

American Bullshit

By

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The following is a true story based on a whole lot of
bullshit...

EXT. WEST 74TH STREET - GRAMERCY PARK - DAY

TWO SLEAZILY-DRESSED CONNECTICUT SQUARES walk down the block and disappear down a flight steps adjacent to the Ansonia Hotel. A discreet sign above the steps reads: THE GARDEN OF EDEN.

SUPERIMPOSE: "July, 1978 - New York City"

INT. CHECK-IN DESK - GARDEN OF EDEN - CONTINUOUS

Entering a gaudy lobby, the Squares exchange a nervous glance then approach the TOOL at the front desk. A sign on the counter lists the club rules: "Only Straight Couples and women admitted, absolutely no homosexuals. No drugs or alcohol. No gang-bangs."

SQUARE#1
Burt Gregory and Danny Gold to see
Larry ---

TOOL
He's in the jelly pit.

INT. GARDEN OF EDEN - MAIN ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The Squares walk through the huge main room of the swingers club, the flood-lights revealing all its disgust and seediness...

From the cave-like entrance of the JELLY PIT the Squares hear the moans and talk of people fucking, they hesitantly enter.

INT. JELLY PIT - GARDEN OF EDEN - CONTINUOUS

A large space designed to look like a cave, at the center of which is a big circular fuck-pit filled with a foot of KY jelly. A PORN-CREW is filming TWO PORN ACTORS done up with cheesy Vulcan/Dr. Spock make-up having crazy alien sex, doggy style...

PORN ACTRESS
Your cock is highly illogical, but I
love it!!!

PORN ACTOR
Live long and prosper, bitch!!!

The Squares lock onto LARRY LEVINSON, a fat, lurid man in Porsche sunglasses and a Sergio Tacchini sweat-suit, sitting in a director's chair. Larry has all the tell-tale signs of being coked out of his mind. He's flanked by TWO LETHAL-LOOKING BODYGUARDS who are clearly strapped with guns.

SQUARE#1
Larry? I'm Burt Gregory --- this is
my partner Danny Gold. We're friends
with Al Martucci...

LEVINSON
Oh yeah, yeah --- the fucking tax
lawyers from Connecticut --- right?

INT. GARDEN OF EDEN - MOMENTS LATER

WE MOVE WITH Levinson and the Squares as the Bodyguards follow a few feet behind.

LEVINSON

So Martucci tells me you guys are fronting for a client looking to move four hundred grand in cash. Is that right?

SQUARE#2

Exactly ---

LEVINSON

Well I'm always looking for people to invest in my fuck club franchise or one of my movies ---

SQUARE#1

No, we're specifically interested in your expertise in bankruptcy bust-outs and asset bleed-outs.

Levinson stops and eyes the Squares coldly.

LEVINSON

You mean money laundering?

SQUARE#2

Uh, yes.

Levinson smiles casually and ushers the men to the locker room.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - GARDEN OF EDEN - MOMENTS LATER

The locker room is buzzing with activity. NAKED PORN ACTORS AND ACTRESSES seated on benches getting made up to look like aliens.

The Squares and Bodyguards follow Levinson over to the movie's star, CANDY CANE, a voluptuous brunette, as a male MAKE-UP ARTIST puts the finishing touches on her third alien breast --- but Levinson couldn't care less, his attention is drawn to her hands.

LEVINSON

(furious, to Make-Up Artist)
What kind of cuntshit is this? Candy's playing a fucking Romulan and you paint her fingernails red!?

MAKE-UP ARTIST

Yeah, so what?

In a coke-induced spasm of rage, Levinson whips out a belly-holstered .38 Special and puts it to the terrified Make-Up Artist's head. Candy doesn't so much as bat an eye, but the Squares along with everyone else in the room are alarmed.

LEVINSON

Are you being smart with me?

MAKE-UP ARTIST

No! Just tell me what you want ---

LEVINSON

What do I want? I want some creativity!
I want some "WOW!" Like what if you stick some fucking octopus tentacles
(MORE)

LEVINSON (CONT'D)
 on her finger nails --- that Candy
 could use to finger herself with! Now
 that's entertainment! Am I right?

The Make-Up Artist is on the verge of tears, nodding furiously.
 Levinson belly holsters the gun and just starts laughing.

LEVINSON (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry. It's all right. I'm sorry.
 It's okay, everyone. Go back to work.
 (sighing to the Squares)
 Thank God it's Friday. All right,
 look. Why don't we talk business in
 the schivitz. Vic here'll set you up
 with lockers and towels and I'll meet
 you in there in a few.

Levinson leaves with one of his Bodyguards before the Squares
 even have a chance to respond. Bodyguard Vic retrieves some
 towels and sandals and ushers them over to some lockers and
 moves to the doorway, where he waits for them to undress.

The Squares exchange an anxious look and whisper to each other ---

SQUARE#2
 We're leaving --- now.

SQUARE#1
 We go, we burn the relationship and
 all the work we've done to get here ---

SQUARE#2
 This guy's out of his mind.

SQUARE#1
 He's a serious player and I don't
 want to lose him.

SQUARE#2
 You know I can't get undressed...

SQUARE#1
 (after a thoughtful beat)
 Go to the bathroom and try to relieve
 yourself of your problem.

INT. BATHROOM - GARDEN OF EDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Square#2 comes into the bathroom, which is busy with naked porn
 actors running dialogue in the mirror, doing blow, etc..

ANGLE IN BATHROOM STALL - MOMENTS LATER: Square#2 enters and
 locks the door. Trying not to panic, he eyes the dirty toilet
 with apprehension. Dropping his pants, he reaches into his
 underwear and removes a metal MICROCASSETTE RECORDER taped
 between his ass cheeks and the microphone taped to his balls.

Sitting down on the toilet, he scans the stall for some place
 to stash them, but finds nothing. Thinking quickly, he uses all
 of his strength to SMASH the recorder against an EXPOSED PIPE
 as he simultaneously flushes the toilet to mask the noise.

Having broken the recorder into several large components, Square#2 frantically snaps them into smaller pieces, which he drops into the toilet. Once he's done, he gets up and flushes the plastic-packed toilet again. The electronic components are initially sucked into the pipe but then quickly block it...

ANGLE BACK ON LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS: Square#1 is now undressed and in his towel, nervously waiting. Levinson walks in wearing a robe, followed by his other Bodyguard, also robed.

LEVINSON

Where's your partner, Gold?

SQUARE#1

Oh, he's just in the bathroom. He'll be right back ---

LEVINSON

All right, I'll wait for him. Mickey here will take you to the schvitz.

Levinson just turns and walks away. With no alternative, Square#1 is reluctantly ushered away by Bodyguard Mickey.

BACK IN BATHROOM STALL - CONTINUOUS: Square#2 panicking as the water in the blocked toilet quickly RISES --- pieces of the recorder floating on the surface along with other refuse.

LEVINSON (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You all right in there, Gold?

SQUARE#2

Yeah, yeah, just give me a minute.

Square#2 frantically looks for the toilet's shutoff, but there is none. As the water is about to overflow, he has no choice...

Shutting his eyes in dread, he reaches into the toilet --- extending deep into the pipe --- trying not to vomit as he tries to unclog it. But he's unable to reach the obstruction and the shitty water nears the rim of the toilet. Square#2 tries to pull his arm out, but is horrorstruck to realize --- it's stuck.

OUTSIDE THE BATHROOM STALL - CONTINUOUS: Levinson and Bodyguard Vic step back in disgust as water seeps from the stall.

LEVINSON

What the fuck --- ?

Levinson sees pieces of the recorder flow out from beneath the stall with the shitty toilet water and immediately he knows.

LEVINSON (CONT'D)

Vic, bust the door!

Pulling out his gun, Bodyguard Vic kicks in the door to reveal --- Square#2 with his left arm stuck in the overflowing toilet, holding up his right arm in a desperate halting gesture ---

SQUARE#2

Don't shoot! Don't shoot! FBI!

After his initial shock, Levinson is so amused by the FBI's incompetence he just explodes into hysterical laughter. Bodyguard Vic joins him, as do the porn stars.

LEVINSON

Jesus Christ --- you Feds, you guys
are dumber than a box of fucking cunt
hair.

(walking away)
God I love this country!

CUT TO BLACK:

Over the blackness we HEAR the shrill DESCENDING WHISTLES AND
EXPLOSIONS of 4th of July fireworks going off...

ROLE TITLE: Big, bullshit letters... "**AMERICAN BULLSHIT**"

FADE UP:

INT. JFK AIRPORT - EASTERN AIRLINES CONCOURSE - MORNING

FOLLOWING CLOSELY BEHIND THE BALL-CRUSHINGLY RAPTUROUS FIGURE
OF A WOMAN tightly wrapped in a chic Chanel skirt-suit ---
striding down the middle of the bustling flight concourse.

REVERSE ANGLE: In her late twenties, **MAXINE GARDNER** is a ravenous
beauty whose scorching blue eyes give her a visceral, blow-torch
appeal. Ann Margaret meets Dorothy Parker.

Max approaches the gate of an arriving flight as PASSENGERS
flow into the terminal. **HAROLD PIEDMONT**, a craggy blue-blood
steps off the jetway, sees the orchid broach pinned to Max's
lapel and greets her with an unctuous grin.

PIEDMONT

Ms. Gardner --- ?

MAX

(finishing school accent)
Please Harold, it's Max... So good to
finally meet you in person ---
(taking him by the arm)
Now come along, the car is waiting...

EXT./INT. STRETCH LIMO - A LITTLE LATER

Stretch limo making its way into the city. Piedmont and Max are
seated directly across from each other.

PIEDMONT

I must confess, I'm not comfortable
dealing with loan brokers like
yourself. I've heard stories, unseemly
stories about the kind of capital you
people represent ---

MAX

Please, Harold, there's really no
need to be so vituperative. The shop
we're meeting with only deals with
the most reputable lenders ---

Piedmont looks out the window as they pass a gas station and
sees a long line of cars waiting to fill up... Someone has spray-
painted the words: "FUCK OPEC" over the station's sign.

PIEDMONT

That god damn peanut farmer in the White House is running this economy into the void! Stagflation, inflation --- credit markets are all locked up ---

(eyes return to Max)

I mean when institutional bankers like Chase Manhattan won't lend to a Piedmont, you know this country's in serious trouble.

MAX

And yet despite all of this I'm still confident that your luck is about to change.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER - MID TOWN MANHATTAN - LATER THAT MORNING

Max and Piedmont enter a stunning, Fifth Ave. skyscraper.

INT. 10TH FLOOR - SKYSCRAPER - MINUTES LATER

Max and Piedmont approach a door: "LONDON INVESTORS - New York, London, Zurich". We MOVE with them as they enter...

INT. LONDON INVESTORS - SKYSCRAPER - CONTINUOUS

...The sumptuous reception area exudes an air of success and reputability. Max can see that Piedmont is impressed.

INT. MEL'S OFFICE - LONDON INVESTORS - SECONDS LATER

The RECEPTIONIST ushers Piedmont and Max into a handsome office, where they find MEL WEINBERG waiting. In his late thirties, Mel seems to possess the innate street-wise confidence of a man who doesn't just know the odds but sets them. Mel is beautifully manicured and dressed in a custom Pierre Cardin three-piece.

Mel greets Piedmont with an earnest smile and handshake.

MEL

Mel Weinberg...

Mel then gives Max a cordial peck on the cheek.

MEL (CONT'D)

Hi ya Max... How are things?

MAX

Lovely --- and you?

MEL

Capital.

Mel directs Max and Piedmont to sit --- and as she moves to the couch Mel tilts his head slightly and admires the swing of Max's ass. He then sits across from Piedmont, who is admiring the office --- the fine art, pictures of Mel with prominent luminaries and awards from civic and business organizations.

MEL (CONT'D)

Not to be rude but I've got a back to back day as I'm sure you do as well --- so if we could just cap to the climax ---

MAX

Well have you looked at the setup?

MEL

Yeah, fantastic deal. Top shelf property. Perfect location for a shopping center ---

(takes out cigarette)

Now, I don't know what Max has told you about London Investors so let me just give you the quick of it ---

(lights up, takes a drag)

I work very closely with a consortium of off shore banks that are expanding their loan portfolios. On their end I help them find worthy deals that the mainline lenders have missed. On your end I help you put a loan package together and hand-hold the deal through the process --- using all my weight to get the loan approved ---

PIEDMONT

Can you guarantee an approval?

MEL

Of course not. That being said you should know I never take on deals I can't close.

PIEDMONT

How much is all this going to cost me?

MEL

Six points on the backend, after you get yours. Only thing I ask is that you cover my costs with processing your package, which in your case will be about twenty-five thousand ---

PIEDMONT

If you don't get me the financing do I get the twenty-five thousand back?

Mel flashes Max a "the fuck's wrong with this guy?" look.

MEL

No. The twenty five is non-refundable, just like my time...

With an anxious sigh Piedmont gives Mel a desperate glare.

PIEDMONT

I just need to know that you can get me the money ---

MEL

Look, I'm not Willy Loman. I'm not here to sell you --- that being said---

(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)

(leans forward earnestly)
 You should know that I believe in cash and happy endings. I mean when a businessman needs money, he needs money --- not an aspirin and a fuckin' prayer. That's how I make my living ---
 (gets up from chair)
 Anyway, think it over. I hope we can do some business together. If not, best of luck down the block.

EXT. SKYSCRAPER - MID TOWN MANHATTAN - LATER THAT DAY

We see Mel behind the wheel of a forest green, Lincoln Mark-V as it exits the garage and heads down the street.

EXT. STREETS - MANHATTAN - CONTINUOUS

VARIOUS ANGLES of Mel driving --- sultry late afternoon. He pulls up to the valet of the PIERRE HOTEL and exits...

INT. SUITE - PIERRE HOTEL - MINUTE LATER

Mel enters the elegant residential suite. Late afternoon sun floods through the huge window overlooking the park. A Shirley Temple waits on the bar. He sits on the sofa, sips, gazes out.

The room darkens as the sun sets behind the skyline across the park --- and Mel suddenly sees the reflection of a woman in the window. The woman is standing in the bathroom door behind him.

MEL

What's up, pussycat. Is he hooked?

WOMAN (O.S.)

Heavy as lead.

Walking towards Mel, the woman reveals herself to be Max. She hands Mel a check from 'Harold Piedmont' made out to London Investors for '\$25,000.' --- And gives him a sensual kiss.

Max positions a chair in front of Mel, sits down provocatively, her skirt hiked up to her panties. Kicking off her heels, she perches her feet on Mel's knees and lazily spreads her legs.

MAX

(foxy grin)
 I also got him to front me three points on that Bank of Sark CD I've been holding.

MEL

What is it with you Max? Always wanting. I mean we talked about this. You never send a guy to the river ---

MAX

Oh please. Don't show me the moves if you don't want me to make them.

MEL

I just want you to make them smartly ---

MAX

Life is short and so is money ---

Max reclines into the chair; totally relaxed, completely uninhibited. Then beckons Mel with a pleasure-seeking grin.

MAX (CONT'D)

So why not go out on a limb? I mean --- isn't that where the fruit is?

Mel moves in but Max shoves him back with her feet.

MAX (CONT'D)

You know, it occurred to me earlier today --- that once I walk into your office I'm just a spectator...

OVER THE SHOULDER of Max: Keeping Mel pinned back with one leg, she slides her underwear off the other.

MAX (CONT'D)

I always have to just sit there with my mouth shut and watch you get yourself off as you close the deal ---
(slides hand over her crotch)
Well, now it's your turn to watch me.

Max's body slowly twists and turns as she starts to get herself off --- and Mel's grin swells into a stupefied, life-affirming smile.

EXT./INT. STELLA'S SUPPER CLUB - FIFTY SEVENTH STREET - LATER

A noisy but chic restaurant packed with wiseguys, hustlers and celebs. Like the Copa without the shows. The place to be seen.

SONNY BLITZ, a nattily-dressed wiseguy, rolls up next to Mel.

SONNY

Well, if it ain't the golden Hebe.

MEL

So Sonny --- I guess that makes you the nickel plated ginzo?

SONNY

Don't get smart with me jagoff ---

MEL

Zip your fly, Sonny ---

Sonny looks like he's about to stab Mel but is stopped by the sight of his Capo, **DOMINIC CASALE**, a stalwart man with the jovial facade of a grandfather.

DOM

Hey, there he is ---
(hugs and kisses Mel)
How are ya babe?

Taking Mel by the arm, Dom ushers him towards the back door.

MEL

What is it with your fuckin' crew --?
Always breaking my balls ---

DOM

Whaddya expect? You're a compulsive
earner -- Ya make 'em look bad...

EXT. PARKING LOT - ALLEY - BACK OF STELLA'S - MINUTE LATER

Dom and Mel lean up against Dom's Cadillac. Mel hands Dom a cash stuffed envelope.

MEL

August.

DOM

(smiles, impressed)
Heavy.

MEL

These things come in streaks. And
it's been seven come eleven for me
lately.

DOM

Luck is the residue of design, Mel.
(lights a cigarette)
While everyone else is out there
scrambling for the big score --- you ---
you figured out that the real money's
in small scores at a high volume ---
you're like the McDonald's of con
merchants. A real innovator ---
(grins)
Your father must be very proud.

MEL

Yeah, right. Poor schmuck was the
most honest man I ever knew and all
it bought him was grief. Shit, he's
the reason I got into this game.

Dom hands Mel an envelope stained with tomato sauce.

DOM

Just like you asked for, right?

MEL

(peaks in envelope, smiles)
Yeah, wow. Thanks, Dom.

DOM

Keep up the good work, Mel. And if
you have any problems with anything,
you let me know, okay?
(smiles, pats Mel's cheek)
I don't want anyone fucking with my
golden Heeb.

EXT. MEL'S HOUSE - LONG ISLAND, NY - LATER THAT NIGHT

Driving down an upper-middle class street of ranch houses, Mel pulls into his driveway, parks next to a station wagon. We can see the name WEINBERG on the mailbox.

INT. MEL'S HOUSE - LONG ISLAND, NY - MINUTES LATER

The house is in the midst of a REMODEL. Mel enters and navigates a maze of construction materials and walks down a hall.

INT. MEL'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mel enters the bedroom, where his wife, **ESTELLE**, sits in the middle of the bed. In her early thirties, Estelle has the saucy appeal of a once-upon-a-time starlet who's been domesticated. On her nightstand is an overflowing ashtray and prescription bottles for various "mother's little helpers" medications ---

Clad in a matching Fila tennis skirt and shirt, Estelle smokes while enthusiastically sorting through tile samples. The floor and bed are blanketed by hundreds of combination piles of samples of fabric, wallpaper, paint, flooring, etc...

MEL

Jesus, Estelle -- what is this? Whaddya doing?

ESTELLE

I'm decorating...

Looking at Mel, Estelle's eyes are lit up with the overenthusiasm of a manic episode --- her speech is rapid, pressured and urgent.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Patterns, I'm blending patterns...

MEL

For chrissake --- Do you know what time it is?

ESTELLE

You mean now?

(going back to tiles)
Patterns, great blends of patterns, like great recipes, they gotta be carefully tasted --- constant tasting's the key to having a tasteful home ---

MEL

Did you see Dr. Marcus today?

ESTELLE

Marcus? No. Been too busy decorating --- since early this morning...

MEL

Jesus ---

ESTELLE

You work all day, all night, all week --- I'm trying to do something beautiful here, Mel ---

(MORE)

ESTELLE (CONT'D)
 (locks eyes with Mel)
 Do you want our home to feel like a
 flight of fancy --- ?

MEL
 What?

ESTELLE
 Like a stretch of the imagination? A
 whim?
 (scans floor, mumbling)
 Prodigal Blue, prodigal blue, prodigal ---
 (locking on paint sample)
 Prodigal blue!

She excitedly gets off the bed and places a tile next to the
 Prodigal blue paint chip.

MEL
 Estelle, please --- you need to get
 some sleep ---

ESTELLE
 Sleep? How can I sleep when it's all
 just starting to come together ---

Too tired and frustrated to deal, Mel gives up and walks out.

INT. KITCHEN - MEL'S HOUSE - MINUTE LATER

Mel opens the fridge and finds a beautifully prepared sandwich
 and salad with a child's-scrawled note attached to it: "YANKEES
 8, ORIOLES 7. YOU OWE ME FIVE BUCKS, WILLIE".

Smiling at the note, Mel grabs the sandwich and is about to sit
 when the backdoor suddenly opens --- and in shuffles little
WILLIE WEINBERG, age 12. Willie's wearing nothing but boxers.

Mel lights up like a pinball machine when he sees his son ---
 his eyes filled with pure adoration and joy.

MEL
 Hey buddy --

WILLIE
 (groggy)
 I'm sleeping in the hammock. Too hot
 to be inside. Inez says it's okay.

MEL
 Okay.

WILLIE
 I gotta pee.

Willie sleepily marches over to the bathroom off the kitchen.
 Mel watches as Willie lifts up the seat.

MEL
 How was camp today?

WILLIE

Don't talk to me. You know I can't go
if you talk to me.

Mel shuts his mouth and smiles inwardly. Willie finally pees,
flushes, washes his hands --- and shuffles out.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Camp was good ---

MEL

What else?

WILLIE

Inez and I made sloppy joes for dinner
and then watched the game ---
(raised eyebrow)
You get my note?

MEL

Yeah I got it. What happened?

WILLIE

Top of the eighth, Reggie took it
downtown off a high and hard one.

Willie holds out his hand with a grin which Mel returns as he
hands him the cash, along with the envelope Dom gave him.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

What's this?

Willie looks inside the envelope, sees Yankee tickets --- a
smile of astounded glee overtakes his face...

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Tickets for the series with Boston?!!

MEL

Best seats in the house.

WILLIE

OH MY GOD! I can't believe it. Alfredo
Shoenstein couldn't even get these
and his dad's Billy Martin's
podiatrist.

MEL

(chuckles)
Willie-boy, if you were purple then
purple would be my favorite color.

WILLIE

(gives Mel big hug)
Likewise, Pop.

EXT. FIFTH AVE. - MIDTOWN MANHATTAN - DAY

REVERSE TRACK ON **JIMMY BOYLE** striding up Fifth Ave in a suit,
carrying a briefcase. In his early thirties, Boyle has the hard-
boiled good looks of a book-smart boxer and exudes the edgy,
alluring intensity of a man on the make.

An ATTRACTIVE WOMAN in front of him gets her high heel caught in a vent. Boyle smoothly swoops in, effortlessly pulls the heel out and then flashes the woman a smile --- before moving on and entering the skyscraper Mel's office is in.

INT. LONDON INVESTORS - SKYSCRAPER - TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Boyle waits in reception. The Receptionist stands, nods to Boyle.

BOYLE

Mind if I use your phone for a second?

The Receptionist turns her phone around. Boyle dials and flashes her a flirtatious smile which she can't help but return.

BOYLE (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

It's me. Let her call in five.

Hanging up, Boyle FOLLOWS the Receptionist through a door and into Mel's office and closes the door behind him...

INT. MEL'S OFFICE - LONDON INVESTORS - SKYSCRAPER

Mel gives Boyle a hearty handshake.

BOYLE

James Boyle ---

MEL

(gesturing Boyle to sit)
Mel Weinberg...

Boyle takes a seat and Mel sits across from him.

MEL (CONT'D)

So who are you coming to me through?

BOYLE

Maxine Gardner ---

Boyle hands Mel Max's business card and surveys the office.

MEL

Funny, Max never mentioned your name ---

BOYLE

I didn't see the point in giving her a fee for just walking me in ---

MEL

The point is that I know her and I don't know you.

BOYLE

I'm strapped for cash, Mel ---

Mel eyes Boyle with a subtle wariness, sizing him up.

MEL

Well as Max might of mentioned I have a strong relationship with a consortium of offshore banks that are expanding their loan portfolios ---

BOYLE

How do I know your banks are real?

MEL

Real? These are all legally chartered, reputable, second tier lenders.

BOYLE

Just because they're chartered doesn't mean they have money. For all I know your bank is just some guy in the Bahamas with nothing more than a phone, Telex, and a box of stationary.

Mel leans back and tenses up --- upset by Boyle's comment.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

Sorry. It's just, I know people who've been burned by scam artists posing as money brokers, guys who take front end fees by promising loans from non existent banks.

MEL

If you have questions about my lenders I can get you financials, counter party references, whatever --- and if you have concerns about me --- take a look around, does it look like I'm some five and dime hustler dealing out of my hat?

BOYLE

No, I've got to hand it to you, Mel. This really is an unbelievably convincing setup. It's the detail work, the little things -- like the picture of you with Spiro Agnew. That's what pulls it all together. Makes everything feel so legit --- and safe.
(locking eyes with Mel)
You've got a real gift.

Mel sits back. An uneasy silence as they stare each other down.

MEL

Who you with?

The phone on the table next to Mel suddenly RINGS. Mel doesn't pick it up, just sits there glaring at Boyle.

BOYLE

You're going to want to take that.

MEL (INTO PHONE)

(finally picks up phone)
Yeah, okay put her through... What's up, Max? --- When?

(glares at Boyle)
No, don't say anything. I'll take care of it. Where have they got you? ---
Alright, just sit tight...

Mel hangs up the phone, lights a cigarette, takes a drag.

BOYLE
Special Agent Jimmy Boyle --- FBI ---

MEL
So what's on your warrant for me?

BOYLE
Bank fraud, wire fraud, securities fraud, criminal conspiracy. (Beat)
But whether or not I execute it, that all depends.

MEL
Yeah okay, whatever, kid --- you mind if I call my lawyer now?

BOYLE
Sure, but how about you let me buy you a drink first?
(off Mel's silence)
C'mon Mel. You lawyer up then I have to arrest you. Why not at least hear me out? I know a place right around the corner.

EXT. STREET - MIDTOWN MANHATTAN - A LITTLE LATER

MOVING with Mel and Boyle as they stroll down Fifth Avenue. Boyle takes off his tie and unbuttons his shirt.

MEL
So whaddya wanna talk to me about?

BOYLE
Love.

MEL
Love?

BOYLE
Yeah, right, love. You see the bitch of it for me is that you do it all so smart. I mean trying to build up enough evidence to make a case on you, it's like trying to pick up Mercury with a fork. But then I realized ---
(little smile at Mel)
Who needs evidence when you've got love?

MEL
You wanna fuck me or arrest me?

BOYLE
I've been watching you for the past few months --- Your wife Estelle, your son Willie --- I know that your family has no idea who and what you really are. They think you're a legit guy: loyal husband, adoring father --- pillar of the community, right?

They hit 42nd Street and Boyle steers Mel towards Bryant Park.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

I don't know how you do it, Mel. I mean the energy it must take to sustain the lie. Day in, day out. (beat) And it tells me things --- like how much you want to protect them --- how much you care about what they think --- how much you love them ---

They roll up to a hot dog stand on the outskirts of the park. Boyle gestures Mel if he wants something.

MEL

Lemme have a Tab.

BOYLE

(to vendor)

Gimme a Tab and a Yoohoo.

The vendor hands the drinks to Boyle, who pays and hands Mel his. Moving to a park bench, the two men sit. From his briefcase Boyle pulls a stack of compromising surveillance photos of Max and Mel -- hands them to Mel.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

And then there's Maxine Gardner.

(taking a swig of Yoohoo)

I look at these snapshots and you know what I see? I see a man that's head over heels. And who could blame you? She's a phenomenal woman.

Boyle pulls out and hands Mel a Justice Department indictment summary that, point by point, lays out their case against Max.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

Unfortunately she's greedy --- and not as careful as you are.

As he reviews the document, Mel's cool facade begins to melt into one of restrained anxiety.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

Now you might be able to beat your rap down to a banker's bit, maybe even probation -- but as you can see our case against Max is a lock.

(takes summary from Mel)

She's going away, Mel, and I mean for at least a nickel --- and there's no fix Dominic Casale can put in that's gonna make this go away.

MEL

Whaddya want?

BOYLE

Five high-line white collar busts ---

MEL

You talking confidential informant?

BOYLE

No, you'd be a cooperating witness, that way I could use you at the trials. Broad strokes; you close up your shop, you and Max plead out on all counts --- we'll get the judge to suspend the execution of the sentence --- and after you help me close five cases you and Max can skate on probation.

MEL

Just like that?

BOYLE

Yeah, right, just like that.

(off Mel's doubt)

Come on Mel, what's the alternative? Max is being a stand up girl right now, but what do you think's going to happen after she's done a year at Attica? What do you think's going to happen to your wife when my agents slap her with a warrant, toss your house, ask her all kinds of questions and show her those pictures --- And what about your son, Mel? What happens when he reads about you in the papers, learns that his father's a crook?

(finishes Yoohoo, burps)

You don't take the deal, you lose everything that you love the most.

MEL

(after a long hard beat)

I gotta think about it.

BOYLE

I'll give you until noon tomorrow.

(stands, hands Mel a card)

You call me and let me know if you're going to fuck or fight.

Leaving a shell-shocked Mel on the bench --- WE MOVE WITH BOYLE as he exits the park, crosses the street, rounds a corner, and gets in the back of a BLACK CROWN VICTORIA parked in the red.

INT. BLACK CROWN VICTORIA - CONTINUOUS

The two FBI agents in front are from the Garden of Eden: shotgun is **BURT GROSSWALD**; behind the wheel is **ALVIN ACKERMAN**, the agent who had the wire. Boyle is much younger than his subordinates.

BOYLE

We'll know by noon tomorrow.

Boyle can see Ackerman and Grosswald exchange a doubtful look. Ackerman puts the car into gear, pulls into traffic and drives.

ACKERMAN

If he doesn't take the offer, we're gonna look like a bunch of assholes.

BOYLE

This coming from the genius who got his arm stuck up a toilet? I got news for you guys, you already do look like a bunch of assholes, simply by the fact that you're in White Collar.

GROSSWALD

You've only been running this unit for three months --- what do you know?

BOYLE

C'mon, Grosswald, the perception within the Bureau is that White Collar is a dead end track, where they send the dipshits nobody else wants ---

GROSSWALD

(turns angrily to Boyle)
Then why'd you push so hard to take over this unit? If you're such a hot shot looking to be a big swinging Bureau dick --- shouldn't you be working Organized Crime?

BOYLE

Me along with every other lace curtain Irish fuck out of Queens?
(loses tie, unbuttons shirt)
OC's an over-saturated beat, but this, this is virgin territory. When's the last time anybody in White Collar made a big game bust?

GROSSWALD

So then how are we supposed to deliver big game busts when nobody gives a shit about some prick embezzling money or pushing forged securities? The Bureau wants sexy cases, the kind that make headlines, 'cause headlines translate into political capital ---

BOYLE

The real problem in White Collar isn't a lack of sex appeal, it's a lack of methodology. Our way of dealing with this kind of thing is outdated and completely reactive. Believe me, the headliner cases are there, we just need a new approach to catching them --- something *proactive*.

ACKERMAN

Oh, and you're the fucking whiz kid who's going to come up with it?

Although Boyle doesn't say a word, you can see the answer in his eyes --- "You're fucking aye right I am."

EXT. MET CORRECTIONAL CENTER - DOWNTOWN - WAITING AREA - LATER

Mel stands in a waiting room of the federal remand center holding a pink BAKERY BOX as Max is escorted in by a BAIL BONDSMAN. She looks shaken up. Relieved to see each other, Max sees the bakery box in Mel's hand and her face brightens up slightly.

MAX

Chocolate rugelach from Moishe's?

MEL

Your favorite.

Deeply touched, Max gives Mel a soulful, tender hug...

EXT. MEL'S LINCOLN - A LITTLE LATER

Mel's driving and Max is riding shotgun, eating the rugelach.

MAX

You should reach out to Dom ---

MEL

I can't. I get this anywhere near Dom and suddenly this thing has predicates --- FEDS will try to fold it into a RICO statute ---

MAX

Then call Bernie Meyerson, you always said he's the best defense in town ---

MEL

Whaddya think Bernie's gonna do except take his fee? He can't fix this ---

MAX

How do we know until we talk to him?

MEL

'Cause that snot-nosed little feeb showed me their summary against you -- it's open and shut. Tapes of you closing over the phone. Signed letters of commitment that you sent through the mail. Your prints on The Sark paper. I mean I couldn't believe it ---
(disappointed look at Max)
And the worst part about it is that you knew better. I taught you better...

MAX

What do you want me to say? You're right? I'm sorry? We all know better despite doing worse.

MEL

Don't get all fucking abstract on me. I'm talking here and now --- you have any idea the spot you've put me in?

Tense silence. Mel glances at Max, sees her regret and dismay.

MAX

Look, this is my fuck-up. I'm totally prepared to deal with the consequences ---

Mel lets loose a "get real" snort.

MEL

Can you deal with doing five years in shit city?! One week inside you'll be ready to talk ---

An enraged Max PUNCHES Mel in the mouth hard enough to draw blood. Mel slams on the brakes and the car screeches to a halt.

MEL (CONT'D)

The fuck is wrong with you?!

Max gets out and marches up Broadway barefoot. Mel dabs his lip, looks at the blood on his fingers, then gazes out at Max --- tilting his head slightly to admire the swing of her ass.

Mel pulls the car over, gets out. We see him catch up to her.

EXT. WEST BROADWAY - TRIBECA - CONTINUOUS

MEL

Max, whaddya doing? Hold up ---

Mel tries to grab her but she swats his hand away.

MEL (CONT'D)

C'mon, I didn't mean how that sounded ---

MAX

Yes you did. You're so fucking scared that I'd rat you out you'd become a rat yourself just to stop me ---

MEL

That's how it works with the Feds. They come after the things you care about the most and turn 'em on you ---

MAX

Which is why you can't take this deal, Mel. You can't trust them.

MEL

So what am I supposed to do, Max? Just let these fucks put you away? Let 'em out me to my family?

MAX

Tell your wife the truth, tell the Feebs to fuck off --- let's go to court and fight this thing together.

MEL

As soon as I tell Estelle, she'll go nuts --- file for divorce --- try to get full custody of Willie ---

MAX

Working for the Feds won't stop her from finding out, it only postpones the inevitable. Once you make your cases for them it's all gonna come out at the trials!

MEL

No, not everything. Not you and me. And this deal will buy me some space between now and then --- give me some time to come up with a plan ---

MAX

The only thing this is gonna buy you is more trouble ---

EXT. MEL'S HOUSE - LONG ISLAND, NY - LATER THAT MORNING

Mel parks in his driveway, exits his car -- looking strung out.

INT. MEL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

INEZ, the housekeeper, a plump latina woman in her fifties, is unloading the dishwasher. Willie's at the table, eating cereal and watching *Scooby Doo*. Inez gives Willie a stern glare.

INEZ

Willie, stop the cartoon and you finish your breakfast ---

Mel enters, moves to the cabinet, grabs the J&B and a glass --- and sits. Inez is concerned by Mel's sorry state and the booze.

WILLIE

Hey, Pop.

MEL

Hey ---

INEZ

You like some breakfast, Mister Mel?

MEL

No thanks, Inez ---

Irritable and depressed, Estelle slumps into the room clad in her robe and smoking, not acknowledging Willie or noticing Mel.

ESTELLE

(to Inez)

My coffee ready yet?

Having anticipated this, Inez is already handing Estelle a mug.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

And does it really have to be so bright in here?

Estelle watches Inez close the blinds as she sips her coffee. She turns to the table and only then realizes that Mel is home.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

What're you doing home? I thought you were staying in the city ---

Girding up his loins, Mel shoots a glass of whiskey.

MEL

We need to talk.

ESTELLE

About what? 'Cause if this is gonna be you shitting all over me, telling me to see more doctors or take more pills, I don't wanna hear it.

MEL

Our son's sitting right here, Estelle ---

Realizing Willie is in the room, Estelle is slightly embarrassed.

ESTELLE

Sorry, Willie. Mommy's not feeling well today.

WILLIE

It's okay, mom.

Mel stands and ushers Estelle into the dining room.

INT. MEL'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

ESTELLE

Seriously, Mel, I'm not in the mood for one of your talks.

MEL

This has nothing to do with that --- it's about I'm having some problems with the business.

ESTELLE

Whaddya mean? What kind of problems?

MEL

It's complicated. You wouldn't understand ---

ESTELLE

Well is it serious?

MEL

Serious enough that we're gonna have to tighten our belts for a little while --- put the remodel on hold ---

ESTELLE

On hold?! Whaddya mean on hold? I've ordered all the fabrics, tiles, wallpaper, everything --- how can we put the remodel on hold?

MEL

It's just a temporary thing.

Estelle deflates like a punctured balloon and starts to sob, her face a mixture of despair and rage.

MEL (CONT'D)

Estelle, please. I just need a little time to work things out.

ESTELLE

And what about me, Mel? My needs? Do you even care?

In tears, Estelle storms off and we hear the bedroom door slam.

INT. MEL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - A BEAT LATER

Mel shambles back in, plops into a chair.

MEL

Sorry you had to hear that, buddy.

WILLIE

Don't sweat it, pop. It's like you say to me --- best thing to do with a slump is ignore it.

Cracking a bittersweet smile, Mel hugs and kisses Willie, the weight of the world in his face.

MEL

You got nothing to worry about, Willie. Everything's gonna be fine.

WILLIE

I know.

MEL

Good. Now go get ready.

Willie exits. Inez puts breakfast and coffee in front of Mel.

MEL (CONT'D)

Thanks, Inez.

Inez pats him on the back and leaves him alone in the room. Taking Boyle's card out, Mel stares at it for a long beat. He moves to the phone and dials.

MEL (INTO PHONE)

Okay, Boyle ---- let's fuck.

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. GRAVEYARD - THE BRONX - DAY

A light drizzle falls over an overcast expanse of tombstones and trees. In the distance we see Mel's Lincoln cut along a road towards the center of the screen and park.

SUPER: "November, 1978"

CLOSE ON THE GRAVESTONE OF NATHAN WEINBERG: Standing solemnly, Mel notices that his father's grave is dirty with grime and leaves --- but the grave next to it is immaculate. Mel then

sees that there's a small "Perpetual Care" plaque affixed to the bottom of the clean gravestone.

JUMP CUT TO:

ANGLE ON OPENED TRUNK OF MEL'S CAR: From a tool box, Mel pulls super glue, a flat-head screwdriver, and hammer.

JUMP CUT TO:

ANGLE ON GRAVE NEXT TO MEL'S FATHER: Mel uses the tools to chisel off the Perpetual Care plaque. Spreading the glue onto the plaque, he affixes it to his father's stone.

MEL

From me to you Pop...

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(grating New England accent)

Put it back ---

Spinning around, Mel sees a STIFF in a raincoat and suit marching towards him. The Stiff has a face like a foot --- and exudes the tight-ass energy of a guy so painfully ill at ease with himself he makes everyone uncomfortable.

STIFF

I saw what you did. Now put it back.

MEL

Put what back? I don't know what you're talking about.

STIFF

Empty your pockets.

MEL

Fuck you, jaggoff ---

The Stiff makes an aggressive move for Mel's pocket --- and Mel SHOVES him so hard the Stiff slips on the slick grass and falls.

BOYLE (O.S.)

(hollering)

What the hell is this?

Both men look and see Boyle getting out of his Crown Vic and storm towards them. The Stiff scrambles to his feet, embarrassed.

Boyle is followed by Agents Grosswald and Ackerman.

STIFF

I observed the 2-0-9 remove a perpetual care marker from this grave and put it on that grave and when I ordered him to put it back he assaulted me.

MEL

Assaulted you? This asshole tried to stick his hands in my pockets and ---

BOYLE

I don't want to hear it, Weinberg.

(MORE)

BOYLE (CONT'D)
 (gets into Mel's face)
 If an FBI agent tells you to do something, anything --- tells you to pour gasoline on your cock and balls, light them on fire so he can warm his hands around it --- you do it, or you are done.

MEL
 This hump is with you?

BOYLE
 That's Special Agent Bob Polk. Special Agent Burt Grosswald. And Special Agent Alvin Ackerman ---

MEL
 Holy shit! I don't believe it! A fuckin' Jew in the Bureau!?
 (smiles, offering hand)
 Hey, mishpokheh --- mazel tov, babe ---

ACKERMAN
 I'm not Jewish...

MEL
 Yeah, sure you're not...

BOYLE
 These agents along with myself will be handling you.

MEL
 Terrific --- so what now?

BOYLE
 Tony Denato.

MEL
 Tony the Nutcracker --- ?

BOYLE
 He's one of the city's biggest butterfly dealers --- stolen, counterfeit securities, funny paper ---

MEL
 Fuck that. The deal was for me to help you make cases against con merchants like me --- not a mobbed up maniac like Denato. Motherfucker got his nickname by puttin' guy's balls in a nutcracker and squeezing them till they popped ---

BOYLE
 This is the target Mel --- and you're going to deliver him --- Thanksgiving's in two weeks. I want ideas for an approach the Monday after.

Boyle starts back to his car, but then stops and turns to Mel.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

Oh, and from here on out, I pick the places we're gonna meet, not you.

Mel stands there with a "fuck me" expression on his face as Ackerman and Grosswald follow Boyle to the car. After a beat, Mel sees Polk staring at him and gestures, "What?"

POLK

The marker --- put it back.

Mel gives him an "are you for real?" head shake and walks off.

EXT. CHELSEA HOTEL - MANHATTAN - LATE THAT AFTERNOON

The venerable old hotel for artists and stoners of the day...

INT. ROOM - CHELSEA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

The worn, bohemian charm of the Chelsea is a stark contrast to the elegance of the Pierre...

Mel lays on the bed, strung out with anxiety. In the mirror on the bathroom door we see Max soaking in the tub, smoking a joint.

MAX

I miss the Pierre. I miss the days that I could just reach under my bed and pull out forty thousand dollars.

MEL

For chrissake, it's been a coupla months and you're talking like it was ten years ago.

MAX

Well it feels like it was.
(beat, takes a long drag)
I've got no action, can't make any moves --- running out of cash. I don't know what to do with myself...

MEL

Spare me, Max. Your inertia is the least of my problems right now. I gotta figure out how to deal with this Denato situation.

Max slinks out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel, gets on the bed and straddles Mel.

MEL (CONT'D)

Hey -- you're all wet!

MAX

I know ---

MEL

(shoves Max off)
C'mon --- I need your brain right now, not your pussy.

Mel's rejection cuts across Max's face as she gets off the bed.

MAX

Whatever, Mel. If you had any balls or brains you'd stop wasting your time trying to think of ways to help the Feds and start thinking of ways to help yourself.

MEL

You know what, you're right ---
(grabs his jacket)
And I'm gonna start by getting the fuck outta here.

MAX

Don't vent on me, Mel. I told you they'd screw you ---

MEL

No matter what happens in life there's always some asshole who knew it would ---

Mel walks out, slamming the door behind him.

EXT. CHELSEA BAR - A LITTLE LATER

Through the pub's window, we see Mel at the bar next to BARFLIES.

MIKE WALLACE (V.O.)

Tonight on 60 minutes, the shadowy world of Arab oil and the fabulous wealth it's creating in the Middle East ---

INT. CHELSEA BAR - CONTINUOUS

Mel nurses his drink, lost in his thoughts while kind of watching the TV behind the bar at the same time.

ON THE TV Mike Wallace presents a 60 MINUTES intro to a segment about the Arab sheiks that control OPEC. IMAGES ARE INTERCUT OF white-robed Arabs, Rolls Royces, oil fields in Saudi Arabia and gas lines in the United States, etc...

MIKE WALLACE (ONSCREEN)

--- From their extravagant homes, their opulent yachts, their incredible lifestyles... all of it powered by the world's most valuable commodity, Petroleum. Are the men that control OPEC getting filthy rich at the expense of the rest of the world? Tonight on 60 Minutes!

The show cuts to a commercial and Mel sits up as if stung by an inspired notion. His wheels begin to turn...

BARFLY ONE

Fucking Arabs keep getting richer and I gotta wait forty five minutes just to fill up my goddamn tank!?

BARFLY TWO

They got all the money in the world, whadda they need more for?

Off this exchange, Mel's face suddenly lights up with an inward smile as his inspired notion blooms into an ingenious scheme.

EXT./INT. MEL'S MARK V - STEINWAY ST - ASTORIA - DAY

Mel slowly cruising down Steinway St. in the Little Egypt section of Astoria, Queens. Mel scans both sides of the small road lined with Arab shops and restaurants -- clearly looking for something.

EXT. BASIR'S TOBACCO SHOP - STEINWAY STREET - CONTINUOUS

The TOBACCO SHOP PROPRIETOR, a stately-looking EGYPTIAN in his sixties, plays backgammon with ANOTHER EGYPTIAN MAN, surrounded by their THREE RESPECTIVE SONS, all speaking Arabic.

Mel's LINCOLN rolls down the street. Mel locks eyes on the men, quickly sizes them up, pulls over. The chatter goes quiet as the Egyptians warily watch Mel get out of his car and approach.

MEL

Salam wa aleikum, fellas.

PROPRIETOR

Aleikum ah salam. Can I help you?

MEL

Well, if you're interested in making a few shekels, then yeah...

EXT. STELLA'S SUPPER CLUB - NIGHT

A BLACK ROLLS ROYCE PHANTOM pulls up in front of Stella's. A CHAUFFEUR gets out and opens the door.

A small crowd of people awaiting their cars watch as Mel, clad in his best suit, steps out of the limo, followed by the Tobacco Shop Proprietor, who's wearing a beautiful white thobe and kingly headdress. He's trailed by his three sons, also in Arab garb.

Ushering his "Arabs" to the door of the club, Mel walks a few feet behind when he bumps into BUDDY MARKS, a gaudily-dressed hustler with a bimchette on his arm.

BUDDY

Hey, Mel, whaddya hear? whaddya say?

MEL

How you doin', Buddy?

About to step through the door, the Tobacco Shop Proprietor looks back at Mel for direction. Mel gestures for him to go ahead, he'll be in in a second.

BUDDY

Word is you closed down London 'cause you're into a new deal with some oil-rich Arab ---

(gesturing to Arab entourage entering the club)

So's that the fuckin' guy?

MEL

He's a sheik, Buddy. From the Emirates.

BUDDY

Get the fuck out --- are you serious?

MEL

Serious as prick cancer.

BUDDY

I hear you're looking for paper: CDs, securities, b-bonds, notes, whatever ---

MEL

Yeah, the Sheik's money is all tied up in the Emirate banks, and he thinks the shitstorm they got in Iran is comin' his way --- so he wants his cash out before it's too late ---

BUDDY

And bullshit paper helps him do that?

MEL

Yeah, it'll help him get around his country's strict banking laws preventing capital flight. He puts a million dollar CD in his bank, and they'll let him take out a mil in cash.

BUDDY

How much you lookin' for?

MEL

As much as you can get your hands on.

BUDDY

Yeah, okay --- lemme get back at you ---

MEL

You do that, Buddy, and spread the word 'cause I'm hungry.

INT. STELLA'S SUPPER CLUB - LITTLE LATER

Mel and the Egyptians sit at the best table, a private corner booth. Everyone's checking them out. Mel waves or nods to people he knows, respectfully keeping them away from his "Sheik".

CLOSE ON TABLE: The sons chat in Arabic, having fun, but in deference to their father who sits in a reserved, regal posture.

Son #2 accidentally spills some red sauce on his robe...

MEL

(screaming whisper)
Hey, shmuck, careful will ya. Costume shop's gonna jam me on the dry cleaning ---

Mel's interrupted by the sight of BOYLE entering and approaching. He sits next to Mel, leans in. They talk in hushed, angry tones.

MEL (CONT'D)

The fuck you doing here?!!!

BOYLE

Let me ask you a question, Mel --- do I look like some bog-trotting, shanty asswipe from Hackensack?

MEL

What?

Boyle suddenly and stealthily punches Mel in the groin. Mel does his best to stay composed, but is obviously in pain --- Tobacco Shop Proprietor is alarmed and confused...

BOYLE

Answer the question, Mel. Do I look like some bog-trotting, shanty asswipe from Hackensack?

MEL

What the hell are you talking about!?

Boyle gives Mel an even harder dick-punch. He keels forward and Boyle pats him on the back as if he's having indigestion.

BOYLE

I'm talking about it hasn't even been two weeks since we started up and you're already back into business for yourself!?

(off look on Mel's face)

Yeah, I know about you and the Arab. Everyone knows. It's all over the street!

The freaked out Tobacco Shop Proprietor starts to get up to leave but Mel forces him to sit back down.

MEL

The fuck you going?

PROPRIETOR

I do not want a problem ---

MEL

Then sit your ass down and keep your mouth shut ---

BOYLE

What the hell are you into here?

MEL

How do you think this works Boyle? You think I just call up a wiseguy like Denato and say let's make a deal? No. You gotta put out the honey-pot and let the flies come to you ---
(smiling nod to Proprietor)
...And what better honey-pot is there than an oil-rich Sheik? You got some jacked paintings? Yeah, sure, the Sheik's a fuckin' art lover! Stolen securities, bullshit CD's? Just what
(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)

the camel-jockey ordered! You see where this is going? The Sheik can be all things to all hustlers --- a scam for all seasons...

BOYLE

Are you out of your fucking mind!?

MEL

I been lining things up. Just say the word and I can deliver twelve buy-busts for you by the end of the day --- all cock solid cases.

BOYLE

(reeling with fury)

This isn't the Mel Weinberg show. You don't decide what cases we run with. I do. Everything you do, **EVERYTHING** has to be authorized before you do it ---

MEL

You said you wanted five cases, I got you twelve --- so don't get badge heavy with me. I produced.

BOYLE

Produced what? I said I wanted Denato ---

MEL

(gesturing to the bar)

And there he is, sitting pretty on three hundred mil in bullshit CD's ---

Following Mel's line of sight to the bar Boyle sees **TONY DENATO**, a hefty, hatchet-faced fuck with a wandering left eye.

BOYLE

You're approaching him here, now?

MEL

I was until you walked in ---

BOYLE

Well then I'm going with you.

MEL

C'mon, Boyle. Guy's gonna take one look at your choirboy face and know ---

BOYLE

Know what? He knows only what you tell him, fuckstick ---

(off Mel's look)

This isn't the first time I've been under. I know how to handle my shit ---

MEL

Here's how you handle your shit, Boyle. You say nothing, follow my lead and let me do all the talking. But if you

(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)

gotta speak only three things should
be coming out of your mouth: yes, no,
or none of your fuckin' business.

Mel takes out a pair of sunglasses and puts them on Boyle.

MEL (CONT'D)

And leave these on no matter what.
(to Proprietor)
I'll be back, just keep doin' what
you're doin'.

Mel and Boyle head to the bar, near but not next to Denato...

MEL (CONT'D)

(shouts to BARTENDER)
Pack of Pall Malls ---

After a few beats Denato cuts over and nudges up to Mel.

DENATO

Mel ---

MEL

Hey --- Tony D --- how are you?

DENATO

Yeah, okay ---
(gesturing to table)
So do I get to meet the Arab?

MEL

The Sheik doesn't wanna talk to anyone ---
that's what he's paying me for ---

DENATO

(turns to eyefuck Boyle)
You never said anything about bringing
company ---

MEL

Yeah, well, this is, uh, James Hoyle,
a special advisor to the sheik ---

Denato gives Boyle the once over while hustling his balls ---
and then throws Mel a suspicious glare.

MEL (CONT'D)

Hey, you don't like it? I can take
the Sheik's money down the block. But
this guy's gotta have eyes on
everything I do.

DENATO

Why?

MEL

Whaddya mean why? Fucking Arabs don't
trust Jews.

DENATO

Well I guess that's one thing the
Sheik and I got in common ---
(MORE)

DENATO (CONT'D)
 (turns back to Boyle)
 Too bright in here for your, Mr. Hoyle?

BOYLE
 None of your fucking business.

EXT. PARKING LOT IN BACK OF STELLAS - MINUTE LATER

Mel and Boyle emerge from Stella's back door and follow Denato to his brown Cadillac Seville --- when suddenly ---

A savage, rabid-eyed, scar-ravaged **PITBULL** hurls itself up against the Caddie's backseat window, in full-attack mode. Scares the shit out Mel and Boyle --- but Denato doesn't flinch.

DENATO
 My pride and joy. Fifteen bouts and still undefeated ---

A blood-like substance is dripping from the dog's mouth, staining the window as he tries to bite through the glass.

MEL
 What is that shit --- blood!?

DENATO
 Uh uuh. It's my own little cocktail of hot sauce, gravy and gunpowder. Helps maintain his heightened sense of rage --- those steel trap jaws of his can deliver over two thousand pounds of pressure per square inch and once he locks them into some flesh, there's only one way to unlock them...
 (motions with index finger)
 You gotta stick your finger all the way up his ass and press on his prostate.
 (eye-fucking Mel)
 You ever stick your finger up a rabid Pit Bull's ass?

MEL
 Uh... No. Tony I haven't.

DENATO
 Neither have I.

Denato opens his trunk, pulls out a pair of latex gloves and hands them to Mel who puts them on. Unlocking a steel briefcase, Denato takes out a CERTIFICATE OF DEPOSIT FROM THE BANK OF SCOTLAND. The CD is sealed in a clear plastic sleeve --- he hands it to Mel who takes the CD out of its sleeve and carefully inspects every aspect of it. Impressed, Mel hands the CD back.

MEL
 Beautiful, Tony --- really.

DENATO
 I got one hundred security backed units at a half a mil a pop --- all
 (MORE)

DENATO (CONT'D)

vouchable through Bobbie Allenwood's
new shop in the Bahama's ---

(grins with pride)

Stuff is so clean you'll have at least
a six month lead before anyone figures
they're bullshit ---

MEL

Whaddya want?

DENATO

Nine and a half on the dollar, cash.

MEL

I'll give you four million --- for
all of it. When can you deliver them?

DENATO

(in a state of shock & awe)

Uh, couple of weeks ---

MEL

Call me when they're ready.

Mel and Boyle begin to head back when Denato hurriedly closes
everything up in his trunk and scurries after them.

DENATO

Hey, Mel --- Mel --- lemme ask you --
if the Arab's really got that kind of
money, where's he gonna put it all
once he gets it out of the desert?

MEL

Someplace where it can earn for him ---

DENATO

Atlantic City, Mel... You know they
just legalized gambling there ---

MEL

Yeah --- I spent my birthday losing
my ass at the tables at Resorts...

DENATO

You along with every other hump in
the tri-state area. Resorts is
projecting their first year take to
be over two hundred mil. That's more
than any joint's ever made anywhere
in the history of the world.

MEL

That'll change once some other joints
open up ---

DENATO

No, you see as things stand there
aren't going to be any other casinos
opening up.

MEL

How is that possible?

DENATO

Jersey gaming laws require a joint be approved twice by the Casino Control Commission --- the first license before they start construction and only after they're done, a permanent license to operate. So here you've got the banks being asked to invest 80 mil in construction without knowing if the casino's gonna get their permanent license --- and that's all she wrote. No one's willing to put up the money cause of the risk of a default if the permanent license is denied.

BOYLE

What about the Teamsters?

Mel and Denato are surprised by Boyle's leap into the discussion.

DENATO

Uh uuh. Department of Labor stripped them of their control over the pension --- Everyone's scrambling to find a white knight and they're willing to do whatever it takes to hire his money. You could whack up the interest rates, take a stake in the joint, a piece of the skim, whatever ---

BOYLE

Interesting...

MEL

(glaring at Boyle)

No. It isn't --- cause the Sheik ain't a schmuck and there's no way he's gonna risk his cash without the guarantee of the permanent license ---

DENATO

And what I'm telling you is that I can get him that guarantee ---

MEL

Bullshit ---

Boyle takes off his sunglasses, his eyes wide with excitement as he tries to read Denato.

BOYLE

How?

DENATO

I gotta guy who owns three of the key votes on the Casino Control Commission.

MEL

Look, we're getting way ahead of ourselves. We came here for the paper --- I don't have the authority to get into anything like Atlantic City ---

BOYLE

But I do.

Mel gives Boyle a "what the fuck!?" look, which he ignores.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

Who's your guy?

DENATO

Kiss my sweaty wop ass, that's my guy.

BOYLE

I won't take this to the Sheik without a name...

Denato stares at Boyle for a beat, hustles his balls and winces.

DENATO

Errichetti. Mayor Angelo Errichetti.

INT. HALLWAY - FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - MANHATTAN - EARLY EVENING

Boyle waits on a bench by a closed courtroom. The door opens and Boyle stands as people roll out -- among them is **ASSISTANT US ATTORNEY JOSEPH TUCCIO**. Head of the Organized Crime Strike Force for NYC's Southern District, Tuccio's a completely bald, stocky man in his early thirties with a heavy Jersey accent.

Surprised to see Boyle --- the two men approach each other when suddenly a DEFENSE ATTORNEY gets to Tuccio first.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Joe, can't we work something out?---

TUCCIO

Sure. Your client either testifies, or he's on the bus to Marion ---

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

C'mon, my guy's just an accountant ---

TUCCIO

So what? I'll ask for the max, get it, eat a ham sandwich and then come back and do the same thing to the next asshole I catch washing cash for the Colombos --- and it won't mean a goddamn thing to me 'cause I've got more important stuff to do with my time, like getting my hair cut.

On that note, Tuccio walks over to a smiling Boyle and sighs.

TUCCIO (CONT'D)

It's just a never-ending river of crap ---

BOYLE

(points just below his eye)
 These are the world's smallest fucking
 tears weeping for you. Thirty two and
 already head of an Organized Crime
 Strike Force for Justice --- everyone
 should have your problems.

Tuccio smiles and we MOVE with them through the busy hallways.

TUCCIO

Hey, Jimmy, you could be right there
 with me, a Bureau all star --- but
 you're never gonna get there by dicking
 around in White Collar.

BOYLE

I wouldn't be too sure about that.

TUCCIO

What's up?

BOYLE

You know anything about Angelo
 Errichetti, the Mayor of Camden?

TUCCIO

Errichetti? He's about as heavy as
 they come in Jersey ---

BOYLE

Guy's the fucking mayor of Camden ---
 how much weight can he possibly carry?

TUCCIO

Well factor in that he's also the
 most powerful senator in the state
 legislature and the backroom boss of
 the Jersey Democratic machine...

BOYLE

How about Errichetti's connections in
 Atlantic City?

TUCCIO

He's Resorts International's velvet
 steamroller --- one of the key
 legislators that got the gambling
 referendum passed in Jersey ---

BOYLE

He help them get their casino license?

TUCCIO

Somebody did. I mean shit, everyone
 knows Resorts was started by Meyer
 Lansky's group --- and yet despite
 being totally mobbed up, they not
 only get a casino license, they get
 it before anyone??

Tuccio sees Boyle's wheels turning and stops to square off.

TUCCIO (CONT'D)

What's going on? What're you into?

BOYLE

(taunting grin)

Nothing. Just dicking around in White Collar.

TUCCIO

C'mon, Jimmy. I mean, we came up together for Chrissake. We got history. Hell, I'd let you ball my sister, and you're gonna hold back on me?

BOYLE

All right. How 'bout I buy you that ham sandwich and tell you all about it?

TUCCIO

Lead the way.

We see them walk away...

BOYLE

So, uh, Tooch --- what's your sister's number again?

TUCCIO

212 -- fuck you, Boyle.

INT. SEAFOOD RESTAURANT - LONG ISLAND - DAY

MEL

(restrained rage)

You guys are un-fucking-believable!

Mel eats shrimp cocktail at an upscale restaurant with Boyle, Tuccio, Grosswald, Ackerman and Polk, who aren't eating.

MEL (CONT'D)

I put myself out on the line, spend my own money setting up a scam that gets you Denato --- and now you wanna piss it all away!?

BOYLE

We're not pissin' it away, we're just doubling down on Denato for Errichetti ---

MEL

Well then Denato should count as one of my busts. What's right is right, Boyle.

Boyle looks to Tuccio who nods --- then Boyle nods to Mel.

MEL (CONT'D)

Who the fuck are you again?

TUCCIO

Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph Tuccio --- I run the Organized Crime Strike Force, Southern District.

BOYLE

Just think of him as my lawyer ---

This discussion is interrupted by a ruckus at the next table where a DOUCHEBAG BERATES HIS WIFE. This continues throughout the scene. They're all annoyed, but do nothing.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

I want Errichetti, Mel ---

MEL

Yeah? I wanna tit-bang Racquel Welch while eatin' a Porterhouse steak -- still don't mean it's ever gonna happen.

TUCCIO

Denato said he'd set up the Errichetti meeting ---

MEL

We're supposed to give the guy four mil for his paper end of next week. He ain't gonna set up anything till he sees his.

GROSSWALD

C'mon, we all know you could stall him ---

MEL

Even if I could, still wouldn't matter.

BOYLE

Why not?

MEL

Cause Errichetti's been playing his game and winning since you were shittin' yellow.

(off Boyle's look)

First thing he's gonna do is check you out. Whaddya think's gonna happen when it comes back that James Hoyle don't exist?

ACKERMAN

I could call Bill Tager in Undercover Safeguards. See if he can rush a full package job for us. Backstopped bonafides, creds...the works.

MEL

You guys just don't get it. Only way to bag an elephant like Errichetti is to give him the big show ---

GROSSWALD

For those of us that don't speak your language, you wanna translate?

MEL

A con's nothing more than a big Broadway show. I'm talking about living theater with sets and props, costumes, actors, special effects. I mean, Boyle, you saw it for yourself.

POLK

It didn't take a Broadway show to nail you, just some good old hard work.

MEL

Polk, better to keep your mouth shut and just look stupid than open it and remove all doubt.

POLK

Hey, up yours, Mister ---

Mel just laughs and shakes his head...

BOYLE

Will you stop with him and stay on point.

MEL

If you get the meet with Errichetti, where are you gonna have it?

ACKERMAN

What difference does it make?

MEL

You're supposed to be repping a billionaire Sheik. Errichetti's gonna expect the Presidential Suite at the Ritz or a swank office. He's gonna wanna experience the Sheik's wealth and through it the magnitude of his own impending good fortune --- and for that you need a stage.

BOYLE

Say we could figure something out ---

MEL

Fine. Now where are you gonna get the money to convince him?

TUCCIO

The bribe money won't be a problem ---

MEL

I'm not talking about the bribe money, I'm talking about the convincer.

(off everyone's cluelessness)

For Errichetti to be convinced that the Sheik's real enough to bankroll casino construction you gotta show him that the Arab's sittin' on hundreds of millions in cash. Actual cash.

BOYLE

Couldn't we mock-up some bank account statements ---?

MEL

Fuckin' account statements? Whaddya in the second grade? Before he ever agrees to get in a room you gotta assume Errichetti's gonna call the bank, verify the Sheik's deposits.

ACKERMAN

My brother-in-law is the Senior VP at Chase Manhattan --- I think I can get him to open up a dummy account for us, put however much money we want in there.

The men exchange a look of resolve and then turn to Mel for a sign of encouragement -- but get none.

BOYLE

Come on Mel, this can work...

The Douchebag's wife succumbs to her husband's abuse, begins to cry hysterically --- just as the WAITER delivers Mel's lobster.

Overloaded by the insanity, Mel looks over to the crying wife, looks at the lobster, looks up at the agents -- disgusted.

And with that, Mel stands up and as he does, he accidentally-on-purpose KNOCKS HIS DRINK, spilling it on the Douchebag.

DOUCHEBAG

WHAT THE HELL!?!---

MEL

Sorry, buddy. Total accident. I feel terrible. In fact, I'll tell ya what, let me take care of your lunch --- I insist. What's your name?

DOUCHEBAG

Ted White.

MEL

Okay, Ted, I'm gonna talk to the maitre'd. So when you see me point you out to him just wave your hand so he knows who I'm paying for. Ok?

DOUCHEBAG

Yeah okay sure, thanks.

We MOVE with Mel and the others to the front of the restaurant --- Ackerman, Polk, and Grosswald exit.

Mel flashes a look at the MAITRE'D's nametag as he approaches.

MEL

Hey, Michael, you see that guy sitting there --- my good friend Ted?

(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)
 (points to Douchebag)
 Ted lost a little bet so he's picking
 up my tab for lunch today, okay?

When Mel and the Maitre'D look at the Douchebag, he waves back
 at them --- smiling and nodding his head.

MAITRE'D
 No problem.

Mel gives the Maitre'D a smile and exits. Boyle and Tuccio
 standing in the doorway, having witnessed the whole thing.

BOYLE
 Hey, you can't do that ---

MEL
 No, you can't do that. And that's why
 this will never work.

Mel blows past them and heads for his car...

EXT. PARKING LOT - SEAFOOD RESTAURANT - LONG ISLAND - CONTINUOUS

We MOVE with Boyle and Tuccio as they head for their cars...

TUCCIO
 He's got a point, Jimmy --- I mean
 it's hard enough to run an undercover
 OP with just one agent, and now we're
 going to mount a Broadway production?

BOYLE
 You know how I've been saying that we
 need a new approach? Weinberg's smart
 in all the ways we're not. He can
 teach us ---

TUCCIO
 Come on ---

BOYLE
 Look, you yourself said that
 Errichetti's corrupt as fuck; a king's
 man to Resorts and the Lansky group ---
 and we both know that the families
 are moving into Atlantic City. This
 could be our backdoor into all of it.

TUCCIO
 That's swinging for the bleachers,
 and right now you've got Denato on a
 buy bust that'll put him away for a
 dime. Make you look like a superstar.
 You really want to risk all that for
 the "what-if" of Errichetti?

BOYLE
 Are you saying that you don't?

TUCCIO

I'm saying there are consequences to taking a shot at a heavy like Errichetti. Now me, I'm not afraid to do it. I'm a lawyer. I've got options beyond my tour at Justice --- But the Bureau is your life ---

BOYLE

Why are you coming at me like this!?

TUCCIO

Because I'm your friend. (beat) You're only thirty years old and in ten years you could have a top slot in the company --- now you see Polk over there? He's about the same age as you --- and in ten years he's got a chance to be forty. I just don't want you to end up being the guy with a great future behind him, Jimmy.

EXT. PLAZA HOTEL - MANHATTAN - NIGHT

We gaze across 5th Ave., at the elegant Plaza Hotel.

SUPER: "March 10th, 1979"

INT. ROOM - COMMAND POST - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

The tiny hotel room is the operation's makeshift command center. Grosswald quietly confers over a radio while Tuccio and an FBI TECHIE sit by two TV monitors connected to video recorders.

ON EACH OF THE MONITORS: A crude black & white image from a pinhole camera secretly placed in the adjoining suite --- Boyle, Polk and a few FBI TECHIES moving about.

TUCCIO

(anxious, to Techie)
Can you brighten up this image so we can use these tapes at the trials?
(looks back to Grosswald)
What's the ETA on Errichetti?

GROSSWALD

Thirty-forty minutes...

Tuccio puts on headphones and we HEAR Mel's voice come through.

MEL (OVER HEADPHONES)

--- Fuckin' joke! I ask for champagne and caviar and you gimmee chopped-liver, Shlitz, and the shittiest suite in the joint ---

INT. SUITE - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

The suite's living room is awkwardly shaped and laughably small.

MEL

Best thing I can say about you guys is that you're cheap ---

Mel angrily holds up a small stack of paper off the desk.

MEL (CONT'D)

You think a billionaire Sheik is gonna have his stationary printed on Xerox paper?! Fuck no! Egyptian cotton! Two pound, four ply, Ivory Monarch. Embossed, motherfucker!

BOYLE

Will you calm down? It's nothing ---

MEL

No, it's everything, Boyle. Get it through your thick fucking skulls --- It's all in the details!

The door opens and Ackerman leads in AGENT MANNY RIVERA, a stout Puerto Rican in his 30s with a mustache. Clad in sunglasses and a chicken-shit costume store thobe and headdress that don't quite fit, Agent Rivera looks like a cartoon character.

MEL (CONT'D)

What the fuck is this?

ACKERMAN

This is Agent Manny Rivera, our sheik.

MEL

Guy's a fucking Mexican!

RIVERA

Puerto Rican ---

MEL

Whatever!

ACKERMAN

Well, he does kinda look like an Arab.

Mel drops the paper, reeling with exasperation.

MEL

Al, are you like mentally deficient?
(looks at Boyle)
Didn't I tell you to get the guy that I used at Stella's, the tobacco shop guy?

BOYLE

Yeah, but this is an FBI operation, we can't just use some civilian off the street.

MEL

DON'T YOU GET IT! DENATO SAW THAT GUY AT STELLA'S --- THAT'S WHO HE THINKS IS THE FUCKIN' SHEIK! NOT SOME FUCKIN' SPIC IN A CHICKEN-SHIT COSTUME!

Boyle and the other agents stand in embarrassed silence, realizing Mel's right.

MEL (CONT'D)

All my life I been lookin' over my shoulder, worried about the Feds --- and for what? If I knew how fuckin' stupid you guys really were I woulda stole the world.

Mel STORMS out of the room. Boyle flashes Polk a look...

BOYLE

Lose the paper.
(to Ackerman)
Lose the sheik.

Boyle follows Mel out the door.

INT. ROOM - COMMAND POST - PLAZA HOTEL - A LITTLE LATER

Everyone in a pregame huddle.

TUCCIO

Alright, Mel, the rules of entrapment ---

MEL

(annoyed, rolling his eyes)
Jesus, how many times you gonna break my balls about this?

BOYLE

Just shut up and give it to him...

MEL

It's okay to put out the honey pot by telling Errichetti we're gonna pay him off for certain favors. But I can't induce him to commit specific illegal acts. The flies gotta come to the honey pot outta their own volition.

TUCCIO

Exactly --- without a clean admission, we've got nothing. So before any money gets handed to Denato, Errichetti needs to make it clear that he's the one ultimately getting the payoff in exchange for the casino license...

POLK

Uh --- the payoff isn't being made directly to Errichetti?

MEL

Denato's the Mayor's bagman, his insulation ---
(off Polk's cluelessness)
If we try to give the money directly to the Errichetti we'll blow the whole show.

Suddenly, we HEAR an AGENT over a WALKIE-TALKIE ---

FBI AGENT (OVER WALKIE TALKIE)

Control, the package is in the lobby.

The room EXPLODES with FRANTIC ACTIVITY, everyone rushing into position. Tuccio hustles Boyle, Polk and Mel to the door.

INT. SUITE - PLAZA HOTEL - MINUTES LATER

Mel anxiously pacing, Boyle and Polk sitting on a couch together.

A KNOCK at the door. Everyone stiffens up as Mel answers it revealing: Tony Denato and **MAYOR ANGELO ERICHETTI**. With his Sinatra-esque appeal, Errichetti exudes the kind of raw, unapologetic bravado and power reserved for a back room boss.

MEL

(shakes with Denato)

Tony --- how are ya?

(shakes with Errichetti)

Pleasure to finally meet you in person,
Mr. Mayor --- Mel Weinberg.

ERRICHETTI

It's Angie, Mel --- please.

Mel ushers in the men. Boyle and Polk smile and shake hands with Denato and Erichetti.

DENATO

And this is James Hoyle, special
advisor to the Sheik.

ERICHETTI

James, beltway buddies of mine speak
very highly of you. West Point into
Military Intelligence, then DIA.
Impressive for such a young man.

BOYLE

Thank you, Sir ---

INT. ROOM - COMMAND POST - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Everyone crowded around the monitors --- headphones on.

POLK (OVER HEADPHONES)

I'm Bob Dolk, President of Abdul
Enterprises, the Sheik's investment
company.

ERRICHETTI (OVER HEADPHONES)

I understand you're an alum of HBS?

ON MONITORS: Polk hesitates, unsure of what he's talking about.

TUCCIO

(under breath)

Harvard Business School. Harvard
Business School...

ERRICHETTI (OVER HEADPHONES)

(off Polk's silence)

Harvard Business School.

POLK (OVER HEADPHONES)

Oh, yes. Of course. Class of '63.

DENATO

So where's the Sheik?

MEL

He got tied up on business in London.

ERRICHETTI

It's too bad, I was looking forward to meeting him.

MEL

You will.

INT. SUITE - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

As the men take their seats, Polk retrieves an ATTACHÉ CASE and gracelessly places it on the coffee table in front of Errichetti --- and then sits himself. Mel restraining his irritation at Polk.

Mel can see Errichetti's not sure what to make of any of it, his face a mixture of bewilderment and discomfort.

MEL

So I assume Tony's explained what the Sheik's intentions are here.

ERRICHETTI

He has, Mel. And let me just say that I welcome and appreciate the Sheik's interest in Atlantic City, which I believe is one of the greatest investment opportunities in the world today. Wanna know why?
(off Mel's nod)

'Cause life for Americans is always becoming, never being. Al Einstein said that, he was a fucking genius. And because it's only a short piece from Philly, New York, Boston, Baltimore --- AC gives more gamblers a chance to become somebody than any other place on Earth.

BOYLE

The Sheik couldn't agree with you more, and is eager to get involved.

MEL

Provided that he can overcome certain obstacles ---

ERRICHETTI

If the Sheik does the right thing, there won't be any obstacles, only opportunities...

MEL

(gesturing to attaché)
He's ready and willing to put his consideration for you on the table, Angie. But we'd like to know how it's gonna work for him ---

DENATO

Fellas, we've discussed this in detail---

POLK

(stiffly interrupting)

Mr. Denato, if you please, we've only discussed this with you. Now we have a hundred thousand dollars for Mayor Errichetti and we need to hear from the him exactly how he intends to guarantee us the casino licenses ---

DENATO

No, you please. I thought ya did hear. And if you didn't, ya should have, 'cause we've been over it enough times ---

In a calming gesture, the Mayor puts his hand on Denato.

ERRICHETTI

Look, Bob, first rule in politics is never make a promise you can't keep. Now I've been in office for over thirty years because I've always abided by that rule --- and I give you my word --- the Sheik will get everything that he needs in Atlantic City. Alright?

INT. ROOM - COMMAND POST - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Everyone's eyes glued to the TV MONITORS --- when suddenly Polk, for no apparent rhyme or reason, stands up...

TUCCIO

What's he doing?!

INT. SUITE - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Polk awkwardly grabs the attaché, leans forward --- and attempts to hand it not to Denato but directly to Errichetti -- who sits motionless, refusing to even acknowledge the case's existence.

DENATO

(tries to take case)

That's supposed to go to me.

... But Polk won't let him have it --- and once again attempts to hand it to Errichetti, who is visibly put off.

MEL

Bob --- give Tony the case.

POLK

But this money's for the Mayor.

DENATO

(still grabbing for case)

I'll make sure it gets to the right place.

Refusing to relinquish the money to Denato, Polk jerks the case back towards himself, at which point Errichetti's had enough. Disturbed and pissed, he stands up, grabs his coat.

ERRICHETTI

I thought everyone here had an understanding. Clearly you don't.

And with that, Errichetti walks out of the room...

INT. ROOM - COMMAND POST - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Everyone frozen in horror. Tuccio has his hands on his head --- if he had any hair, he'd be pulling it out right now.

TUCCIO

This is not happening.

DENATO (OVER HEADPHONES)

What the hell is wrong with you people? We had an agreement---

MEL (OVER HEADPHONES)

Lemme go talk to Angie --- I'll fix everything. Sit tight.

ON MONITORS: Mel rushes out of the room. Denato looks at Polk.

DENATO (OVER HEADPHONES)

This how they teach you to do deals at Harvard?

EXT. ENTRANCE - PLAZA HOTEL - MINUTE LATER

Mel exits and catches up to Errichetti, who's hailing a cab.

MEL

Hey, Angie --- I'm sorry about how that went down. It was a total misunderstanding ---

ERRICHETTI

Misunderstanding? I can't afford to do business with people that don't know how to do business.

MEL

Yeah, yeah, I know. But you gotta realize Dolk and Hoyle, these guys are squares, all right? Barefoot pilgrims --- and Dolk was just following orders from up on high.

ERRICHETTI

The Sheik told him to do that?

MEL

Yeah. Ragheads don't like to deal with middlemen. Everything's direct.

ERRICHETTI

Well we're not in the Middle East ---

MEL

Angie, don't be a shmuck. I know you called Chase about the Sheik's deposits. So you know the Arab's got
(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)

over four hundred million friends banked there. You really wanna turn your back on that kind of money?

(off Errichetti's silence)

Look, I'm not supposed to tell you this, okay? But the Sheik's got big plans for Atlantic City. Much bigger than simply financing one joint.

ERRICHETTI

Whaddya mean?

MEL

He wants to own the entire town: buy all the choice casino sites and then offer would-be owners prepackaged deals at whacked up prices. Everything wrapped up in a bow: the land, the financing, and the gambling licenses.

Mel sees Errichetti's hardened face soften with greed --- and moves in close for the kill.

MEL (CONT'D)

All the deals would flow through you and you'd get a piece, a serious piece, at both ends. But first we gotta grease you, and then your casino commissioners, directly. No middle men, no bullshit. It's the Arab way.

ERRICHETTI

(after a beat)

What about Denato?

MEL

Up to you. He's your guy, comes out of your pocket ---- or not.

Errichetti stands in silence, not sure what he's going to do.

INT. SUITE - PLAZA HOTEL - MINUTES LATER

Denato, Polk and Boyle sit in an uneasy silence. Mel enters and breaks the anxious trance.

MEL

Tony, I tried talking to him. He wouldn't listen. Maybe you can get him back in the room?

DENATO

Where is he?

MEL

I think he caught a cab to Penn Station ---

DENATO

Gimme the case, I'll see what I can do.

MEL

Get him back in here, lemme make sure everything's okay, and the case is yours. You got my word on that.

Denato storms from the room. Boyle deflates in "fuck me" defeat.

MEL (CONT'D)

I swear to God, Polk, if it was raining pussy you'd get hit by a cock...

INT. ROOM - COMMAND POST - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

MEL (OVER HEADPHONES)

--- I mean, if you knew nine more things, you'd be a fuckin' idiot ---

Tuccio angrily yanks off his headphones.

TUCCIO

Fucking disaster. Unmitigated disaster ---

INT. SUITE - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

MEL

--- You're a double threat --- can't hold your tongue or your booze ---

POLK

You don't know what you're talking about, Mister!

MEL

Oh no? You think eating onions is enough to cover that stink coming outta your mouth ---?

Polk finally snaps and lunges for Mel --- but Boyle steps in.

POLK

I'm sorry, Jimmy --- I didn't --- we didn't have the admission ---

MEL

We had a deal! Had you just stuck to it and given the case to Denato, I woulda gotten you the admission ---

BOYLE

Will you back off?

MEL

He has no business being on stage and you know it. I want him out ---

BOYLE

Out of what?! Our hand's been played, we blew it. It's over.

MEL

I'm glad you feel that way, Boyle ---
(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)
 (cuts Boyle a grin)
 'Cause as soon as you can accept the possibility of losing, philosophically, you automatically improve your chances of winning.

Boyle looks at Mel quizzically. Suddenly there is a KNOCK at the door. Boyle seizes up.

INT. ROOM - COMMAND POST - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

A dejected Tuccio confers with Ackerman and Grosswald, who looks over at a monitor to see Errichetti walking back into the room.

GROSSWALD
 Look --- Errichetti's back ---!!!!

Everyone RECOILS back into action --- rushing over, putting on headphones --- as Errichetti sits down with a broad smile.

ERRICHETTI (OVER HEADPHONES)
 Bob, James. Mel's explained everything to me. So I'm gonna tell you in no uncertain terms, here, now -- I'm in.

INT. SUITE - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

ERRICHETTI
 I'll deliver the casino commissioners, the licenses, zoning variances, union concessions --- everything the Sheik needs will be his 'cause I'm gonna be his fucking rabbi. I tell you --- without any bit of imagination or whatever have you --- Atlantic City --- the fucking town is ours.

Boyle flashes Mel a subtle look of excitement and deep gratitude.

INT. ROOM - COMMAND POST - PLAZA HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Everyone watching the monitor with astonished smiles, like they just witnessed some magic trick. Errichetti gets up...

ERRICHETTI (OVER HEADPHONES)
 Just sit tight --- I'll have things rolling in a week.

Errichetti takes the attaché case of money and leaves.

ACKERMAN
 Have we given this op a name yet?

TUCCIO
 Yeah. ABSCAM.

INT. NYC METROPOLITAN MUSEUM - KING TUT EXHIBITION - DAY

LONG SHOT OF AN EGYPTIAN PHARAOH'S TOMB: With King Tut's tomb on display, the museum gallery is like a set from Cleopatra --- A river of museum PATRONS flow down the concourse towards us.

Although we can't see them yet... the VOICES OF MEL AND MAX can be HEARD over the din of the crowd.

MEL (O.S.)

I'm telling you, the play we made ---
the thing was like "Springtime for
Hitler." I mean, when Errichetti took
the cash and declared ---

(snorts)

--- even I couldn't believe it.

MAX (O.S.)

You're really sick, you know that?

Mel and Max emerge from the crowd, perusing the artifacts...

MAX (CONT'D)

Doesn't really matter if you're
hustling for yourself or the Feds ---
you just live for the action like a
junkie lives for his dope.

MEL

Hey, if I've got action, it's like
anything's possible.

MAX

Just because they're forcing you to
play doesn't mean you have to win.

MEL

Only the existentially terrified play
to break even, Max ---

(chuckling)

You shoulda seen Boyle. Guy went crazy.
Thinks I'm Harry-fucking-Houdini. Was
so happy he treated me to a porterhouse
dinner at Peter Luger's ---

MAX

(stops to confront Mel)

So that's why you never showed up
last night? Because you were bouncing
with your new playmate --- the prick
that ruined our lives?!

MEL

Guy's just doin' his job, Max. It
wasn't personal ---

MAX

Not personal!? It couldn't be more
personal. And I can't fucking believe
that you're defending him.

Max angrily resumes her stride. Mel gently stops her, flashes one of his charming smiles.

MEL

Max, c'mon ---

MAX

The charm's not enough anymore ---

MEL
Enough for what?

MAX
For me.

MEL
I don't understand.

MAX
(after a beat, looks away)
I need some space --- away from you.

Mel is caught completely off guard by this revelation and it takes a few beats for it to fully register...

MEL
So I'm out here on the wire doin'
what I'm doin' 'cause of you, for you ---
and you need some fucking space?

Infuriated beyond words, Max storms out of the gallery.

EXT. FRONT STEPS - METROPOLITAN ART MUSEUM - MINUTE LATER

Max emerges onto the museum steps. Mel chases her down.

MEL
Max, please. You're the only person I
can be myself with --- the only one I
can talk to without having to think
about what I'm gonna say first ---

MAX
You can pay a shrink fifty bucks an
hour to do that...

MEL
Max ---

MAX
(cutting Mel off)
What are we without the scam? What am
I to you? A great fuck? A shoulder to
cry on? Seriously Mel, what am I to
you?

MEL
I don't know. I mean, what am I to
you?

MAX
I asked you first.

Max's eyes well up as she waits for Mel to answer. But he can't.

MAX (CONT'D)
I gotta go.

MEL
Please don't do this, Max ---

Mel reaches out for her, but Max pulls away.

MEL (CONT'D)
Can I at least call you?

MAX
You'd just be making it harder.

Leaving Mel on the steps, Max gets into a cab and disappears.

EXT. HILTON HOTEL - JFK AIRPORT - NIGHT

Gazing at a massive hotel located next to the airport.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
...As Vice Chair of the Casino
Commission, I have tremendous sway
over every aspect of the licensing
process ---

INT. SUITE - HILTON HOTEL - JFK AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Boyle, Polk, Mel, Errichetti --- and **KENNETH MACDONALD**, VICE
CHAIR OF N.J. CASINO COMMISSION --- sit around a coffee table...

ERRICHETTI
And he's here to help us...

MEL
We're glad to hear that ---

BOYLE
(Hands cash bag to Macdonald)
The Sheik appreciates people that can
help.

MACDONALD
I'll talk to two of my fellow
commissioners. You'll be able to make
the same arrangement with them ---
which gives you all the votes you
need for the license.

ERRICHETTI
And the first package I'd like us to
bring to the Sheik is a deal to buy
and revamp the old Shelburne Hotel ---
(hands Mel property photos)
We can turn it into the swankiest
joint in A.C. and do it for half the
cost than anyone else.

MEL
How?

ERRICHETTI
I've given Harrison Rand a piece of
the action to fix things...

Boyle and Mel flash each other a quick look of astonishment...

BOYLE
Do you mean Senator Harrison Rand?

Errichetti nods. Boyle and Mel's astonishment quickly shifts to
restrained excitement...

ERRICHETTI

Harry's gonna push some buttons and get a declaratory ruling that'll allow us to renovate instead of tearing down and starting over. That'll save forty mil right off the top.

MATCH CUT TO:

CLOSE ON TV PLAYING SURVEILLANCE VIDEO FROM SUITE:

The time code on the tape: "May 18, 1979."

ERRICHETTI (ON MONITOR) (CONT'D)

Yeah, Harry can do things for us in Trenton and D.C. --- he's lifestyle. He's beautiful. He's with us, okay? --- And he's easy to handle.

BOYLE (ON MONITOR)

What do you mean by that?

CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL:

INT. DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - FBI HQ - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

Boyle and Tuccio sit at a conference table watching the TV Monitor with **LAWRENCE HOUSEMAN, THE DIRECTOR OF THE FBI.**

SUPER: "May 23, 1979 - FBI Headquarters, Washington D.C."

ERRICHETTI (ON MONITOR)

Guy's a lush and a whoremaster. Harry'd fuck a snake if you held its head for him. He's good people ---

HOUSEMAN

(disgusted)

Just turn it off. I've read the transcripts ---

Tuccio STOPS the tape. An uneasy silence. Tuccio and Boyle look a little out of their depth and seem nervous around Houseman.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)

Errichetti's claims about Rand...?

BOYLE

We believe they're credible. There's simply too much money at stake for him to lie to us.

HOUSEMAN

Rand's the fourth-ranking Democrat in the Senate --- and he's the co-chair of CJS Appropriations...

(off their blank looks)

That's the Subcommittee that controls our budget.

TUCCIO

Doesn't change the fact that if he's involved in influence peddling, it's a federal crime---

HOUSEMAN

I'm well aware. But I also have to be mindful that Congress is a vengeful institution and will see this investigation as an attack.

BOYLE

This isn't the first time we've targeted political corruption.

HOUSEMAN

It's the first time we've used such a radical approach...

(gets up and paces)

You're talking about pushing the envelope of inducement with the man that controls our purse strings --- and the individual you've positioned to run point is a criminal whose stock and trade is bullshit.

BOYLE

All due respect, but Mr. Weinberg's gift for bullshit is precisely why we've been so successful.

HOUSEMAN

Are you telling me that you actually trust the man?

BOYLE

I'm telling you that I can control him.

Houseman eyes Boyle coldly for a beat, then sits behind his desk and reviews an open file.

HOUSEMAN

So Rand has agreed to accept a payoff?

TUCCIO

That's what we've been told, but the caveat is that the Senator won't take until he meets the sheik face to face.

BOYLE

Well, what's being discussed isn't exactly a meeting. Mayor Errichetti wants to throw a coming-out party for the sheik in Atlantic City ---

(off Houseman's look)

Along with the Senator, all the key players would be there: gaming officials, union leaders, politicians, organized crime elements --- it could be an intelligence jackpot for us ---

Houseman leans back, contemplatively rubs his nose.

HOUSEMAN

What kind of resources would you need?

BOYLE

We'd like to bring in an agent out of the Chicago office --- he's of Saudi descent and I think can play the part.

(nervously clears throat)

And we'd need you to designate Abscam a "Bureau Special".

This is it --- the do or die moment of truth --- and Houseman eyefucks Boyle with the weight of it ---

HOUSEMAN

Do you fully understand the gravity of this request --- the burden of responsibility that comes with it?

(off Boyle's nod)

And you feel certain that this operation warrants such a high priority designation?

BOYLE

Yes, sir --- I do.

HOUSEMAN

(after a considered beat)

You'll coordinate *everything* through my office --- and I want all of your intel as it becomes available ---

(looks at Tuccio)

But I trust you'll be circumspect about what it is you're showing me. Are we clear?

(off Tuccio's nod)

Good. Now go to work.

Tuccio and Boyle stand up to leave.

BOYLE

Sir, there is one more thing. Mayor Errichetti has requested that the Sheik deposit two million dollars in an Atlantic City bank ---

HOUSEMAN

(incredulous)

Excuse me?

TUCCIO

One of the Mayor's biggest contributors owns the bank and has agreed to give him a sweetheart loan on a vacation property in exchange for arranging such a large deposit. (beat) There's zero risk for us, the money would just sit in an account and earn interest ---

BOYLE

--- But we think the gesture would buy us a lot of goodwill and credibility.

HOUSEMAN

Table it until after the party. I want to see what the Mayor does for us before we do for him.

INT. MEL'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

It's pouring rain outside. The house is still unfinished. Mel and Inez hanging Birthday decorations for Willie in the living room. Mel's put on about ten pounds and the accumulated stress of the past few months is all in his face. After sticking a bow on the Atari videogame set up on the TV, Mel surveys the room.

INEZ

Everything look very nice, Mr. Mel ---

Mel thanks Inez with a smile and she disappears into the kitchen. WE MOVE WITH MEL AS HE WALKS INTO HIS STUDY, sits at his desk. Mel then hits the speaker phone, dials a number, lets it ring.

FRONT DESK (OVER SPEAKERPHONE)

Good afternoon, Chelsea Hotel.

MEL

Simon, it's Mel Weinberg ---

FRONT DESK (OVER SPEAKERPHONE)

Mr. Weinberg, we haven't seen you for a while. How are you?

MEL

Fine. Busy. Listen, can you connect me to Miss Gardner's room?

FRONT DESK (OVER SPEAKERPHONE)

Oh, Miss Gardner has checked out.

MEL

(floored and dismayed)
Did she leave a forwarding address?

FRONT DESK (OVER SPEAKERPHONE)

No, I'm afraid not. I'm sorry.

Hearing a car in the driveway, Mel hangs up. Rushing into the living room, he turns the TV and Atari on just as Estelle, Willie and his TWO BEST FRIENDS come in.

MEL

Happy birthday, buddy!

WILLIE

Aww man, an Atari?! I thought my present was the Knicks game?

MEL

Yeah well, that too.

WILLIE

Thanks, pop.

As Willie and his buds dive into the game, Estelle glares at Mel, the tension between them is heavy --- everything about her is sagging under the oppressive weight of her obvious depression.

INT. KITCHEN - MEL'S HOUSE - MINUTE LATER

Inez is busy making some snack plates. Estelle slumps into the kitchen, and then Mel...

ESTELLE

I thought we didn't have money for extras --- like electronic games.

MEL

We don't. But it's his birthday---

ESTELLE

Oh, so I get to look like the penny pincher and you get to be Daddy Warbucks? It's not fair.

MEL

Look, I'm sorry, okay. I just can't help myself when it comes to Willie.

ESTELLE

That gift isn't about Willie. It's about the guilt you got for not being around the past few months.

MEL

You really want to do this right now?

ESTELLE

No, I wanna get into bed ---

MEL

Fine... is the cake in the car?

ESTELLE

(sags, shut eyes in dread)
Shit --- I forgot to pick it up...

MEL

Jesus, the one thing you said you'd do ---

ESTELLE

Don't you think I fucking know!?

Sensing a fight is about to explode, Inez bravely steps in.

INEZ

Excuse me, Mrs. -- we have the cake mix --- I can make --- no problem.

ESTELLE

Thanks, Inez ---

Inez takes the tray of snacks out to the kids. The phone on the wall starts to RING. Estelle answers.

ESTELLE (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

Hello? Yeah, just a moment---

Estelle hands the phone to Mel --- and proceeds to make herself an ice cream sundae.

MEL (INTO PHONE)

Yeah ---

(suddenly tenses up)

Tony? -- Yeah -- Why you calling me
at home? -- Whaddya talking about? --
I can't, it's my kid's birthday --
Why can't this wait until tomorrow? --
Tony, you need to calm down.

Denato SCREAMS over the phone -- Mel's face tightens with fear.

MEL (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

No -- I'll meet you someplace halfway --
uh -- Victory Lanes, outside Freeport,
off the 27 -- 5:30 -- Tony, you're
laying this on me last minute. I don't
know if I can get Hoyle there, he's a
busy guy -- yeah, I'll try, okay?

Mel hangs up, a grave look on his face. Estelle finishes making
her sundae and is about to leave, but Mel stops hers...

MEL (CONT'D)

Listen, I got an emergency situation
I gotta deal with --- I need you to
take the kids to the Knicks game.

ESTELLE

Knicks game!? No way ---

MEL

Please, Estelle, you really think I'd
do this if it wasn't *that* important?
I gotta serious problem. I gotta meet
this guy ---

ESTELLE

What problem?! What guy?

MEL

It's a business thing --- you wouldn't
understand --- trust me...

ESTELLE

Trust you? How can I trust you when I
hear you in your study lying to those
people on the phone? Talking about
the sheik's private jets --- going to
Geneva, London? It's all lies. You're
not in business with some zillionaire
Arab Sheik ---

MEL

You're acting crazy. You've got this
all wrong ---

ESTELLE

If I'm wrong, then how come we're
still living like we're on the edge?
I mean where's all the Sheik's hundreds
of millions?

MEL

It's locked up in the banks in his country! I'm helpin' him get it---

ESTELLE

Just stop!

MEL

(after a devastating silence)
Look, I know it's been rough --- but you gotta believe me --- things are gonna get better --- I promise ---

ESTELLE

No, Mel --- you gotta show me something ---

MEL

(angry frustration)
I can't do this right now ---

ESTELLE

Okay ---

(as she exits kitchen)
Be sure to break the bad news about the game to Willie on your way out ---

EXT. VICTORY LANES BOWLING ALLEY - LONG ISLAND - LATER

HIGH ANGLE OVER a bowling alley by a two-lane highway. It's still raining. Mel pulls in, parks, goes into the bowling alley. Moments later, a Cadillac rolls in and parks next to Mel's car.

INT. CADILLAC EL DORADO - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Strung out with anxiety, Polk grabs a whiskey bottle from his glove box, swigs. He pulls an onion from a bag, bites into it.

INT. BAR - VICTORY LANES BOWLING ALLEY - MINUTE LATER

An empty rundown bar behind the vacant lanes. Mel sits across from Denato at a back table. They glare at each other unhappily.

DENATO

Is Hoyle coming?

MEL

He's in DC on business but Dolk will be here. And I can tell you he's not happy about the shit you're pulling.

DENATO

The shit that I'm pulling?! First you fucks blow me off on my CDs... Now I find out you're dealing directly with Errichetti, cutting me out of my setup --- and I'm the asshole?

MEL

No one's cutting you out of anything, Tony. You just gotta understand that---

DENATO

No, you gotta understand, Weinberg...

Denato leans back to hustle his balls and reveals a belly-holstered REVOLVER.

MEL
Jesus. Put that away will ya? No one's gonna fuck with you.

Polk enters and approaches. Denato pockets the gun in his jacket.

POLK
Gentlemen ---
(takes off raincoat)
I'll be right back, I just need to use the john.

Hanging his coat on the chair, Polk heads for the bathroom.

MEL
Look, Tony, we're all businessmen here. We're gonna get this thing straightened out ---

Polk's coat suddenly slides off the chair, DROPS to the ground.

MEL (CONT'D)
...But you gotta gear down. I mean Dolk's a civilian, a square---

ON DENATO: he leans down, out of Mel's sight and grabs the coat, roughly picks it up --- causing a WALLET to fall out of a pocket.

MEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You try to put the fear on him and flash your piece? He'll flip out --

Mel sees Denato rise back up and lock eyes with him --- a homicidal expression on his face.

DENATO
You know I know where you hang your hat, right Mel? Where your wife and kid sleep?

MEL
What the fuck Tony? Why would you say something like that?

Denato answers by holding up POLK'S FBI BADGE AND ID -- his other hand in his pocket, pointing his gun at Mel.

DENATO
Get up. We're leaving.

Mel's initial shock and horror are quickly overpowered by an all-consuming rage -- he suddenly erupts to his feet but instead of heading for the exit, he marches towards the bathroom.

DENATO (CONT'D)
Mel ---??! --- Mel!!!

INT. BATHROOM - VICTORY LANES BOWLING ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON POLK: at a urinal, flushing --- when Mel savagely smashes him face first into the steel piping above the porcelain.

Blood spurts out of Polk's nose as he drops to the floor in a daze. Mel viciously stomps Polk in the stomach and solar plexus. Denato enters and is stunned and alarmed to find Mel wailing on the semi-conscious FBI agent...

DENATO

The fuck you doing!?

MEL

The fuck does it look like?

(stomps Polk)

Whatever he's got, it's shit without his testimony. Now gimme your piece.

DENATO

You can't whack a fucking feeb! Not while I'm around!

MEL

Help me or not, Tony --- I'm gonna tell everyone that you did.

Mel gets Polk in a strangle-hold, choking him out. Denato panics, rushes over, grabs Mel from behind and pulls him off Polk ---

Using Denato's momentum, Mel drives the bastard backwards, hammers him into the sink counter --- then grabs Denato's ankles and sweeps him off his feet --- Denato's head smacking the counter-top as he and Mel fall to the floor.

Mel flips over and tries to pin Denato while reaching for his pocketed gun. Denato counters by grabbing Mel's balls and squeezing --- Mel screams --- looks to Polk who is coming to ---

MEL (CONT'D)

Bob --- he's gotta gun...

Denato's eyes widen with shock and fury as he suddenly realizes that Mel's attack on Polk was bullshit.

Polk moves to help and Mel uses the distraction to grab the gun from Denato's pocket. Denato smacks the gun out of Mel's hand --- the revolver slides across the floor --- out of everyone's reach.

As Polk goes for the gun, Denato brutally hammers his elbow into Mel's esophagus. Sputtering off of Denato, Mel struggles to breathe --- Denato BOLTS out --- just as Polk grabs the gun ---

MEL (CONT'D)

(wheezes to Polk)

He has your badge---

POLK

What!?

MEL

He found it in your jacket ---

Polk explodes out of the bathroom in pursuit of Denato.

EXT. PARKING LOT - VICTORY LANES BOWLING ALLEY - SECONDS LATER

Polk blows out the door, sees Denato sprinting for his Seville --- about sixty yards ahead of him -- and is almost there ---

POLK
 (points gun at Denato)
 STOP!!

Denato reaches his car and is about to grab the door --- Polk squeezes off two quick shots --- BAM BAM --- the bullets whiz by Denato --- he FREEZES, puts his hands up in surrender.

POLK (CONT'D)
 Get on your knees! Lock your hands
 behind your head!

Denato complies. As Polk approaches Denato, Mel barrels out of the back door.

Mel sees Polk moving in on Denato --- and out of the corner of his eye, Mel sees Grosswald and Ackerman rushing towards them from a cover car parked across the highway, their guns in hand.

MOVING WITH POLK: He's drawing closer to Denato --- when suddenly Denato reaches for the Seville's back door --- OPENS IT ---

DENATO'S PITBULL EXPLODES OUT OF THE CAR like a bullet from a gun --- and makes a rabid blitz straight for Polk ---

Polk can only get off one errant SHOT --- before the beast pitches into him --- RAMMING Polk to the ground with so much force he drops the gun --- the pit viciously tearing into him ---

Jumping into the Seville, Denato starts the car and kicks up a shitstorm of mud as he spins around and heads for the highway.

Mel, Grosswald and Ackerman rush to help Polk ---

INT. DENATO'S SEVILLE - CONTINUOUS

Denato peels out of the parking lot and just before hitting the highway, takes a quick glance into his rear-view mirror.

He sees his pit mauling Polk and grins with pride --- just as ---

THE THUNDERING BLAST of a truck's air horn overtakes the moment ---

Looking out his driver's side window with horror, Denato sees a KENWORTH SEMI BARRELING TOWARDS HIM FULL BORE --- and that's all she wrote --- there's no time for Denato to do anything but close his eyes before THE CATAclysmic IMPACT...

EXT. PARKING LOT - VICTORY LANES BOWLING ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

As Mel, Grosswald and Ackerman continue to rush towards Polk ---

Behind them the Kenworth RAMS INTO DENATO'S SEVILLE WITH DEVASTATING VIOLENCE ---

Polk's screams of agony overtaken by the sounds of SCREECHING BRAKES --- EXPLODING GLASS --- CRUMPING, SHEARING METAL ---

The men look over in shock as the semi wades deep into the driver's side of the Seville, finally flipping it over on its roof and sending it sliding down the rain-slicked highway...

Polk's SCREAMS regain their attention and the men resume their dash towards him...

ANGLE CLOSE ON POLK: He and the pit are wildly thrashing about in the mud --- Polk punching and clawing the dog which has its jaws locked deep into his left thigh --- blood gushing out --- Grosswald and Ackerman arrive, quickly followed by Mel.

POLK
GET IT OFF ME!

Grosswald tries to get a clean shot on the dog and is about to take it --- but Ackerman suddenly stops him ---

ACKERMAN
A forty-five slug will go right through the dog and into Bob.

GROSSWALD
So what do we do?

MEL
You gotta stick your finger up its ass, press on its prostate.

GROSSWALD
WHAT!?

MEL
Only way to get it to unlock its jaws!
Stick your finger up its ass ---

Overwhelmed by the suggestion, the agents hesitate, so Mel acts. Jumping on top of Polk and the dog, he cringes with disgust as he JAMS his finger up the pit's ass, presses as hard as he can.

The pit bull's eyes widen with alarm, the abrupt anal intrusion causing the dog to release its grip on Polk's thigh ---

As Polk rolls away, the dog lashes back and moves to attack Mel --- but is stopped dead by a BULLET from Grosswald's gun ---

Ackerman uses his belt as a tourniquet on Polk's thigh.

ACKERMAN
Hang tight, Bob. Help's on the way.

Mel gets up and heads for Denato's car. Grosswald follows.

ANGLE ON HIGHWAY CRASH SITE: The shaken TRUCK DRIVER is approaching the Seville. Mel and Grosswald overtake him.

GROSSWALD
Just sit down on the side of the road
'til the paramedics get here.

ANGLE CLOSE ON SEVILLE: Mel and Grosswald look in at Denato's body. Grosswald reaches into the car, checks for a pulse. Seeing Grosswald's grim expression, Mel knows that Denato is dead. He shuts his eyes in dread and shakes his head.

GROSSWALD (CONT'D)
What the fuck happened in there?

Mel answers by pulling POLK'S FBI BADGE out of Denato's pocket and handing it to Grosswald.

GROSSWALD (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ ---

Nauseous and covered in cold sweat, Mel staggers to his car.

GROSSWALD (CONT'D)
Mel, where you going!?

Mel doesn't answer, just gets into his car and peels away.

EXT. BURNSIDE BATHHOUSE - LONG ISLAND - LATER THAT NIGHT

Boyle pulls in behind a CROWN VIC, which is behind Mel's Lincoln. Boyle walks over to the Vic, inside of which are TWO FBI AGENTS.

BOYLE
How long has he been in there?

DRIVER AGENT
'Bout an hour ---

INT. STEAMBATH - BURNSIDE BATHHOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Clad in a towel, Mel sits hunched forward on a bench --- sweating it out in the Russian Banya style steambath. Boyle enters, also in a towel. He spots Mel amid the wet haze, sits next to him.

BOYLE
You okay?

Mel looks up at Boyle before returning to his hunched position.

BOYLE (CONT'D)
Look, before we get into everything,
I just want to say ---
(locks eyes with Mel)
What you did, for Polk, the operation ---
(offers his hand, sincere)
Thanks, Mel... Really...

Mel doesn't shake. Turning on the cold water tap next to him, he fills a bucket and dunks the water over himself.

MEL
I did what I did for me and my family ---
end of story.

BOYLE
Really? What'd you pulling the pit
off Polk have to do with your family?
(off Mel's silence)
Look man, what went down tonight was
completely fucked up --- should've
never happened ---

MEL
Tonight was pre-ordained! How many
times did I tell you about Polk?

BOYLE
And I'm taking him out of the game,
effective immediately---

MEL

Point is, he shouldn't have been playing in the first place and you fucking knew it ---

BOYLE

Polk's got almost twenty years on the job and I'm supposed to back you against him!?

MEL

Spare me this bound by allegiance crap 'cause I'm out here in the real world. I mean, this is life and death and you guys could fuck up a cup of coffee.

(dunks another water bucket)

Freak accident --- fuckin' Mack truck, that's all that stopped things from going from bad to worse. (beat) What happens the next time?

BOYLE

We've been doing the best we can with what we've got, but that's all going to change now.

MEL

Bullshit!

BOYLE

Let's get dressed --- I want to show you something ---

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - MANHATTAN - A LITTLE LATER

Boyle parks across the street from an elegant, four story townhouse located on 69th between Fifth and Madison. The two men exit and Mel follows Boyle to the townhouse's door.

MEL

What is this place?

BOYLE

(unlocking front door)

Used to belong to this big time money launderer --- Bureau seized all the asshole's assets when he fled the country ---

INT. TOWNHOUSE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Although the place is dormant, both men are wowed by the size and grandeur of the sumptuously decorated townhouse...

BOYLE

This is our new home, the Sheik's new home ---

(off Mel's stunned glare)

We hit the majors, Mel. ABSCAM has been made a "BUREAU SPECIAL."

MEL

That supposed to mean something to me?

BOYLE

It means anything we want, we get. This op is now a top priority. Fucking Director himself is overseeing.

Boyle hands Mel an envelope. Mel pulls out a \$5,000 CHECK.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

Your monthly salary ---

Mel is stunned --- but then he just shakes his head with dismay.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

Hey, don't tell me it's not enough 'cause that's more than twice what I get paid...

MEL

The money ain't the issue.

BOYLE

Then what?

MEL

I been a con merchant for over two decades --- tonight was the closest I've ever come to gettin' clipped. First time I ever saw a guy get killed. Twelve years of marriage and never once has Estelle ever suspected that I was into anything shady --- not until I started up with you. I mean here I am working *with* the good guys and now she thinks I'm up to no good. And then ^{Max ---} (heavy beat)
Max broke things off with me ---

BOYLE

When?

MEL

Six weeks ago. Skipped town without even telling me where she was going...

BOYLE

Why didn't you say something?

MEL

'Cause fuck you. That's why. You could give a shit about the problems I got.

BOYLE

That's not true ---

MEL

So you're my new best friend, is that it, Boyle? My compadre? --- I don't even know who you are!

BOYLE

And what do you want to know? That I come from a family of drunks? That my hobbies are beating off, Tegestology and taking long walks on the fucking beach? That I got nobody and nothing except for the job?

MEL

(after an awkward beat)
What the hell is Tegestology?

BOYLE

Coasters. I collect beer coasters.

MEL

You're right, Boyle, the less I know about you the better ---

BOYLE

Will you stop breaking my balls!? This little experiment of ours has just been minted as one of the Bureau's biggest investigations, but I can't do it without you...

MEL

Bet that must drive you fuckin' crazy.

BOYLE

You have no idea.

MEL

Look, I appreciate you coming through on the case-dough, but ---

BOYLE

But what? Come on man --- what do I need to do to make things right?

Mel flashes Boyle a pregnant look.

EXT. MEL'S HOUSE - LONG ISLAND, NY - DAY

A BLACK LIMO pulls up to Mel's house. A CHAUFFEUR gets out and opens the door for Boyle who is clad in a sports coat and slacks.

As Boyle approaches the front door, it opens and Willie is the first to come out, also dressed in a sports coat and slacks.

BOYLE

(shakes hands)
I'm Jimmy.

WILLIE

Willie Weinberg.
(noticing the limo)
Wow. Is that your car?

MEL

(stepping out the door)
No, it's the sheik's limo. But Mr. Hoyle here gets to use it.

WILLIE

Cool! Never been in a sheik's limo before.

MEL

Why don't you go check it out...

Willie runs over and disappears into the limo.

MEL (CONT'D)

Glad you could make it, Jimmy.

Estelle steps out the front door looking prettier than we've ever seen her and greets Boyle with a warm smile.

BOYLE

Hello --- I'm James Hoyle ---

ESTELLE

(eagerly shaking hands)
Estelle. It's really such a pleasure to finally meet you in person ---

MEL

Yeah, Estelle was beginning to think you didn't exist.

ESTELLE

(embarrassed smile)
Stop it.

MEL

Come on, we're gonna be late ---

Mel heads to the limo and Estelle walks with Boyle, who is clearly uncomfortable with the charade.

ESTELLE

Mel's just crazy about the ponies.
Never missed opening day at Belmont since I've known him.

EXT./INT. BELMONT RACETRACK - DAY

VARIOUS ANGLES of opening day at Belmont Racetrack --- THE RINGING OF THE OPENING BELL! Horses ERUPTING from the gates --- Hooves MASHING through dirt --- fighting for position ---

INT. BELMONT ROOM - BELMONT RACETRACK - CONTINUOUS

An elegant, members only club/bar/restaurant --- with huge glass windows that overlook the finish line.

Mel and Willie stand at the window, watching the final stretch. Behind them, Estelle and Boyle sit at a table watching father and son as their horse comes in --- and they both go CRAZY ---

An ebullient Mel and Willie come back to the table.

MEL

Can my boy pick 'em or can my boy pick 'em?

WILLIE
How much did we win?

MEL
Well, he was a false favorite at 6-1,
and we bet a hundred bucks... So how
you gonna figure that out, champ?

Willie trying to figure out the math on a napkin---

WILLIE
Six hundred bucks!

MEL
You wanna collect? Or you wanna lay?

WILLIE
I roll with you, Pop.

Boyle and Estelle watch them walk towards the betting windows.

BOYLE
Mel seems like a wonderful father ---

ESTELLE
Sure, Willie's the great love affair
of his life --- has always put him
first, always made time for him, no
matter how busy he's been --- that
is, until he started doing business
with the Sheik.

BOYLE
Yes, well I'm sorry about that ---
Mel's been working very hard ---

ESTELLE
Doing what, exactly?

BOYLE
(shifting uncomfortably)
Uh --- Mel helps us find worthy
business opportunities to invest in.
He's a tremendous asset to our
organization ---
(locks eyes with Estelle)
I'm sure you'd be very proud of the
job he's doing.

INT. CASHIER'S WINDOW - BELMONT RACETRACK - MINUTES LATER

Mel's in line for the cashier, showing Willie the racing form.

MEL
These are my picks for the fifth---

WILLIE
I like Daddy Longlegs.

MEL
He's a roughy! Look at his stats ---

WILLIE

Yeah, but his name is cool.

Mel laughs when suddenly a HAND comes down on his shoulder. Mel spins around and sees DOMINIC CASELE and SONNY BLITZ.

DOM

Hey, there he is --- openin' day at Belmont --- I knew you were gonna be here --- How are ya, Mel?

MEL

Okay, Dom ---

DOM

Okay's okay. You're a tough man to get a hold of, Mel. I been reachin' out, left a few messages.

MEL

Yeah, and I ---

DOM

When I call, it's for a reason. We need to talk.

MEL

Look, Dom, I got my kid and the wife with me. It's almost post time. How bout I come down tomorrow.

DOM

No, now.
(grabbing Mel by the arm)
This won't take long. Bring the kid.

INT. PADDOCK - HORSE STAGING AREA - MINUTES LATER

An open lawn area where the horses are saddled before post. As Dom paces in front of Mel --- Mel watches anxiously as Sonny Blitz chaperone's Willie amongst the jockeys and horses.

DOM

Haven't seen you in a long time, Mel. Never call back let alone call --- stopped kickin' up.

MEL

I thought you understood. I mean I shut down London cause the heat was all over me. Last thing I wanted to do was get any of it near you. So I stayed away, been laying low.

DOM

So this thing you got going with the Arab. You call that layin' low?

MEL

No, no, Dom. You got it all wrong.

DOM

Do I? Cause I'll tell you, Mel -- few months back when I heard about you showin' up at Stella's with this fuckin' sheik, whoever -- I thought for sure you were runnin' a ringer on a new scam. I didn't know what, but somethin' ---

MEL

It's not like that ---

DOM

So you're going on record with me, this deal with the Arab is legit?

MEL

Due respect, but what does any of it gotta do with you?

DOM

I'll tell you what. I gotta call from somebody -- IN MY FUCKIN' LIFE -- I never thought I'd hear from. Never wanted to hear from. And this somebody was askin' me 'bout you, Mel.

MEL

Who?

DOM

Far as you're concerned, might as well be Satan himself! Might as well be fuckin' God Almighty! That's who and how heavy -- and He wants to know if this deal with the Arab is real.

MEL

Dom ---

DOM

Before you open your mouth I want you to listen. If you are into somethin' you shouldn't be, workin' one of your "specials". This is your one fuckin' chance to get out clean. Just tell me and that'll be that.

Glancing at his son, the gravity of the situation hits Mel hard.

MEL

No misunderstanding Dom. I mean, we're buying, not selling ---

DOM

So you're goin' on record with me?

MEL

Yeah, the Sheik is for real.

DOM

Okay, Mel. Well, then there are some friends of ours that wanna have a sit
(MORE)

DOM (CONT'D)
down with him when he comes in for
the Atlantic City party next month.

MEL
What friends?

DOM
The guy that runs the table in A.C.,
Vegas --- everywhere...

The realization of who he's referring to seizes Mel like a vice.

MEL
The Little Man?

DOM
(nodding)
Lansky's sending his heir apparent,
Arthur Zelnick ---

MEL
I don't know if Sheik will deal
directly with these guys ---

DOM
Well then you need to explain how
things work to him, Mel. If the Arab
wants to play in A.C., he's gotta
meet with Zelnick and they gotta come
to an understanding.
(WHISTLES Blitz over)
You hear what I'm saying?
(off Mel's nod)
They'll be in touch ---

Dom and Blitz leave.

WILLIE
Who were those guys, Pop?

MEL
Nothing, nobodies. But let's not tell
mom about it, okay?

Willie nods but can see Mel's shaken.

EXT. FBI HEADQUARTERS - WASHINGTON DC - DAY

Hard rain is falling over D.C. and the FBI building.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - FBI HEADQUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Boyle, Mel and Tuccio sit silently at the table, waiting... Mel
looks about as comfortable as a priest in a pussyhouse.

On the wall behind Boyle and Tuccio is a large FBI insignia
under which are the words: "FIDELITY, BRAVERY, AND INTEGRITY."

The door opens and in marches FBI Director Houseman --- all
business, no time to waste. Boyle and Tuccio stand, Mel doesn't.

HOUSEMAN
Good morning, gentlemen ---

Waving the men to sit, Houseman takes a seat next to Mel.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)

I have to be on the Hill in thirty so let's get to it, shall we?

MEL

Absolutely --- no. Fuck no.

HOUSEMAN

Excuse me?

MEL

The answer is no --- as in I am done with this operation...

HOUSEMAN

Mister Weinberg, the work you've been doing is important and has already had a profound, systemic effect on the Bureau --- This new investigative technique developed by you and Agent Boyle has revolutionized our approach to undercover work. We're now using your "sting operation" method in nine major cases --- and the results thus far have been impressive ---

MEL

(mordant)

Wow. Terrific, I feel like a dime among pennies...

HOUSEMAN

I understand your trepidation in continuing, but now is the time for us to dig in ---

MEL

Hey, you wanna dig in, I'm all for it -- so long as it ain't with me. I've already explained all this to Boyle and Tooch ---

BOYLE

ABSCAM doesn't work without you, Mel ---

TUCCIO

...and with it we have a real chance to strike a lasting blow against organized crime and political corruption.

HOUSEMAN

Surely this must mean something to you.

Mel gives Houseman a "not really" shrug.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)

What if we were to offer you a fifteen thousand dollar bonus for every case
(MORE)

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)

you make from here on out --- plus an additional one hundred thousand once the trials are done ---

MEL

There's no amount of money you can pay me to line up against an emperor like Meyer Lansky or his people --- you're talkin' suicide.

BOYLE

Mel, you've got to trust me --- the Bureau can protect you and your family ---

MEL

Yeah, I'll pass.

Houseman leans back in his chair and eyes Mel like a butcher sizing up a piece of uncut meat.

HOUSEMAN

Your plea agreement specifies five cases. You've only made four.

MEL

You're right --- and if you wanna send me to shit city, so be it --- I'll do the three years.

HOUSEMAN

Three years? Well, when all is said and done I think it's going to be considerably longer than that ---

Boyle and Tuccio flash each other a look, troubled by this turn.

MEL

Whaddya talkin' about? --- My sentence stipulation was signed off on by a Federal Judge. It's permanent.

HOUSEMAN

It's permanent, for now.

MEL

You wanna try to fuck with my deal? Fine. I'll see you in court.

HOUSEMAN

I have no intention of "fucking" with your deal", but what I am going to do is out you to every 2-0-9 on the East coast, and make sure the street knows that you've been cooperating with the Bureau on several high profile O.C. ops. Then I'm going to contact the editor of every major paper in the country --- and have them run a story about you on the front page of their business section which will describe in detail your criminal exploits and

(MORE)

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
 accomplices --- like Miss Gardner ---
 and urge anyone that's been defrauded
 by one of your scams to contact the
 Justice Department ---
 (leans forward)
 Given your talent I have no doubt the
 phones will be ringing off the hook.
 One month and we'll have enough cases
 and evidence to put you and your
 confederates away for life ---
 (hardcore)
 Although I doubt Dominic Casale will
 ever let you get to trial.

Tuccio and Boyle are stunned and appalled by Houseman's tactics.

BOYLE
 Sir, please, is this really necessary?

HOUSEMAN
 Yes it is, Agent Boyle, but you most
 definitely are not.

Mel chortles cynically and gestures to the words on the wall ---

MEL
 Fidelity, bravery, integrity, huh?
 Buncha bullshit ---

HOUSEMAN
 (almost empathetic smile)
 I know this is difficult, and I don't
 blame you for being upset --- but
 when it comes to protecting the
 foundations of our democracy ---
 (stands, straightens jacket)
 ...sometimes you need to take it in
 the ass for the team.

Houseman exits, leaving Mel on the edge of a full-on meltdown.

TUCCIO
 Mel ---

MEL
 I don't wanna hear it. Not a fuckin'
 word --

Mel staggers towards the door. Boyle jumps up and cuts Mel off.

MEL (CONT'D)
 Outta my fuckin' way Jimmy or I'll
 lay you out right here and now!

BOYLE
 Mel, you gotta believe that Joe and I
 had no idea this was coming.

MEL
 The fuck's the difference? It came.

Mel tries to get past Boyle and gets pushed back.

MEL (CONT'D)
 (desperate)
 I gotta get outta here ---

BOYLE
 Where you gonna go?

MEL
 Anywhere. Somewhere. Just away from
 you douchebags.

BOYLE
 (after a heavy beat)
 Max is at the Beverly Hills Hotel.

MEL
 What---? How do you know?

BOYLE
 I called in a few favors. (beat) Take
 the rest of the week, but you got to
 be back on Monday 'cause that's when
 the Sheik's arriving.

Mel doesn't say anything, just blows out the door.

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - EARLY MORNING

A cab arrives at the hotel. A VALET opens the door, Mel exits.

INT. FOURTH FLOOR HALLWAY - BH HOTEL - MINUTES LATER

As Mel looks for the right room, he approaches a housekeeping
 CART and deftly swipes the KEYS hanging from it. Finally finding
 the room, Mel UNLOCKS the door and WE MOVE WITH HIM as he enters.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - BH HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Mel steps into the suite's dim living room. A few shafts of
 early sunlight illuminate this disaster area strewn with the
 rubble of an all-night party. Champagne bottles, dirty dishes,
 cigarette butts, a mirror dusted with blow on the coffee table.

Looking round, Mel suddenly becomes aware of the sickening,
 gargly SNORE OF A MAN EMANATING FROM THE BEDROOM.

WE MOVE WITH HIM as he follows the snore into...

THE BEDROOM: Where Mel is stupefied and disgusted by the grisly
 sight of MAX in bed with WAYNE NEWTON. They're splayed on either
 side of the bed, crashed out cold. Newton is naked and has the
 most disgusting bitch-titted body you've ever seen in your life.

Mel nudges Newton to wake up, but gets no response. So Mel SMACKS
 him on the cheek. Guy still won't wake --- but the smack rouses
 Max, who leans up and is shocked and mortified to find Mel there.

MEL
 Hiya, pussycat.

MAX
 This isn't what it looks like.

MEL
 (bittersweet chuckle)
 It never is for us, is it Max?

MAX
 What are you doing here?

MEL
 Whaddya think? I miss you.

MAX
 You're out of your fucking mind ---

MEL
 Oh and you're not?

MAX
 I'm fine ---

MEL
 Come on, Max. There's one mark you
 can never beat --- that's the mark
 inside. I mean, look at yourself.
 You're just as fucked up without me
 as I am without you.

Mel can see Max's facade begin to break...

MEL (CONT'D)
 You were right about the Feeps ---
 about everything ---

MAX
 (bittersweet)
 Well, no matter what happens in life
 there's always some asshole who knew
 it would --- huh, Mel?

MEL
 Come back to New York with me.

MAX
 Why?

MEL
 'Cause I need you, Max. (beat) And I
 need your help.

MAX
 Help with what?

MEL
 (subtle grin)
 Gettin' back to my roots.

A beat as Mel and Max stare at each other, silently trying to
 find reconciliation in each other's eyes --- when suddenly ---
 Newton, with a SICKENING SNARL, inexplicably convulses back
 into consciousness and into an upright position --- terrified
 and confused to see Mel standing in front of him.

MEL (CONT'D)

Wayne fuckin' Newton. Man I just gotta say. You seriously have the most disgusting body I have ever seen.

WAYNE NEWTON

Who are you?

MEL

Idi Amin. Now shut the fuck up before I eat your heart.

(turning to Max)

So whaddya say, pussycat? You hooked?

MAX

(ebullient smile)

Heavy as lead.

EXT. ATLANTIC CITY AIRPORT - ATLANTIC CITY, NJ - DAY

A stately limo with diplomatic flags waits on the tarmac --- parked amid a Presidential-looking motorcade with police escort.

SUPER: "July 8, 1979 - Atlantic City"

Mel, Boyle, Errichetti and four Feds posing as the Sheik's BODYGUARDS stand by the limo as a LEAR JET lands and taxis...

ERRICHETTI

The two mil I been asking you to deposit in the Boardwalk Bank, have you cleared it with the Sheik yet?

BOYLE

We're working on it, Angie.

ERRICHETTI

You keep tellin' me that but nothin's happening. I mean what's at issue? All I'm talkin' about is just parking some money in an account.

BOYLE

Dolk was the issue but now that he's been transferred to London, things are gonna be different.

ERRICHETTI

Well thank God for that. It's not that I'm trying to be pushy --- but for me to do certain things for you ---

MEL

Don't worry, Angie --- we're gonna take care of you ---

ERRICHETTI

Good... So, uh, what --- how do I address him? Your eminence?

BOYLE

They call him Shake, we call him Sheik.

MEL
Sheik --- call him Sheik ---

ERRICHETTI
I'm gonna say my friend, Hello my
friend...

The Jet pulls up to the motorcade, kills its engines, opens its door and the stairs drop out. Boyle and Mel enter the jet.

INT. LEAR JET - CONTINUOUS

They find the FBI Agent who is playing the part of the Sheik --- **SPECIAL AGENT SAM SHADDABI**, a 30-something Arab whose proud bearing gives him a noble appeal. Shaddabi is wearing an authentic, regal-looking keffiyeh headdress and white thobe.

(For clarity, Agent Shaddabi will be referred to as "FBI SHEIK") Agent Ackerman and three other FBI Agents are also on the plane.

BOYLE
(shakes with FBI Sheik)
Sam, Jimmy Boyle. It's good to meet
you in person ---
(gestures)
This is Mel Weinberg, our 2-0-9..

The two men acknowledge each other with a nod but don't shake.

ACKERMAN
Any word on the meeting with Lansky's
guy Zelnick?

MEL
It's gonna go down sometime tonight
or tomorrow but we're still waiting
on specifics. One of their people is
supposed to reach out to us...

ACKERMAN
What about Senator Rand?

MEL
Errichetti's saying he'll be there...

BOYLE
(to FBI Sheik)
Ackerman get you all up to speed?

FBI SHEIK
(Chicago accent)
Yeah, I've been fully briefed.

MEL
Well your role is real simple. Act
stupid like you understand English
but can't speak it. Say as little as
possible and follow my lead.

FBI SHEIK
(to Boyle, offended)
Are you running this operation or is
he?

BOYLE

I am, but do like he says. Now is there anything else you'd like to go over? 'Cause once we step out that door, it's showtime.

FBI SHEIK

Yeah, I'd just like to say that I think the name and premise of your operation is fucking offensive ---

MEL

How is "ABSCAM" offensive?

FBI SHEIK

It's short for "Arab Scam" --- I mean this whole thing plays into the worst kind of stereotype ---

MEL

Hey --- stereotype wouldn't be a stereotype unless it was true.

FBI SHEIK

So how would you feel about an FBI op called JEWSCAM where Ackerman posed as a greedy, conniving Israeli?

ACKERMAN

My father was Jewish but my mother was not. WHICH MEANS I AM NOT JEWISH!

MEL

He's right --- technically speaking.

BOYLE

Will you both shut the fuck up!?
(turns to FBI Sheik)
Look, Sam, I see your point but if this was a problem, you should've told us before now ---

FBI SHEIK

You don't have to worry about me. I'll do the job --- I just wanted you to know that I'm not happy about it ---

MEL

Join the fucking club.

BOYLE

Jesus Christ! Are you guys ready to do this thing or what!??

The FBI Sheik nods, takes a breath and gets into character. Boyle can see he's nervous and gives him an encouraging smile.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

You look terrific ---

MEL
 (unconvinced)
 Just 'cause he looks the part don't
 mean he can play it.

EXT. TARMAC - ATLANTIC CITY AIRPORT - MOMENTS LATER

Errichetti excitedly watches as the FBI Sheik and his entourage of Feds posing as bodyguards approach. He greets the FBI Sheik with a retarded bow as if he were a king.

ERRICHETTI
 Sheik, my friend. It is such a superior honor and what have you. On behalf of all Americans and the great Garden State of New Jersey, I welcome you to Atlantic City, my friend.

Slipping into character, the FBI Sheik puts his hand over his heart and speaks broken English with a thick Arab accent.

FBI SHEIK
 Salam wa aleikum, my friend ---

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF ATLANTIC CITY - A LITTLE LATER

VARIOUS ANGLES of the motorcade driving into the ghetto shithole of Atlantic City. An absurd contrast between the procession's pomp and circumstance and the poverty around it --- condemned buildings. Empty lots. Littered streets. Impoverished residents.

EXT. RESORTS CASINO & HOTEL - ATLANTIC CITY - A LITTLE LATER

The hotel's entrance has been roped off like a movie premiere for the sheik's arrival. A High School MARCHING BAND plays "Hail to the Chief." Local newspaper PHOTOGRAPHERS and TV CREWS. Big-titted SHOWGIRLS dressed as glittery peacocks...etc...

At the center is a reception line with ATLANTIC CITY'S MAYOR, the PRESIDENT OF RESORTS INTERNATIONAL, other LOCAL POLITICIANS.

The motorcade stops, the Limo door's opened and out steps the Sheik, then Errichetti, who ushers him down the reception line...

Exiting the limo, Mel and Boyle take in the spectacle. Awed and bemused by the absurdity of it all, they share a quick grin.

THE FIRST GROOVY OPENING NOTES of Eddie Fisher singing the classic "I'm a Born World Shaker" can be heard...

INT. PARTY - HOTEL SUITE - RESORTS CASINO - LATER THAT NIGHT

A huge, swank penthouse with windows overlooking the boardwalk and water. The place is tricked-out and packed with a motley array of politicians, movers and shakers, hookers and the biggest players in the casino business. Everyone talking shop or rocking out to EDDIE FISHER on a small stage in the back of the room.

ANGLE ON ERRICHETTI AND MEL: Watching the action from the corner. Errichetti is clearly a little shitfaced.

MEL
 This is fantastic, Angie. The party,
 the spread --- everything...

ERRICHETTI

Mel, I'm fifty years old, seen a lotta things, dreamed a lotta things; but this is the most un-fuckin-believable thing I've ever been into in my whole life --- and it just keeps coming up ---

MEL

How bout a toast to the guy that brought us together?

ERRICHETTI

(raising a glass)
Hey --- to Tony Denato. May the poor bastard rest in peace.

A scantily clad COCKTAIL WAITRESS struts by. Errichetti PINCHES her on the ass. She angrily WHIPS around to confront Errichetti.

WAITRESS

Did you do that?

ERRICHETTI

Hey, I love you baby. I write you poems; Roses are red. Violets are blue. I like spaghetti. Let's fuck.

The waitress storms off as Mel and Errichetti LAUGH hysterically.

THE BAND SHIFTS INTO a tamped-down royal fanfare and drumroll...

EDDIE FISHER

Ladies and gentlemen... Coming in all the way from the Emirates, may I lay onto you, a great man and humanitarian --- Tonight's guest of honor, Sheik Kambir Abdul Rahman!

A spotlight swings to the FBI Sheik entering the room. Guests CLAP as he moves through the crowd, waving like a rock star.

RAPID FLASH-CUT MONTAGE OF SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS: grip and grin snaps of the FBI Sheik with: TEAMSTER BOSS, N.J. ASSEMBLYMEN, MAYOR OF UNION CITY, PRESIDENT OF CAESAR'S WORLD, PENTHOUSE'S BOB GUCCIONE. Each pic is labeled with the subjects' names.

DEN - LATER: this intimate den, brightly lit compared to the club ambience of the party, is roped off from the main room.

Errichetti, the FBI Sheik, Mel and Boyle are seated on couches, talking to BUCKY ROACH, MANAGER OF THE TROPICANA IN VEGAS.

ERRICHETTI

Buckey's been runnin the Tropicana for years so he knows whereof he speaks ---

ROACH

And I never lie to my friends. You bring me and my crew in to run your casino --- we break bread? You'll never have a problem. If you're a point holder --- you're golden...

FBI SHEIK

Point holder? Yes. Please what does it mean?

ERRICHETTI

Every casino has one hundred secret ownership points, each of which represent a percentage of the skim ---

CAMERA PANS FROM THE SHEIK TO THE WALL BEHIND MEL, ZOOMS IN...

SURVEILLANCE CLOSET - CONTINUOUS: The closet abutting the den is now a makeshift observation post. Three monitors each cover different angles: one of the main room, two of the den/meeting room. With its heavy soundproofing, the closet is a sweatbox.

Grosswald and the FBI TECHIE watching the meeting on the MONITORS. They're in t-shirts and shorts --- wearing headphones.

MEL (MONITORS)

If you're the majority point holder of a joint, your name won't appear anywhere, but you are an owner ---

ROACH (MONITORS)

That's right... And my boys and me, we got our systems down to a science. We can clip the drop seven ways from Sunday. You come to me and say you need five, six hundred thousand taken off? It'll be there. Cash. Tax free ---

GROSSWALD

(cracks an excited smile)

This is great shit ---

PARTY - LATER: In another part of the room, Errichetti introducing the FBI Sheik to Eddie Fisher.

ERRICHETTI

Sheik, this is a very famous entertainer. Sold millions of records. Had his own TV show. Mr. Eddie Fisher.

FISHER

An honor to meet you, sir ---

Mel quickly jumps in to shake Fisher's hand himself.

MEL

Hey Eddie, Mel Weinberg. I just had to shake the hand that got to play with Liz Taylor's pussy.

Everyone except for Fisher starts to LAUGH. Even the Sheik.

RAPID FLASH-CUT MONTAGE OF SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS: grip and grin snaps of FBI Sheik with: A.C. COUNCILMEN, PRESIDENT OF BALLY'S, MAYOR OF NEWARK, N.J. STATE SENATORS, PLAYBOY'S HUGH HEFNER.

DEN - LATER: Mel and Errichetti sit with the senior U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY, HARRISON RAND.

MEL (CONT'D)

--- The Sheik's really been looking forward to this sit down with you Senator Rand ---

SENATOR RAND

As have I, Mel ---

MEL

He's not gonna say much --- but he understands everything ---

ERRICHETTI

And it's important you understand what he wants to hear from you ---

SENATOR RAND

About the Shelburne deal?

SURVEILLANCE CLOSET - CONTINUOUS: Grosswald and FBI Techie intently watching the meeting on the monitors...

MEL (MONITORS)

No. Don't go into specifics about the casino. All you have to do is tell him how powerful you are ---

ERRICHETTI (MONITORS)

In no uncertain terms, Harry ---

MEL (MONITORS)

Fourth ranking Democrat in the Senate, ear of the President, Chairman of whatever committee, who you know --- mention names --- what you can do ---

ERRICHETTI (MONITORS)

Come on as strong as possible. You won't offend him, it's the Arab way ---

DEN - CONTINUOUS:

MEL

Right, without you there is no casino. Explain to him that because you gotta stake in the deal you're gonna use all your power and influence to get him everything he needs: declaratory ruling to renovate instead of build, special tax incentives ---

ERRICHETTI

Whatever he needs. You're the fuckin' man...

SENATOR RAND

I understand --- not a problem...

Boyle escorts the FBI Sheik into the den and all three men stand --- Boyle is carrying a BRIEFCASE filled with cash.

ERRICHETTI

Sheik, my friend. I'd like to introduce
you to the senior U.S. Senator from
New Jersey, Harrison Rand ---

HIGH ANGLE OVER HOTEL SUITE - LATER: Mel, Errichetti, Boyle,
the Sheik and Rand emerge from the Den --- everyone smiling.
RAND HOLDS THE CASE OF CASH. All shake hands and Rand leaves.
Errichetti walks the Sheik to another group, begins intros.

ANGLE CLOSE ON Boyle and Mel as they get a drink at the bar.

BOYLE

It shouldn't be this easy.

MEL

It isn't that it's that easy, it's
that I'm that good ---

Mel and Boyle are suddenly approached by **HOWARD CRIDEN**, fifty-
six, a swollen man with coke-bottle glasses.

CRIDEN

Good evening, I'm Howard Criden. I
believe you've been expecting me.
(off their blank looks)
I'm Mr. Zelnick's attorney.

Mel and Boyle stiffen up and shake hands with him.

MEL

Is Mr. Zelnick here?

CRIDEN

No. If you could please get the Sheik
there's a helicopter waiting for us
on the roof.

Both Mel and Boyle are shocked by this revelation.

BOYLE

Helicopter? We were never told about
this.

CRIDEN

I'm telling you now ---

BOYLE

Well I'm sorry, but there's no way
the Sheik is going to fly off for
points unknown ---

MEL

Sheik's a paranoid guy. He don't like
surprises and he don't like powerplays ---

CRIDEN

These steps were taken to ensure your
employer's safety, not imperil it.

BOYLE

And we're supposed to just take your
word for that?

CRIDEN

Not my word. Mr. Zelnick's. You have
twenty minutes before I take off.

Criden smiles, leaves. Boyle and Mel exchange an anxious look.

EXT./INT. HELICOPTER - OFF THE COAST OF ATLANTIC CITY - LATER

A helicopter flying over the ocean.

Criden, Mel, Boyle, the FBI Sheik and TWO FEDS POSING AS
BODYGUARDS sit in the copter. They gaze out at the dim outline
of a LARGE 150FT YACHT a mile off the Atlantic City coast.

A ring of bright lights illuminate a landing pad on the yacht's
stern. The men exchange a tense look as the helicopter descends.

EXT. YACHT - OFF THE COAST OF ATLANTIC CITY - CONTINUOUS

The moment the helicopter touches down and kills its engine the
landing pad lights go off. TWO DECKHANDS quickly lock down the
copter's skids --- a THIRD HAND opens the door for the FBI Sheik
and his entourage --- and ushers them toward **ARTHUR ZELNICK**.

Zelnick's causal elegance masks the cold intensity of his bottom-
line demeanor. With practiced refinement, Zelnick greets the
FBI Sheik by touching the tips of his fingers to his forehead
while bowing the head slightly. The FBI Sheik responds in kind.

ZELNICK

Shake Kambir Abdul Rahman --- Ahlan
wa-sahlan.

FBI SHEIK

Ahlan Beek.

ZELNICK

Esmee Arthur Zelnick. Motasharefon.

FBI SHEIK

Anta lateef.

Zelnick places the palm of his right hand over his chest.

ZELNICK

Kaifa haloka?

FBI SHEIK

Al hamdu lillah, bi khair. Wa ant?

ZELNICK

Ana bekhair, shokran.

The FBI Sheik is startled and a little freaked by Zelnick's
fluency. Mel and Boyle are gravely concerned.

FBI SHEIK

You speak Arabic very well Assayed
Zelnick.

Zelnick thanks the Sheik with a nod --- gently takes him by the
arm and ushers him along the starboard deck.

We MOVE WITH Criden, Boyle and Mel as they follow ---

ZELNICK

I understand that you're from the United Arab Emirates?

FBI SHEIK

Yes.

ZELNICK

Which Emirate?

FBI SHEIK

Why should you ask?

ZELNICK

I'd like to get to know you better --- especially in lieu of the fact that none of my contacts at the State Department have any record of a Shake Kambir Abdul Rahman from the UAE...

The atmosphere suddenly goes from tense to severe. Boyle and Mel flash each other an 'oh fuck' look: is the jig up?

FBI SHEIK

I'm not surprised. The American intelligence apparatus in my part of the world is pathetic at best ---

ZELNICK

Well then please enlighten me ---

MEL

The Sheik didn't come here to be interrogated ---

ZELNICK

(vicious glare at Mel)
I hardly call asking someone where they're from an interrogation ---

The FBI Sheik gives Mel a diminutive, "it's okay" hand-gesture.

FBI SHEIK

My blood, the blood of my father's runs from the Bani Bakhit tribal region of Ras al-Khaimah ---

ZELNICK

Ras al-Khaimah --- that sits in the East, yes? Along the Gulf of Oman?

The FBI Sheik stops and stares at Zelnick who stands steadfast.

FBI SHEIK

Laa. It is in the North, and sits along the Persian Gulf. But then you know this ---

ZELNICK

Forgive me Shake, I hope you understand a man in my position cannot be too careful ---

FBI SHEIK

Yes -- but for the sake of our discussion things would go much smoother if you could dispense with the, how do you say..? Bullshit ---

INT. LIVING ROOM - ZELNICK'S YACHT - A LITTLE LATER

An elegant living room with windows overlooking the water. The Sheik, Mel and Boyle sit across a coffee table from Zelnick and Criden. The table is covered with a traditional Arab feast.

In the far corner, a SHADOW MAN sits watching from the dark. Mel, FBI Sheik and Boyle are curiously aware of his presence.

ZELNICK

Shake, as I'm sure you're now aware, I help oversee the organization which manages the gaming industry. We're the ones that make sure nobody cheats or steals. We keep track of everyone's secret points. We handle the weekly skim from each casino and distribute it to the point holders. We take care of the credit, set the odds, operate the cages and the pits, run the unions, political protection --- everything. Hal tafham?

FBI SHEIK

Afham.

ZELNICK

Good --- because Atlantic City is the product of a considerable investment of time and money by the group I represent --- and we have no objection to you profiting from the fruits of our labor so long as you're willing to do it our way ---

FBI SHEIK

Please explain ---

ZELNICK

If you want to become a casino owner, and member of our group --- you must first become a U.S. citizen.

FBI SHEIK

And why must I do this?

ZELNICK

The Gas Crisis has created an enormous amount of anti-Arab sentiment --- and it's only a matter of time before our political opponents try to attack you and demonize your intentions in the United States.

CRIDEN

But, if you're a U.S. citizen, it gives us the ability to avoid any of these publicity issues.

We suddenly hear the METALLIC SNAP of a Zippo lighter being opened and ignited as the Shadow Man lights a cigarette.

BOYLE

Excuse me...

(gesturing to Shadow Man)
Who's that person?

ZELNICK

No one you need concern yourself with.
(back to Sheik)

Mister Criden will introduce you to some of our friends in Congress, who will facilitate your citizenship with a private bill providing you and your family political asylum.

CRIDEN

The process will be no different than it's been for you in Atlantic City with the local and state officials. Do the right thing with the right people, there won't be any problems.

FBI SHEIK

And in exchange for your political contacts and influence --- what is it that I must do for you?

ZELNICK

We'd like you to assume twenty one million in Teamster mortgages on various resort properties in Atlantic City, the Poconos and Miami.

FBI SHEIK

I am confused. I came here to discuss projects in Atlantic City -- not Miami or this other place you speak of.

ZELNICK

Statistics clearly show that the vast majority of gamblers reside here on the East Coast. New Jersey is merely the first phase of our plan --- we are in the process of taking the Atlantic City model and replicating it along the entire Eastern seaboard --- The Poconos, Miami, New Orleans, Savannah, The Catskills, Myrtle Beach --- We're currently running campaigns for legalized gambling referendums in six states --- acquiring key political support, locking up all the prime real estate ---

FBI SHEIK

This is all very interesting. But again, I am here to discuss opportunities in Atlantic City.

Mel can see Zelnick is put off by the Sheik's closedmindedness.

ZELNICK

Doing things our way means investing in our whole vision. Not part of it.

FBI SHEIK

Be that as it may, I would rather start with Atlantic City and see how things progress.

ZELNICK

(irritated and suspicious)
Why is it you're so fixated on Atlantic City when there's so much more money to be made elsewhere?

FBI SHEIK

Because I only invest in what is. Not what might be ---

Mel flashes the FBI Sheik a glare, trying to signal him to just play along with Zelnick --- but the FBI Sheik doesn't get it.

MEL

Money's like manure, Sheik. If you spread it around, it can do a lot of good. Make things grow. But if you pile it all up in one place, it won't do anything but smell like shit. All Mr. Zelnick here is saying is that the smart move is to spread it around --- and I couldn't agree with him more.

FBI SHEIK

Ah yes, I see. Thank you for that Mel --- once again your eloquence illuminates the path of my understanding...

ZELNICK

Shake, I know you are new to this business. But please believe me when I tell you that my organization is perhaps the most trustworthy and dependable operating in the world today. We always honor our agreements and make money for our partners --- You can be sure that this is true because if it weren't --- I'd be dead.

FBI SHEIK

(nodding)
Ana fahim ---

ZELNICK

Good. Then should you decide to move forward with us, we cannot formally
(MORE)

ZELNICK (CONT'D)
engage until your citizenship has
been secured --- but I'd like you to
pledge the twenty-one million in an
escrow account as a sign of good faith ---

FBI SHEIK
And if I don't agree to these terms?

ZELNICK
You can either be at the table, or
you can be on the menu. The choice is
yours.

WE HEAR CLAPPING AND CHEERING AS WE CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT COMMAND CENTER - TOWNHOUSE - NEXT DAY

The small group of FEDS of the ABSCAM team clap, cheer and pat Mel, Boyle, and the FBI Sheik on the back as they walk into a large basement serving as the op's off-site Command Center.

Beers are passed out as everyone celebrates the success of the Atlantic City party. A jubilant Grosswald throws his hands around both Boyle and Mel --- giving them a simultaneous bear hug.

GROSSWALD
Holy shit!!! You guys did it! I mean
you really did it!!!

Boyle and Grosswald laugh with glee. Mel is uncomfortable with all the affection being showered on him.

GROSSWALD (CONT'D)
Everyone shut up! I want to say
something ---
(room quiets down)
From the very beginning I was convinced
that this op was going to be a train
wreck. I told Ackerman it was going
to be the end of our careers --

ACKERMAN
He did --- he did!

GROSSWALD
Now here we are --- and you guys not
only bagged a senior U.S. Senator ---
you've opened up the door to Meyer
fucking Lansky, Zelnick and all the
politicians they own --- I mean this
could end up being the biggest case
in Bureau history...
(raises beer to toast)
So I just gotta say --- congratulations ---
I'm an asshole.

Everyone joins in TOASTING and CHEERING --- but the good vibes are quickly extinguished when Tuccio STORMS into the room and SLAMS THE DOOR, glaring at Mel like he wants to eat him.

MEL
The fuck's with you?

BOYLE

What's going on, Joe?

Tuccio hands Boyle a HIGHLIGHTED transcript.

TUCCIO

It's from last night. Mel's little pep talk with the Senator. Read the highlights.

As Boyle reads, his face contorts into a mix of rage and anxiety.

BOYLE

Jesus fucking Christ!

(looks up at Mel, furious)

How many times have we been over the rules of entrapment?! Chapter and verse --- how many times?! And then you go and do this?!

(reading from transcript)

"Explain to him that because you gotta stake in the deal you're gonna use all your power and influence to get him everything he needs"!!??

Boyle angrily HURLS the transcript at Mel.

MEL

What?! I was just trying to make sure you guys got what you needed.

TUCCIO

(picking up transcript)

You were coaching him, putting words into his mouth ---

MEL

I didn't force the Senator to take the money or say what he said!

BOYLE

What's the potential blowback of this?

TUCCIO

There's nothing potential about it. It's all actual. Mel's pep talk not only undermines the case against Rand, it cripples virtually every case connected to this operation because every single defense attorney will use this transcript as evidence that Mel did the same with their clients.

BOYLE

(hard at Mel)

You're gonna get another meeting with Rand so we can get a clean, unsolicited admission ---

MEL

How the fuck am I supposed to get another meeting when the guy already took?

BOYLE

You fucked this up. Figure it out.

TUCCIO

Yeah that's fine Jimmy --- but first we need to figure out Houseman --- he wants the transcripts.

BOYLE

(gestures to transcript)
The Director sees this?! --- and that's it! We're over.

TUCCIO

(after a long, hard beat)
Alright, look, Houseman didn't ask for the warm-up with Rand, he wants the transcript from the actual game ---
(hard look at Boyle)
So let's give it to him.

ACKERMAN

Wait a minute. Are you suggesting we bury Mel's pep talk?

BOYLE

No. We're suggesting that we show it to Houseman after we get the clean admission from the Senator.

A heavy beat. Ackerman stands there with everyone in the room staring at him waiting for him to protest --- but he doesn't.

TUCCIO

(looking at everyone)
If anyone else here has a problem, speak now or forever hold your shit.

No one says anything.

EXT. LEXINGTON AVE. - MIDTOWN MANHATTAN - EARLY EVENING

Mel cuts across traffic carrying a BAKERY BOX from Moishe's. He enters a low-rent, run-down office building.

INT. SEVENTH FLOOR - LEX AVE. OFFICE BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Mel exits the elevator and we MOVE WITH HIM as he walks down the hall to a nondescript office door and enters.

INT. OFFICE - SEVENTH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Mel enters a small, cluttered temporary office. Reclining behind a desk, Max is on the phone, but gives Mel a huge smile.

Mel catches a few glimpses of the walls, which are covered with an array of info --- he approaches Max, puts a bakery box in front of her and gives her a quick but sensuous kiss.

MAX (INTO PHONE)

Yeah, Teddy, do what you have to do, but just make sure the trucks are there on time ---

Max hangs up, rises to embrace and kiss Mel again.

MAX (CONT'D)

Thanks for the rugelach --- but you really shouldn't be here.

MEL

I couldn't help myself.

MAX

(after a smile)
How's everything going?

MEL

So far so good. How about you?

MAX

It'd be going a lot better if I had a hard date.

MEL

I'm workin' on it, pussycat --- but the mob has become priority one --- and it's getting in the way ---

MAX

What do you mean?

MEL

The Sheik's moving forward with Zelnick's offer so that he'll start setting meetings with his politicians ---

MAX

And the FBI's gonna put up the twenty one mil that he's asking for?

TUCCIO

No, we're gonna stall for as long as we can --- and see how much shit we can get on them before they call our bluff.

Max gives Mel a concerned once over --- he looks tired and worn.

MAX

You need to take better care of yourself. You look really strung out ---

MEL

You know how many plates I'm spinning right now? I let any of them drop and we're fucked to forevermore ---

MAX

Why don't you let me take you back to the hotel and pamper you for the night ---

MEL

(groans longingly)
Christ -- wish I could -- but Willie's pitching a big game tonight --- promised I'd be there.

(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)
 (off her disappointment)
 You're not pissed, are you?

MAX
 No, of course not. I love how you
 love your son.

MEL
 Oh yeah?

MAX
 It's one of the things I've always
 adored most about you.

Touched, Mel smiles and pulls her in close for a kiss.

MEL
 You're a knockout you know that?

MAX
 When I'm with you I do.

They kiss.

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - MANHATTAN - DAY

Late afternoon sunlight washing over the elegant townhouse.

BOYLE V.O.
 Uh, you ready --- are we taping?

ACKERMAN (OVER WALKIE-TALKIE)
 Yeah, wait, okay --- go ahead Jimmy...

INT. STUDY - TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Boyle sits at a desk with ten packets of cash. Looking directly into a hidden camera, Boyle speaks stiffly, self-consciously.

BOYLE
 This is Special Agent James Boyle.
 Federal Bureau of Investigation. The
 date is August 19th, 1979. Time, 5:16PM.
 Location, a townhouse in New York
 City. In a short while, I am expecting
 a meeting with attorney Howard Criden
 and U.S. Congressman, "Ozzie" Myers.
 Also participating in this meeting
 will be Mel Weinberg. I have in front
 of me fifty thousand dollars in five
 packets of one hundred dollar bills.
 (puts cash in desk drawer)
 I am now placing the money in this
 drawer where it will remain until it
 is given to Representative Meyers.

ACKERMAN (OVER WALKIE-TALKIE)
 Okay --- we got it ---

MEL (O.S.)
 You sound like the spawn of
 Frankenstein and fuckin' Howard Cosell.
 Loosen up, will ya?

We hear a big brassy, bombastic orchestra begin to play Franz Von Suppe's "Bellman March" --- as the...

THE BULLSHIT MONTAGE BEGINS: Music playing over montage.

CLOSE ON TYPEWRITER: The TABLE OF CONTENTS of a top-secret FBI memo being typed out. The title: "OPERATION ABSCAM: SPECIAL REPORT TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION."

SURVEILLANCE VIDEO FROM TOWNHOUSE STUDY: Timecode: "August 19, 1979." Present in the video are Boyle, Weinberg, Criden and **U.S. CONGRESSMAN MICHAEL "OZZIE" MYERS.**

MEYERS

Lemme tell you what you're getting for what you're giving --- I run the whole bloc of Congressman from Philly and will make sure they all back an asylum bill for the Sheik. With me in his corner, his chances are a 100% ---

BOYLE

I'm glad to hear that Congressman, because this is a lot of money ---

Boyle hands Meyers the fifty thousand dollars and an envelope. Myers tries to stuff the cash into the envelope. It won't fit.

MYERS

I'm gonna need a bigger envelope.

CLOSE ON TYPEWRITER: The table of contents of the top-secret memo continues to be typed out. We see a list of names --- U.S. CONGRESSMAN MICHAEL "OZZIE" MEYERS, 1st District, (D-PA.) --- U.S. CONGRESSMAN RAYMOND LEDERER, 3rd District (D-PA.) ---

SURVEILLANCE VIDEO FROM TOWNHOUSE: Timecode: September 7, 1979. Criden introducing **CONGRESSMAN RICHARD KELLY** to Boyle and Mel.

CRIDEN (ON MONITOR)

This is Richard Kelly. Representative from the 5th District in Florida ---

CLOSE ON TYPEWRITER: The name currently being typed out --- U.S. CONGRESSMAN JOHN WILSON JENRETTE, JR., 6th District (D-S.C.)

INT. BASEMENT COMMAND CENTER - TOWNHOUSE - DAY: Tuccio, Ackerman and Grosswald are crowded around the TV MONITORS watching the meeting between Boyle, Mel, Criden and **U.S. CONGRESSMAN JOHN W. JENRETTE JR.** Timecode: "November 11, 1979."

CONGRESSMAN JENRETTE

...If you invest in my district it will give me the cover I need with my people --- explains why I'm helping Sheik Kaboom or Sheik Kabaam ---

BOYLE

So you'd rather us commit to invest in your district than take the cash?

CONGRESSMAN JENRETTE

You kidding? I got larceny in my blood.

Tuccio and the rest are shocked and disgusted as they watch Jenrette stuff the cash packets in his jacket and pant pockets.

SURVEILLANCE VIDEO FROM TOWNHOUSE: Timecode: November 20th, 1979. Criden introducing **U.S. CONGRESSMAN FRANK THOMPSON** to Boyle and Mel.

CLOSE ON TYPEWRITER: The list of names on the memo's table of contents continues to grow. The name currently being typed is: U.S. CONGRESSMAN FRANK THOMPSON, 4th district, (D-N.J.) ---

INT - HOTEL SUITE - JFK AIRPORT HILTON - DAY: Boyle, Mel and Criden sit in the living room of the suite.

CRIDEN

It's already the end of November ---
we've been following through on our
end --- and Zelnick wants a hard date
for when he can expect the money from
the Sheik ---

Mel doesn't answer. He looks to Boyle.

BOYLE

The end of December --- the latest.

CRIDEN

Why don't we just say, December 29th.

Boyle nods to Criden, and Mel's face registers this hard date. There's a knock at the door. Mel answers it and ushers **CONGRESSMAN JOHN MURPHY** inside.

As Mel and the Congressman shake hands in the background, we see Criden take out a list of typed names and hand it to Boyle.

CRIDEN (CONT'D)

Here's what I'm trying to line up
over the next month.

Pocketing the list, Boyle and Criden rise to greet Murphy.

CRIDEN (CONT'D)

James, this is Congressman John Murphy
of the 17th ---

INT. BASEMENT COMMAND CENTER - TOWNHOUSE - DAY:

Boyle reads Criden's list to Tuccio, Ackerman and Grosswald.

We can see Mel in the background, talking on the phone.

BOYLE

John Murtha, Co-chair of the House
Ethics Committee. Pete Rodino, Chairman
of the House Judiciary Committee.
Senator Jacob Javits, House Majority
Leader ---
(a heavy look to Tuccio)
Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neil ---

TUCCIO

Tip O'Neil?!
(takes list and reads)
Get the fuck out!

BOYLE
 (wheels turning)
 Florida, New York, Pennsylvania,
 Georgia, Massachusetts --- all the
 politicians we've met with --- everyone
 on this list --- they all come from
 the states where Zelnick and the mob
 are trying to legalize gambling ---

GROSSWALD
 This thing just keeps on getting deeper
 and deeper.

Mel hangs up the phone and approaches the men...

TUCCIO
 So what did Angie say?

MEL
 He's just having trouble understanding
 why we need another meeting with Rand.

TUCCIO
 Well then give him some of your
 bullshit and make him understand!

MEL
 Hey, I'm dancin' as fast I can
 motherfucker --- but Errichetti said
 he won't do shit unless we put that
 two mil in his friend's bank.

BOYLE
 All right, I'll get Houseman to sign
 off on the money.

CLOSE ON TYPEWRITER: The TABLE OF CONTENTS of the Memo being
 completed --- The Memo being SEALED into a TOP-SECRET FOLDER ---

END MUSIC AND BULLSHIT MONTAGE.

EXT. FBI HEADQUARTERS - WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

A light snow is falling over D.C.

INT. DIRECTOR HOUSEMAN'S OFFICE - FBI HQ - CONTINUOUS

A strung out Houseman sits across from U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL
 BENJAMIN GARRESH. Reading from the ABSCAM SPECIAL REPORT Garresh
 looks profoundly disturbed as he reviews the list of new targets.

A.G. GARRESH
 Jesus Christ.

Garresh closes the report. Houseman pulls a bottle of Scotch
 from his desk, pours two glasses. They sip contemplatively.

HOUSEMAN
 What do you think?

A.G. GARRESH
 Are you asking me as the Attorney
 General or your friend?

HOUSEMAN

Both. We're in this together.

A.G. GARRESH

Putting aside this list of potential targets, we already have one U.S. Senator and seven U.S. Congressmen in the bag. Almost all of whom are Democrats --- and we're rolling into an election year ---

HOUSEMAN

I know. I know.

(takes another sip)

If I wrap the operation up before the primaries, and move forward with the arrests and indictments on the seven cases we've made, best case scenario, you and I will be party pariahs. The Dems will hold us responsible for sabotaging the Congressional races --- the White House --- everything.

A.G. GARRESH

And if we wait until after the election to move, the Republicans will paint us as partisan conspirators --- and claim that we deliberately delayed breaking the investigation to avoid it swaying the vote.

The men exchange a pointed glare, knowing that they're fucked if they do, fucked if they don't.

HOUSEMAN

Before the election, after --- it doesn't really matter --- either way, ABSCAM is going to have a heavy impact on this country. And the question I'm struggling with is whether that impact is ultimately going to prove more negative than positive.

(off Garresh's look)

The Kennedy assassinations, Vietnam, Nixon and Watergate, Carter and the recession ---

Houseman gazes out at the illuminated Capitol Building.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)

Do we really want to undermine what little faith the American people have left in their government?

EXT. BOARDWALK - ATLANTIC CITY - MORNING

SUPER: "December 27, 1979 - Atlantic City"

An epic shot of the morning sun rising over the ramshackle majesty of the Atlantic City boardwalk.

EXT./INT. LIMO - STREET - ATLANTIC CITY - CONTINUOUS

Grosswald's behind the wheel --- looking at the addresses on buildings as he passes them. Boyle and Mel are in the back seat.

MEL

Two days! Zelnick's deadline is only two fucking days away! You gotta bring down the curtain on this show!

BOYLE

Which is exactly what we're trying to do here, Mel ---

GROSSWALD

The bank's address --- ?

MEL

(looks at a piece of paper)
Fifty-six twenty-four --- supposed to be on a corner.

EXT. BOARDWALK BANK - ATLANTIC CITY - A LITTLE LATER

On the corner of St. James and Broadway, the Boardwalk Bank is your average local bank, across the street from which is a shitty little park with an ocean view. The limo pulls up, Mel and Boyle get out. Boyle has a large suitcase handcuffed to his wrist...

BOYLE

As soon as we make this deposit, call Erichetti and full court press the fucker for an ASAP meeting with Rand ---

MEL

ASAP --- you're giving me only 24 hours to make the meeting happen ---

BOYLE

The minute we get his clean admission, WE ARE DONE. It's over. Tooch will move on the indictments the next day.

MEL

He better cause I vouched for you guys. If we don't end this before the 29th, I'm a dead man on the street.

BOYLE

Mel, mark my words: I'm not going to let anything happen to you.

MEL

Mark 'em yourself --- 'cause the only thing that'll protect me is if arrests are made and indictments handed down.

They walk in.

INT. BOARDWALK BANK - ATLANTIC CITY - CONTINUOUS

Phones are ringing. Customers lined up at the teller windows. Your typical bank. Boyle looks over to an ACCOUNT MANAGER at his desk.

BOYLE
So who are we meeting with?

MEL
Marvin Donaldson, the bank's President.

BOYLE
And he knows we're coming?

MEL
Yeah, yeah, Angie set it all up ---

BOYLE
Marvin Donaldson's office?

The Account Manager points to a back corner office and we MOVE WITH MEL AND BOYLE as they head over and arrive at the desk of DONALDSON'S SECRETARY.

BOYLE (CONT'D)
Please tell Mr. Donaldson that James Hoyle and Mel Weinberg from Abdul Enterprises are here to see him.

SECRETARY
Of course. Just one moment.

She disappears into the office. The Secretary returns, followed by **MARVIN DONALDSON**: a forty-something man who greets them with a hearty smile and handshake.

DONALDSON
Gentlemen, Marvin Donaldson. A pleasure to meet you both. Please come in.

INT. DONALDSON'S OFFICE - BOARDWALK BANK - A LITTLE LATER

Donaldson's secretary sits at a conference table, where the last packet of hundred dollar bills runs through a BILL COUNTING MACHINE, next to which is two million in neatly stacked cash.

At his desk Donaldson walks Boyle through a series of SIGNATURES.

DONALDSON
James, if I could just have three more signatures --- right here, here, and here --- and date the last one ---

Boyle signs the last documents. The Secretary nods at Donaldson, affirming that all the money is there.

DONALDSON (CONT'D)
Please take it to the vault.

Secretary exits with the cash as Donaldson gathers the papers, signs off on them and hands copies to Boyle.

BOYLE
So that's it?

DONALDSON
That's it. I'd like to thank you both, and the Sheik, for doing business
(MORE)

DONALDSON (CONT'D)
 with us here at Boardwalk Bank. Please
 accept this little gift as a token of
 our appreciation ---

Donaldson hands Boyle a box which he then opens and sees a cheap,
 gold-plated PEN and a MECHANICAL PENCIL with the bank's name
 engraved on the side of them. Mel LAUGHS.

MEL
 We just deposited two mil in cash and
 this is what we get?

BOYLE
 (gives pen back to Donaldson)
 I'd rather have the toaster.

EXT. BOARDWALK BANK - ATLANTIC CITY - MINUTE LATER

Exiting the bank, they head for the limo at the end of the block.

BOYLE
 So when are you going to tell Estelle?

MEL
 I dunno. I gotta find the right moment.

BOYLE
 Along with the bad, you've done some
 good, Mel. And you can be proud of
 that.

MEL
 Proud of what? Whaddya think it is
 we've done, Boyle?

BOYLE
 We've rooted out organized crime and
 political corruption at the highest
 levels ---

MEL
 We've been shoveling smoke ---
 nothing's gonna change. Not really.

BOYLE
 How can you say that?

MEL
 Not believing in bullshit is like not
 believing in gravity --- it's part of
 who we are in this country --- and
 it'll always be there --- 'cause
 Americans, they don't want the bad
 truth. They want the good lie.

Boyle gives Mel an incredulous head-shake and affectionate smile.

BOYLE
 Why'd you become a criminal Mel? I
 mean you and I both know you coulda
 made it just as big as a legit
 (MORE)

BOYLE (CONT'D)

businessman as you did as a con man ---
you coulda had it all. Everything.
Legally. Why'd you feel like you had
to go and steal your success?

Mel eyes Boyle warily, trying to read his intent.

MEL

My father, Nathan, for years he had a
successful glass business in the Bronx ---
until the day Lucky Barretti decided
to start a local glaziers union and
then everything just went to shit.
You see, Nate refused to fall in line
'cause he knew Barretti was gonna take
a piece of every dollar he clocked ---
making it so the only way he could
earn for himself was to cheat his
customers --- which is something an
honest man like Nathan Weinberg would
never do. And so Barretti and his boys
tuned my pop up, wrecked his shop,
tried to knock him outta the box...

Mel's attention suddenly shifts to a VENDOR across the street
as he barks out, "Hot chestnuts! Get your hot chestnuts here!"

MEL (CONT'D)

You smell that? God I love that smell.

Mel crosses the street to the Vendor. Boyle follows.

MEL (CONT'D)

Gimme two bags.

The Vendor scoops up two bags of nuts for Mel, who pays him.
Handing Boyle one of the bags, Mel walks over to a bench with a
view of The Atlantic and sits down. Boyle sits next to him.

MEL (CONT'D)

I remember my twelfth birthday. My
pop broke down and started crying
'cause he promised me a new bike, but
with his business in the shitter there
was just no way ---

(shells a nut, eats it)

It was terrifying for me to see my
father like that --- but more than
the fear there was this anger. I mean,
here he was on the verge of losing
his livelihood, security for his
family, the respect of his son ---
and for what? Integrity ain't gonna
get you what you want outta this world.
So I said, "fuck it."

(shells nut, eats it)

That night I snuck out with my
slingshot, box of bolts -- and broke
every fucking window in the
neighborhood. I mean I broke so many
fucking windows they had to import

(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)
 glass in from Jersey to replace 'em
 all. And I kept on breaking windows ---
 until business got better ---

BOYLE
 And you got your bike.

MEL
 One way or the other, Jimmy, everyone
 steals their success.

EXT. THE YALE CLUB - MANHATTAN - MORNING

Snow falls lightly over the venerable Yale Club in New York City. Tuccio and Boyle walk into the building...

SUPER: "December 28, 1979"

INT. LIBRARY - YALE CLUB - MANHATTAN - MOMENTS LATER

We FOLLOW Tuccio and Boyle into a large, handsome library --- small groups of men quietly conversing throughout. Stopping to look around, they see FBI Director Houseman in the corner of the room seated in front of a crackling fire. Someone is sitting in the chair opposite the Director, but they can't see who.

Houseman waves the men over and WE MOVE WITH THEM as they approach. Both Boyle and Tuccio are clearly nervous.

HOUSEMAN
 Gentlemen... I appreciate you coming
 on such short notice ---

BOYLE
 Yes, sir, of course. Um, what are you
 doing here in New York?

Houseman pulls out a transcript and holds it out to them.

HOUSEMAN
 Mr. Weinberg's pep-talk with Senator
 Rand ----

This revelation drops on Boyle and Tuccio like a fucking bomb.

HOUSEMAN (CONT'D)
 I know you had your reasons for
 withholding this from me --- but now
 that I've been made aware, I really
 have no choice but to deal with it.

TUCCIO
 How'd you get it?

ACKERMAN (O.S.)
 I gave it to him.

We PAN WITH TUCCIO AND BOYLE as they whip around and are stunned to see that the person seated across from Houseman is Ackerman.

BOYLE
 I can't believe you did this to us.

ACKERMAN

Sorry, Jimmy, but I was simply responding to the unfortunate circumstances created by an out of control informant, an over-ambitious U.S. attorney and an inexperienced supervising agent.

Ackerman's self-righteous tone causes Boyle to snap --- he begins to take an aggressive step towards Ackerman when Tuccio subtly but forcefully grabs Boyle by the arm and squares off with him.

TUCCIO

(quietly to Boyle)
Don't. Not here. Not now. Just go take a walk and cool off.

Boyle angrily jerks free from Tuccio's grip and whips around to Houseman and threateningly points his finger ---

BOYLE

Sir, you can't ---

HOUSEMAN

(cutting Boyle off)
Agent Boyle, I suggest that you put down that finger and listen to your colleague's advice before you make matters any worse.

Overwhelmed by emotion, Boyle turns and storms out.

EXT. TOWNHOUSE - MANHATTAN - LATER THAT MORNING

INT. LIVING ROOM - TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mel, Grosswald and TWO TECH AGENTS sit around the living room watching TV. On the news a segment about the run-up to the Presidential election dovetails into one about Carter attending a New Years Eve fund raiser in New York.

Boyle suddenly enters the room, looking fucked up. He glares at Mel, who instantly knows something's wrong.

INT. STUDY - TOWNHOUSE - MINUTES LATER

MEL

So that's it? That prick Houseman doesn't even care about getting a clean admission from the Senator?

BOYLE

You're not hearing me, Mel. Houseman's pulling the plug on the whole thing -- Errichetti, the Congressmen, he's dumping it all --- and positioning us to take the fall.

Mel rubs his head and paces, trying to get a grip on it all.

MEL

And this is all 'cause of my pep-talk with Rand?

BOYLE

It's not just that. Everything about this operation scares Houseman ---

MEL

Oh, but he's ain't scared about the fact that U.S. Congressmen and Senators can be so easily bought off?! He's not shitting his pants over how many politicians Zelnick and Lansky might have in their pocket and why?

BOYLE

He's playing politics, Mel. It's an election year.

MEL

Jimmy, without those arrests and indictments I'm naked on the street ---

BOYLE

I know --- and I'm going to figure something out ---

MEL

Bullshit --- You're gonna be having enough troubles covering your own ass to be worrying about mine ---

BOYLE

You really think I'd abandon you?

MEL

Look, as far as Houseman's concerned, I'm a fucking Dixie Cup. A throwaway. What other choice do you got?

BOYLE

I could pick up a whistle and start to blow --- to the Times, the Post ---

MEL

You do that and you're done at the Bureau. Houseman and the rest, they'll crucify you ---

BOYLE

So let them try ---

MEL

C'mon on, Jimmy --- you of all people know, if there's one thing the Bureau's good at, I mean really good at, it's character assassination ---

Moving to a chair in front of the big desk that dominates the study, Boyle grabs the top of the chair, leans down as if overwhelmed with nausea.

MEL (CONT'D)

It'd be like running into machine gun fire hoping you don't catch a bullet.

Boyle's GRIP TIGHTENS ON THE WOOD. And in an EXPLOSION OF RAGE AND FRUSTRATION, he begins SMASHING THE CHAIR against the desk.

Mel is mesmerized by the sight of Boyle wielding the chair like a battlehammer --- using all of his strength to try to DESTROY the desk, but the only thing he ends up destroying is the chair.

EXT. MEL'S STREET - LONG ISLAND - DAY

Mel pulls into his driveway, exits his car holding a briefcase.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MEL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Willie on the floor playing video games --- Mel comes in.

MEL

How you doing buddy?

INT. BEDROOM - MEL'S HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Estelle's on the bed which is covered with sweepstakes entry forms, that she is busy filling out --- she's clearly in one of her manic states. Mel walks in.

MEL

What's this?

ESTELLE

Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes entry forms --

MEL

Estelle, they only let you enter them sweepstakes once.

ESTELLE

Oh eat my fuck, Mel --- least I'm trying to bring some cash into this household. And you, whaddya doin'? Whaddya doin'? You don't even make sense ---

MEL

Estelle, please ---

ESTELLE

No --- I'm over your pleases...

MEL

What's that supposed mean?

ESTELLE

It means maybe I should take Willie to my sister's in Boca for a few weeks or more --- at least Ruth and her husband know how to live nice.

MEL

Hey, you wanna go, great. But Willie's in school, you can't just take him out like that ---

ESTELLE

I'm his mother, I can do whatever I want ---

Mel's anxiety redlines as he struggles to restrain himself ---

MEL

Look, Estelle, I'm in and out right now, but I'll be back in a few hours --- why don't we go out for a nice dinner tonight, talk things through.

Estelle can see the tension in Mel's face.

ESTELLE

I'll see if Inez can stay late.

INT. STUDY - MEL'S HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Mel walks into his study with an empty BANKER'S BOX. He slides his filing cabinet aside to reveal a WALL SAFE. He spins in the code, opens it --- and starts pulling out Xeroxed copies of official FBI/D.O.J. documents and transcripts --- and audiotapes and videotapes that are labeled with the dates and names of the politicians Mel and Boyle met with.

Finally he pulls out a copy of "OPERATION ABSCAM: SPECIAL REPORT TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION" and puts it on top of the other materials.

Mel sits at his typewriter and starts typing up a letter addressed to **LESLIE MAITLAND, NEW YORK TIMES.**

EXT. MEL'S HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Mel comes out carrying the ABSCAM BANKER'S BOX. Locking the box in the trunk of his car, Mel's about to get in when --- A Deville pulls up to his driveway. Sonny Blitz exits and smiles viciously.

SONNY

Well if it ain't the Golden Hebe...

Mel sees Dominic Casele emerge from the car with two Bonebreakers.

MEL

Hey --- Dom --- Whaddy doing here?

DOM

What I'm told.

EXT. MEL'S STREET - CONTINUOUS

FROM DOWN THE STREET we see Mel get into the back seat of the Deville, Bonebreakers on either side of him. The car peels away from the curb and disappears around a corner.

EXT. STREET - OUTSKIRTS OF ATLANTIC CITY - LATE AFTERNOON

HIGH ANGLE OVER a darkening street lined with industrial buildings and warehouses. Behind the street, The Jersey Turnpike --- we can see billboards advertising Atlantic City.

The Deville appears, turns into the lot of the "Allied Amusements" warehouse and HONKS.

INT. CADILLAC DEVILLE - CONTINUOUS

Stuffed in the back seat between the two Bonebreakers, we can see the fear in Mel's eyes. Through the windshield, Mel sees FIVE GOONS emerge from the warehouse. Blitz gets out, confers with the lead goon and nods to the Bonebreaker on Mel's left who then exits the car.

Mel looks to Dom, but his silent appeal is ignored, so he exits.

EXT. PARKING LOT - ALLIED AMUSEMENTS - CONTINUOUS

Blitz grins as the Goons escort Mel towards the warehouse.

INT. ALLIED AMUSEMENTS - SECONDS LATER

MOVING with Mel as the Goons manhandle him through the dark warehouse filled with slot machines and arcade games --- down a flight of stairs --- through a door and into...

INT. RUMPUS ROOM - ALLIED AMUSEMENTS - CONTINUOUS

A formica-paneled rumpus room. Mel's ushered to a table, where a little switchblade of a man, **NICKY SCARFO** sits reading the Wall Street Journal, marking his stocks with a mechanical pencil.

On the table: a plate of cheese, a bottle of Barolo, glasses.

SCARFO

You know who I am?

MEL

Nicky Scarfo.

SCARFO

And what do I do for a living?

MEL

You paint houses...

Scarfo nods. Gesturing him to take a seat, Scarfo pours a glass of wine and slides it towards Mel who declines.

SCARFO

Well then try some of this Belicino ---

MEL

How about you just tell me what I'm doing here, Scarfo?

SCARFO

Come on Mel, I insist. Try the goat cheese. It's world famous...

(slides plate towards Mel)

Comes from my family's farm in Sicily's Belice Valley...

Feigning disgust, Mel slides the plate back.

SCARFO (CONT'D)

What's the problem?

MEL

I know a guy, a fuckin' cheesemonger --- he told me all about the goat cheese from that part of Sicily. He says he won't touch it. Says it's tainted...

SCARFO

Fuck do you mean it's tainted?

MEL

Tainted with that, uh, that animal disease, you know --- Anthrax...

SCARFO

What!?

MEL

Yeah. The cheesemonger says they got serious anthrax problems in that part of Sicily, like an epidemic, 'cause all the farmers there --- after they assfuck their goats they all assfuck each other. It's like a vicious circle.

Scarfo flashes a lethal grin and eats a piece of cheese.

SCARFO

You like to play games Mel? Friend of mine down in Florida -- you know the guy you're into some business with -- he calls me the other day, says that you like to play games.

This revelation hits Mel like a fucking sledgehammer --- and the fear that was contained begins to seep out.

MEL

Bullshit --- why would the guy in Florida say that to you?

SCARFO

'Cause he knows that I'm an avid gamesman myself and he thought that I'd enjoy playing with you ---

And like a COBRA STRIKING --- Scarfo PINS Mel's left arm to the table and PILEDRIVES his metal pencil through Mel's WRIST like an icepick. Mel screams in agony as blood SPURTS from the wound. Scarfo's Goons hold Mel down, keeping his arm pinned.

MEL

WHADDYA DOING?!

SCARFO

Whaddya mean? We're playing the game. The game of truth.

MEL

You don't need to tune me up. Whatever you want --- we can talk ---

ZELNICK (O.S.)

We're through talking, Mel.

Zelnick steps from the shadows into the light.

ZELNICK (CONT'D)
The Shake never put up the money ---

MEL
There was nothing I could do ----

Mel SCREAMS as Scarfo GRINDS the pencil into the wound.

MEL (CONT'D)
Whaddya want?!

ZELNICK
The truth ---

MEL
The truth? (Beat) The truth...
(calm, meditative)
The truth is bullshit.

Scarfo's SAVAGE SKULL PUNCH sends Mel hurling to the floor.

SCARFO
The truth's bullshit?
(STOMPS Mel in the guts)
You're bullshit!

ZELNICK
Commitments were made based on our
deal with the Shake. Financial
commitments --- that I'm now on the
hook for.

Scarfo pulls a GUN, puts the muzzle to Mel's KNEE ---

SCARFO
What kind of game is the Sheik playing,
Mel? Why didn't he get the money up?

MEL
Because there is no sheik ---

Without missing a beat, Scarfo PULLS THE TRIGGER --- AND BOOOOM ---
BLOWS MEL'S LEFT KNEE TO SHIT -- Mel SHRIEKS -- the mind-numbing
agony overloads his circuits and he begins to go into shock.

ZELNICK
I don't want him tapping out.

Two Goons peel Mel off the floor, sit him back in the chair and
hold him up. The third Goon waves smelling salts under Mel's
nose. Mel takes one whiff and RECOILS back into consciousness.

SCARFO
It's gonna be like this all fucking
night, Mel -- piece by piece. Until
you give Mr. Zelnick a straight answer.

Scarfo puts the muzzle of his gun to Mel's right kneecap.

ZELNICK
The truth, Mel.

Mel HYPERVENTILATING his way through the pain...

MEL

The Sheik, everyone surrounding him ---
they're all Feebs.

SCARFO

(pulls gun hammer back)
Keep fucking with us ---

MEL

I swear on the soul of my son, the
whole thing's an FBI sting operation.

ZELNICK

I don't believe it. No way the Feds
could've pulled something like this
off.

MEL

No, not unless they had someone show
them how ---

SCARFO

(puts gun to Mel's forehead)
You crazy rat motherfucker.

ZELNICK

You should've walked away when Dom
gave you the chance.

MEL

You're right ---
(tears welling up)
But the Feds have got nothing on you,
Mr. Zelnick --- all they've got is
Criden and the politicians --- and
they aren't even gonna move against
them ---

SCARFO

You're full of shit, Weinberg. That
don't even make any sense.

MEL

It's politics. Sense don't enter into
the equation. But if you whack me,
you're gonna piss off at least a couple
Feebs that are best left unfucked with ---
(keels forward to puke)
Why make trouble for yourself where
there is none?

ZELNICK

How do I know you're telling us the
truth?

MEL

(cackles)
That's all I got left ---

Zelnick examines Mel's face.

ZELNICK

Know what, Mel? I believe you.

Mel starts to LAUGH deliriously. Feverish with pain, he suddenly seizes up and grabs his LEFT CHEST as if he were just stabbed there with an ice pick --- and then COLLAPSES TO THE FLOOR --- overwhelmed by the onset of a massive HEART ATTACK.

GOON

Looks like he's having a heart attack.

SCARFO

You gotta be shittin me.

MEL'S POV: Looking at Zelnick's shoes...

SCARFO (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Whaddya wanna do?

ZELNICK (O.S.)

Take care of him.

Darkness overtakes Mel's vision as we...

FADE TO BLACK:

CLOSE ON BLACK TELEVISION SCREEN:

The TV is ON. A stupid 70's ad plays before the channel switches to the CBS Evening News. DAN RATHER BREAKS THE ABSCAM STORY --- CAMERA SLOWLY PULLS BACK TO REVEAL:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - ATLANTIC CITY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Boyle, Estelle and Willie sit around watching TV. Boyle's jacket is off, his FBI BADGE clipped to his belt.

A DOCTOR suddenly appears. Everyone gets up.

DOCTOR

Agent Boyle --- He'd like to speak with you first.

Boyle follows Doctor to an ICU ROOM being guarded by two COPS.

INT. ICU ROOM - ATLANTIC CITY HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

Boyle finds Mel in bed, his leg in a cast, elevated by a sling. His wrist is bandaged. There's a gruesome STITCH WOUND running vertically through the center of his chest from open heart surgery. He's hooked up to all manner of monitoring machines.

MEL

How'd I get here?

BOYLE

You were dumped at Emergency in critical condition five days ago. They had to do a bypass.

Boyle moves close to the bed, his face filled with guilt.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

This was all my fault... I'm sorry...

MEL

I know --- and I'll get over it as long as my family is okay ---

BOYLE

Everyone's fine. Estelle and Willie are right outside... Maxine wanted to come, but...

MEL

What does Estelle know?

BOYLE

That I'm an FBI agent --- that you were working for us, not some Sheik --- and now that the story's leaked to the press, she knows why ---

MEL

Somebody leaked the story --- ?

BOYLE

It's all over the news. CBS even got videos of some of the payoffs. Washington's going batshit --- like it was fucking Watergate --- they all think you did it...

MEL

They're only half wrong. I was gonna do it but got picked up before I could finish the job ---

BOYLE

Well you can rest easy --- arrests have been made, indictments are in the works and grand juries should be convening in a couple of weeks.

Mel closes his eyes with deep relief.

MEL

You're the only bog-trotting, shanty asswipe in the world noble enough to run into machine gun fire for me.

(opens eyes)

What you did took a lotta left tit, Jimmy. Thanks.

Boyle's subtle smile is his silent admission. The two men share a deep moment...

BOYLE

You ready for Estelle and Willie?

MEL

The fuck am I gonna tell them?

BOYLE

That's the good thing about the truth, Mel. You don't have to think about it. It just is.

The expression on Mel's face goes fragile with fear.

MEL

I don't want to lose my son, Jimmy.

BOYLE

If you don't do this, you will. (beat)
You need to put your kid first.

MEL

Whaddya mean? I always put my kid
first. Everything I do is for him.

BOYLE

No it isn't. Not really. I mean, I
know how much you adore Willie, but
if he *really* came first, you would've
quit the con game a long time ago.

Mel shuts his eyes in dread and nods. Boyle disappears. A few seconds later, Estelle and Willie come into the room. Estelle is overwhelmed by a storm of conflicting emotion ---

Willie sees his father's state, starts to cry. Mel reaches for him, takes his hand, pulls him in and tenderly consoles him.

MEL

It's okay, buddy, I'm okay. But I
gotta tell you something ---

Mel gently lifts up Willie's chin to look him in the eye.

MEL (CONT'D)

This is the hardest thing I've ever
had to say 'cause it's gonna be the
hardest thing you've ever had to hear ---
but you need to know that I -- me --
your father ---

(deep breath)

All that I have, all that I know, I
stole. (Beat) If I saw you holding a
cigarette a certain way, and I liked
it, I'd steal it. I'm not a
businessman, never have been. I'm a
bullshit artist, a hustler, a thief ---
and that's the truth of me. It's all
a lie, my whole life --- everything ---
Except for you, Willie.

(choking up)

There's nothing truer in this world
than my love for you. You're the only
honest thing I've ever done.

Mel breaks down and CRIES. Willie hugs him. Mel looks to Estelle --- they exchange a heartbreaking glance before she leaves the room.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RESORT COMMUNITY - BOCA RATON, FLORIDA - DAY

A ritzy golf club resort community --- streets lined with palm trees; lush tropical gardens; and swank, brightly-colored houses.

A rental car rolls down the street, pulls over and parks. Mel gets out with a cane and walks up to the front door of a pink house, the name "Wasserstein" on the mailbox. Although not fully recovered, Mel looks on his way. He knocks on the door. After a few beats, Estelle opens the door wearing one of her tennis suits and is unhappy to see Mel.

ESTELLE

What're you doing here?

MEL

I just wanna talk.

ESTELLE

My lawyer says I'm not supposed to talk to you.

MEL

Estelle, please. All I want is five minutes and then I'll leave.

Estelle stands aside, allowing Mel to enter.

INT. WASSERSTEIN HOUSE - BOCA RATON - CONTINUOUS

Mel enters the gaudy house, follows Estelle to the living room.

MEL

So this is how your sister and her prick of a husband live, huh? Nice.
(off her annoyed look)
Where's Willie?

ESTELLE

At the pool, swimming. And I want you out before he gets back ---

MEL

Well then let me just say my piece ---
(clears his throat)
Look, Estelle, I know that you never really wanted the life we had. You got pregnant, we got married --- it all just kinda happened --- and the harder you tried to be the housewife and the mother, the more it messed with your head, 'cause you knew it was bullshit ---

ESTELLE

What are you doing, Mel? What difference does any of this make now?

MEL

The difference is, now you got a chance to start over and have the freedom you always wanted --- but you can't have it with Willie.

ESTELLE

There's no way I'm giving you custody ---

MEL

The only reason you want full custody is to punish me --- but when you get it, what happens to our boy?

ESTELLE

That's my business. Now leave, Mel.

MEL

Estelle, look, I know you love Willie, but do you really want to be saddled by the day in day out responsibilities it takes to raise him? Think about it. Really think about it. In the process of hurting me and Willie, the person who's gonna end up gettin' hurt the most is you. You don't want this, you never did. And that's okay. But don't make the same mistake twice 'cause of me. I'm not worth it.

ESTELLE

Exactly. That's the problem --- you're worthless. How am I supposed to start over, live the life I want to live with nothing?

Mel takes out an envelope, slides a piece of paper from it and shows it to her. Estelle is stunned.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Is this real?

MEL

You think I'd be playing with you at this point? It's real and it's all in your name ---

(he offers envelope to her)

Go start your life over again and let me take Willie. You can see him whenever you want --- you know it's the best thing for everyone.

Tears well up in her eyes as she takes the envelope from him.

EXT. MEL'S HOUSE - MORNING

The first leaves of spring are budding on the trees.

INT. MEL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mel, Boyle, Grosswald and Tuccio sit around the kitchen table, which is covered in legal documents and transcripts. Inez is making breakfast for everyone.

TUCCIO

Look, the defense is going to try to nail us on this --- so when they ask you if Boyle authorized you to make the approach on Tony Denato at Stella's --- you need to answer in the affirmative.

MEL

So you want me to lie?

TUCCIO

No. We don't lie. We never lie. We just put our own interpretation on the truth.

MEL

I like that, that's good.

Inez delivers plates of breakfast to the men, who thank her.

MEL (CONT'D)

Who's gonna pick up Willie from school today? 'Cause Inez has to go to the dentist.

GROSSWALD

I'm on it.

MEL

Burt, when he comes home, none of those fuckin' video games. Kid's gotta ball-breaking math test on Friday, I want him studyin' up.

Grosswald nods. The doorbell RINGS. Boyle leaves to answer it. A few moments later, he walks back in and leans into Mel.

BOYLE

Max is outside.

EXT. MEL'S HOUSE - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Mel walks out of his house to find Max waiting --- he sees a cab parked across the street. The two smile at each other, embrace and kiss.

MAX

You know, this is the first time I've actually seen your house. It's nice.

MEL

Why don't you come in?

MAX

That's okay. I just came here to wish you luck, and make sure I gave you this ---

Max hands Mel a small, thin BOX which has been elegantly wrapped.

MAX (CONT'D)

It's that thing you wanted for ---

MEL

Right --- thanks, pussycat.

(smiles, gesturing to box)
You know --- this was a beautiful touch to the play, Max. One of those genius little details I never woulda come up with on my own.

MAX

Stop. It wasn't that big of a deal.

MEL

No, I was there... It was a moment.

(locks eyes with her)

I couldn't have pulled this off without you, Max.

MAX

Yes, you could've, but thanks.

MEL

So I'll see you later tonight?

MAX

(after a heavy beat)

No, Mel. You won't.

(off Mel's look)

This is it for me. I'm leaving today for Costa Rica. Benny Nightengale's got some action going on down there --- and needs a roper ---

MEL

I figured this was coming.

MAX

I'm sorry ---

MEL

It's okay. It's the smart move.

They share a vulnerable, soul-stirring smile before kissing.

MEL (CONT'D)

Take care of yourself, pussycat.

MAX

You too.

As Mel watches Max head to the cab, he tilts his head slightly to admire the swing of her ass and smiles inwardly.

EXT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - MANHATTAN - LATER THAT MORNING

The courtroom steps are a MEDIA CIRCUS --- Reporters, TV Crews, Photographers all covering the first ABSCAM trial. A VAN pulls up. Grosswald and Boyle emerge and form a human SHIELD around Mel as they cut through the insanity.

INT. HALLWAY - FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

As Boyle ushers Mel down the hall they spot Tuccio waiting for them by the courtroom door, which is being guarded by four ARMED BAILIFFS. Tuccio clearly very anxious...

TUCCIO

So you ready for this? You okay?

MEL

I'm fine, but look at you, you're a nervous fucking wreck --- why don't you go steal away to the men's room and beat one out before game time, relax a little bit.

Tuccio smiles and then considers doing it for a second.

BOYLE

Mel --- you're such a terrific prick, when this is all over, I might actually miss you.

MEL

I love you too, Jimmy ---

Mel catches sight of something down the hall --- FBI Director Houseman marches up to them carrying a FILE and looking like a man out for blood.

HOUSEMAN

I'd like a word with the three of you right now. In private.

Tuccio, Boyle, and Mel follow Houseman as he walks towards a conference chamber. Tuccio looks at Boyle, wondering what's up, but Boyle responds with a concerned, "I have no idea" shrug.

INT. CONFERENCE CHAMBER - FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - MINUTE LATER

Houseman focuses all of his barely controlled fury on Mel. Tuccio opens his mouth, but is instantly silenced by Houseman's stone cold, "shut the fuck up" glare.

HOUSEMAN

Where's the money, Mel?

MEL

Money?

(looks around to the men)

What money?

HOUSEMAN

The two million dollars that you supposedly deposited in the Boardwalk Bank --- where is it?

MEL

Whaddya mean where is it? It's in the bank ---

HOUSEMAN

No, Mel, I don't think so ---

BOYLE

Sir, excuse me, but I personally deposited the money in the bank.

HOUSEMAN

WHAT BANK! THERE IS NO FUCKING BANK!!!

Boyle and Tuccio are freaked and totally confused.

BOYLE

I don't understand ---

Houseman angrily throws a paper-clipped stack of PHOTOS at Boyle.

ANGLE CLOSE ON A SERIES OF PHOTOS as Tuccio and Boyle flip through them. The pics reveal that what was once the Boardwalk Bank, there is now just an EMPTY, UNOCCUPIED SHELL OF A BUILDING.

Boyle and Tuccio are mortified and speechless.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

(to Mel)

Did you do this?!

HOUSEMAN

Of course he did! That's who he is!
That's what he does!

MEL

Look, I wanna be very clear right now. I have absolutely no idea what you're talking about.

HOUSEMAN

The hell you don't! And I intend to prove it and prosecute you to the fullest extent of the law!

MEL

Seven Congressmen. One Senator. Biggest case in FBI history --- and you wanna go after your linchpin witness minutes before he takes the stand onna hunch? Hey, I'm not a lawyer but wouldn't that undermine every case you got?
(sits down, leans back)

Think about it. I'm your Golden Hebe. Without my credibility everything falls apart. So I dunno, maybe the smartly move here is to do nothing ---

HOUSEMAN

You bastard. I wish the heart attack had killed you.

MEL

I understand that this is difficult, but it's like you said, Larry --- when it comes to protecting the foundations of our democracy...
(cuts a grin)

Sometimes you gotta take it in the ass for the team.

Houseman can only stand there palpitating with rage...

INT. COURTROOM - FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

The gallery's packed. Tension is thick. Congressman Myers and his DEFENSE TEAM confer at one table. Tuccio and his Staff huddle at theirs. Mel is seated along the aisle, two rows behind

the prosecution. Boyle's next to him, then Houseman. A solemn JUDGE appears at the bench.

COURT BAILIFF

All rise!

(everyone stands)

This court is now in session, the Honorable Judge Henry Pratt presiding.

The court settles down and everyone sits ---

JUDGE

Bring in the jury.

(after jury files in, sits)

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Tuccio, do the people wish to call their next witness?

TUCCIO

Yes. The people call Melvin Weinberg.

Mel gets up, slyly takes out the gift box and slips it to Boyle.

MEL

(whispering)

A little souvenir of our adventures together. Nothing fancy. But I thought you'd really appreciate it ---

(off Houseman's look)

You too, Larry.

As Mel approaches and gets into the witness stand --- Boyle unwraps his gift --- uncovering a VELVET PEN BOX ---

BAILIFF

Raise your right hand ---

Houseman watches Boyle open the box --- revealing a cheap, gold-plated PEN and MECHANICAL PENCIL with "BOARDWALK BANK" engraved onto the sides.

BAILIFF (CONT'D)

Do you swear to tell the truth, nothing but the truth, so help you God?

An astounded Boyle looks over at a seething Houseman, then they both simultaneously look up to Mel, who's staring right back at them from the witness stand, his hand raised --- as a thin, almost-imperceptible smile cuts across his face --- like a knife gleaming briefly from concealment ---

WE CUT TO BLACK.

AMERICAN BULLSHIT

The ABSCAM operation ultimately resulted in an unprecedented number of arrests, but it was the indictment and conviction of six U.S Congressmen and one U.S Senator that came to define its legacy as one of the biggest political scandals in American history.

In almost every case the accused claimed they were entrapped by the FBI and used the tape of Mel's "pep talk" with the Senator to support this allegation. Nevertheless, the defense was not able to overcome the power of the video evidence of the defendants taking bribe money.

For most Americans, the iconic images of prominent Congressmen stuffing payoffs into their pockets seemed to confirm what they had always suspected: that the politicians running our country were all just a bunch a crooks...

ABSCAM's impact on organized crime was no less significant in that it helped undermine the Mafia's master plan to expand and control the gambling industry. After the scandal broke every single ballot measure to legalize gambling was defeated by the voters -- six different campaigns in six different states.

As a result, the mob lost hundreds of millions of dollars and the secret point holders were eventually forced to sell their interests in Atlantic City casinos to the same conglomerates who muscled them out of Las Vegas.

After his role in the ABSCAM investigation became public, Mel Weinberg was unable to continue his career as a conman. However, bolstered by the publicity from the trials, and with the help of Agent James Boyle, Mel landed a job with Louis Vuitton --- setting up sting operations to capture producers of counterfeit merchandise.

Mel was so successful that within a few months, Louis Vuitton made him head of their security. One of his first orders of business was to hire many of the former FBI agents who'd been a part of the ABSCAM team. Working with Interpol and local law enforcement agencies, Mel set up hundreds of sting operations around the world, resulting in countless arrests and saving Louis Vuitton tens of millions of dollars in potential losses.

Today Mel Weinberg resides in a retirement community in Florida.