

THE OUTSIDER

BY

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GENRE: SHORT FILM

FADE IN:

H.L Menchen said of Theodore Dreiser's writing: He understood well the psychology of the outsider in rising American cities, his loneliness, his desires, and the cost exacted of him for the realization of his dreams. Robert H. Elias, Theodore Dreiser, Apostle of Nature.

EXT. LOS ANGELES, TRAILWAYS BUS STATION ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Late one Spring evening, JOHN ALLEN PRESSER, age 20, leaves the deserted TRAILWAYS BUS STATION for the dark streets of that city. He carries a small worn suitcase.

Booming in his head, he hears his father, HUGO's final advice:

HUGO (V.O.)

John, don't go. Stay here in
Sullivan with those who love you.
Help me in the Fixit shop, and all
this will be yours someday.

EXT. LOS ANGELES, STREET CORNER - NIGHT

John crosses over to study a sign under a dim streetlight. Further down the street, Presser notices a silver LIGHT surrounded by shadows. He walks on to investigate.

EXT. DOORWAY TO SHOP - NIGHT

The reflection, John finds, comes from a streetlight shining on the side of a grocery cart, packed with rags and clothing.

Nearby, an OLD MAN, 70's, dozes against a doorway. Ever watchful, a SMALL DOG guards his master and a dish of coins.

A SIGN reads: "WE NEED YOUR HELP. CLAUDE AND his 'LITTLE BROTHER.'"

LITTLE BROTHER lifts his head to sniff John's hand.

Presser pats the dog, drops a few coins into the dish, then moves on.

At the sound of the COINS, CLAUDE awakens.

CLAUDE
 (calling to John)
 Thanks.

John waves back.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET - NIGHT

Several hours later, John continues his search in a new neighborhood.

The inner VOICE of his Junior College Creative Writing teacher, MR. WALKER, prods John to move faster up a sloping sidewalk:

Mr. WALKER (V.O.)
 Call it a coincidence or some instance of synchronicity. You must test your theory, or you'll wonder about it for the rest of your life.

JOHN
 (speaking aloud to himself)
 I believe you, Professor Walker.

Mr. WALKER (V.O.)
 Follow in the footsteps of your idol, Timothy O'Malley, American novelist. Go where he went after he left Sullivan. Live where he lived. Finish your novel in his shadow. Find out how O'Malley won his fame and fortune and seize them for yourself.

John quickens his pace along the street.

EXT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Presser stops before the Hotel Carlsbad. He checks the address inscribed in his notebook.

JOHN
 (speaking aloud to himself)
 It's still here. 1236 Champion Boulevard, just like I read in his biographies.
 (more)

JOHN (cont'd)
 (approaching the
 front door)

From now on, this is where I must
 write, here, where O'Malley wrote
his novels.

A thin mist surrounds John.

The massive hotel door swings slowly open at John's light
 touch.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, LOBBY - NIGHT

John studies the deserted lobby - at one time, grand and
 elegant, now, the room reflects severe neglect.

Faded window treatments, worn carpeting, sagging furniture,
 dust-covered tables and low-lit shabby lamps, the empty
 fireplace - all cries out for renewal.

Dressed in an elaborate caftan, RUBY DANFORTH, 75, emerges
 from an adjoining room and glides to the front desk. She
 smiles at John.

RUBY
 Welcome. We've been waiting for
 you.

John looks surprised.

JOHN
 You have?

RUBY
 I'm 'Ruby,' by the way, Ruby
 Danforth. Come, come, my dear,
 register in our book. No time to
 waste.

JOHN
 John Presser. Hello.

He drops his suitcase next to the desk. John spins the large
 book around.

Ruby points to a place on the page with a gnarled finger, its
 nail painted a garish red.

RUBY
 On this line, Dear. Hurry.

JOHN
 Okay.

While Ruby drums her fingernails on the desk, John writes his name and address. Ruby turns the book around.

RUBY
Sullivan, Indiana, all that way?
What brings you here this dark
night?

John opens his mouth to answer. The woman stops him with a gesture.

RUBY
(continuing)
I'm a bit of a mind-reader; allow
me to tell you. It will be our
little game on the way up to the
room we've been holding for you.

JOHN
How did you know I'd be here
tonight?

Ruby takes his arm.

Grabbing his bag in time, John allows Ruby to lead him past an elevator door labeled, "Out of Order," on to a staircase.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, STAIRCASE - NIGHT

RUBY
Unfortunately, our elevator failed
to pass inspection recently. Do
you mind if we take the stairs?

Ruby looks back at John as they climb.

JOHN
Exercise is good. I've been
sitting on a bus for days.

On the first landing, John looks up into darkness.

JOHN
(continuing)
On which floor is my room?

RUBY
Fourth floor, 401. It's a special
room.

JOHN
Special?

John stops climbing.

RUBY

No doubt in Sullivan, you've heard of a famous writer who traveled to this city and stayed in our hotel forty years ago.

JOHN

Yes, yes.

RUBY

Wait. Let me guess. Could it be someone by the name of Timothy O'Malley? And you, do you want to be a writer too? You want to be a great writer, am I right?

JOHN

(breathless)

Oh, yes, you're right.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, SECOND LANDING - NIGHT

Ruby reaches this landing first. John struggles to keep up with her.

The old woman stops.

RUBY

Something wrong, Mr. Presser?

JOHN

My bag seems to be getting heavier. I can hardly lift it.

RUBY

A strong young man like you, tired already? Dedicated writers need lots of stamina. Here, let me carry it for you.

JOHN

Well, okay, if you want to try.

Ruby takes his bag and continues climbing, swinging the suitcase around effortlessly. John watches her in disbelief.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, 4TH FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ruby leads John down the art deco hallway. She stops outside 401.

JOHN

Wait. Tell me. Did you really know Timothy O'Malley?

RUBY

Of course I knew him. He lived here for quite some time. And we've decided to let you stay in his special room.

John looks puzzled.

JOHN

Why special? I don't understand.

RUBY

Oh, my dear, I promise soon you will understand.

Ruby unlocks the door. She hands him the key.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, ROOM 401 - NIGHT

John enters, Ruby close behind with his bag.

John appears amazed at the decor.

RUBY

What is it, Mr. Presser?

JOHN

It's so rich and grand. I've never been in a room like this.

Windows with long drapes half-open, stare out into the street.

JOHN

(continuing)

The furniture. It's like some sort of a dream.

John faces himself in a long mirror on a closet door. He imagines himself dressed in fine clothes, a smiling successful writer. Now he sees himself back in his old clothes.

JOHN

(continuing)

I want to be the greatest writer in the world.

RUBY

You will be. Yes.

Ruby stands behind the young man.

RUBY
(continuing)

Listen to me. Wealth and fame come easily. Greatness will cost you something more. Enough talk. No time to waste, John Presser. Your destiny awaits.

With a flourish of her caftan, Ruby exits 401.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, 4TH FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Unseen, John follows Ruby. He watches her take the elevator down. The indicator above the elevator door stops on numeral 1.

EXT. LOS ANGELES STREET - DAY

The next morning, John enters a modest two-story office building.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING, HALL STAIRS - DAY

John climbs one flight to the second floor.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING, SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

Checking a business card, John passes office doors until he reaches Suite 202. John peers inside the open door.

He knocks on the door frame.

JOHN
Anybody here?

He enters.

INT. ROSS MONROE AGENCY, OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Presser notices stacks of scripts occupying every available space in the tiny outer office. One wall features a gallery of signed "Dear ROSS" b/w photos.

A PHONE RINGS once.

ROSS MONROE, 50's, emerges from an inner office. A tall man, he wears jeans, a white dress shirt with rolled up sleeves, a red bandana knotted around his neck, and his bare feet in sandals.

Ross sips boiling coffee from a paper cup. He waves the cup at John.

ROSS MONROE
Coffee? Water?

JOHN
No thanks, sir. Hi, I'm John Allen
Presser, from Sullivan, Indiana.
Ruby over at the Carlsbad Hotel
gave me your card.

They shake hands. Ross beckons John to follow.

INT. ROSS MONROE AGENCY, INNER OFFICE - DAY

Ross leads John into the script-laden inner office.

Four large Rolodex, packed with hundreds of worn cards,
occupy the area next to a computer. John stares at the decks.

ROSS MONROE
B.C., before computers.

John and Ross smile.

JOHN
I need to make an appointment with
you.

ROSS MONROE
Now is good. I'm here. You're
here. Sit.

Ross points at the chair facing his desk. John sinks into the
chair.

PHONE RINGS.

ROSS MONROE (ON PHONE)
Monroe Agency. Mr. Monroe's in a
meeting.

The agent hangs up.

JOHN
I write novels. And I need someone
to put me in touch with a
publisher.

ROSS MONROE
Can you act? I handle mainly
actors with a few odd writers
thrown in.

PHONE RINGS. John squirms in his chair.

ROSS MONROE (ON PHONE)
Monroe Agency.

Ross listens to the caller.

ROSS MONROE (ON PHONE)
(continuing)
I can't teach you how to write a
screenplay on the phone. Go to the
library. Borrow a book.

Monroe hangs up and turns back to John.

ROSS MONROE
Give me the name of your best
novel.

JOHN
There's only one novel and some
short stories, a few poems.
(proudly)
The novel's called "BEHIND IRON
GATES."

Monroe appears interested.

JOHN
(continuing)
Honestly, it's taken me a year to
write three chapters and an
outline.

ROSS MONROE
Right. Say, have we met before?

JOHN
I don't think so.

Ross pulls from his desk a printed sheet and hands it to
John.

ROSS MONROE
My contract. Look it over.

John folds the page; he stuffs it inside his shirt.

PHONE RINGS.

Ross angrily shoves the phone into a desk drawer. RINGING
STOPS.

ROSS MONROE
(continuing)

Tell you what I'm going to do.
Tomorrow morning, I'm taking a
breakfast meeting with a
publisher, a smart woman who wants
to adapt a best-seller for a movie
deal. You know, a package deal.

PHONE RINGS. Ross drags it out of the drawer. He covers the
receiver's mouthpiece with his hand.

ROSS MONROE
(continuing)

Take your time. Drop off your
manuscript before nine-tomorrow
morning. Here's your big chance.
The rest is up to you.

Ross shakes John's hand.

ROSS MONROE
(continuing)
Go home. Start writing.

JOHN
Yes, sir.

ROSS MONROE (ON PHONE)
Monroe Agency. Hey Mort, how's
that Chicago weather treating you?

John leaves the office.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING, SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

Stale cigarette smoke hangs in the air. Presser overhears
Ross talking O.S. on the phone.

ROSS MONROE (ON PHONE, O.S.)
No, no you didn't interrupt. The
meeting is over. He won't be back.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, ROOM 401 - NIGHT

Late evening. John enters 401. The door locks behind him.

Through a window, LIGHT from a NEON SIGN beams ON and OFF
across the floor of the darkened room.

John studies his image in the mirror. The image's face drips
with sweat.

He hears LOUD TICKING of a clock.

JOHN
Too hot in here.

He tears off his sweater.

JOHN
(continuing)
Open a window. Too hot.

John opens all the drapes to their fullest extent. All windows but one seem locked.

He tries, but the window won't move.

In an old desk, John finds a few sheets of paper. He picks up a pen.

JOHN
(continuing; aloud to himself)
This pen is too hot.
(dropping the pen)
Burned my fingers.

With a puzzled expression, he reaches for his suitcase. He pulls out his manuscript, tests the pen with a fingertip. He takes the pen and writes: "Chapter Four" at the top of a page.

The desk clock reads: twelve midnight.

Drops of his sweat fall onto the paper.

JOHN
(continuing; aloud to himself)
Still too hot in here.

He switches ON a table fan.

The sound of odd MUSIC plays; a light mocking tune continues throughout the scene.

Returning to the windows, John tries the first one again. Slowly the window slides open. A cool wind caresses his hair. Shuddering, he covers his mouth with his hand.

Back at the desk, John notices the ceiling light.

JOHN
(continuing; aloud to himself)
I need more light. Too dark in here.

Lights BRIGHTEN INSTANTLY.

Suddenly, the glaring LIGHTS become TOO BRIGHT. They blind John.

In the entire spectrum of colors, LIGHTS flash and flame around him. John appears petrified.

LIGHTS DIM, then BRIGHTEN to a correct level.

A strange feeling overtakes John. He shakes his hands over his head. He stares at his hands.

His eyes widen when he sees his right hand begin to twitch. He grabs the pen again. John tries to stop the writing movement with his left hand.

JOHN
 (continuing;
 stuttering)
 Can't stop. Wait a minute. Hold on
 here. What's happening to me?

The right hand pushes on, forming each word on the page.

John pulls more paper from a drawer. His right hand moves quickly over the page, and over the next, and next.

Sheets fall to the floor. The clock SPINS. DARKNESS Outside it grows LIGHT then DARK again. His hand becomes a BLUR.

It never stops.

The drapes at each window close by themselves.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, ROOM 401 - DAY

Next morning. Drapes stand open. Sun lights the room.

Still dressed, John sleeps, sprawled across the bed. He wakes. He sits up to see hundreds of pages all over the bed, desk, and floor around the room.

John rushes about the room picking up the numbered pages, putting them in order, reading them.

JOHN
 It's good. Very good.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, ROOM 401 - DAY

John sits at the desk with a stack of pages before him.

EXT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, FRONT SIDEWALK - DAY

Novel package clutched in his arms, John runs down the front walk. Unseen by John, Ruby watches with a look of triumph on her face. She claps her hands mos.

RUBY

Yes.

EXT. BRONSON STREET, MONROE AGENCY ENTRANCE - DAY

Morning. Ross Monroe leaves his office building with JANICE PRINCE, 45. She's attractive, in an expensive suit and designer heels. They cross the street.

EXT. BRONSON STREET, CAFE ROSITA ENTRANCE - DAY

John waits for Ross and Janice. He gives the manuscript package to the astonished agent.

INT. BOOKSHOP, BEST-SELLER BOOK DEPARTMENT - DAY

ONE MONTH LATER.

Stacks of John's novel, "*BEHIND IRON GATES*," cover a long table.

John, hair slick and shining, dressed in a peerless jacket, slacks, and new shoes, signs his books for a line of people.

The young writer smiles. Ross and Janice stand behind him.

John sees Claude and Little Brother push their cart past the book shop window.

JOHN

One moment please.

He slaps down the book he's signing and rushes out to stop them.

Ross' POV, through the window, John can be seen giving Claude a card. Claude nods his approval. Little Brother barks.

INT. UPTOWN MOVIE THEATRE - NIGHT

Months go by. John and Ross watch the CREDITS roll for the premier of John's adapted story of the same title as his novel.

AUDIENCE gives the picture a standing ovation.

EXT. JOHN'S HOLLYWOOD HILLS ESTATE, FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

John unlocks the door of his new home. He enters with a sense of confidence.

INT. JOHN'S HOLLYWOOD HILLS ESTATE, PATIO - NIGHT

Evening. John dines alone in a sumptuous setting on a patio near his pool.

In a neat jacket, Claude serves John a champagne cocktail. Claude's dog, wears a new leather collar.

With great pleasure, John views the stars, his house, and his grounds.

INT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS, JOHN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

After supper, John, dressed in a fine robe, smiles at Claude.

JOHN

Claude, no calls please. I'm starting my new novel tonight.

Claude bows and exits. Little Brother settles into a comfortable chair. John pats the dog.

John faces his speakerphone. He dials with one punch.

ROSS MONROE (ON SPEAKER PHONE V.O.)
Monroe Agency.

JOHN (ON PHONE)
Hey, Ross, John.

ROSS MONROE (ON SPEAKER PHONE V.O.)
John, How's the next novel coming?
Your world waits.

JOHN (ON PHONE)
(smiling)
Coming soon to a theatre near you.
I promise, you'll have it soon.

ROSS MONROE (ON SPEAKER PHONE V.O.)
Right.

John hangs up.

Presser paces back and forth, then returns to his desk.

PHONE RINGS TWICE.

He logs on to his computer.

Claude knocks. John talks through the closed door.

JOHN
I said, 'no calls.'

CLAUDE (through door O.S.)
A man on the phone says he's your
father.

JOHN
I'm not home. Say I'm out.

CLAUDE (through door O.S.)
Yes.

JOHN
(to the computer
screen)
I mean to be the greatest writer
of this century.

INT. JOHN'S HOLLYWOOD HILLS ESTATE, OFFICE - DAY

Dawn. John awakens when his head bumps against the blank
computer screen. He buries his face in his hands.

SIX MONTHS LATER

EXT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS ESTATE, FRONT DOOR - DAY

Dead-tired, unshaven, and back in his old clothes, John
appears with Claude, and Little Brother. He locks the front
door.

John gives Claude some money; he kneels to hug the dog, then
John takes his suitcase from Claude and walks down the hill.
Claude and the dog exchange glances.

EXT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

John approaches with his suitcase. He's about to open the
front door to the hotel.

A hand grabs the sleeve of John's sweater.

JOHN
(turning)
What? Claude?

Claude stops John from opening the door.

CLAUDE

Don't go back. I must tell you.
Let me tell you. I'm Timothy
O'Malley. And I'm happy at last
this way.

John looks startled, gasps. He pulls away from O'Malley.

John enters the hotel. He's made his awful choice. The massive door to the hotel closes behind him.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, LOBBY - NIGHT

John signs the Carlsbad register. Ruby grins.

JOHN

(mumbling)
No calls, please.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, STAIRCASE - NIGHT

John hauls his suitcase up the steep flight of stairs.

INT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, 4TH FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

The door to room 401 closes behind John.

EXT. CARLSBAD HOTEL, FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Later that night, outside the hotel, no one notices up there, on the fourth floor: the diabolical flashing of colored lights sparking from every window of a corner room.

FADE OUT.

THE END.