

THIS IS A WORK IN PROGRESS.
THERE ARE INCONSISTENCIES BECAUSE
THE LOCALE IS CHANGING FROM NEW YORK
TO LOS ANGELES. PLEASE DON'T LET THEM
DISTURB YOU TOO MUCH...

COLLATERAL

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FADE IN:

CREDIT SEQUENCE:

Images wipe across the screen, kinetic and abstract, floating
and dreamlike in SLO-MO:

Shades of yellow. Ribbons of silver. Shimmers of chrome.

Headlights sweeping past, flaring to white. Brake lights flashing, halating red. Reflections of overhead fluorescents flowing like liquid along windshield glass...

SOUNDS are dreamlike and abstract as well, echoey and discordant, bouncing off concrete walls:

Car doors OPENING and CLOSING. PISTONS firing up. Brakes SQUEALING. A BABBLE of multi-lingual crosstalk. An ebb and flow of DOZENS OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF MUSIC -- rap, reggae, country, Middle Eastern rhythms, a sitar...

INT - TAXI DISPATCH - QUEENS - DAY

...and we find ourselves in a busy underground garage at change of shift. YELLOW FORD CROWN VICTORIAS are wiping screen, a balletic convergence of arriving and departing cars.

TWO CABS

wipe screen going in opposite directions, parting like curtains to reveal:

MAX RILKE

sitting alone in the midst of it all, biding his time reading a paperback, a battered old BRIEFCASE by his side.

Other CABBIES, mostly immigrants, are in boisterous groups, swapping stories, sharing cigarettes, counting cash.

Not Max. He seems to prefer his own company.

An arriving CAB squeals to a stop. The DAYSHIFT DRIVER gets out, tosses Max the keys...

TIMECUT:

AND IN A SERIES OF SHOTS, Max prepares for his workday:

Wiping the seats with paper towels and 409...

Repairing a tiny tear in the upholstery with DUCT TAPE...

Fitting his T.L.C. LICENSE into the small Lexan slot...

Checking his lights. Indicators. Hazards. All fine...

As CAR HORNS BLARE and CABBIES SHOUT, Max gets behind the wheel, closes the door...

INT - CAB - DAY

...and WHAM! The noise evaporates into welcome silence. Max takes a moment to savor it.

He starts the engine. RAP MUSIC BLARES from the radio. Max quickly turns the volume down, scans the dial to a CLASSICAL STATION. A soothing MOZART SONATA fills the cab.

One last thing. Max opens his briefcase, pulls out

A TATTERED POSTCARD

which depicts the whitest sand and bluest sea you can imagine. A dream place. Limitless horizon. Sailboats dotting the blue. It's Tobago Cays, the Grenadines, in the Caribbean.

MAX

slips the postcard under the rubber bands on the visor, where he can see it whenever he wants to. But not now. He flips the visor up, puts the car in gear, and pulls out as we

CUT TO:

AERIAL SHOT - CAB/QUEENSBORO BRIDGE - LATE DAY

Max travels the Queensboro Bridge into the city. The monolithic skyline of Manhattan rises before us, magical in the light, the SOFT CLASSICAL MUSIC lulling our senses...

INT - CAB - MIDTOWN - LATE DAY

...and the harsh, crappy reality of the job intrudes as we find Max driving on Madison with a YOUNG PROFESSIONAL COUPLE having a heated argument in back:

MAN

...why is everything always about you...

WOMAN

...everything is not about me, don't make me the villain here. That asshole was out of line, and you goddamn well know it...

MAN

...I'm sorry, I don't see it that way...

WOMAN

...oh, bullshit! He was intruding on my space, he was demeaning me personally, he was patronizing...

MAN

...what do you want me to do, punch him out? I have to work with him...

WOMAN

...well, last I checked, you were sleeping with me, so unless you wanna start fucking the guy soon, I'd suggest an attitude shift...

WE HOLD on Max enduring it silently, invisible as a piece of furniture. He doesn't exist as far as his passengers are concerned...

INT - CAB - LATE DAY

...and we're back to blessed silence and soft CLASSICAL MUSIC as Max cruises Chinatown looking for his next fare.

Up ahead, he sees a cluster of CHINESE TEENS wearing gang colors. There's a scuffle going on. One kid's getting pounded by two others while everybody else watches.

Max slows, wondering if he should do something. One GANG MEMBER, sipping a bottle of beer, turns and sees Max.

GANG MEMBER

What's you lookin' at, bitch?

The kid throws the beer. Max hits the accelerator as the bottle shatters off the rear windshield...

EXT/INT - CAB - GAS STATION - LATE DAY

...and we find Max carefully cleaning beer off the car with his paper towels and 409. The gas pump CLICKS OFF. He hangs the nozzle back, gets in the car...

...and slams the door. All quiet again.

He flips the visor down, staring at his postcard. Soothed by all that blue. Hypnotized by it. Taking a mental vacation.

In this quiet moment, we realize we're seeing the most private of Max's rituals, the one he doesn't share with anybody.

A SUDDEN KNOCK on the window pulls him out of it. He glances

over, sees an impatient BUSINESSMAN peering in.

BUSINESSMAN

Uptown?

Max nods, flips the visor up, hiding the postcard from view. The man gets in, triggering an inane automatic recording:

JUDGE JUDY

(tinny)

This is Judge Judy! Buckle up back there! It's the law!

Max pulls out of the gas station...

INT - CAB - WEST SIDE - LATE DAY

...and we find a MIDWESTERN FAMILY piling into the cab, the KIDS bickering, Judge Judy yammering, MOM trying to keep some frazzled order, DAD red-faced and fuming:

DAD

Grand Central.

(to his wife)

I'm telling you, we're never coming back to this goddamn city.

MOM

Don't start.

DAD

Never again, Ellen, you can take that to the friggin' bank. I don't care if your sister lives here, she can rot in this shithole for all I care...

Max pulls smoothly into traffic, staying Zen. Once again, he's part of the furniture, alone and untouched...

CUT TO:

EXT - CRIMINAL COURT BUILDING - MAGIC HOUR

Sunset rims the tops of the buildings. Dusk approaching. The civic center is swarming with PEDESTRIANS and TRAFFIC.

INT - CAB - MAGIC HOUR

Max drops off a fare, makes a careful notation in his trip sheet. He puts the car in gear and creeps forward, waiting for a chance to merge with the flow of traffic...

...but he pauses, seeing a commotion in front of the Criminal Court Building. MINICAM CREWS are jostling as REPORTERS swarm around an emerging GROUP OF CITY OFFICIALS.

Suddenly, a pretty young WOMAN breaks free of the group and makes a beeline for the cab, hollering into a cell phone and fending off stray reporters. The reporters don't really care; they're too intent on the other (mostly male) officials.

The woman, ANNIE FARRELL, jumps in the cab and slams the door. Everything about her says "serious professional" from her Armani suit to her glossy leather briefcase. Her adrenaline's still flying as she finishes her call:

ANNIE

...no, those subpoenas have to be ready by seven a.m., hell or high water, indictments go out at eight. That's straight from the front office.

(beat)

Yeah, Spencer, I'm pulling an all-nighter too, so save some tears for me. Yeah, boo-hoo.

She snaps the cell phone shut, lets out a long breath, her head still spinning. She notices Max's eyes in the rearview mirror. Watching her.

MAX

Hi ya' doin'? Where to?

ANNIE

Park Avenue and East 2nd. Take Centre to Canal, up the Bowery, Cooper and Third, left on 41st, come around on Park.

Max pulls away from the curb, starts the meter, mutters:

MAX

I'll take Sixth. It's faster.

ANNIE

What?

MAX

(louder)

Sixth is faster.

ANNIE

Sixth is a parking lot north of 23rd this time of day.

MAX

The Bowery, you gotta deal with runoff from two bridges.

ANNIE

Sixth, you got delivery trucks blocking traffic at Herald Square. Look, I make this trip all the time.

MAX

First Friday of the month? Linens. Roll right off the trucks. They're in and out in twenty minutes...

(checks his watch)

...which means they left fifteen minutes ago. Traffic will be smooth.

Max catches Annie's skeptical look in the rearview mirror.

MAX (CONT'D)

But Bowery's fine, if that's what you want.

ANNIE

We taking bets? What if you're wrong?

MAX

The ride is free.

ANNIE

You got a deal.

EXT - SIXTH AVE - HERALD SQUARE - DUSK

Max's cab maneuvers easily through light traffic.

INT - CAB - DUSK

Annie glances up from a legal brief, noticing the lack of traffic.

ANNIE

Go ahead, say it.

MAX

No. I got lucky with the lights.

ANNIE

No. You were right, I was wrong...
(glances at his license)
...Max.

She sets the brief aside, eyes tired anyway. She notices the MUSIC playing faintly up front. Bach's "Air on a G String."

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Hey, you mind turning this up?

Max doesn't mind at all. He tweaks the volume up. Annie leans her head back to listen, closes her eyes.

MAX

You like Bach?

ANNIE

(nods)

I used to play this piece back in high school.

MAX

Let me guess. Clarinet?

ANNIE

(smiles)

Violin. I never had the lungs for wind instruments.

MAX

Could'a fooled me, the way you were hollering into that cell phone.

ANNIE

(laughs)

Different instrument altogether.

(beat)

You know, if you'd only listened to me, we'd be bogged down in traffic right now, and you could have made yourself an extra five bucks.

MAX

Keep it. Go wild. Have a party.

ANNIE

Why'd you do that?

(off his silence)

Don't tell me you're a gentleman, Max. I thought chivalry was dead as a necessary consequence of gender politics...

MAX

It's no big deal.

ANNIE

No? How many cabbies get you into an argument to save you money?

MAX

There were two of us. I had the other guy killed. Don't need the competition...

She laughs again, charmed by his deadpan.

ANNIE

You're an anomaly in today's world, Max. You're good at what you do, so you must take pride in it...?

MAX

This?

(hesitates)

Temporary. To pay the bills and save. I got plans...

ANNIE

Like what?

MAX

Travel...and things.

An uncomfortable beat. He quickly turns the conversation back to her:

MAX (CONT'D)

You like being a lawyer?

ANNIE

You psychic?

MAX

Sure. I'm starting an 800 hotline.

(off her look)

Caught part of your phone call. And even if I hadn't, there's the dark pinstripe, Armani, elegant, not too hip, which rules out advertising, plus a top-of-the-line briefcase that you live out of, looks like Bottega...

ANNIE

(laughs)

Bottega.

MAX

...Bottega. Guy gets in my cab wearing a catcher's mask, I think he's a ballplayer. You? Definitely Clarence Darrow.

Annie can't help laughing.

ANNIE

Not quite. He did defense. I'm a prosecutor...

MAX

Big case?

ANNIE

Yeah.

EXT - HIGH RISE OFFICE BUILDING - EAST 42ND - DUSK

Max's cab pulls up at the curb. Still a lot of pedestrian and car traffic, people heading home for the night.

INT - CAB - DUSK

Annie's smile fades as she gazes up at her office building, her exhaustion and weariness all coming back.

ANNIE

Man, you got us here fast...

She pulls out her wallet, digging through it for the fare.

MAX

You never answered my question. You like what you do?

ANNIE

(hedging)
Most of the time.

MAX

But not now?

ANNIE

(hesitates)
Like you, I'm good at it. But at this exact moment in time...like I gotta sumo wrestler on my shoulders until tomorrow morning.

MAX

You need a vacation.

ANNIE
(faint smile)
Just had one.

MAX
Not in a cab... I mean a
disconnection...get your head
straight...you know, get it
together...

ANNIE
When was the last time you took one?

MAX
Soon. But I take little ones all the
time. Comoros Islands in the Indian
Ocean.

ANNIE
How often you go?

MAX
Dozen times a day.

He flips the visor down, revealing the postcard of white
beaches, clear green water. It's the first time he's shared
this with anybody:

MAX (CONT'D)
It gets heavy, I take five minutes and
go there. In my head.

On impulse, he slips the postcard free and offers it to her.

ANNIE
No, no way, I couldn't take that...

MAX
Yes, you could. I think you need it
more than I do.
(off her hesitation)
It'll help. I promise.

She accepts the postcard, surprised and touched. Her gaze
lingers on his for a moment. She holds it.

ANNIE
Thanks for everything, Max. Wow...

MAX

Sure thing.

She gets out of the cab, starts to walk away...

...but turns back, ducking to the cab's window. Looking a bit flustered, she pulls a business card and offers it to him.

ANNIE

In case you ever, you know, wanna
argue routes, start an SEC
investigation on a Fortune 500 company
or something...

And with that, she goes. Max is left somewhat stunned, holding her card. He glances down at it:

**ANNIE FARRELL
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE**

ANGLE ON MAX'S CAB

from across the street. Cab idling at the curb. Annie walking away with her briefcase...

...and ANGLE SHIFTS TIGHT TO VINCENT, gazing in their direction. He's dressed sharply, stunning suit, elegant briefcase. Could be a successful businessman. Or lawyer.

A break in the traffic. Vincent jaywalks across toward the building, watching for cars. Halfway across, he glances idly toward Annie...

...and sees her being met at the entrance by SEVERAL D.A.'s MEN and a pair of UNIFORMED COPS. Casual greeting all around.

VINCENT

veers slightly toward Max's cab. His change of direction is so subtle, we might not even notice it; a casual observer would think he'd been heading for the cab all along.

INT - CAB - DUSK

Max barely notices Vincent get in -- he's still holding the business card, quietly marveling at it. He loops up, watching Annie chatting with her associates.

VINCENT

Hello?

MAX

(glances back)

Oh. Sorry.

Try as he might, Max can't hide his good fortune...

VINCENT

Uh, let's go to...

(Max isn't paying
attention)

Hello...?

MAX

Yeah, yeah, sorry...

Max waves the business card in one hand, not quite sure what to do with it.

MAX (CONT'D)

Ever think your life could change
because someone gets in your cab?

Vincent is perplexed, then follows Max's gaze to Annie.

VINCENT

You're either talking about me or
you're gonna ask her out...

Vincent's read Max's mind. Max hadn't thought it through that far...but now that he does, reality's sinking in. Annie's probably out of his league and he knows it.

She and her group disappear into the building. Max jams her card under the rubber bands on the visor, flips the visor up.

MAX

Where to?

Vincent pulls a file from his briefcase, checks an address.

VINCENT

45 Cherry Street.

Max pulls out, starts the meter. The Judge Judy recording blares forth:

VINCENT (CONT'D)

(checks his watch)

How long you think this'll take?

MAX

Twenty-four minutes.

VINCENT

Twenty-four? Not twenty-five? Or
twenty-three?

MAX

Two minutes to get on Broadway.
They're doing some roadwork around the
bridge. Eleven to get downtown. Four
to the Lower East Side. Six to clear
the roadwork. One minute margin for
error. My math says twenty-four.

Enjoying himself, Vincent checks his watch again.

VINCENT

Mind if I time you?

(Max shrugs)

What do I get if you're wrong? A free
ride?

MAX

An apology.

CUT TO:

EXT - BROADWAY - NIGHT

Fully dark now. Max's cab zooms down Broadway, one of thousands
just like it.

INT - CAB - NIGHT

Vincent's gazing up at all the tall buildings, fascinated.

MAX

First time in New York?

VINCENT

Third, but I still can't tell uptown
from downtown. Tell the truth,
whenever I'm here, I can't wait to
leave. Place gets to me. Too loud,
too fast...too much.

(beat)

You like it here?

MAX

It's home.

VINCENT

You share it with over three million
people every day. You know that's the
population of New Zealand? What's

Manhattan, thirteen miles long?
That's a lot of misery crammed into
thirteen miles.

(beat)

Read about this one guy. Gets on the
subway and dies. Six hours he's
riding around before anybody notices.
Think about that. Here's this corpse
doing laps around Manhattan courtesy
of the New York transit system, people
getting on and off, sitting next to
him, and still nobody catches on.
Three million. That's too damn many
people.

MAX

I see your point.

Vincent glances around the cab.

VINCENT

You know, this is the cleanest cab
I've ever been in. This your regular
ride?

MAX

Yeah. I share it with the dayshift
guy.

VINCENT

You prefer nights?

MAX

People are more relaxed. Less stress,
less traffic, better tips.

VINCENT

You on some kind of work plan?

MAX

You mean like benefits?

VINCENT

Yeah. Retirement? Paid sick leave?

MAX

It's not that kind of job.

VINCENT

You should start a union.

MAX

Me, specifically?

VINCENT

Why not?

MAX

Last thing I need is a reason to keep hacking. This job's a fill-in.

VINCENT

Oh? How long you been doing this?

MAX

Twelve years. But I'm working on other stuff...

VINCENT

Like what?

MAX

I don't talk about it, you know... No offense.

VINCENT

(smiles, shrugs)

None taken. There are talkers and doers. I like doers.

EXT - APARTMENT BUILDING - LOWER EAST SIDE - NIGHT

A largely deserted area. Max's cab pulls to the curb...

INT - CAB - NIGHT

...as Vincent closes his briefcase, checks his watch.

VINCENT

Twenty-four minutes! Man, you're hot...

MAX

Yeah. Lucky with the lights.

VINCENT

Bullshit. You probably know the light schedules, too.

(leans forward)

Listen, I'm in town tonight on a closing. Five stops, one night. I gotta catch a six a.m. flight. I got five stops to make, see some friends, collect some signatures. Why don't

you hang with me?

MAX

I'm not a hire car. It's against
regs?

VINCENT

Regulations? These guys don't even
give you sick leave.

(pulls his wallet)

How much you pull down on a good
night?

MAX

Two, two-fifty.

VINCENT

I'll make it an even five hundred.
Plus an extra hundred if you get me to
LAX on time.

Vincent draws FIVE CRISP HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS, waves them
seductively in Max's direction, coaxing him:

VINCENT (CONT'D)

What's it gonna be? C'mon...I know
you want to. Take a chance.

Max succumbs, accepts the money. Vincent smiles, gives him a
firm handshake.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

We have a deal. What's your name?

MAX

Max.

VINCENT

Max? I'm Vincent.

Vincent gets out. Max calls after him:

MAX

I'll wait in the alley.

Vincent nods. Understood. He steps into the building foyer,
scanning the rows of buzzers.

Max puts the car in reverse...

EXT - ALLEY - NIGHT

...and edges the cab around the corner, backing into the alley that flanks the apartment building.

INT - CAB - NIGHT

As Max brings the car to a stop, he notices Vincent's briefcase lying on the back seat. A trusting soul. Max smiles.

MAX

Definitely not from around here.

He kills the engine. Silence.

There's a noticeable lack of city clamor here, just a DISTANT GRUMBLE OF TRAFFIC from Manhattan Bridge. An occasional car passes the mouth of the alley, but that's about it.

Max turns on the radio, tweaks the volume just loud enough to hear it. A Beethoven Sonata. Soothing.

Max checks his watch. Dinnertime. He turns to his battered briefcase on the passenger seat, opens it.

It's filled with carefully arranged items. NAPKINS in the pockets. UTENSILS in the pen holders. MINI-JARS of mayo and mustard. Bread, cheese, and cold cuts in individual baggies. A 1.5 liter PLASTIC BOTTLE of drinking water.

He sets about making his sandwich, everything applied in methodical order, whistling softly with the music.

Sandwich is done. He pauses, glancing up at the visor. He tilts it down, peering at Annie's business card. Wondering what to do. Knowing he'll probably never call her.

He sits a moment, fighting a wave of sadness. Unhappy with himself. With his life. His place in the world.

He raises the sandwich to take a bite...

...and WHAM! SOMETHING BIG lands on the hood like a hammerblow, rocking the car to its axles! A massive SHOWER OF GLASS rains down with the object. A HEADLIGHT EXPLODES! The windshield CRACKS! Max bounces off the ceiling as mini-jars of mustard and mayo do a Jackson Pollack all over the seats...

...and then abrupt, stunning silence.

Max takes a dazed beat, not even sure what hit him. He peers through the windshield...

...and sees a dead face staring back at him. Max recoils with a

yell, scrambles from the cab, heart pounding...

EXT - ALLEY - NIGHT

...and finds a CORPSE on the hood of the car. Some fat guy in a bathrobe. There's shards of tempered glass everywhere, haloing the ground around the cab.

Max is stunned beyond words. He looks around, hoping somebody else saw it. There's nobody.

He looks up to see where the body came from. A window on the top floor has been shattered. A single white curtain billows out, flapping gently in the breeze.

The SOUND OF RUNNING FEET. He turns as Vincent enters the alley and stops. Beat.

Max is in total shock:

MAX

He fell on my cab!
(points)
From up th-th-there.

VINCENT

(pause)
You always stutter?

MAX

Yeah, yeah. Shit, man. Guy fell on my motherfucking cab.

Max points again, as if Vincent might have missed it the first time.

MAX (CONT'D)

I think he's dead.

VINCENT

No shit. Since he has two .45s double-tapped through the sternum and fell six floors onto his head...

Max stares at Vincent. It's finally sinking in:

MAX

You - you killed him?

VINCENT

No-no, I-I shot him. The bullets and the fall killed him.

A frozen beat. Everything out in the open now. Max realizing the trouble he's in. He starts backing away, glancing over his shoulder for an escape route...

...but quick as a flash, like a magic trick, Vincent's got a silenced SIG-SAUER 9MM AUTOMATIC in his hand, slick two-tone chrome and black.

VINCENT
Red-light-green-light, Max? Light's
now red.

He triggers the laser sight, places a GLOWING RED DOT over Max's heart. Max freezes.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
You can run, but you'll die tired.

Max nods. Shakily raises his hands.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
You cool, Max? Say "I'm cool."

MAX
You're cool.

VINCENT
No. You say you're cool.

MAX
I'm cool.

The laser sight clicks off, the gun smoothly vanishes back into Vincent's coat.

VINCENT
Good. Help me out here.

MAX
With what?

VINCENT
You were going to drive me around.
Drop me at LAX. Never be the wiser.
But El Gordo missed the elevator. So
we go to Plan B. Pop the trunk.

MAX
The trunk?

VINCENT

Did I stutter? The trunk. Unless you want him riding up front with you...but given hygiene and his sphincters have let go...

Max reluctantly pops the trunk, circles to the front of the car. Vincent reaches over the hood, grabs the corpse by the bathrobe lapels, heaves the body into a sitting position.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

I'm gonna roll him off the hood.
Always lift with your legs...

MAX

I don't think I can do this.

VINCENT

It's just a dead guy. On three,
ready? Uno. Dos. Three.

He rolls the corpse off the hood. Grimacing, Max gets a firm grip under the arms, while Vincent gets the legs.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Got it?

MAX

Yeah.

They start shuffling toward the trunk. Suddenly, Max lets out a YELL, almost dropping his end.

VINCENT

What?

MAX

His hand moved! His goddamn hand
twitched!

VINCENT

It's a spasm! Jesus, Max, don't be
such a girl...

ANGLE FROM INSIDE TRUNK

as they heave the body inside, pausing to catch their breath.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Fat fuck. Ever heard of a treadmill?

He slams the trunk, shutting us into DARKNESS...

EXT - CAB - NIGHT

...and we find Vincent and Max frantically trying to clean all the blood off the hood and windshield. Max is going at it with paper towels and 409, while Vincent is dousing the hood with Max's 1.5 liter bottle of drinking water.

VINCENT

Six liters of blood in the average Angeleno, he's gotta dump all his on your car.

(a final dousing)

Okay, that's good.

Vincent heads for the car, notices Max isn't moving.

MAX

Uh, look...why don't you just take the car...

VINCENT

...and you promise you'll never tell anybody about this, right? Get in the fucking car.

Vincent ducks into the back seat...

INT - CAB - NIGHT

...and Max gets in behind the wheel.

VINCENT

C'mon, let's go, let's go...

Max turns the key. The ENGINE GRINDS...but doesn't start. He pumps the gas pedal, tries again. MORE GRINDING.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Max. May we leave the scene of the crime now, please.

MAX

I'm trying...

He turns the ignition again and again. GRIND. GRIND. Vincent's getting steamed:

VINCENT

Max.

MAX

It's not me.

Suddenly, the Sig-Sauer reappears in Vincent's hand, deadly sleight-of-hand, muzzle pressed to the base of Max's skull.

VINCENT

Just because we've shared a few laughs, don't think we've bonded.

Max keeps trying the key. GRIND. GRIND.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

You listening to me?

MAX

Yes! I'm trying, I swear!

VINCENT

Try harder. I'm gonna count to three. One...

GRIND. GRIND.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Two...

GRIND. GRIND.

MAX

It's not me, it's the engine! A fat guy fell on it from six floors up!

Max closes his eyes, waiting for the gunshot. Vincent heaves a weary sigh as we

TIMECUT:

The hood's up. Max is working on the engine while Vincent paces back and forth, looking over his shoulder.

VINCENT

(points)

What about that?

MAX

I tried it.

VINCENT

How about the thingy next to it?

MAX

The thingy next to it has nothing to do with the starter motor...

VINCENT

I'm making you nervous. I'm the one with a schedule.

MAX

(makes an adjustment)

Okay, try it now.

Vincent leans in the window, cranks the key. The ENGINE FIRES UP. A look passes between them. They pile into the cab, slam the doors as:

Max pulls out of the alley...

ANGLE FROM STREET

...and the cab accelerates up the street, disappearing around the corner.

A long beat.

Another CAR appears. It cruises down the street and stops in front of the apartment building.

PHIL HELLER emerges from the car. Tall, 40's, soft-spoken, but looks like he could kick your ass if he had to. There's something endearingly hangdog about his face.

He heads into the entry foyer of the building, rings a buzzer. Waits a moment. Rings again. Nothing.

He sighs, pulls a thin strip of metal from the inner pocket of his overcoat, jimmys the door lock...

INT - APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - 6TH FLOOR - NIGHT

Heller comes down the hallway to apartment 607. He raises his hand and knocks loudly...

...causing the door to swing in slightly. He glances down, sees the door frame splintered at the lock. Like it was kicked in. Tensing, he fades to one side, his hand going to his holster at the back of his belt.

He listens. Draws his gun. Baretta 9mm, standard issue, nothing fancy. He reaches out and pushes the door all the way open...

INT - APARTMENT - NIGHT

...revealing a dark shambles. Heller enters cautiously, alert

for the slightest movement or sound.

HELLER

Ivan?

Nothing but silence. Except...

...the curtains across the room are billowing. He crosses the room, sweeps the curtains aside, finds the floor-to-ceiling plate glass window missing. A few jagged shards in the frame.

He leans out, peering to the alley below. A dizzying drop. A halo of broken glass on the alley floor...in the center of which is a big blank spot.

HELLER (CONT'D)

Fuck.

CUT TO:

INT - CAB - TRAVELING - NIGHT

Max winds his way through downtown traffic, in shock, sneaking petrified glances at Vincent in back. Vincent's got a file from his briefcase, studying it. The silence is thick.

Max finds his hand shaking, lifts it off the wheel, tries to steady his fingers. From the back:

VINCENT

Try some deep breathing.

MAX

What?

VINCENT

Adrenaline's wearing off. You get shaky after. It's not uncommon. Deep breathing helps.

Max starts drawing in breaths, letting them out slowly.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

You better?

MAX

I think so.

They stop at a RED LIGHT. Max glances at the passenger seat. Mustard and mayo everywhere, along with stray slices of lunch meat. He parks the gearshift and automatically goes for the paper towels, trying to clean up.

Vincent's eyes appear over the top of the file folder, taking this in. Softly:

VINCENT
What are you doing?

MAX
It's a mess.

VINCENT
So?

Max keeps wiping, as if getting the seats clean might somehow put everything right again.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
Lady Macbeth, leave the seats.
Light's green. We're sitting here.

A CAR HORN HONKS behind Max. The car pulls around them to get through the intersection.

DRIVER
Asshole!

VINCENT
You no longer have the cleanest cab in
La-La. Live with it. Focus on the
job. Drive.

Max nods. Right. He puts the car in gear and proceeds.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
(checks the file)
58th and Central. You know it?

MAX
South Central.

VINCENT
(checks his watch)
How long, you figure?

Max has to force him to concentrate:

MAX
Seventeen minutes. Why?

Silence from the back. Max glances apprehensively in the rearview, realizing:

MAX (CONT'D)

Oh. Oh, no. You're kidding. We...

VINCENT

I told you we had other stops to make tonight.

MAX

You said you were visiting friends!

VINCENT

They're somebody's friends...

(turns a page)

You drive a cab. I kill people. We both do our jobs right, you might survive the night and come out four hundred bucks ahead.

MAX

Listen. I'm not trying to piss you off, see? Okay? I can't drive you around so you can murder folks.

VINCENT

Tonight it is.

MAX

You don't understand. I mean it. Really. I'm not up for this...

Vincent looks forward, realizes Max is on the verge of panic.

VINCENT

(stows the file)

You're stressed. I understand. Keep breathing. Stay calm.

Max starts deep-breathing again, exhaling slowly.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Are you breathing?

MAX

Yes.

VINCENT

What else calms you down? Candy? Cigarettes? Sex? Breathe.

He does.

MAX

Music.

VINCENT

Play music.

Max turns on the radio. SOFT CLASSICAL.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Chopin prelude. Stodgy, but nice.

(Max nods)

Here's the deal. I didn't want you involved in this. Still breathing? But now that you are, we have to make the best of it, Max. Improvise. Life is that way. Adapt to your environment. Survive. Darwin. "Shit happens." The I Ching. Whatever. Roll with it.

MAX

I Ching? You threw a man out a window!

VINCENT

I didn't throw him, he fell.

MAX

What'd he do to you?

VINCENT

Nothing. I only met him the one time.

MAX

How can you kill him like that?

VINCENT

I should only kill people after I get to know 'em?

(off Max's look)

Six billion people on the planet, you're getting bent out of shape 'cause of one fat guy?

MAX

Who was he?

VINCENT

What do you care? Ever hear of Rwanda?

MAX

Rwanda-Burundi. Central Africa.

VINCENT

Tens of thousands killed before
sundown. Nobody's killed that fast
since Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Did you
bat an eye, Max? Join Amnesty
International? No.

(off Max's silence)

I off one Angeleno, you throw a hissy
fit...

Max stops at another RED LIGHT.

MAX

I don't know any Rwandans.

VINCENT

You don't know the guy in the trunk,
either.

(beat)

If it makes you feel better, he was a
villain involved in a Continuing
Criminal Enterprise.

MAX

Oh, it's okay, then. 'Cause you're
just taking out the garbage...

VINCENT

Yeah, like that...

(distracted)

But, anyway, nobody gets out of this
alive. Even if we quit smoking and
cut out red meat. Everybody dies.

Suddenly -- WHOOSH! A BRILLIANT GLARE OF LIGHT stabs into the
cab. Max looks over, horrified to see --

-- an NYPD CRUISER in the lane next to them. The ROOFTOP LIGHTS
start revolving. Max sits frozen at the wheel as the spinning
colors do a hallucinatory dance throughout the cab.

TWO UNIFORMED COPS emerge from the patrol car. Faceless,
imposing silhouettes.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

(tight)

Get rid of 'em.

MAX

How?

VINCENT

You're a cabby. Like talk yourself
out of a ticket?

The cops are now circling to either side of the cab, pulling
their huge head-buster FLASHLIGHTS.

IN TIGHT, NERVE-WRACKING ANGLES:

Vincent eases the briefcase onto his lap. Pops the latches.

Max flinches at the sound. Knowing that's where the gun is.

MAX

Please. Don't do anything.

VINCENT

Then don't let me get cornered, Max.
You don't have the trunk space.

MAX

I can't believe this.

VINCENT

Believe it.

Vincent eases his hand ever so slowly into his briefcase.

MAX

I'll talk to them, I'll talk to them.

VINCENT

Good luck. You think they got
families?

A COP'S HAND descends to the driver's window, raps loudly, GOLD
WEDDING BAND catching the light as it thunks the glass.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

That one's probably married. Think of
his kids. His wife's pregnant...

MAX

I'll deal with it. I will, I will...

A FLASHLIGHT BEAM pops on at the driver's window. Cop #1
glaring light onto Max's eyes.

A SECOND FLASHLIGHT BEAM pops on, this from Cop #2 on the
passenger side. Checking out Vincent in the back. Vincent
blinks good-naturedly, keeps a bland smile on his face.

VINCENT

Okay, okay.

Max rolls his window down. COP #1 leans down, and we see his face for the first time. A beefy-looking Irish guy.

COP #1

License and registration.

Max pulls them off the visor, hands them over. The cop examines them by flashlight.

COP #1 (CONT'D)

This your current address?

MAX

Yes.

From the other side of the cab, COP #2 lets out a laugh. He's dark and Italian-looking, young. He's playing his flashlight beam across the seats. Mustard and mayo everywhere.

COP #2

Wha'd you have, a food fight in here?
Why don't you clean your seats?

Max gives Vincent an "I told you so" look in the rearview mirror. Vincent sighs, hating to admit Max was right.

Cop #2 plays his beam across the cracked windshield and damaged hood. Faint reddish traces in the paint. His smile fades.

COP #2 (CONT'D)

Is that blood?

MAX

Yeah. I hit a deer.

COP #1

A deer?

MAX

Comin' over Coldwater. Goddamn deer jumps out in front of me. You believe that?

COP #1

(indicated Vincent)

You still carrying passengers?

MAX

I was heading back to my garage. It's

on the way.

COP #1

This vehicle's not safe to drive.
We're gonna have to impound it. Get
you towed. Step away from the vehicle
and pop the trunk.

(swings flashlight beam to
Vincent)

I'm sorry, sir, you'll have to find
another cab.

VINCENT

Is that necessary, Officer? I'm just
a few streets from here.

COP #1

I'm afraid it is. Please exit the
cab.

(to Max)

You, too.

Max hears a SOFT CLICK behind him. The unmistakable sound of a
GUN HAMMER BEING COCKED inside a briefcase. He meets Vincent's
gaze in the rearview mirror. A whisper:

VINCENT

You open that trunk, they go in it.

Behind Vincent, through the rear windshield, we see Cop #2
moving to the trunk, playing his flashlight across it.

Max, mouth dry, looks up at Cop #1.

MAX

Come on, it's been a long, shitty day.
How about a break? I'll call a tow
truck myself, I swear. I won't budge
from this spot.

COP #1

Save me the grief. Step out of the
car, sir, and open the trunk.

Max tosses a last hopeless look in the rearview. Vincent's eyes
are starting at him. No mercy there.

Max steps from the car. As the cop escorts Max toward the rear,
Vincent smoothly pulls his Sig-Sauer from his briefcase and
emerges on the passenger side, gun held tight at his side, a
heartbeat away from opening fire...

...when suddenly, with a CRACKLE OF STATIC, a PANICKY VOICE COMES OVER THE POLICE BAND:

POLICE RADIO
1013, 1013! Officers need assistance!
Suspect armed! Canal and Wooster!

Cop #2 throws an urgent look to his partner.

COP #2
Six blocks away.

COP #1
(to Max)
Know what you are? Luckiest cabbie in
LA.

COP #2
(to Vincent, on the move)
Sorry for the inconvenience!

VINCENT
That's quite all right, Officer.

The cops pile into their cruiser and floor it, ENGINE ROARING OFF into the night.

Max and Vincent are left standing there, gazing across the cab at each other.

VINCENT (CONT'D)
Breathe.

Max starts deep-breathing as they get back in the cab...

CUT TO:

EXT - CONSTRUCTION ZONE - NIGHT

A blocks-long Gotterdammerung of razed earth, heaped rubble, and all-night activity. GIANT BULLDOZERS are lurching and belching smoke; huge EARTH MOVERS are shuttling debris from

here to there; CRANES are swinging steel beams skyward. WORKERS are jackhammering, hollering, swearing. LONG SHOWERS OF WELDING SPARKS are lighting up the night. CLOUDS OF DUST are kicking up, carried on the wind before awesome, stories-tall WORK LIGHT GANTRIES. All in all, a surreal setting.

LONG LENS

finds a HEAVYSET MAN IN A RUMPLED SUIT conversing with a GROUP

OF WORKERS. There's a lot of gesturing and hand-waving, everybody shouting to be heard.

The group disperses. The HEAVYSET MAN turns, walking alone across the construction site toward the periphery...

VINCENT

Jesus. Another fat guy.

INT - CAB - NIGHT

Max and Vincent. Watching. Vincent lowers a tiny pair of BINOCULARS from his eyes. The NOISE here is deafening.

VINCENT

Don't these people ever exercise?

The Heavysset Man exits the construction zone through a gated chain link fence, emerging half a block behind the cab. The man vanishes behind some trucks parked back there...

...and Vincent shifts across to the driver's side, looking back, trying to pick up a visual again. Max dips his head, watching in the sideview mirror, his heart in his throat...

...and the Heavysset Man reappears, emerging from behind the trucks through a row of Port-A-San chemical toilets. He heads across the street to a half-completed building -- eight stories of bare concrete frame with open floors, possible a parking structure for this massive redevelopment.

The Heavysset Man steps onto an open steel-cage construction elevator and hits a button. The elevator rises, climbing the outside of the half-completed building.

The elevator stops on the fourth level. The Heavysset Man gets off, disappearing into darkness. There's the dimmest glow of a worklight up there. Probably a temporary office.

Max flinches as he hears the LATCHES POP on Vincent's briefcase. He turns, almost afraid to look. Vincent has just pulled out a chrome .357 Smith & Wesson J-frame revolver. The gun is almost absurdly small.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

(catches Max's look)

What are you lookin' at?

Moving with that unnerving sleight-of-hand precision, Vincent pops five rounds into the gun with a speed-loader. He pockets another speed-loader as backup, latches the briefcase.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Hands on the wheel. Ten and two o'clock, like they taught you in driver's ed.

MAX

Why?

VINCENT

Because I have a gun and I say so.

Max grips the steering wheel. Vincent gets out, opens Max's door. He grabs the roll of duct tape, glances at the mess, gives Max a wry look...

VINCENT (CONT'D)

This cab's a disgrace. No wonder the cops pulled you over.

...and proceeds quickly and efficiently to duct tape Max's hands to the steering wheel, winding it tight.

No sooner is the task complete than:

DISPATCH RADIO (FILTERED)

Max? Max? You out there, you son of a bitch?

Vincent looks to Max, blinks.

VINCENT

Who's that?

MAX

Lenny, my dispatcher.

LENNY (FILTERED)

I know you're out there! Answer the goddamn call!

VINCENT

What happens if you don't?

MAX

He'll keep calling.

LENNY (FILTERED)

Max! Dammit! Answer!

Vincent reaches across Max, pulls the mike off the dash, holds it up to Max's mouth.

VINCENT

Don't blow it.

Max nods. Vincent thumbs the toggle.

MAX

Uh, yeah? Lenny? It's me.

LENNY (FILTERED)

I just got off the phone with the cops. They called to check you brought the cab in...

Silence as Lenny waits for a reaction. Max and Vincent trade a Vincent shrugs, thumbs the toggle. Say something.

MAX

Yeah? So?

LENNY (FILTERED)

So? Aside from I hate talking to cops, they tell me you crashed the shit out of it.

MAX

It got crashed! I didn't...

LENNY (FILTERED)

I give a shit whose fault it was, you're payin'!

VINCENT

It was an accident. You're not liable. Tell him.

MAX

It was an accident. I'm not liable.

LENNY (FILTERED)

I'm making you liable! It's all comin' outta your goddamn pocket...

Vincent stares at at Max, expecting him to respond.

VINCENT

Don't take that. Tell him to shut the fuck up.

MAX

I can't do that. He's the Man. He'll fire my ass.

VINCENT

So what?

MAX

I need the job.

VINCENT

No you don't.

LENNY (FILTERED)

Max? Max? You still there? I'm
talking to you!

Vincent abruptly puts the mike to his mouth, thumbs the toggle.

VINCENT

He's not paying you one cent!

LENNY (FILTERED)

Who the hell is this?

Vincent glances up, tilts the visor down to see Annie's business card.

VINCENT

Vincent Farrell, Assistant U.S.
Attorney. A passenger in this
taxicab, and I'm reporting you to the
DMV...

LENNY (FILTERED)

(beat)

Let's not get excited, sir.

VINCENT

How am I supposed to not get excited,
listening to you trying to extort your
employee, you sarcastic prick?

LENNY (FILTERED)

I was just tryin' to...to...

VINCENT

Tell it to Max.

(shifts the mike)

Tell him he's an asshole.

MAX

(hesitates)

Lenny? You're an asshole.

VINCENT

Tell him next time he pulls any shit,
you're gonna kick his fat ass.

MAX

Next time you pull any shit, I'm gonna
kick your fat ass.

Vincent clicks off, hangs up the mike. Looks at Max.

Beat. Max nods.

VINCENT

(smiles)

Don't wait up, hon. I gotta work
late.

He grabs the ignition keys, shuts Max's door, strolls away.

Max watches in the sideview mirror as Vincent vanishes into
darkness toward the half-completed building.

Max is left alone, trapped in his own cab.

He looks around. The cab is parked at the periphery of the
construction zone on this otherwise dark and eerily deserted
street. Some trucks nearby, a skip-loader, some more rows of
chemical toilets, pallets of sheetrock, but that's about it.

Max jerks and strains against the duct tape, trying to free his
hands. He gives up, breathing hard.

He glances in the sideview, wondering where Vincent is,
straining for a glimpse.

Nothing. Just darkness back there...

...except the construction elevator starts descending, Vincent
has pressed the call button.

Mind racing, Max looks to the construction site. There's over a
hundred guys out there, all within shouting distance.

MAX

HEY! HEY! OVER HERE! I'M IN THE
CAB! HEY! HELP!

Way too much noise for anybody to hear. Screaming now at the
top of his lungs:

MAX (CONT'D)

HELP! GODDAMN IT! THERE'S A MAN WITH
A GUN! HE'S GONNA KILL SOMEBODY!

The work continues unabated. Max glances in the sideview again...

...and sees the construction elevator now rising, slowly climbing floors. Vincent's on his way up.

Max thrashes wildly against the duct tape, screaming with frustration. He starts head-butting the car-horn...

BEEEEEP! BEEP-BEEEEEEEEEP! BEEEEEP! BEEP-BEEP-BEEEEEEEEEP!

He raises his head, checking the construction site. Life goes on. Bulldozers keep chugging.

MAX (CONT'D)

Oh, fuck me.

He shifts low on the seat, getting his knee under the dashboard. He slams his knee up, hitting the RED EMERGENCY LIGHT BUTTON concealed there. EMERGENCY STROBES START FLASHING at the front and rear of the car, lighting up the street...

...and still nobody notices.

MAX (CONT'D)

GODDAMN IT, I'M FLASHING LIKE STUDIO
54 OVER HERE!

He throws a look to the sideview mirror, sweaty and tense, knowing he's out of time.

THE SIDEVIEW MIRROR

PUSHING IN SLOWLY on Max's reflected eyes. Seconds ticking breathlessly away...

...and ANGLE SHIFTS in the mirror, leaving Max's eyes and bringing the half-completed building into view, becoming Max's POV of it. All the construction sounds seem to drain away, becoming a faint background hum...

...all we really hear now is Max's breathing...

...and a MUZZLE FLASH lights up the fourth floor like a flashbulb going off, throwing concrete columns into stark relief. A SECOND FLASH...then nothing. Just darkness.

MAX

gazes into the sideview mirror. Stunned. Knowing he's just witnessed another murder.

He slowly becomes aware of VOICES. He looks up and sees:

TEENAGERS. White kids. Four of them. Coming up the street, approaching from the front of the cab, shielding their eyes against the flashing strobes. Noticing him there.

MAX (CONT'D)

Oh. Oh, thank God, hey! Hey, guys, hey, help me out here!

KID #1

Yo, whassup?

MAX

(fast, stumbling)

I got my, my hands taped to the steering wheel here, there's this guy, he taped me in the car, he's back there somewhere.

KID #2

You all trapped in there and shit?

MAX

...yeah, he's coming back soon, get me loose so I can call the cops...

Kid #2 whispers quickly in Kid #1's ear. Kid #1 nods...and stuns Max by pulling a cheap .38 and pointing it at him.

KID #1

Fuck that, man, gimme your wallet.

The other kids scatter, encircling the cab to steal the hubcaps. Utter disbelief from Max:

MAX

You're kidding me.

KID #1

I'll fuck you up, you don't hand it over.

MAX

(beat)

My hands are taped to the fucking steering wheel!

It takes a moment for the kid to process this. He steps to the window, presses the grimy two-inch muzzle against Max's cheek.

It's utterly terrifying, everything happening fast:

MAX (CONT'D)

...oh God, don't shoot me...

KID #1

...show me the wallet, man, get your
ass up, up...

Max pulls himself up by the steering wheel, trying to get his butt off the seat to give the kid access. The kid gropes for Max's back pocket, trying to get the wallet, pressing the gun to his face, the other kids swarming past him...

KID #3

...got the hubcaps, man, c'mon...

The other kids race on ahead, vanishing in the night. Kid #1 pulls Max's wallet, pockets it...

...and pauses, seeing Vincent's briefcase on the back seat.

The kid yanks open the back door, grabs the briefcase, and takes off after his friends.

Max is gasping, shaken. He can't believe what just happened. He looks in the sideview mirror...

SIDEVIEW MIRROR

...and sees the reflection of Kid #1 sauntering off, cocky as hell, about to vanish into the night...

...when a shadow detaches from the darkness and steps forward, arm raised. BOOOM! A MUZZLE FLASH TWO FEET LONG and a SOUND LIKE A CANNON. It's a very large bullet coming out of a very small gun. The kid flops to the ground like a rag doll.

Vincent moves into the light, crouches next to the kid. He rifles the kid's pockets, retrieves the briefcase, then rises and walks toward the cab, disappearing from the reflection in the sideview mirror...

MAX

is frozen in utter horror. Waiting. The front passenger door opens. Vincent gets in next to Max, hefts his briefcase into the back seat.

Vincent sits for a long moment, staring off, not even looking at Max. Maybe ready to kill him.

Vincent finally sighs, raises something into view. Max's wallet. He tosses it in Max's lap. Softly:

VINCENT

Some people have no respect for other people's property.

He reaches to his belt, pulls something else. He twirls his hand fast, CLICK-CLACKING it open for Max to see: a BUTTERFLY KNIFE, blade gleaming and razor-sharp...

VINCENT (CONT'D)

(quietly)

I had no idea these cabs came equipped with emergency strobes.

(beat)

Where's the button? Under the dash?

MAX

(dry whisper)

Yeah.

Vincent leans over and slices the duct tape, freeing Max's hands. Beat.

VINCENT

You mind turning it off?

Max doesn't move for a moment, then reaches under the dash and turns off the strobes.

TIMECUT:

Vincent's riding in back again. Max is driving away from the construction site. Through the back window, we see the dead kid receding behind them.

Vincent looks drained, but Max is positively shell-shocked. They both stare ahead, neither saying a word...until softly:

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Another collateral.

MAX

What?

VINCENT

Collateral damage.

MAX

I don't understand...

VINCENT

People in the wrong place at the wrong time. Draws attention, which is something you avoid in my line of work.

(meets Max's gaze)

And for you? You attract attention, you're gonna get people killed who don't need to be.

A stretch of silence, then softly:

MAX

Vincent?

VINCENT

Yes, Max?

MAX

Am I collateral?

Pause. A long one.

VINCENT

I haven't decided.

Max is silent. Absorbing this. Vincent checks his watch, trying to shake their mood off:

VINCENT (CONT'D)

But, hey, some good news. This last one put me way ahead of schedule. We've actually got some time to kill.
(thinks a moment)
Jazz? You like jazz?

MAX

I'm...what? Sorry?

VINCENT

Jazz. Music.

MAX

I listen to classical.

VINCENT

Friend of mine told me about this great place in South Central. Says it's like the birthplace of West Coast bebop. Bird. Dexter Gordon. Thelonious Monk. Chet Baker.
(off Max's look)

I'll buy you a drink. Expand your horizons...

CUT TO:

EXT - ALLEY - NIGHT

A crime scene. COPS and FORENSIC TECHNICIANS. In the midst of it all is:

Phil Heller. We had no way of knowing before, but we now realize he's a plainclothes detective. We find him conferring with his superior, WALT MULDOON, 50-ish, a rumpled little Irishman also in plainclothes:

MULDOON

...this snitch of yours, what's his name, Ivan?

HELLER

Ivan Petrov. Supposed to meet me for dinner, never shows up. I come here, find this.

MULDOON

You guys been holding hands?

HELLER

Months now. He's been feeding me information on Dmitri.

MULDOON

Dmitri Gusunov? What the fuck, why? Forget about Dimitri, Feds are all over him. They're a heartbeat away from taking him down. Word's gone out, they don't want us anywhere near him...

HELLER

Oh, we working for the Feds now?
(points up)

If my snitch flew out a window, he's got Dmitri's handprints on his ass. That makes it homicide, that makes it ours.

MULDOON

(as if to a child)
What homicide? Phil. Where's a body? Look. All we got is glass...

He spreads his hands at the alley floor in a gesture that says "show me something besides glass."

FEMALE TECH (O.S.)

We got blood...

They turn. A FEMALE TECH is examining the alley floor with a handheld BLACKLIGHT WAND, picking out dark, brackish swirls in the disgusting, guttery water.

FEMALE TECH (CONT'D)

...diluted with water and gunk, but it's blood.

MALE TECH

I got a splatter pattern over here...

SHINING FLASHLIGHTS pick out blood on the alley wall. Heller steps to where the cab was parked, stands in the middle of the blank spot surrounded by the glass, points down:

HELLER

There was a car here, you can see where the glass came down all around it. Ivan flew out the window and went bam.

MULDOON

He could'a been depressed. It still doesn't tell me homicide.

PLAINCLOTHES COP (O.S.)

(from above)

Phil! Catch!

They glance up. A PLAINCLOTHES COP is leaning out Ivan's broken window, dangling a clear plastic baggy. He drops it. It comes sailing down six floors...

...right into Heller's grasp. He glances down at it, then dangles it in front of Muldoon's face...

TIGHT ON MULDOON

...revealing two spent 9mm cartridges in the bag.

MULDOON

(turns)

Okay, we got a homicide! Who's got what? We been knocking on doors?

COP (O.S.)

Sir!

Heller and Muldoon turn as TWO UNIFORMED COPS approach from the street. The first cop, black, middle-aged, has his little notebook out. He gestures over his shoulder:

COP (CONT'D)

Old guy across the street, lives above the deli? Says he saw a car parked here earlier tonight. Said there were two men working under the hood.

HELLER

Now we're getting somewhere. He describe the car?

COP

Yes, sir. Late model Ford Crown Vic. Yellow.

(off Heller's look)

It was a taxi cab.

Suppressing a smile, the cop tears the page from his little notebook, hands it to Heller. We hear STIFLED LAUGHTER in the alley...

MULDOON

A yellow cab in New York. By all means, let's put out an APB.

...and the LAUGHTER GROWS. Instead of it bothering him, Heller takes a thoughtful beat, walks from the alley...

STREET IN FRONT OF THE BUILDING

...and pauses at an unmarked car, staring at the small notebook page. Muldoon comes up questioningly behind him.

HELLER

Remember that thing a few years back? That thing with the cab?

MULDOON

What thing?

HELLER

Cabbie drove around all night. Three people got killed.

MULDOON

Oh, right. The guy flipped out or something? Killed some people, then

put a gun to his own head?

HELLER

(nods)

They found him dead in his own cab
down by the Port Authority.

MULDOON

So? It was a random thing.

HELLER

I never bought that.

MULDOON

Oh?

HELLER

Cabbie had no criminal record, no
history of mental illness. Suddenly,
he just wigs out and pops three
people, then himself? Plus the
victims weren't random solid citizens.
They were all lowlives. Wiseguys.

(off Muldoon's look)

I've always wondered if there was
someone else in the cab.

CUT TO:

INT - "DANIEL'S" - JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

Dark and smoky, with history soaked into the walls. As Vincent
said, "the real deal." A BLACK MAN in his mid-50's, DANIEL, is
blowing trumpet onstage with a JAZZ COMBO.

CUSTOMERS are clustered at small tables or crammed into curved
leather booths. The walls are lined with old PLAYBILLS and
FRAMED PHOTOS of jazz greats.

At one of the booths, we find Vincent and Max. Vincent's
enjoying his whiskey sour, while Max is barely touching his.
Vincent's caught up, reveling in the music:

VINCENT

...see now, this has got a little post-
war flavor, a little Miles thing
happening. Awesome.

(looks to Max)

What do you think?

MAX

I never learned jazz.

VINCENT

God, are you always this prosaic? You don't learn jazz, it's not something you're taught. It's like breathing, like life. Like us, tonight, taking what comes and going with the flow.

MAX

That what we're doing? Flowing?

VINCENT

Damn right. Instinct, man. If you think too much, it doesn't work.

(points to stage)

Just listen...

MAX

I'm not catching a melody.

VINCENT

That's the point. You play between the notes, you dance around the structure, you improvise.

(beat)

Some people know where they're going to be ten years from now. Same job, same neighbors, same shit over and over. That's not living. That's dying a little every day. Not me, pal. It's not knowing what's around the corner that makes like worth living. That's jazz.

(points to Daniel)

That guy up there, he knows what I'm talking about. Hell, it's the same thing he's talking about, if you just open your ears. You can hear it in the conversation he's having with that trumpet...

The WAITRESS arrives, a heavy black woman with a tray of drinks:

WAITRESS

'Nothing whiskey sour, hon?

VINCENT

And one for my friend.

(indicates stage)

Say, who is that guy up there?

WAITRESS

That's Daniel, baby, he's the owner.

VINCENT

He's bringing tears to my eyes.
Seriously, I gotta buy him a drink.
Invite him over after his set, would
you be so kind?

WAITRESS

Sure thing, darlin'...

Vincent gives her a radiant smile and tucks a twenty dollars bill into her apron as she leaves...

TIMECUT:

...and we find Daniel sharing a bottle with Vincent and Max a few hours later, the place now closed. Just the three of them.

DANIEL

...I was just a young cat back then,
about nineteen, bussin' tables in this
very place. Didn't pay but shit, but
that wasn't the point. Being around
the music, that was the thing. And I
was. Take this one night...July 22,
1964...who walks in? Mr. Louis
Armstrong.

VINCENT

You're kidding me.

DANIEL

Right through those doors. The man
himself.

VINCENT

Jesus...

DANIEL

He'd come over from Queens to do the
Ed Sullivan show. After, he decides
to come on up to Harlem and hang with
the common folk. That's how he was,
you see. Never forgot
where he came from. Money and fame
an' all that? Meant nothin', long as
he could blow that horn. So before
you it, he's up on that stage,
doin' his thing.

VINCENT

Was it great? Better than great, it had to be...

DANIEL

Like Winton Marsalis says, it was pure, spiritual essence. Louis was playing. God was smiling.

VINCENT

You heard Armstrong play live. I've never been this jealous. You get to talk to him?

DANIEL

Did better'n that.

Vincent gives him a questioning look. Daniel smiles, raises his hands, mimes blowing a trumpet.

VINCENT

No.

DANIEL

Oh, my, yes.

VINCENT

Get outta here! You and Louis?

DANIEL

Fella owned this place back then, Dix Dwyer, he let slip to Louis that I played. So Pops, he just waves me right up. My heart about stopped. But I got up there all the same, and we played for nearly twenty minutes.

VINCENT

Unbelievable...

(to Max)

...you hearing this? Unbelievable.

Max is being drawn into the story in spite of himself.

MAX

How'd you do?

DANIEL

How do you think? You ain't shit when you playing next to Louis Armstrong. But, Dippermouth, he was kind. He could see me trying. He carried my ass as best he could.

VINCENT

Remember what you played?

DANIEL

Most vividly.

(ticking them off)

"St. Louis Blues," "Potato Head
Blues," "Sleepy Time Down South..."

(laughs)

...then Pops laid some "Cornet Chop
Suey" on me, and left me in the dust
like a whipped dog.

VINCENT

The crowd had to dig it.

DANIEL

(smiles, nods)

The crowd was most kind.

(beat)

I was born in 1945, but my life began
the night of July 22, 1964. That was
the moment of my conception. Right
here in this very room.

Daniel picks up the bottle to freshen up their drinks...

VINCENT

That's a great story. I'll have to
tell Dmitri that story.

...and Daniel's hand freezes just as he's about to pour. He
glances up at Vincent.

DANIEL

You know Dmitri?

VINCENT

(softly)

'Fraid so.

Max is glancing from one to the other, unsure what's going on.
Realizing it isn't good.

DANIEL

And here I was thinking you were such
a nice guy.

VINCENT

I am a nice guy, Daniel. With a job
to do. You know how it is.

There's genuine respect in Vincent's tone. Max feels his heart pounding, but manages to keep his voice steady:

MAX

Let him go, Vincent.

VINCENT

You mind? I'm working here.

MAX

You're the one who keeps talking about going with the flow. You like the man, you like the way he plays. How about a little jazz, huh?

VINCENT

Jazz? That's funny, coming from you.

(thinks about it, looks to Daniel)

Okay, some jazz for the jazz man. How's this? I'll ask a question.

DANIEL

What kind of question?

VINCENT

Jazz question. What other kind is there? You get it right, we roll with it. You disappear. Tonight. You don't go home, you don't pack a bag, you just leave town...and nobody, I mean nobody, ever hears from you or sees you again.

DANIEL

How do I know you'll keep your word?

VINCENT

I never lie. Ask Max. Max, have I lied yet?

Daniel looks to Max. Hope, fear, and desperation in the older man's face.

MAX

No. He hasn't lied yet.

Daniel absorbs this, looks back to Vincent.

DANIEL

I know Dmitri. I know for something

like this, he'd hire the best. Which means you're a man who gets by on his reputation.

(beat)

I'll take your word. And I'll give you mine. If I walk out of here tonight, I'd go so far away, it'd be just like I was dead.

Vincent nods. We have a deal. He eases his J-frame out, lays it gently on the table, fingers resting lightly near the grip. Max eyes the gun, his heart in his throat.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

One more thing.

(beat)

If by some chance I get this wrong...tell Dmitri I'm sorry.

VINCENT

Of course.

Daniel pours himself that drink. He lifts his shot glass, hand trembling slightly, knocks it back. Sets the glass down.

DANIEL

Lay it on me.

VINCENT

It's simple. What was your pal Louis' first musical instrument?

DANIEL

I know the answer. I know all there is to know about Louis.

VINCENT

Then let's have it.

Daniel hesitates.

MAX

(blurts out)

It was a trumpet! Wasn't it? Wasn't it a trumpet?

Daniel shakes his head.

DANIEL

Coronet. Bought it from a New Orleans pawnshop when he was a kid. Cost him five dollars. Got a two dollar

advance on his salary from a fine Jewish family he worked for, saved up the rest.

A frozen moment. An endless pause. Max not even breathing, just staring at Vincent, waiting...

...a beat of regret from Vincent...

...and Vincent jerks the gun up so fast Max doesn't even see it happening -- there's just an ENORMOUS MUZZLE FLASH and a SOUND LIKE A CANNON. Daniel's head snaps back, recoiling. He goes face-first onto the table, leaving a red mist of blood swirling in the air.

Max is stunned beyond words or thought, half-deaf from the concussive blast of the J-frame at such close quarters.

Silence now. Blood spreading slowly across the table. Softly:

VINCENT

It was a little tin horn. The kind people celebrate with. It cost him a dime. He'd ride around on the junk wagon owned by that nice Jewish family and play for the neighborhood. People would come out and sell them stuff. Rags. Bottles. Whatever.

Max sits frozen, unable to move...

CUT TO:

EXT - ALLEY BEHIND JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

...and they exit the club. Vincent heads for the cab, turns and sees Max just standing there. Shell-shocked, dazed.

VINCENT

Let's go.

MAX

No.

VINCENT

What you mean, no?

MAX

I'm done. Find another cab.

Max turns, walking slowly away. Vincent just blinks at him, almost laughs.

VINCENT

Max? What are you doing?

MAX

Leave me alone.

VINCENT

Don't even think you're walking away from me.

MAX

(shouting)

I don't wanna know you!

Vincent catches up to him, grabs the back of his collar, slams him against the wall. Their faces inches apart.

VINCENT

Pull your head out of your ass. Get your thinking straight. You wanna die?

MAX

I'm collateral anyway, so just fucking do it and stop making me a part of this!

VINCENT

Teach him how to talk back, suddenly he can't stop.

(low, threatening)

I'm not playing.

MAX

Sure? Like you didn't play him?
String him along?

(off Vincent's look)

If he had gotten the answer right, would you have let him go?

The question hangs in the air. Before Vincent can answer, the DISPATCH RADIO CRACKLES:

LENNY (FILTERED)

Max? Maaax. Pick up, dipshit.

VINCENT

Jesus, what is with this guy?

LENNY (FILTERED)

Maaaaaax!

Vincent spins Max, controls him, almost breaking his neck, as he propels him to the cab, slams him against the fender.

Then Vincent releases him, points at him. Don't move. He reaches into the cab, pulls out the radio mike, clicks it on.

VINCENT

You hassling my driver again?

LENNY

Who is this?

VINCENT

Same fare you talked to last time.
The U.S. Attorney...

LENNY (FILTERED)

What are you guys, taking an all-night
tour?

VINCENT

We're gay lovers, what's it to you?

LENNY (FILTERED)

Nothin'! Aside from Max's mother
driving me crazy, I'm dancin' on a
rainbow! Get him on the line, please.

VINCENT

Hang on.
(to Max)
Carefully...

Max takes the hand mike, clicks it on.

MAX

Yeah?

LENNY (FILTERED)

Where you been the last two hours?
Your mother's been calling every ten
minutes whining about how you didn't
show up.

VINCENT

(whispers)
Show up for what?

MAX

(ignoring him)
Tell her I can't see her tonight,

okay?

LENNY (FILTERED)

What am I, related to you? Tell her yourself! I can't get calls from her all night!

Lenny CLICKS OFF. Dead air.

VINCENT

Show up for what?

MAX

She's in the hospital.

VINCENT

You go every night?

MAX

What difference does it make?

VINCENT

Guy with a routine goes and breaks it? Provokes attention. That's bad. And that's not good...

MAX

There's no way I'm taking you to see my mother!

Vincent yanks his J-frame, jams it to Max's head.

VINCENT

And since when did any of this become a negotiation?

CUT TO:

INT - BELLEVUE HOSPITAL - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Stark corridors, queasy fluorescent lighting, PATIENTS and STAFF MEMBERS. A row of INJURED PEOPLE are seated along one wall, waiting for attention.

The AUTOMATIC DOORS swing open. Max and Vincent enter, the briefcase held at Vincent's side. They proceed up the corridor, pausing as:

VINCENT

Flowers?

Max turns, sees a row of FLOWER BOUQUETS at the gift counter.

MAX

Waste of money. Won't mean anything
to her.

Vincent pulls an arrangement, tosses the flowers to Max, pulls
his wallet to pay.

VINCENT

She carried you in her womb for nine
months.

INT - HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

The elevator arrives. Vincent and Max get on. Vincent presses
the button and the doors start to close...

MAN'S VOICE

Hold, please...

Vincent puts his hand out, stopping the doors. A MAN gets on
the elevator with them...

IN THE ELEVATOR

...and turns around. Detective Phil Heller.

VINCENT

Floor?

HELLER

Nine. Thanks.

Vincent hits the button. The doors close.

The three of them rise up in that awkward silence you only ever
experience with strangers in elevators. Heller barely even
takes notice of Max at the back of the elevator. He glances to
Vincent, nods.

VINCENT

Having a good night?

HELLER

Mezzo-mezzo. You?

Vincent nods. Making do. The elevator stops. Vincent and Max
get off. Heller continues riding up alone...

INT - NINTH FLOOR HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

...and Heller gets off the elevator, heading down the hallway

toward a reception window marked "MORGUE."

INT - HOSPITAL ROOM - LOWER FLOOR - NIGHT

Max enters with the flowers. Vincent appears behind him, hovering in the doorway. Max moves toward the bed...

...where IDA RILKE lies hooked up to a heart monitor, a clear plastic oxygen mask over her mouth. She opens her eyes.

MAX

Hi, Ma.

IDA

I've been calling and calling.

MAX

I got caught up at work.

IDA

You couldn't pick up a phone? I'm lying here, wondering if something horrible happened...

MAX

(cuts her off)

I brought you flowers.

IDA

What am I gonna do with flowers?

MAX

You're gonna cheer up.

IDA

By worrying about you spending money on foolish things? So I can watch them wilt?

MAX

He paid for 'em.

She looks past Max, sees Vincent standing at the door in his nice suit. She ditches the oxygen mask, sits up straighter, starts touching up her hair with her fingertips.

IDA

Why didn't you tell me we had company?

(to Vincent)

And what's your name?

VINCENT

No harm done, ma'am.

She takes the flowers from Max, making a fuss over them:

IDA

You paid for my flowers? They're beautiful. Max, you gonna introduce us?

MAX

Mom, Vincent. Vincent, my mother, Ida Rilke.

Vincent sets his briefcase by the door, approaches the bed, offers his hand. She takes it, all flirty and girlish.

VINCENT

Happy to meet you, Mrs. Rilke.

IDA

Oh, call me Ida. To what do we owe the pleasure?

Vincent sits in the chair at bedside.

VINCENT

I was with Max when he got the call.

IDA

And you came all the way down here to see me?

VINCENT

It's nothing.

IDA

Tell my son. You have to hold a gun to his head to get him to come see me.

VINCENT

Tell me about it.

Vincent leans in to help her adjust her pillows, fluffing them for her.

IDA

You dress nice, you speak nice. You must be a very important client of Max's.

That catches Vincent slightly off guard. He glances to Max.

VINCENT

Client? I like to think of myself as more of a friend. A mentor.

IDA

Max never had many friends. So much with the piano. Always keeping to himself, it's unhealthy...

MAX

I'm...in...the...room, here. Don't talk about me like I'm not in the room.

IDA

(to Vincent)

What's he sayin'?

MAX

I'm standing right here.

IDA

Yesss, you are.

(right back to Vincent)

He's artistic.

VINCENT

I'm sure you're very proud of Max.

IDA

(directed at Max)

Of course I'm proud. You know he started with nothing? Look at him today. Playing concerts.

Vincent looks to Max. Intrigued. Sees him squirming.

MAX

Mom, Vincent's not interested.

VINCENT

Oh, I'm captivated.

IDA

His limousines, his company.

Max returns Vincent's stare with a quiet, pleading look.

VINCENT

Quite an achievement...

IDA

What's your name?

VINCENT

Vincent...

The moment passes. Max heads for the door.

MAX

I came to see you, you look fine. We gotta go.

IDA

Vincent. It was nice to meet you. Visit again?

VINCENT

I'm in town for a short time.

IDA

Try?

VINCENT

Of course!

He turns to find Max gone. He looks down, eyes widening.

So is the briefcase.

Vincent races out into...

THE HALLWAY

...and spins around, frantically trying to see where Max went. Nothing but a FEW PATIENTS and HOSPITAL STAFF...

...and a door marked "STAIRS" swinging shut at the end of the hallway. He runs in that direction...

HOSPITAL STAIRWELL

Vincent bursts through the door into the stairwell, hearing RUNNING FOOTSTEPS below. He peers over the railing...

...and sees Max three flights down. Max freezes, looking up, clutching the briefcase. A moment of eye contact...

VINCENT (CONT'D)

You take one more step, I'll kill her.

MAX

You'd do her a favor.

...and Max keeps going, vanishing from view. Vincent takes off after him, plunging down the stairs at breakneck speed...

VINCENT

I'll tell her the truth!

MOVING WITH MAX

careening dizzily down the steps with the briefcase, hurtling from one landing to the next, FOOTSTEPS ECHOING on concrete.

MOVING WITH VINCENT

racing down the steps like a madman, yanking his Sig-Sauer from under his jacket...

INT - HOSPITAL LAUNDRY - NIGHT

Max comes through the stairway door, racing like crazy along a row of HUGE ROARING INDUSTRIAL WASHERS, trying to make it to the EXIT DOOR at the far end...

...and Vincent bursts from the stairwell in pursuit, pausing to whip his Sig-Sauer up in a two-handed grip, activating the laser sight, aiming down the length of the laundry room...

...just as Max vanishes through the exit room at the far end.

VINCENT

Shit!

EXT - HOSPITAL/F.D.R. DRIVE - NIGHT

Max reaches out the back of the hospital, which faces F.D.R. Drive. Beyond that, the East River.

Max reaches the guard rail above the highway, breathing hard.

It's a fifteen foot drop down to the traffic lanes. FAST TRAFFIC RAGING in both directions.

Max looks back, sees Vincent. Makes his decision in a heartbeat. He vaults over the guard rail...

...and hits the pavement hard, rolling into the first lane. A TRUCK HORN BLARES, HEADLIGHTS GLARING. Max rolls out of the way, an instant to spare, almost crushed as the BIG-RIG blows by him in a hurricane backwash of wind...

Max glances up, sees Vincent arrive at the guard rail. Max dashes into the next lane as CARS SWERVE WILDLY to avoid him...

Vincent vaults the guard rail, also plummeting down into the traffic...

VARIOUS ANGLES

...and the two men make their way across the F.D.R. in a breathless life-and-death game of dodge-the-cars, darting this way and that, playing chicken with the traffic, avoiding death by inches, Vincent whipping his Sig-Sauer up, desperately trying to pin Max with the beam, losing his aim, cars and trucks hurtling between them, Vincent damn near getting run over, Max making it alive to the other side and vaulting over the railing, pressing on toward:

THE EAST RIVER

Max runs up, exhausted. The lights of Queens glitter on the water. He swings the briefcase back, preparing to hurl it...

VINCENT

Don't!

...and a GLOWING RED LASER DOT finds Max, dances up to his ear. Max looks back, sees Vincent in silhouette, gun aimed.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Red-light-green-light, Max.

A heartbeat. A hesitation. And then...

MAX

Bullshit.

...Max hurls the briefcase with all his might. Vincent watches in horror as it spins lazily through the air and takes a plunge into the icy water.

Vincent runs over to Max, just in time to see the briefcase bobbing under, vanishing with the current.

A frozen beat. Vincent doesn't even know what to say. He closes his eyes, desperately trying to visualize:

VINCENT

Shit, the address, what was it,
hundred east forty, no, forty east a
hundred--fuck, forty, something, shit.
Shit, shit, shit! I can see the
fucker's face! Ugly Slavic bastard,
Nikolyai something, Nikolyai, shit!

He spins to Max, pointing toward the water, screaming:

VINCENT (CONT'D)

What the fuck was that?

MAX

Jazz.

Vincent launches himself at Max and knocks him to the ground in a blind fury. The gun comes up, the muzzle pressed to Max's face, the hammer being cocked, a heartbeat away from...

...Vincent pauses, breathing hard. The two men staring at each other. In a hoarse whisper, almost proud:

VINCENT

I didn't know you had it in you.

Oddly enough, this revelation seems to be giving Vincent an idea. He eases the hammer down, draws the gun aside...

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Let's see what else you can do.

...and drags Max to his feet as we

CUT TO:

INT - HOSPITAL MORGUE - NIGHT

Heller's in the "cold room" with a MORGUE ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT

(checking his clipboard)

We've had three come in tonight, one's a John Doe. Maybe it's your guy.

The attendant nods at the first of three SHEET-COVERED CORPSES lying on stainless steel tables. Heller draws the sheet back, looks down, shakes his head.

HELLER

Not him.

The attendant makes a notation on his clipboard. Heller nods at the next corpse.

HELLER (CONT'D)

What about that one?

ATTENDANT

Just some kid. Probably gang-related.

The attendant draws the sheet back. It's the kid who mugged Max and took Vincent's briefcase. Heller gives the corpse a quick glance, shrugs. Means nothing.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)

These two...

(indicates the kid and the
third corpse)

...came in a half hour ago.

Same crime scene. Looks like the same weapon,
large caliber.

Intrigued, Heller steps to the third corpse, draws the sheet back. It's the Heavysset Man murdered at the construction site.

Heller stares down at the dead face. Instant recognition.

INT - HOSPITAL HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

Heller is on a pay phone, amped up, talking with Walt Muldoon. (Muldoon's at home, perched on the edge of his bed, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. INTERCUT as needed:)

HELLER

...yeah, I'm still at Bellevue. The
John Doe didn't pan out, but you'll
never guess who's lying up in the meat
locker.

MULDOON

Elvis?

HELLER

Joey Cicerno. Dear friend and
associate of my missing snitch, Ivan
Petrov. Both of whom were in bed with
Dmitri.

MULDOON

Jesus. Two in one night?

HELLER

Something big's going down, and I'm
betting the Feds don't know about it.
You gotta get us in there.

MULDOON

Pick me up in five minutes.

Muldoon hangs up, hauling himself off the bed as we

CUT TO:

INT - MAX'S CAB - TRAVELING - NIGHT

Max drives in semi-conscious silence, feeling Vincent's gaze on the back of his neck.

VINCENT

Limos, huh?

MAX

Don't start.

VINCENT

Hey, I'm not the one who's been lying to my mother.

MAX

She hears what she wants to hear, okay?

VINCENT

Maybe so. Maybe she hears what you tell her.

MAX

(slaps the wheel)

Fuck! Nothing's ever goddamn good enough! It's always been that way.

VINCENT

It's cause they don't like their lives, so they project their patterns of negative behavior onto you...

(beat)

I had a father like that.

MAX

Yeah? What happened?

VINCENT

He hated everything I did. Hated me. Got drunk and beat the shit out of me, daily...

MAX

What happened?

VINCENT

I killed him. When I was 15. He was my first.

(off Max's look)

Nah, wishful thinking. Liver cancer.

MAX

I'm sorry.

VINCENT

Don't be. I never saw him after I was 15. Went into the military early.

(beat)

So all this talk about "my job's temporary, I got big plans," it's all bullshit.

MAX

It's not bullshit.

VINCENT

What do you call it? Ten years doesn't sound temporary to me. I should have known it was bullshit, you're too good at what you do.

MAX

I've always been good. Ever since I started. Gave up piano. Easy money. I'm putting a stake together, get something started. Go figure it all out...

VINCENT

Yeah? Like what? Limos?

MAX

I told you I don't like to talk about it.

VINCENT

(off Max's silence)

Well, this big stake's got to be big by now. When you leaving?

MAX

See, I've got bills. My mother's been dying of the same disease since I was a kid.

VINCENT

What, no insurance?

MAX

Doesn't cover everything.

VINCENT

Good excuse. How many others you got?

EXT - "LITTLE RUSSIA" POOL HALL & BAR - NIGHT

A divey-looking place on the Lower East Side. A desolate setting. Streets mostly deserted at this time of night...

...except for TWO MEN hanging around outside the pool hall in the shadows. Not doing much. Just hanging.

Headlights appear, cruising slowly toward us. Max's cab.

INT - CAB - NIGHT

VINCENT

Here's good.

Max parks, cuts the engine. The pool hall's across the street. Vincent checks it out, concealing himself as much as possible in the shadows of the back seat.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Gimme your wallet.

MAX

Why?

Vincent just snaps his fingers impatiently. Max pulls his wallet, passes it back.

VINCENT

I'll just hold onto it for you. In case they check.

MAX

In case who checks?

Vincent nods toward the pool hall.

VINCENT

Our friends in Little Russia. Go in and ask for a man named Dmitri.

MAX

Dmitri?

VINCENT

The man who hired me for this contract.

MAX

I don't get it.

VINCENT

You're gonna be me. You're gonna go in, and you're gonna get the info on the remaining two hits.

MAX

(appalled)

Why me? Why don't you do it?

VINCENT

No client has ever seen my face, and I intend to keep it that way. Besides, if he decides to put a bullet in my head, I don't wanna be there for it.

MAX

He's gonna shoot me?

VINCENT

When he finds out you tossed his list? I would.

MAX

No. No way. I can't do this.

VINCENT

Max. You threw my briefcase in the river. You've got balls bigger than Toledo.

MAX

I...I wasn't thinking. I just did it.

VINCENT

That's jazz, my friend. You said it yourself. So don't tell me you don't know how to play between the notes.

Pause. Softly:

MAX

Vincent. Don't make me do this. Don't make me get people killed.

VINCENT

We've both run out of options. If it helps, take comfort in knowing you never had a choice.

Max draws a deep breath, lets it out slowly.

MAX

How long have you been a hit man?

VINCENT

Why?

MAX

In case he asks.

VINCENT

Fifteen years, although I prefer the term "assassin."

MAX

You get benefits?

VINCENT

No.

MAX

Paid sick leave?

VINCENT

You tell me to start a union, I'm blowing your head off. Quit stalling and get out of the cab.

Max hesitates, opens the door, gets out...

EXT - STREET - NIGHT

...and starts slowly across the street. The TWO MEN in front of the pool hall tense up, watching him approach.

HIGH WIDE ANGLE OF STREET

We see Max, a tiny figure, crossing the street below...

FED #1

So now who the fuck is this?

FED #2

Beats me.

...and we hear a STILL CAMERA CLICKING AND WHIRRING, snapping a few shots. ANGLE PULLS BACK...

INT - TOP FLOOR OF TENEMENT - NIGHT

...to reveal FEDERAL AGENTS clustered loosely at a row of arched windows, watching Max cross the street below. The room is littered with SURVEILLANCE EQUIPMENT and PIZZA BOXES.

SENIOR AGENT FRANK PEDROSA stands at a pair of high-powered BINOCULARS mounted on a tripod, tracking Max.

PEDROSA

Mark the time.

A SOFT KNOCK on the door. Heller and Muldoon are ushered in. Pedrosa glances at them, motions "hang on a second," keeps peering through the binoculars...

EXT - POOL HALL - NIGHT

...as Max, hiding his terror, steps up to the two men.

MAN #1

Closed.

MAX

I'm here to see Dmitri. Tell him it's Vincent.

The two men trade a surprised look. Suddenly cautious and respectful. They lead Max inside.

INT - TOP FLOOR OF TENEMENT - NIGHT

Pedrosa watches the group go into the pool hall, then turns to Heller and Muldoon for quick introductions:

MULDOON

Captain Walt Muldoon, NYPD.

HELLER

Detective Sergeant Phil Heller.

PEDROSA

(shaking hands)

Federal Agent Frank Pedrosa.

MULDOON

Thanks for letting us sit in.

PEDROSA

Long as you don't get in our way.

HELLER

Something going on?

PEDROSA

Pretty quiet down there. A cab just pulled up, aside from that...

Heller trades a surprised look with Muldoon. A cab? They rush to the window, see the cab in the street below. Fast:

HELLER

Hood's all beat to shit.

Muldoon's fumbling his cell phone out, already dialing.

MULDOON

What's the medallion number?

Heller swivels the binoculars to the cab, pulling out his notebook and scribbling down the number...

INT - "LITTLE RUSSIA" POOL HALL - NIGHT

...as Max is led into cavernous, multi-level pool hall. There's an enormous bar, scattered tables and chairs, rows of pool tables stretching into the gloom. Dangling china-hat light fixtures throw extreme pools of light, watching a pall of cigar smoke and deepening the shadows.

MEN are grouped loosely about, drinking and smoking, playing pool. Hard-eyed, flinty killers. A few tired, used-up WOMEN keeping them company.

Everybody goes silent, staring at Max.

One of the men with Max pats him down, checking for weapons. The other one goes upstairs.

Max just stands there, not knowing what to do. Suddenly, a trail of CIGAR ASH trickles down from above, along with a DEEP VOICE with a Russian accent:

DMITRI

I thought you'd be taller.

Max turns, looks up to see:

DMITRI GUSUNOV, a Russian gangster built like a beer truck. He's unshaven, sweaty, looks like he was rolled in grease. An evil, dangerous fucker.

DMITRI (CONT'D)

Perhaps it's my perspective. Things change when you look at them from a different point of view, don't you think?

He descends the stairs, slow and deliberate, inspiring dread

with every step. He comes to a stop before Max.

DMITRI (CONT'D)

No. It seems some things stay the same from every angle. Like you. Here. Tonight. Any way I look at it, I see only one thing. I see only trouble.

Dmitri pulls up a chair, sits at a table. Gestures.

DMITRI (CONT'D)

Sit.

Max sits, forces himself to meet Dmitri's gaze. A bottle of vodka is brought, along with two shot glasses.

DMITRI (CONT'D)

So. Vincent. Why are you here? I cannot wait...

INT - TOP FLOOR OF TENEMENT - NIGHT

DMITRI'S VOICE (FILTERED)

...to find out why you would risk your life like this.

The reaction in the room is electric. FED #3, on headphones, turns from the REEL-TO-REEL RECORDER with a stunned look.

FED #3

Did he say "Vincent?"

DMITRI'S VOICE (FILTERED)

You understand my surprise, yes? Long time now, we've had an arrangement...

INT - POOL HALL - NIGHT

DMITRI

...I do not meet you. I do not see you. I do not even speak to you. That made good sense. But now you are here, and I must ask, why?

For a moment it looks like Max isn't even going to get the words out. Then:

MAX

I lost the list.

Pause. Dmitri raises his vodka, knocks it back, lays the shot

glass down.

DMITRI

I see.

(beat)

That was an important list, wouldn't you say? The people on that list are being subpoenaed tomorrow by a federal judge. And you "lost" it?

MAX

I'm sorry.

DMITRI

Sorry?

Dmitri abruptly pulls a scuffed BROWNING HI-POWER 9MM HANDGUN from the back of his belt, SLAMS IT DOWN on the table before him. He leans forward, hand resting lightly near the grip.

Max is nearly pissing himself. Dmitri's gesture is too reminiscent of Vincent preparing to kill Daniel.

DMITRI (CONT'D)

Tell me, Vincent. Do you believe in Santa Claus?

MAX

(finds his voice)

Can't say that I do.

DMITRI

Neither do I. But my children, they're still young. Do you know who they like even more than jolly old Saint Nicholas? His helper, Black Peter. An old Russian fairy tale tells of how Santa got so busy looking after all the good kids, he had to hire a helper to punish all the bad kids. That was Black Peter's job. He was given the list of all the bad children, and he would visit them in their homes late at night. And if he caught them not saying their prayers, he would leave a bundle of wooden switches outside their door. That was a warning. If they continued to misbehave, he would swoop down and take the children away. And they would never be seen again.

Dmitri picks up his gun and racks the slide, LOUDLY JACKING A

ROUND into the chamber.

DMITRI (CONT'D)

Now if I'm Santa Claus, then you are Black Peter. And what do you think would happen if Peter showed up in Santa's pool hall one night and said he'd lost his list of all the bad children? How fucking furious do you think jolly old Saint Nick would be?

He brings the gun up, pressing the barrel solidly to Max's forehead.

DMITRI (CONT'D)

Tell me Vincent. Tell me what you think.

MAX

I think...

He can't finish.

DMITRI

What?

MAX

I think...

(bracing himself)

...I think you should get this gun out of my fucking face.

DMITRI

What? What did you say?

MAX

(low, tight)

I said. Get the gun. Out. Of my fucking face. Before I wrap it in a blintz and feed it to you.

Pause. Dmitri eases back, but doesn't drop his aim.

MAX (CONT'D)

I picked up a tail.

DMITRI

Federal?

MAX

You tell me. I had to toss the list in the river. I was protecting your

sorry, long-winded ass. So why don't you show a little courtesy?

Dmitri considers it, lays the weapon back on the table.

MAX (CONT'D)

You think I wanted to come here tonight? You think I'm that stupid? Sometimes shit happens, you gotta roll with it.

DMITRI

Tell me. Has Black Peter already crossed off a few bad children?

MAX

The fat man on Cherry Street. The other fat man, Mr. Bulldozer. The trumpet player. That leaves two.

DMITRI

(checks his watch)

Can you finish on schedule?

MAX

In fifteen years, I have never left a customer unsatisfied.

Dmitri tosses a look to ARKADY behind the bar. Arkady turns to a hidden WALL SAFE, dials the combination. As they wait in silence, Dmitri pours vodka for himself and Max...

INT - TOP FLOOR OF TENEMENT - NIGHT

...while the Feds to apeshit, dialogue fast, tense, loud:

PEDROSA

...goddamn it, you telling me this motherfucker's whacked three of our witnesses tonight...

HELLER

...Petrov and Cicerno for sure...

FED #3

...shit, how'd he even find out about the subpoenas...

PEDROSA

...doesn't fuckin' matter, just tell me who's left so we don't lose any more...

INT - POOL HALL - NIGHT

A stack of files identical to Vincent's are brought to the table. Dmitri sorts them carefully.

DMITRI

I was going to destroy these as soon as I got your call. Seems I'll have to trust you with these two...

He pulls two, gives the remaining three back to Arkady, muttering:

DMITRI (CONT'D)

(in Russian, subtitled)

Burn these.

Arkady nods, moves off. Dmitri hands the two files across the table to Max. Max grabs them and pulls -- but Dmitri doesn't let go. Their eyes meet.

DMITRI (CONT'D)

Vincent. Do not cross me.

MAX

Wouldn't dream of it.

Dmitri releases the file. Max rises.

MAX (CONT'D)

As a token of my appreciation for your understanding in this matter, I'd like to offer you a discount for my services tonight. Twenty five percent.

DMITRI

Twenty five?

MAX

Hell, make it fifty. Same goes for any business we have in the future.

DMITRI

Very generous.

MAX

(beat)

By the way. Daniel said he was sorry.

Dmitri nods. Max turns and walks out.

The moment he's gone, Dmitri glances to his men. They're giving him grim, questioning looks.

DMITRI

(in Russian, subtitled)

Let him get to Nikolyai's. Make sure the job is done. And then...

Using his thumb, Dmitri makes a quick slashing gesture across his throat. Kill him.

EXT - POOL HALL - NIGHT

Max pauses as he exits, taking in a deep breath of night air, stunned that he's still alive...

INT - TOP FLOOR OF TENEMENT - NIGHT

...while the Feds swarm at the windows, aiming lenses and snapping away like paparazzi, motor-winds WHIRRING AND CLICKING, everybody talking at once:

ALL THE FEDS

(chaotic, ad-lib)

...okay, rolling video...his face, make sure you get his face...so that's Vincent...holy shit...unbelievable, fucking Vincent...you getting him?...yeah, I'm good, it's perfect...

ANGLE SHIFTS to Heller, cell phone to his ear, trying to block out the noise as:

HELLER

...yeah, uh-huh...medium build, dark hair...are you sure...

Heller joins the others at the window, where ANGLE FINDS Agent Pedrosa speaking urgently into a WALKIE-TALKIE:

PEDROSA

Advance team, two men, stick to that goddamn cab, stay in radio contact, the rest of us follow in the van. Nobody moves until the entire team's in place...

HELLER

(into cell phone)

Can you fax me his picture? His license or something? What do you

mean you don't have that there?

(to Muldoon)

Anybody else in the cab?

Muldoon can't tell. ANGLE SHIFTS OUT THE WINDOW. In the street below, Max walks to the cab...

INT - CAB - NIGHT

...and gets in behind the wheel, feeling limp. He lets out a slow breath, reluctantly passes the two files back to Vincent. Vincent returns Max's wallet.

VINCENT

Damn, Max. I'm impressed. Really. I would have bet good money you wouldn't walk out of there.

MAX

Makes two of us.

Vincent flips open a file, scans it. Max STARTS THE ENGINE, looks in the rearview mirror.

VINCENT

Washington and Holt. Dance club called "Fever." Know it?

MAX

Tribeca, near the waterfront, northeast corner. Twelve minutes.

VINCENT

You do impress me, Max. That you do.

Max puts the car in gear and pulls out...

INT - TOP FLOOR OF TENEMENT - NIGHT

...while the Feds are in a frenzy of "mounting up" and getting ready to roll, everybody loading their ASSAULT WEAPONS, putting on body armor, grabbing extra clips of ammo...

...and through it all, Heller and Muldoon are trying to get a word in edgewise with Pedrosa. It's all very kinetic, mile-a-minute, on the move:

HELLER

...got off the phone with his dispatcher. What an asshole. Cabbie's name is Max Rilke, been driving that cab for ten years...

PEDROSA

So?

HELLER

...so, his description of Max the cabdriver matches the guy who walked out of Villa Rodeo. That guy? That guy is a cabbie. And you're telling me this cabbie walks into a phone booth and emerges as a meat eater, assassin with heavy trigger time? What's he do, squeeze 'em in between fares?

PEDROSA

No. Your cabbie is floating down a storm drain or stuffed in the trunk of a cab.

The entire team heads out the door...

HELLER

But the guy who walked out matches the cabbie's description...

OBSERVATION POST STAIRWELL

...and coming down the steps, feet pounding, taking the landings fast, Heller and Muldoon at their heels...

PEDROSA

Lemme tell you something. Vincent and a few other guys like him are fucking ghosts. Nobody even know what he looked like until now...

HELLER

I don't know...

FED #1

We do. We see this more and more with big money criminal enterprises... Globalization and privatized security working for bad guys in Colombia, Mexico, Three Falls...ex-kGB, Mossad, ex-Special Forces. These guys got skill sets...trigger time...

PEDROSA

...like identity theft...like a "cabbie"...

They hit the ground and are making for their cars...

HELLER

What are you gonna do?

PEDROSA

Take him down. Save Richard Yip, our witness...

Pedrosa and the Feds are in the car, which pulls to the curb. Heller is breathless...

HELLER

What if they're wrong?

MULDOON

Not our call, Phil.

HELLER

...if they're wrong?!

MULDOON

This isn't our goddamn game!

CUT TO:

IN A MOODY VISUAL SEQUENCE, WE FOLLOW VARIOUS GROUPS DRIVING TO THE CLUB, ALL WITH THEIR VARIOUS AGENDAS: (YOU MIGHT LISTEN TO MAZZY STAR'S "MARY OF SILENCE" TO SUGGEST TONE HERE.)

MAX'S CAB

cruises north along the Bowery, reflected street lights flowing up the windshield, colors kicking off the bodywork. The streets are deserted; the city seems a haunted place...

FBI CAR

The advance vehicle. TWO AGENTS. Following the cab at a discreet distance. The agent in the passenger seat speaking in hushed tones into a radio mike:

AGENT

...suspect vehicle turning now on East Houston, heading west...

FBI VAN

Pedrosa and half a dozen agents. Quietly checking their gear, passing looks to one another, the silent neighborhoods passing

by while the VOICE drones softly from the radio...

AGENT (FILTERED) (CONT'D)
...passing Broadway now...coming up on
Avenue of the Americas...

1973 CADILLAC FLEETWOOD BROUGHAM

Stuffed with Dmitri's cold-eyed KILLERS. Six of them. Arkady, LEV, YURI, three others. Muttering in Russian. Cigarettes smoldering in their lips. Loading HANDGUNS, fitting clips into UZIS, feeding shells into SAWED-OFF SHOTGUNS..

UNMARKED CAR

Phil Heller at the wheel. Tailing the FBI van at a distance, GHOSTLY CROSSCHATTER drifting from the police band...

INT - MAX'S CAB - NIGHT

Vincent riding in pensive silence. Softly:

VINCENT
Would you have called her?

MAX
Who?

VINCENT
Your lady friend. The one who gave
you her business card.
(off Max's silence)
Think she was just being polite?

MAX
I don't know.

VINCENT
What holds you back, Max? Tell me.
Why does life scare you so much?

MAX
I only owe you a ride, Vincent.

VINCENT
It's not what you owe me. Time is so
fleeting. One day it's gone.
(beat)
You make it out of this alive, Max,
you really should call her. That's
what I think.

EXT - "FEVER" NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

An after-hours disco, a converted warehouse for the party-till-dawn crowd. PEOPLE coming and going at the entrance.

Max's cab cruises by, slowing, pulling around the corner into the alleys crisscrossing this warehouse district...

POV ANGLE THROUGH WINDSHIELD OF FBI CAR

...and we see Max's cab disappearing into the alley as we travel past. ANGLE SHIFTS to the passenger seat as:

AGENT
(into radio)
Club Fever. Nikolyai's place.

INT - FBI VAN - NIGHT

Closing on the club. Pedrosa muttering to his team:

PEDROSA
Watch your backs. Vincent looks at
you cross-eyed, drop him.

INT - MAX'S CAB/ALLEY BEHIND CLUB - NIGHT

Parked in a quiet spot. Vincent glances around as GROUPS OF LATE-NIGHT PARTIERS drift by the cab, laughing drunkenly. Other PEOPLE are mingling in and out of the back entrance of the club, smoking cigarettes, sharing snorts of coke.

VINCENT
You wander more than ten feet from my
side, some random bystander takes the
first bullet. More collateral.
Clear?

Max nods. They exit the cab and head into the club through the back entrance, Vincent giving the DOORMAN a tip...

EXT - FRONT ENTRANCE OF CLUB - NIGHT

...while the FEDS enter through the front, subduing the BOUNCER from alerting anybody...

INT - SIDE ENTRANCE (PRIVATE ENTRANCE) - NIGHT

A VIEWING SLOT opens in the door, revealing a face outside. It's Arkady, Dmitri's man:

ARKADY

(in Russian, subtitled)
Message for Nikolyai. Urgent.

The MAN guarding the door lets them in. Dmitri's MEN swarm inside, shoving him to the wall with a gun at his head...

EXT/INT - REAR ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Heller flashes his badge, brushes past the doorman, proceeds up the dark, narrow corridors which lead to:

INT - CLUB FEVER - NIGHT

Cacophonous, surreal, jammed with people and flashing lights. COLORED LASERS jitter through layers of DANCERS. An enormous MIRROR BALL spins overhead, twirling light. FLASHING STROBES erupt periodically, pixilating the crowd. ABBA's "Gimme, Gimme, Gimme" thunders from the speakers...

VINCENT

drifts through the crowd, cruising like a shark, scanning the moving mass of people. Watchful. Seeking his target. Keeping one eye on Max, who's careful to stay near him...

THE FEDS

are also negotiating the crowd, spreading out through the club, seeking their target...

DMITRI'S THUGS

are doing the same, looking for Max...

HELLER

is scanning the crowd...

VINCENT

pauses, finally zeroing:

NIKOLYAI

The owner of the club. An ugly man in a trendy Milan couture suit that's way too young, hip and loud for him. He's holding court on a raised area at the edge of the dance floor, laughing and carousing with an ENTOURAGE OF FLOOZIES and YES-MEN.

VINCENT

throws a look to Max, cocks his head. This way. They start

across the club, working their way through the dancers...

DMITRI'S THUGS (ARKADY, YURI, LEV)

Lev spots Max, mutters to the others:

LEV
Vincent.

NIKOLYAI'S POSITION

BODYGUARD #1, occupying the wall, suddenly spots Dmitri's men in the crowd. He mutters to BODYGUARD #2:

BODYGUARD #1
(in Russian, subtitled)
What are Dmitri's men doing here?

Bodyguard #2 sees them, instantly suspicious:

BODYGUARD #2
(in Russian, subtitled)
Bring the others.

The man rushes off. Bodyguard #2 bends down to whisper in Nikolyai's ear...

VINCENT

makes his way through the dancers, moving inexorably toward Nikolyai, Max trailing at his side...

FED #3

spots Max, mutters urgently into his sleeve mike:

FED #3
I have visual on Vincent, middle of
dance floor, approaching Nikolyai...

PEDROSA

responds on his wrist mike, already on the move:

PEDROSA
Take him!

FEDERAL AGENTS

suddenly race from all points of the compass, ASSAULT WEAPONS snapping up, patrons scattering, everybody screaming at once:

ALL THE FEDS
(chaotic, ad-lib)
FBI!...FREEZE, MOTHERFUCKER!...DON'T
MOVE, VINCENT!...FREEZE OR YOU'RE A
DEAD MAN!...HANDS IN THE AIR!

Every single FBI WEAPON HAS A LASER SIGHT, all of them now
activated, RED LASER BEAMS CONVERGING...

...on Max, stunned, GLOWING RED DOTS dancing up and down his
body from all directions, people screaming and diving for cover,
stampeding for the exits...

...while CAMERA DOES A QUEASY 360 AROUND MAX, hands quavering in
the air, suddenly the loneliest man in the room...

MAX
DON'T SHOOT ME! I'M NOT VINCENT!

...but nobody can hear him with the ABBA THUNDERING, the FEDS
SHOUTING, the CROWD PANICKING AND SCREAMING. The Feds dart this
way and that, maneuvering for position...

...as Vincent disappears into the confusion and panic...

...and Nikolyai ducks for cover below his table, bodyguards
swarming to his side...

...and Heller elbows his way through PATRONS rushing for the
exits, trying to get to Max, who's still trying to be heard...

MAX (CONT'D)
I'M JUST A CAB DRIVER! DON'T SHOOT!

DMITRI'S THUGS

ARKADY
(in Russian, subtitled)
Don't let them take Vincent alive!
Kill him! And Nikolyai!

THE FEDS

are closing in on Max, everybody amped-up and screaming...

VARIOUS FEDS
ON YOUR KNEES!...NOW, GODDAMN IT,
NOW!...FACE-DOWN, ASSHOLE!

...and it's all a lit fuse just waiting to explode, which is
exactly what happens as:

YURI

pops into frame, pistol aimed at the back of Max's head, but somebody jostles him in the panic and the GUNSHOT GOES WILD, barely missing Max's ear as he's getting to his knees --

-- and the BULLET SMASHES THROUGH AGENT PEDROSA'S KNEE instead, slamming him face-first to the floor!

And then proverbial hell truly breaks loose as:

The Feds OPEN FIRE...

Dmitri's thugs OPEN FIRE...

Nikolyai's bodyguards OPEN FIRE...

...and it's an instant chaotic firefight, everybody OPENING FIRE on everybody else, nobody knowing where it's coming from or exactly who the enemy is, instantly transforming Club Fever into something resembling the Ninth Circle of Dante's Hell...

IN FAST, JARRING ANGLES...

...with MUZZLE FLASHES ERUPTING, MACHINE GUNS BLAZING, SAWED-OFF SHOTGUNS ROARING, DISCO LIGHTS FLASHING, STROBES JITTERING and pixilating the combatants, BULLETS CHEWING UP the walls, the bar, the bottles on the shelves...

Federal agents are being cut down. Dmitri's men are shredded. Nikolyai's bodyguards are torn asunder...

ANGLE ON MAX

...and we find Max in the eye of the storm, hugging the floor, confusion everywhere, debris cascading, tables overturning...

...and BRRAAAP! Fed #2 FIRES AN ASSAULT RIFLE BURST into Arkady, nailing him on the run. Arkady falls dying in front of Max, his SAWED-OFF SHOTGUN BLASTING BOTH BARRELS toward the ceiling and taking out the huge MIRROR BALL, which comes CRASHING DOWN inches from Max in an EXPLOSION of debris...

ANGLE ON HELLER

...and Heller crawls through the shitstorm amidst overturned tables and chairs, trying to get to Max...

ANGLE ON VINCENT

...and we find Vincent elsewhere in the maelstrom, lying on the floor in a jumble of tables and chairs, the only calm one in the

room. His eye on the prize. His Sig-Sauer in his hand. Watching Nikolychai's table. Waiting for his chance...

VINCENT'S POV

Nikolychai scurries from one table to the next, taking cover, trying to get the hell out...

PUSHING TIGHT ON VINCENT

as he brings the Sig-Sauer up into frame, sighting carefully, controlling his breathing, blocking out all distraction...

VINCENT'S POV

Nikolychai breaks from cover again, darting wildly as we track him, dropping from view behind another table...

...and WE PAN DOWN the table to a PAIR OF LOUD CHECKED SOCKS AND WINGTIP SHOES visible just below the table cloth where Nikolychai crouches, ready to make his break for the door...

VINCENT

eases his finger onto the trigger...

VINCENT
(a whisper)
God, those socks.

...and BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Three rapid shots blast Nikolychai's ankles to shreds, slamming him flat to the floor. Nikolychai's terrified face is now visible as he writhes in agony, glancing up for a brief moment of eye contact with Vincent...

...and BLAM! The fourth and final shot takes Nikolychai between the eye, punching a red halo on the wall behind him.

Vincent rolls, scattering chairs from his path, trying to find a way out of there...

WIDE ANGLE OF CLUB

MUZZLE FLASHES becoming sporadic, half the gangsters and Feds dead or wounded, the remaining combatants still trading GUNFIRE from under cover, screaming at each other to surrender, the club largely emptied of party people, the disco laser lights dancing and flashing through a heavy pall of cordite smoke...

ANGLE ON MAX

as Heller reaches him, gun aimed. Max freezes.

HELLER

Max?

MAX

Max Rilke! I'm just a damn cab
driver

Heller grabs him by the lapels, drags him off the floor...

HELLER

I know! I know! I'm Sergeant Heller!
I'm getting you out of here!

...and makes a break toward the rear exit.

STEADICAM MAX AND HELLER

as they leave the main club area behind, weaving down the dark
passageways toward the rear exit, Heller pushing Max on ahead,
covering their retreat with his Baretta poised...

MAX

Oh, man, am I happy to see you...

The open door looms ahead. Salvation. Fresh night air and
safety beyond. And just as they get out the back door...

EXT - ALLEY BEHIND CLUB - NIGHT

...Max's cab screeches to a stop before them, Vincent leveling
his Sig-Sauer from the the driver's window and FIRING THREE QUICK
SHOTS into Heller. Heller is taken right off his feet, a look of
incredible surprise on his face, dead even before his body hits
the ground. Max is horrified.

Vincent leaps from the cab as POLICE SIRENS SWELL CLOSER...

VINCENT

(ferocious)

A thousand cops comin' here! GET IN!

...and shoves Max behind the wheel, jumps in back:

VINCENT (CONT'D)

DRIVE!

Max hits the gas, peeling off in a cloud of smoke and leaving
the dead cop behind us as we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT - AERIAL SHOT - MANHATTAN CITYSCAPE - NIGHT

CAMERA DRIFTS IN over Manhattan, floating like a dream, dizzying us with a million lights...

...and WE ANGLE DOWN through the drifting canyons of buildings, CLOSING ON an endless empty thoroughfare, finding no traffic at this hour...

...except for one lone cab.

INT - MAX'S CAB - NIGHT

Stunned, Max drives in a state of shock.

In back, Vincent's quietly deep-breathing. Even he's a little shaky.

VINCENT

What a clusterfuck. Everything but the Polish cavalry.

(Max doesn't answer;
nothing)

You don't want to talk, tell me to fuck off!

Indifferent, Vincent gazes out the window at the passing buildings.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Good.

(beat)

Blood, urine and death get to you? Try deep breathing. Or remember we all die anyway...

MAX

You had to kill Heller?!

VINCENT

(blase)

Who's Heller?

MAX

That cop!

(beat)

Why'd you have to do that? You couldn't wound him? The guy had a family, maybe, parents, kids who gotta grow up without a dad, he was probably a good guy; and he believed me...

VINCENT

I shoulda saved him 'cause he believed you?

MAX

No, not just that.

VINCENT

Yeah, that.

MAX

Yeah, so, what's wrong with that?

VINCENT

It's what I do for a living.

MAX

Some living.

VINCENT

Head towards Union Station.

MAX

What's at Union Station?

VINCENT

How are you at math? I was hired for five hits. I did four.

MAX

(grim)

One more.

VINCENT

There you go...!

MAX

Whyn't you kill me and find another cab.

VINCENT

You're too good.

(shrugs)

We're in this together. Fates intertwined. Cosmic coincidence and all that crap...

MAX

You're full of shit.

VINCENT

I'm full of shit?

(beat)

You're a monument of bullshit. You even bullshitted yourself all I am, is taking out the garbage. Bad guys killing bad guys...

MAX

That's what you said...

VINCENT

And you believe me...?

MAX

What'd they do?

VINCENT

How do I know?

(beat)

But, they all got that "witnesses for the prosecution" look to me. Probably some major federal indictment against somebody who majorly does not want to get indicted... I dunno.

MAX

That's the reason?

VINCENT

That's the "why." That's the why? There is no reason.

(beat)

No good reason; no bad reason. To live or to die.

MAX

Then what are you?

VINCENT

(beat)

...indifferent.

Max hesitates...

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Get with it. Get over it.
...millions of galaxies of hundreds of millions of stars and a speck on one in a blink...that's us. Lost in space. The universe doesn't care.

(beat)

The cop, you, me? Who notices?

MAX

What happened to you?

VINCENT

As in...?

(waits)

MAX

Man, if someone had a gun to your head and said: "You gotta tell me what's goin' on with that person over there or I'll kill you"...they'd have to kill you...

(beat)

'Cause you don't have a clue for...or about...anyone...

(beat)

To be like that, I don't think you, you have any of that for your own life... Do you believe you're entitled or at least expect to draw breath in the a.m.? Open your eyes in the morning? I don't think you do...I don't think so...

(beat)

I think you are way low...like in your estimation. In your estimation of yourself. So how'd you get that way...?

VINCENT

...all the cabbies in LA, I pull Max, the man with X-ray vision...

MAX

Answer the question.

VINCENT

Look in the mirror.

(pause)

...piss-ant paper towels...a bottle of 409...saving up for goin' to the Comoros. How much you got saved?

MAX

None of your business.

VINCENT

...pie in the sky? "Someday my dream'll come..."

(beat)

But one night you'll wake up and

realize suddenly you're old. It hasn't happened. It never will. Life just flipped on you. Tomorrow became yesterday. Then you'll bullshit yourself it was never gonna happen, anyway, and push it back in memory...and anesthetize yourself in a Barcalounger with daytime TV for the rest of your life...

(beat)

Don't talk to me about murder. You're do-in' yourself...in this yellow prison with steel-belted radials. Clocking in and out everyday...

The needle on the speedometer is creeping past forty...

VINCENT (CONT'D)

All it ever took was a ticket. What the fuck are you still doing in LA?

Needle hitting the fifty mark...

MAX

'Cause I never got it straightened up; made the push, made the moves...

VINCENT

Slow down.

MAX

(ignoring him)

I should have done that. Fixed it and more. Get out from under what I been under...

Needle pushing sixty...

VINCENT

You're going too fast.

MAX

But you know what? Nothing matters, anyway. We are insignificant out here in the big nowhere, say the badass sociopath in my backseat. Right? Yeah. That's one thing I've got to thank you for, bro. And I never saw it that way...

The cab goes blasting through an intersection on a red light. A LOS ANGELES TIMES DELIVERY TRUCK SLAMS ON ITS BRAKES as Max

swerves, barely avoiding a collision.

VINCENT

That was a red light!

Max glances in the rearview.

MAX

...'til now.

Vincent pulls his Sig-Sauer and snaps off the safety, aiming at Max's head. Max almost laughs.

VINCENT

Slow the hell down!

MAX

What are you gonna do, pull the trigger? Kill us? Go ahead, man!
Shoot...my ass.

VINCENT

Slow down!

MAX

Vincent?

Their eyes meet in the rearview mirror. Vincent is stunned by a look in Max that has never been there before. It's the look of a man with nothing to lose.

MAX (CONT'D)

Go fuck yourself.

Max slams on the brakes and cranks the steering wheel hard...

EXT - STREET - NIGHT

...sending the cab slewing through an intersection, a few other CARS veering wildly to avoid him...

...as the cab goes into a violent roll, flipping down the street, SMASHING itself to pieces on the blacktop, shedding parts, spewing glass, rolling at least a dozen times...

...and then settling upside-down, car revolving slowly to a creaking stop, antifreeze drizzling across the pavement...

...and then everything goes silent, motionless, still.

PUSHING IN

on the wreckage. Steam billowing from the ruptured radiator. Crumpled metal. Missing hood. Disintegrated windshield...

...and we find Max trapped upside-down in his seatbelt harness, one side of his face streaked with blood. Alive but dazed.

He hears movement in the back. Moans. Sharp intake of breath. Then a voice...

VINCENT

Well. That was brilliant.

MAX

Was your seatbelt fastened, honey?

Max lets out a dry laugh, starts painfully trying to unclasp his seatbelt.

-- and a BLOODY HAND shoots from the darkness behind him, whipping a GLEAMING BUTTERFLY KNIFE right at his face. Max jerks his head aside and the knife misses him by inches, ramming solidly into the headrest instead.

Max throws the buckle on his seatbelt, dropping and hitting the ceiling of the cab, suddenly in a violent struggle for survival as Vincent lunges forward, a dark avenging shape from the back seat, trying to slice Max's throat, Max fighting wildly back, trying to keep the knife at bay...

...and we hear a POLICE SIREN SWELLING. Vincent pauses, eyes glittering like an animal sniffing the air for danger...

...and he's gone, vanishing like a shadow. Max looks out the window...

MAX'S POV

...and catches a glimpse of Vincent's ankles running off into the night. The J-frame is lying on the pavement ten or fifteen yards away, where it skidded in the crash. Vincent scoops it up on the run, SHOES CRUNCHING on broken safety glass as he vanishes into darkness. The SIREN GROWS LOUDER.

Max crawls from the wreckage, emerging on the driver's side, pushes painfully to his feet. Looks around.

A surreal moment. Max standing by his overturned cab, the empty city all around him, breathing the cool night air.

Alive.

It strikes him in that moment. He's survived the night. The

blood pumping through his veins is a fact, undeniable, intractable, blissful. It stuns him. Overwhelms him.

A sound escapes his throat, starting as a laugh, building toward a scream. Whatever it is, it's release, blessed release, and he howls it at the rooftops because the goddamn sirens are coming, they're almost here, and how good is life?

An NYPD CRUISER screeches to a stop. TWO UNIFORMED COPS, a black driver and his Hispanic partner. The Hispanic cop grabs the mike off the dash, muttering an urgent call...

COP #2

Code 85, request ambulance, East 39th
between Fifth and Madison...

...while Cop #1 jumps out, stunned at all the wreckage:

COP #1

Holy shit, you okay?

And the mundane beauty of the question makes Max laugh even harder, though hardly any sound is coming out now, it's more like a hitching sob, and there are tears streaming down his face. Cop #1 approaches Max, gentle but firm:

COP #1 (CONT'D)

Okay, my man, just relax. You've been
in an accident and you're in shock.
Help's on the way. You understand
what I'm saying?

(Max nods)

Anybody else in the cab?

Max shakes his head. The cop pulls his flashlight, briefly checks the passenger compartment to make sure, returns his attention to Max. Meanwhile, Cop #2 emerges from the cruiser, circling around to inspect the wreckage...

COP #1 (CONT'D)

You dizzy? You want to sit down?

MAX

(finds his voice)

I'm...fine. Fine.

COP #1

You sure? You look pretty shaky...

Cop #2, now at the rear of the cab, suddenly freezes, his flashlight beam finding:

COP #2

Oh, Christ. A body in the trunk.
He's been shot.

A heartbeat. Cop #1 stiffening, hand dropping to his holster, Max glancing back, the trunk hanging open from the crash, the corpse of Ivan Petrov in a sprawled heap.

Cop #1 steps back, drawing his handgun, shouting:

COP #1

Freeze! Hands where I can see 'em!
On your knees! Slowly!

Max does as he's told, hands in the air, getting to his knees on the pavement, and the whole thing strikes him as so insane, so fucking silly, that he can't help laughing again...

MAX

...arrest me, take me in, please...

...and he's on his knees, Cop #1 coming up behind him, Cop #2 hanging back and leveling his pistol, covering his partner...

PUSH IN ON MAX (SLO-MO)

Kneeling. One arm being brought down and wrenched behind his back, handcuffs flashing as they descend...

MAX'S POV

PUSHING SLOWLY across the pavement. Debris from the wreckage. Granules of shattered safety glass. Vincent's scattered files. A black and white photograph of a familiar face. Nikolyai, the guy with the bad suit and checked socks, now deceased...

TIGHTER AND TIGHTER ON MAX (SLO-MO)

as his gaze travels the debris, his expression changing, the sardonic laugh dying in his throat...

MAX'S POV PUSHING IN

...because he sees it. The last file. There, among the scattered pages, another photo:

Annie Farrell. U.S. Attorney's Office.

MAX (SLO-MO)

The breath goes out of him. He feels gut-punched. Cop #1 grabs the other raised hand, wrenching it down Max's back,

seconds away from buffing both wrists...

...and Max sees one last thing:

THE SCATTERED FILES

Not far from Annie's photo, mostly concealed except for the butt sticking out, is Vincent's Sig-Sauer.

MAX

erupts, fast, lunging forward on his knees, grabbing the Sig-Sauer and whipping it up, coming around to his feet, jamming the gun to the cop's neck. Max now using the cop as a shield, his partner trying to draw down and get a clear shot:

COP #2
DROP IT! DROP THE FUCKING GUN! DROP
IT OR I'LL SHOOT!

But Max just jams the gun tighter to his hostage's throat. For some insane reason, he's feeling clear, almost steady:

MAX
Nobody has to get hurt. I want your
gun on the ground.

COP #2
I SAID PUT THE FUCKING GUN DOWN! PUT
IT DOWN NOW! NOW!

MAX
(firm, loud)
When did we start negotiating? Lower
your weapon and put it on the fucking
ground!

A looks passes between the cops. The hostage terrified, eyes pleading. His partner uncertain, wavering.

MAX (CONT'D)
(softly)
Nobody has to get hurt.

Cop #2 lowers his weapon. Lays it reluctantly on the ground. Max pulls Cop #2's sidearm, shoves him toward his partner.

MAX (CONT'D)
Cuff yourselves to the door.

Cop #2 pulls his cuffs, puts his arm through the window frame of the open squad car door, cuffs himself to his partner. They

toss their cuff keys. Trapped.

A tense silence. Max hefts the cop's gun in his left hand almost embarrassed by it. He tosses it, bends down to the cab, pulls Annie's card off the visor, starts backing away from the cops...

MAX (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I just don't have time for you to believe me.

...and the last they see of him, he's vanishing up the street into the darkness.

MAX

Running.

Stripped of everything now. Operating purely on instinct. Vincent's gun in his right hand, handcuff dangling from his left wrist...

Running.

Lungs starting to burn. The city silent around him. The only sound his ragged breathing, his feet hitting the pavement...

Running.

TWO COP CARS rocketing through the intersection a block or so behind him, SIRENS WAILING. Max veering for cover, not breaking stride, pressing on...

SIRENS SWELLING all over the city now, police units responding, Max spinning around, trying to pin the sound, what direction to go, knowing he was only blocks away when the cab flipped...

Cutting onto Park Avenue, racing up the middle of the street toward the Met Life Building, ducking some pre-dawn TRAFFIC...

Seeing a MAN ahead, striding along muttering into a CELL PHONE, Max grabbing the phone right out of his hand as he sails past him, the man spinning around to come after him:

MAN

Hey, motherfucker!

Max whips around, Sig-Sauer snapping up.

MAX

Fuck off!

The man does. Max keeps running, dialing, fumbling Annie's business card, getting the numbers wrong, trying again...

...and he finally stops, gasping for breath, punching in the final numbers as CAMERA CIRCLES SLOWLY AROUND HIM TO REVEAL:

ANNIE'S OFFICE BUILDING. We're on the raised roadbed of Park Ave South, facing the building dead-on. It's flat and black, monolithic, looming into the sky. Empty offices are lit here and there, scattered sparsely up the face of the building.

Except...

Three floors are completely lit, 5th through 7th, pretty much at eye level with Max. The office building and its windows create a surreal effect, like a giant chessboard.

MAX (CONT'D)
(gripping cell phone)
C'mon, go through, go through...

Through WAVES OF CELL PHONE STATIC, we hear RINGING on the other end...

INT - ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Vincent rides up, watching the numbers climb...

EXT - STREET - NIGHT

Max waits, heart pounding, eyes scanning the windows...

He sees a FIGURE on the uppermost fully-lit floor, 7th, crossing an office to grab the phone. Annie.

INT - OFFICE - NIGHT

She lays down some files and grabs up the phone, bleary from exhaustion. She wasn't kidding about pulling an all-nighter.

ANNIE
Annie Farrell.

(INTERCUT AS NEEDED between Annie and Max:)

MAX
(gasping for breath)
Annie...it's Max.

ANNIE
(uncertain)
Max...

MAX

Max, the cab driver!

ANNIE

(beat)

Max? Oh...

(glances at clock)

...it's kind of a strange time to be calling...

MAX

Listen to me! Just listen, okay?
There's a man, Vincent, he's coming to
kill you!

ANNIE

He's...what? Say again? We're in
cell hell...

MAX

(shouting)

Kill you! He's coming to kill you!

ANNIE

(beat)

If this is a joke, it's not funny.

MAX

Dmitri hired him! He's already killed
all your witnesses, now he's coming
after you! He was stalking you when I
dropped you off. I don't know what
happened, but he diverted and got into
my cab, instead.

THE ELEVATOR DOORS

slide open onto Annie's floor. Vincent emerges, moving grimly
down the hallway...

INT - OFFICE - NIGHT

...while Annie tries to decipher what Max is saying through the
RISING AND FALLING CELL PHONE STATIC:

ANNIE

Did you say Dmitri? How do you know
about my case? I don't understand...

MAX

It doesn't matter! Just get out of

the goddamn building...

INT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

...but it's too late, Vincent's at the door marked "Annie Farrell." He draws back and kicks the door in, smashing it off its hinges, lunges through the doorway...

ANNIE'S OFFICE

...and finds nothing. It's not even the same office. Vincent looks furiously around...

ANOTHER OFFICE

...while Annie finally grasps what Max is telling her:

ANNIE

...okay, Max, I believe you...I'll get out of the building...

MAX

No, no, wait...

EXT - STREET - NIGHT

Max sees Vincent rampaging through the offices on the 5th floor, tearing the place apart, looking for Annie...

...and CAMERA TILTS UP to reveal Annie two floors right above Vincent. She's frozen at the desk, phone to her ear.

MAX

...he's two floors below you.

ANNIE

In my office?

MAX

Where are you, what floor?

ANNIE

Seventh, files section. What should I do?

MAX

He doesn't know you're up there! Just stay right where you are! Call the police!

ANNIE

Max, I'm scared. Are you sure?

MAX

Yes! Stay put, goddamn it! Don't
move from that spot...

INT - ANNIE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Vincent suddenly pauses. Eyes going to Annie's desk phone.
Suddenly realizing. One of the extension buttons is GLOWING.

He lunges to the desk, checks the glowing light. Right next to
it, typed on the phone's extension card is:

Files Section, 7th Fl.

Vincent looks toward the ceiling. Knowing where she is. CAMERA
TILTS UP of his look...

EXT - STREET - NIGHT

...as Max reacts, horrified, realizing Vincent knows exactly
where she is...

MAX

(into cell phone)

Annie, hang up! Get out! He knows
where you are! Get out!

INT - FILES SECTION - NIGHT

...but Annie's lost him in the CELL PHONE STATIC:

ANNIE

Hello? Max? Did you say something?

No use, he's gone. She punches a clear line, dials 911...

EXT - STREET - NIGHT

...as Max frantically hits redial. All he gets is a SHRILL FAST-
BUSY TONE. No cell service.

MAX

Shit!

Pure desperation. No time to think. Only to act. He glances
over the abutment to the road below. Fuck it. Over he goes,
falling to the pavement, hitting hard, pushing to his feet,
ankle wrenched, racing/hobbling across the street toward the
office building...

INT - FILES SECTION - NIGHT

...as Annie listens to the 911 RECORDING:

VOICE

...call will be answered in the order received. If this is not an emergency...

EXT - BUILDING LOBBY - NIGHT

Brightly lit inside, all-glass walls facing the street.

Max SLAMS against the glass, shaking the door, POUNDING, hollering to be let in...but he stops, noticing:

Keys in the door lock. Dangling, just on the other side of the glass. Night watchman's keys, an entire array.

Max scans the lobby with dread, sees:

A LONG SMEAR OF BLOOD across the white tile...

...leading to the LOBBY RECEPTION DESK. A PAIR OF FEET sticking out. It's the NIGHT WATCHMAN, dragged there by Vincent.

INT - FILES SECTION - NIGHT

Annie finally hears a CLICK ON THE LINE as:

FEMALE VOICE (FILTERED)

Manhattan 911, what is the nature of your problem?

ANNIE

There's a man in the building, he's trying to kill me...

TELEPHONE MAINTENANCE ROOM/5TH FLOOR HALLWAY

...and WHACK! Vincent swings a FIRE AX, instantly severing the building's telephone trunk line, sparks sputtering from the bundled cables. He tosses the ax, exits into the hallway, jabs the elevator button...

INT - FILES SECTION - NIGHT

...as Annie finds herself talking to a dead line:

ANNIE

...hello?

EXT - BUILDING LOBBY - NIGHT

Max hurls a steel trash can at the glass wall with all his might. It just bounces off the inch-thick glass.

Max pauses, flabbergasted. That's some tough goddamn glass. He raises Vincent's Sig-Sauer, braces himself, squeezes the trigger. Nothing. Shit, where's the safety on this thing?

He tries again. FIRES TWO SHOTS into the glass door, causing a big chunk to disintegrate. He reaches in, frantic, turning the key in the lock...

INT - FILES SECTION - NIGHT

Annie, frozen with indecision. What to do? Stay or go?

She turns. In keeping with the building's design, a WALL OF GLASS separates this area from the corridor beyond, which runs the length of these offices. Normally, you'd be able to see people walking the hallway out there, going to and fro.

Right now, the corridor's silent and dark. Terrifying.

Screw it. Go. She forces herself to move, across the office, running now, out the door...

CORRIDOR

...and she barely gets ten feet before she hears:

DING. The elevator. Arriving. Down the hall. Just around the corner.

She stands frozen. Heart pounding. Listening.

Elevator DOORS OPENING. A SOFT FOOTSTEP. Somebody getting off. Somebody stealthy.

She backpedals, terrified, back into the office...

FILES SECTION

...where she closes the glass door, locks it, kills the overhead lights. Nothing now but the CITY GLOW spilling faintly through the windows. She runs across the room, drops behind:

A DESK F.G.

Annie crouches there, back pressed against the desk, trying to still her breathing.

Over the desk, b.g., is the glass wall running the length of the

office area. The corridor beyond. Empty.

She can't hear a thing. Just her heart pounding. The silence makes her want to scream.

A FIGURE appears in the murky darkness out there. Vincent. Peering in through the glass.

He tries the door. Rattles it gently. The sound makes her breath catch in her throat. Eyes wide.

Vincent stands there for what seems an eternity.

And then moves on, continuing down the hall. FOOTSTEPS receding softly. Then quiet.

TIGHT ON ANNIE

Waiting. Not breathing. Still as a statue.

Now! Go! Rising quickly, fast-fast, across the office, get out, get out now, unlocking the door, swinging it open, out into the hallway toward the elevators...

CORRIDOR

...and she slams right into Vincent waiting for her in the darkness! She SCREAMS, grappling wildly as he wrestles her back through the door into the office...

FILES SECTION

...and he throws her violently across a desk, smashing her through a computer, Annie hitting the floor hard, scrambling to get away, crawling, but Vincent's coming around the desk, grabbing her kicking ankles, dragging her back...

...but Annie lands a kick to his face, breaks free, scrambles to her feet, racing now across the Files Section, bashing into desks in the dark, Vincent right behind her, hurling obstacles aside...

...and WHAM! Annie hits a desk at full run, never even saw it, doubling over as Vincent catches her, driving her to the floor with his weight, straddling her, snarling now as he grabs the phone off the desk, wraps the cord around her neck, jerks it taut with both hands.

Vincent straining. Annie on her hands and knees, strangling, mouth opening and closing for air that isn't there, not even a breath, fingers prying in vain at the phone cord wrapped around her throat...

Dying. She's dying. And she knows it.

VINCENT

Teeth bared. Sweat breaking out on his forehead from the sustained effort. Moments away from finishing the job...

...when a TINY GLOWING RED DOT suddenly appears, travels up his arm, settling on the spot just behind his ear.

Vincent slowly turns.

A SILHOUETTE in the doorway. Aiming a gun. For a moment, Vincent can't quite bring himself to believe:

VINCENT

Max?

MAX

Let her go.

Vincent laughs once, harsh, like a dog's bark.

VINCENT

What are you gonna do, shoot m--

BLAM! A MUZZLE FLASH. It's like Vincent just got kicked in the head. He grows sprawling.

Max rushes to Annie. She's pulling the cord from around her throat, gasping in great lungfuls of ragged breath.

MAX

Are you all r--

They hear a GROAN. Max goes stiff, pulls her to her feet. Both of them backing away, maneuvering toward the door, Max with the Sig-Sauer poised...

VINCENT

sits up, eyes glittering, hand clasped to the side of his head, blood coursing through his fingers.

VINCENT

Jesus, Max. You shot my fuckin' ear off.

He pulls his hand away and laughs in amazement, staring at the sheet of blood on his palm. He looks to Max.

VINCENT (CONT'D)

Good one.

Max keeps the Sig-Sauer aimed, pulls Annie out into the corridor. She slams the glass door, moving quick, locking it from the outside. Vincent gives them a tight smile...

...and his hand thrusts down, yanking his J-frame from an ankle holster, arm coming up stiff and straight, Max and Annie running, Vincent tracking them as he RAPID-FIRES --

CORRIDOR

-- and BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! come the gunshots, punching a ragged line of fractures in the glass, Max and Annie barely one step ahead the bullets...

...and then they're gone, cutting around the corner toward the elevators...

...and a moment later the GLASS WALL EXPLODES into the corridor, Vincent CRASHING through, landing in painful sprawl, pushing to his feet.

IN THE ELEVATOR

Max hits the ground floor button, the doors taking about a million years to close. Just as they're sliding shut, he sees Vincent running up the corridor, slapping fresh bullets into the J-frame with a speed-loader, raising the gun...

Max throws himself on Annie, both to the floor as BULLETS PUNCH through the doors. But the elevator's moving now...

7TH FLOOR HALLWAY

...leaving Vincent behind. He pounds on the doors, screaming:

VINCENT (CONT'D)

GODDAMN, MAX, GOOD FOR YOU! YOU FUCK!

He darts down the hallway for the stairs.

IN THE ELEVATOR

Max and Annie on the floor, breathing hard, staring at each other in wordless shock. They reach the ground floor...

BUILDING LOBBY

...and Max drags her to her feet as the doors open, the two of them racing across the open lobby for the exit.

BUILDING STAIRWELL

Vincent careens down the steps, the entire side of his head bloody, his ear mostly gone. He SLAMS through a door into --

THE LOBBY

-- where he finds the elevator standing empty. He turns, sees the shattered lobby door, runs out of the building --

OUTSIDE THE BUILDING

-- and pauses, hearing FOOTSTEPS RUNNING ON CONCRETE. He catches a glimpse of Max and Annie running across East 42nd Street toward Grand Central. He takes off after them.

MAX AND ANNIE

make it across the street, rushing into:

INT - GRAND CENTRAL STATION - NIGHT

The magnificent rotunda, quiet as a cathedral. Max and Annie race in, FOOTSTEPS ECHOING in the silence.

Hardly a soul in sight, except for an OLD BLACK FLOWER VENDOR setting up his cart for the morning rush. Max and Annie keep running, knowing Vincent's not far behind, Max yelling:

MAX
CALL THE POLICE!

The old man stares at them like they're nuts. They run across the rotunda toward the boarding ramps. Suddenly, Vincent comes through the same entrance they did, raising his J-frame.

BOOOOOM! The J-frame's never been louder, ECHOING LIKE A CANNON in the rotunda. The old man throws himself behind his cart as --

BOOOOOM! BOOOOOM! BOOOOOM! BOOOOOM! Vincent FIRES FOUR MORE SHOTS as Annie and Max disappears down the boarding ramp, BULLETS CHEWING HUGE HOLES in the wall at their backs...

Vincent goes after them, re-loading on the run, FOOTSTEPS RINGING across the marble.

INT - BOARDING RAMPS - NIGHT

Neon-lit and eerie, tubes flickering overhead.

Max and Annie run, turning this way and that, trying to decide

which way to go.

The SOUND OF A TRAIN grows, disembodied, drawing nearer and nearer, WHEELS SHRIEKING ON STEEL until it's deafening...

INT - SUBWAY TUNNEL - NIGHT

...and the TRAIN PULLS IN, HEADLIGHT GLARING. Max and Annie run into the tunnel, down the platform, ducking into...

THE THIRD SUBWAY CAR

...where they collapse, catching their breath, waiting for the doors to close and the train to pull out.

And waiting.

The train sits there for only seconds, but it seems like hours, like fucking forever. They're riveted to the ramp entrance, praying Vincent doesn't appear, hoping they've lost him.

The doors start to close, sliding irrevocably shut...

...and Vincent sails into the tunnel, going for the first car, slamming his hand into the closing doors. The train starts to move, Vincent running alongside, trying to force them open, train picking up speed...

THIRD SUBWAY CAR

Max and Annie are at the sliding door which adjoins the cars, peering through the window into the car ahead, not sure if Vincent made it or not. Then, down at the far end...

[NOTE: PAGES 106 & 107 -- THE SUBWAY CHASE SCENE --
ARE MISSING FROM THE SCRIPT.]

Vincent turns his head slightly, watching Max draw cautiously nearer. Max stares down, seeing the blood spreading across the floor beneath Vincent. Turning into quite a pool.

Vincent tries to speak, can't quite manage. Max sits next to him. Annie appears b.g. from the last car, watching them.

VINCENT AND MAX

just sit there, riding the train. Softly:

MAX

We're almost at the next station.

Vincent smiles faintly. He leans his head toward Max as if conferring a secret. In a halting whisper:

VINCENT

Guy. Gets on a subway. Dies.

(off Max's look)

Think anybody'll notice?

Vincent leans back, gazing straight ahead now. Rocking gently with the motion of the train...

...and suddenly, much to Max's amazement, Vincent starts to laugh. It comes out as a soft, rasping wheeze, but it's laughter all the same.

Max just stares at him. He has no idea what's so funny, but Vincent's exhibiting a lot of mirth for a dying man. Vincent raises his hand, points. Look.

Max follows his gaze. There, right across the car, among all the ADVERTISEMENTS lining the wall near the ceiling, is:

AN AD

The whitest sand and bluest sea you can imagine. A dream place. Limitless horizon. Sailboats dotting the blue. A cheerful blurb advises us to:

Visit the Beautiful Caribbean!

MAX

gazes at the ad. It dawns on him that Vincent's no longer laughing. In fact, Vincent's no longer doing anything. Ever.

Annie comes to Max and sits. Takes his hand. They ride the

train together, side by side, both staring up at the ad, hypnotized by all that blue, neither saying a word. For now.

The WHEELS SHRIEK as the train pulls in to a station...

WIDE ANGLE OF SUBWAY CAR

...and Max pulls Annie to her feet. The doors open. They silently get off.

The doors close again. The train pulls out.

WE HOLD ON Vincent for a while. Riding the train by himself, head back as if sleeping.

Just another dead guy on the subway...

FADE OUT