

# PERRY MASON

(Inspired by the early novels of Erle Stanley Gardner)  
Written by Fitz and Jones, Jones and Fitz

Pilot

Team Mason

3465 Larga Avenue  
Los Angeles, CA 90039

**FADE IN, REAL SLOW-LIKE:**

**EXT. TOWN OF GIRARD, LATE DECEMBER, 1931 - MORNING (D1)**

Gliding high over a row of telephone poles we see fat tracts of land with simple homes on each plot. In the diminishing background, a FARMER finishes burying something in his yard, the scrape of his shovel barely registering from this distance. Wait. Wait for it. A woman's voice. Electrified. Ensnared in the telephone wire. Becoming clear.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Has these stockings in a drawer. Pulls 'em out and says this is what they're wearing in Buenos Aires.

FRIEND'S VOICE

Ha.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Can you imagine if Jim heard that?

(laughs)

Out half the day in his red onion fields, burning my neck black, she's pulling out stockings from Buenos lah-dee-dah Aires.

**EXT. VENTURA BOULEVARD - DAY**

Following the telephone lines east but angled on the mom-and-pop shops lining the south side of the street.

WAITER'S VOICE

Was a good lunch crowd, boss. One of them real estate buses pulls up with a hissing engine. Fella with the straw hat buys twenty-five lunches, twenty-five Cokes while those suckers wait for another bus.

BOSS'S VOICE

Twenty-five Cokes, you don't say.

A roadside diner, and the silhouette of a young WAITER on a phone behind a cash register.

WAITER

It was something good... Turkey's looking a little gray. Could probably get another day out of it, but it's gray-gray.

**EXT. CAHUENGA PASS - MAGIC HOUR (N1)**

Still following the telephone lines but angled on the cars passing from small town to big city, big city to small town. Plymouths, Buicks, Fords...

SLIGHTLY DRUNK WOMAN'S VOICE

Davis 3-4876.

OPERATOR'S VOICE

Davis 3-4876. Putting your call through.

Some clicks. Some breathing.

SLIGHTLY DRUNK WOMAN'S VOICE  
(imitating the phone ring)  
Brrrrr... Brrrrr... Click, click.

DISPATCHER'S VOICE  
Red Top Cab.

SLIGHTLY DRUNK WOMAN'S VOICE  
I'd like a cab to San Marino.

We pass a BILLBOARD advertising the upcoming Olympic Games --  
"Los Angeles, The Athens Of The West!" -- then a glimpse of  
Hollywood. Bright. Dark. Both.

DISPATCHER'S VOICE  
We don't go there.

SLIGHTLY DRUNK WOMAN'S VOICE  
...You don't go to San Marino? Well,  
where do you go?

DISPATCHER'S VOICE  
We go to the moon. What do you want from  
me, lady?

**EXT. HAMMERSMITH STUDIO, HOLLYWOOD - EARLY EVENING**

Telephone lines outside the studio walls. In the background,  
the top of a movie set, a spotlight operator turning his  
equipment on something we can't see.

STUDIO HACK'S VOICE  
No. That line item's legit, it's just on  
the wrong books. There should be an "El  
Dracula" ledger somewhere there.

BEANCOUNTER VOICE  
There's two "Dracula"s?

STUDIO HACK'S VOICE  
We shoot the same movie on the same sets  
but with different crew, different  
actors, all of them speaking Mexican and  
we do it in the dead of night while the  
mighty whites are home snoozing away.

BEANCOUNTER VOICE  
Like a two-for-one thing?

STUDIO HACK'S VOICE  
Folks don't like reading subtitles in  
South America. "El Dracula," "Invisible  
Gringo." We're making a mint down there.

BEANCOUNTER VOICE  
Didn't do this at RKO, Mr. LeBaron.

STUDIO HACK'S VOICE  
Welcome to Hammersmith. We don't sleep.

**EXT. NEW CHINATOWN APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Around a corner third-floor apartment, through the window -- MADAM JIN, Chinese, late 30's, smokes, listens to the other voice on the phone. *Italics=Mandarin.*

MADAM JIN  
*You tell me a time. You tell me what you like. You give me a name.*

MAN'S VOICE  
*Jinggou.*

MADAM JIN  
*Not your real name.*

As the camera comes around to the other side of the window, a couple of WORKING GIRLS, Chinese, late teens/early 20's, sit waiting for work.

MAN'S VOICE  
*Oh. Um. Ming.*

MADAM JIN  
*Good.*

Long drag on that cigarette.

MADAM JIN (CONT'D)  
*Okay, Mister Ming. Tell me what you like.*  
 (looks at the girls)  
*We have an extensive menu.*

**EXT. CENTRAL AVENUE - NIGHT**

Well-dressed African-American men and women out having a good time on the liveliest street in the City of Angels. We push past a GIRL WAITING IN A CAR towards a PREGNANT GIRL in a pharmacy phone booth, listening to her man's voice.

PREGNANT GIRL  
 How 'bout Lorna?

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
 Lorna's alright, I guess.

PREGNANT GIRL  
 Or Lorraine. Or Lucy. I like Lucy.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
 You like them L's.

PREGNANT GIRL  
 Yeah.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
 Put that phone up there 'gainst ya belly.

PREGNANT GIRL  
Stupid... I'm in a booth... My sister's  
waiting in the car...

A moment.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
Do what your man says.

She looks around.

PREGNANT GIRL  
Okay. Here go.

She pulls up her blouse, puts the ear piece to naked stomach.  
He purrs on the other end. She gives a little laugh.

**EXT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES, ANGEL'S FLIGHT - NIGHT**

A TALL MAN IN A BLACK HAT, carrying something we can't quite  
make out, weaves his way through a bustling crowd towards the  
descending Funicular Railway of Angel's Flight.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
Now you two have done good so far. So you  
keep calm. Keep breathing right. It's  
almost over. You still with me?

We push past the Man In The Black Hat, rising to a lighted  
room on the third floor of a building next to the Railway.

VOICE OF MATTHEW DODSON  
Yeah, I'm here.

**EXT/INT. 356 OLIVE STREET, #308 - CONTINUOUS**

MATTHEW DODSON, looking sleepless, holding a phone up to his  
ear. EMILY DODSON paces behind him, between bouts of crying.

EMILY  
What are they saying now?

MATTHEW  
Shut up.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
You shouldn't talk to your wife that way.  
She's been through a lot...

MATTHEW  
Listen here...

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
No. YOU listen. That's all you do. You  
listen and you do exactly what the fuck I  
tell you to do or this ends real bad.

MATTHEW  
I'm listening.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 You been good so far, Mr. Dodson. Don't  
 mess this up.

MATTHEW  
 I said I'm listening.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 You put the money in a bag like I told  
 you to?

Matthew looks down at a suitcase of money.

MATTHEW  
 I put it in a suitcase.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 Does it got a handle?

MATTHEW  
 Of course it has a handle.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 How should I know, Mr. Dodson? I told you  
 to get a bag.

MATTHEW  
 It's got a handle.

He shuts the suitcase.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 You see that table behind you?

MATTHEW  
 (turning to look)  
 Yes.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 Put your fancy fucking suitcase with the  
 handle on that table.

MATTHEW  
 Not until I see my son.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 Big man... Alright. They're loading up a  
 car down below.

MATTHEW looks out and down to the Funicular car at the bottom  
 of the street. People getting off and on.

MATTHEW  
 Yeah.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 Your kid's on that car.

Matthew waves his wife over to the window. They clasp hands.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 We're gonna give you a look. You see the kid. You put the money on the table, you run up the street, get your kid off the car, don't look back and never say a word about it. We understand each other?

MATTHEW  
 (to Emily)  
 He's on the car.

EMILY  
 Oh god.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 Mr. Dodson...

MATTHEW  
 Yes. Yes, I'm here.

EMILY  
 Please don't hurt him!

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 ...you gonna tell her to shut up again?

Dodson. Raging. Impotent.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 Yeah, you don't deserve a woman like that.

The car approaches the window. The Tall Man in the Black Hat is on the side of the car, bouncing something on his lap.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE (V.O.)  
 Stay calm. Here it comes.

As the car passes the window, the Tall Man in the Black Hat turns the object in his lap to the window. It's one-year-old CHARLIE DODSON, wrapped in a blanket, his blue eyes staring out at his parents.

EMILY  
 Charlie!

The Tall Man in The Black Hat quickly turns the baby away as the car heads up the tracks to the street above. From outside the window we see Matthew drop the phone, pull Emily toward the door. He leaves the suitcase on the table, pushes Emily out the door and slams it behind him.

**EXT. OLIVE STREET - MOMENTS LATER**

Matthew and Emily Dodson frantically running to get to the Angel's Flight Olive Street stop.

**EXT. ANGEL'S FLIGHT, OLIVE STREET - CONTINUOUS**

They push past people and come around to the car almost totally unloaded.

They see a bundle in a blanket in one of the last rows. They race to it. It's Charlie! Emily picks him up, hugs him! Overcome with joy, relief!

EMILY

Oh Charlieboy, Charlieboy! Such a brave boy for not crying!

Matthew looks around for any sign of the man who left him there. Behind him the car door of an ESSEX PHAETON across the street slams shut, the car pulls out, turns the corner, side swipes a trolley car as it speeds away. A crowd gathers around, Emily pulls the baby back for a second. Charlie is unmoving, his eyes frozen wide open. Something is not right.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Matthew.

Matthew turns back. A strange look comes over Emily's face.

CLOSE-UP on Charlie's face. The eyes aren't frozen.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP on Charlie's eyes. The eyes have been STITCHED OPEN.

Matthew grabs the baby from Emily.

EMILY (CONT'D)

What's wrong with him, Matthew?

Matthew starts hyperventilating, unwraps the blanket around the boy. As he does, we see Charlie's limbs and torso are all black and blue, dangling, lifeless...THE BABY IS DEAD.

EMILY SCREAMS.

SMASH CUT TO:

**EXT/EST. PTOMAINÉ TOMMY'S - NIGHT**

Iconic greasy spoon from LA's past. WE OVERHEAR two men talking: one is PETE STRICKLAND, 58, likable and gruff.

STRICKLAND (O.S.)

Okay, Mason, here's one for you: "Are you being cheated of Life's big thrills?"

**INT. PTOMAINÉ TOMMY'S - SAME**

The late dinner crowd is just thinning out. On a nearby table sits a ketchup bottle dressed up as SANTA CLAUS; the salt-and-pepper shakers are made up like his REINDEER. An OVERWORKED WAITRESS swaps them out for regular, non-festive containers.

MASON'S VOICE (O.S.)

Probably.

STRICKLAND (O.S.)

"Love? Romance? Excitement?"



And now, Dear Reader, with the rough scrape and spark of a match, here's our first look at PERRY MASON. He has a distinct manner of getting his nicotine, with the cigarette pinched between thumb and index finger, almost slyly, with the ember palmed.

MASON  
Never heard of them.

Strickland looks up from his newspaper.

STRICKLAND  
Mayhaps you should read "Lipstick Girl,"  
by Edna Robb Webster.

MASON  
Never heard of her.

STRICKLAND  
Author of "Dad's Girl," "Joretta," and  
"Love Preferred."

MASON  
Oh, *that* Edna Robb Webster.

A LARGE FAT MAN at another table belches loudly. Mason watches him a moment, sips his coffee.

STRICKLAND  
"Beautiful Marcia Moyer, who thought she was being deprived of life's thrills, seeks and finds adventure in its most dramatic forms."

The Waitress replaces their ketchup, salt and pepper, drops the check. Mason clocks her name tag: "HOLLY."

STRICKLAND (CONT'D)  
"She also finds LOVE: a love that you'll want to read about. Don't miss this great new serial." Hey, it begins today!

Mason enters the expense into a small notebook with a well-used stub of pencil. Strickland looks through his newspaper.

MASON  
Forty cents for two coffees and toast.

The Fat Man belches again. Strickland sniffs, winces.

STRICKLAND  
Christ, my eyes are stinging.

MASON  
How many gallons you throw in the truck?

STRICKLAND  
Six.

MASON

Six gallons gas is a dollar two. Plus three days of meals. Plus another two days' gas, plus cigarettes...

STRICKLAND

My bonus.

MASON

Plus operative expense, and newspapers...

Strickland finds the section, reads...

STRICKLAND

Aha! "The Pappe and Son department store, largest mercantile establishment in Mitchefield, was arousing itself noisily to meet the activities of the day..."

MASON

If you don't stop that right now, I will stab you with this pencil.

STRICKLAND

But then you couldn't write in your diary.

Mason grunts. Strickland smiles, reads on. Mason watches "Holly" drop the Fat Man's check, slip him a folded napkin.

STRICKLAND (CONT'D)

"It shook and dusted and removed white cambric shrouds from bulgy forms, rearranged and settled itself into its most attractive mien. That is, the scores of girls who bustled and whisked and--"

The Fat Man unleashes an incredible belch, coughs on the regurgitated material and starts squeezing out of his booth, ignoring the napkin.

MASON

The White Star Liner is setting sail.

Strickland folds up his paper as they casually rise. Mason deftly grabs it from him.

STRICKLAND

Aw, come on.

MASON

Uh-uh. Bye-bye, Edna.

He tosses it aside.

STRICKLAND

Don't forget the check.

MASON

Thinking we should start splitting these.

STRICKLAND

Oh no, when a private investigator says "plus expenses," those are the fucking expenses. I'm only the humble operative. And I'm doing all the driving.

Bells jingle as the Fat Man leaves the diner.

MASON

Yeah, but it's my fucking truck.

Strickland dons his hat, heads out.

STRICKLAND

I wouldn't brag about it. In fact, you should be paying me to drive that thing.

MASON

I am paying you.

Mason drops some change on the table. Purposely passing the Fat Man's table as he exits, Mason DEFTLY SNAGS the folded napkin/message left there by "Holly."

**EXT. PTOMAINE TOMMY'S - MOMENTS LATER**

Mason watches the Fat Man waddle through the lot and climb into a BEAUTIFUL 1930 CADILLAC V-16. He examines the FOLDED NAPKIN, sees... A LIPSTICK KISS WITH HOLLY'S NAME AND PHONE NUMBER. The Fat Man glides away in his Caddy as Strickland pulls up in a WELL-USED 1920s MODEL-T MILK TRUCK. Mason looks from the cherry Caddy to his truck. An OLD DAIRY LOGO has been mostly sanded off the side of the poor thing.

**INT. MASON'S MILK TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER**

Shot from the "back seat" (empty milk cans and a few old crates) as they tail the Fat Man.

STRICKLAND

How would she know what he's driving?

Ahead of them, the Fat Man makes a turn.

MASON

Maybe she saw him pull in. Going left.

Strickland follows. They pass MEN LOITERING on the corner. One wears a sign: I AM FOR SALE. I MUST HAVE WORK OR STARVE.

STRICKLAND

Nuts to that. Got nothing to do with his Cadillac. Chubby Carmichael is a star.

MASON

Was a star. A silent star.

STRICKLAND

He's still in pictures.

MASON  
Gone the way of *cambric shrouds and mercantiles*. You hear his voice?

STRICKLAND  
So it's a little high. So what?

MASON  
A little?

STRICKLAND  
How many napkin kisses from lonely waitresses are you getting?

MASON  
'Cause I drive this old milk truck, and he's got that--

STRICKLAND  
Ain't the car. Silver screen has the profound effect on female genitalia.

Chubby -- that's the Fat Man's name -- makes another turn.

MASON  
Not lately it hasn't. Three days of following him from meal to meal. I'm going broke on this case.

Strickland follows.

STRICKLAND  
So tell the bastards you quit. I don't cotton to this studio chicanery anyway. A contract is a contract. I mean, morals clause? This entire city needs a shot in the dick.

MASON  
Billboards say we're the Athens of the West.

Chubby pulls up in front of the VISTA MOVIE THEATER.

STRICKLAND  
Hey, remember that bit Chubby did in *Firehouse Flunkies*? With the hose? Riding the damn thing like he was at the rodeo. Never thought I'd stop laughing.

Bright lights rim the impressive marquee with the evening's offerings emblazoned in huge letters: HELL DIVERS, TONIGHT OR NEVER, and SEIZE THE HAY. They watch Chubby enter the theater. Mason pulls out his notebook, writes.

MASON  
(to himself)  
Two theater tickets, sixty cents...

STRICKLAND  
Put down red licorice and a box of corn.

**INT. VISTA THEATER, BALCONY - LATER**

THE AUDIENCE ROARS WITH LAUGHTER. ON SCREEN is the comedy feature SEIZE THE HAY. At the moment, a man wearing the top half of a horse costume is riding a real horse, while the man wearing the bottom half sprints along behind. Funny stuff.

Mason watches from the back of the house. He catches Strickland's eye. Strickland nods towards Chubby Carmichael, who is seated a few rows away. Chubby is having a great time, laughing and eating from a large box of Boston Baked Beans candy. Chubby perks up even more, as...

ON SCREEN we see none other than Chubby himself enter in a bit part as a beleaguered stable hand. Mason watches Chubby chortle and eat as ON SCREEN, the men in the horse costume kick Chubby in the ass every time he turns his back. Chubby can't seem to figure out which horse is kicking him.

Mason watches Chubby drink in his moment. Chubby is overjoyed, happily mouthing along to his repeated, SQUEAKY-VOICED CATCHPHRASE "Hey, cut it out now!" every time another kick is delivered. Strickland roars; Mason doesn't.

MASON (PRE-LAP)  
(on phone)  
Mason here, any messages?

**EXT. VISTA THEATER, PHONE BOOTH - LATER**

Find Mason in a phone booth outside the theater. As he talks, he eyes a particular BILLBOARD across the street. RADIANT ASSEMBLY OF GOD proclaims: "THE AGE OF MIRACLES IS HERE AGAIN! WHAT WAS TRUE IN THE BIBLE IS TRUTH AGAIN!"

VOICE OF WOMAN (V.O.)  
Evening, Mr. Mason. Frank Dillon's office called. Said to remind you about court tomorrow and to wear your nice suit and not the, quote, shitty one, unquote.

A HOMELESS MAN approaches, mimes smoking: *Got a cigarette?*  
Mason pats his pockets, finds his pack.

MASON ON PHONE  
What else?

It's half full. He pulls a cigarette out and gives it to the Homeless Man who nods and smiles: *Thanks, brother.*

VOICE OF WOMAN (V.O.)  
E.B. Jonathan's called twice, says he has some work for you and that you should come by his office immediately.

MASON ON PHONE  
 What sort of work?  
 (to Homeless Man)  
 Hey, wait.

He takes the lone cigarette back, hands him the whole pack.

VOICE OF WOMAN (V.O.)  
 I'm sure I wouldn't know. Also, the  
 County Clerk called again. Wants to talk  
 about your overdue property taxes from  
 years 1928, 1929, 19--

MASON ON PHONE  
 (cutting her off)  
 Yeah, okay, thanks, Irma.

VOICE OF WOMAN (V.O.)  
 (on phone)  
 It's Dianne.

MASON  
 (as he hangs up)  
 Yeah, I know.

**INT. MASON'S MILK TRUCK - LATER**

In the back again as they tail Chubby, this time with Mason  
 behind the wheel.

STRICKLAND  
 The fuckin' horse is kicking him in the  
 ass! How can you not find that hilarious?

MASON  
 I grew up on a farm.

STRICKLAND  
 You got no joy in your life, Mason.

MASON  
 I enjoy you.

STRICKLAND  
 It's your workload. Juggling three, four  
 cases... No time to get properly drunk,  
 no time to get properly fucked.  
 (lighting a cigarette)  
 My wife took off on me, I'd be living it  
 up, brother, I can tell you that.

MASON  
 She didn't take off on me.

STRICKLAND  
 Point is she's gone.

MASON  
 She didn't just take off.

STRICKLAND

Keep the details for the box score,  
buddy. Linda's gone. And you're free.  
That's the fucking point.

She is gone. Can't argue that. Mason drives, churns.

MASON

The steering feels all loose. What the  
hell did you do to it?

STRICKLAND

I didn't do anything. It's a wheel. It  
turns. That's what it does.

MASON

It's loose.

He wiggles the wheel. The truck doesn't move off course.

STRICKLAND

What the hell are we doing in a milk  
truck anyway? Talk about conspicuous.

MASON

Don't say anything bad about my truck.

STRICKLAND

See, I've developed a theory about cars--

MASON

Please, no, don't.

STRICKLAND

The only kind of a car for a detective to  
have is one common enough so it doesn't  
attract attention...

MASON

I asked you nicely.

STRICKLAND

...dependable enough so it'll go  
anywhere, and if a man wants to crowd  
someone into a curb, one more dent in the  
fender doesn't mean anything.

MASON

But you talked anyway. And now I know  
your stupid theory about cars.

STRICKLAND

It's fucking scientific.  
(quiet, then...)  
Heading right.

Chubby makes the turn. Mason follows.

MASON  
Into the hills?

STRICKLAND  
Where you going, Chubby?

Chubby pulls up in front of a LARGE HOME. Mason parks a safe distance behind him. Chubby clambers out of his car. Swigs from a pocket flask. Tidies himself up a bit as he heads to the front door.

MASON  
Wonder who's at home?

The door is opened by a STUNNING REDHEAD in a bathrobe.

STRICKLAND  
Wow.

MASON  
Hello, Red.

Mason reaches his camera out of the back seat, readies it. The Redhead grabs Chubby by the crotch and pulls him inside.

STRICKLAND  
I don't think Mrs. Chubby is going to like this very much.

MASON  
Mrs. Chubby isn't paying us.

Mason climbs out of the car. Eyes Strickland's smoke.

MASON (CONT'D)  
And don't be ashing all over my seats.

Mason heads for the house. Strickland ashes on the seat.

**EXT. LARGE BEVERLY HILLS HOME - MOMENTS LATER**

Mason, in a crouch, eases through the shadows along the side of the house. Faint music emanates from somewhere inside. He stands to peek into the living room window, SEES--

An empty room.

Mason sneaks along to the next window, snagging himself on the rose bush beneath it. He winces, sucks his finger. Raises himself up on his tiptoes to PEER INTO THE BATHROOM--

It's also empty.

However, light spills through a doorway on the far wall. Shadowy figures dance across the floor. A plate breaks, followed by laughter. Mason looks back along the house towards the kitchen. As he starts off, he snags himself on the rose bush again.



Mason makes his way to the kitchen windows. Not only are they too high for him to see into, the blinds are down. Mason looks around for something to stand on. Nothing.

Mason creeps around to the back porch. He can't see anything, but can definitely HEAR the CLANKING OF PLATES and MOANING. He tries the door. It's locked. Fuck it. Mason deftly picks the lock and eases the door open...

**EXT. LARGE BEVERLY HILLS HOME, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER**

Mason tiptoes through the kitchen. The MOANING GETS LOUDER. There's also another noise. A sort of SNUFFLING. Mason slinks to a SWINGING DOOR, cracks it, LOOKS INTO...

**EXT. LARGE BEVERLY HILLS HOME, DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Chubby Carmichael sits at the dining room table, NAKED. Food dribbles off of his chin as he chews. On top of the table, also naked, is the Redhead. Food is smeared across her chest. She takes a handful of cake and mashes it between her legs. Chubby licks his chops and dives in. She moans in ecstasy.

CUT TO:

**INT./EXT. MASON'S MILK TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER**

Where Strickland is half dozing. SUDDENLY, A WOMAN'S SCREAM PIERCES THE QUIET NIGHT. Strickland jolts awake, SEES--

Mason RUNNING FOR HIS LIFE.

MASON  
Start the truck!

A NAKED, AND FULLY ERECT, CHUBBY CARMICHAEL ERUPTS THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR IN HOT PURSUIT. Strickland stares, awed.

MASON (CONT'D)  
Start the goddamn truck!

Strickland snaps to and fumbles to start the goddamn truck as Mason yanks the side door open, leaps in, slams it shut.

CHUBBY  
(loudly squeaking)  
I'm gonna fucking kill you,  
motherfuckers!

The back window EXPLODES. Strickland slams the truck into gear, guns the engine and takes off. Mason, covered in sweat and glass, rises in the back holding A MAN'S HUGE LOAFER.

MASON  
He threw his fucking shoe at me.

STRICKLAND  
(yelling out the window)  
Chubby, you glorious bastard! I'm your  
biggest fan!

Mason drops the shoe, reaches for his notebook.

MASON  
How much you think a window costs?

CLOSE ON Mason as he scribbles his latest expense:

STRICKLAND (O.S.)  
Joyless.

EXT. VANOWEN AIRFIELD, GUARD GATE - DAWN (D2)

BERT, African-American, 40's, guards the gate from his booth. And by "guard," we mean he reads the Obits from the paper, and doesn't look up from them unless he's inspired. From a long, well-worn path, Mason's truck, with a groggy Mason alone in it, comes chugging up. Bert is not inspired.

MASON  
Evening, Bert.

BERT  
Something wrong with your watch, Mr. Mason?

MASON  
'Cause it's morning.

BERT  
'Cause it's morning. Good morning, Mr. Mason.

MASON  
Can you open the gate?

BERT  
I can if you say the word.

MASON  
It's late, Bert.

BERT  
It's early, Mr. Mason.

MASON  
The word is beans.

Bert looks up from his paper, gets out of his booth and goes to open the gate.

BERT  
Beans, beans, and a side of greens. What the world can't see is it's *all* in the beans.

He unlatches the gate. A PLANE is coming in overhead.

BERT (CONT'D)

One of your girls went loose again last night. You need to do some fencework, Mr. Mason.

Mason drives into the airfield, following the worn path. He watches the plane land in the distance, as he pulls up to a decrepit Victorian House.

**EXT. MASON'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Next to the house is a barn that reads MASON DAIRY in lettering a couple of decades old. Mason pulls his truck up beside two identical trucks save for the Mason Dairy logo that hasn't been sanded off. Neither looks like it runs, having been cannibalized for parts; the farm itself, a vestige of Mason's family past, is visibly run-down.

FROM OVERHEAD we see the house is surrounded by the airfield. The only farm that didn't sell.

Mason gets out of his truck, puts his camera on the roof. He goes to his mailbox. A well-traveled BROWN PAPER PACKAGE sits on the ground. He picks it up. We see it's addressed to Theodore Mason with a Fresno address and "REFUSED FOR POSTAGE DUE, RETURN TO SENDER" stamped on it (a glimpse of some Christmas wrapping paper through the torn packaging.) Mason thinks 'Fuck'. He opens the mailbox grabs a few bills, and a *third* notice from the County Clerk's Office. Fuck. He looks over and sees a PILOT hopping out of the plane, and a crew beginning to unload the plane's cargo. The Pilot walks toward the airfield's speakeasy, the HAPPY BOTTOM RIDING CLUB, still somewhat boisterous at this hour. The Pilot takes off a leather flight helmet, revealing LONG BLACK HAIR: turns out the Pilot's a woman -- LUPE BURKE, you'll meet her later -- and she's holding a couple bottles of hooch up high as the bar greets her with some woo-hoos and hot damns. Mason thinks about heading over, then sees his COW, HELVETIA, tied to a tree. Helvetia looks at him as if to say, "Is This The Life We're Supposed To Be Living?"

**INT. MASON'S MILK FARM, BARN - LATER**

Mason walks Helvetia into the barn. Another Cow, MARTHA, looks at him as if to say, "I've Been Waiting For My Food For Hours, Asshole. Fuck You." Mason bales hay. Mason pumps water into a trough. Mason mucks shit into the massive shitpile.

**INT. MASON'S HOUSE - LATER THAT MORNING**

Mason walks through his house with his camera, puts the RETURN TO SENDER PACKAGE and mail on the table next to some old food. Hangs his hat and coat wherever he feels like it. Goes to the wood-burning fireplace in the middle of the room, opens the hatch, puts his gun in it, kicks the hatch shut, heads upstairs.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

There's a hole in the roof where a plane wheel crashed through it. How do we know that? The plane wheel is still there, covered in bird shit. He climbs around the plane wheel, past the master bedroom, to get to his bedroom.

INT. MASON'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Smallish room. Mason drops his camera on the bed. Walks over to his Victrola, cranks it. A high school diploma, an impressive amount of books, a STUFFED OWL, and two photos on the wall: a younger Mason, in US Army Officer's uniform; and another, with his wife and a baby on his lap. He places a needle on the 78 already there. As Lonnie Johnson's "Uncle Ned, Don't Use Your Head" plays, Mason lays out a new suit for the coming day. Scratches out a mustard stain on a lapel. He takes off his shirt, revealing a 79th Infantry Cross Of Lorraine Tattoo. He walks to the window, lights a cigarette. Another PLANE lands in the distance. He looks back at his camera.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - HOURS LATER

POPS of the Developed Chubby Photographs hang in a Grand Master Bedroom converted into a makeshift dark room. Pans of developing fluid on the bed. A HAND pulls down one of the more explicit photos, revealing a faded needlepoint Bible verse behind it, which reads "BLOOM WHERE GOD PLANTS YOU." The needlepoint is knocked crooked by the motion; the wall is faded around it: it has hung here a long time.

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Mason, pants around his ankles, snoring on his toilet.

E.B. (O.S.)

I'd have said it was over when Talkies came...

Mason cracks open his eyes. He stares up at ELIAS BIRCHARD JONATHAN, 70's, distinguished lawyer and on-again/off-again employer of intrepid detectives, looking at a photograph.

E.B. (CONT'D)

...but clearly the man still has a lot to offer the world.

He thrusts the photo at Mason. Sizable Chub on Chubby.

MASON

E.B.

E.B.

You don't call, you don't call a second time, a third...

MASON

How'd you get in here?

Mason attempts to pull up his pants. He's stuck in the toilet ring.

E.B.  
The magic word is beans.

MASON  
He just gave you the magic word?

E.B.  
I'm a very good lawyer, you forget that sometimes.

MASON  
...Can you help me? My legs are asleep.

**INT. MASTER BEDROOM, HALLWAY & BEDROOM - MORNING**

E.B. looking out of a window: a plane landing, another taking off. Mason pulls up blinds, and takes down the four most salacious of the Chubby photographs he developed earlier.

E.B.  
At some point you gotta admit this isn't working out.

MASON  
I'm holding out for the right price.

E.B.  
On a two-cow dairy in the middle of an airport?

MASON  
I was here first.

E.B.  
There's a hole in your roof and a wheel in your hallway. I'm gonna speak for the dead now and say, your parents didn't want this for you. You got pans on their bed.

MASON  
What do you want, E.B.?

E.B.  
Herman Baggerly called me yesterday.

Mason shrugs, heads to the hallway. E.B. follows.

E.B. (CONT'D)  
Herman Baggerly. Major player, boy-o. Lumber, real estate, radio stations. All sorts of this and that. Hell, one of the fattest bank accounts in the city.

Mason steps over the wheel, heads for the bedroom. E.B. steps over the wheel, following.

MASON  
So what's he doing with you then? Did he  
knock up a girl scout?

E.B.  
He's a religious man.

MASON  
Oh, a nun fucker.

Mason puts the photographs into a manila folder. Starts  
putting on the suit he laid out on the bed.

E.B.  
Pentecostal, actually. One of those shout-  
and-stompers over in Edendale. Friend of  
his had some trouble. Police involved.

MASON  
And you need me, why?

E.B.  
Don't know yet, but he hinted as much.  
3pm at my office.

MASON  
I don't know, busy day. The Chubby Thing.  
I'm in court.

E.B.  
He's major. Good for both of us.

MASON  
Is he looking to buy a dairy?

E.B. gestures to the disarray of Mason's home.

E.B.  
This is not a dairy. This is a denial.  
For one of the most meticulous,  
perceptive, dedicated professionals I  
know...

MASON  
I don't know how to mail a package.

E.B.  
You bewilder me, Son. 3pm. And wear your  
good suit.

E.B. heads out.

MASON  
This is my good suit.

Mason curses, glances out the window -- where he spies HELVETIA, the cow, making another break for the collapsed spot in his fence. OFF Mason, thinking, "Fuck..."

CUT TO:

**EXT/EST. HAMMERSMITH STUDIO - LATER**

Two low-level studio MAINTENANCE MEN are going down a line of posters on the exterior wall: one RIPS down posters for the last shitty Hammersmith picture; the other sloppily PLASTERS up new ones for the studio's newest shitty pic.

MASON (PRE-LAP)  
Perry Mason to see Walt LeBaron.

**INT. HAMMERSMITH STUDIO - LEBARON'S OFFICE, ANTEROOM - SAME**

A GUM-CHEWING GAL looks up from her FAN MAG. She pops her gum. Gestures vaguely.

GUM GAL  
Coffee's free if you want some.

MASON  
Sure, that'd be great. Thanks.

He waits for her to get it. She gives him an "as if" smile, pops her gum, points to a side table hosting a large urn.

As Mason makes his way through the ACTORS awaiting their auditions, we may note some ICONIC GESTURES AND POSES being struck by these sides-wielding hopefuls. We may also notice that THEY ARE ALL SPEAKING SPANISH.

Mason pours himself a cup of coffee, turns, and nearly dumps it on himself as he's confronted with the infernal eyes of COUNT DRACULA himself. Well, MEXICAN DRACULA at any rate. *Italics=Spanish.*

MEXICAN DRACULA  
*You're too late. Dracula's blood is  
already flowing in Miss Seward's veins.*

We now realize we are in a roomful of Mexican Draculas practicing their lines. Mason shakes hot coffee off his hand, heads back to Gum Gal at the reception desk.

MASON  
I don't have all day to play around.  
Maybe you could let Mr. LeBaron know that  
I'm about to leave.

She pops her gum, lays down her FAN MAG, grabs the phone.

GUM GAL ON PHONE  
Hey Midge, it's Carol again. This Mason  
character says he's about to leave.

Mason spots something in the FAN MAG. It's A PICTURE OF A YOUNG UP-AND-COMING ACTRESS. He takes the mag, stares.

GUM GAL ON PHONE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Sure thing, Midge. Thanks, hon.

On Mason, focused, wheels turning, a sly smile emerging.

GUM GAL  
Right through that door.

Mason heads off.

GUM GAL (CONT'D)  
Hey! My magazine!

As Mason disappears through the door with it.

GUM GAL (CONT'D)  
You spilled coffee on your tie, ya jerk.

CUT TO:

**A FULL-SCREEN PHOTOGRAPH**

Grainy, but unmistakably Chubby and Redhead "making love."

LEBARON (O.S.)  
Well, that's him alright.

The photograph is shifted behind -- REVEALING ANOTHER, MORE COMPROMISING ONE.

LEBARON (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
No question of, uh, moral relativity here. I mean that's uh, that's food.

Then ANOTHER, and ANOTHER. We recognize LeBaron as the STUDIO HACK whose voice we heard in the opening sequence.

**INT. HAMMERSMITH STUDIO, LEBARON'S OFFICE - DAY**

A bigwig's set-up. Producer WALT LEBARON leans on his huge desk, looking through the photos. Mason licks spit onto his handkerchief, tries to work on the coffee-stained tie, eyes a gaudy framed poster for FRANKENSTEIN -- hung next to an equally-gaudy poster for EL MONSTRUO DE FRANKENSTEIN.

MASON  
Pumpkin pie. Pretty sure.

LeBaron drops the photos onto his desk.

LEBARON  
I blame his agent. I got nothing against the man myself, you understand. The bottom line makes bastards of us all.



MASON

I'm not here to judge anyone, Mr. LeBaron. I just want to get paid. You have any soda water? Got coffee on my...

LeBaron gestures towards a bar, picks up the phone.

LEBARON

I'll have someone cut you a check.  
 (on phone)  
 Business Affairs please, Midge.  
 (to Mason)  
 What was it we said? Two hundred?

Mason spritzes seltzer onto his hanky.

MASON

That's what we said. Of course that was for pictures of Chubby Carmichael. Those happen to be pictures of Margaret Fuller.

We HEAR A VOICE ON THE PHONE: "*Business Affairs. Hello?*"  
 Mason drops the Fan Mag in front of LeBaron.

LEBARON

You're gonna squeeze me on this?

"Hello?" Mason shrugs. LeBaron hangs up.

LEBARON (CONT'D)

How much did you have in mind?

MASON

Five hundred seems fair.

LEBARON

Don't be ridiculous.

MASON

Fine. Make it six. That serious enough?

LEBARON

You got a lot of fucking nerve.

Mason works on his stain.

MASON

Nerve... and these nasty, nasty pictures of your "up-and-coming" starlet.

LeBaron considers his position, sinks into his chair.

LEBARON

I would need to walk this up to Mr. Hammersmith.

Mason gathers the photos, starts out.

MASON  
You have my number.

LEBARON  
He's not going to like it.

MASON  
"Nothing is so painful to the human mind  
as a great and sudden change."

Off LeBaron's confusion, Mason points to Frankenstein.

MASON (CONT'D)  
Was a decent book before you went and  
fucked it up.

CUT TO:

**A STORAGE SLAB BEING PULLED FROM A MORGUE DRAWER**

The body of a DECOMPOSED STIFF, and a paper bag full of the clothes he came in with, exposed to the light as its slab is pulled out into the morgue viewing area.

**INT. CITY MORGUE - DAY**

VIRGIL SHEETS, late 30's, morgue attendant, excellent mustache, waits as Mason rifles through the bag of clothes.

VIRGIL  
How was your Christmas?

MASON  
Came and went.

Mason shakes his head: no good. Virgil shoves the slab back, they move on. Mason sees A UNIFORMED COP in the corner of the room, guarding a gurney with a tiny body underneath a sheet.

VIRGIL  
My wife's folks came by on the day. Her mom brought a fruitcake coulda been used by the Pharaohs. Kids cried when I made them eat it. You got a kid, right?

MASON  
Lives with his mom.

VIRGIL  
You spent Christmas with him, though, right?

MASON  
No.

VIRGIL  
How come?

MASON  
You lonely or something, Virgil?

Virgil takes the hint. He opens another slab, pulls out a YOUNG, SMILING BLUE-EYED STIFF.

MASON (CONT'D)  
He went out happy.

Mason goes through his clothes bag. Drab clothes and...

VIRGIL  
If happy is drowning in panties and a matching bra, yeah why not?

...some women's undergarments. Mason puts the bag back. Virgil closes the slab. On to the next one.

MASON  
(re: cop and gurney)  
And what's with that?

VIRGIL  
Kidnapping gone way wrong. Worst thing you've ever seen.

MASON  
Whaddya you know what I've seen?

Next: A LATINO STIFF WITH FLORAL TATTOO around his nipple. Mason looks through the paper bag, pulls out a tie, holds it up to his suit.

MASON (CONT'D)  
How's this?

VIRGIL  
I like it better than the suit.

Mason hands him two bits, looks over at the cop who stares right through him.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)  
I got an asphyxiation with a three-piece if you want...

Mason turns and walks out.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)  
...or you can be rude.

Virgil shuts the slab.

**INT. LOS ANGELES COUNTY COURTHOUSE - LATER THAT MORNING**

Mid-trial. JUDGE ROBERT ROSS, JURY, STENOGRAPHER, BAILIFFS, the whole nine yards. Haggard DEFENSE ATTORNEY FRANK C.

DILLON sits next to the DEFENDANT in neck brace and arm sling. PROSECUTOR FENTON BOSTWICK grills Mason who now wears the tie he acquired from the dead guy.

BOSTWICK

And Mr. Mason, in what capacity were you hired by the defense?

MASON

I was hired as a private investigator.

BOSTWICK

And is that, these "private investigations," the current means by which you earn a living?

MASON

You know it is, Fenton.

Judge Ross clears his throat, eyes Mason.

MASON (CONT'D)

Pardon me... I mean, Mr. Bostwick.

Mason gives Bostwick his best "go fuck yourself" smile.

BOSTWICK

Now, Mr. Mason... Do you remember saying to the police officers handling this case that you thought the men who assaulted the defendant were Mexican?

MASON

No.

BOSTWICK

Now I ask you, whether or not you remember making a statement to this effect, on that night when the police officers arrived there, that you thought the men who made the assault were in fact Mexican?

MASON

Mr. Bostwick, is it just me, or do you keep asking a question I've already answered?

Mason looks towards Frank C. Dillon, expecting an objection. Dillon seems occupied. Bostwick consults an official-looking piece of paper.

BOSTWICK

Okay, Mr. Mason, now I'd like to ask you about a more recent event. Am I correct in asserting that you were recently cited for assault? On a complaint filed by a Mr. Rutherford.

Mason turns to a dispassionate Judge Ross.

MASON  
This is irrelevant, your honor--

BOSTWICK  
I guess I can understand if you resent  
this line of questioning.

MASON  
What I resent is Alvin Rutherford showing  
up, for an eighth time, after I declined  
politely seven times, offering me pennies  
on the dollar for a home that my father  
built with his own hands.

BOSTWICK  
Tragic, Mr. Mason. But assault?

Mason turns to the jury.

MASON  
I threw a cowpie at him.

They crack up. Bostwick continues, unfazed.

BOSTWICK  
And would it be fair to call this sort of  
behavior a pattern?

MASON  
I don't often throw cowpies, so no.

Another laugh from the jurors. Bostwick smiles.

BOSTWICK  
That's funny. However, far less amusing,  
is the dishonorable end to your military  
career.

Bostwick gives the jurors a meaningful look.

MASON  
That has nothing to do with--!

BOSTWICK  
A blue discharge for conduct unbecoming.  
Would you care to elaborate, Mr. Mason?

MASON  
(to Frank C. Dillon)  
Hey Frank, feel free to jump in.

Frank C. Dillon finally rises.

DILLON  
Objection. Question of relevance.

MASON

You're goddamned right! What the shit, Frank?

JUDGE ROSS

Sustained. Watch the god talk, Mr. Mason.

BOSTWICK

Nothing further, your honor.

JUDGE ROSS

You may step down, Mr. Mason.

Mason stares daggers at Frank C. Dillon.

MASON

I'm not stepping down, until my personal affairs are stricken from the record. They've got nothing to do with--

JUDGE ROSS

Step down, Mr. Mason!

Mason hesitates, barely keeping it together. Then he steps down from the witness stand and stalks past Frank C. Dillon.

E.B. (PRE-LAP)

Judge Ross says you lost your cool. Four words from contempt of court?

**INT. E.B. JONATHAN'S OFFICE, DOWNTOWN - EVENING**

POPS of Frames on a wall: Copies of the Law Journal with pictures of E.B. on the cover. POP of a Brass Gavel Award from the local Bar Association.

E.B. sits across from an agitated Mason, sharing slugs of bourbon from a flask, copy of *Huckleberry Finn* on the desk.

E.B.

For one of Frank C. Dillon's pettifogging cases? Was that smart?

MASON

I do the dirty work. I find the stuff that gets his guy off... I look for a little protection on the stand, that's too much to ask?

E.B.

It was a low blow, yes, trying to impeach you that way. But Fenton had a dog of a case, he had to try something...

MASON

Fucking peanut vendor would have known to object.

There's a knock on the door.

E.B.

Come in!

E.B.'s secretary, DELLA STREET, 30's, unflappable, enters, carrying the mail and a new file.

DELLA

Take the bar if you think you could do better, he'll sponsor you.

MASON

Della thinks you need thicker doors, E.B.

DELLA

Or a quieter voice, Mr. Mason.

Mason smiles.

DELLA (CONT'D)

Mr. Baggerly is waiting for you outside.

E.B.

Bring him in, then stay and take notes.

MASON

Or marry me and never work a day in your life.

DELLA

But who'd milk the cows down on the farm?

She exits.

MASON

(mostly to himself)  
Actually the cows stopped making milk,  
so...

E.B. opens up *Huckleberry Finn* -- and conceals the flask in a hollowed-out hidey-hole inside it.

E.B.

Remember, he's a conservative man. Speak the King's English.

The office door opens up. Della escorts HERMAN BAGGERLY, 60's, dignified, well-dressed. She takes a seat in the corner with a pad of paper.

BAGGERLY

Elias.

E.B.

Herman. Good to see you again. This is my associate, Perry Mason.

MASON

How ya do?

Mr. Baggerly shakes Mason's hand awkwardly, unimpressed.

BAGGERLY  
You're a detective, Mr. Mason?

MASON  
I'm thinking of taking the bar, but for right now, yeah, it pays the bills.

E.B.  
Been working together for what is it, ten years now? Have a seat.

E.B. sits. Herman doesn't move.

E.B. (CONT'D)  
...Gave him his first job back from France, isn't that right, Perry? Have a seat, Herman. New chairs. New-ish.

Herman lets go of Mason's hand, takes a seat.

BAGGERLY  
You served overseas?

MASON  
How can we help you, Mr. Baggerly?

E.B.  
(shooting Mason a look)  
Mr. Mason was a well-respected officer in the army. Survived the Battle of the Argonne Forest.

The Argonne Forest. A bloodbath. Baggerly reconsiders Mason.

BAGGERLY  
It's not me who needs help, Mr. Mason.

He throws a newspaper on the desk. A headline: HORROR AT ANGEL'S FLIGHT. A sweet picture of Charlie Dodson.

BAGGERLY (CONT'D)  
Members of my church. Working people. An unspeakable act happened upon them and they're quite overwhelmed.

Mason picks up the paper.

BAGGERLY (CONT'D)  
And I don't trust the Los Angeles Police Department to handle it.

MASON  
You shouldn't.

The first thing Baggerly has liked outta Mason. E.B. nods to Della as Mason sits.



E.B.  
Tell us what you know, Herman.

INT. MASON'S MILK TRUCK - DAY

Mason drives E.B. and Della. Della is in the back, perched on an old milk can. She nearly goes flying out the door as Mason takes a turn, grinding the gears, still fighting that wheel.

E.B.  
Those new Chevrolets are pretty sharp.

Mason gives him a sideways glance. E.B. ignores him.

E.B. (CONT'D)  
Fifty horsepower, Stovebolt Six, modern design. An impressive machine.

MASON  
There's nothing wrong with my truck.

E.B.  
I hear the new Buicks have adjustable driver's seats.

DELLA  
And back seats, even.

MASON  
Listen, there's a, a, a commonly accepted scientific theory about the proper vehicle for use in, uh, covert activities requiring a certain degree of finesse--

DELLA  
You know there's a lotta glass back here?

MASON  
("Shut up.")  
Yes, thank you.

DELLA  
And a giant shoe.

E.B. sighs, shakes his head. As they arrive at the Dodsons', they find the road blocked by PRESS PHOTOGS with TRIPODS.

DELLA (CONT'D)  
Looks like the newshawks are hard at it.

E.B.  
Expected a circus, but held hope for some consideration.

The Photogs try to clear THE COPS, REPORTERS, and so forth loitering in the front yard out of their wide shot.

E.B. (CONT'D)  
Perhaps we should get out here and leave  
the parking to you.

E.B. and Della climb out.

MASON  
So I'm your chauffeur?

E.B.  
Not at all.

Slam goes the door. Della leans in the window.

DELLA  
It's just that there's a commonly  
accepted scientific theory about being  
seen in a crappy old milk truck.

E.B. and Della head towards the house. A COP WITH A BIG  
LADDER bumbles into the yard, adding to the chaos. The  
PHOTOGRAPHERS yell for him to "Get out of the way!" Mason sighs,  
HONKS at the roadblock.

**INT. DODSON HOUSE, DINING ROOM/LIVING ROOM - LATER**

Matthew Dodson and E.B. Jonathan sit across from DETECTIVES  
ENNIS and HOLCOMB. Della sits to the side, taking notes.  
Ennis is looking at a ransom note, encased in plastic. We can  
see \$100,000 on it.

HOLCOMB  
So you found this upstairs.

MATTHEW  
I told you, my wife did. I was at work.

HOLCOMB  
And she called you?

MATTHEW  
Yeah. Hysterical.

Mason slips into the room with his CAMERA, Holcomb eyes him.  
Mason's scan takes in the adjoining LIVING ROOM: armchair by  
the window, telephone on a table beside it. A sad-looking  
CHRISTMAS TREE, an angel slumped to one side perched on top.

ENNIS  
Why didn't either of you call the police?

MATTHEW  
Read the note. You can read, can't you?

E.B. puts a hand on Matthew's shoulder.

HOLCOMB  
So your wife finds the note, calls you.  
What did she do next?

MATTHEW  
How should I know? Ask her.

ENNIS  
We'll get to her in a minute.

Mason shoots Della a look, mouths: *Where is she?*

HOLCOMB  
You own a grocery store, yeah? Much money  
in that?

Della glances (indicates) upstairs. Mason sees the staircase  
beyond, on the far side of the living room. The others too  
distracted to notice, he ambles into the next room.

MATTHEW  
What?

HOLCOMB  
Nice house for a grocer. Can't be cheap  
to maintain.

MATTHEW  
What are you saying?

HOLCOMB  
How long's it take to get from the  
grocery store to here?

Matthew has had enough of Holcomb.

MATTHEW  
What the hell are you saying?!?

E.B.  
Easy, Matthew.

MATTHEW  
Are you suggesting I had something to do  
with it?!? The hell?!?

Mason stops near the window, eyeing the telephone, eyeing the  
chair. He lifts his camera to snap a picture when he spies a  
NEIGHBOR puttering around in the house across the way.

ENNIS (FROM THE NEXT ROOM)  
We're just covering all the angles, Mr.  
Dodson.

The Neighbor turns and they glare at each other a moment.  
Mason, almost reflexively, gives her a HALF-WAVE. She scowls,  
and just before she angrily draws her drapes on him, he SNAPS  
A PHOTO.

MATTHEW (FROM THE NEXT ROOM)  
Fuck you! Where was I, who saw me, what  
time? I didn't kidnap my son! I didn't  
murder my own son!

E.B. (FROM THE NEXT ROOM)  
No one is saying you did.

Matthew practically leaps at Holcomb. Nobody pays Mason any attention as he casually glides past the Christmas tree and heads upstairs.

MATTHEW  
He is! He's dancing around it, but that's what he fucking thinks!

E.B.  
Maybe this would be a good time to take a little break. That sound okay to you, Detective Holcomb?

HOLCOMB  
Why not? I could use some air.

As E.B. leads him into the kitchen:

MATTHEW  
It's not right. Treat a man like that. You can't, you can't just...

E.B.  
Easy now. Let's get a cold glass of water, huh?

**INT. DODSON HOUSE, UPSTAIRS LANDING - MOMENTS LATER**

Mason reaches the top of the stairs, finds himself face to face with an alcove, in which stands a STATUE of a woman, arms spread. She's the icon of the Radiant Assembly of God: Sister Alice McKeegan. Mason TAKES A PHOTO, then glances through a doorway at the end of the hall where he SEES--

Emily Dodson, sitting on the edge of her bed, lost in the momentary peace of a cigarette. She doesn't notice him.

He watches her a moment, TAKES A PHOTO then heads into...

**INT. DODSON HOUSE, CHARLIE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

A typical 1931 nursery. Crib. Toys. A dresser. Happy pictures on the walls. A light coat of fingerprint dust covers just about everything in sight, giving the place a morbid air.

Mason looks in the crib. Little TURTLES carved into the wood. A TURTLE-PATTERNED blanket still askew from where Charlie was sleeping the night he was taken. Mason TAKES A FEW PHOTOS. He absently rests his hands on the crib's rail, getting dust on them. Wiping them on his jacket, he moves towards the window Charlie was taken through. It's still open. Dust covers the sill and frame. Mason runs a finger through it, leaving a trail, then looks absently out the window, in thought.

Mason LIGHTS A CIGARETTE, tosses the spent match out the window, smokes with butt pinched and the ember "cupped."

On the wall near the window are SEVERAL BABY PICTURES. Little Charlie looks cute in a few "studio" shots. Another picture on the wall seems a little odd and catches Mason's eye:

CHARLIE PROPPED ON A CHAIR IN THE MIDDLE OF A PLOWED FIELD.

Mason takes the picture down for a closer look. Furrowed earth, rough fence, wooden chair and Charlie, ON SOME FARM SEEMINGLY IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.

EMILY (O.S.)

You the man that works with Mr. Jonathan?

Mason turns to find Emily standing just inside the doorway.

MASON

Yes, ma'am. Perry.

EMILY

I'm Emily Dodson, Charlie's mother.

She stares at the picture in his hand. He rehanges it.

MASON

Offer you a cigarette, Mrs. Dodson?

EMILY

If you promise not to tell my husband.

Mason shakes one out for her. Lights her up. She smokes the "normal" way, cig gripped between index and middle fingers.

MASON

Wouldn't dream of it.

EMILY

Thank you.

He casually studies her. She studies him right back.

EMILY (CONT'D)

You were in the war, weren't you?

(off Mason)

The way you hold your cigarette. Hiding the ember in your palm.

Suddenly aware of his habit, he smiles in acknowledgement.

MASON

Guess I'm still trying not to give them something to shoot at.

He changes his grip to match hers.

MASON (CONT'D)

Your husband over there too?

EMILY  
 No. I have a friend who...  
 (then)  
 I really wish they'd let me clean in  
 here. All this dust. Can't help feeling  
 that it reflects poorly on me somehow.

She straightens the picture Mason rehung.

MASON  
 I don't think poorly of you in the  
 slightest.

EMILY  
 God does. That's why I'm being punished.  
 That's why he's left me all alone.

MASON  
 No family to come support you, or...?

The fall of her face means "no." Mason nods. Then:

EMILY  
 Do you have children, Mr. Perry?

An uncomfortable question. Mason shifts away from Emily,  
 busies himself with a shelf of Charlie's knick-knacks.

MASON  
 It's Mason. Perry's my first name. And I  
 have a son.

EMILY  
 What's his name?

MASON  
 Theodore... Teddy.

Mason picks up a small taxidermy turtle. "L.A. Alligator  
 Farm" is written on the bottom.

EMILY  
 How old?

MASON  
 Nine in February.

EMILY  
 Hold him close, Mr. Mason.

Good advice. Currently impossible for Mason.

MASON  
 I will. Moment I see him.  
 (then)  
 A Turtle from the Alligator Farm. That's  
 funny.

EMILY

Charlie likes turtles. Liked. How about your boy?

MASON

Fire trucks.

EMILY

I bet nine is a good age for a boy. Charlie was just a little baby. And they took him. And they killed him.

Mason doesn't know what to say. She wipes her eyes.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Mr. Holcomb says he'll find the men that did it. You think that's true?

He searches for words, a little too long. A DULL THUMP and NOISE OUTSIDE draw Mason's attention to the open window. Emily nearly chokes on her sobs as she rushes from the room. Mason watches her go. Another THUMP...

He leans out, sees: THE LADDER BEING SET AGAINST THE HOUSE.

Reporters and Photographers are gathered below, mocking up a "crime scene" shot for the newspapers. Mason leans back in, looks at Charlie's empty crib, feels Emily's pain.

**EXT. SKIES OVER THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY - MAGIC HOUR (N2)**

A plane wobbles in the sky. Heavy, very particular freight strapped to its wings.

A grand piano.

Lucky for the Virtuoso who will one day play it, the pilot is LUPE BURKE -- late 30's, early 40's, Latina, Treasurer of the International Organization of Women Pilots (the 99's), current air speed champion of the world (kiss my brown ass, Amelia!), three-times-married, two-times-divorced, hard-drinkin' she-demon of the California skies. The name on the side of the plane... BRUJA ROJA.

Lupe buzzes over citrus farmland and aims her plane towards Vanowen Airfield.

**EXT. VANOWEN AIRFIELD - MOMENTS LATER**

A couple GROUND CREW watch with their necks slightly tilted, mimicking the plane's approach. The piano is beginning to slip to one side and Lupe is trying to offset it by balancing the plane the other way. They make a bet on whether or not the piano is gonna make it. Anyone else on the airfield starts running onto the field to help.

The plane lands on one wheel. Crew run along with it trying to grab a hold of the piano legs before they hit the ground.

The plane comes down on the other wheel, and one of the piano legs breaks off.

The plane slows. Stops. Several crew try and lower the piano slowly, cutting the rope that bound it to the plane. Lupe hops out, whips off her helmet and goggles.

LUPE

*Follarme las tetas.*

She bends down on one knee, makes the sign of the cross, then rips a few blades of grass out of the ground and chews them to freshen her breath, heads over toward...

**INT. HAPPY BOTTOM RIDING CLUB - MOMENTS LATER**

PILOTS and airfield folk, and a few GIRLIE GROUPIES that like to be around them, are living it up with Tall Flying Tales and other assorted bullshit that goes with illegal hootchdom. At the end of the bar. E.B and Della are looking at photos Mason took at the Dodson House. Della is looking over her notes. Mason is itemizing his expenses.

E.B.

She told the detectives she gave the boy a bath. Put him to bed. Fell asleep by the fire, listening to the radio.

MASON

Uh-huh.

E.B.

Uh-huh? This is what I'm paying time-and-a-half for.

MASON

(raising his empty glass  
to the bartender)

Plus expenses.

E.B.

(raising his empty too)

Uh-huh.

DELLA

(looking at her notes)

Actually, she puts Charlie to bed. Goes downstairs to clean up the kitchen. Goes back upstairs to check on him. Then goes back downstairs and falls asleep, listening to the radio.

The bartender pours as Mason arranges the photographs to illustrate his take.



MASON

Up the ladder, in the window, grab the baby, climb back down, drive away -- buncha noise and she doesn't wake up? Think she's a drinker?

DELLA

No, she's a mother. Feeding, changing, burping, screaming -- neither of you would last an hour.

Can't argue with that. Mason holds up a photo of the house.

MASON

You're the kidnapper, yeah? You have to case the house for long enough to know what? His hours at the grocery store. The time when she gives the kid a bath, puts the kid to bed, falls asleep in front of the fire. You have to establish a pattern to establish an opportunity. That's a long play. Gotta be in that neighborhood for at least a week, you're gonna get spotted. Unless you had somebody on the inside to--

Just then Lupe bursts in, to a conquering hero's welcome.

LUPE

Alright, you dickless fuckers! Up against the fucking wall, this is a raid...

Della and E.B. are startled. Mason shakes his head.

MASON

Don't worry. That's the owner.

DELLA

Colorful gal.

Lupe goes behind the bar, glad-handing, shit-talking.

MASON

Mouth like a sailor.

E.B.

And a face like a mud fence.

MASON

Tell her that, E.B., see how it goes...

DELLA

You were saying it's a long play.

E.B.

He was saying he thinks the police might be right, and the Dodsons had something to do with it. But I saw those two. That's grief, not guilt.

MASON

I agree. But someone knew they were good for a hundred big. A guy who sells pickled cucumbers and aftershave?

Looks at a photo of Matthew and a photo of the ransom note.

MASON (CONT'D)

It's queer from both sides.

DELLA

And the baby. Someone had to stand over that baby and stitch those eyes...

This lands for everyone. A beat.

MASON

Dark tunnel, E.B. Long, deep, dark tunnel.

E.B.

Wipe it off, gentles. The parameters of our case are to oversee the LAPD's handling of the kidnapping and murder of Charlie Dodson. We do what we're asked to do. Get yourself down to Angel's Flight in the morning, Son. Be my eyes.

E.B. finishes his drink, nods to Della. They head out.

DELLA

Get some sleep, Perry.

MASON

Headed straight to bed, Della.

**INT. MASON'S MILK FARM, DOWNSTAIRS - HOURS LATER**

Lights are out. Mason, at the dining room table... mid fuck. The RETURN TO SENDER PACKAGE has been ripped open, exposing a Christmas wrapped present inside. It wobbles along with the dishes. The sex is hot enough, but not quite hot enough to knock anything off the table.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

So who's big tits and why's she with grandpa?

MASON

I think you're talking about Della and E.B. Jonathan. My current employers.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Yeah? Why don't they make your check out to me, cut out the middle man.

REVEAL Lupe bent over the dining room table, mid fuck.

MASON  
You like Della's tits?

LUPE  
They're alright for a matchstick. I  
prefer fat women.

MASON  
Why's that?

LUPE  
Cause they have fat pussies.

MASON  
Fair enough.

Mason and Lupe continue. Mason looks out the window, sees the piano in the distance, Martha next to it.

MASON (CONT'D)  
What's with the piano out there?

LUPE  
I stole it from husband number two.

MASON  
Is that Seattle, or Dallas?

LUPE  
Reno. I'm still married to Dallas.

Martha turns and looks at Mason as if to say, "I Used To Do That Too. When This Was A Real Dairy. With Bulls. Fuck You."

MASON  
I'm still married to Fresno.  
(looking at the package)  
If something comes back for postage due, do  
you think it actually made it to the house,  
or--Do you think I'm joyless?

Lupe turns over.

LUPE  
Hey, hey, hey.

MASON  
What? What? What?

LUPE  
This girlfriend of mine told me a thing  
to do.

MASON  
Yeah?

LUPE  
Yeah. You wanna try it?

MASON

Sure.

LUPE

Okay, it's like this.

LUPE smacks him on the face. Mason likes. They go at it harder. Dishes fall.

ANGLE on MARTHA outside listening in on her owner and the woman he's chosen over her. Martha makes a strange sound.

BACK TO Mason and Lupe. Now on the couch near the window.

It's clumsy, sweaty, but unlike the previous minute and half... it turns real. Just a new-moon sliver of vulnerability for both. They climax, breathe in sync.

Joy.

LUPE (CONT'D)

Nice, Papi. Good boy.

There's a thought. Then... a horrible moan from outside. Mason looks out the window, watches Martha fall over. Stiff.

LUPE (CONT'D)

What was that?

MASON

...I think my cow just died.

Lupe sits up. Looks out. Starts laughing her ass off. Mason stares ahead 'cause... yeah, his cow just died.

**EXT. STAIRCASE - DAY (D3)**

EIGHT SUITED MEN climb up the aisles of an outdoor venue. They are: PAUL SHOUP, Vice-Chairman of the Southern Pacific Railroad; E. MANCHESTER BODDY, Publisher of the Daily News; ALPHONZO BELL, Oilman and Real Estate Developer; CHARLES HIRAM RANDALL, City Councilman; ORRA E. MONNETTE, Founder of Bank of America; VINCENT A. MARTIN, Chair of the Fire and Police Commissions; JAMES GRIFFIN BOSWELL, Agricultural Magnate; and bringing up the rear... Herman Baggerly.

PAUL SHOUP

Seven months out, gentlemen -- ahead of schedule, under budget.

ORRA MONNETTE

Just barely.

VINCENT A. MARTIN

How many will it hold?

PAUL SHOUP

Over a hundred thousand. Twice as many as the Romans had.

CHARLES HIRAM RANDALL

We can watch the lions eat our Mexicans.

ORRA MONNETTE

As long as it's on budget.

JAMES GRIFFIN BOSWELL

The Greeks bring us here, not the Italians, and if we're gonna eat anyone it should be the Chinkees. The Mexicans are good workers.

ALPHONZO BELL

Says the Valencia Orange King, doing swell on the wet backs of the beaners.

E. MANCHESTER BODDY

If the Mexicans are such good workers, why's the city deporting them?

CHARLES HIRAM RANDALL

Repatriating, Edward. The term is "Repatriation," and I'd appreciate it if your paper would write it that way.

VINCENT A. MARTIN

Deportation or Repatriation, I'd prefer either over child-murder headlines.

E. MANCHESTER BODDY

Child murder sells papers.

PAUL SHOUP

It does not sell the city, however. And that, gentlemen, is why we built this.

They stop climbing and turn around to see the majesty of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. A STILL PHOTOGRAPHER and his ASSISTANTS are setting up below them, the Memorial Flame and the facade in the background.

HERMAN BAGGERLY

In truth, we built it to honor the Veterans of the Great War...

JAMES GRIFFIN BOSWELL

...but why get persnickety?

ALPHONZO BELL

Yeah. Shut up, Herman.

Paul Shoup nods to a couple of WORKERS who unfurl a large tapestry down the facade supporting the Flame that reads:

THE IMPORTANT THING IN THE  
OLYMPIC GAMES IS NOT WINNING  
BUT TAKING PART- THE ESSEN-  
TIAL THING IS NOT CONQUERING  
BUT FIGHTING WELL--

DE COUBERTIN

The men take it in for a second, read it.

ALPHONZO BELL (CONT'D)  
What the fuck is that?

PAUL SHOUP  
It's the Olympic slogan.

ALPHONZO BELL  
Well, it's fucking stupid. The important  
thing is winning.

ORRA MONNETTE  
Why'd they split the word "essential"?  
Looks awful.

PAUL SHOUP  
We'll re-do it.

ORRA MONNETTE  
Only if there's room in the budget.

PHOTOGRAPHER  
Can I have the gentlemen all face  
forward, please?

The men turn around, prepare themselves for immortality. The  
Assistants hand out top hats and place a sign below their  
feet: LOS ANGELES OLYMPICS X GAMES COMMITTEE.

PAUL SHOUP  
Our Police Commissioner makes a salient  
point on the matter of your newspaper,  
Edward. These Games are a magnificent  
opportunity for the city. We need a  
coordinated effort leading up to the  
event.

VINCENT A. MARTIN  
Move the kid to page eight.

E. MANCHESTER BODDY  
I report the news. I don't make it. Find  
the guys who did it, I'll make your boys  
look golden.

PHOTOGRAPHER  
Gentlemen, the hats.

They all swap their hats for the top hats.

HERMAN BAGGERLY  
Should we pray before we immortalize the moment?

ALPHONZO BELL  
No, we should not. Take the picture.

Picture is taken.

ALPHONZO BELL (CONT'D)  
Shoup's right. It's our moment. The country eats our food. Watches our movies. Gases up their cars, all on us. Let's let 'em know it. Let the world know it. Fuck New York.

Alphonzo walks away, hands Herman his top hat.

ALPHONZO BELL (CONT'D)  
Pray on that.

CUT TO:

**FULL SCREEN NEWSPAPER**

An artist's sketch of A MAN IN A BLACK HAT. Nearby headlines blare: "Kid Killer At Large" and "City In Shock."

MASON (O.S.)  
Mason here, any messages?

DIANNE ON PHONE (V.O.)  
Mr. Strickland called.

**INT. CITY MORGUE - DAY**

Mason folds his newspaper, slips it into his pocket. We see that he's using Virgil's desk phone at the Morgue.

DIANNE ON PHONE (V.O.)  
Read me three paragraphs of something called "Lipstick Girl." I did not write them down.

Mason watches Virgil talk with the COP "guarding" Charlie.

MASON ON PHONE  
Anything else?

DIANNE ON PHONE (V.O.)  
Just Walter LeBaron. Hammersmith Pictures requests the honor of your presence at his New Year's party. Two tickets for you at the door. Business to discuss.

The Cop shoots Mason a look as he slides out the door.

MASON ON PHONE

Thanks, Irma.

DIANNE ON PHONE (V.O.)

It's Dianne, goddammit.

CLICK. Mason hangs up as Virgil waves him over.

VIRGIL

You got five minutes. And you owe me twenty bucks.

MASON

You said ten.

VIRGIL

Ten for him, ten for me. That's twenty.

Virgil pulls out the slab. A small body lies underneath a sheet. Virgil looks up at Mason. Mason nods.

We see Charlie Dodson's body only from the expression on Mason's face. Turns out it really is the worst thing he's ever seen, in a life that's seen plenty. He TAKES A PHOTO.

He pulls a pair of TWEEZERS and a small PLASTIC BAG from his coat. He looks at Virgil. Virgil picks up a small pair of scissors, looks back at Mason.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP on the head of Charlie Dodson. Virgil's hand comes into frame, gets under the stitches holding Charlie's eyes open. Snip. Snip. Virgil's hand goes out of frame. Mason's hand comes into frame.

Mason's tweezers pull at the snapped thread. The end of the thread snags a little on Charlie's skin. Pulls up the eyelid just a bit then snaps back.

Mason bags the piece of thread.

We stay on Mason's face as we hear the sheet pulled back. The slab pushed back in.

GNARLED GUY (PRE-LAP)

...last ride little Charlie Dodson ever took, was in this very seat, right here. Poor Charlie. Already cold. Already gone.

**INT. ANGEL'S FLIGHT, CAR - LATER**

A GNARLED homeless-looking man is hustling as a self-made kidnapping tour guide. Mason rides up in the VERY CROWDED CAR. PASSENGERS gawk and soak it up. Gnarled Guy points towards the "ransom site" office. Mason sees the office blinds are drawn. HE TAKES A PHOTO.

GNARLED GUY

And right there, in that very window, sit the boy's parents. Watching. Hopeful. And tragically unaware...



Gnarled Guy holds up the newspaper sketch of Black Hat.

GNARLED GUY (CONT'D)  
 ...that their tiny innocent was ascending  
 to heaven in clutches of this devil, this  
 demon, this heartless instrument of  
 death!

He pauses for effect. Stashes the paper. Bows his head.

GNARLED GUY (CONT'D)  
 Good night, sweet prince. And flights of  
 angels sing thee to thy rest.  
 (a moment of silence)  
 I do this tour for free, folks, because  
 it's the right thing to do. So if any of  
 you could spare some small token of your  
 appreciation...

Gnarled Guy holds out a cup for "donations." Mason's hard  
 stare sends him moving off to greener pastures.

**EXT. TOP OF ANGEL'S FLIGHT, OLIVE STREET - MOMENTS LATER**

As Mason and THE CROWD exit the car. Even more MURDER  
 VULTURES up here, crowding onto Olive Street. Mason  
 recognizes the TRAFFIC COP trying to clear them away.

**EXT. OLIVE STREET - MOMENTS LATER**

Mason shakes hands with the Traffic Cop, who greets his old  
 friend with a smile. Mason hands him a smoke. The Cop says,  
*"What can I do for you, pal?"*

**INT. 356 OLIVE STREET, HALLWAY - LATER**

Mason comes down the hallway towards #308, where Matthew and  
 Emily left the suitcase of cash. He tries the office door.  
 It's locked. Mason quickly picks the lock, enters...

**INT. 356 OLIVE STREET, #308 - CONTINUOUS**

...to find A GUN PRESSED AGAINST HIS TEMPLE. Mason freezes.

HOLCOMB (O.S.)  
 Looking for something?

Holcomb raises the blinds, Mason blinks away the glare.

ENNIS  
 Close the blinds, Phil. Maybe I couldn't  
 see so good and shot him by accident.

MASON  
 Look, fellas, if I interrupted some sort  
 of tender moment, I sincerely apologize.

ENNIS  
Guy's a laugh riot.

Ennis pokes Mason with the barrel of his gun.

MASON  
Can you take it easy with that thing?

HOLCOMB  
What the hell you doing here, Mason?

He nods to Ennis, who stows his gun.

ENNIS  
Could be he's here to plant evidence.

HOLCOMB  
Why else would you hire a private dick  
with real police already on the case?

ENNIS  
Unless you're guilty.

MASON  
You wouldn't know guilty if it shit in  
your mouth.

HOLCOMB  
Don't be an asshole. Matthew Dodson ain't  
right and you know it.

MASON  
Do I?

Mason reaches into his jacket pocket. Ennis shoots out a  
meaty paw and locks it around Mason's wrist.

MASON (CONT'D)  
My cigarettes.  
(producing the pack)  
Have one.

HOLCOMB  
Dance all you want, but you gotta know  
something stinks, else you wouldn't be  
here.

MASON  
I get paid to look into things. And  
that's what I'm doing. You guys should  
try it. Can be very fulfilling.

ENNIS  
Hell with this. Let's run the jerk in.

Ennis moves to cuff Mason, who reacts strongly.

MASON  
Get the fuck off me!

ENNIS  
Go ahead. Take the first shot.

Ennis shoves him. Mason is ready to take a swing. Will he?

HOLCOMB  
Let's ease up here, huh? Hey! Look, you  
got something says Dodson is clean, you'd  
be doing him a favor by telling us.

MASON  
Go fuck yourself.

Ennis slips on a set of brass knuckles

ENNIS  
Oh, I am going to enjoy this.

Mason looks from Ennis to Holcomb.

HOLCOMB  
Up to you, Mason.

Mason takes a deep breath. Pulls a cigarette out.

MASON  
Right after the Dodsons find little  
Charlie, a blue Phaeton goes tearing up  
Olive Street, clips the trolley, and  
races off.

Holcomb is surprised at this, but remains nonplussed.

HOLCOMB  
And you think that's our friend in the  
black hat making his getaway.

ENNIS  
Where'd you get this shit?

He lights his cigarette, gestures out the window towards the  
top of Angel's Flight.

MASON  
Traffic cop working top of the flight. He  
didn't think nothing of it at the time,  
because most cops are stupid.

Ennis starts towards Mason. Holcomb stops him.

HOLCOMB  
Go check it out.

Ennis shoots Holcomb a look, leaves. Mason watches the  
Angel's Flight rising. Gnarled Guy is doing his Hamlet bit.

MASON  
That fucking orangutan almost broke my camera.

HOLCOMB  
Fucking orangutan almost broke your jaw. Here.

Holcomb holds out a folded five dollar bill.

MASON  
What's that?

HOLCOMB  
For the car thing.

Mason focuses his camera out the window, SNAPS A PHOTO.

MASON  
(re: the newspaper sketch)  
Save it for a better sketch artist. White man in a hat? That sure narrows it down. And what about the guy on the phone? Or the guy in the car? Or--?

HOLCOMB  
Fuck. Those guys are halfway to Edmonton by now.

MASON  
That why you like Dodson for it? Stick it in a box, tie a bow around it, and you're done?

Mason turns back to face him.

HOLCOMB  
Listen to you. Your bread and butter is cheating husbands and missing persons, and now you're pissing on my five bucks, 'cause you landed a fucking whale for once. Good for you. Enjoy it. Pad your expenses, fuck your way through Madam Jin's, I don't care. I got the entire city standing on my neck for this and I already wasted two minutes on you. And who are you?

Off Mason, winding his film.

**INT. HAMMERSMITH STUDIO, SOUND STAGE - NIGHT (N3)**

An unused sound stage has been decked out for a New Year's Eve Gala. MOVIE STARS hobnob. Men in black tie; women wearing glorious gowns. THERE IS ACTUAL SNOW falling gently from the rafters onto the bar. A band plays the hits. Folks dance, make out in corners, and generally live it up. A CHEF carves a MASSIVE SLAB OF PRIME RIB.

STRICKLAND (O.S.)  
 Coulda been Blue Tongue killed Martha. Or  
 Fog Fever. Maybe even Hoof and Mouth.

Find Mason and Strickland at the bar, eyeing the chef.

MASON  
 What're you, a cow doctor now?

STRICKLAND  
 Ruthie's got our youngest in 4H. "Head,  
 heart, hands, and health." I also know a  
 fuck-ton about chickens.

Strickland downs his whiskey, signals for another.

STRICKLAND (CONT'D)  
 You bury her?

MASON  
 Sort of. Got a big pile of Martha and  
 ragweed out by my Dad's old hay forks.

Strickland hoists his refill.

STRICKLAND  
 To Martha the cow.

MASON  
 I don't want to drink any of their shit.

STRICKLAND  
 Come on. You still mad about the valet?

MASON  
 He called my truck a heap.

STRICKLAND  
 So what?  
 (catching snowflakes)  
 Look. This is actual fucking snow.  
 Seventy-five outside and they made it  
 snow in here. It's New Year's Eve. Whatta  
 ya say? Happy New Year!

MASON  
 It's not a heap.

STRICKLAND  
 Ahh, I give up. It's the valet. It's  
 Linda. It's a toy truck. Paddle through  
 your pond of misery alone.

FOUR MEN tote what looks like a FRIED PTERODACTYL on a  
 platter. Strickland grabs a LOVELY butlering hors d'oeuvres.

STRICKLAND (CONT'D)  
 Hey, sweetheart. What do they have on  
 that platter there?

LOVELY  
 A fried ostrich.

STRICKLAND  
 You hear that, Joyless? I'm going to eat  
 an ostrich tonight.

Margaret Fuller appears at the end of the bar.

STRICKLAND (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 How about a little New Year's kiss,  
 sweetheart? Just for luck.

LOVELY (O.S.)  
 Okay. But only because you're cute.

Margaret eyes Mason. She looks amazing.

MASON  
 Am I being cheated of Life's big thrills?

A hand claps Mason on the shoulder. Mason turns to see...

LEBARON  
 (smiling broadly)  
 Mr. Mason. So nice to see you. I trust  
 you're having a good time?

MASON  
 I'm curious, Mr. LeBaron. What did Chubby  
 Carmichael ever do to you? He fuck your  
 wife on a pile of Star Hams?

LeBaron's smile fades.

LEBARON  
 Mr. Hammersmith is prepared to discuss  
 our business arrangement now. If you'll  
 just follow me...

Mason glances back towards the bar. Margaret Fuller is gone.

**INT. HAMMERSMITH STUDIO, FRANKENSTEIN'S LAB - LATER**

This OLD SET is being BROKEN DOWN, but we still get that  
 ICONIC VIBE. LeBaron leads Mason towards A GROUP OF  
 CARPENTERS, clustered around BLUEPRINTS laid out on THE LARGE  
 "OPERATING" TABLE. THICK IRON CHAINS run from the table up  
 and out of sight. The circle drifts apart, leaving JULIAN  
 HAMMERSMITH to consider the efficacy of his plans.

HAMMERSMITH  
 Dr. Frankenstein's Lab is about to become  
 Dracula's crypt. Repurpose, don't replace  
 -- that's my motto.

MASON  
 That true for Chubby Carmichael?

Hammersmith grabs one of the chains, looks up into nothing.

HAMMERSMITH  
 (shakes the chain)  
 Not so scary with the work lights on...

MASON  
 If you say so.

HAMMERSMITH  
 Got my start building sets. That was real  
 work. But the bigger you get, the further  
 you are from the details that matter. Now  
 I read reports. Watch dailies.  
 (then)  
 I miss the trenches. That's where the  
 blood flows. Down there, between the  
 muddy banks.  
 (then)  
 May I see the pictures, please?

Mason hands the pictures to LeBaron who then takes them to  
 Hammersmith. They huddle together, slowly going through them.

Mason shakes a cigarette out and has a lit match halfway to  
 it when he SEES MARGARET FULLER, in an alcove, watching.

HAMMERSMITH (CONT'D)  
 Do you have the negatives with you, Mr.  
 Mason?

Mason lights up.

MASON  
 Of course not.

LeBaron whispers something to Hammersmith. He nods.

HAMMERSMITH  
 Walt here thinks you're lying.

MASON  
 Well, tell Walt I thought we'd be  
 haggling over the price, not whispering  
 about my integrity.

Suddenly, TWO CARPENTERS grab Mason and lift/throw him onto  
 the table. LeBaron rummages through Mason's pockets.

MASON (CONT'D)  
 (struggling)  
 What the hell?

BAM! Fist drops into solar plexus. Mason gasps. LeBaron shrugs, no negatives.

HAMMERSMITH  
 Hagglng is the occupation of bedouins.  
 The original deal was for two hundred. I think that's fair value.

MASON  
 I can get six from The Tattler for those and you know it.

Hammersmith produces a lighter, reaches in his pocket, seemingly for a cigarette...

HAMMERSMITH  
 You'd ruin a young woman's career for four hundred dollars?

MASON  
 Try me.

...but pulls out a gun instead.

MASON (CONT'D)  
 (gasping)  
 Wait a min--

BAM! Gut punch. Hammersmith sparks the lighter, holds it to the end of the gun's barrel like he's lighting a cigar.

HAMMERSMITH  
 You have an interesting reputation, Perry Mason. Hard to pin down. I like that about you.

Hammersmith examines the hot gun barrel. Decides it's not done yet. Flame on. Mason manages to get some words out.

MASON  
 I'd like... to reconsider... my position.

HAMMERSMITH  
 Don't prevaricate, Mr. Mason. As you've clearly demonstrated, Margaret is a woman of certain, shall we say, passions, that could lead to the unfortunate loss of my investment in her future.

Hammersmith checks the end of the barrel. Almost ready.



HAMMERSMITH (CONT'D)

However, I didn't get to where I am today by letting others dictate the terms of my existence. So it will be two hundred, as agreed.

He nods to LeBaron who tucks the cash in Mason's pocket.

HAMMERSMITH (CONT'D)

And if any harm should befall Miss Fuller vis-a-vis your pictures, well... blood will have blood, as they say. Do we understand each other?

Mason's eyes find Margaret, watching hungrily.

MASON

Um, yes. Yes we do.

HAMMERSMITH

Good.

Now the gun barrel is practically glowing, red hot.

HAMMERSMITH (CONT'D)

Normally, I'm what you'd call a handshake man. But I feel this particular circumstance calls for an impression to be made. His tie please, Walter...

LeBaron pushes Mason's tie into his mouth and before Mason knows what is about to happen, Hammersmith PRESSES THE RED HOT END OF THE GUN BARREL INTO HIS CHEST. Mason SCREAMS as the hot metal burns through his shirt and sears his flesh.

**INT. HAMMERSMITH STUDIO, SOUND STAGE - NIGHT**

The party is raging! BABY NEW YEAR and FATHER TIME parade through the room. Strickland dances with Lovely. Drunkenness abounds. A fucked-up Mason staggers through THE REVELERS, making and pressing a SNOWBALL to his burned heart.

MASON

Pete. Pete!

Strickland is a dancing, drinking fool.

STRICKLAND

You get the money?

MASON

Sort of.

He stuffs the TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS in Strickland's jacket.

STRICKLAND

Happy New Year!

He grabs Mason, kisses him, goes back to dancing. Mason stands there for a beat, then starts going. He grabs a bottle of whiskey as he passes the bar. Staggered toward the exit.

**EXT. HAMMERSMITH STUDIO, VALET STAND - MOMENTS LATER**

Mason, snowball in one hand, bottle in the other.

VALET  
Evening, sir. How's the night?

MASON  
Fucking idiot, is what I am. Walked right into it. No backup. Always have backup...

VALET  
Sir?

MASON  
Just get my truck.

VALET  
Sure thing. Got your ticket?

MASON  
Yeah, I, I, uh...

Realizes he has neither the free hand, nor the inclination.

MASON (CONT'D)  
It's the fucking heap.

**INT. VERMONT KNOLLS WAREHOUSE, OFFICE 106 - NIGHT**

Outside filthy windows we see the dilapidated landscape of what folks of the time derisively called Darktown. Sounds of a New Year's Countdown revelry are heard in the distance, 5-4-3-2-1-- HAPPY NEW YEAR! Fireworks, crowd noise, etc. Inside a disheveled, forgotten office are PINKY RING, BLACK HAT, LOW RUMBLING VOICE. A desk. Some chairs. Filing cabinets. Tension and cigarette smoke. Pinky Ring fidgets near the window.

BLACK HAT  
Relax. He'll be here.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE  
You got a hot date maybe?

Pinky Ring glares at him.

BLACK HAT  
Uh-oh. Touched a nerve.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE  
I'm starting to think he doesn't like us.

PINKY RING

I don't. I get my money, I walk out that door, I never want to see your faces again.

BLACK HAT

And now my heart is broke.

PINKY RING

Why the hell are you still wearing that hat? Your picture's on every front page in town.

Black Hat checks his reflection in the windows.

BLACK HAT

It's a fedora. One of half a million in Los Angeles. And it looks good on me.

PINKY RING

None of this was part of the plan.

Pinky Ring fumbles for a cigarette.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE

So jump off the pier and swim to Tahiti. I'll take your share.

PINKY RING

My share of what? A noose?

Black Hat lights Pinky Ring's cigarette for him.

BLACK HAT

No one's getting strung up.

Pinky Ring pulls a lungful, exhales. Quiets.

PINKY RING

I shoulda run. The second I saw Charlie done like that. His eyes. Jesus. I shoulda run.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE

We all shoulda.

Right to Pinky Ring.

BLACK HAT

But we didn't. Did we, Killer?

Pinky Ring goes back to the window, smokes with trembling fingers. Black Hat shoots Rumbling Voice a look and a grin. Rumbling Voice chuckles, scratches that cauliflower ear.

A DOOR SLAMS OUTSIDE THE ROOM.

The men immediately go silent.

Steps come down the hallway. Closer. And closer.

A man enters -- Holy shit, it's Detective Ennis! He smiles.

ENNIS

Evening, gentlemen. Sorry I'm late.

He crosses to the desk. Lays a suitcase on it. We immediately recognize it as THE SUITCASE WITH THE RANSOM MONEY.

ENNIS (CONT'D)

Buncha of drunk Sambos blocking the road, singing, dancing. Fucking spooks were so happy, I didn't have the heart to crack any skulls. Me mother always said I'd get soft in me old age. But what the hell? It's New Year's, right?

PINKY RING

Let's get this over with.

ENNIS

No pleasantries?

(shrugs)

Okay.

Ennis spins the suitcase around, offering the honors to the others. Low Rumbling snaps open the clasps, lifts the lid...

It's empty.

LOW RUMBLING VOICE

What the fu--

BLAM! ENNIS SHOOTS LOW RUMBLING STRAIGHT THROUGH THE SUITCASE'S LID, RIGHT IN THE FACE.

Black Hat manages to pull his own gun, but it's too late. BLAM! ENNIS SHOOTS BLACK HAT IN THE THROAT.

Pinky Ring makes a run for the door. BLAM! ENNIS SHOOTS PINKY RING IN THE BACK. He tumbles into the hallway

Black Hat drops his gun, presses his hands to his throat. Blood spurts through his fingers as he gurgles and wheezes his way to a slow and painful death. Ennis stands over him.

ENNIS

Jesus, Jimmy, that's sloppy of me. And I am sorry for this. But they got onto the car. And the trail from the car leads in an unhealthy direction...

He takes aim to put poor Black Hat out of his misery. CLICK.

Nothing. His Colt 1908 Vest Pocket has jammed.

ENNIS (CONT'D)  
For fuck's sake.

He works to clear the jam. Black Hat paws at his leg.

ENNIS (CONT'D)  
Happens more than I care to admit. But  
it's my favorite piece, so...  
(got it)  
Sorry again, Sarecki.

He once again takes aim at the gurgling Black Hat who tugs weakly on his pant leg. BLAM! That's that.

Or is it? Ennis looks towards the door. *Where the hell is that guy I just shot?* He steps out, looks down the hall...

A BLOOD TRAIL leads to an open window and the FIRE ESCAPE.

*...oh, for fuck's sake...*

**EXT. VERMONT KNOLLS WAREHOUSE, FIRE ESCAPE - MOMENTS LATER**

Pinky Ring is trying to trigger the release for the Fire Escape Ladder. Unfortunately, the bullet he took has left him with a useless right arm. He has no choice but to go up.

**EXT. VERMONT KNOLLS WAREHOUSE, ROOFTOP - MOMENTS LATER**

FIREWORKS EXPLODE IN THE SKY, intermittently illuminating a FADED BILLBOARD advertising a "Colored Air Circus" that took place at Eastside Airport earlier this month. Also lit up: Pinky Ring, doing his best to hustle across the flat roof towards a STAIRWELL DOOR. It's locked. Looking back, he SEES--

Ennis coming off the fire escape and onto the roof.

Pinky Ring looks around, desperate. A SKY BURST OF PURPLE throws light onto the roof of the building next door. From this angle they even look connected. He rushes towards his only escape. As he nears the edge, his heart sinks...

The STREETLIGHT BELOW illuminates A THIN ALLEY separating the two buildings. Not too far a jump. And with Ennis closing in, what choice does he have? None.

HE TAKES A RUNNING START, JUMPS...

And falls about nine inches short.

Down he goes, BOUNCING OFF THE SIDE OF THE FAR BUILDING, spinning towards the ground AND SMASHING INTO THE ALLEY FLOOR BELOW. Gruesome.

Ennis leans out over the building's edge. The street light angles up across his twisted features.

VOICE OF LINDA (PRE-LAP)  
 Mailman says it's a stamp short, wants me  
 to pay for it...

OFF Ennis, clearly displeased with how this has gone...

**EXT. VANOWEN AIRFIELD - NIGHT**

We are traveling along the telephone wires above the Happy Bottom Riding Club. Lupe walks out, spraying champagne at drunk pilots stumbling in and out of the bar. The camera follow's Lupe and the phone lines toward Mason's farmhouse.

VOICE OF LINDA (V.O.)  
 ...I says I'd loved to pay for it, except  
 my bum of a ex hadn't sent me the support  
 money he's supposed to send me every  
 month this month. So, no I'm not paying  
 for the fucking bum's postage.

**INT. MASON'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Mason, on his phone, holding the red fire truck under his arm. Ripped up Christmas wrapping on the table. Blood from his burn stains his undershirt. Mason's lit. Linda's responses are muffled from the phone.

MASON  
 (into phone)  
 So you did refuse it...and now Teddy  
 thinks his lousy father forgot Christmas.  
 Two fucking cents, Linda...Watch my  
 language? Every third word outta your  
 mouth...It's been a goddamn tight month,  
 okay? I'll send you the money tomorrow,  
 I got a huge horrible case I'm working  
 on, let me talk to my son...I don't know  
 why the fuck I'm arguing with you about  
 it, put him on the phone.

A knock at his door.

MASON (CONT'D)  
 (into the phone)  
 Then wake him up! I'm the father, I get  
 to talk to my son on New Year's Eve! New  
 Year's Day -- Jesus, put him on the  
 fucking phone, Linda!

Phone clicks. She's hung up. Mason smashes down the receiver. Lupe enters with some champagne and two glasses.

LUPE  
 (drunk)  
 Feliz año nuevo, pene grande Papi Gringo!  
 Nineteen-fucking-

She pops the cork.

LUPE (CONT'D)  
Thirty-two!

MASON  
(into phone)  
Hello Operator, I was just disconnected,  
Happy New Year, I'd like long distance,  
city of Fresno, Axminster 7-7181. Thank  
you.

Perry sets the fire truck down, picks up the champagne  
bottle, drinks.

LUPE  
(re: the blood)  
What the hell happened to you?

He gives Lupe a long, soulless kiss. Lupe pushes him off her.  
Some of his blood has wiped off on her.

VOICE OF OPERATOR (V.O.)  
I'm sorry, sir. There's no answer on that  
line.

MASON  
(into phone)  
Well, I was just on that line. It's the  
number of a heartless woman. But there's  
nothing wrong with her ears, so you keep  
it ringing.

LUPE  
You in the middle of something? Cuz I can  
come back next year.

MASON  
(into phone)  
Some goddamn black angel musta ripped her  
dress open, plunged its fist in her chest  
and ripped it out, 'cause only a  
heartless mother would deny her son over  
a two-cent stamp. You got kids, Operator?  
You got a heart?

VOICE OF OPERATOR (V.O.)  
I'm sorry sir, you'll need to try this  
number later. My switchboard's all hot.

Phone clicks. Line's dead.

MASON  
No heart.

LUPE  
Hey come on out. Everyone's having a good  
time.

MASON  
Love, romance, excitement. All of Life's  
big thrills...

Mason sets the receiver down. Lupe watches him pick up the fire truck and smashes the shit out of it. When he's finally done...

MASON (CONT'D)  
They don't make these things very good,  
do they?

Lupe starts heading for the door.

MASON (CONT'D)  
There's a black angel out there, Lupe. A  
big black angel with long fingers...

Door opens. Door closes. Lupe gone.

MASON (CONT'D)  
...and a needle and thread in his pocket.  
AND HE IS OUT THERE!  
(then, quietly)  
And I'm fucking sorry...or regular sorry.

He closes his eyes, takes a breath. Tired. He heads upstairs, peeling off his undershirt as he goes, revealing for the first time the nasty BURN over his heart.

**INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

Comes to the plane wheel. There are two PIGEONS perched atop it. Shoos them away, heads to his...

**INT. MASON'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Walks over to his Victrola, cranks it. Places a needle on the 78 already there. Lonnie Johnson's "Get Yourself Together" plays. Opens the cabinet over the speaker. Much louder. Grabs the STUFFED OWL, turns back to...

**INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

Places the owl atop the wheel as a bird deterrent.

**INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Stops in the doorframe, sees the remaining Chubby Photographs dangling in the room. Starts yanking them all down, throws them aside.

He's exhausted, starting to slump. He SLAPS HIMSELF awake. Goes to a corner of the room, grabs a stack of photos off the dresser. Starts laying them out on his parents' bed.

A hand-drawn diagram of the Angel's Flight crime scene. *Busy place, public place. That's smart. These guys are pros...*



Photo of the \$100K ransom note. *But why would seasoned pros ask for a hundred grand...*

Photo of Matthew Dodson. *...from this guy? Photo of Emily Dodson smoking. And what aren't you telling me, Emily?*

Lights a cigarette, eyes focused on the photos. Adds photos of the Neighbor across the street, and of the Smudge. *Angry Drapes saw something.*

He picks up the photo of the Radiant Assembly of God Icon. *The church... "Members of my church..." Herman.*

He grabs the newspaper photo, from the evening edition, of the Olympic Committee. Mason grabs a pencil and CIRCLES Herman Baggerly. *Who is this guy? And why does he care about...*

The last photo: CHARLIE DODSON on the morgue slab.

Mason stares a moment, then hangs it up. It dangles from the line, the only one there. He slumps down to perch on the edge of the bed. So tired. From his pants pocket he pulls out the bag with the single thread used to stitch open Charlie's eyes. He removes the thread, holds it up to the light. The song ends, we hear the SCRATCH of the needle skipping repeatedly in the runout groove. Mason stares back at Charlie's picture.

MASON

So... You like turtles.

He's about to nod off, about to nod off... Scratch, scratch.

He takes two fingers and JABS them into his wound.

Pain. Adrenaline.

That'll buy him a half-hour.

END OF PILOT

