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DRAMATIC CONSTRUCTION

?
SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS

Step Outline

1) The loading bay of a New York newspaper, 'The Globe'. The early edition of tomorrow's newspaper is loaded on to the delivery trucks. Each of the trucks features a poster advertising 'J.J. Hunsecker -- The Eyes of Broadway'. Its illustration is a cut out of Hunsecker's eyes framed in the spectacles that are his trademark.

We follow the trucks out into Broadway. It is rush hour. The famous electric lights are ablaze. We focus on one bundle of newspapers dumped on the sidewalk at the corner of Broadway and a side street. Even before the newspaperman has had time to untie it, SIDNEY FALCO appears, impatient to buy a copy.

He retires to the orange juice stand where he has been waiting, opens the paper at the column where the logotype of J.J. Hunsecker is displayed again. He scans the column, reacts in bitter disappointment and throws the paper in the trash can as he starts back towards his office.

2) Sidney's office. Up one flight of steps to a door marked 'SIDNEY FALCO. Publicity'.

SALLY is already on the phone as SIDNEY enters, making an excuse to one of the clients, 'Mr. Weldon'. Signalling that he won't take the call, SIDNEY goes through his cramped and unimpressive office to a room at the back which seems to be a bedroom, his living quarters. He changes into a very smart, expensive looking suit as his secretary reports to him on the complaints from clients, the outstanding bills. In mean temper, SIDNEY informs her that once again J.J. Hunsecker has not included in his column a promised mention of Robard's night club. Unconvincingly cheerful, SIDNEY puts a call through to the night club.

At the other end we see ROBARD'S as he expresses his anger and contempt for Falco as a press agent.

Depressed on behalf of her employee, SALLY follows SIDNEY into his bedroom. Why is Mr. Hunsecker doing this, she wants to know. And why does Sidney stand for it? In a revealing show of his private humiliation, SIDNEY lashes out in sarcasm at the Broadway environment as he knows it. Viciously, he promises the girl that although he is treated like dirt now, there will come a day when he'll be at the top of the ladder called 'Success'.

He leaves to make his evening round of the Broadway clubs and restaurants.

3) A jazz music night club, the 'Elysian Room'. As he enters, SIDNEY is accosted by RITA, a scantily dressed and buxom cigarette girl. She looks miserable and wants to talk to him on a personal matter, SIDNEY promises to listen to her later. He has more urgent business at the moment and questions RITA to know if they have seen Susan Hunsecker, in the last couple of days. While the cigarette girl goes off to enquire, SIDNEY moves to the bar where he joins FRANK D'ANGELO who is Sidney's uncle and also the agent for the jazz ~~grr~~ quintet that is playing at this moment.

We see STEVE DALLAS in performance. An attractive and serious-looking young man who leads the group, he is a guitarist of some talent.

SIDNEY, However, is more interested in questioning D'ANGELO about Susan Hunsecker's relationship to Dallas. Are they still seeing each other? D'ANGELO obviously resents the question: what business is it of Sidney's? Their conversation is interrupted by the return of RITA who whispers in SIDNEY's ear: Susan Hunsecker is in the club right now, waiting backstage.

4) Outside the back entrance of the club, the fire escape steps lead to a very small yard. SUSAN HUNSECKER, possibly in order not to be seen in the public area, is waiting for STEVE when the quintet takes a break, at the end of the set. She is wearing ~~the~~ a mink coat. When STEVE approaches her, obviously nervous, she embraces him, gives him the answer that he has been hoping for: she will marry him. After a moment, SUSAN asks him only that he does not announce it until she has had a chance to talk to her brother; she means to do so first thing in the morning. Senseing that she is not looking forward to it, STEVE offers to be with her when she breaks the news. Reassuring him, SUSAN pleads that J.J. isn't as bad as he is painted.

5) SIDNEY, in search of Steve Dallas, encounters some of his group, asks them where their leader is. It's plain that they don't much like the press agent; they give him no help.

6) But he soon locates the young couple. To explain his intrusion, SIDNEY cheerfully reminds STEVE that the guitarist was going to provide him with some publicity material which SIDNEY would distribute free of charge. STEVE is not impressed. The tension between them rapidly escalates as STEVE reports that he has learned that SIDNEY has been snooping around his hotel, asking questions. If he wants information, why doesn't he ask for it directly? Their confrontation is fortunately defused by the appearance of D'ANGELO along with other members of the quintet. SIDNEY retreats. SUSAN admits to STEVE that she has a headache and, with a show of affection, says that she wants to leave. As she departs, STEVE returns to the club, still a little uneasy.

7) In the meanwhile, RITA has managed to capture SIDNEY. He is preoccupied, watching for Susan Hunsecker, but listens to her story.

It is a comic but pathetic account of an encounter with another Broadway journalist, Les Bartha. On the pretext of writing a feature on cigarette girls, the journalist invited her to his apartment where RITA assumed his wife would also be present. She wasn't -- and the columnist made a clumsy pass at her, taking her so much by surprise that she rejected the man more emphatically than she had intended. RITA now fears that Bartha will, in revenge for the humiliation, contact her boss, the club owner, so that she loses her job.

SIDNEY is more entertained than sympathetic. He promises to do what he can, but cuts her short because he has noticed Susan leaving the club. As SIDNEY hurries off, RITA detains him to ask if he still leaves his key under the mat: she may join him after the Club closes.

8) SIDNEY joins SUSAN as she waits for the doorman to summon a taxi for her. We gather that they have known each other for some years. SUSAN expresses her disappointment that Steve and SIDNEY seem to have taken a dislike to each other. Why? SIDNEY makes a show of protest, but it is clear that SUSAN knows SIDNEY too well.

As they get into the cab which SIDNEY instructs to drop SUSAN at her brother's apartment on Upper Broadway, SIDNEY is clearly probing for information. How serious is the affair with Steve Dallas? Might she marry the boy? SIDNEY takes care to conceal from her his private dismay when SUSAN announces ~~her~~ she intends to tell her brother that Steve has proposed and that she has accepted. She will talk to J.J. at breakfast.

Preoccupied with her private concerns, SUSAN barely notices SIDNEY's reaction to this information. She comments that she knows her brother says that he likes Steve but she's not wholly convinced that this is true. Again SIDNEY protests: why would Hunsecker conceal his feelings? Why would J.J. -- a man who has told Presidents where to go and ~~how~~ what to do -- have to put on an act. Unimpressed by SIDNEY's indignation, SUSAN points out that the 'act' would be for her sake, not for Steve's.

9) SIDNEY keeps the cab waiting as he follows SUSAN into the vestibule of the apartment building on the top floor of which Hunsecker owns a penthouse. He seems to be anxious to help her, eager to be her friend: concerned, he urges her to discuss her decision fully with her brother before she makes a commitment. But SUSAN appears more sure of herself than SIDNEY has ever seen her before: she offers SIDNEY a message for J.J. if SIDNEY runs into him later: Steve Dallas is the first 'real man' that Susan has been in love with.

As she disappears, we see SIDNEY's private reaction. The feelings may be mixed but it's clear that SIDNEY now has something important to do...

He instructs the taxi to drive him back to the Twenty One Club.

10) Exterior of the Twenty One Club. (-- a very famous New York restaurant club that was once a speakeasy in the days of Prohibition, is now an expensive and exclusive rendezvous of Broadway celebrities). Before he gets inside, SIDNEY has the misfortune to encounter one of his clients. JIMMY WELDON, the band leader mentioned earlier, is coming out of the Club with an attractive GIRL. WELDON is drunk. Well aware that the press agent has been trying to avoid him, WELDON ambushes SIDNEY and loudly denounces him for his failure to provide the services for which he is hired. 'It's a dirty job, but I pay good money for it, don't I'. To SIDNEY's chagrin, ~~of~~ WELDON fires him ~~from~~ the job in front of a group of onlookers.

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11) SIDNEY recovers his dignity with some difficulty as he enters the Club and accosts the HEAD WAITER, obviously a man who knows him well. The HEAD WAITER informs him that J.J. is inside at his usual table, but has guests, a Senator, an Agent and a young woman.

SIDNEY decides not to encounter Hunsecker directly. He retires to an ante room where the TELEPHONE OPERATOR of the Club is seated at her switch board, asking to be put through to the phone on Hunsecker's table.

We still do not see the columnist. But as SIDNEY appeals to the phone, asking for a moment to talk in private, it is clear that his request is rejected.

Humiliated once more, SIDNEY appears to make a bold decision: he moves straight into the Dining Room and directly to Hunsecker's table.

Now we see Hunsecker. As soon as he is aware of SIDNEY's presence, the columnist signals a burly WAITER. But before he is bodily ejected from the premises, SIDNEY manages to provide one piece of information: "I have a message from your sister."

This stops HUNSECKER. He decides to ignore SIDNEY, leaving the WAITER uncertain as he resumes a conversation with his guests, the SENATOR, the GIRL and the AGENT. While the WAITER moves away again, SIDNEY finds a seat for himself, not exactly at the table but near enough to be clearly in the group.

The SENATOR, a white-haired individual is clearly slightly embarrassed and tactfully provides SIDNEY with the chance to introduce himself. SIDNEY manages to remember the SENATOR's name, he already knows the AGENT and he is introduced to the GIRL who is represented by the AGENT. Politely, the SENATOR asks SIDNEY if he is an actor.

HUNSECKER is maliciously amused. On SIDNEY's behalf, HUNSECKER explains that SIDNEY is indeed an actor -- of sorts, an individual who has a talent for ingratiating himself to anyone and everyone, as well as making promises that he has no intention of keeping. HUNSECKER's guests witness with fascination the interaction of the columnist and the press agent, involved in some clearly private quarrel which they play out in public.

Hearing that SIDNEY is a Press Agent, the SENATOR asks just exactly what does a Press Agent do. While SIDNEY hesitates, HUNSECKER again cuts in and explains on his behalf -- giving a highly unflattering picture of the profession. While SIDNEY and HUNSECKER exchanged not-very-veiled insults, the AGENT makes the mistake of laughing a little too loudly at one of the columnist jokes. HUNSECKER turns on him with sudden venom, warning him that he is tolerated only because he 'rode in on the Senator's coat tails'.

HUNSECKER's theatrical display of rudeness is so embarrassing that the SENATOR is provoked the AGENT. This is an excuse for HUNSECKER to turn on the SENATOR himself, and though he now speaks in a much more civilised way, HUNSECKER is even more dangerous. He offers the SENATOR a piece of 'advice'. Assuring the SENATOR that he speaks only as a friend, he reminds the politician that, as a 'family man' who might have ambitions some day as a Presidential candidate, he can be damaged by scandal, it is another part of a Press Agent's job to dig up pieces of malicious gossip -- such as, for instance, that the AGENT is a regular companion of the SENATOR only because it conveniently disguises the fact that the SENATOR is having an extra marital affair with this young woman.

The SENATOR, the GIRL and the AGENT are speechless. HUNSECKER, very pleased with himself, makes a joke of the situation as he rises from the table and leaves the three of them in hideously uncomfortable embarrassment.

SIDNEY, recognising that the distraction has put HUNSECKER in a better mood, tags along as they leave the Club. HUNSECKER is even relaxed enough to share his opinion of the Senator with SIDNEY, 'My big toe would make a better President'.

12) As they emerge from the Twenty One Club, SIDNEY directs HUNSECKER's attention to a Police Car parked opposite. They cross the road and are greeted by a heavily built individual who climbs out of the vehicle in which the Police radio can be heard.

HUNSECKER introduces SIDNEY to LIEUTENANT KELLO. SIDNEY knows KELLO - and KELLO's reputation -- all too well, 'the toughest cop in town'. KELLO, pleased to be introduced in this way, is slightly less happy when HUNSECKER reminds him of a previous occasion when the cop was a little too tough, an incident in which Kello was investigated by a Citizens Committee. Unfortunately, KELLO remarks that he 'didn't mean to hit the boy so hard', but then assures HUNSECKER that he is still grateful for the columnist's help on that occasion.

During this, KELLO's companion inside the car, makes some enquiries about an item that might interest J.J.'s readers; the young woman who was in critical condition in Bellevue probably a suicide, just died. "Love suicide?", asks HUNSECKER, "that's show business!"

13) Leaving the cops, SIDNEY has HUNSECKER to himself at last. HUNSECKER, has recognized from SIDNEY's manner that SIDNEY has something to communicate. Before playing his trump, SIDNEY insists on a preamble: J.J. has for several days now deliberately refused to use the publicity material that Sidney supplies and SIDNEY is well aware of the reason: HUNSECKER is trying to put pressure on him. So, okay, SIDNEY has done jobs for J.J. before -- dirty jobs, on occasion. But this one is not only dirty, it's also dangerous and HUNSECKER better know what is involved. HUNSECKER is sarcastic. Why? "My right hand hasn't seen my left hand in thirty years", he boasts. But SIDNEY insists: HUNSECKER wants SIDNEY to contrive a way to break up Susan's relationship with Steve Dallas. But it won't be easy. Neither of the young couple are as naive as J.J. may think. It will be risky, but SIDNEY will take the risk -- providing J.J. keeps this part of the bargain and makes it possible for Sidney to keep his clients. HUNSECKER has begun to lose patience. To make his point, SIDNEY now uses his only lever: he has news, the situation is

lever: he has news, the situation is even worse than HUNSECKER may realise. Susan means to marry the boy. She plans to discuss it with HUNSECKER in the morning.

HUNSECKER is plainly shaken. But he is shrewd enough to recognise that SIDNEY would not have the nerve to bring him this information unless he also has some solution to offer. 'That means you've got a plan. Can you deliver?'

SIDNEY nods. He will take action tonight...

14) SIDNEY continues his evening tour of New York night spots, dropping in on another haunt of journalists, Toots Shors' (an almost equally celebrated New York meeting place). He is in search of Leo Bartha.

Learning that Bartha is dining with his wife, SIDNEY sees her sitting alone and decides to accost the columnist on his way back to the table. 'How goes the Sunday piece on caigarette girls'.

BARTHA is stopped only for a moment, instantly aware of SIDNEY's maneuver. Remarking that he has never met BARTHA's WIFE, SIDNEY produces a bit of paper on which he has an 'item' that he'd like BARTHA to print. 'What is this, blackmail?', demands BARTHA, and goes on his way, 'Beat it'.

Rebuffed, SIDNEY pauses before he follows BARTHA, joins him at the table and blandly introduces himself. MRS. BARTHA is looking at a racing form and for a few moments ignores a conversation between her husband and SIDNEY in which SIDNEY continues to hint that BARTHA should cooperate. Abruptly, BARTHA decides that he has had enough: addressing his WIFE directly he explains that SIDNEY is trying to blackmail him over a trivial, insignificant but humiliating incident between himself and a girl. Having this spiked SIDNEY's guns, he wheels on SIDNEY for a vitriolic denunciation of both SIDNEY and his friend Hunsecker who 'like yourself', has got 'the morals of a guinea pig and scruples of a gangster'.

As BARTHA escorts his wife out of the restaurant, SIDNEY tries to recover from this too-public denunciation. It isn't easy, but SIDNEY has a remarkably thick skin. Following the Barthas, SIDNEY is accosted by OTIS ELWELL, also a columnist and rival of both Bartha and Hunsecker.

ELWELL has observed the incident and is relishing SIDNEY's humiliation. He invites SIDNEY to join him and explain what was going on. At first ill-tempered, SIDNEY suddenly sees an opportunity: he complains indignantly that now both Bartha and Hunsecker have turned against him. ELWELL is intrigued; are Hunsecker and Sidney really 'worked up'. SIDNEY appears miserable; so much so, he insists, that he was trying to retaliate against Hunsecker -- with this. He hands ELWELL the same paper offered to BARTHA. ELWELL studies it. SIDNEY explains; the item refers to a young musician who is engaged to Hunsecker's kid sister. ELWELL is even more interested; anything that will damage Hunsecker interests him. At this moment, SIDNEY happens to notice some magazines among the papers that ELWELL has on the seat beside him: one of them is a girlie magazine. Reminded of ELWELL's reputation as a lecher, SIDNEY suggests that if Elwell will publish the item, SIDNEY could offer him an incentive.

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The incentive is RITA. She has already let herself in to Sidney's office/apartment and is lying on his bed in the back room when the doorbell rings. Expecting Sidney, RITA goes to open it with coy invitation.

To her dismay, SIDNEY is not alone. SIDNEY ushers OTIS ELWELL in and closes the door.

ELWELL studies RITA with barely decent interest. Doesn't he know her from some where? Haven't they met before? In Saratoga last summer, perhaps?

RITA quickly recognises a situation that she wants no part of. She stroms back into the bedroom, closing the door. SIDNEY signals ELWELL to wait, at least until he has had a chance to talk to the girl.

15) In the bedroom, RITA is preparing to leave when SIDNEY joins her. He is not impressed with her indignation. Crudely, he reminds her that she was asking help: she wanted someone to talk to her boss, persuade her boss not to fire her. Who better to do her this favour than an important columnist? As RITA begins to weep, SIDNEY reminds her of her dilemma, her need to keep the job, her boy in military academy.

16) ELWELL is still in the outer office when SIDNEY re-emerges. He is followed by RITA who looks both miserable and angry.

ELWELL is still puzzling over the problem of where he might have met RITA before. Havana?

17) Supplying both of them with drinks, SIDNEY pleads that he has remembered a previous engagement. He must leave them. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do. That gives you a lot of leeway".

ELWELL approaches RITA. She takes a gulp of her drink and makes a confession. "Palm Springs. Two years ago". ELWELL laughs in delight at something remembered. "Don't tell Sidney", pleads RITA.

18) SIDNEY stops at the Orange Juice stand where the story began. It is now in the very early hours of the morning and the once-crowded streets are deserted. SIDNEY is using the pay telephone to call Hunsecker.

19) HUNSECKER is alone in the spacious and luxurious penthouse apartment which has a terrace overlooking the spectacular night skyline of Manhattan. He is typing his copy for the column. He leaves the phone ringing before he answers it, knowing that it must be Sidney.

20) In the orange juice stand, SIDNEY reports that he has completed his part of the bargain: by tomorrow, young Dallas's career will be in bad shape. So would Hunsecker please not forget to mention the name of Sidney's most dissatisfied client, Robard's jazz joint. They are having a 20th anniversary.

21) HUNSECKER makes a note of the name but no promise. And he warns Sidney not to use this phone for the meanwhile. It is too near to Susan's bedroom.

Hanging up, HUNSECKER moves out onto the terrace, approaches the window overlooking his sister's room. Through the half-drawn curtains he watches the sleeping girl in the bed. Then he returns to stand by the parapet from which we can look down on the now darkened and empty streets.

22) The same angle on the same streets now busy with noonday traffic.

SIDNEY emerges from the subway, and buys a copy of the paper for which Otis Elwell writes 'The Record'. He opens it, reads and is pleased at what he reads. Then he throws the paper in a trash can and turns to enter the building that houses the editorial offices of Hunsecker's paper, 'The Globe'.

23) Hunsecker's secretary MARY is dealing with a man from the paper's Legal Department; a nervous individual worried as always about law suits arising out of the gossip column.

SIDNEY apparently knows MARY well enough to enter her office without waiting for invitation. As the Legal expert leaves, MARY reports to SIDNEY that his secretary, Sally, has been trying to reach him because Frank D'Angelo wants to speak to him urgently. MARY knows D'Angelo; isn't he the manager of Susie's boyfriend? Yes, says SIDNEY. Why?

MARY hands him a copy of the Record, indicating Elwell's column. Affecting to read it for the first time, SIDNEY reads it aloud. It is, in the jargon of the trade of yellow journalism, 'a blind item'. It doesn't mention Steve Dallas by name (thereby avoiding a suit for slander) but hints that the leader of a jazz quintet currently featured at an elegant East Side Club is a drug addict and may have communist sympathies.

SIDNEY is on the phone to Sally as he reads. MARY watches him very carefully. SIDNEY appears dubious, remarking that he himself doesn't think that Steve is the type to use drugs. But he agrees that, if true, Hunsecker is likely to explode. While discussing the matter, SIDNEY maneuvers himself so that he can read papers on the secretary's desk: he is trying to get a look at one of the galleys, Hunsecker's not-yet-printed column.

MARY is amused. Both of them are aware that it is strictly forbidden that a press agent has the chance to see the column before the deadline, but she indulges SIDNEY. Handing the galley sheet to him, she embarks on a shrewd, if tolerant, comment on his dubious character. 'you're an amusing boy, but there isn't a drop of respect in you for anything alive -- you're too emerged in the theology of making a fast buck. Not that I don't sometimes feel that you yearn for something better.'

SIDNEY seems ready to accept this if it represents the cost of the chance to read the column. He has found an item that intrigues him. It is a highly flattering comment on the week of a comedian currently appearing at the Palace. Name Herbie Temple. Does Temple have a press agent, he asks, MARY doesn't know. The item was not prompted by any agent that she knows: it is one of Hunsecker's quite rare gestures of unsolicited praise. Evidently the man is funny.

SIDNEY is abruptly pleased and grateful to MARY. He hurries out.