

# "LIFE"

Screenplay by

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SHOOTING DRAFT

1999

FADE IN:

EXT. PRISON CEMETERY – DAY

A handful of people are gathered in an open field under a fierce Mississippi sun. A couple of young inmates, JAKE and LEON, lean on their shovels. They are waiting to bury two identical CASKETS with inmate numbers stenciled on the pinewood lids.

A GUARD rests the butt of his rifle on the ground and takes a long, healthy pull from his canteen. He offers it to the PRISON CHAPLAIN, who is much obliged. SUPERINTENDENT BILL BURKE, a 40-year-old black man, glances at his watch and loosens his tie. Sure is hot.

MARY HUMPHRIES, an elderly white woman in a nurse's uniform, stands behind WILLIE LONG, an ancient inmate sleeping peacefully in a wheelchair. She readjusts an umbrella to shield the old black man from the blistering sun.

Burke dabs his forehead with a handkerchief. He gives the nod to the chaplain, who steps forward and cracks his bible. The men remove their hats.

CHAPLAIN

In accordance with the regulations of the State of Mississippi, we gather here today to lay to rest the remains of inmates R. Gibson, number 4316, and C. Banks, number 4317. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. May God have mercy on their souls.

BURKE  
Go ahead, fellas.

The young inmates plunge their shovels into the dirt. One by one, the mourners head back toward a prison van parked on a nearby dirt road.

NURSE HUMPHRIES  
I'll come back for you in a little while, Willie...

She leaves Willie alone with Jake and Leon. He rolls his chair up to the edge of the graves and gazes at the pinewood caskets.

JAKE  
These two guys friends of yours, old man?

WILLIE  
We spent some time together.

LEON  
Why do I get the feeling when you say some time, you mean some time.

WILLIE  
I was already here a good many years when they came in in 1932.

LEON  
1932? That's like, that's like...

WILLIE  
Sixty-five years ago. They always said the farm couldn't hold 'em forever. Looks like you're finally free, boys.

Willie pulls a bottle of moonshine from his jacket and takes a swig in their honor.

JAKE  
Hey, the dude's holdin'.

LEON

Come on, old-timer, hook the brothers  
up.

Willie passes the bottle to Leon, who takes a swig and winces  
from the unexpected kick.

LEON

Hell of a way to get out. Heard they  
burned up in that fire yesterday.

JAKE

I seen the bodies before they sealed  
'em up. Them fellas sizzled up good.  
Looked like some shit from the X-  
Files.

(taking a swig from  
the bottle)

Damn, that shit's nasty.

WILLIE

Ray's special recipe. He always had  
exacting standards where the hooch  
was concerned.

LEON

What were they, bootleggers?

Willie holds up the bottle, checking the clarity of the  
liquor.

WILLIE

Something like that.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. SPANKY'S BACK ALLEY (1932) – NIGHT

RAY GIBSON holds up a similar bottle of liquor to a light  
over a door. Music comes from within. He takes a swig and  
stashes the bottle in his belt. He adjusts his tie, polishes  
his shoes on the back of his pants and raps on the door.

INT. SPANKY'S – NIGHT

The speakeasy is jumping, jammed with people. Up on stage a  
hot JAZZ BAND is playing backup for a seductive CHANTEUSE.

Well-heeled PATRONS enter through doors near the stage.

In the back, at the end of a long hallway, a BOUNCER cracks open the door and Ray squeezes inside.

BOUNCER

Oh, no, Ray. Not tonight. Spanky's not happy with you.

RAY

Is Spanky here?

BOUNCER

No, but...

RAY

Then what's the problem?

BOUNCER

Do yourself a favor and find another place where they let you in the front door.

RAY

But this is where the action is and I have to be where the action is. Look, when your old lady wanted those alligator shoes, didn't I come through for you? Ain't she stepping in style now?

BOUNCER

Yeah...

RAY

Well, alright then. What do you think about this new tie?

BOUNCER

Sharp.

RAY

I look good tonight. And I feel lucky, too.

Ray heads inside.

BOUNCER

Anyone asks, it wasn't me who let you in.

Ray slides through the crowd, pausing at the bar to nibble on the neck of a COCKTAIL WAITRESS.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

Don't even try it.

RAY

When do you get off?

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

I get off at two, but you ain't never getting off.

She carries a tray of drinks into the crowd. Ray shakes his head in wonderment at her departing form. The BARKEEP steps up as Ray pulls out his bottle.

BARKEEP

You can't drink that in here, Ray.

RAY

I sure can't drink that watered-down swill you're serving. Give me a glass of ice.

BARKEEP

I can't give you a glass of ice. I can't give you anything until you pay your damn tab.

Disregarding the warning, Ray tilts the bottle back. Shaking his head, the barkeep moves on to a paying customer. Ray's eyes follow a bottle of French Champagne as it is delivered to a nearby table.

Here sits the straight-laced CLAUDE BANKS with his girlfriend, DAISY. She's enjoying the show. He's polishing the silverware. The WAITER pours two glasses of champagne and leaves the bottle on ice. Claude regards his glass skeptically.

CLAUDE

For the kind of money they charge here, you'd think they could hire somebody to actually wash the dishes.

DAISY

Claude. Here's to your new job down at the bank. I always knew you'd make something of yourself.

CLAUDE

Know what I'm going to buy with my first pay check?

Daisy thinks she does. She leans in, eyes twinkling.

CLAUDE

Season tickets to the Yankees. Right there on the first base line.  
(off her disappointment)  
What's wrong, baby?

DAISY

I was hoping you were gonna say an engagement ring, Claude.

French Champagne shoots out of Claude's nose.

CLAUDE

Engagement ring!

DAISY

That's what respectable folks do. Get a job, get married, start having babies. That's what you want, isn't it?

CLAUDE

Sure it is. I just don't see any reason to rush into things. Damn, look at this shirt. I'll be right back.

Claude leans in to kiss Daisy on the lips. She offers her cheek. He departs.

OVER BY THE BAR

Ray watches Claude make a beeline for the men's room.

INT. MEN'S ROOM – NIGHT

Claude steps into the bathroom and approaches the sink. A big hand falls on his shoulder and yanks him backwards into a stall...

INT. STALL – NIGHT

Claude is shoved down on the toilet by two BAG MEN in suits. Suddenly, it's crowded in here.

BAG MAN #1

Congratulations, Claude. We understand you finally got yourself a job.

BAG MAN #2

Guess that means you can pay Mr. Riley the fifty bucks you owe him.

They rifle through Claude's jacket and quickly find his wallet.

CLAUDE

Now wait a second, guys. I've got a bill to pay out there.

BAG MAN #1

Twenty-two dollars. Not bad for a start.

They toss back his empty wallet.

CLAUDE

Come on, fellas, that's two weeks pay. I'm here with my girl. You gotta leave me something.

BAG MAN #2

How about your legs?

CLAUDE

My legs? Those are good, I'll keep the legs...

The stall door swings shut as the bag men depart.

INT. SPANKY'S – NIGHT

On his way into the Men's Room, Ray squeezes past the bag men on their way out.

INT. MEN'S ROOM – NIGHT

Glancing around, Ray spots Claude's feet under the stall door. He steps up to the sink, washes his hands and takes a towel from the ATTENDANT. Scanning the assortment of grooming products, he selects a bottle of cologne and takes a sniff.

RAY  
(displeased)  
You have any of that French stuff?

As the attendant bends down to retrieve a bottle of the good stuff, Ray palms a coin from the tip basket.

ATTENDANT  
Here you go.

Ray offers the quarter, a gesture of uncommon generosity.

RAY  
Keep the change.

ATTENDANT  
Why, thank you, sir!

Ray pats the cologne on his face. A toilet flushes and Claude steps over to the sink. Ray catches his eye in the mirror.

RAY  
Don't I know you?

CLAUDE  
I don't think so.

RAY  
Sure I do. What's your name again?

CLAUDE



Claude Banks.

RAY

Claude Banks. How could I forget that? You've got to remember me. Ray Gibson. We went to high school together.

CLAUDE

You went to Monroe?

RAY

(beaming)

That's right! Good old Monroe...

Ray throws his arms around Claude, deftly snatching his wallet. Claude extracts himself from Ray's embrace.

CLAUDE

Well, I went to Jefferson, so you must have a different Claude Banks in mind.

Claude straightens his jacket and heads for the door. Ray stashes the stolen wallet in his jacket.

RAY

Sorry, man. My mistake.

INT. SPANKY'S – NIGHT

On the stage, the chanteuse has downshifted into a sultry number about back-door lovers and broken dreams.

Ray steps out of the men's room and is instantly collared by BULLETHEAD, a man who makes his living being large and threatening.

RAY

Watch the threads, Bullethead. If this is about my tab, I've got it covered.

Pressed up against the wall, Ray reaches into his jacket and produces Claude's wallet. Bullethead snatches it, inspects it and is not impressed.

BULLETHEAD

This ain't about your tab, Ray. You've got bigger problems than that.

He stuffs the wallet back into Ray's jacket and hustles Ray out the back door past the bouncer who let him in.

BOUNCER

Is that Ray Gibson? Who the hell let him in here?

BACK AT CLAUDE'S TABLE

Claude returns to the table where Daisy is sipping champagne. He takes the glass out of her hand.

CLAUDE

Come on, honey, let's get out of here.

DAISY

But I'm having a good time...

WAITER

Excuse me, sir, I believe you forgot this.

The waiter presents Claude with the bill.

CLAUDE

The bill. Of course, the bill. We couldn't leave without paying the bill. Especially such an incredibly large bill.

INT. VAN – NIGHT

Claude is shoved into the back of the van and the doors are slammed behind him. He bangs and shouts, but it's no use.

RAY

Save your energy, Claude. You're gonna need it.

Ray is stretched out against the back wall. Claude is knocked

to the floor as the van lurches into motion.

RAY

Here, this belongs to you.

(tossing Claude his  
wallet)

It was empty when I found it.

CLAUDE

Good old Monroe.

Ray swigs from his bottle and offers it to Claude, who isn't interested.

RAY

What I want to know is what happened  
to your cush between the time that  
you got up from the table and when I  
caught up with you in the Johnny?

CLAUDE

I don't see where that's any of your  
business.

RAY

Did those two muscle heads shake you  
down? Swear I've seen them down at  
the track with Sure-shot Riley. That's  
it, ain't it? A gambling debt.

Busted, Claude snatches the bottle and carefully wipes off the neck before tilting it high. Ray gets a good chuckle out of this straight cat in the bow tie.

CLAUDE

Where they taking us, anyway?

RAY

Probably to Spanky's headquarters  
down at the pier.

CLAUDE

Good, I'm looking forward to meeting  
this Spanky. Give me a chance to  
straighten out this whole mess.

RAY

I can't wait to see that. You slay me, man.

EXT. PIER – NIGHT

The van pulls into a the loading bay of a warehouse at the end of a short pier on the Harlem River.

INT. WAREHOUSE – NIGHT

Bullethead and a HENCHMAN pull Ray and Claude from the back of the van. They find themselves in a dark warehouse filled with crates of contraband.

CLAUDE

(sotto)

What are they gonna do to us?

RAY

You? Dine and ditch, right?

(Claude nods)

Over ten bucks?

(he nods again)

You're probably looking at a thumb.

CLAUDE

A thumb? What do you mean, like cut it off? For ten bucks?

(Ray nods)

That include the tip?

Claude shoves his hands under his armpits at the sound of approaching FOOTSTEPS echoing across the vast space. Claude and Ray peer into the darkness.

SPANKY

(from the darkness)

You picked the wrong night to fuck with me, Ray. I just lost three men and a truck full of Canadian whiskey. You know what that kind of thing does to my business? It makes me want to lash out and hurt somebody.

SPANKY JOHNSON emerges into the light. He uses a small silver

spoon to take an ample snort of cocaine into each nostril.  
He glances at Claude.

SPANKY

Who's he? Friend of yours, Ray?

CLAUDE

I never saw this man before tonight.  
He's a lowlife degenerate who lurks  
in bathrooms. I'm a professional  
man, an upstanding citizen. I go to  
church on Sunday.

SPANKY

Then what are you doing here?

BULLETHEAD

Failure to pay.

CLAUDE

(rattled)

Look, Mr. Johnson, you seem like a  
reasonable man. I got a good job  
starts Monday. I'll pay you back  
with my first pay check. With  
interest. I don't want to tell you  
how to conduct your business, but if  
you cut off my finger you won't get  
jack. Working an adding machine, I  
gotta be whole.

(his fingers dancing  
over imaginary keys)

I need my thumbs and all my fingers  
for praying and doing good...

Spanky holds up a hand, silencing Claude.

SPANKY

The choirboy wants to keep his  
fingers. Who am I to argue? Drop  
him.

CLAUDE

Drop him? What does drop him mean?

Claude protests loudly as Bullethead and the henchman bind

his hands and feet. Spanky turns to Ray.

SPANKY

You gotta lotta balls showing your face around my club. If a man's gonna run numbers on my side of Broadway, you think he'd have the common sense to keep a low profile. But not Ray Gibson.

The goons hoist Claude up on another pulley and dangle him head first over a hole in the floor. Several feet down, the Harlem River laps against the wooden pylons.

CLAUDE

No, not down there! That water's filthy! Help me out here, man!

Shrugging, Ray pinches his nose and puffs out his cheeks. The goons release the rope and Claude plunges into the water. Spanky turns back to Ray.

RAY

You don't have to drown that fella, Spanky. You already scared him half to death. He didn't know who he was fucking with.

SPANKY

But you do. What does that say about you, Ray? What does that say about me? I've given you a lot of leeway over the years on account of your father. But he didn't last long enough to teach you the meaning of the word respect so I guess I'm gonna have to school you myself.

RAY

Come on, Spank, I'm just trying to get by here. You remember how it was when you were starting out.

The henchman yanks on the rope. Claude emerges from the hole, gasping for breath.

CLAUDE

I was supposed to wear this suit on Monday!

The henchman releases the rope, sending Claude back into the water. Ray reaches into his jacket. Bullethead pulls a gun and presses it into Ray's temple. Ray gives him a look and cautiously pulls out his bottle.

SPANKY

What's that, some of your bathtub brew?

RAY

Puerto Rican rum. See for yourself.

Ray tosses him the bottle. Spanky uncorks, sniffs, samples the goods. He's impressed.

SPANKY

Where'd you get this?

RAY

Comes up the Mississippi. I can get more. A lot more. I was thinking about going into business for myself, but under the circumstances, I'd be willing to take on a partner.

Once again, the henchman yanks on the rope and Claude comes up sucking air desperately. He releases the rope, submerging Claude for a third time.

SPANKY

I'm interested. Keep talking.

RAY

All I need is the front money and a truck. I could be back in two, three days tops if I had somebody to share the driving.

Spanky considers the terms. Can he afford to trust Ray? Can he afford not to?

SPANKY

If you fuck me on this one, I'll spare no expense.

RAY  
Understood.

SPANKY  
Alright, Ray, you've got a deal.  
Pick your man and get going.

Ray glances around. The pulley rope is still twitching in the water.

RAY  
I'll take the little choirboy, if you don't mind.

SPANKY  
If I was you, I'd want somebody who can handle himself in a tight spot.

RAY  
I just want somebody who won't put a bullet in my back once the truck is full.

Spanky sees Ray's point. He nods to the henchman, who hoists Claude's limp body out of the water and onto the cement. Spanky plants a foot on Claude's chest and applies pressure. A geyser of Harlem River water shoots from Claude's mouth as he sputters back to life.

SPANKY  
For your sake, I hope you can drive.  
Somebody give him some dry clothes.

CUT TO:

THE SPINNING WHEEL OF A TRUCK

The CAMERA MOVES UP the side of the old Ford truck to find Claude sitting pensively in the passenger seat.

INT. TRUCK (MOVING) – NIGHT

Ray palms the wheel.



RAY

Tell me about that hot sketch you were hypin' last night. She was a choice bit of calico. You two been seeing each other a long time? Gonna slap the handcuffs on her and stroll down the aisle one of these days?

Tight-lipped, Claude shifts in his seat.

RAY

Sometimes I wish I could find me a sheba to settle down with. Suppose I'm just a tomcat by nature.

(trying to fill the  
silence)

This little rum run is gonna seriously improve my relationship with Spanky. He's a good man to have on your side. He's got the capital and the connections. That's what you got to have in that business. Spanky's place is pretty plush, but one of these days I'm gonna open up my own establishment. Ray's Boom-Boom Room. You like that? Ray's Boom-Boom Room. That's in the groove, don't you think?

If Claude does like it, he's not letting on.

RAY

Come on, daddy-o. You haven't said a word since we started. Least you could do is make some friendly conversation.

CLAUDE

Look, man, I don't want friendly conversation. I don't want to be your friend. I've seen your friends and I don't like them. I just want to do this thing and get back to New York in time to start my job.

RAY

Start your job? What kind of job?

CLAUDE

Well, if you must know, bank teller at First Federal of Manhattan. I'm responsible for keeping track of hundreds, occasionally thousands of dollars.

RAY

That's some long green.

CLAUDE

Damn straight, it is. I got my own set of keys because I'm supposed to open up. So if I ain't there 8 a.m. Monday morning, there's gonna be hell to pay.

Beat of silence. Ray laughs to himself.

CLAUDE

What?

RAY

Nothing.

CLAUDE

No, tell me what's so funny.

RAY

I don't know. Bank teller. Sounds like ladies work to me.

CLAUDE

Well, maybe I should dig around in other people's clothes for money. It's obviously been highly successful for you.

RAY

Hey, you'd be surprised what you find in other people's pockets. Just gotta avoid them deadbeat bank tellers. Get you every time.

CLAUDE

I didn't start out to be a bank teller. I was gonna be a ballplayer. Even had an offer to play short for the Newark Eagles.

RAY

Why didn't you take it?

CLAUDE

The Negro League don't pay so good. And you're always on the road. That don't wash with Daisy.

RAY

You gave up baseball to be a bank teller? I can't latch on to that.

CLAUDE

At some point a man's got to get serious about his future. I'm sure you have no idea what I'm talking about.

RAY

You're talking about giving up baseball to be a bank teller.

CLAUDE

Bank teller's just a start. I got plans. Real plans. Not opening some Zoom-Boom Room. This time next year I'll be a loan officer.

RAY

A loan officer?

CLAUDE

That's right, a loan officer.

RAY

So you mean, if I needed some jack to get my nightclub up and running, I'd have to hype some square like you?

CLAUDE  
Uh-huh.

Ray pulls out his pocket watch. A mechanical tune plays as he checks the time.

RAY  
How would I get a loan, anyway?

CLAUDE  
You need collateral.

RAY  
(re: watch)  
Like this?

CLAUDE  
That thing? Who'd you steal it from?

RAY  
My daddy gave me this watch.

CLAUDE  
Yeah? Who'd he steal it from?

RAY  
My daddy is dead so watch your mouth.  
You can say what you want about me,  
but don't be dragging my daddy into  
it. This watch means the world to  
me. Solid gold. Keeps perfect time.

CLAUDE  
Looks like a fake to me. Loan denied!

Ray stuffs his daddy's watch back in his pocket.

RAY  
Ah, go chase yourself. I'll take my  
business elsewhere. And for future  
reference, you are no longer welcome  
at Ray's Boom-Boom Room.

CLAUDE  
There is no Boom-Boom Room.

RAY

When there is, you can forget about it. And I swear to God, you ever talk about my daddy again I'm gonna kick your bank-telling, loan-denying ass, you got me?

CLAUDE

Oooh...

RAY

I think I liked you better when you kept your trap shut.

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER – DAY

The truck veers off the highway and jerks to a halt in front of the rundown establishment.

INT. ROADSIDE DINER – DAY

A dozen WHITE FOLKS look up as Ray and Claude push through the door.

RAY

Man, something smells good in here. How's everybody doing?

Nothing but sullen stares from all corners of the room.

CLAUDE

(sotto)

Maybe we oughta find another place.

RAY

Are you kidding? Tell me you don't want a slice of that pie right over there.

CLAUDE

I must have left my appetite outside, which is where I think we ought to be right now.

Claude tugs Ray towards the door but Ray won't be dissuaded. He boldly addresses a YOUNG MAN in an apron behind the

counter.

RAY

Good evening, Billy. We'd like some coffee and a couple of slices of that homemade pie you've got advertised.

BILLY

How you know my name's Billy?

RAY

It says so right there on your shirt.

BILLY

(glancing down)

That what that says?

Billy's MAMA sets a piping hot pie on the back counter and steps up next to her son. She casts a disparaging glance at Claude's suit.

MAMA

If you boys can read so good, how come you missed that sign in the window?

Claude considers the sign she's pointing to.

CLAUDE

You mean this sign? The one that says "No Coloreds Allowed." That's a good question. Ray, how come we missed the sign?

RAY

Look, ma'am, we've been driving all day. We'd just like to purchase one of those pies and we'll be on our way.

MAMA

Those are whites-only pies.

RAY

Got any nigger pies?

Claude jabs him.

CLAUDE

Any fool could see those are whites-only, not-for-blacks, come-on-let's-get-the-fuck-outta-here pies. Thank you very much.

Claude starts tugging Ray toward the door.

RAY

(sotto)

Thanks for backing me up here, Uncle Claude.

CLAUDE

(sotto)

Don't Uncle Claude me. You get a load of those crackers? Couldn't be a mouthful of teeth among the bunch of 'em. Why you want to pick a fight with people like that for?

RAY

You're soft.

CLAUDE

What'd you say?

Diner patrons stare.

RAY

I said you're soft.

CLAUDE

Hey, man, don't ever call me that.

RAY

I call it like I see it, and what I see is definitely soft.

Claude narrows his eyes.

CLAUDE

Alright. You want some pie?

RAY

Yeah, I want some pie.

CLAUDE

Okay then, I'm gonna walk over to that counter and get us some fucking pie.

Resolved, Claude stomps over to the counter.

CLAUDE

Excuse me, ma'am, I bet a brick will turn that one right there into a colored pie.

Claude lays down a dollar bill. Mama casually pulls a shotgun from under the counter.

MAMA

And I bet this right here will turn you into a colored pie.

CLAUDE

Okay, Ray, I think we can go now. Much obliged...

Ray gives the whole place a cool once-over as Claude pulls him out the door. Mama turns to Billy, still studying the stitching on his shirt.

MAMA

Don't be concentrating so hard, baby. You're liable to seize yourself again.

EXT. DOCKS – NIGHT

The truck rolls up to the waters edge. Ray kills the engine and flashes the lights twice. In the passenger seat, Claude is fast asleep. After a few moments, a FAT MAN appears, shining a flashlight into the cab.

RAY

How you doing? We're looking for Slim.



SLIM  
You found him.

Ray cocks an eyebrow.

EXT. DOCKS – NIGHT

Under cover of darkness, a couple of MEN finish loading crates into the bed of the truck. Ray and Claude keep their eyes peeled for the law. Down by the river, they can see lights and hear music from a district of rowdy juke joints. SLIM steps up, wiping his hands.

SLIM  
That's it, fellas. Thirty six cases of Puerto Rico's finest. At five bucks a case, that's \$180.

Ray pulls out a wad and slaps it in Slim's sweaty palm. The fat man starts counting it out.

RAY  
Man, that music is hot. What goes on down there, Slim?

SLIM  
That's Natchez-under-the-Hill.

RAY  
Blacks welcome there?

SLIM  
Green's the only color that matters under the hill. They got gambling, girls. You oughta check it out.

RAY  
Maybe we will. Nice meeting you.

Slim slips into the shadows.

CLAUDE  
Nice meeting you? You've been here before, haven't you?

RAY

What gave you that idea?

CLAUDE

Oh, I don't know, maybe because our lives depend on it, I just sort of thought you knew what you were doing!

RAY

Don't get all agitated on me. I bought a bottle of rum from a couple of dudes, I heard 'em talking...

CLAUDE

Let me get this straight. We drove all the way down to Klan country 'cause you heard a couple of guys talking?

RAY

What are you complaining about? It worked out. Everything's cool. Now, come on, let's head down there and see what's shaking. We deserve a little reward.

CLAUDE

(dubious)

Reward?

RAY

There are people down there having fun. I want to be one of them. I want you to be one of them. On Monday you can be a bank teller if you want, but tonight you're a bootlegger with a truck full of Puerto Rican rum and a fistful of cash.

A look of excitement crosses Claude's face, but he quickly shakes it off.

CLAUDE

That's gas money.

Exasperated, Ray stuffs a few bills into Claude's pocket.

RAY

There's your gas money. You stay here and watch the truck. And don't worry, I've got the keys.

Left alone, Claude mutters and kicks at the dirt. He leans against the truck.

UP AHEAD/EXT. JUKE JOINT – NIGHT

Ray emerges from the woods and heads down the hill toward the juke joint. Claude hustles up next to him.

CLAUDE

I'm just gonna keep an eye on you, make sure you don't do nothing stupid.

INT. JUKE JOINT – NIGHT

A ramshackle den of iniquity on the banks of the Mississippi. The band is laying down some serious Delta blues, creating an inviting atmosphere for sin and moral corruption.

On a far side of the room, Ray is playing poker with some LOCALS. He seems to be having a bad night. WINSTON HANCOCK, a formidable black man, sweeps in another big pot and puffs happily on his cigar.

OVER AT THE BAR

Perched on a stool, Claude shoots a dark look at Ray and motions for the door. Ray waves him off and returns to his game. Claude becomes aware of a soft, young female hand on his shoulder.

SYLVIA

I've never seen you in here before.

CLAUDE

(staring at the hand)

That's because I've never been here before.

SYLVIA

I'm Sylvia. What's your name?

Against his better judgement, Claude's gaze follows the long, slender arm up past a bare shoulder and settles on SYLVIA'S angelic face. He is struck dumb.

SYLVIA

Can't you remember your own name?

CLAUDE

I know it begins with a "C"...

SYLVIA

Well, Mr. "C", how about buying a girl a drink?

(to the bartender)

Two bourbons.

CLAUDE

I really shouldn't. I gotta keep an eye on my friend.

SYLVIA

He looks like he can take care of himself.

The drinks arrive. She places a shot glass in Claude's reluctant hand. She winks provocatively and slowly pours the whiskey down her throat. Instinctively, Claude tosses back his shot.

CLAUDE

Claude. That's my name. Claude. That's never happened before.

SYLVIA

You're cute. You have any money, Claude?

CLAUDE

Ten dollars. But I need it to get home.

SYLVIA

Why would you want to go home? It's so early.

The bartender refills their glasses.

## BACK AT THE POKER TABLE

Winston considers his cards, hardly looking up as a WAITRESS lays down a cocktail napkin and sets a drink down on top of it. He glances at Ray, who casually considers his cards.

RAY  
I'll take two.

The dealer tosses Ray a couple of cards.

INSERT – Ray fans his cards to reveal a full house.

After considering the other players at the table, Ray pushes what's left of his money into the center of the table. The three other PLAYERS fold with disgust. Winston squints long and hard at Ray, then pushes everything he has into the center of the table.

WINSTON  
I'll see that...

Winston reaches into his jacket and throws down some more money on the pile.

WINSTON  
And while we're at it, let's sweeten the pot.

RAY  
Looks like my sugar bowl's empty, Mr. Hancock.

WINSTON  
(reaching for the pot)  
That's just too damn bad, ain't it?

RAY  
Now, hang on, slick. I ain't through with you yet.

Ray checks his cards again. He looks at the pot, it's a lot of money. With this hand, there's no way he can lose. He places his daddy's pocket watch on top of the pile. Winston checks the time piece.

WINSTON  
That'll cover it.

Ray lays down his hand.

RAY  
Full boat, ladies doing the paddling.

WINSTON  
Four threes.

Ray sits back, stunned. Winston rakes in his winnings. The game is over for the night. The three other players head to the bar.

WINSTON  
Don't take it too hard, New York.  
Have a round on me.

Winston tosses a silver dollar to Ray, who snatches it out of the air. Winston drops his hat on his head and moves through the crowd and out the door.

WAITRESS  
Can I get you something?

Ray shakes his head. Carefully, she begins to clear the table. Suddenly, he grabs her wrist. Winston's glass tips over. Ray flips over the cocktail napkin to reveal an extra pile of cards.

RAY  
Looks like he had a whole lot of  
nothing in his hand until you came  
along.

WAITRESS  
(wrenching free)  
You're hurting my arm.

EXT. JUKE JOINT – NIGHT

Ray dashes into the street, glancing both ways. No sign of Winston. Damn.

## EXT. BACK ALLEY – NIGHT

Winston produces Ray's pocket watch and pops it open. A smile crosses his face as the mechanical tune plays.

A sheriff's sedan rounds a corner, illuminating Winston in its headlights. The car pulls up and SHERIFF WARREN PIKE steps out. Distinguished by a casual cruelty, he's a young white man who loves his uniform.

PIKE

If it isn't Winston Hancock.

Winston tries to move past Pike, but the sheriff blocks his path with a night stick. As Winston backs off, another squad car pulls up behind him. TWO DEPUTIES step from the car, guns drawn.

PIKE

I thought we agreed that you were gonna leave town.

WINSTON

I tried to leave, Sheriff Pike. But your wife begged me to stay.

Pike slams Winston with his club, sending the black man to his knees. As Winston struggles back to his feet, a stiletto flashes and he lunges for the sheriff, slashing his cheek. The deputies grab Winston from behind, holding him by both arms. The long knife clatters to ground. Pike touches his face, examining the blood on his fingers.

PIKE

You just committed suicide, boy.

## INT. BORDELLO HALLWAY – NIGHT

Ray walks slowly down the hallway to Room 13. He is about to knock when he hears the sound of lovemaking from within.

## INT. SYLVIA'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Ray opens the door and peeks in. Sylvia's on top and in charge. Claude is concentrating real hard. Ray smiles to himself and closes the door.

INT. JUKE JOINT – NIGHT

Claude hitches up his suspenders as he comes down the stairs. He finds Ray having a drink at the now-empty bar.

CLAUDE

Hey, Ray. I've been looking for you.

RAY

Here I am.

CLAUDE

Guess we better get going, huh?

RAY

Still got that ten dollars?

CLAUDE

Well, not exactly. See, I met this girl. Real nice girl. God-fearing girl. Her name's Sylvia.

RAY

That jelly you were talking to right here?

CLAUDE

She's in a tight spot. Her mama needs this operation, and they ain't got the money for it. Their church took up a collection but they were still short...

RAY

So you made a generous contribution.

CLAUDE

What can I say? When the spirit moves me.

RAY

That was mighty charitable of you, Claude. Looks like we both got fucked tonight.



CLAUDE

What are you talking about?

RAY

While you were upstairs doing God's work, I was getting jack-legged by a fool with four threes.

CLAUDE

You lost all our money in a card game?

RAY

He even got my daddy's watch.

CLAUDE

Fuck that cheap-ass watch –  
(off Ray's glare)  
I mean, how the hell are we gonna get home without any money?

RAY

We've still got 36 cases of rum.  
That's better than money.

EXT. BACK ALLEY – NIGHT

Ray and Claude head down the alley.

CLAUDE

You sure the truck's this way?  
(looking over his  
shoulder)  
I swear it was back that way.

Suddenly, the bloodied figure of Winston Hancock lurches from the shadows and grabs Claude by the lapels. Claude is too scared to scream, staggering backward. But the man's grip loosens and he slips to the ground.

CLAUDE

(croaking)  
Ray... Yo, Ray...!

Ray turns back to find Claude trembling with fear and covered in blood. He just points down. Ray eyes widen. He kneels

down and turns Winston's body over.

CLAUDE  
I think he's hurt pretty bad.

RAY  
He's dead.

CLAUDE  
Oh, man, I've never seen a dead body  
before!

Much to Claude's horror, Ray starts rifling through Winston's pockets.

CLAUDE  
What do you think you're doing?! The  
man's been dead for two seconds!  
Don't you have any respect?

RAY  
It ain't here.

CLAUDE  
What ain't there?

RAY  
My daddy's watch. This is the dude I  
was telling you about –

Suddenly, the glare of two bright headlights from a pickup truck freeze Ray and Claude in a guilty tableau. FIVE WHITE MEN appear at the end of the alley.

MAN WITH LANTERN  
What's going on here?

Ray gingerly releases Winston's lifeless body.

MAN WITH LANTERN  
What's wrong with that one?

RAY  
Him? He's just drunk.

CLAUDE

Yeah, nobody puts 'em away like old what's-his-name.

RAY

Winston. His name's Winston.

CLAUDE

Come on, Ray, better get Winston back to the truck.

Claude and Ray hoist Winston's body to its feet. The man raises his lantern, takes a closer look at Winston's face.

MAN WITH LANTERN

This fella looks dead.

Ray and Claude check for themselves.

CLAUDE

Would you look at that, Ray. Winston up and died on us.

RAY

Hell with him then. If he can't share the driving, he can't ride in the truck.

MAN WITH LANTERN

He can ride with us.

Suddenly, the men all have guns. And they're pointed at Ray and Claude.

MAN WITH LANTERN

So can you.

INT. NATCHEZ JAIL – NIGHT

In a holding cell, Ray tests the window bars. Solid. Meanwhile, Claude sits on a cot brooding darkly. Through the bars, we see the rednecks laughing and passing around a bottle of bootleg rum with the DEPUTY on duty.

RAY

Man, this is gonna delay everything. Spanky's gonna be pissed.

CLAUDE

Spanky's gonna be pissed? Poor Spanky. Fuck Spanky! What the hell kind of a name is Spanky, anyway? You're responsible for this situation. I blame you for everything. If it wasn't for you, I'd be home having a hot meal right now.

RAY

If it wasn't for me, you'd be washing up on the beach at Coney Island right now.

(mocking Claude)

"I need all my thumbs and fingers for praying and doing good."

The jailhouse door opens and Sheriff Pike walks in. He pauses to give the prisoners the once-over. There's a fresh bandage over the cut on his cheek.

PIKE

What do we have here?

DEPUTY

Billy Bob and the boys found them down down under the hill with Winston Hancock. He was dead. Looks like murder.

PIKE

You don't say.

DEPUTY

Looks like they was running rum. Got thirty six cases of evidence out back. You want I should call in the federal prosecutor?

PIKE

Let's not drag the feds into this. I can think of better uses for that rum than letting it collect dust in some government warehouse up in Nashville.

Pike winks at his deputy, then turns to regard the prisoners.

PIKE

Besides, why bother with bootlegging when we got us a clear cut case of murder?

RAY

Excuse me, sheriff. As we explained to your associate here, there's been a mistake. We didn't kill anybody. Now, as for the bootlegging, we happen to work for a very important man in New York.

CLAUDE

That's right. Does the name Spanky Johnson mean anything to you?

PIKE

Afraid not.

RAY

Mr. Johnson is very well connected. If you were to let us go, I guarantee he would show you his appreciation, if you know what I mean.

PIKE

Are you offering me a bribe?

RAY

I'm just trying to pay the toll on the road to justice.

PIKE

You may be able to buy your way out of trouble up in New York City, but down here we take murder seriously.

CLAUDE

Look, man, how many times we gotta tell you people, we didn't kill that guy!

PIKE

Well, if that's the case, then you don't have anything to worry about, do you?

Pike turns his back on the prisoners and checks the time on a gold pocket watch – Ray's pocket watch. But from his cell, Ray can't hear the mechanical tune.

PIKE

Time to get home to the missus. See y'all in the morning.

In the cell, Claude turns to Ray.

CLAUDE

The man's gotta point. We're innocent, after all. I just gotta get a good night's sleep on this filthy mattress. Keep our heads on straight, stay cool, what's the worst thing that could happen to us?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM – DAY

The CAMERA Scorseses in on the JUDGE'S face...

JUDGE

Life!

The gavel comes down with a thundering crash. Stunned, Ray and Claude resist the BAILIFFS' efforts to remove them from the courtroom.

RAY

Life?! How long is life? We were just walking back to the truck. We didn't do nothing! Fuck life!

CLAUDE

Life?! What's life mean? There's no way I can do life. I got a job starts Monday morning!

They continue to protest loudly as they are dragged bodily through the door.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE – DAY

Blues music kicks in as a prison transport bus rolls down a dirt road cutting through the bleak Mississippi Delta.

INT. BUS (MOVING) – DAY

LONG-CHAIN CHARLIE, a white prison sergeant, sits behind the wheel. A shot gun hangs within easy reach.

The CAMERA MOVES BACK past grim-faced PRISONERS with their hands and feet shackled. We arrive at Ray and Claude sitting in grim silence as the bus lurches along.

EXT. PRISON – DAY

The bus veers off the country road and passes under a sign: MISSISSIPPI STATE PENITENTIARY. Sgt. Dillard's voice PLAYS OVER.

DILLARD (V.O.)

Welcome to the farm. Here you will be provided with ample opportunity to repay your debt to society through the rigors of hard labor...

Ray and Claude stare out the window, getting their first look at the harsh reality that awaits them. Cotton fields stretch to the horizon in every direction. HOE-GANGS till the earth under the watchful gaze of TRUSTY SHOOTERS...

DILLARD (V.O.)

In between harvest and planting season we got fields need clearing, roads need building and ditches need digging. You will eat only what you can grow. Your crop don't come in, you'll go hungry. If you die, don't worry 'bout us none. We'll find somebody to replace you...

Along the road, CONVICTS cast hard looks at the new men as the cart passes. A WHITE SERGEANT on horseback shifts his

rifle and casually spits tobacco juice in the dirt...

## EXT. CAMP 8 – DAY

A low-slung, single-story bunkhouse surrounded by a dirt yard. Two shooter shacks sit at diagonal corners of the yard. In each shack, two trusties with rifles keep vigilant watch over the camp. SGT. FRED DILLARD paces down the line of new men as HOPPIN' BOB, an uncommonly ugly trusty, unlocks their leg irons.

### DILLARD

This here is Camp 8. Camp 8 is for incorrigibles, so whatever you've done to get here, believe me, we're not impressed. You new men are probably noticing that we have no fences here at Camp 8. We don't need no fences, we have the gun line. It runs from shack to shack clear around the yard. You are now inside the gun line. If you step outside the gun line without my permission, you will be shot. If you trip and fall over the gun line, you will be shot. If you spit, if you pee, if you stick your ass out and take a dump over the gun line, you will be shot.

Dillard plucks a hat off one of the new prisoners and tosses it over the gun line. SHOTS ring out from the nearest shack. The hat is torn to shreds.

### DILLARD

One of my trusties puts a bullet in you when you're trying to run, I'm liable to give him a pardon for saving me the trouble of tracking you down, so you can bet their aim is true.

Dillard puts a cigarette in his mouth. Hoppin' Bob is right there with the flame.

### DILLARD

My name is Sgt. Dillard. In the unlikely event that you need to



address me, you call me boss. You already met this handsome fella right here. Hoppin' Bob's my ace boon coon. You run afoul of Hoppin' Bob, you run afoul of me.

Nodding to Bob, Dillard saunters off.

HOPPIN' BOB  
New men, strip down!

Ray and Claude share a look. Self-consciously, the men begin to undress.

INT. BUNKHOUSE – DAY

Double bunks line the walls, with a footlocker for each inmate. As usual, there's a poker game going on.

HOPPIN' BOB  
Okay, ladies, got some fresh meat for ya!

All activity comes to a halt as the new men shuffle into the cage wearing their prison-issue "ring-arounds." Hoppin' Bob slams the metal doors shut behind them.

HOPPIN' BOB  
We ain't got no wallflowers at Camp 8. Everybody gotta dance eventually. But don't worry, they won't try nothing tonight. That would take all of the fun outta the courtship.

The INCORRIGIBLES hungrily eye the new men in total silence. Claude sticks close to Ray as they shuffle toward their assigned bunks. The CAMERA SETTLES on a much younger WILLIE LONG.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – MORNING

The inmates jump down from the mule cart and grab hoes and shovels. Because he can't count, Hoppin' Bob keeps track of the men using a system all his own – a PEBBLE in his pocket for each man. Dillard stands by with his shotgun.

DILLARD  
Got three miles of ditch to clear  
today. Let's keep it moving!

EXT. DITCH – DAY

The men of Camp 8 labor under the brutal mid-day sun. JANGLE LEG, a handsome, muscular man, sings a verse to set the work tempo. Up and down the line, a mighty chorus responds. The CAMERA FINDS Ray and Claude swinging pick axes, sweating profusely.

CLAUDE  
I don't believe this before Abe jive.  
I didn't go to night school to sing  
in no Mississippi Boys Choir!

Claude stops to catch his breath and take off his shirt.

RAY  
I wouldn't do that if I was you.

CLAUDE  
Shut up. It's too damn hot. What do  
you know, anyway?

A SHOT rings out. Claude hits the ground as a bullet kicks up some dust nearby.

RAY  
Told ya.

Claude looks up to see Dillard cracking pistachio nuts as Hoppin' Bob puts another round in the chamber of his rifle.

DILLARD  
Why ain't his pick swinging?

HOPPIN' BOB  
(echoing)  
Why ain't that pick swinging?

CLAUDE  
It's too hot, boss. I'm tired.

HOPPIN' BOB

He says it's too hot, boss.

DILLARD

Too hot, huh? Well, you tell that lazy juggaboo the state of Mississippi ain't interested in his meteorological assessments.

HOPPIN' BOB

Listen up, juggaboo! State of Mississippi ain't interested in your... in your...

(off Dillard's look)  
metropolitan assets!

DILLARD

Tell him the state of Mississippi is only interested in getting this ditch cleared by sundown.

HOPPIN' BOB

State of Mississippi wants this ditch cleared by sundown. You got that?!

CLAUDE

I got it... boss.

DILLARD

He don't sound like he's from 'round here.

HOPPIN' BOB

He's from New York City. That one, too.

DILLARD

New York. That's up north, ain't it? They'll find we do things different down here.

RAY

We noticed.

Annoyed, Dillard jabs the butt of his rifle into Ray's solar plexus. Ray sinks to his knees in the dirt.

DILLARD

Looks like we got a couple of live ones. How long these boys in for?

HOPPIN' BOB

Judge gave 'em the long ride.

DILLARD

Life, huh? They step outta line again, we'll shorten up that sentence real fast.

Dillard swaggers off, dogged at the heels by the ever faithful Hoppin' Bob. Resigned, Ray and Claude return to their labor.

EXT. DITCH – DAY

The men rest in the ditch as BISCUIT, a slight inmate with a red bandanna tied around his head, dispenses water, one ladle per man.

BISCUIT

Drink it up!

Willie exchanges two cigarettes for a second ladle. POKER FACE pulls a crumpled envelope from his shirt. His expression never changes, hence the name.

POKER FACE

Either of you new fellas know how to read? I've had this letter four months now.

CLAUDE

You can't read? None of these guys can read?

WILLIE

Last fella who could read made parole 'round Christmas.

POKER FACE

I don't even know who this is from.

RAY

Here, gimme that.

Ray unfolds the letter and scans it.

RAY

It's from your mama's neighbor, Mrs. Tidwell. She thought you oughta know that your second cousin Bo died.

The prisoners express their condolences. "Sorry, man." "That's some bad news." "I know you loved Bo like a brother..."

RAY

And your other cousin, Sally, on your daddy's side, she died.

More sympathy from the men. "Ooh. Twice in one letter." "Rough break, Poker Face..."

RAY

Apparently, your sister died.

POKER FACE

Jenny?

RAY

No, it says Marleen here.

Relief all around. "Thank goodness."

RAY

Oh, wait, looks like Jenny died, too.

"Bad luck, man." "That's harsh..."

RAY

Then it goes on for a while about how the crop didn't come in on accounta the frost.

(flips over the page)

She finishes up with something about a tornado and how your mama and your daddy died in that. But don't worry none. She'll take care of the dog. That is, if it gets over the worms.

The prisoners share dark looks. Ray folds up the letter and hands it back to Poker Face.

POKER FACE

Appreciate it.

RAY

Anybody else need anything read?

"No, man, we're good." The men shake their heads and return letters and cards to their pockets. Jangle Leg nods and switches places with one of the convicts, parking next to Claude.

JANGLE LEG

How you doin'?

CLAUDE

I'm all right.

JANGLE LEG

You ever done time before?

CLAUDE

You kidding? I've been in and out of prison my entire life. Mostly in. I'm hard-core.

JANGLE LEG

Then you won't have no problem making the adjustment. You need anything, help of any kind, gimme a holler. Name's Jangle Leg.

CLAUDE

'Preciate it. Claude.

As they shake, Jangle Leg inspects Claude's hand thoroughly.

JANGLE LEG

Soft and supple. Like a lady's.

CLAUDE

(eyes narrowing)

I try to moisturize regularly.

HOPPIN' BOB  
(over his shoulder)  
Hey, Jangle Leg, what'd I tell you  
about pitching woo on the job?

JANGLE LEG  
Sorry, Cap'n.

Claude snatches back his hand and gives Jangle Leg a hard look.

HOPPIN' BOB  
Break's over! Back to work!

As the men grab their tools and return to work, Claude leans over to Ray.

CLAUDE  
Why do you think they call him Jangle  
Leg?

RAY  
Somebody just told me he wins the  
three-legged race every year.

CLAUDE  
So?

RAY  
He does it all by himself.

INT. MESS HALL – DUSK

Wincing with each movement and covered in grime from the day's labors, the new men bring up the back of the chow line. COOKIE, the grub-slinger, slaps a large dollop of an unidentifiable substance onto Ray's tray.

RAY  
What is that?

COOKIE  
Creamed chip beef on toast. Except  
we're outta beef, so I had to  
improvise.

RAY

Can't I get one of those steaks you got grilling back there?

COOKIE

Those are for trusties, unless you got thirty cents or two packs of cigs.

Another prisoner lays down some tobacco and gets a juicy steak. Ray grabs a hunk of corn bread and makes his way to the back of the room. Claude steps up, holds out his tray for Cookie.

CLAUDE

Excuse me, I don't like it when the food touches each other, so if you could just –  
(SPLAT!)  
– keep everything separate.

Disappointed, Claude turns to discover that the only seat left is next to Ray. Scowling, he limps toward it.

Jangle Leg's eyes follow Claude as he approaches the table. Biscuit smacks him.

BISCUIT

Eyes front, mister!

Claude sits down and promptly goes to work scraping his burnt toast with his knife. The irritating sound slowly brings the entire room to dead silence. All eyes fall on Claude. Scratch, scratch, scratch...

COOKIE

(stepping up)  
Problem with the toast?

CLAUDE

It's fine now.

Cookie glowers and takes a seat.

RAY

Stop aggravating people. Just eat



your food.

As the room returns to normal, Claude starts polishing his fork with his shirttail. Irritated, Ray shoots him a look.

CLAUDE  
This fork is filthy.

RAY  
The fork is the least of your worries,  
Claude.

Undeterred, Claude breathes on his fork and polishes it some more. Disgusted, Ray pushes aside his plate.

RAY  
What's your name?

WILLIE  
Me? Willie Long.

RAY  
What are you in for, Willie?

WILLIE  
That's a long story...

RADIO  
When he was 13 years old he killed a  
son-of-a-bitch with a claw hammer.

WILLIE  
They never proved that.

CLAUDE  
What a second, you've been in here  
since you were thirteen?

RAY  
What about you, Radio?

RADIO  
Armed robbery.

JANGLE LEG  
Damn liar. Bitch killed his sister

with an axe.

RADIO

She was my half-sister. Shit, I ain't the son-of-a-bitch who poisoned my own parents.

BISCUIT

(protective)

They deserved it. Very strict.

POKER FACE

What about you, Biscuit? You nearly skinned your poor old landlady alive.

COOKIE

At least he didn't kill Santa Claus with his bare hands.

RAY

You killed Santa Claus?

BISCUIT

(scolding)

On Christmas Eve.

POKER FACE

He wasn't the Santa Claus, he was just wearing the suit and ringing a bell.

WILLIE

What did you guys do?

The whole table waits expectantly for their reply.

RAY

I kinda lost track of how many people we killed that night. Must have been 15 or twenty – not counting women and children. It was a real bloodbath. All that screaming...

CLAUDE

Pack of lies. Don't listen to him. We didn't kill nobody. We were

railroaded. And we gonna prove that.

RAY

He just blocked it out. Nigger's crazy. He's the one who did all the stabbing. He's capable of some heinous shit.

(thumbing down the table)

How 'bout him down there?

At the end of the table, GOLDMOUTH, a hulking specimen, snarls menacingly, flashing a glittering set of teeth.

WILLIE

Goldmouth? They say he was born out back behind the shithouse. That's what they say.

RAY

You all been here a long time. Doesn't anybody ever escape from this place?

WILLIE

They run but they never get too far.

RADIO

Couple years back, Cookie made it clear to Greenville.

RAY

Greenville, that the nearest town?

WILLIE

(nodding)

It's a two-day walk if you don't get lost. Take a mighty cagey country boy to navigate the woods and bayous between here and there.

BISCUIT

Those dogs they got can sniff a skid mark in your underpants from a half-mile off.

RAY

Alright, well, let's say you make it to Greenville. What's there, anyway?

COOKIE

Grandma Dodi's Pork Rib Joint.

POKER FACE

That's where they nabbed him.

COOKIE

Didn't even get to have my peach cobbler.

WILLIE

The most important thing they got in Greenville is a train that heads up north.

Just then, Goldmouth stands up, casting a shadow over Claude.

GOLDMOUTH

Hey, girl, you gonna eat your corn bread?

Claude looks up, considering his options.

CLAUDE

No, man. I want you to have it.

RAY

Wait up there, Claude. You give that guy your corn bread and the next thing you know you'll be ironing his shirts and clipping his toenails.

GOLDMOUTH

Maybe I oughta eat your corn bread.

RAY

My corn bread? Oh no, my friend. I love corn bread.

Ray picks up his corn bread and takes a huge bite out of it, rolling his eyes with enthusiasm.

RAY

I thought my mama made good corn bread but this is really something special.

Ray looks at the faces around the room, smiles broadly. Goldmouth is getting embarrassed.

RAY

Who knew I'd have to come all the way down to this here prison, deep in the asshole of the great state of Mississippi, to find such a tasty piece of corn bread?

The prisoners begin to laugh. Ray's got them now.

RAY

And who knew that in this great corn bread-making institution I'd come face to face with the biggest, ugliest, stinkiest, ugliest gold-mouthed negro in the entire world. Now get out of my face before I lose my appetite!

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DUSK

A punch sends Ray sprawling in the dust. Goldmouth looms over him. The incorrigibles form a circle around the combatants. Poker Face, the camp bookie, is taking all bets.

GOLDMOUTH

How you like your corn bread now, New York?

Goldmouth and Ray square off. Goldmouth swings, Ray ducks and counters with a swift jab to the gut. Goldmouth just flashes a shiny grin and clobbers Ray with a fist the size of a Thanksgiving turkey. Ray sinks to the dust. Radio drops down near him.

RADIO

Come on, New York, you can do better than that! Get up and show him how they do it in Harlem!

Ray shakes his head and staggers back to his feet. He circles the big man and gets in a couple of good shots, much to the crowd's approval. Goldmouth shakes his head and wipes the blood from his nose. Now he's mad. He grabs Ray by the shirt and delivers a crushing blow. Ray reels backward into Cookie's arms.

COOKIE

I appreciate you going to all this trouble over my corn bread. I don't get a lot of compliments in my line of work.

Cookie shoves Ray back into the ring for more punishment. Claude emerges from the mess hall, munching on a piece of corn bread. He squeezes in between Poker Face and Willie.

WILLIE

Your pal's getting the tar whipped out of him on your account.

CLAUDE

How many times I got to tell you? He ain't my pal. Besides, he looks like he knows what he's doing.

Just then Claude winces as Goldmouth delivers a jaw-crushing uppercut that knocks Ray on his back. Claude bristles under the incriminating looks coming at him from all directions.

CLAUDE

Alright, alright...

Claude crouches down as Ray rolls over on his stomach and pushes himself up onto all fours. His eyes are swollen shut, his face covered with blood.

CLAUDE

Hey, Ray, I think you made your point, whatever that is. Maybe now's a good time to throw in the towel. You know what I'm saying?

Ray manages a smile and staggers to his feet.

RAY

(slurring)  
Shit, Goldmouth. Back in New York, I  
know bitches who hit harder than  
you.

Goldmouth pulls back his fist and lets it fly. Ray hurtles  
through the crowd, collapsing in the dust. Willie steps in.

WILLIE  
The man's taken enough of a beating.  
Let's get him inside.

Cookie, Radio and Poker Face raise Ray to his feet. Goldmouth  
slings him over his shoulder and carries him toward the  
bunkhouse. Dazed, Ray catches Claude's eye.

RAY  
Got him good, huh, Claude? He won't  
be bothering us anytime soon.

A quick elbow jab from Goldmouth and Ray is out for good.  
Disgusted with himself, Claude tosses what's left of the  
corn bread to the mangy dog, who makes short work of it.

BISCUIT  
(wagging a finger)  
Shame, shame, that's your name.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. MESS HALL – DAY

On Sundays, the mess hall also serves as a chapel. From a  
makeshift pulpit, the blind REVEREND CLAY and his DAUGHTER  
lead the congregation of convicts in a rousing chorus of  
"Down by the Riverside."

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

The gospel music filters into the yard, where the prisoners  
mingle with kinfolk.

EXT. SGT. DILLARD'S HOUSE – DAY

MRS. DILLARD hums along with the gospel music as she places  
a couple of freshly-baked pies on the window sill to cool.

## EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

The CAMERA FINDS Claude and Daisy walking hand in hand toward a simple shack just beyond the gun line. This is the TONK HOUSE and Dillard is the gate keeper.

CLAUDE

Request permission to go to the tonk, boss.

Dillard considers Daisy.

DILLARD

I don't see no wedding ring, Banks. Conjugal visits are for married prisoners only.

CLAUDE

You think you could make an exception just this once, boss? She came all the way down from New York.

DILLARD

I don't need the Baptists on my back, but I suppose I could issue a temporary marriage license for a nominal fee.

Daisy gets the picture. She reaches into her purse and hands Dillard a couple of dollars.

DILLARD

I now pronounce you man and wife.  
(calling to the shooter shack)  
Claude Banks going to the tonk!

Claude takes Daisy's hand and leads her over the gun line.

## ACROSS THE YARD

Ray watches Claude and Daisy step into the tonk house. Then he returns to a game of horseshoes, tossing a ringer. Nearby, Biscuit gives Jangle Leg a haircut.



RAY

Biscuit, when you're done with Jangle Leg, you think you could squeeze me in?

BISCUIT

Thought you'd never ask. Biscuit needs some gravy.

RAY

I'm talking about a haircut.

BISCUIT

Cost you a pair of nylons.

POKER FACE

Hey, Ray, Goldmouth don't believe me. Ain't it so they got trains up in New York City that run under the streets?

RAY

They're called subways. A nickel will take you from one end of Manhattan to the other. Helluva ride, too.

Radio looks up from a vacuum tube receiver he's busy repairing.

RADIO

Hey, Ray, you ever been to the Cotton Club?

RAY

Sure I've been to the Cotton Club. It's pretty sweet. But it don't hold a candle to the Boom Boom Room. That's where the real action is.

WILLIE

What's the Boom Boom Room?

RAY

That's my joint. The swinginest nightclub in town.

COOKIE

You got your own nightclub?

RAY

Well, not yet. It's still in the planning stages.

GOLDMOUTH

So it don't exist.

RAY

Just because it's in my mind,  
Goldmouth, don't mean it ain't real.  
Everything worth anything starts  
with a dream.

Hoppin' Bob calls to Ray from the gun line.

HOPPIN' BOB

Gibson! Got yourself a visitor!

Ray turns to find his MOTHER, a handsome woman in a floral dress, coming toward him.

RAY

Mama?

MAMA GIBSON

Rayford!

The incorrigibles elbow each other and repeat the name "Rayford" as Mama Gibson envelops her son in a fleshy embrace, smothering him with kisses.

RAY

What are you doing here, mama?

MAMA GIBSON

I heard some things so I went to see  
Spanky Johnson. He told me what  
happened and gave me some money to  
get down here. What happened to your  
face?

RAY

Don't worry about that. Hey, fellas,  
this here is my mama. These are some  
of my friends. That's Willie, there's  
Poker Face, Radio, Cookie, Goldmouth,  
Biscuit, Jangle Leg.

The motley crew gathers around, nodding politely. Goldmouth  
flashes a golden grin. Willie gallantly doffs his cap.

WILLIE

Mrs. Gibson. Shame on Rayford here  
for failing to mention that he had  
such a beautiful mama.

Mama manages a half-hearted smile, clutching her bag.

MAMA GIBSON

Nice to meet you all.

GOLDMOUTH

How was your train ride?

MAMA GIBSON

Quite comfortable, thank you.

COOKIE

Them cookies in there?

MAMA GIBSON

Yes, oatmeal.

RADIO

'Scuse me, you got any batteries on  
you?

MAMA GIBSON

No. No I don't.

Biscuit sides up, fingering her dress.

BISCUIT

That's a lovely dress. Make it  
yourself?

MAMA GIBSON

(vaguely unsettled)

Yeah...

EXT. PORCH – DAY

Ray and his mama sit in the shade.

RAY

This is a big surprise, mama. I sure didn't expect to see you down here.

A long, uncomfortable beat. Mama's lip starts to tremble.

MAMA GIBSON

Rayford, I wanted so much more for you than this.

RAY

Don't cry, mama. This place ain't so bad as it looks. Sure, we work hard, but there's plenty fresh air and sunshine... And you know something else, I've taken to going to church regular. They got services every Sunday right there in the mess hall.

MAMA GIBSON

Don't you lie to me, Rayford.

(composing herself)

You still have your daddy's watch?

(Ray shakes his head)

Well, this is all I can give you. I wish it was more.

She puts some money in his hand.

RAY

I can't take that, mama.

MAMA GIBSON

Don't argue with me. You need it more than I do. I know how a little money can help in a place like this.

Reluctantly, Ray stashes the money in his pocket.

RAY

I can't believe this. I always said I'd never end up like this. I thought I'd make something of myself, do something with my life. You know, be successful. Have a big house, a family. Now I'm gonna end up just like daddy.

MAMA GIBSON

Don't say that, Rayford. Don't ever say that. He gave up hope. That's where you gotta be different.

RAY

They gave me life, mama.

MAMA GIBSON

I gave you life. And they can't take it away from you. Remember that. You'll get outta here someday. I believe that. You gotta believe it, too.

INT. TONK HOUSE – DAY

Reclining on a straw mattress, Claude watches intently as Daisy gets dressed. The rickety door reverberates with a loud pounding.

HOPPIN' BOB

(off)

Time's up, Banks! We got a crowd gathering out here!

Claude leaps from the bed and slams his fist against the door.

CLAUDE

Woman came all the way from New York, goddamnit! We'll come out when we're good and ready!

Daisy quickly buttons up her dress.

CLAUDE

Did you go see my cousin Maynard

like I asked you in my letter?

DAISY

Of course I did. He said he'd file an appeal right away. You didn't tell me he was so good looking.

CLAUDE

Yeah, that side of the family has all the looks and none of the brains. I hope he don't mess things up.

DAISY

He seemed like a pretty good lawyer to me. His offices take up an entire floor of that big, new building on 125th Street, and he was using all these words I never heard before. He even offered me a job.

CLAUDE

A job, huh? Well, that's nice, real nice. You won't have to work long. I'll be back soon enough. After I start work at First Federal Bank of Manhattan, I'll be keeping you in style. Everything will get back to normal again. That's a promise.

Daisy smiles weakly and looks away. She doesn't have much faith in this promise.

DAISY

Listen, Claude, Maynard wanted to know if he should file the appeal on behalf of your friend, too.

CLAUDE

Ray Gibson?

(thinks about it)

No, no. He's the reason I'm in here, Daisy. For all I know, he's got a record a mile long. I got a better shot of getting out of here on my own. You tell Maynard to think about me, concentrate on me. Understand?

DAISY

Sure, Claude, whatever you say.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – DAY

The prisoners jump down from the cart and grab hammers and pick axes as Hoppin' Bob keeps count with pebbles.

DILLARD

We lost yesterday on accounta the rain. That means we gotta make up for it today, so put your backs to it.

HOPPIN' BOB

You heard the boss! Let's move!

Ray and Claude jump down after Willie.

WILLIE

(squinting at the sun)  
Looks like a scorcher.

RADIO

I bet the son of a bitch goes over a hundred and ten.

POKER FACE

I'll take that action.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

The long line levels a road to a work tune being sung by Jangle Leg.

Dillard checks the thermometer on the truck – 90 degrees and rising. Mopping his brow, he starts down the line.

The sun arcs overhead, a blazing inferno... Heat rises off the road... The men sweat profusely... "Taking it off here, boss!" echoes up and down the line.

Biscuit has his work cut out for him, lugging a water bucket from man to man, offering the ladle.

The sun... the hammer... the ladle... the axe... the sun...  
the hammer... the ladle... the axe... The mercury hits 110  
degrees...

A NEW GUY lets his hammer slip from his fingers, collapses  
in the dirt. Radio nods to Poker Face, who hands him a pack  
of cigs.

WILLIE  
Man down, boss!

Dillard uses his foot to roll the stricken man over. He's  
still alive. Barely.

DILLARD  
You two, put him on the truck!

Ray and Claude drop their tools, grab the man by his arms  
and legs and lug him up to the road. Once out of earshot,  
Ray whispers to Claude.

RAY  
Cookie drew me a map to Greenville.

CLAUDE  
So?

RAY  
You know what I'm saying.

CLAUDE  
Yeah, I know what your saying. And  
I'm saying if you made it that far,  
they'd be watching every train that  
pulls out of that station.

RAY  
That's why we won't take the train.  
Cookie showed me where there's a  
farm house. They got a boat there.

CLAUDE  
What do you know about boats? I bet  
you can't even swim.

They reach the truck. With effort, they swing the man back



and forth and launch him into the back of the truck.

RAY

What I know about boats is they take you to freedom. Come on, man. I think we can do this.

CLAUDE

Why are you always talking about we? There is no we. There is a me, there is a you. But there is no we between us.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. BUNKHOUSE WASHROOM – DAY

Ray and Claude continue their conversation as they lather up for a shave.

RAY

You want out of this place, don't you? Don't tell me you're starting to like it here.

CLAUDE

No, I don't like it here. Look around. There's nothing but ass. Male ass! Balls and ass! Believe you me, I'm getting out of here.

RAY

What does that mean?

CLAUDE

Forget it.

RAY

I'm not gonna forget it. What does that mean? If you've got a plan, I think I have a right to know about it. I told you my plan.

CLAUDE

Getting a map from a chubby chef named Cookie? Dragging our asses

through the swamps in search of some worm-eaten boat? That ain't a plan, that's a vacation for two in the hole. When you've got a map to New York City, you get back to me.

Claude splits. Scowling, Ray finishes up his shave.

INT. BUNKHOUSE – NIGHT

Moonlight streams through the barred windows of the cage. Exhausted from the day's work, each man stretches out painfully in his bunk.

JANGLE LEG

Sure was hot out there today.

COOKIE

Still too hot to sleep.

RADIO

Every bone in my body feel like a big son-of-a-bitch dog got hold of it.

GOLDMOUTH

I can't wait 'til Sunday.

CLAUDE

What's so great about Sunday? Monday's right after it.

Restless, Radio rolls over.

RADIO

Hey, Ray, what's the name of that nightclub of yours?

RAY

You mean the Boom-Boom Room?

RADIO

That's it. The Boom-Boom Room. Sure would like to see that place when you get it up and running.

RAY

You should have come by last night,  
Radio. You woulda had yourself some  
fun.

WILLIE

Last night? What are you talking  
about, Ray?

RAY

I'm talking about old Satchmo nearly  
blew the roof off the joint.

POKER FACE

Who?

RAY

Satchmo.

GOLDMOUTH

You mean Louis Armstrong?

RAY

He's a good friend of mine. Drops by  
the club whenever he's in town.

CLAUDE

Hey, do we have to listen to this  
bullshit? I'm trying to get some  
sleep around here.

"Shut up, Claude!" echoes around the room. Irritated, Claude  
thumps his pillow and turns his back on the room.

RAY

Yeah, things were hot last night,  
but you'll never guess who's playing  
tonight.

BLAM! A high horn note sounds.

SMASH CUT:

CLOSE-UP – Biscuit, all dolled up and flashing a million-  
dollar smile. She begins to sing.

BISCUIT  
A tisket a tasket...

Biscuit is up on a makeshift platform in the bunkhouse, lipsyncing to Ella Fitzgerald. But its not the depressing bunkhouse anymore, it has transformed into Ray's Boom-Boom Room. PULL OUT SLOWLY as Ray, decked out in a sleek tuxedo steps in front of the CAMERA. He speaks into the CAMERA as he walks...

RAY  
That's right, fellas. Catch any cab heading uptown. All the drivers know Ray's Boom-Boom Room.

GOLDMOUTH (O.S.)  
Hey, Ray...

Ray looks to his left, sees Goldmouth in the old bunkhouse.

GOLDMOUTH  
Where am I at, man?

RAY  
(in nightclub)  
C'mon, Goldmouth, somebody's gotta watch the front door.

The CAMERA PANS off Ray to Goldmouth, in a tuxedo, at the front door of the nightclub with two lovely ladies. He waves to himself, sitting on his bunk. Himself waves back, smiling like a kid in a candy store.

Willie is behind the bar, serving drinks to three gorgeous SKIMMIES.

WILLIE  
Hey, Ray, I could get used to this!

CLOSE ON Cookie sitting a table eating a huge porterhouse. The CAMERA DOLLIES around to find Ray eating with him.

COOKIE  
Ray, my man, this steak is like butter!

RAY  
Made just for you, Cookie.

COOKIE  
How about some steak sauce?

RAY  
No problem. Oh, boy!

Ray motions to a busboy clearing a table. It's Claude.

RAY  
How about some Worcestershire sauce!  
And clean that damn table.

Claude grimaces.

CUT TO:

Willie laughing, Goldmouth laughing, Poker Face in the bunk laughing.

POKER FACE  
Hey, Ray, I know you got some  
gambling!

CUT TO:

Ray at a craps table holding a pair of dice. He looks at  
Poker Face on his bunk.

RAY  
C'mon, Poker Face, what's a club  
without some dice?

The CAMERA PULLS BACK as Ray throws the dice. A perfect seven.  
The CAMERA PANS UP to Poker Face in a tux clutching a fistful  
of cash.

POKER FACE  
Lucky seven! My nigger! Let it ride!

Across the room, Jangle Leg, in a tux, sits at the piano.  
Radio, also in a tux, beats on the drums.

JANGLE LEG

Sing, girlfriend!

Biscuit sings the song, smiling lovingly at her man. Everyone is having a great time in Ray's Boom-Boom Room, until...

Whistles blow. At the front door, Hoppin' Bob appears with FIVE TRUSTIES dressed in police outfits. The incorrigibles scatter.

RADIO

Hey, Ray, looks like trouble!

A hard white light from Hoppin' Bob's flashlight shines directly into the CAMERA.

CLOSE ON Ray, in his bed, back in the old bunkhouse. The music stops abruptly. He shields his eyes from the harsh light. Hoppin' Bob is looming over him. It's back to reality.

HOPPIN' BOB

You don't shut up, you're gonna spend  
the rest of the night in the hole,  
Gibson! That goes for the rest of  
you girls, too. I don't want to hear  
another peep about no Boom-Boom  
fucking Room!

A loud burst of flatulence cuts through the darkness. Hoppin' Bob turns his flashlight on Cookie.

COOKIE

Sorry, Cap'n.

Scowling, Hoppin' Bob steps out of the cage and locks the door behind him. The men slowly settle back in.

RADIO

(whispering)

Pretty good story, Ray. Didn't much  
care for the ending though.

Lights out at Camp 8.

EXT. CAMP 8 – YARD – DAY

Claude's playing pepper with Radio, Jangle Leg and Poker

Face.

DILLARD  
Mail call!

The incorrigibles quickly gather around as he calls off names, passing cards and letters through the crowd.

DILLARD  
Craddock!... Williams... Henshaw!...  
Banks!

CLAUDE  
Here!

Dillard hands the letter to Ray, who glances at it before passing it back to Claude.

RAY  
(reading)  
Maynard Banks, Esquire. Attorney at  
law.

CLAUDE  
Gimme that. That doesn't concern  
you.

RAY  
I'm sure it don't.

INT. CAMP 8 BUNKHOUSE – DAY

Claude rips open the letter. A profound disappointment settles over him as he reads the news from cousin Maynard. Bitterly, he crumples up the letter and tosses it down.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Dillard strolls down the line with his rifle over his shoulder. Under his watchful gaze, hoes rise and fall. After he passes, Claude moves a little closer to Ray.

CLAUDE  
What's up, Ray?

RAY

(cool)  
Claude.

CLAUDE  
Sure is hot today. Think it'll rain  
later?

RAY  
What do you want, Claude?

CLAUDE  
What do I want? What makes you think  
I want something?

RAY  
My daddy always said when a man starts  
talking about the weather keep you  
hand on your wallet.

CLAUDE  
Your daddy must have been a helluva  
guy, a deep man, a wise man. Sure  
wish I could have met him –

RAY  
Cut the bullshit. What do you want,  
Claude?

CLAUDE  
(clearing his throat)  
You still got that map?

RAY  
Yeah.

CLAUDE  
Well, if you're still thinking about  
booking it, I want in. I think we  
can make it.

RAY  
We? Did I hear you say we? As I  
recall, you're the one who said there  
is no we. Guess we got some bad news  
in that letter, huh?



CLAUDE

Look, my cousin Maynard is a lawyer.  
He filed an appeal on my behalf –

RAY

On your behalf. What happened to we?

CLAUDE

The appeal was denied. Then Daisy  
went and fell for Maynard. They're  
engaged to be married, can you believe  
that?

RAY

Well, let's just think about that  
for a moment. He's a successful lawyer  
up in New York City and you're down  
here with a bright future in the  
cotton picking business. Eeny, meeny,  
miney, Maynard.

CLAUDE

Come on, man. Don't shut me out. I'm  
telling you, you and me, that map,  
we can go places.

RAY

You know what, Claude? This whole  
time we've been down here, you've  
done nothing but think about yourself,  
acting like this whole thing is my  
fault. That plan with your cousin,  
did that include me?

A long beat.

CLAUDE

No.

RAY

At least you're honest for once. So  
now you want to be my friend? Well,  
let me tell you something, Claude-my-  
shit-don't-stink-Banks. You got a  
lot to learn about friendship.

CLAUDE  
Does that mean I'm in?

RAY  
I don't think so, Claude. You'd just slow me down. We'd have to stop every five minutes so you could polish your silverware. There's no way around it, you're soft.

CLAUDE  
What'd you say?

RAY  
I said you're soft.

CLAUDE  
Don't call me that. You know I hate it when you call me that.

Ray gets in Claude's face and silently mouths the word – "soft." Claude throws down his hoe and sinks his fist deep into Ray's gut.

CLAUDE  
Damn, that felt good. I should have done that the first time I met you.

Ray touches the blood coming from his nose. Eyes blazing, he tackles Claude, dragging him to the ground. The two men roll around, trying to strangle each other.

Hoppin' Bob hustles down the hill and drags Ray off of Claude. But Claude comes back for more. Hoppin' Bob finds himself in the middle of the fray.

That's when the cavalry arrives. Two trusties use their rifles to crack Ray and Claude over the backs of their heads, sending them both down for the count.

Hoppin' Bob empties his canteen over their faces. They sputter back to consciousness.

HOPPIN' BOB  
Now you girls set aside your differences and get back to work or

I'll see to it –

RAY

– we'll spend a night in the hole.  
We heard this shit before.

Ray and Claude stagger to their feet and pick up their tools. Hoppin' Bob and the trusties head back up the hill. Ray starts to chuckle.

CLAUDE

What the fuck are you laughing about?

Ray opens his palm to reveal TWO PEBBLES. Claude regards Ray with new-found respect.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – SUNDOWN

One by one, the prisoners of Camp 8 climb into the mule carts under the watchful eye of Hoppin' Bob. As each man passes, he removes a pebble from his pocket. The last one in is Willie. Hoppin' Bob's pocket is now empty.

HOPPIN' BOB

All in, boss!

DILLARD

Move it out.

HOPPIN' BOB

Movin' it out, boss.

Dillard spurs his horse, escorting the mule carts back to camp.

EXT. FIELD – SUNDOWN

As the carts fade into the distance, Ray and Claude pop up from a roadside ditch and take off for a grove of trees in the opposite direction.

EXT. WOODS – SUNDOWN

Running for all they're worth, Ray and Claude crash through the bramble. Claude trips over a root and sprawls face first in the bushes. Ray turns around and helps him to his feet.

Claude is still laughing giddily. He throws his arms around Ray.

CLAUDE

You did it, man! You got us out!  
Next stop, New York City!

RAY

New York's a long way's off. Let's  
just keep moving, okay?

As Ray and Claude disappear into the woods...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BUNKHOUSE – NIGHT

Radio's pulling in some jazz music out of New Orleans. Prisoners hit their bunks as the floorwalker does the nightly head count. He stops at Claude and Ray's empty bunks, glancing around, puzzled.

EXT. DILLARD'S PORCH – NIGHT

Dillard smokes a cigarette on the swing. His wife steps out with a fresh bourbon and ice. Suddenly, SIRENS start to wail and emergency floodlights blaze to life at Camp 8.

EXT. FIELD – NIGHT

Hounds scramble down from the back of a truck and gather around the DOG BOY. He holds out a handful of soiled laundry and a dozen snouts sniff it thoroughly.

Nearby, Dillard gathers a DOZEN MEN with rifles and flashlights into a posse. He puts a cigarette in his mouth. Hoppin' Bob lights it for him.

EXT. WOODS – NIGHT

Trees rise ominously around Ray and Claude as they push through dense underbrush.

CLAUDE

I know these trees all look the same,  
but I'm getting an awful familiar

vibration from this one right here.  
You sure you know where we're going?

RAY  
Absolutely. The map is very clear.

CLAUDE  
Let me take a look at that map.

Claude considers it from various angles.

CLAUDE  
You call this a map? What was Cookie  
smoking when he drew this?

RAY  
Cookie didn't draw it. I did.

CLAUDE  
You drew this?!

RAY  
I knew you wouldn't come if I didn't  
have a map.

CLAUDE  
That gripes my soul, man. We're out  
here in the middle of nowhere. There  
is shit nibbling at my balls! Don't  
tell me you don't know where we're  
going!

Ray shrugs and presses on. Dumbfounded, Claude considers the map again, then tears it to shreds. The braying of hounds echoes through the trees.

CLAUDE  
Hey, wait up!

EXT. THE WOODS – NIGHT

Ray and Claude race through the underbrush.

EXT. THE WOODS – NIGHT

Dillard and his men follow the dogs through the woods, hot

on the scent.

EXT. THE WOODS – NIGHT

Ray and Claude race up to a chain-link fence. On the other side, an old Ford is parked on a dirt road. Hearing the posse closing in behind them, Ray and Claude fling themselves onto the fence.

EXT. THE WOODS – NIGHT

The posse is gaining ground. Dillard takes two men off to the left, sending the rest of the men straight ahead.

EXT. THE WOODS – NIGHT

Claude clears the fence first and scrambles for the old Ford. Ray's shirt snags on a piece of wire as he drops down from the fence. Stuck, he dangles helplessly a few feet off the ground.

INT. FORD – NIGHT

Claude yanks open the door and jumps behind the wheel. TWO WHITE TEENAGERS bolt up in the backseat where they were necking. After a beat – group scream. The half-dressed teenagers dive from the car and scramble off down the road. Claude twists the key in the ignition and the engine roars to life.

CLAUDE

Come on, Ray, time to go!

RAY

I'm stuck!

Claude sees Ray caught up on the fence, then hears the sounds of the approaching posse. If he floored it right now, he might make it. But he can't just leave Ray hanging there.

EXT. FENCE – NIGHT

Claude runs up and grabs Ray's legs, pulling for all he's worth. The shirt rips free, sending Ray and Claude tumbling to the ground. They leap to their feet and turn toward the car – running smack into the barrel of Dillard's shotgun.

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION – DAY

An OLD BLACK PRISONER delivers a frosty mint julep to SUPERINTENDENT ABERNATHY who rocks slowly in his chair. At his feet, his 10-year-old daughter MAE ROSE is playing jacks. Her long blonde hair makes her look like a little angel.

MAE ROSE

Look, daddy. They caught those two men who escaped last night.

Mae Rose is pointing down the drive, where Dillard and a couple of trusties march Ray and Claude toward the house.

ABERNATHY

They ain't men, Mae Rose. They're convicts. And nigger convicts to boot. Can you say nigger?

MAE ROSE

Nagger?

ABERNATHY

No, nigger.

MAE ROSE

Nigger.

ABERNATHY

That's my girl.

Bound by leg irons and handcuffs, Ray and Claude are deposited at the bottom of the stairs.

DILLARD

Here they are, Superintendent. We tracked 'em all the way to the Tallahachie.

ABERNATHY

That's quite a ways. I'm glad you New York boys could see some of our lovely countryside while you're down here. What do you say, Mae Rose? How should we teach these two a lesson?

Mae Rose considers their faces. Ray and Claude look like they've been to hell and back.

MAE ROSE  
A night in the hole?

ABERNATHY  
Better make it a week.

Dillard nods and turns Ray and Claude around. As they march back down the drive, Abernathy takes sip of his mint julep and affectionately pats Mae Rose on the head.

EXT. CAMP 8 – DAY

The incorrigibles of Camp 8 gather at the gun line, watching silently as Dillard and a couple of trusties march Ray and Claude toward the hole.

EXT. THE HOLE – DAY

The trusties shove them each into a small, dank cell and slam the doors behind them. Dillard secures both doors with an iron bar.

DILLARD  
See you in a week, boys.

OMITTED

Sequence omitted from original script.

INT. RAY'S CELL – DAY

Ray slumps to the floor, propping his feet against the wall.

RAY  
Hey, Claude. I just want to say thanks  
for coming back for me.

INT. CLAUDE'S CELL – DAY

Claude considers his bleak surroundings. It's a small, uncomfortable space, not even big enough to lie down. Just a tin bucket for a toilet.



CLAUDE  
Don't mention it.

RAY  
(off)  
Hell, you'd probably be half way to  
New York by now...

CLAUDE  
I'm serious, man. Don't mention it.  
Ever.

EXT. THE HOLE – DAY

The sun beats down on the tin roofs...

INT. BUNKHOUSE – CAGE – NIGHT

The prisoners are gathered around a table, laying out money.  
As usual, Poker Face is keeping tabs.

COOKIE  
I'll take Claude to die on Wednesday  
for fifty cents.

POKER FACE  
Wednesday for two bits. And don't  
forget you already owe me a steak.

BISCUIT  
I'll take Claude for Friday. That's  
my birthday.

With an ear to his receiver, Radio slaps his money on the  
table.

RADIO  
Weatherman says a heat wave's coming.  
I say neither one of 'em son of  
bitches gonna last past Thursday.

POKER FACE  
I told you before, I don't take  
pennies. Two cigarettes or one nickel  
minimum. What about you, Willie?

Gonna get in on this action?

WILLIE

I got a crispy new dollar bill says  
both of them gonna make it.

This gives the men pause. Willie tosses his money on the table.

POKER FACE

Now that's what I call a bet.

GOLDMOUTH

It's a mighty long shot, Willie.  
Nobody ever made it a week in the  
hole.

JANGLE LEG

Not in August, anyway.

But Willie leaves the money where it is.

POKER FACE

Who else has some guts around here?

Poker Face makes notations as the betting resumes.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

Work goes on as usual for the prisoners of Camp 8. Trustees keep their eyes peeled for slackers.

EXT. THE HOLE – DAY

The brick shacks bake in the noonday sun.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

Biscuit moves down the line offering the ladle to the men as they struggle under a crushing heat wave.

EXT. THE HOLE – DAY

Superintendent Abernathy strides up and gives the nod to Dillard, who unlocks the doors. Huddled in their respective cells, Ray and Claude shrink from the bright sunlight. Then,

slowly and painfully, they rise to their feet.

In the background, the incorrigibles gather at the gun line as word spreads that the fellows are still alive. Abernathy glances at the crowd with annoyance.

ABERNATHY

I don't think these boys have learned their lesson. Let's give 'em another week for good measure.

DILLARD

Sure you want to do that, sir?

ABERNATHY

Don't you ever question me, Sgt. Dillard. When I give an order, you jump to it, or I'll kick you and that first-cousin you call a wife outta that pretty little house so fast it'll make your pin-head spin. You got that?

DILLARD

Yes, sir.

Dillard slams the doors on Ray and Claude and clamps shut the padlocks. Abernathy smiles at the incorrigibles, who regard him with undisguised hatred.

AT THE GUN LINE

A somber Poker Face offers Willie a wad of bills.

POKER FACE

Well, they made it a week. Looks like you win, Willie.

WILLIE

Let it ride.

INT. CLAUDE'S CELL – NIGHT

A slot at the bottom of the door opens. A tin plate of mush slides through and the slot closes. Slumped in the corner, Claude reaches for the food – but a RAT beats him to it,

scampering out of the shadows and leaping onto the dish.

INT. RAY'S CELL – NIGHT

A commotion and wild screams come from Claude's cell. Ray leaps to his feet, shouting through the wall.

RAY  
Claude? You alright?!

INT. CLAUDE'S CELL – NIGHT

Claude continues to stomp the rat.

CLAUDE  
Can't take it no more, Ray! Die,  
motherfucker! Gotta get the fuck  
outta here!

Claude pounds against the door, raising a holy racket. We continue to cut back and forth between cells as needed.

RAY  
Keep it together, Claude. You wake  
up the man, he'll shoot you for sure.

CLAUDE  
He'd be doing me a favor. I'm getting  
outta here one way or the other!  
Goddamn rats and shit! Fuck!

Claude continues shouting and pounding.

RAY  
All right, man, just settle down.  
We'll get outta here, Claude. We'll  
get outta here real soon.

CLAUDE  
How the fuck are we gonna do that,  
Ray?!

Ray looks around his cell. Claude's pounding is bound to wake up somebody soon.

RAY

We'll just get off at the next stop.

CLAUDE  
(stops pounding,  
confused)  
Say what?

RAY  
That's right, we'll get off at the  
next stop. The train's pulling into  
the station right now.

CLAUDE  
The hell you talking about? What  
train?

RAY  
We're in the Bronx, my man. Hundred  
and Sixty First Street.

Claude focuses on what Ray is saying and starts to breathe  
easier.

CLAUDE  
Hundred and Sixty First Street? That's  
Yankee Stadium.

RAY  
Hell, yes, Yankee Stadium. Bombers  
are playing a double-header against  
the Red Sox.

CLAUDE  
Red Sox... Who's on the mound?

RAY  
I don't know. Who do you want?

CLAUDE  
Allie Reynolds. He's my boy.

RAY  
Sure, it says Allie Reynolds right  
here in the program. He's warming up  
right now. Man, we're so close to  
the field I need cleats. How'd you

get such good seats?

CLAUDE  
I know people.

RAY  
They must be the right people. Whoa,  
there goes the hot dog man. Let's  
get a couple. Damn, that smells good.  
Nothing like a ballpark hot dog,  
huh?

CLAUDE  
You get ketchup?

RAY  
Ketchup? Who eats ketchup on a hot  
dog? Mustard's what you want.

CLAUDE  
I can't eat it with mustard.

#### EXT. THE HOLE – NIGHT

Dillard strides toward the hole, shotgun in hand. He pauses  
to listen to the argument, cocking an eyebrow in befuddlement.

RAY  
(off)  
Give me back that hot dog. I'll eat  
it myself.

CLAUDE  
(off)  
What am I gonna eat?

RAY  
(off)  
You can starve to death for all I  
care. Now shut up, the game's about  
to start.

CLAUDE  
(off)  
Hey, man, is Babe Ruth in the lineup  
today?

RAY

(off)

Of course, he's in the lineup. There he goes right there. Hey, Babe...!

Dillard shakes his head, shoulders his gun and heads back toward his house.

EXT. THE HOLE – DAY

Abernathy gives the nod to Dillard, who unlocks the doors. Two trusties drag Ray and Claude out of their cells.

INT. BUNKHOUSE – DAY

The men crowd around the windows.

RADIO

What's going on? Are they alive or dead?

GOLDMOUTH

Don't look too good.

POKER FACE

They're not moving.

EXT. THE HOLE – DAY

Slowly, Claude opens his eyes, squinting in the harsh light of day. Summoning his strength, he staggers to his feet.

CLAUDE

Hey, Ray...

Ray's eyes blink open. Claude holds out a hand and helps him stand up. They share a look. They made it.

ABERNATHY

(scowling)

Sergeant Dillard, make sure these two are out in the fields first thing in the morning.

Abernathy turns on his heels. Dillard considers the two tough

guys standing before him.

DILLARD  
Go on, get inside.

Ray and Claude stagger toward the bunkhouse as the incorrigibles gather on the porch and help them in out of the sun.

DISSOLVE TO:

INSERT – TIME PASSAGE

(Note: This montage is mixed with 16mm and Super 8 footage. A beautiful 1940s song plays over.)

A. King Kong is machined-gunned off the top of the Empire State Building...

B. FDR introduces his New Deal...

C. The incorrigibles chop weeds...

D. With Willie and Claude standing guard, Ray samples a batch of moonshine from a secret still in his footlocker...

E. At the height of the depression, poor people line up in front of a soup kitchen...

F. Ray and the crew sit around the poker table playing cards and laughing...

G. Ray opens a letter and pulls out a snapshot of his mama which he places over his bunk.

H. The incorrigibles level a road...

I. Jesse Owens wins the 100 meter race at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin...

J. Benny Goodman sets the kids dancing with wild abandon in the aisles of the Paramount Theater...

K. The Hindenburg bursts into flames...

L. Claude writes a letter, "Dear Sylvia"...



M. In the juke joint, Sylvia reads the letter and smiles. She shows it to a few other WORKING GIRLS...

N. Adolf Hitler stabs the air in front of a foreboding sea of Nazis...

O. The 1939 World's Fair opens in New York...

P. Ray nails a sign to the side of the bunkhouse: RAY'S BOOM BOOM ROOM. He steps back to admire the effect. Behind him, Sylvia and her friends mingle with the incorrigibles in the yard... Dillard takes his cut as Claude and Sylvia head for the tonk house. Ray and his date step up...

Q. Lou Gehrig is honored at Yankee Stadium. "Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the Earth..."

R. With a pillow stuffed under a home-made Santa outfit, Ray distributes chocolate to the incorrigibles while Claude and Willie decorate the saddest little Christmas tree you ever saw.

S. The 1940 Oldsmobile is introduced...

T. Japanese Zeros bomb Pearl Harbor...

U. FDR declares "a day that will live in infamy."...

V. A WWII newsreel shows American G.I. s storming a beach in the South Pacific...

INT. MESS HALL (1943) – NIGHT

The inmates of Camp 8 cheer for the American soldiers up on a makeshift movie screen. Instead of black and white stripes, the prisoners now wear blue twill. In an audience of new faces, the CAMERA FINDS some familiar ones. Ray and Claude are surrounded by their crew – Willie, Radio, Poker Face, Cookie, Biscuit, Jangle Leg and Goldmouth. A decade has passed.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

A line of NEW PRISONERS stands before Dillard, now 10 years older.

DILLARD

...Camp 8 is for incorrigibles, so whatever you've done to get here, believe me, we are not impressed. You new men are probably noticing that we have no fences here at Camp 8. We don't need no fences, we have the gun line. It runs from shack to shack clear around the yard –

Dillard pauses in front of a big country boy who can't be more than 18 years old. The kid is bouncing a rubber ball.

DILLARD

What the hell you think you're doing?

The kid don't answer. An OLD GUY steps forward.

OLD GUY

Excuse me, boss. That kid don't talk. Something wrong with his head, just can't get right, boss.

DILLARD

Can't get right, huh? We'll see how long he last. Now, where was I?

HOPPIN' BOB

We don't need no fences at Camp 8, boss.

DILLARD

That's right. We don't need no fences, we have the gun line. It runs from shack to shack clear around the yard. You are now inside the gun line...

INT. BUNKHOUSE – DAY

Ray and some of the fellas are playing poker. Dillard's voice drifts in through the open window.

RAY

(mouthing along)

If you step outside the gun line

without my permission, you will be shot. If you trip and fall over the gun line, you will be shot. If you spit, if you pee, if you stick your ass out and take a dump over the gun line, you will be shot...

He lays down his cards and rakes in the pot.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD – DAY

Jangle Leg pitches to Radio, who swings and misses. Behind the plate, Goldmouth tosses the ball back to Jangle Leg. On the sideline, Ray teaches three-card monte to CAN'T GET RIGHT. Claude paces nearby.

CLAUDE

I try to teach 'em the finer points of the game, share my wisdom, but I don't know why I bother. They don't listen, they sure don't learn...

Another pitch, another strike.

RAY

What you're dealing with here is a complete lack of talent.

CLAUDE

I'm sick of watching Camp 12 win the championship. Every year they get to roast the victory pig and we get dick. This year I want that pig.

Radio knocks a grounder up the middle.

CLAUDE

Alright, Radio, there you go. Who wants to hit next?

Can't Get Right looks at Ray.

RAY

You want to hit?  
(to Claude)  
Yo, Claude. Give Can't Get Right a

shot.

CLAUDE  
(skeptical)  
Him?

RAY  
Can't be worse than any of these  
other fools.

CLAUDE  
All right, grab the bat. Let's see  
what you can do.

Can't Get Right shuffles to the plate. Goldmouth hands him  
the bat.

CLAUDE  
Jangle Leg's gonna throw the ball  
nice and easy. You just go ahead and  
take a swing.

Jangle Leg tosses the ball. Can't Get Right swings and  
connects with a mighty CRACK! The incorrigibles crane their  
necks as the ball disappears into the sky. They turn to look  
at Can't Get Right. Ray gives Claude a significant look,  
then tosses another ball out to Jangle Leg on the mound.

CLAUDE  
Okay. Let's try that again. This  
time give it a little juice.

Jangle Leg nods, winds up and delivers a whistling fast ball.  
Can't Get Right clobbers it. Once again, the incorrigibles  
track the departing projectile.

RAY  
Told ya.

Can't Get Right smiles for the first time.

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION – DAY

The men of Camp 8 paint a fence along the drive leading up  
to the big house.

RADIO

I heard Camp 12 got themselves a son-of-a-bitch used to pitch for the Mud Hens.

GOLDMOUTH

That boy got a year for jay-walking.

RAY

Judge must have money riding on the championship.

CLAUDE

Don't matter who Camp 12 puts on the mound. All I know is when this season's over Camp 8's gonna have pork chops.

Just then a U. S. Army Jeep swerves past the men and parks in front of the mansion. Young CAPT. TOM BURNETTE helps MAE ROSE out of the car. The prisoners stare furtively at her long legs and curly blonde tresses.

POKER FACE

Looks like little Mae Rose has grown up.

BISCUIT

And out.

COOKIE

Mmm-mm, that girl's got gams.

CLAUDE

She's got it all. And it's firm and round and fully packed.

RAY

You shred it, wheat. That there is fresh water.

Next to them, Can't Get Right stares openly, mesmerized by her beauty. Ray nudges him.

RAY

Be cool, man. You can look, just

don't drool.

Up at the mansion, Abernathy and his WIFE come out onto the porch, all smiles.

ABERNATHY

How was the honeymoon? Am I gonna be a granddaddy soon?

MRS. ABERNATHY

Don't pay attention to the superintendent, Tom. You're going to stay for supper, aren't you?

TOM

Afraid not. I'm shipping out this afternoon.

The prisoners steal glances as Mae Rose kisses her new husband goodbye. She gives them quite a show, raising her leg behind her just like Betty Grable. Then Tom climbs into the Jeep and pulls away.

Mae Rose takes a long glance at the prisoners. The men all look away – except Can't Get Right who stands there smiling innocently. Mae Rose gives him a little wink, then turns her back and bounces up the steps.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD – DAY

A plump PIG roots about in a small pen. A sign dangles from a post – "First Prize." The incorrigibles of Camp 8 limber up for the big game with the inmates of Camp 12 across the field.

POKER FACE

Think you can handle something that big, Cookie?

COOKIE

I handled your mama, didn't I? Don't y'all worry. I got plans for that bad boy. Ain't none of him going to waste.

Beyond the fence, a late-model sedan rolls up. STAN BLOCKER,

in a straw hat and a rumpled suit, climbs out and stretches his legs. Irritated, he smacks a mosquito and exchanges a few words with Dillard.

DILLARD

Banks! Get over here!

Claude hustles over, removing his hat.

DILLARD

This is Stan Blocker. Scout for the Nigger Leagues.

BLOCKER

Negro Leagues, actually. Pittsburgh Crawfords. Ever hear of us?

CLAUDE

We get the games on the radio sometimes.

BLOCKER

We played down in Jackson yesterday. Heard a rumor you've got a boy up here who can hit the ball a ton.

CLAUDE

You probably mean Can't Get Right. That's him over there.

BLOCKER

Can't Get Right? That's the kid's name? Can I talk to him?

CLAUDE

You can try, but you won't get too far. Why you interested?

BLOCKER

Crawford's are always looking for new talent.

CLAUDE

Maybe you didn't notice, but this is a prison.

BLOCKER

There are ways around that. Right sergeant?

Blocker winks at Dillard, then glances at the incorrigibles practicing in the field. Goldmouth, Cookie, Poker Face, Biscuit – they don't exactly inspire confidence.

BLOCKER

Nice looking squad. See you after the game.

Blocker takes a seat on the bench.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD – DAY

The inmates of Camp 12 are in the field. Our boys from Camp 8 cheer for Cookie digging in at the plate. Ray taunts the opposition from the third base line.

The PITCHER winds up and releases a fast ball. Cookie swings and connects for a base hit up the middle.

IN THE STANDS

Mrs. Abernathy and Mrs. Dillard share a box of Cracker Jack.

MRS. ABERNATHY

Of course, the superintendent's hoping for a boy, but personally, I'd prefer a girl.

MRS. DILLARD

Whatever it is will be a little gift from heaven. Look at the way she glows.

Mae Rose sits next to them. She is SIX MONTHS PREGNANT. She removes her sunglasses and coyly bites a fingernail when she spots Can't Get Right in the on-deck circle.

DOWN ON THE FIELD

Can't Get Right smiles shyly. Sensing trouble, Claude ushers Can't Get Right toward the plate, massaging his shoulders.



CLAUDE

You're my boy, just keep what little  
mind you have focused on the game.  
If you hit that ball the way I know  
you can, you might just be our ticket  
off this farm.

Can't Get Right digs in. Claude returns to the sidelines and  
appeals to the gods. The pitcher winds up and releases a  
fast ball. Can't Get Right connects with that familiar CRACK!  
Blocker stands up and watches the ball clear the fence and  
just keep going.

With his team cheering him on, Can't Get Right trots around  
the bases. But he's still looking at Mae Rose.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD (LATER) – DAY

Cookie slowly turns the pig on a spit over an open fire. The  
incorrigibles are savoring a victory feast. As always, trusty  
guards keep an eye on things.

Off to the side, Blocker is laughing with Ray and Claude. He  
takes a hit off Ray's bottle of shine. It's not his first,  
either.

BLOCKER

Mark my words, within five years  
there's gonna be a colored man playing  
in the majors.

RAY

Come on, the world hasn't changed  
that much.

BLOCKER

Maybe not yet. But it will. And I'll  
be out of a job. Damn, that's some  
tasty hooch.

CLAUDE

It's amazing what Ray here can do  
with a couple of pounds of potato  
skins and some molasses.

RAY

So, Blocker, what do you think of our boy?

BLOCKER

I think that boy could be the next Josh Gibson. I'm gonna talk to the front office about him, you can bet on that. Damn, it's getting late. We got a game in Memphis tomorrow.

Blocker starts for his car, parked just beyond the gun line.

CLAUDE

What about us? Don't forget to mention us.

RAY

We're like his handlers. He can't function without us.

BLOCKER

I'll put in a good word for you. You've done a good job with that boy. Thanks for your hospitality.

Ray and Claude's eyes gleam with hope as Blocker's car rumbles off down the road.

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION – NIGHT

Inside, a woman screams in agony. Then, the HEALTHY CRIES of a new-born baby.

INT. MAE ROSE'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Superintendent Abernathy paces anxiously in front of a white curtain surrounding Mae Rose's bed. Suddenly, Mrs Abernathy staggers out from behind the curtain with a stricken look on her face. She tries to speak, but words fail her. Her legs go wobbly and she faints dead away.

ABERNATHY

Uh, doctor...

The DOCTOR steps from behind the curtain, drawing it behind him. He checks Mrs. Abernathy's pulse.

DOCTOR

She'll be fine. She just had a bit  
of a shock.

ABERNATHY

Is Mae Rose okay?

DOCTOR

She's doing just fine.

ABERNATHY

And the baby?

DOCTOR

(vague)

He's a big one.

ABERNATHY

It's a boy! Well, let's get a look  
at him.

Abernathy pushes past the doctor and yanks open the curtain.  
Mae Rose is propped up in bed, looking exhausted.

ABERNATHY

Well, where is he? Where's my new  
grandson?

The NURSE turns around, cradling the baby in her arms.  
Abernathy gently pulls back the soft blanket. His eyes widen  
with horror upon discovering that the newest member of the  
Abernathy family is black.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

Can't Get Right bounces his rubber ball off the wall, catching  
it on the rebound.

INT. BUNKHOUSE CAGE – DAY

Ray passes around his latest batch of buck as the men discuss  
Can't Get Right's professional prospects. The thump-thump of  
the ball on the wall outside plays over.

POKER FACE

You really think they'll let him out  
of here just to play baseball?

WILLIE

Why not? Boy's got God-given talent.

CLAUDE

God may have given it, but Claude  
Banks spotted it and nurtured it.

RAY

Damn straight. I expect those  
Pittsburgh Crawdads to remember that.

CLAUDE

Crawfords.

RAY

Whatever.

COOKIE

(glancing out the  
window)

Heads up, here comes trouble.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

Abernathy drives his sedan up to the bunkhouse. All of his worldly possessions are strapped to the roof. It appears that the Abernathys are leaving town. In the back seat, Mae Rose cradles her baby. Her mother sits next to her. Dillard steps out into the yard to confer with the Superintendent, then turns to address the inmates.

DILLARD

Alright, listen up! I want every man  
lined up out here in the yard on the  
double! Let's move it!

HOPPIN' BOB

You heard what the man said! Move  
it!

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

Abernathy holds his newborn grandson up next to Ray's face.

Hmm. Scowling, he moves a little further down the line, scrutinizing the features of each man. He pauses in front of Claude, holds up the baby. Maybe. Abernathy stops in front of Goldmouth. Holds up the baby. The possibility makes him shudder. He moves on to Can't Get Right. His eyes narrow.

ABERNATHY

I know it was somebody from this camp. I can feel it in my bones.

Disgusted, Abernathy hands the baby back to Mae Rose. Then he turns, walks back to Can't Get Right and places a revolver against his head.

ABERNATHY

Do you know who the father of that little chocolated baby is?

Can't Get Right nods slowly. Abernathy smiles.

ABERNATHY

Well, then, who is it?

Up and down the line, the men brace themselves for the worst. Can't Get Right just grins. Enraged, Abernathy cocks the revolver. That's when Ray steps forward.

RAY

The baby's mine, boss.

Stunned, Abernathy lowers the gun and approaches Ray. Then Claude steps forward.

CLAUDE

He's lying, boss. I'm the father of that baby.

Confused, Abernathy looks back and forth between the two men. Then Willie steps forward.

WILLIE

Actually, it was me, boss. I know I may look old...

BISCUIT

Any fool could see that baby's mine,

boss.

COOKIE

I beg to differ. That cute little rascal belongs to me...

POKER FACE

I'm the father...

RADIO

I'm the father, boss...

GOLDMOUTH

I'm the father...

JANGLE LEG

I'm the father...

And so it goes down the line, until every last man of Camp 8 has stepped forward to claim kinship with the Superintendent. Even hard-ass Dillard can't help cracking a smile. Disgusted, confused and thoroughly fed up, Abernathy jams the revolver into his belt and climbs into the car. As he guns the engine, Mae Rose gazes out the back window, smiling one last time at the father of her baby. Can't Get Right smiles back.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

It's visiting Sunday and Ray's Boom Boom Room is in full swing. Sylvia's girls are everywhere. Down at the gunline, Dillard takes his cut from inmates lined up for their turn in the tonk. A FIVE-PIECE PRISON BAND is playing the blues. Nearby, Willie is dispensing Ray's moonshine from a bunkhouse window. He raises a jar in a toast.

WILLIE

To Superintendent Abernathy. May he have many more grandchildren!

The incorrigibles erupt in boisterous agreement. Claude grabs Can't Get Right and shakes him.

CLAUDE

What I want to know is where? When?

How?

WILLIE

Wasting your breath, Claude. He ain't the type to kiss and tell.

Just then, Rev. Clay and his daughter emerge from the mess hall and start across the yard. It's a good thing the old man is blind because he wouldn't want to see how far his flock has strayed. The Reverend inhales deeply as one of Sylvia's girls passes nearby.

REV. CLAY

There's a sweet fragrance in the air today.

CLAY'S DAUGHTER

The magnolias are blooming early this year, daddy.

Blissed out incorrigibles enjoy a last dance as the band downshifts into a slow, sultry number. In the midst of the dancers, Claude clings to Sylvia. Nearby, Jangle Leg dances intimately with a YOUNG WOMAN.

Up on the porch, Ray refreshes Biscuit's drink. Biscuit has been crying and it shows. The liquor probably isn't helping.

RAY

Don't take it so hard, Biscuit. She don't mean nothin' to him.

BISCUIT

Hell with him. It ain't that.

He pulls some folded sheets of paper from his pocket, passes them to Ray.

RAY

These are free papers.

BISCUIT

(devastated)

What am I gonna do out there, Ray? I can't go home to my mama like this. I'll get the strap for sure.

RAY

Come on, Biscuit, this is good news.  
Your mama's gonna break down in tears  
when you show up on her doorstep.

Poker Face leans in.

POKER FACE

(sotto)

I'll give you three to one she gives  
him the strap.

Ray gives Poker face a shove, then turns back to Biscuit.

RAY

It's 1945. It's a different world  
now.

BISCUIT

Not for me, it ain't.

RAY

Well you can't stay here, Biscuit.  
This ain't no life for a man. Any  
one of these fellas would give their  
right arm to be in your shoes. I  
sure know I would.

Ray hands back the papers and heads off to dance with a PRETTY YOUNG WOMAN lingering nearby. Left alone, Biscuit polishes off his moonshine and checks his reflection in the bunkhouse window.

BISCUIT

No life on the inside, no life on  
the outside...

He crumples the discharge papers and drops them. Then he steps down from the porch and walks calmly past the dancing prisoners toward the gun line.

Ray lifts his head off his date's shoulder. Something about the way Biscuit is walking suggests that he isn't going to stop.



RAY  
Hey, Biscuit...!

But it's too late. Biscuit crosses the gun line and keeps walking, his eyes focused on the horizon.

TRUSTY  
Man over the line!

The band stops playing, the dancers grow still. Dillard turns around and squints.

DILLARD  
Goddamnit, Biscuit, get back here!

But Biscuit isn't paying attention. He breaks into a run. Dillard nods to Hoppin' Bob who raises his rifle and draws a bead. But he can't pull the trigger. He lowers his gun.

Shots ring out from the shooter shacks. Biscuit reels from the impact of the bullets and looks down sadly at the blood spreading across his ring-arounds...

Prisoners silently gather at the gunline. Jangle Leg pushes his way through the crowd and crosses the gunline without hesitation. Dillard indicates for the shooters to hold their fire. They train their rifles on Jangle Leg as he strides toward his fallen companion. Jangle Leg gently lifts Biscuit's lifeless body into his big arms and somberly carries him back toward the camp. The CAMERA RISES HIGH OVERHEAD as the prisoners make way for Jangle Leg to cross back over the gunline.

INT. BUNKHOUSE – DAY

A dark mood hangs over the men. Jangle Leg sits stoically as Radio fiddles with his receiver. Nearby, Poker Face and Ray play a listless game of gin rummy. Claude is thumbing distractedly through a dog-eared copy of Baseball Digest.

RADIO  
Hey, fellas, I got Chicago.

But nobody can muster much enthusiasm for this news. Radio shrugs and drops down on his bunk.

Just then, Can't Get Right walks past heading for the door. He's dressed in civilian clothes, his bundle slung over his shoulder.

CLAUDE  
Hey, Can't Get Right, where you going?  
Why you dressed like that?

Can't Get Right holds out a piece of paper which Ray scrutinizes.

RAY  
It's a pardon from the governor.

CLAUDE  
Let me see that.

The incorrigibles gather around for a glimpse at Can't Get Right's ticket to freedom.

CLAUDE  
Where'd you get this?

Can't Get Right nods out the window. Stan Blocker is waiting by his car.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

Claude storms across the yard and stops at the gun line. Ray is a few steps behind.

CLAUDE  
Yo, Blocker, what's going on here?

BLOCKER  
Kid's getting out. I got him a pardon.

CLAUDE  
Yeah, but what about me and Ray? I didn't see our names on that pardon. You said you were gonna put in a good word for us.

BLOCKER  
I did, Claude. I mentioned you. I mentioned you both. But the fact is,

pardons don't come cheap. The kid  
can hit. What can you do?

This hits Claude hard.

RAY  
Let it go, Claude.

CLAUDE  
I'm not gonna let it go. The man  
needs to explain himself. Makin'  
promises.

BLOCKER  
Look, I am truly sorry about this.  
I'd like to help you...

CLAUDE  
But you can't.

BLOCKER  
At least the kid's getting out. Isn't  
this what you wanted?

Claude looks around as the incorrigibles begin to gather.  
He's on the spot. Dillard approaches with Can't Get Right.  
Claude looks into the big kid's eyes.

CLAUDE  
(resigned)  
Yeah. Of course it is.

Steeling himself to the reality of the situation, Claude  
gives Can't Get Right a hug.

CLAUDE  
You show them Crawfords how to play  
ball.

RAY  
Make 'em throw strikes.

Can't Get Right nods. He steps up to the gun line and looks  
at both shooter shacks.

DILLARD

It's alright. You're a free man now.

Can't Get Right steps across the gun line. Blocker opens the car door for him. But before he climbs in, Can't Get Right reaches into his pocket and pulls out his rubber ball. With a smile, he tosses it to Claude, who snatches it out of the air.

BLOCKER

Don't worry, we'll take good care of him.

Blocker tips his hat and climbs behind the wheel. Claude and Ray watch Blocker's car drive off under a red Mississippi sunset. Slowly, the inmates drift back toward the bunkhouse until Ray and Claude are left alone at the gun line.

RAY

One of the new kids said they're farming those acres just north of the swamp. He said he saw a crop duster flying around the place.

CLAUDE

I'm not in the mood right now, Ray.

RAY

He said they keep it parked out behind the barn. Can't be that hard to fly a plane. Lots of people do it.

CLAUDE

They're called pilots! I'm serious, Ray. I'm not in the mood for one of your stupid, fucked-up plans right now.

RAY

I don't see you coming up with any plans.

CLAUDE

(getting mad)

My plan is on his way to Pittsburgh right now. That congenital idiot just got himself a pardon signed by

the governor thanks to us, but we can't seem to do nothing for ourselves. Don't you feel a little disgusted right now?

RAY

Crop duster.

CLAUDE

I ain't getting in no airplane with you. I'm finally wrapping my mind around the concept. They threw us in this shithole for life. Don't you get it, Ray? We're gonna die here! Might as well head up to the cemetery, pick a plot and start digging.

Suddenly enraged, Ray hauls off and knocks Claude down with a solid right. Surprised, Claude touches his bloody lip.

RAY

My daddy died in prison. He gave up hope and hung himself. What you're talking about is the same damn thing. That ain't how I'm going.

CLAUDE

Maybe you're fooling yourself, Ray. Maybe you're just a chip off the old block.

RAY

Take that back or we ain't friends no more, Claude Banks.

CLAUDE

Here's a news flash, Ray. We never were friends. We've just been stuck together for 12 years. It's been nothing but bad luck since the moment I ran into you. Every time I look at you I get sick to my stomach thinking about what my life could have been if I'd never bumped into Ray Gibson.

A hard look comes to Ray's eyes as Claude rises to his feet.

RAY

Better watch yourself Claude, before  
you say something you regret.

CLAUDE

The only thing I regret is the day I  
met you.

RAY

Well, if that's the way it is...

CLAUDE

That's the way it is.

RAY

Then I have nothing left to say to  
you.

Ray walks away, leaving Claude to nurse his split lip.

CLAUDE

You never said nothing of value  
anyway.

#### INSERT – TIME PASSAGE

A. In his Pittsburgh Crawfords uniform, Can't Get Right lays  
into a fast ball, sending it soaring into the bleachers...

B. People dance in the street in Time Square, marking the  
end of WWII...

C. Hoppin' Bob drops a package on Ray's bunk. Ray rips off  
the brown paper to reveal a book: "So You Want to Learn to  
Fly..."

D. Claude and Sylvia make love in the tonk house...

E. In the mess hall, Ray pointedly carries his tray past a  
table where Claude sits with Willie...

F. An A-bomb explodes in the Bikini Atolls...

G. Jimmy Stewart hugs his wife and children at the end of  
"It's a Wonderful Life" ...

H. Jackie Robinson slides across home plate at Ebbets Field...

I. Ray runs full tilt across a field toward a barn. Sure enough, there's the single engine crop duster parked right where he said it would be...

J. Claude and another INMATE repair a hole in the bunkhouse roof. They dive for cover as Ray's crop duster swoops low overhead and dips out of sight beyond the trees. A puff of smoke rises into the sky...

K. Soot-stained, Ray is marched to the hole and shoved inside...

L. Newly elected president Harry Truman holds up a copy of the Chicago Tribune baring the headline "Dewey Defeats Truman" ...

M. RCA unveils the first color television...

N. Cars pull up next to speaker poles in front of a drive-in movie screen...

O. In the bunkhouse, early rock and roll plays on a modern 1950s radio that sits where the old vacuum tube receiver used to be. A YOUNG TOUGH now occupies Radio's old bunk...

P. At the poker table, Poker Face slumps forward onto his pile of chips, revealing a straight flush. The other men quickly fold...

Q. With a TRUSTY standing guard, Claude and Ray silently shovel dirt into Poker Face's grave. The CAMERA MOVES past gravemarkers – Biscuit, Jangle Leg, Radio...

R. Marilyn Monroe's skirt rises on a blast of subway air in "The Seven-Year Itch" ...

S. Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to sit in the back of the bus...

T. Elvis Presley creates a sensation on the Ed Sullivan Show...

U. School children learn to "duck and cover" in the event of

nuclear attack...

V. The inmates of Camp 8 work to level a road. Ray's on one side, Claude's on the other...

W. Prisoners mingle with friends and family on visiting Sunday. Claude waits on the bunkhouse steps. His face brightens when Sylvia appears...

X. Blacks sit-in at lunch counters in Greensboro, N.C...

Y. Kennedy is elected...

Z. OMITTED...

AA. Martin Luther King delivers his "I have a dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial...

BB. The Zapruder footage of Kennedy being shot...

CC. American soldiers jump down from helicopters and run for the jungles in Vietnam...

DD. Ford introduces the 1965 Mustang...

EE. The assassination of Malcolm X...

FF. Muhammad Ali looms over Sonny Liston, asking "What's my name?" ...

GG. The CAMERA MOVES past more gravemarkers – Hoppin' Bob, Goldmouth – to find Claude and Ray silently shoveling dirt over another casket. Ray pounds a simple marker into the ground: Cookie. Briefly, they lock eyes. But neither one speaks and the moment passes...

HH. Go-Go dancers...

II. Mao Tse Tung...

JJ. Jimi Hendrix at the Monterey Pop Festival...

KK. TV's Batman and Robin battle the forces of evil in Gotham City...

LL. Black Panthers...



MM. Peace Protesters...

NN. The death of Martin Luther King...

OO. Robert Kennedy...

PP. Neil Armstrong sets foot on the moon...

QQ. Vida Blue rears back and fires a pitch in the 1972 World Series...

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

On the porch, Willie, now in his 70s, sits in a wheelchair watching the ball game on a black-and-white television. A TRUSTY waits nearby. Ray, now in his mid-60s, emerges from the bunkhouse lugging a duffle bag.

RAY

Alright Willie, I think I got everything. I'll talk to Dillard, see if I can get up to the infirmary and check up on you. Make sure they're changing your diapers regular.

WILLIE

They'll be sending you up there soon enough. And not just for a visit, neither.

RAY

(leaning in)

I slipped in a couple of bottles of my latest batch. Help wash down all them pills they'll be giving you.

He gives Willie a slap on the back and nods to the trusty. The trusty wheels the old man across the yard where YOUNG PRISONERS mingle with WIVES and FAMILY MEMBERS sporting the fashions of the early '70s – Afros, mutton chops, paisley prints and bell-bottom pants.

ACROSS THE YARD

Looking old-style, Claude sits on the mess hall steps waiting

for Sylvia. He catches Willie's eye. The two men nod to each other, an unspoken farewell. Then Claude turns to find Ray looking at him from the bunkhouse steps. Ray and Claude hold each others gaze for a moment. Then Ray heads back into the bunkhouse.

YVETTE

(off)

Are you Claude Banks?

Claude turns to face YVETTE, a pretty young woman.

CLAUDE

Yeah.

YVETTE

My name's Yvette. Sylvia sent me.  
You look just like she said.

CLAUDE

She's alright, isn't she?

YVETTE

Oh, she's fine. She's just not coming  
today.

CLAUDE

Why not?

YVETTE

She got married last month.

CLAUDE

Married?

YVETTE

Real nice guy, too. Trumpet player.  
They moved down to New Orleans.

Claude takes this in, staring off into space.

YVETTE

She always said that if you were on  
the outside...

CLAUDE

But I'm not on the outside. I'm in here.

YVETTE

I know she's sorry she won't be seeing you anymore. Anyway, she wanted me to take care of you.

CLAUDE

Take care of me?

YVETTE

You know, go to the tonk or whatever.

CLAUDE

I'm too old for you. Besides, I'm not much in the mood.

YVETTE

Want me to come back some other time?

CLAUDE

(shaking his head)

Nice girl like you don't belong in a place like this. But if you talk to Sylvia, tell her old Claude said congratulations.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

Claude stands at the gun line, staring across at the Dillard house. Mrs. Dillard places a couple of pies on the windowsill to cool.

CLAUDE

Whites-only pies...

Suddenly, he makes a break for the Dillard house.

TRUSTY

Man over the line!

Ray turns to see Claude dashing across no-man's land. Shots ring out from the shooter shack, kicking up dirt around Claude's feet as he serpentine across the field.

EXT. DILLARD'S HOUSE – DAY

Breathless, Claude makes it to the kitchen window and digs his hand into the golden-brown crust, shoving a sloppy fistful of pie into his mouth. More shots ring out. Bullets PING all around him. Grabbing the pie, he darts around the side of the building, out of range. Back against the wall, he drops down on his haunches, snarfing pie like a hungry wolf.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

A case of empty Coke bottles sits in the middle of the yard, glinting in the hot sun. His face smeared with boysenberry, Claude finishes taking off his boots and socks and steps barefoot onto the bottles.

DILLARD  
Comfortable?

CLAUDE  
As a pair of fur-lined bedroom  
slippers, boss.

DILLARD  
We'll see what those slippers feel  
like after, say, 24 hours. And if  
you step down off them bottles – if  
one toe so much as touches the dirt –  
one of these boys is gonna shoot you  
dead. Let's see. We need a special  
man for this job.

He takes a trusty's rifle and moves among the inmates, who have gathered around. He stops when he gets to Ray.

DILLARD  
How about it, Ray?

Ray glances at Claude, then back at Dillard.

DILLARD  
I'll make you trusty right now. If  
that pie-eatin' son of a bitch falls  
off those bottles and you have to  
shoot him, I'll see to it you get a  
pardon. Hell, I'll personally escort

you out the gate.

Dillard offers the rifle to Ray, who doesn't have to think too long.

RAY

You don't want to give me a gun, boss. I'm liable to use it on you.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – SUNDOWN

Ray's been given the same treatment as Claude. Barefoot, balanced on Coke bottles, the two men stand a few feet apart facing each other. A trusty with a rifle keeps an eye on them. After years of silence, the tension reaches the breaking point...

CLAUDE

You're a sucker. I'd have taken that deal.

RAY

Excuse me? Are you talking to me?

CLAUDE

I'd have knocked you off those bottles, put a bullet in your ass and be half way to New York right now.

RAY

After all these years of blissful silence, I almost forgot how annoying the sound of your voice can be.

CLAUDE

I hope you don't think I owe you anything. Because I don't owe you a damn thing.

RAY

I didn't do it for you, anyway. I just ain't no boot-licking trusty, that's all.

The trusty tightens his grip on his rifle. He'd love the

opportunity.

CLAUDE

I was sorry to hear about your mama passing.

RAY

That was five years ago.

CLAUDE

I know, but since we're talking, I thought I'd mention it.

RAY

We're not talking, you're talking, and doing too damn much of it, if you ask me.

They stand in stony silence. Then Ray starts to laugh. A long, low belly laugh.

CLAUDE

What?!

RAY

You sure looked funny running for those pies, bullets flying all around you.

CLAUDE

Bullets weren't the problem. That pie was too hot. Burned my tongue.

The two men start to laugh. Really laugh. Nearly a decade's worth of laughter comes welling up out of them, and they nearly lose their balance, which only makes them laugh harder.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD – DAY

A trusty bangs the rap iron. Young prisoners pour from the bunkhouse and line up for breakfast. Claude and Ray bring up the rear, the elder statesmen of the bunch. By a long shot.

DILLARD

Fourteen acres today and only 12 hours of daylight! Eat up and move

it out! Gibson! Banks! Get your sorry asses over here!

Claude and Ray step out of line and approach Dillard.

DILLARD

Every morning I wake up praying that Ray Gibson and Claude Banks have died in their sleep and every morning you disappoint me.

RAY AND CLAUDE

Sorry, boss.

DILLARD

I stand before you a defeated man. Try as I might, I can't seem to break you. I swear, if they dropped a nuclear bomb on this camp, you and the cockroaches would be the only things left. But starting today at least I won't have to endure your presence any longer. You've got fifteen minutes to clear out your footlockers. You're both being reassigned to the Superintendent's mansion. And I, for one, will not miss you.

Ray and Claude share a look. Then Ray embraces Dillard, who stoically endures the breach of his personal space.

RAY

I always wanted to do that.

(sighing)

There is so much love inside of this man.

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION – DAY

Up on the porch, Claude brings a tray of minted iced tea to Superintendent Wilkins, who sets aside his bible and washes down a couple of pills.

Before going back inside, Claude can't resist taunting Ray, busy trimming a hedge out in the hot sun.

CLAUDE

Oh, yard boy, these pansies could use some attention over here. Perhaps some fertilizer would restore their exuberance.

EXT. MARSH – DAY

Claude and Ray beat the bulrushes with switches, rustling a couple of pheasants from their hiding spot. As the birds take wing, Wilkins aims his shot gun and fires twice in rapid succession. Both birds fall from the sky in a flutter of feathers.

OMITTED

Sequence omitted from original script.

OMITTED

Sequence omitted from original script.

INT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION – DAY

Claude fills Wilkins' water glass as the Superintendent takes a bite of lamb chop and winces in pain.

WILKINS

Damn dentures slipping again. Everything falls apart when you grow old, eh, Claude? Time sure marches on.

CLAUDE

Yes, boss.

WILKINS

You know, I'm fixing on retiring at the end of the summer, gonna try to enjoy what few years I have left. What do you think of this place? It's one of those new retirement communities down on the Gulf.

Claude glances at a glossy brochure. From outside, Ray peers



suspiciously through the dining room window as he hacks at a rose bush.

CLAUDE

Ocean views, palm trees, two heated swimming pools and a golf course – sounds a damn sight better than that infirmary across the way where I'm gonna end up.

Claude returns the brochure.

WILKINS

I apologize, Claude. That was rude of me.

CLAUDE

That's alright, boss. Takes a lot more than a colorful brochure to hurt my feelings.

WILKINS

You been on the farm for quite a spell, haven't you?

CLAUDE

Over forty years now. Me and Ray Gibson out there.

Wilkins glances over at the window. Ray ducks out of view.

WILKINS

Forty years. That's a long time for any crime, even murder.

CLAUDE

It's a hell of a lot longer when you're innocent.

WILKINS

Half the men in this prison swear they're innocent. Don't you think that's kinda funny?

CLAUDE

You have to forgive me if I don't

laugh.

Claude pushes back into the kitchen, leaving Wilkins to think this one over.

INT. SERVANTS' QUARTERS – NIGHT

Ray and Claude are getting ready for bed.

RAY

You and Wilkins sure are getting chummy. You two planning on going steady, or something?

CLAUDE

He's just a lonely old man. He likes to talk.

RAY

Hey, I'm a lonely old man. I like to talk, too. So why don't we start by talking about what kind of a plan you're working on?

CLAUDE

I'm not working on a plan.

RAY

You can't fool me, Claude. I know you got something brewing.

CLAUDE

Goodnight, Ray.

Claude punches his pillow and turns off the light.

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION – DAY

Ray hacks a rose bush down to the nub. From the garage comes the sound of an engine turning over. Wilkins' 1973 Lincoln Continental convertible lurches down the drive with Claude at the wheel. He screeches to a halt inches from Ray's legs and climbs from the car.

RAY

What the hell are you doing?

CLAUDE  
Don't touch that car.

Claude pulls out a hanky and buffs Ray's finger print off the hood.

CLAUDE  
Wilkins' driver's got the flu, so he asked me to fill in for him.

RAY  
You haven't driven in 40 years, you ain't even got a license. Man's taking his life in his hands, putting you behind the wheel! Where you taking him?

CLAUDE  
Greenville. We're picking up the new Superintendent at the bus station.

Ray scowls as Claude straightens his chauffeur uniform and heads up the path to the mansion.

EXT. GREENVILLE BUS STATION – DAY

Claude pulls up in front of the station, steps out of the car and holds the door for Wilkins, who checks his watch.

WILKINS  
You know I trust you, Claude.

CLAUDE  
Yes, sir.

WILKINS  
I'll be right back.

Wilkins heads into the station, leaving Claude alone with the Continental. All around him are the sights, sounds and smells of the free world. A woman rushes into the arms of a man as he climbs off a bus. Across the street is Grandma Dodi's Pork Rib Joint where Cookie never made it to the peach cobbler. A young brother with a boom box walks by. In the street, kids crowd around the back of an ice cream truck.

Then Claude catches his reflection in the car window and frowns. When did he get this old? Unnerved, he moves around to the back of the car and pops open the trunk.

RAY

(sitting up)

Damn, it was getting hot in there.

CLAUDE

What the hell are you doing in that trunk?!

RAY

You didn't think I was gonna let you escape alone, did you?

CLAUDE

I ain't escaping! We're picking up the new super just like I told you.

RAY

Then you're lucky I came along. Doesn't take a visionary to spot a golden opportunity like this. Now help me out of this trunk.

CLAUDE

You ain't getting out of that trunk.

RAY

Come on, man, I'm starting to cramp up here.

(Ray struggles out of the trunk)

We have the chance right here, right now, I say we go!

CLAUDE

Go where, Ray?

RAY

Back to New York for starters.

CLAUDE

And what will we do when we get there? I'm sixty-five years old, Ray. So

are you. What are we gonna do out here? Get married, have kids, settle down? That boat sailed without us, man.

RAY

This boat's gonna sail without you, too. I don't care if I last one day out here. At least it's one day of freedom. Now gimme those keys.

CLAUDE

Forget about that. You run if you want to, but you're not taking this car.

RAY

Claude, man, I'm serious. Give me those keys.

CLAUDE

I ain't spending a month in the hole so you can take a joy ride.

RAY

Don't make me take them away from you.

CLAUDE

Hey, there's Wilkins!

Ray looks, Claude clocks him. Ray slumps back into the trunk. Claude stuffs Ray's legs back into the trunk and slams the lid.

CLAUDE

Who's driving now, bitch?

He looks up just as Wilkins and the new superintendent exit the bus station. Warren Pike's hair has gone grey and he's 40 years older, but there's no mistaking the former sheriff of Natchez County. He still bears a nasty scar on his cheek from a wound inflicted long ago.

CLAUDE'S POV – Pike appears as a young man in his sheriff's uniform striding slowly toward him.

Claude blinks and looks again. Pike has returned to his old self as he and Wilkins step up.

PIKE  
(dropping his bags)  
There you go, boy.

Oblivious, Pike climbs into the back seat. Wilkins nods to Claude.

WILKINS  
Come on, Claude, time to go.

Claude snaps to it, grabbing the bags. He considers opening the trunk, but decides to carry them around to the front seat with him.

EXT. KITCHEN PORCH – DUSK

Backs to the CAMERA, Ray and Claude urinate, presumably off the porch.

RAY  
You sure it was him?

CLAUDE  
Some faces you just don't forget.  
Warren Pike's is one of 'em.

RAY  
I don't like it, I don't like it one bit. We shoulda taken that car when we had the opportunity. We'd be half way to New York by now.

CLAUDE  
We'd be in the hole by now. Hey, man, you're peeing on my shoe.

RAY  
I know. Simultaneously, they shake and zip. Claude bends down and picks up a bowl of gumbo, placing it on a tray next to an identical one.

INT. DINING ROOM – NIGHT

Wilkins pours a frosty drink and offers it to Pike.

WILKINS  
Lemonade?

PIKE  
I prefer bourbon.

WILKINS  
I'm sorry, I don't keep any liquor  
in the house.

PIKE  
Well, fortunately, I carry my own.

Pike pulls a flask from his jacket and tilts it high. Claude enters from the kitchen with the two steaming bowls of gumbo.

WILKINS  
Hunting's been pretty good on the  
farm the last few years. It's one of  
the perks of the job. If you're  
interested, tomorrow I could show  
you some of my favorite spots.

PIKE  
You don't have to twist my arm.  
(digging in)  
Say now, that gumbo has quite a kick.

WILKINS  
Thank you, Claude. That'll be all  
for tonight.

CLAUDE  
Goodnight, Mr. Wilkins. Mr. Pike.

WILKINS  
Goodnight, Claude.

Pike nods coldly. Claude steps back into the kitchen.

PIKE  
If you don't mind my saying, you

seem mighty familiar with your house boy.

WILKINS

I believe in treating the convicts with respect, if that's what you mean.

PIKE

(sarcastic)

Respect? Well, isn't that progressive.

WILKINS

If somebody deserves respect, Mr. Pike, they receive it from me, convict or no convict.

Pike curls his lip with disdain before taking a healthy spoonful of gumbo.

EXT. MARSH – DAY

Claude and Ray beat the bullrushes with switches. Amid a flutter of wings, three pheasants take to the air. Wilkins fires first, knocking one out the sky. Pike pulls off two rounds, playing clean up.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

Ray and Claude dump their game bags into the back of a pickup truck. Nearby, Pike drains his flask while Wilkins scrapes mud off his boots. The breeze picks up, clouds fill the sky.

WILKINS

Well, that's a pretty good haul. What do you say, Mr. Pike? Ready to call it a day?

Pike pulls a gold watch from his pocket and releases the face plate. A familiar mechanical tune floats on the gathering breeze. Ray turns around slowly. His eyes fall on the watch in Pike's hand. His daddy's watch. In Pike's hand.

PIKE

Yeah, it's getting late. I could sure use a bath.



RAY

That's a real nice watch you got there, sir. Fancy old thing even plays a little tune.

PIKE

Yeah, it's special. They don't make 'em like this anymore.

RAY

Sure don't. Mind if I ask where you got it?

PIKE

Why, my wife gave it to me on our anniversary some years back.

Claude looks at the watch, then at Ray. Uh oh.

RAY

Must have been some time ago. Maybe forty years?

PIKE

(eyes narrowing)  
Something like that, yes.

RAY

She give you that scar, too?

Pike thrusts the barrel of his gun up under Ray's chin.

PIKE

I oughta shoot you for that comment, boy.

RAY

Like you shot Winston Hancock?

Wilkins turns to see Pike holding Ray at gunpoint.

WILKINS

What's going on here?

PIKE

I'm afraid I'm gonna have to teach this uppity nigger a lesson in manners.

RAY

That's Mr. Uppity Nigger to you.

Ray grabs the barrel of the shotgun and slams it into Pike's face. Pike rolls over and freezes, staring down the barrel of his own gun now in Ray's hands. Confused, Wilkins points his gun at Ray.

CLAUDE

Cool it, Ray. You're gonna get us in a lot of trouble.

WILKINS

He's right, Gibson. Put down the gun and we'll work this out.

RAY

I'm gonna work this man's brains out the back of his head.

PIKE

Shoot him, Wilkins!

CLAUDE

Don't shoot, sir. I can deal with this.

(cautiously)

Ray, buddy, you don't want to shoot this white man. See, you do that, they'll kill you for sure. And it's not that I like you or anything, but I've kinda gotten used to having you around.

RAY

He's got my daddy's watch, Claude. I always knew whoever took that watch killed Winston Hancock. And that was you, Mr. Pike.

PIKE

He's crazy. Don't listen to him,

Wilkins.

WILKINS

Do you realize what your saying,  
Gibson?

RAY

That watch was the only thing my  
daddy ever gave me. It meant the  
world to me.

PIKE

Goddamn it, Wilkins, would you please  
just shoot the nigger!

RAY

He shoots me, I swear I'll take you  
with me! I just want to hear you say  
it.

WILKINS

Is there any truth to what he's  
saying, Pike?

PIKE

What difference does it make? Natchez  
was better off without Winston  
Hancock! Who cares if a couple of no-  
account bootleggers went to jail for  
his killing? At least the state of  
Mississippi got 40 years of cheap  
labor out of the deal!

CLAUDE

Forty years of cheap labor! Gimme  
that gun.

Claude grabs for the gun.

RAY

No, I'm gonna kill him –

CLAUDE

No, believe me, I'm gonna kill him!

Claude yanks the gun free and points it right in Pike's face.

Wilkins trains his gun on Claude. But the moment passes.  
Claude lowers the gun. Bewildered, Wilkins does the same.

CLAUDE  
I can't do it.

RAY  
That's because you're soft. Gimme  
the gun.

CLAUDE  
What'd you say?

RAY  
I said you're soft.

CLAUDE  
Don't call me soft, I hate it when  
you call me that.

Ray mouths the word – "soft." Claude clenches his jaw, points  
the gun and pulls the trigger. Click.

Pike smirks and pulls a small gun from his boot. But as he  
raises it – BLAM! Pike is hurled backward by a shotgun blast.  
Shocked, Ray and Claude look at Wilkins, his gun still smoking  
in his hands.

After a significant beat, Ray reaches down and gingerly  
retrieves his daddy's gold pocket watch.

RAY  
I believe this is mine.

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION – DAY

A gurney carrying Pike's body is lifted into the back of a  
van by two COUNTY CORONERS. Nearby, a distraught Wilkins  
tells his story to a couple of SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES.

WILKINS  
...I was drawing a bead on a bird  
when Mr. Pike just stepped into my  
line of fire.

DEPUTY #1

Where were the two convicts when the shot was fired?

WILKINS

They were busy loading up the truck. We got him back here as quick as possible, but... I just feel terrible about this...

INT. MANSION – DAY

Ray and Claude watch through the window as Wilkins talks to the deputies.

CLAUDE

Why don't he just tell 'em the truth?

RAY

He knows nobody wants to hear the truth.

One of the deputies pats Wilkins sympathetically on the back. Then he and his partner put away their notebooks and head for their vehicle. Wilkins heads up the steps and into the house.

WILKINS

Well, I think they bought it. One of the deputies belongs to my church.

Visibly shaken, Wilkins takes a seat, wiping the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief.

WILKINS

I realize there's no way... There's nothing I can say to make up for forty years... I'll have Charlotte prepare those pardon papers right away.

Wilkins winces and swallows a couple of pills from his box.

WILKINS

Claude, mind helping me to the bathroom?

CLAUDE  
(giving him a hand)  
Sure, boss.

WILKINS  
I'm not your boss. Not anymore.

EXT. PRISON CEMETERY (PRESENT) – DAY

Jake looks at Willie expectantly.

JAKE  
So Ray and Claude got their pardons,  
right?

LEON  
(smacking him)  
No, they didn't get their pardons,  
you dumb shit! If they'd got their  
pardons way back then, we wouldn't  
be burying them today, would we?

JAKE  
(chewing on it)  
Oh, right. Well, why didn't they get  
those pardons?

WILLIE  
Old man Wilkins' never came out of  
that bathroom. Died right there on  
the crapper.

LEON  
Just like Elvis.

WILLIE  
Of course nobody believed Ray and  
Claude.

JAKE  
That musta messed 'em up pretty bad.

LEON  
What happened to 'em after that,  
Willie?

WILLIE

After that? Well, let's see. After that they got old. We all got old.

EXT. INFIRMARY – DAY

Ray and Claude, now in their nineties, sit under a tree in the courtyard listening to a Yankees game on a transistor radio.

RAY

Nurse Humphries was checking my prostate this morning. I got an erection.

CLAUDE

An erection, huh? Haven't had one of those in a while.

RAY

Tell me about it. Scared me at first. Then, before I could figure out what to do with it, it was gone. Imagine my disappointment.

On the radio, the announcer voice rises in pitch as the Yankees score. Ray and Claude share a satisfied look.

CLAUDE

Sure would like to see the house that Ruth built one more time.

RAY

Well, Ruth shoulda built it a little better. Damn thing's falling to pieces. Gonna hurt somebody.

CLAUDE

What do you expect? It's almost as old as we are.

RAY

They oughta tear that shit down and ship them Yankees cross the river to Jersey.

CLAUDE

Remember what that place looked like on a sunny spring day? More beautiful than any church I was ever in.

TWO ORDERLIES push a DEAD BODY past on a squeaking gurney.

CLAUDE

Looks like old Jonesy finally got his walking papers.

Ray tips his flask in a simple salute.

RAY

Over to the morgue and up the hill to the cemetery. Never thought I'd admit it, Claude, but you were right.

CLAUDE

'Course I was right. About what?

RAY

You're the one who said that boneyard's the only way we're getting out of here. We're gonna join all the rest of 'em soon enough. Jangle Leg, Biscuit, Goldmouth, Poker Face, Cookie, Radio – yes sir, pick a plot and start digging...

Ray closes his eyes and settles in for a nap. Claude turns to watch Jonesy squeaking away. Something about what Ray just said has given him an idea.

INT. INFIRMARY – DAY

"Oprah" blares on the television. Old convicts linger about in various states of repose and decay. A young ORDERLY pops to the music on his Walkman as he pushes a cart through the ward.

Over at a table, Ray and Claude play poker with Willie, a SHAKY OLD JUNKIE and TWO YOUNG GANG BANGERS. The currency on the table isn't poker chips, it's pills of various sizes and colors.



GANG BANGER #1  
Two Percodan.

CLAUDE  
I'll raise you.

GANG BANGER #1  
What the fuck are those?

CLAUDE  
Keeps your cholesterol down.

GANG BANGER #1  
I look like I give a shit about my  
cholesterol?

GANG BANGER #2 takes a quick hit of cocaine from a bullet.  
He notices Ray staring at him.

GANG BANGER #2  
You want a bump, G?

RAY  
I wouldn't be putting that shit up  
my nose. That came in in somebody's  
ass. It's like you're sniffin' ass.  
Maybe that's your thing, but it ain't  
mine.

Ray pushes his bet to the center of the table. The shaky  
junkie folds. Willie tosses in some pills and turns to Gang  
Banger #2.

WILLIE  
Looks like it's up to you, stinky  
ass sniffer.

Glaring, Gang Banger #2 flips a big pill into the pot.

CLAUDE  
Thorazine? Well, that's a little  
rich for my blood.

He tosses down his cards. The shaky junkie attempts to light  
a cigarette. The match slips from his trembling fingers and  
falls into his lap.

CLAUDE

Damn fool gonna set this place on  
fire one of these days.

Gang Banger #1 folds. It's back to Ray.

RAY

I got three stool softeners left.

(to Gang Banger #2)

That oughta be right up your alley.

The remaining players match the pot. Gang Banger #2 reveals his cards. Willie frowns. Ray lays down his cards and victoriously sweeps his winnings into a paper cup. Across the room, Nurse Humphries enters with a tray of snacks. She, too, is showing the years.

NURSE HUMPHRIES

Who wants Jell-O?

The magic word. The poker players join a stampede of oldsters in a clatter of canes, walkers and artificial limbs. Ray and Claude are left alone at the table.

RAY

Hey, where you going? We got money  
on the table here!

Claude glances around to ensure that he's not overheard.

CLAUDE

You know, Ray, I've been chewing on  
what you said this afternoon. I think  
I got a plan.

Ray gives Claude a long look.

RAY

Are you trying to tell me after all  
this time you finally have a plan  
for busting out of here?

CLAUDE

Shh! Is that so hard to believe?

RAY

Don't tell me, I don't want to hear it. It's probably all fucked up, anyway.

CLAUDE

You don't want to hear it, you don't want to hear it. There's no shame in that.

RAY

It's too late for plans.

CLAUDE

Never thought I'd hear Ray Gibson say that. Hell with you then. You'd only slow me down anyway.

Ray turns away as Claude walks off. A DODDERING INMATE stands nearby slurping on Jell-O. His robe hangs open.

RAY

Hey, man, cover that shit up!

Disgusted, Ray discards his own Jell-O. He pulls out his daddy's pocket watch and checks the time. The little mechanical tune nags at him. He snaps the lid shut and considers the watch resting in the palm of his hand.

OMITTED

Sequence omitted from original script.

EXT. INFIRMARY – NIGHT

The building is dark. But then, through a first-floor window, we see the unmistakable orange glow of a fire.

INT. INFIRMARY – NIGHT

An ALARM BLARES as the place fills with smoke. Wearing a robe and slippers, Nurse Humphries runs among the prisoners, helping them out the door.

EXT. INFIRMARY – NIGHT

Coughing and disheveled, Ray emerges onto the lawn pushing Willie in the wheelchair. As other prisoners evacuate the building, Ray looks around for Claude, but he doesn't see him. Nurse Humphries takes a quick head count.

NURSE HUMPHRIES

Is everyone here?

RAY

Hey, where's Claude? I don't see Claude!

NURSE HUMPHRIES

Stay calm, Ray. We'll find him. Claude! Has anyone seen Claude?

RAY

He must still be in there.

Grimly, Ray starts toward the burning infirmary. Nurse Humphries holds him back.

NURSE HUMPHRIES

Wait for the firemen!

RAY

It'll be too late.

NURSE HUMPHRIES

You can't go in there, Ray! You'll never make it!

RAY

I'm going in for him. He'd do the same for me.

Ray shakes her off and runs up the steps, disappearing into the burning building.

INT. INFIRMARY – NIGHT

Ray dodges flames as he presses into the inferno.

EXT. INFIRMARY – NIGHT

Nurse Humphries, Willie and the rest of the inmates watch

grimly as flames engulf the building. Nobody could survive this blaze. From the highway comes the siren wail of approaching fire engines. But it's too late. Sparks erupt into the night sky as the roof collapses...

EXT. INFIRMARY – DAWN

Fire trucks pull away from the smoldering ruins. A local REPORTER interviews witnesses. INVESTIGATORS comb through the wreckage, making notes. COUNTY CORONERS pull a couple of gurneys from the back of their van.

EXT. INFIRMARY RUINS – DAY

Superintendent Bill Burke is led through the destruction by a FIRE INSPECTOR. They approach the coroners as they finish zipping up two body bags.

BURKE

How did it start?

FIRE INSPECTOR

Probably old wires. The place was a tinderbox just waiting to go.

BURKE

I guess we should have torn this old building down a long time ago.

FIRE INSPECTOR

Gibson made it this far before he was probably overcome by smoke. From the look of things, Banks never even made it out of bed.

Burke watches solemnly as the coroners wheel the bodies past him.

EXT. PRISON CEMETERY – DAY

Jake and Leon shake their heads and look at the two fresh graves.

LEON

Man, you really bummed me out. That's a terrible story.

(looking at Jake)  
Nigger, you crying?

JAKE  
Hell, no! I just got something in my eye.

WILLIE  
It's alright for a man to cry once in awhile. Just don't make a habit of it.

LEON  
Hey, Willie, what was Claude's plan, anyway?

WILLIE  
Nothing to it, really. Claude figured they could steal a couple of bodies from the morgue. They got a couple of crackers working there don't know their asses from their elbows. Then they was gonna set fire to the infirmary and make it look like those bodies was them that got stuck inside. Claude figured during the commotion, it wouldn't be too hard to slip onto one of the fire trucks and hang tight until it rolled right on out of here in the morning.

The young inmates share a look, then glance into the graves, then look back at Willie.

JAKE  
What makes you think it didn't work?

WILLIE  
I never said it didn't work.

Leon and Jake do the arithmetic. You can almost hear the gears grinding under the strain.

LEON  
You trying to tell us that's not Ray and Claude in those boxes?

Willie starts to chuckle and sets his electric wheel chair on auto-pilot, leaving the young inmates to guess at the truth.

JAKE

What do you think about that?

LEON

I think that old man lost his marbles about a hundred years ago. Come on, let's get this over with.

They pick up their shovels and go back to work burying the caskets.

INT. GREENVILLE FIRE STATION – DAY

The CAMERA MOVES PAST a FIREMAN hosing down the truck, past another group of soot-stained FIREMEN eating breakfast, and pauses in front of two lockers. A couple of FIREMEN emerge from the showers wrapped in towels and open their lockers. They share a look.

FIREMAN #1

(to the room)

Alright, which of you hambones took our clothes?

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM – DAY – WIDE SHOT

Scalpers sell tickets. Vendors hawk souvenirs. Fans stream up from the subway and through the gates. Somebody is singing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

EXT. STANDS – DAY

In the middle of a capacity crowd, a VENDOR fixes two hot dogs and passes them to a KID at the end of an aisle. The kid passes them to the MAN next to him, and so on down the line.

The CAMERA FOLLOWS the hot dogs from face to face, some old, some young, some black, some white – it's New York City, after all – and finally the hot dogs arrive in a pair of old, calloused black hands. Ray passes one of the dogs to

Claude.

CLAUDE  
I can't eat this.

RAY  
Why the hell not?

CLAUDE  
I saw that hot dog guy in the bathroom  
urinating. He didn't wash his hands.

Ray and Claude glance around confused as the wave rolls through their section of the bleachers. What the fuck? Claude inspects his hot dog.

RAY  
Just put some mustard on it and eat  
it.

CLAUDE  
You didn't get ketchup?

RAY  
Gimme that damn thing.

Ray snatches back the hot dog.

CLAUDE  
What am I gonna eat?

Ray is suddenly young again.

RAY  
Have my ice cream.

Claude takes the ice cream. He, too, is suddenly young again.

CLAUDE  
Thanks.

They look at each other and share a laugh.

RAY  
Hell of a day for a ballgame, huh,  
Claude?



CLAUDE  
Hell of a day, Ray. Yankees are on  
fire.

Claude pops the top on his ice cream. Suddenly, they are  
both old again.

CLAUDE  
No, this ain't gonna work either.  
It's half chocolate, half vanilla.

RAY  
So?

CLAUDE  
They're touching.

The CAMERA begins to pull back.

RAY  
If you don't eat that ice cream right  
now, I'm gonna strangle you until  
you are completely dead.

CLAUDE  
Yeah? You and what army?

RAY  
Next thing, you're gonna be  
complaining about the seats.

CLAUDE  
Well, if you must know, they could  
be closer.

RAY  
Damn, I shoulda let Spanky Johnson  
drown you in the river when I had  
the chance.

"Pipe downs" etc. from the people around them.

CLAUDE  
(glancing around)  
I know you're not talking to me...

RAY

I'm sorry, he's on medication...

The CAMERA PULLS BACK as the arguing continues, just like the old days. MUSIC UP.

THE END