

The Secret Room

by Malcolm Hart

PRE-TITLE SEQUENCE:

INT. A BEDROOM. NIGHT.

The bedroom is shadowy, lit by candles and the leaping flames of a log fire. There is crying, moaning and sobbing.

On the bed, a beautiful Hispanic female of about thirty years in slip and stockings, makes love atop her lover. A large mirror hangs at the head of the bed. She watches herself in the mirror as she rides him triumphantly towards their climax.

In the mirror, the heavy velvet drapes at the window stir. In the mirror, the woman, wildly approaching orgasm, sees the curious face of a ten year old boy, eyes large, peering at her from behind the drapes.

The boy stares at her confused and wide-eyed trying to fathom what is going on. She catches his eyes and holds them as gasping, laughing, crying, she comes. The boy, terrified, leaves his hiding place and makes a dash for the door. He's freaking as he wrestles with the doorknob.

TITLES OVER:

INT. BATHROOM. DAY.

JOSE GARCIA AURELIANO stands in pyjamas at the marble hand-basin, stropping an open razor.

He's in his late forties, handsome, dark hair greying at the temples. He wears beard and moustache but shaven neck and cheeks. He applies soap then carefully shaves the unbearded parts of his face.

INT. THE PARLOUR. DAY.

Midsummer. A large room with french-windows gives onto a garden. Aureliano sits at the table laid for breakfast by the window. He reads the newspaper. The front page story is to do with the Nazi conquest of Europe.

MRS MCCABE, grey-haired, nervous, middle-aged woman in an apron, enters with a boiled egg, toast and a pot of coffee on a silver tray.

MRS MCCABE

Another fine morning sir...

Aureliano looks up, smiles, continues leafing through the newspaper.

She puts the egg, etc., in front of him and exits.

He puts down the paper and cracks open the egg with almost ceremonious precision and eats it. He pours and drinks coffee.

The clock on the mantle chimes the quarter-hour. It's 8.45. Aureliano wipes the corners of his mouth with his napkin.

EXT. MAIN STREET, AN EASTERN UNIVERSITY TOWN. DAY.

SUPER: NOVEMBER 1941.

Not many people about. One or two merchants opening up their stores. A street sweeper. One or two ladies doing early shopping. Aureliano, linen jacket, panama, drives carefully down the street in his shiny Plymouth coupe.

EXT. A LARGE, GOTHIC UNIVERSITY. DAY.

The clock in the university tower chimes nine as Aureliano drives into the car park. Students, milling and chattering in groups, stream through the portals.

Two maintenance men are painting over graffiti on a wall... KEEP AMERICA OUT OF THE WAR!

END TITLES

INT. AN AUDITORIUM IN THE UNIVERSITY. DAY.

Hubbub of conversation. A group of a dozen or so students, predominantly male, in the seats directly in front of the vacant lectern. At the back of the auditorium, to one side, two men, age about twenty. DAVID MILFORD is slim, pale skinned, dark of hair and eye. He's reading a letter. PETER GERSON is athletic, square-jawed, blond and blue eyed. He leans back, chin pointed to the ceiling, hands behind his head.

MILFORD

Claire says she's looking forward to meeting the illustrious Gerson. She's quite a gal... you'll adore her.

Milford grins, gives Gerson a dig. He continues reading and chatting at the same time.

She admires jocks...

Gerson gives Milford an old fashioned look.

GERSON

Are we talking about your mother?

MILFORD

Stepmother old man... stepmother.

He folds the letter away.

It's a cool eighty five in Montevideo...
Everyone's at the beach. Wait till you
see the beaches Gerson...

He sighs. Aureliano enters the auditorium closing the door behind him.

Four more days of this...

The room falls silent as Aureliano mounts to the lectern.

He speaks with an attractive Spanish accent. His delivery is quiet and
authoritative.

AURELIANO

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

(Pause)

Many of you will be rushing off after
graduation... like lemmings to the sea ...

Laughter from the students. Aureliano looks around the auditorium,
smiling at the response.

While you rest your weary minds on the
warm sandy beaches of indolence...
perhaps you'll give thought to the less
fortunate. Perhaps you'll give thought
to an entire continent where the sun no
longer rises... where there is only
immense cold and darkness...

Pause. His audience pays sober attention.

where truth and beauty are banished...
 where innocence lies murdered in its
 crib...

Milford and Gerson glance at each other. Milford whispers...

MILFORD

And a merry Christmas to all our
 readers.

Gerson chuckles - loud in the deathly silence of the auditorium.

Aureliano turns his attention to the elevated, isolated, Milford and
 Gerson, fixes them for a moment, then continues.

AURELIANO

Truth. Beauty. Innocence.
 Truth replaced by advertising...
 propaganda... no longer to be trusted...
 even here...
 Beauty? Look around you... bought and
 sold in the market place... cheapened on
 every bill-board... imprisoned in musea...
 now raped and sullied by the dogs of
 war.

He lowers his voice.

And innocence?
 The death of innocence is the saddest
 loss of all. For without innocence there
 can be no love.

Aureliano, eyes closed, is silent. The auditorium is silent. Aureliano
 opens his eyes.

Questions?

Milford gets to his feet, hand raised. Gerson cocks an eyebrow.

AURELIANO (CONT'D)

Yes?

MILFORD

With respect sir. Aren't you overstating
the situation?

All heads turn.

AURELIANO

Milford isn't it?

MILFORD

Yes sir.

AURELIANO

You think I overstate the situation Mr.
Milford?

MILFORD

Well yes sir. Throughout this semester
your theme has been Love and
Innocence. You say that without
innocence there can be no love.

Milford pauses. Aureliano nods.

AURELIANO

Go on.

MILFORD

Well sir... it's something that continues
to baffle me... even in your own
inestimable verse sir.

Gerson hides his grin. A murmur of amusement from the students.
Milford is encouraged.

To come directly to the point sir... this
spiritual kind of love you write about
may be OK for Gods and Goddesses but
it doesn't cut the mustard with ordinary
red-blooded Americans.

Milford's gesture includes everyone in the class

What ever happened to the lover sir?
Sighing like furnace to his mistress
eyebrows? ... What has happened to the
sweetness of her lips sir... the perfume of
her breath... her hair... the touch of her
skin?... her passion... her desire...
You see my problem...

A frown momentarily clouds Aureliano's composure. The students
switch their attention back and forth between the adversaries. They
await Aureliano's response. He takes his time.

AURELIANO

If... Milford?... if you think to divert the
attention of this class from it's higher
purpose to the yearnings of your own
tawdry nature you are wasting both
your time and mine.

(MORE)

AURELIANO (CONT'D)

I see your problem very clearly and my
advice to you is to take your talents
elsewhere. An advertising agency?
Hollywood perhaps?

The students laugh. Aureliano is satisfied. Milford retires, a defeated competitor.

INT. A LARGE DRAWING ROOM. NIGHT.

A cocktail party. Many guests, dressed for dinner, mill about drinking, eating, gossiping, chattering. Door bell rings.

Middle-aged hostess, MAUD VANDENBERG, leaves the party to answer it.

Two women, DIERDRA MALPRESSE and SERINA FOSDYKE, both about forty years old, attractive in their dinner-gowns and jewelry, stand drinking, smoking, gossiping with each other. They turn as Maud and Aureliano enter.

DIERDRA

Who's that with old Maud?

SERINA

The poet. Aureliano.

DIERDRA

Cute. You know him darling?

SERINA

He's in John's department. Poet in residence.

They are joined by JOHN FOSDYKE, a bespectacled, white-haired academic.

FOSDYKE

What are you two witches up to? Hello
Dierdra. Where's Bill?

DIERDRA

(dryly)

Bill who?

She kisses his cheek.

He couldn't make it... What else is new?
John my sweet... won't you introduce me
to your poet?

FOSDYKE

Aureliano? Sure. I didn't know you were
interested in poetry...

They squeeze their way across the room to Aureliano, now standing
alone sipping champagne.

AURELIANO

Good evening Professor... Mrs.
Fosdyke...

He shakes Fosdyke and Serina by the hand, turns to Dierdra.

FOSDYKE

May I introduce Mrs. Malpresse?

AURELIANO

How do you do Mrs. Malpresse.

He shakes her hand.

DIERDRA

Dierdra...

He smiles. She takes his arm and steers him off.

I've something to ask you Senor...

INT. ANOTHER ROOM. NIGHT.

Aureliano and Dierdra are alone. Dierdra, shoe-less, sits curled up on a sofa, Aureliano next to her. She watches him through her cigarette smoke.

DIERDRA

Serina says you're a great poet.

AURELIANO

Do you read poetry?

DIERDRA

No.

AURELIANO

What do you read?

DIERDRA

Mostly detective stories.

AURELIANO

Detective stories.

DIERDRA

What sort of poetry d'you write?

AURELIANO

You mean what do I write about?

DIERDRA

That's what I mean.

Aureliano is pensive.

AURELIANO

I write about love

He plays with his empty glass.

DIERDRA

So... you write about love...

She watches him through her cigarette smoke.

AURELIANO

Yes.

DIERDRA

About people breaking each other's
hearts? Stuff like that?

AURELIANO

No. Not that kind.

DIERDRA

What other kind is there?

Aureliano fidgets with his glass.

AURELIANO

You'd have to read the poems...

Dierdra lights another cigarette.

DIERDRA

Perhaps you'll read them to me
sometime.

Another drink?

Dierdra pulls on her shoes. Aureliano checks his watch.

AURELIANO

I'm afraid I...

DIERDRA

I'm famished. Why don't we sneak off.
We could go to my place. I've got food...
everything.

Aureliano looks at his watch again.

AURELIANO

That would be great ... but you'll have to
forgive me... I have a previous
engagement.

Dierdra shrugs. She smiles.

DIERDRA

Too bad. Another time.

EXT. AIRPORT, MONTEVIDEO. DAY.

CLAIRE MILFORD, beautiful, in her thirties, throws away her cigarette as Milford and Gerson emerge from customs and immigration with baggage. Milford waves. Claire smiles.

INT. CAR. DAY

Claire, smoking, drives, Milford next to her, Gerson in back. There's some kind of silent rapport between Claire and Milford.

GERSON

It's very kind of you and Mr. Milford to
invite me. I really appreciate it.

CLAIRE

Forget it Pete... may I call you Pete?

GERSON

Sure.

CLAIRE

Milford hates being called Dave don't
you darling.

MILFORD

Almost as much as darling... darling.

CLAIRE

Fate decrees you stay with us this
summer.

Claire lowers the window, throws out the cigarette.

In fact your presence is urgently
required. Isn't that so Milford? Milford
says your tennis is excellent.

EXT. US AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, MONTEVIDEO. DAY

Establishing shot of a large mansion in an exclusive residential
district, half-hidden behind sub-tropical palms and bushes. THOMAS
JEFFERSON MILFORD walks down the steps to meet the car as it draws
up. Thomas J Milford is around sixty, grey-haired, patrician. He shakes
hands with Milford.

TOM

Good to see you David. How are you?

MILFORD

Just fine.

GERSON

How do you do sir. Peter Gerson.

TOM

Heard a lot about you. OK if I call you
Pete?

GERSON

Everyone does sir.

CLAIRE

Everyone but Milford. You boys must be
famished.

Claire takes Milford on one arm and Gerson on the other.

INT. DINING ROOM. DAY.

The four of them eat lunch. Claire watches Gerson with concealed
amusement as he hungrily devours his food. Milford watches Claire
watching Gerson.

TOM

So. What are your plans Pete?

Gerson looks up, food in his mouth. He stops chewing; looks from Tom
to Milford, glances at Claire then back to Tom.

CLAIRE

They've only just arrived Tom...

MILFORD

I'd say he plans to do some serious
eating...

Gerson swallows his food.

GERSON

Well nothing really... I don't know...

Looks at Milford.

We thought we'd take it easy for a while... swim a bit... I have to work on my butterfly...

TOM

I meant career Pete. Now you're graduated. Any plans?

GERSON

Well... not really... Milford and I thought...

Gerson glances across at Milford who's pouring himself another glass of wine.

TOM

I think that's enough David.

Milford doesn't respond. Glances at Claire. They exchange subtle looks of despair.

GERSON

We kind of thought... what with the international situation and all... well... we just don't know do we?... what's going to happen I mean...

CLAIRE

That's true. It's really tough on these guys. Times aren't exactly normal.

TOM

And if nothing happens? You've got to have a plan... some idea of what you want to do with your life...

(pointedly)

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

Some of us like to use uncertainty as an
excuse to get drunk...

MILFORD

... like there's no tomorrow.

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

A long-lens camera pans and wanders across the few family groups scattered around the week-day beach, children and teenagers chaperoned by mothers and aunts. It moves from one group to the next, searching out the shapely and nubile, sometimes zipping back to reexamine some overlooked beauty.

It pans up from a beautiful teen-age body... off the beach... beyond the surf... and settles on a sleek grey warship flying the German flag at anchor.

Milford and Gerson are lying in the sand, Gerson on his back sunbathing, Milford on his belly taking photographs with his Leica.

MILFORD VO

She's been here ever since we arrived.

GERSON

Who?

Gerson rolls over, curious to see who Milford's talking about. He realises he means the ship.

GERSON (CONT'D)

Oh that.

Gerson aims his fingers at the ship. Fires a salvo.

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

Milford and Gerson walk moodily across dunes to a parked MG sports car. They get in, Milford at the wheel. They stare in silence at the warship. Milford pulls out a hip-flask and drinks. He passes it to Gerson who drinks and belches.

High above the car, a twin-engine passenger aeroplane starts its descent towards the city airport. Gerson looks up at it, follows its progress towards Montevideo. Milford fires up the car startling Gulls and Terns which swirl and squawk around them as they drive off towards the distant city.

EXT. MONTEVIDEO AIRPORT. DAY.

The aeroplane lands and taxis to the terminal building.

INT. AIRPORT IMMIGRATION. DAY.

Aureliano, in dark suit, dark hat and dark glasses, hands his passport to an official who flicks through it and hands it back.

OFFICIAL

(In Spanish)

Welcome home Senor Aureliano.

INT. AIRPORT LOBBY. DAY.

An older man, SENOR CARLOS, also dressed in dark clothes, wearing a black arm band, is there to meet him.

CARLOS

(In Spanish)

Welcome home Senor Aureliano. I wish it could have been under happier circumstances. What can I say?

They shake hands.

The car is outside.

INT. A CHAUFFEUR-DRIVEN LIMOUSINE. DAY.

Aureliano and Carlos sit in the back in silence. Carlos mops his perspiring brow with a handkerchief. Aureliano gazes out the window.

EXT. THE HIGHWAY. DAY.

The limousine leaves the main road. It follows a country road, threading its way between vineyards, to a large house.

EXT. THE HOUSE. DAY.

The car crunches up gravel path to the house. A manservant waits. As the car comes to a stop he opens Aureliano's door.

INT. THE HOUSE. DAY.

The rooms are draped, funereal. Servants tip-toe about, bowing and curtsying to Aureliano. He stands on the threshold, taking in every detail of the house. His expression tells of past familiarity.

INT. THE PARLOUR. DAY.

A coffin in the centre of the room. Aureliano stands looking down at the corpse of an elderly woman. Even in age and death she is beautiful, identifiably the woman in the pre-title sequence. Her face, even in death, wears a look of triumph. A rosary is entwined in her hands. Aureliano gives little sign of his feelings. He stands over the coffin, head bowed. Snr Carlos watches from the door.

Aureliano looks up, nods to Snr Carlos. Snr Carlos signals the undertaker. Undertaker's assistants wrinkle their noses as they screw the lid on the casket.

Aureliano walks to the stairs and Carlos follows him. Aureliano pauses, turns, silently forbids him and continues upstairs alone.

INT. A LARGE BEDROOM SUITE. DAY.

It is identifiably the same bedroom as in the pre-title sequence. A woman's bedroom, a sensual place, made intimate by large numbers of personal treasures on wall, table and shelf.

Aureliano enters, quietly closing the door behind him. He stands, again taking everything in as if he'd not seen it in a long time. His gaze wanders to the curtain drapes, the mirror at the head of the bed, the porcelain doorknob. He moves around the room opening little caskets, handling gew-gaws, looking at photographs, many of which are of him in varying stages of growing up. He opens a wardrobe, his fingers riffle through the rich fabrics of the hanging clothes. He draws out a silken garment. He kneels, holding it to his face feeling it, smelling it, kissing it.

EXT. THE EMBASSY GARDEN. NIGHT.

HAPPY THANKSGIVING 1941 is in lights strung between trees. Guests drift in and out of the house. One or two couples are dancing to a small band playing popular tunes of the day. Claire is truly into the spirit of the occasion, the perfect hostess moving around making introductions and keeping an eye on the servants with food and drinks. Tom is deeply engrossed in conversations with elderly dignitaries.

Both Gerson and Milford are wearing white, ROTC uniforms. Milford is busy with his Leica taking photographs of guests.

Claire detaches herself from a middle-aged couple and their beautiful eighteen year old daughter. She crosses to Gerson.

CLAIRE

My you look handsome Gerson.

GERSON

May I have this dance?

CLAIRE

Come and meet the beautiful Camilla...
she's had eyes
for no one but you all evening poor
thing.

Claire takes Gerson's hand. They walk over to the middle-aged couple and their beautiful daughter. Milford follows them through the lens of his camera.

MILFORD'S POV THROUGH CAMERA LENS.

Gerson exchanges looks with Claire as she introduces him to Camilla and her parents. Gerson bows to Camilla and invites her to dance. They dance but Gerson's attention remains on Claire.

EXT. A DESERTED BEACH. DAY

Gerson wades out of the waves up the beach, his fine body glistening in the afternoon sun. He stands on his hands.

Milford, in the shade in shirtsleeves, is photographing him. Gerson walks much of the way up the beach on his hands, collapses in the sand next to Milford. Rolls over.

Milford produces the hip-flask, takes a pull and hands it to Gerson.

GERSON

Cheers.

Gerson drinks. He stares out to sea. Takes another swig and passes the flask back to Milford who drains it.

Gerson pulls on his clothes. He and Milford walk across the dunes to the MG sports car. They get in.

GERSON (CONT'D)

Not a great deal to do in these parts.

MILFORD

Not a great deal.

GERSON

Movies?

MILFORD

In town.

GERSON

Bars? Women?

MILFORD

Sure. Everything.

Milford fires up the car and they drive off.

EXT. LOS CUATROS GENERALES CAFE. DAY.

A student hang-out. The sports car is parked at the curb. Milford and Gerson seat themselves wearily at a table and order a bottle of wine. Milford in the shade fans himself with a menu. Gerson in the hazy sunlight, leans back in his chair, eyes closed. A waiter brings a bottle of wine and uncorks it.

GERSON

How about a movie tonight?

MILFORD

Can't tonight. We're expected home for dinner.

GERSON

What's the occasion?

MILFORD

Someone from Washington.

GERSON

We have to be there?

MILFORD

Dad would throw a fit. He's a stickler for
bullshit...

Claire would be very disappointed if we
didn't show.

Milford glances at Gerson and smiles. A vendor moves deftly amongst the tables selling an afternoon English language newspaper. Milford buys one. Bold headlines tell about German 5th Column penetration of Uruguayan society and governmental departments. Protests from America and Britain. Milford peruses the front-page story.

MILFORD (CONT'D)

They say we'll be in the war by the end
of the year.

GERSON

Here's to it.

They raise their glasses.

MILFORD

We who are about to die salute you.

They drain their glasses, Milford refills them. Gerson picks up the newspaper, leafs idly through it. Milford takes out note pad and pencil, starts scribbling.

GERSON

It was thirty-five degrees in New York
City last week... Wonder if Milly
Pershing is missing me...

MILFORD

I heard she was desperately in love with
Chadwick Bingham.

GERSON

That's a lie! Where d'you hear that?
Bingham? That jerk? Not Milly...

Gerson folds back the newspaper at a page he's reading.

Hey. Listen to this.

He reads aloud.

"Return of a famous son. José Garcia
Aureliano comes home for mother's
funeral."

Milford looks up.

MILFORD

You're kidding!

Gerson throws the paper down in front of Milford. Two photographs,
one of Aureliano and another of his mother when she was about thirty
five, dominate the page. Milford picks it up.

I'll be damned. I thought he was Puerto
Rican.

Reads aloud.

"World famous poet... sole survivor of one of Montevideo's oldest families... comes home after fifteen years to bury his mother."
Well I'll be damned!

Gerson empties the bottle into their glasses. He's already a little drunk. He calls for a waiter. Waves the empty bottle at him. Raises his glass.

GERSON

I'd like to propose a toast. To old José.

MILFORD

I'm not drinking to that asshole...

GERSON

C'mon Milford... In bereavement a man needs all the friends he can muster.

Milford reluctantly raises his glass.

MILFORD

All right all right all right... to old José...

GERSON

To José Garcia Aureliano. And his mother...

MILFORD

And his mother.

GERSON

Quite a looker.

They ponder the photograph.

MILFORD

Gerson... I've been thinking... and what I've been thinking is... it would be absolutely in order for us to pay our respects in person to Senor Aureliano in his hour of grief.

GERSON

Absolutely in order. The least a man can do. Goddamn! What are friends for...

EXT. A BROAD BOULEVARD. DAY.

It's late afternoon. A motorised funeral cortege headed by a motorcycle cop progresses slowly down the boulevard. There's little other traffic. People on the sidewalks pause and remove their hats as the cortege passes. The sports car appears at the end of the procession. Swaying perilously close to the long line of polished limousines, it proceeds to slowly overtake them.

EXT. THE SPORTS CAR. DAY.

Milford, driving, and Gerson are both quite drunk.

GERSON

Is it the right funeral?

MILFORD

Funerals all look alike to me old man...
Ask these good people...

The sports car sways alongside a limousine full of elderly mourners. The windows are lowered on account of the heat. Gerson, gripping the windscreen, gets unsteadily to his feet to bring himself level with the window.

GERSON

(With delicacy in faltering
Spanish)

Excuse me sir... please... is this the
Aureliano... er... funeral?

Mourners shrink from the window fingering cravats and pearls and
waving fans.

What's the matter with these guys?

Milford drives the car further along the line of limousines trailing the
hearse.

INT. A LIMOUSINE. DAY.

Aureliano alone in the back, pensive. To his amazement, Gerson's face
slides into the frame of the window. He's momentarily stunned,
incapable of believing his eyes.

Gerson's face lights up, a smile of recognition. He makes an attempt at
reverence and respect.

GERSON

Ah! Mr Aureliano sir... Remember me
sir? Gerson? We heard you were in
town... that is Milford and I... wish to
offer you our sincerest

AURELIANO

(Coldly furious)

What the hell do you think you're
doing?

EXT. THE SPORTS CAR. DAY.

Milford cranes his neck to see what's happening. The swaying sports car kisses the side of the limousine and bounces off into the middle of the boulevard towards an oncoming truck.

EXT. THE BOULEVARD. DAY.

The truck swerves to avoid the MG and hits the hearse, dislodging casket and wreaths. The cortege comes to an undignified halt like a derailed train, completely blocking the boulevard. The casket, slid from its bed, hangs rakishly out of the back of the hearse, the road strewn with wreaths and flowers. Sirens herald the arrival of police. Funeral guests and policemen mill about. Aureliano, furious at the insult, watches from within the limousine.

EXT. THE SIDEWALK. DAY.

The sports car is nosed into a tree on the sidewalk belching steam from its burst radiator. Milford and Gerson, dazed and bemused, struggle to get out. Four policemen converge on them, nightsticks raised. The young men make a futile attempt at apology but the angry police are on them, beating them. They fight and are cruelly subdued with sticks, fists and boots. They're handcuffed.

An officer of police marches officiously to Aureliano's limousine.

EXT. THE LIMOUSINE. DAY.

The officer addresses Aureliano quietly through the window.

OFFICER OF POLICE

(In Spanish)

My deepest regrets Senor Aureliano.

An outrage against decent people. We'll have you on your way in just a moment.

He calls out to Milford and Gerson's captors to bring them over.

Rest assured... I'll see these gringos get
what's coming to them.

Milford and Gerson are dragged to the window.

Senor... you know these pigs?

Aureliano looks hard at Milford and Gerson. They grin sheepishly back at him.

AURELIANO

(In Spanish)

No.

He turns away. A police car swoops up. The policemen bundle the protesting Gerson and Milford into it. It drives away.

EXT. US AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, MONTEVIDEO. NIGHT.

Move in to lighted upstairs window.

INT. A BEDROOM SUITE. NIGHT.

Claire, dressed for dinner, sits in front of a mirror fixing her ear-rings. Tom, still in shirt-sleeves, is fixing a wing-collar and tying a black bow-tie. He's in a hurry, making a mess of it and angry.

CLAIRE

You're making a fuss over nothing.

TOM

Nothing? Where in tarnation are they?

Claire stands and goes over to Tom. She takes the tie from his struggling hands and ties it for him.

CLAIRE

Don't get over-excited... Jim Scully's not going to be bothered if Milford's here or not.

TOM

David Claire! His name's David for chrissake!
It's the principal of the thing... he should be here. It's damn bad manners...

Claire stands back to view the bow tie.

CLAIRE

There.

Tom takes his jacket from the wardrobe.

TOM

Scully's an hombre muy importante... carries a lot of weight... It's darn important we make the right impression.

For a moment Claire looks at herself unsmiling in the mirror. The doorbell can be heard ringing. She starts.

CLAIRE

That'll be them.

She goes to the bedroom door, opens it, listens, closes it.

It's Scully.

TOM

Shit! Is it seven already?

Tom quickly pulls on his jacket. Claire helps him.

CLAIRE

For heaven's sakes relax!

Tom pauses. Shakes his head.

TOM

I'm sorry honey. Bare with me.

He kisses her on the cheek. They walk arm in arm from the bedroom.

INT. THE DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

Servants clear the table. Amongst the debris of dinner, two placements of glasses, cutlery, etc., remain untouched.

INT. LIBRARY. NIGHT.

The Milfords and JAMES SCULLY, dignified, grey-haired, sixty years old. The men sit comfortably, smoking and being served coffee. Claire isn't able to relax. She looks at her watch, her attention drifting in and out of the conversation.

JAMES SCULLY

... couldn't have happened at a worse time for Congress...

No problem for FDR. Everyone knows how he feels about Europe. He can hardly wait to get us in there...

TOM

And this could be the excuse he's been looking for...

JAMES SCULLY

Yeah. It kinda looks that way...

Pregnant pause. Claire looks at her watch again.

CLAIRE

I wonder what happened to the boys?

TOM

I really must apologise Jim...

JAMES SCULLY

No need. I wouldn't worry about them...

CLAIRE

I'm really not...

She exchanges glances with Tom.

I'm sure they're all right. They might have thought to phone... Cigarette Jim?

JAMES SCULLY

Thanks.

TOM

This generation's completely out of line... no consideration for anyone but themselves.

JAMES SCULLY

They're probably preoccupied in manly pursuits. Remember how it was Tom? Nothing changes.

Claire reacts as the telephone rings in the hallway. It's answered. A servant knocks and enters.

SERVANT

Telephone Senora...

TOM

I'll get it.

Claire gets up quickly.

CLAIRE

You look after Jim darling. I'm sure he'd
love some cognac...

She sweeps out of the room closing the door. Tom uncorks the cognac.

TOM

Jim?

JAMES SCULLY

Thanks. No. I've a lot of work to catch
up on. I'm meeting the British later
tonight. They're pretty much as
disturbed about these events as we are.

Claire returns, all smiles.

CLAIRE

It was the boys. Everything's fine.

JAMES SCULLY

What did I tell you.

TOM

What happened to them?

CLAIRE

The MG. A burst radiator.

TOM

Where are they?

CLAIRE

It's all right darling. I've got the
address... they pushed it to a garage.
Leaving so soon Jim?

JAMES SCULLY

The Chief wants the Monroe Doctrine
rewritten and on his desk before
breakfast.
Thanks for dinner... sorry I couldn't
stay longer.

Tom. I'll call you in the morning.

Handshakes and James Scully leaves.

TOM

OK. Where the hell are they?

CLAIRE

Central police headquarters.

TOM

Jesus Christ!

EXT. CENTRAL POLICE HEADQUARTERS. NIGHT.

Claire, with Gerson and Milford either side of her, descends the steps
outside the police station to a her car. The boys, bruised and
dishevelled, get in the back, Claire in the front. They drive off.

INT. CLAIRE'S CAR. NIGHT.

Claire driving, Milford and Gerson in back. Silence. Claire watches the
boys in the driving mirror. They are beat. Milford is dark and sullen.

CLAIRE

So the casket actually slid out of the
hearse? Right to the ground?

GERSON

Well... not quite to the ground. It sort of
hung there...

CLAIRE

It must have been bizarre!!!

GERSON

I guess you could say that. You could
say it was kind of bizarre hey Milford?

Claire chuckles. Gerson giggles painfully. Milford, eyes closed, remains
silent.

INT. EMBASSY LIBRARY. LATER THAT NIGHT.

Tom is agitated. He walks up and down the room in front of the
dishevelled and contrite Milford and Gerson. Claire lights a cigarette in
the background. Tom stops in front of the boys.

TOM

I don't get it. How could you be so dumb?
I spend my life currying favour with the
locals keeping relations between our
countries cordial while my son
perpetrates the grossest public insult on
them imaginable. I just don't get it! I
really don't get it!

Gerson turns and catches Claire's eye. He gives her a wry smile. She
bursts into a fit of coughing and excuses herself from the room.

TOM (CONT'D)

I don't have the time for this. The international situation's coming to the boil and it sure as hell doesn't need any help from you. This Senor Aureliano's from a family muy importante... I have to write an official apology and you'd better do the same. Understood?

Milford, eyes lowered, is silent. Tom yells at him...

Is that understood???

MILFORD

Yes sir.

EXT. SENORA AURELIANO'S VILLA. DAY.

Workmen are closing the outside shutters on all the windows. Servants are leaving carrying their belongings. A chauffeur sits at the wheel of a limousine parked in the drive.

INT. SENORA AURELIANO'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Aureliano sits on the bed, deep in private thought. The light suddenly diminishes as a workman, outside, slams the shutters and nails them closed.

INT. THE HALLWAY IN THE VILLA. DAY.

Aureliano descends the dust-sheeted stairs. Senor Carlos is waiting for him.

AURELIANO

(In Spanish)

Don't touch my mother's room. I want it left exactly as it is.

SENOR CARLOS

(In Spanish)

Of course.

This was delivered by hand this
morning.

Senor Carlos hands him an envelope. Aureliano examines it. It has the US Embassy crest on it. He opens it. Takes out the letter and reads it. His expression is unchanged. He folds the letter away into a pocket.

EXT. AURELIANO'S VILLA. DAY

Aureliano and Snr Carlos walk to the limousine. Carlos opens the door for Aureliano.

AURELIANO

Send me quarterly accounts.

SENOR CARLOS

Of course sir.

AURELIANO

Goodbye Senor Carlos. Thank you.

SENOR CARLOS

Go with God.

They shake hands. Aureliano gets in the car, Senor Carlos closes the door on him and watches the car drive away down the dusty drive.

INT. MILFORD'S ROOM. DAY.

Milford is typing. A knock at the door. Gerson enters in tennis clothes. The faces of both boys still bear the marks of their debacle with the police.

GERSON

We need a fourth... Claire thought you might like to.

Milford continues typing.

MILFORD

Who's the third?

GERSON

You know... the beautiful Camilla Valdez.

Milford doesn't look round.

MILFORD

Sure. As soon as I've finished this.

Milford continues typing. Gerson's gaze wanders over the desk. Uppermost on the pile of books and papers is a copy of Aphrodite Arise by JG Aureliano. Gerson glances over Milford's shoulder at the paper in the typewriter.

GERSON

Is that the apology?

Milford draws the paper out of the typewriter and hands it over his shoulder to Gerson.

Gerson takes it, curious. Puzzled, he reads it aloud.

GERSON (CONT'D)

Senor Aureliano.

A few days ago... driven to despair by an unfaithful lover - to whom I obviously meant nothing - I decided to end my life.

Gerson glances at Milford. Continues, more mystified than ever.

I turned on the gas and picked a book at random from the shelf. It turned out to be your Aphrodite Arise. I opened it and started reading.

Your understanding of the true nature of love made me realise that what I felt for my lover was a passing passion simply not worth dying for. I am indebted to you."

Gerson looks at Milford.

Nadja? Who's Nadja? What the heck are you up to?

Milford is typing an address on an envelope.

MILFORD

Infiltrating Aureliano's secret room.

GERSON

Aureliano's what?

MILFORD

His secret room.

GERSON

His secret room?

MILFORD

That's correct. His secret room.

Everyone's got one y'know.

Gerson still doesn't understand.

Milford taps his forehead.

MILFORD (CONT'D)

In here old man. A secret place... a private space where you can act and think as you like without guilt or shame. You know what I mean Gerson. The place you go in your head when you want to masturbate or something like that.

He takes the letter from him, folds it, slides it into the addressed envelope. Fixes a stamp.

GERSON

And Nadja? Who's she?

MILFORD

She's the ultimate... the most fantastic woman imaginable.

GERSON

Who? Do we know her?

Milford sighs. Turns to Gerson.

MILFORD

You still don't get it do you. In the secret room Nadja is whoever you want her to be.

I wonder about you sometimes Gerson...

Milford licks the flap and seals it.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. DAY.

The room, dominated by a large portrait of Aureliano's mother aged around thirty-five, is simply, but expensively furnished and conveys a sense of meticulous order.

The walls are covered floor to ceiling with shelves of books. The desk at the window overlooking the garden is empty save for a telephone and a framed photograph of Aureliano as child with his mother.

Aureliano sits at the desk reading an article in a newspaper. What he reads seems to please him. He folds the newspaper and places it on the desk, leans back gazing out the window. He checks his watch as the postman walks up the path.

The telephone rings. He lets it ring two or three times before picking up.

AURELIANO

Aureliano.

Aureliano smiles.

Hello Max.

CUT BACK &
FORTH:

INT. MAX STEIN'S OFFICE. DAY.

MAX STEIN, forty years old, long untidy hair, corduroy suit.

MAX

I wasn't sure if you were back yet. I
didn't want to bother you... you know...
Did everything...? Are you...?

AURELIANO

I'm fine Max. Everything's done that
had to be done. I've been back over a
week.

There's a knock at the study door. Aureliano yells out...

AURELIANO (CONT'D)

Come.

He listens to Max while Mrs. McCabe brings in a tray of coffee and the morning's mail. She places them on Aureliano's desk and leaves.

I've just read it.

He picks up the newspaper.

I know. It's splendid. When were critics
so generous...

He tosses the newspaper onto the desk disturbing the neat pile of mail. As he talks, his attention is fixed on the top envelope. He stares at it as he listens on the telephone.

MAX

No rush understand... just looking
ahead understand... are we any further
with the Cantos?

He listens with a certain apprehension. He shakes his head.

No no. Course not old chap... no hurry.
By the way... I have the contract from
Pilgrims for you to sign. Shall I put it in
the mail?

AURELIANO

Sure.

MAX

Oh yes... I forwarded a letter post
marked Montevideo... thought it might
be something personal... OK?

Aureliano picks up the letter on top of the pile, the typed address crossed out and forwarded. Aureliano looks at the post mark. Replaces it on the desk.

AURELIANO

Thanks.

He listens, his eyes on the letter.

Sure. Goodbye Max.

He puts down the telephone and pours coffee. He sips it. He puts down his cup and picks up the envelope. He slits it open with a paper-knife, takes out the letter and reads it. He lays it on the desk. Takes another sip of coffee. Stands, picks up the letter and walks slowly to the window. He rereads it.

EXT. MONTEVIDEO. DAY.

Gerson cycles care-free through the town. He turns off the main road into a working-class neighbourhood.

He parks his bike and goes into a dingy little corner store that sells cigarettes and groceries and has post-card advertisements in its grimy window. He comes out tucking an envelope into his jacket pocket, mounts the bike and rides off, whistling.

EXT. LOS CUATRO GENERALES CAFE. DAY.

Same morning. Milford sits alone at a table, scribbling in his notebook and drinking wine. Gerson enters, trousers in bicycle-clips, joins him.

Milford is expectant. Gerson slumps into a chair.

GERSON

Nada...

Milford deflates.

Grinning, Gerson takes the envelope from his pocket and tosses it on the table. It's addressed in stylish, Italianate hand to Nadja.

MILFORD

You bastard!

They both sit looking at it and grinning at each other.

GERSON

Well open it for Chrissakes.

Milford savours the moment.

MILFORD

All right all right... take it easy...

He picks it up and rips it open. His smile of triumph broadens as he reads aloud.

MILFORD (CONT'D)

"My dear Nadja.

It is a most felicitous circumstance that allows one to be of service to another.

Your friend José Garcia Aureliano."

Got him! I've got him Gerson. Haven't

I?

There's a gleam of satisfaction in Milford's eye, a sense of spite gratified. Gerson notices... has a fleeting moment of doubt... and then they're both laughing again and drinking.

GERSON

Are you going to reply?

MILFORD

You betcha! I've got it all worked out.

He refers to his notebook.

First... she's going to break the news the suicide story was a hoax... just to grab his attention. Then she's going to tell him he's a phony... out of touch with real women... something like that.

They both crack up laughing.

GERSON

He'll shit himself!

Milford smiles. Drains his glass.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. DAY.

Mrs. McCabe kneels at the fireplace lighting a fire. It comes ablaze nicely. Aureliano, the newspaper in his lap, watches her from an armchair. She gets up and goes to the door.

MRS MCCABE

They say we're in for a cold spell sir.

Don't forget your coffee sir... while it's hot.

Mrs. McCabe exits. Aureliano goes to the desk and pours coffee. He picks up the mail and riffles through. He smiles as he comes across a familiar envelope, familiar typing, familiar post-mark. He lays it on the desk.

He finishes his coffee and sits down, picks up the letter, opens it with paper-knife, carefully unfolds it and reads.

His mood changes. A shadow of hurt, a flicker of anger. He reads the letter over and over. He places it on the desk. Sinks back in the chair, eyes closed, brow furrowed.

He seems to hear distant sounds... surf breaking on a beach and hissing back on itself... a voice calling out...

EXT. A BEACH. DAY.

In the distance, a figure moves towards him indistinct in the haze. From billowing hair and clothing it would seem to be a woman. She wades at the edge of the surf. She calls out as she approaches, her voice indistinct beneath the sounds of the incoming tide. As she gets closer it becomes clear she's calling Aureliano's name.

Aureliano watches her approach with uncertainty. He's spellbound by the way she moves, the way her long, black hair billows around her face and shoulders.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm Nadja.

Aureliano turns away.

Nadja follows him. She walks at his side down the beach. He avoids looking at her.

AURELIANO

Why did you want to meet if you think so little of me?

NADJA

I have an indebtedness. You rescued me from the gas oven. Now it's my turn to rescue you.

AURELIANO

Gas oven! You said it was all lies. Now you want to rescue me? Really. From what? I'm not about to end my life.

She turns to him, charming, smiling but saying nothing. He repeats...

Well? Rescue me from what?

She laughs pleasantly. Looks him in the eyes.

NADJA

You know...
Like a knight of old come to rescue a young maiden from her tower...

She holds his eyes for a few moments then leaves his side, wading into the surf dragging her skirt high above her knees.

Aureliano, baffled, watches as she blatantly flaunts her sexuality. He turns and walks angrily away. Nadja leaves the water and catches up with him. She takes his arm.

NADJA (CONT'D)

I mean you no harm.

They walk a while in silence for some time, Aureliano deep in thought.

AURELIANO

You're perceptive. I do live in a tower. I deliberately distance myself from the world... from the distractions of everyday life... I can't deny it.
Not very sociable but how else would I get any work done.

Nadja returns his smile. They walk on.

NADJA

Tell me about yourself.

AURELIANO

What would you like to know? It's all in the poetry.

NADJA

Love and Innocence? Do you really believe that stuff?

AURELIANO

You think Man is just another animal in Darwin's zoo... but it's not the case. Man has a higher purpose... he has the potential for transformation... to *know* himself. He has the power to... to become as God.

They've stopped walking. Nadja looks Aureliano full in the eye.

NADJA

And you? Have you made this transformation? Am I talking to God... or are you still a man?

Aureliano is embarrassed, confused, angry.

AURELIANO

What the hell do you want from me?

NADJA

Don't be afraid...

AURELIANO

What's fear got to do with it? Afraid? Afraid of what?

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. DAY.

The telephone is ringing. It startles him to his senses. Dusk is closing in. He's still sitting in the same position. He lets the phone ring for some moments before answering it.

AURELIANO

Hello.

Who? Ah. Mrs. Malpresse.

Of course I do... Dierdra. No no. I'm fine.

He forces a laugh.

I was far away. What can I do for you?

CUT TO:

INT. DIERDRA MALPRESSE'S LOUNGE. DAY.

Dierdra in silk pyjamas, lounges on a settee with her feet up. She has a drink by her side, the telephone on her lap. She smokes a cigarette.

DIERDRA

I wanted to offer you my condolences...

Serina Fosdyke told me the sad news... I

called but you'd already left. I'm so

sorry... Yes... I understand perfectly... it

must have been harrowing.

(pause)

Yes there is... It's the refugee relief fund.

Yes. I'm on the dinner committee if you

can believe it.

She laughs.

Yes. I'm in a spot.

(MORE)

DIERDRA (CONT'D)

Serina's in charge of the whole thing...
she thought you might like to help me
out. It's for a good cause...

Well... Bill... my husband... he can't make
it.

He'll be out of town... a client. He'll be
away until the end of the month so I
need a beau for the evening. Would you
be a darling?

She draws deeply on her cigarette as she listens to Aureliano. She
frowns and sighs and casts eyes to the ceiling. She interrupts him...

Come on now José... a damsel in
distress?

She waits like a gambler, in the balance.

I knew you wouldn't refuse me. It'll be
painless I promise. You won't have to do
a thing. I'll pick you up and drop you
home again.

She smiles confidently.

Wednesday the twenty fourth. Seven
PM. See you then.

She puts the telephone on the floor. Sips her drink, lays back and blows
a smoke ring.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. DAY.

Aureliano hangs up. Angry with himself, he gets up, goes to a cabinet
and pours himself a large cognac.

He picks up Nadja's letter. Rereads it, frowning.

He sits at the desk, takes a clean sheet of paper from a drawer, picks up a pen and starts writing. MY DEAR NADJA...

INT. THE AUDITORIUM IN THE UNIVERSITY. DAY.

Nadja sits by herself in the middle of the auditorium, part of a large and attentive student audience. Aureliano is at the lectern.

AURELIANO

This morning I want you to consider
the human condition in which we are
trapped... held fast by our mortal
nature.

Pause. Students scribble notes. Nadja concentrates her attention on Aureliano. He smiles at her, pleased to see her there. He scans his audience...

While he is talking, a late-comer, a handsome young man, appears at the back of the auditorium. Without pausing in his discourse, Aureliano follows him curiously with his eyes as he threads his way along a row of seats and sits down next to Nadja.

But the very anchors holding us are
paradoxically the instruments of our
liberation.

These are our propensities and abilities.

The young man next to Nadja is the only one in the auditorium not paying rapt attention to Aureliano's lecture. He has eyes only for Nadja. He plays with a curl on the nape of her neck. Aureliano cannot take his eyes off him.

First our propensities...

(MORE)

AURELIANO (CONT'D)

our instinctive inclinations... What are they?

The foremost of these inclinations is sexual desire. Some call this Love.

He sips water, spilling some down his lapel and on his notes. He stares at the young man now with his arm around Nadja's shoulder. Nadja leans into him, her eyes on Aureliano.

What do we mean Love. Love? An ambiguity at the best of times. Love noble or Love ignoble.

Are we to be satisfied simply by transient carnal pleasure or do we thirst for something higher... something eternal?

His voice trails away. He stares at Nadja and the young man whose hand has slipped from her shoulder to her breast, the other on her thigh. He breathes kisses on her neck. She leans into him. Aureliano tries to ignore them. He continues with difficulty, distracted from the flow of his complicated text. The rest of his audience seems unaware of anything unusual.

Humankind considers compassionate love for all things a mark of nobility. Our propensity for ability... er... nobility... is the ability to transcend the gross...

Nadja's eyes close momentarily as she leans ever closer into the young man's shoulder. She guides one of his hands between her legs, she presses his other tightly to her breast.

Her lips part as he leans across her, kissing her ear, her cheek, her mouth. The rest of the audience continues to pay rapt attention to the lecture.

Aureliano cannot take his eyes from the lovers. His expression changes rapidly. Indignation, horror, anger, shame... all of it released in a jumbled flow of words...

AURELIANO (CONT'D)

bestiality lascivious fornication...
 unutterable desire thick as mud upon
 our lewd and sensuous creature body... I
 will not... cannot... will not... cannot...

The young man has slipped from sight. Nadja leaning back, gripping the ledge in front of her, moans fitfully, her eyes held fast on Aureliano. Breathing harder and faster, snorting, crying, she reaches orgasm. Aureliano is screaming wildly.

Will not... cannot ... will not... cannot...

INT. AURELIANO'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Aureliano, in bed, is suddenly awake, sweat of fear on his face. He clutches the bedclothes, his heart palpitating, his breath coming in sobs...

Daylight seeps through undrawn curtains. He relaxes... It's some moments before he hears the knocking at the door.

AURELIANO

Come in.

The door opens, anxious Mrs. McCabe peers around it.

MRS MCCABE

It's past ten sir. Shall I bring your
breakfast?

Aureliano groans.

AURELIANO

Be a good woman... Get me the aspirins.

Mrs. McCabe disappears. Sounds of clinking glass and running water.
She reappears carrying a glass of water and a small medicinal bottle.
She trips on his clothes lying on the floor.

MRS MCCABE

Oh my goodness... Here we are Mr.
Aureliano sir. I'll put them here.

She spots an empty cognac bottle. More anxious than ever she picks up
the clothes from the floor folding them over her arm. Aureliano, one
eye open, watches her.

It's the finest morning sir... a little
warmer than yesterday... feels almost
like summer again...

She goes to open the curtains.

AURELIANO

For god's sake... Leave them.

He groans, a hand over his eyes. Pulls himself into a sitting position,
opens the bottle of aspirins, swallows several with the water. Mrs.
McCabe opens the door to leave.

AURELIANO (CONT'D)

You'll find a letter on my desk. I want it mailed immediately.

MRS MCCABE

Yes sir. Will you be wanting breakfast sir?

AURELIANO

Just mail the letter.

MRS MCCABE

Yes sir. I have to go up to Main Street this afternoon. I'll take it then.

Aureliano freaks. He shouts at her.

AURELIANO

No Mrs. McCabe. You'll take it now. Right now. You understand?

MRS MCCABE

Yes sir.

She backs timidly out of the room.

EXT. A POLO FIELD. DAY.

A melee of polo ponies and riders, Gerson among them. Mallets swing, horses snort, players grunt in their exertions.

INT. THE MEMBERS PAVILION. DAY

Claire and Tom sit amongst local socialites and dignitaries, there more for social or business reasons than to watch the match. While Tom chats to a uniformed general, Claire watches the game through binoculars.

CLAIRE'S POV

The binoculars follow Gerson. He strikes the ball and the play follows it to a far corner of the field... where Milford is parking the MG. Claire's binoculars pick up on Milford as he gets out of the car and walks along the perimeter of the polo field.

EXT. THE POLO FIELD PERIMETER. DAY.

Milford's wearing a linen suit, tie and sunglasses, a camera slung over his shoulder, newspaper, letters and books bundled under his arm. He drags a pair of deck-chairs under the shade of a tree, slumps into one of them and gazes out at the polo match.

A skirmish near one of the goals and the umpire declares the game ended. Players trot their mounts off the field to the waiting grooms. Gerson removes helmet and sunglasses and heads towards Milford. Milford takes a snap of Gerson as he walks towards him. Gerson flops, exhausted, into the empty deck-chair. For some moments they sit in silence gazing at the deserted field.

GERSON

Jesus It's hot!

Milford slides a silver flask out of the bundle of papers and books, unscrews the cap, offers it to Gerson. Gerson takes the flask and drinks.

MILFORD

Did you win?

GERSON

Nope.

He sits up, taking stock of Milford. Takes another pull from the flask.

(MORE)

GERSON (CONT'D)

We're looking very spruce today... Got an assignation or something?

Milford smiles, secretive, suppressing excitement.

MILFORD

In a manner of speaking.

Gerson passes him the flask. Belches.

GERSON

OK. Let's have it. Que passa?

Milford smirks.

Gerson notices the letters in the bundle on Milford's lap. He frowns.

GERSON (CONT'D)

Not Aureliano...

Milford can barely contain himself.

MILFORD

Hole in one old buddy.

He takes a letter from one of several in his bundle.

You've gotta hear this. Shall I read it?

Gerson doesn't immediately share Milford's enthusiasm. He polishes his sun-glasses.

MILFORD (CONT'D)

Well d'you want to hear it?

Gerson shrugs.

GERSON

Sure.

Milford reads with a certain relish.

MILFORD

"Dear Nadja.

I fail to understand your need to play such a strange and cruel game with me. As to the aspersions you cast upon my work and character... I have only this to offer."

This is the bit... Listen to this.

"In dedicating my life and work to the higher planes of the heart I may have isolated myself to some degree from more worldly experience. Perhaps I am guilty of innocence.

Aureliano."

Milford is triumphant.

Isn't it a pisser? He's taken it hook line and sinker.

Gerson is awkward.

GERSON

Yeah... I don't know...

MILFORD

What you mean "you don't know"?

What's got into you Gerson?

GERSON

I mean the poor guy really believes you... He believes Nadja really exists...

MILFORD

And so she does. She's alive and well in
his secret room...

Milford folds the letter back into its envelope and pockets it.

The asshole writes better letters than
poetry. Could be the beginning of a
significant literary correspondence...
what d'you think?

Gerson's subdued, serious. Heaves a sigh.

GERSON

You want to know what I think.... I
think we should leave him alone. OK?

He brightens, gets up, slaps Milford on the knee.

Come on let's move it. Boy! I'm
starving.

Dark clouds are building. They walk to the car in silence, Gerson's arm
around Milford's shoulder. They get to the car.

Milford... This thing with Aureliano...
You made your point ... let's drop it.

The sky is rapidly darkening. A distant rumble of thunder.

MILFORD

Give us a hand with the roof will you?
It's blowing up a storm.

INT. THE DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

Tom, Claire, Milford and Gerson are eating dinner.

Milford and Gerson have finished. Tom eats silently in his own world of anxious thoughts. He reads a paper at the side of his plate. Claire drains her wine glass. Gerson glances at Claire. She catches his eye. He looks away. Milford notices.

MILFORD

Didn't you think Gerson was brilliant
this morning mumsy?

Claire smiles at him. Tom looks up at Milford for a moment. He's about to pass a remark but changes his mind and returns to his reading.

CLAIRE

Pour me another glass darling.

GERSON

I've got it.

Gerson reaches for the bottle, refills Claire's glass. Claire smiles her acknowledgement. Milford smiles. Tom, unconscious of the exchanges taking place, polishes off his meal. Claire looks at Gerson.

CLAIRE

I thought he was perfectly splendid.

To Tom.

Didn't you think so Tom?

Tom looks up.

TOM

What's that?

CLAIRE

Gerson... this morning... Don't you think
he performed well?

Tom wipes his mouth with a napkin.

TOM

It's gratifying that at least one member of the household's man enough for the game...

To Milford.

Where were you this morning? I didn't see you at the ground.

MILFORD

I was there.

CLAIRE

He was there darling. I saw him.

TOM

Why wasn't he in the pavilion where he should have been? It looks bad when a member of the family blatantly snubs the locals.

CLAIRE

Darling. You know how Milford loves those get-togethers...

TOM

Dammit Claire. His name's David!

Servants clear the dishes. Tom stands.

CLAIRE

Shall we take coffee in the drawing room?

TOM

I won't join you. I've got to get back to the office.

CLAIRE

Won't it wait?

TOM

Afraid not.

David... ask Patrick to bring the car round... I have a helluva lot of work to do. Better you don't wait up. I'm going to be late...

He kisses Claire formally on cheek and leaves. Claire and the boys look at each other and heave great sighs.

INT. THE LIBRARY. NIGHT.

The boys are genuinely relieved and happy. Claire, wistful at first, falls into their carefree mood. Milford is at the piano playing I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANYTHING BUT LOVE. Claire and Gerson are dancing to it. Claire and Milford sing along.

CLAIRE AND MILFORD

I can't give you anything but love baby...

It's the only thing I've plenty of baby...

INT. THE UNIVERSITY GYMNASIUM. NIGHT.

The gymnasium equipment has been cleared. A banner reading SUPPORT THE REFUGEE RELIEF COMMITTEE hangs from a beam. Multi national, allied flags and bunting are festooned from beams and wall-bars. A hundred or so dinner-dressed people, some in military or naval uniform, drinks in hand, move in and out.

Couples dance to a swing band raised on a platform at one end of the gym playing I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANYTHING BUT LOVE.

VOCALIST

Dream a while... scheme awhile... You're
sure to find... happiness... and I guess
All the things you've ever dreamed of...
etc.

Dierdra dances with Aureliano on the crowded floor. He dances elegantly, holding Dierdra formally at arm's length. They are enjoying themselves. The music changes to BLUE MOON. Dierdra draws Aureliano closer as they dance to the slower tempo.

INT. POWDER ROOM. NIGHT.

The powder room is actually the gym changing room. The music can be heard from the gym. Serina Fosdyke watches Dierdra carefully and deliberately repairing her make-up. Toilets flush, women come and go.

SERINA

You two have plans?

DIERDRA

Serina. What kind of question is that?

Serina laughs.

SERINA

He really is divine. You look good
together.

Dierdra draws lipstick carefully around the lines of her pouting mouth.

DIERDRA

I can't figure him out. We're dancing and
he seems to be somewhere else...

(MORE)

DIERDRA (CONT'D)

as if he's with someone else. I smell a mistress. Nothing comes easy these days.

Serina laughs.

SERINA

If he's got a mistress he's keeping her well out of sight...

DIERDRA

He's damn attractive.

SERINA

Sure... but no one seems to get anywhere. No one I know has even got to first base... even set foot inside his house... not even John and I for that matter.

DIERDRA

That'll make me the first.

SERINA

He's invited you back?

DIERDRA

No...

SERINA

What makes you think he will?

DIERDRA

He will.

SERINA

A dime to a dollar you don't make it.

DIERDRA

I'll call you from inside the fort.

Serina laughs. Dierdra's make-up complete, they exit arm in arm.

INT. DIERDRA'S CAR. NIGHT.

Dierdra at the wheel, Aureliano by her side. They draw to the curb outside Aureliano's house. Aureliano opens his door, smiles.

AURELIANO

Thanks for a charming evening. I'm
glad you persuaded me.

Dierdra smiles, puts her hand on his arm.

DIERDRA

Any time.

She suddenly remembers something.

Darn it. I've lost an earring. Dammit! I
left it in the powder room. José may I
use your phone?

Aureliano gets out. A flicker of impatience.

AURELIANO

Of course.

INT. THE HALLWAY IN AURELIANO'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Dierdra, telephone to ear, holding for a connection. Aureliano waits
patiently.

DIERDRA

Serina darling... I'm so glad you're still there. Would you believe I left an earring in the men's room?

Dierdra smiles, turns nonchalantly to Aureliano. Speaking so Serina can hear.

DIERDRA (CONT'D)

Be a darling José... A teensy night-cap?

Aureliano is not pleased.

AURELIANO

Of course. Cognac?

Aureliano turns sharply and mounts the stairs. Dierdra watches him go. She fumbles in her bag for a cigarette. Lights it, inhales deeply.

DIERDRA

Forget the earring darling... over and out.

Dierdra smiles and slowly replaces the receiver. She slips out of her fur coat, checks her lipstick in the hall mirror.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. NIGHT.

Aureliano pours two cognacs. He picks them up. Dierdra stands in the doorway, a person about to enter a strange place. She takes stock of the room as she moves slowly across it to Aureliano. She takes one of the glasses. She looks around the room again.

DIERDRA

God you're tidy.

Dierdra smiles over her glass at Aureliano.

Here's looking at you...

AURELIANO

Cheers.

Did you find your earring?

DIERDRA

It was exactly where I left it. Serina's
got it.

Aureliano smiles and nods, his impatience thinly disguised. He watches Dierdra wandering around his room yet again, this time touching things, picking things up. At his desk, she picks up the framed photograph of him as a boy with his mother. She looks at it thoughtfully for a moment then replaces it. She turns to Aureliano. Sees him sadly gazing at his cognac.

DIERDRA (CONT'D)

Why so sad? You look like that little boy
when you're sad...

Aureliano manages a quick smile, a shrug.

AURELIANO

I guess I'm tired...

Dierdra moves closer to Aureliano. She speaks softly.

DIERDRA

What's the matter?

AURELIANO

Nothing... I assure you...

DIERDRA

Don't you find me attractive?

He searches hurriedly for words. Dierdra can't figure him out.

AURELIANO

I do... yes...

DIERDRA

But?

AURELIANO

Dierdra... this isn't a good time for me...

Aureliano turns away. Dierdra is puzzled. She speculates.

DIERDRA

Am I intruding?

Her eyes widen. The possibility dawns on her.

Oh Jesus. You're expecting someone...

Are you expecting someone?

Aureliano looks up at her. Taking advantage of the idea he shrugs hopelessly. Dierdra is taken aback. She laughs in embarrassment.

DIERDRA (CONT'D)

I apologise... I'm so sorry. Please forgive me... I feel such a fool...

AURELIANO

You weren't to know...

Dierdra drains her glass, hides her disappointment. She picks up her purse. Manages a smile.

DIERDRA

No. Guess I'd better get going.

Will you call me?

AURELIANO

Yes. I will. You're very understanding...

She suddenly kisses him on the mouth, walks to the door.

DIERDRA

I'll see myself out.

Aureliano listens, immobile, to Dierdra's departure. The front door, the car door, the engine as she drives away. He closes the study door firmly, loosens his tie, pours himself another liberal measure of cognac and collapses into an armchair. He drinks, heaves a great sigh.

EXT. A RED LACQUERED STREET DOOR. NIGHT.

Aureliano knocks at the door and waits. The door is opened. Nadja, in robe, hair tied back, stands in the lighted doorway. She smiles with surprise. Aureliano is shy.

AURELIANO

I hope you don't mind... I was passing...

NADJA

Of course not. Come in.

AURELIANO

If it's inconvenient...

NADJA

Not at all. Please come in.

She's genuinely pleased to see him. She stands aside for him.

INT. NADJA'S SITTING ROOM. NIGHT

Nadja leads Aureliano into a comfortable room, softly-lighted by many candles.

In the dim candlelight, draped walls, low couches, embroidered silk cushions, woven carpets, low tables of teak and brass, give the room a sensuous Moorish flavour.

At the far end of the room, seated cross-legged on the floor, the handsome young man, recognisably the young man that made love to Nadja in front of Aureliano at his lecture. Aureliano is taken off his guard.

NADJA

This is Cortez. Cortez... meet the poet
Aureliano.

Cortez smiles, stands and crosses the room. He bows, shakes Aureliano's hand. Aureliano is hesitant.

CORTEZ

An honour.

Aureliano is awkward.

AURELIANO

I'm intruding...

NADJA

Cortez was just leaving. Let me fix you a
drink.

Cortez smiles pleasantly, bows again to Aureliano and follows Nadja out of the room. Sound of muffled voices, front-door opening and closing. Aureliano is ill at ease.

Nadja returns with a glass of purplish liqueur. She hands it to Aureliano. He takes it, admires the colour, smells it, tastes it. Eyebrows rise in appreciation.

NADJA (CONT'D)

You like it?

AURELIANO

What is it? I don't think I've ever tasted anything quite like it. It's delicious.

NADJA

Take off your jacket... relax... make yourself comfortable.

AURELIANO

I can only stay a moment or two... there's something I want to say to you...

She helps him out of his jacket, loosens his tie.

NADJA

That's better isn't it?

Aureliano smiles shyly. Nadja settles next to him, her hand on his knee. She looks at him.

I'm glad you came. I wasn't sure you would. I thought perhaps I'd put you off. I did come on a bit strong...

AURELIANO

You were only being honest. I came to tell you... I've never been able to tell anyone before... I feel I can trust you... You see... you're the first woman I've ever felt at ease with... I mean really at ease. I've always been... well... afraid I suppose...

Nadja unties her hair. It cascades down around her face and shoulders. Aureliano is mesmerised by her beauty. She slides her hand from his knee to his thigh. She looks at him with rising desire.

NADJA

You're very beautiful...

She leans over him, lowers her face to his. She makes love to him tenderly and he submits.

NEWSREEL:

Buildings explode and crash in flames to the ground. The dome of a St Paul's Cathedral starkly silhouetted against a fiery night sky crisscrossed by searchlight beams, littered with puff-ball explosions of anti-aircraft shells.

The cockpit of a Heinkel III bomber. Pilots and bombardiers grin at each other giving thumbs-up signals. Bombardier's eye glued to bombsight, hand on bomb-release. Narrator, in strident German, underscores the drama. A shoal of Heinkel IIIs letting go their load. Bombs away. More buildings explode and fall as the narrator extols the victorious, the inspired and mighty Luftwaffe.

Milford and Gerson are sitting in a small, dingy cinema watching the newsreel.

EXT. THE CINEMA. DAY.

Milford and Gerson stumble through the doors blinking into a bright sunlit afternoon in Montevideo.

They stroll idly down the street, Milford moody behind sunglasses. Gerson ogles beautiful young girls as they pass on the sidewalk. Milford pauses at the grimy window of a funky old book shop. Something catches his attention. He brightens up.

MILFORD

Wait a sec...

GERSON

What?

INT. BOOK SHOP. DAY.

Milford and Gerson enter.

A dark, shadowy Aladdin's cave of row upon row of ancient tomes, crumbling parchments, dust-covered sheaves of papers and pamphlets. Milford removes his sunglasses. Apart from an aged, bespectacled and unkempt proprietor behind a counter, reading a newspaper, they are alone.

MILFORD

Good afternoon. May we look around?

The proprietor replies without looking up.

PROPRIETOR

Sure. You know what you're looking for?

MILFORD

No. Not exactly...

PROPRIETOR

Go ahead. Take your time. Be careful though... Some of the stock is very old.

Milford and Gerson progress through the shop examining titles, leafing through old magazines and postcards. Gerson turns up a box of old photographs. He whispers excitedly to Milford.

GERSON

What d'you make of these?

Although the box is dirty, stained with damp, the contents are fresh, almost as new, each photograph mounted on card, folded in glazed paper wrappers dating from around the turn of the century. Each one is a well executed study of beautiful young men and women in bondage. Milford studies them with interest. He smiles.

EXT. THE STREET. DAY

Milford and Gerson exit the book shop, Milford carrying a wrapped parcel under his arm.

GERSON

What do you want them for?

MILFORD

Want what for?

GERSON

The photographs asshole. What do you want them for? What are you going to do with them? Can't exactly show them around can you.

MILFORD

No? I think I know someone who'd be fascinated by them

GERSON

Yeah? Like who?

Realisation dawns on Gerson. He throws his hands in the air in exasperation.

GERSON (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ Milford! I thought we'd done with him! Sometimes you scare me Milford. Aureliano's become an obsession.

Milford thinks for a moment.

MILFORD

Look at it this way old buddy...
You go in for team games... Aureliano is more my kind of sport.

EXT. CONCERT HALL. NIGHT.

It's pouring rain. Outside the deserted entrance to the hall a poster advertises a quartet's recital of Schumann to be followed by a reading by the renowned poet José Garcia Aureliano.

The doorman, umbrella raised, steps from the entrance as a cab draws up. He opens the cab door, Aureliano steps out. The doorman shelters him to the entrance.

INT. THE FOYER. NIGHT.

Strains of Schumann from within the hall. The impresario KARL FLYNN is there to meet Aureliano. They shake hands.

FLYNN

Filthy night Mr. Aureliano.

He helps Aureliano out of his coat.

AURELIANO

Yes. How's the house?

FLYNN

Sold out. Good crowd. You still have about thirty minutes. Perhaps you'd join me for a drink?

AURELIANO

Good idea.

Flynn leads the way upstairs to the bar. About to enter, they are waylaid by a young man.

YOUNG MAN

Excuse me Mr. Flynn... call for you in my office.

FLYNN

(to Aureliano)

You go ahead. I'll be right there.

INT. CONCERT HALL BAR. NIGHT.

The bar is empty. Strains of Schuman from the hall as Aureliano enters. He goes to the bar, perches on a stool. The barman comes over, setting up bowls of nuts and crackers.

BARMAN

Dirty night sir... What'll it be?

AURELIANO

Cognac... a large one.

The strains of Schuman swell again as the door opens. Aureliano turns expecting Flynn to enter. Instead, a fashionably dressed woman in her mid-thirties. She walks in, sits at the other end of the bar. The barman brings Aureliano's cognac. Aureliano watches him serve the woman.

BARMAN

Dirty night, ma'am... What'll it be?

WOMAN

You have Bombay gin?

BARMAN

Sure.

WOMAN

Martini dry as Nevada with a twist.

Aureliano and the woman watch the barman mix and shake the martini. Silence save for clinking glass, pouring liquid and the muffled strains of Schumann. Barman sets up the woman's martini on the bar in front of her. Aureliano sips his cognac, looks at his watch, completely ignores the woman. She watches him over the rim of her glass. She takes out a cigarette.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Would you have a light?

Aureliano looks up. Smiles. Shakes his head.

AURELIANO

Sorry.

The bar tender flicks a lighter for her. She smokes.

WOMAN

You don't smoke?

Aureliano looks up again. Smiles.

AURELIANO

No.

He looks at his watch.

WOMAN

Filthy habit. I keep meaning to give it
up...

Aureliano returns to his cognac.

You don't care for Schumann either?

Aureliano looks up again with less of a smile.

AURELIANO

I do... usually...
But tonight....

She interrupts him.

WOMAN

I'm like that.
Suddenly I've heard as much as I can
take then... pooff!

Silence. Just bar noises and Schumann. The woman finishes her drink.
She catches the barman's eye, taps her empty glass. He nods and
prepares another.

Anyway... I didn't come to hear
Schumann. I came to see José Garcia
Aureliano.

Aureliano is surprised. Curious, he drains his glass. Barman sets up
the woman's martini. Sees Aureliano's empty glass.

BARMAN

Same again?

Aureliano nods. Turns to the woman.

AURELIANO

You admire his work?

The woman picks the lemon peel out of her martini with lacquered nails. She raises the glass.

WOMAN

Less than Schumann.

Aureliano stiffens.

Here's mud in your eye.

She laughs.

I really came just to get a look at him.

You know?

Everyone thinks so highly of this guy
but he just doesn't add up... the writing's
OK but I think he's faking it... there's no
experience there. Know what I mean?...
No passion.

She drains the remains of her martini, smiles at Aureliano.

A woman can tell...

She signals the bar-tender to refill her glass, picks up her purse and stands. She smiles at Aureliano.

Don't go away...

She exits to the toilet.

Aureliano looks strangely sad. He puts money on the bar and leaves.
The barman clears the glasses, takes the money.

The woman returns from the toilet to her martini. Puts a cigarette in her mouth. The barman snaps his lighter. She looks around for Aureliano. Shrugs.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Did I say something?

The barman shrugs. Schumann swells as the door opens. The woman turns. Flynn comes in, looks around perplexed. Calls across to the barman.

FLYNN

Did Mr Aureliano say where he was going?

The barman looks at the woman then at Flynn. Shakes his head. Shrugs his shoulders.

Flynn leaves in a hurry.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. DAY.

The telephone is ringing. Grey morning light filters into the room. The desk is in a state of disarray. Books, papers all over the place. Aureliano is sitting in an easy chair, drink in hand, staring into the fire. It's some moments before he gets up and crosses the room to answer it.

AURELIANO

Aureliano.

CUT BACK&
FORTH:

INT. MAX'S OFFICE. DAY.

Max at his desk talks to Aureliano on the telephone. He is a little impatient.

MAX

What happened old chap?

AURELIANO

I'm sorry.

MAX

Would you like to talk about it?

AURELIANO

There's nothing to say. I was suddenly overcome by complete and utter dread... I just couldn't face an audience... I called Flynn and apologised.

MAX

I know... I spoke to him... but you know how these people are... I mean... it's not good... It's OK but I had a lot of explaining to do.

AURELIANO

That's what you get paid for isn't it?

Max is surprised and hurt.

MAX

Hey. Come on now ...

AURELIANO

I'm sorry. I don't know what's gotten into me...

Max sighs.

MAX

Forget it old chap. Water under the bridge. I'm concerned José... everyone has their off days but... well... perhaps things are getting on top of you... perhaps you should take a break... I know how it is.

He pauses, waiting for a response.

José? You still there?
And the contract... it's nearly two weeks now... you said you'd have it back to me by return.

(pause)

The contract José. The contract. These lads won't wait for ever. Why don't you do it now while we're on the phone?

Aureliano sighs.

AURELIANO

It's here somewhere...

He searches through the papers on his desk, pulls out a document and spreads it out. He finds a pen. Signs in a couple of places.

There Max... it's done. First thing I've written in a week.

Sound of truck pulling up outside house. Aureliano watches it through the window.

MAX

If you're talking about the Cantos... take
a vacation... go to the country for a few
days...

It's probably a touch of writer's block.

Aureliano watches the delivery man carry a large book-size parcel to his front door. Aureliano is curious. He hears the front door open and close.

AURELIANO

(distracted)

Writer's block. I hadn't thought of that.

Maybe you're right....

There's a knock at the door.

Hang on a moment...

It opens a crack. Mrs. McCabe peers around it, the parcel in her hand. Aureliano beckons her in. She tip-toes to the desk, puts down the parcel and tip-toes out again. Aureliano is distracted from his conversation by the familiar typing on the label. He stares at it as he talks.

As you say Max... probably a touch of
writer's block.

(pause)

It'll be in the mail to you today. Promise.

Yes. Goodbye.

He hangs up the phone and immediately turns his full attention to the parcel.

He sits for some moments savouring the opening of it then carefully removes the wrapping paper revealing the old, damp-stained box. He delicately removes the lid, placing it down carefully. Delicately, he opens the glassine cover of the first photograph.

INT. NADJA'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Candle-lit. Aureliano lies face-down naked on a couch amid cushions and furs. Nadja, in slip and stockings, is binding him. He's curious and apprehensive. She's tied his legs and ankles and is working on his arms and wrists with considerable seriousness of purpose.

NADJA

How's that?

AURELIANO

A little tight...

She smiles.

NADJA

Roll over...

AURELIANO

Roll over? I can't move.

She rolls him over, props him up with cushions then slaps his face hard. He recoils, surprised, hurt, cross.

Nadja!

She slaps him again, harder.

NADJA

Shut up. I'm in charge here.

Aureliano shrinks from her. He's confused but he obeys.

Nadja removes her slip, kneels at a table in front of a mirror. Ignoring Aureliano, she applies finishing touches to her elaborate make-up. She adds more rouge to her lips and then her nipples.

Aureliano watches her, fascinated as she adorns herself with jewelry, pendant ear-rings, necklace. She turns to Aureliano, no trace of a smile. He looks at her in awe.

NADJA (CONT'D)

I had a client... when I had him tied up
he liked me to piss over him.

Aureliano's confused, disgusted.

AURELIANO

What d'you mean... client?

Nadja rolls down her stockings. Smiles sardonically, balling the stockings in her hands.

NADJA

You're not that naive. A girl has to live.

Aureliano's confused. He doesn't know whether or not to take her seriously. He laughs.

AURELIANO

Come on now. This has gone far
enough...

She grabs his hair, roughly pulls his head around. He winces, angry and afraid.

Nadja sneers into his face.

NADJA

Gone far enough?

She stuffs the stockings in his mouth, pushing them all the way in with her fingers. Aureliano is shocked, makes angry, choking noises. She ties her slip tightly over his mouth. He struggles. She caresses his sex. He becomes aroused.

NADJA (CONT'D)

Relax José...

They've all been here... princes...

politicians...

She lowers herself onto him.

poets... painters... punters... punks...

She slides back and forth on him, slowly at first, gradually gaining momentum, glittering pendants swinging rhythmically. Both of them moaning, she moves faster, crying, gasping, moving faster and faster, inexorably towards total abandonment until Aureliano, his screams stifled by the gag, stiffens and they shudder together into explosive climax.

Aureliano lies perfectly still, eyes closed as though sleeping. Nadja pulls the gag from his mouth. He opens his eyes, looking up at her. He starts laughing. She unties his hands and arms. He embraces her, holding her very close. She strokes his hair. His giggling becomes sobbing. His body shakes with his sobbing.

INT. LOS CUATROS GENERALES. DAY.

It's raining. Milford and Gerson sit drinking. There's a tenseness, an underlying frustration. Milford plays with his empty glass.

MILFORD

Aureliano wrote and thanked me for the photographs.

Gerson drains his glass. He's unamused.

GERSON

What did you expect? He's a polite kind of guy.

MILFORD

I wasn't sure. I thought maybe I'd gone too far... he'd be so freaked he'd clam up... but he wasn't...

Gerson stares glumly out the window at the rain. Milford takes a letter from his pocket.

He loved them. Wrote a very appreciative letter. Want to read it?

GERSON

I don't want to read any lousy fucking letter. Let's drop it. Huh?

Milford smiles.

MILFORD

Sometimes you can be quite a pompous ass. Don't you see what's happening here? I'm creating something... something that didn't exist before... a relationship out of thin air...

Gerson, unsmiling, stares at him.

GERSON

Relationship? Some relationship! Nadja doesn't even exist!

(MORE)

GERSON (CONT'D)

A relationship? It's a dumb fucking illusion!

Silence. Milford scowls angrily.

MILFORD

Isn't everything a dumb fucking illusion asshole!

He stands. Kicks the chair.

Let's get out of here.

EXT. THE STREET. DAY.

The rain has stopped. Milford and Gerson come out of the bar and stroll down the street. The sun is shining, the tension dissipates.

MILFORD

I'm sorry. Let's forget it. OK?

GERSON

I will if you will.

Milford takes his arm. He grins.

MILFORD

Looks like you and Claire are getting along fine...
Made it with her yet?

GERSON

Jesus Milford! What kind of goddamn tasteless question is that?

MILFORD

Just checking. She obviously fancies you and it's equally obvious she's not getting any from Tom.

I kind of like the idea... my best gal and my best pal...

GERSON

Very droll.

Milford puts an arm around Gerson's shoulder.

MILFORD

Sorry old man.

They walk on. Gerson smiles.

GERSON

José really liked the pictures?

INT. A LIQUOR STORE. DAY.

Late afternoon. Aureliano is buying a bottle of cognac. He looks tired, a little wasted. His soft beard, once meticulously shaped, now completely covers his cheeks and throat. As he leaves, he bumps into Dierdra Malpresse.

DIERDRA

José Aureliano? Goddamn.

Serina and I were just talking about you.

Aureliano looks at her in surprise. Dierdra is sarcastic.

Dierdra... remember?

Aureliano remembers.

AURELIANO

It's been a long time... How are you?

DIERDRA

Pretty desperate. And you?

Aureliano smiles.

AURELIANO

Much the same. You know...

DIERDRA

That bad? Come and have coffee. You look as though you could do with a break.

Aureliano is hesitant. Looks at his watch.

AURELIANO

It's very kind of you...

DIERDRA

Come on... I'm right around the corner... car's outside.

Aureliano bites his lip. He smiles, looks again at his watch and gives in. She takes his arm.

You pay that watch a helluva lot of attention.

AURELIANO

The muse is my mistress... but time is my master...

They both laugh.

INT. DIERDRA MALPRESSE'S SITTING ROOM. DAY.

Aureliano and Dierdra sit drinking coffee.

DIERDRA

Are you still in love?

Aureliano, surprised.

AURELIANO

In love?

DIERDRA

Your girlfriend?

AURELIANO

Girlfriend?

DIERDRA

You remember... that evening I dropped
you home? The charity hop?

AURELIANO

Ah. That. No. That's long since over.

He finishes his coffee, puts cup and saucer on the table.

DIERDRA

How about now?

AURELIANO

I'm not in love with anyone in
particular if that's what you mean...

DIERDRA

More coffee?

Aureliano looks at his watch. Is regretful.

AURELIANO

I'm afraid I must be getting along.

Dierdra is disappointed, irritated.

DIERDRA

Am I boring you?

Aureliano laughs uneasily.

AURELIANO

Of course not... I just have to be...
getting along...

DIERDRA

You've ducked out on me twice. I'm not
letting you get away so easily this time.

Aureliano stands, smiles.

AURELIANO

My dear lady...

Dierdra's patience is wearing thin.

DIERDRA

I'm not your dear lady. I'm Dierdra...
Dierdra. Get it?

She nervously lights a cigarette.

AURELIANO

I'm sorry... Dierdra... I didn't mean...

Dierdra gets up, paces around. Aureliano watches helplessly, doesn't
know what to do.

DIERDRA

Is there something wrong with me? Am
I repulsive or something?

AURELIANO

Don't be absurd... you're very
attractive...

DIERDRA

Then why don't you do something about
it.

Aureliano searches for the reply.

AURELIANO

Come on Dierdra... you've a husband...

Dierdra spins off into an angry, tearful tirade.

DIERDRA

I have? What the fuck's he got to do
with the price of bananas! He's not here
is he? He's never here. He's fucking his
little tarts from the agency. I'm sorry
José. I didn't mean to offend you. I need
a drink. Damn! I didn't get any.
Bumping into you put me quite off my
stroke... Damn! Jesus José...

She stomps out her cigarette, bursts into tears. Aureliano puts his
arms around her, comforting her. She sobs on his breast.

What did you buy?

AURELIANO

Cognac.

DIERDRA

That'll do.

She sits. Aureliano uncorks the cognac, pours, brings the glass to Dierdra. She wipes away her tears. She drinks and sobs.

DIERDRA (CONT'D)

It's all right for you... tucked away in
your tidy little world of words and
rhymes. But out here in the real world
things can get pretty tough for a girl.
Sometimes I wonder why I bother.

She drains her glass. Holds it up to him.

Be a pal...

He pours. She laughs through her sniffles.

Be more of a pal...

He pours a little more.

Thanks. You're not drinking... Come and
sit down.

Her tears have stopped. She reaches out for his hand.

Come on...

He sits. She holds his hand. Looks into his eyes.

God you have beautiful eyes... Don't go.
Stay awhile...

Aureliano, eyes lowered, gently withdraws his hand. He stands.
Dierdra clings to his jacket.

Please stay...

AURELIANO

I can't...

DIERDRA

What d'you mean you can't?

AURELIANO

I'm sorry... I have to go.

He's exhausted. He tries to disengage her hand from his jacket. She lets go and shrieks at him. He backs away from her.

DIERDRA

Then get the fuck out creep.

He's dismayed. She pours more cognac. She's miserable.

Get the fuck out.

She throws the bottle of cognac at him, narrowly missing. Aureliano leaves.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. DAY.

Broad daylight. Aureliano is unconscious, slumped across his desk. Next to his head, an empty bottle of cognac. A knocking at the door. The door opens a crack and Mrs. McCabe peers in. She's alarmed.

MRS MCCABE

Mr. Aureliano sir...

The telephone on the desk starts ringing but Aureliano doesn't move.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. DAY.

Order has been restored. The mail is neatly stacked on the desk next to a tray with coffee and an untouched banana. Aureliano in robe, freshly showered, hair still damp, sits in an armchair nursing his hangover. Max Stein looks at him anxiously.

MAX

A man's entitled to tie one on once in a while. You had a little too much that's all...

Silence. Max walks around the room, looks out of the window.

MAX (CONT'D)

José... we've been friends a long time... I love you like a brother. But this drinking... Look at you José... you're not taking care of yourself... tell me what's eating you. Maybe I can help.

Silence.

AURELIANO

Writer's block. That's what you said.

MAX

The Cantos? They're not that important. They'll wait. Get away for a bit. You need a rest.

Silence.

AURELIANO

The Cantos are the block. I can't write that stuff any more.

MAX

Of course you can. It flows from your pen... you just need a rest... get away for a few weeks you'll come back a new man.

AURELIANO

The muse has departed. Not departed exactly... She stands in the shadows beckoning... daring me to join her in a dance of truth.

MAX

I don't understand...

Aureliano laughs quietly.

AURELIANO

I know Max. You see... she's bored with Aureliano... bored with the flimsy conceits he calls poetry. She's no longer satisfied with such trivial offerings. She wants more. Much more. She wants his secrets Max.

Silence.

Poor Max. You really don't understand do you?

Max is dejected.

MAX

Afraid not old chap... I'm sure if you just distanced yourself...

Silence. Max heaves a sigh. Looks at his watch.

I have to go.

Aureliano gets up and goes with him to the door, opens it. They shake hands. Max lowers his head.

AURELIANO

Goodbye Max.

MAX

Goodbye. I'll call you. Take care.

Max leaves.

Aureliano gets a bottle of cognac out of the cabinet, pours some in a tumbler, screws up his face as he drinks. Sound of front door opening and closing. He goes to the window. Watches Max walk down the path and look up as he turns into the street.

Once alone, buoyed up by the alcohol, he examines the mail. A letter from Nadja. He smiles as he slits it open. He unfolds and reads. His smile broadens. He tops up his drink and carries it with the letter to an armchair in front of the fireplace. He sits in the armchair, bottle to the side, rereading the letter, chuckling.

INT. NADJA'S BATHROOM. NIGHT.

All the mirrors in the bathroom are draped. Aureliano lies back comfortably in steaming water. Nadja is shaving off his beard and moustache.

NADJA

There's someone I'd like you to meet.

AURELIANO

Oh? Who?

NADJA

A friend.

AURELIANO

Male or female?

NADJA

Female. I invited her for tea.

AURELIANO

When?

NADJA

Today.

Aureliano frowns.

AURELIANO

You might have said. I'm not sure I want company today. I thought we were going to be by ourselves.

NADJA

Trust me... she's a good friend. You'll like her.

AURELIANO

Is she a lover?

NADJA

Keep still or I'll cut you.

She works expertly with the razor until the face is clean shaven. She stares at his face for some moments. Aureliano fingers the unaccustomed smoothness.

AURELIANO

How does it look? No one will recognise me. Pass the mirror.

NADJA

Not yet. I haven't finished.

DISSOLVE TO:

Aureliano sits wrapped in a voluminous bath-towel at the mirror-draped dressing table. Nadja applies an unguent to his face, gently massaging it in, smoothing it. Then she applies creamy powders of various shades. She is totally absorbed in her work. He strokes her leg. She paints and shadows his eyes.

NADJA (CONT'D)

You have the most beautiful eyes.

She paints his mouth, exaggerating the fullness of his lips.

AURELIANO

This friend...

NADJA

She'll be here soon. Keep still...

She brushes out his hair, pressing curls around his ears.

Nadja drops the drape from the mirror and Aureliano is confronted by a beautiful, totally strange yet familiar woman.

He has difficulty relating to the mirror image. He smiles, she smiles. He turns his head, she turns hers. It takes him a few moments to orientate himself. He studies his female self admiringly. He looks at Nadja in the mirror. She looks back at him, her fingers massaging his shoulders. She slides the bathrobe off them. Kisses them gently, rubs her body against them. She's totally turned on by her creation.

NADJA (CONT'D)

What d'you think of her?

AURELIANO

She's stunning.

It's me... but it's not. It's quite a different person... It's the strangest sensation...

Nadja strokes his smooth, naked shoulders.

INT. SITTING ROOM. NIGHT.

By candlelight, Aureliano, in almost unrecognizable transformation, completely absorbed into his female persona, in robe over filmy underwear, garter belt, stockings, etc., sits languorously on the divan while Nadja paints his nails. Nadja is dressed similarly.

They sit like two hedonists, intimate in the privacy of their boudoir, pampering themselves. Nadja hangs ornaments at her lover's ears, a necklace. She cannot resist touching him, kissing him. She pours wine, puts music on the phonograph. They make love, holding each other in almost motionless dance.

EXT. THE BEACH. DAY.

A hot day. Gerson is laid out, gazing at the blue sky. A beach-tent flaps in the brisk inshore wind. Milford, in the shade of the tent, is reading a letter several pages long. They have a picnic basket, books, towels.

Gerson stretches, yawns, stands. Opens the basket, takes out a sandwich, examines it, puts it back. Takes out a bottle of wine, draws the cork and fills two glasses. Hands one to Milford.

GERSON

Sandwich?

Milford takes the glass, still on the last page of the letter.

MILFORD

No thanks.

Gerson drinks. Drains the glass. Wanders about not knowing what to do with himself.

GERSON

Jesus ... let's do something! Anything!

Milford doesn't respond. Gerson sulks. Resumes his prone position on the sand, closes his eyes.

Milford folds the letter, tucks it under the cover of a book. He gets up, examines the sandwiches, replenishes his glass.

GERSON (CONT'D)

What did he have to say that took so long?

MILFORD

Who?

GERSON

Asshole.

Milford stands over Gerson and pours wine onto his naked chest. Gerson grabs him by the ankle, he falls, they wrestle. While they wrestle, the wind whips open the book. The pages of the letter are gusted down the beach.

MILFORD

Gerson! The letter!

GERSON

Fuck the letter! Fuck Aureliano!

He struggles to get up. Gerson hangs on to him.

MILFORD

You sonofabitch! Let me up!

Milford wrestles. Gerson masters him, straddles him, pressing his shoulders to the sand. He leans over him with a sly grin.

GERSON

If you don't behave yourself old man...

Milford relaxes. They grin at each other a moment too long. They unravel themselves and sit staring out to sea.

MILFORD

Let's go sailing.

EXT. AURELIANO'S HOUSE. DAY.

Summer is over. The wind gusts rain along the deserted street. The mailman stuffs a bundle of mail through Aureliano's letter-box and hurries on.

INT. THE HALLWAY. DAY.

Aureliano comes downstairs and picks it up, riffles through it. Not finding what he's looking for, he carelessly tosses the mail down on the hall table, already overflowing with unopened bills and circulars. He climbs wearily back up the stairs.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. DAY.

The desk is in disarray, littered with papers, letters, old newspapers. A sweater lies on the floor. The telephone is disconnected from the wall. Aureliano enters, goes to the liquor cabinet, takes out a bottle of cognac, opens it, pours into a tumbler, drinks. He sits at the desk in the half-light of the dying day, sipping cognac beneath the portrait of his mother.

INT. AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

Claire, Milford and Gerson eat dinner in silence. Claire looks from one to the other. The telephone rings. Claire looks at her watch.

CLAIRE

That'll be Tom.

Milford continues eating. He watches Claire smile at Gerson as she stands and leaves the room.

MILFORD

What are you two up to?

Gerson doesn't respond. Claire returns, sits down at table and lights a cigarette.

CLAIRE

The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor this morning.

EXT. THE RED LACQUERED DOOR OF NADJA'S APARTMENT. NIGHT.

Aureliano knocks at the door. Waits, knocks again. Waits. Sounds of chain, bolts being drawn. Nadja, in bathrobe with towel around her head, opens the door. Surprised, she looks at him for a moment.

NADJA

Come in.

Aureliano is awkward. He comes in. Nadja pokes her head out of the door, looks around, before closing it.

INT. NADJA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

The bed is unmade, clothes and lingerie litter the room. Nadja, steaming from a bath, busies herself picking things up and clearing a chair for Aureliano. She lights a cigarette. Aureliano looks around the room as though half expecting to find someone else there.

NADJA

Drink?

AURELIANO

I wouldn't have come like this...
unannounced... but you didn't write... It's
been over a month... I didn't know what
to think.

Nadja looks at him, smiles sadly.

NADJA

Ah... poor baby...

She puts her arms around him, kisses him. He holds her closely. She gently pulls away. Sits him down. Takes a pull at her cigarette, appraising him through the smoke.

NADJA (CONT'D)

I'll get you a drink. I'll get us both a
drink.

She leaves. Aureliano picks up a silk stocking left lying on the floor. His fingers unconsciously caress the fine fabric. Nadja returns. Hands him a drink.

AURELIANO

Why did you stop writing?

Nadja is uncharacteristically edgy. She wanders around the room, drink and cigarette in hand. Opens the wardrobe, takes out dresses, looks at them, replaces them, searching for one she'll fancy. Aureliano waits for a reply. Nadja sits at her dressing table, starts to make up her face.

AURELIANO (CONT'D)

Why ?

NADJA

Why what Honey?

AURELIANO

Why have you stopped answering my letters?

NADJA

Perhaps I ran out of things to say.
Come on José...I don't have to explain myself. How's your drink?

Aureliano stares down miserably into his untouched drink.

What's the matter with you?

AURELIANO

I'm in love with you.

Nadja sighs, barely pausing in her make-up. She unwraps the towel from her hair. Hair-pins between compressed lips, brushes it out, combs it, pins it back.

NADJA

I love you too José.

She lights another cigarette. She removes her bathrobe and puts on a garter belt and one stocking.

Cigarette in mouth, she wanders around looking for another, Aureliano hands her the one on his lap. She smiles and puts it on. He watches her dress.

AURELIANO

Are you going out?

NADJA

Uh huh.

She selects a dark silk evening gown and slithers into it. Goes to the mirror, tidies her hair, attends to a detail of make-up.

AURELIANO

Do you have to? Couldn't we spend the evening together...

NADJA

I'm sorry darling.

She hangs earrings at her lobes, a necklace. She stands.

A long-standing arrangement. Zip me up?

He stands, paces about.

AURELIANO

Does all that's happened between us mean so little to you? Are the secrets we've shared of such little importance to you?

Nadja's growing impatience dissolves into a smile.

NADJA

Come now baby... Of course they're important to me. You're important to me.

She opens her arms. They hold each other. She strokes his hair.

This beard needs a trim. How about Tuesday? I'll make us dinner... Tidy you up a bit... Would you like that? You need looking after...

Aureliano holds her by the shoulders.

AURELIANO

I'm serious.

NADJA

Don't be serious. You're a bore when you're serious.

She pulls away from him.

AURELIANO

Where are you going? Who are you meeting that's so important?

NADJA

I don't think that's any of your business. Get the zip...

She backs up to him. He raises the zip.

AURELIANO

It is my business!

NADJA

How do you figure that?

He takes her by the arm.

AURELIANO

I have to know. I can't stand the
thought of you sharing yourself...
making love the way we do with
someone else.

Nadja pulls away from him again, laughs derisively.

NADJA

Jesus José you're pathetic. Is this the
master of sublime love? Is this Man
transformed? Is this God?

Aureliano swings a wild blow at her, striking her on the side of the
head. She goes down. He stands over her, aghast at what he's done. He
kneels, offers his hand. She sits up, shaking her head, dazed.

NADJA (CONT'D)

Don't touch me.

She gets to her feet. Goes to her dressing table, sits down. Examines
her temple, powders over the damage. She finishes her drink. She
stands, throws a wrap about her shoulders, wriggles her feet into
shiny pumps, picks up her purse. She looks at herself in the mirror,
straightening her dress. She goes to the door. Aureliano is kneeling on
the floor, head bowed. She turns.

NADJA (CONT'D)

I don't think you should come here any
more. Pull the door to when you leave.

She exits. Sound of front door opening and closing. Aureliano doesn't move.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. DAY.

Dawn. Aureliano sits at his desk hunched, catatonic. Desperately sad eyes stare at an empty cognac bottle. Above him, the portrait of his mother smiles her little triumph.

INT. SITTING ROOM. DAY.

Claire and Gerson are alone. She's reading, he's staring at the ceiling. Claire puts down her book and studies him. He's moody. She moves closer to him, laying a sympathetic hand on his arm.

CLAIRE

What's the matter?

GERSON

I guess it's the war... this limbo... the waiting...

He puts his hand on hers and they turn and look at each other. Claire touches his face.

CLAIRE

Everything's so uncertain...

She leans forward and kisses him. He tries to hold her.

Not now...

INT. TOM AND CLAIRE'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Claire is putting on a nightgown and getting into bed. Tom is changing his shirt.

CLAIRE

Will you be late?

TOM

Afraid so. Don't wait up... I'll probably
sleep over at the office...

He ties his tie carefully.

CLAIRE

Tom... how long d'you think this war
will last?

TOM

You mustn't worry about it. We'll make
it through.

Tom slips on his jacket.

CLAIRE

But the boys Tom... they're so young...

TOM

I know honey...

Claire heaves a great sigh and slides under the covers, pulling them
over her head. Tom sits on the edge of the bed for a moment trying to
find words. He shrugs. Stands.

I'd better get going. Shall I switch off
the light?

Claire doesn't respond. Tom switches off the light and leaves.

After a few moments Claire's head emerges from the blankets. She lies,
open-eyed, in the dark. When all is silent, she gets out of bed, puts on a
robe, quietly opens the door.

INT. GERSON'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Gerson in bed, asleep. The door opens silently, Claire enters. She makes her way in the dark to Gerson's bedside. She sits on the bed, startling Gerson awake. She puts her hand on his mouth.

CLAIRE

Sssh...

Claire leans over him and kisses him on the mouth. They make love.

EXT. AURELIANO'S HOUSE. DAY.

The mailman stuffs mail into Aureliano's mailbox. Aureliano, beard and hair unkempt, watches through a window.

Aureliano comes out of the house, walks down the path, opens the mailbox, takes out the mail. He can tell at a glance what he's looking for isn't there. He shrugs, goes back into the house.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. DAY

The Kyrie in Mozart's Requiem is playing loud on the phonograph. Aureliano stands inspired in the middle of the room, glass in hand, conducting the music, absorbed in its rising energy.

He sits, exhausted at his desk. He rummages around in the litter on the desk looking for something. He finds a pen. He looks for paper. He sweeps everything off the desk to the floor, takes fresh paper from a drawer. Starts writing.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. NIGHT.

Daylight recedes into dusk. Aureliano continues writing. Several pages covered in his neat italianate hand are to the side. They are manifestly verse. Night falls.

EXT. LOS CUATROS GENERALES. DAY.

Gerson sits alone, pensive, an unopened bottle of champagne in an ice-bucket in the middle of the table. Milford arrives in dark glasses in sober mood, books and letters under his arm. He drops them onto the table, sits down. He looks curiously at the champagne then at Gerson. Gerson draws the bottle from the bucket and fires out the cork. Pours two glasses.

MILFORD

What's the occasion?

GERSON

I'm leaving.

MILFORD

Something wrong?

GERSON

I'm enlisting.

MILFORD

Oh.

Milford picks up his glass, stirs the champagne with his finger, watches the bubbles fizz, sucks his finger. Gerson fidgets impatiently.

GERSON

You're coming with me aren't you?

Milford thinks for a moment; brightens up.

MILFORD

You're crazy if you think I'm going to let you have all the glory. Besides... it really is time to go.

They laugh. They raise their glasses.

MILFORD & GERSON

We who are about to die salute you!

They drink deeply. Gerson refills the glasses.

GERSON

Your right. It's definitely time to go.

He drains his glass and pours more. Milford is glum again. Gerson simmers down.

GERSON (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

MILFORD

Nothing.

GERSON

Come on... let's have it.

MILFORD

I stopped by the corner store to pay the account. I haven't been down there for a couple of weeks. These were there waiting... You'd better read them.

Milford tosses three envelopes on the table. They are addressed to Nadja in Aureliano's distinctive hand. Gerson puts down his glass, hesitates, picks one up and draws out several pages of verse. He reads. He picks up another envelope, draws out more pages of verse and reads. Milford fidgets, drains his glass and refills it. Drinks. Smiles, wryly.

MILFORD (CONT'D)

Pretty good huh?

Gerson, still reading.

GERSON

What the hell have we done?

MILFORD

Made a poet out of him perhaps.

GERSON

I didn't realise it would go this far...

We've got to let him off the hook.

Milford, his attention elsewhere, appears not to be listening.

Milford... We've got to let him off the
fucking hook.

Milford smiles humourless behind dark glasses.

MILFORD

Yeah.

INT. MONTEVIDEO AIRPORT TERMINAL. DAY.

Tom, Claire, Milford and Gerson stand around waiting. The boys
shuffle their feet. No one seems to know what to say.

TOM

Come on David... you and I'll get a few
things for the journey.

Tom and Milford walk off.

INT. AIRPORT STORE. DAY.

Tom and Milford stroll slowly in silence around the store.

TOM

David...

Milford raises his eyebrows. Looks at Tom.

I know we've not spent much time
together... perhaps we've not really
gotten to know each other as father and
son should.

He laughs nervously.

I never took you to a ball game... or
fishing... or anything like that...

Milford smiles.

MILFORD

You did great dad. You know how I love
baseball.

Tom chokes a little on his words.

TOM

Times like these make you realise... I just
wanted to tell you...

MILFORD

C'mon dad... Let's go.

INT. MONTEVIDEO AIRPORT TERMINAL. DAY.

Claire and Gerson wait in silence. Claire smokes a cigarette, Gerson
looks everywhere but at her. He shuffles awkwardly. Looks at his
watch.

GERSON

We should be in Miami by three I guess...
and the Pensacola base for supper.

Claire exhales smoke, drops her cigarette to the ground, studiously grinds it with her shoe.

I'm gonna miss you Claire...

Claire looks at him.

CLAIRE

You can write me once in a while. Let me know how you're keeping...

Gerson swallows. He nods. He manages a wry smile as Tom and Milford return.

PA SYSTEM VO

All United States military personnel bound for Miami please report to Colonel Palmer on runway two.

It repeats. Tom looks at his watch.

TOM

Well I guess this is it.

He shakes hands with Gerson.

Good luck son. Kick ass.

He takes Milford's hand. They look at each other. They have nothing to say. Claire kisses Gerson's cheek, then Milford's.

CLAIRE

God bless you Milford. Take good care of your buddy.

Milford smiles and kisses her on the cheek. Milford and Gerson pick up their bags and walk off. Claire and Tom, arm in arm, watch them out of sight then they leave.

EXT. OUTSIDE AURELIANO'S HOUSE. DAY.

Aureliano, carrying a bag of groceries, walks briskly. Although he looks tired he's comparatively spruce. His beard is full but trimmed, his hair long but brushed tidy. He pauses at the mail box, and draws out the mail. He glances briefly at it as he walks to the house. He stops. He lets all but one of the envelopes fall from his fingers to the ground.

INT. THE HALLWAY. DAY.

Aureliano puts down the grocery bag. It falls over, spilling its contents. Looking at the letter with growing excitement, he climbs the stairs.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. DAY.

A fire is burning in the grate. The room is tidy, the desk clear. Aureliano carries the letter to the desk, slits it open, draws out a single folded sheet of paper. He reads the few words typed in the middle of the page. He lays it on the desk.

LETTER

Dear José. I am leaving. I don't know
where I'm going. I'll not be returning.
Nadja.

Aureliano wanders distractedly to the cabinet, takes out a bottle of cognac and a glass, takes them and the letter to a chair in front of the fire, sinks into it.

INT. NADJA'S APARTMENT. NIGHT.

The front door is ajar, the apartment in darkness. Aureliano enters, feeling his way into the hall, his shoes scraping on unfamiliar bare boards. He calls out in low voice.

AURELIANO

Nadja? Is she there?

He gropes his way to her bedroom. Glimmers of street-light penetrate undraped windows. Rolled carpets, packing cases, bundles and trunks all over the place. He calls out again.

Nadja?

NADJA

Over here José.

A match explodes in the far corner of the room. A cigarette is lit. Nadja, indistinct in the shadows, sits in the corner. Aureliano picks his way through the jumble. He sits beside her.

AURELIANO

So you're really going?

Nadja draws on her cigarette. There is no more attitude, no make-up.

NADJA

Yes.

AURELIANO

You're really going. I didn't want to believe it... I had to come and see...

Aureliano is depressed, hangs his head.

Nadja sighs, exhales. Takes his hand, smiles.

NADJA

Why don't you come with me?

He withdraws his hand. Looks down at his fingers. He stands with his back to her, head bowed.

AURELIANO

I can't.

She smiles.

NADJA

You can if you want.

He is anguished.

AURELIANO

You know I can't.

NADJA

What is there left for you now? There's nothing to stop you leaving. No one will miss you. Wouldn't you rather be with me?

She stubs out her cigarette on the floor boards and stands. Aureliano heaves a great sigh. Nadja smiles, takes his arm... presses herself against him.

EXT. A WINDING COASTAL ROAD.

An open touring car winds it's way around the bends of the hilly road, the sea to its side.

INT. THE CAR. DAY.

Nadja drives, Aureliano sits next to her. She turns to him. Smiles. Her hand drops gently onto his. He looks at her.

EXT. THE ROAD. DAY.

The car is climbing a steep hill. The sea and beach fall away behind it.

INT. THE CAR. DAY.

Aureliano, relaxed, holds Nadja's hand. He looks down at the beach, now fifty or sixty feet below them. Nadja smiles, squeezes his hand.

Ahead of them, directly to the east, the summit of the hill radiates with the brilliance of the rising sun. As they round a bend at the top of the hill they are suddenly dazzled by the sun's blinding light as it bursts above the horizon in front of them.

EXT. LANDSCAPE. DAY.

The car breaches the fence at the road's edge in an explosion of rocks and timber. In total silence, it hurtles slowly out into the azure morning sky, crashing onto rocks a hundred feet below. The bouncing, rolling wreck comes to rest a few feet from the incoming tide.

INT. AURELIANO'S STUDY. NIGHT.

Aureliano stares into the dying embers of the fire, Nadja's letter still in his hand. He leans forward, pokes the letter in amongst glowing coals, warms his hands on its flame as it ignites.

AURELIANO VO

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.

I loved her, and sometimes she loved me
too.

Through nights like this one I held her
in my arms.

I kissed her again and again under the
endless sky.

She loved me, sometimes I loved her too.

How could one have not loved her great
still eyes.

INT. THE LECTURE AUDITORIUM, THE UNIVERSITY. DAY.

Pan around the audience of students listening to Aureliano reading Pablo Naruda's poem.

AURELIANO

I no longer love her, that's certain, but
maybe I love her.

Love is so short, forgetting is so long.
Because through nights like this one I
held her in my arms
my soul is not satisfied that it has lost
her.

Though this be the last pain that she
makes me suffer
and these the last verses that I write for
her.

END