

"LIFE"

Screenplay by

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SHOOTING DRAFT

1999

FADE IN:

EXT. PRISON CEMETERY -- DAY

a
and
two
A handful of people are gathered in an open field under
fierce Mississippi sun. A couple of young inmates, JAKE
LEON, lean on their shovels. They are waiting to bury
identical CASKETS with inmate numbers stenciled on the
pinewood lids.

takes
the
BILL
and
A GUARD rests the butt of his rifle on the ground and
a long, healthy pull from his canteen. He offers it to
PRISON CHAPLAIN, who is much obliged. SUPERINTENDENT
BURKE, a 40-year-old black man, glances at his watch
loosens his tie. Sure is hot.

uniform,
to
MARY HUMPHRIES, an elderly white woman in a nurse's
stands behind WILLIE LONG, an ancient inmate sleeping
peacefully in a wheelchair. She readjusts an umbrella
shield the old black man from the blistering sun.

the
bible.
Burke dabs his forehead with a handkerchief. He gives
nod to the chaplain, who steps forward and cracks his
The men remove their hats.

CHAPLAIN

In accordance with the regulations
of the State of Mississippi, we gather
here today to lay to rest the remains

of inmates R. Gibson, number 4316,
and C. Banks, number 4317. Ashes to
ashes, dust to dust. May God have
mercy on their souls.

BURKE

Go ahead, fellas.

One by
on a

The young inmates plunge their shovels into the dirt.
one, the mourners head back toward a prison van parked
nearby dirt road.

NURSE HUMPHRIES

I'll come back for you in a little
while, Willie...

his
pinewood

She leaves Willie alone with Jake and Leon. He rolls
chair up to the edge of the graves and gazes at the
caskets.

JAKE

These two guys friends of yours, old
man?

WILLIE

We spent some time together.

LEON

Why do I get the feeling when you
say some time, you mean some time.

WILLIE

I was already here a good many years
when they came in in 1932.

LEON

1932? That's like, that's like...

WILLIE

Sixty-five years ago. They always
said the farm couldn't hold 'em
forever. Looks like you're finally
free, boys.

takes

Willie pulls a bottle of moonshine from his jacket and
a swig in their honor.

JAKE

Hey, the dude's holdin'.

LEON

Come on, old-timer, hook the brothers up.

winces

Willie passes the bottle to Leon, who takes a swig and from the unexpected kick.

LEON

Hell of a way to get out. Heard they burned up in that fire yesterday.

JAKE

I seen the bodies before they sealed 'em up. Them fellas sizzled up good. Looked like some shit from the X-Files.

(taking a swig from the bottle)

Damn, that shit's nasty.

WILLIE

Ray's special recipe. He always had exacting standards where the hooch was concerned.

LEON

What were they, bootleggers?

Willie holds up the bottle, checking the clarity of the liquor.

WILLIE

Something like that.

MATCH

CUT TO:

EXT. SPANKY'S BACK ALLEY (1932) -- NIGHT

light
and
polishes
door.

RAY GIBSON holds up a similar bottle of liquor to a over a door. Music comes from within. He takes a swig stashes the bottle in his belt. He adjusts his tie, his shoes on the back of his pants and raps on the

INT. SPANKY'S -- NIGHT

stage a
CHANTEUSE.

The speakeasy is jumping, jammed with people. Up on
hot JAZZ BAND is playing backup for a seductive
Well-heeled PATRONS enter through doors near the stage.
In the back, at the end of a long hallway, a BOUNCER
cracks
open the door and Ray squeezes inside.

BOUNCER

Oh, no, Ray. Not tonight. Spanky's
not happy with you.

RAY

Is Spanky here?

BOUNCER

No, but...

RAY

Then what's the problem?

BOUNCER

Do yourself a favor and find another
place where they let you in the front
door.

RAY

But this is where the action is and
I have to be where the action is.
Look, when your old lady wanted those
alligator shoes, didn't I come through
for you? Ain't she stepping in style
now?

BOUNCER

Yeah...

RAY

Well, alright then. What do you think
about this new tie?

BOUNCER

Sharp.

RAY

I look good tonight. And I feel lucky,
too.

Ray heads inside.

BOUNCER

Anyone asks, it wasn't me who let you in.

nibble

Ray slides through the crowd, pausing at the bar to nibble on the neck of a COCKTAIL WAITRESS.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

Don't even try it.

RAY

When do you get off?

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

I get off at two, but you ain't never getting off.

his

She carries a tray of drinks into the crowd. Ray shakes his head in wonderment at her departing form. The BARKEEP steps up as Ray pulls out his bottle.

BARKEEP

You can't drink that in here, Ray.

RAY

I sure can't drink that watered-down swill you're serving. Give me a glass of ice.

BARKEEP

I can't give you a glass of ice. I can't give you anything until you pay your damn tab.

Shaking

Disregarding the warning, Ray tilts the bottle back. his head, the barkeep moves on to a paying customer. Ray's eyes follow a bottle of French Champagne as it is delivered to a nearby table.

girlfriend,
silverware.

Here sits the straight-laced CLAUDE BANKS with his girlfriend, DAISY. She's enjoying the show. He's polishing the silverware.

the

The WAITER pours two glasses of champagne and leaves bottle on ice. Claude regards his glass skeptically.

CLAUDE

For the kind of money they charge here, you'd think they could hire somebody to actually wash the dishes.

DAISY

Claude. Here's to your new job down at the bank. I always knew you'd make something of yourself.

CLAUDE

Know what I'm going to buy with my first pay check?

Daisy thinks she does. She leans in, eyes twinkling.

CLAUDE

Season tickets to the Yankees. Right there on the first base line.
(off her disappointment)
What's wrong, baby?

DAISY

I was hoping you were gonna say an engagement ring, Claude.

French Champagne shoots out of Claude's nose.

CLAUDE

Engagement ring!

DAISY

That's what respectable folks do. Get a job, get married, start having babies. That's what you want, isn't it?

CLAUDE

Sure it is. I just don't see any reason to rush into things. Damn, look at this shirt. I'll be right back.

her

Claude leans in to kiss Daisy on the lips. She offers cheek. He departs.

OVER BY THE BAR

Ray watches Claude make a beeline for the men's room.

INT. MEN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

A
into

Claude steps into the bathroom and approaches the sink.
A big hand falls on his shoulder and yanks him backwards
into a stall...

INT. STALL -- NIGHT

suits.

Claude is shoved down on the toilet by two BAG MEN in
suits. Suddenly, it's crowded in here.

BAG MAN #1

Congratulations, Claude. We understand
you finally got yourself a job.

BAG MAN #2

Guess that means you can pay Mr.
Riley the fifty bucks you owe him.

They rifle through Claude's jacket and quickly find his
wallet.

CLAUDE

Now wait a second, guys. I've got a
bill to pay out there.

BAG MAN #1

Twenty-two dollars. Not bad for a
start.

They toss back his empty wallet.

CLAUDE

Come on, fellas, that's two weeks
pay. I'm here with my girl. You gotta
leave me something.

BAG MAN #2

How about your legs?

CLAUDE

My legs? Those are good, I'll keep
the legs...

The stall door swings shut as the bag men depart.

INT. SPANKY'S -- NIGHT

bag
On his way into the Men's Room, Ray squeezes past the men on their way out.

INT. MEN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

stall
takes a
grooming
sniff.
Glancing around, Ray spots Claude's feet under the door. He steps up to the sink, washes his hands and towel from the ATTENDANT. Scanning the assortment of products, he selects a bottle of cologne and takes a

RAY

(displeased)

You have any of that French stuff?

good
As the attendant bends down to retrieve a bottle of the stuff, Ray palms a coin from the tip basket.

ATTENDENT

Here you go.

generosity.
Ray offers the quarter, a gesture of uncommon

RAY

Keep the change.

ATTENDENT

Why, thank you, sir!

Claude
mirror.
Ray pats the cologne on his face. A toilet flushes and steps over to the sink. Ray catches his eye in the

RAY

Don't I know you?

CLAUDE

I don't think so.

RAY

Sure I do. What's your name again?

CLAUDE

Claude Banks.

RAY

Claude Banks. How could I forget that? You've got to remember me. Ray Gibson. We went to high school together.

CLAUDE

You went to Monroe?

RAY

(beaming)

That's right! Good old Monroe...

Ray throws his arms around Claude, deftly snatching his wallet. Claude extracts himself from Ray's embrace.

CLAUDE

Well, I went to Jefferson, so you must have a different Claude Banks in mind.

Claude straightens his jacket and heads for the door.

Ray

stashes the stolen wallet in his jacket.

RAY

Sorry, man. My mistake.

INT. SPANKY'S -- NIGHT

sultry

On the stage, the chanteuse has downshifted into a number about back-door lovers and broken dreams.

collared by

Ray steps out of the men's room and is instantly

BULLETHEAD, a man who makes his living being large and threatening.

RAY

Watch the threads, Bullethead. If this is about my tab, I've got it covered.

jacket and

Pressed up against the wall, Ray reaches into his produces Claude's wallet. Bullethead snatches it,

inspects

it and is not impressed.

BULLETHEAD

This ain't about your tab, Ray. You've got bigger problems than that.

Ray He stuffs the wallet back into Ray's jacket and hustles out the back door past the bouncer who let him in.

BOUNCER

Is that Ray Gibson? Who the hell let him in here?

BACK AT CLAUDE'S TABLE

champagne. Claude returns to the table where Daisy is sipping. He takes the glass out of her hand.

CLAUDE

Come on, honey, let's get out of here.

DAISY

But I'm having a good time...

WAITER

Excuse me, sir, I believe you forgot this.

The waiter presents Claude with the bill.

CLAUDE

The bill. Of course, the bill. We couldn't leave without paying the bill. Especially such an incredibly large bill.

INT. VAN -- NIGHT

are use. Claude is shoved into the back of the van and the doors slammed behind him. He bangs and shouts, but it's no use.

RAY

Save your energy, Claude. You're gonna need it.

knocked Ray is stretched out against the back wall. Claude is to the floor as the van lurches into motion.

RAY

Here, this belongs to you.
(tossing Claude his
wallet)
It was empty when I found it.

CLAUDE

Good old Monroe.

Ray swigs from his bottle and offers it to Claude, who
isn't interested.

RAY

What I want to know is what happened
to your cush between the time that
you got up from the table and when I
caught up with you in the Johnny?

CLAUDE

I don't see where that's any of your
business.

RAY

Did those two muscle heads shake you
down? Swear I've seen them down at
the track with Sure-shot Riley. That's
it, ain't it? A gambling debt.

Busted, Claude snatches the bottle and carefully wipes
off the neck before tilting it high. Ray gets a good
chuckle out of this straight cat in the bow tie.

CLAUDE

Where they taking us, anyway?

RAY

Probably to Spanky's headquarters
down at the pier.

CLAUDE

Good, I'm looking forward to meeting
this Spanky. Give me a chance to
straighten out this whole mess.

RAY

I can't wait to see that. You slay
me, man.

EXT. PIER -- NIGHT

the
The van pulls into a the loading bay of a warehouse at
end of a short pier on the Harlem River.

INT. WAREHOUSE -- NIGHT

back
filled
Bullethead and a HENCHMAN pull Ray and Claude from the
of the van. They find themselves in a dark warehouse
with crates of contraband.

CLAUDE

(sotto)

What are they gonna do to us?

RAY

You? Dine and ditch, right?

(Claude nods)

Over ten bucks?

(he nods again)

You're probably looking at a thumb.

CLAUDE

A thumb? What do you mean, like cut
it off? For ten bucks?

(Ray nods)

That include the tip?

of
Claude
Claude shoves his hands under his armpits at the sound
approaching FOOTSTEPS echoing across the vast space.
and Ray peer into the darkness.

SPANKY

(from the darkness)

You picked the wrong night to fuck
with me, Ray. I just lost three men
and a truck full of Canadian whiskey.
You know what that kind of thing
does to my business? It makes me
want to lash out and hurt somebody.

silver
nostril.
SPANKY JOHNSON emerges into the light. He uses a small
spoon to take an ample snort of cocaine into each
He glances at Claude.

SPANKY

Who's he? Friend of yours, Ray?

CLAUDE

I never saw this man before tonight. He's a lowlife degenerate who lurks in bathrooms. I'm a professional man, an upstanding citizen. I go to church on Sunday.

SPANKY

Then what are you doing here?

BULLETHEAD

Failure to pay.

CLAUDE

(rattled)

Look, Mr. Johnson, you seem like a reasonable man. I got a good job starts Monday. I'll pay you back with my first pay check. With interest. I don't want to tell you how to conduct your business, but if you cut off my finger you won't get jack. Working an adding machine, I gotta be whole.

(his fingers dancing
over imaginary keys)

I need my thumbs and all my fingers for praying and doing good...

Spanky holds up a hand, silencing Claude.

SPANKY

The choirboy wants to keep his fingers. Who am I to argue? Drop him.

CLAUDE

Drop him? What does drop him mean?

bind
Claude protests loudly as Bullethead and the henchman
his hands and feet. Spanky turns to Ray.

SPANKY

You gotta lotta balls showing your face around my club. If a man's gonna run numbers on my side of Broadway, you think he'd have the common sense to keep a low profile. But not Ray Gibson.

him
the
The goons hoist Claude up on another pulley and dangle
head first over a hole in the floor. Several feet down,
Harlem River laps against the wooden pylons.

CLAUDE

No, not down there! That water's
filthy! Help me out here, man!

cheeks.
water.
Shrugging, Ray pinches his nose and puffs out his
The goons release the rope and Claude plunges into the
Spanky turns back to Ray.

RAY

You don't have to drown that fella,
Spanky. You already scared him half
to death. He didn't know who he was
fucking with.

SPANKY

But you do. What does that say about
you, Ray? What does that say about
me? I've given you a lot of leeway
over the years on account of your
father. But he didn't last long enough
to teach you the meaning of the word
respect so I guess I'm gonna have to
school you myself.

RAY

Come on, Spank, I'm just trying to
get by here. You remember how it was
when you were starting out.

hole,
The henchman yanks on the rope. Claude emerges from the
gasping for breath.

CLAUDE

I was supposed to wear this suit on
Monday!

into the
gun
and
The henchman releases the rope, sending Claude back
water. Ray reaches into his jacket. Bullethead pulls a
and presses it into Ray's temple. Ray gives him a look

cautiously pulls out his bottle.

SPANKY

What's that, some of your bathtub
brew?

RAY

Puerto Rican rum. See for yourself.

Ray tosses him the bottle. Spanky uncorks, sniffs,
samples
the goods. He's impressed.

SPANKY

Where'd you get this?

RAY

Comes up the Mississippi. I can get
more. A lot more. I was thinking
about going into business for myself,
but under the circumstances, I'd be
willing to take on a partner.

Once again, the henchman yanks on the rope and Claude
comes
up sucking air desperately. He releases the rope,
submerging
Claude for a third time.

SPANKY

I'm interested. Keep talking.

RAY

All I need is the front money and a
truck. I could be back in two, three
days tops if I had somebody to share
the driving.

Spanky considers the terms. Can he afford to trust Ray?
Can
he afford not to?

SPANKY

If you fuck me on this one, I'll
spare no expense.

RAY

Understood.

SPANKY

Alright, Ray, you've got a deal.
Pick your man and get going.

in
Ray glances around. The pulley rope is still twitching
the water.

RAY

I'll take the little choirboy, if
you don't mind.

SPANKY

If I was you, I'd want somebody who
can handle himself in a tight spot.

RAY

I just want somebody who won't put a
bullet in my back once the truck is
full.

hoists
cement.
pressure.
mouth as
Spanky sees Ray's point. He nods to the henchman, who
Claude's limp body out of the water and onto the
Spanky plants a foot on Claude's chest and applies
A geyser of Harlem River water shoots from Claude's
he sputters back to life.

SPANKY

For your sake, I hope you can drive.
Somebody give him some dry clothes.

CUT TO:

THE SPINNING WHEEL OF A TRUCK

find
The CAMERA MOVES UP the side of the old Ford truck to
Claude sitting pensively in the passenger seat.

INT. TRUCK (MOVING) -- NIGHT

Ray palms the wheel.

RAY

Tell me about that hot sketch you
were hypin' last night. She was a
choice bit of calico. You two been
seeing each other a long time? Gonna
slap the handcuffs on her and stroll
down the aisle one of these days?

Tight-lipped, Claude shifts in his seat.

RAY

Sometimes I wish I could find me a sheba to settle down with. Suppose I'm just a tomcat by nature.

(trying to fill the
silence)

This little rum run is gonna seriously improve my relationship with Spanky. He's a good man to have on your side. He's got the capital and the connections. That's what you got to have in that business. Spanky's place is pretty plush, but one of these days I'm gonna open up my own establishment. Ray's Boom-Boom Room. You like that? Ray's Boom-Boom Room. That's in the groove, don't you think?

If Claude does like it, he's not letting on.

RAY

Come on, daddy-o. You haven't said a word since we started. Least you could do is make some friendly conversation.

CLAUDE

Look, man, I don't want friendly conversation. I don't want to be your friend. I've seen your friends and I don't like them. I just want to do this thing and get back to New York in time to start my job.

RAY

Start your job? What kind of job?

CLAUDE

Well, if you must know, bank teller at First Federal of Manhattan. I'm responsible for keeping track of hundreds, occasionally thousands of dollars.

RAY

That's some long green.

CLAUDE

Damn straight, it is. I got my own

set of keys because I'm supposed to open up. So if I ain't there 8 a.m. Monday morning, there's gonna be hell to pay.

Beat of silence. Ray laughs to himself.

CLAUDE

What?

RAY

Nothing.

CLAUDE

No, tell me what's so funny.

RAY

I don't know. Bank teller. Sounds like ladies work to me.

CLAUDE

Well, maybe I should dig around in other people's clothes for money. It's obviously been highly successful for you.

RAY

Hey, you'd be surprised what you find in other people's pockets. Just gotta avoid them deadbeat bank tellers. Get you every time.

CLAUDE

I didn't start out to be a bank teller. I was gonna be a ballplayer. Even had an offer to play short for the Newark Eagles.

RAY

Why didn't you take it?

CLAUDE

The Negro League don't pay so good. And you're always on the road. That don't wash with Daisy.

RAY

You gave up baseball to be a bank teller? I can't latch on to that.

CLAUDE

At some point a man's got to get

serious about his future. I'm sure you have no idea what I'm talking about.

RAY

You're talking about giving up baseball to be a bank teller.

CLAUDE

Bank teller's just a start. I got plans. Real plans. Not opening some Zoom-Boom Room. This time next year I'll be a loan officer.

RAY

A loan officer?

CLAUDE

That's right, a loan officer.

RAY

So you mean, if I needed some jack to get my nightclub up and running, I'd have to hype some square like you?

CLAUDE

Uh-huh.

as Ray pulls out his pocket watch. A mechanical tune plays he checks the time.

RAY

How would I get a loan, anyway?

CLAUDE

You need collateral.

RAY

(re: watch)

Like this?

CLAUDE

That thing? Who'd you steal it from?

RAY

My daddy gave me this watch.

CLAUDE

Yeah? Who'd he steal it from?

RAY

My daddy is dead so watch your mouth. You can say what you want about me, but don't be dragging my daddy into it. This watch means the world to me. Solid gold. Keeps perfect time.

CLAUDE

Looks like a fake to me. Loan denied!

Ray stuffs his daddy's watch back in his pocket.

RAY

Ah, go chase yourself. I'll take my business elsewhere. And for future reference, you are no longer welcome at Ray's Boom-Boom Room.

CLAUDE

There is no Boom-Boom Room.

RAY

When there is, you can forget about it. And I swear to God, you ever talk about my daddy again I'm gonna kick your bank-telling, loan-denying ass, you got me?

CLAUDE

Oooh...

RAY

I think I liked you better when you kept your trap shut.

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER -- DAY

front The truck veers off the highway and jerks to a halt in
of the rundown establishment.

INT. ROADSIDE DINER -- DAY

through A dozen WHITE FOLKS look up as Ray and Claude push
the door.

RAY

Man, something smells good in here. How's everybody doing?

Nothing but sullen stares from all corners of the room.

CLAUDE

(sotto)

Maybe we oughta find another place.

RAY

Are you kidding? Tell me you don't want a slice of that pie right over there.

CLAUDE

I must have left my appetite outside, which is where I think we ought to be right now.

dissuaded. Claude tugs Ray towards the door but Ray won't be

He boldly addresses a YOUNG MAN in an apron behind the counter.

RAY

Good evening, Billy. We'd like some coffee and a couple of slices of that homemade pie you've got advertised.

BILLY

How you know my name's Billy?

RAY

It says so right there on your shirt.

BILLY

(glancing down)

That what that says?

and Billy's MAMA sets a piping hot pie on the back counter
glance at steps up next to her son. She casts a disparaging
Claude's suit.

MAMA

If you boys can read so good, how come you missed that sign in the window?

Claude considers the sign she's pointing to.

CLAUDE

You mean this sign? The one that says "No Coloreds Allowed." That's a

good question. Ray, how come we missed the sign?

RAY

Look, ma'am, we've been driving all day. We'd just like to purchase one of those pies and we'll be on our way.

MAMA

Those are whites-only pies.

RAY

Got any nigger pies?

Claude jabs him.

CLAUDE

Any fool could see those are whites-only, not-for-blacks, come-on-let's-get-the-fuck-outta-here pies. Thank you very much.

Claude starts tugging Ray toward the door.

RAY

(sotto)

Thanks for backing me up here, Uncle Claude.

CLAUDE

(sotto)

Don't Uncle Claude me. You get a load of those crackers? Couldn't be a mouthful of teeth among the bunch of 'em. Why you want to pick a fight with people like that for?

RAY

You're soft.

CLAUDE

What'd you say?

Diner patrons stare.

RAY

I said you're soft.

CLAUDE

Hey, man, don't ever call me that.

RAY

I call it like I see it, and what I see is definitely soft.

Claude narrows his eyes.

CLAUDE

Alright. You want some pie?

RAY

Yeah, I want some pie.

CLAUDE

Okay then, I'm gonna walk over to that counter and get us some fucking pie.

Resolved, Claude stomps over to the counter.

CLAUDE

Excuse me, ma'am, I bet a brick will turn that one right there into a colored pie.

shotgun
Claude lays down a dollar bill. Mama casually pulls a
from under the counter.

MAMA

And I bet this right here will turn you into a colored pie.

CLAUDE

Okay, Ray, I think we can go now.
Much obliged...

pulls
the
Ray gives the whole place a cool once-over as Claude
him out the door. Mama turns to Billy, still studying
stitching on his shirt.

MAMA

Don't be concentrating so hard, baby.
You're liable to seize yourself again.

EXT. DOCKS -- NIGHT

engine
Claude
The truck rolls up to the waters edge. Ray kills the
and flashes the lights twice. In the passenger seat,

is fast asleep. After a few moments, a FAT MAN appears, shining a flashlight into the cab.

RAY

How you doing? We're looking for Slim.

SLIM

You found him.

Ray cocks an eyebrow.

EXT. DOCKS -- NIGHT

Under cover of darkness, a couple of MEN finish loading crates into the bed of the truck. Ray and Claude keep their eyes peeled for the law. Down by the river, they can see lights and hear music from a district of rowdy juke joints. SLIM steps up, wiping his hands.

SLIM

That's it, fellas. Thirty six cases of Puerto Rico's finest. At five bucks a case, that's \$180.

The Ray pulls out a wad and slaps it in Slim's sweaty palm. fat man starts counting it out.

RAY

Man, that music is hot. What goes on down there, Slim?

SLIM

That's Natchez-under-the-Hill.

RAY

Blacks welcome there?

SLIM

Green's the only color that matters under the hill. They got gambling, girls. You oughta check it out.

RAY

Maybe we will. Nice meeting you.

Slim slips into the shadows.

CLAUDE

Nice meeting you? You've been here before, haven't you?

RAY

What gave you that idea?

CLAUDE

Oh, I don't know, maybe because our lives depend on it, I just sort of thought you knew what you were doing!

RAY

Don't get all agitated on me. I bought a bottle of rum from a couple of dudes, I heard 'em talking...

CLAUDE

Let me get this straight. We drove all the way down to Klan country 'cause you heard a couple of guys talking?

RAY

What are you complaining about? It worked out. Everything's cool. Now, come on, let's head down there and see what's shaking. We deserve a little reward.

CLAUDE

(dubious)

Reward?

RAY

There are people down there having fun. I want to be one of them. I want you to be one of them. On Monday you can be a bank teller if you want, but tonight you're a bootlegger with a truck full of Puerto Rican rum and a fistful of cash.

quickly A look of excitement crosses Claude's face, but he shakes it off.

CLAUDE

That's gas money.

pocket. Exasperated, Ray stuffs a few bills into Claude's

RAY

There's your gas money. You stay here and watch the truck. And don't worry, I've got the keys.

leans Left alone, Claude mutters and kicks at the dirt. He against the truck.

UP AHEAD/EXT. JUKE JOINT -- NIGHT

toward Ray emerges from the woods and heads down the hill the juke joint. Claude hustles up next to him.

CLAUDE

I'm just gonna keep an eye on you, make sure you don't do nothing stupid.

INT. JUKE JOINT -- NIGHT

Mississippi. A ramshackle den of iniquity on the banks of the creating The band is laying down some serious Delta blues, an inviting atmosphere for sin and moral corruption. some On a far side of the room, Ray is playing poker with HANCOCK, LOCALS. He seems to be having a bad night. WINSTON puffs a formidable black man, sweeps in another big pot and happily on his cigar.

OVER AT THE BAR

and Perched on a stool, Claude shoots a dark look at Ray his motions for the door. Ray waves him off and returns to on game. Claude becomes aware of a soft, young female hand his shoulder.

SYLVIA

I've never seen you in here before.

CLAUDE

(staring at the hand)
That's because I've never been here
before.

SYLVIA

I'm Sylvia. What's your name?

long,

SYLVIA'S

Against his better judgement, Claude's gaze follows the
slender arm up past a bare shoulder and settles on
angelic face. He is struck dumb.

SYLVIA

Can't you remember your own name?

CLAUDE

I know it begins with a "C"...

SYLVIA

Well, Mr. "C", how about buying a
girl a drink?

(to the bartender)

Two bourbons.

CLAUDE

I really shouldn't. I gotta keep an
eye on my friend.

SYLVIA

He looks like he can take care of
himself.

pours the

back

The drinks arrive. She places a shot glass in Claude's
reluctant hand. She winks provocatively and slowly
whiskey down her throat. Instinctively, Claude tosses
his shot.

CLAUDE

Claude. That's my name. Claude. That's
never happened before.

SYLVIA

You're cute. You have any money,
Claude?

CLAUDE

Ten dollars. But I need it to get
home.

SYLVIA

Why would you want to go home? It's so early.

The bartender refills their glasses.

BACK AT THE POKER TABLE

WAITRESS
top of
cards.

Winston considers his cards, hardly looking up as a
lays down a cocktail napkin and sets a drink down on
it. He glances at Ray, who casually considers his

RAY

I'll take two.

The dealer tosses Ray a couple of cards.

INSERT -- Ray fans his cards to reveal a full house.

pushes
The
long
center

After considering the other players at the table, Ray
what's left of his money into the center of the table.
three other PLAYERS fold with disgust. Winston squints
and hard at Ray, then pushes everything he has into the
of the table.

WINSTON

I'll see that...

more

Winston reaches into his jacket and throws down some
money on the pile.

WINSTON

And while we're at it, let's sweeten
the pot.

RAY

Looks like my sugar bowl's empty,
Mr. Hancock.

WINSTON

(reaching for the pot)
That's just too damn bad, ain't it?

RAY

Now, hang on, slick. I ain't through
with you yet.

lot
He
Winston
Ray checks his cards again. He looks at the pot, it's a
of money. With this hand, there's no way he can lose.
places his daddy's pocket watch on top of the pile.
checks the time piece.

WINSTON

That'll cover it.

Ray lays down his hand.

RAY

Full boat, ladies doing the paddling.

WINSTON

Four threes.

The
head to
Ray sits back, stunned. Winston rakes in his winnings.
game is over for the night. The three other players
the bar.

WINSTON

Don't take it too hard, New York.
Have a round on me.

out
Winston tosses a silver dollar to Ray, who snatches it
of the air. Winston drops his hat on his head and moves
through the crowd and out the door.

WAITRESS

Can I get you something?

table.
over. Ray
of
Ray shakes his head. Carefully, she begins to clear the
Suddenly, he grabs her wrist. Winston's glass tips
flips over the cocktail napkin to reveal an extra pile
cards.

RAY

Looks like he had a whole lot of
nothing in his hand until you came
along.

WAITRESS

(wrenching free)
You're hurting my arm.

EXT. JUKE JOINT -- NIGHT

of Ray dashes into the street, glancing both ways. No sign
Winston. Damn.

EXT. BACK ALLEY -- NIGHT

smile Winston produces Ray's pocket watch and pops it open. A
crosses his face as the mechanical tune plays.
A sheriff's sedan rounds a corner, illuminating Winston
in its headlights. The car pulls up and SHERIFF WARREN
PIKE steps out. Distinguished by a casual cruelty, he's a
young white man who loves his uniform.

PIKE

If it isn't Winston Hancock.

his Winston tries to move past Pike, but the sheriff blocks
squad path with a night stick. As Winston backs off, another
car, pulls up behind him. TWO DEPUTIES step from the
guns drawn.

PIKE

I thought we agreed that you were
gonna leave town.

WINSTON

I tried to leave, Sheriff Pike. But
your wife begged me to stay.

to Pike slams Winston with his club, sending the black man
stiletto his knees. As Winston struggles back to his feet, a
cheek. flashes and he lunges for the sheriff, slashing his
both The deputies grab Winston from behind, holding him by

his

arms. The long knife clatters to ground. Pike touches face, examining the blood on his fingers.

PIKE

You just committed suicide, boy.

INT. BORDELLO HALLWAY -- NIGHT

about to
within.

Ray walks slowly down the hallway to Room 13. He is knock when he hears the sound of lovemaking from

INT. SYLVIA'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

to

Ray opens the door and peeks in. Sylvia's on top and in charge. Claude is concentrating real hard. Ray smiles himself and closes the door.

INT. JUKE JOINT -- NIGHT

stairs.

Claude hitches up his suspenders as he comes down the He finds Ray having a drink at the now-empty bar.

CLAUDE

Hey, Ray. I've been looking for you.

RAY

Here I am.

CLAUDE

Guess we better get going, huh?

RAY

Still got that ten dollars?

CLAUDE

Well, not exactly. See, I met this girl. Real nice girl. God-fearing girl. Her name's Sylvia.

RAY

That jelly you were talking to right here?

CLAUDE

She's in a tight spot. Her mama needs this operation, and they ain't got the money for it. Their church took

up a collection but they were still short...

RAY

So you made a generous contribution.

CLAUDE

What can I say? When the spirit moves me.

RAY

That was mighty charitable of you, Claude. Looks like we both got fucked tonight.

CLAUDE

What are you talking about?

RAY

While you were upstairs doing God's work, I was getting jack-legged by a fool with four threes.

CLAUDE

You lost all our money in a card game?

RAY

He even got my daddy's watch.

CLAUDE

Fuck that cheap-ass watch --
(off Ray's glare)
I mean, how the hell are we gonna get home without any money?

RAY

We've still got 36 cases of rum.
That's better than money.

EXT. BACK ALLEY -- NIGHT

Ray and Claude head down the alley.

CLAUDE

You sure the truck's this way?
(looking over his
shoulder)
I swear it was back that way.

Suddenly, the bloodied figure of Winston Hancock

lurches

is
man's

from the shadows and grabs Claude by the lapels. Claude too scared to scream, staggering backward. But the grip loosens and he slips to the ground.

CLAUDE

(croaking)

Ray... Yo, Ray...!

covered
kneels

Ray turns back to find Claude trembling with fear and in blood. He just points down. Ray eyes widen. He down and turns Winston's body over.

CLAUDE

I think he's hurt pretty bad.

RAY

He's dead.

CLAUDE

Oh, man, I've never seen a dead body before!

Winston's

Much to Claude's horror, Ray starts rifling through pockets.

CLAUDE

What do you think you're doing?! The man's been dead for two seconds! Don't you have any respect?

RAY

It ain't here.

CLAUDE

What ain't there?

RAY

My daddy's watch. This is the dude I was telling you about --

pickup
WHITE

Suddenly, the glare of two bright headlights from a truck freeze Ray and Claude in a guilty tableau. FIVE MEN appear at the end of the alley.

MAN WITH LANTERN

What's going on here?

Ray gingerly releases Winston's lifeless body.

MAN WITH LANTERN

What's wrong with that one?

RAY

Him? He's just drunk.

CLAUDE

Yeah, nobody puts 'em away like old
what's-his-name.

RAY

Winston. His name's Winston.

CLAUDE

Come on, Ray, better get Winston
back to the truck.

man
face.
Claude and Ray hoist Winston's body to its feet. The
raises his lantern, takes a closer look at Winston's

MAN WITH LANTERN

This fella looks dead.

Ray and Claude check for themselves.

CLAUDE

Would you look at that, Ray. Winston
up and died on us.

RAY

Hell with him then. If he can't share
the driving, he can't ride in the
truck.

MAN WITH LANTERN

He can ride with us.

Ray
Suddenly, the men all have guns. And they're pointed at
and Claude.

MAN WITH LANTERN

So can you.

INT. NATCHEZ JAIL -- NIGHT

Through the
bottle

In a holding cell, Ray tests the window bars. Solid.
Meanwhile, Claude sits on a cot brooding darkly.

bars, we see the rednecks laughing and passing around a
of bootleg rum with the DEPUTY on duty.

RAY

Man, this is gonna delay everything.
Spanky's gonna be pissed.

CLAUDE

Spanky's gonna be pissed? Poor Spanky.
Fuck Spanky! What the hell kind of a
name is Spanky, anyway? You're
responsible for this situation. I
blame you for everything. If it wasn't
for you, I'd be home having a hot
meal right now.

RAY

If it wasn't for me, you'd be washing
up on the beach at Coney Island right
now.

(mocking Claude)

"I need all my thumbs and fingers
for praying and doing good."

pauses
bandage

The jailhouse door opens and Sheriff Pike walks in. He
to give the prisoners the once-over. There's a fresh
over the cut on his cheek.

PIKE

What do we have here?

DEPUTY

Billy Bob and the boys found them
down down under the hill with Winston
Hancock. He was dead. Looks like
murder.

PIKE

You don't say.

DEPUTY

Looks like they was running rum. Got
thirty six cases of evidence out
back. You want I should call in the
federal prosecutor?

PIKE

Let's not drag the feds into this. I can think of better uses for that rum than letting it collect dust in some government warehouse up in Nashville.

Pike winks at his deputy, then turns to regard the prisoners.

PIKE

Besides, why bother with bootlegging when we got us a clear cut case of murder?

RAY

Excuse me, sheriff. As we explained to your associate here, there's been a mistake. We didn't kill anybody. Now, as for the bootlegging, we happen to work for a very important man in New York.

CLAUDE

That's right. Does the name Spanky Johnson mean anything to you?

PIKE

Afraid not.

RAY

Mr. Johnson is very well connected. If you were to let us go, I guarantee he would show you his appreciation, if you know what I mean.

PIKE

Are you offering me a bribe?

RAY

I'm just trying to pay the toll on the road to justice.

PIKE

You may be able to buy your way out of trouble up in New York City, but down here we take murder seriously.

CLAUDE

Look, man, how many times we gotta tell you people, we didn't kill that guy!

PIKE

Well, if that's the case, then you don't have anything to worry about, do you?

time on
cell,
Pike turns his back on the prisoners and checks the a gold pocket watch -- Ray's pocket watch. But from his Ray can't hear the mechanical tune.

PIKE

Time to get home to the missus. See y'all in the morning.

In the cell, Claude turns to Ray.

CLAUDE

The man's gotta point. We're innocent, after all. I just gotta get a good night's sleep on this filthy mattress. Keep our heads on straight, stay cool, what's the worst thing that could happen to us?

SMASH

CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM -- DAY

The CAMERA Scorseses in on the JUDGE'S face...

JUDGE

Life!

Ray
from
The gavel comes down with a thundering crash. Stunned, and Claude resist the BAILIFFS' efforts to remove them the courtroom.

RAY

Life?! How long is life? We were just walking back to the truck. We didn't do nothing! Fuck life!

CLAUDE

Life?! What's life mean? There's no way I can do life. I got a job starts Monday morning!

bodily They continue to protest loudly as they are dragged through the door.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY

down a Blues music kicks in as a prison transport bus rolls dirt road cutting through the bleak Mississippi Delta.

INT. BUS (MOVING) -- DAY

behind the LONG-CHAIN CHARLIE, a white prison sergeant, sits wheel. A shot gun hangs within easy reach.

their The CAMERA MOVES BACK past grim-faced PRISONERS with hands and feet shackled. We arrive at Ray and Claude sitting in grim silence as the bus lurches along.

EXT. PRISON -- DAY

sign: The bus veers off the country road and passes under a MISSISSIPPI STATE PENITENTIARY. Sgt. Dillard's voice PLAYS OVER.

DILLARD (V.O.)

Welcome to the farm. Here you will be provided with ample opportunity to repay your debt to society through the rigors of hard labor...

first Ray and Claude stare out the window, getting their fields look at the harsh reality that awaits them. Cotton stretch to the horizon in every direction. HOE-GANGS till the earth under the watchful gaze of TRUSTY SHOOTERS...

DILLARD (V.O.)

In between harvest and planting season we got fields need clearing, roads need building and ditches need digging. You will eat only what you can grow. Your crop don't come in, you'll go hungry. If you die, don't worry 'bout us none. We'll find

somebody to replace you...

as
his
Along the road, CONVICTS cast hard looks at the new men
the cart passes. A WHITE SERGEANT on horseback shifts
rifle and casually spits tobacco juice in the dirt...

EXT. CAMP 8 -- DAY

dirt
yard.
watch
new
their
A low-slung, single-story bunkhouse surrounded by a
yard. Two shooter shacks sit at diagonal corners of the
In each shack, two trusties with rifles keep vigilant
over the camp. SGT. FRED DILLARD paces down the line of
men as HOPPIN' BOB, an uncommonly ugly trusty, unlocks
leg irons.

DILLARD

This here is Camp 8. Camp 8 is for incorrigibles, so whatever you've done to get here, believe me, we're not impressed. You new men are probably noticing that we have no fences here at Camp 8. We don't need no fences, we have the gun line. It runs from shack to shack clear around the yard. You are now inside the gun line. If you step outside the gun line without my permission, you will be shot. If you trip and fall over the gun line, you will be shot. If you spit, if you pee, if you stick your ass out and take a dump over the gun line, you will be shot.

tosses
shack.
Dillard plucks a hat off one of the new prisoners and
it over the gun line. SHOTS ring out from the nearest
The hat is torn to shreds.

DILLARD

One of my trusties puts a bullet in you when you're trying to run, I'm liable to give him a pardon for saving me the trouble of tracking you down, so you can bet their aim is true.

right
Dillard puts a cigarette in his mouth. Hoppin' Bob is
there with the flame.

DILLARD

My name is Sgt. Dillard. In the unlikely event that you need to address me, you call me boss. You already met this handsome fella right here. Hoppin' Bob's my ace boon coon. You run afoul of Hoppin' Bob, you run afoul of me.

Nodding to Bob, Dillard saunters off.

HOPPIN' BOB

New men, strip down!

begin
Ray and Claude share a look. Self-consciously, the men
to undress.

INT. BUNKHOUSE -- DAY

Double bunks line the walls, with a footlocker for each inmate. As usual, there's a poker game going on.

HOPPIN' BOB

Okay, ladies, got some fresh meat for ya!

into the
Bob
All activity comes to a halt as the new men shuffle
cage wearing their prison-issue "ring-arounds." Hoppin'
slams the metal doors shut behind them.

HOPPIN' BOB

We ain't got no wallflowers at Camp 8. Everybody gotta dance eventually. But don't worry, they won't try nothing tonight. That would take all of the fun outta the courtship.

silence.
The INCORRIGIBLES hungrily eye the new men in total

WILLIE
Claude sticks close to Ray as they shuffle toward their assigned bunks. The CAMERA SETTLES on a much younger

LONG.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- MORNING

and
track of
pocket

The inmates jump down from the mule cart and grab hoes
shovels. Because he can't count, Hoppin' Bob keeps
the men using a system all his own -- a PEBBLE in his
for each man. Dillard stands by with his shotgun.

DILLARD

Got three miles of ditch to clear
today. Let's keep it moving!

EXT. DITCH -- DAY

JANGLE
work
The
sweating

The men of Camp 8 labor under the brutal mid-day sun.
LEG, a handsome, muscular man, sings a verse to set the
tempo. Up and down the line, a mighty chorus responds.
CAMERA FINDS Ray and Claude swinging pick axes,
profusely.

CLAUDE

I don't believe this before Abe jive.
I didn't go to night school to sing
in no Mississippi Boys Choir!

shirt.

Claude stops to catch his breath and take off his

RAY

I wouldn't do that if I was you.

CLAUDE

Shut up. It's too damn hot. What do
you know, anyway?

kicks

A SHOT rings out. Claude hits the ground as a bullet
up some dust nearby.

RAY

Told ya.

as
rifle.

Claude looks up to see Dillard cracking pistachio nuts
Hoppin' Bob puts another round in the chamber of his

DILLARD

Why ain't his pick swinging?

HOPPIN' BOB

(echoing)

Why ain't that pick swinging?

CLAUDE

It's too hot, boss. I'm tired.

HOPPIN' BOB

He says it's too hot, boss.

DILLARD

Too hot, huh? Well, you tell that lazy juggaboo the state of Mississippi ain't interested in his meteorological assessments.

HOPPIN' BOB

Listen up, juggaboo! State of Mississippi ain't interested in your... in your...

(off Dillard's look)

metropolitan assets!

DILLARD

Tell him the state of Mississippi is only interested in getting this ditch cleared by sundown.

HOPPIN' BOB

State of Mississippi wants this ditch cleared by sundown. You got that?!

CLAUDE

I got it... boss.

DILLARD

He don't sound like he's from 'round here.

HOPPIN' BOB

He's from New York City. That one, too.

DILLARD

New York. That's up north, ain't it? They'll find we do things different down here.

RAY

We noticed.

solar

Annoyed, Dillard jabs the butt of his rifle into Ray's plexus. Ray sinks to his knees in the dirt.

DILLARD

Looks like we got a couple of live ones. How long these boys in for?

HOPPIN' BOB

Judge gave 'em the long ride.

DILLARD

Life, huh? They step outta line again, we'll shorten up that sentence real fast.

faithful
labor.

Dillard swaggers off, dogged at the heels by the ever Hoppin' Bob. Resigned, Ray and Claude return to their

EXT. DITCH -- DAY

with a
ladle

The men rest in the ditch as BISCUIT, a slight inmate red bandanna tied around his head, dispenses water, one per man.

BISCUIT

Drink it up!

POKER

expression

Willie exchanges two cigarettes for a second ladle.

FACE pulls a crumpled envelope from his shirt. His never changes, hence the name.

POKER FACE

Either of you new fellas know how to read? I've had this letter four months now.

CLAUDE

You can't read? None of these guys can read?

WILLIE

Last fella who could read made parole

'round Christmas.

POKER FACE

I don't even know who this is from.

RAY

Here, gimme that.

Ray unfolds the letter and scans it.

RAY

It's from your mama's neighbor, Mrs. Tidwell. She thought you oughta know that your second cousin Bo died.

"That's
The prisoners express their condolences. "Sorry, man."
some bad news." "I know you loved Bo like a brother..."

RAY

And your other cousin, Sally, on your daddy's side, she died.

"Rough
More sympathy from the men. "Ooh. Twice in one letter."
break, Poker Face..."

RAY

Apparently, your sister died.

POKER FACE

Jenny?

RAY

No, it says Marleen here.

Relief all around. "Thank goodness."

RAY

Oh, wait, looks like Jenny died, too.

"Bad luck, man." "That's harsh..."

RAY

Then it goes on for a while about how the crop didn't come in on accounta the frost.

(flips over the page)

She finishes up with something about a tornado and how your mama and your daddy died in that. But don't worry

none. She'll take care of the dog.
That is, if it gets over the worms.

and The prisoners share dark looks. Ray folds up the letter
hands it back to Poker Face.

POKER FACE

Appreciate it.

RAY

Anybody else need anything read?

return "No, man, we're good." The men shake their heads and
to letters and cards to their pockets. Jangle Leg nods and
switches places with one of the convicts, parking next
Claude.

JANGLE LEG

How you doin'?

CLAUDE

I'm all right.

JANGLE LEG

You ever done time before?

CLAUDE

You kidding? I've been in and out of
prison my entire life. Mostly in.
I'm hard-core.

JANGLE LEG

Then you won't have no problem making
the adjustment. You need anything,
help of any kind, gimme a holler.
Name's Jangle Leg.

CLAUDE

'Preciate it. Claude.

thoroughly. As they shake, Jangle Leg inspects Claude's hand

JANGLE LEG

Soft and supple. Like a lady's.

CLAUDE

(eyes narrowing)
I try to moisturize regularly.

HOPPIN' BOB

(over his shoulder)
Hey, Jangle Leg, what'd I tell you
about pitching woo on the job?

JANGLE LEG

Sorry, Cap'n.

hard Claude snatches back his hand and gives Jangle Leg a
look.

HOPPIN' BOB

Break's over! Back to work!

leans As the men grab their tools and return to work, Claude
over to Ray.

CLAUDE

Why do you think they call him Jangle
Leg?

RAY

Somebody just told me he wins the
three-legged race every year.

CLAUDE

So?

RAY

He does it all by himself.

INT. MESS HALL -- DUSK

the Wincing with each movement and covered in grime from
line. day's labors, the new men bring up the back of the chow
COOKIE, the grub-slinger, slaps a large dollop of an
unidentifiable substance onto Ray's tray.

RAY

What is that?

COOKIE

Creamed chip beef on toast. Except
we're outta beef, so I had to
improvise.

RAY

Can't I get one of those steaks you
got grilling back there?

COOKIE

Those are for trusties, unless you
got thirty cents or two packs of
cigs.

juicy
to
tray

Another prisoner lays down some tobacco and gets a
steak. Ray grabs a hunk of corn bread and makes his way
the back of the room. Claude steps up, holds out his
for Cookie.

CLAUDE

Excuse me, I don't like it when the
food touches each other, so if you
could just --

(SPLAT!)

-- keep everything separate.

seat
table.

Disappointed, Claude turns to discover that the only
left is next to Ray. Scowling, he limps toward it.
Jangle Leg's eyes follow Claude as he approaches the
Biscuit smacks him.

BISCUIT

Eyes front, mister!

burnt
brings the
Scratch,

Claude sits down and promptly goes to work scraping his
toast with his knife. The irritating sound slowly
entire room to dead silence. All eyes fall on Claude.
scratch, scratch...

COOKIE

(stepping up)

Problem with the toast?

CLAUDE

It's fine now.

Cookie glowers and takes a seat.

RAY

Stop aggravating people. Just eat
your food.

his
look.
As the room returns to normal, Claude starts polishing
fork with his shirttail. Irritated, Ray shoots him a

CLAUDE

This fork is filthy.

RAY

The fork is the least of your worries,
Claude.

some
Undeterred, Claude breathes on his fork and polishes it
more. Disgusted, Ray pushes aside his plate.

RAY

What's your name?

WILLIE

Me? Willie Long.

RAY

What are you in for, Willie?

WILLIE

That's a long story...

RADIO

When he was 13 years old he killed a
son-of-a-bitch with a claw hammer.

WILLIE

They never proved that.

CLAUDE

What a second, you've been in here
since you were thirteen?

RAY

What about you, Radio?

RADIO

Armed robbery.

JANGLE LEG

Damn liar. Bitch killed his sister
with an axe.

RADIO

She was my half-sister. Shit, I ain't the son-of-a-bitch who poisoned my own parents.

BISCUIT

(protective)

They deserved it. Very strict.

POKER FACE

What about you, Biscuit? You nearly skinned your poor old landlady alive.

COOKIE

At least he didn't kill Santa Claus with his bare hands.

RAY

You killed Santa Claus?

BISCUIT

(scolding)

On Christmas Eve.

POKER FACE

He wasn't the Santa Claus, he was just wearing the suit and ringing a bell.

WILLIE

What did you guys do?

The whole table waits expectantly for their reply.

RAY

I kinda lost track of how many people we killed that night. Must have been 15 or twenty -- not counting women and children. It was a real bloodbath. All that screaming...

CLAUDE

Pack of lies. Don't listen to him. We didn't kill nobody. We were railroaded. And we gonna prove that.

RAY

He just blocked it out. Nigger's crazy. He's the one who did all the stabbing. He's capable of some heinous shit.

(thumbing down the

table)
How 'bout him down there?

snarls
At the end of the table, GOLDMOUTH, a hulking specimen,
menacingly, flashing a glittering set of teeth.

WILLIE

Goldmouth? They say he was born out
back behind the shithouse. That's
what they say.

RAY

You all been here a long time. Doesn't
anybody ever escape from this place?

WILLIE

They run but they never get too far.

RADIO

Couple years back, Cookie made it
clear to Greenville.

RAY

Greenville, that the nearest town?

WILLIE

(nodding)

It's a two-day walk if you don't get
lost. Take a mighty cagey country
boy to navigate the woods and bayous
between here and there.

BISCUIT

Those dogs they got can sniff a skid
mark in your underpants from a half-
mile off.

RAY

Alright, well, let's say you make it
to Greenville. What's there, anyway?

COOKIE

Grandma Dodi's Pork Rib Joint.

POKER FACE

That's where they nabbed him.

COOKIE

Didn't even get to have my peach
cobbler.

WILLIE

The most important thing they got in Greenville is a train that heads up north.

Claude. Just then, Goldmouth stands up, casting a shadow over

GOLDMOUTH

Hey, girl, you gonna eat your corn bread?

Claude looks up, considering his options.

CLAUDE

No, man. I want you to have it.

RAY

Wait up there, Claude. You give that guy your corn bread and the next thing you know you'll be ironing his shirts and clipping his toenails.

GOLDMOUTH

Maybe I oughta eat your corn bread.

RAY

My corn bread? Oh no, my friend. I love corn bread.

of it, Ray picks up his corn bread and takes a huge bite out rolling his eyes with enthusiasm.

RAY

I thought my mama made good corn bread but this is really something special.

Ray looks at the faces around the room, smiles broadly. Goldmouth is getting embarrassed.

RAY

Who knew I'd have to come all the way down to this here prison, deep in the asshole of the great state of Mississippi, to find such a tasty piece of corn bread?

The prisoners begin to laugh. Ray's got them now.

RAY

And who knew that in this great corn bread-making institution I'd come face to face with the biggest, ugliest, stinkiest, ugliest gold-mouthed negro in the entire world. Now get out of my face before I lose my appetite!

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DUSK

looks
bets.

A punch sends Ray sprawling in the dust. Goldmouth
over him. The incorrigibles form a circle around the
combatants. Poker Face, the camp bookie, is taking all

GOLDMOUTH

How you like your corn bread now,
New York?

ducks
just
size
drops

Goldmouth and Ray square off. Goldmouth swings, Ray
and counters with a swift jab to the gut. Goldmouth
flashes a shiny grin and clobbers Ray with a fist the
of a Thanksgiving turkey. Ray sinks to the dust. Radio
down near him.

RADIO

Come on, New York, you can do better
than that! Get up and show him how
they do it in Harlem!

circles
the
the
shirt
Cookie's

Ray shakes his head and staggers back to his feet. He
the big man and gets in a couple of good shots, much to
crowd's approval. Goldmouth shakes his head and wipes
blood from his nose. Now he's mad. He grabs Ray by the
and delivers a crushing blow. Ray reels backward into
arms.

COOKIE

I appreciate you going to all this
trouble over my corn bread. I don't
get a lot of compliments in my line
of work.

punishment.
of
Willie.

Cookie shoves Ray back into the ring for more
Claude emerges from the mess hall, munching on a piece
corn bread. He squeezes in between Poker Face and

WILLIE

Your pal's getting the tar whipped
out of him on your account.

CLAUDE

How many times I got to tell you? He
ain't my pal. Besides, he looks like
he knows what he's doing.

crushing
under
directions.

Just then Claude winces as Goldmouth delivers a jaw-
uppercut that knocks Ray on his back. Claude bristles
the incriminating looks coming at him from all

CLAUDE

Alright, alright...

and
shut,

Claude crouches down as Ray rolls over on his stomach
pushes himself up onto all fours. His eyes are swollen
his face covered with blood.

CLAUDE

Hey, Ray, I think you made your point,
whatever that is. Maybe now's a good
time to throw in the towel. You know
what I'm saying?

Ray manages a smile and staggers to his feet.

RAY

(slurring)

Shit, Goldmouth. Back in New York, I
know bitches who hit harder than
you.

hurtles
in.

Goldmouth pulls back his fist and lets it fly. Ray
through the crowd, collapsing in the dust. Willie steps

WILLIE

The man's taken enough of a beating.
Let's get him inside.

Goldmouth Cookie, Radio and Poker Face raise Ray to his feet.
slings him over his shoulder and carries him toward the
bunkhouse. Dazed, Ray catches Claude's eye.

RAY

Got him good, huh, Claude? He won't
be bothering us anytime soon.

good.
the
it.
A quick elbow jab from Goldmouth and Ray is out for
Disgusted with himself, Claude tosses what's left of
corn bread to the mangy dog, who makes short work of

BISCUIT

(wagging a finger)
Shame, shame, that's your name.

FADE TO

BLACK:

INT. MESS HALL -- DAY

a
DAUGHTER
of
On Sundays, the mess hall also serves as a chapel. From
makeshift pulpit, the blind REVEREND CLAY and his
lead the congregation of convicts in a rousing chorus
"Down by the Riverside."

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY

prisoners
The gospel music filters into the yard, where the
mingle with kinfolk.

EXT. SGT. DILLARD'S HOUSE -- DAY

places
cool.
MRS. DILLARD hums along with the gospel music as she
a couple of freshly-baked pies on the window sill to

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY

toward
TONK

The CAMERA FINDS Claude and Daisy walking hand in hand
a simple shack just beyond the gun line. This is the
HOUSE and Dillard is the gate keeper.

CLAUDE

Request permission to go to the tonk,
boss.

Dillard considers Daisy.

DILLARD

I don't see no wedding ring, Banks.
Conjugal visits are for married
prisoners only.

CLAUDE

You think you could make an exception
just this once, boss? She came all
the way down from New York.

DILLARD

I don't need the Baptists on my back,
but I suppose I could issue a
temporary marriage license for a
nominal fee.

hands

Daisy gets the picture. She reaches into her purse and
Dillard a couple of dollars.

DILLARD

I now pronounce you man and wife.
(calling to the shooter
shack)
Claude Banks going to the tonk!

line.

Claude takes Daisy's hand and leads her over the gun

ACROSS THE YARD

Then
Nearby,

Ray watches Claude and Daisy step into the tonk house.
he returns to a game of horseshoes, tossing a ringer.
Biscuit gives Jangle Leg a haircut.

RAY

Biscuit, when you're done with Jangle
Leg, you think you could squeeze me

in?

BISCUIT

Thought you'd never ask. Biscuit needs some gravy.

RAY

I'm talking about a haircut.

BISCUIT

Cost you a pair of nylons.

POKER FACE

Hey, Ray, Goldmouth don't believe me. Ain't it so they got trains up in New York City that run under the streets?

RAY

They're called subways. A nickel will take you from one end of Manhattan to the other. Helluva ride, too.

Radio looks up from a vacuum tube receiver he's busy repairing.

RADIO

Hey, Ray, you ever been to the Cotton Club?

RAY

Sure I've been to the Cotton Club. It's pretty sweet. But it don't hold a candle to the Boom Boom Room. That's where the real action is.

WILLIE

What's the Boom Boom Room?

RAY

That's my joint. The swinginest nightclub in town.

COOKIE

You got your own nightclub?

RAY

Well, not yet. It's still in the planning stages.

GOLDMOUTH

So it don't exist.

RAY

Just because it's in my mind,
Goldmouth, don't mean it ain't real.
Everything worth anything starts
with a dream.

Hoppin' Bob calls to Ray from the gun line.

HOPPIN' BOB

Gibson! Got yourself a visitor!

floral

Ray turns to find his MOTHER, a handsome woman in a
dress, coming toward him.

RAY

Mama?

MAMA GIBSON

Rayford!

embrace,

The incorrigibles elbow each other and repeat the name
"Rayford" as Mama Gibson envelops her son in a fleshy
smothering him with kisses.

RAY

What are you doing here, mama?

MAMA GIBSON

I heard some things so I went to see
Spanky Johnson. He told me what
happened and gave me some money to
get down here. What happened to your
face?

RAY

Don't worry about that. Hey, fellas,
this here is my mama. These are some
of my friends. That's Willie, there's
Poker Face, Radio, Cookie, Goldmouth,
Biscuit, Jangle Leg.

Goldmouth

The motley crew gathers around, nodding politely.
flashes a golden grin. Willie gallantly doffs his cap.

WILLIE

Mrs. Gibson. Shame on Rayford here
for failing to mention that he had

such a beautiful mama.

Mama manages a half-hearted smile, clutching her bag.

MAMA GIBSON

Nice to meet you all.

GOLDMOUTH

How was your train ride?

MAMA GIBSON

Quite comfortable, thank you.

COOKIE

Them cookies in there?

MAMA GIBSON

Yes, oatmeal.

RADIO

'Scuse me, you got any batteries on you?

MAMA GIBSON

No. No I don't.

Biscuit sides up, fingering her dress.

BISCUIT

That's a lovely dress. Make it yourself?

MAMA GIBSON

(vaguely unsettled)

Yeah...

EXT. PORCH -- DAY

Ray and his mama sit in the shade.

RAY

This is a big surprise, mama. I sure didn't expect to see you down here.

A long, uncomfortable beat. Mama's lip starts to tremble.

MAMA GIBSON

Rayford, I wanted so much more for you than this.

RAY

Don't cry, mama. This place ain't so bad as it looks. Sure, we work hard, but there's plenty fresh air and sunshine... And you know something else, I've taken to going to church regular. They got services every Sunday right there in the mess hall.

MAMA GIBSON

Don't you lie to me, Rayford.
(composing herself)
You still have your daddy's watch?
(Ray shakes his head)
Well, this is all I can give you. I wish it was more.

She puts some money in his hand.

RAY

I can't take that, mama.

MAMA GIBSON

Don't argue with me. You need it more than I do. I know how a little money can help in a place like this.

Reluctantly, Ray stashes the money in his pocket.

RAY

I can't believe this. I always said I'd never end up like this. I thought I'd make something of myself, do something with my life. You know, be successful. Have a big house, a family. Now I'm gonna end up just like daddy.

MAMA GIBSON

Don't say that, Rayford. Don't ever say that. He gave up hope. That's where you gotta be different.

RAY

They gave me life, mama.

MAMA GIBSON

I gave you life. And they can't take it away from you. Remember that. You'll get outta here someday. I believe that. You gotta believe it, too.

INT. TONK HOUSE -- DAY

as
a
Reclining on a straw mattress, Claude watches intently
Daisy gets dressed. The rickety door reverberates with
loud pounding.

HOPPIN' BOB

(off)

Time's up, Banks! We got a crowd
gathering out here!

the
Claude leaps from the bed and slams his fist against
door.

CLAUDE

Woman came all the way from New York,
goddamnit! We'll come out when we're
good and ready!

Daisy quickly buttons up her dress.

CLAUDE

Did you go see my cousin Maynard
like I asked you in my letter?

DAISY

Of course I did. He said he'd file
an appeal right away. You didn't
tell me he was so good looking.

CLAUDE

Yeah, that side of the family has
all the looks and none of the brains.
I hope he don't mess things up.

DAISY

He seemed like a pretty good lawyer
to me. His offices take up an entire
floor of that big, new building on
125th Street, and he was using all
these words I never heard before. He
even offered me a job.

CLAUDE

A job, huh? Well, that's nice, real
nice. You won't have to work long.
I'll be back soon enough. After I
start work at First Federal Bank of
Manhattan, I'll be keeping you in

style. Everything will get back to normal again. That's a promise.

much

Daisy smiles weakly and looks away. She doesn't have faith in this promise.

DAISY

Listen, Claude, Maynard wanted to know if he should file the appeal on behalf of your friend, too.

CLAUDE

Ray Gibson?

(thinks about it)

No, no. He's the reason I'm in here, Daisy. For all I know, he's got a record a mile long. I got a better shot of getting out of here on my own. You tell Maynard to think about me, concentrate on me. Understand?

DAISY

Sure, Claude, whatever you say.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

and

The prisoners jump down from the cart and grab hammers pick axes as Hoppin' Bob keeps count with pebbles.

DILLARD

We lost yesterday on accounta the rain. That means we gotta make up for it today, so put your backs to it.

HOPPIN' BOB

You heard the boss! Let's move!

Ray and Claude jump down after Willie.

WILLIE

(squinting at the sun)

Looks like a scorcher.

RADIO

I bet the son of a bitch goes over a hundred and ten.

POKER FACE

I'll take that action.

EXT. FIELD -- DAY

by The long line levels a road to a work tune being sung
Jangle Leg.

degrees Dillard checks the thermometer on the truck -- 90
and rising. Mopping his brow, he starts down the line.
off The sun arcs overhead, a blazing inferno... Heat rises
here, the road... The men sweat profusely... "Taking it off
boss!" echoes up and down the line.

bucket Biscuit has his work cut out for him, lugging a water
from man to man, offering the ladle.

sun... The sun... the hammer... the ladle... the axe... the
110 the hammer... the ladle... the axe... The mercury hits
degrees...

collapses A NEW GUY lets his hammer slip from his fingers,
pack in the dirt. Radio nods to Poker Face, who hands him a
of cigs.

WILLIE

Man down, boss!

He's Dillard uses his foot to roll the stricken man over.
still alive. Barely.

DILLARD

You two, put him on the truck!

arms Ray and Claude drop their tools, grab the man by his
earshot, and legs and lug him up to the road. Once out of
Ray whispers to Claude.

RAY

Cookie drew me a map to Greenville.

CLAUDE

So?

RAY

You know what I'm saying.

CLAUDE

Yeah, I know what your saying. And I'm saying if you made it that far, they'd be watching every train that pulls out of that station.

RAY

That's why we won't take the train. Cookie showed me where there's a farm house. They got a boat there.

CLAUDE

What do you know about boats? I bet you can't even swim.

back

They reach the truck. With effort, they swing the man and forth and launch him into the back of the truck.

RAY

What I know about boats is they take you to freedom. Come on, man. I think we can do this.

CLAUDE

Why are you always talking about we? There is no we. There is a me, there is a you. But there is no we between us.

HARD

CUT TO:

INT. BUNKHOUSE WASHROOM -- DAY

lather up

Ray and Claude continue their conversation as they for a shave.

RAY

You want out of this place, don't you? Don't tell me you're starting to like it here.

CLAUDE

No, I don't like it here. Look around.

There's nothing but ass. Male ass!
Balls and ass! Believe you me, I'm
getting out of here.

RAY

What does that mean?

CLAUDE

Forget it.

RAY

I'm not gonna forget it. What does
that mean? If you've got a plan, I
think I have a right to know about
it. I told you my plan.

CLAUDE

Getting a map from a chubby chef
named Cookie? Dragging our asses
through the swamps in search of some
worm-eaten boat? That ain't a plan,
that's a vacation for two in the
hole. When you've got a map to New
York City, you get back to me.

Claude splits. Scowling, Ray finishes up his shave.

INT. BUNKHOUSE -- NIGHT

Moonlight streams through the barred windows of the
cage.

Exhausted from the day's work, each man stretches out
painfully in his bunk.

JANGLE LEG

Sure was hot out there today.

COOKIE

Still too hot to sleep.

RADIO

Every bone in my body feel like a
big son-of-a-bitch dog got hold of
it.

GOLDMOUTH

I can't wait 'til Sunday.

CLAUDE

What's so great about Sunday? Monday's
right after it.

Restless, Radio rolls over.

RADIO

Hey, Ray, what's the name of that nightclub of yours?

RAY

You mean the Boom-Boom Room?

RADIO

That's it. The Boom-Boom Room. Sure would like to see that place when you get it up and running.

RAY

You should have come by last night, Radio. You woulda had yourself some fun.

WILLIE

Last night? What are you talking about, Ray?

RAY

I'm talking about old Satchmo nearly blew the roof off the joint.

POKER FACE

Who?

RAY

Satchmo.

GOLDMOUTH

You mean Louis Armstrong?

RAY

He's a good friend of mine. Drops by the club whenever he's in town.

CLAUDE

Hey, do we have to listen to this bullshit? I'm trying to get some sleep around here.

Claude

"Shut up, Claude!" echoes around the room. Irritated, thumps his pillow and turns his back on the room.

RAY

Yeah, things were hot last night, but you'll never guess who's playing

tonight.

BLAM! A high horn note sounds.

SMASH

CUT:

million-

CLOSE-UP -- Biscuit, all dolled up and flashing a dollar smile. She begins to sing.

BISCUIT

A tisket a tasket...

depressing

Boom

tuxedo

as

Biscuit is up on a makeshift platform in the bunkhouse, lipsyncing to Ella Fitzgerald. But its not the bunkhouse anymore, it has transformed into Ray's Boom-Room. PULL OUT SLOWLY as Ray, decked out in a sleek tuxedo steps in front of the CAMERA. He speaks into the CAMERA as he walks...

RAY

That's right, fellas. Catch any cab heading uptown. All the drivers know Ray's Boom-Boom Room.

GOLDMOUTH (O.S.)

Hey, Ray...

bunkhouse.

Ray looks to his left, sees Goldmouth in the old

GOLDMOUTH

Where am I at, man?

RAY

(in nightclub)

C'mon, Goldmouth, somebody's gotta watch the front door.

the

waves

smiling

The CAMERA PANS off Ray to Goldmouth, in a tuxedo, at front door of the nightclub with two lovely ladies. He waves to himself, sitting on his bunk. Himself waves back, smiling like a kid in a candy store.

gorgeous Willie is behind the bar, serving drinks to three

SKIMMIES.

WILLIE

Hey, Ray, I could get used to this!

porterhouse. CLOSE ON Cookie sitting a table eating a huge

The CAMERA DOLLIES around to find Ray eating with him.

COOKIE

Ray, my man, this steak is like
butter!

RAY

Made just for you, Cookie.

COOKIE

How about some steak sauce?

RAY

No problem. Oh, boy!

Ray motions to a busboy clearing a table. It's Claude.

RAY

How about some Worchestershire sauce!
And clean that damn table.

Claude grimaces.

CUT TO:

bunk Willie laughing, Goldmouth laughing, Poker Face in the
laughing.

POKER FACE

Hey, Ray, I know you got some
gambling!

CUT TO:

at Ray at a craps table holding a pair of dice. He looks
Poker Face on his bunk.

RAY

C'mon, Poker Face, what's a club

without some dice?

seven.
fistful
The CAMERA PULLS BACK as Ray throws the dice. A perfect
The CAMERA PANS UP to Poker Face in a tux clutching a
of cash.

POKER FACE

Lucky seven! My nigger! Let it ride!

piano.
Across the room, Jangle Leg, in a tux, sits at the
Radio, also in a tux, beats on the drums.

JANGLE LEG

Sing, girlfriend!

Everyone
until...
Biscuit sings the song, smiling lovingly at her man.
is having a great time in Ray's Boom-Boom Room,

with
incorrigibles
Whistles blow. At the front door, Hoppin' Bob appears
FIVE TRUSTIES dressed in police outfits. The
scatter.

RADIO

Hey, Ray, looks like trouble!

The
harsh
reality.
A hard white light from Hoppin' Bob's flashlight shines
directly into the CAMERA.
CLOSE ON Ray, in his bed, back in the old bunkhouse.
music stops abruptly. He shields his eyes from the
light. Hoppin' Bob is looming over him. It's back to

HOPPIN' BOB

You don't shut up, you're gonna spend
the rest of the night in the hole,
Gibson! That goes for the rest of
you girls, too. I don't want to hear
another peep about no Boom-Boom
fucking Room!

Hoppin'
A loud burst of flatulence cuts through the darkness.

Bob turns his flashlight on Cookie.

COOKIE

Sorry, Cap'n.

the

Scowling, Hoppin' Bob steps out of the cage and locks door behind him. The men slowly settle back in.

RADIO

(whispering)

Pretty good story, Ray. Didn't much care for the ending though.

Lights out at Camp 8.

EXT. CAMP 8 -- YARD -- DAY

Poker

Claude's playing pepper with Radio, Jangle Leg and Face.

DILLARD

Mail call!

names,

The incorrigibles quickly gather around as he calls off passing cards and letters through the crowd.

DILLARD

Craddock!... Williams... Henshaw!...
Banks!

CLAUDE

Here!

before

Dillard hands the letter to Ray, who glances at it passing it back to Claude.

RAY

(reading)

Maynard Banks, Esquire. Attorney at law.

CLAUDE

Gimme that. That doesn't concern you.

RAY

I'm sure it don't.

INT. CAMP 8 BUNKHOUSE -- DAY

settles
Bitterly,
Claude rips open the letter. A profound disappointment
over him as he reads the news from cousin Maynard.
he crumples up the letter and tosses it down.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

After
Dillard strolls down the line with his rifle over his
shoulder. Under his watchful gaze, hoes rise and fall.
he passes, Claude moves a little closer to Ray.

CLAUDE

What's up, Ray?

RAY

(cool)
Claude.

CLAUDE

Sure is hot today. Think it'll rain
later?

RAY

What do you want, Claude?

CLAUDE

What do I want? What makes you think
I want something?

RAY

My daddy always said when a man starts
talking about the weather keep you
hand on your wallet.

CLAUDE

Your daddy must have been a helluva
guy, a deep man, a wise man. Sure
wish I could have met him --

RAY

Cut the bullshit. What do you want,
Claude?

CLAUDE

(clearing his throat)
You still got that map?

RAY

Yeah.

CLAUDE

Well, if you're still thinking about booking it, I want in. I think we can make it.

RAY

We? Did I hear you say we? As I recall, you're the one who said there is no we. Guess we got some bad news in that letter, huh?

CLAUDE

Look, my cousin Maynard is a lawyer. He filed an appeal on my behalf --

RAY

On your behalf. What happened to we?

CLAUDE

The appeal was denied. Then Daisy went and fell for Maynard. They're engaged to be married, can you believe that?

RAY

Well, let's just think about that for a moment. He's a successful lawyer up in New York City and you're down here with a bright future in the cotton picking business. Eeny, meeny, miney, Maynard.

CLAUDE

Come on, man. Don't shut me out. I'm telling you, you and me, that map, we can go places.

RAY

You know what, Claude? This whole time we've been down here, you've done nothing but think about yourself, acting like this whole thing is my fault. That plan with your cousin, did that include me?

A long beat.

CLAUDE

No.

RAY

At least you're honest for once. So now you want to be my friend? Well, let me tell you something, Claude-my-shit-don't-stink-Banks. You got a lot to learn about friendship.

CLAUDE

Does that mean I'm in?

RAY

I don't think so, Claude. You'd just slow me down. We'd have to stop every five minutes so you could polish your silverware. There's no way around it, you're soft.

CLAUDE

What'd you say?

RAY

I said you're soft.

CLAUDE

Don't call me that. You know I hate it when you call me that.

--
Ray gets in Claude's face and silently mouths the word
deep "soft." Claude throws down his hoe and sinks his fist
into Ray's gut.

CLAUDE

Damn, that felt good. I should have done that the first time I met you.

blazing, he
roll Ray touches the blood coming from his nose. Eyes
tackles Claude, dragging him to the ground. The two men
around, trying to strangle each other.

Claude.
himself in Hoppin' Bob hustles down the hill and drags Ray off of
But Claude comes back for more. Hoppin' Bob finds
the middle of the fray.

rifles That's when the cavalry arrives. Two trusties use their

sending to crack Ray and Claude over the backs of their heads,
them both down for the count.

sputter Hoppin' Bob empties his canteen over their faces. They
back to consciousness.

HOPPIN' BOB

Now you girls set aside your
differences and get back to work or
I'll see to it --

RAY

-- we'll spend a night in the hole.
We heard this shit before.

tools.
starts Ray and Claude stagger to their feet and pick up their
Hoppin' Bob and the trusties head back up the hill. Ray
to chuckle.

CLAUDE

What the fuck are you laughing about?

regards Ray Ray opens his palm to reveal TWO PEBBLES. Claude
with new-found respect.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- SUNDOWN

carts One by one, the prisoners of Camp 8 climb into the mule
passes, under the watchful eye of Hoppin' Bob. As each man
he removes a pebble from his pocket. The last one in is
Willie. Hoppin' Bob's pocket is now empty.

HOPPIN' BOB

All in, boss!

DILLARD

Move it out.

HOPPIN' BOB

Movin' it out, boss.

to Dillard spurs his horse, escorting the mule carts back
camp.

EXT. FIELD -- SUNDOWN

up
in
As the carts fade into the distance, Ray and Claude pop from a roadside ditch and take off for a grove of trees the opposite direction.

EXT. WOODS -- SUNDOWN

through
first
feet.
around
Running for all they're worth, Ray and Claude crash the bramble. Claude trips over a root and sprawls face in the bushes. Ray turns around and helps him to his feet. Claude is still laughing giddily. He throws his arms around Ray.

CLAUDE

You did it, man! You got us out!
Next stop, New York City!

RAY

New York's a long way's off. Let's
just keep moving, okay?

As Ray and Claude disappear into the woods...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BUNKHOUSE -- NIGHT

nightly
glancing
Radio's pulling in some jazz music out of New Orleans. Prisoners hit their bunks as the floorwalker does the head count. He stops at Claude and Ray's empty bunks, around, puzzled.

EXT. DILLARD'S PORCH -- NIGHT

out
wail
Dillard smokes a cigarette on the swing. His wife steps with a fresh bourbon and ice. Suddenly, SIRENS start to and emergency floodlights blaze to life at Camp 8.

EXT. FIELD -- NIGHT

gather
laundry

mouth.

Hounds scramble down from the back of a truck and around the DOG BOY. He holds out a handful of soiled and a dozen snouts sniff it thoroughly.

Nearby, Dillard gathers a DOZEN MEN with rifles and flashlights into a posse. He puts a cigarette in his Hoppin' Bob lights it for him.

EXT. WOODS -- NIGHT

Trees rise ominously around Ray and Claude as they push through dense underbrush.

CLAUDE

I know these trees all look the same, but I'm getting an awful familiar vibration from this one right here. You sure you know where we're going?

RAY

Absolutely. The map is very clear.

CLAUDE

Let me take a look at that map.

Claude considers it from various angles.

CLAUDE

You call this a map? What was Cookie smoking when he drew this?

RAY

Cookie didn't draw it. I did.

CLAUDE

You drew this?!

RAY

I knew you wouldn't come if I didn't have a map.

CLAUDE

That gripes my soul, man. We're out here in the middle of nowhere. There is shit nibbling at my balls! Don't tell me you don't know where we're going!

considers the
hounds

Ray shrugs and presses on. Dumbfounded, Claude
map again, then tears it to shreds. The braying of
echoes through the trees.

CLAUDE

Hey, wait up!

EXT. THE WOODS -- NIGHT

Ray and Claude race through the underbrush.

EXT. THE WOODS -- NIGHT

hot

Dillard and his men follow the dogs through the woods,
on the scent.

EXT. THE WOODS -- NIGHT

other
posse
onto

Ray and Claude race up to a chain-link fence. On the
side, an old Ford is parked on a dirt road. Hearing the
closing in behind them, Ray and Claude fling themselves
the fence.

EXT. THE WOODS -- NIGHT

to

The posse is gaining ground. Dillard takes two men off
the left, sending the rest of the men straight ahead.

EXT. THE WOODS -- NIGHT

Ford.
from
the

Claude clears the fence first and scrambles for the old
Ray's shirt snags on a piece of wire as he drops down
the fence. Stuck, he dangles helplessly a few feet off
ground.

INT. FORD -- NIGHT

TWO

Claude yanks open the door and jumps behind the wheel.

WHITE TEENAGERS bolt up in the backseat where they were
necking. After a beat -- group scream. The half-dressed

road.
roars

teenagers dive from the car and scramble off down the
Claude twists the key in the ignition and the engine
to life.

CLAUDE

Come on, Ray, time to go!

RAY

I'm stuck!

sounds
he
there.

Claude sees Ray caught up on the fence, then hears the
of the approaching posse. If he floored it right now,
might make it. But he can't just leave Ray hanging

EXT. FENCE -- NIGHT

he's
tumbling
the
shotgun.

Claude runs up and grabs Ray's legs, pulling for all
worth. The shirt rips free, sending Ray and Claude
to the ground. They leap to their feet and turn toward
car -- running smack into the barrel of Dillard's

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION -- DAY

At
jacks.
angel.

An OLD BLACK PRISONER delivers a frosty mint julep to
SUPERINTENDENT ABERNATHY who rocks slowly in his chair.
his feet, his 10-year-old daughter MAE ROSE is playing
Her long blonde hair makes her look like a little

MAE ROSE

Look, daddy. They caught those two
men who escaped last night.

Mae Rose is pointing down the drive, where Dillard and
a
couple of trusties march Ray and Claude toward the
house.

ABERNATHY

They ain't men, Mae Rose. They're
convicts. And nigger convicts to

boot. Can you say nigger?

MAE ROSE

Nagger?

ABERNATHY

No, nigger.

MAE ROSE

Nigger.

ABERNATHY

That's my girl.

deposited
Bound by leg irons and handcuffs, Ray and Claude are
at the bottom of the stairs.

DILLARD

Here they are, Superintendent. We
tracked 'em all the way to the
Tallahachie.

ABERNATHY

That's quite a ways. I'm glad you
New York boys could see some of our
lovely countryside while you're down
here. What do you say, Mae Rose? How
should we teach these two a lesson?

like
Mae Rose considers their faces. Ray and Claude look
they've been to hell and back.

MAE ROSE

A night in the hole?

ABERNATHY

Better make it a week.

march
julep
Dillard nods and turns Ray and Claude around. As they
back down the drive, Abernathy takes sip of his mint
and affectionately pats Mae Rose on the head.

EXT. CAMP 8 -- DAY

watching
and
The incorrigibles of Camp 8 gather at the gun line,
silently as Dillard and a couple of trustees march Ray

Claude toward the hole.

EXT. THE HOLE -- DAY

and
with
The trusties shove them each into a small, dank cell
slam the doors behind them. Dillard secures both doors
an iron bar.

DILLARD

See you in a week, boys.

OMITTED

Sequence omitted from original script.

INT. RAY'S CELL -- DAY

wall.
Ray slumps to the floor, propping his feet against the

RAY

Hey, Claude. I just want to say thanks
for coming back for me.

INT. CLAUDE'S CELL -- DAY

Just a
Claude considers his bleak surroundings. It's a small,
uncomfortable space, not even big enough to lie down.
tin bucket for a toilet.

CLAUDE

Don't mention it.

RAY

(off)
Hell, you'd probably be half way to
New York by now...

CLAUDE

I'm serious, man. Don't mention it.
Ever.

EXT. THE HOLE -- DAY

The sun beats down on the tin roofs...

INT. BUNKHOUSE -- CAGE -- NIGHT

money. The prisoners are gathered around a table, laying out

As usual, Poker Face is keeping tabs.

COOKIE

I'll take Claude to die on Wednesday
for fifty cents.

POKER FACE

Wednesday for two bits. And don't
forget you already owe me a steak.

BISCUIT

I'll take Claude for Friday. That's
my birthday.

the With an ear to his receiver, Radio slaps his money on
table.

RADIO

Weatherman says a heat wave's coming.
I say neither one of 'em son of
bitches gonna last past Thursday.

POKER FACE

I told you before, I don't take
pennies. Two cigarettes or one nickel
minimum. What about you, Willie?
Gonna get in on this action?

WILLIE

I got a crispy new dollar bill says
both of them gonna make it.

the This gives the men pause. Willie tosses his money on
table.

POKER FACE

Now that's what I call a bet.

GOLDMOUTH

It's a mighty long shot, Willie.
Nobody ever made it a week in the
hole.

JANGLE LEG

Not in August, anyway.

But Willie leaves the money where it is.

POKER FACE

Who else has some guts around here?

Poker Face makes notations as the betting resumes.

EXT. FIELD -- DAY

Trusties

Work goes on as usual for the prisoners of Camp 8.
keep their eyes peeled for slackers.

EXT. THE HOLE -- DAY

The brick shacks bake in the noonday sun.

EXT. FIELD -- DAY

men as

Biscuit moves down the line offering the ladle to the
they struggle under a crushing heat wave.

EXT. THE HOLE -- DAY

to

respective

Then,

line

Abernathy

Superintendent Abernathy strides up and gives the nod
Dillard, who unlocks the doors. Huddled in their
cells, Ray and Claude shrink from the bright sunlight.
slowly and painfully, they rise to their feet.
In the background, the incorrigibles gather at the gun
as word spreads that the fellows are still alive.
glances at the crowd with annoyance.

ABERNATHY

I don't think these boys have learned
their lesson. Let's give 'em another
week for good measure.

DILLARD

Sure you want to do that, sir?

ABERNATHY

Don't you ever question me, Sgt.
Dillard. When I give an order, you
jump to it, or I'll kick you and
that first-cousin you call a wife
outta that pretty little house so
fast it'll make your pin-head spin.

You got that?

DILLARD

Yes, sir.

shut
who

Dillard slams the doors on Ray and Claude and clamps the padlocks. Abernathy smiles at the incorrigibles, regard him with undisguised hatred.

AT THE GUN LINE

A somber Poker Face offers Willie a wad of bills.

POKER FACE

Well, they made it a week. Looks like you win, Willie.

WILLIE

Let it ride.

INT. CLAUDE'S CELL -- NIGHT

mush
corner,
it,
dish.

A slot at the bottom of the door opens. A tin plate of slides through and the slot closes. Slumped in the Claude reaches for the food -- but a RAT beats him to scampering out of the shadows and leaping onto the

INT. RAY'S CELL -- NIGHT

Ray

A commotion and wild screams come from Claude's cell. leaps to his feet, shouting through the wall.

RAY

Claude? You alright?!

INT. CLAUDE'S CELL -- NIGHT

Claude continues to stomp the rat.

CLAUDE

Can't take it no more, Ray! Die, motherfucker! Gotta get the fuck outta here!

We

Claude pounds against the door, raising a holy racket.
continue to cut back and forth between cells as needed.

RAY

Keep it together, Claude. You wake
up the man, he'll shoot you for sure.

CLAUDE

He'd be doing me a favor. I'm getting
outta here one way or the other!
Goddamn rats and shit! Fuck!

Claude continues shouting and pounding.

RAY

All right, man, just settle down.
We'll get outta here, Claude. We'll
get outta here real soon.

CLAUDE

How the fuck are we gonna do that,
Ray?!

to

Ray looks around his cell. Claude's pounding is bound
wake up somebody soon.

RAY

We'll just get off at the next stop.

CLAUDE

(stops pounding,
confused)
Say what?

RAY

That's right, we'll get off at the
next stop. The train's pulling into
the station right now.

CLAUDE

The hell you talking about? What
train?

RAY

We're in the Bronx, my man. Hundred
and Sixty First Street.

breathe

Claude focuses on what Ray is saying and starts to
easier.

CLAUDE

Hundred and Sixty First Street? That's Yankee Stadium.

RAY

Hell, yes, Yankee Stadium. Bombers are playing a double-header against the Red Sox.

CLAUDE

Red Sox... Who's on the mound?

RAY

I don't know. Who do you want?

CLAUDE

Allie Reynolds. He's my boy.

RAY

Sure, it says Allie Reynolds right here in the program. He's warming up right now. Man, we're so close to the field I need cleats. How'd you get such good seats?

CLAUDE

I know people.

RAY

They must be the right people. Whoa, there goes the hot dog man. Let's get a couple. Damn, that smells good. Nothing like a ballpark hot dog, huh?

CLAUDE

You get ketchup?

RAY

Ketchup? Who eats ketchup on a hot dog? Mustard's what you want.

CLAUDE

I can't eat it with mustard.

EXT. THE HOLE -- NIGHT

pauses
Dillard strides toward the hole, shotgun in hand. He
to listen to the argument, cocking an eyebrow in
befuddlement.

RAY

(off)

Give me back that hot dog. I'll eat it myself.

CLAUDE

(off)

What am I gonna eat?

RAY

(off)

You can starve to death for all I care. Now shut up, the game's about to start.

CLAUDE

(off)

Hey, man, is Babe Ruth in the lineup today?

RAY

(off)

Of course, he's in the lineup. There he goes right there. Hey, Babe...!

back

Dillard shakes his head, shoulders his gun and heads toward his house.

EXT. THE HOLE -- DAY

doors.

Abernathy gives the nod to Dillard, who unlocks the doors. Two trusties drag Ray and Claude out of their cells.

INT. BUNKHOUSE -- DAY

The men crowd around the windows.

RADIO

What's going on? Are they alive or dead?

GOLDMOUTH

Don't look too good.

POKER FACE

They're not moving.

EXT. THE HOLE -- DAY

light
feet.
Slowly, Claude opens his eyes, squinting in the harsh
of day. Summoning his strength, he staggers to his

CLAUDE

Hey, Ray...

helps him
Ray's eyes blink open. Claude holds out a hand and
stand up. They share a look. They made it.

ABERNATHY

(scowling)

Sergeant Dillard, make sure these
two are out in the fields first thing
in the morning.

tough
Abernathy turns on his heels. Dillard considers the two
guys standing before him.

DILLARD

Go on, get inside.

of
Ray and Claude stagger toward the bunkhouse as the
incorrigibles gather on the porch and help them in out
the sun.

DISSOLVE TO:

INSERT -- TIME PASSAGE

footage.
(Note: This montage is mixed with 16mm and Super 8

A beautiful 1940s song plays over.)

Empire
A. King Kong is machined-gunned off the top of the
State Building...

B. FDR introduces his New Deal...

C. The incorrigibles chop weeds...

batch
D. With Willie and Claude standing guard, Ray samples a
of moonshine from a secret still in his footlocker...

in
E. At the height of the depression, poor people line up
front of a soup kitchen...

cards
F. Ray and the crew sit around the poker table playing
and laughing...

mama
G. Ray opens a letter and pulls out a snapshot of his
which he places over his bunk.

H. The incorribles level a road...

Olympics
I. Jesse Owens wins the 100 meter race at the 1936
in Berlin...

abandon in
J. Benny Goodman sets the kids dancing with wild
the aisles of the Paramount Theater...

K. The Hindenburg bursts into flames...

L. Claude writes a letter, "Dear Sylvia"...

smiles.
M. In the juke joint, Sylvia reads the letter and
She shows it to a few other WORKING GIRLS...

sea
N. Adolf Hitler stabs the air in front of a foreboding
of Nazis...

O. The 1939 World's Fair opens in New York...

BOOM
P. Ray nails a sign to the side of the bunkhouse: RAY'S
BOOM ROOM. He steps back to admire the effect. Behind
him,
Sylvia and her friends mingle with the incorrigibles in
the
yard... Dillard takes his cut as Claude and Sylvia head
for
the tonk house. Ray and his date step up...

consider
Q. Lou Gehrig is honored at Yankee Stadium. "Today I
myself the luckiest man on the face of the Earth..."

outfit, Ray
R. With a pillow stuffed under a home-made Santa

and
ever

distributes chocolate to the incorrigibles while Claude
Willie decorate the saddest little Christmas tree you
saw.

S. The 1940 Oldsmobile is introduced...

T. Japanese Zeros bomb Pearl Harbor...

U. FDR declares "a day that will live in infamy."...

beach in

V. A WWII newsreel shows American G.I. s storming a
the South Pacific...

INT. MESS HALL (1943) -- NIGHT

up on
stripes,
new
Claude
Face,

The inmates of Camp 8 cheer for the American soldiers
a makeshift movie screen. Instead of black and white
the prisoners now wear blue twill. In an audience of
faces, the CAMERA FINDS some familiar ones. Ray and
are surrounded by their crew -- Willie, Radio, Poker
Cookie, Biscuit, Jangle Leg and Goldmouth. A decade has
passed.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY

years

A line of NEW PRISONERS stands before Dillard, now 10
older.

DILLARD

...Camp 8 is for incorrigibles, so
whatever you've done to get here,
believe me, we are not impressed.
You new men are probably noticing
that we have no fences here at Camp
8. We don't need no fences, we have
the gun line. It runs from shack to
shack clear around the yard --

be
ball.

Dillard pauses in front of a big country boy who can't
more than 18 years old. The kid is bouncing a rubber

DILLARD

What the hell you think you're doing?

The kid don't answer. An OLD GUY steps forward.

OLD GUY

Excuse me, boss. That kid don't talk. Something wrong with his head, just can't get right, boss.

DILLARD

Can't get right, huh? We'll see how long he last. Now, where was I?

HOPPIN' BOB

We don't need no fences at Camp 8, boss.

DILLARD

That's right. We don't need no fences, we have the gun line. It runs from shack to shack clear around the yard. You are now inside the gun line...

INT. BUNKHOUSE -- DAY

voice

Ray and some of the fellas are playing poker. Dillard's drifts in through the open window.

RAY

(mouthing along)

If you step outside the gun line without my permission, you will be shot. If you trip and fall over the gun line, you will be shot. If you spit, if you pee, if you stick your ass out and take a dump over the gun line, you will be shot...

He lays down his cards and rakes in the pot.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD -- DAY

Behind

Leg. On

RIGHT.

Jangle Leg pitches to Radio, who swings and misses. the plate, Goldmouth tosses the ball back to Jangle the sideline, Ray teaches three-card monte to CAN'T GET Claude paces nearby.

CLAUDE

I try to teach 'em the finer points of the game, share my wisdom, but I don't know why I bother. They don't listen, they sure don't learn...

Another pitch, another strike.

RAY

What you're dealing with here is a complete lack of talent.

CLAUDE

I'm sick of watching Camp 12 win the championship. Every year they get to roast the victory pig and we get dick. This year I want that pig.

Radio knocks a grounder up the middle.

CLAUDE

Alright, Radio, there you go. Who wants to hit next?

Can't Get Right looks at Ray.

RAY

You want to hit?
(to Claude)
Yo, Claude. Give Can't Get Right a shot.

CLAUDE

(skeptical)
Him?

RAY

Can't be worse than any of these other fools.

CLAUDE

All right, grab the bat. Let's see what you can do.

him
Can't Get Right shuffles to the plate. Goldmouth hands
the bat.

CLAUDE

Jangle Leg's gonna throw the ball nice and easy. You just go ahead and take a swing.

their
look
look,
mound.

Jangle Leg tosses the ball. Can't Get Right swings and connects with a mighty CRACK! The incorrigibles crane necks as the ball disappears into the sky. They turn to at Can't Get Right. Ray gives Claude a significant then tosses another ball out to Jangle Leg on the

CLAUDE

Okay. Let's try that again. This time give it a little juice.

ball.
incorrigibles

Jangle Leg nods, winds up and delivers a whistling fast Can't Get Right clobbers it. Once again, the track the departing projectile.

RAY

Told ya.

Can't Get Right smiles for the first time.

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION -- DAY

up

The men of Camp 8 paint a fence along the drive leading to the big house.

RADIO

I heard Camp 12 got themselves a son-of-a-bitch used to pitch for the Mud Hens.

GOLDMOUTH

That boy got a year for jay-walking.

RAY

Judge must have money riding on the championship.

CLAUDE

Don't matter who Camp 12 puts on the mound. All I know is when this season's over Camp 8's gonna have pork chops.

parks

Just then a U. S. Army Jeep swerves past the men and

MAE
her

in front of the mansion. Young CAPT. TOM BURNETTE helps ROSE out of the car. The prisoners stare furtively at long legs and curly blonde tresses.

POKER FACE

Looks like little Mae Rose has grown up.

BISCUIT

And out.

COOKIE

Mmm-mm, that girl's got gams.

CLAUDE

She's got it all. And it's firm and round and fully packed.

RAY

You shred it, wheat. That there is fresh water.

by

Next to them, Can't Get Right stares openly, mesmerized her beauty. Ray nudges him.

RAY

Be cool, man. You can look, just don't drool.

the

Up at the mansion, Abernathy and his WIFE come out onto porch, all smiles.

ABERNATHY

How was the honeymoon? Am I gonna be a granddaddy soon?

MRS. ABERNATHY

Don't pay attention to the superintendent, Tom. You're going to stay for supper, aren't you?

TOM

Afraid not. I'm shipping out this afternoon.

husband

The prisoners steal glances as Mae Rose kisses her new

behind
Jeep

goodbye. She gives them quite a show, raising her leg
her just like Betty Grable. Then Tom climbs into the
and pulls away.

all
smiling
turns her

Mae Rose takes a long glance at the prisoners. The men
look away -- except Can't Get Right who stands there
innocently. Mae Rose gives him a little wink, then
back and bounces up the steps.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD -- DAY

from
limber
the

A plump PIG roots about in a small pen. A sign dangles
a post -- "First Prize." The incorrigibles of Camp 8
up for the big game with the inmates of Camp 12 across
field.

POKER FACE

Think you can handle something that
big, Cookie?

COOKIE

I handled your mama, didn't I? Don't
y'all worry. I got plans for that
bad boy. Ain't none of him going to
waste.

BLOCKER,
stretches
a

Beyond the fence, a late-model sedan rolls up. STAN
in a straw hat and a rumpled suit, climbs out and
his legs. Irritated, he smacks a mosquito and exchanges
few words with Dillard.

DILLARD

Banks! Get over here!

Claude hustles over, removing his hat.

DILLARD

This is Stan Blocker. Scout for the
Nigger Leagues.

BLOCKER

Negro Leagues, actually. Pittsburgh
Crawfords. Ever hear of us?

CLAUDE

We get the games on the radio
sometimes.

BLOCKER

We played down in Jackson yesterday.
Heard a rumor you've got a boy up
here who can hit the ball a ton.

CLAUDE

You probably mean Can't Get Right.
That's him over there.

BLOCKER

Can't Get Right? That's the kid's
name? Can I talk to him?

CLAUDE

You can try, but you won't get too
far. Why you interested?

BLOCKER

Crawford's are always looking for
new talent.

CLAUDE

Maybe you didn't notice, but this is
a prison.

BLOCKER

There are ways around that. Right
sergeant?

Blocker winks at Dillard, then glances at the
incorrigibles practicing in the field. Goldmouth, Cookie, Poker Face,
Biscuit -- they don't exactly inspire confidence.

BLOCKER

Nice looking squad. See you after
the game.

Blocker takes a seat on the bench.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD -- DAY

Camp The inmates of Camp 12 are in the field. Our boys from

the
8 cheer for Cookie digging in at the plate. Ray taunts
opposition from the third base line.

swings
The PITCHER winds up and releases a fast ball. Cookie
and connects for a base hit up the middle.

IN THE STANDS

Jack.
Mrs. Abernathy and Mrs. Dillard share a box of Cracker

MRS. ABERNATHY

Of course, the superintendent's hoping
for a boy, but personally, I'd prefer
a girl.

MRS. DILLARD

Whatever it is will be a little gift
from heaven. Look at the way she
glows.

She
removes her sunglasses and coyly bites a fingernail
when she
spots Can't Get Right in the on-deck circle.

DOWN ON THE FIELD

ushers
Can't Get Right smiles shyly. Sensing trouble, Claude
shoulders.
Can't Get Right toward the plate, massaging his

CLAUDE

You're my boy, just keep what little
mind you have focused on the game.
If you hit that ball the way I know
you can, you might just be our ticket
off this farm.

sidelines and
appeals to the gods. The pitcher winds up and releases
a
fast ball. Can't Get Right connects with that familiar
CRACK!
Blocker stands up and watches the ball clear the fence
and
just keep going.

around
With his team cheering him on, Can't Get Right trots
the bases. But he's still looking at Mae Rose.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD (LATER) -- DAY

fire. The
Cookie slowly turns the pig on a spit over an open
trusty
incorrigibles are savoring a victory feast. As always,
guards keep an eye on things.

Claude. He
Off to the side, Blocker is laughing with Ray and
first,
takes a hit off Ray's bottle of shine. It's not his
either.

BLOCKER

Mark my words, within five years
there's gonna be a colored man playing
in the majors.

RAY

Come on, the world hasn't changed
that much.

BLOCKER

Maybe not yet. But it will. And I'll
be out of a job. Damn, that's some
tasty hooch.

CLAUDE

It's amazing what Ray here can do
with a couple of pounds of potato
skins and some molasses.

RAY

So, Blocker, what do you think of
our boy?

BLOCKER

I think that boy could be the next
Josh Gibson. I'm gonna talk to the
front office about him, you can bet
on that. Damn, it's getting late. We
got a game in Memphis tomorrow.

line.
Blocker starts for his car, parked just beyond the gun

CLAUDE

What about us? Don't forget to mention us.

RAY

We're like his handlers. He can't function without us.

BLOCKER

I'll put in a good word for you. You've done a good job with that boy. Thanks for your hospitality.

rumbles Ray and Claude's eyes gleam with hope as Blocker's car off down the road.

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION -- NIGHT

cries of Inside, a woman screams in agony. Then, the HEALTHY a new-born baby.

INT. MAE ROSE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

white Superintendent Abernathy paces anxiously in front of a curtain surrounding Mae Rose's bed. Suddenly, Mrs Abernathy staggers out from behind the curtain with a stricken look on her face. She tries to speak, but words fail her. Her legs go wobbly and she faints dead away.

ABERNATHY

Uh, doctor...

behind The DOCTOR steps from behind the curtain, drawing it him. He checks Mrs. Abernathy's pulse.

DOCTOR

She'll be fine. She just had a bit of a shock.

ABERNATHY

Is Mae Rose okay?

DOCTOR

She's doing just fine.

ABERNATHY

And the baby?

DOCTOR

(vague)

He's a big one.

ABERNATHY

It's a boy! Well, let's get a look at him.

Abernathy pushes past the doctor and yanks open the curtain.

Mae Rose is propped up in bed, looking exhausted.

ABERNATHY

Well, where is he? Where's my new grandson?

The NURSE turns around, cradling the baby in her arms. Abernathy gently pulls back the soft blanket. His eyes widen the with horror upon discovering that the newest member of Abernathy family is black.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY

Can't Get Right bounces his rubber ball off the wall, catching it on the rebound.

INT. BUNKHOUSE CAGE -- DAY

Ray passes around his latest batch of buck as the men discuss Can't Get Right's professional prospects. The thump-thump of the ball on the wall outside plays over.

POKER FACE

You really think they'll let him out of here just to play baseball?

WILLIE

Why not? Boy's got God-given talent.

CLAUDE

God may have given it, but Claude Banks spotted it and nurtured it.

RAY

Damn straight. I expect those
Pittsburgh Crawdads to remember that.

CLAUDE

Crawfords.

RAY

Whatever.

COOKIE

(glancing out the
window)

Heads up, here comes trouble.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY

his
appears
Mae
Dillard
Superintendent,
Abernathy drives his sedan up to the bunkhouse. All of
worldly possessions are strapped to the roof. It
that the Abernathys are leaving town. In the back seat,
Rose cradles her baby. Her mother sits next to her.
steps out into the yard to confer with the
then turns to address the inmates.

DILLARD

Alright, listen up! I want every man
lined up out here in the yard on the
double! Let's move it!

HOPPIN' BOB

You heard what the man said! Move
it!

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY

face.
front of
front
narrow.
Abernathy holds his newborn grandson up next to Ray's
Hmm. Scowling, he moves a little further down the line,
scrutinizing the features of each man. He pauses in
Claude, holds up the baby. Maybe. Abernathy stops in
Goldmouth. Holds up the baby. The possibility makes him
shudder. He moves on to Can't Get Right. His eyes

ABERNATHY

I know it was somebody from this

camp. I can feel it in my bones.

Then
revolver
Disgusted, Abernathy hands the baby back to Mae Rose.
he turns, walks back to Can't Get Right and places a
against his head.

ABERNATHY

Do you know who the father of that
little chocolated baby is?

Can't Get Right nods slowly. Abernathy smiles.

ABERNATHY

Well, then, who is it?

worst.
the
Up and down the line, the men brace themselves for the
Can't Get Right just grins. Enraged, Abernathy cocks
revolver. That's when Ray steps forward.

RAY

The baby's mine, boss.

Then
Claude steps forward.
Stunned, Abernathy lowers the gun and approaches Ray.

CLAUDE

He's lying, boss. I'm the father of
that baby.

two
Confused, Abernathy looks back and forth between the
men. Then Willie steps forward.

WILLIE

Actually, it was me, boss. I know I
may look old...

BISCUIT

Any fool could see that baby's mine,
boss.

COOKIE

I beg to differ. That cute little
rascal belongs to me...

POKER FACE

I'm the father...

RADIO

I'm the father, boss...

GOLDMOUTH

I'm the father...

JANGLE LEG

I'm the father...

Camp 8
Superintendent.
Disgusted,
revolver
engine,
time at

And so it goes down the line, until every last man of
has stepped forward to claim kinship with the
Even hard-ass Dillard can't help cracking a smile.
confused and thoroughly fed up, Abernathy jams the
into his belt and climbs into the car. As he guns the
Mae Rose gazes out the back window, smiling one last
the father of her baby. Can't Get Right smiles back.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY

full
gunline,
turn
blues.
bunkhouse

It's visiting Sunday and Ray's Boom Boom Room is in
swing. Sylvia's girls are everywhere. Down at the
Dillard takes his cut from inmates lined up for their
in the tonk. A FIVE-PIECE PRISON BAND is playing the
Nearby, Willie is dispensing Ray's moonshine from a
window. He raises a jar in a toast.

WILLIE

To Superintendent Abernathy. May he
have many more grandchildren!

grabs

The incorrigibles erupt in boisterous agreement. Claude
Can't Get Right and shakes him.

CLAUDE

What I want to know is where? When?
How?

WILLIE

Wasting your breath, Claude. He ain't
the type to kiss and tell.

mess
old
his
of

Just then, Rev. Clay and his daughter emerge from the
hall and start across the yard. It's a good thing the
man is blind because he wouldn't want to see how far
flock has strayed. The Reverend inhales deeply as one
Sylvia's girls passes nearby.

REV. CLAY

There's a sweet fragrance in the air
today.

CLAY'S DAUGHTER

The magnolias are blooming early
this year, daddy.

band
the
dances

Blissed out incorrigibles enjoy a last dance as the
downshifts into a slow, sultry number. In the midst of
dancers, Claude clings to Sylvia. Nearby, Jangle Leg
intimately with a YOUNG WOMAN.

has
helping.

Up on the porch, Ray refreshes Biscuit's drink. Biscuit
been crying and it shows. The liquor probably isn't

RAY

Don't take it so hard, Biscuit. She
don't mean nothin' to him.

BISCUIT

Hell with him. It ain't that.

passes

He pulls some folded sheets of paper from his pocket,
them to Ray.

RAY

These are free papers.

BISCUIT

(devastated)

What am I gonna do out there, Ray? I can't go home to my mama like this. I'll get the strap for sure.

RAY

Come on, Biscuit, this is good news. Your mama's gonna break down in tears when you show up on her doorstep.

Poker Face leans in.

POKER FACE

(sotto)

I'll give you three to one she gives him the strap.

Ray gives Poker face a shove, then turns back to Biscuit.

RAY

It's 1945. It's a different world now.

BISCUIT

Not for me, it ain't.

RAY

Well you can't stay here, Biscuit. This ain't no life for a man. Any one of these fellas would give their right arm to be in your shoes. I sure know I would.

PRETTY
polishes
bunkhouse

Ray hands back the papers and heads off to dance with a YOUNG WOMAN lingering nearby. Left alone, Biscuit off his moonshine and checks his reflection in the window.

BISCUIT

No life on the inside, no life on the outside...

he
dancing

He crumples the discharge papers and drops them. Then steps down from the porch and walks calmly past the prisoners toward the gun line.

about
to

Ray lifts his head off his date's shoulder. Something
the way Biscuit is walking suggests that he isn't going
stop.

RAY

Hey, Biscuit...!

keeps

But it's too late. Biscuit crosses the gun line and
walking, his eyes focused on the horizon.

TRUSTY

Man over the line!

turns

The band stops playing, the dancers grow still. Dillard
around and squints.

DILLARD

Goddamnit, Biscuit, get back here!

run.
draws a
from
blood

But Biscuit isn't paying attention. He breaks into a
Dillard nods to Hoppin' Bob who raises his rifle and
bead. But he can't pull the trigger. He lowers his gun.
Shots ring out from the shooter shacks. Biscuit reels
the impact of the bullets and looks down sadly at the
spreading across his ring-arounds...

pushes
without
their
strides
Biscuit's
him
the
the

Prisoners silently gather at the gunline. Jangle Leg
his way through the crowd and crosses the gunline
hesitation. Dillard indicates for the shooters to hold
fire. They train their rifles on Jangle Leg as he
toward his fallen companion. Jangle Leg gently lifts
lifeless body into his big arms and somberly carries
back toward the camp. The CAMERA RISES HIGH OVERHEAD as
prisoners make way for Jangle Leg to cross back over
gunline.

INT. BUNKHOUSE -- DAY

stoically as
Ray
Digest.

A dark mood hangs over the men. Jangle Leg sits
Radio fiddles with his receiver. Nearby, Poker Face and
play a listless game of gin rummy. Claude is thumbing
distractedly through a dog-eared copy of Baseball

RADIO

Hey, fellas, I got Chicago.

Radio
door.
his

But nobody can muster much enthusiasm for this news.

shrugs and drops down on his bunk.

Just then, Can't Get Right walks past heading for the

He's dressed in civilian clothes, his bindle slung over
shoulder.

CLAUDE

Hey, Can't Get Right, where you going?
Why you dressed like that?

Can't Get Right holds out a piece of paper which Ray
scrutinizes.

RAY

It's a pardon from the governor.

CLAUDE

Let me see that.

Get

The incorrigibles gather around for a glimpse at Can't
Right's ticket to freedom.

CLAUDE

Where'd you get this?

waiting

Can't Get Right nods out the window. Stan Blocker is
by his car.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY

line. Ray

Claude storms across the yard and stops at the gun

is a few steps behind.

CLAUDE

Yo, Blocker, what's going on here?

BLOCKER

Kid's getting out. I got him a pardon.

CLAUDE

Yeah, but what about me and Ray? I didn't see our names on that pardon. You said you were gonna put in a good word for us.

BLOCKER

I did, Claude. I mentioned you. I mentioned you both. But the fact is, pardons don't come cheap. The kid can hit. What can you do?

This hits Claude hard.

RAY

Let it go, Claude.

CLAUDE

I'm not gonna let it go. The man needs to explain himself. Makin' promises.

BLOCKER

Look, I am truly sorry about this. I'd like to help you...

CLAUDE

But you can't.

BLOCKER

At least the kid's getting out. Isn't this what you wanted?

Claude looks around as the incorrigibles begin to gather.
He's on the spot. Dillard approaches with Can't Get Right.
Claude looks into the big kid's eyes.

CLAUDE

(resigned)
Yeah. Of course it is.

Claude

Steeling himself to the reality of the situation,
gives Can't Get Right a hug.

CLAUDE

You show them Crawfords how to play
ball.

RAY

Make 'em throw strikes.

looks

Can't Get Right nods. He steps up to the gun line and
at both shooter shacks.

DILLARD

It's alright. You're a free man now.

opens the

Right

With

the

Can't Get Right steps across the gun line. Blocker
car door for him. But before he climbs in, Can't Get
reaches into his pocket and pulls out his rubber ball.
a smile, he tosses it to Claude, who snatches it out of
air.

BLOCKER

Don't worry, we'll take good care of
him.

Claude and

Mississippi

bunkhouse

Blocker tips his hat and climbs behind the wheel.
Ray watch Blocker's car drive off under a red
sunset. Slowly, the inmates drift back toward the
until Ray an Claude are left alone at the gun line.

RAY

One of the new kids said they're
farming those acres just north of
the swamp. He said he saw a crop
duster flying around the place.

CLAUDE

I'm not in the mood right now, Ray.

RAY

He said they keep it parked out behind
the barn. Can't be that hard to fly

a plane. Lots of people do it.

CLAUDE

They're called pilots! I'm serious, Ray. I'm not in the mood for one of your stupid, fucked-up plans right now.

RAY

I don't see you coming up with any plans.

CLAUDE

(getting mad)

My plan is on his way to Pittsburgh right now. That congenital idiot just got himself a pardon signed by the governor thanks to us, but we can't seem to do nothing for ourselves. Don't you feel a little disgusted right now?

RAY

Crop duster.

CLAUDE

I ain't getting in no airplane with you. I'm finally wrapping my mind around the concept. They threw us in this shithole for life. Don't you get it, Ray? We're gonna die here! Might as well head up to the cemetery, pick a plot and start digging.

with
lip.

Suddenly enraged, Ray hauls off and knocks Claude down a solid right. Surprised, Claude touches his bloody

RAY

My daddy died in prison. He gave up hope and hung himself. What you're talking about is the same damn thing. That ain't how I'm going.

CLAUDE

Maybe you're fooling yourself, Ray. Maybe you're just a chip off the old block.

RAY

Take that back or we ain't friends

no more, Claude Banks.

CLAUDE

Here's a news flash, Ray. We never were friends. We've just been stuck together for 12 years. It's been nothing but bad luck since the moment I ran into you. Every time I look at you I get sick to my stomach thinking about what my life could have been if I'd never bumped into Ray Gibson.

A hard look comes to Ray's eyes as Claude rises to his feet.

RAY

Better watch yourself Claude, before you say something you regret.

CLAUDE

The only thing I regret is the day I met you.

RAY

Well, if that's the way it is...

CLAUDE

That's the way it is.

RAY

Then I have nothing left to say to you.

Ray walks away, leaving Claude to nurse his split lip.

CLAUDE

You never said nothing of value anyway.

INSERT -- TIME PASSAGE

lays
bleachers...
the
off

A. In his Pittsburgh Crawfords uniform, Can't Get Right into a fast ball, sending it soaring into the

B. People dance in the street in Time Square, marking end of WWII...

C. Hoppin' Bob drops a package on Ray's bunk. Ray rips

to the brown paper to reveal a book: "So You Want to Learn Fly..."

D. Claude and Sylvia make love in the tonk house...

past a E. In the mess hall, Ray pointedly carries his tray table where Claude sits with Willie...

of F. An A-bomb explodes in the Bikini Atolls...

Field... G. Jimmy Stewart hugs his wife and children at the end "It's a Wonderful Life"...

Sure I. Ray runs full tilt across a field toward a barn. right enough, there's the single engine crop duster parked where he said it would be...

bunkhouse J. Claude and another INMATE repair a hole in the roof. They dive for cover as Ray's crop duster swoops low overhead and dips out of sight beyond the trees. A puff of smoke rises into the sky...

of K. Soot-stained, Ray is marched to the hole and shoved inside...

of L. Newly elected president Harry Truman holds up a copy the Chicago Tribune baring the headline "Dewey Defeats Truman"...

drive-in M. RCA unveils the first color television...

modern N. Cars pull up next to speaker poles in front of a receiver movie screen...

O. In the bunkhouse, early rock and roll plays on a 1950s radio that sits where the old vacuum tube

bunk... used to be. A YOUNG TOUGH now occupies Radio's old

his P. At the poker table, Poker Face slumps forward onto
men pile of chips, revealing a straight flush. The other
quickly fold...

silently Q. With a TRUSTY standing guard, Claude and Ray
past shovel dirt into Poker Face's grave. The CAMERA MOVES
gravemarkers -- Biscuit, Jangle Leg, Radio...

air in R. Marilyn Monroe's skirt rises on a blast of subway
"The Seven-Year Itch"...

back of S. Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to sit in the
the bus...

T. Elvis Presley creates a sensation on the Ed Sullivan
Show...

event of U. School children learn to "duck and cover" in the
nuclear attack...

one V. The inmates of Camp 8 work to level a road. Ray's on
side, Claude's on the other...

W. Prisoners mingle with friends and family on visiting
Sunday. Claude waits on the bunkhouse steps. His face
brightens when Sylvia appears...

N.C... X. Blacks sit-in at lunch counters in Greensboro,

Y. Kennedy is elected...

Z. OMITTED...

speech AA. Martin Luther King delivers his "I have a dream"
at the Lincoln Memorial...

BB. The Zapruder footage of Kennedy being shot...

run for
CC. American soldiers jump down from helicopters and
the jungles in Vietnam...
DD. Ford introduces the 1965 Mustang...
EE. The assassination of Malcolm X...
"What's my
FF. Muhammad Ali looms over Sonny Liston, asking
name?"...
GG. The CAMERA MOVES past more gravemarkers -- Hoppin'
Bob,
Goldmouth -- to find Claude and Ray silently shoveling
dirt
over another casket. Ray pounds a simple marker into
the
ground: Cookie. Briefly, they lock eyes. But neither
one
speaks and the moment passes...
HH. Go-Go dancers...
II. Mao Tse Tung...
JJ. Jimi Hendrix at the Monterey Pop Festival...
KK. TV's Batman and Robin battle the forces of evil in
Gotham
City...
LL. Black Panthers...
MM. Peace Protesters...
NN. The death of Martin Luther King...
OO. Robert Kennedy...
PP. Neil Armstrong sets foot on the moon...
World
QQ. Vida Blue rears back and fires a pitch in the 1972
Series...
EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY
On the porch, Willie, now in his 70s, sits in a
wheelchair
watching the ball game on a black-and-white television.

A

from

TRUSTY waits nearby. Ray, now in his mid-60s, emerges
the bunkhouse lugging a duffle bag.

RAY

Alright Willie, I think I got
everything. I'll talk to Dillard,
see if I can get up to the infirmary
and check up on you. Make sure they're
changing your diapers regular.

WILLIE

They'll be sending you up there soon
enough. And not just for a visit,
neither.

RAY

(leaning in)

I slipped in a couple of bottles of
my latest batch. Help wash down all
them pills they'll be giving you.

trusty.

YOUNG

the

paisley

He gives Willie a slap on the back and nods to the
The trusty wheels the old man across the yard where
PRISONERS mingle with WIVES and FAMILY MEMBERS sporting
fashions of the early '70s -- Afros, mutton chops,
prints and bell-bottom pants.

ACROSS THE YARD

waiting

each

Ray

hold

the

Looking old-style, Claude sits on the mess hall steps
for Sylvia. He catches Willie's eye. The two men nod to
other, an unspoken farewell. Then Claude turns to find
looking at him from the bunkhouse steps. Ray and Claude
each others gaze for a moment. Then Ray heads back into
bunkhouse.

YVETTE

(off)

Are you Claude Banks?

Claude turns to face YVETTE, a pretty young woman.

CLAUDE

Yeah.

YVETTE

My name's Yvette. Sylvia sent me.
You look just like she said.

CLAUDE

She's alright, isn't she?

YVETTE

Oh, she's fine. She's just not coming
today.

CLAUDE

Why not?

YVETTE

She got married last month.

CLAUDE

Married?

YVETTE

Real nice guy, too. Trumpet player.
They moved down to New Orleans.

Claude takes this in, staring off into space.

YVETTE

She always said that if you were on
the outside...

CLAUDE

But I'm not on the outside. I'm in
here.

YVETTE

I know she's sorry she won't be seeing
you anymore. Anyway, she wanted me
to take care of you.

CLAUDE

Take care of me?

YVETTE

You know, go to the tonk or whatever.

CLAUDE

I'm too old for you. Besides, I'm
not much in the mood.

YVETTE

Want me to come back some other time?

CLAUDE

(shaking his head)

Nice girl like you don't belong in a place like this. But if you talk to Sylvia, tell her old Claude said congratulations.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY

Dillard
windowsill

Claude stands at the gun line, staring across at the house. Mrs. Dillard places a couple of pies on the to cool.

CLAUDE

Whites-only pies...

Suddenly, he makes a break for the Dillard house.

TRUSTY

Man over the line!

Shots

Ray turns to see Claude dashing across no-man's land.

ring out from the shooter shack, kicking up dirt around Claude's feet as he serpentine across the field.

EXT. DILLARD'S HOUSE -- DAY

digs
fistful
PING all
of
drops

Breathless, Claude makes it to the kitchen window and his hand into the golden-brown crust, shoving a sloppy of pie into his mouth. More shots ring out. Bullets around him. Grabbing the pie, he darts around the side the building, out of range. Back against the wall, he down on his haunches, snarfing pie like a hungry wolf.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY

yard,
boysenberry,

A case of empty Coke bottles sits in the middle of the glinting in the hot sun. His face smeared with

steps

Claude finishes taking off his boots and socks and barefoot onto the bottles.

DILLARD

Comfortable?

CLAUDE

As a pair of fur-lined bedroom slippers, boss.

DILLARD

We'll see what those slippers feel like after, say, 24 hours. And if you step down off them bottles -- if one toe so much as touches the dirt -- one of these boys is gonna shoot you dead. Let's see. We need a special man for this job.

who

He takes a trusty's rifle and moves among the inmates, have gathered around. He stops when he gets to Ray.

DILLARD

How about it, Ray?

Ray glances at Claude, then back at Dillard.

DILLARD

I'll make you trusty right now. If that pie-eatin' son of a bitch falls off those bottles and you have to shoot him, I'll see to it you get a pardon. Hell, I'll personally escort you out the gate.

think

Dillard offers the rifle to Ray, who doesn't have to too long.

RAY

You don't want to give me a gun, boss. I'm liable to use it on you.

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- SUNDOWN

Barefoot,
apart

Ray's been given the same treatment as Claude. balanced on Coke bottles, the two men stand a few feet

on
breaking

facing each other. A trusty with a rifle keeps an eye
them. After years of silence, the tension reaches the
point...

CLAUDE

You're a sucker. I'd have taken that
deal.

RAY

Excuse me? Are you talking to me?

CLAUDE

I'd have knocked you off those
bottles, put a bullet in your ass
and be half way to New York right
now.

RAY

After all these years of blissful
silence, I almost forgot how annoying
the sound of your voice can be.

CLAUDE

I hope you don't think I owe you
anything. Because I don't owe you a
damn thing.

RAY

I didn't do it for you, anyway. I
just ain't no boot-licking trusty,
that's all.

the

The trusty tightens his grip on his rifle. He'd love
opportunity.

CLAUDE

I was sorry to hear about your mama
passing.

RAY

That was five years ago.

CLAUDE

I know, but since we're talking, I
thought I'd mention it.

RAY

We're not talking, you're talking,
and doing too damn much of it, if

you ask me.

They stand in stony silence. Then Ray starts to laugh.

A

long, low belly laugh.

CLAUDE

What?!

RAY

You sure looked funny running for those pies, bullets flying all around you.

CLAUDE

Bullets weren't the problem. That pie was too hot. Burned my tongue.

decade's

they

harder.

The two men start to laugh. Really laugh. Nearly a worth of laughter comes welling up out of them, and nearly lose their balance, which only makes them laugh

EXT. CAMP 8 YARD -- DAY

the

bring up

shot.

A trusty bangs the rap iron. Young prisoners pour from bunkhouse and line up for breakfast. Claude and Ray the rear, the elder statesmen of the bunch. By a long

DILLARD

Fourteen acres today and only 12 hours of daylight! Eat up and move it out! Gibson! Banks! Get your sorry asses over here!

Claude and Ray step out of line and approach Dillard.

DILLARD

Every morning I wake up praying that Ray Gibson and Claude Banks have died in their sleep and every morning you disappoint me.

RAY AND CLAUDE

Sorry, boss.

DILLARD

I stand before you a defeated man.
Try as I might, I can't seem to break
you. I swear, if they dropped a
nuclear bomb on this camp, you and
the cockroaches would be the only
things left. But starting today at
least I won't have to endure your
presence any longer. You've got
fifteen minutes to clear out your
footlockers. You're both being
reassigned to the Superintendent's
mansion. And I, for one, will not
miss you.

who Ray and Claude share a look. Then Ray embraces Dillard,
stoically endures the breach of his personal space.

RAY

I always wanted to do that.
(sighing)
There is so much love inside of this
man.

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION -- DAY

tea to Up on the porch, Claude brings a tray of minted iced
washes Superintendent Wilkins, who sets aside his bible and
down a couple of pills.

Ray, Before going back inside, Claude can't resist taunting
busy trimming a hedge out in the hot sun.

CLAUDE

Oh, yard boy, these pansies could
use some attention over here. Perhaps
some fertilizer would restore their
exuberance.

EXT. MARSH -- DAY

rustling a Claude and Ray beat the bulrushes with switches,
birds couple of pheasants from their hiding spot. As the
rapid take wing, Wilkins aims his shot gun and fires twice in
of succession. Both birds fall from the sky in a flutter

feathers.

OMITTED

Sequence omitted from original script.

OMITTED

Sequence omitted from original script.

INT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION -- DAY

takes

Claude fills Wilkins' water glass as the Superintendent
a bite of lamb chop and winces in pain.

WILKINS

Damn dentures slipping again.
Everything falls apart when you grow
old, eh, Claude? Time sure marches
on.

CLAUDE

Yes, boss.

WILKINS

You know, I'm fixing on retiring at
the end of the summer, gonna try to
enjoy what few years I have left.
What do you think of this place?
It's one of those new retirement
communities down on the Gulf.

peers

at a

Claude glances at a glossy brochure. From outside, Ray
suspiciously through the dining room window as he hacks
rose bush.

CLAUDE

Ocean views, palm trees, two heated
swimming pools and a golf course --
sounds a damn sight better than that
infirmary across the way where I'm
gonna end up.

Claude returns the brochure.

WILKINS

I apologize, Claude. That was rude
of me.

CLAUDE

That's alright, boss. Takes a lot more than a colorful brochure to hurt my feelings.

WILKINS

You been on the farm for quite a spell, haven't you?

CLAUDE

Over forty years now. Me and Ray Gibson out there.

view. Wilkins glances over at the window. Ray ducks out of

WILKINS

Forty years. That's a long time for any crime, even murder.

CLAUDE

It's a hell of a lot longer when you're innocent.

WILKINS

Half the men in this prison swear they're innocent. Don't you think that's kinda funny?

CLAUDE

You have to forgive me if I don't laugh.

think Claude pushes back into the kitchen, leaving Wilkins to this one over.

INT. SERVANTS' QUARTERS -- NIGHT

Ray and Claude are getting ready for bed.

RAY

You and Wilkins sure are getting chummy. You two planning on going steady, or something?

CLAUDE

He's just a lonely old man. He likes to talk.

RAY

Hey, I'm a lonely old man. I like to

talk, too. So why don't we start by talking about what kind of a plan you're working on?

CLAUDE

I'm not working on a plan.

RAY

You can't fool me, Claude. I know you got something brewing.

CLAUDE

Goodnight, Ray.

Claude punches his pillow and turns off the light.

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION -- DAY

comes
Lincoln
Claude
legs

Ray hacks a rose bush down to the nub. From the garage the sound of an engine turning over. Wilkins' 1973 Continental convertible lurches down the drive with at the wheel. He screeches to a halt inches from Ray's and climbs from the car.

RAY

What the hell are you doing?

CLAUDE

Don't touch that car.

off

Claude pulls out a hanky and buffs Ray's finger print the hood.

CLAUDE

Wilkins' driver's got the flu, so he asked me to fill in for him.

RAY

You haven't driven in 40 years, you ain't even got a license. Man's taking his life in his hands, putting you behind the wheel! Where you taking him?

CLAUDE

Greenville. We're picking up the new Superintendent at the bus station.

and
Ray scowls as Claude straightens his chauffeur uniform
heads up the path to the mansion.

EXT. GREENVILLE BUS STATION -- DAY

the
watch.
Claude pulls up in front of the station, steps out of
car and holds the door for Wilkins, who checks his

WILKINS

You know I trust you, Claude.

CLAUDE

Yes, sir.

WILKINS

I'll be right back.

with
and
of a
Grandma
peach
the
truck.
and
around
Wilkins heads into the station, leaving Claude alone
the Continental. All around him are the sights, sounds
smells of the free world. A woman rushes into the arms
man as he climbs off a bus. Across the street is
Dodi's Pork Rib Joint where Cookie never made it to the
cobbler. A young brother with a boom box walks by. In
street, kids crowd around the back of an ice cream
Then Claude catches his reflection in the car window
frowns. When did he get this old? Unnerved, he moves
to the back of the car and pops open the trunk.

RAY

(sitting up)

Damn, it was getting hot in there.

CLAUDE

What the hell are you doing in that
trunk?!

RAY

You didn't think I was gonna let you
escape alone, did you?

CLAUDE

I ain't escaping! We're picking up the new super just like I told you.

RAY

Then you're lucky I came along. Doesn't take a visionary to spot a golden opportunity like this. Now help me out of this trunk.

CLAUDE

You ain't getting out of that trunk.

RAY

Come on, man, I'm starting to cramp up here.

(Ray struggles out of the trunk)

We have the chance right here, right now, I say we go!

CLAUDE

Go where, Ray?

RAY

Back to New York for starters.

CLAUDE

And what will we do when we get there? I'm sixty-five years old, Ray. So are you. What are we gonna do out here? Get married, have kids, settle down? That boat sailed without us, man.

RAY

This boat's gonna sail without you, too. I don't care if I last one day out here. At least it's one day of freedom. Now gimme those keys.

CLAUDE

Forget about that. You run if you want to, but you're not taking this car.

RAY

Claude, man, I'm serious. Give me those keys.

CLAUDE

I ain't spending a month in the hole
so you can take a joy ride.

RAY

Don't make me take them away from
you.

CLAUDE

Hey, there's Wilkins!

Ray looks, Claude clocks him. Ray slumps back into the
trunk.
Claude stuffs Ray's legs back into the trunk and slams
the
lid.

CLAUDE

Who's driving now, bitch?

He looks up just as Wilkins and the new superintendent
exit
the bus station. Warren Pike's hair has gone grey and
he's
40 years older, but there's no mistaking the former
sheriff
of Natchez County. He still bears a nasty scar on his
cheek
from a wound inflicted long ago.

CLAUDE'S POV -- Pike appears as a young man in his
sheriff's
uniform striding slowly toward him.

Claude blinks and looks again. Pike has returned to his
old
self as he and Wilkins step up.

PIKE

(dropping his bags)
There you go, boy.

Oblivious, Pike climbs into the back seat. Wilkins nods
to
Claude.

WILKINS

Come on, Claude, time to go.

Claude snaps to it, grabbing the bags. He considers
opening
the trunk, but decides to carry them around to the
front

seat with him.

EXT. KITCHEN PORCH -- DUSK

Backs to the CAMERA, Ray and Claude urinate, presumably
off the porch.

RAY

You sure it was him?

CLAUDE

Some faces you just don't forget.
Warren Pike's is one of 'em.

RAY

I don't like it, I don't like it one
bit. We shoulda taken that car when
we had the opportunity. We'd be half
way to New York by now.

CLAUDE

We'd be in the hole by now. Hey,
man, you're peeing on my shoe.

RAY

I know. Simultaneously, they shake
and zip. Claude bends down and picks
up a bowl of gumbo, placing it on a
tray next to an identical one.

INT. DINING ROOM -- NIGHT

Wilkins pours a frosty drink and offers it to Pike.

WILKINS

Lemonade?

PIKE

I prefer bourbon.

WILKINS

I'm sorry, I don't keep any liquor
in the house.

PIKE

Well, fortunately, I carry my own.

Claude
gumbo.
Pike pulls a flask from his jacket and tilts it high.
enters from the kitchen with the two steaming bowls of

WILKINS

Hunting's been pretty good on the farm the last few years. It's one of the perks of the job. If you're interested, tomorrow I could show you some of my favorite spots.

PIKE

You don't have to twist my arm.
(digging in)
Say now, that gumbo has quite a kick.

WILKINS

Thank you, Claude. That'll be all for tonight.

CLAUDE

Goodnight, Mr. Wilkins. Mr. Pike.

WILKINS

Goodnight, Claude.

Pike nods coldly. Claude steps back into the kitchen.

PIKE

If you don't mind my saying, you seem mighty familiar with your house boy.

WILKINS

I believe in treating the convicts with respect, if that's what you mean.

PIKE

(sarcastic)
Respect? Well, isn't that progressive.

WILKINS

If somebody deserves respect, Mr. Pike, they receive it from me, convict or no convict.

Pike curls his lip with disdain before taking a healthy spoonful of gumbo.

EXT. MARSH -- DAY

Claude and Ray beat the bullrushes with switches. Amid

Wilkins flutter of wings, three pheasants take to the air.
two fires first, knocking one out the sky. Pike pulls off
rounds, playing clean up.

EXT. FIELD -- DAY

pickup Ray and Claude dump their game bags into the back of a
scrapes truck. Nearby, Pike drains his flask while Wilkins
sky. mud off his boots. The breeze picks up, clouds fill the

WILKINS

Well, that's a pretty good haul.
What do you say, Mr. Pike? Ready to
call it a day?

the Pike pulls a gold watch from his pocket and releases
gathering face plate. A familiar mechanical tune floats on the
watch breeze. Ray turns around slowly. His eyes fall on the
in Pike's hand. His daddy's watch. In Pike's hand.

PIKE

Yeah, it's getting late. I could
sure use a bath.

RAY

That's a real nice watch you got
there, sir. Fancy old thing even
plays a little tune.

PIKE

Yeah, it's special. They don't make
'em like this anymore.

RAY

Sure don't. Mind if I ask where you
got it?

PIKE

Why, my wife gave it to me on our
anniversary some years back.

Claude looks at the watch, then at Ray. Uh oh.

RAY

Must have been some time ago. Maybe
forty years?

PIKE

(eyes narrowing)
Something like that, yes.

RAY

She give you that scar, too?

Pike thrusts the barrel of his gun up under Ray's chin.

PIKE

I oughta shoot you for that comment,
boy.

RAY

Like you shot Winston Hancock?

Wilkins turns to see Pike holding Ray at gunpoint.

WILKINS

What's going on here?

PIKE

I'm afraid I'm gonna have to teach
this uppity nigger a lesson in
manners.

RAY

That's Mr. Uppity Nigger to you.

Pike's
barrel
points

Ray grabs the barrel of the shotgun and slams it into
face. Pike rolls over and freezes, staring down the
of his own gun now in Ray's hands. Confused, Wilkins
his gun at Ray.

CLAUDE

Cool it, Ray. You're gonna get us in
a lot of trouble.

WILKINS

He's right, Gibson. Put down the gun
and we'll work this out.

RAY

I'm gonna work this man's brains out
the back of his head.

PIKE

Shoot him, Wilkins!

CLAUDE

Don't shoot, sir. I can deal with this.

(cautiously)

Ray, buddy, you don't want to shoot this white man. See, you do that, they'll kill you for sure. And it's not that I like you or anything, but I've kinda gotten used to having you around.

RAY

He's got my daddy's watch, Claude. I always knew whoever took that watch killed Winston Hancock. And that was you, Mr. Pike.

PIKE

He's crazy. Don't listen to him, Wilkins.

WILKINS

Do you realize what your saying, Gibson?

RAY

That watch was the only thing my daddy ever gave me. It meant the world to me.

PIKE

Goddamn it, Wilkins, would you please just shoot the nigger!

RAY

He shoots me, I swear I'll take you with me! I just want to hear you say it.

WILKINS

Is there any truth to what he's saying, Pike?

PIKE

What difference does it make? Natchez was better off without Winston Hancock! Who cares if a couple of no-account bootleggers went to jail for his killing? At least the state of

Mississippi got 40 years of cheap labor out of the deal!

CLAUDE

Forty years of cheap labor! Gimme that gun.

Claude grabs for the gun.

RAY

No, I'm gonna kill him --

CLAUDE

No, believe me, I'm gonna kill him!

face.
passes.
same.

Claude yanks the gun free and points it right in Pike's Wilkins trains his gun on Claude. But the moment Claude lowers the gun. Bewildered, Wilkins does the

CLAUDE

I can't do it.

RAY

That's because you're soft. Gimme the gun.

CLAUDE

What'd you say?

RAY

I said you're soft.

CLAUDE

Don't call me soft, I hate it when you call me that.

points

Ray mouths the word -- "soft." Claude clenches his jaw, the gun and pulls the trigger. Click.

he

Pike smirks and pulls a small gun from his boot. But as raises it -- BLAM! Pike is hurled backward by a shotgun blast. Shocked, Ray and Claude look at Wilkins, his gun still smoking in his hands.

After a significant beat, Ray reaches down and gingerly

retrieves his daddy's gold pocket watch.

RAY

I believe this is mine.

EXT. SUPERINTENDENT'S MANSION -- DAY

of a
Wilkins
A gurney carrying Pike's body is lifted into the back
van by two COUNTY CORONERS. Nearby, a distraught
tells his story to a couple of SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES.

WILKINS

...I was drawing a bead on a bird
when Mr. Pike just stepped into my
line of fire.

DEPUTY #1

Where were the two convicts when the
shot was fired?

WILKINS

They were busy loading up the truck.
We got him back here as quick as
possible, but... I just feel terrible
about this...

INT. MANSION -- DAY

talks to
Ray and Claude watch through the window as Wilkins
the deputies.

CLAUDE

Why don't he just tell 'em the truth?

RAY

He knows nobody wants to hear the
truth.

back.
head
the
One of the deputies pats Wilkins sympathetically on the
Then he and his partner put away their notebooks and
for their vehicle. Wilkins heads up the steps and into
house.

WILKINS

Well, I think they bought it. One of
the deputies belongs to my church.

from Visibly shaken, Wilkins takes a seat, wiping the sweat
his brow with a handkerchief.

WILKINS

I realize there's no way... There's nothing I can say to make up for forty years... I'll have Charlotte prepare those pardon papers right away.

Wilkins winces and swallows a couple of pills from his
box.

WILKINS

Claude, mind helping me to the bathroom?

CLAUDE

(giving him a hand)
Sure, boss.

WILKINS

I'm not your boss. Not anymore.

EXT. PRISON CEMETERY (PRESENT) -- DAY

Jake looks at Willie expectantly.

JAKE

So Ray and Claude got their pardons, right?

LEON

(smacking him)
No, they didn't get their pardons, you dumb shit! If they'd got their pardons way back then, we wouldn't be burying them today, would we?

JAKE

(chewing on it)
Oh, right. Well, why didn't they get those pardons?

WILLIE

Old man Wilkins' never came out of that bathroom. Died right there on the crapper.

LEON

Just like Elvis.

WILLIE

Of course nobody believed Ray and Claude.

JAKE

That musta messed 'em up pretty bad.

LEON

What happened to 'em after that, Willie?

WILLIE

After that? Well, let's see. After that they got old. We all got old.

EXT. INFIRMARY -- DAY

Ray and Claude, now in their nineties, sit under a tree in the courtyard listening to a Yankees game on a transistor radio.

RAY

Nurse Humphries was checking my prostate this morning. I got an erection.

CLAUDE

An erection, huh? Haven't had one of those in a while.

RAY

Tell me about it. Scared me at first. Then, before I could figure out what to do with it, it was gone. Imagine my disappointment.

On the radio, the announcer voice rises in pitch as the Yankees score. Ray and Claude share a satisfied look.

CLAUDE

Sure would like to see the house that Ruth built one more time.

RAY

Well, Ruth shoulda built it a little better. Damn thing's falling to pieces. Gonna hurt somebody.

CLAUDE

What do you expect? It's almost as old as we are.

RAY

They oughta tear that shit down and ship them Yankees cross the river to Jersey.

CLAUDE

Remember what that place looked like on a sunny spring day? More beautiful than any church I was ever in.

TWO ORDERLIES push a DEAD BODY past on a squeaking gurney.

CLAUDE

Looks like old Jonesy finally got his walking papers.

Ray tips his flask in a simple salute.

RAY

Over to the morgue and up the hill to the cemetery. Never thought I'd admit it, Claude, but you were right.

CLAUDE

'Course I was right. About what?

RAY

You're the one who said that boneyard's the only way we're getting out of here. We're gonna join all the rest of 'em soon enough. Jangle Leg, Biscuit, Goldmouth, Poker Face, Cookie, Radio -- yes sir, pick a plot and start digging...

Ray closes his eyes and settles in for a nap. Claude turns to watch Jonesy squeaking away. Something about what Ray just said has given him an idea.

INT. INFIRMARY -- DAY

"Oprah" blares on the television. Old convicts linger about in various states of repose and decay. A young ORDERLY pops

the

to the music on his Walkman as he pushes a cart through
ward.

a

currency on
sizes and

Over at a table, Ray and Claude play poker with Willie,
SHAKY OLD JUNKIE and TWO YOUNG GANG BANGERS. The
the table isn't poker chips, it's pills of various
colors.

GANG BANGER #1

Two Percodan.

CLAUDE

I'll raise you.

GANG BANGER #1

What the fuck are those?

CLAUDE

Keeps your cholesterol down.

GANG BANGER #1

I look like I give a shit about my
cholesterol?

bullet.

GANG BANGER #2 takes a quick hit of cocaine from a
He notices Ray staring at him.

GANG BANGER #2

You want a bump, G?

RAY

I wouldn't be putting that shit up
my nose. That came in in somebody's
ass. It's like you're sniffin' ass.
Maybe that's your thing, but it ain't
mine.

shaky

Gang

Ray pushes his bet to the center of the table. The
junkie folds. Willie tosses in some pills and turns to
Banger #2.

WILLIE

Looks like it's up to you, stinky
ass sniffer.

Glaring, Gang Banger #2 flips a big pill into the pot.

CLAUDE

Thorazine? Well, that's a little
rich for my blood.

light
and

He tosses down his cards. The shaky junkie attempts to
a cigarette. The match slips from his trembling fingers
falls into his lap.

CLAUDE

Damn fool gonna set this place on
fire one of these days.

Gang Banger #1 folds. It's back to Ray.

RAY

I got three stool softeners left.
(to Gang Banger #2)
That oughta be right up your alley.

reveals
Across
She,

The remaining players match the pot. Gang Banger #2
his cards. Willie frowns. Ray lays down his cards and
victoriously sweeps his winnings into a paper cup.
the room, Nurse Humphries enters with a tray of snacks.
too, is showing the years.

NURSE HUMPHRIES

Who wants Jell-O?

oldsters
Ray and

The magic word. The poker players join a stampede of
in a clatter of canes, walkers and artificial limbs.
Claude are left alone at the table.

RAY

Hey, where you going? We got money
on the table here!

overheard.

Claude glances around to ensure that he's not

CLAUDE

You know, Ray, I've been chewing on
what you said this afternoon. I think
I got a plan.

Ray gives Claude a long look.

RAY

Are you trying to tell me after all this time you finally have a plan for busting out of here?

CLAUDE

Shh! Is that so hard to believe?

RAY

Don't tell me, I don't want to hear it. It's probably all fucked up, anyway.

CLAUDE

You don't want to hear it, you don't want to hear it. There's no shame in that.

RAY

It's too late for plans.

CLAUDE

Never thought I'd hear Ray Gibson say that. Hell with you then. You'd only slow me down anyway.

stands Ray turns away as Claude walks off. A DODDERING INMATE nearby slurping on Jell-O. His robe hangs open.

RAY

Hey, man, cover that shit up!

his Disgusted, Ray discards his own Jell-O. He pulls out daddy's pocket watch and checks the time. The little mechanical tune nags at him. He snaps the lid shut and considers the watch resting in the palm of his hand.

OMITTED

Sequence omitted from original script.

EXT. INFIRMARY -- NIGHT

window, The building is dark. But then, through a first-floor we see the unmistakable orange glow of a fire.

INT. INFIRMARY -- NIGHT

a
prisoners,
An ALARM BLARES as the place fills with smoke. Wearing
robe and slippers, Nurse Humphries runs among the
helping them out the door.

EXT. INFIRMARY -- NIGHT

pushing
the
see
Coughing and disheveled, Ray emerges onto the lawn
Willie in the wheelchair. As other prisoners evacuate
building, Ray looks around for Claude, but he doesn't
him. Nurse Humphries takes a quick head count.

NURSE HUMPHRIES

Is everyone here?

RAY

Hey, where's Claude? I don't see
Claude!

NURSE HUMPHRIES

Stay calm, Ray. We'll find him.
Claude! Has anyone seen Claude?

RAY

He must still be in there.

Grimly, Ray starts toward the burning infirmary. Nurse
Humphries holds him back.

NURSE HUMPHRIES

Wait for the firemen!

RAY

It'll be too late.

NURSE HUMPHRIES

You can't go in there, Ray! You'll
never make it!

RAY

I'm going in for him. He'd do the
same for me.

into
the burning building.
Ray shakes her off and runs up the steps, disappearing

INT. INFIRMARY -- NIGHT

Ray dodges flames as he presses into the inferno.

EXT. INFIRMARY -- NIGHT

watch
survive
erupt

Nurse Humphries, Willie and the rest of the inmates grimly as flames engulf the building. Nobody could this blaze. From the highway comes the siren wail of approaching fire engines. But it's too late. Sparks erupt into the night sky as the roof collapses...

EXT. INFIRMARY -- DAWN

local
through
couple of

Fire trucks pull away from the smoldering ruins. A REPORTER interviews witnesses. INVESTIGATORS comb the wreckage, making notes. COUNTY CORONERS pull a couple of gurneys from the back of their van.

EXT. INFIRMARY RUINS -- DAY

destruction by
finish

Superintendent Bill Burke is led through the a FIRE INSPECTOR. They approach the coroners as they zipping up two body bags.

BURKE

How did it start?

FIRE INSPECTOR

Probably old wires. The place was a tinderbox just waiting to go.

BURKE

I guess we should have torn this old building down a long time ago.

FIRE INSPECTOR

Gibson made it this far before he was probably overcome by smoke. From the look of things, Banks never even made it out of bed.

past

Burke watches solemnly as the coroners wheel the bodies
him.

EXT. PRISON CEMETERY -- DAY

fresh

Jake and Leon shake their heads and look at the two
graves.

LEON

Man, you really bummed me out. That's
a terrible story.

(looking at Jake)

Nigger, you crying?

JAKE

Hell, no! I just got something in my
eye.

WILLIE

It's alright for a man to cry once
in awhile. Just don't make a habit
of it.

LEON

Hey, Willie, what was Claude's plan,
anyway?

WILLIE

Nothing to it, really. Claude figured
they could steal a couple of bodies
from the morgue. They got a couple
of crackers working there don't know
their asses from their elbows. Then
they was gonna set fire to the
infirmary and make it look like those
bodies was them that got stuck inside.
Claude figured during the commotion,
it wouldn't be too hard to slip onto
one of the fire trucks and hang tight
until it rolled right on out of here
in the morning.

graves,

The young inmates share a look, then glance into the
then look back at Willie.

JAKE

What makes you think it didn't work?

WILLIE

I never said it didn't work.

the
Leon and Jake do the arithmetic. You can almost hear
gears grinding under the strain.

LEON

You trying to tell us that's not Ray
and Claude in those boxes?

chair
the
Willie starts to chuckle and sets his electric wheel
on auto-pilot, leaving the young inmates to guess at
truth.

JAKE

What do you think about that?

LEON

I think that old man lost his marbles
about a hundred years ago. Come on,
let's get this over with.

the
They pick up their shovels and go back to work burying
caskets.

INT. GREENVILLE FIRE STATION -- DAY

past
and
emerge
lockers.
The CAMERA MOVES PAST a FIREMAN hosing down the truck,
another group of soot-stained FIREMEN eating breakfast,
pauses in front of two lockers. A couple of FIREMEN
from the showers wrapped in towels and open their
They share a look.

FIREMAN #1

(to the room)
Alright, which of you hambones took
our clothes?

EXT. YANKEE STADIUM -- DAY -- WIDE SHOT

stream
singing
Scalpers sell tickets. Vendors hawk souvenirs. Fans
up from the subway and through the gates. Somebody is
"The Star-Spangled Banner."

EXT. STANDS -- DAY

hot
The
the

In the middle of a capacity crowd, a VENDOR fixes two dogs and passes them to a KID at the end of an aisle. kid passes them to the MAN next to him, and so on down line.

old,
City,
of
to

The CAMERA FOLLOWS the hot dogs from face to face, some some young, some black, some white -- it's New York after all -- and finally the hot dogs arrive in a pair old, calloused black hands. Ray passes one of the dogs Claude.

CLAUDE

I can't eat this.

RAY

Why the hell not?

CLAUDE

I saw that hot dog guy in the bathroom urinating. He didn't wash his hands.

Claude

Ray and Claude glance around confused as the wave rolls through their section of the bleachers. What the fuck? inspects his hot dog.

RAY

Just put some mustard on it and eat it.

CLAUDE

You didn't get ketchup?

RAY

Gimme that damn thing.

Ray snatches back the hot dog.

CLAUDE

What am I gonna eat?

Ray is suddenly young again.

RAY

Have my ice cream.

Claude takes the ice cream. He, too, is suddenly young again.

CLAUDE

Thanks.

They look at each other and share a laugh.

RAY

Hell of a day for a ballgame, huh, Claude?

CLAUDE

Hell of a day, Ray. Yankees are on fire.

Claude pops the top on his ice cream. Suddenly, they are both old again.

CLAUDE

No, this ain't gonna work either. It's half chocolate, half vanilla.

RAY

So?

CLAUDE

They're touching.

The CAMERA begins to pull back.

RAY

If you don't eat that ice cream right now, I'm gonna strangle you until you are completely dead.

CLAUDE

Yeah? You and what army?

RAY

Next thing, you're gonna be complaining about the seats.

CLAUDE

Well, if you must know, they could be closer.

RAY

Damn, I shoulda let Spanky Johnson
drown you in the river when I had
the chance.

"Pipe downs" etc. from the people around them.

CLAUDE

(glancing around)
I know you're not talking to me...

RAY

I'm sorry, he's on medication...

like
The CAMERA PULLS BACK as the arguing continues, just
the old days. MUSIC UP.

THE END