

Suburbicon

Original Screenplay by
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Black.

In black we hear a light, irregular tapping, thin and sharp, as of something tapping against glass.

A slow fade-up defines crossing slats of wood—a window frame. The panes themselves remain black: it is night.

A delayed fade-up now defines a branch, leafless and twisted, tapping against a pane. We are looking out a second-story window.

Now fading up is the rest of the tree, a tangle of bare branches, swaying.

And finally the streetlit mansard and eaves of a house across the street, solid, suburban.

We start to pull back. A junior-scale baseball bat leans against the wall by the window. The continuing pullback shows a mitt and ball on a bookshelf nearby and other marks of a young boy's bedroom.

Under the tapping of the limb, the approaching murmur of male voices. We hear footsteps on a staircase as the two voices assume distinct characters—one placating, one gruff.

The murmuring ends as we hear a door opening. A shaft of light cuts across the room. Only one pair of footsteps enters.

Our track back finds and settles on an eight-year-old boy asleep in bed. A hand enters to shake him awake.

Voice

Nicky. Wake up.

The boy's eyes open.

Gardner, his father, stands over him in a bathrobe.

Gardner

Nicky. . .

Silhouetted in the doorway beyond him is a man in an overcoat.

. . . You have to get up, son. There are men in the house.

The boy climbs out of bed and takes his father's hand.

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

Nicky holds his father's hand as they go to the stairs. Following behind is the overcoated man, about thirty-five years old, Hispanic, heavy-set. His mustacheless beard and receding hairline accentuate the roundness of his face.

We hear a stop-and-start electronic whir from downstairs.

Gardner

We'll just do what they tell us and they'll leave soon.
Everything will be all right.

Nicky looks back over his shoulder at the man following behind.

The man stares at Nicky as he walks. No expression.

The three begin to descend the stairs. Opposite the bannister two rails are sunk into the staircase wall. The whirring noise grows louder.

Gardner

These men are just going to look around a little and then
they'll leave.

Nicky looks through the bannister, descending.

The living room below comes into view, foreground strobed by balusters. Two women in bathrobes are seated on a flower-print couch. The first is a handsome woman in her early forties—the boy's mother, Rose. The second is a few years younger but is heavier and less attractive—the boy's aunt, Margaret. Both look apprehensively at:

A second overcoated man, riding a motorized wheelchair around the living room, stopping here and there to poke through drawers and shelves.

Gardner twitches with anger.

Gardner

Get the hell out of there.

He lets go of Nicky's hand and hurries down the stairs.

The man in the wheelchair makes it pivot to face the stairs. He is in his forties, like the

other man heavy-set and roundfaced, but Anglo, crew-cut, face shadowed by beard-stubbed and punctuated with spikes of white nostril- and ear-hair. He is Ira Sloan.

Ira Sloan

Shaddup.

The father stops in the middle of the living room.

. . . Get me a drink.

They stare at each other. Finally the father turns towards the bar at the back end of the living room. He pours some bourbon into a glass and starts toward the man in the wheelchair.

. . . On a tray.

Another exchange of hard looks. The father turns back to the bar for a small metal tray, places the drink on it, brings it to Ira Sloan. Ira Sloan reaches for it.

Nicky is halted at the foot of the stairs. He watches Ira Sloan.

Leering at the boy's father from the wheelchair, Ira Sloan takes the drink from the tray. His hand is gloved—a leather driving glove with perforations for breathing and vents at the knuckles.

The Hispanic man, Luis Colina, pushes Nicky forward into the living room. Luis Colina is wearing the same driving gloves.

Luis Colina

Gimme a drink on a tray too.

Ira Sloan steps up out of the wheelchair. He pushes the wheelchair toward the couch.

At the bar Gardner finishes pouring the second drink and turns.

Ira Sloan

Don't give that to him. Gets mean when he's drunk.

Gardner looks back and forth between the two men.

Luis Colina

Give it here.

Gardner looks at Ira Sloan, who shrugs.

Ira Sloan

All right. Your fucking responsibility.

Gardner crosses the living room to hand over the drink.

Gardner

What do you want to do? Let's get this over with.

Luis Colina is taking a sip from his drink.

Luis Colina

What's the hurry, got an appointment?

Ira Sloan

He's got an appointment. He's got a social appointment.

Luis Colina

Where's the toilet?

Ira Sloan

Forget that. Let's quit fucking around and go.

Nick looks at Ira Sloan striding toward his mother. Beneath his overcoat are what seems like uniform pants, blue with a darker blue satin stripe running down the seam to a pair of shiny black lace-up boots.

At the couch now, Ira Sloan bends down towards the older woman, his head close to hers, almost as if to kiss her.

Ira Sloan

Just put your arms around my neck.

She does.

Gardner

I'll do that.

Ira Sloan scoops her off the couch.

Ira Sloan

Why don't you just shut up. She don't mind.

As he carries her over to the wheelchair:

. . . You don't mind, do ya ma'am?

Rose

No.

Ira Sloan

She don't mind.

Luis Colina

Tell me where the toilet is. I gotta pee like there's no tamarra.

Margaret

Through the hall on the left.

Luis Colina

Thank you ma'am.

Nicky walks over to his mother and watches Luis Colina leave. He is also wearing the blue dress pants and black lace-up boots. Nick puts a hand on his mother's arm.

Luis Colina's exit has left a lull in the talk. Finally:

Ira Sloan

If I were you I'd keep an eye on that guy. He's, uh, whadda they say, he's loco, ya know, he's outta his fucking mind. And he's got a weight problem.

He leans in confidentially to Gardner:

. . . You don't think that was his first drink, do ya?

Rose

How can we keep him away from Nicky?

Ira Sloan shrugs indifference:

Ira Sloan

Beats me.

Gardner

We have an understanding, correct—

Luis Colina

(laughing as he reenters)

An understanding, yeah.

He is carrying a blue bath mat and a matching blue toilet seat cover in one hand. A dark metal box is tucked under his other arm. He waves the toilet seat cover.

. . . This one-size-fits-all?

Margaret

Yes, it's, uh. . . standard. Standard size.

Luis Colina

It better be. How's this thing work?

He holds up a TiVo box, its cords dangling.

Gardner

You. . . It records your television programs to a hard drive but—

Luis Colina

Off the cable?

Gardner

Yes but you have to up-res to high def—You have to—

Luis Colina

Ah fuck it.

He drops the box clattering to the floor.

Ira Sloan

Let's quit fucking around.

BASEMENT STAIRCASE

As its light is switched on. Two rails, like those on the upper staircase, run the length of the stairs. At the head of the stairs Gardner wheels Rose onto the platform that travels on the piping.

Gardner

We have an agreement, don't we, that if we Clarkate no harm will come to us.

Ira Sloan

Yeah we got an agreement but I ain't God, you know what

I mean?

Gardner
(*carefully*)

No, I'm not sure I do.

Ira Sloan
Well, that makes two of us.

MINUTES LATER

Nicky and the rest of the family are in the home's finished basement, a rec room with a pool table, old television set, etc.

All four are seated. Gardner and Margaret are already bound hand and foot. Ira Sloan is now working on Rose as Nicky looks on, seated next to her. As Ira Sloan finishes a knot:

Ira Sloan
That more comfortable for ya, ma'am?

Rose
I'm fine. Just. . . please, don't hurt us. You promised you wouldn't hurt us.

Ira Sloan
Would we bother to tie you up if we were gonna hurt ya?
It's a question that answers itself.

He looks at her for a moment.

. . . You must think we're pretty sick. A couple a animals.
Is that what you think?

She doesn't answer. Ira Sloan's tone sharpens:

. . . I asked you a question. Smart guy.

Gardner
No no, she doesn't think that.

Ira Sloan
Shaddup. I've had enough from you. Don't tell her what she thinks.

Rose

No, I don't think that.

Ira Sloan has finished on Rose. He straightens up, glances over at Margaret.

Ira Sloan

You're pretty quiet over there.

She doesn't say anything.

. . . What do you think about all this?

Margaret

I . . . I'm sure you won't hurt us.

Ira Sloan smiles, stoops down to start tying up Nicky.

Ira Sloan

Lady, you ain't in a position to be sure about anything.

He is thinking out loud.

. . . Anyway, you make me sick.

Rose

Do you have to tie him up?

Ira Sloan

Jesus Christ, think about it for a minute. It's a question that answers itself.

A cel phone rings.

Ira Sloan and Luis Colina look at each other, uncertain. A beat.

Luis Colina reaches into his pocket and takes out a phone. He squints at its display:

Gombrich.

Luis Colina

Shit. I gotta get this.

Ira Sloan

You're shittin' me.

Luis Colina

Nah, it's all right.

Ira Sloan

You gotta be fuckin'—

Luis Colina

Nah, it's all right. Just keep it down. No one talk.

He flips open the phone, his other hand held up toward Ira Sloan for silence.

Hey man. . . Not much. . . Just, you know, on the job. . . I know. . . I know. . . Okay. You too, man. Have a good one.

He flips the phone shut and looks at Rose.

. . . You got a bathroom down here?

Ira Sloan

What? You gotta pee again? What're you so fucking nervous about?

He straightens up from Nicky, a little nervous himself.

. . . Just give me the chloroform.

Luis Colina hands him a bottle. Ira Sloan takes out his handkerchief, soaks it, and heads for Margaret.

. . . We'll start with the auntie over here. Shut up her yapping. "Auntie Em, Auntie Em. . ."

He holds the handkerchief over her mouth.

Just breathe normal.

She struggles before passing out.

. . . God, I love that fucking movie.

Nicky shrinks back in his chair, watching.

Ira Sloan is moving for the father. As he puts the handkerchief over his mouth, Rose starts to wail.

Rose

No. . . please don't. . .

Ira Sloan

Shutup you. No more talking.

As Gardner passes out, he turns and walks towards the mother.

As Nicky watches the man approach his mother he starts to struggle violently and cry. He is writhing in his chair as much as the rope will allow.

Luis Colina

Do the kid. He's freaking out.

Ira Sloan

Fuck you. You do him.

A pair of hands comes into frame with a red bandana soaked in chloroform.

Nicky struggles, tossing his head, making it impossible for Luis Colina to press the rag over his face.

Ira Sloan stands behind his mother with a handkerchief. Her eyes are on him.

Luis Colina

Just settle down, kid.

Rose

Be gentle with—

Ira Sloan is pressing the kerchief over her mouth.

Ira Sloan

We're just gonna send him to Oz. . .

Nicky, still struggling, looks at his mother.

. . . It'll be a riot.

Luis Colina gets his hands over Nicky's mouth. He settles down.

His mother is passed out, her head lolling onto her chest. Ira Sloan re-soaks his handkerchief, grabs her by the hair, pulls her head back and clamps the kerchief over her mouth again.

Nicky starts to struggle again, but Luis Colina has his rag firmly over his mouth now.

He sees Ira Sloan with his kerchief over his mother's mouth.

His eyes start to droop.

He sees his mother's legs. They are starting to tremble.

The picture begins to fade.

Luis Colina

Jesus, Jesus. . .

Offscreen, muffled, mixing down:

Ira Sloan

If you're gonna puke do it in the bathroom. Fucking greaseball. . .

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN:
HOSPITAL EMERGENCY WAITING ROOM

A middle-aged black man holds a blood-soaked towel around his arm, waiting for attendance. In the background we can hear the squeak of rubber-soled shoes on linoleum, an echoing PA system occasionally paging a doctor, etc.

Nicky, sitting opposite the injured man, is staring at him. He is pale, drawn, exhausted.

He looks down the hall.

Near the door to the waiting room, his father stands listening to a short Oriental doctor whose words are barely discernible:

Doctor

—she's on a respirator and we're profusing her, but, frankly, the prognosis is not good. Chloroform's a progressive depressant. It works on the motors and usually just has a temporary narcotic effect, but obviously your

wife respired a lot more of the stuff. . .

Nicky looks away, the doctor's voice continuing in the background as a muffled drone.

The black man seated across from him looks at him impassively.

FADE OUT

FADE IN
WAITING ROOM

Later. Nicky is waking up as we hear a door open offscreen. He rubs his eyes, looks across the room.

The chair where the black man had been sitting is now empty. There are a few drops of blood on the linoleum floor next to the chair.

On either side of Nicky, Gardner and Margaret rise from their chairs. Nicky's eyes follow them as they leave frame. He edges apprehensively forward.

His father and aunt are talking to the doctor. His voice is muted, solemn. Margaret starts sobbing. Gardner, nodding meaninglessly, looks at the doctor, looks at Nicky. He starts slowly across the room towards Nicky.

Nicky, watching his father approach, sinks back into his chair.

FADE OUT

CEMETERY

A sleek wooden coffin is being hydraulically lowered into a grave. As it slips down it reveals the members of the family and other mourners standing on the far lip of the grave. Nick is flanked on one side by Gardner and on the other by a stocky man with a solid gut—Nick's Uncle Mitch.

Nick mutely watches the coffin being lowered as the priest intones a prayer.

The hydraulics lowering the coffin make the same sound as the staircase wheelchair. The coffin comes to rest at the bottom of the grave. The priest has finished speaking. A scoopful of dirt hits the top of the coffin.

Gardner hands the scoop to Margaret. She shovels some dirt into the grave, then breaks down. Gardner puts a consoling arm around her and leads her away.

Nicky watches them. His father gives Margaret a consoling kiss.

Nicky turns back toward the grave.

Uncle Mitch scoops some dirt into it, then takes a small flower from his lapel and tosses it down onto the coffin.

CEMETERY ROAD

Nicky, Gardner, Mitch and Margaret are approaching the family limo. The priest is hurrying to meet them.

Priest

Please remember, Gardner, if there's anything you need, don't hesitate to call me. Rose was a very brave woman and. . .

Mitch, muttering, draws Nicky away while Gardner and Margaret talk to the priest. Mitch's accent is Bronx working-class.

Mitch

Full a shit. Come on, Nicky, let's you and me take a little walk.

Nicky

Yes sir.

They start walking down the drive.

Mitch

These fucking Episcopalian priests. Jesus Christ. They don't give two shits about spiritual guidance and family and the concerns of, you know. The bereaved. You know what they're thinkin' about Nicky?

Nicky

No sir.

Mitch

Their next martini.

Nicky

Yes sir.

Mitch

That's what these guys drink. With a fuckin' gahnish. What a suhvice. A goddamn travesty. Your mother was a fuckin' catlick, Nicky—excuse me. I'm upset. We're all upset.

He wipes an eye, shakes his head.

She was a catlick. Until she was hijacked. My sister was hijacked by a goddamn Wasp. You know what a Wasp is? Never mind. Just rememba: your mutha was a catlick. And that makes you a catlick. Not a goddamn Wasp. Jesus Christ. That suhvice. And what was with that seurmon. It's like he didn't even know huh, that fuckin' priest. A bunch of inane verbiage. He coulda been talkin' about anybody. These people have no soul, no values. Thank god they drink or they'd control everything. They got their eye on the ball, Nicky. Which is money. People think it's Jews think about money all the time. No. It's these people.

Nicky

Yes sir.

Mitch

When you're older you'll understand.

He looks at Nicky and finally seems to realize he is talking to an eight-year-old. He smiles, reaches out and pinches Nicky's nose between the middle knuckles of his index and middle fingers.

. . . Who's got ya nose, ya fuckin' kid, ya?

Nicky

You do, Uzzle Mitch.

Mitch releases Nicky's nose.

Mitch

Who loves ya like a son?

Nicky

(rubbing the color back into his nose)

Daddy does.

Mitch
(*undaunted*)

Yeah, well, who else?

Nicky

You do, Uncle Mitch.

Mitch is taking coins out of his pocket and slipping them into various pockets of Nicky's suit.

Mitch
Who let's you keep all the coins that stay in ya pockets?

Mitch is scooping Nicky off the ground with one arm around his waist.

Nicky
You do, Uncle Mitch.

Mitch takes one of Nicky's ankles in one hand, then the other ankle in the other hand. With the boy now dangling upside down, Mitch starts shaking him vigorously. Apparently it is a ritual of long standing.

Mitch
Goddamn, kid, you weigh a fucking ton.

Coins are jangling out of Nicky's pockets and spinning on the asphalt beneath him.

LIMO INTERIOR

Gardner sits with Margaret in the back of their limo, now tooling down the street.

Gardner
Damn it. Just once I'd like to see your brother show a little sense. . .

Through the windshield of the limousine we see Mitch, standing in the middle of the road, giving frantic but comically silent bounces to the upside-down Nicky.

. . . Just once I'd like to see that.

EXTERIOR LIMO

As it pulls up next to Mitch. The back door opens as Mitch lets the boy back to the ground.

Margaret

Come on, kids.

Nicky scrambles into the car but Mitch is on his hands and knees, picking coins off the pavement. His face is flushed from the exertion.

Mitch

Hold your hosses, Maggie, I'm paying for the limousine.

INTERIOR LIMO

Nicky is seated between Gardner and Margaret. Mitch faces them, his back to the driver. At the cut we hear only the hum of the engine. The awkward silence inside the car is finally broken by Gardner:

Gardner

Nicky, we've decided that it would be best if your Auntie Margaret stayed with us for awhile. You'd like that, wouldn't you?

Nicky doesn't say anything. He stares out the window at the bleak cemetery slipping by.

Mitch

If I didn't have a business to run, by God I'd stay too. Would you like that, son?

Nicky looks out the window, silent.

Margaret

He's had a bad shock. He doesn't want to talk now. I think he just needs some time.

Mitch takes a small flask of whisky out of his coat pocket, unscrews the cap and takes a long drought. He offers it to Gardner.

Gardner

No thanks, Mitch.

Mitch

Do ya good.

Gardner

No thanks.

Mitch shrugs and takes another swig. He burps, then sighs and looks out the window. He grimaces at a thought. Angrily, to no one:

Mitch

What was with that suhvice?

Silence.

Mitch comes to. He looks across the limo at the family.

Mitch

I'll promise you one thing, Gahdnuh. If I ever get my hands on the cocksuckas that did that to Rosie, I'm gonna fuckin' peel 'em back from their assholes. Just right inside the fuck out, sittin teh with teh fuckin guts hangin out—

Margaret

(*sharply*)

Mitch.

Mitch looks at her, puzzled, then follows her glance to the child.

His gaze drifts off again. Again his face clouds.

Mitch

. . . What was with that suhvice?

NICKY'S BEDROOM NIGHT

We are close on Nicky asleep in bed. The thin, sharp tapping sound. . . the muffled voices of the two killers, echoing, dreamlike. . . footsteps approaching on the staircase, and the sound of his bedroom door opening—

Nicky bolts upright in bed, sweating, and the noises abruptly stop.

He looks over at the door: not open. Hallway light leaks from underneath.

But, from downstairs, a brief exchange of male voices and the sound of a door closing, a heavy door, like the front door of the house. Was it real?

Nicky is breathing hard. Slowly he climbs out of bed and pads across the room to the door, listening.

THE HALLWAY

We are on the door to Nicky's bedroom; it slowly opens and Nick peers cautiously out.

The hallway is empty.

Nick emerges from the bedroom and heads for the stairway. We hear Gardner's muffled voice, then silence.

Nick starts down the stairs.

His point-of-view: bannister rails strobe in the foreground; the foremost part of the living room is coming into view; the backmost part is still hidden in by our high perspective.

Nick slowly descends.

DAD. . . ?
Nicky

His dropping point-of-view shows more of the living room; finally a pair of legs comes into view and then the rest of Gardner, striding into the foremost part of the living room, looking up the stairs. Ice cubes click in the drink he holds.

Gardner
Nicky. How long have you been there?

Nicky
. . . I had a bad dream.

Gardner looks off screen.

Gardner
Maggie?

We hear footsteps and Margaret enters frame from the back of the living room, wearing a rumpled bathrobe. She looks up at Nicky.

Margaret
What's the matter, angel?

Gardner

He had a nightmare. Uh. . . Maggie`ll put you to bed.

Margaret has already started up the stairs, extending her hand towards Nicky.

Margaret

Come along, sweetheart. Auntie`ll tuck you in.

THE BEDROOM

Nicky scrambles into bed. Margaret starts tucking in the covers.

Margaret

There`s nothing to be afraid of any more, Nicky.

Nicky

I know.

Margaret

Did you say your prayers before you went to sleep?

Nicky

Umm. . . I forgot.

Margaret

Well that`s probably why you had nightmares. Shall we say one together?

Nicky

Uh-huh

Margaret

Which one do you say?

Nicky

Our Father who art in heaven. . .

Margaret recites with him:

Nicky and Margaret

Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses
 As we forgive those who trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation,
 But deliver us from evil.

Margaret

Amen.

She strokes Nicky's hair.

. . . You know when you talk to God you talk to your
 mother too, because your mother is with God now.

Nicky

Yes ma'am.

Margaret

Your mother is with God, but your daddy and me and
 Uncle Mitch are still with you.

Nicky

Yes ma'am.

Margaret

And we love you.

Nicky

Okay. . .

His eyes are drifting shut.

. . . Aunt Margaret?

Margaret

Yes, Nicky.

Nicky

Are you a catlick?

Margaret

Catholic? Yes.

Nicky
(*drowsily*)

Okay. . . Aunt Margaret?

Margaret

Yes.

Nicky
They were . . .wearing the same pants.

Margaret

Who, angel?

Nick
Those men. . . who came in . . . the house.

His eyes flutter open.

Margaret is gazing down at him, her mouth slightly open, expressionless.

After a beat she smiles, reassuringly. His eyes start to droop again. They slowly close and we:

FADE OUT

BATHROOM MORNING

We are close on Gardner. He is leaning into a a medicine cabinet mirror, dressed in a crisp white shirt with his necktie thrown over his right shoulder. He is carefully clipping his nosehairs with a small Hoffritz scissors.

We hear a banging at the door.

Margaret
If Nick doesn't hurry up he's going to miss the bus.

Gardner
I'll drop him on the way to the train.

THE FOOT OF THE STAIRCASE

Gardner leans in shrugging on his topcoat.

Gardner
Come on Nick! Get the lead out.

THE STREET

Gardner pulls Nicky briskly down the street. Gardner is carrying a leather attaché case. Nick carries a lunchbox.

Gardner turns off the sidewalk to cut through a neighboring golf course.

THE GOLF COURSE

As Nick and Gardner cross a green. Gardner is setting a brisk pace, now several yards in front of Nicky.

It is early morning. The light is soft and low ground fog still covers the golf course.

Gardner pauses at the top of a rise to wait for Nick.

As Nick approaches we hear a sudden chicha-chicha-chicha as a dozen automatic sprinklers sprout on the fairway below. The mist from the sprinklers halates in the early sun.

Nick pauses beside Gardner. Gardner puts a hand on top of the boy's head as they both stare down at the sprinklers, the one holding a briefcase, the other a lunchbox.

After a long beat:

Gardner
God, life is a joke.

FADE OUT

ELEVATOR

Gardner stands at the back of the elevator, wearing a dark suit, carrying a briefcase. The elevator doors open to admit two more passengers.

Passenger
Gardner, welcome back.

He grabs Gardners hand and presses it between both of his.

. . . Sorry to hear about your loss.

Gardner

Thanks Roger.

Roger shifts awkwardly, then indicates the younger executive he entered with.

Roger

Gardner, this is Robert Hughes, a new account executive.
Bob, this is Gardner Lodge, financial v.p.

Gardner

Glad to meet you.

Robert Hughes

Likewise. Sorry we couldn't have met under more, uh. . .

Roger

(jumping in)

Scooting up to eight to introduce Bob to the Maniacs. . .

He glances at his watch.

. . . Damn. Trouble with those Creative people is they're never in before eight-thirty.

TRACKING POV THROUGH OFFICE AREA

Linda, the secretary outside of Gardner's office, is just getting to her feet.

Linda

I'm so sorry, Mr. Lodge.

Gardner

Thanks, Linda.

Linda

I'm so sorry.

Gardner

What do we have today?

Linda
Nothing right away. Mr. Pappas would like to see you
whenever. . . well, whenever. . .

Gardner
Thanks.

TRACKING

Through a lavishly appointed executive suite. A logo on the wall reads "Pappas & Swain".

A tall, deeply tanned man is walking towards the camera with his arms extended for an embrace.

Gardner extends his hand to be shaken.

Ed Pappas smoothly avoids trouble by bringing his hands together to wrap around Gardner's, then turns and drapes an arm around Gardner's shoulder and leads him away.

Pappas
Gardner. So sorry to hear about your loss.

Gardner
Thanks, Ed.

Pappas
Yeah, well come inside. We'll have a talk. Hold my calls,
Virginia.

PAPPAS'S OFFICE

Gardner is sitting into a chair that faces the large mahogany desk; Pappas perches on the edge of the desk facing Gardner. He looks at Gardner. Gardner looks at him. There is a long, awkward silence.

Finally Pappas brings his fist up to chest level and gives it a short, emphatic wave, smiling.

Pappas
Yeah.

There is another pause. After a moment he repeats the gesture and phrase

Voice

Gardner. No bullshit, just heartfelt condolences.

Gardner

Thanks, Phil.

Voice

Right. I won't keep you, just hang in there.

Gardner

Right.

He hangs up.

He looks off into space.

Another intercom buzz.

Gardner

Yeah.

Linda's Voice

John Sears on six.

He punches a phone button and leans back with the receiver.

Gardner

John.

Agitated Voice

Gardner, Jesus, how are you?

Gardner

Well —

Agitated Voice

I'm so goddamn sorry, I . . . I . . .

There is a long silence. Finally:

—Oh, God, Gardner, I don't know what to say!

Gardner

That's all right, John.

Agitated Voice
God, Gardner!

Gardner
Thanks, John.

Sears' voice continues, faint and tinny, as Gardner leans forward to cradle the phone.

He hits the intercom switch.

Gardner
Hold my calls, Linda.

Linda's Voice
Yes sir.

He sinks wearily back into his chair.

His eyes close. A tear runs down his cheek.

As he has rocked back in his chair, his feet under the desk dangle above the floor.

More tears drop from under his closed eyes. Suddenly his eyes open. He looks down at his desk.

He opens a top drawer and takes out two spring-tension hand grips. He starts squeezing them, one in each hand.

We are wide on the office as Gardner settles back in his chair, once again closing his eyes, still weeping, holding his hands out at either side and squeezing the grips, his feet dangling.

The only sound over the drone of the air-conditioner is the squeak-squeak-squeak of the spring grips.

There is a harsh buzz from the intercom.

Gardner leans for the intercom. Hoarsely:

Gardner
No calls, Linda.

Linda's Voice
Sorry Mr. Lodge, but I thought you might want this one.

The Rowahton police department.

Gardner

. . . Okay, I'll take it.

He sets the grips down on the desktop and rubs his eyes, trying to compose himself. He picks up the phone.

Gardner

Yes?

Voice

Mr. Lodge?

Gardner

Yes?

Voice

This is Officer Gale Hightower of the Rowahton P.D.
Right off the bat I gotta tell ya I'm sorry about your wife.

Gardner

Thank you—

Hightower

The other thing is I got a couple guys here I'd like you to look at. Stamford police picked 'em up last night and sent 'em down here 'cause they more or less fit your description, male Hispanic and a white guy—

Gardner

They've been caught?!

Hightower

Now don't get too anxious there, Mr. Lodge; nobody's been caught unless you say they have. These are just two clowns picked up for trying to kill each other, just a brawl, but, ya know. . .

Gardner

Well. . . what do you want me to do?

Hightower

Take a look at 'em. Ya know, if you'd be so kind and all that. . .

Gardner stares blankly down at the top of the desk.

. . . You still there pal?

Gardner

It'll. . . it'll take me a little while to get there.

Hightower

Hey, they ain't going anywhere.

PRECINCT HOUSE

Gardner sits in a folding chair in the precinct waiting room. A black hand enters frame, extended for a handshake.

Voice

Mr. Lodge? Lt. Hightower.

Gardner looks up at the tall middle-aged black man and smiles weakly. Hightower's hand is still extended.

Gardner

You're, uh—

Hightower

I'm the law around here. Go ahead, it won't rub off.

Gardner hastily rises and reaches for the hand.

PULLING GARDNER AND HIGHTOWER

They walk down a busy corridor in the police station.

Hightower

Hate to go over old ground, but are you sure there wasn't any cash in the house the night of the break-in?

Gardner

Hardly any. Why?

Hightower

Well, these two morons had a lot of dough on 'em when

they were picked up. Especially the male Hispanic. Well they're both males. Hey Mr. Lodge, you're brother-in-law, um. . .

Gardner

Mitch? Egan?

Hightower

Yeah, he—very well-intentioned, I'm sure, but—he's called a few times, check on the progress, offer some suggestions—

Gardner

He used to be a cop.

Hightower

Uh-huh, he mentioned that. Seven or eight times. Used the words “professional courtesy” maybe what, ten or twelve times. The point is, I always try to be polite. I'm a public servant, you know. But you're brother-in-law is a fucking pain in the ass.

Gardner

I'll. . . I'll get him to calm down.

Hightower

You know, that would be very helpful. So okay, so these two schmeggeges—that's what you call 'em, right?

Gardner

What? I'm. . . I'm Episcopalian.

Hightower

Yeah whatever, if you could just take a look. I had a squad car pick up your sister-in-law too. . .

Hightower is just opening a door to a small room with a glass wall at one end.

INSIDE

Margaret, a worried expression on her face, stands holding Nicky's hand, next to a police matron.

Hightower

. . . I thought she should see this. By the way, sorry about your wife. I mentioned that, right?

Gardner looks down at Nicky and freezes. He looks up at Margaret.

Gardner
Are you crazy?

Margaret
He was afraid to stay home alone.

Gardner
(to *Hightower*)
Must he be subjected to this?

Hightower shrugs.

Hightower
Beats me. How ya doing, junior?

Nicky
Okay.

Hightower
Wanna wait outside for a few minutes?

Nicky
I'm okay.

Hightower looks at Gardner and shrugs again.

Hightower
I think it's okay.

Gardner
Well I don't think it's okay! I don't think it's okay that he's been having nightmares! I don't think it's okay that he should have to see these people again! Are you people sadists down here?

Nicky
I don't mind looking at 'em, Dad.

Gardner stares at Hightower. The policeman sighs, stretches his hand out to Nicky.

Hightower

Better wait out in the hall, kid. We'll only be a minute.

He leads Nicky out the door of the viewing room, shuts it behind him.

. . . Kids love police work, what can I tell ya. Why don't you folks sit down.

As they do so, Hightower cuts the light in the viewing room and speaks through the intercom next to the light panel.

. . . Ready for the swimsuit competition.

The glass wall to the far side of the room shows a brightly lit platform, a door at the back of which is now being opened by a uniformed policeman. Six bored-looking men enter and mill vaguely about.

Hightower

(into the intercom)

Just line up on that black tape on the floor, gentlemen.

They fall in.

Gardner looks.

Ira Sloan and Luis Colina are among the six men, Luis Colina now with a discolored eye, Ira Sloan with a splinted middle finger.

As Gardner continues to look through the glass without any visible reaction, we hear a door opening. A wedge of light opens across the darkened viewing room. The forms of Hightower, Gardner, Margaret and the police matron are reflected in the glass that separates the two rooms.

Up on the platform, Ira Sloan raises his hand to shield his eyes from the overheads, squinting out at the viewing room.

Hightower calls over his shoulder:

Hightower

Keep it shut please. . .

He turns to look back up at the platform. He hits the intercom.

. . . Could we offer you some opera glasses?

Ira Sloan drops his hand from his eyes, pausing to curl a fist and show his splintered middle finger to the policeman.

The viewing-room door is easing shut on its hydraulic stop. Nicky now stands just inside the door, against the back wall of the room.

The viewing room returns to semi-darkness as the door closes; the backs of the heads of his father and aunt and the policeman are foreground silhouettes blocking his view of the brightly lit line-up

Hightower
(to Gardner)

Well. . . ?

Gardner shakes his head.

Gardner

No.

Nicky rises to his tip-toes to get a better view.

Hightower

. . . Ma'am?

Nicky shifts and cranes his neck.

The line-up is now in view. Ira Sloan and Luis Colina, looking bored, gaze out.

Nicky's eyes widen. He looks at his father, opens his mouth to speak, is interrupted:

Hightower
Turn to your right, fellas. . . You in the middle, speak
English? Your right. El righto, get me?

He turns from the intercom to Margaret, waiting for her confirmation. She still sits mute.

Gardner too looks at her, expectantly.

Hightower turns up a palm.

. . . Come on dear, you're not picking out wallpaper.

Margaret turns and looks at him levelly.

Margaret

No. They're not there. I just wanted to be sure.

Nicky, astounded, looks from her to his father.

Nicky

Dad. . . ?

Gardner turns abruptly to see Nicky for the first time.

Gardner

What're you doing here?

He turns to Hightower:

. . . What is he doing in here?

He strides over to Nicky:

. . . Come on. This isn't for you.

Hightower glances casually back over his shoulder, then looks at the matron.

Hightower

Sarah, take him out and keep him out, will ya? And you stick around, Mr. L.

He leans back to the intercom

The policewoman takes Nicky's hand and starts leading him out of the room. Nicky looks back over his shoulder.

Nicky

Dad. . . I gotta. . .

Hightower

No winners tonight. Sorry boys, I know how bad you wanted that scholarship —

We are tracking back out of the viewing room. Hightower is hunched over his intercom. Gardner stands rooted to the spot, staring at Nicky. Beyond him the line-up men are filing out the platform door.

In the foreground the viewing-room door hisses shut on its stop.

CAR

Nicky sits in the front seat between Gardner, driving, and Margaret. For a long while nobody speaks and we hear only the drone of the engine. Nicky, motionless, stares straight ahead through the windshield. Finally, looking as they pass a gas station:

Gardner

Never thought I'd live to see the day gas hit three dollars.

More driving in silence.

Then:

Margaret

Mrs. Najarian sent some flowers.

Gardner

She's s fine woman. . . We owe the Najarians a dinner.

Margaret

The Stouts also.

Gardner

Not on the same night, though. Herb and Thayer don't get along.

Margaret

Oh. Well just let me know when you think it's proper to start entertaining. . . I was just rereading some of "Life Races"—that book you gave me.

Gardner

Yeah, Dr., uh. . .

Margaret

Evan Maslansky. You know how he talks about life being a series of races, where you have to triumph in each one before you proceed to the next.

Gardner

Mm.

Margaret

Evan said that when you find a terrible hurdle in one of your Life Races, you can either remove it or choose another

Life Race. . .

She looks cautiously at Nicky, who does not seem to be listening.

. . . Well I just think we are being tested, Gardner.

Gardner

—Hmm? I'm sorry, I wasn't listening.

Margaret

Well. . . I was just rambling, I guess.

Silence. Finally, as they pass another gas station.

Gardner

I'll tell you one thing. I never thought I'd see gas hit three dollars.

Nicky suddenly lunges across Margaret's lap and claws for the handle of her door.

Gardner

Nicky! What the hell are you —

Margaret

ANGEL!

Gardner, not understanding what is going on, has not slowed the car. As Nicky's feet unintentionally kick at him, he fights to control the car.

Nicky starts vomiting into Margaret's lap.

LUIS COLINA

Driving. He responds to a vibrating hum, squints at his phone. *Gombrich*.

Luis Colina

Shit.

He flips it open.

Hey man.

Gombrich's Voice

Hey. Wuddya doin', Luis.

Luis Colina

Nothin. On my way home.

Gombrich's Voice

Driving?

Luis Colina

Uh-huh.

Gombrich

That's illegal. Driving, talking on a cel phone. That's a big no-no.

Luis Colina

Well shit, man—

Gombrich

No, I'm serious. That's a violation.

Luis Colina

Well—I saw it was you, man! I'm gonna not answer? Thass not good either.

Gombrich

I could red-tag your file. It's a violation.

Luis Colina

Well shit, okay, I'm hangin' up—

Gombrich

Don't you fucking hang up on me!

Luis Colina

Okay, what? Okay, okay, okay I'm pulling over.

He continues driving.

. . . One second. Okay. . .

He continues driving.

. . . Okay, whassup.

Gombrich

I wanna see you at your residence in fifteen minutes. Get your ass in gear.

LUIS COLINA'S APARTMENT

We push over Luis Colina's shoulder as he pushes open a door to enter an apartment that is a pandemonium of children yelling (the older ones) and bawling (the younger). A diapered child sits in the middle of the living room banging on the floor with a dirty frying pan.

An Hispanic woman screams:

Woman

Where the fuck have you been? You been gone like twenty-four hours, this is how we do it now? You fucking asshole!

Luis Colina

Everything is good, baby.

A buzzer sounds.

. . . Shit, thass him already.

Woman

Everything is good except that you're a fucking asshole!

Luis Colina presses a button set into an intercom by the door.

Luis Colina

Okay now don't yell at me with the guy here.

Woman

The what guy! The what fucking guy!

Luis Colina

It's Ernie. It's my P.O., man.

Child

It's the pee guy!

Luis Colina
Okay now don't call him that. When he's here.

Another Child
Lula's pee-guy is here!

A knock at the door.

Woman
That guy's a fucking creep.

Third Child
Lula's pee-guy is here!

Luis Colina
SHUT THE FUCK UP!

He opens the door to Ernie Gombrich, who wears a short-sleeve sport shirt and khaki pants and sneakers.

. . . Come on in.

Gombrich
Hey Luis.

Luis Colina
Mi casa es su casa.

Gombrich enters, looking around.

Gombrich
No thanks. Where you been, Luis?

Luis Colina
Oh, you know.

Gombrich
Uh-huh.

Silence.

What the fuck does that mean?

Luis Colina
Oh, you know, just. . . on the job, man. Playing with the

kiddies.

A hoot from the woman.

Gombrich nods, still gazing around.

Gombrich

Great, that's great. . .

He absently pulls an empty baby-food sized bottle from his shirt and unscrews its cap and hands it to Luis.

. . . So you weren't down at the Rowahnton precinct house
this morning?

Luis Colina stares at him.

A beat.

Luis Colina

Well yeah I was there.

Beat.

. . . Briefly.

Gombrich

Yeah, you fuckin' lie to me about where you been—

Luis Colina

I didn't lie, man! It was, you know, beneath notice!

Gombrich

Beneath notice. Are you gonna pee in that or what.

Luis Colina

Yeah, it was all a fucking mistake, they bring us in—they
bring me in for a line-up, some crazy shit that wasn't me in
the first place, I don't know—

Gombrich

Luis, let me 'splain something. You know three strikes
you're out? They play baseball in—where you from?

Luis Colina

Caracas.

Gombrich

Caracas. Is that where they make the—is that where the musical instrument's from?

Luis Colina

Whuh? Could be, I—whuh instrument?

Gombrich shakes his hands, going chicka-chicka, illustrating.

Gombrich

Caracas.

Woman

Thass castanets you fucking moron.

Luis Colina

SHUT THE FUCK UP!

Gombrich

No, the shakers—oh yeah, I guess it is castanets. Anyway, three strikes, that's the rule here, three strikes you're out. I red-tag your file, you go back to Attica, ya know, do not pass Go. You gonna pee in that, what's the matter, you want me to hold it for you?

Woman

You sick.

Luis Colina

SHUT THE FUCK UP! Yeah, I take it to the bathroom.

Gombrich

No no, here. You know how we do.

Luis Colina

Not in front of the—oh, fuck.

He goes to a corner of the room and turns his back.

. . . Don't look kids. Lula's got his dick out.

BATHROOM

We are close on the bathtub faucet dripping into the filled tub.

Nicky lies in the tub, watching the water drip. There is a knock on the door and he looks up.

Nicky

Dad?

Gardner walks in. He looks down at Nicky and shuts the door behind him. Gardner is dressed in a three-piece business suit that looks too warm for the steamed-up bathroom.

Gardner

So how're you feeling, son?

Nicky

I'm okay.

Gardner looks awkwardly around, then perches on the edge of the toilet.

Gardner

Fine, fine. It's been a rough day. How was your little league practice?

Nicky

I guess it was okay. I worked on my stance.

Gardner

Well good. That's fine. That's just fine. . .

Rising to leave:

. . . Well you keep working on that stance.

Nicky

Dad?

Gardner turns. His glasses are beginning to fog.

. . . How come you said it wasn't them?

Gardner freezes.

Gardner

. . . It wasn't who?

Nicky's wet hair is plastered to his head.

Nicky

It wasn't the. . . the robbers who. . . who killed mom.

Gardner starts to sweat in the heat of the closed bathroom.

Gardner

Nicky, did you see the line-up?

Nicky

I saw—

Gardner

Because that certainly was not the. . . robbers. It certainly was not.

Nicky

But —

Gardner

Young man, I want you to understand something. People walk into my office every day who say they've met me and I don't remember them at all. . .

He works himself up:

. . . Sometimes I see people I think I know and yet they tell me later that we've never even met. Maybe they look like someone else, maybe they talk like someone else, maybe they're related—

Nicky

But Dad, I —

Gardner

My point is that it's a very shady business, this who you know and who you don't know, often one is mistaken—very much mistaken and--and I'm telling you I got a good look at those clowns and I'd never seen them before.

Nicky

Uncle Mitch promised if I ever—

Gardner's voice rises, almost breaks:

Gardner
Uncle Mitch doesn't matter! He's a buffoon!

Nicky shrinks.

Gardner brings himself up short and composes himself. Noticing that his glasses are fogged he removes them and takes a handkerchief out of his pocket.

Nicky watches. From somewhere downstairs, we hear Margaret starting to sing. Her voice, filtering up into the utter quiet of the bathroom, has an eerie clarity. She is singing "Please Release Me."

Gardner starts to clean his glasses, the handkerchief squeaking against the glass.

. . . This is a family matter, and I don't want you talking to
Uncle Mitch about it. Is that understood.

Nicky
Yes sir.

Gardner turns to leave.

Gardner
It's a terrible, terrible tragedy.

DISPATCHING OFFICE

Of the city bus system. Route maps cover the cubicle's walls; schedules and papers clutter the desk of the shirt-sleeved supervisor who works there, Clement Greenberg. On his desk is a shellacked wood knickknack that shows the Twin Towers in flames and says "United We Stand/America."

Ira Sloan is entering the cubicle. He wears an MTA uniform.

Ira Sloan
Yeah?

Greenberg looks up.

Greenberg

You were late again yesterday morning.

Ira Sloan

Yeah?

Greenberg

Where were you?

Ira Sloan

Overslept. Your wife forgot to wake me.

Greenberg

Funny. (*taps a file*) I'm lookin' at this, Sloan. You show up late. You show up drunk. You show up hung-over.

Ira Sloan

Yeah, well. You show up full a shit.

Greenberg

Okay. Fine. That's it?

Ira Sloan

That's it what?

Greenberg

That's all you've got to say?

Ira Sloan stands there looking bored. Greenberg sighs.

. . . Okay. You're being fired for cause.

Ira Sloan

I got a labor union.

Greenberg

Yeah? See if they can get your a licence. Your B-2's gonna be revoked.

Ira Sloan stiffens.

Ira Sloan

. . . What?

Greenberg

It's a rumor I heard. You're gone. (*goes back to his*

paperwork) I already cleaned out your locker.

Ira Sloan

You fuck.

Greenberg

Uh-huh.

Ira Sloan glares at him. When he speaks again, it is carefully:

Ira Sloan

There was a . . . a thing in my locker.

This brings Clement Greenberg's look up.

Greenberg

Oh yeah?

Ira Sloan

Yeah.

Greenberg

Did you have a permit for it?

The two men stare at each other. At length:

Ira Sloan

That thing is mine.

Clement Greenberg holds the stare.

Greenberg

Gee. I didn't see a . . . thing. Why don't you report it stolen.

Ira Sloan finally breaks the look and turns to the door. He turns back to the desk with an afterthought. He spits on the papers strewn across it. He turns back for the door.

Ira Sloan

Big man. Clement fuckin Greenberg.

INTERIOR OF CITY BUS

It slowly cruises down the street. Luis Colina is driving. He pulls over to a bus shelter where an elderly woman waits. The door hisses open.

The elderly woman gingerly steps in, taking the stairs a cautious step at a time. As she reaches the top step, Luis Colina looks beyond her at the open door.

Ira Sloan, still in his MTA uniform, approaches the doorway.

Luis Colina panics and reaches for the door lever. The door hisses shut. Ira Sloan has one hand inside.

Luis Colina hits the gas. The bus lurches away.

Ira Sloan's hand slips out the door.

Luis Colina is cruising out into traffic. We hear Ira Sloan's muffled shouts receding outside. Luis Colina looks in his side mirror.

Ira Sloan runs down the street after the bus, shouting, arms pumping at his side.

From the back of the bus:

Voice
Driver! That was my stop!

The passengers all look apprehensively at Luis Colina.

More Voices
Driver! Driver!

The elderly woman who got on at the last stop is swaying precariously in the middle of the aisle. Which way will she fall?

Luis Colina looks from his rear-view mirror through the windshield.

Up ahead the next traffic light is turning red.

He reluctantly slows the bus to a halt. He looks in his side mirror.

Behind him the street is empty.

At the sound of a loud SMACK, his head whips around toward the door.

Ira Sloan has one hand slid between the two door bumpers and is pounding on the glass with the other.

Luis Colina's hand moves to the door lever, hesitates for a moment, then pulls. The door hisses open.

As Ira Sloan climbs the steps:

Luis Colina

What do you want, man?

Ira Sloan slaps at him awkwardly.

Ira Sloan

What're you doin'?

Luis Colina pushes back.

Luis Colina

What do you want?

Luis Colina reaches a baseball bat from where it is tucked upright next to his seat.

Ira Sloan

What's that.

Luis Colina

It's my whacker, man. In case a whacko gets on the bus.

Ira Sloan

Oh yeah?

Luis Colina

Thass right, man.

Ira Sloan

A whacko gets on the bus every time you drive. Come on, outside.

Both men have their hands up, Luis Colina with the bat, each waiting to see what the other will do.

A staring beat.

Finally, bat in hand:

Luis Colina

I'm on the job, man.

Ira Sloan

Outside. . .

He lowers his hands and takes one step back.

. . . Come on. Friends. Put away the fishbat. Whacko.
Whacker.

Luis Colina relents. He tucks the bat back behind the seat and rises cautiously and sucks under the handrail. As he starts down the steps, Ira Sloan is pushing him from behind.

Voice

Driver, are we moving on?

EXTERIOR

The bus is halted on a busy street. Ira Sloan gesticulates angrily.

Ira Sloan

They took away my fucking B-2. What do you think about that. And Clement Greenberg stoled my fuckin piece.

Luis Colina

Come on, man, I can't do anything. I'm sorry.

Ira Sloan

Sorry don't get me back my B-2. Or my gun.

Luis Colina

Well I'm sorry. Come on, man, I'm on the job.

A puzzled-looking middle-aged business man takes a tentative step out of the bus.

Ira Sloan

Get back in that bus.

Luis Colina
(reasonably)

This ain't a stop, man.

The business man gets back in the bus.

Ira Sloan

I lost my fuckin job. We gotta get the rest of our money.

Luis Colina

Hey look, he don't wanna pay us yet. He ain't gonna pay us the rest yet.

Ira Sloan

We talk to him again, believe me he'll pay us.

Luis Colina

He said a month, man, what's a month. A deal's a deal.

Ira Sloan

Fuckin kid seeing us at the station house wasn't part of the deal. Deal's off, man. It's payday.

Luis Colina looks nervously at his watch.

Luis Colina

I'm ten minutes off my route, man.

Ira Sloan

We're gonna go see him. And stop trying to avoid me. I ain't got the bucolic plague.

Luis Colina

I was ten minutes off when you stopped me. I'm twelve minutes off my route, man.

He is climbing back into the bus, leaving Ira Sloan out on the sidewalk.

. . . Ain't gonna lose my fuckin B-2

CHURCH

Mitch Egan is in a pew in the knear-empty church, kneeling with his hands clasped and his forehead resting on his knuckles. He looks up, eyes wet.

The Virgin Mary over the altar.

Mitch's eyes shift.

Christ crucified in the stained glass.

RECTORY

Mitch sits across from the priest, a man of like age and like background, in the priest's office.

Mitch

It's been a tawment to me. I just don't feel it's a good enviament fudda child, my phoney-baloney brotha-in-law—

Priest

Ya sista is theh.

Mitch shakes his head.

Mitch

She's a good woman, Margaret, but she's very scattuhd. It's just eatin at me, it just don't feel right. You should a seen this funeral suhvice fa Rose. It was a damn travesty. I mean Rose was the heart a that family and now theh's no heart left fudda child.

The priest shakes his head.

Priest

I don't know. Listenin' t'you, I don't know. Ya brotha-in-law, it doesn't matta who he is he's the boy's fatha. It doesn't matta is he an Episcopalean, y'attach too much impawtance to it. And this is ya catlick priest talkin', Mitch. And Margaret is a good woman, Margaret is a woman who comes to Mass every week, and she's theh fudda child—and I know I know, she's not gonna replace Rose but who would. You think about that, Mitch, who would. The mutha is gone. God blessa. And you ah not gonna be the mutha. You are a good man but you are a batchla. Lemme ask you, has the child complained.

Mitch is silent.

The priest repeats:

. . . Has the child complained.

Mitch
(*grudging*)

No.

Beat.

Quietly:

Priest
Go home, Mitch. Gah blessya.

LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD

A beautiful, sunny day. Nicky and several other kids his age mill about in the dugout, all dressed in their uniforms. Approaching the dugout from his parked car is a burly middle-aged man in Bermuda shorts and a sweatshirt with COACH printed on it. This is the Pee-Wee team's coach, Vern Wallerstein.

As he approaches the team:

Coach
All right, line up you little shitbums, line up, line up. . .

He sips from a beer can wrapped in a brown paper bag as he watches the boys line up.

. . . The field is not playable today.

From the line-up comes a chorus of "Huh?" and one piping, incredulous "What?!"

. . . Therefore, practice is canceled.

Moans from the team. One disappointed "Oh, God. . . "

Coach looks around.

. . . Who said that? "Oh God"—Who said that?

A small Hispanic boy raises his hand.

Boy
(*eagerly*)

I did, Coach.

Coach
Alvez, I hate to be the first to break the news to you. . .

He sips from the beer and gives Alvez a deliberate look.

. . . but God is dead.

Alvez
What?!

There is a chorus of more disbelieving exclamations from the team. Coach, however, focuses on Alvez.

Coach
You a religious man, Alvez?

Alvez
Uh-huh.

Coach
Yeah, well I don't know what kind of bullshit your parents have been teaching you at home, but He died about three and a half years ago in a car accident. . .

The boys are listening with rapt attention; the Coach straightens up from Alvez.

. . . It was quick. All right, get lost. I got better things to do.

As the team slowly starts to break up:

Voice
Coach?

Coach turns back with a pained expression.

Coach
Yes Siegelbaum, what is it?

Siegelbaum
My mom's not picking me up for another hour and a half.

Coach shoves a baseball bat in his hands and pushes him towards the dugout.

Coach
Just go in there and work on your stance.

SUBURBAN STREET

As Nicky walks home in his Little League uniform, bat on his shoulder. As he is about to cross the street a city bus pulls up. He waits for it to pass, then crosses.

LIVING ROOM

As Nicky lets himself into the house. It is curtained against the bright sun, and as Nicky makes his way across the still room we hear only the soft hum of the central air-conditioning.

He leans his bat against the wall near a side table and his attention is drawn by some brochures that have been left there beneath a burning light, spread out next to Gardner's half-glasses and a mug of coffee, still steaming.

Nicky picks up one of the brochures.

A ten-year-old child pictured on the front is wearing a dress uniform and has his white-gloved hand raised to his forehead in salute. The large-script heading says: THE CITADEL/A Place of Discipline.

Nicky looks at it with growing consternation. He puts it down, picks up another brochure: VALLEY FORGE MILITARY ACADEMY/Preparing Young Men for Life.

Another one: FORT SNELLING/Discipline and Love/Courage and Achievement. A Boarding School for Young Men.

Nick opens the brochure. Inside a young cadet is saluting two officers.

Nick notices something with consternation: The officers wear dark blue pants with a darker blue satin stripe running down the seam. They end in a pair of shiny black lace-up boots.

Nicky stares with mounting horror. Suddenly there is a loud clatter from the basement and Nicky freezes and listens.

Stillness, and then another clatter and the sounds of a struggle. Galvanized, breathing hard, Nicky picks up his baseball bat. He stands frozen, clutching the bat, listening.

From downstairs we hear Margaret scream.

Nicky edges forward, bat at the ready.

STAIRCASE

Nicky's feet cautiously descend. He clutches the bat.

From the rec room we hear:

Margaret
Please. . . please. . . PLEASE!

More clatter.

Nicky throws open the door to the rec room. He is brought up short.

Gardner is on top of Margaret, who is on top of the ping-pong table. She appears to be naked.

Gardner, who partially blocks our view of her, is in a state of semi-undress. Both are flushed and sweating.

Margaret clutches a ping-pong paddle in either hand.

Gardner wheels to face the door, his face panic-stricken.

Margaret looks up, also horrified.

Margaret
Angel!

She slides off the ping-pong table and runs into the bathroom, wailing.

. . . Oh Lord!

Gardner
What's going on here? Are you crazy?

Nicky stares as Gardner approach him.

Gardner
What're you doing home?!

FADE OUT

FADE IN:
KITCHEN

From a long way up, directly overhead, we are looking down on the kitchen table. Gardner and Nicky sit facing each other across the table.

Gardner

We'll be eating alone tonight. Aunt Margaret is feeling ill.

Nicky

I'm not eating anymore.

Gardner

You're not, huh.

Nicky

I wanna move.

Gardner

Is that right.

Nicky

I don't wanna be here anymore.

Gardner

Is that right. Let me tell you something, buster. You are a little boy. And at the moment, you are a very silly little boy. And I guess that the day that what you want starts counting around here, that'll be the day that you go into the office and earn money for dinners that I can say no to.

Nicky

I don't care when it is.

Gardner

Do you want to go into the office tomorrow? Because I can certainly arrange it.

Nicky
(*sullenly*)

No sir.

Gardner
Just say the word and I'll pick up that telephone and call
Linda and tell her to expect Nicholas tomorrow.

Picking up the phone:

. . . Shall I do that?

Nicky
(sullenly)

No sir.

Gardner
Well then I won't hear another word out of you.

FADE OUT

RECEPTION OFFICE

A receptionist at the front desk is answering the phone.

Receptionist
Egan Security, may I help you?

Nicky's Voice
Is Mitch there?

Receptionist
Uh, Mr. Egan?

Nicky's Voice
. . . Um-hum.

Receptionist
Just a moment, please.

She hits a button on the telephone console.

OFFICE ANTEROOM

A secretary reaches for her phone.

Secretary

Mr. Egan's office.

Nicky's Voice
Uncle Mitch?

Secretary
I beg your pardon?

Nicky's Voice
. . . Is Uncle Mitch there?

Secretary
Mr Egan's in a meeting right now. Can I take a message.

Nicky's Voice
. . . Huh?

Secretary
He's in a meeting, ma'am. . . Could I take a message.

Nicky's Voice
Can I wait till he's done meeting?

Secretary
Well I don't think you'll want to hold; it may be awhile.
Who am I speaking to?

Nicky's Voice
. . . Can he call me?

Secretary
If you leave your name and number, I'll be happy to give
him the message.

Nicky's Voice
He's gotta call me before my father gets back.

PULLING IRA SLOAN AND LUIS COLINA

They walk through the office area leading up to Gardner's office. Luis Colina is wearing his MTA uniform. Ira Sloan has dressed for the occasion: he wears a plaid coat and clashing pants.

Secretaries stare at them as they approach the desk of Gardner's secretary who rises apprehensively.

Secretary
May I help you?

Ira Sloan
Just sit down, lady.

They walk past her towards the office door.

Secretary
Gentlemen, he is in a meeting!

Ira Sloan
(pushing the door open)
Same meeting he's been in for the past three days?

GARDNER'S OFFICE

Ira Sloan and Luis Colina come barging in. A young executive is sitting across from Gardner, going over some papers on his desk. He turns to stare at the two men as Gardner rises.

The secretary stands, bewildered, in the open doorway.

Ira Sloan
Hi pal.

Gardner
(flustered)
It's all right, Linda. . .

She exits, shutting the door behind her. Gardner looks nervously between Ira Sloan and Luis Colina and the executive still seated across from him.

. . . Bill, can we, uh, finish this up later?

Bill
(also flustered)
. . . I guess, Gardner. . .

He scoops his papers off the desk.

. . . you bet.

When he is halfway to the door:

Gardner

—These men are, uh. . . doing some work on my house.

Bill pauses awkwardly.

Bill

Well, uh. . . that's nice.

He nods at Ira Sloan and Luis Colina.

. . . Good meeting you.

He leaves.

Gardner leans across the desk.

Gardner

Are you crazy, barging in here—

Ira Sloan presses a palm to his chest and gives him a violent push backwards. Gardner lands, sitting, in his chair.

Ira Sloan

Shutup. . .

He leans, knuckles on desk top, towards Gardner.

. . . You crazy little boy-ass, you think you can get rid of us?

One hand darts out to land a slap on Gardner's face.

. . . That what you think? You think you can fuck us and that's the end of it?

Gardner

Don't touch me. You made an agreement. Live with it.

Ira Sloan slaps him again:

Ira Sloan

Live with this, ya fuckin hard-on.

He grabs Gardner by the lapels and hauls him bodily onto the desk, stomach-down.

. . . Big shot. . . . Bring your fuckin kid to the police station. Mental case.

He has dragged the length of Gardner's body across the desk and he now lets him fall on his side of it.

Luis Colina

Thass fucked up, man.

Luis Colina has been studying the knick-knacks on Gardner's desk. He picks up the grip strengtheners.

Ira Sloan grabs Gardner by the lapels again and hauls him to his feet. He leans him against the near side of the desk and slaps him again.

. . . Is that what you are? A mental case.

Another slap.

. . . Fuck me, I love it.

He pushes Gardner backwards onto the desk, straightens his coat. He turns to Luis Colina.

Ira Sloan

Gimme that.

He flings the grip at Gardner's head. It bounces off his forehead leaving a slight gash.

. . . Take care of that kid. I don't care what you do or how you do it.

Luis Colina

You gotta do that, man.

Ira Sloan

Either you do it or we do it. . . .

He turns to go.

. . . And that money, man, fuckin' due and payable.

As an after thought, he turns back to spit on the desk. As he turns to go:

. . . Big man.

Luis Colina

Mental case. Whacko.

ELEVATOR

Ira Sloan and Luis Colina ride down the Papas & Swain elevator with two other passengers. Ira Sloan is feeling on top of the world. After a brief silence:

Ira Sloan

We showed that hard-on, didn't we.

Luis Colina

Yeah.

The other two passengers glance around at them.

Ira Sloan

Big help you were.

Luis Colina

Fuck you.

The elevator door opens. The two passengers get off and a lone secretary gets on, young and good-looking.

The three ride in silence, Ira Sloan shooting appreciative glances at the young woman. Finally he leans over to her:

Ira Sloan

. . . What're you doing tonight?

GARDNER'S OFFICE

Gardner paces back and forth in front of his desk dabbing at his forehead with a handkerchief. His secretary's voice comes over the intercom:

Secretary

Your brother-in-law on seven.

Gardner walks slowly over to the telephone and picks up.

Gardner
Mitch?

Mitch's Voice
Gahdnuh, how are ya?

Gardner
(*curt*)
Good.

Mitch
Did you call me?

Gardner
No.—Call you? No.

Mitch
My god I got the weirdest message my heart skipped a beat it said, "Mrs. Lawdige called." Witcha home numba on it theh. I thought it might a been you, like an S got stuck in after Mista.

Gardner's knuckles whiten around the receiver.

Silence.

. . . You theh?

Gardner
Yeah. I—

Mitch
My god I almost dropped dead right theh. "Mrs. Lawdige called." Swear to god.

Gardner
That's very strange.

Mitch
Yeah. Well okay. Well I should come visit. See Nicky.

A beat. Gardner gropes.

Gardner
Mitch, uh. . . Give us a while.

Mitch
Huh?

Gardner
It's hard for us. I know it's hard for you too, I'm sorry.
But no visitors for a while. I'm sorry. Nicky needs time.

He hangs up.

LIVING ROOM

Nicky lies on the floor in his pyjamas, chin propped in his hands, watching TV.

The door to Gardner's study opens and Margaret emerges. She speaks softly:

Margaret
Nicky, your father would like to have a word with you.

STUDY

The room is a wood-paneled carpeted den with a dropped soft-tile ceiling. Gardner, in a gray cardigan sweater and reading glasses perched halfway down his nose, sits behind a wooden desk, too big for the room, reading *THE BATES BOOK*—*Selling Direct*.

Behind him an aquarium is set into the wall. The only sound in the room is the intermittent *blurrup* of the oxygen compressor forcing air into the tank.

Without looking up:

Gardner
Close the door, Nicholas.

Nick does, and sits across from the desk in a padded wicker chair.

There is a long silence as Gardner continues to read.

Finally he closes the book and looks up.

. . . Nick, I have tried to instill in you a certain discipline. Maybe it's my fault. . .

He nods, musing.

. . . Maybe it's my fault. Because it hasn't taken. But we live in a world where there is no achievement without discipline. It's a world of competitors. It's a world—the adult world—it's a world of things, some pleasant, some not so pleasant. Duty, certainly. Well. Your mother indulged you, I think. And that's fine, up to a point. The cocoon, so forth. That's fine. But now we draw the balance sheet. And we see where we are. Do you understand?

Nick

Yes sir.

Gardner

I see a little boy who is sullen. I see a little boy who is frequently withdrawn. In his own. . .

He waves a vague hand.

. . . little world. A little boy with no friends. Doesn't fit in. And these things are important. We don't laugh these things off. Okay?

Nicky doesn't say anything.

. . . And so we've looked into sleep-away school. A place where young men learn about discipline. And fitting in. The fledgling always wants the nest, Nicholas. But is it good for him. Is it good for him. We've consulted the experts. I think not. . .

Nicky doesn't say anything. The aquarium compressor *blurrups*.

. . . I think not. Aunt Margaret and I have decided that Valley Forge, the Academy, after consulting educators, we've decided, uh. . . the best solution, starting next semester. They've made room for a new plebe, they, uh, you will wear the uniform. Had to pull some strings but, uh, I think you're in. Congratulations.

He picks up The Bates Book.

LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD

The coach is once again addressing the team assembled in the dugout.

Coach
All right, today we're gonna start with the calisthenics, you
know what they are, when you're done come and get me.
I'll be in my car—

As the team starts to break up:

Voice
Ah, fuck. . .

Coach halts.

Coach
—What? Who said that? Everyone get back here. Who
said that?

One of the boys nervously raises his hand.

Boy
I did.

Coach
You know what "fuck" is, De Luca?

De Luca
Uhh. . . uh-uh.

Coach
You use words you don't know what the fuck they are?
Who here knows what fuck is?

He looks around the team.

. . . Anybody?

Alvez eagerly waves his hand to get the coach's attention.

Alvez

I do, Coach!

Coach
(dripping sarcasm)

Great. Alvez is gonna tell us what fuck means.

Alvez

My sister says fuck is like saying shutup to God.

Silence.

Coach stares sadly at Alvez.

Coach

Alvez, is there any idiocy in your family?

He takes a deep breath and looks around at the team.

. . . Okay, listen up. Coach is gonna tell you what fuck is.
Fuck is, a man and a woman, the night they get married,
they take off their clothes in front of each other. . .

The team listens with a mixture of rapt fascination, horror, and disbelief.

. . . The man looks at the woman's tits, he gets a hard-on, it
comes out about yea long. . .

He holds one hand out about three feet in front of his waist.

. . . And then they have babies. That's what fuck is.

De Luca is incredulous. His voice strains at its highest register:

De Luca

What?!

Siegelbaum is nodding sagely.

Siegelbaum

It's true. My folks gave me a book about it called "It's Perfectly Natural."

Another Boy

He's crazy.

Coach
Wake up, De Luca, you're living in a dream world.

Siegelbaum
Yeah, my folks said he was right about God, too.

Coach
(turning to go)
Siegelbaum, no one here gives a flying fuck what your folks think.

Siegelbaum looks at his feet, chastened.

As Coach heads for his car Nicky runs up to him and tugs at his sweatshirt.

Nicky
Can I talk to you, Coach?

Coach drapes an arm around Nicky's shoulder as he continues to walk.

Coach
Is it about ball?

Nicky
No sir.

Coach
So it's a personal problem not related to team sports?

Nicky
Yeah, my dad —

Coach
Lodge, let me tell you something. When I was playing Triple-A ball in Columbus I went to my manager once with a personal problem, and the manager said to me, and I'll never forget it, he said: "Wallerstein, I don't care about your personal problems; all I care about is your performance on the diamond." Son, I don't feel that way. I don't even care about your performance on the diamond.

Coach drops his hand from Nicky's shoulder and pulls away, muttering as he recedes:

. . . I guess that's the difference between Little League and the Minors.

Nicky slows to a stop and watches the coach walk away.

MASTER BEDROOM

Gardner and Margaret lie in bed.

Margaret

It would be terrible if he talked to Mitch. Mitch is so hot-tempered.

Gardner

He's not talking to anyone. He's going to Valley Forge in two weeks.

Margaret

But is that good enough for these men? We don't want to antagonize them.

Gardner

What're you talking about, I'm not going to just knuckle under to these clowns. They're goddamn bus drivers. You let me worry about them.

Margaret

But if they say we have to do something about Nicky, then don't we have to do something?

Gardner

Maggie, do you know what they mean by "do something"?

Margaret

Well, I don't know. They don't mean Valley Forge, though.

Gardner

No they don't.

Margaret

Well I don't know; I just want everyone to be happy.

Gardner

Well. . .

He nods.

. . . Believe me.

Margaret

You know, Gardner, I don't like these conversations. And I love Nicky as much as you do. But this is the Life Race we've chosen—

Gardner

Shutup with that Life Race garbage! It's what got us into this mess in the first place!

Margaret

Please don't be angry with me Gardner. . .

Gardner

I'm not angry with you.

Margaret breaks down and sobs quietly.

Margaret

I didn't mean to bring him to the station. It's just that there were all those officers in the house all of a sudden. . . I didn't want to disobey the officers. . . Please don't be angry with me.

Gardner looks at her, still whimpering. His manner softens. She is so vulnerable.

Gardner

Give me strength, Maggie.

Margaret

We'll give each other strength. . .

Gardner

. . . Like last time.

Margaret reaches up and rips open the front of her nightgown.

Margaret

Look at my breasts, Gardner. Look upon them!

HALLWAY

A seedy apartment building hallway whose ghastly unshaded fluorescents throw a sheen on the white enamel-painted walls. A door at the back opens and Ira Sloan emerges from his apartment and goes to a door standing ajar near the front of the building and knocks.

Tony Janson appears at the open door.

Ira Sloan
Need to buy another fuckin piece.

Janson
Okay.

Ira Sloan steps in, leaving the door open, and looks around. A shabby ground-floor apartment.

Ira Sloan
This prick Clement Greenberg stole my piece.

Janson
Oh no. Want another .38?

Ira Sloan
Yeah, I'm not, you know, .38, .45, whatever. Whatever you got. I'm not one of these guys where it's a dick substitute.

Janson
I get it.

Ira Sloan
My dick is fine, know what I'm sayin'?

Janson
Yeah, okay. Three hundred.

Ira Sloan
Done. Um. . . it's just, uh, can I pay you about a week?
Maybe less even.

Janssen

Sure. Come back when you got the money, I give you the piece.

Ira Sloan

Yeah but, see, thing is, I need the piece to get the money. To show the guy who owes it to me I'm serious. If you could just borra me the thing a couple days—

Janson

Ira, I sell guns.

Ira Sloan

Yuh-huh.

Janson

Sales. I don't invest.

Ira Sloan

Ah yuh. . . so I can't count on you people then.

Janson

This is not Merrill Lynch.

Ira Sloan

Ah fuck-a-doodle-do. Yeah, okay. Okay. I gotta call a guy then, I gotta go back to the fuckin' depot—can I use your phone? They detached my, you know, my service.

Janson

Yeah, sure. You go ahead, use my phone. I got unlimited local usage, I ain't an asshole about it.

Ira Sloan

Yeah. Thanks. Fuck.

Janson

Guns I don't got unlimited. Phone, yes.

LIVING ROOM DAY

Nicky kneels on a sofa that sits beneath the front living room windows, looking out at the street. We hear rain pattering on the glass and drumming on the roof.

The occasional car hisses by on the street outside. It is a gray, rainy morning. From offscreen we hear the sound of a television set broadcasting a soap opera.

TV Woman's Voice

You can't go through with the operation.

TV Man's Voice

Don't you remember what they called me in medical school, McKenzie the Mechanical Marvel? I've got no nerves. My problems with Linda do not enter this O. R. . . .

A Chevrolet Monte Carlo pulls up into the driveway. A tall man in a trench coat gets out of the car, looks briefly around, then trots through the rain up toward the front stoop.

Nicky hops off the couch as the doorbell chimes.

FRONT FOYER

As Nicky enters. The front door is chained, higher than he can reach. Nicky opens the door as far as the chain will allow. Through the crack in the door, the man smiles down at him. He is craggily good looking.

Man

Are you Nicky?

Nicky

Uh-huh.

Man

Is your father at home, Nicky?

Nicky

No sir.

Man

Is your aunt here?

Nicky

Uh-huh.

The man is still smiling as he stands in the pouring rain.

Man

Can I come in? Awful wet out here.

Nicky

Um. . . I'm not supposed to open the door for strangers.

Man

Oh my.

Nicky

Do you know my Uncle Mitch?

Man

I'm afraid I haven't had the pleasure. Do you think maybe you could get your aunt? Awful wet out here.

Nicky

I'll go get her.

As Nicky turns from the door:

Man

Roger.

Nicky turns back to the door and squints up at the man.

Nicky

Are you an astronaut?

The man laughs.

Man

No, I was too tall to fit in the rockets so they told me to go into the insurance biz.

Nicky nods at this, then turns and goes.

KITCHEN

As Nick enters from the hallway.

The TV is louder here.

2nd Man's Voice

You can't blame yourself, it'll only destroy you. It happens

every day—

1st Man's Voice

Not to me.

2nd Man's Voice

You're not a miracle worker, you're a man, Jim.

Margaret is standing over the kitchen sink, wearing rubber gloves and pouring Draino into the standing water that fills the sink.

As she works she occasionally glances over at a portable TV. She notices Nicky.

Margaret

I'll fix your lunch in a minute, Angel.

Nicky

There's a man at the front door from the Insurance biz.

Margaret starts toward the foyer, stripping off her gloves and taking Nicky's hand.

Margaret

Oh goodness, what pests. . .

THE FOYER

As Margaret enters, still leading Nicky by the hand.

The man outside still waits patiently in the pouring rain.

Margaret

. . . Yes?

Man

Miss Egan? I'm Kenneth Clark from Canyon Prop and Life—

As she starts to close the door:

Margaret

Thank you for stopping by, Mr Clark—

Clark

Kenneth is fine.

Margaret

Yes—I'm quite sure we have all the insurance we need—

Clark

I'm sure you do, but fact is I'm not a salesman; I'm here to discuss your sister's policy.

Margaret

Oh! Well. . . you'll have to talk to Gardner about that. He'll be home this evening; he has all the information on that.

Clark

Could I just come in for a second? Awful wet out here.

Margaret

(flustered)

Well. . . I don't have any of the information. . .

Clark

That doesn't matter, Miss Egan; I'd just like to chat with you for a minute.

LIVING ROOM

Clark is just taking off his dripping trench coat.

Margaret

Let me hang that in the bathroom.

Holding the dripping coat in front of her, she trots out of the living room, cooing:

. . . Ohhhhh!

Clark

(calling after her)

I'm sorry, it's a lovely rug.

Margaret bustles back in, carrying an old sheet. She walks over to where Clark sits on the couch.

Margaret
 Could you get up for just a moment?

Clark
 Oh, I'm sorry.

He helps her drape the sheet over the couch, then sits back down again. Margaret sits down on the edge of a chair opposite Clark.

Margaret
 I haven't the faintest idea how I can help you, since I don't have any of the information, but, uh. . . What is it exactly that you do for the insurance people?

Clark
 Oh, I guess my official title is Claims Investigator, what you might call a professional skeptic.

Margaret gives a little titter to acknowledge his smile.

Margaret
 Well I'm afraid I. . . is there something wrong with the policy?

Clark
 No no no no, the policy seems to be all ship-shape; Mr. Lodge's been very steady with the payments; your agent, um. . .

He gropes for the name.

Margaret
 Mr. Rosenblum?

Clark
 Right, Bobby Rosenblum, he tells me everything's in order. Have you met him?

Margaret
 No, I really don't know anything about Gardner's business affairs. That's why I'm afraid I can't—

Clark
 Well I wouldn't worry overmuch about "information", Miss Egan, because people always put information in quotes. . .

He makes quotation marks in the air with his fingers.

. . . but it isn't always like that. I mean people just don't realize how much they know; for instance, you happen to know the agent's name. . .

He is opening his attache case.

. . . I have all that information here.

He puts on a pair of glasses and flips through papers.

. . . I'm really more interested in the other kind. . .

Absently, as he continues reading.

. . . Which all really boils down. . . to one . . . word. . . Do you live here now, Miss Egan?

Margaret

(uneasy)

Well I'm here now, of course.

Clark

Is that a temporary or a permanent arrangement?

Margaret

I . . . I think that Nicky needs a mother.

Clark

Of course.

Margaret

What. . . what was the word?

Clark

Excuse me?

Margaret

You said it all boiled down to one word?

Clark

. . . Did I? Oh yeah. Coincidence. That's what it all boils down to. Yeah, it happens a lot in the opera.

Margaret

Does it?

Clark

Sure, Aida, Barber of Seville, it's just. . . It gets ridiculous.

Margaret

I'm not much of a—

Clark

But in real life it doesn't happen much. If it did, I guess it'd stop being a coincidence. It's not the policy, Miss Egan; it's the claim. Ya see, a coincidence on a claim, it's like a little red flag that makes us sit up and take notice. And this claim has a bunch of little red flags on it.

Margaret

Good heavens—

Clark

Nothing to worry about, believe me, I'm just here to chase down all those flags, very routine. We just have to have them explained before we send out a check. The claim will be honored, of course. To the penny.

Margaret

(relieved)

Oh, that's good.

Clark

Oh sure. Let's just take a look here. See, the first little red flag I noticed was that—March 3rd—about three months before the, uh, incident—the amount of the term part of the policy was substantially increased, but there was no increase on the whole life, kind of unusual, I don't suppose you know anything about—

Margaret

That was Gardner's idea.

Clark

It was, huh? Well I guess I'd better ask him about that this evening. What else have we got here, we've got. . . Oh yeah, more than one claim on a policy, that's always a little

red flag, we've got that claim from '96, Rose's car accident, you stung us good on that one, well that's okay, that's what we're here for.—Oh! Here's a little red flag, didn't even notice this before. Jeez, about five months ago Mr. Lodge redeems twenty thousand worth of his whole life policy with us, we always like to notice things like that, but I guess you know what he need the money for?

Margaret

Oooh!

She has just noticed Nicky sitting on the staircase, his face pressed between two balusters, watching.

Margaret dashes to the stairs, takes Nicky by the hand and leads him up towards the bedrooms. Clark saunters over to wait for her at the foot of the stairs. He looks this way and that, glances at his watch.

Margaret descends the stairs, alone, and tentative.

Margaret

I'm sorry, that was money for Nicky's college education.

Clark nods sympathetically.

Clark

College and orthodontia, they really kill ya.

Margaret

He has excellent teeth.

Clark

Well thank God for that. I guess he put it in a trust fund or something?

Margaret gropes.

Margaret

Would you like a cup of coffee?

Clark

That would be absolutely terrific.

She is heading for the kitchen. Clark idly follows her, chatting on.

. . . I don't suppose you know where that account is?—Well it doesn't matter, I'll ask Mr. Lodge about that one. . . Sorry to be such a pest, I mean this stuff isn't very important. But I'll tell ya, I could put you on the floor with some of the scams I've seen and I'm talking about real knee-slappers, I gotta smile just thinking about `em. . .

He starts to laugh.

Margaret looks at him.

He laughs harder.

Margaret starts laughing with him.

. . . I mean I had a guy couple years ago puts in a claim for his clothing store burned down, you're not gonna believe this, we find a couple gas cans in there with Eula May printed on `em, his own wife's name, it's the name of his pleasure boat where he got the cans from.

He laughs heartily.

. . . he thought those aluminum cans were gonna burn up or something, I don't know what he thought. . .

Margaret laughs with him.

. . . and cars! Thank you. . .

He takes the cup of coffee from Margaret and leans against the wall, sipping from it.

. . . You wouldn't believe what people do to their cars just because something's a little wrong with the transmission and they figure they can fleece us for the whole thing. Sell `em for scrap, report `em stolen, but the body shop guy knows we pay a bounty for those things. . .

As he laughs a little coffee dribbles out of his mouth down his chin. He smears it away with one hand.

. . . Excuse me. Anyway. . .

He sighs.

. . . Yeah, you been in this business as long as I have, you develop a nose for hanky-panky. Because it smells, ya know, it has this. . .

He flutters his hand.

. . . faint aroma. This smells bad, that smells good—you know what I mean. But this one—this particular case here doesn't have that faint aroma.

Margaret

Thank goodness for that.

Clark nods, still smiling pleasantly

Clark

. . . Nah, this one stinks. This one, I've been smelling this one since I got off the turnpike. Jesus does it stink. Ya sleep with Gardner, do ya?

Margaret stares at him. He continues, affably:

. . . Well, that's none of my business. But I gotta tell ya, this kind of nonsense, it can come back to haunt you down the road. Ya see, all the insurance companies. . .

He laces his fingers together.

. . . are like one big interlocking network. We all share our files, you won't be able to buy yourself a policy at any price. And that's serious. I mean, you could go to jail for the rest of your life and have a shit credit rating.

He sets his coffee cup down on the counter and turns to go.

. . . On the other hand, it could be worse. They haven't executed anyone in this state in over thirty years.

Margaret stares as we hear Clark's footsteps receding down the hall.

. . . Tell Mr. Lodge that I'll be back this evening. I'd like to visit with him for a while too.

We hear the front door opening.

. . . Hope I didn't get the couch wet.

We hear the front door slam shut.

MTA LOCKER ROOM

Ira Sloan, in his civvies, walks down a corridor of lockers, nodding occasionally to a remembered colleague. Through large double doors at the far end of the room we can hear the hiss and chug of busses about to pull out into dawn for morning rush hour.

Luis Colina, sitting in front of his locker, is handing some money to another driver as Ira Sloan walks up to him.

Ira Sloan

You're taking the day off.

Luis Colina

What? Thanks, man.

The other driver nods and walks off. Ira Sloan watches him go, puzzled.

Ira Sloan

You're taking the day off, I got more important things for you to do.—He's your connection? Georgie Vasari?

Luis Colina

No he don't go near that stuff, Georgie's a fucking vegetarian. That's why I pay him, throw him a few bucks every week for his piss.

Ira Sloan

What the fuck?

Luis Colina

Yeah, he pees in a cigar tin for me, I load it inna baggie carry it around. These fuckin' spot-checks from my P.O., man.

He pulls his shirt open between two buttons to show some concealed tubing.

. . . Sa fuckin' pain in the ass. I ruptured once.

Ira Sloan

You fuckin whacko fuck. So I got something you gotta

take care of today.

Luis Colina

No. No more days off. I would be fucking fucked.

Ira Sloan

Don't worry, I got Stanhope to come in and cover for you.
Fuck Clement Greenberg.

Luis Colina

Iss not Greenberg, iss my P.O. crawlin' up my ass. I told you. Iss Ernie Gombrich. Do this, do that, come here, go there, pee in this, pee in that. What the fuck is so important?

Ira Sloan

The guy's a fuckin hard-on is what it is. He hung up on me last night.

Luis Colina

The square guy? Oh no, man. Thass fucked up.

Ira Sloan

Yeah, it's the same old bullshit all over again, man. He doesn't care. We talk to him, he doesn't care. I think he's getting ready to fuck us.

Luis Colina

He can't fuck us.

Ira Sloan

That's right. That's why you're taking the day off. Take care of the kid and the fat lady. Give him something to think about when he gets home.

Luis Colina

What?! Why me?

Ira Sloan

You haven't been pulling your weight around here, jackass.
You gotta do more than carry your pee around.

Luis Colina

Do two more fuckin people? I don't know, man. That's fucked up.

Ira Sloan

I'm tellin' you you ain't got any choice. It's either that or he fucks us. The guy don't respond, he don't respond.

Luis Colina

Two people, man. . .

Ira Sloan

Look, if you can't take care of a kid and a fat lady, you know what that means.

Luis Colina

Yeah yeah.

Ira Sloan

It means you're a fuckin pussy.

Luis Colina laughs nervously. He rubs his forehead.

Luis Colina

Ah shit. Nnnnkay.

Ira Sloan

Fuck, I'd do it but Clement Greenberg has my piece.

FRONT FOYER EVENING

As the front door opens and Gardner starts to enter, a loud STING and someone lurches at him.

The scare subsides: it is Margaret, hugging Gardner, her body heaving with sobs.

Margaret

Gardner, darling, I'm so so so sorry, Gardner, I love you, please don't be angry with me, I'm so sorry. . .

Gardner struggles to disengage himself. He looks into Margaret's tear-streaked face.

Gardner

Maggie, what is it? What happened?

Margaret

I'm so sorry, a man came today, from the insurance company, he said he was a professional skeptic, but he was so charming at first. . .

She breaks down sobbing again, unable to continue. Finally:

. . . I was so confused. I told him I didn't have any of the information. But at the end he knew everything, he knows everything, he's coming back, everything, everything, I'm so sorry. . .

Gardner
(*grimly*)

When's he coming back?

Margaret

I'll make it up to you, I swear I will. . .

Gardner shakes her.

Gardner

When's he coming back?

Margaret screams:

Margaret

THIS EVENING! This evening! He'll be here again this evening!

Gardner hugs her.

Gardner

It's all right, Maggie. We'll talk to him. We'll see how much he knows.

LIVING ROOM LATER

Gardner sits in the living room. Staring. Somewhere in the room a clock ticks. Waiting. From offscreen we hear a snuffle.

Margaret sits opposite. Her eyes are red and puffy. Tears roll silently down her cheeks. After a long silence, she snuffles again.

Gardner and Margaret sit, waiting. The clock ticks. Finally there is the sound of a car pulling up into the driveway. Gardner rises and goes to the front door.

FRONT FOYER

Gardner opens the door to Kenneth Clark.

Clark
Mr. Lodge?

Gardner
Yes.

Clark
Your sister-in-law might have mentioned me to you. Can I come in?

Gardner
Yes.

THE LIVING ROOM

As the two men enter. Gardner motions Clark to a chair and sits down himself.

Gardner
What are these accusations I've been hearing?

Clark nods at Margaret.

Clark
Hello ma'am. I'll tell ya, some coffee would be really terrific if it isn't too much trouble.

Margaret rises.

Margaret
Yes. No trouble. . .

As she leaves:

Gardner
What are these—

Clark

I've had a long day, so let's get right to the point. You killed your wife, you're trying to collect, I'm between you and the money. Too bad for you. I'm not gonna negotiate on this, I don't wanna talk about it for a long time, I've had a long day, I don't wanna listen to any denials. Just tell me yes or no.

Gardner sits stunned.

Gardner

. . . What. . . what do you want? You want a part of the claim?

Clark gives a tired laugh.

Clark

I want all of it. All of it. You give me the money or you go straight to jail, pal.

Margaret, still snuffling, enters with two coffee cups on saucers. She hands one to Gardner, one to Clark.

Clark

Thanks.

Margaret leaves.

. . . you don't have any choice. I think, a moment's reflection, you can figure that out for yourself and then we can discuss how we're going to arrange it.

Gardner licks his lips.

Gardner

. . . If we did. . . if we did kill my wife, what makes you think I won't kill you?

Clark sadly shakes his head.

Clark

Mr. Lodge, are you crazy? You think I'm the only investigator who knows how to read a claim for fraud? Do you have any idea what happens when an investigator

who's working on a case like this dies? Haven't you fucked with the insurance company enough?

He takes a sip of coffee.

. . . Believe me, if anything happens to me, you're in deep, deep—

Clark frowns. Suddenly he rises to his feet. He freezes for a moment. He reaches down, picks up the coffee cup and hurls it at the living room wall.

Coffee splashes and the china cup shatters against it.

Gardner stares, uncomprehending.

Gardner

What the hell are you do—

Clark's face is purpling and his mouth stretches wide. He emits an ear-splitting BELLOW.

NICKY'S BEDROOM

Nicky wakes up to muffled bellowing. He listens, slowly rises, and pads across the room.

THE HALLWAY

As Nicky emerges from the bedroom. The bellowing is louder here. We now also hear thuds and crashes from downstairs. Nicky moves cautiously toward the stairway.

THE STAIRWAY

As Nicky takes one slow step at a time down.

His high point-of-view gives an oddly top-cropped picture of the pandemonium in the living room below. Clark is mostly just legs, charging around, out of control, thumping into furniture, screaming, his waving fists occasionally dipping into view.

DOWNSTAIRS

Margaret is running into the living room with her hands over her ears, howling.

Margaret
Oh God! Oh God! Ooohhh!

Clark is still careening around off the furniture like a chicken with its head cut off.

Gardner, stock-still in the middle of the cyclone, shouts:

Gardner
What did you put in the coffee?! Goddamnit! What did
you do?!

Margaret
Oh God! Just lye! Just a little bit of Draino!

Clark is ripping open the front of his shirt, screaming as he staggers toward the foyer.

THE FOYER

Clark reaches the front door. He launches a fist through its window. He reaches up and claws desperately at his own throat, drawing blood.

He hurls the door open and staggers out into the night.

THE LIVING ROOM

Margaret stands wailing in the middle of the room.

Gardner hurls open the door to the foyer closet. From a golfbag inside he withdraws a nine-iron.

Gardner
Stay here. Stay here. Don't move until I get back.

THE STAIRS

Nicky watches.

Gardner's legs are leaving, the poker down at his side.

SUBURBAN STREET

Gardner runs down the street. Ahead in the dark we can make out Clark's form as he staggers crazily away, struggling out of his suit coat, clawing at his throat, his white shirt flashing. Gardner shoots an apprehensive glance at the dark houses.

Clark staggers, sucking for air that won't burn. He is slowing, his gait becoming ever more herky-jerky.

Gardner overtakes him and, from behind, swings the golfclub with a *whoosh* at the insurance man's head.

On the *thud*, we cut.

STAIRS

Nicky descends cautiously, quietly, a step at a time. From somewhere—not from him—a whimpering sound.

Margaret comes into view at the far end of the living room. She is stooped over, picking up pieces of broken china, putting them into a cupped palm, whimpering.

A creak in the stair—she notices Nicky, straightens, and moans:

Margaret
Ohhh, Nicky. . .

Nicky heads for the front door, which stands open.

She drops the collected china and grabs the shovel off the fireplace rack, but her manner remains unthreatening:

. . . No, Nicky, wait.

But he is running.

She runs awkwardly after, raising the shovel.

PORCH

Nicky is off and away.

Margaret emerges onto the porch but clearly will not catch him; she stops at the lip of the porch.

Margaret

No, angel!

LIVING ROOM

Minutes later. Margaret sits in the easy chair formerly occupied by the insurance man, sobbing, as Gardner enters.

His voice is dull:

Gardner

I put him in the car.

He looks at her crying.

. . . It's falling apart, Maggie. It's over. All over.

She shakes her head, still weeping.

. . . We'll have to go away.

His gaze drifts off, up the stairs.

. . . Where's Nicky?

Margaret sobs:

Margaret

Oh Gardner—he got away!

Gardner squints incomprehension.

Gardner

. . . What're you talking about "got away"?

Margaret

I tried to take care of it! I just—I just—I'm trying to manage. . .

Gardner

Margaret—what're you talking about?

Margaret

Oh, Gardner!

A MEZUZA

Tacked to a doorpost; it has ornate metalwork and Hebrew letters. We hear faint doorbell chimes.

Wider shows Nicky, having just pressed the doorbell, looking up at the mezuzah.

After a beat the front door swings open to reveal Sieglebaum in his pyjamas.

Sieglebaum

Holy moley! What're you doing here Nicky?

Nicky

Can I come in, Noah? My dad's trying to kill me.

Sieglebaum

Oh. Okay.

NOAH'S BEDROOM

The two boys sit on Noah's bed in a small carpeted room littered with sporting gear and electronic toys.

Sieglebaum

Inside is a little piece of parchment with the Sh'mah on it.

Nicky

What's parchment?

Sieglebaum

I dunno. It's old paper that the Pharaohs used. Are you staying over?

Nicky

Can I?

With a crash the door bursts open and Aaron, Sieglebaum's thirteen-year-old brother, strides in.

Aaron

Where's my Sega joystick you little faggot?

Noticing Nick:

—What's he doing here?

Sieglebaum

I didn't touch your stupid—

Aaron has already grabbed Sieglebaum by the hair.

. . . AHHHHHHHH. STOP! I DON'T HAVE YOUR—
AHHHHHHH—

Aaron wrestles the flailing Sieglebaum to the ground and sits on top of his stomach, pressing his thumbs into the soft spots behind Sieglebaum's ears. He bellows:

Aaron

SAY "I'M A FAGGOT! I'M A FAGGOT!"

Sieglebaum

AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

He starts bouncing his brother's head against the floor in time with his chant:

Aaron

"I'M A FAGGOT! I'M A FAGGOT!"

We hear pounding footsteps and Nicky looks up from the fight as Mr. Sieglebaum appears in the doorway.

Mr. Sieglebaum

Cut it out, Aaron.

He wades in to break up the fight. He hooks a hand under Aaron's armpit and starts leading him out of the room.

. . . You know who's room this is.

Aaron

Yeah well he's been in my room, the little faggot.

Mr. Sieglebaum

Hey! Aaron!

As he leads him out the door he nods at someone in the hall.

. . . They're in here.

They disappear around the corner.

Gardner appears in the doorway.

He and Nicky look at each other.

Gardner holds out his hand.

Gardner

Come on, son.

Nicky remains sitting, staring.

. . . Come on.

Nicky gets up, goes to his father, takes the extended hand.

LUIS COLINA'S APARTMENT EXTERIOR

Luis Colina is exiting the four-story apartment building holding a baseball bat. He glances around as he heads for his car parked at the curb.

Halfway there a vibrating hum stops him. He fishes out his phone and squints at it: *Gombrich*.

Luis Colina

Shit.

He flips it open.

. . . How ya doin', man.

Gombrich's Voice

Going to practice?

Luis Colina

Huh?

Gombrich
Going to batting practice?

Luis Colina looks wildly around. His look lands on:

A parked car, someone in it. Gombrich's voice continues:

. . . Yeah, come on over. Hop in.

LODGE HOME

Nicky is walking up the stairs immediately in front of Gardner.

They go down the hall to his bedroom. As Nick is about to enter:

Gardner
Nicholas.

Nick turns, looks up.

. . . Do you need the privvy?

Nicky
No.

Gardner nods solemnly.

He shuts the door behind Nick.

We hear a key turning in the door, and then retreating footsteps.

A sharp, thin tapping sound brings Nicky's look around.

The cherry limb taps at the dark of his windowpane.

ERNIE GOMBRICH'S CAR

Gombrich looks over at Luis Colina as they drive down a suburban street. Gombrich looks forward, shaking his head.

A long beat.

Luis Colina finally breaks the silence:

Luis Colina

You keep shaking your head, man. Iss freaking me out.

Ernie

I've tried to be a friend to you, Luis. You know—
supportive. And now this. And now this.

Luis Colina

And now this what, man?

Gombrich

Luis, I'm gonna tell you straight out. There was zinc in
your urine.

Luis Colina

Zinc?

A perplexed beat.

. . . Zinc.

Gombrich

Yeah zinc.

Luis Colina

So, that means, what, I got a high zinc count or what.

Gombrich

Luis, lemme 'splain something. This is not natural levels
of zinc. Unless you're the fucking Tin Man. You know.
Oil me.

Luis Colina

Oil me?

Gombrich

This urine, lemme tell you about this urine. This is old
urine. This is stored-up urine. This is bullshit urine.

Luis Colina

No, this is my urine, man—

Gombrich

You are a goddamn three-time loser. I tried to warn you,

three strikes you're out. That's how we play the game here in the US of A. And I smell a whiffer. I smell a goddamned whiffer. I red-tagged your file, Luis. We're going back to Attica.

Luis Colina

This was good urine, man.

Gombrich

WAKE UP, COLINA! YOU'RE GOING BACK TO THE JOINT! YOU'RE—Humph!

Luis Colina has just socked him in the face.

. . . Fuck—shit—

Ernie Gombrich fights to control the car as Luis Colina grabs his head and slams it into the wheel a couple of times, the car giving a brief honk at each impact.

Bumps, swerves, a big bump and a wrenching impact.

EXTERIOR

The car has hit a lamppost.

Ernie Gombrich dribbles out of the driver's side, moaning.

Luis Colina flings open the passenger door and emerges. He leans back in for his baseball bat.

He rounds the car and starts whacking Ernie Gombrich's head.

MASTER BEDROOM

Margaret is in bed; Gardner sits on the edge of the bed in his shirtsleeves, elbows on his knees, gazing at a spot on the floor.

Gardner

. . . Aruba, I think.

Margaret

Where is it?

Gardner

The Carribean. It's a Dutch protectorate, there's no uh. . . reciprocal uh, extradition . . .

Margaret

Well, I don't understand anything about that. Isn't it—

Gardner

We could take a boat from another island, not leave a ticket trail.

Margaret

. . . Isn't it spicy, mango food?

Gardner

You can get any sort of food. Food of any description. There's golfing. Couples golfing. The windsurfing. I went with Rose, many times.

Margaret

Well that's good, darling. You could relax. You could paint, express yourself. The artistic thing is important to you. I loved Rose, but you need someone to help you explore that side of yourself. . .

Gardner continues to stare at the floor, listening.

. . . We should have done this a long time ago. You were trapped at the agency, Gardner—this is for the best. . .

NICKY'S BEDROOM

Nicky sits in the dark, on his bed, knees drawn up to his chest.

Sharp and present, though not loud, is the tap at the window.

Muted by an intervening wall are the voices from next door, their tones matter-of-fact. No words are discernible, only the lulling back-and-forth of male voice alternating with female.

A new sound: from outside, the approaching rattle of a car whose fanbelt is rhythmically slapping the engine block.

Nicky rises and goes to the window.

Ernie Gombrich's car is pulling to the curb across the street, its hood crumpled. Once it is parked its engine sputters and dies out along with its associated coughs and clunks.

Nicky stares.

No one emerges from the car.

The muffled adult voices from the other bedroom drone on.

FADE OUT

NICKY'S BEDROOM

It is early morning. Nicky is still dressed but is now asleep on top of the bedcovers. The clunk of a car door wakes him.

He goes to the window.

Gardner's car is pulling out of the driveway.

The beat-up car at the curb across the street is still there. Once Gardner's car has pulled away, its door opens.

Luis Colina emerges.

Nicky's eyes widen.

Luis Colina looks up the street in the direction in which Gardner's car disappeared. Satisfied that it is gone, he pulls a baseball bat from his car. He starts across the street.

Nicky goes to his bedroom door and pounds.

Nicky

Aunt Margaret!

KITCHEN

Margaret stands at the counter making scrambled eggs, glancing up occasionally at the portable television.

Voice

It's beautiful, Donna.

Another Voice

The Butterfly Broach has a silver setting and five high-quality zircon stones—

She reacts to the muffled pounding and shouting from upstairs:

Margaret

Just a minute!

MASTER BEDROOM/BATH

With the eggs between toast wedges on a small plate, Margaret walks through the bedroom to the adjoining bathroom, humming to herself.

She sets the plate down next to the sink and opens the medicine cabinet.

She raises her voice in response to the continuing pounding:

Margaret

I'm just fixing your breakfast!

She takes a small vial out of the medicine cabinet and sprinkles the contents of the vial onto the eggs. She uses the fork to mash it in. She picks up the plate.

She emerges from the bathroom and stops short, with a quick intake of breath.

Luis Colina stands in the bedroom doorway in his MTA uniform holding the baseball bat.

Margaret stares.

Margaret

Goodness. I don't know what your business is here, but you'll have to talk to Gardner.

Luis Colina steps hesitantly into the bedroom.

Luis Colina

Sorry lady. Iss just the nature of the way things is.

NICKY'S BEDROOM

Nicky stops pounding at the sound of a scream. The scream ends in a dull thumping

sound. Nicky listens at the door. A short beat. Two more dull thunks.

HALLWAY

Empty.

A silent beat.

Luis Colina emerges from the master bedroom holding the stained baseball bat. He closes the door behind him.

We hold on the closed door as Luis Colina leaves frame. We hear him walking down the hallway, opening and shutting doors.

NICKY'S BEDROOM

Muffled here, we hear Luis Colina's progress in the hallway. Nicky stands with his ear pressed to the door, struggling to control his frightened breathing.

The footsteps approach. . .

His own doorknob is rattled. A pause. Another rattle to confirm that it is locked.

A muffled voice:

Luis Colina

. . . Kid?

A THUMP at the door makes Nicky start. Another THUMP. It sounds like Luis Colina is giving it the shoulder.

Nicky scrambles to his bed and under it.

His point-of-view from under the bed shows very little outside; a dust ruffle comes almost to the floor.

The thumps continue, the very bottom of the door trembling with each one, but remaining closed.

Finally with the sound of wood splintering around its lock, the door swings open.

A beat of quiet.

Nicky tries to quiet his breathing.

A pair of black-shod feet enter, topped by blue uniform pants. The business side of a baseball bat dangles next to his feet. It is smeared with blood. The feet take a couple of hesitant steps in.

The man is pausing, looking around. His voice is clear now:

. . . Kid?

A couple more steps toward the bed; the room is not big. The feet are now planted immediately in front of the bed.

Motion in the feet; the sound of knees cracking; the dust ruffle is plucked up so that Luis Colina can peer in at us, his head angled sideways.

Nicky stares back.

After a long look, a smile from Luis Colina:

. . . Hi.

And then—oddly—he lets the dust ruffle drop. He is gone, but only for a moment:

His arm reaches in. It gropes blindly towards Nicky.

Nicky presses himself against the wall and starts screaming.

Just audible under the screams as the arm continues to grope:

. . . C'mon kid. . . I'm sorry. Iss just how things is.

Nicky bats, screaming, at the groping hand, but now it closes over his upper arm, tightens, and starts to drag him.

Nicky screams.

There is a dull crunching sound and the hand stops dragging. In fact, it relaxes.

There is another scream, not from Nicky.

There is another crunch that ends the scream, and then three more, at a measured pace, in the silence that follows.

The hand is an inert thing. Blood is seeping into the carpet from beyond Luis Colina's

shoulder.

Suddenly the shoulder and arm slide away, dragged effortlessly, and the dust ruffle drops back into place.

It is plucked up again and Uncle Mitch peers in.

Mitch

Nicky. . .

He helps Nicky scramble out and then scoops him up and tucks Nicky's head into his shoulder as he jogs him out the bedroom door.

. . . Don't look, Nicky, don't look. . . It's a mess. . .

He lumbers down the stairs, stroking the back of Nicky's head.

. . . Was that one of the cocksuckas?

Nicky sobs.

Nicky

Yes! Daddy's a cocksucker too!

HOUSE EXTERIOR

Mitch, grim-faced, jogs Nicky down the lawn to where his car is parked.

As Mitch stoops to ease Nicky into the passenger side:

Mitch

I'm takin' you home, Nicky. My home. Ow-uh home. . .

Having deposited the boy he straightens.

. . . On the way you can tell me wusco non. . .

He goes around the car and pops the trunk.

. . . and I'll take care of everything.

The trunk holds security paraphernalia including walkie-talkies and clubs and a snap-flap holster which he grabs. There is also a small case. Mitch

pops its clasps. Inside is a handgun.

. . . Uncle Mitch'll take care of it.

GARDNER'S OFFICE

Gardner is striding for his office; his secretary rises to greet him:

Linda

Good morning, Mr. Lodge, you're early today—you don't have anything until ten.

Gardner

I'm sorry, Linda, you're going to have to cancel everything today, I've just come in to pick up a few things. . .

He opens the inner-office door but pauses in the doorway to continue:

. . . See if you can get Erwin Panofsky at First Hartford on the line before I go, I need to talk to him about some fund transfers, and then I'll need—

His eyes widen, reacting to something oncoming a split second before Mitch's back enters frame and he is muscled backwards into his office.

Mitch

SCUMBAGS!. . . SCUMBAGS!. . . I WANT HIS NAME!

Linda, standing in the doorway with her notepad and pencil, emits sharp, chirping screams.

Mitch slaps Gardner forehead and backhand.

. . . I WANT HIS SCUMBAG NAME!

His hand closes around Gardner's throat and he shakes him by his neck. Gardner struggles to get the words out:

Gardner

Luis. . . Luis Colina.

Mitch's veins are popping, his face is beet red, he is screaming:

Mitch
I KILT THE FUCKIN SPIC! I WANT THE UDDA ONE!

Linda's high piping screams continue, ignored by the two men.

Gardner
Ira. . . Ira Sloan.

Mitch hurls Gardner across the room where he lands in a heap.

Mitch
I'll be back fa you!

TONY JANSON'S APARTMENT

Ira Sloan is on the phone in the apartment of the gun salesman down the hall.

Ira Sloan
Ain't back yet?! When he leave?

Barely audible, filtered through the phone, we hear a woman's voice and the pandemonium of children.

From somewhere more present, a muffled buzz.

Ira Sloan sticks a finger in his ear.

. . . I can't hear you, ya wha? . . . Yeah, I know where he
went, I'm the one who sent him, but why ain't he back?

Two muffled buzzes in quick succession.

Tony Janson is at a table, a beer in front of him.

Tony
That your buzzer?

Ira Sloan
When he gets back you tell him to call me. Fuck, he can't
call me.

Another muffled buzz. Tony raises his voice to Ira Sloan:

Tony
Somebody's ringin' your apartment.

Ira Sloan
Tell him he—wait, maybe this's him.—

He lowers the phone mouthpiece to address Tony:

Can you buzz'em in?

Tony goes to an intercom by his open apartment door and holds down a button. We hear a heavy door unlatching down the hall. Ira Sloan is back into the telephone:

. . . I said maybe that's—can you hear me? Put a cork
innose kids why don't ya. . .

Mitch clomps by in the hallway, some kind of aerosol in one hand, eyes taking in the number on the open apartment door and flitting without interest over Ira Sloan and Tony Janson as he passes.

Ira Sloan and Tony Janson exchange a look. Ira Sloan hesitates at the phone.

. . . Uh. . . nev mind. Gubbye.

Ira Sloan carefully cradles the phone. We hear pounding on a doorway down the hall.

Mitch's Voice
Hello. . . Ya deh?

More pounding.

. . . Open iss daw!

Ira Sloan clears his throat. He asks quietly:

Ira Sloan
Can I have a beer?

Tony Janson is puzzled.

Tony
A beer.

HALLWAY

At the end of the hall Mitch is a small figure pounding on Ira Sloan's door, his back to us.

Mitch

I know ya indeh ya fuckin scumbag, open is fuckin daw!

Ira Sloan emerges from Tony's apartment holding a capped beer by the neck. He walks slowly down the hall, Mitch's noise covering his approach.

Mitch unsnaps a holster on his belt.

. . . I know ya indeh, c'mon.

He withdraws the gun.

. . . C'mon, open iss dawn will talk, ya fuckin creep ya—
Hrugh!

Ira Sloan has clubbed him from behind.

He clubs him down the door, Mitch grunting under each blow. Ira Sloan bends down to pick up Mitch's gun. A hissing noise.

Ira Sloan straightens, screaming. Mitch, slumped on his back, is macing him.

Ira Sloan steps back, still screaming. He wraps his left elbow around his face and extends his right hand with the gun. He fires blindly.

Bang. Bang. One bullet thunks the door. One hits Mitch in the chest. The third *clanks* and starts an airshriek: it has hit the mace.

The pressurized cannister hits the ground and spins shrieking. Mace sprays everywhere. Ira Sloan yells on, firing. *Bang. Bang. Bang.* Bullets plug the wall, Mitch's body, Mitch's face.

Ira Sloan stumbles away screaming. He blunders the length of the narrow hallway caroming off the walls, face still wrapped into his elbow. He hits the front-door window and it shatters. He uncovers his face—starting to swell—to grope for the knob.

He finds it and plunges out into the street, screaming, trailing broken glass.

NICKY

He sits in a cheap formal parlor, on an uncomfortable-looking Louis XV chair that doesn't quite let his feet touch the ground. He is chewing a peanut butter sandwich; its plate and a glass of milk sit on a side table next to him. We hear the TV, off, which he watches. The window behind him gives a view of a suburbia more downscale than his own.

A car is pulling up the drive though no sound carries through into the house. Gardner emerges from the car and we do just barely hear its door slam. He trots toward the front of the house, his gait suggesting that he is unused to running: stiff-legged, with one hand pressed down against his suit coat to keep it from flapping back as he runs.

Nick continues to watch TV.

GARDNER'S CAR

Gardner drives in a thin-lipped fury.

Gardner

How did you get to Mitch's house? Who let you out?

Nick is huddled in the corner of the passenger front seat.

Nicky

Uncle Mitch brought me.

Gardner grimly shakes his head.

Gardner

I don't even want to think about the two of you talking. . . saying crazy, irresponsible thing. . . words have consequences Nicholas, yes?

Silence.

. . . Yes?

Again he shakes his head.

. . . You are in deep, deep doo-doo.

He decides something.

. . . You're going with us. To Aruba. You can't be left to yourself.

He nods to himself.

. . . Margaret will understand.

Nicky

She's dead.

Gardner looks at him, not alarmed, merely uncomprehending:

Gardner

. . . What?

Nicky

One of the men from Valley Forge came back. He kilt her.

Gardner stares at him.

Gardner

. . . One of the. . . what?

He gives a strangled hiccough of surprise. He glances front, stares back at Nicky, then emits a short, barking, humorless laugh.

Oh no. No, they wouldn't do that. . . She's waiting at home. . . No. . .

He stares out at the street, his jaw working. He suddenly busts out sobbing. Through tears:

. . . I'll tell you one thing, son: I'm not going anywhere without Maggie. Oh God! Oh God!

He bears down on the accelerator. The car is picking up speed.

Nicky speaks in a small voice:

Nicky

Everybody's dead. God is dead.

Solemnly:

Gardner

Don't ever say that, son.

Up ahead, their house is just coming into view. Parked across the street from it is a green Delta 88. Ira Sloan has just gotten out of the car and is heading across the street for the house. At the whine of the approaching car he turns.

His face is grotesquely swollen, eyes puffed down to slits. He squints through tears at the approaching car, mouth agape, breath rattling, snot flowing.

He digs for his—Mitch's—gun, finds it, levels it at the car.

Gardner punches the accelerator.

Impact. From inside the car we see Ira Sloan's body flip up over the hood, smack the windshield directly in front of us, and flip back onto the roof.

Gardner blubbers.

Nicky shrinks. Over Gardner's wails another sound: a thudding-bouncing on the roof of the car.

The car exterior: Ira Sloan's leg is caught on the roof luggage rack.

Back to the interior: the thudding of Ira Sloan's body is painfully loud inside the car, like being inside a drum. Nicky claps his hands to his ears. Gardner wails.

Ira Sloan's head flops down directly in front of us and bounces against the windshield. His face is ballooned. Blood streams across it.

Nicky screams.

Gardner blubbers.

His foot presses the accelerator to the floor.

Nicky screams.

Ira Sloan's head, bouncing with the car, sends blood streaming down the windshield. Wind feathers the blood back across the glass.

Nicky screams, looks from the windshield to Gardner.

The car is speeding out of control.

Gardner's hands are clenched on the steering wheel. Nicky's small hands try to pry them loose.

Gardner's foot vibrates against the accelerator. Nicky's legs kick at it.

The car hits a bump; there is the sound of rolling on the roof. Nicky turns to look out the back window:

Ira Sloan's body rolls onto the trunk and then off onto the street and bounces away, growing small fast as the car speeds along.

Nicky looks back to Gardner who moans, gasping for air.

Gardner clutches at his chest with one hand. His face is turning a deep shade of purple. He is displaying the classic symptoms of myo-cardial infarction.

Nicky pries at Gardner's hands which rigidly grasp the wheel. Suddenly they grow limp; his head slumps down against the wheel, staring, glassy-eyed.

Nicky screams. The car gives a tremendous jolt and he looks front.

The car has jumped the curb in front of a white colonial house and is speeding up its manicured lawn, churning sod.

EXTERIOR HOUSE

At impact. The car groans to a halt, half-inside, half-outside the house. Dust from splintered wood and pulverized wallboard eddies through the air. The engine loudly whines, racing, as the car sits on its undercarriage with the rear wheels off the ground, tires crazily spinning.

FADE OUT

LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD

We pan the team as they listen to the coach—a voice we haven't heard before:

Voice

All right, men, excellent game today, excellent. You displayed good attitude, good sportsmanship, good mental alertness. . .

The pan reveals uniformed Nicky, a little bruised but not much worse for wear, standing next to Alvez.

. . . I can tolerate an occasional physical error on the field,
but there were no mental errors today. . .

We finally cut to the team's new coach. He is a tall, serious, athletic-looking younger middle-aged man in a pressed sweat shirt and sweat pants. A shiny silver whistle hangs around his neck.

New Coach

. . . and you're to be congratulated for that. You've shaped up marvelously since Coach Wallerstein was. . . was asked to leave. I guess our play-off berth is a testament to that. See you all next week, but remember, no one's stopping you from doing those isometric exercises at home.

He blows his whistle and the team disperses.

The new coach looks over at Nicky.

. . . Ready to go, son?

NEW COACH'S CAR

It is a country sedan station wagon full of Little League gear. A bag of baseball bats rattles in the back. Nicky is strapped into the front seat next to the new coach.

New Coach

I'm just warning you, young man, that kind of language won't fly in your new home.

Nicky is gazing out the windshield.

Nicky

Yes sir.

The new coach's voice softens:

New Coach

All right then. . . I wonder what Mom's whipped up for dinner. . .

They are pulling up the driveway of Nicky's new home: a white Colonial with a manicured lawn. Laborers are working on the damaged ground-floor wall.