Pat Hobby and Orson Welles, F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

“Who’s this Welles?” Pat asked of Louie, the studio bookie. “Every time I pick up a paper they got about this Welles.”

“You know, he’s that beard,” explained Louie.

“Sure, I know he’s that beard, you couldn’t miss that. But what credits’s he got? What’s he done to draw one hundred and fifty grand a picture?”

What indeed? Had he, like Pat, been in Hollywood over twenty years? Did he have credits that would knock your eye out, extending up to—well, up to five years ago when Pat’s credits had begun to be few and far between?

“Listen—they don’t last long,” said Louie consolingly, “We’ve seen ’em come and we’ve seen ’em go. Hey, Pat?”

Yes—but meanwhile those who had toiled in the vineyard through the heat of the day were lucky to get a few weeks at three-fifty. Men who had once had wives and Filipinos and swimming pools.

“Maybe it’s the beard,” said Louie. “Maybe you and I should grow a beard. My father had a beard, but it never got him off Grand Street.”

The gift of hope had remained with Pat through his misfortunes—and the valuable alloy of his hope was proximity. Above all things one must stick around, one must be there when the glazed, tired mind of the producer grappled with the question, “Who?” So presently Pat wandered out of the drugstore, and crossed the street to the lot that was home.

As he passed through the side entrance an unfamiliar studio policeman stood in his way.

“Everybody in the front entrance now.”

“I’m Hobby, the writer,” Pat said.

The Cossack was unimpressed.

“Got your card?”

“I’m between pictures. But I’ve got an engagement with Jack Berners.”

“Front gate.”

As he turned away Pat thought savagely: “Lousy Keystone Cop!” In his mind he shot it out with him. Plunk! The stomach. Plunk! plunk! plunk!

At the main entrance, too, there was a new face.

“Where’s Ike?” Pat demanded.

“Ike’s gone.”

“Well, it’s all right, I’m Pat Hobby. Ike always passes me.”

“That’s why he’s gone,” said the guardian blandly. “Who’s your business with?”

Pat hesitated. He hated to disturb a producer.

“Call Jack Berner’s office,” he said. “Just speak to his secretary.”

After a minute, the man turned from his phone.

“What about?” he said.

“About a picture.”

He waited for an answer.

“She wants to know what picture?”

“To hell with it,” said Pat disgustedly. “Look—call Louie Griebel. What’s all this about?”

“Orders from Mr. Kasper,” said the clerk. “Last week a visitor from Chicago fell in the wind machine—Hello. Mr. Louie Griebel?”

“I’ll talk to him,” said Pat, taking the phone.

“I can’t do nothing, Pat,” mourned Louie. “I had trouble getting my boy in this morning. Some twirp from Chicago fell in the wind machine.”

“What’s that got to do with me?” demanded Pat vehemently.

He walked a little faster than his wont, along the studio wall to the point where it joined the back lot. There was a guard there, but there were always people passing to and fro and he joined one of the groups. Once inside he would see Jack and have himself excepted from this absurd ban. Why, he had known this lot when the first shacks were rising on it, when this was considered the edge of the desert.

“Sorry mister, you with this party?”

“I’m in a hurry,” said Pat, “I’ve lost my card.”

“Yeah? Well, for all I know you may be a plain clothes man.” He held up a copy of a photo magazine under Pat’s nose, “I wouldn’t let you in even if you told me you was this here Orson Welles.”

II

There is an old Charlie Chaplin picture about a crowded streetcar where the entrance of one man at the rear forces another out in front. A similar image came into Pat’s mind in the ensuing days whenever he thought of Orson Welles. Welles was in; Hobby was out. Never before had the studio been barred to Pat and though Welles was on another lot it seemed as if his large body, pushing in brashly from nowhere, had edged Pat out of the gate.

“Now where do you go?” Pat thought. He had worked in the other studios, but they were not his. At this studio he never felt unemployed—in recent times of stress he had eaten property food on its stages—half a cold lobster during a scene from The Divine Miss Carstairs; he had often slept on the sets and last winter made use of a Chesterfield overcoat from the costume department. Orson Welles had no business edging him out of this. Orson Welles belonged with the rest of the snobs in New York.

On the third day he was frantic with gloom. He had sent note after note to Jack Berners and even asked Louie to intercede—now word came that Jack had left town. There were so few friends left. Desolate, he stood in front of the automobile gate with a crowd of staring children, feeling that he had reached the end at last.

A great limousine rolled out, in the back of which Pat recognized the great overstuffed Roman face of Harold Marcus. The car rolled toward the children and, as one of them ran in front of it, slowed down. The old man spoke into the tube and the car halted. He leaned out blinking.

"Is there no police man here?" he asked of Pat.

"No, Mr. Marcus," said Pat quickly. "There should be. I'm Pat Hobby, the writer—could you give me a lift down the street?"

It was unprecedented—it was an act of desperation but Pat's need was great.

Mr. Marcus looked at him closely.

"Oh, yes, I remember you," he said, "Get in."

He might have possibly meant get up in front with the chauffeur. Pat compromised by opening one of the little seats. Mr. Marcus was one of the most powerful men in the whole picture world. He did not occupy himself with production any longer. He spent most of his time rocking from coast to coast on fast trains, merging ands launching, launching and merging, like a much divorced woman.

"Some day those children'll get hurt."

"Yes, Mr. Marcus," agreed Pat heartily. "Mr. Marcus—"

"They ought to have a policeman there."

"Yes, Mr. Marcus. Mr. Marcus—"

"Hm-m-m!" said Mr. Marcus. "Where do you want to be dropped?"

Pat geared himself to work fast.

"Mr. Marcus, when I was your press agent—"

"I know," said Mr. Marcus, "You wanted a ten dollar a week raise."

"What a memory!" cried Pat in gladness. "What a memory! But Mr. Marcus, now I don't want anything at all."

"This is a miracle."

"I've got modest wants, see, and I've saved enough to retire."

He thrust his shoes slightly forward under a hanging blanket. The Chesterfield coat effectively concealed the rest.

"That's what I'd like," said Mr. Marcus gloomily. "A farm—with chickens. Maybe a little nine-hole course. Not even a stock ticker."

“I want to retire, but different,” said Pat earnestly. “Pictures have been my life. I want to watch them grow and grow—”

Mr. Marcus groaned.

“Till they explode,” he said. “Look at Fox! I cried for him.” He pointed to his eyes, “Tears!”

Pat nodded very sympathetically.

“I want only one thing.” From the long familiarity he went into the foreign locution. “I should go on the lot anytime. From nothing. Only to be there. Should bother nobody. Only help a little from nothing if any young person wants advice.”

“See Berners,” said Marcus.

“He said see you.”

“Then you did want something,” Marcus smiled. “All right, all right by me. Where do you get off now?”

“Can you write me a pass?” Pat pleaded. “Just a word on your card?”

“I’ll look into it,” said Mr. Marcus. “Just now I’ve got things on my mind. I’m going to a luncheon.” He sighed profoundly. “They want I should meet this new Orson Welles that’s in Hollywood.”

Pat’s heart winced. There it was again—that name, sinister and remorseless, spreading like a dark cloud over all his skies.

“Mr. Marcus,” he said so sincerely that his voice trembled, “I wouldn’t be surprised if Orson Welles is the biggest menace that’s come to Hollywood for years. He gets a hundred and fifty grand a picture and I wouldn’t be surprised if he were so radical that you had to have all new equipment and start all over again like you did with sound in 1928.”

“Oh my God!” groaned Mr. Marcus.

“And me,” said Pat, “All I want is a pass and no money—to leave things as they are.”

Mr. Marcus reached for his card case.

III

To those grouped together under the name “talent” the atmosphere of a studio is not unfailingly bright—one fluctuates too quickly between high hope and grave apprehension. Those few who decide things are happy in their work and sure that they are worthy of their hire—the rest live in a mist of doubt as to when their vast inadequacy will be disclosed.

Pat’s psychology was, oddly, that of the masters and for the most part he was unworried even though he was off salary. But there was one large fly in the ointment—for the first time in his life he began to feel a loss of identity. Due to reasons that he did not quite understand, though it might have been traced to his conversation, a number of people began to address him as “Orson.”

Now to lose one's identity is a careless thing in any case. But to lose it to an enemy, or at least to one who has become scapegoat for our misfortunes—that is a hardship. Pat was not Orson. Any resemblance must be faint and far-fetched and he was aware of the fact. The final effect was to make him, in that regard, something of an eccentric.

"Pat," said Joe the barber, "Orson was in here today and asked me to trim his beard."

"I hope you set fire to it," said Pat.

"I did," Joe winked at waiting customers over a hot towel. "He asked for a singe so I took it all off. Now his face is as bald as yours. In fact you look a bit alike."

This was the morning the kidding was so ubiquitous that, to avoid it, Pat lingered in Mario's bar across the street. He was not drinking—at the bar, that is, for he was down to his last thirty cents, but he refreshed himself frequently from a half-pint in his back pocket. He needed the stimulus for he had to make a touch presently and he knew that money was easier to borrow when one didn't have an air of urgent need.

His quarry, Jeff Boldini, was in an unsympathetic state of mind. He too was an artist, albeit a successful one, and a certain great lady of the screen had just burned him up by criticizing a wig he had made for her. He told the story to Pat at length and the latter waited until it was all out before broaching his request.

"No soap," said Jeff. "Hell, you never paid me back what you borrowed last month."

"But I got a job now," lied Pat. "This is just to tide me over. I start tomorrow."

"If they don't give the job to Orson Welles," said Jeff humorously.

Pat's eyes narrowed, but he managed to utter a polite, borrower's laugh.

"Hold it," said Jeff, "You know, I think you look like him?"

"Yeah."

"Honest. Anyhow I could make you look like him. I could make you a beard that would be his double."

"I wouldn't be his double for fifty grand."

With his head on one side Jeff regarded Pat.

"I could," he said, "Come on in to my chair and let me see."

"Like hell."

"Come on. I'd like to try it. You haven't got anything to do. You don't work till tomorrow."

"I don't want a beard."

"It'll come off."

“I don’t want it.”

“It won’t cost you anything. In fact I’ll be paying you—I’ll loan you the ten smackers if you’ll let me make you a beard.”

Half an hour later Jeff looked at his completed work.

“It’s perfect,” he said. “Not only the beard but the eyes and everything.”

“All right. Now take it off,” said Pat moodily.

“What’s the hurry? That’s a fine muff. That’s a work of art. We ought to put a camera on it. Too bad you’re working tomorrow—they’re using a dozen beards out on Sam Jones’ set and one of them went to jail in a homo raid. I bet with that muff you could get the job.”

It was weeks since Pat had heard the word job and he could not himself say how he managed to exist and eat. Jeff saw the light in his eye.

“What say? Let me drive you out there just for fun,” pleaded Jeff. “I’d like to see if Sam could tell it was a phony muff.”

“I’m a writer, not a ham.”

“Come on! Nobody would never know you back of that. And you’d draw another ten bucks.”

As they left the make-up department Jeff lingered behind a minute. On a strip of cardboard he crayoned the name Orson Welles in large block letters. And outside without Pat’s notice, he stuck it in the windshield of his car

He did not go directly to the back lot. Instead he drove not too swiftly up the main studio street. In front of the administration building he stopped on the pretext that engine was missing, and almost in no time a small but definitely interested crowd began to gather. But Jeff’s plans did not include stopping anywhere long, so he hopped in and they started on a tour around the commissary.

“Where are we going?” demanded Pat.

He had already made one nervous attempt to tear the beard from him, but to his surprise it did not come away.

He complained of this to Jeff.

“Sure,” Jeff explained. “That’s made to last. You’ll have to soak it off.”

The car paused momentarily at the door of the commissary. Pat saw blank eyes staring at him and he stared back at them blankly from the rear seat.

“You’d think I was the only beard on the lot,” he said gloomily.

“You can sympathize with Orson Welles.”

“To hell with him.”

This colloquy would have puzzled those without, to whom he was nothing less than the real McCoy.

Jeff drove on slowly up the street. Ahead of them a little group of men were walking—one of them, turning, saw the car and drew the attention of the others to it. Whereupon the most elderly member of the party, threw up his arms in what appeared to be a defensive gesture, and plunged to the sidewalk as the car went past.

“My God, did you see that?” exclaimed Jeff. “That was Mr. Marcus.”

He came to a stop. An excited man ran up and put his head in the car window.

“Mr. Welles, our Mr. Marcus has had a heart attack. Can we use your car to get him to the infirmary?”

Pat stared. Then very quickly he opened the door on the other side and dashed from the car. Not even the beard could impede his streamlined flight. The policeman at the gate, not recognizing the incarnation, tried to have words with him but Pat shook him off with the ease of a triple-threat back and never paused till he reached Mario’s bar.

Three extras with beards stood at the rail, and with relief Pat merged himself into their corporate whickers. With a trembling hand he took the hard-earned ten dollar bill from his pocket.

“Set ’em up,” he cried hoarsely. “Every muff has a drink on me.”