

"The Outsider"

FADE IN:

EXT. BOARDINGHOUSE, FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

The old building dark except for a room on the 4th floor.  
Silhouettes of figures visible in lighted windows.

SUPER: 1955 CHICAGO

INT. BOARDING HOUSE, ROOM 401 - NIGHT

A DOCTOR covers the face of a middle-aged MAN lying on a bed.  
A younger WOMAN sobs nearby.

Burning candles reflect in the full-length mirror on a closet  
door.

The Doctor and another MAN leave with the woman.

Manuscript pages turn, seemingly by themselves.

The last page contains only the words:

"CHAPTER 30"

The desk lamp suddenly crashes to the floor.

INT. SPACE BEHIND THE MIRRORED DOOR - NIGHT

The IMAGE of NORMAN RISK, whose body lies under the sheet,  
looks through the mirror into the room.

He pushes on the glass, but fails to penetrate the mirror.

Risk walks into darkness.

INT. ROOM 401 - DAY

RUBY DANFORTH, 30, locks away the unfinished book in a desk  
drawer. She pockets the key.

She hears something.

The faint sound of a man CRYING comes from behind the mirrored door.

Ruby puts her ear to the mirror. Tears run down her face.

INT. ROOM 401 - DAY

Following day. The drapes stand open around the room. Light floods in through tall windows. The empty bed is made.

Dressed in black, Ruby sketches at an easel near a window. She begins a line-drawing of a large butterfly.

SUPER: FORTY YEARS LATER

RUBY'S BODY AND FACE AND THE DRAWING MORPH TO HER PRESENT AGE OF 70. THE DRAWING BECOMES A DETAILED WATER COLOR PAINTING OF THE BUTTERFLY'S WINGS. HEAD AND BODY OF THE INSECT REMAIN UNFINISHED.

INT. ROOM 401 - DAY - PRESENT

At her easel, Ruby paints tiny details on the delicate wings of her butterfly painting.

From time to time, she refers to an elaborate book of butterfly drawings in full-color.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE, FRONT WINDOW, MAIN FLOOR - DAY

Ruby places a "TO LET" sign in the window.

INT. EXPECTATIONS BOOKSHOP - DAY

Ruby enters.

The PROPRIETOR, 80's, looks up from a thick book. He nods.

PROPRIETOR

Anything new?

RUBY

Soon, I think.

PROPRIETOR

You're running out of time, my dear.

RUBY

I know.

At the rear of the shop, Ruby sees a bulletin board with odd bits of information posted.

She pins a small card to the board.

The card reads:

"WRITER WANTED. ROOM TO LET." An address follows.

EXT. JOHN PRESSER'S HOME, SULLIVAN, INDIANA - DAY

SUPER: Sullivan, Indiana

A small bungalow, in need of paint, sits in a tangle of overgrown bushes. A wagon and bike park near the front porch steps.

INT. JOHN'S ATTIC BEDROOM - DAY

JOHN ALLEN PRESSER, 20, types at his desk on an old typewriter. Discarded sheets of paper surround the desk on the floor.

A KNOCK at the door.

JOHN

I'm busy now.

A small boy's voice answers.

TODDY (OS)

Aw, John, I gotta come in. I brought up hot soup for you.

JOHN

Come in.

With his eyes glued to the soup mug he's carrying on a hot pad, TODDY PRESSER, 7, enters.

TODDY

Pa sent this up to you. It's kind of hot.

Toddy goes to the desk. He looks for a spot to put the steaming mug. He spots a book on its side.

JOHN

Not on that book.

TODDY

What?

John takes the mug and sets it on his desk. He places the book on his bed.

TODDY

Is your book done?

JOHN

No, my book's not done. I'm stuck on the last chapter.

John leans back in his chair and takes a sip of his soup.

TODDY

Tell me the "ALICE" story?

JOHN

Not now, Toddy.

Toddy notices the half-packed suitcase on the bed.

TODDY

Oh no. You are going away. Why?

JOHN

I have to go. You're too little to understand.

Tears roll down Toddy's cheeks.

TODDY

Please don't go.

Toddy sits on John's bed.

John rescues his book.

TODDY

Can I see that book?

JOHN

There's no pictures.

(Showing the book to

Toddy)

See, it's my Norman Risk book.

John turns the novel over. Toddy looks at Risk's picture on the dust jacket.

TODDY

Who's he?

JOHN

The famous writer, Norman Risk.

TROOPER, a dog of many breeds, nudges open John's door, sniffs the soup, then joins Toddy on the bed.

Toddy pats Trooper.

JOHN

Don't be sad. I'll come back.

JOHN

My book will be published. And you  
and I will be free forever.

TODDY

Free?

Toddy's puzzled eyes come up from Trooper.

JOHN

Yes. Now, you and Trooper go play. I  
need to get done packing.

John gently pulls Toddy off the bed. Trooper follows.

Toddy and Trooper exit.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Late afternoon. The sun pierces gray clouds. A driving wind whirls across stubbled cornfields that stretch horizon to horizon.

A CHEVY bounces into view. Signs painted on its sides read: "PRESSER'S FIXIT."

Barely visible through the dust-streaked windshield, sits driver, HUGO PRESSER, 40's, and John. Toddy's wedged between Hugo and John.

INT. CHEVY - DAY

With a tense face, John looks out his side window. He's cold.

John notices Hugo's black fingernails and huge hands in a white-knuckled grip on the wheel.

Toddy shivers in his oversized coat.

TODDY

I'm cold.

HUGO

Heater's broke. Quiet. I'm trying to drive here.

Toddy looks up at John.

TODDY

Tell the "ALICE" story, where Alice goes through the looking glass.

JOHN

Not now.

HUGO

Stories, stories... that's the problem. Your mother's aunt Anna was a poet. She died a pauper in a little room with only a bed in the corner.

JOHN

But she wrote books of poems.

John reads a bus stop sign up ahead.

JOHN

There.

Hugo pulls over.

EXT. BUS STOP, SULLIVAN OUTSKIRTS - DAY

The family waits. The wind snatches John's hat. The boy traps it under his foot. Hugo draws his coat closer.

Toddy watches his breath come in vapors.

John and Toddy see the BUS in the distance.

Toddy gasps. Hugo holds the boy's shoulder.

The bus stops.

A sign on the bus above the front window reads: "CHICAGO."

John grips his bag.

The DRIVER swings down and out. With his hands cupped, he lights a cigarette in the wind. He lets the wind take the spent match.

Hugo moves closer to John.

Toddy cries.

John and Hugo face each other.

John looks at his shoes. Hugo grabs John's sleeve.

HUGO

You sure you got to do this?

John nods his head.

HUGO

And when the money ma left you runs out?

John looks bitter.

HUGO

No instant success in this life.  
Things don't work that way.

JOHN

I know. I know.

HUGO

Go, see a bit of the world. I can  
understand that.

John takes Toddy's face in his hands.

JOHN

You be good. Take good care of  
Trooper like ma used to.

TODDY

I will.

John gives Toddy a big hug. Toddy won't let go.

HUGO

Then come home. Learn the business.  
Take over for me --

DRIVER

Last call.

The driver flicks his cigarette away. John shoves Toddy aside.

John carries his bag and suitcase up the steps.

INT. MOVING BUS - DAY

Through his window, John watches Hugo throw up his hands and  
walk toward the car. He sees Toddy run onto the highway. Hugo  
takes Toddy's hand.

Relief spreads across John's face. He luxuriates in his seat.  
He watches the family car grow smaller in the distance.

INT. MOVING BUS, INDIANA HIGHWAY - DAY

John drapes his damp sweater across the back of the adjoining  
seat. He stows his suitcase and hat on the shelf above.



The boy opens his well-worn copy of Norman Risk's book.

On the dust jacket, the title reads:

"BEHIND IRON GATES -- a personal memoir, the Chicago years"

Over an illustration of iron gates, printed below the title:

"RISK DIES BEFORE WRITING LAST CHAPTER"

INT. REFLECTION BUS WINDOW AND CORNFIELD - NIGHT

John sees silent fields slide past and disappear.

EXT. HIGHWAY, ILLINOIS - NIGHT

The bus HEADLIGHTS strobe the highway.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Two men snore in unison behind John. Across the aisle, an old woman knits.

John reads the Risk novel. He writes in his notebook. He studies the picture of Norman Risk on the back cover of the book.

NORMAN RISK PICTURE shows a shaggy haired man in a tweed jacket. The face looks tired and thin.

EXT. HIGHWAY, ILLINOIS - NIGHT

The bus RUMBLES through a sleeping town. Shops and houses appear surreal under dim streetlights.

INT. BUS - DAY

Gray and glum morning.

REFLECTION BUS WINDOW AND CHICAGO CITY-SCAPE

John's face presses to the window. He sees telegraph poles stalk toward the city.

SUPER: CHICAGO

Blocks and blocks of gray tenements spring from the pavement. Huge smokestacks tower over factory and business roofs. From the stacks, sooty smoke spews into the air.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET CORNER, WABASH AND MICHIGAN AVE. - DAY

Bits of paper and trash blow by in the wind. Steam rises from manhole covers.

A policeman directs TRAFFIC at a busy corner.

John studies the teeming battleground before him. The RICH. The POOR.

EXT. MICHIGAN AVE., FURTHER ALONG - DAY

John stoops to give a penny to an organ grinder's MONKEY.

The monkey tips his cap and deposits the penny in his master's pocket.

Smiling, John searches his pockets. The monkey leaps to the organ grinder's shoulder.

EXT. STATE STREET - DAY

Wind churns up litter from the sidewalk.

A ragged hollow-eyed man and woman huddle in a doorway.

John buys an apple for a penny from an unshaven old man. The man tries to hug John.

John bites the apple -- it's rotten. He eats the apple.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN BEACH - DAY

John hurls his apple core into heaving waves on a deserted beach.

EXT. CORNER - DAY

THREE YOUNG MEN, 20'S, nearly collide with John as they come around the corner. John steps back to let them pass.

They suppress a laugh at John's expense. Their new hats, tweed coats, polished shoes, and leather briefcases -- it all dazzles John.

The three young men spin away from John through a shiny REVOLVING DOOR into the CHICAGO GLOBE NEWSPAPER BUILDING.

John follows them inside.

INT. NEWSPAPER NEWS ROOM - DAY

John takes in the scene.

John notices SUSAN THOMAS, 25.

SUSAN

Can I help?

John shows Susan a clipping.

JOHN

I'm looking for the reporter, Jack Doss. He wrote this article. I need to find an address.

Susan waves toward the back of the room.

SUSAN

Jack. In the last row of desks.

John squeezes by busy REPORTERS. Everyone glances at John. He passes TED SLOAN, 30. Ted's a big man. John looks up at Ted.

TED

Hey you, there's no panhandling in here.

John's face turns red with embarrassment.

Ted takes hold of John's arm and drags him toward the hall door.

JOHN

Wait. I need to talk to Jack Doss. He wrote this article --

John shows Ted the clipping.

Ted pushes John out the door into the hallway.

TED

We all write articles here, man. Now out with you.

John gives up. He hurries away through the crowded hallway.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING, ENTRANCE - DAY

In a plate-glass window, John notices his own shabby IMAGE. Shame and frustration play across his face.

He shoves his hands deep inside his pockets. He kicks the side of his bag.

EXT. WABASH STREET - DAY

John stops OFFICER RANDALL, a uniformed POLICEMAN.

JOHN

I'm looking for this house. I'm lost.

OFFICER RANDALL

Move along.

John falls in step with PEDESTRIANS walking down the block.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Late afternoon. John sleeps on a park bench.

A vagrant, NATE TAGGERT, 60, tiptoes up to the bench. He quietly looks inside John's bag.

Nate's face glows when he discovers the Risk novel and John's manuscript.

John stirs.

Nate shoves everything back into John's bag.

NATE

Wake up. Get up.

John sits up. Nate leaps on John. Like a wild man, he drags the boy from the bench.

JOHN

What is it? W-what?

NATE

This is my bench.

John grabs his hat and bag, and his suitcase and backs away.

NATE

(Muttering to himself)

Every time I come back someone's on my bench.

JOHN

I'm sorry.

NATE

No you're not.

Nate jumps onto the bench. He stands there, swaying a bit. John stumbles backwards a few steps.

JOHN

(to himself)

I mean... how'm I supposed to know?  
I hate this... See. Ahh, forget it.

Nate waves John's newspaper clipping. John stops. He drops his suitcase. John reaches for the clipping.

JOHN

That's mine.

NATE

I know. I can help you find this place.

JOHN

You can?

NATE

Yes sir.

JOHN

Who are you?

NATE

Nate Taggert, at your service.

Nate bows with a flourish. He gives John his clipping.

NATE

I used to live in that boarding house. Norman and I were good friends.

Relief spreads over John's face.

JOHN

Tell me, what was he like? I have so many questions. He's my favorite writer.

Nate runs a few steps down the walk.

NATE

Then follow me. I'll lead you right to it. It's near a book shop. You'll see. Follow me.

John hesitates.

Nate dances ahead. John follows Nate Taggert's ragged figure away from the park.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Nate jogs ahead some distance.

John walks at a fast pace. He stops to look back the way he came. When he turns back, Nate has vanished.

JOHN

Oh no. Where is he?

EXT. ANOTHER STREET - NIGHT

Late, and John is lost. He spins around in growing panic.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - NIGHT

The street gives way to a jumble of pasteboard box hovels and crying CHILDREN.

He presses his sleeve to his nose.

Men and women, squalid and sad, cook supper before fires and talk in hushed tones.

John staves off BARKING DOGS that jump on him looking for food.

John wanders through the maze of shacks.

He stops at a hut made of tin sheets. A soiled blanket hangs in the doorway.

John draws back the blanket.

TWO CHILDREN with dirty faces sit with their ragged FATHER, 30. They eat crusts of bread around a small fire.

The BOY and GIRL, under 10, look up at John. In despair, they reach out to him.

John backs out of the hut.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

John runs on and on, until he finds his way back.

EXT. STREET, FURTHER ON - NIGHT

Street lights seem like pale eyes in the FOG. Night sounds: a distant police SIREN, the wind MOANS round corners, faint music PLAYS.

John wanders past dark buildings. The colors of traffic lights reflect on the wet street.

The OS CLIP CLOP sound of a HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE.

John kicks a TIN CAN down the center of the deserted street.

EXT. STONE CUTTER'S YARD - NIGHT

John walks by the yard strewn with odd statues and weird garden fountains and birdbaths.

TWO FEARSOME WINGED GARGOYLES, their tongues lolling and their eyes round as pies, leer at John as he passes.

He speeds his pace.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET - NIGHT

Slowing down, John notices the Expectations Bookshop. He stops to catch his breath.

Calmer, he walks on with a brisk step.

EXT. EXPECTATIONS BOOKSHOP - NIGHT

John stares into the lighted window at pyramids of Norman Risk's novels. He enters.

INT. EXPECTATIONS BOOKSHOP - NIGHT

The PROPRIETOR never looks up from his oversized book.

On the bulletin board, midst various announcement cards and newspaper clippings, John finds Ruby's card.

John takes the little sign with him. He exits.

The Proprietor picks up his phone.

EXT. BOARDINGHOUSE, FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

An IRON-SPEAR fence backed by a thorn hedge encloses the aging structure.

A "BUILDING CONDEMNED" SIGN hangs on the fence near the gate.



John opens the heavy gate. The rusty hinges GROAN. He walks down the long front sidewalk. He mounts the steps to the huge front door.

John reads the "ROOM TO LET" sign.

He rings the bell.

The heavy door opens.

Ruby stands in the open doorway.

RUBY

Yes?

JOHN

I'm here about the room.

RUBY

Come in. We've been waiting for you.

JOHN

You have?

RUBY

Of course. We're always waiting for new young tenants.

John steps inside; he removes his hat, as the great door closes and LOCKS behind him.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Three doors stand in a row on either side of the hallway. All silent.

A glass phone booth guards a staircase which rises in a tunnel of shadows.

Ruby studies her guest book.

RUBY

Would you care to see your room,  
Mr. -- ?

John nods.

RUBY  
Follow me, then. I'm Ruby Danforth.  
I manage this rooming house.

Ruby beckons to John.

John notices three colorful drawings of butterflies on the wall.

RUBY  
You like my paintings?

JOHN  
They're so real looking.

RUBY  
My mother had a collection of  
butterflies in glass boxes. I learned  
to sketch them when I was little.

JOHN  
They're nice.

RUBY  
It's a corner room. Room 401.

John reluctantly stops his examination of Ruby's paintings.

INT. STAIRCASE, BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

Ruby and John climb the twisting stairs to the second floor.  
As they climb, John's suitcase and bag seem to grow heavier.

RUBY  
What line of work are you in, Mr. -- ?

JOHN  
Presser.

JOHN  
I'm --

RUBY  
No. Let me guess. I love guessing  
games.

The OS sound of a violin PLAYING comes from Room 203. Ruby turns to see John's questioning look.

RUBY

A new boarder. He takes his  
breakfasts in his room.

The VIOLINIST hits a WRONG NOTE. The CORRECT NOTE sounds.  
MUSIC PLAYS on growing fainter as they move up.

RUBY

I know, you're a... concert pianist.  
No piano in 401, I'm afraid.

JOHN

I --

RUBY

No. No. It won't do to tell me. I  
must guess.

John readjusts his load.

INT. THIRD FLOOR LANDING - NIGHT

John and Ruby pass a grandfather clock. The clock's hands stand at midnight. The mechanism, chimes, and pendulum, missing.

John gapes at the clock. Ruby moves on.

RUBY

Dear me, so many things you might be.

John's face, strained and pale. He ties the sleeves of his sweater around his waist.

JOHN

Is it much further?

RUBY

And you're a young man. Tired already.

Ruby appears serene and happy. She's only a little winded.

RUBY

A plumber? We could use someone to  
fix a few pipes around here.

JOHN

Not a plumber... can't fix anything.

RUBY

Pity.

John's bag slips from his hand. It tumbles down a few steps.  
Dropping the suitcase, he stumbles down to catch it in time.

John looks into the dark stairwell. He steps back.

Ruby observes John with interest. Her head shakes slightly.  
She smiles.

RUBY

Afraid of heights?

JOHN

No.

John drags himself up after Ruby.

RUBY

A writer! That's it. I could tell the  
moment I saw you. Silly me.

John reacts with surprise.

RUBY

What town you from?

JOHN

Sullivan, Indiana.

Ruby, triumphant. She exalts in her right guess.

RUBY

What a coincidence. He was too.

JOHN

Who?

RUBY

Another great writer from Sullivan,  
Indiana.

John drops his suitcase on his foot.

JOHN

Ohhhh.

Ruby lifts the bag easily. John sits on a step to rest.

RUBY

Your room's one that the noted  
author, Norman Risk, occupied when he  
was writing his novels in 1955. Of  
course, I was a young woman then.

INT. FOURTH FLOOR LANDING - NIGHT

John can't catch his breath. He gasps for air.

INT. FOURTH FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ruby unlocks room 401. The door swings open.

INT. ROOM 401 - NIGHT

Dark, except for the BLINKING on and off of a Starlite  
Diner sign through side windows.

Ruby lights a rusted floor lamp.

A ceiling fan turns in silence. The immense bed with carved  
headboard dominates the room. Carpet, thick and soft.

A Tiffany lamp hovers over a rocking chair.

Magazines, dated 1955, add clutter to a table.

Ruby places John's bag near the writing desk.

RUBY

Come in, Mr. Presser. No harm here.

JOHN  
It's too... fine.

RUBY  
You're a cautious one.

John enters and sits in a rocking chair.

RUBY  
That was Mr. Risk's favorite chair.

John jumps to his feet.

Ruby rushes about picking up magazines.

RUBY  
There's plenty of paper for you to  
use in the desk. Help yourself.

John checks the desk drawers.

He notices the ceiling fan.

RUBY  
Would you like a window open? Air  
things out a bit?

John nods "yes."

Ruby walks toward the window.

RUBY  
A stuffy room can become all  
consuming.

Ruby opens the WINDOW.

Suddenly, a BLAST of WIND sends Ruby backwards.

She wrestles with the blowing window. Like a willful child,  
the window dodges back and forth beyond Ruby's reach.

Helpless, Ruby turns to John.

John leans way out for the illusive handle.

Instantly, the WIND stops and the window flies right to his  
outstretched hand with a hard THUMP.

Amazed and shaken, John fastens the window. He draws in his wet hand.

RUBY  
A black night, isn't it?

The wind RATTLES the windows. A thick pause.

RUBY  
Stubborn thing. You'd think it had a mind of its own.

John pulls his sweater on again.

Ruby hurries to turn on the radiators. One after another, they grow live with STEAM.

She opens the bathroom door. Ruby hands two keys to John. He points to the MIRRORED DOOR.

JOHN  
Where does that lead?

RUBY  
Nowhere. A small closet we keep locked.

John tests the handle. Locked. No keyhole.

John's reflection stares back at him.

JOHN  
I wish --

Ruby's reflection appears in the glass close behind John.

John turns his head to see her gnarled hand on his shoulder. The fingernails, painted a brilliant red.

RUBY  
Ohhhh, Mr. Presser, do be careful about what you wish for in this room. I'm afraid you'll surely get it.

John shudders. Ruby moves to the doorway.

JOHN  
What do I owe you?

Ruby stands in the doorway.

RUBY

Not now. After you've rested and eaten, we'll discuss it then.

John follows her to the door.

RUBY

Now that you're tucked away, I really must lock up.

Ruby opens the door.

RUBY

I serve a nice breakfast for my boarders every morning. My nephew, Jack, will be a guest tomorrow. Do come and meet him and the others.

JOHN

Thanks.

RUBY

Breakfast starts at 8. Follow your nose. Oh, one more thing. My painting.

Ruby leads John over to her easel.

RUBY

I like to paint here in the afternoons. I won't be a bother to you if your in.

John marvels at the great detail and rich colors of the butterfly wings.

JOHN

It's beautiful.

Ruby exits; the door LOCKS behind her.

INT. ROOM 401 - NIGHT

John turns on the desk lamp. He takes out paper and pencil and begins a letter.



JOHN (VO)  
(Reading aloud as he  
writes)  
Dear Toddy,...

John balls up the page and tosses it into a wastebasket next to the desk.

He moves to a window. He draws back the drapes to reveal the MOON behind gray clouds.

INT. ROOM 401 - DAY

Through a small opening between the drapes, a chink of light falls upon the desk.

John's wastebasket overflows with crumpled sheets.

A desk clock reads 8:00.

With great concern, he spreads his money on the desk.

He gathers the dollars and change carefully into a worn coin purse.

Through a side window, John notices the Starlite Diner across the street.

INT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

John waits on the phone.

A thin MAN walks slowly by the booth. GEORG MONTAND, 50, stops to glare at John through the glass.

The boy startles at Georg's scull-like face and vacant eyes.

Georg continues down the hall.

INT. PRESSER KITCHEN, INDIANA - DAY - SAME

Hugo, half-shaved, stands at the sink. He talks on the wall phone.

HUGO (ON PHONE)  
Are you all right? where are you  
staying? Wait. Wait.

Toddy runs into the kitchen.

Hugo shakes his head.

HUGO  
They cut him off. The time was up.

Toddy looks lost.

INT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY - SAME

John hangs up. The phone CLICKS. He reaches into the coin  
return. Nothing.

He closes his eyes for a few seconds.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - DAY

John exits the booth and heads for the front door.

RUBY (OS)  
Mr. Presser? This way. Hot breakfast.

John smells the delicious aromas coming from an open door. He  
looks at his watch. Hat in hand, he enters Ruby's flat.

INT. RUBY'S DINING-ROOM - DAY

John gasps at the huge sideboard groaning under a multitude  
of silver chafing dishes, bowls of fruit, baskets of toasted  
breads of every kind.

In bubbling gravy, swim tiny sausages in one dish and  
meatballs in another.

Ruby heads the long table. She's in conversation with the  
attractive well-dressed, MICHAEL and ROSE SWIFT, 30ish.

Next to the Swifts, Georg eats in silence.

On Georg's left, the stout MR. EDMOND SWINBORN, 65, notes John's entrance.

MR. SWINBORN

Ahh. Our new lodger arrives. It's  
Mr. -- ?

JOHN

John Presser.

MR. SWINBORN

Call me Edmond. My friends do.

John and Mr. Swinborn shake hands. Swinborn takes John's hat and places it on a chair.

JOHN

(To Ruby)

Excuse me? About the rent?

Ruby waves John away with a piece of toast.

MR. SWINBORN

Michael and Rose are photographers.  
See there above the buffet.

John stares at the couple, then the large photo of a three-year-old girl. She stands alone on what appears to be a Mexican street. In the photo, signs in Spanish hang above shop doorways.

MR. SWINBORN

You'll see their work throughout the  
house. That was their child, Melanie.

He takes a quick look to see if the Swifts can hear him.

MR. SWINBORN

(Lowering his voice)

She wandered away... never found...  
Mexico.

John looks back at the photo.

MR. SWINBORN

Food's getting cold. Help yourself.

John shivers.

He piles his plate full.

MR. SWINBORN  
Here... my boy... sit by me.

John sits.

MR. SWINBORN  
(To Ruby)  
A good repast.  
(To John)  
My dear boy, you haven't lived until  
you try Ruby's Souffle Glace au  
Citron.

Ruby nods to Mr. Swinborn.

MR. SWINBORN  
Try it there in the yellow bowl.  
Instead of four eggs, she use twenty.

John obeys.

MR. SWINBORN  
Mr. Presser, taste the souffle first.

Mr. Swinborn pours coffee for John from a large coffee pot.

John digs in.

Mr. Swinborn shows surprise at John's ravenous eating.

MR. SWINBORN  
Ruby's a wonder in the kitchen.

John nods with his mouth full.

MR. SWINBORN  
Don't mind Georg. He's quiet, but  
he's a fine sculptor.

Georg offers only a weak smile and suddenly falls asleep.

MR. SWINBORN  
Georg's work appears in all the  
galleries.

MR. SWINBORN

Good work, Georg.

Georg's eyes snap open.

MR. SWIFT

Georg visited us in Mexico on one of our photo shoots.

John studies Georg with admiration.

WILSON SKYLOR III enters. Portly, 30's. His shiny black hair, parted in the center. Wilson's clothes signal wealth.

MR. SWINBORN

Oh say, Wilson.

MR. SKYLOR

Yes.

Wilson fills his plate.

MR. SWINBORN

Meet John Presser, our newest boarder in 401.

Wilson sits next to John.

MR. SKYLOR

401, you say?

JOHN

Are you on the fourth floor?

MR. SKYLOR

I'm afraid you're alone up there.

John wolfs down his eggs.

Ruby waves her hand for silence.

RUBY

Mr. Presser's a writer. I found him out last night.

ROSE SWIFT

Might we have read your work? Novels? Essays? Poetry?

JOHN

Mainly short stories and one unfinished novel.

Basking in the attention, John deepens his voice.

JOHN

I'm... nothing has been published.  
I'm looking for the right publisher.

Smiles of approval all around the table. OS sound of MEN and WOMEN LAUGHING from somewhere upstairs.

The LAUGHTER DIES suddenly as if someone turned off a radio.

JOHN

What was that?

Mr. and Mrs. Swift rise. Ruby yawns. Wilson eats. Georg dozes.

MR. SWINBORN

Somebody's radio, I expect. Not to worry. A few of us don't choose to come down for breakfast.

Georg's eyes open. He leans to whisper something to Mr. Swinborn. They stare at John.

JACK DOSS, 30's enters. Ruby makes room next to her. Jack waves briefly at the group.

RUBY

Here's my favorite nephew, Jack Doss, everyone. He's agreed to do a documentary on our boarding house.

Jack nods. He rises to fill a plate at the buffet.

RUBY

His crew will be over here shortly.

JACK

We'll try not to disturb you too much.

Ruby turns to John.

RUBY

You see, we have this problem.  
Certain people want to tear us down.

Everyone at the table looks distressed. They all talk at once.

JACK

My crew and I will be knocking on  
your doors, filming. Thanks for your  
patience.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - DAY

Later. John, in his sweater and hat, pauses at the front  
door. He carries a large envelope Mr. Swinborn stops him.

MR. SWINBORN

I know just the right publisher for  
you, my boy.

JOHN

Really?

MR. SWINBORN

I do. I do. Sylvia Mai Hayworth.  
Hayworth Publishing.

Swinborn pulls a business card from his vest pocket.

JOHN

I was going to ask you --

MR. SWINBORN

Great minds, same road. Mention I  
sent you. She's an old friend.

Mr. Swinborn hands the card to John.

John studies the card.

John opens the front door a crack then closes it against the  
wind.

Behind John, Swinborn whispers to Skylor who gives two quick  
nods. As he climbs the stairs, Mr. Swinborn laughs to himself.

The phone in the glass booth RINGS. John turns back to answer it. Skylor answers first, closing the glass door. He nods and smiles at John.

INT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

Skylor winks and waves at John through the glass door. John waves as he enters Ruby's apartment.

SKYLOR (ON PHONE)

You want John Presser? You must have the wrong number, Sir. No one here by that name.

INT. RUBY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Ruby's at the sink washing dishes. Stacks of clean plates drain to her right. Piles of dirty plates tower on the left.

John taps at the kitchen door.

RUBY

Speak up. What do you want?

He enters; she hands John a dish towel. His eyes climb the tower of dirty dishes.

Ruby waits for John to dry a dish. He takes one saucer and wipes it awkwardly.

RUBY

On the table. Put the dry ones on the table.

John selects a wet cup.

RUBY

Didn't you help with dishes back home?

JOHN

Ma didn't ask me.

Ruby shakes her head and rolls her eyes.



RUBY  
Everything satisfactory with your  
room? Anything happen?

JOHN  
What do you mean?

RUBY  
Was something wrong with the room?  
Out with it. Was it the bed?

JOHN  
No, the bed's fine.

Ruby exchanges his cup for a wet plate.

RUBY  
If you've a complaint, tell me. Won't  
do to keep it to yourself.

John dries the plate, stacks it, takes another. He picks up  
speed.

JOHN  
I owe you for rent.

Ruby plunges her hands into the hot dishwater.

RUBY  
Can you pay three dollars a week?

JOHN  
Three?

RUBY  
Three it'll be then. Pay now. And on  
Mondays before midnight.

John gives her one of his fives. She dries her hands on her  
apron. Ruby pulls two crumpled dollar bills from her apron  
pocket.

RUBY  
Thank you kindly.

JOHN  
Where will you go when this house is  
torn down?

RUBY

Oh, don't speak of it. A tragic thing. Our beautiful old building.

John looks concerned.

RUBY

We're hoping Jack's documentary will help us to save it.

With a sigh, Ruby turns back to the sink.

INT. ROOM 401 - DAY

John buttons his shirt.

A KNOCK at the door.

JOHN

Who is it?

JACK (OS)

Hey. Mr. Presser? John? It's Jack and the crew.

John grimaces. He opens the door. Jack, DEVON, and HARRIS enter. They're in their 30's.

JACK

Can we leave our equipment in the hall?

John shrugs.

They shake hands with John all around.

JOHN

What is it?

JACK

Can we sit and chat?

JOHN

I was just going out in a few minutes.

Jack tries to persuade John to allow the crew to spend a few nights in room 401. John refuses. His writing is too important to waste the time.

Jack assures him that the documentary about Norman Risk and the very room he lived in could stop the demolition and get the house historical status in Chicago.

EXT. BOARDINGHOUSE, STREET CORNER - DAY

John waits for a break in traffic. He carries his manuscripts in a package wrapped in brown paper and string.

A snowball falls on John's head. John squints into the sun. He looks up in time to see one of room 401's windows blow shut.

He examines the snowball. No one nearby. Puzzled, John drops the ball.

Across the street, EVELYN HART, 18, shades her eyes against brilliant sunlight. She waits for heavy TRAFFIC to clear.

Suddenly, a ray of sunlight, reflected in a room 401 window, shines directly into her eyes and blinds her.

Evelyn steps in front of an oncoming truck.

John drops his package and runs in front of the truck and knocks her out of the way. He falls on top of her in a puddle.

EVELYN

Ohhh. My knee.

JOHN

Sorry.

He helps her to her feet. John looks up. Room 401's window stands open again.

JOHN

(To himself)

I know I shut that window.

EVELYN

You must be freezing in that sweater.

A man hands John his package.

JOHN

Thanks.

(To Evelyn)

Can you walk?

EVELYN

I think so. May I lean on you? Could you help me inside the diner?

JOHN

Sure.

John offers his arm. They enter the Starlite Diner.

INT. STARLITE DINER - DAY

POP, 60's, sits in a booth reading the paper. He's wearing heavy work clothes. His hard hat sits next to him.

Two shoppers eat breakfast at a table.

John helps Evelyn with her coat. Evelyn wears a waitress uniform.

John follows Evelyn.

JOHN

I live across the street. I don't need to put you out.

POP

Well, look at you.

He notices Evelyn's limp.

EVELYN

This is my dad.

JOHN

John Presser. Hey.

POP

(To Evelyn)

You all right?

Evelyn serves coffee to John and Pop.

EVELYN

You saved my life. Have some hot  
coffee on me?

John gives Evelyn a smile. She looks down at her wet uniform.

EVELYN

I'll run in back and change. Only be  
a minute.

Evelyn heads for the kitchen door. Pop lights a cigar. John  
sits opposite him.

POP

Where did you say you were staying?

John points to his boarding house across the street.

POP

You'll have to move soon. My company  
has a contract to tear that place  
down.

JOHN

I saw your signs. How long before  
you --

POP

Maybe a month. The tenants are trying  
to save it.

Evelyn appears in a dry uniform. Her limp is better.

John finishes his coffee.

JOHN

I'm sort of wet and cold. I should go  
back and change.

EVELYN

Maybe the cook has some old clothes  
back there.

JOHN

That's okay. I can run over to my  
room.

Evelyn looks disappointed.

JOHN

I'm new here. I don't know anyone.  
Could I maybe call you sometime?

Pop smiles.

EVELYN

I guess so.  
(Looking at pop)  
Sure.

Evelyn scribbles her number on a blank check.

John takes her number. He shakes hands with Pop.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - NIGHT

John dials Evelyn's number from the Starlite check. He deposits coins.

JOHN (ON PHONE)

Hey. It's me, John Presser. Remember me? The one who saved your life?  
(Laughing)  
Right.

EVELYN (VO)

John. I'm not limping anymore. How are you?

JOHN (ON PHONE)

Good. I was wondering if you're free tonight. We could go to a show or something.

EVELYN (VO)

I could meet you at the diner. I get off at 9:00. We could go from there.

JOHN (ON PHONE)

Great. I'll pick you up then.

EVELYN (VO)

That would be fun. Yeah. You in town for awhile?

JOHN (ON PHONE)

I'm not sure how long. If I can get a job, or sell my stories, I might stay.

EVELYN (VO)

Are you on a pay phone? I could call you back.

JOHN (ON PHONE)

That's okay. I can't talk long. I have some writing to do. I'm trying to finish my last chapter.

The phone clicks.

OPERATOR (VO)

Please deposit 25 cents. Your time is up.

JOHN (ON PHONE)

I don't have any change. I'll see you tonight then.

DIAL TONE sounds.

EXT. STARLITE DINER - NIGHT

The night is clear and cold as John and Evelyn leave the diner. John wears an old coat.

JOHN

Thanks again for letting me borrow this coat. When I find a job, I'll give it back.

EVELYN

Pop's not using it anymore. I just thought it might fit. You're not offended?

JOHN

No. It's nice to feel warm on a night like tonight.

A sudden GUST of wind nearly blows John's hat away. He tugs at the brim.

They cross the street.

EXT. BOARDINGHOUSE, FRONT SIDEWALK - NIGHT

John and Evelyn notice the dark windows of John's room above. Evelyn trips on a crack in the sidewalk. John takes her arm.

EVELYN

Thanks. You're going to like this theatre. They only show old movies. It's fun.

John smiles.

The couple hurries past the front door. John notices the ROOM TO LET sign no longer appears in the window.

EVELYN

You haven't told me about your room.

JOHN

I think I can write there.

EVELYN

What about the boarders?

JOHN

They're an odd bunch.

Evelyn looks at John. They pass the Boardinghouse. Involved in their MOS conversation, they fail to see the scene above their heads.

UNSEEN PERSON'S POV - WINDOWS ROOM 401: The LIGHTS inside room 401 BLAZE -- changing to ANGRY RED, to PURPLE, to an eerie unnatural envious GREEN. WAVES of SEETHING GREEN LIGHT pulsate from every window.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

John and Evelyn, oblivious to the ominous light show above, turn the corner.



EXT. CHICAGO THEATRE - NIGHT

John and Evelyn wait in line for tickets. People ahead and behind them chat quietly.

INT. CHICAGO THEATRE - NIGHT

John leads Evelyn into the darkened Theatre.

MOVIETONE STOCK FOOTAGE:

NOVEMBER 22, 1932: HOOVER URGES CUTS; DEFICIT 700 MILLION and

HITLER PLEADS FOR A CHANCE TO RULE GERMANY

The audience -- COUPLES -- ELDERLY and TEENAGE. TEENS cause a commotion of their own.

JOHN  
(whispering)  
Can you see?

EVELYN  
Yes.

John puts his arm around Evelyn's coat and helps her to remove it. She settles in and they look at one another.

The feature begins.

GABLE AND HARLOW in "RED DUST"

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT

GABLE and HARLOW embrace passionately.

Evelyn gives John a sidelong glance. He gives her a shy smile.

EXT. STATE STREET - NIGHT

John and Evelyn walk hand in hand.

EXT. AUTOMATIC PHOTO BOOTH - NIGHT

Three sailors exit the booth.

Evelyn looks at John. He nods "yes," and they squeeze inside.

INT. PHOTO BOOTH - NIGHT

Evelyn shares the seat with John. John deposits his four quarters into the coin slot. He puts his arms around Evelyn.

JOHN

Smile, Honey.

Evelyn's face shines. The camera LIGHTS FLASH.

EXT. PHOTO BOOTH - NIGHT

Moments later, Evelyn holds the strip of pictures.

Only one turns out. Evelyn takes a small scissors from her purse and snips off the good picture.

Evelyn cuts the good picture in half between their faces.

JOHN

Hey, don't cut the good one.

EVELYN

I'll give you my picture and I'll keep yours. Maybe someday if we're still... well, maybe we'll join the two halves.

John studies her photo. She places his picture in her wallet.

EXT. EVELYN'S FLAT, STREET ENTRANCE - NIGHT

John pulls Evelyn close. They kiss. He holds her. Evelyn breaks.

EVELYN

Do you have a girl back home?

JOHN

No.

EVELYN

You know what I loved best about tonight?

JOHN

Right now?

EVELYN

No... well, yes.

She laughs softly.

EVELYN

I loved the part in the movie when the storm comes up.

John hugs her again.

EVELYN

No, wait... and Gable picks up Mary Astor and runs through the jungle with her in his arms.

JOHN

You have to be strong to do something like that.

John looks willing to try.

She gently pushes him away.

JOHN

Tomorrow?

She unlocks the door. There are happy tears in her eyes.

EVELYN

Tomorrow. And don't forget.

John disappears into the darkness.

INT. ROOM 401 - NIGHT

Still wearing Pop's coat, John sinks into the rocking chair.

He kicks off his wet shoes and stretches his legs.

INT. ROOM 401 - NIGHT

John sits on the bed counting his money. Shaking his head, he puts all that's left into his coin purse.

A KNOCK at the door.

JACK (OS)

It's me, Jack, Mr. Presser. Could I talk to you about filming your room?

John opens the door abruptly.

JOHN

I told you, I'm busy writing.

Jack glances at a page of John's novel. It lies on the desk unbound.

JACK

Hey, this your writing? Says, "by John Presser."

JOHN

It's mine.

JACK

Funny thing, Mr. Presser, your writing is so much like Norman Risk's prose. His exact style, you might say.

John looks down.

JOHN

He's my writing idol. I want to complete his work. I can't waste the time --

JACK

Aunt Ruby has other rooms. Can't you write in one of them while we film this one?

JOHN

I suppose so --

JACK

Don't get me wrong, John. I don't want to cause you any trouble. A new writer's reputation is so fragile.

John registers Jack's threat.

JOHN

You won't say anything will you?

JACK

I'm only asking you to think about it. Please, let my crew film in here a couple of nights? Time is short.

INT. RUBY'S KITCHEN - DAY

John pays her another three dollars.

RUBY

You paid already. Pay next week.

She pushes his hand away.

JOHN

Please take it. I'm afraid I might spend this money. I don't want to lose the room.

RUBY

You'll mess up my bookkeeping.

He presses the bills on her again. Reluctantly, Ruby takes the money.

JOHN

Thank you. Thank you.

JOHN

Has anyone called for me?

RUBY

Nobody called for you.

EXT. BOARDINGHOUSE, FRONT STEPS - DAY

John emerges with his story package. He notices that there are more signs of demolition preparations around the property.

A REMOTE CHICAGO TV INTERVIEW.

John joins a gathering CROWD around the INTERVIEW.

Ruby, Pop, and the Documentary crew field questions re razing the boarding house. Representatives from Historical Societies to save old Chicago express their views too.

Ruby and Jack explain the value of the house as the famous Norman Risk's residence when he wrote his best selling unfinished novel: "BEHIND IRON GATES."

Nate Taggart steps from behind the hedge. He watches John.

EXT. WALTON STREET - DAY

Later in the morning. John asks a POLICEMAN for directions MOS. The policeman points to the building across the street.

EXT. HAYWORTH PUBLISHING BUILDING - DAY

The brass-clad entrance glistens against the white building.

A brass plate announces HAYWORTH PUBLISHING establ. 1912.

John enters the building.

INT. HAYWORTH MAIN FLOOR - DAY

The ROAR of high-pitched CHATTER. MUSIC comes from a speaker.

Young men carrying leather briefcases pace in front of the elevators.

Hesitant under their disdainful looks, John moves into the crowd. He hugs his paper and string package close to his chest.

INT. HAYWORTH ELEVATOR - DAY

The brass doors close behind John.

INT. HAYWORTH HALLWAY - DAY

OS, the sound of TYPING from many offices.

John pushes through milling crowds of staff and office boys.

INT. SYLVIA HAYWORTH'S OFFICE - DAY

Black, white Art Deco style.

John walks to the nearest desk. He faces MARION KNIGHTSBRIDGE, 30's. She's neat, tailored, professional.

Miss Knightsbridge looks up from her computer.

JOHN

Excuse me, a Mr. Swinborn said I should bring these manuscripts to a Ms. Hayworth.

She takes the package.

MARION

Sorry, we don't tip messengers. We'll call... what's the author's name?

JOHN

Presser. John Allen Presser.

MARION

We'll report to Mr. Presser when Ms. Hayworth reads and decides. Good Day.

John grins.

MARION

Ms. Hayworth's in a meeting. I'll give it to her when she's free. You may leave.

JOHN

I wrote these stories.

MARION

You must be joking.

Humiliated, John plunges on.

JOHN

You can reach me at this number. It's  
a pay phone where I live.

He hands her a scrap of paper with his phone number on it.  
Marion takes the paper and staples it to John's stories.

MARION

Wait here. I'll see if Ms. Hayworth  
can see you.

Marion returns without his stories.

MARION

Ms. Hayworth will see you. Go right  
in.

She resumes typing. John enters Ms. Hayworth's office.

INT. SYLVIA HAYWORTH'S OFFICE - DAY

Sylvia's office -- all chrome and black leather. Floor to  
ceiling windows overlook the City and the Lake to the East.

SYLVIA MAI HAYWORTH, 65 -- a dramatic, domineering, dark  
beauty, with white skin. Scrupulously clean and shining black  
hair, extreme eye makeup, and clear red lips.

Black is her color. SOLITAIRE, her game.

Sylvia glares at John's tense face across her desk.

She taps her long red fingernail on John's story package.

SYLVIA

I read a page or two. They're good.  
A+.

JOHN

Would you take one story? I'm low on  
funds right now.



Sylvia raises her hand to check him.

SYLVIA

I might, if you promise to attend a party this evening at my place.

She picks one story and hands the rest to John. Sylvia rises. She smiles. Laying a slender hand on John's sleeve, she leans closer.

SYLVIA

You need a makeover.

John draws away.

SYLVIA

You have talent; talent's not enough.

She stops to pour a glass of mineral water for herself.

SYLVIA

Here's my address. Eight o'clock tonight.

John reaches for her business card.

JOHN

May I bring a friend?

SYLVIA

If you must.

John stands.

SYLVIA

Stop outside. My secretary will draw you a check.

JOHN

I'll be there tonight.

John leaves. Sylvia idly deals a game of SOLITAIRE on her black lacquer desk.

EXT. LAKE SHORE DRIVE, APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

John and Evelyn cross the street. They can't find room to walk between parked limousines.

Three chauffeurs stand beside their cars.

John and Evelyn circle the back of the last car.

They attempt to enter, but two well-dressed couples wearing fur from head to toe sweep past them with the nose-in-the-air carriage of the monied class.

Two women kiss the air beside their cheeks.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING, FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

John escorts Evelyn past a dour-faced doorman. A shabby pair -- she in her cloth coat, he in his old hat and Pop's coat.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING, FOYER - NIGHT

John and Evelyn enter.

John rings for the elevator.

While they wait, a FROND from a POTTED PALM brushes Evelyn's cheek. She turns quickly, frightened.

INT. APARTMENT ELEVATOR - NIGHT

John clings to Evelyn behind the uniformed ELEVATOR OPERATOR.

ELEVATOR OPERATOR

Out please.

The elevator stops.

INT. HAYWORTH PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

John and Evelyn stand in the open doorway. They stare at care-free couples dancing and drinking in casual elegance.

Throughout the scene, pianist, TYRONE MARTINIQUE, plays GEORGE GERSHWIN TUNES or similar SONGS on a black baby grand.

John and Evelyn's shabby clothes spark a fire of contempt from one well-dressed man and woman.

A BUTLER takes their coats. He whisks them quickly out of sight.

Guests surround Sylvia in her white sequined gown.

Dazzling Sylvia greets John and an unhappy Evelyn.

SYLVIA

I have some people I want you to meet.

Sylvia pulls him into her arms.

She speaks quietly like the sound of rustling silk. Only John can hear her.

SYLVIA

Relax, John.

John becomes absorbed in the MUSIC.

SYLVIA

You understand I can help your career? Don't you?

JOHN

Yes.

JOHN

I have a girl with me... I should --

SYLVIA

I hear you have a novel.

JOHN

Who told you I have a novel?

He basks in her close attention.

Sylvia relaxes in his arms as they dance.

SYLVIA

You surely do have one, don't you?

JOHN

Well... yes.

SYLVIA

I have one place left on my spring list. Bring your novel by tomorrow.

JOHN

Tomorrow?

SYLVIA

I don't waste my time on short fiction for long. Novels make lots of money.

JOHN

I don't see how I can bring you a novel --

John smiles nervously.

SYLVIA

Have you ever considered a writer's success? Fine clothes, and lots of money to spend?

JOHN

You have everything.

Evelyn appears in the hallway with their coats. John looks over, annoyed.

JOHN

I, we can't stay. I see my... friend doesn't feel well.

SYLVIA

Perhaps you'll return later on? Nights up this high can be spectacular.

She gestures toward the gleaming glass windows and all of the city's LIGHTS aglow.

JOHN

Maybe, I will.

John offers his hand to Sylvia; she holds his hand with both of hers.

He looks into Sylvia's eyes.

SYLVIA

I can't wait to read it.

JOHN

Read what?

SYLVIA

Your novel. Remember? Tomorrow then.

JOHN

Tomorrow.

John returns to Evelyn. He takes Pop's coat. They open the door to leave.

EXT. EVELYN'S FLAT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

John and Evelyn speak in low voices, as if they were in Church.

JOHN

I may not be around tomorrow night.

EVELYN

I know.

JOHN

I'm going to try to finish my novel.

EVELYN

I see.

JOHN

I'll get this coat back to Pop soon.

EVELYN

Keep the coat for luck.

JOHN

Goodnight.

He kisses her lightly. She turns to unlock the door. He walks away.

INT. FLAT, STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Evelyn stands sobbing at the bottom of the long staircase.

INT. HALLWAY - OUTSIDE ROOM 401 - NIGHT

John climbs the last few stairs. He unlocks the door to room 401.

INT. ROOM 401 - NIGHT

Ruby bends over her butterfly painting. She paints the last bit of a wing. She looks up.

JOHN

Oh.

RUBY

I hope you don't mind. I let myself in. I felt I must finish the painting.

JOHN

Yes. Go ahead. Don't let me bother you.

RUBY

Our appeal to delay the razing of our building lost. They called an hour ago.

John looks at the painting.

The body and head of the butterfly still not filled in.

JOHN

You still have a lot to finish.

RUBY

No. I think it's done. This is all that's needed.

Ruby sits in the rocking chair.

RUBY

They're going to destroy this building tomorrow. Our friends have no time to pack. Their belongings will be destroyed with the house.

JOHN

They could pack all night. Save something.

RUBY

No use.

RUBY

I must tell you a story. You may have guessed by now.

JOHN

What is it?

RUBY

You see, I'm the "last chapter" of Norman's book. All these years I've kept the secret. Hoping that he would break through somehow someday. But it was not to be. And now it's too late anyway.

John sits at the desk.

JOHN

I don't understand.

RUBY

When I was quite a girl. I came to Chicago from a small town in Ohio. I came to be an actress.

John leans forward.

RUBY

After a year of auditions, I finally got a small part in a play.

JOHN

How did you meet Norman?

Ruby paces.

RUBY

One night, he came back stage to meet me. After a time, we became lovers. He lived here in this room. I moved in with him. He loved my paintings.

John stands at the window looking out at the moon.

RUBY

After a blissful year together, he was finishing his memoirs, he suddenly became ill. At first we made light of it. But he grew weaker. Finally, he took to his bed. I nursed him day and night.

JOHN

I'm sorry. Sorry.

RUBY

He so wanted to write of our love. Our beautiful time together. But, too late.

Ruby wipes her tears with a handkerchief.

JOHN

What happened next?

RUBY

Well, he passed on. Or so I thought, so we all thought. After the funeral, I continued painting this picture, for him, to somehow pour the love I still felt for him into the picture.

John stands before the picture.

RUBY

Every afternoon, I came in here and worked on it. I gave up acting. He left everything to me. I did not need to work ever again.

JOHN

Did you ever marry?



RUBY

He was married. Divorce was not what it is today. She refused. So we couldn't be married.

Ruby stands at the door.

RUBY

That may be something you can answer.

JOHN

Me?

Ruby smiles.

RUBY

From all I've seen in this room since you came here. I believe you will be the one to help Norman realize his dream. I must go now.

Ruby leaves.

INT. ROOM 401 - NIGHT

John draws open the drapes. They CREAK apart. Fog hides the other buildings from view.

Sound of SOFT CLASSICAL MUSIC PLAYS under scene.

John rests on the bed. He gets up and paces around the room.

He rocks in the chair. He stares at the mirrored door. His reflection stares back.

JOHN

(To his reflection)  
I'm hungry. I wish I had a sandwich.

INT. ROOM 401 - NIGHT

Later. When he enters the room from the bathroom, John's shocked to find a tray of hot tea and sandwiches.

JOHN

Look at this. Ruby must have come back.

He pours the tea and takes a bite of sandwich.

INT. ROOM 401 - NIGHT

Still later. Fog thins to reveal the street between the boardinghouse and the diner.

Through a side window, John sees the darkened Starlite sign.

The sound of MICE SCRATCHING. Puzzled, John looks behind the door, under the bed.

DESK CLOCK reads 11:55.

John sits at the desk with his head in his hands. He takes a deep breath and opens the bottom right hand drawer to find a stack of blank paper.

Nervously, John places the stack to his right and closes the drawer.

JOHN

(Touching the last sandwich)

I wish I could finish this novel in one night.

John shakes his head. He stretches out his fingers.

With a shaking hand, he picks up his pencil. He taps the pencil. He takes a sheet and writes "CHAPTER 30" --

A long pause.

JOHN

Nobody can do this in one night.

He checks his watch against the time on the desk clock.

JOHN

Oh, I wish I could write faster... faster than ever before.

OS, a distant muted sound of a CLOCK GONGING 12 times down on the third floor landing.

John's mouth drops open as he listens. A long pause.

JOHN

Wait a minute. That can't be...  
another clock, maybe?

He grabs his key and rushes out the door.

INT. THIRD FLOOR LANDING - NIGHT

John races down the stairs. He stops transfixed before the the old clock.

The clock's glass case, empty as before. The hands, point to 12.

John panics. He backs away up the stairs to his room.

INT. ROOM 401 - NIGHT

Later. John faces the mirrored door.

JOHN

I can't go home. Pa will bury me in  
that shop.

The ROOM shakes.

John clings to the desk. He falls backwards onto the bed. The shaking stops.

He notices MIST swirling within the mirror on the closet door.

The mist clears to show IRON GATES slowly swinging open.

Shocked, John stares into the mirror.

John sits at his desk. He shakes his hands. He looks at them. His mouth is open.

He takes the pencil and writes ten pages top speed. He laughs. He cries.

He stops to read one of the pages, but his hand must continue.

He tosses pages aside. John writes on and on.

Desk clock's hands spin round the dial.

LIGHT outside the windows changes from light, to dark, then to light again.

John's hand writes faster and faster, until it becomes a blur.

PAGES float about the room like large snowflakes.

Sweat pours from John's face and body. Moments later, he shivers with cold.

He writes until the stack of paper is gone.

INT. ROOM 401 - DAY

The drapes stand open, and dawn comes.

The desk clock lies stopped on its side.

Still dressed, John sleeps on the bed. His eyes pop open; he sits upright.

Room 401 is covered with sheets of paper.

Giddy with excitement, John gathers them quickly.

On his knees, he picks one then another, searching for the next and the next to keep the number sequence in order.

JOHN

Here it is. Page 331, and 332. Wait.  
Where's...? Oh, yes. There you are...  
I can't believe it. I can't believe  
it.

His eyes gleam as he stacks the pages.

John scans some of the first page, then another, then the last.

JOHN

It is about Ruby. The last chapter of his book.

JOHN

How could this be? How could I have written this when I know none of these things I wrote.

John stares into the mirror. His reflection looks back.

He props the pillows on the bed. He continues reading the page.

He springs from the bed.

John wraps the chapter pages in brown paper, addresses it to Hayworth Publishing, and writes his return address on the package.

He throws on his coat and leaves with the package in his arms.

EXT. BUS - DAY

The BUS rounds a corner.

Icy winds SHRIEK across the Lake. They HOWL between tall buildings.

INT. BUS - DAY

His package next to him on the seat, John sits facing sideways in the car.

He reads the ads as the bus HUMS its way along.

Tired-faced men and women hang on looped straps around him.

The swaying bus rolls on, rocking John into a drowsy state.

The CONDUCTOR rings his bell. John wakes. He grasps a metal post with one hand; the other hand rests upon the manuscript package.

John notices a MAN sitting across the aisle has neither socks nor shoelaces in his worn shoes.

Nate Taggert glares at John and his package.

EXT. BUS - DAY

The bus stops at a corner for two old women.

INT. BUS - DAY

The conductor punches the women's transfers. They struggle to stand in the swaying bus.

Nate's eyes watch John's package like a snake observing its prey.

John feels someone brush past him.

He realizes his package is gone.

John freezes. Through a window, he sees Nate running down the street, the manuscript under his arm.

John pulls the wire above his head. The bus LURCHES to a halt.

EXT. BUS - DAY

Stumbling, nearly falling down the steps, John bursts through the door onto the icy street.

EXT. STREET - DAY

John sees the thief running fast up ahead. John follows.

JOHN

Can't be happening... Come back.

John reaches the alley's entrance.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

John stops to listen.

JOHN

It's worth nothing to you. You hear me?

The distant sound of a Police car SIREN several blocks away.

JOHN

Give it back and I'll forget the whole thing.

Nate emerges from behind a large crate. John tenses as Nate shoves the manuscript into his shirt.

They race to the end of the alley. A high fence blocks the way.

Nate tries to scale the fence. John reaches for him.

Nate's fingers slide and scratch across the slick surface. John drags Nate down.

JOHN

You. You're the man in the park. You tricked me.

Nate grabs a board. He swings at John and hits him hard across the face.

John's lip bleeds. They circle each other.

NATE

Norman and I were close friends. He was a better writer. I wanted his fame and fortune. You tried to take my bench.

John snatches at the manuscript in Nate's shirt.

NATE

It's mine now. Get away from me, or I'll kill you.

Nate grabs a small board and hurls it at John.

John dodges the board.

Nate's ragged shoe, soaked with snow, falls from one bare foot.

JOHN

It's not worth anything to you.

Nate tears open the end of the package enough to see what it is.

NATE

I'll take it to Hayworth. Tell her I found it in your room in a secret drawer in the desk. I'll never give it back.

John knocks Nate back against the fence. Nate hits his head. He slides to the ground.

Wild-eyed, John stands over the unconscious Nate.

Blood flows from a wound on the back of Nate's head.

John cradles Nate. He listens for Nate's heart beat.

OS sound of windows BANGING overhead.

MAN'S VOICE (OS)

Down there, see. Call the Police.  
Fighting... someone's hurt.

Slowly, so's not to wake him, John removes the manuscript from Nate's bloody shirt.

In shock, he places it beside Nate's body.

JOHN

Got to get out of here.

John rises -- unsteady on his feet. He bends to reach the package. Dizzy. John staggers.

He rubs his bleeding lip. Leans on a wall. Walks a few steps. Trips on Nate's shoe.

John returns with the shoe and tries to shove it onto Nate's foot.

JOHN

I've killed you. I'm so sorry.



The sound of Police SIRENS. Clutching the manuscript, John runs back through the alley to the street.

EXT. STREET - DAY

John crosses the street.

The sound of SIRENS, louder. The street fills in with lights and people running and cars pulling up.

John pauses, then slips out easily into the crowd and stands for awhile in the doorway of a drug store.

John watches POLICE bring Nate's body out on a stretcher covered with a sheet.

A REPORTER carrying a SPEED-GRAPHIC snaps pictures of Nate on the stretcher.

EXT. HAYWORTH APARTMENT - DAY

Before entering, John combs his hair with a shaking hand. His shirt is torn. His lip is swollen. He has Norman Risk's last chapter.

INT. HAYWORTH PENTHOUSE - DAY

John steadies himself in the doorway. Sylvia embraces him.

SYLVIA

You look as though you've been  
fighting in the streets.

John shakes his head and looks down. She catches his wrist.

SYLVIA

Your watch. It's smashed.

JOHN

I won't be needing a watch that much  
any more.

SYLVIA

You do need a haircut. And a whole  
new look.

He breaks her hold to present the battered manuscript package.

JOHN

Here.

With a bemused expression, Sylvia unwraps the novel.

SYLVIA

Let's see what you're really made of.  
Tell me the title.

JOHN

"behind iron gates." It's Risk's last  
chapter.

SYLVIA

Let me see this. Perhaps, you've  
found the key to those "gates" at  
last.

Sylvia smooths her hair. She rings a small gold bell. Her  
maid MALITA instantly appears.

SYLVIA

Send Anson to me. I have an  
assignment for him.

Malita exits.

ANSON BLANE, 25, stands in the doorway with a disapproving  
glance in John's direction.

Anson's the "Harvard man" of Hayworth Publications.

He drinks from a flask encased in leather.

SYLVIA

Have Mr. Presser looking presentable  
by day's end.

Anson bites his lip.

ANSON

Human, perhaps. Not presentable.

SYLVIA

You bore me when you're witty.

John looks confused.

JOHN  
I can't afford --

SYLVIA  
Think of it as an advance on a new  
complete edition of Risk's memoirs.

EXT. NEWSSTAND - DAY

A new John. He's groomed and dressed in the latest mode. From his suave haircut and Knox hat to the Johnston and Murphy black leather shoes and camel hair overcoat. He carries a shiny black leather briefcase.

He scans the morning paper.

HEADLINES read:

MAN ATTACKED IN ALLEY

ASSAILANT SOUGHT BY POLICE

POLICE FOLLOW LEADS IN CASE

John throws the paper in the trash. He walks on as if pursued.

EXT. STARLITE DINER - DAY

Outside the entrance, John stands in the rain under his new black umbrella. He glances up and down the street.

Awkward with his new possessions, John juggles the umbrella, brief case, and Pop's coat in a bag.

INT. STARLITE DINER - DAY

Pop and Evelyn study a newspaper at the counter.

POP  
Brutal. Who would do such a terrible  
thing?

John's big entrance dampens when he spots their newspaper.  
Pop drops the paper.

POP

Look at this fine gentleman.

John touches the brim of his new fedora with a leather glove.  
Evelyn reacts -- transfixed at the "New John."

EVELYN

Did she dress you like this? You know  
what that means don't you?

JOHN

Sylvia gave me an advance on a book  
I finished.

EVELYN

"Sylvia?" Not "Ms. Hayworth" anymore?

JOHN

Hey, I love you. Forgive me for the  
other night?

Evelyn tries to hide a little smile.

EVELYN

I don't want to share you with Ms.  
Hayworth.

John reaches for Evelyn. She steps back.

EVELYN

I want you all to myself. I can't  
play her game.

John gives Evelyn a gold ring. The tiny diamond SPARKS.

EVELYN

Did Ms. Hayworth supply the money for  
this too?

JOHN

I sold my own novel to her.

EVELYN

She sort of owns you. She'll want you to hang around her like those other young guys.

JOHN

Come on, Evelyn. Take the ring. Let me put it on your finger.

EVELYN

Give back everything she's given you.

JOHN

You don't understand. I've finally made it. I've sold a novel. A novel I finished in one night.

EVELYN

You're dreaming.

JOHN

No, I'm not. It's going to be published. My wish came true.

He grabs her hand.

JOHN

Why make me choose like this? We'll never be poor again.

EVELYN

And she'll have you, soul and body. What's left for me?

John looks away.

EVELYN

Write all you want, but not on her terms, not under her control.

JOHN

I can't give it back.

He drops her hand and puts away the ring box.

Evelyn takes Pop's coat and exits through the hall door.

John stares after her. Pop lights a cigar.

INT. STARLITE DINER - NIGHT

Evelyn stands in the dark at the window.

The Starlite sign FLASHES on and off, giving an eerie look to the diner.

She looks up to John's fourth floor windows. The drapes are open. And the lights are all on.

EXT. BOARDINGHOUSE, FRONT STEPS - DAY

People hurry by. Evelyn approaches. She sees two heavysset MEN on the steps.

Mr. Swinborn and Mr. Skylor, in deep conversation.

EVELYN

Do you know John Presser?

MR. SKYLOR

Mr. Presser still lives here, Miss.  
We saw him leave a little bit ago.

EVELYN

Did he say when he'd be back?

MR. SWINBORN

No, he didn't. Dressed to kill he was, though, in a new tuxedo.

EVELYN

I see.

She starts to leave.

MR. SKYLOR

My guess is he'll be out late. He had a red carnation in his buttonhole.

EVELYN

I haven't seen him for some time.

MR. SWINBORN

Why don't you leave him a note?

EVELYN

Why, that's a good idea.

Evelyn takes a scrap of paper and a pencil stub from her purse. She sits on the step and writes a short note.

Mr. Skylor and Mr. Swinborn chat MOS.

Evelyn mounts the steps. She's about to ring the bell. Ruby opens the door.

RUBY

Yes, my dear?

EVELYN

I wish to leave a note for Mr. Presser. That's all.

RUBY

Well then, if you wish it. Come in, Miss. You may leave your note in his room. He won't be back for hours.

Evelyn enters and Mr. Skylor and Mr. Swinborn exchange glances. The door closes and LOCKS.

INT. BOARDINGHOUSE, HALLWAY - DAY

Evelyn looks apprehensive. Ruby points toward the stairs.

RUBY

That way, right up those stairs. Room 401, Dear.

Ruby stops her. She pulls keys from her pocket.

RUBY

Here. The keys. Go on in and wait for him if you like.

EVELYN

Thank you. Maybe, I will wait for a little while.

RUBY

I don't mind. You seem like a good girl. You may have a long wait.

Evelyn takes the two keys and begins to climb the staircase.

INT. BOARDINGHOUSE, STAIRCASE - DAY

Evelyn mounts the steps slowly. She hears OS LAUGHTER and MUSIC.

At the next landing, she passes Georg's room. The door stands open.

She peeks in to see statues of every type and size. They fill all floor and shelf space. Evelyn gasps at the sight of Georg and the MAN'S HEAD he's chiseling in marble.

Georg's whole body sweats as he works with terrific speed.

The STATUE'S FACE expresses great terror. It's mouth stands open in a silent scream.

Evelyn climbs to the next landing.

INT. FOURTH FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

Evelyn hears OS mirthless LAUGHTER and TALKING. She puts her ear to the wall outside room 401. The LAUGHTER STOPS.

Puzzled, she pauses before Room 401. Evelyn's about to slip her note under the door. No. She shoves the note into her purse. She decides to go inside.

Evelyn inserts the smaller gold key in the lock. It doesn't fit. Next, she tries the larger key; the door swings open.

INT. ROOM 401 - DAY

Evelyn switches on the lights.

At the desk, she digs into her purse to find her half of the photo booth picture and the note.

Evelyn props picture and note against the desk lamp.

She looks at the tiny gold key still in her hand. It piques Evelyn's curiosity. She glances around. She sees the mirrored door.



Evelyn stands before the mirrored door.

She fixes her hair. She remembers the key.

The key fits perfectly in a small keyhole -- a keyhole now visible beneath the knob. She turns the key.

The lock CLICKS; the DOOR swings noiselessly inward a few inches.

A bright light shines into the room from behind the mirrored door.

OS, the distant sound of an orchestra PLAYING.

The MUSIC continues under the scene. Evelyn listens.

Evelyn opens the mirrored door a bit wider.

Evelyn opens the door wide enough to peek inside. A brilliant light nearly blinds her.

With a quick gasp, she slams the door and locks it leaving the key in the lock.

Grabbing her purse, she runs from the room down the stairs.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Evelyn runs through the hall and out the front door. Ruby watches Evelyn from her open door.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE, FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

All demolition equipment stands ready. Pop and his team enter the building.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Pop and his workers stomp through the hallways.

POP

Today's the day. Please leave now.

Ruby carries her mother's butterfly collection.

RUBY

Please. We're not ready. We didn't believe you would do this.

MR. SWINBORN

Truly, we all need at least a week more. Couldn't you postpone --

POP

I'm hurting for you people. You had months to prepare.

They walk through the building.

Georg struggles to carry one of his hundred's of statues. He gives Pop a helpless look.

The Swifts run by with the photograph of their daughter on the Mexican Street.

INT. 45TH FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

Pop and the other men stand outside room 401. They pound on the door.

JOHN

Don't do this, Pop.

John pleads with them running a few steps ahead.

Pop and his men ignore him.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Pop and his team take their positions. The TV NEWS CHANNELS broadcast.

Jack and his crew exit the building. Jack shakes his head.

He embraces Ruby.

When he exits, Evelyn runs to John. She sobs in his arms.

Pop signals.

The building explodes.

John and Evelyn see something fly out one of room 401's windows.

Against the gray dust of crumbling walls, John, Evelyn, and Ruby see a large BUTTERFLY. It beats its wings and manages to rise steadily past the falling rubble up up.

Ruby sees the wings are colored like the ones in her painting.

The butterfly's black body has a human head. Norman Risk's face smiles down at Ruby. The butterfly circles and then disappears into the sun.

Ruby looks at John. He gives her a hug. Evelyn, in shock, leans on John's arm.

The ROARING sound of the falling building blots out any comments from the TV REPORTERS.

Everyone backs away from the exploding debris.

Jack and his crew continue to film.

John and Evelyn embrace. They walk away from the building.

FADE OUT.

THE END