
MY DARK PLACES

Screenplay by
Jan Oxenberg

Based on the book by
James Ellroy

FOURTH DRAFT
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(M)

FADE IN:

1 INT. ARMAND ELLROY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1958 1

A run down studio apartment in a seedy part of Hollywood. But to ten-year-old JAMES ELLROY, it's heaven. DAD (ARMAND ELLROY, 55) cooks hot dogs on a hot plate in his underwear. Little James sits on the couch, paging through Daddy's girlie magazine. JAZZ plays on a SCRATCHY RADIO.

ARMAND
Gimme another dog, kiddo.

James BANGS the frozen hot dogs against the coffee table trying to snap one off. BANG BANG BANG.

JAMES
They're stuck.

ARMAND
(demonstrating)
Put your whole body into it. Whack it
against the wall.

James copies his Dad's motion. A frozen dog goes flying.

ARMAND (cont'd)
Thatta boy.

James picks up the frozen dog from the scuzzy unswept floor and brings it to his Dad at the hot plate.

2 INT. DESERT INN - NIGHT 2

JEAN ELLROY, dancing, flirting with a TALL, THIN, SWARTHY MAN in the smoky, tacky Desert Inn. She's high on booze. We see him only from the back and, obscured, from the side. Jean presses herself against him as they sway to the slow rhythm; she rubs her soft cheek against his neck. She's wild, turned on; she smells like sex. She wears her hair up in a bun. She has a stern look that heightens her sexuality. She's no floozy. She turns to a BLONDE WOMAN dancing with another man, a drunk man. They signal one another with their eyes. This is what they want. A night without responsibility or inhibition. A night to feel wanted.

3 EXT. DESERT INN - PARKING LOT - NIGHT 3

MUSIC CONTINUES. Jean and the Swarthy Man are laughing, getting into a car. The images are choppy, abstract almost. Her purse, his key chain.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN
I should get back.

SWARTHY MAN
Get back?

JEAN
Yeah.

SWARTHY MAN
I'll get you back.

JEAN
You know. For my kid. He's coming home early morning.

SWARTHY MAN
Uh huh.

She leans into him. She wants sex. Affection. Something. More.

4 INT. CAR - DRIVING - NIGHT

4

The passenger side vanity mirror. She fixes her lipstick. Tacky neon lights of the El Monte club strip reflected in mirror.

5 INT. DAD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

5

Hot dogs cook on a hot plate. Armand Ellroy sits next to his son on the couch; they're both reading.

ARMAND
What's happening in your story, son?

JAMES
No one can catch this mountain lion. He's smarter than all the people and he's the color of the rocks.

ARMAND
Blend into your surroundings. Keep a low profile.

JAMES
What's happening in your story, Dad?

ARMAND
(laughs)
Well, this lady is getting her pussy shaved.

(CONTINUED)

James reaches over to look at the picture.

JAMES
That's her pussy?

ARMAND
It sure is. Pussy. Snatch. Gash.
Beaver. Repeat after me.

He loves the outrageousness of it.

JAMES
Pussy, snatch, gash... beaver!

ARMAND
Hairy bitch whore.

JAMES
Is she a whore?

ARMAND
She's a hairy bitch whore. Let's hear
you say that.

JAMES
Hairy bitch whore!

This completely CRACKS UP Ellroy's Dad.

ARMAND
And what don't you ever want to be?

JAMES
Pussy whipped!
(smells the room)
Dad, the dogs are burning.

ARMAND
Shit.

Armand jumps up, pulls burnt hot dogs off the one burner hot plate. Little James picks up his father's magazine and thumbs through it. Dad comes over with a plate of burnt hot dogs for each of them. They look at the cheesecake girlie mag together - family dinner hour at the Ellroy's.

JAMES
I don't want to go back to her house
tomorrow.

ARMAND
Don't call your mother "her".

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

I don't want to go back to the hairy
bitch whore's house tomorrow.

Ellroy's Dad LAUGHS. Then pretends to slap him.

ARMAND

Be good, boy.

JAMES

I really want to stay here, Dad.

ARMAND

(puts his arm around him)
I know, champ. But go home - keep
your eyes open - get some dirt on her -
bottles, boyfriends, good dirt. Dirt
I can take to court.

JAMES

And then I can stay with you all the
time?

ARMAND

All the time. We'll have one great
big fuckin' ever lovin' never endin' -

JAMES

What?

ARMAND

Father-son picnic.

6 EXT. STAN'S DRIVE-IN EATERY - NIGHT

6

They pull up to a spot at Stan's futuristic Fifties drive-
in. LAVONNE CHAMBERS (25) walks to the car to take their
order. Her POV of Jean, gorgeous red hair disheveled
now, big fake pearl ring and necklace. She's laughing.
The man is silent.

JEAN

I'll have - what'll I have
(she's laughing, drunk)
I'm hungry but --
(to the man)
What do you think I should have? What
are you having?

SWARTHY MAN

(bored)
Don't know, honey.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

Okay. I'll have a sandwich. What's the flattest sandwich you got?

LAVONNE

The flattest?

JEAN

Yeah. Skinniest.

She looks to her date like he should be amused. He smiles but he's obviously still bored.

LAVONNE

(laughs)

Well, let's see. I'd say grilled cheese.

JEAN

Okay. Grilled cheese. And coffee.

7 EXT.-INT. CAR - ARROYO HIGH SCHOOL WOODED AREA - NIGHT 7

They're making out in the car. Quick, abstract cuts. It's rough. Ambiguous whether that's sex or coercion.

8 EXT. WOODED AREA - NIGHT 8

They're on the ground. A struggle. His hands on her throat. She pulls away. Her fake pearl necklace breaks. Pearls scatter. Her hair is loose now, matted with leaves. She tries to SCREAM. He muffles it with a hand on her mouth. He rips at her stocking.

On the ground: her broken pearl necklace. Her torn stocking. Striped with dirt and blood.

NIGHT FADES INTO DAY:

9 EXT. ARROYO HIGH SCHOOL WOODED AREA - DAY 9

A troop of Boy Scouts hike through the trail at the side of the high school. The lead Boy Scout stops when he sees pearls scattered in a line leading to a woman's body.

10 EXT. ELLROY EL MONTE HOUSE - DAY 10

The front lawn of a small, charming stone fronted bungalow. Crawling with police officers, detectives, newspaper and police photographers. Neighbors. ANNA MAE and GEORGE KRYCKI (late 40's) look toward:

11 EXT. STREET - DAY

11

Little James gets out of a cab near the house. He walks uncertainly toward the circus on the lawn.

Mrs. Krycki looks at DETECTIVE WARD HALLINEN.

MRS. KRYCKI

That's the boy. Oh my God, I can't say it.

HALLINEN

Don't worry, Ma'am.

MRS. KRYCKI

I'm just the neighbor.

HALLINEN

It's okay. It's my job.

They let him approach. James becomes aware of everybody looking at him. His face visibly hardens.

MRS. KRYCKI

(inappropriately upbeat)

James. Hi.

Now James knows something's really wrong. Detective Hallinen squats to his level.

HALLINEN

Son... is your father here?

JAMES

He's at the bus station.

HALLINEN

Son. There's no good way to say this. Something terrible happened to your mother.

A pause. James' face is a blank stare.

HALLINEN

Your mother's been killed, son. Last night. I'm real sorry.

He looks at the boy, expecting tears, ready to hug him. Instead James' stoic face breaks into a little smile.

FLASH! A photographer takes a picture of James, immortalizing that strange smile.

(CONTINUED)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Hey, kid. Look serious. This is going in the newspaper.

FLASH.

James is in the

12 WOODSHED

12

posing for the photographers at the woodbench, holding an awl and a piece of wood.

PHOTOGRAPHER 2

Over here, kid.

FLASH. James holds his enigmatic, stoic, amused expression, hamming it up.

JAMES

Hairy bitch whore...

FLASH FLASH FLASH.

ARMAND ELLROY approaches, pushing past a shocked Mrs. Krycki watching James from outside the shed; pushing past photographers.

ARMAND

(to the photographers)

You shitbirds get away from my boy.

Little James runs to his Dad who hugs him tight.

13 EXT. BUS ON PRIMITIVE FREEWAY - DAY

13

A run down city bus drives the newly built, unlandscaped freeway. Yellow smog makes the sunlight look sick.

14 INT. BUS - DAY

14

James and Dad. James looks back in the direction of the house, then turns and looks ahead.

ELLROY (ADULT, V.O.)

I knew I should cry. I knew tears should fall from my beady eyes.

He squeezes his eyes, trying hard to ring out some tears. And he does; a few begin to trickle down his face.

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED:

14

ELLROY (ADULT, V.O.)
 My mother's death was a gift. And I
 knew I should pay for it.

Armand puts his arm around James.

15 MAIN TITLE SEQUENCE OVER

15

16 EXT. BUS ON PRIMITIVE FREEWAY - DAY

16

FIFTIES cool cat SWING MUSIC conjures images of carefree
 bebop lindy hoppers, skirts flying, as the bus travels -
 in time and space - toward Los Angeles, 1995. (i.e.
 VISUAL EFFECT: as the bus gets closer to LA the
 landscape, the billboards, the style of the bus itself
 change to reflect the passing of the years between '58
 and '95.) Finally, the 1995 LA bus morphs into an
 airplane flying east across the country, into the blue
 sky and white clouds.

OVER the images, we begin to hear an English accented
 MALE VOICE,

HENRY STANS (V.O.)
 Mr. Ellroy? This is Henry Stans of
 Unsolved Mysteries...

HENRY STANS (cont'd)
 It's Henry Stans of Unsolved Mysteries
 calling again for James Ellroy...

HENRY STANS (cont'd)
 ... mother's murder in El Monte...we
 would appreciate a call back...

HENRY STANS (cont'd)
 Henry Stans, trying again. I've also
 spoken to your agent. Has he talked to
 you about us?

17 INT. BOOKSTORE - NIGHT - 1995

17

East coast. Winter. Forty or so fans listen to JAMES
 ELLROY, all grown-up, finish his reading. Six feet
 tall, hulking, handsome, wearing a trademark wild
 Hawaiian shirt, super intense dark eyes, sporting a
 "Hitler"-style mustache.

ELLROY
 "I saw: Plastic dolls sash cord
 strangled, dripping nail polish blood.
 Chris Staples publicity pix, semen-
 crusted. Barbie and Ken dolls going
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY (cont'd)

69. Crudely glued-on photograph faces. I said, "Just find Chris and save her."

(closes the book, looks up)

Hep cats, tell everybody you heard it from the Demon Dog of American crime fiction. The master of family entertainment. If your family's name is Manson.

Audience LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE. HELEN KNODE (42), lithe, long-haired bohemian, intensely intelligent eyes, watches from the side of the room.

ELLROY (cont'd)

Questions.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

You write pretty violent stuff about women. Does that do it for you? Turn you on?

ELLROY

Does it turn you on?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Sometimes.

ELLROY

Well, I'll do you a favor. If your hard-on makes you want to hurt a female, come on up here Daddy-O and I'll chop it off myself with my personally autographed set of Lorena Bobbit steak knives.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

No thanks.

ELLROY

Next question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Mr. Ellroy, I'm Henry Stans from Unsolved Mysteries - the man whose calls you've been avoiding. As you know we're doing a period piece on southern California unsolved murders and one of them is your mother's. I'm here to ask you to participate.

ELLROY

(real emotion)

Here's my participation - you keep
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY (cont'd)
your grave robbing, mother raping,
famous writer exploiting, general
purveyor of bad juju hands off my
mother. She's mine.

The audience CHEERS.

HENRY STANS
I understand. But, unfortunately, we
will be doing this piece, with you or
without you.

(he's walking toward the
front, toward Ellroy)

ELLROY
The only person who exploits my
mother's death is me.

HENRY STANS
(walking)
Do you remember this photograph?

He holds up an 8x10 of the newspaper photo of James at
the woodworking bench with the strange, sad smile.

HENRY STANS
I publicly challenge you to be part of
it, James Ellroy.

FLASH A photographer snaps. A fan? A media ambush?

ELLROY
Hey. No cameras.
("on" again)
Where are the sumo wrestling bookstore
bouncers when you need them?

CROWD is into it, LAUGHING, BOOING, HECKLING.

ELLROY (cont'd)
(gesture to Helen)
In their absence my brilliant, karate
trained fiance will take you out.

HENRY STANS
(good natured smile)
Sorry. But I'm afraid you'll be
hearing from me again.

HELEN approaches Stans.

HELEN
(re: photo)
Can I see that?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HELEN (cont'd)
(to Ellroy)
When was this taken?

HENRY STANS
(astonished)
You've never seen this before?

ON Helen, watching James, looking at the long ago photo.

18 INT. RESTAURANT/NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT 18

James and Helen at a table, after the reading. THE PHOTO
is on the table between them.

JAMES
(sings)
"Strangler in the night, exchanging
glances, wondering in the night, what
were the chances, she'd be dead and
gone before the night was through..."

HELEN
Do you want to talk?

JAMES
I want to sing!
(he does, making mock
"strangling" hand motions)
"Strangler in the night, two lonely
people, one was a strangler in the
night, until the moment when she said
her last goodbye, never knowing why,
death was just a glance away, a sex-
drenched, bloody dance away..."

People are looking at him.

ELLROY
Everybody!
(sings)
"Strangler in the night... exchanging
glances..."

He takes Helen's hand, pulls her up.

ELLROY
Dance with me.
(sings)
"something in her eyes, told him he
could have her..."

HELEN
James. James.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY
Call me "dog".

He starts to BARK at her. Then HOWL. Other customers look at them. Helen gets up.

Standing, Helen's moved the photograph of the young Ellroy aside to reveal a second photo from the envelope Stans gave them:

A fuzzy newsprint photo of JEAN ELLROY, in front of the El Monte cottage, in her nurse's uniform. It's a wide shot. We can see her nurse's cap; we can make out her tall, shapely figure against the backdrop of the cottage porch. But Jean Ellroy's face is an indistinct blur of photographic dots.

HELEN (cont'd)
Let's go home.

ELLROY
(re:photo)
Hey. You don't feel you're in competition with her, do you?

HELEN
No. Of course not. It's idiotic to compete with the dead. They can't lose.

Ellroy looks at the photo, SINGS and HOWLS.

19 EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

19

Ellroy, alone, smoking cigarettes, pacing near the empty swimming pool in the motel courtyard. It's the middle of the night. He flicks a butt into the empty pool.

Helen joins him, a robe over her nightshirt.

HELEN
Hi. Can't sleep?

ELLROY
The rugs smell. Like formaldehyde.
I hate it here.

HELEN
(after a pause)
Maybe you need to deal with this thing. About your mother. Not blow it off again.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY

Why?

HELEN

Because of the look on your face when you saw her picture. Because you haven't seen a picture of your mother in thirty years.

(beat)

Because you're smoking...

He flicks the lit cigarette into the empty pool. It burns on the dry turquoise cement at the bottom.

HELEN (cont'd)

Because you talk about everything, but you never talk about her. You're a crime writer, but you never write about the crime against your mother.

He lights another cigarette.

ELLROY

I never write about anything but the crime against my mother.

(turns to her)

Look. Jean Ellroy liked to drink and fuck. She got murdered by a guy she picked up in a bar.

HELEN

That's it? End of story?

ELLROY

She gave me a dog. Barko. For awhile I thought Barko was my real father. My mother fucked Barko and had me. That's why I'm half man, half dog. I'm a Mawg. After that, it's all a big, fucking blank. Which is what it should be.

(looks at Helen, intense)

I am who I am because I don't dwell. I don't do boo hoo numbers on Oprah. I do whatever it takes to get me from point A to point B.

HELEN

Where is point B?

Ellroy has no ready answer. He flicks his lit cigarette into the bottom of the empty pool.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN (cont'd)
Because I'd like to get there with
you. I really would...

Helen's look says maybe that won't be easy. She puts her
arm around Ellroy's waist. He flicks another cigarette
butt into the empty pool.

CUT TO:

20 INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

20

Ellroy and Helen flying west, each absorbed in their own
thoughts.

ELLROY V.O.
It had taken 35 years for me to turn
my attention from other murdered
women's bodies to the body, the face
behind it all. I got the name of one
of the top unsolved cases homicide
cops in greater L.A., the guy who
broke the Cotton Club case. I planned
to enlist him in my cause. I turned
Unsolved Mysteries to my own purposes.
I figured I'd placate my wife-to-be,
and get priceless publicity for my
next book. I was sure I'd find
nothing. I was wrong.

Ellroy looks out the airplane window at wisps of clouds.
VISUAL TRANSITION as day turns to night; 1995 turns to
1958, and we're back in:

CUT TO:

21 INT. ELLROY HOUSE IN EL MONTE - DAY - 1957

21

10 year-old James sitting on the couch, his eyes closed.

JAMES
Okay, they're closed.

JEAN (O.S.)
Keep 'em closed. Don't open 'em.

Jean Ellroy walks in the room, back from work, in her
nurse's uniform, puts what she's carrying on the floor.

JEAN
O-kay. Now.

(CONTINUED)

James opens his eyes to see a beagle puppy, female, sitting in front of him on the floor, peeing.

JEAN
(laughing)
No. Oh, no, girl. Bad. Bad dog.
(looks at James)
Happy birthday, James.

James is really happy. He pets and hugs the dog.

JEAN
You get to name her.

JAMES
Thanks, Mom.

JEAN
(wiping the floor)
Is this the kind you wanted? I got
her at the pound.
(to the dog)
I saved your life, little devil.
(to James)
C'mere, honey, sit down. You can
bring the dog. I want to talk to you.

James is immediately wary. He sits.

JEAN
You're ten years old now. You're old
enough to decide some things for
yourself. I want you to tell me the
truth. If you got to choose, who
would you want to live with now? Me?
Or your no-good, lazy father?

She laughs. The dog jumps up on James and licks his
face.

JAMES
(softly)
Him.

JEAN
What?

JAMES
Him.

Jean SLAPS him across the face - the side the dog isn't
licking. James falls off the couch.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
You're a lush and a whore!

She goes for him again. He ducks.

JEAN
(yells)
Who said that? Your father?

JAMES
I said it!

James runs for the front door, almost tripping over the frightened, peeing, YELPING doggie.

Jean follows him to the door, calls to him as he runs onto the front lawn.

22 EXT. EL MONTE HOUSE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

22

JEAN
James. James, stop. It's okay.

James stops half way between the front door and the street.

JEAN (cont'd)
Come on. I know this is all confusing now. Come on back here and give me a hug.

James doesn't move.

JEAN (cont'd)
C'mon. Let's hug and make up.

James just looks at her standing in the doorway. Then he turns, and walks out the front gate to the street.

CUT TO:

23 EXT. FORMER ELLROY HOUSE IN EL MONTE - DAY - 1995

23

JAMES ELLROY, all grown up, standing for the first time in thirty-seven years in the front yard of his old El Monte house. There's a new river rock porch but mostly the house is as it was so long ago: small and shabby with little pockets of hard earned charm.

A red-haired, Jean Ellroy look-a-like stands in the front doorway. James stares at her as the UNSOLVED MYSTERIES crew sets up all around him.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY STANS
(re: the actress in the
doorway)
What do you think of "Mom"?

The mood is broken as Henry Stans and an ASSISTANT approach. Suddenly Ellroy is "on".

ELLROY
She doesn't look cheap enough.

HENRY STANS
What would you change?

ELLROY
More cleavage.
(yells, to actress)
Hi, "Mom".

ACTRESS
Hi, "sonny".

Ellroy gives a piece of paper to the Assistant.

ELLROY
This is the 800 number I set up.

Helen approaches with a tall, weathered, handsome man in a suit. This is DET. BILL STONER, 58, big like James, but soft-spoken, with a penetrating gaze that belies his easy manner. Helen can see that Stoner is taken aback by the part of Ellroy's schtick he's overheard.

HELEN
(to Stoner, apologetic)
Well, that's him.

STONER
The guy in the shirt.

HELEN
James, this is Detective Stoner.

ELLROY
(shaking hands)
It's great to meet you.

Henry Stans returns with the ACTRESS PLAYING JEAN ELLROY.

ELLROY (cont'd)
Henry! This is Bill Stoner, from the
Unsolved Unit. The Cotton Club guy.

(CONTINUED)

STANS

Great! Could we interview you on camera? A little later?

Stoner's wary of this whole scene, non-committal.

Ellroy turns his attention to the Actress back on the scene, having been at wardrobe and make-up.

ACTRESS

Is this better?

Her dress shows more cleavage, her make-up looks floozier. She looks like an exaggerated, distorted version of the "real" Jean Ellroy we saw in the opening scenes.

ELLROY

Much.

STANS

Okay, you'll be on the porch. The boy is coming out the front door.

(to Ellroy)

Want to try directing a rehearsal?

He makes a "roll" sign to the handheld cameraman.

ELLROY

Sure.

(to actress, mock earnest)

Now in this scene, you see your only son and you say -

(new tone)

"Get that spike out of your arm right now, James Ellroy, and don't let me catch you sniffing my panties again."

Every time you think you've reached Ellroy's limit he oversteps it again. No one knows what to say. Then, Stans, smiling,

STANS

Maybe I'll direct it, after all.
Okay, bring in the boy.

EXT. EL MONTE HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY

They're shooting a scene with "Jean Ellroy" and her "son" playing in the yard. A smiling, maternal Jean Ellroy pushes her laughing son on a rope swing hanging from a banana tree. Ellroy watches, with Stoner, Helen.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY

Never believe anything you see on TV.
(turns to Stoner)
Have you thought about my offer? Will
you help me find the man who killed
her?

STONER

For a publicity stunt?

ELLROY

You'll be paid well.

STONER

I can take you to see your mother's
murder file.

Ellroy's facade can't hide a visceral reaction to those
words. Stoner's sharp eye sees it; his tone softens.

STONER (cont'd)

I checked like I said I would. The
file still exists. All of it.

ELLROY

Filed under "Whore Gets What She
Deserves"?

STONER

(after a pause)
You're a sad man, Mr. Ellroy.

ELLROY

Because my Mom was strangled?
(he makes a choking motion
with his hands)
I don't want your pity.

STONER

(smiles)
You should have let me know that
sooner.
(shakes his hand)
Good luck, Mr. Ellroy. I hope you
find what you're looking for.

ELLROY

(as Stoner leaves)
Wait a minute. Okay. Will you help
me out of pity?

Stoner looks at Helen.

(CONTINUED)

STONER
I'll show you the file.

Helen mouths a silent "thanks."

STONER (cont'd)
But, I have to advise you, Mr. Ellroy,
before you go throwing your money
around, 1958 is a cold, cold trail.

Stoner goes. Ellroy is left standing there for a beat,
with Helen, before he gets swept back into the production
activity.

24 INT. LAX AIRPORT - GIFT SHOP - NIGHT

24

Ellroy at the counter paying. He takes his purchases,
walks outside the shop to the airport concourse where
Helen waits with her bags. He hands her a bag of candy.

ELLROY
(mock movie voice)
Red Hots, baby. To remember me by.

HELEN
I think I'll remember you, Big Dog.

They walk to the gate.

ELLROY
Get a lot of writing done.

HELEN
I will.

ELLROY
This won't take long.

HELEN
It won't take long to solve your
mother's murder?

ELLROY
Hey. This was your idea. Sending me
into the forest to bring back the head
of a killer and win your fair hand in
marriage. Right?

HELEN
Not exactly. I just said find out
more about your mother.

(they're approaching the
gate)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HELEN (cont'd)
I'll be a three hour plane ride away.
I love you, Big Dog.

They embrace.

EXT. EL MONTE STREETS - DAY

Camera swoops down on Ellroy, driving his rental car into El Monte, down the main thoroughfare, toward the Hall of Justice.

ELLROY V.O.

The San Gabriel Valley was the rat's ass of Los Angeles County - a 30 mile stretch of hick towns due east of L.A. proper. When the '50's divorce boom was peaking, El Monte was the social hot spot of the Valley. You could hit the Aces, the Torch, the Ship's Inn, the Wee Nipee, the Playroom, Suzanne's, the Kit Kat, the Hat, the Bonnie Rae or the Jolly Jug. You could belt a few. You could draw from a big pool of at-the-ready women. The San Gabriel Valley was White Trash Heaven.

Ellroy stops the car in front of the Hall of Justice.

INT. EL MONTE HALL OF JUSTICE - CONTINUOUS

Ellroy stops at the Sgts. desk, gets directions, walks the hall to,

25 INTERVIEW ROOM ONE

25

where Bill Stoner waits for him. There's a big fat brown folder on the metal table. The label reads, in big red letters, "Unsolved", followed by a number, 2-483-362. Ellroy looks at it, then ignores it like the elephant in the room.

Stoner shows Ellroy a hardcover copy of Ellroy's book.

STONER

I read one of your books. All the cops are extortionists and perverts.

ELLROY

Good cops make bad fiction.

Stoner notices James won't look at the file. Tries to make him comfortable.

(CONTINUED)

STONER
(re: photo on book jacket)
This your dog?

James nods.

STONER (cont'd)
What's his name?

ELLROY
God.

Nothing more to say. Stoner sits down.

STONER
Mr. Ellroy, these crime scene photos
are graphic. Are you sure you want to
see them?

ELLROY
Yes.

James opens the cardboard storage box, takes out a big,
messy overflowing file. He removes the rubber band that
binds it. Disorganized papers and notes fall out.

ELLROY
This is a mess.

He starts to straighten things in his mother's murder
file, creating neat piles.

ELLROY (cont'd)
Look at this.

STONER
They didn't have computers back then.

Stoner lets Ellroy continue obsessively neatening the
file, then pitches in and helps him sort things in piles.

ELLROY
(re: fragile blue notebook)
What's this?

STONER
The murder book. Where the detectives
on the case would have kept a running
record. Those are suspect rap sheets.

ELLROY
(arranging, straightening)
No wonder those shitbirds didn't solve
this.

He pulls out the crime scene photos. Puts them in a
separate pile. Stops.

STONER
If you want, I'll go through there and
pull out the ones you may not want to
see.

ELLROY
No. It's okay.

The first photo is a two tone car in a parking lot. He
moves that one away. The second photo is a curb with
scuff marks - the scene where the body was found. He
moves that photo off the top of the pile.

In the next photo James sees his mother - lying on the
grass, dead, her head turned to the side, her dress
pulled up around her waist, her coat laid out across her
knees. Even in death, she's beautiful.

Ellroy is hit hard. He hangs on to a detached, technical
attitude, for dear life. He takes notes on a yellow
legal pad, writing in tiny, obsessive print.

ELLROY
This doesn't look like her.

STONER
Well, it's - her face is bloated,
probably, from the incident.

Ellroy nods, writes on his pad.

ELLROY
Okay. These marks on her body that
look like little bites - are those
post mortem or were those part of the
event?

STONER
Those look like ant bites.

ELLROY
Ant bites?

Ellroy writes this down.

(CONTINUED)

STONER

From her lying there overnight.

ELLROY

Her eyes being closed. Would that have happened naturally? Or do you think the killer deliberately closed her eyes?

STONER

I think that happens in 90 percent of strangulations. That their eyes close.

Ellroy flips to another view of his mother.

ELLROY

The way her dress is pulled up -
(he falters)

STONER

These pictures would have been taken just as she was found.

ELLROY

Okay.

(checks another photo)

This one's from a different angle...

(he writes, then)

I remember that dress.

(to deflect the emotion)

Okay, now tell me, what would they have done first?

(he smiles)

Those extortionists and perverts of the LA County Sheriffs Department?

CUT TO:

26 EXT. STAN'S DRIVE-IN EATERY - DAY - 1958

26

DET. WARD HALLINEN, the man who told James his mother was dead, pulls into STAN'S DRIVE-IN. Attractive CARHOPS on roller skates deliver trays to cars lined up at speaker stands, beneath the futuristic, Jetson-style Stan's sign.

27 INT. MANAGER'S CUBBY HOLE - DAY

27

Hallinen interviews a nervous LAVONNE CHAMBERS, the 28 year old carhop we saw serving Jean Ellroy and her killer.

(CONTINUED)

LAVONNE

I heard it on the radio. When I heard about her red hair, I thought - maybe.

Hallinen shows her a photograph. (we don't see it)

HALLINEN

Is this her?

Lavonne looks, her eyes show pain.

LAVONNE

She looks so alive.

HALLINEN

Well, Ma'am, she is alive in this picture.

LAVONNE

No. I mean just the whole way she looks. Like that night. She had, she kind of radiated.

HALLINEN

Radiated.

LAVONNE

Heat. She had a big pearl ring. Not real, of course. But, you had to be a certain kind of person to wear a ring that size. I remember thinking that. She must be a confident lady.

HALLINEN

Tell me about the man.

LAVONNE

The guy she was with, I would say didn't seem to appreciate her.

HALLINEN

You could say that again.

LAVONNE

I mean he looked bored. She was really up, probably had a few drinks. Even the second time they were here she was still up, really, really happy.

HALLINEN

They were here twice?

(CONTINUED)

NOW WE SEE A DRAMATIZATION FROM LAVONNE'S POV

We're roller skating toward a green and gray two tone car. An Oldsmobile. No, it's a Chevy.

We hear snatches of Lavonne's description over the picture of what she's describing, which changes as she revises her recollection. We see patches of Jean's face, even fewer patches of Swarthy Man's. The car drives off. Frustratingly, the license plate is completely obscured.

LAVONNE

The time? Must have been just after 2 a.m. Said they'd closed the Desert Inn and 2 a.m.'s last call.

28 INT. DESERT INN - DAY - 1958

28

The San Gabriel Valley's version of a happening night spot. Minus its alcohol fueled glamour in the light of day. Hallinen and Lawton interview MARGIE TRAWICK (36). She leads them from the bar to a stool near the front door.

MARGIE TRAWICK

I was sitting right here. I'm supposed to watch over the place.

She feels terrible.

MARGIE TRAWICK (cont'd)

(re: the Desert Inn)

Premier nightspot in the City of Divorced Women. So it's not just locals. The men, I mean. They come from all around. It's got that reputation. Plenty of 'em aren't divorced either. But, that's another story. I'm divorced. Eight years.

HALLINEN

Yes, Ma'am.

She sees he'd like to get closer to the topic at hand.

MARGIE TRAWICK

The redhead was attractive. I call it a Titian red. I don't know what you would call it. Very nicely dressed, a navy blue duster dress, matched her coat.

Lawton's writing.

(CONTINUED)

HALLINEN

You have a good eye for details.

MARGIE TRAWICK

I can see in the dark. I'm used to it. Anyway, there was another girl with them. A blonde.

DRAMATIZATION OF MARGIE'S ACCOUNT

HALLINEN

Her age?

MARGIE TRAWICK

Same as the other lady. But she had a pony tail which is trying to look younger.

HALLINEN

Was there anyone else at the table?

29 INT. DESERT INN - NIGHT

29

A subjective visual of the scene Margie is describing:

Margie is on a stool near the door watching a table of three people, Jean, the Swarthy Man (back to us), the BLONDE WOMAN (seen vaguely) and A DRUNKEN MAN, about 25. He seems to invite himself to sit down, almost falling off the chair as he does.

He asks Jean to dance. They get up and dance. Swarthy Man watches them.

30 BACK TO MARGIE BEING INTERVIEWED

30

MARGIE TRAWICK

The drunken man's name is Michael Whittaker. He's a regular. I don't think he could have done it, 'cause he got arrested for plain drunk that night. The other man, I have no idea.

LAVONNE (V.O.)

Dark. Italian maybe, or even Latin. Greek. Something like that. What they call a swarthy complexion. Thin face. Dark hair combed straight back...

31 INT. HOMICIDE BUREAU - TWO ROOMS INTERCUT - DAY 31

Lavonne and Margie each work with a sketch artist to create an Identi-kit portrait of the man they saw with Jean Ellroy.

They work separately, in two rooms, intercut.

MARGIE TRAWICK

His face is a little more sunken in,
the cheeks.

LAVONNE

Thinner lips.

MARGIE TRAWICK

More hair.

LAVONNE

Thinner hair. More receded.

MARGIE TRAWICK

Darker.

LAVONNE

Not that dark.

They produce two Identi-kit portraits. Surprisingly similar. The Swarthy Man who will haunt Ellroy's life.

32 EXT. EL MONTE STREET - DAY 32

Uniformed cops distributing "Swarthy Man" wanted flyers to local businesses. Posting them on wooden telephone and light poles. Left behind, all over, occupying, desecrating the sleepy, sleazy town: the Swarthy Man.

33 INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY 33

Hallinen and his partner JACK LAWTON interview suspects.

PERVERT 1

I just opened my fly to take a pee. I
wasn't trying to show it to anybody.

CUT TO:

PERVERT 2

I grabbed a lady's behind, she
couldn't take a compliment and I did
time in County on the beef. What more
do you guys want from me?

34 EXT. POLICE HEADQUARTERS HALLWAY - DAY (CONTINUOUS) 34

PAN ACROSS six more pathetic perverts waiting in the hall to be questioned. Anyone who can even vaguely be said to meet the Swarthy Man's description.

STONER (O.S.)

They must have interviewed every
pervert in the San Gabriel Valley with
dark hair...

CUT BACK TO:

35 INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY - 1995 (CONTINUOUS) 35

Stoner and Ellroy settled in, they've been here for hours, poring over documents. They both seem really involved in what they're looking at.

STONER

Listen to this one: they pulled in a guy - Jim Boss Bennett - accused of attempted rape on a woman he picked up in one of the clubs on the strip here - took her home, tries to rape her, she says okay but I have to move my car first so my husband won't see it from the road. She goes to her car, jumps in, his dog jumps in after her, growling and barking - but not at her - at Jim Boss Bennett who's running after the both of 'em. She and the dog take off, drive to the police station - and the dog leads the police back to Bennett's house where they arrest him. A hero dog.

(looks at Ellroy)

You like dogs.

ELLROY

But Jim Boss Bennett didn't kill Jean Ellroy?

STONER

The detectives back then didn't think so. Doesn't really say why.

Ellroy writes on his pad. Stoner watches him.

STONER (cont'd)

Had enough for today?

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY
(opens a wrinkled paper bag)
Contents of her purse. Lipstick,
matches, blah blah blah.

Ellroy acts as though touching these objects has no particular effect on him.

ELLROY (cont'd)
The usual. But, no wallet. No
address book found. What's this?

He handles a metal object, about 3 inches by 4 inches, an irregular square with a twisted part. It's got a number stamped into the metal.

STONER
(looks up the tag number)
They thought this meant something for
some reason. There's a lot missing
here. Does it mean anything to you?

Ellroy shakes his head, no. He surveys the room.

ELLROY
Okay. Before you leave me on my own -
You look at everything in this room -
what hits you?

Stoner takes a moment. Then, hunts for and touches the crime scene photo of Jean Ellroy lying on the ground. He tries to spare James having to see it again.

STONER
Her coat. The way it's draped across
her legs.

ELLROY
Let me see that.

Stoner does. Though it doesn't seem natural to him that this man wants to look and is so clinical.

STONER (cont'd)
That's unusual, personal. Either some
kind of trademark of the killer. Or -
your mother knew the man who killed
her - and he maybe regretted what he'd
done. Covering her up. Is a way of
caring about her.

ON Ellroy, finally looking away from the photograph.

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED: (2)

35

EXT. EL MONTE POLICE STATION - DUSK

Stoner says goodbye to a cop friend and leaves the building.

He stops when he sees Ellroy just sitting there in his car, staring out toward the darkening sky, his look far, far away. Unseen, Stoner watches Ellroy in this private, unguarded moment.

Then, affected by what he's seen, Stoner walks on, toward his own car, leaving Ellroy his privacy.

CUT TO:

36 EXT. EL MONTE HOUSE - DAY - 1957

36

Ten year old Ellroy walking back from school with his books, stops outside the house to stab the banana tree. Over and over again. Happily.

He walks into the house.

37 INT. EL MONTE HOUSE - DAY

37

James walks in - the front door leads directly into the living room which leads directly into his mother's bedroom. At the noise of James entering:

JEAN

Don't come in here, honey!

So of course James immediately walks to his mother's bedroom and finds his mother in bed with a man. Her breasts are uncovered. James stands there staring as his mother pulls a sheet over her breasts. James walks away without saying a word. Leaves the house.

JEAN (cont'd)

James!

38 INT. BATHROOM - NEXT MORNING

38

Jean is at the mirror after a shower. Her head is wrapped in a towel turban. She's in a her robe. She's beautiful.

We see whose point of view we've been watching her from: little James standing in the hallway, looking through the partially open door. His mother notices him.

JEAN

James? James. Come in here.

(CONTINUED)

He walks to the door.

JEAN

Come on.

(he walks in)

You saw something yesterday that may have frightened you.

(James says nothing)

I want to talk to you about that.
Okay?

JAMES

Okay.

JEAN

You may have seen my breast. And you may have seen that one of the nipples is gone. What happened is, they had to remove it in an operation because it got infected when you were a baby. It doesn't hurt or anything. It's fine now. So there's nothing to be frightened of.

She matter of factly opens her robe and shows James the breast.

JEAN (cont'd)

See? It looks a little different, but it's nothing to be scared about. Were you worried I was hurt?

JAMES

No.

JEAN

(taken aback)

Good. Okay, then?

JAMES

Okay.

JEAN

You shouldn't walk in on people like that.

JAMES

Okay.

James starts to walk out.

(CONTINUED)

JEAN

You're not gonna tell your father are you? It's none of his goddam business what I do now.

JAMES

You mean about the nipple?

JEAN

You know what I mean.

39 EXT. EL MONTE HOUSE - DAY 39

James sneaks away. Runs down the street, past Mexicans washing their cars on the lawn. Runs through the

40 STREETS OF EL MONTE 40

to the bus station. He digs change and lint out of his pocket. Gets on the bus.

41 EXT. LA BUS TERMINAL - DAY 41

James gets off the bus in LA. Walks through the terminal, past a newsstand where he rips off a comic book. Gets on a city bus.

42 INT. CITY BUS - DAY 42

Reading his stolen comic book, James looks happy as the bus gets to a seedy part of LA.

43 EXT. HOLLYWOOD STREET - DAY 43

James gets off the bus and walks to his father's apartment.

44 INT. ARMAND ELLROY'S APARTMENT - DAY 44

His father answers the door in his underwear.

DAD

Hey, kiddo. What are you doing here?

JAMES

She's whorin' around, Dad. I got the goods.

45 INT COURTHOUSE BATHROOM - DAY 45

Armand in a cheap suit pulls James, in a suit that's too big, into the big institutional bathroom. A couple of men in suits pee in the urinals in the background.

(CONTINUED)

ARMAND

Don't let your mother know we talked
in here. And especially not that
scumsucking shitbird lawyer of hers.

One of the men, a lawyer no doubt, turns, surprised to
see this man use this language with his young son.

JAMES

(offended)

What do you think I am, Dad?

ARMAND

Okay. You know what you're gonna say
to the judge?

The peeing lawyer turns around again. Armand gives him
the finger.

Jean Ellroy, dressed nicely for court, bursts into the
room, shielding her eyes from the men at the urinals.

JEAN

Excuse me, everybody. Sorry. Armand,
what are you doing with him in here?

ARMAND

What do you think?

JEAN

I think you're pathetic. Feeding your
own son your stupid lies.

MAN AT URINAL

Lady, do you mind?

ARMAND

You could get arrested in here, you
know.

Jean takes James' hand.

JEAN

C'mon, James.

ARMAND

He has to go.

JEAN

(to James)

Do you have to go?

ON James, caught between the two of them.

(CONTINUED)

45 CONTINUED: (2)

45

JEAN (cont'd)
I'll wait outside.

She leaves. The peeing lawyer is looking at Armand again. Armand gives him two fingers.

46 INT. COURTROOM - DAY

46

Jean Ellroy walks into the courtroom with her arm around an innocent looking James. They sit at one of the tables. Armand Ellroy walks in with his sleazebag lawyer, sits at the other table.

The Judge walks in, takes a seat, looks out into the courtroom. It's the "peeing lawyer". He smiles at Armand.

47 EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

47

Jean walks out with her arm around James. Armand walks out, pissed, arguing with his lawyer.

ARMAND
Can I just say goodbye to him?

Armand bends to whisper in his ear.

ARMAND
She must be fucking the judge.

CUT TO:

48 INT. ELLROY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT - 1995

48

Ellroy's on the phone, pacing, drinking coffee.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY

(pissed)

You sent me here. You wanted me to do this. I found out more about my mother. I saw Jean Ellroy lying strangled in the bushes at Arroyo High School today.

HELEN

Are you okay, Big Dog? You want me to come back out there?

ELLROY

Actually, I'm fine.

(changing subject, tone)

I'd like to get Stoner on board. I dig the guy. He's a fucking paragon of moral rectitude.

HELEN

You like that.

(pause)

Two men bonding over the body of a dead woman. It's classic.

ELLROY

Yeah. He hates my guts. I gotta figure out how to hook him.

HELEN

Well, if you can't - maybe she can.

ELLROY

Geneva "Jean" Hilliker Ellroy. The red-haired goddess who could turn Rock Hudson straight. The femme fatale who could make JFK a one-woman man. Pandora's box is open. Geneva sends her love, Helen.

(pause, genuine)

So do I.

Ellroy stands there, trying to keep the hurt, the neediness, at bay.

It's the former Desert Inn, where Jean Ellroy and the Swarthy Man danced before she died. We recognize it; enough of the details are the same. Now it's an all-Mexican night club. Ellroy takes a beat to look at the outside and walks in.

50 INT. VALENZUELA'S - NIGHT

50

Ellroy's sitting at a bar stool, staring at the dance floor. He's out of place and he draws glances - his Hawaiian shirt, his pasty white face.

Bill Stoner walks in, spots Ellroy, walks toward him. Ellroy watches him,

ELLROY V.O.

Most homicide cops were romantics. They blasted through lives devastated by murder and dispensed comfort and counsel. They met the sisters and female friends of their victims and succumbed to sexual tension hot-wired to bereavement. Stoner wasn't that craxy. Dead women fired up his imagination. He honored them with tender thoughts. He didn't want them to run his life. Anymore.

ELLROY

Thanks for coming.
(checks his watch)
You're punctual.
(to bartender)
Okay, Manuel.
(to Stoner)
I slipped him fifty big ones for the privilege.

The bartender changes the channel on the bar TV from basketball to the opening credits of UNSOLVED MYSTERIES.

ELLROY (cont'd)

Turn it up.
(lays another twenty on the counter)
Way up.

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES SEGMENT PLAYS

The sound of the TV fights the Mexican music from the jukebox.

ELLROY (cont'd)

Hey, that's my mamacita. Jean Ellroy back at the Desert Inn for an encore.

Stoner watches the Jean Ellroy actress intently, watches the "phony" little James.

(CONTINUED)

STONER
She look like your mother?

ELLROY
Not much.

STONER
You'll need photographs of her to show people. Spark their memory.

ELLROY
I don't have any.

They watch the re-enactment of the murder. Ellroy turns to an attractive woman at the bar.

ELLROY
That's my mamacita!

WOMAN IN BAR
That lady who got murdered? She's your mama? Oh, pobrecito.

ELLROY
It's okay.
(to Stoner)
You want to guess how many times Jean Ellroy's gotten me laid? Might rub off on you, if you work with me...

STONER
My wife wouldn't appreciate that.
Want a drink?

ELLROY
I'm 27 years sober.

He turns to the TV; the "bogus" scene where "Jean Ellroy" pushes "James" on the swing. He turns back to Stoner.

ELLROY (cont'd)
I've studied you, Stoner.

STONER
(oh, really?)
Have you.

ELLROY
You're a 53 year-old, recently retired homicide detective. You solved nineteen out of twenty-one cases in one calendar year. You broke the Cotton Club murder when everybody else
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

50 CONTINUED: (2)

50

ELLROY (cont'd)
thought it was dead. You aren't
corrupt and you aren't a drunk. They
say you have a righteous soft spot for
female victims.

(beat)
I'm a bumbling, ego-driven amateur.
You're the professional.
(re: the TV; more images of
"Jean Ellroy")
She needs you.

On Stoner, non-committal.

51 INT. ELLROY'S HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

51

Ellroy wears the same clothes; he's been up all night.
He's got ultra-neat piles of material related to his
mother's case spread out on every available surface.
He's got several decades old phone books open around him;
he's circling names and taking notes. KNOCK on door.

ELLROY
Yeah?

MALE VOICE
Police.

Ellroy opens the door. It's Bill Stoner.

ELLROY
Come in.

Stoner walks over to Ellroy's desk - already an
obsessively ordered Jean Ellroy murder display.

STONER (cont'd)
You do this? They talk about this in
forensics. Needing the world to be
orderly and under your control. Sign
of a serial killer.

ELLROY
Like I said, you people are full of
crap.

STONER
Sometimes we are.

Stoner straightens an index card in a pile - it was
sticking out a half inch. Next to the index card he sees
an old El Monte phone book - from 1958 - with a lot of
names circles in ink.

(CONTINUED)

STONER (cont'd)
Where'd you get this?

ELLROY
El Monte Historical Society.

STONER
They let these go out?

Ellroy shrugs, smiles.

ELLROY
You gonna arrest me?

STONER
(picks up the paper Ellroy's
writing on, reads)
Alioto, John; Arancia, Anthony,
Baglioni, Mario... what the hell is
this?

ELLROY
Swarthy Man may have been Italian.

STONER
(reads)
Del Vecchio, Robert...
(to Ellroy)
You're insane. You're gonna look up
every Italian in El Monte in 1958?

ELLROY
I'm thorough. And, by the way, serial
killers bore me to death.

STONER
Okay. Here are my conditions.
No calling your mother a "whore" in
front of witnesses. If we do this,
we'll be dredging up the past for some
elderly people. I'm not gonna sit
there and listen to you call your
mother a slut in front of them. And -
if we ever do find a real suspect -
and he's alive - it goes right to the
police. Let's say you're absolutely
convinced he's our guy. But he'll
never be convicted in a court of law.
What do you do?

After a pause.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY

Kill the bastard. Yank him out of his wheelchair, rip his shriveled balls off and strangle him with his oxygen hose.

(Stoner says nothing)

C'mon. Can't you take a joke?

STONER

I talked it over with my wife and we decided to put your money in an escrow account. That way if things don't work out with me and you, I can give your money back. Clean.

ELLROY

You're putting me in escrow?

STONER

You want to look at it that way, fine.

(beat)

I'm not doing this for you. I'm doing it for her.

ELLROY

(after a pause, hands Stoner
the phone book)

I'm up to the E's.

Stoner tosses the book.

ELLROY (cont'd)

Well, where would you start?

STONER

A little closer to home. Tell me about your father.

CUT TO:

52 INT. EL MONTE POLICE STATION - DAY - 1958

52

DET. WARD HALLINEN (43), the man who told James his mother was killed, and his partner, JACK LAWTON (36), question James.

James sits, swinging one leg back and forth, annoyingly scraping the linoleum, Hallinen and Lawton interview him.

HALLINEN

You want a candy bar?

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

No.
(bravado)
Am I a suspect?

HALLINEN

(this kid is weird)
No, son. Of course not.

JAMES

(trying for cool, but it's
his real question)
What about my father?

HALLINEN

He was with you. Wasn't he?

JAMES

Yeah. But - you don't think he hired
somebody to do it, or anything. Do
you?

LAWTON

Do you?

JAMES

(adamant)
No!

HALLINEN

'Course not, James. That's not the
way it happened. We know that.

Hallinen and Lawton exchange a look. It's too early for
them to know anything, but they're not gonna tell the
motherless kid.

LAWTON

But your mother and your Daddy didn't
get along, did they?

JAMES

(major untruth)
I don't know.

HALLINEN

What time did you go to sleep that
night, James?

JAMES

I don't know. We watched the whole
fight card.

(CONTINUED)

HALLINEN

Is it possible your Dad could have gone out while you were asleep? You know, gone to the store?

JAMES

My father doesn't even have a car!

HALLINEN

Okay. Okay. We know he didn't do it. James, did your mother have any boyfriends? Men who called your mother or she went out on dates with?

JAMES

(depressed)

I don't know their names. And I was supposed to be getting them for my father too.

HALLINEN

It's okay, kid. I'm sure he understands.

(reaches in his pocket)

Hey. This Mars bar's melting.

He hands it to James.

JAMES

(softly)

Thanks.

CUT TO:

53 EXT.-INT. CAR ON SAN BERNADINO FREEWAY - DAY - 1995 53

Stoner drives his retirement present, a Chrysler convertible. Ellroy's in the passenger seat.

STONER

You're driving the Body Dump Expressway. That's what we call it.

ELLROY

Just the 134?

STONER

All of them. Freeways are the southern California victim drop zone of choice. I hate 'em. One thing I swore was, once I retired, I'd never drive these freeways again.

(CONTINUED)

After a pause.

ELLROY
Want me to drive?

Stoner just smiles.

ELLROY (cont'd)
Mind if we keep the top up next time?

STONER
Why?

ELLROY
I like temperature controlled,
contained environments.

STONER
That why you went to county jail so
often?

ELLROY
How do you know about that?

STONER
I looked up your rap sheet.
(off Ellroy's look)
Just on a hunch. I'm thorough too.
Open the glove compartment.

Ellroy does. Pulls out his rap sheet, featuring a mug
shot from 1965. He's a pimply faced, long-haired, loser.

ELLROY
Fuck.

STONER
You look like a clown. All penny ante
stuff too. B&E's, drunk, drunk,
drunk, shoplifting, indecent exposure.
How come you're still alive?

ELLROY
Dead women and a swarthy man saved my
life. When we find the guy, before I
fry him, I'm gonna shake his hand.

Stoner pulls over.

ELLROY (cont'd)
You gonna put the top up?

(CONTINUED)

STONER

Get out.

ELLROY

Why?

STONER

Out of the car!

He gets out of the car; Ellroy gets out too.

STONER (cont'd)

You little snotnose brat. I'm not taking you to see the man who tried to solve your mother's murder and have you tell him that!

(in his face)

I still wake up in a cold sweat thinking of some of my victims. And I ask myself if I did everything that could have been done.

ELLROY

You want to turn around? Turn around.

STONER

I'm not turning around. You know why? Because your mother deserves justice and she deserves better than you. So now - get back in the car

(he nudges Ellroy into the car)

And you are going to keep your big mouth shut. Until I say you can open it. You're going to watch me and listen to me and try to learn from me.

Ellroy starts to speak.

STONER (cont'd)

Get in!

Ellroy gets in. Doesn't speak. Stoner gets in. Starts to drive again. After a pause,

ELLROY

(a major concession)

You can keep the top down.

Stoner just looks at him. Drives. Then,

(CONTINUED)

STONER

Karen Reilly was a body dump on this road. Nice girl from a nice family. We had to I.D. her from her jewelry. She got caught on the wrong side of being stupid, rebellious and nineteen. A year later, maybe she'd have been over that.

(looks at Ellroy)

Stupid, rebellious girls have limited life spans. The world favors stupid, rebellious boys. Like you.

Stoner's look says he thinks that's unfortunate. He catches the freeway sign. Heads for the exit.

54 EXT. WARD HALLINEN'S HOUSE - DAY

54

A faux-ranch house surrounded by shade trees on a big plot of land. There's a barn off to the side; two horses graze.

A very frail Ward Hallinen (83) waits for Ellroy and Stoner to approach.

STONER

Ward Hallinen? I'm Bill Stoner and this is James Ellroy. He's all grown up now.

Stoner's warning look at Ellroy says, you better be.

ELLROY

You gave me a candy bar. That day. I can still taste it.

Ellroy looks at Stoner like, I talked, okay?

HALLINEN

Did I? I don't recall it.

And they're in the

55 KITCHEN

55

STONER

We found out your old partner Jack Lawton passed away.

HALLINEN

Oh, yeah. Lawton. Harry Andre. Claude Everley. Blackie McGowan. Ray Hopkinson. Captain Etzel. All dead.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HALLINEN (cont'd)
(looks at Stoner)
How old are you?

STONER
Fifty-eight.

Hallinen LAUGHS. No one knows quite what to do.

HALLINEN
So, you think I didn't do a very good
job, is that it?

STONER
No, that's not it at all.

HALLINEN
Well, I'll try to help now as best as
I can.

STONER
We thought these might jog your
memory.

Ellroy pulls out the crime scene photos of his mother,
lays them out on the kitchen table. Hallinen glances at
the photos, looks at Ellroy.

HALLINEN
("how could you?")
You carry these things around?

ELLROY
Lots of people carry pictures of their
mother.

Stoner gives him a warning look. Ellroy shuts up.

STONER
(sober)
That's Arroyo High School. June,
1958. Mrs. Ellroy was found in the
bushes. Strangled. With her own
stocking. I have some mug shots of
suspects.
(hands them over)
Do any of these raise a memory?

Hallinen stares at them hard, starts to sweat with the
effort. Grips the table. He's frustrated.

HALLINEN
One of these guys did it?

(CONTINUED)

STONER

We don't know.

HALLINEN

I remember the old El Monte police chief. He had one green eye and one brown.

STONER

(hands Hallinen the blue murder book)

You talk about these suspects in your original case reports. You want to flip through them, see if it jogs anything?

HALLINEN

(opens the book, smiles)

That's my handwriting.

(turning pages)

I remember the stenographer.

Margaret. She was divorced.

(looks at Ellroy)

Like your mother, right?

ELLROY

Yes!

HALLINEN

But it wasn't your father who did it?

We were definite about that?

Ellroy looks to Stoner for permission to speak.

ELLROY

It wasn't him. All my relatives thought it was but they just hated his guts.

Hallinen just looks confused.

STONER

Det. Hallinen, did you keep a personal case notebook? I know we used to - something to write quick impressions, questions. Not the official record but...

HALLINEN

Oh, yes. I had that. Threw 'em all away two years ago.

Ellroy's disappointment/annoyance shows on his face.

(CONTINUED)

HALLINEN
(to Ellroy)
I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I wish I'd
nailed the bastard.

Hallinen smiles, lovingly, at Ellroy. He has no barriers to his emotions. Ellroy is all barriers. Hallinen spooks Ellroy with his kind smile. He lifts his frail hand and puts it on top of Ellroy's. Ellroy freezes. Hallinen's eyes tear up. Snot runs out of his nose. Ellroy withdraws his hand, but says kindly,

ELLROY
Thanks for all your hard work,
Detective Hallinen.

HALLINEN
(enjoying the memory)
Detective.

56 EXT. HALLINEN'S HOUSE - DAY

56

Stoner and Ellroy leaving, walking to the car. The mood is hushed. Ellroy finally speaks.

ELLROY
I hope they shoot me before I end up
like that. At least he didn't drool
on the crime scene pics.

Stoner just walks on ahead. Then he turns back.

STONER
What I'm trying to figure is which
one's the act. You being an asshole?
Or you being a normal person?

He walks ahead.

ELLROY
You don't know anything about it.

Stoner gets to the car.

STONER
Tell me. You're our best witness.
Solving this case is gonna be about
solving the mystery of your mother's
life. Why did she move you to El
Monte? Was she running from someone?
Who were her close friends? Who was
the blonde? What did she like to eat,
what music moved her, what did she do
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

STONER (cont'd)
at her job, did she piss off anybody?
Details. Lowly, boring details.

Mrs. Hallinen comes out onto the lawn, knocks on the car window. Ellroy rolls down his window.

MRS. HALLINEN
Ward said to tell you.

ELLROY
Yes?

MRS. HALLINEN
He remembered something about the neighbor.
(they're waiting)
The neighbor wore a wig.

ELLROY
Mrs. Krycki?

MRS. HALLINEN
And she lied.

ELLROY
About the wig?

MRS. HALLINEN
That's all he said. He thought the neighbor wore a wig. And she lied.

CUT TO:

57 EXT. EL MONTE HOUSE - DAY - 1958

57

Armand, James and Barko walk from the now empty house to the yard where they're met by Mrs. Krycki. Armand carries a big cardboard box. James carries a boy-sized cardboard box.

ARMAND
Did she owe anything on the rent? We got that squared away?

MRS. KRYCKI
Rent's paid up. She should get a refund, I guess.

ARMAND
Oh. On the security deposit?

MRS. KRYCKI
Well. I did have to take out fifty dollars from the deposit for the tree.

(CONTINUED)

ARMAND
What about the tree?

Little James knows just what she's talking about. He walks to the side to hide his evil little smile.

MRS. KRYCKI
The boy liked to stab it. And kick it.

ARMAND
(privately amused)
My boy?

MRS. KRYCKI
Yes.
(apologetic)
We had to call a tree surgeon.

ON Little James looking back at the house for the last time.

MRS. KRYCKI
Bye bye, James. Good luck.

Mrs. Krycki's face is full of pity - and relief.

James and his father walk out of the yard, down the street to their car.

ARMAND (cont'd)
Do you want to talk about her?

JAMES
No.

ARMAND
I think we should son, man to man.

James shrugs, busies himself picking lint.

ARMAND (cont'd)
I personally think it was a three-way gone bad. The blonde, the swarthy guy and her.
(makes eye contact with James)
But, you know, life goes on. The planet just keeps spinning. And there's nothing we can do to stop it. We're gonna make it fine together. Right, champ? We'll never forget her. But, we're gonna do just fine.

(CONTINUED)

57 CONTINUED: (2)

57

Armand produces a small, hardcover book from underneath his shirt, like a magician. Hands it to James.

ARMAND (cont'd)
We can't forget the past, kiddo, but
we need to keep our eyes on the
future. I got you something.

He hands James a hardcover book with a dramatic black and white drawing of a Jack Webb type policeman on the cover. The book is The Badge: True Stories of the LAPD.

ARMAND (cont'd)
Maybe you'll want to be a cop.

ON Mrs. Krycki watching them as they get in the car and leave. Mr. Krycki sweeping the driveway.

CUT TO:

58 EXT.-INT. CAR ON KRYCKI'S UTAH STREET - DAY - 1995 58

They drive toward a modest cottage in a working class neighborhood. Red rock formations in the background.

ELLROY
(SINGS)
Oh, give me a home, where the buffalo
roam, where the deer and the antelope
play, where pervert stranglers are
free, to defile you and me, and the
skies are not cloudy all day...

GEORGE KRYCKI (70) is out front, sweeping the driveway.

59 EXT. HOUSE - DAY 59

Mr. Krycki brings Ellroy and Stoner to the front door where they find MRS. KRYCKI, 35 years older than when we last saw her.

ELLROY
Mrs. Krycki? I'm James Ellroy. The
kid who ruined your tree.

60 INT. KRYCKI HOUSE LIVING ROOM - DAY 60

Mr. and Mrs. Krycki sit together on the couch, under a large painting of a seascape with a pirate ship. Ellroy and Stoner sit in the two arm chairs on the other side of a rustic, Old West coffee table. The room is a melange of mismatched furniture and upholstery: plaids, paisley,

(CONTINUED)

stripes, geometric designs all working against each other. The overall effect is agitation.

Mrs. Krycki is quite recognizable even though she's clearly wearing a wig now. Mr. Krycki is bald.

Mrs. Krycki is handling the strange metal object Stoner and Ellroy found in the evidence box. She hands it to Mr. Krycki.

MRS. KRYCKI
I don't know. An ashtray?

MR. KRYCKI
Sorry.

Stoner signals Ellroy: let me do this.

STONER
What about her friends, Mrs. Krycki?

MRS. KRYCKI
She didn't have any that came around.
Not that I knew about.

STONER
It was a long time ago. Maybe you
want to think about it a little more.

MRS. KRYCKI
I'm not saying your mother didn't have
friends. She used the telephone from
our house because they didn't have
one.

STONER
Did you know who she called? Did Mrs.
Ellroy ever mention a name? I'm going
to the movies with so and so?

MRS. KRYCKI
She was discreet. Very private. Not
unfriendly. But she kept her business
to herself.

She looks to her husband.

MR. KRYCKI
I saw a Buick once, how do I remember
that? She'd go out on a date Saturday
night. Sometimes the fella would pick
her up.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. KRYCKI
She was a beautiful dresser.

ELLROY
My mother drank a lot. Did she ever
talk when she drank?

MRS. KRYCKI
Oh, no. What makes you say that? I
wouldn't say she drank.

MR. KRYCKI
She did.

ELLROY
It's alright.

MRS. KRYCKI
No. I would have known.

MR. KRYCKI
Yes. C'mon.

MRS. KRYCKI
C'mon, what?

MR. KRYCKI
I'd find bottles in the bushes
sometimes.

MRS. KRYCKI
Did you ever tell me that?

MR. KRYCKI
I don't remember.

MRS. KRYCKI
Well, you didn't. I'd remember.

MR. KRYCKI
It was obvious, Anna.

MRS. KRYCKI
Then why didn't we talk about it?
(turns to James)
She was very attractive and she liked
to laugh. That I remember. She had a
blue coat with a flowered lining. I
remember that. And little James --

ELLROY
Yes?

MRS. KRYCKI

Well, you were a spasticated boy.
George was always trying to teach you
how to use a broom properly. You
couldn't get the hang of it.

ELLROY

I was spasticated?

MR. KRYCKI

It's true.

Stoner gives a silent, prearranged signal to Ellroy.

ELLROY

Mr. Krycki, would you be willing to
take me outside and teach me your
sweeping technique, for old times
sake? How about it? I'll pay more
attention this time...

STONER

This I gotta see.

Mr. Krycki looks to Mrs. Krycki.

MRS. KRYCKI

It's okay, dear.

MR. KRYCKI

Well, alright.

They leave, Ellroy already practicing his sweeping
motion. Stoner and Mrs. Krycki are alone.

STONER

Mrs. Krycki, I'm just an old retired
detective. But, I think I've still
got some of my instincts left. Can
you help me out?

MRS. KRYCKI

I'll try.

STONER

Because when I was reading over your
interview back then, I just got this
feeling that there was something you
held back. Am I crazy?

(CONTINUED)

MRS. KRYCKI
That was so long ago.
(Stoner waits, patient)
You're not crazy.

STONER
Tell me.

MRS. KRYCKI
I warned Mrs. Ellroy about a man I had
a date with.

STONER
Go on.

MRS. KRYCKI
(softly; it's hard)
I met him at a bar. When things
weren't so good with -
(nods outside)
Everything was different then.
Anyway, he took me out in his car,
started touching me. He was smooth.
Drove out to Puente Hills. I slapped
him. I opened the car door. He
grabbed me by my dress and pulled me
back into the back seat. He pulled at
my dress and he was holding me down
and then he --
(embarrassed)
erupted - before he could do any more
to me. You know what I mean?
(Stoner nods)
Then he said, "You've got mustard."
and "You've got nothing to worry about
now." He wiped himself off. And
drove me home. I didn't call the cops
or tell anybody.

Stoner nods, compassionate. Looks in her eyes.

STONER
What made you warn Mrs. Ellroy about
him?

MRS. KRYCKI
(after a pause)
I saw them together.

Ellroy steps into the room. He's been listening just
outside.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY

(pissed)

Mrs. Krycki. You never told the cops about him when they were investigating the murder?

(to Stoner)

I was just coming in to use the bathroom.

(to Mrs. Krycki)

How could you do that!?

MRS. KRYCKI

You don't know what it was like back then for women.

(starts to cry)

What would I have told them?

Stoner looks at Ellroy, furious. Turns to Mrs. Krycki.

STONER

He's just upset 'cause it's his mother.

MRS. KRYCKI

(icy)

He wasn't very upset when it happened.

STONER

Mrs. Krycki, do you remember the man's name? The one you warned Mrs. Ellroy about?

MRS. KRYCKI

(looks right at Ellroy)

No.

Ellroy knows he's blown it.

ELLROY

Mrs. Krycki. I know I'm - I'm sorry. I apologize. For everything. For what I just said, that was terrible. And for the banana tree. And for being spasticated. Please. Please. This is really important.

MRS. KRYCKI

(to Stoner)

You won't tell him where you heard it?
You won't tell anybody.

(Stoner nods, no)

John LoPresti. He was dark, too.

61 EXT. KRYCKI HOUSE - DAY

61

Stoner and Ellroy leave, waving to Mr. Krycki who's back to sweeping. Ellroy's jumping out of his skin.

ELLROY

We have a suspect! We have a real suspect!

STONER

I think we do.

Ellroy gleefully "stabs" a tree on the sidewalk in front of the Krycki house. Then does a mock "stand-up".

ELLROY

James Ellroy the Demon Dog of American crime fiction has unearthed a new lead in the thirty-seven year quest to bring his mother's killer to justice. Working with world reknowned retired Sheriff's Homicide Detective Bill Stoner, the Dynamic Demon Duo vows to pursue truth, justice and the American way until Swarthy Man enters the gates of Hell on Earth.

(as commentator)

Mr. Ellroy, do you have any comment on what you've learned so far in the investigation?

(as Ellroy)

There's a lotta sick fucks around.

CUT TO:

62 INT. GRAMMAR SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY - 1958

62

James Ellroy's sixth grade class. A girl is up front, finishing a book report.

GIRL

And that's why Charlotte's Web will always be considered a classic, to be read to little children, or read yourself if you're older like me.

The students CLAP.

TEACHER

Very good, Denise.

(Denise starts for her seat)

Don't forget to put the written report on my desk, okay?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TEACHER (cont'd)
(Denise does this)
Now - James - let's hear from you.

James walks to the front of the class. He's a big, lumbering kid compared to the other sixth graders. A cross between a geek and a Neanderthal Mafia enforcer. Without introduction he opens the book he's chosen for his report - The Badge - and starts reading.

JAMES
"He sawed her body in half with a serrated tool and drained out all the blood. That's how she was found, in two neat pieces, on a sidewalk in downtown Los Angeles. One of the pieces was hidden behind a shrub. But the bottom half of Betty Short's body protruded onto the sidewalk itself...

Kids reacting. Nervous laughter, gross out sounds.

TEACHER
James, what are you doing?

JAMES
My book report.

TEACHER
What kind of book is that?

JAMES
Non-fiction.

TEACHER
That's not what I meant. Where did you get it?

JAMES
My father gave it to me.

TEACHER
Sit down.

JAMES
What? I didn't get to the part where I talk about the book as literature!

TEACHER
Just sit down.

James sits. A couple of the boys think what he did was cool, but most just think he's weird.

63 INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE ARMAND'S APARTMENT - DAY - 1958 63

James returns from school, stops outside the part open door because he hears RAISED VOICES.

ARMAND

I was Rita Hayworth's business manager while you were selling used tires in Okeefenokee.

UNCLE BOB

You don't even know what state Okeefenokee is in. It's not in Wisconsin, I can tell you that.

AUNT ALMA

We're only concerned about the boy.

UNCLE BOB

You can't even support yourself.

ARMAND

I make a boffo living.

AUNT ALMA

I owe it to my sister to take care of him.

ARMAND

You want her insurance money, Alma. Come clean.

AUNT ALMA

That's outrageous.

UNCLE BOB

(looking around the apartment)

What do you spend your money on, Armand?

ARMAND

That's really none of your business, Bob.

Barko runs to the door, BARKING and scratching, sniffing James outside. He walks in.

ARMAND

Hey, James. Say hello to your Aunt Alma and Uncle Bob.

(CONTINUED)

63 CONTINUED:

63

UNCLE BOB
(aside to Armand)
We'll be keeping an eye on you.

Aunt Alma hugs James.

AUNT ALMA
Hi, sweetie. How are you?

James exchanges Wicked Witch of the West looks with Armand.

UNCLE BOB
Girls. Come on out. He's here.
(to James)
Your cousins are in the bedroom.

LAURA (11) and JANIE (9) come out of the bedroom looking disgusted with whatever they found in there. The cousins look at one another, warily.

ARMAND
Let's all sit down.

Alma sits on the couch. As she does she notices rolled under the edge of the couch, a dried up dog turd.

CUT TO:

64 LATER

64

Johnny Mercer croons ISN'T IT ROMANTIC on the scratchy radio. They all sit there, nothing left to say. Bob keeps pushing the dog off of him.

Alma looks at black and white photographs.

Armand picks his teeth.

James, Laura and Janie play a desultory game of Parcheesi. James throws the dice and they roll off the board. He leans over to get them and, on a perverse whim, cops a feel of Laura's budding breast, as if he couldn't help it.

LAURA
(jumps away)
Mommy. Mommy.

AUNT ALMA
What, honey?

(CONTINUED)

LAURA
James - hit me.

AUNT ALMA
He hit you? I'm sure it was an
accident.

ARMAND
What did you do?

JANIE
He touched her.

UNCLE BOB
What?

JANIE
(touches her chest)
Here.

AUNT ALMA
Oh, my God.

JAMES
I did not!

Laura hits Janet for telling. Armand smacks James. The
dog jumps and BARKS.

AUNT ALMA
Did he touch you?

James and Laura exchange a look. That pre-pube
combination of horror and excitement. James smiles a
tiny smile; Aunt Alma won't be taking him home with her!

LAURA
(mumbles)
He just bumped into me.

UNCLE BOB
You're not hurt, are you honey?

AUNT ALMA
(fed up, to Armand)
Do you know you have a dog turd on the
floor!

ARMAND
(sees it, picks it up)
Oh, shit, Alma, you've been sitting
there this whole time? Why didn't you
say something?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

64 CONTINUED: (2)

64

ARMAND (cont'd)
(play whacks James)
I told you to clean up.

JAMES
Sorry, Dad.

CUT TO:

65 HALLWAY

65

The visit's over. They leave. Parcheesi board and all.

UNCLE BOB
We're definitely keeping an eye on
you, Ellroy.

ARMAND
You do that.

Aunt Alma, crying, hugs James to her. It isn't the
dogshit anymore. She's thinking of her sister.

AUNT ALMA
(in his ear)
She was so beautiful. Don't forget
her, James.

Aunt Alma hugs him. James waves to his cousins as the
Coles descend the stairs. Armand turns to his son,

ARMAND
Let's get out of here, Fritz. What do
you want to do?

66 INT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

66

On the screen: a woman being murdered in lurid, fifties
technicolor. Stabbed over and over again.

In the seats, father and son share a tub of popcorn.

67 EXT. MOVIE THEATER - DAY

67

They leave the theater, into the unforgiving LA sun.

JAMES
Is Aunt Alma coming back?

ARMAND
Nah.
(laughs)
She thinks I killed your mother.

He bends down to James' level as a big bus goes by.

(CONTINUED)

ARMAND

Listen, kiddo. Your mother in her infinite wisdom gave control of the insurance money to your Aunt. But they can't use it. It's for you. If they have you, then they can use the money. That's what this whole bruhaha is about. It'll die down.

Armand doesn't seem to realize he's just told his son his relatives don't care about him. James, however, gets the message.

ARMAND (cont'd)

But we gotta stick together. Right, champ? Show that meddling bitch we can get along just fine.

No time to dwell though, 'cause it's time to give the secret Ellroy signal. James and Armand give each other the finger.

ARMAND (cont'd)

I've got big plans for us.

They walk together down the street.

ELLROY V.O.

I dug the Dad-as-killer concept. It subverted my awareness of my father's passive nature and gave the man some panache. He killed my mother to gain custody of me. He knew that I hated her. He was a killer and I was a thief.

James snatches a box of Good 'N Plenty as they pass a newstand.

68 INT. ARMAND ELLROY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

68

James on his cot in a tiny room. It's sweltering. A curtain blows, uselessly, in the open window. SOUNDS of street life from the spillover of a bar across the street mixed with traffic. From the living room, the sound of the FIGHTS. Good 'N Plenties spill onto the bed from the open box. James closes his eyes. And sees,

69 INT. EL MONTE HOUSE - BATHROOM

69

An image through the open bathroom door: Jean Ellroy, just out of the shower, pulls a towel through her legs,

(CONTINUED)

69 CONTINUED:

69

drying herself. Her red hair cascades over her soft, white shoulders.

She looks up, sees James looking at her. Her face, embarrassed at first, then disgusted.

In slow motion, she turns her face away from James.

ELLROY V.O.

I didn't know that costs accrue. I didn't know...

70 INT. ARMAND'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

70

ELLROY V.O.

...you always pay for what you suppress.

James wanders into the living room for comfort. Stands next to his Dad's armchair, as the fight breaks for a commercial. On TV, Betty Furness displays the new Westinghouse refrigerator, as if it's a sensuous sexual aid and she an all-knowing household dominatrix.

ARMAND

Hey, Betty, suck my dick.
(points to his dick)
Westinghouse, this.

James looks at the TV. His POV:

Betty Furness has Jean Ellroy's face and her nurse's cap. She opens her refrigerator door wide and shows the goodies inside.

James closes his eyes, to make the image go away. He opens his eyes. The TV screen is dark. Armand's in the kitchen making a sandwich.

CUT TO:

71 EXT. SAN GABRIEL VALLY RESIDENTIAL STREET - 1995

71

Ellroy being interviewed by the segment producer of a magazine show like 48 Hours.

ELLROY

I'm James Ellroy, Demon Dog of American Crime Fiction. Thirty-seven years ago my mother was murdered, most likely by a man she met at a bar. The murder was never solved. I'm standing across the street from the home of a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY (cont'd)
man who may provide a new lead in the
investigation of the crime...

Bill Stoner walks up to them.

STONER
Ellroy. You think we'll get useful
information talking to our suspect
with a television crew?

ELLROY
Of course not. They're gonna wait
outside.
(to Stoner)
Ready, Detective?

Stoner starts walking with Ellroy.

STONER
It isn't real enough for you? Walking
into that house over there - possibly
to meet the man who killed your
mother! - that isn't worth anything
unless you're getting publicity out of
it?

ELLROY
You can kill two birds with one stone.

STONER
You can't just do this for your
mother. It has to be about you.

ELLROY
My mother's dead. I'm not.

STONER
Really?
(off Ellroy's look)
The plain truth is - you're scared
shitless.

ELLROY
(humoring him)
Of what?

STONER
I would say, you're scared of the
truth, Ellroy. About your mother.
You're scared of what it'll make you
feel and what it'll make you do. I
don't know what that truth is. But I
know you're terrified of it. That's
why you need your media circus. // You
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

STONER (cont'd)
can't do this without a camera,
without an excuse, without a crutch.

ELLROY
(re: the one camera crew)
I don't see a circus.

STONER
(even more pathetic)
I know.

They've reached the walk to John LoPresti's house.
Stoner puts his finger to his lips to quiet Ellroy.

72 EXT. LOPRESTI HOUSE - DAY

72

They RING the BELL. As soon as the door opens - it's
opened by a six-year-old BOY - they're blasted with LOUIS
PRIMA MUSIC and the SOUNDS of a real circus: twelve or so
Italian relatives at a family dinner.

BOY
Come in!

STONER
(to Ellroy)
Maybe this is a bad time.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Who's at the door, Teddy?

ELLROY
(to the boy, all charm)
We're here to see Mr. John LoPresti.

BOY
It's for Grandpa.

JOANNE
Can I help you?

Ellroy looks at Stoner - go.

STONER
(badges her)
This isn't an emergency Ma'am, but, if
he's available, we'd like to have a
word with Mr. John LoPresti.

JOANNE
Come on in.

KIDS running. MEN watching football.

(CONTINUED)

MAN

Joanne, get me a beer, will ya?

JOANNE

Do you know where Daddy is?

MAN

In the upstairs bathroom.

JOANNE

(calls up)

Daddy!

A very fat, bald man, JOHN LOPRESTI, comes down the stairs. Ellroy befriends the man at the TV.

ELLROY

Who's winning?

MAN

Raiders by 14.

JOHN

What do you want, Joanne?

JOANNE

These men want to talk to you.

STONER

If we could have a few minutes of your time, in private? We're investigating an old murder in El Monte. We thought you might have some information about it.

Ellroy and Stoner watch his face closely for signs of guilt. He looks delighted.

JOHN

Me? Hey, everybody - they want me to help with a murder investigation!

AD LIB REACTIONS. Everybody watches as LoPresti leads Ellroy and Stoner upstairs.

MAN

(to TV)

Throw the ball, jerkoff.

73 INT. LOPRESTI'S BEDROOM - DAY

73

The walls are adorned with framed racing forms, magazine pictures of Italy and a couple of Playboy centerfolds, mounted on wood and laminated with high-gloss shellac.

Ellroy keeps watching LoPresti's face.

JOHN

I was around then. But I don't recall the case.

ELLROY

She was a nurse. There were headlines. Red-haired Nurse Found Strangled. It's interesting that you don't remember.

LoPresti shrugs.

STONER

We heard you were one sharp dude with the ladies.

JOHN

That's true.

ELLROY

Got any pictures of yourself back then?

JOHN

Yeah. Sure, I do.

He opens a drawer, takes out a framed picture of himself in the Fifties. It's definitely the same guy - he's fat and already balding. Far from Swarthy Man.

JOHN (cont'd)

I had a big personality.

ELLROY

Yeah. We heard you were a hit with the ladies.

JOHN

I was.

ELLROY

That's why we thought you might have known Jean Ellroy.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

Red head? I never had a red head.

ELLROY

But we heard you got lots of pussy.

JOHN

I got probably more than my share.

ELLROY

We heard you mauled a woman named Anna Mae Krycki and shot your load prematurely.

Now John reacts. He shakes, cringes.

JOHN

Hey, c'mon.

Ellroy and Stoner are silent.

JOHN (cont'd)

I didn't kill anybody. For Chrissake. I didn't strangle anybody!

They look at him for another few beats.

STONER

Well, thanks for your time, Mr. LoPresti.

ELLROY

Yeah. Enjoy your dinner.

74 EXT. LOPRESTI HOUSE - DUSK

74

Ellroy talking to the camera.

ELLROY

But I know that every dead end brings me closer to the dark kernel of truth. To a Swarthy Man and a Blonde. To a midnight dance at the Desert Inn that ended my mother's life. We have an 800 number, for anyone - anyone - with information about the red-head, Jean or Geneva Ellroy, the Swarthy Man and especially the missing Blonde. If she's out there, she's the key to the whole mystery.

(CONTINUED)

PRODUCER

James Ellroy, if you find the Swarthy Man, what will you say to him?

Ellroy takes a moment, seems to fill with emotion, looks right at the camera, says softly,

ELLROY

"Why?"

PRODUCER

And - Cut. That was very powerful.

ELLROY

(ironic)

When it comes to being a shameless whore, I learned from the best.

Stoner looks at Ellroy, still wondering, which one is the "act": the Ellroy who feels or the Ellroy who doesn't.

75 INT. STONER'S CAR - DUSK

75

They drive in silence. Then.

ELLROY

Some murder investigation. We're like bullshit avenging angels. Hey hep cat, if you wagged your wanger at a woman thirty years ago, watch out! We're gonna make you feel like the slime you are. For five looong minutes.

STONER

Want to quit? You've got your publicity.

They drive. Ellroy turns the radio on to a classical station. WAGNER screams from Stoner's car as they drive the Body Dump Expressway. Ellroy turns to Stoner.

ELLROY

You know what you'd be doing if you weren't doing this?

STONER

What?

ELLROY

Pissing your life away.

(CONTINUED)

75 CONTINUED:

75

And the music screams, Doppler effect, into the night as Ellroy lays back on the seat.

CUT TO:

76 EXT. L.A. STREET - DAY - 1959

76

James and Armand walking down the street in an industrial part of downtown L.A.

They arrive at the metal door to a warehouse. Japanese characters are hastily, hand painted on the door.

77 INT. JAPANESE WAREHOUSE - DAY

77

Boxes, boxes, boxes stacked on the floor and on floor to ceiling metal shelves. Some of the boxes are ripped open on top. Spilling out of those boxes, and haphazardly thrown around all over: plastic inflatable "Tote Seats".

James blows one up while his father negotiates with an older Japanese man.

JAPANESE MAN

Ten cents a piece. You sell fifty cents.

ARMAND

Nobody'll pay fifty cents for this crap.

JAPANESE MAN

Yes. Fifty cents. My kid sells them.

ARMAND

How many suckers you got sellin' these things at the Stadium?

JAPANESE MAN

Not now. Last year he sold. Plenty of them.

ARMAND

I'd have to be exclusive. Exclusive Tote Seat representative for the Los Angeles area.

JAPANESE MAN

Okay. But you have to talk to Dodgers.

(CONTINUED)

ARMAND

Don't worry about the Dodgers. I've got the Rams sewed up too.

JAPANESE MAN

Good. Good deal. How many you want?

ARMAND

I'll take - ten thousand.

James looks on, impressed. He pounces, ass first, on his blown up Tote Seat. It's indestructible.

JAPANESE MAN

Strong. Good quality. War surplus.

ARMAND

Jap war surplus. What'd they do? Sit on these on the battlefield and drink tea?

JAPANESE MAN

I don't know.

ARMAND

Maybe that's why they lost the war!

JAPANESE MAN

I think Japanese lost war because of A-bomb.

78 INT. ARMAND ELLROY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

78

Stacks and stacks of Tote Seats overwhelm the apartment. Blown up seats are used as cushions on every chair, on the couch, on the floor, on the coffee table. Armand walks into the room, kicking one aside with a good kick.

ARMAND

Fuckin' Dodgers.

James is using one as a punching bag. Punching it, then going to retrieve it and punching it again.

JAMES

Fuckin' Rams.

Armand kicks another Tote Seat, James stomps one. They're kicking and punching them, batting them at each other.

ARMAND

Fuck Walter O'Malley.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
Fuck Duke Snyder.

ARMAND
Fuck PeeWee Reese.

JAMES
Fuck Jackie Robinson.

ARMAND
Fuck Gil Hodges.

JAMES
I hate 'em. I hate 'em. I hate 'em.
I hate 'em. I hate 'em. Hate 'em,
hate 'em, hate 'em...

Major Tote Seat blow out fight.

ARMAND
Hey, hey, hey, you okay, son?

JAMES
Yeah.

ARMAND
You still sad about your mother?

JAMES
Nah.

ARMAND
Okay.
(a pause)
Do you believe in God?

JAMES
Yeah.

ARMAND
If your mother's in Heaven I'll bet
she's giving God a run for his money.
You know what I mean, son?

JAMES
You think she's fucking God?

ARMAND
God or the Devil. Wherever she is,
I'm sure she wangled her way to the
top.

He brings out a cigar box from a cabinet over the sink.

(CONTINUED)

78 CONTINUED: (2)

78

ARMAND (cont'd)

Here she is. Whenever you want to look.

Armand opens the box: inside are snapshots of his mother and newspaper clippings about her death. James glances inside and, in response to a sudden flood of emotion, he SPITS right in the box, and walks to his room.

79 INT. JAMES' BEDROOM - NIGHT

79

James masturbating under the covers to a fantasy of the photographic image he glimpsed in the cigar box.

The images changes to:

80 EXT. HEAVEN - DAY

80

Jean Ellroy of the photograph come to life, lying on a cloud, her arms open to accept God as her lover.

Then, a shadowy image forms of a boy, whose silhouette looks not unlike young James! He's waiting for Jean. She's pushing God aside to accept her son. As young James lowers himself onto her soft body, the image is jerked away, the visual equivalent of a needle scratching across a phonograph record. James can't let himself continue. And back to,

81 INT. JAMES' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

81

James opens his eyes, he's drenched with sweat and shame.

James gets up. Wanders into the

82 KITCHEN

82

Where Armand is doing the crossword puzzle.

JAMES

Dad?

ARMAND

Yeah?

JAMES

What do you think really happened to the Black Dahlia?

ARMAND

Well, I remember that case, you know. It was in the headlines every day. An unknown assailant sliced her open.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
Yeah. But, why?

ARMAND
I don't know, kiddo. Maybe he wanted to see what was inside. See what made her tick.

JAMES
Then why didn't he slice open her head?

ARMAND
I don't think he was interested in her brain. He wanted to see her female organs.

JAMES
Hunh.

ARMAND
He was a very sick man.

JAMES
I'm hungry.

Armand opens the frig. A couple of beers, some old American cheese slices. He reaches for his wallet, takes out its contents: two dollars.

ARMAND
Go down and get us something.
(empties his pocket, thirty cents more)
Hot dogs, maybe.

James takes the money and leaves.

83 INT. GROCERY STORE - DUSK

83

James walking the aisles, keeping an eye on the owner and his other customers at the counter.

He walks to the frozen food section. He picks up a package of hot dogs. He looks. He picks up two steaks, hides them under his jacket.

He checks the overhead mirror. Sees the owner ringing up a sale. The owner looks up, toward James.

84 INT. ARMAND ELLROY'S APARTMENT - DUSK

84

The door opens. James comes in with a paper sack, walks to the kitchen table. Empties the sack: frozen hot dogs, four steaks, fancy French cheese, olives, packs of baseball cards and gum, Ring Dings.

Armand watches, obviously knows what happened, we see a moment of his shame, he finally speaks.

ARMAND

You got the hot dogs.

CUT TO:

85 EATING DINNER

85

They're eating the steaks.

ARMAND

Don't shovel the food. With your fingers. Girls won't like that. Cut the pieces smaller. You have to learn manners.

JAMES

Okay.

ARMAND

Son, lemme see your teeth.

JAMES

Why?

ARMAND

Just open your mouth.

JAMES

You think I got pieces of meat stuck there?

James smiles super wide. He does have a few pieces of meat sticking out between his teeth. But this isn't Dad's point.

ARMAND

James, it looks to me like you need braces. I think we gotta hit your Aunt Alma up for some of your insurance money. For orthodonture work.

(CONTINUED)

He and James smile conspiratorially. Armand has meat stuck in his teeth too.

JAMES
Cool, Daddy-o.

86 INT. ARMAND ELLROY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

86

The dog is chewing on the leg of an armchair. Both Armand and James are in thier underwear. James is on the phone.

JAMES
It's not because I eat candy, Aunt Alma. Candy doesn't make you need braces. Anyway, the Commies flouridated the water here to prevent tooth decay... In school. .. They did so.
(to Dad)
She wants to talk to you.

Armand makes two fuck you signs with his fingers and takes the phone.

ARMAND
Hey, Alma, what's cookin'? Yeah, it's a bitch. Well, what do you think she left the money for! Well, he can't go to college with his teeth sticking out like a dumb Jap, can he? I can control myself, just fine.
(to James)
She wants to talk to you.

James takes the phone.

JAMES
Thanks, Aunt Alma. No, you don't have to come here. I'll send you a picture.

CUT TO:

87 INT. FALLOUT SHELTER - DAY - 1995

87

Great atmosphere. Light filters through the dust, just as James envisioned. A camera crew from DATELINE is there. The place is an old Fifties fallout shelter; the old triangular metal signs, rusting, yellow, still nailed to the concrete walls.

(CONTINUED)

A few UNIFORMS watch as Ellroy and Stoner look for Hallinen's old case files. Ellroy, and especially Stoner, are a bit stilted, conscious of the camera.

ELLROY

This an accurate representation of the way it was back then, Stoner?
Handwritten notes, dusty boxes, all this elbow grease to find things?

STONER

I guess so.

ELLROY

(to camera)

We're searching for suspect files from the original detectives on the case, Jack Lawton, who's passed away and Ward Hallinen who's elderly now. Nothing's in alphabetical order.

STONER

I'm gonna check down this aisle, by date.

The CAMERA CREW stays with Ellroy. He pulls out a file box. Reads, growing excited.

ELLROY

Spade Cooley wife-beating rap! I remember that as a kid. I used to fantasize breaking into Chino prison and giving him a shiv in the kidney, extracting Ella Mae's revenge.

(looking, candy store)

Oh, man. Carole Tregoff! Sucked gas at San Quentin for her shitbird lover Dr. Bernard Peck.

(to camera)

This is my childhood! Stoner, you remember Ma Barker?

Stoner doesn't answer.

ELLROY (cont'd)

Stoner?

(to camera)

He's down that aisle. "Ladies undergarments, trusses, sexual aids..."

STONER (O.S.)

Ellroy.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY

What?

STONER

I think I found something.

He gestures James over. He gets a look at a box labelled "VIC: GENEVA "JEAN" HILLIKER ELLROY.

STONER (cont'd)

(to producer)

It looks like another box of evidence from Mrs. Ellroy's case.

(to James, re: cameras)

Do you want to open it here?

PRODUCER

You had no idea this was here?

James just begins opening the box.

ELLROY

Anybody have a knife?

STONER

I do.

Stoner pulls a Swiss Army knife from his pocket.

ELLROY

Boy Scout and Master Detective.

Ellroy takes the knife, cuts the old, old tape and twine. Some of the brittle tape crumbles as he cuts into it.

He rips open the last closed flaps of the box.

We see it on his face first. The box contains physical evidence. On top: his mother's dress, the one she was killed in. The one we've seen over and over in the crime scene photo.

In a trance, oblivious to the cameras, James picks up the dress, feels the material, lifts it to his face. Suddenly, his face, the dress is blasted with illumination from the camera crew's mobile light. Ellroy's face is raw pain. He winces from the light, turns away.

PRODUCER

You asked us to be here. This is the money shot. You wanted publicity...

(CONTINUED)

Ellroy turns back to the light, his face blasted again.

ELLROY
(desperate)
Turn it off.
(rage, pain rising)
Turn the fucking thing off! Turn the
goddam, fucking light off. Turn it
off!

Stoner steps into the light, between Ellroy and the camera.

STONER
Let's go.

Stoner hustles the crew away, the light switches off. Stoner and the crew wipe the screen. We're left with Ellroy, alone, in the dark, holding his mother's dress to him, like a baby.

Ellroy glances at the box. On top now: a plastic bag with Jean Ellroy's torn and knotted stocking inside: the murder weapon.

88 EXT. ARROYO HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

88

Dark. We can just make out the edges of trees, a fence.

ELLROY V.O.
I had to honor my debt and pursue my claim. My will to look and learn was strong and perversely attuned. I was my father crouched outside my mother's bedroom window.

Again, light suddenly floods the scene. It's the high beam from Stoner's car, illuminating the spot where Jean Ellroy's body was discovered, where her murder probably took place.

STONER
We need to talk about what happened here that night, James.

He looks at Ellroy who says nothing.

STONER
I think your mother was raped.

ELLROY
I don't buy it.

(CONTINUED)

STONER

I think Swarthy Man buys her a sandwich and figures the night isn't over. He knows a dark, quiet place, near the high school. They drive there. He wants something for buying her that grilled cheese. But she has her period, she says no. He says yes. He hits her, maybe even knocks her unconscious - that's why there are few signs of struggle - he has his way with her. Then he figures she can ID him, he panics, he strangles her and leaves her body.

ELLROY

No. That's not the way it happened. She wants more. More sex, more drink, more male attention, more pure sensation. But he's tired of her prattle, he's tired of her smell, he's tired of her need...

89 EXT. ARROYO HIGH SCHOOL GROUNDS - NIGHT - JUNE 22, 1958 89

Swarthy Man's two-tone sedan parked in a dark, remote patch of foliage, where the edge of the school grounds meet the beginning of the woods.

ELLROY (V.O.)

He'll give her one more toss in the back seat. But then, it all goes wrong.

90 INT. SWARTHY MAN'S CAR

90

Jean Ellroy, her dress pulled down off her shoulder, laughing, drunk, with Swarthy Man in the back seat.

JEAN

Here. Take another drink. You're not happy enough.

She puts the beer bottle up to his lips. Beer dribbles down his chin. He spits it out, right into her face. She LAUGHS. She takes a sip and spits it into his face.

SWARTHY MAN

(disgusted)
Clean yourself up.

JEAN

I thought we were kidding. I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

She wipes his mouth with a tissue. He pulls her hand away.

SWARTHY MAN
Get dressed, honey.

JEAN
What's the matter? C'mon. I don't want to go home yet. Make love to me. Just once more.
(no response)
It's not my breast, is it? The nipple? Does that disgust you? I told you what happened...

SWARTHY MAN
Can't you just keep quiet?

JEAN
You didn't have a problem with my breasts a couple hours ago.

SWARTHY MAN
Your breasts are fine.

JEAN
They need to be kissed.

She grabs his head and urgently pushes it down. In a rage, he SLAMS her back against the door.

JEAN (cont'd)
What's wrong with you? Maybe there's something wrong with you...

He HITS her across the mouth. She starts to SCREAM. To shut her up he puts his hand over her mouth and shakes her head. She passes out.

SWARTHY MAN
Oh, fuck. Fuck.

He drags her limp body out of his car, rips off her stocking and starts to finish the job.

SWARTHY MAN (cont'd)
You want more? Huh? C'mon. I'll give it to you.

91 INT. STONER'S CAR - NIGHT

91

ELLROY

She wanted more. And she was too naive, or too needy, to notice. There was no more.

STONER

What makes you so sure that's the way it happened?

ELLROY

Because I'm the same way.

CUT TO:

92 EXT. ARMAND ELLROY APARTMENT - DAY - 1963

92

Armand and James watch as the Sheriff's Marshall puts a huge padlock on their door. The place is being repossessed; they're evicted.

Armand and James coming upstairs - stop at the landing and watch. James looks to Armand to do something. Armand, ashamed, knows they should run. Shushes James.

JAMES

Dad -

James runs out of his father's grasp and starts pushing the Marshall at the door. Through the half-open door we can see all their things - Tote Seats galore.

JAMES

Hey, our stuff is in there!

MARSHALL

Sorry, but the landlord gets it to pay the back rent.

JAMES

You cocksuckers can't do that!

MARSHALL

Hey, get this kid off me. Is your father here?

(reads)

Armand Ellroy?

James glances over to the stairway landing.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES

No.

(looks inside)

Can't I get --

MARSHALL

Sorry, kid. Your father's gotta take it up with the landlord.

JAMES

Where's my dog?? My dog's in there!! Barko, Barko...

MARSHALL

There's no dog in here.

The two Marshalls exchange a guilty look.

MARSHALL

I didn't see a dog in here. Did you?

JAMES

Let me in there! Let me in! I gotta get my dog!

MARSHALL

(holding James back)

The dog ran out when we opened the door. Sorry. He'll probably get picked up by the pound.

James kicks the Marshall and takes off down toward the stairs - no Armand. He's split.

James runs down the stairs, out to the

93 STREET

93

JAMES

Barko! Here Barko! Barko!

He's running, scared, up the street.

JAMES (cont'd)

Barko! Dad! Barko! Armand!

Armand appears from around the corner, grabs hold of James, pulls him into a storefront - a bar, pretty deserted in mid-day.

ARMAND

Hey. Hey, c'mere. It's okay.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
Dad, they're --

ARMAND
Hey, it's okay. Look what I found.

Armand takes James behind the bar where Barko drinks thirstily from a plate on the floor.

Armand picks up Barko, hands her to James; she whimpers and starts to pee all over both of them.

ARMAND (cont'd)
Shit. Let's get outta here.

JAMES
What about our stuff?

ARMAND
We'll get new stuff. Fuck those
faggot shitbird Nazis.

Armand, James and Barko high tail it out of the bar and away from the apartment building while,

94 UPSTAIRS

94

PADLOCK goes on front door.

INSIDE THE APARTMENT: Camera surveys the loss - Tote Seats, tattered furniture, girlie magazines, James' lurid-cover crime books, the hot plate where they cooked, and into James' bedroom where we see comic books, underwear and, stuck under the bed the CIGAR box with all the photographs of Jean Ellroy.

95 EXT. ARMAND'S NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NIGHT - 1959

95

James wandering alone down a marginal Hollywood street.

He enters the adjoining neighborhood, Hancock Park. It's quite a contrast - large, well-kept houses, stately, almost like mansions. Families inside. He can see glimpses of a family eating dinner; a kid playing a game with his mother. Normal family life.

ELLROY V.O.
Hancock Park. Large Tudor houses and
French chateaus. Spanish mansions.
Broad-front lawns, trellised arbors,
tree-lined curbsides and an air of
time-warp containment. Perfectly
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY V.O. (cont'd)
circumscribed order and wealth a few
blocks from my shit-encrusted home.

He moves closer to a house with several windows lit up.
Peeks in at Father-Knows-Best land, watches.

Then he heads toward another window, lit up, on the side
of the house. He ducks and hides in the bushes. The
shade is 3/4 up. He peeks his head up and sees a TEENAGE
GIRL inside. She's taking off her sweater. James moves
closer to the window. She walks to the closet in her
bra. James watches her.

Suddenly a look of horror comes over James' face as the
girl sees him and SCREAMS and he takes off.

ELLROY V.O. (cont'd)
I was still preadolescent. I was a
thief and a voyeur. I was headed for
a hot date with a desecrated woman.

CUT TO:

96 INT. ELLROY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT - 1995

96

Ellroy gets home. Doesn't listen to his messages. Plays
the 800 number tape.

WOMAN
(drunk and sad)
That poor woman. My father could have
done it. He was a pervert. A child
abuser... he abused my sister and
me... My name is Jackie.

Ellroy speeds up the tape.

MAN
My name is Carlos Morales. Your
mother's killer appeared for me in a
dream last night. I can describe
him...

WOMAN
My ex-husband collected pornography
about nurses. I always had the
impression he was in some kind of
trouble before he met me. He was a
violent drunk who used his fists on me
and my son. He wanted me to dress up
like a nurse. I think it's worth
checking him out. I should have
killed him myself. His name is Donald
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WOMAN (cont'd)
Roebecker. It's all water under the
bridge now, isn't it?

As Ellroy listens to the 800 number line, the regular
phone RINGS and RINGS. He doesn't answer. The machine
picks up.

HELEN
James. Big Dog. Call me back.
Sinead O'Conner's on TV. She's gone
New Age. Mellow doesn't suit her at
all. She's meant to be a righteous
rock 'n roll banshee, telling off the
Pope and shouting lyrics about her
vagina. You can still catch it. It's
three hours earlier there. When you
get in. Call me, Big Dog. God's
howling at the window. Trying to
catch your scent. He misses you. I
tell him you'll be home soon.

Ellroy finally picks up the phone.

ELLROY
I'm here.

HELEN
You sound awful.

ELLROY
I'm just - it's like when I'm writing
and I'm in the hole. I'm focused.
And concentrated. There's nothing for
you to be concerned about.

HELEN
(doesn't believe him)
I'm concerned about you.

ELLROY
You send me off to do battle with
every rotten, horrible, settled thing
in my past, because you're concerned
about me. Maybe I need someone who
isn't quite so concerned about me.

HELEN
James, wait a minute... Talk to me.
What's going on?

ELLROY
Weren't those words?

HELEN

They were more like little bullets.

ELLROY

I stuck my face in the dress my mother was murdered in thirty-seven years ago. It still smelled like her. Is that possible? Or, am I going fuckin' nuts? Bring out the butterfly nets, lace up the straight jackets. He's fucking insane!

HELEN

(is he?)

You're not insane.

(beat)

Do you want me to come out there?

ELLROY

No. I'm okay, really. This whole bogus investigation is going nowhere. But, I like nowhere. Nowhere is a very underappreciated place to be.

(softens)

I'm just tired. I'll call you in a few days.

Ellroy looks more than tired. He looks ragged. He paces the room, uncomfortable in his own skin.

97 EXT. LA STREET - DAY

97

Ellroy walks out of a photography shop with a large, almost unmanageable, rectangular package.

98 INT. ELLROY'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

98

Ellroy putting up poster size blow-ups of the Jean Ellroy crime scene photos. And a poster size blow-up of the newspaper photo of Jean Ellroy - she's a mass of blown-up dots, impenetrable. A smaller blow-up of the Swarthy Man drawing.

ELLROY (V.O.)

I knew if I just looked harder, if I looked from another angle, no one had ever looked at this photograph with as discerning and knowledgable an eye as me. I felt if I could enter between those dots. The answer was in some chemical reaction provoked by a powerful needy woman and one particular man, who probably didn't

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY (cont'd)
mean to kill a woman that night, who
panicked, who saw her menstrual blood
on his car upholstery, who maybe never
did anything bad again, who's waiting
for me, waiting for me to find him and
relieve him of his burden of guilt.
Waiting for me, dead or alive.

CLOSE INTO one of the black and white crime scene photos
which explodes in dots and coalesces into the live-action
crime scene,

99 EXT. CRIME SCENE AT ARROYO HIGH SCHOOL - JUNE 22, 1958 99

Jean Ellroy is already dead. A repentent Swarthy Man
gets her coat from inside the car.

He places her coat over her, over her bare legs, he
places it there gently, covering her, he adjusts it,
somerly. He looks at her one last time.

ELLROY V.O.
All men hate all women for tried and
true reasons they share in jokes and
banter every day. Now you know. You
know that half the world will condone
what you just did.

His back is always toward us; his face obscured, in
shadows.

RING, RING of a telephone

CUT BACK TO:

100 INT. ELLROY'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY 100

The machine picks up. It's Stoner. Ellroy listens.

STONER
Ellroy, it's Stoner. You there?

Ellroy picks up.

ELLROY
Ellroy.

STONER
I found Lavonne Chambers - the car hop
from Stan's Drive-In.

101 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

101

LAVONNE CHAMBERS (73) has an oxygen tube in her nose. She pauses for breath between words, but struggles to speak to Ellroy and Stoner. She looks fragile but projects tough and sturdy - and astonished.

LAVONNE

Carhops. Are supposed to write down. License plate numbers. If I could take back one thing. In my life. It would be to do what. I should have done that night. And wrote down that number.

(pauses for breath)

ELLROY

Would you like to rest?

LAVONNE

No.

(smiles)

Time enough for that soon, right?

(breathes)

This is a nice thing you're doing for your mother. I'll bet she's looking down from heaven right now, smiling at you.

JAMES

I always thought her address would more likely be hell. But, thanks. Why did you even notice her?

LAVONNE

I've thought that through. Your mother was maybe about my age. Middle aged or almost. And she was on a date so she was divorced or widowed probably. And in those days, that was a tough position to be in. You were kind of an outcast, really. And I guess I identified with her, because I was in the same boat. Divorced. Carhopping at Stan's to support two kids. And here was this beautiful woman, laughing and with a good looking man and seemingly happy. And I thought, okay, Lavonne, see? It can be done.

(beat)

I wish I could help you more.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY

You've been a big help.

LAVONNE

I was having an affair with a married man back then. He was a Sheriff's Deputy from San Pedro. Tony Alfred Danno. My memory's shot, and I have no idea where he is now, but I talked to him all the time about the case - maybe he'd remember something I'm forgetting.

Stoner writes it down.

LAVONNE (cont'd)

Oh. And that lady - have you found - what was her name? The one from the Desert Inn who saw them dancing...?

ELLROY

Margie Trawick. We're still looking.

102 INT. CAR ON FREEWAY - NIGHT

102

Stoner and Ellroy driving.

ELLROY

Was everybody fucking everybody back then? Right under Dwight Eisenhower's nose?

STONER

Yeah. I know. It's tough.

ELLROY

What is?

STONER

Everybody likes to think their mother is special.

103 EXT. COTTAGE - SAN GABRIEL VALLEY - NIGHT

103

Ellroy and Stoner talk to a 14 year old girl at the door.

YOUNG WOMAN

Margie Trawick was my grandmother's maiden name. I remember her talking about being a witness in a murder case. She died in the beauty salon two years ago. She had brain cancer
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

103 CONTINUED:

103

YOUNG WOMAN (cont'd)
and she hemoragghed while she was
getting her hair done.

104 INT. SACRAMENTO GOVERNMENT OFFICE - DAY

104

Ellroy and Stoner wait. A government bureaucrat returns.

BUREAUCRAT

I'm sorry, Det. Stoner, but they
disposed of those semen slides in
1984. We can't hold on to these
things forever. There isn't enough
room.

105 INT. MICHAEL WHITTAKER'S WELFARE HOTEL ROOM - DAY

105

Ellroy and Stoner question a prime example of a male
lowlife. It's Michael Whittaker, now a 62 year-old,
strung-out drug addict.

ELLROY

You danced with a red-haired woman.
At the Desert Inn...

WHITTAKER

Was she the one who got murdered or
was it the other lady?

106 INT. CAR ON FREEWAY - NIGHT

106

Stoner and Ellroy, exhausted, going nowhere.

ELLROY

We're at a dead end, aren't we?

STONER

(shrugs)

I'd like to contact your mother's
relatives.

ELLROY

They don't know anything.

STONER

We're looking under rocks. Your
family is a big rock.

Ellroy is silent. Then,

ELLROY

They probably think I'm dead.

(CONTINUED)

106 CONTINUED:

106

STONER

Won't they be glad to know you're
alive?

Ellroy's look is the answer: no.

CUT TO:

107 INT. SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICE, HOLLYWOOD - DAY - 1963 107

An overhead fan turns slowly, barely moving the air,
making an annoying SQUEAK, SQUEAK with each revolution.
Armand's in his most conservative suit. James' suit
which used to be way too big is now noticably too small.
Aunt Alma wears a straw hat with strawberry decorations.
Uncle Bob wears a grim expression.

A slight man, 35, steps out of his office.

SOCIAL WORKER

Come in, please.

They follow him wordlessly into his

108 OFFICE

108

SOCIAL WORKER

Sit right down everybody. Mr. and
Mrs. Cole, you can sit on the couch.
Mr. Ellroy, the chair.

ARMAND

(to James)

He's giving me "the chair".

SOCIAL WORKER

Not quite yet, Mr. Ellroy.
(to James)

James, you're here because under your
father's supervision you were caught --
peeping in a window...

JAMES

I was looking for my Spaldeens. It
rolled in the bushes.
(looks around)
I told you.

ARMAND

I believe him.

(CONTINUED)

SOCIAL WORKER

(looks at Armand)

Yes. I understand, Mr. Ellroy, you've been evicted from your home.

ARMAND

(ashamed)

We found a better place to live. I showed you the address.

SOCIAL WORKER

Yes.

AUNT ALMA

We live on a beautiful farm.

JAMES

My mother hated you, Aunt Alma. She used to imitate you.

(does a funny, cruel

imitation of her speech)

She hated you and your stupid farm.

All she ever wanted to do was get away from you.

UNCLE BOB

You little... Your mother hated him.

(Armand)

JAMES (OVER)

If she hadn't left him she wouldn't be dead!

AUNT ALMA

(holding back tears)

Oh, please. Please stop it.

ARMAND

The boy's got a point.

SOCIAL WORKER

There are a lot of strong feelings in this room...

JAMES

They just want me for the money, they're crooks.

UNCLE BOB

(stands)

We don't want you.

(re: Alma)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

UNCLE BOB (cont'd)

She did, but you've managed to talk
some sense into her, hasn't he?

Alma is really torn, between her husband and her loyalty
to her dead sister, and maybe some real affection for
James. She chooses her husband.

AUNT ALMA

(to James)

I'm sorry.

UNCLE BOB

We won't be back. We don't want you
around our girls.

JAMES

Good! Good riddance. Fuck you!
Leave me alone!

SOCIAL WORKER

Alright, People! This isn't solving
our problem.

UNCLE BOB

Open your mouth, James. Open it! He
doesn't have any braces. Fifteen
hundred dollars for braces.

(re: Armand)

He stole from us. And the boy has no
braces and no place to live!

ARMAND

(in charm mode)

Listen. I moved me and the boy to a
new place, sure it's small, but it's
in the Fairfax High School district.
You know what that means? Fairfax
High School is 95% Jewish! And,
whatever else you want to say about
them, they're smart. My kid is gonna
compete with the best Jewish brains in
the city.

(to Bob and Alma, losing it)

So don't you tell me I don't know how
to do take care of my son. Everything
I do, I do for a reason!

Bob hustles Alma out.

UNCLE BOB

Good luck to both of you.

AUNT ALMA

God bless you, James.

(CONTINUED)

James flashes her a smile, emphasizing his lack of braces. His look of triumph is mixed with a tinge of doubt as his last chance for a "normal" life walks out the door.

CUT TO:

109 INT. ELLROY'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY - 1995

109

Every time we come back to the room, the boards and displays are a little more full, a dense, obsessively ordered collage of Jean Ellroy's death.

STONER

You should be the one to call.

ELLROY

I don't want to give anyone a heart attack.

STONER

Ellroy?

ELLROY

Yeah.

STONER

You overestimate yourself.

He hands him the phone.

STONER (cont'd)

Want some privacy?

ELLROY

(shrugs)

Stay and enjoy the show.

He hits the speakerphone button; electronic beeps are broadcast to the room as makes the call.

JANIE

(45 years old now)

Hello?

ELLROY

Are Mr. or Mrs. Cole in?

JANIE

Who's calling?

ELLROY

Their nephew, James Ellroy.

(CONTINUED)

Silence.

ELLROY (cont'd)
Calling from LA.

JANIE
(cold)
James Ellroy. This is your cousin,
Janie.

ELLROY
Wow. Hi. So - Janie - I'm alive.

JANIE
This really isn't a good time.

ELLROY
For me to be alive?

JANIE
(not charmed)
My father is in the hospital. He had
a heart attack. He's in intensive
care.

ELLROY
Janie, I'm really sorry. Is that
where Aunt Leoda is?

JANIE
My mother died fifteen years ago.

ELLROY
(damn)
Geez. I'm sorry.

JANIE
Honestly? We assumed you were dead.
(beat)
Well, I'm sure you want something. Is
it still money?

ELLROY
(quietly)
I don't want your money. I'm a
successful novelist.

JANIE
(after a pause)
That doesn't seem believable to me.
James, I don't want to be short but
I'm very upset and I have to get to
the hospital. What do you want?

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY

I was wondering if I could come visit,
talk to you folks. About my mother.

Janie

Do you still call her "the whore"?
(before he can reply)
You broke my mother's heart, James.
I'm not letting you anywhere near my
father... You think I'm gonna let you
come here and upset him, when he's
lying sick in a hospital?

ELLROY

I don't want to upset anybody.

JANIE

That would be a first.
(she relents, a little)
Maybe when he's better, if he gets
better, I can tell him you called.

ELLROY

Okay. And -- I wasn't lying to you,
Janie. Go to any bookstore. Look
under my name.

JANIE

Really? Should I get one of your
books for my father?

ELLROY

(after a pause)
No.

JANIE

I really have to go now.

ELLROY

Let me give you my numbers.

But she's already hung up. DIAL TONE. Ellroy hits the
speakerphone button off.

Ellroy's been studiously not looking at Stoner all
through this. Stoner has kept his eyes averted too. His
basic decency won't allow him to use this private moment
against James.

STONER

Well...

Ellroy still won't meet his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY
(softly)
One cold bitch, huh?

Stoner says nothing.

ELLROY (cont'd)
Maybe we should shoot out there,
anyway. If Uncle Bob's really that
sick...

STONER
Just skip the get well card, huh?

Ellroy's efforts at being his obnoxious self are falling
a little flat, even for him.

ELLROY
Well, the bastard had a heart attack
without consulting me. And without
any help from me.

STONER
I'm sorry about your Aunt.
(Ellroy nods)
They'll call. You probably just
shocked that poor woman.

ELLROY
I know.

STONER
(leaving, turns)
I have a question, Ellroy. Why'd you
leave the speakerphone on?

ELLROY
(after a pause)
So you'd believe me when I tell you
things about myself, from now on.

STONER
(compassionate)
When you tell me what a shithead you
are? Okay. I'll never doubt you
again.

ELLROY
Good.

STONER
Well. Then, that's settled.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY
Okay.

STONER
Alright.

ELLROY
Thanks.

STONER
You're welcome.

Ellroy's let Stoner see him, beneath the mask. With a connection, a knowledge, unsaid but acknowledged between them, Stoner leaves.

CUT TO:

110 INT. ARMAND ELLROY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - 1965 110

Armand, 64 now, skinny, pasty, wasted, sitting on the dog-chewed couch in his boxers and undershirt, watching the black and white TV, background noise about Vietnam.

He sips from a beer bottle and pets Barko, fat in her doggie middle age. He's a sad sight.

James, 17, comes in from outside.

ARMAND
You're gonna be a drunk like your mother, huh? A lazy, weak, pisspoor drunk.

JAMES
You watching this?

He turns the TV off. Turns on a radio. COOL JAZZ.

ARMAND
(still looking at TV)
I love this country. God bless America.

James just loses himself in the music, and a paperback crime pulp with a lurid cover.

ARMAND (cont'd)
And I love you, Fritz. Even though you're a half-breed from a line of draft-dodging Krauts in Wisconsin. I only ever wanted what was best for you.

(CONTINUED)

James says nothing, embarrassed by his father's beer-soaked sentimentality.

JAMES
I'll make some hot dogs.

ARMAND
I'll go take a piss.

He takes a frozen pack out of the fridge. WHACKS it against the wall to "defrost" it. Armand walks to the bathroom. Barko BARKS and jumps up to grab the dogs.

JAMES
Down, girl. Down.

James bangs the dogs, one goes flying. Barko runs to retrieve it, into the bathroom. She BARKS AND BARKS. Then runs back, agitated, with the hot dog in her teeth.

JAMES
Dad?

GRUNTING SOUND from the bathroom.

JAMES (cont'd)
Dad?

Ellroy walks into the

111 BATHROOM

111

Barko follows with the hot dog still between her teeth. Armand's on the floor; he's had a stroke.

112 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

112

James's at his side. Armand looks emaciated and very weak. He has tubes in his nose and arms. James holds his father's hand on the metal bed rail.

JAMES
You'll be fine. You're gonna be fine.

ARMAND
Uh uh. Fritz.

Spittle dribbles out of Armand's mouth as he tries to smile and only half his mouth moves. He tries to speak some more.

JAMES

What?

(he leans down to his
father's face)

What? Say it.

After a struggle Armand gets out these words.

ARMAND

Try to pick up. Every waitress who
serves you.

113 INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

113

James smokes in the corridor outside his father's room.
A patient ALARM sounds from the room. The crash team
rushes in, followed by James. That's it for Dad.

114 INT. HOLLYWOOD FLOP HOUSE - NIGHT - 1967

114

Uncle Bob climbs the stairs of a flop house. It's
smelly. The people he passes are scary. He looks for a
room number. He KNOCKS.

JAMES (O.S.)

Come on in.

No one opens the door. Bob waits. Then turns the knob.
It's open.The inside is truly sad. James sits on the floor next to
the bed, completely stoned and drunk.

JAMES (cont'd)

Hi, Uncle Bob.

UNCLE BOB

Oh, my God, boy.

JAMES

Don't sit down.

Bob's taken a few steps forward toward James and the bed.
The bed has vomit on it. Bob holds his nose.

UNCLE BOB

I can't help you if you're gonna be
like this.

JAMES

Just give me my money.

(CONTINUED)

114 CONTINUED:

114

UNCLE BOB

There is no more money.

JAMES

You still want me?

He looks at Ed, smiling, half-hopeful. He sniffs a hit off a benezdrine inhaler. Reacts blissfully to the rush.

UNCLE BOB

Maybe I can help you get to a hospital.

James has nodded out. Bob comes over, gingerly, tries to lift him.

UNCLE BOB (cont'd)

Thank God your mother isn't alive to see this.

James rouses himself enough to SPIT at Uncle Bob.

JAMES

(trying to talk)

I'm gonna -- I'm gonna --

UNCLE BOB

Phew. You stink.

JAMES

(delirious)

I'm gonna be famous.

CUT TO:

115 CLOSE ON ELLROY'S FACE, THE PRESENT

115

He looks frightened, dissheveled, in the glare of street lamps and garish neon signs on the El Monte strip,

116 EXT. EL MONTE STREET - NIGHT - 1995

116

He's breathing fast. He pulls a few drags from a cigarette, tosses it, lights another and another. He looks lost, but he's got a destination. Like a man reluctantly pulled toward a destiny he can no longer avoid.

Emerging from a dark patch, a purple neon "V" suddenly illuminates his features and he looks up at,

117 EXT. VALENZUELA'S BAR AND RESTAURANT - NIGHT 117

Valenzuela's - where Jean Ellroy and the Swarthy Man danced and drank, that night. He enters.

118 INT. VALENZUELA'S - NIGHT 118

He stands in the doorway, surveying the place. It's crowded now, noisy. Loud MEXICAN MUSIC. The bartender looks up, following the eyes of a patron, to the strange guy at the door who looks like trouble. Then, his eyes register recognition. He remembers Ellroy. Ellroy's eyes look at everything, but register nothing. Like an abuse victim who's had too much but knows more is coming, anyway. Then, Ellroy's eyes do register a kind of recognition, a gathering purpose. The sexy waitress with red hair sees him from the middle of the floor; they make eye contact. It's intense; she looks away, a bit unnerved, continues serving a customer.

Ellroy starts toward her, weaving through the crowd. When he reaches her, she smiles, using friendliness as a shield.

SEXY MEXICAN RED-HEAD

Oje. You're back. Can I get you something?

ELLROY

Dance with me.

It isn't the demand of an asshole. It's raw, naked, need.

SEXY MEXICAN RED-HEAD

(shrugs)

I'm working.

ELLROY

I'll pay you a hundred dollars. One dance.

SEXY MEXICAN RED-HEAD

I'm not that good a dancer! I wish I was.

A male customer, overhearing,

CUSTOMER

(in Spanish)

You want me to get rid of this strange creep?

(CONTINUED)

118 CONTINUED:

118

 SEXY MEXICAN RED-HEAD
 (in Spanish)
It's okay. I know him.
 (to Ellroy)
I have a break coming, anyway.

CUT TO:

119 THE DANCE FLOOR

119

Ellroy and the red-haired woman dance to a slow tune. She likes the feel of him; she pulls him closer. She can feel his body shivering. His eyes are far away.

120 INTERCUT, TO THE MUSIC,

120

This dance is intercut with the images flooding Ellroy's head. Murdered women. His mother, the Black Dahlia, the murdered women of his fiction, his imagination, of the pulp magazines he read as a kid. This has to be done carefully, the images should not be titillating but they should be horrible - in the sense that we feel the horror the women victims feel - as Ellroy does - in the movie he can't stop in his head.

121 INT. ELLROY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

121

No Ellroy. We hear Helen's voice on the answering machine.

HELEN

Big Dog. Hey. Where are you? The basement's flooded. I'm in hip boots, bailing out. God loves the water but I'm afraid he's gonna lick a socket and get electrocuted. Call me.

122 HOTEL ROOM - SUNRISE

122

More unanswered calls.

HELEN

Hey, c'mon, James. Please. Just let me know you're alright. David, not the dentist, David your agent's been calling. Do you remember you have a reading in two days in Chicago?

STONER

Ellroy, where the fuck are you? We had an appointment with the guy from the car dealership next to the Desert Inn.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

Jung says we have to walk through the shadow to get to the light. Ann Landers says you should let the people you love know how you're doing. Okay, I'm the coward. Not you. I'm scared. I love you.

Day has turned to dusk and back to night. No one there to answer.

FADE TO:

123 EXT. WISCONSIN CEMETERY - DAY

123

It's a snowy, freezing, windy winter day. We see gravestones. We see Ellroy standing there, freezing, in his Hawaaiian shirt.

He walks on. He looks awful.

At the very corner of his line of sight, a family gathered, some under umbrellas, the end of a funeral. Ellroy stops, and watches as, in the distance, a coffin is lowered into the ground. The distant, muffled sound of CRYING, carried by the wind.

The funeral party leaves the graveside, begins to walk toward the vehicles, in Ellroy's direction.

Ellroy gets as close as he dares, wanting to see these people, not wanting to be seen. Finally, he ducks behind a tall gravestone, as they pass.

As the funeral party gets into the cars and limousine in the distance, Ellroy starts toward the gravesite.

Ellroy reaches the graves. The fresh one has no stone yet, just a sign stuck in the dirt that says "ROBERT EDGAR COLE". Next to it is the headstone for "ALMA HILLIKER COLE BELOVED WIFE, MOTHER, GRANDMOTHER, SISTER, AUNT".

Ellroy stands and looks, shivering in his shirtsleeves. Fingering his metal object talisman.

CUT TO:

124 INT. ELLROY'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

124

Stoner and Helen enter the room - the walls are hung with poster-size blow-ups of details of the Jean Ellroy crime scene photos and the indistinct photo of Jean in front of

(CONTINUED)

the house. The obsession board has expanded. It fills an entire side of the room.

HELEN

Oh, my God.

STONER

You know, it's ... I've seen plenty of detectives become obsessed with their cases. I've been there. He's a big boy, Helen.

HELEN

It's not the big boy part of him I'm worried about.

STONER

I know.

HELEN

He almost went down once. All the way down.

STONER

But, he didn't.

HELEN

I don't know. Maybe he had a good reason for never thinking or talking about her. Maybe I acted out of hubris and my own fears about getting married. I'm gonna fix you and save you - he was right - right out of some pathetic female stereotype. You know about his Black Dahlia obsession?

STONER

He told me.

HELEN

Maybe we should have left well enough alone. Maybe he can't take Jean Ellroy straight, unfiltered.

STONER

You think Jean Ellroy is more frightening to him than a woman sawed in half on the street?

They look at one another and agree.

HELEN

Much.

(CONTINUED)

Stoner turns on an answering machine.

STONER

This is the tip line he set up.

FEMALE VOICE

Hey, you guys, I know who killed that lady. O.J. did it. (LAUGHTER)

MALE VOICE

I know who killed the Black Dahlia and your mother... and he's coming after you.

HELEN

My messages must have fit right in.

125 EXT. WISCONSIN SUBURBAN HOUSE - DUSK

125

Ellroy watches the house from across the street. Warm lights burn inside; it's the post-funeral reception, winding down. People in dark clothing leave the house, in twos and threes, saying their goodbyes. A man notices Ellroy across the street, goes back in the house, comes out with a MIDDLE AGED WOMAN in black. She looks across the street, makes eye contact with Ellroy. A hint of recognition in Ellroy's eyes. He starts to cross the street, toward the grown-up Laura, still fat.

ELLROY

Laura? I'm your cousin, James.

LAURA

My, God. You grew up.

Before Ellroy can answer, Janie, the other cousin, joins them, in a rage, taking out her grief on Ellroy.

JANIE

What's he doing here? Your nerve never stops, does it? Even on the day my father's buried!?

LAURA

I invited him.

JANIE

You? You said we should send his money back!

LAURA

We should.

(CONTINUED)

JANIE
(letting tears go)
You can't even respect me on this one day?
(to Ellroy)
What do you want? You must want something.

ELLROY
I'm very sorry about your father.

JEANIE
Sure, you are. After ripping him off all those years and insulting...

LAURA
(to Ellroy)
She's just upset.

JEANIE
Yeah, because I cared about Daddy. I didn't upset him on his deathbed!

LAURA
Neither did I! He was glad to hear that James was... alive.

ELLROY
This is bad timing...

LAURA
Welcome back to the family.
(as Janie storms inside)
Actually, you called just in time.
My father told me where to look. I never would have found it.

126 INT. LAURA BENNET'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

126

It's a warm, chaotic family. The thing Ellroy never had. The kids are eager to impress him. MINDY (14) plays the piano. CASEY (12) shows cousin James his Gameboy. Janet's husband BRIAN serves iced tea. The family dog, a friendly brown lab, CHOMPER, licks Ellroy's hand; a cockatoo SQUAWKS in its cage, occasionally saying HOWDY PAL. Ellroy is awkward, antsy; wants to join in, feels left out.

Laura enters the room carrying a cardboard box.

LAURA
These are all of your mother.

(CONTINUED)

She puts the box on the table. Opens it. The box is full of photographs of Jean Ellroy at different stages of her life.

She hands Ellroy a black and white photo of Jean Ellroy, 24 or 25. She's wearing a plaid shirt, a windbreaker, jodhpurs and boots that lace up to her knees. She's sitting on a rustic wooden fence, staring straight into the camera with a little smile. She looks beautiful, proud and strong. This is the first time James has seen good photographs of his mother since the eviction.

MINDY

Do you have this one?

ELLROY

I don't have any pictures of her.

Chomper tries to lick a photo; Laura snatches it away.

LAURA

Honey, put Chomper outside. He's gonna ruin these.

BRIAN

C'mere, Chomper. C'mon, boy.

Laura and Brian are affected, seeing Ellroy's clearly emotional reaction.

CASEY

She's pretty.

LAURA

This was her honeymoon - her first marriage.

ELLROY

(shock)

First marriage?

LAURA

Yeah. To the Spalding guy. The heir to the Spalding fortune? You never knew about that?

Ellroy shakes his head, no.

LAURA

Yeah. My mother used to tell us about that. Didn't last long. But she was supposedly really in love.

(CONTINUED)

Ellroy is compulsively staring at this and other photos from this period. His mother looks wholesome, happy, vibrant.

LAURA

Here they are as kids. My mother adored her big sister.

For the first time Ellroy sees his mother as a ten year old. Indeed Leoda, her sister, is staring up at her, with a big, worshipful smile.

ELLROY

Is that her Dad? My old man always used to call him the Kraut draft dodger.

BRIAN

Kraut?

ELLROY

You know, the German immigrant blood libel.

Brian and Laura exchange a look.

LAURA

Our family isn't German.

BRIAN

No. What are they, they're all --

Laura

- from England, I guess, originally. I mean the names are all -- Hilliker, Linscott, Pierce. Grandma's name was Jessie Woodard Hilliker.. I don't know, they'd been here like 150 years or something.

ELLROY

Why did my father think you were all "Krauts"?

LAURA

I have no idea.

Casey has several black and white snapshots of Jean as a young woman posing in gorgeous Western scenery. He's turned one over and reads.

(CONTINUED)

CASEY

"A single cloud in the Western sky turned my eyes heavenward today. I watched it change from a pitchfork to a cat and then disappear. That's why I'm smiling in the picture." Look, James, your mother wrote this.

Laura picks up a snapshot and reads a poetic description.

LAURA

"We saw a mountain lion's paw prints still visible in the dust here. That means, no wind today. Or, a mountain lion is very close! I didn't run, though. I stayed and waited for him."

She picks up another one.

LAURA

Looks like you inherited your talent, James. She was a writer, too.

We see this hit Ellroy. Pride and pain and loss, for so much he didn't know. More, laid out on the table - pictures, report cards, local newspaper clippings that mention her...

LAURA

I wish my parents had known you were alive. They could have told you all about your mother.

CASEY

What happened to his mother?

Mindy, thinking she can't be seen makes a motion like shooting somebody in the head.

ELLROY

No, it was more like -

He starts to make a strangling motion with his hands. It's his patented shock 'em routine. But he stops in the middle. No one makes a sound.

Ellroy gets up to walk outside.

CUT TO:

127 EXT. ARROYO HIGH SCHOOL GROUNDS - NIGHT - JUNE 22, 1958 127

Impressionistic shots. But there's no ambiguity. It's violent, it's a rape.

JEAN
No, no. Ooow.

Swarthy Man climaxes. He pauses just a beat to catch his breath, still pinning her down. Then he looks at Jean, with a look of cold inevitability.

JEAN (cont'd)
(panicked)
I won't tell anyone. It's okay. I promise. Just let me go home. I'll never tell anybody...

But he's moving toward her, his hands around her neck. She struggles away from his hands, gasping for breath, pleading, fighting.

JEAN (cont'd)
Oh, God. No. No. I have a little boy! Please. No. He needs me. I'll never tell. No, no! James!

He chokes the breath out of her. Swarthy Man turns around and for the first time we see his face in full. It's James Ellroy's face.

FEMALE VOICE
James. James.

CUT TO:

128 INT. KLOCK GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

128

Ellroy wakes up in a sweat. There's a soft KNOCKING on the door.

LAURA (O.S.)
James, are you awake?

ELLROY
Yeah.

LAURA
A Bill Stoner is on the phone.

Ellroy gets up, goes into the hall and picks up the phone.

(CONTINUED)

STONER
You sonofabitch.

ELLROY
I...

STONER
No, don't say anything. While you
were pulling your disappearing act, I
may have found the Swarthy Man.

CUT TO:

129 CLOSE ON A METAL DESK, TWO BLACK AND WHITE CRIME SCENE 129
PHOTOGRAPHS, SIDE BY SIDE.

130 INT. EL MONTE POLICE STATION OFFICE - DAY 130

One of the photos is familiar: Jean Ellroy, strangled,
her coat laid across her legs. The second photo is of
another woman, in a different location, strangled, her
coat draped across her legs. The woman is blonde.

A male hand comes into frame, touches the second photo.

STONER (O.S.)
Elspeth "Bobbie" Long. Found
strangled nine months after your
mother's murder. About 20 miles away.
(off Ellroy's look)
Unsolved. And - you can't really tell
from this picture but, she was blonde.

ELLROY
So. The blonde is dead. Long dead.

STONER
I found her neice. Showed her a
picture of Swarthy Man. She said he
looked a lot like her Aunt's friend,
Jack, who used to come around when she
was a kid. "Uncle" Jack.

Ellroy waits, not breathing.

STONER (cont'd)
She still gets Christmas cards from
him. He's in a trailer park in
Alhambra.

This is major, major news. Ellroy takes it in.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY

So - all you needed to solve the case
was for me to leave town.

STONER

No, Ellroy. Your egocentric mania for
publicity is what got Det. Burke to
call.

131 INT. ELLROY'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

131

The content of the board is changed. It's now filled
with his mother's nursing school report cards, old photos
of her, notes she wrote... The bulletin board is now Jean
Ellroy's LIFE, not just her death.

Ellroy comes out of the bathroom, partly dressed.

ELLROY

How do you dress to meet the man who
had sex with and murdered your mother?

132 INT. CAR ON FREEWAY - DAY

132

Ellroy and Stoner drive to meet Uncle Jack.

STONER

He may not even be there.

ELLROY

I know.

STONER

We want to hit him cold, we may be
going back three, four times.

ELLROY

Right.

STONER

Maybe he's dead. Maybe he died last
week.

ELLROY

My heart's racing.

STONER

Adrenaline.

ELLROY

I feel like I'm on my way to a
whorehouse for my first fuck.

(CONTINUED)

132 CONTINUED:

117.
132

Stoner looks at him - has this guy ever heard of Freud?

STONER

You still got some wires to uncross,
Ellroy.

Stoner swerves off the freeway.

133 EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY

133

They drive a gravel road to a seedy trailer court. On a mailbox tree near the front of the court they find Uncle Jack's name and trailer space number.

Stoner pulls into a parking area. As they get out of the car, Stoner opens the glove compartment, takes out a service revolver and puts it in a shoulder holster. Ellroy looks at him, surprised.

STONER

We're going in to accuse a guy of
murder potentially. Anything can
happen.

ELLROY

You got one for me?

STONER

No way.

They walk toward the trailer spot. It's early. A woman in a housedress is outside her trailer, dumping burnt sausages on the ground for her dog.

They approach Uncle Jack's trailer. There's a light on inside, a curtain pulled back. He's there.

Stoner signals Ellroy - it's your show. Ellroy KNOCKS.

A shuffling sound. The door opens. And there he is. About 75, skinny, but still muscled. He's in an undershirt. He looks Italian.

ELLROY

Jack?

CUT TO:

134 INT. JACK'S TRAILER - DAY

134

Ellroy and Stoner in Jack's cramped trailer. Ellroy and Stoner both notice old paperback copies of Ellroy's novels on Jack's small bookshelf.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY
I heard you dated my mother.

JACK
I knew your mother from Airtek.

Jack looks visibly nervous.

ELLROY (cont'd)
(cool)
What was the name of that place you
two hung out? The Desert Inn?

JACK
I didn't hang out there.

ELLROY
You know the place? Ever go there
with Bobbie Long?

JACK
Bobbie Long? Who's he? What - why
are you here?

ELLROY
Did you kill my mother?

JACK
Oh, my God.

He looks at Stoner, scared.

STONER
(quiet)
It was a long time ago. Nobody's read
you your rights. You can just tell
us.

ELLROY
Yeah. Tell us. Tell me. Get it off
your chest.

STONER
It could all be over.

ELLROY
I just want to hear it from you.
That's all. I need to hear it from
you!

JACK
(to Stoner)
Mister, I didn't do anything!

(CONTINUED)

He's peeing his pants. It's dripping down the chair leg.
Ellroy looks at the puddle, humiliting him.

ELLROY

Did you date my mother?

JACK

(loud)

Yes!

ELLROY

Did you fuck her?

JACK

(small voice)

Once.

ELLROY

And then you killed her?

JACK

No! Then I went home. And she went home. To you.

ELLROY

(losing it)

She didn't come home to me. She never came home! And, I want you to tell me it was you. C'mon, tell me it was you. And, tell me why!

JACK

I don't know why!

ELLROY

You have no idea what you took away from me.

JACK

Tell me.

ELLROY

Forgiveness. She died with me hating her. Not having the smallest idea who she was. She died with that hurt. And I need to give her something, Jack, so I need it to be you. If it's you - I just need to give her that. We both do.

JACK

(simple, true)

I was in Florida when it happened.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JACK (cont'd)
With my mother.
(beat)
I wish it was me if it would give you
peace...

ELLROY
Did somebody check out your story?
(no answer)
You look so much like him. How come
they never even questioned you?

JACK
I don't know. Everyone knew I was a
nice guy.
(a beat)
You know that song, "Chances Are"?
Johnny Mathis?
(they do)
They had a little memorial for your
mother at Airtek. I got back just in
time for it. They kept playing that
song over and over. It must have been
her favorite or something.
(to James)
She never stopped talking about you.
She had a lot of trouble with your
father. Trying to take you away.
Isn't that right?

ELLROY
He did take me away. I helped him.

Jack isn't quite sure what this means. He goes on.

JACK
She was always saying her kid was
"too smart for his own good." Your
birthday must be in the summer or
something?

ELLROY
Yeah. Why?

JACK
Did you used to be interested in
rocket ships?

STONER
(turns to James, amused)
Were you?

JACK
Well, all boys are, right?

(CONTINUED)

STONER
He isn't all boys.

ELLROY
(an innocent, pleasant
memory; he smiles)
Yeah. I wanted to be a spaceman.
Sputnik. Captain Video.

JACK
'Cause she had me helping her with
some birthday present for you. We
made parts for those first test
rockets. Then we'd analyze 'em after
they fired. She made me cadge a
piece.

ELLROY
I need you to come with me to my car.

Jack's still nervous. He looks around his trailer.
Should he go? Is this guy nuts? He looks to Stoner who
nods, it's okay, do it.

135 EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY - CONTINUOUS

135

They approach the car in silence. Ellroy opens the
passanger door, like in a dream, pulls something out of
the glove compartment. A flash of light on metal.
That's where the gun was. Stoner tenses, reflexively.

JACK
Yeah, that's it.
(it's the strange metal
object)
This piece of rocket ship went up into
space. She wanted you to have it.

JACK
(seeing his pain)
I'm sorry I wasn't him. I guess.

ELLROY
(gently)
Me, too. I'll be checking your alibi.

136 INT. CAR ON FREEWAY - DUSK

136

Stoner and Ellroy drive the freeway once again.

STONER
You know, it's bullshit, Ellroy.

(CONTINUED)

ELLROY

What? Jack's alibi?

STONER

You knew who she was. And you didn't hate her, you loved her, in the way that counts.

(he hits Ellroy's chest:
inside)

ELLROY

How do you know?

STONER

Because you're not that special. All little boys love their mothers. You just can't stand to admit how normal you are. Just another little part of the human race.

ELLROY

You're accusing me of being normal?
In the human race?

STONER

Yeah. Well, now, I am.

ELLROY

(after a pause)
You don't know jack shit.

Stoner just nods.

STONER

Oh, yeah, I forgot to tell you. I took your money out of escrow a while ago. So, I'm in. As long as you want to go on.

ELLROY

He's either out there. Or he isn't.

STONER

We'll probably never find out.

ELLROY

That's right.

STONER

Every mystery doesn't have an answer.
Can you live with that? Does it matter now?

(CONTINUED)

Ellroy's look says it. Yes, it matters. And, no. It really doesn't anymore. And they exit off the body dump freeway, for now.

137 INT. ELLROY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

137

Helen and Ellroy silently pack up, taking down photos and documents from the Jean Ellroy obsession chamber. Ellroy looks at the photos of his mother. He watches Helen for a moment, appreciating her. He takes an old newspaper clipping down from the wall.

ELLROY

Did you see this one? This is how my mother got to LA. She was the winner of the "Best Redhead in Upper Wisconsin" contest. Her roommate secretly entered her. It says here, Jean Ellroy was much too modest to enter the contest herself.

HELEN

Let me see that.

There's still a lot of tension between them. He walks to her, embraces her from behind, they face the wall of photos,

ELLROY

Mom. Hey, Mom. Swarthy Man took you away from me. I want you to meet the woman who brought you back.

On Helen, moved. She starts to protest.

HELEN

You did...

ELLROY

(no)

I didn't know who she was. I sure as hell didn't know who my father was.

(he turns Helen around,
close)

Maybe it isn't too late for me to know who I am...

(before she can say
anything)

And, if you'll take me under those conditions, knowing how wrong I've been, about a lot of things... it's not the best way to start, admitting you've been so wrong... when you're

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

137 CONTINUED:

137

ELLROY (cont'd)
telling the person you love how sure
you are... that you love them and need
them and you want to spend your life
with them... but, I guess I've been
humbled... and, so, if...

HELEN

Yes?

ELLROY
(confirming)

Yes?

HELEN

That was a question, not an answer.

ELLROY

I love you so much. Could it be an
answer?

For an answer, she leans in and they kiss. They stumble
back onto the bed. CAMERA MOVES UP to find a photo on
the wall: one of the photos he got from the relatives in
Wisconsin. It's little James and his mother in long
forgotten happy days. She's pushing him on a swing. The
image from Unsolved Mysteries; the image he said never
happened.

ELLROY (VOICE OVER)

I'm with you now. You ran and hid and
I found you. I robbed your grave. I
revealed you. I showed you in
shameful moments. I learned things
about you. Everything I learned made
me love you more dearly. I can't hear
your voice. I can smell you and taste
your breath. I can feel you. You're
brushing against me.

(James looks out on the
vista)

You're gone and I want more of you.

THE CAMERA MOVES INTO THE BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO UNTIL
IT'S A BLUR AND BECOMES,

138 EXT. EL MONTE HOUSE - DAY - 1958

138

A scene we've seen before: Young James outside the house,
leaving. He turns back, his mother calling to him from
the front door. He sees Jean Ellroy standing there,
looking at him, her face sad. She's always been there.

(CONTINUED)

This time James doesn't turn away. He runs to his mother and gives her the hug she asked for. He hugs her tight.

DISSOLVES TO:

139 END CREDITS OVER, 139

140 INT. PACIFIC DINING CAR RESTAURANT - DAY 140

James and Helen's wedding. Bill Stoner is Best Man. Cousin Laura and family are there. Lavonne Chambers is there.

Ellroy looks into the crowd - and there, amongst them, is the image of a vibrant, smiling, red-haired woman in Fifties dress; Jean Ellroy, red hair gleaming in the light, smiling at James.

MUSIC: CHANCES ARE. As images of the wedding reception continue. Ellroy looks back and sees the ethereal image of Jean Ellroy, once again, smiling at her son. He smiles back. The image of Jean Ellroy slowly fades, and it's just James and Helen.

ELLROY (V.O.)
(a whisper)
Mom.

THE END