

1.

(A soundstage. The set of an unfinished movie in Arizona, the mid-1980s. An empty swimming pool, a hole in the ground the color of bone. A brilliant, technicolor sunset plays out in the distance. Footsteps. ORSON WELLES enters the frame. He is larger than life. He smokes a cigar. He is droll and dapper and, almost imperceptibly, unwell. He speaks to an audience, seen and unseen.)

WELLES

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Orson Welles. I'd like to take a moment before we begin 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.

(The first magic trick. WELLES pulls a tiny box out of thin air. Inside the box is a room. Inside the room is woman from another place in time. Her name is BEATRICE NELSON. She listens to piano music on a radio. In the background is a window. The month is May. Almost a century ago. Outside the window is a cherry blossom tree. White blossoms. As they fall, they look like snow. )

WELLES

It was, I suppose, a kind of lost world, one of those Edens you get thrown out of. My father was an inventor, a maker of gadgets. My mother played the piano, Debussy, Ravel. She died when I was still a boy.

(Inside the box is a memory, a reflection. WELLES holds it up to the light, and the world suddenly shifts. The piano music turns into static. BEATRICE NELSON moves closer to the radio. An echo of the nurse in the doorway of Kane's room. The memory recedes, becomes a tiny picture inside a box, and vanishes. Close-up on WELLES' mouth.)

WELLES

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.

(Through the static, an announcer's voice breaks through. A fragment from an ancient radio broadcast of The War of the Worlds. WELLES signals for silence.)

#### WELLES

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. Moments of a public life captured on film, video, TV interviews, home movies, outtakes, fragments of a documentary. Voiceover narration.)

#### ANNOUNCER

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

(The sequence ends with footage of ORSON WELLES at the end of his life. His back is to us. He is an enormous figure in a black cloak and hat – the old magician from F For Fake. He's in the distance, striding away from the camera. We watch as he disappears from view. The picture cuts out. A blank screen. Sound of the projector. )

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. A roomfull of anonymous men. Silhouettes. Their faces are invisible. The bright white light of the projection booth cuts through the dimness. The men are smoking. Dust motes swirl in the air.)

THOMPSON  
That's it.

FIRST MAN  
Hello.

SECOND MAN  
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  
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. 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.

FIRST MAN

That's all he says, Thorne?

SECOND MAN

What the hell is "Thorne?"

THIRD MAN

Just one word.

What was it?

SECOND MAN

Or who was it?

THIRD MAN

Could be a woman.

FIRST MAN

Could be a lot of things.

SECOND MAN

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?

STRATTEN

Maybe it was a horse he bet on once.

FIRST MAN

Yeah, and didn't come in.

SECOND MAN

All right, but where was the race?

STRATTEN

Thorne.

FIRST MAN

Thompson!

STRATTEN

Yes, sir.

THOMPSON

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

STRATTEN

Thorne.

THIRD MAN

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.

STRATTEN

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.

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

3.

(Music. An ancient movie already in progress. 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. LENI ZADROV is an aging beauty. She holds a tumbler of scotch. She's been drinking. 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

Miss Zadrov -

LENI ZADROV

He died in the middle of the night, he was working on a script, he was always working, even at the end, he never stopped, he never - 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 he was, what he was to me, that's not for anyone else. It's private. He was a great man - nobody understood how great he was, even now. They couldn't see.

THOMPSON

I understand he was making a film in those last years of his life. What was it about? Do you know ?

LENI ZADROV

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.

(Thunder. Lightening. Freeze 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

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

His life? 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.

(Piano music. A frame within a frame. The image from the top of the play returns. A tiny box. Inside the box is a room. Inside the room is BEATRICE NELSON. She is a memory frozen in space and time. She turns and watches WELLES. Behind her is a window. Outside the window, we see a night sky. A giant, unknown vastness. The sky begins to fill with light. The light grows brighter. Static. The piano music disappears. A radio broadcast.)

#### NEWSCASTER

Ladies and gentlemen, here is the latest bulletin from the Intercontinental Radio News. Toronto, Canada: Professor Morse of McMillan 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 a meteorite, 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.

(Fragments from The War of the Worlds broadcast fast-forwarded, rewind. In the shadows, ORSON WELLES speaks into a microphone. New York City, 1938.)

WELLES

You're listening to a CBS presentation 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 Broadcasting 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

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

CALLER #2

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

CALLER #3

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 #2

I'll tell you what, there's some guy 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 #5

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

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?

(A dial tone. It grows. The sound of static. The fragment of piano music, a ghost song from long ago. A frame within a frame. A tiny box.

Within the frame, BEATRICE NELSON gazes out the window at the bright light. An echo of Agnes Moorehead gazing out the window at the young Charles Foster Kane. The sound of a young boy playing outside. He calls out for his mother. His voice is distant. And then a giant hand passes over the image, and the image disappears. The hand belongs to ORSON WELLES. A magic trick in process.)

7.

(A fictive fragment from an ancient movie. Black and white, a scratchy print. Headlines from tomorrow's papers.)

TAYLOR

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. 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. Woolcott.

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

Is that right? Well, good. That's exactly how I want to look.

(The door opens. The roar of reporters. The blinding flash of cameras.)

8.

(The FILM SCHOLAR interjects. THOMPSON takes notes. An interview already in progress.)

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

(The sound of a projector. In darkness, a 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.)

Susan– Who do ya think yer kiddin. Its always about you. Yeah, "Go ahead honey, the world's yer oyster....but I own you too." (Slap). Don't tell me you regret it.

Charles– I don't regret it. (Scene shifts to S's bedroom.)

Susan– I'm ready Frances, Go ahead and order the car around. Sure, they'll know. I'll see them again, its you I won't see. I didn't expect people not to find out. (Charles grabs Susan , she disengages from him.)

Susan– Goodbye

Charles– Wait.....think what you're doing, what you're doing to me  
Susan– You? I get it. Its got nothing to do with me, nothin at all. I can't leave you? Watch. (She exits.)

FILM SCHOLAR

Kane, you see, it was all about pan, focus, dissolve. Welles and Toland, they 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. Now see, 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 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. I've never understood -

(The projector sputters to a halt. Bright white light. The sound of a clock.)

FILM SCHOLAR

Forgive me. I lost track of time.

THOMPSON

Never mind. Mr. Bernstein?

(Footsteps. SUSAN ALEXANDER makes her exit as the next scene begins. Lap dissolve.)

9.

(BERNSTEIN and THOMPSON. In the middle of a conversation. THOMPSON has just asked a question. We enter midway into their conversation.)

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.

(The actress playing SUSAN ALEXANDER makes her exit.)

BERNSTEIN

Who else have you seen?

(BERNSTEIN picks up a cigarette.

THOMPSON lights it.  
of the lighter.)

The click

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 with those



guys. 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.

(The RKO lot at Culver City. WELLES and WEBBER stand at outside the doors to a soundstage. A memory from half a century ago.)

WELLES

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

WEBBER

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

WELLES

We're going to try something new here, Stephen. They might not understand it all at first, but they will. Stick with me, Stephen. I might even make you a star.

WEBBER

Would you?

WELLES

You have my word. Now, let's get to work. We've got some movies to make.

(Shouting into the empty space:) Hello?

WEBBER

(Echoing WELLES:) Hello?

WEBBER

After you, Mr. Welles.

(Music. WELLES and WEBBER enter the gates of the RKO lot. A musical number. EXTRAS in costume, STARLETS, and STUDIO PERSONNEL whiz by. An old-fashioned spectacle. Hollywood in the 1930s. The machinery of film-making in action.)

WELLES

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

BERNSTEIN

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. 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. 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

(To: WEBBER) Mr. Welles. Welcome. Welcome to the RKO 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. 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, one or two.

(A loud crash. BERNSTEIN enters with boxes, trunk, and suitcases.)

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.

How do you do?	BERNSTEIN
Mr. Bernstein.	WEBBER
Mr. Bernstein is an old family friend.	WELLES
How do you do, Mr. Schaefer.	BERNSTEIN
Mr. Shaefer-	WELLES
Yes? How do you do?	SCHAEFER
Mr. Schaefer-	WELLES
Yes, Mr. Bernstine.	SCHAEFER
Stene.	BERNSTEIN
Welles.	SCHAEFER
Mr. Schaefer - Do you know The Heart of Darkness, Mr. Schaefer?	WELLES
The heart of darkness-?	SCHAEFER
Excuse me.	WARDROBE GIRL #1
I don't think I understand.	SCHAEFER
Excuse me.	BERNSTEIN
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" -	WELLES

Mr. Schaefer.

WEBBER

The camera is an "I"?

SCHAEFER

Mr. Schaefer.

WEBBER

Yes?

SCHAEFER

Excuse me.

WEBBER

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

SCHAEFER

Excuse me.

WARDROBE GIRL #1

Around here, we have ways we do things. We have a system, a formula, if you will -

SCHAEFER

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

WELLES

A seance?

SCHAEFER

Excuse me.

WARDROBE GIRL #1

That's right, Mr. Schaefer.

WELLES

Excuse me.

WEBBER

Excuse me.

BERNSTEIN

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

SCHAEFER

don't understand.

(Freeze frame. Static snow. WELLES steps out of the picture. An empty soundstage.)

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 about the frame, you see, it's all about the frame –

(Piano music. A frame within a frame. The image from the top of the play returns. A tiny box. Inside the box is a room. The room is shadowy and dark. Candlelight flickers within. BEATRICE NELSON can be seen in bits and pieces.)

WELLES

Because my movie, you see, will be more like a seance, an extended dream, a dream of someone living in a remote recess of one's mind, of something that happened a lifetime ago, the tiniest thing, balanced on the edge of a memory. Because sometimes, you see, in the dead watches of the night, it strikes me –

(The sound of children's voices from long ago. The sound of the children's rhyme "Georgie Porgie, Pudding and Pie." The laughter of ghosts. The laughter and the voices grow. WELLES blows. And the candles in the room go out. WELLES signals for lights. He signals for music. He signals the actors.)

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.)

VOICE #5

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

VOICE #4

Who is he? Who does he think he is?

VOICE #2

Orson Welles? Why, he's an exhibitionist –

VOICE #5

A publicity seeker –

VOICE #2

A headline hunter –

VOICE #4

A cheap sensationalist.

VOICE #3

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

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 #2

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.

WELLES

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

VOICE #3

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

BEATRICE NELSON

Orson.

VOICE #4

People like to laugh. 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.

BEATRICE NELSON

Orson.

VOICE #3

Kane and then Ambersons.

VOICE #2



Box office disappointments.

VOICE #3

We were all, we were all disappointed.

BEATRICE NELSON

George Orson.

VOICE #4

There were many disappointments, one after the next.

VOICE #5

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

BEATRICE NELSON

George Orson. George.

(A babel of gossips, naysayers, and critics. The sound grows so loud. The voice of BEATRICE NELSON. Her voice emanates from the shadows of the room. She comes into focus, a ghost inside a frame.)

WELLES

Cut. Cut. Cut. Quiet please.

(Silence.)

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.

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

WELLES

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.

(The clip from The Magnificent Ambersons flickers in and out of view, fast forwards, rewinds, and then plays out. A black and white memory. A flawed print, incomplete. The volume is muted. ORSON WELLES smokes a cigar. A nimbus of smoke. He remembers out loud.)

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.

(The clip from Magnificent Ambersons 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 WELLES watching the studio cut of Ambersons on a hotel room TV towards the end of his life. STRATTEN interrupts from offstage.)

STRATTEN

Hey, Mr. Welles!

THOMPSON

Ssh.

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 –

STRATTEN

Hey, Mr. Welles!

(A flash. The picture breaks up.)

13.

(STRATTEN leaps onstage. He's dressed like Uncle Sam. A skit from the MERCURY WONDER SHOW. An interlude.)

STRATTEN

Ever been to Rio? Rio de Janeiro? Beaches. Carnival. Girls. Lots of pretty girls. What if I told you, RKO 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?

WELLES

Nelson Rockefeller.

BERNSTEIN and WEBBER

Nelson Rockefeller?!

STRATTEN

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

(Enter DANCING GIRLS with elaborate head-dresses, feathers and glitter. A song and dance number.)

STRATTEN and THE DANCING

GIRLS

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

(The DANCING GIRLS pull ORSON WELLES away. ORSON WELLES dances in the background.)

WELLES

(Taking off his cape:) Stephen, catch.

(BERNSTEIN and WEBBER look on in the foreground. A close-up. They shout above the music.)

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 music and the dancing drown out WEBBER's voice. Iris out.)

14.

(The sound of a plane. WELLES begins his voyage to unknown lands.)

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.

(Samba music. WELLES shoots scenes from carnival. Telegrams from RK0 STAFF in Rio.)

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?

(The dance begins to break down. The music becomes louder. Sweat and chaos.)

WELLES

Stop. Stop. Stop.

(Silence. The image disintegrates before our eyes.)

WELLES

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

WEBBER

Welles is nowhere to be found.

WELLES

That's a lie.

WEBBER

There is no script, there is no movie, Welles is completely out of control -

WELLES

That's a goddamn lie.

WEBBER

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

(The clip from The Magnificent Ambersons reanimates. STRATTEN emerges from the darkness.)

WELLES

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

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 shooting It's All True, 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 – well, you could say 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. The roar of an unseen crowd. The actors from the clip break out of the frame. STRATTEN disappears into the future.)

HOLLYWOOD REPORTER #2

RKO pulls plug on It's All True.

HOLLYWOOD REPORTER #1

Back home, Citizen Kane shut out at Oscars.

HOLLYWOOD REPORTER #2

Magnificent Amberson: Box Office Flop.

HOLLYWOOD REPORTER #1

Boy Wonder turned Has-been almost overnight.

HOLLYWOOD REPORTER #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?

HOLLYWOOD REPORTER #1

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. Credits. The ACTORS disperse. WELLES exits. Lap dissolve.)

15.

(BERNSTEIN and THOMPSON in the middle of an interview. 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. Ambersons, too, for that matter. 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 Welles. 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.

(Lap dissolve.)



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.

(Shakespeare. Young men rehearse a scene. A scene from a lifetime ago.)

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. Poins! Now shall we know if Gadshill have set a match.

(BERNSTEIN enters the scene.)

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?

WEBBER

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!

(The memory begins to fade. Bits and pieces.)

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.

(WELLES vanishes.)

17.

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

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.

(ORSON WELLES is in the shadows. An evening in Hollywood, circa 1942. Post-Ambersons, post-It's All True. A dark, cavernous hall. The guests have gone home. LENI ZADROV is out of frame, laughing. Her laughter fills the space.)

WELLES

What are you laughing at?

(LENI ZADROV approaches in her Mercury Wonder Show costume. An echo of Charles Foster Kane's first encounter with Susan Alexander. A flirtation.)

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.

(A door closes. Darkness. ZADROV and WELLES laugh in the darkness. Light returns, like a door opening. The feel of the world is different. WELLES and ZADROV are not where we last saw them. A different angle. A different point in time. As they speak, LENI ZADROV almost imperceptibly begins to levitate.)

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.)

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 another 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 another magic trick. And another one after that.)

ZADROV

God, your crafty.

WELLES

Not really. How old are you anyway?

ZADROV

Ancient.



Is Leni Zadrov, is that your real name? WELLES

No. ZADROV

What is? WELLES

I'll never say. ZADROV

Have you always acted? WELLES

Ever since I can remember. ZADROV

And are you acting now? WELLES

I am. And you? ZADROV

You don't think I'm Orson Welles? WELLES

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. ZADROV

Would you sing for me now? WELLES

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

Yes. Yes, I would. WELLES

(Music from another era. ZADROV sings. And the world changes yet again. A party in progress. Partygoers stream into the space.)

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 ZADROV

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. ZADROV and WELLES dance. They are, for a little while, the happiest people in the world. The world shifts once more. Dissolve to: WELLES alone in a dark, cavernous space. ZADROV and the other partygoers vanish. The camera pans across time and space.)

19.

(Camera pans down. The clip from The Stranger plays out. The murder scene. WELLES acts and directs. WEBBER stands apart.)

- Death's what brought you here. Well, that's all over now.  
- Give it up ... Listen!

- Fall ...fall's right ... sure you can kill me but, you're the one's gonna fall.  
- ... the people of the town. They followed you here. The nobodies you love to mock. Well, who's laughing now? You held the world in the palm of your hands. Now you're losing your grip and it's slipping through your fingers ... slipping little by little until there's nothing left. Nothing.

Orson: I'm not responsible ...

Man : You are responsible.

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 scene ends with a gunshot. The character WELLES is playing dies.)

WELLES

Cut!

(WELLES moves on.)

WELLES

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. A restaurant in Paris. Circa 1949. A dinner party in progress. Eating and drinking. WELLES is presiding. He is a celebrity, the guest

of honor. The people at the table are strangers. Their faces are unfamiliar. The sense of a great man in a foreign place, surrounded by STRANGERS. BEATRICE NELSON watches WELLES from a distant past. THOMPSON watches, too. He watches from a distant future.)

STRANGER #3

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

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? 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. A flirtation. STRATTEN begins a magic trick. ZADROV is his volunteer. WELLES watches them. They continue their performance. He is powerless to stop them.)

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.

STRANGER #3

I don't even recognize you. I don't recognize who you are anymore. It's as if you've become somebody else.

BEATRICE NELSON

George. George Orson.

(An echo of the names, George, Orson, and the singsong children's rhyme "Georgie Porgie, Pudding and Pie." WELLES turns back. The world grows strange and unfamiliar. The faces are cold and indifferent. The laughter is mocking.)

STRATTEN

Orson Welles and Citizen Kane – can't think of one without the other. Funny how that works. People always said, you know, 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.)

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 becomes a figure in the distant background. An echo of Kane's confrontation with Boss Gettys. WELLES' image recedes. His voice grows faint. The sense of a door closing. And then WELLES is gone. His voice, his image vanish. 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. The FILM SCHOLAR appears.)

He's been watching. THOMPSON takes notes.)

#### 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 - is one of his most vivid film metaphors.

(The FILM SCHOLAR's voice fades away. White noise. And then silence.)

Elsa- Its safer in here. Listen to me. Jack was going to look after us, but he went off his head and shot Brand. He was crazy. I had to kill him after that

Michael- And what are we going to do?

Elsa- We can be together

Michael-You talking about you and me or you and Grinstead?

Elsa- Listen to me-

turn 1: Hello darling ... (adlib: don't look so surprised ... )

turn 2: ... expect to see me ... (adlib: oh I of course know about your friend here ...)

turn 3: ... my fortune ...

turn 4: ... so darling ...

(An ACTRESS speaks her private thoughts out loud. An exposé. A scandal. The stories of RITA HAYWORTH, DOLORES DEL RIO, and ELSA BANNISTER blend into one. A funhouse of memories. Reflection upon reflection.)

#### ACTRESS

He stood in the doorway and looked inside. He couldn't see me from where he stood. Inside the room, the curtains were drawn, darkness all around. Through the window, I could hear the children playing outside. I could hear their voices, their shouts and their laughter. It was springtime. It was the month of May. He was born in the month of May. George, I said, George Orson. Come closer. Look what I have for you, look. I watched as he drew near. I watched him in the flickering light, candlelight. A ring of candles, nine candles in all, one for each year. How little time was left to us then, how quickly it all goes. I wondered if he would remember me. There was so much I wanted to say to him. Make a wish, I said. It was all I could say. Make a wish.

22.

(WELLES is backstage. The University Theatre in Salt Lake City. May 1947. The theatre is empty. Enter WEBBER. He's been drinking. WEBBER and WELLES are actors. They have scripts. They speak their lines.)

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. Stephen.

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 –



I've taken another job.

WEBBER

You already have a job.

WELLES

In Los Angeles. Working for Selznick.

WEBBER

Selznick? What about Mercury?

WELLES

I think that ended a long time ago, don't you?

WEBBER

You're serious.

WELLES

We see things differently. We have for some time now. What will you do?

WEBBER

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

WELLES

For how long?

WEBBER

I don't know, I don't know for how long. It doesn't really matter, does it? There's nothing keeping me here anymore. I'm a free agent. I suppose I prefer it that way. Stephen.

WELLES

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

WEBBER

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

WELLES

(WEBBER exits. The sound of footsteps across a vast space. A door closes. Fade out.)

23.

(Fade up. Backstage. Chaos. Late 1940s, early 1950s. Europe and North Africa. A movie version of an ancient play. The ACTORS change into costumes. The FILM CREW gets set up. The feeling of looking at old photographs come to life.)

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. Harry's Bar in Rome, the Pam Pam in Antibes. Circa 1949. WELLES enters with an entourage. The band is playing the theme from The Third Man. REPORTERS converge on WELLES.)

WELLES

If I have to hear that song one more time.

REPORTER #1

Mr. Welles.

REPORTER #2

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

It's enchanting.

REPORTER #1

People love The Third Man. What do you think?

WELLES

Don't ask.

REPORTER #2

How do you like to acting?

WELLES

Why, it depends on whom I'm acting with.

REPORTER #2

Is it true what they say about you and Rita?

WELLES

Oh please.

REPORTER #1

Tell me about War of the Worlds.

WELLES

Next.

REPORTER #2

Citizen Kane - ?

WELLES

Next.

REPORTER #1

Who's your friend?

Next.	WELLES
Does she have a name?	REPORTER #2
Next.	WELLES
Does she speak English?	REPORTER #1
Does she speak?	REPORTER #2
Next. Next. Next.	WELLES
(Lap dissolve:)	

24.

(1949–1955. Fast-forwarding through time. A montage of places, various film locations in Europe and Africa, a world of hotel rooms and restaurants. A chorus of overlapping PERSONALITIES: Michael MacLiammoir, Carol Reed, Alexander Korda, Laurence Olivier, Lea

Padovani, Lady Diana Duff, Kenneth Tynan, Eartha Kitt, Brooks Atkinson, Walter Kerr, et al. WELLES presides.)

PERSONALITY #1

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

PERSONALITY #2

Welles had a Berber mistress.

PERSONALITY #1

It was 120 degrees by midday. We were absolutely miserable.

PERSONALITY #2

No one knew her name.

PERSONALITY #1

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

PERSONALITY #3

He and Hathaway fought night and day.

PERSONALITY #1

We had no money to pay, not one penny.

PERSONALITY #4

One night, Orson sang a song in white pajamas.

PERSONALITY #2

Later, we came upon the idea of mandolins.

PERSONALITY #4

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

PERSONALITY #1

Robert, you see, was afraid of heights.

PERSONALITY #3

Michael was suffering from sun-blindness, and the wind was so damn strong.

And then, of course, he kept changing Desdemonas.

PERSONALITY #2

First there was Lea, then Cecile –

PERSONALITY #3

Then Betsy –

Then – what was her name?	PERSONALITY #1
Suzanne.	PERSONALITY #4
Poor Suzanne. Do you remember – ?	PERSONALITY #3
I do.	PERSONALITY #2
Long days.	PERSONALITY #1
You have no idea.	PERSONALITY #3
No, no, no, but it was very jolly in the evenings.	PERSONALITY #4
No, that’s true. We stayed, remember, at Casa Pilozzo.	PERSONALITY #1
We ate caviar and drank brandy.	PERSONALITY #4
Oh my.	PERSONALITY #3
I remember Virginia and Charles came to visit.	PERSONALITY #1
Yes, that’s right.	PERSONALITY #3
Orson spoke about the Bhagavad Gita and W.C. Fields.	PERSONALITY #4
And Little Christopher, she did the most uncanny imitations of the Barrymores.	PERSONALITY #1
We had a lovely time. We really did.	PERSONALITY #4
Eventually, of course, the money ran out.	PERSONALITY #2

WELLES

Arranging payment as fast as possible repeat as fast as possible.

PERSONALITY #3

Nobody saw Orson. He dropped out of sight.

PERSONALITY #2

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

PERSONALITY #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.

PERSONALITY #1

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.

PERSONALITY #3

He'd scream at us, you see, and then he'd disappear.

WELLES

I can't work this way. I refuse.

PERSONALITY #2

And then, of course, the money ran out.

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.

PERSONALITY #3

He was staying at Claridges.

PERSONALITY #1

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

PERSONALITY #4

He kept hatching these plans, one after the next after the next.

PERSONALITY #1

He always had something up his sleeve. I loved that.

PERSONALITY #3

Lots of talk. Not much follow through.

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.

PERSONALITY #4

Eartha.

PERSONALITY #1

Eartha.

PERSONALITY #2

Eartha.

PERSONALITY #3

Her name was Eartha.

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.

PERSONALITY #4

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

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.

PERSONALITY #3

Are you out of your mind?

WELLES

Of course I am, didn't you know?

PERSONALITY #1

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

WELLES

Doctor Faustus, not Faust goddamnit.

PERSONALITY #2

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

WELLES

I despise Goethe.



PERSONALITY #4

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

WELLES

I hate the zither.

PERSONALITY #3

I guess you'd call it – what? – a kind a variety show.

PERSONALITY #4

We toured all over Germany.

WELLES

I hate the Germans.

PERSONALITY #4

The Germans were perplexed.

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.

PERSONALITY #1

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

PERSONALITY #3

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

PERSONALITY #1

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

WELLES

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

PERSONALITY #3

An actor he is not. What he is I can't say.

PERSONALITY #2

It had to have hurt, his wallet and his pride.

PERSONALITY #3

A personality perhaps. An impresario. A character. Orson – well, he's quite a character.

PERSONALITY #2

I think he's beginning to lose his edge.

I think he lost it years ago.

PERSONALITY #4

Between you and me, I think he's a bit unhinged.

PERSONALITY #1

A genius, but completely unreliable.

PERSONALITY #3

I wouldn't work with him.

PERSONALITY #4

Nor I.

PERSONALITY #2

I'm sick of it, I really am.

PERSONALITY #1

Did I tell you he owes me \$30,000?

PERSONALITY #3

He owes me \$60, 000.

PERSONALITY #4

The man owes me over \$50, 000.

PERSONALITY #2

He owes back taxes totalling \$80,000.

PERSONALITY #3

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

PERSONALITY #1

\$48,000.

PERSONALITY #4

\$63,000.

PERSONALITY #2

\$75, 000.

PERSONALITY #3

\$89, 000.

PERSONALITY #4

(The voices grow louder. An echo of the children's rhyme "Georgie Porgie." Ghost voices from different points in one's past. A frame within a frame. A tiny room. BEATRICE NELSON appears in candlelight. The light casts shadows. The voices fade away. The sound of a clock ticking. The sound of BEATRICE NELSON breathing. A close-up of her

face. The sound of a young boy playing outside. He calls his mother. His calls go unanswered. WELLES blows. The candle goes out. Darkness. WELLES is on a stage inhabited by ghosts. The glare of footlights.)

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.

(Lap dissolve: New York. 1955. WELLES returns to America after years of living overseas. Opening night of Lear. Welles is center in a wheel chair. He is all of a sudden older and unwell. The world is a changed place. Time is passing quickly.)

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!

(The memory fades away.)

25.

(THOMPSON and WEBBER. The FILM CREW has vanished. THOMPSON and WEBBER are alone in a vast dark space full of ghosts. WELLES moves across the soundstage, trapped within an ancient movie, the story of one man's life, a familiar story.)

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 NELSON appears out of the frame. She emerges from the shadow. A ghost let loose in the machine. WELLES sees her. She is a memory from a distant past. A ghost in the machine.)

WEBBER

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

What do you say afterall 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?

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?

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 NELSON

George. (Rewind.)

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 backwards in time, back to the hotel room, back to the interview with THOMPSON. Time is moving backwards. A rush of memories. WELLES tries to restore order, tries to be heard above the din. BEATRICE NELSON appears.)

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 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.

BEATRICE NELSON

George Orson Welles.

WELLES

A truth. A memory. You see, you have to let it go. You have to.

(An ancient, 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. Silence.)

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.

(One last scene between LENI ZADROV and ORSON WELLES. A clip of The Trial. A maze of shadows. They watch the movie. They are the movie. )

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

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.

(Echoes of A Touch of Evil. The voice of Hank Quinlan. WELLES transforms before our eyes.)

ZADROV

He felt guilty. He wore his guilt for all to see.

Sloth, gluttony, vanity, pride –

It was dark, but even so –

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

It was like a dream -

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

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-

It was like some terrible dream -

Don't tell me your sorry.

WELLES

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

(LENI ZADROV turns and walks away. The sound of her footsteps as she walks down the hall. Eyes follow her as she goes.)

WELLES

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

(WELLES fills the stage with the machinery of film-making, an echo of the objects filling up the great hall of Xanadu. A litany of names and titles begins, all the movies, all the roles. A lifetime of work, one man's legacy.)

FILM SCHOLAR

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.

28.

(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

Sometimes I think the longer you look at a thing – it's as if there's always something beyond what you can see, and something beyond that, and something beyond that, too. 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.)

29.

(A sound stage in disrepair. An echo chamber. Fragments, pieces, puzzle pieces coming together. WELLES is in the foreground. He has trouble breathing. His heart hurts.)

BERNSTEIN

Hello.

WEBBER

Hello.

THOMPSON

That's it.

BERNSTEIN

Stand by.

(An echo of laughter, 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.

He's a genius.

LENI ZADROV

An absolute genius.

BERNSTEIN

Hit it Harry!

STRATTEN

I've flown around the world in a plane.

LENI ZADROV

You and Welles were close.

THOMPSON

We were friends and then we weren't.

WEBBER

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.

LENI ZADROV

Excuse me, Mr. Welles.

BERNSTEIN

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

WEBBER

Mr. Welles doesn't scare easy.

LENI ZADROV

Can you tell me anything about his life?

THOMPSON

Welcome to the RK0 lot Mr. Welles.

STRATTEN

(The last magic trick. The stage is suddenly empty.)

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

WELLES

in mid-air. To be a child again, to see with the eyes of a child.  
Ladies and Gentlemen, this has been War of the Worlds. An original  
adaptation. My name was Orson Welles. Goodnight.