

"THE HUSTLER"

Screenplay by

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Based on a novel by

Walter Tevis

EXT. SMALL TOWN MAIN STREET - AFTERNOON

An old Packard coupé pulls up to a roadside gas pump. Two men get out and stretch their legs. The older man, Charlie Burns, a balding, desiccated man in his mid-forties, shambles toward the bar across the street. Eddie Felson remains behind to speak to the attendant.

ATTENDANT

Yes sir?

EDDIE

I think I got a little grease in this lining here.

ATTENDANT

Oh yeah. Well, it will take me about thirty minutes to check it. You want me to fill her up too?

EDDIE

Yeah. You better check the oil too.

ATTENDANT

Yes sir.

Eddie leaves the car parked at the gas station and heads for the bar.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ARMSTEAD'S BAR - AFTERNOON

Armstead's is a typical small town pool hall. It has a bar, a short order counter, a skee-ball machine, and pool tables for small, friendly games. The few people in Armstead's this day are not playing; they sit and read the papers. Charlie and Eddie are at the bar, drinking straight bourbon.

BARTENDER

Boys just passing through?

EDDIE

Yep.

BARTENDER

Pittsburgh?

EDDIE

Mm hmm.

BARTENDER

Comin' in or goin' out?

EDDIE

Goin' in. We got a sales convention.  
Gotta be there tomorrow.

BARTENDER

What do you guys sell?

CHARLIE

Druggist supplies. Buster here is  
gonna get an award.

(Eddie scoffs, as if  
embarrassed)

No, he sold seventeen thousand bucks'  
worth of stuff last month. Fastest  
boy in the territory.

EDDIE

Yep. Fastest and the bestest... Hey,  
give us another round, will ya? One  
for him, one for yourself.

BARTENDER

Thanks. Sure is a hot day for driving.  
Late afternoon is better. You guys  
have plenty of time. Make Pittsburgh  
in two, maybe three hours.

EDDIE

(to Charlie)

Hey, he's right!

(eyes the unused pool  
table)

Whaddya say, Charlie, huh? Play a  
little pool? Wait out the heat?

CHARLIE

(laughs)

It's gonna cost ya money. It always  
does.

EDDIE

Oh, come on, stop stalling. Grab  
yourself a cue.

Charlie rises from his barstool.

CHARLIE

(to the bartender)

Good thing he can afford it.

Eddie is already at the table.

EDDIE  
(to the bartender)  
Keep 'em coming, will ya, friend?  
J. T. S. Brown.

Charlie joins Eddie.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ARMSTEAD'S BAR - TIME LAPSE

The game is in mid-progress. It's Eddie's shot. He downs his bourbon, weaves a bit, bends over the table, and awkwardly pokes at the white cue ball with his stick, missing an easy shot. Several more townspeople have come in from the street and are following the play. The bartender refills the glasses as soon as they are emptied.

CHARLIE  
You miss again, you lose again.

OLD MAN  
(at the bar)  
What's the kid in hock for so far?

BARTENDER  
About sixty, seventy bucks.

EDDIE  
(racking the balls,  
to Charlie)  
Next game, ten bucks.

OLD MAN  
(to the bartender)  
Nice lookin' boy. Clean-cut. Too bad  
he can't hold his liquor.

CUT TO:

INT. ARMSTEAD'S BAR - TIME LAPSE

Two balls lay side by side on the table. Eddie peers at them, trying to figure his shot, blinking his eyes to focus better. Some of the onlookers seem skeptical. But Eddie pats the corner pocket confidently, leans over, and raps out his shot. The ball banks in.

EDDIE  
I made it, boy! I finally made it!  
C'mon, pay up. Pay up, sucker.

He pounds his pal Charlie on the shoulder and collapses into

a nearby chair.

CHARLIE

You ought to take up crap shooting.  
Talk about luck!

EDDIE

Luck! Whaddya mean, luck?

CHARLIE

You know what I mean. You couldn't  
make that shot again in a million  
years.

EDDIE

I couldn't, huh? Okay. Go ahead. Set  
'em up the way they were before.

CHARLIE

Why?

EDDIE

Go ahead. Set 'em up the way they  
were before. Bet ya twenty bucks.  
Make that shot just the way I made  
it before.

CHARLIE

Nobody can make that shot and you  
know it. Not even a lucky lush.

Stung, Eddie lies across the table and sets them up himself.

EDDIE

How's that?

(to the bystanders)

Hm? Is that the way they were before?

MAN

Yeah, that's right.

EDDIE

(to Charlie)

C'mon, put it up.

They toss their money on the table, and Eddie shoots, but  
his shot is too hard and his ball leaps over the side of the  
table. The bartender cannot contain his staccato laughter.

EDDIE

Set 'em up again... C'mon, set 'em  
up again.

CHARLIE

(putting up his cue)

You're drunk, boy. I'm not gonna bet  
ya any more.

EDDIE

Whaddya mean?

CHARLIE

Let's get back on the road. You gotta be at that convention in the morning.

EDDIE

Up the flagpole with the convention. C'mon, Charlie. You're into me now. I got my money on the table.

CHARLIE

I don't want it.

BARTENDER

I'll try you.

Eddie pauses, smiling.

EDDIE

Well... well, now.

CHARLIE

Don't be a chump. Don't bet any more money on that damn fool shot.

EDDIE

(to the bartender)

Well, now... I mean, you figure I'm a little drunk, and I'm loaded on the hip, and you just want in, real friendly, while the money's still floating, huh? Okay... Go ahead. Set 'em up.

Sheepishly, the bartender replaces the balls in their original positions.

EDDIE

All right, you want some easy money, huh? Here's a hundred and five dollars. That's one week's commission. Now you want to take the whole thing, and then you get a crack at your easy money.

BYSTANDER

I'll take a piece of that action.

ANOTHER

Me too.

EDDIE

(viciously)

No. I want him.

BARTENDER

I'll take it out of the till.

CHARLIE

(to Eddie)

I'll meet you in the car, chump.

Eddie chalks up his cue, waiting impatiently for the bartender to return with the money from the cash register. Then he downs his drink and quickly strokes out his shot, the ball banking crisply and directly into the corner pocket. There is a cocky leer on his face as he reaches for the dollar bills.

CUT TO:

EXT. GAS STATION - AFTERNOON

The door of the Packard coupe slams shut. Eddie Felson holds up his stuffed billfold for his pal, Charlie Burns, to see. He tosses it on the seat beside him and turns on the ignition.

QUICK FADE:

MAIN TITLE SEQUENCE

INT. AMES POOL HALL - MORNING

FADE IN:

Henry, the elderly Negro janitor, draws up the Venetian blinds to let the early morning light flood into AMES POOL HALL. Henry is the janitor of Ames, the sexton of this immense, shabby cathedral of pool, in which the pews are pool tables covered with oilcloth slipcovers and the great vault of a room is lit by brass-and-globe chandeliers. Henry ambles through Ames righting overturned ashtrays and replacing yesterday's abandoned cue sticks. The cashier enters. He looks at his watch, then checks his time against that of the clock on the wall.

CASHIER

Morning, Henry.

Henry nods, then steps up on a stool to fix the minute hand of the clock. It now stands at ten o'clock.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AMES POOL HALL - DAY

It is twelve-thirty when Eddie Felson and Charlie Burns first enter into Ames. Only one table is in use; the hall is empty. In Eddie's hand is his leather cue case. They stand before the swinging doors and look around.

CHARLIE

It's quiet.

EDDIE

Yeah, like a church. Church of the Good Hustler.

CHARLIE

Looks more like a morgue to me. Those pool tables are the slabs they lay the stiff on.

EDDIE

I'll be alive when I get out, Charlie.

They saunter over to the cashier's cage. A sign on the brass bar reads NO GAMBLING ALLOWED...

EDDIE

Any table?

CASHIER

Any table.

Eddie's arrival is noted by Big John and Preacher, a gambler and an addict, who hang out at Ames at all hours, waiting for action.

EDDIE

(to the cashier)

No bar?

CASHIER

(with some annoyance)

No bar, no pinball machines, no bowling alleys. Just pool. Nothing else. This is Ames, mister.

Eddie takes his cue ball from the cashier's cage and heads for a table.

As he passes Charlie, he mimics the cashier wickedly:

EDDIE

This is Ames, mister.

The two go to a table. Eddie selects a house cue, then rolls it over the table top to test the roll. He seems pleased. He runs his hand over the green felt as if he were caressing it. His last test is to sweep the cue ball into the corner pocket.

EDDIE

Nice clean pocket drop.

Eddie takes some balls out of the return box and throws them on the table.

EDDIE

(chalks his cue)

How much am I gonna win tonight? Hm?

Charlie doesn't reply. But Big John and Preacher lean forward in their chairs to listen in.

EDDIE

Ten grand. I'm gonna win ten grand in one night.

(Charlie stares at him)

...Well, who's gonna beat me? C'mon, Charlie, who's gonna beat me?

CHARLIE

Okay... Okay. Nobody can beat you.

EDDIE

Ten grand! I mean, what other poolroom is there in the country where a guy can walk out with ten grand in one night? Jeez, you know, I can remember hustling an old man for a dime a game.

Big John, stubbly cigar between his fingers, drifts over to their table.

CHARLIE

(to Eddie, off Big John)

You got company.

BIG JOHN

(approaching Eddie)

You looking for action?

EDDIE

Maybe. You want to play?

BIG JOHN

No. Hell, no! You Eddie Felson?

EDDIE

Who's he?

BIG JOHN

What's your game? What do you shoot?

EDDIE

You name it, we shoot it.

BIG JOHN

Look, friend, I'm not trying to hustle. I don't never hustle people

that walk into poolrooms with leather satchels. Don't try to hustle me.

EDDIE

Okay, I'm Eddie Felson. I shoot straight pool. You got any straight pool shooters in this here poolroom?

BIG JOHN

What kind of straight pool game you like?

EDDIE

The expensive kind.

BIG JOHN

Come up here to play straight pool with Minnesota Fats?

EDDIE

Yeah, that's right.

BIG JOHN

Want some free advice?

CHARLIE

(interrupts, sourly)

How much'll it cost?

BIG JOHN

(turns to Charlie)

Who are you -- his manager, his friend, his stooge?

EDDIE

He's my partner.

BIG JOHN

(to Charlie)

You well-heeled, partner?

CHARLIE

We got enough.

BIG JOHN

Go home. Take your boy and go home. Fats don't need your money, there's no way you can beat him. Nobody's beat him in fifteen years. He's the best in the country.

EDDIE

You got that wrong, mister. I am.

BIG JOHN

Okay, I told you what I wanted about Minnesota Fats. You just go ahead

and play him, friend.

EDDIE

Just tell me where I can find him,  
friend.

BIG JOHN

Comes right in this poolroom every  
night, eight o'clock on the nose.  
Just stay where you are. He'll find  
you.

As Big John walks off, Eddie smiles at Charlie.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AMES POOL HALL - NIGHT

Eight sharp. A departing customer holds the door for an  
incoming one:

Minnesota Fats. Heads turn when he makes his punctual  
appearance.

Fats' clothes reflect his high station at Ames Pool Hall: a  
gray felt bowler hat, and an expensive, tailored overcoat,  
with a carnation in its lapel and two silk handkerchiefs  
peeking up from its breast pocket.

He moves like a sultan through the room, past Big John, whose  
eyes dip significantly, and over to the coat rack, where  
Henry respectfully takes his coat and hat. The buzzard-like  
eyes of the cashier direct his gaze toward Eddie's table.  
Fats withdraws a cigarette from his gold case, then casually  
strolls toward Eddie's table standing apart and quietly  
observing the sharp, precise movements of his prospective  
opponent. Even though Ames is filled with players, there is  
little noise other than the clicking of pool balls.

MINNESOTA FATS

You shoot a good stick.

EDDIE

Thank you. Gee, you shoot straight  
pool, mister?

FATS

Now and then. You know how it is.

EDDIE

(grinning)

You're, uh, you're Minnesota Fats,  
aren't you? You know, uh, they say  
Minnesota Fats is the best in the  
country out where I come from.

FATS

Is that a fact?

EDDIE

Yes sir, boy, they, heh, they say that old Fats just shoots the eyes right off them balls.

FATS

Where do you come from?

EDDIE

California. Oakland.

FATS

California? Is your name Felson? Eddie Felson?

EDDIE

That's right.

FATS

I hear you've been looking for me.

EDDIE

Yeah. That's right, too.

FATS

Big John! You think this boy is a hustler?

Fats and Eddie regard each other with amusement, sharing the private joke of pool hustlers.

FATS

Do you like to gamble, Eddie? Gamble money on pool games?

EDDIE

Fats, let's you and I shoot a game of straight pool.

FATS

Hundred dollars?

EDDIE

Well, you shoot big-time pool, Fats. I mean, that's what everybody says, you shoot big-time pool. Let's make it two hundred dollars a game.

FATS

Now I know why they call you Fast Eddie. Eddie, you talk my kind of talk...

(moving to the main table)

Sausage! Rack 'em up!

At his command, Ames comes to life. Players drag their chairs across the floor and position them around the main table. Eddie, hand to his mouth, realizes that the big moment has arrived and beckons to Charlie for his leather cue case. The uniformed maids withdraw the cover off the green felt top, and Sausage, the racker, begins to bang the balls into the wooden racking triangle.

Fats is in the washroom, scrubbing his hands and nails. Eddie stands and screws together his inlaid, ivory-pointed cue as Fats dries his hands. He and Fats eye one another.

CHARLIE

How do you feel?

EDDIE

Fast and loose, man.

CHARLIE

In the gut, I mean.

EDDIE

I feel tight -- but good.

Henry helps Fats on with his coat. Sausage finishes racking. Fats carefully extends his palms so that Henry may sprinkle on some talcum powder. They are ready to start. Fats, immaculate in jacket and tie, tosses a wad of bills -- his stake money -- onto the table. Charlie does the same, counting the bills out one by one.

FATS

(off the cash)

Willie, hang onto that.

Willie takes the money. Two balls are rolled to the end of the table, and Fats and Eddie, like two duelers, prepare to shoot for the break.

In the silence of the room, they bend over their cues and softly stroke out their shots. The balls roll down the table, bank off the far shoulder, and slowly return toward the two players. Fats' ball hits the closer shoulder.

FATS

You break.

The balls are returned and Eddie makes his break shot, a glancing blow that leaves the pack of balls nearly intact and the white cue ball lying far away at the end of the table. Eddie looks up, with a smile.

EDDIE

Didn't leave you much.

Fats walks around the table and peers at the balls.

FATS

(after a pause)

You left enough... six in the corner.

Placing his cigarette on the wooden rim of the table, Fats rams the cue ball into the pack, dropping the six ball into the pocket. The table is now his. Eddie sits down unhappily. Fats plays quickly, moving from shot to shot with studied authority, his eyes and hands working fluidly together.

FATS

Fifteen in the corner...

(shot goes in)

Ace in the side.

The shot goes in. As Eddie watches, the prancing, elegant Fats maneuvers around the table.

FATS

Eight.

(shot goes in)

Ten...

(shot goes in)

Eleven.

The shot goes in.

EDDIE

(whispers, to Charlie)

Boy, he is great! Jeez, that old fat man. Look at the way he moves. Like a dancer.

FATS

Twelve. Cross side.

We see Fats' bejeweled fingers curl around the cue stick, the stick then darting out to send a ball caroming off a far bank and into a side pocket.

EDDIE (O.S.)

And them fingers, them chubby fingers.  
And that stroke. It's like he's, uh,  
like he's playing a violin or  
something.

FATS

Nine ball.

(shot goes in)

Three ball.

Fats keeps sinking shots.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

It is eleven o'clock. Eddie is up. The crowd at Ames sits stolidly in their seats, watching each player, each move.

EDDIE

Four ball.

The shot goes in and he lines up another.

EDDIE

Cross-corner.

The shot is a difficult one involving a combination of balls. As it rolls in, the crowd breaks into applause, and Fats bangs the butt of his cue stick on the floor to show his appreciation.

SAUSAGE

Game.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

A high angle of the table. Fats plays defensively, playing a safety, leaving Eddie with little to shoot at.

FATS

Safe.

So Eddie does the same.

EDDIE

Safe.

Fats peers at the pack of balls huddled together, then points to one that lies in the middle of the pack.

FATS

Seven ball in the corner.

Big John looks around -- the shot seems impossible. Fats slams the cue ball into the pack. The balls carom outward in all directions. Only the seven rolls slowly into the corner pocket. Eddie slumps back in his seat as the crowd applauds.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

It is twelve o'clock, and Fats dominates the play. As he calls out the litany of his shots, we see, superimposed over his hands and his face and the sound of socking pool balls, the spectators, stupefied by the action; Charlie, swallowing hard; Eddie, looking on, waiting to play; and the bills endlessly unfolding out of Charlie's hands and floating onto the table.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

One-thirty and Fats is still shooting.

FATS  
Ace in the corner.

The shot rolls in.

CHARLIE  
(darkly, to Eddie)  
Quit. He's too good.

EDDIE  
Charlie, I'm gonna take him.

FATS (O.S.)  
Your shot.

EDDIE  
You miss?  
(goes to the table  
and chalks his cue)  
Well, you don't leave much when you  
miss, do you, fat man?

FATS  
(from his seat)  
That's what the game's all about.

EDDIE  
Mm hm... Two ball, side pocket.

The shot goes in. Fats pounds his stick on the floor. No one else makes a noise.

FATS  
Very good shot.

EDDIE  
You know I gotta hunch, fat man. I  
gotta hunch it's me from here on  
in... One ball, corner pocket.  
(shot goes in)  
I mean, that ever happen to you?  
When all of a sudden you feel like  
you can't miss? I dreamed about this  
game, fat man. I dreamed about this  
game every night on the road... five  
ball...

(shot goes in)  
You know, this is my table, man. I  
own it.

Fats allows a perfunctory bow of his head, a courtly gesture, to Eddie's manager. Charlie looks away, avoiding his eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

It is two-thirty. Now it's Eddie's voice we hear calling out the shots.

He circles the table, a proud, cocky smile on his face, and superimposed over his movements we see the spectators, hunched up in their chairs, and Fats' face, glowering, hostile.

SAUSAGE

Rack.

The applause grows louder as the balls keep spinning toward the pockets.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

SAUSAGE

Game!

Eddie beams with pride and excitement as he accepts the acclamation of the sharks at Ames. He slaps down the chalk and returns to his seat. It is almost four o'clock.

EDDIE

Pay the man again, Fats.

Fats draws himself slowly out of his chair and hands the money to Charlie.

EDDIE

(to Charlie)

Hey, how much are we ahead?

CHARLIE

Approximately? One thousand bucks.

EDDIE

Fats, let's you and I shoot a game of pool for a thousand dollars a game.

Fats hesitates for a moment, then reaches in his pocket for some bills.

FATS

Preach! Go down and get me some White Tavern whisky, a glass, and some ice.

EDDIE

Preacher! Go on down and get me some  
bourbon. J. T. S. Brown. No ice, no  
glass.

FATS

Preach... get it at Johnny's.  
(to Eddie)  
You got a bet.

They stand up, remove their jackets, and prepare to play  
again.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S BAR, THE BACK ROOM - NIGHT

As Preacher opens the door to the back room, clutching a  
paper bag filled with bottles to his chest, we see six men  
seated around a table, playing poker. Preacher approaches  
one of them and whispers something hurriedly in his ear. The  
man is Bert Gordon. Except for his dark glasses, he might  
pass for a conservative businessman out for an evening with  
the boys, sipping milk instead of alcohol to soothe an ulcer.  
He nods to Preacher who then leaves. Bert appears thoughtful  
for a moment. He rises.

BERT GORDON

Cash me in.

Bert sips his milk.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - EARLY MORNING

A floor full of cigarette butts surround Charlie's chair.  
Charlie crushes out another on the floor and immediately  
reaches for more.

FATS (O.S.)

Two in the corner.  
(shot goes in)  
Seven.

The shot goes in. Eddie drains the last drips from his bottle  
of bourbon, then looks jauntily at Bert, who now sits quietly  
in a chair, watching them both.

FATS

Ace in the corner.

He misses. Eddie squirms out of his seat, eager to play,  
eager to go on winning. Bert sighs.

EDDIE

Two ball, side pocket.

The shot goes in. Fats opens a fresh bottle of whisky.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

The game goes on. The hands of the clock on the wall spin around toward eight in the morning. Ames is empty now, except for the players and the employees. Only the voice of Sausage is heard, signaling the end of a game.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

As Fats bends over to shoot, Henry draws the Venetian blinds.

FATS

Will you cut that sunshine out?

Bert holds a hand to his temple, unnerved by Fats' discomposure.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

There is a break in the action. Fats and Eddie eye each other coldly, Fats with his glass in his hand, Eddie with his bottle. Eddie takes a swig and returns to the game.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

Bert reaches forward to hand Charlie more money. Bert replaces the billfold in his coat pocket.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

Eddie, weary now, his hands resting on the table, looks up at the cool, impassive face of Bert Gordon.

EDDIE

Hey, mister.

BERT

The name's Gordon. Bert Gordon.

EDDIE

Mister. You been sittin' in that spot for hours. Would you mind moving? It bothers me.

Bert rises, moves his chair about six inches, and sits down again.

EDDIE

Five ball.

It sinks.

SAUSAGE

That's game.

Eddie goes over to the water cooler for a drink while Fats doles out his losings on the table.

EDDIE

(to Charlie)

How much we got?

CHARLIE

Eleven thousand four hundred, cash.  
Here in my pocket.

EDDIE

Preacher, go on down and get me some breakfast, will ya? Egg sandwich and a cup of coffee. You want something, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Now wait a minute. You're coming with me. You're gonna eat breakfast at the hotel. Pool game is over.

EDDIE

No, it isn't, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Eddie...

EDDIE

The pool game is over when Fats says it's over.

CHARLIE

You wanted ten thousand? You got ten thousand.

EDDIE

Ah, get with it, will ya, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Get with what?

EDDIE

You can't see it, can you, Charlie?  
I mean, you've never been able to see it. I came after him. And I'm

gonna get him. I'm goin' with him  
all the way. The pool game is not  
over until Minnesota Fats says it's  
over. Is it over, Fats?

He stands before Fats and Bert Gordon, waiting for an answer.  
Fats and Bert exchange glances but nothing is said.

EDDIE

(to Bert)

I'm gonna beat him, mister. I beat  
him all night and I'm gonna beat him  
all day.

Still no reply, no sign of giving in. Eddie starts to go  
back to his chair, suddenly turns, a weary, clowning smile  
on his face.

EDDIE

I'm the best you ever seen, Fats.  
I'm the best there is. Now even if  
you beat me, I'm still the best.

Eddie walks over to the water cooler.

BERT

(quietly, to Fats)

Stay with this kid. He's a loser.

EDDIE

(turns to Charlie,  
off Bert)

What did he say?

Charlie doesn't know and shakes his head.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE - NIGHT

Eddie's face buried in his lap as Charlie massages his back.  
Behind him, in the washroom, is Fats, washing his face and  
hands.

CHARLIE

Twenty-five hours, Eddie. Twenty-  
five hours you been playin' straight.

EDDIE

Give me a drink, will ya?

CHARLIE

You don't need a drink.

EDDIE

Will you shut up... Just give me a  
drink.

Charlie gets Eddie a bottle. Bert and Henry watch Eddie coldly.

CHARLIE

Eighteen thousand, Eddie. We're ahead  
eighteen thousand.

A drunken, exhausted Eddie nods, looks up at Bert, grins maliciously, and takes a drink. Charlie starts to put away Eddie's cue stick.

BERT

I thought you said this game was  
over when Minnesota Fats said it  
was.

CHARLIE

Now, it's over now.

Fats emerges from the washroom, dries his hands, looks at Eddie and then at Bert who nods. Henry helps Fats into the jacket with the carnation still in the lapel. Eddie grins at this. So does Bert. Fats opens his palms for the sprinkling of the talcum powder. Fats rubs his hands together, then takes out his cigarette case.

FATS

Fast Eddie, let's play some pool.

Bert smiles in appreciation.

CHARLIE

Let's go, Eddie.

Eddie grabs the leather case out of Charlie's hands. Eddie rises and confronts Fats almost scornfully.

EDDIE

You look beautiful, Fats. Just like  
a baby... all pink, and powdered up.

Eddie looks down at his own dirty, disheveled shirt. He and a smiling Bert exchange glances. Eddie moves to put on his jacket. Charlie confronts him.

CHARLIE

What are you trying to do, Eddie?  
You beat him. You beat him bad. You  
wanna kill yourself?

EDDIE

What are ya, chicken, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Well, maybe that's it. I'm chicken.

EDDIE

Go on home. Just leave me the money.

CHARLIE

Go to hell.

EDDIE

(enraged)

Charlie, boy, you better give me that money. C'mon now, give it to me. It's mine.

CHARLIE

Okay, here...

(slaps money into  
Eddie's hand)

Be a damn fool.

Eddie puts a bottle into the pocket of his jacket and returns to the table to screw together his cue stick. The sight of Fats makes him laugh again.

EDDIE

You know, you really look beautiful,  
Fats.

Everyone stares at Eddie as he scratches his head, alone with his private joke. Eddie abruptly tosses his cue case away.

EDDIE

(casually)

I'll break.

A worried Charlie picks up the case and stands by mutely, watching Eddie disintegrate. Eddie leans over to shoot, then turns away, laughing loudly to himself. Fats watches him, soberly, patiently.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT AMES - TIME LAPSE

A high angle. Fats is shooting. No one is really watching any more.

Eddie is asleep on a stool against a wall. Even Bert is dozing.

FATS

Nine ball... fifteen.

The shots go in.

SAUSAGE

That's one twenty-five.

CHARLIE

Eddie. Wake up, Eddie...  
(Eddie awakens slowly)  
We lose again.

Eddie bangs his head against the wall. He knocks over a bottle as he tries to get up off the stool. The noise startles him. Charlie watches sadly. Eddie gropes through his pockets and comes up with a few crumpled bills.

EDDIE

Is this all we got left?

CHARLIE

If that's all you got, that's all we got left.

Fats rises and tosses his cue on the table.

FATS

Willie, give me the stake money.

Willie gives him the stake money. Fats confronts Eddie.

EDDIE

Fats, I got about two hundred dollars here.

FATS

Game's over, Eddie.

EDDIE

Fats, look, I got about two hundred dollars here. You can't run out on me.

FATS

You watch me.

Fats steps by Eddie and heads for the coat rack, slapping the stake money into Bert's hand as he goes by. Bert returns the money to his billfold, wordlessly. The blinds are drawn and the light strikes Eddie in the eyes, but still he stumbles after Fats, holding his money out before him, pleading.

EDDIE

Fats, c'mon. C'mon. Hey, Fats?

He bangs against the corner of the table and falls onto the floor. Fats hears him go down and pauses, turning to see Charlie rush to Eddie's side. After a moment, Fats continues on toward the door. Charlie slaps Eddie's cheeks.

CHARLIE

Eddie... Eddie... Eddie... Eddie...

Bert, Sausage, Willie, Preach step around the body on their

way out.

FADE OUT:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

FADE IN:

Eddie is lying on his bed staring at the ceiling, the crashing of pool balls sounding in his head. He looks over at Charlie, asleep in the next bed. He rolls out of bed and goes to the window. We see a neon sign flashing across the street. It reads AMES BILLIARDS. Then Eddie returns to his bed, leaves the keys to the Packard and some money on the night table next to Charlie. He picks up his valise, his hanging bag, and his leather cue case.

EDDIE

(softly)

I'm sorry, Charlie.

Eddie goes toward the door.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BUS STATION - EARLY MORNING

As Eddie enters, carrying his bags, a few early morning travelers -- some soldiers and a man in a Stetson hat -- pass him by. He has been up all night. He rubs his grimy face, then heads for the door marked "Gentlemen."

CUT TO:

INT. WASHROOM - EARLY MORNING

It is a typical bus station washroom at that time of the morning. The residue of a full day's traveling is in evidence: crumpled paper towels, cigarette butts, etc. Part of the residue is a drunk who sits on the shoeshine seat, fast asleep. Eddie looks at him, shaking his head. A wizened old attendant sits nearby. A sign on the wall reads IS THIS YOUR LUCKY DAY? Eddie laughs to himself, puts his hanging bag and cue case on a chair, then turns to face his image in the mirror.

EDDIE

(to the attendant)

Give me a towel, will ya?

The attendant, whose every move seems to require a tremendous effort, shuffles over and grabs a towel as Eddie removes his jacket.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BUS STATION - EARLY MORNING

Near the row of coin lockers in the waiting room is a small lunch counter and several tables. At one table, facing the lockers, is a young woman, Sarah: a book is open before her, and a cup of coffee, and an ashtray filled with cigarette butts. She looks up for an instant as Eddie appears. He now has on a clean shirt and is clean and freshly shaven. He locks his bags in a locker. Her eyes return to the printed page. Moving toward the counter, Eddie notices Sarah. He goes to the lunch counter, still looking at her. He sniffs some wrapped sandwiches.

WAITRESS

Can I get you something?

EDDIE

Later.

Eddie wanders over to a table next to Sarah's and sits down. She ignores him.

EDDIE

Long wait for a bus?

SARAH

(looks up)

Yes.

She returns to her reading. Eddie keeps looking at her. Her hair is brown, cut short, practically straight. Her lips are pale and thin, and the bone structure of her face, although delicate, is much in evidence.

There is a suggestion of tired wakefulness, of self-sufficiency, about her. And a frank, open regard which has nothing in it to imply flirtation -- or the lack of it.

EDDIE

How long you been waiting?

SARAH

(looking up)

What?

EDDIE

How long have you been waiting?

SARAH

Since four.

Sarah goes back to reading. The waitress arrives to take Eddie's order.

EDDIE

(to the waitress)

Just a cup of black coffee, please...

(the waitress starts

to go)  
Hey, ma'am! Wait a minute!  
(to Sarah)  
Would you, uh, like another cup?

SARAH  
(shrugs)  
Fine, thanks.

Eddie holds up two fingers to the waitress, who departs.

EDDIE  
What time does the bus leave?

SARAH  
What bus?

EDDIE  
Yours.

SARAH  
Eight o'clock.

Eddie sighs.

SARAH  
That wouldn't give us much time,  
would it?

EDDIE  
(amused)  
Well, you're right. I guess it  
wouldn't.

The coffee comes.

EDDIE  
(making a toast)  
Hello and goodbye...

Eddie leans back against the wall and shuts his eyes.

EDDIE  
(after a long pause)  
Have a nice trip.

SARAH  
Thanks. I will.

He slips off to sleep. The waitress brings a check.

SARAH  
Give it to me.

She looks at Eddie anxiously as she digs in her purse for  
the coins.

She pays, collects her purse and book, and rises to leave.  
Eddie doesn't stir.

CUT TO:

INT. BUS STATION LUNCH COUNTER - MORNING

The public address system bleats over the noise of the crowded luncheonette. The waitress leans over and slaps Eddie on the shoulder.

He wakes up with a cramped neck.

EDDIE  
How much do I owe you?

WAITRESS  
It was paid for... by the lady.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BAR AND GRILL - NOON

The bar is nearly empty when Eddie comes in.

EDDIE  
(to the bartender)  
Give me some bourbon. J. T. S. Brown.

BARTENDER  
You want a chaser?

EDDIE  
No.

As he looks around the bar he sees Sarah, alone at a back booth, sipping a highball. She seems amused by their encounter. So does he. He takes his drink and joins her at the booth.

EDDIE  
Have a nice trip?

SARAH  
Fair.

EDDIE  
Can I sit down?

SARAH  
Why not? We already know each other's secrets.

EDDIE  
(after he sits)  
Thanks for the, uh, for the breakfast.

SARAH

Two ships that pass in the night  
should always buy each other  
breakfast.

EDDIE

Can I buy you another drink?

Sarah nods.

EDDIE

(calls to the bartender)  
Hey, another one for me and another  
one for the lady.

BARTENDER

Check!

EDDIE

You look different... More relaxed.

SARAH

It's the lights. And the scotch.

EDDIE

How come you didn't catch your bus?

SARAH

I wasn't waiting for a bus.

EDDIE

Then why go to the bus station?

SARAH

Same reason you went: at that hour  
of the morning you haven't much  
choice. Besides, I only live three  
blocks from there. Where do you live?

EDDIE

Around.

SARAH

I know where you live: in a locker,  
in a bus station. What's it like  
living in a locker?

EDDIE

Cramped.

(she smiles)

You always drink like this, so early  
in the morning?

SARAH

Do you always ask so many questions?

EDDIE

No, not always.

SARAH

Sometimes I wake up and I can't sleep, not without a drink. The bars don't open until eight. Mack over there has faith in me. When I'm broke, he trusts me. Don't you trust me, Mack?

BARTENDER

Check!

SARAH

When I'm not broke, I usually have a bottle in my room, in which case I sleep very well indeed.

EDDIE

You talk kind of funny, but I like it.

SARAH

I used to be an actress.

EDDIE

Yeah? What do you do now?

SARAH

I'm a college girl. Two days a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, I go to college.

EDDIE

You don't look like a college girl.

SARAH

I'm the emancipated type. Real emancipated.

EDDIE

No, I didn't mean that -- whatever that means. I mean, you just don't look young enough.

SARAH

I'm not.

EDDIE

So why go to college?

SARAH

I've got nothing else to do on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

EDDIE

What do you do on the other days?

SARAH

I drink.

EDDIE

(to the bartender)

Hey!

SARAH

No. No more. I'm getting sleepy.

(puts a scarf around  
her head)

Thank you very much, Mr...?

EDDIE

Eddie. The name is Eddie.

SARAH

(studies his face)

The name should be Eddie. What should  
my name be?

EDDIE

I don't know. Whatever you like it  
to be.

SARAH

I like it to be what it is. It's  
Sarah. That's a biblical name. You  
want to know its meaning?

EDDIE

I could always get us a bottle.

SARAH

(a little alarmed)

No.

EDDIE

Fifth of scotch?

SARAH

What do you want me to do, just step  
out in the alley? Is that it?

EDDIE

No. I'll take you home.

There is a long pause as she tries to read his face.

SARAH

All right.

Eddie finishes his drink, rises, crosses to the bar, pays  
the bill, and returns to the booth. As they go out, Sarah  
stumbles, and he catches her by the arm.

SARAH

It's all right.  
(smiling)  
I'm not drunk...  
(serious)  
I'm lame.

Eddie pauses a moment to register this as she limps off, then follows.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - MIDDAY

Eddie goes into the liquor store. Sarah waits outside, stiff and uneasy.

Then he comes out with the scotch and they walk off down the street together. They walk slowly, with their eyes pointed straight ahead. He tries to ignore her halting gait. They pass under the awning of the neighborhood's elegant Parisien restaurant.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HALLWAY OF APARTMENT HOUSE - MIDDAY

As she searches through her purse for her keys, he reaches out and puts his hand on her shoulder. She closes her eyes, then draws back against the door, fearful, like a threatened animal.

SARAH

Why me?

He takes her head in his hands and kisses her. She responds but, as he holds her tighter, she starts to struggle.

SARAH

Please... please... please.

She pushes him away and shakes her head.

SARAH

You're too hungry.

They stand there for a long moment: she looks away; he looks down at the floor. Then Eddie takes the bag of scotch and places it underneath her arm.

EDDIE

Take it. It's yours.

He leaves her there in the hall and walks off.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FLOPHOUSE - AFTERNOON

A door opens. A hotel manager shows Eddie into a dingy, barely furnished room.

MANAGER

You can have this one for a buck and a half a night, or seven bucks by the week.

EDDIE

By the night.

MANAGER

In advance.

He reaches in his pocket and pulls out some bills.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BUS DEPOT - NIGHT

Eddie removes his bags from the locker. The sight of the lunch counter reminds him of Sarah. But the lunchroom is empty; only the janitor is there, mopping up. Eddie picks up his bags and goes out.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Eddie, on his way back to the hotel, stops at the same liquor store for a bottle.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

He enters his room, puts down his bags and the liquor, and sits on his rusted brass bed. From his pocket he pulls out the few crumpled bills he has left. He looks at the money, shakes his head disgustedly, and closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR WITH POOL TABLE - NIGHT

It is a friendly, neighborhood bar for business people and cocktail drinkers. Eddie walks casually by the pool table and over to the bar.

EDDIE

Bottle of beer.

He turns on his stool to watch the game.

EDDIE

Hey, uh, mister? Hey, okay if I grab

a cue?

PLAYER

Hey, you're Eddie Felson, aren't you?

EDDIE

Who's he?

PLAYER

Now, look, fella, I saw you playing at Ames the other night.

EDDIE

Hey, I'll tell you what -- I'll play you jack-up pool -- just keep one hand in my pocket.

PLAYER

(returning to his game)

Oh man, you're way out of our league.

Eddie goes back to his bottle of beer.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ANOTHER BAR - NIGHT

Some bills drop on a ragged, beat-up pool table. Two men, dressed in work clothes, stand around looking disgruntled.

FIRST MAN

What are you stuck for?

SECOND MAN

Three. That's enough for me.

EDDIE

(picks up the cash)

Thanks... Can I, uh, buy you fellas a drink?

MEN

Okay... Okay.

They go to the bar.

FIRST MAN

You know, you shoot good. But you also shoot lucky.

EDDIE

(nodding his head)

Yeah. I shoot lucky.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BUS DEPOT - EARLY MORNING

Eddie sits at a table, smoking, waiting. The paper bag with the whisky is on the table. Sarah, dressed in a dark suit, limps toward him. He mashes out his cigarette in the ashtray. When he looks up, he sees Sarah standing nearby. She seems cold and suspicious as she limps toward the table. She pauses and looks at him. They stare at one another for a long moment. He gets up, puts his arm around her shoulder, and walks away with her. As they walk, she hesitantly puts an arm around his waist.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - MORNING

A hand reaches up to open the wooden shutters. As they open, we see Eddie, in his underclothes, on the bed. Sarah, in a robe, walks up and joins him in bed as they both peer out the window.

SARAH

Why did you do that?

EDDIE

I wanted to see what kind of a day it is.

SARAH

A day like any other. People come, people go.

EDDIE

Give me a drag.

She hands him her cigarette. He starts to put on his wristwatch.

SARAH

What time is it?

EDDIE

Eleven o'clock... I'll be back later.

SARAH

Why?

EDDIE

Come here.

He kisses her on the cheek.

SARAH

Oh, you need a shave. You mustn't go looking like that. There's a razor and shaving cream in the bathroom.

Compliments of the house.

EDDIE

What did you say that for, Sarah?

SARAH

How did you know my name was Sarah?

EDDIE

You told me.

SARAH

I lied. When I'm drunk I lie.

EDDIE

Okay. So what's your name today?

SARAH

Sarah.

(pause)

Eddie, look. I've got troubles, and I think maybe you've got troubles. Maybe it'd be better if we just leave each other alone.

He kisses her again, this time on the lips.

EDDIE

I got my things over at the hotel. I'll bring them over later...  
(shifts position,  
pulls her close)  
Come here.

SARAH

(in his arms)

I'm not sure... I don't know.

EDDIE

Well, what do you want to know? And why?

He reaches out and closes the shutters.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Sarah emerges from a neighborhood grocery store loaded down with a Cheese Doodles carton full of food. A woman runs out of the store to give her a parcel she left behind.

SARAH

(warmly)

Thank you.

WOMAN

Prego.

She carries the carton across the street to her apartment house, quietly saying hello to a couple of neighbors along the way.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sarah's apartment is a typical city studio apartment: one cluttered room for sleeping and eating, and a small kitchenette. As Sarah knocks, Eddie is perched on the window sill. He goes to open the door. Sarah enters.

EDDIE

Where you been all day?

SARAH

At school. It's Thursday.

EDDIE

Oh, I forgot.

He pulls her schoolbooks out of the carton and takes her purse.

SARAH

You were asleep when I left. I didn't want to wake you. Did you go out?

EDDIE

Yeah, I went out for a couple of hours.

She unloads liquor and canned goods from the carton, then goes to join Eddie by the window. Sarah takes a cigarette lighter out of her purse and hands it to Eddie.

SARAH

(off the lighter)

Present...

He takes it.

SARAH

You know, I've been living here for almost three years. Now in three days it seems as if I know everybody. When I pass people on the street I want to stop and say, "Listen, I got a fella."

EDDIE

(strokes her hand)

Thanks.

SARAH

Eddie, where do you go when you go out?

EDDIE

Museums... art galleries... concerts.

She smiles, then she gets up and returns to the kitchenette.

EDDIE

Well, I believe you when you say you go to school.

SARAH

You want to go with me?

EDDIE

What, are you kidding? See that book?

(holds up a book)

I've been trying to get through that book ever since I first got here. I haven't finished the first chapter.

(off her bookcase)

Did you read all them books?

SARAH

Mm hmm.

EDDIE

You got it all in your head?

SARAH

When I'm sober. They get a little mixed up when I'm drunk. Most of the time they're mixed up.

EDDIE

(angrily)

Oh, stop talking about yourself like you're a lush or something. I don't like it.

(genuinely concerned)

Maybe you ought to go to a clinic, get some treatments.

SARAH

I'm getting treatments right here.

He comes up behind her and puts his arms around her.

EDDIE

I'm hungry.

SARAH

Take your choice. I've got enough so we won't have to go out of the house till Tuesday.

EDDIE

What did all this stuff cost you?

SARAH

When you've got money, you'll pay.

EDDIE

No, c'mon, I wanna know. I wanna keep score.

SARAH

The bills are right here. You didn't say what you wanted.

EDDIE

(off the canned goods)  
Don't you ever cook anything?

SARAH

Eggs. How do you like them?

EDDIE

Raw.

She cuts her hand opening a can.

SARAH

Oh, cut my finger.

EDDIE

I've got something in my bag.

SARAH

Oh, it's not bad.

As he rummages through the closet for his bag he pulls out his leather cue case.

SARAH

Eddie, what's in that case?

EDDIE

Haven't you opened it?

SARAH

No, why should I? It's yours.

EDDIE

It's a machine gun. This guy told me when I came to the big city I'd have to have a machine gun, so I bought one.

(bandages her finger)

Where do you get the money? To pay for all this? I mean the liquor, and the groceries, and the rent?

SARAH

From a rich old man who used to be  
my lover.

They kiss. Someone knocks on the door. Sarah goes to open  
it. We stay on Eddie, who examines the lighter in his hand.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Hello, Eddie.

He enters the room, awkwardly, toying with the rim of his  
hat.

EDDIE

Hello, Charlie...

(turns)

C'mon in...

(off Sarah)

That's my girl.

CHARLIE

(to Sarah)

Hello, Eddie's girl...

(to Eddie)

I looked all over for you.

EDDIE

Oh yeah? How'd you find me?

CHARLIE

I asked around.

There is a long silence.

SARAH

(to Eddie)

Do you want me to go?

EDDIE

No, stick around.

(to Charlie)

Can I get you something? Drink?

Coffee?

CHARLIE

Oh, I don't want to be no bother to  
nobody.

EDDIE

Oh, don't play it small, Charlie. It  
don't look good on you.

CHARLIE

How do you want me to play it? I'm  
broke.

EDDIE

So am I... Sit down.

(to Sarah)

Would you get us a couple of drinks?

She starts to make the drinks. Charlie sits.

CHARLIE

You walked out on me like that. No  
goodbye, no nothing. Like a thief in  
the dark. We were partners. We were  
more than partners.

(to Sarah)

He was like a... like --

EDDIE

A son.

CHARLIE

Yeah, yeah, like a son.

(to Sarah who brings  
drinks)

I've known this boy since he was  
sixteen. The first time I saw him,  
back in Oakland, I said, "This is a  
talented boy. This is a smart boy."

EDDIE

Talk to me, Charlie.

CHARLIE

I want you to come back on the road  
with me.

EDDIE

Aah! I've got no stomach for that  
any more. I've had that kind of life.

CHARLIE

What kind of life have you got here?  
Scufflin' around the small rooms,  
picking up eight, ten bucks a day?

EDDIE

I'll connect. I'll get you your money  
back.

CHARLIE

Are you figuring on going back to  
Ames to play Minnesota Fats again?  
Is that what's on your mind?

EDDIE

Never been out of it. I'm gonna beat  
that fat man... with that curly hair,  
and those diamond rings, and that  
carnation.

CHARLIE

(to Sarah)

This boy's crazy. They wiped the floor with him. They beat his brains out and he wants to go back.

(to Eddie)

What for? To take another beating?

EDDIE

I told you you'd get your money back.

CHARLIE

(to Sarah)

He thinks I care about the money.

(to Eddie)

I care about you. Do you care about me, Eddie? We're together a long time, night and day. So how do you say goodbye?

(rises)

You gimme the car and a hundred bucks. You think I care about the dough, the car? I care about you.

(to Sarah)

This boy is the greatest pool hustler you ever saw. A real high-class con man. He can charm anybody into anything. Did he ever tell you how well we were doing on the road? We had everything: we ate good, we slept late, we had money to burn. Whisky, dames...

(apologetic, to Sarah)

Excuse me...

(to Eddie, off Sarah)

I'll tell you what -- take her along.

Eddie leans up against the wall, listening. Sarah watches them both, curious, confused.

CHARLIE

I'll tell you what else: you don't want to start right away, we won't start right away. We'll get in the car and drive down to Miami, get all this crud out of your system, have a few laughs, lie in the sun for a couple of weeks.

Suddenly Eddie becomes tense.

EDDIE

With what?

CHARLIE

Don't worry about it. I'll raise the

money.

EDDIE

Oh yeah? Where?

CHARLIE

What's the difference where? I'll raise it.

(to Sarah)

Is it all right if I have another drink?

Sarah turns to fix the drink. Eddie signals her to stay where she is.

He moves forward, confronting Charlie.

EDDIE

Did you hold out on me, Charlie?...  
How much?

Charlie doesn't answer, so Eddie snatches hold of his jacket and shoves him back into a chair.

EDDIE

HOW MUCH?!

CHARLIE

My twenty-five per cent. Approximately fifteen hundred bucks.

EDDIE

Oh, you crumb. With that fifteen hundred I coulda beat him. That's all I needed, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Aw, Eddie.

EDDIE

C'mon, c'mon, just give me the money.

CHARLIE

What for? To play Fats again?

EDDIE

Yeah, to play Fats again.

CHARLIE

You wanna come back on the road with me, okay, the money's yours. But if you wanna give it to Minnesota Fats... nothing doing. What do you say?

EDDIE

(viciously)

You still don't see it, do you,

Charlie? You are nothing but a small-time Charlie. You'd love to keep me hustling for you, huh? Wouldn't ya? I mean, a couple more years with me, scuffling around them little towns and those back alleys. You might make yourself enough to get a little poolroom back in Oakland. Six tables and a handbook on the side. Is that when you say goodbye to me, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Is that what you think?

EDDIE

Yeah, that's what I think.

CHARLIE

All right. That's what I want. Poolroom with a little handbook on the side. Getting old.

EDDIE

Lay down and die by yourself. Don't take me with you.

Eddie walks off. A pause.

CHARLIE

Just like that?

EDDIE

Yeah. Just like that.

A tear rolls down Sarah's cheek as she hears this. She stands near the door, with her back to both of them. Charlie gets up and moves toward the door.

CHARLIE

Thanks for the drink, Eddie's girl.

Sarah, her cheek wet, says nothing. Charlie puts on his hat and leaves.

Eddie empties his glass and slaps it on the shelf next to Sarah.

EDDIE

Give me another drink.

She pours it out, saying nothing.

EDDIE

Boy! Everybody, everybody wants a piece of me!

Sarah hands Eddie his drink without looking him in the eye.

EDDIE

Aren't you gonna have one?

She pours herself a very stiff drink as Eddie moves about restlessly.

EDDIE

What did he have to come back here for anyway?

Sarah drinks her drink.

EDDIE

C'mere.

She keeps drinking.

EDDIE

Come here!

Still drinking, she turns to him. They embrace and kiss one another without putting down their glasses.

FADE OUT:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

FADE IN:

The room is a mess and Sarah is drunk. She sits on her knees on the floor, pecking at the keys of her typewriter with one finger. Her bottle and her glass are beside her. A bare-chested Eddie is in the kitchen behind her, tossing empty cans and bottles from the sink into a garbage bag. He carelessly wipes the sink, then throws down the dishrag and goes to the closet, pulling out his leather case.

SARAH

You going out?

EDDIE

Yeah. For a little while.

Reaching for the bottle, Sarah abruptly lurches forward over her typewriter, and knocks the bottle over.

SARAH

(atop the typewriter)  
Ohhhhh...

Eddie quickly moves to help her.

EDDIE

Hey!

He helps her up.

EDDIE

Okay?

She doesn't answer. Eddie stares at Sarah as she sways limply on her knees, unmindful of her open robe. Eddie picks up the bottle and sets it before her. Taking her ashtray, Eddie rises, runs his hand through her hair for a moment, and then carries off the ashtray and empties it in the garbage bag.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - TIME LAPSE

Sarah, still hopelessly drunk, is sprawled out on her bed, futilely attempting to dial a telephone. Eddie, in a clean shirt and pants, watches her. He sets the bottle down near the typewriter and notices the sheet of paper stuck in the typewriter's carriage. He bends down to read it.

EDDIE

What are you writing?

SARAH

(looks up from the  
phone)

Oh, it's a story. A story I'm making  
up.

She falls back on the bed. Eddie pulls the paper out of the carriage and reads it.

SARAH

Give it to me.

EDDIE

What's this supposed to mean?

SARAH

Give it back to me.

EDDIE

What's this supposed to mean: "We  
have a contract of depravity. All we  
have to do is pull the blinds down."

She doesn't answer. He thinks for a moment, then angrily crumples the paper in his hands and throws it at her.

EDDIE

Write yourself another story.

Eddie walks off.

SARAH

(with a sardonic laugh)

Well, what else have we got? We never

talk about anything. We stay here in this room, and we drink, and we make love.

(sits up in bed)

We're strangers. What happens when the liquor and the money run out, Eddie?

Eddie gives her a look, then lowers his eyes.

SARAH

You told Charlie to lay down and die. Will you say that to me too?

(rises and stumbles over to him)

What happens, Eddie?

EDDIE

You'll find yourself another rich old lover.

SARAH

That's right! And I'm sure you'll help me.

Eddie turns and slaps her on the cheek.

SARAH

You waiting for me to cry?

(stares at him coldly)

You bum... You poolroom bum.

He reaches for his jacket.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S BAR - NIGHT

As Eddie pushes through the glass doors to the front room of Johnny's bar. He looks around at the unused pool tables, then goes to the bar.

EDDIE

Give me a bottle of beer.

BARTENDER

Right.

A man in a business suit comes out of the back room and joins him at the bar.

BARTENDER

How did you make out?

MAN

I made a couple of bucks.

EDDIE  
Poker game?

MAN  
Yeah.

EDDIE  
Is it open?

The man looks to the bartender for his answer.

EDDIE  
(to the bartender)  
Huh?

BARTENDER  
It's open...  
(to the man)  
What'll you have?

MAN  
Gimme a beer.

Eddie takes his beer to the back room.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S BACK ROOM - NIGHT

The poker game is in progress. Four men are playing. One of them is Bert Gordon. His glass of milk is beside him on the table. He takes note of Eddie's presence with a quick dart of his eyes.

EDDIE  
Okay?

BERT  
Sit down.

He takes a seat next to Bert.

EDDIE  
What's the limit?

PLAYER  
Half and a dollar.

EDDIE  
Gimme ten bucks.

PLAYER  
Ten dollars.

He takes the chips, then throws out another bill.

EDDIE

Make it twenty.

BERT  
(to Eddie)

Cut.

EDDIE  
Deal.

As the cards are dealt Eddie steals a glance at the man he has come to see.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S FRONT ROOM - TIME LAPSE

The game is over. Bert is already in the front room. He sits at a table with a drink, and watches Eddie pass him by on the way to the bar.

EDDIE  
Bourbon. J. T. S. Brown.

BERT  
(to the bartender)  
Two.

Eddie looks at Bert.

BERT  
(pleasantly, to Eddie)  
I'm buyin'.

EDDIE  
Thought you only drank milk.

BERT  
Only when I work.

EDDIE  
Yeah? Why?

BERT  
I like it. It's good for you. Besides, you start drinking whisky gambling and it gives you an excuse for losing. That's something you don't need -- an excuse for losing. How did you make out in the poker game?

EDDIE  
I lost twenty bucks.

BERT  
Poker's not your game.

EDDIE

What is?

BERT

Pool.

EDDIE

You being cute?

BERT

I don't think there's a pool player alive shoots better pool than I saw you shoot the other night at Ames. You got talent.

EDDIE

So I got talent. So what beat me?

BERT

Character.

EDDIE

(laughs)

Yeah. Sure, sure.

BERT

You're damned right I'm sure. Everybody's got talent. I got talent. You think you can play big-money straight pool, or poker, for forty straight hours on nothing but talent? You think they call Minnesota Fats the best in the country just 'cause he's got talent? Nah. Minnesota Fats's got more character in one finger than you got in your whole skinny body.

EDDIE

I got drunk.

BERT

He drank as much whisky as you did.

EDDIE

Maybe he knows how to drink.

BERT

You bet he knows how.

(sips his drink)

You think that's a talent too, huh? Knowin' how to drink whisky? You think Minnesota Fats was born knowin' how to drink?

EDDIE

Okay, okay... What do I do now, lie down on the floor and, uh, bow from

the ankles? What do I do, go home?

BERT

That's your problem.

EDDIE

So I stay. Stay until I hustle up enough to play Fats again. Maybe by that time I'll develop myself some character.

Amused, Bert gets up and joins Eddie at the bar.

BERT

Maybe by that time you'll die of old age. How much do you think you'll, uh, need?

EDDIE

A thousand.

BERT

No, three thousand at least. He'll start you off at five hundred a game -- he'll beat the pants off you. That's the way he plays when he comes up against a man who knows the way the game is. He'll beat you flat four or five games -- maybe more, depending on how, uh... steady your nerves are. But he might -- he just might be a little scared of you, and that could change things. But I wouldn't count on it.

EDDIE

How do you know? Huh? When nobody knows that much?

BERT

See that big car parked out by the fireplug on the way in? Well, that's mine. I like that car. But I get a new one every year because I make it my business to know what guys like you and Minnesota Fats are gonna do. I made enough off of you the other night to pay for it twice over.

EDDIE

In that case, you owe me another drink.

Bert laughs and signals the bartender for another round.

BERT

Eddie, is it all right if I get

personal?

EDDIE

Whaddya been so far?

BERT

Eddie, you're a born loser.

EDDIE

What's that supposed to mean?

BERT

First time in ten years I ever saw Minnesota Fats hooked, really hooked. But you let him off.

EDDIE

I told you. I got drunk.

BERT

Sure, you got drunk. That's the best excuse in the world for losing. No trouble losing when you got a good excuse. And winning! That can be heavy on your back too. Like a monkey. You drop that load too when you got an excuse. All you gotta do is learn to feel sorry for yourself. It's one of the best indoor sports: feeling sorry for yourself -- a sport enjoyed by all, especially the born losers.

EDDIE

(slaps down his glass  
and rises)

Thanks for the drink.

BERT

Wait a minute. Maybe I can help you.

EDDIE

To do what?

BERT

Get the three thousand. Play Minnesota Fats again.

EDDIE

Why?

BERT

Ten reasons. Maybe fifteen. And also there's something in it for me.

EDDIE

Oh yeah, I figured that. How much?

BERT  
Seventy-five per cent.

EDDIE  
For who?

BERT  
For me.

EDDIE  
That's a -- that's a pretty big slice.  
Who do you think you are, General  
Motors?

BERT  
How much you think you're worth these  
days? I'm puttin' up the money, I'm  
puttin' up the time. For that I get  
seventy-five per cent return on my  
money -- if you win.

EDDIE  
You think I can lose?

BERT  
I never saw you do anything else.

EDDIE  
You saw me beat Minnesota Fats for  
eighteen thousand dollars.

BERT  
Look, you wanna hustle pool, don't  
you? This game isn't like football.  
Nobody pays you for yardage. When  
you hustle you keep score real simple.  
The end of the game you count up  
your money. That's how you find out  
who's best. That's the only way.

EDDIE  
Why back me then? Why not back  
yourself? Go find yourself a big fat  
poker game and get rich. You know  
all the angles.

BERT  
I'm already rich. But I like action.  
That's one thing I think you're good  
for is action. Besides, like I say...  
you got talent.

EDDIE  
(pleased)  
Yeah, you already told me that. You  
cut that slice down to bite-size and  
maybe we can talk.

BERT

No, we don't talk. I don't make bad bets. Seventy-five, twenty-five. That's it.

EDDIE

Kiss off.

He starts to go.

BERT

Hey, wait.

(beat)

What are you gonna do about the money?

EDDIE

There are places. I'll scuffle around.

BERT

Word's out on you, Eddie. You walk in the wrong kind of place and they'll eat you alive.

EDDIE

Now, when did you adopt me?

BERT

(with a friendly grin)

I don't know when it was.

Eddie exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. WATERFRONT - NIGHT

Sound of ship's horn. Eddie walks past the piers and warehouses toward a small waterfront bar called Arthur's Pool Hall.

CUT TO:

INT. ARTHUR'S POOL HALL - NIGHT

The atmosphere at Arthur's is stifling, oppressive. A few lonely drinkers, dock workers, sit stooped over their beer bottles at the bar.

In the back is a pool table. As Eddie enters, we see two burly men, cue sticks in hand, watching as a pale, skinny young man lines up his shot.

EDDIE

(to young man)

Hi.

YOUNG MAN

Hi.

They exchange glances, sizing each other up. Then the young man puts in his shot.

PLAYER

(throwing money on  
the table)

You lucky punk. I quit ya.

YOUNG MAN

(to Eddie)

You want in, friend?

EDDIE

How much you playin' for?

YOUNG MAN

A dollar on the five, two on the  
nine.

EDDIE

Yeah, I'll play you a couple. Just  
for kicks.

YOUNG MAN

Okay, friend.

Eddie goes over to the rack and takes a cue.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ARTHUR'S POOL HALL - TIME LAPSE

One of the other players is putting away his cue.

PLAYER

That's it for me.

ANOTHER PLAYER

Well, I guess that does it for me  
too.

YOUNG MAN

(brashly, to Eddie)

You quittin' too?

EDDIE

You're a pretty good player.

YOUNG MAN

How much are you ahead?

EDDIE

Couple of bucks.

YOUNG MAN

I guess it's just you and me, huh?

EDDIE

Yeah, I guess it is, boy. Just you and me.

YOUNG MAN

You wanna raise the bet? Two on the five, five on the nine?

EDDIE

You know what, kid? I think maybe you're a hustler.

YOUNG MAN

Try me.

EDDIE

Shoot.

YOUNG MAN

Okay.

The young man makes his break shot, slamming the nine into the pocket.

He looks up at Eddie, grinning snidely. The other two men, the losers, stand around, mutely following the play.

YOUNG MAN

You sure you don't want to quit, friend?

EDDIE

(suddenly irked)

Let's cut out the small stuff, huh? Hundred dollar freeze-out. Ten games, ten bucks a game, winner take all. And then we'll see who quits.

YOUNG MAN

Okay, friend. You're on.

EDDIE

(pulls out a coin)

Call it.

YOUNG MAN

Heads.

Eddie tosses the coin on the table.

YOUNG MAN

You win.

Eddie collects his coin while the young man racks up the

balls.

Preparing to break, Eddie chalks his cue.

YOUNG MAN

You better not miss, friend.

EDDIE

(savagely)

I don't rattle, kid. But just for that I'm gonna beat you flat.

He rams the cue ball into the pack. The nine drops in. Everyone is stunned, particularly the young man.

EDDIE

That's one.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME AT ARTHUR'S - TIME LAPSE

Eddie has lost control of himself. He is shooting as he did at Ames, rapping in his shots with perfect control. He is completely oblivious to the glowering faces of the group of men who have gathered around the table to watch.

EDDIE

That's five.

Eddie makes a tough shot. The men exchange uneasy glances.

EDDIE

That's six.

More tough shots: tricky combinations, etc.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GAME AT ARTHUR'S - TIME LAPSE

Eddie finishes up with yet another combination shot.

EDDIE

That's ten. You punk, you two-bit punk. C'mon, pay up. A hundred bucks.

The young man digs nervously into his jacket for the money. All eyes are on Eddie. The young man sets down his cue.

EDDIE

You quittin', friend?

YOUNG MAN

Yeah, I'm quittin'.

Sensing what is about to happen, the young man pays up. He

drops the cash on the table and leaves quickly. Then one of the other men steps forward, a thick-fleshed, obscene-looking man named Turk. His mouth twists into a mock smile. As Eddie looks about him at the circle of silent men, each one glaring at him, his fury gives way to fear.

TURK

Why, you're a pool shark, boy. A real pool shark.

EDDIE

Well, so's he.

TURK

But you're better than he was. Much better.

(points to bills on the table)

There's your money, boy.

Eddie wipes his mouth with his sleeve and nervously backs away.

TURK

There's your money, boy.

Eddie tries to back off but there is nowhere to go, so he makes a casual movement toward the table.

EDDIE

Okay.

Suddenly, the men grab Eddie and pin his arms. One man grabs him around the throat.

TURK

(sardonically, to the men)

Wait a minute! Let's give this boy his money.

(to Eddie)

We always pay what we lose, boy.

Turk takes the bills from the table and stuffs them into Eddie's breast pocket.

TURK

(to Eddie)

We got no use for pool sharks around here.

They drag Eddie into the men's room and shove him up against the ground-glass partition. We see his cheek pressed against the glass, and the foggy silhouettes of the others behind him. Eddie, his mouth open, screams horribly. There is a pause. He screams again. They let go of his arms and he slumps to the floor. The bartender turns and goes back to the bar

in the front room. The ship's horn is heard again.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sarah sits alone in the darkened room, dressed in her robe and slip, lost in a drunken half-sleep. There is a knock at the door.

SARAH

Who is it?

EDDIE

Me. It's Eddie.

She goes to the door and opens it. Her eyes are puffy, her face is covered with perspiration. She opens the door, then looks up to see him leaning against the wall, his arms tucked into his chest, with one hand covering the other.

SARAH

What happened?

EDDIE

I got beat up. They...

(beat)

They broke my thumbs.

Sarah is stunned and moves to him.

SARAH

Oh, God!

She takes him in her arms. He starts to cry.

EDDIE

Oh, they broke my thumbs. Broke my thumbs.

She holds him.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sarah watches as Eddie, both hands now encased in plaster casts, tries to sleep. He tries to move his arms, as if trying to defend himself.

Sarah rises, joins him, and strokes his head.

SARAH

It's all right. I'm here.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - MORNING

They are seated at the breakfast table. Sarah pours him some coffee and he tries to bring the cup to his lips, but he cannot manage it.

Disgusted, he drops the cup on the floor and gets up from the table.

Sarah bends down and patiently wipes up the spilled coffee.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is now clean and neat. And Sarah is sober. She is at her table, typing, while Eddie stands at the window, trying to reach over his shoulder to scratch his back. He comes over to the table and, with his mouth, picks a cigarette out of the pack. He looks quickly at her, without asking directly for the match. She lights it and, as she does, he glances at the sheet in the typewriter.

SARAH

You can read it, if you want to.

(Eddie shrugs)

You want to go out for a while? To a movie?

EDDIE

(pacing restlessly)

You wanna drink?

SARAH

No. You?

EDDIE

(suddenly opening the door)

What's it so hot in here for?

He starts to unbutton his shirt and Sarah immediately gets up to help.

But he holds her off.

EDDIE

Please!

She watches him struggle with the button for a while then spread his arms in a gesture of helplessness. As she unbuttons his shirt for him, he takes her face in his hands and kisses her.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SARAH'S APARTMENT HOUSE - MORNING

Sarah and Eddie emerges from the doorway. It is a warm, beautiful day, and Sarah has a basket with her. Eddie seems happy to be out with her, almost as if he has forgotten the casts on his hands.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RIVERSIDE PARK - DAY

They stop at a spot that overlooks the river and spread out a blanket.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY

Eddie leans back on the grass and looks at Sarah. They both seem easy and relaxed in the sunshine together.

EDDIE

Sarah, do you think I'm a loser?

SARAH

A loser?

EDDIE

Yeah. I met this guy -- Gordon, Bert Gordon. He said I was. Born loser.

SARAH

Would he know?

EDDIE

He knows. A lot.

SARAH

Why did he tell you?

EDDIE

I don't know. I'm not sure. He said there are people who want to lose, who are always looking for an excuse to lose.

SARAH

What does he do, this Bert Gordon?

EDDIE

He's a gambler.

SARAH

Is he a winner?

EDDIE

Well, he owns things.

SARAH

Is that what makes a winner?

EDDIE

Well, what else does?

SARAH

Does it bother you? What he said?

EDDIE

Yeah.

(after a pause)

Yeah. It bothers me a lot.

(pause)

'Cause, you see, twice, Sarah --  
once at Ames with Minnesota Fats and  
then again at Arthur's...

(sits up)

...in that cheap, crummy poolroom...  
Now, why'd I do it, Sarah? Why'd I  
do it? I coulda beat that guy, I  
coulda beat him cold. He never woulda  
known. But I just had to show 'em, I  
just had to show those creeps and  
those punks what the game is like  
when it's great, when it's really  
great. You know, like anything can  
be great -- anything can be great...  
I don't care, bricklaying can be  
great. If a guy knows. If he knows  
what he's doing and why, and if he  
can make it come off. I mean, when  
I'm goin' -- when I'm really goin' --  
I feel like...

(beat)

...like a jockey must feel. He's  
sittin' on his horse, he's got all  
that speed and that power underneath  
him, he's comin' into the stretch,  
the pressure's on him -- and he knows --  
just feels -- when to let it go, and  
how much. 'Cause he's got everything  
workin' for him -- timing, touch.  
It's a great feeling, boy, it's a  
real great feeling when you're right,  
and you know you're right. It's like  
all of a sudden I got oil in my arm.  
Pool cue's part of me. You know,  
it's a -- pool cue's got nerves in  
it. It's a piece of wood -- it's got  
nerves in it. You feel the roll of  
those balls. You don't have to look.  
You just know. Ya make shots that  
nobody's ever made before. And you  
play that game the way nobody's ever  
played it before.

SARAH

You're not a loser, Eddie. You're a winner. Some men never get to feel that way about anything. I love you, Eddie.

Eddie lowers his eyes and leans back.

EDDIE

You know, someday, Sarah, you're gonna settle down. You're gonna marry a college professor, and you're gonna write a great book. Maybe about me, huh? Fast Eddie Felson, hustler.

SARAH

(after a pause)

I love you.

EDDIE

You need the words?

SARAH

Yes, I need them very much. And if you ever say them I'll never let you take them back.

Eddie just stares at her.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Eddie is about to knock on the door to Sarah's apartment. He stops for a moment to look at his hands. The casts are off. He knocks on the door with his wrist, as he would if he still had them on. When she opens the door he holds them up boyishly before her face.

EDDIE

You glad?

SARAH

Yes, I'm glad.

She kisses his hands.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S PLACE - DAY

Eddie flexes his fingers, then tries out a shot on one of Johnny's pool tables. He uses the simpler, open hand bridge to support his cue. Bert Gordon enters, and watches him play.

BERT

Hello, Eddie.

EDDIE

Hi. How's business?

BERT

Ahh, slow... Why the open hand bridge?  
Something wrong with your hand?

EDDIE

(continues to shoot)  
Yeah. Had a little accident. A place  
called Arthur's.

BERT

Oh. You seem to do all right that  
way.

EDDIE

I'd say my game is about twenty per  
cent off. Maybe more.

BERT

What happened? Somebody step on your  
hands?

EDDIE

Yeah. Big creep. Broke my thumbs.

BERT

Man named Turk Baker?

EDDIE

You know everybody, don't you?

BERT

Everybody who can hurt me, everybody  
who can help me. It pays.

EDDIE

Maybe you oughta give me lessons.

BERT

Sign up.

EDDIE

Where do I sign?

BERT

The first match I got in mind for  
you is in Louisville, Kentucky.

EDDIE

You name the place, boss. I'll be  
there.

BERT

What happened to you anyway?

EDDIE

Like I told ya. My thumbs.

BERT

No, I don't mean the thumbs. You already told me about the thumbs.

EDDIE

I been thinking.

BERT

Thinking about what?

EDDIE

Maybe I'm not such a high-class piece of property right now. And a twenty-five per cent slice of something big is better than a hundred per cent slice of nothin'.

BERT

(to the bartender)

Hey, get us a couple of drinks here, will ya? J. T. S. Brown.

Bert smiles at Eddie.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

It is a quiet, elegant restaurant, one with soft piano music and subdued lighting. Eddie and Sarah had walked past it the first day they met. Eddie and Sarah enter. She has on new dress and Eddie, looking a little ill at ease, has on a suit and tie.

HEADWAITER

Good evening, sir.

EDDIE

Good evening.

(digs into pocket and hands him a bill)

Give use a nice, quiet table.

HEADWAITER

Yes, sir. Right this way.

The headwaiter seats them at a table. Eddie and Sarah exchange smiles.

A waiter approaches.

WAITER

Would you like a drink before dinner,

sir?

EDDIE

(to Sarah)

Hey?

SARAH

Sherry.

(to the waiter)

Very old, very dry.

EDDIE

(to the waiter)

Two.

(the waiter leaves)

Sherry?... Nice joint. You look very pretty.

SARAH

I feel pretty.

Suddenly she breaks into laughter.

EDDIE

Well, what's so funny?

SARAH

Your tie. I never saw you wear one before.

EDDIE

(touches the knot  
self-consciously)

First time for everything.

The waiter returns with the bottle of sherry and holds it out to Eddie for his approval. There is a long pause as Eddie looks from the bottle to the waiter. Finally, Eddie realizes he must respond.

EDDIE

Oh. Yeah. That's great.

The waiter pours out the sherry as Eddie and Sarah stare at each other over their glasses. Then Eddie looks away. Sarah proposes a toast.

SARAH

To you, Eddie.

They touch glasses.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - TIME LAPSE

The waiter brings the check.

WAITER

Thank you, sir.

Eddie nods and drinks down the last of his brandy as the waiter leaves.

Sarah sees that Eddie seems somber, preoccupied.

SARAH

What is it, Eddie?

EDDIE

Nothin'.

(looks at the check)

Want another drink?

SARAH

What do you want to tell me?

EDDIE

Well, I, uh, I'll be leaving town  
for a little while.

SARAH

(stunned)

For how long?

EDDIE

Oh, I don't know.

SARAH

A week? A year?

EDDIE

More like a week. Look, I'll be back.

SARAH

Sure. Let's go home.

She picks up her purse and gloves and leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

It is raining heavily. Sarah emerges from the building and leans wearily against the awning. Eddie, having hurriedly paid the bill, follows after her. He catches up with Sarah, taking her by the arm, and stepping out into the street to hail a cab.

EDDIE

Taxi.

She angrily breaks away from him and walks out into the rain.

SARAH  
No, I want to walk.

EDDIE  
(running after her)  
Come here. Come on, now.

Eddie grabs Sarah and starts to pull her back under the awning.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SARAH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The door opens and the two of them enter, thoroughly drenched.

EDDIE  
You better get some dry things on.

She walks to a chair, limping noticeably.

EDDIE  
Don't you want to know where I'm going?

SARAH  
No.  
(collapses into a chair)  
Yes, I want to know what for. But I don't want to ask.

EDDIE  
(sits)  
I'm going to Kentucky. To Louisville. With a friend. Try to make some money. I need it, the money. I'll be leaving early in the morning.

SARAH  
Leave now.

EDDIE  
Oh, grow up.

SARAH  
Why should I?

EDDIE  
Sarah, I'm going to Kentucky to play pool, with a guy by the name of Findley. Now, I need the action and I need the money. I told you I'd be back.

SARAH  
If you were going to come back you

wouldn't have taken me out tonight.  
You wouldn't have bought this dress.  
You're hustling me, Eddie. You've  
never stopped hustling me.

EDDIE

Now, I never hustled you. Even when  
I thought I was. You know it.

SARAH

What do you want me to do? Just sit  
here and wait? Faithful little Sarah.  
Pull the shades down and sit. When  
you feel like coming back, you'll  
come back. And you'll love me. And  
then you'll go away again. Is that  
your idea of love?

EDDIE

I got no idea of love. And neither  
have you. I mean, neither one of us  
would know what it was if we saw it  
coming down the street.

SARAH

I'd know it, Eddie. I'd know. For  
God's sakes, what are you trying to  
do to me? I love you.

EDDIE

Well, what's your idea of love?  
Chains?

SARAH

No.

(long pause)

I made you up, didn't I, Eddie? You  
weren't real. I made you up, like  
everything else. There was no car  
crash, Eddie. When I was five, I had  
polio. I was never an actress. The  
rich old man is my father. He walked  
out on us when I was seven. He sends  
me a check every month. That's how  
he buys his way out of my life. The  
men I've known... after they left,  
I'd say they weren't real, I made  
them up. But you, Eddie. I wanted  
you to be real.

He reaches across and pulls her to him, burying his face in  
her head.

SARAH

I'm so scared, Eddie... I'm scared.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Bert Gordon leans on the hood of a cab. His face drops when he sees Eddie and Sarah walking toward him. Eddie carries two suitcases and his leather cue case. He sets the suitcases on the curb and the cab driver moves to take them. Courteously, Bert opens the door of the taxi for Eddie and Sarah.

EDDIE

Sarah Packard... Bert Gordon.

BERT

Miss Packard. How do you do?

Sarah eyes Bert distrustfully and starts to get in the cab.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAY

Eddie, Sarah, and Bert squeeze through the door of the train compartment.

BERT

(to a redcap, off  
luggage)

That brown one's mine. It goes in  
drawing room A, huh? Thanks.

The redcap exits, carrying the luggage.

EDDIE

(to redcap, off  
compartment door)

I got it, I got it.

Eddie shuts the door. Bert and Sarah sit across from each other.

BERT

You sure you going to be comfortable  
enough there, Miss... ah... ?

SARAH

(loudly)

Packard. Sarah Packard.

BERT

It always takes me a little while to  
get a name fixed in my mind. Are you  
sure you don't want anything?

SARAH

No, I'm fine.

BERT

You, uh, you ever been to Louisville during Derby week, Miss, ah, Packard?

SARAH

I've never been to Louisville.

BERT

Lots of action. Lots of money.  
(to Eddie, seated beside him)

Lots of class. You'll see some of the best-dressed and most beautiful women in the world at the races. Knock your eye out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TRAIN DINING ROOM - MORNING

The Kentucky-bound train rolls down the track. Bert and Eddie finish their breakfast coffee in the dining room. Sarah is in the washroom.

BERT

James Findley is a very rich man. Grandfather left him twenty per cent of a tobacco company.

EDDIE

What? And he -- he hustles pool?

BERT

(chuckles)

He's a gentleman. Gentleman gambler. He gets his kicks playing with hustlers. He's got an old Southern mansion with a pool table in the basement, drinks eight-year-old bourbon, smokes cork-tipped cigarettes.

EDDIE

How good is he?

BERT

I don't know. Never saw him play. They say he's one of the best.

Sarah makes her way down the aisle and joins them at the table.

SARAH

(brightly)

I'm ready.

BERT

Soon as I finish my coffee.

She stands there, lips pursed, absorbing the insult.

EDDIE

(to Bert)

You must have a lot of confidence in me.

BERT

I don't. But I got confidence in Findley.

EDDIE

What's that supposed to mean?

BERT

Means I got confidence that he's a loser. All the way a loser. You happen to be about only one-half loser -- the other half, winner.

(off his coffee)

I'm finished.

Bert gets up and reaches in his pocket for his billfold.

EDDIE

Here, I got it.

BERT

No, no. When you play for me, I pick up all the tabs.

Eddie and Sarah just stare at him.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TRAIN CLUB CAR - NIGHT

They are at a table, sipping drinks. Bert shuffles a deck of cards as he talks. Eddie, like a schoolboy, listens intently. Sarah sits apart, watching them both.

BERT

Fats knew the game was in the clutch, knew he had to do something to stop ya. He played it smart.

EDDIE

I played that game, Bert. In my head I played it a thousand times.

BERT

Play it again. Learn something.

(laughs, to Sarah)

Fats went in the john, see? Washed his face, cleaned his fingernails, made his mind a blank, combed his

hair, came back all ready to go.

(to Eddie)

You were through. You saw him, you saw how he looked. Clean, all set to start all over again. Hold tight and push hard. You know what you were doing? You were waitin' to get beat. Flattened out on your butt, swimmin' around in glory. And whisky. Probably deciding how you could lose.

SARAH

What makes you know so much? How do you know what Eddie was thinking?

BERT

I know. Been there myself. We've all been there, haven't we, Miss Packard?

Eddie glances at Sarah who stares mutely at Bert.

BERT

(takes a cigarette)

Got a match, Eddie?

Eddie reaches across to light Bert's cigarette with the lighter Sarah gave him. Bert's own lighter is on the table, before him. Sarah sees it, picks it up, and sparks it into flame.

SARAH

Doesn't your lighter work, Mr. Gordon?

BERT

(smiling politely)

Oh, I forgot all about it.

(to Eddie, who still holds the flame)

How's the hands?

EDDIE

Fine.

BERT

Good. I'd hate to think I was putting my money on a cripple.

EDDIE

(angrily)

Hey, whaddya say something like that for?

SARAH

It's all right, Eddie. I'm sure Mr. Gordon meant no offense. It was a figure of speech.

BERT

That's right, Miss Packard.

SARAH

And a fact is a fact.

BERT

She's a smart girl, Eddie.

Bert goes back to shuffling his deck of cards.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LOUISVILLE HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

The lobby is thronged with gamblers and their women, sportsmen, tourists, all there for the Derby. A jazz combo can be heard over the din of their voices. Eddie, looking excited, leads Sarah through the crowd. Behind them is Bert, his face now shaded by dark glasses, following a bellhop to the main desk.

BELLHOP

Right this way, Mr. Gordon.

He forces his way through some people to get to the desk.

BELLHOP

Here you are, Mr. Gordon.

CONCIERGE

Suite fifty-six.

BERT

Look, I-I wired ahead for two suites adjoining.

CONCIERGE

I don't recall.

BERT

Well, I do. I want two suites.

CONCIERGE

Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Gordon. We're filled up. This is Derby week.

Bert displays a neatly folded wad of money in his hand.

BERT

Look, son, you've got it all wrong. You must have gotten my wire. Look through your reservations, huh?

CONCIERGE

(artfully accepts  
cash bribe)

I'll see what I can do... You were right, Mr. Gordon. I mislaid your wire. Uh, two adjoining suites?

Eddie laughs and moves toward the open door leading to the billiard rooms. His face glows as he watches the flow of men moving in and out of the crowded room, and hears the sound of clicking pool balls. He tucks his cue case under his arm and turns to Bert and Sarah who join him.

EDDIE

(to Bert)

You know, that's real sweet music in there. You can almost smell the action and the money. You know, I can feel it right down in the bottom of my shoes.

BERT

(laughs)

Come on, let's go...

Before they can head to their rooms, a small, neatly groomed man approaches Eddie.

BILLY

Eddie!

EDDIE

(shaking his hand warmly)

Hey, Billy, how are ya?

BILLY

Fast Eddie. I didn't know you were here. Everybody's here. It's like a hustler's convention. The Whetstone Kid, Johnny Jumbo. C'mon in. The guys'll be glad to see you. C'mon.

EDDIE

(to Sarah)

What room are you in?

SARAH

Fifty-seven.

EDDIE

I'll be up later.

Sarah turns toward the elevators, with Bert behind her, jiggling his keys.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOTEL SUITE - NIGHT

The bellboy unlocks the door and Sarah enters. The doors to the other suite are open. As she catches sight of Bert arranging things with the bellboy she closes one door. The bellboy leaves as she moves to close the other.

BERT

Oh, wait a minute, Miss Packard.

SARAH

We're neighbors now. You can call me Sarah.

He comes to the door, holding it open.

BERT

I want to talk to you.

SARAH

Do we need words?

BERT

Yeah, I think we do. We could try to cut each other up. But that would be bad for everybody. Bad for me, bad for you. And worst of all, be bad for Eddie.

SARAH

You know what's good for him?

BERT

To win.

SARAH

For whom and for what?

BERT

For what makes the world go round. For money, and for glory.

SARAH

You didn't answer my first question. For whom?

BERT

All right. Today for me, tomorrow for himself.

SARAH

No, there's no tomorrow. Not with you. You own all the tomorrows because you buy them today, and you buy cheap.

BERT

(nods)

Well, nobody has to sell.

He turns away.

SARAH

You bastard.

BERT

(turns back to her,  
savagely)

Listen, Miss Ladybird, you're here on a rain check and I know it. You're hanging on by your nails. You let that glory whistle blow loud and clear for Eddie and you're a wreck on a railroad track. You're a horse that finished last. So don't make trouble, Miss Ladybird. Live and let live. While you can.

There is a long pause as he glares at her.

BERT

I'll make it up to you.

SARAH

(weakly)

How?

BERT

You tell me.

He goes back into his room. She closes the door and leans against it.

CUT TO:

EXT. RACETRACK - DAY

Screams are heard as the horses jerk out of the starting gate to begin their runs.

CUT TO:

INT. RACETRACK BAR - DAY

Eddie cashes in a winning ticket

EDDIE

(to the cashier)

Thanks.

Eddie moves through the ornate racetrack bar to join Sarah at a table.

Sarah has been drinking.

EDDIE

(excited)

Where's Bert?

SARAH  
He went off someplace.

EDDIE  
Well, that old lovin' horse paid  
twenty-two forty.  
(counts his money)  
Let's see... two hundred I won from  
the jockey last night. And today at  
the track... I got five hundred and  
forty bucks.  
(folds it up)  
Here, you hold it.

SARAH  
(takes it)  
Why?

EDDIE  
Just for luck.

As she puts the money in her purse, Bert sits down.

BERT  
Hey, Findley's here.

EDDIE  
Where?

BERT  
Over there by the bar.

We see Findley, studying his program and holding a drink in his hand.

He is tall and refined, with a pale, debauched, yet oddly youthful face that some men of forty or more sometimes have. A cork-tipped cigarette dangles from his fingers.

EDDIE  
Aren't you gonna go over and talk to him?

BERT  
Nah. Sit tight. He'll be over here.

Findley spots Bert, takes a long drag on his cigarette, and saunters toward them.

BERT  
(to Sarah)  
Are you ready for another?

SARAH  
Thank you.

Bert points to Eddie.

EDDIE

No, no more for me.

FINDLEY

(joins them, speaks  
in a soft Southern  
drawl, to Bert)

Well, hello. Haven't seen you in a  
long time.

BERT

Well, hello. Haven't been here for a  
long time.

(makes introductions)

Ah, Miss Packard, Eddie Felson...  
James...

Bert snaps his fingers, pretending to forget Findley's name.

FINDLEY

Findley.

EDDIE

Glad to meet you.

FINDLEY

And I you.

(shakes Eddie's hand)

I think I've heard about you, Mr.  
Felson. You play pocket billiards,  
don't you?

EDDIE

(playing along)

Now and then. Why, do you?

FINDLEY

A little, although I'm afraid I  
generally lose.

BERT

So does Eddie.

EDDIE

Well, I win sometimes.

FINDLEY

(smugly)

I'll bet you do, Mr. Felson. I'll  
just bet you do.

EDDIE

How much?

FINDLEY

Bert, I believe Mr. Felson's making  
a proposition.

BERT

Could be.

FINDLEY

Well, Mr. Felson, maybe you could  
come out to my place some evening.  
We could play a few games of  
billiards.

EDDIE

When?

FINDLEY

You're very direct, Mr. Felson.

EDDIE

That's right. When?

FINDLEY

Would you like to come out tonight?

EDDIE

What time?

FINDLEY

I'm having some people over for drinks  
right after the races. Why don't you  
all come over? Then about nine, ten  
o'clock we can play.

BERT

We'll be there.

FINDLEY

Good, good.

He nods to them all, and leaves.

SARAH

If you don't mind I think I'll stay  
at the hotel.

EDDIE

Well, what's the matter?

SARAH

(her voice slurred)

I'm a little tired.

BERT

C'mon, there'll be a lot of laughs.  
Findley's parties are famous. He  
invites everybody from top to bottom,

from high society to every tout,  
hustler, and tramp in town. That's  
another way he has of gettin' his  
kicks. It excites him to be around  
what he calls the criminal type.  
Some men are like that.

(beat)

Some women too.

Sarah gives Bert a look.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FINDLEY'S PARTY - NIGHT

The camera tilts upward from a Dixieland combo blaring out a bouncy tune to find Sarah, descending the stairs, looking on at the party below. Holding the rail with one hand, and a champagne glass in the other, she maneuvers her way down the steps. She stops a waitress on the way upstairs and exchanges her glass for a new one. We follow her unsteady, doll-like descent. She moves slowly, dreamily past the combo; past Eddie, who is cornered by a chic blonde in a low-cut dress; past Findley, alone with his drink, observing his guests; past the bleary-eyed couples on the dance floor, until she comes to the bar.

Bert is there too, his head bobbing to the Dixie beat, his eyes running over her body so plainly covered by a cotton print dress. Spinning away from him, she takes her glass and goes to a corner of the room. Bert walks casually to her side. He leans over and whispers something in her ear. Her face hardens. Angrily she turns and throws her champagne in his face and smashes her glass on the floor. Then she starts to cry and starts to fall, but Bert holds her up by the shoulders. The music stops. The dance couples strain to get a look at what has happened.

Eddie shoves through the gawking crowd.

EDDIE

What's the matter? What happened?

BERT

It's all right. She had a little too  
much to drink, that's all. Forget  
it.

(to Sarah)

Go upstairs and sleep it off.

Eddie tries to take her in his arms, but she beats on his chest, sobbing, unable to make words.

EDDIE

Hey, c'mon. Cut it out! Do what he  
says. Come on upstairs.

Eddie drags her limp, trembling body across the dance floor to the stairs. Bert watches them go, wiping the champagne off his coat lapels.

The music starts up again.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. AN UPSTAIRS COAT ROOM - TIME LAPSE

A Negro maid sits patiently in the room, watching over Sarah and the coats that Sarah is lying on. A woman enters and, disgusted, pushes Sarah off her fur coat. Eddie appears in the doorway. The woman takes her coat and leaves. Eddie looks at Sarah for a moment, then turns and walks out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BILLIARD ROOM AT FINDLEY'S - NIGHT

Findley, drink and cork-tipped cigarette in hand, escorts Bert and Eddie down the stairs to his game room. It is a beautifully appointed salon, wood-paneled, filled with plush divans and decorated with terra cotta Roman statuary. In the center of the room is the billiard table, now covered by a cloth. Findley goes to the bar.

FINDLEY

You gentlemen care for a drink?

EDDIE

(steps briskly into  
the room)

No, none for me. Come on, let's play.

FINDLEY

By all means.

Eddie eagerly pulls back the cloth that covers the table. But it's not a pool table -- it's a billiard table.

EDDIE

I thought we came here to play pool.

FINDLEY

I don't play pool, Mr. Felson. I play billiards. My house, my game. You don't have to play if you don't want to.

BERT

Well, we won't.

EDDIE

C'mon, Bert. Let me play him.

BERT

(to Findley)  
How much?

FINDLEY  
Oh, we'll start small... a hundred  
dollars a game.

BERT  
(to Eddie)  
You ever played billiards before?

EDDIE  
Sure.

BERT  
You hustlin' me?

FINDLEY  
I'm sure Mr. Felson knows what he's  
doing. Certainly you can afford a  
hundred dollars to find out.

BERT  
Deal the cards.

Eddie finishes uncovering the table. Bert takes a seat.  
Findley has a mischievous look on his face as he brings out  
a cloth bag and pours out the three billiard balls on the  
table.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BILLIARD GAME - TIME LAPSE

Eddie shoots. His red ball ricochets off the shoulder and  
returns to kiss the third ball.

FINDLEY  
Beautiful shot, Felson. Beautiful.  
You've played billiards before, Mr.  
Felson. Ah, you gentlemen sure you  
don't care for a drink?

EDDIE  
Oh no, nothing for me.

Findley steps up to the bar, leaving Bert and Eddie alone.

EDDIE  
(to Bert)  
How do we stand?

BERT  
'Bout even.

EDDIE  
When do I raise the bet?

BERT

I don't know.

EDDIE

Bert, if that's his best game, I can beat him.

BERT

Level with me, Eddie. You ever play billiards before?

EDDIE

What's the difference? You got a pool cue, balls on the table. All you gotta do is get the feel of it.

FINDLEY

(returns with a fresh drink)

Like to raise the stakes, Mr. Felson?

EDDIE

(to Bert)

Okay?

BERT

How much?

FINDLEY

Oh, about five hundred.

BERT

(to Eddie)

Do you really think you can beat him?

FINDLEY

Of course he thinks he can beat me, Bert. He wouldn't be playing me if he didn't. Right, Felson?

BERT

I didn't ask him can he beat you. I already know he can beat you. I asked him will he? With Eddie, that's two different things.

EDDIE

I can beat him.

BERT

All right. Five hundred.

Findley points to a statue on a table behind the couch. It is a figure of Pan, with horns sticking up through his curly head, and the legs of a goat extending down below his waist.

FINDLEY

Have you noticed, Bert? This fellow here bears a striking resemblance to you. It seems as though you might have modeled for the artist.

BERT

(nods)

It's possible.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BILLIARD GAME - TIME LAPSE

Findley completes a shot, then lays his cue gently on the table and goes to the bar.

FINDLEY

Mark that one up too, Bert.

Eddie, his coat off, rubs his hand nervously.

EDDIE

I'll beat him the next game.

BERT

(toying with his  
billfold)

How're the hands?

EDDIE

They're fine.

BERT

Well, rack up your cue. We're leavin'.

FINDLEY

That seems a shame. The night is young.

BERT

The night is two thousand dollars old.

EDDIE

Hey, Bert. Wait a minute!

BERT

I said we're leavin'.

Bert turns his back on Eddie and joins Findley at the bar. Eddie stands helplessly for a moment. Findley pours a drink as Eddie approaches.

EDDIE

I can beat him, Bert. Now he suckered

me 'cause he knows how to hustle. I didn't think he did. But I can outplay him. I can beat him.

BERT

I don't believe you, Eddie. I think you're still a loser.

EDDIE

All right, then. I'll play him with my own money.

He reaches in his pocket, then remembers that he gave his money to Sarah.

EDDIE

I'll be right back.

He bounds up the stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSTAIRS COAT ROOM - NIGHT

He bursts into the room, goes past Sarah, stretched out on the bed, and takes the money out of her purse. She is facing away from him but her eyes are open. She listens to him as he shuts the door loudly on his way out.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BILLIARD ROOM - NIGHT

Eddie leaps down the stairs, two at a time.

EDDIE

Okay, c'mon. Let's play.

Bert eyes Eddie with controlled rage as the two get ready to play again.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BILLIARD ROOM - TIME LAPSE

A game has just ended as Sarah quietly descends the stairs. She stands at the rail, listening.

EDDIE (O.S.)

There it is. I'm broke.

FINDLEY (O.S.)

Ah, that's unfortunate, Mr. Felson.

EDDIE (O.S.)

For who, Mr. Findley? ...Bert, he only beat me by one point. Now, you

can't get off me now.

BERT (O.S.)

The bank is closed.

Bert sits with his shoes up on the couch.

EDDIE

Please don't get off me now.

BERT

I know when to quit. You don't. Win or lose, you don't know when to quit.

EDDIE

(down on one knee)

What do you want me to do, huh? What do you want me to do? Just say it and you got it but PLEASE don't get off me now.

SARAH

(from the stairs)

Don't beg him, Eddie.

Eddie turns and sees her.

EDDIE

Go on back to the hotel.

SARAH

Please, Eddie, don't beg him.

EDDIE

Would you go on back to the hotel? Take a cab, go on back to the hotel.

SARAH

Doesn't all of this come through to you, Eddie? Doesn't any of this mean anything to you? That man, this place, the people. They wear masks, Eddie. And underneath the masks they're perverted, twisted, crippled.

EDDIE

Shut up.

His eyes are shut tight; his balled-up fists rub against his temples.

SARAH

(moving to him)

Don't wear a mask, Eddie. You don't have to.

(points to Bert)

That's Turk, Eddie, the man who broke

your thumbs. Only he's not going to break your thumbs. He'll break your heart, your guts. And for the same reason -- 'cause he hates you, 'cause of what you are. 'Cause of what you have and he hasn't.

EDDIE

(rises)

Would you get off my back, Sarah?  
Once and for all, will you get out,  
will you GET OFF MY BACK?!

There is a long pause.

BERT

Go ahead and play him, Eddie. Play  
him for a thousand dollars a game.

A stunned Eddie moves to the billiard table. Defeated, Sarah turns and goes up the stairs. The men return to the table to continue their game.

Bert, deeply satisfied, puts on his coat and sits to watch the action.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FINDLEY'S DEN - TIME LAPSE

A shaken Findley flops into a leather swivel chair. A bucket of iced champagne sits on the desk, ready to be emptied. Findley puffs on his cigarette as he looks at the impatient face of Bert, slouching in the chair across from him. Eddie leans against a wall nearby. He is quiet, morose.

FINDLEY

Will you take a check, Bert?

BERT

(pause)

Cash.

FINDLEY

How much do I owe you?

BERT

Twelve thousand.

Findley reaches nervously for the bottle, gulps at his drink. Then he unlocks his desk drawer and takes out the money. Eddie looks on as Findley gives the money to Bert.

FINDLEY

Here.

(to Eddie)

Been an interestin' evening.

EDDIE  
Yeah, sure has.

FINDLEY  
(to a valet)  
Charles, will you call a cab for  
these gentlemen, please.  
(to Eddie)  
I'd show you to the door, but I...

EDDIE  
Oh yeah, yeah. You're tired.  
(to Bert)  
And beat.

FINDLEY  
Yeah. You must come again.

EDDIE  
Yeah. Sure.

Eddie moves to leave. Findley and Bert watch him go.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FINDLEY'S FOYER - NIGHT

Eddie waits for Bert to come down the stairs.

BERT  
There's your share. Three thousand.

CHARLES  
The cab's waiting.

BERT  
(tips him)  
Oh, yeah. Here. Thanks... C'mon,  
Eddie, let's go.

EDDIE  
I wanna walk.

BERT  
It's a long walk.

EDDIE  
I got time, Bert.

BERT  
You want me to tell her for you?

EDDIE  
Tell her what?

BERT

You gotta be hard, Eddie.

Eddie abruptly turns and walks out of the house. Bert watches him for a moment then follows.

CUT TO:

INT. BERT'S HOTEL SUITE - LATE NIGHT

Bert enters his suite, removes his overcoat, then looks at the door that divides his room from Sarah's. He seems hesitant, unsure of himself. He pours himself a drink and downs it in one gulp, walks to the door, listens, and opens it himself without knocking. Sarah is there, seated primly on the bed. There is a drink in her hand, and a suitcase beside her on the bed. Bert enters her suite and confronts her.

BERT

When are you leaving?

Sarah's voice is subdued, controlled.

SARAH

In a little while. That's what you want, isn't it?

BERT

It's what Eddie wants. He, uh, told me to give you some money.

He stands over her, pulling a wad of bills from his pocket.

SARAH

Put it on the bed. That's the way it's done, isn't it?

BERT

(tossing it there)  
That's the way it's done.

SARAH

And the way you're looking at me, is that the way you look at a man you've just beaten? As if you'd just taken his money, and now all you want is... his pride?

BERT

All I want's the money.

SARAH

Sure, sure, just the money, and the aristocratic pleasure of seeing him fall apart. You're a Roman, Bert. You have to win them all.

He picks her up and tries to kiss her but she is cold and limp in his arms, so he lets go and she drops back on the bed. Then he turns and walks back into his room. She waits for a moment. Then she takes a cigarette out of a pack, gets up, and goes into his room.

SARAH  
(at the door)  
You got a drink?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BERT'S HOTEL SUITE - TIME LAPSE

In the bathroom mirror we see Bert asleep on his bed. The sheets are rumpled and tossed about. Then we see Sarah, in her slip, enter the bathroom and shut the door. She takes out her lipstick and scrawls across the image of herself in the glass "Perverted, twisted, crippled." She underlines the word "crippled."

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - EARLY MORNING

Eddie is just getting back. He walks through the lobby, ignoring the uniformed policeman standing nearby, and stops at the desk.

EDDIE  
Give me my key, please. Room fifty-seven.

The concierge stares dumbly.

EDDIE  
Well, c'mon, give me my key.

The concierge hands it to him. Eddie walks quickly toward the elevators.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOTEL SUITE - TIME LAPSE

He enters, sees the money on Sarah's bed, puts down his cue case, and turns to see a crowd in the adjoining room. Bert, laying in bed, talks to a plainclothesman who stands over him, taking notes. A photographer with a flash camera stands by the bathroom.

PLAINCLOTHESMAN  
Now, let's go over this again. You say you were in the other room...

BERT  
No, she closed the door. I told you

she closed the door. I was in the other room. She closed the door, went in there, maybe, I don't know, ten minutes, five minutes...

Bert stops when he sees Eddie through the open door. A uniformed policeman bars Eddie's entrance.

BERT  
(to the policeman)  
Hey. Let him come in, huh?

Eddie comes in. He looks at the detectives around Bert's bed.

BERT  
Eddie?

The photographer's bulb flashes as he takes a picture of the bathroom.

Eddie pushes by the photographer, then stops as he sees Sarah's body laid out on the tiled floor. He drops to his knees beside her.

BERT  
Eddie?

Eddie reaches out to touch her, then pulls back his hand. Bert appears at the bathroom door behind him.

BERT  
Eddie? She come in here, Eddie. She asked me for a drink. I give her one. We had a few more.

Eyes closed, he writhes as he listens to Bert.

BERT  
Eddie, she came in here.

Suddenly he uncoils and lunges at Bert, grasping him by the throat and pushing him back. A policeman untangles them, but Eddie breaks free. We hear Bert scream as he squirms along the floor trying to avoid Eddie's fists.

FADE OUT:

INT. AMES POOL HALL - LATE AFTERNOON

FADE IN:

Minnesota Fats sits in his chair, engrossed in the afternoon paper. Big John is at a pool table, trying out a few shots. Bert, in dark glasses, stands near the cashier's cage, chucking dice into a leather shaker.

The noise of the dice echoes in the slow, late afternoon gloom of Ames.

When Bert sees Eddie push open the glass doors, he draws himself up fearfully like a turtle, and motions with his eyes to his men for protection. Eddie, his cue case tucked under his arm, walks straight toward him. He stops, stares at him for a moment, then turns and walks over to Minnesota Fats.

EDDIE

I came to play pool, Fats.

FATS

(after a glance at Bert)

That's good, Eddie. For how much?

EDDIE

You name it.

FATS

Thousand dollars a game.

EDDIE

Let's make it three thousand dollars a game, Fats. C'mon, three thousand dollars. That's my bankroll, my life's savings.

(beat)

What's the matter, Fats? All you gotta do is beat me the first game and I'm on my way back to Oakland.

FATS

Let's go.

Fats rises, ready to play. Eddie starts to screw his cue together.

EDDIE

Get on me, Bert. I can't lose.

He turns to join Fats at the table. The balls are already racked and ready.

FATS

Willie.

Willie collects their stake money and prepares to toss the coin.

Preacher, Big John draw up their chairs around the table. Bert also takes a seat, but far away, near the coat rack.

WILLIE

Call it.

EDDIE

Heads.

Willie taps Fats on the lapel. It's his break. Sausage sends the cue ball down the table and the game begins at once. Fats makes a good break, leaving the cue ball teetering over the far corner pocket. He looks up at Eddie, and steps back. Eddie looks at the lineup of the balls. Then he sets down his cue and walks over to the washroom. He glances at Bert as he sprinkles the powder on his hands.

EDDIE

How shall I play that one, Bert?  
Play it safe? That's the way you  
always told me to play it, safe,  
play the percentage. Well, here we  
go... fast and loose.

He turns and snatches up his cue.

EDDIE

One ball, corner pocket.  
(chalks his cue, lines  
up his shot)  
Yeah, percentage players die broke  
too, don't they, Bert?

He rams a bank shot into the pack. The one ball rolls in, while others scatter about the table. The crowd applauds. Eddie moves swiftly to his next shot. As he plays, he talks to Bert.

EDDIE

How can I lose? Twelve ball.  
(shot goes in)  
I mean, how can I lose? Because you  
were right, Bert. I mean, it's not  
enough that you just have talent.  
You gotta have character too. Four  
ball.  
(shot goes in, a pause)  
Yeah and I sure got character now. I  
picked it up in a hotel room in  
Louisville.

Bert and Fats exchange glances.

FATS

(from his seat)  
Shoot pool, Fast Eddie.

EDDIE

I'm shootin' pool, Fats. When I miss  
you can shoot.

Eddie returns to his game and Fats waits for his turn, puffing

steadily on his cigarette. Bert shifts uneasily in his chair and we hear the pool balls knock together, then slowly roll down the track through the belly of the table.

EDDIE

Five ball.  
(shot goes in)  
...Fourteen ball.  
(shot goes in)  
...Four ball.

The shot goes in. Eddie looks significantly at Fats who lowers his eyes and puffs on his cigarette.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME - TIME LAPSE

A VOICE

That's game.

The balls are racked. Eddie sinks shots right and left -- some tricky, some not. Bert and Fats exchange uneasy looks. Eddie circles the table like a hawk. Then, Fats is up; his jacket is off, his tie is pulled loose. He makes a shot, chalks his cue.

FATS

Eight ball.

It's a hard shot and he misses. Eddie moves to take his shot, ignoring Fats altogether.

EDDIE

Thirteen ball.

Bert looks on. But Eddie is shooting pool now, making all his shots quickly and accurately. A depressed Fats watches him shoot.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE GAME - TIME LAPSE

The clock over the door reads six o'clock. Fats is still in his seat.

He has a drink in his hand.

FATS

I quit, Eddie. I can't beat you.  
Willie, give him the stakes.  
(rises, to Bert)  
You got yourself a pool player.

EDDIE

(softly, as he counts

his money)  
Preacher, gimme my coat, will ya?

BERT  
Where do you think you're going?

Eddie slips into the jacket, helped by Preacher.

BERT  
Eddie?...  
(loses it)  
YOU OWE ME MONEY!

EDDIE  
(calmly)  
And just how do you figure that,  
Bert? What do you figure I owe you?

BERT  
Half.

EDDIE  
In Louisville it was seventy-five  
per cent.

BERT  
Well, here it's half.

EDDIE  
What if I don't pay ya, Bert?

BERT  
(chuckling)  
You don't pay me? You gonna get your  
thumbs broken.  
(stands up and paces)  
And your fingers. And if I want them  
to, your right arm in three or four  
places.

FATS  
Better pay him, Eddie.

Eddie unscrews his cue, thinking it over. Bert's bodyguards  
stand around, waiting for the word.

EDDIE  
So you figure you're still my manager,  
huh?

BERT  
I'm a businessman, kid.

EDDIE  
Well, you got a lot of games lined  
up for me?

BERT

Yeah, we're gonna make a lotta money together, from now on.

EDDIE

Fifty per cent?

BERT

No, it don't have to be fifty. It can be thirty... twenty-five.

EDDIE

We really stuck the knife in her, didn't we, Bert?

BERT

(disgustedly)  
Aaaahhhh!

EDDIE

Boy, we really gave it to her good.

BERT

If it didn't happen in Louisville, it'd happened someplace else. If it didn't happen now, it'd happen six months from now. That's the kinda dame she was.

EDDIE

And we twisted it, didn't we, Bert? Course, maybe that doesn't stick in your throat cause you spit it out just like you spit out everything else. But it sticks in mine. I loved her, Bert. I traded her in on a pool game. But that wouldn't mean anything to you. Because who did you ever care about? Just win, win, you said, win, that's the important thing. You don't know what winnin' is, Bert. You're a loser. 'Cause you're dead inside, and you can't live unless you make everything else dead around ya.

Fats listens, his head bowed.

EDDIE

Too high, Bert. Price is too high. Because if I take it, she never lived, she never died. And we both know that's not true, Bert, don't we, huh? She lived, she died. Boy, you better... You tell your boys they better kill me, Bert. They better go all the way with me. Because if they

just bust me up, I'll put all those pieces back together again, and so help me, so help me God, Bert... I'm gonna come back here and I'm gonna kill you.

Bert's men start to move forward but he stops them with a gesture of his hand. He tries to smile. A friendly smile.

BERT  
All right... All right.

Eddie puts away his cue.

BERT  
Only, uh, don't ever walk into a big-time pool hall again.

Eddie just stares at Bert, then looks over at the downcast face of Minnesota Fats.

EDDIE  
Fat man...

Fats looks up at Eddie.

EDDIE  
...you shoot a great game of pool.

FATS  
(saluting him with  
his glass of whisky)  
So do you, Fast Eddie.

Eddie takes his cue case and heads for the door. He stops for a moment, looks around at the rows of empty tables, and goes out. Then Ames returns to normal. Fats puts on his coat; Henry sweeps up. And Bert takes his seat again on his throne overlooking Ames, sipping his glass of milk.

FADE OUT:

THE END