

ONE DAY SHE'LL DARKEN

by

Sam Sheridan

Inspired by the story of Fauna Hodel

OVER BLACK

White letters, the title "1965"

FAINT MUSIC ("I'll be Doggone," Marvin Gaye).

EXT. SPARKS, NEVADA - DAWN

The gray of early morning, brown mountains stand looming over the desert. Reno in the far distance.

The suburb of Sparks, cottages and shacks on the edge of the desert. The wrong side of town.

We close on one COTTAGE. Two well-dressed BLACK GIRLS, BRINDA, 16 and JOYCE, 17, walk towards our house, nodding at HOMER, 40's, bent over the open hood of his car, small transistor RADIO (playing Marvin Gaye). The girls fall into a few dance steps as they move past.

Two tiny black CHILDREN, 4 and 5, sit on their steps, watching Homer, listening to the music.

BRINDA
Mornin' Homer.

HOMER
Morning girls. Off to school?

BRINDA
Yessir.

She rolls her eyes at Joyce, *dumb question*.

JOYCE
(whispers)
No, we're headed to the moon.

The girls giggle as they mount the steps.

BRINDA
Pat?! JOYCE (CONT'D)
Pat!

JIMMY LEE, 40's, a black woman with a hard, beautiful face, pokes her head out the door.

JIMMY LEE
You girls sit down, she'll be right out.

INT. JIMMY LEE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

PAT, 16, back to us, sits patiently (perfectly prim in a stylish tight sweater and skirt) before her Momma. Their well-heeled clothes belie the ramshackle edge on the kitchen.

Jimmy Lee uses a hot comb, heated off the gas stove, to straighten and style Pat's hair. There's rough love in Jimmy Lee's careful fingers; if not in her eyes.

A smouldering cigarette in the ashtray. A highball GLASS with orange juice and ice-cubes in it. *Drinking already.*

JIMMY LEE

Almost done.

We don't see Pat's face. Her voice is baby-soft.

PAT

Momma? You working tonight?

JIMMY LEE

Mmm-hmm. Okay hop on now...

Jimmy Lee's finished. We stay on the back of Pat's head, following her through the house, she gathers books from her bed, her homework slid into a stylish leather backpack (like a briefcase) with narrow straps.

PAT

I'll be at my shift at the hospital, too... wish I could just work...

JIMMY LEE

Now you got to stay in school you ever gonna be somebody...

Pat TURNS in the door, REVEALED-- for the first time, we see Pat's face, her BLUE EYES. She's lovely, much lighter-skinned than her mother.

PAT

I'm going to be like you, momma. Pretty Jimmy.

Jimmy Lee smiles, in spite of herself.

JIMMY LEE

Shoot. Pretty Pat. Go on now.

EXT. SPARKS, NEVADA - MORNING

Pat and the girls cross from dusty DIRT road onto some railroad tracks.

PAT
 ...besides, Miss Mina's from Florida. She ain't never gone respect us.

We all know what Southerners think of us.

JOYCE
 Shoot. That's right. But did you hear what Annie was sayin'?

Their shoes CLICK onto the paved roads.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

The students stand at attention, hands over their hearts. Pat in the back (with the black girls, the class is cleanly self-segregated). The students all drone, eyes dead, in the familiar monotone...

CLASS
 I pledge allegiance, to the flag,
 of the United States of America...

Another mind-numbing day.

EXT. SPARKS, NEVADA - HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Pat follows along behind Brinda, listening while Brinda chatters with Joyce. SCHOOL'S OUT; they swim through the exodus of kids, well-dressed by today's standards, heading for freedom, chattering excitedly.

Several BLACK BOYS swagger by, led by the absurdly handsome LEWIS, 17. Every step away from school their strut deepens, their lean increases; neat in white t-shirts under artfully unbuttoned collared shirts, the odd pork-pie hat or small-brimmed fedora.

Lewis slides by Joyce (ignoring her), grins at Pat.

LEWIS
 Girl, you look sweet enough to put
 on my cornflakes...

Pat BLUSHES, and the other BOYS laugh.

Joyce glares daggers; if looks could kill Pat would dog food.

EXT. SPARKS, NEVADA - PARKING LOT - LATER

On the corner of parking lot, near a fast-food joint with a neon "Hot Dogs" sign (just a counter inside) the Negro kids socialize, hang out, dance to the transistor radio (Fontella Bass, "Rescue Me"). Laugh themselves into stitches. Some of the boys play-fight, showing off, hands up like boxers but jabbing hard into each other's chests, eyes serious until it gets too serious; then they laugh. Some of the girls dance in sync.

Pat sits with Brinda and Joyce. Brinda indicates Pat's shoes.

BRINDA

Them the new Mary Janes with the T-Strap?

PAT

Yeah. Momma got 'em...

During the conversation, Joyce tracks a dynamic: Lewis, in the center of the storm, glances over at Pat, and grins. Each time Lewis does it, Pat looks down and blushes, looks away.

PAT (CONT'D)

I had to wear 'em so I had something to smile about today, what with that quiz Miss Comiskey gave--

BRINDA

Ain't she a nasty ole cow though?

The girls LAUGH. Conversation burbles.

Pat glances back shyly at Lewis, but her view is suddenly blocked; Joyce stands in front of her.

JOYCE

What you smiling at, girl? Who the fuck you smiling at?

Pat looks away nervously, shaking her head, *I'm not...* Joyce grabs her arm, the bully. Dangerous.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

You spendin' time wit Lewis? Is that what it is? He your man now?

PAT

Well, yeah, we been spendin' some time, I guess, you know--

JOYCE

--bitch he ain't. He ain't. Lewis and me got history, unnerstan'? You ain't even... you light-skinned bitch think you're all that you ain't, I'ma see if that light skin scratches off, I wanna see if that blood is black--

PAT

--screw you Joyce, you coconut, you ain't blacker than nobody, you seen my momma, Smoky Robinson got blue eyes, I'm darker every day--

JOYCE

--let's see if that blood is black--

Brinda smoothly works her way between them-- she's used to this, protecting Pat.

BRINDA

--C'mon Joyce, she ain't doing nothing...

PAT

I'm getting darker.

Brinda leads Pat away. Joyce calls:

JOYCE

Don't go cryin baby, you gonna fink to your momma?

MOMENTS LATER

Brinda and Pat confer by the edge of the lot.

BRINDA

You know what she like. You okay to walk to work?

PAT

(sheesh)

Yeah, I'm fine, I AM sixteen
Brinda! I can walk to work.

Brinda looks around, and her eyes catch on a dark CAR on the street.

Inside, watching them, a pockmarked, ugly WHITE MAN, hat low, unshaven and a little dangerous. We'll later come to know him as SEPP.

BRINDA

Look.

Look at this shit. Pat follows her eyes.

PAT

Oh yeah. I see. That's him.

BRINDA

You seen him before right?

PAT

Yeah I tole you. He never stays long. Just wants a look.

The car drives off. Brinda watches it go.

BRINDA

Creep. Snap case.

Pat starts to walk away, still hurt from Joyce's words, but hiding it. She tosses back over her shoulder:

PAT

See ya tomorrow.

BRINDA

Awright.

They go their separate ways.

EXT. MALIBU BEACH - AFTERNOON

The beach, hot sun and white sand, 1960's beach music ("A Fat Boy Can Cry", Billy Stewart) and surfers, all tan (the beach is lily-white; segregated) and gleaming smiles. We're seeing the transition to hippie-dom, some long hair, some pomaded and styled, and some in between.

A FOREST of long-boards stand straight up in the sand, and JAY SINGLETARY, late 30's, in a swimsuit, picks his way through. His military short hair seems out of place here on the beach, and his glaring farmer's tan shows that he doesn't come down here much... Jay's cradling SOMETHING under his arm, wrapped up in a towel.

He walks right in front of three SURFERS, golden bodies, one with longer hair and a mustache smirks at him.

SURFER

Be careful out here Snow White,
you're gonna catch fire...

SURFER 2

You're burning my eyes, hodad...

The surfers amuse themselves as Jay presses onwards, ignoring them, re-gripping the SOMETHING under his towel, his face hard.

Jay strides along the beach, then he SPLASHES into the ocean to bypass a FENCE in the sand that ends in the gentle surf, with a sign reading "PRIVATE".

He passes outside a rocky promontory that divides the beaches...

Up ahead, a secluded private BEACH with a series of fancy Malibu houses that front onto the sand.

EXT. MALIBU BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

Jay stalks down the white sand, searching for something, adjusting the THING under the towel again. Then he freezes-- the hunter has spotted his quarry.

Down the beach, behind a well-trimmed hedge, at a private pool in front of a Malibu house, an incredibly lovely platinum BLOND WOMAN in a white bikini cavorts with an older, balding MAN.

Jay casually strolls down the beach, closing on his targets...

The Blond Woman throws back her head and LAUGHS, she's kissing the Bald Man...

Jay's moving fast now, the towel hits the ground, a flash of black metal...

Jay jumps up and crashes in, wedging through the hedge--

Brandishing a CAMERA! Jay shoots, works the lever on the CANON, clicks as fast as he can!

It takes a moment for the couple, locked in a kiss, to notice, and then the Bald Man thrusts the Blond Woman off him roughly--

BALD MAN
What the hell, fella!?

BLOND WOMAN
What the fuck are you doing!!

Jay keeps SNAPPING, and the Bald Man lurches away towards the house, yelling for "Gerry! Gerry!"

Jay SNAPS one last picture of the Blond Woman, and forces himself out through the hedge, back the way he came.

BLOND WOMAN (CONT'D)
 You sonuvabitch! You sad
 sonuvabitch!

MOMENTS LATER

Jay retraces his steps, passes the FENCE, splashing through the surf, and looks back-- the Blond Woman follows.

BLOND WOMAN
 Asshole! You're an asshole!

MOMENTS LATER

Jay still walks quickly, looks back to see the Blond Woman still behind him, but now she's weeping-- her makeup running--

BLOND WOMAN
 Please, please, no, you'll ruin
 me...
 (shrieks)
 You'll ruin me!!!

JAY
 (laughing)
 I didn't ruin you, you ruined you!

Now they move through the SURFERS, deeply entertained and enjoying the dramatic show-- they stop and stare and begin to catcall Jay "Why you bein' an asshole?" "What happened, sugar?" And offer the Blond Woman consolation, "I can help you, sweetheart, don't cry, he's no good..."

BLOND WOMAN
 You're gonna ruin him and ruin me,
 you sonuva... you snake...

The Blond makes a run for the camera, but JAY easily evades her. She's powerless.

Finally, she sinks to her knees in the sand, weeping piteously.

BLOND WOMAN (CONT'D)
 Please, please, don't... who are
 you? Who are you?

Jay glances back, cold. He snaps another pic for an insult, of this broken woman.

The crowd is torn between RAZZING her and HARASSING Jay.

BLOND WOMAN (CONT'D)
Please... please...

JAY
You wanted to be famous,
sweetheart.

EXT. SPARKS, NEVADA HOSPITAL - SUNSET

The CATHOLIC HOSPITAL, a white flood-lit CROSS glows brightly against the oncoming desert night, the crimson sky.

INT. HOSPITAL - SUNSET

Pat, wearing a white uniform, pushes a mop and bucket onto a quiet hallway and begins to mop. Flooded with red light.

The bucket has a pedal that squeezes two rollers to wring out the mop, Pat works it professionally.

She SMILES as she looks up to see Lewis, also in a pristine white uniform, pushing a massive hamper of laundry along the corridor. With the change of outfit and without his friends, he's a 'good boy.'

LEWIS
Sorry for spottin' your floor.

PAT
Oh that's all right.

Lewis looks around, the coast is clear.

LEWIS
Why you light out so quick? I
woul'da walked with you...

PAT
I dinnit want to be late.

He KISSES her and Pat blushes to the roots of her hair. Electrified. But she grips his collar.

PAT (CONT'D)
You gonna get us both fired, Sister
Sarah will catch us--

LEWIS

--oh poo Sister Sarah. You knockin' off at seven? I'll walk you home.

PAT

Yeah... but don't let my Momma see--

LEWIS

--your Momma's a whole different--

Lewis catches sight of a NUN (SISTER SARAH) in a habit, frowning down the corridor, and he quickly pushes on.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

(through closed lips)

--Oh shit she seen me. I'll catch you at seven.

Pat swings her mop with renewed gusto.

EXT. BEACH PAYPHONE - SUNSET

Jay, buttoning a shirt, stands at the payphone in a beach parking lot, talking, looking out over the sand and waves. Cars rumble by.

JAY

They were there. Right where you said they would be. That was a good tip...

Jay's face is hard to read as he listens. We can hear the tinny voice down the line:

SALAZAAR (O.S.)

Great kid. Great. Yeah, well, that tip wasn't cheap neither... That was a smart play, coming in from the beach... what a crack-up, we got that bimbo dead to rights. She'll be back in Iowa in twenty-four hours, Mayer won't stand for a two-timing bitch... she's through in Hollywood, pal! And fuck that kike producer, too, he's a fucking joke...

It's hard to know what Jay's thinking as he stares out at the waves. A lot of things. Fiddles with the camera.

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

Jay, you there? Bring 'em in now, why dontcha.

(MORE)

SALAZAAR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 If they're good, that's a grand,
 easy, see what the run ends up
 being, if I break a hundred you'll
 see it I promise...

JAY
 I ahh... I didn't get 'em.

SALAZAAR (O.S.)
 (are you fucking kidding
 me?)
 What? What did you say? Sorry Jay,
 sounded like you said--

JAY
 --I didn't get 'em. I didn't get
 the shots. The camera wasn't
 working.

SALAZAAR (O.S.)
 What...? You just said you... you
 what? What! You fucking clown, you
 get that camera working and go back
 there, and you get those goddamn
 pictures... fucking idiot... Jesus
 Christ... you fucking kidding me...

Salazaar trails off in screaming invective, which Jay ignores. Jay leaves the phone dangling, we can hear the BUZZ of Salazaar's anger.

Jay pops open the Canon, and STRIPS the film out, exposing it; ruining it. He snaps the Canon closed, and SLAMS the reams of ruined film in the trash.

He glances back at the phone, we still hear Salazaar yelling at him...

Jay SNATCHES up the phone receiver and violently SMASHES it against the box, hammering away until the black plastic shatters in his hands.

Now it's quiet.

An expressionless SURFER KID, scrawny, long-haired, barefoot, he'd been waiting for the phone, turns and walks away. Laconic, without judgment, never takes his hands out of his pockets.

Jay takes a deep, shuddering breath. BLOOD trickles down his knuckles.

INT. JAY'S CAR - SECONDS LATER

Jay sucks blood off his fist, and with a trembling hand, reaches for the KEYS (in the ignition) but his hands are shaking too much.

He shakes his head, betrayed by his body; then pulls out a small metal VIAL. He unscrews it; the cap has a built-in tiny SNUFF-SPOON, and Jay hits a single BUMP of white powder into a nostril, SNIFFING deep (Despite his shaking hands, there's a smooth, easy professional feel to all this, he's done it a hundred times).

Now... he breathes DEEP, his hands calm, and he starts the car.

EXT. SPARKS, NEVADA - NIGHT

Pat and Lewis stroll along, taking their time, through the soft desert night. A car rolls by, lighting them starkly, and then drops them back into the shadows.

After it passes, they hold hands.

LEWIS

My cousin got a good job for me
over at the Auto shop on Centinela.
Full time.

PAT

You gonna drop out?

A lot of their friends have.

LEWIS

Maybe.

He looks at her.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

I could quit school, we both could.
My cousins paying thirty-seven
dollars a week. We could get our
own place...

PAT

(longing)
I want to. Momma'd kill me...

LEWIS

Who cares what your damn crazy
Momma thinks?

PAT
You gonna marry me?

Laughing, tense underneath it.

LEWIS
I would.
(thoughtful)
You can't no how. You're seventeen.
We cain't get married.

PAT
(laughing)
I could lie.

LEWIS
Shoot girl. The preacher or Justice
gonna want a birth certificate, or
sumthin.

Neither are too sure of how serious the other is.

PAT
I'll change it... I just wanna be
with you. Be your woman.

LEWIS
I want to be with you. All the
time. You're all I think about. All
I dream about.

PAT
You're all I dream about.

She KISSES him until the lights of another CAR catch them,
and he leaps away.

But it's too late... the CAR lighting them rolls up along
side, slowly, the CRUNCH of gravel... and we see under the
street light it's the POLICE.

Two white POLICEMEN gaze at Pat and Lewis from inside the
shadowy car. OFFICER MATT (the smart one) and OFFICER SMITH.

OFFICER SMITH
Whatta we got?

MOMENTS LATER

Officer Matt talks to Pat, while on the other side of the
cruiser Officer Smith harangues Lewis, just out of our
earshot.

OFFICER MATT
Well now, Pat, is that colored boy
bothering you?

PAT
Nossir. I'm colored, sir.

OFFICER MATT
You're colored?

PAT
Yessir, I'm mixed-race, my mother
is Negro. I live with her. Over in
East Sparks.

She glances over at Lewis, who has gone totally submissive in front of the white cop. Eyes down, head bowed.

Officer Smith has his STICK out, and TAPS Lewis gently on the shoulder, talking quietly. Pregnant with violence.

OFFICER MATT
(to Officer Smith)
She's colored!

Officer Smith looks over, frowning, then squints. Lucky for Lewis.

OFFICER SMITH
(to Lewis)
Go on, go home boy! Git! Go on now!

Lewis vanishes into the night, without a glance at Pat.

Officer Matt frowns at Pat. He doesn't like it. Officer Smith wanders over to them. Both wearing the same expression. Fishy.

OFFICER MATT
This young lady's colored.

Officer Smith looks at her, thinks about it, and then finally shrugs, *okay, who cares?*

OFFICER SMITH
Alright, let's go.

Officer Matt stares at Pat for a long time, his suspicion not going away.

OFFICER MATT
Alright. Go on home now. Don't be
out here with these boys, I know
you got school tomorrow.

EXT. JIMMY LEE'S PORCH - NIGHT

Pat hurries up the stairs home...

Jimmy Lee's hard face is angry, cigarette dangling from her lips. Watchful, dangerous glint in her eye. We're not sure how drunk she is. Maybe very.

JIMMY LEE

Well, look what the cat drug in.

PAT

(nervous)

Hi Momma.

JIMMY LEE

Where you been?

PAT

Jest at work, Momma. I came straight home.

JIMMY LEE

Oh yeah, izzat right?

Pat, eyes averted, slips past her Momma. Jimmy Lee's radioactive anger glows in the dark, a dangerous heat Pat can feel.

INT. JIMMY LEE'S KITCHEN

Pat takes in the Vodka bottle with 1/3rd left, the ice cube tray, spilled orange juice, brimming ashtray... as she scurries for the safety of her room.

JIMMY LEE

Hold up.

Pat winces, unseen by Jimmy Lee.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)

You was with that Lewis Ferguson, wasn't you? I can smell him on you. Like a bitch in heat. Well, lemme tell you something, you better than him. He's a no good nigger never gonna be nothing. Them boys, they only want one thing from you and they'll tell you any damn thing--

PAT

--Lewis Ferguson is a good man. I love him, Momma. And he loves me.

Pat, *that's enough bravery for tonight*, flounces into her room. Jimmy Lee follows, LAUGHING from the door. Jealous, drunk, filled with rage and envy at her beautiful daughter.

JIMMY LEE

Oh my goodness, you stupid little girl, you don't know nothing bout nothing. You love him. Oh my stars... you dumb chicken, you could be more than this shithole, this po-dunk little town, than goddamn Lewis Ferguson! You're better than all this... shit!

Jimmy Lee sweeps her arms to encompass her house, her life, the town.

PAT

I'm not stupid, Momma, I'm not a baby anymore! I'm sixteen years old!

JIMMY LEE

Oh you grown now? You know so much?

PAT

I know plenty. I do, Momma.

JIMMY LEE

You don't know nothing. Stupid. I'll tell you things... you never knew! Shit.

Pat suddenly looks at Jimmy Lee differently, *what was that?* It dawns on Jimmy Lee that she's said too much, and she stumbles back into the kitchen.

Pat follows, watching as Jimmy Lee splashes herself another drink.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)

(very drunk)

--you're more than me. You could be. More than Pretty Jimmy. You ain't like me--

PAT

--I don't want to be more than you, I just want to be a girl in Sparks and married--

JIMMY LEE

--I coulda been somebody, I was supposed to be Lena Horne goddammit! I'm prettier than her and a better singer too! Lewis goddamn Ferguson!

The Lewis Fergusons of the world prevented Jimmy Lee from being a famous singer, that much is clear.

Jimmy Lee drains her full glass of almost all vodka, her throat pumping-- this is the drink that puts her over the edge, almost instantly she's far drunker.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)

I tried to protect you from niggers like that... hard raisin' a mixed child, waitin' on your skin to darken...

(maudlin)

You know I looked for brown-skint dolls. There ain't any. Least-ways not in Sparks. I know somewhere, there's a big storeroom, filled with boxes of brown baby-dolls, waiting for little girls. In the dark, with their eyes open.

(she spits)

All my work for nothing, you gonna leave your momma for some fool--

PAT

--you're wrong about him Momma--

JIMMY LEE

--You don't know shit. There's things you don't know, chile...

(shaking her head)

You don't know nothin'.

PAT

What do you mean? I'm your girl, I'm gonna be like you--

JIMMY LEE

--oh you my girl? You my girl?

Pat stares, and tears start to come...

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)

(fury)

You gonna cry, little girl? You little baby?

(MORE)

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)
 (she drinks, thirsty)
 You don't know nothing about it.

PAT
 What are you sayin', Momma?

Worried that she might have gone too far but too drunk to comprehend it, Jimmy Lee stands, sways, and heads for her room.

JIMMY LEE
 Nothing.
 (her final judgement)
 Stupid.

Jimmy Lee lurches into her bedroom and SLAMS the door.

Pat stares after her, anger setting in-- but something else, too, a nagging suspicion takes hold.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Jay crosses the dark street, pushes into a bar named "Sal's."

INT. SAL'S BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Sal's is something of a dive, and PETER, 50's, mid-rant, holds court to a young man, TOMMY, 18. Both in ruffled suits.

PETER
 ...like Ben Hecht said, kid, and he was a great writer, there ain't a profession out there-- not even soldierin'-- that makes a selfless hero like journalism.

Tommy nods fervently, Jay approaches behind them.

JAY
 Is that right?

PETER
 (doesn't look)
 That's right. He also said "socially a journalist fits between a whore and a bartender... but spiritually, he stands beside Galileo! He knows the world is round!"

JAY
 (pulls up a stool)
Eppur si muove.
 (under his breath)
 Whores know that, too.

Peter drinks long. He nods, squinting at the BARTENDER. Jay whispers "Coca-cola" off the Bartender's look and gestures to get both Peter and Tommy another...

PETER
 But the most important rule of
 journalism, kid, is this: never
 have a hangover on your own time.

Jay LAUGHS. Tommy's not sure if he's being made fun of, or should he be writing this down?

PETER (CONT'D)
 How you doing, Mister Singletary?

The new drinks arrive.

JAY
 You gotta get me something, Pete. I
 can't do this shit any more.

PETER
 Jay...

JAY
 Please.

PETER
 Jay, I don't make decisions at the
 Times anymore. I do what they tell
 me--

JAY
 --please Petey. Please. I'm gonna
 kill somebody.

Jay grips Peter's arm.

JAY (CONT'D)
 It'll be your fault.

PETER
 (sighs)
 I'll try, but you know what's gonna
 happen, your name on a byline
 they'll shitcan it--

JAY

--gimme something Pete or I'm gonna
kill myself... and I'll haunt
you... I'll rattle chains in your
closet...

Jay's not really kidding.

Peter consults an open NOTEBOOK on the bar in front of him--
Peter works from here, we realize.

PETER

Awright... I got something...
tomorrow at the City Morgue, early,
there's a press conference, a girl
got hacked... Might be interesting.
My cop said the body was, and I
quote, "really something."

(reading his notes)

Janice... Brewster. Get me some
pictures and write something real
and I'll see what I can do. Maybe
more eloquent than "really
something."

JAY

(scribbling)

Another shitty little murder about
nothing that changes nothin' and
nobody cares--

PETER

--that's the gig, you above it?

JAY

--Naaw, I'm down in the gutter
looking up at it.

PETER

You're welcome.

TOMMY

(to Jay, hopeful)

Do you write for the LA Times?

JAY

Do I write for the Times? No, I'm a
goddamn stringer for the Examiner.
I'm a loser. Dig it?

Jay walks away, looks back. Tommy's hurt, resentful, *I don't
deserve that* and maybe gonna say something...

JAY (CONT'D)
You got a problem with anything,
hotshot?

Jay's hands are SHAKING. Fidgeting.

TOMMY
No, no problem.

JAY
You feelin' froggy you go ahead and
jump. Any which way.

He stares at Tommy, eyes glinting-- *Jay wants to fight.*
Tommy, horrified and confused, shies away.

Jay turns, jamming his trembling hands in his pockets to hide
them. Walks quickly away.

Tommy stares after him, wide-eyed, while Peter grins and
drinks greedily.

TOMMY
Jesus, what's wrong with him?

PETER
What's wrong with Jay Singletary?
Shit. Where do I start... He was a
Marine at the Chosin in Korea, for
one... but his problems are bigger
than that, even. You know, when he
was eighteen, he was a full
reporter for the LA Times? Good
writer, better than me... but he
messed up. Some stories you can't
tell.

TOMMY
What's that mean?

PETER
It means, and you'll learn this,
don't push too hard on the wrong
door. There are some stories that
don't want to be told. Some stories
will eat you alive.

EXT. JIMMY LEE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Through the late night darkness, we're looking IN the window
at Pat, in a white nightgown, staring out at us. Her blue
eyes.

At first, we think maybe she's looking at the stars, but then she adjusts her hair... she's looking at herself. Thinking.

INT. JIMMY LEE'S KITCHEN - LATE AT NIGHT

Still, dark, empty kitchen.

LIGHT, from beneath Pat's door. Then it CRACKS open.

Pat creeps out of her room, and pauses, listening at Jimmy Lee's door. She controls her breathing, tense, like a burglar.

Nothing. Pat slowly pushes Jimmy Lee's door open, with a tiny CREAK (bringing a wince) and Pat slips into Jimmy Lee's room.

INT. JIMMY LEE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Pitch black room, the faint outline of Jimmy Lee, SNORING, on the bed. Still dressed, one shoe on.

Pat slips silently across the room, until her foot KICKS the empty BOTTLE in the darkness, sending it ROLLING across the floor!

Pat freezes, face contorted. Jimmy Lee SNORTS, turns, SNORING resumes.

Pat waits, then moves again, and CREAKS open the closet. She rummages around the overpacked closet, and emerges with something (a shoebox) tucked under her arm.

INT. PAT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Pat sits on her bed in her white nightgown, the warm yellow glow of the lamp, and the box open in front of her.

Pat shifts through envelopes, letters, papers of Jimmy's. Spreads them out on the bed, neat, organized.

She finds a manila envelope, "Baby Patty."

She opens the envelope, pulling out school registration forms, doctors and dentist bills, and then a smaller WHITE ENVELOPE. Unmarked and sealed, but older.

On the envelope: "Baby Patricia Ann Greenwade. Do Not Open."

Pat opens the envelope with her nail file.

She unfolds a CERTIFICATE OF LIVE BIRTH.

Her eyes grow wide-- jackpot. Then her eyes narrow in confusion as she reads:

"State of California, Certificate of Live Birth, Name: FAUNA HODEL. Mother: TAMAR HODEL, Race: WHITE. Father: INFORMATION WITHHELD, Race: NEGRO."

Pat stares in deep confusion at the piece of paper. Looks through the rest.

PAT
Fauna Hodel?

There's nothing else.

She picks the Birth Certificate back up. Reading it in confusion but also a deep dawning sense of dread.

PAT (CONT'D)
Fauna?

INT. JIMMY LEE'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Pat sits staring at the kitchen table. Disheveled, still in her nightgown. She hasn't slept. She pours herself some cereal, then sits staring at the bowl-- unaware of the task.

Jimmy Lee's door opens, and Jimmy Lee comes out-- fully dressed, makeup on, smoking.

They don't look at each other. Jimmy Lee silently pours the coffee. Back turned.

JIMMY LEE
You better get dressed.

Pat pulls out the Birth Certificate and unfolds it. Her hands shake a tiny bit.

PAT
Who is Fauna Hodel?

Jimmy Lee freezes in place.

JIMMY LEE
What...?

Jimmy Lee turns, and takes in the paper in Pat's hands.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)
You been sneaking in my stuff?

Her voice rises in anger-- Pat isn't cowed.

PAT
Who's Fauna Hodel, Momma?

JIMMY LEE
You stealing from me. You sneaky
little bitch.

She crosses to snatch the paper back, but Pat stands quickly,
KNOCKING over the chair. Pat keeps the table between them.

PAT
Momma! Don't you lie to me!

JIMMY LEE
How dare you come into my stuff,
after all I done-- you gimme that
back, I'll burn you--

PAT
Momma goddammit! I'll go to the PO-
lice! I will!

That brings Jimmy Lee up short.

JIMMY LEE
You would too. You little bitch.
Sneak bitch.

Jimmy Lee turns away, trembling with rage.

PAT
You tell me, Momma. Tell me.

Jimmy Lee lights a cigarette, eyes still snapping.

JIMMY LEE
You wanna know? I'll tell you. I
always hated that name Fauna,
stupid fairy-tale name.

Pat's unable to move, her world condensing around her.

PAT
(very small voice)
What?

JIMMY LEE
You are Fauna Hodel, stupid. You
are.

Pat stares down at the paper.

PAT
 (whispers)
 I am?

JIMMY LEE
 (punishing)
 You was given to me in a goddamn
 bathroom, 'cause nobody wanted you.

Jimmy Lee has (in her mind) been trying to protect Pat from the truth. She meant to tell Pat the truth, but there hasn't been the right time...

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)
 A woman, in the rest-room at the casino, I was taking good care of her. White woman, money, big styled blond hair, gold jewelry... I tole her about me and the Reverend Greenwade, but I lied a little, told her we was married, not just living together... I was angling on a big tip, right? She had tipped good before. So I laid it on her thick, I tole her "The Lord didn't bless us with children" and she got all excited. She straight-up asked me if I would adopt her daughter's child.

Jimmy Lee paces, defensive.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)
 She was drunk... and crazy... Who'da thought she wasn't? So I says yes Ma'am oh certainly Ma'am because she already tipped me fifty dollars!

Jimmy Lee shakes her head, FIFTY DOLLARS?

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)
 She says how her fifteen year ole daughter was pregnant, that's that "Tamar" on there-- stupid name-- and the father's a Negro boy. So, they had to give it up... and here I am, childless, married to a preacher, a good decent god-fearing woman.

(snorts)
 Would I take the baby? Shit. I said Surely Ma'am and Praise Jesus and she tipped me 'nother fifty.

Jimmy Lee smokes, drinks coffee. You woulda done it too for a hundred bucks, a crazy lady? Another sucker in the casino?

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)

I got a telegram from her, maybe six months on, and I didn't even know what the Hell it was... I had forgotten all about it! I threw that damn thing in the trash!

Jimmy Lee laughs, shakes her head.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)

But then that white lady comes and braces me on the floor, hollering about keeping my word. Making a scene. Shit. Gonna get me fired. And she meets Christopher and now he wants the baby, he thinks it's gonna make me happy, settle me down, make us a damn family...

Jimmy Lee rolls her eyes.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)

So here we are. Without the good Reverend Greenwade, of course. Fuck him.

(aware of her failings as a mother)

Nobody wants a mixed-race girl. You know I did the best I could. You always had the best clothes for school. You was always the best dressed girl in school.

Jimmy Lee looks at her watch.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)

Shoot, I'm gonna be late. You should know one thing-- this the important thing, girl. Your white family, they're rich. Your grandfather, he a famous rich white doctor in Los Angeles. You're gonna be rich one day. You got to keep that name, legal, Fauna Hodel. And then you kin take care of your Momma, too.

Jimmy Lee throws on her coat.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)

That's why you're better than Lewis
Ferguson, girl. Now get on to
school.

Pat stares after her Momma.

The door clicks shut.

Pat stares at the Birth Certificate in her hand.

PAT

Fauna. Fauna.

Now she knows her name, and from here on she'll be FAUNA.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - MORNING

One a busy morning street, Jay gets out of his car,
straightens his tie, and adjusts the camera strap.

He walks towards a big, impressive government stone building,
the MORGUE, falling in behind other REPORTERS.

INT. CITY MORGUE - FRONT ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Jay joins a line of REPORTERS, up too early, smoking, nursing
hangovers. Jay drifts in, eavesdropping...

REPORTER 1

...it's news cause she's from
Pasadena, nice white girls don't
end up like this--

REPORTER 2

--well shit if it's the niggers
then its news and ole Parker's got
the handle, if he can't keep it--

Reporter 1 catches Jay's inward drift and jerks his head, *we
got company*, and Reporter 2 glances at Jay, rolls his eyes
and shakes his head, *the riff-raff are here*.

They shuffle towards the entrance, where a burly Uniformed
Cop glances at Press Credentials.

REPORTER 1

What is this?

COP

I gotta see Press Passes. C'mon,
cough 'em up.

REPORTER 1
We got security now?

REPORTER 2
This is America!

COP
The press conference is for
accredited only.

The Reporters GRUMBLE but produce worn, dog-eared PRESS
PASSES and credentials.

Jay makes a show of patting his pockets,

JAY
Listen, mine's in the car, but I'm
here for the LA Times, you think--

COP
--go get it. Better hurry, they
ain't gonna wait.

The Reporters SNICKER as Jay steps out of line, giving the
Cop an aggrieved look. It's like giving an aggrieved look to
a stone wall.

Jay spins on his heel.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - CITY MORGUE - SECONDS LATER

JAY
(muttering)
Does he know I stand with Galileo?
No he does not--

Jay cuts down an side-street around the Morgue, pulling off
his JACKET--

--revealing a grimy WHITE LAB COAT underneath. His whole
demeanor changes, he's suddenly stealthy, aware.

INT. HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

Fauna, in her white uniform, pauses, holding her Mop Bucket.
She watches a TV set high on the wall, in the Maternity Ward,
most of the beds empty but ONE MOTHER AND INFANT, asleep.

Fauna's transfixed: On the TV, the opening for the "Doris Day
Show"-- set to the music of "Que Sera, Sera." A cute, perky,
blond woman, Doris Day, wanders a pastoral scene, a pond at
sunset, willows, two adorable little blond Boys catch a
butterfly, a gruff but heartwarming Grandpa on horseback...
The FANTASY OF WHITE LIFE, and it strikes home for Fauna.

She unfolds the BIRTH CERTIFICATE and looks at it.

She pushes the Mop and Bucket on, rolling through the corridor that has the window onto the rows of CRIBS, most are empty but a few babies in there.

Fauna glances through the glass, and then catches sight of her haunted face in the reflection.

She looks for a long moment, then SNARLS at herself.

FAUNA

Awww, you gonna cry little baby?

She shakes her head. No I am not.

She carefully leans the mop in the bucket, then sets off with purpose, fists clenching and un-clenching.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - BACK OF THE MORGUE - DAY

An AMBULANCE (like a big red-and-white hearse) wipes past Jay (now in a stained white lab coat) and he glances around.

Behind the Morgue is a depressingly functional set-up: a loading dock, where Coroner's Wagons and Ambulances (some like hearses, some like vans) disgorge the dead. It's open to allow the Ambulances to come easily in and out, and yet somewhat shielded from the casual viewer. There is, however, no security outside. A Coroner's AIDE dressed in a dark nurse's uniform comes to aid an Ambulance DRIVER, in white, wheel a covered CORPSE on a folding gurney.

It's quiet-- and Jay slips around the sides of the Ambulance, quietly opens driver's door and gently scuttles up inside the VAN.

INT. AMBULANCE - SECONDS LATER

Jay unhooks an empty rolling STRETCHER, and drags it out the door, expertly snapping into position... and pushing out *through* the Ambulance onto the dock...

I/E. CITY MORGUE - BACK ENTRANCE - SECONDS LATER

Jay briskly wheels the STRETCHER into the Morgue, banging through the swinging doors (just a bundle of rags and blankets on his Stretcher, covered in a sheet).

With his head down, Jay wheels past a SECURITY GUARD at a station, his feet up, reading "Field & Stream." The Guard never looks up.

INT. CITY MORGUE - CONTINUOUS

Jay wheels towards the admitting desk, where a couple of AIDES fill out paperwork and chat to the DRIVER.

One of the AIDES (an older black man) looks up, and frowns.

REVERSE POV: The corridor is empty, we recognize Jay's empty stretcher rolling slowly to a stop, THUNK, against the wall.

But we don't see Jay.

The AIDE turns back to his paperwork.

CUT TO:

INT. MORGUE CRYPTS - SECONDS LATER

Jay's BREATH fogs the air, it's cold...

He glances around, a little wide-eyed. Not thrilled. He wrinkles his nose at the smell.

The Morgue holds four hundred bodies on average, and "processes" thirty a day. We get a sense of the industry of death, down here in one corner of the morgue, there must be FIFTY CORPSES stacked in here. A long, low-ceilinged room with metal racks on the walls, metal tables on wheels. And everywhere, CORPSES wrapped in sheets, some bound neatly, others loose. Stacked to the ceiling, some staining their sheets. Tile floors. Rows of TOE TAGS peeking through.

It's a lot of death. Jay exhales, slowly.

Jay hears a RATTLE and ducks down-- someone moves past the corridor some fifty feet away. They BANG a metal table, LAUGH. Then they're gone... Jay looks up, shakes his head.

Jay moves on. He steps onto a massive steel plate-- a scale, set in the floor, a dial turns on the wall. He looks at it.

JAY
(whispers)
Little light today.

A young black AIDE wheels a body in, banging in too fast-- JAY FREEZES, he's totally nailed-- the AIDE doesn't even see Jay, although Jay's only twenty feet away, and staring.

The AIDE grabs a CLIPBOARD off the wall, marks something on it-- the pencil SCRITCHING as Jay watches, holding his breath-- then hangs the CLIPBOARD back up.

Magically, the Aide never even sees Jay. Too bored with his surroundings. The Aide BANGS out the swinging doors.

Whew. Jay shakes his head, *close one*.

He grabs the CLIPBOARD off the wall and studies it.

INT. MORGUE CRYPTS - MOMENTS LATER

Jay prowls the narrow rooms, lined with bodies-- jumping and starting, lunging for cover as the Aides and Examiners go about their business.

To avoid a loud conversation in the hallway, Jay grabs a random CORPSE on a metal wheeled table and pushes it from one room to another.

Something pulls him up short:

A wall of smaller metal boxes-- every box filled with a smaller shrouded and bound BODY.

Children's corpses, some infants.

He forces his eyes away, sighing. Jay's seen it all, but it all sucks.

INT. MORGUE EXAMINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A clinical room, with surgical instruments and some decidedly non-surgical ones-- massive cutting shears for cracking ribs, etc. A bloody mop, a bloody drain. But overall pretty clean.

Jay slips in, and begins checking toe tags on the wrapped BODIES.

Against the wall are ROWS of sliding body-lockers, that store the bodies inside the wall. Some of the EMPTY ONES are left OPEN.

He finds the TOE-TAG he's looking for... and stares for a long moment at the SHROUDED FORM.

JAY
(whispers)
Hey Janice... how's it going?

He quickly unties and unwraps the BODY.

Jay HISSES, his facade cracks; just a glimpse, a beautiful DEAD WOMAN with her face cut in a ghastly smile...

JAY (CONT'D)
(wincing)
Not that great.

Jay pauses, scratching his head. Snaps pictures.

Now he hears something: VOICES, loud, coming this way. Jay looks up-- shadowy FIGURES outside the door-- it's too late! He desperately RE-COVERS the corpse...

Now the VOICES are right outside!

CORONER (O.S.)
...yeah, she's next on the slate,
c'mon I'm gonna pop her right
now...

Jay gazes frantically around... nowhere to go!

Jay climbs into an open body locker (almost like a cupboard with a slide-out bed), SLIDES himself in as the doors OPEN and two CORONERS walk in with two smoking DETECTIVES. They don't see Jay as he quietly, gently, pulls the door almost shut.

There's a BAR OF LIGHT on his eye, the locker door left a sliver ajar... until:

SNICK! Someone pushes the locker door shut, plunging Jay into total darkness. Muffled VOICES.

Jay's breathing suddenly catches, panicked. Shut in a coffin. Those things don't open from the inside...

INT. HOSPITAL ADMIN CENTER - DAY

Several NURSES and NUNS bustle about, busy with the business of the hospital.

Fauna passes by, unchallenged, shoes CLICKING on the tile.

Then, she turns a corner and pauses, looking:

Up ahead: SISTER SARAH, the frowning nun, sits at her desk, checking reports. Her desk serves as a sort of counter to the corridor as well.

MOMENTS LATER

Fauna CRAWLS along the corridor. If she can stay low enough, and quiet enough, she'll slip right by Sister Sarah.

Some part of Fauna can't even believe she's doing this.

As Fauna crawls by the front of the counter/desk, Sister Sarah looks up-- but Fauna is shielded by the desk. Sister Sarah frowns more deeply, then resumes her work.

Fauna looks up from the floor at the corridor past the desk, there it is:

A glass door marked 'RECORDS AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY'.

Fauna crawls silently, slowly, patiently towards the door. Now she hears something, and looks back--

A NURSE heads this way, eyes down, flipping through her records on a clipboard.

Fauna, agonizingly moves slightly faster, and bumps THROUGH the glass door.

Sister Sarah looks up, and catches the door shutting-- did it move? But then the Nurse is on her.

NURSE

Sarah, where did Nellie move that patient in 6C too? She better not have discharged him-- Dr. Feldspar changed the diagnosis--

INT. HOSPITAL RECORDS ROOM - SECONDS LATER

A long room filled with floor-to-ceiling file cabinets.

Fauna leans heavily against the wall, her eyes wide, her breath coming in GASPS.

INT. MORGUE BODY LOCKER - AT THE SAME MOMENT

In the pitch BLACK, Jay's rapid breathing echoes Fauna's.

We hear CLICK, and the RASP of the wheel, then the FLAME flares into view: Jay's ZIPPO. We're in the claustrophobic tomb with him, shadows flickering. Jay's sweating. Panicked.

He fumbles with his free hand, and manages to get out his VIAL. As he shakily unscrews it, he DROPS it, it skitters, and the flame goes out.

BLACKNESS.

JAY

Shit.
 (snorts)
 Bullshit.

At first we think he's panicking, and then we realize he's GIGGLING.

JAY (CONT'D)

Is this what it's come to? What the Hell am I doing? Jesus H. Christ. Galileo. How... who ends up... what the--

He's LAUGHING HARDER now, and then suddenly the DOOR BANGS OPEN, bright light spills in, and TWO frowning, burly DETECTIVES are reaching down to grab ahold of his shirt. One of them is BILLIS, 40's, scarred face, dangerous. The other is CUDDY, 40's, fat.

CUDDY

What the Hell?

JAY

(laughing)
 I'm feeling much better Doc--

INT. HOSPITAL RECORDS ROOM - LATER

Fauna scans a massive row of cabinets marked UNWED MOTHERS GENERAL. Flipping through 'H.' Finds Hodel. There's a few papers, a copy of the birth certificate she already has, some things about CUSTODY OF CHILD, general legal documents.

Then, Fauna slows... she found something good.

That PAPER she pulls out, folds up and tucks away.

EXT. THE CITY MORGUE - AFTERNOON

CRASH! Jay lands out on the street pavement, TOSSED OUT like a bum out of a bar. Above him, Billis and Cuddy dust their hands off.

BILLIS

We'd book ya for criminal trespass
 if we gave a shit, ya schlep.

CUDDY

Hey asshole, don't forgit ya camera-

He tosses Jay's camera high into the air, in a long arc, just out of reach, Jay winces as the camera SMASHES into the street, cracking open. Destroyed.

JAY

Thanks...

The DETECTIVES laugh, and so does a REPORTER watching.

Jay, sits up, dazed, and laughs with them; and we close on his clenched FISTS. One of them OPENS: his VIAL of heroin, unbroken. The other fist OPENS: the FILM cannister, completely wound-- he's got the pictures.

INT. HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

Fauna moves with purpose, searching, and she spots Lewis with another massive load of laundry.

FAUNA

Lewis? Lewis!

LEWIS

Yeah, yeah, what's goin' on girl?

FAUNA

You got any change? Any nickles, dimes, anything?

LEWIS

Yeah, think so...
(digs in his pockets)
Why?

FAUNA

Just give it to me!

Suddenly, Fauna glances up and sees SISTER SARAH, moving fast towards them. She slips behind the door, just out of sight.

SISTER SARAH (O.S.)

Oh, Lewis?

LEWIS

Yes ma'am?

SISTER SARAH

Have you seen Pat anywhere?

LEWIS

No ma'am, not in a minute.

Lewis lies without a hitch, smoothly, practiced-- you always lie to the boss.

SISTER SARAH

Well. Tell her to speak to me at once, please.

LEWIS

Yes ma'am. Will do.

Sister Sarah turns in a whirl of black robes and Lewis digs out some CHANGE and turns to Fauna, still hidden behind the door.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Now what in the Hell is goin' on?

Fauna doesn't answer, she snatches the change from his hand and trails Sister Sarah, furtive.

She hangs back, watching, ducking under cover when Sister Sarah looks, until finally Sister Sarah goes one way, allowing Fauna to go the other.

INT. HOSPITAL PAYPHONES - MOMENTS LATER

Fauna stands at a bank of payphones, individual half-booths. She smooths the stolen PAPER and dials a number off it.

RINGING. RINGING. Nothing. She hangs up, the coin comes back, CLANK.

Fauna, gazes thoughtfully, and now her finger slides down the page. She hesitates, then DIALS.

RINGING.

GEORGE (O.S.)

Hello?

Fauna hesitates. A gentleman's cultured voice, distorted and metallic down the line.

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

(slightly impatient)

Hello?

FAUNA

Mr. Hodel?

GEORGE (O.S.)

Who's this?

FAUNA

Mr. Hodel... it's Pat.

GEORGE (O.S.)

Pat? I'm sorry, I think you've got the wrong number... and it's Doctor.

FAUNA

Fauna! It's Fauna, Mr. Hodel. Doctor Hodel.

She glances at the papers in her hand.

FAUNA (CONT'D)

Tamar's daughter, Doctor Hodel. Your grand-daughter.

A long pregnant silence down the line. Fauna waits. Somehow we know that George is still on the line.

GEORGE (O.S.)

Fauna...?

He's remembering, thinking.

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

Hello Fauna. Nice to hear from you. Where are you?

FAUNA

I'm in Sparks, sir.

GEORGE (O.S.)

Of course, Sparks. Of course. And things are well there?

FAUNA

Well, yes, I guess...

GEORGE

Has Mrs. Greenwade been taking good care of you?

He knows about Jimmy?

FAUNA

Oh. Fine, I guess.

GEORGE

Good, good.

(thinking)

Have you spoken to your mother? To Tamar?

FAUNA

No, I don't have a number for her.

GEORGE (O.S.)

Good. Good. That's for the best. Your mother, sadly, is not well. Not at all... I wouldn't talk to her, if I were you, it would be very distressing... and confusing. She's not well. But it's lovely to hear your voice, Fauna, I'm so glad you've contacted me. How old are you now?

FAUNA

I'm... sixteen, sir.

GEORGE

That's wonderful. How are your studies? How is school, in Sparks?

There's a faint note of contempt in his voice, the educated snob, *how good could it be?*

FAUNA

It's fine, sir.

GEORGE

Fauna, you can call me George. In fact, you should come here and to see me. Yes, that's an idea: Come to Los Angeles, Fauna. Come and see me. I'd love to see you. Come to Los Angeles, take the bus and I'll reimburse you, just call me from bus station when you get here. Good-bye now.

CLICK. He's gone. The suddenness startles Fauna, who wanted more. She wants to keep talking, her mouth open, but the dial tone is insistent and clear. He hung up.

Fauna slowly replaces the receiver, somewhat stunned--

SISTER SARAH (O.S.)

Pat!

Fauna jumps, and turns, already protesting...

FAUNA

Sister Sarah, I'm sorry, I just had to check, I know I shouldn't have done that...

But Sister Sarah's face is cold, calm, forbidding and she sweeps magisterially down upon Fauna, not listening to a word Fauna says. She GRASPS Fauna tightly on both shoulders.

<p>SISTER SARAH</p> <p>I am so sorry child. So sorry that you should have this heavy burden.</p>	<p>FAUNA (CONT'D)</p> <p>No, I should have asked, I'm sorry...</p>
--	--

Both are confused.

SISTER SARAH

--Pat, Pat! Listen to me! It's your mother!

FAUNA

My mother...?
(do you mean)
Momma?

SISTER SARAH

I am so sorry that I should be the one to tell you. I just got a phone call... your mother is dead.

FAUNA

What? Who's dead?

SISTER SARAH

Your mother is dead, child. Jimmy Lee's gone to God. The Police called.

Fauna staggers, and Sister Sarah, stronger than she looks, holds her up.

FAUNA

Momma?

SISTER SARAH

I'm so sorry child. Say the Lord's Prayer with me.
(holding her tight)
"Our Father, who art in Heaven,
hallowed be thy name--"

Fauna's nodding in shock, about to start reciting the prayer, when she SNAPS and BREAKS free. Her face a combination of disbelief and horror.

FAUNA

--Momma's dead...?

EXT. HOSPITAL - SECONDS LATER

Fauna dashes out of the front door, denial and anguish on her face.

EXT. SPARKS, NEVADA - JIMMY LEE'S HOUSE - DAY

Fauna, PANTING, her face twisted, trots towards the house and stops. It's so quiet. Everything looks so normal.

She dashes up the steps.

INT. JIMMY LEE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Fauna walks quickly around the house, frantic.

FAUNA
Momma? Momma!

In a few seconds, Fauna shows the house to be empty.

Now she starts to cry.

FAUNA (CONT'D)
Momma!

She grabs the table, the wall, to keep from falling over...

She sits, and buries her head in her arms, and HOWLS.

FAUNA (CONT'D)
What is happening... Momma!

Then, suddenly, she hears SOMETHING. She stops. What is that? Her tear-stained face comes up.

Sounds like somebody CRYING?

Fauna slowly stands and moves towards the back screen-door...

A long beat of horror/surreal, this strange sound, what is it?

EXT. JIMMY LEE'S BACK YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Fauna steps hesitantly out onto the back yard. Across the dusty way, another little run-down shack, HOMER'S PLACE. Two shadowy figures on his back porch.

Again, that sound of CRYING. We slowly realize, along with Fauna, that it's LAUGHTER.

JIMMY LEE (O.S.)
I tole you I'd get her home lickety-
split, dinnit I?

Jimmy Lee stumbles into the light, laughing at Fauna. Drunk.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)
Gotcha girl. Gotcha.

Fauna stands frozen, in the door. Then she slowly turns, and walks back inside.

INT. JIMMY LEE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Fauna walks into her bedroom, and sits on her bed, and pulls her knees up and hugs herself. More stunned and embarrassed than anything else.

Jimmy Lee and Homer ARGUE about something in the yard, then Jimmy Lee bangs into the house, BOTTLE in her hand.

She stands in the doorway, looking at Fauna with bright malice and conflict in her eyes.

JIMMY LEE
Homer bet me I couldn't get you
home when I wanted. I had Blackie
call the hospital...

She knows, on some level, that what she did hurt Fauna.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)
It was just a joke, baby.

Jimmy Lee turns, swaying, apology over with.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)
Can't take a joke, might as well go
broke.

Fauna curls down inside herself, and then stands, her eyes snapping with anger.

FAUNA
Well, that's fine, Momma. Fine.

Fauna turns and dashes into her room.

INT. PAT'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Fauna yanks a small SUITCASE from beneath the bed, snaps it open, and begins packing her few belongings.

Jimmy Lee bangs through the door, sways in the entrance.

JIMMY LEE
What the Hell you think your doin'?

FAUNA
Leaving.

JIMMY LEE
Leaving? Like Hell you are. Like Hell. No you ain't.

FAUNA
I am.

JIMMY LEE
You gonna go to that Lewis boy I'll call the Po-lice. I'll see him in jail.

Fauna turns, fists clenched in rage.

FAUNA
No, Momma! I ain't going to be with Lewis. I'm going to Los Angeles.

JIMMY LEE
...what? Why for?

Fauna resumes her rushed packing.

FAUNA
I called him.

JIMMY LEE
Who'd you call?

FAUNA
I called my grandfather. George Hodel.

Jimmy Lee goes very quiet.

FAUNA (CONT'D)
Did you hear that?

JIMMY LEE
(quiet)
Yeah I heard. I heard you.

FAUNA
He invited me to Los Angeles.

Jimmy Lee turns, her eyes glinting. She's about to say something, then she drinks long, instead.

FAUNA (CONT'D)

I'm going.

JIMMY LEE

Go on then. Go find them, I always knew you'd leave me.

FAUNA

You... you always knew! You just had me thinking you were dead! For a darn joke, Momma! You know how scared I was? I ran here from the Hospital, how'm I sposed to go back there and tell Sister Sarah my Momma's ain't dead, she's crazy!

JIMMY LEE

...just a joke--

FAUNA

--a joke! I am leaving Momma. Ima go find my real family.

JIMMY LEE

Why don't you go straight to Hell.

Jimmy Lee wants to say more, searches for words, can't find them, and walks out.

LATER

Fauna emerges from her room, she's changed into a neat dress, stylish prim traveling clothes. She has a small SUITCASE packed.

FAUNA

Momma?

No answer.

There's an ENVELOPE on the table. Fauna looks in it, there's FIFTY DOLLARS in cash. No note.

Fauna sighs, sits down and begins to laboriously write a note on the envelope. She finishes it, sets her shoulders and picks up her case and walks out, leaves the money.

Then comes back for it.

INT. SAL'S BAR - DAY

For all we know, Peter may have never left, although his clothes are different and his briefcase and files on the bar in front of him are spread out differently.

JAY appears behind him, and SETS THE FILM down with emphasis on the bar top.

PETER
You got it?

Mildly surprised.

JAY
Yeah I got it.

PETER
Well all right.

JAY slides onto a bar-stool, nods for a "Coca-cola." He unfolds a SHEAF of papers, drops it down.

JAY
Four hundred words, I talked to the mother.

Peter glances at the papers.

PETER
Is it good?

JAY
It's not shit. Innocent in a cold cruel city, and so on.

PETER
That's my story, too.

He stuffs the film and the papers into his briefcase.

PETER (CONT'D)
Okay. Okay. Well, you can follow up; they got somebody. Negro named Brody Stiles in Watts copped to the murder, I guess. After "intensive questioning."

Peter and Jay exchange a look. They know this routine.

JAY
(sarcastic)
Well, nobody would ever confess to something they didn't do, right?

PETER

Gotta be a reason they liked him
for it, right?

JAY

(because it was easy)
Yeah.

PETER

Well, head down to Watts and see if
you can talk to somebody who knows
him. Write something good, gimme an
angle; angry Negro fed up with
society, over-sexed white girl,
whatever... And sugar-tit, if LAPD
is measuring him twice and fitting
him for the jacket, maybe we can
write that too. But you better find
something I can print.

JAY sucks on his ice.

JAY

Thanks for the cherry.

As JAY leaves, they yell at each other, moving away.

PETER

Maybe do it the easy way one time?
The Negro menace moves paper.

JAY

But you're the Times, you want the
truth, right?

PETER

Oh yeah, right, sure, the truth,
beautiful, I dig it...

EXT. SPARKS, NEVADA - BUS STATION - AFTERNOON

A small town bus station, but it has plenty of customers.

Fauna confers with Lewis in the corner, he holds her
suitcase. Both dressed up, making them look older.

LEWIS

Los Angeles.

FAUNA

I'll be back.

Lewis smiles painfully, hiding the hurt.

LEWIS

Shoot. You gonna find your rich family, live in a mansion in Hollywood...

FAUNA

Oh come on. You'd go too if you had never seen your real family. I'll be back in a week, at the most. And we'll do like we said. I'm through with Momma, I can't live with her no more. I'll be with you.

She moves to kiss him, but he pulls back, alarmed: *you can't kiss me here! Are you crazy?* He looks around, meaningfully, at the people everywhere. Porters, uniforms, white people...

FAUNA (CONT'D)

It doesn't matter who I am.

Lewis, suddenly older than her, looks away with sad brown eyes.

LEWIS

(quiet)

Is that right?

He knows, somewhere in his heart, she's lost to him. Fauna laughs at the long face...

FAUNA

Don't be silly, I'll be back!

LATER

Lewis watches through the windows of the bus. Fauna looks at him as the bus backs out. A romantic moment, the lovers torn asunder...

Neither of them see the CAR across the street, with a shadow inside.

INT. SEPP'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Inside the car, the ugly WHITE MAN who was watching Fauna and Brinda before, SEPP. Something hungry in his eyes.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - AFTERNOON

Jay walks from his car into a dive BAR in a black neighborhood, right on the edge of Watts. A faded sign, "The Boom Boom Room."

INT. THE BOOM BOOM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jay descends into a dark, smoky, shadowy dive bar. This is not a place to dance. This is a place where serious drinkers drink and fall comatose and get dragged outside into the alley and rolled. Mostly BLACK, a few WHITE faces in there.

Jay scans the bar, and finds an older BLACK MAN down at the end, HORACE, 60's. Battered, drunk, but still dressed neatly.

Jay slides in beside him.

JAY

Hey Horace, lemme buy a round.

Horace glares up at Jay with red-rimmed eyes, we're not sure if he recognizes Jay or not. His voice is high and wheezy.

HORACE

Shit. What you want man?

JAY

Horace, I just wanted to see you... don't be so suspicious, can't a guy come see his friend and buy him a drink?

Horace laughs, wheezily.

HORACE

Sure man, sure. Awright. My friend.

Jay waves to the bartender, gets Horace another and under the bar slides Horace a folded ten dollar bill.

JAY

Horace, I know you're the most reliable jailhouse snitch in LA County. Which is saying somethin'. So tell me, who is Brody Stiles?

Horace glares at him. Insulted, in a cosmic sense.

HORACE

Brody Stiles shit, man. Brody Stiles a birdie.

JAY
Whaddya mean?

HORACE
I mean he work with LAPD alla time,
he a pigeon, man. He dummy up
confessions to LAPD, "Oh yes
officer, he confessed last night to
me in the cell he did it."

Jay shakes his head, slowly.

HORACE (CONT'D)
Ain't that some shit now? They done
got poor Brody Stiles for killin' a
white girl and they fixin' to send
him up hard.

JAY
You know him?

HORACE
Like a white woman gonna get in the
car with Brody Stiles. That nigger
arthritis so bad he can barely hold
his damn bottle.
(beat)
Yeah, I know Brody.

JAY
So... what are you telling me?

HORACE
I'm telling you that nigger get his
seventy-year-ole-momma to open his
twist-off whisky cap.

JAY
The cops think it's Brody, they
gotta have good reason...

Horace WHEEZES laughter, genuinely amused.

HORACE
Yeah, sure man, fucking *reasons*.

JAY and Horace realize the BAR HAS GONE SILENT, and they both
look towards the door to see two burly WHITE DETECTIVES
coming towards them through the crowd. It's Billis and Cuddy.

HORACE (CONT'D)
(quiet)
Here come the white whale.

They beeline for Horace, ignoring Jay, who hides his face, turns away into his drink.

BILLIS

Hey Horace, we need you down at the station.

HORACE

Yessir.

Horace knocks back his drink, grabs his smoke and his hat and follows Billis and his Partner out the door.

Jay trails.

EXT. THE BOOM BOOM ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Outside of the bar, Billis and his Partner escort Horace to their unmarked CAR. Jay watches for a moment, then steps up.

JAY

Hang on a sec, Officer, where are you taking him, what'sa charges?

Billis turns to look at Jay, his scarred face blank.

BILLIS

Who're you? Do I know you, cupcake?

JAY

Jay Singletary, I'm reporter for the Examiner--

BILLIS

--oh yeah I know you! From the freezer!

Without warning, Billis SMASHES Jay in the face with the butt of his gun!

Jay goes down, eyes fluttering, blood streaming from his broken nose.

BILLIS (CONT'D)

Now you're under arrest, genius.

Jay grins up at Billis through a bloody mask.

INT. UNMARKED POLICE CAR - SECONDS LATER

Horace sits quietly next to Jay (Jay's hands cuffed behind his back, blood streaming from his nose).

Horace mutters quietly, without looking at Jay:

HORACE

Watch out boy, ole Billis beat
Reginald Hicks up so bad he died at
the 84th Street sub-station. Billis
on the rough side.

Jay spits blood. Looking out his window.

JAY

Now you tell me.

Horace laughs a little, still looking away.

Outside, Billis and Cuddy talk to a UNIFORM, who holds a
shotgun casually.

Jay takes in the gathering CROWD-- all black faces. Serious,
watchful, silent. The COPS are oblivious.

HORACE

White boys surely do bleed. Don't
blow your nose.

JAY

I know.

EXT. DESERT REST STOP - SUNSET

A small REST STOP, in the middle of the vast desert, the
classic "Lost Highway/Route 66." The sky filled with
tortured, surreal clouds, colors that would seem to never
happen naturally.

A GREYHOUND BUS hisses to a stop. The doors open, and a
variety of travelers emerge, among them Fauna, looking young.

LATER

Fauna sits on a bench, drinking a glass bottle of Coke.

She looks at the strange, beautiful sunset. Excited-- on the
road to the truth. There's a hushed stillness.

NICE MAN (O.S.)

Beautiful night.

Fauna glances over as a NICE MAN, 60's, sits on the far side
of the bench. He's handsome, a thin man with a mustache,
tinted GLASSES.

FAUNA
Yes, it is.

NICE MAN
Smoke?

He leans over, extending the pack towards Fauna.
Fauna looks at him. She can't quite see his eyes.

FAUNA
No thank you, I don't smoke.

The Nice Man shrugs, shakes a cigarette, lights it.

NICE MAN
That's good.
(puffs)
Are you traveling far?

FAUNA
No sir. Just to Los Angeles.

The Nice Man nods.

NICE MAN
What brings you to Los Angeles?

FAUNA
A Greyhound?
(grins)
I'm visiting my grandfather.

The Nice Man considers. Possibly disrespected by her sass.
Fauna tries to make nice.

FAUNA (CONT'D)
I've never met him.

NICE MAN
Well, that will be interesting.

FAUNA
I just want to know... who I am, I
guess.

It sounds silly to her. But the Nice Man just watches. Then
he nods, *good answer*.

NICE MAN
That's a good thing to know.

He smiles at her.

Fauna sees that her BUS is BOARDING.

FAUNA

Well, there's my ride. See ya.

She stands.

NICE MAN

Bye now.

She walks towards the BUS.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - 77TH PRECINCT STATION - NIGHT

The parking lot of the Police Station at night, full of Squad cars coming and going, Black and Whites. We push in on one Black and White in particular.

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Jay, still covered in dried blood, still cuffed, lies sideways on the seat. Half asleep.

Suddenly the door OPENS. Jay blinks up at a respectable Detective, OHLS, 40's.

OHLS

What the Hell, Jay?

EXT. 77TH PRECINCT PARKING LOT - SECONDS LATER

Ohls UNLOCKS Jay's cuffs as they stand awkwardly under the bright street lights.

OHLS

This is horse-shit. You wanna press charges?

JAY

Naaw.

He rubs his wrists.

JAY (CONT'D)

Just as long as I can still play the piano.

OHLS

What happened? Was it Billis, that fucking ape?

JAY
I cut myself shaving.

OHLS
You want I can take this to the
Captain, for chrissake you're a
reporter--

JAY
--no thanks. It's nothing.

Jay's shirt and jacket look like somebody dumped a pitcher of
blood out on it. He rubs his wrists, still numb.

OHLS
It's nothing?

JAY
C'mon man, you know I press charges
on this thing, next time I fall
down a flight of stairs, or I hang
myself in a cell. You know how it
works.

Ohls looks away, angry.

OHLS
Allright. Well, I talked to him
about charging you and he agreed to
drop it. Seeing as we served
together and all.

JAY
Thanks Ohls. Give my best to
Gloria. Take care.

OHLS
You should come by...

JAY
Ask Gloria if I should, buddy.

She won't agree, and with good reason.

OHLS
You want a ride to your car?

JAY
Naaw, it's not far.

OHLS
Jay, listen, don't get involved.
Whatever it is.

(MORE)

OHLS (CONT'D)

Billis is his own operator but he's just the hand, right? Don't mess with it.

JAY

What does that mean?

OHLS

It means, he ain't an original thinker. If he's doing something, that's the way it's getting done. Don't go digging around.

Meaningful look from Ohls, and Jay considers it.

JAY

Yeah. Okay.

Jay turns and walks off, rubbing his wrists. Hands starting to hurt, pins and needles.

OHLS

Hey Jay! "Two up, one back," right?

Jay nods, calls back:

JAY

"Take the high ground."

OHLS

"Take the high ground and don't piss in the stream, boys--"

Jay walks on, away from Ohls. Ohls looks after him.

OHLS (CONT'D)

(to himself)

We'll be drinking that water tomorrow.

JAY

(to himself)

We'll be drinking the water tomorrow.

It's supposed to be funny, and both Ohls and Jay try to smile. A lot of bad memories mixed with the few good.

OHLS

(shouting)

We'll have you for dinner!

Jay doesn't look back, makes a gesture that could be a 'yes' wave or could mean nothing.

INT. GREYHOUND - NIGHT

Fauna watches out the window as the BUS rolls through Los Angeles. She catches sight of THREE FASHIONABLE BLACK GIRLS, big hoop earrings, their hair in AFROS-- natural hair is incredibly rebellious! Fauna's never seen anything like that.

She feels like a time traveler arriving in the future.

EXT. LOS ANGELES STREETS - NIGHT

Jay walks along, ignoring the looks, a bloody mess.

A GREYHOUND BUS turns the corner and drives by him.

INT. GREYHOUND - CONTINUOUS

Fauna catches a glimpse of the bloody JAY out the window, she cranes her neck to watch him as she passes by, and shakes her head. Damn.

EXT. JAY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

Jay pulls over and parks at his seedy apartment building. He climbs out of the car, aching.

I/E. LOS ANGELES BUS STATION - NIGHT

A large bus station, with bays for twenty buses, and plenty of activity. Travelers of all kinds, cases, luggage, crying babies.

At a long row of payphones, we find Fauna in the center. Men and women, black and white, coming and going around her.

INT. PHONE BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

FAUNA

(into phone)

Yes, hullo, this is... Fauna Hodel?

I'm George's grand-daughter?

(she listens)

Is Dr. Hodel there? Well, yes, ma'am, he... ma'am he tole me...

Yes, I'm sorry but... well yes, but... okay, thank you.

(MORE)

FAUNA (CONT'D)

Yes, the message is from Fauna, and I am in Los Angeles at the downtown Greyhound Station. Yes ma'am.
Thank you, ma'am.

Fauna slowly hangs up, thinking. She pulls out the paper, should she try other numbers?

INT. JAY'S APARTMENT - LATER

A neat, Spartan, poor man's apartment. Almost nothing on the walls. Some filing cabinets. A record player (Miles Davis, "Flamenco Sketches"). Jay, clean shirt, bandaged nose, two black eyes, pulls out a tray of instruments. We realize belatedly he's setting up an OPIUM PIPE, a long thick wooden instrument, and all the accoutrement. A kerosene lamp/wick.

His phone RINGS.

Jay sighs, annoyed. RINGS.

Over the small candle, Jay heats the black, tarry opium/heroin mix on a thin metal needle, then carefully places it into the long pipe, and smokes with the pipe canted over to allow the flame in to heat the opium... He pulls long into the pipe. The phone RINGS.

Jay smoothly exhales thick white SMOKE, in a deep breath. He crosses and answers. His voice thick, HUSHED, as if he was just asleep.

JAY

Hello? Yes?

INTERCUT:

Jimmy Lee, neatly dressed, smokes at a payphone in downtown RENO, outside the Casino where she works. She's holding a folded, yellowed newspaper clipping. Reading off it. Taking drags on her cigarette.

JIMMY LEE

Yeah, this Jay Singletary?

JAY

Whozzis?

JIMMY LEE

Jay Singletary, the reporter?

JAY

...yeah? So?

JIMMY LEE

Was it you wrote that story for the
Los Angeles Times about Doctor
George Hodel? In Forty-Nine?

This is the absolute LAST thing Jay was expecting hear. He
struggles to make sense of reality. Almost laughs.

JIMMY LEE (CONT'D)

You there?

JAY

...What? What? ...George Hodel?

JIMMY LEE

Well, I have some more information
about that case that you might be
interested in. Bout that trial. You
think about what it might be worth
to ya. Think about five hundred
dollars. I'll call back in a few
days.

She hangs up. Dial tone.

JAY

Wait, what now? Who the...
(blinking)
Hello? Hello?

Jay gingerly replaces the phone as if it might bite his hand.

He looks around his apartment, runs his fingers through his
hair.

JAY (CONT'D)

(quiet)
Doctor George Hodel.

That name brings back memories. Bad ones.

Jay crosses slowly over to his file cabinets, and slides the
bottom one open, flips through, pulls out a yellowing
newspaper.

Lays it on the table, next to his opium pipe.

EXT. RENO - NIGHT

Jimmy Lee holds up the newspaper clipping to the light, and
looks at a picture-- a glimpse, is that the NICE MAN who was
just with Fauna at the rest stop? Wait a minute--

INT. JAY'S APARTMENT - SAME

We read the unfolded newspaper (the same clipping that Jimmy Lee has) over JAY's shoulder as he prepares another ball of opium:

"HOLLYWOOD DOCTOR IN INCEST TRIAL!"

And lower down, a big picture labeled: DR. GEORGE HODEL--

Now we can really see... it's him: the NICE MAN.

EXT. LOS ANGELES BUS STATION - NIGHT

A dark, still night, it's very late now. A homeless drunk passed out in an alley. Nothing moves.

Fauna sits on a bench. She looks around, nervous and bored. She's been there for hours.

Waiting.

Fauna waits, so young and alone, in a pool of light, and the night seems to have teeth all around her.

END PILOT.