

Screenplay 3rd week

CHARACTER			
INTERIOR	EXTERIOR		
<i>character biography</i>	professional	personal	private
<i>dramatic need, point of view, attitude, change</i>	(work)	(marital or social)	(alone)

Character: the main character acts, not reacts all the time, or character disappears.

Harold Pinter: “they observe you, their writer, warily. It may sound absurd but I’ve suffered two kinds of pain from my characters. I have witnessed their pain when I’m in the act of distorting or falsifying them, and I’ve suffered pain when I’ve been unable to get to the quick of them, when they willfully elude me, when they withdraw into the shadow.”

Fitzgerald wrote in his journals: “when you begin with an individual, you create a type.” ↔ *This Side of Paradise*

“It’s about this guy in the Sahara Desert. We open at sunrise with a long shot of dust rising out of the desert. Then we see a Jeep racing across the sand. Suddenly, the engine sputters, coughs, and finally dies. The man climbs out of the Jeep, looks around, and jerks open the hood. Then we hear strange noises coming from behind a distant dune. Suddenly, several racing camels sweep down over the hill. They see him and stop. They look at each other surrounded by the silence.”

First 2 pages of *After Life*

WE OPEN IN BLACK:

A PENCIL SCRATCHES ON PAPER, and we hear:

LIGHTER (V.O.)

Looking back, it's easy to see that our world has changed from what it once was. But what happened, and how it happened. . . That's the mystery.

FADE INTO:

EXT. DEEP SPACE

Black, forbidding, unknown. . . Then, a velvety RIPPLE reveals the COSMOS-BILLIONS OF STARS back-dropped with brilliant hues of GASES, STARDUST and NEBULAE. Spiraling into position, we watch as TWO NEUTRON STARS SPIN, conjoined in their final nanoseconds of life, and IMplode IN A SPECTACULAR DISPLAY OF LIGHT AND MATTER.

Alfa to Omega: the beginning and the end.

LIGHTER (V.O.)

What quirky little twist of fate managed to tick the clock one step closer to the end? Well. . .

WHITE OUT:

A MASSIVE EXPLOSION erupts, thrusting a tremendous amount of destructive energy ripping through the blackest night at the speed of light. A phenomenon known as a GAMMA RAY BURST.

LIGHTER (V.O.) (cont'd)

That was a long time ago, back at the beginning.

THE CAMERA TREMBLES as giant pulsations of deadly radiation sweep through space, burning nebulae, exploding stars—literally

gobbling up everything in its path. Layers of gases, clouds, matter and planetary bodies vanish with its passing. It travels thousands of light years, leaving an unbelievable path of destruction.

EXT. PLUTO

PLUTO, glittering in the distant light of the sun, travels quietly along its orbit. The deadly gamma rays approach our solar system. SUDDENLY the tiny PLANET is OBLITERATED, blown out of existence as you or I might blow out a candle.

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

INT. NASA SPACE FACILITY, ARIZONA—DAY

SUPER TITLE:

FEBRUARY 23, 2323

A BLINKING RED LIGHT flashes silently. We PULL BACK and gaze upon a blank computer screen.

A dazzling display of computer symbols BLASTS onto the screen; the WATCHER PROGRAM boots up and we see a graphic display of our Solar System. But something's out of whack; something's missing.

IT'S PLUTO.

The orbital trajectory remains the same—but there is no planet there. PLUTO IS GONE. VANISHED.

DR. TRAVIS LIGHTER sits at the computer working the program. Mid-forties, trim and athletic, a space scientist, he works the program impatiently. There's a glitch and he doesn't handle them very well.

He pushes a button on the intercom.

LIGHTER

Sushi!

SUCHI (V.O.)

Yes, Dr. Lighter.

He stands, sighs deeply, walks to the large window at the mountains standing guard over the brilliant desert wilderness on the edge of suburban Phoenix. Stately saguaro cacti dot the sandy, rocky landscape in the mid-morning sun.

LIGHTER (cont'd)

The overnight in? I think we've got another glitch in Watcher.

SUDHI (V.O.)

Yes. . . but you're late-again. Do I tell them you're coming? Or do I tell them that you're just late-again?

Chagrined, Lighter gives her a look.

INT. LAB CORRIDOR—DAY

Lighter and SUDHI PANARJEE, Lighter's assistant, attractive, mid-thirties, walk quickly down the hallway. And we

CUT INTO:

(page 1 of screenplay)

CHINATOWN

By Robert Towne

FADE IN

grainy but unmistakably a man and woman making love. Photograph shakes. SOUND of a man MOANING in anguish. The photograph is dropped, REVEALING another, more compromising one. Then another, and another. More moans.

CURLY'S VOICE

(crying out)

Oh, no.

INT. GITTES' OFFICE

Curly drops the photos on Gittes' desk. Curly towers over Gittes and sweats heavily through his workman's clothes, his breathing progressively more labored. A drop plunks on Gittes' shiny desktop.

Gittes notes it. A fan whirrs overhead. Gittes glances up at it. He looks cool and brisk in a white linen suit despite the heat. Never taking his eyes off Curly, he lights a cigarette using a lighter with a "nail" on his desk.

Curly, with another anguished sob, turns and rams his fist into the wall, kicking the wastebasket as he does. He starts to sob again, slides along the wall where his fist has left a noticeable dent and its impact has sent the signed photos of several movie stars askew.

Curly slides on into the blinds and sinks to his knees. He is weeping heavily now, and is in such pain that he actually bites into the blinds.

Gittes doesn't move from his chair.

GITTES

All right, enough is enough—you can't eat the venetian blinds, Curly. I just had 'em installed on Wednesday.

Curly responds slowly, rising to his feet, crying. Gittes reaches into his desk and pulls out a shot glass, quickly selects a cheaper bottle of bourbon from several fifths of more expensive whiskeys.

Gittes pours a large shot. He shoves the glass across his desk toward Curly.

2)

GITTES

Down the hatch.

Curly stares dumbly at it. Then picks it up, and drains it. He sinks back into the chair opposite Gittes, begins to cry quietly.

CURLY

(drinking, relaxing a little)

She's just no good.

GITTES

What can I tell you, kid? You're
Right. When you're right, you're right, and you're right.

CURLY

Ain't worth thinking about.

GITTES leaves the bottle with Curly.

GITTES

You're absolutely right, I wouldn't
Give her another thought.

CURLY

(pouring himself)

You know, you're okay, Mr. Gittes. I know it's your job, but you're

okay.

GITTES

(settling back, breathing in a little easier)

Thanks, Curly. Call me Jake.

CURLY

Thanks. You know something, Jake?

GITTES

What's that, Curly?

CURLY

I think I'll kill her.

3)

INT. DUFFY & WALSY'S OFFICE

Noticeably less plush than Gittes'. A well-groomed, dark-haired WOMAN sits nervously between their two desks, fiddling with the veil on her pillbox hat.

WOMAN

I was hoping Mr. Gittes could see to this personally—

WALSH

(almost the manner of someone comforting the bereaved)

If you'll allow us to complete our preliminary questioning, by then he'll be free.

There is the SOUND of ANOTHER MOAL coming from Gittes' office—something made of glass shatters. The woman grows more edgy.

INT. GITTES' OFFICE—GITTES & CURLY

Gittes and Curly stand in front of the desk, Gittes staring contemptuously at the heavy breathing hulk towering over him. Gittes takes a handkerchief

and wipes away the plunk of perspiration on his desk.

CURLY

(crying)

They don't kill a guy for that.

GITTES

Oh they don't?

CURLY

Not for your wife. That's the unwritten law.

Gittes pounds the photos on the desk, shouting:

GITTES (Cont'd)

I'll tell you the unwritten law, you dumb son of a bitch, you gotta be
rich to kill somebody, anybody, and get away with it. You think you
got that kind of doubh, you think you got that kind of class?

4)

Curly shrinks back a little

CURLY

... No. ...

GITTES

You bet your ass you don't. You can't even pay me off.

This seems to upset Curly even more.

CURLY

I'll pay the rest next trip—we only caught sixty ton of skipjack
around San Benedict. We hit a Chubasco, they don't pay you for
skipjack the way they do tuna or albacore—

GITTES

(easing him out of his office)

Forget it. I only mention it to illustrate a point. . .

INT. OFFICE Reception

He's now walking him past SOPHIE, who pointedly averts her gaze. He opens the door where on the pebbled glass can be read: J. J. GITTES and Associates-DISCREET INVESTIGATION.

GITTES

I don't want your last dime.

He throws an arm around Curly and flashes a dazzling smile.

GITTES

(continuing)

What kind of a guy do you think I am?

CURLY

Thanks, Mr. Gittes.

GITTES

Call me Jake. Careful driving home, Curly.

He shuts the door on him and the smile disappears.

5)

He shakes his head, starting to swear under his breath.

SOPHIE

A Mrs. Mulwray is waiting for you, with Mr. Walsh and Mr. Duffy.

Gittes nods, walks on in.

INT. DUFFY & WALSH'S OFFICE

Walsh rises when Gittes enters.

WALSH

Mrs. Mulwray, may I present Mr. Gittes?

Gittes walks over to her and again flashes a warm, sympathetic smile.

GITTES

How do you do, Mrs. Mulwray?

MRS MULWRAY

Mr. Gittes. . .

GITTES

Now, Mrs. Mulwray, what seems to be the problem?

She holds her breath. The revelation isn't easy for her.

MRS. MULWRAY

My husband, I believe, is seeing another woman.

Gittes looks mildly shocked. He turns for confirmation to his two partners.

GITTES

(gravely)

No, really?

MRS. MULWRAY

I'm afraid so.

GITTES

I am sorry.

Gittes pulls up a chair, sitting next to Mrs. Mulwray-between Duffy and Walsh. Duffy cracks his gum.

Gittes gives him an irritated glance. Duffy stops chewing.

MRS. MULWRAY

Can't we talk about this alone, Mr. Gittes?

GITTES

I'm afraid not, Mrs. Mulwray. These men are my operatives and at some point they're going to assist me. I can't do everything myself.

MRS. MULWRAY

Of course not.

GITTES

Now-what makes you certain he is involved with someone?

Mrs. Mulwray hesitates. She seems uncommonly nervous at the question.

MRS. MULWRAY

A wife can tell.

Gittes sighs.

GITTES

Mrs. Mulwray, do you love your husband?

MRS. MULWRAY

(shocked)

. . . Yes, of course.

GITTES

(deliberately)

Then go home and forget about it.

MRS. MULWRAY

But. . .

GITTES

(staring intently at her)

I am sure he loves you, too. You know the expression, “let sleeping dogs lie”? You’re better off not knowing.

7)

MRS. MULWRAY

(with some real anxiety)

But I have to know!

Her intensity is genuine. Gittes looks to his two partners.

GITTES

All right, what’s your husband’s first name?

MRS. MULWRAY

Hollis. Hollis Mulway.

GITTES

(visibly surprised)

Water and Power?

Mrs. Mulway nods, almost shyly. Gittes is now casually but carefully checking out the detailing of Mrs. Mulway’s dress-her handbag, shoes, etc.

MRS. MULWRAY

He’s the Chief Engineer.

DUFFY

(a little eagerly)

Chief Engineer?

Gittes’ glance tells Duffy Gittes wants to do the questioning. Mrs. Mulway nods.

GITTES

(confidentially)

This type of investigation can be hard on your pocketbook, Mrs. Mulwray. It takes time.

MRS. MULWRAY

Money doesn't matter to me, Mr. Gittes.

Gittes sighs.

GITTES

Very well. We'll see what we can do.

EXT. CITY HALL-MORNING

already shimmering with heat.

8)

A drunk blows his nose with his fingers into the fountain at the foot of the steps.

Gittes, impeccably dressed, passes the drunk on the way up the stairs.

INT. COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Former Mayor SAM BAGBY is speaking. Behind him is a huge map, with overleafs and bold lettering:

“PROPOSED ALTO VALLEJO DAM AND RESERVOIR”

Some of the councilmen are reading funny papers and gossip columns while Bagby is speaking.

BAGBY

Gentlemen, today you can walk out that door, turn right, hop on a streetcar and in twenty-five minutes end up smack in the Pacific Ocean. Now you can swim in it, you can fish in it, you can sail in it—but you can't drink it, you can't irrigate an orange grove with it. Remember—we live next door to the ocean but we also live on the

edge of the desert. Los Angeles is a desert community. Beneath this building, beneath every street, there's a desert. Without water the dust will rise up and cover us as though we'd never existed!

(pausing, letting the implication sink in)

CLOSE-GITTES

Sitting next to some grubby farmers, bored. He yawns—edges away from one of the dirtier farmers.

BAGBY (O.S.)

(continuing)

The Alto Vallejo can save us from that, and I respectfully suggest that eight and a half million dollars is a fair price to pay to keep the desert from our streets—and not on top of them.

(9)

AUDIENCE-COUNCIL CHAMBERS

An amalgam of farmers, businessmen, and city employees have been listening with keen interest. A couple of the farmers applaud. Somebody shooshes them.

COUNCIL COMMITTEE

In a whispered conference.

COUNCILMAN

(acknowledging Bagby)

Mayor Bagby. . . let's hear from the departments again—I suppose we better take Water and Power first. Mr. Mulwray.

REACTION-GITTES

Looking up with interest from his racing form.

MULWRAY

walks to the huge map with overleafs. He is a slender man in his sixties who wears glasses and moves with surprising fluidity. He turns to a smaller, younger man, and nods. The man turns the overleaf on the map.

MULWRAY

In case you've forgotten, gentlemen, over five hundred lives were lost when the Van der Lip Dam gave way—core samples have shown that beneath this bedrock is shale similar to the permeable shale in the Van der Lip disaster. It couldn't withstand that kind of pressure there.

(referring to a new overleaf)

Now you propose yet another dirt-banked terminus dam with slopes of two and one half to one, one hundred twelve feet high and a twelve-thousand-acre water surface. Well, it won't hold. I won't build it. It's that simple—I am not making that kind of mistake twice. Thank you, gentlemen.

(10)

Mulwray leaves the overleaf board and sits down. Suddenly there are some whoops and hollers from the rear of the changers and a red-faced FARMER drives in several scrawny, bleating sheep. Naturally, they cause a commotion.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT

(shouting to farmer)

What in the hell do you think you're doing?

(as the sheep bleat down the aisle toward the Council)

Get those goddam things out of here!

FARMER

(right back)

Tell me where to take them! You don't have an answer for that so quick, do you?

Bailiffs and sergeants-at-arms respond to the imprecations of the COUNCIL and attempt to capture the sheep and the farmers, having to restrain one who looks like he's going to bodily attack Mulwray.

FARMER

(through above, to Mulwray)

You steal the water from the Valley, ruin the grazing, starve my livestock—who's paying you to do that, Mr. Mulwray, that's what I want to know!

OMITTED

The scene ends and we cut to Los Angeles River bed where Gittes watches Mulwray through binoculars.