

BRIGHT ORANGE FOR THE SHROUD

based on the 'Travis McGee' novels by
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screenplay by

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EXT. BEACH CLUB - INDOOR/OUTDOOR BAR - DAY

Through large open arches, a bright mid-afternoon sun shines down on lush green vegetation and golden sand. The tropical blue sky is nearly the same color as the ocean.

The interior of the resort bar is cool shadows and dark wood. A lithe, leggy native WAITRESS, a tall glass on her tray, makes her way across the room, her heels rapping on the deep red ceramic tile floor. She reaches a table, where a man sits alone. Her voice has the graceful Bahaman lilt to it.

WAITRESS

Mr. McGee?

(sets the drink
on the table)

I hope it's to your taste.

TRAVIS MCGEE leans forward. His eyes are pale; a permanent deep-water tan makes his hair appear lighter than it is. He tries the drink.

MCGEE

Perfect.

WAITRESS

I'll have to try it. Pour sherry over ice, drain the sherry, then pour in gin. Very simple.

MCGEE

But elegant.

WAITRESS

You are a bartender, perhaps?

MCGEE

No.

WAITRESS

Pity...we need a new one. The old one is returning to the States Friday.

McGee smiles into his glass as he takes a sip.

MCGEE

Pity.

WAITRESS

This is not a vacation for you.
Business, yes?

McGEE

How can you tell?

WAITRESS

(a wide smile)

I think I can tell if a man is one
who would not take a vacation alone.

McGee smiles back. The waitress' demeanor changes suddenly, from genuine friendliness to professional courtesy tinged with nervousness. McGee spots the cause of the change: an expensively-dressed couple who make their way toward him, CARRESTAS and his wife, SUSAN.

CARRESTAS is in his late sixties. Behind his thick glasses, his eyes are clouded. He carries a briefcase; he rests his other hand on the crook of his wife's arm as she guides him to the table.

SUSAN is a beautiful young woman, the focus of male attention in any room she enters. Her wary expression contrasts with the excitement on her husband's face.

MR. CARRESTAS

Mr. McGee--you've found them?

McGee smiles, rising. Despite his size, he moves with a loose-jointed ease.

McGEE

I found them.

WAITRESS

Good afternoon, Mr. Carrestas, Mrs.
Carrestas. May I get you something?

Mr. Carrestas squints at her, trying to recognize her.

MR. CARRESTAS

No, no--no thank you. And no charge
for Mr. McGee's drinks, okay?

WAITRESS

Yes, sir.

She leaves the table. The Carrestas sit. McGee takes four glaseline envelopes from his pocket, puts them on the table.

Carrestas is overjoyed. He brings one of the envelopes close to his face, peers at the stamp inside. He gestures to his wife. She is preoccupied, glancing back toward the bar nervously.

CARRESTAS

Susan?

She starts, then takes a magnifying glass from her purse. Carrestas takes it, tries to examine the stamps. He pushes the glass and stamps over in front of his wife.

CARRESTAS

Damn cataracts...

Susan examines the stamps quickly but carefully.

SUSAN

These are them.

Carrestas beams, first at the stamps, then at McGee. He sets his briefcase onto the table, snaps open the latches--pauses.

CARRESTAS

Would you please excuse us, Susan.

She nods, stands slowly, reluctantly, staring penetratingly at McGee. McGee wears an impassive poker face. She turns away, heads for the bar.

CARRESTAS

The book value on the stamps is a hundred thousand dollars, Mr. McGee--
(hands over an envelope)
That's fifty thousand. I--is that enough?

McGee discreetly lifts his shirt, revealing a money belt--he pushes the envelope inside without counting the money.

McGEE

That's fine, Mr. Carrestas.

Carrestas smiles--he seems nervous now. He begins to gather the stamps, put them in the case.

CARRESTAS

You know, Mr. McGee. The eyes aren't the only things telling me I'm getting old. Crazy ideas occur to you, like the brain is backfiring, like the carburetors are clogged, you know?

He doesn't look up at McGee. McGee looks past his shoulder to the bar where Susan stands, staring intently at the GOOD-LOOKING BARTENDER, who chooses not to see her out of the corner of his eye. His jaw is bruised and puff; his left earlobe is bandaged.

CARRESTAS

What I mean to say is...

McGEE

Mr. Carrestas. The person who stole your stamps was a small-time burglar who got lucky. I found him, and made him give them back. That's all.

CARRESTAS

...then my wife--?

McGEE

That's all.

A beat, then Carrestas smiles broadly, relieved. He snaps the case closed.

CARRESTAS

That's what I figured. I knew it couldn't--I'm certainly glad that you came along, Mr. McGee. I took you for a sharp when you showed up, but, well...thank you.

He extends a hand as he rises. McGee stands, clasps it. They smile at each other, but McGee's grin is shaded by some secret knowledge.

CARRESTAS

Susan..?

Susan returns, approaching the table apprehensively. Carrestas beams at her.

CARRESTAS

We should get these home.

SUSAN

(slightly startled)
Of course. Mr. McGee.

She shakes his hand, then turns to escort her husband out. McGee reaches, snakes her purse out from under her arm. She looks back at him, frowning--he smiles at her tightly, gestures for her to go and come back.

Her look turns into one of resigned distaste. She and Carrestas move away.

McGee sips at the remainder of his drink, watching them.

Outside the doors, Susan speaks to the valet, then to her husband. She strides back into the bar toward McGee. McGee takes her arm and guides her behind a pillar.

SUSAN

I hope you have--

McGEE

Shut up. I didn't tell your husband.

SUSAN

Tell my husband what?

McGee stares at her. She looks away, then looks back.

SUSAN

I appreciate that, Mr. McGee.

McGEE

I didn't do it for you. For some reason, that old man loves you. It would destroy him to find out you're not what he thinks you are.

He steps closer to her.

McGEE

So here's how you play it from this moment forward. You are the loving, attentive wife. You take care of him, you make him drinks, you hang on his every word. And on that sad, gray day when he dies, you wear black and cry widow's tears. Then--and only then--do you get his money.

She swings to slap him, but he easily catches her wrist. He pulls her arm down, turns her palm up, and drops something into it:

A large-carat diamond-stud earring with an ornate sleeve.

Susan stares at it. It is the twin to the one in her right ear. There is a small, brown fleck on the post. Realization dawns on her. She looks back toward the bar.

The bartender drops his eyes from the scene, turns away from it. His bandaged earlobe is conspicuous.

Susan is horrified. She looks at the earring in her hand, then up at McGee.

McGEE

And if you must have affairs in the future, then you keep them brief, you keep them discreet. No more gifts.

McGee takes the earring from her hand, fastens it in her ear.

McGEE

Because flaunting that sort of thing is cruel.

(his fingers still
on the earring)

I don't think we need to be cruel.

A beat; she nods. He smiles at her, drops his hand. Gives her her purse. Takes her elbow and walks her to the doors.

EXT. BEACH CLUB - CURBSIDE

As McGee and Susan rejoin Carrestas. The Carrestas' Mercedes has been brought up.

CARRESTAS

Thank you again, Mr. McGee.

McGEE

I'm glad I could help.

SUSAN

Come on, darling. We should get home.

CARRESTAS

Of course, of course.

She helps him into the car, goes around to the drivers' side.

CARRESTAS

Tell me, son. What are you going to do with the money?

McGee smiles enigmatically.

McGEE

I'll put it toward my retirement.

Carrestas smiles, nods; McGee stands at the curb in front of the beach club, watching as the car pulls away.

McGEE (V.O.)

I'd decided long ago that retirement was wasted on the old.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FLORIDA KEYS - DAY

The sea is a hundred shades, from the pale tan of shallow sand through lime and lavender to cobalt. The lush vegetation of the key is a green band against the endless blue sky.

Cruising past is the BUSTED FLUSH, a 52-foot barge-style houseboat--burly, ugly luxury at its finest.

McGEE (V.O.)

Instead of waiting until I'm sixty,
I take mine in chunks, whenever I
can afford it.

EXT. FLORIDA COAST - BUSTED FLUSH - AERIAL

McGee mans the flying bridge. Several people fish off the aft deck; some lie on lounges on the sundeck rear of the bridge.

McGEE (V.O.)

It was a comforting wad of money I
had netted. A careful husbanding of
funds would see me through, leaving
the war chest untapped, ready to
finance some kind of operation in
the fall.

The V of the Flush's wake mars the crystal ocean; a school of fish darken the water as it passes beneath the Flush.

EXT. BUSTED FLUSH - AFT DECK

CAT KILLIAN breaks the surface of the ocean, and in one smooth motion pulls herself onto the diving platform. Behind her, the boat's name is visible, painted on the rear bulwark.

McGEE (V.O.)

Until then, I was determined it
would be a slob summer. A long,
lazy drifting time of good fish,
old friends, of talk and laughter--

Her legs dangling in the water, her red hair spilling down across her back, Cat examines a handful of shells. She is gorgeous, an elegant, vital presence.

McGEE (V.O.)

And cold beer, and a beautiful woman.

EXT. KEY BISCAIYNE - YACHT CLUB GAS DOCK - DAY

McGee stands near the pump as an attendant gasses up the Flush. Cat, barefoot, steps onto the hot, sunbaked dock--she quick-steps over to McGee, stepping up onto his feet to get off the dock, her arms encircling him. She gives him a kiss.

CAT

Good ones. For such a raunchy old beach bum, you know a lot of good ones.

McGEE

Yes, I do.

He kisses her again, then turns to check the pump. A couple on the restaurant terrace beyond the gas dock has caught his eye. He squints at them. Cat follows his gaze.

At the table sits TUSH BANNON. He is a huge man, the lines in his face those an ever-smiling optimist. But he's not smiling now--he speaks intently, almost pleadingly, to his companion, DEBRA BROWN.

CAT

More friends of yours?

McGEE

Just him. Tush Bannon.

Debra is a stunner in a casual suit carefully tailored to her slenderness. Her eyes are a cool, impossible green. She closes her eyes and slowly shakes her head in a prolonged No.

CAT (O.S.)

I'd say he's getting called out on strikes.

Tush half-bangs his hand on the table, catching himself and turning the angry gesture into a self-conscious, embarrassed one. He leans forward, brow furrowed, speaking quickly--Debra slides her chair back, looks away from him impatiently.

CAT

Ah--He's lost his cool. Bad move. The hard sell makes a gal nervous these days.

McGEE

Didn't it always?

CAT

Are you going to say hello?

McGee turns away from the scene to pay the attendant; Cat steps off his feet onto the shadow of the pump.

McGEE

(smiles grimly)

This is not the point where one ambles over, smacks his buddy on the shoulder and asks him how the wife is.

CAT

Wife?

McGee heads back to the Flush. Cat hangs back, watches as Debra signs the check. Tush, hands spread wide, continues to talk even as she strides away. He slumps into his chair, drops his forehead into his hands.

EXT. FLUSH - TOPDECK/FLYING BRIDGE

Cat sits forward of the flying bridge, her elbows resting on her knees, gazing off to one side, closed in on herself.

EXT. FLUSH - STARBOARD SIDEDECK

McGee comes out of the darkness of the lounge, smiling at some comment, carrying three bottles of beer. He climbs one-handed up the ladder to the topdeck.

EXT. TOPDECK/FLYING BRIDGE

McGee pauses at the top of the ladder, looking toward Cat. Frowning, McGee reaches the bridge, where BARNI, a petite blonde, mans the wheel. He hands her one of the bottles.

BARNI

(indicating Cat)

Looks like we lost Cat again.

McGee nods thoughtfully.

BARNI

Funny thing about this Cat Killian of yours. I like her, Trav, but you think she's telling you all about herself, and afterward you realize she hasn't really told you a thing. What's the story?

McGEE

I don't know.

Barni raises a scolding eyebrow.

McGEE

Don't look at me like that. I know she's from Seattle, that she shed a husband not long before she showed up here. And I know that I met her a couple months ago only because she stepped on a sea urchin and was cursing blue blazes and ordered me to come over and do something about it right now.

Barni smiles at this.

McGEE

And I know that once in a while she goes absolutely dead silent and all she wants is for you to pretend she isn't there.

Barni nods, quietly thinking this over. She goes to the port ladder, climbs part-way down. She looks back at McGee.

BARNI

She has a very soft look for you, Travis. When you're not looking at her.

McGEE

Troublemaker.

But he can't hide that he's pleased to hear it.

BARNI

...and the same's true of you for her.

With that, she disappears down to the lower deck.

ANGLE ON - Cat, her gaze distant, her eyes large and slightly moist. Behind her at the bridge, McGee sips from his beer, watching her, the two of them alone on the top deck, away from the commotion below.

McGEE (V.O.)

I knew one thing for certain about Cat. She was one of the Good Ones.

EXT. FLORIDA KEYS - NIGHT

The Busted Flush, all lit up, anchored off a small key. The lights of the causeway are visible in the distance.

McGEE (V.O.)

A stately, random redhead who believed the world is mad. The perfect companion to help rid me of the aftertaste of too damned many fervid conversations, midnight plots and dirty little violences.

EXT. BAHIA MAR - MORNING

A 35-acre marina, berth to millions of floating dollars, all varieties of pleasure craft. Cat stands behind McGee on the bridge, arms around his shoulders. The day has clouded up.

McGEE (V.O.)

That's how they do you. That's the way they set you up. There ought to be a warning bell on the happymeter, so that every time it creeps high enough, you get dang-dang alert. Duck, boy--the glow makes you too visible.

(beat)

When it happens so often, wouldn't you think I'd be ready for it?

EXT. SLIP F-18 - DAY

The Flush is tied up at the dock. Sharing the slip is a 24-foot powerboat under a canvas mooring cover. McGee hooks up the utility umbilicals. Cat joins him.

CAT

Is it just me, or does it feel like that little jaunt lasted a week?

McGEE

Meyer says when they don't seem to, they haven't worked.

CAT

It worked. Thanks, Travis.

She kisses him. Behind them, Barni, her boyfriend MICK, and another couple exit the lounge, bags over their arms.

MICK

Hey, we're going down to the Alabama Tiger's...wanna come?

CAT

That doesn't sound too bad...

POGO (O.S.)

Travis! Hey, Trav!

Trotting up the dock toward them is POGO, an always-smiling roustabout wearing a Bahia Mar T-shirt and cutoffs.

McGEE

(to the group)

I'll meet you there.

As they move off:

BARNI

I've never been to a Perpetual
Floating Houseparty before...what's
it like?

CAT

It's an experience all its own.

Pogo reaches McGee.

McGEE

Hey, Pogo.

POGO

There was a guy here looking for you,
Travis. Guy was here yesterday.

McGEE

(a little wary)

Do you remember his name?

POGO

Uhm...it was funny, I remember. I
couldn't help laughing. I didn't
mean to...Tush. That was it.

McGEE

Tush Bannon?

POGO

Yeah...Funny name. He was looking for
you. He said to tell you to call him.
Gave me five dollars to tell you. He
seemed...sad.

McGEE

(preoccupied by the message)

Okay, Pogo. Thanks.

POGO

Welcome, Travis.
(he looks up)
Might rain soon.

He ambles away. McGee quickly hooks up the phone cable.

INT. FLUSH - LOUNGE

McGee sits on the curved yellow couch, phone to his ear, waiting for an answer. He finally hangs up, frowning.

EXT. ALABAMA TIGER - DAY

A big, lush luxury yacht--the party spills out onto the main and upper decks. McGee comes in past a life saver emblazoned with the boat's name, continues into the main cabin.

INT. MAIN CABIN

Partygoers gathered around the perimeter of the cabin watch as JUNEBUG, a rubbery brown solid chunk of a girl, dances to the Afro-Cuban beat. She is a whirling dervish, black short hair snapping, body flexing and pumping.

Junebug's challenger is a straight-haired BLONDE, who is beginning to lag and flounder, miss the beat and catch up. A man sharpens the beat, his hands a blur on a pair of battered bongos. Three piles of money are at his feet.

McGee approaches the ALABAMA TIGER, a large, very happy man.

McGEE

(indicating the dancers)

How long?

TIGER

Seventy-four minutes. I give them maybe five more, then the blonde'll just pass out. It's the beat.

(off McGee's look)

The challengers can go all day to the beat they're used to. They don't realize the additional demand the Afro-Cuban tempo makes on stamina.

McGee thinks this over, nodding, willing to believe it.

McGEE

Have you seen Cat?

Tiger looks worried, leads McGee back out to the deck.

TIGER

She was up on the foredeck. Hero was heading in her direction.

McGEE

(a grimace)

Well, had to happen...She can take care of herself, though. The foredeck?

Tiger nods; McGee moves toward the foredeck--from inside there is a yell, and Junebug comes out, jumping into the air with every third stride, leaping down to the dock.

JUNEBUG

Anybody else? Any new pigeon, step up and put your money on the deck!

She picks up the dock hose and sprays her face...then under her bikini top, and then under the bottoms. As McGee moves toward the foredeck:

JUNEBUG

Hey you, McGee. Hey, you never told me when we're gonna go steady.

McGEE

I know my limits.

JUNEBUG

Awww--poor fella. I wouldn't kill you. Just cripple up pretty good, hah?

McGEE

I think your trouble is you're too shy. You lack self-confidence. Get out and meet people.

JUNEBUG

Coward!

EXT. ALABAMA TIGER - FOREDECK

Crowded with more partyers--through them, McGee spots Cat and HERO, a chisel-chinned heart-flutterer. He leans over her, smiling intimately, chatting her up.

Cat looks exasperated. She gestures him closer, whispers in his ear. Hero looks startled, then confused. Cat smiles at him. A pretty girl goes by; Hero's smile returns, and he moves after her, passing McGee as McGee comes up to Cat.

CAT

I had to tell that clown 'no' five times before he got the message.

McGEE

Only five?

CAT

Impromptu surgery was mentioned. Probably be minor surgery, at that.

McGEE

Not from what I've heard. Speculation
has it he suffers from a combination
of satyriasis and priapism.

CAT

(mockingly re-interested)

Oh?

McGee grins at her, then sits down beside her.

McGEE

(a little worried)

Anyway...how'd you like to take a
little cruise on a houseboat?

CAT

Trouble?

McGEE

I hope not. What do you say? Just
you and me this time--no throngs.

CAT

I think it might be fun to try and
prove that two can be a throng.

EXT. INLAND WATERWAY - DAY

The Flush navigates north up the waterway. The flat developed
beaches give way to broad moist banks with stands of cypress.
Where the tide seeps into a river, dwarf mangrove, hammocks
of oaks, and fifty other varieties of trees grow wild.

McGEE (O.S.)

Tush is the portrait of the eternal
optimist...You'll like him. He and
his wife...

EXT. FLUSH - TOPDECK/FLYING BRIDGE - DAY

McGee is smiling, unable to pin down what he wants to say.

CAT

Something wrong with her?

McGEE

(an ironic laugh)

No. Jan's terrific, but...well, the
chemistry's off between us. The way
it usually is with the friend who
knew the husband before the husband
knew the wife.

CAT

Sure. You're dangerous. You're not housebroken.

EXT. SHAWANA RIVER

McGee maneuvers the Flush up the mouth of the Shawana River.

CAT

So what is it with your friends, huh?
There's Hero, Pogo, Tiger, Tush...

MCGEE

Got a problem with that, Cat?

CAT

Okay, okay...But Tush? Did his parents hate him, or what?

EXT. FLUSH - TOPDECK/FLYING BRIDGE

McGee smiles, thinking back.

MCGEE

Brantley Bannon is a man totally incapable of profanity. Which is rare in anyone, let alone an offensive fullback.

CAT

You two played together?

MCGEE

um-hm. The crudest he'd ever get was 'darn.' Until one game, we ran a play designed just for him. He was a little slow to start, but once he got going...So we got a good jump and cleared him a big hole. But as he went through, he was juggling the ball--

McGee mimes losing control of the football.

MCGEE

--hand to chin to chest to forearm to hand--and wham! he gets hit from the side. The ball floats into the hands of their defensive center--who takes a few seconds to realize he actually has the football--and he takes off, and runs it all the way back for a touchdown.

CAT

Oh, no!

McGEE

Oh, yeah. The winning six points. So there's Bannon on his knees. Feeling bad. Angry. He hates the other team, the football, himself. He rips off his helmet, slams it to the ground, and yells, 'Oh...TUSH!'

Cat has a terrible attack of the giggles. McGee laughs along.

CAT

(recovering)

And the name just stuck.

McGEE

How could we let him forget it?

Cat visors her eyes with her hand, searching up-river.

CAT

So where's this marina of his?

McGEE

Please. It's a 'boatel.' Not much further.

EXT. SHAWANA RIVER

The Flush draws around a bend.

EXT. FLUSH - TOPDECK/FLYING BRIDGE

McGee stares, his expectant expression replaced by one of dismay. Cat frowns, looks at McGee.

POV - McGEE, as the docks of the Boatel draw near. The slate gray sky looms above the motel structure. It is run down, in need of paint, some windows broken.

The foundation of an addition has been poured; wild grass grows around it, and the protruding pipework is rusted.

A faded sign and two large holes mark where the fuel pumps at the end of the dock once stood. All the slips save one are empty; a moored skiff rides low, filled with water. The in-and-out rack stores only an aged fiberglass launch hull.

CLOSE ON McGEE, his jaw tightening as he takes in the desolation, remembering how it once was...

FLASHBACK - POV - MCGEE,

same angle as before, drawing nearer to the dock. But this is a sunny, blue-sky day. The motel is clean and neat, all windows intact. The rack storage is half-filled. Six small houseboats are moored along the dock.

The captain of a flashy cigarette boat chats with Tush Bannon, who is gassing up the boat.

A short horn toot causes Tush to look up, then grin and hurry over to the other side of the dock as McGee drifts into frame, piloting the Munequita, a 24-foot deep-V dual-engine runabout. He tosses a bow line to Tush.

TUSH

Hey! Hey, now, McGee! This is some fine little boat you got here.

MCGEE

I just picked her up in an estate sale, and I thought, what excuse do I have to go run her around? So here I am.

Tush ties off the aft line, stands, waiting. McGee grins.

MCGEE

Come aboard all ready.

Tush scrambles into the boat.

EXT. SHAWANA RIVER - DAY

Tush pilots the Munequita upriver, playing with the twin throttles, enjoying the response of the boat, the boatel receding behind them.

They cruise between the concrete footings and shoreside remains of a large bridge.

MCGEE

What happened to the Shawana bridge?

TUSH

It's four miles further up river. County commissioners thought it'd look better up there. 'Building a brighter future for Shawana County.'

MCGEE

Doesn't that sort of cut down your trade?

TUSH

Yeah, a bit. And with the roadwork going on in front of my place...

(brightening)

Once it's finished, though, things'll pick up again.

McGEE

How long 'til then?

TUSH

(biting the words off)

Last March. Then July. This is November. You tell me.

(cutting off any response)

This is a dream, Trav. Handles like a dream.

He throttles up, whipping into a big turn.

EXT. BOATEL - DAY

Tush leads McGee around the motel, pointing out surveyor's stakes. A large Euclid earth-mover roars past on the road, kicking up dust. Most of the tarmac has been torn out.

TUSH

--we're putting in ten more units here, so with the houseboats, we'll have room for twenty-five paying guests, plus me and Jan's room.

They come to the repair shed. A tripod hoist stands to one side. A trailered boat, engine cowl raised, sits inside the shed. Tush gets beers out of a cooler, hands one to McGee.

McGEE

Sounds pretty nice, Tush.

TUSH

Oh, yeah, it is. Real nice.

He looks off, preoccupied. McGee eyes him, takes a drink, puzzled. A car horn HONKS. They look up. Tush hurries into the yard.

An old-model Vanagon limps into the yard on a rim. JAN BANNON climbs out. She's too angular to be beautiful, too feminine to be boyish, and too angry to notice McGee.

JAN

They put in a new ditch just past where the hardtop ends, right at the curve. Improving our roadways.

Tush is examining the bent rim.

TUSH

Were you going fast, Jan?

Jan stares at him.

JAN

Oh, good Christ, I was making better time than Danny Unser, laughing and singing cause the world is so sweet, and probably drunk, too, and I was trying to blow out all four!

She spins, heading for the motel, passing McGee, barely giving him a glance.

TUSH

You could say hello to my friend!
The least you could do is say hello!

She stops on the steps, turns. No change of expression.

JAN

Hello. Hello. Hello.

She goes inside. Tush kicks the tire, can't bring himself to look over at McGee.

TUSH

Sorry, boy.

McGEE

For what? There are good days, medium days and bad days.

TUSH

We seem to be getting a long run of one kind.

EXT. BOATEL - DAY - PRESENT

As the Flush BUMPS up against the dock.

McGee shuts down the engines, and he and Cat scramble off, make the lines fast. He straightens from a cleat, and looks up at the motel. Walks toward it. Cat follows.

On the motel office door is a new padlock and hasp, and a Shawana County Sheriff's Dept. eviction notice. McGee rattles the lock, peers in through one of the windows.

McGee walks around to the repair shed. The boat that was in the shed is near the hoist. Its engine is on the hoist, raised to the top. Another lock and notice are on the shed.

McGee surveys the entire scene. A swinging sign creaks as the wind kicks up.

CAT

(hushed)

What happened?

McGEE

There's no neighbors, no one to ask.
I suppose we walk into Osceola City.

CAT

Gives me the spooks.

McGee turns his head, looks toward the road--a gas company service truck has slowed to a stop. It turns, lurches into the yard.

A beat; then McGee's entire demeanor changes. He waves at the serviceman, scuffs toward the truck.

The serviceman climbs out of the truck, eyeing McGee warily.

McGEE

Hey, there. I'm looking for Mr.
Bannon.

SERVICEMAN

Why?

McGEE

Oh, a while back, I put in here with
a bilge pump that was acting up.
Bannon put in a loaner, 'til he could
see if he could get mine fixed, but
I didn't get back as soon as I thought.
Now it looks like he's gone out of
business or something.

Cat moves slightly away from McGee, eyeing him uncertainly.

SERVICEMAN

(snorts)

You could say that. Yeah, you could.
Let me do my shut-off, and I'll tell
you what happened. I'd kinda like to
take a look at where he did it myself.

McGee follows the serviceman as he heads for the gas meter.

McGEE

Where he did what?

SERVICEMAN

Where he killed himself.

McGee stops, stunned. Cat is also shocked. McGee turns his head away, not wanting to accept it.

EXT. BANNON BOATEL - DAY

The serviceman leads McGee toward the hoist. McGee is back in character as a morbidly interested passerby. Cat keeps some distance from them both.

SERVICEMAN

If you'd gotten here yesterday, then you'd a seen something for sure. Sheriff found him when he came down to get him off the property.

The serviceman stays a few feet back from the hoist, crouching slightly to peer up at the underside of the block.

SERVICEMAN

Look at that! There's still hair and mess on the bottom there.

Cat turns away, bends over, coughs shallowly a few times. She gropes over to a sawhorse, sits on it, her back to the scene.

SERVICEMAN

Yeah, pretty terrible way to kill yourself. My cousin--he's a deputy, so he was down here. He said Bannon'd wrapped a piece of wire around the ratchet lever, then laid down...

He mimes yanking a wire, makes a 'whump' sound.

SERVICEMAN

Mashed him pretty terrible. Andy--my cousin--said he still had the wire wrapped around his hand.
(beat)

Least it was quick and certain.

A beat as they think about it.

McGEE

Anyone know why he did it? Because he was broke?

They head back toward the serviceman's truck.

SERVICEMAN

Maybe. Maybe 'cause his wife left him. When they came out Friday with the eviction papers, she was the only one here. Andy said she just packed and left. She was crying, but not really. Crying without making any noise. They figure Bannon got back Saturday night or yesterday morning and did himself.

McGEE

What happened to the wife?

SERVICEMAN

She's up staying in Osceola City somewhere, I guess.

McGEE

(shakes his head)

Bannon seemed pretty sharp. Not the type of guy who'd go broke. Guess it musta been booze, or the dogs, or other women. Seen it happen.

The serviceman climbs into the truck and stares out at McGee.

SERVICEMAN

Not this time. No, sir. Fact is, they run this boy off. He was in the way, and they run him off. But you didn't hear me say that, mister.

McGEE

(nods)

I didn't hear you, friend.

The serviceman starts up the truck.

SERVICEMAN

Best see to your missus.

He pulls away. McGee walks toward Cat, studying the hoist. When he gets near her, she looks up him, then rises.

CAT

My heart bled for you, McGee. The way you went reeling around in shock. Your dear old buddy has gone to the big marina in the sky. The hard way. And you came to get your bilge pump. God's sake, Travis!

McGEE

If he'd known I was a friend of
Tush's, how much do you think he
would have said?

McGee turns away from her, staring at the hoist. He slaps the
top of the sawhorse.

McGEE

Dammit, I should've paid more
attention. Things were going bad for
him. I should have talked to him
when we saw him. I should have...
done something.

A beat; he strides toward the Flush, disappears inside. Cat
stares after him, trying to fathom this man.

McGee re-emerges with a 35mm camera. He walks to the hoist,
carefully takes photos of all four sides, and the underside.
He searches out a length of wire from a rubbish pile behind
the shed, attaches it to the ratchet.

CAT

I don't think...you can't feel
responsible for him giving up.

McGee yanks the wire, releasing the ratchet--the engine block
drops, thuds hard to the ground. McGee cranks it back up.

McGEE

He didn't give up. He came to see
me. He wanted my help. Then he
kills himself? No.

The engine reaches the top of the hoist; McGee secures it.

CAT

So what are you going to do?

McGEE

Help him.

EXT. OSCEOLA CITY SQUARE - DAY

A four-story orange-brick-and-marble courthouse, complete
with clock tower, dominates the square. Small diners, a
defunct movie house, cinder block stores and a bailbondsman's
office crouch around it, cypress trees visible just beyond.

INT. SHAWANA COUNTY COURTHOUSE - VESTIBULE - DAY

McGee and Cat check the directory. The entry beside CORONER reads: RODALE G. MD - 228.

INT. CORONER'S OFFICE - DAY

RODALE is 60-ish, with a fat man's face on a gaunt body. He is pleasant, but constant glances at the clock and a fishing rod case and tackle box tell us where his heart lies.

RODALE

Tush Bannon was a suicide. I know it's hard for a friend to believe something like that, but...I'm sorry, Mr. McGee.

McGee and Cat sit in front of the desk. McGee leans forward.

McGEE

Dr. Rodale. I'm not saying you're wrong. I'm not calling your work into question.

Rodale grins, shrugs, as if it wouldn't bother him much if McGee was calling his work into question.

McGEE

I'm only asking if there was anything that was...inconsistent with suicide.

Rodale stares at his fishing gear for a moment, then turns and addresses McGee.

RODALE

Mr. McGee. This is a small county. I'm a small county doctor. I was elected coroner because I've been around for a long time and people like me, and because no one else wanted the job. Most of my work is signing death certificates for people who died of natural causes. When we have a suspicious death, we send the body to Tampa for the postmortem. We don't have the facilities here, and, frankly, I don't have the expertise.

McGee nods, starts to speak--Rodale doesn't let him.

RODALE

But--Tush Bannon was not a suspicious death. He comes home, his wife's gone without a word, his business is padlocked. So... he takes his own life.

MCGEE

All right. So he drowns himself. So he shoots himself.

(a methodical listing)

But does he crank an engine to the top of a hoist...find a length of wire...attach it to the ratchet... lie down--

CAT

Face up.

MCGEE

Lies down face up...and lets the engine go? Does he watch it?

Rodale scowls at the mental picture. McGee produces a film roll from his pocket.

MCGEE

These are some pictures I took of the block and hoist. If you could just look over everything one more time, eliminating the possibility of suicide from your mind...

Rodale considers it, then slowly takes the film roll.

RODALE

Mr. McGee, what makes you so certain he didn't commit suicide?

MCGEE

I've been friends with Tush Bannon for a long time. He wouldn't do something like that.

EXT. CYPRESS MOTEL - DAY

McGee exits the office, nods to Cat and points toward--

EXT. ROOM 17 - DAY

As McGee taps on the door. Jan opens it. Her eyes are red, her hair limp. She is surprised.

JAN

...Travis?

TRAVIS

Hello, Jan.

Tears well in her eyes, and then she leans into him. He holds her, comfortingly--she stiffens suddenly, pulls away. An awkward moment as she stands there, self-consciously.

TRAVIS

Jan, this is Catherine Killian.

CAT

Cat to my friends. I'm very sorry about your husband, Mrs. Bannon.

Jan nods, fighting back her tears--clenches her eyes and fists, gets control. She nods, accepting the condolence.

JAN

Please, it's Jan. How did you find out..?

MCGEE

Happenstance. I'd like to hear what's been going on.

INT. DINER - DAY

A relatively clean but unremarkable coffee shop. Through the window, across the street, the Cypress motel can be seen, Jan's Vanagon parked in one of the slots in front.

McGee and Jan drink coffee; Jan just rotates her cup slowly. She is a walking knot; she must occasionally strain to keep her voice from breaking.

JAN

--and then the inspectors started visiting regularly--electrical, health, fire, all of 'em, and they'd find something wrong, fine us, close us, so we'd fix it and re-open and then the inspectors'd show up again.

MCGEE

When did this start? Can you date it back to something specific?

JAN

Oh, yeah. Crane Watts.

McGee's look prompts her to continue.

JAN

He's a real estate attorney. He came out offering to buy the boatel. Tush refused. Watts came back a couple more times, offering more each time. But you know Tush--he didn't want money. He just wanted--
(her voice almost breaks)
--his own marina and to live on the water and mess around with boats.

(beat)

That was too much to ask.

CAT

Sounds just about right to me.

JAN

Not in Osceola City. Not in Shawana County.

(beat)

Tush...killed himself...thinking I was leaving him.

(beat)

No. Knowing I was leaving him. I was leaving him. I couldn't take it anymore. When they foreclosed, I...I was--

Jan looks away, eyes shut tight. She draws a deep breath, shudders, regaining her tenuous control.

McGEE

Why did Watts want the land?

JAN

Tush found out he had some sort of deal cooked up to sell a big tract to Southways Incorporated.

McGEE

(impressed with the name)
Gary Santo's outfit?

JAN

(nods)

Tush tried to see Santo. He drove down to Key Biscayne--Santo keeps a yacht there. Tush figured if Santo knew a little guy was getting hurt for one of his deals, he'd stop it.

Jan smiles, shakes her head, at once remembering fondly Tush's optimism and ruining his naivete.

JAN

Poor Tush. When he called, he was crushed. He couldn't even get in to see Santo. His personal assistant handled it. Tush said she didn't even care.

McGee and Cat glance at each other.

McGEE

Tush must've come by to see me right after that.

JAN

He said he was going to ask you for help. He said you knew how to deal with these kind of people. But--I'm sorry, Travis, but what could you do?

She looks down, once again fighting tears. McGee reaches across, puts a hand on her arm. She looks up.

McGEE

I've got a few ideas.

EXT. BUSTED FLUSH - NIGHT

McGee walks back up the dock from the phone booth. Cat stands on the aft deck.

McGEE

I got ahold of Meyer. He's going to rent a car, and meet us at the bank tomorrow. We may have a way to get the land back to Jan.

CAT

But--it's been foreclosed on. Is that possible?

McGEE

Meyer said my plan seemed... 'workable.' High praise from Meyer.

He puts his arms around her. They stand still, listening to the sounds of the river at night.

CAT

I wonder if one of us should have stayed with Jan.

McGEE

She was pretty emphatic about it.

CAT

She's punishing herself. Like she can't let herself cry, or feel comforted, because she ran away.

McGEE

I hope she'll be all right. I'm going to need her at her best tomorrow.

CAT

I think it's going to be a very long time before she's at her best again.

INT. FLUSH - MASTER STATEROOM

The tide laps hollowly, rhythmically, against the hull. They lie in the moonlight, Cat's head on McGee's chest. McGee's eyes are shut; Cat traces the path of a long knife scar on his ribs.

CAT

Travis...I know we said no questions--

McGEE

I never said no questions. I just agreed to it.

She pauses--that is not the topic she wants to discuss.

McGEE

What do you want to know?

Cat is ashamed she's made the list, but can't ignore it.

CAT

It's just...Travis, there are some weird things about this wonderful houseboat of yours. Like that bell that bing-bongs when someone steps on the gangplank. And--I found this by accident--

She reaches across him and shoves a panel on the headboard. It flips over, revealing a pistol in a quick-release mount, within easy reach of McGee.

McGEE

Cat--

CAT

And you're body. All these scars.
There isn't enough unblemished
McGee to make a decent lampshade.

(McGee makes a face
at the metaphor)

I mean, you shamble around like some
half-asleep beach bum, but...the
other day, when Marilee slipped on
that piece of ice. I was watching
you. You were at least ten feet away
from her, and you were there before
she even realized she was going
headfirst down the ladderway. You
just yanked her right out of the air.

Cat sits forward, talking quickly now.

CAT

And that little song-and-dance you
did for the gas man. And what Jan
said, that you 'know how to deal
with these people.'

(she looks at him)

Travis...is this relationship going
to end with sirens and a SWAT team
and teargas through the windows?

McGee smiles. Lines creak against a breeze. McGee's smile
fades; he looks up at the gun compartment.

MCGEE

There's another one of these in a
space behind the medicine cabinet.

(closes the compartment)

What I do for a living is salvage
work.

Her expression demands further explanation.

MCGEE

This is a tricky, complex, indifferent
society, Cat. It's a loophole world.
And there are a lot of clever animals
who know how to reach through the
loopholes and pick the pockets of
the unsuspecting. And the law can't
do anything to help. The pigeon might
as well have dropped his wallet into
a river full of crocodiles. He knows
right where it is, but all he can do
is stand on shore and wring his hands.

A shadow glides across them, a night-hunting bird passing in front of the moon.

McGEE

So I'm the salvage expert. And I've known a lot of crocodiles. So I make a deal with the pigeon. I dive down, bring up his wallet, and split the contents with him, fifty-fifty.

(smiles)

I prefer to ride to the rescue when there's money involved.

CAT

That's a pretty steep cut.

McGEE

As I often point out, without me, they get zero. Half is damn site better than nothing. If I don't make it, I'm out expenses.

CAT

Or you are a dainty dish for the crocs, man.

McGEE

So far I've been indigestible.

Cat again traces the scar again. She smiles slightly.

CAT

Good. Good. So I'm not a gun moll. I'm more like Sancho Panza.

McGEE

(chuckles)

Please. San-cha.

Cat smiles, kisses him. She searches his eyes with hers.

CAT

I think...I think there are a lot of people who are going to be sorry that Tush Bannon had a friend like you.

She kisses him gently. From a distance, the night bird calls.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - STREET - DAY

Cat and McGee (in a suit) stand outside the SHAWANA NATIONAL BANK AND TRUST. Jan waits inside the Vanagon.

McGee checks his watch, and then looks past the Vanagon to across the street, at the fairly new, single-story glass-and-brick office of WATTS REAL ESTATE.

McGEE

Just pretend you're a customer. The important thing is to keep him away from here 'til it's too late. Okay?

CAT

Ha! Can the gaudy redhead from the big city dazzle Crane Watts, rube attorney with her promissory charms? You're a little vague on details, McGee. Do I give all for the cause?

McGEE

I've always had the impression that if the string on the carrot was too long, and if the donkey snapped at it and got it, he'd lose his incentive and stop pulling the load.

CAT

Just for the hell of it, McGee, what would be your reaction if I kept the carrot on a mighty short string?

McGEE

Killian, I would have to admit that I am just stodgy and old-fashioned enough to enjoy being the dog in your manger. I like a kind of sentimental exclusivity.

CAT

So be it. I am now motivated to defend my honor.

A quick kiss, and she strolls off, across the street.

McGee opens the door of the van, helps Jan out.

McGEE

We're going to have to start without Meyer. Let's go on in.

INT. SHAWANA NATIONAL BANK AND TRUST - OFFICE - DAY

Jan and McGee sit facing WHITT SANDERS, a big old boy in a three piece suit, who sits behind his massive desk.

SANDERS

You can rest assured Mrs. Bannon, Mr. McGee, that the bank is doing everything in its power to liquidate the property in question at the maximum figure obtainable.

McGEE

I'm sure that's true, but--

SANDERS

Of course, certain unfortunate situations in that area have made it a difficult piece to move at this time, but we negotiated something which I think anyone would agree is more than fair--

The door opens, and MEYER sticks his head in. He is a bear of a man, his otherwise imposing features softened by his always-smiling blue eyes.

MEYER

Hi. They said I could find you here.

McGee gets up, moves over to him. They speak in whispers:

McGEE

You're late.

MEYER

I had to make a stop. Would you rather me be late and prepared, or early and useless?

McGEE

On time and informed.

MEYER

Idealist.

SANDERS

Who is this man?

McGEE

Jan, Mr. Sanders--Whitt...allow me to introduce Meyer.

Meyer takes Jan's hand. He searches her eyes, smiles sympathetically. She smiles back slightly, unable to help feeling his genuine concern. He rises, gives her hand a squeeze, turns to Sanders, juts out his hand.

MEYER

How do you do?

SANDERS

(takes the hand warily)
...call me Whitt.

MEYER

Okay, Whitt.

McGEE

Meyer's come up from Lauderdale to help Mrs. Bannon clear up her mortgage and take possession of the deed.

Sanders looks at Jan uneasily--then returns to Meyer.

SANDERS

I guess I don't know what you're driving at, actually. The business isn't part of the estate because there was a foreclosure before Mr. Bannon died. So title has passed to the bank.

MEYER

That so?

(draws a check out of
his portfolio)

Funny. I have the impression that when I turn over to you this certified check made out in the name of Janine Bannon, which covers back payments, fees and expenses, the title is going to ease right back to her.

Jan looks at Meyer wonderingly, looks over at McGee. McGee smiles, enjoying it. Sanders stares uncomprehending at Meyer.

SANDERS

Are you a lawyer?

MEYER

No. I'm an economist. But I think the law works the same for the layman and professional alike.

He flashes a brief, sardonic smile at Sanders. Sanders addresses Jan.

SANDERS

I'm sorry, but the grace period has ended. There's no way to return title.

MEYER

Are you a lawyer?

SANDERS

(beat)

No.

MEYER

Then there's no point in citing precedent where the courts have ruled in favor of widows and orphans, especially where the widow was one of the parties on the mortgage. Is there?

Sanders feels he should say something, but has no answer.

MEYER

Have you passed title to a third party?

SANDERS

(brightening)

We've accepted an earnest offer, yes.

MEYER

Oh. Money has changed hands?

SANDERS

Yes. Definitely.

MEYER

(wary)

Money totalling ten percent of purchase price?

SANDERS

(recovering his mastery
of the situation)

Yes.

MEYER

You'll have to return it. The acceptance of that money does not constitute change of ownership on the property. Now, here's the check. May we have a receipt, please.

Slowly, Sanders switches on his computer. He begins to type out the check receipt. Meyer digs through his portfolio, and pulls out some official papers.

MEYER

And while we're at it, we may as well take care of this. A friend drew these up--

(he looks up at Sanders)
--a lawyer. Everything's all ready to record, but we'll need the bank's approval of the transfer of the mortgage from Mrs. Bannon to Mr. McGee.

SANDERS

What?

Jan, too, is surprised. Meyer slides the papers over to Sanders, who looks them over, becoming indignant.

SANDERS

I would be remiss if I didn't protest this, Mrs. Bannon. This offer is one third what Crane Watts has offered--

Jan has been looking at McGee, who returns her gaze steadily. She makes her decision.

JAN

I don't care.

SANDERS

But--

JAN

I don't care. I'd burn the place out and salt the earth before I'd let Crane Watts have it. Tush wouldn't sell to him. Neither will I.

She stares at Sanders defiantly. Sanders looks at Meyer. At McGee. McGee gestures to Sanders to get on with it. Meyer nods, nudging the papers closer. Sanders resumes typing.

EXT. SHAWANA NATIONAL BANK AND TRUST - DAY

McGee, Meyer, and a troubled Jan walk out to the Vanagon.

JAN

Travis, why...why did you want me to sell you the boatel? It--it's just...the money was so low...

McGEE

Watts is after that land. This way you don't have to deal with him. I get to.

MEYER

You have a plan.

McGEE

At this point, I'm just blowing smoke into the burrow.

Cat arrives at the Vanagon.

CAT

Meyer!

(they embrace)

(to McGee)

One windmill accounted for, sir.

McGEE

What happened?

CAT

(not believing a word of it)

Crane Watts is one of the prime movers of the Shawana County Renaissance. He is civic minded. His hands got clammy when I sat too close. He has a wife named Vivian. She plays too much tennis and isn't there to support him.

(rolls her eyes)

Our pleasant time together was abruptly ended. He got a phone call that upset him quite a bit. Somebody named 'Whitt'.

McGEE

How nice.

CAT

He also invited me to a city council meeting tonight, to hear all about the county's bright future. And maybe a drink afterward.

MEYER

I think attending that meeting is a priority.

McGEE

I agree.

(to Cat)

Clammy hands and drinks, huh? You sure you kept that string short?

CAT

Good carrots.

INT. SHAWANA COUNTY COURTHOUSE - LAND REGISTRAR DEPT. - DAY

A slow moving line. McGee and Meyer wait, Meyer unperturbedly reading through papers from his briefcase. McGee shifts impatiently; he does not like lines. He finds the clock.

McGEE

Jan's flight leaves Melbourne at six.

MEYER

The funeral, hm? Where was Tush from--Ohio, wasn't it?

McGEE

Oklahoma.

MEYER

I knew it was one of those flat states that begins with a vowel.

(beat)

How much money are you planning to wring out of Crane Watts?

McGEE

All of it.

(off Meyer's look)

I don't want to just hurt him. I want him crippled. Him and Santo both.

Meyer is slightly shocked. He leads McGee away from the line.

MEYER

Now, wait a minute! Watts is one thing, but Gary Santo--

McGEE

Out of my league?

(Meyer doesn't answer)

Santo knew what was going on. And he let the roof fall in on Tush, for a lousy crumb of acreage.

(beat)

I'd like to at least sting him. Just a little.

MEYER

He has lawyers and accountants double-checking his every move.

MCGEE

I was thinking of something legitimate. Some kind of listed stock--like that Westec thing you told me about...

Meyer's mind is already working.

MEYER

I'd have to get a line on a dirty situation before it began to sour...
(shakes his head)
But why does Gary Santo even listen to Travis McGee?

MCGEE

(smiles)
Because I've picked some very big winners over the past year.

Meyer sees where McGee is heading with this.

MEYER

Hindsight! Perfect! Dated, machine-printed confirmations of stock purchases...on official forms, from a reputable brokerage house--
(beat)
One day, maybe two, in New York...
I can come back with proof that you're a genius!

MCGEE

And a stock?

Meyer is little more skeptical of this, but finally nods.

MEYER

If one's out there, I'll find it.

INT. MELBOURNE AIRPORT TERMINAL - EVENING

Near the x-ray machine and metal detector. McGee, Cat and Meyer watch from the terminal side as Jan picks her suitcase up off the x-ray machine belt.

Meyer sets his garment bag on the belt, turns to Travis.

MEYER

So how rich do you want to be?

McGEE

Say I started a year ago with two hundred thousand.

MEYER

(goes through the detector)
Congratulations. You're now worth a quarter of a million.

McGEE

Success hasn't spoiled me, Meyer-- have you noticed?

EXT. SHAWANA COUNTY COURTHOUSE - NIGHT

Lit by floodlights on the lawn.

CRANE (O.S.)

...and I'm also happy to say that provisions have been made...

INT. SHAWANA COUNTY COURTHOUSE - COUNCIL ROOM - EVENING

CRANE WATTS stands at the podium, addressing the seven-man council. Crane is blond, good-looking, well-dressed--but it comes across as the disguise of an anxious, going-to-seed young man.

Several aerial charts and artists' renderings of the proposed marina-resort stand on easels.

CRANE (cont'd)

...to insure that the Shawana River Resort and Marina will exist in harmony with the natural environment--

DANYOV

What kind of provisions?

DANYOV, an intense, impatient woman, stands at a second podium, a line of people behind her waiting for their turns.

CRANE

We'll be instituting programs along the lines of the ones that have proved successful in the past--like the ones at Marcos Island--

DANYOV

What? A bunch of concrete eagles' nests?

The Shawana Conservation League, well-represented in the audience, boo and catcall. Danyov gestures, trying to shush them. The hearing room is S.R.O., a cross-section of culture.

At the back of the room, McGee and Cat watch the goings-on with interest.

CHAIRMAN

(rapping his gavel)

Please, Mr. Watts has the floor. Crane?

DANYOV

We've heard all this before--

The meeting breaks down into an even more chaotic hubbub, the chair trying to restore order. Cat touches McGee's arm (he has been staring hard at Watts) and points surreptitiously.

CAT

Watts had that woman's picture on his desk.

McGee looks over at VIVIAN WATTS, a handsome, dark-haired woman who has just entered. She stands near the back.

INT. HEARING ROOM

McGee steps beside Vivian as if he has just entered. Vivian takes note of him as Danyov and Crane continue arguing.

MCGEE

That's Crane Watts, isn't it?

(Vivian nods)

So what do you think of him?

Vivian thinks a moment, smiles to herself.

VIVIAN

He is my husband.

(McGee looks a little embarrassed)

Vivian Watts.

MCGEE

Travis McGee. So, I take it you're for the development?

VIVIAN

(almost by rote)

This county's dying. Everything else in Florida's making money except us. Excuse me.

Vivian moves forward, toward an open seat in the first row. The chairman has quieted the room, but not silenced it.

CHAIRMAN

That's enough! Mr. Watts has the floor--everyone else will have a turn to address the council--

DANYOV

You're just going to rubber stamp this? There should at least be an 18-month environmental impact report--

CRANE

Southways will commission a study-- what we're talking about is new jobs, an increased tax-base, all beneficial to the community---

DANYOV

To you and Southways and Gary Santo--

CRANE

That's not true! We--

Debra Brown steps forward from the crowd, approaches Crane.

DEBRA

Mr. Chairman, if I may?

Crane is relieved to see her; he waves her to the microphone. McGee and Cat exchange a startled look across the room.

CHAIRMAN

Who are you?

CRANE

This is Debra Brown, with Southways. I relinquish the floor to her.

The Conservation League boos and hisses. Danyov is again gesturing her group to hush.

CHAIRMAN

Go ahead.

DEBRA

Thank you, sir. As Mr. Watts said, I represent Southways Incorporated and Mr. Santo. I've come here tonight to make an announcement. On further consideration, Southways has decided to drop its plans for the development of the Shawana River. We would also--

The Conservation League cheers. Crane has gone ashen. Debra speaks her last quickly over the celebration.

DEBRA

We would also like to announce at this time that we will be taking a more active role in the conservation and preservation of Florida's natural resources. Thank you.

She strides out, shaking a few proffered hands impatiently.

Crane turns--Vivian puts a consoling hand on his arm. Crane shrugs it off, hurries after Debra. Vivian stands there, not sure whether to follow.

INT. SHAWANA COUNTY COURTHOUSE - VESTIBULE

Crane stands between Debra and the front doors. McGee comes out of the hearing room, hangs back behind a pillar.

CRANE

--we can work this out. It's just a few more days.

DEBRA

Yes or no: Can you deliver all three tracts of land?

CRANE

Just a few more days--

DEBRA

Mr. Watts. I don't care. Mr. Santo's involvement is finished. Good-bye.

Debra pushes past Crane, out the doors. Crane watches her go, unable to make any move.

Crane rubs a hand across his mouth. He glances toward the hearing room, then shoves out the doors. McGee watches, his face grim. Cat joins him; he takes her arm and moves them toward the door.

INT. THE ANNEX - NIGHT

Dim light and candlelit tables. Crane, one of the few customers, sits alone at the bar, drinking a Scotch, an empty glass to one side. Cat sits down on the stool to his right. He looks at her, surprised, pleased.

CRANE

Maybe this won't be such a bad night after all.

CAT

Don't get your hopes up. Crane--
Travis McGee.

McGee sits down on the other side of Crane, smiles at him.

CRANE

What's going on? You're the guy who
screwed everything up, you son of a
bitch.

He stands to get off the stool; McGee puts a hand on his
shoulder, pushes him back down. Crane tries to stand again;
McGee holds him in place, still smiling.

Crane puts his muscle into it, slapping off McGee's hand. He
swings a roundhouse right at McGee. McGee moves his head just
enough to let the punch go by.

Cat, watching, sees McGee's face change to something hard and
sharp, darkly vicious. She gasps as

McGee catches Crane's face in his hand and shoves down and
back, banging the back of Crane's head off the edge of the
bar. Crane drops to the floor, out. McGee kneels, drapes one
of Crane's arms over his shoulders and hoists him up.

The bartender has hurried down to them.

BARTENDER

Is there a problem? What happened to
Mr. Watts?

McGEE

One over the limit. Could you call
his wife? Tell her I'm bringing him
home.

BARTENDER

Sure...not the first time.

The bartender moves off. McGee half-carries, half-drags Crane
past Cat. She is still shocked. McGee doesn't look at her.

McGEE

Take the van...go back to the Flush.

A beat; he looks at her. She nods. He continues to the doors,
out, away from Cat.

McGEE (V.O.)

Mine isn't a very respectable dedication.
Sometimes, though, I get a faint echo
of the knight errant psychosis.

INT. CRANE'S CAR - NIGHT

McGee drives; Crane slumps against the window. Crane's wallet is on the seat between them, open to his driver's license.

McGEE (V.O.)

It would be easy to make more of it
than what is there. It would be easy
to knock someone around and then
spit the bad taste out of my mouth
by saying, 'It's for a good cause.'

The rearview mirror has been knocked askew. Its reflection shows Watts, unconscious on the seat. McGee straightens it-- he is staring into his own eyes. He knocks it askew again.

McGEE (V.O.)

But, the truth is, everyone's hall
closet is full lances and shields
and other tourney gear.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - WATT'S HOME

The neighborhood has more empty lots than houses. The Watts home is a long low Florida block house, with subtle signs of neglect: the front lawn is sunbrowned, the driveway sign saying The Watts is turned and bent.

McGEE (V.O.)

The guy who sells you insurance gets
singed by his own secret kind of
dragon breath. And his own Maid Marian
yoo-hoos him back to the castle tower.
So I do what I do, and live with the
consequences.

The porch light goes on as McGee pulls up into the drive. McGee helps a semi-conscious Crane toward the front door where Vivian, in an orange housecoat, waits.

INT. WATTS HOME - LIVING ROOM

Vivian helps McGee guide Crane to the couch.

VIVIAN

Thank you, Mr. McGee.
(beat)

I'd offer you a drink, but I
guess you've had about all anyone
would want of this.

McGEE

Coffee would be nice.

VIVIAN

I think I can manage that.

She heads into the kitchen. Crane moans, opens his eyes. He stares at McGee lividly. He stands up, moves to the barcart, pours himself a bourbon. McGee steps over, takes the glass out of his hand.

CRANE

Goddammit. I need that.

MCGEE

Not if we're going to talk.

CRANE

Talk about what?

MCGEE

Maybe about how you can help me make some money.

Crane wipes his face slowly with his hand, stops and looks at McGee with a skeptical eye. He straightens.

CRANE

Just a moment.

He reaches into the ice bucket, puts some cold water on his face, shakes it off. He pops an ice cube into his mouth.

CRANE

All right.

MCGEE

Sorry I had to do what I did.

CRANE

Maybe I didn't give you any choice. What's the deal?

MCGEE

The deal is, I want to buy your land.

CRANE

You do, huh? How much?

McGee looks him over before giving him the offer. There is the slight feeling that McGee is making this up as he goes.

MCGEE

Two thousand an acre.

Crane cracks the ice cube as he thinks it over.

CRANE

Sorry. Not enough. I've been working on this thing one way or another for for a year and a half, about. The way things are, I have to make it big. Tell you what--I'll buy the Bannon property.

McGEE

You will, huh? How much?

CRANE

(smiling, hands spread)
Two thousand an acre.

McGEE

(smiling, hands spread)
Not enough.

CRANE

C'mon--we're not talking boatel and we are not talking mom-and-pop business. We're talking ten acres.

McGEE

Ten acres smack in the middle of your deal, like a June bug in a birthday cake.

Crane thinks this over, struggling with it.

CRANE

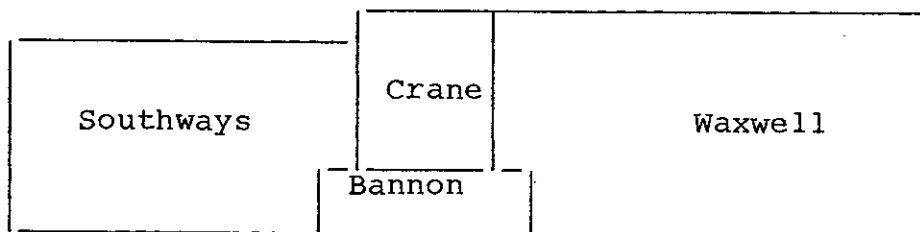
Okay. The way I see it, we can learn to eat out of the same dish, or spill the dinner. I'll cut you in on my re-sale.

McGEE

Tell me about it.

INT. WATT'S HOUSE - STUDY

Ill-kept; messy. Crane refers to a a surveyor's map; the relevant borders he has outlined in marking pen:



Crane indicates the parcel on the left.

CRANE

Over here, this is Santo's.
(indicates Waxwell's
land)

Then, over on this side--Boone
Waxwell owns all this over here.
It's been Waxwell land as far back
as anyone can remember. I'd been
selling parts of it for him for a
couple years, little bit here,
little bit there. Waxwell's crazy.
I'm the only one who could've got
that option.

McGEE

So that left Bannon's Boatel.

CRANE

Yeah...

McGEE

So you tried to force him out. Got
the county to move the bridge, put
the road out of commission.

CRANE

I've got a certain amount of juice
around here. It wasn't anything
against the law. I--nobody wished
him any ill-will--but...business
is business.

McGEE

Killing Bannon was business?

CRANE

Bannon? Bannon committed suicide!
I didn't want him dead, for God's
sake--look how it's screwed
everything up.

(beat)

I even went to Santo, to see if he'd
kick in, up the offer to Bannon. But
he just told me to take care of it.
Hell, he can just let his land sit
there for ten years. He doesn't have
to sweat these things out.

McGEE

In a way, that's my policy, too.

Crane looks a little panicked.

CRANE

Look. You can't move your land, unless you move Santo's parcel at the same time, right?

McGEE

Maybe. Or maybe I've got a buyer who doesn't need that much room.

Crane tries to hide his interest in the new buyer.

CRANE

I'll play it like a Mexican standoff, mister. I'll squat on my fifty, you squat on your ten.

McGEE

You won't sell?

CRANE

I've got to be in on the re-sale.

McGee examines the map, considering the situation.

McGEE

The thing of it is, Crane--I know this deal will go through. It's as near a sure thing as you can get.

CRANE

How's that?

McGEE

The buyer's representative will not only recommend our deal, he'll go to the top limit authorized.

Crane smiles slyly.

CRANE

If we sweeten it for him, under the table. Sweeten it how much?

McGEE

Two hundred thousand.

Crane whistles.

CRANE

That's a lot of sugar.

McGEE

If you want in on the resale, you have to be in on the bribe.

CRANE
What's the top limit authorized?

McGEE
Thirty thousand an acre.

Crane's eyebrows go up. The door opens; Vivian, looks in.

VIVIAN
What are you two doing?

CRANE
I'm getting rich. Close the door
as you leave.

Vivian gives Crane a look, gives the same look to McGee. She sets two coffee cups down hard, then she slams the door.

Crane looks at McGee. Shrugs his shoulders. Smiles.

CRANE
We're getting rich. So we split
the bribe?

McGEE
(nods)
And I suggest we don't pay it until
the full sale price arrives. The
buyer is...slippery.

CRANE
I've dealt with that kind before.
He got a name?

McGEE
(beat)
Meyer.

INT. CRANE'S CAR - NIGHT

Vivian presents a stony silence to McGee as she drives.

EXT. BOATEL - NIGHT

McGee gets out of the car.

McGEE
Vivian--

VIVIAN
You make an excellent first impression,
McGee. But the second is more lasting.

She puts the car in gear and accelerates away.

INT. FLUSH - MASTER STATEROOM

Cat lies with her back to the door; McGee comes in quietly, slips off his shoes, his shirt. He sits down on the bed, rests a hand on her shoulder.

McGEE

Cat?...I'm sorry if...about tonight.

CAT

That's not--

(shakes her head)

Don't be. I...I asked you what you were. I found out, sort of.

McGEE

It's only a part.

CAT

Just smile like kindly ol' McGee, dear, to kind of erase that other... that other look.

McGEE

That bad?

CAT

They could bottle it and use it to poison pit vipers.

He smiles at the joke. He reaches out, touches her cheek with a knuckle. She takes his hand, kisses the palm, then turns as he lies down beside her, pulling his arm across her shoulder.

CAT

Just hold me. It just seems like such a dark, dark night to be alone.

McGee, behind her, arms around her, hugs her tight.

FADE OUT

EXT. FLUSH - MORNING

White mist rises from the river, bleaching all color from the sky. McGee unstraps the small dinghy from its mounts.

McGee launches the dinghy from the deck, keeping the splashes as quiet as possible. He sets a rod and tackle box inside.

EXT. SHAWANA RIVER - MORNING

McGee sculls upriver, the blades of the oars making small, smooth sounds as they pull through the water.

EXT. SHAWANA RIVER - MORNING

McGee rows past the remains of the old bridge, the river banks becoming more wild. Giant poinciana trees are in bloom, many of the flaming petals drifting in the current.

EXT. SHAWANA RIVER - BAIT LANDING - MORNING

McGee drifts in toward the rickety dock. A gnarled LOCAL MAN sits next to the small shack at the pier's end, mending a gill net. He watches as McGee climbs out, ties up.

LOCAL

You want bait? Joe don't unlock 'till ten.

McGEE

(shakes his head)

There's a man here I was told to look up. Name of Waxwell.

The man never stops his mending.

LOCAL

There's Waxwells spread all the way from here to Forty Mile Bend. There's Waxwells in Everglades City, and, as far as I know, a couple way up to La Belle.

(beat)

When they breed, it's always boy babies, and they breed frequent.

McGEE

Boone Waxwell?

The man's hands hesitate briefly, then continue their work.

LOCAL

Now that one's a Shawana River Waxwell, and he could be out to his place, just a mile from where the dirt slants away from the black top.

(beat)

If he's there, it's still the time of day he could get mean about anybody coming to visit.

McGEE

I don't expect there'd be any time he'd be pleased to see me.

McGee starts up the crushed shell road toward the blacktop. The man continues his mending, calls out over his shoulder.

LOCAL

Be careful on one thing, or size
won't do you no good atall.

(McGee waits)

What he does, he comes smiling up,
nice as pie, gets close enough and
kicks a man's kneecap off. Then he
settles down to stomping him good.

McGEE

Thanks. I'm grateful to you.

The man grunts. McGee turns, and crunches up the road.

EXT. SWAMP CLEARING/WAXWELL'S SHACK - MORNING

Barely visible from between the trees is a weathered gray house, set back a hundred feet off the dirt road.

McGee follows the rutted drive, notes the large, handsome inboard launch--the SUICIDE KING--strapped on a heavy duty trailer. Next to it is a white Lincoln Continental four-door convertible, its rear bumper smashed.

McGee stops thirty feet from the house, yells:

McGEE

Waxwell! Yo! Boone Waxwell!

Some thumping from inside, then the door opens. BOONE WAXWELL comes onto the porch. He is barefoot, shirtless, good wads of muscle on his shoulders. With long dark hair and long lashes, he is brutishly handsome--a seedy, indolent sexuality. He carries a shotgun like a pistol, barrel down.

WAXWELL

Git on off my land or I'll blow a
foot off you and tote you off.

McGEE

My name's McGee. Crane Watts told
me about the option he's got on
your land.

WAXWELL

Now in't he some lawyer fella over
to Osceola City?

McGEE

C'mon. I'm here to make a deal. You
can either be in or out.

Waxwell considers him--then he smiles. He tosses the shotgun onto a battered couch on the front porch and comes down toward McGee, hand stuck out, wearing a merry smile.

McGee takes the hand--then jumps aside; Waxwell's kick misses McGee's knee, unbalancing him. McGee chops down on Waxwell's throat with his forearm, driving Waxwell to the ground.

Waxwell stares at McGee in purest astonishment--then laughs, his laugh full of delight.

WAXWELL

Man, man. You as rough and quick as
the business end of an alligator gar.
Taught ol Boo a Sunday school lesson.

And then he is off the ground, lightning-quick, springing at McGee, off-guard, surprised at his opponent's speed.

Waxwell connects with cross, then screws his heels into the ground, starts throwing big hooks, as fast as he can swing.

McGee gets his arms and elbows up--he looks awkward, but he blocks all the punches with his forearms and shoulders. Small grunts of exertion and scrabbling feet are the only sounds.

Waxwell, tiring, swings roundhouse right, left, right--McGee slips it, comes down hard on Waxwell's instep--then brings his elbow up under his jaw. In the same motion, he whips him across the eyes with an open backhand.

As Waxwell cries out, McGee thumbs him in the throat socket, slaps him on the ear, punches him under the belt buckle... then clamps onto his wrist, turns it up between his shoulder blades and rams him two steps into the side of the boat.

Waxwell's body goes loose. McGee drops him to the damp earth, where he rolls onto his back, coughing, eyes shut.

McGee steps back, feeling his arms, the side of his head, checking for damage. He wipes his split lip--his hands are shaking. He leans against the boat, head against the hull, breathing deeply to calm himself.

CINDY (O.S.)

Do me a favor if'n you kilt him.

McGee looks over where CINDY INGERFELDT, not yet sixteen, stands on the porch, looking calmly at Waxwell, combing her long blond hair.

MCGEE

There he is. Finish the job.

CINDY

Could might just do that some time,
or somebody will. Onliest way I
could get stopped from coming on
over here. Hah! He just three month
from my Pa's age.

(beat)

But you don't kill off Waxwells.
It comes out the other way around.

Waxwell, groaning, slowly works his way up to a sitting
position. Cindy goes over to him, bends to speak to him.

CINDY

Look, I'm going to be going along now.

WAXWELL

So you go along, Cindy.

Cindy shrugs. She climbs onto an old moped, turns to McGee.

CINDY

Mister, he'll be thinkin on some
way to bust you up when you least
expeck.

WAXWELL

Ain't gonna work on this old boy.
Get on home, girl.

Cindy pedals away. The engine catches, and she motors off.

McGEE

Little young for you, isn't she?

WAXWELL

Cindy, she's my nearby girl this year.
A nearby girl is when it's too damn
much trouble to go after anything else.

Waxwell studies McGee closely.

WAXWELL

Lord God, you got a size on you. I
shoul'da looked more careful to start.
From those wrists, you'll go twenty
pound more than I guessed.

(beat)

Guess I can listen to what you got
to say. Let's go on to the house and
have us a set-to--and maybe a drink.

He turns and heads for the shack, picking up the shotgun by
the barrel on the way in. McGee follows.

INT. WAXWELL'S SHACK - MORNING

A living room/kitchen. A new refrigerator stocked with beer; stacks of cases of expensive liquor. In the tiny bedroom, the bed is made up with rumpled, leopard-print silk sheets. Whatever isn't new is squalid.

Waxwell cracks open a new bottle of bourbon, pours two glasses at the rickety, battered table.

WAXWELL

Watts was real upset 'bout you buying Bannon's place from the widow. You fixing to run it yourself?

McGEE

I bought it as an investment.

WAXWELL

Hell, the buildings're worth more than the land, with Southways not wanting to buy it up anymore.

(beat)

Lessen you got another buyer in mind.

McGee drinks his bourbon, not flinching under Waxwell's scrutiny. Waxwell grins, refills McGee's glass.

McGEE

I need to know when Crane's option on your land runs out.

WAXWELL

That dumb bastard talks awful quick, don't he?

McGEE

You and me, Boo, we know the ways to make them talk quick.

WAXWELL

I got only one more piece of business with lawyer boy. You seen that wife of his? Vivian? She looks at old Boo like he's a spitty place on the sidewalk. I got it in my mind to take care of that. She's got next to no man 'tall, and it's sure a waste.

(he winks)

And she was just a little too snotty to ol' Boo, which is always a good sign every time. They get like that when they get little ideas in their pretty heads. Makes 'em skitty.

McGEE

Why are you stalling? Tell me when the option reverts, so we can deal.

WAXWELL

How much? And it better be the best you can do right off, 'cause I don't dicker.

McGEE

The best I can offer on an immediate sale--provided title is clear--would be two thousand an acre.

Waxwell peers at him. He gets up and stamps over to the door, spits out into the yard. He speaks thoughtfully.

WAXWELL

A man can't jump at a piece of money like that right off. He has to set and taste it a time.

McGee looks at Waxwell with a slow smile of understanding.

McGEE

(shakes his head)
Oh, you got took.

WAXWELL

How's that?

McGEE

I'll tell you my guess. Crane can extend the option if he wants, locking you in at his old price.

(stands)
I'm talking to the wrong person.

Waxwell slams the door with the side of his fist.

WAXWELL

Goddamn that stupid lawyer-boy! He wrote that shitty contract...

Waxwell thinks for a moment, then forces a crocodile smile.

WAXWELL

Now wait a minute. Maybe it takes you a while to put your deal together.

(sits on the couch)
Crane's option runs out, and you've a lot of money tied up; expenses start eating into your cut--

McGEE

All of a sudden, Boo, your diction improves.

WAXWELL

(grins)

Sometimes I had to go away for a spell. Got me some college women to learn me.

(beat)

So how about it? Could be, we get a paper drawn up that says come next... oh, say April the fifteenth--

McGEE

Sorry. If my deal goes through, it'll go quick or not at all. I'll take my chances with Crane.

(finishes his bourbon)

But thanks for letting me know how long Crane's option runs.

McGee walks out, past Waxwell, whose expression turns black. He springs off the couch.

EXT. WAXWELL'S SHACK - MORNING

McGee turns at the bottom of the porch steps, on the defensive, as Waxwell comes out the door.

WAXWELL

Bastard. You an' Watts an'--

McGEE

You give me any more trouble, Boo, and I'll learn you some. It's a promise. You'll totter around like a very old man for a very long time.

WAXWELL

You could bust all the bones I got, and I'd put my mind on mending up and coming after you. And knowing I couldn't take you even, I'd take you any ways seems safe, take you way up Shawana River and stuff you under the red mangrove roots for crab food.

McGEE

Then I'll put it another way, Boo. If you try something, and it doesn't work, I'll make sure you never get well enough to get in or out of a boat.

A beat as they face each other, then McGee turns and walks away, Waxwell and the shack receding. McGee's step remains steady, his shoulders square--but his face is alert, worried at the stupidity of exposing himself this way.

Behind him, in the distance, Waxwell drifts back into the darkness of his shack as the shack merges into the swamp.

EXT. FLUSH - SUNDECK - DAY

Meyer displays several documents to McGee, including business cards, blue-backed legal papers, and various letters. Meyer hands McGee one particular document.

MEYER

Here's a list of your purchases.
You're a financial genius. All of
the stocks were splendid values back
at the time you bought them--the
time you apparently bought them.

McGee nods. Meyer leans back, steeples his fingers.

MEYER

In terms of our little Trojan Horse
stock, I've found several likelies.
Winnowing them down will simply be
a matter of--

(no change in tone)

--What is wrong with you, McGee?

McGee looks at him, realizing belatedly he's changed topics.

MEYER

All this should be making you grin
that irritatingly smug grin of yours.

McGee shakes his head slightly.

MCGEE

I'm sorry, Meyer. Boone Waxwell
shook me up. He came damned close to
stomping me. I realized it has been
a long time since I have seen anyone
move that fast.

CAT (O.S.)

Besides you, you mean.

Cat stands at the top of the ladder. McGee smiles grimly.

MCGEE

Besides me.

Cat comes over, sits down on the lounge with McGee.

CAT

Here's a dilemma, gents. Today is Tush's funeral. Which is worse, to call Jan or not to call her?

McGEE

There's one of Meyer's laws that covers that. Tell her.

MEYER

In all emotional conflicts, the thing you find the hardest to do is the thing you should do.

Cat thinks it over, nods. Then frowns, nodding again. She rises, moves to the ladder, goes down.

Meyer notes her response, looks at McGee with raised eyebrows. McGee shrugs.

McGEE

This is all good work, Meyer.

MEYER

Thank you. Thing is, I would like to have Jan already sitting on some Fletcher stock before you set Santos loose. That takes money.

Meyer looks over--there is a very broad grin on McGee's face.

MEYER

That's the grin.

McGEE

I didn't get to tell you my news. You and I are going to work a little variation on the pigeon drop.

INT. FLUSH - BILGE

McGee lifts out a perfectly-fitted section of decking. Between the deck and hull is a space; inside is an ammo box--McGee's war chest. Inside are neat bricks of money.

McGEE (cont'd) (V.O.)

Meyer, I think you'd make a nice plant location expert. Somebody with the authority to make firm recommendations to a big fat rich company.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

McGee drives, Meyer practicing his role beside him.

MEYER

It is an exact science, my good fellow. We take all the factors--labor supply, area schools and recreation facilities. Transportation costs. By adjusting these by formula before programming...Travis, what is a pigeon drop?

McGEE

Unlike what might first come to mind, this is something that drops onto a pigeon.

MEYER

You couldn't have made it more clear.

INT. CRANE WATT'S OFFICE - DAY

McGee introduces Meyer. Meyer looks self-important and shifty as he sizes up Crane sizing him up. Neither man offers a hand; Crane gestures over his shoulder.

INT. CRANE WATT'S OFFICE - LATER

Crane and Meyer examine documents. Meyer hands him another, indicating a particular detail. McGee stands to one side, arms folded, watching.

EXT. RIVERFRONT LAND - DIRT ROAD

Crane, Meyer and McGee are gathered around a large survey map on the hood of the rental car. A strong breeze makes the map hard to keep flat. Crane gestures toward the river.

EXT. BOATEL - BEACH

The three small figures step onto the beach. The Flush sits placidly at its moorings. Meyer turns and speaks to Crane, nodding. The two shake hands.

INT. CRANE WATT'S OFFICE - DAY

Crane sits opposite Meyer at the table; McGee stands to one side and slightly behind Crane.

MEYER

So, if we can settle the last little detail, gentlemen?

Crane glances at McGee, indicates that McGee should do the talking. McGee leans forward, palms on the table.

McGEE

Mr. Meyer. We get the three point six million dollar check or definite confirmation from your bosses that the deal has gone through. Then you get your two hundred thousand.

Meyer stares at McGee with a heavy, convincing contempt.

MEYER

And do what if I don't get it, Mr. McGee? Sue you in Small Claims Court? (points out a document)
You see the authorizations. It will go through the minute I say so.

McGee straightens. He watches Crane as he speaks.

McGEE

And at the last minute they change their minds.

Crane nods slightly; McGee notes it. They are now allies.

McGEE

I mean, what have we got to make you give it back?

MEYER

There can be nothing in writing. You understand that. What you have is my word.

CRANE

But you won't take ours?

MEYER

So forget it, gentlemen. Impasse. I'll resume negotiations for the other tract in Tampa.

Meyer rises, gathering in his papers. Crane glances at McGee, disbelieving. McGee sits quickly down beside him.

McGEE

Wait, please.

(Meyer pauses)

Surely this can be resolved. Maybe if somehow we can set it up so that the money's there for you, but only if the deal goes through--

MEYER

(appalled)

An escrow account?

CRANE

He's right, McGee. I don't think any of us can afford those kind of records.

McGEE

Well, how about...some sort of impromptu escrow account?

Meyer looks interested at this.

CRANE

What do you mean?

Both he and Meyer wait. McGee rises, thinking it through.

McGEE

Okay...Okay, suppose we take our money--you have your half?

CRANE

In my safe.

McGEE

Okay, we take the money, and we put it in a safety deposit box, and... No--a double-key safety deposit box.
(smiling now)

Meyer--Mr. Meyer takes one key, we hang on to the other. Right? That way, the money's there, but neither side can get at it if the other side isn't satisfied. A little insurance policy, for all concerned.

Crane considers it, wavering. Meyer is exasperated.

MEYER

Kid games! Nonsense games!

CRANE

I think it's a good idea.

Crane and McGee look to Meyer. Meyer milks the moment.

MEYER

Sometimes being too careful is stupid, gentlemen.

(beat)

All right. I'll play along.

INT. BANK - DAY

A smaller, more modern bank than the Osceola National. McGee and Crane, both carrying briefcases, accompany a clerk into the vault. Meyer follows them, wearing a sour expression.

INT. SAFETY DEPOSIT VAULT - DAY

Two keys in the locks of box number 762. The clerk uses the master key, pulls out the large, deep box. McGee takes it.

INT. CUBICLE - DAY

McGee's briefcase stands empty. Meyer, seated at the table, takes money stacks from Crane's case, counts it. He pauses.

MEYER

You can make this deal right now
for one hundred fifty thousand. None
of this silliness.

Crane glances at McGee. McGee warningly shakes his head.

CRANE

I tend to snap at a good bargain,
Mr. Meyer. When I hear one, I will.

He indicates Meyer should continue. Meyer sighs, puts the money into the box, takes another stack from the case.

INT. SAFETY DEPOSIT VAULT

The clerk, with McGee's help, puts the box back in its slot. She hands the two keys to McGee as they leave the vault.

INT. BANK

The clerk moves away as McGee hands one key to Meyer.

MCGEE

Mr. Meyer...

Meyer takes it.

MEYER

Games for children. An expensive
game for you, my friends.

McGee puts the other key into his right front pants pocket.

CRANE

Hold up, McGee. Why are you the one
to keep the key?

McGee hesitates. Meyer chuckles nastily.

MEYER

Children.

McGee and Meyer look at him. McGee takes the key from his pocket, hands it to Crane. Crane pockets it. They both smile at Meyer. Meyer smiles back.

EXT. BANK - PARKING LOT - DAY

Meyer sits on the passenger side of the car. McGee and Crane stand next to Crane's car, shaking hands.

McGEE

Crane, I think we're really in business.

CRANE

How soon do you think the deal'll go through?

McGEE

A matter of days. I'll see what I can get out of him on the way back to his hotel. I'll call you.

Crane nods, pats his pocket where the key is, gets in his car.

INT. SEDAN

McGee gets in the car with Meyer. They watch Crane pull away.

MEYER

Pidgeon Drop, smidgeon drop. How was I?

McGEE

Like a pro. You have a gift for this.

MEYER

My mother would be proud.

McGee tosses the empty briefcase into the back seat, picks up a good-sized canvas rucksack.

McGEE

Shall we?

MEYER

So soon?

McGEE

Why not?

INT. BANK - DAY

Meyer and McGee move toward the safety deposit vault.

MEYER

Were you worried?

McGEE

Of course. I counted six people who
could have remembered my renting
an identical box this morning.

(as they reach the clerk)

Hello again, young lady.

INT. SAFETY DEPOSIT VAULT

McGee takes two keys from his right front pants pocket.

MEYER

(sotto)

The switch was a little clumsy, don't
you think?

Meyer removes the key from his own pocket, hands it to McGee.

McGEE

(defensive)

Only because you were looking for it.

McGee matches two of the three keys; gives the other to
Meyer. He then inserts the two keys into box number 762. The
clerk slides it out.

INT. CUBICLE

McGee and Meyer transfer money from the box to the rucksack.

INT. SAFETY DEPOSIT VAULT - LATER

Meyer holds the now-bulging bag with two hands. McGee smiles
at the clerk as he slides the box back into place. He takes
both keys from it, hands them to her.

McGEE

We're through with this, thank you.

EXT. BOATEL - DOCK - EVENING

McGee comes down from the Vanagon. He sees Cat sitting on the
foreward topdeck, silhouetted against the deepening blue of
the evening sky. Dark clouds move quickly in from the sea.

EXT. FLUSH - TOPDECK/FLYING BRIDGE - EVENING

Cat sits with one knee up, eyes half-shut, as if she is looking at other than what is in front of her.

She turns as McGee steps up to her, carrying two glasses of gin and ice. He offers one to her. She takes it, drinks.

McGEE

Ought to get inside...you don't want the bugs to eat you alive.

Cat half-smiles; the smile fades as she turns back to her thoughts. A beat, then:

CAT

Tell me Meyer's law again. The exact words.

McGEE

'In an emotional conflict, the thing you find hardest to do is the thing you should do.'

She nods, seeing how it confirms her thoughts. She seems to come to a decision, stands, moves chest-to-chest with McGee.

CAT

What happens when two people start with gin and taper off with champagne?

McGEE

The two people seldom remember their own names.

Cat puts her arms around his neck...

CAT

Lets try for that.

...and kisses him. She slips away from him, taking his hand.

CAT

C'mon...you don't want the bugs to eat you alive. Do you?

McGee smiles as she tugs him toward the starboard ladder.

INT. MASTER STATEROOM - NIGHT

All sound is lost to that of the rain rattling on the topdeck. Flickering moonlight limns Cat's back as she pushes herself up from McGee's chest.

He comes up with her, one arm going around the small of her back, lifting her, turning her, setting her gently back onto the mattress. She pulls McGee closer, pulls his face to her neck, hiding from him the tears on her face.

Rain falls, a curtain drenching the river.

INT. MASTER STATEROOM - MORNING

McGee comes awake, alone in the large bed.

INT. HEAD - MORNING

Luxurious. A seven-foot by four-foot semi-sunken tub and double-sized shower stall. McGee brushes his teeth, notices the toothbrush holder: it is empty. He opens the medicine cabinet. The shelf space had been divided; now, one half of the space is empty. McGee frowns.

INT. MASTER STATEROOM - MORNING

McGee shuts the door of the half-empty hanging locker. He slides open a couple of drawers, all empty.

INT. LOUNGE - DAY

Meyer enters the lounge brandishing a stockholders' report.

MEYER

Eureka--I have found it. A dog called Fletcher Industries. On the surface, it has the same beautiful future like those other stocks you picked. So why should Santo be nervous? I tell you, he would be nervous if he knew what a terrible lousy stock I found.

McGee leafs through the report.

McGEE

What's wrong with it?

MEYER

This I shouldn't even try to explain. There are maybe eight perfectly ethical and legitimate choices a C.P.A. has when he's figuring profit per share. Most make one choice one way, another, another way, so it cancels out. But this Fletcher outfit, they use every chance they have to make profits look bigger. The book value is all puffed up. The profit margin is nonsense. Even the cash flow is jiggered up.

McGEE

Book value? Cash flow?

MEYER

Forget it. All you have to know is that no matter how careful Santo is, the stock will go up like penny rockets and when it starts down, it should maybe end up a two-dollar stock where it belongs.

McGEE

Great.

He sets the report aside, exits the lounge. Meyer looks after him quizzically, looks around the lounge, follows him.

EXT. FLUSH/BOATEL DOCK - DAY

Meyer hurries up to McGee on the dock, matches his pace.

MEYER

I feel as though the boat seems...
larger somehow.

McGee's off-handed tone is almost convincing.

McGEE

Cat left.

MEYER

Ah.
(beat)
For good?

McGee shrugs perfunctorily, then reconsiders. He stops.

McGEE

For good. She's gone away a couple of times before, for a couple of days. This time, she took everything.

Meyer nods. McGee seems to have more to say. Meyer waits.

McGEE

Here's what I thought when I realized what was what. I thought, Dammit, I'm not ready yet.

(smiles grimly)

Yet. We hadn't reached the cutoff point where McGee would make the break on his terms.

(trailing off)

What a sorry son of a bitch...

McGee turns away. Meyer regards him.

MEYER

You're right. She was just a fun and games one. A sea urchin arranged the meeting. The urchin didn't wash up, she didn't step on it, what have you lost? Don't answer! Your disposition you've lost.

McGEE

I'm glad I depend on you for sympathy, Meyer.

MEYER

I don't think you drove that one off. I think it was her choice.

(beat)

There were secrets to that one.

McGee digests this, wanting to accept it, believe it. He isn't quite able to. He looks back at the Flush, then heads for Meyer's rental car. Meyer follows.

INT. CRANE WATTS' OFFICE - DAY

Crane looks up as McGee comes in.

McGEE

Crane, I think we're in trouble.

CRANE

What do you mean?

McGEE

I went by Meyer's hotel today. He as much as admitted he's dumping us. He got another parcel, and the seller's willing to grease him now, with no wait.

CRANE

That goddamned son-of-a-bitch--

McGEE

He said if we play it his way, the way he wanted it in the beginning, he'll move right ahead with it. But it has to be tonight.

CRANE

Jesus. Tonight?

12
MCGEE

Tonight. Unfortunately, I'm leaving town today. But I told him you'd meet him and give him his damned one hundred thousand. He'll give you his key to the escrow box.

CRANE

One hundred thousand?

MCGEE

Yeah. He said he'd take a hundred thousand if we do it now.

Crane sits back in his chair, thinking it over.

CRANE

You get the feeling we're being played for fools?

McGee hesitates. He sounds unsure.

MCGEE

Once he gets his money, he'll come through.

CRANE

So where am I supposed to get that kind of money at this time of night?

MCGEE

You're too good a businessman not to know where you can get that kind of money at this time of night.

Crane taps his fingers on the desk, begins to nod.

CRANE

Okay. Suppose I can get it. So what if this Meyer just takes the hundred thou and screws us? What can we do?

MCGEE

Absolutely nothing. But I'm assuming the risk. Got that? You're getting Meyer's key. Monday morning, you go to the bank and get the two hundred thousand. Use my half to pay back your loan. Keep yours. You're out nothing.

CRANE

That seems awful generous of you, McGee.

McGEE

I'm looking at the back end, Crane.
You should, too.

Crane regards him from across the desk.

INT. SEDAN - DAY

McGee climbs in. Meyer is slouched furtively in his seat.

McGEE

Be at the Annex tonight at eleven.

EXT. FLUSH/BOATEL DOCK - DAY

The idling engines of the Flush rumble. Meyer and McGee stand on the starboard sidedeck, near the wheelhouse door.

McGEE

One last thing. So I con Santo into buying into Fletcher. It goes up and he makes a lot of paper profit, and then when it goes down, he sells out and keeps the profit.

MEYER

With everybody selling, who will buy it? No buyers and they'll suspend trading. When it opens again, it will open in the cellar.

Meyer steps onto the dock, begins untying the bow line.

McGEE

How much can you make for Jan if things work out right?

MEYER

If? Did I hear you say if? You get Santo to bite at it and I'll do the rest. I'd say the original stake plus a million.

McGEE

Oh come on!

Meyer tosses the bow line onto the Flush's deck.

MEYER

That's before short-term gains tax. You see, that's what'll lock Santo onto it. He'll be hoping to ride the profit for six months.

McGEE
You kill me, Meyer.

MEYER
Make sure nobody else kills you.
My life might get boring.

Meyer pushes the Flush out as McGee throttles forward.

EXT. THE WATERWAY - DAY

The Flush travelling south.

EXT. BAHIA MAR - SLIP F-18 - DAY

McGee maneuvers the Flush into its slip.

INT. ALABAMA TIGER - GAME CABIN - DAY

McGee talks to Tiger near a pool table, over the party noise.

McGEE
It's just for a few days. I've got
business down in Miami.

TIGER
The Ferrari is running well.

McGEE
No, I think something a little more
conservative.

EXT. MIAMI - SOUTHWAYS INCORPORATED OFFICES - DAY

McGee pilots a red Alfa-Romero Spyder into the parking
structure of a modern office building.

INT. SOUTHWAYS OFFICES - FOYER - DAY

Plush. Behind the receptionist's desk is small bullpen area,
several people working at CRTs and phones. Moving through it
is Debra Brown. The receptionist points her toward McGee, who
stands examining a painting.

DEBRA
Mr. McGee?

McGEE
(looks her over)
Now we're getting somewhere. The first
string?

DEBRA
I'm Mr. Santo's executive assistant.

McGEE

I'm here to see Mr. Santo.

DEBRA

And the nature of your business?

McGEE

Is with Mr. Santo.

DEBRA

I'm sorry. I cannot make an appointment...blind, as it were. This is a busy office.

McGEE

And I just happen to come bumbling in off the street to bother all you busy, dedicated people.

Debra rests a finger against her chin and tilts her head.

DEBRA

You have that deep-water look. This is probably more of that treasure-map nonsense. Spanish galleons, Mr. McGee?

McGEE

Do I look like a con artist? Aren't you supposed to exercise some instinct and judgment?

Debra nods once, arching an eyebrow. McGee grins, shakes his head in mock disappointment in her.

McGEE

All right. I will tell you enough so that you will open the door to let me see Santo.

DEBRA

May we call him Mr. Santo?

McGEE

But I am not going to talk standing here like the last guests at a cocktail party. I want to sit at a desk or a table and you can sit on the other side of it and listen to as much as I care to tell you.

DEBRA

Or as much as I care to listen to.
(gestures primly)
This way.

INT. SOUTHWAYS OFFICES - HALLWAY

McGee follows behind Debra.

McGEE

So what's your name?

DEBRA

Debra Brown.

McGEE

(grinning)

And never ever Debbie.

DEBRA

Never indeed.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM D - DAY

Debra sits across from McGee, radiating skepticism.

McGEE

I am a speculator, Debra Brown. I'm not a trader. There is enough income from certain other sources so that the Fed won't class me as a professional and cut it all back to straight income. Is this over your head.

DEBRA

Hardly! In fact, you've almost run out of time, Mr. McGee.

McGEE

I do not want to sell Santo a hot item. I do not want him in any syndicate operation. This is not nickel and dime. It's a listed security.

McGee looks at her questioningly.

DEBRA

You haven't lost me. And your time hasn't run out.

McGEE

So I've heard word that Santo will swing when something looks good. And I think he is smart enough to ease his way into it, because if he comes in too hard and too fast, I'm not going to be able to use the buying power on the margin account to keep doubling on the way up.

DEBRA

You said something about it not being nickel and dime.

McGEE

It depends on how far he wants to go. It would take a million to create the pressure it needs. Let's say he can count on three hundred percent long-term gains.

Debra arches her brow again, looks at McGee in a new light.

DEBRA

A listed security?

McGEE

In a potentially dynamic growth area.

The suggestion of a smile plays at her lips.

DEBRA

And absolutely no point at all in asking you the name of it, of course. Or you for bank references.

McGEE

All Santo will be interested in is my track record.

McGee takes an envelope out of his inside jacket pocket, removes the brokerage account forms, flips them over to her.

McGEE

Take a look, if you can read and interpret them. Then you can give Santo a nice verbal reference.

Debra looks them over...glances at McGee, very impressed now.

DEBRA

May I have these copied? It would just take a few minutes.

McGEE

On one basis. You see them and Santo sees them, and that's it.

DEBRA

That would be up to him.

McGEE

So relay my humble request to the great man.

DEBRA

Do you have to be so sarcastic?

McGEE

Am I supposed to be impressed by Gary Santo? He happens to be number one on a list of three possibles. I didn't come to beg, sweetie.

DEBRA

You do make that clear.

McGEE

If you ever stoop to manual labor around this shop, it would be nice if you did the Xeroxing yourself.

DEBRA

I shall, sweetie. And you just made a nice brownie point. Cautious is as cautious does.

She smiles at him, then goes out. McGee takes the opportunity to break character, work a kink out of his neck. He smiles.

INT. SOUTHWAYS - LOBBY

Debra opens the door to the lobby, copies of McGee's documents held to her chest. McGee steps through.

McGEE

You see, Miss, there's all those chests of gold coin busted open and spilled out right across the white sand bottom next to Hustler Reef.

DEBRA

That was clumsy, wasn't it? I must stop typecasting. Of course you realize I cannot say if this idea will appeal to Santo. You can call Friday to find out.

McGEE

Just what is your job around here, Debra Brown?

DEBRA

You might call me a buffer zone.

McGEE

Have I gotten past you?

DEBRA

On Friday we'll both know, won't we?

EXT. BAHIA MAR - BUSTED FLUSH - DAY

McGee strolls up the dock. Meyer waves to him from the sundeck of the Flush, starts down the ladder with briefcase.

INT. FLUSH - LOUNGE - AFTERNOON

The briefcase, open, full of very old, wrinkled, dirty money.

MEYER

You know, I have seldom seen a greasier, grimmer wad of money. The fellow Watts borrowed it from was there.

EXT. ANNEX PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Watts walks nervously away from a figure silhouetted in the sodium arc lights: Boo Waxwell. Watts presents the briefcase to Meyer.

MEYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

He made Crane very nervous. Me, too. A real swamp rat type. Probably keeps his money buried in coffee cans behind his house. Reminded me of your description of Boone Waxwell.

INT. FLUSH - LOUNGE

McGEE

Maybe it was Waxwell...

MEYER

He drove off in a white convertible.

McGEE

(nodding)
Waxwell.

A beat as he thinks about it, becoming worried.

McGEE

Not bright. I don't think Waxwell will be very forgiving when Crane tells him he's lost his money.

Meyer nods, thinking it over. Something occurs to him; he smiles. McGee notices it, gives him a puzzled look.

MEYER

(smugly)
You know, you never asked me about the other safety deposit box.

McGEE

Tell me, Meyer, what about the other safety deposit box?

Meyer clears his throat, theatrically.

MEYER

Here is the scene. Mr. Crane Watts, possessor of dual safety deposit box keys, hurries to the bank first thing Monday morning. He is panting, right?

McGEE

His hands are trembling.

MEYER

So the young woman leads him into the vault, to one of the boxes.

INT. BANK - SAFETY DEPOSIT VAULT - DAY

--as the attendant does just as Meyer describes. Crane, behind her, is anxious, but trying to hide it.

MEYER (V.O.)

He is a bit disoriented--it doesn't seem like the same one he remembered, though he can't say for sure.

The two keys go into box 760. The attendant pulls out the box, gives it to Crane, who looks worried.

INT. CUBICLE

as Crane kicks the door shut, claws open the box.

MEYER (V.O.)

It is, in fact, a different box--the one that I rented earlier in the day--

INT. FLUSH - LOUNGE

McGEE

Meyer, remember me? I know this part.

MEYER

Shut up. Let me enjoy. So he's opening the box...

INT. CUBICLE

Crane frowns down into the open box. He pulls from the box a small white envelope. His face is ashen gray.

MEYER (V.O.)

What he doesn't see is the two hundred thousand. Instead, he sees a small white envelope. Number Ten. Greeting Card sized--

INT. FLUSH - LOUNGE

McGEE

And so, stunned, bewildered, shocked, our friend Crane thumbs the white envelope open. What does the card say?

MEYER

It says on the front 'Congratulations from the Gang at the Office.' You open it. Inside it says 'It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.'

McGEE

This is very wicked, Meyer.

MEYER

Hold your applause--there's more.

INT. CUBICLE

Crane slumps in the chair, breathing badly. On the table is the greeting card. Taped inside, fanned out, are five cards--

MEYER (V.O.)

He saw your houseboat. He saw the name. Inside the greeting card he finds five playing cards. The two, three, seven, and ten of hearts. And the two of clubs.

(beat)

Right? A busted flush?

INT. FLUSH - LOUNGE

McGee looks at Meyer admiringly.

McGEE

Meyer, you have great class. You have an instinct for this kind of work.

MEYER

It was nothing, really. Just innate good taste, a creative mind, and high intelligence. I think it will make a nice signature--

A bing-bong sound. McGee looks out the lounge door.

Debra Brown, in sporty-casual-yet-sexy clothes, stands at his gangplank. She rings the bell on the mooring post again.

McGEE

Dammit! What is she doing here?

Meyer has joined him at the door, peers out.

MEYER

Amazing. Cat leaves, so they send you a replacement.

McGee shoots him a dirty look.

McGEE

Santo must have aimed her at me.

MEYER

Perhaps this is less a monkey wrench in the plans than an accelerator?

EXT. BAHIA MAR - BUSTED FLUSH - DAY

as McGee meets Debra on the dock.

McGEE

Now, this is a surprise...

DEBRA

Pleasant, I hope.

McGEE

Yes, but--it's kind of a bad time--

She hears this, but pretends not to.

DEBRA

(delighted)

What a strange boat! May I?

She is already stepping aboard. Behind her, McGee gestures 'sure, come aboard.'

INT. FLUSH - LOUNGE

Debra goes through quickly, looking around--she slows briefly as she goes by stock papers on the table, her eyes taking them in hawk-like.

DEBRA

This is wonderful! You live on this?

Before McGee can answer, she turns away, going into the

INT. FLUSH - GANGWAY

Debra wanders along, peering in the staterooms, pleased. She looks into the head.

DEBRA

My God.

INT. HEAD

She stares at the tub. McGee leans in the doorframe.

DEBRA

This is...positively decadent.

McGEE

The man I won it from had a Brazillian mistress who was...very clean, I guess.

DEBRA

You won it?

McGEE

In a marathon poker session in Palm Beach. At one point, I won a large pot on a bluff. As I pulled in the chips, somehow I accidentally flipped over my hole card.

She smiles slyly, appreciatively.

DEBRA

Let me guess: From then on, everyone paid your price for your hands.

McGEE

(nodding)

I loaned the big loser ten thousand against the houseboat, and then ten more. When it was gone, she was mine.

(smiles)

He wanted to go another ten against the mistress, but his friends took him away and quieted him down and the game ended.

She steps close to him, head tilted.

DEBRA

The hand you bluffed on--the one you let show. It was a busted flush?

McGEE

Yes indeed.

Debra steps even closer to him. She looks back at the tub.

DEBRA

(shyly)
Looks big enough for two...
(before he can answer)
Want the crazy message, McGee?

McGee folds his arms. He shoots a glance toward the lounge.

McGEE

Message by special delivery. Sure,
Debra.

Debra makes her eyes very wide and solemn. She takes McGee's hand, folds it into a fist. Holding it in both hands, she lifts it, bumps her chin into the knuckles. She whispers.

DEBRA

Pow. Like right off, the first minute.
I'm never like that.

She stares up at him, eyelids slightly lowered. She unfolds his fist, runs his hand slowly down to cup her breast. McGee swallows, glances away from her--

MEYER (O.S.)

Mr. McGee, I am--

Debra steps away from McGee as Meyer appears in the gangway.

MEYER

Oh. Excuse me.

McGEE

Um...Debra Brown. This is Meyer.

Meyer smiles broadly, extends a salesman's hand.

MEYER

Product development. Fletcher
Industries. Pleased to meet you.

Debra, eyebrow arched, takes Meyer's hand.

EXT. BAHIA MAR - DAY

As McGee shuts Debra into her car, leans in the window.

DEBRA

--you should have just said it was
business. I'm all grown up.
(remembers to sweeten it)
It's the only excuse I'd let you use.

McGEE
I appreciate your understanding...

DEBRA
Of course.

She pulls away before he is clear of the window. McGee smiles to himself, almost laughing aloud. Meyer steps up behind him.

MEYER
One of the new breed of executives.
Do you think she bought it?

McGEE
Oh, yeah. She's telling Santo about
you right now. Phone in the car.

INT. BUSTED FLUSH - LOUNGE - EVENING

McGee and Meyer play chess. The phone rings. McGee answers.

McGEE
Hello?...Hello, Debra.

McGee listens. He raises an eyebrow, then smiles at Meyer.

EXT. COURTYARD RESTAURANT - EVENING

Four star all the way. GARY SANTO, an astonishingly youthful sixty, reads over papers. Holding the papers is a lemon-faced man, MR. SPARTAN. Santo signs with a gold pen, recaps it as Spartan returns to his chair.

SANTO
Thank you for your indulgence, McGee.

McGee, slouched in his chair, makes a dismissive gesture.

SANTO (cont'd)
(signalling for a waiter)
More wine.

McGEE
No. How about an answer.

Santo drops his hand, looking flatly at McGee. Then smiles.

SANTO
Questions first. If I go for your
deal, if I like the flavor of it,
how much do you have to know?

McGee straightens up and leans forward.

McGEE

The day you start and how much you are going to spring for all together.

SANTO

Have you taken a position in it?

McGEE

About the same way porcupines make love, but I'm nowhere near as far in as I want to be.

SANTO

Will you need to know my orders?

McGEE

No. I'll have a man watching it.

Santo nods, sips his wine.

SANTO

There's one place where we have to be coordinated on it, and that's getting off it.

McGEE

As carefully as we get on, I hope.

SANTO

And the last thing, of course, is the name of it.

McGEE

Fletcher Industries. American Exchange.

Santo looks over at Debra, who smiles.

SANTO

Want to brief me a little?

McGEE

It's a duplication of effort. If your people can't see why it's as good as it is, you need new people.

SANTO

You have your full and complete share of mouth, McGee.

McGEE

Have you gotten too accustomed to total humility on all sides, Santo?

DEBRA

Hush, now! You're both right. Don't you two go all ballsy and wicked when you're going to be helping each other.

Santo laughs a boyish laugh.

SANTO

Her biggest trouble is, she makes sense. She gives you high marks.

(he stands)

By Wednesday, phone her and she'll have a Yes or No on it, and a probable figure.

McGEE

Will do.

Santo stands--Spartan also gets up. Santo smiles down at McGee and Debra.

SANTO

I like your new friend, Debra. I think he's maybe brought us another winner.

Santo nods sharply, then leaves, Spartan trailing. Debra leans close to McGee.

DEBRA

I think we're in bed together on this.

McGEE

Figuratively, at least. I'm sorry to say this, Debra, but, um...business.

Debra makes a moue face.

DEBRA

You're not exactly overwhelming me with enthusiasm.

(beat)

How about this? Tomorrow morning, I drive up and we take your big, funny boat out and spend the day celebrating.

McGee smiles.

McGEE

Okay. Let me tell you where you can find me if I'm not aboard the Flush...

EXT. BAHIA MAR - ALABAMA TIGER

McGee hands the car keys to Tiger.

McGEE

Thanks, Tiger. One more favor: A very nice little package is going to come here looking for me. Brown hair, large brown eyes. If she does, aim her at Hero.

TIGER

What's the matter? You hate the girl?

McGEE

Let's just say they deserve each other. As soon as he starts to try and snow her, go over and tell her I went off with some other girl.

TIGER

You got it.

(as McGee moves off)

Why don't I just chunk her on the head and help Hero carry her off?

McGEE

(over his shoulder)

Because it's entirely possible she might chunk him on the head.

McGee disappears down the gangplank.

TIGER

Ah. One of those.

EXT. BAHIA MAR - DOCK

McGee walks along the dock, nears the JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES, a stubby thirty-foot cabin cruiser. Meyer hurries out of the cabin, waits until McGee reaches him to speak.

MEYER

Jan's is back. I've been filling her in.

McGEE

How is she?

MEYER

Not good. A tendency to trail off while talking. It doesn't look like she's been eating, either.

McGEE

Why don't you two come over to the
Flush--

MEYER

That's the other thing. I thought
it best to keep her away from there.
You've got company.

INT. BUSTED FLUSH - LOUNGE

Dr. Rodale, holding a folder, turns when McGee enters.

McGEE

Dr. Rodale. You didn't have to
come all the way down here.

RODALE

Well, as it turns out, Mr. McGee,
you were right, and I felt kinda
obligated to track you down. Wasn't
too hard to find this boat of yours.

McGee nods; a brief, awkward silence.

RODALE

Let's cut to the chase.

He spreads the contents of the folder out on the coffee
table. 8X10 photos of the hoist, and photos of Tush's body.

RODALE

I went through all of it carefully.
First off, there was so much damage,
about all I can say for sure is he
wasn't shot in the head first. Other
than that...

He shrugs. Then fishes out several particular photos.

RODALE

Well, you said you wanted me to
look at it like a murder. Right?

McGee nods.

RODALE

(indicates photo)

All right. This batch of photos you
took show--see it right here? A
hexagon-shaped nut on the underside
of the block. Well...

He searches through, finds another photo.

RODALE

--this print is full frame of Bannon's chest area. See the areas marked A and B?

McGee peers closely at the photo.

RODALE

They are clear imprints--'incised impressions'--of that hexagon-shaped nut.

McGEE

In simple lousy English, you are saying that the engine block was dropped on him twice.

RODALE

Yeah. Which isn't exactly consistent with suicide.

McGEE

Anything we could take to the police?

He shrugs, tears apart the case:

RODALE

Whoever found him got clumsy. They raised the hoist; it slipped and the engine block fell on him a second time.

(beat)

A first-year P.D. could establish reasonable doubt.

He raises his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

RODALE

There are other marks that could have been the engine block, but...

He shakes his head, hands another photo to McGee. The photo shows a man's bare left leg, the knee area disfigured.

RODALE

My guess is he got them in a fight beforehand. Broken knuckles on the right hand, left kneecap busted...

At the mention of the kneecap, McGee's face darkens. The rest of what Rodale says is lost to him as he stares at the photo.

McGEE (V.O.)

Boone Waxwell murdered Tush.

INT. JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES - CABIN - NIGHT

Jan is stunned. She stares at McGee, then beyond him, as she turns inward, comprehending what this means. Meyer looks up at McGee, who stands in front of packed built-in bookshelves.

MEYER

Are you sure?

McGEE

Tush didn't kill himself because
of the forclosure--

(to Jan)

or because you left him. His kneecap
was crushed. I almost got to find
out what that feels like. It was
definitely Waxwell--I can't prove
it in court, but I know it.

JAN

(low)

We have to get him.

MEYER

Wait a second--

Jan is on her feet, talking to McGee.

JAN

He killed Tush. You're making me
rich, and I thank you for that.
Crane and Santo deserve it. But
Waxwell killed Tush--is he just
going to get away with it?

McGee locks eyes with her. In silence, Meyer watches them.

McGEE

No.

MEYER

Travis!

McGee doesn't answer. He turns toward the port window; the reflection of his face, dark with anger, lays superimposed on the dark blue water. Meyer steps close, lowers his voice.

MEYER

Right now you are too tightened over
this. You are too close to this one.
Please--be careful. I don't want to
lose you. Some terrible people might
take over slip F-18. Non-drinkers,
going around saying shush.

McGee continues to stare out the glass. Meyer smiles gently. The dark look fades as McGee considers what Meyer has said.

McGEE

You're right.

Jan looks up sharply. Her voice is brittle, angry.

JAN

We just let him get away with it?

For the first time, Meyer's eyes stop smiling.

MEYER

I never said that.

EXT. BAHIA MAR - FLUSH - MORNING

Jan, on the flying bridge, warms up the engines. McGee unhooks the umbilicles. Meyer comes up beside him. He carries a Quotrak, a handheld electronic stock ticker. McGee waves to Jan; she cuts back the engines to idle, lowering the volume.

MEYER

Good news. You don't have to wait for the phone call from Debra.

McGEE

Why's that?

MEYER

(indicating the Quotrak)
Santo's answer is right here. Fletcher Industries moved up one and an eighth.

(beat)
He took the bait.

McGEE

So we're all set?

MEYER

I just have stare at this little screen day after day, ten in the morning three-thirty in the afternoon. That's all.

He smiles at McGee; a beat, then his demeanor changes.

MEYER

Be careful with Waxwell.

McGee nods. Meyer steps away as McGee steps aboard the Flush.

Meyer watches from the dock as Jan pilots the Flush away.

EXT. BOATEL - DAY

McGee stands outside the open door of one of the units. Jan comes out. She hands McGee an expensive tank watch.

JAN

Will this do?

McGee takes the watch, looks it over. The band is broken.

JAN

Tush used to wear it constantly--
the band broke a few months ago,
but he hadn't gotten it fixed.

McGEE

(reading the inscription)
'Always. Jan.'
(he looks up at her)
Perfect. We'll plant it out at
Boo's place, then tip the cops.

They move away, toward the dock.

JAN

Is this going to work?

McGEE

We're playing the odds. The idea is
to get the police to re-think the
case, and look long and hard at
Boo Waxwell as they do.

JAN

Will it be enough?

McGEE

It has to be.

EXT. TENNIS CLUB - MORNING

On a court, Vivian Watts, working hard, returns balls from a machine, alternating forehands and two-handed backhands.

In the glass-and-stone club house, McGee talks to a red-jacketed waiter, who points out toward Vivian. McGee nods, comes out through the French doors, down to the court.

He waits through several more shots. Vivian hits a backhand, looks over at McGee, unable to believe his audacity. The machine continues firing; she ignores it.

VIVIAN

What do you want?

54
MCGEE

I want to form a little mutual aid society with you, Vivian.

Vivian laughs, almost a sob.

VIVIAN

Sure, Mr. McGee. What nasty little piece of work do you want Crane to do?

MCGEE

Your husband began his nasty little piece of work more than a year ago. It didn't do anybody any good.

Vivian pales a little at this. The machine runs out of balls, continues running. Vivian can't meet McGee's eyes.

VIVIAN

What do you mean?

MCGEE

Crane's whipped himself here--worse than you know. If you had some cash, right now, you could get out. Try it again in a new place. What is he? Thirty-one? There's time.

(beat)

But maybe he's lost you along the way, and you're not interested.

Vivian looks up. Her expression softens; she looks younger.

VIVIAN

He hasn't lost me.

MCGEE

Would thirty thousand be enough to start over somewhere else?

VIVIAN

(taken aback)

Who do I have to kill?

MCGEE

You have to be bait, Vivian. To lure Boone Waxwell out of his cave. I have to know for certain when he won't be there.

Vivian's shoulders move slowly up.

VIVIAN

No...not...I don't want to be near that man. The few times I've ever seen him, he's...he acts as if we have...some dirty secret.

(she looks up at McGee)

The thought of him touching me...

McGEE

It could be as simple as a phone call. Tell him that you'll meet him someplace.

VIVIAN

I think that if Boone Waxwell ever...got me, I might walk around afterwards and look just the same, but...I would be dead inside. No.

She turns as if to leave.

McGEE

Maybe there's some other way you could help. And I think you should meet the person you're helping. Jan Bannon.

At the mention of the name, Vivian pales a little, her hand going to her mouth--but she looks more hurt than surprised.

VIVIAN

That was the nasty little piece of work?

(McGee nods)

Crane was so secretive...He said he wanted to--to give me the kind of life I deserved.

(beat)

Maybe I was pushing him. I don't think so, but...maybe.

McGEE

Maybe we can meet you tonight. We can set up the decoy operation--or think of something else.

Vivian considers, wavering, then decides.

VIVIAN

Come by the house about eleven.

McGEE

What about your husband?

Vivian shakes her head, begins walking toward the clubhouse. McGee stays in step alongside her.

VIVIAN

The big suspense in my life every evening is whether he'll pass out in his chair or totter to bed first. I make his drinks, on demand. Tonight I'll make them strong.

McGEE

Thank you, Vivian.

McGee turns away from the clubhouse, toward the parking lot.

VIVIAN

Maybe it'll work. Maybe people can go back and start the race a second time.

She smiles shakily, then climbs the stairs.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

The neighborhood is dark. The Vanagon approaches the Watts home, which is brightly lit.

INT. VANAGON

McGee, driving, peers out the windshield.

McGEE

Quite a few lights on. I guess our lawyer-boy is still semi-conscious--

McGee cuts himself off, looks suddenly worried. Jan, in the passenger seat, is bright-eyed with fear.

JAN

What is it?

ANGLE - OUTSIDE THE VAN, moving past the house; Boo Waxwell's Lincoln Continental convertible comes into view, sitting in the darkness at the side of the house.

McGEE

Good ol Boo's white Lincoln, tucked in at the side, there. See it?

JAN

Yes, I see it. My God.

The Vanagon continues past the house. McGee turns left onto the next street, mostly empty development land. He turns off the lights, makes a U-turn, shuts off the engine.

EXT. EMPTY LOT

McGee and Jan climb out of the van. In the silence, a slight wind rattles the fronds. Beyond the empty lot, several houses sit in a line beneath a canopy of stars.

JAN

What are you going to do?

McGEE

Just going to take a look. You wait for me right here.

JAN

What if you get into trouble?

McGee hesitates, looks pained for a second.

McGEE

I'll either come back on the double, or I won't. If I don't, if you think you can handle it, get as close as you can and see what you can see. Don't take any chances. All right?

McGee looks at her, waits until she nods agreement. He turns and makes his way by moonlight into the darkened field.

EXT. WATTS HOME

McGee cautiously pushes through the gate at rear property line. Keeping low, he runs to the carport, crouches next to Waxwell's convertible. He touches the tailpipe; it is cool. Slowly, he rises up, looks into a partially open side window.

P.O.V. McGEE - THROUGH THE WINDOW, where in the living room, Crane Watts sits, passed out in his chair, legs sprawled on a ottoman, a spilled drink on the rug. His head lolls to one side; he murmurs, then is again motionless.

McGee rises, moves to the front of the car. As he passes between the car and the house, his shadow stretches out ahead of him--he is silhouetted against the streetlamp.

McGee notes the shadow, realizes the target that he is--

--and there is a THOP from near the side door of the house--

--the soft whisper of air movement near McGee--

--the CHUD of lead tearing into the fence beside the carport.

McGee twists, diving back to the cover of the car--

---another THOP---

--McGee's diving body jerks--

--and then house, streetlight, and white convertible spin; the ground rushes up, jarring impact, WHITE NOISE and A WHITE FLASH fading quickly through red to

BLACK

FADE UP: BRIGHT WHITE. McGee stares at it. It comes into focus: the upholstery of Waxwell's car.

EXT. WATTS HOME

McGee has been tossed in the back seat, partly covered with a tarp. His head is bloody--he reaches up with his right hand, feels it--he nearly faints at the pain.

McGee tries to sit up--his right arm lifts him, but his left arm betrays him. He reaches across his body, to the left side...pokes it, prods his arm, his leg. His eyes widen with fear. He shuts his eyes, breathing deeply, calming himself. He opens his eyes again, looks around.

Reaching up, he finds the release on the rear door. It clicks; McGee shoves it with his good leg. He slides himself out of the car, onto the cement slab, his right arm doing all the work.

It is all McGee can do to crawl. He rolls to his side, brings his right knee up, reaches up with his right hand. Digs fingers into soil. Pull and push in order to slide. Repeats.

At the corner of the house, McGee pauses, breathing hard. Suddenly, directly over him, a voice startles him:

WAXWELL (O.S.)

Gone play dead now, hey? Little ol' country club pussycat gone try that little game that didn't work the other times neither?

McGee moves his head: he is beside a sliding glass door that leads into the bedroom. From his low angle, through the diaphanous drapes, McGee sees only one of Vivian's bare legs on the mattress. Waxwell steps suddenly into view, naked.

WAXWELL

Pore little dead pussycat, thinks she's all wore down. Ol' Boo, he knows better. Such a sweet piece you are now. And you do so fine...

He sits down on the mattress. His body obscures her further. He wraps a hand around her ankle, then moves it roughly up her shin. Vivian's voice is low, a begging, toneless plaint.

McGee turns away sharply, revulsed. He reaches out and drags himself away from the window, as quickly as he can, fighting the pain. He pauses finally, his face twisted in a grimace. Waxwell's voice is still there:

WAXWELL (O.S.)

What's this? And this hear? How
in the worl' can this be a-happenin
to a pore dead pussycat?

--and a plaintive moan. McGee tries to tune it out. He strains--his left arm moves. An effort of will gets it in front of him--he drags himself forward. He looks up--the fence beckons, but seems impossibly far.

There is a slap--McGee jerks, looks back at the window, then away again, works closer to the fence--his left arm gives out suddenly; his chin hits the ground and he stifles a scream.

He lies face down in the sand, breathing hard. He looks up at the fence, then lays his head back down, closing his eyes.

There is a silence...save for a slow sound of motion, steadying to a slow heavy beat.

From beyond McGee comes the sound of the gate scraping open.

JAN (O.S.)

(a hiss)
Travis...?

She spots him as he looks up. His head is covered with blood; his clothes are torn from his ordeal. She shuts her mouth tightly to keep from crying out. She moves to him quickly.

JAN

Can you walk?

He nods, indicating that she should help him up. She gets a shoulder under his left arm. He pushes up with his right leg and she rises. Most of his weight is on her.

WAXWELL (O.S.)

(voice suddenly tight)
Now hows this for you?

Jan starts, looks over at the sliding glass window. A woman's voice rises, keening, an less-than-human sound of sensation and fear and pain. Jan is horror-stricken.

McGEE

(a hiss)
Get us out of here.
(she hesitates)
Go!

She turns away, helps McGee stagger to the gate, through it.

EXT. EMPTY LOT - NIGHT

Jan gets McGee to the van; she slides open the cargo door. He practically falls in; she controls it somewhat--then recoils at the sight of McGee, illumined by the car's courtesy light.

JAN

I've got to get you to a doctor--

McGEE

Hold it. Got to think.

JAN

But--

McGEE

Hold it! How much time's gone by?

JAN

It's a quarter after twelve.
(beat)

I'm sorry it took me so long--

McGee waves her silent. She watches him as he works it out.

Just then, there is the sound of a car starting. McGee and Jan look out toward the house.

Still brightly lit, there is enough light from the windows to make out the shape of Waxwell's car as it tears away.

McGee chuckles, a ghastly sound.

McGEE

Probably gave him a shock, me not
where he left me...

He lets himself drop back to a prone position.

JAN

I should put you in the hospital
and call the police.

McGEE

You have a very conventional approach.

INT. VANAGON - NIGHT - LATER

Jan applies an efficient field dressing to McGee's head. She digs in the open first aid kit for wrapping bandages.

JAN

Without stitches, this is going to be an ugly scar.

McGEE

That's why I have hair. Done?

Jan finishes, drops the scissors. McGee pushes open the door.

From the house comes the sound of a muffled shot, not more than a 'snap.' McGee starts limping quickly toward the house.

McGEE

Hurry.

A second report is heard as Jan helps McGee.

EXT. WATTS HOME - REAR DOOR

McGee tries the outside screen door of the Florida room. It is latched from the inside. McGee opens his mouth to call out--stops. Sniffs. He curses under his breath.

McGEE

(to Jan)

When we're in the house, don't touch a thing unless I tell you. Stay away from the windows in the front. Squat low if you hear a car.

Bracing himself against the frame, McGee puts a knee through the screen, ripping it. He reaches through, unlatches it.

INT. WATTS HOME - FLORIDA ROOM

With the palm of his hand, McGee smears the metal handle of the door where he touched it.

INT. LIVING ROOM

McGee enters, followed by Jan. They both react to the rotten smell, breathe through their mouths.

Crane Watts has slid down between the chair and the hassock, half sitting, head canted back on the chair seat. His face is unnaturally fat, his eyes bugging wide, pushed out by pressure behind them.

McGee approaches the body, kneels down. He gingerly brushes back hair away from Crane's charred ear. Behind McGee, Jan is outwardly calm; the tremor in her voice shows how close she is to the edge.

JAN

I...I don't understand. Why would he shoot him?

McGEE

Boo didn't do this--

(reconsiders)

Least, he didn't pull the trigger.

McGee rises, stands over the body.

JAN

...Vivian...?

McGee nods briefly, sharply. He moves into the hallway.

INT. WATTS HOME - BEDROOM

McGee enters the brightly-lit room, Jan trailing behind. On the dressing table is a note, a downhill scrawl written in eye-shadow pencil. McGee picks it up, reads:

McGEE

'God forgive me. There is no other choice. My darling was asleep and felt nothing. Vivian Harney Watts.'

McGee puts the note down. He limps across the room to the bathroom, pulls open the door.

For a moment, behind him, Jan cannot see past...until McGee moves, sits down on the edge of the tub.

ANGLE - THE TUB, where Vivian Watts lies almost flat, head lolling over on her shoulder. She wears a floor-length orange housecoat, buttoned neatly from the the throat to the hem. Her hair is fixed; her face made up as if to go out.

A dark stain between her breasts. The .22 pistol is askew at her hip, black against the white tile.

McGee reaches out, touches her forehead. He lowers his head slightly, takes his hand away. There is a crevice for soap built into the tub, directly opposite, McGee reaches out, touches the soap. It is moist.

McGEE

She must have scrubbed herself first, the water as hot as she could stand it--

From the bedroom comes a dry gagging sound. McGee looks; Jan, back to the body, is hunched over, her hands to her mouth.

McGEE

Stop it! Not in here--

Jan struggles to gain control. She puts a hand back, gestures that she is all right even as she hurries out of the room.

EXT. WATTS HOME - REAR DOOR

Jan tries to regain her composure. McGee takes her hand.

McGEE

I have some things to do. I'll try to make it fast.

JAN

D-Do you need help?

McGEE

No.

INT. WATTS HOME - BEDROOM

Beyond the tossed bed, McGee finds a chest of drawers, the bottom drawer open, .22-long cartridges a-spill from a cardboard box. McGee picks them up, closes the drawer.

McGEE (V.O.)

Dishonor before death. And more effective with that popgun than she would ever know.

INT. BATHROOM

McGee hoists Vivian's body up out of the tub, her neck pressed against his chin, his arms around her waist.

McGEE (V.O.)

Two shots, even with the barrel against the target, seldom kill two people.

INT. BEDROOM

McGee lowers the body onto the bed; she lays in dead abandon. McGee grasps the hem of the bright orange housecoat and with one hard wrench, tears it open to the waist.

McGEE (V.O.)

You made yourself all pretty to die. I'm sorry they'll see you like this, Vivian, but you'll like the way it works out. I promise you.

McGee tousles her black hair and, with his thumb, smears the fresh lipstick on her mouth.

McGee tips the dressing table bench over. Using a kleenex as a glove, he picks up a jar, cracks the dressing table mirror.

At the door, McGee stuffs the suicide note, the gun, the bullets into his pockets. He tips the lamp shade crooked so that it points at her, making highlights and deep shadows on the tumble of dead woman.

McGEE (V.O.)

I'm sorry I ruined your housecoat,
Vivian.

He turns away, into the darkness of the hall.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

Jan is at the car; McGee gimps over to the passenger side.

JAN

What did you do?

McGEE

She--I think she would have helped
us get Boo, when she was alive. I'm
giving her a chance to do it dead.

EXT. STREET - PHONE BOOTH

McGee lowers his voice, speaks into the receiver.

McGEE

--license number BF-501-89. Florida
plates, yeah, sure. A white Lincoln
convertible, with the top down.

(pause)

Listen, I'm just passing through. I
don't want to get involved or anything.

(pause)

John Doe, Joe Citizen, who cares?
It's Clementis Drive. I don't know
the number, but it's not a long street.

He hangs up the phone, already pushing out of the booth.

INT. VANAGON - NIGHT

Jan drives the mostly-empty road. McGee is sweating, pale.

JAN

You haven't asked me why it took
me so long to come after you.

McGEE

I wasn't counting on any help.

JAN

I...I guess I just want you to know, then. I did sneak over there, when you didn't come back, like you said. I got into the side yard, behind a tree.

She shudders.

JAN

All of a sudden he came around the side of the house, and he...he had you over his shoulder. He gave a heave, and you...fell into the car, in back. You made such a thud, such a dead thud.

McGee works to follow what she is saying, not pass out.

JAN

I...froze. And then I decided, go to the police. I went very fast, and then I went slower and slower. I pulled off the road.

McGEE

What made you come back?

JAN

I ran away from Tush, when he needed me.

McGEE

You came back. Hang on to that.

A beat; Jan nods. McGee doesn't see it; he has passed out.

INT. FLUSH - MASTER STATEROOM - AFTERNOON

McGee moans, regains consciousness. His head dressing has been changed; he lies on the bed. Jan sits beside him.

McGEE

What time is it?

JAN

Nearly four in the afternoon. How do you feel?

McGEE

Shot.

He sits up, swings his legs over the edge of the bed. Nearly completely keeps his balance.

McGEE

We have to get out of here.

JAN

We're not at the boatel anymore. I moved us down river.

McGee looks out the port; they are moored in a small, wild cove.

JAN (cont'd)

I've been listening to the radio...
The police are hunting for Boo Waxwell,
but they haven't found him. There's
a BOLO out for him.

McGEE

You moved us?

(Jan nods)

Good work. That was exactly the
right thing to do.

JAN

I didn't want to try open sea,
though. But if you're all right,
could we get the hell out of here?

INT. FLUSH - WHEELHOUSE - EVENING

A chart of the inland waterway. McGee's finger traces their path from the Shawana River. The chart is spread across the top of the control console. Outside the ports, the landscape is wild, windblown, the sky dark gray. Music from the lounge.

McGEE

There's a big, full-service marina
about ten miles up. We'll put in there.

JAN

(turning from the window)

It's going to be a big one.

McGee nods, eases back the throttles, engages the auto-pilot.

McGEE

We'd better take down the awnings
and stow the deck furniture. There's
some foul weather gear in the locker
by the lounge. Could you get it?

Jan leaves the wheelhouse. McGee goes out the port door.

EXT. FLUSH - TOPDECK/FLYING BRIDGE - EVENING

McGee lashes the chairs and lounges to eyelets on the rail. He moves to the flying bridge, begins to remove the awning.

There is a small 'bump-bump' sound. McGee frowns. He pulls the throttles back, quieting the engines. He looks around, turns to look back...

An empty white boat moves astern of the Flush--it is jounced by the wake, turning enough to reveal the name: SUICIDE KING.

McGee yanks the twin levers into reverse. The Flush stalls in the water. McGee picks up a fish billy club stored near the wheel. He goes to the ladder, climbs down to the lower deck--

He steps cautiously around to the starboard door, sneaks his head around for a look into--

INT. FLUSH - LOUNGE

--the bright light and music. Jan is there, with Boone Waxwell behind her, grinning over her shoulder. One of her arms is pulled behind her. Two battered orange slickers lie in a pile on the floor. Waxwell's pistol is aimed right at McGee's head. McGee pulls back--

WAXWELL

Uh-uh.

--and Waxwell puts the gun to Jan's temple.

WAXWELL

You want your bilges to pump pink for the next three months, try something cute.

McGee steps into the door, drops the club.

JAN

Trav?...I'm sorry, Trav.

WAXWELL

Sure hope you got more life in you on your back, pussycat, than you got on your feet.

(to McGee)

Cut the music off!

McGee turns it off. The only sound in the silence is the idling rumble of the diesels.

WAXWELL

Couldn b'lieve my ol eyes. Figured I had to take me a boat. Holed up where I figure the best chance to get me a good one, and by God here comes the Busted Flush I heard about when you were anchored off Bannon's land. One teeny little son of a bitch of a world. My, my.

McGEE

So what happens now, Boo?

WAXWELL

Me and this little pussycat go to Jamaica...though she don't seem as she'll be too much fun.

(narrows his eyes)

You hadda be the one that killed the Wattses and pinned it on me.

McGee has been darting glances around the lounge surreptitiously, looking for an opening, a plan.

McGEE

Half-right, Boo. Mrs. Watts pulled the trigger after you left her. I just made it look like a murder.

(beat)

Kind of variation on your technique.

Waxwell looks at him, sorting out his meaning. He gets it finally.

WAXWELL

Ol' Bannon just didn't know when to quit. He was holdin' up my goddamned money. That what your talking 'bout? I just went out to talk to him, see if he'd reconsider his position.

McGEE

And kill him.

WAXWELL

That was his own damn fault. I was being polite as you like, and he jumped out on me. So we tussled.

(shakes his head)

Weren't but half into it when he slipped and thunked his head into the corner of that shed. Busted up somethin' pretty bad.

Waxwell shrugs.

WAXWELL (cont'd)

Didn't need no murder charge against me, so I just tucked him under that engine block an' let it go.

McGEE

Twice?

WAXWELL

Hadda make sure no one could tell he'd been beat up.

Jan lets out a sob.

WAXWELL

What's the matter, pussycat? Was just an accident.

JAN

(building hysteria; nearly indecipherable)

...he was--my--HUSBAND!

She twists, clawing for his eyes. Waxwell grabs her skull, slams her viciously into the bulkhead. She goes down heavily.

McGee takes a step toward her; Waxwell brings the gun up.

WAXWELL

(regards Jan)

Might be more fun'n I figured.

McGEE

Boo, listen: I've got the reserve batteries on charge, and it's past time to change back.

Waxwell squints at him.

WAXWELL

Now, why you worrying 'bout batteries that ain't hardly yours anymore?

McGEE

The lights go off all of sudden, you might get nervous with that gun.

WAXWELL

Smart to think of that. Go ahead an' take care of it.

Waxwell gestures with the gun. McGee opens the starboard door, his eyes searching. Waxwell grins smugly, raises the gun like a sap--McGee sees it reflected in the door's window, ducks--the blow thuds into the back of his neck.

EXT. FLUSH - STARBOARD SIDEDECK

McGee staggers hard against the siderail, claws along it wildly, away from Waxwell, who aims at him. McGee shoves himself out, tumbling gracelessly into the water.

A bullet just misses his head--McGee forces himself beneath the water--Waxwell heads up the ladder--McGee resurfaces, gasping--Waxwell fires again as he reaches the bridge--

McGee dives--Waxwell slams the throttles forward--

The Flush pulls away at its 15 knot top speed.

McGee breaks the surface near a hammock--he pulls himself up onto it. Fresh blood seeps from his bandage. He reaches out like a blind man, grasping for a handhold--he finds a root, pulls himself onto the hammock. Face down in the tall grass, his shoulders hunch as he tries to rise--he collapses.

McGee lies unconscious as the Flush recedes in the distance, making for the sea.

EXT. WATERWAY - LATER

The skies have darkened. Rain comes down hard.

McGee comes to slowly. He rolls over, his eyes still shut, letting the rain revive him. He opens his eyes, sits up--chokes down bile. His head is tender. The bandage has come off, but the bleeding has stopped. McGee looks around.

Across the water, wedged against the bank by the current, is the Suicide King.

McGee pushes himself up, into the water.

Lightning flares, strobing across McGee as he reaches the boat. He pulls himself up into it. Thunder booms. He looks over the control console. The keys are there. He turns them.

The engine kicks to life. McGee drops it into gear. The boat planes quickly, cutting across the heavy chop toward the sea.

McGEE'S PURSUIT: SERIES OF SHOTS:

1. The King leaves the waterway, into the rough sea, out past a navigational buoy.

2. McGee checks the compass bolted to the top of the console, orients south, turns the wheel.
3. Lightning splits the sky as the boat pounds through the waves.
4. McGee braces himself as best he can in the cockpit of the boat, white-knuckling the wheel at the jarring impacts.
5. The King gets air at the crest of a wave; it falls hard into the trough.
6. The boat slows, tossed in the rough sea. McGee stands, searching the ocean. Lightning flashes; he sweeps his eyes across the horizon--nothing. His face is anguished in the light of the control panel; thunder booms.
7. The little boat sits still, buffeted by the ocean, alone.

INT. SUICIDE KING/EXT. OCEAN - NIGHT

McGee leans his forehead against the wheel--then looks up again, at the sky. He is in a calm, between the storm he just came through and a second one moving in. Dark thunderheads roll toward him. Lightning flares beneath them, low and blue against the sea. Eerie and silent, and almost continuous.

McGee starts; he has picked up something out of the corner of his eye. He wipes his eyes, peers, squinting--

--and there it is: a blob between his boat and the lightning of the second storm. A dark, sharp-edged blob. The Busted Flush, outlined against the lightning in the darkening night.

McGee kicks the engines and the King leaps forward, toward the Flush and the storm. Lightning flashes.

In the cockpit, McGee counts to himself: 'one, two, thr--'. Thunder booms. McGee smiles grimly, hunching over the wheel.

EXT. OCEAN/FLUSH - NIGHT

McGee sweeps up next to the Flush, adjusting his speed to it, hanging off. Another bolt of lightning; McGee counts to two, then twists the wheel toward the Flush. Thunder booms, obscuring the sound of the King bumping the Flush, of McGee stepping aboard on the port sidedeck, near the bow. The ocean pushes the King away from the Flush.

The rain picks up. McGee hangs on tight, reaches for the wheelhouse door: locked. He grits his teeth, then begins inching back along the side deck toward the port ladder.

He looks into the porthole of the master stateroom. Waxwell sleeps, gun near his hand, soaked slicker on the floor.

A wave hits broadside, washing over the freeboard, knocking McGee off-balance. He regains his footing, continues.

He looks into the next port. Jan is on the bed, hands and feet tied together. A broken lamp is on the floor. Using a shard, she works feverishly at the rope, a trickle of blood running from her wrists.

Suddenly the stateroom door bursts open--Jan looks up as Waxwell, wearing the slicker, levels his gun at the window, aimed right at McGee--Jan looks over as McGee ducks away. The window stars behind him as McGee grabs at the siderail, scrambling to keep from going over. He makes it, lunges for the ladder, scrambles up it to the top deck.

EXT. FLUSH - TOPDECK/FLYING BRIDGE

McGee moves slowly--the wheel ticks occasionally, the auto-pilot on. McGee cranes to see over both sides of the boat--lights come on in the wheelhouse--McGee watches as Waxwell comes out the starboard wheelhouse door in a crouch, gun out. Waxwell moves stealthily, around the bow.

INT. GUEST STATEROOM

The blood has lubricated the ropes enough--Jan gasps with pain as she tears her hands out of their binding. She rubs her wrists, reaches for her feet.

EXT. FLUSH - STARBOARD SIDEDECK

As McGee swings down. He swoons, graying out slightly, shakes his head. The undulation of the boat causes the wheelhouse door to slide back and forth. McGee slinks toward it.

Waxwell appears suddenly, gun up, bracing himself against the siderail. McGee lunges an arm into the wheelhouse, yanks one of the throttles back--the boat lurches--Waxwell staggers against the siderail.

McGee moves recklessly, as fast he can astern along the sidedeck. Waxwell braces himself, snaps off a shot as McGee disappears around the corner.

INT. FLUSH - GANGWAY

Jan, eyes wide, reacts to the shot, moves warily toward the front of the boat, to the wheelhouse. She ducks back as Waxwell moves past the open door, astern, out of view.

EXT. FLUSH - STARBOARD SIDEDECK/BOW

Jan looks out cautiously. Waxwell, back to her, slips around the stern corner. She steps into the rain, frightened. The Flush is now going in a big clockwise circle. Jan spots a 20-pound Danforth anchor by the bow cleat. She hoists it, lugs it to the bench-locker in front of the wheelhouse.

EXT. FLUSH - STERN

Waxwell searches cautiously for McGee. He checks the aft lounge door--it is locked. He moves toward port.

McGee watches him from astern. He hangs off the diving platform, his lower body lost in the wake of the props.

Waxwell moves up the port sidedeck. McGee pulls himself onto the platform. He stands cautiously, slips under the rail, moves to the starboard sidedeck.

EXT. FLUSH - TOPDECK/FLYING BRIDGE

Jan watches Waxwell, eyes wide. He pauses, cocks his head as though scenting something. He grabs the wheelhouse door--still locked--he strains, forces it open, disappears inside.

EXT. FLUSH - STERN

McGee stands at the stern starboard corner of cabin, nervously checking the stern deck and the starboard sidedeck. He decides; moves slowly toward the wheelhouse.

The starboard lounge door bursts open, and Waxwell comes out of the shadows onto the sidedeck, right in front of McGee, gun in both hands aimed at McGee's face. Waxwell grins--

The Danforth anchor drops heavily onto his arms, knocking them down, knocking the gun overboard. McGee looks up--Jan stands on the topdeck--and then Waxwell is on him, hands at his throat, slamming him back into the cabin bulkhead.

There is a loud crunch--the Suicide King bumps off the side of the Flush. McGee uses the diversion to break Waxwell's grip, shove him back. Waxwell gets his footing--

McGee dives at him, shoulder into the pit of the belly, driving Waxwell back of into the starboard rail as it dips low. Waxwell goes over, grabbing at McGee, clawing.

But McGee catches hold of the rail and Waxwell misses it; Waxwell goes into the sea. McGee clings to the rail, gasping and gagging. He looks around, expecting an attack. He sees:

Waxwell pops up, snaps the water out of his eyes. He orients himself, turns, churns for the Suicide King.

McGee grits his teeth, looks down at the deck. He grabs up the anchor, swings it by the chain, a make-shift mace--

Waxwell pulls himself onto the King's side, gets a leg over--

McGee lets the anchor fly--it hurtles across the ten feet separating the boats, slams into Waxwell, smashing him against the side of the boat, taking him down into the sea.

The anchor line whips against McGee's ankles as it plays out--McGee grabs it, ties it off to the stern cleat. He stares out at where Waxwell last was--nothing.

McGee keeps watching, feeling along for the starboard ladder, finds it. He turns away finally, climbs up the ladder.

EXT. FLUSH - TOPDECK/FLYING BRIDGE

Jan is crouched, still staring at the sea. McGee puts an arm around her, helps her stand, moves her toward the controls.

JAN

Oh, God, Travis, I was afraid you were dead.

McGEE

So was I.

(he smiles shakily)

Thanks for...you kept fighting.

She nods. McGee pulls one throttle forward, straightening out the Flush, moving them away from the Suicide King. He checks the compass, turns the wheel.

Jan rubs her bleeding wrists. She looks at the rain coming down, pulls her collar up--then she sees something behind the boat. She gasps. McGee looks back to where she is looking.

Something trails behind the boat in the wake.

McGee snaps on one of the halogen spots on the consoles, swings it around--

The wake makes a smooth hump about twenty feet back. Boone Waxwell rides that hump, face up out of the water, grinning.

McGee does not move.

Suddenly, as if to show off, Waxwell makes a quick roll, the orange of the slicker disappearing, the metal of the anchor gleaming in the glare of the light.

McGee and Jan stare in horror.

Waxwell does a second, slower roll. His throat is wedged in the space between the flukes of the Danforth, the edges of the points angled up behind the corners of his jaw, the tension spreading his jowls into a grin.

McGee scrambles down the ladder, unties the anchor line, throws it away from the boat. Waxwell sinks into the wake, disappearing.

McGee reaches a shaky hand for the rail. His legs go out; He grabs the rail, supporting himself with it, his eyes never leaving the wake.

But the sea is empty.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

A calm ocean, the sky a freshly-scrubbed blue. The Flush moves slowly. The tattered deck awning flaps in the breeze.

INT. FLUSH - WHEELHOUSE - DAY

McGee holds the radio mic. His head is re-bandaged.

McGEE

It was spur of the moment, Meyer.
Crazy, wild kids taking off on a
magic adventure. I don't know how
long we'll cruise around. Over.

MEYER

(filtered)
It will be great for her, Travis.
And it won't hurt you. Have fun. Catch
some fish. Sing a little.

(beat)
By the way. Fletcher closed at twenty-
four and a quarter. It may be time
to take a careful step off the
merry-go-round. Over.

McGEE

Are you asking me or telling me? Over.

MEYER

Telling you. What else? You are the
expert on pigeon drops. I am the
expert on the biggest crap game in
the world.

INT. FLUSH - GUEST STATEROOM

Jan is using towels to mop up the floor; cardboard and a plastic trashbag is taped over the window. McGee comes in.

McGEE

I talked to Meyer. Told him we were going to cruise around for awhile.

JAN

Did you tell him about...what happened?

McGEE

Later, I will. Not over an open frequency, that's for sure. I don't need any official interest. So we just say nothing.

(beat)

Not a word, Jan. Not ever, to anyone. Can you handle that?

Jan's face is quiet, thoughtful.

JAN

I'll be all right, Travis. I'll be fine.

She turns back to her task.

EXT. ISLAND COVE - DAY/INTERCUT IMAGES WITH VOICE-OVER

A small beautiful cove. The Flush floats peacefully. Beyond technicolor reefs, the dingy is beached on a spit of white sand. Jan walks along the waterline, lost in thought.

INT. FLUSH - LOUNGE

McGee is pulling out the shot-up window in the guest stateroom. He pauses, watches her. Returns to his work.

McGEE (V.O.)

It is so damned strange about the dead. Life is like a big ship, all lights and action and turmoil as it chugs across a dark sea.

EXT. FLUSH - TOPDECK/FLYING BRIDGE - DAY

McGee, with Jan's help, remounts the mended awning.

McGEE (V.O.)

You have to drop the dead ones over the side. An insignificant little splash, and the ship goes on.

EXT. FLUSH - WHEELHOUSE - DAWN

McGee steps onto the deck, sipping at a mug of coffee. The surface of the water is broken by fish, leaping as they feed.

McGEE (V.O.)

I could look back and think of Tush,
and all the others I knew, dropped
all the way back to the horizon and
beyond.

He looks up at the topdeck, where Jan sits on the dingy, back to him, elbows on her knees, her shoulders moving slightly.

McGEE (V.O.)

The voyage saddens as you lose them.
You wish they could see how things are.

Nearby, a large fish jumps, drawing both their attention.

EXT. ISLAND COVE - DAY

The turquoise water reflects the sunlight, casting shimmering highlights on the side of the Flush. Jan swims up, pulls herself out of the water, smiling, victorious. A beat; McGee swims up, towing the dingy, mock scowling.

McGEE (V.O.)

And you know that inevitably you'll
be dropped over the side, you and
everyone you have loved and known,
little consecutive splashes in the
silent sea. And the ship continues,
maintaining its unknown course.

McGee pulls himself aboard, and they sit there, looking out to sea, lost in their own thoughts.

EXT. ISLAND - DAY

The Flush is moored in the distance. McGee sits against a tree, beer at his side, reading a paperback. A sound causes him to look up. The sound builds, becoming recognizable: Laughter, hearty and full. He rises, walks toward its source.

At the water's edge, Jan sprawls in the dingy, clutching her mid-section, laughing hard. McGee looks at her, puzzled. She notices him, reins herself in, tries to explain:

JAN

I was thinking...what Tush would
say about the way you took Crane.

McGEE
 (sits on the dingy's edge)
 What?

Jan does a passable physical and vocal imitation of Tush.

JAN
 Hot...damn!

That sets her off again. A beat as McGee contemplates it, then he joins her. Deep cathartic laughter. Jan takes McGee's hand. She begins to cry, but does not stop laughing.

EXT. BAHIA MAR - FLYING BRIDGE - DAY

McGee pilots the Flush. He looks over at Jan beside him. She is stretched out in her chair, eyes closed, smiling in the sunlight. She looks tan and healthy--recovered. McGee smiles.

EXT. BAHIA MAR - FLUSH - DAY

As McGee and Jan disembark. Meyer waits for them dockside, holding a small frame under his arm, smiling beatifically.

He displays the framed headline from the Wall Street Journal: SEC SUSPENDS FLETCHER TRADING/Santo Subject of Investigation.

Jan gleefully hugs Meyer, pulls McGee into the embrace.

EXT. BAHIA MAR - DOCK - DAY

Jan sets her suitcase into the Vanagon, then turns back.

MEYER
 So how does it feel to be a millionaire?

JAN
 Wonderful. I...I want to thank you.

She kisses Meyer on the cheek.

MEYER
 Oh, tosh.

Jan goes to McGee, takes his arm, moves him to one side.

JAN
 A sort of announcement, Travis McGee. I wish to announce that you are a dear, strange, ceremonious kind of guy, and I didn't like you very much at all before Tush died and didn't know why he liked you, and now I do, maybe.

McGEE

Tell me. Maybe I can use it.

JAN

It made me jumpy to be alone with you, because the way I had you all figured out, you were going to comfort the little widow woman. Life goes on and all that.

(beat)

Instead, you were very stuffy and proper and dear.

She leans over, kisses McGee under the ear.

JAN

So thanks for not trying to be God's gift to the bereaved, dear.

McGEE

You're welcome any time. You wear well.

They smile at each other.

EXT. BAHIA MAR - DOCKS

The Vanagon pulls away. Meyer and McGee turn, walk away.

INT. FLUSH - LOUNGE - DAY

McGee, sweating, is rehangng the starboard lounge door.

POGO

Travis? Hey, Travis?

Pogo steps into the lounge, holding a small package.

POGO

This wouldn't fit in your box, Trav.

McGEE

(taking the package)

Thank you very much, Pogo.

Pogo grins, nods, leaves. McGee examines the package, unwraps it: a cassette. He drops it into the stereo, turns it on.

CAT

Hi, Travis. I promised I'd tell you the whole story someday, and I'm a woman of her word. So here it is.

The voice staggers McGee. He drops his eyes, listens.

CAT

About six months before you met me on the beach, they took a little black beast out of my head, as big as an English walnut almost, and with stumpy little legs like a spider. And the men in white dug around to try and get every little morsel of the beast, because it turned out to be the bad kind.

McGee sits down, absorbing it. Despite the subject, Cat's voice remains matter-of-fact, even light and ironic.

CAT

And...There was never a divorce. I have a husband, and I love him very much, but...Life began to seem like one long practice funeral. I started to think that if I got lucky and lived, I'd disappoint everyone. So I ran. I came a-hunting and found you.

INT. FLUSH - LOUNGE - NIGHT

Meyer listens to the tape, watching McGee. McGee does not look at him, listening as intently as he did the first time.

CAT

Thank you, Travis, for making the days--and the nights...Thank you for making them full. I kept telling myself, Hell, girl. You deserve it.

(mock-sullen)

And then Meyer ruined it. Hairy old Meyer and his damned law. Tell him he was absolutely right.

McGee makes a gesture: 'this part is significant.'

CAT

The right thing for me to do was to come home. I owe my Paul as much of me as possible, because it is all he is going to get...and he has to have enough to get him past the worst of it. Meyer got me back here where I belong in time.

Meyer nods sadly, understanding, agreeing.

CAT

So that's it. The ballad of Cat Killian. The end.

(beat)

Get a pretty girl to give Meyer a kiss for me. Say good-bye to all the good ones.

(her voice breaks)

Remember me, Travis. Because I loved you. Love you. Because I will always love you.

A hiss of tape, and then Meyer punches the machine off. He ejects the tape, weighing it in the palm of his hand. He speaks without looking from it to McGee.

MEYER

What are you going to do?

McGee stirs. Slowly, he looks back at Meyer, then drops his eyes. He hates his answer.

MCGEE

Nothing.

EXT. BAHIA MAR

McGee and Meyer play chess on the aftdeck.

SANTO (O.S.)

May we come aboard?

Santo stands at the gangplank, flanked by Debra and Spartan.

MCGEE

Why, surely. Please do.

As they file onto the aft deck:

SPARTAN

It might be advisable for you to have your attorney present, too, if you could reach him quickly.

MCGEE

Now what do I need an attorney for? Someone suing me?

SANTO

Don't get so damned cute!

SPARTAN

Please, Mr. Santo. Mr. McGee, we are facing what might shape up into a very exhaustive investigation of Mr. Santo's role in the speculation in Fletcher Industries. It may become necessary to have you testify as to your part in bringing this...uh... investment opportunity to Mr. Santo's attention.

McGEE

You lost me there somewhere. I never bought a share of Fletcher. I don't own any stock at all. Never have.

SANTO

Come off it, friend. You'd better be able to show me you took a real good bath in Fletcher.

Spartan looks sad. He digs into his briefcase, pulls out a sheaf of stapled Xerox copies.

SPARTAN

Come now, Mr. McGee! Surely you know that your account records can be subpoenaed from the brokerage house.

McGee looks at the records and hands them back.

McGEE

If I had to guess, I'd say these were copies of some kind of forgery, or there's somebody else with my name.

SPARTAN

Do you actually want to deny that you went to Mr. Santo's offices and talked about the whole matter with Miss Brown?

McGEE

Oh, I went there all right. We had a nice long talk about how Crane Watts, working for Santo, was trying to put together a parcel for resale.

DEBRA

What? There was nothing like that!

McGEE

Don't you remember? You told me how Tush Bannon got through to you, and how you had a drink with him. How he was being squeezed and wanted Santo's help--

DEBRA

What are you trying to do to me?

Santo moves toward Debra--McGee is just fast enough. He catches Santo's hand as it comes back for a slap. McGee swings the wrist around.

McGEE

I squashed Watts. I would have squashed you too if I could have figured a way. But you're too big and too spread out. All I could do was sting you a little.

SANTO

A little? A little? I might never take up the slack you put in me.

McGEE

You still don't get it, do you?

McGee stands, moves toward Santo slowly.

McGEE

I came prowling for you. If the thing you cared most about in the world was that face you wear, I would have changed it permanently. If your most precious possession was a beautiful wife, she'd be right down there in the master stateroom, waiting for you to leave so I could get back to her. If you juggled for a living, you'd have broken wrists at the elbows.

SANTO

What the hell is the matter with you?

McGEE

Tush Bannon was one of the best friends I ever had. Get off my boat.

SANTO

Best...friend?

Santo's color goes bad as the situation is finally clear.

SANTO

Everything I've ever worked for might be gone.

MEYER

Wait a minute. I've got an idea.

SANTO

(looks at him)

Yes? What?

MEYER

The answer was staring us right in the face all the time. It's so simple! What you do is kill yourself!

Santo stares at Meyer, not comprehending the joke. Meyer's smile stays put, but not one gleam of humor touches his eyes. He rises and walks away, toward the bow.

Santo looks at Debra, turns toward her.

SANTO

You're fired, you stupid bitch.

DEBRA

But I didn't--

SANTO

You didn't do what you're overpaid to do. You could have saved me going into the tank for enough to buy five thousand of you for a lifetime. And that makes you too damned expensive. I couldn't look at you again without feeling sick.

DEBRA

Gary, you just don't know how mutual that feeling is.

Santo, trailed by Spartan, turns and makes his way across the gangplank, his gait hurried, uneven.

Debra watches them go. She turns, leans against the rail.

DEBRA

I can't tell you how much enjoyment there was in watching someone stick it to the great Gary Santo.

(beat)

So, Travis. How about buying a nice unemployed girl lunch?

McGee hesitates, considering his answer.

DEBRA

After all, you still owe me--

Her attention is suddenly diverted. McGee turns, spots what she is looking at:

Hero, ambling along the dock, toward the Alabama Tiger.

McGee is surprised. He looks back at Debra, who is still staring after Hero. She finally looks back at McGee. It seems to take her a bit to remember who he is.

DEBRA

Oh, I just remembered--Forgive me
if I un-invite myself? I've got a
friend down here I'd like to visit.

She is already moving toward the gangplank.

McGEE

No problem. Run along.

She does. McGee shakes his head, half-sad, half-sardonic.

EXT. FLUSH - TOPDECK - DAY

McGee comes up the ladder. Meyer is slouched in one of the deck chairs, scowling. McGee regards him.

McGEE

What's bothering you?

MEYER

Me.

(turns to McGee)

Did you hear me? On the sidewalk,
there is a bug, I will change my step
to miss him. For me, the business of
the hook almost spoils the fishing.

(beat)

When I first got into your line of...
endeavor, I said--forgive me for saying
this to you--I said I will go only
so far into it. There are things McGee
does that somehow hurt McGee. Hurt him
in the way that he thinks of himself.

McGee takes this without comment.

MEYER

Maybe this is a bad business you're in, Travis. Is there this kind of ugly anger in a man that waits for some kind of virtuous excuse?

(beat)

Travis, my friend, is this the little demonstration of how half the evil in the world is done in the name of honor?

This hits McGee hard. His expression becomes dark. He leans, palms on siderail, facing away from Meyer.

McGEE

Yeah. I wonder...I wonder if I should have just let it all be. I wonder--

His throat tightens, cutting off his words. Meyer steps up beside him, studying him. McGee does not look at him. He finally forces it out, the black thing he does not like.

McGEE

(finding the words)

Boo and I...are we that different?

He lowers his eyes. Meyer contemplates the question, and then his brow smooths, the smile coming back to his eyes.

MEYER

Maybe the answer for both of us is:

(gently)

Different enough.

McGee finally looks at him, searching his face for proof that this is absolute truth. He does not find it. Meyer claps McGee on the back.

MEYER

Why don't we take some time off. Go as far down the Exuma Cays as the range of this silly barge. Assemble a little group--say six ladies and four gentlemen.

(beat; enumerates)

No drunks, no whiners, nobody paired off, no dubious genders. No one who can't swim.

McGee adds his own demands grumpily.

McGEE

No camera addicts--and nobody who sunburns.

MEYER

Empty cays, gaudy reefs, hot sun,
swift fish...and maybe some talk
when it becomes time for talking.

McGee nods, pushes away from the rail.

MEYER

Oh, I almost forgot. This is yours.

Meyer takes an envelope from his pocket, proffers it to
McGee. McGee opens it. It is a check for \$50,000.

McGEE

What the hell?

MEYER

I put us into Fletcher and rode
it up nicely and took us out, and
split the bonus right down the
middle.

(beat)

Figure it's a longer retirement
this time.

McGee stares at the check. A broad smile breaks across his
face. He turns it on Meyer.

McGEE

So give me a hand with the lines
and we'll take this crock over to
the gas dock and top off the tanks.

Meyer nods, and they turn to the chore.

From a distance, they are just two small figures in the
active marina, silhouetted against the orange of the sky as
it burns itself out, toward the night.

FADE OUT

THE END