

MOONLIGHT OVER L.A.
A Crime Story in Two Acts
by Ken Love

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CHARACTERS

JOE BARNES

Black Male. Early thirties.

MONA

Black Female. Early twenties.

SIMMS

Black Male. Early thirties.

REILLY

White Male. Forties.

GEORGIE

Black Female. Late twenties.

PLACE AND TIME

Los Angeles. Late summer. 1972.

“No matter what you do, no matter where you turn, fate sticks out its foot to trip you.”

Detour (1945)

*“There’s only three things for sure –
taxes, death and trouble.
This I know, baby.
This I know.”*

Marvin Gaye – “Trouble Man”

for Gus Edwards

ACT ONE

(Darkness. Overhead spot fades in on Joe)

JOE

A few minutes after three a.m., a Thursday morning in August, I turned myself in to the police. The night before, I'd killed a woman.

(Georgie appears, singing a slow, moody "I Can't Believe That You're in Love with Me" in a nightclub)

He's still out there. And I don't believe anybody will catch him now. I let her down.

(Fade on Georgie. Lights up in a bar. Mona is sitting, drinking a beer and smoking)

A hot night in August. I couldn't stop myself from looking at her. With all I'd been through with Georgie, I had to keep looking. Her beauty was unholy.
If I'd only known.

(He is now sitting in the bar, smoking and nursing a drink as well)

MONA

I'm sure glad he left that front door open.

JOE

I'm sorry – Did you say something?

MONA

I said as hot as it is, I'm glad somebody left the door open.

JOE

Oh, yeah. The air conditioner must be broke.

MONA

Is California always this hot?

JOE

Around this time of the summer, yeah. Sometimes.

MONA

You from here?

JOE

Yep. Born and raised. Compton.

MONA

Compton?

JOE

It's to the south.

MONA

My goodness! There's sho a lot t' this city. All this time I thought the only thing to Los Angeles was Los Angeles and Hollywood.

JOE

In other words, you're not from around here.

MONA

I'm from North Carolina.

JOE

Long way from home, ain't you?

MONA

I'm waitin' for my boyfriend.

JOE

I see.

MONA

He had t' stay behind and 'tend t' some business. So, he sent me here t' wait for him. He's from here, too.

JOE

What do you think so far?

MONA

Don't reckon I know just yet. I ain't never been in nothin' this big in my life. I will say, though, its good t' finally be ol' enough and out from under all that red clay back home.

JOE

Well, now that you're here, I wish I could say this town won't bite.

MONA

Oh, I know. I got t' be careful and – how they say – *watch my back?*

JOE

Something you didn't have to do too much of down south, I take it?

MONA

Not now-days. 'Course, back in the time when Mr. Charlie was lookin' to lynch us, there was a whole lot of watchin' and lookin'. But now, ain't too much t' keep you 'wake at night.

JOE

I'm Joe Barnes, by the way.

MONA

I'm Mona.

JOE

I like your name.

MONA

You thinkin' it's the kinda name that makes a woman sound like she stays ready for a man, don't you?

JOE

I ain't said all that.

MONA

And what is you? Some kinda gentleman?

JOE

If it means I like to show a woman respect, yeah. You could call me a gentleman.

MONA

I see you was raised good.

(She reaches into her purse and brings out a lighter, but is unable to locate another cigarette)

JOE

You want a cigarette?

MONA

Please.

(He gives her a cigarette. She lights it and smokes)

Must've lost track of what I had left.

JOE

It ain't hard to do.

MONA

So, how you make yo' living?

JOE

I work for a distribution company. In the warehouse. Loading-unloading trucks.

MONA

You don't look like the loadin'-unloadin' kind.

JOE

What do you mean?

MONA

Looks t' me like you was cut out f' somethin' else.

JOE

That obvious, huh?

MONA

Um hm. Like you usta be somethin' big and had t' give it all up.

JOE

Now I'm scared.

MONA

Of what?

JOE

Meaning I'm scared to ask what more you know.

MONA

I don't know shit. But I bet I can guess what you was.

JOE

I'll bet you won't.

MONA

I bet I will.

JOE

How much?

I don't know . . .

MONA

You wanna bet a dollar?

JOE

I'll bet a quarter.

MONA

Shoot.

JOE

Aw'ight. You was a singer.

MONA

Uh uh.

JOE

Okay, then – A movie actor.

MONA

Hell, no.

JOE

Was you some kinda ath-a-lete?

MONA

(Silence)

Basketball?

(He shakes his head)

Baseball!

(He smiles, then gives her a quarter)

You played baseball? Who with?

JOE

Nobody. Although, I did play in college. In fact, I was drafted. By the Pirates.

MONA

The Pittsburgh Pirates? No bullshit?

Yep.
 JOE
 Damn! What happened?
 MONA
 Fate.
 JOE
 You sayin' God had somethin' t' do with it?
 MONA
 Maybe.
 JOE
 What was it?
 MONA
 Well . . . I got problems with my heart. The doctor took me in and told me I have heart murmur. And that ended it.
 JOE
 Tha's tough, ain't it?
 MONA
 Yeah. Look, what you drinking, beer?
 JOE
 Um hm.
 MONA
 Want another?
 JOE
 Oh, no, thank you. This could turn into a long night. And I need to watch m'self.
 MONA
 How long have you been waiting?
 JOE
 I got here this morning.
 MONA
 And when is your boyfriend gon show up?
 JOE

MONA

In a day, or two. Tha's what he said, anyhow. He gave me a few dollars t' find a motel. And once I get settled in, I'm gon call 'im.

JOE

You're all by yourself in this town.

MONA

Looks that way. And it's all a li'l bit scary, come t' think of it.

JOE

You had anything to eat?

MONA

Not since this morning.

JOE

You want to walk down the street with me? There's a barbecue joint –

MONA

I don't know.

JOE

I'll treat.

MONA

I don't know.

JOE

What's wrong?

MONA

After a man offers t' feed a woman, he's gon want something for the trouble.

JOE

Who told you that?

MONA

Ain't nobody had t' tell me. Something like that is just in the wind.

JOE

Well, ain't nothing to it at all. And I wish women would quit throwing mess like that in a man's face.

MONA

Wouldn't be nothin' t' throw if it won't some truth in it –

JOE

Mona! Do you want to go eat, or sit here complicating shit?

MONA

Is this barbecue any good?

JOE

The joint is run by down home folks. Like you.

MONA

I guess I ain't got nothin' t' worry about, do I?

(She rises, takes up her purse and they exit)

JOE

I stay up the street and around the corner just off Crenshaw, a few blocks from the bar. Right within sniffing distance is Miss Rosetta's Soul Food where you'll find the best barbecue in town. Mona and I sat and ate. Talked. Drank a few too many beers. Talked some more. And laughed – which is a dangerous thing to do with another mans woman. When she laughs, and if she's beautiful, her eyes begin to burn. You watch the fire dancing in them. And all you want in this doomed world is to crawl under her warm skin and die in the closeness. It was too damned much. I hated it. It threatened to take me away from Georgie.

(Georgie appears still singing in the nightclub. After a few moments, she fades)

I sweet talked Rosetta into letting Mona make a long-distance call from the restaurant phone. And Mona yapped with some bastard for thirty goddamned minutes. Rather than give Rosetta a good reason to kick her ass, I promised I'd reimburse her for the call.

When she finally got off the phone, she looked shaken, distressed.
You alright?

MONA

Sho. He gon come back.

JOE

When?

MONA

In a couple of days. Like he said.

JOE

She looked so weak and upset, so beautiful. I couldn't handle it. Like the damned fool I was, I offered to let her stay with me while she waited for her man.

(Mona and Joe enter his apartment)

And there's my great big ol' couch. Like I told you.

MONA

I sho appreciate this.

JOE

Don't sweat it. I know what it's like to wait on somebody.

(She kisses his cheek)

MONA

Tha's the least I can do for you.

JOE

It's enough.

MONA

You sho you ain't got no woman?

JOE

I ought to be.

(She notices a framed photo of Georgie)

MONA

Who is that?

JOE

Nobody to worry about. She's not around anymore, anyway.

MONA

No bullshit?

JOE

Nope.

MONA

I just don't wanna roll all the way out here and wreck nobodies' home.

JOE

Again – there’s no woman here. And if there was you ain’t doing nothing but sleeping on the couch.

MONA

A woman will read between the lines, though.

JOE

You’re something, Mona.

MONA

I’m in the big city. I got t’ watch myself.

JOE

I’ll get you some bedding. Want me to turn off the light?

MONA

Please.

(She removes her shoes and reclines on the sofa as Joe gets a blanket and covers her. Georgie appears)

GEORGIE

Did you get a good look at him?

JOE

That whale-size cat sitting in the front?

GEORGIE

Trying to be subtle, eyeing me like a fox looking to hump a chicken.

JOE

You saying all the cat was doing was looking?

GEORGIE

Joe, I know the difference between a look and a leer.

JOE

So, tell him. Confront his fat ass about it.

GEORGIE

Then again, I’m not in the business of running a paying customer off. And who’s to say he’s not the only rooster with reckless eyeballs in the henhouse, anyway.

JOE

Now you're getting neurotic over this shit.

GEORGIE

Okay! I'll let the son of a bitch be. Let him have his little fun.

JOE

Of course, in his case it's more like –

GEORGIE

I know. Torture.

JOE

Something you're good at. Something you do to every man. Including me.

(He attempts intimacy. She stops him)

GEORGIE

It's late.

JOE

Really?

GEORGIE

I'm tired.

JOE

Then why'd you invite me up here?

GEORGIE

You want a drink?

(Silence. She pours two drinks)

Thanks for taking me to eat, by the way. I try not to have anything too heavy before a show. I seem to sing better on a half empty stomach. And I'm glad Rosetta keeps late hours.

(She hands him the drink)

Sit down.

(They sit)

The owner says he's happy with everything. The customers are starting to warm

to me. And he wants this to remain an ongoing thing. And maybe have me work a night or two at his supper club in Beverly Hills.

JOE

Sounds like big time.

GEORGIE

And I'm growing right into it.

JOE

Hope it's a good fit.

GEORGIE

What's wrong?

JOE

Nothing. Just thinking that . . . I don't know. Maybe it's time to rethink my place in the scheme of things.

GEORGIE

Joe, you're a college educated man with a degree. What's more, I love you. Besides, what you're thinking . . .

JOE

You reading my mind?

GEORGIE

What I'm saying is I've never been about that. And you know better.

JOE

No, Georgie, I'm a fool. So, please, if there's anything more to this, school me.

GEORGIE

Alright. I need time.

JOE

You sure you don't mean distance?

GEORGIE

I know my mind, Joe.

JOE

And I've already expressed *mine*. You know where I'm at, or at least, where I'm trying to get to. And you know my heart.

GEORGIE

I'll take your heart, but you've got to be patient with me. As I am with you. With all I've been through –

JOE

Haven't we both been through it?

GEORGIE

Yes. And it's the very reason why we shouldn't not run into each other and hurt ourselves.

(He laughs)

Don't laugh at me.

JOE

I'm laughing at that awkward metaphor, Georgie. And I'm laughing at myself.

GEORGIE

Don't do that either.

JOE

You're straight when you say you're finished with him?

GEORGIE

I'm through. The marriage still stands, but as far as I'm concerned, it's dead. All that's left is to seal that death with my bloody signature.

JOE

And your old man's gon go for this?

GEORGIE

He doesn't have a choice.

JOE

Which leaves me –

GEORGIE

With me. You wanted to start this – fine. If you want it finished . . . *help.*

JOE

Georgie sang at a club in West Hollywood, a place where the clientele was mostly young, hip, white. The type of crowd you'd see prowling Harlem during the 1940's for jazz, the educated and urbane, looking to slum and glide ever so slowly on the knife edge and feel the sweet hurt.

GEORGIE

Never forget, baby . . . you'll always be my ballplayer. And don't worry. I'll be here.

(She kisses him)

JOE

Georgie had left her husband back in Oakland. He abused her. Until she finally got smart and walked. Her family here in Los Angeles put her up until she was able to get it together. I loved Georgie. And she knew it. Yet, she was scared to death. And living on borrowed time.

(She parts from him. Fade on Georgie)

I rose a little earlier than usual the morning after I'd brought Mona up to the crib. We had breakfast and talked for a while before I took myself to work.

(Lights rise in Joe's apartment. Mona is sitting on the sofa drinking coffee)

So, your boyfriend's back in North Carolina taking care of business?

MONA

That's what he said.

JOE

What kind of business is he in?

MONA

I think it best if I don't say.

JOE

Oh?

MONA

I ain't sayin' it's nothin' bad, but –

(Silence)

JOE

Uh . . . okay. Ain't no sweat. If you need to keep it to yourself, it's cool.

MONA

He's gon think it's somethin', though, when I tell 'im I stayed wit' a ballplayer.

JOE

A “not-even-has-been” ball player. Make sure you tell him that, too.

MONA

It’s still a whole lot in my eyesight. How many men live t’ have somebody like the Pittsburgh Pirates even look at ‘em?

JOE

Good point.

MONA

You ain’t made it, but you ought t’ be right proud of yo’self, just the same.

JOE

Yeah, but . . . listen, I’m trying to put all that shit behind me, okay?

MONA

I understand.

(She looks at Georgie’s photo)

She sho is pretty.

JOE

Yep.

MONA

Ain’t around no more, huh?

JOE

No. She died.

MONA

I’m sorry t’ hear that. What was her name?

JOE

Georgina. But everybody called her Georgie.

MONA

Tha’s a nice name.

JOE

Used to be a singer. Was about to cut an album.

MONA

How'd she go if you don't mind me askin'.

JOE

Her ex killed her. He cut her throat. And ran. They never found the bastard, either.

(Silence)

Listen, while I'm gone, you go ahead and stay here. There's food in the kitchen. Help yourself. And there's a TV. And if you need to go anywhere, lock up. I'll leave a key by the telephone.

MONA

Okay.

JOE

You'll be alright. Don't worry.

MONA

I won't.

(Fade on Mona)

JOE

Later that day, I'd gotten off the bus and was taking myself home from work when I just happened to stroll by the bar to see Mona laughing and jawboning with this white cat as if she'd known him.

(Lights rise on Mona sitting with Reilly in the bar, both a little tipsy and enjoying each other's company)

MONA

. . . and I killed 'im, too. I sho did! I killed th' muthafucker . . .

(They laugh as lights fade)

JOE

When I got back, I found the door not only unlocked but slightly ajar. I didn't get pissed until I was sure nobody had taken it upon themselves to waltz in. With that, I sat in the living room and waited up through the night for her ass.

(Mona enters suddenly. She is drunk)

I have no idea as to where your mind is, or what shithole you crawled out of

back in North Carolina, but this here is the big city where folks steal from each other. Or, worse.

MONA

Wha' chu tryin' say t' me?

JOE

You left my goddamn door open.

MONA

Sho nuff . . . ?

JOE

What were you thinking, Mona?

MONA

Is yo' shit still here?

JOE

Yes, but . . .

MONA

Then why you so mad?

JOE

I ought to put your ass out.

MONA

But you won't.

(She approaches temptingly and kisses him)

JOE

You smell like a goddamn liquor store.

MONA

Store open, too.

JOE

Go to bed, Mona. Sleep it off.

MONA

I ain't ready t' go t' bed.

JOE
Mona, stop it.

MONA
C'mere.

JOE
Mona!

MONA
Come on, niggah . . .

JOE
I thought you were another man's woman.

MONA
And I'm gon stay his woman.

JOE
Then, what is this?

MONA
What it look like?

JOE
Mona – go lay down.

MONA
In yo' bed?

JOE
For now, yes.

MONA
All by myself?

JOE
For tonight. Now go ahead.

MONA
Tha's a whole lotta bed for jus' one woman.

JOE
You need to stop this – I said STOP IT!

MONA

Wha's wrong with you? Ain't you a man?

JOE

Fuck you.

(She laughs in his face)

MONA

There's niggahs woulda ate me up if I'd so much as winked at 'em good. And here it is wide open. And you gon throw it away. Shit! Ain't there no men in this ass-lickin' city?

(She exits. Following a short moment, there is a sudden knock at the door. Joe answers. It is Reilly)

JOE

Yeah? What is it?

REILLY

Hey, is, uh . . . is this where Mona stays?

JOE

What's the problem?

REILLY

No problem, pal. Nothing, I – look, forget it –

JOE

Wait a minute – what's up?

REILLY

Listen, I assure you, Mister . . .

JOE

No – no, look, I ain't nothing to her. Understand? Nothing.

REILLY

Not a boyfriend, or . . . ?

JOE

What's the problem?

REILLY

Well . . .

JOE

C'mon, spill it.

REILLY

She's got something of mine, is all. Is she awake?

JOE

Not at the moment, but . . .

REILLY

Listen, if it's okay, I'll come back tomorrow, or do you work?

JOE

No. It's Saturday. I'm off weekends.

REILLY

Good. It's alright then to . . .

JOE

Yeah, yeah. Sure. I'll be expecting you.

REILLY

Thanks, pal. Sorry to disturb you.

(He exits)

JOE

I could feel a heaviness settle inside my gut, something too big to cut out. The story was getting complicated. As if I'd become married to it.

(The next morning in Joe's apartment. Mona is sitting on the sofa drinking coffee)

MONA

I don't know no white man.

JOE

Then, I'm a fool.

MONA

I ain't said you was no fool.

JOE

Alright, I'm crazy.

MONA

I don't know no white man, Joe.

JOE

Who was that in the bar yesterday?

MONA

Some man what bought me a drink.

JOE

And you don't know him?

MONA

How am I s'posed t' know him? Or anybody here? I ain't never set foot in no Los Angeles. Not until day b'fore yesterday.

JOE

Well, be that as . . . whatever, I think –

MONA

What?

JOE

You need to find a motel.

MONA

Wha's wrong, Joe?

JOE

It's not a question of what's wrong now, but what I'm setting myself up for.

MONA

There's worse girls than me.

JOE

And I'll never know it.

MONA

Joe . . .

JOE

You need to split, Mona.

MONA

I can't.

JOE

You can't *what*?

MONA

I can't go nowhere. I mean . . . I might not have nowhere t' go.

JOE

What are you saying? What about your man?

(Again, a knock. Joe answers. Reilly is again standing at the door, this time in his policeman's uniform)

REILLY

Hey. Mona up yet?

(He looks inside, then enters)

Hi, sweetheart.

(Mona rises, frightened)

Go ahead. Ask me. Go on. *I said ask me!*

MONA

How'd . . . how did you get here?

REILLY

I'm a cop. Of course, you didn't know that did you?

(He looks at Joe)

I'm Officer Reilly. And you are . . . ?

JOE

Joe. Joe Barnes.

REILLY

Pleased to meet you, Joe. And, again, my apologies for the intrusion. As I'd said earlier, the little woman here has something which belongs to me. Don't you, honey?

MONA

What if I said I ain't had it no more?

REILLY

Oh, you've got it. Even if the scratch is gone, you still got what I paid for.

MONA

I . . . I gotta boyfriend.

REILLY

Ain't my problem.

MONA

Well, wha' chu want me t' do? Spread it right here?

REILLY

Why not?

JOE

Hold it a minute –

MONA

We can't do nothin' in this man's house. Not wit' him here.

REILLY

Why not?

JOE

'Cause I live here. And it's my house.

REILLY

No, my brother, you're renting. And I know the landlord.

JOE

That don't mean nothing.

REILLY

Look – be a good boy and excuse us. Take a walk.

JOE

Fuck you.

REILLY

You know who you're barking at?

JOE

Some dirty-ass pig cop –

REILLY

Who will arrest your black ass for pimping, harboring a prostitute and anything else I can manage to shit on ya.

JOE

Ain't this a bitch!

MONA

Why can't we go get a motel room and let him alone?

REILLY

It would be an inconvenience! Now you jacked a fifty from me, you tried to skip, I caught up with your cheap, whore ass, and now I've come to collect my product.

JOE

Not in my crib!

REILLY

I'm done with you! Now blow! Give us thirty minutes, or stand there talking smack and suffer the inevitable consequences . . . or, join in.

JOE

What?

REILLY

Like you said – it's your pad. So, if you want – partake. Please.

(Silence as he vacillates. Then –)

JOE

Make sure it's just thirty minutes.

REILLY

Not a second over.

(Fade on Joe's apartment. Lights rise on Georgie lying in bed. She and Joe have just made love)

GEORGIE

You're good to me.

JOE

I can't help myself.

GEORGIE

Don't get too good, though.

JOE

Sounds like a threat.

GEORGIE

I just want to keep believing in you, Joe.

(They kiss)

JOE

What happened? A week, or so ago you were bringing on the ice. And tonight, you bust in and damn near tear me to rags.

GEORGIE

I'm scared.

JOE

That's a hell of a way to show fear.

GEORGIE

Maybe I'm running.

JOE

Come again?

GEORGIE

You heard right.

JOE

I don't get it.

GEORGIE

Joe . . . you are my black angel –

JOE

Hey! Let's quit trading these awkward-ass metaphors and state plainly.

GEORGIE

I spoke to my husband today.

JOE

And?

GEORGIE

Once again, I told him how it was. And what I wanted. As usual, he wasn't exactly thrilled with what he heard, but he knows there's no longer a choice.

JOE

I'm proud of you.

GEORGIE

Me, too. To the point where I'm scared shitless. It's like I've ripped a tumor out of my skull.

JOE

So, is that it?

GEORGIE

Not exactly. He tried to say he'd since gotten religion. He's a Christian. He's changed. I didn't buy it. I told him it didn't make any difference and that I'd kill myself before I'd go back. And I meant it. And I knew I meant it. And it scared the hell out of me.

I can't go back, Joe.

JOE

Then, don't –

GEORGIE

No, baby. It's not so simple. I want you to help me. Whatever it takes.

JOE

Georgie, I . . .

GEORGIE

Look in my eyes – say you love me. Say it.

JOE

You know I love you.

GEORGIE

Then do as I ask. Whatever it takes.

(She kisses him)

JOE

Whatever the cost.

GEORGIE

And I'm yours, Joe . . .

JOE

Whatever the cost.

(Fade on Georgie)

It is unsafe to make deals with a lover. When the bargain explodes in your hand, the wound is always cruel and ugly, like a grimace, the ragged lips never closing because the joke will not cease to be at your expense. And the bloodletting nearly fatal, with neither party escaping without losing something vital.

I was unaware of it at the moment, but Georgie had consigned herself to an early death. Her plea for help was empty. I was powerless. And everything was down to time.

As for Mona, we seemed to be at the brink of some sort of precipice, standing side by side looking down and watching the abyss rise toward us.

(Lights rise in Joe's apartment. Mona is sitting on the sofa adjusting her clothes, fixing her hair, etc)

Proud of yourself?

MONA

I'm a grown woman.

JOE

You showed it, too.

MONA

Aw, niggah, go fuck yo'self.

JOE

Fine. I'm glad you making this easy –

MONA

No! No – wait a minute. I . . .

(Silence)

I needed some money, Joe. My boyfriend . . . I come to see he didn't leave me with as much as I – Well, I just got scared. I didn't want to end up here with nothing. And . . . Joe, I swear – I got scared.

JOE

You got scared?

MONA

That's all. I swear, Joe.

JOE

This is so stupid – STUPID!

MONA

I know. I know it is. And I'm . . . I'm sorry.

(Silence)

JOE

Alright, I'll . . . GODDAMMIT! . . . Alright, I'll – I'll give it a couple of more days. Day after tomorrow, though, man or no man, you've got to split.

MONA

Fair enough. Anyhow, when I talked to 'im last, he said we gon settle down here. He got a business meeting with somebody big and important. He said he's gon finally set things straight. And live like the man he always saw himself as. Tha's what he said. He said it was somethin' he jus' come up on. Now he won't up and tell all that t' leave me in the wind. Right?

JOE

How should I know? And whatever this . . . whatever it is he's talking about, for the short time remaining for you to stay here, I can't have none of it around me. You dig?

MONA

Aw'ight. And I'm . . . I'm sho he gon come f' me.

JOE

And that being said, what did you do? Fall in love with the nigger, then run away with him?

MONA

Kinda.

JOE

Oh, please . . .

MONA

Well, see . . . I was livin' with a man. A white man. Old man Porterfield. See, my

daddy helped work his farm. And he owed Mr. Porterfield money. Sometimes the crop won't too good. And sometimes he would have t' go to Mr. Porterfield for credit t' get supplies and groceries and stuff. And over time, daddy owed 'im a piece of money. Plus, he'd hit the bottle a little once too often, if you know what I mean. But Mr. Porterfield liked daddy, jus' the same. And told 'im t' let me stay in his house and cook and clean for a spell and he'd see t' takin' care of all that debt. Mama'd since passed on. So, it was up t' daddy. He agreed to it. Next thing I know, I'm livin' with a ol' white man. And livin' good, too. I ain't never knowed what it was t' not go to bed hungry. And what it was t' have a closet fulla clothes. He sho was a good white man. And I could see he'd took a right nice shine t' me, too.

He said I could go any place in that house I wanted, but t' stay 'way from the room in the basement off from the water heater. He kept it locked up. And he didn't want nobody in it. What was behind that door was his business and his business alone. See, Mr. Porterfield usta go on and on sometimes 'bout how much he hated banks. He couldn't stand a bank. He said that once your money gets tied up in a bank, the government's gon grab hold of it till won't nothin' be left for you but the fatty crumbs. And he hated the government worse than he hated the bank. And I figured must be some money behind that locked door, seein' as wasn't nothin' of his in no bank. Or so I thought.

Anyhow, one night I was layin' in the bed half 'sleep when I felt somethin' crawling b'tween my legs. I looked and there was Mr. Porterfield smilin' like the devil and workin' his hand up my leg. "Now, tell me," He say, "For the time you been stayin' here livin' and eatin', ain't you been livin' and eatin' good?" All I did was say "Yessah". Then he said somethin' 'bout daddy bein' free and clear and not owin' him so much as a nickel. And he said if I was pleased to do so, I could go on stayin' with him for as long as I wanted. And do f' him and live in his house and eat and sleep good and keep on wearin' pretty clothes. And the whole time his hand is workin' b'tween my legs. After a li'l bit, I didn't feel scared no more. All I did was moan while his hand worked and worked up inside my legs.

I stayed with that ol' man f' a li'l over a year. Then one day, the man who would come to *my* man drove up the road.

(Simms enters)

SIMMS

Hey, there, sweet meat! Damn! A nigger got to be crazier than a mad bull on smack to let somethin' as young and fine as you walk up and down these country roads with all this brand-new Lincoln Continental I got sittin' here.

MONA

I was comin' out the store. He told me his name was Simms. And I didn't know God could make a man t' be so pretty and t' smile so good. And talk so sweet.

SIMMS

You dig this here automobile, don't you? C'mon! Jump in. I'll take you wherever you need to go.

MONA

I swear, when he opened his mouth, I forgot all about that ol' muthafucker back at that house.

SIMMS

Besides, I ain't been here long. I might need somebody to . . . you know, show a nigger around. Right?

MONA

I got in the car, and he rode me the rest of the day, smilin' and sweet talkin' till I got silly in the head.

SIMMS

Now, I'm gon scratch the phone number of the motel I'm staying at on this card. I'll be squatin' there for a while. And I want you to call me. You hear? Do that and I'll take your fine ass some place.

(He kisses her. Fade on Simms)

MONA

The first time I saw Mr. Porterfield mad was when Simms dropped me off in front of the house that night. I stayed gone all day. And he was so mad he took took off his belt and whooped me.

I was ready t' kill that man. Two days went by with him watchin' me like somebody's guard dog. One night, after he'd gone t' sleep, I got on the phone and called Simms t' come and get me. I went with him to his motel room and stayed gone the whole night. I drank some of his liquor. And I let him have me.

(Lights rise on Simms)

SIMMS

How old did you say you was?

MONA

Old enough t' be grown.

SIMMS

But ain't nobody treated you as such. Right?

(Mona shakes her head)

Well, sweetheart, you *are* grown! What's more, you're a woman. And I'm gon treat you like a woman. And, in time, you sure as shit gon feel it. I learned about how to treat a woman a long time ago from a pimp, of all people. A cat who called himself Sweet Sam. He cracked my skull and schooled me on the many ways of not only loving a woman, but having her feel like a woman, so full of her womaness to where she can't take all of it without shouting.

MONA

And I sho did me a piece of shoutin' with that pretty muthafucker.

He was down there on a job. He wouldn't go into it, but somethin' he had goin' with a white man – a *I*-talian, somethin' he said was gon bring him a nice payday. And the car was part of the package.

He said he was always on the lookout for the next big thing. Tha's when I told 'im about Porterfield. And how I was ready t' kill 'im. And about the room in his basement he didn't want nobody t' go in. And how he couldn't stand no bank. And how I thought it must be some money in the room, or else wouldn't be no need t' keep it locked up so folks'd stay out of it.

SIMMS

You sure about this?

MONA

I ain't sure of nothin'. But it would make sense if it was.

SIMMS

I don't know, Mona.

MONA

Wha' chu mean you don't know?

SIMMS

What if there's no money, is what I mean.

MONA

But what if there is?

SIMMS

Mona –

MONA

I told you what the man said 'bout not likin' no bank.

SIMMS

Yeah, but it don't mean –

MONA

What if there's money in there, Simms?

SIMMS

Alright, why can't you check it out first?

MONA

I ain't able to.

SIMMS

Why not?

MONA

He goes down there all the time. Three, four times a day. Sometimes more. If he see the lock even lookin' like it's been fucked with –

SIMMS

What? He'll whoop you again?

MONA

That ol' man might kill me.

(He laughs)

He'll kill me, Simms!

SIMMS

Okay, look, let's drop it. Sounds like a waste of time, anyway. And I ain't risking my neck for nothin'.

MONA

But ain't *risk* what you all about?

SIMMS

No, baby doll. I won't ever just take a simple *risk*. I'm all about what's known as a *calculated* risk. Which means, if I'm assured – i.e. assured – of something of value behind said door, or wall, or within a room, or a vault, or whatever, then what comes next is planning the execution and . . .

MONA

It's that much t' bein' a crook?

SIMMS

If you want to keep your dark hide out of jail, yeah.

MONA

I think you fulla shit.

SIMMS

Alright, again – why don't you do it?

MONA

I told you – I'm scared of him!

(Simms laughs again)

Quit laughin' at me, goddammit!

SIMMS

Hey! Bitch, you need t' cool it!

MONA

Simms, he looks at me different now. Since that night he gave me a whoopin', it's like he b'come somebody else. I could be walkin' through the house and b'fore I take my next breath he's creepin' up b'hind me. Sometimes it's like I can't see 'im, but I sho as shit can hear him. And when I catch him lookin' at me, there's a thing in his eyes. It's evil. I'm scared, baby.

SIMMS

Why don't you cut?

MONA

I ain't got nowhere t' go.

SIMMS

What about your family? Where's your daddy at?

MONA

That man is a drunk. He can't even take care of hisself.

SIMMS

Oh, I see. I'm supposed to do this shit, plus be your foster-goddamned-father, too? Is that it?

MONA

There's a whole lot I can do for you.

SIMMS

You don't say?

MONA
Sho. I love you, baby.

SIMMS
What?

MONA
You heard right.

SIMMS
I'll be goddamned . . .

MONA
I mean it. *I love you.*

SIMMS
Well, you can say the word. I'll give you that.

MONA
You don't b'lieve me?

SIMMS
No. In fact, I think you're dangerous. And you're too young to even know it.

MONA
You ain't nobodies' teddy bear yo'self.

SIMMS
True . . . true.

MONA
I believe there's some money in that room.

SIMMS
Alright. What else?

MONA
You get it out and some of it is yours.

SIMMS
Some of it?

MONA
I got t' eat, too.

SIMMS

Okay. *And what else?*

MONA

The money. Tha's all.

SIMMS

Uh uh. You're leaving shit out.

MONA

Aw'ight: *take care of the ol' man*, if you know what I mean.

SIMMS

And if I do this, it's on you – you'll be the one asking for trouble.

MONA

Naw – what I'm askin' is for you t' get back at that ol' coot f' me.

SIMMS

Ain't leaving him enough?

MONA

No.

SIMMS

Fine. As long as you know the consequences.

MONA

You'll take care o' things, though – right?

SIMMS

Sure. But sooner or later –

MONA

Just fix it so won't be nothin' to run after me for. And, like you said, you got t' take me which you.

SIMMS

Um hm.

MONA

I can make you a happy man, Simms.

SIMMS

Um hm.

MONA

That's right. Make me your woman, and I swear, I'll get you to holler so it'll put cracks in them walls.

(Fade on Simms)

JOE

There was no money in that room, was there?

MONA

When I talked on the phone to Simms, he said Porterfield didn't have nothin' but a painted picture of his wife hangin' on the wall. He told me he got hisself in the house after dark and was in the basement when he seen the door was unlocked. He went on in and saw Porterfield sittin' in front of that big ol' picture and prayin' his heart out. He was cryin' and beggin' her t' forgive 'im f' not bein' able t' help hisself aroun' me. Then he swore to Jesus he was gon put me away like Sarah did Hagar in the Bible. Tha's what Simms heard b'fore he turned and caught 'im standin' at his back.

JOE

And I take it Simms had to ice him?

MONA

He said he didn't leave 'im no choice. It's why he sent me out here ahead of 'im, b'fore he brought the shit down on Porterfield. He said there was a chance it could all turn bad. And he didn't want me in the thick of it.

JOE

But you do know it still makes you a wanted woman.

MONA

They got t' catch me first.

JOE

That ain't so hard to do.

MONA

What you tryin' t' say? You gon cheese on me?

JOE

Mona, I don't want nothin' to do with this.

MONA

But I'm in your house. That means you standin' knee-deep in shit, too.

JOE

You really do think you're a smart little bitch, don't you?

MONA

Maybe I jus' know how t' look out f' myself. I am in the big city now.

JOE

And having said that, let me ask you a question: with all that's gone down, why should Simms come for you?

MONA

Oh, he comin' back. When you think on it, can't no man walk away from Mona.

(Fade on Mona)

JOE

It would sound cliché and misleading to dismiss Mona as someone who'd merely grown up too fast. But you couldn't escape the brutal fact that this young country girl had the makings of a seasoned crook. And by listening to her story, I'd become a party to something imminently dreadful. Against my better judgment, I had bargained and gotten suckered. And it wasn't fate. It couldn't have been – there's no such thing. No – I was a fool. Plain and simple.

Sunday, I'd thought of going to church to pray for Mona to make good on her promise to leave. Instead, on Monday after work I stopped by the bar to drink and comfort myself with the certainty of her departure.

(Lights up on Simms sitting at a table in the bar, drinking, smoking)

The barkeep, however, pointed me in the direction of a man sitting at a table toward the back, a man who'd been looking for me.

(Joe approaches Simms, who extends his hand. They shake)

SIMMS

You must be Mr. Barnes.

JOE

Joe will do. And I take it you're Mr. Simms.

SIMMS

That's right. I guess you know why I'm here.

(Joe sits)

JOE

Yeah.

SIMMS

She called and said this'd be a good place to meet.

JOE

Well, I put her up at my place. She was here by herself, a long way from home, you know. I felt sorry for her.

SIMMS

Sure. Sure. And I appreciate it.

JOE

Nothing funny went on, though.

SIMMS

Oh, I ain't gon sweat that. If something went on – if it didn't, it don't make no never-mind. Long as she's all of a piece, y' know?

JOE

You for real, Jack?

(Simms laughs)

SIMMS

Where you from, man?

JOE

I was born and raised here.

SIMMS

You shittin' me.

JOE

Nope. I was brought up in Compton, as a matter of fact.

SIMMS

Well, I'll be damned. You sure as hell don't act like no Compton nigger.

JOE

It's where my mama dropped me. What can I say?

SIMMS

Ain't that something?

JOE

Mona says you're from here, too.

SIMMS

Watts, brother. And it's all over me.

JOE

You don't say?

(He laughs again)

SIMMS

I like you already, man.

JOE

Well, look, you want me to take you to her?

SIMMS

What's the rush, home? What's the rush? Have a drink.

JOE

I . . .

SIMMS

On me.

JOE

Sure.

SIMMS

Name it.

JOE

Scotch.

SIMMS

Hold on.

(He crosses to the bar and brings back two glasses of Scotch)

So, tell me: has my li'l girl been behaving herself?

JOE

For the most part, yeah.

SIMMS

What she do?

JOE

She didn't do nothing.

SIMMS

Brother, I'm her man. Now go ahead. Spill it.

JOE

In that case, I think you and Mona need to talk and keep it between yourselves. I don't want no part . . .

SIMMS

She had any company up there?

JOE

C'mon, man.

SIMMS

I got a right to know, Slick.

JOE

Why can't you ask her?

SIMMS

I think you know why.

JOE

I do?

SIMMS

Look, home, you and me – we just met. Now let's not start trading shit right from jump and get all up on each other's bad side.

JOE

I just don't like being no monkey-in-the-middle of nobodies . . .

SIMMS

Here.

(He takes out a roll and peels off a few dollars, which he hands to Joe)

This is for the trouble.

JOE

When I bring you up to see her, what's next?

SIMMS

We split.

JOE

Tonight?

SIMMS

No later than, brother. No later than.

(Joe takes and pockets the money)

JOE

Okay. She . . . she danced, more or less, with some white cat. A cop. A day, or so ago.

SIMMS

A cop?

JOE

Yeah. Some low-down pig.

SIMMS

He pay her?

JOE

Yeah. Well, she jacked him, but he caught up with her.

SIMMS

You saying he got his satisfaction anyway?

JOE

I'd left the room, so I can only guess.

SIMMS

Anything else?

JOE

Nothing. Except I'll be glad when she's gone.

SIMMS

And I will see to that, my big-hearted brother. Rest assured.

JOE

Thank you.

SIMMS

Mona's a smart girl, ain't she?

JOE

So smart she's scary.

SIMMS

Yeah, man. Like a dog my auntie had one time. Mutt was so goddamned smart he scared you. Too smart for his own good, if you asked me. And vicious – WHOO! Man, I hated him. And do you know she had to up and shoot that animal in the head one day? He turned on her. And she had to do him. Oh, yeah. Smart, but vicious. And too much to take.

JOE

Like a woman sometimes.

SIMMS

Man, I know what you mean. And Mona's got it in 'er, f' sure. Pretty as the devils wench, though, ain't she? I swear, if I was a treacherous muthafucker I'd try to make some money off her.

JOE

Hmm.

SIMMS

One more question –

JOE

I said no. And there's no need to ask again.

SIMMS

She tried you, though. Didn't she?

JOE

Yes, she did. But I played like a resourceful pimp and kept my swipe out of her.

SIMMS

My man!

JOE

Now I got a question for you.

SIMMS

Shoot.

JOE

Why'd you come back? There was nothing in that room at Porterfield's house.

SIMMS

She told you about that?

JOE

She volunteered it, yeah.

SIMMS

Hmm . . . but, no. Not a goddamn thing. I even combed through the rest of the house to sniff out some scratch hid in a pillowcase, or under a mattress, or whatever, but didn't turn up shit.

JOE

So, why didn't you cut?

SIMMS

Aside from the fact that I'm exploring a very large business prospect, I'm a committed man.

JOE

Don't shit me.

SIMMS

Let's just say we made an arrangement.

JOE

Based on what?

SIMMS

Alright, Slick. You got me!

JOE

You saying you fell in love?

SIMMS

Ain't it a bitch?

JOE

And do you know what you got yourself into?

SIMMS

Put yourself in my kicks, man. What would you do? Run? Okay – if that’s so, how come you ain’t done such yet? Put her out? Alright, then why is she still holding court in your crib?

JOE

She said don’t no man walk away from Mona.

SIMMS

And she was right.

(Fade on the bar as Joe steps forward)

JOE

I was surprised to see this man surrender himself to the dilemma of being caught in Mona’s hair strings. And I suspect that he was all too aware of the fact that I had, in my own way, fallen for her, too.

I had to know how it would end with this girl. Where on this road of bleakness was she taking us next?

(Lights up in Joe’s apartment. Mona is lying on the sofa. As they enter, Simms steps quietly toward the sofa and kisses her. She rouses)

MONA

You jus’ getting’ here?

SIMMS

I was kept.

MONA

By who?

SIMMS

Stop being so damned ignorant.

MONA

I’m ‘bout t’ knock a hole in you, Simms.

SIMMS

C’mon, now, baby . . .

MONA

I didn’t think you was gon come back.

SIMMS

Now that's stupid.

MONA

I was scared.

SIMMS

Well, I'm here. And who can walk away from somethin' as fine as you? Huh? Remember what you said?

MONA

I bet you wanted to blow when you didn't find no money at ol' man Porterfield's.

SIMMS

And how can I go anywhere without my woman?

MONA

You was still 'bout t' cut, though.

SIMMS

Mona . . .

MONA

Don't you "Mona" me. And don't tell me you won't thinkin' about it.

SIMMS

Goddammit, girl! I'm here, alright? Now get off my ass.

MONA

I'm jus' wonderin' why it took you so long to . . .

SIMMS

You want me to split? Huh?

(She embraces him. They kiss)

By the way – I copped a nice, fat bankroll from the other job I told you about.

MONA

How much?

SIMMS

Uh uh, sugar. That's classified.

MONA

You so fulla shit.

SIMMS

Anyway, we got enough to keep us well fed for a while.

MONA

You take care of Porterfield?

SIMMS

Of course.

MONA

And did you fix it so won't nobody put me with it?

SIMMS

Mona, however it could've been fixed, the fact that you lived with him then skipped is bound to give any John Law a reason to set the dogs after you.

MONA

But don't none of that mean you couldn't . . .

SIMMS

If it will make you feel just a little bit better, I cleaned things up and took it on myself to dispose of the body.

MONA

Wha' chu do with it?

JOE

You don't need to know that Mona.

MONA

Well, is it gon help?

SIMMS

Probably. Listen, if they uncovered anything – which I don't think they have yet – keep in mind they still won't know your whereabouts. So, let's cool it and cross that bridge when and if we get to it.

MONA

And if we get to it, what then? You gon throw me off it?

SIMMS

Look, don't I at least get a thank you?

MONA

For what?

SIMMS

Didn't I just do your li'l skank ass a favor?

MONA

Aw, to hell which you and yo' shit talkin'!

SIMMS

Alright, keep on and I'm gon turn y' ass in.

MONA

Go ahead!

(Joe rises to leave)

Where you goin'?

JOE

Out for a while. I need some air.

SIMMS

We ain't putting you out, are we, Slick?

JOE

No – no. Just make sure you're out before I get back. I'll give you an hour.

(He exits)

I've never had the stomach for melodrama. On any level. And though I began to have second thoughts about leaving a thief in the place, I needed to cut. I had nothing worth stealing anyway.

It had rained earlier. The air and the sidewalks were damp. The L.A. moonlight and the coolness of the evening should have been enough to settle me. They weren't. I walked the wet Crenshaw streets. And longed for Georgie.

(Light sound of Georgie's singing is heard)

Why would any man with even a faint whimper of a heartbeat want to bring harm to a woman so beautiful, so sweet, so utterly herself? She'd gone to Oakland to sever the ties. He said he'd gotten religion and that he was sorry. He'd begged his God for atonement. Yet, he still found it in himself to kill her. And run.

For a good, long while I'd call the Oakland P.D. two, three times a week to see if anybody'd gotten any closer to sniffing him out. And with every call I'd hear the

same surly response. And walk away feeling like I'd been kicked in the balls.

I refused to weep when they told how she'd been whacked. And I haven't wept since. The wailing in my soul, though, will not be silenced. I'll never get over her. And I'll probably end up cracking before I'm fifty.

I had to get her out of my head. And I knew where I wanted to go – or go back to.

(Lights rise in the bar. Joe enters and sits. Reilly is sitting and drinking at the far end. Singing fades)

REILLY

Buy you a drink?

JOE

You say something?

REILLY

I offered to buy you a drink.

JOE

Do I know you?

REILLY

No. You may have seen me, though.

JOE

Or, smelled you.

REILLY

Excuse me?

JOE

Pork doesn't agree with my constitution, officer. So, lay off.

REILLY

Alright, I got a little beside myself that day. I was wrong. I shouldn't have taken it out on you.

JOE

Save it, man.

REILLY

C'mon. Let's bury the hatchet. Have a drink with me.

JOE

I'd rather put a knife in your throat.

REILLY

But you won't do that.

JOE

You're right. Now consider yourself lucky and go on about your merry business.

REILLY

What's your name again?

JOE

Fuck you. With a "mister" in front of it.

REILLY

I do not mean any harm. I only wanna talk –

JOE

What is with you, Jack? Are you deaf, or just plain retarded?

REILLY

I want to apologize for the other day.

JOE

Apology accepted. Now blow.

REILLY

They're gonna catch up to that girl. Sooner, or later. And I think you know it, too.

JOE

The question is how do you –

REILLY

I'm a cop.

JOE

But you ain't God.

REILLY

Thank goodness, I ain't omnipotent. But I got ears, kid. And I did have a moment with Mona in this bar, her with a head full of booze and yapping about how she whacked some old paddy back home. So, just for shits and giggles, you know what I did? I checked it out. According to the P.D. "back home", yeah – they

uncovered a dead old man alright. With a nickel sized bullet hole in his head.

I also got the dibs on Simms.

JOE

I do, too. He's a thief.

REILLY

That ain't all. He's a lot dirtier than he puts himself up to be. See . . . *I knew his father.*

JOE

Listen . . . Officer –

REILLY

Reilly. And let's see – Yeah! Joe, isn't it? Joe Barnes? You're a good man, Joe.

JOE

And for that, thank my mama.

REILLY

Tell me: why would a decent man like yourself want to get mixed up with –

JOE

Whoa! Stop! I ran across the woman here. She told me she was waiting for her old man. I felt empathy and put her up at my place, which I now realize was a mistake –

REILLY

What are they doing still cooling it at your pad, man?

JOE

They're leaving tonight. If you want to make a good bust, you better hustle it.

REILLY

And what makes you think I need to bust somebody tonight?

JOE

I don't dig where this is headed. And, not to sound rude, but I really ain't in need of company.

REILLY

Sure. Maybe some other time.

JOE

I wouldn't hold my breath.

(He takes money from his wallet and places it on the bar)

REILLY

The drink's on me.

(He turns to leave, then stops)

Y' know, talking with Mona that night, she also let a thing slip out on a girlfriend of yours, a singer, killed by her ex, wasn't it? And nobody's caught up with the bastard, huh? Man, that's bad. I recall reading about it in the paper, as a matter of fact. What I would have given to have heard her sing.

(He exits)

JOE

I wanted to hate that cop. Hate him enough to kill him. Which was not, of course, in my best interest. I couldn't afford it. What seemed practical, what made more sense, was to watch this pig. I hadn't a whiff of what the motherfucker was onto. I only knew I needed to watch him.

(Slow fade. End Act One)

ACT TWO

(Lights fade in on Joe)

JOE

My house guests had since split. I could settle back into myself now. Or, at least, what I had left of me.

(Georgie emerges from the darkness and embraces him from behind)

GEORGIE

I'm afraid, Joe. He called me. I didn't want to talk, but he kept me on the phone for over an hour. He says all he does is cry. The weight of his sin pains him. And God help me if I didn't feel some of that hurt.

JOE

You got to be strong, baby. Whatever the cost, remember?

GEORGIE

I have to go back to Oakland and finalize the divorce.

JOE

I'll go with you.

GEORGIE

Good. I need you with me.

JOE

It's gon be fine. He's playing dirty, is all. Ain't nothin' to that shit about him being a Christian and feeling pain. Hell, who is he – Jesus?

GEORGIE

Wouldn't that be something?

JOE

But we didn't make that trip. She did, though. And I was left completely in the dark. Until I'd gotten a phone call very late one night . . .

GEORGIE

We've got to leave this weekend.

(Fade on Georgie)

JOE

. . . A call that ended everything.

(A knock at his door. He answers. It is Reilly)

REILLY

Hi, Joe. You got company?

JOE

What's it to you?

REILLY

I wouldn't want to disturb nothing.

JOE

You won't get the opportunity.

REILLY

Listen, if you're not busy, I'd like to invite you down to the bar for a drink. With a friend of mine.

JOE

No. Goodnight.

REILLY

I think this friend might be of interest to you.

JOE

Who is he?

REILLY

Someone you know or are acquainted with.

JOE

Who, man?

REILLY

C'mon down and you'll see –

JOE

G'nite, officer . . .

REILLY

You're not a happy man, are you, Joseph?

JOE

Not with your ass standing in my door.

REILLY

I mean generally. You've got a tragic air about you.

JOE

What are you getting at, man?

REILLY

Georgina Sullivan, your girlfriend who was murdered? It's a shame, but the location of her ex, i.e. killer, *is* – in fact – unknown.

(Silence. Joe holds a steady gaze upon him)

Anyway, last night, when I left you at the bar, I stopped by your crib and offered to take your guests to dinner. Like I'd told you, I know of Simms 'cause I knew his father. And over dinner and drinks and what-not, we're talking and, soon enough, your name is broached. Mona says you had baseball prospects which were unfulfilled due to a latent health issue . . .

JOE

Get to the point, pig.

REILLY

I'd like you to come down and have a drink with me and my new-found friend, Mr. Simms. I want to lay a proposition on you. To which, if you accept, I can arrange to have your girlfriends' killer nabbed.

JOE

You what?

REILLY

No bullshit.

JOE

You can do that?

REILLY

Wouldn't have said it if I couldn't.

JOE

That was Oakland. Why would the L.A.P.D. –

REILLY

It ain't the L.A.P.D.'s business. This will be on my dime.

JOE

You can do what a whole police department couldn't?

REILLY

I can set it in motion.

JOE

How?

REILLY

I have friends in sordid places. Believe me, they're efficient.

JOE

And what's in it for you?

REILLY

We'll discuss it downstairs.

JOE

And if I remain recalcitrant?

REILLY

No skin off my nose, pal. Georgie's killer is out there, though. Living, eating, and most likely with someone else's daughter in his crosshairs.

(Silence)

I'll tell you what – think it over and do what's in your best interest. We'll give you about an hour.

(He exits)

JOE

What was this? A set up? A joke? *What?* I wanted to forget it, stay home, have a shower, go to bed, and leave those two fallen angels in the bar to hold their dicks. The heaviness had found a home in the pit of my stomach again.

(Georgie's voice is heard)

GEORGIE

Whatever it takes, honey.

JOE

He could arrange to find Georgie's ex . . .

(Georgie appears in US limbo. She is on the phone, crying as she speaks. Her faint singing voice is also heard)

GEORGIE

Joe? Joe, baby . . . Are you there . . . ?

JOE

He knew people who could run down Georgie's ex . . . My Georgie's killer . . .

GEORGIE

I love you, Joe.

JOE

. . . That bastard was still out there. He could track him down. And nail his ass.

GEORGIE

Whatever it takes, baby. Please, don't forget. Whatever it takes . . .

(Fade on Georgie)

JOE

Georgie's ex - Her killer.

After about an hour and a half, I stepped down to the bar. With any luck, they'd be gone.

(Lights rise inside the bar. Reilly and Simms sit at a table)

REILLY

I knew you'd show.

JOE

I'm late.

REILLY

And on purpose, too. Sit down.

(Joe sits)

SIMMS

Looks like the heat done finally caught up with me, Slick. He done nailed me to

the cross.

REILLY

Aw, quit fucking with me, will ya?

SIMMS

This jive peckerwood knew he was sittin' on something good and hot. Couldn't wait for a nigger to get here. Had to dig up my room number all the way in North "Kak".

REILLY

Nino said it'd be cool. And you told me I wasn't disturbing nothing.

SIMMS

Wha' chu talkin' about? The phone rang right on the down stroke.

REILLY

Bullshit. You said you'd already sent Mona to L.A.

SIMMS

What makes you think it was Mona?

REILLY

Well, was *he* at least eighteen?

SIMMS

Fuck you, pig.

(They laugh)

REILLY

Speaking of which, you should've seen the look on little Mona's face when I popped in.

SIMMS

She cried, brother. No shit. My girl got on her knees, weeping and moaning like a whooped dog. *Oh, daddy! Please, daddy! I didn't want to, daddy! He made me, daddy! Oh, daddy!*

REILLY

It was almost like some of the shit I see on Hollywood Blvd after midnight.

SIMMS

I ain't gon lie to you, home. She was layin' it on me. Copping a terrible plea.

REILLY

And when you told her you not only knew about it, but didn't give a shit –

SIMMS

The bitch got mad. Was primin' to tear my ass.

REILLY

I cooled her down, though, when I offered to take her to eat.

SIMMS

Which was right white of you, officer, if I don't say so myself.

(They toast, their glasses chinking)

On the other hand, I got on my game, too, when you fell up in the man's crib
shining your Marshall Dillon badge in my face.

REILLY

Didn't know what to expect, did ya?

SIMMS

You didn't say nothing about being no cop.

REILLY

I wanted it to be a surprise.

SIMMS

Thought Slick here brought the heat down on us.

JOE

Why? I hate cops as much as the next black man.

REILLY

I'll drink to that.

(Another toast)

Oh – as you can see, I went ahead and ordered a Scotch for ya. Neat.

JOE

Again, how very white of you.

REILLY

Can't help it, y' know?

JOE

Nice to see the two of you so chummy, by the way.

SIMMS

That a problem?

REILLY

Like I said, Joseph, I actually knew Simms' father, Octavius.

JOE

A Roman?

SIMMS

No, man. My daddy was from the Caribbean. Trinidad.

REILLY

Used to run the biggest numbers racket in Los Angeles. For which his only son worked as a bookie.

SIMMS

Always had a thing for numbers.

JOE

You should have been an accountant.

REILLY

No, way! Mr. Simms is too big for the straight life.

SIMMS

And I'm always on the lookout for big prospects.

JOE

Just like Howard Hughes.

SIMMS

Something like that.

JOE

Well, it looks like the two of you have a nice little party warming up in here.

REILLY

A reunion of sorts, yeah. See, past few years, I've been cooking up an idea, a plan. I checked with my sources and found that Octavius' son was still in the life, so to speak. Over time, I pulled a few coat tails, prowled through the network, and finally uncovered this black bastard. I wanted him to know about a bigger party I

plan to throw out here. With him as host.

JOE

Why was I invited?

REILLY

We like you, Joe. And, most important, you look like you can be trusted.

JOE

With what?

REILLY

We're getting to it – Something wrong?

JOE

Perhaps this party's getting a wild, is all.

SIMMS

We don't throw no wild parties.

REILLY

And you're still at the point where you've got the option to split without incurring pain.

JOE

To be, or not to be trick fucked in the ass.

REILLY

Oh, nothing as perverse as all that. However, I will say that, not only is there a barrel-sized bankroll waiting at the end of this rainbow for you, but your Jack-the-Ripper will no longer be in the wind. Again, I'll see to it that your girlfriends account is settled.

JOE

What do I have to do?

REILLY

First, are you in?

JOE

Don't I get to see what I'm buying, or at least get a test drive?

REILLY

It would be a risk.

JOE

For who?

REILLY

Sorry it has to be this way, but we need your word that you're in, then we do business.

JOE

Come on, man. Even Faust got some forewarning.

SIMMS

Who?

JOE

You don't know him.

REILLY

I'm white, but I'm no devil, Joe. I assure you.

JOE

It's just that . . . I don't get it.

REILLY

What?

JOE

Whatever this is – *why me?* You motherfuckers do not operate in a box. In fact, there's got to be at least five to six dozen lost souls crawling the streets now who'd want nothing better than to be pulled by their dicks into this kinda shit.

REILLY

We want *you*, Joe.

SIMMS

A brother in need.

JOE

What brother ain't?

REILLY

Flat out, Joseph, we want you for the job. Are you in or out? Tell me now. If you're with us, I'll lay the deal on you. Keep in mind, though, that once your ears are pricked, there's no chumping out of it.

JOE

Other than in a pine box.

REILLY

And to be honest, I'd rather see that asshole who clipped your lady friend in it. Not you, man.

JOE

And how will you do him?

REILLY

We'll have a sit down with an old man who'll put us on to his son, Mr. Lucci.

JOE

Lucci? *Silvio* Lucci?

REILLY

I told you, I got friends in sordid places.

JOE

You know Silvio Lucci? And you can get him to do this?

REILLY

It'll be a return on the favor you extend to me. Dig?

(Georgie's singing is heard)

JOE

What kind of shit-pile was I stepping into? Why was I willing to bring the world to a crushing end all around me? Just to nail the man who murdered the woman who still held, with all of her blessed life, my beating heart, my head and everything else . . . and would not release any of it even in the embrace of death? What had I done to remain so possessed by her? What, Georgie? WHAT?

(Singing fades)

REILLY

Well?

JOE

I must be crazy.

REILLY

It's a crazy world.

SIMMS

So, live in it, Slick.

JOE

I won't kill nobody –

REILLY

You won't.

JOE

I mean that . . .

REILLY

You got my word.

(Joe chuckles)

Honest. On my wife and kids. Even my mother.

(Georgie's voice)

GEORGIE

Joe. I love you. Whatever it takes . . .

(A murky light rises on her face)

. . . Whatever it takes . . .

(The image fades)

JOE

I won't kill anybody, except . . . except for *him*. When this is all over, *I'm the one who gets to do him*. Set it up with your man Lucci. Do what needs to be done. But *I* take the son of a bitch out. You dig?

(Silence. And they nod)

Okay. Spill it.

I'd sit and listen, looking at neither of them, but taking in every word. The air conditioning was finally working. The place was now cool. But the droning of that old machine was fair indication that it needed to be replaced. Outside, bodies seemed to glide like balloons along the sidewalks in silence as the two men talked.

REILLY

From around 1944 to 1961, Octavius Simms ran his business like a well-oiled Cadillac.

SIMMS

The cops were cool as long as they got a little sugar under the door. When the number hit, folks got paid, nobody got chumped.

REILLY

And the man gave back to the community. Everybody liked him.

SIMMS

Daddy was a goddamned saint!

REILLY

Sure! Then, from out of the darkness comes a Hebe named Berkowitz. He'd been out of prison for a few years and was getting his operation back together. Before then, his game was liquor. Capone had Chicago, Lucky Luciano had New York, and Mr. Berkowitz controlled the booze going in and out of Los Angeles. He even ran a speakeasy in Hollywood. Anyway, it all came down on him when the FBI raided his set up. Being a Jew, he was certainly no idiot – he got the best representation his money could get. And with all the wheels he'd greased in city hall, he was sure he'd get a walk. Not so. The Feds got him on racketeering, tax evasion and extortion. There was more, but this was all they could make stick. And it was enough. He ended up wearing stripped pajamas for twenty-five years.

Once he was free, Berkowitz surveys the landscape. By now, he's operating an illegal gambling joint in Long Beach. Business is good. His prospects grow. He opens other joints, but the old man can't sate his hunger. It takes him a few years, but he manages to organize a hit – the biggest I'd ever heard of – on Octavius Simms' organization.

SIMMS

They busted into the storefronts and policy houses. Daddy's men get popped left and right.

REILLY

Within a week, the entire racket is obliterated.

SIMMS

I watched two men from his crew ice my father.

REILLY

Berkowitz moves his people in. A year passes and he's the only game in town.

SIMMS

Meanwhile, I put together a crew. And for about another year, we do nothing but terrorize that muthafucker and collect us some payback.

REILLY

But it all proves to be a futile exercise, doesn't it, my man? In the end you get yourselves nailed for illegal possession of firearms. And drugs.

JOE

So, how'd you become a thief?

SIMMS

Before I left the joint, somebody cracked my skull about a cat named Nino, an Italian. He was a thief – a professional. And when I got out, I was in need of work. I hooked up with him and was surprised the cat had heard of me.

REILLY

The thing is – this Jewish fuck has been making enemies since prohibition. The Italians hate him. The blacks do business with him 'cause they're hungry. But they'd just as soon see him hang by his nuts from a flagpole as well.

SIMMS

He's got a few minions from city hall in his pocket.

REILLY

He put a few stragglers from the local P.D. on his payroll for protection. But make no mistake – if he was to get whacked, say – tomorrow, nobody, including the Hebrew God, would give a rats ass.

SIMMS

As long as the scratch continues to soften their footsteps.

JOE

So . . .

REILLY

We have a plan to take the wandering Jew out and put the family business back into the hands of an actual family member.

JOE

How?

REILLY

Listen . . .

JOE

The AC's breath was cold yet sweat poured from my skin like rain. I listened. This time, I didn't catch everything. Only what was essential to the execution: it would take place on a Wednesday night, a time when Berkowitz haunts a particular gaming hall in Reseda. Reilly would be there that evening for the sake of appearance, sitting at one of the tables and playing a few hands. He was a repeat customer, a gambler and he liked to bet high. He lived for it. And got into a lot of shit because of it.

REILLY

I'd made detective. I was sitting pretty good. But I encountered some pretty fierce headwinds with this gambling bullshit. It even got me busted. I was put back into a uniform and thrown on the streets.

I've been married and divorced twice. I got five kids. The alimony and child support are fucking me in the ass. And to top the cake – I'm into this Jew for a bankroll. So, you can understand my motivation.

JOE

I listened to his story, but I was already onto him: what he really wanted was control of the entire L.A. numbers and illegal gambling rackets *for himself*. He'd be the power behind the throne, with Simms as nothing but a nigger proxy.

REILLY

Simms will be the man, like his father would have wanted it. And I'll have his back. I'll be invisible, a ghost in blue. Always around.

JOE

You mean running the shit?

REILLY

No, I mean seeing to it that Mr. Simms stays in his royal roost until he croaks. Every city official on the payroll, by the way, is with us. As long as their axles keep getting greased.

SIMMS

Now, here's the score: Mona will drive. You go in with me. On any given night, there's at least fifty to a hundred grand on the tables. Sometimes more. You'll collect that while I keep everybody at bay. Then you wait downstairs and keep things tight while I pull the Jew upstairs and take the safe.

REILLY

It'll look like a couple of coons in another routine stick-up. No offense, but you get the idea: it's a way of throwing off the scent, so to speak, of keeping them blinded to the fact that they're being moved out, so they won't know where the hell to look.

SIMMS

Anyway, when all the scratch is gathered, you hold court while I cap this Berkowitz muthafucker, then we get up with Mona in the car and split.

REILLY

The money, half of it anyway, will serve as the beginning of our stake. And with the head off the rooster, Simms puts together his crew . . .

SIMMS

. . . Then, very carefully – surgically – we take down the lower echelon. We do it clean, leaving no mess.

REILLY

And in a short period of time, we roll in and assume the vacant position.

JOE

Which makes you a killer after all, hey, Simms?

SIMMS

Not necessarily. I prefer to look at it as exacting justice. Old Testament justice. The Jews believe in a God of vengeance. And I'm about to turn some of that same retribution on one of their own.

REILLY

So, what about it, Joe? You still down with us, man?

SIMMS

Does it all sound *practical* enough now, brotha?

JOE

I had crossed the Rubicon. And was one with the gang. I kept telling myself it was all for Georgie. I wanted her put to rest for good. I missed her. I still felt love. Yet, I had to be done with her. With this deed, I could finally tear her from my life.

(Georgie appears)

GEORGIE

Joe? Joe, if you come to the club tonight, I'll sing something for you.

JOE

I'm a little tired, but . . . sure. I'll come.

GEORGIE

Great! Anything you wanna hear?

JOE

Not really. Whatever you sing is – wait a minute – Do you know “How High the Moon”?

GEORGIE

Sure.

JOE

My mother loved to hear Ella Fitzgerald sing that.

GEORGIE

I’ve got a slower version I’ll do for you.

JOE

Beautiful.

GEORGIE

See you tonight then?

JOE

Yeah. See ya. Love you.

(Fade on Georgie)

I told Reilly I was still with it, as if I’d had a choice. He grinned and bought us another round. It was after closing when we were finally motivated enough to leave.

Simms had gotten a motel room for himself and Mona at the Super 8, about a bus ride from my crib. He’d be out for most of the day solidifying his base, making and renewing contacts, preparing, while I held fast to my normal routine of work, rest and waiting for the end – of what? The bottom of the abyss was closer than ever. I would welcome the fall, though. I’d be free. *He would answer for her death.* And I’d be free.

And with Mona close by, once again, it was down to time. She was surely scoping the neighborhood, learning her way around. I would welcome the end. But, not before the knock on my door.

(There is a knock. He answers. It is Mona)

MONA

Wha’s hap’nin’?

JOE

She stopped by with a bag of G. With which we cut through the warm night, making and having our way with one another. And when the slugfest had spent

itself, when we'd both gone the distance, we lay side by side, sweating like two Georgia mules. I opened the window and let the noise from South Central invade the bedroom while we smoked some of the G.

(Lights up on Mona and Joe in bed smoking grass)

MONA

So wha's up with you?

JOE

Hmm?

MONA

Wha' chu all about? Where you at?

JOE

What are you talking about, Mona?

MONA

Is you satisfied with yo' life, is what I'm askin'.

JOE

I'm just as content as the next black man.

MONA

All you wanna do is load trucks?

JOE

It's a damn living.

MONA

You look like you can do better.

JOE

Oh, yeah?

MONA

You know you could be doin' a lot more 'n what you doin'.

JOE

Who are you, my wife?

MONA

Maybe I give a shit about you, Joe.

JOE

Maybe I don't.

MONA

You lyin'.

JOE

Alright, I'm lying.

MONA

It's y' girlfriend, ain't it?

JOE

No, it's me. Nobody but me. *I don't give a fuck!* And that's the end of it!

MONA

I'm sorry. I ain't meant t' make you mad.

JOE

I'm not mad. Just . . . Let's talk about something else.

MONA

This thing, you gon be ready?

JOE

It's too late to back out.

MONA

You'll do all this t' get the man what killed yo' woman?

JOE

There's men who've done worse. Besides, as long as I ain't got to kill nobody there, as long as we're dealing with crooks anyway, I'll be cool.

MONA

I hope you won't get hurt.

JOE

What do you mean?

MONA

Ain't nothin'. You'll be aw'ight.

JOE

Do you know something I don't?

MONA

All I know is t' drive th' car.

JOE

Mona . . .

MONA

Tha's all. I swear.

(Silence. They kiss, embrace)

JOE

Did Simms tell you they found Porterfield's body?

MONA

Yeah, but he say not t' sweat nothin' 'cause it's gon be a long time b'fore them country-fied cops get t' anything.

JOE

I hope he's right.

MONA

Simms say things gon be a whole lot different when he start runnin' the show.

JOE

Simms will be little more than a puppet. And I'll bet he knows it, too.

MONA

What?

JOE

He'll be the nigger overseer on the plantation, Mona. And you and I both can figure out who the massah is. It won't be no different from what your father had with Porterfield.

MONA

You sayin' that white cop –

JOE

Hey, I'm not saying shit. You didn't hear none of this from me.

MONA

He won't do nothin' t, Simms, will he?

JOE

Probably not. Reilly needs him and . . . I don't know – he might even like Simms a little bit. And one hand washes the other, I guess.

MONA

I won't like it if somethin' happen t' you, Joe.

JOE

All I can do is keep myself out of the line of fire –

MONA

But I want you t' watch yo'self. I mean it! Come t' think of it, these some dangerous, cut th'out, backstabbing cats you fixin' t' work with.

JOE

And you just now figured this out?

MONA

I fucked both of 'em, didn't I?

JOE

Fine. I guess I ought to watch my back then.

MONA

You was born and bred in the big city. You used to it.

(Silence. They kiss)

JOE

The truth is . . . I used to care, used to give a shit about things, about my life. When this thing with my heart came out and a career in baseball was gone, I thought, with time, I'd get it together and find my life anyway. When Georgie was killed, though –

(Mona silences him with a kiss)

GEORGIE

You just be ready for tomorrow night. Everything else is gone take care of itself.

(Fade on Mona)

JOE

The moonlight over L.A. was as a whisper from a muted trumpet, pushing its way gently through the urban detritus and into the bedroom window where it embraced and defined our nakedness in the dark. We fell into one another again and again

until we were tired. Mona slept. I didn't.

We got together at Reilly's place on the night of the take down. Two days earlier, Simms took me out past the city limits so I could get a quick drill on operating an assault rifle, a .38, and a .45 caliber automatic. I reminded him of the agreement – that I would not kill anybody there. He knew, he said. He only wanted me prepared.

The weapons were procured from a cat who owned a minor stockpile he and a few brothers had muscled together during the late sixties, brothers affiliated with the Black Panthers, brothers laying and waiting for the imminent revolution. To the cat who was the provider, our hit was close enough to a revolution for him. Ergo, he was only too pleased to facilitate.

The plan, on the surface, didn't seem difficult. In fact, to a hardened criminal, I suppose it would be as easy as sex. And just as exhilarating. Yet I was nervous. And . . . I had doubts.

(Lights up in Reilly's place. We see Reilly, along with Simms, Mona and Joe. Everyone except Reilly is dressed in black and prepared for the hit)

REILLY

By the book, people. You listening? Strictly by the numbers. I don't want no improvisation; I don't want no monkey-shining. I don't need anybody who thinks they're smarter than me. Nobody gets hurt, I can't have a mess. And, with the exception of the Hebe in charge, we won't ice nobody. Unless they come at us first. Everybody got it?

(They acknowledge)

We'll go over it again: you two bust in, tell them to put their hands on the tables. While Simms holds 'em all in his gun sights, you – Joseph – will collect all the scratch on those tables in this duffle bag. After which, Simms will have Berkowitz lead him upstairs to the safe while you take up the slack downstairs. Anybody so much as twitches their nose – you plug 'em.

JOE

But –

REILLY

It's either you or them, kid. If you're lucky, they'll be making like wax works. Just protect yourself. You hear?

(Joe nods)

Everything okay? You look a little shaky.

JOE

Don't sweat it. I'll hope up my end.

REILLY

Just follow the steps, and all will be cool. You dig?

(Again, Joe nods)

Now, as planned, I'll be in the joint already playing a few hands. So, when it goes down, nobody's looking at me. Okay? Simms, you know what's next.

SIMMS

We fill what's in the safe with duffle bag number two. I put Mr. B out of our misery. We back out of the place with the two pipes still trained on everybody. Slick slips out the door first, I hold 'em down and give him time to make it to the car. Once he's in, I haul ass and jump in behind him, and we split.

REILLY

Clean. No mess.

SIMMS

That's phase one.

REILLY

They'll chase their tails for a while. And before they can see straight, the cocksuckers'll get hit again.

SIMMS

And yet again. Until the flag is captured.

JOE

You cats make it sound like walking a dog.

REILLY

If we stick to the plan, there shouldn't be . . .

JOE

What makes you think Berkowitz ain't got one, too?

REILLY

Is there a problem, Joe?

JOE

Just feeling a little expendable all of a sudden. That's all.

SIMMS

The world has always been a big place, brotha. Ain't nobody who ain't expendable.

REILLY

Anyway, we got nothing up our sleeves, man. And it's just as I said – *I like you*.

JOE

Yet even mothers have eaten their own young.

REILLY

Is there anything you're trying to tell me?

JOE

Just nervous, officer. You understand. Right?

REILLY

Sure. Sure.

JOE

We fulfill our obligation to one another. Afterwards, we return to our respective lives.

REILLY

You'll never see me again.

JOE

I'd like that.

(Fade on Reilly and the crew. Overhead on Joe)

Of course, something would go wrong. Why should a hit ever advance by the book, or as planned? This kind of action, by its nature, invites chaos, an immediate rupture in the order of the universe, an actualization of fate.

I'd held my place while Simms did his thing with Berkowitz upstairs. All the men, including Reilly, were as stone – as Lots wife after she peeked – *as wax works*. Reilly was to have played his part. To “throw off the scent”, as he put it. I was to cap anything that quaked, as per his instruction. So, why – oh, why! – of all the motherfuckers in the room, did Reilly have to move? He pulled his hand abruptly from the table. I barked at him – I had to make it look legit. Somebody turned around and looked at Reilly. Then somebody else. Then another, and another. A bald, fat man looked over and reached for somebody . . .

I stopped thinking. I aimed and squeezed the trigger. Before I saw what happened, I'd put three slugs into the fat man's neck. Blood wept from the holes and down his chest. And all his fat, sloppy weight spilled further into the chair.

My mind was ahead of me, or in back of me – I couldn't tell. I was soon in the car, which seemed to float over the streets at top speed. Simms' laughter shattered my ears. Mona's face looked as if it was pressed against the windshield as she drove deeper into darkness, cutting through the curtain of moonlight faster and faster . . .

(Lights up in Reilly's pad where they await him.
Stacks of money sit on the table. Simms pulls from
a bottle of liquor)

SIMMS

C'mon, Slick. What's done is done.

JOE

You ain't got to tell me. I know the shit is done.

SIMMS

Have a drink.

JOE

I'd rather not.

SIMMS

Drink, man! We celebrating! I avenged my daddies' death tonight! Somewhere in somebodies stinking hell a murdering Jew is dancing on fire. C'mon, now. You can't let it get to you, baby. Besides, that fat turkey lump coulda had anything up his joint.

JOE

His hand was just moving toward somebody else. What was that?

SIMMS

A move.

JOE

Then why didn't I shoot that goddamn Reilly?

SIMMS

You were thinking, is why.

JOE

And he wasn't? Mother fuck that cocksucking ofay! All that shit-talking and he's the one to make the first move.

SIMMS

Listen, we got a big ol' take here, brother. A good chunk of it belongs to you.

JOE

Somebody got wasted.

SIMMS

Yeah. The enemy.

JOE

And . . .

SIMMS

Nobody.

JOE

And I'd said I wasn't killing "nobody".

SIMMS

Well, you did. What are them card playing crooks gonna do? Call the po-lice?

JOE

What if he wasn't just any kind of crook? What if he was some wise guy?

SIMMS

What if he was J Edgar Hoover's faggot? It still don't mean shit. They don't know you, man. To them, you was just another nigger thug out of a hundred runnin' through the dark night. Now FUCK IT! And have a drink.

(Reilly enters)

REILLY

How much we got here?

SIMMS

'Bout three hundred fifty K, Mistah Charlie!

(Reilly looks at Joe)

REILLY

How you holding up?

JOE

Why did you move?

REILLY

Must've had an itch.

(Joe hits Reilly, knocking him down)

You're playing with your life, junior.

JOE

If I was any kind of a man, I'd waste your pig ass now.

(Reilly gets up)

REILLY

Know what your problem is? You've been listening to your mama for too long.

JOE

As if a motherfucker needs his mama to keep him from stepping in shit.

SIMMS

Okay, cool it. Let's all have a drink.

REILLY

What do you want, an apology?

JOE

I want to know why you moved.

REILLY

I thought I had an itch.

JOE

I'm not gon play your chump much longer, you dick-lickin' asshole!

MONA

Joe, go home.

REILLY

Yeah. Take your ass home. Then come to me in the morning with a cooler head and a more congenial disposition.

JOE

Why did you move?

REILLY

I told you – my dick itched.

(Joe pulls a gun and aims at Reilly)

SIMMS

Whoa! Slick – watch what you doin', man.

JOE

Go fuck yourself, Simms, before I do – with my foot!

SIMMS

You don't wanna write that check, my brother.

JOE

And I ain't carrying no checks – I tote cash.

SIMMS

Oh, you the man, I see.

JOE

No, I'm the death angel. Like in the Old Testament. Right?

MONA

Joe . . .

REILLY

You gonna shoot me? I'm waiting.

JOE

WHY DID YOU MOVE?

REILLY

Alright! Insurance.

JOE

What?

REILLY

You wouldn't pop me. But I was about seventy to ninety percent sure you'd clip another individual who sneezed. I simply had to get the dominoes moving, y' know.

JOE

Insurance.

REILLY

I had to buy your silence, man.

JOE

Ain't this a bitch? And there you sat with all that sugar talk 'bout how much you liked me.

REILLY

And I still do. Which is all the more of a reason to take out a policy.

SIMMS

They don't call whitey the devil for nothing.

JOE

Who'd I kill?

REILLY

You don't want to know.

JOE

Jesus . . .

SIMMS

Aw'ight! We're through with it. Now let's get to cuttin' this here pie, huh?

REILLY

Are we done with it, Joe? Wha' d'ya say?

(Silence. Joe puts away the gun)

JOE

What's up with this money?

REILLY

Like I said, I want half for the stake. The rest we divide amongst ourselves.

(They start to divide and bag the money)

SIMMS

Three ways.

MONA

Three?

SIMMS

Yep. Me, Slick over there, and Officer Reilly.

MONA

Well, I got t' eat.

SIMMS

What's yours is mine, baby. You know that.

MONA

I don't know shit. Except I want a cut.

SIMMS

For what, Mona?

MONA

I drove, goddammit!

SIMMS

Yes, you did. For your man and his partners in crime.

MONA

I want a cut, Simms. Like . . . fair and square.

SIMMS

No, it's more like the man and his other half.

MONA

Whichever way you want to put it –

SIMMS

You goddamn right! And seeing as I'm the half with the dick, what I say goes to the wall. We livin' under the law of the jungle, sweetheart. And in that jungle the lion is king. Ergo, the man. Which means whatever cut you got coming to you is mine!

MONA

Simms, you is so fulla shit . . .

SIMMS

Look go sit down and wait till the grown folks are finished.

MONA

You ain't got no business talkin' t' me that way –

SIMMS

BUTTON IT! And sit y' ass down before I kick it!

REILLY

Hey, c'mon. Lighten up. She's your girl. Throw her a few skins.

SIMMS

Fuck 'er, Reilly. The girl's livin' like a pig in shit as it is. She oughta be grateful.

JOE

He sounds more like a pimp every day, don't he?

SIMMS

Stay out my business, Slick, or I'll make you spend some of that cash, seeing as you ain't totin' no checks.

REILLY

Okay, knock it off. Everybody! This is my crib. You wanna start that shit, take it outside.

JOE

And let's not forget the other part of our agreement.

REILLY

Tomorrow I'll get in touch with Silvio, arrange a sit down with the three of us, and we'll discuss it.

SIMMS

And what's more, my smart, well-spoken brother – I believe I'll be taking a C-note from you.

JOE

For what?

SIMMS

Services rendered, Jack. This time, it's all over you. That's right – the proof is in the pudding, as they say.

JOE

What are you talking about, man?

SIMMS

Quit playing me for a fool, home. I see everything. In fact, I smelled it on 'er the very next morning – no need to run your peeps on her. She just as surprised by it as you.

(Joe laughs in spite of himself and hands Simms a hundred-dollar bill)

JOE

A "C" is all you want?

SIMMS

I ain't greedy.

JOE

You ain't no pimp either, right?

SIMMS

Don't got the heart, brother. Besides, this is my woman, man.

(They've finished dividing and bagging the money)

Alright, sweet meat. Let's roll.

(They suddenly notice Mona holding a gun on Simms)

Well, would you look at here.

MONA

We ain't rollin' nowhere till I get a cut.

REILLY

Mona, put the gun down, honey. And we'll talk about it. Okay?

MONA

Uh uh. We th'ough talkin'. Send some of the scratch this way, or somebodies' man won't walk from here t'night.

SIMMS

That's it, huh? This is the way you gon close it up? Gon shoot me over some dirty-ass money.

MONA

It ain't jus' the money, Simms. It's how you treat me. You didn't have no cause t' talk at me like you did.

SIMMS

Quit acting like somethin' used up and I might . . .

REILLY

Hey, man. C'mon. Let's see if we can diffuse this a little.

JOE

Ain't no need for this, Mona.

SIMMS

Should've left your skank ass down south, back in them sticks with that old peckerwood.

REILLY

Take it easy, man.

JOE

Mona be smart. Put the piece down.

SIMMS

Naw, let the bitch alone. Let 'er go ahead and get her satisfaction.

JOE

Simms shut up!

MONA

Hand me some money. Now! Or I swear, I'm gon put a hole in you.

SIMMS

Why don't you crawl over here and take it?

MONA

Hand it over, Simms!

SIMMS

And I say come and get it, bitch –

(She shoots him, again and again. He falls)

Look at you. Gon shoot me . . . right in front . . . of the other two dicks what had you. It's like a goddamn soap opera, ain't it?

(He laughs, then dies)

REILLY

You know what you did?

MONA

Satisfied myself.

REILLY

No, you little cunt! You brought down my whole operation!

MONA

T' hell which you – you dirty cop peckerwood! You won't 'bout t' do nothin' but sweat this and every other broke niggah in this city. You ain't no different form the worse of 'em. Jus' like Joe said.

REILLY

Oh, you've been listening to him, I see.

JOE

My word don't mean shit.

REILLY

You're right. In fact, nothing means shit, 'cause shit is what I got, thanks to you.

MONA

Watch yo' mouth wit' me, man.

REILLY

Or, what? You gonna shoot me, too?

MONA

I ain't above it.

JOE

Mona, you've done enough. Drop the piece and split. While you still can.

REILLY

She fucked up my operation! SHE AIN'T LEAVING HERE ALIVE!

JOE

Man, you never had no operation. Who you fooling –

(He is reaching for his gun when Mona shoots him. Reilly goes down)

REILLY! GODDAMMIT!

(Joe goes to him, attempting to revive him. He searches for a pulse. There is none)

Oh, God! Georgie . . . Georgie.

(The faint sound of Georgie's singing is heard)

MONA

I got t' watch myself. I'm in the big city now. Right?

JOE

I was gonna pull the trigger. And be done with it. Oh, Georgie, baby. I'm so sorry.

(The singing fades into silence)

MONA

It's a whole lotta money in them sacks. We can live good.

JOE

Mona – goddamn you.

MONA

Quit lookin' at me like that, Joe. Quit, I said. We . . . we can live good. I'll be your woman. And we can live good –

(She cries out suddenly as Joe grabs her neck and begins to strangle her. She laughs)

JOE

You think this is funny?

MONA

Yeah, it's funny. It's funny . . . cuz . . . cuz you a fool. I thought . . . I thought you was halfway smart. You . . . ain't nothin' . . . but a goddamn fool . . .

JOE

Shut up.

MONA

You could live good, Joe. But . . . you's a fool . . .

(His grip tightens. She is choking, letting out a few gasps of laughter. After a moment, silence. Then she is limp. He releases her and she falls. For a few beats, he surveys the dead around him, then sits in silence)

JOE

For two, maybe three hours, I sat and allowed my thoughts to possess me again.

(He rises and moves DS. Fade on Reilly's place)

At about three a.m., I left Reilly's place and took a cab to the nearest police station and turned myself in.

The numbers rackets stayed active for a few more years. Things were changing, however. Illegal gambling and betting continued, but in different areas. The culture and influence of the numbers game would dissipate in the black community, with a new generation under the spell of a bigger and more formidable monster – the lottery.

(Lights up on Georgie in a nightclub singing a slow, haunting "How High the Moon")

I recall when Georgie wanted to get our astrological chart read. I've never been into that shit, but it might have been okay, I guess, doing that with her. Sitting before an astrologer, looking up into the night sky to find how or where exactly we'd fit within all that darkness and light. In all that space above the distant moonlight as it beamed over us. As it beamed over Los Angeles.

(Georgie finishes the last bars. Fade on Joe)

GEORGIE

And I'd like to dedicate that to the most beautiful man in my life – Joe. I love you, baby.

(Slow fade. End of play)

