

VERVE

THE MUNCHKIN

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT

A limo pulls up. In the reflection of its siding flashbulbs pop, filaments sizzle then char; photographers with their faces hidden by their cameras look like a sea of fedoras.

The limo door opens and the size 5 heel of **JUDY GARLAND** touches down on red carpet for the first time -- all of 16.

A bleacher full of adoring fans, mainly kids, scream at the top-of-their lungs for this pint sized starlet. Above the bleachers, a large sign reads MGM'S AMAZING WIZARD OF OZ.

An equally young **MICKEY ROONEY** and Judy's mother, **ETHEL GARLAND** accompany her where the feverish commotion she faces is so intense her ears start ringing. She covers them.

From Judy's P.O.V., her world turns to black and white and SLOW MOTION. No volume. Silence. Only the sound of her breath like someone in a scuba mask submerged underwater.

Then volume returns. Color too. Both louder and brighter than before. She looks lost. Then Ethel grabs her hand.

INT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATRE - NIGHT

Ethel Garland sits between Judy and Mickey. The light from the movie screen flickers off Judy's face. The "Off to See The Wizard" scene begins. Judy's right leg starts to twitch.

Ethel notices and places her hand over it to make it stop. Judy's leg twitches again. Ethel's hand clamps down. Again. Her nails dig in. Judy tries to concentrate on the film to keep her mind distracted from the pain. Finally, Ethel releases her nails and Judy's chest collapses with relief.

ON THE SCREEN IN THE THEATRE:

DOROTHY marches down the Yellow Brick Road, arms linked with the **SCARECROW** and **TIN MAN** singing "Off to See the Wizard".

We PUSH IN on a tree limb snap suddenly in the background then see a dark shadow of something or someone hanging in the shadows, gently swaying back and forth. Completely lifeless.

EXT. VIC'S OFFICE - DAY

We hear loud grunting, like someone bench pressing a cow; stenciled letters on the frosted glass to the office read:

VIC SHEA

PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

WALK-INS WELCOME

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - DAY

We HOLD ON a pair of worn out brown brogues strapped in leather footholds attached to the top of the doorway.

We continue south, past argyle socks, wool trousers, linen dress shirt soaked with sweat and stop on the beet red face of **VIC SHEA** (40s): a little person hanging upsidedown.

His jugular bulges like an oak. He checks his Hamilton. The second hand moves like molasses. Lying below him on the floor, his fedora collects sweat dripping off his face like a bucket. His secretary, **DORIS BANKS** (29) calls for him.

DORIS (O.S.)
You got a walk-in, Vic!

From Vic's upsidedown P.O.V., the door flies open and Doris pops inside his office. She's normal-size and real pretty.

DORIS (CONT'D)
Vic!

She lets out a sigh and shuts the door. Vic begins to curl his torso upward to undo his foot straps at the top of the doorway. He does and dismounts. It's a daily routine.

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Vic sits atop phone books behind a desk in the main room of the office across from a ten-year old GIRL in pigtails.

VIC
How can I be of service?

GIRL
It's about Cleopatra.

VIC
Who's Cleopatra?

GIRL
My cat. She's missing.

VIC
I don't do pets, kid.

GIRL
The ad says no case is too small.

VIC
What ad?

GIRL
The ad in The Pennysaver.

Vic looks at Doris through the door between their offices.
She smiles at him. It was her. He kicks shut the door.

VIC
Look, kid --

The little girl looks like she's about to cry.

VIC (CONT'D)
Okay.
(sighs)
When did she go missing?

Vic takes out a pad and pen.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - LOS FELIZ - LATER THAT DAY

Vic crawls on all fours along a precarious branch to where CLEOPATRA perches. Below, the little girl and some kids from the neighborhood all watch as he inches toward the cat.

Vic inches closer to Cleopatra. She hisses at Vic. He lunges for the cat and manages to grab her tail, but he slips and now hangs from one arm by the branch, cat in other.

GIRL
(hysterical)
Cleopatra!

VIC
Don't worry, I'm okay!

He stares down the cat.

VIC (CONT'D)
You're in good hands. Don't worry.

C.U. - Vic begins to lose his grip.

Cleopatra slips and now hangs by one of her claws to Vic's shirt. To save the cat, Vic makes one last valiant effort.

He swings his arm with Cleopatra on it freeing her claw from his sleeve then catches her with the same arm in mid air. She's now safe and tucked in his arm like a football.

All the kids applaud and cheer below. As soon as Vic lets out a sigh of relief, the tree branch he's barely holding onto with one arm SNAPS. He hurtles to the ground below.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - LOS FELIZ - MOMENTS LATER

All the kids gather round a fallen Vic in a circle. The little girl breaks through, tears in her eyes. Vic looks up from his woozy P.O.V. He presents her Cleopatra unscathed.

GIRL
You saved Cleopatra.

VIC
You're welcome, kid.

Vic's helped to his feet and holds his lower back in pain, but tries not to show it. The girl hands him her piggy bank.

VIC (CONT'D)
What's this?

GIRL
For solving the case.

VIC
I can't take your money.

GIRL
Please. You deserve it.

A pause. Then the girl dumps all its contents out into Vic's open palms. It's not a lot. But he'll take it.

VIC
Thanks, kid.

GIRL
Wanna play with us?

VIC
Maybe another time.

BOY 1
You dropped this.

He holds out Vic's fedora.

VIC
Thanks.

BOY 2
How old are you?

VIC
Too old for this.

Vic puts on his fedora.

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET

Vic clutches his lower back getting in.

DORIS
Meow.

VIC
Just drive.

She pulls away from the curb.

DORIS
You didn't take that little girl's
money, did you?

VIC
Of course I did. How do you think
I'm bankrolling our date tonight?

DORIS
You remembered?

He dips his fedora over his eyes.

VIC
You only reminded me 900 times.

She smiles at him as he dozes off.

INT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATRE - THAT NIGHT

Vic slumps next to Doris at a showing of *The Wizard of Oz*. A few rows in front, some kids keep glancing back at him during the Lollipop Kid scene. They start to point. Doris looks over at Vic. It makes him boil, but he swallows it.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BLVD - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT

The two walk Hollywood Blvd with ice cream cones.

VIC

How come you wanna be an actress?

DORIS

How come you wanna be taller?

VIC

The world's tall.

DORIS

Acting's just in my blood. I can't explain it. It's who I am I guess.

VIC

But no one takes actors seriously.
Except for Jimmy Cagney.

DORIS

Why's Cagney any different?

VIC

'Cause he's my favorite.

DORIS

Oh really? You're the expert?

VIC

Look, kid. I just don't want you to get your feelings hurt is all.

DORIS

No. You just don't want to lose a free secretary, kid.

VIC

(coy)

You sure you really wanna act?

DORIS

(rolls her eyes)

So, did you like it?

VIC

Like what?

DORIS

Wizard of OZ, Cagney.

VIC

It was okay I guess. But how come they didn't do it all color?
They run out of money or something?

Doris stops and looks at him.

VIC (CONT'D)
What?

She shakes her head and continues on. He remains standing.

VIC (CONT'D)
Does my opinion not matter?

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Doris rides Vic on the couch till she climaxes rapturously, then collapses on top of him. Both lie spent and breathless.

DORIS
Do you love me, Vic?

VIC
Didn't we just make love?

He lights a cigarette.

DORIS
C'mon, don't play dumb. You know what I mean. Saying so matters.

VIC
What difference does it make?

DORIS
It just does, okay?

VIC
Actions speak louder than words.

He exhales a big plume of smoke.

DORIS
You're hopeless.

VIC
You always say that.

DORIS
'Cause it's true.

She takes the cigarette from him.

EXT. OLD CARRIAGE HOUSE - CHINATOWN - FOLLOWING DAY

We HOLD ON a vertical sign with Chinese characters barely decipherable due to a layer of pollution that's collected.

A steam engine whistles as it chugs into Union Station a stone's throw south on the edge of downtown Los Angeles.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

We circle around a musty office with velvet curtains that block out the sun. The walls are filled with floor-to-ceiling shelves that contain vials of exotic concoctions.

On tables, oddities are on display like the skeleton of a groundhog under a glass dome with lichen, posed like he's just surfaced to make his prediction.

On the other side of the room, a series of what resemble medieval torture devices are lined up like exercise equipment in a gym.

We stop at **DR. PEI**, an old Chinese man behind an ornate desk, wearing a tattered robe made of black silk and matching cap.

Across from him, Vic sits on a chair with a book called *Cryptozoology* underneath him to prop him up to eye level.

VIC

I'm making no gains. None
whatsoever. The hanging upside down
stuff just gives me headaches.

(takes vial out of pocket)
And this powder I'm putting in my
coffee and booze...dried lizard
tails or whatever...just gives me
bizarre dreams and a full mast.

Vic sets the vial down on the desk.

DR. PEI
Why not just accept one's self?

VIC

You promised height. And I still
like to take a man at his word.
Especially when I'm paying him.

Dr. Pei looks off, pondering.

DR. PEI
There is one thing.

CUT TO:

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM

Dr. Pei pulls down a diagram showing the skeleton of a very short man. He swats his cane across the legs.

DR. PEI (CONT'D)
Break here.

He pulls down another diagram. This one shows two bolted metal inserts in the space between two severed fibulas.

DR. PEI (CONT'D)
Make long. Then wait. Maybe year?

VIC
You've done this before?

DR. PEI
No one ever want height this much.

VIC
How much does it cost?

DR. PEI
(twirls mustache)
How much is it worth?

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

The fan on his desk sputters as Vic watches a tile of wallpaper hang off the ceiling by one sticky corner.

He opens a desk drawer. A bottle of LAUDANUM rolls into view. He picks the bottle up. From the way he looks at it, it's clear this is his vice. A vice he can't resist.

He closes his eyes as he drinks the liquid opium like water. Doris enters. He hides the bottle in the nick of time.

DORIS
You got a walk-in.

VIC
Send them in.

DORIS
You promised you'd quit.

VIC
I didn't know I had any left.

She confiscates it.

DORIS
The others too.

VIC
Others? What others?

She collects another hidden inside a hollow Bible on his bookshelf. And one more under the skirt of a Hula lamp.

VIC (CONT'D)
You're killing me, Doris.

DORIS
No. You've shown you're perfectly capable of doing that by yourself.

She slams the door behind her causing the tile of wallpaper to finally peel off the ceiling and fall to the floor.

INT. OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

GERALDINE BUSBY (40), a pretty woman with a freckly face in a sun dress fanning herself with *The Los Angeles Times* waits.

VIC
Sorry to keep you waiting, Miss --

They shake hands.

GERALDINE
Busby, Geraldine Busby. But everyone calls me "Gerry."

She sits back down.

GERALDINE (CONT'D)
Your secretary's very pretty.

VIC
That's why I hired her.

Doris rolls her eyes as Vic shuts the connecting door before walking around his desk taking a seat atop two phone books.

VIC (CONT'D)
(sighs)
How can I be of service?

GERALDINE
It's about my daughter, Claudette.

She takes out a photograph. He takes it.

GERALDINE (CONT'D)
She's missing.

CLOSE ON: A little person. Female. In her early teens.
It conjures something inside him. Perhaps a hint of sadness.

GERALDINE (CONT'D)
Is something the matter?

VIC
No. Nothing. Nothing at all.

He sets the photograph down.

VIC (CONT'D)
How come you think she's missing?

Next, she passes a postcard with a picture of the Hollywoodland sign on it across his desk. He turns it over.

ANGLE ON: The note on back addressed "Dear Mama" in cursive. We glimpse fragments like "Wizard of OZ" and "Munchkin."

GERALDINE
She's not in the movie.

VIC
Did you go to the police?

GERALDINE
You know how it is.

VIC
How what is?

GERALDINE
They don't care about a girl like that. That's why I came to you.

Sensing he's offended, she back pedals.

GERALDINE (CONT'D)
What I mean is I thought you'd be best suited to find her because you live in her world; know her people.

VIC
I'm sure she just didn't make the cut and was too proud to tell you.

GERALDINE
But it's been months since they finished making that movie, and she used to write me every week.

He pushes the postcard back.

VIC
I'm sorry, but I can't be of help.

GERALDINE
I have money.

Frantic, she gets out her purse.

VIC
Please. There's no need.

GERALDINE
I don't understand.

VIC
I don't take little person cases.

She looks at him, baffled. But she can tell he's serious.

VIC (CONT'D)
Look, everyone gets lost out here.
Lots of promises are broken. Your
daughter will turn up eventually.

He stands and walks around to her.

GERALDINE
You don't know that.

VIC
I'm sorry I can't help you.

He offers his hands to help her up. She refuses.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Vic opens the door to let her out. She stops. Shakes head.

GERALDINE
Where's your compassion?

He tries to hand the photograph back.

GERALDINE (CONT'D)
No. Keep it. My number's on the
back. Good day, Detective.

She leaves. He sighs, turns around to face Doris. She
looks up at him from reading The Hairy Ape by Eugene O'Neill.

DORIS
There goes your ship.

VIC
Try tugboat.

DORIS
Still floats.

VIC
So do witches.

DORIS
It's her daughter, Vic.

VIC
I know. Imagine if your daughter
grew up to be a munchkin one day.

DORIS
But hers never did.

VIC
I'd rather look for missing cats.

Vic picks some letters off a table by the door. He quickly
files through them, but stops on one in particular. A beat.

DORIS
How come you never write back?

He throws away the letter in question. Grabs his fedora.

DORIS (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

VIC
Out.

DORIS
Vic.

VIC
What?

DORIS
Aren't you curious at all?

The two lock eyes for a beat before he heads out. He slams
the door behind him causing Doris to flinch.

ANGLE ON: The envelope he threw away lying atop the trash
addressed to Vic. Its sender: Shea. From AIDA, OKLA.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE - LATER THAT DAY

Vic takes a swig from a flask as he sits in an empty theatre watching his idol, James Cagney, in *The Oklahoma Kid* (1939).

ON THE SCREEN IN THE THEATRE:

The diminutive James Cagney is larger-than-life despite looking like a mushroom stuffed in Western garb.

THE OKLAHOMA KID

Listen, I learned this about human nature when I was but so high. And that is: that the strong take away from the weak, and the smart take it away from the strong.

Vic watches, clearly enthralled by his silver screen idol. He finishes off the remainder of his flask and sighs. Numb.

INT. OFFICE - DUSK

Vic attempts to hang his fedora on the highest peg despite lower pegs within reach. He fails. He tries again. Fails.

VIC

Any calls?

He frisbees it in the corner out of frustration as he staggers into the reception area drunk as a skunk.

VIC (CONT'D)

Doris?

She's gone. But there's a note on the desk. He picks it up.

INT. FRANK & MUSSO GRILL - NIGHT

He enters to find Doris finishing off a Martini.

VIC

How come whenever you're angry at me I find you someplace when the bill's about to come?

He grabs the stool next to her.

DORIS

Who says I'm finished?

She kills her drink and motions for another.

VIC
Make that two.

DORIS
You smell like you're on four.

He takes the stool next to her, and nearly falls off as he's already three sheets to the wind and capsizing.

VIC
I'll let you catch up.

DORIS
While you watch Cagney movies in the middle of the day with a quart of bourbon like a bum, I'm waiting for your phone to ring. *Yours.*
Not mine. You think I like that?

VIC
First off, it was mid morning.
Second, it was gin. Third, neither of us gets any calls of importance.

DORIS
I can't keep watching you sit around feeling sorry for yourself.

He downs his drink. Belches. She turns away in disgust.

VIC
Sorry for myself? C'mon, Doris.
It's time to call a spade a spade.

DORIS
What are you talking about?

VIC
Look at you. Look at me. We're oil and water. That's really what this is about, isn't it?

He points to a CLASSICALLY HANDSOME MAN at the bar.

VIC (CONT'D)
You should be with that guy.

DORIS
Stop it, Vic. You're drunk.

VIC
Nice work, Detective.

DORIS
You do this every time.

VIC
(loud, to man)
What do you think of her?!

She grabs Vic.

DORIS
Stop it.

She looks into his eyes.

DORIS (CONT'D)
How can I ever expect you to love
me when you can't love yourself?

She opens her purse and starts to pull out some money.

VIC
C'mon, Doris. Don't go. I'm just
drunk. You said so yourself.

He tries to pull her back.

DORIS
Let go, Vic.

She pushes his hand off her.

DORIS (CONT'D)
I can't stand watching you do this
to yourself. It's masochistic.

VIC
Doris, I'm--

DORIS
I need a break.

She leaves some money and picks up her things.

DORIS (CONT'D)
Bye, Vic.

He watches her exit, then turns back to the bar to gaze at
his olive slowly drown to the bottom of his martini glass.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD AND VINE - LATER ON

Vic wanders aimlessly through the night. He stops in front of the Broadway-Hollywood Department store and stares into one of its display windows as he drinks from an open flask.

Inside the window, a MALE MANNEQUIN on bent knee in front of a FEMALE MANNEQUIN with her hands over her mouth. In the Male Mannequin's hand he holds out a sparkling diamond ring.

He walks to the next display window. Inside this one, a YOUNG BOY MANNEQUIN is getting a new pair of shoes tied by a MOTHER MANNEQUIN. Vic stops and presses against the glass. His focus sharpens on the pair of shoes the Mother is lacing.

Then Vic's eyes travel upward and focus on the Young Boy Mannequin's eyes. He's staring right back. A beat. Then Vic suddenly turns away, gasping for air like he's just had an asthma attack. He takes out his flask and polishes its contents off. After he regains his breath, he continues on.

INT. DRUGSTORE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Vic tries the door. The OWNER sweeping the floor inside points to the sign saying they're CLOSED. Vic slaps money against the window. Waits. Finally, the Owner acquiesces and sets his broom down to open for Vic.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - LATER THAT NIGHT

Vic finishes off the bottle of Laudanum he just purchased at the drugstore and throws it in the street. It shatters.

From Vic's drunken, opium haze P.O.V., we see life from 4'5". The world looks as scary as it is gigantic as Vic bounces aimlessly though the night like a pinball shot into play.

People glare down at him as they walk by. A car splashes through a puddle; muddy water covers Vic's legs like a tidal wave. A Doberman walked by its owner snarls at eye level.

EXT. GRAUMAN'S CHINESE THEATRE - NIGHT

Vic loses his balance in front of the theatre and falls right before the Clark Gable square with the actor's foot and handprints and inscribed "Great Guy" above his signature.

VIC
(slurring)
Hey, I'm a great guy too.

Vic places his hands in Clark Gable's hand imprints.

VIC (CONT'D)
(in reference to Gable's)
Your hands aren't so big.

But they are. Vic's hands swim in the imprint.

POLICEMAN
Get up.

VIC
Good evening, Officer.

He crawls to his feet.

VIC (CONT'D)
Did you know I was almost a cop? I
was half-way there.

Vic raises his hand above his head to drive the punch line.

POLICEMEN
Move along now or I'll cite you.

Vic comically salutes the Policeman.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT

Vic can't see a yard ahead of him as he continues stumbling down the boulevard of broken dreams high on heroin and booze.

VIC
*Wrap me up in me oil-skin and
jumper. No more on the docks I'll
be seen. Just tell me old
shipmates, I'm taking a trip mates.
And I'll see you some day in
Fiddler's Green!*

Vic trips and falls. Drunk, he keeps falling backwards as he tries to get on his feet. A trio of HOOLIGANS spot Vic.

HOOLIGAN 1
Take a look at this freak!

HOOLIGAN 2
Hey. How's the weather down there?

Vic finally gets to his feet. HOOLIGAN 3 pushes him back.

VIC
Easy, fellas. No need for that.

HOOLIGAN 3
(points, laughing)
He's pissed himself. Look.

Sure enough Vic has. Vic looks at his crotch.

VIC
I was feeling a bit warm.

The Hooligans start laughing. Vic starts to walk on.

HOOLIGAN 1
Where do you think you're going?

He shoves Vic back.

HOOLIGAN 2
We're just getting started.

VIC
So was I.

Vic punches Hooligan 2 in the balls. Hooligan 2 drops to his knees. Eye-level with Vic now, Vic slugs him in the face.

Hooligan 1 and 3 come over to defend their friend.

VIC (CONT'D)
Which of you two ladies is gonna ice that for him in bed tonight?

Hooligan 1 comes at Vic. But Vic ducks and levels his elbow across on Hooligan 1's kneecaps. He SCREAMS in pain.

Hooligan 2 gets back on his feet and takes out a switchblade. He and Hooligan 3 start to corner Vic, who puts his dukes up.

VIC (CONT'D)
C'mon, fellas. One at a time.
There's two of you and half of me.

They don't listen. Vic wises up and takes off running.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT

Vic turns down an alley and charges down it. The Hooligans spot him at the entrance of the alleyway and chase after him.

At the end of the alley, there's a fence. Vic starts to climb it. He's just about to fall over when they catch up.

Hooligan 2 goes to stab Vic in the ankle with the switchblade, but misses flesh. He tears Vic's pant leg instead.

VIC
Let me go, assholes!

Vic kicks Hooligan 2, causing him to drop the switchblade. It skitters under a garbage bin out-of-reach.

Hooligan 1 lunges up and grabs Vic before he can slip over the fence. And Vic's dragged back down to earth.

The Hooligans surround him and continue to taunt him. Vic fights back as hard as he can, but there's just too many.

Soon Vic's overwhelmed and held back by Hooligan 1 and 3. Hooligan 2, who's taken the most punishment rises up.

HOOLIGAN 2
You play ball, freak?

Hooligan 2 picks up a nearby pipe.

HOOLIGAN 2 (CONT'D)
Tie game. Full count. Bases loaded. DiMaggio at the plate.

He taps the ground with the pipe.

HOOLIGAN 2 (CONT'D)
Pitch me the midget.

Hooligan 2 raises the pipe over his shoulder.

Vic shuts his eyes. Hooligan 2's about to swing when a burst of GUN FIRE rings out. Vic slowly opens his eyes to see Hooligan 2 lying lifeless in front of him. Vic looks up.

Vic sees the black silhouette of a short man wearing a fedora and holding a Tommy Gun appear out of steam that rises from a sewer grate. It's Cagney -- JAMES CAGNEY.

Cagney prods the body of Hooligan 2 with his shoe. Hooligan 2 lets out a pathetic moan. Cagney aims his Tommy Gun down.

JAMES CAGNEY
Say "hi" to Satan for me.

Cagney unloads. Meanwhile, Hooligan 1 tries to sneak away.

JAMES CAGNEY (CONT'D)
Where you going in such a hurry?

He rat-a-tat-tats him dead.

JAMES CAGNEY (CONT'D)
Any more, boss?

Vic points at Hooligan 3. Cagney swivels.

JAMES CAGNEY (CONT'D)
Smile, you filthy rat.

Cagney fills him with more lead than a pencil factory.

JAMES CAGNEY (CONT'D)
You're a helluva look-out, kid.
(helps Vic up)
Twain once said: "It's not the size
of the dog in the fight, it's the
size of the fight in the dog."
(offers his gun to Vic)
For barking.

He takes the gun. The barrel still hot, its muzzle emits a staircase of smoke like a cigarette on an ashtray.

He blinks his eyes. This can't be happening. Cagney nods. More steam fills the alley, till we can no longer see either.

FADE TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY - HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - MORNING

Cagney was never in that alley. He was Vic's Laudanum-induced hallucination. Vic opens his eyes. Reality smarts.

A RAT stares at him; the two eye-level. They continue their stare down till the rat flinches first and scurries away.

Vic winces, touches his temple. Damp with blood. By the garbage bin, the pipe they used on him lies streaked with it.

Vic picks it up like a sword left after a battle and stares at his reflection. He's ugly but still has his life.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - MORNING

Vic's small black silhouette appears in between the two buildings at the entrance of the alleyway as he re-emerges.

Across the street, the marquee for THE WIZARD OF OZ at Grauman's Chinese Theatre. It looms like Mount Kilimanjaro.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A bandage wrapped around his head, Vic stares at the quote on a piece of paper Dr. Pei gave him for his surgery.

Then Vic looks over at the photograph of Claudette. He picks it up. Turns it over. On the back is the number.

EXT. THE PANTRY CAFÉ - DOWNTOWN - DAY

The iconic greasy spoon on South Figueroa.

INT. THE PANTRY CAFÉ - DOWNTOWN - DAY

Vic walks gingerly over to Geraldine waiting in a booth.

GERALDINE
What happened to you?

VIC
I got the sense knocked into me.

GERALDINE
Are you okay?

VIC
I can still breathe and cash checks. Speaking of which -

He sits down slowly, his body stiff as a board.

VIC (CONT'D)
Before I start, I require a check up front from all my clients.

She already has her purse out.

GERALDINE
Is cash okay instead?

VIC
Does a bear shit in the woods and wipe his ass with a white fluffy rabbit?

She hands him a wad of cash. He pockets it, happy.

VIC (CONT'D)
Now. Let's start over, shall we?

He takes out a pad and pen.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - DAY

Vic heads up the steps to an apartment complex at 1710 Camino Palmero where Claudette lived when she first came to Los Angeles. He sees a mailbox for "Busby, C." - #408."

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - DAY

Vic gets off on the fourth floor and heads down the red carpeted hallway where all sorts of noises can be heard from the rooms he passes. Music. Moans. Headboards rocking.

He stops in front of 408 and knocks. Nothing. Then he tries the door knob. It's locked. Then a female voice.

ANNE (O.C.)
Can I help you?

Startled, he turns around to find **ANNE OSTERSTOCK** (30s) gorgeous, in a silk kimono with red hair combed to one side.

ANNE (CONT'D)
I'm Anne, the landlord here.

VIC
Vic Shea, Private Investigator.

He hands her his card. She glances at it, then looks up.

ANNE
Is something wrong?

INT. CLAUDETTE'S OLD APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Anne opens the door to Claudette's apartment. It feels stale inside. Dust circles in the shaft of light from the window.

ANNE
She told me she was going out of town, but didn't say how long.

VIC
When did she tell you this?

ANNE
A month ago? Maybe less?
She was very private, so I didn't meddle. I assumed it had to do with her mother. She was ill.

VIC
She must have gotten better.

ANNE
I don't understand.

VIC
Her mother hired me.

A beat. He heads into the kitchen.

ANNE
Have you gone to the police yet?

Checks the ice box. Plugs his nose. Shuts it.

VIC
Unfortunately, they only look for
things they want to find.

Anne sits down. A grief-stricken look on her face.

ANNE
I feel like this is all my fault.

VIC
Don't beat yourself up.

ANNE
I can't have children of my own so
these girls are like family to me.
I consider myself more a mother
around here than a landlord. I
can't help but feel responsible.

VIC
When did she first move here?

ANNE
The moment she got off the bus.

Teary-eyed, she looks off fondly.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - DAY - FLASHBACK

CLAUDETTE BUSBY (15), in a dress that looks like she'd been
travelling in it for a week, heaves a suitcase up the stairs.

ANNE (O.C.)
You must be Claudette.

She looks up and sees Anne on the next landing. Claudette is
awed by Anne's beauty, takes a moment to form her next words.

ANNE (CONT'D)
I'm Anne, the landlord. We spoke
on the phone earlier. Welcome.

She comes down to greet Claudette.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Here. Let me help you with that.

She picks up her suitcase.

CLAUDETTE
You don't have to do this.

ANNE
Nonsense. You relax, child.

Claudette follows Anne up the staircase.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Where's home, Sweetheart?

CLAUDETTE
Kansas.

ANNE
I hope you didn't run away now. I
don't like taking in runaways.

CLAUDETTE
No, ma'am. I had to. My Mom's
real sick and there was no work.
I'm hoping to send her money.

Anne stops on the staircase.

ANNE
You dear thing. Good news. You've
come to the right place. There's
something for everyone out here.

EXT. CLAUDETTE'S APARTMENT - FLASHBACK

Anne sets Claudette's suitcase down in front of #408.

ANNE
This is you. Great sunlight.
Window over a little courtyard.
(hands Claudette key)
Rent's due the first of every
month, but I'll allow you some
slack as you're new in town.

CLAUDETTE
You don't have to worry about me.

ANNE
Say, how would you like to go to a
party with me later on tonight?

CLAUDETTE
Party?

ANNE
For MGM. You've heard of the
studio before?

CLAUDETTE
I'm not looking to get into
Hollywood.

ANNE
Neither am I, but it's a good way
to see the town, have fun.

CLAUDETTE
You're not serious. Who'd want me
at some fancy Hollywood party?

ANNE
I do.

CLAUDETTE
Really?

ANNE
Yes, really.

Claudette smiles, excited.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Now go rest up.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. CLAUDETTE'S OLD APARTMENT - DAY

He peeks inside a closet. Coats. Shoes. A suitcase.

VIC
Did she have any friends?

He shuts the door to the closet. Continues looking around.

ANNE
I'm sure she did. She was so very
friendly, but I didn't see any.

VIC
What about boyfriends?

He opens the window. Outside a courtyard with a fountain. A couple birds. On the path below, a broken flower pot.

ANNE
Boyfriends? She was only 15.

He shuts the window. Anne puts her head in her hands.

ANNE (CONT'D)
I feel like this is all my fault.
I should have kept closer tabs.
(through tears)
She's just a little girl.

VIC
Thanks for all your help.

He stops by the door. Looks back.

VIC (CONT'D)
She'll turn up eventually.

She looks up at him with wet eyes, nods.

INT. POLICE STATION - LATER THAT DAY - CONTINUOUS

Vic tries to keep up with Doris' brother, **LLOYD** (30).

LLOYD
You can't keep using the police
department like your personal
library. It doesn't work that way.

VIC
Missing persons is public.

Lloyd stops at an office.

LLOYD
You got that license yet?

VIC
It's in the mail.

Lloyd enters his office and shuts the door behind him. A moment goes by, then Lloyd reappears with a list.

LLOYD
Five minutes. That's it.

Vic takes the list.

VIC
I'll see you're promoted.

INT. POLICE STATION - WAITING AREA

Vic wades through the few pages of names and pictures. None match the girl or description. When he's done, he scoots off his chair and goes to return the list to Lloyd.

INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Down the hallway, he collides with a pair of POLICEMEN.

POLICEMAN 1
If it isn't Leprechaun P.I. Looks like you've fallen off the ugly tree and hit every branch again.

POLICEMEN 2
(fake Irish accent)
You find that pot o'gold yet?

VIC
I will once your fat ass stops blocking the rainbow.

Policeman 2 is about to swing at Vic when Lloyd re-emerges.

LLOYD
Cool it down. The both of you.

POLICEMAN 1
I'm sorry. I didn't know you were allowed to take kids to work today.

The two cops brush past Vic.

LLOYD
I leave you alone for five minutes.

VIC
I'm not a dog.

LLOYD
You're not. Dogs obey.

Vic hands the list back.

VIC
No cigar. But thanks anyway.

LLOYD
Who's missing?

VIC
A munchkin.

LLOYD
Try under the bar at The Culver Hotel. That's where they all stayed. Nearly ran the place into the ground. A god damn asylum.

VIC
I'll check it out. Thanks.

LLOYD
I hope Doris gave you that welt.

VIC
With her left hook I'd be in the hospital.

Vic heads for the exit.

LLOYD
Every time you piss her off, she moves back with me. I don't want my sister for a roommate, you hear?

Vic raises his hand in acknowledgement.

INT. THE CULVER HOTEL - CULVER CITY - DAY

Vic taps the counter to get the FRONT DESK GUY's attention. The Front Desk Guy, a wimpy, sour-looking man in his 60s, is reading The LA Times with the headline for September 3rd, 1939: *German U-boat sinks British passenger ship Athenia.*

FRONT DESK GUY
(without looking up)
We're booked solid. Sorry.

VIC
I'm not looking for a room.

Vic takes out Claudette's picture.

VIC (CONT'D)
I'm looking for a Munchkin. She's 15.

FRONT DESK GUY
 (peers over paper)
 Try a mirror yet?

Vic smiles, then lunges over the desk and grabs the Front Desk Guy by his necktie. He pulls till they are eye-to-eye.

VIC
 I don't know about you, but I like it when people look me in the eye.

FRONT DESK GUY
 (beet red, gasping for air)
 Let go of me, freak!

VIC
 I bet you like freaks, don't you?

Vic grabs a pair of scissors off the desk.

FRONT DESK GUY
 (still gasping for air and covering his eyes)
 I don't! Please!

Vic looks like he's going to snip the Front Desk Guy's nose off, but snips the necktie instead, releasing him.

VIC
 Let's try this again. Shall we?

FRONT DESK GUY
 Look, the only 15 year old in here during that time was Judy Garland.

VIC
 As in 'Dorothy'?

FRONT DESK PERSON
 Yes. She came in more than once while I was on my shift. Almost as tiny as them. But all those stars are short, you know? Like Cagney.

Vic leans down, gets right in his face again.

VIC
 Leave Cagney out of this. I wanna know about Judy. Why was she here?

FRONT DESK PERSON
 To practice lines? How should I know?

VIC
Let me see the guest registry.

FRONT DESK GUY
It's confidential.

Vic flashes the scissors again.

FRONT DESK GUY (CONT'D)
(hands up, shielding)
We don't have it! I swear!

VIC
Don't have it? Where is it? OZ?

FRONT DESK GUY
It might as well.

The Front Desk Guy points toward the lobby. Vic turns and sees the sign for MGM scroll across Culver City's skyline.

EXT. MGM STUDIOS

Vic walks with a group on a tour of the studio's back lot led by an overly enthusiastic, young FEMALE TOUR GUIDE.

TOUR GUIDE
This is Stage B where MGM's first all-color talkie was filmed. Does anyone know the name of it?

Vic sneaks off behind the tour.

INT. MGM STUDIOS - MAIN OFFICES

Vic stands on his tip toes before the RECEPTIONIST.

RECEPTIONIST
May I help you, sir?

VIC
Which floor's accounting on?

RECEPTIONIST
Do you have an appointment?

VIC
No. Just dropping in to get an outstanding check for some work.
(leans in, sly)
I was a Munchkin.

He winks at her.

RECEPTIONIST

Oh. They're on the second floor,
three doors down on the right.

INT. MGM STUDIOS

Vic heads down the hallway on the second floor towards ACCOUNTING. He peeks inside the door, the office is packed with people, mostly men, in identical cubicles.

Thinking on his feet, he spots a fire alarm and smashes it. The alarm starts ringing. Everyone quickly scampers out.

The last person out shuts the door. Before it closes, Vic, who was hiding behind the door, slips inside unnoticed.

INT. MGM STUDIOS - ACCOUNTING

Vic quickly searches through the file cabinets. We recognize tabs of MGM titles: *The Third Man*, *Tarzan and His Mate*, *Saratoga*, etc. -- Finally, he comes upon *The Wizard of OZ*.

He takes out his Minox Riga, a 8x11mm subminiature camera, and begins quickly to photograph the pages in the file.

EXT. MGM STUDIOS - STUDIO LOT

The tour's at the edge of a movie set of a Western.

TOUR GUIDE

Does anyone know what book MGM's *Redemption* is based on?

VIC (O.C.)

The Living Corpse by Tolstoy.

He's back like he never left.

VIC (CONT'D)

And it's a play. Not a book.

The Tour Guide looks at him impressed. Tourists as well.

VIC (CONT'D)

(put on the spot)
My girl. She acts.

INT. VIC'S DARKROOM - LATER

Vic turns on a red light. Using a magnifier loupe, he examines the negatives from MGM. Eventually he comes upon:

Busby, Claudette - Room #314 - The Culver Hotel

Next, he takes the negative over to begin the process of enlargement when something on the drying line makes him stop.

He carefully takes the photograph in question off the line.

ANGLE ON: A black and white photograph of Doris and him on The Golden Gate Bridge engaged in a kiss during better times.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LLOYD'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Vic raps on the door.

VIC
Open up, Doris. C'mon.

Continues knocking.

VIC (CONT'D)
Doris, I know you're in there.

DORIS (O.S.)
Leave me alone, Vic! I've got an
audition tomorrow. I need sleep!

VIC
I came here to apologize.

DORIS (O.S.)
I'm over your phony apologies.

VIC
This one's authentic. I swear.

DORIS (O.S.)
Leave, Vic. Or I'll call the cops!

VIC
You live with a cop!

LLOYD (O.S.)
Leave me out of this, Vic!

Vic rests his forehead against the door. He sighs, then takes something out of his coat and slips it under the door.

INT. LLOYD'S APARTMENT - FEW SECONDS LATER

Something slips under the door. It's the picture of them on The Golden Gate Bridge. She turns it over. The note reads:

I might as well jump without you.
-Vic

INT. CANTER'S - FOLLOWING DAY

Vic bites into a Pastrami sandwich the size of a baby.

DORIS (O.C.)
You manipulative sonofabitch.

He looks up, his mouth full.

DORIS (CONT'D)
What happened to your face?

VIC
I got too near a pipe.

She takes the seat across from him.

DORIS
You promise to change?

VIC
I'll do my best.

DORIS
Your best isn't good enough.

VIC
(raises hand)
Scout's honor.

DORIS
I want a promise.

VIC
I promise.

She looks into his eyes. He doesn't flinch.

DORIS
We'll see about that.

She starts eating his sandwich.

VIC
Help yourself.

DORIS
(mouth-full, chewing)
And I want a raise.

VIC
(sighs)
Fine. Now give my sandwich back.

She plays keep away. He throws a pickle at her. A mini food fight escalates between them in the middle of Canter's.

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - MOVING

Vic makes a right off Fairfax onto Venice. Doris excitedly peruses the blown up photos of the file documents from MGM.

DORIS
Toto got \$124 a week and the
Munchkins got \$50. And I thought
women had it bad. Unbelievable.

VIC
He was the star.

She gives him a look.

VIC (CONT'D)
What?

DORIS
(holds up the folder)
How did you get this?

VIC
Tour souvenir.

DORIS
What if someone saw you?

VIC
Don't worry, I'm a professional.

INT. CULVER HOTEL - CULVER CITY

The Front Desk Guy, minus a tie, reads the paper at his desk.

VIC (O.C.)
No tie today?

The Front Desk Guy looks up and nearly jumps a foot.

DORIS
You two know each other?

VIC
We go way back, isn't that right?

FRONT DESK GUY
How can I be of help?

VIC
314 available?

FRONT DESK GUY
(stammers)
Hold on. Lemme check.
(consults ledger)
I'm afraid we've got an orchid
convention coming in tonight and
they booked the entire third floor.
But I've got rooms on the fourth.

DORIS
(turns to Vic)
But 314 is my lucky number.

Doris presses her cleavage on the desk.

VIC
He's just sensitive, honey. Boy
doesn't want to ruffle any orchid
petals is all. We'll go elsewhere.

They start to leave.

FRONT DESK GUY
Hold on.

Vic and Doris turn back.

FRONT DESK GUY (CONT'D)
(holds out room key)
Only for tonight.

DORIS
If he can last that long.

She takes the key, sultry-like and winks at him.

INT. CULVER HOTEL - ROOM #314

Vic pokes around the room. Doris takes a seat on the bed.

DORIS
What are we doing here?

VIC
Looking for clues.

He checks under the mattress. She nearly falls off.

DORIS
Hey!

VIC
Walking in their shoes, you know?
See what they may have seen -

He opens the window. Sticks his head out.

VIC (CONT'D)
- Or saw.

Washington Blvd buzzes below. Looks around. Shuts it.

VIC (CONT'D)
Then we start asking questions.

Doris sits back on the bed and lies back. Stares at ceiling.

DORIS
She must have been scared coming
out to the West Coast all alone.

VIC
Probably less scary than what she
was running from.

He looks behind the dresser, then pushes it back.

VIC (CONT'D)
I think we're done here.

He joins her on the bed, begins kissing her neck.

DORIS
Vic.

He pushes her on her back, begins undoing her blouse.

DORIS (CONT'D)
But you're on the clock.

VIC
We're paying for the room.

He flips her over on her stomach, heads south.

DORIS
(giggling)
Stop. What are you doing?

VIC
Trying something new.

DORIS
Vic!

VIC
Whhaat?!

DORIS
Look!

Vic lifts his head to see where she's pointing. Squints.

CLOSE ON: C + D with a heart carved into headboard.

VIC
How many adults carve the initials
of their crush into a bed?

DORIS
She's not an adult. She's just a
kid. Maybe it's a boyfriend or
crush? You said to look for clues.

VIC
And you want me to accept this
based purely on female intuition?

DORIS
No. I want you to *consider* it
because I know what it's like to be
a 15 year old girl and infatuated.

VIC
I'm just playing Devil's Advocate.

DORIS
It's probably nothing. A hunch.

Vic runs his finger over the carved letters.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE OF INTERVIEWS:

-- They interview the ELEVATOR OPERATOR while they take the elevator down to the lobby. But he's got nothing for them.

-- Vic talks to the BARTENDER on the first floor as he cleans up some glassware. He shakes his head "no" at one point.

-- Vic walks beside a teenage BELLHOP as he carries luggage through the lobby. But he just shakes his head "no" too.

-- Doris takes notes while Vic interviews a MAID. At one point the Maid points in the other direction of the hallway.

EXT. THE CULVER HOTEL - SERVICE ENTRANCE - DAY

They exit out the back of the hotel where an African American **JANITOR**, on a cigarette break, sits on the back steps.

VIC
Excuse me, sir.

The Janitor looks up.

VIC (CONT'D)
Mind if I ask you a few questions?

JANITOR
You don't look like no police.

VIC
I'm not. I'm a private
investigator. Here about the girl.

JANITOR
What girl?

VIC
The Munchkin.

JANITOR
There were lots of those.

VIC
What about this one?

Vic holds up Claudette's picture.

VIC (CONT'D)
Know her?

JANITOR
Nobody knows anybody these days.

VIC
 I don't care about 'anybody', I
 only care about what you know.

DORIS
 She's missing.

The Janitor looks at Doris. A beat.

JANITOR
 When she disappeared no one said a
 thing. No cops came. It was like
 she'd never walked this earth.
 Maybe that's why I kept it?

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. THE CULVER HOTEL - BASEMENT LOCKERS

The Janitor hands Vic an envelope he's kept in his locker.

JANITOR
 Maids found it. They gave it to me
 thinking I could read it to them,
 but I can't read either. But I do
 recognize the word love in there.

ANGLE ON: "Dear Francis."

INT. DON THE BEACHCOMBER - THAT NIGHT

Outside heavy rain sheets down. Doris studies the letter.

DORIS
 This isn't a love letter.

She takes off her reading glasses, turns to Vic.

DORIS (CONT'D)
 It's between two friends. Girls.
 I used to write these kind of
 letters all the time to my best
 friend when I was that age.

Two drinks arrive. Orange concoctions.

VIC
 What did you order us?

DORIS
 Zombies.

VIC
What's in 'em?

DORIS
Alcohol. Your favorite.

She pushes the letter in front of him.

DORIS (CONT'D)
This is innocent.

He points to "XO Francis".

VIC
The only Francis I ever knew was a
priest who'd whip me for cussing.
Name one female Francis you know.

DORIS
Francis Farmer?

VIC
Fine. But I asked who you know.

DORIS
My mother. Her maiden name is
Francis.

Vic grabs his coat.

DORIS (CONT'D)
Hey. Where you going?

VIC
To find Francis. Ask her. Or him.

DORIS
How?

He holds up the letter.

VIC
Return to sender.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - LATER THAT EVENING

The two sit in a parked car across the street from an
unassuming Tudor style home painted beige with a brick fence.

From a binoculars' P.O.V., we see the living room window
where a WOMAN sits in profile playing the piano.

The binoculars then travel up to meet someone, who's not yet in focus, standing next to the piano, singing.

The binoculars' lens adjusts and that someone comes into focus. And it's not just someone. It's Judy Garland.

DORIS (V.O.)
Oh my God...

VIC (V.O.)
What is it?

DORIS (V.O.)
You're right.

Doris puts down the binoculars.

DORIS
It's not Francis.

She hands him the binoculars.

INT. 180 S. MCCADDEN - NIGHT

We PUSH INSIDE where Judy sings "I Cried for You", a song from her upcoming musical *Babes in Arms*. Ethel accompanies.

JUDY
*I cried for you
Now it's your turn to cry over me
Every road has a turning
That's one thing you're learning
I cried for you
What a fool I used to be.*

Ethel slams the piano cover shut. Judy nearly jumps a foot.

ETHEL
God damn it, child!

JUDY
I need a break. Please.

Judy starts to cry as Ethel nears.

ETHEL
(mocking)
I need a break. I need a break.
Christ. If only you put the same
effort into your work as you did
into your crying, you'd be a star.

JUDY
Just leave me alone, please!

ETHEL
You'll always be Francis Ethel Gumm
from Grand Rapids, Minnesota till
you prove otherwise. You hear me?!

Judy races out of the living room.

INT. GARLAND RESIDENCE - 180 S. MCCADDEN

Judy has her head buried in pillows as Ethel tries the door.
Ethel starts banging. The door hinges almost come loose.

ETHEL (O.C.)
Let me in, you ungrateful child!

Judy buries her face deeper to muffle the banging.

ETHEL (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Open this door right now or God
help me I will break it down!

Judy opens up her bedside drawer and a bottle of prescription
pills from Schwab's Pharmacy in Beverly Hills rolls forward.

ETHEL (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Fine. I'm calling Arthur right now
to say you've quit. You want that?

Judy's trembling hands fumble to unscrew the top. Finally
she frees it and empties a handful of pills into her palm.

ETHEL (O.C.) (CONT'D)
You better get some sleep child
because I'm breaking this door down
the moment the sun rises and will
strap you to that piano so help me
God.

Judy gulps them down then curls in the fetal position holding
the bottle of pills to her chest like a stuffed animal.

EXT. GARLAND RESIDENCE - 180 S. MCCADDEN

The front door flies open, then slams behind Ethel as she
storms out. Vic and Doris watch as she gets into her car and
backs out of the driveway. They duck as the car passes.

VIC
I thought she'd never leave.

DORIS

So, what now? Just knock on the front door and ask for "Judy"?

VIC

Something along those lines.

DORIS

I wish you'd let me stay and finish my drink. I'm too sober for this.

Vic opens the passenger door. Glances back at Doris.

VIC

Watch out for the Wicked Witch.

He gets out and heads for the Garland residence.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARLAND RESIDENCE - 180 S. MCCADDEN - NIGHT

Vic takes a deep breath then knocks. Nothing. Only the sounds of crickets from outside. He tries again. Nothing.

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET

Through the binoculars, Doris watches Vic creep between the bushes and the front of the house to peer inside the windows.

Then she watches him head around the side of the house. He tries to open a gate to the backyard, but it's locked.

Suddenly, Vic starts attempting to climb the brick fence, trying to heave himself over the wall. We hear a dog bark. Then he disappears; his body tumbles over the wall.

Doris lowers her binoculars.

DORIS

(aloud, to herself)
What the hell are you doing?

EXT. 180 S. MCCADDEN - BACKYARD - NIGHT

After Vic gets back on his feet, he finds himself in a small backyard with gardens all around. Along the side of the house, he spots a lone room in the back with its lights on.

CUT TO:

EXT. JUDY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vic rises from the bushes he's hiding in to the right of a pair of french doors that lead out to the backyard from her bedroom. He peeks through the panes of glass.

Through his P.O.V., we see Judy Garland lying face down on her bed. Next, his eyes travel to a prescription bottle on its side on the night stand. Several pills spilled out.

He turns away, standing there paralyzed, deliberating if he should stay or go. Then, out-of-nowhere a loud THUD.

He returns to the window, but there's no Judy in bed. His eyes quickly move to the floor where Judy lies convulsing.

EXT./INT. JUDY'S BEDROOM - SECONDS LATER

Vic jimmies the french doors to enter Judy's bedroom. He lifts her small body up. Her eyes roll back into her head.

VIC
Hang in there, kid.

He tries to calm her.

VIC (CONT'D)
C'mon, don't die on me!

Judy suddenly projectile vomits. Vic's so relieved he doesn't care he's dripping in the child star's vomit.

VIC (CONT'D)
Jesus, thank God.

Coughing, Judy comes to again. Very groggy.

JUDY
Whaaaa...Where am I? What's--
Who...Who are you? What's hap-

VIC
Easy, kid. It's okay.

She suddenly grabs Vic by the collar.

JUDY
Where am I?!

Then she lets out, suddenly frightened.

JUDY (CONT'D)
Who are you?! Oh my God.

Her lips start to tremble, her body quivers.

JUDY (CONT'D)
How did you get in my bedroom?!

VIC
I can explain. Calm down.

Judy kicks Vic in the groin. Vic keels over.

VIC (CONT'D)
(still smarting)
I'm a private detective.

JUDY
A what? Who let you in here?

Judy stumbles to her feet like a newborn calf. She trips and falls to the floor. Vic helps her up. She pushes him off.

JUDY (CONT'D)
Don't touch me!

VIC
I came to ask you a few questions, then you took all those pills and one thing led to the next. Look, you should be thanking me, kid.

Judy, looking terrified suddenly, starts to scoot backwards on her elbows to her desk. Vic raises his hands up.

VIC (CONT'D)
Relax. I'm not going to hurt you.

Judy starts opening drawers.

JUDY
Get out!

VIC
Just give me one minute.

She unearths a letter opener. Points it at Vic.

JUDY
You need to leave.

He fumbles for something in his pocket.

JUDY (CONT'D)
Now!

She lunges toward him. Vic backs off.

VIC
I'm here about your friend,
Claudette. She's disappeared.

He takes out the picture of Claudette.

JUDY
(trembling)
I'm calling the police.

VIC
Tell me about Claudette.

Judy pulls the phone off her desk.

VIC (CONT'D)
When was the last time you saw her?

Her eyes stay on Vic as she dials the operator.

VIC (CONT'D)
I'm not here to hurt you. I just
want to ask you a couple questions.

OPERATOR
Hello? Is anyone there?

JUDY
Yes. I have an emergency.

VIC
What are you going to say? A dwarf
private eye broke in and saved your
life after you took enough
tranquilizers to kill a horse farm?

Judy starts shaking like a leaf.

VIC (CONT'D)
That'll go over like gang busters
once I leak it to the press. I'm
sure Ethel will understand though.

JUDY
You have no proof.

Vic takes out his camera.

VIC
Like a picture yet to be developed
of you lying on the floor passed
out with pills all around you?

He's bluffing, but she buys it.

OPERATOR
Hello? Ma'am?

Judy slowly returns the phone to the cradle. Vic puts away his camera, and takes out Claudette's photo again. A beat.

JUDY
I don't know who that is.

VIC
You certain?

JUDY
I have no reason to lie.

VIC
I thought you two were friends.

JUDY
Tell me: How could I be friends
with someone I've never met?

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - MEANWHILE

Doris, still glued to the binoculars, almost doesn't notice Ethel pulling back into the driveway. But Doris is helpless.

DORIS
Shit. Get out of there, Vic.

INT. JUDY'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME - NIGHT

Vic takes out the letter.

VIC
She was certainly fond of you.

JUDY
I get a lot of fan mail, mister.

VIC
I'm sure you do, however I doubt
many contain your home address and
government name. *Francis.*

He hands her the letter. But she doesn't look at it.

JUDY
You're wasting your time. I
already told you: I don't know her.

Suddenly, we hear the front door open. Ethel is home. But it doesn't rattle Vic. He remains transfixed on Judy.

VIC
Why are you so afraid?

JUDY
I'm not, but you should be. You have thirty seconds, or I'll call my mother and, trust me, you'll wish I'd called the cops instead.

Judy tries to give him back the letter.

VIC
Keep it. It's addressed to you.

JUDY
Give me back the film.

He hands Judy his business card.

VIC
I will once your memory returns.

She takes his business card.

JUDY
This is blackmail.

VIC
Usually does the trick.

He picks his fedora off the floor.

VIC (CONT'D)
Easy on those pills, kid.

Puts his fedora back on.

VIC (CONT'D)
You're not in Kansas anymore.

He disappears out her bedroom into the black of night.

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - NIGHT

Vic collapses in the passenger seat.

VIC
Drive.

She pulls away from the curb.

DORIS
What's on your shirt?

VIC
She's lying.

DORIS
Wait. You actually talked to her?

VIC
(peeling off his shirt)
I tried. Between saving her life
and avoiding getting stabbed.

DORIS
Well?

VIC
Well what?

DORIS
What did she say?

VIC
Nothing.

In the side mirror, he looks back at the Garland home vanishing behind them and his own reflection enter focus.

VIC (CONT'D)
Which tells me everything.

INT. JUDY'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

From a bird's eye view, a catatonic-looking Judy lies sprawled on her back in bed, clutching the letter in one hand. We watch as the room begins to spin like a top.

INT. ON SET - THE WIZARD OF OZ - FLASHBACK

Director, **VICTOR FLEMING** (50, slicked back silver hair, white dress shirt and tie) who stands by the camera as it shoots.

We watch the scene unfold from his P.O.V. in the foreground before the masterfully lit and colorful soundstage.

The hum of the camera flickers and playback drones over as three actors lock arms and skip down the Yellow Brick Road.

Suddenly, a BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAM. Victor stands.

VICTOR FLEMING
Cut!

We hear a bell ringing and the CREW disperse. Victor runs toward Judy who stands balling, pointing at one of the trees.

RAY BOLGER ("Scarecrow") and **JACK HALEY** ("Tin Man") try and console Judy. Victor puts his hands on Judy's shoulders.

VICTOR FLEMING (CONT'D)
What is it? What's wrong?

JUDY
T-t-t-h-here.

She points to the trees. Victor turns his head.

VICTOR FLEMING
Call the medic! Jesus!

Judy crumbles to the ground, crying. Ray and Jack follow Victor over into the background filled with fake trees.

A Sarus Crane, the tallest of the flying birds, standing at 5'9" passes them, gently flapping its wings.

At the very back of the set, they stop and discover what Judy was screaming and pointing at: a DUMMY hanging from a tree.

The Dummy's the size of a Munchkin actor, but dressed in the same clothes and matching wig to Dorothy's character in OZ.

JACK HALEY
Jesus Christ.

RAY BOLGER
There's a note. Look.

He removes a note pinned to its chest and hands it to Victor. Ray and Jack huddle around Victor. He reads the note aloud.

VICTOR FLEMING
"The wise of heart will receive commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin." Proverbs 10:8.

JACK HALEY
What's that got to do with her?

He turns to look at Judy writhing on the Yellow Brick Road as a pair of FEMALE SET WORKERS try and calm her down.

VICTOR FLEMING
I haven't the faintest.

He makes eye contact with Judy.

JUDY
TELL ME! PLEASE! TELL ME!

Judy tries to run toward Victor, but the two Stage Workers hold her back. She starts flailing her arms and kicking.

JUDY (CONT'D)
Let go of me! Let go! Please!
Just let go! I wanna know.

Suddenly, several MEN IN SUITS rush on set and help calm Judy down. One is a DOCTOR. He kneels down and opens his bag.

JUDY (CONT'D)
What's going on? What are you
doing? Please. What does it say?!

The Doctor takes out a syringe and holds it up. Its needle glints in the bright hot heat of set lights above.

He squirts a little fluid out, then lowers the needle. One of the men in suits holds Judy's arm down. She trembles.

DOCTOR
This will help you calm down.

JUDY
What are you doing?! I don't want
to calm down! I'm fine. I just
want to know what it says. Please!

The needle meets her soft white skin then pushes through the surface as the contents of the syringe enter Judy.

JUDY (CONT'D)
STOP IT! What are you doing?!

DOCTOR
Shhh. Shhh. Almost done. *There.*

A **NURSE** accompanying him wipes Judy's arm with an iodine-soaked cotton ball then dresses Judy with a small band-aid.

Judy is suddenly calm. Her body sinks to the Yellow Brick Road and she drifts into unconsciousness, then out cold.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. VIC'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Doris sits in a chair. One leg crossed. Smoldering.

DORIS

If you think I did it because I thought I could get away with it, you're wrong. Show me one woman in this world who's ever gotten away with anything. Whether it be pinching a loaf of bread or murder.

She lights a cigarette. Uncrosses her leg. Exhales.

DORIS (CONT'D)

But I could have.

VIC (O.C.)

Why did you come back? To kill me in cold blood like you did her?

DORIS

(smiles, ashes cigarette)
That would be too easy. No.
(suddenly stern; cold)
I came back to see the look on your face knowing you'd lost everything. That same look I felt inside every time I saw the two of you together.

VIC (O.C.)

Your own sister. You're deranged. Sick. Why I oughta --

DORIS

What? Kill me? You already did. The day you chose her over me.

VIC (O.C.)

(flat, reads direction)
Takes out pistol. Shoots her dead.

Vic hands the sides back to Doris.

VIC (CONT'D)

You did good, kid.

DORIS

Really?

VIC

Really. It was like seeing Bebe Daniels in the flesh. Only better.

DORIS

I wasn't too dramatic?

VIC
Isn't that the point?

DORIS
I'm incapable of being subtle.

She leans down and kisses him.

DORIS (CONT'D)
I love you.

She waits, longing to hear the same in return.

VIC
Time for bed, kid.

He gets up. She sighs.

FADE TO:

INT. JUDY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Judy sits at her desk staring at something.

ETHEL (O.C.)
I'm taking your sisters to the
dentist. The studio's sending a
car to pick you up at three.

JUDY
Okay!

ETHEL (O.C.)
Study your lines and be ready out
front. No making them wait again!

JUDY
Yes, mother!

Off in the other end of the house, we hear Ethel shut the front door to leave with Judy's two sisters.

We return to Judy to reveal what she's been staring at: Vic's business card. Then she looks at her phone.

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - MORNING

We PAN 360 degrees around Vic's office as the phone rings off the hook until we find him on the couch in a deep sleep.

On the coffee table we see an opened envelope with a check from Western Union made out to him from Geraldine Busby.

The ringing finally wakes him from his slumber. He picks up.

VIC
Vic Shea, Private Eye.

JUDY (V.O.)
Can you meet?

VIC
(still groggy)
Who is this?

JUDY (V.O.)
Judy.

VIC
Judy? Judy who?

JUDY (V.O.)
Garland.

VIC
(like an espresso shot)
Judy. Yes, of course. What ca-

JUDY (V.O.)
My house. Noon. Bring the film
and cigarettes. No funny business.

She hangs up before he can say another word.

EXT. GARLAND RESIDENCE - LATER THAT DAY

We follow Vic's footsteps as he walks through the Garland's backyard headed toward the sound of something squeaking.

Other than squeaking, the only other sounds are birds, leaves rustling and a far off sprinkler. Vic's footsteps stop.

From his P.O.V., we see the origin of the squeaking: a swing on which Judy sits rocking back and forth, her back to him.

A hummingbird by a crop of flowers near Judy flaps its wings frantically as it gathers nectar from a hanging snapdragon.

Judy's back is to us. She begins speaking.

JUDY
Do you know hummingbirds flap their
wings up to 200 times a second? If
they stop, they die.
(MORE)

JUDY (CONT'D)
It sounds like a stressful life,
but I think there's something
beautiful about it. No time to
think. Or be sad. You just...

VIC
Flap?

JUDY
Something like that.

She turns to Vic for the first time.

JUDY (CONT'D)
Do you have those cigarettes?

He takes out a fresh pack.

VIC
You should try to quit.

She takes a cigarette out.

VIC (CONT'D)
Smoking's no good for singers.

JUDY
Who says I want to sing?

A beat. Then he lights her cigarette.

JUDY (CONT'D)
Thanks.

She takes a long, grateful drag.

JUDY (CONT'D)
Claudette was my best friend.

Judy stares off into the garden again.

JUDY (CONT'D)
The only time I ever felt normal
was when we were together.

VIC
How come you denied knowing her?

JUDY
The last time I tried telling the
truth someone ended up dead.

VIC
Dead? Who? Claudette?

JUDY
No.

She returns her gaze to Vic.

JUDY (CONT'D)
Douglas, her fiancé.

VIC
Fiancé?
(to himself, realizes)
The "D" she etched on her bed.

JUDY
He was like her. Like you.

VIC
A little person.

JUDY
They met at a party.

VIC
What kind of party?

JUDY
An MGM party. For Eddie Mannix.

INT. THE COCOANUT GROVE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A banner reads *HAPPY BIRTHDAY, EDDIE!* The infamous nightclub at The Ambassador Hotel with white clothed circular tables scattered throughout along with real planted palm trees.

The party is already in full swing with the majority of its guests dancing to a big band.

We find Claudette sitting alone at a table watching everyone else dance. She's done up, almost like a doll, unrecognizable from the picture Vic was shown earlier.

DOUGLAS (O.C.)
Not one for dancing?

She turns around to find **DOUGLAS LOACH**, a dwarf in his 30s with a widow's peak, expressive eyebrows wearing a tuxedo.

CLAUDETTE
I don't know how.

DOUGLAS
How about a magic trick instead?

CLAUDETTE
As long as I don't disappear.

DOUGLAS
No disappearing. I promise.

He extends his hand.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Douglas.

CLAUDETTE
Yes, I saw your act. It was very
impressive. Claudette.

They shake. Then he takes out a deck of cards.

DOUGLAS
Claudette, pick a card. Any card.

He fans a deck of cards in front of her. She does.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Alright.

He hands her a pen.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Now, please sign it for me.

CLAUDETTE
I can write on it?

DOUGLAS
Yes. It won't hurt its feelings.

She signs it.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Now place it back in the deck.

She does. The moment she does -- *SNAP* -- the card magically jumps into Douglas' outer coat pocket. Claudette's eyes fan.

CLAUDETTE
How did you do that?

DOUGLAS
(playing dumb)
I didn't mean to. Swear. Here.

Takes card out of his pocket. Hands it back.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Let's try this again, shall we?

She sticks the card back in the middle of his deck, and it happens again. The moment he goes to shuffle it, it jumps into his outer coat pocket. She does it again. Same result.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Okay. One last time.

He hands her the card back. She places it in the middle of his deck and he reshuffles, but this time the card doesn't jump into his outer coat pocket. He hands her the deck.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Do you see your card in there?

She starts shuffling through it. But doesn't see it.

CLAUDETTE
Nope. Not there.

DOUGLAS
Hmmm...

He starts searching his other pockets before finally unearthing his wallet from his inner coat pocket and there, inside a zipped shut wallet, is her card. Hands it to her.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Is this the card you signed?

CLAUDETTE
How did...?

DOUGLAS
(smiling)
Since I have your signature, might as well write your number too.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. GARLAND'S HOME - 180 S. MCCADDEN - CONTINUOUS

Judy and Vic walk around the garden.

VIC
What happened to him?

JUDY
He disappeared.

Vic stops walking.

VIC
You said he was murdered.

JUDY
You think people just disappear
into thin air all of a sudden?

VIC
People run away everyday.

JUDY
She was pregnant. But not by him.

VIC
That gives him motive.

JUDY
Motive for what?

VIC
Jealous fiance goes into rage when
the woman he's to marry tells him
she's pregnant by another man.

JUDY
Douglas loved her unconditionally.
He'd just bought land outside LA.
They were going to get married and
start a life together. That didn't
change even after she told him.

VIC
Told him what?

JUDY
She was raped.

VIC
What are you talking about?

JUDY
At the party.

VIC
By who?

She ashes her cigarette, takes a short drag.

JUDY
She wouldn't tell me, but I always
found it odd she got cast
immediately after that party.

VIC
Did she say anything else?

She puts her cigarette out.

JUDY
Can I have the film back now?

We hear a car pull into the driveway out front.

VIC
Did she have any other friends she
may have confided in? Think.

JUDY
We had a deal.

She gives him a look. Vic sighs. Hands her an envelope.

JUDY (CONT'D)
I hope you find her.

She takes the envelope. Before she leaves.

JUDY (CONT'D)
I think she was close to someone
who lived across the hall from her
at the Culver Hotel. Another
Munchkin. I forget her name, but
she might know something though.

VIC
Thanks. I'll look into it.

A beat.

JUDY
You think you know what you're
dealing with, but you have no idea.

The car in the driveway honks. She raises a hand to indicate she's coming then turns back to Vic, but he's already gone.

INT. TOWN CAR - MOVING

Judy opens the envelope and removes its contents. It's a postcard of an elephant standing on its toes at the circus. She turns it over. On the other side inscribed:

A picture's worth a thousand words!

She smiles, realizing he was bluffing about having pictures.

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

We PAN DOWN from the ceiling tile that continues to peel off to Vic studying the floor plan of The Culver Hotel.

ANGLE ON: He marks a big red "X" on room #314 where Claudette stayed then draws a line to the room directly across: #317.

Next, he runs his finger down the names of the guest registry from the MGM file until he reaches #317 and matches the name.

VIC
(under his breath)
Miss Marie Winters. 156 Lighthouse
Way. Del Mar, California.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MARIE WINTER'S HOME - DEL MAR - SUNSET

The taxi lets them off in front of a home atop a hill where you can see the thin blue horizon of the Pacific over trees.

DORIS
I hope you called ahead of time.

VIC
If you warn them they never show.

They reach the door. Vic knocks. Nothing. He tries again.

VIC (CONT'D)
Someone's gotta be here.
(points)
See. The grass. Freshly cut.

Doris gives him a look of skepticism. He keeps knocking.

VIC (CONT'D)
C'mon. Answer.

Then Doris presses the doorbell.

MARIE (O.S.)
Who is it?!

Vic turns to Doris who smiles.

VIC
I was going to try that next.

He turns back to the door.

VIC (CONT'D)
 Miss Winters, my name's Vic Shea.
 I wanted to ask you a couple
 questions about a Claudette Busby,
 I was told you two were friends.

MARIE (O.S.)
 If I'm not under arrest, then
 please go away. I already told
 them everything I know.

VIC
 Ma'am, I'm not a police officer.

The door opens to reveal **MARIE WINTERS** (30s), an attractive little person in a nightgown with curlers in her hair.

VIC (CONT'D)
 I'm a private detective.

Marie looks pleasantly surprised at the sight of another little person, but less pleased when she looks up at Doris.

MARIE
 Who's she?

VIC
 My associate.

DORIS
 Partner.

He looks back at Doris, then back at a baffled Marie.

VIC
 Do you mind if I -

Doris nudges him.

VIC (CONT'D)
 We ask you a few questions?

Marie gives them both strange looks again.

INT. MARIE WINTER'S HOME - KITCHEN

A tea kettle whistles. We watch Marie deftly move about her kitchen sliding a wooden block across the floor as a step to safely get the tea kettle and retrieve cups off shelves.

MARIE
 She wasn't there long, you know.

Marie puts the tea and cups on a tray.

MARIE (CONT'D)
She dropped out of Wizard.

She lifts the tray and comes into the dining area where Vic and Doris sit. Out the window, we see a pink setting sun.

MARIE (CONT'D)
(to Doris)
Milk?

DORIS
Please.

Marie looks at Vic.

VIC
No thank you.

She pours his tea.

DORIS
When did you first meet her?

MARIE
At a party.

VIC
A birthday party?

MARIE
If that's what you want to call it.

INT. THE COCOANUT GROVE - FLASHBACK

Marie, dressed in a sequin outfit, walks around the circular table selling cigarettes. At the table MGM's General Manager, **EDDIE MANNIX**, who looks like a gangster out of Central Casting, and his **MISTRESS** sit next to **LOUIS B. MAYER**.

MR. MAYER
Let's talk a little business.

EDDIE
C'mon, Louis. Live a little.
Can't you see it's my birthday?

MR. MAYER
And the studio's paying for it, so
I'd like to take it as a write-off.

Eddie looks at him. He's serious. Eddie starts laughing.

EDDIE
You see this guy, toots?
(pulls her near, points)
Don't let this man's looks fool
you: *he's a cold-blooded killer.*

MISTRESS
(airy like Marilyn Monroe)
Don't be silly, Eddie.

Eddie grabs her arm hard. Squeezes like a tourniquet.

EDDIE
What did you just say?

MISTRESS
Nothing, Eddie. Relax.

She tries to pull away.

MISTRESS (CONT'D)
Stop it. You're crazy.

Louis watches Eddie whisper something in her ear that makes her face go white as a ghost. Then Eddie composes himself.

EDDIE
Okay. Let's talk business.

MR. MAYER
I cast the lead for Wizard.

EDDIE
Who?

MR. MAYER
Her name is Judy Garland.

EDDIE
Never heard of her.

MR. MAYER
No one has. Yet.

EDDIE
When were you going to tell me?

MR. MAYER
I just did.

He smiles at Eddie. It connects like a jab.

MR. MAYER (CONT'D)
Happy Birthday, Eddie.

Eddie's still reeling as the lights dim and band picks up.

INT. THE COCOANUT GROVE - STAGE - FLASHBACK

A spotlight cuts through the room and shines on closed curtains on stage. **MAX SHULTE** (40s), tall, with a mustache and spectacles, wearing a tuxedo, bounds on stage.

MAX

Good evening! And welcome to The famous Cocoanut Grove. Tonight we celebrate the man, the myth, the legend and the reason Mr. Mayer has no hair left on his head.

Awkward laughter.

MAX (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentleman, friends, romans, countrymen, rich people, even richer people and actors; I mean waiters. Let's give a warm round of applause for the man of the hour, the birthday boy himself, and my boss: *Eddie Mannix!*

Eddie Mannix stands. Everyone in the place turns and claps in his direction. He smiles big and acknowledges his guests.

MAX (CONT'D)

Our first performer is about a third the size of Eddie, perhaps a fourth after he finishes dinner.

More awkward laughter.

MAX (CONT'D)

Now, for a man who could not only fit in Houdini's pocket, but also escape, The Cocoanut Grove welcomes to its stage illusionist extraordinaire, Douglas Loach!

Curtains part for Douglas, who's met with cheers, jeers, some laughter as he walks downstage to address the cavernous room.

DOUGLAS

How many of you out there have too much time on your hands?

No hands go up.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
 Didn't think so considering this is
 a room full of industry titans.

He takes out pocket watch, holds it up.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
 But I do. Let me show you.

He closes his fist, then re-opens it. There are two watches.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
 See what I mean?

He closes it again. Re-opens, now there are three. He does it again, now there are four. Again. Five. Again. Six.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
 And right when I figure out what
 I'm going to do with all this time-

He closes his fists.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
 -It's all gone.

He opens his hands. No more watches. The crowd applauds. At one of the tables, we see Claudette sitting next to Anne.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. MARIE WINTER'S HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Marie re-fills her cup of tea. Outside, it's dark now.

DORIS
 And you went with Claudette?

MARIE
 No. I answered an ad in The
 Pennysaver for a casting.

VIC
 But I thought it was a party?

MARIE
 Studios place ads all the time
 about open castings which are
 really just a ruse to get women to
 attend parties as "entertainment."

VIC
 What about Claudette?

MARIE
What about her?

VIC
Did she answer the same ad?

MARIE
I don't know. It was odd. She
said she wasn't an actress, but I
saw her next week at rehearsals.

VIC
Did she come alone that night?

MARIE
No. She was with a woman.

Marie looks at Doris.

MARIE (CONT'D)
(with a hint of cattiness)
Like you.

She returns to address both again.

MARIE (CONT'D)
Beautiful, with flowing red hair.
Probably an actress. I think
Claudette said they lived in the
same building in the hills.

Marie takes out a cigarette. Vic lights it for her.

DORIS
Did you know she was pregnant?

MARIE
Who? Claudette?

DORIS
She was raped.

Marie breathes in, purses her lips. The news shakes her.

VIC
Do you know who could have done
such a thing to her?

She ashes her cigarette, looks out window as the sun sets
into the pacific like a ball of flame into a black abyss.

MARIE
(quietly)
No.

Then she turns back and looks at Vic.

MARIE (CONT'D)
But I could take a guess.

INT. THE COCOANUT GROVE - BY THE BAR - FLASHBACK

Eddie takes out a fresh cigar. Max lights it for him. After the smoke clears, we see Anne sitting beside Claudette.

From Eddie's P.O.V., his focus slowly hones in on Claudette until she's framed in a halo-like vignette portrait.

INT. THE COCOANUT GROVE - CLAUDETTE'S TABLE - FLASHBACK

Eddie pulls up a chair between Anne and Claudette, still smoking his cigar. On stage, The Dandridge Sisters perform.

ANNE
Happy Birthday, Eddie.

EDDIE
Anne, you look radiant. As always.
(kisses Anne's hand,
notices Claudette)
Who's this beautiful little lady
you have with you tonight?

ANNE
Claudette meet Eddie.

Eddie takes Claudette's hand.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Eddie: Claudette.

He kisses her hand.

EDDIE
Do you like Laurel and Hardy?

CLAUDETTE
Like? I love them.

EDDIE
How would you like to see them
perform later on tonight?

CLAUDETTE
Are they performing here?

EDDIE
Just for me. And you. Later.

CLAUDETTE
Are you serious?

Eddie starts laughing.

ANNE
(to Claudette)
Eddie's the General Manager of MGM.

CLAUDETTE
I'm sorry. I didn't know.

He brushes her hair to one side.

EDDIE
I've never met a Claudette before.

CLAUDETTE
If you'll excuse me, I have to use
the little girl's room.

EDDIE
Of course. Nature calls.

CLAUDETTE
Nice to meet you, Mr. Mannix.

EDDIE
Please. Call me "Eddie."

CLAUDETTE
Eddie. It was nice to meet you.

She heads to the women's room. Eddie's eyes remain on her until he puffs a cloud of cigar smoke that shrouds his face.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. JUDY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ethel enters the room where Judy lies fast asleep. Ethel picks up some laundry off the floor when she spots something.

INT. GARLAND'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ethel sits on the couch with the phone to her ear.

ETHEL

Hi, Mr. Mayer. It's Ethel Garland.
I'm sorry to disturb you so late.

MR. MAYER (V.O.)

It's fine. What's the matter?

ETHEL

It's about Judy.

MR. MAYER (V.O.)

(with concern)
Is something the matter?

ETHEL

No. But I want to be sure.

ANGLE ON: Vic's business card in her hand.

EXT. PARAMOUNT PICTURES - FOLLOWING MORNING

Outside, the pearly white gates of the other iconic studio.

INT. PARAMOUNT PICTURES - CASTING DEPARTMENT

Doris sits nervously against a wall studying her sides with a legion of other women waiting their turn to audition.

The door opens. The woman who just auditioned exits. She and Doris make eye contact for a split second.

The woman looks eerily similar to Claudette's mother.

Doris goes back to studying her sides, but something just doesn't sit right with her. She gets up walks to the front where a CASTING ASSISTANT, grizzly and unpleasant, sits.

DORIS

Who was that woman?

CASTING ASSISTANT

What woman?

DORIS

The one who just left.

CASTING ASSISTANT

(dips her glasses)
Seriously?

DORIS

I'm sorry.

She pushes the sign-in book forward.

CASTING ASSISTANT
Check for yourself.

Doris consults the book. Her eyes move down the column of actors who signed in and out, then stop on the last entry.

NAME: Rebecca Cole IN: 8:59 OUT: 9:37

EXT. PARAMOUNT PICTURES - BACK LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Doris exits into the blinding midday sun. She looks both ways, but no sign of the woman. Doris turns into an alleyway between two buildings and sees the woman at the other end.

DORIS
Wait!

The woman stops. They lock eyes. The woman looks scared. Clearly the two recognize each other. She's been made.

Then she quickly runs off. The click of her shoes echoes off the walls of the two soundstages. But Doris doesn't pursue. Instead she stands there like she's just seen a ghost.

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - RECEPTION - FLASHBACK

Doris opens the door for Geraldine Busby. It's unmistakably the same person as Rebecca Cole, the actress Doris just saw.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. CANTER'S DELI - LATER THAT MORNING

Vic sits at a booth reading the LA Times for September 30th, 1939. The headline: *Brits Evacuate; Anticipate War.*

DORIS (O.C.)
Where the hell have you been?!
I've been looking all over for you!

Vic looks up and sees Doris nearly collide with a WAITRESS.

DORIS (CONT'D)
We've been set-up, Vic!

She nearly falls onto Vic's table. Her eyes: manic.

DORIS (CONT'D)
You're not going to believe this!

VIC
Doris, will you please sit down.

DORIS
There's no time to sit. We're in
the middle of a conspiracy here.

A COUPLE in the next booth look over at them.

VIC
(to the COUPLE)
I swear I don't know this woman.

DORIS
You know the woman who hired you to
find her daughter?

VIC
Geraldine?

She sits down across from Vic. Leans in, whispers paranoid.

DORIS
She's not Claudette's mother.

VIC
I got a check from her yesterday.

DORIS
It's not her, Vic.

He looks up. Her eyes transfix on his. A long beat.

VIC
Then who am I working for?

She slaps something on the table. He turns it over, slowly.

ANGLE ON: Rebecca Cole's head shot smiling back at him.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Vic and Doris park in front of a puke green apartment
building dead smack on the corner of Hobart and 8th.

DORIS
This has to be her home address.
It's certainly not an agency.

VIC
Unless she's managed by some pimp.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Vic knocks on Rebecca's door. Nothing. He tries again. Still nothing. He leans in and tries to yell for her inside.

VIC
Hello?! Is a Rebecca Cole home?

Still nothing. Turns to Doris.

VIC (CONT'D)
At least we didn't have to take a train to get here.

He goes to leave, but Doris persists. She keeps trying.

DORIS
Rebecca? Are you in there?

VIC
C'mon, let's go. She's not home.

Doris puts her head to the door.

DORIS
Wait, Vic.

VIC
We'll try later. I need coffee.

Vic turns back.

DORIS
No, Vic. Look.

She points to the door crack; water is seeping out.

JUMP CUT TO:

EXT./INT. REBECCA COLE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Doris kicks down the door. Vic looks at her, stunned, but impressed. They wade through the studio apartment flooding with water. Vic spots its source and heads in its direction.

INT. REBECCA COLE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM

Vic enters to find Rebecca drowned in her bathtub, the water pouring over the edges. Her face is bright purple.

VIC
Don't come in here, Doris!

But it's too late. Doris gasps, turns away in shock.

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

Vic sits at his desk sorting through the mail when he stops. It's another letter with return address of AIDA, OKLA. He's about to toss it when something compels him to open it.

Reading the letter, we see Vic look vulnerable for the first time. Clearly it pains him. Right to the bone. He pauses after reading it, he takes out his flask. Takes a slug.

We hear the door unlock. He quickly hides the flask.

VIC
Where the hell have you been?

DORIS
Rebecca Cole wasn't only an actress.

VIC
Let me guess. A waitress too?

Doris, rolling her eyes, hands him a folder.

DORIS
She was also a prostitute.

VIC
That was going to be my second guess.

Vic opens it. Inside are police documents.

DORIS
Busted in some sting at a brothel off Sunset two years ago. Coroner is ruling her death a suicide.

She finds the flask Vic thinks he's just hidden.

DORIS (CONT'D)
I don't buy it. Not one bit. Since when is suicide this convenient?

She takes a big gulp from the flask.

DORIS (CONT'D)
She was murdered, Vic. I know it.

He shuts the folder.

VIC
Makes no difference. Her on a slab
does us no good either way.

DORIS
What happens now?

VIC
You pour me a drink too.

DORIS
No. The case.

VIC
It still needs solving.

DORIS
What about the money?

VIC
What about it?

DORIS
A dead woman can't cut checks.

Vic takes out Claudette's photograph.

VIC
This isn't about the money anymore.

EXT. DORIS' APARTMENT - SUNSET

Vic pulls up in front. Sheeting rain outside.

VIC
Tell your brother thanks for me.

He hands Doris the folder back.

DORIS
He doesn't know I have it.

VIC
You really are a quick study.

She smiles, but her eyes are misty.

DORIS
I don't know if I want children.

A tear trickles down her cheek.

DORIS (CONT'D)
This world is a sick place.

VIC
Hey.

He lifts her chin. Her eyes meet his.

VIC (CONT'D)
I'm going to find her.

His eyes remain steadfast. He wipes her tear away.

VIC (CONT'D)
Now get some rest. We've got a
conspiracy that needs solving.

She forces a smile. They lean in and kiss.

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - MOVING

At an intersection a POLICE CRUISER and a BLACK PACKARD SEDAN pull in front of Vic, blocking him. Vic lays on the horn.

All of a sudden, a hand raps at the driver's side window. It's a BURLY COP WITH A MUSTACHE. Vic rolls down the window a crack in the heavy rain so he doesn't get soaked.

BURLY COP WITH MUSTACHE
Get out of the car.

VIC
What's going on?

BURLY COP WITH MUSTACHE
Your car will be safe.

VIC
Am I under arrest?

BURLY COP WITH MUSTACHE
Do you want to be?

A beat. Vic realizes it isn't a choice.

INT. BLACK PACKARD SEDAN - MOVING

Vic sits in the back of one of the black sedans alone. He's being driven not by a cop, but a DRIVER in a black suit.

VIC

What the hell is going on here? I thought this was a police matter?

No answer. Vic tries to open the door. No luck.

VIC (CONT'D)

Get me out of this car.

Vic tries to kick the window out. For the first time, the Driver looks back in the mirror through the partition.

DRIVER

They're bulletproof, Mr. Shea.

VIC

Fancy. You must have booze then.

DRIVER

Center console.

Vic checks it. Inside, there are crystal decanters with booze. He picks one up and starts drinking right out of it.

VIC

So, where you taking me? The middle of the desert to bury me?

DRIVER

No, Mr. Shea.

(checks back in mirror)
Dinner.

INT. THE BROWN DERBY - NIGHT

Vic's escorted by the Driver to the back of the restaurant. In the last booth Louis B. Mayer sits eating a Cobb Salad.

MR. MAYER

(seeing Vic)

Please.

He motions for Vic, who's in shock, to sit down. Vic notices that the business card he left at Judy's is on his place mat.

MR. MAYER (CONT'D)

Thanks for agreeing to meet.

VIC
 Depends on your definition of
 'agreeing'.

MR. MAYER
 I do work in pictures, Mr. Shea.
 Perhaps the flair for the dramatic
 has rubbed off a bit too much on
 me.

A drink arrives for Vic.

MR. MAYER (CONT'D)
 Hope that suits you. Unfortunately
 Laudanum's not on the menu.

Vic looks up mid-sip, taken aback.

MR. MAYER (CONT'D)
 Oh, I know all about you, Mr. Shea.
 Aida, Oklahoma. Operating without
 a license. Six failed attempts at
 the police academy. I could go on.

Mr. Mayer shakes some pepper on his salad.

MR. MAYER (CONT'D)
 But I admire a man who keeps
 getting up, even if he'll never be
 tall enough to look me in the eye.

Vic's Cobb salad arrives.

MR. MAYER (CONT'D)
 My father was in the scrap metal
 business. Do you know anything
 about that line of work?

Vic doesn't respond.

MR. MAYER (CONT'D)
 The nuts and bolts of it is finding
 things no one else wants or can
 find, then selling those parts to
 someone else to become whole again.
 Next, they're either mended, welded
 or just melted down to make more
 sheet metal. Eventually, they all
 become one. Movies are no
 different. You find scraps then
 put them together. Most only see
 the final product; everything
 welded together polished, perfect
 and clean.

(MORE)

MR. MAYER (CONT'D)
But me, I remember the scraps.
Each and every one of them because
I know what it's like to look for
them. To find them. Rescue
them. Care for them. They're
family to me.

He wipes his mouth off, leans in.

MR. MAYER (CONT'D)
Continue picking through my family,
Mr. Shea, and no one will ever hire
you to go picking again. That's
not a threat. It's a promise.

(stands)
Enjoy your salad, Mr. Shea.

Mr. Mayer motions to his Driver. They head for the door.

VIC
Eddie Mannix.

Mr. Mayer's footsteps stop.

VIC (CONT'D)
Is that who does your picking?

He slowly turns around to face Vic.

VIC (CONT'D)
(motions him to sit)
Please.

Mr. Mayer slowly sits back down. Vic eats while he talks.

VIC (CONT'D)
Let me tell you about my line of
work: I pull things apart. Tell me
what you think of these pieces. A
young lady who's new in town gets
invited to a party thinking it's
going to be a fun night, but
instead it's just a big stag party
for MGM suits. Anyway, she gets
raped at this party, but someone
stops her from going to the
authorities. I don't know who.

He looks up at Mr. Mayer.

VIC (CONT'D)
But someone powerful.

Vic returns to eating.

VIC (CONT'D)
 With a thing for little people.
 So, they dangle this carrot:
 they'll give her a part in *The Wizard of Oz* to keep her mouth shut. And she does. Then she's fired for obvious reasons. You can't have a pregnant fifteen year old Munchkin in your movie, can you? What's fishy though is she just vanishes into thin air. Just like that. So does her boyfriend. So, I thought to myself, maybe they ran off and eloped? But I don't think so. I don't think you do either. No. Something happened.

Vic stabs a hardboiled egg. Devours it.

VIC (CONT'D)
 First clue, her mother hired me to find her daughter. Then I found out it wasn't her mother at all.

He takes out Rebecca Cole's head shot.

VIC (CONT'D)
 It was an actress who hired me.
 So, tell me: why would an actress pose as her mother to hire me?

MR. MAYER
 This is complete bull shit.

VIC
 That's what I thought too, then it hit me like a ton of bricks. I was hired because whoever this actress was working for didn't want anyone to know they were looking for the missing girl. Someone with a lot to lose. Or hide.

MR. MAYER
 Let me guess? Eddie Mannix really hired you? Is that your theory?

VIC
 He had the most to lose.
 (leans in)
 What if I told you I have someone who says it was him who raped Claudette at that party? What then?

He looks at Vic, not sure what to make of this pint-sized detective taking on him, the most powerful CEO in America.

MR. MAYER
You watch too many movies, Mr Shea.

Mr. Mayer stands to leave.

MR. MAYER (CONT'D)
Remember what I said about family.
They mean everything to me.

VIC
So does finding this girl.

MR. MAYER
Then find her, Mr. Shea.

He walks out. Vic realizes he's left him the bill.

INT. MGM STUDIOS - EDDIE MANNIX'S OFFICE - FOLLOWING MORNING

Eddie is on the phone in the middle of a jovial conversation when Louis B. Mayer enters, and shuts the door behind him.

EDDIE
(seeing Mayer)
Listen, I have to go, but you tell
him "no." Alright? You got that?
(beat)
Good. I'll call you later. Bye.

Eddie hangs up.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
That was just --

Louis lunges at Eddie and pulls him off his desk chair by his necktie to the floor where he pins him down. Louis seethes.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ, Louis!

MR. MAYER
You raped that girl, didn't you?!

EDDIE
What the hell are you doing?

Eddie struggles free and gets to his feet.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
What girl?

MR. MAYER
The dwarf at your birthday.

EDDIE
I may have my vices, Louis. But
I'm not sick. *Louis*. Look at me.

MR. MAYER
I am! After looking the other way
for years. With the mistresses;
you nearly killing your own wife,
and all your nocturnal activities
in the name of 'business'. But
enough is enough. This is *my*
business. Not yours. Now I have
blood on my hands thanks to you.

He slams the far bigger Eddie against a bookshelf.

MR. MAYER (CONT'D)
Do you have ANY idea what this
could mean, you fucking wop?! It
could cost me everything.
EVERYTHING! Now one last time:
what in God's name did you do? And
don't you fucking lie to me, Eddie.

EDDIE
Let me explain, Louis. Please.
(takes a deep breath)
There was a little girl. It's not
what you think. I didn't do
anything to her. I swear to God.

Eddie raises his right hand.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
She came to my suite after the
party, but I passed out. I woke up
alone. Alone, Louis. Alone. I
didn't lay a hand on her. She'd
tell you the same if she was here.

MR. MAYER
But she's not. Is she?

EDDIE
I had nothing to do with any rape
or her going missing. Nothing. I
may be dumb sometimes, but I'm not
stupid, Louis. I'm not stupid.

Eddie's nose-to-nose with the studio titan.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Nothing happened. I promise.

Mr. Mayer doesn't respond. He just remains pinning Eddie to the floor as he processes everything. Then he releases him.

Mr. Mayer stands up and brushes himself off while Eddie remains on the floor. Mr. Mayer then heads for the door.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Now tell me.

Mr. Mayer stops, his hand on the door knob.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Who told you these lies?

INT. THE BULL DOG CAFE - DAY

Vic noshes on a tamale while reading The Los Angeles Times. He flips to the back page. A headline reads: EX CALL GIRL FOUND DEAD; SUICIDE. The mug shot of Rebecca Cole under it.

BOY (O.C.)
Excuse me, sir.

He lowers his paper to find a BOY standing at his booth accompanied by his MOTHER who smiles and has giant breasts.

BOY (CONT'D)
May I ask you for your autograph?

The BOY holds out a pen and napkin. Vic looks perplexed.

MOTHER
I'm sorry. He just saw *Wizard of OZ* and loved the Munchkins so much.

Vic looks at the Boy's Mother smiling at him with her giant breasts falling out of her blouse like a pair of beach balls.

VIC
Sure thing, kid. What's your name?

BOY
Billy.

Vic hands the napkin back and walks out of the restaurant. After Vic's left, the Boy looks down at the signed napkin.

*Billy,
Your Mom has great tits!*

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - MOVING

Vic heads down Washington when all of a sudden, a POLICE CRUISER and two BLACK PACKARD SEDANS cut him off at La Brea.

Vic sighs. *Again?* The BURLY COP WITH A MUSTACHE approaches like before. Vic rolls down his window. Sarcastic.

VIC
Tell Mr. Mayer I already ate.

No sooner does the quip escape Vic's lips, the Burly Cop levies the butt of his gun down on Vic's temple. And BLACK.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - LATER

The two black Packard sedans turn off a main road and rumble across raw desert on their way to the middle of nowhere.

INT. BLACK PACKARD SEDAN - MOVING

Vic looks out the window as the car ahead of them comes to a complete stop and turns off its engine. The sedan Vic rides in does the same. Silence. Only the hum of the engines.

The Driver's side door opens and we hear footsteps walk over the dry sand, the grains crackling under smooth dress soles.

JUMP CUT TO:

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - DAY

The Driver of Vic's sedan throws Vic to the ground near the back door of the other sedan. The door opens and a pair of black derby shoes touch down on the sand near Vic's head.

We PAN UP to REVEAL Eddie Mannix standing over Vic.

EDDIE
You must be the midget dick.

Vic writhes in the dust. Eddie kicks him.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Get up.

Eddie kicks him again. This time in the mouth.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
On your feet.

Vic spits blood out of his mouth. Along with a tooth. Then he presses his palms on the sand to lift himself up.

Finally on his feet, Vic stands before Eddie like a scarecrow, beaten by the elements and barely conscious.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I know your kind, Mr. Shea. I know it well. Your kind has to work twice as hard to get half as much.

Eddie lights a cigar, then looks at the horizon where the sun begins to melt and night begins to weigh upon the desert.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
That's why I like your kind: twice the pleasure. Half the price.

VIC
Is that why you hired me?

EDDIE
(laughs)
Hire you?

Eddie crouches down, menacingly over Vic.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I wouldn't hire you to fuck a donkey on account of the donkey.

Eddie touches the spike of a nearby cactus.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Lies can grow anywhere and survive on nothing. Like these plants.

Eddie's TWO GOONS restrain Vic. One pries open Vic's mouth.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
You should learn to hold your tongue, Mr. Shea.

He holds the cigar as if he is going to burn the tongue, then suddenly mashes it into the back of Vic's hand. Vic screams.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I never touched the little twat.

VIC
You got a witness?

Eddie casually takes out a gun.

EDDIE
Yeah.

Loads it. Spins barrel.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Laurel and Hardy.

He spins the chamber, aims at Vic.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
You want me to put you in touch
with their agent?

He starts to shoot all around Vic's body. Dust flies up in each bullet's wake like little dust storms.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
You're lucky I forgot a shovel or
you'd be digging right now.

He smiles at Vic, then knocks Vic over the head with the butt of the gun with enough force to knock him out. And does.

PITCH BLACK.

EXT. MOJAVE DESERT - FOLLOWING DAY

Vic's ears are still-ringing from being struck by the gun as he slowly opens his eyes again. They twitch from the dust.

From Vic's fuzzy P.O.V., JAMES CAGNEY appears again this time in a black pinstripe suit looking out on the desert.

JAMES CAGNEY
The things the world needs the most
are simplicity, honesty and decency
--and you find them more often in
the country than in the city. I
don't like to be in the cities at
all. I like to be where animals
are and things growing.

Cagney turns to look at Vic.

JAMES CAGNEY (CONT'D)
If this girl you're looking for is
alive and has a lick of sense, she
won't be there. But out here.
(gazes out on horizon)
Somewhere...

He looks back down at Vic.

JAMES CAGNEY (CONT'D)
Keep looking, kid.

Then Cagney FADES AWAY with Vic's consciousness again.

INT. MOJAVE DESERT - LATER THAT DAY, MAYBE THE NEXT

Vic appears on the horizon; his body wavy in the sweltering heat that shimmers up from the desert.

INT. BACK OF A TRUCK - NIGHT

Vic lies slumped next to crate upon crate of chickens. They cluck like a schizophrenic symphony. Mouths like scissors.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - DAWN

The truck pulls away leaving Vic by the side of the road. He stumbles a few yards before collapsing just as the sun rises.

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Vic wakes up to find himself lying on his back in his office. Doris changes his bandage on his hand. He groans in pain.

DORIS
You need to drink.

VIC
I do. Get my flask.

DORIS
No. Water, you fool.

She brings a cup of water to his lips.

DORIS (CONT'D)
Drink as much as you can.

He sips it, but can't manage much.

DORIS (CONT'D)
You've been asleep the better part
of two days. The doctor says
you're lucky to be alive.

VIC
Two days?

DORIS

Yes. And we need to get you back to full health. You've got a case that still needs solving.

VIC

Which case? Eddie didn't do it.

DORIS

He tried to kill you.

VIC

If he'd done it, he would have finished the job.

DORIS

We need to contact the police.

VIC

They are the police, Doris.

His eyes lock on hers. She leaves, clearly disappointed. Vic slumps back and stares up at the ceiling where another tile is peeling, hanging by one sticky corner for dear life.

INT. SPEAKEASY - NIGHT

Vic wanders through an underground speakeasy where hedonists hang like clothing in some strange closet. He passes junkies passed out and businessmen sharing Absinthe in a booth.

He makes accidental eye contact with a man getting a blow job by the bathroom. A bob of blonde hair between the man's legs turns around to reveal a transvestite with a thin mustache.

INT. SPEAKEASY - BAR - NIGHT

The BARTENDER, a lithe man with a widow's peak sees Vic. Knows what he wants without asking. He takes out a bottle of Laudanum and sets it in front of Vic. Vic stares the label: red with skull and cross bones. 48% Alcohol, %45.6 Opium.

FADE TO:

EXT. CORNFIELD - DAY (VIC'S FLASHBACK)

A **YOUNG VIC** (13) walks with his **YOUNGER BROTHER** (10) through a cornfield. Vic's younger brother is a little person too. The stalks taller than both of them, they thrash through with sticks like makeshift machetes, Vic leading the way.

VIC'S YOUNGER BROTHER
You promised you'd play.

YOUNG VIC
I said I wanted to be by myself.

VIC'S YOUNGER BROTHER
C'mon. Please. You promised.

YOUNG VIC
Why don't you get some friends?
I'm tired of being your toy.

VIC'S YOUNGER BROTHER
You don't have any friends.

YOUNG VIC
I do too.

VIC'S YOUNGER BROTHER
Do not!

YOUNG VIC
Do too!

Vic shoves his Younger Brother.

YOUNG VIC (CONT'D)
I just don't introduce them to you
because you'd scare them away!

It looks like Vic's Younger Brother is about to cry.

YOUNG VIC (CONT'D)
Fine. One game. That's it.

His Younger Brother immediately brightens.

VIC'S YOUNGER BROTHER
All the way to a hundred this time.
I know you cheated last time.

Vic covers his eyes with his hands.

YOUNG VIC
Fine. All the way to a hundred.

Vic's Younger Brother runs off. Yells back.

VIC'S YOUNGER BROTHER
And no peeking!

YOUNG VIC
One, two, three, four, five...

Then Vic removes his hands. Opens his eyes. Checks if the coast is clear, then walks off occasionally yelling out a number, but he's just abandoned the game altogether.

EXT./INT. FARM HOUSE - DUSK (VIC'S FLASHBACK)

Vic enters through the back, kicks off his pair of dirty white sneakers and heads into the kitchen where **VIC'S MOTHER**, also a little person is preparing dinner.

VIC'S MOTHER
Where's your brother?

VIC
He's not here?

VIC'S MOTHER
No. I thought he was with you.

VIC
I was just playing hide n go seek
with him.

VIC'S MOTHER
Well, did you find him?

EXT. CORNFIELDS - NIGHT (VIC'S FLASHBACK)

Vic walks with an oil lantern beside his mother as they call out for his younger brother and her other son.

VIC'S MOTHER
You shouldn't have left him out
here.

VIC
But I swear I counted to a hundred
just like we always do.

VIC'S MOTHER
You didn't leave him at all?

VIC
I was looking for him the whole
time.

She looks at Vic, sensing he's scared, then ruffles his hair.

VIC'S MOTHER
He's probably just still hiding.

She smiles at Vic, and they continue on.

EXT. ROAD BY CORNFIELD - NIGHT (VIC'S FLASHBACK)

Young Vic and his Mother come out of the brush by the road, holding out their oil lanterns. They keep calling out, then Vic stops. He leans down and sets his lantern down.

ON: A small shoe. Its laces still tied.

He picks it up. Examines it by the light. By the look on his face we know it's his brother's. His Mother looks over.

VIC'S MOTHER
What is it? What did you find?

Vic turns around. His face illuminated by the light of the lantern. He holds up the shoe. His Mother's face begins trembling, then she screams. It echoes over the cornfields.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. SPEAKEASY - CLOSING TIME

Everyone is gone. The Bartender's just finished cleaning his last glass. Vic remains seated with the bottle in front of him. He leaves a tip. Exits. He never touched the bottle.

EXT./INT. RECEPTION - MORNING

Vic enters to find Doris behind her desk in the reception area typing away. Then her typing stops. She lifts her head. She sees him and the two hold each other's gaze.

DORIS
You got a walk-in waiting.

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Vic discovers an **ELDERLY WOMAN** seated before his desk.

VIC
I hope I didn't keep you long.

ELDERLY WOMAN
It's quite alright. When you get to be my age you get used to it.

He sits down at his desk.

VIC
How can I be of service?

ELDERLY WOMAN
I fear my Ben may have flown off
with another bird.

VIC
What makes you think your husband
would be having an affair?

ELDERLY WOMAN
Husband?! Heaven's no. That
bastard kicked the can years ago.
(looks off, crestfallen)
No. Ben's the love of my life.
(back to Vic)
He's my parrot.

VIC
Parrot?

ELDERLY WOMAN
Yes. Parrot. They're supposed to
be loyal, so I fear the worst. Oh,
but he's been acting very strange l-

Vic cuts her off.

VIC
I'm sorry, ma'am.

ELDERLY WOMAN
What's the matter?

VIC
I don't do pets.

ELDERLY WOMAN
But it said in The Pennysaver; no
case too big, no case too small.

VIC
Yes, but nowhere does it say --

Vic stops.

VIC (CONT'D)
(to himself)
The Pennysaver.

She takes the ad out of her purse.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Yes. False advertising indeed.

She slaps it down.

VIC
Thank you!

He kisses her on the hand and exits.

ELDERLY WOMAN
What about Ben?!

The door shuts behind him. She just sits there perplexed.

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - MOVING

C.U. - Vic's foot slams the wood block atop the accelerator.

Doris rides shotgun as Vic weaves hurriedly through traffic.

DORIS
What's The Pennysaver got to do
with Claudette going missing?

VIC
Whoever placed that casting ad is
the person who must have hired me.

DORIS
That makes no sense. Why would
someone hire a private eye to find
a person *they* made disappear?

VIC
They didn't though. They hired
someone else to pose as her mother.

DORIS
The same person who killed Douglas.

VIC
Unless he has an identical twin.

DORIS
(connecting the dots)
Must have also killed Rebecca Cole.

VIC
Let's not get greedy, we just need
one.

(glances over at her)
You make a quick study, partner.

She smiles. It's the first time he's called her that.

INT. PENNYSAYER OFFICES - DAY

Doris makes busy distracting the EMPLOYEE at the front desk, a lanky OLD MAN, with snow white hair, wearing suspenders.

DORIS

(points to receipt)

Right here. There's the same number of words as last month, yet you've charged me twice the amount.

EMPLOYEE

(takes out his glasses)

Let me see both receipts.

DORIS

Both receipts?

EMPLOYEE

You're claiming we charged you double, so I'd need to see the bill for the previous ad you placed.

DORIS

Are you calling me a liar?

EMPLOYEE

No. What are you crazy?

DORIS

So, now I'm crazy, am I?

Meanwhile, we PAN DOWN to find Vic crawling behind the front desk area and into the back where the files are kept.

EMPLOYEE (O.C.)

You certainly sound like it.

DORIS (O.C.)

Sir, I'm an actress.

EMPLOYEE (O.C.)

Like I said: *crazy*.

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - LATER

Vic pulls up to a small building off Duquesne Ave.

INT. MAX SHULTE'S OFFICE - RECEPTION - DAY

Vic and Doris enter to find themselves in the middle of a reception area filled with actresses studying their sides.

SECRETARY
May I help you?

VIC
We're here to see Mr. Shulte.

SECRETARY
Mr. Shulte is busy right now.

Vic takes out his pad and pen.

VIC
Could you get a note to him?

SECRETARY
Is it urgent?

VIC
You be the judge.

He passes the note to her. She looks at it quickly, then back at Vic. Her face goes red in reaction to what she read.

INT. MAX SHULTE'S OFFICE - NOT ALL THAT MUCH LATER

Max stands with this back to us looking out his window on a courtyard where two birds land at a fountain to drink.

After a long beat.

MAX
How did you find me?

Vic plops The Pennysaver on his desk.

VIC
Same way she found you.

Max turns around for the first time.

VIC (CONT'D)
Same way you found me.

Max picks up The Pennysaver.

MAX
What are you talking about? I've never placed an ad in this. Ever.

He tosses back on the desk.

VIC

Tell me, Mr. Shulte: Do you typically cast actresses as mothers of your underage crushes to hire private eyes, or am I just special?

MAX

(looks at Doris)
Is this some kind of joke?

VIC

It struck me funny too, but it was also genius: having someone pose as her mother to cover your identity.

MAX

This is preposterous. I never knew she was missing till you walked in here and told me. The only thing I'm guilty of is helping that girl.

DORIS

By 'help' you mean serving her up as a party favor for Eddie Mannix?

MAX

No. By help I mean casting her in the biggest film of the year at MGM! I'm calling the police.

Max picks up the phone.

VIC

Which ones? The lackeys who do MGM's bidding, or the city's? Lately I can't tell the two apart.

He starts dialing.

DORIS

You raped her.

He pauses. His index finger trembles.

DORIS (CONT'D)

She was pregnant.

A beat. Max slowly returns the phone to its cradle, and resumes looking out the window. After a long silence:

MAX

What do you want?

VIC
What happened to Douglas?

MAX
Who's Douglas?

VIC
The man she left you for. He
disappeared before Claudette went
missing. She was the lucky one.

MAX
She never left me. I left her.

Vic picks up a head shot on Max's desk. A stunning actress.

VIC
You look at pretty women all day.
But that doesn't do it for you,
does it? You like them young.
Real young. Little too.

MAX
Careful, Mr. Shea. I'm a married
man. A happily married man.

VIC
Doesn't stop Eddie. Now does it?

Vic sets the head shot back facedown.

VIC (CONT'D)
When did that start?

He starts to walk around the desk to Max.

VIC (CONT'D)
Is it because when you were young
you were the happiest, is that it?

Vic nears. Continues prodding. Max looks away.

VIC (CONT'D)
Or was that she looked like your
sister? Did you ever kiss your
sister, Mr. Shulte. Practice, you
know? You can tell me.

Max's face trembles. Vic looks up at him.

VIC (CONT'D)
Were you on top?

Max suddenly throws Vic against the wall.

MAX
STOP IT!

He slams Vic again. Books fall off the shelf.

MAX (CONT'D)
What do you want?!

VIC
The truth.

Suddenly Max backs off. REVEAL: Vic, gun pointed at Max.

MAX
I don't know any Douglas!

VIC
You're lying, Mr. Shulte.

MAX
I swear.

Vic aims the gun at Max's head. Max lowers to the floor.

VIC
You know, I had a little brother once. Smaller than me if you can believe it. He went wherever I went. One day, we were playing hide-and-go seek in the field. After awhile I went looking for him. He was never good at hiding. Anyway, I can't find him anywhere. I almost give up when I come across this stretch of road right next to that field. I come out on that road and I see a shoe. A little shoe. My brother's shoe. It was laced. Not untied. He'd been pulled out of his shoe. Gone.

Doris looks on, clearly having never heard this before.

VIC (CONT'D)
I told everyone that we'd been playing hide 'n go seek and I'd counted to 100 and went looking for him. But I lied. The truth is I never counted to a hundred -- I left him. I left him because he was annoying me. He was always asking a million questions and I'd gotten sick of it that day.

(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

So I played a trick on him: when he went to hide, I simply left. Went off and chucked some rocks in a creek. Had a smoke. Then when the sun started to set, I go looking for him. But I never found him. I go home. Figure he's there. But he's not. My Mom asks me what happened and I told her the lie. Told the police. Told everyone. Even myself. All these years. Lying.

Vic presses the barrel of the gun to Max's forehead. Max's temples are pouring with sweat, and he is trembling.

VIC (CONT'D)

They never found my brother. Never found whoever took him. But if I'd played that game. Counted to 100, whoever took my brother that day would be right where you are now: wetting his pants, pleading to me. Lying to me. Just like you.

Vic cocks the gun. Max shuts his eyes. His body convulsing.

MAX

He drowned!

Doris and Vic make eye contact. Vic takes the gun off Max, but Max remains huddled on the ground. Then looks up at Vic.

MAX (CONT'D)

...I drowned him.

A buoy faintly chimes through heavy fog --

EXT. BOAT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Douglas stands in shackles, shivering in the cold night air. Max drags him toward the stern of the boat as Douglas pleads.

DOUGLAS

I promise. I will run. You will never see me again. I swear.

MAX

Too late. I told you to run already. Warned you. But you didn't listen, did you? Did you?

He belts Douglas across the face.

MAX (CONT'D)
Half a man. That's what you are.
Half. You hear me?! HALF!

Douglas lifts his head up, the color drains out his temples.

DOUGLAS
But she wanted all of me.

Furious, Max shoves Douglas against the side of the boat.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
You're not a killer, Max. I know
you. Don't do this. Please.

Douglas looks like he's on the verge of tears. He shakes.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
You'll never be able to look at
yourself in the mirror. Max.

Max bellows out in frustration. Tears pour down his cheeks.

MAX
I didn't mean to hurt her.

INT. PACIFIC OCEAN - DEPTHS OF THE OCEAN - FLASHBACK

Douglas descends to the ocean's floor, shackled like a mummy in chains and weights. Bubbles cease to come out of his mouth. His eyes shut as his body disappears into darkness.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. MAX SHULTE'S OFFICE - RECEPTION - DAY

Vic and Doris watch Max led out in handcuffs by two policemen. Lloyd joins them, turns to his sister.

LLOYD
You've got an interesting way of
trying to make it as an actress
taking down one of the biggest
casting directors in town.

Vic picks up a picture off a bookshelf.

DORIS
I never liked auditioning anyway.

LLOYD
What is my sister doing here? Vic.

Vic returns the picture to the bookshelf.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
You two are a team now?

DORIS
Yeah.

VIC
Yeah.

Doris and Vic look at one another. Awkward silence.

VIC (CONT'D)
Who could use a drink?

LLOYD
No thanks. I've still got a body
waiting at the bottom of an ocean.

VIC
Say 'hi' to the fishes for me.

Lloyd points at Doris.

LLOYD
I want you out of my apartment.

DORIS
(salutes him)
Yes, sir.

LLOYD
I'm serious!

We PAN OVER to the bookshelf.

HOLD ON: The black and white framed photograph Vic was looking at. It's of a WOMAN wearing sunglasses and a scarf on the stern of a boat; the name of the boat on back: "RED".

INT. FORMOSA CAFE - FORMOSA & SANTA MONICA BLVD - NIGHT

Vic and Doris toast shot glasses and down them together. Doris' face grimaces from the after burn. Vic's used to it.

DORIS
How come you never told me?

A beat.

VIC
I never thought I'd tell anyone.

DORIS
You chose to tell a murderer
instead of your girlfriend.

VIC
Maybe it's just easier confessing
bad things to bad people?

She puts her hand over his.

DORIS
It wasn't your fault.

He looks up. Their eyes meet.

VIC
Okay.

She smiles.

DORIS
So, what happens now?

VIC
We order another round.

Vic hails the Bartender.

DORIS
No. What happens to Claudette?

VIC
What do you mean?

The Bartender re-fills their shot glasses.

DORIS
Do you think she's safe?

VIC
From that guy at least.

Vic holds up his shot glass to toast again. Doris doesn't.

VIC (CONT'D)
Hey. What's the matter?

He lifts her chin up.

VIC (CONT'D)
The bad guy's behind bars.

INT. FORMOSA CAFE - MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Vic washes his hands, then splashes some cold water on his face. As he dries his hands and face off with a towel, something makes him stop suddenly. He squints in the mirror.

RACK FOCUS: In the mirror, we see a picture on the wall.

Vic tosses the towel in the basket and walks over to where the picture hangs over one of the urinals. It's of The Cocoanut Grove commemorating its grand opening in 1921.

Then it hits him like a ton of bricks.

QUICK MONTAGE:

1. Judy telling Vic that she found it odd Claudette got cast in Wizard of OZ right after the party where she was raped.
2. Anne introduces Claudette to Eddie at The Cocoanut Grove. We see Max watch this unfold across the room.
3. Marie describing the woman with whom Claudette came to Eddie's party as being "beautiful, with flowing red hair."
4. Anne telling Vic many actresses live in the building and sees her role "more like a mother to them than a landlord."
5. Anne telling Vic that Claudette had told her she was going out of town about a month ago or so.
6. Vic opens the closet in Claudette's apartment. First we see the coats, then a suitcase. We HOLD ON it.
7. The picture of a woman standing on the stern of a boat wearing scarf and sunglasses. The boat's name on back: RED.
8. Vic at Claudette's old apartment turning around to see Anne for the first time dressed in the silk kimono, her flowing red hair combed to one side.

INT. FORMOSA CAFE - BY THE BAR

Vic holds out Doris' coat.

VIC
We've got to go. Now.

DORIS
What's going on?

He lays down some money on the bar.

VIC
I was wrong.

DORIS
What do you mean?

VIC
Max isn't the enemy. He's sleeping
with it.

INT. POLICE STATION - FRONT DESK

Doris stands at the front desk where an OVERWEIGHT COP sits reading a newspaper and noshing on some kind of Danish.

DORIS
Excuse me, sir?

He looks up. He quickly straightens up. Smiles.

OVERWEIGHT COP
Yes?

DORIS
I have a problem, Officer.

She leans in. Her bust presses on the counter.

DORIS (CONT'D)
It concerns my pussy --

He nearly chokes on his Danish.

DORIS (CONT'D)
-- Cat. She's missing, I think.

INT. POLICE STATION - RECORDS

Vic quickly searches through the "O's" and finds "Osterstock, A." He pulls the file and stuffs it into his jacket.

INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY

Vic looks both ways before exiting the records room. As he starts back towards the front desk area, a voice calls out.

LLOYD (O.C.)
Speak of the Devil.

Vic stops, his face cringes.

RACK FOCUS: Lloyd standing a couple yards away.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
Little Devil that is.

VIC
(feigns relief)
Oh, there you are. I've been
looking all over for you.

LLOYD
How did you get back here, Vic?

VIC
Honestly?

LLOYD
No. Lie to me. I prefer it.

VIC
I snuck under the front desk. I
know, I know it was wrong, but I
thought you'd never let me back.
And I wanted to talk to you.

LLOYD
I could have you locked up right
now for trespassing.

VIC
And you'd be well within your
rights, I have no doubt.

Lloyd crosses his arms. Waiting.

LLOYD
C'mon. Spit it out, Ace.

VIC
I'm here to ask for your blessing.

LLOYD
My blessing?

VIC
I want to marry Doris.

LLOYD
Are you seriously asking me this?

VIC
I wanted to get your blessing
first. But I was afraid.

LLOYD

Afraid?

VIC

You'd say 'no.'

LLOYD

'No'? Are you kidding me? I
thought you'd never ask. Hell,
I'll even pay for the honeymoon.

(quickly, worried)

She's going to live with you right?

VIC

That's the plan.

Lloyd breathes a sigh of relief, pats Vic on the back.

LLOYD

Nice work, Detective. You finally
solved one of my problems instead
of creating more of them.

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET

Vic peels out of the parking area.

DORIS

You make a detour through the
morgue? You were gone forever.
There's only so long a girl can
talk about her missing pussy.

He looks over at her, perplexed.

VIC

I ran into your brother.

DORIS

He didn't catch you, did he?

VIC

No. He gave me his blessing.

Vic hands the file to Doris.

VIC (CONT'D)

Turns out sweet Anne the friendly
landlord is really a Hollywood
Madame. Ran a huge ring up on
Sunset. Busted two years ago and
did a year in the big house.

DORIS

Rebecca Cole was arrested in that
very same ring. Oh God...

VIC

What?

DORIS

Anne was once Rebecca's Madame.
She knew her. She was the one who
had Rebecca pose as Claudette's
mother to hire you. And after her
cover was blown, Anne either had
her killed or Rebecca was so afraid
she beat Anne to the punch.

VIC

Max just confessed to Douglas'
murder. It makes no sense. What
would Anne want with Claudette?

DORIS

Unless she knew.

VIC

Knew what?

DORIS

About the baby.

Doris looks out the window.

DORIS (CONT'D)

But only Claudette knows. Wherever
she is. We'll never know, will we?

Vic drives in silence. He doesn't have the answer.

INT. VIC'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

We PUSH INSIDE to the office completely turned upsidedown.
At the desk, we find Anne madly rifling through its drawers
looking for any clues to lead her to Claudette's whereabouts.

Suddenly, there's a KNOCK at the door. Anne becomes quiet.

CLOSE ON: We see Anne holding a revolver under the desk.

More KNOCKING. Finally, the door opens. It's JUDY GARLAND.
She sees Anne behind the desk. Anne is speechless. A beat.

JUDY

Is Vic in?

Anne doesn't say anything.

JUDY (CONT'D)
Are you his secretary?

A beat. Anne plays along. Smiles.

ANNE
I am.

Judy looks around. Notices the disarray.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Excuse the mess. Spring cleaning.

JUDY
Do you know when he'll be back?

ANNE
He just stepped out. Is there
something I can help you with?

Judy opens her purse and takes out an envelope.

JUDY
Could you make sure he gets this?

Judy holds out the envelope. Anne takes it.

ANNE
Of course.

JUDY
Thank you.

Judy goes to leave. She stops in the doorway, turns back.

JUDY (CONT'D)
One more thing.

Anne looks up. Her eyes meet Judy's.

JUDY (CONT'D)
Tell him I'm trying to quit.

ANNE
I will.

After Judy leaves, Anne examines the already opened envelope in her hand. She notices the postmark is from two days ago. Quizzically, she takes out the letter inside it.

ANGLE ON:

(MORE)

ANNE (CONT'D)

Dear Francis,

We're safe. I pray you are too.

Always, C

Anne recites the letter aloud under her breath. She pauses, trying to process what it means. Then she consults it again.

Each line hits like a hammer, as Anne draws the connection.

CLOSE ON: "We're safe."

CLOSE ON: "Always, C"

CLOSE ON: "C"

ANNE (CONT'D)

Claudette...

Anne returns the letter to envelope. Postmark: INDIO, CALI. She HONES IN on the RETURN ADDRESS. *Anne's a step ahead now.*

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - MOVING

Vic hangs a right on Hollywood Blvd off Highland.

DORIS

Hey, Vic. Look!

She points out the window. On the sidewalk, we see someone waiting by the trolley stop wearing a scarf and sunglasses.

DORIS (CONT'D)

Isn't that...?

VIC

(peers)

It is. What's she doing?

Vic rolls down the window. Whistles. Judy looks both ways, not sure of the whistle's origin. He honks. Judy spots him.

EXT./INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET

Judy gets in the back seat.

JUDY

I took the trolley all the way here without anyone noticing.

Defeated, she removes her disguise.

JUDY (CONT'D)
How did you know?

VIC
I didn't. My secretary did.

JUDY
You have two?

VIC
Two?

JUDY
Secretaries.

DORIS
He wishes.

Judy looks confused.

JUDY
But I just saw your secretary.

VIC
What are you talking about?

JUDY
I came to tell you Claudette's
safe. She wrote me a letter.

VIC
Where is it?

JUDY
Palm Springs, I think.

VIC
No. The letter. Where is it?

JUDY
I left it with your secretary. She
said she was. I asked her myself.

DORIS
What did she look like?

JUDY
She had red hair.

Doris looks over at Vic. Silence.

JUDY (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

SFX -- "Strange Fruit" by Nina Simone crackles over a radio

INT. ANNE'S CAR - MOVING

HOLD ON the letter on the passenger seat of a car. We PAN UP from the letter to Anne, who drives with a placid look on her face as Simone's song bleeds out the Motorola car radio.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - SAME TIME

The same Motorola car radio playing the same song. We PAN UP up to where Vic drives fast to try to make up for lost time.

EXT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - NIGHT

His car blasts past a sign that reads INDIO, CALI - 15 miles.

EXT. PHILLIPS 66 GAS STATION - NIGHT

Through the window, we watch Vic hold up Claudette's picture for the CASHIER. The Cashier shakes his head "no".

EXT. SMALL PUEBLO HOME - NIGHT

Anne pulls onto the shoulder and turns off her car across the street from a small pueblo home with a detached garage.

Through a window, Anne watches as Claudette rocks a small baby in her arms getting ready to put her to bed.

Then Anne opens the glove compartment. There's a gun inside.

EXT. DINER - NIGHT

Through the window, we watch Vic hold up Claudette's picture for a couple of WAITRESSES. They shake their heads "no".

EXT. SMALL PUEBLO HOME - NIGHT

Anne sneaks around the back of the home. Through the back window, she watches as Claudette puts her baby down.

EXT. MEXICAN DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Through the window, we see Vic hold up Claudette's photo for the Bartender. The Bartender takes it. A beat. He nods.

SFX --"Strange Fruit" by Nina Simone ENDS.

EXT./INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET

Vic gets in and quickly starts the car.

VIC
A mile up the road.

He hands Doris a napkin.

VIC (CONT'D)
Says she's up the road a mile or
so. Buddy helped mend her fence.

Vic backs out of the parking lot.

EXT./INT. SMALL PUEBLO HOME - SAME TIME

Anne enters through the baby's room. She stops to peer over the crib. The baby is fast asleep. Suddenly the baby cries.

We hear footsteps down the hall. Then Claudette appears in the doorway. Just stops dead in her tracks.

REVERSE ON: Anne holding the baby, trying to soothe it.

ANNE
(looks up)
She's got your eyes. His nose.

Claudette trembles, her arms out wanting her child back.

CLAUDETTE
Please. Give her back. Anne.

EXT. SMALL PUEBLO HOME - SAME TIME

Vic breaks hard and parks behind Anne's car.

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET

Vic loads the chambers of his gun.

VIC
I want you to stay here.

DORIS
No way. I'm going with you.

He cocks the gun and turns to her.

VIC
It's not safe.

DORIS
Since when was any of this safe?

She gets out without a second thought.

INT. SMALL PUEBLO HOME - SAME TIME

Claudette nears Anne with her arms out, crying now.

CLAUDETTE
Let me have her. Please.

ANNE
I tried to help you.

CLAUDETTE
Please, don't hurt my baby.

ANNE
All you had to do was shut up.

CLAUDETTE
I'm sorry, please.

ANNE
We had a deal.

Anne knocks Claudette to the floor. The baby starts wailing.

EXT./INT. SMALL PUEBLO HOME

Vic and Doris enter through a window in the front. As Vic topples inside, he knocks over a lamp. It breaks. Loudly.

INT. SMALL PUEBLO HOME

We hear the CRASH over the baby's cries. Anne looks up.

ANNE
Who else is here?

CLAUDETTE
No one. I'm alone.

Then Anne looks up. Sees Vic and Doris.

ANNE
Always a step behind.

VIC
I've got short legs.

ANNE
Put the gun down.

Vic slowly puts his gun down. Then Anne turns to Doris.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Get on the floor. Both of you.

Vic and Doris get on their knees.

VIC
You go through all this to find
this girl to kill her out of spite?

ANNE
You think this is spite?

VIC
What do you want with her? She
would have never been able to pin
your husband to Douglas' murder.
She would have never talked.

ANNE
But she did. She told him. And
Douglas told Max. I couldn't risk
it. I have a business to protect.

VIC
The same business you ran with your
husband. Let me guess, he sends
you young actresses in need of cash
to whore out? But it doesn't work
out so great when he goes around
raping and impregnating girls meant
for the clientele, does it now?

ANNE
She seduced him.

CLAUDETTE
He raped me.

Her words hang in the air.

ANNE
He's weak.

CLAUDETTE
Give her back.

ANNE
(gazes fondly at the baby)
Do you know how long I've tried to
get pregnant? How badly I wanted a
child of my own. With him. And
then to have this...
(holds baby up)
...Thing grow out of you and not
me. You don't deserve it.

Anne puts the gun to the baby's head. She's about to pull the trigger when a GUN SHOT rings out of nowhere.

Anne drops to the floor as Vic lunges and rescues the baby, just like he rescued the cat from falling out of the tree.

Vic looks up to find Douglas in the doorway with a shotgun. Douglas stares down at the body of Anne, in shock himself.

DOUGLAS
I was working on the car in the
garage and heard noises.

Claudette takes her baby from Vic. Douglas looks up.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Thank you.

Doris FAINTS. Then Vic looks up at Douglas.

VIC
Aren't you dead?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SMALL PUEBLO HOME - SUNRISE

The CORONER takes Anne's covered body away. Douglas finishes talking to the police and walks over to Vic and Doris.

DOUGLAS
Claudette tells me you got Max.

VIC
Apparently he didn't get you.

DOUGLAS

After Claudette had told me what had happened to her, I promised her I wouldn't do anything. I thought I could. But it ate at me.

FADE TO:

INT. PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Douglas huddles in a phone booth, it's pouring rain out. We see a flask in Douglas' hand. Clearly he'd been drinking.

DOUGLAS (V.O.)

I told him I wanted to meet. Soon as possible. I didn't say about what, but said it was important.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MARINA DEL REY - DAY - FLASHBACK

Douglas walks down a dock.

DOUGLAS (V.O.)

He said he could meet me in the Marina the following day, take his boat, RED, out to Catalina.

Ahead of Douglas, we see Red moored.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - SUNSET - FLASHBACK

Douglas and Max are in the middle of a heated argument.

DOUGLAS (V.O.)

I confronted him about it and he denied it. Over and over again. But I could tell he was lying by the way his lip kept quivering.

Max starts to break down.

DOUGLAS (V.O.)

Then he confesses. Tells me everything. How Claudette had gone up to see Eddie that night, but Eddie had passed out. She was drunk too. And he couldn't help himself. My blood boiled.

Douglas grabs Max by the neck.

DOUGLAS (V.O.)
I wanted to kill him, but then all
of a sudden I was knocked out cold.

Douglas falls like a deck of cards.

RACK FOCUS: Anne holding the shaft of a wood fishing net.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - THAT NIGHT - FLASHBACK

We see Douglas regain consciousness. He's shackled now.

DOUGLAS (V.O.)
When I came to, it was night and I
had shackles and weights on me. I
knew their plan. It was only a
matter of time. I thought how
stupid I'd been to go out in that
boat. I'd never see Claudette
again. It was over.

Douglas is dragged over to the edge.

DOUGLAS (V.O.)
But when it came to it, he didn't
have the heart to push me over. But
she did. They started arguing. And
that's when I saw my opportunity.

CLOSE ON: A fish hook on the floor of the boat.

Douglas scoots his head to position himself to put the fish hook in his mouth. He hides it in his mouth just before Anne heaves his shackled body overboard.

INT. PACIFIC OCEAN - FLASHBACK

Douglas writhes like a mummy in his shackles as he tries to crane his head down to reach his hands. Finally, he gets his mouth close enough to his fingers to reach the fish hook.

DOUGLAS (V.O.)
I'd done escapist tricks before,
but only when I was in complete
control. And this was no trick.
They wanted me dead. But the
thought of losing Claudette gave me
focus. I had to live.

We watch as Douglas works quickly to pick the lock on his shackles as he continues to sink.

Just before reaching the ocean floor, he frees himself.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Douglas bursts to the surface right by the buoy. He swims over to hold on for dear life to wait for rescue.

DOUGLAS (V.O.)
Eventually a fishing boat came by
and took me to shore.

EXT. MARINA DEL REY - BAR - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Douglas huddles, soaking wet in a phone booth.

DOUGLAS
I called her as soon as I could and told her to get to the desert as soon as possible, don't pack, don't tell anyone you're leaving and that I'd be there as soon as I could.

INT. CLAUDETTE'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME - FLASHBACK

She hangs up. Knocking at the door. Frantic, she crawls out the window onto the fire escape just as Anne enters.

FADE TO:

INT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - MOVING

Vic pulls away from the crime scene with Doris and the two head back down the dirt road toward a setting sun.

DORIS
What now?

VIC
I'm thinking Acapulco.

DORIS
Acapulco?

VIC
For our Honeymoon.

DORIS
Honeymoon? You haven't even asked
me to marry you yet.

Vic takes a small velvet box out of his pocket.

VIC
You can get married in Mexico too.

She opens the small velvet box. It's the engagement ring Vic
admired in the department store window. He looks at her.

VIC (CONT'D)
Well...?

DORIS
YES!

She throws her arms around him; he nearly veers off the road.
They kiss. She holds her hand up, admires the ring.

VIC
You can thank Claudette's phony
mother for that.

She leans over and kisses him again.

VIC (CONT'D)
I love you.

The three words she's waited for.

EXT. VIC'S FORD V-8 CABRIOLET - MOVING

We watch the car disappear on the horizon.

DORIS (V.O.)
Do you have any money left for a
honeymoon?

VIC (V.O.)
Your brother said he'd pay for it.

FADE OUT.

SIX MONTHS LATER...

EXT. SMALL FARM HOUSE - DAY

Vic's Ford Cabriolet pulls up in front of a small farm house. He comes around to the passenger side and opens the door for Doris. He helps her out of the car. She's pregnant.

The front door of the house opens. Vic's MOTHER, a little person in her 70s, appears. Her face quivers in disbelief.

Vic takes off his hat. A pleasant smile comes over Vic's face as the two make eye contact for the first time in years.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END