

## PART I

### **The 8 O’Clock Movie**

*Boston 1973*—Years had passed and I assumed a Different life when one night, while resting from Books on Marlborough Street (where things like This can happen), there came into my room images

In black-and-white with a flow of light that Would not die. It all came back to me in different Terms: characters were born again, met up with Each other in adult life, drifted across the

Screen to discover cattle and oil, traveled miles On horseback in dust and heat, characters whose Names emerged as if they mattered in a history Book. Some were swept up by power and prejudice

Toward neighbors different from themselves, Because that is what the picture is about, with Class distinctions moving the plot along. A few Could distinguish right from wrong; those who

Could not you condemned from the beginning when You noticed them at all. Still others married or Backed off from the ranch with poignant flare, Like James Dean, who in the middle of grazing land

Unearthed the treasures of oil, buried his soul in Money and went incoherent with alcohol. When the 40s Came, two young men were drafted, the one called *Angel* Dying at war. It’s a generational tale, so everybody

Aged once more and said what they had to say along the Way according to the script. And then the end: the Hamburger joint brought into existence to the beat of “The Yellow Rose of Texas,” Juana and her child the

Color of dark amber, foreshadowing the Mexican -looking Couple and their daughter, all in muteness, wanting To be served, I climbed out of bed and in my head Was a roaring of light—words spoken and unspoken

Had brought the obliterated back. Not again (I said, From my second-floor room)...let this not be happening Three and-a-half hours had flicked by. As the sound Trailed off into nothing, memory would not dissolve.

### **The Benedicts (up-close)**

Together with their daughter Luz, they  
Are casually rich, self-assured, handsome—: have  
Written their hoof-beats upon the land and

Named it; whose son is absent from this  
Scene and is not a keeper of cows, but Harvard-trained  
Instead, and thus a rebel who practices

The goodness of medicine alongside the  
Ethnic good looks of his able nurse, Juana, who is  
Here with her child trying to cross

The burning threshold of this pull-in café  
And gets caught in the vast unwelcome which are the eyes  
Of Sarge that fire upon the heart.

### **The Serving of Water**

Tell the portly waitress to stay overtime and  
She will do it. Dressed in white, she is a  
Version of Sarge... Who follows orders well  
... Who may have it in her mind she is “The

Sweetest little rosebud that Texas ever knew.”  
Her whole embodiment is whatever she is doing—:

At a booth, here on the warm sketchy plain  
Of day, it is water she sets out for the  
Benedicts: the measurement of water is a ritual  
That isolates a face from the many colors of the

Day, and she does so with her eyes aimed at  
Anyone she has given a harsh name to—like Juana,

And her child, half-Anglo, who in Juana’s womb  
Became all Mexican just the same. The waitress  
Entirely conscious of her act, whose eyes, quick,  
Flee back to Sarge and now call out in silence,

Brings this moment to the edge of something tense  
That spreads to everything. Her sudden look of

Outward regard—then Sarge, stirring dense cloud  
Gathering (*entering left*), standing over everyone  
In tallness almighty. Ice-cream is what Rock Hudson

Wishes for grandson. “Ice-cream it shall be,”

His words a revelation of delight: “Give the  
Little fella some ice-cream”...Summer is one long

Afternoon when Sarge, moved by deep familiar  
Wrath, talks down: “Ice-cream—thought that kid’d  
Want a *tamale*.” An angry mass of time travels  
Back and forth the distance between Sarge and

Rock Hudson, as I sit, shy of speech, in a stammer  
Of light, and breathe a breath not fully breathed...

### **Claiming the Air**

Sarge, the proprietor, has already claimed the air with  
His eyes, squared off against Rock Hudson by slurring  
His grandchild. The camera’s eye blinks, adjust its

Focus to the segment that follows, the one grown around  
Me like a lingering first cause. I remember it frame  
By frame almost: *The little bell on top of the door is*

*Heard as the door opens:* an old Mexican American couple,  
And a woman, who could be an eldest daughter, come in.  
Their image stays frozen, burns evenly around my brain: a  
Tableau of himself, he is stooped in the ruts of old age,  
Bits of gray hair fluffing out from under his hat, that

Courteous hat. The women, in uneventful-street clothes,  
How their faces do not glow back from themselves, yet  
Beckon with the color of sepia subdued—his also. Slow  
In their gait toward the nearest booth by the door, they  
Show a tired look as if from a journey begun long ago, one

Only their heritage could know. A woman I could be nephew  
To and a couple old enough to call me grandson have walked  
Into my life. They go unnoticed, except by Sarge, who walks

Among the greasy fires of his kitchen, comes to a stop and  
Lets fly, heavy as lead: “Hey, you!” This is Sarge’s Place.  
A hamburger joint risen like a voice against the good.

### **Text for a *Vaquero*: Flashback**

*Giant* (1956), next-to-the-last scene: Old man Polo,  
head *vaquero* on Rock Hudson’s Reata Ranch, has come

from sunlight, wife and daughter with him, to break bread, where hamburgers might be enough for a family who shall not be served. In my other mind I see him in his youthful air—:

*Dawns were easy in the branding camps  
when he scrambled up  
to the restless movement of the herd.  
And when morning had lifted into noon  
he didn't choke on dust  
because his lungs were stronger  
than wind shifts.  
He owned the language of the roundup  
and each day experienced triumphed on the range.*

*I see him riding with others:  
sombros obeying the knowledge of the head:  
chaparreras rough-riding  
with their legs.  
He is straight-backed, bandana at the neck,  
and leather-brown face toughened by the sun  
glancing off his sweat.  
Now he's moving warily  
around stampedes he still remembers  
in his bones.  
So that if, for an instant, he grows quieter,  
it's because he remains a separate fact—  
a silhouetted stoic in his saddle*

*like some vigilant bronzed god  
pondering his fate.*

*Evening draws upon the plain  
and the cattle have been managed  
into place. And it becomes almost like desire  
when he reins his mount  
before the mingled odors  
of leather and foodstuff,  
and beckons, in bated breath, a radiant sky  
to show itself. Where the wind is cut off,  
he lies with the flesh-tones of earth,  
thinks about the history of the moon  
and whether rain will come  
to soothe the dust raving up from hooves  
in the middle of July.  
Bedded down, he's an object  
half-buried among the blankets and the chaparral,  
counting stars to fall asleep.*

*And when he dreams  
he dreams that in a hundred years  
his sons can own the ground he roams  
and that his can be near...*

That was many years ago. Now the trail has led  
to here: the false hell of the hamburger place that  
consumes him...where time denies him what he's been:  
where there's no earth nor sky to make him free.