ed
Way out of line.

Creighton
Right! Strictly business.

Ed
Yeah.

CLOSE ON TYPEWRITTEN NOTE

It says:

I KNOW ABOUT YOU AND DORIS CRANE.
COOPERATE OR ED CRANE WILL KNOW.
YOUR WIFE WILL KNOW. EVERYONE WILL
KNOW. GATHER \$10,000 AND AWAIT
INSTRUCTIONS.

A hand pulls the note out of a typewriter carriage.

Voice-Over
I sent it to Dave the next morning. And I waited.

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BARBERSHOP

We are looking down at the top of an eight-year-old's crew cut as clippers buzz its perimeter.

Frank reads a magazine. The youngster reads a comic as Ed works his head.

Ed

Frank.

Frank

Huh?

Ed

This hair.

Frank

Yeah...

Ed

... You ever wonder about it?

Frank

Whuddya mean?

Ed

I don't know... How it keeps on coming. It just keeps growing.

Frank

Yeah—lucky for us, huh pal?

Ed

No, I mean it's growing, it's part of us. And we cut it off. And throw it away.

Frank

Come on Eddy, you're gonna scare the kid.

Ed shuts off the clippers and gives the apron a flap.

Ed

Okay bud, you're through.

The kid hops down, still reading his comic, and ambles out the door. Ed gives Frank a considered stare.

... I'm gonna take his hair and throw it out in the dirt.

Frank

What the--

Ed

I'm gonna mingle it with common house dirt.

Frank

What the hell are you talking about?

Ed turns back to the counter to hang up his clippers.

Ed

I don't know. Skip it.

EXT ED'S HOUSE

It is twilight. Ed lifts the latch on the front gate and, hands in his pockets and cigarette in his mouth, ambles up the walk.

Radio music filters out from the house.

INSIDE

Ed is walking through the living room, hands still in his pockets. He cranes to peer through a bedroom doorway on the far side of the house. The music emanates from a radio somewhere in the bedroom.

Doris (off)

Ed?

A track forward reveals Doris sitting at a vanity, doing her hair. Her dress is half zipped up in back.

... Gimme a zip.

Ed walks over behind her.

Ed

Where you going?

Doris

Me? Us! The party at Nirdlinger's—I told you last week.
For the Christmas Push.

Ed

... Yeah, right.

We are close on the zipper as Ed's hand takes the tab, pauses, then lowers it slightly. Her back blooms through the dark fabric of the dress.

Doris turns to give Ed a brief quizzical look over her shoulder.

He slides the zipper the rest of the way.

Doris reaches for a perfume atomizer.

Doris

Come on, get ready. It's important.

Ed

Nah. . . go ahead. I'm not big on patties.

Doris

Oh, don't be a grump.

THE SALES FLOOR

It is festooned with streamers.

Ed leans against a wall, one hand dug into a pocket, the other bringing a cigarette to his mouth.

Band music plays and Nirdlinger's employees whirl on the dance floor. Bobby-soxed teenagers Lindy-hop and pass palms over their knees.

A thin young man in a sports coat stands next to Ed, watching, his Adam's apple bobbing.

Young Man

Wild, man!

He goes out onto the dance floor.

Ed, left by himself, gazes across the floor.

His view, broken by dancers' crosses, shows Big Dave talking to Doris, a worried expression clashing with his checked suit.

Doris reacts angrily.

Ed continues to watch.

Big Dave morosely absorbs the angry words from Doris. He glances up toward Ed and catches his gaze with consternation. He gives Doris a jerk of the head, and she too looks over toward Ed.

Voice

You in ladies' wear?

Ed looks over.

The young man with the Adam's apple is back, looking out at the floor, snapping his fingers.

Ed

... Huh?

Young Man

Haven't I seen you up in ladies' wear?

Ed

I don't work here. My wife does.

Young Man

Uh-huh. Some beat, huh?

Ed

Yeah.

The young man nods out at the floor, fingers snapping, shoulders swaying.

YoungMan

Check out the rack on that broad in the angorra.

Ed

... Uh-huh.

A hand is laid on Ed's shoulder. It is Big Dave; he leans in to murmur.

Big Dave

Ed. Can I talk to you?

BIG DAVE'S OFFICE

Music from the party drifts in only faintly. The office is built into a corner of the sales floor. It is dominated by a large desk. A large plate glass window on the far side affords a partial view of the floor.

Big Dave

Siddown. Siddown...

Ed sits in a leather chair in front of the desk. Dave fumbles nervously on top of the desk for a cigar. He trims the end of the cigar with a short double-bladed knife with a steel grip.

... Souvenirized it off a Jap in New Guinea. . .

He hands one cigar to Ed, takes one for himself, then drags up another chair to face Ed.

... I guess you're wondering what that ruckus was about. . .

The office remains dark, the only illumination coming from the window on the bright floor behind Big Dave. Ed leans forward as Dave lights the cigars.

... These're Havanas. Romeo and Juliets. Private stock.

Dave, clearly agitated, pulls nervously on his cigar.

... Ed, I...

Ed

What is it, Dave?

Suddenly Dave breaks down weeping. He rocks gently forward, his face buried in his hands, the burning cigar in his right hand perilously close to his hair.

Big Dave

Ed, I've been weak. . .

His shoulders heave.

. . . I've, uh. . . I've, uh. . . thanks.

Ed has taken his cigar so that he won't burn himself.

. . . I've, uh. . . Oh Jesus. I've been carrying on with a married woman. Uh, no one you know. And now the, uh—what is it they say?—the—the—the chickens are coming home to roost.

Ed awkwardly holds the two burning cigars.

Ed

Uh-huh.

Big Dave

Hell, I, I'm not proud of it. But, uh—that's not the worst of it. I got a note. A blackmail note. You know, come across or everybody knows.

Ed

Uh-huh. . .

Big Dave

Well you know that that would do to me.

Ed

I guess it would be pretty awkward.

Big Dave

Awkward?! Ann'd throw me out on my keister! Hell, it's her family's store—~~her~~ store. I serve at the indulgence of the goddamn ownership, Ed.

Ed

Uh-huh.

Big Dave

What is it they say?

He looks up through blearily miserable eyes.

. . . I . . . I only work here. And the lady's husband would know. . . Oh, Jesus. . .

Ed

. . . How much do they want, Dave?

Big Dave

Ten thousand dollars! I don't know what to do, Ed. I don't know what I can do. . .

He sobs, trying to catch his breath:

. . . even though—even though—I know who the sonofabitch is.

Ed

. . . You know. . . who who is?

Big Dave

The sonofabitch. The blackmailer. It's uh, it's no one you know. It's a businessman from Sacramento. A goddamn pansy, Ed. He tried to rope me into some crackpot scheme; I heard him out and then told him to go to hell. And the very next day, the very next day Ed, I get blackmailed for the same amount.

Ed

Would he—it sounds pretty obvious.

Big Dave

Well I guess he don't care that it's obvious.

Ed

Mm. How, uh. . . how did he know that—

Big Dave

I don't know. He's staying at the hotel I've gone to with uh, with the lady in question. Must've seen us.

Big Dave blows his nose, reaches his cigar from Ed.

... Thanks...

He exhales with a long sigh.

... Well, he's got me by the proverbial short'n curlies.

Suddenly Big Dave breaks down again and rocks forward, his shoulders heaving.

Dave

Oh Jesus...

Ed

... Why don't you just pay him, Dave?

Big Dave

That's my capitalization on the Annex! My operation, Ed!
Christ allmighty. That's what I was--that's what I was just
talking to Doris about. A way of getting the money from
the store that we could hide from Ann.

Ed

Mm.

Dave

Embezzling, Ed. From my own goddamn wife!

Collecting himself again, he gives a forced tearful chuckle:

Dave

Doris, she was pretty hot about that. God bless her. She
doesn't know I'm telling you this--she's mad enough already.
But, Jesus Ed, you're the only one I can talk to. I'm, I'm
sorry I... I better get back to the party.

He rises, clears his throat as he rubs the tears from his face.

... I look all right?

PULLING ED

He has left the office to wander through an adjacent room lit only by spill from the party. It is the music department; pianos and spinets are arranged around the floor.

Voice-Over

In a way I felt bad for Big Dave. I knew the ten grand was going to pinch him where it hurt . . .

Ed sits on a piano stool next to a standing ashtray. He takes out a cigarette, lights it off his cigar, stubs out the cigar.

. . . But Doris was two-timing me and I guess, somewhere, that pinched a little too.

His attention is caught by a distant wood knock. Someone is raising the wooden key-guard on a piano across the room.

The person can be seen only obscurely, from three-quarters behind, past the jumble of instruments arranged haphazardly across the floor. The person begins to play.

Ed listens. The piece is slow, sweet, almost like a lullaby.

The player, unaware that there is an audience, plays on, and Ed listens, eyes narrowed against the smoke curling up past his face.

The piece ends.

Ed

That was pretty.

The player turns, surprised. It is a young woman.

. . . Did you make that up?

Young Woman

Oh no. That was written by Mr. Ludwig Van Beethoven.

Ed nods recognition of the name.

Ed

That was quite something.

Young Woman

He wrote some beautiful piano sonatas.

Ed
That was something. I'm Ed Crane-

Young Woman
I know who you are, Mr. Crane.

He gives her a quizzical look.

... My father used to take me with you when he got his hair cut. Walter Abundas?

Ed's head tilts back in acknowledgment.

... I'm Rachel Abundas. Everyone calls me Birdy.

Ed
Sorry, I just didn't remember.

Birdy
Oh that's all right. You can't be expected to remember every skinny girl who comes in with her dad.

Ed gives a wry smile.

... You don't like the music out there?

Ed
It's okay I guess. No, I don't really. I'm not big on music, ordinarily.

A woman's voice calls sharply from offscreen:

Voice

Ed

He looks.

Silhouetted in the doorway to the party room is Doris, coat over her arm, purse in hand.

INSIDE ED'S CAR NIGHT

Doris and Ed are driving home.

Doris draws heavily at a cigarette, looking flintily out at the road.

Doris
... What a knucklehead.

Ed
Who?

Doris
Dave.

Ed
How's that?

Doris
Ahh...

She waves angrily.

... Money problems. He's thinking about canceling the Annex.

Ed
So?

Doris
That means I don't run Nirdlinger's!

Ed
Mm.

They ride in silence for a beat. Doris shakes her head.

Doris
... What a knucklehead.

THE STREET

As the car roars past and into the distance.

STREET DAY

We are looking from inside a parked car towards a hotel entrance. Big Dave emerges from the hotel and gets into a Hudson and drives off.

Voice-Over

Big Dave did it, though. . .

Ed, sitting in his car, is watching him.

. . . I sent a note telling him where to drop the money. . .

HOTEL HALLWAY

Ed emerges from a stairwell and goes to a standing ashtray by the elevator.

Voice-Over

. . . and he did. He came across.

Ed reaches into the trash hole in the ashtray column and reaches out a Nirdlinger's bag.

He goes back to the stairwell.

ANOTHER FLOOR

Ed emerges from the stairwell, goes to a door and knocks.

The door swings open.

Creighton

Yeah, good, how are ya, come in. . .

Ed follows him into the room.

. . . You bring a check?

Ed

Cash.

Creighton

Cash?!

He gives Ed a look.

. . . Usually we do this kind of thing with a bank draft. But cash—that's fine—it's all the same in the end—dough's dough, huh?

Ed

Sure.

Creighton

I got the paperwork here. Partnership papers here, they reflect our agreement, fifty-fifty on the net, I supply professional services, you supply the capital—I'll give you a receipt on the dough there, huh?

Ed

Yeah.

Creighton

Pretty straightforward, but I don't know if you wanna show this stuff to a lawyer—

Ed

It's okay.

Creighton

Yeah, fuck 'em, huh? Pay 'em to tangle it up and then you pay 'em to untangle it, what's the point.

Creighton perspires as he counts the money.

. . . Just a second here I'll give you a receipt on the, uh. . . Whoa, Nellie. . . Oh—by the way—we didn't talk about this, I, uh. . . I think I'm gonna call the place "Tolliver's," after me, you know—I didn't think you were much interested in, uh—

Ed

That'll be fine.

Creighton
Yeah, good. Lemme just, uh. . .

He wipes his brow, finishes counting.

. . . Yeah, that's it. As per our discussion.

Ed
Uh-huh.

He hands Ed an executed agreement and a receipt.

Creighton
Well, there it is. Writ large in legal escriture, next step is-

Ed
Look, uh. . . Creighton. . .

He gives Creighton a level stare, smoke pluming up from the cigarette jammed in his mouth.

. . . You're not gonna screw me on this?

Creighton
Screw you-Jesus! Take it to a lawyer! No, I insist! This is dry-cleaning-this is not some fly-by-night thing here! I must say, I've been an entrepreneur for 13 years and I've never-

Ed
All right.

Creighton
And I've never been asked-Look, you want the dough back? You know who I am! You-

Ed
Okay.

Creighton mops his brow again.

Creighton
So, uh. . . "Tolliver's" is okay then?

CAR

Ed drives with a cigarette dangling from his lower lip. Doris sits next to him. Rural scenery slips by in the background.

Voice-Over

The next day was Saturday. We were going to a reception for Doris's cousin Gina, who'd just married a wop vintner out near Modesto. Doris didn't much feel like going and I didn't either but, like she said, we had a Commitment.

Doris gazes stonily out at the road. At length:

Doris

... I hate wops.

Ed gives her a bemused glance, then shrugs, blowing smoke. Doris glares at him.

... What's so damn strange about that?

Ed

I didn't say a word.

She looks back out at the road.

Doris

... You didn't have to grow up with 'em.

This brings nothing from Ed. Doris shakes her head.

... Family. Boy.

BY A BARN

Wops in Sunday clothing greet each other around tables piled with food.

A small child runs up to his mother and yanks on her dress and screams:

Child

He's ridin' Garibaldi! Uncle Frankie's ridin' Garibaldi!

Surrounded by cheering children, with a jug of wine slung over his shoulder, Frank is riding an enormous pig. He swipes at the pig's ass with his large straw hat.

Voice-Over

That was when she started drinking.

Doris is standing by one of the tables, drinking red wine from a water glass. Ed stands nearby.

A large woman hugs Doris.

Woman

How you doin', Doris, you been okay?

Doris

How're you, Costanza?

Woman

Oh, you know, I got my healt'. And how you been, uh. . .

Ed

Ed.

Woman

Ed. How's a business?

Ed

Okay.

Woman

(to Doris)

He's a barber, right? It's a good trade. So how come you got no kids?

PICNIC TABLE

A group of kids are pulling Frank, laughing, by the hand towards a picnic table set out with a number of pies.

Voices

Uncle Frankie's gotta join! Wait for Frankie!

Frank
No, come on kids—I just ate lunch!

Voices
No no—Uncle Frankie's gotta join!

An old man is standing by with a stopwatch.

Old Man
Ready. . .

He clicks the timer.

—Go!

Frankie and the line of children plunge their faces into the line of blueberry pies.

The other picnickers cheer them on.

ELSEWHERE

Ed and Doris approach the young couple—innocent looking, the bride still in her gown, accepting congratulations.

Doris, holding her empty glass, is not a happy drunk.

Doris
Congratulations, Gina. It's so goddamn wonderful.

Ed
Congratulations, Gina.

Doris
Life is so goddamn wonderful, you almost won't believe it.

Ed
Honey. . .

Doris
It's just a goddamn bowl a cherries, I'm sure. . .

Ed tries to lead her away.

Ed

Honey...

Doris calls back over her shoulder:

Doris

Congratulations on your goddamn cherries...

As Ed and Doris recede we hear her petulant:

... Leggo my goddamn elbow.

ELSEWHERE

In long shot we see Frankie at the crest of a hill staggering slowly, painfully, towards a tree. In his right hand he clutches something—a trophy.

When he reaches the tree he leans against it with his free hand, and vomits.

CAR

Late afternoon, driving home.

Ed drives. Doris sits in the front passenger seat, snoring lightly. Frankie sits in the back seat hugging his trophy in both arms, eyes closed, but speaking:

Frankie

I never wanna see another blueberry pie...

Silence.

... I never even wanna hear those words.

Doris moans.

More silence.

... Don't say those words, Ed.

OUTSIDE THE BUNGALOW

It is twilight. Ed's coupe is parked in the driveway. He is just rounding the back of the car to open the passenger side doorway. He pulls Doris from the car, half asleep, half drunk.

INSIDE THE BUNGALOW

As the door swings open. Ed stumbles in supporting Doris who has one arm draped around his neck. He helps her into the bedroom and eases her onto the bed.

He sits on the edge of the bed and looks down at her.

Shadows from branches outside play softly over her face. She is breathing through her open mouth; her face is moist with perspiration.

Voice-Over

I'd met Doris blind on a double-date with a loudmouthed buddy of mine who was seeing a friend of hers from work. We went to a movie; Doris had a flask; we killed it. She could put it away. At the end of the night she said she liked it I didn't talk much. A couple weeks later she suggested—

There is the harsh jangle of the telephone. Doris moans but does not wake; Ed rises and goes to the living room.

He picks up the phone.

Ed

Yeah.

Big Dave

Ed, it's Big Dave. I gotta talk to you.

Ed

What—now?

Big Dave

Please, Ed.

Ed

But it's...

Big Dave

Please, Ed.

Ed sighs.

Ed

Your place?

Big Dave

I'm at Nirdlinger's. Let yourself in.

Ed

Okay.

He hangs up.

He nudges Doris.

... Honey.

She murmurs.

... Honey.

She rolls away and burrows into a pillow.

Ed opens her purse and pokes through it.

A DOOR

We are looking over Ed's shoulder as he hesitantly swings the door open.

It reveals Big Dave's office in Nirdlinger's. The place is quiet—very quiet.

The office is rather dark. A down-facing banker's lamp on the desk illuminates Big Dave's hands on the desktop. He is a dark shape behind the desk.

Ed
... Dave?

Big Dave
Come on in.

Ed enters, sits.

An awkward silence.

Ed
... What's the problem, Big Dave?

Another silence.

Big Dave
... I'm ruined.

His hands writhe on the desktop.

... It ruined me. This money. No annex. I'm all shot to hell.

Ed
So you paid the guy?

Big Dave stares without speaking.

After a long beat:

Big Dave
... What kind of man are you.

Ed
... Huh?

Big Dave
What kind of man are you.

Ed
Big Dave--

Big Dave

I'd understand if you'd walked in here. Socked me in the nose. Whatever. I deserved it.

Ed

I, uh...

Big Dave

I'm not proud of what I did. But you.

No one talks.

Big Dave sighs.

... Yeah I paid up. As you well know. And then I went and found the pansy.

He looks at Ed.

... Got nothin' to say, huh? Yeah, well, you already know the story. I didn't, I had to beat it out of the pansy. Your money.

No response.

... What kind of man are you.

Big Dave rises.

... Well.

He crosses around the desk and adds, sadly:

... I'm all shot to hell.

Ed starts to rise but Big Dave is already looming over him. Big Dave bear-hugs him and spins him into a wall.

Ed hits the wall, bounces off, back into Big Dave. Big Dave wallops him in the stomach. Ed doubles over.

... What kind of man are you.

Big Dave hurls him against the desk, then slams his face against the desktop. Ed's hands

scramble at the top of the desk as Big Dave grabs him by the neck and lifts him onto his toes. He slams him face-first into the glass wall between the office and the darkened sales floor.

Ed twists around, the back of his head now pressed against the glass. Big Dave's hands lock around his neck.

Big Dave sweats and strains. After a beat a crack shoots up the pain of glass.

Ed's hand sweeps up and plunges something into Big Dave's neck.

Big Dave grunts and turns away, gurgling. His hands go up to his throat.

Ed watches. He is holding Big Dave's cigar trimmer.

Big Dave takes a couple of deliberate steps backward, his head twisted away.

He falls back, tripped up by a chair, which spins him face-down onto the floor.

Big Dave crawls away face-down across the floor, on his knees but with his hands still at his throat. His face and knees awkwardly support his weight as if he were pushing something across the floor with his nose.

He reaches a corner but still pushes forward, wedging himself in, legs still scraping away as if to push him through the wall. Blood is pooling out from under him.

Big Dave's legs are still working. His gurgling continues.

Ed watches.

Big Dave's legs start to move furiously. They convulse. His whole body shakes as he goes into shock.

Ed watches.

Big Dave stops shaking. He remains wedged awkwardly into the corner, face-down. He is still.

Ed stares down at the inert mass on the floor. The room is very quiet.

Ed looks down at his hands, rolling them over to look at his fingertips.

He walks across the room, pushes the door open and walks across the darkened sales

floor.

EXT THE STORE

Ed walks to his car. He does not look about, is not particularly furtive. He gets into the car. He starts the ignition.

EXT HIS HOUSE

He pulls up, sits motionless for a beat. Gradually, something draws his attention; he cocks his head and looks up through the windshield.

A branch creaks and sways in the breeze.

INT THE HOUSE

Ed gets into bed next to Doris. He stares at the ceiling. Wind rustles outside.

A branch shadow on the ceiling nods in time with the wind.

He looks at Doris.

Her face is still lightly sheened with sweat but her mouth is closed now, her breathing more peaceful. The leaf shadows play over her face.

Voice-Over

. . . It was only a couple of weeks after we met that Doris suggested getting married. I said, Don't you wanna get to know me more? She said, Why, does it get better? She looked at me like I was a dope, which I've never really minded from her. And she had a point, I guess. We knew each other as well then as now. . . .

He is gazing at her.

. . . Anyway, well enough.

The sound and image fade out.

BARBERSHOP

The next day.

Ed cuts hair, a cigarette pluming between his lips.

Frankie
Holy-moly do I got a headache.

Frankie is giving a haircut as well.

... How you today, Ed?

Ed
Okay.

Frankie
You don't got a headache?

Ed continues cutting hair.

Ed
... Nah.

Frankie
Damn, I got a headache to beat the band.

LATER

Ed sits in his chair, hands folded in his lap, head tilted back, eyes closed.

We hold on Ed as we hear a clipper buzzing and Frankie talking to someone in his chair.

Frankie
Ya can't pump it. Did ya pump it? That'll just flood it.

Customer
Ya gotta pump it. Ya can't just hold it down. That'll flood it.

Frankie
You crazy? You pumped it?

Customer

Well ya can't hold it down.

There is the jingle of the door bell. Ed opens his eyes.

Two men in fedoras are walking in.

Ed starts to rise.

Man 1

Ed Crane?

Ed

Right.

Man 1

Come on outside.

Ed is already pulling off his smock.

Ed

Sure.

OUTSIDE

The two men are staring at the sidewalk, smoking, hesitant to speak. One of them finally comes up with an icebreaker:

Man 2

... So you're a barber, huh?

Ed

That's right.

Man 1

I'm Officer Persky. This is Krebs. ...

Ed nods toward their car.

Ed

... We going?

Krebs

Huh? No.

Beat

Persky

. . . Cigarette?

Ed holds up one hand with a smoking cigarette.

Persky

Right. Uh. . . Pete's got some news for you.

His partner gives Persky a dirty look.

Krebs

. . . Look pal, it's a tough break, but uh. . . well damnit, your wife's been pinched.

Persky

They sent us around to tell ya.

Ed

Huh?

Krebs

They sent us to tell ya. We pulled the detail.

Ed

My wife?

Persky

Yeah, uh, they brung her to the county jail, uh. . .

Krebs

Homicide.

Persky

Well, embezzlement and homicide. A guy named David Brewster. He's, uh. . . He's the decedant.

Ed

I don't understand.

Krebs

He's the dead guy.

Ed stares at him.

Persky

Yeah, it's a tough break.

Krebs

Visiting ends at five. Too late today. You can see her tomorrow.

Persky

Sorry, pal. They sent us to tell ya.

He shakes his head.

... Crap detail.

RESIDENTIAL STREET

It is evening. Ed is just pulling up to a house on a tree-lined street similar to his own. He gets out of his car and goes up the walk, and a man sitting on the porch swing holds up a hand of greeting.

Man

'Lo Ed.

Ed

Hello Walter.

He steps up to the porch.

The man is holding a tumbler of whiskey and ice that clinks as the swing moves. He has a light sheen of drinker's sweat, and the very slightly expansive manner of someone who's put one or two away.

Walter

Have a seat.

Ed glances around but the swing is the only seat. He sits down next to Walter.

Ed

Thanks. Thanks for seeing me, at home.

Walter

Oh hell. Drink?

Ed

No thanks.

Walter

Sure you don't need one?

Ed

I'm fine.

Walter

Okay. Boy. Jesus!

Ed

Yeah. What do I, uh. . .

Walter

Well of course I, uh, it's out of my league, criminal stuff. I do, uh, probate, real estate, title search, uh. . . I'd be absolutely worthless, something like this. Absolutely worthless.

He belches.

-Scuse me, just finished dinner. Um. Frankly, Doris'd be better off with the county defender.

Ed

He a good man?

Walter

Bert's okay, sure, he's a good man. I won't kid you though, Ed, nobody around here has any experience with this kind of, er. . . And I hear they're bringing a prosecutor up from Sacramento. Capital offense. Taking it seriously. . .
Hmm. . .

Ed

So--

Walter
Taking it seriously.

Ed
So, who should I--

The front door opens and someone speaks through the screen:

Voice
You want any coffee, dad?

Ed looks around at the voice.

--Oh, hello Mr. Crane.

She steps out; it is Birdy Abundas.

Ed rises and they awkwardly shake hands.

Ed
Hello Rachel.

Birdy
I'm so sorry. . . I was sorry to hear.

Ed
Yeah. Thanks.

Walter
Coffee, Ed?

Ed
I'm fine. Thanks.

Walter
No thanks, honey.

Birdy
Okay. Nice to see you, Mr. Crane.

They watch her go back in.

Walter
Damn it! She's a good kid.

Ed nods.

A beat.

Ed
. . . So, uh, who should I—

Walter
Oh yeah. Well there's Lloyd Garroway in San Francisco.
Probity—you know, no one ever said anything iffy about
Lloyd Garroway. Conservative. Jury might like that. .
Might like that here.

He takes a sip of his drink.

. . . Probity.

Ed
Uh-huh. Is he the best then, for uh. . .

Walter
Well the best, the money-is-no-object best, for a criminal
case, any lawyer would tell you Freddy Riedenschneider.
Out of Sacramento. Course, I don't know how you're fixed
for money.

Ed
Uh-huh. He's the, uh. . .

Walter
Yeah, the best.

He sniffs.

. . . Yeah, Riedenschneider. Wish I could tell you more.
Hell, I wish I could handle it myself. But I'd be absolutely
worthless for this kind of thing.

He takes a musing sip from his drink.

... Criminal matter? Freddy Riedenschneider.

He thinks.

... No question about it.

ED AT A TABLE

It is a long table with chairs stretching down both sides, one side for prisoners, the other for visitors. The room is empty except for a guard, and an elderly woman sitting across from a younger woman at the far end of the table. The younger woman, in a prison smock, is wailing, her cries echoing in the large room. The elderly woman is holding her hand.

Ed sits across from an empty chair clutching a flower-printed toiletries kit. There are echoing voices suggesting large spaces outside the room.

He sits and waits.

Approaching footsteps.

The door opens. A large prison matron steps aside to let Doris enter.

Doris looks lost in a prison-issue jumper that is too big for her. Her hair is uncurled and bedraggled.

Not only is she not made up, she has a couple of bruises and a cut on her lip.

As Ed stands she gives a hollow look around.

Ed

Honey. . . I brought your make-up.

She looks at him.

Doris

Honey.

Ed

How are you?

She shrugs.

Doris
I don't know what's going on. I-

Ed
What happened to you?

She shakes her head.

... I don't know what happened to Big Dave. I know some of it. Irregularities in my books, they said. Can I explain it.

Ed
You don't have to-

Doris
I helped him cook the books, Ed. I did do that-

Ed
You don't have to tell them anything. We're getting you a lawyer.

Doris doesn't seem to be listening. She sighs:

Doris
I know all about that. But I don't know how much to tell them.

Ed
Don't tell 'em anything. We're getting you Freddy Riedenschneider.

Doris finally looks at him.

Doris
Should I . . . Should I tell you why?

Ed
You don't have to tell me anything.

Her gaze drifts away again. She notices the sobbing woman.

Doris

Jesus Christ.

Doris looks around and laughs.

... My books used to be perfect. Anyone could open them up, make sense of the whole goddamn store.

Ed

Honey...

She shakes her head.

Doris

... I knew we'd pay for it.

BARBERSHOP

Ed sits in a waiting-customer chair, wearing his smock. Frank paces in front of him, wearing-oddly-a suit.

He smacks a fist into his palm.

Frank

This is what family is for, Ed! This is when ya come together!

Ed

Yeah.

Frank

Close ranks! Goddamnit! Those sons of bitches!

Ed

Frank, uh-you know I'll try to contribute, but, uh-Freddy Riedenschneider-

Frank

I don't care what it costs! This is when ya come together!

Ed

That's very generous.

Frank
The hell with it, Eddie!

BANK INTERIOR

Ed and Frank sit waiting on a bench in the high-vaulted lobby. Frank looks uncomfortable in an ill-fitting suit. As they wait, he looks nervously about.

In a hushed voice:

Frank
They're just people like you and me, Ed. Remember that.

Ed
Uh-huh.

Frank
Just people. They gotta put up the big front so that people will trust them with their money. This is why the big lobby, Ed. But they put their pants on one leg at a time. Just like you and me.

Ed
Uh-huh.

Frank
They too use the toilet, Ed. In spite of appearances. And their money will be secured by the barbershop. A rock. A ~~rock~~, the barbershop. And they're just like you'n-

A door opens. A conservatively dressed man of late middle age emerges.

Man
Mr. Raffio?

Frank hops to his feet.

Frank
Yes sir.

Man
 Could you come with me please?

Frank
 Sure. Can Ed come too?

The man looks dubiously at Ed.

Man
 Mr. . . . ?

Ed
 Crane. Ed Crane.

Man
 You also have an interest in the securing property?

Frank
 He's a barber.

Man
 Ah.

Frank
 Second chair.

Man
 Not an owner.

Frank
 No, he's family, he's my brother-in-law.

Man
 Ah-hah. It would be best if he waited here.

He enters the half-glassed doorway of his office, Frank trailing dejectedly behind. The door closes and we hear their muffled voices from the interior, the words indistinct.

Ed sits and watches the two men perform their pantomime of business: Frank nervously reads documents with one hand cupped to his forehead for concentration; the banker passes successive documents across the desk with a word of explanation for each; Frankie signs them.

Ed takes out a cigarette, lights it, impassively continues to watch.

Voice-Over

The barbershop. Doris and Frank's father had worked thirty years to own it free and clear. Now it got signed over to the bank, and the bank signed some money over to Frank, and Frank signed the money over. . .

TRACKING POINT-OF-VIEW

It is midday; we are tracking forward along the sidewalk, nearing a long cream-colored Packard parked at the curb. A couple of kids have stopped to peer into the car's windows; no doubt the car is the fanciest in town.

. . . to Freddy Riedenschneider, who got into town two days later. . .

Ed is walking along the sidewalk. He looks up at the storefront: a restaurant with a large front window covered inside by plush red drapery; gilt lettering on the window says DaVINCI.

. . . and told me to meet him at Da Vinci's for lunch.

TRACKING POINT-OF-VIEW

Inside the restaurant. We are tracking towards a table whose lone occupant sits with his back to us holding open a menu as he gives his order to a facing waitress:

Man

. . . not fried, poached. Three of 'em for two minutes. A strip steak medium rare, flapjacks, potatoes, tomato juice and plenty of hot coffee.

He flips the menu over.

. . . Do you have prairie oysters?

Waitress

No sir.

Man

Then bring me a fruit cocktail while I wait.

He looks up at Ed.

...You're Crane?

Ed

Yeah--

Man

Barber, right? I'm Freddy Reidenschnieder. Hungry? They tell me the chow's okay here. I made some inquiries.

Ed

No thanks, I--

The waitress has put the fruit cocktail down in front of Reidenschnieder

Riedenschneider

Look, I don't wanna waste your time so I'll eat while we talk. Ya mind? You don't mind. So while I'm in town I'll be staying at the Hotel Metropole, the Turandot Suite. Yeah it's goofy, the suites're named after operas; room's okay though, I checked it out. I'm having 'em hold it for me on account of I'll be back and forth. In addition to my retainer you're paying hotel, living expenses, secretarial, private eye if we need to make inquiries, headshrinker should we go that way. We'll talk about appeals if as and when. For right now, has she confessed?

Ed

No. Of course not. She didn't do it.

Riedenschneider

Good! That helps. Not that she didn't do it, that she didn't confess. Of course there's ways to deal with a confession, but that's good!--one less thing to think about. Now. Interview. I'm seeing her tomorrow. You should be there. Three o'clock. One more thing: You keep your mouth shut. I get the lay of the land, I tell you what to say. No talking out of school. What's out of school? Everything's out of school. I do the talking; you keep your trap shut. I'm an attorney, you're a barber, you don't know anything.

Understood?

Ed shrugs:

Ed

Okay.

Riedenschneider

Good! Any questions give me a ring-Turandot suite; if I'm out leave a message. You sure you don't want anything?
No?

He points a finger at him.

... You're okay, pal. You're okay, she's okay. Everything's gonna be hunky-dory.

The waitress puts down a plate of steak and eggs.

... And the flapjacks, honey.

DRIVING POINT-OF-VIEW

We are looking at people walking along the sidewalk through the windshield of a moving car.

Voice-Over

All going about their business. It seemed like I knew a secret—a bigger one even than what had really happened to Big Dave, something none of them knew. . .

Ed, driving, is gazing through the windshield.

... I guess I didn't, really, but that was how it felt. Like I had made it to the outside, somehow, and they were all still struggling, way down below.

ED IN BED

Arms folded behind his head, staring at the ceiling.

On the ceiling is the moving shadow of a tree limb, cast by a streetlight.

We hear a distant muffled knock.

Ed turns his head.

THE FRONT DOOR

Ed opens it as he finishes cinching a bathrobe.

The woman waiting on the front porch is dressed in black—black dress and a black veiled hat that is too big for her small birdlike frame.

Wind rustles in the trees behind her.

She stares at Ed.

Ed

Ann.

For the first time we hear her speak, in a low, tremulous voice:

Ann

Hello Ed.

Ed

Ann. Will you come in?

She shakes her head.

Ann

... No. No, it's very late.

Ed nods.

After an uncomfortable beat, through which she continues to stare:

Ed

... I'm so sorry about your loss.

Ann

Yes. Thank you.

Ed

Of course, you know—Doris had nothing to do with it.
Nothing at all.

She lays a black-gloved hand on his arm.

Ann

Oh, I know. Don't worry Ed. I came to tell you. . .

Ed

Yes, Ann?

Ann

And you should tell Doris. . .

She falls silent. The trees behind her rustle.

She gives a wary look back. Then, confidently, to Ed:

. . . You know how Big Dave loved camping. And the
outdoors.

Ed is puzzled:

Ed

Yes?

Ann

We went camping last summer. In Eugene Oregon.
Outside of Eugene, Ed.

She gives him a searching look, as if to determine whether this signifies anything to him.

Ed

. . . Yes?

Ann

At night—there were lights—we both saw them. We never
told anyone, outside of our official report.

Ed

Ann-

Ann

A spacecraft. I saw the creatures. They led Big Dave onto the craft. He never told anyone what they did, outside of his report. Of course he told me. No one else.

Ed

Ann-

Ann

The government knows. I cannot repeat it to you. But this thing goes deep, Ed. This was not your wife. It goes deep, and involves the government. There is a great deal of fear. You know how certain circles would find it--the knowledge--a threat. They try to limit it. . . and . .

Ed

Ann, will you come in, sit down, maybe have a drink.

Ann

Sometimes knowledge is a curse, Ed. After this happened, things changed. Big Dave. . . he never touched me again. .

Ed says nothing. Finally she touches his arm again.

.... Tell Doris not to worry. I know it wasn't her. Perhaps this will bring it out, finally. Perhaps now it will all come out.

She turns and heads down the walk.

Her high-heeled footsteps echo on the walk, then the sidewalk, then are subsumed by the rustle of leaves.

Ed watches her go: a small black figure, growing smaller.

PRISON MEETING ROOM

It is a bare unadorned room with a simple wood table and chairs. One high window lets in a shaft of sunlight.

Ed and Doris sit at the table; Freddy Riedenschneider stands to one side staring up at the high window, hands dug into his pockets.

All three are motionless for a long beat. Finally:

Riedenschneider

... It stinks.

Doris

But it's true.

Riedenschneider

I don't care it's true it's not true; it stinks. You say he was being blackmailed; by who? You don't know. For having an affair—with who? You don't know. Did anyone else know about it? Probably not; you don't know.

Ed

I knew about it. Big Dave told me about it, and the spot he was putting himself in by getting the money.

Riedenschneider

Terrific. Your husband backs you up. That's terrific.

He starts pacing.

... You've gotta give me something to work with. Freddy Riedenschneider is good, but he's not a magician. He can't just wave his little wand in the air and make a plausible defense materialize. Look. Look at what the other side is gonna run at us. They got the company books, prepared by you-cooked by you—that's Motive. They got a murder scene you had access to. That's Opportunity. They got that little trimmer thing he was stabbed in the throat with—a dame's weapon—

Ed

It was Big Dave's.

Riedenschneider

—don't interrupt me—that's Means. They got a fine upstanding pillar of the business community as a victim and then they got you, a disgruntled number-juggling underling who on the day in question was drunk as a skunk and whose alibi for the time in question is being passed out at home, alone.

Ed

I was with her.

Riedenschneider gives him a hard stare.

Riedenschneider

. . . Like I say, it stinks.

There is another long pause.

Ed

. . . I killed him.

Riedenschneider eyes him. Wheels start turning.

Riedenschneider

Okay, we forget the blackmail. You killed him. How come?

Ed

He and Doris. . . were having an affair.

Doris eyes him. His manner does not reveal anything.

Riedenschneider

Okay, how did you know?

Ed

I. . . just knew. A husband knows.

Riedenschneider rolls his eyes.

Riedenschneider

Will anyone else say they knew?

Ed

I don't know. I don't think so.

Riedenschneider

How did you get into the store?

Ed

I took Doris's keys.

Riedenschneider

Will anyone say they saw you there? On your way there?
In there? On your way back?

Ed

... I don't think so.

Riedenschneider

Will anyone corroborate any goddamn part of your story at
all?

Ed returns Riedenschneider's stare. Riedenschneider resumes pacing.

... Come on, people. You can't help each other like that.
Let's be realistic now. Let's look at our options. Well,
frankly, I don't see any options.

A nod of the head indicates Doris:

... I cannot present Story A.

Another nod indicates Ed:

... I cannot present Story B. I could plead you for a
nutcase but you look too composed. I could offer a guilty
plea and in return they don't give you the juice, but I don't
think you want to spend the rest of your life in Chino and I
know you didn't hire Freddy Riedenschneider to bold your
hand at a sentencing hearing. Hell, you could've gotten
Lloyd Garroway for that. No, we're not giving up yet; you
hired Freddy Riedenschneider it means you're not throwing
in the towel. I litigate, I don't capitulate. All right, no
options, we gotta think. All right, we go back to the
blackmail thing. It titillates, it's open-ended. . .

His pacing becomes more animated.

... And it makes him the bad guy—ya dig around, ya never know, something unsavory from his past, he approaches you to help with the money, it's too late—his past comes back to haunt him. Who's to say. . .

He is heading for the door.

... Yeah. Okay. Forget the jealous husband thing, that's silly; we're going with the blackmail. I'll be in touch.

The door slams.

HOTEL LOBBY

The camera is drifting in toward the reception desk. Ed is talking to someone behind the desk but the scene plays silently; we hear only Ed's voice-over:

Voice-Over

Of course, there was one person who could confirm Doris's story, or plenty of it: the dry-cleaning pansy. . .

The desk clerk is shaking his head.

... But he'd left the hotel, skipped out on his bill. . .

HALLWAY

It is a rooming-house hallway. A stern middle-aged woman is on the hall telephone. This too plays silently under voice-over:

... He'd also disappeared from the residence he gave me. . .

ED'S LIVING ROOM

We are drifting in towards Ed, who nods at the telephone, and then cradles it. He stares down at the business card he holds in one hand.

... owing two months rent. How could I have been so stupid. Handing over ten thousand dollars. For a piece of paper. And the man gone. . . like a ghost. . .

PULLING BACK FROM ED

In a different living room. He sits on a sofa, hands clasped behind his head, listening. For the first time we hear atmosphere from the scene as the voice-over continues: piano music.

... disappeared, into thin air, vaporized, like the Nips at Nagasaki. Gone now. All gone. The money gone. Big Dave gone. Doris going. How could I have been so stupid.

The continuing pull back reveals Walter Abundas on a nearby chair, also listening as Birdy continues to play.

Walter holds a drink in one hand; he is nodding; his eyelids are drooping. As the piano piece reaches its mournful end, his chin alights on his chest, his eyelids tremble closed, and he starts lightly to snore.

BARBERSHOP

The distinctive buzz of electric hairclippers bangs in at the cut. Ed and Frankie stand behind their respective chairs, administering haircuts.

The customer in Ed's chair is in white shirtsleeves that does not hide rolls of fat. He also has a hot towel over his face that does not inhibit the drone of his speech, although it does muffle it to some extent:

Customer

... She makes this stuff, she calls it gatto, it's got egg in there, it's got sugar, it's got—it's cake, basically, except she calls it gatto. Like if you don't call it cake maybe you won't put on any weight, like I need to eat gatto, you know what I'm saying? This stuff, if I've had a square meal, I've had my steak and potatoes, I can just have another cup of coffee afterward, I won't ask for the desert if it's not there. . .

His voice turns into a drone under the voice-over:

Voice-Over

Sooner or later everyone needs a haircut. . .

Customer

Got the recipe from a magazine, woman's magazine. . .

Voice-Over

We were working for the bank now. We kept cutting the hair, trying to stay afloat, make the payments, tread the water, day by day, day by day. . .

CRANE DOWN

Inside a courtroom, we boom down toward the defendant's table as the customer's drone under the voice-over transmutes into the drone of the bailiff reading an indictment. Doris stands next to Freddy Riedenschneider.

Voice-Over

Most people think someone's accused of a crime they haul 'em in and bring 'em to trial, but it's not like that, it's not that fast. The wheels of justice turn slow. . .

Bailiff

. . . did willfully and with malice aforethought take the life of one David Allen Brewster, a human being. . .

Voice-Over

They have the arraignment, and then the indictment, and they entertain motions to dismiss, and postpone, and change the venue, and alter this and that and the other. They empanel a jury, which brings more motions, and they set a trial date and then change the date, and then often as not they'll change it again.

Bailiff

What say you to these charges?

Our boom down has ended close on Doris. We hear Freddy Riedenschneider off:

Riedenschneider

We plead not guilty, your honor.

BARBERSHOP

Booming down toward the fat man.

Voice-Over

And through all of it we cut the hair. . .

Customer

I say, Honey, if you're gonna make cobbler, make a little bit of cobbler, you don't put a whole pan in front of me and tell me it's not gonna be any good when it's cold. . .

OPERA SINGERS

We are panning photographic portraits of opera singers in character, wearing the wardrobe of different eras, armies, dukedoms, boudoirs, and displaying the heights and depths of various emotions, their mouths stretched in song. We pan off the pictures to discover that we are in a hotel room, floating in toward a bed holding Freddy Riedenschneider, a sleeping mask over his eyes.

Voice-Over

. . . Meantime, Freddy Riedenschneider slept at the Metropole. . .

RESTAURANT

Tracking in toward Freddy Riedenschneider who sits at a table twirling spaghetti with a fork against a spoon.

. . . and ate at Da Vinci's.

LATERAL TRACK

From inside a car. Pedestrians bustle along on a sidewalk; among them scurries a weedy little man who has one hand clamped to the crown of his hat as if to keep it in place in a stiff wind

. . . He'd brought in a private investigator from Sacramento. . .

Ed, driving, is looking to the side.

LATERAL TRACK

Moving the opposite way; a different day, but again a crowd moves along the sidewalk and among them the little man scuttles in the opposite direction, hand still raised to his hat, his forearm and the tilt of his head largely obscuring his face.

. . . to nose around into Big Dave's past.

Ed, driving, is looking through the other window.

PUSHING INTO ED

In the Abundas living room again, again listening to Birdy playing the piano, but now they are alone in the room.

. . . I found myself, more and more going over to the Abundas's. It was a routine we fell into, most every evening. I even went when Walter was away on his research trips. He was a genealogist, had traced back his side of the family seven generations, his late wife's eight. It seemed like a screwy hobby. But then maybe all hobbies are. Maybe Walter found something there, in the old county courthouses, hospital file rooms, city archives, property rolls, registries, something maybe like what I found listening to Birdy play. Some kind of escape. . .

The piece ends in a sustain which begins to fade, but then is snapped by a sharp clang:

A PRISON DOOR SWINGS OPEN

We are pushing into the high-windowed prison meeting room. None of the three people inside are moving.

The tableau consists of Doris staring down at the table; the private investigator sitting on a straightbacked chair which is tipped back against a wall, his arms folded across his chest, his fedora pushed back on his head, a toothpick clamped between his teeth; and Freddy Riedenschneider, standing, hands clasped behind his back, gazing up into the

shaft of light that slants through the high window, wearing a dreamy smile.

A warder shuts the door behind Ed.

Doris and the private investigator turn to note his entrance; Riedenschneider doesn't move.

Ed pulls out a chair across from Doris, clasps his hands on top of hers.

Ed

'Lo, honey.

She looks at his hands on top of hers.

A long beat.

Still gazing up into the shaft of light, Freddy Riedenschneider announces:

Riedenschneider

... They got this guy, in Germany. Fritz Something-or-other. Or is it. Maybe it's Werner. Anyway, he's got this theory, you wanna test something, you know, scientifically—how the planets go round the sun, what sunspots are made of, why the water comes out of the tap—well, you gotta look at it. But sometimes, you look at it, your looking changes it. Ya can't know the reality of what happened, or what would've happened if you hadda a stuck in your own goddamn schnozz. So there is no "what happened." Not in any sense that we can grasp, with our puny minds. Because our minds—our minds get in the way. Looking at something changes it. They call it the "Uncertainty Principle". Sure, it sounds screwy, but even Einstein says the guy's on to something. And this is science.

His gaze up at the window breaks. He starts strolling around the room, still smiling.

... Science. Perception. Reality. Doubt. ...

Here he stops to examine a bur on his fingernail.

... Reasonable doubt. I'm sayin', sometimes, the more you look, the less you really know. It's a fact. In a way,

it's the only fact there is. This heinie even wrote it out in numbers.

He looks up at the private detective.

... Burns?

With a slight weight shift Burns lets the front two legs of his chair slap down onto the ground. He reaches a small notebook from an inside pocket.

His boredom is profound; his only concession to performance is to move the toothpick from one side of his mouth to the other where, perhaps, it will less inhibit speech.

Burns

Subject: David Allen Brewster. Born, Cincinnati, 1911. Father, insurance salesman, mother, homemaker. Family moves 1924 Eugene, Oregon. Subject educated public schools. One year Case Western University on football scholarship. Flunks out. 1931 retail appliance salesman in Barnhoff's Department Store, Cincinnati. 1933 meets Anne Nirdlinger, married later that year, moves here. 1935 arrested on an assault complaint, complainant an organizer for the ILGWU, has a broken nose, couple a ribs, wife's family intercedes, some kind of settlement, charges dropped. 1936 another assault beef, bar altercation--

Riedenschneider

Yeah yeah, couple of fistfights. Go to his service record.

Burns looks at him sourly. He flips a couple of pages.

Burns

... Inducted March 15, 1942, assigned to fifth fleet U.S. Navy, ensign first class, serves in clerical capacity in U.S. Naval Shipyards in San Diego, one fistfight broken up by MP's, no court martial, honorable discharge May 8, 1945. Since then he's been clean.

Riedenschneider nods, smiling.

Riedenschneider

... Thank you, Burns, get lost.

Burns pockets his notebook, adjusts his hat, jams his hands into his pockets, and strolls out of the room.

The slam of the door leaves quiet.

At length:

Ed

... So?

Riedenschneider's fixed smile now fades.

Riedenschneider

So? ~~So~~?! This could be your dolly's ticket out of the deathhouse, so!

Ed and Doris look at each other.

Ed

... I don't get it.

Riedenschneider

Look, chum, this is a guy, from what I understand, told everybody he was a war hero, right? Island hopping, practically liberated the Pacific all by himself with a knife in one hand and a gun in the other and twenty yards of Jap guts between his teeth.

Ed

Yeah.

Riedenschneider

And now it turns out this dope spent the war sitting on his ass in some boatyard in San Diego. You asked for blackmail, lemme give you blackmail. Mr. Hale-Fellow-Well-Met, about to open his own business here, has been lying to everybody in this town for the last four years, probably including half the people sitting on that jury. Well, it finally caught up with him—these dopes, it always does; someone threatened to spill it. Somebody knew his dirty little secret, just like your wife says. They called, they demanded money. . .

He is looking at Doris.

... Did Big Dave mention that it was something about his war service? I don't know, I wasn't there, you'll have to tell us. Maybe he specified, maybe he didn't; I'm not gonna put words in your mouth—the point is that this liar, this cynical manipulator, this man who through his lies sneered and belittled the sacrifice and heroism of all our boys who did serve and bleed and puke and die on foreign shores, and who made a fool out of this entire town, turns to you to help him out of his jam. Fat-assed sonofabitch!

Ed

So... who... who actually--

Riedenschneider

Who? Who? I don't know who! But the point is if that Mr. Prosecutor over there had devoted half the time he's spent persecuting this woman, to even the most cursory investigation of this schmoe's past, then we might know who! But we can't know what really happened! Because of Fritz, or Werner, or whatever-the-hell his name is! And because Mr. Prosecutor is also a lazy fat-assed sonofabitch who decided it's easier to victimize your wife! Because it's easier not to look! Because the more you look, the less you know! But the beauty of it is, we don't gotta know! We just gotta show that, goddamnit, they don't know. Reasonable doubt. Science. The atom. You explain it to me. Go ahead. Try.

He chuckles as he heads for the door.

... Yeah, Freddy Riedenschneider sees daylight. We got a real shot at this, folks. Let's not get cocky.

He shuts the door behind him.

Doris is staring down at the table as at the head of the scene.

A silent beat; a smile starts to tug at the corners of her mouth.

Ed

Honey...?

The smile twitches, and then stays. Doris starts laughing. Ed frowns.

... Honey?

Her laughter builds, not quite to the point of hysteria. Finally it subsides and, still staring at the tabletop and smiling, she shakes her head:

Doris

What a dope.

ABUNDAS LIVING ROOM

Ed sits listening again as Birdy plays. She talks, after a moment, keeping her eyes on the sheet music and continuing to play:

Birdy

He was deaf when he wrote this.

Ed

Who?

Birdy

Beethoven. He created it, and yet he never actually heard it. Isn't that remarkable?

Ed

Mm.

Birdy

I suppose he heard it all in his head, somehow.

She carries on playing.

Voice-Over

So maybe it would work out with Doris. Maybe it would all work out. And I thought—I hoped—that maybe there was a way out for me as well. . .

A SIGN

The cardboard sign on an easel announces COME ONE, COME ALL/PETALUMA HIGH TALENT SHOW/WEDNESDAY APRIL 29, 1949, 8:00 P.M. Ed's voice-over continues:

. . . The girl had talent, anyone could see that. And she wasn't some fly-by-nighter, she was just a good clean kid.

SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

A young man holding a saxophone is just leaving the makeshift stage to a smattering of applause; Birdy walks out to the baby grand that has been set out center stage.

. . . If she was going to have a career she'd need a responsible adult looking out for her. . .

We track up the rows of folding chairs that have been set out on the gym floor for the audience of students and parents, many of whom fan themselves with programs; we come to rest on Ed.

. . . Some kind of . . . manager. She'd have contracts to look at, be going out on tours, playing on the radio maybe. I could help her sort through all of that without charging her an arm and a leg, just enough to get by. . .

Birdy begins to play for the quietly attentive audience.

SCHOOL EXTERIOR

Ed is among the crowd streaming from the gym into the warm summer night. He looks around the parking lot.

. . . I could afford to charge less than the usual manager, not having to put up a big front like a lot of these phonies. And I could be with her, enough to keep myself feeling okay. . .

A trace of a frown as he spots her leaning against a car, laughing, trading a cigarette back and forth with another student—a boy.

. . . Why couldn't that work? . . . Why not? . . .

Birdy's easy smile remains as Ed approaches, but the boy's drops; he puts on a more serious face suitable for presenting to a adult.

Birdy

Hi Mr. Crane.

Ed

Hello Birdy. I thought that was very good.

Birdy

Oh, in there? I messed up a little bit in the scherzo. I guess if nobody noticed it's okay. Mr. Crane, this is Gino, a friend of mine. Gino, Mr. Crane.

Ed

Hello Gino.

Gino

Hello sir.

There is a silence. The teens wait for the adult to direct the conversation; Ed has nothing to say. At length he clears his throat.

Ed

... Well, congratulations. I guess I'll be getting home.

Gino

Nice to meet you, sir.

TURANDOT SUITE

It is morning. We are tracking past the unmade bed towards the bathroom, where we hear water running.

Voice-Over

... Anyway, that's what I was thinking about in the days leading up to the trial. It seemed like once that was over, I'd be ready for a new start. Freddy Riedenschneider was very optimistic. He was busy preparing...

We have rounded the open bathroom door to find Riedenschneider hunched over the sink, toothbrush in hand, spitting out water. He rises, looks at himself in the mirror,

sprinkles some tonic in his hair.

... And finally it came... the first day of the trial...

He runs fingers through his hair.

... What Riedenschneider called the Big Show...

He straightens his tie, gives his neck a twist.

COURTROOM

We are medium close on the back of Freddy Riedenschneider's glistening and carefully tended hair. He is sitting at the defense table.

There is the murmuring of a crowd that has yet to be called to order.

Frankie

Where's the judge? How come there's no judge?

Ed and Frankie are sitting next to each other in the first gallery row directly behind Freddy Riedenschneider.

... Where's the judge, Ed?

Ed shrugs. Frank looks at Riedenschneider's back.

... How come the judge doesn't come out?

Riedenschneider looks back at them, glances at his watch.

Riedenschneider

The judge comes in last. He'll come in when Doris gets here.

Frankie

So where's Doris? I thought we started at ten. Hey Riedenschneider, where's Doris?

Riedenschneider is curt:

Riedenschneider

She's late.

Frankie
Late? How can she be late?

Riedenschneider doesn't answer; Frankie turns to Ed:

. . . She's in prison, Ed. None of us are in prison, and yet we're not late. We're on time, Ed. How can Doris be late? What, they don't have wake-up calls?

The murmur of the crowd abruptly subsides as a door behind the judge's bench opens and the black-robed judge hurriedly enters.

The gallery rises but the judge quickly waves them back down and, rather than seating himself, leans forward over his desk and gives a peremptory beckoning wave to Riedenschneider and the prosecutor:

Judge
Counselors.

Riedenschneider, puzzled, approaches the bench, as does his counterpart. The judge, still leaning forward, speaks to them in a low voice inaudible from the gallery.

The crowd has started murmuring again, also in hushed tones. Frankie leans in toward Ed:

Frankie
What's going on, Ed? I thought there would be arguments.
The bailiff, and so forth. . .

Ed, also puzzled, is watching Riedenschneider, who suddenly stiffens. As the judge continues to talk Riedenschneider looks back over his shoulder, at Ed.

. . . Ed, what is this? Is this procedure?

The two lawyers nod at the judge and walk back to their respective tables. The judge now gives the same sharp wave to a uniformed man standing to one side:

Judge
Bailiff.

As he and the bailiff now confer, Freddy Riedenschneider looks sadly down at his desk

and, for something to do, straightens various papers.

Riedenschneider

I don't understand. . . We had a real shot at it. . . We could have won this thing. . .

The bailiff is starting an announcement:

Bailiff

In the matter of the State of California versus Doris Crane,
Case Number 87249 assigned to this Superior Court. . .

As the bailiff drones, Riedenschneider shakes his head.

Riedenschneider

. . . It doesn't make any sense. . .

BARBERSHOP

Late afternoon sun slants in.

The shop, not open for business, is very still. Ed, still in his suit, sits in one of the red-and-cream vinyl chairs that line one wall, hunched forward, forearms on his knees.

Frankie, also still in his suit, is up in one of the barber chairs, one hand cupped to his forehead, weeping.

Voice-Over

She'd hanged herself. . . I'd brought her a dress to wear to court and she'd used the belt. I didn't understand it either. At first I thought maybe it had something to do with me, that she'd figured out somehow how I fit into it and couldn't stand it, couldn't stand knowing. . .

BEDROOM

Night. Ed is in bed staring at the ceiling.

. . . That wasn't it, I would find out later. For now, everything just seemed ruined. . .

METROPOLE LOBBY

Freddy Riedenschneider stands at the cashier's desk checking out; behind him is a bellman's cart piled high with his bags.

Voice-Over

. . . Freddie Riedenschneider went back to Sacramento still shaking his head, saying it was the biggest disappointment of his professional career. . .

FRANKIE'S HOUSE

Day. Frankie's kitchen.

Frankie sits at his kitchen table, staring, in a bathrobe thrown over his pyjamas, not yet shaved.

Voice-Over

. . . Frankie fell to pieces. I suspect he was drinking; anyway, he stopped coming in to work. . .

BARBERSHOP

Ed, in his smock, works on a customer.

Voice-Over

. . . That left me to keep the place going, or the bank would've taken it.

As he uses the electric clippers a cigarette plumes between his lips; he squints against the smoke drifting past his eyes.

. . . I was the principal barber now. I hired a new man for the second chair. . .

Ed's former chair is indeed being manned by a newcomer. He is a gangly young man whom we see animatedly chatting up his customer as the voice-over continues.

... I'd hired the guy who did the least gabbing when he came in for an interview. But I guess the new man had only kept quiet because he was nervous; once he had the job, he talked from the minute I opened the shop in the morning...

BARBERSHOP EXTERIOR

It is evening. Ed is locking the barbershop as, next to him on the sidewalk, the new man continues to chat, gesticulating to punctuate his story.

... until I locked up at night. For all I know he talked to himself on the way home.

STREET

As Ed walks along the sidewalk.

... When I walked home, it seemed like everyone avoided looking at me...

Indeed, none of the passers-by establish eye contact; their averted eyes make the crowd a faceless throng.

... as if I'd caught some disease. This thing with Doris, nobody wanted to talk about it; it was like I was a ghost walking down the street...

INTERIOR HOUSE

As Ed lets himself in.

... And when I got home now, the place felt empty.

He sits on the couch and, after a beat, reaches a cigarette pack from his pocket and taps out a smoke.

... I sat in the house, but there was nobody there. I was a ghost; I didn't see anyone; no one saw me...

BARBERSHOP AGAIN

Ed is in his smock again, operating the clippers.

... I was the barber.

FADE OUT

The drone off the clippers has continued over the black. A voice fades up offscreen:

Voice

So two blocks later I look at the change sbe gave me and,
golly, I'm two bits short-

Second Voice

Two bits short-

Voice

So I walk back over to Linton's, find this gal-big
argument-she doesn't even recall the transaction-

Second Voice

No recollection-

Voice

Doesn't recall the transaction, no recollection, So I said,
look dear. . .

FADE IN

We are looking at a page in a magazine. An illustration of a cresting wave bears the
headline: **WAVE OF THE FUTURE**

Underneath are black-and-white photographs of heavy equipment and racks of clothing
on motorized tracks. A further headline reads: **NEXT TO GODLINESS-Dry Cleaning
Sweeps the Nation-The Thoroughly Modern Way to Clean.**

Ed sits in one of the vinyl chairs staring down at Life Magazine. Late afternoon light slants
in through the window. Offscreen the conversation drones on as the New Man works on
his customer.

New Man
 . . . go ahead, look at the menu, if you're in before six
 o'clock it's the, whatchamacallit, the--

Customer
 Early Bird Special--

New Man
 What? Yeah, the Early Riser. . .

Ed flips the pages of the magazine. We see a dark photograph of a desert landscape with one bright light hovering in the sky. Underneath, a caption: ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO.

Voice
 Crane?

Ed looks up.

A man in a black suit and fedora has directed the question at the New Man, who looks up from his interrupted gabbling, momentarily slackjawed.

Ed
 I'm Crane.

Man
 My name is Diedrickson. County medical examiner.

Ed
 Yeah?

Diedrickson
 Just came for an informal chat. . .

Diedrickson looks around uncomfortably.

. . . Why don't I buy you a drink.

Ed rises from his chair and as he unbuttons his smock addresses the New Man, who still gapes:

Ed
 Dwight, you okay here for a few minutes?

New Man
Whuh--uh, yeah, sure Ed, take your time.

BAR

It is late afternoon, dusty and empty.

Ed and Diedrickson sit onto adjacent stools, Diedrickson edging his hat lower on his forehead to its man-at-the-bar position.

As the bartender approaches:

Diedrickson
Rye.

Ed
Just coffee.

Diedrickson
You sure you don't want something stiffer?

Ed shrugs and shakes bis head.

Bartender
Coffee it is.

He ambles off. Diedrickson interlaces his fingers on the bartop and stares at them. After a beat:

Diedrickson
... County M.E. does an autopsy on anyone who dies in custody. I don't know if you knew that. It's routine.

Ed doesn't answer. Diedrickson, after some more staring at his hands, plows on:

... Doesn't become a matter of public record unless there's foul play. However. I don't believe I'm prohibited from telling you this. I guess I'm not obliged to tell you either. I don't exactly know. But if I were the man, I'd want to be told.

Ed

Told what?

Diedrickson

I, uh. . . thanks.

The bartender has set down his drink. He sets down Ed's coffee.

Diedrickson waits for him to leave. He takes a hit from the glass. Finally:

. . . I'm sorry to add to your burden, Crane, but I'd want to know if it was me. Your wife was pregnant. Second trimester.

A pause.

. . . Well, there it is.

Another pause.

. . . I'm sorry.

He mutters to himself:

. . . Hell, I hope I've done the right thing.

Ed

My wife and I had not. . . performed the sex act in many years.

Diedrickson stiffens. He murmurs:

Diedrickson

. . . Jesus.

Aloud:

. . . Well, that's not really my business.

He is hastily digging for money.

. . . I'm sorry. Well, there it is.

He leaves a couple bills on the bar and mumbles as he leaves:

... Good luck, Crane.

His retreating footsteps echo down the bar.

APARTMENT HALLWAY

It is a dingy hallway lit by bare bulbs. Ed stands in the middle background, knocking on a door.

Voice-Over

Doris and I had never really talked much. I don't think that's a bad thing, necessarily. But it was funny: now I wanted to talk, now, with everyone gone. I was alone, with secrets I didn't want and no one to tell them to anyway. . .

The door opens and Ed is admitted by the unseen tenant.

APARTMENT INTERIOR

We hear a low murmuring as we slowly pan the apartment. It is overfurnished with heavy, ornate chairs, sideboards, chests too big for the space and all going to seed. Surface areas are covered with yellowing lacework or exotic brocades; the one lamp has a veil thrown over it to further scrim down its feeble light.

Our pan brings us onto Ed, seated at a small card table, and a small elderly woman in a shawl who is the source of the murmuring. Her eyes are squeezed shut with concentration as she mumbles.

... I visited a woman who was supposed to have powers in communicating with those who had passed across, as she called it. She said that people who passed across were picky about who they'd communicate with, not like most people you run into on this side. . .

The woman opens her eyes and looks at Ed.

Woman

Giff me your hant.

Ed places his hand in the center of the table.

Voice-Over

... so you needed a guide who they didn't mind talking to, someone with a gift for talking to souls. . .

Ed looks at the woman's spotted and vein-lined hand as it rests upon his. Her murmuring resumes.

... Well, first she told me that my wife was in a peaceful place, that our souls were still connected by some spiritual bond, that she had never stopped loving me, even though she'd done some things she wasn't proud of. . .

Ed looks again at his hand in the medium's grip.

... She was reading me like a book. I suppose I always knew somewhere it was just another racket, that it was only blind hope that had me sitting there. . .

Ed looks up at the old woman. She is staring down at the table as she continues to mutter. She steals a glance at Ed to check his reaction.

... And then she started talking about "Dolores" this and "Dolores" that and was there anything I wanted to tell "Dolores," and I knew I'd just be telling it to the old bat. And even if somehow Doris could hear, it wouldn't be on account of this so-called medium.

HALLWAY

Ed is leaving.

... She was a phony. Just another gabber.

TENEMENT EXTERIOR

Ed emerges from the building.

... I was turning into Ann Nirdlinger—Big Dave's wife. I had to turn my back on the old lady, on the veils, on the

ghosts, on the dead, before they all sucked me in.

Ed disappears into the night.

ABUNDAS HOUSE

It is night. We are looking through the screen door. Walter Abundas sits in yellow lamplight by a small table to the side of the staircase, over which papers are strewn. He is murmuring into the telephone as he examines the papers, glasses halfway down his nose, a drink in one hand.

Ed's hand enters to rap on the door. Walter looks up, sets the phone down and comes to the door.

Walter

Ed, how're you holding up?

Ed

I'm okay Walter, thanks.

Walter opens the door to him.

Walter

I'm so damn sorry about your loss. Terrible thing. Just damn terrible.

Ed

Yeah.

Walter

Birdy's in the parlor—I'm on long distance here. . .

Ed

Sure Walter. Thanks.

PARLOR

Birdy also has papers spread across a table in front of her: her homework. She looks up at Ed's entrance.

Birdy

Hello, Mr. Crane.

Ed

Hello, Birdy.

Birdy

We haven't seen you since. . . I'm terribly sorry.

Ed sits across from her.

Ed

Yeah.

Birdy

We've certainly missed you.

Ed

Birdy, I've been doing a lot of thinking. There are a lot of things that haven't worked out for me. Life has dealt me some bum cards. . .

He is loading a cigarette into his mouth.

. . . or maybe I just haven't played 'em right, I don't know.
But you're--

Birdy

Pop doesn't like people smoking in here.

Ed stares. This takes a moment to register.

Ed

Oh. Sorry.

Birdy lowers her voice:

Birdy

Sometimes I have a cigarette in here when he's away.
Never when he's in the house. He can smell it a mile away.

Ed is pocketing the cigarette.

Ed

Sure. . . Sure, it's his house.

Birdy

That's what he keeps telling me.

Ed smiles thinly.

Ed

Anyway, uh. . . my point is you're young. A kid really, your whole life ahead of you. But it's not too soon to start thinking. . . to start making opportunities for yourself. Before it all washes away.

Birdy

Well sure, I guess. Pop says so too. I work pretty hard at school.

Ed

That's swell. However, the music, if you want to pursue it, well, the lessons from Mrs. Swan, they'll only take you so far. There's this guy in San Francisco, I've made inquiries, everybody says he's the best. Trained lots of people who've gone on to have big concert careers, symphony orchestras, the works. His name is Jacques Carcanogues. I'm not sure I'm pronouncing it right. Anyway, he's a Frenchman.

Birdy

Boy.

Ed

You've got talent, anyone could see that. And he's the best. If he thinks a student has talent, he'll take 'em on for next to nothing. You're a cinch to be accepted, I could cover the cost of the lessons, like I said, it's pretty modest—

Birdy

Oh, Mr. Crane—

Ed

I have to do it. I can't stand by and watch more things go down the drain. You're young, you don't understand.

Birdy

Geez, Mr. Crane, I don't know. . . I hadn't really thought about a career or stuff. . .

Ed

I know you haven't. Look, just go meet him as a favor to me. I talked to this guy. Hope I pronounced his name right. He sounded very busy, but he's not a bad egg; he loosened up a little when I told him how talented you are. He agreed to see you this Saturday. He said maybe you were a diamond in the rough. His words.

Birdy

Geez, Mr. Crane.

Ed

Just see him, as a favor to me.

STUDIO WAITING ROOM

It is a small square room with straight backed chairs set against the walls. At the far end of the room another door leads to a studio from which piano music dully emanates; it is a swift and difficult piece of music.

Ed sits waiting on one of the chairs. He is the only adult in the waiting room; two or three youngsters of various ages sit in the chairs apparently waiting their turn.

Ed looks at one of the waiting boys in a white shirt and bow tie. He is perhaps eleven. His hair is greased back in a Junior Contour.

Another boy, in a cardigan sweater, sports a Butch.

The piano piece is ending. There is the murmur of voices. Dull footsteps.

The studio door swings open.

A small man in a rumpled black suit smudged with cigarette ash is bowing Birdy out the door. He sports a goatee, a knotted foulard and a Gallic air. His eyes flit over the waiting room and alight on Ed.

... You are ze fabzer?

Ed
No. Uh... family friend.

Man
I am Carcanogues.

He smiles at Birdy.

... You wait, my dear?

Birdy
Sure, Mr. K.

A jerk of Carcanogues' head summons Ed to the studio.

STUDIO

Ed is uncomfortable. He glances around to take in the high-ceilinged space, dominated by a grand piano.

Carcanogues is running water from a tap.

Carcanogues
I speak to you on ze phone, non? You have a special
interest in music?

Ed shrugs.

Ed
Uh-huh.

Carcanogues
Ah yes, a music lover.

Ed
Well, I don't pretend to be an expert.

Carcanogues
Ah.

He uncaps a small bottle of pills, shakes two into his palm, tosses them back and washes them down with a glass of water.

... Ah-hah.

He twists a cigarette into a long holder, sticks it in his mouth, and lights it.

... Mm.

Ed

Well? How'd she do?

Carcanogues

Ze girl?

He performs a Gallic frown of consideration.

... She seems like a very nice girl. She plays, Monsieur, like a very nice girl. ~~Ztinks~~. Very nice girl. However, ~~ztinks~~.

Ed

I don't understand.

Carcanogues

Is not so hard to understand. Her playing, very polite.

Ed

Did she make mistakes?

Another Gallic moue:

Carcanogues

Mistake, no, it says E-flat, she plays E-flat. Ping-ping. Hit the right note, always. Very proper.

Ed

I don't understand, no mistakes, she's just a kid—I thought you taught the, uh, the—

Carcanogues

Ah, but that is just what I cannot teach. I cannot teach her to have the soul. Look, monsieur, play the piano, is not

about the fingers. Done with the fingers, yes. But the music, she is inside. Inside, monsieur. . .

An expansive two-handed gesture, indicating his heart.

. . . The music start here. . .

He waggles his fingers:

. . . come out through here; then, maybe. . .

He waves to take in the heavens:

. . . she can go up there.

Ed

Well, look, I don't claim to be an expert—

Carcanogues

Then you listen to me, for I am expert. That girl, she give me a headache. She cannot play. Nice girl. Very clever hands. Nice girl. Someday, I think, maybe, she make a very good typist.

DRIVING

We are driving through the rural countryside of northern California. It is a two-lane road, with no other cars about. Sun strobos the road through the passing trees.

Ed drives, glaring. Birdy, next to him, seems unperturbed, even cheerful.

Birdy

. . . I stank, didn't I.

Ed

He didn't say that.

Birdy

But more or less—

Ed

Look, I'm no expert, but--

Birdy
It doesn't matter, Mr. Crane.

Ed
I'm sure there's a dozen teachers better than this clown.
More, uh, qualified. Goddamn phony.

Birdy
But it doesn't matter. Really. I'm not interested in playing
music professionally.

Ed looks over at her, still visibly upset.

... I'm not certain I'll have a career at all--and if I do, I'll
probably be a veterinarian.

Ed
... Uh-huh.

Birdy
I do appreciate the interest you've taken, though.

Ed
Ah, no... it's nothing.

Birdy
I'm only sorry that I didn't play better for you. I know it
would've made you happy. You know what you are?

Ed
Huh.

Birdy
You're an enthusiast.

Ed
Huh. Yeah. Maybe...

He loads a cigarette into his mouth.

... I guess I've been all wet.

Birdy
But I do appreciate it, Mr. Crane. . .

Hesitantly, she reaches over to touch his thigh.

. . . I wanted to make you happy.

Ed
Birdy--

Birdy
It's okay. . .

She is leaning over his lap.

. . . I want to do it, Mr. Crane.

Ed is shocked:

Ed
Birdy!

He is torn, wanting to push her away but not wanting to be violent. Looking down, he tries to cup her chin with his hand:

. . . No, please.

Birdy
Please, Mr. Crane, it's okay, please--

The blare of an oncoming horn:

Ed looks up, one hand struggling with Birdy, the other on the wheel.

The oncoming car.

Ed swerves, tires screech into a skid, Birdy screams:

CRASH: the car hits a roadside tree.

BLACK

Voice

Time slows down, right before an accident, and I had time to think about things. I thought about what an undertaker had told me once—that your hair keeps growing, for a while anyway, after you die. . .

A hubcap is skipping in slow motion along the road and then off of it, to spin down an embankment.

. . . And then it stops. I thought, what keeps it growing? Is it like a plant in soil? What goes out of the soil? The soul? And when does the hair realize that it's gone?

We are high looking straight down at Ed, who is motionless, his head resting on the steering wheel of the stopped car. We boom down toward him, slowly rotating as we move in. As we come closer we lose focus; Ed becomes more and more blurry.

The blurry shape is now slowly spinning away from us, a bright revolving disc spinning up into the darkness until it disappears leaving only black.

FADE IN

Ed sits on the front porch of his bungalow, smoking a cigarette in the late afternoon light.

We hear a dog barking next door, a distant screen door slam, children playing somewhere up the street.

Ed looks down at his watch. It reads 5:30.

Something attracts his attention and he looks up: At the foot of his driveway stands a man in a cream-colored suit and hat. He is a small figure, perfectly still, staring at the gravel driveway.

After a beat he lifts up a small clip board and, squinting at the house starts to jot something down.

Ed continues to watch from the shadowy porch, cigarette smoke drifting up past his face.

The man continues to write. He finishes, screws the lid back onto his pen, and is sticking it into a breast pocket when he notices that there is someone on the porch watching him. His manner instantly warms:

Man

Hello!

Ed

Hello.

He starts up the walk.

Man

I notice you still have pea stone in your driveway.

Ed

Yeah.

Man

Well of course you have to rejuvenate that once every couple of years, don't you, when the pea stone thins out.

Ed shrugs.

. . . Where does it go, huh? Like the odd sock. But you know where it goes—you probably pick pieces of it off your lawn all the time, churn it up with your lawn mower, sweep it off the walk here—pain in the neck.

Ed shrugs again.

Ed

Doesn't bother me.

Man

Well have you ever considered tar Macadam? People think it's just for public works and commercial purposes, roads, parking lots, so forth. . .

A car pulls into the drive, churning up the stone.

. . . but we have the technology now to bring it to the homeowner, the individual consumer, at a very reasonable price.

Doris emerges from the car.

... Mind if I show you the specifications?—Evening,
ma'am.

Doris gives him a hard look as she passes him.

Doris
What're you selling?

The man has a practiced laugh.

Man
Well ma'am, I was just telling your husband here about tar
Macadam, for your home driveway here—these are the
specs. . .

Doris takes the brochure he has pulled from a small case.

... It's the modern way to—

Doris tears the brochure in half and hands it back.

Doris
Get lost.

The man gazes at her. His smile fades, his warmth drains away, and he and Doris stare at each other, two hard cases.

He turns stiffly and walks off.

Once his gaze has broken Doris turns as well. She stalks up the stairs to the porch and bangs through the screen front door of the house, letting it bang shut behind her.

Quiet, early evening. Ed still sits, smoking. At length he rises and goes into the house.

INTERIOR

It is dim, no lights yet on. We hear banging and clomping from the kitchen.

Doris emerges with a light clinking sound, chasing ice cubes around a drink with a swizel stick. Her face is still hard-set.

With a groan of old upholstery springs she sits onto the couch.

Ed sits on the couch as well. He draws on the cigarette, drags an ashtray closer on the coffee table.

She sips. He puffs.

Ed

... Doris—

Doris

Nah, don't say anything. I'm all right.

They sit. The light is failing. There is the clink of ice cubes.

FADEOUT

In the black we hear machine noise of indistinct origin. As the noise becomes more defined, we also hear shouting, faint, distant:

Voice

Are you there?! Are you awake?

A new image is fading up, a blurry white disc. As it focuses it resolves into the reflector worn by a white-robed doctor, leaning in close.

He leans away, murmuring:

Doctor

He's coming around. Can you talk, sir? These men have to talk.

The machine noise is hospital life-support; the withdrawing doctor leaves behind the glare of a multi-joint lamp that his body had formerly blocked.

The reverse shows Ed lying on a pillow. His face is bandaged and one side grotesquely swells.

... Sir? Are you awake? He's awake.

Two police officers, Persky and Krebs, lean in.

Persky

Are you awake?

He looks off.

... Is he awake?

Krebs

Crane? We have to tell you, as soon as you're conscious—is he conscious?

Persky

His eyes are open.

Krebs

Uh... you're under arrest.

Persky

As soon as the doctor lets us, we gotta move you. Does he understand that? We're supposed to tell him. Are you conscious?

Krebs

You'll go to the prison hospital.

Persky

Under arrest for murder.

Ed's speech is thickened by his injuries, and perhaps by anesthesia:

Ed

Birdy... I didn't mean to—

Krebs

What'd he say?

Ed

Birdy...

Doctor's voice

Birdy. The girl. No, the girl's okay. Broken clavicle.

The doctor leans in.

... That's the collarbone, Crane. Broken. She's okay though.

Krebs

So he understands? He's under arrest for murder?

The doctor shrugs.

Ed

Big Dave.

Persky

Huh?

Krebs

What'd he say? Does he understand?

Persky

He said okay. Is that what he said?

Krebs raises his voice:

Krebs

You're under arrest for the murder of Creighton Tolliver!
Do you understand?

The voices are fading away:

Persky

... Does he understand? ...

FADE OUT

UNDERWATER

Light glimmers in water. We are drifting down, down, down:

We bring in languidly waving arms—the arms of a child, waving to keep himself submerged. The continuing descent shows us a ten-year-old boy gaping, wide-eyed, at something in front of him. Bubbles intermittently stream from his open mouth.

Voice-Over

The pansy. A kid diving at a waterhole outside of town had found his car. . .

The reverse shows the car, also submerged, with Creighton Tolliver inside, also wide-eyed, his hairpiece snagged at only one corner, the rest of it waving free.

... They'd winched it out. . .

TRACKING

We are laterally tracking across a line of faces--seated men. The men all rise.

... and found he'd been beaten, just like Big Dave said--
beaten to death . . .

We arc around a judge entering the chamber through the small door behind his raised bench.

... Inside his briefcase were the partnership papers I'd signed. . .

The judge seats himself, and we resume our lateral track on the jury, now also reseating itself.

... showing that I'd given him ten grand. For the district attorney. . .

In response to a prompt from the judge, all playing distantly, muted, the words not audible under the voice-over, the district attorney rises to read the charge.

... that made it fall into place: I'd gotten Doris to steal the money. . . Big Dave had found out. . . I'd had to kill him and then, to cover my tracks, the pansy too. I was in a spot. I called in Freddy Riedenschneider. . .

Now Freddy Riedenschneider rises into frame, at the defense table. As he listens to the charge:

... and signed the house over to him. He said he didn't ordinarily work that cheap, but he figured he owed me something since the last one hadn't played out. . .

The drone of the D.A. has ended and Riedenschneider's echoing voice drops into the hole:

Riedenschneider

Not guilty, your honor. . .

Voice-Over

I tried to tell him the whole story, but Riedenschneider stopped me. He said the story made his head hurt, and anyway he didn't see any way of using it without putting me on the hot seat for the murder of Big Dave. . .

Riedenschneider claps Ed reassuringly on the shoulder as he sits, next to him. Ed still wears a cast on one arm and one leg.

. . . He told me not to worry, though, said he'd think of something, Freddy Riedenschneider wouldn't let me down.

JAIL

We are tracking in on Ed, lying on the bunk in his cell.

. . . They put me on twenty-four hour death-watch. . .

A reverse track shows a guard on a tilted back straightbacked chair, outside the cell door, staring at Ed.

. . . so that I couldn't Cheat Justice like they said my wife had done. . .

JUDICIAL CHAMBER

The district attorney is rising again, this time to address the jury.

. . . But in front of the jury they had it that Doris was a saint; the whole plan had been mine, I was a Svengali who'd forced Doris to join my criminal enterprise. . .

The district attorney is pointing at Ed:

District Attorney

. . . cynically used his own wife as a cat's paw in a scheme of diabolical cunning. . .

Voice-Over

On and on it went; how I'd used Doris and then let her take the fall. That stuff smarted because some of it was close to being true. . .

The district attorney is seating himself. The jury's eyes turn to Freddy Riedenschneider who studies the tabletop in front of him, either digesting the D.A.'s opening statement, or seeking inspiration for his own.

. . . And then it was Riedenschneider's turn.

Riedenschneider rises, paces, begins to talk.

. . . I gotta hand it to him, he tossed a lot of sand in their eyes. He talked about how I'd lost my place in the universe. . .

Riedenschneider

. . . a puny player on the great world's stage. . .

Voice-Over

. . . how I was too ordinary to be the criminal mastermind the D.A. made me out to be, how there was some greater scheme at work that the state had yet to unravel, and he threw in some of the old truth stuff he hadn't had a chance to trot out for Doris. . .

Riedenschneider

. . . who among us is in a position to say. . .

Voice-Over

. . . He told them to look at me--look at me close. That the closer they looked the less sense it would all make, that I wasn't the kind of guy to kill a guy, that I was the barber for Christ sake. . .

We pan the solemn faces of the jury, listening to Riedenschneider.

. . . I was just like them, an ordinary man, guilty of living in a world that had no place for me, guilty of wanting to be a dry-cleaner, sure, but not of murder. . .

Riedenschneider is energetically striding into the foreground to point a finger directly at

Ed's face.

... He said I was Modern Man, and if they voted to convict me, well, they'd be practically cinching the noose around their own necks. He told them to look not at the facts but at the meaning of the facts, and then he said the facts had no meaning. It was a pretty good speech, and even had me going...

A tap on his shoulder turns Ed around.

... until Frankie interrupted it.

Frankie socks Ed, sending him clattering to the floor.

A bailiff immediately restrains him but Frankie looms over Ed, bellowing through his tears:

Frankie

What kind of man are you? What kind of man are you?

Riedenschneider interposes his body between Frankie's and Ed's, still on the floor. He bellows toward the bench:

Riedenschneider

Move for a mistrial your honor! Move for a mistrial! This outrageous display cannot help but prejudice...

Ed moves to get up but Riedenschneider, with a sidelong glance and furtive gesture, motions for him to stay on the floor.

... and inflame the passions of these twelve fine men and women...

Voice-Over

... Well, he got his mistrial, but the well had run dry. There was nothing left to mortgage; Riedenschneider went home and the court appointed Lloyd Garroway...

Ed is now standing next to a distinguished older gentleman who stands to enter the plea in the new trial:

Garroway

Your honor, we plead guilty, with extenuating circumstances. . .

Voice-Over

. . . who threw me on the mercy of the court. It was my only chance, he said. I guess that meant I never had a chance. . .

The judge starts droning a sentence:

Judge

. . . a menace to society. . . a predator on his own wife, his business associates, on an innocent young girl. . . social contract. . . line crossed. . . the offender forfeits the right to his own life. . . I hereby order that you be taken to a place of confinement. . .

PRISON HALLWAY

We are tracking down the hall.

Voice-Over

He wasn't buying any of that Modern Man stuff, or the Uncertainty stuff, or any of the mercy stuff either. No, he was going by the book, and the book said I got the Chair. . .

Ed is in the cell at the end of the hall, lying on his bunk, hands clasped behind his head.

. . . so here I am. At first I didn't know how I got here. I knew step by step of course, which is what I've told you, step by step; but I couldn't see any pattern. . .

LATER

Ed sits at the little table next to his bunk, writing.

. . . Now that I'm near the end, I'm glad that this men's magazine paid me to tell my story; writing it has helped me sort it all out. They're paying five cents a word, so you'll pardon me if sometimes I've told you more than you wanted to know. . .

Recent issues of the magazine, GENT and its sister publication NUGGET, lie on the little desk. Their lurid covers depict feature stories like I WAS ABDUCTED BY ALIENS and AFTER TEN YEARS OF NORMAL LIFE, I DISCOVER I AM AN ESCAPED LUNATIC.

... But now, all the disconnected things seem to hook up.

Ed sets aside the pen, lies down on his bunk and closes his eyes.

... That's the funny thing about going away, knowing the date that you're gonna die—and the men's magazine wanted me to tell how that felt. . .

We hear a pulsing treble hum. Ed opens his eyes.

The door to his cell is open.

He rises, goes through the door.

HALLWAY

Ed, alone, walks down the hallway. The pulsing treble hum is louder.

... Well, it's like pulling away from the maze. While you're in the maze, you go through willy-nilly, turning where you think you have to turn, banging into the dead ends, one thing after another. . .

EXERCISE YARD

Ed emerges into the empty exercise yard, ringed by high stone walls. An unnatural light shines down on him from above. He looks up.

... But get some distance on it, and all those twists and turns, why, they're the shape of your life. . . It's hard to explain. . .

A flying saucer hovers above. We see its revolving underside and, as it irregularly cants, we see a bit of its top bubble.

After spinning briefly, it tips and flies away, carrying the tremolo hum with it.

... But seeing it whole gives you some peace.

He turns and reenters the prison.

HIS CELL

Ed is lying on his bunk, eyes closed, hands clasped behind his head. A hand enters to shake him awake.

Three men loom over him: two guards, and another man wearing a surplice and holding a Bible.

... The men's magazine also asked about remorse. Yeah, I guess I'm sorry about the pain I caused other people. . .

HALLWAY

He is walking the last mile.

... but I don't regret anything. Not a thing I used to. I used to regret being the barber. . .

A door at the end opens:

An electric chair, its straps open and waiting.

... And I'm not afraid to die. . . it's an idea you get used to.

Ed is placed in the chair.

A man stoops at his feet. He has a bucket of water and a straight razor. He waggles the razor in the water and starts shaving Ed's calves.

... I still wonder about the hair, though. . . and why it keeps growing. . .

Ed watches as the razor makes the trip from his leg to the bucket of water, which begins to spot with small floating hairs.

... and why it stops.

They are strapping him in, connecting the electrodes.

. . . I don't know what I'll find on the other side, beyond the earth and sky. Whether Doris'll be there. . .

The men withdraw. Ed looks to the side. A thin man in a dark suit, his face shadowed by a fedora, stands by the switch.

. . . I hope she is. There are things I'd like to tell her.

The man throws the switch and the screen goes black.