

THEN IT HAPPENED

Screenplay By
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Adapted from the book "The Name Above the Title" by
Frank Capra

FINAL DRAFT

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TITLE:

"A film about the making of *It Happened One Night* would have been much funnier than the picture itself."

- Frank Capra

NEW TITLE:

Well Frank, here's to trying...

INT. AMBASSADOR HOTEL, FIESTA ROOM - NIGHT

It's 1934. The hotel room is packed full of tables and each table is packed full of glamorous people all dressed in their best furs, silks and bowties.

The excitement is palpable - people are smiling, leaning over to whisper things to one another, smiling once more. Some are genuine smiles, some nervous smiles.

In the center of the room is a small dance floor, leading up to a platform on which stands WILL ROGERS (55).

On a table in front of him, arranged in a neat row, are familiar-looking gold statuettes: Oscars.

Out on the floor, at one of the tightly packed tables sits FRANK CAPRA (37): a short, serious-looking Italian, with dark eyes and equally dark, wavy hair. Although his face clearly has the potential to be animated, right now it seems to have been frozen by sheer anticipation.

Around his table, his friends alternate their looks between Frank and the platform in front, expectant smiles on their faces.

Underneath the tablecloth Frank's hands are fidgeting with what appears to be a speech, now completely crumpled and wrinkled.

Will Rogers picks up one of the gold statuettes from the table and begins to speak. The room falls silent as all faces turn to him.

WILL ROGERS

And now, for the best director
of the year! Envelope please.

And assistant quickly inserts the envelope into Will
Rogers' hand. He opens it, smiles.

WILL ROGERS (CONT'D)

Well, well, well, what do you
know! I've watched this young
man for a long time. Saw him
come up from the bottom. And I
mean the bottom. It couldn't
happen to a nicer guy. Come up
and get it...

Frank's face is almost bursting with the anticipation of
waiting for the name.

At this point, however, Will Rogers' voice dies out and
another voice, much softer and less elated, is heard.

WALTER (V.O.)

Frank. Frank?

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

It's 1933. Frank Capra is sitting in a barber's chair,
seemingly staring at his reflection in the mirror, but
really staring off into an indiscernible distance.

Behind him stands the barber, WALTER, a man who looks like
he is in his late fifties but is actually only forty-
something.

WALTER

Frank?

Frank snaps out of his pensive state and back to reality.

FRANK

What?

WALTER

Are you happy with how much I've
taken off the back?

He holds up a mirror so that Frank can see the back of his head.

FRANK

That's great Walter, thanks.

The barber takes the towel off Frank's shoulders. Frank gets up and follows Walter to the counter.

WALTER

It must be a real glamorous life, being a motion picture director in Hollywood. Getting to meet all the famous movie stars and such.

Frank laughs a little to himself.

FRANK

Working at Columbia? Sure I meet them. I meet them on their way up and then I meet them again on the way down. Stars are not particularly keen to call Columbia their home. How much do I owe ya?

WALTER

This one's one the house.

FRANK

Walter, I couldn't...

WALTER

It's my pleasure!

From a back room sounds a loud, shrill woman's voice.

SHRILL WIFE (O.S.)

Walter!

WALTER

Excuse me, I'll be right back.

Walter, embarrassed, slinks off to the back room. His gentle voice is heard trying to compete with that of his considerably less gentle SHRILL WIFE.

Frank tries his best not to listen. He looks around the room. In the corner, previously unnoticed, he sees a young BOY (11) sitting on a chair and holding a broom in his hands.

Frank smiles politely at the boy, sits down on the couch and picks up a copy of Cosmopolitan magazine and begins to flip through it. He tries very hard to look as if he cannot hear any of the argument going on in the next room.

SHRILL WIFE (O.S.)

What the hell do you think you're doing? How you gonna run a business if nobody pays!

WALTER (O.S.)

But he's not nobody. He's a Hollywood man.

SHRILL WIFE (O.S.)

What's his name?

WALTER (O.S.)

Frank Capra.

SHRILL WIFE (O.S.)

Never heard of him.

Frank looks up from the magazine, clearly a little hurt. He tries not to show it.

WALTER (O.S.)

That's because you ain't cultured!

SHRILL WIFE (O.S.)

Oh! And you're oozing class! What was the name of his last picture?

There's a silence as Walter tries to remember the title. Frank is almost holding his breath, waiting to see if he can get it right.

WALTER (O.S.)

Uhh...

SHRILL WIFE (O.S.)

See! A nobody! Don't you know
that there's a Depression on?
And you're giving away free
haircuts! No second thought for
your son!

Their voices taper off as they move further away, into
another room.

Frank tries to shake off that last blow when the boy in the
corner suddenly speaks up.

BOY

I've seen your pictures. You did
all those action ones with Jack
Holt and Red Graves.

FRANK

Among other things.

BOY

They weren't bad.

Frank can't help but be affected by the boy's
unenthusiastic tone.

FRANK

Thanks.

BOY

Can I get your autograph?

As the boy brings Frank a pen and paper, Frank brightens up
a bit, flattered. He signs his autograph on the blank page.

BOY (CONT'D)

I get autographs from all the
Hollywood folks I meet.

FRANK

You collect them?

BOY

Naw. I sell 'em. To tourists. I
sold Greta Garbo's for 50 bucks
once!

FRANK

Fifty!

BOY

Yip.

The boy walks over to a small bag that he has put underneath his chair and takes out of it a stack of small pieces of paper.

He brings them over and begins to display them for Frank. Each one has the signature of a famous person on it. One catches Frank's eye.

FRANK

You got John Ford's autograph?

BOY

Yeah. That was a real find. He makes great movies!

FRANK

Yes he does.

The boy places Frank's autograph on top of his collection.

BOY

Thanks for the autograph. Might be worth a couple bucks.

He goes to redeposit the autographs into his bag.

FRANK

A couple bucks?! How much are you selling John Ford's for?

The boy plops back down on his chair.

BOY

Twenty-five.

Frank's face darkens.

FRANK

You better hang on to that autograph, kid. It will be worth more than twenty-five someday.

Frank tries to refocus his attention on the magazine. As he continues to flip through the pages, his attention is caught by the title of a short story: "Night Bus".

As he begins to read, the boy continues to watch him.

Frank laughs at something in the story. He looks up at the boy.

FRANK

Can I buy this magazine from you?

The boy hops off the chair, ready for action once again.

BOY

Sure, it will cost ya two dollars.

FRANK

Two dollars! The haircut only cost 25 cents. And this copy's two months old.

BOY

Anybody can buy a new one. That one there is a collectable. My mother always says that the economy is all about supply and demand.

FRANK

I bet she does.

He hands the boy four dollars.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Here. That should cover everything.

The boy eagerly pockets the money.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Keep up this attitude and someday you'll be a very successful movie producer!

BOY

Do you mean that?!

Frank smiles at the boy.

FRANK

Give it ten years and then come see me at Columbia. Maybe I can give you a job.

BOY

Naw. I wanna work at a real studio, like MGM.

Frank's smile quickly disappears.

FRANK

Who doesn't.

He folds up the magazine under his arm and leaves. Outside the window, we see him getting into his car and driving off.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MGM STUDIOS - DAY

Frank drives his car along a broad, well-maintained boulevard. He begins to slow down and then stops the car altogether, staring out the window at something across the street. And boy is it worth staring at!

There, in all their glory, are the front gates to MGM Studios. The elaborate gates are flanked by a monumental façade adorned with ten giant Corinthian columns.

Frank watches as a black limousine drives up to the gates and is greeted by a security guard. The gates swing open and the limousine drives inside.

Frank sighs, starts up his car again and drives off.

EXT. COLUMBIA STUDIOS - DAY

Frank, Cosmopolitan magazine still under-arm, walks down a rather less glamorous street than the one he has just come from.

He walks up to a large but more unpretentious looking building with the number 1438 next to the door. Only two regular-sized columns at this entrance.

Above the door, bold letters proclaim that this is "COLUMBIA STUDIOS". Frank walks inside.

INT. COLUMBIA FOYER - CONTINUOUS

In the simply but tastefully decorated foyer, a secretary, SALLY (25), sits at her desk. Frank approaches her.

FRANK
Is the boss in yet?

SALLY
Mr. Cohn? No.

She glances at her watch.

SALLY (CONT'D)
Half past eleven. He'll be in soon.

FRANK
That gives me just enough time to get in, get Riskin, and get out. I'm in no mood to deal with Harry today.

SALLY
Have you been given the tour of his new office yet?

FRANK
Yeah, I have.

She leans in toward Frank conspiratorially.

SALLY
Is it true he based it on the office of Mister Mussolini?

FRANK

(smiling)

If you look like you're in power, you must be in power, right? And Harry sure likes to be in power.

He walks off and turns into a hallway.

INT. COLUMBIA HALLWAYS - CONTINUOUS

As Frank maneuvers his way through the halls, we get a sense of the - rather chaotic - geography of Columbia Studios.

The winding and extremely narrow hallways and staircases are lined chock-a-block with doors leading on to various offices. One gets the sense that the building is somehow incomplete, with new passages, offices and stairs being haphazardly added on to existing ones...which is not far from the truth.

Frank approaches a door on which the name plaque reads "ROBERT RISKIN". Without knocking he goes inside.

INT. ROBERT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Frank walks inside to find ROBERT RISKIN (36) sprawled out on his couch, unpackaging something from a box. Robert is a good-looking man with classically-defined features and an ever-so-slightly receding hairline.

Aside from the couch, the office is sparsely furnished with a desk and a bookshelf crammed with books. Some more books are stacked in a pile on the floor next to the shelf. At the far end of the room is a balcony with a comfortable-looking chair on it.

FRANK

Do you know what your autograph is worth, Bob?

ROBERT

Well, I would say that depends entirely on the value of the cheque I am signing.

FRANK

I think children are overrated!

ROBERT

I wouldn't say that to your newly pregnant wife.

FRANK

Mine will be different. At least then there'll be one person in the world who thinks I matter.

ROBERT

Don't be silly Frank! Your wife seems to like you.

FRANK

You're a real pal!

Frank eyes the package in Robert's hand.

FRANK (CONT'D)

What the hell is that?

ROBERT

Scalp treatment. Meant to help with hair loss.

FRANK

Does it work?

ROBERT

Dunno. Just got it. I see you've been tending to your hair, too. Getting ready for the big preview? *Lady For a Day* gets her first chance in front of an audience.

Frank puts the *Cosmopolitan* magazine down onto the table, sits back on the edge of it.

FRANK

Don't remind me about that. And say, can we get out of here before Harry gets in. I know he'll corner me about it.

ROBERT

What's the matter? I thought you were happy with the picture. I think we did a good job.

FRANK

Well let's hope everyone else thinks so too. Otherwise it will be the third bust in a row for me.

ROBERT

Ah, don't take it so hard.

Robert starts to become engrossed in his hair treatment package. He pulls out the instructions and begins to unfold them. They stretch on and on, like a scroll.

Frank doesn't notice. He begins pacing the room.

FRANK

How else am I supposed to take it? Three in a row is quite a losing streak in Hollywood. And I was doing so well, too.

ROBERT

I would say so! Thirteen home-runs one after the other. All money-makers.

FRANK

Sure, but then comes *Miracle Woman*. Bust. Then *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* flounders. If *Lady For a Day* isn't a hit I might as well pack my bags. You're only as good as your last picture, right? And if I can't make it at Columbia, where the hell else am I gonna go?

While Frank is talking, Robert continues to unpack the box, taking out all manner of strange looking attachments and tubes out of it. He looks up at Frank.

ROBERT

Don't worry. *Lady* will be different.

FRANK

What makes you so sure?

ROBERT

Well, firstly 'cause it's a comedy. Not like the other two. And you're always better at comedy. And secondly... 'cause I wrote it.

FRANK

You wrote *Miracle Woman*, too.

ROBERT

I wrote the play. And the first thing I said when Harry called me in and gave me a job was that the play was no good, that it lost me a bunch of money, and that anyone who wants to make it into a picture is an idiot. I can't help it if you were that idiot.

Robert smiles at Frank reassuringly. Suddenly a loud voice echoes from down the hall.

HARRY (O.S.)

You damn people are wasting my money!

ROBERT

Sounds like Harry's here.

Frank looks at his watch.

FRANK

Twelve o'clock. Right on schedule.

Robert gets up and opens the door very slightly to hear the rant a little better.

HARRY (O.S.)

Who the hell left this light on?
Every time you idiots spend a
dollar, 25 cents of it is mine!
Stop wasting it!

Footsteps are heard, slowly getting closer to the door.
Robert closes the door quickly.

FRANK

I really don't feel like dealing
with him today! Wanna slip out
for lunch?

ROBERT

Sounds great.

Frank picks up the magazine off the table and hands it to Robert as they head out.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

What's this?

FRANK

Got a great story in it. "Night
Bus". You should read it.

ROBERT

"Night Bus", huh?

He begins to page through the magazine as they exit.

INT. COLUMBIA FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Robert and Frank are on their way to the door, Robert still reading the magazine.

FRANK

I mean, what if I die tomorrow?
How will people remember me? I
don't just want to make pictures
that make money.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

I want to make pictures that
mean something. Great pictures.

Robert reads something that makes him laugh to himself.

ROBERT

Hey, this stuff's not bad.

Sally is on the phone at her desk. Just as the duo are about to exit, she calls after them.

SALLY

Frank! That was Mr. Cohn. He
wants to see you right away.

Frank's face drops. He turns to Robert.

ROBERT

So close.

INT. HARRY'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Frank and Robert walk through the outer office where a RECEPTIONIST is busy typing away. She waves them into the inner office.

ROBERT

Our offices look like they're
being held together by scotch
tape, but Harry builds himself
two receptions? Unbelievable.

FRANK

Only if you don't know Harry.

INT. HARRY'S INNER OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

As Frank and Robert walk in, they are faced with the sight of a tremendous door, whose height spans floor to ceiling. On one side of the door sits the head secretary, the very matter-of-fact STELLA (38), and on the other side an ASSISTANT. They are both busy at work.

Stella glances up at them, presses a button on the intercom.

STELLA

Mr. Cohn, Mr. Capra and Mr. Riskin are here to see you.

As Frank and Robert approach the door, something strange suddenly strikes them - the absence of a door knob. Frank throws a questioning glance to Stella.

FRANK

Where's the door knob?

STELLA

Mr. Cohn had it removed.

FRANK

So how the hell are we supposed to get in?

STELLA

You have to open the door at exactly the moment when he buzzes you in. Don't miss the buzz. He gets very annoyed.

Frank is too stunned to say anything. He and Riskin exchange knowing looks which are interrupted by the sound of the buzzer. Frank opens the door.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

In keeping with the pomp and circumstance that involve getting inside it, Harry's office is quite an impressive sight.

The first thing that strikes one is its sheer magnitude: a huge length of space stretches between the door and the semi-circular desk on the other side of the room, positioned on a slightly raised platform.

On the left are several doors leading to other rooms, while on the right are a series of large windows. Between them, on the floor, is a thick, luxurious carpet.

At the desk, surrounded by telephones and intercoms - quite the vision of power indeed - is HARRY COHN (42).

Though Harry has positioned himself at his desk to look like the picture of stoic contemplation, watching Frank and Robert enter, there is still something about his expression that defies his demeanor - his bright blue eyes, glinting, as if with a life of their own.

Frank is the first to speak on the long walk to Harry's desk.

FRANK

What's all this about Harry?

HARRY

How'd you like my new office?

FRANK

I've seen it.

HARRY

Who the hell said I was talking to you? Riskin hasn't.

ROBERT

It's a nice office, Harry.

HARRY

It's a hella-vu-lot better than nice. I hire you shmucks to have some artistic taste and you can't even appreciate a thing of beauty when you see it.

FRANK

Is that why we're here? To appreciate your office?

HARRY

You're here 'cause I told you to be here! That's all the information you need.

He pauses for a moment to let the statement sink in.

HARRY (CONT'D)

How's *Lady For a Day* looking?
Ready for the preview?

FRANK

Of course it's ready.

HARRY

It better be a hit. Not like the
last two you gave me.

FRANK

If you're so unhappy Harry, fire
me. But then who's gonna make
your 'A' pictures for you? You
can go back to specializing in
cheap quickies.

HARRY

Columbia was built on cheap
quickies you son-of-a-bitch! And
without Columbia you'd still be
a bit gag writer. Or unemployed
somewhere! Don't you forget
that. What good are your 'A'
pictures if they don't make
money?

Frank gives Robert an "I told you so" look. Robert, sensing
the tension rising, steps in.

ROBERT

Hey, *Lady's* in good shape. The
preview's gonna prove it.

Harry is about to respond when the buzzer on the intercom
sounds. Harry answers.

HARRY

What?

STELLA (V.O.)

Mr. Cohn, Mr. Bateman is here to
see you.

HARRY

Who?

STELLA (V.O.)

The writer you sent for.

HARRY

Oh, send him in.

He buzzes the door open. MR BATEMAN - a young, slender man with a wide-eyed expression on his face - slowly walks into the office. He stands still at the door.

HARRY (CONT'D)

What the hell you waiting for?
Get over here.

The writer begins his cautious journey to Harry's desk, the length of the room completely overwhelming him.

Harry stares him down. He picks up a script off his table and chucks it over to the opposite edge of the table.

HARRY (CONT'D)

What the hell is this?

Bateman leans over, takes a look at the script.

BATEMAN

That's my script.

HARRY

It's shit! I've never read such garbage in my life. Is this what I hired you for?

BATEMAN

(in complete panic)

I can change it Mr. Cohn! It was only a first draft. There's so many things I can improve...

HARRY

Get the hell out of my office!

Bateman is shocked to his core.

BATEMAN

But Mr. Cohn...

HARRY

Out! And take this junk with you.

Harry gestures to the script. Bateman grabs the script, scared to get too close to the desk, and rushes out of the office.

Frank and Robert watch this with a knowing resignation - they've seen it all before. Harry turns his attention to them.

HARRY (CONT'D)

What are you two waiting for? Go get my picture ready!

Frank and Robert begin to leave. Just as they are about to exit, Frank turns to Harry.

FRANK

It's ready Harry. And it's gonna be a hit.

Before Harry can respond, Frank closes the door.

INT. HARRY'S INNER OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The moment the door is closed behind them, Frank lets out a huge sigh. His confident façade falters.

FRANK

Jesus, what if it's not a hit?

ROBERT

Relax, will ya.

FRANK

I'll be finished!

INT. COLUMBIA HALLWAY - DAY

Frank and Robert are walking briskly down the hall, eager to put some distance between them and Harry's office.

They see Bateman sitting on a step, script in hand, completely shell-shocked.

FRANK
(to Robert)
You go ahead, I'll be right out.

ROBERT
Hurry up, will ya, before he
finds a reason to call us in
again.

Robert walks past Bateman, leaving him alone with Frank.

FRANK
(gesturing to the
script)
May I see that?

Bateman hands over the script. Frank flips through the
pages, reading an excerpt here and there. He laughs
slightly.

BATEMAN
Is it that bad?

FRANK
No, it's not bad at all.

He hands the script back.

FRANK (CONT'D)
I can guarantee you that Harry
hasn't read a word of it.

BATEMAN
But he said...

FRANK
I know what he said. He says it
to everyone. It's what he does.

BATEMAN
Why would he do that?

FRANK
To test you. To test your
confidence.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

It's the commodity Harry Cohn likes most in the people who work for him. He wants to know whether you have the guts to stand by your work, whether you know the answers.

BATEMAN

What if I don't know the answers?

FRANK

Give 'em anyway. You're bound to be right at least fifty percent of the time! Cheer up.

Frank begins to rush off, but turns back.

FRANK (CONT'D)

And if I can give you a small tip. When you get into his office, make sure you're the first one to speak. That place is designed to trip you up.

Frank turns back to go. Bateman's spirit is now slightly lifted. He calls after Frank.

BATEMAN

Hey thanks for the advice Mr. Capra! And good luck for your preview.

INT. MOVIE-HOUSE #1, LOBBY - NIGHT

The foyer is empty of all people save for Frank, who is pacing the floor.

He opens the door to the auditorium to get a sneak peak: it's packed with people chattering away, anticipating the start of the picture.

Robert approaches behind him.

ROBERT

What the hell are you still
doing out here?

FRANK

Waiting for Lu. She's in the
ladies.

ROBERT

You gotta relax a bit, Frank.

FRANK

Three bombs in a row...

ROBERT

It's not gonna be a bomb... Here
comes Lu.

LU CAPRA (30) enters the foyer, elegantly dressed and with
a radiant smile on her face. Everything about her air seems
pleasant and cheerful.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Lu! It's great to see you! I
believe congratulations are in
order. Frank tells me you two
have your first bambino on the
way.

LU

Thanks Bob.

ROBERT

Now can you tell your husband
that there's nothing to worry
about and that the picture's
great.

LU

I tell him that every day, but
do you think he listens? The
only people he'll listen to are
in there.

She gestures toward the auditorium.

ROBERT

Well then for god's sake let's
take a seat and get this over
with!

The three sneak into the auditorium.

INT. MOVIE-HOUSE #1, AUDITORIUM - CONTINUOUS

Lu, Frank and Robert take their seats toward the back of
the room. Frank knots his hands in anticipation.

The lights go off in the auditorium. The screen comes to
life. The old Columbia logo appears. Immediately groans are
heard from the audience. In the row in front of Frank, a
SNOBBISH WOMAN leans over to her friend in the audience.

SNOBBISH WOMAN

If I knew this was a Columbia
picture I wouldn't have made
such an effort to come!

They both laugh.

Frank takes a deep breath, knots his hands even tighter.

MONTAGE

As scenes from *Lady For a Day* flash by on the screen, the
audience begin to laugh, first softly, then louder and
louder. And as their reactions get stronger and stronger,
Frank's hands relax more and more. Finally, he's even able
to exchange a relieved smile with Robert.

INT. MOVIE-HOUSE #1, LOBBY - NIGHT

The audience is piling out of the auditorium. All have
smiles on their faces. Snippets of their conversation -
"splendid picture", "great show" etc. - can be heard
through all the chatter.

Standing aside in one of the corners is Lu and Frank.
Robert approaches them.

ROBERT

What did I tell you! They loved it. I heard someone call it the best picture they've seen all year. Where the hell is Harry?

FRANK

He's already back at his office. Wants to see us there, too.

ROBERT

What did he go back to the office for?

FRANK

Said he had an important phone call to make.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Harry is sitting at his desk, on the phone, grinning from ear to ear. He buzzes the door to let in Frank, Lu and Robert.

HARRY

(on the phone)

That's what I'm telling ya, you idiot! The preview's a runaway success. I got me a blockbuster!

(beat)

No, that's not it! I want you bastards to fly out here and see it for yourselves. You sit in your goddamn New York offices, miles away from everything, and think you can tell me how to make pictures and run the company...

(brief pause)

Vice president? I don't care who you are! You know jack-shit about what happens here in Hollywood. Hah! Get it - 'Jack' shit! Just get down here you son-of-a-bitch.

He hangs up the phone and turns to his visitors.

HARRY (CONT'D)
That was my brother, Jack.

He notices Lu.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Excuse the language; I didn't realize a lady was present. But if you knew the grief that man gives me from across the country, you'd understand.

Lu just smiles in acceptance of the apology.

Harry grabs a bottle of wine from an ice-bucket next to his desk.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Let's have a drink. Pour the wine, Frank.

He hands the bottle to Frank who pours some into three glasses.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Here's to Frank - who can make shit taste like pineapple!

Frank accepts the compliment with an uncertain smile.

ROBERT
And here's to the queues round the theatres!

EXT. RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL - DAY

A big marquee proclaims that the theatre is screening *Lady For a Day*. A queue of people is lined up to get tickets for the next show.

In the queue, a MIDDLE-CLASS WOMAN is reading a review of the film from the *New York Times* to her friend.

MIDDLE-CLASS WOMAN

May Robson appears as a gray-haired Cinderella in the film, "Lady For a Day", which is now at the Radio City Music Hall. It is a merry tale with touches of sentiment...

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank's office is even more sparsely decorated than Robert's. In fact, 'decorated' is a strong word - it contains a desk and a mix of kitchen stools and fold-out camping chairs.

On one of these chairs Robert is seated. He's watching Frank pace the room as he reads from the same review as in the previous scene, continuing where the middle-class woman left off.

FRANK

...a picture which evoked laughter and tears from an audience at the first showing.

(skips ahead a bit)

The story is based on one by Damon Runyon called "Madam La Gimp," and it offers the desired opportunities to appeal to virtually all those who go to motion-picture theatres.

(looks up at Robert)

Looks like we did it, Bob.

ROBERT

So what now?

FRANK

Now, we wait.

ROBERT

What for?

FRANK

The Academy Award nominations.

ROBERT

Ah, Frank, not that again...

FRANK

What d'ya mean?

ROBERT

You talk about those awards as if they're the Holy Grail.

FRANK

Maybe they are to me.

ROBERT

You thought you could win with a drama, so you make *Miracle Woman*. Nothing. You move on to *Bitter Tea*. Nothing. Now we got a hit on our hands. Can't that be enough?

FRANK

But imagine how great it'll be. Getting an Oscar on Poverty Row. Tiny little Columbia, leaving all those big studios in the dust!

ROBERT

Oh, so this is all about Columbia...

FRANK

Of course not. Harry Cohn gets his profits. But what do I get?

ROBERT

A job.

FRANK

I want recognition. I want the big guys like John Ford and Victor Fleming to vote for my picture, to think it was great. That's priceless.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

It means that you've really accomplished something. You've hit the big time!

ROBERT

I just don't want you to get your hopes up, Frank.

FRANK

Getting my hopes up is what I do best, Bob.

He picks up a few drawing pins from his desk and walks over to an empty wall, begins to pin up the review.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Don't worry Riskin. I've got a good feeling about this one. I don't think this good review's the last one.

As he pins the review to the wall, we transition into...

A MONTAGE

As we move along the wall, we see more and more reviews being pinned up onto it, each with a laudatory title, each dated slightly later than the last.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - DAY

Robert walks into the office to find Frank pinning another review onto the wall. He gives the wall a quick scan - it's now full of other such reviews.

ROBERT

Don't you read anything other than reviews these days?

Frank turns around. He's in a great mood.

FRANK

Hey Bob!

ROBERT

I'm keen to get back to work,
aren't you?

FRANK

I just wanna enjoy this for a
bit. Besides, I think you'll
like what this review has to
say.

He motions to the review he's just pinned up.

ROBERT

Oh yeah?

FRANK

It tips off *Lady* for Oscar
nominations. For both of us! And
best picture. Isn't that great?

ROBERT

Frank, now remember what we
spoke about...

The phone on Frank's desk begins to ring. He goes over to
pick it up.

FRANK

I know, I know, don't get hopes
up and so on and so on...

(picks up the
phone)

Hello?...Now?...Be right there.

He puts down the phone.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Harry wants to see me.

ROBERT

Maybe he wants to tell you how
proud he is of all the good
reviews!

FRANK

(laughing)

That will be the day!

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank strides into the office, trying to keep his good mood alive. Harry is at his desk, looking over some papers.

HARRY

Do you think you're on a sabbatical?

FRANK

What?

HARRY

A sabbatical. It means holiday, dumbass...

FRANK

I know what it means.

HARRY

Good. Then stop walking around the studio like you're on vacation and get back to work.

FRANK

I just finished a picture that's currently making you a lot of money Harry...

HARRY

Which is exactly the time to start another one. Get Riskin on it, too. While people still remember your names from the last one.

FRANK

That last picture, I'll have you know, has just been tipped off for three Academy Award nominations.

HARRY

(in mock
admiration)

Oh, well isn't that wonderful. I had no idea. Make another one!

FRANK

I don't work on a production line, Harry. I can't just produce pictures like nuts and bolts!

HARRY

You'll produce one out your ass if you have to! I want a pitch by the end of the week. Or are you afraid that you'll go back to making flops?

Harry turns his attention to a paper on his desk.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Now get the hell out of my office I'm busy.

FRANK

You're reading horse-racing stats Harry, and we both know it!

With that he storms out, Harry yelling after him.

HARRY

Get back to work you son-of-a-bitch!

The door slams behind Frank.

INT. COLUMBIA HALLWAY - DAY

Frank is storming his way through the hallway when he comes across Robert, sauntering, sandwich in hand.

Robert immediately realizes what's happened and starts following Frank to his office.

ROBERT

What'd he say to you?

FRANK

He wants another picture.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

And he wants us to pitch an idea to him by the end of the week. I guess you get your wish - we get to go back to work.

ROBERT

That's not so bad, is it?

FRANK

The man has no respect for me! I'm sure John Ford doesn't have to put up with this shit!

ROBERT

I wouldn't bet on it.

They reach Frank's office and go inside.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Frank goes to sit at his desk. Robert perches on a kitchen stool, still munching on his sandwich.

ROBERT

Harry's never been known for his bedside manner. You know that better than anyone.

FRANK

How am I supposed to produce good work without a second to think?

ROBERT

Hey, how about that Cosmopolitan story, "Night Bus"?

FRANK

"Night Bus"? I'd already forgotten about that.

Frank ruffles through one of his desk drawers until he finds the copy of Cosmopolitan he had acquired weeks earlier. He flips through it to find the short story, glances over it.

FRANK (CONT'D)

An heiress runs away from home
and gets on a bus. I dunno...

ROBERT

I think it'll be good luck.
Cosmopolitan is where we found
the story for *Lady For a Day*. I
think we can make something of
this one, too.

FRANK

Alright. Let's do it. At least
it'll get Harry off my back.

He picks up the phone, dials.

FRANK (CONT'D)

(on the phone)

Sally, I got a story here -
"Night Bus" - was in
Cosmopolitan a few months back.
Find out how much it'll cost me,
will ya? Thanks.

He turns to Robert.

FRANK (CONT'D)

How fast can you get an outline
ready?

Robert stands up, heads for the door.

ROBERT

Consider it done. Go sell the
idea to Harry.

He throws the sandwich wrapper in the bin, and he's gone.
Frank picks up the phone again.

FRANK

Me again. Is Harry in his
office?

(beat)

He's out?

EXT. RACETRACK STALLS - DAY

The air is filled with excitement as hundreds of people are cheering an on-going race.

Frank rushes down the steps of the race-track stalls to find Harry, betting card in hand, eagerly watching the race.

FRANK

Hello Harry...

Harry turns to see who it is. His face registers both confusion and disbelief when he sees Frank.

HARRY

Frank? What the hell are you doin' here?

FRANK

I came to tell you that pitch you wanted to hear.

HARRY

Here? Are you nuts?

FRANK

You said asap.

HARRY

Yeah, but Jesus, have you not heard of office hours?

FRANK

You come to work at noon and leave at midnight!

HARRY

There's method there.

FRANK

Well I have my own methods...

HARRY

Alright, alright! Just tell me this goddamn story that's so important I'm missing the race.

FRANK

It's called "Night Bus". It's about an heiress. Spoiled. Wants to get married but her father doesn't approve. So she runs away, gets on a bus. But there she meets this other fellow...

HARRY

A bus picture?

FRANK

Yeah...

HARRY

No bus pictures.

FRANK

What d'ya mean? You said you want me to make another picture. This is my next picture.

HARRY

This is your next flop! MGM and Universal have just made two bus pictures. The trends are against 'em.

FRANK

Who cares about MGM?

HARRY

Everybody!

Frank stares at Harry, who's turned to watch the race again. It's a battle of the wills, and Frank knows it.

FRANK

Trends or no trends, Harry, "Night Bus" is my next picture.

As Frank talks, the race keeps catching Harry's eye. He's clearly eager to devote his full attention back to it.

HARRY

How much for the story?

FRANK

Five thousands. Peanuts.

Harry is paying less and less attention to him.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Robert and I are gonna go to
Palm Springs to work on a draft.

By now, Harry is almost entirely engrossed by the race.

HARRY

Alright, alright. Go wherever
the hell you want. If it stinks,
I'll can it.

FRANK

Fine.

He gets up to leave.

HARRY

Just get the word bus outta the
title, would 'ya!

FRANK

Fine!

He walks off. Harry turns to one of his friends.

HARRY

Goddamn directors are wasting my
money! Who won?

FRIEND

Black Diamond. You just lost
five grand.

HARRY

Shit! Go make another bet, make
this one ten!

EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - DAY

A car pulls up in the driveway of a stylish, tasteful suburban Los Angeles house. Driving the car is Frank, Lu next to him in the passenger seat.

Frank honks the horn. Robert appears in the doorway, dressed like a sophisticated play-boy, suitcase in hand.

He pops the suitcase into the boot, then himself into the back seat.

INT. FRANK'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Frank turns to Robert.

FRANK

Ready to go to Palm Springs Mr. Riskin?

ROBERT

Ready Mr. Capra.

FRANK

You know, I think Harry doesn't think we can repeat the success *Lady For a Day* had. Well we'll show him!

They drive off.

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOTEL, LOUNGE - DAY

Frank and Robert, both dressed in shorts, lemonade in hand, are sitting in armchairs, with Robert's legal-pad notes spread out before them on the floor.

FRANK

So what've we got?

ROBERT

We have a spoiled heiress, Elspeth Andrews...

FRANK

Right...

ROBERT

Who runs away from home and gets
on a cross-country bus...

FRANK

Right...

ROBERT

Where she meets and falls for a
good-hearted chemist.

FRANK

Right.

There's a moment of silence. They both take a sip of
lemonade.

FRANK (CONT'D)

We saw something in this...

ROBERT

Right...

FRANK

What was it?

Silence again. They both take another sip of lemonade.

ROBERT

The story is packed with
interesting incidents...

FRANK

Yeah, but something about the
whole package don't gel.

Silence. Another sip of lemonade. Suddenly, Robert sits up.

ROBERT

So what we have is a series of
ellipses. All we gotta do is
fill in the gaps.

Frank sits up too.

FRANK

Right! Well, let's start with the main characters then. Is there anything about 'em that doesn't work?

ROBERT

Her name for one - Elsbeth Andrews.

FRANK

I knew a girl named Ellen Andrews in college. Took her on a date I think...

ROBERT

Ellen. Ellie. Sounds good.

FRANK

And the guy - I don't know if I want to write a picture about a chemist.

ROBERT

I bought a new hair cream from a chemist last week. Gave me a terrible rash.

FRANK

That settles it then. Let's make him something more exciting...a painter.

ROBERT

A Greenwich Village painter.

FRANK

You know, I'm starting to feel better about this already.

He calls out to the other room.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Lu, can you bring us some more of your lemonade please.

Lu comes in with a tray of glasses and a jug of lemonade.

LU

Getting ready to start writing
boys?

ROBERT

Yes we are!

Robert sits down at a table on which his typewriter is positioned.

Lu pours the lemonade into the glasses.

Robert inserts a blank page into the typewriter. As he moves the page into place, with the click of the typewriter we begin...

A MONTAGE

Set all in the lounge, we see the passage of time as Frank and Robert work on the script. Robert, sitting at his typewriter, types up page after page of script while Frank paces the room, elaborating on scenes with expressive hand gestures. Each time we see a new shot of each of them, they are dressed slightly differently - always wearing the same pair of shorts, but with a new shirt or sweater in each shot.

The montage is punctuated by sounds of Robert's typewriter being slammed into starting position, as well as by the complementing sound of empty glasses of lemonade being slammed down onto the table. As we see the stack of typed pages grow, we also see glass after glass being refilled with lemonade. All this builds in rhythm and pace until...

INT. PALM SPRINGS HOTEL, LOUNGE - DAY

Lu walks into the lounge, where Robert and Frank are sitting in armchairs, much like on their first day, drinking lemonade. Both look completely relaxed.

LU

Frank, the hotel wants to know
why we're running so low on...

Her eyes rest on a rather sizeable pyramid of glasses that Frank has built in the middle of the room.

LU (CONT'D)

...glasses.

FRANK

We're done!

Lu looks over at the neat stack of pages on the table.

LU

The script's finished?

They both nod.

LU (CONT'D)

That's wonderful! So what are you gonna call it?

FRANK

Huh?

LU

Didn't Harry want a title change?

FRANK

Damn, I clean forgot about that.

ROBERT

We'll think of something. The question is, are you ready to go back and present this thing to Cohn?

FRANK

As ready as I'll ever be. Let's just try to do this with as few conferences as possible!

INT. COLUMBIA CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: FIRST CONFERENCE

Harry is seated at the head of a long table around which are congregated a dozen or so EXECS, all suited up, quietly talking amongst themselves.

At the other end of the table are Frank and Robert. Frank leans over to whisper something to Robert.

FRANK

I don't remember there being so many executives before we left.

ROBERT

That's because their salaries are being paid for by the profits of *Lady For a Day*.

Harry's loud voice booms across the room.

HARRY

Alright, alright, everybody shut up!

A silence falls upon the room. Frank speaks up.

FRANK

So Harry, what d'ya think?

As if governed by one mind, the execs all turn to look at Harry. He picks up his copy of the script.

HARRY

'It Happened One Night'.

(pause)

Well, at least you got 'bus' outta the title.

A moment of silence.

HARRY (CONT'D)

(addressing the
execs)

I'm not paying 'ya to waste oxygen! Does no one else have an opinion in this room?

Suddenly the room explodes as each executive tries to beat the next one in voicing some criticism or other.

EXEC #1

'It Happened One Night'? Mile-long title...

EXEC #2

You'll never get it onto a
marquee!

EXEC #3

Winter's coming and it's all
exteriors...

EXEC #4

The weather'll murder you!

EXEC #5

The story has no suspense...

EXEC #6

No heart...

EXEC #7

No oomph!

EXEC #8

It's just another bus picture...

EXEC #9

Shelve it, Harry!

Harry turns to Frank.

HARRY

What do you say to that, genius?

Robert glances at Frank's hand underneath the table: it has
tightened into a fist.

FRANK

I say, with all due respect,
that they're all wrong.

HARRY

Oh yeah? You the only one in the
whole goddamn studio that has an
idea worth a dime.

FRANK

Maybe not, but my ideas are the
ones that bring in the most
dimes, and you know it.

The decibel levels escalate.

HARRY

Now listen here, Dago, don't forget who's actually running this show!

FRANK

So run it! Maybe I'll just go somewhere where my talent won't be wasted!

HARRY

Wanna play in the big leagues, huh?

FRANK

And why the hell not? Maybe then I'll actually achieve something, win some awards!

HARRY

Oh, here we go with this awards bullshit again!

FRANK

What's bullshit is that no one will give me an Oscar because I'm over here at Columbia. It'll be easier to tell the sex of a fly than to win an Oscar on Poverty Row!

HARRY

Alright, so go! Go on! Go to MGM and see what happens. Except wait, you have gone there. Twice. And they sent you packing back to Poverty Row both times!

FRANK

That's not fair Harry...

HARRY

We both know why you stick around.

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

Because they won't put up with your crap anywhere else. You wanna make all the calls on your pictures and I let you. Let's see how far that attitude gets you at MG-fucking-M!

Frank gets up and storms out of the conference room.

Robert quietly stands, takes an almost imperceptible bow.

ROBERT

Excuse me, gentlemen.

He follows Frank out the door.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - DAY

Robert walks into the office to find Frank fuming and pacing the floor.

ROBERT

So the first conference didn't go particularly well...

FRANK

Was that a conference? Felt more like trial by fire. Harry's out to kill this picture.

ROBERT

Naw, I don't think that's it.

Robert slumps down into one of the camping chairs.

FRANK

Then what the hell's his problem?

ROBERT

Same problem as yours - he's got a big ego.

Frank is taken aback by the statement.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Don't think Harry hasn't seen all that 'Capra is Columbia' stuff they've started printing in the papers...

FRANK

So? I didn't write it!

ROBERT

No, but I'm sure Harry wants to check whether you're starting to believe it. Are you?

Frank doesn't respond. He just sits down at his desk.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Harry's given you a lot of control over your pictures, but he wants to make sure that when it comes to the studio, he's still king of the castle.

Frank gives Robert a long, contemplative look.

INT. COLUMBIA CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: SECOND CONFERENCE

The same long table. The same line-up of suited-up execs. The same face-off between Harry - now with a riding crop in hand - at one end of the table and Frank and Robert at the other.

Harry is the first to speak. As before, the execs all turn to face him at once.

HARRY

So, Frank. Where are we with all this bus picture business?

As if watching a tennis match, the execs all turn to Frank to see what happens now that the ball is in his court.

FRANK

I've been thinking about all the comments that have been made, Harry -

(slightly forced)

and I'm grateful for them - but I don't agree with them. I like the script and I want to make it - as is.

The execs follow the ball to Harry's side of the room.

Harry's face begins to tense up ever so slightly. He bends the riding crop in his hands.

FRANK (CONT'D)

But Harry, you're the president of Columbia and in my book the man that puts up the money makes the final decisions.

The bent riding crop in Harry's hands relaxes a little. For a moment, Harry just continues to stare at Frank, as if evaluating him. Suddenly, he bangs the riding crop on the table and stands up.

HARRY

Alright! We've screwed around enough with this bus thing. Let's stop wasting time and make the damned picture.

Frank and Robert exchange a quick smile.

HARRY (CONT'D)

What about casting? Who can play the girl?

Frank sits up in his chair, eager now to talk shop.

FRANK

Well, MGM still owes you a star for the loan out picture I was supposed to do for them, right? So I thought of Myrna Loy. If we get her...

HARRY

What d'ya mean 'if'? Course I'll
get her!

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Harry is at his desk, looking somber, Frank sitting
opposite him looking dumbfounded.

FRANK

What d'ya mean we didn't get
her?

HARRY

I mean she doesn't like your
script, genius!

FRANK

What did Louis B. Mayer have to
say about this? He owes us a
star!

HARRY

Gave me some bullshit about
never asking his precious little
girls to do anything they don't
want to. So, who's next on your
list?

FRANK

What about Margaret Sullavan?

INT. MARGARET SULLAVAN'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

MARGARET SULLAVAN is standing at her dressing room door in
a silk dressing gown, script in hand.

She hands the script over to a COLUMBIA ASSISTANT, standing
on the other side of the doorway.

MARGARET SULLAVAN

No...thank you.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank is now standing, looking out of the windows, in serious contemplation. Harry is still at his desk.

FRANK

She really said no?

HARRY

What about Loretta Young?

FRANK

Naw, she's not right for it.
Bette Davis?

INT. HARRY'S INNER OFFICE - DAY

Frank and Harry are standing over Stella's desk as she receives a message over the teletype machine.

STELLA

"Harry, got your request to loan-out Bette Davis. Unfortunately, Miss Davis is currently not doing any pictures outside of Warner Bros. Sorry couldn't help, Jack Warner."

HARRY

I had a feelin' this would happen. The Warners have her on a tight leash over there ever since she raised hell to do a picture with RKO.

FRANK

Her leash, my noose. Same rope.

HARRY

Stop with this self-pity crap. Now, I think Carole Lombard could be right for the part.

FRANK

Carole Lombard...

Frank suddenly looks a lot more cheery.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You know, Robert's been taking her on some dates recently. Maybe he can ask her.

INT. ROBERT'S OFFICE - DAY

Robert is leaning against his desk, pleading with Frank.

ROBERT

You gotta understand, I really tried. She just can't do it. She's signed up for another picture and the schedules clash.

FRANK

This is getting serious Robert.

ROBERT

How serious? Are we gonna have another conference?

INT. COLUMBIA CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: THIRD CONFERENCE

The scene is as before: Harry at one end, Frank and Robert at the other end, execs in between.

EXEC #1

Harry, turning down this picture is becoming a trend!

EXEC #2

If it gets out in the papers, you'll never cast it!

HARRY

Now listen, we decided we were gonna make this picture, so we're gonna damn-well make it!

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

Let's try be a bit more subtle
in our approach to this casting
business.

EXEC #3

I have a friend who knows a guy
who knows Miriam Hopkins. He
could slip her the script.

HARRY

Frank?

FRANK

Worth a shot.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Harry is at his desk. Exec #3 is standing in front him,
script in hand.

EXEC #3

She said:

(carefully reciting
from memory)

"Not if I never play another
part."

INT. COLUMBIA CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: FOURTH CONFERENCE

The scene is familiar by now. An exec speaks up.

EXEC #4

I heard Constance Bennett was in
Palm Springs on vacation.

EXEC #5 turns to a man sitting beside him, SAM JAFFE.

EXEC #5

Hey, Sam, aren't you good pals
with Connie? You could ask her.

SAM

Sure, I guess.

HARRY

Good, let's try the personal touch. Sam, take this bus script to Connie Bennett and for chrissake sell it to her!

INT. COLUMBIA CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: FIFTH CONFERENCE

The scene is as per usual, with all eyes on Sam Jaffe, seated in his chair.

HARRY

Well?

SAM

I tried to sell it to her...

HARRY

And?

SAM

She wants to buy it.

FRANK

You mean she'll take the part?

SAM

No, I mean she literally wants to buy it. She'll pay a small profit over what we got sunk in it. Have it rewritten for her.

There's a moment of silence as everyone contemplates the news.

SAM (CONT'D)

It's a great out Harry.

HARRY

What d'ya think Frank?

FRANK

I think Connie is a smart gal. She'll buy the script for peanuts and make a hit out of it. We'll be the laugh of the town...

HARRY

Hey, big shot, we've been trying to cast this thing for weeks now!

FRANK

I know! Just give me two more weeks. Just two. Then you can sell.

Harry considers for a moment, clearly losing his limited patience.

HARRY

Two weeks. Not a second more!

INT. FRANK'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Frank, Robert and Lu are seated around a table on which are visible the remnants of a delicious meal.

Frank and Robert are both despondent - Robert keeps sipping on his wine absent-mindedly while Frank plays with a piece of food left on his plate.

LU

I've never seen two such sour mugs in my life! What's the matter?

FRANK

A certain amount of rejection in Hollywood is normal. It's to be expected. But after a certain point, it starts to get serious. Frank Capra - the director nobody wants to work with!

ROBERT
(half joking)
And Robert Riskin - the writer
whose script no one wants to act
in.

FRANK
(offhand)
Exactly.

Robert throws him a slightly startled glance at the
brusqueness of the comment.

LU
Is there really something so
wrong with this script that the
two of you can't fix?

FRANK
I didn't think there was
anything wrong with it until
everyone started turning it
down.

They sit in silence for a moment.

LU
I don't know about you two, but
I don't know that many
heiresses.

Frank and Robert look up at her.

LU (CONT'D)
I don't know many Greenwich
Village painters either.

FRANK
I'm not sure I follow you...

Robert slowly sits up.

ROBERT
I think I do. We've been such
idiots!

FRANK

How'd ya reckon?

ROBERT

We've written two characters that the audience can't relate to. Can't sympathize with. We've gotta have at least one character that's...

ROBERT (CONT'D)

One of us.

FRANK

One of us!

Lu smiles and gets up from the table and exits into the kitchen. Frank and Robert are now ecstatic.

Robert picks up a silver candle-holder from the middle of the table, puts it down in front of himself.

ROBERT

Now, let's take our heiress. She's a brat, sure, but how can we make her more likeable?

FRANK

We can make her bored. Dying for some freedom, some adventure...

ROBERT

Right, all she really wants to be is a plumber's daughter!

FRANK

That's a good line. Alright, well what about the leading man?

Frank picks up a wooden pepper grinder and places it next to the candle-holder. Robert takes a moment to think.

ROBERT

I wrote a poem when I was boy about how my friends and I went to Coney Island and only had a dollar and ninety-three cents to spend.

FRANK

You lost me Bob.

ROBERT

Our hero's got to be the kind of
guy who can teach the brat the
value of a dime. Not the clean-
cut painter we wrote, but a bit
rougher round the edges. A
reporter maybe...

FRANK

A reporter...

Frank suddenly jumps up from his chair and runs into the
next room.

ROBERT

Where you going?

FRANK

To call Harry!

INT. FRANK'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Frank runs up to the telephone and dials frantically.

FRANK

(on the phone)

Harry? ... No ... stop grumbling
and listen! I need you to call
MGM ... yes again, but this time
tell them that we want Robert
Montgomery, for the male lead.
Tell them we have a part that he
won't be able to turn down!

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank is standing in front of Harry's desk. Frank looks
bewildered. Harry looks fed up.

FRANK

What do you mean he turned it
down?!

HARRY

He said there are too many bus pictures.

FRANK

Oh for god's sake! I've just about had it with this thing! Maybe you're right; maybe we should just sell it to Connie Bennett.

Frank begins the long walk back to the door. Harry calls out after him.

HARRY

Frank. Frank...Frank!

Frank doesn't turn around, just heads for the door and leaves.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Goddamn it!

He picks up the phone, barks into the receiver.

HARRY (CONT'D)

(on the phone)

Get me Louis Mayer on the phone!

INT. L.B. MAYER'S OFFICE - DAY

On a larger white desk filled with notes, scripts and other folders, a telephone is ringing. A hand protruding out of a pinstriped suit with gold cufflinks reaches for the receiver.

It picks it up, brings it up to a thinning head of hair. The face remains unseen because its owner is looking out of a window positioned behind the desk.

MAYER

(on the phone)

Mayer.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Harry sits up in his chair. This is the first time we've seen him close to being ruffled.

HARRY

Louie! Listen, I know you're busy, but this bus thing is really killing me here...

L.B. MAYER (49) spins around in his chair. His face is rounded, dominated largely by his nose and framed by round glasses. He looks perfectly at ease and in control at the same time.

MAYER

I feel for you Harry, but what can I do? Montgomery doesn't wanna do it. And quite frankly, I think he's right about the bus trends.

(beat)

Alright, alright, calm down. Listen Herschel, you've caught me in a good mood. I've got an actor here who's been a bad boy. He wants more money. I want to teach him a lesson. You can have Clark Gable.

HARRY

Louis, 'spose he don't like the script?

MAYER

Herschel, this is Louis B. Mayer talking. I'm telling you to take Gable.

Mayer puts down the phone.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank and Robert are sitting in front of Harry's desk. Harry is beaming with glee. Frank and Robert less so.

ROBERT

Clark Gable.

FRANK

Harry, doesn't he only do tough-guy roles? Does he even know how to do comedy?

HARRY

Who gives a shit! We finally have a name to put to this damned picture.

FRANK

And how does Mr. Gable feel about all this?

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE CLARK GABLE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Two neighbors, an ELDERLY HUSBAND and WIFE, dressed in expensive pajamas and robes, are standing outside their front door, staring at the door opposite theirs.

From the other side of that door, loud shouting can be heard. One voice belongs to CLARK GABLE, the other to his wife, RIA.

The neighbors listen with animated shock.

CLARK (O.S.)

Columbia! They're gonna send me to Columbia!

RIA (O.S.)

Honey, calm down...

CLARK (O.S.)

Calm Down? They're sending me to Siberia for chrissake!

RIA (O.S.)

It's just one picture!

CLARK (O.S.)

I'm gonna call that son-of-a-bitch and cancel my contract right now!

RIA (O.S.)

You do that and Mayer will make sure you never get another picture deal ever again. You know that.

CLARK (O.S.)

Ohhh! Screw Mayer and screw MGM!

The sound of a door slamming is heard. The neighbors exchange dazed looks.

ELDERLY WIFE

I told you this would happen if we let those movie people move into the building.

The couple, wearing indignant expressions, shuffle back into their own apartment and shut the door.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank is at his desk, reading a script, when JO SWERLING (36), a rather squat man wearing thick glasses and smoking a cigar, walks through the door, smiling from ear to ear.

JO

Hiya Frank!

FRANK

Hey Joe. How's your script going?

JO

Oh, going fine. How's your picture going?

FRANK

I dunno. You tell me. You're clearly burstin' to tell me something.

JO

I just saw Clark Gable walk into the studio. He's on his way to see you.

FRANK

Yeah?

JO

Yeah. But it looks like he stopped at every bar between MGM and here first.

Frank's calm expression turns to one of trepidation.

JO (CONT'D)

Good luck to ya!

He waltzes out the door.

A moment later, heavy footsteps are heard ascending a staircase outside Frank's office.

Frank stares at the door.

A tall, broad-shouldered figure appears in the doorway. It is, of course, CLARK GABLE (32). Even in his drunken state, he is incredibly handsome: dark hair parted to the side, dark suit, hat tilted over his eyes. He is, however, clean shaven - no signature moustache yet.

Leaning against the doorway, he tilts up his hat with one finger to get a better look at his surroundings.

Even though the door is wide open, he makes an effort to knock several times.

CLARK

Is this Mishter Frank Capra's office?

Frank stands up at his desk.

FRANK

Yes, Mr. Gable. I'm Frank Capra. Come in, please.

Clark saunters into the office, stretching out his hand to greet Frank.

CLARK
Glad to meet cha.

But before Frank can even motion to return the handshake, Clark continues of his own accord.

CLARK (CONT'D)
(hiccupping)
Likewise.

He takes a bow, and then proceeds to walk over to a kitchen stool. His balance is so precarious and his weight so great for the stool that it groans as he sits down.

Clark take a moment to consider the stool, stands up, and walks over to another chair - a fold-out camper - and takes a seat once more. The sight of his long limbs squashed into the camping chair paints quite a comical picture.

CLARK (CONT'D)
So this is what Siberia looks like.

FRANK
Mr. Gable...

CLARK
(sniffing)
What's that smell?

He stands up, begins to walk over to yet another chair and lowers himself into it very slowly.

FRANK
Mr. Gable, I...

Clark jumps up from the chair before he's even sat down properly.

CLARK
Son-of-a-bitch Mayer!

Frank's expression says that he doesn't disagree.

Clark stumbles back to the first chair once more and begins to examine it, testing its structural stability.

FRANK

Mr. Gable...

CLARK

(not looking up)

Hmmm...

FRANK

Mr. Gable!

Clark raises his eyes to look at Frank, who holds up the script.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Mr. Gable, you and I are supposed to make a picture out of this. Shall I tell you the story or would you rather read the script by yourself?

Clark tries to stand as upright as he can manage.

CLARK

Buddy, I don't give a fuck what you do with it!

Frank throws the script down across the table.

FRANK

Maybe you can read it between drinks!

Clark considers the script for a moment, picks it up, gives Frank a slow nod and sways back toward the door.

Frank follows him to the doorway, watches as he stumbles back down the stairs.

INT. COLUMBIA HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Clark is making his way down the stairs as two Columbia employees are making their way up. They do their best not to bump into the staggering Clark.

CLARK
People! Why aren't you wearing
parkas in Siberia?!

He turns to look at them as they walk off.

CLARK (CONT'D)
(saluting)
Comrades!
(singing)
Siberia...

He disappears round a corner.

Outside his door, Frank sighs with relief. But no sooner does relief come than anger follows. Frank storms off in the opposite direction to the one Clark went in.

INT. HARRY'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Frank rushes into the outer office and heads straight for the giant door. Forgetting about the buzzer, he tries to push the door open, frustrated when it doesn't work.

The startled Stella watches him.

FRANK
(knocking furiously
on the door)
Harry, open up!

STELLA
It's soundproof.

FRANK
You gotta be kidding!

She presses a button on the intercom.

STELLA
(into the intercom)
Frank Capra to see you.

The door buzzes and Frank flies into the office.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Frank marches up to Harry's desk, not giving him a second to speak.

FRANK

So I just met with Clark Gable.

HARRY

What you want, a medal?

FRANK

He was drunk as a skunk! And I'm pretty sure he'll never step foot in here again.

HARRY

Frank...

FRANK

I'm fed up. You were right. All your supervisors were right. Let's just shelve this thing.

HARRY

No one's shelving anything. We're doing the picture. And Gable will have no choice but to show up, or there'll be no MGM to go back to.

FRANK

Oh, I see, and we have no choice but to do the picture because Mayer wants to chastise Gable. God forbid you let the maharaja of Hollywood down! I'm not the only one who wants to play in the big leagues, Harry!

Frank has clearly struck a nerve. Harry tenses up.

HARRY

Now listen here! I've just about had it with your crap! You're the reason we're stuck with this bus thing, not Gable or Mayer.

Frank is about to respond but doesn't. There's nothing to say - Harry's right.

Harry stands up, picks up his riding crop. He walks over to the window and looks down at the street. Down below, a SUITED-UP MAN is hastily walking across the street. Harry yells down to him.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Hey! You!

The suited-up man looks up at the window.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Where the hell do you think you're going? There's still several hours of working day left!

The suited-up man quickly turns around and heads back inside the building.

Harry turns back to Frank, now in a better mood.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Have you thought about who can play the girl?

FRANK

I'm fresh out of ideas on that one.

HARRY

Jesus, do I have to do all the work around here? First I get you Gable now I have to find you a leading lady!

Frank is about to interject but Harry won't let him.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Lucky for you I got a brainstorm! Claudette Colbert.

FRANK

You're not serious. You remember *For the Love of Mike*, right?

HARRY

Last picture you did before coming to Columbia. It was a huge flop.

FRANK

Right. It was also Claudette Colbert's first picture.

HARRY

So you know each other. Great. You can go see her personal.

FRANK

Harry, I'm not sure she'll wanna see me 'personal'. She hated every minute of that picture. And said so.

HARRY

Ancient history.

Frank is desperate to find a way out of this.

FRANK

Isn't she under contract to Paramount?

HARRY

Her vacation starts today.

FRANK

Oh, great, now we're interrupting her vacation too! She's really gonna love me now.

HARRY

Stop whining will ya and go see her! Take Riskin. For the charm.

EXT. CLAUDETTE COLBERT'S HOUSE - DAY

Robert and Frank are standing (rather sheepishly) side by side outside of Claudette Colbert's expansive, white, double-storey Georgian house.

Robert rings the doorbell.

ROBERT
Charm, huh?

FRANK
That's what he said.

Robert laughs to himself. He rings the doorbell again. The door opens. A MAID stands before Robert and Frank.

MAID
How can I help you gentlemen?

FRANK
Hi, I'm Frank Capra. This is Robert Riskin. We're from Columbia Studios, here to see Miss Colbert.

A loud voice sounds from inside.

CLAUDETTE (O.S.)
Who is it?

The maid turns around and shouts back.

MAID
Two men from Columbia Studios.

CLAUDETTE (O.S.)
Tell them I'm not here!

Robert and Frank exchange awkward glances with the maid.

CLAUDETTE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Oh! Can you please come help me with this darn suitcase!

The maid rushes off, leaving the door ajar. Frank and Robert hesitate slightly, then tiptoe inside.

INT. CLAUDETTE COLBERT'S HOUSE, FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Frank and Robert edge their way into the center of the dazzling foyer.

Their dark clothes are in sharp contrast with the rest of the very tastefully decorated room: white walls, glittering chandelier, delicate marble sculptures and even more delicate glass vases.

To the right, a staircase winds its way to the bedrooms on the second floor.

With their hands in their pockets, Frank and Robert examine the space, not quite sure what to do with themselves.

Suddenly, loud, high-pitched barking sounds at the top of the staircase. A white poodle appears at its summit.

The poodle runs down towards the duo and heads straight for Frank. Looking up at Frank, the poodle continues to bark.

ROBERT

Now you've done it.

FRANK

What did I do?

ROBERT

You've upset her dog. Now we'll never get her for the part.

FRANK

(to the dog)

Shhh!

The dog runs a couple of circles around Frank and then bites him on the ankle.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Ow! The stupid little thing bit me...

He bends down to assess the wound.

ROBERT

(smiling)

We're in! You've drawn first blood.

He looks up at the staircase.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Oh, oh...here she comes.

Frank looks up.

At the top of the stairs appears CLAUDETTE COLBERT (30). Dressed in slacks and a silk blouse, she looks sophisticated and beautiful. But her casual appearance is far from matched by her demeanor - she is clearly in a rush.

CLAUDETTE

What's going on down here?

She spots Frank and Robert. Frank slowly stands upright.

FRANK

Miss Colbert...

CLAUDETTE

I thought you two had gone.

FRANK

We have an appointment to see you...

She descends down the staircase, only now taking a moment to notice who she's talking to.

CLAUDETTE

Frank Capra! The reason I almost quit pictures.

FRANK

This is my writing partner, Robert Riskin.

CLAUDETTE

Hello Robert. Listen, gentlemen, I'm afraid there's been a terrible mistake. I couldn't have made any appointment. I'm right in the middle of packing.

FRANK

This will only take a minute...

Claudette doesn't hear him. She's already headed back up the stairs.

CLAUDETTE

My friends are waiting for me in Sun Valley. I'm supposed to leave in half an hour. I'm terribly sorry. Hope this hasn't been an inconvenience. But you must excuse me!

As she speaks she climbs the steps faster than the words tumble out of her mouth. By the last phrase, she's already turning the corner to go into another room.

ROBERT

Shall we surrender?

FRANK

No, are you kidding? Can't you just see her in the part? She's perfect for it.

ROBERT

So what do we do?

FRANK

Charm her. Isn't that what you're here for?

Frank runs up the stairs, followed by Robert, followed by the poodle.

INT. CLAUDETTE COLBERT'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Frank and Robert walk into a room that is just as beautiful as the foyer; here not only the walls are white, but the carpet is a plush white also.

Claudette is busily running between the closet and her bed, on which is an open suitcase that she is busy packing.

FRANK

Claudette...

She spins around, shocked to see them still here.

CLAUDETTE

What are you guys still doing here?

FRANK

If you could just hear the story, it's a great part. Perfect for you. You see, there's this heiress, and she's spoiled and bratty...

Claudette throws Frank a questioning glance. Robert decides to step in with his 'charm'.

ROBERT

...and lovely. So lovely. But bored with her life, see. So she marries this aviator...

As Robert is talking, Claudette continues to move between the closet and the bed, packing. Robert, almost without noticing it, begins to walk back and forth with her.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

But her father doesn't approve so she runs away from home and gets on a bus...

CLAUDETTE

(still packing)

I thought bus pictures weren't doing well?

FRANK

This one will!

As he says this, he notices the poodle still standing at his feet, watching him. He also notices that his ankle is bleeding - right onto the white carpet!

Frank quickly shifts his foot to cover the stain. Robert notices out of the corner of his eye, but continues to sell the script.

ROBERT

On the bus she meets a reporter - Clark Gable will play him...

For the first time Claudette looks up at Robert, but only for a moment.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

And he's a rough, street-smart kind of guy, and at first they hate each but then...

While Robert is talking, Frank tries to surreptitiously bend down and address his wound.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

They have to spend the night together and...

Claudette throws a final pile of clothes into her suitcase.

CLAUDETTE

Can't you understand? I'm tired. I'm leaving for Sun Valley. I don't want to hear any story. I don't want anything!

ROBERT

Nothing at all?

Claudette takes a moment to consider, and then, just to get rid of them...

CLAUDETTE

Paramount pays me twenty-five thousand per picture. You double that -

At the news of this sum, Frank - who's already precariously balanced trying to suppress the bleeding - nearly falls over.

CLAUDETTE (CONT'D)

- and finish with me in four weeks from today - which you can't - so please leave me alone.

She grabs the suitcase and begins to take it down the stairs. Robert relieves her of her chore.

INT. CLAUDETTE COLBERT'S HOUSE, FOYER - CONTINUOUS

The trio are descending the stairs, Claudette out front, Frank trailing, dog in tow.

FRANK

May I use your phone?

CLAUDETTE

Sure, it's over there...

She gestures to a table in the corner. As she heads outside, Robert following with her bag, Frank rushes to the phone. He dials.

FRANK

(on the phone)

Harry? ... Yeah, I'm here right now. She'll do the picture - for fifty thousand.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Harry is at his desk, sipping on a glass of orange juice. At the sound of the words "fifty thousand" he nearly chokes.

HARRY

(on the phone)

Fifty G's! That's double her salary!

FRANK

That's just for openers. We've got to finish with her in four weeks.

HARRY

Can you do that?

FRANK

No.

For a moment, Frank is silent, Harry is silent.

HARRY

Look, goddamn you, you started this jinx thing. You finish with her in four weeks and I'll double her salary!

FRANK

But it's fifty thousand! The whole picture's only budgeted at 325 G's.

HARRY

Sometimes the right star is worth paying for! And right now, she's all we got!

He hangs up.

Claudette and Robert walk back into the foyer as Frank is putting down the phone.

FRANK

Deal Claudette! Fifty thousand for four weeks.

CLAUDETTE

Oh for God's sake!

Behind her, Robert is just as stunned.

FRANK

Will you do it?

He and Robert hold their breath.

CLAUDETTE

All right, damn it! I'll do your picture. But you listen to me - on the 23rd of December I'm leaving to spend Christmas in Sun Valley, whether you've got this thing in the can or not!

Frank rushes over to Robert, ready to make an exit now that they have their answer.

FRANK

No problem. We'll start this week. Wardrobe will be real simple - just one outfit for the whole shebang and then a wedding dress at the end. Alright?
Great! See you then.

He shuffles Robert out the door, leaving a shell-shocked Claudette in the foyer.

EXT. CLAUDETTE COLBERT'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Frank and Robert make their way down the lawns to the car.

ROBERT

We better get out of here before she sees that blood you dripped on her carpet.

FRANK

December 23rd. What's the date today?

ROBERT

November 21st.

FRANK

Maybe we should walk faster.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Harry is sitting at his desk, riding crop in hand, looking quite pleased with himself.

Frank and Robert are sitting opposite him.

HARRY

Jesus, we finally did it! Well it was mostly me. But we finally have our stars.

ROBERT

Both of whom don't really want to be here.

FRANK

Harry, neither of them is known for doing comedies. How do we know this picture won't stink?

HARRY

Listen, maestro, audiences will pay to see them and that's good enough for me!

FRANK

I don't wanna put my name on a shitty picture, Harry.

But Harry isn't listening; he hits a button on the intercom.

HARRY

(into intercom)

I want an advertisement drawn up for the trade papers. Big letters. "Columbia is getting the stars". Exclamation point. "They're none of 'em too big for a Columbia picture now."

Frank lets out a puff of exasperation.

INT. COLUMBIA HALLWAY - DAY

On the door of a dressing room, below the sign of a star, Clark Gable's name is being inserted into the name slot.

Just down the hall, on another dressing room door below another star, Claudette Colbert's name is being inserted into the name slot.

INT. COLUMBIA DINING ROOM - DAY

Frank and Robert are having lunch with cinematographer JOE WALKER (41), a man with a relatively square face, strong jaw and a thin moustache. He is immaculately dressed in a suit and flat cap.

Joe sits at the long dining room table, casually sipping on his coffee.

Frank paces the floor whilst reading some sort of document.

Robert is also seated at the table, reading a newspaper. On the back page is the whole-page advert that Harry had dictated to his secretary: COLUMBIA IS GETTING THE STARS.

ROBERT

Hey Frank, they have a name for us now...

FRANK

What d'ya mean? Is it dirty?

ROBERT

The trade papers are talking about *It Happened One Night* as a "Capriskin" picture.

FRANK

It will be caput if our 'stars' have anything to do with it.

He holds up the document in his hand

FRANK (CONT'D)

Miss Colbert's contract alone is an incredible piece of literature. It says here that we must at all times during the shooting give preference to the right side of her face!

JOE

Didn't you know? Over at Paramount they call the left side of her face 'the dark side of the moon'.

Sally rushes into the dining room with a note in her hand.

SALLY

Hi fellas. Frank, a memo just came for you from MGM.

Frank's face immediately registers disdain. Robert simply smirks. Sally hands Frank the note. He opens it furtively.

FRANK

(reading)

"To the Columbia people" - what are we, a clan? - "Please mind Mr. Gable's ears."

ROBERT

What?

FRANK

That's all it says. What the hell...

SALLY

They're quite big...his ears.

They all turn to her.

SALLY (CONT'D)

In some of his pictures, if they don't photograph him just right, they stick out.

They continue to stare at her for a moment.

ROBERT

Well, serves us right for not reading fan magazines.

Frank hands the memo back to Sally.

FRANK

Send them a memo back. Say: "To the MGM gang. Don't worry. Will give Gable moustache to distract from ears. Columbia."

Sally nods and exits.

JOE

First I can't shoot the left side of her face, now I can't show his ears...

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

Are there any other body parts I should omit? Maybe we just show their feet; it'll be real artistic! Maybe that'll get you an Oscar, hey Frank?

Frank slumps down into a chair.

ROBERT

(with mock
enthusiasm)

So, first day of shooting tomorrow. Everyone excited?

Frank buries his head in his hands.

INT. BUS STATION #1 SET - DAY

A sign leaned against a doorway reads "Night Bus to New York". It's a prop on the set of *It Happened One Night's* first bus station scene.

It's the - relative - calm before the storm: as everyone waits for the cameras to start rolling, vignettes of action are visible throughout the set.

Joe and his assistants are putting some final touches on the lighting set up.

Extras are gathered in groups, chatting amongst each other.

Frank is discussing something with a crew member when a WARDROBE ASSISTANT rushes over to him, her face flushed with anxiety.

WARDROBE ASSISTANT

Mr. Capra? I'm having some trouble with Mr. Gable.

FRANK

What is it?

WARDROBE ASSISTANT

He's wearing a parka...
(MORE)

WARDROBE ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

...and he refuses to take it off. Has there been a change of wardrobe I don't know about?

FRANK

(sighs)

No. He's just protesting. Exile to Siberia. Don't worry about it, I'll take care of it in a moment.

Frank looks over to the corner where Clark (now sporting a moustache) is seated in his chair, surrounded by some male EXTRAS. He has pulled the fur-lined hood of the parka over his face, so that slouched in his chair he looks all the more depressed and despondent.

Just a little way off from him, Claudette, already in her travelling suit costume, is sitting and reading a magazine.

Clark is delivering a monologue to the extras, drawing out the words and going to great lengths to dramatize his dejection. They listen keenly.

CLARK

Poverty Row. I used to come to Poverty Row. When I was just starting out in the business. Gower Street. They used to call it Gower Gulch - it's where all the extras would wait around, hoping for some work in the quickie Westerns. I used to be one of them. I thought I moved up in the world. But you never can trust these things. Now I'm back in Gower Gulch. Metaphorically.

He takes a deep breath for effect.

CLARK (CONT'D)

And you always have to struggle...

The extras shake their heads in agreement.

CLARK (CONT'D)

D'ya know that they're paying me a fraction of what that French dame is getting. A fraction! Her overtime alone is more than my whole salary.

The extras shake their heads in lament. Claudette overhears the conversation.

CLAUDETTE

Hey fella! I was a star on Broadway while you were still trying to make your big break, so I wouldn't compare apples to oranges.

Clark is about to retort when Frank walks into the middle of the set and calls out to get everybody's attention.

FRANK

All right everyone!

Everyone in the room turns to him.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Welcome to the picture. Now, before we get started, I just wanna say a few words. Clear the air. At one point or another, none of us here wanted to make this picture. In fact, for some that still hasn't changed.

He looks in the direction of his two stars, who don't disagree.

FRANK (CONT'D)

But we're here now and so we're gonna make this picture. Fast. We all know we're on a tight schedule. So let's get going, and let's try to have fun and, just maybe, we'll come out of this thing with something worth seeing! We start our first scene in five, so take your places.

A buzz erupts on the set as people scramble for their places. Frank approaches Clark.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Okay Mr. Gable. First scene is all yours. You know the drill - you're on the phone with your boss who's just fired you. You're trying to set him straight but he hangs up. But you gotta save face in front of the men who've been listening, so you carry on talking.

CLARK

(listlessly)

Sure.

FRANK

And you're drunk the whole time, so you should be able to relate to the character real easy.

Clark tries to suppress a smile.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Do you mind taking off the parka now?

Clark stands up, takes off the parka. Underneath he's dressed in costume: shirt, tie, jersey, suit jacket and scarf.

The Wardrobe Assistant hands him his trench coat and hat, which he puts on, completing the look.

Clark ties the belt of his coat and takes his place inside the telephone booth. The extras which had previously been listening to his talk now take their places around the booth.

Frank takes his place beside Joe Walker's camera.

FRANK

Okay, everybody ready for the master?

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

We'll take it from the editor's
line - Judith will read it for
us.

JUDITH, a gum-chewing script girl, flips to the right page
in her script, nods to Frank.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Camera rolling.

An assistant runs in front of the camera with a clapper
board.

ASSISTANT

It Happened One Night. Scene
Four. Take One.

FRANK

Action!

Judith reads the editor's lines without much expression.

JUDITH

"Say listen you. When you get
back to New York you keep far
away from this office. You're
fired. You don't work here
anymore and you never will." He
hangs up.

Clark, now in character, takes a moment to look behind him,
sees the men outside the booth watching him, and begins to
simulate his response with a perfectly put-on drunken
drawl.

CLARK (AS PETER)

Oh, so you're changing your tune
hey? You're a little late with
your apologies. I wouldn't go
back to work for you if you
begged me on your hands and
knees. And I hope this will be a
lesson to ya!

He hangs up. The scene proceeds as he exits the booth, the men crowding around him, congratulating him and shaking hands with him. Clark takes a swig from a bottle of liquor.

CLARK (AS PETER) (CONT'D)

Is my chariot ready?

EXTRA #1

(tipping his hat
off)

Your chariot awaiteth withouteth
almighty King!

The men gather around him and begin to walk with him to the exit, shouting "Make way for the King!" and "All hail the King!" as they do so. Clark, in the centre, looks smug and satisfied.

FRANK

Cut! That was a great first
take. Well done everyone.

The set breaks out from the silence of the take as everyone scrambles to change the set-up for the next one.

Clark returns to his chair. Claudette walks up to him.

CLAUDETTE

Either you're really good or you
really believe that you're the
king of something!

CLARK

Maybe someday I will be. King of
Hollywood!

CLAUDETTE

Keep me posted.

She walks off.

On the other side of the room, Frank is talking to Joe.

FRANK

Well, that went okay I think.
Maybe this won't be that bad
after all?

Suddenly, Claudette's voice is heard from the other side of the room.

CLAUDETTE

Well why am I sitting here when we're not even filming my scene?! December 23rd Frank!

She walks off. Frank and Joe exchange glances.

JOE

Four weeks.

FRANK

I can't decide whether it's gonna be the shortest or the longest four weeks of my life!

MONTAGE - CLAUDETTE PROTESTS

SUPERIMPOSE: WEEK 1

-- EXT. BUS STATION #1 SET - DAY -- Claudette is being prepped for a close-up by a make-up assistant. Claudette addresses Joe: "Now remember, I'll be standing just so, so that you can get my right side."

-- INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, BUS SET- DAY -- Clark is sitting down on the back seat, Claudette standing above him. Claudette: "How am I supposed to sit down when he hasn't left me enough room?"

-- EXT. BUS STATION #2 SET- DAY -- Claudette is waiting as Frank and Joe set up for a long take. Claudette: "Just how long am I supposed to wait?" She fiddles with her costume: "How poor is Poverty Row exactly? Can we not even afford clothes that fit well?"

-- INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, BUS SET - DAY -- Frank is standing next to Joe as he shoots a take of Claudette sleeping on Clark's shoulder. Frank yells cut. Claudette immediately gets up. Claudette: "It's about time. Another second and I would have really fallen asleep. I'm going home."

-- EXT. MOTEL SET - NIGHT -- Claudette: "I'm leaving."

-- EXT. MOTEL SHOWER - DAY -- Claudette: "Are we done yet?"

-- EXT. BUS STATION #3 SET - NIGHT -- Claudette is waiting in her chair: "How long must I wait!"

-- INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, BUS SET - DAY -- Claudette: "Please stop shooting my left side!"

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, MOTEL SET - DAY

The cast and crew are in the middle of filming the first motel scene. The set is lit for nighttime, with simulated rain pouring outside the windows.

CLAUDETTE (AS ELLIE)
I just had the unpleasant
sensation of having you referred
to as my husband.

CLARK (AS PETER)
Oh yeah. I forgot to tell you
about that. I registered as Mr.
and Mrs.

CLAUDETTE (AS ELLIE)
Oh you did...

Suddenly, a loud voice comes through a loudspeaker somewhere on set. It's Harry Cohn.

HARRY (V.O.)
That was terrible! Do it again.

Everyone looks up to see where the voice is coming from. Claudette is especially startled.

CLAUDETTE
Who was that?

JOE
God.

Claudette throws a questioning glance at Frank.

FRANK

That was Harry Cohn.
(speaking loudly
up to the ceiling)
Turn that goddamn thing off
Harry!

CLAUDETTE

Well I've just about had enough
of this!

She walks off. Clark approaches Frank.

CLARK

I thought that was pretty funny.
That dame needs to lighten up a
little. Hey, were we really that
bad?

FRANK

(extremely annoyed)
No, you certainly weren't! That
son-of-a-bitch Harry...

He marches off set. Clark turns to Joe.

CLARK

Why the hell does he use a
loudspeaker? Can't he just come
to set like other producers?

JOE

The last time he showed up on
Frank's set Frank told the whole
cast and crew to stand in a line
and sing a song. Wouldn't shoot
a foot of film with Harry there.

Clark nods, a little bit more impressed with Frank's
methods. He leaves Joe and walks over to Claudette, who is
getting ready to leave the set.

CLAUDETTE

Can you believe the kind of show
they're running here? And this
picture...

CLARK

I dunno. I think this wop's got something. Say, I think Capra's gone to yell at Harry Cohn. That might take a while. Wanna grab a coffee?

Claudette turns to him in shock, not quite believing that he's trying to flirt with her.

CLAUDETTE

No, thank you.

CLARK

May I ask why not?

CLAUDETTE

Mr. Gable, I'm perfectly aware of the...

(she searches for
the right word)

...reputation you have with women. Especially the ones you work with, it would seem.

She turns to go.

CLARK

Are you going to your dressing room?

CLAUDETTE

That's none of your concern.

CLARK

I'm just looking out for you. You know that Harry Cohn has secret passageways leading from his office to the dressing rooms of the leading ladies.

CLAUDETTE

That's not funny.

Clark keeps a straight face.

CLAUDETTE (CONT'D)

You're not serious?

Clark shrugs. With a huff of exasperation Claudette walks away, leaving Clark laughing to himself.

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, MOTEL SET - DAY

The cast and crew are back at work, filming the same scene as before. Frank is once more at the camera next to Joe.

CLAUDETTE (AS ELLIE)

I just had the unpleasant sensation of having you referred to as my husband.

CLARK (AS PETER)

Oh yeah. I forgot to tell you about that. I registered as Mr. and Mrs.

CLAUDETTE (AS ELLIE)

Oh you did...

FRANK

Let's cut there! Okay, everybody back to starting positions, let's take it from the top.

CLAUDETTE

Hey wait a minute. Don't we get a break between scenes?

FRANK

No time. December 23rd, remember? This way's quicker. Gets better performances, too. Okay, ready?

Just at that moment, Robert comes rushing onto set carrying a newspaper. Everyone, including Frank, turns to him.

FRANK (CONT'D)

What the hell's going on Bob?

ROBERT

I've got some news for you!

FRANK

Can't it wait? I'm in the middle
of a scene.

CLARK

December 23rd Bob! It's our new
catchphrase.

Claudette scowls at him.

ROBERT

You're gonna wanna hear this
now!

CLARK

Well spit it out pal. You've got
us all is suspense.

ROBERT

Lady For A Day has just been
nominated for four Academy
Awards. That's all.

Frank's face lights up immediately.

FRANK

Four? Four Oscars? Are you
messing with me Bob?

ROBERT

Look for yourself.

He hands him the papers. Frank reads for a moment, and then
lets out a shout of glee. He kisses the newspaper, runs
over to Robert and kisses him too.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Easy there!

FRANK

We did it!

ROBERT

Yes we did.

FRANK

I can't wait to tell Harry. Does he know?

ROBERT

Dunno.

Claudette, still in her staging position, is starting to look impatient.

CLAUDETTTE

I hate to disrupt such a merry occasion, but would Mr. Capra care to finish this picture at all?

FRANK

Yeah, let's finish it. Let's finish it as quickly as possible!

He runs back to the camera.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Places...

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank, still riding his high, walks into the office to find it empty of its usual occupant.

FRANK

Harry? Harry?

He notices a door on the left side of the room slightly ajar. He goes inside.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE BEDROOM - DAY

The room has been furnished to be a 'bedroom away from home' for Harry, complete with a king-sized bed and lamps to create a relaxed atmosphere.

Harry is lying in bed in his suit. On his bedside table are arranged several bottles of pills. Sitting at his bedside is a Catholic priest.

Frank is understandably taken aback at the sight.

FRANK

Harry? What's going on...

HARRY

I'm sick.

FRANK

Is it serious?

HARRY

Who knows. Doctors are full of
shit. What d'ya want?

For a second Frank has forgotten why he came in.

HARRY (CONT'D)

So? What's this news that
couldn't wait?

Frank shakes off his surprise.

FRANK

You'll jump out of that bed when
I tell you.

HARRY

Oh for the love of God!

The priest registers his disapproval through a small cough.

FRANK

Lady For a Day has been
nominated for four Academy
Awards!

HARRY

Oh Jesus...

(to the priest)

Sorry.

FRANK

Well?

HARRY

Well what? When you win, that's when I'll jump out of bed!

FRANK

This is big news!

HARRY

A nomination isn't a win, so don't go celebratin' just yet.

FRANK

Lady will win all four awards! You'll see!

He turns to go.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Mark my words!

He leaves the room.

HARRY

(calling after him)

Hey, you wanna tell me something useful? Like how your stupid bus picture is going? You better not be over-budget on that fucking thing!

(to the shocked priest)

You know, he's gonna be impossible to live with now. Even more than usual. No wonder I'm dying!

INT. HARRY'S INNER OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Frank is breezing through the office to the exit. He turns to Stella on his way out.

FRANK

D'ya know he's got a priest in there? He's not even Catholic.

STELLA

At lunchtime it was a Rabbi and before him a doctor.

FRANK

What's the matter with him?

STELLA

He's got the flu.

INT. FRANK'S HOUSE, FOYER - NIGHT

Frank comes in through the front door, still gliding on air. Lu, now at the end of her second trimester, comes in to greet him.

LU

Hi honey. What's got you in such a good mood? Shooting going well?

FRANK

Screw the shoot! But a man is bound to be happy when he's up for an Oscar!

He runs up to her and showers her with hugs and kisses.

LU

Oh, that's wonderful news!

FRANK

Lady For a Day got four nominations! Best Picture, Best Director, Best Writer and Best Actress!

LU

I'm so happy for you!

FRANK

Can you believe it? I wonder if a picture has even won four awards. I don't reckon it has! I need to double-check that.

He begins to run up the stairs.

LU

Frank...

He runs back down to her.

FRANK

There's so much to take care of...

He begins to run back up the stairs.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I've got to get a new suit! And a new dress for you. And, oh my god, the acceptance speech!

LU

Sweetheart, you haven't won yet!

Frank runs back down to her again. He puts his hands on her stomach.

FRANK

Lu, I promise you that when this baby is born, he, or she, will have an Academy Award Winning father!

LU

Somehow I don't think the baby will care very much.

FRANK

Maybe not, but I certainly do! If I win, I won't be on the outside looking in anymore!

He looks at Lu's belly.

FRANK (CONT'D)

John Ford will be his godfather!
Or hers.

LU

Lucky him. Or her.

Frank kisses her and ascends the stairs yet again.

FRANK

That baby will have a father
who's a real somebody!

LU

Frank, you haven't even told me
how *It Happened One Night* is
going?

Frank waves his hand without turning around.

FRANK

Oh fine, it's going fine.

He turns a corner at the top of the stairs.

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, MOTEL SET - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: WEEK 2

The cast and crew are at work, continuing the filming of the first motel scene. The set is once again lit for nighttime and, once again, simulated rain is pouring outside the motel windows.

Frank looks on as Clark and Claudette are mid-scene. Clark is hanging up a blanket between their two beds as Claudette, standing skeptically by the door, looks on.

CLARK (AS PETER)

Behold the Walls of Jericho.
Maybe not as sturdy as the ones
Joshua blew down with his
trumpet, but a lot safer. You
see, I have no trumpet.

(MORE)

CLARK (AS PETER) (CONT'D)

Now just to show you my heart's
in the right place, I'll give
you my best pair of pajamas.

He picks up a pair of pajamas off his bed and offers it to
Claudette. She doesn't move, so Clark throws them at her.

Claudette tries to catch them, but fails - they land on the
floor. Claudette breaks character.

CLAUDETTE

Oh for God's sake!

Frank's face sinks.

CLAUDETTE (CONT'D)

(to Frank)

How am I supposed to do the
scene if he can't throw
properly?

CLARK

Maybe you just can't catch!

FRANK

(eager to avoid a
fight)

Alright, let's take five!

Claudette immediately walks off. Clark approaches Frank.

CLARK

You know, I reckon that dame
needs to relax a bit.

FRANK

There's an understatement!

CLARK

Maybe we should help
her...loosen up.

FRANK

What d'ya have in mind?

Clark smiles.

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, MOTEL SET - DAY

The crew have reset the shot and everyone is in position to do another take. Clark and Claudette are in the same positions as before.

FRANK

Okay, let's pick up where we left off. Everyone ready?
Action!

CLARK (AS PETER)

Do you mind joining the Israelites?

Claudette doesn't move.

CLARK (AS PETER) (CONT'D)

You don't wanna join the Israelites? Alright. Perhaps you're interested in how a man undresses.

(he begins to take off his jersey)

It's quite a study in psychology. No two men do it alike.

He flings his jersey onto the bed. Claudette remains unmoved.

All of a sudden, Clark takes a few steps towards Claudette, who's taken aback. She glances at Frank as if to ask what's going on. Frank doesn't react.

Suddenly, Clark grabs her violently and pulls her into an unscripted embrace.

Claudette yells out and pulls away. She immediately looks down at his crotch, which is, shall we say, bulging!

CLAUDETTE

What are you doing!

CLARK

I'm so attracted to you, I just can't help it!

CLAUDETTE
(lost for words)
What...what...

CLARK
Relax!

He puts his hand into his pants, which elicits further momentary horror from Claudette, and pulls out a hammer.

The crew, including and especially Frank, burst out into uncontrollable laughter.

Claudette takes a moment to register what has happened and then, without a word, walks off.

Frank tries to call after her.

FRANK
Claudette...

But he simply can't control his laughter.

CLAUDETTE
One Oscar nomination doesn't make you Cecil B de Mille. You can't just do what you want on set!

She storms off.

FRANK
Let's take ten everyone.

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, MOTEL SET - DAY

The shot has once again been reset. The crew are waiting. Frank and Clark stand in a corner, still smiling at their joke.

Claudette walks in, as somber as ever.

CLARK
Somehow she still doesn't seem relaxed to me.

FRANK

Great everyone, let's get going.
We've done Clark's striptease...

A few hoots and whistles from the crew.

FRANK (CONT'D)

...now it's Miss Colbert's turn.

CLAUDETTE

If you think I'm taking off my
clothes for you, you've got
another thing coming!

FRANK

(suddenly serious)

Claudette, it's in the script.

CLAUDETTE

And that's where it will stay.

She sits down in her chair. Joe approaches Frank.

JOE

I told you this would happen.
First you can't show this part
of them, then that part of them.
My offer to film their feet
still stands.

FRANK

Claudette, please! The whole
scene rides on this. It's gotta
be sexy.

Claudette doesn't look up at him. Frank sighs, takes a
moment to think.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Okay, how about this. You start
to undress, see, and then we'll
cut to Clark's side of the room
and just show all your clothes
being draped on the blanket.
How's that...

Claudette looks up at him, clearly deliberating the idea.

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, MOTEL SET - DAY

The set has been lit for almost total darkness, only the light from the windows is meant to be illuminating the characters.

Clark is lying in his bed, Claudette standing on her side of the blanket. The crew is silent, anticipating Frank's...

FRANK

Action!

Claudette begins to undress, taking off her suit jacket to reveal her negligée.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Cut! Now let's get Clark's side.

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, MOTEL SET - DAY

The same scene is being filmed, but now only for the purposes of showing Clark's reactions.

Clark is still in bed, Frank standing next to him.

FRANK

Now remember, you have to be looking at that blanket, wondering what's on the other side.

CLARK

That won't be hard!

Frank returns to Joe's side and yells...

FRANK

Action!

Claudette's negligee is draped onto the blanket.

CLARK (AS PETER)

I wish you would take those things off the Walls of Jericho.

CLAUDETTE (AS ELLIE) (O.S.)
Oh excuse me!

FRANK
Cut! Perfect!

He turns to Joe.

FRANK (CONT'D)
You know, sometimes less really
is more!

JOE
Can't beat the power of the
imagination!

Clark walks up to them, staring at Claudette as he speaks.

CLARK
You got that right!

FRANK
(calls out to the
crew)
Alright, that's it for today.
Let's get these sets redressed
for the second motel. We'll
shoot all that stuff tomorrow.

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, 2ND MOTEL SET - DAY

The set has been converted to another night-time motel scene. Once again there is a blanket separating the two beds. Claudette and Clark are in their pajama costumes.

FRANK
(to Claudette)
Okay, next shot's easy. It's
just a close-up of you sleeping
in your bed, okay?

CLAUDETTE
Okay.

Claudette walks over to the bed, passing Clark.

CLAUDETTE (CONT'D)

(to Clark)

No tricks!

CLARK

I'm not even in this shot!

Claudette gets into the bed takes her position - lying flat on her stomach, hand under her head.

FRANK

Action!

Claudette closes her eyes and begins to 'sleep'. The set is gravely silent for several moments. Until...

As if out of nowhere, Frank jumps onto Claudette, shouting to startle her.

And he succeeds - Claudette screams and stumbles out of bed, leaving Frank sitting in the bed laughing, accompanied by the entire crew.

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, 2ND MOTEL SET - DAY

The scene has been reset. Again. Everyone is waiting for the next take. Again.

Claudette is sitting on her bed, reading a magazine while she waits. Frank walks over to her from the other side of the blanket, looking very serious.

FRANK

Listen, Claudette, we're having some trouble with this next shot - Clark and I. I know we've done one already, but can I trouble you for another rehearsal?

Claudette puts down her magazine with an exasperated sigh and follows Frank to the other side of the blanket.

CLAUDETTE

What seems to be the...

She comes round to Clark's side of the blanket. The crew has their eyes fixed on her.

CLAUDETTE (CONT'D)

...problem.

Her eyes widen. Clark is lying in bed with yet another bulge in his crotch area.

He throws open the blanket to reveal a potato masher between his legs.

Clark and Frank smile. The smiles quickly turn into laughs. Claudette begins to laugh with them.

CLAUDETTE (CONT'D)

You guys!

They all bust out laughing.

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, 2ND MOTEL SET - DAY

The shooting is done for the day. The crew is packing up the equipment and Clark and Claudette are getting ready to leave.

Frank approaches them.

FRANK

So about next week. Bob has been doing some rewrites on the hitchhiking scene. He's got a great idea for it. Can I send you the pages tonight?

CLARK

Sure thing.

CLAUDETTE

As long as you pay me.

She walks off. Clark watches her as she struts away.

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD, HITCHHIKING SCENE - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: WEEK 3

The crew has set up the equipment for the filming of the hitchhiking scene and is waiting for commencement of shooting, sitting idly around the location.

A nervous-looking ASSISTANT is speaking to Frank.

ASSISTANT

"Not if you pay me a million dollars!" That's what she said.

FRANK

(enraged)

But she agreed to do it yesterday!

ASSISTANT

That was before she saw the new script.

Frank looks like he's about ready to strangle the assistant. He begins to stress almost every word he says, edging closer and closer to the assistant with each emphasis. The assistant keeps trying to step further and further back.

FRANK

But the scene doesn't work without it! Clark is teaching her to hitchhike. He shows her all the different techniques he uses to stop the cars. But none of them work. So she pushes him aside and lifts up her skirt, showing her legs and stopping a car right there and then.

ASSISTANT

I know that, Mr. Capra, but she says she won't do it!

Frank turns to Joe with a look of desperation.

JOE

Don't look at me! Now we can't even film their feet. I'm all out of ideas.

Frank turns back to the assistant.

FRANK

Call Columbia! Tell them I want five chorus girls brought here right away! And tell Miss Colbert to get her ass down here for the rest of the scene.

The assistant nods and runs off. Frank begins to rant at no-one in particular.

FRANK (CONT'D)

How am I supposed to finish this goddamn picture in four weeks if she won't even show up on set! December 23rd! This is exactly the kind of thing that Oscar-winning directors don't have to put up with!

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD, HITCHHIKING SCENE - DAY

The crew members are all still in the same places, but looking all the more bored for the wait.

Frank and Clark are sitting side-by-side in their chairs, Frank looking furious, Clark looking un-phased.

A car drives up the road they are on. It stops in front of the crew. One after the other, five pretty CHORUS GIRLS emerge from the vehicle.

They line up in front of Frank and Clark.

FRANK

Okay girls, lift 'em up!

One by one, the girls lift up their skirts and stick out their right legs for display.

CLARK

This is not a bad job!

Another car pulls up. Out of it steps Claudette.

FRANK

Okay. You.

(pointing to the
middle girl)

Go to wardrobe and get yourself
into costume.

Claudette marches up to Frank.

CLAUDETTE

The hell she will!

FRANK

But you said...

CLAUDETTE

Those are not my legs!

She lifts up her skirt.

CLAUDETTE (CONT'D)

These are my legs. So get that
broad out of here and let's film
this damn scene.

Frank smiles.

FRANK

(to the crew)

You heard her!

Everyone jumps up and moves into action. The chosen chorus
girl is reluctantly ushered back to the car.

Clark walks up to Claudette.

CLARK

I wouldn't let an impostor in
either if I had legs like that.

Claudette smiles at him coquettishly.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Any chance I could see more of them?

CLAUDETTE

I don't know. You keep putting props down your pants and so a girl has to wonder what's really going on down there...

CLARK

Only one way to find out.

Claudette smiles again. She begins to walk away.

CLAUDETTE

You know, I think I prefer you with that moustache. Makes you look less like a pretty boy.

Clark strokes his moustache, smiles at Frank.

CLARK

Did you hear that?

EXT. FIELD, HAYSTACK SCENE - NIGHT

The crew is in the middle of filming a take: Claudette is lying on a stack of hay, Clark leaning over her, tucking his coat over her like a blanket.

They look into each other's eyes; Clark leans closer, dangerously close. They're about to kiss and the chemistry is palpable. They hold their positions for a moment as everyone on set watches the scene with baited breath.

FRANK

Cut!

It takes a second for the moment to break. Then, as if coming out of a dream, the bustling action of the set resumes. Clark and Claudette get up from the haystack.

Joe leans over and whispers to Frank.

JOE

Any chance the Walls of Jericho
are toppling for real between
those two?

FRANK

No! It couldn't be...

He stops talking as he sees Claudette approach them.

CLAUDETTE

Say, are there any more props
missing?

FRANK

Props?

CLAUDETTE

Hammers, potato mashers, things
like that?

FRANK

No. Why?

Claudette entertains some secret thought for a moment.

CLAUDETTE

No reason.

She walks off. Joe and Frank turn to look at each other.

FRANK

Could it be?

Joe shrugs.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Jesus, if those two get caught
up in something, we'll never
finish this thing! Can you
imagine the drama?

JOE

I don't think this set can
afford any more drama.

FRANK

Exactly. Let's wrap this up,
shall we?

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, INTERIOR BUS SET - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: WEEK 4

A take is in progress. Joe is at his camera, Frank next to him, clearly enjoying what he is watching.

Before them, on the set, is a bus-load of passengers, all in their appointed seats. Clark and Claudette are among them. But the camera is not focused on them this time.

Instead, its lens is pointed at three musicians at the back of the bus - one on violin, one on guitar and one SINGER - who are mid-song.

SINGER

"The girl that I loved she was
handsome,
I tried all I knew her to
please.
But I could not please her one
quarter so well
As the man on the flying
trapeze."

As the Singer starts on the chorus...

SINGER (CONT'D)

"He'd fly through the air with
the greatest of ease..."

Something catches Frank's eye. He sees a couple of passengers in front of the musicians singing along with the lyrics. Frank looks around. He notices other passengers doing the same as the Singer continues with his song.

SINGER (CONT'D)

"That daring young man on the
flying trapeze.
His actions are graceful, all
girls he could please..."

FRANK

Cut!

The Singer and all the other actors look confused. Frank quickly turns to Joe.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Say, Joe, I think I got a great idea. Let's get a couple more cameras in here.

JOE

The take is fine, Frank.

FRANK

It can be better.

JOE

What about December 23rd?

FRANK

I have heard enough about December 23rd! I still have to make a good picture, don't I? I'm an Oscar-nominated director for chrissake!

JOE

Tell that to Harry when I have to ask him for more cameras!

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, INTERIOR BUS SET - DAY

The set is a bustle of activity as crew members rush around trying to set up for last-minute changes.

Frank and Joe are standing next to a camera, deep in discussion, when Claudette marches up to them.

CLAUDETTE

Frank! Can you explain to me what on earth is going on here? I thought the musicians were here just for background and now we're setting up for new shots...

FRANK

Don't worry, it won't delay the schedule. You'll make Sun Valley just like you planned.

CLAUDETTE

I just don't see how this is going to work in the picture?

FRANK

Well, if it doesn't it can come right out without disturbing the story. Excuse me.

He walks off, leaving Claudette rather exasperated.

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, INTERIOR BUS SET - DAY

The bus set has been set up for another take. The cast and crew are all in their places, ready for Frank's word.

Frank addresses the bus passengers.

FRANK

Okay, so there's no rehearsal on this one. The musicians are gonna start their song, and then you guys join in. Whenever and however you like. And that includes our unhappy couple...

He turns to Clark and Claudette in their seats.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Just 'unfreeze' whenever you feel like it, okay?

He takes a step back.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Camera ready...Action!

The musicians start up the song again, the Singer picking up the chorus.

SINGER

"He'd fly through the air with
the greatest of ease
That daring young man on the
flying trapeze.
His actions are graceful, all
girls he could please
And my love he purloined away."

As he sings, the passengers begin to join in one by one.
When he finishes the verse, they erupt into applause.

Another musician, dressed as a SAILOR, stands up from his
seat.

SAILOR

I know that second verse
there...

Frank smiles, he sits back in his chair and watches as the
Sailor continues the song.

SAILOR (CONT'D)

"Now he'd smile from the bar on
the people below
And one night he smiled on my
love.
She blew him a kiss and she
hollered 'Bravo',
As he hung by his nose up
above."

As the Sailor moves into the chorus, the other passengers
join in again, even more animatedly than before.

Now Clark begins to sing-along, clearly enjoying himself.
Slowly, Claudette begins to mouth the words, faintly at
first, but then picking up and beginning to enjoy it, too.

SAILOR (CONT'D)

"He'd fly through the air with
the greatest of ease
That daring young man on the
flying trapeze.
His actions are graceful, all
girls he could please
And my love he stolen away."

As Claudette sings along, she looks out at the crew standing behind Frank and Joe, looking on at the scene. They are all smiling; some are miming the words to the song or swaying along with its rhythm.

Her gaze meets Frank's. He smiles at her as if to say "This isn't so bad." She smiles back, but enigmatically, not giving too much away.

INT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE, INTERIOR BUS SET - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: DECEMBER 23rd

The filming has been concluded and the cast and crew are standing around the set in small groups, chatting to one another.

Frank jumps up onto a crate in the middle of the room, shouting to get everyone's attention.

FRANK

Hey everyone!

They all turn to face him.

FRANK (CONT'D)

So it looks like we did it!

Applause sounds from across the room.

FRANK (CONT'D)

We're on time and on budget, which is nothing short of a Christmas miracle! So I just wanted to say thank you for making it happen!

More applause from the cast and crew.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Have a great Christmas everyone!

He steps off the crate as people begin to bustle and chatter amid themselves again.

In a corner of the room, Clark and Claudette, still in costume, are talking to each other as Claudette packs a few items into her handbag.

CLARK

This turned out to be quite a fun ride.

CLAUDETTE

Maybe for you. But what kind of a reception can a film like this really get in the end?

CLARK

What d'ya mean?

CLAUDETTE

We're in the middle of the Depression. People want fantasy. Escape. And here we are - riding on a bus. Looking rather seedy, too.

She looks up at him.

CLAUDETTE (CONT'D)

Although I really do like your moustache.

Frank approaches them.

FRANK

Ready for Sun Valley?

CLAUDETTE

My car's waiting outside.

FRANK

Not a moment to lose, huh?

CLAUDETTE

I'll send you the suit back by airmail.

FRANK

Keep it. As a souvenir.

CLAUDETTE
(deadpan)
It's too much. Really.

She begins to walk off. Clark runs after her.

CLARK
How about one last cup of
coffee?

Claudette doesn't turn around.

CLAUDETTE
Another time maybe.

As she exits, Clark turns back to Frank.

CLARK
What d'ya think of me keeping
the moustache?

EXT. COLUMBIA SOUNDSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Claudette walks out into the sunlight and gets into the car
that is waiting for her.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Claudette sits down in the back seat and leans back with a
huge sigh. She closes her eyes.

DRIVER
Long day?

CLAUDETTE
Long month. I have just finished
what may be the worst picture I
have ever done!

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank is standing in front of Harry's desk, exhausted.

HARRY

This is the worst picture you've ever done!

FRANK

You haven't even seen it yet!

HARRY

Exactly!

The phone rings. Harry answers.

HARRY (CONT'D)

(on the phone)

What? ... For god's sake, it's barely in the can! Tell them to wait!

He hangs up and gestures to the phone.

HARRY (CONT'D)

New York! Those bastards are on my ass to get this picture cut and out in cinemas.

FRANK

Harry, I need time!

HARRY

We don't have any. Listen, if you fail, I fail. And I don't fail!

The phone rings again. Harry picks up.

HARRY (CONT'D)

(on the phone)

What? ... Tell them they have to back down because I sure as hell ain't gonna!

He hangs up.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Your stupid title is even giving me problems!

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

MGM has a picture called *It Happened One Day* in the works. Now I have to fight them for it! Why the hell does everything happen to me?! Why are you still here? Get out of here and cut that picture!

INT. EDITING ROOM - DAY

In the dark editing room, Frank is sitting next to his editor, GENE HAVLICK (39).

GENE

So Frank, how d'ya wanna go about this?

FRANK

I would like to take my time, but Harry wants a picture yesterday, so let's just put together a rough cut and see how it looks, okay?

GENE

Fine by me.

He takes a strip of film and begins to start threading it through the equipment.

INT. COLUMBIA DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Frank, looking tired and haggard, walks into the dining room where Harry is seated at the head of the long table, with several execs around him. Evidently, Harry has just told a joke at which he and the execs are busy laughing - rather loudly.

Frank heads straight for the coffee table at the far end of the room.

HARRY

Frank! How's that bus picture of yours looking?

Frank pours himself a cup of coffee.

FRANK

It's getting there. And it has a name you know.

HARRY

Yeah. A name I have to fight for now! Sit down Frank, you look like shit.

Frank glances around the table looking for an empty seat. He picks one that's farthest away from Harry and sits down.

But the moment he makes contact with the chair, an electric shock rushes through his body causing it to shudder. Frank jumps up from the chair.

After a moment of silence, Harry bursts out into laughter.

FRANK

What the fuck was that?

HARRY

It's my new booby-trap.

FRANK

That thing electrocuted me!

HARRY

Well that's the trap, wise guy!

FRANK

Wise guy? I'm not the one installing electrified chairs in the dining room!

HARRY

Relax, it was a joke...

FRANK

A joke? This whole studio is a joke!

HARRY

Well that's too bad, 'cause no-one else will take you!

Frank stares at Harry for several moments. Then, all of a sudden, he grabs the chair by both arms, picks it up and slams it down on the floor, breaking one of its legs. He repeats the motion several times, breaking the chair more and more each time.

Everyone in the room stares at him in shock.

Finally satisfied, Frank puts down the chair.

FRANK

The second I win that Oscar I'm
cancelling my contract and
leaving this dump.

He marches to the door.

HARRY

The hell you will! Now you have
to stay and pay-off that goddamn
chair. And finish that bus
picture!

Frank turns back to Harry.

FRANK

Finish it? You want me to finish
it? Fine! I'll finish it!

He storms out. Harry turns to his execs.

HARRY

It's just the stress talking. I
think he's had too much coffee.

The execs nod in agreement.

INT. EDITING ROOM - NIGHT

Frank, Robert and Gene are sitting in the editing room.
Frank looks quietly furious.

GENE

So what did your agent say?

FRANK

He says I can't leave. If I break my contract with Columbia, no one else will take me. I believe his exact words were "you're not Greta Garbo".

ROBERT

Frank, be serious. No one else will take a gamble on you and you know it.

Frank looks a little stunned at Robert's frankness.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Harry's willing to give you more control over your pictures than you'd get anywhere else. You think Louis B. Mayer lets his directors sit in the editing room like this? They'll be lucky if they get a word in after the shoot is done.

Frank becomes very quiet. He doesn't respond, but simply turns to Gene.

FRANK

Hey Gene, how long's the film now?

GENE

Two hours...

FRANK

Great. Let's get it ready for a preview.

GENE

But I thought this was just the rough cut?

FRANK

Does the story make sense?

GENE

Sure...

FRANK

Then it's good enough for a
preview!

INT. MOVIE-HOUSE #2, AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: 28 JANUARY 1934

Frank and Robert are seated in the front row of the not yet darkened auditorium as audience members are filing in behind them.

Robert is happily munching on popcorn while Frank just sits in silence, staring up at the screen.

ROBERT

Why d'ya look so serious? I'm
sure they'll like it.

FRANK

I'm going over my acceptance
speech in my head.

ROBERT

The awards are nearly two months
away! Let's just watch this
movie.

The lights darken and a hush falls over the auditorium. The screen lights up with the Columbia logo.

Frank takes a deep breath.

The opening credits for *It Happened One Night* flash on the screen.

INT. MOVIE-HOUSE #2, LOBBY - NIGHT

The doors to the auditorium open and the audience begins to pour out. Among them are Frank and Robert.

ROBERT

See, they laughed.

FRANK

Yeah. It's a good start.

A man's arm touches Frank on the shoulder. Frank turns around to see PHIL BERG, a man who looks like he's permanently in a hurry.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Phil, glad you could make it!

(to Robert)

This is my agent, Phil Berg.

PHIL

I like the new picture boys.

FRANK

Well, it's no *Lady For a Day*.

ROBERT

He hasn't shut up about his Oscar nomination for weeks!

PHIL

Well, maybe it's not Oscar nominated, but it's still good. Say, that Gable was really impressive. This material's not his usual fare. D'ya know who's representing him?

FRANK

Yeah...

PHIL

Send me their details, will ya. I wanna talk to that fellow.

He begins to walk off into the exiting crowd.

PHIL (CONT'D)

See ya Frank. Good picture.

He is pulled in by the crowd toward the exit.

ROBERT

See, he liked it.

FRANK

Yeah, now let's see if our boss
does.

ROBERT

Conference?

FRANK

Conference.

INT. COLUMBIA CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

It's a familiar scene. Harry is seated at the head of the table, Frank and Robert on the other side, and the usual swarm of executives between them.

Harry, Frank and Robert face each other with expressionless faces, while the executives look anxious to tear into the film. Harry opens the floodgates.

HARRY

So?

EXEC #1

Much too long, Harry!

EXEC #2

No comedy can stand two hours!

EXEC #3

It's not *Ben Hur*...

EXEC #4

It's just a longer bus film.

EXEC #5

Theatres will lose one show...

EXEC #6

Know what that means for
revenue?

EXEC #7

Cut it down...

EXEC #8

Cut out half an hour and what
schmuck will know the
difference?

EXEC #9

Cut it down Harry!

Harry's demeanor remains unchanged. He looks up at Frank.
Frank is also perfectly composed.

HARRY

Whadda ya say, Frank?

FRANK

I'm sick of it, Harry. Ship it.

Harry considers Frank for a moment, then, banging his hand
on the table...

HARRY

Ship it!

There's a silence in the room for a moment.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Alright, now let's put some
money on how many Oscars *Lady*
For a Day will scoop.

Frank smiles.

INT. COLUMBIA CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

It's a little while later and the executives are piling out
of the room, Frank and Robert in the rear. As Frank is
about to exit, Harry calls out to him.

HARRY

Frank, I want a word...

Frank nods to Robert to go ahead as the last men exit the
room.

Harry and Frank are left on their own. Harry seems lost in
thought.

HARRY (CONT'D)

You know, it was almost ten years ago exactly that Columbia Pictures was officially born.

Frank is not sure what to make of the situation that's unfolding. He just listens.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Before that we were CBC - Cohn, Brandt, Cohn. My brother Jack was always the finance man in New York and I managed production down here...

The thought trails off.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Know what they used to call us? Corned Beef and Cabbage. So in January 1924 I bought out Joe Brandt's share of the company and became president. Changed the name to Columbia. Ten years ago...

He gets lost in his thoughts for a moment, and then recovers himself, turning to Frank.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Ten years later and we're releasing a picture with two big stars. Maybe it's good luck or a good omen or something?

FRANK

I hope so...

Harry snaps back to his normal self.

HARRY

Alright, what the hell you standing around for? Get out of here.

FRANK

Goodnight Harry.

Frank walks out of the room, taking one last look at Harry before he closes the door: sitting there, at the head of the empty table, contemplating all that he has achieved, he looks more human than he ever has before.

INT. FRANK'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alone in the large bedroom, Frank, wearing a tuxedo, is standing in front of a full-length mirror, evaluating his appearance.

He adjusts the collar slightly, runs his hand along the jacket to smooth out any creases.

Clearing his throat and straightening his posture, he begins a speech.

FRANK

Ladies and gentlemen, I am so grateful for this award...

He thinks for a moment.

FRANK (CONT'D)

This honor that you have bestowed upon me tonight. Bestowed. Bestowed...

He considers the word.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Lady For a Day would not have been possible without the help of...

The bedroom door opens and Lu, with her pregnant belly now very large, walks in. She's startled at the sight of Frank in a tux.

LU

Honey...what are you doing wearing that?

FRANK

It just arrived today. For the awards.

LU

It looks good.

He takes her in his arms and begins to slow-dance with her.

FRANK

Are you sure you won't change your mind about coming? I can buy you a beautiful new dress.

LU

So that my water can break in it? I think so close to the due date I'd rather be in bed with a book than in high heels with a back ache.

He kisses her in lieu of a response.

LU (CONT'D)

I actually came in to ask you about *It Happened One Night*. Didn't it open this week? You haven't said anything; how are the numbers?

FRANK

The numbers are good. Great!

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank is standing in front of Harry, who's sitting at his desk and back in old form - furious.

HARRY

These numbers are shit!

FRANK

But I thought you said the picture was doing well.

HARRY

That was in the first week. Then the numbers started dropping.

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

Radio City couldn't keep it on for a second week. And it's been like that in all the major cities. Goddamn bus picture!

FRANK

So what now?

HARRY

So now forget the A list theatres. We've sent it to the smaller towns. Two big stars and the thing's playing like a third-rate picture! Goddam waste of money!

FRANK

Good thing you didn't spend much on it then.

HARRY

Don't you start complaining about budgets again!

FRANK

Forget about *It Happened One Night*! The Oscars are around the corner, Harry. And after that, Columbia will have several little gold statues to its name. We'll be in the big leagues! My friend Will Rogers is hosting. I knew him when I was still a gag man at Sennett's. That's gotta be good luck.

INT. AMBASSADOR HOTEL, FIESTA ROOM - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: 16th March 1934

We're back to the film's opening scene again. The hotel room is packed full of tables and each table is packed full of glamorous people all dressed in their best furs, silks and bowties.

The excitement is palpable - people are smiling, leaning over to whisper things to one another, smiling once more. Some are genuine smiles, some nervous smiles.

In the center of the room is a small dance floor, leading up to a platform on which stands WILL ROGERS (55).

On a table in front of him, arranged in a neat row, are familiar-looking gold statuettes: Oscars.

Behind him, a banner reads: THE 6TH ANNUAL ACADEMY AWARDS.

At one of the tables is Frank, surrounded by some of his friends.

He looks at another table nearby where Robert is seated, surrounded by his own supporters. Robert is furiously puffing away at a cigarette. He looks over at Frank and they exchange nervous smiles.

Will Rogers clears his throat and gets the attention of the room. He holds up an envelope.

WILL ROGERS

And now the award for Best
Adaptation. Let me remind you of
the nominees, shall I: Robert
Riskin for *Lady For a Day*...

Everyone at Frank and Robert's tables erupt into applause.

WILL ROGERS (CONT'D)

...Victor Heerman and Sarah
Mason for *Little Women*, and Paul
Green and Sonya Levien for *State
Fair*. And the winner is...

He opens the envelope.

WILL ROGERS (CONT'D)

Victor Heerman and Sarah Mason
for *Little Women*!

As the victors stand up and, followed by a spotlight, move towards the front to accept their award, Frank bows his head.

Frank looks over at Robert, who shrugs his shoulders as if to say "Oh well" and puts out his cigarette.

At another table, Harry is watching Frank's reaction. Frank attempts a smile for the supporters at his table.

FRANK

Guess we'll have to settle for three.

He looks underneath the table cloth at the acceptance speech in his hands. His hands are shaking with nerves as he fiddles with the page. Someone at his table gets his attention again.

SUPPORTER #1

Frank, they're reading out the best actress award! You're gonna miss it.

Frank looks up at the platform.

WILL ROGERS

And the winner is...Katharine Hepburn for *Morning Glory*!

As the applause erupts for Katherine Hepburn, Frank's head sinks again. His supporters are starting to look concerned.

SUPPORTER #2

Don't worry. Your award's coming up soon. I'm sure you'll get it!

INT. AMBASSADOR HOTEL, FIESTA ROOM - NIGHT

A little time has passed. The acceptance speech in Frank's hands is now a crumpled mess. His face is frozen with anxiety.

WILL ROGERS

And now we move on to the award for Best Director. Nominated in this category are Frank Lloyd for *Cavalcade*, George Cukor for *Little Women*, and Frank Capra for *Lady For a Day*.

Will Rogers picks up one of the gold statuettes from the table. The room becomes silent as all faces turn to him.

WILL ROGERS (CONT'D)

And now, for the best director
of the year! Envelope please.

And assistant quickly inserts an envelope into Will Rogers' hand. He opens it, smiles.

WILL ROGERS (CONT'D)

Well, well, well, what do you
know! I've watched this young
man for a long time. Saw him
come up from the bottom, and I
mean the bottom. It couldn't
happen to a nicer guy. Come up
and get it...

Frank's face is almost bursting now with the anticipation of waiting for the name.

WILL ROGERS (CONT'D)

Come up and get it, Frank!

Frank's face lights up. He gets up from the chair and begins to fumble his way through the tables to get to the open dance floor, making excuses as he bumps into other people's chairs and tables.

Suddenly, he notices that the spotlight that should be following him is in fact following someone across the room. He stops, watches the spotlight.

In its light, another man bounces onto the stage and takes the statue from Will Rogers. It's FRANK LLOYD.

WILL ROGERS (CONT'D)

Frank Lloyd everyone...

As the audience applauds, Frank stands, wedged between two tables, numb with disappointment. A guest at a nearby table gets his attention with a whispered shout.

GUEST

Hey, pal, sit down will 'ya. I
can't see.

As embarrassment begins to kick in, Frank makes his way back to his table, fumbling even more on the way back.

As he slumps down into his chair, his friends looking at him with sympathetic expressions of regret, his own face becomes transfixed with agonizing disenchantment.

INT. AMBASSADOR HOTEL, LOBBY - NIGHT

The room is filled with jubilant guests immersed in conversation, congratulations and compliments all round.

Somewhere in a corner, Robert and Frank are commiserating. Robert tries to remain upbeat, but Frank is truly depressed.

ROBERT

So I guess this isn't the year
that Columbia gets it first
Oscar.

FRANK

Not a single award. Can you
believe that?

Harry comes up to them, his tough façade unchanged by the loss.

HARRY

So *Cavalcade* is the best picture
of the year, huh?

He looks at Frank, who doesn't look up at him.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Oh, don't take it so personal. I
told you they only vote for arty
junk!

Frank nods.

FRANK

Excuse me, I'm gonna get a
drink.

He walks past Harry and Robert and off into the happy crowd, pressing through to the bar.

INT. FRANK'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lu enters the bedroom to find Frank, sitting on the floor in front of the bed, a bottle of brandy beside him. He looks completely depressed.

She sits down on the edge of the bed.

There is a long silence.

LU
It's still a great picture.

FRANK
For Columbia.

LU
Frank...

FRANK
That's what everyone thinks,
isn't it? Why can't I say it?

LU
It's just an award.

FRANK
So they tell me. But somehow I
don't think everyone would say
that if I won.

A long pause.

FRANK (CONT'D)
I'm thirty seven years old, Lu.
I know it's just an award. But
it would be nice to have
something that says I've done...
(he searches for the
word)
...something great with my life.

Lu puts her arms around Frank's shoulders.

Another silence.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - DAY

Robert is sitting in one of the camping chairs, eating an apple, silently watching Frank take down the reviews for *Lady For a Day* from the wall, one by one.

After watching for a few more moments, Robert speaks up.

ROBERT

This may be the saddest thing
I've ever seen.

Frank doesn't say a word. He continues with his task.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

It's just an award! No one died.

Frank bristles at the phrase.

FRANK

It's not just an award - it's a
symbol. It's something that says
"You've made it".

He continues to take down the reviews. Robert shakes his head and continues to eat his apple.

The door flings open and Sally rushes in, out of breath.

SALLY

Mr. Capra! They've called from
the hospital. Your wife is in
labor!

Frank immediately drops the review in his hand.

FRANK

Lu's having the baby?

Sally nods. Frank turns to Robert.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Lu's having the baby! I have to
go! I'm having a baby!

He grabs his coat and hat and rushes out of the door.

Robert turns to the out-of-breath Sally.

ROBERT

Good news couldn't come at a better time! But next time, just use the phone darling.

INT. COLUMBIA HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Frank is running down the hall when Harry comes walking in the opposite direction.

HARRY

Where the hell do you think you're going? You can't wallow forever! Get back to work.

FRANK

Lu's having a baby! I'm off to the hospital.

Harry smiles.

HARRY

A baby? Fifty bucks says it's a girl!

FRANK

Deal!

He runs off again.

INT. HOSPITAL DELIVERY ROOM - DAY

A doctor holds up a red, screaming, newly born baby.

DOCTOR

It's a boy!

Frank, standing beside Lu's bed, smiles with absolute joy. Lu smiles too.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Harry is reading some papers at his desk when the intercom sounds.

STELLA (V.O.)
Mr. Cohn, Frank Capra to see
you.

HARRY
Send him in.

The buzzer on the door sounds. Frank enters, beaming.

HARRY (CONT'D)
So, you a father?

FRANK
Yes I am! Lu gave birth to a
baby boy. They're both doing
great.

HARRY
A boy, huh. What d'ya name him?

FRANK
Frank Junior.

HARRY
Oh God! You think the world can
handle another Frank Capra?

FRANK
You owe me fifty bucks. For our
bet.

HARRY
Well, I think I'll have plenty
of dough to cover that.

He throws the document he was reading across the table to Frank.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Read this.

Frank picks up the pages.

FRANK

What's this?

HARRY

The latest numbers for *It Happened One Night!*

Frank looks up at him, confused.

FRANK

I don't understand. You said it wasn't doing well.

HARRY

It wasn't! It was a bust in all the major cities, but then... somethin' happened. We sent it to the smaller towns and the numbers started picking up.

FRANK

Did you start promoting it differently?

HARRY

Promoting it? I was ready to bury it! But the goddamn thing might turn out to be a hit!

Frank looks down at the figures, then back up at Harry, still hesitant to believe what he is saying.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank is leaning on his desk, looking at the remaining reviews on his wall. Robert is sitting at the desk, feet up.

ROBERT

So Harry thinks it's a hit?

FRANK

Yeah, but I don't see how that's possible. There was all this hoopla around *Lady For a Day*...

The door opens and Sally walks in, holding a stack of envelopes.

SALLY

Mr. Capra, I have some letters for you.

He takes the envelopes from her.

ROBERT

Do any of them start with "Dear Mr. Capra, you have been an awful schmuck! Forget the Academy Awards." That's the one I'd like to read.

Frank takes the letters from Sally, opens one of the envelopes and glances over it.

FRANK

It's from a man in Seattle. It's about *It Happened One Night*. He says he's seen the picture six times.

ROBERT

Six times! Was nothing else playing that week?

FRANK

Well, that's just it. Listen to this: "Every week I take my family to see a picture. When your picture had just opened we voted and decided to go see it. The next week, when it came to a vote, we all decided to go back for second time. The same thing happened the third week, and the fourth. Now we have all seen your picture six times."

(to Robert)

Six times. Do you think Harry could be right? Do you think we have a hit on our hands?

ROBERT

You're the one who always says
"read what the gods write, but
always listen to the mortals."
Well, I think the mortals have
spoken.

Frank looks back down at the letter. A smile begins to form on his face.

MONTAGE - IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT BECOMES A HIT

-- EXT. THEATRE #1 - DAY -- A marquee proclaims that it *It Happened One Night* is showing. COUPLE #1 walk into the theatre.

-- INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY -- Harry, sitting at his desk, opens a folder entitled "MAY PROFITS". Inside, a graph shows an increase in takings from the previous month.

-- INT. THEATRE #2 - DAY -- A SCRAWNY MAN, seated in a darkened auditorium, watches Clark Gable in a scene from *It Happened One Night*. The man smiles as Clark Gable tells Claudette Colbert to "shut up".

-- INT. DEPARTMENT STORE #1 - DAY -- The Scrawny Man tries on a suit just like Gable's.

-- EXT. DEPARTMENT STORE #1 - DAY -- The Scrawny Man walks out of the department store, dressed to look like Clark Gable.

-- EXT. DEPARTMENT STORE #2 - DAY -- A TALL MAN walks past another department store and in the window sees a mannequin dressed like Gable. He goes inside.

-- EXT. DEPARTMENT STORE #2 - DAY -- The tall man exits the store dressed in the displayed outfit.

-- EXT. DEPARTMENT STORE #3 - DAY -- MAN #3 walks out of the store, dressed like Gable.

-- EXT. DEPARTMENT STORE #4 - DAY -- MAN #4 walks out of the store, dressed like Gable.

-- INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY -- Harry opens a folder entitled "JUNE PROFITS". Inside, the graph shows another increase in takings.

-- EXT. THEATRE #1 - DAY -- Couple #1 walk up to the theatre again, this time taking another couple, COUPLE #2, with them.

-- INT. DINER - DAY -- At the bar a CHUBBY MAN turns to his DATE and tells her to "shut up". She turns to him and says: "Who do you think you are, Clark Gable?"

-- EXT. THEATRE #1 - DAY -- Couple #2 are taking COUPLE #3 to see *It Happened One Night*.

-- INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY -- Harry opens a folder entitled "JULY PROFITS". Inside, the graph shows yet another increase in takings.

-- INT. THEATRE #1 - DAY -- Couple #3 are sitting in a darkened auditorium, watching *It Happened One Night*, laughing. On one side of them is COUPLE #4 and on the other COUPLE #5.

-- INT. DEPARTMENT STORE #5 - DAY -- The MANAGER is on the phone, pleading: "You gotta put me through to Mr. Cohn! Sales of undershirts have gone down by 75% in the last six months and I have a feeling his picture has something to do with it. People reckon that if Clark Gable doesn't wear one, why should they?" He turns to look behind him: MAN #5 is trying on a Gable-style hat in front of a mirror. The manager sighs.

-- INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY -- Harry opens a folder entitled "AUGUST PROFITS".

-- INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY -- Harry opens a folder entitled "SEPTEMBER PROFITS".

-- INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY -- Harry opens a folder entitled "OCTOBER PROFITS".

END MONTAGE

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Harry is at his desk, a folder entitled "NOVEMBER PROFITS" lying in front of him.

His attention, however, is fixed on three men from the Art Department standing in front of him with mounted pictures of the current Columbia logo, as well as some photographs of actresses modeling various new looks for the Columbia torch lady.

Harry does not look impressed.

HARRY

Is this all you got?

ART DEPARTMENT MAN

Harry, it's late, we've been at this for hours...

HARRY

It's not good enough! I want class, you hear me. I want our logo to make that MGM lion look like a pussycat!

The phone rings. Harry picks up, annoyed.

HARRY (CONT'D)

(on the phone)

What?!

(beat)

When?...What hospital?

INT. ROBERT'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Robert has fallen asleep on his bed with a yellow legal-pad and pen lying next to him. The phone rings and startles him awake. He scrambles to pick up.

ROBERT

(on the phone)

Hello?...Is he okay?...I'll be right over.

He jumps out of bed.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Lu is pacing the waiting room floor, looking tired and panicked.

Robert comes rushing down the corridor to meet her. Just behind him, Harry exits out of an elevator and walks over to join them.

Robert hugs Lu.

ROBERT

What happened?

LU

He hasn't been feeling well for a while. At first we didn't think much of it...

HARRY

Is it an ulcer? Lots of people at Columbia get ulcers.

LU

They think it's his appendix. They said it was best to operate immediately. He's in there now.

HARRY

Don't worry. I'll make sure he gets all the best doctors!

Harry rushes over to the nurse's desk. Lu turns to Robert.

LU

Everything was going so well for him... My first husband died because of his appendix!

Robert hugs her again.

ROBERT

He'll be fine.

Over at the nurse's station, Harry is mid-complaint to an unsympathetic and stern-looking NURSE.

HARRY

That's the doctor I want for my friend! Are you deaf?!

NURSE

That doctor is a heart surgeon. Mr. Capra is having an appendectomy!

HARRY

Jesus Christ, you call this service?!

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

A little while later, Lu, Robert and Harry are all sitting in the waiting room in silence.

A DOCTOR approaches them.

DOCTOR

Mrs. Capra?

LU

Yes?

DOCTOR

Your husband has come out of surgery. Everything went really well. He will probably need to spend a week in the hospital, so we can monitor him, and then we will be able to discharge him and send him home to recover.

Lu breathes out a sigh of relief. She smiles at Robert.

Harry stands up - it's back to business.

HARRY

Alright Riskin, let's get back to work!

ROBERT

Harry, it's two in the morning!

Harry glances at his watch.

HARRY

Never too early!

(to Lu)

He's a tough son-of-bitch! He'll
be fine.

He walks off.

INT. COLUMBIA FOYER - DAY

Robert is standing in front of Sally's desk with a pile of
letters in his arms.

ROBERT

What am I supposed to do with
them?

SALLY

I dunno. Read them.

ROBERT

They're addressed to Frank.

SALLY

They're from fans. Of your
picture. They've been building
up since Frank's been away...

The phone rings. Sally picks up.

SALLY (CONT'D)

(on the phone)

Hello?...No, he's right here in
front of me. Well, what's so
urgent?...I see. I'll tell him.

She puts down the phone and gives Robert a solemn look.

SALLY (CONT'D)

You're wanted back at the
hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

Robert is standing at the nurse's station, arguing with the same Nurse.

ROBERT

So get me someone who knows what's going on!

NURSE

Please calm down sir.

ROBERT

My friend was getting better and now I hear that's he's had a second surgery! You stay fucking calm lady. I reserve the right to panic.

Harry rushes round the corner to join them.

HARRY

What's going on? What happened?

ROBERT

I dunno! She won't tell me.

Harry gives her a steely gaze.

HARRY

Yeah, that one's a piece of work!

(to the Nurse)

We wanna see Frank Capra!

NURSE

Only family are allowed to see the patient at this time.

HARRY

Lady, I am his producer. That's more important than family!

The Nurse just gives him a cold look.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Listen, we are gonna sit on that couch over there until I know what's going on! Understand?

NURSE

Do what you like.

Harry and Robert walk over to the couch and sit down, Harry still staring down the Nurse.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

Harry and Robert are still sitting on the couch. Harry looks over at the nurse's station, where the Nurse is conversing with a doctor.

The doctor hands her a file and walks away. The Nurse glances over at Harry.

NURSE

(dryly)

Your friend had an infection. The operation has cleared it up. He's in recovery now. Visiting hours aren't till tomorrow.

Harry stands up and walks over to the nurse.

HARRY

You will be hearing from me every five minutes until that man is doing cartwheels, understand?

NURSE

I can't wait.

Harry walks off, giving the Nurse a final, warning glance.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

The Nurse is sitting at her station, reading a magazine. The cover boasts a headline proclaiming that "IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT SETS NEW FASHION TRENDS".

Harry walks up to her.

HARRY

Jesus, does no one else work here?

NURSE

Can I help you?

HARRY

I'm here to see Frank Capra.

NURSE

Not visiting hours yet.

HARRY

This is an emergency.

NURSE

This is a hospital. We have different definitions of what an emergency is.

Harry scowls at her and walks over to Robert, who is sitting on the couch.

Behind him, a Christmas tree has been put up. Robert is wearing a Santa's hat and writing notes on his yellow legal pad.

HARRY

She's a ray of sunshine.

ROBERT

It's been like this for two weeks. I sent Lu home to rest.

HARRY

Listen, I need to get past that bitch to see Frank.

ROBERT

Is everything okay?

HARRY

Everything is great. I've got news.

ROBERT

What is it?

HARRY

I gotta tell Frank first. Can
you distract her?

Robert looks at Harry for a moment, but can't figure him
out. He nods.

Robert gets up and walks up to the Nurse. She's still
reading her magazine.

ROBERT

(gesturing at the
magazine)

I'm from Hollywood, too, you
know.

She doesn't look up.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I wrote *It Happened One Night*.

She gives him a dismissive glance. He leans onto the
counter.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Have you ever considered being
in pictures?

She looks at him: skeptical, but interested.

As Robert continues to chat to her, Harry takes the
opportunity to slip through the double-doors into the ward.

INT. FRANK'S HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Harry quietly slips into the room where Frank, looking pale
and weak, is lying in bed.

HARRY

Hey, dago?

Frank opens his eyes and tries to focus them on Harry.

FRANK

Harry?

HARRY

Well I ain't Santa Claus.

FRANK

What are you doing here?

HARRY

Checking up on you. I need to make sure you're not just faking all this to get out of work.

Frank manages a smile.

HARRY (CONT'D)

You look like shit.

FRANK

I feel like shit.

HARRY

Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you, but all this dying business has to end now.

(he pauses)

I can't have one of my directors showing up to the Academy Awards looking like a bum.

Frank looks up at him with a question in his eyes.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Now, I don't want you to burst your stitches or anything like that, but your stupid bus picture has just been nominated for five Oscars.

Frank tries to sit up in shock.

FRANK

Five?!

He lies back down in pain.

HARRY

What did I just tell ya!

FRANK

Which five?

HARRY

Best script, best actor, best actress, best picture and ... best director.

FRANK

The big five?

HARRY

Would appear so.

FRANK

It Happened One Night is nominated for all five major Academy Awards?

HARRY

Who would have thought, huh?

Frank is silenced by his disbelief.

HARRY (CONT'D)

You're never gonna win, of course. Because they only...

FRANK

...only vote for that arty junk.

Frank smiles.

HARRY

Right. But I still wanna see you at those awards. You got a couple months, just don't fucking relapse into anything again!

Frank smiles again. He understands that this is Harry's way of saying that he cares.

The door opens and Robert comes in.

ROBERT

Harry, I think you may have to give Miss Sunshine out there a part in your next picture.

Harry gives Robert an angry glance and straightens himself out - it's back to old form.

HARRY

(to Frank)

Listen, will you cut all this bullshit and get better already. Do you know how much money Columbia is losing with you in this goddamn hospital? And this one...

(he nods to Robert)

...always by your side. Get back to work!

He heads for the door, but turns back to Frank.

HARRY (CONT'D)

I know some good rabbis if you're interested.

He exits. Robert turns to Frank.

ROBERT

I thought you were Catholic?

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Harry walks out of the ward. For a brief moment a faint smile passes over his face.

Then he walks past the Nurse and the smile turns to a scowl, which she reciprocates.

EXT. BILTMORE HOTEL - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: 27 February 1935

Thousands of fans are crowding the street around the brightly illuminated hotel, watching the stars make their entrance.

The flashes of reporters' cameras add to the already remarkable illumination.

Currently making his way into the hotel is Clark Gable, with his wife, Ria, on his arm. Female fans are shouting their adulations at him as he goes inside.

INT. BILTMORE HOTEL, LOBBY - NIGHT

Thousands more people are crammed into the lobby, all dressed in glamorous outfits, all mingling.

Clark spots Lu and Frank - still looking pale and rather weak from his illness - in the crowd and makes his way towards them.

CLARK

Frank! I'm glad you could make it! I heard you've been sick. Feelin' better?

FRANK

Sure. I'll feel even better if we win!

CLARK

Well, let's go and find out!

They start to walk towards the entrance to the ballroom.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Where's Riskin?

FRANK

He's not coming. He's supporting the Screenwriters Guild. They're not really on good terms with the Academy at the moment.

CLARK

Well let's hope he doesn't win then! That will be very awkward.

INT. BILTMORE HOTEL, BALLROOM - NIGHT

About one thousand guests are now seated at their tables, all eyes on the podium where IRVIN S. COBB (59) is talking.

IRVIN S. COBB

And now, I think it's about time
that we move on to the awards
section of the evening.

Applause from the crowd. Amid them, seated at a table near the front, is Frank, Lu and a group of their friends.

Behind their table, with his back to Frank, is Harry, surrounded by his table of supporters. Harry turns to Frank.

HARRY

I'm gonna kill Riskin!

FRANK

Relax, we haven't even won
anything yet.

In the background, Irvin is introducing the first award.

IRVIN S. COBB

Tonight I am honored to
introduce a new Award - for best
Original Song.

HARRY

All this union stuff is driving
me nuts!

FRANK

Harry...

HARRY

If he wins, I'm gonna fire that
son of bitch for not showing up!

Their conversation is interrupted by a huge wave of applause as the two winners for the Best Song category go up to accept their award.

Harry claps unenthusiastically.

INT. BILTMORE HOTEL, BALLROOM - NIGHT

IRVIN S. COBB
And now for the other writing
category - Best Adaptation. Our
nominees tonight are Robert
Riskin for *It Happened One
Night*, Frances Goodrich and
Albert Hackett for *The Thin Man*
and Ben Hecht for *Viva Villa!*

As he reads out the names, Harry gives Frank an angry
glare. Frank just shakes it off.

IRVIN S. COBB (CONT'D)
(opening the
envelope)
And the winner is...Robert
Riskin, *It Happened One Night!*

Frank and his table erupt into applause.

IRVIN S. COBB (CONT'D)
I believe Mr. Riskin is not with
us tonight...

HARRY
(to himself)
Son-of-a-bitch.

Frank turns to him.

FRANK
I think this is a good start to
the night!

INT. BILTMORE HOTEL, BALLROOM - NIGHT

Irvin is holding out his hand as an envelope gets handed to
him.

IRVIN S. COBB
So, the best actress award goes
to...

He opens the envelope.

IRVIN S. COBB (CONT'D)
Miss Claudette Colbert! *It
Happened One Night!*

Applause erupts from the room, including Frank and Harry's tables. Everyone looks around to find Claudette, but she's nowhere to be seen.

Harry turns to Frank.

HARRY
Where the fuck is she?

INT. BILTMORE HOTEL, SIDE ENTRANCE TO BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

A PUBLICIST is watching the proceedings, looking rather displeased. He turns to his PA.

PUBLICIST
Where is she?

PA
Union Station. She's catching a train to New York.

PUBLICIST
Get me Union Station on the phone! Now! Tell them they have to get her off that train!

The PA runs off.

INT. BILTMORE HOTEL, BALLROOM - CONTINUOUS

IRVIN S. COBB
Where are all the *It Happened One Night* folks tonight?

Harry scowls.

IRVIN S. COBB (CONT'D)
Alright, well let's move on to the best actor award, shall we? Frank Morgan, William Powell and Clark Gable - are you all here?

A few cheers erupt from the audience, including ones from Clark, sitting at his table.

IRVIN S. COBB (CONT'D)

That's a good start! Envelope please.

He's handed the envelope. As he opens it, a smile appears on his face.

IRVIN S. COBB (CONT'D)

Well, you might not believe it, but the winner is Clark Gable for *It Happened One Night*!

Clark, in shock, makes his way up to the podium.

Taking his Oscar from Irvin, he stands in front of the microphone to face the audience, a newsreel camera just in front of him capturing the moment.

CLARK

I honestly never expected to win one of these. There are too many good actors in this business! But I feel as happy as a kid and a little foolish they picked me...

He composes himself a bit and continues his speech.

CLARK (CONT'D)

I want to express my thanks and sincere gratitude to Mr. Frank Capra, the director of *It Happened One Night*, and Miss Claudette Colbert, who was gracious enough to co-star with me in that same picture. Thank you.

Applause for Clark breaks out again as he poses for a photograph with his Oscar.

At his table, Frank is jubilantly applauding, too.

EXT. UNION STATION - NIGHT

The Publicist is running through the station to reach Claudette who is standing, waiting rather impatiently next to the door to her train carriage. She is dressed in a tan travelling suit.

He reaches her, out of breath.

PUBLICIST

Miss Colbert, thank God...

CLAUDETTE

What is the meaning of all this?

PUBLICIST

You won! You won the Academy Award. Don't you at least want to accept it?

CLAUDETTE

I told your man on the phone, I simply have no time. My train is about to leave.

PUBLICIST

We'll hold the train!

CLAUDETTE

Hold the train?

PUBLICIST

Please, Miss Colbert...this is like the Nobel Prize of motion pictures!

CLAUDETTE

I'm not even properly dressed for the occasion...

PUBLICIST

I've got a private car here; no one will even see you!

She sighs, reluctantly accepting the offer.

INT. BILTMORE HOTEL, BALLROOM - NIGHT

Under the table cloth, Frank is tightly holding Lu's hand.

IRVIN S. COBB

Things are getting serious now!
Directors, are you ready?
Envelope please.

Irvin is handed an envelope. As he opens it, Frank takes a deep breath.

IRVIN S. COBB (CONT'D)

You know, you Columbia folks are
ruining the suspense. The winner
is Frank Capra. I'm sure you all
know the title of the picture by
now!

Applause erupts. It takes Frank a moment to process what has happened.

With Lu and Harry urging him on, he makes his way to the podium.

He takes the Oscar from Irvin, shaking his hand and smiling, as if in a dream. He turns to the audience, happy but serious in delivering his thanks.

FRANK

I don't know what to say! Thank
you! Thank you Academy and thank
you to all the people who helped
me make this picture. None of us
saw this coming!

EXT. LOS ANGELES STREET - NIGHT

A police motorcycle is speeding through the street. Behind it is a limousine, rushing Claudette to the ceremony.

INT. BILTMORE HOTEL, BALLROOM - NIGHT

Everyone is in their seats, watching Irvin on stage in anticipation as he opens another envelope in his hand.

He looks up, smiles. He waits for a moment.

IRVIN S. COBB

Well, I guess I can't keep you waiting much longer. The Academy Award for Outstanding Production during the year of 1934 goes to...

He looks around the room.

IRVIN S. COBB (CONT'D)

I wonder if you already know?
It's something that...

He gestures with his hands, like a conductor of an orchestra, asking the audience to join in.

AUDIENCE

Happened One Night!

IRVIN S. COBB

You guessed it!

Frank jumps up from his table with sheer glee. Harry does the same behind him. Frank embraces Harry, kissing him on the cheek.

Harry makes his way to the podium through the applause. Receiving the Oscar, he turns to the microphone.

HARRY

I want to thank Frank Capra.

Frank smiles.

HARRY (CONT'D)

(just a little
reluctantly)

And I want to thank Robert Riskin. I was just an innocent bystander!

The audience laughs at the joke, still applauding.

EXT. SIDE STREET BEHIND THE BILTMORE HOTEL - NIGHT

The police escort and limo drive up to the side entrance to the hotel. The Publicist gets out first, then Claudette. He ushers her inside.

INT. BILTMORE HOTEL, BALLROOM - NIGHT

Irvin is standing in front of the podium. Next to him is a little girl, 6-year old SHIRLEY TEMPLE. He is handing her a miniature Oscar.

IRVIN S. COBB

And what better way to end the night than to present Miss Shirley Temple with this honorary Oscar for her outstanding contribution to screen entertainment!

As the crowd applauds, an assistant rushes up to Irvin and whispers something in his ear. Irvin nods.

IRVIN S. COBB (CONT'D)

Well, it looks like Miss Colbert has made it after all to receive her award.

In the back of the room, Claudette has just entered.

IRVIN S. COBB (CONT'D)

Miss Claudette Colbert everybody!

Through the applause, Claudette makes her way to the front of the room.

Irvin grabs her Oscar and hands it to Shirley Temple.

IRVIN S. COBB (CONT'D)

Why don't you do the honors?

As assistant rushes out with a chair and helps Shirley get onto it. She does so just in time to hand Claudette, who has made her way through the room, her award.

Claudette turns to face the audience. As she sees the sea of faces, all smiling and applauding her, she becomes overwhelmed with emotion.

CLAUDETTE

I feel so silly; I'm afraid I'm going to cry.

She tries to compose herself.

CLAUDETTE (CONT'D)

Thank you. Thank you everyone!

She rushes off towards the nearest exit. But as she is about to leave, she turns and runs back to podium, quickly ducking behind the microphone.

CLAUDETTE (CONT'D)

I owe Frank Capra for this.

Somewhere in the audience, she finds Frank. Their eyes meet. She smiles a smile just for him. He smiles back. She waves her Oscar and runs off again. Frank continues smiling.

INT. BILTMORE HOTEL, LOBBY - NIGHT

The room is once again filled with people in the midst of jubilant celebrations and congratulations.

Somewhere in the crowd, Clark is talking to Phil Berg.

PHIL

I heard that your agent got you three grand a week on your last contract. I think after tonight, you're worth more. And I can get it for you!

CLARK

Well, what are you waiting for?

In another part of the room, an ecstatic Frank is talking to Lu. Clark walks up to them.

CLARK

Phil Berg just offered to represent me. Thinks I'm worth more than just three grand a week. I didn't tell him I'm only earning two!

FRANK

I think he knows. That's just his strategy.

CLARK

Well it worked! I'm still gonna wear the same sized hat, though!

FRANK

Don't you mean same sized crown? You're on your way to becoming King of Hollywood, remember.

Clark brushes off the comment.

CLARK

Ah! I am gonna keep the moustache though!

FRANK

It suits you!

CLARK

So what now? You gonna join us at MGM Mr. Capra, now that you're an Oscar winner and all?

FRANK

Maybe I'll stick to Poverty Row for now. Filmmaking by way of committee isn't really my style. No offense.

CLARK

None taken. I'm never on the committee!

Frank raises a glass.

FRANK
Here's to Hollywood.

Clark raises his.

CLARK
No place quite like it.

A hand reaches from behind Frank and taps him on the shoulder. Frank turns around. And who is standing there but...

JOHN FORD (41), cutting a rather imposing figure at six feet tall, wearing darkened glasses.

FRANK
Mr. Ford!

JOHN
Well done on the picture, Capra.

FRANK
Thanks...

JOHN
I saw it. Pretty funny stuff.

Frank is clearly extremely flattered. John looks around, a little uneasy.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Just thought I'd say hello on my way out. Don't really like all these ceremonies, you know.

As John walks away, Frank turns back to Clark.

FRANK
Jesus, I can't believe John Ford just told me he liked my movie.

He takes a moment to process this.

FRANK (CONT'D)
His autograph is worth twenty-five dollars you know.

CLARK

Really? How much do you think mine would go for?

They begin to walk off.

FRANK

After tonight, Mr. Gable, who knows?! But I reckon mine must be up to at least two dollars fifty.

They disappear into the crowd.

INT. COLUMBIA HALLWAY - DAY

Frank and Robert are standing outside Robert's office, laughing.

FRANK

If you let Harry see that you're using that thing as a doorstopper, he'll kill you.

Robert looks down to the foot of his door, where his Oscar is propping it open.

ROBERT

At least it's practical.

Frank shakes his head.

FRANK

Doesn't it mean anything to you?

ROBERT

Let's focus on what's important. Like the fact that because of the profits for *It Happened One Night*, Columbia is no longer rationing paper clips!

Suddenly, a loud voice is heard down the hall. It's Harry.

HARRY (O.S.)
Goddamn it! Who the fuck left
the fucking lights on in here!

Frank and Robert watch as Harry approaches them.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Jesus, do you two not work
anymore? Get your ass down to my
office. I have something to show
you.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Frank, Robert and Harry are standing side by side in front
of Harry's desk, staring at something behind it.

HARRY
I had it installed yesterday.

They continue to look on.

The object of their gaze is a glass cabinet behind Harry's
desk. In it, right in the center, illuminated by a small
spotlight, is a gold statuette: Columbia's Oscar for Best
Picture.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Columbia's first Oscar!

ROBERT
Well boys, I think Poverty Row
has just entered the big
leagues!

HARRY
And goddamn it it's about time!

FRANK
Couldn't say it better myself.

The three continue to stare at the Oscar.

One by one, they begin to smile to themselves at what they
have achieved.

SUPERIMPOSE ON FRANK: Frank Capra would go on to make some of the most beloved American classics, including *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *It's a Wonderful Life*. For his work he would receive two more Academy Awards for Best Director. His partnership with Columbia Studios lasted until 1939.

SUPERIMPOSE ON ROBERT: Robert Riskin continued the "Capriskin" partnership for another six years, collaborating with Frank on five films after *It Happened One Night* and receiving three more Oscar nominations.

SUPERIMPOSE ON HARRY: Harry Cohn would remain President of Columbia Pictures until the day he died. Under his leadership, Columbia graduated from its Poverty Row beginnings to becoming one of the major Hollywood studios. His funeral was held at Soundstage 12 at Columbia Studios.

SUPERIMPOSE ON THE OSCAR CABINET: Harry Cohn died 23 years to the day after the Academy Awards ceremony in which Columbia received its first Oscar. At the time of his death, the cabinet would house five more Oscars for Best Picture. During Harry's reign, Columbia films won a total of 52 Academy Awards.

It would take another 41 years for a film to win all of the "Big Five" Academy Awards. To date, only three films have achieved the feat.

It Happened One Night will always be the first.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END

THE FOUR DEGREES OF NARRATIVE SEPARATION:

EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION THROUGH BIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS

To write critically about any given text is very different to writing critically about the *process* of that text's creation. Given that this essay will deal closely with representations of the self, perhaps it is not out of place for me to open with an autobiographical confession: while I greatly enjoy the former, relishing opportunities to analyse both literary and filmic texts, I have no such fond feelings for the latter, especially when the situation calls for a critical analysis of my own writing process. The task seems to intrude on a sacred space that I imagine most writers value greatly, a time when what will eventually become the 'finished product' is still in formation, is still incomplete. Due to the very nature of the process, it is a time when everything is still in flux, when ideas are still seeking their final form. Therefore, subjecting this tenuous process to critical examination seems somewhat like a betrayal of its nature, a desire to fix in meaning that which has no such absolute meaning. As a result, I have strategically avoided such undertakings in the past as much as possible. It then comes as a surprise to me that after completing the screenplay for *Then It Happened*, I have the desire to do just that. The reason, I believe, is revealing. It is not the aforementioned final product (the screenplay) that has inspired the ideas that will be discussed in this essay, but the process of creating it, for it is the process that brought me into contact with the three incarnations of the biographical narrative that will be discussed below: autobiography, biography and the biopic (in the form of both the screenplay and the final film).

If I have done my job as a storyteller relatively well, then – hopefully – upon reading the screenplay, the reader will receive it as one coherent narrative, with a unity of purpose and style. They will not see it as a collage, composed out of several key sources, namely, Frank Capra's autobiography *The Name Above the Title*, Joseph McBride's biography of Capra, *The Catastrophe of Success*, as well as six other biographies of the key players: Harry Cohn, Robert Riskin, Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert. The reader might – again, hopefully – glean the sense that a significant amount of research has gone into the screenplay, and from this might infer that multiple sources have been used, but the *story* should not feel in any way disjointed or

fragmented. The purpose of this essay, then, will be precisely to take this story apart and to reveal the collage. In this critical analysis of my writing process, I would like to reverse that very process: instead of stitching together the information gathered through my research, attempting to make the connections invisible, I will magnify those very seams and examine the act of their creation. For I believe that these seams can inform the way that we think about the processes of writing, reading, adaptation as well as the intimate connections between the three, ultimately revealing the importance of narrative in our lives.

I will begin, in sections one and two, by examining the forms of autobiography and biography in their own right as well as in their relationships to one another. These sections of the essay will be used to establish a foundation on which the discussion of key questions may be based – questions about subjectivity, interpretation, adaptation and fidelity. Then, in sections three and four, I will look more closely at my own writing process and its intersection with the autobiographical and biographical writings of others. Here I will examine the biopic genre and connect it with reflections on theories of adaptation, furthering this discussion by exploring alternate ways in which both my screenplay, as well as biopics in general, may be read in relation to the contested issue of fidelity.

1. AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Autobiography might very well seem like the natural place to start exploring the narrative chain that led to *Then It Happened*. Indeed, Frank Capra's book, *The Name Above the Title*, was the original source of inspiration for writing a screenplay based on events from his life. Yet although Capra's book provided the initial moment of inspiration for my screenplay, I would like to interrogate whether it is in fact accurate to call it the "original text", in the manner in which critics and consumers distinguish between the original and the adaptation? What, then, of the life that came before the book? Where does it fit in this narrative chain? The answer lies in a debate that theorists of the genre of autobiography have been engaging in for some time.

Writing about the process of adaptation, André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion ask the following question:

Is it possible for the story (*fabula*) to exist outside any and all media? Or, to put it differently, is it possible to imagine a story in a kind of original virgin state, prior to any mediatic incarnation?" (2004, p.58)

Writing about the genre of autobiography, Jerome Bruner makes a statement that is intimately linked with their concerns:

I take the view that there is no such thing as a 'life as lived' to be referred to. On this view, a life is created or constructed by the act of autobiography. It is a way of constructing experience – and of reconstructing it and reconstructing it until our breath or our pen fails us. Construal and reconstrual are interpretative. Like all forms of interpretation, how we construe our lives is subject to intentions, to the interpretative conventions available to us, and to the meanings imposed upon us by the usages of our culture and language. (1993, p.38)

The juxtaposition of these two quotes is enlightening in two key ways. Firstly, they both question the possibility of a story (be it fictional or based in fact) outside of any given medium. Secondly, they force us to consider the autobiography as itself a form of adaptation, evident in Bruner's multiple uses of the word "interpretation". So while a critical analysis of a film based on an autobiography might take the latter to be the "original" or, to appropriate Gaudreault and Marion's term, "virginal" text, the critical study of autobiography itself leads us in an entirely different direction.

"The theorist knows, but is not deterred by the knowledge, that the autobiographer is already the interpreter of his life, already a textualist, and not some godlike chronicler mysteriously exempted from the equivocations of language," writes John Sturrock (1993, pp.25-26). In his observations we again see the concept of interpretation taking a central role in the study of autobiography. But there is another word he uses that speaks to an additional concern of those studying autobiography – "godlike". For aside from the possibility of the existence of an omniscient deity, the question emerges of whether – even outside the bounds of an autobiography – there is such a thing as a 'life lived', as Bruner puts it. This question in turn is connected to broader debates about the possibility of thought outside or beyond any medial construction, a connection that Gaudreault and Marion highlight at the start of their paper: "Can thought exist without being always already formulated, that is to say, mediated, if only for oneself alone, inside one's head" (2004, p.59). In accordance with this, just like Gaudreault and Marion have asked whether it is possible to have a story in a virgin state, so do critics of autobiography ask whether it is possible to have a 'life lived' in such a state. The answer is usually in the negative. Mary Evans, for example, states that:

the genres of autobiography and biography cannot represent what they claim to represent, namely the 'whole' life of a person. Furthermore, this whole person is in any case a fiction, a belief created by the very form of auto/biography itself. (1999, p.1).

Not only does Evans echo Bruner's sentiment that there is no such thing as a 'whole' life, a 'life as lived', but both identify the very form of autobiography as being responsible for perpetuating the myth that such a life might exist. Bruner himself gets to the crux of the matter when he refutes the possibility that we have access to an 'objective' truth about ourselves:

“there is no such thing as a 'uniquely' true, correct, or even faithful autobiography. This should warn us away from the heavy-handed judgement that autobiography is particularly subject to 'self-deception'. Such a judgement is surely based on some curious presuppositions about self-knowledge – that somehow 'we' know all [...] and that 'we' are hiding something from 'ourselves'. [...] But everything we know about the structure of direct experience and of memory storage and retrieval tells us this is a deeply misleading view. Perceiving and remembering are themselves constructions and reconstructions. What is 'laid down' in memory is not some aboriginal encounter with the 'real world', but is highly schematized. (1993, pp.39-40)

Here again we have a parallel between theories of autobiography and theories of adaptation. Gaudreault and Marion's "story in a kind of original virgin state" becomes Bruner's "aboriginal encounter with the 'real world'". Additionally, Bruner's observations about construction and reconstruction also have a close link with more contemporary views on the adaptation process, which will be explored in greater depth below. For now, it is sufficient to observe that these parallels are far from arbitrary, for those who study autobiography already see it as a form of adaptation, a narrativization of remembered life events.

And it is not simply the fact of narrativization itself that blurs the line between fact and fiction in autobiography, but also the forms that these narratives take. In the introduction to her book on autobiography, Jill Ker Conway writes:

If we study the history of autobiography in Western Europe and the white settler societies that are its offshoots, it soon becomes apparent that there are archetypal life scripts for men and for women which show remarkable persistence over time. (1999, p.7)

The very title of Conway's introduction is telling in this respect – "Memory's Plots". The rest of the book is structured so that each chapter examines in more detail some of these 'plots'. She

notes, too, that archetypal life scripts are gendered, and goes on to explain the origin of the model for a man's life story:

For men, the overarching pattern for life comes from adaptations of the story of the epic hero in classical antiquity. Life is an odyssey, a journey through many trials and tests, which the hero must surmount alone through courage, endurance, cunning and moral strength. [...] His achievement comes about through his own agency and his successful rite of passage leaves him master of his fortunes, though, of course, still subject to the whims of the gods or the turning wheel of destiny. (ibid)

Once again the link between autobiography and adaptation emerges as Conway describes men's autobiographical narratives as "*adaptations* of the story of the epic hero". And, indeed, if we compare Conway's description of the archetypal male narrative to the story presented to us in Frank Capra's autobiography, we can see the validity of her claims.

Capra certainly does present his life as an "odyssey, a journey through many trials and tests" in which "his achievement comes about through his own agency". In fact, his book may be broken down into several sections, each defined by the central obstacle that Capra is battling at that given period in his life. The first of these is the section dealing with childhood and coming of age, in which the central goal of the 'protagonist' Capra is to get an education and therefore rise above the illiterate, working class status of the rest of his family, working multiple jobs from a young age in order to fund his studies. Although most of his family immigrates to America from Sicily when Capra is only six years old, it is chiefly Capra himself who is painted as pursuing advancement in the so-called land of opportunity. This narrative line taps into another, more recent, archetypal narrative of the industrious immigrant who comes to America with nothing and makes his fortune – an especially popular narrative where the birth of Hollywood is concerned. In fact, the foreword to Capra's book, written by John Ford, succinctly summarizes this 'plot':

A great man and a great American, Frank Capra is an inspiration to those who believe in the American Dream. He has called his story *The Name Above the Title*. If he didn't object so strongly to the trite, he might as well have named it *The Land of Opportunity*. For even in early youth he was no stranger to the work, the worry, and the long hours that went with being a poor immigrant boy in a dog-eat-dog society. If all this constituted a deprived childhood, Frank was too busy and too ambitious to notice. Humble beginnings have not deterred his rise to eminence in the arts, letters, and sciences. (1972, p.ix)

Here we clearly see the epic hero's story, transposed from classical antiquity to America in the first half of the twentieth century. It is interesting to note that this is not only the archetypal life script of Capra's own narrative, but echoes also the stories in his own films: *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) and *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) are all exemplars of the narrative of the "little guy". They all have at their centre a man rooted in humble beginnings who achieves greatness and makes an extraordinary impact on people's lives. Already the line between 'reality' and 'fiction' – a line that will be interrogated throughout the course of this essay – is beginning to blur.

The second section of Capra's book begins after his graduation from Cal-Tech and centres on his search not only for a job, but a vocation. Multiple engagements follow – service in the army and tutoring among them, until the "wheel of destiny" leads him to his first encounter with the world of filmmaking. Capra seizes the opportunity, and the experience kindles in him a desire to pursue a career as a filmmaker: "Yes, I was hooked," he declares (1972, p.30).

The next part of Capra's journey takes us through the "trials and tests" he would have to overcome to become a director: starting out as a prop man, being promoted to editor, then working as a 'gag man', first on the *Our Gang* comedies, then under the employ of the famous Mack Sennett, culminating with his employment at Columbia Studios. There, a new section of the story begins: Capra as a lowly director at a minor 'Poverty Row' studio, struggling against the odds to 'hit the big time', a goal represented for him by the Academy Awards, one of which he was desperate to win. "It was my Holy Grail," Capra says of the Oscar for Best Director (ibid, p.144). Simultaneously with this quest for the 'Holy Grail', Capra is also working at this stage of his life to find an identity for himself as a filmmaker, battling with the question of what it is he wants his films to say. By the time he leaves Columbia in 1939, he has achieved both of these goals: he has found a message for his films, and has won the Grail (three times). After his departure from Columbia, new trials ensue, as Capra tells of his experiences serving in the army during World War II (making the *Why We Fight* documentary films) and then recounts the obstacles he faces when he returns to a new kind of Hollywood after the war. So while each section of the narrative has its own set of goals and obstacles, as a whole, Frank Capra's autobiography can indeed be defined as an odyssey in which an overarching theme is Capra's triumph over the obstacles he encounters. Furthermore, the narrative defines Capra as a man who

is always true to himself and who refuses to compromise on his vision – a testament of the epic hero’s “moral strength”.

It would be a misrepresentation, however, to imply that it is only critics and theorists who are aware of the mediated nature of autobiography. The authors of autobiography themselves are, to various extents, aware of the constructed nature of the text. The preface to Capra’s autobiography is revealing in this light. In it he writes:

This is not truly an autobiography – a recording of doings and happenings historically documented. Rather it is mostly random recalls of what went on in my head during my youth and in my forty-odd years of filmmaking. At times I will telescope conversations – which strung out over weeks and months – into one scene. I shall use real names; describe the kings, the queens, and the rogues of Hollywood as I saw them from the inside of my own eyeballs. You may also sense a story: A cheap, egotistical punk grows into a man. (1972, p.xi)

There are several key acknowledgements here. Firstly, Capra recognizes the narrative nature of his project – “you may also sense a story” – and refers to moments from his life as scenes. Secondly, Capra also points to the ‘editing’ process involved in writing his book – “I will telescope conversations”. He also concedes the subjective nature of the text – “random recalls of what went on in my head”; “as I saw them from the inside of my own eyeballs”. These words speak directly to what Conway describes as being a key pleasure in reading autobiographies: “The satisfaction comes from being allowed *inside* the experience of another person who really lived and who tells about experiences which did in fact occur” (1999, p.6). By stressing that autobiographies allow us “inside” another person’s experience, Conway is intimating that it is precisely the subjective, mediated nature of the text that attracts us to it. Thus, autobiographies are constantly negotiating the line between ‘facts’ and the author’s personal relationship with those facts. What is ironic, however, is that while Capra makes these acknowledgements about the nature of his text (characteristics that, as we have seen, contemporary theorists of autobiography view as inherent to the genre), he simultaneously denies that what he has written is in fact a true autobiography. The justification he gives is that it is not “a recording of doings and happenings historically documented”. This statement speaks directly to more ‘traditional’ views of what an autobiography is supposed to be, and it is precisely such false beliefs in the possibility of objective truth that critics such as Conway, Bruner and Evans seek to expose. To

be sure, what Frank Capra describes here is precisely what all autobiographies are, whether they acknowledge this or not. So while perhaps the function of this paragraph in the preface was to act as something of a disclaimer, what Capra has written is to some extent a working definition of the autobiography.

All this confirmation of the constructed nature of autobiography should, in theory, make my job as an adapter of this autobiography easier by highlighting the problematic notion of fidelity to the ‘truth’, and thus freeing me from the constraints that assumptions of such fidelity typically impose. In theory. But as a creative writer I often wear a different ‘hat’ to when I am working on theoretical essays; my perspective changes. As a theorist I am happy to accept contemporary views on the impossibility of true fidelity, but as a writer my ethics (for lack of better word) are more conservative. While Frank Capra may be allowed to exercise creative license when writing about his life – it is his life, after all – should I be afforded the same right? How far can I go in making changes to his narrative before I feel (uncomfortably so) that I have crossed the line? These questions are met not with an answer, but with another question. None of us live in isolation. The autobiography of any individual will inevitably include references to many other people. What happens then, when that same creative license touches their stories, their lives? Where do my ethics of fidelity leave me then? The answers to these questions, in turn, lie in the next link in the narrative chain I am following.

2. BIOGRAPHY

When I decided that I would be adapting a relatively brief period in Frank Capra’s life – the story of how he made *It Happened One Night* – I was faced with a very practical problem. In Capra’s book, these events are told over the course of eleven pages: a tiny fraction of the book’s 500 page totality. Even if I expanded the events that Capra “telescoped”, I would not have enough material for a feature-length screenplay. I had a choice to make – I could either elaborate the story using my own imagination, or I could turn to additional sources to help me ‘fill in the gaps’. For reasons I will explain more fully below, I chose the latter. The subsequent research process provided an interesting insight into the biographical text.

The one thing that biographies (and autobiographies) have in common is that you know exactly who the protagonist of the story will be before you’ve even read a single word. You

know where the spotlight is going to shine. But that, inevitably, leaves other things in the dark. Being able to read the biographies of five people whose lives intersected at some point in time brought this fact into sharp relief. A couple of examples will serve to illustrate the point.

In Capra's autobiography, he describes the "metamorphosis" of Clark Gable – "the bad boy exiled to Siberia" – during the shooting of the film thus:

It took him a day or two to get over his 'burn', but when he did he had the time of his life. I believe it was the only picture in which Gable was ever allowed to play himself: the fun-loving, boyish, attractive, he-man rogue that was the *real* Gable. (1972, p.170)

In order to acquire more details about what exactly "the time of his life" entailed, I had to turn to the biographies of Clark Gable himself, where he is the protagonist of the story. Thus, *Long Live the King* by Lyn Tornabene and *Clark Gable: A Biography* by Warren G. Harris became the sources of the pranks that Gable pulled on set. In addition, they expanded on what Capra alludes to when he writes that "it was the only picture in which Gable was ever allowed to play himself" by chronicling the star's career up until that point, explaining in more detail how and why Gable's role in *It Happened One Night* was different from what had come before.

However, in their turn, the Gable biographies do not do justice to the life of his co-star, Claudette Colbert. In *Clark Gable: A Biography*, Warren G. Harris writes:

He [Gable] also knew that she [Colbert] was a lesbian in a sham marriage with gay actor-director Norman Foster, so he never tried to make a pass or to entice her into the temporary dressing suite that Columbia gave him. (2002, p.113)

Here, Harris rather dismissively turns to a rumour about Colbert's sexuality in order to explain why she was one of the few co-stars Gable had apparently not had sexual relations with.

When it came time for Bernard F. Dick to write his biography of Colbert, he explained that in relation to her personal life, he had two choices: to "go with the flow", by which he means to agree with popular rumour about Colbert's sexuality, or to "offer an alternative version" (2008, p.249). "I have chosen the latter because it requires more research than hearsay," he then explains (*ibid*). Thus, Dick hoped to illuminate those aspects of Colbert's life that other narratives had left out. His "alternative version" of Colbert's story seeks to illustrate the 'truth' behind Colbert's "modern marriage", as she herself termed it (*ibid*, p.247). He explains that this

“modern marriage” was “a necessity, not an arrangement”, brought on by Colbert’s mother, who had a severe dislike of her daughter’s husband, and Colbert’s inability, in her turn, to escape her mother’s grasp (ibid, p.248). While Dick acknowledges that the precise circumstances of Colbert’s affairs would only be known by her, he does seek to redress ‘misconceptions’ about her sexuality. In so doing, he quotes the above passage from Harris’ book in order to deconstruct it and highlight its logical and factual flaws. He goes on to present new information in his own book, procured precisely because this time, the spotlight is on Colbert:

Propriety prevailed on social occasions, but never to the extent of depriving Claudette of the gossip she longed to hear or the myths that she could deflate. When the question of Clark Gable’s sexual prowess came up, as well as his anatomy, Claudette offered a firsthand account. Not only did she admit to going “all the way with him,” but she also challenged agent Minna Wallis’s description of her former client’s physical endowments, implying that Gable was far better equipped than Wallis claimed. Apparently, not all of Gable’s erections on the *It Happened One Night* set were simulated. So much for Gable avoiding Claudette because he suspected she was a lesbian. (2008, pp.250-251)

Here, Dick’s writing is making direct intertextual references to the biographies of Gable, citing the on-set pranks that involved simulated erections. Whether either of these versions of Colbert’s sexuality is ‘accurate’ or unproblematic is arguable (a contemporary queer reading of Colbert’s star persona would be interesting in helping to explore this issue further, but is outside the scope of this current essay). But what these examples do demonstrate is the tendency of one biography to ‘side-line’ other lives that intersected with its subject’s.¹

These, however, are relatively minor ‘corrections’ and amendments made from one text to another, mainly resulting from the very obvious and practical consideration that the person who is under scrutiny by a given biography will receive the bulk of the attention. Additionally, the examples cited are from lives that intersected fairly briefly. But what of longer partnerships and relationships that span years or even decades? How are they affected when one person in the partnership decides to tell *their* story? To answer this question we must turn to the relationships Frank Capra had with his producer, Harry Cohn, and his screenwriting partner, Robert Riskin, as they are presented in Joseph McBride’s biography of Capra – *The Catastrophe of Success*.

¹ I, in my turn, have to acknowledge my own decision to treat the Colbert-Gable affair ambiguously in my screenplay. Because the focus of my screenplay was primarily on Capra and Columbia Studios, I could afford to leave the “did they or didn’t they” question about the affair up to the audience’s discretion and imagination.

Writing about autobiography, Robert Folkenflik cites an eighteenth-century voice on the matter, quoting Samuel Johnson:

He that recounts the life of another, commonly dwells most upon conspicuous events, lessens the familiarity of his tale to increase its dignity, shews his favourite at a distance decorated and magnified like the ancient actors in their tragick dress, and endeavours to hide the man that he may produce a hero. (1993, p.7)

Folkenflik explains that for “Johnson, autobiography is preferable because the autobiographer is closer to useful truth, and because he knows it, he will be less likely to distort that truth than a partisan” (ibid). While McBride might be less familiar in his approach to Frank Capra’s life, the dynamic between his biography and Capra’s autobiography is in every other way and exact opposite of Johnson’s perspective on the matter. In many ways, it is Capra who creates a hero and McBride who shows us the man – or, at least, that is the interpretation that McBride’s methodology seems to imply.

McBride’s approach to Capra’s biography is perhaps best encapsulated by the quotes chosen for the cover of the St. Martin’s Griffin paperback edition in 2000. Dennis Drabelle of *The Washington Post Book World* is quoted as calling the book “resolutely iconoclastic”, while David Thomson of *The Boston Globe* praises its “quiet but firm rejection of the legend in favour of facts”. If we return to Capra’s view of what his own book is not – “a recording of doings and happenings historically documented” – then McBride’s biography certainly attempts to fill that niche. The above mentioned front cover also boasts that the book “contains newly declassified information”, speaking directly to the desires of those who do prefer their biographies to be “historically documented”. Bernard F. Dick, in his biography of Harry Cohn, summarises the book thus: “Some two decades after Capra reinvented himself, Joseph McBride revised the reinvention in his exhaustive biography of the director, setting the record straight by crediting those whom Capra had slighted or ignored” (2009, pp.89-90).

Any autobiography is bound to have omissions. Writing about the biography of Simone de Beauvoir, for example, Evans notes the “the pattern of evasions, absences and at times misrepresentations that characterise her autobiography” (1999, p. 31). However, the more pertinent question that is implied here is whether such evasions and misrepresentations are constructed ‘on purpose’. This, of course, harks back to Bruner’s warning about reading

biographies as self-deception. But what is being implied by Evans, and by McBride, is something much more direct than Bruner's concept of self-deception. The suggestion is that the authors of these autobiographies have willingly and knowingly omitted or misrepresented facts into order to portray themselves in a certain light to the reader. In Capra's case, it is the reshaping of his image as a director to suit a new era when the 'auteur' director was becoming prominent. To do this, he minimized the role that other collaborators played in his life and in his career. For after all, "the hero must surmount alone" those trials placed before him (to return to Conway's definition). This, at least, is McBride's thesis.

In order to achieve his goal of a more 'objective' portrait of Capra, McBride undertakes a systematic reversal of Capra's own approach: where Capra admitted to his subjectivity, McBride strives for a detached objectivity; where Capra relied on flawed memory, McBride relies on documents and records; where Capra 'telescopes' events, McBride reconstructs their original chronological order. To 'correct' Capra's autobiography, McBride's method was simple (albeit only in theory) – multiply the number of sources used. While Capra relied to a large extent on his own memory, McBride embarked on an exhaustive research process that included scores of interviews (including ones with Capra himself) as well as access to a multitude of documents, ranging in scope from official to personal. Indeed, some fifty pages at the back of the book are dedicated to 'Notes on Sources' – a comprehensive, chapter by chapter list detailing the sources used and what information was procured from them. Does this scholarly methodology produce a more accurate picture of how it all happened as opposed to Capra's subjective memories? Whether this does, indeed, result in a more 'faithful' image of Frank Capra's life is up for debate. What is undeniable, however, is that the approach resonated with future biographers.

This influence is evident in the biographies of Harry Cohn and Robert Riskin that followed in the wake of McBride's book. McBride had opened the door for these biographies by demonstrating how Capra had diminished the roles that his collaborators played in creating 'Frank Capra' films. Chief among these were Riskin and Cohn, so it is no surprise that the biographies of these men would follow on from McBride's thesis. The very title of Ian Scott's biography of Riskin is extremely telling – *In Capra's Shadow: The Life and Career of Screenwriter Robert Riskin*. Scott relies heavily, not only on McBride's thesis, but on his research as well, duplicating much of it, in order to demonstrate the extent to which the identity that Capra had finally found for 'his' films was actually a product of Riskin's vision and style,

too. Even after their creative partnership had ended, the influence Riskin had brought to Capra's pictures would continue to be felt, Scott argues.

The effect of McBride's book can also be seen on the biography of Harry Cohn. As part of my research, I read two biographies on Cohn – one, *King Cohn*, was written prior to the publication of the McBride biography, the other, *The Merchant Prince of Poverty Row*, soon after. Both, of course, make some reference to Capra; he was, after all, a key figure in the history of Columbia Studios. But the nature of these references is very different. While *King Cohn* relates humorous anecdotes about Capra's time at Columbia and his interactions with Cohn (some of which will already be familiar to readers of Capra's autobiography), *Merchant Prince* takes a much more revisionist approach. In the spirit of McBride's book, which the author cites almost immediately at the start of the chapter dedicated to Cohn's ventures with Capra, this biography seeks to show how Capra's style was influenced by Harry Cohn. The conclusion to the chapter cements biographer Bernard K. Dick's desire to portray Cohn's partnership with Capra as yet another 'unsung' collaboration that made the director's signature style possible, just as his partnership with Robert Riskin ('Capriskin' as they were called) had been. Playing on the label that some of Capra's "detractors" gave him, Dick writes:

But "Capracorn" is not entirely accurate; his special brand of film would have been impossible without Harry. So, perhaps "CapraCohn" is more precise. (2009, p.118)

Caprsikin. CapraCohn. Even in this wordplay the desire to augment 'the name above the title' is made clear.

As we draw closer to the next link in the narrative chain, moving from biographical writing to the biopic, the seemingly undying issue of adaptation studies emerges once more – the question of fidelity. Of course, the problem has already begun to surface in the discussion of McBride's biography. Is McBride being more 'faithful' to the truth of Capra's life than Capra himself? And am I, myself, trying to replicate this fidelity by relying on multiple sources in constructing my narrative? Can any one of these sources be considered the 'original' text on which my adaptation is based? Questions such as these clearly direct us toward the field of adaptation studies, but in order to find answers for them I would like to turn to more contemporary theories of adaptation, ones that construe the notion of 'fidelity' in a less

traditional way. For by doing so, they provide a new platform from which both the biographical writing process and the adaptation of it from text to screen may be discussed.

3. THE BIOPIC

Before moving on to an express discussion of the biopic, and of my own engagement with this genre, it is necessary to create a foundation for this forthcoming discussion by rooting it in theories of adaptation. To be more specific, I would like to draw on the perspective of a particular theorist on the matter, that of Thomas Leitch. His views on adaptation – as presented in his book, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*, provide a useful platform from which the particular characteristics of the biopic may be discussed.

Leitch's book, and his approach to adaptation, is more than a repudiation of out-dated notions of fidelity. His central thesis reaches to much more deep-rooted, foundational ideas about the nature of the 'original text'. In the introduction to his book, Leitch encapsulates the distinction between his approach, and more traditional models:

[T]his alternative approach to adaptation study does not approach adaptations as either transcriptions of canonical classics or attempts to create new classics but rather as illustrations of the incessant process of rewriting as critical reading. It is informed by the conflict Bakhtin discerns between heteroglossia, whose protean, internally persuasive meanings are irreducibly dependent on the contexts generated by particular readers and reading situations, and canonization, which seeks to standardize authoritative meanings for all readers. [...] this approach to adaptation study treats both adaptations and their originals as heteroglot texts rather than canonical works, emphasizing the fact that every text offers itself as an invitation to be rewritten. (2007, p.16)

Working with this approach to adaptation, we can already see it at work in the biographical texts that have been examined thus far. Indeed, Leitch's explanation overlaps in several key ways with Bruner's description of autobiography cited earlier:

Construal and reconstrual are interpretative. Like all forms of interpretation, how we construe our lives is subject to intentions, to the interpretative conventions available to us, and to the meanings imposed upon us by the usages of our culture and language. (2007, p.38)

Both authors highlight the importance of interpretation and stress the role of context in this process. Consequently, Leitch's concept of "rewriting as critical reading" can successfully be applied to the biographical texts under examination. Viewed in this light, Capra's *The Name Above the Title* is not a fixed, canonical work, but part of "the incessant process of rewriting" in which Capra is performing a critical reading of his life, rewriting it to tell a particular story. And McBride, in turn, is critically reading Capra's book, engaging with its content but also continuing the process by rewriting Capra's story.

This more fluid and dynamic approach to adaptation, Leitch explains, is what can help us move beyond the constrictions imposed by theories of adaptation founded on the premise of fidelity:

Fidelity as a touchstone of adaptations will always give their source texts, which are always faithful to themselves, an advantage so enormous and unfair that it renders the comparison meaningless. To evaluate adaptations fairly, we need to evaluate their source texts as well – an activity traditional adaptation study, which takes the literary text as an unquestioned touchstone of value for any adaptation, has traditionally avoided. To revitalize adaptation study, we need to reframe the assumption that even the most cursory consideration of the problem forces on us – source texts cannot be rewritten – as a new assumption: source texts must be rewritten; we cannot help rewriting them. (2007, p.16)

If we follow the premise that biographies are 'adaptations' of a life of an individual, then they can become very instructive texts, demonstrating Leitch's theory at work. This is partly because we do not normally think of biographies *as* adaptations and therefore apply to them a slightly different standard of measure. While the traditional mode of adaptation study that Leitch refers to will chastise an adaptation for 'rewriting' a text, biographies do just that. Not only do they narrativise the life of their subject, but if more than one biography exists on the same subject, the one that came second will inevitably be a rewriting of the first. This is for the simple reason that no one will want to read the same story twice. It will therefore be the onus of the second biography to fill in any 'gaps' left by its predecessor, or perhaps to alter its narrative focus. And as we have seen, the same process will ensue when biographies are written about individuals whose lives intersected. Scott's biography of Riskin, for example, is a rewriting of Capra's story, while at the same time being an extension of McBride's narrative. None of these texts see the 'original source' as an untouchable whole; instead, they engage in precisely that process of

evaluation that Leitch advocates. By seeking out the ‘gaps’ in the source text, they are engaging in what, for Leitch, is the process of critical reading:

It would help redress the balance between literature and literacy to think of each adaptation not in terms of what it faithfully reproduces – what it selects, emphasizes, and transforms – but of what it leaves out. Instead of acting as if the power of a story lay in what it explicitly portrayed, we might explore further the “gaps” Wolfgang Iser calls “a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves,” because “whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins.” The very process of supplying omitted material draws each reader closer to the story, its world, and the process of world making. (2007, p.18)

Following this thesis, it might help to understand one biography filling in the ‘gaps’ of another not as one text trying to correct another (even if that is the position that the biographer himself takes), but as one text entering into a process of communication with another. In order to shift one’s mindset thus, it is helpful to understand that ‘gaps’ are by no means the exception in any give text – a ‘flaw’ that somehow needs to be remedied – but rather as an inherent characteristic of *any* text. As Leitch explains:

To the extent that we praise a TV miniseries for its fidelity to a Thackeray novel because it does not omit telling passages or import irrelevant biases, we ignore the fact that every novel comes with programmatic omissions and biases of its own, telltale traces of other novels it could have been. (2007, p.17)

This, in turn, brings us back to the question of omission in autobiography. If we view autobiography not as an impossible reproductions of the ‘facts’, but as an adaptation, then we can, too, accept the omissions in these texts as a natural and inevitable part of narrativization. If we successfully adopt this mentality, then there will be no need to ask whether Capra’s version of his life or McBride’s is more ‘faithful’ to the ‘truth’, judging the merit of each by examining how few omissions there are in each. Both narratives are ‘true’ – they just have different sets of ‘gaps’ based on the narrative that each decides to tell. Capra tells the story of an “egotistical punk” growing into a man, while McBride tells the story of man struggling with the implications of success. Both are stories of Capra’s life, they simply show us different facets of the same man. This brings me back to the process of adaptation as it pertains to the biopic, and the question that, as I writer, I am faced with at the beginning of this creative process – “Where’s the story?”

In order to facilitate a discussion of biopics, I would like to differentiate between two different approaches to the genre – micro and macro narratives. Macro narratives can be defined as those that attempt to encompass as much of the subject’s life as possible. According to research conducted by Carolyn Anderson and Jon Lupo, in the 1990s this “full life story approach” began to decrease (2002, p.92). Of course there are exceptions, such as Richard Attenborough’s 1992 biopic *Chaplin*, which tracks the icon’s life from childhood to old age, touching on both his personal and professional lives. Micro narratives, on the other hand, can be seen as being much more selective in what they depict. A clear way to do this is to limit the amount of time that the narrative spans. *My Week With Marilyn* (Simon Curtis, 2011), for example, moves away from the full life story, focusing instead on only a few weeks in the actress’ life as she films *The Prince and the Showgirl*. Of course, time is not the only way in which a story may be focalized. The narrative of *The King’s Speech* (Tom Hooper, 2010), although it does not tell a full life story, does span fourteen years. However, the film feels much more intimate than a ‘panorama’ of those fourteen years would. This is because the film focuses so specifically on the relationship between King George VI and Lionel Logue, confining the bulk of the action to Logue’s office, that all other events appear as if ‘glimpsed’ through this primary narrative framework. I do not want to imply that micro and macro narrative are two self-contained categories into which all biopics can and must be divided into. Instead, I propose them as two poles between which an almost infinite amount of possibilities is available to the adapter. They are tools to help one understand the complex array of possibilities that an adaptation of a life to the screen brings with it. Each comes with its own advantages, the comparison of which brings to foreground the unsolvable problem of fidelity.

After I read Frank Capra’s autobiography, I was faced with the task of selection, of determining where my narrative focus would be. Would mine be a macro narrative, in which I attempt to tell Capra’s ‘full’ life story, or would it be narrower in its focus? The choice between these two approaches would also bring with it two different creative processes. The macro narrative is defined by a process of contraction – in order to fit Capra’s life story, from birth to death, into a feature-length screenplay, my primary task would be to decide what to ‘cut’ from his book. The micro narrative, on the other hand, is defined by a process of expansion. As I have mentioned earlier, once I decided to focus on the making of *It Happened One Night*, I was faced

with the challenge of how to turn eleven pages of Capra's autobiography into a feature-length screenplay. This would entail expanding on and adding to the source text.

If we were to judge these two narrative approaches by the benchmark of fidelity, an inevitable conundrum would present itself. At first, it might seem that the macro approach would most easily meet the criteria of traditional adaptation theory, as its purpose is to capture on screen as much of the 'whole' life as possible. This would eliminate a common criticism many of us have heard (or made) in relation to the biopic; namely, that the story 'stops' at a convenient moment, leaving out developments in the subject's life that would alter our opinion of them or their actions. However, as I established above, in order to encompass the 'full' life of an individual in a film, the adapter would have to make many omissions, and omissions are precisely what traditional approaches to adaptation frown upon. So perhaps the micro approach would be more faithful after all. By narrowing the field of focus, the adapter can include much more detail about the area of the subject's life that is being narrativized, avoiding too much information falling into cinematic ellipsis. Yet this brings us back to the problem of omission, for if the film only focuses on a brief period in the subject's life, then it is leaving out information that occurred before and after this period, thus manipulating our perceptions of the subject to some degree. And so the recurrent problem of fidelity continues.

The only way to break this cycle is to return to the mindset described above, where 'gaps are good'. To revisit Leitch's comment about omission:

It would help redress the balance between literature and literacy to think of each adaptation not in terms of what it faithfully reproduces – what it selects, emphasizes, and transforms – but of what it leaves out.
(2007, p.18)

Their statement is, however, slightly misleading, for the process of selection is, simultaneously, the process of omission. They are two sides of the same coin. Because the perfect reproduction of a source is impossible – an autobiography will never be a 'life as lived'; a biopic will never be an exact 'translation' of a biography – asking questions about what to "select" and what to "leave out" is part of the same process of adaptation. That having been said, the essential function of Leitch's statement is not to elevate omission over selection in the adaptation process, but rather to draw our attention to the creative potential of omissions. As Allen S. Weiss puts it: "Might it not be that the most faithful adaptation is that which is not depicted but merely implied?" (2004,

p.168) When they are accepted as an inherent part of the creative process, gaps and ellipses can become a powerful and constructive tool.

To return, then, to my own writing process and a question I posed earlier: by multiplying the number of sources used, was I simply trying to conform to traditional notions of fidelity? The answer is both yes and no. I have already admitted that as a creative writer I am far more conservative than when I am engaging with theory. So for the purposes of full disclosure, I must admit that I was eager to expand on Capra's narrative not with material of my own invention, but by turning to additional sources. But even this seemingly simple decision has greater implications than may at first be apparent.

I have acknowledged that Frank's Capra's autobiography was the initial inspiration for the screenplay. I was captured by Capra's story, as well as by his humour and his dynamic writing style. Thus, my first goal became to write a screenplay based on some portion of his life. But I had a second goal also, and that was to capture the 'spirit' of old Hollywood, flourishing in its Golden Age. And it is this second goal that informed many of my decisions. Having read and loved books such as *The Wit and Wisdom of Hollywood* – a collection of anecdotes from those who lived through Hollywood's Golden Age – I wanted to revel in the minutia of this time and place. This motivated the choice to create a micro narrative, as opposed to trying to tell a 'full' life story. I wanted my story to be about more than just Frank Capra, and a macro narrative would not allow me this freedom. However, the story behind the making of *It Happened One Night* would. I would be able to tell not only the story of how Capra got his big break, but also of how a lowly studio – Columbia – won its first victory against the major studios. And within this narrative there would be pieces of others – the story of a studio boss who raised Columbia from its Poverty Row beginnings to 'Major' status; the story of how big stars could make even bigger demands, while at the same time being subject to strict studio control; the story of how Hollywood produced many great friendships and even more love-hate relationships. It is also the story of a single film – *It Happened One Night* – following it from its uncertain beginnings to its rushed production, chronicling the filming of some its most beloved scenes, and ending with its triumphant success with both the public and the critics. Finally, it is a homage to the fast-paced, witty style of writing that Classical Hollywood mastered and that *It Happened One Night* is representative of.

And in order to flesh out *these* stories, I would have to move beyond Capra's book and draw from the biographies of all the key players involved. The decision was about more than an attempt at greater fidelity; it was about putting multiple sources into *conversation* with one another and seeing what one narrative could contribute to another. What would they 'say' about each other? Thus began my own process of selection and omission.

The process started, of course, with *The Name Above the Title*. Capra's autobiography was the source of two fundamental aspects of the narrative – the protagonist and the plot. To stop there, however, would be to overlook a third, critical contribution made by his book – the tone. For me, personally, the best stories about old Hollywood are the ones told by the people who experienced it first-hand. The survivors. The reason harks back to Conway's observation that the "satisfaction" of an autobiography "comes from being allowed *inside* the experience of another person" (1999, p.6) or, to paraphrase Capra's words, to see things from the inside of their own eyeballs (1972, p.xi). The subjectivity is part – a large part – of the allure. Those who have not lived during this era of Hollywood's history can (and have) recount the 'facts' of this history. But those who *have* lived through it can bring something else to the telling, because their humour, their language, their subjective memories, can communicate to us something of the spirit, the tone of that era. And that is precisely the tone that I wanted to capture in my screenplay. I was not interested in reproducing Hollywood 'realistically', the way it 'really was' (if such a thing is even possible), but rather to depict it with the nostalgic romanticism that Capra's autobiography (certainly the first half) and numerous other anecdotes and stories from that time do. Thus, in order to fill in the ellipsis in Capra's narrative, I wanted to turn, as much as possible, to texts that would bring me closer to this 'atmospheric' fidelity. The truth, they say, is stranger than fiction; I believe that no-one could invent a history for Hollywood that is more bizarre – or funnier – than the tales told by its citizens. In accordance with this belief, I did not try.

Of course, by expanding on this portion of Capra's narrative, I created a new series of ellipsis. Without being able to see the life Capra lived before the moment where the screenplay begins – when he is already on the cusp of success – one is not able to appreciate the full extent of his struggle, or to get a more complete sense of what is motivating him at this juncture in his life. And because the story ends on a note of triumph, one does not get to witness the complications and downward turns Capra's career would take later on in his life. Intimations of

both of these narratives have been woven into the script. Moments of dialogue express Capra's desire for greatness – a desire that, in Capra's narrative, is a catalyst for success, while in McBride's version it is an Achilles Heel that would plague Capra for his entire life – but this, of course, is not the 'full' story. But then, nothing is. So perhaps these gaps, too, will be constructive – the “pivots” on which the relationship between my narrative and the audience will hinge, beginning a new process of critical reading. And as my communication with them begins, so too are all the other texts that have served as my sources drawn into the dialogue.

To return, then, to the broader examination of the biopic. In order to free this genre of the constraints put on it by traditional notions of fidelity to a “full life story”, we must first acknowledge the impossibility that any such fidelity can exist. This brings us back to an issue raised at the very beginning of this essay – the questionable existence of a ‘whole’ person outside of a given biographical text. Writing about auto/biography, Evans refutes the idea that “we are an ‘integrated’ self [...] a ‘knowable’ person, a person with a coherent emotional *curriculum vitae*” (1999, p.23). She cites as an alternative approach the work of biographer Lytton Strachey, stating that “what [he] was content to do in biography was to interpret a life”. Evans calls his biographies “modern essay in ‘reading’ a life” and contrasts them with twentieth century works “which assume that, in the collection and presentation of all available material about a subject, coherence will emerge” (ibid). This approach is, of course, a direct parallel of Leitch's approach to adaptation. The same key words reappear: “reread”, “interpret”. Both authors refute the possibility of a fixed source, be it a written text or a life. It is this process of interpretation that we have seen throughout the narrative chain I have been analysing: it is what happens when Frank Capra looks back on his life and writes an autobiography; it is what happens when Joseph McBride reads Capra's autobiography and perceives in it an untold story; and it is what happens when I combine these and other sources, forging a new narrative. The processes of interpretation and adaptation are inextricably connected. The goal of these processes is not to piece together a puzzle, so that if one piece is missing, the ‘whole’ picture cannot be seen. It is, instead, that very process of critical reading that both Evans and Leitch speak of.

This does not mean that I do not want to produce a coherent story. As I stated at the outset of this essay, I do hope that my screenplay will come across as a coherent whole. But in saying this I am only referring to the narrative. I would like to present to readers of my screenplay a coherent story, while at the same time acknowledging that within it exist a plurality

of voices and, hence, a plurality of truths: Capra's, McBride's, those of the five other biographers I have cited and, inevitably, mine. My creative process was centred not on trying to combine all these voice into one, but rather to try and place them into conversation with each other in an aesthetically harmonious and entertaining way.

This principle can be illustrated very clearly by a recent addition to the biopic genre: the musical biopic *Jersey Boys* (Clint Eastwood, 2014). Both the film and the Broadway musical it is adapted from take their premise, as well as their narrative structure, from the open acknowledgement that memory and perception are subjective and that when (as in my screenplay also) the lives of several individuals intersect, each one will have their own version of events. But instead of trying to silence any of these voices, or trying to reconcile their contradictions, the film relishes in them, structuring its narrative as a relay race in which each member of the *Four Seasons* gets to tell their part of the story of how the group rose to fame and then eventually broke up. Indeed, the tagline used for the poster of the film can serve as an epilogue for the issues discussed in this essay thus far: "Everybody remembers it how they need to".

4. THE MISSING LINK

In the title of this I essay I refer to four degrees of narrative separation. Thus far, we have covered three: the move from an actual life to an autobiography, from the autobiography to biographies, and from biographies to the biopic. There is a link missing, then, in this narrative chain – the screenplay. Or, to be more accurate, it is not missing, but has been compounded with the discussion of film; thus far, I have been considering my screenplay and biopics in general under the same category. Yet, as we well know, a screenplay is far from being a completed film. So in this last section of the essay I would like to briefly discuss the role of the screenplay itself in the narrative chain, and to explore how this form of writing is in many ways a perfect exponent of the approaches to adaptation and interpretation that have been discussed above.

Unlike the written text of a play, the screenplay is very rarely studied in its own right, even though both are written not solely for their own sake, but with a performance in mind. Yet when we refer to a film adaptation of *Hamlet* or *Death of a Salesman*, we are inevitably referring to an adaptation of the original text, not a particular staging of that play. This, in many ways, has to do with the historical context in which the play, as opposed to the screenplay, was born. For

centuries, there was no technology available to record live performances of plays; they remained ephemeral in their nature. Hence, the only way to ‘reproduce’ the play, and consequently to study it, was to return to the written text. Thus it is the text, not any given performance of it, that passed into the canon. Screenplays, of course, had no such luck. Their final performances – the films – were designed precisely to be recorded, to be fixed in a material form, and thus when a new ‘classic’ was born out of the process, it was the film, not the screenplay. As a result, screenplays get relegated to the category of ‘blueprints’, interesting in the same way that a lighting plan or a storyboard for the film may be – evidence of the ‘evolution’ of the final product – but not a complete entity in their own right.

But if we look closely at the phrases being used here – that the screenplay is not a ‘fixed’ and complete work in its own right, that it has not entered the canon – we can begin to see a similarity between the screenplay and Leitch’s definition of how source texts *should* be treated. Indeed, what I would like to propose here is that all screenplays are source texts, written with the express purpose to be adapted to screen. Thus, when filmmakers ‘turn’ a screenplay into a film, they are continuing that “incessant process of rewriting as critical reading” that Leitch described, with their efforts taking material form in the guise of the motion picture (2007, p.16). Unlike most writers, who write with a ‘complete’ final product in mind, the screenwriter is asked to be sharply aware of the ‘unfinished’ nature of his task. We need only to examine the prescribed format of the screenplay to understand this.

The process of writing a screenplay is as much about what is *not* said as it is about what is said. The white, empty space on the page of a screenplay is sacred – fill too much of it, and you will be criticized for not following the form. That is because the screenplay is full of constructed omissions, things that the writer is discouraged from including – advice replicated in numerous screenwriting handbooks and taught in screenwriting classes. One should avoid using excessive camera language – it is not a screenwriter’s job to tell the director how to film the scene; instead, shots can be *implied* through careful manipulation of language. Parenthesis should be kept to a minimal – do not tell the actor how to perform the role; they will bring their own interpretation to the written words. Do not write excessive descriptions – it will be the job of the production designer to design and embellish the world you have created. As a result, the screenwriter is in a very different position when finishing his or her work than another writer is. Whereas writers have, traditionally, been very cautious about their work being taken on and

adapted by another party – worried about the changes that will be made to their complete and perfectly constructed text – the screenwriter must hope for exactly that. They want their screenplay to be produced, so that those omissions, so carefully structured into the text, can be filled in.

Of course, there is anxiety. Screenwriters are still writers, after all; and if a lot of effort has been put into the creative process, there is always anxiety when one must hand over the baton. Screenwriters, at least, are more prepared for the process, as they have kept it in mind throughout the course of their writing. Thus, as I complete my screenplay, I am aware that, ideally, the progression of the narrative chain should not end here, but should continue as the screenplay becomes a film. The screenplay was designed to be a homage to the style and spirit of Classical Hollywood, and since film is a visual medium, the homage can only be completed once the text becomes image. The performances of actors, the decisions of a cinematographer and the visualisation of a director will all be necessary to recreate the fast-paced, witty and slick style that the screenplay is intended to be a tribute to. These are aspects that are implied in the screenplay, but can only be realised in the next link in the narrative chain. So while my essay alludes to four degrees of narrative separation, the number could be increased quite significantly when one considers future possibilities: the “adaptation” of the Classical Hollywood style in order to pay tribute to it, the reworking of scenes from *It Happened One Night* to illustrate to contemporary audiences their genesis and the interpretations these audiences will, in turn, bring to the text.

Screenplays are often overlooked as intermediary texts, and perhaps they are. But they are also perfect examples of the adaptation process. For all those omissions, institutionalized into the very format of the text, are ideal examples of the ‘gaps’ that Leitch describes. And while we have seen that such gaps are an inevitable part of every text, there are few places where they are given such prominence as in a screenplay. For the success of a screenwriter depends precisely on whether those gaps will begin an effective process of communication between them and the filmmakers who adapt their screenplay. The screenwriter cannot say too much, yet they must learn to *imply* a great deal, so that their ideas effectively reach the screen. Yes, screenplays are intermediary texts, but perhaps this should be considered as their strength and not a weakness, as they provide us with a clear example of new ways to think about narrative, adaptation, and the relationship between the writer and reader.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

If my screenplay is analysed according to more traditional approaches to adaptation, it will probably not fare very well. It is after all, a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy, removed from its original source (Frank Capra's life) by several degrees of narrative separation. This, of course, was not my intention. But when this same process is viewed through the lens of more contemporary (and more fluid) approaches to adaptation, such as that of Thomas Leitch, a different possibility emerges. Each part of these degrees of separation can be seen as a critical reading of another text, and my own screenplay as continuing the process, rewriting these texts by placing them into dialogue with one another. Indeed, when we view adaptation in this new light, we can change the way we relate to it entirely. Instead of being some kind of "other" in the world of literary studies, removed from more legitimate creative processes, we can begin to see it for what it is – a fundamental aspect of the way we live our lives. Adaptation is present in the way we narrativize our own lives and those of others, and it is also present in the way that we read and rewrite the texts we come into contact with. It is what Bruner refers to when he describes our "construal and reconstrual" of our lives (1993, p.38). It is what Bernard F. Dick alludes to when he writes about the fact that Joseph McBride "revised the reinvention" of Capra's autobiography (2009, pp.89-90).

I began this essay by expressing my hesitations about theorizing the writing process, for the writing process is incomplete, a journey rather than a final product, ideas still in search of a narrative. In these respects, it is much like life itself. What 'finished' texts, on the other hand, provide us is precisely that what our lives lack – an illusion of coherence. As Mary Evans writes in the conclusion to her book: "what auto/biography does is to offer us a chance to stabilise the uncertainties of existence" (1999, p.131). While this desire may be more evident in biographical writings, I believe that it is the function of all narratives, be they fact or fiction (if such a distinction can be made). What is imperfect in life can become ideal in art. Perhaps this is why we are so wary of adaptation, especially the approach that theorists such as Leitch advocate – it unravels that which we assumed to be fixed. But if we recognise that no text is ever 'finished', and that it is rewritten each time it is read by someone new, we move towards a more productive understanding of the writing process itself, of adaptation, of life, and of the impossibly blurred lines between the three.

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