

GREENWICH, NEW YORK

by
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"If you're goin' up to the city,
you better learn to shout.
If you don't stand up and holler,
you're gonna be left out."

--Mose Allison

GREENWICH, NEW YORK

FADE IN:

EXT. MANHATTAN SKYLINE - EARLY MORNING

The Manhattan skyline in full view, just as the sun is coming up. The whole city is cast in the shadows of the skyscrapers, the monoliths themselves blocking out the rising sun. VARIOUS SHOTS of the buildings, the parks, the city streets, the inhabitants of said streets. Over this:

JOHN (V.O.)

Two days a year -- usually 'round late May, mid July -- the sunset aligns exactly with the east-west street grid pattern. This effect, dubbed the Manhattanhenge -- after the Stonehenge, of course -- makes it so the sun's seen setting exactly over the centerline of every street in the whole city, east-west.

(beat)

One year, when I was a younger fella -- round July -- my father'n me spent all afternoon -- and most of the evening -- waiting to see this natural phenomenon with our very own eyes. After a while we couldn't help but notice we'd missed it entirely. Went right by, right under our noses. Came and went before our very own eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. MICKEY'S SPORTS BAR - MORNING

JOHN ALTON, early 50s, grizzled and worn about the edges, lies flat-out across the padded seat of a booth clutching half a bottle of bourbon to his stomach. His chest rising and falling slowly the only indicator of life in this poor, shrunken shell of a man. Suddenly a large hand rises INTO FRAME, poised to strike, accompanied by a shout:

MAN (O.S.)

John!

No answer. At once the mighty, heavy paw comes down hard across John's cheek, slapping life into him from the moment of contact. He sits up, bugs his eyes out, presses up against the wall behind him as if to recoil from the blow. In the process spills most of the remaining bourbon on his shirt, and his undone tie.

MAN (O.S.)
 ...John?

After giving his surroundings a quick once-over John sighs deeply, sits up and tiredly rubs the exhaust from his eyes.

JOHN
 Yeah, Mic?

MAN (O.S.)
 Christ, John. For a moment there I thought maybe you'd lost your pulse.

John checks for himself, grunts, a bit sadly:

JOHN
 Nah, still kickin'.

Wearily he props himself up, slides out of the booth and onto his feet. His knees give a bit. He stammers, wobbles drunkenly, grunts again.

MAN (O.S.)
 You alright?

JOHN
 Not particularly, but I'll live.

MICKEY, early 50s, grizzled in a far more dignified way, helps keep John on his feet, leads him slowly to the front door now.

MICKEY
 You're a monster, you know that?

JOHN
 So I've been told.

MICKEY
 What're you trying to do exactly, kill yourself? I know I got no right to say it, but -- hell, John, you're just too damn old to be carrying on like this. Sooner or later you're gonna have to start thinking about your health.

JOHN
 My *health*...? Shit. You know who you remind me of?

Mickey stops in his tracks -- meaning John does, too.

MICKEY
 Who's that?

JOHN
 My mother. Get my hat, willya?

Mickey frowns, turns and grabs an old, tattered fedora off a nearby coat rack, only a few paces from the front door now. He hands it to John, shakes his head forlornly.

MICKEY

Don't mind me, I'm just trying to help. Just noticed you were looking a little worse for wear, is all.

JOHN

(putting on fedora)
I don't much doubt that, Mic.
(then)
So what do I owe ya?

MICKEY

What do you got?

John jams a hand in his trouser pocket, fishes around. Whistles loudly.

JOHN

Not much. You take lint?

Mickey sighs again, puts a hand on John's shoulder, starts pushing him out the door.

MICKEY

Guess that means I gotta let it slide. Again.

JOHN

Just put it on my tab, huh?

Mickey opens the door, maneuvers John through the doorway.

MICKEY

(sighs)
And exactly what choice do I got?
Just don't be surprised if I
throw in a little extra for
maintenance and care.

JOHN

I won't hold it against you.

He stops, out the door now, and crosses his heart.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Scout's honor.

And with that, Mickey shuts him out.

EXT. MICKEY'S SPORTS BAR - CONT'D

John sighs, turns, peers out over the empty streets before him, still cast mostly in shadow at this hour. A bit woozily he steps out onto the sidewalk, then onto the street, crosses the empty intersection.

JOHN (V.O.)
Wasn't more than six, six thirty.
Plenty more time to rest. Plenty
time to clean myself up again.

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING, STAIRWAY

John slowly trudges up the stairs, gripping the railing for dear life. He reaches in his coat, fumbles for his keys.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
Didn't plan on being busy, at any
rate. Not like you could blame me.

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING, HALLWAY

John tiredly stumbles down the hall to one of the last doors near the end, with "OFFICES OF JOHN ALTON, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR" printed on the glass, cracked and peeling. He reaches the door and raises his keys, tries to fit them in the front lock a few times, unsuccessfully, before finally pulling it off. He pushes the door open, stumbles in, slides it closed behind him.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
Folks ain't got much use for people
in my line of work. Not any more,
at least.
(beat)
Pop always called us a dying breed.
Can't say I blame him much, either.

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - CONT'D

The office lies in shambles. A desk, two tattered chairs and even more tattered couch make up the only furniture in the room -- at least, all that's visible in plain sight, and not hidden under piles of clothing and other debris. An eight-by-ten framed headshot of Humphrey Bogart hangs nearby, holding court over the office with a perpetually amused smirk.

John pulls his jacket off, tosses it carelessly on his desk. Begins removing his wet tie, untucking his wet shirt, unbuttoning the dampened cuffs.

JOHN (V.O.)

At this point all I can really ask of you is that you don't judge me. And don't try to make no sense outta this, neither. I imagine you'll only end up hurting yourself.

He sees a bottle of booze lying on the edge of his desk, likely warmed over. Pauses. Grabs it, tosses what's left down. Almost brings it up again. It's hot.

JOHN

Nasty shit...

He puts the bottle down, wipes his mouth and curses.

He paces the room for a few moments, aimlessly, still tugging at his damp cuffs. Pauses before Bogart's visage and grunts:

JOHN

Keep smiling, fella. Go right ahead.

He goes over to the couch, pushes some things aside, makes some room -- enough to lie down, spread himself out.

Which, of course, he does.

JOHN

(mutters)

Just keep smiling...

He yawns, rolls over on his side, folds his hands under his head...and within moments is passed out all over again.

FADE TO:

BLACK. Silence, for a few beats. Then sounds of KNOCKING pierce this silence, in an urgent RAT-TAT-TAT fashion.

SLAM UP:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - EARLY EVENING

About twelve hours later, give or take. John, remarkably, is still passed out in that same position on his pitiful excuse for a couch. After another loud bout of RAT-TAT-TAT he springs to life, eyes shooting open.

JOHN (V.O.)

Seems the goddamn stars had aligned, brought someone to my door.

(beat)

They must be lost.

With some effort he lifts himself up off the couch, takes a moment to collect himself, moves for the door.

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Could be Mrs. Grenowski again,
 her and her fucking cats. No doubt
 ready to gimme an earful about
 what a hopeless schmuck I am.

Upon reaching the door he stops, scratches at his neck.
 Shouts to the person at the opposite side:

JOHN
 Yeah?

WOMAN (O.S.)
 ...John Alton?

He can't place the voice, looks up at the shadowy, vague silhouette staring back at him through the glass. Squints.

JOHN (V.O.)
 How long's it been, since I heard
 a woman say my name? A real, bona-
 fide, honest-to-god woman?

JOHN
 Yes ma'am?

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 ...On second thought, I'd rather
 not remember.

WOMAN (O.S.)
 May I come in?

John unlocks the door, pulls it open. A tall, beautiful blonde -- MARLENE CAMPBELL, mid 30s -- steps in carrying a large leather satchel and takes a look around. Obviously isn't impressed by what she sees. After an awkward beat:

MARLENE
 (uneasily)
 Mr. Alton, I was...wondering if
 you could help me, possibly?

JOHN
 Very possible, ma'am.

He motions to his desk, and the ratty chair in front of it.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Take a seat.

She crosses to the chair, takes another look around, crinkles her nose. Tries to be debonair regardless. She sits, lays the satchel down at her feet.

John closes the door behind her, eyes her suspiciously.

Slowly crosses behind the desk and lowers himself into an equally ratty chair.

JOHN
Now what'd you have in mind,
miss?

Marlene, eyes on the couch (and the pile of clothing on said couch), slowly guides her glance towards John, a bit baffled.

MARLENE
I'm sorry were you -- were you
sleeping? When I knocked? I
didn't wake you, did I?

JOHN
(stammering)
No, I was, uh -- I was working.
Just, ah...looking over some
notes, files. That whole deal.

MARLENE
Oh. Right. Well I'm sorry if
I disturbed you, but I...well I
was just wondering if maybe you
might have some free time, to--

He jumps at this, a little too quickly.

JOHN
Of course!

MARLENE
You mean of course as in you do?
So you're not busy, then?

John shoots his eyes at something past her, momentarily:
A calendar hangs on the wall adjacent to Marlene, on the
month of November. From the looks of it he's free all month.

JOHN
I got a little time to spare,
sure.

MARLENE
The only reason I ask is that
I...well see I think I might have
a job for you, Mr. Alton. If you'd
be interested of course.

Beat. John stares across the table, bug-eyed, then slowly
forces a smile. Over this:

JOHN (V.O.)
How long had I been waiting to
hear those words again?
Especially coming outta such a
fine pair of lips...

JOHN
Oh...? Well I'm all ears, ma'am.

Another forced smile, from the other side of the table now. John reaches in his pocket, pulls out a pack of cigarettes. Takes one out, offers one to Marlene. She shakes her head.

MARLENE
Oh, no. That's--

JOHN
No offense darlin', but you look like you could use one. Do ya good.

A beat. She nods, takes one, puts it to her lips.

MARLENE
...Sure. Thank you.

JOHN
Need a light?

MARLENE
That would be great.

He shuffles some debris around on his desk, much to Marlene's dismay and shielded disgust. After a few moments he manages to dislodge a small matchbook, strikes one.

He leans over and lights the cigarette between her lips, then with the same match, his own.

JOHN
So...

He takes a drag, blows a vicious O-ring. Waves the match out.

JOHN (CONT'D)
...Shoot.

MARLENE
(beat)
Mr. Alton, my name is Marlene Campbell. Three weeks ago, my husband Al -- short for Alvin -- disappeared. At first I thought maybe he'd walked out. We were, ah...

John raises his brow, intrigued.

MARLENE (CONT'D)
...having problems, you see.

JOHN
Sure. Husband-and-wife sorta problems?

MARLENE

Yes, that's right. Only what threw me off was that he...well, he hadn't actually *taken* anything; everything was just as I'd left it, no clothes missing, no valuables, nothing out of the ordinary. It didn't seem like a planned departure, at least not as far as I could tell. After some time I became...well understandably, I was quite worried.

JOHN

Of course.

MARLENE

When I woke up the next morning he was still gone. I thought well, okay, maybe he'd spent the night elsewhere -- it wouldn't be the first time. But even when I returned that night, he was still nowhere to be found. He'd never done anything like that before -- just leave without saying anything, disappear all night, all day. It just wasn't like him.

John nods, takes another drag, exhales. Then:

JOHN

So you figured something was up?

MARLENE

That's right. Naturally I called the police. They said they hadn't gotten any reports, but promised to look into it and tell me if and when anything came up.

(beat)

I didn't hear one word for the next two weeks. Two weeks, Mr. Alton. Do you know how hard that is, for a woman? For a *wife*...? My husband disappears for two weeks, without a trace, and I -- I don't know anything about it. Don't even know if he's *safe*...

She has tears in her eyes now, tries to fight back to urge to break down and sob right in the middle of this dank, depressing excuse for an office.

John is, understandably, kind of embarrassed for her. The whole situation's steering into awkward territory, and he's not even manning the damn ship.

MARLENE (CONT'D)

(beat)

So, I...I get a call one evening.
It's the police. They've found him.
He...oh, *excuse me*...

She pauses for a moment, lowers her head. Produces a handkerchief from her purse and dabs at her wet eyes.

JOHN

It's okay miss, ah...

MARLENE

Campbell.

JOHN

Right, Miss Campbell. Please,
just take your time.

She dabs for another beat or two, sniffles, raises her head.

MARLENE

They said he'd killed himself.
Drove himself right off the
Triborough Bridge. A passing boat
saw something down in the water,
called it in. They fished it out.
It was Al.

She dabs again, holds back a sob. John seems like he'd like to comfort her but, to his dismay, doesn't quite know how. As she continues dabbing at her eyes she reaches back into her pocketbook, pulls out something else: A photograph. She hands it to John, who looks it over gravely.

JOHN

And this is the, ah...*deceased*?
This is your husband, then?

MARLENE

(weepy)

That's Al. Poor, sweet Al.

John looks at her, then back down at the picture again.

In it Marlene is framed with a man -- handsome, boyish Al -- with their arms draped around each other, beaming joyously at the camera. A casual snapshot, from the looks of it.

JOHN

(low)

Huh. Handsome fella...

He looks back over at Marlene, who's slowly starting to compose herself again.

JOHN (CONT'D)

And the, ah, "incident", if you
may...when did this take place?

MARLENE
Three weeks ago.

JOHN
(thinks)
Right. Yeah. Pretty sure I read something about that, actually. Said he was driving a, uh--

MARLENE
An Oldsmobile.

JOHN
Bing-o.

MARLENE
Yes and well, here's the thing, Mr. Alton: We don't own an Oldsmobile. Never have.

JOHN
Maybe he rented the car, borrowed it from a friend?

MARLENE
It would be possible, but no. Believe me when I say I did a little fact-checking of my own, and frankly the car is still a mystery. But do you know what really disturbed me, Mr. Alton?

John shakes his head "no."

MARLENE (CONT'D)
They wouldn't let me see the body. Wouldn't even let me identify my own husband.

JOHN
(murmurs)
Then how'd they know it was...

And even before the words are out of his mouth, he gets the gist of where this is going. Marlene nods knowingly.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Ah-ha. Okay. So now you think--

MARLENE
I'd rather not say what I think, Mr. Alton. It's just an...idea.

JOHN
Right. So then, this idea of yours -- that they're, ah, "hiding" your husband -- or, at least, the man they say is your husband...this leads you to believe that he's -- well, not? Your husband, I mean.

It takes her a moment to wrap her head around the confused, rambling nature of what he's just laid out. Nods.

MARLENE
That's the gist of it, yes.

JOHN
Huh.

He contemplates for a moment, takes another drag, blows another O-ring. A beat.

JOHN
Let me just say this, Miss Campbell: If I were a betting man, I wouldn't put my chips down just yet.

Marlene sighs, closes her eyes for a moment. Seems a bit disappointed by his analysis, but offers indifferently:

MARLENE
Either way, I'd still like to know.

JOHN
Know what?

She opens her eyes, purses her lips. All business.

MARLENE
What any wife has the right to know, Mr. Alton. The truth.

And now, finally, she takes a long, liberal drag.

John sits back, ashes the remainder of his cigarette on the edge of his desk. Eyes Marlene with some curiosity. Nods.

JOHN
Fair enough. So now I take it you want me to--

MARLENE
I want you to find out the truth, Mr. Alton. That's all I ask.

JOHN
(sighs)
Well, it's -- it's like I said: It'd be my pleasure ma'am, but all I can really promise you is that I'll do my best.

She considers this, nods. Rises to a standing position before the desk, dabs at her eyes one more time, then stashes the handkerchief back in her purse. Pulls out one more item.

MARLENE

For starters, I think this may
be of some use...

She slips the item into John's outstretched hand.

He looks down at it. Its business card for a gentleman's club named "ARABIAN NIGHTS." He furrows a brow.

MARLENE (CONT'D)

They claimed to have found it
on him when...well, you know.

John studies the card, nods, then tucks it into his own pocket.

JOHN

Truthfully speaking, ma'am, if
this theory of yours holds any
weight it could very well mean
nothing at all. Probably just to
throw you off, or explain the,
ah, "disappearance."

MARLENE

(resigned)

Frankly that's for you to find
out, Mr. Alton. And I do wish
you luck.

She turns abruptly and starts walking out of the room,
brings the meeting to a close right then and there.

John stares after her for a few moments, slack-jawed.
Manages to call out, when she's already halfway out his
door:

JOHN

Shouldn't we discuss the, uh,
"payment plan", miss...?

She pauses, for a beat. Turns and motions towards the
satchel still sitting before his desk.

MARLENE

I'm hoping that will cover it.
At least until things get moving.

And with that she turns and walks out, leaving him entirely
to his lonesome.

He, in turn, slowly guides his eyes down to the satchel,
his curiosity piqued.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

John's eyes stare down at something with an intense, white-hot focus. Unblinking.

Then we see what he's staring at: The satchel, unzipped now to show stacks upon stacks of hundred dollar bills lining the interior. Practically a king's ransom.

JOHN (V.O.)
Well I'll be damned. The dame
thought of everything.

He continues staring for a few beats, then slowly zips the satchel up again. Runs his fingers over the leather exterior.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
By my count I had nearly ten grand
at arm's length. More money than I
even knew what to do with, let
alone knew how to spend.

He looks up at the empty doorway. Moves towards it, stops, stares down the empty hallway. No sign of anyone.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
So why this rotten feeling...?

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

John sits at his desk, smoking, staring off into space.

JOHN (V.O.)
It was a wild goose chase, if
anything. More likely it was
nothing. Poor gal. Husband gets
himself sauced, drives right
into the East River before he
can even make heads or tails
about it. Then she goes nuts
worrying, concocts some sorta
conspiracy theory to help ease
the pain. Shells out what looks
to be their life savings just
to be sure. To know the truth.
(beat)
"The truth", she called it...

He reaches for the photograph laying on his desk, repositions the desk lamp to get a better view of it. Sighs mournfully.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
Least I could do is check it out,
make sure everything's on the up-
and-up. Hell, I'd be lying if I
said I couldn't use the work.

He rises from the desk with a tired groan, flips off the lamp. Picks up his coat and heads for the door.

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Or, for that matter, the money.
Ten grand's a helluva lot to say
no to -- and I'm in no particular
position to be picky.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

John walks the sparsely inhabited street, leisurely, his collar turned up against the cool night's breeze. He passes Mickey's Sports Bar looming across the street, pauses. Turns his head to stare it down. It seems to beckon to him, in its own silent way.

He stares, hard. Considers. Grumbles to himself:

JOHN
Maybe later...

And keeps right on walking.

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX, ROOM SIX - NIGHT

CLOSE on the front door. A hand rises INTO FRAME, KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCKs. Voices chatter inside for a moment. The chime of glass against glass is heard. KNOCK-KNOCK--

On the third knock a woman, KATHY pulls the door open, obviously flustered. She's about John's age, mid 40s, a bit overdressed -- as if to show off what she's not exactly sure she's got anymore. Upon laying eyes on her visitor she seems taken aback, takes a moment to utter out:

KATHY
John? What are you--

JOHN
Is Cassie here?

John, his hands deep in his pockets, attempts to peer over her and into the apartment. She, in turn, takes a worried glance inside, steps out and pulls the door closed behind her.

KATHY
This isn't your time of the month,
is it?

JOHN
Jesus. What am I, Aunt Flo?

She rolls her eyes, telegraphs immediate disgust. He re-evaluates, changes tracks.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Look, I just wanted to talk to her for a minute or two, that's all. Just tell her the good news and then I'll be on my way.

KATHY
 Good news?

He nods, grins sheepishly. He can't help it.

JOHN
 I got a case. Or at least, one on the pipeline. Pays well, too.

KATHY
 (rolls eyes)
 That's great. You can tell her the next time you see her.

A beat. He seems taken aback by her tone, even a bit hurt.

JOHN
 Really, that's it? So you're not even gonna invite me in?

KATHY
 It's not a good time now, John.

He tries, again unsuccessfully, to peer through the crack in the doorway and into the apartment. Seems worried now.

JOHN
 Is she even--

KATHY
 No. She's...*off*, somewhere. Studying I hope. Look--

Now the door behind her is pulled open by a MAN, large, hand-some, well dressed, brandishing a martini glass. He looks at Kathy first, a bit worriedly.

MAN
 Is everything alright here?

KATHY
 Just fine. Great, actually.

He looks at John, then back at her. Not quite convinced.

KATHY (CONT'D)
 (sighs)
 Mark, this is John. John--

He extends a hand, all smiles.

MARK

--Mark. How do you do?

John stares at his outstretched hand, then up at his face. His curious eyes, his nervous-yet-charming smile.

Then he looks back over at Kathy standing beside him, feint sadness in his own eyes. He tries to speak, but can't get the right words out.

WOMAN

(beat)

Now do you get the picture, John?

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Darkness. After a beat a shadow appears at the front door, fumbling with a pair of keys. Fits one in the lock. Pushes the door open lazily. It's John. As he tosses his coat off:

JOHN (V.O.)

Less than sixteen hours on the wagon and I'm already feeling the sting.

He crosses to the middle of the room, tosses his hat off, undoes his tie. Begins unbuttoning his shirt, pauses about three buttons down to take a deep, calming breath. Shuts his eyes tight.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)

Keep it up, you craggy ol' bastard. We got a big day tomorrow.

He undoes the last few buttons, unbuttons the cuffs.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)

Day to make our mark on the world all over again. To start earning our keep, in the old-fashioned sense. Or to try to, anyway...

And as he continues to undress, peeling the clothing off like heavy armor, we slowly...

FADE OUT

SLAM UP:

INT. NONDESCRIPT ROOM

John stands in medium close-up against a stark, bare wall, monologues directly to camera:

JOHN

There was this case, a while back. I was a young buck just starting out, straight off the force and looking to scrape out a living on my own, right? Now this young couple comes to me, and almost immediately I smell trouble. Just don't like the sound of it, you know? The gal -- a young gal, about twenty-five, twenty-six, tops -- starts bawling almost right when she gets through the door, talking about her sweet ol' grandmother disappearing on her. No trace, right? Now once she's cooled down a bit I manage to make out that they'd shipped the ol' broad off to one of those homes -- like for seniors and all? Retirement homes, I guess you'd call 'em. Anyway, they'd shipped her off, and not six months later all communication's just...shut off. Like she just doggone vanished. Now of course the younger one's all upset, worried whether her ol' lady's safe and all, but they can't bear to drive up there and see so for themselves. She's in school, and hubby's got a full-time gig. They just couldn't fit it in.

He reaches into his coat, rummages.

JOHN (CONT'D)

That's exactly how they put it, too. "We just can't fit it in." *Feh...*

He pulls out a pack of cigarettes, removes one, puts it to his lips. Strikes a match and lights it, takes a long drag. As he exhales:

JOHN (CONT'D)

Of course I take the case, like the young, silly little thing I am. And of course there's more to the story.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Turns out this home -- this ah, "relaxation community", as they called it -- had a little side operation all their own. See what they'd do is, once they got the ol' birds all saddled up, they'd go out and take out a little insurance claim on 'em; don't know the specifics on that one, but they managed to net themselves quite a little bundle off the backs of these poor old slabs. And, here's the kicker -- once they had these little walking cash cows all paid up, they'd bump 'em off, systematically; one at a time and few and far between, so as to deflect any scrutiny or skepticism. Then they'd collect on the insurance claims, whip up all the forged documents they could dream up, and make themselves a small fortune in dead lil ol' ladies. It was some gruesome shit, I'll tell you that much.

(beat)

Worst part of it is, they found most of these, uh, "dearly departed" ol' hens washed up off some old sewage plant a few miles up the road. All these sweet lil' half-decomposed or worse ol' ladies, stretched out all along the fucking place. And, hell... with a buffet like that, its hard work keeping the hawks off 'em. Work I didn't quite have the strength left in me to do, to be perfectly honest.

He pauses to take another drag, his eyes almost glassy now. After exhaling he muses, a bit sadly:

JOHN

(beat)

I miss that, you know? The human element.

CUT TO:

INT. CITY PRECINCT - MORNING

John sits beside one of about a dozen or so desks in a large room, with tired-looking men in cheap suits staring blankly into their morning coffees sitting at them. These men are, of course, detectives.

John, for that matter, doesn't look too hot himself -- bags under his eyes, hair messy, face showing hints of five o' clock shadow. He could probably use a cup of coffee as well.

MAN (O.S.)
No offense buddy, but you look
like shit. Long night?

John stares at the man across from him -- DETECTIVE CARLYLE, mid 30s, sucking back the last of a Chesterfield and staring at him not unlike a bemused tourist would an animal at the zoo.

JOHN
Don't sleep much, these days.
Kinda comes with the job.

CARLYLE
I hear that, pal.
(wistfully)
It's a helluva world out there.
That much I can tell you.

JOHN
Is that all...?

Beat. The man sighs, snubs out the rest of his cigarette, disgorges a folder from the mountain of papers and similar looking folders that pepper his desk. He flips it open, scans his eyes over its contents, once. A bit too quickly.

CARLYLE
That's about it I'm afraid. Ain't
exactly like there's much to tell.

JOHN
Well, mister--

CARLYLE
(hard)
Detective. Carlyle.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I'd appreciate whatever you can
give me just the same.

Carlyle stares at John with that same curious expression for another beat, then stiffens, shrugs, scans over the contents of the folder again.

CARLYLE

Well it's like we told Miss Campbell here -- forensics showed the husband got himself piss-drunk, behind the wheel of a shit-heap he had no business driving, and plunged her right into the East River. Was practically still swimming in Jack Daniels when we dragged him out.

John lets this sink in, nods. Mulls it over.

JOHN

Any idea where he got the shit-heap? My client said she couldn't place it.

CARLYLE

Look -- no offense meant to your client, but there's a reason we get *paid* to do the snooping, right? I mean, if it were all up to fucking housewives--

JOHN

You got something or not?

CARLYLE

(pause)

Yeah, I got something. It ain't much, but if you feel like playing out a bum lead...

JOHN

A lead's a lead, as far as I'm concerned. And they all gotta lead somewhere.

Carlyle shrugs indifferently, leans over and grabs a notepad, scribbles some information on it.

CARLYLE

(as he writes)

A name and an address. Local dealer. Used, parts, second-hand...

He finishes, rips the page off, holds it out to John. John takes it, scans it, tucks it into his coat pocket.

CARLYLE (CONT'D)

Hey -- it's gotta lead *somewhere*, right?

John detects the hint of sarcasm in Carlyle's voice. Obviously doesn't appreciate being talked down to. Lets his own voice drip with condescension as he presses:

JOHN

Another thing, *detective* -- my client claims she was never shown a body. Never identified your man as the husband. Care to elaborate?

CARLYLE

Sure. The guy looked half albino, half sloppy joe -- face and body mangled all to shit, rigid and colder than ice water. Wasn't a pretty sight.

JOHN

So you did it to...?

CARLYLE

To give the little lady a break. Way we saw it, she already lost her damn husband, no use letting her set her eyes on the damage. Would have damn near broke her heart, I bet.

JOHN

Yeah, I bet.

CARLYLE

Besides, we got a positive I.D.

JOHN

Really?

Carlyle flips through the Campbell file again, whips out a document and slides it over to give John a look.

CARLYLE

Dental records. Read 'em and weep.

John scans over the document, furrows a brow.

CARLYLE (CONT'D)

Everything matches. Open-and-shut case, right?

John keeps scanning, then nods his head slowly. Doesn't seem too thrilled nor too sold, but replies, coldly:

JOHN

Yeah, open and shut.

CARLYLE

So then, *detective*, you got any more pressing questions you wanna throw my way? You wanna see the stiff?

JOHN
 (flatly)
 No, I don't think that'll be
 necessary. Thanks all the same.

Carlyle stashes the folder, rises. John follows suit.

CARLYLE
 Well then you'll excuse me if
 I bring this little meeting of
 the minds to a close?

JOHN
 Of course. I just can't promise
 this is the last you'll see of me.

CARLYLE
 In all honestly that's a chance
 I'm willing to take. Now if you
 don't mind...

He motions away from the desk with his hand, pointing
 towards the exit. John gets the hint. He takes one last look
 around, at the plain walls, the drab décor, the suit-jockeys
 looking into the bottoms of their coffee mugs. Seems almost
 remorseful.

JOHN
 (sighs)
 This place...kinda brings back
 memories.

CARLYLE
 Desk-jockey? You?

JOHN
 Worked the beat, actually.

CARLYLE
 You miss it much?

Beat. John takes a deep breath, peels his eyes off the
 walls, back onto Carlyle. Shakes his head.

JOHN
 Not one bit.

And oddly, even he doesn't seem to believe it.

CUT TO:

EXT. EAST RIVER ESPLANADE - DAY

John sits on a bench quietly accessing the polaroid of Marlene and Al Campbell. After a few moments:

JOHN (V.O.)
I contemplate the dead man. I look at his ears, his eyes, his nose, his smile...I look at her. They look happy together.

He sighs tiredly, shoves the picture back in his inner coat pocket. Stands and slowly drifts over towards the railing overlooking the East River.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
On one level, it turns my stomach.

He stares down at the water below, curiously, as if expecting to see Al's body float by at any second.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
On another, beyond all comprehension, it makes me...feh. It makes me compassionate. I must be going soft in my old age.
(beat)
My gut tells me this won't end well. But then when have I ever held stock in my own intuition?

He shakes it off, reaches back into his coat, pulls out something else -- the scrap of paper with Carlyle's info scrawled on it. We make out the words "BENNY'S AUTO WORLD", and an upper east side address.

JOHN (V.O.)
For their sake. For hers...

MATCH CUT:

EXT. BENNY'S AUTO WORLD, UPPER EAST SIDE N.Y. - DAY

John's hand still grips the scrap of paper, standing outside the lot now.

He scans over it again worriedly, as if to double check. The look on his face says it all.

Benny's "dealership" looks like little more than a spruced up junkyard, with a small handful of cars that barely even look operable placed on the "lot." On top of that, the place is downright deserted.

John approaches, a bit cautiously. Pretends to examine a few of the vehicles, makes like a perusing customer.

JOHN (V.O.)
 No wonder poor sweet Al offed
 himself. No self-respecting gasbag
 would be caught dead driving one
 of these. Probably threw himself
 overboard in lieu of being seen.

MAN (O.S.)
 (thick Southern drawl)
 Can I help you?

John looks up, sees no one. Furrows a brow. He turns to see ANOTHER MAN right standing behind him, mid 30s, in a cheap, tacky suit. With his hair greased back and his smile hardly masking an insidious undertone, he fits the standard mold of "shady auto dealer" like a glove.

JOHN
 (uneasy)
 I was, uh...are you the owner?

The man's smile broadens. He sticks out a hand, forcing John into a shaking situation.

MAN
 Benny Brickman, mister...?

JOHN
 (shakes)
 Alton. John Alton.

Benny nods, motions to a nearby car.

BENNY
 I couldn't help but notice you
 were eyeing this little beauty here.
 You interested?

JOHN
 Just taking a look, actually. As
 a matter of fact--

BENNY
 Oh, sure sure. I understand.
 You're not sure if it's a good fit,
 right?

JOHN
 Well--

BENNY (CONT'D)
 Or maybe you're not even sure if
 you're, shall we say -- "in the
 market?"

JOHN
 That's not--

BENNY (CONT'D)
 Let me -- John? John -- Let me
 just see if I can't just change
 your mind, huh?

JOHN
 Well actually, I was--

BENNY
 Thing is, I've been there.
 Yeah, sure. I know what you're
 thinking: Successful looking guy
 like you? Really? YES, John. Yes.
 When I bought my first car I was
 around -- oh, about your age. What
 are you, twenty-four, twenty-five?

John clearly does *not* look a day shy of forty, though he
 seems a bit flattered all the same.

BENNY (CONT'D)
 Yeah, sure. I was young, naive...
 I thought, why not spring for
 something flashy? Something
 that'll get the chicks wet, you
 know? Have them stripping off
 their panties the minute they see
 me driving down the block. And
 why the heck not?

JOHN
 Actually, uh--

BENNY (CONT'D)
 I'll tell you why, John. John?
John -- you need something
 dependable. Something that'll
 get you from point A to point B,
 that won't crap out on you the
 minute--

JOHN
 (forcefully)
 Actually, I'm not really here
 for that.

A beat. Benny's plastered-on smile fades, slowly, replaced
 now by a nervous, shady glare.

BENNY
 Well, I...what exactly can I help
 you with, sir?

JOHN
 That's the thing--

BENNY
 Wait, wait...are you a cop?

John sighs, reaches into his coat, pulls out a wallet. Flips the front flap to reveal a weathered, worn badge. Benny tenses right up.

JOHN
Not exactly. P.I.

Benny stares back, blankly.

JOHN (CONT'D)
...Private Investigator?

Nothing doing.

JOHN (CONT'D)
(sighs)
Detective.

BENNY
But you just said--

JOHN
I ain't a cop, Benny. I'm freelance.

Benny -- not quite seeming to understand -- nods anyway, if only to appease John, who pockets the badge and elaborates:

JOHN (CONT'D)
I got a case. Guy drives himself off the Triborough bridge, wife thinks it's a cover-up, yadda yadda yadda. Point is, he was driving one of your tin-cans. An Oldsmobile.

BENNY
Who...?

JOHN
Don't worry, seems you didn't deal with him directly.

BENNY
O-Oh?

JOHN
Which means I gotta ask: Who did you sell her to?

A beat. Benny looks at John, then the car closest to them, then back, faint traces of tears in his eyes now.

BENNY
S-So you don't wanna buy...?

JOHN
(flatly)
Nah, Benny. I don't want the car.

BENNY

B-But--

JOHN

No, Benny. I ain't buying this...

He looks at the car in disgust, kicks the back tire.

JOHN (CONT'D)

...this fuckin' jalopy!

That does it. Benny begins openly sobbing now, falls to his knees and blubbers like a schoolgirl. All very dramatic.

John looks on, a bit taken aback. Clearly embarrassed.

JOHN (V.O.)

(beat)

Ten grand. A whole stinking ten grand.

CUT TO:

EXT. BENNY'S AUTO WORLD - DAY

In a little makeshift hut of an office at the back of the lot, John can be seen through the window trying to calm down Benny. As the latter sits slumped behind his desk, tears streaking his face and shaking, John reaches into his pocket, pulls out his wallet, removes a bill. He holds the bill before Benny's face, moves it up and down as you would a toy before a small child. Benny smiles sheepishly, grabs at it. Slowly composes himself. Over this:

JOHN (V.O.)

Took quite an effort, but eventually I managed to get ol' Benny to piece himself together again. In any case, enough to give me some information.

CUT TO:

EXT. BENNY'S AUTO WORLD - DAY

Benny, still seen through the window, scrawls something on a scrap of paper and hands it to John. John places another bill on the edge of his desk, takes the scrap and leaves.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)

A name and an address.

(beat)

Maybe my luck was changing. I just can't say for better or for worse.

Benny watches him go, pulls out a handkerchief, dabs at his red, teary eyes a couple times more.

CUT TO:

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING, STAIRWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

John huffs and puffs tiredly up the stairs, mops the sweat from his brow. Rummages for his keys.

At the top of the stairs an elderly woman -- MRS. GRENOWLSKI, she of many cats -- begins making her slow, labored descent. At a certain point the two cross paths. John tips his hat, feigns neighborly courtesy.

JOHN
Evening, ma'am.

She scoffs, looks away in disgust. He in turn averts his eyes, hustles up the rest of the flight looking downright ashamed.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

John comes in, doesn't hit the lights. We lose him in the darkness, for a moment. Then the desk lamp flips on, illuminating the room and John, who stares down solemnly at his desk.

He takes a knee, fiddles with the lock on the last drawer of the lot. Puts in the combo -- which is, of course, 6-6-6 -- and it pops right off. He pulls the drawer open.

JOHN (V.O.)
I haven't used a piece since...
1995, I think.

He fiddles with a second lock, on a small metal lock-box inside the drawer. After some hesitation it, too, pops off. He opens the box.

Inside a large .50 caliber desert eagle lies inert, looking just as untouched as he claims. A small box of bullets lies inset.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
Part of me hopes I won't have to
use it tonight. The other part
thinks I'm wasting my time even
touching the fucking thing.

He takes hold of the weapon, weighs it in his hands. Wraps his fingers around the grip, fits his index finger around the trigger, gives it a few squeezes -- CLICK, CLICK, CLICK.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
Thing about guns is, well...I just
don't like 'em. Don't let the whole
"Private Dick" thing throw you off,
either. My father hated guns. Cops
hate guns -- well the ones with
any sense, anyhow.

After examining the weapon for another beat he snugs it into the back of his waistband, grabs the box of bullets, closes the lock-box once again. Stashes it away.

He closes the drawer, pops the lock back on it, gets up.

Flips off the desk lamp, crosses through the darkness back over to the door. Over this:

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
 The people who do like guns, the people who do fetishize 'em -- well, shoot; they're usually the ones who end up in the emergency room with their fingers blown off, or a nice hunk of metal wedged right up the ass. And those are light consequences, if you can imagine.

He pauses at the door, takes a look up and down the hall as if to watch out for spectators. Obviously even having the thing on him makes him kind of paranoid.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
 Like I said, it's best to leave 'em alone if you got any sense.

After making sure the coast is clear he steps out, closes the door softly behind him. Locks up.

JOHN (V.O.)
 (beat)
 One night in, I'm already breaking my own rules.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

John sits at the end of a car, alone on a two-seater. Beat. He slowly guides his glance over to the middle of the car, where his sole traveling companion sits: A YOUNG WOMAN, pop/punk chic, who keeps darting her eyes towards him and back. Shaking terribly. A total ball of nerves.

John continues to stare, curiously.

Through the ear-buds jammed in her ears, one can hear faint sounds of screaming, panting, and crying. It's not music, exactly -- more like a snuff film in audio form.

She continues to glance over and back, head and body unmoving. The shaking only gets worse.

Slowly John peels his eyes off her, a bit freaked out himself.

It's safe to say the rest of the ride is...uncomfortable, for both parties.

CUT TO:

INT. BUYER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

On a wooden door. Beat. Suddenly it's blown backwards -- almost off the hinges -- by pure force.

John stands in the doorway, his gun drawn, leg raised. He lowers it, slowly, and creeps into the room. No reaction from within, just dead silence. Unsurprisingly, no one rolls out the welcome mat for him.

JOHN (V.O.)
I knocked. Honest.

He takes a look around and catches his bearings, appears to be standing in the living room. There's furniture around but, other than that, no signs of any actual inhabitance.

Slowly he stalks past the connected kitchen, heading down a long hallway. All but one of three doors down this hall are open.

He sticks his gun through one, then his head.

It's a bedroom, with a bed, some furniture around...

He looks over at the open closet, gun still raised.

Everything's been ripped off the hangers. A few articles of clothing lie in a pile on the floor, discarded.

Slowly John exits back out into the hall, looking a bit perplexed now. He moves to the second door -- gun first, then his head, and looks inside.

It's another bedroom, smaller than the first. This one has almost no furniture in it save for a lone, tattered mattress.

The closet is, of course, emptied out.

He sticks his head out, back into the hall. Slowly creeps towards the last, closed door now.

Pauses before it. Looks down to see a small sliver of light emanating from within.

He leans against the doorway, gun angled towards the floor. Takes a deep breath. Calls out:

JOHN
I don't want any trouble, alright?
I'm just here to talk!
(no response)
I-I have a gun! I know how to use
it too, okay?

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)
 I don't want any funny business,
 and I'm sure you don't want to
 get shot, right? So let's just be
 cool, and have ourselves a nice,
 friendly chat...

Still no response. He gets a little impatient now.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Sure, fine! Okay! This is how
 you wanna play it, I'm game!
 You got -- you got THREE SECONDS
 to open this door, alright?

Not a peep. Silence.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Three seconds, pal! I sure fuckin'
 hope you can count...

Still nothing. It's go time.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Three...

His grip on the pistol is shaky. He tightens it.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 ...Two...

He waits a few extra seconds for a reaction. Gets none.

JOHN
 This is -- okay! You wanted this,
 now we're gonna have to -- JUST
 OPEN THE FUCKING DOOR, HUH?!

Nada. That clinches it. He raises his leg, hollers:

JOHN
 Fuck this -- ONE!

INT. BUYER'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM - CONT'D

The front door comes flying backwards, again almost completely off the hinges. John scuttles in, pistol raised, looking like he's ready for anything.

There's nothing. It's a small, cramped bathroom which, given the looks of the medicine cabinet -- open, with most of the contents spilled out and spots missing, as if someone carelessly raided it in a hurry -- has been recently deserted. Just like the rest of the place. After taking in his surroundings John lowers the pistol, breathes a heavy, relieved sigh. Mops the sweat from his brow.

JOHN
 (low)
 Fuck me...

He takes another look around. Peels back the curtain on the shower, finds no one hiding inside. Looks out the little window, sees no one running from the place. Even checks the damn toilet bowl. Zilch.

JOHN (V.O.)
 She's like an onion, this one.
 Every time I pry she pulls back
 another layer, more deeper-hidden
 than the last.

Beat. He re-sheathes his pistol, curses his rotten luck. Slowly guides his eyes over to the medicine cabinet.

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And sooner or later, I'm stuck
 bawling like a goddamned infant.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

John sits behind his desk -- his coat off, tie undone, cuffs unbuttoned -- unscrewing the cap off a bottle of pills. He pops a couple in his mouth, gulps 'em down. Swallows. Washes them down with a glass of scotch.

After relaxing for a few beats, letting the mix of painkillers and scotch have their way with him, he leans forward, picks up the receiver off an old rotary telephone sitting on his desk. He dials a number. After a few RINGS, a familiar voice answers:

KATHY (PHONE)
 ...Hello?

JOHN
 (into phone)
 It's me. Cassie there?

KATHY (PHONE)
 John? What are you--

JOHN
 I want to talk to my daughter,
 Kathy. Christ. What, you gotta
 screen my calls now too?

KATHY (PHONE)
 I'm just asking, John. There's
 no need to be so defensive.

JOHN
 (sighs)
 I wasn't -- look just put Cassie
 on, okay?

KATHY (PHONE)
She's not here.

A beat. John sighs, rubs his eyes tiredly, stammers.

JOHN
What -- what are you saying...?
What time is it?

KATHY (PHONE)
Eleven thirty.

JOHN
And she's--

KATHY (PHONE)
At a friend's.

JOHN
(beat)
Jesus H. Are you--

KATHY (PHONE)
What? Am I *what*, John? You think
I'm lying? Should I go double
check for you?

John makes like he's gonna answer, instead stammers, rubs his eyes again. Sighs heavily.

JOHN
That's...no. It's okay, forget it.

KATHY (PHONE)
...Are you okay, John?

JOHN
Just fine.

KATHY (PHONE)
Really? Because from my end, you
honestly sound--

JOHN
I'm tired, is all. Good night,
Kathy. I'm sorry I disturbed you.

With that he slams the receiver down on the hook, curses. Eyes the scotch. Pours himself another glass, gulps it down. Tries to relax.

Practically lost to the deadly painkillers/hard scotch combo now he rises, a bit uneasily, and heads for the couch.

JOHN (V.O.)
Easy there, killer. We've had a
pretty eventful day. At least,
eventful by *our* standards.

He pushes some clothes around, lowers himself to the tattered upholstery with a groan. Kicks off his shoes one by one. Spreads out, gets comfortable - or tries to, anyway.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
 Pretty much narrows this sucker
 down to one lead, now. We'll chase
 her tomorrow.

His eyes fall upon the satchel across the room, sitting there untouched. Practically calling out to him.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
 And, hell...maybe we'll do it in
 style.

CUT TO:

INT. NYC YELLOW CAB (MOVING) - DAY

John sits in the backseat of a cab staring wistfully out at the city passing by his window. We hear someone fiddle with a radio, preceding a loud blast of 80s hair-metal on the cab's tinny speakers. John sighs, looks over at:

The DRIVER -- a large, hulking black male in a tattered tee-shirt and wearing a kippah atop his shiny dome -- who bangs his head intensely to the music.

JOHN
 (barely audible)
 Could you turn that down please?

The driver stops banging, seems to stiffen up a bit. Otherwise doesn't do a damn thing. John persists.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Sir? Sir...? Mister, ah...

He looks at the mock-up driver's license plastered to the back of the guy's seat. Reads the name printed on it:

" RICHARD T. NIXON "

A broad smile appears on his face now. He tries to stifle a laugh, leans over and taps the driver's shoulder.

JOHN
 Hey look, I'm sorry to ask this
 and all but...Richard Nixon? Come
 on, is that for real or--

The driver turns his head to look at him now, fire in his eyes. His knuckles turn white as his grip instantly tightens on the steering wheel. Apparently, John's crossed the line.

RICHARD NIXON
 (loudly)
 What, motherfucker?! What the --
 what the hell you tryin' to say?

JOHN
W-Well I, ah...

RICHARD NIXON
Yeah -- ah yeah, motherfucker!
See that? White as a goddamn sheet
now, ain'tcha? No more smart
motherfucker in the back, huh?

JOHN
Whoa buddy, look--

RICHARD NIXON
I ain't your buddy motherfucker!
Don't be callin' me your goddamn
buddy!

JOHN
That's--

RICHARD NIXON
Ah-ha! You scared now, huh? No
more big talk, huh? No more -- no
more askin' me to turn down my
music -- my goddamn *music*, man?
My own car, can't even listen to
my own motherfuckin' music? Nah,
nah -- Miss Drive-Me fuckin' Daisy
in the back don't like that. Too
much *noise* for her. Well -- look
at me, white boy--
(he does)
This is my ride, and I do as I
goddamn please. Shit, man.
Where's your goddamn manners...?

JOHN
I'm sorry, I was just--

RICHARD NIXON
Yeah, you sorry. You're gonna
be sorry, I'll tell you that
much. Shit...

Beat. He keeps his eyes on the road, seems to be talking to himself more than anyone else when he continues:

RICHARD NIXON
When the revolution come, you
best believe your ass gonna be
the first against the mother-
fuckin' wall, motherfucker.

He turns a dial on the dash, raising the music.

RICHARD NIXON (CONT'D)
Might even make you my *bitch*...

They drive in silence for the next few moments, before Nixon runs the car sharply off the road, pulls over. He turns his head to look at John dead-on, fire still in his eyes.

RICHARD NIXON

This where you get off, white boy.
Now get the fuck out my cab.

Without making a peep John hands over a couple bills, pops his door open, and slides out of the cab.

EXT. CITY STREET, CURBSIDE - CONT'D

John stretches upon stepping out onto the curb, takes a deep breath. Leans down a bit to stare at Nixon in the cab and extends a hand, with some caution:

JOHN

Could I get my change--

Before he can finish Nixon slams on the gas, tearing ass off the scene. John watches the cab race away for a beat wearing an odd expression on his face. Then as if deciding not to bother he simply shrugs it off, starts hoofing it the rest of the way.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

John walks, leisurely. The streets are teeming with patrons of the smoke shops, the sex shops, street vendors and vagrants. Brimming with life.

JOHN (V.O.)

The village. I walk amongst filth.
I breathe it in my nostrils, down
into my lungs, let it enter my
bloodstream. Let it corrupt.

(beat)

The filth...I wouldn't have it
any other way.

After a few moments he rounds a corner and continues for a few beats, eventually comes to a stop before a club whose awning blazes the name "ARABIAN NIGHTS".

He walks right up to someone standing out front: A young, 30-something Brazilian female, strutting her stuff in pumps, hot-pants, and a small studded bra which leaves perilously little to the imagination.

JOHN

Hey, Co-Co.

She locks eyes on him, smiles broadly.

CO-CO
 (thick Brazilian)
 Aye, 'ello J-ohn!

CO-CO -- for whatever reason -- seems particularly excited by her unexpected visitor, proceeds to wrap her arms around his neck and peck at his cheek. John hems and haws a bit before stepping out of her embrace, cheeks slowly turning scarlet.

JOHN
 (uneasy)
 Is, uh...is Tony around?

CO-CO
 An-Tonee? 'Vey of course!

She pulls the front door to the place open, motions for John to pass through. He hesitates.

CO-CO
 Go right in. Go on, honee...

JOHN
 Thanks.

He tips his hat, slinks inside.

INT. ARABIAN NIGHTS - CONT'D

The club is understandably devoid of customers, it being mid-day and all. At the bar up front, TONY -- late 30s, Italian, in a cheap Armani knock-off -- sips scotch, scans over a paper spread out on the counter before him. John saunters in, walks up to the bar, stops right behind the unsuspecting Italian. Makes a "gun" with his fingers and sticks it into the small of Tony's back. Tony stops sipping, tenses right up.

JOHN
 (as Western gunslinger)
 Put 'em up, Wayne.

Tony relaxes a bit, recognizing the voice at once.

TONY
 What are you, fuckin' nuts?

He swivels around, pulls back the flap of his cheap jacket so John can get a view of the pistol tucked into his waistband.

TONY (CONT'D)
 If I didn't know any better, you'd
 be kissin' the floor right now.

He covers the gun again, not looking all too pleased.

JOHN

You got a license for that thing?

TONY

Yeah, I got a fucking license.
The hell kinda two-bit hoodlum
you think I am?

JOHN

The kind with delusions of
grandeur. Don't worry, there's
no need to turn this place into
the wild west. I just wanted us
to have a little chat.

TONY

What's up...?

JOHN

I got a case.

TONY

I'm happy for you.

JOHN

Meaning I've got some questions.

Tony finishes his scotch, sighs, hoists himself up off his stool with a lazy groan. He eyes John suspiciously, remarks, with some distaste:

TONY

It's always something with you,
eh? Come on, walk with me.

He begins moving towards the stage, with John in tow.

TONY (CONT'D)

Now what the hell are ya
bothering me for, exactly?

JOHN

Just playing a last ditch lead,
is all. Shouldn't take too much
time out of your busy schedule.

TONY

You're right, I *am* busy -- so
spit it out and brush off, let me
run my respectable business in
some fuckin' peace. What are we
talking about...?

JOHN
 Couple weeks back, guy gets
 boozed up and sinks his ride into
 the East River. His wife--

They pass a dolled-up STRIPPER, who immediately catches
 Tony's eye, as well as his undivided attention.

TONY
 (to John)
 Hold on.
 (after her)
 Candy, Candy -- what the hell are
 we, savages? What do I always say?
 Don't be afraid to flaunt, baby!
Flaunt! Okay...?

He looks back at John, shakes his head sadly.

TONY (CONT'D)
 Continue.

JOHN
 (beat)
 The wife comes to me, says there's
 more to the story. Police cover-up,
 someone playing switcheroo with
 the cadavers, who the hell knows.

TONY
 And so you're on my case, why?

John reaches in his coat, pulls out the business card.
 Slides it into Tony's palm.

JOHN
 He had this on him when they
 dragged him out.

Tony looks down at the card quizzically, furrows a brow.

TONY
 Huh. And who's this fella, again?

JOHN
 Name was Al Campbell -- short for
 Alvin. Ring any bells?

Tony stops, turns, gives John a pat on the arm. Hands the
 card back with an indifferent shrug.

TONY
Never heard of the guy.

JOHN
Really? No one ever step in here
by that name? Not once?

TONY
I don't know, Christ. How the
fuck should I know? Lots of guys
come in here, lots don't use
their real names -- for obvious
reasons -- and hell, we don't ask.
I'm not saying he was never here,
but I never fuckin' heard of the
guy. As far as I know, he coulda
been anyone.

JOHN
Wait a second...

He reaches in his coat, pulls out the picture of Marlene and Al, hands it over. Tony gives him a curious look, then stares down at the picture curiously.

TONY
This is him, here?

JOHN
So I'm told. You ever seen him
before...?

TONY
No.

He hands the picture back, shrugs again. John seems crest-fallen.

TONY (CONT'D)
Tough luck, kiddo.

John shoves the picture back in his coat, shakes his head glumly. Remarks, with a weary sigh:

JOHN
You know, that -- that just about
tears it. Believe it or not, I
think I'm officially out of leads.

TONY
The Great Shamus? Say it ain't so!

He sees the look on John's face, changes tracks. Gives him another sympathetic pat on the arm.

TONY (CONT'D)
Come on. No frets, huh? You'll
come up with something.

He gives him a parting grin, then hops up on the stage and begins walking towards the back of the place. After a few steps he turns, calls out again:

TONY (CONT'D)
Hell, I'll guarantee it!

...and keeps walking.

John turns, hangs his head. Behind him Tony crosses paths with Candy again, remarks, barely audible:

TONY
Jeezus, what the -- I said *flaunt*!
This ain't a fuckin' peep-show,
gorgeous!

A bit nervously, Candy begins unlacing her top.

John meanwhile crosses back to the bar, looking downright beat. He finds Co-Co there waiting for him, drink in hand.

CO-CO
Why zee long face, J-ohn?

JOHN
I'm between a rock and a hard
place, honey.

Co-co considers, nods gravely. Takes a sip of her martini. Then:

CO-CO
Yah, I've been 'zere.

John stares at her with askance, then looks over at the BARTENDER. Pulls out and waves a hundred dollar bill.

JOHN
Get me the strongest thing you've
got, and lots of it.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - SUNDOWN

John walks -- nay, rather stumbles drunkenly -- down the street, almost knocking over or into passing pedestrians. The look on his face says it all. He's shit out of luck.

JOHN (V.O.)

Seems to me that the only thing left to do is throw in the damn towel. Nothing new, of course. Just another item on a long list of failings and disappointments.

He bumps into one passing stranger, a young BUSINESSMAN by the looks of him. The guy, still walking, looks over his shoulder and fumes:

BUSINESSMAN

Watch your fuckin' step, asshole!

John looks over at him, walking still in the opposite direction, and grumbles incoherently. Flips him off.

JOHN (V.O.)

(beat)

You blew it, Marlowe.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

John shambles over to his desk, his hat in his hand, barely even able to walk straight. He drops himself into his ratty chair with a loud groan, puts his hat down, rubs the exhaust from his eyes tiredly.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)

Yeah, you blew it.

Still rubbing, he whines, aloud:

JOHN

And what the fuck was I supposed to do? It's a bum case!

JOHN (V.O.)

Sure, blame the damn case.

JOHN

(pissy)

Aw, shut the hell up!

He leans forward, rests his elbows on the edge of the desk, runs his fingers through his hair. Sighs heavily. After a few moments a VOICE very much like John's own speaks, coming from an unseen source in the office.

VOICE
So what's the plan?

JOHN
Well, I...

He looks up, swallows hard. Looks around the office, before resting his eyes on the satchel.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I'll give the money back, I suppose. After taking a small cut for the labor.

VOICE
And you're okay with that?

JOHN
Yeah, I'm okay with that.

VOICE
You know, there are..."other" options.

John's face goes white. He gets the message.

JOHN
Oh no. No no no--

VOICE
No *what*?

JOHN
I ain't -- I ain't just taking the money, flat-out. It ain't fair.

VOICE
But it's your money.

JOHN
No, it ain't. It's hers. And in all honesty I don't much deserve it, anyhow.

VOICE

And why not?

(no answer)

You did your best, didn't you?

JOHN

I did what I could, that's all.

VOICE

Exactly, and--

JOHN

(hard)

And it wasn't good enough.

No response. He stares off into the darkness for a few beats, takes a deep breath. Reaches into his pocket and pulls out the business card.

He stares at the front, at the "ARABIAN NIGHTS" inscription. Runs his fingers over the lettering. Beat. Then, he flips it over, to the back, on which a PHONE NUMBER has been scrawled:

" 555 - 7653 "

He sighs wistfully, looks over at portrait of Bogart hanging on the wall some ways away. Grumbles:

JOHN

Don't look at me like that. We both know It ain't right.

But Humphrey remains silent.

John stiffens, reaches for the phone. Puts the receiver to his ear. Looks back up, out ahead. At nothing. Nobody.

JOHN (CONT'D)

No sir. Not even a little...

And he dials...

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

John rides in the sparsely inhabited car, staring out the window to his side, satchel resting on his lap. Over this we hear a DIAL TONE...then RINGING, for a few beats...then:

MARLENE'S VOICE

Hello?

JOHN'S VOICE

Mrs. Campbell?

MARLENE'S VOICE

Yes...? Who is this?

JOHN'S VOICE

It's John. John Alton.

MARLENE'S VOICE

Alton...?

JOHN'S VOICE

You know, the, ah--

MARLENE'S VOICE

Oh, yes! How are you, John?

JOHN'S VOICE

Just fine. I, uh...look--

INT. TAXI CAB (MOVING) - NIGHT

John rides in the backseat, still staring off. He checks his wristwatch for the time, nods. Continues spacing.

JOHN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

There's been some new developments with the case I thought I oughtta make you aware of.

MARLENE'S VOICE

Oh?

JOHN'S VOICE

Yes ma'am. It's -- well, it's rather complicated. Honestly I'd prefer not to do this over the phone.

MARLENE'S VOICE

I understand. Are you free?

JOHN'S VOICE

(pause)

Yeah, I'm free.

MARLENE'S VOICE

Good. Well then if you wouldn't mind making the trip maybe we could talk it over here?

Something out the window catches John's eye. He leans over, taps the DRIVER's shoulder.

JOHN'S VOICE

You mean at your place?

MARLENE'S VOICE

Yes, if that's alright with you.

JOHN (V.O.)

(beat)

Yeah, that'd be fine. Sure.

EXT. CAMPBELL MANOR - NIGHT

John exits the cab, which has come to a stop outside a large, luxurious manor. He pays the driver, watches the vehicle speed off. Then after taking a deep breath, he begins his approach.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)

Just gimme an address, and I'll be over quick as I can.

MARLENE (V.O.)

That would be lovely, John.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPBELL MANOR - MOMENTS LATER

John comes to a stop right outside the front door, takes another deep breath. Looks down at his shabby attire, furrows his brow, straightens his tie.

He reaches for the buzzer, presses it. Hears an elaborate, almost musical assemblage of chimes go off inside the house. But that's it. After waiting a few beats, John is a bit perplexed to find that no one's come to greet him at the door.

He presses the buzzer again, twice this time. Waits longer.

Nothing. He sighs, puts the satchel down at his feet.

He balls up his fist -- knuckles out -- to knock. Just as he's about to make contact with the door, it slowly pulls back.

And yet still no one is there to greet him. In fact, the door has been open this whole time.

Perplexed further John stares, curiously, then picks up the satchel and pushes through into the house.

INT. CAMPBELL MANOR, MAIN HALL - CONT'D

The whole place is enveloped in darkness, with just enough light coming through to make out the lay of the place.

After taking a look around John cups his hand to the side of his mouth, hollers out:

JOHN
Mrs. Campbell?

And...nothing. He tries again, a bit louder this time:

JOHN
Mrs. Campbell? It's John Alton.
I, uh....Are you home?

Still nothing. He looks around again, rests his eyes on a large staircase leading up to the next floor.

With the satchel under his arm he slowly shambles over, peers up curiously, begins his ascent.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPBELL MANOR, BEDROOM - NIGHT

On the front door, also slightly askew. Down the hall we hear John's voice, growing louder as he approaches.

JOHN (O.S.)
Mrs. Campbell if you're playing
some kind of game here let me just
say--

He gets to the door, pushes it open. Stares into the room.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I really don't appreciate...

His voice drifts off.

On a large king-sized bed at the center of the room lies a WOMAN -- presumably lady Campbell herself -- in a nightgown, her back towards the door.

Slowly John creeps into the room, pauses a few feet inside.

JOHN

(low)

Mrs. Campbell? Hello...?

No answer. He approaches the bed, slowly, rests the satchel down on the mattress. Stares.

JOHN

Mrs. Campbell, it's...it's John?

Still nothing. With some hesitation he slowly leans forward, places a hand on her shoulder.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(under his breath)

Jeez, this is awkward...

(then)

Mrs. Campbell...? You awake?

He lets his fingers linger there for a few moments. She doesn't stir.

He pulls back, sighs, slowly lowers himself to the foot of the mattress, rubs the back of his neck tiredly.

JOHN

Maybe it's better this way, you know? Just leave the money here, give you your due, without wasting time on the who-did-what and the technicalities and all that unnecessary hodge-podge. Hell, I know I'd prefer it.

(beat)

I never liked having to break bad news. It's just, well - I just ain't no good at it, really. I never...never really quite know what to say...

He looks over at her...and something catches his eye. He reaches a hand out, places it on her shoulder, slowly pulls her towards him. With a little force she flops over, onto her back.

John's face goes white as a sheet now. His eyes bulge. He gets a lump in his throat, swallows hard.

Staring back at him from behind two wide, misty eyes, Marlene lies motionless. Fresh blood oozes from a small hole in her left temple, no larger than a nickel. A BULLET HOLE.

John slaps a hand over his mouth, just in time to stifle a yell.

Marlene just continues to stare, behind cold, unblinking eyes.

JOHN

What the -- what the *fuck?!*

He can't stop staring, despite his best efforts. A cold sweat takes over. His eyes dart all over the room, looking for signs: A perp, a weapon, anything. Nothing seems out of the ordinary. Nothing except the lifeless corpse of Mrs. Campbell staring back at him.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(low)

Oh, jeezus -- oh jeezus -- this is bad. This is so fucking *bad!*

He continues to stare, for a few beats. Gears turning.

JOHN (V.O.)

Only one thought crosses my mind now, and I hate myself instantly for thinking it:

In a flash he darts to the other side of the bed, picks the satchel up off the mattress, and hurriedly exits the room, out into:

THE HALLWAY

where he continues to move, in a hurry, for the stairway.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)

What the hell have you gotten yourself into, John?

He flies down the stairs, feet slapping the padded steps. We can tell just by looking that his heart's pounding a mile a minute. He gets down to:

THE GROUND FLOOR

still shrouded in darkness, and pauses. Out of breath.

He takes another look around, sees nothing. Nobody.

And in a flash, he's racing out the front door.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN STRIP, SIDEWALK - NIGHT

John sprints down the sidewalk, clutching the satchel under his arm. Away from the house, and out of potential harm's way. The quaint suburban homes fly by behind him, a blur. HOLD on John for quite some time, running, sweating, all adrenaline, nothing on his mind except warning signs and flashing lights. And then slowly, languidly, we...

FADE OUT

SLAM UP:

INT. NONDESCRIPT ROOM

John stands in medium close-up, as before, and monologues directly to the camera:

JOHN

There's this old joke I know. It's flooding, bad -- I'm talking Noah's arc kinda rain. And as the water keeps rising this guy gets out of his house, goes and stands around on the stoop, just... waiting. Sooner or later another fella in a rowboat comes by and tells him to get in, that the water's getting bad, how he'll take him to safety and all that. But this other guy, he ain't hearing it. "No", he says; he's got faith in God, that God will save him. "Okay", the guy in the rowboat says -- what's he gonna do? -- "it's your funeral" he says, and he goes off. And in no time the flood gets worse, and this poor sap on the stoop goes back in the house, moves up to the second floor now.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

And there he just keeps waiting. Sooner or later a motorboat passes by, and a guy hollers out "come on man, get in the boat, it's getting dangerous out here!" But this other fella, he still doesn't budge. "No, no", he says, "God will save me." He's got perfect faith in God, thinks God's gonna come down and wash this all away, right? So, okay -- the motorboat goes off, and to no one's surprise, the flood gets even worse. And this guy on the second floor's got no choice but to go up on the roof now. And there he waits. Lo and behold, a helicopter swoops on by, lowers a rope down for him. "Get in, get in, this is suicide!", they yell. The guy still doesn't budge. No sir. He's still got his faith in God, thinks God's just biding his time, testing our poor, confused hero. I mean he's gotta be, right? What other option does this poor fella have?

(beat)

So, the copter goes off. And the guy waits, and waits, and waits, and...nothing. Eventually the water rises too high, engulfs the house, engulfs the poor sap standing on it, and he dies. Now good Christian that he is he goes right on up to heaven, first class, and when he gets there he wants to know what the fuckin' story is. What went wrong? He tells God, "I had faith in You, and You let me down! How could You do that?" And God looks him up and down, completely baffled, and he says: "What the hell are you talking about? I sent you two boats and a helicopter!"

He chuckles quietly at his own joke for a few moments, then shakes his head forlornly, sighs.

JOHN
 Me...? I didn't get any helicopter.
 No hand of God. Not even a goddamn
 rowboat.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

John bursts in, still rattled, still sweating, his heart still fighting it out with his lungs in his chest.

He crosses hurriedly to his desk, pulls open the top drawer, pulls out his bottle of bourbon and a murky glass. Hurriedly pours himself a drink, with shaky hands, spilling carelessly all over the place.

He gulps down the bourbon in a flash, shuts his eyes tight as it works its way down his throat. He tries to relax. It's no good. His hands, his shoulders, his whole body shakes.

JOHN
 (low)
 Shit! This is...*shit!*

He goes to pour himself another glass, only to find that the bottle's been drained, its contents already soaking into his desk now. He sighs heavily, puts the bottle down.

He takes off his hat, throws it on the couch. Undoes his tie. Slumps down into his chair and rubs his eyes.

JOHN (V.O.)
 I knew this thing stunk to high
 heaven. Ten grand for a goddamn
 goose chase. Who knows if she even
 had a husband at all?

Suddenly from somewhere else in the room, a familiar VOICE replies:

VOICE
 You saw his picture, didn't you?

JOHN
 That doesn't mean anything...
 That could have been anyone...

From out of the shadows now ANOTHER MAN creeps into the middle of the room, a slight smirk on his face.

Upon closer inspection, this man is a dead ringer for John.

When he speaks again, his voice sounds unmistakably like John's own. Like a carbon copy, albeit surly and sporting a more acutely sinister demeanor.

DOPPELGANGER
Same goes for the broad.

John frowns, looks away.

His inexplicable doppelganger snickers, croaks:

DOPPELGANGER (CONT'D)
Oh, that's rich. You went sweet on her, didn't you?

JOHN
She was a client!

DOPPELGANGER
Exactly, you thick fuck!

John groans, waves him off angrily.

DOPPELGANGER (CONT'D)
What did pop always used to say, huh? Never get--

JOHN
Involved with a client, I know. And so what? Look at him, he went and married one of his.

DOPPELGANGER
(bitterly)
Ran off with her, too.

John slouches, pouts. His doppelganger gingerly glides towards the desk, pops a squat on the edge.

JOHN
Look, it -- it doesn't matter none, anyway. Not anymore. She's--

DOPPELGANGER
Up shit's creak, is what she is. And you're floating right along after her.

JOHN
And what would you have me do?

DOPPELGANGER

Use your fucking head, for starters.
Shit...

He reaches for the bottle of bourbon, tries to toss it back.
Frowns when he realizes it's empty and sets it down, hard.

DOPPELGANGER (CONT'D)

I mean, look -- unless you got a
death wish, it don't make a lick of
sense pressing any further. She
probably covered the same ground,
and now...

He slides a finger over his throat, signaling "she's croaked."
John looks off, clearly agitated.

DOPPELGANGER (CONT'D)

If you're smart, you'll chalk it up
to a loss.

JOHN

And -- and what, just ignore the
fact that she's *dead*?!

DOPPELGANGER

Jeez-us, listen to yourself! You
got ten grand for a case that's
already been solved for you. What
the fuck more could you possibly
want?

JOHN

I can't...I can't just stop, call
it off and close up shop. Not now.

His doppelganger rises, moans loudly, agitated himself now.
John persists, tries to strengthen his case:

JOHN (CONT'D)

What, you're telling me you don't
see it? Clearly there's something
rotten in Denmark!

DOPPELGANGER

You don't LIVE in fucking Denmark!
For chrissakes quit being such a
stubborn goddamn--

Someone knocks on the opposite side of the wall, yells:

WOMAN (O.S.)
Will you shut the hell up?!

And immediately, in unison, the duo retorts:

JOHN	DOPPELGANGER
(yelling)	(yelling)
Ah, piss off!	Go play with yer fuckin' cats!

Beat. They get no response. Turning back to John:

DOPPELGANGER (CONT'D)
Listen to me. If you're smart,
you'll let it go. It ain't your
business now, anyhow.

JOHN
Not my business? Don't you get it?
She made it my business.

He points a stubby finger at the satchel, still laying
untouched just a few feet away.

JOHN (CONT'D)
THIS makes it my business!

DOPPELGANGER
And you were all set to give it back
just a few hours ago.

Beat. John can't think of a proper response.

DOPPELGANGER (CONT'D)
You remember now, huh? Fact is,
you didn't want this. Sure, it
stinks -- and you knew better.
Now, what? You got a conscience
all outta the fucking *blue*?

John looks off, fuming. Stays quiet.

DOPPELGANGER (CONT'D)
(beat)
Give it up. And do yourself a
favor: Give the dame up, too.

John rises from behind his desk now, determinedly. He
crosses to the couch, disregarding his doppelganger, and
picks up his discarded hat, then heads right for the door.

Pressing further:

DOPPELGANGER

You know, she had a husband--

JOHN

I need a drink.

And with that, he exits.

CUT TO:

INT. MICKEY'S SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

A light smattering of patrons are in the process of losing themselves at the bottoms of their mugs. The jukebox in back belts out an old sixties pop/rock tune, which does very little to get the place hopping.

After a few moments the front door is pushed back by John, who trudges in looking like all hell. From behind the bar:

MICKEY

Rough night?

JOHN

(sighs)

I've had better.

He walks up to the bar, slides into a stool with a weary sigh. Mickey moves towards him.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Was mulling it over and figured hey,
why not get a little boozed up?

MICKEY

Can't argue with that.

He places a mug in front of John, pours some bourbon in it.

MICKEY (CONT'D)

It's the usual then?

JOHN

Gee, Mic, you know me so well.

Mickey finishes pouring. John downs most of the bourbon in one long gulp, motions for Mickey to fill her up again. With some hesitation, he does.

As John reaches for a cigarette Mickey leans in, intones:

MICKEY

You know, John...I hate to ask you this, but I was kind of wondering when you planned on paying your tab?

(off John's look)

I was crunching some numbers before, and, well...it's just getting a little out of hand, you know?

John sighs, places a stick between his lips and lights it.

JOHN

What do you take me for, huh? You know you can hold me to my word.

MICKEY

Yeah, but it's not a matter of whether or not you'll pay, John. I know that. It's when?

JOHN

(beat)

Soon. And you can hold me to that.

Mickey takes this in, nods slowly. Slight hesitation.

MICKEY

Well see, the thing is...I mean you know I wouldn't come at you like this normally, it's just... there's these guys been coming around, crunching their own numbers. And I was just wondering--

JOHN

(hard)

I gave you an answer, right?

MICKEY

...Yeah. Yeah, you did.

JOHN

Then leave it.

Mickey stiffens, makes like he's gonna say something else, stops himself. As he turns to leave:

JOHN (CONT'D)
And leave the bottle, too.

CUT TO:

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING, HALLWAY - NIGHT

John creeps up, swaying as he walks as if to unheard music, humming sporadically and wildly off key. Drunk. He approaches the door to his office, rummages in his coat for his keys...and stops cold.

The door's already open, slightly ajar.

He tenses up at once. Pats himself down for his gun.

JOHN
(low, hisses)
Shit!

It ain't on him. He takes a deep breath, stiffens. Slowly reaches a hand out to push the door open.

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - CONT'D

The place is ransacked. Clothes all over, papers tossed every which way, the drawers of his desk and nearby file cabinets thrown open carelessly.

John creeps in, feels hurriedly for the light switch. Flips it. Shudders at what he sees.

The damage is immense.

And there's his Doppelganger, lying face-down in a small pool of blood in the middle of it all.

Bogie's picture lies smashed on the floor inches away, defiled.

And yet no sign of any perp.

John quickly snaps to action, searching around under the piles of clothing and other debris frantically. He tosses clothes around, throws papers every which way -- in effect, makes the place look even worse.

As he does so:

JOHN
Shit shit shitty shit shit!
(etc.)

And there, under a pile of dirty shirts, he finds what he's so frantically searching for: The satchel. Untouched.

He grabs it and races out of the room, back out into:

THE HALLWAY

and hurriedly, with shaky hands, puts his key in the lock and closes up. Stares up and down the hall, sweat pouring off his face. He sees nothing. No one. And gulps, hard.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

John exits the building out onto the street, a twitchy, sweaty mess. As far as he can see the streets are deserted. With the satchel held tightly against his chest he moves, walking quickly first before breaking into a full-out, slapdash run, straight out of sight. All terror, sweat and quiet desperation.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PENNSYLVANIA STATION - NIGHT

Out on the main floor, with countless ticket windows and tickers on display. At one of the windows a TELLER is just finishing up with a customer, who moves on only to be replaced by John -- still sweating, still twitchy, still a nervous wreck -- not a moment later.

TELLER
Yes, sir?

JOHN
(between breaths)
I need one...out of...the city.

The Teller gives him a once-over, obviously put off by his appearance. With some hesitation:

TELLER
Any, ah...*particular* destination
in mind, sir?

JOHN

No. Just...get me...the *hell*...
out of here.

CUT TO:

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA STATION, UNDERGROUND PLATFORM - NIGHT

John can be seen through the window of a train resting his head against the glass, eyes wide open. Still white as a sheet. After picking up momentum for a few moments the train begins to move, slowly pulls out of the station. Over this:

JOHN (V.O.)

I know what you're probably
thinking. The curtains are peeling.
Things are becoming clearer...
somewhat. There's more to all this
than meets the eye. So why am I
letting up?

(beat)

Because I'm a chicken-shit coward.
Have been all my life.

INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - NIGHT

As the train leaves the station John slowly starts to let his guard down and relaxes a bit. Rests the satchel at his side. The rest of the car is empty save for a YOUNG COUPLE sitting a few rows back, speaking in hushed whispers. As we HOLD on John for some time, as he slowly shuts his eyes and drifts off, we begin to make out their conversation:

YOUNG WOMAN

This isn't right. We shouldn't
be doing this.

YOUNG MAN

What's so wrong about it?

YOUNG WOMAN

It's not...it's not fair, you
know? Leaving them behind like
that, without saying anything...

YOUNG MAN

Screw 'em. We're on our own now.

On the LOUDSPEAKER above a ROBOTIC VOICE cuts in, informing them that:

ROBOTIC VOICE
This is the train to...Port
Washington. The next station
is...Woodside.

And cuts out. The couple stay quiet for a beat, then:

YOUNG WOMAN
How can you say that?

YOUNG MAN
Say what?

YOUNG WOMAN
"Screw 'em", like you don't even
care. Are you really...?

YOUNG MAN
What? Am I really *what*?

YOUNG WOMAN
Do you really not care? Is this
all just a game to you?

YOUNG MAN
Jesus Linda, don't start--

YOUNG WOMAN
No, answer me. Do you care? Or did
you bring me all this way -- have
me throw my whole *life* away -- for
some big joke?

YOUNG MAN
Oh, so - so what? Now all of a
sudden I ruined YOUR life? Fucked
all YOUR shit up? How about--

YOUNG WOMAN
(looks over at John,
hisses)
Keep-your-voice-down!

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
How about what I threw away for
you, huh? How about *that*?

No response. The Young Man looks off, muses:

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
 Christ. I shoulda listened, I
 shoulda fuckin' listened. "Never
 get hooked on a Jap--"

YOUNG WOMAN
 A *what?*
 He looks right in her face, spits out:

YOUNG MAN
 A Jew fuckin' princess!

Beat. She looks down, tears in her eyes now.

YOUNG WOMAN
 Is that...is that really what you
 think of me?

Her companion looks off, doesn't say anything. Beat.

YOUNG WOMAN
 (sobs)
 I...oh, no. No no *no...*

She dabs at her eyes, hisses, low:

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)
 I -- I threw away everything for
 you! My family, my life, my
 career...and you...?

The Young Man sighs loudly and rises, starts walking to
 the opposite end of the train. As he passes John stirs,
 opens his eyes slowly. Yawns. Behind him:

YOUNG WOMAN
 (softly)
 You ruined me.

She reaches into her bag, takes hold of something. John
 scratches at his neck, shuts his eyes again. From above:

ROBOTIC VOICE
 This is the train to...Port
 Washington. The next station
 is...Woodside.

The Young Woman rises, her shoulders shaking, and slowly
 begins following in her companion's wake. She passes John
 who stirs again and cracks an eye open. She continues O.S.

Now both of John's eyes crack open. He raises his head, shouts out:

JOHN

Look out--!

And -- *BLAM!* A GUNSHOT rings out, deafening. Beat. John's white as a sheet, looks like he just shit himself. Probably has.

At the other end of the car the Young Woman lies on her knees, hunched over a pair of male legs, unmoving, stretched out on the ground -- which one can only assume belong to the Young Man. She looks up at John, tears in her eyes.

John stares back, eyes wide, big ol' lump in his throat.

She smiles faintly, then positions the revolver in her grip against her own temple. Exhales sadly.

John closes his eyes as another GUNSHOT rips through the air, alongside the sound of a body hitting the floor of the compartment with a loud, heavy "THUD!" After some time he cracks one eye open, then the other. Is visibly rattled by what he sees. From above we hear another loud "DING!" on the loudspeaker.

ROBOTIC VOICE

This station is...Woodside.

The train starts slowing down now. John takes a few moments to collect himself, picks the satchel up off the seat beside him and rises. Quickly moves OUT OF FRAME.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODSIDE STATION, PLATFORM - NIGHT

The train has slowed to a stop. After another audible "DING!" the doors slide open and John spills out onto the platform, shaking terribly. Once on solid ground he drops the satchel, leans over, hands on his knees, and RETCHES. After a few beats, and another loud "DING!", the train doors slide closed again.

Slowly the train departs. John, woozy, composes himself, rises, wipes the bile from his mouth. Picks up the satchel and tucks it under his arm.

As the train disappears into the distance, he turns to see the Manhattan skyline staring back at him from some ways away. Beckoning. Calling to him. Inescapable, in its own way.

JOHN (V.O.)

(beat)

Needless to say, the city took
me back. I was met with
indifference.

And he starts walking off, down the platform, back towards
the beckoning city...

FADE OUT

SLAM UP:

EXT. CITY STREETS, BACK ALLEYWAY - MORNING

A narrow, filthy alleyway behind a Chinese restaurant. John
lies in a pile of debris, sleeping, clutching the satchel to
his chest. Slowly, he stirs, awakens. Takes the next few
moments to come to terms with the fact that he's sleeping in
a pile of garbage behind a Chinese restaurant.

JOHN (V.O.)

Had I really ended up here? Had
all the years -- the bum cases,
the vices, my mind's slow,
unavoidable deterioration --
really been leading up to this?

He rises slowly, one foot at a time. Checks himself out.
Finds his clothes dampened. Sniffs.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)

A practice run for sleeping in
garbage -- in someone else's
piss -- with my arms wrapped
around a bundle of money I was
too afraid to spend?

He shuts his eyes, takes a deep breath.

JOHN

(low)

Buck up, soldier.

He cracks one eye open, then the other. Looks off, some ways
ahead...and tenses right up.

He is not alone in this alley. In fact, he soon comes to
find that he's being stared down by a BUM, standing a few
yards away and fuming mad.

After a long, uncomfortable beat:

JOHN
Uh...hey?

BUM
(loudly)
What the hell you doin', man?

John looks around, as if expecting someone else to be standing behind him, the object of this Bum's ridicule. No such luck.

JOHN
Me...?

BUM
Yes, you! Who the fuck else I'ma talk to out here?

JOHN
I -- jeez. No one, I guess.

The bum stares at him, gripped with rage. Baring teeth.

BUM
The hell you *doin'*, man?!

JOHN
I was just, ah...resting?

BUM
Yeah, I can see that. What the hell you doin' resting here?

He spits as if to mark his territory.

BUM (CONT'D)
In MY fuckin' spot?!

John stammers, but can't spit anything out.

The bum gives him a once-over. Notices his clothing.

BUM
(louder)
Hey man, that's -- that's my piss!

John looks down at his dampened shirt and slacks, whistles loudly.

JOHN

Oh, good. I was starting to wonder...

BUM

Who the fuck told you you could just sleep in my *piss*, man?!

JOHN

Look, I'm sorry but--

BUM

FUCK you!

JOHN (CONT'D)

Alright, sure. But like I was saying, if I could give it back I would, only--

BUM

That some kinda *joke*...?

He cracks his knuckles, then his neck. John gets the message.

JOHN

Aw, shit, don't -- please don't do that. Look there's no reason to resort to--

BUM

(yelling)

Shut the hell up, man! Shut your goddamn mouth!

John does as he's told. It doesn't help much. Suddenly the Bum comes flying at him, fist raised the strike.

John, acting all on impulse, cranes his own fist back and lets fly. Clocks the Bum square in the jaw. He hits the ground with a loud "THUD!", and stays there.

A long beat. John stares down at him, waiting for a reaction. Slowly prods with his foot.

JOHN

Uh, hello...? Buddy...?

Nothing. John slowly tenses up. A cold sweat takes over.

JOHN
 Oh, what the fuck?! This is--
 (louder)
 Get up, huh?! You're not...I mean,
 you *can't* be...

Nothing. Not a peep.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 (gravely)
 He's dead. He's fucking *dead!*

John backs away, in shock. Gears turning.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 I -- I killed a bum! First day on
 the streets and I killed a fucking
 bum! Jesus Christ, how the hell--

And then, as if reacting in response, the Bum stirs,
 grumbles:

BUM
Ggarrggghhhhl!

John exhales happily, a huge weight suddenly lifted off his
 shoulders. Replies cheerfully:

JOHN
 Oh, shit. That's a relief.

And then he high-tails it outta there.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY - DAY

Further down the same alley now. John slows to a quick walk,
 takes a deep breath. Looks down at the satchel in his arms.
 Pauses. He looks off, at a nearby dumpster, and nods.

He takes a knee, unzips the satchel. Removes a stack of
 bills and pockets it, then zips the satchel back up.

He walks over to the dumpster and pokes around, moves it off
 the wall so there's some space in back. He stares down at
 the satchel for a beat, then rests it at his feet and shoves
 it, with the tip of his foot, into the free space behind the
 dumpster.

He takes a deep breath, eyes locked on the satchel. Then, from some ways off:

BUM (O.S.)
 (loudly)
 Where...where the hell are you,
 asshole?!

John looks off, heart skipping a beat.

JOHN
 (low)
Shit....!

He pushes the dumpster back into place, leaving the satchel there for safe keeping. Proceeds to haul ass.

CUT TO:

INT. MICKEY'S SPORTS BAR - DAY

John bursts in, frantic, and hollers:

JOHN
 Christ Mic, you ain't gonna
 believe what I just--

He looks inside, and stops cold.

Mickey stands between two large, hulking men -- let's call them KNUCKLES and CHUCKLES -- who each have firm hands planted on each of his shoulders. The guys turn to look at over John, snarl.

CHUCKLES
 Say now, you don't suppose...
 (to Mickey)
 Is this the guy?

He looks over at Mickey, prods him. Mickey gulps, looks away, ashamedly. Mutters:

MICKEY
 Yeah. Yeah, that's him.

John just stands there, not quite knowing what to make of this. Knuckles moves for him, grabs hold of his arm -- hard.

KNUCKLES
 Come on buddy. No fuss, eh?

John looks over at Mickey, who won't meet his eyes.

JOHN
Mic, what the hell...what is this?

Mickey makes like he's gonna say something, but can't.

Knuckles meanwhile takes to dragging John through the place, heading for the back door. Chuckles turns to Mickey.

CHUCKLES
Don't go nowhere, huh?

Mickey nods, nervously. Chuckles pats him on the cheek -- hard.

CUT TO:

EXT. MICKEY'S SPORTS BAR, BACK ALLEY - DAY

John comes flying out the back door, lands with a "THUD!" on the pavement below. Knuckles and Chuckles follow on foot. With a heavy groan:

JOHN
What the *hell*--

KNUCKLES
Do you know who we are?

John looks up to see the duo standing before him, each with vaguely sinister smirks on their mugs. He wheezes:

JOHN
Let me guess. You're...Knuckles,
which would make you...Chuckles?

Knuckles laughs, looks over at Chuckles.

KNUCKLES
Would ya listen to that?

CHUCKLES
Why he's a regular cutie pie, eh?

Knuckles laughs, then savagely kicks John in the stomach. John reels, spits. Mucous and blood.

CHUCKLES
Jesus, look at him.

KNUCKLES
He looks like shit.

 CHUCKLES
And he--
 (sniffs air)
...smells like piss, no?

 KNUCKLES
Why Chuckles, I do believe he does.
 (to John)
You piss yer pants, sweetheart?

John sighs deeply, closes his eyes.

 JOHN
Please, don't ask.

 CHUCKLES
Fair enough.

 KNUCKLES
 (shakes head)
It ain't important.

 CHUCKLES
None of our concern. See, what we
want to know is--

 KNUCKLES
Where's the money, hot-shot?

John looks up, dread slowly creeping in.

 JOHN
"The money"? I don't--

Knuckles sighs loudly, kicks him again. Harder this time.

John cries out, doubles over on the ground.

 CHUCKLES
You some kinda joker, pal?

 KNUCKLES
Yeah, a regular laugh riot.

 CHUCKLES
 (flatly)
"Oh, my aching sides!"

John slowly composes himself, spits. More mucous, more blood.

JOHN
 (between breaths)
 The *hell*...are you two clowns...
 babbling about?

Chuckles sighs grimly, looks over at Knuckles.

CHUCKLES
 Knuckles? You wanna teach our new
 friend some manners, or you want
 I should do it?

Knuckles nods, then catches John off guard with another
 swift kick to the gut. And kicks again. And again. That one
 does it. John tosses his head over, retches.

CHUCKLES
 Whoa there Knuckles! Ease up on
 the merch, huh?

Knuckles steps back, a bit surprised.

KNUCKLES
 My mistake.
 (to John)
 You know sometimes--

CHUCKLES
 He just don't know his own
 strength.

KNUCKLES
 My deepest sympathies.

John wipes his mouth, slowly. Tries to compose himself.

JOHN
 (between breaths)
 You know...it sorta...*stings*...

CHUCKLES
 It's supposed to, sweetheart.

He reaches in his coat, pulls out a pack of cigarettes. Fits
 one between his lips. As he strikes a match:

CHUCKLES (CONT'D)
 Now I'm gonna ask you once again,
 and I'm just hoping like hell you
 me a straight answer this time.

KNUCKLES
 We don't wanna have to get
 violent now, you understand?

 JOHN
 (sighs)
 Sure. Shoot.

Chuckles regards his cigarette, takes a drag. Then:

 CHUCKLES
 Where's the money?

 JOHN
 Look, fellas, I don't know what
 the hell you're talking about.

 KNUCKLES
 (tosses hands)
 Aw, Christ!

 CHUCKLES
 (loudly)
 The money, you thick fuck!

 KNUCKLES
 The money you owe the barkeep!

He motions inside, presumably at Mickey.

John gets the picture now. Sighs, a bit relieved.

 JOHN
 Christ, don't tell me--

 CHUCKLES
 You ever plan on payin' that tab,
 padre?

 KNUCKLES
 Or what, you think this is a free
 country? Ha!

 CHUCKLES
 "Oh, my aching sides."

John struggles to get up, can't. Resorts to propping himself
 up on his elbows.

 JOHN
 And so, my tab -- how's this any
 of your business, again?

CHUCKLES
We make it our business.

KNUCKLES
Don't ask.

John sighs, rolls his eyes, reaches in his pocket. Pulls out the stack of hundreds.

Chuckles whistles loudly. Both are obviously delighted by this sudden flash of green.

CHUCKLES
Oh-ho, big spendah!

KNUCKLES
Had you pegged all wrong, boss.

He steps up, wrestles the cash out of John's hands. Moves back over to Chuckles. As they examine the money:

KNUCKLES
You know, Chuckles...

CHUCKLES
Yeah, Knuckles?

KNUCKLES
This looks about right to me.

CHUCKLES
Yeah, I'm feeling pretty satisfied myself.

They share a laugh. Knuckles peels off a few bills, crumples them up and tosses them carelessly at John, who just takes it, silently fuming.

KNUCKLES
There ya go, boss. Keep it.

CHUCKLES
Clean yourself up, eh?

KNUCKLES
Get presentable.

Knuckles pockets the rest of the cash. They turn, push past Mickey through the back door and disappear back into the bar.

KNUCKLES (O.S)
Have a nice day, fellas.

And with that, they're gone.

A long beat. John slowly peels himself off the ground, unballs the crumpled bills and pockets them. Dusts himself off.

Mickey just stands there, slowly working up his nerves. After some heavy deliberation:

 MICKEY
You know, that wasn't--

 JOHN
Save it.

He too pushes past Mickey, continues on into the bar.

CUT TO:

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING, HALLWAY - DAY

John enters the hallway, dragging his soggy coat behind him, carelessly. Downright beat, and nearing broken.

As he approaches the door to his office he sees a small cat sitting in front of it, staring up at him. He stops in his tracks. Beat. Slowly he pokes a foot out, prods at the animal. It hisses at him, but doesn't move. Just keeps staring.

 JOHN (V.O.)
Just what I need. I wake up in a puddle of piss, get chewed out by a guy with no teeth, then get manhandled by Happy and Slappy back there like I was somebody's redheaded stepchild.

Finally the cat lifts up and scurries off, leaving a nice, wet puddle of piss in its wake. Right in front of the office door. John sighs, rummages for his keys.

 JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
And now *this*. More piss. Cat piss.

He steps over the puddle, puts a key in the door, pushes it open. Only narrowly avoids slipping on the wetness and falling on his face as he trudges inside.

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - CONT'D

John tosses his coat on the couch, then his hat. Lets the door slam shut behind him, then locks it.

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
As days go, I've had better.

He crosses tiredly to his desk, takes a knee behind it.

He fiddles with the last drawer down at the bottom, punches in the combo -- 6-6-6 -- on the heavy lock. Pulls the drawer open and takes out the desert eagle, and the box of bullets. Closes the drawer.

He puts the gun down on his desk, opens the box, shakes out about a dozen bullets. He pulls out the clip from the desert eagle's handle, slowly begins loading in a few rounds. After doing so he jams the clip back in, cocks the weapon. Weighs it in his hands.

He crosses over to the couch, yawns tiredly. Pushes some things aside and lays himself flat-out, gun still in hand.

He pulls his coat over him like a blanket, then takes his hat and lays it on his forehead, rim over his eyes. And just like that, in that position, he begins to drift off, lets sleep carry him away as we...

FADE OUT

SLAM UP:

INT. JOHN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Darkness and quiet, for a few beats. Then through the foggy glass encased within the front door TWO LARGE SILHOUETTES become distinctly visible. Someone fiddles with the door handle. Pause. Then two voices -- both male -- whisper:

MAN (K.)
Shit! It's locked.

OTHER MAN (C.)
So? Just break it.

MAN (K.)
Break it? Wait, I'm not -- that's a little much ain't it?

OTHER MAN (C.)
 (heavy sigh)
 Christ. Step aside, willya?

Suddenly a hand comes smashing through the glass, feels around. Startles John on the couch, who snaps wide awake.

Just as the hand falls upon the lock, unlatches the door and pushes through--

--BLAM! The desert eagle goes off. One of the men CRIES OUT in pain, crashes hard to the floor.

John shoots off the couch, takes aim at the guy still standing, shouts in the darkness:

JOHN
 Don't move, asshole! I gotcha
 trained right between the fuckin'
 eyes!

The other guy puts his hands up, doesn't even try to make a break for it.

John maneuvers over, in the darkness, presses the weapon against the guy's side. He fumbles for a moment for the light switch, flips it. Finds himself pressing his desert eagle into Chuckles' abdomen, whose wide, wet eyes are locked on Knuckles' bloody, unmoving form on the floor below.

JOHN
 ...You?

CHUCKLES
 D-Don't shoot! I ain't gonna run
 or nothing, honest!

John opens his mouth to say something, when:

WOMAN (O.S.)
 What the hell's going on?!

He groans miserably, pokes his head out into:

THE HALLWAY

and finds Mrs. Grenowlski standing in her pajamas at her open doorway, fuming mad. He offers:

JOHN
 It's nothing, alright?

MRS. GRENOWLSKI
Yeah, "nothing". It's *always* gotta
be something with you!

JOHN
Just forget it. Go back inside.

MRS. GRENOWLSKI
You don't tell me that! I'll go
back inside when I'm good and ready!
All this racket this late, how the
heck am I supposed to--

John finally loses his cool, pokes his gun out at her and
barks, angrily:

JOHN
GO BACK INSIDE!

And immediately shuts her up. She scrambles back in her
apartment, quickly latches the door behind her. Back in:

THE OFFICE

John repositions his gun on Chuckles, who's dropped to his
knees before Knuckles, lightly caressing. He sobs quietly.

CHUCKLES
You killed him.

JOHN
Yeah well what the hell do you
expect? Come busting in here like
that, with no warning...hell,
you're lucky you're still suckin'
air.

Chuckles looks down, tears in his eyes.

JOHN (CONT'D)
So what in God's name are you
two doing here, anyway? Didn't
take enough of my money this
morning, you gotta come back for
more?

CHUCKLES
It -- it ain't like that! We...

He trails off, physically shaking now.

JOHN
(prods with gun)
You what? Talk!

CHUCKLES
W-We didn't know it was you, boss!
I swear!

JOHN
So then what the hell are you two
doing here, exactly?

CHUCKLES
We wuz hired. They told us to
scope the place out, look for a
fella name of Alton. If we see him,
make sure he ain't never seen again.

JOHN
And who hired you?

No answer. He prods Chuckles with the weapon again.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I asked you a question.

CHUCKLES
We never seen 'em. Just a voice
on the phone, alright? They
contacted us with the job, wired
us some cash to show they ain't
messing around.
(muses)
Whoever they are, they sure got
some grudge against you.

JOHN
And how do I know you're not
bullshitting me here?

Chuckles looks over his shoulder, up at John, sadly.

CHUCKLES
What reason I got to bullshit
you, boss?

He snuffles, looks back down at Knuckles. Places a hand on
the dead man's shoulder.

John considers this, gears turning. Lowers his weapon.

JOHN
Alright. Okay...
(beat)
You said these guys contacted
you?

CHUCKLES
Yeah.

JOHN
Which means you never contacted
them, at all?

CHUCKLES
Nah. Don't even know how.

JOHN
(thinks)
And you said that, these guys --
they really mean business?

CHUCKLES
They don't fuck around.

John furrows a brow, gears turning. Shifts the pistol in
his hands nervously, then offers:

JOHN
You're gonna do me a favor now,
alright? Free of charge.

CHUCKLES
(nods)
Sure, boss. Whatever you say.

JOHN
You're gonna find some way to
contact these guys -- I don't
care how. You're gonna tell 'em
you failed. Tell 'em your dipshit
partner got dead in the process.
And tell 'em I'm gonna be coming
for them next.

Chuckles looks up, curiously, not sure what to make of this.

CHUCKLES
Are you for real?

JOHN
Yeah, I'm for real. Why?

CHUCKLES

Buddy, if I were you I'd pack up and ship off yesterday. Like I said, these guys...they don't fuck around.

JOHN

And neither do I. Now are you gonna tell 'em what I said or not?

CHUCKLES

(shrugs)

Hey man, it's your funeral.

JOHN

Get up.

Slowly Chuckles rises, eyes still on his fallen comrade. John motions at the door.

JOHN

Alright, beat it.

Chuckles looks over at him, unsure.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You hard of hearing, Chuckles?
I said scram!

Chuckles makes to leave, before John stops him.

JOHN

Hold it. You carrying?

CHUCKLES

Yeah?

JOHN

(holds out hand)

Hand 'er over.

Chuckles slowly reaches into his coat, pulls out his pistol. Reluctantly places it in John's open palm.

JOHN

Alright, now piss off.

And with that Chuckles flies out the door, down the hall, and out of sight. As his frantic footsteps fade from earshot, John tucks away his guns, bends down to examine Knuckles.

He's dead alright. His eyes have already started glazing over, a small pool of blood already spreading out on the floor.

John proceeds to pat him down, slowly. Grimaces. Pauses.

He gives the dead man's pocket another feel, then reaches inside, pulls something out.

He raises it in the light to get a better view, squints.

It's a business card. For a club dubbed "ARABIAN NIGHTS".

John examines the card for a few moments, astounded somewhat. Then in the distance, the distinct sounds of police sirens wailing. Drawing closer...

John groans, hurriedly tucks the card away and rises. Crosses to the couch and picks up his jacket and fedora, dresses the part again.

He crosses to the door, pauses. Looks back down at Knuckles.

Clearly the guy isn't going anywhere. And John's got too much on his plate to explain to the cops why the guy's lying dead at the entrance to his office.

With a deep breath he steps over the body, hits the lights, and books it down the hallway.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - SUNDOWN

A pay phone on a relatively busy street in downtown Manhattan. John passes, stops, contemplates. Goes over.

He rummages in his pocket, finds a quarter, drops it into the machine. Pulls out the business card and squints, tries to read the number printed on it. Dials.

It RINGS for some time, but no one picks up. With a heavy sigh he slams the receiver back on the hook. The quarter CLANK-CLANK-CLANKS to the bottom, into the change slot. John takes it, motions to leave. Stops again.

He drops the quarter in again, hesitates. Dials a different number. It RINGS once, twice, a third time. Then:

YOUNG WOMAN (PHONE)

...Hello?

JOHN
 (into phone)
 Cassie?

CASSIE (PHONE)
 Oh. Is that you, pop?

JOHN
 Yeah. Yeah, it's me.

CASSIE (PHONE)
 What -- what time is it?

JOHN
 It's late. Look I'm sorry I called
 you like this, I just...

CASSIE (PHONE)
 Yeah, pop? What's up?

JOHN
 (beat)
 I just wanted to hear your voice,
 I guess.

CASSIE (PHONE)
 Well, uh...here you go?

They share a slight, uneasy laugh. Then partake in a long,
 uncomfortable silence, before:

JOHN
 Did your ma tell you I stopped by?

CASSIE (PHONE)
 Oh, really? When?

JOHN
 Couple nights ago. She didn't--

CASSIE (PHONE)
 Aww, you know how she is with that
 stuff. She probably just forgot.

JOHN
 ...Yeah, probably. Anyway I just
 wanted to tell you the news--

CASSIE (PHONE)
 What news?

JOHN

I got a case.

A beat. John looks over his shoulder at a guy slowly drawing closer, hustling for change, asking passersby loudly for money to get something to eat. He shifts uncomfortably.

CASSIE (PHONE)

A case? So you're still doing all that detective stuff, huh?

JOHN

'Fraid so.

CASSIE (PHONE)

How's it going?

JOHN

It's, ah...it's going. Anyway I just thought you should know.

CASSIE (PHONE)

That's...good. I'm happy for you.

Another long silence. John shifts again, as the guy -- dressed in a tattered business suit, looking like a former Wall Street stockbroker -- draws ever closer.

CASSIE (PHONE)

(uneasy)

Well, uh...I should probably--

JOHN

You need to go?

CASSIE (PHONE)

Yeah--

JOHN

Oh, sure. Yeah. I just, ah...I love you Cass. You know that, don't know?

CASSIE (PHONE)

Of course I do, pop. Sure.

(beat)

Are you...are you alright?

A beat. John mulls it over, replies half-heartedly:

JOHN
Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine. It was nice
talking to you, hon.

CASSIE (PHONE)
Yeah, same here. Goodnight, pop.

JOHN
Good night, sweetie.

He places the receiver back on the hook, slowly. Takes a moment to compose himself.

Seeing that he's free the guy nearby taps his shoulder, asks, hoarsely:

WALL STREET
Hey buddy, spare some change

He jingles a small can in front of John. John turns his head to look at him, wipes at his eyes, shakes his head.

JOHN
Sorry, pal. All out.

And with that, he stalks off.

CUT TO:

EXT. EAST RIVER ESPLANADE - NIGHT

John walks along the river's edge, staring out across the water, his collar turned up against the wind. Lost in his thoughts.

JOHN (V.O.)
It's a wonder I ain't some mind-
less, drooling cantaloupe by now.
Or maybe I am. Maybe I've been
fooling myself, all these years...

John keeps staring, searching intently for something -- a clue, a sign, anything. The water simply sways in the wind, splashes.

JOHN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Or maybe it's like my father used
to say, after a particularly sour
night on the town:

John stares off, at the skyline looming in the distance.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
 "That's the thing about the city",
 he'd say. "That's the thing about
 the city. Even when you're down,
 she just keeps on kicking." Like a
 scorned ex, a woman with a grudge...

He reaches in his coat, feels around. Pulls out the Polaroid
 of Marlene and poor sweet Al, happy and carefree. John
 regards the picture somberly, sadness in his eyes.

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)
 She'll kick and she'll kick till you
 damn near bust, then she'll kick a
 little longer just to remind you
 where you stand.

And then he lets it slip from his hands, walks off. We FOLLOW
 the Polaroid as it sways in the wind, falls lower, lower...
 until it breaks the surface of the water, takes a dip into
 the East River, and fades from sight into the watery depths
 of the abyss.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. EAST RIVER ESPLANADE - NIGHT

John lays in a fetal position across a large, cold bench,
 passed out. A COP slowly makes his way over and stands before
 him, prods reluctantly with his nightstick.

COP
 Okay buddy, rise and shine.

Beat. After another prod or two John stirs, picks his head up
 to look at the guy. Grumbles incoherently.

COP
 Come on, pal. You can't sleep here.

John nods, tiredly rises to a sitting position, rubs the
 exhaust from his eyes. The cop lingers, uncertain.

COP (CONT'D)
 You understand me...?

JOHN
 Yeah, I got it.

The cop lingers for another beat, then presses on. John takes a few moments to collect himself, then rises and slowly, tiredly trudges off.

We TRACK with John as he walks against the wind, shivering slightly. The edges of his eyes are streaked with tears.

Lingering a few yards behind the Cop watches John trudge off, a curious look on his face. He fingers his walkie-talkie, makes like he's gonna call something in, stops. Thinks better of it. Continues watching, his brow furrowed, then shakes it off and continues on in the opposite direction.

FADE OUT

FADE UP:

EXT. ARABIAN NIGHTS - DAY

Co-Co's out front strutting her stuff. TWO GUYS pass her, smile, continue on inside. Beat. Then another guy goes up.

JOHN

Hey, Co-Co.

Her eyes go wide. She tries to speak, but can't seem to get the words out.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Is Tony around?

CO-CO

(stammering)

N-No he's, ah -- he's no here today, Jo-hn. He leave.

JOHN

Uh-huh.

He moves past her anyway, goes right on inside. She follows.

INT. ARABIAN NIGHTS - CONT'D

John walks through the place determinedly, paying no mind to Co-Co, who nips at his heels and shrieks:

CO-CO

You no allowed in here! Get out, Jo-hn! I tell Tony you here, he keel you! He keel me!

John nonchalantly reaches into his coat, draws out his desert eagle, cocks it. Passes the bar and moves out into the main showroom now. Co-Co persists diligently.

CO-CO (CONT'D)

Jo-hn, listen! You no stay here!
You leave!

Still no answer. She snakes around in front of him, fuming, stands in his way. He pauses, tries to push past her.

JOHN

Move it, willya?

CO-CO

No, Jo-hn! No. You go now. You go now! You leave!

John raises his pistol, thumbs back the hammer.

JOHN

No, YOU leave! If you know what's good for you get the hell out of here.

CO-CO

No!

JOHN

I will DROP you, do you understand me? I'll do to you what I'm about to do to that fat fucking' piece of shit! Now step off!

He waves the barrel in her face, all business. With great reluctance she steps out of his way, tears in her eyes.

CO-CO

(softly)

Oh, Jo-hn...

She scampers off. John picks up again, moving through the place with a quicker pace now. All eyes are on him. He doesn't notice, or rather doesn't seem to care.

CUT TO:

INT. ARABIAN NIGHTS, BACK ROOMS - MOMENTS LATER

John marches through the dressing rooms, weapon in hand, oblivious to the looks of the startled STRIPPERS powdering their noses and dolling themselves up around him.

He goes right to one door right at the back of the place, on which "TONY CALCETTI, MANAGER" is printed. With no hesitation whatsoever he kicks the door down -- almost off the hinges -- and marches, gun raised, into the room.

INT. ARABIAN NIGHTS, TONY'S OFFICE - CONT'D

It's empty. Beat. John lowers his gun slowly, perplexed. Hears voices chatter, close by...

He crosses over to the window, peers through the blinds. Stiffens. Tightens his grip on the desert eagle and marches right back out of the room.

INT. ARABIAN NIGHTS, BACK ROOMS - CONT'D

John gets to the last door, right at the back of the building, leading out into the back parking lot. He pauses, checks his gun. Almost has a full clip. Nods definitively.

And with a deep breath he leans back, gathers his strength, and bashes the door backwards.

EXT. ARABIAN NIGHTS, BACK LOT - CONT'D

He gets a view outside, and stops cold.

Out in the middle of the lot and packing suitcases into the trunk of an Oldsmobile are, in order: TONY, DET. CARLYLE, A THIRD MAN and none other than the dearly departed himself, AL CAMPBELL.

John immediately recognizes the latter from his picture, and it hits him like a ton of bricks. He stares ahead slack-jawed.

A long, silent beat follows. Nobody moves. Everybody stares.

Then all at once, all hell breaks loose.

Carlyle snaps to action, reaches for his gun, draws.

Tony races around to the driver's side of the car, with Al following close behind.

The Third Man also reaches for his weapon, but not before--
--Carlyle FIRES.

A nice, meaty chunk is ripped right out of John's midsection.

He cries out in pain, but not before he FIRES his own weapon, sending Carlyle flying back against the side of the vehicle and taking him out of the game permanently.

As John stumbles backwards, Tony tosses the driver's side door of the car open, hops in.

John recoils, FIRES again.

Rips a chunk out of Tony's neck. The Italian cries out all bloody murder, slumps back in his seat.

The Third Man FIRES his own weapon, misses.

Al rips Tony out of the driver's seat of the Oldsmobile, hops in. Turns the key in the ignition.

John FIRES at the Third Man, hits his shoulder. The guy doubles over, falls flat on his back.

Right under the Oldsmobile's tires.

As Al is putting the car in reverse.

All told, you can probably guess what happens next.

And soon Al's driving out of the lot and tearing ass to safety as John tries to give chase, YELLING hoarsely for him to stop.

And just like that, the whole thing quiets down.

John takes stock of the situation: Carlyle and the Third Man lie dead on the floor, in various states of decomposition.

Tony wiggles around on the pavement, groaning incoherently, as the red stuff pours out of his neck all over the place.

John takes a deep breath, drags himself lazily over to Tony, takes a knee next to the bloody bastard.

He slowly puts a hand to his midsection, feels around. Pulls his hand back. There's fresh BLOOD on it. A fatal wound.

JOHN
(spits)
Shit...

He grimaces, looks down at Tony.

The guy stares back up at him with a faint grin on his face, offers, weakly:

TONY
Well, Johnny...

JOHN
...Yeah?

A long silence. Soft chuckle from Tony. Then, between strained breaths:

TONY
I think it's...safe to say...
you'll never really understand.

A long beat. John looks at him, considers. Wears a slight grin of his own now.

JOHN
You know buddy, I think it's safe
to say you're right.

They share a soft chuckle, down there on the pavement.

Then John slowly brings his desert eagle up against Tony's temple, FIRES. Puts the guy out of his misery.

And still in that same position he checks the gun, checks the clip. It's empty.

He sighs heavily, tosses it. Rises, with some strained effort. Sounds of police sirens in the distance now, drawing close.

John looks back down at Tony, then the other two collecting flies in the middle of the lot. He spits, curses.

And then stumbles out of the lot, and out of sight.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN SKYLINE - DAY

VARIOUS SHOTS of the city, the streets pulsating and brimming with life, juxtaposed with shots of the remains of Tony, Carlyle and the Third Man still collecting flies in the club parking lot.

JOHN (V.O.)

(slow)

In the end, I think I could handle death. Yeah, sure. Why not...? Everyone dies. The best one could hope for is to get it over with quick and easy, as painless as possible. But most of us just ain't afforded that luxury.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

A busy street corner with dozens of New Yorkers moving to and fro. Sirens wail close by, growing louder by the second. A pair of squad cars speed past us, momentarily capturing our attention. Once they've past John makes himself visible, quickly pulls up the collar of his jacket and lowers the brim of his fedora just slightly over his eyes -- makes himself invisible, somewhat. He doesn't move, just watches the squad cars disappear down the street, waits until they're out of sight. Then he turns his attention to the opposite end of the street, begins hobbling away. Over:

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)

(beat)

For the rest of us, death is... among other things...like a moment of clarity.

INSERT:

INT. NONDESCRIPT ROOM

John takes one last drag, tosses his cigarette, crushes the butt under his heel. Regards us somberly and muses:

JOHN (CONT'D)

Do I regret it, whatever the hell I did? Would I do things any different, given the chance?

(beat)

Does the Pope shit in the woods?

BACK TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - SAME

John passes us, hobbling, his hands shoved deep in his coat pockets. We linger, stay behind, watch as he slowly assimilates into the throng of New Yorkers on the sidewalk. We lose him momentarily in the vast sea of bodies. Over:

JOHN (V.O.)(CONT'D)

Well...given the state of things,
I wouldn't be all that surprised.

And then we hear them: More sirens, preceding the arrival of more cops. And John breaks out into a slapdash run now, brushing past civilians, fading quickly into the distance, letting the cacophony of the metropolis slowly drown out the sound of his feet slapping the pavement.

He moves faster, faster, becomes a speck in the distance, leaving us behind to watch from afar.

And just like that, he's lost us.

We're left hanging, pushed out of his life, just another loose end he doesn't have the strength left in him to tie.

Our camera dips, our vision collides with the pavement below, and then we sharply--

CUT TO BLACK