

OBERON MODERN PLAYS

Moonlight and Magnolias

by Ron Hutchinson



THE OBERON COLLECTION



THE OBERON COLLECTION



Characters

DAVID O. SELZNICK

BEN HECHT

VICTOR FLEMING

MISS POPPENGUHL

Voices:

SECURITY CHIEF

NUNNALLY JOHNSON

MARTIN QUIGLEY

LELAND HAYWARD

Moonlight and Magnolias was originally produced by The Goodman Theatre in Chicago, Illinois, on 15 May 2004, with the following cast:

BEN HECHT, William Dick
VICTOR FLEMING, Rob Riley
DAVID O. SELZNICK, Ron Orbach
MISS POPPENGHUL, Mary Seibel

Director Steve Robman
Set and Lighting Design Michael Philippi
Costume Design Birgit Rattenborg Wise
Sound Design Richard Woodbury

The first British production of *Moonlight and Magnolias* was at the Tricycle Theatre, London, on 27 September 2007, with the following cast:

BEN HECHT, Duncan Bell
VICTOR FLEMING, Steven Pacey
DAVID O. SELZNICK, Andy Nyman
MISS POPPENGHUL, Josephine Butler

Director Sean Holmes
Designer Francis O'Connor
Lighting Designer Davy Cunningham
Sound Carolyn Downing

Act One

SCENE ONE

The lights rise on an office on a Hollywood studio lot in 1939. It's the office of legendary producer DAVID O. SELZNICK.

There's a cart piled high with breakfast foods in the center of the room – bagels, pastries, fruit, juices. Pink early morning Los Angeles sunlight floods in through the blinds.

There are two doors leading off – one goes to the outer office, the other to the bathroom.

There are two men in the room. One is SELZNICK himself, dressed in a sharply cut business suit, collar and tie. The other is screenwriter and playwright BEN HECHT, in casual slacks and jacket.

SELZNICK's on his feet, looking at HECHT, who's at the cart trying to decide what to eat, dish cover in hand. SELZNICK looks as if he's just had some very bad news –

SELZNICK: You didn't read it?

HECHT: No.

SELZNICK: You didn't read it?

HECHT: No.

SELZNICK thinks for a moment, tries again.

SELZNICK: You didn't read the book?

HECHT: No.

SELZNICK: You didn't read the book?

HECHT: No.

SELZNICK: You know what book I'm talking about?

HECHT: Yes.

SELZNICK: This book?

RON HUTCHINSON

He grabs a thick volume of Gone With The Wind from a shelf.

HECHT: I didn't read it.

SELZNICK: Then what are you doing here?

HECHT: You said you needed me.

SELZNICK: I need you to read the book.

HECHT: Okay –

He sets the dish cover down, takes the book, curls up in the armchair, as if settling down for a long read.

SELZNICK: What are you doing?

HECHT: Reading the book.

SELZNICK: You're reading the book?

HECHT: Yes.

SELZNICK: You don't have time to read the book.

He snatches it back, then grins, relieved.

You're putting me on, right?

HECHT: No.

SELZNICK: It's a gag.

HECHT: No.

SELZNICK: Everybody in the world has read the book.

HECHT: Not me.

SELZNICK: You *know* about the book?

HECHT: *Gone With The* – ? Sure. I read the first page. *Feh.*

SELZNICK: *Feh* – ?

HECHT: Moonlight and magnolias? Gimme a break.

SELZNICK: You know why you're here?

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: Did it get there?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Thirty minutes ago, I checked personally.

SELZNICK: With a phone call?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: That you made yourself?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: To his house?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: Where he lives?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: I want him in here the moment he arrives.

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

She leaves.

HECHT: Does Cukor agree with closing the movie down?

SELZNICK: George Cukor is no longer the director of *Gone With The Wind*.

HECHT: You fired him?

SELZNICK: Last night. It's my studio, my picture, I can do any damn thing I want –

HECHT: He's your best friend.

SELZNICK: You think that made it any easier?

HECHT: Your kids call him Uncle George.

SELZNICK: Thank you.

HECHT: *Uncle George.*

SELZNICK: (*Warning.*) Ben –

HECHT: Mayer okayed this?

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

SELZNICK: Louis B. Mayer has only fifty per cent of this picture. I'm in creative control. He gets half the profits, I get all the ulcers.

HECHT: But you don't have a screenplay?

SELZNICK: I have you.

HECHT: I didn't read the –

SELZNICK: Don't keep saying that – (*Agonized.*) *You didn't read the – You're the only person on the face of the planet – (His fists bunch.) I read the first –*

He controls himself –

This novel – for your information – is the biggest sensation in publishing history. It's about a nation torn in two, an entire civilization having to decide between the modern world and its past. The heroine is Scarlett O'Hara, which I can't believe you don't know, considering I've been searching for an actress to play her for the last couple of years – (*Remembering something.*) Twenty seconds –

He presses the intercom again –

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Yes, Mr. Selznick?

SELZNICK: Memo to Wardrobe. I'm not happy with Miss Leigh's red dress. She's got a pair of boobs, let's make sure we can get a look at them. More cleavage –

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) More cleavage, yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: Any sign of Fleming yet?

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) No, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK turns back to HECHT, reverently holding the book, tries to get back onto track –

SELZNICK: Scarlett – yes? – fights to rebuild Tara, just as the readers had to find a way to keep going through the Depression –

HECHT: Tara?

RON HUTCHINSON

The intercom buzzer sounds –

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Hedda Hopper on line one,
Mr. Selznick –

SELZNICK grabs the phone –

SELZNICK: No, Hedda, I have not closed production down – I
don't know where you're getting your information from –

It buzzes again –

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Louella Parsons on line two,
Mr. Selznick –

He grabs another phone –

SELZNICK: That's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard –
close down *Gone With The Wind* after three weeks?

The intercom buzzes again –

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Ed Sullivan on line one, Mr.
Selznick –

He grabs the third phone –

SELZNICK: Trouble? On *Gone With The Wind*? You know
you'd be the first person I'd call if anything like that ever
happened, Sully –

Shaken, he sets the phones down.

(*To HECHT.*) I'll give you ten thousand dollars.

HECHT is already heading towards the door.

Twelve. Fifteen. No screenplay? – no movie. No movie? –
no more Selznick Studios. No more Selznick Studios? – I'm
back working for my father-in-law. Ruin. Humiliation.
Failure. You want that for me?

HECHT: I didn't read the –

SELZNICK: Say that once more –

He makes a naked appeal to him –

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: The O'Haras' plantation in Georgia – think pillars, staircase, cotton fields, “Ol’ Man River” – hot, it’s so hot, it’s always hot.

Without warning he grabs HECHT by the lapels –

Ah bejaysus – land, land, land – ’tis the only thing that lasts – d’you hear me? – land –

HECHT pulls back in alarm –

HECHT: David – ?

SELZNICK: Gerald O’Hara. Scarlett’s father.

SELZNICK sucks in his stomach, pulls himself upright, assuming Ellen O’Hara’s character, using a French accent –

Her mother. Ellen Robillard O’Hara, Mistress of Tara, *très aristocratique, très élégante* –

He parades up and down, hand thrown out on limp wrist to demonstrate Ellen’s character.

HECHT: (*Wincing.*) *Très* early in the day for this –

SELZNICK’s getting in the groove –

SELZNICK: Her mother’s the only person that Scarlett O’Hara has ever been afraid of –

He strikes a coquettish pose, legs crossed, hip thrown out, finger on cheek –

Scarlett herself, beautiful, spoiled, tiny feet, flawless skin, a laugh that cares for no one –

He leans at an exaggerated angle against the couch, tosses an imaginary mane of red hair back, whispers languorously –

Why, fiddle de dee –

HECHT: Oy –

SELZNICK pulls himself upright again –

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

SELZNICK: The men. Think spurs, boots, buttons, cravats –

He circles an imaginary enemy, jabbing and weaving –

Every one of them desperately in love with Scarlett –
yes? – who has nothing in her pretty little head but dreamy
old Ashley Wilkes.

HECHT: Ashley?

SELZNICK sits at his desk, strikes a pose over a book –

SELZNICK: Proud, cultured, Mozart, Europe, books, the oboe,
mezzotint –

HECHT gets the idea –

SELZNICK / HECHT: No spurs –

SELZNICK: You get the main characters?

*As he explains the narrative he indicates the position on
stage each of the characters he's summoning up –*

When the movie opens Scarlett's convinced that Ashley
is about to declare his love for her. Then she discovers
that Ashley is about to marry Melanie Hamilton, his own
cousin –

HECHT: Is that legal?

SELZNICK: It's the South. Scarlett has always been sure that
Ashley will one day be hers. When she hears the news
she assumes it's a mistake, a terrible, terrible mistake. She
thinks he's going to elope with her. He says *It can't be*.
Nobody's ever said No to her before. She argues. *It can be*.
It can't be. *It can be*. It can't be. *It can be* –

HECHT: I get the idea.

SELZNICK: You're going to love this – Ashley leaves but
unknown to either of them, the ruthless but charming –

He ducks behind the couch –

Rhett Butler –

He jumps up again –

RON HUTCHINSON

Has heard it all.

HECHT: Rhett Butler?

SELZNICK: Think – think – think Clark Gable, that's all you have to think – She's mad at him for eavesdropping but he laughs in her face –

HECHT: *Ha?*

SELZNICK: *Ha ha.* Scarlett has met her match. It gets even better – Stung by Ashley's rejection she marries Charles Hamilton – Melanie's brother and a poor boob who just happens to be the first person she sees after getting the heave-ho from Ashley, who's far too noble to walk out on Melanie even though we suspect he has the hots for Scarlett who in short order has a child by him –

HECHT: By Ashcroft?

SELZNICK: *Ashley.* By Hamilton. But don't worry about him. He's just about to get himself killed –

HECHT: The war's broken out by now?

SELZNICK: Can't you keep up?

He hands him a huge sheaf of papers –

Here's Sidney Howard's scenario – most of the story beats are in there –

HECHT: Most?

SELZNICK: We left a few things out.

HECHT: David – this is longer than a whore's dream –

A knock on the door.

SELZNICK: Yes?

MISS POPPENGHUL enters –

MISS POPPENGHUL: Mr. Fleming, Mr. Selznick –

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: Cukor took five days to shoot the opening scene.
His pacing's too slow. He's putting his own dialog in.
Margaret Mitchell's original name for Scarlett O'Hara was
Pansy. That's how he's shot the movie. Pansified. I know
that won't happen with you. You may be a son of a bitch
bastard –

FLEMING: Thanks –

SELZNICK: But you're a talented one – and Gable's a pal of
yours, isn't he?

FLEMING: Are you kidding? I taught him to *be* Gable.

HECHT: So what happens on *Oz*?

SELZNICK: (*Dismissive.*) That's not your problem.

FLEMING: It's my movie.

SELZNICK: It *was* your movie.

FLEMING: So I don't have to go back to the Munchkins?

SELZNICK: No.

FLEMING: I can live with that. When we screened the dailies
yesterday the little bastards were singing "Ding Dong the
Bitch is Dead." (*Cautious.*) Mayer's happy with this?

SELZNICK: He agrees with me you're the only guy who could
take this on.

FLEMING: So give me a couple of weeks to read the
screenplay, make notes, work with the actors –

SELZNICK: We don't have a couple of weeks and we don't
have a screenplay.

HECHT smiles, waves at FLEMING –

HECHT: Hi.

SELZNICK: That's why Ben Hecht's here.

FLEMING: You don't have – ?

HECHT: He fired the screenplay's ass, too.

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

FLEMING: So what are we working from?

SELZNICK: You read the book?

FLEMING: (*Cautious.*) It's a very *big* book –

SELZNICK: But you know what's in there?

FLEMING: Don't most people?

SELZNICK: Not our screenwriter.

FLEMING: (*To HECHT.*) You didn't – ?

HECHT: No.

SELZNICK: It's not a problem. He's going to give it a week.

FLEMING: A week?

SELZNICK: Seven days.

HECHT: Five days. A *working* week.

FLEMING sees a copy of the book, hefts it –

FLEMING: Five days to turn this into a screenplay?

SELZNICK: Ben can do more in five days than anybody in Hollywood.

FLEMING: He's going to turn a thousand and thirty seven pages into a hundred and thirty – ?

SELZNICK: He's the best there is.

FLEMING: When he hasn't read any of them?

HECHT: I read the first page.

FLEMING: And?

HECHT: *Feh.*

FLEMING: David – *uh oh* – big book – big movie –

SELZNICK: Ben wrote *Scarface* in eleven days.

HECHT: *Hurricane* in two days –

FLEMING: This isn't a piece of shit like those –

RON HUTCHINSON

HECHT: Piece of shit?

FLEMING: You know what I mean –

HECHT: That they didn't reach the giddy artistic heights of *Test Pilot*?

FLEMING: There was something wrong with *Test Pilot*?

He's shaping up physically to HECHT. SELZNICK hastily intervenes –

SELZNICK: Such kidders – The best rewrite guy in Hollywood – the only director with the balls to take this on – Big book, yes, but Ben's got Sidney Howard's first pass, he's going to work from that.

FLEMING: Okay, so let me know when we have a screenplay –

He's heading towards the door. SELZNICK stops him leaving –

SELZNICK: I need you here. There might be some things he wants to bounce off his director –

HECHT: I can think of one or two things already –

SELZNICK: You're my guys. I'm your guy. That's the only way we're going to get through it. But the clock's ticking. It's costing me fifty thousand dollars a day to idle the picture.

He thrusts a legal pad and pencil at HECHT.

HECHT: Why doesn't Mayer rewrite the movie? He called me in once. He said *This is all you need to know about screenwriting. The rose is here.*

He holds the pencil aloft –

It should be here.

He moves it several inches away, shrugs –

I'm still trying to figure what he meant.

The good soldier and honest craftsman, he hunkers down, ready to write the story beats on the legal pad –

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

So – Hamilton buys the farm and – ?

SELZNICK: The war heats up. The South attacks –

He rushes to the other side of the room –

The North counter-attacks –

He rushes to the opposite corner –

The South is thrown back –

He rushes to the first corner –

They attack again –

He rushes to the opposite corner –

Once more the North counter-attacks –

HECHT: You're making me nauseous.

SELZNICK: Atlanta burns – (*To FLEMING.*) – which I shot already so you don't have to bother with that.

FLEMING: Before we get into this, David – I get to finish this job, yes? It's not going to be – seven in the morning *Oz*, eight o'clock *Gone With The Wind*, nine o'clock *The Ice Follies*?

SELZNICK: I won't dignify that with an answer.

He thrusts the script to FLEMING, who tries to follow along as SELZNICK narrates for HECHT's benefit –

Flames, falling buildings, people rushing here and there and in the middle of it – Oh –

He sticks his stomach out and puts his hand on it –

Melanie's about to have Ashley's baby. Horse, cart, Scarlett, Melanie, her baby, gunshots, looters, flames, smoke – Scarlett makes her way back to Tara –

SELZNICK turns back to HECHT and FLEMING, sweeping across the room, arms outstretched, as Scarlett –

Tara, Tara, if only I can get to Tara –

RON HUTCHINSON

FLEMING: (*Screenplay in hand.*) When she gets there – mother dead –

SELZNICK helpfully pulls himself into Ellen's shape –

Father out of his mind with grief –

SELZNICK sketches a crazed Gerald –

Most of the slaves have run away – no food or livestock left, none of the neighbors has a roof over their head –

HECHT: Where else would you put a roof?

SELZNICK: Scarlett finds a Union soldier looting the house –

He mimes a struggle with FLEMING –

She's a helpless woman, alone –

SELZNICK mimes a gun, aims at FLEMING –

She shoots him stone dead – (*To FLEMING.*) Whatever else it is, it's a melodrama, remember that – (*Back to HECHT.*) She buries the body. She leaves Melanie and her baby at the house with a couple of loyal slaves –

HECHT: *Loyal* slaves?

FLEMING: She goes back to Atlanta –

HECHT: I thought she just left Atlanta?

SELZNICK: In Atlanta she comes across who else but –

FLEMING: Rhett Butler.

SELZNICK: He's in jail –

HECHT: For impersonating Clark Gable?

SELZNICK: Scarlett is desperate for money.

He sits on the couch alongside FLEMING, tugs his jacket open –

She offers to become Rhett's mistress if he gives it to her. He laughs in her face.

HECHT: *Ha ha?*

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

SELZNICK: Humiliated, Scarlett marries –

FLEMING: Frank Kennedy –

HECHT: Did I miss him?

SELZNICK: He owns a store. She doesn't love him but she
never wants to be hungry again.

HECHT: Who does?

Heading towards the breakfast cart –

Which reminds me –

SELZNICK: Get away from the food.

HECHT: Just one bagel –

FLEMING: Isn't this where Scarlett sees there's money in saw
mills?

SELZNICK: It's Reconstruction.

HECHT: The war's over?

SELZNICK: The South will rise again – but they'll need
lumber –

HECHT: Lumber, yes –

FLEMING: Rhett's back on the scene –

HECHT: He got out of jail?

SELZNICK: He's still bewitched by Scarlett –

HECHT: Who's got all that lumber –

SELZNICK: She has another baby –

HECHT: Number two?

SELZNICK: It's a girl, her husband thinks it'll make her settle
down –

HECHT: But once a woman has discovered the lure of running
a saw mill –

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: Scarlett's attacked. Scarlett's husband and Ashley join a Klan raid to avenge her.

FLEMING: Rhett saves the day –

HECHT: *That* Klan?

FLEMING: Aren't you following this?

HECHT: The – ?

He makes a pointed shape over his head –

And the – ?

He makes eye slits with his fingers –

And especially the – ?

He puts his hand to his throat, drops his head on one side, as if he's been lynched.

SELZNICK: Yes.

FLEMING: Can we get on?

HECHT: Hold it. *Please*. This is insane. You have a heroine whose lack of morals would be remarked on in a two dollar whorehouse, a hero who would shoot his own grandmother in the belly, a plot that makes *Finnegan's Wake* a model of lucidity. You have this other character, Ashworthy –

SELZNICK / FLEMING: Ashley –

HECHT: Who's some kind of faggot –

SELZNICK: Ashley Wilkes is not a faggot.

HECHT: Played by?

SELZNICK: Leslie Howard.

HECHT: An English actor? I rest my case.

FLEMING: He's actually a Hungarian Jew –

HECHT: He *plays* English.

SELZNICK: Ashley wants to do the right thing –

HECHT: He wants to get in the little tramp's pants –

SELZNICK: *Gone With The Wind* contains one of the great love triangles of all time –

HECHT: David, I don't know whether this is a very good bad book or a very bad good book or more likely a bad bad book but I do know you'll never get a movie out of it –

SELZNICK pulls the door open, indicates the brass plate on it –

SELZNICK: David O. Selznick. *Producer.*

He slams it shut again.

HECHT: You're a great film maker, nobody's going to argue about that –

He indicates the contents of SELZNICK's bookshelf –

David Copperfield, The Prisoner of Zenda, A Tale of Two Cities –
there isn't a classic you haven't pillaged – What happened?
How did you get suckered into buying this side of lox?

SELZNICK pulls some of the trades from the shelf –

SELZNICK: The whole world cares about this book – this movie –

He reads some of the headlines –

Tatt Av Vinden – Via Col Vento – Vom Winde Verweht – Kaze To Tomo Ni Sarinu –

HECHT: There's going to be war in Europe sometime soon.

SELZNICK: Europe's a long way away and it's none of our business.

HECHT: No? With half the directors in Hollywood here because they've had to run from the Nazis? But of course you're the guy who won't give me one lousy dollar for Jewish Relief –

SELZNICK: Don't start that stuff again. We have a job to do.

RON HUTCHINSON

FLEMING: (*Needling.*) And when are we going to – you know – get some –

He mimes typing.

SELZNICK: I believe in this movie.

HECHT: Enough to lose everything?

He indicates the buildings and the offices outside the windows –

The big house across the street from the Chaplins, the cars, the yacht? Your reputation as someone who's almost as smart as Thalberg was?

SELZNICK: Almost?

HECHT: You really want to end up like your old man?

SELZNICK: (*Ignores it.*) You want to get to work?

He sees FLEMING about to take something from the food cart –

Put that down –

He grabs it –

The digestive juices get mixed up with the creative ones. It's a scientific fact. We're going to be writing against the clock –

HECHT: I've done that before.

SELZNICK: Not with these stakes.

HECHT: I don't need a steak, just a bagel –

He approaches the cart but SELZNICK shields it from him –

SELZNICK: No –

HECHT: One bagel.

SELZNICK: It'll slow you down.

HECHT: I'll go easy on the schmeer.

SELZNICK: I can't allow it.

HECHT: Half a bagel.

SELZNICK: I can't risk it.

SELZNICK opens the door –

(The food cart.) Get this out of here –

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick –

MISS POPPENGUHL exits as HECHT turns to FLEMING –

HECHT: Tell him he's crazy.

FLEMING: If you can write it, I can shoot it.

HECHT: The politics of it? At a time like this?

FLEMING: You're confusing me with somebody who gives a shit.

SELZNICK indicates one of the shelves –

SELZNICK: That's the attitude. There's some production design and costume stuff there. You should try to get a jump on it. You'll be on set, Monday.

FLEMING: With a script?

SELZNICK: Sure, with a script. Right, Ben?

HECHT brandishes Sidney Howard's script –

HECHT: *(Despairing.)* She goes to Atlanta, she leaves Atlanta, she goes back to Atlanta, she wants whatshisname, then she wants Rhett Butler, he leaves, he comes back, whatshisname leaves, he comes back, he wants her, he doesn't want her, she leaves Atlanta, she goes back to Atlanta, they're winning the war, they're losing the war, Rhett Butler's back, no – he's gone again, she's back in Atlanta, no, they're burning Atlanta, she leaves Atlanta – How in God's name is any sane person supposed to make sense of it?

FLEMING: Yeah well – you're the –

RON HUTCHINSON

He mockingly copies the wave HECHT gave him earlier –

Writer, aren't you?

He takes the drawings from the shelves and starts to leaf through them.

SELZNICK: (*To HECHT.*) If I could get a screenplay out of *Anna Karenina* I can get one out of this.

HECHT: Have you even *been* to the South?

SELZNICK: I'm planning the premiere for Atlanta. I'll go then.

He opens the door, indicates MISS POPPENGHUL should enter –

You know what a banana is?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: The fruit?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: You know what peanuts are?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: I want bananas, lots of bananas, peanuts, get me peanuts.

Perennially suspicious that he's surrounded by idiots, he queries her again –

You know what I'm talking about? Bananas? Peanuts?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick. Miss Leigh has asked if she can go back to England while the movie is down.

SELZNICK: (*Automatic.*) The movie is not – (*Controlling himself*) Remind Miss Leigh she's still under contract and must remain in Los Angeles until we resume production so Mr. Olivier should keep it in his pants a little longer.

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Her memo pad.*) ...in his pants...

SELZNICK makes sure HECHT hears him –

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

SELZNICK: By the end of this week Mr. Hecht will have a completed screenplay for us. You know what a typewriter is?

MISS POPPENGHUL: A typewriter?

SELZNICK: We need a typewriter, paper, carbons, pencils, erasers, pens, ink, notepads –

HECHT: Cyanide capsules?

SELZNICK: – and we need them right away –

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: Don't forget those bananas. They're brain food.

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: Hold all my calls.

MISS POPPENGHUL: Mr. Mayer's on line one.

SELZNICK: I can't talk to him.

MISS POPPENGHUL: Mr. Louis B. Mayer.

SELZNICK: No calls.

MISS POPPENGHUL: Your father-in-law, Mr. Mayer.

SELZNICK: I know who Louis B. Mayer is.

MISS POPPENGHUL: The father of your wife.

SELZNICK: I get that.

MISS POPPENGHUL: Your wife Irene.

SELZNICK: I know my own wife's name.

MISS POPPENGUHL exits as SELZNICK turns to HECHT with renewed energy, indicates the office –

Where do you want to work?

HECHT: Honolulu? Before we get in too deep here – does the movie have to be set in the Civil War?

SELZNICK: Yes.

RON HUTCHINSON

HECHT: You've thought this through?

SELZNICK: Yes.

HECHT: *This* civil war?

SELZNICK: We only had one so far.

HECHT: Somebody once told Thalberg –

SELZNICK: (*Automatic.*) It's Thalberg – always Thalberg –

HECHT: – he couldn't have a beachfront scene set in Paris because Paris isn't on the ocean. Thalberg said *we can't cater to the handful of people who know Paris.*

FLEMING looks up from the drawings –

FLEMING: Your point being?

HECHT: We play with it a little – maybe we're in the right street but knocking on the wrong door –

SELZNICK: We're stuck with the American Civil War and we're stuck with this storyline and these characters. We're also going to use only the dialog that's in the book –

Beat –

Sure, we may not use it in the same scenes and different characters might say the words, but they're going to be the originals –

HECHT: Aren't these people fighting to keep slaves?

SELZNICK: (*Evasive.*) Slavery is a part of their world, yes –

HECHT: And the audience is supposed to root for them?

SELZNICK: They will if we do our jobs right.

HECHT: That doesn't – ? you know – *slavery*? The owning of one person by another?

SELZNICK: It depends how it's handled.

SELZNICK presses the intercom –

Our company motto –

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

MISS POPPENGHUL enters, recites what she's already recited many times –

MISS POPPENGHUL: *Selznick Pictures Create Happy Hours.*

SELZNICK: Our credo?

MISS POPPENGHUL: *To gain the respect of the American public through quality alone has always been the single aim of Selznick Pictures. That is why they are to be found at theaters of the highest standard. That is why you feel as if you had been associating with a charming and intelligent friend, as you leave the theater –*

HECHT: Not as if you've been part of a lynch mob in the Deep South?

SELZNICK: *(Ignoring him, to MISS POPPENGHUL.)* Where are the bananas?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Coming right in, Mr. Selznick.

She exits.

HECHT: Didn't you tell me that our heroine plugs a Union soldier in the belly? Don't you think that makes her – how shall I put this – a tad unsympathetic?

SELZNICK: It depends how we shoot it. Right, Victor?

FLEMING: Sure – but I need a screenplay to work from and call me crazy but a screenwriter who hasn't read the material –

SELZNICK: Material? Somewhere to start?

SELZNICK gives a bitter laugh –

I have all the material he needs –

He pulls two boxes from the shelves, starts pulling items out at random –

First drafts, second drafts, third drafts, polishes, notes of story meetings, scene breakdowns – You want to hear what Margaret Mitchell has to say? She suggested Groucho Marx should play Rhett Butler.

RON HUTCHINSON

The intercom buzzer sounds –

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Salted, plain, roasted, shelled or unshelled, Mr. Selznick?

SELZNICK: What?

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) The peanuts?

SELZNICK: Peanuts, just peanuts.

Brooding, he stares at yet another shelf, on which are ranged dozens of failed screenplays. He tosses individual scripts onto the floor as he reads the writer's names.

Whose draft do you want? Jo Swerling – John Van Druten – Oliver H. P. Garnett – Charles MacArthur –

HECHT: Charlie had a piece of this, too?

The scripts keep flying off the shelf –

SELZNICK: Winston Miller – John Balderston – Michael Foster – Edwin Justus Mayer – Scott Fitzgerald –

HECHT: *That* Scott Fitzgerald?

SELZNICK: He gave me two lines I could use.

MISS POPPENGHUL enters, pushing a cart loaded with the typewriter, office supplies and bananas.

MISS POPPENGHUL: I have everything, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: The bananas?

MISS POPPENGHUL: They're here, Mr. Selznick.

Obsessive as ever, he queries her again –

SELZNICK: Peanuts?

MISS POPPENGHUL: On the way, Mr. Selznick. And I think you really should speak to Mr. Mayer –

SELZNICK: (*Defeated.*) Okay, okay –

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

SELZNICK grimaces, braces himself, then takes the call as MISS POPPENGHUL sets out the writing table, arranges the bananas.

SELZNICK: *L. B.* –

He opens and closes his mouth, unable to get more than a few words in as HECHT and FLEMING talk –

HECHT: (*To FLEMING.*) I heard your big pal Gable had to be strong-armed into this movie.

FLEMING: He's scared stiff of the role. Everybody's got it in their head that he *is* Rhett Butler. If he blows it –

SELZNICK: (*On the phone.*) Fleming's here, yes –

HECHT: Wasn't there a little –

He wiggles his hand –

Between him and Cukor? In a men's restroom? When he first came out to Hollywood?

FLEMING: Let's not get into that, buddy. Okay?

SELZNICK: (*On the phone.*) I had Hecht come in at six –

HECHT: Think you'll get on with what's-her-name?

FLEMING: I imagine she'll do whatever she can to get me canned and get Gorgeous George back so if at some point I'm going to have to tell Miss Fiddle Dee Dee to stick the screenplay up her Royal British ass, I'm ready to do it –

HECHT: I guess the man who slugged Judy Garland –

FLEMING: I hit her once – *once* –

SELZNICK: (*On the phone.*) I put them straight to work –

FLEMING: The question is, can you get the script done in a week? How many are you working on right now?

HECHT: The new Marx Brothers movie...one for Warners – no – *two* for Warners – one for RKO – four –

SELZNICK: (*On the phone.*) They're really getting into it –

RON HUTCHINSON

He mops his forehead, indicates for MISS POPPENGHUL to pour him a glass of ice water from the tray.

FLEMING: You can keep four screenplays in your head at one time?

HECHT: You can do *Wizard of Oz* one day, *Gone With The Wind* the next?

FLEMING advances on HECHT, sticks his nose into his face –

FLEMING: Don't worry about my direction, and I won't worry about you getting writer's cramp, sonny boy –

SELZNICK: (*On the phone.*) Hecht and Fleming –

SELZNICK sees the two men nose to nose, as if about to come to blows –

What a team –

Thankfully he puts the phone down, takes the water, drinks. Then he holds the glass at arm's length, stares at it as MISS POPPENGHUL exits –

Ice cubes.

HECHT: Ice cubes?

SELZNICK: They wouldn't have had ice cubes back then. In period. What would they use? Crushed ice?

FLEMING: The hell with the ice cubes – we don't have a screenplay –

He indicates the lot, seen through the window –

What about one of those bastards in the Writer's Building? How about him? The guy in the argyll sweater and corduroy pants.

HECHT: *One of those bastards in the Writer's Building?*

FLEMING: Yeah, one of those failed poets and college professors and dollar-a-line hacks who earn more in a week

than an average Joe in a year and do nothing but bitch about it –

HECHT: *Bitch?*

FLEMING: How much are you getting for five days' work?

HECHT: That's *your* business?

SELZNICK: Ben's worth every dollar.

FLEMING: It's your money, David, but why not give somebody else a chance to butcher the script?

HECHT: I'm here to butcher the book. I think we can trust you to butcher the script.

FLEMING rattles the typewriter keys again –

FLEMING: This sound mean anything to you, pal?

SELZNICK presses the intercom –

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick?

SELZNICK: Get me Security – there's a writer on the loose.

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Right away, Mr. Selznick –

SELZNICK: And a memo to Props. Crushed ice any time we see a drink in somebody's hand on camera, not ice cubes. Crushed. No cubes.

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) ...no cubes...

HECHT: I just need to know what happens in the book – the little matter of character and narrative –

SELZNICK: It's all very simple –

The intercom squawks –

SECURITY CHIEF: (*Intercom.*) Security here, Mr. Selznick –

SELZNICK: There's a Writer out of his bungalow. Tall guy, argyll sweater, smoking a pipe –

SECURITY CHIEF: (*Intercom.*) Sweater – pipe –

SELZNICK: Find out who he is and what his story is –

RON HUTCHINSON

SECURITY CHIEF: (*Intercom.*) The story he's working on?

SELZNICK: What he thinks he's doing smoking a pipe on my dime.

SECURITY CHIEF: (*Intercom.*) We're on it, Mr. Selznick –

HECHT: If you had a thirty-eight you could probably wing him from here.

*SELZNICK turns away from the intercom, back to HECHT.
Again he indicates where the imaginary characters have been
established on the stage –*

SELZNICK: Scarlett thinks she's in love with Ashley Wilkes but he's going to marry Melanie although he's really in love with Scarlett who's in love with Rhett Butler though she doesn't know it so to spite Ashley she marries the first guy she sees and has a baby by him but he gets killed which means she's free to chase after Ashley again but she can't because by this time he's married to Melanie by which time Rhett Butler who everybody thinks doesn't love anybody but himself is in love with Scarlett.

HECHT: (*Trying hard to get it.*) Okay – Scarlett thinks she's in love with – who?

FLEMING: (*Explodes.*) The worst thing that happened to this business was talking pictures. Now we need "the words", we have to sit around waiting for a goddamn Chicago newspaperman to deliver –

HECHT: You were a chauffeur, yes? You gave somebody a ride to a movie shoot and the camera broke down and you fixed it and now you're Mr. Big Shot Director –

FLEMING: You can't pull this off you might end up writing for the newspapers again, Mr. Rewrite Guy.

HECHT turns an imaginary steering wheel –

HECHT: *Toot toot toot –*

FLEMING: You might end up back in the Windy City – (*Mimes shivering from the cold.*) *Brrr brrr brrr –*

SELZNICK steps between them, pleading –

SELZNICK: I need this, guys. I need it. You have no idea how badly I need it. My father in law's just waiting for me to fall on my ass. He told Irene *Keep away from that schnook. He'll be a bum, just like his old man.*

He's naked, desperate –

Give me a hit, fellas. A hit. You know what it's like when a million people go see your movie? When a million people say Yes?

SELZNICK drags HECHT to the window, looks longingly out –

Ever been on a lot Monday morning when the studio's had a smash that weekend? Even the cop on the gate is standing a little taller. There's an extra snap in the way the waiter in the commissary opens your napkin. Yes, sir. Suddenly you're a genius. The fact that every previous release for the past three years has been a dog doesn't matter any more – you out of all the people in Hollywood know exactly what those Joe Blows and Jane Does want to plunk their fifty cents on; other people have hits, sure, but that's dumb luck – you, you genius bastard made it happen on sheer talent and you're going to keep on doing it, week after week, movie after movie from now on, everything you touch is going to turn to gold – But it's not just the money. It's knowing that you *know*. You know what I mean – *you know?*

HECHT: And they forget you're a Jewboy in English tweeds?

SELZNICK: Nix the Jewboy –

HECHT: Who they won't let into their country club –

SELZNICK: Can you stay off that for five minutes?

HECHT: You want to belong so badly? Fine. I'll give it my best shot. But in five days? Working from this? (*Sidney Howard's script.*) With *him?* (*FLEMING.*)

RON HUTCHINSON

He gives a helpless shrug –

Okay –

He picks up the book –

Scarlett thinks she's in love with Ashburton –

FLEMING: Ashley –

SELZNICK: No.

SELZNICK dumps the book into the waste basket.

HECHT: But he's about to marry his own sister?

HECHT reaches for the screenplay, SELZNICK grabs that, too –

SELZNICK: No –

He takes a deep breath –

What's a movie? Specks of light stuck to a strip of celluloid. Did you ever think of it like that? A goddamn authentic miracle. A series of moments frozen in time by the only time machine ever invented. So what do we want our specks of light to be? This time? When we're sitting in a movie palace and the lights go down –

He dims the lights –

And the theater disappears and the magic starts to happen?

He starts to open the drapes –

Say we hear an overture – I don't know – something like – da da da da dah dah dah da da – and the curtains open – da da da dah–

He opens the curtains fully –

And on the screen we see a sky in flames, a sky that looks as if it's the end of the world –

He holds his hand up, as if he can almost touch the image –

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: If I tell you nobody comes in here for the next five days – you know what I mean?

HECHT: David –

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

She takes out a key.

SELZNICK: You know what a telephone is?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: So when I say no calls for the next five days –

FLEMING: *David* –

HECHT: I didn't agree to this –

SELZNICK: You said you'd give me five days. (*To FLEMING.*) You're on contract, remember. (*Indicating.*) There's the bathroom, there's the bananas. (*To MISS POPPENGHUL.*) We have peanuts too?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: The door –

She exits.

Big book, yes. But big brain –

He claps HECHT on the shoulder –

Big guy –

He claps FLEMING on the shoulder –

Big shot –

He sticks his thumb in his own chest –

Five days, one screenplay. (*To HECHT.*) The blood red sky –

HECHT sits at the typewriter.

HECHT: Sure, the blood red sky. Then what?

SELZNICK: Then Fleming and me act out the book for you.

FLEMING: Act out the book?

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

SELZNICK: You have a better idea?

FLEMING: The whole book?

SELZNICK rearranges the furniture to create an acting area –

SELZNICK: We do a scene from the book, he watches it, he writes it up as a movie scene; we do the next scene, he says *why do we need this scene, we can tell the story without it* so we toss that scene – we look at the next scene and by the end of the week we have a movie –

HECHT: (*Shrugs.*) That nobody's going to want to watch but hey –

SELZNICK: Fade up –

Unwilling to argue any more HECHT starts to type –

HECHT: *One –*

SELZNICK: *Exterior –*

HECHT: *Day –*

SELZNICK: *Tara –*

FLEMING: Big, it's all got to be big, the acting, the emotions, we have to ham it up, make them forget what piffle it is –

HECHT: (*Impatient.*) So let's go –

SELZNICK puts his hands on his hips, sashays across the room, à la Scarlett O'Hara –

SELZNICK: *War, war, war – that's all anybody can talk about –*

He reaches FLEMING.

War, war, war –

FLEMING: What?

SELZNICK: What?

FLEMING: I'm not an actor –

SELZNICK: You think I am?

RON HUTCHINSON

HECHT is typing –

HECHT: I'm running low on dialog here –

SELZNICK: *War war war –*

He drapes himself coquettishly on FLEMING –

Why, Ashley Wilkes, I didn't see you there –

He waits for FLEMING to answer –

(Impatient.) You do remember the book?

FLEMING: Sure – ah –

He makes an effort to recall –

Hey – Scarlett – how's it going?

HECHT: "Hey Scarlett how's it going?"

SELZNICK: You're Ashley Wilkes, okay?

HECHT: You have to give me something to work with.

FLEMING: Ashley, okay, Ashley –

SELZNICK: Unless you'd rather play Scarlett?

FLEMING: No, Ashley's good.

HECHT: Five days and you lose me, remember.

FLEMING makes an attempt to portray Ashley –

FLEMING: *I... I... I've something to say to you, Scarlett. Something to tell you about my cousin Melanie and me –*

SELZNICK drapes himself in FLEMING's arms, looking up at him with fluttering eyelashes as HECHT keeps hammering the keys –

SELZNICK: *Melanie? Poor little flat-chested, skinny little Melanie?*

He gives a high pitched, coquettish laugh –

Why fiddle de dee –

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

The lights fade with the sound of a thousand frantic typewriter keys getting louder and louder, like an army of typists at work against the clock...

End Scene One

SCENE TWO

In the blackout we hear that frantic clattering of typewriter keys. As the lights rise we see the room lit by the soft glow of table and floor lamps. It's the middle of the night two days later. By the lamp light we see the devastation that's been wrought in the office since we last saw it. Scores of papers are scattered on the floor, there are heaps of banana skins and piles of peanut shells on every surface, the cardboard boxes have been overturned and the contents spilled out.

It looks like a battle has taken place here – and the rumpled, dishevelled, wild-eyed state of the three men emphasize it further. They're all in shirtsleeves, their hair is wild, their chins are dark with stubble.

HECHT winces as he types, as if his fingers are aching in every joint. Regardless, he hammers on, the consummate pro. Even for him it's a struggle to stay upright, gripped by fatigue and hunger.

He shades his eyes as if they're hurting him, looks across the room to where FLEMING is lying on the floor as Melanie, giving birth. SELZNICK is crouching over him, as Scarlett –

SELZNICK: *Push – push.*

FLEMING: *I'm pushing –*

SELZNICK: *Push harder –*

FLEMING: *Uh –*

SELZNICK: *Harder –*

FLEMING: *Uh – uh –*

SELZNICK: *You have to throw yourself into it –*

RON HUTCHINSON

FLEMING: *Uh uh uh* –

SELZNICK gets to his feet –

SELZNICK: *It's no good – where is that girl? Prissy, Prissy –*

He looks at HECHT but HECHT has fallen forward on the desk, snoring gently –

Ben –

HECHT jerks awake –

HECHT: Wha – ?

SELZNICK: Scarlett's in Atlanta, remember?

HECHT: Atlanta?

SELZNICK: Melanie's having Ashley's baby –

HECHT: Melanie?

SELZNICK: There's only Scarlett to help her –

HECHT: Scarlett?

HECHT goes to type, then winces –

Ow –

SELZNICK: Not again –

He goes to HECHT's desk, massages his knees as FLEMING rolls over, goes to sleep.

With a painful grunt HECHT manages to straighten his knees.

HECHT: I think I lost the use of my legs –

He leans on SELZNICK as he gets to his feet, still hunched forward. SELZNICK grabs him by the shoulders and jerks him upright.

SELZNICK: Have a banana.

HECHT gives a short, shrill screech.

Peanut?

HECHT gives the same screech.

Take it easy.

HECHT: God damn you to hell, David Selznick. I haven't had a bowel movement in two days – I'm deaf in my right ear from this goddamn typewriter –

He tugs at his pants. There's a good three inch gap between his belt and his belly –

I must have lost five pounds.

He indicates his left hand. It's still twitching, typing on invisible keys.

Look at that.

SELZNICK: It's nothing serious –

HECHT walks a couple of shuffling steps, feels something crunching underfoot.

HECHT: What's that?

SELZNICK: You threw the peanuts at me, remember?

HECHT: (*Hopefully.*) Did I hurt you badly?

SELZNICK: Fleming held you down until you were over it.

HECHT: Fleming?

He looks vaguely towards the snoring form of FLEMING –

What's he doing here?

SELZNICK: Stop kidding around.

He prods FLEMING awake.

FLEMING: *I'm pushing, I'm pushing –*

SELZNICK: We're doing pretty good –

He lifts up a pile of completed script pages by the typewriter –

We're making progress but we've still got a ways to go –

HECHT groans, winces –

RON HUTCHINSON

HECHT: My back –

SELZNICK: We have to keep going –

HECHT: My head –

SELZNICK: You know where we are, right? In the story?

HECHT: Let me take a walk, get some fresh air –

He takes a half-hearted trot towards the door but SELZNICK heads him off –

SELZNICK: No.

HECHT heads towards the couch –

HECHT: Let me sleep for ten minutes –

SELZNICK: We don't have time.

He directs him back to the typewriter.

We have a baby on the way here.

HECHT looks around, dazed, as if trying to see it –

HECHT: A baby?

SELZNICK: Melanie's having Ashley's baby with only Scarlett to help. Scarlett's maid Prissy told her she knew about birthing babies but she didn't know nu'thing.

He leans over FLEMING as Scarlett again –

Push – push –

He gets to his feet –

FLEMING: *I'm pushing.*

SELZNICK: Prissy's taking too long -- Melanie's in a real bad way –

FLEMING: *Uh – uh –*

SELZNICK: Prissy comes back, dawdling –

He indicates FLEMING should get to his feet –

FLEMING: I'm having a baby here.

SELZNICK: Not without Prissy.

FLEMING gets to his feet to play Prissy –

Prissy runs up the stairs –

FLEMING mimes running up the stairs –

She's alone, she hasn't brought any help, she's a bad, bad stupid girl –

FLEMING: *I's a stupid stupid girl –*

SELZNICK: Scarlett loses it and –

He slaps FLEMING across the face.

Now Scarlett's left with a woman who's giving birth to a child by the one man who Scarlett ever loved –

HECHT: (*Disbelieving.*) Whoa – whoa – back up –

SELZNICK: You wonder why this book sold a million and a half copies in twelve months? There it is, right there. You want to talk character, dilemma, dramatic irony? *Zola* couldn't have done it any better.

HECHT: Hold it –

He squeezes his forehead, trying to assemble his thoughts –

She slaps the maid?

SELZNICK: Socks her one right here –

HECHT: The colored maid?

SELZNICK: Prissy.

FLEMING mimes Prissy –

FLEMING: *I's a stupid, stupid girl.*

HECHT: How old's this girl?

SELZNICK: Ten, twelve?

HECHT: You can't put this in a movie.

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: The girl lied to her. She said she could birth babies.

FLEMING: *I did, I told Miss Scarlett I could birth babies –*

SELZNICK: Then she dawdles on the way back –

FLEMING: *I did, I dawdled something awful –*

He skips, miming Prissy's dawdling.

SELZNICK: Meantime Melanie's dying here.

FLEMING hits the floor, as Melanie –

FLEMING: Okay – push – push –

HECHT: You're paying me to tell you what scenes to cut. Cut this one.

SELZNICK: No.

HECHT: Have you any idea what it says about your heroine?

SELZNICK: She's under a lot of pressure here –

HECHT: So it's okay to beat up the black kid?

FLEMING drags himself to his feet again –

FLEMING: *I know I's been a bad girl –*

He skips, miming the dawdling again.

SELZNICK: (*To HECHT.*) Could you please dialog-in the scene?

HECHT: No.

SELZNICK: Write it.

HECHT: I won't do it.

SELZNICK: Who's the producer?

HECHT: Who's the writer?

FLEMING: So *write*.

HECHT: What happened, David? *You?* Making a movie that doesn't just glorify the Confederacy but – *she slaps the little girl?*

SELZNICK: The audience is waiting for it.

HECHT: Look at how Fleming's playing Prissy.

SELZNICK: He's not an actor.

HECHT: Don't you have a responsibility to make America look its ugly mug in the face?

SELZNICK: My only responsibility is to make the best movie I can.

HECHT: This isn't the David Selznick I know, the David Selznick I admire, I *love* – In this gold-lined sewer I always thought there was one executive who saw things the way I do –

SELZNICK: I can't deal with the race question now.

HECHT: If you can't deal with it in *Gone With The Wind*, when will you?

FLEMING: Oh God – more Chicago newspaperman B.S. –

FLEMING heads unsteadily to the restroom.

I'll be in the john –

HECHT: If there's one person who could make this movie mean something, it's you.

SELZNICK: It's a melodrama. Possibly the greatest one ever written but a *melodrama* –

HECHT: If there's anybody who can understand the legacy of prejudice it's us Jews.

SELZNICK: (*Bewildered.*) How did the Jews get into this?

HECHT: *The audience is waiting for the slap?* What are you thinking?

SELZNICK: That I don't have you for much longer and Melanie's having a baby and Scarlett sees Prissy and *blam*. Where's Fleming? Write it.

HECHT: Not in a million years.

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: I've spent a lot of time, effort and money making sure everybody in this story is treated with respect –

HECHT: As much as you've spent on Vivien Leigh's breastwork? On the ice cubes?

SELZNICK: The Negro characters in my movie will have as much dignity as all the other characters –

HECHT: However you slice it, this is an elegy for the Old South. Tell me you see the problem. Harry Cohn wouldn't see it. Jack Warner wouldn't see it. Thalberg might have –

SELZNICK: Enough with the Thalberg – write it –

HECHT: I can't write it.

SELZNICK: I have to be loyal to the book.

HECHT: How about being loyal to your conscience?

SELZNICK: There's only so much I can do.

HECHT: That's kind of disappointing, don't you think?

SELZNICK: *Write it.*

HECHT goes to the typewriter again, energized, defiant –

HECHT: Okay, okay – how about this? We keep the slap but we give Prissy a speech – *Yes, she says, defiantly, holding her hand to her bleeding mouth, I did dawdle, I did take my time, I know Miss Melly's hurting up there, hurting real bad –*

FLEMING's voice sounds from behind the closed bathroom door –

FLEMING: *Push – push –*

HECHT: – *and if she dies what do I care, because what do any of you care, any of you white folk, you in particular Miss Scarlett O'Hara, about us, the people who've made the wealth, who toiled and died for you, year after year, generation after generation – You see where I'm going?*

He stands as he types, fired-up –

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

HECHT: *I hope she dies and I hope you die, because something else is being born right now, too – a new America, where there's a place for me as well as you –*

SELZNICK: Are you nuts?

HECHT: Okay, it's a first pass –

SELZNICK: Give me that –

Before HECHT can protest he rips the paper out of the typewriter.

There's a sudden cry from the restroom –

FLEMING: (*Offstage.*) Aaaaaaahh –

HECHT and SELZNICK rush to the bathroom door.

(*Offstage.*) Aaaaaaaaaahh –

The door opens and FLEMING stumbles out. He's clutching at his left eye.

SELZNICK: What is it?

FLEMING: My eye –

SELZNICK: Let me see –

FLEMING: You don't want to look –

SELZNICK grabs his hand, looks at his eye, backs away –

SELZNICK: My God –

HECHT: What is it?

SELZNICK: You don't want to look.

They stare at FLEMING. One of his eyeballs is bright red.

FLEMING: Will I lose the eye?

HECHT: It's only a burst blood vessel.

FLEMING: (*Panicking.*) I can't work if I lose the eye.

HECHT: You're not going to lose the eye. Sit down –

RON HUTCHINSON

He guides him to an armchair. FLEMING sinks into it, grabs his hand –

FLEMING: Don't let this get out, okay?

SELZNICK: It's nothing serious.

FLEMING: I can get insured for any movie you want me to make.

SELZNICK: I want you to make this one.

HECHT: Relax –

He strokes the back of FLEMING's hand, trying to soothe him –

Breathe –

FLEMING: I don't want to go back to driving somebody else's car –

SELZNICK: You won't have to do that –

HECHT: Who'd employ a one-eyed driver?

FLEMING takes a half-hearted swing at HECHT, falls back in the chair –

FLEMING: You don't think I could lose the eye?

SELZNICK strokes his hand again –

SELZNICK: Sssssh –

FLEMING: I mean, they wouldn't take out an eye because you burst a blood vessel, would they? I can still read a script –

He feels on HECHT's desk, pulls out the new page HECHT typed, reads, with one hand over his eye, holding the page an inch from him –

“Yes, I did dawdle, I did take my time, I know Miss Melly's hurting up there, hurting real bad – and I'm glad, do you hear, I'm glad, and if she dies what do I care, because what do any of you care, any of you white folk, you in particular Miss Scarlett O'Hara –”

He stares at it in disgust –

Where did this piece of shit come from?

SELZNICK: It's something Ben was trying out –

He grabs the page before HECHT can retrieve it –

HECHT: Piece of shit? (*Goads.*) Where do you stand on the race question, Mr. Fleming? Do you think there's a place for it in the popular movie?

FLEMING: You're just a newspaper man at heart, aren't you, Hecht? *Brr brr brr –*

HECHT: As a director you make a pretty good chauffeur. *Toot toot toot –*

FLEMING: Any damn fool could write a screenplay like this. We've acted it for you. We've given you the dialog. What more do you want?

HECHT: Do you mind? David and I are trying to get some work done here –

FLEMING: Do I mind?

FLEMING bristles, near breaking point –

Do I mind? The "Writer's" trying to do some "work" so I should disappear up my own ass?

SELZNICK: *Push –*

FLEMING: Selznick and me are the ones who've been doing "the work", sonny boy –

SELZNICK: *Push –*

FLEMING: You're maybe feeling the heat for the couple of hours it's going to take to put this piece of shit screenplay together. But where are you going to be the six months I'm going to be living with this turkey day after day, hour after hour?

SELZNICK: Here comes Prissy –

FLEMING ignores him, bears down on HECHT –

RON HUTCHINSON

FLEMING: Is "the Writer" going to deal with set, wardrobe, props, transport, hair, make-up, catering – *him* –

He indicates SELZNICK.

SELZNICK: She's on the stairs –

FLEMING: Are you going to sit up to midnight because your actors refuse to come to work because they don't like the color of their shower curtains? Are you going to hold their hands, let them put their heads on your shoulders, listen to their life stories when all you really want to do is punch them in the nose and tell them, *it's acting, just turn up and say the line, damn it?*

HECHT: In the beginning was The Word.

FLEMING: But it doesn't get said unless some poor son of a bitch shouts *Action*.

HECHT: (*Needling.*) If it's true that no Director starts out to make a bad movie then what *is* the explanation?

FLEMING: Because even before the shooting starts somebody's nagging at me – drop this scene, drop that scene, *do you really need so many extras – Going into a production without a screenplay's a great idea* – You get to the set – Day One somebody takes you aside, there's a problem, casting, location, whatever, *can you give us a little help here, can you be flexible?* Day Two somebody else asks you to compromise on something else – You give a little bit here, a little bit there, what the hell – Say it takes nine months to get from script to premiere. Given one little compromise a day, that's two hundred and seventy compromises. Say your movie lasts ninety minutes, that's one compromise every twenty seconds.

SELZNICK: Guys, please –

HECHT: (*Ignoring him.*) You want to talk about compromise? Imagine you meet this drop-dead beautiful woman and there's an unspoken *Yes* in her eyes and you say *Your place or mine?* And when you get there she slips her shoes off and

you put something slow on the Radiola and she breathes
Yes and then you're in the bedroom and she's naked in the
moonlight and there's that *Yes* in her eyes again and you're
about to climb out of your pants when the director steps
through the door and says *Okay, I'll take over now – leave it
to me* – How'd you like to be a Hollywood screenwriter,
Mac? How'd you like to live with that?

FLEMING: Suck it down, pal. The real movie magic is
somebody like me showing up on a sound stage and
turning this –

He grabs the completed pages of the screenplay –

Into those specks of light Selznick's always bullshitting
about.

SELZNICK: In the beginning was The Deal. You (*HECHT.*) don't
get to write the words – you (*FLEMING.*) don't get to shout
Action – until somebody puts the money together. Now
that's an art form. You want to talk about being creative? –
take a look at the studio's books. That's *real* imagination.
You're disappointed in me, Ben? It's a free country,
anybody can make the movie they want. You want to
make *your Gone With The Wind* – go ahead – as long as
you can raise a million dollars and control the rights. You
have a million dollars? You have the rights? No? Then
maybe you're here to help me make the *Gone With The
Wind* I want to make. I pay you to write it the way I want
it written and somebody like Fleming to direct it the way I
see it. That's called collaboration.

HECHT: Only in Hollywood.

SELZNICK reaches for the battered copy of the book –

SELZNICK: Movies get made because somebody like me,
who everybody thinks is the asshole who just happens to
own the studio, picks up a book and, sure, yes, I think it's
going to be another *Moonlight and Magnolias* but a couple
pages in the same thing happens to me as happened to
Margaret Mitchell. Scarlett O'Hara grabbed me by the nuts

RON HUTCHINSON

and never let go. I think Mitchell started out to write just another bodice ripper but Scarlett took the book over. You don't make judgements about the little brat. You go with her. A million and a half readers did. As sure as I know there's a God of the movies, I know that tens of millions of moviegoers will –

HECHT: Who exactly might the God of the movies be? You?

FLEMING: No, but he is a very close relative.

HECHT: So we have to do it your way? Me – (*Indicates FLEMING.*) Him?

SELZNICK: Somebody has to have the vision and willpower to make it all happen. That's just how it is.

HECHT: Isn't that what Hitler's telling his people? What Mussolini and Stalin have been telling theirs?

SELZNICK: Hitler couldn't take the pressure of running a studio, Mussolini wouldn't have the patience, and Stalin's too nice – Get back to your desk –

HECHT: Aren't you running a dictatorship, too?

SELZNICK: Those guys don't have Mayer breathing down their necks – I've been carrying this movie in my gut for three years. I *know* Scarlett O'Hara. I *know* Melanie. I *know* Ashley and Rhett Butler and Tara and I care about them more than any hired hand, which at the end of the day are what you two are – (*At FLEMING.*) – and while we're talking about compromises the shape of the ice cubes does matter, okay, *everything* matters – one mistake and the whole illusion's lost, it's just a bunch of actors standing in front of wood and canvas – (*Beseeching.*) I can *taste* this movie but I need your help to get it on the screen – (*Setting the book down again.*) I raise the money – Fleming figures where the camera goes and how the actor says the line – Isn't there something you should be doing? You (*FLEMING.*) stop blubbering like a girl about your eye – You (*HECHT.*) stop dreaming of making Hollywood what it can never be – Put your butt into that chair and give me Prissy's big scene –

HECHT fits in a new page, types defiantly –

HECHT: *Scarlett hauls off on the girl. Her head swings around like she's been hit by a baseball bat –*

SELZNICK: No –

HECHT: *Scarlett's fist connects. The girl's head explodes like a ripe watermelon –*

SELZNICK: No –

HECHT: *Scarlett nails her. Her jaw snaps with a twang –*

SELZNICK: No –

HECHT: You see the problem?

SELZNICK: Write it, damn it –

HECHT: What is it – a right hook?

FLEMING: It could be an uppercut – a jab –

He thoughtfully throws some punches –

Does she cold cock her? I dropped a guy in a bar once with one of these –

He makes a sudden head butt.

HECHT: Then a kick in the ribs?

SELZNICK: *Write it –*

HECHT: Our adulterous, two-timing, slave-driving heroine is now about to add child abuse to her resumé –

SELZNICK: It's just a little slap –

HECHT: Vivien Leigh's no Joe Louis but she either connects or she doesn't –

SELZNICK: (*Losing it.*) Mayer wants me to fail. All the people who said this was the biggest white elephant in Hollywood history want me to fail – all the people who, okay, said I was going to end up like my dad, losing everything he ever had – all the people who Thalberg this and Thalberg that – but I'm going to make the best damn movie this

RON HUTCHINSON

town has ever made, the best damn movie in the history of the world and I need this scene. I need it, Ben, I need it, for God's sake, I need it –

He suddenly freezes, as if locked in position –

HECHT: David? You okay?

SELZNICK doesn't move.

I said, are you okay?

FLEMING: What did you do to him?

HECHT: He just kind of – froze.

FLEMING: You think it's the bananas?

HECHT: I don't know.

FLEMING: You killed him.

HECHT: Don't say that.

FLEMING: Over one lousy scene.

HECHT: We should call a doctor.

FLEMING: Did *I* get one for my eye?

HECHT: This is different. This is – freezing.

FLEMING leans forward, listens to SELZNICK's breathing –

FLEMING: He's still breathing.

He holds SELZNICK's wrist –

He's got a pulse.

They pull back, stare at SELZNICK, frozen stiff. FLEMING reaches for the phone on SELZNICK's desk.

HECHT: What are you doing?

FLEMING: Calling a doctor.

HECHT: We can call from home.

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

FLEMING is momentarily puzzled. Then he gets it. He sets the phone down. HECHT looks at the door. FLEMING follows his look.

You wouldn't like a shower, a shave, a clean shirt?

FLEMING: (*Tempted.*) Something to eat – ?

HECHT: Get that eye looked at –

FLEMING: I could murder a rib-eye –

HECHT: Take a shower –

FLEMING: A short stack of blueberry pancakes –

HECHT: A toasted onion bagel, light on the cream cheese, nova and a pickle –

They head towards the still catatonic SELZNICK –

FLEMING: You can't ask people to work like this –

HECHT: Lock them in a room –

FLEMING: Give them peanuts and bananas –

They rifle through his pockets, find the key of the door that leads to the outer office.

HECHT: Look at this place –

FLEMING: Have you seen the bathroom?

HECHT: You don't treat the director of *Test Pilot* like this –

FLEMING: The writer of *Hurricane* –

HECHT: What about some respect for the guy who puts the movie on the screen?

FLEMING: The guy who gives us the screenplay to work with?

HECHT: The peanuts –

FLEMING: The bananas –

HECHT: The bathroom –

He unlocks the door, cautiously tugs it open, peers into the outer office.

RON HUTCHINSON

She's not at her desk.

FLEMING: In the ladies' room?

HECHT: (*Nods.*) We could make it to Washington Boulevard,
call for a cab –

FLEMING: What about the guards on the gates? Would they
shoot?

HECHT: Come on –

*He's about to go through the door when he sees FLEMING
hesitate.*

What?

FLEMING: I don't know –

HECHT: Selznick can't be right and the rest of the world
wrong. This movie's going to derail the career of
everybody involved with it. He's screwed up with the eyes
of the world on him. He'll be eating crow at MGM by the
end of the month.

FLEMING: Hey – I'm keeping out of the family stuff. I advise
you to do the same. You know what these people are like.

HECHT: These people?

FLEMING: The – you know –

HECHT: All these Jews?

FLEMING: That's not what I'm getting at –

HECHT: All the Jews who run the studios?

FLEMING: (*Exasperated.*) There you go again. I started out as a
driver, okay, *buddy*? And every time I sit in the studio car
I'm saying to myself *I'm never going to be that sucker again.*

HECHT: That's the most pathetic thing I ever heard.

FLEMING: Those lines are the most pathetic thing I ever
heard.

HECHT indicates the outer office, nerving himself –

HECHT: I'm going to make a run for it.

FLEMING: Nobody could blame you. A writer can work
anyplace. Me? I'd rather be sitting in the limo than
working under it with a wrench.

HECHT: *Adios* –

FLEMING: I happen to agree with you – this is a piece of shit.
(*Indicates SELZNICK.*) He has a heroine who doesn't have
enough class to be a hooker. Ashley Wilkes is a pantywaist.
The rooting interest is Gable but not even Gable can pull
this off. But you know what – ? (*Indicates SELZNICK.*) You
said you'd give him five days. And if there's anybody who
could figure out how to stuff this sausage, it's Ben Hecht.

HECHT: The newspaperman? *Brrr brrr brrr* –

FLEMING: I've seen what you can do. Hour after hour. Day
after day. You must have a cast iron ass. The picture needs
that ass. *I need it.*

He indicates the still frozen SELZNICK –

He needs it even more.

Beat –

Okay, so I'm not – you know – you and him – you're –
from the same – you know – from –

HECHT: Jewtown?

FLEMING: I think you could walk out on me, but not on him.

HECHT: Watch me.

FLEMING: And you need him. Because there's only one
person who'd ever make the kind of bullshit movies you
want to make.

HECHT takes a deep breath, locks the door again.

HECHT: Okay – he gets his five days – but you're the one
who's going to have to figure how to sell the slap –

FLEMING: I'll find a way –

RON HUTCHINSON

He takes the key from HECHT and slips it back into SELZNICK's pocket.

HECHT: I can't wait –

HECHT hammers the typewriter keys.

Prissy enters – Scarlett socks her. Action?

HECHT pulls the sheet of paper out, thrusts it at FLEMING.

"Action" pulls SELZNICK out of his trance –

SELZNICK: What happened?

HECHT: We lost you for a minute.

SELZNICK: (*To HECHT.*) Have we got it? The slap? Tell me we've got it.

HECHT: I did my bit –

SELZNICK looks at FLEMING –

SELZNICK: So?

FLEMING holds the sheet, starts to pace –

FLEMING: Okay, yes, right –

He keeps pacing, looking for inspiration –

Prissy – Scarlett –

He stares at the sheet, as if looking for inspiration –

Scarlett – Prissy –

SELZNICK: (*To FLEMING, impatient.*) And?

FLEMING: She comes up the stairs –

SELZNICK sketches an imaginary sound stage –

SELZNICK: You've got a crew of one hundred and fifty standing around – any minute you're going to lose the light – they're all waiting for you – the tech guys, the actors – you're the one guy besides me who has to look as if he knows what he's doing –

FLEMING: She comes up the stairs –

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

SELZNICK: You're the guy who invented the camera dolly, the travelling mike – You're going to let this little thing beat you?

HECHT: (*Goads.*) *Toot toot –*

FLEMING: Okay –

He throws an experimental slap at HECHT.

HECHT: Hey –

FLEMING: Or maybe –

He throws a variation of the slap.

SELZNICK: You don't think a –

SELZNICK snakes out a slap at FLEMING.

Or a – ?

FLEMING: I think a –

He slaps SELZNICK.

HECHT: It's not more of a – ?

He slaps FLEMING.

SELZNICK: It's more like a –

He also slaps FLEMING.

FLEMING: We could –

He slaps SELZNICK, who slaps HECHT, who slaps him back. SELZNICK slaps FLEMING, who slaps HECHT. HECHT goes to slap FLEMING, who ducks. HECHT slaps SELZNICK instead. A free-for-all begins, with papers and peanuts thrown all over the room as their frustrations with each other explode. In the mêlée HECHT tries to escape but the door to the outer office is locked again.

HECHT: Let me out! Open the door!

He sees FLEMING bearing down on him, picks up a floor fan to defend himself with.

RON HUTCHINSON

FLEMING: I've got it –

SELZNICK: I don't have a scene if I don't have the slap –

FLEMING: Will you listen? It's all about where I put the camera – Stick it here –

He takes the floor fan, places it one side of HECHT –

Put Prissy there –

He maneuvers HECHT into place –

Throw the mitt –

He slaps the groggy HECHT again –

Then you get the head coming into the camera, wham, like it's come loose –

SELZNICK: Which is what I don't want –

FLEMING: So we do the shot this way instead –

He takes the fan/camera to the other side of HECHT –

We stick the camera here – and pop –

He slaps HECHT again –

It takes the YOW! off it –

SELZNICK: You think we can sell it?

FLEMING: You want to see it the other way again?

He shapes up to the dazed HECHT again and can't resist making a fist as he readies the blow. HECHT goes flying over the couch.

SELZNICK: You were right the first time –

He snaps his fingers at HECHT –

Let's go. You still owe me three days.

HECHT: Two.

SELZNICK: But who's counting?

HECHT crawls back to the typewriter.

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT ONE

Roll 'em – (*As Scarlett.*) *Where is she? Where is that bad, stupid girl?*

FLEMING: Do I *have* to play Prissy?

SELZNICK: Yes.

FLEMING: *Here I is, Miss Scarlett –*

SELZNICK: *The Doctor – where's the doctor?*

FLEMING: *I don't got none doctor –*

SELZNICK pulls back his hand to hit him –

Wait –

He positions the camera where he's going to take the shot from –

It's the angle, always the angle – Action –

SELZNICK slaps him, turns to HECHT –

SELZNICK: You writing, Ben?

HECHT wearily starts to type again –

HECHT: Heaven help us all, I am –

SELZNICK: The slap stays in the movie. The Civil War stays in the movie. And before anybody asks – Scarlett O'Hara stays in the movie –

He holds the book over his head –

Twenty-two chapters down – forty-one to go –

As FLEMING looks for a place to collapse again, HECHT resumes that frantic typing...

End Scene Two

End Act One

ACT TWO

The typing becomes more and more labored as the lights come up, at dawn two days later. The room is in even more of a mess – apocalyptically so, in fact. Two of the chairs lie upside down, pictures hang crookedly on the walls, the bookcase doors hang open and one of the drapes has been tied into a knot. SELZNICK is curled in a fetal position on his desk, comatose.

HECHT is typing, one letter at a time, using the last of his strength. FLEMING is on his hands and knees, looking for something on the floor. He finds it. It's the one remaining banana. He clutches it to him, hiding it from the others.

The intercom buzzer sounds and SELZNICK jerks awake –

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Mr. Mayer's on the line again, Mr. Selznick –

SELZNICK: I said no calls –

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Yes, Mr. Selznick –

SELZNICK: More peanuts, Miss Poppenghul –

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Yes, Mr. Selznick –

FLEMING tries to peel the banana but doesn't have the strength to pull the top part open. Frustrated with trying to open it with his hands he places it on a chair, jams it under his foot, pulls upwards. He's still too weak to split it open.

MISS POPPENGHUL totters into the room with another bowl of peanuts. Her hair is disordered, her dress crumpled, her voice is shaky, sounds a little odd, as if this normally superhumanly efficient woman is also suffering from the ordeal –

Will you speak to Miss Leigh, Mr. Selznick? She sounds awfully upset –

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT TWO

SELZNICK: Okay –

He fumbles for a phone, listens –

Yes...I know...I understand that...but I have every confidence in Victor Fleming –

He looks towards FLEMING, who is staring brokenly at the banana he can't peel –

(*Listens.*) What thing with Garland – ? (*Listens.*) I never heard about a slap – (*Listens.*) Come Monday, I think you're going to be very happy with him and the new screenplay –

HECHT snores.

Hecht's almost up to the last scene –

He aims a banana skin at HECHT, who has momentarily stopped typing as his head slumps on the typewriter in sleep. HECHT wakes as SELZNICK puts the phone down, presses the buzzer –

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick?

He jumps, swings wildly around at her, stares at her, recovers.

SELZNICK: Memo to –

He shakes his head, trying to think of somebody to send a memo to –

MISS POPPENGHUL: Memo to, Mr. Selznick – ?

SELZNICK: Memo to – memo to – well send everybody a memo – about everything –

As MISS POPPENGHUL wearily exits, FLEMING looks wildly around the room –

FLEMING: The Chinaman –

HECHT: The Chinaman?

RON HUTCHINSON

FLEMING: The one-legged Chinaman who was dancing on the piano – ? With the red head in the barrel? Over there, with all the fish –

He looks over his head, as if trying to see something –

Up there –

SELZNICK: Don't *you* lose it now –

FLEMING peels away from him, heads to the window, opens a blind and peers through –

FLEMING: The cops. Somebody's got to have missed me. They'll have the place staked out. You think you can get away with this?

SELZNICK: Ben – where are we up to?

HECHT: Bonnie just died – I think – I know *somebody* fell off a horse –

SELZNICK: (*To FLEMING.*) You see how near we are to getting out of here?

FLEMING pulls the blind up –

FLEMING: Don't shoot!

FLEMING puts his hands in the air.

SELZNICK: Get away from the window.

FLEMING lets the blind drop again, his shoulders sag –

FLEMING: This is what the Lindberg kid must have gone through, poor little bastard.

SELZNICK: Victor!

FLEMING shudders as he looks around the room –

FLEMING: Oh God, it's real, then.

SELZNICK: Eat your banana –

FLEMING: I only have one kidney, you know that?

SELZNICK: Don't tell me you can't take the heat?

FLEMING: Who could take this?

SELZNICK: (*Encouraging.*) What about that shot you had in *Test Pilot*? When you had a hundred and ten planes in the air at one time – ? Eighteen cameras – ?

FLEMING: That was easier than this –

He chews on the banana as he totters to the couch –

Why are you doing this to us? What are you trying to prove? If it's because your dad went overnight from a mansion on Park Avenue to a one-room apartment – ? Because a Mayer's always had you by the balls – ? Whether it was Louis or Irene –

SELZNICK: I don't need counselling from a Cherokee German.

FLEMING: You know what the odds are against this movie, even if you don't kill Hecht before he's done?

SELZNICK: I'll remind you you said that – when you pick up your Oscar.

FLEMING: So *that's* why we're being put through this?

He cradles an imaginary Oscar –

SELZNICK: Feel pretty good, wouldn't it – having that little fella on your desk?

FLEMING: I always thought they made it look like a big gold pecker. Probably not by accident.

SELZNICK hears HECHT falter –

SELZNICK: Keep at it, Ben –

FLEMING: You want to win so you can piss on Mayer on the way up to collect it.

SELZNICK: I want to win because the movies are dead. It's over. This industry's finished. Before we turn the lights off, I want to make one great movie, to show just how good it could have been.

RON HUTCHINSON

FLEMING: (*Protesting.*) Our careers may be over after this but Hollywood's never been in better shape –

SELZNICK: Hollywood? The town had thirty great years. Amazing years. Who could have imagined when it all began that some of the biggest fortunes on the planet were going to be made by making people sit in a room full of strangers, many of them probably tubercular, switching the lights off and throwing pictures on a glorified horse blanket? But we didn't just kill the goose that laid the golden egg – we stuck the golden egg up its ass and fricasseed it.

FLEMING: Hollywood's going to make over three hundred movies this year.

SELZNICK: Tell me how in the name of God that can't be three hundred variations of the same dumb story and the same dumb bunch of characters.

He pulls a large drawer open. It contains movie posters. He pulls them out, holds them up before dropping them to the floor at his feet, taking out another –

The girl next door, the hooker with a heart of gold, the broad, the flirt, the tease. The good guy, the bad guy, the funny guy, the sidekick, the fresh kid –

His shoulders go down –

In a few years this place is going to be like Egypt. Full of crumbling pyramids. And when it's all over, what have the movies been? A flood of claptrap that's helped bitch up the world. Thirty years and maybe one good movie.

FLEMING: *Test Pilot?*

He hears HECHT falter again –

SELZNICK: But I need the screenplay. Ben, come on – I know these aren't the ideal conditions to work in –

HECHT reacts, almost at the end of his tether –

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT TWO

HECHT: Believe me, the loneliness of literary creation is seldom part of movie writing – not with the phone ringing like a firehouse bell, the boss charging in and out of your atelier, the director tearing his hair out, waiting for the pages. *More peanuts, Miss Poppenghul?* Ideal?

SELZNICK appeals to him again –

SELZNICK: But for me, Ben? Please? The last reel – ?

FLEMING: Melanie's on the couch, about to croak –

SELZNICK: In the biggest damn tear-jerker of a scene that's ever been put on film –

HECHT rounds on SELZNICK, his tormentor –

HECHT: Why don't you ask yourself why you always prefer the classics? Costume drama. Dead books by dead writers. Now you have a book that could be made to mean something you're still trying to play it safe –

SELZNICK: Me? Play it safe? I'm the biggest gambler in Hollywood.

HECHT: A handful of Jews gave the world the movies but deep down you're scared we'll be run out of town, one day – all us Mayers and Goldwyns and Zukors and Cohns and Hechts – we'll be chased back to Russia or Poland or Hungary, back to the *stetls*, where we'll be glove salesmen, furriers, pants pressers again – we'll have lost it all – the cars, the houses, the blonde *shiksas*.

FLEMING: The hell with it. I just want to get the goddamn screenplay finished. My grandfather actually fought in the Civil War.

HECHT rounds on him –

HECHT: So?

FLEMING: So the last reel –

HECHT: (*Persisting.*) Somehow that makes you more American than us? (*To SELZNICK.*) You hear that?

RON HUTCHINSON

FLEMING looks like he's about to explode with the effort of containing his frustration –

FLEMING: Uh. Uh. Uhhhhhhh!

SELZNICK: I don't think he's saying that.

HECHT won't let it go –

HECHT: So what are you saying? What do you think about being locked in a room with two crazy Jews, Victor? Really?

FLEMING: It wouldn't be the first time.

HECHT: Not in Hollywood, that's for sure – right, *Victor*?

FLEMING: Well that would be a fact, wouldn't it?

SELZNICK pulls HECHT away from FLEMING –

SELZNICK: What are you trying to do? Make him walk out of here? Sabotage the movie?

HECHT breaks free of SELZNICK –

HECHT: I'm looking at a place in Beverly Hills right now. Who was Beverly? The wife of the developer. He built it because Jews can't live in Hancock Park – (*Angled to SELZNICK*.) No matter how much money they have, how many movies they make.

FLEMING: Yeah well the movie we're trying to make right now is *Gone With The Wind* –

HECHT turns to SELZNICK –

HECHT: You may be a Prince of Hollywood, David, but you know you can't you join any country club in Los Angeles you want or live any place you like. Admit it.

SELZNICK: Why don't you keep your politics, obsessions, bees in your bonnet and personal opinions out of my studio?

HECHT: Isn't that exactly where they should be? Where yours should be? You remember Plato's Cave?

FLEMING: (*Sneering*.) Isn't that a roadhouse in Topanga?

SELZNICK: Plato!

HECHT: Plato says we're like men staring at the wall, seeing flickering shadows from the fire behind us, trying to figure what they mean. What's that but a movie theater? Forget these goddamn melodramas and make something about real people for a change, living real lives.

FLEMING: People go to the movies because real life stinks. They want to see something *larger* than life up there.

HECHT: (*Persisting, to SELZNICK.*) Why don't you take a real gamble and make a movie that could make America look its ugly face in the mirror?

SELZNICK: Because that's not what it wants to see. It wants to see the way it *thinks* it looks.

HECHT: And that's okay by you?

SELZNICK: And you? You've done pretty good for yourself out here. Ever walk away from a paycheck?

HECHT's momentarily off balance –

HECHT: I take the money and run and keep coming back for more, yes – thank you for pointing that out –

HECHT sinks into his chair with the despair of exhaustion –

Maybe they just put the American movie industry in the wrong place. Out here in the desert. With that sun frying your brains. Where it's always, like, two thirty on a Tuesday afternoon. Where when you listen hard enough you can hear your brain cells tinkling as they hit the ground. Who could do any real work here? Maybe only the Jews would be crazy enough or broke enough to try to build something here. Or maybe we see something that remind us of home. The Mojave – the Negev? Are they so different? It's just hard to accept that the guy with the whip is always another Jew –

SELZNICK: We're back to Hitler? Mussolini?

FLEMING: We should be back to Melanie –

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: At least Fleming is honest. He doesn't give a shit –

FLEMING: (*Flattered.*) That's right.

SELZNICK: Nobody's got a gun to your head. You could walk out of here right now –

HECHT: I said I'd give you five days.

SELZNICK: So get your ass in that chair –

He turns to FLEMING –

Yes, my grandfather was probably behind a pushcart somewhere in Russia when yours was fighting the Civil War.

He grabs the tattered novel –

But I'm the one making our *War and Peace* –

HECHT: *Our War and Peace?*

SELZNICK whipsaws back to HECHT –

SELZNICK: You want to see everything through a six-pointed star, go right ahead. That's your problem, not mine.

Nobody's going to send us anyplace – we're *Americans* now.

HECHT: Is that right, David? Give me twenty seconds –

He presses the intercom button –

Is Nunnally Johnson on the lot?

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Yes, Mr. Hecht –

HECHT: Get him for me, please –

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Right away, Mr. Hecht.

SELZNICK: What are you doing?

HECHT: Wait and see –

A ring tone sounds from the intercom –

JOHNSON: (*Intercom.*) Nunnally Johnson here –

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT TWO

HECHT: It's Ben. I have a question for you. David Selznick – is he an American or a Jew?

JOHNSON: (*Intercom.*) He's a Jew.

HECHT: I'll be in touch.

He thumbs the intercom off.

SELZNICK: Another pissed-off screenwriter? That doesn't prove anything.

HECHT thumbs the intercom again –

HECHT: Get me Martin Quigley.

SELZNICK: What does it prove?

A ring tone sounds on the intercom –

QUIGLEY: (*Intercom.*) Quigley.

HECHT: Hecht here. I'll make it quick. David O. Selznick – Jew or American?

QUIGLEY: (*Intercom.*) How can he be an American? Even the O's fake. He doesn't have a middle name.

HECHT: Thank you.

He thumbs the intercom off.

SELZNICK: It's a set up. He was always too pally with Thalberg.

HECHT: You tell me who to phone.

SELZNICK: We don't have time for this.

HECHT: Are you scared to find out?

SELZNICK: Your agent.

HECHT: Okay –

He thumbs the intercom –

Get me Leland Hayward –

SELZNICK: Then we finish the scenario –

RON HUTCHINSON

Another ring tone sounds –

HAYWARD: (*Intercom.*) Hayward. Who's that?

HECHT: It's Ben Hecht. Settle a bet for me. David O. Selznick is on the Titanic. There are two lifeboats. One filled with Jews, one with Americans. Which one would you put him in?

HAYWARD: (*Intercom.*) He goes down with the Jews.

HECHT: That's all I wanted to know.

He looks towards SELZNICK, who's digesting the betrayals.

You can make their *War and Peace* for them. You're still going to be a Selznick.

It takes a moment for SELZNICK to recover from the blow of the phone calls. He takes a deep breath.

SELZNICK: So you've just proved how clever a guy you are, Ben. Me – I never even finished college. I had to do my growing up on a movie lot. All I've known is the sound stage and the commissary. I even married the boss's daughter. That's how limited my horizons are.

HECHT: You're one of the smartest men I ever met.

SELZNICK: But I'm not a Man of Ideas, like you. I'm too busy making movies.

HECHT: That's not all there is to the world –

SELZNICK: I like to think I have some ideas, too, but I'm not a writer. I can't put them on the page, make a parade of them. But movies don't get made by Men of Ideas. Nothing happens anywhere without the Men of Action –

FLEMING jerks awake –

FLEMING: (*Automatic.*) Action –

HECHT: The guys with the power? – as who else might say, wearing a little black moustache and lederhosen?

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT TWO

SELZNICK: What power do I have, Ben? I can't *make* you finish the screenplay, I can't *make* people go see my movies, I can't fix the rocks in those guys' heads and I'm not about to waste my time trying. You want to talk about power? You know who has the power in the end? The real power?

FLEMING: Mayer –

SELZNICK: No.

HECHT: The Hays Office –

SELZNICK: Not even close.

FLEMING: The banks –

SELZNICK: No –

SELZNICK points to the photo of the crowd outside Grauman's Chinese Theater on his wall again. He jabs a thumb at an anonymous face in the crowd –

This guy here –

Jabs it at another face –

Her –

Another one –

I have to keep this guy happy –

Another one –

This one –

Another one –

This son of a bitch here –

Another one –

This jerk –

Another one –

That asshole –

Another one –

RON HUTCHINSON

Fatso, here –

Another one –

Baldy –

Another one –

The gimp –

Another one –

Her with the big tits –

Another one –

Him with the boil on his nose –

More faces –

This Irishman, that Polak, Giovanni, Mike, Hans, Mr. and Mrs. Wong, the Dutchman, the Wop –

Even more –

The farmer, the shopgirl, the clerk, the housewife, the masseuse, the factory hand, the short order cook –

Even more –

All those Joe Blows and Jane Does, the guy with the lunch pail, the broad in the elevator, all those little people who have nothing in common except they go to the movies three or four times a week and every time they go they buy a ticket and every ticket is a vote for my movie or a vote against it. They're the people who hand out the ulcers, pal, they're the ones who run this town, the world, they have the power, the real power. Mayer? Me? Hedda Hopper? Gable? We don't amount to anything if they give us the thumbs down. Princes of Hollywood? America's Royalty? We are down on our knees sucking the collective dick of the Great Unwashed.

HECHT: That's democracy.

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT TWO

SELZNICK: And brother, do I hate it. Because to stay in business you have to give them what they want, not what's good for them.

FLEMING: You can't blame how lousy the movies are on the movie audience – cretins though most of them are –

SELZNICK: They bought the book. I hope they go see the movie. That's all I can do. But I'll make it my way, in my studio. If they like it I'll be the Boy Wonder again. If they don't –

FLEMING: It's all a crap shoot, anyway. You bust your balls on something that's a surefire hit, it makes three hundred bucks and lies there like a yak turd. Or on the other hand you take garbage like this –

SELZNICK: That's very encouraging, Victor.

Trying to rally them for one final effort –

Ask yourself why we do this, fellas. Why we put ourselves through it. (*To FLEMING.*) Why a guy like you risks losing your eye for a picture?

FLEMING: (*Hand to his eye.*) Don't say that –

HECHT: The money?

SELZNICK: There's easier ways to make a living. But people who make railroad switchgear don't get up every morning feeling like we do. Soap manufacturers don't. Real estate brokers don't. The whole world wants to work in the movies. Not just because of the money or because of the glamor of that out there –

HECHT: The studio? That stockyard for the human soul?

SELZNICK: It's only in the movies where the dead can walk. You have any other way to live forever?

FLEMING: (*Taking charge.*) The last reel –

HECHT totters back to the typewriter, FLEMING heads thankfully to the couch –

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: We've got them on the edge of their seats. For three hours they've lived with Scarlett and Rhett and Ashley and Melanie, they've fought and suffered alongside them. A million eyes are fixed on the screen, a million hearts are beating in tune with our characters –

FLEMING lies on the couch as Melanie, dying –

FLEMING: Melanie's on the couch, about to cash in her chips –

SELZNICK: (*At HECHT.*) Here's the sockeroo. Wait till you get a load of this –

SELZNICK kneels alongside FLEMING, holds his hand –

Before Melanie dies she tells Scarlett –

FLEMING: *Be good to Rhett – he really loves you – aaaaaaaah –*

He twists feverishly, miming Melanie's death, then arches his back, twitches and dies.

SELZNICK: Scarlett's now free to marry Ashley but she finds out that the big milksop never really loved her, not like he loved Melanie –

Throwing himself into Scarlett again, running his hands over his body –

It was this you wanted, this –

As Ashley –

I guess it was, Scarlett –

As Scarlett –

I've been a silly little fool. It's Rhett I really love –

She rushes back to Rhett – running, running, running –

As Scarlett, running around the office –

I've been blind and stupid all these years, that's what I've been, it's always been Rhett – Rhett – Rhett –

HECHT is typing grimly –

HECHT: *Rhett – Rhett – Rhett –*

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT TWO

SELZNICK: But he's staring at her with a cold glint in his eye,
as if he's never seen her before -

(As Scarlett, recoiling.) Don't look at me like that -

*He puts his hand to his heart, backs away as FLEMING
sneers -*

FLEMING: *Melanie was worth a million of you -*

SELZNICK: *I know that now -*

FLEMING: *I expect you'll be shacking up with ole Ashley now -*

SELZNICK: *No, no, it's you I love - Rhett - Rhett - (To HECHT.)*
Are you getting this, Ben?

HECHT: *Am I ever -*

*SELZNICK holds his arms out for an embrace but FLEMING/
Rhett moves away -*

FLEMING: *And I loved you, kid -*

SELZNICK: *Loved - ?*

FLEMING: *But you screwed it up. Time and again. You couldn't get
that damn wishy washy Ashley out of your head. And now it's too
late -*

SELZNICK: *Too late - ?*

FLEMING heads to the door -

FLEMING: *It's goodbye, Toots - forever -*

SELZNICK: *No -*

He throws himself on the floor, grabs FLEMING's ankle -

FLEMING: *You're easy on the eye and a hellcat in the sack - but it's
time to blow -*

He opens the door -

SELZNICK: *Rhett -*

FLEMING: *Can it, sister -*

He shakes his ankle free -

RON HUTCHINSON

It's the big fade out.

SELZNICK: *What about me?*

FLEMING: *My dear, I don't give a shit -*

SELZNICK: *Damn*, he doesn't give a *damn*.

HECHT: You can't use that line.

SELZNICK grimaces -

SELZNICK: Ben's right.

HECHT: You'll never get "damn" past the Hays Office.

SELZNICK: That's not the problem.

To FLEMING -

Say it again.

FLEMING: *My dear, I don't give a damn.*

SELZNICK: Again.

FLEMING: *My dear, I don't give a damn.*

SELZNICK: There's something wrong -

He screws his face up, tasting the words as he speaks them -

I don't give a - I don't give a -

Frustrated -

It needs a handle -

FLEMING: Does it matter?

SELZNICK: They showed me the one-sheet for that gorilla movie I made. I said you can't call it "Kong". "*King Kong*".
That's a handle -

FLEMING: Just let him finish the goddamn screenplay -

HECHT impatiently hammers the keys -

HECHT: Melanie dies, Scarlett gets the brush-off from Rhett and then - ?

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT TWO

SELZNICK: He walks out.

HECHT: And?

FLEMING: That's the end of the book.

HECHT: Wait wait wait –

Blearily he rubs his eyes, grabs the book, turns to the last page –

The end?

SELZNICK: *Finis.*

The bewildered HECHT is flipping the page backwards and forwards –

HECHT: What did I miss? Did we drop some scenes? Do they end up together or don't they?

SELZNICK: Yes.

HECHT: What do you mean Yes?

SELZNICK: No.

HECHT: Yes or No?

SELZNICK: Yes *and* No.

HECHT: *And* no?

SELZNICK: No.

HECHT: No?

SELZNICK: Yes.

HECHT: *Do they or don't they?*

FLEMING: Is it important?

HECHT: I've been hanging on five days to find out –

SELZNICK: It's how Margaret Mitchell ends the book –

HECHT: Wait –

He grabs the cover, which is hanging by a thread –

This is Book One, right? There's another volume?

RON HUTCHINSON

FLEMING: (*Shudders.*) Don't even suggest it –

HECHT: After all that Rhett walks out? With nothing decided? We don't know whether she gets him back, whether he changes his mind – ? Whether he gets run over by the fire wagon the moment he steps off the sidewalk – ? You can't end a movie like that.

SELZNICK: It's how the book ends and a million and a half people bought the book.

HECHT: So a million and a half people threw it at the dog when they got to the last page?

SELZNICK: We can't rewrite the ending. It wouldn't be *Gone With The Wind*.

HECHT: This from the man who let W. C. Fields throw a juggling routine into *David Copperfield*?

SELZNICK: When you buy a book you buy what the writer got wrong as well as what they got right.

HECHT: So you *know* this ending doesn't work?

SELZNICK: I also know not to mess with it –

HECHT turns to FLEMING –

HECHT: Do you think you can end a movie like that?

FLEMING: I don't care any more. I just want to get out of here and onto the set. (*Brokenly.*) I want to feel the wind on my face, hear the cries of children at play, have a little puppy lick my hand. Finish it any damn way you please – just finish it –

SELZNICK: I can't change Margaret Mitchell's ending.

HECHT: But you know it doesn't work?

FLEMING: (*Wavering.*) I'll shoot any ending you want, David, but this one is a little –

HECHT: It's not an ending. It's like she said "The hell with this, let *them* figure it out, I'm going to worm the parakeet – "

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT TWO

SELZNICK: It's got its problems but I'm not going to change it –

HECHT: The last card always reads *The End*. Not – *Kind Of The End*.

FLEMING: You wouldn't shoot a little – *an alternative ending?*

HECHT: Or *The Best Ending We Can Think Of Right Now But If We Can Think Of A Better One We'll Get Back To You* –

FLEMING: A little insurance? If it doesn't preview well?

FLEMING indicates the typewriter –

You don't mind if I – ?

HECHT: Go right ahead –

FLEMING sits, starts to type –

FLEMING: We keep the same dialog B.S. but we cut to Scarlett looking up –

HECHT: One of these?

HECHT mimes Scarlett.

FLEMING: Then we hear galloping hoofbeats and Rhett rides back, he scoops her up, in his arms –

HECHT: He leaps a fence –

FLEMING: He jumps a ditch –

HECHT: A wild glint in his eye –

FLEMING: A cruel smile on his lips –

HECHT: They ride off together, her hair streaming in the wind –

FLEMING: I love the hair –

HECHT: He says –

FLEMING: *You silly little fool* –

HECHT: And she sighs –

RON HUTCHINSON

FLEMING: *Oh, Rhett -*

HECHT: They jump another fence -

FLEMING: And gallop into the sunset -

HECHT: *That's* how to end a movie -

FLEMING, flushed with the pride of authorship, pulls the sheet of paper out of the typewriter and hands it to SELZNICK. He's tempted -

SELZNICK: That's - that's how to end a movie. But it's not how she ends the book. Because she knows. She *knows*, too.

Regretfully he crumples the paper up and drops it on the floor with the other detritus -

Ben -

He snaps his fingers and FLEMING moves away from the typewriter. SELZNICK hands HECHT the book, opened to the last page -

Bring it home.

HECHT reads -

HECHT: Tomorrow is - (*Anguished, disbelieving.*) No no no no no no no. Is that the last line? Isn't it obvious that *tomorrow's another day*?

FLEMING: Ben, please -

HECHT: It's a hell of a long wait to be told that.

SELZNICK: Put the button on it.

HECHT writhes in agony, as if every fibre of his writer's soul is rebelling at writing those words -

HECHT: Ah - ah - ah -

FLEMING goes behind HECHT, massages his shoulders, kneading them like a boxer's second -

FLEMING: You can do it, Ben. Sure you can.

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT TWO

He grabs a glass of water, makes HECHT drink, then pats him on the back so that he spits the water into a vase –

Attaboy –

He kneads HECHT's fingers –

One more line –

HECHT: I can't –

His hands are shaking, he's genuinely unable to write another line – especially not that line.

Not that line, no – don't make me –

He makes a run towards the door.

FLEMING: We lost him –

SELZNICK: Come back, Ben, come back –

FLEMING: It's no good –

HECHT has reached the door. He's about to open it when SELZNICK bursts into song –

SELZNICK: *Da da da da –*

Taken by surprise, HECHT is stalled for a moment.

I know what I do to make sense of the world – or if not make sense of it, keep too busy to be scared there is no sense. I make movies.

He sees HECHT is about to bolt –

Da da da – Vic finds his way to make some kind of order every day, out of the chaos of a movie set. You mould a shapeless world with the power of words. Sure, these aren't yours and who the hell knows what they mean –

He indicates the desk –

But you don't have a choice – it's what you do.

HECHT groans and brokenly types the last few words of the screenplay. As he does so SELZNICK heads to the intercom –

RON HUTCHINSON

Do I have any other meetings today?

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Thirty-two, Mr. Selznick. And Security wants to know what to do about the writer you had arrested.

SELZNICK: Okay. Come in here and clean this place up, would you? And then bring me some breakfast.

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*Intercom.*) Mr. Mayer is still holding –

SELZNICK: Twenty seconds – (*To HECHT.*) How are we doing, Ben?

He snaps his fingers, impatiently –

You think this is the only movie I have in development? I've got *Intermezzo* and *Rebecca* to worry about.

HECHT: (*Typing.*) *Tomorrow is* – I need hardly say – *another* – but Selznick seems to think it needs saying – *another day.*

He slumps in his seat, exhausted, nauseated by the writing of the last line as MISS POPPENGUHL enters. She moves in an uncoordinated, dazed way as she picks up scripts, rearranges the furniture, puts right all the disorder.

Fade out. Roll end titles.

FLEMING: *The End?*

HECHT: – of our careers, yes.

FLEMING: Really the end?

HECHT: Goodnight, Vienna –

Even SELZNICK looks as if he's having trouble believing it –

SELZNICK: We did it?

HECHT: I guess we did –

He takes the last page out, stares at it in wonder –

My God – we did.

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT TWO

*Brokenly he gets to his feet, tries to unbend his fingers,
straighten out his back as SELZNICK grabs the screenplay,
starts flicking through it –*

SELZNICK: *One. Exterior. Day. Tara. Field hands labor under a
blood red sky –*

*The lights isolate him as he intently reads, his creation
coming to life on the sound track as we hear drumbeats
getting nearer and near –*

Scarlett... Melanie... Ashley... Rhett...

Now we hear "Dixie" in the far distance –

Good...good...not bad...good –

*"Dixie" is countered by "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"
as he skims the pages, the sheets flying through his fingers.*

Ah – The North attacks –

*Battle is joined on the soundtrack; he sways as cannons
boom, muskets crackle, men cry out –*

The slap –

*We hear the sound of Prissy being slapped followed by a
baby cry –*

Atlanta burns –

We hear the crackling of flames –

Back to Tara –

*We hear the sound of a horse drawn wagon, the crack of
a whip –*

She shoots the –

We hear a gunshot –

Never be hungry –

We hear someone take a bite out of a carrot –

The lumberyard –

RON HUTCHINSON

We hear the buzz of a sawmill –

She marries Rhett –

We hear dance music –

Bonnie jumps the –

We hear galloping hoofbeats, a horse's neigh and a sharp crack as Bonnie hits the deck –

Ashley Melanie Scarlett Rhett – Ashley Scarlett – Scarlett
Melanie – Scarlett Ashley – Scarlett Rhett – Scarlett –
Scarlett – Scarlett – Scarlett –

We hear church bells sound –

*Tomorrow, I'll think of some way to get him back. After all,
tomorrow is...*

*MISS POPPENGHUL gives a heartfelt sigh but HECHT isn't
impressed –*

HECHT: A terrible line to end a movie on.

*FLEMING can see the shot, frames it with his fingers as he
and SELZNICK head upstage –*

FLEMING: And I put the camera here – maybe an eighteen –
and I go in close and then I pull back and –

*They turn to face the window. As they do so MISS
POPPENGHUL has coincidentally reached its center, behind
SELZNICK's desk. In her red dress she's holding up one of the
bananas she's been collecting. She looks oddly like Scarlett
in her iconic "never be hungry again" pose...*

SELZNICK: It's perfect, Ben –

*The lights change, the Poppenghul/Scarlett illusion
goes. SELZNICK's throat works, his voice is hoarse with
emotion –*

I don't want to change a line.

HECHT: I'm off assignment?

SELZNICK: It's a work of genius.

HECHT: I can go?

SELZNICK: Sure. There's nothing we can't fix later.

*There's a moment when it looks as if all his strength has gone.
Then he pulls himself upright and through the next speeches
changes into clean shirt, new tie and fresh suit.*

(To MISS POPPENGHUL.) Typists. Get me typists. Lots of typists. Memo to all departments. Art – camera – grips – electrics – wardrobe – props – transport – marketing – publicity – stills – catering – finance – stenographers – continuity – extras casting – the script is locked. We start shooting first thing Monday. Actors on the set in make-up and costume at six a.m.

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes Mr. Selznick –

SELZNICK catches the exhausted FLEMING mid-yawn –

SELZNICK: What are you waiting for?

He pushes the screenplay into his hands –

We need a shot list and call sheet by tonight.

FLEMING: Shot list – call sheet –

SELZNICK: (To HECHT.) Are you still here?

HECHT: My check?

FLEMING is heading wearily to the door –

FLEMING: Shot list...call sheet –

SELZNICK: Keep on top of Vivien Leigh's cleavage. If she's playing a tramp she's got to look like one. And no cubed ice, okay? You'll have that shot list on my desk by six?

FLEMING: I'm going to be allowed to finish this movie?

SELZNICK: Sure. And you can take a fee up front or I'll give you a piece of the gross. What do you say?

FLEMING: Thanks but I know a turkey when I see one. I'll take the fee.

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: But you're ready to do this, right? Now that we have a script?

FLEMING: David, you and I know the screenplay's just the pimple on the ass of the production.

HECHT: Oh, really?

FLEMING: Now the man's work starts –

FLEMING squares his shoulders, readying himself for the immense task ahead. As he heads to the door with the script he gives HECHT a look of grudging admiration –

But you did pretty good, at that.

HECHT: Good luck. You're going to need it.

FLEMING hesitates –

FLEMING: What did you really think of *Test Pilot*?

HECHT: I don't think you could make a better movie.

FLEMING decides to take it as a compliment, exits as MISS POPPENGUHL exits with the cart.

SELZNICK: (*To HECHT.*) Fifteen thousand dollars?

HECHT watches as SELZNICK writes one check –

What's the name of that movie I pulled Fleming off?

HECHT: *The Wizard of Oz.*

SELZNICK: There's a character in it, right, the guy everybody's scared of – ?

HECHT: The Wizard of Oz –

SELZNICK: I know the title – the name of the character?

HECHT: The Wizard of Oz.

SELZNICK: No, there's a character who turns out to be just this guy sitting behind a curtain, pulling levers and making funny voices and stuff so everybody's scared of him? But he's just a guy, right? Not a monster. Not a Hitler or a Stalin or a Mussolini. Just a guy.

He tears out the check.

What do I have, Ben? What does Sam Goldwyn have? What – okay – did Thalberg have? What's a producer, when you get down to it? Just a guy with a phone and a desk and a fly buzzing in his ear with an idea for a movie and willing to ride his hunch.

He hands HECHT the check.

HECHT: You know what a gamble this particular movie is?

SELZNICK: The movies are the biggest gamble there is and Hollywood's rigged the game – but it's the only game in town.

HECHT: But you're a born gambler and born gamblers don't play to win. They play to lose.

SELZNICK: Is that right?

HECHT: They have to leave the table broke. Dostoyevsky used to ejaculate when he lost.

SELZNICK: I'll make a note not to sit facing him.

He takes a deep satisfied breath, totally at peace with himself, ready to lose it all as he writes a second check.

I'm going to roll the dice. Either I break the bank or I go belly up. My poppa might have died broke but he didn't die poor. He said, Always be broke, throw it around, give it away. Living beyond your means gives a man confidence. For once I'm making a movie without any compromises – I'm going to show everybody how it should be done – and if it takes a crazy Jew to do it, what the hell, somebody else can figure out what that means – frankly, I don't give a damn –

He hesitates –

That's it, that's the handle. *Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn –*

HECHT: That's good –

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: You like it?

HECHT: It did need a handle. But I thought we weren't changing any of Margaret Mitchell's lines?

SELZNICK: Yeah, well, I'm the Producer.

HECHT: You want me to –

He takes out a pencil, ready to make the correction.

SELZNICK: I'll do it. There's a couple of other things I want to noodle at –

MISS POPPENGHUL enters with the breakfast cart –

MISS POPPENGHUL: Your breakfast, Mr. Selznick –

SELZNICK writes a second check.

SELZNICK: What was the name of that organization you're always bugging me about? The one that helps get people out of Europe?

HECHT: Jewish Relief.

SELZNICK: Jewish Relief...

MISS POPPENGHUL exits as he tears the check out of the book, holds it out to HECHT, who reaches for it. SELZNICK doesn't let go.

Who'd you be in the movie? Rhett? Or Ashley? What do you think? You'd be the guy looking ahead or the guy looking back?

HECHT: I couldn't say – but I think you make a wonderful Scarlett O'Hara.

SELZNICK: Is there anything wrong with getting the job done, no matter what it takes?

HECHT: Not if you make sure you remember who you are and what you should do about it.

SELZNICK: I gave you the check, didn't I?

HECHT: Not yet.

MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS: ACT TWO

A momentary hesitation, then SELZNICK lets go of the check, grabs a pastry, heads to his desk, piled high with files, letters and scripts for other movies.

SELZNICK: Not so fast. I'm having a little scenario problem with *Intermezzo*. It wouldn't take much to punch it up. Are you free – (*Checks his watch.*) Say this afternoon – ?

HECHT: (*Shaken.*) Am I free this afternoon? Am I – ? No. I'm just about to check myself into a mental home. Don't – just don't – don't call me, okay?

SELZNICK: Ben, I ever get myself in a hole like this again, you're the only guy I'm going to call.

HECHT: Yeah...well...

He covers his reaction by taking the pastry from SELZNICK's hand –

I still say no Civil War movie ever made a dime.

HECHT exits with the pastry as MISS POPPENGHUL enters –

MISS POPPENGHUL: Your coffee, Mr. Selznick.

SELZNICK: Where's my first meeting?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Coming right in, Mr. Selznick. Mr. Mayer is still on the line.

SELZNICK: Put him through, would you, Miss Poppenghul?

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick.

Instinctively she reaches for her memo pad –

Memo to who, Mr. Selznick?

Her hand twitches as it hovers over the pad –

Coming right in, Mr. Selznick. More peanuts, Mr. Selznick?
Memo to – ? Memo to?

SELZNICK: Take the rest of the day off, Miss Poppenghul.

MISS POPPENGHUL: (*With relief.*) Thank you, Mr. Selznick –

RON HUTCHINSON

SELZNICK: But first put Mayer through.

MISS POPPENGHUL: Yes, Mr. Selznick. Oh thank you, Mr. Selznick -

As she exits he opens his desk drawer, takes out a pipe, sighs with anticipation, lights it, draws, savors the taste, exhales.

The phone rings. He ignores it, takes the tattered remains of the book of Gone With The Wind and places it onto the top shelf of the bookcase. He slaps it in place; sits at the desk, takes his time answering the ringing phone, feet on the desk -

SELZNICK: Louis? (Beat.) Poppa - I have some very good news for you -

He blows out more pipe smoke -

- we're making a movie...

Dawn light floods the room, echoing the red sky over Tara. Through the window we see dark figures silhouetted against a sunset and hear the overture to Gone With The Wind as huge marquee letters spelling out "Gone With The Wind" glimmer and sparkle and we...

End