

1. EXT: DAY. ELEVATED SUBWAY TRAIN

Against the backdrop of the Manhattan skyline, we see an elevated subway train heading toward Brooklyn.

After a moment, we begin to hear voices. An animated discussion is taking place inside the Brooklyn Cigar Company.

2. INT: DAY. THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO.

The cigar shop from within. Displays of cigar boxes, a wall of magazines, piles of newspapers. cigarettes, smoking paraphernalia. On the walls, we see framed black-and-white photographs of people smoking cigars: Groucho Marx, George Burns, Clint Eastwood, Edward G. Robinson, Orson Welles, Charles Laughton, Frankenstein's monster, Leslie Caron, Ernie Kovacs.

Words appear on the screen: "SUMMER 1990."

AUGGIE WREN is behind the counter. Somewhere between forty and fifty years old, AUGGIE is a scruffy presence: unkempt hair, a two-day stubble of beard, dressed in blue jeans and a black T-shirt. We see an intricate tattoo on one arm.

It is a slow hour. AUGGIE is flipping through a photography magazine.

Near the counter are the three OTB MEN. These are local characters who like to hang out in the store, shooting the breeze with AUGGIE. One is black (TOMMY) and the other two are white (JERRY and DENNIS). DENNIS wears a T-shirt with the following words printed across the front: "If life is a dream, what happens when I wake up?"

TOMMY

I'll tell you why they're not going anywhere.

JERRY

Yeah? And why is that?

TOMMY

Management. Those guys are walking around with their heads up their asses.

DENNIS

They made some great deals. Tommy. Hernandez. Carter. Without those two, there never woulda been no World Series.

TOMMY

That was four years ago. I'm talking about now.

(Growing more intense)

Look who they got rid of. Mitchell. Backman. McDowell. Dykstra. Aguilera. Mookie. Mookie Wilson, for Chrissakes.

(Shakes his head)

JERRY

(Sarcastically)

And Nolan Ryan. Don't forget him.

DENNIS

(Chiming in)

Yeah. And Amos Otis.

TOMMY

(Shrugs)

Okay, joke about it. I don't give a shit.

JERRY

Jesus, Tommy, it ain't science, you know. You got your good trades and your bad trades. That's how it works.

TOMMY

They didn't have to do a thing, that's all I'm saying. The team was good, the best fucking team in baseball. But then they had to screw it up.

(Pause)

They traded their birthright for a mess of porridge.

(Shakes his head)

A mess of porridge.

The bells on the door jangle as someone enters. It is AUGGIE'S protégé, JIMMY ROSE, a mentally retarded man in his late twenties. He has been

sweeping the sidewalk outside the store and holds a broom in his right hand.

AUGGIE  
How'd you do out there, Jimmy?

JIMMY  
Good, Auggie. Real good.  
(Proudly thrusts out broom)  
All finished.

AUGGIE  
(Philosophically)  
It'll never be finished.

JIMMY  
(Confused)  
Huh?

AUGGIE  
That's how it is with sidewalks. People come, people go, and they all drop shit on the ground. As soon as you clean up one spot and move on to the next, the first spot is dirty again.

JIMMY  
(Trying to digest AUGGIE'S comment)  
I just do what you tell me, Auggie. You tell me to sweep, so I sweep.

The bells on the door jangle again, and a customer enters the store: a middle-class man in his early thirties. He walks to the counter as JERRY teases JIMMY. In the background, we see him talking to AUGGIE. AUGGIE pulls some cigar boxes out of the display case and puts them on the counter for the YOUNG MAN to inspect. In the foreground we see:

JERRY  
(Interrupting. Playfully)  
Hey, Jimmy. You got the time?

JIMMY  
(Turning to the SECOND OTB MAN)  
Huh?

JERRY

You still have that watch Auggie gave you?

JIMMY

(Holds up left wrist showing  
cheap digital watch. Smiles)

Tick-tock, tick-tock.

JERRY

So what's the time?

JIMMY

(Studying watch)

Twelve-eleven.

(Pause, marveling as  
the numbers change)

Twelve-twelve.

(Looks up, smiling)

Twelve-twelve.

A sudden outburst is heard from the area near the counter.

YOUNG MAN

(Aghast)

Ninety-two dollars?

The focus of the scene shifts to AUGGIE and the YOUNG MAN.

AUGGIE

They don't come cheap, son. These little honeys are works of art. Rolled by hand in a tropical climate, most likely by an eighteen year old girl in a thin cotton dress with no underwear on. Little beads of sweat forming in her naked cleavage. The smooth, delicate fingers nimbly turning out one masterpiece after another...

YOUNG MAN

(Pointing)

And how much are these?

AUGGIE

Seventy-eight dollars. The girl who rolled these was probably wearing panties.

YOUNG MAN

(Pointing)

And these?

AUGGIE

Fifty-six. That girl had on a corset.

YOUNG MAN

(Pointing)

And these?

AUGGIE

Forty-four. They're on special this week from the Canary Islands. A real bargain.

YOUNG MAN

I think I'll take them.

(Takes wallet from his pocket  
and counts out \$50 which he  
hands to AUGGIE)

AUGGIE

A good choice. You wouldn't want to celebrate the birth of your firstborn with a box of stinkers, would you? Remember to keep them in the refrigerator until you hand them out.

YOUNG MAN

The refrigerator?

AUGGIE

It'll keep them fresh. If they get too dry, they'll break. And you don't want that to happen, do you?

(Putting cigar box into a bag,  
ringing up sale on the cash register)

Tobacco is a plant, and it needs the same loving care you'd give an orchid.

YOUNG MAN

Thanks for the tip.

AUGGIE

Any time. And congratulations to you and your wife. Just remember, though, in the immortal words of Rudyard Kipling: "A woman is just a woman, but a cigar is a smoke."

YOUNG MAN

(Confused)

What does that mean?

AUGGIE

Damned if I know. But it has a nice ring to it,  
don't it?

At that moment, we hear the bells on the door jangle again. Cut to the door. Another customer enters the store: PAUL BENJAMIN. He is in his early forties, dressed in rumpled casual clothes. As he approaches the counter, the YOUNG MAN brushes past him and leaves the store. The MEN and JIMMY look on as PAUL and AUGGIE talk.

PAUL  
Hey, Auggie. How's it going?

AUGGIE  
Hey, man. Good to see you. What'll it be today?

PAUL  
Two tins of Schimmelpennincks. And throw in a lighter while you're at it.

AUGGIE  
(Reaching for cigars and lighter)  
The boys and I were just having a philosophical discussion about women and cigars. Some interesting connections there, don't you think?

PAUL  
(Laughs)  
Definitely.  
(Pause)  
I suppose it all goes back to Queen Elizabeth.

AUGGIE  
The Queen of England?

PAUL  
Not Elizabeth the Second, Elizabeth the First.  
(Pause)  
Did you ever hear of Sir Walter Raleigh?

TOMMY  
Sure. He's the guy who threw his cloak down over the puddle.

JERRY  
I used to smoke Raleigh cigarettes. They came

with a free gift coupon in every pack.

PAUL

That's the man. Well, Raleigh was the person who introduced tobacco in England, and since he was a favorite of the Queen's -- Queen Bess, he used to call her -- smoking caught on as a fashion at court. I'm sure Old Bess must have shared a stogie or two with Sir Walter. Once, he made a bet with her that he could measure the weight of smoke.

DENNIS

You mean, weigh smoke?

PAUL

Exactly. Weigh smoke.

TOMMY

You can't do that. It's like weighing air.

PAUL

I admit it's strange. Almost like weighing someone's soul. But Sir Walter was a clever guy. First, he took an unsmoked cigar and put it on a balance and weighed it. Then he lit up and smoked the cigar, carefully tapping the ashes into the balance pan. When he was finished, he put the butt into the pan along with the ashes and weighed what was there. Then he subtracted that number from the original weight of the unsmoked cigar. The difference was the weight of the smoke.

TOMMY

Not bad. That's the kind of guy we need to take over the Mets.

PAUL

Oh, he was smart, all right. But not so smart that he didn't wind up having his head chopped off twenty years later.

(Pause)

But that's another story.

AUGGIE

(Handing PAUL his change and putting cigar tins and lighter in a paper bag)  
Seven eighty-five out of twenty.

(As PAUL turns to leave)  
Take care of yourself now, and don't do  
anything I wouldn't do.

PAUL  
(Smiling)  
I wouldn't think of it.  
(Waves casually to the OTB MEN)  
See you around, fellas.

AUGGIE and the OTB MEN watch as PAUL leaves the store.

TOMMY  
(Turning to AUGGIE)  
What is he, some kind of wise guy?

AUGGIE  
Nah. He's a good kid.

JERRY  
I've seen him around. He comes in here a lot,  
don't he?

AUGGIE  
Couple of times a week, maybe. He's a writer.  
Lives in the neighborhood.

TOMMY  
And what kind of writer is he? An underwriter?

AUGGIE  
(Peeved)  
Very funny. Some of the cracks you make. Tommy,  
sometimes I think you should see a doctor. You  
know, go in for some wit therapy or something.  
To clean out the valves in your brain.

TOMMY  
(A little embarrassed. Shrugs)  
It was just a joke.

AUGGIE  
The guy's a novelist. Paul Benjamin. You ever  
hear of him?

(Pause)  
That's a stupid question. The only things you  
guys read is the Racing Form and pages of the  
Post.

(Pause)

He's published three or four books. But nothing now for the past few years.

DENNIS

What's the matter? He run out of ideas?

AUGGIE

He ran out of luck.

(Pause)

Remember that holdup out here on Seventh Avenue few years back?

JERRY

You talking about the bank? The time those two guys started spraying bullets all over the street?

AUGGIE

That's it. Four people got killed. One of them was Paul's wife.

(Pause)

The poor lug, he hasn't been the same since.

(Pause)

The funny thing was, she stopped in here just before it happened. To stock up on cigars for him. She was a nice lady, Ellen. Four or five months pregnant at the time, which means that when she was killed, the baby was killed, too.

TOMMY

Bad day at Black Rock, eh, Auggie?

Close-up of AUGGIE'S face. Remembering.

AUGGIE

It was bad, all right. I sometimes think that if she hadn't given me exact change that day, or if the store had been a little more crowded, it would have taken her a few more seconds to get out of here, and then maybe she wouldn't have stepped in front of that bullet. She'd still be alive, the baby would have been born, and Paul would be sitting at home writing another book instead of wandering the streets with a hangover.

(Pensive, his expression suddenly turns to one of alarm)

Cut to white youth in the corner of the store, shoving paperback books into the pockets of his tattered army fatigue jacket.

AUGGIE (cont'd)  
Hey! What are you doing there, kid? Hey, cut that out!

AUGGIE scrambles out from behind the counter, pushing his way past the OTB MEN as the kid takes off and runs out of the store.

3. EXT: DAY. SEVENTH AVENUE

AUGGIE chases the BOOK THIEF down the street. Eventually, he gets winded and gives up. He pauses for a moment to catch his breath, then turns around and heads back in the direction of the store.

4. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT. A BROWNSTONE BUILDING IN PARK SLOPE (THIRD FLOOR)

Shot of a little brown cigar, burning in an ashtray.

The camera pulls back to reveal PAUL at his desk. He is writing in longhand, using a pad of yellow legal paper. An old Smith-Corona typewriter is also on the desk, poised for work with a half-written page in the roller. Off in the corner, we see a neglected word processor.

The workroom is a bare and simple place. Desk, chair, and a small wooden bookcase with manuscripts and papers shoved onto its shelves. The window faces a brick wall.

As PAUL continues to write, the camera travels from the workroom into the larger of the two rooms that make up his apartment.

This larger room is an all-purpose space that includes a sleeping area, a kitchenette in one corner, a dining table and a large easy chair. Crowded bookshelves occupy one wall from floor to ceiling. The bow windows face front, looking down onto the street. Near the bed, we see a framed photograph of a young woman. (This is Ellen, Paul's dead wife.)

The camera travels back into the workroom. We see PAUL at work.  
Fade  
out.

Fade in. We see PAUL at his desk, eating a TV dinner while still writing in the pad. After a moment, he inadvertently knocks the food off the desk with his elbow. He begins to bend over to pick up the food, but as he does so a new idea suddenly occurs to him. Instead of cleaning up the mess, he turns back to his pad and continues writing.

5 EXT: DAY. IN FRONT OF THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO.

We see PAUL walking out of the cigar store. JIMMY ROSE is on the corner, observing him throughout the scene. PAUL takes three or four steps, then realizes he has forgotten something. He goes back into the store. During his brief absence, JIMMY remains on the corner, imitating PAUL'S gestures: patting in pockets, looking puzzled, realizing that he has forgotten the cigars he just bought.

PAUL comes out again a moment later, holding a tin of Schimmelpenninck cigars. He pauses, takes a cigar out of the tin, and lights up. He continues walking, obviously distracted. He stops briefly at a corner, then steps out into the street, paying no attention to the traffic. A speeding tow truck is rushing toward the intersection. At the last second, a black hand reaches out, grabs PAUL by the arm, and pulls him back to the curb. If not for that timely move, PAUL would surely have been run down.

We see PAUL'S rescuer: it is RASHID COLE, a black adolescent of sixteen or seventeen. He is tall and well built for his age. A nylon backpack is slung over his left shoulder.

RASHID

Watch out, man. You'll get yourself killed like that.

PAUL  
(Badly shaken, still  
clinging to RASHID'S arm)  
I can't believe I did that ... Christ. I'm  
walking around in a fog ...

RASHID  
No harm done. Everything's okay now.  
(Looks down and notices that he and  
PAUL are still gripping each other's  
arms. Tries to pull away)  
I've got to be going.

PAUL  
(Still rattled. Begins to loosen grip,  
then grabs hold of RASHID'S again)  
No, wait. You can't just walk off.  
(Pause)  
You saved my life.

RASHID  
(Shrugs)  
I just happened to be there. The right place  
at the right time.

PAUL  
(Relaxes grip on RASHID'S arm)  
I owe you something.

RASHID  
It's okay, mister. No big deal.

PAUL  
Yes it is. It's a law of the universe. If I let  
you walk away, the moon will spin out of orbit  
... pestilence will reign over the city for a  
hundred years.

RASHID  
(Mystified, amused. Smiles faintly)  
Well, if you put it that way...

PAUL  
You have to let me do something for you to put  
the scales in balance.

RASHID  
(Thinks, shakes his head)

That's all right. If I think of something, I'll send my butler over to tell you.

PAUL  
Come on. At least let me buy you a cup of coffee.

RASHID  
I don't drink coffee.  
(Smiles)  
On the other hand, since you insist, if you offered me a cold lemonade. I wouldn't say no.

PAUL  
Good. Lemonade it is.  
(Pause. Extends right hand)  
I'm Paul.

RASHID  
Rashid. Rashid Cole.  
(Shakes PAUL'S hand)

Cut to:

6. INT: DAY. GREEK DINER IN PARK SLOPE

PAUL and RASHID are sitting in a booth. The restaurant is nearly empty.  
We see RASHID finishing his second lemonade.

PAUL  
(Watching RASHID drink)  
Are you sure you don't want some food to go along with it? It might help to absorb some of that liquid. You don't want to slosh around too much when you stand up.

RASHID  
That's okay. I've already had lunch.

PAUL  
(Looks at clock on wall)  
You must eat lunch pretty early. It's only eleven o'clock.

RASHID  
I mean breakfast.

PAUL

(Studying RASHID closely)  
Yeah, sure, and I bet you had lobster last night. Along with two bottles of champagne.

RASHID  
Just one bottle. I believe in moderation.

PAUL  
Look, kid, it's okay with me. You don't have to play games. If you want a hamburger or something, go ahead and order it.

RASHID  
(Hesitates)  
Well, maybe just one. To be polite.

PAUL  
(Turning to WAITRESS. She comes)  
Cocktail hour is over. The young man would like to order a hamburger.

WAITRESS  
(To RASHID)  
How do you want that cooked?

RASHID  
Medium rare, please.

WAITRESS  
Fries?

RASHID  
(Looks at PAUL. PAUL nods)  
Yes, please.

WAITRESS  
Lettuce and tomato?

RASHID  
(Looks at PAUL. PAUL nods)  
Yes, please.

WAITRESS  
(Pointing to RASHID'S empty lemonade glass)  
You want another one of these, too?

PAUL  
Yeah, give him another one. And I'll take a cup

of coffee while you're at it.

WAITRESS  
Hot coffee or iced coffee?

PAUL  
Do you have real iced coffee, or do you just  
pour hot coffee over some ice cubes?

WAITRESS  
Everything is real in here, honey.  
(Pause)  
As real as the color of my hair.

PAUL and RASHID look at her hair. It is dyed bright red.

PAUL  
(Deadpan)  
I'll take the iced coffee.  
(Pause)  
You only live once, right?

WAITRESS  
(Equally deadpan)  
If you're lucky.  
(Pause)  
Then again, it depends on what you call living.  
(She walks off)

PAUL  
(To RASHID)  
I don't mean to pry, but I see a kid walking  
around with a big knapsack on his back, and I  
begin to wonder if all his worldly possessions  
aren't stowed in there. Are you in some kind of  
trouble or what?

RASHID  
(Keeping up his pose)  
Mostly what.

PAUL  
(Studying RASHID)  
You don't have to tell me if you don't want to,  
but I might be able to help.

RASHID  
(Hesitating)  
You don't know me from a hole in the wall.

PAUL

That's true. But I also owe you something, and I'm not sure that buying you a hamburger is going to do the job.

(Pause)

What is it? Family problems? Money problems?

RASHID

(Imitating white upper-class accent)

Oh no. Momsie and Popsie have oodles.

PAUL

And where do Momsie and Popsie live?

RASHID

East Seventy-fourth Street.

PAUL

In Manhattan?

RASHID

Of course. Where else?

PAUL

Then what are you doing in Park Slope? It's a little far from home, isn't it?

RASHID

(Beginning to relent)

That's where the *what* comes in.

PAUL

The what?

RASHID

The what.

(Pause)

I've kind of run away from home, you see.

(Pause)

It has nothing to do with my parents or money. I saw something I wasn't supposed to see, and for the time being it's best that I keep myself out of sight.

PAUL

You can't be more specific than that?

RASHID looks at PAUL, hesitates, then lowers his eyes.

PAUL (cont'd)

(Pause. Decides not to press him)

So where have you been staying in the meantime?

RASHID

Here and there. Around.

PAUL

Uh-huh. One of those cozy bed and breakfast places, probably.

RASHID

Yeah, that's right.

PAUL

Except that there's no bed, is there? And no breakfast either.

RASHID

The material world is an illusion. It doesn't matter if they're there or not. The world is in my head.

PAUL

But your body is in the world, isn't it?

(Pause)

If someone offered you a place to stay, you wouldn't necessarily refuse, would you?

RASHID

(Pause. Thinks)

People don't do that kind of thing. Not in New York.

PAUL

I'm not "people." I'm just me. And I do whatever I goddamn want to do. Got it?

RASHID

Thanks, but I'll manage.

PAUL

In case you're wondering, I like women, not little boys. And I'm not offering you a long-term lease -- just a place to crash for a couple of nights.

RASHID

I can take care of myself. Don't worry.

PAUL

Suit yourself. But if you change your mind,  
here's the address.

(Takes out a pad from his pocket and  
scribbles down the address. Tears  
sheet from the pad and hands it to  
RASHID)

The WAITRESS arrives with their orders.

WAITRESS

One burger medium rare with lettuce and tomato.

(Setting down plate in front of RASHID)

One order of fries.

(Setting down plate)

One lemonade.

(Setting down glass)

And one dose of reality.

(Setting down iced coffee  
in front of PAUL)

PAUL looks on as RASHID picks up hamburger and takes his first  
bite.

7. INT: DAY. THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO.

A slow hour. AUGGIE is sitting behind the counter, looking through  
a  
magazine and eating a slice of pizza for lunch. VINNIE enters the  
frame. He is the owner of the store: a large man in his fifties.

VINNIE

Okay. I think everything's set.

(Lights up cigar)

You've got the number for Cape Cod, right? Just  
in case something goes wrong.

AUGGIE

(Chewing pizza; not looking  
up from magazine)

No problem, Vinnie. Everything's under control.

(Finally looking up)

I could run this store in my sleep.

VINNIE

(Studying AUGGIE)

How long you been working for me, Auggie?

AUGGIE

(Shrugs, looks down at magazine again)  
I don't know. Thirteen, fourteen years.  
Something like that.

VINNIE

It's pretty crazy, don't you think? I mean, a  
smart guy like you. What do you want to hang  
on to a dead-end job like this for?

AUGGIE

(Shrugs again)  
I don't know.  
(Turns pages of magazine)  
Maybe because I love you so much, boss.

VINNIE

Shit. You should have been married to someone  
by now. You know, settled down somewhere with a  
kid or two, a nice steady job.

AUGGIE

I almost got married once.

VINNIE

Yeah, I know. To that girl who moved to  
Pittsburgh.

AUGGIE

Ruby McNutt. My one true love.

VINNIE

Sounds like another one of your stories to me.

AUGGIE

(Shakes his head)  
She upped and married some other cat after I  
joined the navy. By the time I got my  
discharge, though, she was divorced. Her  
husband poked out her eye in a domestic  
quarrel.

VINNIE

(Puffing on his cigar)  
Lovely.

AUGGIE

(Remembering)

She made a play for me after I got back, but her glass eye kept interfering with my concentration. Every time we got into a clinch, I'd start thinking about that hole in her head, that empty socket with the glass eye in it. An eye that couldn't see, an eye that couldn't shed any tears. The minute I started thinking about it, Mr. Johnson would get all soft and small. And I can't see getting married if Mr. Johnson isn't going to be in tiptop shape.

VINNIE

(Shaking his head)

You don't take anything seriously, do you?

AUGGIE

I try not to, anyway. It's better for your health. I mean, look at you, Vincent. You're the guy with the wife and three kids and the ranch house on Long Island. You're the guy with the white shoes and the white Caddy and the white shag carpet. But you've had two heart attacks, and I'm still waiting for my first.

VINNIE

(Takes cigar out of his mouth  
and looks at it with disgust)

I should stop smoking these damn things is what I should do. The fuckers are going to kill me one day.

AUGGIE

Enjoy it while you can, Vin. Pretty soon, they're going to legislate us out of business anyway.

VINNIE

They catch you smoking tobacco, they'll stand you up against a wall and shoot you.

AUGGIE

(Nodding)

Tobacco today, sex tomorrow. In three or four years, it'll probably be against the law to smile at strangers.

VINNIE

(Remembering something)

Speaking of which, are you still going ahead

with that deal on the Montecristos?

AUGGIE

It's all set. My guy in Miami said he'd have them within the next few weeks.

(Pause)

Are you sure you don't want to go in with me? Five thousand dollars outlay, a guaranteed ten-thousand-dollar return. A consortium of Court Street lawyers and judges. They're just drooling to get their lips around some genuine Cuban cigars.

VINNIE

No thanks. I don't care what you do, but just make sure you don't get caught, okay? The last I heard, it was still illegal to sell Cuban cigars in this country.

AUGGIE

It's the law that's buying. That's what's so beautiful about it. I mean, when was the last time you heard of a judge sending himself to jail?

VINNIE

Suit yourself. But don't keep the boxes around here long.

AUGGIE

They come in, they go out. I've got it planned to the last detail.

VINNIE

(Looking at his watch)

I've got to get moving. Terry will bust my chops if I'm late. See you in September, Auggie.

AUGGIE

Okay, my man. Love to the wife and kids, et cetera, et cetera. Drop me a postcard if you can remember the address.

VINNIE leaves. AUGGIE turns back to his pizza and magazine.

8. EXT: EVENING. FACADE OF THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO.

A shot of the darkening sky. A shot of the cigar store. We see the

lights go out. AUGGIE comes outside, locks the door, and begins pulling down the metal gate in front of the windows. Cut to:

A shot of PAUL running down the street toward AUGGIE.

PAUL  
(Out of breath)  
Are you closed?

AUGGIE  
You run out of Schimmelpennincks?

PAUL  
(Nods)  
Do you think I could buy some before you leave?

AUGGIE  
No problem. It's not as though I'm rushing off to the opera or anything.

AUGGIE lifts the gate and the two of them go into the store.

9. INT: EVENING. THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO.

PAUL and AUGGIE enter the darkened store. AUGGIE turns on the lights and then goes behind the counter to fetch PAUL'S cigars. PAUL, on the other side, notices a 35-millimeter camera near the cash register.

PAUL  
Looks like someone forgot a camera.

AUGGIE  
(Turning around)  
Yeah, I did.

PAUL  
It's yours?

AUGGIE  
It's mine all right. I've owned that little sucker for a long time.

PAUL  
I didn't know you took pictures.

AUGGIE

(Handing PAUL his cigars)

I guess you could call it a hobby. It doesn't take me more than about five minutes a day to do it, but I do it every day. Rain or shine, sleet or snow. Sort of like the postman.

(Pause)

Sometimes it feels like my hobby is my real job, and my job is just a way to support my hobby.

PAUL

So you're not just some guy who pushes coins across a counter.

AUGGIE

That's what people see, but that ain't necessarily what I am.

PAUL

(Looking at AUGGIE with new eyes)

How'd you get started?

AUGGIE

Taking pictures?

(Smiles)

It's a long story. I'd need two or three drinks to get through that one.

PAUL

(Nodding)

A photographer ...

AUGGIE

Well, let's not exaggerate. I take pictures. You line up what you want in the viewfinder and click the shutter. No need to mess around with all that artisto crap.

PAUL

I'd like to see your pictures some day.

AUGGIE

It can be arranged. Seeing as how I've read your books. I don't see why I shouldn't share my pictures with you.

(Pause. Suddenly embarrassed)

It would be an honor.

10. INT: NIGHT. AUGGIE'S APARTMENT

AUGGIE and PAUL are sitting at the kitchen table, opened boxes of Chinese food pushed to one side. Most of the surface of the table is covered with large black photograph albums. There are fourteen in all, and the spine of each one is labeled with a year -- ranging from 1977 to 1990. One of these albums (1987) is open on PAUL'S lap.

Close-up of one of the pages in the album. There are six black-and-white photos on the page, each one of an identical scene: the corner of 3rd Street and Seventh Avenue at eight o'clock in the morning. In the upper right-hand corner of each photo, there is a small white label bearing the date: 8-9-87, 8-10-87, 8-11-87, etc. PAUL'S hand turns the page; we see six more similar photographs. He turns the page again: same thing. And again: same thing.

PAUL  
(Astonished)  
They're all the same.

AUGGIE  
(Smiling proudly)  
That's right. More than four thousand pictures of the same place. The corner of 3rd Street and Seventh Avenue at eight o'clock in the morning. Four thousand straight days in all kinds of weather.  
(Pause)  
That's why I can never take a vacation. I've got to be in my spot every morning. Every morning in the same spot at the same time.

PAUL  
(At a loss. Turns a page,  
then another page)  
I've never seen anything like it.

AUGGIE  
It's my project. What you'd call my life's work.

PAUL  
(Puts down the album and picks up  
another. Flips through the pages and  
finds more of the same. Shakes his

head in bafflement)  
Amazing.

(Trying to be polite)  
I'm not sure I get it, though. I mean, how did you ever come up with the idea to do this ... this project?

AUGGIE  
I don't know, it just came to me. It's my corner, after all. It's just one little part of the world, but things happen there, too, just like everywhere else. It's a record of my little spot.

PAUL  
(Flipping through the album,  
still shaking his head)  
It's kind of overwhelming.

AUGGIE  
(Still smiling)  
You'll never get it if you don't slow down, my friend.

PAUL  
What do you mean?

AUGGIE  
I mean, you're going too fast. You're hardly even looking at the pictures.

PAUL  
But they're all the same.

AUGGIE  
They're all the same, but each one is different from every other one. You've got your bright mornings and your dark mornings. You've got your summer light and your autumn light. You've got your weekdays and your weekends. You've got your people in overcoats and galoshes, and you've got your people in shorts and T-shirts. Sometimes the same people, sometimes different ones. And sometimes the different ones become the same, and the same ones disappear. The earth revolves around the sun, and every day the light from the sun hits the earth at a different angle.

PAUL  
(Looks up from the album at AUGGIE)  
Slow down, huh?

AUGGIE  
Yeah, that's what I'd recommend. You know how  
it is. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, time  
creeps on its petty pace.

Close-ups of the photo album. One by one, a single picture occupies  
the  
entire screen. AUGGIE'S project unfolds before us. One picture  
follows  
another: the same place at the same time at different moments of  
the  
year. Close-ups of different faces within the close-ups. The same  
people appear in different pictures, sometimes looking into the  
camera,  
sometimes looking away. Dozens of stills. Finally, we come to a  
close-up of Ellen, PAUL'S dead wife.

Close-up of PAUL'S face.

PAUL  
Jesus, look. It's Ellen.

The camera pulls away. AUGGIE leans over PAUL'S shoulder. We see  
PAUL'S  
finger pointing to Ellen's face.

AUGGIE  
Yeah. There she is. She's in quite a few from  
that year. She must have been on her way to  
work.

PAUL  
(Moved, on the point of tears)  
It's Ellen. Look at her. Look at my sweet  
darling.

Fade out.

11. INT: NIGHT. PAUL'S APARTMENT

We see PAUL scribbling furiously in his legal pad, lost in his  
work.  
Behind him, we see ten or twelve index cards pinned to the wall.  
The  
cards are covered with writing. One of them reads: "The woman with

brown hair and blue eyes." Another one reads: "The mind is led on, step by step, to defeat its own logic." A third one reads: "Remember the Alamo."

PAUL stands up from his desk, goes over to the wall, pulls off one of the cards, and studies it as he returns to his desk. An instant later, he begins writing again.

The intercom buzzer sings loudly in the other room. PAUL continues to work, oblivious to the noise. The buzzer sounds again. PAUL puts down his pen.

PAUL  
(Under his breath)

Shit.

(He stands up from his chair, walks to the other room, and presses the "talk" button on the intercom)

Who is it?

VOICE FROM THE INTERCOM  
Rashid.

PAUL  
Who?

VOICE FROM THE INTERCOM  
Rashid Cole. The lemonade kid, remember?

PAUL  
Yeah.  
(Without much enthusiasm)  
Come on up.  
(Pushes "door" button the intercom)

PAUL walks to the door and opens it, peering into the hall as he waits for RASHID to arrive. A moment later, RASHID appears -- dressed as before, the backpack slung over his shoulder. He appears awkward, ill at ease.

PAUL  
I didn't expect to see you again.

RASHID

(Making the best of it)

Same here. But I had a long talk with my accountant this afternoon. You know, to see how a move like this would affect my tax picture, and he said it would be okay.

PAUL studies him with a mixture of bafflement and curiosity, but doesn't answer. RASHID puts down his bag and begins looking around the apartment. After a moment:

PAUL

That's it. Just the two rooms.

RASHID

(Continuing to study his new surroundings)

This is the first house I've been in without a TV.

PAUL

I used to have one, but it broke a couple of years ago and I never got around to replacing it.

(Pause)

I'd just as soon not have one anyway. I hate those damn things.

RASHID

But then you don't get to watch the ball games. You told me you were a Mets fan.

PAUL

I listen on the radio. I can see the games just fine that way.

(Pause)

The world is in your head, remember?

RASHID

(Smiles. Continues to walk around. Sees a small pen-and-ink drawing hanging on the wall above the stereo cabinet: the head of a small child. He stops to examine it)

Nice drawing. Did you do that?

PAUL

My father did. Believe it or not, that little baby is me.

RASHID

(Studying the drawing more carefully.  
Turns to look at PAUL, then turns  
back to the drawing)

Yeah, I can believe it.

PAUL

It's strange, though, isn't it? Looking at yourself before you knew who you were.

RASHID

Is your father an artist?

PAUL

No, he was a schoolteacher. But he liked to dabble.

RASHID

He's dead?

PAUL

Twelve, thirteen years ago.

(Pause)

Actually, he died with his sketch pad open on his lap. Up in the Berkshires one weekend, drawing a picture of Mount Greylock.

RASHID

(Studying the picture, nodding  
his head. As if to himself)

Drawing's a good thing.

PAUL

Is that what you do? Draw pictures?

RASHID

(Smiles)

Yeah, sometimes.

(Shrugs, as if suddenly embarrassed)

I like to dabble, too.

12. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

Two hours later. We see PAUL writing at his desk in the workroom.  
After

a moment, he stands up and opens the double doors a crack. From PAUL'S POV: we see RASHID sitting at the table in the main room, head resting on his arms, asleep. The backpack is still where he put it down in the previous scene.

13. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

8:00 in the morning. PAUL is sitting at the dining table drinking coffee. He looks at his watch, puts down the cup, walks to the workroom door, opens it, pokes head inside. Shot of RASHID asleep on the floor; shot of the typewriter and legal pad on the desk. PAUL closes the door, sighs, returns to the other room and pours himself another cup of coffee. Looks at his watch. Close-up of the watch: dissolve from 8:05 to 8:35. PAUL puts down the cup, stands up, walks to the workroom door, knocks.

PAUL  
Time to wake up.  
(Waits, listens, knocks again)  
Hey, kid, time to wake up.  
(Waits, listens, knocks again)  
Rashid!  
(Opens door. RASHID is  
groggily opening his eyes)  
Up and out. I have to work in here. The slumber  
party is over.

RASHID  
(Sitting up, rubbing his eyes)  
What time is it?

PAUL  
Eight-thirty.

RASHID  
(Appalled by early hour)  
Eight-thirty?

PAUL  
You'll find juice and eggs and milk in the  
refrigerator. Cereal in the cupboard. Coffee

on the stove. Take whatever you want. But it's time for me to get started in here.

RASHID stands up, embarrassed. He is dressed in underpants only. He rolls up the sleeping bag and pushes it to one side, then he gathers up his clothes and hustles out of the room.

14. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

Twenty minutes later. PAUL is sitting at his desk, staring at his typewriter. A loud noise comes from the other room: the clatter of dishes being put into the sink. PAUL stands up, walks to the door, opens it. He sees RASHID, now fully dressed, picking up the telephone next to the bed. He sees RASHID'S knapsack opened; a brown paper bag is sitting next to it. He watches RASHID dial a number.

RASHID

(In a low voice)

May I speak to Emily Vail, please? Yes, thank you, I'll wait.

(Silence, three or four beats. RASHID fiddles with a pillow on the bed)

Aunt Em? Hi, it's me. I just wanted you to know I'm okay.

(Pause, as he listens. The response from the other end is an angry one)

I know, I'm sorry.

(Pause, as he listens)

I just didn't want you to worry about me.

(Silence, as he listens. Begins to show irritation with Aunt Em's hostility)

Just cool it, okay? Take it easy.

(Click on the other end. He stares at the receiver for a moment, then hangs up)

PAUL closes the door quietly. RASHID does not know he has been observed. Cut back to PAUL in workroom. He sits down at his desk, thinks for a moment, then begins typing.

15. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

Several hours later. With the sounds of PAUL'S typing continuing to come from the workroom, we see RASHID stand on a chair next to the bookcase in the larger room and deposit the brown paper bag behind the books on one of the upper shelves.

16. INT: NIGHT. PAUL'S APARTMENT

A shot of RASHID asleep in PAUL'S bed. Lying next to him on the bed is an open, half-read copy of one of PAUL'S books: The Mysterious Barricades by Paul Benjamin.

Cut to a shot of PAUL sleeping on the floor of the workroom.

17. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

PAUL is in his workroom, sitting at his desk, typing. We see more index cards pinned to the wall. PAUL hears a loud crash from the other room. He pops up from his desk, exasperated, then walks to the door and opens it. Shot of the other room: RASHID is standing there, looking down at broken dishes.

PAUL

(Irritated)

Jesus, do you make a lot of noise. Can't you see I'm trying to work?

RASHID

(Mortified)

I'm sorry. They just... they just slipped out of my hands.

PAUL

A little less clumsiness around here would be nice, don't you think?

RASHID

(Growing defensive)

I'm a teenager. All teenagers are clumsy. It's because we're still growing. We don't know where our bodies end and the world begins.

PAUL

The world is going to end pretty soon if you don't learn fast.

(Pause. PAUL reaches into his pocket and pulls out his wallet, then removes a twenty-dollar bill)

Look, why not make yourself useful? I'm just

about out of smokes. Go around the corner to the Brooklyn Cigar Company and buy me two tins of Schimmelpenninck Medias.

(Hands the bill to RASHID)

RASHID

(Taking the bill)

Twenty dollars is a lot of money. Are you sure you can trust me with it? I mean, aren't you afraid I might steal it?

PAUL

If you want to steal it, that's your business. At least I won't have you around here making noise.

(Pause)

It might be worth it.

RASHID, visibly hurt by PAUL'S remark, puts the money in his pocket.

For once, he is unable to come up with a quick retort.

RASHID walks out of the apartment. PAUL watches the door slam.

Slight

pause, then he bends down and starts picking up the broken dishes.

18. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

The workroom. A few minutes later. PAUL returns to his desk and begins

to type. Almost immediately, the ribbon jams. He lets out a groan, then

opens the typewriter to inspect the damage.

19. EXT: DAY. THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO., AS SEEN FROM ACROSS THE STREET

Eight o'clock in the morning. We see AUGGIE on the corner, getting ready to take his daily photograph. Cut to the corner as seen through

the lens of the camera. Hustle and bustle, people on their way to work.

Automobile traffic, buses, delivery trucks. We hear the shutter click.

The picture freezes.

20. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

The workroom. PAUL is sitting at his desk, writing. A loud crash from the other room punctuates the silence. He jumps in his chair.

PAUL  
(Groans)  
Shit.

He stands up, goes to the door, opens it. Shot of RASHID standing precariously on the arm of a chair, his right hand groping behind the books on the top shelf of the bookcase. Several books have already fallen to the floor.

PAUL (cont'd)  
Jesus Christ. Are you at it again?

RASHID turns at the sound of PAUL'S voice, momentarily losing his balance. As he grabs hold of the bookcase again to steady himself, more books fall off the shelf and come tumbling to the floor. An instant later, he lands on the floor as well.

PAUL (cont'd)  
What is it with you, anyway? You're like a human wrecking ball.

RASHID  
(Climbing to his feet. Ashamed)  
I'm sorry. I'm really sorry... I was trying to reach for one of the books up there ...  
(Points)  
And then, I don't know, the sky fell on top of me.

PAUL  
(With growing irritation)  
It just won't do, will it? I go two and a half years without being able to write a word, and then, when I finally get started on something, when it looks as though I might actually be coming to life again, you show up and start breaking everything in my house. It just won't do, will it?

RASHID  
(Hurt, subdued)  
I didn't ask to come here. You invited me, remember?

(Pause)

If you want me to leave, all you have to do is say so.

PAUL

How long have you been here?

RASHID

Three nights.

PAUL

And how long did I tell you you could stay?

RASHID

Two or three nights.

PAUL

It sounds like our time is up, doesn't it?

RASHID

(Looking down at floor)

I'm sorry I messed up. You've been very kind to me ...

(Walks toward the bed, picks up the backpack from the floor, and begins stuffing his things into it)

But all good things have to come to an end, right?

PAUL

No hard feelings, okay? It's a small place, and I can't get my work done with you around.

RASHID

You don't have to apologize.

(Pause)

The coast is probably clear now anyway.

PAUL

(Softening)

Are you going to be all right?

RASHID

Absolutely. The world is my oyster.

(Pause)

Whatever that means.

(He looks up at the bookshelf, studying the spot where the bag is hidden. He makes a quick, resolute decision to

leave the bag where it is)

PAUL

Do you need some money? Some extra clothes?

RASHID

Not a penny, not a stitch. I'm cool, man.

(Hoists the backpack over his shoulder,  
begins walking toward the door)

PAUL

(a little stunned by  
RASHID'S decisiveness)

Take good care of yourself, okay?

RASHID

You too. And make sure the light is green  
before you cross the street.

(Reaches for the doorknob, opens  
the door, hesitates, turns around)

Oh, by the way, I liked your book. I think  
you're a hell of a good writer.

(Without waiting for a response, he  
opens the door again and leaves)

Shot of PAUL standing alone in the middle of the room. He walks to the window and looks outside. Shot of the street below. After three or four seconds, RASHID emerges from the building. Without glancing back, he begins walking down the street.

Cut to PAUL standing at the window. He lights up a cigar. Cut back to the street. RASHID has disappeared. An instant later, a blind man comes walking around the corner, tapping his white cane on the sidewalk.

21. INT: NIGHT. AUGGIE'S APARTMENT

The windows are open and traffic noises can be heard from the street below.

AUGGIE alone. Jazz is playing on his tape machine. He takes a TV dinner out of the oven, then sits down at the kitchen table and begins to eat.

Fade out.

Fade in. The meal is over. AUGGIE pours himself a shot of bourbon. He drinks it down in one swallow and smacks his lips, exhaling loudly. Stares blankly ahead of him for a moment. Then he reaches for a paperback copy of Crime and Punishment open on the table. As he finds his place in the book, he lights a cigarette. After one or two puffs, he begins to cough: a deep, rattling, prolonged smoker's cough. He pounds his chest. It doesn't help. He stands up, banging the table as the coughing fit continues. He begins to stagger around the kitchen, cursing between breaths. In his rage, he sweeps everything off the table: glass, bottle, book, remnants of the TV dinner. The cough subsides, then starts up again. He grabs hold of the kitchen sink and spits into the basin.

22. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

The main room. We hear the sound of PAUL typing. A loud, insistent banging is heard at the front door. Cut to PAUL opening the door. RASHID'S AUNT EM is standing in the hall. She is a black woman of about forty, dressed in clothes that suggest she works in an office.

AUNT EM  
(Angrily)  
Is your name Paul Benjamin?

PAUL  
(Taken aback)  
What can I do for you?

AUNT EM  
(Barging into the apartment)  
I just want to know what your game is, mister,  
that's all.

PAUL  
(Horrorified. Watching her as she  
charges around the room)  
How the hell did you get into the building?

AUNT EM  
What do you mean, how'd I get in? I pushed the

door and walked in. What do you think?

PAUL

(Muttering to himself)

The damn lock's broken again.

(Pause, as he returns

AUNT EM'S glare. Louder)

And so you just barge in on strangers, is that what you do? Is that your game?

AUNT EM

I'm looking for my nephew, Thomas.

PAUL

Thomas? Who's Thomas?

AUNT EM

Don't give me any of that. I know he's been here. You can't fool me, mister.

PAUL

I'm telling you. I don't know anyone named Thomas.

AUNT EM

Thomas Cole. Thomas Jefferson Cole. My nephew.

PAUL

You mean Rashid?

AUNT EM

Rashid? Rashid! Is that what he told you his name was?

PAUL

Well, whatever his name is, he's not here anymore. He left two days ago, and I haven't heard from him since.

AUNT EM

And what was he doing here in the first place? That's what I want to know. What's a man like you messing around with a black boy like Thomas for? Are you some kind of pervert, or what?

PAUL

(Losing patience)

Look, lady, that's enough. If you don't calm

down. I'm going to throw you out. Do you hear me? Right now!

AUNT EM  
(Getting a grip on herself)  
I just want to know where he is.

PAUL  
As far as I know, he went back to his parents.

AUNT EM  
(Incredulous)  
His parents? Is that what he told you? His parents?

PAUL  
That's what he said. He told me he lived with his mother and father on East Seventy-fourth Street.

AUNT EM  
(Defeated, shaking her head)  
I always knew that boy had an imagination, but now he's gone and made up a whole new life for himself.

(Pause)  
Do you mind if I sit down?  
(PAUL gestures to a chair; she sits down)  
He's been living with me and his uncle Henry since he was a baby. And we don't live in Manhattan. We live in Boerum Hill. In the projects.

PAUL  
He doesn't go to the Trinity School?

AUNT EM  
He goes to John Jay High School in Brooklyn.

PAUL  
(Beginning to show concern)  
And his parents?

AUNT EM  
His mother's dead, and he hasn't seen his father in twelve years.

PAUL

(Softly, almost to himself)  
I shouldn't have let him go.

AUNT EM  
(Studying PAUL)  
Which brings me back to my original question.  
What was he doing here in the first place?

PAUL  
I was about to get run over by a car, and your  
nephew pulled me back. He saved my life.  
(Pause)  
I sensed he was in trouble, so I offered to put  
him up for a few days. Maybe I should have  
pressed him a little more, I don't know. I  
feel pretty stupid about it now.

AUNT EM  
He's in trouble, all right. But I don't have  
any idea what it is.

PAUL  
(Sits down in a chair, lets out a sigh,  
thinks for a moment. Turns to AUNT EM)  
Do you want something to drink? A beer? A glass  
of water?

AUNT EM  
(Primly)  
No thank you.

PAUL  
(Lapses into thought again.  
After a moment)  
Has anything happened lately? Anything unusual  
or unexpected?

AUNT EM  
(Thinks)  
Well, one thing I suppose, but I don't think it  
has anything to do with this.  
(Pause)  
A friend of mine called about two weeks ago and  
said she'd spotted Thomas's father working at  
some gas station outside of Peekskill.

PAUL  
And you told your nephew about it?

AUNT EM  
(Shrugs)

I figured he had a right to know.

PAUL  
And?

AUNT EM  
And nothing. Thomas looked at me straight in the eye and said, "I don't have a father. As far as I'm concerned, that son-of-a-bitch is dead."

PAUL  
Those are pretty hostile words.

The camera slowly closes in on her face as she speaks:

AUNT EM  
His father walked out on his mother a couple of months after he was born. Louisa was Henry's younger sister, and she and the baby moved in with us. Four or five years go by, and then one day Cyrus shows up out of the blue, tail between his legs, wanting to patch things up with Louisa. I thought Henry was going to tear Cyrus apart when he saw him walk through the door. They're both big men, those two, and if they ever started to tangle, you'd see some teeth jumping on the floor. I guarantee it ... So Cyrus persuaded Louisa to go out with him to talk things over in quiet. And the poor girl never came back.

PAUL (OFF)  
You mean she just ran off with him and left her little boy behind?

AUNT EM  
Don't put words in my mouth. What I'm saying is she drove off in Cyrus's car and went to the Five-Spot Lounge with him for a drink. What I'm saying is that he imbibed too much in the way of alcohol and that when they finished their little talk three hours later and got back in the car, he was in no shape to drive. But he drove the car anyway, and before he could get her back to where she lived, the damn fool ran a red light and went straight into a truck.

Louisa got thrown through the windshield and was killed. Cyrus lived, but he came out of it a cripple. His left arm was so mangled, the doctors had to cut it off. Small punishment for what he did, if you ask me.

PAUL (OFF)  
(Aghast)

Jesus.

AUNT EM

Jesus had nothing to do with it. If He'd been involved. He would have seen to it that things worked out the opposite from what they did.

PAUL (OFF)

It can't have been easy on him. Walking around with that on his conscience all these years.

AUNT EM

No, I don't suppose it has. He was broken up like nobody's business in that hospital when he found out Louisa was dead.

PAUL (OFF)

And he's never tried to get in touch with his son?

AUNT EM

Henry told Cyrus he'd kill him if he ever showed his face around our house again. When Henry makes a threat like that, people tend to take him seriously.

PAUL and AUNT EM look at each other. Cut to shot of the kitchen sink.

Water is slowly dripping from the faucet. Hold for two or three beats.

23. EXT: DAY. A COUNTRY ROAD OUTSIDE OF PEEKSKILL

Early morning. Trees, shrubs, twittering birds. We see RASHID trudging down the road. Dissolve to:

The same road, a mile on. RASHID looks up. Cut to:

24. EXT: DAY. COLE'S GARAGE

The garage is a ramshackle, two-story building. Over the main door is a clumsily executed hand-painted sign that reads: COLE'S GARAGE. Two Chevron gas pumps stand alone in the front: weeds sprout through the macadam. To one side of the station is a grassy area with a weather-beaten picnic table.

The double garage doors are open. We see a man in there working on the engine of an old Chevrolet. The hood is up, which obscures the man's face, but we can see that he is wearing mechanic's overalls and that the color of his skin is black.

He is a large, burly man of about forty. Once he appears from behind the hood, we see that his left hand is missing. A metal hook juts out of his sleeve.

This is RASHID'S father, CYRUS COLE.

25. EXT: DAY. THE SIDE OF THE COUNTRY ROAD, DIRECTLY OPPOSITE COLE'S GARAGE

We see RASHID sitting on the hood of a rusted car across the road from the garage. He is motionless, hugging his knees and gazing intently in the direction of the camera. Hold for three, four beats.

26. INT: DAY. COLE'S GARAGE

A bit later. CYRUS, still busily at work on the Chevrolet, glances up and sees RASHID across the road. He studies him for a moment, then returns to his work.

27. EXT: DAY. THE SIDE OF THE COUNTRY ROAD, DIRECTLY OPPOSITE COLE'S GARAGE

An hour later. We see RASHID sitting on the hood of the car, as before. This time he has his sketch pad propped against his knees and is doing a pencil drawing of the garage across the way.

28. EXT: DAY. OUTSIDE COLE'S GARAGE

An hour later. We see CYRUS emerge from the garage carrying a brown paper bag. He walks over to the picnic table, sits down, and takes out his lunch from the bag: a ham sandwich, an apple, a can of iced tea. As he chews and drinks, he studies RASHID across the road. Every now and then, a car or truck passes by.

The camera cuts between RASHID and CYRUS. RASHID, working busily on his drawing, pretends not to notice he is being watched.

At last, CYRUS finishes his lunch. He crumples up the paper bag, gets to his feet, and tosses his garbage into a rusted metal trash can next to the picnic table. Instead of going back to work, he crosses the road.

29. EXT: DAY. THE SIDE OF THE COUNTRY ROAD, DIRECTLY OPPOSITE COLE'S GARAGE

Master shot. As CYRUS approaches, RASHID looks up, meeting the man's eyes for the first time. Before CYRUS can get close enough to see the drawing, RASHID closes the sketch pad and presses it against his chest. He makes no attempt to stand up.

CYRUS

You going to sit here all day?

RASHID

I don't know. I haven't decided yet.

CYRUS

Why don't you pick some other spot? It gives a man the creeps to be stared at all morning.

RASHID

It's a free country, isn't it? As long as I'm not trespassing on your property. I can stay here till kingdom come.

CYRUS

(Approaching the car. RASHID jumps  
off the hood as CYRUS draws closer)  
Let me give you some useful information, son.  
There's two dollars and fifty-seven cents in  
that cash register over there  
(gestures with his hand to the  
garage across the road)  
and considering all the time you've put in  
casing the joint so far, you won't make but  
about fifty cents an hour for all your pains.  
However you slice it, that's a losing  
proposition.

RASHID  
I'm not going to rob you, mister.  
(Amused)  
Do I look like a thief?

CYRUS  
I don't know what you look like, boy. As far as  
I can tell, you sprouted up like a mushroom in  
this spot last night.  
(Pause. Studies RASHID more closely)  
You live in this town -- or on your way from  
here to there?

RASHID  
Just passing through.

CYRUS  
Just passing through. A lonesome traveler with  
a knapsack on his back plops himself across  
from my garage to admire the view. There's  
other places to roam, kid, that's all I'm  
saying. You don't want to make a nuisance of  
yourself.

RASHID  
I'm working on a sketch. That old garage of  
yours is so rundown, it's kind of interesting.

CYRUS  
It's rundown, all right. But drawing a picture  
won't improve the way it looks.  
(Zeroing in on the sketch pad  
pressed against RASHID'S chest)  
Let's see what you did, Rembrandt.

RASHID

(Thinking fast)  
It'll cost you five bucks.

CYRUS  
Five bucks! You mean you're going to charge me five bucks just to look at it?

RASHID  
Once you look at it, you're going to want to buy it from me. That's guaranteed. And that's the price: five bucks. So if you're not willing to spring for it, you might as well not bother to look. It'll just tear you up inside and make you miserable.

CYRUS  
(Shaking his head)  
Son-of-a-bitch. You're some piece of work, aren't you?

RASHID  
(Shrugs)  
I just tell it like it is, mister.  
(Pause)  
If I'm getting on your nerves, though, you might want to think about hiring me.

CYRUS  
(Growing annoyed)  
Do you have eyes in your head, or are those brown things bulging out of your sockets just marbles? You've been sitting here all day, and how many cars have you seen drive up and ask for gas?

RASHID  
Not a one.

CYRUS  
Not a one. Not one customer all day. I bought this broken-down shit-hole of a place three weeks ago, and if business don't pick up soon, I'm going straight down the skids. What do I want to be hiring someone for? I can't even pay my own wages.

RASHID  
It was just a thought.

CYRUS

Yeah, well, do your thinking somewhere else,  
Michelangelo. I got work to do.

CYRUS begins to leave. We see him crossing the road, shaking his head.

Halfway there, he suddenly stops, turns, and shouts at RASHID:

CYRUS (cont'd)

Who do you think I am, the fucking State  
Employment Agency?

30. EXT: DAY. THE SIDE OF THE COUNTRY ROAD, DIRECTLY OPPOSITE  
COLE'S GARAGE

Half an hour later. We see RASHID sitting on the hood of the car,  
as  
before. This time he is eating a sandwich, chewing slowly as he  
gazes  
ahead.

31. EXT: DAY. COLE'S GARAGE

We see CYRUS at work on the Chevrolet. Every now and then, he  
glances  
up to look at RASHID.

CYRUS finishes the job he has been doing. He slams the hood of the  
Chevrolet shut. Quick cut to:

32. EXT: DAY. THE SIDE OF THE COUNTRY ROAD, DIRECTLY OPPOSITE  
COLE'S GARAGE

CYRUS enters the frame and hoists himself onto the hood of the car  
--  
right next to RASHID. A long silence.

CYRUS

(Trying to be friendly)

I'll tell you what. You want to work. I'll give  
you a job. Nothing permanent, mind you, but that  
upstairs room over there

(Turns, points)

-- the one above the office -- is a hell of a  
mess. It looks like they've been throwing junk  
in there for twenty years, and it's time it got  
cleaned up.

RASHID

(Playing it cool)  
What's your offer?

CYRUS  
Five bucks an hour. That's the going rate,  
isn't it?

(Looks at his wristwatch)  
It's a quarter past two now. My wife's picking  
me up at five-thirty, so that'll give you about  
three hours. If you can't finish today, you can  
do the rest tomorrow.

RASHID  
(Getting to his feet)  
Is there a benefits package, or are you hiring  
me on a freelance basis?

CYRUS  
Benefits?

RASHID  
You know, health insurance, dental plan, paid  
vacation. It's not fun being exploited. Workers  
have to stand up for their rights.

CYRUS  
I'm afraid we'll be working on a strictly  
freelance basis.

RASHID  
(Long pause, pretending  
to think it over)  
Five dollars an hour?  
(Another pause)  
I'll take it.

CYRUS  
(Cracking a faint smile.  
Extends his right hand)  
The name is Cyrus Cole.

RASHID  
Paul. Paul Benjamin.

They shake hands.

33. INT: DAY. THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO.

It is a slow hour in the middle of the afternoon. AUGGIE is sitting on a stool behind the counter, reading his paperback copy of Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment. JIMMY ROSE is working in silence near the far wall on the other side of the counter, diligently and awkwardly straightening the stacks of newspapers and magazines.

The bell on the front door rattles, signaling the arrival of a customer. Shot of JIMMY stopping his work to look up in the direction of the door. From JIMMY'S POV: a woman enters the store. She is RUBY McNUTT (AUGGIE'S old flame). Mid-forties, wearing a sleeveless summer dress, her face registering a tumult of anxiety, determination, and self-consciousness. She wears a black patch over her left eye.

Shot of JIMMY looking in wonder at the patch. Shot of RUBY looking in the direction of the counter. Shot of AUGGIE sitting behind the counter, still immersed in his book, not bothering to glance up. Close-up of RUBY'S face: she is looking at AUGGIE. Her lips are trembling. She is obviously moved, but she is too afraid to speak. With the camera fixed on RUBY'S face, we hear:

JIMMY (OFF)  
(Hesitantly)  
Auggie.  
(No response. Pause)  
Auggie, I think there's a customer.

Close-up of AUGGIE glancing up from his book. We see his expression change from one of indifference to recognition and astonishment.

Close-up of RUBY looking at him. She smiles tentatively. As they talk, JIMMY studies them with rapt attention.

RUBY  
Auggie?

Shot of AUGGIE'S face: he is still too amazed to speak.

RUBY (cont'd)  
It's really you, Auggie, isn't it?

AUGGIE

(Finally)

Christ, Ruby, it's been so long. I figured you were dead.

RUBY

Eighteen and a half years.

AUGGIE

Is that all? I thought it was about three hundred.

RUBY

(Shyly, hesitantly)

You're looking good, Auggie.

AUGGIE

No I'm not. I look like shit. And so do you, Ruby. You look just awful.

(Pause, with increasing bitterness)

What's with the patch, anyway? What'd you do with that old blue marble -- hock it for a bottle of gin?

RUBY

(Hurt, embarrassed)

I don't want to talk about it.

(Pause)

If you really want to know. I lost it. And I'm not sorry I did. That eye was cursed, Auggie, and it never gave me nothing but grief.

AUGGIE

And you think it looks better to go around dressed up like Captain Hook?

RUBY

(In a low voice, trying to maintain her composure and dignity)

You always were a son-of-a-bitch, weren't you? A little weasel with a quick, dirty mouth.

AUGGIE

At least I've stayed true to myself. Which is more than I can say about some people.

RUBY

(Again, she tries to shrug it off. Takes a deep breath)

I've got something to talk to you about, and the least you can do is listen. You owe me that much. I drove all the way from Pittsburgh to see you, and I'm not going until you've heard me out.

AUGGIE

Talk away, lady of my dreams. I'm all ears.

RUBY

(Glancing around the store.

Sees JIMMY studying her)

This is private, Auggie. Just between you and I.

AUGGIE

(Addressing JIMMY with  
unaccustomed irritation)

You heard her, pipsqueak. The lady and I have private business to discuss. Go outside and stand in front of the door. If anyone tries to come in, tell 'em we're closed. You got that?

JIMMY

Sure, Auggie, I got it.

(Pause)

The store's closed.

(Pause, thinks)

And when do I tell them it's open?

AUGGIE

(Snaps)

When I tell you it's open. It's open when I tell you it's open!

JIMMY

(Hurt)

Okay, Auggie, I got it. You don't have to yell.

JIMMY goes outside and posts himself in front of the door.

AUGGIE

(Looking closely at RUBY as  
he lights a cigarette)

All right, sugar, what's on your mind?

RUBY

(Pause. Self-conscious)

Don't look at me like that. Auggie. It gives me the creeps.

AUGGIE

Like what?

RUBY

Like what you're doing. I'm not going to eat you up.

(Pause)

I need your help, and if you keep staring at me like that. I might start screaming.

AUGGIE

(With an edge of sarcasm)

Help, huh? And I don't suppose this help has anything to do with money, does it?

RUBY

Don't rush me, okay? You're jumping to conclusions before I've even said anything.

(Pause)

And besides, it's not for me.

(Pause. Realizing she's let the cat out of the bag. In desperation, she plunges on)

It's for our daughter.

AUGGIE

(Shocked, growing belligerent)

Our daughter? Is that what you said? Our daughter? I mean, you might have a daughter, but I sure as hell don't. And even if I did -- which I don't -- she wouldn't be our daughter.

RUBY

Her name is Felicity, and she just turned eighteen.

(Pause)

She ran away from Pittsburgh last year, and now she's living in some shit-hole here in Brooklyn with a guy named Chico. Strung out on crack, four months pregnant.

(Pause)

I can't bear to think about that baby. Our grandchild, Auggie. Just think of it. Our grandchild.

AUGGIE

(Waving her off, impatient)

Stop it, already. Just stop all this crap right

now.

(Pause. Changing the  
subject. With contempt)

Was that your idea to call her Felicity?

RUBY

It means "happiness."

AUGGIE

I know what it means. That still don't make it  
a good name.

RUBY

I don't know who else to turn to, Auggie.

AUGGIE

You've suckered me before, darling, remember?  
Why should I believe you now?

RUBY

Why would I lie to you, Auggie? You think it  
was easy to come here and walk into this place?  
Why would I do it if I didn't have to?

AUGGIE

That's what you told me when I shoplifted that  
necklace for you. You remember, baby, don't  
you? The judge gave me a choice: either go to  
the can or enlist. So, instead of going to  
college, I wind up in the navy for four years,  
I watch men lose their arms and legs, I nearly  
get my head blown off, and you, sweet Ruby  
McNutt, you run off and marry that asshole,  
Bill.

RUBY

You didn't write to me for more than a year.  
What was I supposed to think?

AUGGIE

Yeah, well, I lost my pen. By the time I got a  
new one, I was clean out of paper.

RUBY

It was over with Bill before you ever came  
home. Maybe you don't remember it now, but you  
were pretty hot to see me back then.

AUGGIE

You weren't so lukewarm yourself. At least at first.

RUBY

It fizzled, baby. That's the way it goes. But we had our times, didn't we? It wasn't all bad.

AUGGIE

A couple of moments, I'll grant you that. A second or two snatched from the jaws of eternity.

RUBY

And that's how Felicity came into the picture. During one of those two seconds.

AUGGIE

You're conning me, sweetheart. I ain't responsible for no baby.

RUBY

Then why do you think I married Frank? I was already pregnant, and I didn't have much time. Say what you like, but at least he gave my kid a name.

AUGGIE

Good old Frank. And how is fat Mr. Grease Monkey these days?

RUBY

Who the hell knows?

(Shrugs)

He dropped out of sight fifteen years ago.

AUGGIE

Fifteen years ago?

(Shakes head)

It won't wash, pumpkin. No mother waits fifteen years to tell a man he's a father. I wasn't born yesterday, you know.

RUBY

(Her lips start to tremble. We see tears falling from her one good eye)

I thought I could handle it. I didn't want to bug you. I thought I could handle it on my own, but I couldn't. She's in real bad, Auggie.

AUGGIE

Nice try, old girl. I'd like to help you out. You know, for old time's sake. But all my spare cash is tied up in a business venture, and I haven't collected my profits yet. Too bad. You caught me at the wrong time.

RUBY

(Still crying)

You're a cold-hearted bastard, aren't you? How'd you ever get so mean, Auggie?

AUGGIE

I know you think I'm lying to you, but I'm not. Every word I told you is the God's honest truth.

Pause. Then cut to the store entrance. The door suddenly bursts open as an IRATE CUSTOMER pushes his way past JIMMY. We see JIMMY futilely trying to hold him back.

AUGGIE (cont'd)

(Shouting at customer. Beside himself)

The store's closed! Didn't you hear what the kid told you? The goddamn store is closed!

34. INT: DAY. THE UPSTAIRS ROOM OF COLE'S GARAGE

We see RASHID working diligently. The place is a pigsty, cluttered with all sorts of debris: rusty bicycles, rags, automotive parts, a female mannequin, broken radios, shower curtains, etc. One by one, RASHID drags or carries these things toward the door. At one point, he finds a small, portable black-and-white TV hidden under a rug. The rabbit ears are broken, the casing is covered with dust, but other than that it seems to be in reasonably good shape.

35. EXT: DAY. OUTSIDE COLE'S GARAGE

RASHID and CYRUS are carrying the debris from the upstairs room and throwing it into the back of an old red pickup truck. Once they get rid of a load, they go back inside for more. Since RASHID is faster, they are working out of phase: when one is outside, the other is inside.

They work in silence. CYRUS begins to huff and puff from going up and down the stairs. Eventually, after a number of trips, he drops a load into the truck and stops. He leans against the truck, pulls out a large, cheap half-smoked cigar from his shirt pocket, and lights up. Close-up of the hook as he strikes the match. After one or two puffs on the cigar, RASHID appears with another load and tosses it into the truck.

CYRUS

Time for a pause.

Without further ado, RASHID promptly sits down on the rear bumper of the truck. He does it so quickly, the effect is comical. He watches CYRUS smoke. Two or three beats.

RASHID

I don't mean to be nosy, but I was wondering what happened to your arm.

CYRUS

(Holds up his hook and studies it for a moment)

An ugly piece of hardware, isn't it?

(Pause)

I'll tell you what happened to my arm.

(Pause. Remembering)

I'll tell you what happened.

(Pause)

Twelve years ago, God looked down on me and said, "Cyrus, you're a bad, stupid, selfish man. First of all, I'm going to fill your body with spirits, and then I'm going to put you behind the wheel of a car, and then I'm going to make you crash that car and kill the woman who loves you. But you, Cyrus, I'm going to let you live, because living is a lot worse than death. And just so you don't forget what you did to that poor girl, I'm going to rip off your arm and replace it with a hook. If I wanted to, I could rip off both your arms and both your legs, but I'm going to be merciful and just take off your left arm. Every time you look at your hook, I want you to remember what a bad, stupid,

selfish man you are. Let that be a lesson to you, Cyrus, a warning to mend your ways."

RASHID

(Impressed by the sincerity  
of CYRUS'S speech)

And have you mended them?

CYRUS

I don't know. I try. Every day I keep on trying,  
but it's no easy task for a man to change his  
nature.

(Pause)

I'm off the booze, though. Haven't had a drop  
in six years. And now I've got me a wife.  
Doreen. Best damned woman I've ever known.

(Pause)

And a little boy, too. Cyrus Junior.

(Pause)

So things have definitely improved since I got  
fitted with this hook. If I can just turn this  
goddamn garage around, I'll be in pretty good  
shape.

RASHID

You named the kid after yourself, huh?

CYRUS

(Smiling at the thought of his son)

That boy's one in a million. A real tiger.

Cut to close-up of RASHID'S face. He seems to be growing more and  
more  
upset.

CYRUS (cont'd)

And what about you, kid? What's your story?

RASHID

(Turning away)

Who, me? I don't have a story. I'm just a kid.

Fade out.

36. EXT: DAY. OUTSIDE COLE'S GARAGE

Late afternoon. RASHID and CYRUS continue loading debris into the  
back  
of the truck. We see the black-and-white portable TV sitting on the

ground outside the office.

After a few moments, a ten-year-old blue Ford pulls up next to the truck and stops. It is driven by CYRUS'S wife, DOREEN. She is an attractive, self-possessed woman in her late twenties. CYRUS JUNIOR is sitting in a child-restraint seat in the back. He is two years old.

CYRUS'S face lights up when he sees the car. DOREEN cuts off the engine and gets out, smiling at her husband. RASHID, suddenly forgotten by CYRUS, watches the exchange with keen interest.

CYRUS

Hi, baby. How'd it go today?

DOREEN

(Joking)

If I have to wash one more old lady's hair, I think my fingers would fall off.

(She kisses him on the cheek)

CYRUS

Busy, huh? That's good, because things around here sure were sleepy today.

DOREEN

(Opening the back of the car, unstrapping JUNIOR from his seat, and picking him up in her arms)

Don't worry, Cy. It's early days yet.

(Addressing JUNIOR, but at the same time catching sight of RASHID)

Say hello to Daddy.

JUNIOR

(In his mother's arms, excited at seeing his father)

Dada! Dada!

CYRUS

(Taking the boy in his arms and giving him a big kiss)

Hey there, little tiger. And what did you do today?

DOREEN

(Addressing RASHID as she hands the baby to CYRUS)

Hello.

RASHID  
(Shyly)

Hello.

CYRUS  
(Noticing the exchange  
between DOREEN and RASHID)  
Jesus, I almost forgot you were here. Doreen,  
this is Paul. My new assistant.

DOREEN extends her right hand to RASHID.

RASHID  
(Shaking DOREEN'S hand)  
It's only temporary. On a freelance basis.

CYRUS  
(Turning JUNIOR toward RASHID)  
And this one, in case you haven't guessed, is  
Junior.

RASHID  
(Studying JUNIOR carefully. Mumbles  
in a barely audible voice)  
Hi there, little brother.

CYRUS  
(To JUNIOR) Say hi to Paul.

JUNIOR  
Hi there, little brother.

CYRUS  
(To DOREEN)  
He's helping me clean out that upstairs room.  
Might as well get this place looking good,  
anyway.  
(To RASHID)  
I guess that's it for today, sport. Come back  
tomorrow morning at eight, and you can pick up  
where you left off.  
(Starts walking to the office  
with JUNIOR in his arms)

We see him through the window: opening the cash register, pocketing  
the

money, turning out the lights, then coming out and closing the garage doors. In the foreground, we see RASHID standing with DOREEN. He looks down at the ground, too shy to say a word to her. She studies him with a mixture of curiosity and amusement. When CYRUS is finished closing up, he walks toward them and says to RASHID:

CYRUS (cont'd)

Do you want me to pay you now, or can you wait until tomorrow?

RASHID

Tomorrow's fine. There's no rush.

37. EXT: EARLY EVENING. OUTSIDE COLE'S GARAGE

A little later. We see RASHID sitting next to the TV outside the office door. He is utterly still. Hold for two, three beats.

38. INT: EARLY EVENING. INSIDE THE OFFICE OF COLE'S GARAGE

We see a pencil drawing being slid under the door. It is an excellent rendering of the garage as seen from across the road.

The camera moves in on the drawing until it occupies the entire screen. Hold for two, three beats.

39. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

PAUL opens the door. RASHID is standing in the hall, holding the black-and-white TV in his arms. The knapsack is on his back. His clothes have become a little shabbier since the last time we saw him.

PAUL

(Surprised)

Hey, it's you.

RASHID

(Serious)

I wanted to give you this as a token of my appreciation.

PAUL  
Appreciation for what?

RASHID  
I don't know. For helping me out.

PAUL  
(Eyeing TV suspiciously)  
Where did you get that thing?

RASHID  
I bought it. Twenty-nine ninety-five on sale at Goldbaum's TV and Radio.

(Hands TV to PAUL, who takes it  
in his arms. RASHID smiles)  
Well, that just about takes care of it, I  
guess. You'll be able to watch the ball games.  
You know, as a little break from your work.  
(Begins to leave)

PAUL  
Where the hell do you think you're going?

RASHID  
Business appointment. I'm seeing my broker at  
three o'clock.

PAUL  
Cut it out, will you? Just cut it out and come  
back here.

RASHID  
(Looking at his watch. Shrugs)  
I don't have much time.  
(Returns to the doorway,  
enters the apartment)

PAUL  
(Puts TV on the stereo cabinet)  
Close the door.  
(RASHID closes the door)  
Sit down in that chair.  
(Points. RASHID sits down in the chair)  
Now listen carefully. Your Aunt Em came here a  
couple of days ago. She was sick with worry,  
out of her mind. We had an interesting talk  
about you, Thomas. Do you understand what I'm  
saying? Your aunt thinks you're in trouble and  
so do I. Tell me about it, kid. I want to hear

all about it right now.

RASHID

(Realizes he is trapped. Shrugs. Smiles weakly. Looks down at floor to avoid PAUL'S gaze. When he dares to look up again, PAUL is still glowering at him.)

You don't really want to know.

PAUL

(Impatient)

I don't, huh? And what makes you such an authority on what I want or don't want?

RASHID

(Sighs, defeated)

Okay, okay.

(Pause)

It's all so stupid.

(Pause)

There's this guy, see. Charles Clemm. The Creeper, that's what people call him. The kind of guy you don't want to cross paths with.

PAUL

And?

RASHID

I crossed paths with him. That's why I'm trying to stay clear of my neighborhood. To make sure I don't run into him again.

PAUL

So that's the something you weren't supposed to see, huh?

Close-up of RASHID, becoming more animated as he talks.

RASHID

I just happened to be walking by... All of a sudden, the Creeper and this other guy come running out of this check-cashing place with masks on their faces and guns in their hands... They just about ran smack into me. The Creeper recognized me, and I knew he knew I recognized him... If the guy from the check-cashing place hadn't rushed out then screaming bloody murder, he would have shot me. I'm telling you, the Creeper would have shot me right there on the

sidewalk. But the noise distracted him, and when he turned around to see what was happening, I took off... One more second, and I would have been dead.

PAUL  
Why don't you go to the police?

RASHID  
You're joking, right? I mean, that's your way of trying to be funny, right?

PAUL  
If they put this Creeper in jail, then you'd be safe.

RASHID  
The man has friends. And they're not likely to forgive me if I testify against him.

PAUL  
(Thinking)  
What makes you think you'll be any safer around here? It's only about a mile away from where you live.

RASHID  
It might not be far, but it's another galaxy. Black is black and white is white, and never the twain shall meet.

PAUL  
It looks like they've met in this apartment.

RASHID  
That's because we don't belong anywhere. You don't fit into your world, and I don't fit into mine. We're the outcasts of the universe.

PAUL  
(Studying RASHID)  
Maybe. Or maybe it's the other people who don't belong.

RASHID  
Let's not get too idealistic.

PAUL  
(Pause. Breaks into a smile)

Fair enough. We wouldn't want to get carried away, would we?

(Pause)

Now call your aunt Em and let her know you're alive.

40. INT: EVENING. PAUL'S APARTMENT

PAUL and RASHID are watching the Mets on television. They are both smoking little cigars. PAUL puffs on his calmly; RASHID coughs after each puff of his. He is clearly not used to smoking. The television has a defective tube, the reception is poor, and every now and then one of them stands up and bangs the top of the set to bring the picture back into focus. They watch the ball game in silence. Close-up of the TV screen: the batter swings. An announcer's voice is heard describing the action.

41. EXT: LATE AFTERNOON. THE CORNER IN FRONT OF THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO.

AUGGIE is alone, closing up shop, looking particularly scruffy and unshaven. Just as he finishes pulling down the last metal gate, a car with Pennsylvania license plates comes speeding down Seventh Avenue and brakes to a sudden stop in front of the store. It is a ten-year-old Pontiac in rather sorry shape: belching smoke, with a defective muffler and a dented body. AUGGIE, distracted by the commotion, turns and looks at the car.

From AUGGIE'S POV: we look into the car and see that the driver is RUBY McNUTT. She leans out the open window and addresses AUGGIE in an urgent voice.

RUBY

Get in, Auggie. I've got something to show you.

AUGGIE

(Reluctant)

You don't give up, do you?

RUBY

Just get in and shut up. I'm not asking you to do anything. I just need you to come with me.

AUGGIE  
Where to?

RUBY  
(Impatient)  
Dammit, Auggie, don't ask so many questions.  
Just get in the car.

AUGGIE shrugs. RUBY opens the right front door of the car, and he climbs in. They drive off.

42. EXT: EVENING. THE STREETS OF BROOKLYN

We see RUBY'S car as it travels through the Brooklyn evening, making its way down Seventh Avenue to Flatbush Avenue, then turning onto Eastern Parkway and gliding past the Public Library and the Brooklyn Museum as it penetrates the slums of Crown Heights and East New York.

RUBY  
I told her she was going to meet her father.

AUGGIE  
You what?

RUBY  
It was the only way, Auggie. Otherwise, she wasn't going to let me see her.

AUGGIE  
I think you'd better stop the car and let me out.

RUBY  
Relax, okay? You don't have to do anything. Just go in there and pretend. It won't kill you to do a little favor like that. Besides, you might even learn something.

AUGGIE  
Yeah, like what?

RUBY  
That I wasn't bullshitting you, sweetheart. At

least you'll know I've been telling the truth.

AUGGIE

Look, I'm not saying you don't have a daughter.  
It's just that she's not my daughter.

RUBY

Wait till you see her, Auggie.

AUGGIE

And what's that supposed to mean?

RUBY

She looks just like you.

AUGGIE

(Irritated)

Cut it out. Just cut it out, okay? It's  
starting to get on my nerves.

RUBY

When I told her I was going to bring her father,  
she kind of melted. It's the first time  
Felicity's talked nice to me since she left  
home. She's dying to meet you, Auggie.

They drive on in silence for a few more seconds. By now they have entered one of the worst, most dangerous parts of the city. We see broken-down, boarded-up buildings, vacant lots strewn with rubble, trash scattered on the sidewalks. RUBY turns down one of these streets, then brings the car to a halt in front of a walk-up building with spray-painted graffiti on the outer door: KILL THE COPS. AUGGIE and RUBY get out of the car and start walking toward the building. Down the street, in the distance, we see a black man pick up a metal garbage can and throw it violently to the ground. It lands with a loud crash.

AUGGIE

Nice neighborhood you've brought me to. Full of  
happy, prosperous people.

43. INT: EVENING. FELICITY'S APARTMENT

Close-up of a scarred green door. A knocking is heard from the other side. Pause. The knocking is heard again. After another pause, we hear

feet padding toward the door. A second later a shoulder enters the frame. This is FELICITY from behind. She is dressed in a cheap flowered robe.

FELICITY  
Yeah? Who is it?

RUBY (OFF)  
It's me, honey. It's Mom.

We see FELICITY'S hand reach out and unbolt the lock. The door opens to reveal AUGGIE and RUBY standing in the hall. They both look nervous: RUBY expectant and hopeful, with a forced smile on her face, AUGGIE guarded and closed in on himself. Cut to a close-up of FELICITY'S face. She is a very pretty blonde of eighteen. Her expression is hostile, however, and there is a wasted look in her eyes. We see clumsily applied rouge on her cheeks, a slash of red lipstick on her lips. She runs her hand through her stringy, unwashed hair. Cut to a close-up of AUGGIE'S face. It is impossible to know what he is thinking.

As AUGGIE and RUBY enter the apartment, the camera backs up to show the room. It is a tawdry place with little furniture: a double mattress on the floor (the bed is unmade), a rickety wooden table and two chairs along the far wall (we see a box of Sugar Pops on the table), a hot plate, and an enormous color television near the mattress. The television is on, but the sound is off. Images of commercials flicker in the background during the rest of the scene. The only decoration is a large black-and-white poster of Jim Morrison Scotch-taped to one of the walls. Clothes are strewn everywhere: on the floor, on the table, on top of the television set.

By the time RUBY has shut the door behind her, FELICITY has already retreated to the other side of the room and is lighting a cigarette from a pack of Newports on the table. No one says anything. An awkward silence as FELICITY glares at her mother and AUGGIE.

RUBY  
(Finally)

Well?

FELICITY  
Well what?

RUBY  
Aren't you going to say anything?

FELICITY  
What do you want me to say?

RUBY  
I don't know. Hello, Mom. Hello, Dad. Something like that.

FELICITY  
(Takes a drag on her cigarette, looking AUGGIE up and down. Then, turning to RUBY)  
I don't got no daddy, you dig? I got born last week when some dog fucked you up the ass.

AUGGIE  
(Muttering under his breath)  
Jesus Christ. This is all I need.

RUBY  
(Trying to ignore the viciousness of her daughter's remark)  
You told me you wanted to meet him. Well, here he is.

FELICITY  
Yeah, I might have said that. Chico told me to see what he was like, maybe there'd be some dough in it for us. Well, now I've seen him, and I can't say I'm too impressed.  
(Pause. Turning to AUGGIE)  
Hey, mister. Are you rich or what?

AUGGIE  
(Disgusted)  
Yeah, I'm a millionaire. I walk around in disguise because I'm ashamed of all my money.

RUBY

(To FELICITY. Imploringly)  
Be nice, sweetie. We're just here to help you.

FELICITY  
(Snaps back)  
Help? What the fuck do I need your help for?  
I've got a man, don't I? That's more than you  
can say for yourself, Hawkeye.

AUGGIE  
Hey, hey, don't talk to your mother like that.

FELICITY  
(Crushing out her cigarette on the  
table. Ignoring AUGGIE'S remark,  
to her mother)  
You're telling me you actually went to bed with  
this guy? You're telling me you actually let  
him fuck you?

RUBY  
(Mortified, struggling not  
to lose her composure)  
You can do whatever you want with your own life.  
We're thinking of the baby, that's all. We want  
you to get yourself cleaned up for the baby.  
Before it's too late.

FELICITY  
Baby? And what baby is that?

RUBY  
Your baby. The baby you're carrying around  
inside you.

FELICITY  
Yeah, well, there ain't no baby in there now.  
You dig? There's nothing in there now.

RUBY  
What are you talking about?

FELICITY  
An abortion, stupid.  
(Laughs bitterly)  
I had an abortion the day before yesterday. So  
you don't have to bug me about that shit  
anymore.  
(Laughs again. Defiantly,

almost to herself)  
Bye-bye, baby!

AUGGIE  
(Taking hold of RUBY'S arm. RUBY is  
about to break into tears)  
Come on, let's get out of here. I've had enough.

RUBY shrugs off AUGGIE'S hand and goes on looking at her daughter.  
As  
FELICITY speaks, the camera closes in on her face.

FELICITY  
Yeah, that's right, you better go. Chico'll be  
back any minute, and I'm sure your boyfriend  
doesn't want to mess with him. Chico's a real  
man. Not some scuzzy dickhead you find in last  
month's garbage. Do you hear what I'm saying?  
He'll chop up Mr. Dad here into little pieces.  
That's a promise. He'll kick the living shit  
out of him.

44. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

It is morning. RASHID is preparing a pot of coffee in the  
kitchenette.  
PAUL stumbles out of the bathroom, wiping his face with a towel. He  
has  
just woken up and is still groggy. He approaches the table.

PAUL  
Ah, coffee. Smells good.

RASHID  
(Handing him a cup)  
One sip of this stuff and your eyes will blast  
open.

PAUL  
(Taking the cup and sitting down)  
Thanks.  
(Begins to drink)

RASHID  
What time did you get to bed last night?

PAUL  
I don't know. Two or three. It was pretty late.

RASHID

You work too hard, you know that?

PAUL

Once a story gets hold of you, it's hard to let go.

(Pause)

Besides, I'm making up for lost time.

RASHID

Just so you don't overdo it. You don't want to die of sleep deprivation before you finish.

PAUL

(Almost to himself. Looking up at the photo of Ellen on the wall)

If you don't sleep, you don't dream. If you don't dream, you don't have nightmares.

RASHID

That's logical. And if you don't sleep, you don't need a bed. Saves you money, too.

(Pause)

So what's this story you're working on, anyway?

PAUL

If I tell you, I might not be able to finish it.

RASHID

Come on, just a little hint.

PAUL

(Smiling at RASHID'S eagerness. Pause)

Okay, just a little hint. I can't tell you the story, but I'll tell you what gave me the idea for it.

RASHID

The inspiration.

PAUL

Yeah, right. The inspiration. It's a true story anyway, so I don't suppose it can hurt, can it?

RASHID

No way.

PAUL

All right. Listen carefully.

(The camera slowly moves in  
for a close-up of PAUL'S face)  
About twenty-five years ago, a young man went  
skiing alone in the Alps. There was an  
avalanche, the snow swallowed him up, and his  
body was never recovered.

RASHID  
(Mockingly)  
The end.

PAUL  
No, not the end. The beginning.  
(Pause)

His son was just a little boy at the time, but  
the years passed, and when he grew up, he  
became a skier, too. One day last winter, he  
went out by himself for a run down the  
mountain. He gets halfway to the bottom and  
then stops to eat his lunch next to a big rock.  
Just as he's unwrapping his cheese sandwich, he  
looks down and sees a body frozen in the ice --  
right there at his feet. He bends down to take  
a closer look, and suddenly he feels that he's  
looking into a mirror, that he's looking at  
himself. There he is -- dead -- and the body  
is perfectly intact, sealed away in a block of  
ice -- like someone preserved in suspended  
animation. He gets down on all fours, looks  
right into the dead man's face, and realizes  
that he's looking at his father.

Cut to RASHID'S face. We see him listening intently.

PAUL (cont'd) (OFF)  
And the strange thing is that the father is  
younger than the son is now. The boy has become  
a man, and it turns out that he's older than  
his own father.

The camera holds on RASHID'S face. After a moment:

PAUL (OFF)  
So what are you going to do today?

RASHID (Shrugs)  
Read, think, do some drawings if I get in the  
mood.

He points to the coffee table: we see the sketch pad and a paperback copy of Shakespeare's Othello.

RASHID (cont'd)  
But tonight I'm going to celebrate. That's definite.

PAUL  
Celebrate? What for?

RASHID  
It's my birthday. I'm seventeen years old  
(looks at wristwatch)  
as of forty-seven minutes ago, and I think I should celebrate having made it this far.

PAUL  
(Raising coffee cup)  
Hey, hey. Happy birthday. Why didn't you tell me?

RASHID  
(Deadpan)  
I just did.

PAUL  
I mean earlier. We could have planned something.

Close-up of RASHID'S face.

RASHID  
I don't like plans. I prefer to take things as they come.

45. INT: LATE AFTERNOON. THE BOOKSTORE

A small, cluttered independent bookshop.

The scene begins with a close-up of the clerk's face: APRIL LEE, a Eurasian woman in her mid- to late twenties. She is sitting behind the front counter with an open book before her. Her expression is puzzled, searching, as if she has just remembered or recognized something, but can't quite figure out what it is. We see her looking toward the back

of the store, straining to listen in on PAUL and RASHID'S conversation.

RASHID (OFF)

Here we are.

(Pause)

Rembrandt's drawings. Edward Hopper. Van Gogh's letters.

PAUL (OFF)

Pick two or three. Now that the coffers are open, you might as well take advantage of me.

As PAUL and RASHID start walking back in the direction of the counter, APRIL lowers her gaze and pretends to be reading. We see PAUL and RASHID enter the field of the camera from behind. PAUL puts a small pile of art books on the counter.

PAUL

We'll take these, please.

APRIL looks up: her eyes meet PAUL'S. They study each other for a brief moment -- a significant exchange that does not escape RASHID'S notice.

APRIL

Will that be cash or charge?

PAUL

(Taking out his wallet  
and looking inside)

Better make it charge.

(Removes the credit card  
and hands it to APRIL)

APRIL

(Looking at the card, smiles)

I thought I recognized you. You're Paul Benjamin the writer, aren't you?

PAUL

(Both pleased and surprised)

I confess.

APRIL

I keep waiting for the next novel to come out. Anything in the works?

RASHID

(Butting in, with enthusiasm)

It's coming along. At the rate he's going, he'll have a story finished by the end of the summer.

APRIL

Wonderful. When your next book is published, maybe you could come into the store and do a signing. I'm sure we could get a lot of people to show up.

PAUL

(Still staring at APRIL)

Uh, actually, I tend to shy away from that kind of thing.

RASHID

(To APRIL)

Excuse me for asking, but you aren't married, are you?

APRIL

(Taken aback)

What!

RASHID

Perhaps I should rephrase the question. What I mean to say is, are you married or seriously involved with a significant other?

APRIL

(Still astonished. Bursts out laughing)

No! At least I don't think I am!

RASHID

(Smiling with satisfaction)

Good. Then may I have the honor of extending an invitation to you?

APRIL

An invitation?

Close-up of PAUL, listening to the exchange between RASHID and APRIL.

RASHID

Yes, an invitation. I apologize for springing

it on you at the last minute, but Mr. Benjamin and I are attending a celebration tonight, and we would be most pleased if you chose to accompany us.

(Looking at PAUL)

Isn't that right, Mr. Benjamin?

PAUL

(Breaking into a broad smile)

Absolutely. We would be honored.

APRIL

(Smiling)

And what's the occasion of this celebration?

RASHID

It's my birthday.

APRIL

And how many people will be attending this birthday party?

RASHID

I wouldn't actually call it a party. It's more along the lines of a dinner in celebration of my birthday.

(Pause)

The guest list is quite restricted. So far, there's Mr. Benjamin and myself. If you accept, that would make three of us.

APRIL

(Ironic. With a crafty smile)

Ah-hah, I see. A cozy dinner. But aren't threesomes a little awkward? How does the phrase go--

RASHID

Three's a crowd. Yes, I'm aware of that. But I have to keep an eye on Mr. Benjamin wherever he goes. To make sure he doesn't get himself into trouble.

APRIL

And what are you, his chaperone?

RASHID

(With a straight face)

Actually, I'm his father.

APRIL bursts out laughing, amused by the mounting silliness of the conversation.

PAUL

It's true. Most people assume I'm his father. It's a logical assumption -- given that I'm older than he is and so on. But the fact is, it's the other way around. He's my father, and I'm his son.

Close-up of APRIL'S face. She is still laughing.

Cut to:

46. INT: EVENING. CHINESE RESTAURANT IN BROOKLYN

In the background, we see a number of other customers. At one table, a Chinese family is celebrating a birthday. Toward the end of the scene, they all get up to pose for a group photograph. PAUL, RASHID, and APRIL are sitting together at a round table. They are in the middle of their meal.

PAUL

So your mother grew up in Shanghai?

APRIL

Until she was twelve. She moved here in 'forty-nine.

PAUL

And your father? Is he from New York?

APRIL

(Smiling)

Muncie, Indiana. He and my mother met as students. But I'm from Brooklyn. My sisters and I were all born and bred right here.

PAUL

Just like me.

RASHID

Like me, too.

APRIL

I once read somewhere that one quarter of all the people in the United States have at least one relative who has lived in Brooklyn at one time or another.

RASHID

No wonder it's such a screwed-up place.

PAUL

(To APRIL)

And the bookstore? Have you been working there long?

APRIL

It's just a summer job. Something to help pay the bills while I finish my dissertation.

PAUL

Your dissertation? What subject do you study?

APRIL

American literature. What else?

PAUL

What else. Of course, what else? And what are you writing about for your thesis?

APRIL

(With mock pomposity)

Visions of Utopia in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction.

PAUL

Wow. You don't fool around, do you?

APRIL

(Smiling)

Of course I fool around. But not so much when it comes to my work, it's true.

(Pause)

Have you ever read *Pierre*, or the *Ambiguities*?

PAUL

Melville, huh?

(Smiles)

It's been a while.

APRIL

That's the subject of my last chapter.

PAUL

Not an easy book.

APRIL

Which explains why this hasn't been the easiest summer of my life.

RASHID

All the more reason to let 'er rip tonight, sweetheart.

(Raises glass)

You know, go for the gusto.

APRIL clinks her glass with RASHID and laughs merrily as PAUL looks on and smiles. Cut to:

47. INT: NIGHT. A BAR IN BROOKLYN

A noisy, crowded blue-collar hangout. APRIL, PAUL, and RASHID are standing together, looking rather tipsy. They are engaged in animated three-way conversation, but we can't hear their voices over the din.

A song is playing on the jukebox ("Downtown Train," by Tom Waits). APRIL asks PAUL to dance. He agrees. As they dance, RASHID looks on.

Even though the rhythm of the song is fast, PAUL and APRIL dance slowly, tentatively, not quite sure how to behave with each other.

After a moment, AUGGIE emerges from the back room with VIOLET, his flashy girlfriend, hanging on his arm. They are both plastered.

AUGGIE

(Drunk, smiling)

Hey, man, good to see you.

PAUL

This is April Lee, Auggie. April, say hello to Auggie Wren.

APRIL

(Smiling)

Hello, Auggie Wren.

AUGGIE

(Affecting the voice of a cowboy,

tipping an imaginary hat)  
Howdy, Miss April. I'm right pleased to make  
your acquaintance.

(Turning to VIOLET)  
And this pretty little lady here is Miss  
Vi-o-let Sanchez de Jalapeño, the hottest chili  
pepper this side of the Rio Grande. Ain't that  
so, baby?

VIOLET  
Ees so, Auggie. And you not so cold, neither.  
Eh, baby?

PAUL, APRIL, and RASHID nod hello to VIOLET.

AUGGIE  
So, what brings you to a dive like this?

PAUL  
(Gesturing with thumb to  
RASHID; addressing AUGGIE)  
It's his birthday so we decided to whoop it up  
a little.

AUGGIE  
(To RASHID)  
How old, kid?

RASHID  
Seventeen.

AUGGIE  
Seventeen? I remember when I was seventeen.  
Christ, I was one little whacked-out  
son-of-a-bitch when I was seventeen. Is that  
what you are, son? One little whacked-out crazy  
fella?

RASHID  
(With feigned seriousness, nodding)  
Definitely. I'd say you've hit the nail on the  
head.

AUGGIE  
Good. Keep it up, and maybe one day you'll grow  
up and become a great man like me.  
(Bursts out laughing)

PAUL puts his arm around AUGGIE, addressing him in quieter tones. As they talk, APRIL and VIOLET look each other up and down, smiling awkwardly. RASHID strains to hear what PAUL and AUGGIE are saying to each other.

PAUL  
Hey, Auggie, I've just been thinking. You wouldn't need some help around the store, would you? Some summer help while Vinnie's gone?

AUGGIE  
(Thinking)  
Help? Hmm. It's possible. What did you have in mind?

PAUL  
I'm thinking about the kid. I'm sure he'd do a good job for you.

AUGGIE  
(Looking up and studying RASHID)  
Hey, kid. You interested in a job? I just got word from your employment agency that you're looking for a position in retail sales.

RASHID  
A job?  
(Pause. Looks at PAUL)  
I definitely wouldn't turn down a job.

AUGGIE  
Come around to the cigar store tomorrow morning at ten o'clock and we'll talk about it, okay? We'll see what we can work out.

RASHID  
Ten o'clock tomorrow morning. I'll be there.

PAUL  
(Patting AUGGIE on the back)  
I owe you one. Don't forget.

48. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

Morning. PAUL and RASHID sitting at the table, eating breakfast.  
RASHID

is wearing a red T-shirt with the word "FIRE" emblazoned on the back in white letters. We catch them in mid-conversation.

PAUL

It's 1942, right? And he's caught in Leningrad during the siege. I'm talking about one of the worst moments in human history. Five hundred thousand people died in that one place, and there's Bakhtin, holed up in an apartment, expecting to be killed any day. He has plenty of tobacco, but no paper to roll it in. So he takes the pages of a manuscript he's been working on for ten years and tears them up to roll his cigarettes.

RASHID

(Incredulous)

His only copy?

PAUL

His only copy.

(Pause)

I mean, if you think you're going to die, what's more important, a good book or a good smoke? And so he huffed and he puffed, and little by little he smoked his book.

RASHID

(Thinks, then smiles)

Nice try. You had me going for a second, but no ... no writer would ever do a thing like that.

(Slight pause. Looking at PAUL)

Would he?

PAUL

(Amused)

You don't believe me, huh?

(Stands up from the table and begins walking to the bookcase)

Look, I'll show you. It's all in this book.

PAUL stands on a chair and reaches for a book on the top shelf. In doing so, he catches sight of the paper bag RASHID planted there in Scene 15. He studies it in bewilderment, then picks it up and dangles it in the air as he turns toward RASHID.

PAUL (cont'd)

What's this?

RASHID

(Squirming with embarrassment)

I don't know.

PAUL

Is it yours?

RASHID

Yeah, it might be.

PAUL

(Shrugs, not wanting to  
make an issue of it)

Here, catch.

PAUL tosses the bag in RASHID'S direction. The bag breaks open in midair, and a shower of twenty-, fifty-, and hundred-dollar bills rains down from the ceiling. PAUL is stunned; RASHID is watching the world crumble before his eyes.

Fade out.

49. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT (LATER)

Fade in. A few minutes later. PAUL and RASHID are sitting at the table again, the money stacked in neat piles between them. Again, we catch them in mid-conversation.

PAUL

So you're saying it wasn't like that at all.

RASHID

Not exactly. I mean, there was more to it than I told you.

PAUL

Christ. You didn't just see what happened. They dropped the package on the ground and you picked it up.

RASHID

Yeah, I picked it up.

PAUL  
And started to run.

RASHID  
And started to run.

PAUL  
(Sarcastic)  
Good thinking.

RASHID  
That's just it. I didn't think. I just did it.

PAUL  
You have one hell of a knack for getting into  
trouble, don't you?  
(Pause, gesturing to the money)  
So how much does it come to?

RASHID  
Six thousand dollars. Five thousand eight  
hundred and fourteen dollars, to be exact.

PAUL  
(Shaking his head, trying to  
absorb this new turn of events)  
So you robbed the robbers, and now the robbers  
are after you.

RASHID  
That's it. In a nutshell.

PAUL  
Yeah, well, you have to be nuts to do what you  
did. If you want my opinion, you should give  
this money back to the Creeper. Just give it  
back and tell him you're sorry.

RASHID  
(Shaking his head)  
No way. There's no way I'm giving that money  
back. It's my money now.

PAUL  
A lot of good it will do you if the Creeper  
finds you.

RASHID  
(Stubbornly)

That money is my whole future.

PAUL

Keep up with that attitude, and you won't have a future.

(Pause)

Seventeen is a hell of an age to die. Is that what you want?

Close-up of RASHID'S face. Fade out.

50. INT: DAY. THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO.

We see RASHID mopping the floor. He finishes up and carries the mop to the bathroom behind the cash register and puts it in the bucket that is sitting in the sink. He turns on the tap and rinses the mop. Just to the side of the sink, there are two open cardboard boxes on the floor.

We catch a glimpse of the contents: boxes of Montecristos (Cuban cigars). AUGGIE'S shipment from Miami has arrived.

RASHID turns off the tap, but the water continues to trickle out in a small stream into the bucket. RASHID doesn't notice.

RASHID returns to the counter. AUGGIE is standing by the door getting ready to go out. For the first time, he is clean-shaven, his hair is combed, and he is wearing dress-up clothes: a bright red plaid sports jacket, white slacks, etc. The effect is strange, laughable.

AUGGIE

I'll be back in about an hour. Watch the register while I'm gone, okay?

RASHID

Sure thing. See you later.

AUGGIE waves goodbye and leaves.

Cut to the bathroom. Close-up of the bucket in the sink. The water is overflowing, spilling onto the boxes of Cuban cigars.

Cut to the store. RASHID is sitting behind the counter, studying a picture of a naked woman in Penthouse magazine.

Cut to bathroom. Close-up of water inundating the Cuban cigars.

Cut to store. Close-up of RASHID gaping at the photograph. We hear him groan softly.

RASHID  
(Muttering to himself)  
Jesus God, save me.

Dissolve.

The jarring noise of the door opening. RASHID hastily closes the magazine and stashes it under the counter. AUGGIE enters the store with two middle-aged men in dark, pin-striped suits: his lawyer-customers for the Cuban cigars.

AUGGIE  
(Addressing the TWO LAWYERS as they enter. He is obviously keyed up. His manner is jovial, ingratiating)  
It might be illegal, but it's hard to see where the crime is if there's no victim. No harm done, right?

FIRST LAWYER  
This is what it must have felt like to go to a speakeasy during Prohibition

SECOND LAWYER  
Forbidden pleasures, eh?

AUGGIE  
(To RASHID)  
Much business while I was gone?

RASHID  
A little. Not much.

AUGGIE  
(To the LAWYERS)  
This way, gentlemen. Let's retire to my office, shall we?

He points to the bathroom behind the counter.

The camera stays on RASHID as AUGGIE and the LAWYERS disappear. A second later, we hear AUGGIE explode with rage.

AUGGIE (OFF)

What the fuck is going on here! Look at this!  
The goddamn place is flooded! Holy fucking  
shit! Look at this! Look at this goddamn mess!

51. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

Close-up of RASHID'S face. He is in tears.

PAUL (OFF)

So you lost the job. Is that what you're  
telling me? He just up and fired you?

RASHID

(Scarcely able to speak)

It was more complicated than that. There was a  
reason.

PAUL (OFF)

Well?

RASHID

It wasn't my fault.

PAUL (OFF)

(Irritated)

If you don't tell me what happened, how do you  
expect me to know that? I need facts, not  
opinions.

RASHID

(Struggling to speak,  
fighting back the tears)

The water was dripping, see... I turned it off,  
but it was still dripping, and then Auggie had  
to go out, and so I left the back room ... And  
later on ... well, later on ... when Auggie  
came back ... the whole place was flooded. His  
Cuban cigars got all messed up ... You know,  
soaked through ... just when he was about to  
sell them ... to these rich guys in suits....

Shot of PAUL standing in the middle of the room looking at RASHID,  
who

is sitting on the bed.

PAUL

Cuban cigars. You mean he had some hanky-panky going with those guys?

RASHID

I suppose so. He never told me about it.

PAUL

No wonder he was angry.

RASHID

He was out five thousand bucks, he said.... He kept saying it over and over.... Five thousand bucks down the drain.... He wouldn't stop.... Five thousand bucks, five thousand bucks.... He was like out of his mind with those five thousand bucks....

Silence. PAUL paces about the room, thinking. He sits down in a chair by the table. Thinks some more.

PAUL

Here's what you're going to do. You're going to open up your backpack, take out your bag of money, count out five thousand dollars, and hand it over to Auggie.

RASHID

(Appalled)

What are you talking about?

(Pause)

You can't be serious.

PAUL

I'm serious, all right. You've got to square it with Auggie. Since you won't give the money back to the Creeper, you can use it to make things right with Auggie. That's probably better anyway. Better to keep your friends than to worry about your enemies.

RASHID

(Stubbornly. Fresh tears falling down his cheeks)

I'm not going to do it.

PAUL

You'll do it, all right. You fuck up, you've got to undo the damage. That's how it works, buster. If you don't do it, I'm going to throw you out of here. Do you understand me? If you don't pay Auggie what you owe him. I'm finished with you.

RASHID

I pay Auggie, and I've got nothing. Eight hundred bucks and a ticket to Shit City.

PAUL

Don't worry about it. You've got friends now, remember? Just behave yourself, and everything will work out.

52. INT: NIGHT. A BAR IN BROOKLYN

AUGGIE is sitting alone at the bar, smoking a cigarette and drinking a beer. He looks disgusted: muttering to himself, swearing under his breath. Business is slow, and the place is almost empty.

PAUL and RASHID enter and approach AUGGIE at the bar. RASHID is carrying a brown paper bag. AUGGIE gestures with his head for them to follow him into the back room. Cut to:

The three of them taking their seats at a table in the back room. A long, awkward pause.

PAUL

The kid's sorry, Auggie.

AUGGIE

(Scowls, fiddles with the napkin on the table)

Yeah, well, I'm sorry too.

(Pause)

It took me three years to save up those five thousand bucks, and now I'm broke. I can't hardly pay for this beer. Not to speak of having my credibility destroyed. Do you understand what I'm saying? My credibility. So yeah, I'm sorry, too. About as sorry as I've ever been in my whole fucking life.

PAUL

He's got something to tell you, Auggie.

AUGGIE

If he's got something to tell me, why don't he tell it to me himself?

Without saying a word, RASHID lifts the bag off his knees and puts it on the table in front of AUGGIE. AUGGIE eyes the bag suspiciously.

RASHID

It's for you.

AUGGIE

For me? And what am I supposed to do with a paper bag?

RASHID

Open it.

AUGGIE

(Taking a peek inside)

What is this, some kind of joke?

RASHID

No, it's five thousand dollars.

AUGGIE

(Disgusted)

Shit. I don't want your money, you little twerp.

(Peeking inside the paper bag again)

It's probably stolen anyway.

RASHID

What do you care where it comes from? It's yours.

AUGGIE

And why the hell would you give me money?

RASHID

So I can get my job back.

AUGGIE

Your job? You've got five thousand bucks. What do you want a piece-of-shit job like that for?

RASHID

To look at the dirty magazines. I can see all the naked women I want, and it doesn't cost me a cent.

AUGGIE

You're a dumb, whacked-out little fuck, do you know that?

Auggie pushes the bag toward RASHID. Without hesitating for a second,

RASHID pushes the bag back toward AUGGIE.

PAUL

Don't be an ass, Auggie. He's trying to make it up to you, can't you see that?

AUGGIE

(Sighs, shakes head,  
peeks into bag again)

He's crazy.

PAUL

No, he's not. You are.

AUGGIE

(Shrugs. Begins to crack a smile)

You're right. I just wasn't sure you knew.

PAUL

It's written all over you like a neon sign. Now say something nice to Rashid to make him feel better.

AUGGIE

(Peeking into the bag again. Smiles)

Fuck you, kid.

RASHID

(Beginning to smile)

Fuck you, too, you white son-of-a-bitch.

PAUL

(Pause. He laughs. Then, slapping his hands on the table)

Good. I'm glad that's settled!

53. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

PAUL is alone at his desk, typing. The keys suddenly stick, jam up.

PAUL  
(Spreading his hands in front of his  
face and addressing his fingers)  
Pay attention, boys. Look sharp.

54. INT: DAY. PAUL'S APARTMENT

Several hours later. As before: PAUL alone at his desk, typing. A loud knocking is heard at the door. PAUL continues typing. Another loud knock on the door. PAUL sighs, stands up from his desk, and leaves the workroom. Shot of PAUL walking through the big room and opening the front door. Two black men are standing in the hallway. One is very large, in his mid-thirties; the other is small, in his twenties. They are Charles Clemm, THE CREEPER, and his sidekick, ROGER GOODWIN.

CREEPER  
Mr. Benjamin, I presume?

Before PAUL can respond, CREEPER and GOODWIN push their way past him into the apartment. GOODWIN slams the door behind him. PAUL backs up nervously. He positions himself by the windows that look down at the street.

GOODWIN  
You got a security problem in this building, you know that? The lock on that door downstairs is busted.

CREEPER  
Not a good idea in these troubled times. You never know what kind of trash might wander in off the streets.

PAUL  
(Nervous)  
I'll talk to the landlord about it tomorrow.

GOODWIN  
You do that. Don't want no unpleasant surprises, do you?

PAUL

(Looking them over)

And who do I have the pleasure of talking to now?

CREEPER

Pleasure?

(Laughs)

I wouldn't call this pleasure, funny man. I'd say it's more in the nature of business.

PAUL

It doesn't matter. I know who you are anyway.

(Pause)

You're the Creeper, aren't you?

CREEPER

(Indignant)

The what?

GOODWIN

(Whipping out a .45 automatic  
and pointing it at PAUL)

Ain't nobody calls Charles by that name to his face.

(Grabs PAUL'S arm and puts  
him in a hammerlock)

Understand?

PAUL

(Grunting in pain)

Sure, I understand.

Before GOODWIN can do any real violence, the CREEPER waves him off.

At

that moment, PAUL glances out the window. Shot of RASHID down on the

street, approaching the building. Shot from RASHID'S POV: We see PAUL

upstairs with his back to the window, moving his hand with a shooing

gesture, trying to warn RASHID of the danger. Another shot of RASHID'S

face, puzzled. Another shot from RASHID'S POV: the CREEPER'S head enters the picture. Another shot of RASHID: he takes off, running down

the street. As all this happens we hear the following:

CREEPER (OFF)

Let me tell you the business we're here about.  
We want your cooperation in helping us locate a  
certain party. We know he's been staying here,  
so we don't want no denials about it, understand?

PAUL  
What party are you looking for?

GOODWIN (OFF)  
Little Tommy Cole. A homeboy with a brain the  
size of a pea.

PAUL (OFF)  
(Stalling)  
Tommy Cole? Never heard of him.

By now, RASHID is gone. Shot of PAUL'S face. He glances over his  
shoulder at the street below. Shot of the street: no sight of  
RASHID  
anywhere. Followed by a shot of PAUL, CREEPER, and GOODWIN standing  
in  
the room.

CREEPER  
I'm not sure you heard me the first time. We  
know that boy's been here.

PAUL  
You might think you know, but you've got the  
wrong information. I never heard of anyone  
named Tommy Cole.

GOODWIN  
(Strolling about the room. Sees  
RASHID'S sketch pad on coffee table)  
Looke here, Charles. Ain't cousin Tommy fond  
of doodling?

He picks up the pad, flips through it, and then starts ripping up  
the  
drawings and tossing them on the floor.

PAUL  
Hey, what the hell are you doing?

Before GOODWIN answers, CREEPER comes close to PAUL and without any  
warning delivers a fast, powerful punch to his stomach. PAUL  
doubles  
over in pain and falls to the floor.

CREEPER

So what's it going to be, funny man? Do you cooperate, or do we send you to the hospital?

GOODWIN

(Walking toward the bookcase,  
addressing PAUL over his shoulder)  
Hope you got some good Blue Cross, baby.

GOODWIN suddenly starts pulling books off the shelves and sweeping them violently onto the floor.

55. EXT: DAY. IN FRONT OF THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO.

AUGGIE is standing with his arm on JIMMY ROSE'S shoulder. We catch them in mid-conversation. AUGGIE is talking; JIMMY is doing his best to follow him: looking down at the ground and nodding, surreptitiously picking his nose. As they talk, we see PAUL walking down the street in their direction. He is limping: one side of his face is bandaged, his left arm is in a sling.

AUGGIE

... If it happens, it happens. If it doesn't, it doesn't. Do you understand what I'm saying? You never know what's going to happen next, and the moment you think you know, that's the moment you don't know a goddamn thing. That's what we call a paradox. Are you following me?

JIMMY

Sure, Auggie. I follow. When you don't know nothing, it's like paradise. I know what that is. It's after you're dead and you go up to heaven and sit with the angels.

AUGGIE

(About to correct JIMMY when he spots PAUL approaching the corner)  
Jesus, man, you're one fucking mess.

PAUL

(Shrugs)  
It could have been worse. If the cops hadn't

come, I might not be standing here now.

AUGGIE  
Cops? You mean they nabbed those crud's?

PAUL  
No. The ... uh ... the Bobbsey Twins lit out when they heard the sirens. But at least they stopped playing that marimba duet on my skull.  
(Pause. Smiles)  
Assaultus interruptus.

AUGGIE  
(Studying PAUL'S wounds)  
Fuckus my assus. They did some number on you.

PAUL  
For once in my life I managed to keep my mouth shut. There's something to be said for that, I suppose.

JIMMY, who has been watching PAUL intently since his arrival, gently and hesitantly raises his hand and touches PAUL'S bruised face.  
PAUL  
winces slightly.

JIMMY  
Does it hurt?

AUGGIE  
Of course it hurts. What does it look like?

JIMMY  
(Quietly)  
I thought maybe he was pretending.

PAUL  
(To AUGGIE)  
You haven't heard from Rashid, have you?

AUGGIE  
Not a peep.

PAUL  
I spoke to his aunt a couple of days ago, but she hasn't heard from him either. It's beginning to get a little scary.

AUGGIE

That could be a good sign, though. It could mean that he got away.

PAUL

Or didn't.

(Pause)

There's no way of knowing, is there?

56. EXT: DAY. A BROOKLYN STREET

We see PAUL walking down the street, returning home. He spots a young black man from behind. He is wearing the same red "FIRE" T-shirt that RASHID was wearing in Scene 48. PAUL, growing excited, limps forward to catch up with him. Once he gets close enough, he taps the young man on the shoulder.

YOUNG MAN

(Wheeling around as if he had been attacked. Angrily)

What the fuck you want, mister?

PAUL

(Embarrassed)

I'm sorry. I thought you were someone else.

YOUNG MAN

I ain't someone else, got it? You can go fuck yourself with your someone else.

57. INT: NIGHT. PAUL'S APARTMENT

PAUL, sitting in his easy chair, continues to work on his story by hand. The apartment has more or less been put back in order, but several traces of the CREEPER'S visit remain: bits of broken furniture, a pile of destroyed books in one corner, etc.

After a few moments, PAUL gets up from his chair, walks over to the television set, and turns it on. We hear the crowd noises of a baseball game, the voice of the announcer describing the action, but there is no image: Only a single white line across the black screen. PAUL mutters

under his breath and pounds the top of the TV. An image jumps into view: a baseball game in progress. PAUL backs up to watch. The moment he steps back, the image vanishes. Once again we see the white line across the black screen. PAUL steps forward and pounds the TV again. Nothing happens. He pounds again, and still the white line remains. The camera moves in slowly for a close-up of the TV screen. The camera travels through it, into the darkness. After a moment we hear the clicking of PAUL'S keyboard. The sounds of typing resonate in the void.

58. EXT: LATE MORNING. THE BROOKLYN PROMENADE

Sunday, late morning, brilliant sunshine. Against the backdrop of lower Manhattan, we see the summer weekend crowd along the Promenade: old people on benches reading newspapers, young couples out with their babies, girls on roller skates, boys on skateboards, bag ladies, bums. Traveling camera. Amongst the bustle of bodies and colors, we see the Brooklyn Bridge off to the right, a spider web of cables set against the buildings of upper Manhattan; to the left we see the expanse of New York Harbor, the Staten Island ferry, the Statue of Liberty. AUGGIE and RUBY are walking along the promenade, deep in conversation. AUGGIE is clean-shaven, his hair is slicked back, and he is wearing his white pants and a bright red Hawaiian shirt. RUBY is wearing sunglasses, black toreador pants, and spike heels.

AUGGIE

So you're just going to give up and go home?

RUBY

I don't have much choice, do I? It's pretty clear she doesn't want me around.

AUGGIE

(Thinks)

Still, you can't just write her off.

RUBY

Yeah? And what else am I supposed to do? There's no baby anymore, and if she wants to

throw away her life, that's her business.

AUGGIE

She's just a kid. There's time for more babies later. After she grows up.

RUBY

Dream on, Auggie. She'll be lucky to make it to her nineteenth birthday.

AUGGIE

Not if you got her into one of those rehab programs.

RUBY

I'd never be able to talk her into it. And even if I could, those things cost money. And that's just what I don't have. I'm flat out dead broke.

AUGGIE

No you're not.

RUBY

(She stops)

Are you calling me a liar? I'm telling you I'm broke. I don't even have insurance on my goddamned car.

AUGGIE

(Ignoring her remark)

Remember that business venture I was telling you about? Well, my tugboat came in. I'm flush.

RUBY

(Pouting)

Bully for you.

AUGGIE

No, bully for you.

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a long white envelope, and hands it to RUBY.

RUBY

What's this?

AUGGIE

Why don't you open it and find out?

RUBY  
(Opens the envelope. It  
is filled with cash)  
Jesus God, Auggie. There's money in here.

AUGGIE  
Five thousand bucks.

RUBY  
(Incredulous)  
And you're giving it to me?

AUGGIE  
It's all yours, baby.

RUBY  
(Moved, to the point of tears)  
For keeps?

AUGGIE  
For keeps.

RUBY  
(Now crying in earnest)  
I can't believe it. Oh God, I can't believe it.  
(Pause, to catch her breath)  
You're an angel, Auggie. An angel from heaven.

She tries to put her arms around him, but AUGGIE squirms away.

AUGGIE  
Fuck this angel shit. Just take the dough,  
Ruby. But no bawling, okay? I can't stand  
people who blubber.

RUBY  
I'm sorry, baby. I can't help it.

RUBY pulls a handkerchief from her purse and blows her nose,  
honking  
loudly. AUGGIE lights a cigarette. After a moment they start  
walking  
again.

AUGGIE  
There's just one thing I want to know.

RUBY

(More composed)  
Anything, Auggie. Just name it.

AUGGIE stops walking.

AUGGIE  
Felicity.  
(Pause)  
She's not my daughter, is she?

Long pause. Close-up of RUBY'S face.

RUBY  
I don't know, Auggie. She might be. Then again,  
she might not. Mathematically speaking, there's  
a fifty-fifty chance. It's your call.

Close-up of AUGGIE'S face. After a moment, he begins to smile. Fade out.

59. EXT: DAY. SEVENTH AVENUE

We see PAUL walking down the crowded street with a manila envelope tucked under his arm.

60. INT: DAY. THE BOOKSTORE

We see APRIL behind the counter. She is ringing up a sale for a CUSTOMER, an Indian woman dressed in a sari.

PAUL enters the store and approaches the counter. When APRIL looks up and notices who it is, her face brightens -- then instantly shows alarm at the sight of PAUL'S wounds and bandages. She completely forgets about the customer.

APRIL  
Jesus, what happened to you?

PAUL  
(Shrugging it off)  
It looks worse than it is. I'm okay.

APRIL  
What happened?

PAUL  
I'll tell you all about it...

(Glancing around the store)  
... but not here.

APRIL  
(Pause. Shyly)  
It's been a while. I thought maybe you'd be in touch.

PAUL  
Yeah, well, I've sort of been out of commission.  
(Pause)  
How's Melville?

APRIL  
Almost done. A week or ten days, and I'll be there.

CUSTOMER  
(Growing impatient)  
Miss, could I have my change, please?

APRIL  
Oh, I'm sorry.  
(Hands the woman her change)

CUSTOMER  
And my book.

APRIL  
Sorry.  
(She slips the book -- Portrait of a Lady  
-- into a bag and gives it to the woman)

The CUSTOMER leaves, glancing over her shoulder with a disapproving look at APRIL and PAUL.

PAUL  
(Extending the manila envelope to APRIL)  
I finished my story. I thought you might want to take a look at it.

APRIL  
(Taking the envelope -- and at the same moment understanding the significance of PAUL'S gesture. She begins to smile)  
I'd love to.

PAUL  
Good. I hope you like it. It was a long time in

coming.

APRIL

(Glancing at her watch)

I get off for lunch in ten minutes. Can I treat you to a hamburger?

PAUL

(Awkwardly)

Uh ... actually, it might be better if you read the story first. Call me when you're finished, okay?

APRIL

(A bit mystified, but putting a good face on her disappointment)

Okay. I'll read it tonight and call you tomorrow.

(Weighing the envelope in her hand)

It doesn't seem to be too long.

PAUL

Forty-one pages.

Another CUSTOMER -- a young white man of about twenty -- appears at the counter with a copy of On the Road. PAUL begins backing toward the door.

PAUL (cont'd)

You won't forget to call?

APRIL

I won't forget. I promise.

61. INT: NIGHT. PAUL'S APARTMENT

The telephone rings -- two, three, four times -- but no one is there to answer it. Cut to:

62 INT: NIGHT. THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO.

Shot of the empty store. We hear a telephone ringing in the distance.

63. INT: NIGHT. AUGGIE'S APARTMENT

AUGGIE is sitting alone at his kitchen table, removing recently

developed photographs from a yellow Kodak envelope. The 1990 album lies open on the table before him. One by one, AUGGIE affixes a small white label to the lower-right-hand corner of each image, carefully marking the date on each label with a pen: 7-30-90, 7-31-90; 8-1-90; etc. Then, one by one, he slips each photo into its appropriate place in the album. AUGGIE smokes a cigarette, hums a song under his breath, sips from a glass of bourbon. He looks like a beachcomber: unshaven, tousled hair, bare-chested, wearing a pair of baggy shorts.

The telephone is ringing. Not to be rushed, AUGGIE slides another photo into its place, takes a sip of his drink, and then, finally, answers the phone.

AUGGIE

Bureau of Missing Persons. Sergeant Fosdick.

(Pause. Listens)

Well, blow me down. Peter Rabbit's alive.

(Pause. Listens)

Yeah, that's cool. No problem.

(Pause. Listens)

Danzinger Road, Peekskill.

(Pause. Listens)

Yeah, I got it. I don't need no pencil.

(Pause. Listens)

How the hell do I know? I can't help it if he's not answering his phone.

(Pause. Listens)

So you're the one who called the cops, huh?

Good work.

(Pause. Listens)

Yeah, I mean it. Good work. It probably saved his skin.

(Pause. Listens)

You got that right. Bad. You owe him a lot, keemosabbe.

(Pause. Listens)

No, not tomorrow. I have to work, chuckle brain -- remember?

(Pause. Listens)

No, not Saturday either. Sunday.

(Pause. Listens)

Yeah. Right. Okay.

(Smiles)

Yeah, and kiss my ass, too.

(Pause. Listens. Smiles again)

You, too.

(Hangs up the phone)

64. EXT: DAY. PAUL'S STREET

Sunday morning. PAUL and AUGGIE are walking together on the sidewalk.

PAUL is carrying RASHID'S backpack.

PAUL

So what did he say when he called?

AUGGIE

Nothing much. He said his socks and underpants were dirty, and would we mind driving up with his things.

(Pause)

Fucking kids, huh? They take you for granted every time.

AUGGIE stops in front of a car parked at the curb: a fifteen-year-old red Coupe de Ville.

PAUL

(Impressed)

Nice machine, Auggie. Where'd you find it?

AUGGIE

It's Tommy's. The sucker owed me a favor.

AUGGIE unlocks the door on the passenger side, then walks around the car to unlock the door on the driver's side.

PAUL

(Opening the door)

It's not a long drive. An hour, an hour and a half. We'll be back in time for dinner.

AUGGIE

We'd better be. I haven't spent a night out of Brooklyn in fourteen years, and I'm not about to break my record now. Besides, I've got to be on my corner at eight sharp tomorrow morning.

They both climb into the car. AUGGIE starts up the engine. Cut to:

65. INT/EXT: DAY. PEEKSKILL. COLE'S GARAGE

We see RASHID painting the walls in the upstairs room. The room has been transformed since the last time we saw it. It is entirely bare now

and neat as a pin. With each touch of white paint that RASHID applies to the walls, the look of the place improves. He works with care, proud of what he has accomplished so far.

Suddenly: the noise of a car down below. RASHID goes to the open window and looks out. Cut to:

From RASHID'S POV: We see CYRUS, DOREEN, and JUNIOR pull up in the blue Ford. They get out. DOREEN is carrying a large picnic cooler. CYRUS opens the back door and unbuckles JUNIOR from his seat.

RASHID (OFF)

(Mumbling, alarm in his voice)

Oh, Jesus. What are they doing here on Sunday?

DOREEN

(Waving up to RASHID)

Hi, Paul. We decided to have a picnic. Want to join us?

Cut to RASHID at the window:

RASHID

Uh, yeah, sure.

(Pause)

Just a minute. I'll be down in a minute.

Cut to RASHID in the upstairs room. He crouches down, puts the brush he has been working with on top of the open paint can, and begins wiping his hands with a rag when, suddenly, the noise of another car is heard down below. RASHID stands up to have a look. Cut to:

From RASHID'S POV: We see the red Coupe de Ville limping into the station with a flat tire. The car stops. PAUL and AUGGIE climb out.

Cut to:

Close-up of RASHID, looking out the window. His face registers panic, alarm.

RASHID  
Jesus Christ!

He begins running toward the door, hoping to get downstairs to PAUL and AUGGIE before CYRUS can reach them. In his haste, he kicks over the open paint bucket.

The scene ends with a close-up of white paint oozing over the bare wood floor.

66. EXT: DAY. IN FRONT OF COLE'S GARAGE

Shot of CYRUS, DOREEN, and JUNIOR by the picnic table, unpacking their lunch. The camera pans from CYRUS -- beginning to walk toward PAUL and AUGGIE -- to PAUL and AUGGIE, who are standing by the gas pumps. We see PAUL and AUGGIE looking in the direction of the office, smiles beginning to form on their faces. At the precise instant CYRUS gets to them, RASHID enters the frame, panting hard from his dash down the stairs.

PAUL  
(To RASHID)  
Hi, kid.

RASHID  
(Looking at PAUL'S wounds and bandages. He is shocked)  
Wow. They sure did a job on you.

PAUL  
Research. I worked the scene right into my story.  
(Pause)  
That makes the medical bills one hundred percent tax deductible.

AUGGIE

(Under his breath)  
Try selling that one to the IRS.

CYRUS  
(Watching the exchange with a  
confused look on his face. To RASHID)  
You know these men?  
(Gesturing to the flat tire)  
I thought we had some customers.

AUGGIE  
Yeah, he knows us. But you've also got some  
customers.  
(Wheels around and kicks  
the Coupe de Ville)  
Fucking Tommy. Leave it to him to drive around  
with bald tires.

PAUL  
We came here to deliver some clean laundry.

RASHID  
(To CYRUS)  
It's all right. I really do know them.

CYRUS  
(Still confused, but  
trying to be friendly)  
I'm the owner here. Cyrus Cole.  
(Extends his right hand to AUGGIE)

AUGGIE  
(Shaking CYRUS'S hand)  
Augustus Wren.

CYRUS extends his right hand to PAUL.

PAUL  
(Shaking CYRUS'S hand)  
Paul Benjamin.

Cut to close-up of RASHID'S face. The sky has just fallen on top of  
him.

CYRUS  
(More confused than ever.  
Turning to RASHID)  
That's funny. His name is the same as yours.

RASHID

(In a panic)

Well, you and Junior have the same name, too,  
don't you?

CYRUS

Yeah, but he's my son. Nothing strange about  
that. He's my own flesh and blood. But here  
you got the same name as this man here, and  
you're not even the same color.

RASHID

(Improvising)

That's how we met. We're members of the  
International Same Name Club. Believe it or  
not, there are 846 Paul Benjamins in America.  
But only two in the New York metropolitan area.  
That's how Paul and I got to be such good  
friends. We're the only ones who show up at  
the meetings.

AUGGIE

(Disgusted)

You're full of crap, kid. Why don't you just  
come clean and tell the man who you are?

By now, drawn by curiosity, DOREEN has come over to where the four  
men  
are standing. She is carrying JUNIOR in her arms.

CYRUS

(Turning to PAUL)

What the hell's going on, mister?

PAUL

(Shrugs, gestures to RASHID)

You better ask him.

AUGGIE

Yeah, Rashid baby, spill it.

DOREEN

(In a loud voice)

Rashid?

PAUL

(To DOREEN)

Sometimes. It's what you'd call a nom de  
guerre.

CYRUS  
(More and more confused)  
What the hell are we talking about?

AUGGIE  
(To RASHID)  
Come on. Tell him your real name. The name on  
your birth certificate.

Close-up of RASHID'S face. His lower lip is trembling. Tears are  
beginning to form in his eyes.

RASHID  
(Almost inaudibly)  
Thomas.

CYRUS  
Paul. Rashid. Thomas. Which one is it?

RASHID  
Thomas.

AUGGIE  
(Impatient)  
Come on, come on, you yellow belly. The whole  
thing. First name and last name.

RASHID  
(Trying to stall. Tears begin  
to slide down his cheeks)  
What difference does it make?

PAUL  
If it doesn't make any difference, why not just  
say it?

RASHID  
(To PAUL, his voice breaking)  
I was going to tell him ... but in my own time.  
In my own time... .

AUGGIE  
No time like the present, man.

CYRUS  
(To RASHID)  
Well?

RASHID  
(Blinking back the tears.  
Looking at CYRUS)  
Thomas Cole. My name is Thomas Jefferson Cole.

CYRUS  
(thunderstruck)  
Are you making fun of me? I won't be mocked. Do  
you hear me? I won't let no punk kid stand  
there and mock me!

DOREEN  
(Upset)  
Cyrus!

JUNIOR  
(Reaching out to CYRUS)  
Dada.

RASHID  
(Standing his ground)  
Like it or not, Cyrus, that's my name. Cole.  
Just like yours.

PAUL  
(To CYRUS)  
Now ask him who his mother was.

CYRUS  
(Beside himself)  
I don't like this. I don't like it one bit.

RASHID  
Louisa Vail. Remember her, Cyrus?

CYRUS  
You shut your mouth! You shut your mouth now!

Unable to control his rage, CYRUS hauls off and slugs RASHID in the  
face. RASHID falls to the ground.

AUGGIE  
(Alarmed)  
Hey, cut it out!

AUGGIE takes a wild swing and clips CYRUS in the mouth. DOREEN,  
seeing  
her husband attacked, gives AUGGIE a quick kick in the shins.  
AUGGIE

lets out a yell and starts hopping up and down in pain.

DOREEN

(To AUGGIE)

Damn you. There'll be none of that on my watch,  
you dumpy bag of shit.

DOREEN puts down JUNIOR. The little boy immediately runs over to PAUL and whacks him on his bad arm. PAUL howls in pain and drops to the ground. The whole scene is quickly degenerating into chaos.

In the meantime, RASHID has climbed back to his feet. He lines up CYRUS, rushes toward him, and tackles him to the ground. The two of them roll around on the macadam, fighting with all their strength. After a moment, it looks as though CYRUS is getting the better of the struggle. AUGGIE tries to pull them apart, but to no avail.

DOREEN (cont'd)

(Pounding CYRUS on the  
back with her fists)

Stop it! Stop it! You'll kill him, Cyrus!

DOREEN'S shrieking voice brings the fight to a momentary halt.  
CYRUS

rolls off RASHID and stands up. RASHID stands up as well. But the hatred between them has not subsided. CYRUS raises his hook.

DOREEN (cont'd)

(Screaming)

He's your son, goddammit! He's your son! Do you  
want to kill your son?

Suddenly: CYRUS stops. He lowers his arm and buries his face in his right hand. A moment later, he breaks down and weeps. His sobbing makes a terrible sound: pure, animal misery. He staggers around, then falls to his knees, unable to stop the tears.

Cut to RASHID. He stands there without moving, watching CYRUS. He drops his arms to his sides, unclenches his fists. Tears are pouring down his cheeks, he is breathing hard. Close-up of his face.

Fade out.

67. EXT: DAY. THE PICNIC TABLE OUTSIDE COLE'S GARAGE

Some time later.

Long shot. We see everyone from the previous scene sitting at the picnic table eating lunch: fried chicken, lemonade, potato chips, etc.

The image has the effect of a still life.

DOREEN is sitting next to CYRUS. RASHID is holding JUNIOR in his arms, gently rocking him as the child drinks milk from a bottle with his eyes closed. AUGGIE and PAUL are sitting next to each other, eating chicken and listening to DOREEN (who is the only one who has the energy to talk). CYRUS looks sullen, defeated. Every once in a while, he steals a glance at RASHID. RASHID, however, pretends to ignore him, keeping his eyes fixed on the sleeping JUNIOR.

At first we hear nothing. Then the camera moves in for a closer shot and we can begin to make out what DOREEN is saying. As she speaks, we see Paul reach into his pocket and take out a tin of his little cigars. He leans forward and offers one to CYRUS, but CYRUS reaches into his own pocket and offers PAUL a big cigar. Paul accepts and lights up. CYRUS then lights up one of his own.

DOREEN

... It might not have been the smartest investment, but it didn't cost much, and if Cyrus can make a go of it, we'll be able to take care of our needs. The man knows his way around cars, I'll tell you that, but the problem is this road is too far off the beaten track. Ever since they put in that mall, the traffic hasn't been too heavy around here. But you take the good with the bad, right? You do your best and hope that things work out...

Music begins to play. Cut to:

68. BLACK SCREEN

The music continues. After a few moments, the following words appear on the screen: "THREE MONTHS LATER."

69. EXT: DAY. ELEVATED SUBWAY, BROOKLYN

The music continues to play. We see an elevated subway train snaking along the tracks in the dim November light.

70. INT: DAY. THE BROOKLYN CIGAR CO.

AUGGIE is behind the counter, wearing a flannel shirt. The three OTB MEN are there with him, as in Scene 2. JIMMY enters the store and places a paper bag on the counter in front of AUGGIE, then slides around the counter and takes a seat beside AUGGIE. JIMMY studies his watch. AUGGIE removes a cup of take-out coffee from the bag. He lifts off the cover and steam rises from the cup. In the meantime, we see and hear the OTB MEN talking.

TOMMY

Of course there's gonna be a war. You think they'd send five hundred thousand troops over there just to lie in the sun? I mean, there's plenty of beach, but not a hell of a lot of water. Half a million soldiers. It ain't no seaside holiday, you can bet on that.

JERRY

I don't know, Tommy. You think anyone gives a rat's ass about Kuwait? I read something about the head sheik over there. He marries a different virgin every Friday and then divorces her on Monday. You think we want to have our kids dying for a guy like that?

DENNIS

That's one way of upholding American values, eh, Tommy?

TOMMY

Laugh all you want. I'm telling you there's gonna be a war. With things in Russia falling apart, those slobs in the Pentagon'll be out of work unless they find a new enemy. They got

this Saddam character now, and they're going to hit him with all they've got. Mark my words.

PAUL enters the store wearing a scarf and leather jacket. The OTB MEN stop talking and study him as he approaches the counter.

AUGGIE  
(To PAUL)  
Hey, man, how's it going?

PAUL  
Hi, Auggie.

Without waiting for PAUL to ask, AUGGIE turns around, pulls out two tins of Schimmelpennincks from the cigar cabinet, and places them on the counter.

AUGGIE  
Two, right?

PAUL  
Uh, better make it one.

AUGGIE  
You usually get two.

PAUL  
Yeah, I know, but I'm trying to cut down.  
(Pause)  
Somebody's worried about my health.

AUGGIE  
(Twitching his eyebrows playfully)  
Ah-hah.

PAUL shrugs with embarrassment, then slowly breaks into a warm smile.

AUGGIE (cont'd)  
And how's the work going these days, maestro?

PAUL  
(Still grinning. Absentmindedly)  
Fine.  
(Pause. Pulling himself together)  
Or it was until a couple of days ago. A guy from The New York Times called and asked me

to write a Christmas story. They want to publish it on Christmas Day.

AUGGIE

That's a feather in your cap, man. The paper of record.

PAUL

Yeah, great. The problem is, I have four days to come up with something, and I don't have a single idea.

(Pause)

You know anything about Christmas stories?

AUGGIE

(Blustering)

Christmas stories? Sure, I know a ton of 'em.

PAUL

Anything good?

AUGGIE

Good? Of course. Are you kidding?

(Pause)

I'll tell you what. Buy me lunch, my friend, and I'll tell you the best Christmas story you ever heard. How's that? And I guarantee every word of it is true.

PAUL

(Smiling)

It doesn't have to be true. It just has to be good.

AUGGIE

(Turning to JIMMY ROSE)

Take over the register while I'm gone, okay, Jimmy?

(Begins to extricate himself from behind the counter)

JIMMY ROSE

You want me to do it, Auggie? You sure you want me to do it?

AUGGIE

Sure I'm sure. Just remember what I taught you. And don't let any of these kibitzers cause you trouble.

(Gestures to OTB MEN)  
You got a problem, you come and see me. I'll  
be down the block at Jack's.  
(To PAUL)  
Jack's okay?

PAUL  
Jack's is fine.

PAUL and AUGGIE leave the store together.

71. INT: DAY. JACK'S RESTAURANT

A cramped and boisterous kosher delicatessen with sports  
photographs on  
the walls: old Brooklyn Dodger teams, the 1969 Mets, a portrait of  
Jackie Robinson. PAUL and AUGGIE are sitting at a table in the  
back,  
studying the menus.

PAUL  
(Closing menu)  
I have to pee. If the waiter comes, order me  
a corned beef on rye and a ginger ale, okay?

AUGGIE  
You got it.

PAUL stands up and leaves to go to the men's room. Alone at the  
table,  
AUGGIE glances down at the empty chair next to him and sees a copy  
of  
the New York Post. The paper is open to an article with a headline  
that  
reads: "SHOOTOUT IN BROOKLYN." AUGGIE bends over to inspect the  
article  
more closely. Close-up of the article. We see photographs of  
CHARLES  
CLEMM (the CREEPER) and ROBERT GOODWIN and their names in the  
captions.  
A secondary headline reads: "ROBBERS KILLED IN JEWEL HEIST." In the  
meantime, as AUGGIE continues to study the article, the WAITER  
arrives  
to take his order. He is a round, balding, middle-aged man with a  
weary  
expression on his face.

WAITER (OFF)  
What'll it be, Auggie?

AUGGIE

(Looking up)

Uh...

(Pointing to PAUL'S empty place)

My friend over here would like a corned beef on rye and a ginger ale.

Shot of WAITER holding pencil and order pad.

WAITER

And what about for you?

AUGGIE

(Reading the paper again. Suddenly remembers the WAITER is there)

Huh?

WAITER

What about for you?

AUGGIE

For me?

(Pause)

I'll have the same thing.

(Looks down at the article again)

WAITER

Do me a favor, will you?

AUGGIE

(Glancing up again)

What's that, Sol?

WAITER

Next time, when you want two corned beef sandwiches, say, "Two corned beef sandwiches." When you want two ginger ales, say, "Two ginger ales."

AUGGIE

What's the difference?

WAITER

It's simpler, that's what. It makes things go faster.

AUGGIE

(Mystified. Humoring the WAITER)

Uh, sure, Sol. Anything you say. Instead of saying, "One corned beef sandwich," and then, "Another corned beef sandwich," I'll say, "Two corned beef sandwiches."

WAITER

(Deadpan)

Thanks. I knew you'd understand.

The WAITER leaves. AUGGIE looks down at the article again. PAUL returns and sits down in his chair across from AUGGIE.

PAUL

(Settling in)

So. Are we ready?

AUGGIE

Ready. Any time you are.

PAUL

I'm all ears.

AUGGIE

Okay.

(Pause. Thinks)

You remember how you once asked me how I started taking pictures? Well, this is the story of how I got my first camera. As a matter of fact, it's the only camera I've ever had. Are you following me so far?

PAUL

Every word.

AUGGIE

(Close-up of AUGGIE'S face)

Okay.

(Pause)

So this is the story of how it happened.

(Pause)

Okay.

(Pause)

It was the summer of 'seventy-six, back when I first started working for Vinnie. The summer of the bicentennial.

(Pause)

A kid came in one morning and started stealing things from the store. He's standing by the

rack of paperbacks near the front window stuffing skin magazines under his shirt. It was crowded around the counter just then, so I didn't see him at first....

AUGGIE'S face dissolves into PAUL'S. Black-and-white footage begins: we see AUGGIE acting out the events he describes to PAUL. This scene exactly duplicates the events shown earlier in Scenes 2 and 3 -- with one difference. The thief is now ROGER GOODWIN, the same person who beat up PAUL in Scene 54, the same person whose picture AUGGIE has just noticed in the newspaper. The events unfold in silence, accompanied by AUGGIE'S voice-over narration.

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

But once I noticed what he was up to, I started to shout. He took off like a jackrabbit, and by the time I managed to get out from behind the counter, he was already tearing down Seventh Avenue. I chased after him for about half a block, and then I gave up. He'd dropped something along the way, and since I didn't feel like running anymore, I bent down to see what it was.

We see AUGGIE chasing the kid, giving up, and bending down for the wallet. He starts walking back to the store.

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

It turned out to be his wallet. There wasn't any money inside, but his driver's license was there, along with three or four snapshots. I suppose I could have called the cops and had him arrested. I had his name and address from the license, but I felt kind of sorry for him. He was just a measly little punk, and once I looked at those pictures in his wallet, I couldn't bring myself to feel very angry at him....

We see AUGGIE examining the pictures. Close-ups of the pictures.

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

Roger Goodwin. That was his name. In one of the pictures, I remember, he was standing next to his mother. In another one, he was holding some

trophy he got from school and smiling like he just won the Irish Sweepstakes. I just didn't have the heart. A poor kid from Brooklyn without much going for him, and who cared about a couple of dirty magazines, anyway?

Cut to Jack's Restaurant. The WAITER arrives at the table with their orders.

WAITER

Here you go, boys. Two corned beef sandwiches. Two ginger ales. The fast way. The simple way.  
(He leaves)

PAUL

(Putting mustard on his sandwich)

And?

AUGGIE

(Taking a sip of his drink)

So I held onto the wallet. Every once in a while I'd get a little urge to send it back to him, but I kept delaying and never did anything about it.

(Puts mustard on his sandwich)

Then Christmas rolls around, and I'm stuck with nothing to do. Vinnie was going to invite me over, but his mother got sick, and he and his wife had to go down to Florida at the last minute.

(Takes a bite of the sandwich, chews)

So I'm sitting in my apartment that morning, feeling a little sorry for myself, and then I see Roger Goodwin's wallet lying on a shelf in the kitchen. I figure what the hell, why not do something nice for once, and I put on my coat and go out to return the wallet... .

Cut to black-and-white footage: the housing projects in Boerum Hill. We see AUGGIE wandering alone among the buildings, bundled up against the cold. At the same time, we hear:

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

The address was over in Boerum Hill, somewhere in the projects. It was freezing out that day, and I remember getting lost a few times trying

to find the right building. Everything looks the same in that place, and you keep going over the same ground thinking you're somewhere else. Anyway, I finally get to the apartment I'm looking for and ring the bell...

Shot of AUGGIE walking down a corridor in the housing projects; graffiti on the cinder-block walls. He stops in front of a door and pushes the buzzer.

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

Nothing happens. I assume no one's there, but I try again just to make sure. I wait a little longer, and just when I'm about to give up, I hear someone shuffling to the door. An old woman's voice asks, "Who's there?" and I say I'm looking for Roger Goodwin. "Is that you, Roger?" the old woman says, and then she undoes about fifteen locks and opens the door....

Shot of a very old black woman, GRANNY ETHEL, opening the door. A rapturous, expectant smile is on her face. Even though the scene unfolds in silence, we see AUGGIE and GRANNY ETHEL mouthing the dialogue that AUGGIE repeats to PAUL.

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

She has to be at least eighty, maybe ninety years old, and the first thing I notice about her is she's blind. "I knew you'd come. Roger," she says. "I knew you wouldn't forget your Granny Ethel on Christmas." And then she opens her arms as if she's about to hug me.

We see AUGGIE hesitate for a second. As he reports the next little part of the story, we see him giving in, opening his arms, and hugging GRANNY ETHEL. The hug is then repeated in somewhat slower motion, then again in slow motion; then again, in very slow motion: then again in motion so slow that it appears as a sequence of still photographs.

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

I don't have much time to think, you understand. I had to say something real fast, and before I knew what was happening, I could hear the words coming out of my mouth. "That's right, Granny Ethel," I said. "I came back to see you on Christmas." Don't ask me why I did it. I don't

have any idea. It just came out that way, and suddenly this old woman's hugging me there in front of the door, and I'm hugging her back. It was like a game we both decided to play -- without having to discuss the rules. I mean, that woman knew I wasn't her grandson. She was old and dotty, but she wasn't so far gone that she couldn't tell the difference between a stranger and her own flesh and blood. But it made her happy to pretend, and since I had nothing better to do anyway, I was happy to go along with her....

AUGGIE and GRANNY ETHEL enter the apartment and sit down in chairs in the living room. We see them talking, laughing. Meanwhile, we hear:

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

So we went into the apartment and spent the day together. Every time she asked me a question about how I was, I would lie to her. I told her I'd found a good job in a cigar store. I told her I was about to get married. I told her a hundred pretty stories, and she made like she believed every one of them. "That's fine, Roger," she would say, nodding her head and smiling. "I always knew things would work out for you...."

The camera pans slowly through GRANNY ETHEL'S apartment, lingering momentarily on various objects. Among other things, we see portraits of Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy, family photographs, balls of yarn, knitting needles. By the time this visual tour is completed, we see AUGGIE entering the apartment again, wearing his coat and carrying a large bag of groceries. As described in the simultaneous narration:

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

After a while, I started getting hungry. There didn't seem to be much food in the house, so I went out to a store in the neighborhood and brought back a mess of stuff. A precooked chicken, vegetable soup, a bucket of potato salad, all kinds of things. Ethel had a couple of bottles of wine stashed in her bedroom, and

so between us we managed to put together a fairly decent Christmas dinner....

We see AUGGIE and GRANNY ETHEL at the dining-room table: eating the food, drinking the wine, talking.

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

We both got a little tipsy from the wine, I remember, and after the meal was over we went out to sit in the living room where the chairs were more comfortable...

We see AUGGIE leading GRANNY ETHEL by the arm and helping her into a chair. Then AUGGIE leaves the living room and walks to the bathroom down the hall.

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

I had to take a pee, so I excused myself and went to the bathroom down the hall. That's where things took another turn. It was ditsy enough doing my little jig as Ethel's grandson, but what I did next was positively crazy, and I've never forgiven myself for it....

We see AUGGIE in the bathroom. As he pees, we see the boxes of cameras, just as he describes them.

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

I go into the bathroom, and stacked up against the wall next to the shower, I see a pile of six or seven cameras. Brand-new, thirty-five millimeter cameras, still in their boxes. I figure this is the work of the real Roger, a storage place for one of his recent hauls. I've never taken a picture in my life, and I've certainly never stolen anything, but the moment I see those cameras sitting in the bathroom, I decide I want one of them for myself. Just like that. And without even stopping to think about it, I tuck one of the boxes under my arm and go back to the living room....

We see AUGGIE return to the living room with the camera. GRANNY ETHEL is sleeping soundly in her chair. AUGGIE puts the camera down, clears

the table, and washes the dishes in the kitchen.

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

I couldn't have been gone for more than three minutes, but in that time Granny Ethel had fallen asleep. Too much Chianti, I suppose. I went into the kitchen to wash the dishes, and she slept on through the whole racket, snoring like a baby. There didn't seem to be any point in disturbing her, so I decided to leave. I couldn't even write a note to say good-bye, seeing that she was blind and all, so I just left. I put her grandson's wallet on the table, picked up the camera again, and walked out of the apartment... .

We see AUGGIE bending over the sleeping GRANNY ETHEL and deciding not to wake her. We see him put the wallet on the table and pick up the camera. We see him walking out of the apartment. Shot of the closing door.

AUGGIE (VOICE-OVER)

And that's the end of the story.

Cut to PAUL'S face. PAUL and AUGGIE are sitting at the table, eating the last bites of their sandwiches.

PAUL

Did you ever go back to see her?

AUGGIE

Once, about three or four months later. I felt so bad about stealing the camera, I hadn't even used it yet. I finally made up my mind to return it, but Granny Ethel wasn't there anymore. Someone else had moved into the apartment, and he couldn't tell me where she was.

PAUL

She probably died.

AUGGIE

Yeah, probably.

PAUL

Which means that she spent her last Christmas with you.

AUGGIE

I guess so. I never thought of it that way.

PAUL

It was a good deed, Auggie. It was a nice thing you did for her.

AUGGIE

I lied to her, and then I stole from her. I don't see how you can call that a good deed.

PAUL

You made her happy. And the camera was stolen anyway. It's not as if the person you took it from really owned it.

AUGGIE

Anything for art, eh, Paul?

PAUL

I wouldn't say that. But at least you've put the camera to good use.

AUGGIE

And now you've got your Christmas story, don't you?

PAUL

(Pause. Thinks)

Yes, I suppose I do.

PAUL looks at AUGGIE. A wicked grin is spreading across AUGGIE'S face.

The look in his eyes is so mysterious, so fraught with the glow of some inner delight, that PAUL begins to suspect that AUGGIE has made the whole thing up. He is about to ask AUGGIE if he has been putting him on -- but then stops, realizing that AUGGIE would never tell him. PAUL smiles.

PAUL (cont'd)

Bullshit is a real talent, Auggie. To make up a good story, a person has to know how to push all the right buttons.

(Pause)

I'd say you're up there among the masters.

AUGGIE  
What do you mean?

PAUL  
I mean, it's a good story.

AUGGIE  
Shit. If you can't share your secrets with your  
friends, what kind of friend are you?

PAUL  
Exactly. Life just wouldn't be worth living,  
would it?

AUGGIE is still smiling. PAUL smiles back at him. AUGGIE lights a  
cigarette; PAUL lights a little cigar. They blow smoke into the  
air,  
still smiling at each other.

The camera follows the smoke as it rises toward the ceiling. Close-  
up  
of the smoke. Hold for three, four beats.

The screen goes black. Music begins to play. Final credits.