

THE JOHNNY CRISP CASE

Sergeant Willie Gleason, an aging, cynical, veteran homicide detective, is being interviewed by an L.A. Times reporter on his celebrated, but controversial, career in homicide. Requiring that the reporter meet with him at the Code Four Bar, a cop watering hole, Gleason unravels a perplexing case involving a fifteen-year old who was murdered and buried under the parents bedroom. To arrive at the truth, which trumps justice in this case, he resorts to a method never attempted, much less approved, to flesh out the facts.

The cast consists of four speaking roles

THE JOHNNY CRISP CASE

by

Dick Rogers

CHARACTERS

Fergus O'Brien	Bartender of Code Four bar. Medically retired cop, with a "been there, done that" attitude. Late fifties.
Willie Gleason	Seasoned, cynical homicide detective/sergeant, outspoken, sure of himself and street savvy. Late sixties.
Bill Mathis	L.A. Times reporter, easy going, mid thirties
Sydney Crisp	Troubled brother of Johnny Crisp (deceased), mid thirties

SETTINGS

Act I, scene 1	Code Four Bar.
Act I, scene 2	Interview Room
Act I, scene 3	Code Four Bar
Act II, scene 1	Cocktail Lounge
Act II, scene 2	Code Four Bar

ACT I

Scene i

SETTING

The Code Four Bar, a hangout for off-duty or on-their-way-home cops, daytime, modern day.

AT RISE

SERGEANT GLEASON, a thirty-eight year veteran of the L.A. Sheriff's Dept., twenty-five of which were as a homicide detective, has agreed to meet with an L.A. Times reporter, BILL MATHIS, who intends to highlight Gleason's illustrious, but sometimes controversial, career. Gleason is sitting at the bar with a drink, conversing with Fergus, the bartender.

FERGUS

Wiping the bar down with a towel.

You? C'mon, why the fuck would anybody want to read about you?

GLEASON

(smiling)

I'm a celebrated dick, dick-head!

(sips his drink)

Celebrated!

FERGUS

Throws the towel under the bar.

Like I'm really impressed. C'mon, what's going on?

GLEASON

(wearily)

I don't know. Captain Wheatly said the Times wanted to do a story on me.

(sarcastic)

He told them, "...Sure thing. He'd love to do it."

(GLEASON starts laughing)

FERGUS

What's so funny?

GLEASON

Points his finger toward the door as though it's a gun.

Just fantasizing. How bout I shoot the fucker as he comes in. That would reach the front page. That would show how "celebrated" I am.

FERGUS

It would show them something. Why here?

(checks the time)

It's only 2:30.

GLEASON

If this is going down, it'll be on my turf.

FERGUS

Do you get a chance to see the questions?

GLEASON

How would I know?

FERGUS

I'd be leery of it.

GLEASON

(cautious)

Why?

FERGUS

Usually, they have an angle you don't know about.

GLEASON

Well, I'll psych the fucker out.

FERGUS

You do that. Be careful. I've seen a few go down in flames talking to the press.

GLEASON

Maybe I will shoot him.

FERGUS

(smiles)

When are you gonna retire?

GLEASON

Retire? To what? Shoving drinks around like you?

FERGUS

Cool your heels, asshole! My retirement was forced.

GLEASON

(joking)

So what? You took a bullet and are puffing on one cylinder. You can still walk.

FERGUS

Waves a fist in Gleason's face.

Anyone but you would be flat on the floor for saying that.

GLEASON

If I am put on the floor, I'd want it done by someone like you.

FERGUS

As he pours himself a cup of coffee.

Yeah. I love you too.

(suddenly, MATHIS enters and stands by the door)

GLEASON

There it is, I guess. Don't look like much.

(turns to face MATHIS)

You Mathis?

MATHIS

Yeah.

(GLEASON motions to a table, walks over with his drink and they both sit)

MATHIS cont'd

I've been here before...probably ten years ago.

GLEASON

You must have been with your father.

MATHIS

(with a slight edge)

My father? I was with a cop. A recent graduate from the LAPD academy.

GLEASON

I was probably sitting at this same table.

MATHIS

Mathis, Bill Mathis...

(they shake)

...Like the singer.

GLEASON

You're too young to know Johnny Mathis.

MATHIS

Not too young to know good music when I hear it.

GLEASON

You're right there. You related to him?

MATHIS

Wrong color.

GLEASON

(studies MATHIS)

Un hunh. Did you get this assignment because you went after it, or did some jefe tell you to come here and irritate me?

MATHIS

(slight edge)

Hey, if this is a drain on you, I can hightail it.

GLEASON

Okay by me. Don't forget to pay for your drink.

MATHIS

I didn't have a drink...yet.

(frustrated)

My editor sent me to do it. Not my idea.

Fergus walks over and stands between Gleason and Mathis. Mathis looks up at him, nods, and looks back at Gleason.

FERGUS

You gonna order a drink or do I charge you rent on the chair?

MATHIS

A beer, how about a beer.

FERGUS

Raised eyebrows and a feigned smile.

Does your beer have a name?

MATHIS

Looks quizzically at Gleason, who smiles.

I'll have a Guinness.

FERGUS

Looks at Gleason with a slight wag of his head.

Guinness.

MATHIS

As Fergus walks back to the bar.

What's with him?

GLEASON

A Guinness truck ran over his dog.

MATHIS

Bug-eyed as he looks back and forth between Gleason and Fergus.

How was I to know?

GLEASON

Oh, settle down, he never had a dog. He's just had too much mankind in his life.

MATHIS

Looks around.

Maybe that's why the place is so empty.

GLEASON

The place is “empty” (checks his watch) because it’s 2:47 in the afternoon.
 (rubs his chin as he studies MATHIS)
 What does your editor think is so newsworthy about me?

MATHIS

You’ve got a history, some big cases, and a few spasms of controversy.

GLEASON

(cagey smile)

Controversy?

MATHIS

How about that op-ed piece you wrote in the Times , describing the Christopher Commission as the Knapp Commission’s illegitimate offspring?

GLEASON

I was being kind.

MATHIS

Hard to figure why you’d take an interest in it. Their focus was on LAPD, not the Sheriff.

GLEASON

The only thing that distinguishes the two departments is the color of the uniforms.

MATHIS

That’s a good start, when did you leave the uniforms?

GLEASON

I don’t remember. That was a long time ago.

Fergus plops the Guinness down.

FERGUS

(feigned politeness)

Would you like a frosted glass?

Gleason chuckles as Mathis looks up at Fergus.

MATHIS

No. No glass.

As he swills a mouthful of beer. Finally,
 When did you get assigned to Homicide?

GLEASON

I guess when my belly got too big for uniforms.

MATHIS throws his pad on the table and runs his hands through his hair as Fergus chuckles.

Look, if you want to do a little hack job on me, just stick to what I did when my belly got too big. Anything before that would not matter.

MATHIS

(scans his notepad, an air of
irritation)

Fine. The Perrault Case. You arrested him for murdering the gay club owner, and he was released two days later.

GLEASON

I had a disagreement with the D. A.

MATHIS

From what I read, you tried to file it and the D.A. rejected it.

GLEASON

It should have gone before a jury.

MATHIS

The D.A. didn't agree.

GLEASON

Obviously, he didn't.

MATHIS

So you went out and busted him anyway?

GLEASON

Ballsy, huh?

MATHIS

I don't know. It was the D.A.s call.

GLEASON

Sure, it was. It was my call to bust his dirty ass. I made a point of doing it in front of his buddies.

MATHIS

What's the point of doing that?

GLEASON
 (draws close and in a measured
 tone)

It made me feel good.

MATHIS
 Did the Sheriff go along with your slant on this?

GLEASON
 I don't know. We're pretty much left alone. It has to be that way.

MATHIS
 Being left alone?

GLEASON
 Yeah. The job requires it.

MATHIS
 Free reign?

GLEASON
 Free reign.

MATHIS
 Reporters have free reign too.

GLEASON
 (patronizing)
 Isn't that's nice.

Mathis appears a bit vexed but says nothing. He looks at Fergus who smiles and shrugs.

MATHIS
 (checks notes)
 Back in 06, you called a Medical Examiner, Dr. YoYo.

GLEASON
 Dr. Brown. It was a joke, and he enjoyed it. His boss got off on it though..

MATHIS
 What was it about?

GLEASON

Some gal was found dead in a pet store, just lying on the floor in a pool of blood, nothing missing. Later, during the post, Dr. Brown...

MATHIS

(interrupts)

Wait...Post? What?

GLEASON

Post mortem...autopsy!

MATHIS

Oh, sorry.

GLEASON

So, he shaved the head and found two deep lacerations on the back of her skull, about two inches apart. "Obvious homicide," he said. I then pointed out the fact that a short ladder used to get items off an upper shelf behind the counter was tipped over, and I showed him a photo of these heavy metal stanchions used to hold up aquariums. The points on the vertical frame measured the same as the marks on her head. Then he said, "Oh, well, probably accidental." Then, I pointed out the fact that the aquarium stand was ten feet away from where the small ladder had stood on the other side of the counter.

MATHIS

Oh, oh, we're back to homicide again?

GLEASON

Do old men drool on their pillows? . "Well now," Brown said, "We're back to homicide, aaren't we? But then I pointed out that as she was falling backward, she apparently stepped on the counter, which propelled her onto the stanchion There was a footprint on the counter. I showed him a photo.

MATHIS

You're fucking kidding! Accidental again?

(GLEASON Nods)

Why didn't you just come out with all this at once?

GLEASON

And miss all that fun? Eventually, when he opened up the skull there was evidence of coup and contrecoup injury.

MATHIS

Whatever that means.

GLEASON

Simple, if I hit you with a ball bat as you sit right now, there would be coup injury on the brain at the point of impact inside the skull. If you were on a ladder and fell, like the little lady, your body would be in motion and when you strike something, it causes a serious injury at the point of impact, and there will be a corresponding lesser injury on the opposite side of the brain.

(MATHIS shakes in head in bewilderment)

MATHIS

Dr. YoYo. He enjoyed that?

GLEASON

He laughed, if that counts as enjoyment.

MATHIS

If you don't mind my saying this, you seem overly opinionated for someone who...

(hesitates)

what's the word?

GLEASON

Who's just a working stiff?

MATHIS

Yeah, something like that. The piece on the Christopher Commission was spot on, but coming from a detective-sergeant?

GLEASON

Even working stiff's know which way the wind is blowing.

MATHIS

I would think the Sheriff would be the one shooting off something like that.

GLEASON

He congratulated me on it, if that means anything.

MATHIS

He didn't have a beef over you writing it?

GLEASON

No.

MATHIS

(checks notes)

You've been a detective-sergeant for nineteen years. No interest in promotions?

GLEASON

I didn't want to leave homicide.

MATHIS

Why?

GLEASON

You're playing with a Pandora's box when you prod me on that. Do you really want to go there?

MATHIS

That's what reporters are paid for.

GLEASON

Quite a few years ago, a commander came running into the Bureau, hand out, smiling.
"Congrats, Willie, You're on the lieutenants list."

MATHIS

Can't you be promoted and stay in the unit?

GLEASON

No, you can't. You get reassigned, and as a lieutenant, it would be as a watch commander at the jail, a station or some other unit.

MATHIS

That's no good?

GLEASON

No, it's fucked. You shuffle papers,
(grabs his belly)
and put on a belly.

MATHIS

But you could be re-assigned back into homicide, right?

GLEASON

Wrong, oh you could come back, but not to investigate. The last working rank in the L.A. Sheriff's Department is sergeant. Lieutenants don't work cases.

MATHIS

I had no clue. So you had no interest in moving up the ranks?

GLEASON

I had no interest in joining the ranks of the “Golden Boys.”

(Mathis frowns)

You don’t have a clue what that means, do you?

(MATHIS shakes his head)

GLEASON (cont’d)

I hate even talking about it.

MATHIS

So you didn’t become a Golden Boy?

GLEASON

Are you listening to what I’m saying?

MATHIS

Jesus! Why are you so touchy?

GLEASON

It’s the way you prod. I told you I wouldn’t accept the lieutenant’s promotion. Move on!

MATHIS

I’m just not getting the connection. What is a Golden Boy?

Gleason in frustration sits back with a forced smile on his face. Mathis looks at Fergus, who is slowly shaking his head.

GLEASON

They’re a joke.

MATHIS

Meanng?

GLEASON

They shouldn’t be cops. They’re fucked!

MATHIS

This is a pretty weak rationale for refusing promotion.

GLEASON

(animated)

Why would I leave a job that made my day worth getting up for?

MATHIS

Is working homicide that great?

GLEASON

It is. Most homicide dicks stay in the unit and retire out of of it.

MATHIS

Hmm. Are you a religious man?

Fergus breaks out in a laugh as he turns his back while polishing glasses.

GLEASON

Why would you ask me something like that?

MATHIS

(sure of himself)

It's been my experience that people with the muck of the world as their focus are spiritual in nature.

GLEASON

The idea, I suppose, is that we need a religion to stabilize us in dealing with this muck?

MATHIS

That's not a good reason?

GLEASON

Now, why would I seek stability in something that causes so much violence?

MATHIS

Would things be better without religion?

GLEASON

Things are now so fucked up, there is no way to tell.

MATHIS

(persistent)

The question, are you spiritual?

GLEASON

(slight edge)

Yes! Move on, sir.

MATHIS

(checks notes again)

August 10, 2006, L.A. News-Press front page, "Teenager Buried Under Master Bedroom for 23 Years."

Gleason jerks back, gets up and walks to the bar, looks at Fergus, but says nothing, then returns to the table and sits.

Out of all the cases I've handled, why would you come up with that?

MATHIS

(smiles)

Struck a nerve?

GLEASON

No you didn't strike a nerve!

(calms down)

It's just another case.

MATHIS

Why did you react the way you did?

GLEASON

Is this a God damned inquisition or are you here to interview me?

MATHIS

Why is that case a problem for you?

GLEASON

Who said it's a problem?

Swills the remainder of his drink and motions to Fergus, who nods and mixes a drink.

What do you know about it?

MATHIS

Just what I read in the papers.

GLEASON

Don't play fuck-around with me. What do you know?

MATHIS

Teenager buried under the parents bedroom for twenty-three years.

GLEASON

The master bedroom.

MATHIS

Right beneath the parents.

GLEASON

Hold on Mr. newspaper man. Where did you pick that up?

MATHIS

Like I said, in the...

GLEASON

Bullshit!

MATHIS

What's going on?

GLEASON

That info about him being right under the parents bed was not shared.

MATHIS

Maybe it wasn't intended to be shared, but things like that get moved around.

GLEASON

Who killed him?

MATHIS

I should be asking that.

GLEASON

I'm asking it.

MATHIS

The last word I got was that it...

GLEASON

Gimmee your notebook!

MATHIS

What?

GLEASON

Grabs the notebook as Fergus brings his drink. Fergus looks at Gleason with a nod of disapproval.

I've been had a few times, but not easily.

(he flips through the pages)

I don't like being fucked with.

MATHIS

I'm not fucking with you.

GLEASON

(flips the notebook back)

So you say. Why did you grab onto that case?

MATHIS

Look, I'm the one who should be asking questions. It's an interesting case, that's it. Why does this case bother you?

GLEASON

All my cases bother me.

MATHIS

Was it solved?

GLEASON

Any dip shit who can find his way out of a toilet knows it was closed as "solved." Why are you asking that?

MATHIS

(sure of himself)

Some say there are things that are...well, unresolved.

GLEASON

Unresolved?

Moves closer to Mathis, and is a touch menacing.

Tell me what is "unresolved?"

MATHIS

Sydney.

GLEASON

What about Sydney?

MATHIS

He won't talk with me.

GLEASON

That's no headline. I'm surprised I'm talking to you. You've dug up some dirt, haven't you?

MATHIS

I research my stories.

GLEASON

And what does your research tell you?

MATHIS

That your conclusion might have been premature.

GLEASON

Based on what?

Mathis is hesitant and fidgets with his notebook.

On what? God damn it!

MATHIS

You're not the only cop working cases!

GLEASON

(calmly)

But I'm the only cop who knows my cases.

(sips his drink)

Backward and forward.

MATHIS

And your involvement in your cases? You have no problems?

GLEASON

You assume a lot, don't you? Is that what makes for a good reporter?

MATHIS

Finding out what your problem is makes for a good reporter.

GLEASON

I don't have a ...there wasn't a problem with...

(flustered)

Well shit! You want to hear about Johnny Crisp, you'll get Johnny Crisp in spades!

MATHIS

Tell me more than what was in that scandal sheet rendition.

GLEASON

I forgot about that. Front page no less. Well shit! That should give you an idea of what I was dealing with. A scandal rag features my case. It isn't an investigation, it's a sit-com.

MATHIS

Why are you so worked up over this case?

GLEASON

You think I'm worked up?

MATHIS

I do.

GLEASON

(turns away)

It was just another homicide.

Gleason looks over and sees Fergus quietly chuckling.

MATHIS

Then let's talk about it.

GLEASON

(cagey)

I had a serial case with thirty victims, how bout that?

Fergus raises his arms, nodding.

MATHIS

(laughs)

Let's stick with Johnny Crisp.

GLEASON

Studies Mathis, then takes a deep breath.

Johnny Crisp, a local, juvenile gangster.

MATHIS

(checks notes)

He was fifteen! A gangster?

GLEASON

What would you call a twerp who beat up kids, and extorted money, had them steal from their parents? He was a little mobster.

MATHIS

And he ended up under the mom's bedroom?

GLEASON

Step-mom. Yup, little Johnny-Go-Badly ends up within three or four feet of the parents, nothing but a neat little skeleton by the time we brought him back to daylight twenty-three years later. Think about it, he was lying directly below their bed, almost as though he was snuggled between them, but with sand for a blanket.

MATHIS

Tell me about that.

GLEASON

(sits back, his hands behind his neck)

July 9, 1983, a Saturday evening. Johnny, his younger brother, Sydney, and a step-sister, Janet, were watching cartoons on TV

Fergus leans on the bar, interested.

MATHIS

(scribbling)

How old was Janet?

GLEASON

(severe look)

She was sixteen! You aren't gonna be interrupting me with shit like that every ten seconds?

MATHIS

Sorry.

GLEASON

She was sixteen, and a real hard case. There was a knock on the door, according to Sydney, who we managed to locate after 23 years. Johnny went out and was never seen again...well, until we excavated him.

(GLEASON looks at MATHIS expecting)

a question. None comes)

Twenty-three years later, cut to the first week in August, 06. The house is empty and up for sale. A Termite Inspector checks under the house for whatever they look for and sees toe bones sticking up from the sand.

(MATHIS appears confused)

There was a crawl space under the house and screened covers here and there. So, naturally, the termite guy drops a dime and I get Johnny's case.

MATHIS

Where were mom and dad when there was a knock on the door?

GLEASON

Soaking up suds. They were bar hopping the night Johnny disappeared.

MATHIS

You said Janet was Johnny's stepsister?

GLEASON

Johnny and Sydney were the dad's kids, Janet and an older kid, Howard, were the mom's. The older kid was pretty much on his own, never around.

MATHIS

Your gangster rep on Johnny, how serious was it?

GLEASON

He had a regular route he followed in getting kids in the hood to rifle their mom's purses, and their dad's wallets when they were sleeping. He'd bust their balls if they refused. He was a little pervert too. When we interviewed Sydney before the News-Press story broke, he described a typical evening for Johnny. When his dad was getting it on with his step mom, he'd peek through the keyhole in the door.

MATHIS

I guess he wasn't missed, then.

(checks notes)

This case was never solved in the classic sense, was it?

GLEASON

Mountains don't wash to the sea overnight. It depends on what you mean by solved. We got a lot a flack about the case. "How come they didn't smell the decaying body?" They lived in what was then a rural community. They had pigeons, chickens, cats, even a goat. The body was covered with sand and all the body fluids leached into the sand.

MATHIS

The dad and step mom slept right over the body?

GLEASON

They did, for twenty-three years.

MATHIS

So, you get to the scene and you have to crawl under the house?

GLEASON

(sour look as he studies him)

Crawl under the house?

(laughs)

No, no, we called a County Carpenter who came out and he cut a six-foot by eight-foot hole in the master bedroom. Then we called a Forensic Anthropologist and she took four hours to

(uses his fingers to emphasize)

unearth the skeleton.

MATHIS

She had to crawl under the house?

GLEASON

Weren't you listening? We cut a big hole in the bedroom floor. She sat between the joists and with her little brush brought Johnny back into this world.

MATHIS

That doesn't make a lot of sense. Johnny leaves when someone comes to the door, and he ends up under the master bedroom?

GLEASON

There's hope for you yet. I might add that Johnny was dragged under the house with a 3-foot length of rope that was tied around his neck. What does that tell you?

MATHIS

The kids, Sydney and Janet were lying?

GLEASON

Well, something was afoot. Who would you focus on from the start?

MATHIS

Well, it's obvious he was strangled with the rope, right?

GLEASON

Wrong. Strangled he was, but not with the rope.

MATHIS

I guess I'd focus on Sydney.

GLEASON

He was second on my list. Janet was number one.

MATHIS

What did she tell you?

GLEASON

Dead people don't talk.

MATHIS

She died?

GLEASON

She was murdered.

MATHIS

Jesus! No wonder the News-Press went with this. What happened to her?

GLEASON

Everything bad.

(saddens, hesitates)

At age seventeen, she was picked up with two guys in a stolen car. She got probation. I located her PO and she said the girl tested over 140 in IQ, had a lot of promise. She could tell nothing was going her way.

MATHIS

Isn't 140 at Mensa level?

GLEASON

I suppose, but she didn't get to know Mensa from Medusa. She spiraled down after that. She hooked up with a Vegas card dealer, became a hooker and was eventually murdered by her pimp. He's still in the joint.

MATHIS

So, you didn't get to talk with her?

GLEASON

(laughs)

As I said, sir, dead people don't talk. But her actions spoke volumes.

MATHIS

(embarrassed)

Yeah, I knew...I was just recapping. What about her actions?

GLEASON

Up until the disappearance of Johnny, she was an A student, was thought a decent gal. Even showed an interest in going to college.

MATHIS

What does that tell you...or me?

GLEASON

Something terrible happened that night and she knew what it was.

MATHIS

You got that from her past?

GLEASON

I got that from the cumulative pasts of everyone I've made contact with, doing what I do.

MATHIS

Did you talk with the pimp?

GLEASON

Now, you're talking! We contacted him at Nevada State Prison in Carson City, hoping Janet had told him something.

MATHIS

And?

GLEASON

Zip. Not a word.

MATHIS

Now what did you do?

GLEASON

I probably had a drink or two thinking about it. That's one of the three essential Ss of homicide work, you know.

Fergus takes a towel he had on one shoulder, swings it around a few times and puts it on the other shoulder. Gleason looks at him with upraised brows.

MATHIS

Essential Ss?

GLEASON

In a figurative sense,

Fergus puts a finger in the air and as Gleason recites, he mimes the words and raises a finger for each one.

The Ss stand for scotch, shoe leather and snitches.

Fergus shakes his head, laughs, and pours himself some more coffee.

Any good Dick will slow down and think about his case, and a drink helps to slow him down.

MATHIS

Scotch? More like putting one to sleep.

GLEASON

You're not very imaginative, are you? I said in a "figurative sense." The drink could be coffee, lemonade, or in your case, Chai.

MATHIS

(stunned)

How the hell did you know I drink Chai?

Fergus laughs out loud without turning around. Gleason and Mathis look at him. Fergus slows it to a chuckle without turning around.

GLEASON

I guessed. I saw your shoes. I figured Chai.

MATHIS

And the other two Ss?

GLEASON

Shoe leather and snitches. You don't solve cases sitting on your ass drinking Chai all day. Get out and pound the pavement! Work the case! Snitches speak for themselves.

MATHIS

I heard jailhouse snitches can't be trusted.

Fergus nods in agreement and sits down at a table, watching them.

GLEASON

You heard right, never use them. I'm talking about confidential snitches or informants, developed over years in the field. They are protected at all costs.

MATHIS

(again, studies notes)

So, Janet is no help, are you now focused on Sydney?

GLEASON

Actually, I located the dad and step mom in Idaho. I wanted to get a heads up on their kids from their perspective. In a nutshell, they were in a perpetual stupor during the time Johnny went missing.

(disgusted, turns away)

Hmm.

MATHIS

What's the matter?

GLEASON

(troubled)

I think bad thoughts when I'm around people like that.

MATHIS

The parents?

GLEASON

Parents? They weren't parents! Sure, they propagated offspring, any dumb animal can do that. What they did to those kids can't be found in any code book or journal.

(slight pause)

Did I say dumb animal? That's misplaced, the animal takes care of its offspring. The dumb organisms were the two I left in Boise. They wounded their kids with hatred.

MATHIS

I'm picking up on your spirituality.

GLEASON

What?

Fergus walks up .

FERGUS

Does your spirituality want another drink?

GLEASON

No,
Waves him off with his hand.
Don't be a pain in the ass.

As fergus walks off and starts polishing glasses again.

MATHIS

You don't go to church, do you?

GLEASON

Man, you are one strange duck!

MATHIS

Do you?

GLEASON

(angry)
Do I what?

MATHIS

Do you go to church?

Fergus turns an ear to listen and drops a glass. It shatters.

GLEASON

(leans close to MATHIS)
No, I don't. Does that tell you anything?

MATHIS

That Dylan seems to be your preacher of choice.

GLEASON

(weighs it, then chuckles)
Which Dylan?

MATHIS

Bob Dylan, of course.

GLEASON

Right now, it would be the Thomas variety. But that's good. If Bob Dylan was a preacher and had a church, I'd go.

MATHIS

When do we get to Sydney?

GLEASON

We get to him now.

(GLEASON draws his chair closer
to MATHIS)

What do you know about polygraphs?

MATHIS

Only that they're inadmissible in court.

GLEASON

Let me put it another way. If you lived a lie for twenty-three years and were put on the polygraph about events that occurred twenty-three years earlier, what would be the truth?

MATHIS

I'm not following you.

GLEASON

If you imagine that black is gray for that long, will black be gray in your mind?

MATHIS

I suppose so, like you conditioned yourself.

GLEASON

Not so much conditioned yourself as to reject a reality that doesn't appeal to you.

MATHIS

Is that what happened with Sydney?

GLEASON

Sydney was a strong young man in his mid-thirties when I interviewed him, but he shook like a shimmy dancer when I mentioned his father. Between the father's binges, when the kids couldn't avoid him, he bloodied them, and sometimes broke bones. Sydney was petrified of him. When I told him his dad now weighed about 100 pounds and could hardly breathe, it didn't faze him. He had to grab a handful of paper towels to mop up the sweat on his neck and face.

MATHIS

After all those years? That's strong stuff.

GLEASON

Hate is strong stuff. Well, I caused him to sweat again. When we talked about the knock on the door, the sweat glands opened, and his personal summer came in waves, actually dripping from his nose.

MATHIS

You were on to something.

GLEASON

I was on the scent, but I had to be careful.

MATHIS

Why?

GLEASON

I felt that he wanted to open up but it must be on his terms...when he was ready.

MATHIS

When would you know that?

GLEASON

His demeanor would tell me.

MATHIS

Were you close?

GLEASON

I was at a crossroad.

Gleason leans forward, rubbing his forehead and staring at the floor.

A nagging, troublesome, hard to navigate crossroad.

END OF SCENE

(sits forward, hands rubbing his
forehead, staring at the floor)

a nagging, troublesome, hard to navigate crossroad.

END OF SCENE

ACT I

Scene ii

SETTING Interview room, sparsely set.

AT RISE SGT. GLEASON stands opposite SYDNEY CRISP who is seated and appears at ease and friendly. GLEASON sets a cup of water down before SYDNEY and then sits down.

GLEASON

Sydney, I'm in a fog. What happened that Saturday night just doesn't add up.. You don't mind talking with me again, do you?

SYDNEY

No, I don't, but I've told you everything I remember.

GLEASON

Because of what I do, I'm a man of facts, and the facts have to fit. Think about this. You said that someone came to the door and Johnny left. The next time anyone sees him is when a termite guy spots his toe bones twenty-three years later...

(GLEASON chuckles)

...right under your folk's bedroom.

(SYDNEY wipes his brow and seems troubled)

SYDNEY

Yeah, like that.

GLEASON

Look at this from my perspective. I find it strange that neither you, nor Janet. was curious about who came to the door.

(SYDNEY wipes brow again)

SYDNEY

I don't know.

GLEASON

Look at you! You're dripping wet!

SYDNEY

I wish Janet were still alive.

(SYDNEY is unconsciously rubbing his forearm)

GLEASON

Why do you say that?

SYDNEY

Maybe she could tell you what you want to know.

GLEASON

Why are you rubbing your arm?

SYDNEY

Huh? I don't...I don't know.

GLEASON

What are those marks on your arm?

SYDNEY

I...ah...I was bitten...by Alfred.

GLEASON

Alfred? Who is Alfred?

SYDNEY

He was our dog, my dad's dog. He ran away.

(GLEASON takes hold of SYDNEY'S
arm and examines it, looks in his eyes and
smiles)

GLEASON

Interesting. Did you like Johnny?

SYDNEY

Not much, he was mean.

GLEASON

How was he mean?

SYDNEY

He'd make me do things I didn't want to do.

GLEASON

Give me an example.

(long wait)

Sydney? An example?

SYDNEY

He'd make me watch dad and my step-mom.

GLEASON

Watch them? What were they doing?

SYDNEY

Screwing. He'd watch them a lot.

GLEASON

They never caught him?

SYDNEY

(shakes his head)

He'd look through the keyhole. Sometimes the door was cracked.

GLEASON

Did he ever try anything with Janet?

SYDNEY

(reacts too quickly)

No, she was too strong.

GLEASON

So, he tried to do something?

SYDNEY

I didn't say that!

GLEASON

You said she was too strong. I take that to mean Johnny either tried or knew better than to try something.

SYDNEY

She didn't take anything from Johnny. She didn't really like him. She was very smart.

GLEASON

So I hear...and strong. Your brother-in-law, what's his name?

SYDNEY

Howard.

GLEASON

Was he ever part of your group?

SYDNEY

No. He was nineteen. He thought we were jerks. He was gone most of the time.

GLEASON

Tell me about your dad and step-mom.

SYDNEY

(slowly shakes his head)

The only time we knew they were home is when they fell all over themselves coming in from the bars, or when they were beating on us.

GLEASON

Who fed you?

SYDNEY

We fed ourselves. Dinty Moore's can of stew sometimes...donuts...popcorn.

GLEASON

Johnny was not well liked in the neighborhood, was he?

SYDNEY

He caused a lot of trouble.

GLEASON

Were you afraid of him?

SYDNEY

Yeah. He'd get real mean if I didn't do what he wanted.

GLEASON

Sydney, you are thirty-five now. What happened that night occurred when you were 12 years old. If you know something you are afraid to tell me, you will not be in trouble, unless, and it is a big unless, you personally killed Johnny.

SYDNEY

(again wipes his brow)

I didn't! I didn't kill Johnny!

(long pause as GLEASON
studies SYDNEY, then)

GLEASON

I want you to take a polygraph. Would you agree to that?

SYDNEY

Only if I have to.

GLEASON

You don't have to. I think we're getting close to the truth. If you had no direct participation in what happened to Johnny, I'd think you'd welcome getting it off your chest. Are you protecting someone?

SYDNEY

What did you mean by direct participation?

GLEASON

Jesus, Sydney! You've as much as said, YES, I KNOW WHAT HAPPENED! Get it out, God damn it!

(SYDNEY wipes his forehead)

There you go again, sauna time. I'll bring you a towel next time. I'm beginning to feel you murdered your brother.

SYDNEY

I didn't! No, I didn't!

GLEASON

Then take the polygraph. If it comes back negative, I won't bother you again.

SYDNEY

Are they ever wrong?

GLEASON

They aren't perfect, that's why they aren't admissible.

SYDNEY

Why do they do it then?

GLEASON

They are good enough to tell us when someone is not telling the truth, that's about it.

SYDNEY

Okay, I'll do it. Can you give me an idea of what the questions are like?

GLEASON

(laughs)

They'll get you comfy, asking things like "Do you live in Boston, are you employed?" Then they'll throw in the zinger. "Do you own a claw hammer?"

SYDNEY

A claw hammer, why?

GLEASON

Because in that particular case, a claw hammer was used to kill the victim. Only the suspect and the police would know that.

SYDNEY

Oh. It doesn't sound very scientific.

GLEASON

For good reason, it isn't. It's only a tool. We sometimes use them to get us going in the right direction. I'll set up your exam. You okay with that?

SYDNEY

Un huh.

GLEASON

The dog, you said it was your dad's??

(this surprises SYDNEY)

SYDNEY

Uh...yeah, he was...ah my Dad's dog.

GLEASON

And he ran away?

SYDNEY

Yes.

GLEASON

When?

SYDNEY

Right after he bit me.

GLEASON

When did he bite you?

(SYDNEY becomes unsettled)

SYDNEY

Why are you asking me this?

GLEASON

(smiles)

It's what I do Sydney. I ask questions.

SYDNEY

He ran away right after Johnny...after Johnny...ah, left.

GLEASON

You know what fangs are, right Sydney?

SYDNEY

Of course I know what fangs are.

GLEASON

Can you point to the fang marks on your arm?

(SYDNEY covers the marks, then
looks at them)

SYDNEY

Maybe they went away.

GLEASON

Like Johnny went away.

SYDNEY

I don't know what you mean.

GLEASON

At some point, you'll realize that I am not the person to fear. Your father never had a dog.

(GLEASON gets up and looks down
at SYDNEY)

I'll call you when I've set up the exam.

(GLEASON exits quickly. SYDNEY
looks at his arm then holds his hands
up to his face)

END OF SCENE

ACT I

Scene iii

SETTING

The Code Four Bar

AT RISE

SGT. GLEASON is seated, rubbing his chin as he stares at the ceiling. MATHIS, also seated, is writing something in his notebook. Fergus appears to be napping behind the bar.

GLEASON

At that point I convinced him to take a polygraph.

MATHIS

I'm surprised he went for that.

GLEASON

He was aware of my problem with his story and the fact that Johnny ends up under their house. It didn't make sense to me and it was obviously troubling to him.

MATHIS

He said that?

GLEASON

No, his demeanor said that. Sydney was being crushed by some heavy psychological weight. He came across as a victim.

MATHIS

I don't follow you.

GLEASON

It's a gut feeling, or, if you like, intuitive stirrings. Sydney was having trouble spilling the beans because he's had to deal with it for twenty-three years. The mind works wonders. It lets you compensate for your condition or situation.

(thinks about it)

That's profound, isn't it? I should have been a shrink.

MATHIS

I'm not getting it. I'm missing something.

GLEASON

Look, he was aware of the fact I knew the dog bite story was not flying. I could see a semi-circle curvature on Sydney's arm. It was obviously a human bite.

MATHIS

So why would he stick with his story?

GLEASON

(shouts it out)

Because it is the story he's lived with for twenty-three fucking years!

(MATHIS runs his fingers through his hair as he factors it all)

MATHIS

So, how'd it come out?

GLEASON

How did what come out?

MATHIS

The polygraph.

GLEASON

Inconclusive, not entirely surprising given what I just said.

MATHIS

What did you do?

GLEASON

My wheel was still in spin. I changed polygraphers, a second opinion.

MATHIS

And?

GLEASON

Inconclusive. Again no big surprise. You can't unravel twenty-three years of re-arranging your personal history with a machine.

MATHIS

I guess that was the end of the road for you.

GLEASON

There is no "end of the road" in our work.

MATHIS

What *could* you do now?

GLEASON

Put him under. A psychiatrist agreed to hypnotize him.

MATHIS

Really? That surprises me.

GLEASON

You haven't been out in the world much, have you? At this point, Sydney would go for anything. Actually, we were bonding

MATHIS

How so?

GLEASON

Nothing warm and cuddly, he just sensed I meant him no harm.

MATHIS

I don't know why, but I'm thinking the shrink didn't help you. Did he?

GLEASON

You'd be right. He put him under and took him back to that Saturday night. Things went just ducky until he got to the knock on the door.

(GLEASON closes his eyes and lowers
his head)

He started shaking and his face was a glistening mess. I thought his head would fall off. The shrink looked at me and...

MATHIS

(interrupts)

You were there?

GLEASON

I was seated in a dark corner. Your interruptions are starting to remind me of my nieces.

MATHIS

Sorry.

GLEASON

(moves fingers across his neck to
suggest a cutting motion)

He made a motion with his fingers that he had to stop it. He brought Sydney out.

MATHIS

Did Sydney have anything to say?

GLEASON

Only that he thought he was dreaming. I did point out to him that his shirt was soaked.

MATHIS

Why?

GLEASON

I wanted him to connect with the fact that I noticed it and the shrink noticed it. I wanted him to think about it.

MATHIS

Did it work?

GLEASON

The measure of things that work in any field equates with getting answers.

MATHIS

So, you got answers?

(GLEASON studies him for a few moments)

GLEASON

No, I didn't.

(MATHIS drops his pen on the table and sits back, frustrated)

MATHIS

A while ago, I asked you if this case was solved. You said it depends on what being solved is. Okay, let's cut to the chase, was it eventually solved?

GLEASON

Slow down, God damn it! I don't "cut to chases." This case has connections for me that will never find their way to paper. A late headline, Mr. Reporter, we're on the verge of my slamming the door on this. You either take it as I lay it out or split.

MATHIS

I meant nothing by that statement. I can see the case means something to you...something that hits home.

(smiles sheepishly)

So, in your eyes....solved?

GLEASON

You'd never make in homicide work. My report says "solved.!" Move on.

MATHIS

(now with a bite to it)

No, I wouldn't, I'm a God damned news reporter, trying to put a head on a really disconnected, strange, what-the-hell-is-it kind of story.

GLEASON

(smiling)

Really? I thought this little date was to plumb the inner workings of yours truly?

MATHIS

(draws back, then chuckles)

Yeah, you're right. I just got caught up in the thing. Was there anything else you could try?

GLEASON

(sits back and studies MATHIS)

What's more important, truth or justice?

MATHIS

Justice, I suppose.

GLEASON

That's a bit weak. You *suppose* justice is more important?

MATHIS

I don't know, I'd have to think about it.

GLEASON

I've had a lot of time to "think" about it and I opt for truth. The truth, beyond clearing up things tends to cleanse.

MATHIS

I think I need some convincing.

GLEASON

I won't try to convince you other than to say that justice is up for sale in this country.

(with an edge)

You can get all the fucked-up justice that money can buy! Isn't that a sorry thing for someone in my shoes to say?

MATHIS

Are you saying that truth can't be bought?

GLEASON

I believe truth can be manipulated, but truth, universally, wins out over justice. I was seeking the truth...The TRUTH...from Sydney...fuck the justice..

(now subduing)

I just had to figure out how to get there.

Gleason looks over to see Fergus napping.

GLEASON (cont'd)

Fergus! FERGUS!

Fergus jolts awake and instinctively wipes the counter.

GLEASON (cont'd)

Waves his empty glass.
When you get a chance.

MATHIS

I'm getting a feeling what I'm about to hear isn't in your report on the killing.

GLEASON

Oh, the rough nuts and bolts will find their way to paper, but the
(taps his head)
heart of the story remains in here.

MATHIS

What was your plan?

GLEASON

It wasn't a nice plan. I wanted to get Sydney drunk...not falling down drunk, but sufficiently in the bag to lower his defenses.

MATHIS

Was that legal?

GLEASON

I saw a movie once where the guy said,
(emotes)
"Don't confuse the beauty of the thing with legalities." I'm not sure something like that has ever been adjudicated. I didn't worry about it because I knew the results of our night out would never end up in a courtroom..

MATHIS

Talk about ballsy!

Fergus slowly walks up with his drink. . He picks up Mathis' Guinness and sees that only one gulp has been taken. Shakes his head as he leans toward Gleason.

FERGUS

Wind and the Lion.

GLEASON

What?

FERGUS

What you said, about legalities.

GLEASON

Wha the fuck are you talking about?

MATHIS

That quote you used came from the movie *The Wind and the Lion*.

GLEASON

Looks at Fergus with a nod of approval.

Hunh! I'm impressed.

FERGUS

As he walks back to the bar.

You should be.

MATHIS

So you had to get Sydney in the bag.

GLEASON

The first hurdle was to get him to have a drink with me. To do that, I told him I had an idea of what happened that night. I made it up. We went to a nice cocktail lounge in the San Gabriel Valley, his home turf.

MATHIS

What was your story?

GLEASON

I told him he was protecting Howard, the older kid who was never there. Sydney had mentioned that Howard had come to his aid once when Johnny was beating the crap out of him. I said, I didn't believe there was a knock at the door because no one, but Johnny, went to the door.

MATHIS

Did he bite on that?

GLEASON

At first, he was stunned, thunder-struck. His lower jaw dropped, almost comical. Then you could almost see his gears turning; he started mumbling, and then his head started shaking, throwing out the idea. Then he erupted, "Howard had nothing to do with it!" TA DA!

(MATHIS jerks back)

The TA DA moment!

MATHIS

Which was...?

GLEASON

Really? I have to explain that? By saying Howard had nothing to do with it, he *was* saying he *did* know who did have something to do with it. What came next was me doing a quick shuffle in my brain to factor Sydney's bizarre reaction...I had hit on something unexpected.

MATHIS

Jesus, you talk in riddles!

GLEASON

I expected him to laugh at my idea, but it was like I hit him in the gut. Now I'm thinking, did Howard have something to do with it?

MATHIS

Did you tell him that?

GLEASON

No, I didn't want him to know I'd picked up on that.

MAATHIS

Okay, I can see that. What came next?

GLEASON

Another round. We talked about Howard a bit. I wanted to keep him from that threshold where his blocking mechanism kicks in.

MATHIS

For me, this blocking thing needs some meat on it.

GLEASON

It goes back to the shrink. Sydney had lived a lie so long, it became the truth as he wanted to...no, as he needed to remember it. That's why the two polygraphs were inconclusive. Sydney's mind had built a version of events that kept him from harm, and it became so recurrent in his memory of it, that it took on the face of a real event.

MATHIS

At some point, I suppose, I'm going to find out the truth, right?

GLEASON

If you're patient.

MATHIS

I'm patient, but I have to pee. Keep that thought.

(MATHIS exits as GLEASON sits back in his chair, hands clasped behind his head, his eyes narrowing in thought, as though troubled by something)

END OF SCENE

SYDNEY

There's no other shoe.

GLEASON

(paternally, but slightly slurred)

Sydney, do you know what a blocking mechanism is when it comes to our recall of things that happened?

SYDNEY

I think I did...do. I think I do.

GLEASON

Tell me.

SYDNEY

(slowly)

It makes it hard for someone to know...to tell the truth.

GLEASON

Because?

SYDNEY

Because the truth is too hard to live... to deal with.

GLEASON

Do you have a truth that is too hard to deal with?

SYDNEY

(a long pause as SYDNEY swigs his drink, his gaze bouncing back and forth from his glass to GLEASON'S face)

Yeah...a truth...

(he looks down)

GLEASON

Hold it right there. Think about this. We're half in the bag so nothing that occurs here, nothing that you say here, will ever find its way out of this bar.

SYDNEY

(slowly shakes his head)

I've had this...

(takes another drink)

I've had this *thing* I've lived with for.....for a long, long time.
 (starts sobbing)

GLEASON

Okay, Sydney, take it in little dribs and drabs. I'll try to help you. The knock at the door, fiction?
 (SYDNEY nods)

Let me build the scene. You, Johnny and Janet were watching cartoons, is that correct?
 (SYDNEY nods again)

You're doing fine Sydney. What did you do after the cartoons.

SYDNEY

The cartoons ended and Johnny did go out. Janet went to take a shower.

(GLEASON alerts to this)

GLEASON

Did Johnny come back inside?
 (SYDNEY nods)

Where was Janet?

SYDNEY

Still taking a shower.

(SYDNEY is barely moaning and
 rubbing his forearm which GLEASON notes)

GLEASON

Go ahead, try to stay on top of it.

SYDNEY

(almost crying)

He peeked through the keyhole at Janet. Then he went in and tried to...he tried to screw Janet.

GLEASON

What were you doing?

SYDNEY

Nothing, until Johnny screamed out for me to help him. Janet was too strong for him.

GLEASON

Did you help him?

SYDNEY

(starts losing it, shaking)

I was really afraid of him. I went in and saw Janet with her arm around his neck. He twisted and they fell to the floor. He told me to hold her arms down. I tried to but she bit me.

(SYDNEY rubs his arm forcefully)

She bit me real bad, I ran out.

GLEASON

What happened next?

SYDNEY

I stood on the other side of the living room. Janet and Johnny fell out on the floor. She had him in a headlock. She kept making these weird noises as she kept shaking him. His mouth was open and his tongue was out. Finally, she dropped him to the floor.

(SYDNEY, dripping wet seems relieved and is almost smiling)

I've wanted to say that for...for a ...

GLEASON

You did the right thing. What did Janet do then?

SYDNEY

When he realized he was...she, I mean, when she realized he was dead she told me I had to help her get rid of him. If I didn't she would say I was part of it. He got a piece of rope out of the garage and dragged him out of the house and into the crawl space

GLEASON

There, you said it twice. You said he...HE!

SYDNEY

No... I meant she.

(SYDNEY seems panic struck)

GLEASON

Sydney, you may believe it was Janet, but in your mind you made it that way.

SYDNEY

It was Janet! She did kill him!

GLEASON

I came here with a bullshit story about Howard to try and get you to open up. I didn't realize that he was actually part of this thing.

SYDNEY

Sydney lays back moaning, twisting back and forth as though trying to free himself of something. he slowly quiets, then looks Gleason in the eye.

He came in after I got bit.

GLEASON

Howard?

SYDNEY

Howard.

GLEASON

Were Janet and Johnny still fighting?

SYDNEY

(he nods)

She was still on the floor with Johnny. They were fighting. She screamed, "He tried to rape me!" Howard grabbed Johnny by the throat and pinned him against the wall. Then Johnny went limp.

GLEASON

Where is Howard now?

SYDNEY

He's in the Air Force.

GLEASON

Still?

(SYDNEY nods)

What does he do in the Air Force?

SYDNEY

He commands a fighter squadron.. He's a colonel.

GLEASON

Hmm. Who dragged Johnny under the house?

SYDNEY

Howard.

GLEASON

Why did you protect Howard?

SYDNEY

He wasn't like us. He got away from my Dad and Step-Mom. Every now and then he'd come back to see how we were doing. He just walked into that mess.

GLEASON

Do you stay in touch with him?

SYDNEY

Not much. He always sends me a card on my birthday. He's the only part of my family I have now.

GLEASON

Do you ever talk about what happened?

SYDNEY

Never.

(at GLEASON with intensity)

Are you going to arrest him?

GLEASON

I think you mean, am I going to arrest Janet.

(smiles)

I can't arrest a dead person.

SYDNEY

Am I in trouble now?

GLEASON

No, Sydney, you are as far from trouble now as you have been in the past 23 years.

SYDNEY

Why would you do this for me....for us?

GLEASON

You wouldn't understand, but it has something to do with truth winning out over justice.

(motions towards SYDNEY'S drink)

Finish up. We're done.

(as SYDNEY swills his drink they rise, somewhat unsteady and walk slowly toward the EXIT,. GLEASON'S arm is draped over SYDNEY'S shoulder)

SYDNEY

You're a nice man.

GLEASON

No, Sydney, you're a nice man, and Howard is a Prince of the City.

END OF SCENE

ACT II

Scene ii

SETTING

Code Four Bar

AT RISE

GLEASON sums up with MATHIS. FERGUS is on the phone.

GLEASON

Sydney turned out to be a prodigious drinker. I was more in the bag than he was, but our night out had its rewards.

MATHIS

He opened up?

GLEASON

Not easily, but open up he did. Johnny tried to rape Janet and found that things weren't going to work out very well. She started to throttle the little bastard. He screamed out for Sydney to hold her arms. He was so petrified of Johnny that he tried to but Janet chomped on his forearm and sent him packing.

MATHIS

So Janet killed him by herself?

(Gleason thinks about it for a moment)

GLEASON

Do you find that believable?

MATHIS

(MATHIS studies him)

I guess I have to. There is no other explanation...right?

GLEASON

Of course, given the fact she was murdered, I closed the case out with a supplemental indicating the victim of my homicide, Little Johnny Be Bad, had been strangled while attempting to rape his half-sister.

MATHIS

Wow. No wonder she split from that setting.

GLEASON

And where does one go when the only way out is to stick your neck in some other noose?

MATHIS

Is there anything you've told me that would cause you grief if I wrote about it?

GLEASON

You wouldn't hear about it if I had concerns. As I said, the truth can cleanse as well as clarify, and I believe that the truth as I know it will stand and I'll defend it with a baseball bat if need be. The one thing this old duck has learned from years on the street is that truth will always trump justice.

MATHIS

Those are pretty strong words.

GLEASON

No, it's the truth that's strong. Words are just the vehicles.

MATHIS

I guess my question to you is answered, you solved the case, but no prosecution.

GLEASON

There was enough prosecution in that family, and as for it being "solved" I think I can say it was solved in more ways than one.

MATHIS

Are you talking about closure?

GLEASON

Closure! I detest that damned word. There can never be closure in my mind regarding this case. Can you imagine what Sydney went through?

MATHIS

Sydney?

GLEASON

Yes, Sydney! How do you rectify the wasted years he's lived with the "truth" of this case? How do you rectify the horrors of Janet's short life?

MATHIS

You're a homicide dick, not a social worker.

GLEASON

Oh, that's what I am?

(sarcastic)

We don't get emotionally involved in our cases, do we?

(a touch emotional)

Or do we?

(MATHIS shrugs)

Fergus now seems intently interested in what Gleason is saying.

You remember I told you about Janet's Probation Officer? When I brought her up to speed on what happened to Janet, that she was shot in the face, dumped on a dirt road outside Vegas...

(GLEASON stops)

The PO slumped down in a chair and basically fell apart.

MATHIS

I'm a bit surprised, I had no idea people in the system took things like that home with them. I'm thinking it works on you too.

GLEASON

In a cumulative sense it does. The PO told me that Janet reminded her of her niece. They had the same personality and outlook. She had that to deal with. I had something too, something as remote as an old photo. Early on in this case, I spotted a black and white photo of the four kids, much younger, all lined up, heads turned to the camera, smiling, innocent.

(sadly and softly)

I have a photo, almost identical, of my brother and sister. The same pose, same smile, same innocence, and in the same cheap frame. My sister would be Janet, I would be Sydney and my brother Howard. I keep seeing that photo, over and over.

MATHIS

But the circumstances are quite different.

GLEASON

Night and day.

MATHIS

How did you leave it with Sydney?

GLEASON

I wished him well. I know he got rid of a load, but he is still a troubled man. It wasn't just the truth of that night that needed repair, he dreaded his father. Just the name would cause him to tremble.

MATHIS

Didn't you say he was just a skeleton?

GLEASON

I showed him a photo I took of his father. He studied it for a long time. Then he said, "Jesus, it is him!"

MATHIS

Wasn't that a gamble?

GLEASON

I don't think so. Seeing his father as he now exists is bringing truth home to him. He can do with that however he wants. I knew I had to show it to him.

MATHIS

You know, I need a closing for this story. Are you retiring soon?

GLEASON

Am I retiring? Not that I know of. I don't want you putting a cap on it like some TV show. Just end the story by saying I told you to take a hike.

MATHIS

Well, that's an ending too.

GLEASON

Johnny Crisp is put to bed but my bean is in session on dozens of other cases. I need to exercise one of the essential Ss...without you.

MATHIS

I think I've got everything I need.

(MATHIS closes his pad and gets up, extending his hand, They shake)

GLEASON

Spell my name right, and you can leave out the business about the photo.

MATHIS

Not a chance!

GLEASON

(smiles)

Just checking. You'll do it up right.

(MATHIS walks briskly to EXIT,)

GLEASON (cont'd)

Holds up his glass, Fergus nods.

I'm beholden.

Fergus raises his arm, pours the drink, pours one for himself and joins Gleason.

FERGUS

Well, at least you didn't shoot him.

GLEASON

(smiles)

Actually, he's a nice kid.

FERGUS

From you, that's a hell of a compliment.

GLEASON

My glass house stills stands. He didn't have a brick with him.

Glass house?
FERGUS

Johnny Crisp.
GLEASON

What the hell are you talking about?
FERGUS

Gleason appears confused as he studies Fergus.

That's right. You'd already retired.
GLEASON

So, what's this "glass house" shit?
FERFGUS

Nothing, Fergus, nothing at all.
GLEASON

Gleason's cell phone reings.

Gleason.
GLEASON (cont'd)

Gleason grabs a notebook from his sjacket and scribbles.

How many? Wait a minute! I'm off rotation.

Listens.

What? The whole God damn unit?

Listens.

Yeah. The full moon...Very funny. (pause) Yeah, I got it. I'm rolling.

Slides his drink to Fergus.

See what your missing?

He rises, as Fergus shakes his head and waves him off. Half way to the door he stops and turns.

GLEASON (cont'd)

The little buckaroo got away without paying for his drink.

FERGUS

No sweat. I'll put it on your tab.

Gleason thinks for a moment, studies his notebook abstractly, smiles and then exits quickly, humming the theme from DRAGNET)

FAD TO BLACK

CURTAIN

THE JOHNNY CRISP CASE