

# The Palooka

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Character Descriptions / Setting

Lloyd: Late 20's hulking man. Good, boyish looks that have not been ruined by his time in the ring.

Ernie: Large man in his 40's. He has the sly look of a con artist but the grit of the un-prosperous.

Renee: Seductive young woman. 20's. Her features are primed and intelligent.

Val: Suave, dangerous and attractive man in his early 30's.

Slim: Intimidating man in his early 30's. He wears a face of disinterest in the lives of others.

Other Players:

Trainer 1: Old man.

Trainer 2: Older man.

Lloyd's Sparring Partner: Young man.

Bartender: Young man.

SETTING:

Late 1950's. Philadelphia

ACT I, SCENE ONE: THE GYM / DAY

(Stage is dark. The sound of a jump rope begins. As the lights come up, other beats are audible; the bass thump of the heavy bag, the staccato of the speed bag and heft of a medicine ball.)

(Two fighters are sparring in a small, lack-luster ring. Lloyd fights hesitantly behind a jab. In one corner, two old trainers lean in over the ropes with nervous, hunting eyes. Slightly outside the ring Ernie, dressed in a stylish suit watches silently.)

TRAINER 1

What is that? Move! You're a stumblebum or something?

TRAINER 2

Don't wait.

(The fighters tangle again, their punches and feints slumping into a clinch.)

TRAINER 1

That's getting you nowhere. What you going to do now?

TRAINER 2

Don't wait.

(One of the fighters slips away from the grapple and opens up with flurry of lefts and rights. He begins to drive Lloyd to the corner.)

TRAINER 1

That's it! Work it! Hit and move.

TRAINER 2

Don't wait!

(The aggressor trails Lloyd to one corner. He fires off punch after punch. Lloyd bobs and weaves and blocks methodically, answering with only a few cursory punches. The bell rings to end the round. The aggressor walks off, his head held up, beckoned by the trainers.)

TRAINER 1

Good round, champ. Made him fight your fight.

TRAINER 2

Had him on his heels.

TRAINER 1

Had him pinned down.

TRAINER 2

Couldn't hurt you if he wanted to.

(The fighter and his trainers exit the ring and the stage. Lloyd peels off his headgear, steps down from the ring and begins to try to work off the laces of his gloves. He doesn't notice Ernie, who watches him the entire time.)

ERNIE

Lo! A man who likes a getting hit upside the head. The reverse-fighter. He's a regular boxing enigma.

LLOYD

Ernie LaSall?

ERNIE

Sure ain't no other. How are you Lloyd? You old yet?

(Lloyd shuffles towards Ernie in a boxing stance.)

LLOYD

I'm doing better than you think.

(Ernie throws some quick slaps at Lloyd. Lloyd fends off each effortlessly with his gloves.)

ERNIE

An-hah! Now why aren't those hands so lively in there?

LLOYD

In that ring?

ERNIE

Yes, Sir. In that ring right there.

LLOYD

Don't you worry about it none. I got it figured. I got an angle in there.

(Lloyd struggles to remove his gloves)

ERNIE

Oh, an angle. The kid is all grown up, huh? No more superstition. Now he's watching the angles?

LLOYD

More or less.

ERNIE

See, the only angle I saw in there was his big hooks angling at your face.

(Ernie motions towards Lloyd's hands. Lloyd presents the gloves and Ernie unlaces them.)

LLOYD

Nah. Didn't hurt me none. I told you I got it figured. Besides, if I circle around that ring three times to the right, just three times, nobody can a lay tough glove on me - you know that.

ERNIE

Yeah sure, Lloyd. I remember, three times to the right ...

LLOYD

And the fight's got no spite. Yeah.

ERNIE

Guess you haven't changed up as much as I thought.

LLOYD

Nah. Nah. Same old me.

ERNIE

And who was your partner in there?

LLOYD

That man? He's got it made. He's a to-be champ.

ERNIE

Him? Mr. Softshoe?

(Ernie pantomimes a few clumsy steps while still unlacing Lloyd's gloves.)

LLOYD

He's got the right trainers, promoters - You know boxing don't matter all that much in boxing.

(Lloyd and Ernie eye each other uneasily)

LLOYD

You *got* to know. You taught it to me.

(Ernie takes both gloves and tosses them in the ring.)

ERNIE

All right, so what's your big angle? Give old Ernie a lesson here. Since I just don't see how being a to-be champ's punching bag pays out.

LLOYD

Look it ain't so big. I just said I got it figured, a little bit. I take a few shots, I'm careful I don't mark him up too bad - cause his people sure don't like that - and I get taken care of. His trainers, they watch out for me. His guys get me some pretty good fights. Everybody is happy.

ERNIE

See, to me, that don't sound like an angle. To me that sounds a lot like a handout.

LLOYD

That's the only play I got lately, Ernie. You going to show me a better one?

ERNIE

Anytime.

LLOYD

Great, cause it sure ain't easy. I got to pick fights up where I can nowadays.

ERNIE

You got one coming up?

LLOYD

Yeah. A week.

ERNIE

Yeah? Who? I mean, is it a real fight this time?

LLOYD

They're all real fights, Ernie.

ERNIE

I guess they are, Lloyd.

(Lloyd grimaces and begins to dress in a hooded sweatshirt and pants over his trunks.)

LLOYD

So you come down here for something or you just wagging that snake-tongue? Right? That's what you used to call it, snake-tongue.

ERNIE

Forked. And I'm not down here to lay double-talk on you.

LLOYD

You're not trying hit me up, right? Cause in the area of cash I am plumb out. And you wouldn't just need double talk to get any out of me either. You need triple talk or, four talk or something ...

ERNIE

I ain't here to hit you up, Lloyd. I came with opportunity, maybe. Maybe a chance at something outside of boxing.

LLOYD

Outside of boxing? Well I like that. And I knew that's why you showed up. Even knew you were coming.

ERNIE

Yeah?

LLOYD

Course. I could read the signs from a mile away. And I am ready for a change.

ERNIE

I guess so. Job might be a little dirty though.

LLOYD

Oh yeah? What is it?

ERNIE

Val. You remember him?

LLOYD

Yeah, sure I do. Valiant, right? He's big time now, right? Must be a regular Street-King by now. He's got to be with you advising him and all.

ERNIE

He's getting there, Lloyd. Sure.

LLOYD

So you put in a good word for me? He's giving me another shot at body-guarding?

ERNIE

Hey, what did I tell you? I said I don't know. And I don't. Val just brought you up, offhand like, saying he's got a spot. Didn't even say it was work, just said he's got a spot he was thinking you could fill. Just said I should bring you around.

LLOYD

Hey, that's just fine. I'll take a spot over nothing. I'm just happy he's thinking of me, you know, after last time went, ah ...

ERNIE

Yeah, well, I don't think last time made anybody too happy.

LLOYD

But he's got a spot body guarding? That's great cause I sure could use the money. I mean, fighting is good and all, but there is no way for me to get ahead, you know? That's why I was glad you introduced me to Val and his guys and that girl, Val's girl.

ERNIE

Renee?

LLOYD

Yeah, Renee. I appreciate you getting me connected with them 'cause I can get a little ahead, you know? The way you're getting ahead with them.

ERNIE

Look, I don't even know if it's going to happen. Don't go getting your hopes up too high.

(Lloyd smiles broadly.)

ERNIE

I mean it. I know how you get excited thinking things are going to fall into place. Val didn't say body guarding. Val didn't say job. He said spot - offhanded.

LLOYD

Well all right. I'm just curious is all. I know you must have all the angles figured straight if you don't want to tell me.

ERNIE

I ain't got nothing figured. I said it. There ain't nothing more to tell.

LLOYD

Well, then why you so moody?

ERNIE

I don't know.

(Lloyd sucks his teeth, waiting for Ernie to come up with something more.)

ERNIE

All Val said was he wanted to tell you himself. Sure don't know why ...

LLOYD

So he wants me?

ERNIE

I guess. Look, I've been getting to know Val and he's more of a heavy hitter than I thought. Him and that guy, Slim. You follow me?

LLOYD

More important?

ERNIE

Yeah, kind of. Like he's got connections. Or he's going to have them. Look, I don't know. Val and Slim have drive, but it ain't just drive, the two of them are danger..

LLOYD

But you're in with them, right? Advising them and such. And it's good to have drive, right? That's what you used to tell me. Two tough guys get in a ring and it's the one with drive that's coming out. I remember.

ERNIE

Yeah. It's just, maybe the job is, I don't know, maybe it's not the job for you.

LLOYD

Why you want to say that?

ERNIE

I don't know. There's plenty of jobs out there that are a lot more dangerous than they look. Especially where we have to operate.

LLOYD

You know I can handle myself.

ERNIE

That don't matter. Val makes you a bagman or something like that you say no, all right?

LLOYD

What's a bagman?

ERNIE

A guy who carries money. Look, if he wants you to carry money, if he wants you to deliver a message or something like that, just tell him you're busy. Anything solo, just forget about it.

LLOYD

Why?

ERNIE

Didn't I tell you anything about the way the world works down in the cracks of society? You don't see those angles. The bagman winds up washing up on a dock somewhere, that's why. He's a loose end and he gets taken care of.

LLOYD

Do you not want me to be in with Val? I mean you're the good, I mean, you're my best friend here in this thing so if you don't want me to mess things with Val I ... you know.

ERNIE

No, Lloyd.

LLOYD

Cause I felt really bad after last time. It was real bad luck ...

ERNIE

It's fine. I mean Val said to bring you around. And he's got work. It's probably some body guarding work like you said.

LLOYD

Yeah. I can feel it. I am sure that's what it is. You know I got up this morning with the sun right in my eyes.

ERNIE

What?

LLOYD

Serious. There is this little hole in my curtains, right? And it just happened I woke up and sun was shining right through it. Right on my face.

ERNIE

So?

LLOYD

So it's good luck. It was opportunity shining right through, waking me up.

ERNIE

Jesus, Lloyd.

LLOYD

Well I knew something was going to happen today. And here it is. So how you going to explain that? You showing up the first time in a year?

ERNIE

Lloyd, you can believe whatever the hell you want about sun-spots or anything else but you just keep you mouth shut to Val about it - got me?

LLOYD

All right, Ernie.

ERNIE

All right. We got to go. Hit the shower. I got the car outside. I'll run you home, we'll find something decent for you to wear and then go see Val.

LLOYD

Sure, co... I mean, yeah. Good seeing you Ernie.

(Ernie nods curtly, turns on his heel. Lloyd runs for the showers in the other direction. Ernie removes a pocket flask from his jacket and takes a hit.)

ACT I, SCENE TWO: LLOYD'S APARTMENT / DAY

(Val, Slim and Renee wait in Lloyd's bare-brick wall apartment. Furnishing and decoration is sparse other than a few framed pictures and boxing event advertisements. Weights and other training equipment litter corners of the room.)

(Val is tall, with sharp, dangerous and attractive features. Slim picks his nails with a small folding knife. Renee is slight and very attractive. They all perk up at the sound of the key in the lock. Lloyd and Ernie enter. Lloyd is initially startled by their presence.)

VAL

Home again, home again. Lloyd, my boy, how are you?

LLOYD

I'm good, Val, real good.

VAL

You remember Slim, yeah?

(Val gets to his feet to guide Lloyd like he's showing him around his own place.)

LLOYD

Yeah.

RENEE

Hi, Lloyd. You're looking fit to a T.

LLOYD

Hello, ma'am.

VAL

Sorry we were a little impatient with your lock. Slim don't like to wait on his feet.

LLOYD

Yeah. Sure. That's awful bad luck though.

VAL

What?

LLOYD

It's bad luck coming in a place uninvited.

ERNIE

Lloyd ...

LLOYD

Serious. That's how housebreakers get caught. They leave clues cause of that bad luck.

VAL

Bad luck, huh?

LLOYD

Yeah, real bad. I don't mind you coming in, but when you go you should step out backwards and don't step on the crack. That should reverse it, or it least fix it up.

(Val and Slim look at each other. Finally Val laughs, breaking the tension.)

VAL

You're a good sport, Lloyd. Isn't he, Slim?

SLIM

Yeah. A real good-nik.

VAL

And what do you know? Ol' Ernie right here with him.

SLIM

Imagine that.

VAL

I don't need to imagine it, Slim, here he is just like you said.

ERNIE

Boys.

SLIM

Get all your errands done, Ernie?

ERNIE

I did.

VAL

Lloyd, your boy Ernie here is a piece of work. One minute he's having waffles with us. Right across the street, you know the place I mean?

LLOYD

The diner over there. Yeah.

VAL

Yeah! And we are having the best waffles. And right as I am taking that first bite Ernie gets up. He's got to go.

SLIM

He's got ants in his pants or something.

VAL

Or he is going to give us the ol' stickeroo with bill, right?

ERNIE

I wouldn't do that to you, Val.

VAL

No, you wouldn't. Who's going to give ol' Valiant the stick? But you had me worried. Did he have you worried, Slim?

SLIM

I was shaking in my moccasins.

VAL

I think even Renee was concerned.

RENEE

Utterly vexed.

(Val takes a moment to comprehend  
Renee's response.)

VAL

Yeah, sure. Vexed. But then, like always, he  
turns into a good sport. Said he had to run  
some errands and he throws down a twenty for  
us.

ERNIE

Don't suppose there is any change?

SLIM

None.

VAL

Anyways, sorry Lloyd, I'm getting off track.  
Ernie tell ya we have work for you?

LLOYD

He said something about it, yeah.

VAL

Figured. I suppose you could use a little  
extra scratch.

LLOYD

Sure could, Val. Fighting's not real easy  
money.

SLIM

Even for a palooka?

LLOYD

What?

ERNIE

Watch your mouth, Slim.

SLIM

Or what?

ERNIE

Or you can watch Lloyd knock it across the  
room.

LLOYD

Now I may not be champ, but I fought a lot of guys and I never laid down for any of them.

ERNIE

And plenty guys that gone up against Lloyd got sent to the hospital or worse!

VAL

Easy, everybody, easy. We're here to offer our friend Lloyd a job, not get people up in a tizzy.

RENEE

You really put some guys in the ground, Lloyd?

LLOYD

That's not really something I like to talk about.

(Ernie bolts out of the chair like he is once again a high-energy fight promoter stoking the investment flames.)

ERNIE

Are you kidding? This was back in Pittsburgh; Lloyd goes toe to toe with this bruiser, this killer. Everybody knew the guy was bad news. What was it Benny, something, you remember?

LLOYD

Don't remember.

ERNIE

Benny ... uh, Benny 'the Bomber' Reynolds. That's it. Wasn't that it?

LLOYD

Yeah.

ERNIE

So Lloyd hears that Benny's been around boozin' it up at a couple of the hayseed bars. And rumor is Reynolds beat on a couple of the local girls.

RENEE

Well that's just savage.

ERNIE

Word gets out to Lloyd and he says he won't have anybody beatin' on no women around his hometown. It gets in the papers and people get to following the story - so Lloyd gets his shot at Reynolds even though he was just a young fighter from the sticks, right. And lo, just a couple of days later the women come to see us. Three nice field girls with shiners and broken noses. Well, when Lloyd got in the ring the next night Benny got what was coming to him.

SLIM

Went down for the old dirt nap, huh?

ERNIE

You better believe it. It wasn't sixty seconds into the third round that Reynolds is out on his feet and Lloyd here is delivering the 'cup da gray-sey.'

RENEE

(Laughs) Well aren't you just the horseman of Philadelphia, Lloyd.

ERNIE

And this is in the ring. You should hear about Lloyd's street fights.

VAL

I heard you were an able-type-fella, Lloyd.

LLOYD

That's me.

VAL

Well that's what I am looking for. Now, I want you to know before we get to talking, that the whole other thing is forgotten about, ok? It's in the past.

LLOYD

OK.

VAL

I mean it. We're square. In fact, I appreciate you looking out for Renee even when she didn't need it. Renee appreciates it to, don't you doll?

RENEE

I sure do, Lloyd. You're an out and out gallant.

SLIM

A regular honest-injun.

VAL

So there you go. We're square like I said. Now we got to talk about the future.

LLOYD

Whatever you say, Val.

VAL

Huh, you're a good kid, Lloyd. You see that respect, Ernie. You could learn something from that.

ERNIE

You know what they say about old dogs and new tricks, Val.

VAL

Yeah, I guess not. So, Lloyd, let me tell it to you now. Me and Slim have this problem. Do you know Jimmy, Jimmy DeStaphano? He runs a car dealership downtown and some other things.

LLOYD

Yeah Val, I think I might. But I don't own a car.

VAL

(Laughs) No, right, well here's the thing. Slim bought a real nice car from this guy, Jimmy.

SLIM

A beautiful car.

VAL

It was real nice. But Slim, he's not too good with money.

SLIM

It slips through my fingers.

VAL

Yeah, so one time he misses a payment. You know what I'm saying? He bought the car on credit so he's got to pay a little every month. But this one month, he forgets to pay.

SLIM

Must have had something else on my mind.

VAL

And this guy, Jimmy, he sends these two thugs over and jacks Slim's car right out of the parking lot. Yeah. How do you like that?

SLIM

Course we can't say nothing.

VAL

You know how it is.

LLOYD

Did you talk to Jimmy?

VAL

Oh yeah, we talked to him. Said Slim here was in *De-fault* and that the car was his now - again. Just didn't seem right.

SLIM

Not right at all.

VAL

So, we're going to get the car back.

ERNIE

You're going to get the car back from Jimmy?  
Jimmy the Eye?

VAL

Hey, we're all going to down there and  
explain it again to him. That's all. We  
need Lloyd here as our, ah, rabbit's foot.  
He is going to keep everybody feeling lucky  
by looking just the way he does.

ERNIE

And if things don't stay lucky?

VAL

Well like you said, Ernie, if things don't  
play Lloyd's a regular one-man wrecking  
crew. Right, Lloyd?

LLOYD

I don't know. Usually I just do, you know,  
body-guarding stuff. Like looking out for  
Renee. I'm not lucky all the time.

VAL

Yeah, well sure didn't work out too good  
last time, now did it?

LLOYD

No.

VAL

No. But I am willing to forgive ...

LLOYD

I don't know, Val.

VAL

What exactly don't you know? Cause this  
seems pretty simple to me. Is it simple to  
you, Slim?

SLIM

Sure ain't Chinese algerbras.

VAL

There you go. Ain't no-thing too hard about  
it.

LLOYD

It's just; I got this fight coming up...

VAL

Oh. And when is this fight you are getting ready for?

LLOYD

A week.

VAL

A week. Who you fighting?

LLOYD

Mike Fitzpatrick.

VAL

Never heard of him.

ERNIE

Val ...

VAL

Shut it Ernie. Lloyd and I are having a conversation. Lloyd, I never heard of this, Fitzpatrick.

SLIM

Sure ain't no Joe Louis.

VAL

Sure ain't. But I don't mean no disrespect. Man's got to make a living. And iffing you're a boxer, you can't always fight the champ, right? How much are you making off him?

LLOYD

Seventy Five.

VAL

And if you lose?

LLOYD

Thirty.

VAL

Well that sure don't sound like a lot.

SLIM

How much more if you lie down?

LLOYD

I told you I ain't no bum. I don't lie down for nobody.

VAL

Hey, that's why we like you Lloyd. Cause you're a stand up guy. You got pride. You don't lie down for nobody. Now, I know you never did nothing like we were talking about before, being an ace in the hole, but it sounds like you just never got the chance. I'm sure we could scrape together what, hundred fifty?

SLIM

Sure, Val, one fifty we could get.

VAL

By my count, that's a month's wages for you Lloyd, for one days work.

(There is a pause in conversation and Lloyd searches the faces of everyone, finally settling on Renee. Val nudges her to respond, which she does in a hollow tone.)

RENEE

It sure would mean a lot to us, Lloyd.

LLOYD

When are you all planning on going to see Jimmy?

VAL

Ah, nice. Tomorrow, Lloyd, my boy. We'll be by around four to pick you up.

(Val turns on his heel toward the door. Slim and then Renee follow suit in turn.)

VAL

Get some rest, champ.

SLIM

Don't scrape your knuckles too bad training.

(Val considers the door and then  
strides out, as does Slim.)

RENEE

Sure was good seeing you again, Lloyd.  
Goodbye.

LLOYD

Hey, Renee.

(Renee turns over her shoulder.)

LLOYD

Go out backwards. Really. It will save you  
some luck.

(Renee, amused, backs out of the  
apartment and closes the door as the  
last one to leave. Ernie and Lloyd eye  
each other.)

ERNIE

Ah, Lloyd. You should've said no.

LLOYD

What? Why? Besides, I could've said no if I  
wanted to.

ERNIE

Didn't you want to?

LLOYD

I told you about that light I saw this  
morning ... I don't know if I wanted to say  
no.

ERNIE

You did. You just didn't say anything. And  
what was that craziness with the door? I  
mean damn ...

LLOYD

It's true though ...

(Ernie fixates one of the small pictures hung on the wall. He crosses towards it.)

ERNIE

Jesus! Is that?

LLOYD

Yeah. Reynolds. Our first win in Philadelphia.

ERNIE

Thought you said you couldn't remember. Holy cow. I was so thin.

LLOYD

Yeah. You were great. Great trainer, great promoter. You could've thrown me in there with a lion and I would've ...

ERNIE

Man, I thought we had a chance.

LLOYD

Yeah. Ah. Yeah ... You know, you should come down to the gym again.

ERNIE

Oh no. There's too much heart ... Boxing is just too much for me. Besides you have a whole group now right? Tony and that, guy, Cus?

LLOYD

Most days they're around.

ERNIE

You should think about coaching too, Lloyd. You're getting a little long in the tooth to be in that ring.

LLOYD

Oh, I do. All the time I'm thinking about coaching. I'm even working with this kid now. Tony said I should go up to New York or Boston or something. I'm going to do it as soon as I can save up some money. Then you and me could go up there and ...

ERNIE

Let's not go jumping the gun.

LLOYD

Yeah. But that's why I got to make some, ah, capital. Right, that's what you used to say. Got to have capital before you start something big. Man's nothing without capital.

ERNIE

Did I say that stuff to you?

LLOYD

You taught me more than ...

ERNIE

Yeah right. Lloyd, you got to start doing for yourself now and again. Don't go following my advice. What's your record now?

LLOYD

Thirty-five and six.

ERNIE

Six? Jesus, Lloyd. A fighter's only as good as his record.

LLOYD

Yeah, well, I fought some young guys. I wasn't such good shape you know. That's why I am working real hard...

ERNIE

Hard to be a champ with six nowadays. When I left off you had one.

LLOYD

Yeah, but I mean, boxing, I don't know if I'll ever be champ.

(Ernie stares at Lloyd with surprise and expectation.)

LLOYD

So I ain't going to be champ. I'm still a good fighter. That's worth something. All that struggle, you know?

LLOYD (CONT'D)

You got to cope with training, and then you got put up with a cheap decision they give to some kid, and you got to take all those shots over the years. And I may not be champ but I got ... I don't know. I mean what are people going to say about me when I am not around?

ERNIE

Is that what those new trainers are telling you? Jesus, you sound like a Chinatown fortune-teller or something.

LLOYD

Yeah well, doesn't matter what I think. I still got to pay the bills. I'm really glad you put in another good word for me with Val.

ERNIE

I didn't. I told you, Lloyd, he asked for you.

LLOYD

Oh, right. The light.

ERNIE

Jesus, Lloyd ... Six? Six losses. Were you fighting hurt?

LLOYD

No! See ... Listen, Ernie, I guess I got to tell you something.

ERNIE

What's that?

LLOYD

I never said anything about this to you or nobody. But, those losses, hell, I have laid down a couple times.

ERNIE

You ... You did? When was this?

LLOYD

Last year. A couple times. I was in a real pinch, you know. Didn't have any money.

ERNIE

You don't say?

LLOYD

It was a real tough spot, Ernie. The guy told me, if I didn't take a dive I wouldn't get any fights. Fair, or fixed or anything. The guy told me I'd be a wash up. He could've done it too. He's got an eye that'll curse you just looking at it.

ERNIE

Well, well so what. That still doesn't make you a bum.

LLOYD

No?

ERNIE

No sir. You made some money off it? Did you see the real angle?

LLOYD

Yeah.

ERNIE

Well, there you go. I hope you had a couple bets on the side, cause if you're going go down, no use just sticking with the doe that's handed to you. You got get yourself some more gravy. You got to ...

LLOYD

Not the first time, but after I bet fifty dollars on the other guy.

ERNIE

(laughs) Well it's a start. Glad to see you finally learned an angle, or, half an angle at least. But you got to know that grift is going to dry up fast.

LLOYD

Yeah.

ERNIE

Yeah. Sooner or later, and with six losses it's going to be sooner, you won't get even odds. You see that right?

LLOYD

I see it.

ERNIE

You better. Now listen. So you made a couple of extra dollars ducking some punches from young punks. You gotta eat right? And good for you not telling Val and that Slim. Don't tell them. Even though they think they can pull one over on you, they respect your, I don't know, talent.

LLOYD

What about Renee?

ERNIE

What about Renee?

LLOYD

Do you think she respects my talent?

ERNIE

I don't think it matters one bit what she thinks about you, get me?

LLOYD

Yeah.

ERNIE

Yeah.

LLOYD

Ernie.

ERNIE

What?

LLOYD

One other thing.

ERNIE

What's that?

LLOYD

Forget it. You're going to be there tomorrow, right?

ERNIE

I'm going to be there and it's all going to go all right. All right, champ? You're going to sit there looking pretty, OK? Just let Val do all the talking.

LLOYD

All right. See you tomorrow, Ernie.

ERNIE

All right. I'll be by a little early, just, you know, to be a little early. It's good seeing you, Lloyd.

LLOYD

Goodbye, Ernie.

(Ernie leaves, closing the door behind him. Lloyd collapses into the chair Ernie had been sitting in. Lloyd bites his finger as the lights fade.)

ACT I, SCENE THREE: THE BAR / NIGHT

(Ernie sits at a lack-luster bar. His eyes are glazed and he has wadded and shredded the paper napkin in front of him. A young bartender dutifully does his best with a rag.)

ERNIE

Another.

(The bartender approaches, considering Ernie's state.)

BARTENDER

Ernie, how are you ... um, you got cash on you?

ERNIE

Yeah I got cash on me. Course. What's it to you?

BARTENDER

Management says I'm not supposed to run you a tab no more. But if you got cash then it's not a problem.

ERNIE

Problem? What problem? Now wait just a minute, son. I said I got cash in the pocket but I intend to leave it there. You see at this fine establishment *I am known*. I got credit.

BARTENDER

No, now last time you done talked me into it. But management ...

ERNIE

Management can kiss my ass.

(Bartender laughs nervously and looks over his shoulder. Ernie smiles.)

ERNIE

Yeah, that's right. After all the favors I pulled for management. Jesus. They squeeze you anyway they can. You ever feel like that son? You know what I'm saying to you, right?

BARTENDER

Yeah?

ERNIE

Yeah! You pay your dues in an establishment it used to mean something. Now I can't even get, I don't know, a bourbon.

BARTENDER

You can get one, I just can't put it on your tab?

(Ernie sucks his teeth in disappointment.)

ERNIE

Now that's just adding to the problem. You're doing their dirty work. You got the hard job right back in there; having to cut people off while management just sits back and watches the money roll on in. I do hope you're making large cash cause you are doing all the large work.

(Ernie waits for a reaction out of the bartender. The bartender looks over his shoulder and thumbs the air in the same direction.)

ERNIE

Huh, well you better just bring me an ice water then. Iffing you can put an ice water on my tab.

(The bartender steps away and Ernie grumbles under his breath. He removes a flask from his pocket and takes a long drag. He slips it back into his jacket as the bartender returns with ice water and a bourbon.)

BARTENDER

Just don't say nothing. OK, Ernie?

ERNIE

Ah, good boy. Taking a stand. You're going places, son.

(The bartender walks away shaking his head. Ernie smiles and kills his drink and fills it again with his flask. Val and Slim file in behind him.)

VAL

Slim, you are on a roll. Here be the man just like you said. Second time today. You've got radar.

SLIM

Not such a hard guess.

ERNIE

Evening boys. To what do I owe the pleasure?

VAL

This ain't really a social call, Ernie.

ERNIE

Figured.

VAL

We got to talk about tomorrow.

ERNIE

Yeah? Seemed to me you all didn't want ol' Ernie's opinion on things.

VAL

Regardless. We still got to talk about tomorrow.

ERNIE

About Jimmy the Eye? See, I thought we was all just planning on committing suicide tomorrow so I was having a last few before I go.

SLIM

Oh, I thought you was just a deadbeat drunk tanking up for the night, my mistake. What I tell you, Val? Nothing but lip.

VAL

Relax. Ernie, you know I've got an angle.

ERNIE

Who doesn't?

VAL

Yeah, and some are sharper than others.

(Val removes an envelop from his jacket and slides it over to Ernie.)

ERNIE

What's that?

VAL

It's a little get-right.

(Ernie opens the envelope. Inside is three hundred dollars. Ernie folds the money back inside the envelope and slips it into his jacket.)

ERNIE

Get-right for what? I don't mind Slim's face that much.

VAL

(laughing) How long you known your boy, Lloyd.

ERNIE

Ten years.

VAL

Long time.

ERNIE

I guess.

SLIM

And you were what, his coach or something?

ERNIE

I knew some boxing. Ran a fight game in Georgia way back. More grift than anything else. Lloyd just kinda happened.

SLIM

That's funny. A grifter stumbling on a legit act. Don't hear that one everyday.

VAL

But after you got to Philly you split up, yeah? Legit or not, you got out of the fight game?

ERNIE

Yeah. Not enough money in boxing. Too small time.

SLIM

Yeah, Sure. And it wasn't just that you woke up one-day promoting a no-talent wash-up.

ERNIE

It don't matter why I stopped promoting Lloyd. You can just come out and tell me what this is about. I don't need all this dancing around.

VAL

All right, Ernie. Let me tell you what that money means. It means you're in with us, right? Means you ain't a free agent no more.

SLIM

It means, somehow, someway, you're in with us guys going to the top.

VAL

And to get to the top we got carve out a piece for ourselves.

ERNIE

Jimmy.

VAL

Yeah. Jimmy the Eye.

ERNIE

All right, you tell it to me. What's one car worth going up against Jimmy. How's that worth it?

VAL

(Laughs) Come on, Ernie, use that head o' yours you say is filled with so much smarts. You think this is about some beat up T-bird? If somebody gets to Jimmy they're going be running the south side the very next morning, right? You show that strength and people know you're king.

ERNIE

But Val ...

VAL

And hear this. I am tired of small time angles. I am ready for that crown.

ERNIE

There is play in the small game though, Val. Things add up.

SLIM

Here we go. He's going to add it up for us. Tell us how one day, when we old and gray, we wake up kings just like that.

ERNIE

We've had two good years with me calling the, ah, making good plays. With how many problems? Zero. Money's coming in regular ...

SLIM

Money? You mean that chump-change you're using to keep yourself in the sauce?

VAL

That's not going to cut it no more. What's the point if you're going to stay small-time forever?

ERNIE

But now? Against Jimmy the eye?

VAL

What's so tough about Jimmy? Really.

ERNIE

So tough? What's not tough?

VAL

Educate me, Ernie.

ERNIE

He's got muscle.

VAL

We got muscle. Anybody's got muscle. I just bought some this morning.

SLIM

Yeah, on the cheap too.

VAL

And if Jimmy's not around, who's gonna tell that muscle what to do. Listen, you ever play chess?

ERNIE

Yes, Valiant, I do.

VAL

Well then you know. Everbody in chess got their role, their positions and what not. You get rid of the king and it don't matter what kind of muscle you have.

ERNIE

With flawless strategy like that I don't know how I ever doubted.

VAL

It don't matter what you think, cause that's not what you're afraid of, anyway, is it?

ERNIE

He's got the cops.

VAL

Ah, now the smart man is thinking.

SLIM

He's like old faithful.

VAL

The cops. What is a couple of hoods going to do about Jimmy's cops?

ERNIE

That does seem to be the dilemma.

VAL

'Cause sure, word gets out that the Eye got rolled by some of us boys, that's not going sit too well.

ERNIE

Not one bit.

VAL

No. That's why we're going need to give them something.

ERNIE

Yeah.

VAL

Maybe a little get-right, to smooth things over.

ERNIE

It's a start.

VAL

So what if I told you Renee is bringing some money - big money - over to a few friendly officers right now.

ERNIE

I said it's a start.

VAL

Boy, the old brain o' yours is cooking. So you figure cash wont be enough?

ERNIE

Nope.

VAL

So we'll have to give them something else.

ERNIE

Yep.

VAL

Somebody, actually.

(Ernie is suddenly chilled at Val's words but attempts to keep his composure.)

ERNIE

I guess so.

VAL

And it can't be just any old hood, right? Got to be some big, scary, able-body type that them cops can put down in the street.

ERNIE

Oh.

VAL

Yeah.

SLIM

You getting us, Ernie?

VAL

He's reading us, Slim. Don't you worry about Ernie. He's always just a little smarter than he looks.

(Ernie takes out his flask and takes a long drag. He then pours the rest in his empty glass.)

VAL

After this we'll be the big time. We'll be near untouchable. I'm counting on you here to see the smart play. You do see it don't you?

(Ernie drinks the remaining whiskey.)

SLIM

Listen, Ernie. This ain't no offer you can just turn a drunk nose up on ...

(Val motions to Slim to ease off.)

VAL

I got to know if you see it. Don't go blowing your chance out of habit, old man. I got to know if you see it.

ERNIE

I see it.

VAL

All right, then.

(With the tension broken Ernie begins to back-peddle.)

ERNIE

I'm telling you though, Val, the boy ain't too dependable. I don't want to monkey up your plans, but you should've told me from the get go. I don't know if he's the right man for the job.

SLIM

Not the right man? You told me yourself the guy is a killer. The story will stick to him like flypaper.

VAL

Just what do you mean, Ernie?

ERNIE

The guy ducks outta things. He's not the kid I remember. You saw how flaky he is with that bad luck stuff. And right after you all left today he pulls me aside and tells me he took some dives just earlier this year.

(Val and Slim consider the new information silently.)

SLIM

What I tell you?

ERNIE

You're right, Slim, you're right.

VAL

So you're thinking?

ERNIE

Well if he's spooked he might be a no-show.  
Now, I don't know ...

VAL

I don't care if he's a fink or not, but your  
boy Lloyd is your responsibility. You make  
sure he shows up, that's your job now. Now  
that you're in with us.

ERNIE

All right, Val, I'll try.

VAL

I don't want try. I want the kid there, with  
us, tomorrow afternoon so its easy for the  
cops to assemble. Get me?

ERNIE

Yeah, course I do, Val.

VAL

Yeah. Bartender!

(Val lays twenty dollars on the bar.)

VAL

Keep my man here in the suds, or whatever  
the hell he's drinking.

SLIM

Don't worry. It'll all be over 'fore you  
know it.

(Val and Slim leave. The bartender  
comes over with another bourbon. He  
reaches for the money but Ernie places  
his hand over it.)

ERNIE

On my tab.

(Intimidated, the bartender hurries  
away. Ernie, downs the drink, places  
the money in his pocket and stumbles  
out of the bar.)

ACT I, SCENE FOUR: LLOYD'S APARTMENT / DAWN

(The apartment is dark. Three loud thumps rattle the front door and lights come on. Lloyd hops up from his bed and throws on a robe. He fishes out a Billy club from under his bed and moves to the door.)

LLOYD

Who is it?

ERNIE (OS)

Lloyd!

LLOYD

Ernie?

ERNIE

Open the damn door.

(Lloyd opens the door. Ernie is drunk and sweating through his shirt he leans on the doorframe.)

LLOYD

Oh, Ernie.

ERNIE

You want to let me in, or you going to give me one over the head.

LLOYD

Oh. Sorry. Come in.

(Lloyd steps aside, setting the Billy club down. Ernie stumbles in, collapsing on a chair.)

LLOYD

Why you hit that bottle so hard I'm never going to know.

ERNIE

Why not? Huh? Lloyd, listen you got ... you got to tell Val you can't do this thing.

LLOYD

What? That's what you came over to tell me.

ERNIE

Lloyd, you never had much sense. You don't see nothing right. You can see punches 'nuff to get out the way, but you don't see what nobody's thinking.

LLOYD

Maybe I don't see everything easy like you do, all right, but I know enough.

ERNIE

That has nothing to do with nothing.

LLOYD

Sure, Ernie.

ERNIE

So you're not going to do it, right? Just call it in sick or something. Skip town. I'll figure an excuse to lay on Val. I planted the seed of doubt in his mind so you don't have to worry none ...

LLOYD

I would.

ERNIE

Yeah?

LLOYD

But I can't. I need the money. I already spent that one fifty Val was talking. I'm not good with cash like you. I got bills that need paying and they don't just go away the way you can make them.

ERNIE

You are not listening to me. You are not doing this thing. I don't care what bills you got...

LLOYD

You going to give me the money. Huh, Ernie? You going to stake me?

ERNIE

No. I ain't got nothing.

LLOYD

I figured. Besides, breaking a promise is bad luck.

ERNIE

This ain't about money and it ain't about your damn luck. You're a fighter. You got other ways of making bread then getting yourself dead for some keen thug.

LLOYD

Yeah, I'm a fighter, right. But you said it yourself. My angle, my *handout*, it's about to dry up. And I don't have no vision for what people are thinking. I got to take what opportunities I can get.

ERNIE

Opportunities? Lloyd, damn it, you're some kind of businessman now?

LLOYD

Nah. Just trying to survive. Just like you.

ERNIE

Then smarten up and get gone.

LLOYD

You're not hearing me are you? This job makes me more than a fighter. It makes me more ... And that's what I need to ...

ERNIE

To what?

LLOYD

Fighting is for a young chump with no angle. That ain't for me no more.

ERNIE

Bull! You ain't even a fighter. You got no sense for angles. You're just some weird-o, superstitious kid who don't know nothing.

LLOYD

I said, I know enough.

ERNIE

You know enough, huh? Did you know I don't know boxing? That's right. Nothing. It was a grift, Lloyd. You ain't just a fake, you're just a part of one big gyp. Most of them guys you fought, I had the fix in. You know enough to know that? Huh?

LLOYD

Why you bring all this stuff up? Just so I won't get in on a little piece that you got with Val.

ERNIE

I asked you a question, son! You know half your fights were crooked?

LLOYD

Ernie...

ERNIE

Did you?

LLOYD

Yeah, Ernie. I figured it out. But I beat those guys anyways. Three times to the right ...

ERNIE

You did? You did, huh? What were doing with me then?

LLOYD

Making money. What else was I going to do? Right? Me, from the sticks, I tried to learn boxing cause what the hell else I got. I meet you and you're getting me good fights. At sixteen I'm paying my own ticket.

ERNIE

Lloyd...

LLOYD

You think you were hiding it from me? You damn near told me every time I had to drag your drunk ass from a bar.

ERNIE

Damn it, Lloyd...

LLOYD

We were going pretty good. Ready to go big-time. But then we got Reynolds. I wasn't supposed to win that one, was I?

ERNIE

It was legit. I mean, we just blundered into it. I couldn't believe we got it in the first place. And he wouldn't take my money. I offered him double the purse and that damn thug wouldn't take it. But Lloyd...

LLOYD

But I beat him anyway.

ERNIE

You did. It was a damn lucky punch and where did that get you?

LLOYD

You didn't think I was going to win.

ERNIE

And it cost me. Does that make you feel stronger about it? Better? It cleaned me out pretty bad, Lloyd.

LLOYD

Sure it did.

ERNIE

Ho. What was I supposed to do? Bet on you? After half the guys we fought were fixed and the other half were bums.

LLOYD

I knew I was going to beat him. I told you, I was. I had the sun in my eyes the morning before the fight and I knew ...

ERNIE

Jesus, Lloyd! How is that a sure thing?

LLOYD

It don't matter. I saw you cheering in the corner when I was going round the ring.

(Lloyd's alarm clock goes off. Ernie is startled but Lloyd moves quickly to shut it off.)

LLOYD

I got to go to the gym.

ERNIE

What? It's the middle of the goddamn night?

LLOYD

It's five thirty. I got to go. Why don't you just sleep this off?

(Lloyd takes off the robe and begins to dress in sweatpants, canvas sneakers and a tank top. Ernie is ready to pass out.)

ERNIE

Lloyd, you can't do this thing with Val. You got to get out of the city?

LLOYD

Why, so he'll never give me work again? So you're the only one managing me. Like old times, building me up to the chiselers just to get your own fix in.

ERNIE

No! You're going get hurt doing this thing. You could get killed. You don't know Val and Slim.

LLOYD

I know them enough. And I'll figure out the rest.

ERNIE

Lloyd ...

LLOYD

Don't do me no more favors, Ernie.

(Lloyd lifts a bag of equipment onto his shoulder and steps out of the apartment. Ernie tries to stand and then stumbles back onto the bed.)

ERNIE

God. Damn it, Lloyd. Damn it.

(Ernie's head lolls back on the bed. The sound of cheering slowly becomes audible off stage. )

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

... The kid is circling. He keeps circling to the right. There's a left. Another. Reynolds just can't seem to figure where they're coming from. He looks worn out.

And the kid from Pittsburgh keeps coming. His corner is waving him on. His trainer is in a frenzy. Telling him to get in there. The kid is getting braver by the second. He's righteous! A jab. And another left! Another! Reynolds against the ropes. The kid's unloading! Reynolds is out on his feet! Where's the referee! Oh no ...

(The cheers crescendo and then fade. The lights black out.)

ACT II, SCENE ONE: THE GYM / DAY 2

(With the lights low a woman in a fifties style bathing suit and sunglasses struts across the stage. She carries a round card with the number two above her head. Jeering and cat calls are audible. As she steps off the stage, the double pang of a bell sounds and the lights spring up.)

(Lloyd is in the ring with the same fighter. He chases him around, much more aggressive than the day before.)

TRAINER 1

What's with all that backpedaling? How you gonna punch doing that?

TRAINER 2

Don't drop that left.

TRAINER 1

No! In. In! Move in.

TRAINER 2

Watch that left!

(The fighters tangle again. Lloyd throws a flurry of punches, breaking through his opponent's guard with an overhead right. The other fighter falls to the canvas. Trainer 1 jumps into the ring.)

TRAINER 1

Hey, what's the matter with you, boy?

TRAINER 2

Told him to watch that left.

TRAINER 1

Come on champ. Lucky punch.

(The trainers help Lloyd's opponent to his feet and out of the ring.)

TRAINER 2

Every dog has his day.

TRAINER 1

That was that lug's one shot in a million.

TRAINER 2

Couldn't hurt you again if he wanted to.

(The trainers exit with their fighter. Renee enters as Lloyd peels off his headgear. She wears a tan overcoat, buttoned and cinched at the waist.)

RENEE

Lloyd.

LLOYD

Renee. Hey, Renee, they let you in? I mean...

RENEE

Yeah, Lloyd they let me in, invited even.

LLOYD

I just meant that this isn't really a place for a lady.

RENEE

Hmmm. You're positively quaint.

LLOYD

Not that I'm saying ...

RENEE

Course not, Lloyd. Who'd ever suggest such a thing?

LLOYD

Yeah, ah, yeah.

(Lloyd nervously removes his gloves and stashes them in a bag.)

RENEE

Sure is lonely in here.

LLOYD

Morning rush is over. Everybody goes home till afternoon. Besides, boxing is lonely.

(Stifled with nerves, Lloyd continues to pack his equipment keeping his eyes off Renee.)

RENEE

I saw you fighting with that man. I've never been much of a fight fan but it was heady. Rousing even.

LLOYD

Yeah? You liked it?

RENEE

Sure. You've got an artist's touch in there, dancing around until just the right moment and then, wham-o! Very Jackson Pollack. One good one right in the kisser.

(Slowly Lloyd is drawn into the conversation.)

LLOYD

I really wasn't supposed to hit that man; it was kind of a mistake.

RENEE

How do you mean mistake? Isn't that the point? Giving better than you take?

LLOYD

That man is going to be champ someday. He's pretty good, and he's got all the right trainers and all the right promoters. He's going all the way. And I'm really just supposed to be helping him out.

(Renee casually removes her coat revealing a form fitting dress. She tosses gingerly over the rope of the ring.)

RENEE

Well that seems positively unjust. If he's destined to be champion someday, by rights that makes you champion today.

LLOYD

That's not really the way boxing works. There's a logic to it but ... your dress sure does look pretty, Renee.

RENEE

It's not the dress. It's me.

LLOYD

Yeah, you look nice in it.

RENEE

Why thank you, Lloyd. You look positively Herculean this morning. We're a right pair you and I. You all bravado and me all recherché. (laughs)

LLOYD

(Laughs) Why do you talk that way?

RENEE

What way?

LLOYD

You know what I mean. The way you talk, with those crazy words.

RENEE

That's how people speak after they been to college.

LLOYD

Yeah? College?

RENEE

Two years in New York.

LLOYD

Wow. I figured you were pretty smart but I thought maybe, I don't know. I guess I thought you were born with it.

RENEE

Maybe I just was. I'm glad you like the dress. It was a gift, from a mutual friend. Do you know who?

LLOYD

Val?

RENEE

Hah. Ol' Valiant wouldn't know good taste from a horseshit popsicle.

(Lloyd laughs nervously.)

RENEE

Pardon the French, sweetheart. I'll give you one more guess.

LLOYD

Jimmy.

RENEE

On the money. Jimmy the ... Jimmy DeStaphano - now there's a man with some taste. Good guess, by the by. I knew you fellas weren't all hammer-heads.

LLOYD

Why you bringing up Jimmy the Eye? I hate that eye. Is that why you came down here?

RENEE

Oh, and even smarter. Lloyd, there might be life for you after pugilism. That is if you get yourself out of this one.

LLOYD

I wasn't going to say anything. Not to anybody.

RENEE

That's sweet of you, but that's not going to do it. Like I said before, we're a pair. The two of us are caught in the same little trap.

RENEE (CONT'D)

We sure like Val but we also got a friend in Jimmy, even though nobody knows about it. Jimmy the Eye is a friend in the dark.

LLOYD

I don't know what you're saying when you talk like that. I've done some favors for Jimmy, and now I'm going to do one for Val.

RENEE

Did you tell Jimmy you were partnering up with Val?

LLOYD

No.

RENEE

What do you think Jimmy is going to say when he sees you as Val's right hand man?

LLOYD

I didn't expect him to say nothing.

RENEE

Nothing? Did your mom leave you out in the sun to long or something?

LLOYD

No.

RENEE

You sure are a puzzle.

LLOYD

Huh?

RENEE

A right imbroglio, that's what you are. See I don't know if you're being coy or reckless or just what you're up to. It's intriguing, Lloyd. That's why I came down here - to figure you out.

LLOYD

I don't think that should be too hard.

RENEE

No? We'll see.

LLOYD

What do you want to know about me?

RENEE

Do you have a girlfriend, Lloyd?

LLOYD

What?

RENEE

A woman. Do you like women, Lloyd?

LLOYD

I know. Of course I do! I just thought you were going ask me about Jimmy or Val or something.

RENEE

We'll get there. You're not in a rush are you? You don't mind talking with me, do you Lloyd?

LLOYD

No.

RENEE

Good. So?

LLOYD

I don't have a girlfriend.

RENEE

Now see, that's a puzzle right there. A big, able man like yourself, I'd figure the girls would be falling all over you.

LLOYD

No. I just ... Everybody's got talents. I'm OK in the ring but I'm not smooth like Val or Ernie. They have a sense about that stuff.

RENEE

Oh boy, you are just as sweet as can be. Now, I'm guessing maybe you're a little shy.

LLOYD

I guess.

RENEE

Yeah. See Lloyd, now that can be a perilous limitation. If you're too shy, you let people walk all over you, know what I'm saying?

LLOYD

Yeah. That's what Ernie...

RENEE

Ernie and Val, it's not that they're smooth, not by a long-shot, but they sure ain't shy.

LLOYD

No they ain't.

RENEE

And take me for example. Now I can't go knocking heads around like you do Lloyd, but I sure ain't shy either. When I want something, I get it. I got to be a little creative about how I do it, but I get it just the same. Do you think that's un-lady like?

LLOYD

No, ah, no I guess not.

RENEE

It's tough. I know I'm supposed to be demure. But its operose to keep my wants and desires all bundled in a shy little package. Which do you like Lloyd?

LLOYD

What?

RENEE

Do you like a shy little thing or a gal who's more vivacious? Hmmm? I mean with a little more sass?

LLOYD

I don't know, Renee.

RENEE

I don't mean to put you on the spot, Lloyd. I'm just curious is all. Personally I like both. It's funny with men. Usually you get both mixed up in the same one. The big, smooth, tough guys go all yellow on you once, ah, you get to know them. And its those shy, quite ones that are red-blooded behind closed doors.

LLOYD

Is that the way it is with Jimmy and Val?

RENEE

Gosh, Lloyd. Just when I think I'm losing you, you cut right through all the bull. You're right. The two of them come on strong at first but they're just big softies in the end.

LLOYD

Yeah?

RENEE

Yeah. Still, it's a shame I had to choose one over the other. It's a real sacrifice for me.

LLOYD

A sacrifice?

RENEE

Not in the voodoo way, Lloyd, but a sacrifice nonetheless. I had to choose between Jimmy and Val. I had to look into the future and choose who to give the drop to. And I chose Jimmy.

LLOYD

You did.

RENEE

Yes sir.

LLOYD

Why?

RENEE

Now you're trying to figure me out. Is that where we are?

LLOYD

No. I just wanted to know, not for nothing.

RENEE

No, Lloyd, I'll tell you. It's simple to understand. Fellas treat girls different. Some are rougher than others. Now Valiant is plenty nice, but he can be rough, you know what I'm saying?

(Lloyd flinches at Renee's words.)

LLOYD

Yeah.

RENEE

You like don't like that. Hmmm. It's ok, I don't like it much either.

LLOYD

Its just ... I think beaten on a woman is real bad luck. It's about the worst thing, I think ...

RENEE

Mmmm, taboo ... Well, not only is Jimmy better at knowing how to treat a girl, but he's the future in this town, Lloyd, and I can get you in on it.

LLOYD

How you figuring on do that?

RENEE

It's real easy. All you got to do is just lie back and relax and I'll tell it to you. Can you do that for me?

(Renee takes one of the corner stools from the ring and bids Lloyd to seat himself in front of her. Lloyd skittishly obeys.)

RENEE

There you go. Now, first off, this whole car business Val tried to sell you is artifice and flim-flam. I figured you worked that one out yourself.

LLOYD

Ah, sure I did. Yeah.

RENEE

Val has been trying to come up with a way to knock Jimmy for a long time now. For a while, I even thought he might have the guile to do it. But lately he's been talking real serious about it and I knew it was time for me to choose.

LLOYD

So you went to Jimmy?

RENEE

Oh yeah. Jimmy went out and got himself two real hard-cases. The real thing. Good with a shiv and not much else. And the way I figured it, Val and Slim would've run head long into the pair of them. But then Val, he gets smart all of a sudden and offers you a job. Now I don't want to heap compliments on you Lloyd, but with you there, it goes back to even money. And that's exactly what I don't want. I need to know Jimmy is coming out ahead on this.

LLOYD

So what do you want me to do?

RENEE

Lloyd, I want you to play it safe. Just keep sitting there. Do what you do.

(Renee begins to approach Lloyd. Lloyd shivers nervously, not knowing what to say.)

LLOYD

You think it's going to rain today?

(Renee halts, confused.)

RENEE

What?

LLOYD

It looks like it's getting ready to storm.

RENEE

What? What are you saying?

LLOYD

Sorry. Ernie just used to tell me, I mean, I just wanted some inoculated conversation.

RENEE

Innocuous? Well, all right Lloyd, if you're galled with the topic of conversation we can change it. I do think it's going to rain, hard. Have you ever heard the story of Aeneas and Dido?

LLOYD

No. What is that?

RENEE

That's him and her, sweetheart. Aeneas was a soldier from Troy, his, ah, hometown. But the town was destroyed so Aeneas led the survivors away.

LLOYD

Where

RENEE

Rome. You've heard of that one?

LLOYD

Rome, Sure. Gladiators, right?

RENEE

Right, Gladiators. Now, on the way, Aeneas meets a queen named Dido. She's beautiful, witty, and has all the things a man desires. You know what I mean, Lloyd?

LLOYD

Yeah.

RENEE

Dido and Aeneas are out walking one day and the gods cook up an outrageous storm. Aeneas and Dido find shelter in a cave and pass the storm with the delights of each other's company.

LLOYD

You know, maybe I'm a little punch drunk, but you're going to need to be plain with me.

RENEE

What so ever do you mean?

LLOYD

What?

RENEE

Punch drunk?

LLOYD

Ha! Oh, it's when a fighter takes too many shots upstairs and starts seeing lights on all the time in his head.

RENEE

That sounds absolutely barbarous, Lloyd.

LLOYD

Yeah, it ain't so pretty. But the point of boxing isn't standing around letting somebody knock your head off. You got to stick and move ...

RENEE

Well said, Lloyd. I don't think I could have fashioned a better metaphor to explain myself. Sometimes you got to stick and sometimes move, and right now we got to move.

LLOYD

Where?

RENEE

I know a place, Lloyd.

(Renee's body bends suggestively toward, Lloyd.)

RENEE

Downtown. It's pretty small, sure. Barely enough room for two. But a girl's gotta have a place to get away to, and, someone to protect her in a storm, if she can manage it.

LLOYD

Wait. Iffing I go with you, what about Ernie?

RENEE

Sweetheart, that's the point. Now I told you I had to make a sacrifice. And it looks like you're going to have to make one too.

LLOYD

But Ernie, last night ...

RENEE

Lloyd. This ain't much of a choice when you think about it. Let's say you go down there with Val and Ernie and Slim. You got a lot to lose. No matter how it goes down Jimmy is going to let it out that you took dives on his nickel.

LLOYD

I'm not some palooka...

RENEE

I'm not saying you are, sweetheart, whatever that is. It's like I said before, Lloyd, we're two peas in a pod. We're both giving up something for better times to come. I have to give up Val, and that don't make a girl feel great. But I know things are going to be better. And I can make sure things get better for you. Trust me.

LLOYD

But, I mean, Ernie ...

RENEE

Ernie can take care of himself! He's been trying to get in with Val and Slim for two years now. Don't think he doesn't take every angle that comes his way. I know. I've seen it. He even made a few moves on me to see how it would play. Yeah, Ernie can do for himself just fine.

LLOYD

Yeah.

RENEE

Yeah is right. You think he stood up for you the last time things went bad. He was ready to give you up. It was Val that squared things. All on the count that he liked the fact you mopped up the floor with his friend who got fresh with me. But Ernie, he was ready to sell you out flat.

LLOYD

Well that's a whole lot of bad luck on him. Selling somebody out, me, you're just asking the world for trouble. It's just ...

RENEE

I'm telling you, Lloyd, those three don't have no respect for you, Ernie especially. He ain't got nothing but guile for anyone.

LLOYD

He told me he didn't want me doing the job neither.

RENEE

What? Well, I don't know what kind of crazy angle he's got but I'm sure it ain't good for you. Probably just some short play to cut you out of the action. Probably doesn't even see the big picture.

LLOYD

But ...

RENEE

Lloyd, I need somebody ... I'm scared.

(Renee begins to sob. Lloyd tentatively points his arms around her.)

RENEE

Do something for yourself for once. Don't be shy.

(Renee kisses Lloyd slowly. Lloyd moves to kiss Renee again but she hesitates.)

RENEE

Let's just get out of here.

(Renee and Lloyd move toward the exit as one. Lights go out. There is a thunderclap and the sound of rain in the city.)

ACT II, SCENE TWO: LLOYD'S APARTMENT / DAY 2

(Ernie is sleeping on Lloyd's bed. He snores loudly. Through Lloyd's curtain a small beam of light shines on his eyes. There is a knock at the door that does nothing to stir him. A moment later the door rattles slightly and pops open. Val and Slim enter. They are wet from the rain.)

VAL

What the hell is this?

SLIM

Told you we should've hung it all on Ernie from the start.

(Val crosses the room and shakes Ernie awake.)

VAL

Wake up, you dumb lush.

ERNIE

Val!

VAL

Yeah, Val.

SLIM

Where's the muscle?

ERNIE

I don't know.

SLIM

What?

VAL

This don't make you look to good, Ernie.

ERNIE

He's not here. How the Hell should I know where he is?

SLIM

I knew that guy was a bum. He had palooka written all over him.

ERNIE

I told you, Val, he's a fool. I told you he couldn't handle this. Didn't I?

VAL

He's a pawn in this and I told you to handle him. But here I find your drunk-ass sleeping and him gone.

ERNIE

The boy has got no subtlety to him. That's what I said. No subtly. Can't even do body guarding right. Man comes sniffing around and Lloyd's got to knock his head in before he finds out what the score is. If he can't handle that I don't know how you thought he could be with us.

VAL

All right shut it.

ERNIE

But what are we going to do now? Are we just forgetting Jimmy? Cause that's where I think the smart play is at. Otherwise, we got to find somebody else who can ...

VAL

No. We ain't forgetting Jimmy.

SLIM

I don't know. Seems like everything is going bust-o.

ERNIE

What?

VAL

Nothing is bust-o. Renee is ... late. The cops she was supposed pay off said they never got the money.

ERNIE

Well then Hell, we shouldn't be even thinking about still doing this. We should be breaking out here. This town should be on the horizon ...

VAL

No. Nix. That might be how the grifter operates, but that ain't how I operate. Maybe Jimmy is wise to us, or maybe he's having things fall into place natural-like. Who knows.

SLIM

So what do we do, Val?

VAL

We're going to have to get bloody, Slim. We're going to have to force this thing here.

SLIM

That's why you keep me around, Val.

ERNIE

Now, I don't know what you boys are talking but it sounds like a pretty rough-type of operation.

VAL

Yeah, well we're a rough bunch of guys. Right-o?

SLIM

We're sandpaper, Val.

VAL

Damn-straight. This play ain't just about Jimmy. It's about ambition. And it's time to show who's got it and who don't?

SLIM

You got it, right Ernie?

ERNIE

Yeah, sure. Course. But...

(Slim removes a pistol from inside his jacket and hands it to Ernie.)

VAL

Good. We got roles to play, you know. Like chess or something. I'm the king, right? And Slim, he's like, well, I think he's like the rook.

ERNIE

Why that?

VAL

I don't know, look at him, doesn't he look like the rook? It fits him.

SLIM

Sure Val.

VAL

And you, Ernie? What are you?

ERNIE

I don't know, Val?

VAL

No. Come on now. Pick. You are the ...

ERNIE

Bishop.

VAL

The bishop. I like it. Yeah, I like that. Why the bishop?

ERNIE

I move diagonal like.

VAL

Diagonal, sure. Look now, I like you as the bishop. But if you don't find your friend, you're the trigger-man, and you know what piece that is.

ERNIE

Wait. What?

SLIM

That's right, that's the play. Ernie as the trigger-man.

VAL

Ernie as the pawn!

ERNIE

That's not my strong suit, Val. Come on, that's not work I am cut out for. Why don't we find Renee and the money, then I'll square things with the cops, and then we worry about Lloyd and Jimmy.

VAL

No. I'm taking care of Renee.

SLIM

Like you said, this ain't your strong suit.

VAL

Just do what you're told and things will work themselves out just fine. Yeah, Ernie. You'll be moving *diagonal* in no time.

(Slim and Val turn and stare down Ernie. Ernie collapses in the chair. Slim and Val stalk out of the room. Ernie casts the gun onto the table with disgust and moves back to the bed. He sees the picture he'd examined earlier. He moves to it and speaks to it.)

ERNIE

Jesus. Now we all taking dives.

(Ernie removes his flask from his jacket and takes a long, slow drag. Lights fade.)

ACT II, SCENE THREE: RENEE'S HIDEOUT / DUSK 2

(Renee's single room flat is short of decoration and dominated by a large bed. The bed was once ornate but time and poor care is apparent. There's a window with light coming in though the sound of rain can be heard. At the foot of the bed is a suitcase wrapped with a belt.

Lloyd and Renee lie side-by-side, naked beneath the covers.)

RENEE

Lloyd, darling.

LLOYD

Yeah.

RENEE

How many girls have you been with?

LLOYD

What kind of question is ... Why you have to ask me that?

RENEE

Relax. I don't mean to cut you down. It was great. It was better than great. It was capital. It's just...

LLOYD

What?

RENEE

I could tell you really wanted it to be good.

(Renee slides her body against Lloyd's and kisses the side of his face.)

RENEE

And it was awfully good. Exquisite. I just haven't had a man aim to please in a long time is all.

LLOYD

Oh.

RENEE

Don't be grim. I'm paying you a complement.

(Renee slips from beneath the covers and ties a robe around herself.)

RENEE

You want a drink?

LLOYD

No.

(Renee moves to the nightstand and pours herself a half-inch of gin.)

RENEE

What's eating you? I told you it was a compliment.

LLOYD

No. I don't mind what you said.

RENEE

Ah-huh.

LLOYD

Do you think its over? For Ern...

RENEE

I know what you mean. And I don't think that's a good thing to dwell on for you.

LLOYD

I just want to know.

RENEE

I guess it's probably is over. But don't think about it.

LLOYD

Why?

RENEE

Cause it ain't right to think about people  
you condemned, Lloyd, all right? It'll mess  
you up. Better to just let that lie.

(Renee moves to the window and stares  
outside.)

RENEE

Look at that. It's raining, but the sun's  
out and out shining.

LLOYD

A witch got married.

RENEE

What?

LLOYD

When it's raining and the sun is out - a  
witch got married.

RENEE

Well ain't that something.

LLOYD

I don't think it's real lucky.

RENEE

No?

LLOYD

Not likely.

RENEE

Lloyd, you are a regular twentieth century  
shaw-man. You got that luck on the brain.  
I don't know how you know all that stuff.

LLOYD

I don't see angles too good but I can sure  
read signs.

RENEE

Signs, huh? How's that working out for you?

LLOYD

Works okay. I mean it works good. Kept me out of loads of trouble. And just the other day I woke up and the sun was shining through my curtains.

RENEE

So?

LLOYD

Well, if that not opportunity, I mean if that just don't move you to go out and do something, I mean, it's all right there.

RENEE

Maybe for you. That is some strange logic you've got brewing in that head.

LLOYD

I, yeah ... It works for me though.

RENEE

We'll then tell me Lloyd, who married the witch today?

(Lloyd laughs.)

LLOYD

I don't know. Some fool.

RENEE

Yeah some fool. Or maybe it's raining and sunny for us Lloyd. Maybe it's no witch. Maybe it's raining cause Jimmy and Slim and Ernie are making their exit and it's sunny for us cause we made the smart play. How about that witch-doctor? Do I have the second sight?

LLOYD

I thought you said I shouldn't think about that stuff.

(Their conversation trails off while Renee watches the rain. Lloyd begins to dress. He is troubled.)

LLOYD

What happens when Aneas and Dido go to Rome.

RENEE

Dido, she doesn't go. Aneas leaves.

LLOYD

Why?

RENEE

It's unclear Lloyd.

LLOYD

What do you mean?

RENEE

I mean they don't explain it.

LLOYD

Well what kind of story is that?

(Renee turns back to the window. Lloyd finishes dressing.)

RENEE

Lloyd, we got to talk about Val and Ernie a little, just a little. We ain't out of this thing just yet.

(Renee throws back the rest of her drink.)

LLOYD

What do you mean?

RENEE

I'm saying we're not out of the woods, sweetheart.

(Renee draws the suitcase from the foot of the bed, opens the belt and shows the contents to Lloyd's. Lloyd's eyes open wide with provincial amazement.)

LLOYD

Holy.

RENEE

It's a real vision isn't it? Look at it. You can feel it pushing in on the world.

LLOYD

Where'd you get all that?

RENEE

It was Val's. I was supposed to give to some cop he had in his pocket. All part of his big move.

(Renee re-fastens the bag.)

RENEE

Don't suppose Val or that cop will be needing it now.

LLOYD

Jimmy?

RENEE

Yes, sir. Jimmy's going to run this whole town soon. Val's guys, whats left of them, are going to come under his heel right quick with this.

LLOYD

I suppose you're seeing all the angles.

RENEE

I sure am, Lloyd. I girl's got to be real careful when she's dealing like this. She can't do for herself outright. Cause that just don't work. She's got to seek out those few men who got the strength to do for themselves.

(Renee passes her hand over Lloyd's cheek. Lloyd looks away.)

RENEE

Now listen Lloyd. I told you I knew how I could make things better for you, and here's the angle we're going to play. You're going to take this over to Jimmy.

LLOYD

What? Why?

RENEE

Come on Lloyd. Cause that will put you in with him right quick. You don't see that?

LLOYD

No. I see it. It's just ... I was going to lie low. Go back to my place and just keep a low profile.

RENEE

Lloyd, a low profile? That is exactly what you cannot afford. You have an opportunity, a real opportunity here.

LLOYD

I know. I can see what you're saying, that getting in with Jimmy is the way to go ...

RENEE

Well I am glad you can manage to see that.

LLOYD

Just, I'm not used to living like this.

RENEE

Like what?

LLOYD

Like this, you, the money. Ernie and Val and Slim!

(Lloyd turns away from Renee, biting his finger. Renee is momentarily panicked but then collects her composure and puts her arms around Lloyd.)

RENEE

It's all right, Lloyd. You did what you had to do today. You know those boys were going to turn on you.

(Lloyd's attention refocuses on Renee.)

RENEE

I've been thinking about it. Val, that is, that was his, that was his strength. He could turn on you like mad dog, like he didn't remember one good thing you done for him. And those three were going to turn on you. You know it. I'm sure if you think about it you could see some sign pointing it out to you.

LLOYD

You really think that's how it would've played out.

RENEE

Yeah, Lloyd.

LLOYD

Then Ernie was right telling me not to go.

RENEE

Look, I told you not to think about this too much. It'll get all turned around in your head and you won't be able to see anything straight. You know what Ernie thought of you. When you don't know the score you can blunder straight on into the truth and still not know what to do with it.

LLOYD

I got to get out of here.

(Lloyd breaks from Renee's embrace.)

RENEE

Now Lloyd, listen to me. None of this matters. You did what you had to. You made the right play and that's all.

LLOYD

I just want to go home.

RENEE

You can't go home. Jimmy is expecting that money.

LLOYD

Well then you bring it to him.

RENEE

I can't Lloyd.

LLOYD

Why?

RENEE

Cause I told him you were coming with it.

LLOYD

So?

RENEE

So if you don't show it's going to look bad. Lloyd, it's going to look like you're still in with Val.

(Lloyd throws his hands in the air.)

LLOYD

Why'd you tell him I'd bring it? I don't like Jimmy. I can feel him waiting to curse me.

RENEE

Lloyd, it's a simple job but it shows a lot of respect. All you have to do is take the bag to Jimmy. What's so scary about that?

(Lloyd considers the suitcase and then Renee.)

RENEE

It's just a bag. You just carry the bag. Please. Do it as a favor, for me. I think you know I'm good for it.

LLOYD

Just deliver the bag? That's it?

RENEE

Yes Lloyd. Come on. The sun is out for you. Things are falling into place.

LLOYD

Yeah. Right into place. All right.

(Renee hands Lloyd the suitcase and kisses him on the cheek. Lloyd moves to the door and turns back to Renee.)

LLOYD

Goodbye, Renee.

RENEE

Bye, Lloyd.

(Lloyd leaves closing the door behind him. Renee waits for a moment then hurries to the door, stares out the peep hole. She turns the lock. Renee crosses the room to the phone and dials.)

RENEE

Put Jimmy on, it's Renee. (Pause) Yeah, he's on his way. (Pause) No. No, he's thick as a brick. You'll have no trouble at all. Just ... Just make it quick, all right? Yeah. Bye.

(Renee hangs the receiver. There are three solid knocks at the door.)

RENEE

(Whisper) Damn it, Lloyd! (shouting) One minute.

(Renee crosses back to the door, pulls back the deadbolt and opens the door. Val and Slim are outside.)

RENEE

You forget something, Lloyd ...

(Renee wilts seeing Val and Slim. She staggers back against the bed as the two men enter slowly, surveying the room. Val shakes his head.)

VAL

Renee.

(Blackout.)

ACT II, SCENE FOUR: LLOYD'S APARTMENT / NIGHT 2

(Ernie is at Lloyd's table. His flask is empty and standing upright. He holds the gun in his right hand. He is motionless, starring at the revolver.)

The sound of keys jingling in the lock is audible. Ernie snaps awake and nimbly moves behind the door frame, back to the wall, pistol at the ready. He trembles with fear.

Lloyd enters carrying the suitcase. He moves with purpose to the back of his apartment, not seeing Ernie behind him. Lloyd begins packing. Ernie tucks the pistol into his waist and steps tentatively toward him.)

ERNIE

Lloyd.

(Lloyd whirls around and trembles at the site of Ernie. For a moment he is sure he must be seeing the specter of his dead friend.)

LLOYD

Ernie. Oh my God, Ernie, I'm sorry.

ERNIE

Lloyd, it's ok. Ok? We're just a little late. Val postponed things.

LLOYD

Oh, jeez, for a second there I thought you was a ghost or something. Ernie, jeez.

ERNIE

What? Where were you going?

LLOYD

No, ah ... Nowheres.

ERNIE

Lloyd, where were you packing up for? You can't leave now, its too late.

LLOYD

Ernie, I'm not doing this. You can't do this. We have to get away from here. This place is over for us.

ERNIE

But listen ...

LLOYD

No, you listen. I know Jimmy DeStaphano. I've been in with him before. He's who paid me to take those dives.

ERNIE

You've been in with Jimmy? Jimmy the Eye?

LLOYD

Yes, yes, Jimmy and his damn eye brought this luck on us. I should've known it. I knew as soon as I met him that his eye was no good. And I knew it could lay a curse serious. And it went and did just that.

ERNIE

Easy now, Lloyd. We just got to figure this thing out. Everybody has got a role in this thing and we just got to figure them all, right? So you were in with Jimmy, but that was a long time ago ...

LLOYD

No. Jimmy knows Val is coming for him and he's got professionals with him.

ERNIE

Professionals. Professional whats? Now, did you tell Jimmy something...

LLOYD

Renee told him everything. She's been going with him, with Jimmy. She's been with him for a long time.

ERNIE

Oh. Oh Jesus. Where were you?

(Lloyd doesn't answer and keeps packing his bag.)

ERNIE

You and ... Oh Lloyd.

LLOYD

I don't know why I picked her.

(Lloyd stops packing and looks at Ernie, his eyes pleading.)

LLOYD

She just talked me up and down. She used a snake charm or something. Had me doubting you. Hell, I thought you and Val and Slim were going to end up dead. And then she wanted to make me a bagman, just like you said. And I knew the angle. I saw it straight off. But we got another chance here. I sure don't know why, but here it is.

(Lloyd motions to the suitcase.)

ERNIE

What are you saying, second chance? We got to find Val and straighten this all out.

LLOYD

We'll go to New York. We'll start a gym or something, like you said. That's the real opportunity. That's what that light was trying to tell me. Jimmy and Renee and Val and Slim can have this place.

ERNIE

No, Lloyd, we got to think this through.

LLOYD

There ain't no thinking it through. I did enough of that at Renee's. And the more I went over it in my head, lying there, even kissing her; I knew my luck was spoiling. I'm going.

ERNIE

And how are you fixing to do that?

LLOYD

I got some money. Our capital. I got it and now we are getting gone - out of here.

ERNIE

But Slim and Val ...

LLOYD

Slim and Val ain't got nothing but guile for us. Just like everybody else here. I can feel this place coming down, can't you? We got to go, now. We can start something new. You and me.

(Lloyd opens the suitcase and Ernie stares into its contents, hypnotized. Ernie places his hands in the suitcase and removes a bound stack of twenty dollar bills. He thumbs through it.)

ERNIE

Lloyd, I got to know.

LLOYD

I took it from Renee's place. She told me to bring it over to Jimmy as a peace offering or something. Wanted me to take a dive and be the bagman. But I remembered what you said and knew I couldn't go over there. Then I got to thinking, Hell, with this we could get to Europe if we wanted to. All the way to Rome or something.

ERNIE

Lloyd, wait, I mean ... Why you bringing me in on this thing here? I don't see your ...

LLOYD

I got to trust somebody, right? That's how this has to work right? How am I going to make it? I don't see the way people put the screws to you. But, you do. And I don't have sense enough to be cruel. How would I make it?

ERNIE

I don't know, but somehow you're making it all right.

LLOYD

Lets just go. You and me.

ERNIE

All right. You and me. We split the money. I go by train you go by bus. We'll meet up in New York in two days. All right?

LLOYD

All right. All right, yeah. Where?

ERNIE

Where what?

LLOYD

Where are we going to meet? In New York

ERNIE

Oh. Oh, yeah good, thinking. Ah, I don't know.

LLOYD

We'll meet at the Empire State Building. Right at the top. At noon.

ERNIE

Perfect.

LLOYD

Ernie, why are we going to split the money?

ERNIE

We both need it to travel, right? And it's less conspicuous that way.

LLOYD

Ok.

ERNIE

But maybe you're right. They'll be looking for you once word gets out. Maybe I should carry it - all.

LLOYD

Ok Ernie, whatever you say.

(Ernie takes hold of the money, closes Lloyd's suitcase and gives it to him.)

ERNIE

Now, you got enough cash for a ticket?

(Lloyd shakes his head 'no'. Ernie reaches into his jacket pocket and hands Lloyd the envelope Val had given him earlier.)

ERNIE

That'll carry you through, ok champ, least till we get to New York.

LLOYD

Ok.

ERNIE

Ok. Trust me, Lloyd. It's the right play.

(Slim and Val step into the room.)

VAL

No, Lloyd. It's the right play for him, but it sure ain't the smart play you.

SLIM

But then, you'd expect something desperate like that from a washed-up fighter. Some kind of round-twelve haymaker's punch. Pathetic.

VAL

But not from you, Ernie. You're supposed to be in with us. But I'm sure once you put the double cross on Lloyd you coming back this way, right?

ERNIE

Val, we were just talking.

SLIM

Sure, we been listening to you jab it up out there.

VAL

And don't worry; we knew something fishy was going on since the kid went missing - so we already took care of Jimmy and his *professionals*.

SLIM

Thing is, nobody's a professional when you got the drop.

VAL

Yeah nobody. So now we are just cleaning up.

SLIM

Tying up the loose ends.

VAL

Figure we'd stop by here after we'd been over to Renee's.

SLIM

Hard to find her.

VAL

Harder still to get the story out of her. Anyway, the money.

(Val and slim advance from the door. Slim's knife is out and Val slides out a pistol from his waistband.)

VAL

Ernie, would you mind taking the bag and stepping over here where it's safe.

SLIM

Don't want to ruin that suit getting anything on you.

ERNIE

Now lets just talk this through. Things are busted out pretty bad.

VAL

Nothing is busted. We got Jimmy. We got the money for the cops. And now we got someone to hang it on. So get over here Ernie, it's the only play you got.

LLOYD

Ernie?

(Ernie pulls the pistol from his belt and aims at Val.)

ERNIE

Don't.

(Slim steps forward, undaunted.)

VAL

What are you thinking? Huh. You going to stick with that piece of garbage? Yeah? You think you two bums are getting out of here on account of that little pop-gun. Or is this you moving diagonal, trying to bilk us and your friend. New York. (laughs.) You ain't big enough for a play like that. Put it down, Ernie, and get over here.

ERNIE

Val.

VAL

Who are you fighting for? It ain't clear.

ERNIE

Valliant.

VAL

Get that pistol down.

(Both Slim and Val advance.)

VAL

I said down!

(Ernie fires twice turning his head away. Val looks shocked that Ernie would dare fire at him and then falls dead. Ernie turns his gun on Slim but is too late. Slim is on him. Slim stabs Ernie twice in the belly. Ernie falls dead.)

LLOYD

No!

(Lloyd rushes Slim who slashes at him. Lloyd deftly avoids the knife. He circles Slim three times to the right, counting as he goes.)

LLOYD

One ... Two ... Three times to the right ...

(Slim stabs but Lloyd catches his arm. Lloyd drives Slim into the back wall of the apartment. The pictures on the walls shake and the knife drops from Slim's hand.

Slim's eyes open wide in terror. Bellowing, Lloyd whips Slim into the back bathroom doorway of the apartment.

We can no longer see Slim but we hear Lloyd's fist slam down on him repeatedly. When Lloyd is sure Slim is dead he returns, shaking. Lloyd's knuckles are wet with blood. He stammers to Ernie.)

LLOYD

Ernie. Oh damn it, Ernie. (pause) All right. All right. Fight's got no spite. I know you was fighting for me. I know you was. Course you was ... Sure you was.

(Lloyd sees the Ernie's hand still clutching the bag of money and realizes Ernie would have betrayed him. Disgusted, Lloyd pries the bag from Ernie's hand and moves toward the door.)

LLOYD

Damn you, Ernie.

(Just as he opens the door Renee appears in the door frame. She has a dark, black-eye and bruises on her wrists and arms.)

RENEE

Lloyd.

LLOYD

Renee, I thought ...

RENEE

No.

(Renee's eyes dart around the room at Val's body, Ernie's body and the blood on Lloyd's hands. With each sign of violence she becomes more confident.)

RENEE

They gave it to me good but I can take it.  
You better wash your hands.

(Lloyd quickly pulls a handkerchief from his back pocket and wipes down his hands.)

LLOYD

I'm going. Getting out of here.

(Lloyd nods and makes to walk past her but Renee moves to block his exit.)

RENEE

Jimmy's dead.

LLOYD

I'm going to make it someplace new.

RENEE

And Val, too. Lloyd. A girl's got to have someone.

LLOYD

No.

RENEE

No. Lloyd wait. I'm scared. I need somebody.

(Renee begins to weep and opens her arms to Lloyd. Lloyd looks away from Renee's eyes and pushes past her. He opens the door.)

LLOYD

But you can't have me.

RENEE

Don't be cruel. It ain't you.

(Renee seizes Val's pistol and turns it on Lloyd. But Lloyd is too quick and wrenches it gently from her hand.)

RENEE

Lloyd.

(Renee slaps Lloyd's face. Lloyd has no reaction but to step toward the door. Renee pushes her body in front of him and slaps him again, harder. Lloyd brushes her away and moves to the door.)

RENEE

Lloyd! Don't go! You good for nothing! Stay.

(Renee moves to physically pull him back but Lloyd turns and eyes her with a steeled gaze of lost innocence. Lloyd leaves. Renee turns her head, fighting back tears.)

Blackout