

Sunset Boulevard

Sunset Boulevard

Sunset Boulevard

1994 The Really Useful Group Ltd.

Music by **Andrew Lloyd Webber**

Book and Lyrics by

Don Black and Christopher Hampton

Based on the **Billy Wilder** film

ACT I

The House on Sunset

The patio and exterior of a preposterous Italianate Hollywood mansion, not more than twenty years old, but already shabby from neglect. The deep end of the swimming pool is visible, the rest stretching off into the wings. Floating in the pool, fully clothed, face down, is the body of a young man. Dawn is just beginning to break. Over this image, once it has become established, the VOICE OF JOE GILLIS:

JOE (V.O.)

I guess it was five A.M.

A homicide had been reported

from one of those crazy mansions up on Sunset.

tomorrow every front page is going to lead with this story;

you see an old time movie star is involved,

maybe the biggest star of all.

(By now, a handsome, broad -shouldered man has emerged from the crowd and moved Downstage to address the audience directly: this is JOE GILLIS.)

JOE

But before you read about it

before it gets distorted

by those Hollywood piranhas

if you wanna know the real facts

You've come to the right party.

(During this, the stage is irregularly raked by cold blue light which turns out to be thrown by the L.A.P.D. patrol cars, on eof which draws up and disgorges a number of POLICEMEN, who split up; TWO approach the house, while another TWO move over to contemplate the body in the pool.)

Paramount

The gates and open areas at the front of the Paramount lot, leading to the studios and the administration blocks. it is morning and a variety of YOUNG HOPEFULS are milling about in the forecourt, waiting for their interviews, assignments or auditions, and trying to impress one another. As this world gradually assembles before our eyes, JOE'S tone changes; HE continues to address the audience.

JOE (V.O.)

Let me take you back six months

I was at the bottom of the barrel

I'd had a contract down at Fox

but I'd fallen foul of Darryl.

Now I had a date at Paramount

along with about a thousand other writers,

if it didn't come up roses, I'd be covering funerals

back in Dayton, Ohio.

I'd hidden my car three blocks away,

turned out to be a smart move.

(Joe joins the young hopefuls; these include MYRON, a director; MARY, an actress, blonde and beautiful, artfully dishevelled; and JOANNA, a writer, dark and intense. THEY greet each other with air-kisses, casual waves and ritualized exchanges.)

JOE

Hi there, Myron

MYRON

How's it hanging?

JOE

I've got a date with Sheldrake

MYRON

I'm shooting a western down at Fox

JOE

How can you work with Darryl?

MYRON

We should talk

JOE

Gotta run

BOTH

Let's have lunch

MARY

Hi, Mr. Gillis

JOE

You look great

MARY

I'm up for an audition

JOE

Sheldrake is driving me insane

MARY

Don't forget me when you're casting

JOE

We should talk

MARY

Gotta run

BOTH

Let's have lunch

JOE

Morning, Joanna

MARY

Hi there, Myron

JOANNA

Who are you meeting

MYRON

You look great

JOE

Sheldrake, but do I need it?

MARY

I've spent the last month fasting

JOANNA

I'm handing in my second draft

MYRON

I'm shooting a western down at Fox

JOE

I'd really love to read it

MARY

Don't forget me when you're casting

JOANNA

We should talk

MYRON

We should talk

JOE

Gotta run

MARY

Gotta run

BOTH

Let's have lunch

BOTH

Let's have lunch

(JOE approaches the gate, where he's challenged by JONES, the elderly guard.
Underscore continues.)

JOE

Yeh, I have an appointment with Mr. Sheldrake

JONES

Name?

JOE

Gillis, Joseph Gillis

(JONES consults his clipboard.)

JONES

All right, sir, you know your way?

JOE

Yeah

(JOE is suddenly waylaid by two men in hats and bad suits: FINANCEMEN.)

1ST FIN.

We want the key to your car

2ND FIN.

You're way behind the payments

1ST FIN.

Don't give us any fancy footwork....

2ND FIN.

Give us the keys.

JOE

**I only wish I could help.
I loaned it to my accountant
he has an important client down in Palm Springs
felt like shooting the breeze**

**1ST FIN.
Are you telling us you walked here?**

**JOE
I believe in self-denial
I'm in training for the priesthood**

**2ND FIN.
Okay wise guy, three hundred bucks**

**1ST FIN
Or we're taking the car**

**2ND FIN
We have a court order**

**JOE
I love it when you talk dirty**

(The Paramount gates open. JOE slips away from the FINANCEMEN, back into the social whirl.)

DANCE SEQUENCE

(A group of EXTRAS from Cecil B. DeMille's latest extravaganza 'Samson and Delilah' crosses the stage. JOE thinks he recognizes a man with a false beard and gold helmet who's accompanied by a gaggle of scantily-clad DANCING GIRLS: SAMMY. HE raises his hand in a priestly gesture.)

**SAMMY
Bless you, Joseph**

**JOE
That you, Sammy?**

SAMMY

How do you like my harem?

JOE

How come you get such lousy breaks?

JOE

One learns to grin and bear 'em.

GIRLS

This is the biggest film ever made

JOE

What're you playing?

ANITA

Temple Virgin

DAWN

Handmaiden to Delilah

JOE

Let's have lunch, gotta run.

(The FINANCEMEN, meanwhile, settle down to watch and wait. JOE moves swiftly towards a sharply-dressed middle-aged man, MORINO , his agent. MORINO is with a very much younger man and does his best to pretend not to notice JOE. When he realizes the encounter is unavoidable, HE makes a great show of pleasurable surprise and greets JOE with effusive bonhomie.)

JOE

You've got to find me a job.

I'm way behind with my payments

I thought you were meant to be my agent

I need some work

MORINO

I only wish I could help

this town is dead at the moment

there's been this slowdown in production....

(JOE interrupts, indicating the YOUNGER MAN)

JOE

Who is this jerk?

MORINO

He's my wunderkind from Broadway.

Every major studio wants him .

YOUNGER MAN

Playing one against the other....

JOE

What I need is three hundred bucks.

MORINO

Maybe what you need is a new agent.

(JOE spots a friend of his, ARTIE GREEN, a fresh-faced assistant director in his mid-twenties)

JOE

Hello, Artie

ARTIE

Joe, you bastard!

JOE

You never call me anymore.

ARTIE

Found a cuter dancing partner

How are things?

JOE

Not so great.

ARTIE

Will this help?

Twenty bucks?

(ARTIE hands JOE a twenty dollar bill; JOE hesitates then accepts it.)

JOE

Thanks, you're a pal.

ALL (Ad-Lib)

Good morning, Mr. De Mille

MYRON

Good morning, C.B.

(During this exchange, the lights have come up on SHELDRAKE's office. SHELDRAKE, a mournful, dyspeptic figure sits behind his desk, speaking into one of an array of phones.)

SHELDRAKE

This is Sheldrake

bring some water

get me that shithead Nolan.

(HE puts down one phone and picks up another)

Nolan, sweetheart,

great to talk

This draft is so much brighter.

You're the best

even so

I've hired another writer.

(HE puts the phone down as his SECRETARY shows JOE into the office, handing Sheldrake a tumbler of water as she does so. SHELDRAKE seems surprised to see JOE and makes some unconvincing stab at conviviality as HE shakes some bicarb into the water.)

SECRETARY

Mr. Gillis

SHELDRAKE

Joe! What the fuck bring you here?

JOE

You wanted to see me

SHELDRAKE

I did? What about?

JOE

"Based Loaded" It's an outline for a baseball picture.

SHELDRAKE

So, pitch.

JOE

It's about a rookie shortstop. He's batting .347. The kid was once mixed up in a hold-up. Now he's trying to go straight.

SHELDRAKE (Interrupting)

Wait a minute. Wait a minute. I think I have read this.

(HE presses a buzzer on the intercom on his desk)

Somebody, bring in whatever we've got on....

(HE looks up at JOE, hoping for guidance)

JOE

"Bases Loaded"

SHELDRAKE

..."Bases Loaded."

JOE

They're pretty hot for it over at Twentieth

SHELDRAKE

Good!

JOE

But can you see Ty Power as a short-stop?

ENSEMBLE

Let's have lunch.

(There's a knock at the door and BETTY SCHAEFER steps into the room. SHE's a clean-cut, bright-looking girl, in her twenties. SHE advances on SHELDRAKE, dropping a folder on his desk, not noticing JOE.)

BETTY

Here's that "Bases Loaded" material, Mr. Sheldrake. I made a two-page synopsis for you, but I wouldn't bother to read it.

SHELDRAKE

Why not?

BETTY

It's just a rehash of something that wasn't very good to begin with.

SHELDRAKE

Meet Mr. Gillis. He wrote it.

ENSEMBLE

We should talk.

SHELDRAKE

This is Miss Kramer.

(BETTY turns to JOE, horribly embarrassed.)

BETTY

Schaefer, Betty Schaefer. And right now, I'd like to crawl into a hole and pull it in after me.

JOE

If I could be of any help...

BETTY

I'm sorry, Mr. Gillis, I couldn't see the point of it.

JOE

What sort of material do you suggest? James Joyce? Dostoyevsky?

BETTY

I think pictures should at least try to say a little something.

JOE

I see you're one of the message kids. I expect you'll have turned down "Gone with the Wind."

SHELDRAKE

No, that was me.

ENSEMBLE

Gotta run.

BETTY

And I guess I was disappointed. I've read some of your other work and I thought you had some real talent.

JOE

Yeah, that was last year. This year I felt like eating.

BETTY

Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Gillis

SHELDRAKE

Thank you, Miss Kramer.

(BETTY leaves the room. SHELDRAKE looks up at JOE.)

Well, looks like Zanuck's got himself a baseball picture.

ENSEMBLE

We should talk

Gotta run,

Let's have lunch.

JOE

You've got to give me some work

I'll take whatever's on offer

there must be some shit that needs a rewrite

throw it my way.

SHELDRAKE

**I only wish I could help
there's no spare shit at the moment
remember the greatest writers starved in garrets
didn't care about pay.**

JOE

Are you trying to be funny?

SHELDRAKE

**I believe in self-denial
gives a man some moral backbone.**

JOE

Can you loan me three hundred bucks?

Sheldrake

I'm sorry, Gillis. Good-bye.

(JOE leaves.)

JOE

I just love Hollywood.

(The light hits JOE. Splintered lines overlap, creating a nightmarish cacophony of phoney greetings.)

MYRON

Morning, Joanna

CLIFF

__Where've you been hiding?

____SAMMY

____Hi there, Lisa

____MYRON

____How're you doing?

____KATHERINE

____I hate this weather

_____CLIFF
_____You look great

_____LIZ
_____RKO are O.K.!

MARY
What are you doing?

__JOANNA
__You look great

_____GIRLS
_____This is the biggest film ever made

_____CLIFF
_____I'm trying to make my mind up

_____MARY
_____Guess I was born to play her

_____DAWN
_____What is my motivation?

JOANNA
You look great

__SAMMY
__They're taling nominations

_____LIZ
_____You should go work for Warners'

_____MYRON
_____Is your new script with Sheldrake?

_____MORINO
_____I'm very close to Sheldrake

ARTIE
We shoot next month

SAMMY, SAND/ARTIE, MORINO, MYRON
Gotta run

JOHN
Let's drive to Vegas this weekend

KATHERINE/JOANNA
Let's have lunch

ANITA
You look great

__JOANNA
__I'm handling in my second draft

____MARY
____It's between me and Dietrich

____KATHERINE
____I've landed a big Broadway show

____ADAM
____I'm gonna work for Metro

____CLIFF
____Let's have lunch

____MARY
____Let's have lunch

GIRLS
Let's have lunch, this is the biggest film ever made

__MYRON
__I'd really love to read it

____CLIFF
____I'd know just how to light you

____JOHN
____Let's have lunch

_____JOHN/LISA
_____It won't work

_____MORINO
_____Let's pencil Thursday morning

GROUP 1
We should talk

GROUP 4
Gotta run

CHORUS
Let's have lunch

CHORUS (Not Joe)
Hi! Good morning, aren't we lucky?
going to work with Cukor
Paramount is paradise, movies from A to Zukor
We should talk, gotta run

GROUP 1
Let's have lunch

GROUP 2
We should talk

GROUP 1
Gotta run

GROUP 2
Gotta run

ALL
Let's have lunch!

(EVERYONE has dispersed, leaving JOE isolated, a prey to the waiting FINANCEMEN. HE's just addressing this situation when, to his surprise, BETTY materializes at his elbow.)

JOE

Come to get your knife back?

(Spoken)

It's still there, right between my shoulder blades.

BETTY

**I read one of your stories,
wasn't it Scribner's, some magazine.**

Title-

something with windows.

JOE

**It was "Blind Windows"
if that's what you mean.**

BETTY

**That's right
I really liked it.**

JOE

**I'm all warm
and runny inside.**

BETTY

**Let me
Pitch it to Sheldrake.**

JOE

**I may be broke but
I still have my pride.**

BETTY

**Come on.
get off your high horse
writers with pride don't live in L.A.
silence
exile and cunning
those are the only cards you can play.**

JOE

Sheldrake
won't buy this story
he likes trash with fairy lights.
Jesus,
think of the effort
trying to get him
to heighten his sights.

BETTY
Every
movie's a circus.
Can't we discuss this
Schwab's Thursday night?

JOE
What for?
Nothing will happen.
I gotta go now.
Fight the good fight.

BETTY
What's the rush?

(The FINANCEMEN appear in the doorway, looking around.)

JOE
See those Gorillas?

BETTY
Yes, what about them?

JOE
Do me a terrific favor
keep them amused while I escape.

BETTY
If you're at Schwab's on Thursday.

(JOE hesitates fractionally)

JOE

Done. Look, those guys are after my car. If I lose that in this town, it's like having my legs cut off.

BETTY

Let's duck into the soundstage.

1ST FIN.

Come on Gillis, give us the keys.

BETTY

Shhh! Please be quiet, Mr. De Mille is shooting right over there.

1ST FIN.

So what?

BETTY

He's working on "Samson and Delilah"; they're doing a red hot scene with Hedy Lamarr. You want to stay and watch?

1ST FIN.

No.

2ND FIN. (Interrupting)

Relax, we got five minutes.

(SHE leads them into a corner and JOE takes the opportunity to slip away. It's not long, however, before they realize that there is no scene being shot and furiously set off at a run, pursuing JOE)

BOTH FIN. MEN

Hey, hey, come back here...

On the Road

JOE's car noses into one of the main boulevards near Paramount; but the FINANCEMEN come roaring up in pursuit. JOE hits the gas and a high-speed chase ensues. Finally, after a hair-raising dash through the Holmby Hills, JOE's car turns onto Sunset, gains some distance with an enterprising U-turn and then suffers a sudden blow-out. With some difficulty, JOE manages to control the car

and turns into an open driveway, which then curves away from the street so that the FINANCEMEN thunder by without seeing JOE's car.

The House on Sunset

The property is noticeably shabbier and more run down than it was in the opening scene. The patio and little formal garden are choked with weeds, the plants on the balcony are over-grown and out of control and the pool is covered over. JOE jumps out of his car.

JOE

What a lovely sight! At the end of the driveway; a great big empty garage.

(HE pushes his car the last few yards into an open garage, and discovers it is not open after all. Under a tarpaulin, which JOE lifts curious, is the rear of an insanely elaborate 1932 Isotto-Fraschini with speaking tubes, running boards, glass partitions and leopard-skin upholstery. HE contemplates it for a moment.)

This thing must burn up 10 gallons to a mile.

(Then HE emerges from the garage and starts walking towards the house, as a ghostly version of "NEW WAYS TO DREAM" begins. HE comes to a halt, marvelling at both the scale and the dereliction of the house.)

Christ, where am I?

I had landed

in the garden of some palazzo

like an abandoned movie set.

(Suddenly, HE is startled by a sharp, decisive woman's VOICE, cutting harshly into his reverie... HE looks up at the balcony above but no one is visible.)

VOICE

You there!

(JOE approaches, still searching in vain for the source of the VOICE.)

Why are you so late?

(Before HE can summon up an answer, another shock; the French doors grind open and an extraordinary figure emerges from the house. This is MAX VON

MAYERLING, a sixty-year-old butler in black tail coat, striped trousers, stiff-collar shirt and white cotton gloves. HE contemplates JOE, his expression blank; then speaks in some mitteleuropaisch accent.)

MAX

This way.

(JOE steps forward, responding to MAX's natural authority)

JOE

Hey look, buddy, I just pulled my car....

MAX

And wipe your feet!

VOICE

Max! Tell him to wait!

(MAX turns to JOE, his tone chilly.)

MAX

You heard.

(HE starts to move off.)

If you need my help with the coffin, call me.

JOE

Hey, wait a minute... Hey, buddy...

(But MAX is gone. JOE looks around, somewhat at a loss. But before HE can make a move, the door to the gallery opens and another bizarre figure appears: NORMA DESMOND. Despite the gloom, SHE's wearing dark glasses and SHE's dressed in black loose pajamas and black high heel pumps. SHE looks younger than her age, which is probably somewhere in the vicinity of 50, and , despite a sickly pallor, SHE's extremely striking and was evidently once a great beauty. Her hair is encased in a leopard-patterned chiffon scarf. JOE watches her, transfixed, as SHE proceeds in stately fashion down the stairs.)

NORMA

Any law against burying him in the garden?

JOE

I wouldn't know.

NORMA

I don't care anyway.

(SHE sweeps past him to the back of the room, where SHE stands for a moment looking down at the child-sized bundle on the massage table. JOE, all his writer's instincts now alerted, watches her, fascinated. The music swells.)

**No more wars to fight
White flags fly tonight
You are out of danger now
Battlefield is still
Wild poppies on the hill
Peace can only come when you surrender**

**Here the tracers fly
Lighting up the sky
But I'll fight on to the end
Let them send their armies
I will never bend
I won't see you now 'till I surrender
I'll see you again when I surrender.**

(As the last echoes of this die away, SHE sweeps up the corpse into her arms, the shawl falls away and for the first time we see the body is that of a chimpanzee. NORMA stares defiantly at JOE, the monkey's face cradled against her own.)

Now don't you give me a fancy price just because I'm rich.

JOE

Look, lady, you've got the wrong man.

(NORMA pauses in the act of rearranging the corpse and shots JOE a fierce glance.)

I have some trouble with my car, I just pulled into your driveway.

NORMA

Get out.

JOE

O.K. I'm sorry you lost your friend.

NORMA

Get out of here.

(JOE's almost out, then HE turns back, frowning.)

JOE

Haven't I seen you somewhere before?

NORMA

Or shall I call my servant?

JOE

Aren't you Norma Desmond? You used to be in pictures. You used to be big.

NORMA

I am big. It's the pictures that got small.

(She advances on him, flushed with indignation.)

Once upon a time not long ago

The head of any studio

knew how and when to play his aces.

Now they put some

talentless unknown

beneath their sacred microphone.

We didn't need words, we had faces.

Yes, they took all the idols and smashed them.

The Fairbanks, the Gilberts, the Valentinos.

They trampled on what was divine

They threw away the gold of silence

when all they needed was this face of mine.

JOE

Hey! Don't blame me, I'm just a writer.

(JOE's back in the room now; watching as NORMA summons up before him the essence of her vanished stardom.)

With one look

I can break your heart

With one look

I play every part

I can make your sad heart sing

With one look you'll know

all you need to know

With one smile

I'm the girl next door

or the love that you've hungered for

When I speak it's with my soul

I can play any role

No words can tell

the stories my eyes tell

Watch me when I frown

You can't write that down

You know I'm right

It's there in black and white

When I look your way

you'll hear what I say

Yes, with one look

I put words to shame

Just one look

sets the screen aflame

Silent music starts to play

One tear in my eye

makes the whole world cry.

With one look

they'll forgive the past

They'll rejoice: I've returned at last

to my people in the dark

Still out there in the dark....

(SHE sweeps majestically around the stage as the orchestra takes the melody.)

Silent music starts to play
With one look
you'll know all you need to know.

With one look
I'll ignite a blaze
I'll return to my glory days
They'll say Norma's back at last.

This time I am staying
I'm staying for good
I'll be back
where I was born to be
With one look
I'll be me.

(SHE comes to herself suddenly, aware once again of his presence.)

Now go.

JOE
Next time I'll bring my autograph album.

(JOE nods good-naturedly, turns and sets off towards the French doors. HE's almost out of them, when NORMA speaks again.)

NORMA
Just a minute, you.

(JOE stops in the doorway, half-turns back.)

Did you say you were a writer?

JOE
That's what it says on my guild card.

NORMA
And you've written pictures?

JOE

Sure have. Would you like to see my credits?

NORMA

Come over here, I want to ask you something.

(JOE hesitates; but his curiosity gets the better of him and HE begins to move back into the body of the room.)

Just what sort of length is a movie script these days?

JOE

Depends.

(Standing by the sofa, next to the gold grand piano covered in photographs, is an immense manuscript, several bundles, each wrapped in red ribbon, standing about two feet high.)

NORMA

I wrote this, it's a very important picture.

JOE

Looks like six very important pictures.

NORMA

It's for De Mille to direct.

JOE

Oh, yeah? And will you be in it?

NORMA

Of course. What do you think?

JOE

Just asking. I didn't know you were planning a comeback.

NORMA

I hate that word. It's a return.

JOE

Well... fair enough.

NORMA

I want you to read it.

(This takes JOE by surprise; it takes him a moment to devise a response.)

JOE

You shouldn't let another writer read your stuff. He may steal it.

NORMA

I am not afraid. Sit down. Max!

(JOE still dithers; MAX appears at once.)

Bring something to drink.

MAX

Yes, Madame.

(JOE brightens; but still hesitates.)

NORMA

I said sit down!

(JOE lapses on to the sofa. The following sequence telescopes the passing of time covered by the reading of the script; but for now, NORMA, with great care, picks up the first of the bundles of the manuscript, almost sensually slips off the ribbon and proffers it to JOE.)

It's about Salome.

(MAX arrives wheeling a silver trolley, with champagne, caviar and red venetian glasses. JOE takes the manuscript from NORMA and settles himself.)

Salome: the story of a woman. The woman who was all women.

(HE begins to read. MAX withdraws. NORMA hovers, watching JOE)

Salome, what a woman, what a part!

Innocent body and a sinful heart,

inflaming Herods' lust,

But secretly loving a holy man.

No one could play her like I can.

JOE

**Well, I had nothing urgent coming up,
I thought I might as well skim it.
It's fun to see how bad bad writing can be,
this promised to go to the limit.**

(SHE's off in a world of her own; so much so, that JOE is able to sing his lines directly to the audience, as HE sifts through the pages and sips champagne.)

NORMA

**There's so many great scenes,
I can't wait.
A boiling cauldron of love and hate,
She toys with Herod
'till he putty in her hands
he reels tormented through the desert sands.**

(MAX reappears and moves around the room, lighting lamps. JOE picks up another bundle.)

JOE

**It sure was a real cheery set-up
the wind wheezing through that organ
Max shuffling around and a dead ape
dumped on a shelf
and her staring like a gorgon.**

(NORMA is on the stairs now, peering across the room at JOE.)

NORMA

**They drag the Baptist up from the jails.
She dances the dance of the seven veils.**

(NORMA throws herself into an extravagant dance, distracting JOE.)

Herod says: I'll give you anything.

(JOE resumes reading as MAX shows in a man dressed in formal evening clothes:

the PET UNDERTAKER. HE has a baby coffin under his arm.)

JOE

**Now it was time for some comedy relief
the guy with the baby casket.
Must have seen a thing or two, that chimp,
shame it was too late to ask it.**

(During this, MAX has scooped up the corpse of the chimp and exited, followed closely by the PET UNDERTAKER.)

NORMA

**Have you got to the scene
where she asks for his head?
If she can't have him living,
she'll take him dead.
They bring in his head on a silver tray.
She kisses his mouth, it's a great screenplay!**

(JOE'S on the last bundle now. NORMA lights herself a Turkish cigarette, having first inserted it in a holder attached to a curious clip which twists around her index finger.)

JOE

**It got to be eleven, I was feeling ill,
what the hell was I doing?
Melodrama and sweet champagne
and a garbled plot from a scrambled brain;
but I had my own plot brewing.**

(HE lays down the last page with a slight sigh. NORMA is instantly alert.)

Just how old is Salome?

(NORMA doesn't bat an eyelid.)

NORMA

Sixteen.

JOE

I see.

NORMA

Well?

JOE

It's fascinating.

NORMA

Of course it is.

(JOE looks up at her, choosing his words judiciously.)

JOE

**Could be it's a little long
Maybe the opening's wrong
but it's extremely good for the beginner.**

NORMA

**No, it's a perfect start,
I wrote that with my heart
The river-bank, the Baptist and the sinner.**

JOE

Shouldn't there be some dialogue?

NORMA

I can say anything I want with my eyes.

JOE

It could use a few cuts.

NORMA

I will not have it butchered!

JOE

**I'm not talking limb from limb,
I just mean a little trim
All you need is someone who can edit.**

NORMA

**I want someone with a knack
Not just any studio hack
And don't think for a moment
I'd share credit!**

(NORMA stares at him, an idea beginning to form in her mind.)

When were you born?

JOE
December twenty-first, why?

NORMA
I like Sagittarians. You can trust them.

JOE
Thanks.

(SHE turns on him, her eyes blazing.)

NORMA
I want you to do this work.

(JOE feigns a moment of surprise; then his eyes narrow and his voice is shrewd.)

JOE
Me? Gee, I don't know, I'm busy. I just finished one script and I'm about to start a new assignment.

NORMA
I don't care.

JOE
I'm pretty expensive. I get five hundred a week.

NORMA
Don't you worry about money. I'll make it worth your while.

(JOE is still not giving anything away. HE pretends to reflect.)

JOE

Well. It's getting kind of late.

NORMA

Are you married, Mr...?

JOE

The name is Gillis. Single.

NORMA

Where do you live?

JOE

Hollywood. Alto Nido Apartments.

NORMA

You'll stay here.

JOE

I'll come back early tomorrow.

NORMA

Nonsense. There's a room over the garage. Max will take you there. Max!

(Rather unerringly, MAX emerges from the shadows; HE's been there for some time.)

MAX

Yes, Madame.

NORMA

Take Mr. Gillis to the guest room.

(After a second's hesitation, JOE finds himself following MAX towards the French doors.)

We'll begin at nine sharp.

(MAX, holding up a lamp, leads JOE across the dark patio and up an outside wooden staircase to an austere small room above the garage.)

JOE

Now this is more like it.

MAX

I made up the bed this afternoon.

JOE

Thanks. How did you know I was going to stay?

MAX

There's a soap and a toothbrush in the bathroom.

JOE

She's quite a character, isn't she, that Norma Desmond?

(MAX is slightly scandalized by this remark, but HE preserves his dignity and looks JOE straight in the eye.)

MAX

Once,

you won't remember,

if you said Hollywood, hers was the face you'd think of.

Her face on every billboard,

in just a single week she'd get ten thousand letters.

Men would offer

fortunes for a bloom from her corsage

Or a few strands of her hair.

Today

she's half-forgotten,

but it's the pictures that got small.

She is the greatest star of all.

Then, you can't imagine,

how fans would sacrifice themselves to touch her shadow.

There was

a Maharajah who hanged himself

with one of her discarded stockings.

She's immortal

**caught inside that flickering light beam
is the youth which cannot fade.**

**Madame's a living legend;
I've seen so many idols fall.
She is the greatest star of all.**

(HE leaves the room. JOE watches him go, strangely impressed. Left alone, JOE moves relentlessly around the room for a moment.)

JOE (V.O.)

When he'd gone, I stood looking out the window for a while. There was the ghost of a tennis court with faded markings and a sagging net. There was an empty pool where Clara Bow and Fatty Arbuckle must have swum 10,000 midnights ago. And then there was something else; the chimp's last rites, as if she were laying a child to rest. Was her life really as empty as that?

(Below MAX disappears for a moment into the shadow of the garage. Then HE re-emerges. HE's carrying a shovel under his arm, the chimpanzee's coffin. HE advances to a spot where there's an overgrown rosebed in the center of the patio outside the French doors. As HE arrives there, NORMA who's evidently been waiting, emerges into the garden. THEY stand for a moment in silent communion, the atmosphere solemn. Then MAX takes up the shovel.

Above in his room, JOE is about to pull the curtain when HE catches sight of MAX and NORMA. HE stands at the window, staring down at them, riveted by the peculiarity of the scene, shaking his head wonderingly.)

SLOW FADE TO BLACK

Schwab's Drugstore

Schwab's is a Sunset Boulevard institution, a combination of soda-fountain, newsstand, tobacconist's and diner; it's crowded with movie people of one sort or another. It's closing time, and the patrons are on their last cup of coffee, preparing to drift away.

**ALL
Every
movie's a circus**

**on the wire
without a net**

**JOANNA
Coffee?**

**MYRON
I'm up too early
shooting at seven
I gotta go**

**ALL
Movies**

**BOY
What's wrong?**

**MARY
Can't get a screen test.
Don't you hate it
when a yes-man says no?**

**ALL
Movies**

**GIRL
Good part?**

**BOY
I'm a policeman
"Hang up, punk"
That's all I say.**

**ACTOR
First time
you worked on the lot there**

**ACTRESS
I must say R.
K.O are O.K.**

ALL
Movies.

BOY
Then what?

GIRL
He pressed a button.
Out of the wall
fell a four-poster bed.

ALL
Movies.

MYRON
Busy?

JOANNA
They shot my screenplay

MYRON
Isn't that great?

JOANNA
No, they shot the thing dead.

ALL
Every
movie's a circus
on the wire
without a net.

BOY
Lonely?

GIRL
That's how I like it.

BOY
Can't you be nice?

GIRL

Why? We're not on the set.

ALL

Movies.

(JOE slips into the drugstore. ARTIE, who's sitting at the bar by the telephone greets HIM.)

ARTIE

Hey, Joe

what are you, slumming?

JOE

Here for a meeting.

ARTIE

This time of night?

ALL

Movies.

JOE

Yeah, it's some

studio smartass

You know I'm famous

for being polite.

ALL

Movies.

ARTIE

Guess what?

I'm getting married.

JOE

Congratulations

ARTIE

She'll be right back.

ALL
Movies.

ARTIE
Fact is
we were just leaving
She's been stood up by
some uppity hack.

ALL
Movies.

JOE
Married
Who would have thought it?
Why don't you look happy?
Come on, be brave.

ALL
Movies.

ARTIE
It's this
movie I'm shooting.

JOE
You first assistant?

ARTIE
More like a slave.

ALL
Every
movie's a circus.

ARTIE
But this is a circus
movie as well.
Problems,
nothing but problems.

**Animals, actors,
two kinds of hell.**

**ALL
Every
movie's a circus
on the wire
without a net.**

(BETTY comes in.)

**BETTY
Well, hello,
Mr. Gillis.**

**ARTIE
You two have met?**

**JOE
I'm the uppity hack.**

**ARTIE
And she's
the studio smartass.**

**BETTY
What's going on here?**

(The phone rings. The BARMAN picks it up.)

**BARMAN (To ARTIE)
Artie, they're calling you back.**

(BETTY and JOE move over to a table; there's a moment of awkwardness between them, before BETTY decides to grasp the nettle. As THEY begin their number, isolated phrases from ARTIE's phone call puncture their tentative conversation.)

**BETTY
I just
reread "Blind Windows"**

**It needs some real
re-working, of course.
If we
fixed up the opening**

**ARTIE
Call up the wrangler
pay off the horse.**

**JOE
Girl meets boy
That's a safe beginning**

**BETTY
It's nearly closing
I thought you weren't
going to show.**

**JOE
So did I.
I felt it might be kinder**

**BETTY
What are you saying?**

**JOE
Come on, Miss Schaefer,
you know.**

**BETTY
What?**

**JOE
Every time I see some young kid
dreaming they'll produce
a masterpiece
I just want to throw them
on the next train home.**

BETTY

**Never thought
you'd be so condescending.**

JOE

**Sorry, Miss Schaefer
I didn't come here to fight.**

BETTY

**Girl meets boy.
If that's how you want it.
She's a young teacher,
he's a reporter.
It's hate at first sight.**

JOE

**It won't sell,
these days they want glamour:
Fabulous heiress
meets handsome Hollywood heel.
The problem is,
she thinks he's a burglar.
Would you believe it?
A wedding in the last reel.**

BETTY

**It doesn't have to be so mindless.
You should write from your experience
Give us something really moving;
something true.**

JOE

**Who wants true?
Who the hell wants moving?
Moving means starving
and true means holes in your shoe.**

BETTY

**No, you're wrong.
They still make good pictures.**

**Stick to your story,
it's a good story.**

JOE
O.K. Miss Schaefer;
I give it to you.

(HE's on his feet; BETTY is looking up at him, completely wrong-footed by his unexpected reaction.)

BETTY
What do you mean?

JOE
It's what I said. I've given up writing myself. So you write it.

BETTY
Oh, I'm not good enough to do it on my own. But I thought we could write it together.

JOE
I can't, I'm all tied up.

BETTY
Couldn't we work evenings? Six o'clock in the morning? I'd come to your place.

JOE
Look, Betty, it can't be done. It's out.

(HE relents a little at her obvious disappointment, smiles apologetically)

Let's keep in touch through Artie. That way if you get stuck, we can at least talk.

(HE smiles at HER, relaxed now.)

Write this down
I'll give you some ground rules.
Plenty of conflict
but nice guy don't break the law.

**Girl meets boy
she give herself completely
and though she loves him**

JOE/BETTY

She keeps one foot on the floor.

BETTY

**No one dies except the best friend
No one ever mentions communists
No one takes a black friend to a restaurant.**

JOE

**Very good.
Nothing I can teach you
We could have had fun
fighting the studio.**

BETTY

**Yes, Mr. Gillis.
That's just what I want.**

ARTIE

**What a nightmare.
Good to see you.
Come to my new year party.**

JOE

Last year it got out of hand.

ARTIE

Guaranteed bad behavior.

JOE

See you then.

BETTY

Don't give up, you're too good.

(SHE begins to move off with ARTIE.)

JOE

Thanks.

(THEY leave; and JOE is the last customer in the drugstore, staring ruefully into his cup of coffee.)

The House on Sunset (Exterior)

(The house, ghostly in the moonlight. To begin with, the stage is empty, then JOE appears, moving across the patio. As a certain point, HE's startled, as MAX glides out through the French doors to intercept him.)

MAX

Where have you been?

JOE

Out. I assume I can go out when I feel like it.

MAX

Madame is quite agitated. Earlier this evening, she wanted you for something and you could not be found.

JOE

Well, that's tough.

MAX

I don't think you understand, Mr. Gillis. Madame is extremely fragile. She has moments of melancholy. There have been suicide attempts.

JOE

Why? Because of her career? She's done well enough. Look at all the fan mail she gets every day.

MAX

I wouldn't look too closely at the postmarks if I were you.

JOE

You mean you write them?

MAX

Will you be requiring some supper this evening, sir?

JOE

No. And Max?

MAX

Yes, sir?

JOE

Who the hell do you think you are, Bringing my stuff up from my apartment without consulting me? I have a life of my own - now you're telling me I'm supposed to be a prisoner here.

(MAX considers him for a moment, his eye cold.)

MAX

I think, perhaps, sir, you will have to make up your mind to abide by the rules of this house. That is, if you want the job.

(HE turns; the house swallows him up and HE disappears as abruptly as HE materialized. JOE stands for a moment, perplexed; then he proceeds on his way up the wooden staircase towards his room above the garage.)

The House on Sunset (Interior)

A table has been cleared for JOE in the main room. HE sits at the typewriter, the manuscript piled at his elbow , a pencil held between his teeth, scissors and a pot of paste at hand. NORMA is on the sofa signing photos to fans, with MAX in attendance.

JOE

I started work on the script

I hacked my way through the thicket

A maze of fragmented ramblings

by a soul in limbo

She hovered there like a hawk

afraid I'd damage her baby.

(JOE drops a page of manuscript into the waste-paper basket and NORMA reacts instantly.)

NORMA

What's that?

JOE

I thought we might cut away from the slave market...

NORMA

Cut away from me?

JOE

Norma, they don't want you in every scene.

NORMA

Of course they do. What else would they have come for? Put it back.

(HE sighs and retrieves the page. Presently, SHE leaves the room. Once she's gone, JOE drops the page back into the waste-paper basket and turns to the audience.)

JOE

I'd made my first big mistake

I'd put my foot in the quick sand

It wouldn't be a few days paste and scissors

This would take weeks.

The house was always so quiet

Just me and Max and that organ

No one phoned and nobody ever came

And there was only one kind of entertainment on hand.

Max, what's on this evening?

I hope it's not one of her weepy melodramas.

MAX

We'll be showing one of

Madame's enduring classics:

"The Ordeal Of Joan Of Arc"

JOE

Oh, God, we saw that last week.

MAX

**A masterpiece can never fall
She is the greatest star of all.**

(During this MAX has been busying himself, setting up a projector and lacing the reels. JOE wanders over to take his place on the sofa. Eventually, NORMA sweeps in, dressed to the nines and settles down next to JOE. MAX switches on the projector and the beam, radiates across the auditorium. For a while, the whirr of the projector; NORMA watches, entranced; while JOE, far more detached, lights himself a cigarette, the smoke drifting across the light-beam.)

NORMA

**This was dawn
there were no rules,
we were so young.
Movies were born;
so many songs
yet to be sung.
So many roads
still unexplored;
we gave the world
new ways to dream.
Somehow we found
new ways to dream.**

(SHE takes JOE's arm excitedly and points up at the screen, somewhere above the audience's heads.)

Joan of Arc:

**look at my face,
isn't it strong?
There in the dark,
up on the screen,
where I belong.**

**We'll show them all
nothing has changed.
We'll give the world**

new ways to dream
Everyone needs
new ways to dream

("WITH ONE LOOK" returns as under-scoring.

By now SHE's gripping on to JOE, who detaches himself gently and moves to the other end of the sofa, where HE turns to contemplate NORMA, who's still staring ecstatically at the screen.)

JOE

I didn't argue,
why hurt her?
You don't yell at the sleepwalker
or she could fall and break her neck.
She smelled of faded roses.
It made me sad to watch her
as she relived her glory.
Poor Norma,
so happy,
lost in her silver heaven.

(NORMA continues to watch, and JOE watches her.)

NORMA

Nothing has changed
We'll give the world
new ways to dream.
Everyone needs
new ways to dream.

(JOE is touched; HE reaches out and takes her hand.)

FADE TO BLACK

The House on Sunset

The sound of heavy rain. It's day-time but dull enough to need the lights on. JOE's typewriter is no longer on the table, but closed and standing on end on the floor. HE's alone in the great room, playing solitaire. MAX is at the organ, wearing his

white gloves, playing. HE looks up at the audience, breaks off from his game.

JOE

In December, the rains came. One great big package, over-sized, like everything else in California; and it came right through the roof of my room above the garage. So she had me moved into the main house. Into what Max called " The room of the husbands." And on a clear day, the theory was, you could see Catalina. And little by little I worked through to the end of the script. At which point I might have left; Only by then those two boys from the finance company had traced my car and towed it away; and I hadn't seen one single dollar of cash money since I arrived.

(HE resumes his game; all of a sudden NORMA sweeps out of her room and down the stairs. SHE's holding a fat typescript in her hand. SHE snaps at MAX.)

NORMA

Stop that!

(MAX stops playing.)

Today's the day.

JOE

What do you mean?

NORMA

Max is going to deliver the script to Paramount.

JOE

You're really going to give it to De Mille?

NORMA

I've just spoken with my astrologer. She read De Mille's horoscope; she read mine.

JOE

Did she read the script?

NORMA

De Mille is Leo; I'm Scorpio. Mars is transiting Jupiter, and today is the day of

closest conjunction.

JOE

Oh, well, that's all right, then.

NORMA

Max

MAX

Yes, Madame

(SHE hands the typescript to MAX.)

NORMA

Make sure it goes to Mr. De Mille in person.

(HE leaves the house by the front door. There's a silence; NORMA moves up and down in a state of heightened emotion; JOE is steeling himself to broach a difficult subject.)

JOE

Well....

NORMA

Great day.

JOE

It's been real interesting.

NORMA

Yes... hasn't it?

JOE

I want to thank you for trusting me with your baby.

NORMA

Not at all, it is I who should thank you.

JOE

Will you call and let me know as soon as you have some news?

(NORMA frowns; SHE turns to him, her expression bewildered.)

NORMA

Call? Where?

JOE

My apartment.

NORMA

Oh, but, you couldn't possibly think of leaving now, Joe.

JOE

Norma, the script is finished.

NORMA

No, Joe. No. It's just the beginning, it's just the first draft: I couldn't dream of letting you go, I need your support.

JOE

Well, I can't stay.

NORMA

You'll stay on with full salary, of course...

JOE

Oh, Norma, it's not the money.

(NORMA now has a look of genuine panic on her face, and JOE sees that some reassurance is essential.)

Yes, of course, I'll stay until we get some sort of news back from Paramount.

(HE's on his feet now, and NORMA grips his hand tightly for a moment.)

NORMA

Thank you, thank you, Joe.

(SHE releases his hand and moves off leaving him a little shaken by this turn of events, his expression rueful. HE turns to the audience.)

JOE

**So, Max wheeled out that foreign bus
brushed the leopardskin upholstery.
He trundled along to Paramount
to hand Cecil B. our hopeless opus.
My work was over
I was feeling no pain
locked up like John the Baptist.**

The House on Sunset

MAX shows in an imposing, rather oily-looking man's outfitter, MR MANFRED, who's followed by a number of his ASSISTANTS carrying armfuls of boxes and teetering heaps of clothing. As THEY begin to deploy around the room, setting out their wares, NORMA bustles in from the patio.

NORMA

**Hurry up, the birthday boy is on his way.
This is a surprise celebration
I hope you've remembered everything I've said
I want to see a total transformation**

(JOE wanders into the room; HE stops in the doorway, startled by the unaccustomed crowd.)

JOE

What's all this?

NORMA

Happy birthday, darling. Did you think we'd forgotten?

JOE

Well... I don't know.

NORMA

These people are from the best men's shop in town. I had them close it down for a day.

JOE

Norma, now listen!

NORMA

I'll leave you boys to it.

(And before JOE can stop her, SHE's gone again, MANFRED is already circling warily, trying to assess his new customer; JOE looks at him, obviously dismayed, a hint of rebellion in his expression.)

MANFRED

Happy birthday, welcome to your shopathon!

JOE

What's going on?

MANFRED

Help yourself, it's all been taken care of.

Anyone who's anyone is dressed by me.

JOE

Well, golly gee.

MANFRED

Pick out anything you like a pair of.

You just point, I'll do the rest

I've brought nothing but the best

You're a very lucky writer

Come along now, get undressed

Unless I'm much mistaken

that's a 42-inch chest

JOE

I don't understand a word you're saying.

MANFRED

Well, all you need to know's the lady's paying.

It's nice to get your just reward this time of year.

JOE

Get outa here!

MANFRED

**And all my merchandise is strictly Kosher.
When you've thrown away all your old worn-out stuff,**

JOE

Hey, that's enough.

MANFRED

**Perhaps you'd like to model for my brochure.
I have just a thing for you.
Chalk-stripe suits**

SALESMAN 1

In black

SALESMAN 2

Or blue

SALESMAN 3

Glen paid trousers

SALESMAN 4

Cashmere sweaters

SALESMAN 5

Bathing shorts for Malibu

SALESMAN 6

Here's a patent leather lace-up

SALESMAN 7

It's a virtuoso shoe.

MANFRED

And a simply marvellous coat made of vicuna

JOE

You know what you can do with your vicuna

(At this delicate point, NORMA saunters back into the room. Oblivious to the atmosphere, SHE registers only that no progress has been made.)

NORMA

Come on, Joe, you haven't even started yet.

JOE

You wanna bet?

NORMA

(SHE turns to MANFRED.)

I thought by now he'd look the height of fashion
He always takes forever making up his mind.

(And back to JOE)

**Don't be unkind,
I thought you writers knew about
compassion**

(Impatient now, SHE plunges in among the clothes, towing MANFRED in her wake.)

I love flannel on a man

(SHE picks out a beautiful pale jacket)

MANFRED

This will complement his tan.

(Now SHE's grabbing at shirts and trousers.)

NORMA

We'll take two of these and four of those

MANFRED

**I'm still your greatest fan!
Very soon now we'll have stopped him
looking like an also-ran**

JOE

You're going to make me sorry that I'm staying.

NORMA

Well, all right. I'll choose, after all, I'm paying.

(SHE picks out more and more clothes, handing them to the SALESMAN, JOE slouching sullenly behind her.)

MANFRED

Evening clothes?

NORMA

I want to see your most deluxe.

JOE

Won't wear a tux.

NORMA

Of course not, dear, tuxedos are for waiters.

MANFRED

What we need are tails, a white tie and top hat.

JOE

I can't wear that.

NORMA

Joe, second-rate clothes are for second-raters.

JOE

Norma, please...

NORMA

Shut up, I'm rich

Not some platinum blonde bitch

I own so many apartments

I've forgotten which is which.

JOE

I don't have to go to premieres

I'm never on display

You seem to forget that I'm a writer,

Who cares what you wear when you're a writer?

(But HE's clearly weakening, and now NORMA moves in for the kill.)

NORMA

I care, Joe, and please don't be so mean to me.

JOE

O.K. all right.

NORMA

You can't come to my New Year's Eve party in that filling-station shirt.

JOE

I've been invited somewhere else on New Year's Eve.

NORMA

Where?

JOE

Artie Green. He's an old friend of mine.

NORMA

**I can't do without you, Joe, I need you
I've sent out every single invitation.**

JOE

All right, Norma, I give in.

NORMA

**Of course, you do
and when they've dressed you
you'll cause a sensation**

(And with this SHE sweeps off, up the stairs. JOE and MANFRED look at each other for a moment. Finally, JOE shrugs and spreads his arms, conceding. MANFRED snaps his fingers and the SALESMAN descend on JOE, engulfing him, so that HE disappears in the scrimmage.)

SALESMEN

We equip the chosen few of movieland.

MANFRED

(The latest cut)

SALESMEN

**We dress every movie star and crooner
from their shiny toecaps
to their hatband.**

MANFRED

(Conceal your gut)

You won't regret selecting the vicuna

SALESMEN

**If you need a hand to shake
If there's a girl you want to make
If there's a soul you're out to capture
or a heart you want to break
If you want the world to love you**

MANFRED

You'll have to learn to take

(The SALESMAN move away from JOE, to reveal that HE is now transformed, in full evening dress, white tie and tails.)

SALESMEN

And gracefully accept the role you're playing.

MANFRED

You will earn every cent the lady's paying

SALESMEN

So why not have it all?

(MANFRED is now more or less cheek to cheek with JOE, hissing into HIS ear with offensive intimacy.)

MANFRED

Now that didn't hurt, did it?

SALESMEN

The lady's paying!

BLACKOUT

The House on Sunset & Artie's Apartment

JOE paces uneasily in his white tie and tails, as a Palm Court QUARTET begins playing tango music.

Lights up on the LITTLE ORCHESTRA, tucked in under the stairs; the streamers, the trees in tubs, the floral arrangements, the dozens of blazing candles. MAX is busying himself, preparing the drinks tray.

JOE

Max

You've pulled the stops out.

It looks like gala night aboard S.S. Titanic.

Will we

play spot the actor?

As if we're visiting a gallery of waxworks?

MAX

Would you rather

I mix for you a dry martini

or shall I open a champagne?

JOE

Max, don't be evasive

who's she invited to the ball?

MAX

Madame herself made every call.

(Suddenly, NORMA appears at the top of the stairs in a dazzling diamente evening gown with long black gloves and bird of paradise feathers in her hair. SHE begins a stately descent. JOE puts his glass down and applauds. MAX watches discreetly, evidently moved; HE opens a bottle of champagne.

JOE waits to meet her at the bottom of the stairs. HE's reaching out to take her

arm, when as if from nowhere, SHE suddenly produces a gold cigarette case and hands it to him.)

NORMA

Here. Happy New Year.

JOE

Norma, I can't take this.

NORMA

Oh, shut up. Open it. Read what it says.

(JOE opens it and reads out, half-amused and half-appalled.)

JOE

"Mad about the boy"

NORMA

Yes, and you do look absolutely divine.

(JOE is touched, despite his embarrassment; HE decides to give in gracefully and slips the cigarette case into his pocket.)

JOE

Well, thank you.

(NORMA stretches out a hand to lead JOE onto the freshly-waxed tiles dance-floor.)

NORMA

I had these tiles put in, you know, because Rudy Valentino said to me, it takes tiles to tango. Come on.

JOE

No, no, not on the same floor as Valentino!

NORMA

Oh come on, come on, come on. Get up. Follow me. And one, two.... and one, two, one, two together. And one.

(THEY begin to dance. After a while, NORMA snaps at JOE.)

Don't lean back like that.

JOE

Norma, it's that thing. It tickles.

(NORMA pulls the feathers out of her hair and casts them aside. THEY resume dancing, closer this time.)

NORMA

Ring out the old
Ring in the new
A midnight wish
to share with you
Your lips are warm
my head is light;
were we alive
before tonight?

I don't need a crowded ballroom
everything I want is here
If you're with me
next year will be
the perfect year

(JOE is beginning to be aware what's happening; still, at the same time, HE's caught up in the intoxication of the movement.)

JOE

Before we play
some dangerous game;
before we fan
some harmless flame,
we have to ask
if this is wise
and if the game
is worth the prize.

With this wine and with this music,
how can anything be clear?

Let's wait and see
it may just be
the perfect year.

(THEY dance.)

NORMA

It's New Year's Eve
and hope are high,
Dance one year in,
kiss one good-bye.
Another chance,
another start,
so many dreams
to tease the heart.

We don't need a crowded ballroom
everything we want is here
and face to face
we will embrace
the perfect year.

We don't need a crowded ballroom
everything we want is here
and face to face
we will embrace
the perfect year.

(SHE kisses him lightly as the number comes to an end. Then, as the orchestra strikes up the next piece, THEY move off the floor to take up the glasses of champagne which MAX has poured for them. They clink glasses and drink.)

JOE

So, what time are they supposed to get here?

NORMA

Who?

JOE

The other guests.

NORMA

There are no other guests. Just you and me.

(SHE leans in to kiss him again, this time more seriously. MAX half turns away, averting his eyes.)

I'm in love with you. Surely you know that.

(JOE is terribly startled by this.)

JOE

Norma....

NORMA

We'll have a wonderful time next year. I'll have the pool filled up for you. I'll open up my house in Malibu, and you can have the whole ocean. I have enough money to buy us anything we want.

JOE

Cut out that "us" business.

NORMA

What's the matter with you?

JOE

What right do you have to take me for granted?

NORMA

What right? Do you want me to tell you?

(JOE is out of his depth now; all he can do is bluster.)

JOE

Norma, what I'm trying to say is that I'm the wrong guy for you; you need a big shot, someone with polo ponies, a Valentino...

NORMA

What you're trying to say is, you don't want me to love you. Say it! Say it!

(JOE doesn't answer; he looks away, avoiding her eye. Thus, it takes him a completely by surprise when SHE slaps his face. And, before HE can react, SHE's turned and run all the way up the stairs to vanish into her bedroom. JOE finds himself standing face to face with MAX.)

JOE

Max. Get me a taxi.

(As MAX moves towards the phone, the house moves back a way to reveal ARTIE's apartment, a modest one-room affair, packed to the rafters with carefree young people, many of whom we have already encountered at the studio and at Schwab's. Several of the GUESTS cluster around the piano and there's a BOY with a saxophone. Others help themselves to some dangerous looking alcoholic concoction from a punchbowl. The house at Sunset remains visible throughout.

As the new scene establishes itself, JOE encases himself in his vicuna coat.)

I had to get out

I needed

to be with people my own age

to hear the sound of laughter

and mix with hungry actors,

underemployed composers,

nicotine-poisoned writers,

real people,

real problems,

having a really good time.

(JOE hesitates in the doorway of the apartment, suddenly embarrassed by how overdressed HE is. Meanwhile, ARTIE hails him and pushes through the crowd to greet him.)

ARTIE

Hey, Gillis! We'd given you up.

(BETTY, by the piano, hears this and looks around, delighted to see JOE. By now, ARTIE has reached him.)

Let me take your coat.

(HE touches the coat and reacts, surprised.)

Jesus, Joe, what's this made of? Mink?

(HE's even more surprised when the coat comes off to reveal JOE's tails.)

Who did you borrow this from? Adolphe Menjou?

JOE

Close, but no cigar.

(HE gestures around the room.)

Hey! It's quite a crowd.

ARTIE

I invited all the kids doing walk-ons in "Samson and Delilah."

BETTY

Where have you been hiding? I called your apartment. I called your ex-agent. I was about to call the Bureau of Missing Persons.

JOE

Well, they always know where to find me.

(Before SHE can develop this, the BOYS and GIRLS around the piano launch into their song.)

RICHARD A

Hey, Sammy!

**You gotta say your new year's
resolution out loud.**

Jean!

JEAN

**By this time next year
I'll have landed a juicy part**

STEVE

Nineteen fifty will be my start

RICHARD T

No more carrying spears

MARY

I'll be discovered

my life won't ever be the same

Billy Wilder will know my name

and he'll call all the time

KATHERINE

**'Til he does, can one of you guys
lend her a dime?**

ALISA

Just an apartment

with no roaches and no dry rot

ANITA

Where the hot water comes out hot

BOTH

That's my Hollywood dream

RICHARD A.

Your resolution

JOANNA

Is to write something that get shot

with approximately the plot

I first had in my head

MYRON

But you'll get rewritten

even after you're dead.

RICHARD A.

Artie!

ARTIE

It's a year to begin a new life

**Buy a place somewhere quiet,
somewhere pretty.
When you have a young kid and a wife
then you need somewhere green far from the city
It's rambling old house with a big apple tree
With a swing for the kid and a hammock for me.**

(The mood is broken as a number of GIRLS, dressed as the harem from 'Samson and Delilah' burst squealing out of the kitchen followed by SAMMY, wearing jodhpurs and knee-length riding boots and carrying a megaphone. HE adjusts his spectacles and assumes the grave, patriarchal air of CECIL B. DE MILLE.)

**SAMMY
Behold, my children,
it is I, Cecil B. De Mille,
Meeting me must be quite a thrill,**

**ADAM
But there's no need to kneel.**

**SAMMY
I guarantee you
every girl in my chorus line
is a genuine Philistine**

**SANDY
They don't come off the shelf**

**SAMMY
I flew everyone in from Philistia myself.**

(The GIRLS dance a kind of parody Middle Eastern bump and grind.)

(Meanwhile, in the house, NORMA emerges from her room and descends the stairs, walking carefully as if holding herself together. MAX intercepts her with a glass of champagne. SHE lights a cigarette, inserts it in her holder-contraption and begins pacing up and down, listening to the orchestra with half an ear.

Back at ARTIE's apartment, BETTY is looking around for JOE, who has moved off on his own and is now sitting, pensive, in the bathroom. Eventually, SHE finds

him and advances determinedly towards him.)

BETTY

**I have some good news
It's "Blind Windows."**

JOE

You don't let go.

BETTY

**I gave Sheldrake an outline, Joe,
and he swallowed the bait.**

JOE

Well, Hallelujah!

BETTY

**While you've been buying vicuna coats
I've been making a lot of notes
Now there's work we should do...**

JOE

**Betty, you're forgetting that I gave it to you.
You remind me of me long ago
off the bus, full of ignorant ambition
Thought I'd waltz into some studio
and achieve overnight recognition.
I've seen too many optimists sinking like stones
Felt them suck all the marrow clean out of my bones.**

(At the house, NORMA drifts back upstairs with her glass of champagne. MAX watches her leave, very concerned.)

BETTY

**I love "Blind Windows"
but I can't write it on my own.
Can't we speak on the telephone?
All my evening are free.**

ARTIE

**Hey, just a minute
I'm the fellow who bought the ring.**

BETTY

**Artie, this is a business thing
It's important to me.
You'll be on location in Clinch, Tennessee.**

(SHE turns to JOE, talking with a real intensity.)

Please make this your New Year's resolution for me.

(The CHORUS starts up again.)

ALL

**By this time next year
I will get my foot in the door
Next year I know I'm going to score
an amazing success.**

**Cut to the moment
when they open the envelope
Pass the statuette to Bob Hope
and it's my name you hear.**

**We'll be down on our knees
outside Grauman's Chinese
Palm prints there on the street
Immortality's neat!
This time next year
this time next year**

**We'll have nothing to fear
contracts all signed
Three-picture deal
yellow brick road career.
Hope we're not still saying these things
this time next year.**

(Back in the house, MAX is seized by a sudden fear. Moving with surprising

speed, HE suddenly bounds up the stairs and disappears into NORMA's bedroom.)

JOE

You know, I think I will be available in the New Year.

In fact, I'm available right now.

BETTY

Joe, that's great!

(He turns to ARTIE)

JOE

Hey, Artie, where's your phone?

ARTIE

Under the bar.

JOE

Hey, Artie. You think you could put me up for a couple of weeks?

ARTIE

It's just so happens we've got a vacancy on the couch.

JOE

I'll take it.

(HE pushes across to the phone, picks it up and dials. HE has to put a finger in his ear, because some new piece of nonsense has started up in the room.

MAX comes down the stairs and hurriedly dismisses the orchestra. HE looks unprecedently ramshackled and dishevelled. HE starts back up the stairs.

The phone rings in the house. MAX picks up the receiver.)

MAX

Yes?

JOE

Max, it's Mr. Gillis. I want you to do me a favor.

MAX

I'm sorry Mr. Gillis. I can't talk right now.

JOE

Listen, I want you to take my old suitcases...

MAX

I'm sorry, I'm attending to Madame.

JOE

What do you mean?

MAX

Madame found a razor in your room. And she's cut her wrists.

ALL

Three, two, one, Happy New Year!

Should auld acquaintance be forgot

and never brought to mind

Should auld acquaintance be forgot

and days of auld lang syne.

For auld lang syne, my dear

for auld lang syne

We'll take a cup of kindness yet

for the sake of auld lang syne.

(Repeat, fading to scene change.)

(BETTY, meanwhile, has been making her way over to speak to him. SHE arrives by his side and is immediately aware something is wrong.)

(JOE stares at her as if HE's never seen her before in his life. Then, abruptly, HE hangs up and, to BETTY's total astonishment, HE pushes across the room, disrupting the cabaret, grabs his coat from the book-shelf where ARTIE has carefully stowed it, and slams out of the apartment.)

(ARTIE's apartment dissolves; now it's the house again. Presently MAX appears, supporting NORMA. Her wrists are heavily bandaged; SHE looks much older, frail and shaky. With infinite tenderness, MAX shepherds NORMA to the old sofa near the piano, out of site of the orchestra. He's made the necessary preparations

beforehand and now HE drops to his knees and begins to bathe her forehead and temples with a flannel dipped in ice water.

Suddenly, JOE bursts through the front door, panting and extremely agitated. MAX rises; NORMA half sits up, glaring at JOE.)

NORMA

Go away.

JOE

What kind of silly thing was that to do?

NORMA

I'll do it again! I'll do it again! I'll do it again!

JOE

Attractive headline: "Great Star Kills Herself for Unknown Writer."

NORMA

Great stars have great pride.

(SHE turns away from him. MAX, still anxious, is moving back, melting into the background.)

You must have some girl; Why don't you go to her?

(Now JOE kneels beside NORMA and speaks to her with great gentleness.)

JOE

I never meant to hurt you, Norma, You've been good to me. You're the only person in this stinking town that's ever been good to me.

NORMA

Then why don't you say thank you and go? Go, go! Go!

(JOE goes to the stairs as if to leave, then goes to NORMA.

He sits near HER on the sofa, leans forward and kisses HER.)

JOE

Happy New Year.

(SHE reaches up and wraps her bandaged arms around his neck.)

NORMA

Happy New Year, darling.

(THEY kiss; NORMA pulls JOE down onto the sofa. Through this...)

SLOW FADE TO BLACK

ACT II

The House on Sunset

The exterior of the house in blazing sunshine. JOE, in dark glasses, sipping a Calafornian cocktail, sits on a chaise-longue, in the shade of a large umbrella. HE smiles smugly and addresses the audience.

JOE

Sure, I came out here

To make my name

Wanted my pool, my dose of fame

Wanted my parking space at Warners'.

But, after a year

A one-room hell

A Murphy bedA rancid smell

Wallpaper peeling at the corners

Sunset Boulevard

Twisting Boulevard

Secretive and rich, a little scary.

Sunset Boulevard,

Tempting Boulevard,

Waiting there to swallow the unwary.

Dreams are not enough

To win a war

Out here they're always keeping score

Beneath the tan the battle rages.

**Smile a rented smile
Fill someone's glass
Kiss someone's wife
Kiss someone's ass
We do whatever pays the wages.**

**Sunset Boulevard
Headline Boulevard
Getting here is only the beginning.
Sunset Boulevard
Jackpot Boulevard
Once you've won you have to go on winning.**

**You think I've sold out?
Dead right I've sold out.
I've just been waiting
For the right offer:
Comfortable quarters,
Regular rations,
24 hour
Five-star room service.**

**And if I'm honest
I like the lady
I can't help being
Touched by her folly.
I'm treading water,
Taking the money,
Watching her sunset...**

Well, I'm a writer.

**LA's changed a lot
Over the years
Since those brave Gold Rush pioneers
Came in their creaky covered wagons.**

**Far as they could go
End of the line**

**Their dreams were yours
Their dreams were mine
But in those dreams were hidden dragons.**

**Sunset Boulevard
Frenzied Boulevard
Swamped with every kind of false emotion.**

**Sunset Boulevard
Brutal Boulevard
Just like you we'll wind up in the ocean.**

**She was sinking fast
I threw a rope
Now I have suits
And she has hope
It seemed an elegant solution.**

**One day this must end
It isn't real
Still, I'll enjoy
A hearty meal
Before tomorrow's execution.**

**Sunset Boulevard
Ruthless Boulevard
Destination for the stony-hearted.**

**Sunset Boulevard
Lethal Boulevard
Everyone's forgotten how they started
Here on Sunset Boulevard.**

(HE pours himself a glass of champagne from an open bottle. As HE's sipping at it, NORMA comes hurrying out of the house in a state of high excitement.)

**NORMA
There's been a call,
What did I say?**

**They want to see
Me right away.**

**Joe, Paramount,
They love our child,
Mr. DeMille
Is going wild.**

(JOE is a little surprised by this, but manages to conceal his scepticism almost at once.)

JOE
Well, that's wonderful, Norma.

**NORMA
But it was some fool assistant,
Not acceptable at all.
If he wants me, then Cecil B.
Himself must call.**

(JOE shakes his head, a little disapproving.)

JOE
I don't know if this is a time to stand on ceremony.

**NORMA
Ive been waiting twenty years now,
What's a few more days, my dear?
It's happened, Joe,
I told you so,
The perfect year.**

(She stretches out her hand to him, invitingly.)

NORMA
Now, let's go upstairs.

**JOE (Hesitating)
Shouldnt you at least call back?**

NORMA

No; they can wait until I'm good and ready.

On the Road

JOE

It took her three days

And she was ready.

She checked with her astrologer,

Who sacrificed a chicken.

She dressed up like a pharaoh,

Slapped on a pound of make-up

And set forth in her chariot.

Poor Norma

So happy,

Re-entering her kingdom.

Paramount

(The Isotta-Fraschini turns off Brobnson and pulls up in front of the main gates. For the moment, nothing happens; but MAX , it emerges, is engaged in important business, staring fixedly into the rear view mirror.)

MAX

If you will pardon me, Madame, the shadow over the left eye is not quite balanced.

NORMA

Thank you, Max.

(She attends to it, using a handkerchief. Meanwhile, MAX sounds the horn impatiently. A young STUDIO GUARD breaks off a conversation HE's been having with an EXTRA dressed as an indian brave.)

GUARD

Hey, that's enough of that.

MAX

To see Mr. DeMille. Open the gate.

GUARD

Mr. DeMille is shooting. You need an appointment.

MAX

This is Norma Desmond. No appointment is necessary.

GUARD

Norma who?

(Meanwhile, however, NORMA has recognized JONES, who is sitting on a wooden chair, reading a newspaper. She rolls down the window.)

NORMA

Jonesy!

(JONES looks up, frowning; then his expression clears and he approaches the car.)

JONES

Why, if it isn't Miss Desmond. How have you been, Miss Desmond?

NORMA

Fine, Jonesy. Open the gate.

(JONES turns to his young COLLEAGUE.)

JONES

You heard Miss Desmond.

GUARD

They don't have a pass.

(JONES shakes his head, exasperated, and begins to open the gate himself. The car moves forward.)

JONES

Stage 18, Miss Desmond.

NORMA

Thank you, Jonesy. And teach your friend some manners. Tell him without me there wouldn't be any Paramount Studio.

(As the car glides through the gates, JONES picks up his telephone.)

JONES

Get me Stage 18. I have a message for Mr. DeMille.

(A scene-change reveals the cavernous exterior of Sound Stage 18, where the STAND-INS for Victor Mature and Hedy Lammaar are in position, in a blaze of light, on the grandiose "Samson and Delilah" set. MR. DEMILLE, recognizable from the parody version of Act I, confers with his DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY. HE's interrupted by one of his assistants, HEATHER, who approaches with some trepidation.)

HEATHER

Mr. DeMille?

DEMILLE

What is it?

HEATHER

Norma Desmond is here to see you, Mr. DeMille.

DEMILLE

Norma Desmond?

HEATHER

She's here at the studio.

DEMILLE

It must be about that appalling script of hers. What shall I say?

HEATHER

Maybe I could give her the brush.

DEMILLE

Thirty million fans have given her the brush. Isn't that enough? Give me a minute.

(He turns towards the set.

Meanwhile, NORMA has arrived outside the studio with MAX and JOE. She hesitates for a moment, gripping JOE's hand fiercely.)

NORMA

Won't you come along, darling?

(JOE shakes his head.)

JOE

It's your script. It's your show. Good luck.

NORMA

Thank you, darling.

(By this time, HEATHER has emerged from the studio. She comes over to greet NORMA.)

HEATHER

Miss Desmond.

(She leads NORMA towards the studio. DE MILLE is waiting just inside; he envelops her in his arms.)

DEMILLE

Well, well, well.

NORMA

Hello, Mr. DeMille.

(A long embrace.)

NORMA

Last time I saw you was some place terribly gay. I was dancing on a table.

DEMILLE

A lot of people were. Lindbergh had just landed.

(He starts to lead her into the studio.)

NORMA

You read the script, of course.

DEMILLE

Well, yes...

NORMA

I know how busy you are when you're shooting, but I really think you could have picked up the phone yourself, instead of leaving it to some assistant.

DEMILLE

I don't know what you mean, Norma.

NORMA

Yes, you do.

DEMILLE

Come on in.

(HE leads her into the studio, a bewildering chaos of sound and activity, which at first stuns her. HE shouts to be heard above the cacophony. He hurries off. Slowly, as NORMA looks around, the sound fades to nothing. She stands there, looking around the old familiar space. Suddenly, a VOICE rings out.)

VOICE

Miss Desmond! Hey, Miss Desmond!

(NORMA looks around, unable to identify the source of the VOICE)

HOG-EYE

Up here, Miss Desmond; it's Hog-eye!

(NORMA looks up. Up in the flies, balanced on the walkway, is a quite elderly ELECTRICIAN.)

NORMA

Hog-eye! Well, hello!

HOG-EYE

Let's get a look at you.

(And so saying, HE swivels one of the big lamps until it finds her. SHE stands for a moment, isolated, bathed in the light. Then, from all over the studio, murmuring among themselves, TECHNICIANS, EXTRAS and STAGEHANDS begin to

converge on her.)

NORMA

**I don't know why I'm frightened,
I know my way around here
The cardboard trees,
The painted seas,
The sound here.**

**Yes, a world to rediscover
But I'm not in any hurry
And I need a moment.**

**The whispered conversations
In overcrowded hallways,
The atmosphere
As thrilling here
As always.**

**Feel the early morning madness
Feel the magic in the making
Why, everything's as if we never said goodbye.**

**I've spent so many mornings
Just trying to resist you
I'm trembling now
You can't know how
I've missed you,**

**Missed the fairy-tale adventures
In this ever-spinning playground,
We were young together.**

**I'm coming out of make-up
The lights already burning
Not long until
The cameras will
Start turning.**

**Feel the early morning madness
Feel the magic in the making
Yes, everything's as if we never said goodbye.**

**I don't want to be alone
That's all in the past
This world's waited long enough
I've come home at last.**

**And this time will be bigger
And brighter than we knew it
So watch me fly
We all know I
Can do it.**

**Could I stop my hand from shaking?
Has there ever been a moment
With so much to live for?**

**The whispered conversations
In overcrowded hallways,
So much to say
Not just today
But always**

**We'll have early morning madness
We'll have magic in the making
Yes, everything's as if we never said goodbye.
Yes, everything's as if we never said goodbye.**

We taught the world new ways to dream.

(The focus shifts to outside the studio, where JOE has moved off to lean against a wall, smoke a cigarette, and enjoy the passing parade. Suddenly, HE sees BETTY hurrying past, a bundle of scripts under her arm. HE thinks about avoiding HER altogether, but she's seen him and bears down on him.)

**BETTY
Well, hello,**

Mr. Gillis.

**Where have you been
Keeping yourself?**

JOE

**Someone's
Been doing it for me.**

BETTY

**And meanwhile "Blind Windows"
Is stuck on the shelf.
You said
We'd work together.**

JOE

**New Year's crisis
What can I say?**

BETTY

**Always
Full of excuses.**

JOE

**Promise I'll call you
Later today.**

(BETTY looks at HIM for a moment.)

BETTY

You said that last time.

JOE

Betty, I won't let you down.

BETTY

I guess I'll just have to trust you.

(BETTY smiles at him and hurries on.)

During this exchange, SHELDRAKE has entered. HE stops having caught sight of

the Isotta. HE tries to catch MAXs attention, but MAX deliberately ignores him. Finally, SHELDRAKE plants himself unavoidably in front of him.)

SHELDRAKE

You're Miss Desmonds German shepherd.

I'm the one who's been calling.

The name is Sheldrake, A couple of weeks ago, I was looking out of my office window and I saw you driving on to the lot. And I said that's exactly the car I've been looking for. Great for my new Crosby picture. So, I made some inquiries and I've been calling for two weeks. Doesnt she ever answer the phone? It's so perfect. You can't find that kind of quality outside of a museum. Were willing to pay a hundred dollars a week...

MAX

It's outrageous,

You insult her,

How can you be so cruel?

I forbid you to approach her.

SHELDRAKE

You're insane.

MAX

Go away.

Go away!

(SHELDRAKE hurries off. In the studio, DEMILLE has been attempting to set up his shot. Now, however, unable to ignore the kerfuffle surrounding NORMA, he steps down and approaches her; NORMA turns to him, radiant.)

NORMA

Did you see

How they all came

Crowding around?

They still love me

And soon we'll be

Breaking new ground.

Brave pioneers.

DEMILLE

Those were the days.

NORMA

Just like before.

DEMILLE

We had such fun.

NORMA

We gave the world

New ways to dream.

NORMA AND DEMILLE

We always found

New ways to dream.

(The red light goes on and the studio bell shrills. VICTOR MATURE and HEDY LAMARR arrive to take the place of their identically costumed STAND-INS.)

DEMILLE

Let's have a good long talk one day.

NORMA

The old team will be back in business.

DEMILLE

Sorry, my next shot's ready.

(He begins to walk her towards the studio door.

Meanwhile, outside, JOE has moved over towards MAX and notices right away, from the LATTE's thunderous expression, that something disturbing has happened.)

MAX

Mr. Gillis...

JOE

What's the matter, Max?

MAX

I just found out the reason for all those phone calls from Paramount. It's not Madame they want. It's her car.

JOE

Oh, my God.

(DEMILLE and NORMA have reached the doorway of the studio.)

NORMA

Now, you remember, don't you? I don't work before 10 or after 4:30 in the afternoon.

DEMILLE

It isn't entirely my decision, Norma, New York must be consulted.

NORMA

That's fine. You ask any exhibitor in the country. I'm not forgotten.

DEMILLE

Of course you're not.

(He embraces her.)

DEMILLE

Goodbye, young fellow. We'll see what we can do.

NORMA

I'm not worried. It's so wonderful to be back.

(SHE turns and sweeps regally away towards her car, the door of which MAX is holding open. DEMILLE waves goodbye to her; then, as the Isotta drives off, HE shakes his head, disturbed, and moves, preoccupied, back towards the studio doorway. HEATHER is waiting for him. BETTY rushes out of the soundstage)

BETTY

Was that really Norma Desmond?

DEMILLE

It was.

HEATHER

She must be about a million years old.

DEMILLE

I hate to think where that puts me. I could be her father.

HEATHER

Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. DeMille.

(The shot is ready, and EVERYONE is waiting on DEMILLE's orders, but HE pauses for a moment, in pensive mood, his hand on the back of his chair.)

DEMILLE

If you could have seen

Her at seventeen

When all of her dreams were new,

Beautiful and strong,

Before it all went wrong;

She's never known the meaning of

Surrender;

Never known the meaning of

Surrender.

(Slow fade to black.)

Bettys Office

Night on the Paramount lot. BETTY's office is a spartan affair, one of a row of wooden cubicles suspended at first-floor level, above the darkened streets of the back lot. BETTY sits behind her desk, staring at her typewriter, from which a piece of paper protrudes; JOE, in his shirt-sleeves, paces up and down, holding a pencil. Presently, as the silence extends, HE crosses to look down at the sheet of paper in his typewriter, frown,; then, his brow clears as an idea occurs to him.

JOE

How about

They don't know each other

He works the night shift,

And she takes classes all day?

**Here's the thing
They both share the same room,
Sleep in the same bed
It works out cheaper that way.**

BETTY

**Well, I've a feeling you're just kidding,
But to me it sounds believable.
Makes a better opening than that car chase scene:
Girl finds boy
Borrowing her toothbrush
Or oversleeping
Or at her sewing-machine.**

(She's got up as the excitement over her ideas has gripped her, and now JOE takes her place behind the typewriter.)

JOE

You know, it's not bad, there are some real possibilities...

(BETTY picks up JOE's cigarette case, helps herself to a cigarette and then notices the inscription.)

BETTY

Who's Norma?

JOE

Who's who?

BETTY

I'm sorry, I don't usually read private cigarette cases.

JOE

Normas a friend of mine, middle-aged lady, very foolish, very generous.

BETTY

I'll say: this is solid gold. Mad about the boy?

(JOE rises to his feet, thinks of a way to change the subject.)

JOE

So how's Artie?

BETTY

Stuck in Tennessee. It rains all the time, they're weeks behind. Nobody knows when they'll get back.

JOE

Good.

BETTY

What's good about it! I'm missing him something fierce.

JOE

No, I mean this idea we had is really pretty good.

(He picks up the notebook, scribbles a note, as BETTY moves back towards the desk.)

JOE

Back to work.

BETTY

What if he's a teacher?

JOE

Where does that get us?

Don't see what good it would do.

BETTY

No, it's great,

If they do the same job...

JOE

So much in common,

They fall in love, wouldn't you?

BETTY

Yes, but if he's just a teacher,

We lose those scenes in the factory.

JOE

**Not if he's a champion for the working man.
Girl likes boy,
She respects his talent.**

BETTY

**Working with someone,
Can turn you into a fan.**

JOE

**This is fun,
Writing with a partner.**

BETTY

Yes, and it could be...

JOE

A Helluva movie.

BETTY

Can we really do this?

JOE AND BETTY

I know that we can!

(Blackout.)

The House on Sunset (Interior)

The drawing room, gloomy and cavernous as ever. JOE sits under one of the lamps, reading a book. NORMA, her face invisible, lies face-down on the massage table, covered only by a towel. A MASSEUR is working on her legs; an immaculate BEAUTICIAN, a blonde, is attending to her cuticles, and a woman ASTROLOGER in a headscarf hovers about at the top end of the table.

ASTROLOGER

**I don't think you should shoot before July 15th.
Right now is a perilous time for Pisces.
If you wait till Venus is in Capricorn
You'll avoid a catalogue of crises.**

(The MASSEUR drums away at her thighs.)

FIRST MASSEUSE

**I need three more weeks to get these thighs in shape,
No more carbohydrates, don't be naughty.**

SECOND MASSEUSE

**We'll soon have you skipping like an ingnue,
You won't look a day over forty.**

(At this point, NORMA turns her face to look downstage and we see that it is coated in some thick white gunk, with slices of cucumber covering their eyes. Meanwhile, JOE puts his book down, checks his watch, gets up and begins moving round the room, trying to appear casual, but evidently looking for something.)

FIRST BEAUTICIAN

We have dry heat, we have steam.

SECOND BEAUTICIAN

We have moisturizing cream.

THIRD BEAUTICIAN

We have mud-packs, we have blood sacks.

SECOND BEAUTICIAN

It's a rigorous regime.

ALL

**Not a wrinkle when you twinkle,
Or a wobble when you walk.**

THIRD BEAUTICIAN

**Of course, there's bound to
Be a little suffering.**

ALL

Eternal youth is worth a little suffering.

ANALYST

Listen to your superego not your id,

**Age is just another damn neurosis.
Ill have you regressing back to infancy,
And up into the womb under hypnosis.**

DOCTOR

**I inject the tissue of the foetal lamb,
The formulas the one Somerset Maugham owns.
Just a modest course of thirty-seven shots,
And you will be a heaving mass of hormones.**

ALL

**No more crow's feet, no mote flab,
No more love handles to grab.
You'll be so thin they'll all think you're
Walking sideways like a crab.**

**Nothing sagging, nothing bagging,
Nothing dragging on the floor,
Of course, there's bound to be a little suffering,
Eternal youth is worth a little suffering.**

**Of course, there's bound to be a little suffering,
Eternal youth is worth a little suffering.
Of course, there's bound to be a little suffering,
Eternal youth is worth a little suffering.**

(With this, the BEAUTY TEAM packs up and leaves, shown out by MAX. JOE, still looking, winds up in NORMA's vicinity. SHE suddenly produces a script from under a towel.)

NORMA

Is this what you're looking for, by any chance?

JOE

Why, yes.

NORMA

Whose phone number is this?

(JOE takes the script from her, a little sheepish, not answering. NORMA rises

from the massage table, gathering her towel about her, peeling the cucumber slices from her eyes.)

NORMA

I've been worried about the line of my throat. I think this woman has done wonders with it.

JOE

Good.

NORMA

And I've lost half a pound since Tuesday.

JOE

Very good.

NORMA

And now it's after nine. I'd better get to bed.

JOE

You had.

NORMA

Are you coming up?

JOE

I think I'll read a little longer.

NORMA

You went out last night, didn't you, Joe?

JOE

I went for a walk.

NORMA

You took the car.

JOE

I drove to the beach.

NORMA

Who's Betty Schaefer?

(Silence. Eventually, JOE shakes his head.)

JOE

Surely you don't want me to feel I'm a prisoner in this house!

NORMA

You don't understand, Joe. I'm under a terrible strain. It's been so hard I even got myself a revolver. The only thing that stopped me from killing myself was the thought of all those people waiting to see me back on the screen. How could I disappoint them? All I ask is a little patience, a little understanding.

JOE

Norma, there's nothing to worry about, I haven't done anything.

NORMA

Of course you haven't. Good night, my darling.

(SHE kisses him lightly, as best she can in the circumstances, and sets off upstairs, a bizarre figure in her mask and white towel. JOE waits until she has disappeared and gathers up his script. Then HE turns to the audience.)

JOE

I should have stayed there.

Poor Norma,

So desperate to be ready

For what would never happen.

But Betty would be waiting,

We had the script to finish.

One unexpected love scene,

Two people

Both risking

A kind of happy ending.

(HE slips quietly out through the French doors. As HE does so, MAX, previously seen escorting the BEAUTY TEAM out, quite unexpectedly emerges from the shadows of some recess in the room. His expression is troubled.

Fade to black.)

Bettys Office & The Back Lot at Paramount

It is night on the Paramount lot and BETTY is once again at her typewriter, but this time there is some light on the standing New York street set, which is being dressed for action the following day. JOE watches as BETTY finishes typing.

BETTY

T-H-E E-N-D! I can't believe it, I've finished my first script!

JOE

Stop it, you're making me feel old.

BETTY

It's exciting, though, isn't it?

JOE

How old are you, anyway?

BETTY

Twenty-two.

JOE

Smart girl.

BETTY

Shouldn't we open some champagne?

JOE

Best I can offer is a stroll to the water cooler at the end of the lot.

BETTY

Sounds good to me.

(Pause)

I love the back lot here. All cardboard, all hollow, all phoney, all done with mirrors; I think I love it better than any street in the world. I spent my childhood here.

JOE

What were you, a child actress?

BETTY

No, but my family always expected me to become a great star. I had ten years of dramatic lessons, diction, dancing, everything you can think of; then the studio made a test.

JOE (Laughing)

That's the saddest story I ever heard.

BETTY

Not at all. Come on.

(Pause)

BETTY

I was born two blocks from here. My father was head electrician at the studio until he died, and Mother still works in wardrobe.

JOE

Second generation, huh?

BETTY

Third. Grandma did stunt work for Pearl White.

(As THEY walk down the Manhattan street, the stage begins to revolve slowly, so that THEY end up walking Downstage; and the flimsy struts holding up the substantial sets are gradually revealed.)

JOE and BETTY walk in silence for a while; BETTY's expression is deeply preoccupied. They come to a halt in front of the water cooler.)

JOE

I guess it is kind of exciting, at that, finishing a script.

(HE fixes a couple of paper cups of water, and hands one to BETTY, who's miles away and comes to with a start when he touches her arm.)

BETTY

What?

JOE

Are you all right?

BETTY

Sure.

JOE

Something's the matter, isn't it?

(Pause. Then BETTY blurts out.)

BETTY

I had a telegram from Artie.

JOE

Is something wrong?

BETTY

He wants me to come out to Tennessee. He says it would only cost 2 dollars to get married in Clinch.

JOE

Well, what's stopping you! Now we've finished the script...

(He breaks off, amazed to see that SHE's crying.)

JOE

Why are you crying? You're getting married, isn't that what you wanted?

BETTY

Not any more.

JOE

Don't you love Artie?

BETTY

Of course I do. I'm just not in love with him any more, that's all.

JOE

Why not? What happened?

BETTY

You did.

(Suddenly, THEY're in each other's arms. A long kiss.)

BETTY

**When I was a kid,
I played on this street,
I always loved illusion.
I thought make-believe
Was truer than life
But now it's all confusion.**

**Please can you tell me what's happening?
I just don't know any more.
If this is real,
How should I feel?
What should I look for?**

JOE

**If you were smart,
You would keep on walking
Out of my life,
As fast as you can.**

**I'm not the one
You should pin your hopes on,
You're falling for
The wrong kind of man.**

**This is crazy.
You know we should call it a day.
Sound advice, great advice,
Let's throw it away.**

**I can't control
All the things I'm feeling,
I haven't got a prayer.**

**If I'm a fool,
Well, I'm too much in love to care.
I knew where I was,**

**I'd given up hope,
Made friends with disillusion.**

**No one in my life,
But I look at you,
And now it's all confusion.**

BETTY

**Please can you tell me what's happening?
I just don't know any more.
If this is real,
How should I feel?
What should I look for?**

**I thought I had
Everything I needed.
My life was set,
My dreams were in place.
My heart could see
Way into the future.
All of that goes
When I see your face.**

**I should hate you,
There I was, the world in my hand.
Can one kiss kiss away
Everything I planned?**

**I can't control
All the things I'm feeling,
I'm floating in mid-air.
I know it's wrong,
But I'm too much in love to care.**

JOE AND BETTY

**I thought I had
Everything I needed.
My life was set,
My dreams were in place.**

**My heart could see
Way into the future.
All of that goes
When I see your face.
This is crazy.
You know we should call it a day.**

**JOE
Sound advice**

**BETTY
Great advice**

**JOE AND BETTY
Let's throw it away.
I can't control
All the things I'm feeling.
We're floating in mid-air.
If we are fools,
Well, we're too much in love to care.
If we are fools,
Well, we're too much in love to care!**

(They fall into each other's arms and embrace passionately. Then JOE leads BETTY by the hand back into the office. They kiss again and it is obvious that THEY're about to make love.)

The House on Sunset (Exterior)

It is late at night as JOE, in the Isotta, glides back into the garage. HE steps down from the car with a gleam in his eye and a spring in his step, and is therefore thoroughly startled when the sombre figure of Max steps forward out of the darkness. However, HE recovers quickly. It is a murky night, wind rising, rain threatening.

JOE
What's the matter there, Max? You waiting to wash the car?

MAX

Please be careful when you cross the patio. Madame may be watching.

JOE

Suppose I tiptoe up the back stairs and undress in the dark, will that do it?

MAX

It's just that I am greatly worried about Madame.

JOE

Well, we're not helping any, feeding her lies and more lies. What happens when she finds out they're not going to make her picture?

MAX

She never will. That is my job. I made her a star and I will never let her be destroyed.

JOE

You made her a star?

MAX

I directed all her early pictures. In those days there were three young directors who showed promise: D. W Griffith, Cecil B. DeMille and...

(JOE interrupts, as the realisation suddenly dawns on him.)

JOE

Max von Mayerling.

MAX

That's right.

(By now, THEY've moved out of the garage on to the dimly lit patio.)

**When we met
She was a child,
Barely sixteen;
Awkward, and yet
She had an air
I'd never seen.
I knew I'd found**

**My perfect face.
Deep in her eyes,
New ways to dream,
And we inspired
New ways to dream.**

**Talkies came,
I stayed with her,
Took up this life.
Threw away fame,**

(He hesitates, before steeling himself to go on.)

**MAX
Please understand,**

(A beat)

She was my wife.

(Pause. JOE is staggered. MAX is fighting back a wave of emotion.)

**MAX
We had achieved
Far more than most.**

**We gave the world
New ways to dream.
Everyone needs
New ways to dream.**

(JOE shakes his head, still incredulous.)

JOE
You're telling me you were married to her!

MAX
I was the first husband.

**So I play this game,
Keeper of the flame,**

**Sharing with her one last dream.
Don't you think I knew
It could never come true?
She'll be the very last one to surrender.
I will not allow her to surrender.**

The House on Sunset (Interior)

The main room comes into view, and NORMA, her face now bare of make-up, wearing a white negligee, her expression profoundly tormented picks up the phone, and dials.

NORMA

Hello, is this Gladstone 9281? Miss Schaefer! ... Miss Schaefer, you must forgive me for calling so late, but I really feel it's my duty. It's about Mr. Gillis ... You do know a Mr Gillis? Well, exactly how much do you know about him? Do you know where he lives? Do you know what he lives on?

(At around this point, JOE, unseen by NORMA, steps in through the French doors and freezes in the shadows, listening.)

NORMA

**I want to spare you
A lot of sadness.
I don't know what he's told you,
But I can guarantee you
He doesn't live with Mother,
Or what you'd call a room-mate.
He's just a ... I can't say it.
Poor Betty,
You ask him,
I'd love to hear his answer.**

(SHE's completely taken by surprise as JOE snatches the receiver from her.)

JOE

That's right, Betty, why don't you ask me? Or better yet, come over and see for yourself. Yes, right now. The address is ten thousand eighty-six, Sunset

Boulevard.

(HE hangs up violently and turns to stare at NORMA in furious silence. SHE flinches under his gaze.)

NORMA

Don't hate me, Joe. I did it because I need you. Look at me. Look at my hands. Look at my face. Look under my eyes. How can I go back to work if I'm wasting away?

(JOE says nothing. He is trying to control his rage.)

NORMA

Don't stand there hating me, Joe. Shout at me, strike me, but say you don't hate me.

(But JOE, who has been looking at her with an expression of infinite contempt, deliberately turns his back on her.

A distant rumble of thunder, and an orchestral interlude begins, during which the storm intensifies, a torrential tropical rain starts to fall, lightning flashes and NORMA makes her way shakily up the stairs. JOE paces, steeling himself for the coming encounter. NORMA vanishes into her bedroom. JOE finally slumps on the big sofa. Unseen by him, NORMA re-emerges quietly, on to the landing. SHE is holding a revolver. SHE sinks to the floor and waits. The shrill of the doorbell. JOE springs to his feet and

hurries to let BETTY in.)

JOE

Come on in.

(He leads BETTY into the main room. She looks around for a moment, unnerved by the size of the place.)

BETTY

What's going on, Joe?

Why am I so scared?

What was that woman saying?

She sounded so weird,

I don't understand ...

Please can't you tell me what's happening?

You said you loved me tonight.

Shall I just go?

Say something, Joe.

(NORMA moves stealthily forward, staring down at BETTY through the balustrade.)

JOE

Have some pink champagne,

And caviar,

When you go visit with a star,

The hospitality is stellar.

BETTY

So this is where you're living?

JOE

Yes, it's quite a place,

Sleeps seventeen,

Eight sunken tubs,

A movie screen,

A bowling alley in the cellar.

BETTY

I didnt come to see a house, Joe.

JOE

Sunset Boulevard

Cruise the Boulevard

Win yourself a Hollywood palazzo.

Sunset Boulevard

Mythic Boulevard

Valentino danced on the terrazzo.

BETTY

Who's it belong to?

JOE

Just look around you.

BETTY

That's Norma Desmond.

(SHE's seen the big portrait above the fireplace. Now JOE begins to draw her attention to some of the innumerable other portraits, photographs and stills.)

JOE

Right on the money.

That's Norma Desmond

That's Norma Desmond

That's Norma Desmond

That's Norma Desmond.

BETTY

Why did she call me?

JOE

Give you three guesses.

It's the oldest story

In the book:

Come see the taker being took

The world is full of Joes and Normas.

Older woman

Very well-to-do

Meets younger man

A standard cue

For two mechanical performers.

(BETTY puts a hand over his mouth.)

BETTY

Just pack your things and let's go.

JOE

You mean all my things?

**Have you gone mad!
Leave all the things I've never had?
Leave this luxurious existence?**

**You want me to face
That one-room hell,
That Murphy bed,
That rancid smell,
Go back to living on subsistence?**

**It's no time to begin a new life,
Now I've finally made a perfect landing.
I'm afraid there's no room for a wife,
Not unless she's uniquely understanding.
You should go back to Artie and marry the fool
And you'll always be welcome to swim in my pool.**

BETTY

I can't look at you any more, Joe.

(SHE turns and rushes blindly out of the French door, leaving it open. JOE'S head slowly sinks. HE's overcome by a wave of misery.

Meanwhile, on the landing, NORMA scrambles to her feet. The revolver is no longer in evidence. SHE crosses the landing and starts off down the stairs; a flutter of movement catches JOE's eye and HE turns. NORMA stops on the stairs, temporarily halted by the fierceness of his expression, but as HE moves towards her and starts up the stairs, SHE stretches out a hand to him.)

NORMA

Thank you, thank you, Joe, thank you thank you.

(JOE brushes past her, brusquely shaking off her hand as SHE touches his wrist and vanishing into his room. SHE stays where SHE is, uncertain, unable to make sense of what's happening; and, suddenly, JOE reappears. HE is carrying his battered old typewriter. Calm and unhurried, HE starts off down the stairs again, as NORMA stares wildly at him.)

NORMA

What are you doing, Joe?

(HE ignores her, continues to move evenly down the stairs.)

NORMA

You're not leaving me?

JOE

Yes, I am, Norma.

NORMA

You can't! Max!

JOE

It's been a bundle of laughs

And thanks for the use of the trinkets.

(He takes the gold cigarette case out of his pocket and hands it to her.)

JOE

A little ritzy for the copy desk

Back in Dayton.

(HE starts to move on, then turns back to her, his expression serious.)

JOE

And there's something you ought to know.

I want to do you this favour:

They'll never shoot that hopeless script of yours,

They only wanted your car.

(During this, MAX has entered below. HE looks on, helpless.)

NORMA

That's a lie! They still want me!

What about all my fan mail?

JOE

It's Max who writes you letters,

Your audience has vanished.

They left when you weren't looking.

**Nothing's wrong with being fifty,
Unless you're acting twenty.**

(HE sets off down the stairs.)

NORMA

I am the greatest star of them all.

JOE

Goodbye, Norma.

(HE has spoken without looking back; so HE does not see NORMA fetch the revolver out of her pocket and point it at him.)

NORMA

No one ever leaves a star.

(She fires. JOE looks extremely surprised but carries on walking, for the moment apparently unaffected. At the bottom of the stairs, HE lets go of the typewriter which crashes down on to the tiles. HE staggers slightly, but carries on walking. NORMA hurries after him. SHE fires twice more. MAX moves forward to the Center of the stage, aghast, for once completely at a loss.)

SLOW FADE TO BLACK

The House on Sunset

In the blackout, the orchestra plays NORMA's "LULABY," and soon the lights come up on the cold dawn of the opening scene. There's been a semi-revolve so that the garden is now visible, bathed by an eerie glow, disrupted by patrol cars. JOE's body floats, face down, in the pool. The entrance hall of the house is crowded with REPORTERS, POLICE, NEWSREEL CREWS with their cameras, ALL fired with eager anticipation. MAX moves around the various groups, consulting with POLICEMEN and CAMERAMAN.

REPORTER

And as dawn breaks over the murder house, Norma Desmond, famed star of yesteryear, is in a state of complete mental shock.

(Suddenly, all movement stops and all heads rise. NORMA has emerged from her room on to the landing. SHE's dressed in some strange approximation of a Salome costume and SHE's still holding the revolver. There is an atmosphere of extreme apprehension below. One of the uniformed POLICEMEN has brought out his gun; MAX leans over to talk to the head of homicide, a PLAINCLOTHES POLICEMAN.

SHE's clearly disoriented, in a world of her own, moving, lost and bewildered, around the landing, letting out, unaccompanied by the orchestra, odd broken phrases of song.)

NORMA

This was dawn.

I don't know why I'm frightened.

Silent music starts to play.

Happy New Year, darling.

If you're with me, next year will be

Next year will be...

They bring in his head on a silver tray,

She kisses his mouth...

She kisses his mouth...Mad about the boy!

They'll say Norma's back at last!

(A POLICEMAN starts to move towards NORMA on the stairs. MAX stops HIM.)

MAX (Turning to NORMA on the stairs)

Madame, the cameras have arrived.

NORMA

Max, where am I?

MAX

This is the staircase of the palace

And they're waiting for your dance.

NORMA

Of course,

Now I remember:

I was so frightened I might fall...

MAX

You are the greatest star of all!

(SHE starts down the stairs. MAX cups a hand to his mouth and springs into action.)

MAX

Lights!

(The portable lights flare up. In addition, there is the flash of countless flashbulbs. NORMA reacts, her eyes widen, SHE drapes the scarf around her shoulders.)

MAX

Cameras!

(The whirr and grind of the old-fashioned Movietone cameras.)

MAX

Action!

(And, as the music swells, NORMA descends the staircase, wooing her arms in some strange rendition of Salome's approach to the throne. However, halfway down, she suddenly comes to a halt and begins to sing.)

NORMA

When he scorned me I

Knew he'd have to die,

Let me kiss his severed head.

Compromise or death,

He fought to his last breath,

He never had it in him to surrender.

Just like me he never could surrender.

I can't go on with the scene; I'm too happy. May I say a few words, Mr DeMille? I can't tell you how wonderful it is to be back in the studio making a picture. I promise you I'll never desert you again. This is my life. It always will be. There is nothing else. Just us and the cameras and all the wonderful people out there in the dark. And now, Mr DeMille, I'm ready for my close-up.

(She continues down the staircase as 'WITH ONE LOOK' swells to a climax.)

NORMA

**This time I'm staying,
I'm staying for good,
I'll be back,
Where I was born to be,
With one look
I'll be me.**

(Darkness.)

T H E E N D

Questo copione è stato visto: