1980

Wolf: A Screenplay

Thompson Crane-Baker

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd

Part of the Theatre and Performance Studies Commons

© The Author

Downloaded from
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/4447

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.
APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

WOLF

A SCREENPLAY

by

Thompson Crane-Baker

Approved:

Thesis Advisor

Departmental Reader

Director of Graduate Studies

Approved:

Dean, School of the Arts

Date

11 August 1980
My attraction to Jack London is long-standing and stemmed initially from an interest in his life itself. London's is the Horatio Alger story -- the rags to riches motif that lends itself so well to romanticism and embellishment. And embellished it has been. Yet even when the myth and glorification have been stripped away there remains a forty-year span perhaps more romantic and action packed than that of any other modern writer.

London is a pivotal American author who has been ridiculed, ignored and finally relegated to the juvenile shelf of the library. Efforts to rescue him from this ignoble position have only recently begun. The majority of his fifty-odd books are unavailable in America. Yet the entire collection of his works has never been out of print in Russia. An odd state of affairs for a western writer.

Abroad London is hailed as a leading spokesman for the socialist movement in the United States. Here, in his native land, if he is associated at all with the Socialist Party it is as a sort of dilettante -- a dabbler in the sordid affairs of the downtrodden. The truth it would seem lies somewhere in between.

To read London's works on Socialism, particularly *The Iron Heel* and *The People Of The Abyss*, is to be convinced of his revolutionary fervor. Here is a virtual firebrand fanning the flames of international revolt. His speeches fomented brawls and riots and he was offered the presidential slot on the Socialist Party ticket; he declined. Yet this same man who quit the part claiming it to be too docile would live out his life like a mighty patriarch on his California mountaintop. This contradiction fascinates me and is seminal to the screenplay which follows.

More than half a dozen films have been made of London's life. They have generally been overblown and half-truthful. For this reason I did not wish to deal directly with the biographical aspects of his life. I have chosen instead to use his life experiences as building blocks and to project a character forged by them. A character in the final week of life -- sick, broken and cynical, still trying to bang out what came easily in years past.

London is confronted by a mirror image of himself as a youth: innocent, vital and idealistic. The resulting conflict between the
two men leads to the inevitable survival of youth and the equally inevitable destruction of youthful idealism.

Every effort has been made to faithfully render the atmosphere and events of London's final days. His death, whether suicide or accident, remains to this day unresolved.
WOLF
A Screenplay
by
Thompson Crane-Baker
FADE IN on blood-red screen. Titles appear. Lower S.R. a graphic of a wolf's head. Titles and graphic in black. The SOUND OF A STEAM TRAIN BUILDS THROUGHOUT. Screen to black. SOUND: SCREAM OF TRAIN WHISTLE.

INT. DAY. TRAIN.

A YOUNGMAN is startled awake by the whistle. Disoriented, he looks about. First at the passing landscape then at his fellow passengers. This is JAMES BILLINGTON. He is eighteen. A handsome face, intelligent; his light brown hair a little shaggy. He wears a neat but inexpensive dark gray suit.

There are TEN OR TWELVE PASSENGERS widely dispersed. Several read newspapers.

A book has slipped off Billington's lap and is jammed down beside the cushion. He retrieves it. THE TURTLES OF TASMAN by Jack London. He places it on the aisle seat beside a small valise.

He checks his pocketwatch and settles back to look out the window. His reflection flickers against the landscape of rolling grass-covered hills.

SOUND: CAR DOOR OPENING, WHOOSH OF AIR, THEN CLOSING.

A CONDUCTOR ENTERS through the rear door. He moves down the aisle stooping to pickup a fallen ticketstub and then continues.

BILLINGTON

Excuse me. How long till Glen Ellen?

CONDUCTOR

(Glancing out window)

Well this here's Sonoma Valley. 'Bout ten minutes I'd say.

The conductor points at the book on the seat.

CONDUCTOR (CONT'D)

That his newest?

Billington nods and the conductor picks up the book and pages through it.

CONDUCTOR (CONT'D)

Lives in Glen Ellen, ya know?

BILLINGTON

Yes. (BEAT) I'm going up to visit him.
CONDUCTOR
(Impressed)
Had him here on the train a few times.
Real fine fella. Ain't got no airs if ya know what I mean. (BEAT) Well, ten minutes now hear?
The conductor smiles and moves off. He EXITs through the front of the car.

Billington's attention returns to the window.

SOUND: CAR DOOR.

Billington's eyes dart to the front door. A WOMAN AND A BOY ENTER. The boy is seven with a dirty face and tousled hair.

WOMAN
(Wearily)
I hope that's the last time now. Justta few minutes and we'll be home!
The boy pays no attention. He stops at the empty seat by Billington.

BOY
Hi!

Billington smiles as the woman hustles the boy off to his seat. He turns to watch. They sit several rows back on the opposite side.

Billington shifts anxiously in his seat. He takes up the book and reads. After a moment he closes the book and checks his watch. He looks out the window.

SOUND: CAR DOOR.
The CONDUCTOR ENTERs.

CONDUCTOR
(Droning)
This stop Glen Ellen. Glen Ellen this stop.

He nods amiably to Billington as he passes. He makes his announcement again and then EXITs.

The train begins to slow. Billington stands and straightens his suit. He takes down a large bag from overhead. He stows the book in the small valise.
In the b.g. the woman struggles to get a jacket on the boy.

The train pulls slowly into the station. Billington glances out the window as great billows of steam rise up and obscure the depot momentarily.

Billington moves down the aisle.

EXT. DAY. THE PLATFORM.

Billington emerges from the train. He stands at the top of the steps looking around. He descends and walks off S.R.

INT. DAY STATIONHOUSE.

Through the dirty windows we see Billington walking down the platform. He moves slowly, glancing about. His body lists to the right from the weight of the large bag.

The CAMERA PANS with him until he passes the window. The PAN continues across the room.

VOICE (O.S.)
Well Jake... that looks to be the one.

At the far end of the room are two brass-caged ticketbooths. The shade on the first is drawn. Inside the second is an old man. This is JAKE: short, bald and bespectacled. Leaning up against the booth on the outside is a man in his late forties. He is of medium height and has a very grizzled outdoor look. He sports a red bandanna around his neck and a three day growth on his face. This is HAZEN COWAN, ranch hand.

JAKE
(Snorting)
Well sure ain't Miz Jennin's and that kid a' hers. (BEAT) Now that little fella he's...

HAZEN
(Interrupting)
Weeell... lemme hitch up with my young customer here.

Hazen smiles and pulls himself off the wall.

JAKE
Things musta changed up there considerable.

Jake takes off his glasses and rubs his nose.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Hell I remember a dozen'd git offa one train.
Jake replaces his glasses.

HAZEN
Yeah...well. See ya Jake.

JAKE
Sure. See ya Haz.

EXT. DAY. PLATFORM.

From the rear as Hazen ambles down the platform. In the b.g. Billington stands at the far end. Beyond him is a wagon hitched to two horses.

As Hazen approaches he pulls a scrap of paper from his shirt pocket and consults it.

HAZEN
(Reading)
Mister Billin'ton?

Billington turns. Hazen shoves the paper back into his pants.

HAZEN (CONT'D)
Take yer bag?

BILLINGTON
You're from the ranch? (BEAT) I thought Mr. London was to meet me.

Hazen grabs up the large suitcase and starts down the steps towards the wagon.

HAZEN
Nay Sir. I do mosta the meetin'. (BEAT) Mister Jack's a mite busy.

As the train begins to build up steam Billington trails after Hazen. He carries the small valise.

Hazen tosses the bag into the back of the wagon and climbs aboard. He takes the valise from Billington and places it on the floorboards by his feet. Billington climbs up.

In the b.g. the platform is deserted. The train pulls out with a great rush of steam. Hazen wheels the horses around.

The wagon pulls away from the station and on down the dusty street. They roll past a feed store and several saloons. Outside the Glen Ellen Hotel sits a dusty automobile.
HAZEN
Yeah, like I say, I do the meetin' 'n haulin'. Reckon you ain't bin here else you'da know. (BEAT) 'Sides he ain't bin feelin' so pretty good. Soes I guess ya git Hazen like or not.

Hazen laughs exposing a mouthful of tobacco-stained teeth.

They leave the outskirts of town behind and begin to wind up the mountain among the trees.

HAZEN (CONT'D)
Come on fellas! Look lively now. Ain't got all the day.

Hazen pulls a plug of tobacco from his pocket and bites off a chew. He starts to put it away then offers it to Billington.

Billington eyes it and refuses with a shake of the head. Hazen grins and replaces it.

BILLINGTON
Been on the ranch long?

Hazen regards him suspiciously. He works his chaw and spits into the dusty road.

HAZEN
(Heavy emphasis on first syllable)
Ya ain't a reporter?

BILLINGTON
(Startled laugh)
No. No I'm not. (BEAT) I didn't mean to pry.

HAZEN
Thought ya a mite young. (BEAT) Dam' fools always 'round asken questions! (BEAT) Gotta reporter fella up the ranch now. Frisco Bull'tin. Takin' movin' pictures. Them's the damdest thin's I seen.

On either side of the road are newly furrowed fields.

BILLINGTON
Is Mr. London ill? I mean you said...
Billington breaks off. Hazen spits and shrugs.

HAZEN
Weeell... he don't tell me much 'cept 'bout horses and sech. (BEAT) We all pulls lame sometimes Hazen, is what he sed. (BEAT) Ain't gittin' round much I'll tell ya.

What brin's ya up here anyways?

BILLINGTON
I...well my father. He was in the Klondike with Mr. London and...

HAZEN
(Interrupting)
Don't say! How 'bout that. Betcha you've heard some real tall ones! (LAUGHS) Yes sir. I've metta few of 'em myself. Bin a passel of Klondikers through here pickin' up a meal 'n flop. Mister Jack he never turn 'em away.

Hazen laughs and a little rivulet of tobacco juice seeps out of his mouth and down his chin. He mops it away with the bandanna around his neck.

Ahead a white wooden gate stretches across the road. On the gate is a sign: BY KINDNESS YOU USE THIS GATE. IN KINDNESS CLOSE THIS GATE.

Hazen pulls the horses to a halt.

HAZEN(CONT'D)
Spread starts right here.

On Hazen's side of the road is a post with a rope handle. The gate is rigged with pulleys so that the driver need not leave the wagon.

Hazen gives a yank and the gate opens. He moves the wagon through. He closes the gate in a similar fashion. The wagon moves on.

BILLINGTON
Does he own the entire mountain?

HAZEN
(Laughing)
Not yet he don't. 'Bout fifteen hunderd acres I reckon.
BILLINGTON
All under cultivation?

HAZEN
Dang ifya ain't fulla questions!
(GRINNING) Like I sed I tend the horses 'n don't bother much else.
(BEAT) Lotsa growin'. Grapes, figs, that sorta stuff. Livestock a plenty.

(LAUGHS) 'n U-kill-ip-tus every whitch way.

BILLINGTON
Eucalyptus?

HAZEN
Yeah. He figgered on makin' a killin' ya know with...aah...ya know that kinda walnut wood. What ever hell it is.

BILLINGTON
Circassian?

HAZEN
Yeah! That's the ticket alright. (BEAT) Anyways he planted 'bout hundred fifty thousan' of em then the durn market give up. (SPITS) Som hard luck that was.

The wagon rounds a bend in the road and a series of outbuildings are visible: sheds, blacksmith shop and holding pens. ESTABLISHING SHOTS of ranch as Hazen explains.

HAZEN
Up here on the left's Mis Eliza's place. Mister Jack's sis. She pretty much run the ranch. Super'tendent.

They turn off the road at the farmhouse scattering a score of chickens as they roll by. A larger house lies ahead.

HAZEN
That there's the main house. Sortta built onto the ol' win'ry. The big un down the way a bit that's the stable and bunkhouse. (BEAT) Road jus' winds on up the mount'in.
The wagon rolls on to the main house. In the b.g. a white-jacketed Japanese emerges from the house and awaits them on the porch. This is SEKINE the young houseboy. He is devoted to London and indispensable to the orderly running of the house.

Hazen pulls the wagon to a halt at the house. Sekine descends the steps and immediately hauls out the large suitcase.

HAZEN
(Grinning)
Gotcha a liv' un here, Sekeen! Don'cha let em talk yer ear off now.

Hazen laughs and Billington smiles embarrassedly as he climbs from the wagon. Hazen tosses Billington the small valise which he fumbles but recovers before it drops.

BILLINGTON

Thanks.

HAZEN
(Spits)
See ya later son.

Hazen wheels the wagon off towards the stable.

SEKINE

Please?

Sekine motions for Billington to follow. They move up the stairs and enter the house.

INT. DAY. HALLWAY.

The hallway is long and unevenly lit. There are several landscape paintings on the walls. The rest of the wall space is taken up with South Sea souvenirs -- matting, colorful beaten cloth and some wood-carvings.

There are several doors on either side of the hall. At the far end the hall divides, leading to the London's separate apartments.

Sekine opens the first door S.L. and follows Billington into the room.

INT. DAY. ROOM.

The room is small but comfortable. There is a double bed and a dresser. A writing desk is between the bed and window. There are rugs of native matting on the floor.
Sekine heaves the large suitcase onto the dresser and moves to the window where he pulls open the curtains flooding the room with light. The window faces the front porch.

SEKINE
(Smiling broadly)
This your room. Hope find O.K.? Master busy now. He see you later. O.K.?

Sekine moves to the door.

SEKINE
You need. I be in kitchen. O.K.?

Sekine points out window towards the old winery portion of the house.

BILLINGTON
Thanks. I'll be fine.

SEKINE EXITS.

Billington stands surveying the room. Sekine passes by outside the window heading for the mainhouse.

Billington tests the bed and then crosses to the desk and unpacks the small bag. He places the book from the train and several others on the desk. There is also a hardbound journal and a student notebook.

Billington goes to the dresser and opens the suitcase.

SOUND OF DOG yapping is heard.

Billington crosses to the window and raises it. Thrusting his head out the window he sees a small two-wheeled gig pulled by a single horse coming from the direction of the stable.

As he watches it passes directly in front of the house. The gig is driven by a small dark-haired woman in her late forties. This is ELIZA, London's half-sister.

Scurrying after the horse is a small black and white fox terrier who appears about to be stepped on with each stride of the horse.

ELIZA
(Frantic)
Possum! Stop that. Possum! Please!
Possum does not heed and the gig moves off down the road with the dog yapping merrily at the horse's heels.

EXT. DAY. THE PORCH.

Grinning, Billington pulls his head back into the room and shuts the window. A moment later he appears at the porch door. He stands quietly looking out over the various farm buildings. The gig has disappeared and the dust settles in the road.

Billington moves down the breezeway towards the attached stone building. He knocks on the massive wooden door. He receives no answer and enters.

INT. DAY. LIVINGROOM.

The old winery is a converted livingroom-diningroom combination. The floors and walls are stone. The ceiling is of dark wood and very high. The room is about forty feet long.

The front door opens onto the livingroom section. Two large sofas face each other over a low table. A large stone fireplace dominates this end of the room. There is a gunrack with assorted weapons. Fur rugs are scattered everywhere. There are several other chairs and a grand piano. There is a small alcove holding a desk and swivel chair.

The grand piano essentially divides the two sections of room. Beyond it is the diningroom.

The diningroom table is large, suitable for fifteen or twenty people. It is encircled by straight-backed chairs. At the far end of the table, under a window, is a monstrously large chair of South Sea origin.

The kitchen opens off the dining area but is hidden by a tapa screen. Nearby is a sideboard nearly half of which is taken up with assorted liquors. There is a large brass dinner gong on a wooden stand.

All table-space throughout both rooms is filled with knick-knacks and souvenirs. One whole section of wall is devoted to the original cover designs for London's books. Even more space is given to photographs many of which have typed captions at the bottom of the frame.

Billington closes the door behind him. He stands stunned for the moment taking in the size and clutter of the room. His eyes sweep back and forth.
He moves into the room; wandering, unsure where to begin.

He approaches the wall devoted to book covers and photographs. He drinks them in.

CLOSE-UP of various titles -- The Call Of The Wild, White Fang, The Sea Wolf etc. also lurid and colorful drawings of salivating wolves and dogs, fierce men fighting for life in the Klondike, on the masthead, in the jungle of the cities, etc.

CLOSE-UP of photographs:
A very young London seated in a small skiff.


Two young girls (ages three and four) frolic in a hammock.


London and wife Charmian dangling feet over bow of half-built sailboat.

The sailboat Snark at dockside. Caption: sailing day April 1907.

London at the wheel of the Snark.

South Sea dancers.

South Sea warriors.

London shooting the sun with a sextant.

London in a costume of human hair: chest piece and skirt. He wears a crown on his head and holds a large wooden gourd.

London and Charmian with gloves on boxing in the backyard.

London with great Shire stallion. Four blue ribbons have been attached to the frame.

A bull. A red ribbon attached to frame.

SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS. SEKINE ENTERS.
Billington turns from the pictures and sees Sekine standing at the dining table with a handful of flowers and pomegranate blossoms. As Billington watches, Sekine deftly weaves the flowers into a wreath which he places around the goldfish bowl at the center of the table.

Billington approaches the table. Sekine looks up.

BILLINGTON
That's very beautiful.

Sekine smiles and sweeps a few scattered blossoms off the table and into his hand.

BILLINGTON (CONT'D)
The driver... Hazen? He said Mr. London was making moving pictures.

SEKINE
Yes. Yes. Behind the stable. You go. O.K.?

BILLINGTON
Yes. Thanks.

EXT. DAY. NEAR THE STABLE

Billington approaches. From out of nowhere Possum appears. He bounds after Billington barking madly.

Billington turns clapping his hands and calling the dog.

As Billington bends over, the dog bounds into his arms knocking him over backwards.

Billington is on his back. Possum perches on his chest furiously licking his face. Billington laughs helplessly.

Suddenly, on either side of Billington's face, appear large black boots. He looks up.

Looming over him is a tall heavy-set man with a handlebar moustache. This is EARNEST HOPKINS the reporter. He is in his late fifties with thinning hair and a florid complexion. He wears a plaid shirt and baggy brown pants.

HOPKINS
(In a booming voice)
Well what have we here? What's all the commotion about?
Billington pushes the dog off and scrambles to his feet. He wipes his face with his sleeve and looks sheepishly at the other man.

Hopkins breaks into a deep full-chested laugh.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
So you're Jack's young visitor. Looks like you found the welcoming committee alright. (BEAT) Turn around. Let me brush you off.

Hopkins brushes the straw from Billington's jacket as Possum continues to jump up on the boy's leg. Hopkins gives the dog a gentle shove with his foot.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
Enough Possum! Get outta here.

The dog backs off and sits. Hopkins finishes and turns Billington around by the shoulders. He thrusts out his hand.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
Earnest Hopkins.

They shake hands.

BILLINGTON
James Billington. Thanks. (LAUGHING) He took me a little by surprise. (BEAT) I was trying to find where the pictures were being...

HOPKINS
(Interrupting)
Sure. Come on along. We're just on the other side of the barn.

They walk along the side of the barn.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
Heard all this barking an such so I came arunnin'. (LAUGHS) Left poor Jack going around in circles on his manure spreader.

As they come around the side of the stable a large field can be seen. In the field are TWO MEN with cameras. One is a motion picture camera with a tripod. The other is a still camera. Moving around the men in a rough circle is London riding a manure spreader drawn by two horses.
As soon as London sees them he waves and

LONDON
(letter and laughing)
Hey! Come on Hop. You've forsaken me.
Haven't got all day to perch up here.

HOPKINS
Find yourself a spot. We're almost finished.

Hopkins heads into the field at a trot.

Billington watches after him then moves over to an apple tree and sits.

London stops the spreader as Hopkins approaches. Hopkins points back towards Billington and the breeze carries snatches of good-natured laughter back to Billington.

London resumes his circular trip around the field. The motion picture camera pans with London's movements.

We see London through the camera's eye: he wears a white shirt and white riding pants tucked into brown leather puttees. A wide black tie is loosely knotted at the neck. On his head a brown wide-brimmed ranger hat.

London is five foot nine and very much over-weight at 195 plus. He looks pasty and bloated, obviously in poor health.

HOPKINS (O.S.)
(lettering)
Alright that'll do it, Jack. You can stop.

London stops the spreader and the three men approach.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
O.K. I just want a couple of stills and we'll call it quits.

LONDON
You're the boss.

London climbs down from the spreader. He reaches back in and pulls out a rifle. He leans on it like a cane as the pictures are taken.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Got everything I need.
HOPKINS
Fine. That's it then.

LONDON
Good. How 'bout a drink?

HOPKINS
Sounds great to me. Let me get these fellas headed back to town and I'll join you.

LONDON
Pleasure meeting the both of you. If you find yourselves in this part of the woods again you make sure you stop on by.

London shakes hands with both men and then heads off towards Billington. He moves slowly with a decided limp on the left side. He throws the rifle butt out cane-like as he walks. In the b.g. the men gather their equipment together.

London whistles and Possum races into the frame. The dog makes a beeline for London and jumps frantically up on his master's leg. London stops and gives the dog a vigorous scratching behind the ears.

Billington rises and moves towards London.

A HIGH, WIDE-ANGLE SHOT: There is no sound other than the wind. London and Billington shake hands and talk. Beyond them clearly visible are the deep furrows made by the spreader. Through the rough circle of furrows the two cameramen, toting their equipment, follow Hopkins towards the stable.

London and Billington move off across the field in the direction of the house. Possum runs in energetic circles around them. The wind gusts blowing the fields of buff-colored grasses as we look out over the Sonoma Valley.

EXT. DAY. THE BACKYARD.

From the rear as London and Billington cross the yard. In the b.g. is the house. Extending off the back are two glassed-in sleeping porches: London's S.L. and his wife's S.R.

There is a small flower garden, a hammock hung between two oak trees, a small fountain with goldfish, and a concrete table with four wrought-iron chairs.
LONDON
(Pointing S.L.)
And up the road a piece is the Pig Palace. (GRINNING) That piggery will be the delight of every pig man in the U.S. You mark my words. Stone floors, individual stalls. Even running water!

London halts by the table. Obviously in some pain, he flops down into one of the chairs.

LONDON
Sit down. Sit down. (BEAT) Walking is something I try to avoid so let's take a load off, huh?

Billington sits. He is both happy and nervous. His eyes flicker from the table-top to London and back again.

London leans the rifle against the table and regards Billington steadily.

LONDON
Well what do you think? Of course you've only seen a part. The rest will have to wait until we ride. But what do you think about my Beauty Ranch?

BILLINGTON
I hardly know what to think. (BEAT) I've never thought of you as a farmer.

LONDON
(Laughing)
That's what they all say.

BILLINGTON
I mean it's so ambitious...but what are you trying to do?

London takes off his ranger hat and places it on the table. His brown hair is thick and unruly. Habitually a lank of it slips down onto his face. Unconsciously he shoves it back up.

LONDON
I'm trying to do what the Chinese have done for centuries. Namely to farm without commercial fertilizers. (BEAT) To rebuild land that has been worked out by misuse.
(SLAPPING THE TABLE) Good soil, Jim. That's the secret. There's no reason for hunger when good soil worked by one man can feed one hundred!

London pulls out a pack of cigarettes. He offers one to Billington who refuses. London lights one.

    LONDON (CONT'D)
    It's dreadfully hard for me to get my friends to understand just what this ranch means to me. (BEAT) I don't know... I guess it's what actresses or racehorses or collecting stamps are to other men.

Anyway that's enough about me. (BEAT) I'm glad you're here. I was very sorry to hear about your father. He was a fine man.

    BILLINGTON
    Thank you.

    LONDON
    I mean it. You can't spend months snowed in with a man without finding what he's made of.

    ELIZA
    (Calling O.S.)
    Jack. (BEAT) Jack.

ELIZA comes around the side of the house.

    ELIZA (CONT'D)
    There you are. Oh! I'm sorry I didn't know you were busy.

    LONDON
    It's alright.

Eliza approaches the table. Billington stands.

    LONDON (CONT'D)
    Eliza, this is Jim Billington. My sister.

Billington takes her hand as

    ELIZA
    Oh yes. Of course. How nice you've come.
BILLINGTON

How do you do?

LONDON

Eliza here is the boss. Runs the whole shooting match.

Eliza blushes with pleasure.

LONDON (CONT'D)

All I have to do is the simple task of paying the bills.

ELIZA

(Scolding playfully)

Oh Jack!

LONDON

 Alright Sis sit down and tell me what I can do for you.

Eliza and Billington sit.

ELIZA

The harnesses have finally come in. I'd practically given up hope.  
(SHE GIVES A SLY LOOK TO LONDON)

But this morning I had a feeling so I called.

An amused smile plays on London's face.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

(Triumphant)

They came in just yesterday!

London laughs. He looks sidelong at Billington and rolls his eyeballs.

LONDON

Aaaha! So you had a feeling, huh? More telepathic hunches?

ELIZA

(Feigning a pout)

You just stop your teasing Jack London! You'll have Mr. Billington here thinking me some sort of loon.

BILLINGTON

Oh no. Not at all. (BEAT) Please call me Jim.
ELIZA
(Flash Billington a smile)
Anyway I want to send Hazen to pick them up if you don't need him for anything.

LONDON
Well he's gonna run a couple of fellas to the station. No that'll be just fine.

ELIZA
Is Charmian any better? I haven't had a moment to pop in.

LONDON
She's still feeling poorly.

ELIZA
(Standing)
Well let me catch Hazen before he runs off.

Eliza turns to leave and then stops.

ELIZA
Oh Jack. I hate to bring this up now but we must go over the accounts. (Beat)
Everything needs straightening before you can leave for New York.

Eliza looks at London helplessly and he nods wearily.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
It was nice meeting you Mr...ah...Jim.
I must hurry now. Bye.

Eliza bustles off.

London removes a handkerchief from his pocket and wipes the sweatband of his hat. He puts the hat on and gets slowly to his feet dragging up the rifle.

LONDON
Believe me this ranch really burns up the shekels.

BILLINGTON
(Rising)
Mr. London? I...I didn't realize your wife was ill. Perhaps this isn't a good time for me to be visiting.
London plants the rifle in front of him and grasps it with both hands.

LONDON
Nonsense. The Mate's just a little under the weather. That's all. Nothing serious.
(BEAT) Damn shame though. Today's our anniversary. The tenth.

London puts an arm on Billington's shoulder and they move away from the table towards the house.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Why don't you go ahead and call me Jack. Nobody ever Mr. London's me. I put up with no more formalities than I have to.

Side by side they move across the yard. Billington's easy youthful gait is matched by London's awkward tentative walk.

INT. DAY. THE LIVINGROOM.

London enters followed by Billington.

LONDON
(Calling)
Sekine!

London drops into the farthest sofa.

LONDON
Have a seat, Jim.

Billington sits. SEKINE ENTERS from the kitchen and crosses to London's side.

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Handing him the rifle)
Put this away will you Sekine.

London bends down and removes his puttees. In the b.g. Sekine puts the rifle in the rack.

LONDON (CONT'D)
How's our Lady?

SEKINE
She resting Master.
LONDON
Good. (BEAT) We'll need some whiskey.

Sekine nods, picks up the puttees and EXITS.

London removes his left shoe and begins to massage his ankle. He looks up at Billington and

LONDON
(With slight anger)
Rheumatism. (BEAT) Well...I'm a rider not a walker. That's for damn sure.

BILLINGTON
(Awestruck)
I just can't get over this room. I...
I was in here earlier. Looking at the pictures and things...browsing.
(EMBARRASSED SMILE)
I hope you don't mind?

LONDON
(Proudly)
Oh no. Not a bit.

HOPKINS ENTERS.

HOPKINS
Well they're on their way. How 'bout that drink?

LONDON
On its way.

Hopkins sits beside London.

LONDON (CONT'D)
You know I almost forgot. Earnest told me he saved you from the vicious Possum!

General laughter.

BILLINGTON
I'm afraid I was taken by surprise. But I couldn't have asked for a more enthusiastic greeting.

London slaps Hopkins knee.
LONDON
Young Jim here wants to be a writer. Maybe you can give him a few pointers. (BEAT) Earnest is with the Bulletin.

HOPKINS
Pointers! From me? Aren't you being modest today. (BEAT) A writer, huh? The exotic sort like our host here or the lowly garden-variety newspaperman.

BILLINGTON
(Serious)
I'm not quite sure yet. I'm leaning towards newspapers.

LONDON
He's intent on interviewing me for the University! (BEAT) After all the railing I've done over what they teach I'm distressed to find they're studying me.

HOPKINS
(Winking to Billington)
The Lord moves in mysterious ways.

SEKINE ENTERS with three glasses and a bottle on a silver tray.

LONDON
This newspaper hack and I will have a whiskey, Sekine. How bout you Jim?

BILLINGTON
No. Nothing thanks.

HOPKINS
(Amused)
Aha! That settles that. Obviously not a newsman. Sounds suspiciously like Upton Sinclair to me. What do you think Jack?

Hopkins and London roar with laughter.

LONDON
Far be it from me to tempt the Devil. Cider perhaps? Fresh daily. Our own apples.
BILLINGTON
(Challenged)
Well maybe a small whiskey.

HOPKINS
(Hooting)
Another triumph for John Barleycorn!

Sekine pours and serves the drinks. He leaves the bottle on the table between them and EXITS.

BILLINGTON
Are you planning an article? Is that the reason for all the pictures?

HOPKINS
Uh huh.

London pours himself and Hopkins another. Billington nurses his.

LONDON
Don't let him kid you. He's really up here for revenge. The photographs are only a blind.

HOPKINS
(Mock seriousness)
Jack. Jack. What will the boy think!

LONDON
Listen. The last time Hop was up I took him to the lake. Finn Frolich and I went swimming but he just paddled around in the canoe. (LAUGHING) Well Finn and I rose like two sea-monsters from the deep and dumped him! City clothes and all!

You should have seen him. Sputtering away, his starched collar flapping around his neck like a pair of water-wings!

(CONSPIRATORIALLY) He's just here biding his time waiting to commit some dastardly act. (BEAT) Course he'll never admit it.

Laughter. London replaces his shoe.
LONDON (CONT'D)
Have to check on the Mate. I'm going to leave you two to your own devices. I'll dine with Charmian but perhaps we can get together afterwards.

HOPKINS
How 'bout a little red dog?

LONDON
Sure. It's been ages. (BEAT) What do you say, Jim?

BILLINGTON
Red dog?

HOPKINS
Cards. An all time favorite among newsmen. It takes no skill and the betting's fast.

LONDON
Twenty-five cents a shot. You'll catch on.

You know Hop, I haven't played since Sterling was up.

BILLINGTON
George Sterling? The poet?

LONDON
Yeah. George and I would play for hours.

Hopkins pours himself a drink.

HOPKINS
The story goes that every time Sterling lost a hand he'd have a shot of Jack's whiskey. He figured that way he always stayed even.

Laughter.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
Wait a minute. That's not all of it. If my source is correct you'd write a word whenever you lost. (BEAT) Just to stay even.
LONDON
(Laughing)
Well you have to keep your head above water.

London raises his glass in a toast. He downs it. He rises.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Until later then.

London moves off towards the door.

INT. DAY. CHARMIAN'S SITTING ROOM.

It is a bright cheerful room. A glassed-in sleeping porch adjoins it. There is a desk with typewriter and scattered manuscript pages. Several pictures of Charmian and London are displayed on the desk-top.

There is an armchair with a small table and lamp, a fireplace, and a Polynesian tapa rug on the floor.

A woman lies on the sofa covered by a fur rug. This is CHARMIAN LONDON. She is forty-five years old but her girlish mannerisms and slender figure belie her age. She has very widespread eyes and reddish brown hair. Charmian has a penchant for wearing red and a liking for the frilly lace caps of the last century.

As LONDON ENTERS, Charmian's eyes flutter open. She pulls herself into a sitting position.

CHARMIAN
(Pouting)
I was wondering when you'd get around to me.

LONDON
How's it going Mate? Feeling better?

Charmian makes room and London sits beside her. She takes his hand.

CHARMIAN
Now I am.

London kisses her forehead.

LONDON
Know what today is?
CHARMIAN
(Coyly)
Should I?

LONDON
Playing hard to get?

Me?

London holds out his other hand which contains a small velvet box. Charmian takes it and opens it. Inside is a small wristwatch.

CHARMIAN
(Hugging him)
Oh Mate! It's exquisite. I adore it!

LONDON
Happy anniversary.

Charmian removes her arms from around his neck. She fingers the watch and looks crestfallen.

CHARMIAN
I hadn't forgotten. (BEAT) But I haven't gotten into town. I'm...

LONDON
Hush. None of that. Just get well that's present enough.

CHARMIAN
I am feeling better.

London kisses her again.

LONDON
It's Swiss. I ordered it and had Earnest bring it up.

CHARMIAN
It's beautiful I shall have it engraved. (BEAT) What shall we say?

Charmian slips the watch on her wrist.

LONDON
Oh, 'Mate from Wolf', I guess.

Charmian gives him a curious look.
LONDON (CONT'D)
If you don't mind. (BEAT) I have wished you would call me Wolf more often.

CHARMIAN
I wish I had since you would have liked it. (BEAT) But it seemed so preciously George's name for you. That's why I seldom used it.

Charmian reaches up and pushes the fallen lock of hair out of London's eyes. She looks as much at the wristwatch as at his face.

INT. NIGHT. THE DINING ROOM.

London sits at the head of the table. Billington and Hopkins are pulled close to him on either side. A card game is in progress. The room is dim except for a single light over the table.

Hopkins smokes a large cigar and the room is smoke-filled. On the table are three glasses and a whiskey bottle half empty. Poker chips are scattered about.

Billington is bleary-eyed. He has changed into casual clothes. He holds the largest pile of chips.

A fire roars in the livingroom. Nearby a phonograph cranks out Caruso.

Hopkins gathers up the cards.

LONDON
No. I'm serious. This is no yarn. Ask Hop. There's at least one double maybe several. I just don't know.

He has cropped up everywhere and in so many different guises that I never know what his next stunt might be. (BEAT) For all I know he might be copyrighting in my name!

Hopkins begins to shuffle the cards.

LONDON (CONT'D)
It's been going on for years now. (BEAT) When I was in California he was in Alaska. When I was in China I was meeting the people who had met him in Alaska! It's absolutely maddening.
LONDON (CONT'D)
He's always gotten me into trouble. When I was in the East he was making love to a married woman in Sacramento. When I was here he was in New York lugging away armfuls of books from the Astor Library on the strength of my name.

HOPKINS
Are you in or out?

LONDON
In.

Hopkins deals. Five cards to each. London regards his cards and his diminished pile of chips.

LONDON (CONT'D)
I'll go for three.

London separates three chips and stacks them in front of him. Hopkins flips over the top card of the deck.

HOPKINS
Beat the queen of hearts?

London shakes his head and tosses his cards down face up. Hopkins rakes London's three chips into the pot.

HOPKINS
How about you Jimmy?

BILLINGTON
Four.

Hopkins shows a king of spades and Billington counters with an ace. Billington takes back his four chips and an additional four from the pot.

HOPKINS
I pass.

Hopkins tosses in his cards and London gathers them up.

LONDON
You know what bothers me the most about this other guy? (BEAT) I keep receiving letters and postcards in a woman's handwriting. They're mailed from San Francisco and she calls me Babe and signs herself Babe!
LONDON (CONT'D)
Now that's alright except when it comes to the postcards! I mean I live in the country here and I'm married. And it bothers other people a whole lot. (GRINNING) If you catch my drift?

London deals. Billington pushes forward four chips. He wins.

HOPKINS
(Laughing)
I don't know about this kid. (BEAT) Yeah. I'll go. Just to make it interesting you understand.

Hopkins tosses in two chips. He wins.

LONDON
Think any of this will rub off on me?

London goes for three. He loses.

HOPKINS
I think, my friend, that you should be writing a few words.

LONDON
Paragraphs you mean.

The record comes to an end. The needle can be heard skipping.

BILLINGTON
(Indicating the phonograph)
Should I...

LONDON
No need. Sekine will handle it.

Hopkins places his cigar in the ashtray. He blows a great cloud of smoke down into his hands as he mimes a crystal ball.

HOPKINS
Jim my boy. I foresee a lucrative future for you in the pressrooms of America.

Billington is intoxicated and caught between pleasure and acute embarrassment at his winnings.

Billington picks up the cards and begins to shuffle them sloppily.
BILLINGTON
(Hastily)
I guess you get a great deal of mail.
(BEAT) I mean...well not like that
crank stuff but just letters from your
readers?

LONDON
(Smiling)
Thousands. All from complete unknowns.
(BEAT) I've got a phonograph into which
I talk all my replies. But I still can't
keep up.

London lights a cigarette.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Lots of requests for money. As many as
five a day. (BEAT) It is manifestly im-
possible to lend money to the multitudes
who beg by mail. I know. I've tried it.
Never heard another word from any of them.
(BEAT) Except of course the few who tried
it a second time.

Billington deals.

HOPKINS
I've got it this time. Four of these
little beauties.

Hopkins throws out the chips. Billington draws a seven of
clubs. Hopkins slams down a jack.

HOPKINS
I told you! (BEAT) It was nothing.
Really.

Hopkins laughs gleefully. London drums his cards on the table.
He stares at his seven remaining chips.

SOUND: the music begins again.

SEKINE can be seen hovering over the phonograph.

LONDON
O.K. Jim, give it to me. I'm good for
three.

Billington pulls a three of hearts.

HOPKINS
Well there's something you can beat.

London groans.
LONDON
I don't believe it. I don't even
have a heart!

London tosses down his cards and laughs in disgust.

HOPKINS
I've heard that.

LONDON
(Good-naturedly)
Oh go to hell!

BILLINGTON
I pass if that's any consolation.

LONDON
I quit. (BEAT) While I still have a
dollar to my name.

London rises. He goes to the sideboard and gets a silver bowl. He returns with it to the table. The bowl has money in it: about fifteen dollars. London throws in his four chips and extracts a dollar. He pockets it.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Tomorrow when I answer my latest begging
letters I shall tell them all that I
am unable to comply because I have been fleeced by some young card-sharp.

I'll try and give you some time tomorrow,
Jim. I work till noon so I won't be avail-
able before then.

HOPKINS
Don't worry. I was planning on showing
him around a bit.

LONDON
Good.

London drops a hand on Billington's shoulder as he passes.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Glad you're here. (BEAT) 'Night Earnest.

London heads across the room for the door. Billington stares after him, lost in thought.
LONDON EXITS.

Hopkins raps his knuckles on the table, breaking-in on Billington.

BILLINGTON
Huh?

HOPKINS
I'd watch my water-glass if I were you.

My what?

HOPKINS
Jack's favorite remedy for the overawed visitor. The leaky water-glass. It never fails. As soon as that water pours down their fronts they always manage to get both feet back on earth.

BILLINGTON
I'm sorry...I. (LAUGHS) Thanks for the warning.

Hopkins begins to count his chips. After a moment he looks up.

HOPKINS
I don't think I've ever laughed as hard as I have in this room. (BEAT) Jack's always been a joker. An incurable trickster.

Hopkins pours them both a drink.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
This room has been the scene of some of the most bizarre gatherings. You couldn't imagine. (LAUGHING) Capitalists, socialists, anarchists, royalty, even, tramps. All together right here at this table. And Jack presiding over all!

Occasionally he'd have a particularly hot-headed anarchist. An Emma Goldman, lets say. And Jack would put by their plate this beautifully bound book called Four Weeks, A Loud Book.

Well of course, the unsuspecting anarchist would open it. And as soon as they did it would explode! Naturally they'd be terrified and Jack would whoop and holler that so timid a person could never overthrow the world even if given a chance.
Hopkins laughs convulsively and Billington adds a drunken giggle.

Hopkins divides the chips in the pot between himself and Billington. He takes his share of the money from the silver bowl and then scoots it across the table to Billington.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
I'll tell you one they pulled on me. Some of the beds in the guesthouse are rigged with ropes. Well I was just an innocent and I woke up in the middle of the night to this great shaking. Good God! I was scared stiff. I went racing outside in my underwear screaming; earthquake! Earthquake! Trying to raise the ranch. Only to find Jack and several others rolling around on the ground in hysterics!

Billington collects his money. Hopkins grinds out his cigar.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
Guess I've talked your ear off.

BILLINGTON
No. Really, I enjoyed it.

HOPKINS
I'm afraid rambling is an occupational hazard.

Hopkins checks his pocket watch. He pulls a silver flask from his hip pocket. He fills the flask from the whiskey bottle on the table. He spills. He wipes it up with a red bandanna.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
Interested in a walk. (BEAT) I usually walk before turning in.

BILLINGTON
Yeah. I could probably use the air.

HOPKINS
Well drink up.

EXT. NIGHT. THE ROAD.

The moon is bright. Billington and Hopkins walk side by side. Billington is very unsteady. Every four or five steps he lurches into Hopkins. Hopkins takes no notice.
It's chilly enough to see their breath but neither man wears a coat.

HOPKINS

I'll tell you one damn thing, Jim. There ain't a newsman alive doesn't have some dog-eared novel stashed in the bottom drawer.

Every once in awhile you get a snoot-full and drag it out. (LAUGHING) It's exactly like drinking with an old friend you haven't seen in years. (BEAT) It's great to see him but you soon find there's not a helluva lot to say.

BILLINGTON

You've got a book?

HOPKINS

Five or six. At least. (BEAT) Absolute tripe.

Billington giggles.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)

Really. I'm serious. (BEAT) Never finished one of 'em. You see I always get preachy when I write fiction. I don't know why, I just do. And there's nothing I hate worse.

Hopkins takes a pull from the flask and hands it to Billington.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)

Trouble is I just feel comfortable with facts. Ya know? That's bedrock. Know what I mean?

BILLINGTON

Sure. I know 'xactly what you mean.

Grinning idiotically, Billington recaps the flask with a flourish and hands it back.

HOPKINS

That canoe story Jack told? About dumping me? Didn't happen like that at all. Oh I was in the canoe alright. But I'd been swimming and I even had my bathingsuit on. (BEAT) Now those are the facts. But Jack's a storyteller. And there's no way 'round the fact that his version's better than mine.
HOPKINS (CONT'D)
See? That's the difference right there between writers and newspapermen. I don't know. Maybe that's the choice you gotta make finally. Between a good story and a true one.

Hopkins pounds an arm down on Billington's shoulder, causing him to stumble.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
But not to worry. You've got time yet.

They walk on in silence listening to the sounds of night.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
(Suddenly)
Hey! Have you seen The Ruins?

WOLFHOUSE

BILLINGTON

No, 'course you haven't. (BEAT) Should though. Oh yes that's a must.

BILLINGTON
Don'ya think we oughtta wait till mornin'?

HOPKINS

Nope. I don't. Now is the time. (BEAT) Here take a slug of this.

Hopkins offers the flask.

BILLINGTON

(Laughing)
Earnes' I can't. I can't even walk!

Hopkins pulls to a halt suddenly. Billington continues on several steps before noticing that Hopkins has stopped. He lurches to a halt.

HOPKINS

Walkin' O.K. to me.

Hopkins rejoins Billington. He holds out the flask.
HOPKINS
Gotta. Loosens the tongue and lubricates the soul. (BEAT) Good for night-vision too. Beats hell outta carrots an' tonics an' all that.

Hopkins pokes at the flask with a large finger.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
This is the one that'll bring you eyeball to eyeball with FACTS!

Billington giggles and accepts the flask. He upends it, taking a mighty swig as

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
There. Up ahead.

Close by, nestled in a grove of redwood trees, a dark looming structure is visible. Five giant chimneys rise like spires among the trees. In the moonlight the remains of the house give off an eerie purplish glow.

The two men skirt a split-rail fence and approach the stone structure.

Stone steps lead up to a front stoop beyond which is a large gaping doorway. There are gigantic picture windows on either side of the entrance.

The men halt at the steps. It is dark on this side of the house; the ruins and the redwoods combine to keep out the moonlight.

BILLINGTON
My God. It's huge!

HOPKINS
More castle than house fer damn sure.

Billington climbs the stairs and heads for the front door. At the door he changes his mind and moves instead to the S.R. window. Here he leans on the stone sill with his elbows. He studies the shadowy interior.

BILLINGTON
It was really set afire?

Hopkins drops himself down on the steps.

HOPKINS
Yep. It was torched alright. No doubt.
Giving wide berth to the doorway, Billington crosses to the other picture window.

**HOPKINS**
Eighty thousan' bucks worth of burned-out dreams...gutted. (SNAPPING HIS FINGERS) Just like that.

**BILLINGTON**
But who? (BEAT) That's crazy.

**HOPKINS**
Jes' theories and rumors is all.

Billington comes and sits down beside Hopkins.

**HOPKINS (CONT'D)**
Some folks say 'twas Eliza's husband. Bitter divorce goin' on then. He'd had a fight with Jack that day.

Hopkins removes the flask from his pocket.

**HOPKINS (CONT'D)**
(Expansively)
Others suscribe to the theory of the renegade Socialis' frenzied with jealousy over Jack's great good fortune.

**BILLINGTON**
That's pretty par... (GIGGLES)...pretty FAR-fetched. Idn't it?

Hopkins shrugs.

**HOPKINS**
There's even a laborer that Jack threw off the place for beatin' his wife.

I dunno. (BEAT) The who doesn't make much diff'rence, I guess.

Hopkins drinks.

**HOPKINS (CONT'D)**
Knocked somthin' outta Jack though. Somthin' big.

He offers the flask to Billington.

**BILLINGTON**
Oh no. Not fer me...really.
HOPKINS
Ya can't get drunk. Not here. Believe me...I know what 'm talking about!

BILLINGTON
Earnes'. Earnes' yer overlookin' the fact that...(LAUGHING)...I can hardly stan' up!

Hopkins waves a finger in Billington's face.

HOPKINS
No no no. Wait one minute. You see... you see this rock? All this rock?

Hopkins launches himself to his feet. He gestures to the ruins.

HOPKINS
Every little bit of it's the same. Ameth...amethystine. All of it. (BEAT) Greek. Take Greek?

BILLINGTON
No...latin.

HOPKINS
Same root. (BEAT) Amethystos in Greek. Means not drunken. Not drunken! you understand?

Hopkins drops back down beside Billington with a broad smile on his face.

HOPKINS
They believed amethyst prevented intoxication!

Laughing, Billington takes a drink. He presses the palm of his free hand against the stones of the wall. The whiskey goes down the wrong way and he coughs and sprays it out. He breaks into uproarious laughter. He laughs and coughs at the same time.

Hopkins rescues the flask and slaps him several times on the back.

HOPKINS
Alright?

BILLINGTON
(Breathless with laughter)
Earnes' Earnes' are you tellin' the truth? IS that true?
HOPKINS
As true as true can be.

Billington is laughing so hard that tears roll down his cheeks. The laughter lapses then begins again. He leans back on the stairs, his elbows on the step above.

BILLINGTON
(Sighing)
Oooh. That's funny. (BEAT) Really funny.

Hopkins places the open flask on the tread between them. From his shirt pocket he takes tobacco and rolling papers.

HOPKINS
Want one?

BILLINGTON
No. Don't like it much.

There is silence while Hopkins rolls the cigarette. Billington watches intently.

BILLINGTON (CONT'D)
Ya know, I never could get the knack. (BEAT) Stole some papers from my Dad once. Snuck into the woods an' smoked dry leaves.

Paper 'd always tear tho'.

Billington sits up and hangs his head down between his knees.

HOPKINS
Oh I can roll 'em with the best. (BEAT) Leastwise when I'm drunk.
It's when I'm hungover I can't. (BEAT) The dam' shakes. (BEAT) That's why I always carry a pack with me.

Sure ya don't want one?

Billington's head still hangs down. He does not reply. Hopkins shrugs and strikes a wooden match against the stone.

Billington lifts his head. In the light of the flaring match his face is drawn and beaded with perspiration. Hopkins lights his cigarette.
Billington's body suddenly quivers and he grabs his mouth.

BILLINGTON
(Groaning)

Oh God!

Billington jumps up, knocking over the flask, and stumbles off in the dark towards the ruins. For a moment he leans against the wall pressing his face on the cool stones. He pushes off the wall and vomits.

Hopkins remains seated looking after Billington. Finally, he retrieves the flask. He wipes it on his pants and then slips it back into his hip pocket.

He stands and approaches Billington.

Billington is sitting slumped against the wall. He looks haggard and miserable. He eventually raises his eyes from the ground and looks at Hopkins. A giggle breaks from him.

BILLINGTON
(Giggling)
So mush for the Greeks.

Hopkins laughs.

HOPKINS
Come on, son. Lets getcha inta bed.

Hopkins grabs him by the arms and lifts him up. Billington stops giggling. He shakes himself loose and falls back against the wall. He begins to shiver. He hugs himself.

BILLINGTON
(With a tight smile)
'Is cold.

Billington becomes almost vacant for a moment. Then a violent sob wracks him.

BILLINGTON (CONT'D)
(Whining)
Jesus Earnes' whadda he need a castle for...

Hopkins pulls him off the wall.

HOPKINS
Come on, Jimmy. Tomorrow's another day.
INT. DAY. LONDON'S WORKROOM.

It is a good size room with bookshelves from floor to ceiling. The top shelf is given over to storage of large white cardboard boxes. There is a window onto the side-yard: in the distance is the stable. There are several metal file cabinets and a large safe has been fitted into the fireplace, thus incapacitating it.

London is seated at a large rolltop desk. Beyond him is a doorway opening onto the glassed-in sleeping porch. The windows and bamboo shades are up and the backyard is visible.

Billington sits at a flat desk several feet from London. The desk is cluttered with pamphlets and papers. Books in the process of being read are scattered everywhere. Between the two desks is a rolling dictaphone machine.

London wears a green eyeshade and smokes.

Billington is hungover and nervous. He has cut himself shaving and a small piece of cotton still sticks to his neck.

London stubs out a cigarette in a large abalone shell.

LONDON
(Vaguely)
Rebuild? Of course, any time now.

BILLINGTON
There's no question it was arson?

LONDON
To be perfectly honest, Jim, it still hurts to talk about...even now.

BILLINGTON
(Pressing)
But you do have a definite idea who?

LONDON
(Evenly)
I care not to utter another word on the whole sad topic. (BEAT) I will say this: I'd rather be the man whose house was burned than the man who burned it.

London lights another cigarette.
BILLINGTON
Do you always smoke so much?

LONDON
Always. (BEAT) There are all sorts of bad habits in this world. Cigarettes. Overwork. One's as bad as the other and I do both.

I'll bet you even money that cigarettes don't kill me.

BILLINGTON
No bet.

There is a knock and SEKINE ENTERS.

SEKINE
Excuse Master. Anything you need?

LONDON
Yes. Juice. Uum...apple, pineapple. Anything that's cool.

That's the one hitch about smoking. Throat gets awfully hot and dry.

How 'bout it, Jim? Something stronger?

BILLINGTON
Oh no. Please. I'm afraid I had more than my share last night. (LAUGHING) Juice'll be just fine.

SEKINE EXITS.

There is a brief silence as Billington consults his notebook.

LONDON
Tied one on last night, did you?

BILLINGTON
(Embarrassed smile)
Feels like I tied on several actually.

London laughs.

BILLINGTON (CONT'D)
(Hurriedly)
I...I want to ask you about when you first started writing. You were working in a factory, is that right?
LONDON
Yep. Thirteen hours a day. (BEAT) That didn't leave much time for composition. (BEAT) What happened was that the San Francisco Call offered a prize for a descriptive article and my mother urged me to give it a try.

I'd shipped out on a sealer to Japan, so I choose to write about a typhoon off the coast of China.

BILLINGTON
And you were how old?

LONDON
Sixteen. (BEAT) Anyway the first prize came to me and that success turned my thoughts to writing. (BEAT) But my blood was still too hot for such a settled routine.

BILLINGTON
So you went tramping around the country instead?

LONDON
Yes. (BEAT) By the way, every once in a while I run upon sketches of my life, wherein, delicately phrased, I learn that it was in order to study sociology that I became a tramp.

Well this is very nice and thoughtful but it's inaccurate. So you might as well have it right. (BEAT) I became a tramp... well...because the wanderlust in my blood wouldn't let me rest. The sociology was incidental.

BILLINGTON
I understand. But it was formative. I mean as far as your revolutionary stance was concerned?

LONDON
Oh of course. I achieved a new concept. (BEAT) As a tramp I was behind the scenes of society -- down in the cellar. I learned that the dignity of labor was not what I had been told.
LONDON (CONT'D)
As a matter of fact, I couldn't see any dignity at all! So my new concept was that manual labor was undignified and didn't pay. (BEAT) Brains paid not brawn and I resolved never again to offer my muscles for sale in the brawn market. (BEAT) I soon returned to California with the intention of developing my brain.

BILLINGTON
It was some time though before your first sale?

LONDON
Oh Lord yes. Years. I put myself through high school first. (BEAT) My writing was getting nowhere so I shipped out for the Yukon with the first rush in '97. But you know that part.

When I returned I buckled on the harness and went up against the magazines. (BEAT) I knew nothing about it. I didn't even know what an editor looked like. I didn't know a soul who had ever tried to write anything. Much less publish it.

(SHAKING HIS HEAD) All my manuscripts came back. It seemed like the workings of a souless machine.

(POINTING) I've still got alot of them up in those boxes.

BILLINGTON
But finally you did sell...TO A MAN ON TRAIL, wasn't it?

LONDON
(Smiling)
Yep. I never panned any gold but the Klondike was my mother lode alright.

BILLINGTON
It's widely reported that you are now the highest paid writer in the world. How does that make you feel?
LONDON
(With boyish grin)
Just fine. Beats the hell outta being poor. (BEAT) It's money I want...or rather the things money can buy. I could never possibly have too much.

I think it was Dr. Johnson who said no man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money. Well I'm no blockhead I assure you. I'd write rot if someone would pay me for it!

SEKINE ENTERS. He carries a tray with a pitcher and two glasses.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Sekine! You're a lifesaver. What have we got?

SEKINE
Apple juice. O.K.?

LONDON
O.K.!

Sekine serves both. He places the tray and pitcher on the desk beside Billington. SEKINE EXITS.

They both drink.

BILLINGTON
From your apples? It's excellent.

LONDON
Thanks.

Billington consults his notes.

BILLINGTON
Have you many unfinished stories?

LONDON
Not a one. I complete everything I start. If it's good, I sign it and send it out. If it isn't good, I sign it and send it out.

Let me tell you how I write. I type as fast as I write so each day sees the work all on the final manuscript.
LONDON (CONT'D)
On the day I finish it, I fold it up and send it off without once going back over it.

BILLINGTON
(Incredulous)
You never go back over it?

LONDON
I never revise. (BEAT) I never do things a second time. I'm not proud of the fact. I'm so made, that's all.

I just can't rewrite. But in turn I write more slowly. I used to go at it like a hurricane but I gradually grew out of that bad habit.

London sips his juice and looks at Billington keenly.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Never write anything at white heat. (BEAT) Hell is kept warm by unpublished manuscripts written at white heat.

BILLINGTON
That sort of touches on my next question. Do you have advice for aspiring writers?

LONDON
Like yourself? (BEAT) In my opinion there are three things necessary for success. First, a study and knowledge of literature. Second, a knowledge of life, and third a working philosophy of life.

(LAUGHING) Negatively, I would suggest that the best preparation is a stern refusal to blindly accept the canons of literary art as laid down by high school and university english teachers. (BEAT) I found that I had to unlearn about everything they taught me.

BILLINGTON
I think you might find that the universities have changed considerably.
LONDON
Perhaps so. I only completed the first half of my freshman year before a lack of money and the conviction that the university was not giving me all I wanted forced me to quit. (BEAT) There's a terribly bourgeois valuation put upon the university sheepskin.

BILLINGTON
Well for one who never finished college it must be flattering to be so often called a genius.

LONDON
Ha! (BEAT) I've been called worse I guess.

London leans back and lights a cigarette.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Genius? No there's no genius in me. Too practical. (BEAT) Take George Sterling, though. You know his work?

BILLINGTON
Yes.

LONDON
Now there's genius. Big genius. (BEAT) That's him up there. Ages ago in Carmel.

London points to a picture on the wall. It is of a nude man sitting on a beach. His arms are folded on his knees and his face rests hidden in his arms. Beside the feet which are stuck in the sand lies an abalone shell.

London looks wistfully at the picture for a moment.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Now you hand him a problem of almost any sort and ten to one he'll give you a masterful solution. (BEAT) That's what I call genius. Me? I just read a lot. Always have.

BILLINGTON
Even as a child?
LONDON
Especially then. Morning, afternoon and night. I read in bed, at the table, to and from school, even at recess. (LAUGHING) I began to get the jerks. To everyone I snapped, 'get away get away! You make me nervous!'

BILLINGTON
Did you always want to be a writer?

LONDON
Actually my first preference was to be a musician. When I was eight or nine I found a copy of Ouida's novel, Signa. Do you know it? (BEAT) Well I was greatly impressed.

(CLOSING HIS EYES) I think the opening is: 'he was only a little lad, yet he had dreams of becoming a great musician and having all of Europe at his feet'.

Well I was only a little lad too. (BEAT) I devoured it regularly for a couple of years. The closing chapters were missing so I never knew the ending till I grew up. I just keep dreaming with the hero.

It opened up to me the possibilities of the world of art. In fact it became my star to which I hitched my child's wagon.

BILLINGTON
And your desire to become a musician?

LONDON
(Laughing)
I simply didn't have the talent, so I resolutely gave it up.

London lights a cigarette.

LONDON (CONT'D)
(With slight bitterness)
The things we wish the most for usually pass us by -- at least that's been my experience. (BEAT) I'm still fascinated by music though.
London rises and crosses to the window. He opens it and looks out into the sideyard for a moment.

BILLINGTON
Are you as unconventional as the papers make you out to be?

LONDON
(Turning from window)
I don't know.

London twists his eyeshade around sideways on his head and mugs at Billington.

LONDON (CONT'D)
What do you think?

They both laugh. London straightens the eyeshade.

LONDON (CONT'D)
I'll tell you one thing. My friends have passed the stage of being shocked by anything I do. They simply say: it's only Jack.

I take to conventionality uneasily. Rebeliously. (GRINNING) I'm just a California savage. Ask anyone.

London crosses back to the desk and drops into the chair. He takes a sip of juice and then finally,

LONDON (CONT'D)
Anyway I don't believe everything I read in the newspapers. Do you? (BEAT) Some people never grow up. They retain their childish belief in the papers.

(WAGGING A FINGER) Hell and newspapers are full of men who do careless work.

BILLINGTON
Do you feel that you're unfairly treated?

LONDON
(Shrugs)
Life is so short and people so silly that from the very beginning I made it a point to deny nothing charged against me in the papers. (BEAT) I gave up because I was beaten. I have never yet succeeded in nailing a lie!
London is in pain. It is evidenced by the tightness of his facial muscles; the shaking of his hand as he flicks ashes into the abalone shell. He shifts uncomfortably in his chair and presses one arm tightly against his belly. After a moment he continues, but with the pain comes an added belligerence.

LONDON (CONT'D)
The bigger you are the more people gun for you. That's a fact. (BEAT) The lead dog's fair game for the pack. I accept that as a fact of nature. (A TIGHT SMILE) But that doesn't make it any more tolerable.

I've been made out a plagiarist, an anarchist, a disgrace to the socialist movement. Even a nature-faker. Me! They call me a nature-faker; as if I didn't know what the hell I was writing about! (BEAT) Bunch of lunatics and feeble-minded cretins.

There is a silence. London crushes his cigarette in the ashtray violently, as if it were the source of his pain. He gives Billington a stony stare.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Those that aren't trying to pull you down in the traces are trying to stick their damn muzzles into your lard-pail!

BILLINGTON
Are you alright?

LONDON
I wish to high heaven you could experience the impossibility of pleasing everyone all the time.

London grabs up a handful of letters from his desk. He shakes them and then tosses them back.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Endless requests to assist every struggling artist. Painters, sculptors, writers, musicians, composers, singers! The lot.

Men who want to leave on my hands their mothers, wives, children, grandparents. Whatever! While they pursue their favorite phantom!
LONDON (CONT'D)

Men by the score who want to die here on
my ranch from tuberculosis, leprosy, and
cancer! Oh hell I haven't the time to
enumerate the flotsam and jetsam that
swamps this ranch ten deep year-in and
year-out!

London tosses his eyeshade onto the desk in disgust. He pushes
the hair back from his eyes. He stares at Billington, finally.

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Quiet and challenging)
I grow sometimes to almost hate the masses.
(BEAT) Does that surprise you?

BILLINGTON
(Confused)
I...

LONDON
(Flippantly)
Oh you needn't answer. I see that it
does.

Billington's confusion at London's vehemence gives way to hurt
and astonishment.

BILLINGTON
(Short nervous laugh)
I...I aah. I don't understand how you
can say that! (BEAT) And mean it.

London shrugs and lights a cigarette.

LONDON
Nevertheless I do mean it. (BEAT) I've
done my part. Now I'm just weary. Of
everything. I no longer think of the
world or the movement. This ranch is
my world now. And when the time comes
I'm going to sit right here and let
the revolution go to blazes!

BILLINGTON
But that's precisely what you've always
condemned!

London's pain is forgotten in a wave of bitterness and self-pity.
LONDON

Look. I have something like eight books on Socialism. All my others ooze socialism! Hell, eighteen years ago I went to jail fighting for it.

And now? Now the whole movement's headed along a very lovely sidetrack. And because I disagree with them they now deny I ever struck a blow or did anything for the Cause! They call me a dreamer and dismiss all memory of me.

BILLINGTON

(Desperate)
But that's not true! We...

LONDON

(Interrups sarcastically)
Well I feel I've done a pretty fair share of work for the Revolution. (BEAT) My lectures alone have netted the Cause a few hundred dollars. (SNORTING) And my wounded feelings from the personal abuse of the capitalist press ought to count for a few hundred more.

(LESS FORCEFULLY) A dreamer? (BEAT) Yes I am a dreamer. A great dreamer... just like you. But now I dream of my ranch. Of beautiful horses and soil. And I write for no other purpose than to add to the beauty that belongs to me. (BEAT) A book to add three or four hundred acres to my estate. A story to buy a stallion.

(WEARILY) I don't write because I love the game. I loathe it. I write because I'm well paid for my labor. And that's exactly what I call it -- labor. I'd dig ditches if I could get as much!

My friends don't believe me when I say it but I'm absolutely sincere. I hate my profession! I detest it. (BEAT) What do you think of that, huh? Believe me, I wouldn't think of saying a thing like that if I didn't mean it.

HOPKINS APPEARS unseen at the porch window behind London. He leans on the sill listening.
LONDON (CONT'D)
If I had my choice I'd never put pen to paper. (BEAT) I always write what the editors want anyway, not what I'd like.

Hell! I'd rather win a waterfight in the swimming pool than write the Great American Novel!

Billington is horrified. He stares intently at London: his world caving-in around him.

Still unseen by either man, Hopkins breaks into applause. He has obviously been drinking.

HOPKINS
Bravo! Bravo!

Startled, Billington leaps to his feet. London doesn't even flinch. He turns slowly in his chair to face Hopkins. He looks completely spent.

HOPKINS
Come on. Aren't you two done yet? (BEAT) Let's go riding, Jack. What do you say?

LONDON
(Quietly)
I think not, Earnest. I got in a lot of reading last night, but not much sleep. (BEAT) I think I'll nap.

Hopkins gives London a curious look and appears ready to protest.

HOPKINS
Get some rest then. (BEAT) Come on, James. You and I shall venture to the lake alone. (BEAT) As Charmian declined as well.

Billington nods.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
Well. So be it. We'll just let the old folks lay about then. Meet me out front. I'll have Hazen ready the horses.

Hopkins flashes London a smile and disappears out of view.
There is an awkward silence. London remains slumped in his chair staring out the porch windows.

Billington shakes himself out of his stupor. He picks up his notebook and fingers it uneasily. Finally,

BILLINGTON
(Formally)
I appreciate your time.

London swings around to him. His face is blank. He stares at Billington who can not hold the gaze. Billington's eyes drop to the floor.

BILLINGTON (CONT'D)
I...

BILLINGTON EXITS hurriedly.

London remains seated for several moments. He looks after the retreating Billington. He turns back to the desk and puts out the cigarette. He rises and enters the sleeping porch. Charmian can be seen moving through the garden with a pair of clippers. London leans against the window looking at her. He drops the bamboo curtain down.

CLOSE-UP of the curtain.

EXT. DAY. THE LAKE.

Two horses are tied to a low-hanging branch. S.R. there is a redwood picnic table and benches. Beyond the table stands a log bathhouse. In the b.g. a dock juts out into the lake. Made of rough-hewn wood, it has two pilings at the far end and two more about midway.

Hopkins sits on one of the far pilings chewing on a twig. Billington, hands in pockets, is standing looking out over the water.

There is silence except for the wind and an occasional bird. Hopkins watches Billington carefully. He breaks the twig in half and throws the pieces into the water. Finally,

HOPKINS
You're awfully quiet. (BEAT) Jack really got to you.
BILLINGTON
I don't know. (BEAT) Yeah. I suppose he did.

Everything's so different from what I expected. He's different.

Billington drops onto the piling in a slump avoiding Hopkin's eyes. In the b.g. several ducks cruise the calm waters moving in and out of the trees' shadows.

Hopkins extracts the flask from his backpocket and takes a long pull. He offers the flask to Billington who refuses and then accepts.

Hopkins tosses the flask to him and it clatters at Billington's feet.

HOPKINS
He's contradictory, I'll give you that. But that's something we all have in common. (BEAT) 'cept of course you youngsters.

Billington raises the flask. He drinks too deeply and coughs and sputters.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
For you everything's black and white. (BEAT) Hell the only thing I know black and white's a newspaper. And most of that smears off in your hands.

Hopkins holds out his hand for the flask. Billington tosses it. Hopkins takes another drink. The whiskey begins to take its toll and there is a trace of cruelty as

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
You want him to be more like the book? More like the tales your old man told you? (BEAT) He did didn't he? (BEAT) Well?

Billington sits with his face buried in his hands.

BILLINGTON
(Nearly inaudible)
Yes.

HOPKINS
What?
BILLINGTON
Yes! (BEAT) Yes many times. (BEAT) He was so proud to know a famous man. He clipped magazines, newspapers, everything he could find.

Every month he'd bring home the new serials and sit by my bed reading them. (BEAT) Nearly all were Klondike adventures and he read with such intensity that sometimes I'd be more caught-up with his excitement than the tale itself.

The last thing I'd hear before dropping off to sleep would be him whispering: 'damn Jimmy. That's just the way it was!'

Billington looks helplessly at Hopkins.

Hopkins stands and gestures widely to the surrounding landscape. He raises his flask.

HOPKINS
(Very loud)
To the way it was!

Hopkins snorts in disgust and upends the flask. He takes a long drink and then sits back on the piling without looking. He misses the piling but makes the best of it by sliding down its length into a sitting position on the dock. Leaning his head back against the piling he scoots the flask across the deck to Billington.

Billington retrieves the flask. He toys with it: shining its silvered surface on his pants leg. Finally

BILLINGTON
When I was eight we read The Sea Wolf. A chapter a night. Afterwards, alone, I'd lie for hours rolled tightly in my blankets swaying gently like some hammock in a fo'c'sle. Terrified that each sound, each shadow held the blind eyes and iron grip of Wolf Larsen come to throttle me.

Billington gives a short unamused laugh and takes another slug of whiskey. He is beginning to feel "good" in a maudlin way. He removes his jacket, tossing it on the deck.
HOPKINS
Toss that over here.

Billington tosses the flask.

BILLINGTON
I suppose you think it's all very childish. (BEAT) Maybe it is. I don't even care!

Damn it. It's not just the stories or him hating writing or any of it. It's...

Billington lapses into silence.

BILLINGTON (CONT'D)
He made me care about people. You know, what happens to them.

(BITTERLY) It's pretty funny I guess. I didn't even read Marx. None of us did. We read London! (BEAT) The Iron Heel. The People of the Abyss.

Billington stands.

BILLINGTON (CONT'D)
(Disgusted)
God what a fool I've been. He used to care about truth! Now it's just comfort. Beauty!

Billington turns and moves several feet towards the shore. In the silence, Hopkins drinks.

HOPKINS
'When old age shall this generation waste
Thou shalt remain in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man to whom Thou sayest
Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty, -- that is all
Ye know on earth, all ye need to know.

Billington whirls around to Hopkins. He is red-faced and clumsy with drink.

BILLINGTON
Keats be damned!

Hopkins slowly pulls himself to his feet and brushes off his pants.
HOPKINS
Perhaps you are a fool. (BEAT) A young fool. But it's not a terminal ailment I'm happy to say.

(HARSHLY) Maybe we should all die young while we're white hot. When the teeth are sharp, the muscles taut and the blood red.

But Christ man! It's not like that. (BEAT) You demand that he measure up... conform to some silly fantasy of yours.

Billington turns and races to the shore and up towards the horses.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
(Yelling after him)
This is a man not some goddamn book!

Hopkins stares after the fleeing Billington. With a look of disgust he shrugs and turns back to the lake. He stands surveying the water and takes another drink, finishing the flask.

He upturns the flask and allows the final drops to fall into the water.

CLOSE-UP of the concentric circles made by the drops as they distort Hopkins' reflection in the water.

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. DAY. THE LAKE.

Hopkins sits on the end of the dock dangling his feet over the side. His boots just skim the water's surface.

SOUND of footsteps on the dock.

Billington moves slowly towards Hopkins. He stops where his coat lies on the dock. He begins to speak and then changes his mind.

HOPKINS
(Without turning)
Isn't any more.

BILLINGTON
What?
HOPKINS
Whiskey. There isn't any more.

Billington picks up his coat.

BILLINGTON
Oh. I...I've had enough. (BEAT) Look.
I'm sorry I got so worked up. It was stupid.

Hopkins pulls his feet up and swings them back onto the dock.

HOPKINS
Forget it. (PAUSE) You know I've been sitting here thinking and...well it's pretty funny but somehow I feel partly responsible for your...disillusionment.

You're a victim just like Jack's a victim.
Of the press. They...we...have created a myth so colossal that not even Jack can live up to it.

Hey. Would you mind sitting down, son.
It's mighty hard to confess to someone standing over you.

Billington sits.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
For fifteen years now everything that man's done, and half of what he ain't done, has been front page news. (BEAT) Fodder for the breakfast tables of America.

(HAWKING LIKE A NEWSBOY) Jack London 'round world in 45 foot sloop!

London leads revolutionaries in Mexico!

(WITH BITTER LAUGH) Can you believe it?
The papers had him wounded. Captured.
Wasting in a federal prison. An in¬
ternational incident. Diaz blasting the U.S. for intervention!

Jack was in Los Angeles. (BEAT) But the
damn thing sold papers. Plenty of 'em.

Hopkins reaches for the flask and then remembers that it's empty.
HOPKINS (CONT'D)
Do you understand? It's always been that way. (BEAT) Hell if the boots are too big for him to fill it's no fault of his.

Unable to have a drink, Hopkins rolls a cigarette. He carefully shields the tobacco from the wind.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
I covered London for the paper. That was the first time I'd really known anything about him. Oh, I guess I'd read some of his magazine stuff. You know, picked it up somewhere along the line.

Hopkins moistens the cigarette with his tongue.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
But I was sent to cover a speech of his at the university. Couple a thousand students gathered to hear Jack London speak on Literature. (LAUGHS) To the surprise of all and the consternation of many he spoke instead on Revolution!

Hopkins strikes a match and flares his cigarette. He draws deeply on it and leans back on the piling.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
He opened by saying something like: yesterday I received a letter. It began 'dear comrade' and ended 'yours for the revolution'. This morning I answered that letter. I began 'dear comrade' and ended 'yours for the revolution'.

There are five hundred thousand men in the United States beginning and ending their letters like that. A million in France. Three million in Germany. Seven million in the world!

(LAUGHING) There he stood with a twinkle in his eyes, shoveling world revolution in their gaping mouths like so much coal into a furnace. (BEAT) I was transfixed. You could have heard a pin drop in that great hall.
INT. DAY AUDITORIUM

The camera travels very slowly down the center aisle revealing hundreds of young men and women. Hopkins' lines overlap London's speech.

**SIMULTANEOUSLY**

**HOPKINS (O.S.)**
Oh. There were grumblings and mumblings alright. But most were stunned into silence.

**LONDON (O.S.)**
Now what do these facts mean? They mean that the Revolution is here, Now! We are in it.

As the CAMERA PANS over the audience we see a young Earnest Hopkins standing under one of the far windows. He listens intently, pad and pencil poised.

As the camera reaches the front of the hall we see Jack London on stage behind a podium. London wears a baggy black suit, white flannel shirt and loose tie. He looks very bohemian.

Ranged behind London are a dozen or so university dignitaries.

**HOPKINS (O.S.)**
The president of the university sat behind Jack. The berobed and august faculty occupied the front several rows. Jack stood there, offered up that irresistible smile and let them have it!

**LONDON**
The comradeship of the revolutionists is alive and warm. It passes over geographical lines, transcends race prejudice, and has even proved itself mightier than the fourth of July, spread-eagle Americanism of our forefathers.

**LONDON**
Here are seven million comrades in an organized international revolutionary movement. They laugh to scorn the sweet ideals and dear moralities of bourgeois society. They intend to destroy bourgeois society with most of its sweet ideals and dear moralities -- private ownership of capital, survival of the fittest and patriotism -- yes, even patriotism.
LONDON (CONT'D)
Such an army is a thing to make rulers
and ruling classes pause and consider.
(BEAT) The cry of this army is: NO
QUARTER! WE WANT ALL YOU POSSESS. WE
WILL BE CONTENT WITH NOTHING LESS!

The facial expressions of the men behind London range from a
stony stare to apoplectic rage.

LONDON (CONT'D)
LOOK AT US. WE ARE STRONG. CONSIDER OUR
HANDS! THEY ARE STRONG HANDS AND EVEN
NOW THEY ARE REACHING FORTH FOR ALL
YOU HAVE. AND THEY WILL TAKE IT. (BEAT)
BY THE FORCE OF THEIR STRONG HANDS. TAKE
IT FROM YOUR FEEBLE GRASP!

London's hands are raised and clenched. He pauses and surveys
the audience.

Several scattered members of the faculty rise and leave.

Hopkins can be seen madly scribbling in a notebook.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Naturally the question arises: why is
this so?

There are many counts of the indictment
but for the present use only one will
be stated. (BEAT) The capitalist class
has managed society, and its management
has failed. And not only has it failed
but it has failed deplorably, ignobly,
horribly.

(FOCUS ON FACULTY) But all this is like
so much cobwebs to the bourgeois mind.
As it was blind in the past, it is
blind now and cannot see nor understand!

In the United States eighty thousand
children are toiling out their lives
in the textile mills alone. In the
South they work twelve hour shifts.
They never see the day. Those on the
night shift are asleep when the sun
pours its life and warmth over the
world. While those on the day shift
are at the machines before dawn.
LONDON (CONT'D)
When they become sick and are unable to rise from their beds to go to work, there are men employed to go from house to house and cajole and bully them into arising and going to work. (BEAT) Ten percent of them contract active consumption. All are puny wrecks, distorted, stunted, mind and body. (BEAT) So fares modern man and the child of modern man in the United States! Most progressive and enlightened of all countries on Earth!

(SLAMMING FIST ON PODIUM) The capitalist class has been tried and found wanting! It remains for the working class to see what it can do with the opportunity.

The Revolutionist cries out upon wrong and injustice and preaches righteousness. And, most potent of all, he sings the eternal song of human freedom -- a song of all lands and all tongues and all time.

As I look over the universities of my land today, I see the students asleep. Asleep in the face of the awful facts I have given you. Asleep in the greatest revolution that has ever come to the world!

Not long ago, revolutions began, grew, broke out, in Oxford. Today, Russian universities seethe with revolution. (BEAT) I say to you men and women in the full glory of life, here is a cause that appeals to all the romance in you. Awake to its call! Line up! Line up! All the world despises a coward. Read our books! Fight us if you do not agree!

But by all that is brave and strong, show your colors! Line up! Raise your voices one way or the other. BE ALIVE!

London looks out over his audience. He pushes back the hair from his eyes and gives them a boyish grin.
After several beats the majority of the audience breaks into thunderous applause. They rise to their feet cheering.

A moment later most of the faculty in the front two rows joins in.

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. DAY. THE LAKE.

A flight of ducks breaks from the lake's surface and the thunderous applause SEGUES into the flapping of wings.

The CAMERA PANS with the ducks and then holds on the dock. The sun is low in the sky.

Hopkins sits on the piling. Billington sits cross-legged beside him.

HOPKINS
(After a pause)
That's the way I remember Jack. (BEAT)
And I don't give a damn what he says and does now.

I interviewed him afterwards. He wanted to deal them a stinging blow right between the eyes, he said. To shake up their minds even if they thought him a long-haired anarchist.

(LAUGHING) He did that alright. Yes indeedy.

Hopkins pulls out his pocketwatch.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
We'd better be getting back. Supper's real soon.

Hopkins stands.

BILLINGTON
Will you write up this visit for the papers?

HOPKINS
(Sadly)
More grist for the mill? (BEAT) Yes, I suppose I will.
Hopkins extends his hand to Billington and pulls him to his feet. They stand, still grasping hands as

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
That bloody contradiction again. (BEAT)
Come on. Let's get cracking.

They move off down the dock towards the horses.

INT. NIGHT. THE DININGROOM.

London sits at the head of the table under the window. The moonlight filters through behind him. At the opposite end is Charmian and directly across from each other at the middle of the long table are Billington and Hopkins.

The sideboard is laden with food. Sekine stands there filling a plate with roast and potatoes and vegetables. He crosses to the table and sets it before Hopkins. He then retires to a dark corner and waits.

The table is splendidly laid-out; the finest china and crystal. The goldfish bowl is in the center surrounded by a new floral arrangement.

Charmian, Hopkins and Billington are eating roast. Sitting before London is a large duck.

CLOSE-UP of the duck as he cuts into it. The duck is hardly cooked and red blood oozes from it.

The only sound is of eating; the clinking of silverware and goblets.

London eats with great zest hardly taking his eyes from his plate.

Finally,

CHARMIAN
I say, I'm glad you two had such a fine ride. (BEAT) I suppose I should have gone along. Earnest (FLASHES HIM A SMILE) doesn't know all the trails. There's...

LONDON
(Interrupting)
I've got a trail to ride you over that'll make your hair stand up with the beauty of it.

The word "beauty" strikes a chord in Billington and his eyes jerk away from London to Hopkins.
LONDON (CONT'D)
It's a real crackerjack! (BEAT) It's an old one that I just happened to run...

CHARMIAN
(Interrupting)
As you can see Earnest, Jack's disobeying the doctors again.

London turns on Charmian with a ferocious look. Even though she leans towards Hopkins as she speaks her eyes are on London.

CHARMIAN (CONT'D)
He insists on eating these undercooked ducks. Ever since the season opened.

Hopkins is acutely embarrassed. His eyes flick from one end of the table to the other, finally holding on his plate.

CHARMIAN (CONT'D)
He simply won't listen to reason.

There is a crash as London throws his fork down on his plate.

LONDON
(Harshly)
Dammit! Let's not get back on that again.

London sits back in his chair glaring at Charmian. The other two busy themselves with their meals. Charmian gives him a blank look and drops her eyes.

Finally London retrieves his fork and

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Quietly)
Look. I've been good as gold since September. You've seen. Now it won't hurt me to fall off my diet a bit.

London spears a piece of meat and stuffs it in his mouth.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Besides, don't forget I'm a natural meat-eater!

CHARMIAN
Jack at least have some vegetables. (BEAT) Sekine, put some vegetables on Mr. London's plate.
Sekine moves to London's side with the bowl. London stares at Charmian in disbelief.

As Sekine goes to serve him London wards off the spoon with his arm.

LONDON
No! Give them to Jim. He's a growing boy.

Sekine returns the bowl to the sideboard. Charmian shrugs and resumes eating. Hopkins and Billington drill holes into their plates.

A brooding silence falls over the table. Finally

CHARMIAN
(Sweetly)
Mr. Billington? Have you tried the wine? It's our own.

Billington tries the wine and manages a smile.

BILLINGTON
It's quite good. (BEAT) Please call me Jim.

LONDON
(Gruffly)
Never had much experience with wine grapes. The vineyards here were old and worthless so I pulled most of 'em out.

HOPKINS
(Brightly)
Hey. Speaking of which. What's become of the great grape juice deal?

Hopkins smiles at London. The smile quickly fades as London grimaces. Hopkins drains his wine-glass.

LONDON
(Expansively sarcastic)
The Jack London Grape Juice Company? The drink that would knock out John Barleycorn? (BEAT) The deal that would cost me nothing.

Sekine refills Hopkins glass. London stabs a piece of duck which he chews halfheartedly.
LONDON (CONT'D)

Went sour.

Charmian titters. London ignores her.

LONDON (CONT'D)

Sour grapes that's what I got. It'll cost me plenty before I'm through. (BEAT)
I go into the cleanest sort of business,
to make the best non-alcoholic drink known, and I get it in the neck. Pronto.
Just like that! (BEAT) Seems like I'm always in court lately.

London shakes his fork at Hopkins.

LONDON (CONT'D)

(Angrily)
I tell you, I'm fated to do the prisoner of Chillon stunt yet. (BEAT) This is prophecy.

London sinks back in his chair. We see him half hidden behind the remains of the duck's carcass.

Hopkins, acting more drunk than he is, reaches for his wine. He sloshes some onto the table and excuses himself with an innocent smile.

HOPKINS

(Melodramatically)
'What has the gray-haired prisoner done?
Has murder stain'd his hands with gore?
Not so; his crime's a fouler one --
God made this old man poor!
For this he shares a felon's cell,
That fittest earthly type of hell!'

Hopkins stares at London from behind his glass which is raised in toast. There is a pause and then London begins to laugh. The laughter becomes a robust rumble as he raises his own glass in salute.

There is general laughter among the three men. Charmian is conspicuously silent.

LONDON

Mate-woman, perhaps Hop here can spout verse for us after dinner. (BEAT) What do you say, Hop?
HOPKINS

(Laughing)
Oh no you don't! That's your department. Will you read tonight?

CHARMIAN

(Sharply)
Oh yes. Jack please!

(SOFTER) Earnest you should have heard Jack read from Ecclesiastes when we were in Hawaii. It was absolutely beautiful. Please Jack?

HOPKINS

Well Jack? (BEAT) You know, Ecclesiastes might do us all a world of good.

LONDON

(Pleased)
We'll see.

Well Jim, you're pretty quiet. You knew I'd been through prison, didn't you? With stripes on, doing the lockstep.

BILLINGTON

Yes. When you were tramping.

LONDON

(Nods)
That's why I wrote The Star Rover. It's been one of my lifelong ambitions to put across a staggering punch against the whole damnable, rotten jail system. (BEAT) Have you read it?

BILLINGTON

(Embarrassed)
No. Not yet.

LONDON

Read it. (BEAT) You'll find it a curious sort of book. Don't be appalled by it, but read on. I think you'll find some good stuff in it. (BEAT) It cuts various ways but truly states prison conditioning.

Billington is pleased that the conversation has taken a political turn.
BILLINGTON
Don't you think it odd...well what do you think, Earnest. Why so little written about the prisons. Why aren't there any newspaper exposes?

LONDON
Hold up there, Earnest. I'll tell you why Jim. (BEAT) The convicts are few and far between who come out and dare to peep a word of what they know. And they're dead right for keeping mum.

Otherwise under our present wild-animal police and penitentiary system they'd be worse than dead! (BEAT) There's a pleasant little system known as 'railroading'. Every ex-con knows all about it. (BEAT) Keep mum? Wouldn't you?

BILLINGTON
(Doubtful)
Well I suppose under those conditions.

London nods with satisfaction. He pushes his plate back and lights a cigarette. The dinner is over.

Charmian rises.

CHARMIAN
Would you like for me to play?

LONDON
Would you? Handel?

Charmian leaves the three men at the table and crosses to the piano.

Charmian plays. In the b.g. the three men sit at the table.

CLOSE-UP of Charmian's hands moving over the keys.

MATCH CUT

INT. EVENING. THE LIVINGROOM.

CLOSE-UP of Charmian's hands as she massages London's ankle.
CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal a roaring fire. Hopkins stands by the hearth a brandy snifter in hand.

London lies sprawled on one of the sofas reading by the firelight. His shoes and socks are off and one leg rests in Charmian's lap.

Billington sits across from London on the other sofa.

London half-reads and half-recites the following passages. It is obvious that he knows it pretty much by heart. He looks often and long at Billington.

LONDON
(Reading)
For if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

Rejoice, o young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; and walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you to judgement.

Remove vexation from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

Billington sits very stiffly and stares at London.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging proverbs with great care.

The Preacher sought to find pleasing words, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings which are given by one Shepherd.

CLOSE UP OF LONDON
LONDON (CONT'D)
My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

CLOSE UP OF BILLINGTON. There is a silence then the SOUND of the bible slapping closed.

EXT. DAY. TRAIN STATION.

Hopkins and Billington are walking down the platform. Beside them the train is building a head of steam. In the b.g. Hazen can be seen sitting atop the wagon chewing and spitting.

A HALF-DOZEN PASSENGERS mill around saying their goodbyes.

For the first time we see Hopkins in his 'city' clothes. He looks starched and uncomfortable, continually pulling at his collar.

BILLINGTON
(Excited)
He was mocking me you can't deny that!

HOPKINS
Perhaps. (BEAT) Provoking might be a better word.

BILLINGTON
But why? Why all this 'youth and the dawn of life are vanity'?

Hopkins halts. He shifts his bag from one hand to the other. He studies Billington for a moment, finally

HOPKINS
Have you considered that Jack might feel threatened by you?

BILLINGTON
(Surprised)
By me? That's absurd!

HOPKINS
By what you are. Your youth. Your vitality. (BEAT) Perhaps most by your idealism.

The CONDUCTOR moves down the platform.
CONDUCTOR
All 'board! All 'board goin' aboard!

The other passengers begin to climb on the train.

HOPKINS
(Gently)
Aren't you mocking him in a way?

Billington begins to protest but the scream of the whistle cuts him off.

CONDUCTOR
You'd better hurry sir.

Hopkins nods.

HOPKINS
Don't be too rough on him. Or yourself for that matter.

Hopkins sticks out a hand and Billington shakes it. The train begins to move and Hopkins jumps aboard.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
(Yelling over noise)
Give me a ring when you come through town!

With a wave he disappears inside. Lost in thought, Billington watches the train roll out of sight.

INT. DAY. LONDON'S WORKROOM.

London sits hunched over his typewriter. He wears his eyeshade and a cigarette dangles from his mouth. He stares at the sheet of paper in the machine. He bangs out several sentences and then tears the paper out. He places it with several others in a wooden tray.

He grins happily, leaning back in his swivel chair and throwing his feet up on the desk. He sits quietly smoking. After a few moments he checks his wristwatch and then tosses his eyeshade on the desk.

He rises, snuffs out the cigarette and leaves the room with an almost swaggering roll to his walk.

INT. DAY. CHARMIAN'S SITTINGROOM.

Charmian is curled up on the sofa. She is embroidering a large "L" on a small yellow handtowel.
LONDON ENTERS.

LONDON
Hello there, Mate.

CHARMIAN
(Cheerfully)
Hello yourself. You look rather pleased.

LONDON
There's great stuff in me yet, my dear. You just stand back and watch my smoke!

London sits beside Charmian. He playfully grabs away her embroidery and puts it behind him.

LONDON
Come on let's ride up the mountain. (BEAT) I want to see that stretch of land. The one with all the water. What do you say? (BEAT) I may buy it, you know. It'll mean bigger crops. Bigger and better horses and cattle. (BEAT) Life and more life, Mate-woman! Come on up with me.

CHARMIAN
No Jack. I really don't want to. Not today anyway. I've a million things to do.

LONDON
(Imploring)
Please.

CHARMIAN
(Firmly)
No. (BEAT) May I have my embroidery?

London hands her back her needlework. Silence. Finally

CHARMIAN (CONT'D)
Why not ask James. He should be back by now. (BEAT) I'm sorry Jack, I just don't feel up to it.

London nods at her unhappily. He rises and moves to the door. The swagger is all but gone; the limp more pronounced.
EXT. DAY. SONOMA MOUNTAIN.

From the rear as London and Billington ride across a field of tawny winter grass. In the b.g. is a dense woods.

They enter the spruce trees in single file with London leading the way. They ride along side a deep gulch. They weave between the trees and underbrush.

From London's hand hangs a riding crop which is looped over his wrist. London turns in his saddle and points up ahead with the crop.

    LONDON
    This is the trail I was telling you about.
    Cut sometime back in the fifties. Only found it by accident.

London halts and Billington rides up beside him.

    LONDON (CONT'D)
    There was a fake goldrush back then. From over in Petaluma. Some gamblers got it up and there must have been about a thousand suckers.

    (POINTING ACROSS THE GULCH) That's where the camp was.

The CAMERA PANS to reveal a flat plate-like area studded with tree stumps.

    BILLINGTON
    No gold?

    LONDON
    Just the fever. Always the fever. (BEAT) I feel a sort of affinity with those poor souls. I've had it. In the Klondike. (BEAT) And all I brought back was scurvy.

    (LAUGHS) Come on.

The two men ride off and disappear among the trees.

EXT. DAY. THE MOUNTAIN TOP.

ELS - from the mountain slope upwards. The two men ride along the mountain ridge. In the b.g. the afternoon sun is diffused by the gathering mist rolling in from the Pacific.
The CAMERA PANS with them as they ride S.R. towards a large outcropping of rocks which overlook the valley.

They halt their horses at the rock formation. They sit astride their horses looking out over the vast panorama of Sonoma.

The valley floor is obscured by fog but the tops of the rolling hills are visible. High in the sky the moon can be seen.

LONDON

A long silence.

LONDON (CONT'D)
When I look out over it all it kinda makes me ache in the throat with things in my heart I can't find words to say.

London dismounts. He slaps the horse on the rump with the crop and the animal moves off.

London limps to the out-cropping and climbs up. He stands looking out over the valley, maintaining his balance with some difficulty.

Billington dismounts. He stands by his horse holding the reins.

London removes his ranger hat and the stiff breeze blows through his hair. He stands with his back to Billington for several moments. Finally

LONDON
(Quietly)
I disappointed you yesterday. Perhaps even shocked you.

BILLINGTON
(Embarrassed)
No...I...

LONDON
(Turning to face him)
Please Jim. I'm no fool.

London tosses down his hat on the rocks and climbs still higher.
LONDON (CONT'D)
It bothers you that I sometimes sneer at reform. That I live like some country squire. Lord and master of all he surveys! (BEAT) That's it, isn't it?

He points his crop at Billington.

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Halfheartedly)
Well I earn my money honestly. Not off the backs of labor.

BILLINGTON
I know.
It's not even that so much. It's... well for one thing your hibernation up here.

LONDON
(Mocking)
Oh! And you would have me come down from the mountain top. Lead the vanguard of the revolution perhaps?

Billington squirms uncomfortably and slaps the reins in his hands. In the b.g. London's horse grazes.

London drops himself to a rock and slaps another nearby with his crop.

Billington scrambles up the formation and sits. Between them, high in the sky, is the washed-out moon.

LONDON (CONT'D)
It's been a good many years since I jumped into the battle to right political affairs. (BEAT) I feel a sort of veteran. Not exactly a beaten veteran but unlike the raw recruit I don't expect to storm and capture the enemy's position by sunrise.

BILLINGTON
But you do have an interest in the outcome? I mean yesterday you spoke in anger?
Of course I should like to have socialism! (BEAT) Yet I know it's not the next step. Capitalism must live its life. A child must go through its childhood sicknesses before it becomes a man.

BILLINGTON
I don't see why it has to be that way.

LONDON
Look Jim. Study the books. History shows that no master class is ever willing to let go without a quarrel. (SNORTING) The lion and the lamb are not going to lie down together in some vegetarian pasture. The lion is a meat-eater.

BILLINGTON
I just can't accept that. You're too pessimistic!

LONDON
I am a pessimist. I admit it. (BEAT) But pessimists aren't born. They're made. (BEAT) By life.

There is a long pause. London plays with his crop.

LONDON
Let me tell you something about myself. (BEAT) In the eagerness of my youth I made the ancient mistake of pursuing Truth too relentlessly. I tore her veils from her and the sight was too terrible for me to stand. (BEAT) Thus began my long sickness of pessimism.

What I saw was that the things that I had fought for and burned my midnight oil for had failed me! (BEAT) Success. Recognition. Love of woman. Money. What good was an income of a hundred porterhouses a day when I could eat just one?

(MATTER OF FACTLY) Oh, I meditated suicide...cooly as a Greek philosopher might...the crashing darkness of a bullet.
LONDON (CONT'D)
What saved me was the one remaining
ilusion -- the people. (BEAT) By the
people I was handcuffed to life. I
laughed at the editors and publishers
who were the source of my hundredporterhouses a day and threw myself
into the fight for socialism.

London looks keenly at Billington.

LONDON (CONT'D)
It was the people who pulled me through.
(BEAT) And my pessimism was lulled to
sleep for many a long day.

Silence.

BILLINGTON
(Almost a whisper)
And now?

LONDON
Now? (BEAT) Now I have celebrated my
My sixteenth year in the writing game.

And the black pessimism sleeps no more.
(BEAT) It moves with me. Rides with me --
even now. A comrade. A spectre. Always
just beyond my reach.

London takes a futile swipe at the air with his crop.

BILLINGTON
And the people? Do they hold nothing
for you now? (BEAT) For them nothing
has changed.

LONDON
(With a forced smile)
Only me? (BEAT) Oh, I know what you're
driving at. That the Jack London of
today is merely the shell of yesterday.
That I have lost my vim and fire and
youthful energy! (BEAT) I've been so
accused.

BILLINGTON
(Looking away)
I'm sorry. (BEAT) I...I've no right to
judge. I thought I did at first but I
was wrong.
LONDON
On the contrary. Perhaps it's the obligation of youth to judge. To challenge. (BEAT) I was so myself. Kicking authority out of my path. (BEAT) The relentless pursuit of Truth.

London stands.

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Quietly)
But there are many kinds of truth.

London surveys his land and then climbs down from the rocks.

LONDON (CONT'D)
I remember the men who broke their hearts and backs over this soil.

London kicks loose some dirt with his heel. He bends down and picks it up and sifts it through his hands.

LONDON (CONT'D)
This soil that now belongs to me. (BEAT) These men toiled and cleared and planted. (BEAT) They gazed with aching eyes on these same sunrises and sunsets. The same autumn glory of the grapes. The same fog-wisps stealing across the mountain. (BEAT) They're gone. And I too shall soon be gone.

London looks up at Billington, drops the remaining soil and stands.

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Gently)
A Truth, Jim. (BEAT) Gone? I'm going now. In my mouth are the cunning artifices of dentists to replace the parts already gone.

London shows his mouth like one might that of a horse.

London continues calmly but inexorably. He uses his crop as a teacher might before an anatomical chart.
LONDON (CONT'D)
My lean runner's stomach has passed into the limbo of memory.

The joints of my legs are not as they were when in wild nights and days of toil and frolic I strained and snapped and ruptured them.

Never again can I swing dizzily aloft with a single rope-clutch in the driving blackness of storm. (BEAT) Never again run with the sled-dogs along the endless miles of Arctic trails...

BILLINGTON
(Anguished)
Jack! You mustn't.

LONDON
(Ferocious)
This is Truth, Jim. TRUTH! (BEAT) The book of life goes on page after page without end... (EMPHASIZING EACH WORD)... when one is young!

A long pause.

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Quietly)
But I am the Ancient. (BEAT) Within I carry a skeleton. Under this rind of flesh called my face is a bony, noseless death's head. (BEAT) The Noseless One -- the spectre. He rides us all into the earth.

Are these the truths you would pursue? (BEAT) These are the truths which now pursue me.

Billington stares helplessly at London.

London sits back on the rocks below Billington. He massages his leg. Finally he looks up.

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Kindly)
My dear dear boy. None of us can help ourselves... with anything. And heaven helps no one.
LONDON (CONT'D)

Would you soothe me with sweet talk of immortality? Hmmm? (BEAT) I thought not. Stupid clods dream of immortality. But you. You who would open the books as I have. You must know man for what he is. A brother to the dust. A cosmic joke. (BEAT) A beast that arose from the ruck by virtue and accident of two opposable great toes.

London raises his clenched fists and moves his thumbs in a circular motion.

LONDON (CONT'D)

I'll tell you, Jim boy. I've no patience with metaphysical philosophers. (BEAT) Everything depends upon yourself. You must learn that.

Try to dream with me my dreams. Try to realize what I'm after.

London rises.

LONDON (CONT'D)

I want to master this soil and the crops and animals that spring from it. Just as I strove to master the sea and men and women and the books and all the face of life that I could stamp with my will to do. To do! Do you understand?

Books and words are. They do nothing. What are words to a man in revolt? Will they fill his belly? Will they break the chains from the factory gate?

My ranch. My farm. These are facts not fictions. (BEAT) My books are a means to an end. (BEAT) Would you build a monument of my words? Stack them one upon another atop a pedestal? Like great Ozymandias perhaps? 'Look upon my works ye mighty and despair!'

Bah! It amounts to naught. Just another small and sad egotistical effort.
CAMERA PULLS BACK slowly revealing first the rock outcropping and the two men then the field beyond and the two horses. Finally the wind-blown, fog-shrouded mountain.

INT. NIGHT. BILLINGTON'S ROOM.

Billington is stretched out on the bed writing in his journal.

BILLINGTON (V.O.)
Perhaps Earnest is right. Jack is baiting me. But why? For what purpose?
He counters life and hope with death and black pessimism. Does he want me too to look on life with a jaundiced eye?

Billington stares at the journal. Finally he closes it and goes to the desk. He leaves the journal and picks up a book and returns to the bed.

INT. NIGHT. LONDON'S PORCH.

London lies in bed reading. He wears his eyeshade and a gooseneck lamp hangs over his head from the bed frame.

SEKINE ENTERS with a thermos of fresh juice. He places it by the bedside and removes an empty one.
He dumps an overflowing ashtray and replaces it.

London closes his magazine.

LONDON
Is the Mate still up?

SEKINE
No Master. She long sleep.

London nods and discards the magazine. He rifles through a wooden tray filled with reading material and selects another agricultural journal.

LONDON
You might as well turn in.

SEKINE
You need nothing, Master?
LONDON
Nothing. Goodnight, Sekine.

SEKINE
Goodnight, Master.

SEKINE EXITS.

London adjusts the lamp and lights a cigarette.

INT. DAWN. BILLINGTON'S ROOM.

Little light penetrates the heavy curtains. Billington is asleep.

SOUND of heavy footsteps coming down the hall. The footsteps are irregular and stop near Billington's door. SOUND of a door opening and closing.

Billington stirs. All is quiet for a moment. Then, SOUND of coughing and retching.

Billington awakes. He listens intently. He checks his pocketwatch on the desk. He bounds to the dresser and pulls on his pants.

INT. DAWN. THE HALL.

As Billington comes out of his room the door across the hall opens. A pale and haggard London stands there harshly illuminated by the glare of the bathroom light.

They look at each other. London reaches back in and switches off the light. He leans against the doorjamb perspiring heavily.

BILLINGTON
Are you alright?

LONDON
(Weakly)
Yes. I'll be fine. Sorry to wake you. Came down here so as not to disturb the Mate.

BILLINGTON
I was awake. What's the matter.

LONDON
Damn dysentery again. (BEAT) Never been quite right since Australia. (MANAGES A SMILE) Mexico didn't help matters any.
BILLINGTON
Should I call a Doctor for you?

LONDON
Good Lord No! (BEAT) Don't worry, Jim. I'll be alright. (BEAT) Not a word to Charmian now. Hmm?

London moves slowly off to his room. Billington watches after him until his door shuts.

INT. DAY. DININGROOM.

Billington sits alone at the table. He is eating figs and cream. The sunlight streams through the window bouncing off the high-gloss finish of the table.

CHARMIAN ENTERS from the main door. She marches across the floor in a very business-like way. She circles the entire table to stop behind London's chair.

Billington rises hastily but she waves him down.

CHARMIAN
Good morning, James.

BILLINGTON
Good morning.

CHARMIAN
(Dramatically)
Jack is ill this morning. (BEAT) At first I thought it was ptomaine poisoning again. (BEAT) However, he assures me it is not.

BILLINGTON
Again?

CHARMIAN
Yes. He had a bout with it several weeks ago. (BEAT) Anyway, he came to me for sympathy as always. But he brings it on himself. With his atrocious eating habits. I told him so.

SEKINE ENTERS through main door.
CHARMIAN
Oh Sekine. There you are. Please bring my coffee to the porch.

She turns back to Billington.

CHARMIAN (CONT'D)
As I was saying. Jack needs rest. (BEAT) I'm sure you understand. He must remain quiet. So perhaps you two can finish your talk some other time.

Sekine halts by Charmian's side.

SEKINE
Excuse Mistress. Master ask Mr. Billington join him after breakfast.

Charmian gives Sekine a very sharp look and then transfers it to Billington.

CHARMIAN
(Tersely)
I see.

BILLINGTON
If you think it better I...

Avoiding Billington's eyes she gives a stiff shake of her head and marches towards the door.

CHARMIAN
Sekine! My coffee.

INT. DAY. THE HALL OUTSIDE THE WORKROOM.

Billington is walking down the hall. The workroom door is open and the SOUND of London's voice can be heard. He speaks in a monotone, wearily.

LONDON (O.S.)
...in full swing on Hawaiian novel, the heroine of which is named Cherry.

Billington stops at the door and looks in. The workroom is empty. In the sleeping-porch beyond, London lies on the bed dictating into his machine. The shades are drawn and the porch is lit only by a goose-neck lamp hung from the bed frame.
He lies back against three large pillows and a fourth one is under his left elbow. The green eyeshade casts an eerie green tinge to his face. He is fully dressed except for socks and shoes.

LONDON (CONT'D)
It will be anywhere between fifty and sixty thousand words, though I may increase it to a full one hundred thousand.

London looks up and sees Billington. He motions him into the room. As London resumes his dictation, Billington wanders around the workroom, browsing through the books.

LONDON (CONT'D)
I have only begun to collect possible titles, I shall name you a few. Cherry; The Screen Lady; The Screen-Gazer; and Fire Dew. I am still delayed by work but shall be in New York in several weeks. Sincerely Jack London.

London cranes his neck to see Billington perched on a desk thumbing through a book.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Jim? Just one more and I'll be through.

BILLINGTON
Fine. Take your time.

LONDON
Come on in and sit if you want.

Billington thumbs to the front of the book. Inside the cover is London's bookplate; a wolf's head. He closes the book; it is The Sea Wolf. He places it back on the shelf.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Editor, Everyweek Magazine: My Dear Sir, Curses on you, Everyweek! You keep a busy man busy overtime trying to get rid of you while unable to tear himself away.

Billington enters the dim porch. He moves past London to the far end of the room. He moves some books and magazines from a rattan chair and places them on a nearby table. He sits. Stripes of light filter through the bamboo curtains and play on his face and the wall behind.
LONDON (CONT'D)
I wish the man who writes the captions for your photographs had never been born. I just can't refrain from reading every word he writes. And the rest of your staff bothers me the same way. Hereby registering my complaint. Sincerely Jack London.

London leans back on his pillows and closes his eyes for a moment. Billington watches the figure bathed in the harsh white light.

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Rousing himself)
Well, so much for that.

He pushes himself off the pillows and hangs the mouthpiece back onto the dictaphone. He shoves it away from the bed. He looks at Billington for a long moment.

LONDON (CONT'D)
You didn't exactly see me at my best this morning. (BEAT) I apologize. It catches up with me sometimes.

BILLINGTON
No need. You're feeling better?

LONDON
Somewhat.

London takes a drink of juice from one of several thermos bottles which sit on his bedside table. The table is crammed with: packs of cigarettes, ashtrays, magazines, books, and crumpled sheets of paper. Lying on top is a well-worn traveling medicine kit. It is about ten inches long and made of hard leather. It is open and six or seven vials and a syringe can be seen.

The lower shelf holds more books in addition to a large Colt .44.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Haven't gotten much rest. But I've taken some medication that the Doctor swears will make me sleep.

BILLINGTON
Maybe you oughtn't to be working.
LONDON
It'll pass. Anyway I haven't accomplished much. A couple of pages and a handful of these letters.

He picks up a sheaf of papers from the bed. He shakes his head and drops them on the floor.

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Wearily)
At least you have the good grace not to lecture me on my health.

BILLINGTON
(Hesitates)
I would if I thought you'd listen.
(BEAT) Charmian would have rather I hadn't bothered you. She's upset that...

LONDON
(Interrupting)
Yeah, I know. She looked in. (BEAT) She'll get over it. Hell. No one ever died from talking far as I know.

I think you'll find as you get to know her that she's a remarkably resilient person. (BEAT) I'm not the easiest fellow to get along with. (BEAT) But she's game. The gamest woman I've ever met. Bar none.

Lonon lights a cigarette.

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Half-hearted laugh)
You know, she and I use to put on the gloves? Really. We'd go a few rounds. Every once in a while she'd get tagged but a little blood or mess never put her off. She'd wade right back in. Game as anything!

BILLINGTON
(Smiling)
You admire that a great deal.

London
I do. I do. I have no truck with people afraid of life.
LONDON (CONT'D)  
It was Charmian that brought me up here. Put me onto horses too. Oh, I'd done some riding in Korea but it was always a battle as to who was riding whom. (BEAT) Charmian made a horseman of me.

SOUND of knocking at workroom door. London looks up.

LONDON (CONT'D)  
Come.

SEKINE ENTERS the porch. He has a stack of letters and magazines in his hand.

SEKINE  
Excuse Master. Mail.

LONDON  
(Annoyed)  
Oh, Lord! Just dump it on the desk. I've got my hands full already.

SEKINE EXITS.

LONDON (CONT'D)  
You see. It never stops.

Silence.

Finally,

BILLINGTON  
(Anxious)  
I gather from your dictation that you're not working on short stories at the moment.

LONDON  
Well I write them only in spells. (BEAT) Actually I try to avoid them as publishers seem to abhor short stories these days.

London gives a sudden short laugh.

LONDON (CONT'D)  
You know what the critics say? My reputed formula for a short story? (BEAT) That I start with three characters and kill four before the end!
Billington bursts out laughing.

BILLINGTON
I'm sorry. But that's so ridiculous.

LONDON
It's a bonehead world, Jim boy. (BEAT) A writer of raw-beef fiction they call me. I suppose I'm to be content to be admired for my red-blooded brutality and a number of other nice things which aren't true. (BEAT) Well I'm not only a teller of bear stories. I can tell snake stories and fish stores too!

BILLINGTON
You mean you don't think your work is appreciated?

London shifts on the bed so he faces more to Billington.

LONDON
Well I haven't seen a bestseller for a weary time. (BEAT) Is it because the work of others is better than mine? Or has the public soured on me? (SHRUGS) I haven't the faintest idea.

(BEWILDERED) Dog-on this many-headed public! Who can really keep track of what they want?

BILLINGTON
Aren't you able to sell simply on the strength of your name?

LONDON
Not so much any more. (BEAT) The struggle to maintain a name is as severe as trying to make one in the first place.

BILLINGTON
(Awkwardly)
I don't mean to be impudent but is it possible for you to write well when you detest it so?

LONDON
(Evenly)
I think so. I haven't slaked off any. (BEAT) The time devoted to writing is time spent seriously. I don't shirk.
(PROUDLY) I deliver the goods, remember that.

Anyway, I have every intention of continuing to write. I have to. That's all there is to it. (BEAT) I've got boxes of plots. Maybe a hundred novels and five hundred stories.

BILLINGTON
That's amazing. How do you do it? One of the reasons I lean towards newspapers is that I never seem able to come up with plots.

London pulls a small notepad and pencil stub from his shirt pocket.

LONDON
This is the secret. Travel with it. Sleep with it. Slap into it every stray thought that flutters up into your brain. Cheap paper is less perishable than gray matter.

London drops back on his pillows and rests for a moment.

LONDON (CONT'D)
I've got too many projects as it is.

BILLINGTON
The Hawaiian novel you mentioned? What was it... Cherry?

It is a moment before London replies. When he does his voice sounds far away.

LONDON
Yes. (BEAT) And another to be called How We Die.

BILLINGTON
(Lightly)
Well that sounds brutal enough.

LONDON
Perhaps. (BEAT) It's five stories of death. The withdrawal, the fear, the loss of illusion.
LONDON (CONT'D)
(TRAILING OFF) That's what I'm trying
to capture.

BILLINGTON
A psychological study rather than an
adventure? Is that it?

London lies with his eyes closed.

LONDON
Yes. (BEAT) The world of adventure is
almost over now anyway.

His eyes flicker open and he stares at the ceiling.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Even the purple ports of the seven seas
have passed away and become prosaic.

London's eyes drop to Billington. After a moment,

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Sadly)
This is the twentieth century and we
stink of gasoline.

BILLINGTON
Other adventures lie ahead.

London shrugs.

LONDON
I'll sleep now, Jim. (BEAT) I promised
Eliza we'd go over the accounts.

Billington is caught off-guard. He rises.

BILLINGTON
Oh of course. I'm sorry. Get some rest.

As Billington enters the workroom London turns off the light
above his bed. Billington looks back and exits.

INT. EVENING. THE WORKROOM.

London sits at his desk. Eliza sits close by in a straight-
backed chair. Between them is a large green ledger.

London slams a hand down on the ledger and rocks back in his
chair.
LONDON
(Exasperated)
We'll make ends meet that's all there is to it. (BEAT) I'll get an advance from Macmillan on the Hawaiian book.

Hell, I'll knock out a couple of stories before I leave. That'll turn the tide. (BEAT) It's important we move ahead with the plans. I'll come up with the money. You know I always do.

ELIZA
Yes Jack. I know.

London closes the ledger with finality.

LONDON
Anything else?

Eliza begins to speak and stops, she drops her eyes.

LONDON
(Gently)
What is it?

ELIZA
(Quiet but firm)
It's Charmian. (BEAT) She's spending entirely too much on frivolities... again.

Eliza digs into her pocket and pulls out a folded piece of paper. She smooths it out and hands it to London.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
This is just one of the receipts I've come across. Two bolts of velvet! Jack, we simply can't afford such things. Not now! (BEAT) You must speak to her.

She looks at London pleadingly; a mixture of sadness and embarrassment.

LONDON
(Sighing deeply)
I have. (BEAT) Eliza, what can I do? She's just a child.
He runs his fingers through his hair and looks at her helplessly.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Alright. (BEAT) I promise I'll speak to her again before I leave.

London takes a long look at the receipt and then folds it up and puts it in his shirt pocket.

SOUND of dinner gong is heard from deep in the other part of the house. Neither take any notice.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Now about the trip. (BEAT) I'll ship a few head of breeding stock from Chicago.

ELIZA
Fine. What about the fair in Pendleton? Do you want me to buy shorthorns?

LONDON
Yes. Do that.

(EXCITED) As far as things here are concerned I want you to go ahead and turn-over an acre of land to each of the laborer's families. (BEAT) When I get back we'll see about housing each one on their own piece of land!

The rest I'll leave up to you. Select a site for the school and the store. (BEAT) And put in an application for a teacher.

(BEAMING) Total self-sufficiency, Eliza. That's my aim. We won't haul anything up the hill except flour and sugar.

ELIZA
That was the second gong, Jack.

INT. EVENING. THE DININGROOM.

Charmian and Billington are at their usual positions at the table. The food sits on the table -- duck, for everyone.
CHARMIAN
I can't imagine what's keeping Jack.
They should have finished up long ago.
(BEAT) Well, I think we should start.

Charmian whips her napkin off the table and begins to eat.

BILLINGTON
They were still talking when I came
over. I'm sure he'll be along directly.

Billington picks up his knife and fork but hesitates about cutting
into the duck. Finally he does and is relieved that there is no
blood. He eats.

Silence as they eat. Charmian glances over at Billington sev­
eral times but he is absorbed in his meal. Finally

CHARMIAN
(With difficulty)
James? (BEAT) I should apologize for
this morning. I...I haven't been sleep­
ing well and I'm afraid I took it out
on you. I'm sorry.

He's pushing himself so hard. I just
thought if he were to get some rest...
oh I just don't know. (BEAT) Jack's been
so erratic -- so moody. I'm sure you've
noticed. One moment everything is fine
and the next...oh I'm just worried to
death!

EXT. EVENING. THE FRONT PORCH

Eliza and London standing together on the porch.

ELIZA
(Gushing)
Don't you worry, Daddy-man. By the time
you get back I'll have the store and the
school built. And a teacher!

We'll even ask the government for a post
office. And I'll put up a flagpole and
we'll have our own little town up here.
(BEAT) We'll call it Independence!
London gives her a big hug and a kiss on the forehead.

**LONDON**

I'll bet you will, old girl. I'll bet you will.

Eliza beams with pleasure.

**LONDON (CONT'D)**

Now you better run on home or we'll both be late for dinner.

London gives her shoulder another squeeze and then she turns and bustles off across the yard.

London remains on the porch watching her trot up the road towards her house then he turns and heads for the mainhouse.

**INT. EVENING. THE DININGROOM.**

Charmian and Billington are eating as the door opens and LONDON ENTERS. He crosses the room to the table.

**CHARMIAN**

(Without looking up)

Well your duck was perfection a half hour ago but I'm afraid it's far from that now. (BEAT) We've started without you.

London sits.

**LONDON**

(Amiably)

No matter. I'm not really hungry. Jim boy, how are you?

**BILLINGTON**

Just fine. How are you?

**LONDON**

Much better. (BEAT) Been talking big plans with Eliza!

London pokes at his duck with disinterest. He lays down his fork.

**LONDON (CONT'D)**

Charmian? Do you realize that there are enough children on the ranch to warrant opening our own school? And that's exactly what we're going to do!
LONDON (CONT'D)
Going to go ahead with the community store too. That way, Jim, all the laborers can trade right here at much fairer prices.

London ignores his dinner and settles back with a cigarette.

LONDON (CONT'D)
They can be born here, get their schooling here and even be buried here if they want. Right up on Little Hill with the Greenlaw children.

Billington stops eating to listen. He gives London a curious glance.

BILLINGTON
(Smiling)
For a battle-weary veteran it sure sounds like you're setting up some kind of utopian society.

LONDON
I haven't in mind some reform colony if that's what you mean. (BEAT) But perhaps I'm not the bloody capitalist you suspect me to be.

London lapses into silence. Charmian and Billington eat.

LONDON
(Suddenly)
It's going to mean more land. (BEAT) And more money. (BEAT) Charmian, it's mighty important that I land the prospect of some money in New York. I don't know, maybe some of that autobiographical stuff will pay for it.

The necessity of raising the money takes some of the wind out of London's sails.

LONDON (CONT'D)
Have you thought about it, Charmian? (BEAT) I'm planning on leaving on the 29th. Will you come?

Charmian is caught in mid-mouthful.
CHARMIAN
(Patiently)
Jack. We've been over this again and again. I need the time to revise my notes. (TO BILLINGTON) I'm writing another book. More of our adventures in the South Pacific.

LONDON
(Peevishly)
Yeah well give it some more thought.

London slumps back in his chair. He glowers at Charmian. There is a silence. London grinds out his cigarette on his dinner plate. He stares at Charmian as

LONDON (CONT'D)
(Meanly)
Have I told you about the water rights dispute, Jim? My friends and neighbors, instigated by some of Charmian's relatives, took me to court. Sued me! Over my right to divert my own water!

Didn't say one word to me. Just filed a suit without so much as a howdy-do! (BEAT) It's a pretty picayune world, that's all I can say.

He lights another cigarette and tosses the match on his plate. The last shreds of his excitement and good-will are gone.

LONDON (CONT'D)
What am I to think, Mate? Are they all alike? Every person I've done anything for -- and I've not been a pincher -- has thrown me down. (BEAT) Near ones, dear ones, and all the rest.

CHARMIAN
(Almost a whisper)
Some of us are still standing by.

LONDON
Oh I don't mean you of course or Eliza. (DISGUSTED) But the exceptions are so rare.
CHARMIAN
(Gently)
It's always been that way, Mate. Don't think you're the only one who suffers from this. Your kind has plenty of company in the world. (BEAT) No man who ever made money and played Santa Claus to many has escaped your fate. (BEAT) Just don't isolate yourself as a martyr.

Be a real philosopher and forget it. Or else you'll find yourself nursing a persecution mania!

LONDON
(Spiritless)
Just show me where I'm wrong. Just show me.

BILLINGTON
(Uncomfortable)
If you'll excuse me... I have several letters to write.

Charmian gives Billington a grateful nod.

CHARMIAN
Of course James.

BILLINGTON
(Standing)
Goodnight.

CHARMIAN
Goodnight.

Billington looks at London who offers a vacant nod.

BILLINGTON EXITS.

Charmian and London stare at each other down the length of the table. Finally

LONDON
Mate-Woman, my hands are pretty clean, aren't they?

She looks at him with a pained expression.
INT. NIGHT. BILLINGTON'S ROOM.

Billington sits at the writing desk. An unaddressed letter leans against the lamp base. He writes in his journal:

BILLINGTON (V.O.)
November 22nd 1916. Jack ill in a.m. although he seemed better at dinner. He turned suddenly morose. His moods are very erratic and it would appear his health is worse than ever.

I shall consider leaving tomorrow so as not to put any unnecessary strain upon him.

SOUND of footsteps on the porch. Then the front door opens and closes. London and Charmian can be heard moving in the hallway.

LONDON (O.S.)
(Whining)
Would you look at the reading I have to do tonight.

CHARMIAN (O.S.)
But you don't have to do it, Mate.
(BEAT) You're the one who chooses to.

The voices trail off down the hall. All is quiet. Billington returns to writing.

INT. NIGHT. CHARMIAN'S SITTINGROOM.

London is stretched out on the sofa with his head in Charmian's lap. On the floor are two wooden trays sitting atop one another. Both trays are crammed full with reading material: journals, farm reports, etc.

SOUND - the wind-chimes hung in the trees outside can be heard.

London pulls out of the embrace and sits up. He leans his head back on the sofa and looks long and hard at Charmian.
LONDON
(Quietly)
Mate-woman, you're all I've got.
(BEAT) The last straw for me to
cling to. (BRIEF SMILE) My last
bribe for living.

Charmian caresses his face. She puts a finger over his mouth.

CHARMIAN
Hush. (BEAT) Are you so bound on the
wheel that you can't ease up a little?
You're going too fast. (BEAT) Something
will snap if you don't pull up.

London simply looks at her. After a moment he picks up his work
trays. He balances them on his knees.

LONDON
I'm going to turn in.

CHARMIAN
Good.

He rises and moves to the door. At the door he turns back.

LONDON
(Enigmatically)
Thank God you're not afraid of anything.

LONDON EXITS.

A puzzled expression plays on Charmian's face.

INT. NIGHT. HALLWAY.

Charmian, wearing a shawl, comes out of her sittingroom. She
moves quietly to the workroom door and opens it.

INT. NIGHT. WORKROOM.

Charmian takes several steps into the darkened room. A light is
on in the sleeping-porch. She peers in. London lies asleep on
the bed. A book is open on his stomach. He wears his eyeshade.

Charmian turns and leaves, closing the door behind her.
EXT. NIGHT. THE SIDE YARD.

Charmian walks along the side of the house. The wind is gusting and she pulls her shawl tightly around her shoulder. She stops to listen to the ringing chimes.

Suddenly she sees a dark shadow moving nearby. It is Billington and they are both startled.

CHARMIAN
Oh my God! You scared me.

BILLINGTON
Sorry. I couldn't sleep. I was getting some air. (BEAT) The bells are beautiful.

CHARMIAN
Yes. Aren't they. Jack brought them back from Korea. They're scattered about in various trees.

BILLINGTON
How is he?

CHARMIAN
Asleep. I just looked in.

BILLINGTON
Well I guess I'll turn in too.

Goodnight, Charmian.

CHARMIAN
Goodnight, James.

BILLINGTON LEAVES.

Charmian continues walking around the house. She passes London's sleeping-porch. She glances at it and then walks on.

THE CAMERA HOLDS on the porch. Stripes of light leak out through the bamboo shades. The camera begins a SLOW ZOOM in on the porch until we can see the interior between the slits in the shade.

INT. NIGHT. SLEEPING-PORCH.

London is awake. He is rolling back and forth on the bed grasping at his stomach. He doubles over in pain and the agony is written on his sweat drenched face. Still clutching his stomach he manages to sit up.
He bends over, his head between his knees, trying to relieve the pain. He mutters to himself but it is inaudible. Only the wind and the chimes are heard.

Finally the spasm passes. He is shaken and bathed in perspiration. He slumps back on his pillows and reaches out blindly for the cigarettes on the bedside table. He knocks the pack onto the floor. Angry, he forces himself up and bends down and picks up the pack. He shakes one loose and lights it with a quivering hand. He looks at the hand in anger and clenches it into a fist. He smashes the fist on his thigh several times.

London fumbles with the medicine kit on the table. He extracts a vial and reads the label. He places it on the corner of the table.

He props himself back on the pillows and smokes. His face is white and haggard.

INT. MORNING. THE HALLWAY.

Sekine carries a breakfast tray with juice and coffee. He whistles as he moves down the hall towards the workroom.

He enters the workroom without knocking.

INT. MORNING. THE WORKROOM.

Sekine places the tray on a table by the desk and begins to tidy up the desk area.

SEKINE
(Calling)
Good morning, Master.

Sekine picks up several balled up pieces of paper from the floor. He empties the abalone shell ashtray into the trash.

He goes to the porch door and looks in.

London lies on the bed curled up in a tight ball. He faces the wall.

SEKINE
Master?
Receiving no response, Sekine enters the room and tries to rouse London by shaking his shoulder.

London's breathing is ragged and shallow. Sekine bends over the bed and looks at London's face. It is discolored as are his hands and feet.

    SEKINE
    (Scared)
    Master! Master. You wake up!

Wide-eyed with alarm Sekine races from the room.

EXT. MORNING. THE ROAD.

Sekine bursts out of the house and up the road towards the small clapboard farmhouse where Eliza lives.

He reaches the house and bounds up the steps two at a time. He wrenches open the screen door nearly tearing it from its hinges.

INT. MORNING. ELIZA'S KITCHEN.

It is a small room with red and white checkered curtains and table cloth.

Eliza stands by the sink. As Sekine explodes into the room she drops the egg she is holding. It smashes on the floor.

Startled, Eliza's eyes jerk from Sekine to the egg and then back to Sekine again.

    ELIZA
    Sekine! My God. What is it?

    SEKINE
    (Out of breath)
    Missie come quick! Master act funny like drunk. No wake up.

Eliza shows no emotion. She looks thoughtfully at Sekine as she removes her apron. She folds it and hangs it over the back of the chair. She carefully steps over the fallen egg.

    ELIZA
    (Efficiently)
    Come. We must hurry.
They leave the kitchen.

EXT. MORNING. THE ROAD.

Eliza, skirt in hand, trots beside Sekine. Her calm resolve opposed by his borderline hysteria.

INT. MORNING. BILLINGTON'S ROOM.

Billington is asleep.

SOUND of the front door crashing open and loud footsteps.

Billington practically jumps out of bed. He sits up listening and rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

INT. MORNING. LONDON'S PORCH.

Eliza is bent down over the still figure of London. She shakes him by the shoulders and then turns him over on his back. His face is a hideous purple; his breathing is rough and labored.

Sekine looks on in horror from the doorway.

ELIZA
(Sharply)
Jack! Jack! My God wake up!

Eliza checks his eyes and listens to his heartbeat.

ELIZA
(With forced calmness)
Sekine, we must wake Mrs. London.

They move together into the workroom as Billington appears at the door. Billington's hair is disheveled; his shirt tails hang out.

BILLINGTON
What's the matter? Is something wrong?

Billington peers past them and sees London.

ELIZA
It's Jack. We can't wake him. Stay with him.
Billington nods bewilderedly. SEKINE AND ELIZA EXIT.

INT. MORNING. CHARMIAN'S PORCH.

Charmian is asleep. SEKINE AND ELIZA ENTER without knocking. Eliza crosses to the bed and shakes Charmian.

Charmian awakes and sits up. She looks at Eliza and at Sekine who remains in the doorway.

CHARMIAN
(Trace of alarm)
What is it?

ELIZA
Sekine couldn't wake Jack. He came to me. You'd better come and see what you can do.

INT. MORNING. LONDON'S PORCH.

Billington stands over the crumpled body on the bed. He picks up London's wrist and checks his pulse. He shies away from looking at London's face.

As he backs away from the bed he steps on something which smashes beneath his foot.

He lifts his foot and reveals a shattered medicine vial. He kneels down to examine it and finds a label among the crushed glass.

CLOSE-UP OF LABEL: Bowman Drug Co., Oakland, California. 25 tab. 1/4 grain Morphine Sulphate.

He fingers the broken glass. He searches around the fallen bedsheets and the bedside table. On the bottom shelf of the table he sees the Colt .44.

Under the bedside table he finds a second vial.

CLOSE-UP OF SECOND VIAL: same as first except it reads Atropine Sulphate.

SOUND OF FOOTSEPS in the hall. CHARMIAN ENTERS.

Charmian takes no notice of Billington. She has eyes only for London.
Billington is on his feet before ELIZA AND SEKINE reach the Porch doorway. Unconsciously he slips the vial into his pocket and steps back so Charmian can reach London.

Charmian tries ineffectually to wake London.

CHARMIAN
Jack! Mate! Wake up.

His breathing is terrible. Eliza! Call a doctor. (BEAT) Food poisoning again. Hurry!

Eliza hurries from the room. All is quiet for a moment and her retreating footseps echo down the hall.

Charmian moves into the workroom leaving Billington on the porch. She searches for and finds a medical book.

CHARMIAN
We need coffee, Sekine. Strong. Very strong.

SEKINE
Coffee here, Missie. I brought.

Sekine indicates the tray.

CHARMIAN
Good. We'll need more. Now. We must wake him.

SEKINE EXITS

Charmian reads the medical book.

Billington enters from the porch.

BILLINGTON
I think that if we can get him up, you know, move him?

CHARMIAN
(Grateful smile)
Yes. Of course you're right. That would be good.

BILLINGTON
(Awkwardly)
Ah...I don't know whether it's food poisoning.
CHARMIAN
(With a sharp look)
What do you mean?

BILLINGTON
I found an empty morphine bottle by the bed.

Charmian visibly tightens. Her eyes are hard as she stares at him. She snaps the book closed. Billington holds her eyes as long as he can before dropping them to the floor.

Charmian offers up a tight smile as

CHARMIAN
(Patronizingly)
I'm sure you're quite wrong, James.

Long pause.

BILLINGTON
(Defeated)
I'll get Hazen. I need help to move him.

Charmian nods curtly.

INT. DAY. HALLWAY.

Three dimly lit figures move awkwardly down the hall towards the workroom. Hazen and Billington half carry, half drag London's limp form.

They move in crab-like fashion down the narrow hall. As they near the workroom DR. THOMSPON appears in the doorway. He is of medium height, slender, black-haired and in his late thirties. He is in shirt sleeves which are rolled up. He has removed his collar.

THOMSON
Alright. Bring him back in.

Hazen and Billington walk London through the workroom.

INT. DAY. PORCH.

Hazen and Billington place London on the bed and hold him up in a sitting position.
Thomson slaps London across the face several times. In the b.g. Eliza turns away.

    THOMSON
    Wake up man! Wake up. Hear me?

London's eye lids flutter open. The rolled-back eyes swim into view. The lids close again.

Thomson turns to Charmian across the room.

    THOMSON
    Where's the phone?

    CHARMIAN
    In the mainhouse. I'll take you.

Thomson nods and turns back to London. London's head hangs down on his chest. His shirt is mostly unbuttoned and the front is stained with coffee.

    THOMSON
    Might as well walk him some more.
    I'll be right back.

Thomson follows Charmian from the room.

INT. DAY. THE HALL.

Thomson and Charmian walk towards the front door.

    CHARMIAN
    What do you think Doctor?

    THOMSON
    Can't say yet. Have to get his stomach pumped. Would appear to be uremic poisoning. (BEAT) The morphine's the problem though.

    CHARMIAN
    (Guarded)
    Morphine?

    THOMSON
    God yes. He's shot through with it as far as I can see.
INT. DAY. LIVINGROOM.

Thomson is on the phone which sits on the desk in the small alcove. Charmian stands close by.

THOMSON
(Hurried)
I've already talked to them. They have the antidote and expect you. Just grab the pump and get up here!

Thomson hangs up. He turns to Charmian.

THOMSON
I'd better get back.

Charmian stands very still as if in a daze.

THOMSON (CONT'D)
Are you alright?

Charmian shakes herself out of it.

CHARMIAN
Yes. I'll...I'm fine. (BEAT) Can you find your way back?

THOMSON
Yes. (BEAT) Try not to worry. Hayes will be here soon with everything I need.

THOMSON turns and EXITS.

As the door closes behind him, Charmian scoops up the phone. She waits impatiently for the operator.

CHARMIAN
Operator? Oakland 5474 and please hurry.

She drums her fingers nervously on the desktop as she waits.

CHARMIAN (CONT'D)
Dr. Shiels? Sorry to bother you at home. Charmian London. Jack's had an attack. (BEAT) It looks bad. (BEAT) Perhaps food again. (BEAT) Well Doctor Thomson of Sonoma's here but...well I'd rather. (BEAT) Oh thank you Doctor. (BEAT) You'll
CHARMIAN (CONT'D)
call Doctor Porter? Bless you. (BEAT)
Yes, someone will meet you. Yes.
Goodbye.

Charmian slowly returns the receiver to its hook.

INT. DAY. PORCH.

London lies on the bed still comatose. Charmian kneels by his side futilely shaking his shoulders.

The shades have been raised and the sunlight streams in.

CHARMIAN
Mate! Mate! You must come back!
Mate. You've got to come back. To me Mate! To me!

She turns her head and looks into the workroom where Eliza and Thomson confer. She shakes her head sorrowfully.

SOUND of knocking on the workroom door. Sekine ushers in DR. HAYES. He is tall and thin with widespread nervous eyes. He is very distraught. He carries a large black medical bag which he puts on the table.

Hayes nods absently to the women as CHARMIAN ENTERS from the porch.

HAYES
Got here as fast as I could. (BEAT)
Any change.

Thomson ignores the question.

THOMSON
This is my assistant, Dr. Hayes.
If you ladies would wait outside? (BEAT) This is not a pleasant business.

ELIZA
What are you...?

HAYES
Pump his stomach, Miss.
CHARMIAN
Come Eliza. I want to fix my room
so that we can move Jack as soon
as they're through.

BOTH WOMEN EXIT.

EXT. DAY THE FRONT PORCH.

Billington stands there looking tired and worn. He is unshaved.
He looks up the road at an approaching wagon.

Hazen is driving and sitting beside him is a portly, bald man in
his fifties. This is DR. SHIELS.

As the wagon pulls to a halt, CHARMIAN comes out of the house and
stands beside Billington.

Dr. Shiels bounds from the wagon and hurries up the steps. He
gives a brief nod to Billington.

CHARMIAN
Oh thank you for coming so quickly,
Doctor.

Charmian and Shiels enter the house as

CHARMIAN (CONT'D)
Dr. Thomson seems to think that
Jack...

The door closes and the rest of her words are lost.

HAZEN
Whadda 'bout it?

BILLINGTON
No change. They're pumping his
stomach now.

Hazen sighs deeply and gives his scruffy beard a vigorous scratch-
ing.

HAZEN
Funny. Thoughta heard him walkin'
round the stable las' night. (BEAT)
Lemme take care the rig. I'll come
back case ya need me.

Billington nods. Hazen jerks the reins and moves off toward the
stable.
Billington stands at the railing lost in thought.

The door opens behind him and ELIZA comes out. Billington turns hopefully but Eliza drops her eyes and shakes her head. After a moment

ELIZA
The pumps is useless. (BEAT) His muscles are so constricted that they can't...

Eliza is wracked by a sob. The tears flow down her cheeks. She turns away from Billington.

He crosses and puts his hands gently on her shoulders. He doesn't know what to say.

After a moment she regains control and turns to face him

ELIZA
(Sniffling)
There's no fight left in him. (BEAT) It's as if he wants to die!

INT. DAY. WORKROOM.

On one side of the room Dr. Hayes is repacking his black bag. On the opposite side Dr. Thomson is washing his hands in a basin on the table. He dries his hands and throws the towel down angrily. He turns and glares as DR. SHIELS ENTERS from the porch.

SHIELS
I'd say you're quite right. Uremic poisoning following renal colic.

THOMSON
And?

Dr. Shiels crosses to the basin and rinses his hands.

SHIELS
And what?

THOMSON
(Stiffly)
And the comatose state?

SHIELS
(Matter of factly)
Complications.
Shiels dries his hands.

SHIELS (CONT'D)

THOMSON
(Sarcastically)
Really? Name one!

SHIELS
(Blustering)
See here Thomson! I have no intention of quarreling with you. (BEAT) Let Porter sort it out when he arrives.

THOMSON
Porter?

SHIELS
His personal physician.

THOMSON
Just what is there to sort out? There's damn little we can do besides normal massage and resuscitation.

CHARMIAN ENTERS unseen by Dr. Thomson.

THOMSON (CONT'D)
He's so constricted by morphine we can't even treat the uremia! The poisons are still building up!

Dr. Shiels looks at Charmian.

SHIELS
(Flustered)
I don't think this is the proper time for this...this...

Thomson turns and sees Charmian.

CHARMIAN
The room is ready.

Dr. Shiels looks at her without comprehension.
CHARMIAN (CONT'D)
I thought it best to move Jack.
There's more room on my porch.

SHIELS
Quite. Yes, of course.

THOMSON
(Formally)
Mrs. London? Am I to understand
that I'm being superseded by these
bigshots you're bringing in?

CHARMIAN
I appreciate all you've done, Doctor.
(BEAT) We're awaiting the arrival of
Dr. Porter. He will take charge.

THOMSON
I find your casualness in this matter
quite incredible!

CHARMIAN
(Coldly)
Need I remind you Doctor that you
are here to treat my husband not to
diagnose my state of mind!

There is a moment of electric tension.

SHIELS
(Diplomatically)
The important thing is to make him
comfortable. Wouldn't you agree
Doctor? (TO CHARMIAN) Perhaps that
young man I passed on the way in
could lend a hand?

Charmian nods. She gives Thomson a final, withering look and
EXITS.

INT. EARLY EVENING. BILLINGTON'S ROOM.

Billington sits at the writing desk. He has shaved and changed
his clothes. The lamp is on although it is not yet dark.

He is hunched over his journal supporting his head with a hand
as he writes.
BILLINGTON (V.O.)
Jack London lies dying down the hall. No one now believes he will recover. He rallied earlier this afternoon but it was short-lived.

That was hours ago and there has not been a flicker of consciousness since.

Doctor Porter arrived and took charge. Although there seems little enough to do. A thick gloom has settled over the house. (BEAT) We wait.

Billington caps his pen and closes the journal. He rises, stretches AND EXITS.

INT. EVENING. HALLWAY.

As Billington enters the hall he passes SEKINE who carries a bundle of soiled sheets.

Billington moves down the hall. The workroom door is open. The room has been entirely cleaned. On the porch the bed has been made and a single red rose lies on the pillow.

INT. EVENING. THE PORCH.

BILLINGTON ENTERS and surveys the room.

The bedside table has been ordered and made ready for a night's work: packs of cigarettes are stacked next to three thermos bottles which rest in bowls of ice. The medicine kit is gone. He looks but all traces of the broken vial are gone. Again he notices the Colt .44. He hesitates and then reaches for it. He opens the cylinder and finds it fully loaded. He snaps it shut and returns it to its place.

As he stands he glances out the window. Outside, some distance from the house, A DOZEN RANCH-HANDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS are gathered in silent vigil. They are sharply etched by the setting sun behind them.

Billington crosses back into the workroom. As he moves past the desk a scrap of paper thumb-tacked to the wall catches his eye.
CLOSE-UP OF PAPER:
Now I get me up to work
I pray the Lord I shall not shirk;
If I should die before the night,
I pray the Lord my work's all right.

INT. EVENING. CHARMIAN'S SITTING ROOM.

Charmian sits on the sofa. Beside her is her embroidery. DR.
PORTER ENTERS from the porch. He is a tall distinguished man with
a shock of white hair.

He stands beside the sofa for a moment. Charmian looks up and
their eyes meet. He sits down beside her and takes her hand.

PORTER
I'm sorry. (BEAT) We've done all
we can. It's just a matter of time.

Charmian nods and closes her eyes. Porter looks at her steadily.
Her eyes flutter open.

CHARMIAN
I'm alright, Doctor.

Porter pats her hand and rises. Charmian takes a deep breath in
preparation for

CHARMIAN (CONT'D)
Would you ask Dr. Thomson to
come in?

PORTER
Of course.

PORTER EXITS to the porch. After a moment DR. THOMSON ENTERS. He
stands uneasily at the corner of the sofa looking at Charmian.

Charmian rises and moves about the room. She nervously repairs
a strand of fallen hair. Finally

CHARMIAN
I do not wish to challenge you,
Doctor. I hope you understand that.
(BEAT) As you perhaps surmise Jack
has been ill for some time.

Thomson nods.
CHARMIAN
I see no reason to besmirch his name with any talk of morphine poisoning.

Thomson begins to protest. Charmian cuts him off with a wave of her hand.

CHARMIAN (CONT'D)
Doctor! I implore you. What possible purpose can be served by this needless...

Charmian trails off into silence. She looks pleadingly at Dr. Thomson. His face is a study in exhaustion.

THOMSON
It's rather difficult to ignore, Mrs. London. (BEAT) Anyone could have overheard my phone conversations. And...and there's the druggist who prepared the antidote.

Charmian looks him straight in the eyes.

CHARMIAN
Nevertheless, I would appreciate your cooperation. (BEAT) Nothing but harm can come from this. (BEAT) Please!

Thomson turns away. He stands hands in pockets and shoulders slumped, looking out over the porch. On the porch the three other doctors confer quietly. London's hoarse breathing is the loudest sound in either room.

After a long moment, Thomson turns to Charmian and gives her a stiff nod of the head. He returns to the porch.

EXT. NIGHT. THE BACKYARD.

The crowd has swelled to more than a score. Many of the mourners hold candles which flicker in the breeze.

They stand quietly watching the porch for some word. The shades on the porch are pulled down but shadows can be seen moving about inside.
INT. NIGHT. THE SITTING ROOM.

Charmian and Eliza sit very still on the sofa. In Eliza's hand is a coffee cup and saucer. In the b.g. the doctors can be seen moving about.

The only sound is the stenorous breathing of the dying man. London's breathing catches for a moment and the women tense. The breathing continues.

Eliza's cup rattles in the saucer. She rises to put the cup and saucer on the table.

There is a heavy exhalation of breath and then silence.

The cup and saucer smash on the floor.

Eliza runs to the porch door. Charmian remains seated, staring straight ahead.

INT. NIGHT. THE PORCH.

Eliza stands in the doorway biting a rough red knuckle.

Dr. Porter hovers over London's body. The other doctors are scattered about the room.

London lies on the bed his feet propped up on pillows. He is partially covered by a fur rug.

INT. NIGHT. THE SITTINGROOM.

A tear trickles down Charmian's cheek.

EXT. NIGHT. THE BACKYARD.

Over the mourners' shoulders we see the house. The moon has risen and sits over the roof.

The porch shades are being raised and Dr. Porter can be seen. He stands very still for a moment and then shakes his head.

A murmur runs through the crowd.

Porter drops the shade back down.

The wind moans through the yard blowing out the candles.
The chimes ring in the trees.

INT. NIGHT. BILLINGTON'S ROOM.

The room is drenched in shadows. The curtains are tightly pulled and the desk light is on. Billington sits at the desk his head down on his arms.

After a moment he sits up. His face is troubled. On the desk is the open journal.

CLOSE-UP OF JOURNAL: Jack London died tonight at 7:45 p.m. According to the death certificate of gastro-intestinal uremia.

Billington toys with the medicine vial, rolling it around in his hand. Finally stands it on the desk.

He pulls out his pocketwatch: ten minutes past two. He leaves it open on the desk and moves to the bed.

The desk lamp shines in his face. He stares at the ceiling. He stares at the lamp. The light begins to shimmer. He sleeps. He dreams.

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. NIGHT. RANCH ROAD.

Billington walks aimlessly down the road. A full moon hangs overhead.

Suddenly over the treetops he spots a bright eerie light. He stops and stares. It is a fire.

Billington races down the road in the direction of the fire.

Tearing around a bend in the road he sees that Wolfhouse is aflame. Its five chimney spires engulfed by fire. He runs faster, the firelight playing on his face.

He halts some twenty feet from the blaze. The heat is blistering and he shields his eyes. He looks frantically about but there is nothing to be done.

Beyond, among the redwood trees, A FIGURE moves. The shadowed form carries a torch and moves stealthily.

Billington yells and the figure moves away.

Billington gives chase.
The torch-bearer moves deeper into the forest. We can catch only glimpses of the torch dodging in and out of the trees. Suddenly, even that is gone.

Billington plunges ahead. He trips over some underbrush. He regains his footing and stumbles on. Rounding a tree he comes upon the torch sputtering on the ground. He drops to his knees and smashes the torch into the earth and extinguishes it.

He hears movement in the darkness and runs off in that direction.

Breaking through the trees he enters a clearing. Ahead, in the moonlight, he spots the figure. He races on and is soon close enough for a flying tackle.

The two figures pitch forward into the tall grass. Panting, Billington lays atop the other man. Having regained his breath he grabs the man by his collar and twists him over.

The moonlight strikes the man's face: IT IS BILLINGTON.

Billington recoils in horror. He stumbles backwards and falls. He scrambles backwards unable to wrench his eyes away from the other Billington.

The other grins at him.

Finally Billington jerks his eyes away and turns and runs.

He pulls up short. Ahead, atop a white horse, is London.

London is dressed in white shirt and white riding pants. The moonlight shimmers around him creating an almost ethereal aura. His face is indescribably sad. He stares at Billington.

Frantic, Billington points back at the OTHER but when he turns there is no one.

INT. MORNING BILLINGTON'S ROOM.

Billington wakes with a start. His clothes are all rumpled and he is bathed in sweat. His eyes jerk around the room as if not knowing where he is.

He throws his feet over the side of the bed and sits holding his head in his hands. Finally he goes to the window and throws open the curtains. It's first light.
Standing at the desk he stares down at the vial. He picks it up in a shaking hand.

CLOSE-UP as he clenches the vial in his hand.

MATCH CUT

EXT. MORNING. THE LAKE.

Billington opens his fist and we see the vial.

The CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal Billington standing at the end of the dock.

He drops the vial into the water. We watch it sink slowly.

Billington turns away and heads down the dock to his horse which is tethered in the b.g.

INT. DAY. THE HALL.

The door to the workroom is open. Inside can be seen an OLD COUPLE. They are country folk and dressed in their Sunday best.

They stand silently beside a gray coffin. The coffin lid is open. It rests on two sawhorses.

The old lady sobs and her husband puts an arm around her shoulder.

Beyond them, the outside door of the sleeping porch is open. They begin to move in that direction.

SOUND OF A DOOR opening and CHARMIAN ENTERS the hall from her room. In the b.g. the old couple turn and see her.

The old lady breaks away and approaches Charmian. The man remains behind ill at ease.

CHARMIAN

Mrs. Whittaker.

Charmian nods to the man.

MRS. WHITTAKER

We're so sorry, my dear. So sorry.

She takes Charmian's arm and pats it repeatedly.
MRS. WHITTAKER (CONT'D)
We certainly won't bother you. Will we Joe? But if there's anythin' we can do? (BEAT) Joe 'n me. Just call.

She turns to her husband.

MRS. WHITTAKER (CONT'D)
Isn't that right, Joe?

Joe nods and fingers his hat nervously.

The old lady gives Charmian's arm a final pat and rejoins Joe. Arm in arm they EXIT by the porch door.

Charmian continues down the hall.

INT. DAY. BILLINGTON'S ROOM.

Billington is dressed in his city clothes. A suitcase lies open on the bed. He stands over it folding clothes and packing them.

SOUND OF KNOCKING at door.

BILLINGTON
(Calling)
Come in.

CHARMIAN ENTERS, looking first at Billington then the suitcase.

CHARMIAN
Sekine told me you were leaving.

BILLINGTON
I thought it best.

Charmian nods. There is a long pause.

CHARMIAN
I don't wish to impose on you, James. But...

She moves into the room and shuts the door. She stands backed up close to it fiddling with the doorknob.

CHARMIAN (CONT'D)
You could do me a great service. (BEAT) Would you stay? Just until tomorrow. And accompany Eliza to Oakland with the... with Jack? (BEAT) To the crematorium.
Billington folds a shirt with meticulous care and places it in the suitcase.

Charmian sits on the bed.

CHARMIAN (Quickly)
I know it must seem an odd request. I don't want to burden you. (BEAT) But I'm not going myself. Jack wanted no ceremony.

But there's Bess and the two girls. That's Jack's first wife. I can't deny them their final moments. Lord knows they didn't see him much.

(Deep sigh) I'm afraid he wouldn't even have liked people coming here. But what can I do? These were the people he cared most for.

BILLINGTON
Please. It's alright. I understand. Of course I'll stay.

Charmian rises with a relieved smile.

CHARMIAN
Oh James! Thank you. I so didn't want to send Eliza alone. (BEAT) Don't worry it'll all be very simple. I'll make all the arrangements.

CHARMIAN EXITS.

Billington looks thoughtfully after her.

INT. MORNING. CHARMIAN'S PORCH.

Charmian is asleep. SOUND of heavy footsteps and banging comes from the next room.

She wakes and sits up.

SOUND: low rumble of men's voices from next room. Charmian strains to decipher them. The voices fade away.

She rises and crosses to the window. Drawing back the shade she is momentarily blinded by the morning sun.
Shading her eyes she catches a glimpse of several ranch-hands rounding the corner of the house carrying the coffin.

She drops the curtains back into place. Taking up her robe she leaves the room.

INT. MORNING. THE WORKROOM.

Charmian enters tying the sash on her robe. She stares blankly at the two empty sawhorses. She touches one absently.

The exterior door off the porch is open. She closes it.

She wanders aimlessly around the room and then sits at London's rolltop desk.

SOUND of quiet knocking. Charmian swivels around in the chair.

SEKINE stands in the doorway. He holds several articles.

SEKINE  
Missie. These in Master's ranch suit.

Sekine places in front of her: a handful of keys, a dingy chamois bag and several stray notes.

Charmian fingers the items thoughtfully.

SEKINE (CONT'D)  
I put pad and pencil in pocket like always, Missie. (BEAT) Ok?

She gives an absent nod.

SEKINE (CONT'D)  
And note.

CHARMIAN  
Note? What note?

SEKINE  
(Avoiding her eyes)  
I write and send with him. (BEAT) No one know. (BEAT) I say your speech was silver. Your silence now golden.

Sekine looks up his eyes filled with tears.

SEKINE (CONT'D)  
That all. (BEAT) My goodbye.
With a bow SEKINE TURNS AND EXITS.

Deeply moved, Charmian watches him retreat.

CLOSE-UP of Charmian.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

When thoughts
Of the last bitter hour come like a blight
Over the spirit...

INT. DAY. CREMATORIUM CHAPEL.

CLOSE-UP of Billington as

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

...and sad images
Of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall,
And breathless darkness, and the narrow house,
Make thee shudder, and grow sick at heart
Go forth under the open sky...

During the above, the CAMERA PULLS BACK from Billington to reveal a large, dim, domed-ceilinged room. There is a wide center aisle leading to a rostrum from which a LARGE MATRONLY WOMAN speaks.

THIRTY PEOPLE are scattered about the room. Billington stands in the shadows by the massive rear doors.

We see the room from Billington’s POV: ranged behind the speaker are several chairs two of which are occupied by additional speakers: TWO MIDDLE-AGED MEN.

On the opposite side of the rostrum is the coffin. The lid is open. Several flower arrangements are placed around it. There is no music.

Billington leans against the rear wall. Over his shoulder we can see the woman reciting although the words are no longer audible.

Suddenly a hand comes down on his shoulder. He turns and sees HOPKINS.

Hopkins jerks his head towards the speaker and rolls his bloodshot eyes.
HOPKINS (Whisper)

Outside?

Billington nods.

The two men inch their way towards the exit.

EXT. DAY. THE COURTYARD.

Hopkins and Billington come out of the chapel. Billington wears a black mourner's band on his sleeve. He seems stiff and nervous. Hopkins is very loose obviously having been drinking heavily.

They walk in silence down the breezeway which runs along the side of the chapel.

HOPKINS

Jees. I couldn't take much of that woman. (BEAT) I called the ranch. Sekine said I'd find you here.

Billington nods. Silence.

Hopkins pulls out a pack of cigarettes and shakes one loose.

BILLINGTON

May I?

HOPKINS

Sure. (BEAT) Thought you didn't smoke?

BILLINGTON (Flatly)

I don't.

HOPKINS

Yeah. (BEAT) Wish I had a snort myself.

Hopkins lights Billington's cigarette and his own.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)

What happened up there, Jim?

Without inhaling, Billington expels a great cloud of smoke. It stings his eyes and he waves it away. After a moment
BILLINGTON
(Quietly)
I don't know what to tell you.
(BEAT) Nothing really.

Hopkins watches him intently. Billington fingers his cigarette nervously.

BILLINGTON (CONT'D)
(Vaguely)
He just gave up. That's all.

Billington moves away several feet.

HOPKINS
Is it? (BEAT) Maybe you don't know it but the rumors are already flying.
(BEAT) There's a disgruntled doctor apparently. Isn't that right?

BILLINGTON
Let it alone. He's dead. Nothing's going to change that.

HOPKINS
Maybe I'm not making myself clear. I talked to some assistant this morning. A Dr. Hayes?

Billington does not respond. Finally

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
(Tough)
Don't kid yourself into thinking it's Jack's name you're protecting. I don't believe it for a minute!
(BEAT) Besides Charmian is more than capable of tending to that.

Billington tosses away his cigarette angrily.

BILLINGTON
You're drunk Earnest.

HOPKINS
(Loud)
You're damn right I am! I've had a few whiskies and a few tears and I ain't through with either yet.
HOPKINS (CONT'D)
Damn sight more fitting tribute than any this gathering will muster up!

What about you? Any tears shed for the fallen idol? Or have you saved them all for yourself!

BILLINGTON
Just what's that suppose to mean? Damn it Earnest! What do you want from me?

HOPKINS
A little of that Truth you're so fond of!

BILLINGTON
(Lashing out)
Alright then damn you! There was a morphine overdose. Does that satisfy you? Will you tantalize your readers with that little tidbit!

Unruffled, Hopkins gives him a knowing smile.

HOPKINS
You are quite the cynic after all. (BEAT) You don't really believe I would exploit such a thing?

BILLINGTON
(Verge of tears)
No no. I'm sorry. I...I didn't mean that. (BEAT) I...

(Without conviction) Look it was an accident! It must have been an accident, don't you see? My God Earnest his gun was less than two feet away. If he wanted to...you know the kind of man he... (Trails off)

HOPKINS
(Prodding)
You don't sound too sure.
BILLINGTON

(Anguished)
I'm trying to be sure. (BEAT) I have to be sure. Don't I?

Hopkins looks at him for a long moment.

HOPKINS

(Gently)
If you're honest with yourself you never can be sure.

Billington begins to cry. He turns away.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
Sometimes it's wise to hide the truth from others. That's a judgment you must make. But never from yourself.

Hopkins approaches and puts a hand on Billington's shoulder.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)
That you have to tote around with you. Like a piece of baggage. (BEAT) It's the kind of stuff you pickup along the way.

Billington wipes away the tears and gives him a small, sad nod.

In the b.g. the chapel doors swing open and the mourners begin to file out.

INT. DAY. THE CHAPEL.

Billington stands silhouetted in the doorway staring into the chapel.

We see a FRAIL OLD MAN in a morning coat shuffle out from one of the recesses and approach the coffin. Otherwise the chapel is empty.

SOUND: the old man's shoes squeak as he walks slowly across the room.

He reaches the coffin, peers down for a moment and then closes the coffin lid. He moves away.

CLOSE-UP of Billington: SOUND of the squeaking shoes.
EXT. DAY. RANCH ROAD.

SOUND of squeaking shoes segues into the creaking of the wagon as it moves up the road.

A light rain is falling.

Hazen is driving the rig and on the seat beside him is a small brass burial urn wreathed with yellow primroses.

Behind the wagon is a small procession: Charmian and Eliza together, then Billington and finally Sekine.

They pass the stable and head off among the eucalyptus trees.

EXT. DAY. A SMALL KNOLL.

A clearing is nearly encircled by madrone trees, their red-lacquer bark dulled by the rain.

On one side is a small square enclosed by a picket fence. Within are two small weathered gravestones.

On the opposite side, overlooking the valley, a DOZEN RANCH LABORERS create a semi-circle around a freshly dug hole that has been lined with mortar. They stand quietly, some leaning on long crowbars.

Near the hole is a mortar tray and trowel. A huge red volcanic boulder rests several feet away.

The wagon creaks up the hill and halts.

GEORGE PARSLOW, a spry old fellow of sixty-five, comes forward to receive the urn from Hazen.

He carries the urn to the hole as Charmian, Eliza and Billington follow and close the circle behind him. Sekine and Hazen move in among the laborers.

Parslow, on hands and knees, slips the urn into the hole. He reaches for the mortar tray and begins to fill the grave. He works slowly and methodically. The only SOUND is the wind and the scrape of trowel on tray.

He finishes and stands. He signals and four men with crowbars approach. With some effort they roll the red rock over the grave. They fall back into place and there is silence.

The sun breaks through the trees overhead and sends down shafts of light on the mourners.
FULL SHOT of the mourners encircling the grave. The wind blows and the sun glistens on the wet red bark of the madrones.

EXT. DAY. TRAIN STATION.

Billington stands alone on the deserted platform. In the b.g. is the train. He holds his small valise. Beside him is his large suitcase.

He stares after Hazen and the wagon who are some distance away. A trail of dust whips down the road.

He picks up his bag and moves down the platform.

He hands the bag up to a PORTER and starts to climb aboard. Something catches his eye: pulled up to the baggage car is a cart. On the cart is a large coffin-like box. Because of the sun it is difficult for Billington to quite make it out.

He stares back at the box for a long moment. He climbs aboard and disappears.

TWO RAILROADMEN load the box onto the train. We can now see that it is simply a large wooden crate.

The men slide the compartment door closed.

LONG SHOT down length of train as the CONDUCTOR signals and the train moves out.

SCREEN TO RED.

The End