

1.

(The mechanism of a story set into motion.)

(We see a tiny box: a toy theatre. Inside is a tiny room. Inside the room is a woman – BEATRICE NELSON. She is playing piano. She wears white. In the background is a window. Outside the window is a cherry blossom tree. White blossoms. As they fall, they look like snow. The month is May. Almost a century ago. A record plays on an old phonograph.)

BEATRICE

George. George Orson. (Looks at Welles). George.

VOICEOVER

2X 2L Calling CQ

2X 2L Calling CQ

2X 2L Calling CQ

Isn't there anyone on the air?

Isn't there anyone on the air?

Isn't there anyone?

Anyone?

Anyone?

Anyone?

Anyone?

Anyone?

Anyone?

Anyone?

(An Arizona desert. Circa 1985. The set of an unfinished movie. An empty swimming pool, a hole in the ground the color of bone. A brilliant, technicolor sunset plays out in the distance. ORSON WELLES enters the frame. He is larger than life. He smokes a cigar. He is ancient. He is droll and dapper and unwell. He speaks to an audience, seen and unseen.

Another light. ORSON WELLES at the end of his life. His back is to us. He is an enormous figure in a black cloak and hat – see F For Fake. He's in the distance, slowly striding away, receding from view.)

ORSON WELLES

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Orson Welles. I'd like to take a moment to tell you a little bit about what we're going to do here tonight. What you're about to see is a modern American story. It's the story of one man's life, his life's work. It's my story. On the face of it, it's a simple yarn. I was born in Kenosha, Wisconsin, a long time ago, a long way from here.

When I was a much younger man, I was behind a bit of radio hokum called War of the Worlds. Perhaps you've heard of it. It caused quite a stir. After that, I went to Hollywood. I made a few movies. You may have seen one or two. No, now I'm being coy, and I don't want to do that. Not now. I'm here now before you to plead my case, to set the record straight. I have to, you see. It's very important to me. The truth is very important to me. What you're about to hear is the real story, behind the scenes, uncut. And this is another promise – listen carefully: During the next hour, everything you hear will be absolutely true and based on solid fact. Nothing more, nothing less. And now with your permission, a small act of magic. With the sympathetic support of yourselves, ladies and gentlemen, this just might work. Imagine this, if you will: It is night, but not a real night – a night of the mind and of a soundstage. We have no curtain, real or imaginary. There's only the illusion I'd like to create –

(ORSON WELLES disappears in the middle of speaking.)

(Music. News on the March. Highlights from the life ORSON WELLES. Public moments captured on film, home movies, outtakes, fragments of a documentary. Voice over narration. The voice does not belong to ORSON WELLES. The sequence ends with footage of an Arizona desert. Circa 1985. The set of an unfinished movie. An empty swimming pool, a hole in the ground the color of bone. A brilliant, technicolor sunset plays out in the distance. ORSON WELLES enters the frame. He is larger than life. He smokes a cigar. He is ancient. He is droll and dapper and unwell. He speaks to an audience, seen and unseen.)

VOICEOVER

Time On The March. Hollywood. Entertainment Capital of the World. Legendary are the tales of the inhabitants of this sprawling meca, this city of stars, but none of these are so loved and hated more than the potent figure layed to rest this week.

Legendary actor-director-writer-orator-magician. Born May 6, 1915, in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Dubbed a genius virtually from the time he could talk.

Reading at two, playing the violin at seven. Playing Shakespeare at

ten.

In 1934. His first film. His first Broadway performance. His first wife. But not his last.

The year 1937, he founded The Mercury Theatre with John Houseman. His resonant voice then took him to the world of radio and one night made broadcasting history. Halloween 1938. War of the Worlds.

As millions of terrorized citizens swarmed the streets, he was packing his bags for... Hollywood.

The year 1941. Creates the motion picture masterpiece, Citizen Kane.

How many movies did he create in his life time? No man can say.

Then last week, as it must for all men, death came to.....George Orson Welles.

2.

(A projection room. Present are the producers of a documentary on the late Orson Welles. STRATTEN is the executive producer. THOMPSON is the interviewer. During this scene, nobody's face is seen. Sections of bodies are picked out by a table light, a silhouette is thrown on the screen, and their faces and bodies are themselves thrown into silhouette against the brilliant slanting rays of light from the projection booth. The men are smoking.)

THOMPSON
That's it.

FIRST MAN (Bondo)
Hello.

SECOND MAN (Barney)
Hello.

FIRST MAN
Stand by. I'll tell you if we want to run it again.

THOMPSON
Well, how about it, Mr. Stratten?

STRATTEN
How do you like it, boys?

SECOND MAN
Well, seventy years of a man's life...

THIRD MAN (Stephen)
That's a lot to try and get into one film.

STRATTEN
It's a good start, Thompson. But it needs an angle. All we saw on that screen is Welles doing Welles. I already know all about that. Everybody knows all about that.

THIRD MAN
We need to get behind the image. It isn't enough to see the public persona. You've got to tell us who the man was, who he really was.

SECOND MAN
The part of him he didn't even know about.

STRATTEN

Or the part he knew about, and wanted to keep hidden from view. Remember, boys, this was a man who was putting on a show till the day he died. (Clapping his hands) Wait a minute, wait a minute. What were his last words? Do you remember, boys? What were the last words Welles said on earth? Maybe he told us all about himself on his deathbed.

THIRD MAN

Yeah, and maybe he didn't.

SECOND MAN

All we saw on that screen was a big American.

FIRST MAN

One of the biggest.

STRATTEN

Yes, but how is he different from John Houston, or William Randolph Hearst, for that matter – Or John Doe? Yes, sure –

THIRD MAN

I tell you, Thompson, a man's dying words–

FIRST MAN

What were they?

THOMPSON

You don't watch the news.

SECOND MAN

When Welles died, he said just one word.

THIRD MAN

Thorne.

(Pause.)

FIRST MAN

That's all he says, Thorne?

SECOND MAN

What the hell is "Thorne?"

THIRD MAN

Just one word.

SECOND MAN

What was it?

THIRD MAN

Or who was it?

FIRST MAN

Could be a woman.

SECOND MAN

Could be a lot of things.

STRATTEN

Here's a man who was a genius – or so they say – a man who was as loved and hated and talked about as any man in our time – a genius or a charlatan, the real thing or a very good fake, I don't know which – but when he comes to die, he's got one thing on his mind, something called Thorne. What does that mean?

FIRST MAN

Maybe it was a horse he bet on once.

SECOND MAN

Yeah, and didn't come in.

STRATTEN

All right, but where was the race?

FIRST MAN

Thorne.

STRATTEN

Thompson!

THOMPSON

Yes, sir.

STRATTEN

Hold the release date up a week, two weeks if you have to. Find out about Thorne.

THIRD MAN

Thorne.

STRATTEN

Get in touch with everybody that ever knew Welles, or knew him well – that manager of his, Bernstein, the best friend...he's still living.

THIRD MAN

Stephen Webber.

SECOND MAN

And that lady friend of his, too, the actress...?

FIRST MAN

Leni Zadrov.

SECOND MAN

Right.

STRATTEN

See them all. Get in touch with everybody that ever worked for him – whoever loved him, whoever...hated his guts. I don't mean...going through the city directory, of course.

THOMPSON

I'll get on it right away, Mr. Stratten–

STRATTEN

Good! Thorne dead or alive! It'll probably turn out to be a very simple thing.

(LENI ZADROV is suddenly illuminated by light. Music.)

3.

(Music. The living area of a hotel suite. A generic hotel on the outskirts of a city. Thousands of strangers have slept here. A soundless television. A black and white movie. LENI ZADROV is an aging beauty. She drinks. She's been drinking for a while. Her

SILENT ASSISTANT and THOMPSON stand by.)

LENI ZADROV

What does it matter what I say, what anyone says? A person is all things to all people. Get me another.

THOMPSON

Ms. Zadrov -

LENI ZADROV

He died in the middle of the night, working on a script, he was always working, even at the end. What do you want?

THOMPSON

I thought maybe we could talk about Orson Welles.

LENI ZADROV

Talk about Orson. Talk about old times. Old times, for old times' sake. When times are gone they're not old, they're dead. Who told you you could sit down?

THOMPSON

I thought we could just talk.

LENI ZADROV

They called me right after he died, but I couldn't, I couldn't. Everything we made together, everything we were. He was a great man, the greatest. Nobody understood how great he was. Why don't you people leave him alone -

THOMPSON

Maybe later -

LENI ZADROV

Get out -

THOMPSON

Some other time -

LENI ZADROV

Get out. I said, get out.

(Camera pans up. Music. A frame within a frame.)

4.

(A FILM SCHOLAR interjects. A Film Archives. An air-conditioned mausoleum to the art of cinema. THOMPSON is dwarfed by the machinery of film-making.)

FILM SCHOLAR (Tom)

Then the camera pans up, and we see through the telephone booth, Thompson talking in the foreground, and in the background, through the glass, we see

Susan Alexander at the table where he left her, and the waiter watching. It's this frame within a frame effect Welles was able to get, depth of field and sharpness of focus – Citizen Kane – Some people say it's the greatest movie ever made. It was the only Oscar Welles ever won. Won it for the screenplay. Shared it with Mankiewicz. Then, Pauline Kael comes along thirty years later, says he didn't really write it. Welles, that is.

THOMPSON

Can you tell me anything about his life?

FILM SCHOLAR

What's there to tell? Child prodigy. Apple of his mother's eye. His mother was an artist. Played the piano. She was a beauty, they say. Died when Welles was just a boy. He talked about her dying – Oh, don't tell me you're one of those people who thinks the artist's life has anything to do with anything? Well, have fun figuring it out. His life, I mean. Which part's real and which part's fancy – with Welles, it's sometimes hard to tell.

5.

(A frame within a frame. BEATRICE NELSON plays the piano. The same song from the top of the play. Behind her is a window. Outside the

window, a cherry blossom tree. She stops playing. The sound of a clock. She walks to the window. She looks outside. A wind. The petals blow away. A giant hand passes over the window and the image disappears. The hand belongs to ORSON WELLES. A magic trick in process. Beyond the box, we see an old radio.)

VOICEOVER

Ladies and gentlemen, here is the latest bulletin from the Intercontinental Radio News. Torontoto, Canada: Professor Morse of McGill University reports observing a total of three explosions on the planet Mars, between the hours of 7:45 p.m. and 9:20 p.m., Eastern Standard Time. This confirms earlier reports received from American observatories. Now, nearer home, comes a special bulletin from Trenton, New Jersey. It is reported that at 8:50 p.m. a huge, flaming object, believed to be ameteorite, fell on a farm in the neighborhood of Grovers Mill, New Jersey, twenty -two miles from Trenton.

The flash in the sky was visible within a radius of several hundred miles and the noise of the impact was heard as far north as Elizabeth.

We have dispatched a special mobile unit to the scene, and will have our commentator, Carl Phillips, give you a word picture as soon as he can reach there from Princeton.

6.

(In the darkness, through an old radio, we hear fragments from The War of the Worlds broadcast sped up, fast-forwarded, rewound, slowed down. And then the disembodied voice of ORSON WELLES.)

ORSON WELLES

You're listening to a CBS presentatin of Orson Welles and the Mercury

Theater on the air. In an original adaptation of the War of the Worlds by H.G. Wells. The performance will continue after a brief intermission. This is the Columbia Broadcast System.

(The last notes of the War of the Worlds broadcast. Phones are beginning to ring. The switchboard at CBS glitters with incoming calls. The CALLERS speak through a field of static. Their voices seem scratchy, tinny, faraway.)

CALLER #1 (Barney)

Don't you know New Jersey's been destroyed by Martians – it's on the radio.

CALLER #2 (Tom)

Right now, I don't know what to believe.

CALLER #3 (Ellen)

And then I said to him, "O God, save us, please save us."

CALLER #2

Is it real? Is the world coming to an end? Hello – ?

CALLER #3

I looked in the icebox and saw some chicken I was saving for Monday. I said to my nephew, "We may as well eat this chicken – we won't be here in the morning."

CALLER #4 (Akiko)

I've been running all through my apartment building telling everybody the Martians are coming –

CALLER #1

Hello – ?

CALLER #2

I want to know what's going on? What's really going on here – ?

CALLER #4

It's crazy, it's just crazy. I've never seen anything like it. Everybody's just gone crazy –

CALLER #1

Hello – ?

CALLER #3

I can't get through to my father in East Orange. He's older and not well, and I'm worried about him. He's all alone and he's not well –

CALLER #2

I want to know the truth. I mean, what's real and what's bunk. I just want to be clear -

CALLER #1

Hello - ?

CALLER #3

Frankly, I'm scared. Right now I'm very scared -

CALLER #5 (Bondo)

Is this your idea of a joke? Do you people have any idea what you've done? There are mobs in the streets! There are women and children huddled in churches! There's violence and looting - !

CALLER #1

Hello - ?

CALLER #5

It's a travesty and a disgrace, and before I'm through, I promise you, I'm going to sue you and Taylor and CBS and that Orson Welles fellow, and anybody else I can think of -

CALLER #1

Hello - ?

CALLER #3

I'm calling from Trenton. I live in Trenton. I just turned on the radio. I was listening for the weather broadcast. I was with my little boy. My husband was at the movies. I thought it was all up for us. I grabbed my boy and sat and cried

CALLER #2

I don't know what to think. I just don't know. I don't know what to think anymore -

CALLER #1

2X 2L Calling CQ. 2X 2L Calling CQ. Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone?

7.

(A fictive fragment from an old movie plays out. Or what seems to be an old movie. Black and white, a scratchy print. We enter the scene after it's already begun. TAYLOR is reading headlines from tomorrow's papers.)

TAYLOR (Tom)

Radio Listeners Take War Drama as Fact. Fake Radio 'War' Stirs Terror and Hysteria. End of the World – Real Thing or Radio 'Hoax'?

(TAYLOR throws the papers aside, revealing a young ORSON WELLES. An inner room in the CBS Studios. Elsewhere in the building, reporters, police officers, and CBS employees vye for control. Phones are ringing. The sense of pandemonium just outside the closed door.)

TAYLOR
Is this your idea of entertainment?

(Enter BERNSTEIN with a telegram.)

WELLES
I don't know how to entertain, Taylor. I just try everything I can think of.

TAYLOR
I don't think you realize the potential consequences –

(Enter WEBBER.)

WELLES
– Hello, Bernstein.

TAYLOR
– law suits, potential liabilities –

BERNSTEIN
– Excuse me. Mr. Welles, this just came in.

WELLES
Mr. Bernstein, I'd like you to meet Mr. Taylor.

WEBBER
I'll just borrow a cigar.

BERNSTEIN
How do you do, Mr. Taylor?

WELLES
Mr. Webber.

WEBBER

Hello.

WELLES

Mr. Taylor is vice-president for the Columbia Broadcasting System.

BERNSTEIN

We just got a cable from Mr. Woollcott.

WELLES

That's alright. We have no secrets from our listeners. Mr. Taylor is one of our most avid listeners, Mr. Bernstein. Read it to me.

BERNSTEIN

"Dear Orson: This only goes to prove, my beamish boy, that all the intelligent people were listening to a dummy named Charlie and all the dummies were listening to you."

TAYLOR

I assure you, gentlemen, this is no laughing matter. We have an obligation to our listeners, Orson. They rely on us to tell the truth. They believe us, don't you see -

WELLES

Look here, Taylor, it's my duty - and I'll let you in on a little secret, it's also my pleasure - To see to it that decent, hard-working Americans aren't taken in by what the powers-that-be have to say. I scared the American public tonight - some of them, at least. And they should be scared. Not of Martians, but of people like yourself and the interests you represent. They should be very scared.

TAYLOR

You better hope the Crossley figures back you up, and that you keep your audience tuned in next week and the week after that.

WELLES

Tell your bosses not to worry Taylor. I have a lot tricks up my sleeve. I can be a very entertaining fellow, you know.

(TAYLOR exits.)

WEBBER

Very entertaining and very idealistic.

WELLES

I thought so.

WEBBER

Do you believe any of it?

WELLES

I believe some of it. How do I look?

WEBBER

Like you need a shave and a good night's sleep.

WELLES

Good. That's exactly how I want to look.

VOICES

How about a photo Mr. Welles?

(The roar of reporters and the blinding flash of cameras.)

8.

(The FILM SCHOLAR and THOMPSON are watching an old movie.)

FILM SCHOLAR

There but for the grace of God, goes God. Mankiewicz said that. You see – and this is what you have to understand – after War of the Worlds, Welles was a celebrity, a household name. He arrived in Hollywood with a two picture deal, carte blanche, complete artistic control. It was unheard of. (Wow.) Welles operated outside of the

system. He reported to no one but himself. Hollywood hated him for it. He hated them right back. (Wow.) He made Kane in 1940. After Kane, he made The Magnificent Ambersons. Botched it in the editing, well... left it to the studio. Went to Rio. The studio hacked it to pieces, reshot the ending. But that's another story. (Wow.) Remember this? The scene where Susan Alexander leaves Kane.

(The sound of a projector. In darkness, the clip from Citizen Kane begins to play out. Actors playing KANE and SUSAN ALEXANDER. The volume is muted. The voice of the FILM SCHOLAR narrates. THOMPSON watches.)

Kane was all about pan, focus, dissolve. Welles and Toland were using a lot of low angle shots. They had to drill holes in the floor to get the camera low enough. And another thing, too: the ceiling. The ceiling is part of the shot. That was rare back then. Ceilings were a kind of fourth wall, you see. They hid microphones up there, underneath the muslin.

Remember this? The scene where Susan Alexander leaves Kane. The rest of it they shot in a single take. They had to. Welles destroyed the place. It's the heart, I think, of his character and his story, and in a way, it's a rather mysterious moment. It doesn't feel like acting. It feels real. Wow. I've never understood -

(The projector sputters to a halt. Footsteps. The sound of a clock.)

FILM SCHOLAR
Forgive me. I lost track of time.

THOMPSON
Who did location sound on Kane?

FILM SCHOLAR
Fesler. And another guy.

THOMPSON
Who?

WELLES
Stewart.

FILM SCHOLAR

Stewart. I think his name was Stewart. Why do you ask?

THOMPSON
Never mind.

(Footsteps. Lap dissolve.)

9.

(BERNSTEIN and THOMPSON. In the middle of a conversation. THOMPSON has just asked a question. We enter in the middle. The conversation has already begun.)

BERNSTEIN
Thorne - why do you ask? It's just a name afterall, some random thing. You'd be surprised what one remembers at the end. I saw a woman once, this was years ago. I was on a street in Paris. Heard her footsteps before I saw her. She wore a black dress, I remember, tall, pale, she had strange grey eyes - It could've been out of a movie, but that's how it was. Sometimes, years later, I'd hear that

sound, and I'd think it was her, but it wasn't. Who else have you seen?

(BERNSTEIN picks up a cigarette. THOMPSON lights it.)

BERNSTEIN

Leni? Thank you. I called her right after he died, she couldn't even come to the phone. Who else? Let me guess - some film buff somewhere. I bet he had a lot to say. Orson had no patience. He loved to string them along. They never figured him out. I'm not sure anyone ever did. You ought to see Webber, if you haven't already. He was there from the beginning, from before the beginning, in the Mercury Theatre days, pre-Kane, pre-everything. When Orson went to Hollywood, he brought him along for the ride.

10.

(A musical number. The RKO lot at Culver City. Music. EXTRAS in costume, STARLETS, and STUDIO PERSONNEL whiz by. An old-fashioned spectacle. Hollywood in the Thirties. The machinery of film-making. WELLES and WEBBER stand apart.)

WELLES

Take a look at it, Stephen. The biggest electric train set a boy ever had. Stephen.

WEBBER

After you, Mr. Welles.

WELLES

Stephen, welcome to Hollywood.

WEBBER

The Mercury Theater comes to Hollywood. Who would have believed.

WELLES (Shouting into the empty sound stage)

Hello?

WEBBER

Hello?

WELLES

We're going to try something new here Stephen. They might not understand at first but, stick with me... I might even make you a big star.

WEBBER

Thank you.

WELLES

Stephen....let's get to work. We've got some movies to make.

(WELLES and WEBBER enter the fray.)

WELLES

(To a P.A.:) Excuse me..... (repeated)

BERNSTEIN (Cross #1)

Excuse me, I'm looking for Mr. Orson Welles. Has anyone seen Mr. Orson Welles? He's come directly from New York, New York City. He's a director, a writer, an actor as well, theatre and radio. I'm sure you've heard of him. The voice behind Mercury Theatre, Mercury Playhouse, War of the Worlds. He's come to Hollywood to make a movie, a motion picture.

BERNSTEIN (Cross #2)

He's a large man. Six two? Six three? His weight - well, his weight, it's hard to say with his weight. It fluctuates. He's big, he's tall, he's very hard to miss. You'd recognize his face. He has a boyish face. You can see the boy in the man, a chubby little boy with strange, almond eyes. Right now he's got a beard. Nobody cares much for the beard. Handsome, I would call him handsome.

BERNSTEIN (Cross #3)

Excuse me, have you seen Mr. Welles? Orson Welles. His name is Orson Welles. I know he's here. He's just arrived in Hollywood. He's just arrived at RKO. From New York City. The Mercury Playhouse. War of the Worlds. He's very young. You wouldn't know to hear his voice. Oh my goodness, what a voice he has. Excuse me. Excuse me. I'm looking for Mr. Orson Welles? Has anyone seen Mr. Orson Welles.

(The P.A. recognizes WELLES, and motions to SCHAEFER. The music stops. The lot instantly quiets down. Silence. The EXTRAS and the STUDIO PERSONNEL appraise the newcomers.)

SCHAEFER (Tom)

(To: WEBBER) Mr. Welles. Welcome. Welcome to the RK0 lot, Mr. Welles.

WEBBER

Oh, this-

SCHAEFER

I'm George Schaefer, vice-president of development and production.

WELLES

Thank you, Mr. Schaefer. This is Mr. Webber -

SCHAEFER

How do you do, Mr. Webber.

WELLES

- the leading man in my motion picture. I hope I haven't made a mistake, Stephen, have I? It is the leading man you want to be.

WEBBER

That's right.

WELLES

Are they waiting for me?

SCHAEFER

You - Oh, Mr. Welles.

WELLES

That's right. Yes, please go about your about your business, gentlemen, ladies. How do you do?

SCHAEFER

How do you do? Here you are in the flesh. Welcome, welcome.

(The EXTRAS and the STUDIO PERSONNEL drift away.)

SCHAEFER

I didn't know your plans, nobody did -

WELLES

I don't know my plans myself.

SCHAEFER

– So I was unable to make any preparations, I'm afraid.

WELLES

But I have a few ideas.

(A loud crash. BERNSTEIN enters with boxes, trunk, and suitcases filled with scripts, costumes, books, magic paraphernalia.)

BERNSTEIN

Oops.

WELLES

Mr. Bern – Stein.

BERNSTEIN

Yes, Mr. Welles.

WELLES

Mr. Bernstein, would you come here a moment, please.

BERNSTEIN

Yes, Mr. Welles.

WELLES

Mr. Schaefer, this is Mr. Bernstein.

BERNSTEIN

How do you do?

WEBBER

Mr. Bernstein.

WELLES

Mr. Bernstein is an old family friend.

BERNSTEIN

How do you do, Mr. Schaefer.

WELLES

Mr. Shaefer–

SCHAEFER

Yes? How do you do?

WELLES

Mr. Schaefer–

SCHAEFER

Yes, Mr. Bernstine.

BERNSTEIN
Stene.

SCHAEFER
Welles.

WELLES
Mr. Schaefer – Do you know The Heart of Darkness, Mr. Schaefer?

SCHAEFER
The heart of darkness–?

WARDROBE GIRL (Ellen)
Excuse me.

SCHAEFER
I don't think I understand.

BERNSTEIN
Excuse me.

WELLES
Conrad's Heart of Darkness, a trip down river into the jungle, seen through Marlowe's eyes, the human eye, the subjective camera, the camera is an "I" –

WEBBER
Mr. Schaefer.

SCHAEFER
– The camera is an "I"?

WEBBER
Mr. Schaefer.

SCHAEFER
Yes?

WEBBER
Excuse me.

SCHAEFER
But this is all somewhat unorthodox. A movie studio, Mr. Welles, afterall –

WARDROBE GIRL
Excuse me.

SCHAEFER
Around here, we have ways we do things. We have a system, a formula,

if you will –

WELLES

Mr. Schaefer, my movie will not adhere to any formula, I'm afraid. It'll be more like a seance, an extended dream.

SCHAEFER

A seance?

WARDROBE GIRL #2 (Akiko)

Excuse me.

WELLES

That's right, Mr. Schaefer.

WEBBER

Excuse me.

BERNSTEIN

Excuse me.

SCHAEFER

But Mr. Welles, I'm afraid I don't understand. (repeating)

(Lap dissolve from a celluloid dream. WELLES is in the middle of the set.)

WELLES

I don't understand – that's a direct quote, true to form, true to life. It's what was said to me time and time again – "I don't understand." I have spent a lifetime listening to "I don't understand." What is there not to understand? It's right there. It's as plain as day. It's as plain as the nose on your face. It's about the frame, you see, it's all about the frame.

11.

(Fast forward. 1939–1941. A chorus of Hollywood voices. Studio brass, Variety, The Hollywood Insider, Hedda Hopper, Louella Parsons, Big Boy Williams, a disgruntled audience member from Pomona, et al. Underneath the chorus, the whispered refrain: "This is a place where the jungle has crawled to in order to die." The whisper grows beneath the actors' words.)

VOICE #1 (Stephen)

Who is he? Who the hell does he think he is?

VOICE #4 (Ellen)

Who is he? Who does he think he is?

VOICE #2 (Bondo)

Orson Welles? Why, he's an exhibitionist.....

VOICE #6 (Akiko)

a publicity seeker.....

VOICE #2

a headline hunter...

VOICE #6

and a cheap sensationalist.

VOICE #3 (Barney)

Orson at twenty-six is still overshadowed by the glorious memory of Orson at six.

VOICE #2

He's a sort of Lord Byron meets Oscar Wilde. But he has a peculiarly American audacity. The man's an octopus of an ego.

VOICE #4

Too bad Orson Welles isn't an Englishman. If he had been, Hollywood wouldn't give him such a run-around. We reserve that for our own. But Mr. Welles doesn't scare easy. I'm thinking he'll make Hollywood sit up and beg for mercy.

VOICE #3

If Mr. Welles makes a great picture, I'll be the first to say so.

VOICE #5 (Tom)

Look Chappie, dear - one thing I want to warn you about. Orson is a very fascinating personality. He sings a siren song to anybody who listens. Just keep your feet on the ground, and whatever you do, don't let him hypnotize you.

VOICE #6

Genius.

VOICE #4

Welles is a genius.

VOICE #5

The man's a genius.

VOICE #3

Genius.

VOICE #4

He's a genius.

VOICE #2

An absolute genius.

VOICE #1

You don't know how sick to the death I am of that word.

VOICE #3

From now on our motto at RK0 is: Showmanship, not genius.

VOICE #4

People like to laff. We do not need trouble pictures, especially now. Make pictures to make us forget, not remember.

VOICE #5

It was, I would say it was a disappointment.

VOICE #3

Kane and then Ambersons.

VOICE #2

Box office disappointments.

VOICE #3

We were all, we were all disappointed.

VOICE #4

There were many disappointments, one after the next.

VOICE #5

Afterwards, he couldn't help but feel a certain disappointment.

VOICE #6

2X 2L Calling CQ. 2X 2L Calling CQ.

ORSON WELLES

Cut. Cut. Cut. Quiet please.

(Darkness. No sound no light. The darkness is complete. The darkness is electric.)

ORSON WELLES

What were they all saying? So many voices chattering at once, each

one laying claim to the truth. It's funny how you can make a person believe almost anything. The power of suggestion. Ladies and gentlemen, if you would indulge me for a moment, please close your eyes. What if I told you now that there was something lurking in the shadows, something alive but not quite human, something just beyond the edges of what you can see? It's very dark, isn't it?

(The sound of a match being struck. The lit end of a cigar glows in the darkness.)

12.

(A clip from The Magnificent Ambersons flickers in and out of view, fast forward, rewind, and then we find our place. The clip plays out. A black and white memory. A bad print of an ancient film. The volume is muted. ORSON WELLES smokes a cigar. A nimbus of smoke. As WELLES speaks, the clip begins to falter, slow down, and then stop.)

ORSON WELLES

There it is. Magic. When we first got to Hollywood, we were trying to make a kind of magic, to do something new, something that was, in its own way, revolutionary. With Ambersons, I wanted the sense, I wanted it to flow from one scene to the next. A sense of rhythm – that's what it's all about. I know. It's difficult to dissect the creative process. In this scene, the camera never moves. Four minutes, and it doesn't move, not once. Look at them. They were wonderful, they really were – Tim and Ray and Aggie.

STRATTEN

Hey, Mr. Welles!

ORSON WELLES

Look at Aggie. God, she was something. I wish you could see how she wrapped up the whole story at the end...Joe Cotten goes to see her after all those years in a cheap boarding house and there's nothing left between them at all. Everything's over – her feelings and her world – his world, too.

(The clip from Magnificent Ambersons is on pause. It flickers in a kind of suspended animation. The actors are frozen in time. A frame within a frame. WELLES seems all of a sudden old. Recall the story of him years later watching the studio cut of Ambersons on a hotel room TV. Oja Kodar saw him. He was unaware. From the doorway, she saw that he was weeping.)

13.

(STRATTEN interrupts WELLES and explains that the government is sending him to Rio to make this all true. STRATTEN pulls WELLES into a song and dance number.)

STRATTEN

Hey, Mr. Welles! Ever been to Rio? Rio de Janeiro? Beaches. Carnival. Girls. Lots of pretty girls. What if I told you, RK0 will foot the bill? All expenses paid. How'd you like to take a trip down there? Shoot a little film. That's what you do, isn't it? In case you forgot, my friend, we're in a war. It's World War II, I'm talking about. Everybody's gotta do their part, pitch in. See it's like this: Some suit in DC, he got this idea, make a movie, show the people back home just how big our Americas truly are. Remind us what our boys are fighting for. Democracy and freedom, from Peoria all the way down to Rio. We forget our southern neighbors, my friend. We forget how vast and great America truly is. You could change all that. You could make a difference. Rio de Janeiro – What do you think, Welles? Feeling patriotic? Hit it, Harry!

WEBBER

Who's that? (Referring to Stratten).

ORSON

Nelson Rockefeller.

BERNSTEIN and WEBBER

Nelson Rockefeller!!!!

STRATTEN

It's All True, Mr. Welles. Next stop, Rio de Janeiro!

Musical Lyrics

Here is a man, Here is a man
American, American
And for the war you can be sure
He will do all he can
Who loves to smoke, Who loves to smoke
Enjoys a joke, ha, ha, ha, ha
And down in Rio de Janeiro
He will go for broke
Who buys the food? Who buys the food?
Who buys the drinks?' Who buys the drinks?
Who knows that dough is meant to spend
and that's the way he thinks
Now should he go?
No, no, no, no No, no, no, no
Oh, what the hell,
He knows what sells
It's Mr. Welles!

(Enter BRAZILIAN DANCING GIRLS with elaborate head-dresses, feathers and glitter. They pull ORSON WELLES away. Samba dancing. Sweat and chaos. ORSON WELLES is dancing in the background. BERNSTEIN and WEBBER look on in the foreground. They shout above the music.)

WELLES

(Taking off his cape:) Stephen, catch.

BERNSTEIN

What's wrong?

WEBBER

I don't understand what he's doing, I don't understand what he's thinking.

BERNSTEIN

It's just a diversion, Stephen, a little entertainment. The man knows what he's doing.

WEBBER

Does he? I'm not so sure.

(The song and the dancing continues, drowning out WEBBER.)

14.

THE VOICE OF ORSON WELLES

Tomorrow night the Mercury Theatre starts for South America. I've been asked to do a motion picture especially for Americans in all the Americas. I hope to see you again. Until then I remain, as always, obediently yours. This is Orson Welles. Good night.

(WELLES goes to the editing table. Telegrams from RK0 STAFF in Rio. As read by BERNSTEIN and WEBBER.)

BERNSTEIN

Rio is one expensive town. Stop. Spending through the roof. Stop.

WEBBER

Welles is over budget. Stop. No sign of progress on It's All True.

BERNSTEIN

Destroyed hotel room last night. Stop. Drinking and carousing with natives. Stop. Please reply.

WEBBER

Welles has disappeared. Stop. No word on when he'll return. Stop.

Situation getting serious. Stop. Please reply.

BERNSTEIN

There is no script. Stop. No movie. Stop. Spending through the roof. Stop. Welles is out of control. Please reply.

WEBBER

Brazilian actor killed. Stop. What do we do now? What do we do?

ORSON

Stop. Stop. Stop. It's All True. It was called It's All True. If you could see it, you'd know.

WEBBER

What are we doing here? Stop. When are we going home?

(The clip from The Magnificent Amberson's reanimates.)

WELLES

God, the work that went into that. None of that film survives, you know. I left, and they cut it up. They destroyed it all. There's nothing left of it.

(STRATTEN emerges from the shadows.)

STRATTEN

It's tragic what the studio did. You never made the movie you wanted to. And now, I guess, you never will. Would you have done things differently, in retrospect?

WELLES

Who can say.

STRATTEN

You can give me a better answer than that.

WELLES

When I was in Rio, I got a letter from Joe Cotten in which he said, "You don't realize you've made a sort of dark movie. It's more Chekhov than Tarkington." And of course that's what I intended all along. It just wasn't box office. So the studio destroyed Ambersons and then Ambersons destroyed me. I got over it. I had my whole life ahead of me still. You forget: if you want a happy ending it depends on where you stop your story. Next, I said next!

(The flash of a camera. Followed by many camera flashes one after the next. A sudden shift in mood. From elegiac to euphoric. From hushed and private to loud and public. The roar of an unseen crowd. The actors from the clip break out of the frame and take their places on stage. STRATTEN disappears into the future.)

VOICE #2 (Ellen)
RKO pulls plug on It's All True.

VOICE #1 (Tom)
Back home, Citizen Kane shut out at Oscars.

VOICE #2
Magnificent Amberson: Box Office Flop.

VOICE #1
Boy Wonder turned Has-been almost overnight.

VOICE #2
Item: Saw Bad Boy Welles the other day at Harry Cohn's. He was sporting a moustache and twenty extra pounds. What're you going to do, Orson, now that you're out of a job?

A SOCIETY REPORTER (Tom)
Item: Director, Actor, Radio Personality Mr. Orson Welles marries "It" Girl, Miss Rita Hayworth, in a small, private ceremony in Santa Monica, California. Our best wishes go out to the happy newlyweds. May you two love birds live happily ever after.

(A Hollywood ending. Music. Credits. The ACTORS disperse. WELLES exits.)

15.

(The image and the music end abruptly. BERNSTEIN and THOMPSON in the middle of a conversation. The sound of a clock ticking.)

BERNSTEIN

The way things turned out, I don't need to tell you.

THOMPSON

It didn't end well.

BERNSTEIN

The marriage to Rita? Well, that was what it was. As for It's All True - well, I've seen bits and pieces. It might be a masterpiece - it's hard to tell - but what does that matter in the end? It's what people say about a thing, and what people say is that it was a disaster. The studio wrote it off. They didn't lose a dime. Orson was the only one who lost anything. He lost a great deal.

THOMPSON

Lost or squandered?

BERNSTEIN

It's easy to judge. Lesser men have made whole careers for themselves judging Orson. He made mistakes. I won't say he didn't. He was a complicated man. You ought to talk to Webber. Of course, he and Orson

had a falling out. Then again, Orson had a falling out with just about everybody he knew. Artistic differences. Maybe more than that. I wouldn't know.

(Cut. The sound of a clock ticking.)

16.

(A blindingly bright light. STEPHEN WEBBER and THOMPSON.)

WEBBER

It's funny how memory works. It's very unpredictable.

THOMPSON

What about Thorne?

WEBBER

Ah, yes. His dying words. All I can tell you is what I know first-hand, my own imperfect memories. Orson and I, we started out together in the theatre. I met him in '34. I saw him onstage. He was a strange, beautiful boy. And he had the most remarkable voice.

WELLES

Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?

WEBBER

What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day? Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons.

WELLES

Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal; 'tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation. Poin's! Now shall we know if Gadshill have set a match.

WEBBER

Good Morrow, Ned.

BERNSTEIN

Good Morrow, sweet Hal. What says Monsieur Remorse? What says Sir John sack-and-sugar? Jack, how agrees the devil and thee about thy soul, that thou soldest him on Good-Friday last for a cup of Madeira and a cold capon's leg?

WELLES

Sir John stands to his word, the devil shall have his bargain.

BERNSTEIN

Then art thou dammed for keeping thy word with the devil.

WEBBER

Else he had been dammed for cozening the devil.

BERNSTEIN

But, my lads, my lads, to-morrow morning, by four o'clock, early at Gadshill! There are pilgrims going to Canterbury with rich offerings, and traders riding to London with fat Purses: I have bespoke supper to-morrow night in Eastcheap: we may do it as secure as sleep. If you will go, I will stuff your purses full of crowns; if you will not, tarry at home and be hanged.

WELLES

Hear ye, Yedward; if I tarry at home and go not, I'll hang you for going.

BERNSTEIN

You will, chops?

WELLES

Hal, wilt thou make one?

WEBBER

Who, I rob? I a thief? Not I, by my faith.

WELLES

There's neither honesty, manhood, nor good fellowship in thee, nor thou camest not of the blood royal, if thou darest not stand for ten shillings.

BERNSTEIN

Sir John, I pr'ythee, leave the prince and me alone: I will lay him down such reasons for this adventure that he shall go.

WELLES

Well, God give thee the spirit of persuasion. Farewell: you shall

find me in Eastcheap.

WEBBER

Farewell, thou latter spring! Farewell, All-hallown summer!

THOMPSON

You and Welles were close.

WEBBER

We were friends. And then we weren't. We didn't speak for years. He'd felt I betrayed him. Maybe I never really knew him. I wonder what it means to know a man, to know his private self, the inner workings of his heart – I changed the subject, didn't I? You'd think with all the interviews Orson gave towards the end, you'd know all there was to know. But then again he never gave himself away, did he? He never gave anything away. He was a great man. But in the end, he destroyed himself. He'd like for you to think he didn't. He'd like for you to think he was some kind of maverick, that there was some kind of Hollywood conspiracy to keep him back.

WELLES

Marry, then, sweet wag, when thou art king,–

WEBBER

It's an intriguing version of events.

WELLES

Let not us that are squires of the nights body be called thieves of the day's beauty,–

WEBBER

It's just not true.

WELLES

Let us be Diana's foresters,–

WEBBER

Orson had trouble with the truth.

WELLES

Gentlemen of the shade,–

WEBBER

Which is to say he lied.

WELLES

Minions of the moon;

WEBBER

He lied about his past.

WELLES

And let men say we be men of good government,–

WEBBER

He lied about himself.

WELLES

Being governed, as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon,–

WEBBER

I think after a while, he couldn't tell the difference between the lies and the truth.

WELLES

Under whose countenance we steal.

17.

(A blindingly bright light. WEBBER and THOMPSON. CREW PEOPLE move back and forth in the background.)

THOMPSON

Was he ever in love?

WEBBER

Love? Why, I think what he did, everything he ever did, he did for love. I think that's why he made movies. And why he couldn't stop making them.

THOMPSON

How about that actress?

WEBBER

Which one? There were so many, I lost count. Orson – well, after a while, let's just say they all began to blend together.

(The sound of LENI ZADROV laughing.)

18.

(Music. ORSON WELLES is alone, eating. An evening in Hollywood. 1942. Post-Ambersons, post-It's All True. LENI ZADROV is out of frame, laughing.)

WELLES

What are you laughing at?

(LENI ZADROV approaches in her Mercury Wonder Show costume.)

ZADROV

You. You know, you don't gain weight if nobody sees you eat.

WELLES

Is that right?

ZADROV

It's a known, scientific fact.

WELLES

I'm absolutely starving.

ZADROV

Still?

WELLES

Always. And you?

ZADROV

Starving.

WELLES

Where is this going exactly?

ZADROV

It's a digression.

WELLES

Is that what it is?

ZADROV

I like digressions, don't you? One mad little digression can make all the difference in the world.

(Darknessss. Like a door closing. Music continues.)

ZADROV

(Giggles).

WELLES

(Laughs).

(Light returns. Like a door opening. The feel of the world is different. WELLES and ZADROV are not where we last saw them. Music continues throughout.)

ZADROV

How did you do that?

WELLES

Like all good magic, the secret is ridiculously simple. You smile. I'm being serious. I'm a great fan of yours, you know. I saw you in Bird of Paradise. I was seventeen. You were naked. You were underwater. You were rescuing a wounded sailor. Do you always rescue wounded sailors?

ZADROV

Always. I can't help it. There's no logic. It's my character.

WELLES

Let's drink to character.

(Lap dissolve. WELLES snaps his fingers. LENI ZADROV awakes from a trance. Music.)

ZADROV

Did you really hypnotize me?

WELLES

You were in a deep, deep sleep.

ZADROV

Why did you wake me?

WELLES

I was getting a little lonely. I like people to talk to me, you see.

ZADROV

What do you like them to say?

WELLES

That depends.

ZADROV

I'm afraid I never saw your movie, Mr. Welles.

WELLES

(Performing a magic trick:) It was a fiction, Miss Zadrov, make-believe.

ZADROV

Leni. A fiction based on fact.

WELLES

(Performing a magic trick:) A fiction with a little fact thrown in. Am I holding your interest?

ZADROV

Yes, you are. You're very good. Are you a professional magician, Mr. Welles?

WELLES

Orson. George Orson.

ZADROV

Where did you learn all your tricks, George Orson?

WELLES

My father knew Houdini. He taught me a thing or two. The rest I picked up in the Orient. I travelled there when I was a boy. I learned from gurus and mystics. They showed me how to charm snakes, and how to make things disappear.

ZADROV

And your mother? What did she think of your magic?

WELLES

Oh, well, women, you know, most women, they hate magic. It irritates them. They don't like to be fooled. My mother was like most women. She died a long time ago. Are you watching? Watch closely.

(WELLES performs a magic trick. And immediately sets up for a subsequent magic trick.)

ZADROV

God, your crafty.

WELLES

Not really. How old are you anyway?

ZADROV

Ancient.

WELLES

Is Leni Zadorov, is that your real name?

ZADROV

No.

WELLES

What is?

ZADROV

I'll never say.

WELLES

Have you always acted?

ZADROV

Ever since I can remember.

WELLES

And are you acting now?

ZADROV

I am. And you?

WELLES

You don't think I'm Orson Welles?

ZADROV

I suppose you are, if you say you are, if you seem to be. I also sing and dance, you know. That's how I started.

WELLES

Would you sing for me now?

ZADROV

Oh, you wouldn't want to hear me sing.

WELLES

Yes. Yes, I would.

ZADROV (Sings)

I've flown around the world in a plane
I've settled revolutions in Spain
The North Pole I have charted
Still I can't get started with you

Around the golf course I'm under par
and RK0 has made me a star
I've got a house and a showplace
Still I can't get no place with you

You're so supreme
Lyrics I write of you
Scheme...just for the sight of you
Dream....both day and night of you
But, what good does it do

I've been consulted by Franklin D
and Greta Garbo has asked me to tea
You got me down hearted
cause I can't get started with you

ORSON WELLES applauds. One lone man applauding in a dark, cavernous space. The final magic trick. The world shifts. Dissolve to:)

19.

(Camera pans down. The clip from The Stranger begins to play out. A rehearsal of different possibilities. Abortive attempts to play through the scene. The actors must begin, begin again. The moment before death is repeated.)

WEBBER

By the time he made The Stranger, we weren't speaking. What was there to say? Hollywood had brought out the worst in him - his selfishness, his arrogance, his fear. I could see it in his eyes. He was afraid. He was slipping, and he knew it. Everyone knew it. He'd started out a genius, and now he was doing voice-overs for two-bit westerns, any work that came his way he'd do it. He needed the money. He was spending it all. And he was drinking. He was a terrible drunk, abusive, cruel. The smallest thing would set him off. He'd get in fights. People were talking. I knew him better than anyone else. And a part of me loved him still, even then, despite everything. He hated me for that. When things went wrong, he blamed me. He said, I'd turned against him, that I turned others against him. He said I was trying to destroy him. All these years, you sonofabitch, you've been trying to destroy me. The look in his eye when he said that - you'd think he wanted to kill me.

(The actors in the scene stop. They walk away. WELLES is left alone.)

ORSON WELLES

Cut. Sorry I've been jumping around like this, but that's the way it was. I can't explain it. I make the damndest, the most elaborately detailed plans you ever saw, and then I throw them all away. I just can't do it any other way. I may be dead wrong, but I'm so certain that nothing can shake it. It's the only thing I'm certain of.

(Dissolve to:)

20.

(Music. And then voices, the clink of glass and china, laughter.
Time: circa 1949. Location: A restaurant in Paris. A dinner party in progress. WELLES is presiding. See the restaurant scenes in F for Fake. The people at the table are FILM CREW. Their faces are unfamiliar. They are not the principal players except for BEATRICE NELSON. She sits with a small child, sex indeterminate, name: Christopher. BEATRICE NELSON watches WELLES with an unreadable expression. The sense of a great man in a foreign place, surrounded by STRANGERS. BERNSTEIN and WEBBER watch from outside the frame.)

STRANGER #3 (Barney)
What about The Stranger?

WELLES
Awful. There's nothing of me in that picture.

STRANGER #2
Why did you take it on?

WELLES
For money. What a silly question. I was deeply ashamed, but in need of money.

STRANGER #2 (Bondo)
Are you up to trying Kane?

WELLES
Oh, Christ.

STRANGER #3
Why did you use the shrieking cockatoo?

WELLES
To wake them up.

STRANGER #3

Why does the light in his bedroom suddenly go off, and then come on again. Then you cut inside.

WELLES

Why not? (Laughs.) Have another drink. I don't know. Who knows? Who cares?

STRANGER #2

Why did you begin and end with the "No Trespassing" sign?

WELLES

What do you think?

STRANGER #2

A man's life is private.

WELLES

Is it? That should theoretically be the answer, but it turns out that maybe it is and maybe it isn't.

STRANGER #3

You act as though it's painful to remember.

(STRATTEN and ZADROV are speaking out of earshot, laughing. STRATTEN begins a magic trick. ZADROV is his volunteer. WELLES tries to hold up his end of the conversation, but he's distracted by the ensuing performance. Over the course of the following dialogue, STRATTEN has ZADROV lie down on a table. He covers her body with a cloth. And then gradually, he levitates the shrouded body.)

STRANGER #3

Can we talk about Leland's betrayal of Kane?

WELLES

He didn't betray Kane. Kane betrayed him.

STRANGER #2

Why is that, do you suppose?

WELLES

Because he wasn't the man he pretended to be.

STRANGER #2

Yes, but in a sense, didn't Leland –

WELLES

I don't think so.

STRANGER #2

I was going to say something else. Because if you were put in a position like that -

WELLES

I'm not his character. I'm not a friend of the hero. And he's a born friend of the hero. He's the loyal companion of a great man.

STRANGER #3

I certainly felt that Leland betrays him. I felt that emotionally.

WELLES

You're wrong, you're dead wrong. He's cruel to him, but he doesn't betray him.

It's Kane who betrays the friendship. There is no betrayal of Kane. The betrayal is by Kane.

STRANGER #3

Then why do I dislike Leland so much?

WELLES

Because he doesn't have the size and person to love Kane for his faults. But that's not betrayal. He simply doesn't have the humanity, the generosity of spirit. He can't help it, you see. It's his nature. That's the story. How Leland discovers that this great man, his oldest friend in the world, that he's empty inside.

BEATRICE NELSON

George. (Orson looks back.) Orson.

STRATTEN

People say that after Kane, you had trouble seeing things through. That you'd rather have a good meal, spend time with a pretty girl, that you'd rather talk about the one good movie you made, then try to make another one. And meanwhile, of course, time is passing, and you're not as young as you were, and people around you, they're beginning to wonder: What is Welles doing? What is he doing with all that genius? Sure, he's talented, but can you trust him?

(STRATTEN walks away. As WELLES speaks, his voice grows louder. As he speaks, he overturns the table. Dishes and glasses crash to the ground.)

WELLES

I don't want to talk about Kane. I don't want to talk about Kane. I don't want to talk about Kane. I have no regrets, none. If I had it

to do over, I wouldn't change a goddamn thing. I don't care if you believe me or not. Believe whatever the hell you want to believe. Cut. Action.

(STRATTEN continues to walk. He walks towards the camera. His body fills the screen. WELLES shrinks as STRATTEN continues to walk. WELLES becomes a figure in the distant background. His image recedes. His voice grows faint. The sense of a door closing. STRATTEN and BEATRICE NELSON are in the darkness, outside the frame. They regard each other, then go their separate ways.)

21.

(Music. Clip from *The Lady From Shanghai*. A scene with men. A scene with men. Two women speak their private thoughts. Voice-over whispers. An exposé. The story of RITA HAYWORTH, DOLORES DEL RIO, and ELSA BANNISTER. A funhouse of memories. Reflection upon reflection.)

BEATRICE NELSON

He cut her hair. He dyed it blond. He made her look – cold, hard. She always loved him. She couldn't understand how he could do that to her. All those other women. And the way everybody knew, how they all knew. The things people said. Private things. Even in the papers. How they talked about her, how they looked at her. People said he made her look ugly. He made what she did, who she was, he made it all seem so ugly. And a part of her believed them. She felt ashamed. At the end he walked away. He just kept walking. He left her alone in that shattered room. And she saw herself in his eyes, and she felt so ashamed. Even after, she couldn't help it. She thought of him. She kept hoping he'd come back. But then, of course, he never did.

(The clip ends. The sound of footsteps.)

FILM SCHOLAR

Lady From Shanghai was released in 1948. The studio re-edited the picture. They cut its running time by almost half. There are strange gaps in continuity, moments that simply don't make sense. Despite its flaws, it's still considered by many to be a masterpiece. The writer, James Naremore, pointed out that the mirror-maze sequence, which is also the grandest example of Welles's delight in movie illusionism. The gun battle among the mirrors – do you take cream in your coffee? There's a little place right down here. The gun battle among the mirrors functions beautifully within the plot.

22.

(WELLES is backstage. The University Theatre in Salt Lake City. May 1947. It's empty. Enter WEBBER. He's been drinking. The last time the two men will see each other for almost a decade. They are actors. They have scripts.)

WELLES

It makes me nervous not to be able to change anything. I think it comes from being in the theatre. You used to go to opening, then go backstage and change things, cut out bits, rewrite the ending.

WEBBER

Which one am I?

WELLES

The best friend.

WEBBER

All right.

WELLES

I'll get drunk, too, if you'd like, if it would do any good. It's a game, and I'm afraid I don't play it very well.

WEBBER

You talk about it all as if it doesn't matter. As long as I've known you, you used to talk about the work, how it mattered. You used to talk about making art. You used to talk about making something original and new.

WELLES

Aw, go on home.

WEBBER

I believed in you. You could persuade just about anyone to believe in you, love you even. Only it's love on your own terms. Something to

be played your way, according to your rules.

WELLES

You're not drunk enough.

WEBBER

Drunk – What do you care?

WELLES

Stephen –

WEBBER

I've taken another job.

WELLES

You already have a job.

WEBBER

In Los Angeles. Working for Selznick.

WELLES

What about Mercury?

WEBBER

I think that ended a long time ago, don't you? We see things differently now.

WELLES

I warn you, Stephen, you're not going to like Hollywood. They don't know anything about anything out there. They're vulgar and they hate art. Or maybe it's just artists they hate.

WEBBER

I'll take my chances. And you? What will you do?

WELLES

I'm going to Europe. Harry Kohn, RK0, they can all go to hell.

WEBBER

For how long?

WELLES

I don't know, I don't know for how long. There's nothing keeping me here anymore. Stephen.

WEBBER

A toast. I want to make a toast. How do these lines go?

WELLES

To love on my terms. Those are the only terms anyone ever knows, his

own.

(Fade out.)

23.

(Fade up. Backstage. A movie, a play, a hybrid of both. Chaos. The ACTORS change into costumes of the era. Late 40s, early 50s. The feeling of looking at old photographs come to life. Recall the beginning sequence of Ambersons.)

WELLES

I think we tend to look back on the immediate past – the past that isn't history, but still a dim memory – as being faintly comic. It's an American attitude. I remember my parents looking at old pictures of themselves and laughing. One recognizes the impulse. One laughs at oneself. What else can one do? This next part takes place abroad: Rome, Mogador, Venice, Antibes. It features a cast of thousands. There's romance and intrigue. I play a multitude of roles: a Hun, a Nazi, a Moor. I even had time to write a play. It was called The Unthinking Lobster. No one remembers it; it's just as well.

(The theme from The Third Man begins.)

WELLES

Not that goddamn song again.

(Music continues. The scene begins. 1949. WELLES and a FOREIGN STARLET enter Harry's Bar in Rome. Or maybe it's the Pam Pam in Antibes. The band is playing the theme from The Third Man. Two actors playing REPORTERS approach WELLES. They ask a series of questions. A reprieve of the War of the Worlds reporter sequence. A diminished version. There are fewer reporters. Their focus is gossip, not news.)

WELLES

If I have to hear that song one more time.

REPORTER #1 (Bond0)

Mr. Welles.

REPORTER #2 (Barney)
Orson.

REPORTER #1
What are you working on these days?

WELLES
Shakespeare mostly.

REPORTER #1
And how do you find that?

WELLES
Invigorating.

REPORTER #2
Do you miss America?

WELLES
Not one bit.

REPORTER #1
How do you like the local weather?

WELLES
Enchanting.

REPORTER #1
Who's your friend?

REPORTER #2
Does she have a name?

REPORTER #1
Does she speak English?

REPORTER #2
Does she speak?

WELLES
She will.

(Lap dissolve:)

24.

(1949–1955. Fast-forwarding through time. A chorus of overlapping VOICES. The VOICES suggest personalities in WELLES' life during these years: Michael MacLiammoir, Carol Reed, Alexander Korda, Laurence Olivier, Lea Padovani, Lady Diana Duff, Kenneth Tynan, Eartha Kitt, Brooks Atkinson, Walter Kerr, et al. They speak quickly. They interrupt each other. WELLES attempts to conduct. It is impossible. The effort to conduct is exhausting.)

VOICE #1 (Ellen)

When we arrived in Morocco, there were four thousand Arab extras and not a one spoke English. The costumes were torture.

VOICE #2 (Barney)

Welles had a Berber mistress.

VOICE #1 (Ellen)

It was 120 degrees by midday. We were miserable.

VOICE #2 (Barney)

No one knew her name.

VOICE #1

We stayed at the Beau Rivage Hotel. Orson said to order the most expensive things to eat so we'd all seem rich.

VOICE #3 (Tom)

He and Hathaway fought night and day.

VOICE #1

We had no money to pay.

VOICE #4 (Bondo)

One night, Orson sang a song in white pajamas.

VOICE #2

Later, we came upon the idea of mandolins.

VOICE #4 (Bondo)

He said he'd wrote it when he was fourteen.

VOICE #1
Robert was afraid of heights.

VOICE #3
Michael was suffering from sun-blindness, and the wind was so damn strong.
And then, of course, he kept changing Desdemonas.

VOICE #2
First there was Lea, then Cecile...

VOICE #5 (Akiko)
...then Betsy,

ALL
...then Suzanne.

VOICE #4
It was very jolly in the evenings.

VOICE #1
We stayed at Casa Pillozzo.

VOICE #4
We ate caviar and drank brandy.

VOICE #1
Virginia and Charles came to visit.

VOICE #4
Orson spoke about the Bhagavad Gita and W.C. Fields.

VOICE #1
Little Christopher did imitations of the Barrymores.

VOICE #5
Eventually, of course...

ALL
...the money ran out.

ORSON WELLES
Arranging payment as fast as possible repeat as fast as possible.

VOICE #3
Nobody saw Orson. He dropped out of sight.

VOICE #2

He was spotted in Antibes and then Viterbo and then Tuscany and then Nice.

VOICE #4

I saw them all in Venice: Orson and Suzanne in a gondola. Hilton was waving at me from above. I was in my own gondola. I wore a white mushroom hat. Later, Joe Cotten showed up at the villa, and we ate and ate.

VOICE #5

We drank all night long. Orson ate lobster after lobster, and screamed at us the whole time about a shot he'd missed of the sunset, and what a terrible lot we were, all of us.

ORSON WELLES

I can't work this way. I refuse.

VOICE #2

And then, of course...

ALL

...the money ran out.

ORSON WELLES

I need 70, 000 dollars. Leaving tomorrow. On my way to London. Will have your money when we meet in Rome. Arranging payment as fast as possible repeat as fast as possible.

VOICE #3

He was staying at the Claridge.

VOICE #1

Do you have any idea how much it costs to stay at the Claridge?

ORSON WELLES

I'm done with that. I'm onto something else. I've met this lovely black girl. She's just a tiny thing, and phenomenal, just phenomenal.

VOICE #4 (overlapping)

Eartha.

VOICE #1 (overlapping)

Eartha.

VOICE #2 (overlapping)

Eartha.

VOICE #3

Her name was Eartha.

ORSON WELLES

Eartha will play Helen of Troy. Michael will play Algernon. I will play Lady Bracknell. I will also deliver a brief lecture on life.

VOICE #4

We dined out at Bricktop's and Calabados. There was never anything between us, no matter what the papers said.

ORSON WELLES

I will also play Gloucester. I'll have a hunchback. You will play Henry. Later on, I'll perform magic tricks. Eartha will sing throughout.

VOICE #5

Are you out of your mind?

ORSON WELLES

Of course I am, didn't you know?

VOICE #1

We found him naked in bed, smoking a cigar and drinking a gin fizz.

ORSON WELLES

Doctor Faustus, not Faust goddamnit.

VOICE #2

He meant Marlowe's. Not Goethe's. Orson hated Goethe.

ORSON WELLES

I despise Goethe.

VOICE #4

Everywhere we went, they played that song from The Third Man.

ORSON WELLES

I hate the zither.

VOICE #4

We toured all over Germany.

ORSON WELLES

I hate the Germans.

VOICE #4

The Germans were perplexed.

ORSON WELLES

I'm done with that. I'm onto something else. We'll do Othello. We'll do Othello at the St. James. Olivier will produce. Peter will play Iago. Michael will not. I don't care what Michael thinks.

VOICE #4

He kissed me one night on stage, and bit my lip so hard, I bled.

VOICE #3

He had everything except the breath. He didn't go into training.

VOICE #4

Another night, he almost strangled me. I think he's mad, I really do.

ORSON WELLES

I have just come from the St. James Theatre, where I have been murdering Desdemona – or Shakespeare, if you believe the papers.

VOICE #5

He owes me \$30,000.

VOICE #4

He owes me \$60, 000.

VOICE #2

The man owes me over \$50, 000.

VOICE #3

He owes back taxes totalling \$80,000.

VOICE #1

He owes somewhere in the vicinity of \$100, 000.

VOICE #5

\$48,000.

VOICE #2

\$63,000.

VOICE #3

\$75, 000.

ORSON WELLES

After Othello, I thought about doing Julius Caesar, Don Quixote, Twelfth Night. I thought about Volpone and Earnest, but ultimately I was persuaded to do Lear.

(Thunder clap. New York. 1955. Opening night Lear. Welles is center in a wheel chair.)

WELLES

Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm
Invades us to the skin: so 'tis to thee;
But where the greater malady is fixed,
The lesser is scarce felt. Thou'dst shun a bear;
But if thy flight lay toward the roaring sea,
Thou'dst meet the bear i' th' mouth. When the mind's free,
The body's delicate. The tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else,
Save what beats there. Filial ingratitude,
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
For lifting food to't? But I will punish home.
No, I will weep no more. In such a night
To shut me out! Pour on, I will endure.
In such a night as this!

25.

(THOMPSON and WEBBER. WELLES has vanished. The FILM CREW has vanished. It's as if THOMPSON and WEBBER are suddenly alone in a vast dark space. The last two people on earth.)

WEBBER

Afterwards, he went to Vegas, did his magic act at the Riviera; did a little Shakespeare, too, in between the card tricks. He made that movie, too, I forget the name. Paid for it all out of his own pocket, the filming stretched on for years, the actors got old, moved on. He never finished it. Leni was with him all that time towards the end. I think he made that last movie for her.

THOMPSON

That sounds like love.

(BEATRICE is walking towards them, from out of the darkness.)

WEBBER

Oh, I don't know. I think it was something more like defiance. Or spite.

BEATRICE

George.

WEBBER

What do you say after all to a world you don't recognize anymore, a world that seems suddenly alien and strange to you? What do you say to people who never knew who you were, people who have no idea who you are?

BEATRICE

George Orson.

WEBBER

What traces do you leave behind? What signs of life? What do you say before you go? At the end of the day, who will know you? Who will know what you really were?

BEATRICE

George .

WEBBER

You see, I don't think any one word can explain a man, all that he was. And facts, I think facts are less important than truth. Wait...wait...something has happened. Silence...that's odd.

BEATRICE

George.

26.

(BERNSTEIN and THOMPSON. A silent interview in progress. We hear the click of THOMPSON's lighter. We hear BERNSTEIN's laughter. A slow

motion, mute and faraway. LENI ZADROV is moving into place, back to the hotel room, back to the interview with THOMPSON. WELLES is trying to be heard.)

WELLES

Look, I played the Clover Room at the Riviera, I made back everything I lost, no regrets, not a one. I did a ballet, I did Lear, I did a thriller called Pay the Devil. I'm always ready to change, that's the thing. I'm constantly reaching and fishing and hoping and trying and improvising and changing. One does what one needs to do. I have no modesty about these things. Let's keep focused on what really matters, alright, on the thing itself. Let's try to get into it. Everybody in the worlds is an actor. Conversing is acting. Man as a social animal is an actor; everything we do is a kind of performance. My point is that it's how you look at it, point of view. If you came to see Shakespeare - well, then you got something else, but if you came to see theater - well, you got that in spades, didn't you? Everything I do, you see, is a kind of theater, I'm a kind of theater unto myself, I'm always taking on a character, I'm always in character, there's no point where I'm not being someone else. You can call that a lie, if you want, a lie in service of the truth. * A truth. A memory. You see, you have to let it go. You have to.

*BEATRICE

George Orson Welles.

(A black and white movie ends. Static, snow, the sound at the end of the tape. The living area of a hotel suite. A generic hotel on the outskirts of a city. LENI ZADROV and THOMPSON. THOMPSON stands by. The SILENT ASSISTANT turns the television off.)

ZADROV

He made so much, he did so much, but in the end, there was nothing left. Not even his own films. Somebody else always owned the rights. Why do you think he took on all those ridiculous roles, the TV shows, the commercials? You think he wanted to?

THOMPSON

You're the one who knew him.

ZADROV

I don't know. Maybe he had the time of his life. He made a couple of great movies. Mostly, though, he did exactly what he wanted. How many people do you know who can say that? The last time I saw him, you know, we fought. We were staying in a hotel in Prague, and we had a terrible fight. I never saw him again.

27.

(A scene between LENI ZADROV and ORSON WELLES.)

WELLES
I liked the trial.

ZADROV
Did you?

WELLES
I may be the only one. I think Kafka is very amusing.

ZADROV
How can you say that?

WELLES
How can you not?

ZADROV
For me, I think the whole thing, it's very tragic.

WELLES
Well, you're wrong about that. See, he's not guilty, but he feels guilty. It's totally without meaning whether he's guilty or not. The point is that he feels guilty.

ZADROV
But why? Why does he feel guilty, if he did nothing wrong? He must've done something wrong. What did he do?

WELLES
You tell me.

ZADROV
I don't know. It seems so unjust, so cruel to me what happens to him, his fate.

WELLES
Unlucky maybe. I don't know about cruel. You'll have to take another look at it someday. Maybe you'll see things differently.

ZADROV
Maybe. Maybe I will. I saw him in the hotel room. It was the middle of the night. I heard the TV in the other room. He didn't know I was there. He was in his own world by then. He had been unwell for some time, and sad. He hid it well, he tried to, but you could see. He was unhappy.

WELLES

He felt guilty. He wears his guilt for all to see. He can't help it, it's his nature -

ZADROV

It was dark, but even so -

WELLES

Sloth, gluttony, vanity, pride -

ZADROV

He was watching one of his old movies with the sound turned down -

WELLES

He felt ashamed -

ZADROV

It was like a dream -

WELLES

His whole life, the man he was, the man he might have been, his legacy, the smallest thing -

ZADROV

And he was crying. I could see the tears. He was an old man. It was a movie he had made a lifetime ago. All the actors had grown old or died. The best parts had been cut, lost forever-

WELLES

It was like some terrible dream -

ZADROV

Don't tell me your sorry.

WELLES

I'm not sorry. I'm not sorry for anything.

(LENI ZADROV turns and walks away.)

WELLES

Wait, Leni. Leni, don't go. Leni! Please don't go.

(The sound of her footsteps as she walks away. STRATTEN is watching. WELLES recedes into the background. A fragment of a movie ends. The sound at the end of the tape.)

A VOICE (NOT ORSON WELLES)

Citizen Kane, Journey Into Fear, The Magnificent Ambersons, It's All

True, Jane Eyre, Follow the Boys, Tomorrow is Forever, The Stranger, Duel in the Sun, Black Magic, The Lady From Shanghai, The Third Man, The Black Rose, Return to Glennascaul, Lords of the Forest, Trent's Last Case, Napoleon, Othello, Mr. Arkadin, Trouble in the Glen, Moby Dick, Pay the Devil, The Vikings, The Long Hot Summer, Touch of Evil, The Roots of Heaven, Compulsion, High Journey, South Seas Adventure, David and Goliath, Ferry to Hong Kong, Austerlitz, The Crack in the Mirror, The Tartars, Lafayette, King of Kings, The Trial, River of the Ocean, The Finest Hours, The V.I.P.s, Rogopag, Chimes at Midnight, The Adventures of Marco Polo, Casino Royale, Is Paris Burning?, The Sailor From Gibraltar, A Man For All Seasons, I'll Never Forget What's 'is Name, Oedipus the King, The Last Roman, The Immortal Story, House of Cards, The Southern Star, 12 +1, Battle of Neretva, The Deep, Waterloo, The Kremlin Letter, Start the Revolution Without me, Catch-22, Ten Days Wonder, Don Quixote, A Safe Place, The Canterbury Tales, Sentinels of Silence, Sutjeska, Malpertius, F For Fake, The Other Side of the Wind

(The projection room from the top of the play. STRATTEN lights a cigarette. STRATTEN and THOMPSON.)

STRATTEN

When I think of Orson Welles, I think of Paul Masson wine. He was obese at this point. He could barely move. Oh, he still had that voice, that booming voice, but he was difficult. Some said lazy. Towards the end, nobody would hire him. He was a has-been. I saw him once on the Merv Griffin show, laughing at some joke somebody made about his weight. He died in debt, you know. He owed just about everybody. And he never did finish that last movie of his. Just bits and pieces. It's tragic really when you stop and think about it. Such a waste. What did you find out about him? Anything?

THOMPSON

Not much really.

STRATTEN

Did you ever find out what it meant? Thorne, I mean.

THOMPSON

No. I never did.

STRATTEN

You know, there's a room somewhere – Art Institute of Chicago, I think – called the Thorne Room. I went there once when I was a kid. Picture frames all along the walls, and you'd go up close and look through the frame, and inside the frame, there'd be a whole entire world – a room in a house, say, a woman at the window from a long time ago, tiny and perfect, everything just like it was, the smallest thing, and I remember thinking how strange it was – What do I know? Sometimes I think I don't know anything. Keep asking questions, Thompson. Who knows what you'll find.

(STRATTEN and THOMPSON exit.)

(WELLES has transformed into an old man. The accumulation of his roles weighs him down, all the characters he's played. The incantation of the names is like a magic spell gone wrong, a curse. The following are titles of films and TV shows in which WELLES performed or did voice over, 1957-1984. An echo chamber. The ACTORS speak individual lines from the preceding script, the script of a life. Fragments, pieces, puzzle pieces coming together. They speak with increasing velocity and volume. The sound of the clock ticking is very loud. WELLES is in the foreground. He has trouble breathing. His heart hurts.)

BERNSTEIN
Hello.

WEBBER
Hello.

THOMPSON
That's it.

BERNSTEIN
Standby .

LENI ZADROV
(Laughing).

STRATTEN
I'll tell you Thompson a man's dying words.

WEBBER
He was a strange beautiful boy.

BERNSTEIN
One of the biggest.

THOMPSON
How about a photo Mr. Welles.

STRATTEN
Mr. Welles.

BERNSTEIN
Jack, how agrees the devil and thee about thy soul.

WEBBER
Orson and I, we started out together in the theater.

LENI ZADROV

He did so much, he made so much.

BERNSTEIN

Why then though art damned for keeping thy word with the devil.

LENI ZADROV

A person is all things to all people.

THOMPSON

Genius.

LENI ZADROV

Welles is a genius.

STRATTEN

The man's a genius.

WEBBER

Genius.

LENI ZADROV

He's a genius.

BERNSTEIN

An absolute genius.

STRATTEN

Hit it Harry!

LENI ZADROV

I've flown around the worlds in a plane

THOMPSON

You and Welles were close.

WEBBER

We were friends and then we weren't.

LENI ZADROV

The last time I saw him you know we fought. We were staying in a hotel in Prague. We had a terrible fight. I never saw him again.

BERNSTEIN

Excuse me, Mr. Welles.

WEBBER

Take a look at it Stephen, the biggest electric train set a boy ever had.

LENI ZADROV

Mr. Welles doesn't scare easy.

THOMPSON

Can you tell me anything about his life?

STRATTEN

Welcome to the RK0 lot Mr. Welles.

WELLES

Ladies and gentlemen, this is Orson Welles, and I'm in trouble. When I was a much younger man, I had a show. It was called the Mercury Wonder Show. My friends and I, we performed feats of illusion, magic. This was before your time, but magic is timeless. It never gets old. It always begins and ends with the figure of the magician asking the audience to believe, if only for a moment, that the lady is floating in mid-air. To be a child again, to see with the eyes of a child.

30.

(A light. A sound stage in disrepair. Pieces of scenery and technical equipment. No human life. Piano music is heard. We see a tiny box: a toy theatre. Inside is a tiny room. Inside the room is a woman - BEATRICE NELSON. She is playing piano. She wears white. In the background is a window. Outside the window is a cherry blossom tree. White blossoms. As they fall, they look like snow. The month is May. Almost a century ago. ORSON WELLES approaches her. She stops playing. A radio.)

VOICE – Orson Welles

Before the cylinder fell there was a general persuasion that through all the deep of space no life existed beyond the petty surface of our minute sphere. Now we see further. Dim and wonderful is the vision I have conjured up in my mind of life spreading slowly from this little seedbed of the solar system throughout the inanimate vastness of sidereal space. But that is a remote dream. It may be that the destruction of the Martians is only a reprieve. To them, and not to us, is the future ordained perhaps.

Strange it now seems to sit in my peaceful study at Princeton writing down this last chapter of the record begun at a deserted farm in Grovers Mill. Strange to watch children playing in the streets. Strange to see young people strolling on the green, where the new spring grass heals the last black scars of a bruised earth. Strange to watch the sightseers enter the museum where the dissembled parts of a Martian machine are kept on public view. Strange when I recall the time when I first saw it, bright and clean-cut, hard, and silent, under the dawn of that last great day.

(Fade out. End of Play.)