

L.A. NOIR

Based on the Book by John Buntin

Pilot Episode

"A Guy Walks Into A Bar..."

Written by
Frank Darabont

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FADE IN:

EXT. STREET - DOWNTOWN L.A. - DAY

A PAIR OF TOO-BIG SHOES, old and falling apart, come up the sidewalk, a BASEBALL BAT dragging alongside...

SUPER TITLE: "1922"

CAMERA BOOMS UP along an assortment of tortured hand-me-downs to the face of a 9 YEAR-OLD BOY striding the sidewalk like he owns it, dragging the bat.

TWO OTHER BOYS, GABE and HERSCHEL, trail behind him, trying to look tough, following their leader.

EXT. COLUMBIA MOVIE THEATER - DAY

The kid comes to a free-standing ticket booth fronting the sidewalk and peers up at the TICKET GIRL inside. She's engrossed in a paperback romance, glances up.

TICKET GIRL

Would you like a ticket?

KID

(smirks at his boys)

Ticket, she says.

(to the girl)

Just what's in the cashbox, sis, and no lip outta you.

She hesitates, taken aback, decides this has to be some kind of unfunny joke:

TICKET GIRL

Now listen, little boy...

The kid hefts the bat and swings, SMASHES the glass in front of her face (the glass spiderwebs but holds together.) The girl SCREAMS, her book goes flying.

KID

GIMME IT, LADY! FORK IT OVER!

The kid goes berserk swinging, SMASHING THE GLASS on all sides, the girl trapped and SCREAMING inside.

Gabe and Herschel are frozen, wide-eyed with shock.

TWO BEAT COPS run out of a diner across the street, drawn by the commotion. Herschel sees them, yells to Mickey:

HERSCHEL

MICKEY! COPS!

The kid with the bat doesn't hear, doesn't care, just keeps swinging: SMASH! SMASH! SMASH!

KID
NOW, BITCH, NOW!

The cops come running, dodging traffic. Gabe and Herschel take to their heels, fleeing the scene...

Quaking and near tears, the ticket girl grabs the cashbox, digs out the money and shoves it at the kid.

TICKET GIRL
Here! Just take it and go!

He grabs the loot, turns and runs --

-- right into the arms of the arriving cops. Cop #1 grabs him, hoists him kicking and screaming into the air as:

IMAGE FREEZES: The punk kid is frozen before us in the arms of the law, face twisted in rage and defiance...

JOE TEAGUE (V.O.)
That 9 year-old who just robbed a movie theater and got pinched for his trouble? That's Meyer Harris Cohen, but everybody calls him Mickey.
(beat)
By 1947, he'll be the boss of all organized crime in L.A.

IMAGE UNFREEZES: Money flying in the air, kid kicking and screaming. The bat lands a lucky shot to Cop #2's nuts, sends him groaning to his knees...

MICKEY
SCREW YA MAMAS, YA BASTARDS!

EXT. LOEW'S STATE THEATER - DAY

BILL, a 17 year-old usher, is drawn outside as a MODEL-T POLICE CAR goes by with a WAIL OF A HAND-CRANKED SIREN.

Bill gazes up the street. There's some kind of commotion a block away; a crowd has formed.

FRANCETTE (fellow usher and Bill's future wife), hurries up from that direction, late for work.

FRANCETTE
Some pint-size lunatic just tried to rob the Columbia, you believe it?

BILL
You're kidding.

FRANCETTE
With a bat! Clara, the ticket girl? He smashed up her booth!

BILL
She okay?

FRANCETTE
Shook up pretty bad.

In the distance: Mickey gets loaded into the police car, kicking and hollering at the cops who nabbed him.

Bill watches, shakes his head. Unbelievable.

BILL
Thank God for the cops, huh?

Francette pauses at the door, throws him a deadpan look.

FRANCETTE
Those lugs? They come in here all the time, copping free candy, free popcorn...copping a feel while they're at it.
(off his shocked look)
There's a reason they're called "cops."

BILL
They do that? That's not right.

FRANCETTE
Tell you what. You're such a boy scout, you go set 'em straight.
(smirks)
Bill the boy scout...

She goes inside. HOLD ON BILL watching the police car depart, hauling little Mickey Cohen off to jail...

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

SUPER TITLE: "1924"

A FAT IRISH SERGEANT and a BLACK BEAT COP are poised over the hood of a CAR. The sergeant raises a MEGAPHONE...

SERGEANT
YOU IN THERE! YOU'RE SURROUNDED!
COME OUT WITH YOUR HA--

BLAM! The WINDSHIELD IS BLOWN APART in a hail of buckshot.

The cops drop for cover behind the car, sprawling on their asses as shards rain down. (No safety glass in 1924.)

They brush glass off themselves. A DOZEN OTHER COPS are staring at them, everybody crouching behind VEHICLES.

We hear a DISTANT VOICE SHOUTING:

VOICE (O.S.)
Keep talkin' fat man! I'm gonna
kill these damn fools in here,
just see if I don't!

The sergeant sighs, looks at his men.

COP #1
What do we do, Sarge?

SERGEANT
We can't just sit here! He's
got hostages, fer Chrissake!
Somebody's gotta go in.

He looks around for volunteers. Faces staring back.

COP #2
What about Parker?

The sergeant draws a blank. The cop cocks his thumb.

BILL, no longer a theater usher, now a 19 year-old rookie, is crouched several cars away, separate from the group.

SERGEANT
Ain't that the numbnuts who
hauled in the captain's drinking
buddy for drunk driving?

COP
And booked him.

Beat. The sergeant smiles.

SERGEANT
You! Parker!

Bill sees the sergeant beckoning. He scurries over.

BILL
Sergeant.

SERGEANT
This one's yours.

Bill absorbs that. Sees a few cops snickering.

Bill decides these guys aren't getting the better of him. No way. He gives the sergeant a brisk nod.

THE LINE OF CARS

Bill rises into view, gazes across the street at a small GROCERY STORE, a typical Mexican mom-and-pop bodega.

Through the windows, we catch glimpses of a GUNMAN with a shotgun pacing back and forth, scanning the street.

He sees Bill, pokes the shotgun out a window.

GUNMAN
YOU WANNA DIE RIGHT THERE? JUST
KEEP IT UP, BLUE BOY!

Showing he's not a threat, Bill gingerly draws his sidearm with two fingers, lays it gently aside on the car's hood.

BILL
I'M COMING OVER TO TALK!

It makes the gunman pause. Bill raises his hands and steps out, starts carefully across the street while all the other cops trade looks: shit, he's really doing it!

GUNMAN
Slow and easy, boy! Less ya
want a load of buckshot in that
blue belly a yours!

Bill keeps coming, hands raised. The gunman has him in his sights, tracking him...

BEHIND THE CARS

The cops frozen, watching. The sergeant is sweating buckets, grimacing, regretting his hasty move:

SERGEANT
Aw, Sufferin' Christ...this
dummy's gonna die...

EXT/INT. STORE - DAY

The gunman moves from the window to the front door (which is locked, a set of keys dangling in the jamb).

Bill arrives outside. The gunman faces him through the glass, the shotgun leveled.

Bill can see FOUR HOSTAGES huddled on the floor inside.

GUNMAN

What the hell you want? You
wanna be on a slab? That what
you wanna talk about?

Bill gestures to his ears, speaks loudly:

BILL

Sorry! I'm having trouble hearing
you! Could you speak up?

GUNMAN

I'LL BLOW YOU OUT OF YOUR DUMB
COP SHOES! YOU HEAR THAT OKAY?

Bill's "can't hear you" gestures increase...

BILL

SAY AGAIN? LITTLE LOUDER?

GUNMAN

(glances to hostages)
They sent me a deaf cop, you
believe this shit?
(top of his lungs)
YOU DEAF AND STUPID! YOU HEAR
ME NOW, BLUE BITCH?

Bill is shaking his head, motioning to his ears...

BILL

I JUST WANNA TALK! I'M UNARMED!
CAN YOU OPEN THE DOOR JUST A
CRACK SO WE DON'T HAVE TO SHOUT?

Exasperated, the gunman steps close to the door, grabs
the keys dangling in the lock...

No sooner does he turn them...

BAM! Bill shoves the door in hard, whacks the gunman right
between the eyes with the door frame.

The man staggers back half a step, tries to bring the
shotgun to fire, but Bill thrusts his arm in, grabs him
to hold him in place, and:

BAM-BAM-BAM! Bill keeps ramming the door frame rapid-fire
into the man's face, like a boxer with a punching bag.

The gunman's legs buckle. Bill squeezes in, pulls the
shotgun from the gunman's grasp as he keels over...

Bill raises the shotgun and starts racking the pump
repeatedly, ejecting the shells, as:

IMAGE FREEZES: Bill caught in mid-action, a shotgun shell frozen in the air before us...

JOE TEAGUE (V.O.)

This rookie will not be cited for courage in the line of duty for saving the lives of four hostages. That's because nobody likes him much.

(beat)

Around the time Mickey Cohen takes over running the L.A. mob, Bill the Boy Scout here will take over running the Los Angeles Police Department.

IMAGE UNFREEZES: Bill racking the pump, shells flying...

JOE TEAGUE (V.O.)

Nobody calls him numbnuts after that. They call him Chief of Police William Parker. Or sir.

EXT. STORE - DAY

Parker drags the gunman out by the collar, hauls him across the street. The hostages emerge, one of them a HISPANIC WOMAN sobbing at the sky and blessing all the saints...

JOE TEAGUE (V.O.)

White hats. Black hats. That's what they always wore in those old westerns we watched growing up so we could tell the good guys from the bad guys.

Bill hands the unloaded shotgun to the sergeant, hauls the suspect onward toward the paddy wagon...

JOE TEAGUE (V.O.)

That works in a kid's western. In real life, it's different...

EXT. STREET - DAY

ANOTHER PAIR OF SHOES come up a sidewalk. These aren't old or falling apart, they're new TWO-TONE FLORSHEIMS.

CAMERA FOLLOWS the shoes...

JOE TEAGUE (V.O.)

In real life, the bad guys often wear flashy shoes.

SUPER TITLE:

"1947"

CAMERA RISES along a sharp suit to a PAINTED SILK NECK TIE (but we do not reveal the man's face).

The tie's pattern is pure Vegas flash: cards and dice and martinis. Vulgar? No, on this guy it looks great.

JOE TEAGUE (V.O.)
Their ties aren't bad either.
Expensive anyway. Silk.

THE FLORSHEIMS

walk past azalea beds, past a lawn being watered...

A POODLE ON A LEASH goes by, followed by HIGH HEELS showing off sensational legs (skirt below the knee)...

The Florsheims stop, turn back briefly as our unseen man pauses to admire the woman who just passed him.

We hear a low, quiet WOLF WHISTLE.

The Florsheims then pivot forward again, keep walking...

INT. LOBBY OF APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

The man enters backlit by bright daylight, a pure silhouette...we still can't see his face.

The building's seen better days. He moves into the lobby, pulls a CIGARETTE CASE...

DOLLY SHOT

His HANDS are toying with the cigarette case (expensive) as he moves down the long row of tenants' MAILBOXES, the kind that have slots in the doors so you can peek in.

He's looking for a certain one. Pauses.

ANGLE CLOSES IN, as:

He pulls a Dunhill, re-pockets the cigarette case.

Next comes a PAPER MATCHBOOK. He strikes one, lights his Dunhill just above frame, blows a plume of smoke.

Instead of re-pocketing the matchbook, he pulls out a pen and jots something on the inside of its cover.

He closes the cover, drops the matchbook into a mailbox through the little slot in its door, and exits frame...

JOE TEAGUE (V.O.)
 White hats, black hats. They do
 exist. Guys like Parker, guys
 like Cohen. They try to shape
 the world in their image.

CAMERA MOVES IN TIGHT on the mailbox. The name written on
 it is "Joe Teague."

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MAILBOX - DUSK

We're inside the mailbox looking out through the slots.
 An eye appears, looks in, sees there's mail.

JOE TEAGUE (V.O.)
 Most of us have to make do
 somewhere in the middle. We
 live in a world of gray hats.

A KEY IS SLOTTED. The door swings open, revealing:

JOE TEAGUE. A face equal parts brutal and handsome. Like
 a boxer's face. Not a face you mess with.

He's a man who knows the world's pain, is on a first-name
 basis with it, and carries a piece of it in his pocket.

He grabs his meager mail, starts to shut the door, but
 stops and peers back in. Is that a matchbook?

He pulls it out, puzzled.

CLOSEUP: MATCHBOOK

On the front: "Bunny's Jungle Club, Central Avenue." A
 printed address and phone number.

His fingers turn it over...

On the back: A stylized drawing of a BLACK JAZZ PLAYER,
 skinny tie and sunglasses, blowing a sax...

PRE-LAP THE SOUND OF A TORTURED, SMOKY SAXOPHONE...

INT. BUNNY'S JUNGLE CLUB, CENTRAL AVENUE - NIGHT

...taking us from the drawing on the matchbook to the
 real thing: a BLACK SAX PLAYER, caught in a glare of stage
 lights, his sax crying like an angel dying of grief...

A JAZZ TRIO plays to a room filled with shadows and smoke,
 DRINKERS and JAZZ FIENDS, PLAYERS and HUSTLERS...

AT THE BAR

Joe Teague sits with a shotglass of bourbon, a pack of Lucky Strikes and an ashtray on the bar before him.

He knocks loose a Lucky, tears off a match from the matchbook he found in his mailbox, lights up.

He throws an idle glance. On the bar, almost within arm's reach, is a big glass bowl of identical matchbooks.

He stares again at the matchbook he's holding.

CLOSEUP: MATCHBOOK

Hand-written inside the cover: "8 o'clock. Be at the bar."

JOE

sits trying to divine the matchbook's presence in his life. It means something, he just doesn't know what.

AT THE ENTRANCE

A guy walks into a bar...

HECKY NASH, a little man in a loud bow-tie and a louder jacket. He sees Joe at the bar, works up his nerve...

AT THE BAR

Joe, not a man who misses much, clocks Hecky approaching him in the reflection of the bar's mirror.

Hecky keeps glancing Joe's way. Subtle he's not. He steps to the bar, orders a beer. The bartender brings one.

Beer in hand, Hecky sidles down the row of stools, trying to catch Joe's eye. Joe tries to tune him out.

HECKY

You the guy?

JOE

The guy.

HECKY

Yeah, the guy.

JOE

Nah, that guy left. I'm the other guy. The one drinking.

Undeterred, Hecky slides onto the neighboring stool.

HECKY

No, you're him. Master Gunnery
Sergeant Teague.

Joe's shotglass stops near his lips, hovers there. That's
a name he wasn't expecting.

HECKY

Marines, right?

Joe follows through, knocks back his bourbon, signals the
bartender for a refill.

JOE

Not lately.

HECKY

Not now, but then. Joe Teague,
that's what the fella said.

Joe looks over at Hecky. Committing the face. Joe breaks
his gaze as the bartender comes by, tops him up.

JOE

What fella we talking about?

HECKY

The one who said you'd be here
and I should look you up. He
told me to call you "Master
Gunnery Sergeant Teague." Said
you'd get a kick out of it.

JOE

What else this fella say?

HECKY

Said you was in the Pacific.
Said you killed every Jap on
Iwo single-handed. That true?

Joe takes a last drag, tamps out his cigarette.

JOE

I might'a missed one or two.

Joe slides the matchbook over in front of Hecky.

JOE

This yours? It was in my mailbox
with the electric bill.

Hecky opens the cover, sees the message: "8 o'clock. Be
at the bar." He chuckles, folds it shut, slides it back.

HECKY

Somebody tosses this in your mailbox, you come running? You're one curious guy.

Joe drains his shotglass, signals the bartender again.

JOE

Look. You don't know me. Why ruin a good thing?

HECKY

Might be a grand in it for you, is why. Couldn't hurt to listen, could it?

Hecky falls silent as the bartender comes by to refill Joe's glass. Hecky waits until he's gone, leans in.

HECKY

I need a pal.

JOE

Get a dog.

HECKY

Nah. They shed. Gotta walk 'em.
(leans closer)
I need a real pal. A Marine, let's say. A guy who can handle himself. All you gotta do is show up, look mean. An hour of your time, tops. You walk away a grand richer.

JOE

Add some details.

Hecky sighs, wondering how much to say.

HECKY

The guy who said you killed those Japs says you're a man who can be trusted. I asked around, people are of that general opinion. I can confide?

JOE

Confide away.

HECKY

(leans in)
Okay. There's a guy, see.

JOE

Not the guy who said I killed those Japs.

HECKY

No, not him, he's just a go-between. He lawyers sometimes for this other guy, the one I'm talking about. I won't say his name, but you'd know who he is.

JOE

How?

HECKY

You read the papers?

JOE

The funnies. Is it Popeye?

HECKY

No, it's not Popeye. But you'd know him. This guy...who isn't Popeye...desires something that I have. I like to make people happy, so I want him to have it. Thing is, I wanna be compensated. It's a transaction.

JOE

So transact. There a hitch?

HECKY

Yeah, there's a hitch. The guy's the hitch. He's not famous for being reasonable. And he seems to resent the fact that I've invited him to do this business.

JOE

Why? What's the item?

HECKY

I can't tell you that.

JOE

Been nice knowing you.

Joe gets up to leave, but Hecky settles him back down.

HECKY

Hey, hey, relax. I can't say the item, you understand. But I'll give you this: Let's just
(MORE)

HECKY (CONT'D)
 say the item for sale could
 make life very difficult for
 this guy if it, say, fell into
 certain hands other than his.

Joe leans back on his stool, peers at the man.

JOE
 You're blackmailing somebody.

HECKY
 That's a harsh word.

JOE
 It fits. And you want me there
 in case the guy who isn't Popeye
 decides to be...unreasonable.

HECKY
 You tag along, watch my back,
 that's it. Bingo.

Beat. Joe staring. He reaches to the small of his back,
 pulls something off his belt, lays it on the bar.

It's a DETECTIVE'S BADGE in a clip-on leather mount. He
 gives Hecky a good long look at it. Their eyes meet.

JOE
 You do know I'm a cop, right?

Hecky is completely unbothered; of course he knew.

HECKY
 You telling me you don't
 moonlight? All you cops do,
 it's your Christmas fund. A
 grand buys a lot of tinsel. Get
 a tree to put it on.

Joe slides the badge off the bar, re-clips it to his belt.

JOE
 Why me? Why a cop?

HECKY
Because you're a cop. That's
 the beauty part. These people
 don't kill cops. There's too
 much business at stake, so they
 don't do it. Ever. The mugs who
 show up for this thing see you
 standing there, they'll have to
 play nice.

Hecky finishes his beer, wipes his mouth, stands up.

HECKY

You should shine that badge up
real nice, wear it on the front
of your belt like this...
(miming on himself)
...right above your pecker where
they can see it.

JOE

I'll think about it.

HECKY

Don't think too long. It's gotta
happen soon, next night or two.
(pulls his wallet)
Here's my card, my name's on
it...

JOE

I know who you are. Hecky Nash.
I caught your act on the Strip
a few years back.

Hecky puffs up a bit, loves being recognized.

HECKY

Clover Club. Sweet gig while it
lasted. You bring a date? She
laugh? I was funny, right?

JOE

Not as funny as you were tonight.

HECKY

Oh, zing, and I thought I was
the comedian. Hey, try this
one. A guy walks into a bar...

He tucks his card into Joe's pocket.

HECKY

By the end of the week, he's a
grand richer. No joke.

REFLECTED IN THE BAR MIRROR

Hecky walking away...

RACK TO Joe's face in the mirror, his expression
unreadable, watching Hecky head for the exit...

Joe shifts his gaze, signals for the check...

AT THE ENTRANCE

Hecky comes past us on his way out...

ENDFRAME ON A MAN IN A PORKPIE HAT as Hecky goes by.

Porkpie turns his face to the wall, trying to be unobtrusive, waits until Hecky's out the door.

ANGLE CLOSES on Porkpie as he turns back, gazes across the club, eyes riveted to Joe at the bar.

Joe's getting up to leave. Porkpie hurries from the club.

EXT. BUNNY'S JUNGLE CLUB, CENTRAL AVENUE - NIGHT

Porkpie exits onto a sidewalk swarming with Central Avenue night life: SWELLS and DAMES, PIMPS and HUSTLERS, WHITE PEOPLE out slumming for kicks and jazz...

Porkpie steps off the curb...

INT. PARKED CAR - NIGHT

...and hurries across the street, dodging traffic. He gets to the car and jumps in the passenger side.

A RUDDY-FACED MAN is behind the wheel, clocking Hecky moving up the sidewalk. He reaches for the key, but:

PORKPIE HAT

Hang on...

RUDDY FACE

What? Why?

Porkpie motions "just wait," nudges the other man's attention toward the club.

Moments later, Joe exits, heads up the sidewalk.

Porkpie and Ruddy Face trade a look.

PORKPIE HAT

They were very cozy.

The men sit, watching Joe disappear in the crowd...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CIVIC CENTER - DOWNTOWN L.A. - MORNING

Blazing blue skies. City Hall and its plaza dominate.

Joe comes up the sidewalk on his way to work...

On the lawn, a press event is taking place. PEOPLE in folding chairs, REPORTERS scribbling notes, PHOTOGRAPHERS snapping flash photos with GRAFLEX CAMERAS...

MAYOR FLETCHER BOWRON addresses the crowd from the dais:

MAYOR BOWRON

...latest rumors of corruption are an attempt to undermine confidence in this city's police department and my administration. I remind these critics that my office has been at the forefront of rooting out the bad apples and eliminating the corruption that existed in the past...

Joe moves past, heading for the building...

IN THE AUDIENCE

DETECTIVE HAL MORRISON is seated in a row near Captain William Parker (now 42, imposing in his uniform) and DEPUTY CAPTAIN MILES HEWITT, Parker's aide-de-camp.

Hal catches sight of Joe going into the building. He leans out, looks down his row, where:

Porkpie Hat and Ruddy Face also lean out, returning Hal's eye contact. Knowing looks passed.

During this exchange, up on the dais, Bowron has indicated current Police Chief CLEMENCE HORRALL seated to his right:

MAYOR BOWRON

With the vigilance and dedication of fine officers like Police Chief Horrall, the efforts we have spearheaded will continue with all the vigor and resources at our disposal so long as I am mayor of this great city...

Hal rises, quietly edges from his row past Parker.

HAL

'Scuse me, Bill...

INT. BASEMENT RECORDS ROOM - DAY

Joe signs his name in a log book...

SERGEANT JIMMY DELANEY (thick glasses, big hearing aid, in charge of the Records Room since the dawn of time) hands off a file (somebody's criminal jacket).

JOE

Thanks, Jimmy.

DELANEY

Don't forget where ya found it.
Don't make me come look for ya.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Joe wanders up the hallway, absorbed in the file. He turns a corner, enters his office...

INT. JOE'S OFFICE - DAY

...and is surprised to find Hal Morrison sitting at his (Joe's) desk with his feet up, Joe's phone to his ear.

HAL

...yeah, he just walked in.

(beat)

Yes, Jimmy, it's in his hands.
I will make sure he brings it
back. He promises. Right?

(Joe nods)

He just nodded, Jimmy. Yes.

Hal hangs up. Leans back in the chair. Twiddles his thumbs.

HAL

Read any good files lately?

Joe is wary. He lays the open file down, slides it across the desk. Hal leans forward, peers at it.

THE FILE

It's a criminal jacket. MUG SHOTS of Hecky.

HAL

pulls out reading glasses, perches them on his nose.

HAL

Herschel Nussbaum. Aka "Hecky
Nash." Hmm. Stage name, I bet.
A third-rate comedian with a
few gambling arrests.

(glances up)

I doubt he'll ever make the
Public Enemy list.

JOE

Detective Morrison. Make yourself
at home. What can I do for you?

Hal pulls a small pad, checking his notes.

HAL

I'm curious why somebody that my people are tailing...a third-rate comedian with a few gambling arrests...shows up at a seedy jazz club on Central Avenue last night and has a drink with a detective from this division.

He looks up at Joe, waits for the answer.

JOE

It's not that seedy.

HAL

Music good?

JOE

If you like jazz.

HAL

Next morning, this same detective pulls the comedian's jacket. I guess I'm not the only one curious.

(taps the file)

Friend of yours?

Joe knows the awkward spot he's in. Plays it straight.

JOE

Met him once. I caught his act at the Clover a few years back, bought him a beer.

HAL

And?

JOE

He spotted me in Bunny's last night. Came up and offered me an after-hours job.

HAL

Doing what?

JOE

He's blackmailing somebody. He wants me to tag along, see he doesn't wind up in a dumpster.

Hal absorbs that, rises to the window, nods outside at the ongoing press event.

HAL

I was just out there listening to the mayor having to defend his record as a crusader against police corruption. Lot of heat these days, lot of scrutiny. City's looking to make examples of cops who step out of line, or haven't you heard?

JOE

I was just sitting there...

HAL

...minding your own business, having a drink, out of the blue a guy comes up you haven't seen in years, met him only once, and he tries to engage you in a criminal conspiracy.

JOE

Right.

Beat. Hal sighs, dubious, motions "give me more."

JOE

You'll love this. The guy he's blackmailing?

HAL

He give you a name?

JOE

No. But it's somebody high up in the mob.

HAL

How high?

JOE

High. Somebody who gets his name in the papers.

Hal pauses, the ramifications falling into place.

HAL

You were gonna bring this to me, right?

JOE

Why else would I pull the file?

Off Hal, not sure whether to believe him...

INT. WILLIAM PARKER'S OFFICE - DAY

Hal, with Joe at his side, faces William Parker:

HAL

Detective Teague reported the incident to me as soon as he came in this morning. Of course we brought it straight to you.

Parker looks to Miles Hewitt, listening and taking notes.

PARKER

I sense a unique opportunity.

HEWITT

Could be big. Depends on what this blackmail material is.

(to Joe)

You have no idea?

JOE

Nash wouldn't say. But he made it sound like it had weight.

PARKER

If it's enough to blackmail a high-ranking mobster, it must be strong evidence. We get our hands on it, we could bring down somebody big, cripple organized crime in this city.

(to Hal)

That's a win we could use right now. Silence a lot of criticism.

HEWITT

It would reflect well on this department. Not to mention the people in this room.

(to Parker)

Things like this get mayors re-elected. Mayor Bowron's a man who remembers his friends.

Parker approaches Hal and Joe.

PARKER

Bring us whoever shows up for this exchange...and the evidence. Catch them in the act, fellas, that's key...

(wry glance to Hal)

Key to the kingdom?

He moves to Joe, gives him an appraising look.

PARKER

You're on loan to Hal's unit
until further notice. Bring
home the bacon, Detective Teague.
(shakes his hand)
Do this right, you could make
some friends.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE PARKER'S OFFICE - DAY

Hal and Joe exit the office, move up the hallway:

HAL

You get what just happened?
(off Joe's look)
Bill Parker just teed you up to
be his golden boy. Thing like
this could very well put him
one step closer to being our
next Chief. Two things you need
to know about Bill the Boy Scout.
One, it's a position he deserves.

JOE

And two?

HAL

He's also a man who remembers
his friends. You'd write your
own ticket. We both would.

INT. PRIVATE BULLPEN (MOB SQUAD) - DAY

The DETECTIVES of Hal Morrison's squad are gathered around
a table in a dense haze of cigarettes smoke...

Two we recognize: Porkpie Hat is MIKE HENDRY, Ruddy Face
is PAT DOLAN.

Also present are TUG PURCELL, EDDY SANDERSON, NICK BLEDSOE,
and JOHN "FAT JACK" BRAY.

Joe's in the middle of them, feeling like the new stray
in the kennel being sniffed by all the other dogs.

Hal stands at the head of the table with Nash's file:

HAL

Our pal Hecky. A wannabe that
never was. And a bad gambler.

JOE

That file doesn't say mobster.

HAL

No, but he's been hip-deep in their world his whole life. Rubbed a lot of elbows.

HENDRY

Hell, he's friends with Mickey Cohen since they were kids. This guy knows things. A lot of things.

HAL

He'd make a formidable witness. We've tried to squeeze him a few times, but he wriggles away.

JOE

What's special about now? Why were you guys tailing him?

DOLAN

Sooner or later, guy like this is ripe to get flipped. Lately he's been riper.

Hal slides the file to Joe.

HAL

Mr. Nash's fortunes are in serious decline. He's racked up a lot of gambling debts, owes a lot of money to the wrong people.

(takes a seat)

They carry him for old time's sake, but that kind of patience runs out. When it does...

JOE

You wanna be there to catch him when he falls, offer him a way out. Long as he goes witness.

HENDRY

The man twigs.

DOLAN

Tol' you he was bright.

HENDRY

I didn't believe you.

JOE

(glances to Hal)

Where do you get these guys?

Hendry rises, crosses the room toward a phone...

HENDRY

Me, he found under a rock.

(grabs the phone)

Pat here washed up on the beach
one day.

(gathers the cord)

Eddy there crawled out of a
drain pipe.

(brings the phone)

Nick and Tug got left in a basket
on his doorstep.

PURCELL

He raised us from puppies.

"Fat Jack" Bray, the fattest and oldest in the room, leans
over and crushes out his cigarette in Joe's ashtray.

FAT JACK

I danced with the ballet. Didn't
work out.

Hendry slams the phone down on the table in front of Joe,
leans over it.

HENDRY

You? You pull this off, you're
on all our Christmas lists.

Joe stares at the phone. Pulls out Hecky's card.

HAL

Time and location. Those are
vital.

Joe picks up the cradle, starts dialing...

INT. HECKY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

A RINGING PHONE shatters the silence, jerking Hecky from
sleep. Tangled in sheets, he grabs the phone...

HECKY

What? Huh? Who's this?

(listens)

Yeah, right. No, now's a fine
time. Just wakin' up...

Next to him: his girlfriend, JASMINE, picks her head off
the pillows, half-asleep, murmuring:

JASMINE

Who's that?

Hecky's trying to listen, motions "be quiet."

HECKY

Really? Yeah. Great news. Worth waking up for.

(pause)

Let's do it tonight. I'll make a call, set it in motion...

INT. PRIVATE BULLPEN (MOB SQUAD) - MORNING

JOE

I need when and where.

(checks his watch)

Griffin? Yeah, I can meet you then. But Hecky, I need to know where the exchange is happening.

(beat)

'Cause I don't walk in blind.

Tell me now or find someone

else. I mean it.

(listens)

Okay. If that's where they agreed. Right.

He hangs up. All eyes on him.

JOE

He's got a gig tonight at the Griffin. You know it?

BLEDSON

Yeah, it's a dive. Where old strippers go to die.

JOE

I'm meeting him at ten o'clock, when he gets off. We'll drive to the exchange from there.

(to Hal)

Baldwin Hills. The oil fields.

SANDERSON

Oil fields. Goddamn it.

Hendry rises to a CITY MAP hanging on wall hooks.

FAT JACK

Poor kid. Thought they'd make it easy on you? Give you a nice warm closet to pop out of?

JOE

What's wrong with it?

Hendry pulls the map, lays it on the table.

HENDRY

Oil fields are thirty square miles of horseshit. Terrain's wide open. There's no place for us to be, no place to hide...

HAL

...no way to predict where you'll be in all those square miles...

PURCELL

Odds are great they see us up there and just drive off, blow the whole deal.

FAT JACK

Mob loves it. Been dumping bodies up there since Prohibition.

Everybody's hunched over the map, examining options.

HENDRY

Closest we can be to you is down the hill, around Jefferson. That's over half a mile away.

PURCELL

(to Hal)

That's not good for backup. Take us three minutes to get up that hill. Maybe longer.

JOE

So?

FAT JACK

You need backup, you want it now, not in three minutes.

SANDERSON

How's he signal us? Dead zone up there, radios don't work.

FAT JACK

Very Pistol. Sign one out, put it in his trunk.

(to Joe)

It's a flare gun.

JOE

I know. I've used a few.

FAT JACK

Then no problem. Time is right,
you fire that flare, we'll come
charging up the hill like the
cavalry. I'm John Wayne...

(points at Hendry)

...he's Rhonda Fleming.

Pause. The men trading looks. It's a plan. But dicey.

HAL

You'll be on your own up there.
Exposed. Especially after you
fire that flare.

FAT JACK

Three minutes. That's a long
time to wait when your ass is
hanging in the breeze.

JOE

You watch for my signal. I'll
worry about my ass.

Glances are traded. He's earning respect...

INT. THE GRIFFIN - NIGHT

Exactly as Sanderson described it: a place where old
strippers go to die. On-the-skids comedians too:

HECKY

Your ass? No kidding! I thought
that was your wife!

(gets some laughs)

It's got her smile...

(a few guffaws)

So I pull out, apologize to the
guy. Honest mistake, I thought
I was getting a flutter.

(a few chuckles)

Give her my regards, Senator...

IN THE AUDIENCE

Joe hovering near the door, waiting. People around him
ordering drinks, most of them already half-bagged.

HECKY

(points to a guy)

You like that one? Remind me to
check your pulse later.

ON STAGE

Hecky sweating, hating every moment, big false smile:

HECKY
 Speaking of pulse, here's a gal
 who'll give yours a flutter...
 (motions offstage)
 ...treat her nice, she'll do it
 twice...Miss Dixie Hills!

A 3-PIECE BAND strikes up. The spotlight pulls from Hecky to a SCARY-LOOKING STRIPPER strutting onstage...

Hecky fades off stage, catching Joe's eye...

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Hecky's getting paid cash: A FAT SWEATY GUY chewing a cigar crosses his palms with a few wrinkled bills.

Hecky nods and moves off, leading Joe down narrow, cramped corridors, the walls peeling and water-stained.

HECKY
 I'm reduced to working places
 like this. Christ, it's like
 rolling in vomit.
 (glances back)
 Gotta make a fast call.

Hecky turns a corner, squeezing past STRIPPERS, comes to a pay phone on the wall outside the restrooms. Joe hangs back, waiting as Hecky drops a dime and dials.

(During the following, Joe is B.G., gets checked out by a few passing STRIPPERS. One stops to chat him up, but he demurs, pointing at Hecky: "Waiting on him, got business," etc. The girl moves on: "Maybe I see you later?")

HECKY
 Yeah, it's me checking in. I
 said I'd call.
 (beat)
 Yes, tonight. Still. Uh-huh.
 (beat)
 Uh-huh. Uh-huh.
 (beat)
 Jasmine, don't start. I mean
 it. Not again. Jasmine...
 (pause)
Jasmine. I don't need this...

He pounds the receiver against the wall to get her to shut up, puts the receiver back to his ear.

HECKY

I have the floor now? This is happening, okay?

(beat)

I don't care, I can't listen to your grief anymore!

(beat)

I can't take it! Stop talking! Now me! You'll be packed, right? I wanna make sure. Tell me yes.

(beat)

By the time I get there! Like we talked about! I honk, you're out the door. No going back, not even for a toothbrush.

(beat)

Jas...don't get weepy. Just do like I say. Be packed and ready.

(beat)

Good. Just relax, okay? It's gonna be fine. Love you.

He hangs up, has to take a moment. He's so wound up he's shaking. He takes a long breath, turns and goes back up the corridor to where Joe's waiting.

HECKY

Let's do this.

Hecky leads him off...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OIL FIELDS - BALDWIN HILLS - NIGHT

Headlights appear in a dark landscape...

TWO CARS, one leading the other, trail clouds of dust through a desolate sprawl of derricks and dirt roads...

INT. JOE'S CAR - NIGHT

Joe following Hecky. He sees Hecky pull over...

Joe does the same. Kills his engine and lights.

EXT. OIL FIELD - NIGHT

Joe gets out. It's eerily quiet, except for the ghostly GROANS of the derricks rising and falling...

Joe goes to his trunk. Hecky comes from the forward car.

HECKY

What do you think?

JOE
I'd have picked a more public
place.

Hecky glances nervously around as Joe opens his trunk.

JOE
Then again, up here there's
nobody around to get curious.
(off Hecky's look)
It's fine.

F.G.: Hecky drifts toward us, fighting the jitters, gazing
out at the sea of city lights...

B.G.: Joe takes off his jacket, lays it on the lip of the
trunk, pulls BINOCULARS out, hangs them around his neck...

Hecky glances back, as:

Joe pulls a long object wrapped in a blanket from the
trunk, unwraps it, throws the blanket back in...

It's a .30 caliber CARBINE RIFLE. Hecky's face goes slack
as Joe slots the ammo clip.

HECKY
Think you'll need that?

JOE
Doubt it. Maybe.

Joe leans the rifle against the rear fender, grabs a
FLASHLIGHT, comes to where Hecky is.

Joe raises the binoculars, scans the terrain below.

Hecky drifts nearer, checks his watch as he lights a
cigarette, trying to calm his nerves.

JOE
It's not too late, you know.

HECKY
For what?

JOE
Go a different way.

HECKY
My way's fine.

JOE
Then why you shaking?

Hecky looks at his hand holding the cigarette -- it's trembling. It flusters him.

JOE

This evidence you've got. You could take it to the police. Get protection.

Hecky bursts out laughing.

HECKY

Protection. That's a good one. Remember Abe Reles? He got protected right out a sixth-floor window. Secure hotel room, a dozen cops keeping tabs round-the-clock. Some protection.

Joe, unruffled, keeps scanning the terrain.

JOE

Just a thought.

HECKY

You my rabbi? No? Then save it. I'm paying you a grand to cover my ass. That's a lot of money for one ass.

JOE

My math says two. That girl of yours...Jasmine?

HECKY

Jesus, you got big ears. Don't drag her into this.

JOE

You're the one who did that, sounds like. She know the risk?

HECKY

Mostly.

JOE

Enough to not like it.

HECKY

She doesn't have to! She goes my way. My way or the highway.

Hecky flings his cigarette to the ground, angrily crushes it out with the toe of his shoe.

HECKY

They don't know she's any part
of this. So just leave it alone.

Hecky fishes another cigarette from his pack, seething.

HECKY

And don't confuse me for
upstanding. That's not what
this thing is.

JOE

Tell me.

HECKY

(draws closer)

It's a winning hand. My whole
life I been dealt shit cards,
for once I'm holding a royal
flush. Instead of laying it
down and taking my chips, I
should do the cops a favor?

Hecky turns away, lighting his cigarette...

HECKY

Don't make me laugh. Cops never
done nothing for Hecky Nash.
The Blue don't give a damn if I
live or die.

JOE

The guy you're blackmailing
will. You'll be looking over
your shoulder the rest of your
life.

HECKY

Been doing that since I was
born. Finally a win, that's
what this is. My ticket out.

He drifts to the edge of the road, gazes out at the vast
sprawl of lights.

HECKY

This city. So goddamn beautiful.
Like a sky full of stars. But
only from a distance. Up close,
it's all gutter.

(glances to Joe)

You from here?

JOE

Detroit. Until the war.

HECKY

After the war? You didn't go back. Why?

JOE

I grew up in a slum. Didn't want to die in one.

HECKY

The war was your ticket out. See? A smart guy plays the hand he's dealt.

(nods toward city)

Though you ask me, you traded one slum for another.

Hecky takes a drag, wanders back this way.

HECKY

Those islands you fought on. Bet they were pretty too. Till you went ashore.

JOE

No. Those were always ugly. Rocks, most of 'em.

HECKY

Lot of men died for those ugly rocks. Tell me the sense.

JOE

You could die for this scheme. Is there sense in that?
(off Hecky's look)
Just wonder if it's worth it.

HECKY

Might be, just for the looks on their stupid faces.

(off Joe's look)

The wiseguys. They always get the best. Clothes, booze, broads. You see the cars they drive? Money falls out of the sky for these idiots. And the kicker? Dumbest mugs you ever met. I been around 'em all my life.

JOE

Mickey Cohen?

HECKY

Yeah, Mickey. No secret. Since the first grade I know him. 'Course he never got past the second grade.

He moves off again, shaking his head in wonder.

HECKY

The shit this guy's pulled. He should be serving life, or dead a dozen times over. Not Mickey. All he does is rise. Makes like he's the king. Got 300 suits in his closet, you know that? The finest shoes, a guy so dumb he can barely tie the laces.

JOE

I thought you were friends.

HECKY

Friends. Okay, call it that.

Hecky lets out a bitter laugh. It's all coming out, the seething resentment, a lifetime of pent-up bile...

HECKY

We were nine, he says "let's be a gang, we'll pull a heist." Me and another kid, Gabe Zamanski, we say okay. We're kids, we think it's a game. Mickey takes us up to Hoyt Street where all the movie theaters are, and what's he do? Beats the shit out of a ticket booth with a baseball bat. The girl's inside screaming her head off. Two cops show up. I yell at Mickey, try to warn him, does he listen? Like hell. Mickey never listens.

(beat)

Me and Gabe run. Mickey gets pinched. Think he blames himself? Even a little? Think again.

He flings his cigarette down, stomps it out.

HECKY

Me he blames. All these years he rubs my nose in it. I never live it down. He even gave me a nickname: Jesse, he calls me.

(MORE)

HECKY (CONT'D)

Like Jesse Owens. He says,
"That's you, Hecky. Jesse Owens.
A nigger who runs." And he laughs
his ass off, the sick bastard,
'cause that's funny to him. I'm
funny, I'm a goddamn joke.

Hecky pauses, roiling with shame. He meets Joe's gaze.

HECKY

(explodes)

I ran! I was nine years-old,
for Chrissake!

JOE

The guy you're blackmailing. Is
it Mickey?

Hecky hesitates, sees no reason not to say.

HECKY

No. Above him. Even Mickey
answers to somebody. Take my
word, this will not reflect
well on Mickey Cohen. And you
know what? That's jake by me.

He turns away, stares off at the city.

HECKY

Why should they always get away
with it? Them and not me? My
whole life they feast, I get
crumbs. Well now it's my turn.
My score. For once the joke's
on them. I'll get to laugh.

(pause)

Is it worth it. What do you
think?

Joe's gaze shifts.

JOE

I think they're here.

Hecky follows Joe's gaze. HEADLIGHTS below. A CAR is
wandering the oil field, searching...

Hecky goes cold, walloped by fear and sudden doubt.

HECKY

Oh, Christ.

Joe hands him the flashlight.

JOE
Get his attention.

Hecky's scared, fumbles the flashlight, almost drops it.

JOE
Second thoughts?
(Hecky nods)
Backing out was five minutes
ago.

Joe turns and goes back to his car...

Hecky aims the flashlight down the hillside, clicks it on
and off to get the car's attention.

The headlights veer, coming this way. Hecky watches it
approach, his heart in his throat.

AT THE TRUNK

Joe throws a glance, sees Hecky's attention diverted.

He leans in, uncovers the FLARE GUN. He breaks the breech,
loads a flare, getting it ready...

Another fast glance. He tucks it in the back of his pants.

HECKY

glances back, sees Joe straighten up from the trunk.

Joe grabs his rifle, comes back halfway, takes a flanking
position behind Hecky for a clear line of fire.

The car pulls in. Engine shuts off.

Doors open. Two DARK FIGURES get out. They come forward
into the light:

SID and TERRY, two mob bruisers. Sid shields his eyes
against the flashlight.

SID
Hecky? Is it you?

HECKY
It's me.

SID
Lower the thing, willya? What
am I, a moth?

HECKY
Sorry.

Hecky lowers the beam. The men peer past him at Joe.

SID
Who's that? Who's back there?

HECKY
A friend.

SID
Show me him. He makes me nervous
in the dark back there.

Hecky swings the flashlight beam...

Sid and Terry get a good look at Joe: badge on his belt,
carbine nestled in the crook of his arm.

Terry turns, mutters into Sid's shoulder:

TERRY
It's a cop. A goddamn cop.

SID
(to Hecky)
You bring a cop to a thing like
this? What ails you?

HECKY
He's just a pal. Tagged along.

The wiseguys absorb this, getting the picture.

SID
Give us a sec.

They draw aside into a private huddle, whispering:

SID
...he skunked us, the prick,
the skeevy little Hebe...

TERRY
...what do we do...

SID
...we got no choice here...we
gotta do it the other way...

TERRY
...boss won't be happy...

SID
...he can get in line...

They break their huddle, turn back to Hecky and Joe.

SID
I don't like this should happen
with a cop. We're all just pals?

JOE
Just pals. Like he said.

SID
Okay. Fine. Long as it's pals.

He nods to Terry, who reaches into his coat...

Joe swings his carbine up, finger tight on the trigger.

JOE
But go easy. Let's stay pals.

TERRY
I'm easy!

Terry eases his hand from his coat, pulling out a five-inch-thick envelope bound with a thick rubber band.

Joe eases his aim, eyes going to Hecky. (His left hand also starts easing around to the back of his belt where the flare gun is hidden, getting ready to pull it...)

SID
Now you.

Hecky pulls a FLAT GRAY ENVELOPE. He steps forward, lets Sid take it, backs away.

JOE'S HAND (BEHIND HIS BACK)

His fingers touch the flare gun, tighten on the grip...

SID

opens the envelope flap to check the goods. He pulls out a clear plastic sleeve of photo negatives.

SID
Little light here?

Hecky shines his light through the plastic sleeve, throwing rows of grainy black-and-white images onto Sid's face.

As the light plays, throwing all those tiny images...

WE PUSH IN ON JOE'S FACE

Like a man who's seen a ghost. Quietly rocked by some realization. Those rows of negatives in their plastic sleeve mean something to him.

JOE'S HAND (BEHIND HIS BACK)

The flare gun is frozen half out of his belt...

Beat. He eases it back into his belt. His fingers uncurl, letting go of the grip...

HECKY AND THE MOBSTERS

HECKY

He'll love 'em. Little grainy,
but they really show off his
profile. He's very handsome.

Sid grunts, slides the sleeve back in the envelope.

SID

These all the negatives? Gotta
be all of 'em, you know that.

HECKY

Every single one.

Sid gives Terry a nod. Terry tosses his envelope. Hecky catches it, pulls off the rubber band, peers in.

The sight of all the money takes Hecky's breath away.

He tamps down his reaction, looks up at Sid.

SID

We done?

HECKY

We walk away whistling.

They go back to their car. Sid opens his door, pauses.

SID

Smart move tonight, Hecky. Well
played. See you around.

HECKY

Doubt it. I won't be showing my
face much.

SID

That might be best. You burned
bridges with this. Goes without
saying. I said it anyway.

They get in, the doors slam, the engine starts. The car makes a tight U-turn, heads slowly back down the hill.

Joe eases his aim, lowers the carbine.

Hecky is electrified, watching the mobsters drive away.

JOE

You made your score. How's it
feel?

Hecky lets out a dazed laugh. It's sinking in that he's
gotten away with it. He erupts in a scream of joy:

HECKY

Ha! That's how the hand is
played! Ace-high-straight,
suckers! Read 'em and weep!

He flips the car off, tracking its brake lights down the
hill with his middle finger raised.

HECKY

Take this back to the son of a
bitch that sent ya! This right
here! With my highest regards!

Joe comes to Hecky, takes his flashlight back.

JOE

We should go now.

Hecky gets hold of himself, calming down.

HECKY

Just gimme a sec. I need a
second, okay? I just have to
take this in.

Joe smiles, indulges him, walks back to his car.

Hecky watches the mobsters' brake lights crawl slowly
back down the hill...

HECKY

The looks on their faces. That's
the look I was talkin' about.
That look when they see the
cards lay down on the table.

Hecky turns, soaring. Joe's at his open trunk unloading
the carbine, removing the clip.

Hecky approaches him, stops halfway.

HECKY

'Cause of you.

Joe smiles, stows the clip in the trunk, pulls out the
blanket to re-wrap the rifle.

JOE

All I did was show up. What you did took balls. You did good.

Hecky turns to savor one last look down the hill. The mobsters' tail-lights are vanishing in the distance...

HECKY

My whole life I waited for a moment like this. Now I get to rise. I'm king. Me, Hecky Nash.

Behind him, Joe stows the rifle in the trunk...

HECKY

(yells)

Like friggin' Cagney! Top of the world, Ma!

...rises back out with a SNUB-NOSE .38...

JOE

Top of the world, Hecky.

POP! POP! Two in the back.

Hecky arches, pure shock. He takes a few lurching, drunken steps forward, then swandives face-first into the dirt.

The shots echo away. They weren't even very loud.

All we hear now is the eerie groaning of the oil derricks rising and falling all around us...

Joe walks over to Hecky sprawled facedown.

Hecky stirs, lets out a moan. Still alive.

He shifts, rolls over onto his back, looks up at Joe with absolute shock in his eyes. This can't be happening.

HECKY

But--but--you're a cop!

Joe aims down. Hecky gasps, shields his face with his hands...

POP! Right through both hands, a spray of blood.

Beat. Hecky's hands fall away, revealing a ragged hole in his forehead, a faint wisp of smoke drifting out.

Hecky's feet kick a few times. Final death twitch.

Pause. Joe proceeds calmly, methodically:

He pulls a rag, wipes his prints off the gun, tosses it on the ground near Hecky's corpse.

He crouches, grabs the envelope of money, rises and goes back toward his car...

Along the way, he pulls the flare gun, aims it up:

WHOOOSSH! The flare FIRES skyward, arcing high overhead...

He gets to the trunk, tosses the flare gun back in, grabs his jacket off the trunk's lip, puts it back on...

SHOT BECOMES A STEADICAM FOLLOW:

Joe leaves the murder scene and cars behind, walks out into the surrounding oil fields...

The groaning of the derricks is much louder now...

He moves among them, picking a random path...

POLICE SIRENS rise in the distance, faint at first...

Joe pauses, looks around, makes an equally random choice:

He picks a derrick, checks it out, runs his hand up along the steel structure. Finds a good hiding place.

The POLICE SIRENS swell ever louder, coming this way...

Joe slots the envelope of money into the hiding place he's found, jams it tight into the cranny...

CAMERA FOLLOWS Joe back as he retraces his random path through the derricks...

SIRENS GROWING LOUDER AND CLOSER by the moment...

He arrives back at the murder scene, stepping out onto the road, just as:

The CARS appear. LIGHTS AND SIRENS split the night.

Joe holds up his badge as they pull in, the scene going chaotic, COPS pouring out of their cars...

Hal Morrison runs up, trailed by Fat Jack toting a shotgun, all the men stunned at the sight of Hecky's corpse:

HAL
What the hell happened?

JOE

I told him if I fell behind on the drive over here, he should pull up and wait for me down the hill, we'd come up together.

(looks at the corpse)

I don't know why he didn't.

HENDRY

He came up alone? Moron! They were waiting for him up here.

JOE

Looks like they clipped him when he got out of his car.

(aims his flashlight)

They left that behind.

Flashlight beams converge on the discarded .38.

JOE

I didn't see anybody, no other cars. I just drove up here and found him like that.

(off Hal's look)

I couldn't have been more than three minutes behind him.

FAT JACK

See? What I say? Three minutes can make all the difference.

HAL

What about his evidence?

JOE

(shrugs)

Soon as I saw him, I fired off the flare and waited for you.

HAL

(to the men)

Check the body! And tear his damn car apart!

Hendry drops to a crouch, searching Hecky's body.

ANGLE CLOSES ON Joe just standing there, the calm at the center of the storm, watching it all unfold...

AS WE SETTLE INTO HIS CLOSEUP:

PER-LAP THE SOUND OF A SMOKY, WAILING JAZZ SAX...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BUNNY'S JUNGLE CLUB, CENTRAL AVENUE - NIGHT

A guy walks into a bar...

At first, all we see are his familiar TWO-TONE FLORSHEIMS.

WE TRACK THE SHOES across the club...

AT THE BAR

As he comes to a bar stool (we're framed below his face), we also recognize the painted SILK TIE: cards, tumbling dice, martinis.

His hat descends into frame as he takes it off, sets it on the bar...

WE FINALLY REVEAL HIM as he sits into the shot:

NED STAX. Young, rakish, movie-star handsome; the kind of face that makes women go all fluttery.

NED

Scotch, rocks.

The bartender goes to pour his drink...

Ned pulls out his expensive cigarette case, opens it, pulls out a Dunhill.

He starts patting pockets, trying to find his lighter...

ANGLE COMES AROUND...

REVEAL Joe sitting one stool over with his bourbon and his crappy Lucky Strikes.

He knocks one loose, lips it, tears off a match from the matchbook he found in his mailbox, lights up.

He puts the matchbook on the bar, sends it sliding in Ned's direction. Ned snags them.

The bartender brings his drink and an ashtray, leaves.

NED

Thanks.

Ned tears off a match, lights his cigarette. Takes a look at his handwritten note inside...then touches the burning match to the remaining matches. The matchbook flares up.

He drops it in the ashtray, watches it blacken and burn.

Joe pulls something from his coat, lays it on the bar between them...

Ned finds himself staring at Hecky's envelope, decorated with brown spatters of dried blood.

Ned glances around. Jesus. He picks his hat off the bar, shifts it over, covers the envelope with it.

NED

That's fifty grand under my hat.

JOE

That much? I guess your boss will be happy to get it back.

NED

He doesn't care about that. He cared about not getting taken by a two-bit loser.

JOE

So he should be doubly happy.

Ned hesitates, takes a sip of his scotch.

NED

You're missing the point. He wants you to have it, with his compliments.

(off Joe's look)

Take it. You earned it. For service well rendered.

JOE

(beat)

That's crap. We both know what it really is. Your boss thinks he just bought himself a cop. An enforcer with a badge.

NED

That a bad thing? You've got valuable skills. I could steer a lot of work your way.

(beat)

It's a good offer.

Joe weighs it briefly. Looks at Ned.

JOE

Here's my counter. Tell Bugsy Siegel to take that money and shove it up his ass.

NED
In those words?

JOE
Quote me.

Ned absorbs that, smiles a little. He respects the answer.

Joe signals the bartender for his check.

NED
No, no, I got this.
(Joe hesitates)
C'mon. Least you can do is let
me buy you a drink.

Joe gives in with a shrug. He gathers his things off the bar, getting ready to go...

NED
If not for the money, then why?

JOE
You have to ask? You fed me the
guy, you knew what would happen.

NED
Maybe. Maybe I'm just that
clever. Maybe I want to hear
you say it.
(as Joe rises)
Why'd you kill the comedian?

Joe crushes his cigarette out in his ashtray.

JOE
Maybe I didn't like his jokes.

Joe leaves his stool, moves past Ned toward the exit...

But pauses behind him.

JOE
I heard you passed the bar exam.

NED
Passed it, hell. I aced it. Top
five percent.

JOE
I always said you had brains.

NED
Yeah, you always did.

Joe pats Ned's shoulder goodbye, proud of him.

NED
Semper fi, Gunny.

JOE
Semper fi, Marine.

Joe walks away.

Ned watches him go, signals the bartender for a refill.

JOE

goes past the stage on his way out.

ENDFRAME ON THE SAX MAN as Joe leaves our shot...

ANGLE CLOSES ON THE SAX MAN, haloed in a glare of stage lights, pouring his soul through the instrument...

CLOSE TIGHTER AND TIGHTER on the saxophone, notes bending, octaves shredding, telling its story as we

DISSOLVE TO:

THE SAX SOLO CONTINUES...

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

A coda, consisting of a single shot:

A SLOWLY WIDENING ANGLE...

Starting with a woman's face. Staring. Waiting.

All the bad breaks haven't erased her beauty. But all the hard knocks have hammered little dents in her heart.

Tonight, like so many times before, another little dent will form. She's already feeling it.

OUR WIDENING ANGLE reveals Jasmine by the door, sitting on her suitcase, smaller bags arrayed around her...

Staring. Waiting.

It's gotten so very late...

FADE OUT