

FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD

THE LAST TYCOON



Чтение в оригинале (Каро)

Френсис Фицджеральд

**The Last Tycoon / Последний
магнат. Книга для чтения
на английском языке**

«КАРО»

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Фицджеральд Ф. С.

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«Последний магнат» – неоконченный роман Ф. С. Фицджеральда (1896–1940), подготовленный к печати американским писателем и литературным критиком Эдмундом Уилсоном. Неадаптированный текст снабжен комментариями и словарем. Книга адресована студентам языковых вузов и всем любителям американской литературы.

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Содержание

Foreword	6
Chapter I	8
Chapter II	19
Chapter III	23
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	33

**F. Scott Fitzgerald / Фрэнсис
Скотт Фицджеральд
The Last tycoon / Последний магнат.
Книга для чтения на английском языке**

Комментарии и словарь Е. Г. Тигонен

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Foreword

Scott Fitzgerald died suddenly of a heart attack (December 21, 1940) the day after he had written the first episode of Chapter 6 of his novel. The text which is given here is a draft made by the author after considerable rewriting; but it is by no means a finished version. In the margins of almost every one of the episodes, Fitzgerald had written comments – a few of them are included in the notes – which expressed his dissatisfaction with them or indicated his ideas about revising them. His intention was to produce a novel as concentrated and as carefully constructed as *The Great Gatsby* had been, and he would unquestionably have sharpened the effect of most of these scenes as we have them by cutting and by heightening of color. He had originally planned that the novel should be about 60,000 words long, but he had written at the time of his death about 70,000 words without, as will be seen from his outline, having told much more than half his story. He had calculated, when he began, on leaving himself a margin of 10,000 words for cutting; but it seems certain that the novel would have run longer than the proposed 60,000 words. The subject was here more complex than it had been in *The Great Gatsby* – the picture of the Hollywood studios required more space for its presentation than the background of the drinking life of Long Island; and the characters needed more room for their development.

This draft of *The Last Tycoon*, then, represents that point in the artist's work where he has assembled and organized his material and acquired a firm grasp of his theme, but has not yet brought it finally into focus. It is remarkable that, under these circumstances, the story should have already so much power and the character of Stahr emerge with so much intensity and reality. This Hollywood producer, in his misery and grandeur, is certainly the one of Fitzgerald's central figures which he had thought out most completely and which he had most deeply come to understand. His notes on the character show how he had lived with it over a period of three years or more, filling in Stahr's idiosyncrasies and tracing the web of his relationships with the various departments of his business. Amory Blaine and Antony Patch were romantic projections of the author; Gatsby and Dick Diver were conceived more or less objectively, but not very profoundly explored. Monroe Stahr is really created from within at the same time that he is criticized by an intelligence that has now become sure of itself and knows how to assign him to his proper place in a larger scheme of things.

The Last Tycoon is thus, even in its imperfect state, Fitzgerald's most mature piece of work. It is marked off also from his other novels by the fact that it is the first to deal seriously with any profession or business. The earlier books of Fitzgerald had been preoccupied with debutantes and college boys, with the fast lives of the wild spenders¹ of the twenties. The main activities of the people in these stories, the occasions for which they live, are big parties at which they go off like fireworks and which are likely to leave them in pieces². But the parties in *The Last Tycoon* are incidental and unimportant; Monroe Stahr, unlike any other of Scott Fitzgerald's heroes, is inextricably involved with an industry of which he has been one of the creators, and its fate will be implied by his tragedy. The moving-picture business in America has here been observed at a close range, studied with a careful attention and dramatized with a sharp wit such as are not to be found in combination in any of the other novels on the subject. *The Last Tycoon* is far and away³ the best novel we have had about Hollywood, and it is the only one which takes us inside.

It has been possible to supplement this unfinished draft with an outline of the rest of the story as Fitzgerald intended to develop it, and with passages from the author's notes which deal, often vividly, with the characters and scenes.

¹ the wild spenders – (разг.) безумные транжиры

² to leave them in pieces – (разг.) оставить их у разбитого корыта

³ far and away – (разг.) несомненно

Edmund Wilson
1941

Chapter I

Though I haven't ever been on the screen I was brought up in pictures. Rudolph Valentino⁴ came to my fifth birthday party – or so I was told. I put this down only to indicate that even before the age of reason I was in a position to watch the wheels go round.

I was going to write my memoirs once, *The Producer's Daughter*, but at eighteen you never quite get around to anything like that. It's just as well – it would have been as flat as an old column of Lolly Parsons'. My father was in the picture business as another man might be in cotton or steel, and I took it tranquilly. At the worst I accepted Hollywood with the resignation of a ghost assigned to a haunted house. I knew what you were supposed to think about it but I was obstinately unhorrorified.

This is easy to say, but harder to make people understand. When I was at Bennington some of the English teachers who pretended an indifference to Hollywood or its products, really *hated* it. Hated it way down deep as a threat to their existence. Even before that, when I was in a convent, a sweet little nun asked me to get her a script of a screen play so she could “teach her class about movie writing” as she had taught them about the essay and the short story. I got the script for her, and I suppose she puzzled over it and puzzled over it, but it was never mentioned in class, and she gave it back to me with an air of offended surprise and not a single comment. That's what I half expect to happen to this story.

You can take Hollywood for granted like I did, or you can dismiss it with the contempt we reserve for what we don't understand. It can be understood too, but only dimly and in flashes. Not half a dozen men have ever been able to keep the whole equation of pictures in their heads. And perhaps the closest a woman can come to the set-up is to try and understand one of those men.

The world from an airplane I knew. Father always had us travel back and forth that way from school and college. After my sister died when I was a junior, I travelled to and fro alone, and the journey always made me think of her, made me somewhat solemn and subdued. Sometimes there were picture people I knew on board the plane, and occasionally there was an attractive college boy – but not often during the Depression. I seldom really fell asleep during the trip, what with thoughts of Eleanor and the sense of that sharp rip between coast and coast – at least not till we had left those lonely little airports in Tennessee.

This trip was so rough that the passengers divided early into those who turned in right away and those who didn't want to turn in at all. There were two of these latter right across from me, and I was pretty sure from their fragmentary conversation that they were from Hollywood – one of them because he looked like it: a middle-aged Jew, who alternately talked with nervous excitement or else crouched as if ready to spring, in a harrowing silence; the other a pale, plain, stocky man of thirty, whom I was sure I had seen before. He had been to the house or something. But it might have been when I was a little girl, and so I wasn't offended that he didn't recognize me.

The stewardess – she was tall, handsome and flashing dark, a type that they seemed to run to – asked me if she could make up my berth.

“ – and, dear, do you want an aspirin?” She perched on the side of the seat and rocked precariously to and fro with the June hurricane, “ – or nembutal?”

“No.”

“I've been so busy with everyone else that I've had no time to ask you.” She sat down beside me and buckled us both in. “Do you want some gum?”

This reminded me to get rid of the piece that had been boring me for hours. I wrapped it in a piece of magazine and put it into the automatic ash-holder.

⁴ **Rudolph Valentino** – Рудольф Валентино (1895– 1926), американский актер немого кино

"I can always tell people are nice," the stewardess said approvingly, "if they wrap their gum in paper before they put it in there."

We sat for awhile in the half-light of the swaying car. It was vaguely like a swanky restaurant at that twilight time between meals. We were all lingering – and not quite on purpose. Even the stewardess, I think, had to keep reminding herself why she was there.

She and I talked about a young actress I knew, whom she had flown West with two years before. It was in the very lowest time of the Depression, and the young actress kept staring out the window in such an intent way that the stewardess was afraid she was contemplating a leap. It appeared though that she was not afraid of poverty, but only of revolution.

"I know what mother and I are going to do," she confided to the stewardess. "We're coming out to the Yellowstone and we're just going to live simply till it all blows over. Then we'll come back. They don't kill artists – you know?"

The proposition pleased me. It conjured up a pretty picture of the actress and her mother being fed by kind Tory bears who brought them honey, and by gentle fawns who fetched extra milk from the does and then lingered near to make pillows for their heads at night. In turn I told the stewardess about the lawyer and the director who told their plans to Father one night in those brave days. If the bonus army conquered Washington, the lawyer had a boat hidden in the Sacramento River, and he was going to row up stream for a few months and then come back "because they always needed lawyers after a revolution to straighten out the legal side."

The director had tended more toward defeatism. He had an old suit, shirt and shoes in waiting – he never did say whether they were his own or whether he got them from the prop department⁵ – and he was going to Disappear into the Crowd. I remember Father saying: "But they'll look at your hands! They'll know you haven't done manual work for years. And they'll ask for your union card." And I remember how the director's face fell, and how gloomy he was while he ate his dessert, and how funny and puny they sounded to me.

"Is your father an actor, Miss Brady?" asked the stewardess. "I've certainly heard the name."

At the name Brady, both the men across the aisle looked up. Sidewise – that Hollywood look, that always seems thrown over one shoulder. Then the young, pale, stocky man unbuttoned his safety strap and stood in the aisle beside us.

"Are you Cecilia Brady?" he demanded accusingly, as if I'd been holding out on him. "*I thought* I recognized you. I'm Wylie White."

He could have omitted this – for at the same moment a new voice said, "Watch your step⁶, Wylie!", and another man brushed by him in the aisle and went forward in the direction of the cockpit. Wylie White started, and a little too late called after him defiantly:

"I only take orders from the pilot."

I recognized the kind of pleasantries that goes on between the powers in Hollywood and their satellites.

The stewardess reproved him:

"Not so loud, please – some of the passengers are asleep."

I saw now that the other man across the aisle, the middle-aged Jew, was on his feet also, staring, with shameless economic lechery, after the man who had just gone by. Or rather at the back of the man, who gestured sideways with his hand in a sort of farewell, as he went out of my sight.

I asked the stewardess: "Is he the assistant pilot?"

She was unbuckling our belt, about to abandon me to Wylie White.

"No. That's Mr. Smith. He has the private compartment, the 'bridal suite' – only he has it alone. The assistant pilot is always in uniform." She stood up:

⁵ **the prop department** – (театр.) отдел реквизита

⁶ **Watch your step** – (разг.) Держи ухо востро

“I want to find out if we’re going to be grounded in Nashville.”

Wylie White was aghast.

“Why?”

“It’s a storm coming up the Mississippi Valley.”

“Does that mean we’ll have to stay here all *night*?”

“If this keeps up!”

A sudden dip indicated that it would. It tipped Wylie White into the seat opposite me, shunted the stewardess precipitately down in the direction of the cockpit, and plunked the Jewish man into a sitting position. After the studied, unruffled exclamations of distaste that befitted the air-minded, we settled down. There was an introduction.

“Miss Brady – Mr. Schwartz,” said Wylie White. “He’s a great friend of your father’s, too.”

Mr. Schwartz nodded so vehemently that I could almost hear him saying: “It’s true. As God is my judge, it’s true!”

He might have said this right out loud at one time in his life – but he was obviously a man to whom something had happened. Meeting him was like encountering a friend who has been in a fist fight or collision, and got flattened⁷. You stare at your friend and say: “What happened to you?” And he answers something unintelligible through broken teeth and swollen lips. He can’t even tell you about it.

Mr. Schwartz was physically unmarked; the exaggerated Persian nose and oblique eye-shadow were as congenital as the tip-tilted Irish redness around my father’s nostrils.

“Nashville!” cried Wylie White. “That means we go to a hotel. We don’t get to the coast till tomorrow night – if then. My God! I was born in Nashville.”

“I should think you’d like to see it again.”

“Never – I’ve kept away for fifteen years. I hope I’ll *never* see it again.”

But he would – for the plane was unmistakably going down, down, down, like Alice in the rabbit hole. Cupping my hand against the window I saw the blur of the city far away on the left. The green sign “Fasten your belts – No smoking” had been on since we first rode into the storm.

“Did you hear what he said?” said Schwartz from one of his fiery silences across the aisle.

“Hear what?” asked Wylie.

“Hear what he’s calling himself,” said Schwartz. “Mr. *Smith*!”

“Why not?” asked Wylie.

“Oh nothing,” said Schwartz quickly. “I just thought it was funny, Smith.” I never heard a laugh with less mirth in it: “Smith!”

I suppose there has been nothing like the airports since the days of the stage-stops – nothing quite as lonely, as somber-silent. The old red-brick depots were built right into the towns they marked – people didn’t get off at those isolated stations unless they lived there. But airports lead you way back in history like oases, like the stops on the great trade routes. The sight of air travellers strolling in ones and twos into midnight airports will draw a small crowd any night up to two. The young people look at the planes, the older ones look at the passengers with a watchful incredulity. In the big transcontinental planes we were the coastal rich, who casually alighted from our cloud in mid-America. High adventure might be among us, disguised as a movie star. But mostly it wasn’t. And I always wished fervently that we looked more interesting than we did – just as I often have at premières, when the fans look at you with scornful reproach because you’re not a star.

On the ground Wylie and I were suddenly friends, because he held out his arm to steady me when I got out of the plane. From then on, he made a dead set for me⁸ – and I didn’t mind. From the moment we walked into the airport it had become plain that if we were stranded here we were

⁷ got flattened – (разг.) проиграл

⁸ made a dead set for me – (разг.) сделал на меня стойку

stranded here together. (It wasn't like the time I lost my boy – the time my boy played the piano with that girl Reina in a little New England farmhouse near Bennington, and I realized at last I wasn't wanted. Guy Lombardo was on the air playing *Top Hat* and *Cheek to Cheek*, and she taught him the melodies. The keys falling like leaves and her hands splayed over his as she showed him a black chord. I was a freshman then.)

When we went into the airport Mr. Schwartz was along with us, too, but he seemed in a sort of dream. All the time we were trying to get accurate information at the desk, he kept staring at the door that led out to the landing field, as if he were afraid the plane would leave without him. Then I excused myself for a few minutes and something happened that I didn't see, but when I came back he and White were standing close together, White talking and Schwartz looking twice as much as if a great truck had just backed up over him.

He didn't stare at the door to the landing field any more. I heard the end of Wylie White's remark...

“– I told you to shut up. It serves you right.”⁹

“I only said —”

He broke off as I came up and asked if there was any news. It was then half-past two in the morning.

“A little,” said Wylie White. “They don't think we'll be able to start for three hours anyhow, so some of the softies are going to a hotel. But I'd like to take you out to the Hermitage, Home of Andrew Jackson¹⁰.”

“How could we see it in the dark?” demanded Schwartz.

“Hell, it'll be sunrise in two hours.”

“You two go,” said Schwartz.

“All right – you take the bus to the hotel. It's still waiting – *he's* in there.” Wylie's voice had a taunt in it. “Maybe it'd be a good thing.”

“No, I'll go along with you,” said Schwartz hastily.

We took a taxi in the sudden country dark outside, and he seemed to cheer up. He patted my knee-cap encouragingly.

“I should go along,” he said, “I should be chaperone. Once upon a time when I was in the big money¹¹, I had a daughter – a beautiful daughter.”

He spoke as if she had been sold to creditors as a tangible asset.

“You'll have another,” Wylie assured him. “You'll get it all back. Another turn of the wheel and you'll be where Cecilia's papa is, won't he, Cecilia?”

“Where is this Hermitage?” asked Schwartz presently. “Far away at the end of nowhere? Will we miss the plane?”

“Skip it¹²,” said Wylie. “We ought to've brought the stewardess along for you. Didn't you admire the stewardess? I thought she was pretty cute.”

We drove for a long time over a bright level countryside, just a road and a tree and a shack and a tree, and then suddenly along a winding twist of woodland. I could feel even in the darkness that the trees of the woodland were green – that it was all different from the dusty olive-tint of California. Somewhere we passed a negro driving three cows ahead of him, and they mooed as he scatted them to the side of the road. They were real cows, with warm, fresh, silky flanks, and the negro grew gradually real out of the darkness with his big brown eyes staring at us close to the car, as Wylie

⁹ **It serves you right.** – (разг.) Так тебе и надо.

¹⁰ **Andrew Jackson** – Эндрю Джексон (1767–1845), американский генерал, 7-й президент США (1829–1837)

¹¹ **was in the big money** – (сленг) яхшался с очень богатыми людьми

¹² **Skip it** – (разг.) Да ладно; неважно

gave him a quarter. He said “*Thank you – thank you,*” and stood there, and the cows mooed again into the night as we drove off.

I thought of the first sheep I ever remember seeing – hundreds of them, and how our car drove suddenly into them on the back lot of the old Laemmle studio. They were unhappy about being in pictures, but the men in the car with us kept saying:

“Swell?”

“Is that what you wanted, Dick?”

“Isn’t that swell?” And the man named Dick kept standing up in the car as if he were Cortéz¹³ or Balboa¹⁴, looking over that grey fleecy undulation. If I ever knew what picture they were in, I have long forgotten.

We had driven an hour. We crossed a brook over an old rattly iron bridge laid with planks. Now there were roosters crowing and blue-green shadows stirring every time we passed a farmhouse.

“I told you it’d be morning soon,” said Wylie. “I was born near here – the son of impoverished southern paupers. The family mansion is now used as an outhouse. We had four servants – my father, my mother and my two sisters. I refused to join the guild, and so I went to Memphis to start my career, which has now reached a dead end¹⁵.” He put his arm around me: “Cecilia, will you marry me, so I can share the Brady fortune?”

He was disarming enough, so I let my head lie on his shoulder.

“What do you do, Celia. Go to school?”

“I go to Bennington. I’m a junior.”

“Oh, I beg your pardon. I should have known, but I never had the advantage of college training. But a junior – why I read in *Esquire* that juniors have nothing to learn, Cecilia.”

“Why do people think that college girls —”

“Don’t apologize – knowledge is power.”

“You’d know from the way you talk that we were on our way to Hollywood,” I said. “It’s always years and years behind the times.”

He pretended to be shocked.

“You mean girls in the East have no private lives?”

“That’s the point. They *have* got private lives. You’re bothering me, let go.”

“I can’t. It might wake Schwartz, and I think this is the first sleep he’s had for weeks. Listen, Cecilia: I once had an affair with the wife of a producer. A very short affair. When it was over she said to me in no uncertain terms¹⁶, she said: ‘Don’t you ever tell about this or I’ll have you thrown out of Hollywood. My husband’s a much more important man than you!’”

I liked him again now, and presently the taxi turned down a long lane fragrant with honeysuckle and narcissus, and stopped beside the great grey hulk of the Andrew Jackson house. The driver turned around to tell us something about it, but Wylie shushed him, pointing at Schwartz, and we tiptoed out of the car.

“You can’t get into the Mansion now,” the taxi man told us politely.

Wylie and I went and sat against the wide pillars of the steps.

“What about Mr. Schwartz,” I asked. “Who is he?”

“To hell with Schwartz. He was the head of some combine once – First National? Paramount? United Artists? Now he’s down and out¹⁷. But he’ll be back. You can’t flunk out of pictures unless you’re a dope or a drunk.”

¹³ Cortéz – Эрнандо Кортес (1485–1547), испанский конкистадор

¹⁴ Balboa – Васко Нуньес де Бальбоа (1475–1519), испанский исследователь, конкистадор

¹⁵ has now reached a dead end – (разг.) зашла в тупик

¹⁶ in no uncertain terms – (уст.) недвусмысленно, четко и ясно

¹⁷ he’s down and out – (разг.) он совершенно измучен

“You don’t like Hollywood,” I suggested.

“Yes I do. Sure I do. Say! This isn’t anything to talk about on the steps of Andrew Jackson’s house – at dawn.”

“I *like* Hollywood,” I persisted.

“It’s all right. It’s a mining town in lotus land. Who said that? I did. It’s a good place for toughies, but I went there from Savannah, Georgia. I went to a garden party the first day. My host shook hands and left me. It was all there – that swimming pool, green moss at two dollars an inch, beautiful felines having drinks and fun —

“And nobody spoke to me. Not a soul. I spoke to half a dozen people but they didn’t answer. That continued for an hour, two hours – then I got up from where I was sitting and ran out at a dog trot like a crazy man. I didn’t feel I had any rightful identity until I got back to the hotel and the clerk handed me a letter addressed to me in my name.”

Naturally I hadn’t ever had such an experience, but looking back on parties I’d been to, I realized that such things could happen. We don’t go for strangers in Hollywood unless they wear a sign saying that their axe has been thoroughly ground elsewhere, and that in any case it’s not going to fall on our necks – in other words, unless they’re a celebrity. And they’d better look out even then.

“You should have risen above it,” I said smugly. “It’s not a slam at *you* when people are rude – it’s a slam at the people they’ve met before.”

“Such a pretty girl – to say such wise things.”

There was an eager to-do in the eastern sky, and Wylie could see me plain – thin with good features and lots of style, and the kicking fetus of a mind. I wonder what I looked like in that dawn, five years ago. A little rumpled and pale, I suppose, but at that age, when one has the young illusion that most adventures are good, I needed only a bath and a change to go on for hours.

Wylie stared at me with really flattering appreciation – and then suddenly we were not alone. Mr. Schwartz wandered apologetically into the pretty scene.

“I fell upon a large metal handle,” he said, touching the corner of his eye.

Wylie jumped up.

“Just in time, Mr. Schwartz,” he said. “The tour is just starting. Home of Old Hickory – America’s tenth president. The victor of New Orleans, opponent of the National Bank, and inventor of the Spoils System¹⁸.”

Schwartz looked toward me as toward a jury.

“There’s a writer for you,” he said. “Knows everything and at the same time he knows nothing.”

“What’s that?” said Wylie, indignant.

It was my first inkling that he was a writer. And while I like writers – because if you ask a writer anything, you usually get an answer – still it belittled him in my eyes. Writers aren’t people exactly. Or, if they’re any good, they’re a whole *lot* of people trying so hard to be one person. It’s like actors, who try so pathetically not to look in mirrors. Who lean *backward* trying – only to see their faces in the reflecting chandeliers.

“Ain’t writers like that, Celia?” demanded Schwartz. “I have no words for them. I only know it’s true.”

Wylie looked at him with slowly gathering indignation. “I’ve heard that before,” he said. “Look, Manny, I’m a more practical man than you any day! I’ve sat in an office and listened to some mystic stalk up and down for hours spouting tripe that’d land him on a nut-farm anywhere outside of California – and then at the end tell me how practical he was, and *I* was a dreamer – and would I kindly go away and make sense out of what he’d said.”

¹⁸ **the Spoils System** – в США практика, по которой общественные учреждения со всеми своими доходами попадают в распоряжение правящей партии

Mr. Schwartz's face fell into its more disintegrated alignments. One eye looked upward through the tall elms. He raised his hand and bit without interest at the cuticle on his second finger. There was a bird flying about the chimney of the house, and his glance followed it. It perched on the chimney pot like a raven, and Mr. Schwartz's eyes remained fixed upon it as he said: "We can't get in, and it's time for you two to go back to the plane."

It was still not quite dawn. The Hermitage looked like a nice big white box, but a little lonely and vacated still after a hundred years. We walked back to the car. Only after we had gotten in, and Mr. Schwartz had surprisingly shut the taxi door on us, did we realize he didn't intend to come along.

"I'm not going to the Coast – I decided that when I woke up. So I'll stay here, and afterwards the driver could come back for me."

"Going back East?" said Wylie with surprise. "Just because —"

"I have decided," said Schwartz, faintly smiling. "Once I used to be a regular man of decision¹⁹ – you'd be surprised." He felt in his pocket, as the taxi driver warmed up the engine. "Will you give this note to Mr. Smith?"

"Shall I come in two hours?" the driver asked Schwartz.

"Yes... sure. I shall be glad to entertain myself looking around."

I kept thinking of him all the way back to the airport – trying to fit him into that early hour and into that landscape. He had come a long way from some ghetto to present himself at that raw shrine. Manny Schwartz and Andrew Jackson – it was hard to say them in the same sentence. It was doubtful if he knew who Andrew Jackson was as he wandered around, but perhaps he figured that if people had preserved his house Andrew Jackson must have been someone who was large and merciful, able to understand. At both ends of life man needed nourishment: a breast – a shrine. Something to lay himself beside when no one wanted him further, and shoot a bullet into his head.

Of course we did not know this for twenty hours. When we got to the airport we told the purser that Mr. Schwartz was not continuing, and then forgot about him. The storm had wandered away into Eastern Tennessee and broken against the mountains, and we were taking off in less than an hour. Sleepy-eyed travellers appeared from the hotel, and I dozed a few minutes on one of those Iron Maidens²⁰ they use for couches. Slowly the idea of a perilous journey was recreated out of the debris of our failure: a new stewardess, tall, handsome, flashing dark, exactly like the other except she wore seersucker instead of Frenchy red-and-blue, went briskly past us with a suitcase. Wylie sat beside me as we waited.

"Did you give the note to Mr. Smith?" I asked, half asleep.

"Yeah."

"Who is Mr. Smith? I suspect he spoiled Mr. Schwartz's trip."

"It was Schwartz's fault."

"I'm prejudiced against steam-rollers," I said. "My father tries to be a steam-roller around the house, and I tell him to save it for the studio."

I wondered if I was being fair; words are the palest counters at that time in the morning. "Still, he steamrolled me into Bennington and I've always been grateful for that."

"There would be quite a crash," Wylie said, "if steamroller Brady met steam-roller Smith."

"Is Mr. Smith a competitor of Father's?"

"Not exactly. I should say no. But if he was a competitor, I know where my money would be²¹."

"On Father?"

"I'm afraid not."

¹⁹ **used to be a regular man of decision** – (разг.) был когда-то нормальным решительным человеком

²⁰ **Iron Maidens** – «железная дева», средневековый пыточный инструмент

²¹ **I know where my money would be** – (разг.) я знаю, на кого поставить

It was too early in the morning for family patriotism. The pilot was at the desk with the purser and he shook his head as they regarded a prospective passenger who had put two nickels in the electric phonograph and lay alcoholically on a bench fighting off sleep. The first song he had chosen, "Lost," thundered through the room, followed, after a slight interval, by his other choice, "Gone," which was equally dogmatic and final. The pilot shook his head emphatically and walked over to the passenger.

"Afraid we're not going to be able to carry you this time, old man."

"Wha?"

The drunk sat up, awful-looking, yet discernibly attractive, and I was sorry for him in spite of his passionately ill-chosen music.

"Go back to the hotel and get some sleep. There'll be another plane tonight."

"Only going up in the *air*."

"Not this time, old man."²²

In his disappointment the drunk fell off the bench – and above the phonograph, a loudspeaker summoned us respectable people outside. In the corridor of the plane I ran into Monroe Stahr and fell all over him, or wanted to. There was a man any girl would go for, with or without encouragement. I was emphatically without it, but he liked me and sat down opposite till the plane took off.

"Let's all ask for our money back," he suggested. His dark eyes took me in, and I wondered what they would look like if he fell in love. They were kind, aloof and, though they often reasoned with you gently, somewhat superior. It was no fault of theirs if they saw so much. He darted in and out of the role of "one of the boys" with dexterity – but on the whole I should say he wasn't one of them. But he knew how to shut up, how to draw into the background, how to listen. From where he stood (and though he was not a tall man, it always seemed high up) he watched the multitudinous practicalities of his world like a proud young shepherd to whom night and day had never mattered. He was born sleepless, without a talent for rest or the desire for it.

We sat in unembarrassed silence – I had known him since he became Father's partner a dozen years ago, when I was seven and Stahr was twenty-two. Wylie was across the aisle and I didn't know whether or not to introduce them, but Stahr kept turning his ring so abstractedly that he made me feel young and invisible, and I didn't dare. I never dared look quite away from him or quite *at* him, unless I had something important to say – and I knew he affected many other people in the same manner.

"I'll *give* you this ring, Cecilia."

"I beg your pardon. I didn't realize that I was —"

"I've got half a dozen like it."

He handed it to me, a gold nugget with the letter S in bold relief. I had been thinking how oddly its bulk contrasted with his fingers, which were delicate and slender like the rest of his body, and like his slender face with the arched eyebrows and the dark curly hair.

He looked spiritual at times, but he was a fighter – somebody out of his past knew him when he was one of a gang of kids in the Bronx, and gave me a description of how he walked always at the head of his gang, this rather frail boy, occasionally throwing a command backward out of the corner of his mouth.

Stahr folded my hand over the ring, stood up and addressed Wylie.

"Come up to the bridal suite," he said. "See you later, Cecilia."

Before they went out of hearing, I heard Wylie's question: "Did you open Schwartz's note?"

And Stahr: "Not yet."

I must be slow, for only then did I realize that Stahr was Mr. Smith.

Afterwards Wylie told me what was in the note. Written by the headlights of the taxi, it was almost illegible.

"Dear Monroe,

²² **Not this time, old man.** – (разг.) Как-нибудь в другой раз, старина.

You are the best of them all I have always admired your mentality so when you turn against me I know it's no use! I must be no good and am not going to continue the journey let me warn you once again look out! I know.
"Your friend MANNY."

Stahr read it twice, and raised his hand to the morning stubble on his chin.

"He's a nervous wreck²³," he said. "There's nothing to be done – absolutely nothing. I'm sorry I was short with him – but I don't like a man to approach me telling me it's for *my* sake."

"Maybe it was," said Wylie.

"It's poor technique."

"I'd fall for it," said Wylie. "I'm vain as a woman. If anybody pretends to be interested in me, I'll ask for more. I like advice."

Stahr shook his head distastefully. Wylie kept on ribbing him – he was one of those to whom this privilege was permitted.

"You fall for some kinds of flattery," he said. "This 'little Napoleon stuff.'"

"It makes me sick," said Stahr, "but it's not as bad as some man trying to help you."

"If you don't like advice, why do you pay *me*?"

"That's a question of merchandise," said Stahr. "I'm a merchant. I want to buy what's in your mind."

"You're no merchant," said Wylie. "I knew a lot of them when I was a publicity man, and I agree with Charles Francis Adams²⁴."

"What did he say?"

"He knew them all – Gould²⁵, Vanderbilt²⁶, Carnegie²⁷, Astor²⁸ – and he said there wasn't one he'd care to meet again in the hereafter. Well – they haven't improved since then, and that's why I say you're no merchant."

"Adams was probably a sourbelly," said Stahr. "He wanted to be head man himself, but he didn't have the judgment or else the character."

"He had brains," said Wylie rather tartly.

"It takes more than brains.²⁹ You writers and artists poop out and get all mixed up, and somebody has to come in and straighten you out." He shrugged his shoulders. "You seem to take things so personally, hating people and worshipping them – always thinking people are so important – especially yourselves. You just ask to be kicked around. I like people and I like them to like me, but I wear my heart where God put it – on the inside."

He broke off.

"What did I say to Schwartz in the airport? Do you remember – exactly?"

"You said, 'Whatever you're after, the answer is No!'"

Stahr was silent.

"He was sunk," said Wylie, "but I laughed him out of it. We took Billy Brady's daughter for a ride."

Stahr rang for the stewardess.

"That pilot," he said, "would he mind if I sat up in front with him awhile?"

²³ **He's a nervous wreck** – (разг.) Он неврастеник

²⁴ **Charles Francis Adams** – Чарльз Френсис Адамс (1807–1886), сын Джона Квинси Адамса (1767–1848), 6-го президента США; писатель, дипломат

²⁵ **Gould** – Джейсон Гулд (1836–1892), американский финансист

²⁶ **Vanderbilt** – Корнелиус Вандербильт (1794–1877), американский промышленник

²⁷ **Carnegie** – Эндрю Карнеги (1835–1919), американский промышленник, филантроп

²⁸ **Astor** – Джон Джейкоб Астор (1763–1848), американский торговец мехом, капиталист

²⁹ **It takes more than brains.** – (разг.) Здесь нужны не только мозги.

“That’s against the rules, Mr. Smith.”

“Ask him to step in here a minute when he’s free.”

Stahr sat up front all afternoon. While we slid off the endless desert and over the table-lands, dyed with many colors like the white sands we dyed with colors when I was a child. Then in the late afternoon, the peaks themselves – the Mountains of the Frozen Saw – slid under our propellers and we were close to home.

When I wasn’t dozing I was thinking that I wanted to marry Stahr, that I wanted to make him love me. Oh, the conceit! What on earth did I have to offer? But I didn’t think like that then. I had the pride of young women, which draws its strength from such sublime thoughts as “I’m as good as *she* is.” For my purposes I was just as beautiful as the great beauties who must have inevitably thrown themselves at his head. My little spurt of intellectual interest was of course making me fit to be a brilliant ornament of any salon.

I know now it was absurd. Though Stahr’s education was founded on nothing more than a night-school course in stenography, he had a long time ago run ahead through trackless wastes of perception into fields where very few men were able to follow him. But in my reckless conceit I matched my grey eyes against his brown ones for guile, my young golf-and-tennis heart-beats against his, which must be slowing a little after years of over-work. And I planned and I contrived and I plotted – any woman can tell you – but it never came to anything, as you will see. I still like to think that if he’d been a poor boy and nearer my age I could have managed it, but of course the real truth was that I had nothing to offer that he didn’t have; some of my more romantic ideas actually stemmed from pictures – *42nd Street*, for example, had a great influence on me. It’s more than possible that some of the pictures which Stahr himself conceived had shaped me into what I was.

So it was rather hopeless. Emotionally, at least, people can’t live by taking in each other’s washing.

But at that time it was different: Father might help, the stewardess might help. She might go up in the cockpit and say to Stahr: “If I ever saw love, it’s in that girl’s eyes.”

The pilot might help: “Man, are you blind? Why don’t you go back there?”

Wylie White might help – instead of standing in the aisle looking at me doubtfully, wondering whether I was awake or asleep.

“Sit down,” I said. “What’s new? – where are we?”

“Up in the air.”

“Oh, so that’s it. Sit down.” I tried to show a cheerful interest: “What are you writing?”

“Heaven help me, I am writing about a Boy Scout – *The Boy Scout*.”

“Is it Stahr’s idea?”

“I don’t know – he told me to look into it. He may have ten writers working ahead of me or behind me, a system which he so thoughtfully invented. So you’re in love with him?”

“I should say not,” I said indignantly. “I’ve known him all my life.”

“Desperate, eh? Well, I’ll arrange it if you’ll use all your influence to advance me. I want a unit of my own.”

I closed my eyes again and drifted off. When I woke up, the stewardess was putting a blanket over me.

“Almost there,” she said.

Out the window I could see by the sunset that we were in a greener land.

“I just heard something funny,” she volunteered, “up in the cockpit – that Mr. Smith – or Mr. Stahr – I never remember seeing his name – ”

“It’s never on any pictures³⁰,” I said.

“Oh. Well, he’s been asking the pilots a lot about flying – I mean he’s interested? You *know*?”

³⁰ **It’s never on any pictures** – (3d.) Он в титрах никогда не значится

“I know.”

“I mean one of them told me he bet he could teach Mr. Stahr solo flying in ten minutes. He has such a fine mentality, that’s what he said.”

I was getting impatient.

“Well, what was so funny?”

“Well, finally one of the pilots asked Mr. Smith if he liked his business, and Mr. Smith said, ‘Sure. Sure I like it. It’s nice being the only sound nut in a hatful of cracked ones³¹.’”

The stewardess doubled up with laughter – and I could have spit at her.

“I mean calling all those people a hatful of nuts. I mean *cracked* nuts.” Her laughter stopped with unexpected suddenness, and her face was grave as she stood up. “Well, I’ve got to finish my chart.”

“Goodbye.”

Obviously Stahr had put the pilots right up on the throne with him and let them rule with him for awhile. Years later I travelled with one of those same pilots and he told me one thing Stahr had said.

He was looking down at the mountains.

“Suppose you were a railroad man,” he said. “You have to send a train through there somewhere. Well, you get your surveyors’ reports, and you find there’s three or four or half a dozen gaps, and not one is better than the other. You’ve got to decide – on what basis? You can’t test the best way – except by doing it. So you just do it.”

The pilot thought he had missed something.

“How do you mean?”

“You choose some one way for no reason at all – because that mountain’s pink or the blueprint is a better blue. You see?”

The pilot considered that this was very valuable advice. But he doubted if he’d ever be in a position to apply it.

“What I wanted to know,” he told me ruefully, “is how he ever got to be Mr. Stahr.”

I’m afraid Stahr could never have answered that one; for the embryo is not equipped with a memory. But I could answer a little. He had flown up very high to see, on strong wings, when he was young. And while he was up there he had looked on all the kingdoms, with the kind of eyes that can stare straight into the sun. Beating his wings tenaciously – finally frantically – and keeping on beating them, he had stayed up there longer than most of us, and then, remembering all he had seen from his great height of how things were, he had settled gradually to earth.

The motors were off, and all our five senses began to readjust themselves for landing. I could see a line of lights for the Long Beach Naval Station ahead and to the left, and on the right a twinkling blur for Santa Monica. The California moon was out, huge and orange over the Pacific. However I happened to feel about these things – and they were home, after all – I know that Stahr must have felt much more. These were the things I had first opened my eyes on, like the sheep on the back lot of the old Laemmle studio; but this was where Stahr had come to earth after that extraordinary illuminating flight where he saw which way we were going, and how we looked doing it, and how much of it mattered. You could say that this was where an accidental wind blew him, but I don’t think so. I would rather think that in a “long shot”³² he saw a new way of measuring our jerky hopes and graceful rogueries and awkward sorrows, and that he came here from choice to be with us to the end. Like the plane coming down into the Glendale airport, into the warm darkness.

³¹ **the only sound nut in a hatful of cracked ones** – фраза построена на неоднозначности слова nut: 1. орех; 2. чокнутый

³² **in a “long shot”** – (разг.) в этой смелой попытке

Chapter II

It was nine o'clock of a July night and there were still some extras in the drug-store across from the studio – I could see them bent over the pin-games inside – as I parked my car. “Old” Johnny Swanson stood on the corner in his semi-cowboy clothes, staring gloomily past the moon. Once he had been as big in pictures as Tom Mix or Bill Hart³³ – now it was too sad to speak to him, and I hurried across the street and through the front gate.

There is never a time when a studio is absolutely quiet. There is always a night shift of technicians in the laboratories and dubbing rooms and people on the maintenance staff dropping in at the commissary. But the sounds are all different – the padded hush of tires, the quiet tick of a motor running idle, the naked cry of a soprano singing into a nightbound microphone. Around a corner I came upon a man in rubber boots washing down a car in a wonderful white light – a fountain among the dead industrial shadows. I slowed up as I saw Mr. Marcus being hoisted into his car in front of the administration building, because he took so long to say anything, even good night – and while I waited I realized that the soprano was singing, *Come, come, I love you only over and over*; I remember this because she kept singing the same line during the earthquake. That didn't come for five minutes yet.

Father's offices were in the old building with the long balconies and iron rails with their suggestion of a perpetual tightrope. Father was on the second floor, with Stahr on one side and Mr. Marcus on the other – this evening there were lights all along the row. My stomach dipped a little at the proximity to Stahr, but that was in pretty good control now – I'd seen him only once in the month I'd been home.

There were a lot of strange things about Father's office, but I'll make it brief. In the outer part were three poker-faced secretaries who had sat there like witches ever since I could remember – Birdy Peters, Maude something, and Rosemary Schmiel; I don't know whether this was her name, but she was the dean of the trio, so to speak, and under her desk was the kick-lock that admitted you to Father's throne room. All three of the secretaries were passionate capitalists, and Birdy had invented the rule that if typists were seen eating together more than once in a single week, they were hauled up on the carpet. At that time the studios feared mob rule.

I went on in. Nowadays all chief executives have huge drawing rooms, but my father's was the first. It was also the first to have one-way glass in the big French windows³⁴, and I've heard a story about a trap in the floor that would drop unpleasant visitors to an *oubliette*³⁵ below, but believe it to be an invention. There was a big painting of Will Rogers³⁶, hung conspicuously and intended, I think, to suggest Father's essential kinship with Hollywood's St. Francis; there was a signed photograph of Minna Davis, Stahr's dead wife, and photos of other studio celebrities and big chalk drawings of mother and me. Tonight the one-way French windows were open and a big moon, rosy-gold with a haze around, was wedged helpless in one of them. Father and Jacques La Borwitz and Rosemary Schmiel were down at the end around a big circular desk.

What did Father look like? I couldn't describe him except for once in New York when I met him where I didn't expect to; I was aware of a bulky, middle-aged man who looked a little ashamed of himself, and I wished he'd move on – and then I saw he was Father. Afterward I was shocked at my impression. Father can be very magnetic – he has a tough jaw and an Irish smile.

But as for Jacques La Borwitz, I shall spare you. Let me just say he was an assistant producer, which is something like a commissar, and let it go at that. Where Stahr picked up such mental cadavers

³³ **Bill Hart** – Уильям Суррей Харт (1872–1946), американский актер

³⁴ **French windows** – застекленная от пола до потолка дверь, выходящая на улицу или в сад

³⁵ *oubliette* – (фр.) подземная темница с люком

³⁶ **Will Rogers** – Уильям Пенн Эдер Роджерс (1879–1935), американский актер, юморист

or had them forced upon him – or especially how he got any use out of them – has always amazed me, as it amazed everyone fresh from the East who slapped up against them. Jacques La Borwitz had his points, no doubt, but so have the sub-microscopic protozoa, so has a dog prowling for a bitch and a bone. Jacques La – oh my!

From their expressions I was sure they had been talking about Stahr. Stahr had ordered something or forbidden something, or defied Father or junked one of La Borwitz' pictures or something catastrophic, and they were sitting there in protest at night in a community of rebellion and helplessness. Rosemary Schmiel sat pad in hand, as if ready to write down their dejection.

"I'm to drive you home dead or alive," I told Father. "All those birthday presents rotting away in their packages!"

"A birthday!" cried Jacques in a flurry of apology. "How old? I didn't know."

"Forty-three," said Father distinctly.

He was older than that – four years – and Jacques knew it; I saw him note it down in his account book to use some time. Out here these account books are carried open in the hand. One can see the entries being made without recourse to lip-reading, and Rosemary Schmiel was compelled in emulation to make a mark on her pad.

As she rubbed it out, the earth quaked under us.

We didn't get the full shock³⁷ like at Long Beach, where the upper stories of shops were spewed into the streets and small hotels drifted out to sea – but for a full minute our bowels were one with the bowels of the earth – like some nightmare attempt to attach our navel cords again and jerk us back to the womb of creation.

Mother's picture fell off the wall, revealing a small safe – Rosemary and I grabbed frantically for each other and did a strange screaming waltz across the room. Jacques fainted or at least disappeared, and Father clung to his desk and shouted, "Are you all right?" Outside the window the singer came to the climax of *I love you only*, held it a moment and then, I swear, started it all over. Or maybe they were playing it back to her from the recording machine.

The room stood still, shimmying a little. We made our way to the door³⁸, suddenly including Jacques, who had reappeared, and tottered out dizzily through the anteroom on to the iron balcony. Almost all the lights were out, and from here and there we could hear cries and calls. Momentarily we stood waiting for a second shock – then, as with a common impulse, we went into Stahr's entry and through to his office.

The office was big, but not as big as Father's. Stahr sat on the side of his couch rubbing his eyes. When the quake came he had been asleep, and he wasn't sure yet whether he had dreamed it. When we convinced him he thought it was all rather funny – until the telephones began to ring. I watched him as unobtrusively as possible. He was grey with fatigue while he listened to the phone and dictograph; but as the reports came in, his eyes began to pick up shine.

"A couple of water mains have burst³⁹," he said to Father, "– they're heading into the back lot."

"Gray's shooting in the French Village," said Father.

"It's flooded around the Station, too, and in the Jungle and the City Corner. What the hell – nobody seems to be hurt." In passing, he shook my hands gravely: "Where've you been, Cecilia?"

"You going out there, Monroe?" Father asked.

"When all the news is in. One of the power lines is off, too – I've sent for Robinson."

He made me sit down with him on the couch and tell about the quake again.

"You look tired," I said, cute and motherly.

"Yes," he agreed, "I've got no place to go in the evenings, so I just work."

³⁷ We didn't get the full shock – (зд.) Нас потрянуло не так сильно

³⁸ made our way to the door – (разг.) бросились к дверям

³⁹ A couple of water mains have burst – (разг.) Прорвало пару водопроводных труб

"I'll arrange some evenings for you."

"I used to play poker with a gang," he said thoughtfully, "before I was married. But they all drank themselves to death."

Miss Doolan, his secretary, came in with fresh bad news.

"Robby'll take care of everything when he comes," Stahr assured Father. He turned to me. "Now there's a man – that Robinson. He was a trouble-shooter – fixed the telephone wires in Minnesota blizzards – nothing stumps him⁴⁰. He'll be here in a minute – you'll like Robby."

He said it as if it had been his life-long intention to bring us together, and he had arranged the whole earthquake with just that in mind.

"Yes, you'll like Robby," he repeated. "When do you go back to college?"

"I've just come home."

"You get the whole summer?"

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'll go back as soon as I can."

I was in a mist. It hadn't failed to cross my mind that he might have some intention about me, but if it was so, it was in an exasperatingly early stage – I was merely "a good property." And the idea didn't seem so attractive at that moment – like marrying a doctor. He seldom left the studio before eleven.

"How long," he asked my father, "before she graduates from college. That's what I was trying to say."

And I think I was about to sing out eagerly that I needn't go back at all, that I was quite educated already – when the totally admirable Robinson came in. He was a bowlegged young redhead, all ready to go.

"This is Robby, Cecilia," said Stahr. "Come on, Robby."

So I met Robby. I can't say it seemed like fate – but it was. For it was Robby who later told me how Stahr found his love that night.

* * *

Under the moon the back lot⁴¹ was thirty acres of fairyland – not because the locations really looked like African jungles and French châteaux and schooners at anchor and Broadway by night, but because they looked like the torn picture books of childhood, like fragments of stories dancing in an open fire. I never lived in a house with an attic, but a back lot must be something like that, and at night of course in an enchanted distorted way, it all comes true.

When Stahr and Robby arrived, clusters of lights had already picked out the danger spots in the flood.

"We'll pump it out into the swamp on Thirty-Sixth Street," said Robby after a moment. "It's city property – but isn't this an act of God? Say – look there!"

On top of a huge head of the Goddess Siva, two women were floating down the current of an impromptu river. The idol had come unloosed from a set of Burma, and it meandered earnestly on its way, stopping sometimes to waddle and bump in the shallows with the other debris of the tide. The two refugees had found sanctuary along a scroll of curls on its bald forehead and seemed at first glance to be sightseers on an interesting bus-ride through the scene of the flood.

"Will you look at that, Monroe!" said Robby. "Look at those dames!"

Dragging their legs through sudden bogs, they made their way to the bank of the stream. Now they could see the women, looking a little scared but brightening at the prospect of rescue.

⁴⁰ **nothing stumps him** – (разг.) для него нет проблем (он все умеет)

⁴¹ **the back lot** – (кино) съемочные павильоны

“We ought to let ’em drift out to the waste pipe,” said Robby gallantly, “but DeMille⁴² needs that head next week.”

He wouldn’t have hurt a fly, though, and presently he was hip deep in the water, fishing for them with a pole and succeeding only in spinning it in a dizzy circle. Help arrived, and the impression quickly got around that one of them was very pretty, and then that they were people of importance. But they were just strays, and Robby waited disgustedly to give them hell while the thing was brought finally into control and beached.

“Put that head back!” he called up to them. “You think it’s a souvenir?”

One of the women came sliding smoothly down the cheek of the idol, and Robby caught and set her on solid ground; the other one hesitated and then followed. Robby turned to Stahr for judgment.

“What’ll we do with them, chief?”

Stahr did not answer. Smiling faintly at him from not four feet away was the face of his dead wife, identical even to the expression. Across the four feet of moonlight, the eyes he knew looked back at him, a curl blew a little on a familiar forehead; the smile lingered, changed a little according to pattern; the lips parted – the same. An awful fear went over him, and he wanted to cry aloud. Back from the still sour room, the muffled glide of the limousine hearse, the falling concealing flowers, from out there in the dark – here now warm and glowing. The river passed him in a rush, the great spotlights swooped and blinked – and then he heard another voice speak that was not Minna’s voice.

“We’re sorry,” said the voice. “We followed a truck in through a gate.”

A little crowd had gathered – electricians, grips, truckers, and Robby began to nip at them like a sheep dog.

“...get the big pumps on the tanks on Stage 4... put a cable around this head... raft it up on a couple of two by fours... get the water out of the jungle first, for Christ’s sake... that big ‘A’ pipe, lay it down... all that stuff is plastic...”

Stahr stood watching the two women as they threaded their way after a policeman toward an exit gate. Then he took a tentative step to see if the weakness had gone out of his knees. A loud tractor came bumping through the slush, and men began streaming by him – every second one glancing at him, smiling, speaking: “Hello, Monroe... Hello, Mr. Stahr... wet night, Mr. Stahr... Monroe... Monroe... Stahr... Stahr... Stahr.”

He spoke and waved back as the people streamed by in the darkness, looking, I suppose, a little like the Emperor and the Old Guard. There is no world so but it has its heroes, and Stahr was the hero. Most of these men had been here a long time – through the beginnings and the great upset, when sound came⁴³, and the three years of Depression, he had seen that no harm came to them. The old loyalties were trembling now, there were clay feet everywhere; but still he was their man, the last of the princes. And their greeting was a sort of low cheer as they went by.

⁴² DeMille – Сесиль Демилль (1881–1959), американский кинорежиссер, продюсер

⁴³ when sound came – (разг.) когда кино стало звуковым

Chapter III

Between the night I got back and the quake, I'd made many observations.

About Father, for example. I loved Father – in a sort of irregular graph with many low swoops – but I began to see that his strong will didn't fill him out as a passable man. Most of what he accomplished boiled down to shrewd. He had acquired with luck and shrewdness a quarter interest in a booming circus – together with young Stahr. That was his life's effort – all the rest was an instinct to hang on. Of course, he talked that double talk to Wall Street about how mysterious it was to make a picture, but Father didn't know the ABC's⁴⁴ of dubbing or even cutting. Nor had he learned much about the feel of America as a bar boy in Ballyhegan, nor did he have any more than a drummer's sense of a story. On the other hand, he didn't have concealed paresis like —; he came to the studio before noon, and, with a suspiciousness developed like a muscle, it was hard to put anything over on him.

Stahr had been his luck – and Stahr was something else again. He was a marker in industry like Edison and Lumière and Griffith⁴⁵ and Chaplin. He led pictures way up past the range and power of the theatre, reaching a sort of golden age, before the censorship.

Proof of his leadership was the spying that went on around him – not just for inside information or patented process secrets – but spying on his scent for a trend in taste, his guess as to how things were going to be. Too much of his vitality was taken by the mere parrying of these attempts. It made his work secret in part, often devious, slow – and hard to describe as the plans of a general, where the psychological factors become too tenuous and we end by merely adding up the successes and failures. But I have determined to give you a glimpse of him functioning, which is my excuse for what follows. It is drawn partly from a paper I wrote in college on *A Producer's Day* and partly from my imagination. More often I have blocked in the ordinary events myself, while the stranger ones are true.

* * *

In the early morning after the flood, a man walked up to the outside balcony of the Administration Building. He lingered there some time, according to an eyewitness, then mounted to the iron railing and dove head first to the pavement below. Breakage – one arm.

Miss Doolan, Stahr's secretary, told him about it when he buzzed for her at nine. He had slept in his office without hearing the small commotion.

"Pete Zavras!" Stahr exclaimed, " – the camera man?"

"They took him to a doctor's office. It won't be in the paper."⁴⁶

"Hell of a thing," he said. "I knew he'd gone to pot⁴⁷ – but I don't know why. He was all right when we used him two years ago – why should he come here? How did he get in?"

"He bluffed it with his old studio pass," said Catherine Doolan. She was a dry hawk, the wife of an assistant director.

"Perhaps the quake had something to do with it."

"He was the best camera man in town," Stahr said. When he had heard of the hundreds dead at Long Beach, he was still haunted by the abortive suicide at dawn. He told Catherine Doolan to trace the matter down.

The first dictograph messages blew in through the warm morning. While he shaved and had coffee, he talked and listened. Robby had left a message: "If Mr. Stahr wants me tell him to hell with

⁴⁴ **didn't know the ABC's** – (разг.) даже не знал основ

⁴⁵ **Griffith** – Дэвид Льюэлин Уорк Гриффит (1875–1948), американский кинопродюсер, режиссер

⁴⁶ **It won't be in the paper.** – (разг.) В газеты это не попадет.

⁴⁷ **he'd gone to pot** – (разг.) он вылетел в трубу, разорился

it I'm in bed." An actor was sick or thought so; the Governor of California was bringing a party out; a supervisor had beaten up his wife for the prints and must be "reduced to a writer" – these three affairs were Father's job – unless the actor was under personal contract to Stahr. There was early snow on a location in Canada with the company already there – Stahr raced over the possibilities of salvage, reviewing the story of the picture. Nothing. Stahr called Catherine Doolan.

"I want to speak to the cop who put two women off the back lot last night. I think his name's Malone."

"Yes, Mr. Stahr. I've got Joe Wyman – about the trousers."

"Hello, Joe," said Stahr. "Listen – two people at the sneak preview complained that Morgan's fly was open for half the picture⁴⁸... of course they're exaggerating, but even if it's only ten feet... no, we can't find the people, but I want that picture run over and over until you find that footage. Get a lot of people in the projection room – somebody'll spot it."

*"Tout passe. – L'art robuste
Seul a l'éternité."*⁴⁹

"And there's the Prince from Denmark," said Catherine Doolan. "He's very handsome." She was impelled to add pointlessly, "– for a tall man."

"Thanks," Stahr said. "Thank you, Catherine, I appreciate it that I am now the handsomest small man on the lot. Send the Prince out on the sets and tell him we'll lunch at one."

"And Mr. George Boxley – looking very angry in a British way."

"I'll see him for ten minutes."

As she went out, he asked: "Did Robby phone in?"

"No."

"Call sound, and if he's been heard from, call him and ask him this. Ask him this – did he hear that woman's name last night? Either of those women. Or anything so they could be traced."

"Anything else?"

"No, but tell him it's important while he still remembers. What were they? I mean what kind of people – ask him that, too. I mean were they —"

She waited, scratching his words on her pad without looking.

"– oh, were they – questionable? Were they theatrical? Never mind – skip that. Just ask if he knows how they can be traced."

The policeman, Malone, had known nothing. Two dames, and he had hustled 'em, you betcha. One of them was sore. Which one? One of them. They had a car, a Chevy – he thought of taking the license. Was it – the good-looker who was sore? It was one of them.

Not which one – he had noticed nothing. Even on the lot here Minna was forgotten. In three years. So much for that, then.

* * *

Stahr smiled at Mr. George Boxley. It was a kindly fatherly smile Stahr had developed inversely when he was a young man pushed into high places. Originally it had been a smile of respect toward his elders, then as his own decisions grew rapidly to displace theirs, a smile so that they should not feel it – finally emerging as what it was: a smile of kindness – sometimes a little hurried and tired, but always there – toward anyone who had not angered him within the hour. Or anyone he did not intend to insult, aggressive and outright.

⁴⁸ fly was open for half the picture – (разг.) молния на брюках была расстегнута в половине кадров

⁴⁹ *Tout passe. – L'art robuste Seul a l'éternité.* – (фр.) Все проходит. – Вечно одно лишь животворящее искусство. (Теофиль Готье. «Искусство»)

Mr. Boxley did not smile back. He came in with the air of being violently dragged, though no one apparently had a hand on him⁵⁰. He stood in front of a chair, and again it was as if two invisible attendants seized his arms and set him down forcibly into it. He sat there morosely. Even when he lit a cigarette on Stahr's invitation, one felt that the match was held to it by exterior forces he disdained to control.

Stahr looked at him courteously.

"Something not going well, Mr. Boxley?"

The novelist looked back at him in thunderous silence.

"I read your letter," said Stahr. The tone of the pleasant young headmaster was gone. He spoke as to an equal, but with a faint two-edged deference.

"I can't get what I write on paper," broke out Boxley. "You've all been very decent, but it's a sort of conspiracy. Those two hacks you've teamed me with listen to what I say, but they spoil it – they seem to have a vocabulary of about a hundred words."

"Why don't you write it yourself?" asked Stahr.

"I have. I sent you some."

"But it was just talk, back and forth," said Stahr mildly. "Interesting talk but nothing more."

Now it was all the two ghostly attendants could do to hold Boxley in the deep chair. He struggled to get up; he uttered a single quiet bark which had some relation to laughter but none to amusement, and said:

"I don't think you people read things. The men are duelling when the conversation takes place. At the end one of them falls into a well and has to be hauled up in a bucket."

He barked again and subsided.

"Would you write that in a book of your own, Mr. Boxley?"

"What? Naturally not."

"You'd consider it too cheap."

"Movie standards are different," said Boxley, hedging.

"Do you ever go to them?"

"No – almost never."

"Isn't it because people are always duelling and falling down wells?"

"Yes – and wearing strained facial expressions and talking incredible and unnatural dialogue."

"Skip the dialogue for a minute," said Stahr. "Granted your dialogue is more graceful than what these hacks can write – that's why we brought you out here. But let's imagine something that isn't either bad dialogue or jumping down a well. Has your office got a stove in it that lights with a match?"

"I think it has," said Boxley stiffly, " – but I never use it."

"Suppose you're in your office. You've been fighting duels or writing all day and you're too tired to fight or write any more. You're sitting there staring – dull, like we all get sometimes⁵¹. A pretty scenographer that you've seen before comes into the room and you watch her – idly. She doesn't see you, though you're very close to her. She takes off her gloves, opens her purse and dumps it out on a table —"

Stahr stood up, tossing his key-ring on his desk.

"She has two dimes and a nickel – and a cardboard match box. She leaves the nickel on the desk, puts the two dimes back into her purse and takes her black gloves to the stove, opens it and puts them inside. There is one match in the match box and she starts to light it kneeling by the stove. You notice that there's a stiff wind blowing in the window – but just then your telephone rings. The girl picks it up, says hello – listens – and says deliberately into the phone, 'I've never owned a pair of black gloves in my life.' She hangs up, kneels by the stove again, and just as she lights the match,

⁵⁰ **no one apparently had a hand on him** – (разг.) никто его не тащил

⁵¹ **like we all get sometimes** – (разг.) все мы так ведем себя иногда

you glance around very suddenly and see that there's another man in the office, watching every move the girl makes —"

Stahr paused. He picked up his keys and put them in his pocket.

"Go on," said Boxley smiling. "What happens?"

"I don't know," said Stahr. "I was just making pictures."

Boxley felt he was being put in the wrong⁵².

"It's just melodrama," he said.

"Not necessarily," said Stahr. "In any case, nobody has moved violently or talked cheap dialogue or had any facial expression at all. There was only one bad line, and a writer like you could improve it. But you were interested."

"What was the nickel for?" asked Boxley evasively.

"I don't know," said Stahr. Suddenly he laughed. "Oh, yes – the nickel was for the movies."

The two invisible attendants seemed to release Boxley. He relaxed, leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"What in hell do you pay me for?" he demanded. "I don't understand the damn stuff."

"You will," said Stahr grinning, "or you wouldn't have asked about the nickel."

* * *

A dark saucer-eyed man was waiting in the outer office as they came out.

"Mr. Boxley, this is Mr. Mike Van Dyke," Stahr said. "What is it, Mike?"

"Nothing," Mike said. "I just came up to see if you were real."

"Why don't you go to work?" Stahr said. "I haven't had a laugh in the rushes for days."⁵³

"I'm afraid of a nervous breakdown."

"You ought to keep in form," Stahr said. "Let's see you peddle your stuff." He turned to Boxley: "Mike's a gag-man⁵⁴ – he was out here when I was in the cradle. Mike, show Mr. Boxley a double wing, clutch, kick and scam."

"Here?" asked Mike.

"Here."

"There isn't much room. I wanted to ask you about —"

"There's lot of room."

"Well," he looked around tentatively. "You shoot the gun."

Miss Doolan's assistant, Katy, took a paper bag, blew it open.

"It was a routine," Mike said to Boxley, "– back in the Keystone days." He turned to Stahr: "Does he know what a routine is?"

"It means an act," Stahr explained. "Georgie Jessel talks about 'Lincoln's Gettysburg routine'⁵⁵."

Katy poised the neck of the blown-up bag in her mouth. Mike stood with his back to her.

"Ready?" Katy asked. She brought her hands down on the side. Immediately Mike grabbed his bottom with both hands, jumped in the air, slid his feet out on the floor one after the other, remaining in place and flapping his arms twice like a bird —

"Double wing," said Stahr.

– and then ran out the screen door which the office boy held open for him and disappeared past the window of the balcony.

⁵² he was being put in the wrong – (разг.) на него сваливают вину

⁵³ I haven't had a laugh in the rushes for days. – (кино) Давненько я не смеялся на прогонах (просмотрах отснятой пленки).

⁵⁴ gag-man – (разг.) сочинитель острот, шуток, реплик, диалогов

⁵⁵ Lincoln's Gettysburg routine – имеется в виду знаменитая речь Абрахама Линкольна в 1863 г. в Геттисберге, Пенсильвания, в которой он говорил о солдатах Гражданской войны, погибших за правое дело

“Mr. Stahr,” said Miss Doolan, “Mr. Hanson is on the phone from New York.”

Ten minutes later he clicked his dictograph, and Miss Doolan came in. There was a male star waiting to see him in the outer office, Miss Doolan said.

“Tell him I went out by the balcony,” Stahr advised her.

“All right. He’s been in four times this week. He seems very anxious.”

“Did he give you any hint⁵⁶ of what he wanted? Isn’t it something he can see Mr. Brady about?”

“He didn’t say. You have a conference coming up.

Miss Meloney and Mr. White are outside. Mr. Broaca is next door in Mr. Reinmund’s office.”

“Send Mr. Roderiguez in,” said Stahr. “Tell him I can see him only for a minute.”

When the handsome actor came in, Stahr remained standing.

“What is it that can’t wait?” he asked pleasantly.

The actor waited carefully till Miss Doolan had gone out.

“Monroe, I’m through,” he said. “I had to see you.”

“Through!” said Stahr. “Have you seen *Variety*? Your picture’s held over at Roxy’s and did thirty-seven thousand in Chicago last week.”

“That’s the worst of it. That’s the tragedy. I get everything I want, and now it means nothing.”

“Well, go on, explain.”

“There’s nothing between Esther and me any more. There never can be again.”

“A row.”

“Oh, no – worse – I can’t bear to mention it. My head’s in a daze. I wander around like a madman. I go through my part as if I was asleep.”

“I haven’t noticed it,” said Stahr. “You were great in your rushes yesterday.”

“Was I? That just shows you nobody ever guesses.”

“Are you trying to tell me that you and Esther are separating?”

“I suppose it’ll come to that. Yes – inevitably – it will.”

“What was it?” demanded Stahr impatiently. “Did she come in without knocking?⁵⁷”

“Oh, there’s nobody else. It’s just – me. I’m through.”

Stahr got it suddenly.

“How do you know?”

“It’s been true for six weeks.”

“It’s your imagination,” said Stahr. “Have you been to a doctor?”

The actor nodded.

“I’ve tried everything. I even – one day in desperation I went down to – to Claris. But it was hopeless. I’m washed up.⁵⁸”

Stahr had an impish temptation to tell him to go to Brady about it. Brady handled all matters of public relations. Or was this private relations. He turned away a moment, got his face in control, turned back.

“I’ve been to Pat Brady,” said the star, as if guessing the thought. “He gave me a lot of phoney advice and I tried it all, but nothing doing. Esther and I sit opposite each other at dinner, and I’m ashamed to look at her. She’s been a good sport about it⁵⁹, but I’m ashamed. I’m ashamed all day long. I think *Rainy Day* grossed twenty-five thousand in Des Moines and broke all records in St. Louis and did twenty-seven thousand in Kansas City. My fan mail’s way up, and there I am afraid to go home at night, afraid to go to bed.”

⁵⁶ Did he give you any hint – (разг.) Он хоть намекнул вам

⁵⁷ Did she come in without knocking? – (зд.) Она тебя с кем-то застукала?

⁵⁸ I’m washed up. – (сленг) Я человек конченный.

⁵⁹ been a good sport about it – (разг.) хорошо держится, не показывает виду

Stahr began to be faintly oppressed. When the actor first came in, Stahr had intended to invite him to a cocktail party, but now it scarcely seemed appropriate. What would he want with a cocktail party with this hanging over him? In his mind's eye he saw him wandering haunted from guest to guest with a cocktail in his hand and his grosses up twenty-seven thousand.

"So I came to you, Monroe. I never saw a situation where you didn't know a way out. I said to myself: even if he advises me to kill myself, I'll ask Monroe."

The buzzer sounded on Stahr's desk – he switched on the dictograph and heard Miss Doolan's voice.

"Five minutes, Mr. Stahr."

"I'm sorry," said Stahr. "I'll need a few minutes more."

"Five hundred girls marched to my house from the high school," the actor said gloomily, "and I stood behind the curtains and watched them. I couldn't go out."

"You sit down," said Stahr. "We'll take plenty of time and talk this over."

In the outer office, two members of the conference group had already waited ten minutes – Wylie White and Jane Meloney. The latter was a dried-up little blonde of fifty about whom one could hear the fifty assorted opinions of Hollywood – "a sentimental dope," "the best writer on construction in Hollywood," "a veteran," "that old hack," "the smartest woman on the lot," "the cleverest plagiarist in the biz"; and, of course, in addition she was variously described as a nymphomaniac, a virgin, a pushover, a Lesbian and a faithful wife. Without being an old maid, she was, like most self-made women, rather old-maidish. She had ulcers of the stomach, and her salary was over a hundred thousand a year. A complicated treatise could be written on whether she was "worth it" or more than that or nothing at all. Her value lay in such ordinary assets as the bare fact that she was a woman and adaptable, quick and trustworthy, "knew the game"⁶⁰ and was without egotism. She had been a great friend of Minna's, and over a period of years Stahr had managed to stifle what amounted to a sharp physical revulsion.

She and Wylie waited in silence – occasionally addressing a remark to Miss Doolan. Every few minutes Reinmund, the supervisor, called up from his office, where he and Broaca, the director, were waiting. After ten minutes Stahr's button went on, and Miss Doolan called Reinmund and Broaca; simultaneously Stahr and the actor came out of Stahr's office with Stahr holding the man's arm. He was so wound up now that when Wylie White asked him how he was he opened his mouth and began to tell him then and there.

"Oh, I've had an awful time," he said, but Stahr interrupted sharply.

"No, you haven't. Now you go along and do the role the way I said."

"Thank you, Monroe."

Jane Meloney looked after him without speaking.

"Somebody been catching flies on him?" she asked – a phrase for stealing scenes.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting," Stahr said. "Come on in."

* * *

It was noon already and the conferees were entitled to exactly an hour of Stahr's time. No less, for such a conference could only be interrupted by a director who was held up in his shooting; seldom much more, because every eight days the company must release a production as complex and costly as Reinhardt's⁶¹ *Miracle*.

Occasionally, less often than five years ago, Stahr would work all through the night on a single picture. But after such a spree he felt badly for days. If he could go from problem to problem, there

⁶⁰ **knew the game** – (разг.) знала правила игры

⁶¹ **Reinhardt** – Макс Рейнхард (Голдман) (1873–1943), театральный режиссер, актер, продюсер

was a certain rebirth of vitality with each change. And like those sleepers who can wake whenever they wish, he had set his psychological clock to run one hour.

The cast assembled included, besides the writers, Reinmund, one of the most favored of the supervisors, and John Broaca, the picture's director.

Broaca, on the surface, was all engineer – large and without nerves, quietly resolute, popular. He was an ignoramus, and Stahr often caught him making the same scenes over and over – one scene about a rich young girl occurred in all his pictures with the same action, the same business. A bunch of large dogs entered the room and jumped around the girl. Later the girl went to a stable and slapped a horse on the rump. The explanation was probably not Freudian; more likely that at a drab moment in youth he had looked through a fence and seen a beautiful girl with dogs and horses. As a trademark for glamor it was stamped on his brain forever.

Reinmund was a handsome young opportunist, with a fairly good education. Originally a man of some character, he was being daily forced by his anomalous position into devious ways of acting and thinking. He was a bad man now, as men go. At thirty he had none of the virtues which either gentile Americans or Jews are taught to think admirable. But he got his pictures out in time, and by manifesting an almost homosexual fixation on Stahr, seemed to have dulled Stahr's usual acuteness. Stahr liked him – considered him a good all-around man⁶².

Wylie White, of course, in any country would have been recognizable as an intellectual of the second order. He was civilized and voluble, both simple and acute, half dazed and half saturnine. His jealousy of Stahr showed only in unguarded flashes, and was mingled with admiration and even affection.

"The production date for this picture is two weeks from Saturday," said Stahr. "I think basically it's all right – much improved."

Reinmund and the two writers exchanged a glance of congratulation.

"Except for one thing," said Stahr, thoughtfully. "I don't see why it should be produced at all, and I've decided to put it away."

There was a moment of shocked silence – and then murmurs of protest, stricken queries.

"It's not your fault," Stahr said. "I thought there was something there that wasn't there – that was all." He hesitated, looking regretfully at Reinmund: "It's too bad – it was a good play. We paid fifty thousand for it."

"What's the matter with it, Monroe?" asked Broaca bluntly.

"Well, it hardly seems worth while to go into it," said Stahr.

Reinmund and Wylie White were both thinking of the professional effect on them. Reinmund had two pictures to his account this year – but Wylie White needed a credit to start his comeback to the scene. Jane Meloney was watching Stahr closely from little skull-like eyes.

"Couldn't you give us some clue," Reinmund asked. "This is a good deal of a blow, Monroe."

"I just wouldn't put Margaret Sullavan in it," said Stahr. "Or Colman either. I wouldn't advise them to play it —"

"Specifically⁶³, Monroe," begged Wylie White. "What didn't you like? The scenes? the dialogue? the humor? construction?"

Stahr picked up the script from his desk, let it fall as if it were, physically, too heavy to handle.

"I don't like the people," he said. "I wouldn't like to meet them – if I knew they were going to be somewhere, I'd go somewhere else."

Reinmund smiled, but there was worry in his eyes.

"Well, that's a damning criticism," he said. "I thought the people were rather interesting."

"So did I," said Broaca. "I thought Em was very sympathetic."

⁶² **considered him a good all-around man** – (разг.) считал его отличным бойцом

⁶³ **Specifically** – (зд.) А подробнее

“Did you?” asked Stahr sharply. “I could just barely believe she was alive. And when I came to the end, I said to myself, ‘So what?’⁶⁴”

“There must be something to do,” Reinmund said. “Naturally we feel bad about this. This is the structure we agreed on —”

“But it’s not the story,” said Stahr. “I’ve told you many times that the first thing I decide is the *kind* of story I want. We change in every other regard, but once that is set we’ve got to work toward it with every line and movement. This is not the kind of a story I want. The story we bought had shine and glow – it was a happy story. This is all full of doubt and hesitation. The hero and heroine stop loving each other over trifles – then they start up again over trifles. After the first sequence, you don’t care if she never sees him again or he her.”

“That’s my fault,” said Wylie suddenly. “You see, Monroe, I don’t think stenographers have the same dumb admiration for their bosses they had in 1929. They’ve been laid off – they’ve seen their bosses jittery. The world has moved on, that’s all.”

Stahr looked at him impatiently, gave a short nod.

“That’s not under discussion⁶⁵,” he said. “The premise of this story is that the girl did have dumb admiration for her boss, if you want to call it that. And there wasn’t any evidence that he’d ever been jittery. When you make her doubt him in any way, you have a different kind of story. Or rather you haven’t anything at all. These people are extraverts – get that straight – and I want them to extravert all over the lot. When I want to do a Eugene O’Neill⁶⁶ play, I’ll buy one.”

Jane Meloney, who had never taken her eyes off Stahr, knew it was going to be all right now. If he had really been going to abandon the picture, he wouldn’t have gone at it like this. She had been in this game longer than any of them except Broaca, with whom she had had a three-day affair twenty years ago.

Stahr turned to Reinmund.

“You ought to have understood from the casting, Reiny, what kind of a picture I wanted. I started marking the lines that Corliss and McKelway couldn’t say and got tired of it. Remember this in the future – if I order a limousine, I want that kind of car. And the fastest midget racer you ever saw wouldn’t do. Now – ” He looked around. “ – shall we go any farther? Now that I’ve told you I don’t even like the kind of picture this is? Shall we go on? We’ve got two weeks. At the end of that time I’m going to put Corliss and McKelway into this or something else – is it worth while?”

“Well, naturally,” said Reinmund, “I think it is. I feel bad about this. I should have warned Wylie. I thought he had some good ideas.”

“Monroe’s right,” said Broaca bluntly. “I felt this was wrong all the time, but I couldn’t put my finger on it⁶⁷.”

Wylie and Jane looked at him contemptuously and exchanged a glance.

“Do you writers think you can get hot on it again?” asked Stahr, not unkindly. “Or shall I try somebody fresh?”

“I’d like another shot⁶⁸,” said Wylie.

“How about you, Jane?”

She nodded briefly.

“What do you think of the girl?” asked Stahr.

“Well – naturally I’m prejudiced in her favor.”

⁶⁴ **So what?** – (разг.) И что?

⁶⁵ **That’s not under discussion** – (разг.) Это не обсуждается

⁶⁶ **Eugene O’Neill** – Юджин О’Нил (1888–1953), американский драматург, нобелевский лауреат (1936)

⁶⁷ **couldn’t put my finger on it** – (разг.) не мог понять, что именно не так

⁶⁸ **I’d like another shot** – (разг.) Я хочу попробовать еще раз

“You better forget it,” said Stahr warningly. “Ten million Americans would put thumbs down on that girl if she walked on the screen. We’ve got an hour and twenty-five minutes on the screen – you show a woman being unfaithful to a man for one-third of that time and you’ve given the impression that she’s one-third whore.”

“Is that a big proportion?” asked Jane slyly, and they laughed.

“It is for me,” said Stahr thoughtfully, “even if it wasn’t for the Hays office. If you want to paint a scarlet letter on her back⁶⁹, it’s all right, but that’s another story. Not this story. This is a future wife and mother. However – *however* —”

He pointed his pencil at Wylie White.

“ – this has as much passion as that Oscar on my desk.”

“What the hell!” said Wylie. “She’s full of it. Why she goes to —”

“She’s loose enough,” said Stahr, “ – but that’s all. There’s one scene in the play better than all this you cooked up, and you’ve left it out. When she’s trying to make the time pass by changing her watch.”

“It didn’t seem to fit,” Wylie apologized.

“Now,” said Stahr, “I’ve got about fifty ideas. I’m going to call Miss Doolan.” He pressed a button. “ – And if there’s anything you don’t understand, speak up —”

Miss Doolan slid in almost imperceptibly. Pacing the floor swiftly, Stahr began. In the first place he wanted to tell them what kind of a girl she was – what kind of a girl he approved of here. She was a perfect girl with a few small faults as in the play, but a perfect girl not because the public wanted her that way but because it was the kind of girl that he, Stahr, liked to see in this sort of picture. Was that clear? It was no character role. She stood for health, vitality, ambition and love. What gave the play its importance was entirely a situation in which she found herself. She became possessed of a secret that affected a great many lives. There was a right thing and a wrong thing to do – at first it was not plain which was which, but when it was, she went right away and did it. That was the kind of story this was – thin, clean and shining. No doubts.

“She has never heard the word labor troubles,” he said with a sigh. “She might be living in 1929. Is it plain what kind of girl I want?”

“It’s very plain, Monroe.”

“Now about the things she does,” said Stahr. “At all times, at all moments when she is on the screen in our sight, she wants to sleep with Ken Willard. Is that plain, Wylie?”

“Passionately plain.”

“Whatever she does, it is in place of sleeping with Ken Willard. If she walks down the street she is walking to sleep with Ken Willard, if she eats her food it is to give her strength to sleep with Ken Willard. *But* at no time do you give the impression that she would ever consider sleeping with Ken Willard unless they were properly sanctified⁷⁰. I’m ashamed of having to tell you these kindergarten facts, but they have somehow leaked out of the story.”

He opened the script and began to go through it page by page. Miss Doolan’s notes would be typed in quintuplicate and given to them, but Jane Meloney made notes of her own. Broaca put his hand up to his half-closed eyes – he could remember “when a director was something out here,” when writers were gag-men or eager and ashamed young reporters full of whiskey – a director was all there was then. No supervisor – no Stahr.

He started wide-awake as he heard his name.

“It would be nice, John, if you could put the boy on a pointed roof and let him walk around and keep the camera on him. You might get a nice feeling – not danger, not suspense, not pointing for anything – a kid on the roof in the morning.”

⁶⁹ you want to paint a scarlet letter on her back – (разг.) хотите заклеить ее как блудницу

⁷⁰ unless they were properly sanctified – (ирон.) без заключения брака

Broaca brought himself back in the room.

“All right,” he said, “ – just an element of danger.”

“Not exactly,” said Stahr. “He doesn’t start to fall off the roof. Break into the next scene with it.”

“Through the window,” suggested Jane Meloney. “He could climb in his sister’s window.”

“That’s a good transition,” said Stahr. “Right into the diary scene.”

Broaca was wide-awake now.

“I’ll shoot up at him⁷¹,” he said. “Let him go away from the camera. Just a fixed shot from quite a distance – let him go away from the camera. Don’t follow him. Pick him up in a close shot and let him go away again. No attention on him except against the whole roof and the sky.” He liked the shot – it was a director’s shot that didn’t come up on every page any more. He might use a crane – it would be cheaper in the end than building the roof on the ground with a process sky. That was one thing about Stahr – the literal sky was the limit. He had worked with Jews too long to believe legends that they were small with money⁷².

“In the third sequence have him hit the priest,” Stahr said.

⁷¹ I’ll shoot up at him – (кино) Я дам его крупным планом

⁷² small with money – (разг.) мелочные, прижимистые

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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