

The Ladykillers

by

Joel Coen and Ethan Coen

Second Draft
May 8, 2001

A BOAT

Specifically, a garbage scow.

We see it from on high, chugging down the placid but mighty Mississippi.

Head credits play over coverage of the garbage scow. No sound, except for an incongruously heroic score.

The coverage is a little rough, coarse-grained; along with the overbearing score it almost suggests an industrial film rather than a feature.

One piece of sound--the toot of the boat's horn--is obviously library. And not a new library either.

The garbage scow passes under a bridge spanning the broad, sluggish waters, and proceeds on to its landfill, a steaming river island. Disturbed gulls and other scavenger birds rise from where they were picking through trash. Their squawks, like the boat horn, are not quite believable as sync.

The head credits end as the anthemic music resolves.

OLD HOUND DOG

He lies on the weather-grayed and -roughened planking of a front porch. The porch is half shaded from the noonday sun. It is quiet except for the chirr of heat bugs, close by, and, very distant, many voices in chorus, engaged in divine worship in a Baptist church sufficiently far away that vagaries of breeze fan them in and out of audibility.

We once again hear the toot of the scow's horn, distant now and played as real, not slapdash effect. At this, the dog lifts his nose to catch the breeze, sniffs, and then, whining, lowers his head to the floor and covers his snout with his forepaws. He huffs briefly and goes to sleep.

We drift up to show that the dog is sleeping before the

SAUCIER WORM STORE

Your source for "worms," lures, et cetra, et cetra. . .

We travel over to reveal that the modest one-story structure houses two establishments; its other front door leads to the

SAUCIER MUNICIPAL BUILDING.

A campaign sign in the window on the municipal side shows a black man of late middle-age beaming and giving the viewer a thumbs up: RE-ELECT WAYNE WYNER SHERIFF/He Is Too Old to Go to Work.

INSIDE

We hear snoring on top of a low, steady hissing sound.

We are drifting toward the door of the lock-up, which stands open. The small cell is empty, its bed neatly made.

A KEY

We are arcing slowly around a jailer's key on a ring that hangs from a nail. The offscreen snoring and whirring continues.

The track's shifting angle now makes the light catch a spider web spun between the key and the wall.

POLICE SCANNER

We drift across the face of the radio. The peaceful steady jumps in louder at the cut: it is uninterrupted: a transmissionless, crimeless, misdemeanorless idle radio hiss.

The snoring is also louder here. As we travel off the radio we are coming onto a pair of feet propped up on the desktop.

They belong to Sheriff Wyner, tipped back in his chair, fingers laced on his chest, head lolling forward.

As the moving camera finally ends, on him, there is the ring of a telephone—muffled, not present.

It nevertheless rouses the sheriff who almost strangles on a snore as he awakes, and then rocks forward to pick up his phone.

Sheriff

Sheriff Wyner. . .

The muffled ringing continues; the sheriff looks, puzzled, at the phone. Now the ringing stops and we hear a muffled voice next door: "Worms."

The sheriff replaces the phone, leans back again, adjusts his hat, and is about to go back to sleep when we hear the front door open.

The sheriff looks and reacts with genuine, if momentary, fear.

He manages to compose himself and give the intruder a smile:

Sheriff

Afternoon, Miz Munson.

Entering is an elderly black woman in a floral print dress and fruited bonnet.

Mrs. Munson

Afternoon, Sheriff. You know the Funthes boy?

Wyner

. . . Mackatee Funthes?

Mrs. Munson

No no, WeeMack! Mackatee's eldest!

Wyner

Oh yeah, believe I do.

Mrs. Munson

Well, he's a good boy but he done gone down to the Costco in Pascagoula and got hisself a blastah-and he been playin' that music!

Wyner is not sure where this is going:

Wyner

Uh-huh. . .

Mrs. Munson

Loud!

Wyner

Well-

Mrs. Munson

"Left my wallet in El Segundo!"

Wyner

He-

Mrs. Munson

Songs like that!

Wyner

Uh-huh-

Mrs. Munson

Hippity-hop music!

Wyner

I could-

Mrs. Munson

You know they call it hippity-hop music,
but it don't make me wanna go hippity-
hop!

Wyner

No ma'am-

Mrs. Munson

And Othar don't like that music neither!

Sheriff Wyner now displays an exaggerated solicitousness:

Wyner

It's been disturbin' Othar then, has it?

Mrs. Munson

How could it help but do! That kind of
music! You know what they call colored
folks in them songs? Have you got any
idea?

Wyner

I don't think I-

Mrs. Munson

NIGGAZ! I don't wanna say the word. I
won't say it twice, I'll tell you that.
I say it one time.

Wyner

Yes ma'am.

Mrs. Munson

In the course a swearin' out my
complaint.

Wyner

Yes'm-

Mrs. Munson

NIGGAZ! Two thousand years after Jesus!
Thirty years after Martin Luther King!
The age of Montel! Sweet lord a-mercy,
izzat where we at?

Wyner

Mm-mm-

Mrs. Munson

WeeMack down to Pascagoula buyin' a big
thumpy stereo player?! So he can listen
to that word in the house next to mine?
Sheriff, you gotta help that boy!

Wyner

Help him?

Mrs. Munson

You gotta take an innarest! EXTEND THAT
HELPIN' HAND!

Wyner

(dubious)

Well, we're here to help. . .

Mrs. Munson

Well God bless ya. Don't wanna be tried
and found wantin'.

Wyner

No ma'am.

Mrs. Munson

Many many tunkalow parzen, Sheriff
Wyner. Many many tunkalaow parzen!

Wyner

Many what ma'am?

Mrs. Munson

You have been tried and found wanting.
Don't want that writin' on the wall!

Wyner

No ma'am-

Mrs. Munson

Feast a Balthazar!

Wyner

Mm-hm.

Mrs. Munson

John The Apostle said: Behold there is a
stranger in our midst, come to destroy
us!

Wyner

Yes ma'am.

OUTSIDE

She closes the door behind her. She wags a paper fan and
mutters:

Mrs. Munson

He's a good man. Just needs
instruction. Dog, you in peoples' way.

The dog stirs with a whine and ambles off.

A HOUSE

With a neatly tended garden. It is the last house on a street of other similarly modest but well maintained homes; beyond it the street disappears down a bluff. The empty space beyond suggests a wide river, and indeed we can see the top of an anchored, gaudily painted paddle-boat poking over the rise. The paddle-boat is apparently anchored at the near bank of the river.

Mrs. Munson is entering by the gate. She stops in the garden and stoops to pull a tiny weed marring the otherwise perfect row of flowers.

INSIDE

Mrs. Munson lets herself in. A cat lopes up to her, the bell around its neck tinkling, and leans mewing into her leg.

Mrs. Munson
You need somethin' to eat, Angel?

KITCHEN

Mrs. Munson hand-cranks a can opener around a tin of cat food.

Mrs. Munson
Mm. . . gizzards. . .

The cat paces back and forth between her legs, leaning into them and purring, responding to the snap of tin as the cover comes off the can.

The can contains cubed processed gizzard in a gelatinous medium like the stuff that clings to gefilte fish.

LIVING ROOM

Above the fireplace is an oil portrait of a serious-looking black man of late middle-age with a neatly groomed mustache starting to gray. A couple of candles sit on the mantel

below the portrait, giving it the semblance of a shrine.

Mrs. Munson enters and lights the candles.

Mrs. Munson

Othar, I went'n complained about
WeeMack, I hope it'll do some good.
That boy hangin' by a thread! Over the
pit! Fiery pit! "I Left My Wallet in
El Segundo"!

She shakes out the match and sits in a rocker and takes up
her knitting. As she sits she gives an audible groan.

. . . Sixty-seven years of life, forty-
six years of marriage, you mean to tell
me you never one time suffered from
piles? It's the human condition, most
humans anyway. Like that ball player
said: world's got two kinds of folks-
them that's got piles and them that's
gonna get 'em. But you was always
healthy as an ox. . .

There is the distant moan of a riverboat horn.

. . . Passed on before you got piles.
Mmmmmmm. Thank the Lord you wasn't
sick. You don't wanna sicken 'n die.
No, you wanna pass nice 'n peaceful. . .
go to sleep one night, wake up in the
glory land. . . woof. . .

A gust of wind hums under the eaves; the candles below the
portrait flicker. As Mrs. Munson looks around the room,
vaguely towards the ceiling, sensing a negative aura, the
cat arches its back and hisses.

At this moment the doorbell rings.

. . . Well who's that now, Pickles?

She grunts as she hoists herself out of the chair.

FOYER

She opens the door—

A draft—

LIVING ROOM

The candles below the portrait of Othar go out, sending up thin wisps of smoke.

FOYER

The cat shrieks and bolts out the door, past the man on the stoop:

Goldthwait Higginson Dorr, III. He is a middle-aged Southern gentleman wearing a panama hat and a cape over a cream-colored suit. He has dark circles under his eyes. The smile he attempts, mournful yet courtly, is wiped away by:

Mrs. Munson

PICKLES!

Dorr

Ma'am?

Mrs. Munson

Go get 'im!

Dorr

I do beg your pardon?

Mrs. Munson

Go get Pickles, I didn't let 'im out!

Dorr

(tasting the name)

Pickles. . .

OUTSIDE

Dorr walks down the stoop followed by the old lady.

Mrs. Munson

Oh, he's up the tree again. Your gonna have to shimmy on up.

Dorr

I am so terribly sorry, madam. But won't the feline eventually tire of his lonely perch and, pining for his master's affection, return on his own initiative?

Mrs. Munson

Huh? No, he won't come down less you fetch him. He'd set there til Gabriel blows his horn if someone didn't shimmy up. Up with you now!

Dorr

Well then couldn't we perhaps offer him kitty treats and enticements, or if not foodstuffs perhaps squeaky little toys of the kind formerly manufactured in Hong Kong but now produced in the other so-called "Little Tigers". . .

His fingers form the quotes.

. . . of the Pacific Rim? The point bein', do we have to actually ascend the tree—

Mrs. Munson

Look, I don't want no doubletalk. If you ain't gonna fetch him down I guess I gotta call the po-lice. . . .

Dorr

Police. . .

His face darkens.

Mrs. Munson

They ain't gonna be happy. Every time they come fetch him down they swear they won't do it no more. . .

Dorr casts his hat aside and starts awkwardly climbing the

tree. He gasps as he climbs:

Dorr
No need to call the authorities. I did
this often as a youth—why, I was a
positive lemur. . . Here, kitty. . .

The cat backs away down a branch, arching its back and hissing.

Mrs. Munson
Don't upset him, now!

Dorr, on his stomach, inches after the cat, grunting:

Dorr
I wouldn't dream of it. . . harmless
little felix domesticus. . . Come to
G.H. . .

The branch breaks, hinging down to slam Dorr face-first into the trunk, from where he drops the rest of the way to the ground.

OTHAR

The portrait, upside-down, seems to be looking bemusedly down on us.

An objective angle shows Dorr lying on the couch, a damp washcloth on his forehead, eyes rolled back to look at the picture.

Mrs. Munson is entering with a cup of tea. Dorr swings his feet out to sit up and accept the tea.

Dorr
I thank you, madam, for your act of
kindness.

Mrs. Munson
Well you let him out.

Dorr
I certainly did and I do apologize no
end. Allow me to present myself, uh,

formally: Goldthwait Higginson Dorr,
Ph.D.

Mrs. Munson
What, like Elmer?

Dorr
Beg your pardon, ma'am?

Mrs. Munson
Fudd?

Dorr
No no, Ph.D. is a mark of academic
attainment. It is a degree of higher
learning bestowed, in my case, in
recognition of my mastery of the antique
languages of Latin and Greek. I also
hold a number of other advanced degrees
including the backalariat from a school
in Paris France called the Sorbonne.

Munson chuckles.

Mrs. Munson
Sore bone, well I guess that's
appropriate. You ever study at Bob
Jones University?

Dorr
I have not had that privilege.

Mrs. Munson
It's a bible school, only the finest in
the country. I send them five dollars
every month.

Dorr
That's very gener-

Mrs. Munson
I'm on their mailing list. I'm an
Angel.

Dorr
Indeed.

Mrs. Munson

They list my name in the newsletter, every issue. I got the literature here, you wanna examine it.

Dorr

Perhaps when my head has recovered from its . . . buffeting. Mrs. Munson, are you at all curious as to why I darkened your door, as the expression has it, on this lovely camelia-scented morn?

Mrs. Munson

I was wondering, til you let Pickles out. Then in all the excitement—

Dorr

I quite understand. The fact is that I saw the sign on your window advertising a room to let, and it is the only such sign among the houses of this charming, charming street.

Mrs. Munson

Yeah, I got a room. I'm lookin' for a quiet tenant. Fifteen dollars a week

Dorr

I quite understand. Madam, you are addressing a man who is quiet—and yet not quiet, if I may offer a riddle. . .

He sets down the teacup and rises.

. . . Perhaps you can show me the room, Mrs. Munson, and allow me to explain.

Mrs. Munson

Well you can see the room, but I don't like doubletalk.

STAIRCASE

Mrs. Munson precedes him up the stairs.

Dorr

You see, madam, I am currently on sabbatical from the institution where I teach—the University of Mississippi at Hattiesburg. I am taking a year off to indulge my passion—I don't believe that is too strong a word—for the music of the Renaissance. I perform in—and have the honor of directing—a period instrument ensemble that performs at Renaissance fairs and other cultural fora. . . .

BEDROOM

They enter a small bedroom. There is a small bed on a brass frame, a chair, a wash basin, and cheerful yellow chintz drapes on the window. Dorr appreciatively takes it in.

Dorr

. . . thoo-out central and southern Mississippi. We perform on the instruments for which the music was originally composed, in the belief that. . . that. . . Why, this is lovely. . .

Mrs. Munson

Wait a minute. You got some kind of band?

Dorr once again wiggles quotes with his fingers:

Dorr

The word "band" would be, in this context, something of an anachronism. Though we do play together—hence the word "ensemble"—the nature of the music is such that one would hesitate to apply the epithet "band" with its connotations of jangling rhythm and ear-popping amplification.

Mrs. Munson

So you don't play hippity-hop, "I Left My Wallet in El Segundo," songs with the titles spelt all funny?

Dorr

Madam, I shudder. I quake. The revulsion I feel for modern popular music, and all other manifestations of contemporary decay, is, I have no doubt, the equal of y'own. Why, we play music that was composed to the greater glory of God. Devotional music. Church music.

Mrs. Munson

Gospel music?

Dorr

Well-inspired by the gospels, certainly. The vintage, of course, is no more recent than the Rococo.

Mrs. Munson

Rococo, huh? Well, I guess that'd be okay.

Dorr

But I certainly don't propose to inflict our rehearsals on you. May I enquire-do you have a root cellar?

BASEMENT

Dorr ducks while descending the steep, narrow stair in order to avoid an overhead beam. He is followed by Mrs. Munson.

Dorr

Yes, yes, yes, this looks promising. . .

He pulls on a hanging string to light a bare bulb overhead.

Mrs. Munson

Little dank, ain't it?

Dorr

Oh, indeed, but that only improves the acoustics. . .

He experimentally claps his hands.

. . . Marvelous. These earthen walls are ideal for baffling the higher registers of the, uh, lute and, uh, sackbutt. That's why so much music of the cinquecento was played in crypts and catacombs. Yes, this will do nicely. .

He dry-washes his hands with enthusiasm, but his tone remains mournful.

. . . This is perfect. This is more than perfect. I can scarcely contain my glee.

Mrs. Munson
You containing it okay.

He starts to peel cash out of a large, well-worn billfold:

Dorr
Allow me to pay you a week in advance.
Allow me to pay you two weeks in advance. Allow me to pay you a month in advance. I cannot countenance the thought of these charming apartments being tenanted by someone unappreciative of their special je ne sais quoi.

Mrs. Munson
That would be a shame.

TRACKING ON A GARBAGE CART

On the cart is a boombox. It is playing "I Left My Wallet in El Segundo."

It is being pushed through a casino empty of customers.

As the cart stops and a wastebasket is emptied into it:

Voice
You gotta peel this shit out sticks to the bottom.

Wider shows two youngish black men in the khaki uniforms of custodians. Emptying the wastebasket is WeeMack-Mackatee Funthes. He is instructing Gawain MacSam.

. . . You wouldn't believe this shit, sometimes even out here on the casino floor you gonna find sanitary napkin shit stuck there, Tucks, I don't know what the fuck people do while they're gambling here man.

Gawain

I ain't peelin' funky shit with my human hands, man. That's a prescription for disease and viruses and shit, attackin' y'insides.

As they roll on we see more of the gambling floor, which is on something less than the scale of a Las Vegas casino. The floor is not yet open and dealers stack and count chips at the tables, pit bosses with clipboards looking over their shoulders. Other dealers strap on visers and sleeve garters, preparing to work.

WeeMack

You gotta do it. Mr. Gudge checks everything. Man is a motherfuck. Shit-looka this.

After a furtive look around he plucks a chip from the next wastebasket and slips it in his pocket.

. . . You keep an eye out, man. I found a hundred-dollar chip once.

Gawain

Fuck that, man. I ain't pawin' through used Tucks for a fi' dollar chip.

WeeMack

I said it was a hundred.

Gawain

Man, your guts gonna turn to soup'n leak outcha fuckin' asshole.

SERVICE HALL

The cart jitters loudly on the dimpled plastic floor.

WeeMack

This tunnel leads back onto land. To
the office for all the people work for
Mannex. Mannex Corporation. Owns the
Lady Luck 'n three other boats. . .

The two men are entering a windowless fluorescent-lit office
area. A row of wooden office doors and one heavy steel
door.

. . . This is where they think on their
corporate shit, Gudge and them.

He stops to empty a wastebasket.

. . . The lights is ugly but it ain't as
many Tucks.

He bangs on the steel door:

. . . YO, motherfuck! Lemme in!

Muffled Voice

What's the password?

WeeMack

Kiss my ass.

We hear a deep chuckle and the door, steel reinforced,
swings open. The two men enter, WeeMack nodding at the
security man.

WeeMack

This is where they count the dough. You
try to take any of it Elron there shoot
your ass.

Again the security man chuckles. WeeMack picks up some
fast-food wrappers.

. . . This place is a fuckin' pigsty.
You a pig, man, nothin' but a squeaky
ol' motherfuckin' pig. . .

Elron chuckles. He is an enormously fat man; his chuckles come from deep, deep in his chest.

. . . You got fuckin' Kocoa Krispies in ya uniform man, still got breakfast there and you eatin' motherfuckin' lunch.

Elron uses one hand to swipe crumbs off his uniform shirt, chuckling.

. . . You a disgrace before motherfuckin' God. . .

Elron chuckles.

. . . You a motherfuck-oh, hello Mr. Gudge, how we be this mornin'?

A man in a buttoned white shirt nods at him.

Gudge
Funthes. How's the new man?

WeeMack
He is a cleaning motherfucker, man!

Gudge
Is that a fact.

HIGH ON A SMOKING FIELD

It is a ruin of a field; charred trees point bare and gnarled limbs toward a gray sky; smoke drifts across the desolate waste.

Something is bounding towards us from the deep background. We boom down as it approaches: a bulldog, running avidly toward us on its stumpy little legs.

An off-mike male voice:

Voice
One, Mountain!

There is an explosion that showers dirt in front of the dog and makes it veer. Something strapped around the dog's neck bounces as he runs.

. . . Scrub two! Scrub three! Four,
Mountain!

Another explosion makes the dog veer back so that it once again bears on us. The thing that has been bouncing around its neck flies off.

Our continuing boom down has brought us to ground level just as the dog arrives in front of us to feed at a dogfood bowl in the foreground. The yellow plastic bowl has a K-Ration logo facing us.

We hear another offscreen voice:

Voice
Cut, goddamnit. His canteen fell off.

A man's feet enter in the foreground. He hooks the dog's belly with one foot and hoists it roughly away from the bowl. We cut up to:

The director. He scowls down at the animal.

. . . Props!

A man in a Hemingway field-jacket with multiple pockets, and also a loaded utility belt, trots up toward him, his belt jangling as he runs. This is Clark Pancake.

Pancake is a florid beer-bellied man in his late fifties. He has a full blond-grey Grizzly Adams beard and wears multi-pocketed shorts that form an ensemble with his Hemingway jacket.

The director is angry.

. . . The goddamn thing's canteen fell
off. It would have been a good take.

Pancake is unperturbed.

Pancake
Okay. Okay. We're prepared for that. .

He hits a button on the radio on his belt and talks into his headset:

. . . Mountain, bring Otto with the apparatus.

PULLING ANOTHER BULLDOG

He strains at his lead, muscling forward as quickly as his minder and his own stumpy little legs will allow.

He peers through the two goggly eyeholes of an antique leather gas mask, its pignose breathing apparatus covering his own snout. His phlegmy breathing is amplified by the device.

We tilt up the lead to show his minder, Mountain Girl. She is a solid woman in her late forties with freckles beginning to merge into age spots. Her long straw-colored hair is tightly braided into Heidi pigtailed bound with red ribbon. Otherwise her dress is unadorned.

The director squints at the dog.

Director
What the hell is this?

Pancake's manner is professorial:

Pancake
World War I vintage gasmask. It's authentic. Strapped on, of course, so it can't fall off. The animal is free to be as active as he wants, doesn't inhibit his movement, and I think it really sells the whole doughboy thing-

Director
It looks like a fucking joke.

Pancake stares at the director for a moment and, though not doing anything, makes a sound of concentrated effort:

Pancake

. . . Nnnnrnff!

The director squints at him:

Director

What?

Pancake comes out of his trance, or whatever it was:

Pancake

No, nothing, uh. . . you're absolutely right, the gasmask is a whimsical concept-

Director

How the hell does it eat when it gets to the Kennel Rations?

The dog looks up from person to person as each speaks, twisting its neck to peer through the eyeholes. Its breathing is growing louder.

Pancake

Well, you're absolutely right-

Director

Don't let the client see this.

Pancake

Of course not, that would be inappropriate-

Director

Or the Humane fucker.

Pancake

No no-

The dog gets down on its knees, slowly, like a camel, breathing ever more loudly.

Director

They'll shut the fucking spot down, Pancake. Put the goddamn canteen back on. That says he's a soldier. Dented tin canteen. Just tie the damn thing to his collar.

The dog flops over into the mud.

Pancake
Easiest thing in the world. I just
thought—but the canteen is much better.
Good concept. Let's go with that—

Director
What's he doing?

The dog has started to convulse.

Pancake
Well, he's uh. . . Just breathe
normally, Otto.

Director
The fucking dog can't breathe.

Pancake
Oh, he can breathe, that thing is—just
breathe normally, Otto.

The dog's breath is rasping and horrible.

Director
The fucking dog cannot breathe! Get
that fucking thing off him!

Pancake
Of course. Easiest thing in the world.

He stoops and fiddles at the straps.

. . . It's on good and tight, I, uh. . .
Just breathe normally, Otto.

He starts thumping at his pockets.

Director
Get the fucking thing off him!

Pancake
Don't have my Leatherman. Mountain!
Give me your Leatherman! Chop chop!

Director

Get the fucking thing off him! Chitra,
make sure the Humane fucker doesn't come
over here! Bring him to craft services!

As he makes to scoop up the dog:

Pancake
Good idea! Ice water, treats-

Director
Not the dog, you idiot! The Humane
fucker! Distract him!

Pancake
Right! Of course!

He goes back to work on the mask.

Director
Oh my god, he's bleeding!

Pancake
No, that's me-I-the Leatherman. . . here
we go.

His hand gouting blood, he finally manages to get the gas
mask off.

A crowd is starting to gather and gape. The director barks
at a grip:

Director
Put up a couple solids here-I don't want
the client seeing this!

Pancake thumps on the inert dog's chest.

Pancake
Come on, Otto!

Director
Otto is fucking dead!

Pancake
Mountain, have electric run me a
stinger! Don't give up on me, Otto!
Mountain, I need two live leads!

More people crowd in to look.

Mountain

Clarke, the gennie's a hundred yards
away!

Pancake

Goddamnit! Otto's gonna have brain
damage in about ninety seconds! Okay!

He pulls the dog's lips back, exposing its teeth and
slobbered tongue.

. . . Kiss of life!

He sucks in a deep breath and starts mouth-to-mouthing the
beast.

POINT-OF-VIEW OF FOOTBALL FIELD

We are looking out from inside a football helmet; we hear
the super-present breathing of the helmet's occupant. Just
over the breathing we can hear the muffled shouting of a
snap count.

We are in a crouch position looking downfield. At the call
of "Hike!" we and everyone on the field spring into action.

We sprint downfield, the breathing becoming even louder. A
very big person downfield is sprinting toward us.

After several yards, still on the move, we pan quickly
around to look back for the quarterback. Barely visible
among converging bodies, he is releasing the football toward
someone else.

Easing up on the run we pan back around to look downfield
just as the oncoming defender is upon us and-CRUNCH-slams
into us. A strobing pan leaves us looking up at the sky.
Our loud breathing has stopped.

After a long beat the breathing resumes with a raggedy
labored inhale. It continues irregularly. Another helmeted

player appears above us to peer down into our helmet. He extends a hand to help us up.

HUDDLE

We are looking back and forth around the circle at our gathered teammates.

Quarterback
Delta thirty-seven. On four!

All, with a simultaneous handclap:

Team
Huh!

LINE OF SCRIMMAGE

Lined up opposite us is a snarling defender.

Once again, over loud breathing, we can just hear the shouted count.

At "Hike!" we straighten to meet the defensive lineman lunging at us. His mouthpiece clatters against ours and in horrific close-up he strains against us, his animal gurgles of effort audible over our own ragged breath.

With a primal roar from the defenseman our point of view tips back and up, booming down to stop with a CRUNCH against the ground, staring up. Once again our breathing has stopped.

After a beat a foot is planted on our helmet as a looming running back steps on us in his charge downfield. He is pursued by defenders some of whom leap over us and some of whom by the sound of it step on various body parts.

HUDDLE

The same back-and-forth pan.

Quarterback
Okay, Epsilon twenty-two! You the man!.
. . Hey! BUTTHEAD!

This brings our wandering attention panning back to the quarterback:

You the man!

A very, very present voice:

Me the man?

Voice

All

Huh!

LINE OF SCRIMMAGE

The same breathing and count.

On "Hike!" we sprint downfield.
The same distant defender sprinting toward us.

We hear low but very present a dismayed:

Unh. . . oh no. . .

Voice

Our breathing is torn by rasping wheezes of effort as we continue to run.

We look back.

Every player is looking directly at us.

A huge spiralling football coming at us-too close, too soon-and-

BONK!

It bounces off our mouthguard and flies up.

. . . shit. . .

We are looking forward just as

CRUNCH!

We are hit by the defender.

We once again land face-up.

Very steeply foreshortened, right over us, we see the defender juggling the live ball.

With a moan, our own hand reaches weakly up towards the ball and the high, distant defender.

He finally gathers in the ball and securely tucks it, and starts back upfield.

We climb wearily to our feet. We look back upfield just in time to see the defender start an elaborate victory dance in the end zone. He pauses for a moment to point a gloved hand directly at us, then resumes his strut.

Shouting from the sidelines brings our panning attention over.

The coach, face twisted with fury, is shouting at us and using his clipboard to wave us off the field.

We trot toward the sidelines.

All of our teammates stare at us-some in shock, some in anger, some in pity.

At the sideline bench our point of view swings round as we seat ourself. A hand reaches up to the mouthguard to pull off the helmet and we match cut to:

Our first objective shot as the player finishes pulling off his helmet. He is a big blond boy. His entire body, including his face, is solidly built.

An offscreen voice:

Voice

Hudson!

The boy, Hudson, turns to look, and we cut to one last POV:

The coach is striding up, swinging his clipboard at the camera: with a loud CRUNCH! it brings on:

BLACK

HIGH SHOT MINI-MALL

It is a typical sunbaked concrete strip mall with a Seven-Eleven, a launderette, and a Hi-Ho Donut. The Hi-Ho Donut sign shows a pink donut with sprinkles and says in much smaller lettering: And Croissants.

A beat-up Impala pulls into the lot, pulsing hip-hop music. After a long rumbling idle the ignition is killed. Both front doors open. Two black kids get out and look around with a manner that is if anything too casual.

INTERIOR HI-HO DONUT

There is faint muzak and loud air-conditioner hum. Glass cases display donuts identified as GLAZED, JELLY, and FANCIES. Fancies ooze yellow goo. The jelly on the jelly donuts is developing a crust of age. The glazed also look moth-eaten.

One customer, a disheveled older man, sits at one of the little formica tables staring into a coffee cup. Next to the coffee is a brown paper bag from which a straw protrudes.

Behind the counter is a middle-aged Vietnamese woman in a neat white blouse.

The two youths enter pulling out enormous handguns from underneath their windbreakers.

Youth 1

All right Dragon Lady, give us all the fuckin' money!

The woman stares blankly.

Youth 1

We want that donut money!

Woman

Yao gin nyap!

A man appears from the kitchen in back. He is a middle-aged Vietnamese gentleman in a crisply pressed khaki leisure suit. An ascot is knotted at his neck. He wears aviator eyeglasses. In his mouth smolders a half-burned-down filterless cigarette. This, we shall learn later, is the General.

Youth 2

Okay papa-san, we want that donut money.

Youth 1

And we ain't fuckin' around, Mr. Hi-Ho.

Woman

Hi-Ho.

The two youths look at her briefly. Nothing else is forthcoming.

The drunk looks up from his paper bag.

Youth 2

Look, this fuckin' thing, it ain't complicated. You give us all the fuckin money, you don't get shot in the head, you make more donuts, get more money. That's how it works, see?

The General stares at him. As with his wife, none of it seems to register; unlike his wife, he seems unperturbed.

Youth 1

Give us the money!

He is pointing the gun directly at the General's head.

. . . You got three fuckin' seconds.
You understand one-two-three? I'm gonna
count one two three and then shoot.
Okay? Three sec-huh!

The General has swung his fist up to hook two fingers inside the youth's nostrils. His gun clatters to the floor. The fingers are way, way up his nose. Only one knuckle shows on each finger.

The youth is staring cross-eyed at his own nose.

His friend is also stupefied.

Youth 1
(very nasal)

His fingers are way the fuck up my nose.

Youth 2
GET. . . YA FINGAS. . . OUT. . . THE
MAN'S. . . NOSE!

The General still impassively sucks on his cigarette. The first youth is on the verge of tears:

Youth 1
I think they're in my brain, man. . .

Youth 2
MOTHERFUCK!

He raises his gun to start firing.

As he does so the General uses his hookhold on the other youth's nose to slam his head backwards, down into some Fancies.

The door opens and a customer walks in, a semi-elderly lady with a cane.

Youth 2, eyes rolling, wildly swings to cover the door, then back to the General who has his friend's head pressed into the Fancies, then uncertainly over to the Vietnamese woman who is loudly yelling at him in Vietnamese.

Cigarette still dangling from his lower lip, the General calmly plucks a pot of coffee from the coffee warmer and tosses it into Youth 2's face.

Youth 2 screams.

HIGH EXTERIOR

The car is still pulsing hip-hop music. Youth 2 stumbles out of the Hi-Ho, hands covering his face and sinks to his knees.

INTERIOR HI-HO

The General now has the first youth's face pressed into the Fancies from behind. Without disturbing his smoking, the General repeatedly kicks the youth in the ass.

His wife, muttering irritably in Vietnamese, is wheeling a water bucket and mop to where the floor is covered with coffee.

CHURCH

At the cut many voices are swelling in a song of worship. It is a black Baptist church, and the music has great energy.

The white-robed choir finishes singing; a preacher takes the podium.

Preacher

I know you all remember that when Moses came down the mountain, carrying the word a God, come down that Sinai peak, he caught those Israelites red-handed. What he catch 'em doin'? He caught 'em worshipping a golden calf.

Shouts of "That's right!"

. . . He caught 'em with their backs turned on God!

More shouts of "That's right!"

. . . He caught 'em worshipping a FALSE God! A God of EARTHLY things! He caught them Israelites in DECLINE!

"He caught 'em!"

. . . Because backslidin' is DECLINE, brothers and sisters! You hear talk these days, and I know you've heard this

talk, you hear talk of DECLINE, well all that means is we done turned our back on God!

"That's right!"

. People say civilization doin' this, civilization doin' that, civilization in DECLINE! Well it ain't no civilization! It ain't no them! It's US, brothers and sisters!

"Amen!" We are tracking among the congregants, disproportionately women, mostly of middle age and elderly, mostly wearing elaborate go-to-church hats.

. . . It's what's in our hearts, each and every one of us when we like them Israelites! Slidin' awa-a-a-ay down that Godly slope, slippin' and slidin' toward the mire and muck a the stinkhole of greed-that's DECLINE!

"That's decline!" The continuing track brings us onto Mrs. Munson, wearing, like most of her peers, an oversized hat; hers is adorned with a great deal of plastic fruit.

. . . And what did Moses do when he saw those declinin' backslidin' never-mindin' sinners?

"What he do?"

. . . Moses SMOTE those sinners in his wrath yes he did!

"Yes he did!"

. . . Y'all know what smote is! I smite! You smite! He smites! We done smote!

"That's right!"

. . . To smite is to go UPSIDE the head!

"Uh-huh!"

. . . Because sometimes, brothers and sisters, that is the ONLY way!

"Yes it is!"

. . . To smite is to reMIND! We got to STOP that decline! And scramble back UP to the face a the almighty Gyod!

"Amen!"

. . . 'Stead a worshipping' that GOLDEN calf, that earthly TRASH on that GARBAGE island! That GARBAGE island in that shadowland WAY outside the Kingdom a God!

"Way outside!"

. . . That GARBAGE island where scavenger birds feast on the bones a the backslidin' damned!

"Yes they do!"

. . . And so, let us pray. . .

CHURCH STEPS

It is a white clapboard country church. The priest stands at the door chatting with the congregants filing out.

Woman

You preach a wonderful sermon, Brother Cleothus.

Preacher

Why thank you, Sister Rose.

Mrs. Munson

That man has a lot to say.

First Woman

Yes he does.

Mrs. Munson
And every word of it the truth.

First Woman
Mm-mm. Jesus well pleased with him

Third Woman
Deed he is.

Preacher
Oh now ladies. . .

Third Woman
Pleased as he can be.

First Woman
Mm-mm.

Mrs. Munson
Stout, too.

First Woman
Mm-mm.

Preacher
Oh now you gracious ladies.

KITCHEN

Mrs. Munson is at the kitchen table. She folds a five dollar bill into a sheet of paper, raising her voice as she does so:

Mrs. Munson
It was a good sermon. That man has a lot to say.

LIVING ROOM

We have cut to the portrait of Othar over the mantel. He does not answer.
From the kitchen:

Mrs. Munson's Voice

. . . Stout, too. It would've been a comfort to you. . .

KITCHEN

Mrs. Munson has stuffed the paper-enclosed bill into an envelope, which she is now laboriously addressing to Bob Jones University.

Mrs. Munson
. . . And the choir was all in good voice. Mm-mm-

There is a knock at the door.

. . . Who could that-

The cat yowls and hisses.

DOORWAY

As Mrs. Munson swings it open.

G.H. Dorr stands on the stoop mournfully dry-washing his hands and obsequiously ducking his head.

Dorr
My dear Mrs. Munson, I do so hope this is not an inopportune time for our first practice-

Mrs. Munson
Somebody die?

Dorr
I beg your-Oh!

He looks back at the long black vintage Lincoln hearse parked at the curb behind him.

. . . No no, no bereavement, though it is so kind of you to enquire. No, the hearse is simply a vehicle commodious enough to accomodate all of the members of our ensemble. And of course our

instruments, contrived in an age
ignorant of miniaturization. . .

He turns and gestures at the vehicle.

At his sign, Gawain, the custodian, emerges from the driver's side. Carl Pancake emerges from the front passenger side. The General, wearing a different but equally pressed khaki suit and ascot, and with a smoking cigarette in his lips, emerges from a back door.

Gawain goes to the back of the hearse and opens its hatch to let out Lump Hudson, the football player.

Lump helps unload five large and oddly shaped instrument cases, each man taking one except for Lump himself, who carries two. As the parade of losers and misfits winds its way up the walk:

. . . Let me introduce you to my
friends, my colleagues, these devoted
and passionate musicians. . . This is
Gawain MacSam, our bassoonist. . .

Gawain nods as he passes by.

. . . General Nguyen Pham Doc, viola da
gamba. . .

Mrs. Munson
No smoking in this house.

The General tosses his cigarette away and bows stiffly as he passes.

General
So sorry.

Dorr
. . . Carl Pancake—a multi-
instrumentalist, but with his remarkable
embosure Carl specializes in wind
instruments, and is especially
accomplished on the French horn. . .

He nods, passes.

. . . And, finally, Aloysius "Lump"
Hudson. Lump is our sackbuttist and-
thank you, Lump-I see you've also
brought my fiddle. . .

As he hands Dorr the violin case:

Lump
Here's your fiddle, Doctor.

Mrs. Munson sizes up the group.

Mrs. Munson
You ain't gonna make a racket, are ya?

Dorr
Oh no. Oh no no no no no. No, we shall
recuse ourselves to the basement where
we shall be-I think here the expression
is uniquely appropriate. . .

He gives a sickly smile.

. . . as quiet as the crypt.

Mrs. Munson
Hmph.

CELLAR

The general stands stock still, his nose an inch away from
the earthen wall, studying it, squinting through the smoke
of the cigarette pinched between his lips.

The rest of the men are opening their cases and taking out
the instruments. Gawain's case contains, however, not a
musical instrument but a boombox and several tapes. He
loads one of the tapes into the machine.

Dorr
What do you think, General? Present
any problems?

After a beat the general turns away from the wall to give
Dorr a look into which one might read anything, or nothing.

Gawain hits play on the boombox and the cellar is filled with the fussy strains of baroque chamber music.

Dorr nods.

. . . Good then.

He spreads a map open on the sackbutt case.

. . . All right, gentlemen, why don't we all crowd around and go over the plan.

The biggest feature on the map is a wavy, roughly north-south pair of lines: a river. A boat icon sits at one edge and from it a dotted rectangle extends inland.

Dorr taps at the boat icon with his fiddle bow.

. . . This, gentlemen, is the Lady Luck, gambling den, cash cow, Sodom of the Mississippi delta--and the focus of our little exercise. Here is Orchard Street. . .

He is tracing a street that parallels the dotted rectangle extending from the boat. The street is lined by small house icons on either side; the bow comes to rest on one of those icons.

. . . and here is the residence of Marva Munson, the charming lady whom y'all met moments ago. Gentlemen. . .

Bow taps emphasize:

. . . You. . . are. . . here. Now.
This brings us to this square. . .

The bow indicates it, and then withdraws.

Dorr uses the bow as a swagger stick to punctuate as he begins to pace.

. . . Gentlemen, I believe you are all aware that the Solons of the State of Mississippi, to wit, its legislature,

have decreed that no gaming establishment shall be erected within its borders upon dry land. They may, however, legally float upon any watercourse defining a state boundary. But while the gambling activity itself is restricted to riverboats, no such restriction applies to the functions ancillary to this cash-besotted bidnis.

The casino's offices, locker rooms, facilities to cook and clean, and most importantly its counting houses—the reinforced, secret, and super-secure repositories of the lucre—may all be situated. . . wherever. Gawain—where is wherever?

Gawain

Say wha?

Dorr's smug smile fades. Testily:

Dorr

Where is the money?

Gawain

Oh. End of every shift pit boss brings the cash down to the hold of the ship in the locked cash box; once a day all the cash boxes're moved to the counting room.

Dorr

And where is the counting room?

Gawain

Well, uh. . . in that square there. Where you pointing.

Dorr

And what, to flog a horse that if not at this point dead is in mortal danger of expirin', does the dotted square represent?

Gawain hesitates, the question's obviousness suggesting to him some trick.

Gawain
 . . . Offices. Underground.

Dorr's eyes close. A smile of feline contentment curls his lips. He murmurs:

Dorr
 Underground. . . Mmm. . . During the casino's hours of operation the door to the counting room is fiercely guarded, and the door itself is of redoubtable Pittsburgh steel; when the casino is closed the entire underground complex is locked up and the armed guard retreats to the casino's main entrance. There, then, far from the guard, reposes the money, cosseted behind a five-inch-thick steel portal, yes, but the walls, gentlemen, the walls of that room, are but humble masonry, behind which is only the soft loamy soil deposited over the centuries by Ol' Man, the meanderin' Mississipp', as it fanned its way back and forth across this great alluvial plain. . .

He has pried a fistfull of dirt from the cellar wall.

. . . This earth.

He crumbles it, letting it sift to the floor, and then, pleased with himself, he smiles.

. . . Any questions?

Lump looks around, then hesitantly raises his hand.

. . . Yes, Lump?

Lump
 What, uh. . . what does "cosseted" mean?

Once again Dorr's smile fades. He does not dignify the question with answer.

Dorr

The General here, whose curriculum vitae compahends massive tunneling experience thoo the soil of his native French-Indochina, will direct our little ol' tunnelin' operation.

The General acknowledges with a curt nod.

. . . Clark Pancake, while a master of none, is a jack of all those trades corollary to our aim. He will be doin' such fabricatin' and demolition work as our little caper shall require.

Clark acknowledges verbally:

Pancake

Happy to be on board.

Dorr

Gawain is the proverbial "inside man". He has managed to secure a berth on the custodial staff of the Lady Luck, thereby placin' himself in a position to perform certain chores whose precise nature needn't detain us here, but whose performance shall guide this expedition to its happy conclusion.

Gawain

Ya damn skippy.

Dorr

And this brings us to Lump. To look at Lump you might wonder, what function could he possibly fill, what specialized expertise could he possibly offer, to our merry little ol' band a miscreants.

Well gentlemen, in a project of such magnitude and such risks, it is traditional-nay, it is imperative-to enlist the services of a hooligan, a goon, an ape, a physical brute, who will be our security, our fist, our batterin' ram. Lump is our blunt instrument, and on all our behalfs I wish him a warm Mississippi welcome.

Lump

Thanks, Professor.

Dorr

Well gentlemen, here you are, men of different backgrounds and differing talents, men with, in fact only two things in common: one, you all saw fit to answer my little advertisement in the Memphis Scimitar, and, two, you are all going to be, in consequence, very very incredibly rich. Let us revel in our adventure, gentlemen. Let us make beautiful music together. And above all, gentlemen, let us keep it to ourselves. What we say in this root cellar, let it stay in this root cellar.

Lump

There's no "I" in "team".

All stare at him.

Dorr

. . . Lump has a very excellent point.

The music swells, supported now by a male chorus that has the spirited manliness of the Red Army choir. We dissolve into a

MONTAGE

of the men at work, tunneling.

The cat sits on the cellar floor, head cocked, gazing at the hole now opened in the wall.

Lump, in a sleeveless undershirt, glistening with sweat, wields a pickaxe at the forward point.

At the mouth of the hole Clark Pancake shovels dirt into a heavy plastic refuse bag held open by Gawain.

G.H. Dorr sits on a camp chair, one hand idly waving time to the music, reading an old and yellowed tome with halfglasses perched midway down his nose.

The General hops nimbly out of the tunnel and unzips and steps out of his all-in-one to reveal, underneath, his neatly pressed leisure suit and ascot.

Later, Dorr stands at the head of the cellar stairs, looking around the empty parlor. He gives a nod down the stairs and the men troop up past him, carrying sacks of earth.

Over the mantelpiece, the eternal flame of the devotional candle almost animating his features, Othar seems to watch the men as they cross to the front door.

EXTERIOR

The men load the earth into the hearse.

BRIDGE

We are at the Mississippi bridge that we saw in the prologue to the movie, but now, in dead of night, deserted.

The hearse is pulling up at the middle of the bridge and dimming its lights. The men emerge; when they open the back of the hearse to pull out the sacks, the cat bounds out to watch from a distance.

We watch the men from high, angled down along the masonry of a tower that stands in the middle of the suspension bridge. An ornamental gargoyle leers in the foreground.

The garbage scow is approaching. We hear the low toot of hits horn as it nears the bridge. Lump is poised with the first sack hugged to his chest, leaning over the railing.

The nose of the barge enters below us.

Lump releases the sack.

We watch it drop dead away like a bomb from an airplane.

It thuds distantly onto the barge. The next sack has been passed up to Lump and is released.

The cat watches. Its orange eyes blink. Its pupils adjust.

A pull back shows that the cat is in fact back in the basement.

Its point-of-view: continued tunneling.

Back to the cat, watching, then turning its head at a noise:

At the head of the stairs, the cellar door is opening.

A whistle from the General and Lump and Carl Pancake scramble from the tunnel. They whip a curtain over its opening and all men grab up their instruments as Dorr, covering with a cough, turns off the CD player.

The General, his ever-present cigarette smoldering between his lips, tongue-and-lips it up and backwards so that it is inside his mouth, which he now closes.

Marva Munson is heavily and carefully descending the stairs. As the men come into view they are looking up at her, Lump holding his sackbutt but still glistening with sweat and smeared with dirt.

Mrs. Munson

That's okay, don't stop on account of me.

Lump looks around, saucer-eyed, then blows gamely into his sackbutt. It sounds like goose farts until Dorr waves him down.

Dorr

No no, madam, we were about to take a break anyway. The glissandi on this particular piece are technically very demanding and I think we would all welcome a moment of relaxation.

Mrs. Munson

Huh. I just thought you might like to see-what a you gotten up to, honey? Why you sweatin' like that.

It is directed at Lump, who looks down at his own sweat-stained undershirt.

Lump

I, uh. . .

Gawain

That man plays one bitch barrelf a sackbutt. Ain't no one can blow the tenor sackbutt like Lump, hoowee! goes at that thing like it was a pu-uh, like it was a woman! Goddamn! He-

She cuffs him on the head.

Mrs. Munson

You mind! I don't want that kind of talk in my home, even in the root cellar. This is a Christian house, boy, none of that hippity-hop language.

Dorr

Sadly, Gawain is given to-

WHAP! She slaps Gawain again.

Mrs. Munson

Sometimes it's the only way!

He untenses after what seemed like the final blow, but-
WHAP!-she slaps him again.

. . . I'm tryin' to help you, son!

WHAP!

. . . Better yaself!

Dorr

As well you should, ma'am. But Gawain at times is so far transported by his love of the music of the early Renaissance as to-

Mrs. Munson

Don't make no never-mind he's transported!

Dorr has her by the elbow and is ushering her back up the stairs.

Dorr

I understand your—

She pulls her elbow away and sniffs.

Mrs. Munson

You been smokin'?

Dorr

Certainly not, madam. I understand your indignation. And I was offering explanation, not excuse. I myself am offended by those who cannot find the proper words to express themselves and have recourse to—

Gawain calls up the stairs:

Gawain

Don't you be explainin' me, dawg! You can't look into my mind, cape man!

Dorr

Yes, yes. . .

Dorr's tone is soothing as he shuts the door at the top of the stairs.

. . . A fiery lad! But then Youth is fiery! A fact often remarked upon by the poets of the Romantic era.

Mrs. Munson

My youth I was in church, I wasn't walkin' around fiery. Youth ain't no excuse for nothin'! Well, anyway. . . only came down to show you the fife.

She hands him a thick, roughly whittled piece of cane. Dorr holds it, looks at it dumbly. He is, for the first time that we have seen anyway, non-plussed.

. . . Othar's fife. He burned his own.

Dorr tries to summon conversation as the two sit with their backs to the fireplace:

Dorr

. . . Did he?

Mrs. Munson

Mm-hm. I thought maybe bein' a musical man you'd be interested.

Dorr

Oh, I am indeed-

Mrs. Munson

Cut it himself and burned the holes. Israelites called it a kalil.

Dorr

Ah.

Mrs. Munson

Kalil, fife, same thing. You can read about it in the Bible. Ain't nothin' new under the sun.

Dorr

Indeed not.

Mrs. Munson

Gone these twenty years. He was some kind of man.

From Othar's point-of-view, slightly high, we see them both twist in their chairs to look up at the portrait.

Reverse of the portrait, low angle. Othar looks down at us with what appears to be bemusement.

Marva Munson and Dorr gaze up at the portrait for a motionless beat. At length, Marva Munson sighs:

Mrs. Munson

. . . Blowed the kalil.

Dorr's eyes remain on the picture as he inquires:

Dorr

. . . I don't suppose Othar ever turned his hand-or, uh, heh-heh-heh, turned his

lip-to the shofar?

Prompted by her silence, he adds:

. . . The ceremonial ram's horn, sounded
by the priests of the Hebrews?

Mrs. Munson

I don't know nothin' 'bout that. Othar
didn't study no shofar, to the extent a
my knowledge. The kalil was good enough
for my Othar. . .

She gazes at the portrait.

. . . Some kind of man.

TRACKING BEHIND A SASHAYING ASS

We are tracking through the casino, following a woman in a
red dress.

Voice

Hey baby, don't be cruel. Jus' sneak
one little peek. . .

The woman looks back over her shoulder, smiling, as she
continues to walk.

. . . Don't let this uniform fool ya-

A reverse pulling track leads Gawain MacSam, pushing his
wheeled trash bin.

Gawain

You don't need to be gamblin', honey,
you lookin' at a sure thing. They call
me Mr. 21, baby, 'cause that's how I
measure up. I am the original black
Jack, honey, accept no substitutions.
You can pull my lever all day long,
sweet mama, I ain't never gonna come up
lemons. That's right, sugar, you can
blow on my dice any ol' time.

GUDGE'S OFFICE

Gudge has his feet up on the desk and is filing his nails with an emery board.

Gawain

But Mr. Gudge, she had an ass that could pull a bus. This lady was fine, fine, dandy, divine.

Gudge

I don't care how big her ass was, MacSam. You're fired.

Gawain

Say what?

Gudge

There is no fraternizing with customers on the Lady Luck. Clean out your locker.

Gawain

But Gudge-

Gudge

Get out of here. You're fired.

Gawain

You can't fire me. I sue your ass!

Gudge

Sue me? For what?

Gawain

Sue you for fuckin' punitive damages, man!

Gudge

Punitive damages.

Gawain

Ya damn skippy. I know you firin' my ass 'cause I'm black!

Gudge

Everyone on the custodial staff is

black, MacSam. Your replacement's gonna be black. His replacement will no doubt be black.

Gawain
 Fuckin' judge is gonna be black,
 motherfucker, that's who gonna be black!
 You gonna stand tall before the man!

VERY HIGH EXTERIOR

We are looking down past the distinctive pylon-mounted yellow letters: WAFFLE.

INTERIOR WAFFLE HOUSE

The band of miscreants is seated around a table with cups of coffee. Dorr's wardrobe makes no concession to the informality of the setting; he still wears his cape and a black string tie. His manner is more mournful even than usual:

Dorr
 Oh my. Oh my my my my my. This is a severe setback. I am distraught. I am more than distraught, I am devastated. Oh my, this is quite the monkeywrench heaved into the meticulously engineered construct of our little escapade.

Lump
 Yeah, it fucks things up.

Dorr
 I am beside myself. I am at a positive loss for words.

Gawain
 You still talkin' okay though.

Waitress
 Have you all decided?

Dorr's intensely mournful agitation is brought to bear upon

her:

Dorr

Oh madam, we must have waffles. We must all have waffles forthwith!

They hand in their menus.

. . . Oh we must think. We must all have waffles and think, each and every one of us to the very best of his ability! Perhaps if you apologized to the man and gave him flowers, or perhaps a fruit basket, with a card depicting a misty seascape and inscribed with a sentiment.

Gawain

Shit, man, it ain't about apologizin'! He fired me 'cause I'm black!

Pancake

He can't do that. You could sue him. Open and shut case.

Gawain

Fuckin' A.

Pancake

This is not 1952.

Gawain

Man's a fuckin' bigot.

Dorr

Well then, perhaps, surely, a chocolate assortment has been known to warm the heart of even the most hardened misanthrope, especially if it's a premium chocolate, imported, say, from Switzerland, or the Netherlands, or some other of the so-called "Low" countries be they Dutch or Flemish or Walloon-

Gawain

Walloon my ass, the man ain't gonna roll over for a fuckin' candy bar!

Pancake

I'm afraid there's a setback on the tunneling front too. We've run into a pretty large rock, and-

General

-Rock!

All turn to look at the General. He continues to stare at a spot in space. He slowly releases some inhaled cigarette smoke, murmuring:

. . . Very bad.

Dorr

Oh my my, it seems that the poet was right: Troubles never singly come.

Pancake

Oh, we can get through the rock, no worries there. Simplest thing in the world. Why we blow right through it; I've got a pyro license, we bore a hole in the rock, pack in a little plastique; igneous blows pretty good, and we-

Lump

Is he gonna want a piece of the action?

All turn to look at Lump.

Pancake

. . . Who?

Lump hesitates, looking at the inquiring faces that surround him.

Lump

. . . Igneous?

A female voice:

Voice

Hello Carl. Am I ordering the prima cord?

It is Mountain Girl. The men look up at her.

Pancake

Yes, Mountain, we were just talking about that, and some plastique.

All the men are staring at her, agog.

Gawain

. . . The fuck is this?

Pancake

This is Mountain Girl. Mountain is my right hand. She helps me with ordnance. Helps me with damn near everything.

The men stare.

Gawain

. . . You brought your bitch to the waffle house?!

There is tension in the air. Dorr clears his throat.

Dorr

. . . I confess myself to be puzzled as well. I thought we all understood that, so far as our little enterprise is concerned, mum, as the saying would have it, is the word-

Pancake

Of course. I understand that. But this is Mountain. . .

He chuckles.

. . . I don't keep secrets from Mountain. That's not how you maintain a loving, caring relationship.

Gawain

. . . You brought your bitch to the waffle house?

He looks around.

. . . Man brings his bitch to the waffle house!

Pancake
Look, you, I'll thank you to stop referring to Mountain that way. She's the other half of my life.

Gawain
Everybody lookin' at me like I'm a fuck-up, losin' that sorry-ass job, and this motherfucker bring his bitch to the waffle house!

Pancake lunges across the table, sending dishes clattering to the floor as he grabs Gawain by the shirt.

Pancake
You son of a bitch punk! Shut your goddamn mouth!

He shakes him vigorously and rears back to take a swing at him.

Gawain draws a gun.

Gawain
Come and get me motherfuck! Come on, baby, let's get it on!

Mountain starts screaming.

People look, aghast.

Dorr
Gentlemen, please!

The other men pry Pancake and Gawain apart.

. . . Gentlemen, this sort of behavior does you no credit in the eyes of your colleagues, or in those of the other patrons of this waffle house!

Pancake grumbles as he composes himself and straighten his clothes.

Pancake
. . . Nobody talks to Mountain Girl that way. She had an abusive family!

Gawain
Fuck you, man.

Pancake
Little punk. I got syrup on my safari jacket.

He embraces Mountain, who continues to sob quietly.

Dorr
Gentlemen, I propose that we consider the matter of this woman, Mountain Water, to be-

Pancake
Mountain Girl.

Dorr
I am so very sorry. I propose that we consider this matter to be closed, and we shall chose to trust her, since we now have no choice, and since she shall share only in Mr. Pancake's portion of the booty.

Over the shoulder of the quietly weeping Mountain Girl:

Pancake
Of course. Wouldn't have it any other way.

Gawain
Damn right you won't.

Pancake
Up yours, punk.

Dorr
Gentlemen! And the manner of disposing of our igneous impediment is also settled. That leaves only the question of Gawain retrieving his job.

Lump

Couldn't you just bribe the guy?

All turn to look at Lump.

MUNSON LIVING ROOM

Evening. Othar looks serenely down from his spot over the mantelpiece. Marva Munson knits; G.H. Dorr sits nodding over an ancient volume of half-forgotten lore, reading glasses perched midway down his nose. Curtains waft lazily in the summer night breeze.

Mrs. Munson

. . . You just a readin' fool, ain't you Mr. Dorr.

Dorr

Yes yes, I must confess, madam, that often I feel more at home in these ancient volumes than I do in the hustle-bustle of our modern world. To me, paradoxically, the literature of the so-called "dead tongues" has more currency than this mornin's newspaper.

Mrs. Munson

Mm-mm.

Dorr

In these books. . .

He removes his glasses and lazily twirls them.

. . . In these volumes, there is the accum'lated wisdom a mankind which succours me when the day is hard or the night lonely and long.

Mrs. Munson

Wisdom of mankind, what about the wisdom of the Lord?

Dorr

Oh yes, the Good Book, mm. I have found reward in its pages. But for me there

are other good books as well; the heavy volumes of Antiquity, freighted with the insights of Man's glorious age. And then of course I love, love, love the works of Mr. Ed G'Allan Poe.

Mrs. Munson

I know who he is. Kinda creepy.

Dorr

Oh no, madam, noooo. Not of this world, true; he lived in a dream, an ancient dream. . .

Dorr himself is lost in a dream:

"Helen, they beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks a yore
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
To his own native shore. . ."

Mrs. Munson

Who was Helen? She wasn't a loose woman, was she? Some kinda whore a Babylon?

Dorr is still lost:

Dorr

One doesn't know who Helen was, though I picture her as bein' very, very extremely. . . pale.

He comes to himself, focuses on Mrs. Munson.

. . . Miz Munson, I was tryin' to think of some way of expressin' my gratitude to you for takin' in. . .

He chuckles.

. . . this weary, wayworn wanderer. . .

The Professor takes a small ticket envelope from where it had served as bookmark, and hands it across.

. . . It's just a modest little ol' present, why it's practically nothing at all.

Beaming, she takes two tickets out of the envelope and inspects them.

Mrs. Munson

Oh Mr. Dorr, why you are such a gallant man. . .

Dorr

Oh no madam, I blush. I melt. No, I just happened to hear of this gospel concert tomorrow night, The Mighty Mighty Clouds of Joy, and I thought you and a friend from church, perhaps. . .

Mrs. Munson

Othar loved that music. . . Yes, I got a widow-lady friend. . .

Dorr

The concert is up in Memphis, but I have arranged for a car service to transport you thither and, needless to say, back home at the concert's termination. My friends and I will be rehearsing here tomorrow evening so you needn't worry about the security of your charming little old house. . .

There is a knock at the door.

Mrs. Munson

Huh? Excuse me.

DOORWAY

Mrs. Munson swings the door open to Sheriff Wyner. His squad car is parked at the curb.

Mrs. Munson

Sheriff Wyner, how you doin'. . .

LIVING ROOM

The Professor's eyes widen with concern as he hears the voices, off:

Sheriff
Evenin', Miz Munson, I just came by. . .

DOORWAY

The sheriff is tipping his hat and already backing away, trying to make his visit brief:

Sheriff
. . . to let you know I had a word with WeeMack. He says he gonna comply with your request, keep the music down and neighborly.

Mrs. Munson
Mm-hm.

He calls from the bottom of the stoop:

Sheriff
So you have a pleasant evening now, and just let us know-

Mrs. Munson
Hang on there, Sheriff, somebody I want you to meet.

Sheriff
Ma'am, I'm a little pressed for time-

Mrs. Munson
Why, you chasin' a gang of bank robbers?
Get on in here say hello.

LIVING ROOM

The voices approach:

Mrs. Munson
. . . We was just havin' tea, talkin' about Othar-

The two enter and Mrs. Munson stops short, looking.

The living room is empty. Even the Professor's teacup is gone.

. . . . Hm. . Bussed his own dishes. You
can always tell a gentleman.

The sheriff, hat in hand, gazes about.

Sheriff
Someone was here, ma'am?

Mrs. Munson
Mm-hm, with me'n Othar.

Once again, he tries to excuse himself:

Sheriff
Well, maybe I'll catch him next time. .

Mrs. Munson
Come on up to his room.

UPSTAIRS

The door opens and the two look in.

The neatly made bed next to the small, barren dresser.

Mrs. Munson
Mm, he's neat.

Sheriff
Very neat.

Mrs. Munson
Probably went down to the cellar to play
with his friends.

She turns.

Sheriff
Ma'am, I really have to. . .

Point-of-view from under the bed: top-teased by a dust ruffle in the foreground, we see Mrs. Munson's heavy orthopedic shoes turning to pass Sheriff Wyner's shiny black boots.

Reverse shows Dorr, cheek pressed to the floor, his teacup and saucer under the bed with him.

. . . be gettin' back. . .

Back to normal perspective: Mrs. Munson is about to go out the door but notices something:

A corner of the Professor's cape, protruding from under the end of the bed.

Mrs. Munson

What the. . .

Back to the Professor, fearfully watching.

His point-of-view: the heavy orthopedic shoes approach, and then, with loud Mr. Mogul sounds of effort, Mrs. Munson's hands and knees hit the floor.

Her head drops in to view to peer in, her own cheek against the floorboards.

. . . What the. . . Why, Professor!

We see the Sheriff watching and his high point-of-view of Mrs. Munson's enormous ass.

. . . What you doin' havin' tea down there?!

Dorr makes silent hand waves to disavow his own presence. Mrs. Munson roars with laughter.

With difficulty she pushes herself back upright, still laughing.

. . . Land of Goshen! Get out from under there!

Sheriff

Miz Munson, my pager just went off. . .

Mrs. Munson
Why of all the. . .

He is already backing down the stairs:

Sheriff
'Fraid I gotta respond. . .

He opens the front door and calls up:

. . . I'll try to meet your friend some
other time.

In the bedroom, Dorr shimmies out from under the bed.

Dorr
Well that was very. . . refreshing. . .
As you know. . .

He gets to his feet, slaps dust from the front of his pants.

. . . we academics are inordinately fond
of wedgin' ourselves into confined
spaces. At Yale the students will see
how many of their number they can
enclose in a telephone booth; Harvard, a
broom closet.

Mrs. Munson
Why I never!

Dorr
There was the goldfish-swallowin' craze,
of course, a different but related
phenomenon. . . Ahem. . . I hope I
didn't spill any tea. . .

CLOSE ON A BOX OF CHOCOLATES

The box is being pulled open.

Voice
What the hell is this?

Wider shows Gawain in Mr. Gudge's office as Gudge, behind the desk, looks at the gift-wrapped box.

Gawain

It's just my way of sayin', well, goddamnit, I don't know what it's like walkin' in your shoes, bein' all tightass and all, and you don't know what it's like to walk in my shoes, but, well. . .

Gudge is opening a card that was inside the box. Its floral front says in gold script, "I'm Sorry. . . If I hurt your feelings. . ."

. . . You know, there's the custodian, and then there's the man inside the custodian, y'understand what I'm sayin'.

. . .

Gudge opens the card. Inside is a hundred-dollar bill.

. . . and that man has needs, dig, and I guess those needs, Mr. Gudge, which they usually involve women with big asses, well those motherfuckin' needs sometimes well up over the custodian like the motherfuckin' Johnstown Flood. But my point is it ain't gonna happen again. Not if it's humanly possible. . .

Gudge reads the card, flips it over to look at its back.

Gudge

Hmm. . .

Gawain

But Jesus, if you'd seen the ass on that girl, Mr. Gudge, you'd a wanted her sitting on your face too.

Gudge

Well, we're all human

Gawain

Ya damn skippy.

Gudge

This-apology-buys you a one-week probationary period. Stay away from the customers, MacSam.

INSIDE THE TUNNEL

Pancake is on his stomach, wearing goggles, boring a hole into a rock face with a power drill.

CELLAR

We hear the whine of the drill faintly here, all but covered by the sound of the chamber music on the boom box.

The other men sit around. Dorr gives a casual glance at his watch as the whine subsides.

Pancake emerges from the tunnel covered with grime.

Pancake

The drill bit's getting awfully hot. Gawain, maybe you could fill a hudson sprayer and spritz it down while I drill.

Gawain

Fuck you, man, I ain't your house nigger. I'm the inside man!

Pancake

Look, are you gonna have a bug up your ass for the rest of the time we work together?

Lump

I'll get the sprayer.

Pancake

No no, me and this gentleman here have to get square. Let me tell you something, MacSam. You wanna know something?

Gawain

I don't wanna know shit from you.

Pancake leans against the wall and pushes his goggles up on his forehead, leaving racoon eyes.

Pancake

I'm gonna tell you how I came down to Mississippi. Wasn't born here, you know. I'm from Scranton, Pennsylvania.

. . .

Abruptly, he stares off into space.

. . . Nnnff!

Gawain

Huh?

Pancake's eyes regain their focus:

Pancake

. . . Scranton, Pennsylvania. Came down here in 1964. Greyhound Bus. With the Freedom Riders. You know who the Freedom Riders were, MacSam?

Gawain

I don't give a shit who they were. Just tell me when they gonna leave.

Pancake

The Freedom Riders, my fine young man, were a group of concerned liberals from up North—whites, Negroes, and yes, Jewish people—all working together, just like we are here. Concerned citizens who came down here so that local black people could have their civil liberties. So that people like you could have the vote.

All look at Pancake. Quiet, except for the delicate chamber music.

Gawain's tone softens:

Gawain

. . . You know what, man?

Pancake

What, brother?

Gawain

I don't vote. So fuck you.

Pancake darkens:

Pancake

Why you fucking--

Gawain

And the bus you rode in on!

Pancake

That's it!

He peels off his coat.

. . . Let's step outside, MacSam!

There is a knock on the cellar door. The men freeze momentarily, then scramble for their instruments. The General flips his cigarette backwards into his mouth.

Dorr turns off the boom box, then calls:

Dorr

Yes, madam?

The door opens and Mrs. Munson comes down the stairs, holding a large plate covered by a checked napkin.

Mrs. Munson

My friend Mrs. Funthes is here so I'm about to go on out. I just wanted to leave y'all with some cinnamon cookies.

. . .

She takes the napkin off and carries the plate from person to person; each obediently takes a cookie with a murmured "Thank you, ma'am."

. . . Y'all sound pretty good. It'd be nice if you'd come by the church some

day, give us a recital.

Dorr takes her by the arm and escorts her back to the stairs.

Dorr

Oh madam, you are too kind. Our music, however, is-how shall I put it?-rather Roman in its outlook; many of our pieces were commissioned by the Holy See.

Mrs. Munson

Oh, I see all right, but we don't make a big whoop-dee-do about denominations; everybody welcome at our church. We've had Methodists come in. Episcopalists. Even had a Jew come in once with a guitar back in the sixties.

Dorr

Indeed. Excuse me, one moment, ma'am, and I shall see you off. . .

They have reached the top of the stairs and the Professor ushers her out but stays behind himself. He turns to address the rest of the men below:

. . . If you gentlemen can labor harmoniously in the course of my absence, then perhaps upon my return we shall be prepared to explode that vexin' ol' piece a igneous.

Gawain

He's the motherfuckin' piece of igneous.

UPSTAIRS

The Professor emerges from the cellar. Mrs. Munson awaits with her friend who is likewise toggled out in fancy Sunday dress and carrying a shiny black purse.

Mrs. Munson

Professor, this is Rosalie Funthes, Rosalie, Professor G.H. Dorr, Ph.D.

Rosalie

Oh my, that's an awful lot of letters.

Dorr

Well of course in my youth I was simply known as Goldthwait. . .

DOWNSTAIRS

Pancake is taking the boombox off the table to clear some space.

Pancake

All right, safety meeting, let's listen up. General, could you hand me the prima cord and the compound there. Before we set the charge we'll run through our procedure.

Various paraphernalia are laid out on the table.

The cat sits in a corner of the cellar, watching carefully and, it seems, listening attentively.

. . . I have earplugs for whoever wants them. Just wedge them in your ears. Now here we have-not yet, Lump.

Lump stops putting in his earplugs.

. . . Now. Prima cord. Gelatinite. C4. Time comes, we pack the hole in the rock with the C4 and insert two leads. A. . .

He holds up one lead.

. . . and B.

He holds up the other lead.

. . . Charge comes from a battery that is inside this plunger. Ordinary auto battery, you can pick it up at Sears, easiest thing in the world . .

EXTERIOR HOUSE

A black town car idles at the curb. Dorr is just escorting the two ladies out the front door and down the stoop.

Dorr

I remember my father telling me--and it is one of the few memories I retain of the man, from one of his visits home, and how I do cherish it--he said, "Goldthwait, you are not formed as other little boys."

Rosalie

Mm-mm.

Mrs. Munson

He a man of learnin'?

Dorr

G.H. number two was self-educated; he had no career, as such, though the state recognized the breadth of his readin' by making him librarian at the state nervous hospital in Meridian, where he was a distinguished inmate.

BACK TO THE BASEMENT

Pancake sets down the two electrical leads and picks up a hammer.

Pancake

This is the same procedure we will be using when we collapse the tunnel after entering the casino vault and returning to the root cellar.

He looks pointedly at Gawain.

. . . This is for your own protection, so pay close attention. Once these materials are combined only the professionals may handle them. That means me, or the General. Separately they are harmless--completely inert. Why, you could light this stuff on fire, hit

it with a hammer--

He swings the hammer down onto the plastique--

EXTERIOR

--and there is the dull thud of an explosion and the house's windows rattle in their frames.

The Professor, at the open door of the car into which the two ladies have just sat, looks up at the house, as do the ladies.

Mrs. Munson

. . . What in the name of heaven was that?

Dorr stares at the house, appalled.

Dorr

I'm. . . quite sure. . . that there is.
. . . no cause for alarm. . .

He struggles for self-possession.

. . . Why, I'm not even absolutely certain that I heard anything at all.

Mrs. Munson

Didn't hear anything?!

Dorr

Well, something, perhaps, but. . .

Marva Munson starts to get out of the car.

. . . nothing that need discompose us,
was the sense I was trying to convey. .

He urges her back into her seat.

. . . Miz Munson, I will not have you missing your musical recital. Why, you go ahead now. Miz Funthes, you as well, I beg of you. . .

He is backing up the walk.

. . . I shall call the gas company, or the water company, or whatever subterranean utility is implicated in this little . . . occurrence. . . I shall see to the matter. . . as only a highly educated classicist could.

At the door now, he gives the two women peering out the car window a smiling but vigorous wave away, which they do not heed, and then he enters.

INTERIOR

The room is filled with smoke.

Othar, slightly askew over the mantel, looks a little huffy. We hear clomping and screaming on the cellar stairs.

Lump bursts out, shrieking:

Lump
Blood, Professor! Oh my God! Blood!

The General comes bounding up the stairs like a panther, a cigarette burning in his lips. He lands catlike in the living room, glides to the blubbering Lump, grabs one shoulder firmly with one hand, and with the other slaps him sharply, once forehand, once backhand.

Lump stares at him, shocked, his blubbering cut short.

More noise is coming from the stairs:

Pancake
. . . why, it's nothing to make a fuss about. Perfectly all right. . . happens all the time. . .

Gawain
. . . You gotta go find it, dipshit!

Pancake emerges from the stairwell, his hair singed, his face and the front of his jumpsuit darkened by the blast. He is clutching one hand with the other.

Pancake
... No, no. Really, I'm perfectly all
right.

Gawain has ascended just behind to hector him over his
shoulder:

Gawain
Perfectly all right? You just blew your
fucking finger off!

Pancake
Sure, but--

Gawain
Well get back down there and find it,
man! I ain't pickin' up your goddamn
finger!

Dorr
I gather there was a premature
detonation--

Gawain
They can sew that shit back on, jack!
Like that guy his wife cut his dick off!
Just sewed that motherfucker back on!

Pancake
Of course. Simplest thing in the world.
Microsurgery--

Gawain
Saw that motherfucker in a porno! Thing
still works!

Pancake is pale from loss of blood and his pontifications
lack full conviction:

Pancake
Oh yes, they have remarkable abilities
in the, uh. . .

EXTERIOR

Quiet.

The two women sit in the idling car, looking at the house.

From the house there is very muted bellowing.

Still looking toward the house, Mrs. Munson offers a word of explanation to her friend:

Mrs. Munson

They using the house to practice music a
the rococo.

Rosalie

Mmmmm-hm.

BACK INSIDE

The cat, with a human finger in its mouth, sidles cautiously to one side, warily eying someone.

Voices

Get him!

The General, pluming cigarette in his mouth, tensed arms extended outwards, sidles cautiously to cut him off.

Dorr

I propose that we get our fallen comrade
to the hospital, and the General shall
follow when he manages to recover the
severed digit.

Pancake

I don't know what all the fuss is about.

The cat jumps.

The General leaps to follow.

EXTERIOR

The two women looking.

The front door of the house opens. Lump, the Professor, and Gawain emerge, escorting Pancake. Just before Gawain finishes closing the door the cat slips out.

Mrs. Munson

PICKLES!

The door is yanked fully open and the General races out after the cat.

. . . You catch Pickles now!

The cat races across the lawn and, with no break in stride, up his favorite tree.

The General follows and, also without breaking stride, clambers up the tree after it.

Tree limbs shake with activity hidden by the leaves. We hear the hiss of the cat.

The men are bundling Pancake into the hearse. Dorr calls to the women before climbing in:

Dorr

The house is perfectly in order, but we need medical attention for Mr. Pancake who, during the disturbance, pinched his finger in a valve of the sackbutt.

The cat leaps out of the tree and runs away down the road.

Mrs. Munson

You let the cat out!

The General leaps out of the tree to land catlike on the street, arms tensed, casts a look both ways, and then pursues the animal down the road. We hear the retreating padding footsteps of all six feet.

Dorr

The General is even now excercising every effort to retrieve your mischievous little pet. Please go, go and enjoy your concert, and we shall see you later in the evening. Au revoir, mes dames!

DAWN

A new day. The garbage scow chugs down the mighty Mississippi. It toots its horn.

CLOSE ON SCHEMATIC MAP

It shows the underground complex and, stretching towards it in a line drawn with a blunt pencil, is the tunnel. It is now almost to the vault.

A violin bow enters to tap at the line.

Dorr's Voice

Despite our little setback we find ourselves on schedule to penetrate the vault. . .

The bow taps at the vault outline.

. . . here, this afternoon, having successfully blasted that little ol' rock to pieces during Miz Munson's choir practice.

The violin bow withdraws.

. . . Clark, perhaps you can run us through the game plan for what remains of our tunnelin'.

A bandaged hand enters frame and a finger-stump points at the end of the penciled line.

Clark

Of course. Why, it's child's play now, easiest thing in the world. Only a couple of feet separate us from the vault. . .

WIDER

The men are clustered around the map, spread out on the sackbutt case in the cellar. Clark continues:

. . . Just the usual spadework until we hit the masonry of the vault, and then we drill through.

Dorr

And will you be able to wield the drill with your maimed extremity?

Clark

Oh, I should think so, it's only one finger. Inhibits me in doing finer work, of course. I'll always have to live with that. . . Ahem. Maybe, and I'm just thinking out loud here, maybe since, as you say, it will present problems later. . .

Dorr

Yes, Clark?

Clark

Well, maybe--and this is something I've talked over with Mountain Girl, and she agrees with me, so it's not just one person's opinion--maybe I should get a little extra compensation for the accident.

A long, stoney silence.

. . . Somewhat larger share. Why, if this were any other line of work I'd be getting workmen's comp, wouldn't I? Might even have a pretty good lawsuit.

Gawain

You gonna sue yaself for blowin' off your finger?

Clark

Well that is simply asinine--

Dorr

Yes but you see, Clark, this is not what you just called "some other line of work."

Clark

But if it were-

Dorr

This is a criminal enterprise, not to put too fine a point on it, entailin' all manner a risks not involved in honest labor. Governmental regulations an' civic safeguards cannot be assumed to apply to antisocial pursuits.

Lump

Yeah, but he lost his finger.

Gawain

We don't give a shit! Man can blow his own dick off, don't make no nevermind to us! We don't gotta pay the man for goin' around blowin' off body parts! Getcha head outcha ass, man!

Clark

Look, you-

Dorr

I think that in this instance Gawain has a very excellent point. I-

General

No extra share!

All stop and stare at the General.

Clark grumbles:

Clark

Well, okay, majority rules, like I say, it was just a trial balloon. Hand's not so bad really, I even get some phantom feeling.

Gawain

You pull on your prick you get phantom feeling. Greedy motherfuck.

Dorr

Now that that matter is settled, let us synchronize our watches before Gawain

reports to work. In. . . twenty
seconds. . . it will be twelve-sixteen
exactly. . . fifteen. . .

Clark
It will be twelve-fifteen?

Dorr
No, in fifteen seconds--now eleven
seconds--it will be twelve-sixteen. . .
eight. . .

Lump
Professor?

Dorr
Six. . . five--yes, Lump?

Lump
I don't have a watch.

DOORWAY

It is the weathered doorway to the main entrance of the Lady
Luck. A hand enters to rap.

Muffled Voice
Yeah?

Gawain
Me, dickwad.

A low, chesty chuckle. The door swings open and Gawain
enters.

RUMBLING WHEELS ON NUBBY FLOOR

A garbage bin is being wheeled across the empty casino
floor.

WIDER

Gawain is wheeling it. He is approaching the tunnel to the

corporate annex.

BACK TO THE WHEELS

As they roll down the tunnel.

CHURCH

Loud singing at the cut. We are looking at Mrs. Munson in the middle of the choir, holding forth in song.

DOORWAY TO VAULT

Gawain leans back against the wall next to the vault door, arms folded across his chest. Faintly, from inside the vault, we hear the whine of a power tool. Gawain leans over and punches the button on boom box that hangs from the rolling garbage bin. The hallway pulses with "I Left My Wallet In El Segundo."

CHURCH

More singing, Mrs. Munson and the rest of the choir now clapping as they sing.

INSIDE VAULT

The power-tool whine is louder here. We are looking at a patch of wall.

After a beat, and with a loud rev as resistance gives way, a drill bit emerges from the wall, spitting out bits of the masonry.

The drill withdraws.

After a beat, hammer blows.

The chunk of masonry begins to buckle.

OUTSIDE THE VAULT DOOR

The General opens the door, still somehow immaculately groomed. Gawain enters.

CHURCH AGAIN

The gospel number rising to climax, supported by the organist and the rest of the congregation.

INSIDE THE VAULT

Clark and Lump, covered in dirt and plaster dust, have started stuffing bundled bills and small sacks into large garbage bags. An irregular hole, about three feet across, gapes in the far wall.

Gawain punches off the boombox, looking at all the money.

Gawain
Well ain't that somethin'.

Clark suddenly freezes in the act of collecting money. He straightens slowly.

Clark
Hnnnn. Arrunggggh! Rnffff.

He stands stock still, wincing, gazing off into space.

. . . . Mmmmmggh!

He whispers hoarsely, urgently:

. . . IBS!

The other men look at him.

Gawain
. . . Say what?

Clark
IBS! Irritable Bowel Syndrome! Is

there a men's room down here?!

Gawain
Oh man, you shouldn't be using the men's
room—

Clark
Or a lady's room! IBS! Quickly!

Gawain
You shoulda shit back in the house, man!
We don't want Elron finding you in the
goddamn crapper!

Clark's voice is still hoarse. He does small kneebends of
urgency:

Clark
No choice! Quickly! It's a medical
condition!

Gawain
You are disgusting, man. All right,
follow me.

CASINO FLOOR

We are close on Gawain peering anxiously to one side.

He turns and peers the other way.

We hear a toilet flush and, after a beat, Clark emerges from
the men's room door next to which Gawain stands. His manner
is now completely relaxed.

Clark
Feel thirty pounds lighter.

They start walking back to the vault.

. . . Thank you for being so
understanding. Not everyone is, of
course, which is why the biggest
challenge of IBS is educating the
public. Afflicts over two million
people yet most of us have never heard

of it. And it strikes without regard to age, gender or race.

Gawain

Oh fuck, man, I don't wanna know about it.

Clark

That's the kind of attitude we're fighting.

Gawain

Well maybe you should sign me up, man, 'cause you startin' to irritate my bowel.

CHURCH

The choir finishes a number and sits—all except for Marva Munson, who unties the knot on her robe at the nape of her neck, slips it off and, with murmured goodbyes, slips away.

VAULT INTERIOR

As the two men enter Carl is still holding forth:

Pancake

. . . I guess I never told you, that's how Mountain Girl and I met. They had an IBS Weekend at Grossinger's, in the Catskills. Of course the tourist business up there has suffered, with the demise of the Borscht Belt. So they have different promotions, mixers, so on. This was a weekend for Irritable Bowel singles to meet and support each other and share stories.

Gawain

Man, I don't wanna hear a single one a them stories.

Pancake

Well, some of them are very—

Gawain
 Not one fuckin' story! You one fucked-
 up motherfucker! You-

They stop short, looking:

The General and Lump are standing in the middle of the floor, stock still, each clutching a bag of money, staring up at the same corner of the ceiling.

Lump turns to Carl and Gawain.

Lump
 Hey, lookit that.

Gawain and Carl join them in the middle of the vault and look up at the corner of the ceiling.

A small video camera, aimed squarely at the four men.

Through the camera: Black-and-white video, very wide angle high shot, of the four motionless men below goggling up at the lens. Smoke plumes from the General's cigarette.

Back to normal perspective.

Pancake
 Huh. Looks like an Ikegami.

He slips on his reading glasses as he gets a leg up on a shelf just below the camera and hoists himself. He peers in at the lens.

Through the lens: Carl looming into extreme close shot.

. . . Oh yeah. Mm-hm. I'm not sure
 whether it's broadcasting. . .

Normal perspective.

. . . Um-hm. . . No. . .

He is fingering the back of the camera.

. . . Hard wire. . .

Down below, Gawain looks at the wire snaking along the seam of wall and ceiling. At the opposite corner it travels down the joint of the two walls.

He traces its path down and then across one wall at chair-rail height towards the door. The other men follow in an anxious herd as he traces one finger along it. Just before reaching the vault door the wire goes through the wall in a hole finished off with a grommet.

Gawain goes out the vault door and picks up the line where it emerges on the other side, travels down to the joint of wall and floor, and then continues along the floor. Gawain follows it and the other men continue to follow him.

He traces it anxiously down the hall in a hunched lope. The other men scuttle behind.

The wire winds around into an office, back up to chair-rail height, along one wall, behind some cabinetry which Gawain hurries past to find it again on the far side, and then down to a video recorder.

It is not, however, hooked up to the video recorder: its pronged end swings loose just by where it would be plugged in.

Inside the video recorder is a cassette, which Gawain ejects. The men crowd to look over his shoulder as he examines it:

"Shevann's Schvanz".

There is a pile of other videos by the monitor: "Charlayne and the Chocolate Factory," "Big Dick Blaque's Big Night Out," "Lemme Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks," "Anus & Andy." Just next to the pile is an old bowl of Kocoa Krispies.

VAULT

The General climbs into the tunnel with a garbage bagful of money, followed by Lump, likewise encumbered. Lump hands back out a satchel to Gawain, who sets it on the vault floor by the hole. From the way he handles it, it is quite heavy. Pancake, also with a bag of money, is getting ready to climb in:

Pancake
 Look, I didn't choose to have IBS-
 Gawain
 Shut the fuck up!

Lump hands Gawain a smaller, lighter satchel which he likewise sets on the floor.

Pancake
 There's no cure, you know. Only
 control. Lifelong condition. Not
 complaining, just fact. And I did meet
 Mountain.

Gawain
 Grab your bag and get in that fucking
 hole!

EXTERIOR CHURCH

Mrs. Munson is leaving, with singing still audible from the service that continues inside.

CELLAR

We are looking from inside the tunnel towards its mouth, where the Professor stoops slightly to peer in, anxiously dry-washing his hands.

A reverse shows the hunched-over men scuttling along the tunnel towards us, holding large garbage sacks.

Dorr
 Welcome back, gentlemen, mission
 accomplished I see. I am so very very
 delighted. . .

He gives a hand down to each man as he exits the tunnel.

. . . Congratulations. Congratulations.
 I have some cold duck on ice for the
 occasion.

Lump

Maybe we could have something to drink,
too.

VAULT

Gawain, left behind, is muttering to himself as he uses a trowel and other instruments from his satchel to patch up the hole at his end of the tunnel.

Gawain
Motherfucker can't stop talking, can't
stop shitting. Motherfucker tell
everyone about his motherfuckin'
asshole. No one gives a shit about his
asshole. Nobody interested in another
man's asshole. Or his bitch's.

HOUSE EXTERIOR

Mrs. Munson is letting herself in.

CELLAR

The men are sitting around the table, champagne glasses raised. On the table sits the money, stacked in orderly piles.

Dorr
Gentlemen, to we few. We who have
shared each other's company, each
other's care, each other's joy, and who
now reap the fruits of our communal
effits, shoulder to shoulder, from each
accordin' to his abilities so forth
whatnot. We have had our little
diffences along the way, it's true, but
I like to think they have only made us
value one another the more, each coming
to understand and appreciate the other's
unique qualities, potencies, and, yes,
foibles. I suggest that we shall look
back upon this caper one day, one
distant day, grandchildren dandled upon
our knee, and perhaps a tear will form,

and we shall say, Well, with wit, and grit, and no small amount of courage, we accomplished something on that day, a feat of derring-do, an enterprise not ignoble—we, merry band, unbound by the constraints of society and the prejudices of the common ruck, we happy few. Gentlemen—to us!

Men

To us!

They clink.

KITCHEN

Upstairs Mrs. Munson runs water into a teapot, humming to herself.

VAULT

Having finished patching, Gawain starts painting. He turns on his boombox, and out comes the big bassy "I Left My Wallet in El Segundo."

CELLAR

The men, having drunk deep, are setting down their glasses. Pancake looks at his watch with some concern.

Pancake

Charge should've gone off already.

Dorr

I do beg your pardon?

Pancake

The charge to collapse the tunnel. I set it for eight minutes.

Dorr looks at his watch.

Dorr

Well that time, and more, has most certainly elapsed.

FROM INSIDE THE TUNNEL

Looking toward the mouth. The men stoop over and peek fearfully in.

They again stand upright. A silence.

Dorr clears his throat.

Dorr

I need not remind you of the importance of obliterating any trace of a connection between the vault and this house. It was of the essence of this plan that it should appear that the money had simply vanished. Without a trace. Spirited away, as it were, by ghosts.

Pancake

Of course. I understand.

Dorr

The conundrum of the undisturbed yet empty vault, the unsolvable riddle of the sealed yet violated sanctum, is of the utmost importance not only to make our caper innelectually satisfying. It is also exigent as a matter of practical fact: I remind you that if a tunnel is ever found leading to this house, this house's owner knows all of your names.

Pancake

She certainly does.

Dorr

Therefore—to draw the unavoidable conclusion—someone shall have to reenter the tunnel to reset that charge.

INSIDE THE TUNNEL

Pancake, hunched over, scurries along the tunnel. He

reaches the remnants of a large rock, where the tunnel grows smaller.

He drops to crawl position and elbows his way forward, toolbelt clanking along.

We are getting closer and closer to a muffled but thuddingly bassy "I Left My Wallet in El Segundo."

VAULT

The music loudly present at the cut. Gawain takes a handheld blowdryer out of his satchel and flips it on, directing it at the fresh paint on the wall whose repairs are now invisible.

TUNNEL

Music once again muffled. Pancake has reached a little LED-displaying timer with leads trailing off of it.

He grabs it, puts on his reading glasses, squints.

The display shows: TIME REMAINING: 00:12.

The colons in the display rhythmically blink, but the number does not advance. For some reason, stuck.

Pancake

Huh.

He reaches to his toolbelt, pulls out his Leatherman.

LIVING ROOM

Mrs. Munson is setting places at a large table. There are about a dozen place settings.

TUNNEL

Pancake now has a mini-mag light clenched between his teeth, aimed down at the timer. He opens the philips head on his Leatherman but abruptly stops and stares off into space.

Pancake

Nnnnrung. . .

He is squinting with pain.

The muffled hip-hop song is beginning to recede.

VAULT

Gawain is wheeling his garbage cart out the door. The vault is completely empty but looks completely undisturbed.

He closes the heavy vault door behind him, leaving quiet.

TUNNEL

Quiet here as well, now. Pancake's moan trails off to nothing. He relaxes. The moment, whatever it was, has passed.

He looks back down at the unit, flicks it with his finger, and it emits a soft beep.

. . . Huh?

He squints at the back of the unit.

As it beeps again, he turns the unit over to look at its face.

The readout now says: 00:10.

As he watches, peering down through the bottom of his glasses, it continues to advance with a beep as each second slips by: 9. . . 8. . .

. . . What the—

His eyes widen and he frantically shakes the unit. It continues beeping. He briefly and sloppily tries to fit the phillips head into one of the four screws on the back of the unit but immediately gives up and starts a panicked wriggle back up the tunnel, whimpering.

LADY LUCK

Gawain is wheeling his garbage cart past Elron.

Gawain
'Sup.

LIVING ROOM

Mrs. Munson is placing the last piece of silverware, just so.

TUNNEL

Pancake is in full panicked awkward flight as-

CELLAR

-Boom! We cut to the cellar and Pancake is shot out the tunnel like a human cannonball, trailing a comet-tail of dirt, dust, and debris that wafts what were neatly stacked bills up into the air.

LIVING ROOM

The portrait of Othar jostles back to square. He now looks a little angry.

The cat arches her back, emitting a startled yowl.

Mrs. Munson stands, frozen, then looks slowly around, trying to assimilate what has just happened.

LADY LUCK

Gawain and Elron are staring at each other, frozen, also reacting to what just happened.

Finally:

Gawain

. . . You just fart?

Elron

Heh-heh-heh.

LIVING ROOM

Mrs. Munson is looking at the cellar door. Dust drifts out from under it.

She takes a slow step towards it. Another step. She opens the door.

There is no visibility in the cellar due to swirling clay dust.

She takes one step down the stairs, waving at the air in front of her face.

Paper money wafts in and out of the dust.

We hear voices:

Pancake

Perfectly all right. Not a problem.

Lump

Well there sure as shit ain't no tunnel left.

The clearing dust reveals the caped Professor anxiously dancing from foot to foot, gathering money out of the air. As he reaches up to grab a bill that has him facing up in Mrs. Munson's direction, he freezes.

His point-of-view reveals her through dissipating dust.

Mrs. Munson

Professor, I'm surprised.

There is a long beat, through which all stare at her.

Dorr

. . . Properly speaking, madam, we have been surprised; you are taken aback. Though I acknowledge that the sense you

intend is gaining currency through increasing use.

Further dissipation of the dust reveals how much money there is, settling now to cover the floor of the cellar.

. . . You have returned from your devotions betimes.

We hear the ring of the doorbell.

Mrs. Munson

I hadda fix tea. I wanna talk to you, Professor, don't you be leavin'. And don't make any more noise! And you!

She points at the General who, in the excitement, has neglected to hide his ever-present cigarette.

. . . I told you, I don't want any smokin' in here!

She clomps upstairs and shuts the cellar door.

UPSTAIRS

We pull her towards the front door, angry and lost in thought. Her look softens somewhat as she opens the door.

It is a chattering infestation of hens: all of her friends from church push in wearing church dresses and elaborate hats.

CELLAR

The men are still frozen looking up toward the door. The muted cackle of churchladies.

The men gradually unfreeze.

Lump

She saw everything. She saw our hole. .

He turns to Dorr, near tears:

. . . She saw our hole, Professor!

Dorr rubs his hands anxiously, thinking:

Dorr

Yes. . . Yes. . .

Lump

What do we do?

Dorr

Well, first, my dear boy, we follow the
General's example. . .

The General remains staring up at the door, frozen but for
the smoke pluming from the cigarette in his mouth.

. . . and refrain from panic. Secondly,
we coolly, calmly, collectedly think. . .
think. . .

The gaze of all the men drifts back up to the cellar door,
and we look down at them, gazing up.

LIVING ROOM

The chattering ladies are gathered at the table, Mrs. Munson
pouring them tea.

The cellar door creaks noisily—one might almost say
gothically-ajar, and the Professor peers out with an
ingratiating smile.

Dorr

Hsst. . . Madam. . .

The chattering abates and the ladies all look at him. His
smile broadens into ghastliness and he crooks a finger
toward Mrs. Munson.

. . . Mrs. Munson, if I might have a
word. . .

Mrs. Munson

You get back down those stairs!

Dorr
I assure you I shall be-

Mrs. Munson
Hush! Down those stairs! We havin'
tea now! I be down shortly.

He nods meekly and retreats, easing the door creakily shut.

The ladies look inquisitively at Mrs. Munson as his
footsteps are heard descending the stair.

. . . He's the tenant.

Ladies
Mm-hm.

CELLAR

As the Professor rejoins the still staring and silent group.
The money has been picked up and is once again in stacks
upon the table.

Dorr
She shall be down shortly. . .

Explaining, he indicates upstairs with a jerk of the head:
. . . Tea. Dainties.

The men nod, murmuring.

The cellar door squeaks open. There is the clomp of careful
footsteps on the stair.

Using only tongue and teeth, the General flips his smoking
cigarette inwards into his mouth and gives Mrs. Munson his
usual deadpan look.

She halts halfway down the stairs, still wearing an apron
and holding a spatula.

Mrs. Munson
I don't know what you boys been up to
but I wasn't born yesterday and I know
mischievous when I see it. Now I want an

explanation, but first I want you boys to get your fannies up here with y'alls period instruments. I been tellin' the ladies about your music and they wanna hear you play.

She turns to head back up the stairs but abruptly stops to turn and give the General a hard look which he innocently returns.

. . . Hmph.

She turns again and clomps back up the stairs.

The General opens his mouth and, again without using his hands, restores his cigarette to its usual place on his lower lip.

Lump is fretful:

Professor? Lump

Yes, Lump? Dorr

I can't really play the buttsack. Lump

UPSTAIRS

The cellar door opens and the men troop out, G.H. Dorr leading and the other men following rather sheepishly behind.

Dorr
Madame-or rather, mesdames-you will have to accept our apologies for failing to perform since, as you see, we are shorthanded. Gawain is still at work and we could no more play with one part tacit than a horse could canter shy one leg.

Ladies
Mm-hmm.

Mrs. Munson

Hmph.

Dorr

Perhaps I could offer as a poor but
ready substitute a brief poetic recital.

Though I don't pretend to great
oratorical skills, I will happily
present, with your ladies' permission,
verse from the unquiet mind of Mr. Ed
G'Allan Poe.

Lump, Pancake, and the General sit and awkwardly accept
dainty teacups.

The Professor rises, spreads his hand, and pronounces:

. . . "Ladies, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore. . . "

Close-ups of the various ladies, some sipping tea or slowly
munching biscuits, but all eyes glued to the declaiming man
in the cape.

. . . "That gently, o'er a perfumed sea
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
To his own native shore. . . "

Murmuring voice:

Voice

Amen.

A slurp of tea from another quarter.

Dorr bears on:

Dorr

"On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece
And the grandeur that was Rome. . . "

A long silence.

Then, scattered:

Voices
Mm-mm. Glory hallelujah.

A lady holding a teacup turns to the General:

Lady
 That was soooooe poem.

The General stares at her.

. . . You know any?

We hear the front door opening and Gawain enters, still wearing his Lady Luck custodial uniform. He looks.

His point-of-view: church ladies with teacups and his comrades seated among them, also holding teacups and scones.

Gawain
 Y'all been celebratin'?.

LATER

The bustling and chattering ladies are just finishing leaving; Mrs. Munson is seeing them off at the door. Evening is gathering, and we hear the lonely toot of the distant garbage scow.

The men as well stand by the door and, affecting good cheer, wave off the departing ladies.

Dorr
 Goodbye, ladies. We had such a pleasant time.

Mrs. Munson closes the door and her manner instantly darkens.

Mrs. Munson
 Now, I wanna know what's goin' on.

Dorr
 Yes indeed, and the thirst for knowledge is a very commendable thing. Though in

this instance, I believe when you hear the explanation, you will laugh riotously, slappin' your knee and perhaps even wipin' away a giddy tear, relieved of your former concern.

Mrs. Munson

Hmph.

Dorr

You see Lump here is an enthusiastic collector of Indian arrowheads and, having found one simply lying on your cellar floor, a particularly rare artifact of the Natchez tribe, he enlisted us in an all-out effort to sift through the subsoil in search of others.

Well, in doing so, we apparently hit a motherlode of natural gas—I myself became acutely aware of the smell of "rotten eggs"—and it was at just this unfortunate moment that the General here violated one of the cardinal rules of this house and lit himself a cigarette.

The General stiffly bows:

General

So sorry.

The Professor, nodding, smiling, and dry-washing his hands, continues to look at Mrs. Munson, though his story, apparently, has ended.

She returns his ingratiating look with a stare.

Mrs. Munson

. . . What about all that money?

Dorr's smile fades.

Dorr

. . . Ah. The money. The money is. . .
Mr. Pancake's.

Pancake

That's right.

Dorr

He only just remortgaged his house in order to pay for the procedure that will correct the wandering eye of his common-law wife, Mountain Water, who suffers from astygmia and strabismus and a general curdling of the vitreous gelly.

Mr. Pancake however is an ardent foe of the federal reserve and is in fact one of those eccentrics about whom one occasionally reads, hoarding his entire life savings either under the proverbial mattress or, as in Mr. Pancake's case, in a Hefty bag that is his constant companion.

Under her stare, he elaborates:

. . . Steel Sack.

Pancake

Don't trust the banks. Never have.

She thinks, decides.

Mrs. Munson

This don't smell right. I'm callin' Sheriff Wyner.

A chorus of gasps.

Dorr

Madam-if you please. Yes! Yes! It was a lie! A fantastic tale! You have us!

Dead to rights! But please allow me to tell you the truth-in private.

LIVING ROOM

He escorts her to sit beneath the portrait of Othar, sits across from her, and leans confidentially in.

Dorr

Madam. . .

He agonizes. The words do not come easy.

. . . What I am about to reveal to you,
you may find. . . shocking. Mrs.
Munson, I must tell you that we are not.
. . what we appear.

Mrs. Munson

Mm-hm.

Dorr

We are not in fact musicians of the late
Renaissance. Nor of the early or mid
period. We are, in fact. . .
criminals! Desperate men, madam! We
have tunneled into the nearby offices of
the Lady Luck gambling emporium and have
relieved it of its treasure!

Mrs. Munson

Lord have mercy!

Dorr

It is true that the Lady Luck is den of
iniquity, a painted harlot luring people
into sin and exciting the vice of greed
with her false promise of easy winnings.
Oh, her gains are ill-gotten, yes, but
I offer no excuses—save one! We men
have each pledged half of our share of
the booty to a charitable institution—
the General, to a placement service for
Southeast Asian refugees; Mr. Pancake to
the Blue Ridge Parkway Conservancy; and
Lump to the United Jewish Appeal. As
compensation for use of your house we
had planned to donate a full share to
Bob Jones University, without burdening
you with guilty knowledge by informing
you of same. But you have wrested the
information from me! Now it is all on
the table. Now you have it, the whole
story, the awful truth.

Mrs. Munson

Stolen money!

Dorr

Yes, yes, shamefully I admit it, yes!
 But find the victim, Mrs. Munson, I
 challenge you! Even the casino itself,
 that riparian Gomorra, shall suffer no
 harm! It has an insurance company, a
 financial behemoth that will cheerfully
 replenish its depleted vaults! That is
 its function! And the insurance company
 itself is made up of tens and tens of
 thousands of policy-holders so that—we
 have done the calculations, Mrs.
 Munson!—so that at the end of the day,
 at the final reckoning, each policy-
 holder shall have contributed only one
 penny—one single solitary cent—to the
 satisfaction of this claim.

Mrs. Munson

. . . Just one penny?

Dorr

Think of it, Mrs. Munson! One cent from
 thousands upon thousands of people so
 that Bob Jones University can continue
 on its mission! Why, I have no doubt
 that, were the policy-holders aware of
 the existence of that august
 institution, why, each and every one of
 them would have volunteered some token
 amount to the furtherance of its aims!

Mrs. Munson

Well that's prob'ly true. . .

The Professor, warming, has resumed dry-washing his hands:

Dorr

Yes madam, sadly, the criminal stain is
 upon my soul, but the benefit shall
 accrue to any number of worthy causes.
 As long, that is, as the secret stays
 with us. And I, surely, shall not be
 the one to divulge it.

Mrs. Munson nods, musing.

Mrs. Munson
Well. . . it's hard to see the harm in
it. . . One penny. . .

Her gaze drifts around the room, a smile beginning to warm her face. The smile freezes, though, as her look catches on something.

Her point-of-view: Othar, above the mantle, looks down with a disapproving scowl.

. . . I'm sorry, Professor.

Dorr is taken aback:

Dorr
Excuse me, ma'am?

Mrs. Munson
No. It's wrong. Don't you be leadin'
me into temptation.

Dorr
Madam, I must strenuously protest—

Mrs. Munson
No, it's just plain wrong. Stealin'. I
know your intentions were good, and I
won't call the police if you give the
money back. But I gotta see that you do
it.

Dorr
Madam—

Mrs. Munson
And all a you gotta go to church with me
next Sunday.

The Professor is incredulous:

Dorr
And. . . engage in divine worship?

Mrs. Munson
I made up my mind. You can double-talk
all you want, but its church or the
county jail.

Dorr

But—

She rises.

Mrs. Munson

You think it over. I gotta feed the cat.

CELLAR

The men all sit around the card table, lit from below by an oil lamp. The General is neatly packing the stacks of banknotes into the sackbutt case.

Gawain

Motherfuck!

Dorr

Yes. Unfortunately, Mrs. Munson has rather complicated the situation—

Gawain

I know how to discomplicate it! Put a cap in the old lady's head! Then everything simple again!

The group lapses into silence, considering. Even Gawain needs a moment to digest the horror that he himself has proposed.

The Professor is solemn:

Dorr

. . . Not easy to do. Many reasons. Practical ones: a quiet neighborhood, a sleepy town. Reasons of moral repugnance: a harmless woman, a deed conceived and executed in cold blood. No, Gawain; would that it were simple!

Gawain

Well—fuck, man! What we gonna do, give the money back and go to church?!

Dorr

I shudder. I quake.

He turns to the General.

. . . You sir, are a Buddhist. Is there not a middle way?

The General grunts as he closes the clasps on the sackbutt case full of money:

General

Must float like a leaf on the river of life. And kill old lady.

The men murmur.

Dorr

Well. . . I suppose you are right. It is the active nature of the crime, though, that so horrifies—the squeezing of the trigger, the plunging of the knife. But, think a moment—look at the other tools we have at hand.

He looks around.

. . . We have the cellar. We have masonry and trowel. Perhaps we could simply. . . immure her.

Pancake

Sure, easiest thing in the world. I could whip up a little mortar in one of those snow saucers, lay the bricks, anchor in some chains, Mountain has a source for the manacles. . .

Dorr

Ahh but gentlemen, we delude ourselves.

Think of the woman's piteous moans as we lay tier upon tier of brick. Think of her lamentations as we fit the last brick into place, appealing to our better selves, the higher angels of our nature, our recollections of our own sainted mothers. . . No, I fear that we

lack the sand to commit such an act.
 No. . . no. . . shortest and most
 painless is best. Let us confront
 reality. Gawain's gun. . . the retort
 muffled by a pillow. . . into the brain.
 . . the affair of an instant. The only
 question is. . . who wields the weapon.

He looks around the table. Silence. No volunteers.

. . . I believe it is traditional, in
 such circumstances, to draw straws.

Pancake

Well, sure, fair enough.

He takes a broom leaning against the wall, bends back and
 snaps a handful of its bristles.

. . . I'm thinking, though, that since I
 lost my finger—I mean, literally lost it
 because of that goddamn cat—maybe I
 should be excused from this thing. Hard
 for me to squeeze a trigger anyway—

Gawain

You one whiney motherfucker! I squeeze
 your nutsack you keep that up!

Pancake

Listen, punk—

Dorr

Gentlemen, no special pleading, no
 exceptions. It's in the nature of the
 situation that we would all prefer to be
 excused.

Pancake grumbles as he counts out five bristles, takes one
 and snaps it in half, displaying the short straw to the
 group, and then hands the four long and one short to the
 Professor:

Pancake

Well, okay. . . it was just a trial
 balloon. . .

With a flap of his cape the professor jumbles the straws and encloses them in one hand.

Sweaty close-ups. Each man stares at the straws. Some hesitant, some resolute, they draw:

First, the General: long straw. His reaction: impassive.

Next, Lump: long straw. His reaction: relieved.

Next, Pancake. Long straw.

Pancake
Long straw. You all see it. All your
fuss over nothing, punk.

Two straws left. Gawain stares at them, licks his lips.

He reaches for one straw, touches it, hesitates.

Gawain
. . . Motherfucker. . .

He touches the other straw, hesitates.
He goes back to the first straw, closes his hand around it,
closes his eyes, and pulls.

He lifts the straw into frame before his squeezed-shut eyes,
raises his eyebrows, and slowly opens fluttering eyelids to
look: short straw.

The Professor, smiling, opens his fist to confirm that he
holds the last long one.

Gawain moans.

PULLING HIM UP THE STAIRS

Slowly, slowly, Gawain mounts the cellar stairs. Behind
him, gathered in a semi-circle and looking up from the foot
of the stairs, the other men wait.

As he plants one plodding foot in front of the other Gawain
raises the gun, slides back its primer to make sure there is
a round in the chamber, and then slides it shut as he
reaches the door.

LIVING ROOM

In the foreground Mrs. Munson sits knitting, humming an old temperance tune. In the background the cellar door swings open. Marva Munson doesn't notice; her knitting needles continue their rhythmic clack.

We pull Gawain, gun at the ready, as he takes slow, cautious steps across the floor.

We intercut his point-of-view of the back of the old lady's head, bowed over her knitting.

As Gawain passes the sofa he picks up a cushion and buries in it his hand holding the gun.

He looks back up at the old lady. But now, still cautiously approaching, he cocks his head, his expression bemused.

His point-of-view nearing the old lady is now different somehow. The perspective is somewhat lower; the humming woman sounds not quite the same; the rocking chair and the room itself are subtly different.

When we cut back to Gawain he is a runty, ten-year-old child walking slowly across the floor; he is cradling not a gun in a pillow but a squirming little puppy dog.

The dog yips; the woman turns to look at us. It is not Mrs. Munson, but another black woman of about the same age.

Woman

What you got there, Gawain?

Child Gawain

Why-nothin', mama.

Mama

Nothin' my ass! You got a dog there!

Child Gawain

No, Mama!

Mama

A filthy noisy little pest of a puppy

dog gonna shit all over the house!

Child Gawain
He won't shit in the house, Mama, I'm
gonna train him, I promise, gonna train
him real good-

WHAP! She cuffs him on the side of his head.

Mama
I'm gonna train you real good! I told
you don't bring no stray dogs into this
house!

WHAP! Another slap.

. . . You wait til your Daddy gets home,
he gonna lay into you proper!

WHAP!

The little boy, weeping, throws his arms around his mother:

Child Gawain
Please don't hurt me no more! I love
you, Mama!

Mama
Daddy gonna kick your ass!

WHAP!

. . . Bringin' in a filthy dirty dog!

WHAP! Gawain's little brothers and sisters, drawn by the
commotion, have gathered excitedly to watch.

Sister
Mama's whuppin' Gawain's ass!

Brother
(eagerly)
Ain't you gonna use the strap, Mama?

WHAP! WHAP! Gawain is sobbing:

Child Gawain

Please don't hurt me, Mama!

Now it is the adult Gawain blubbering.

The clack of knitting needles stops and Mrs. Munson turns to look.

Mrs. Munson
What you doin'? What you doin' with my
pillow there?

He surreptitiously slides the gun into his pocket,
sniveling:

Gawain
I'm sorry, ma'am, I-

WHAP! She cuffs him on the side of the head.

Mrs. Munson
I'm displeased with you! Colored boy
like you, falling in with that trash
downstairs!

WHAP!

. . . Ashamed a yourself! Didn't your
mama raise you right!

CELLAR
Gawain is tramping down the stairs.

Gawain
I can't do it!

The men are stunned.

Dorr
Why. . . this is most. . . irregular.

Gawain
She reminds me of my mama. I can't
shoot my mama! You motherfuckers just
draw straws again.

Pancake

Wait a minute. You've got to accept your responsibilities, young man.

Gawain

Fuck you. And your irritated bowel. I can't shoot that old lady.

General

Must shoot!

Pancake

Now look here, it's the easiest thing in the world. Pretend her head is a casaba melon, and the gun is a melon-baller, and-

Gawain

What the fuck you talkin' about, man? You think this a melon-baller, you do it, man!

Dorr

My my, this is most irregular.

Pancake

Look, with equal rights come equal responsibilities-

Dorr

I'm afraid that Mr. Pancake is right, my dear fellow. We cannot draw straws again; the exercise loses all credibility if you show that the loser can simply beg off doing the job.

General

Must shoot!

Gawain shoves the gun toward Pancake.

Gawain

She just an old colored lady to you-you do it, man!

Pancake

Why you sniveling little coward!

Gawain

What you say, you whiney motherfucker?
I come up your irritated ass with this
motherfuckin' gun-

He is waving the gun.

Pancake

You think you scare me, you mewling
punk! You don't scare me! Bull Connor
and all his dogs didn't scare me!

He shoves Gawain.

. . . Be a man!

Gawain

You fuck!

He shoves him back.

Pancake shoves:

Pancake

Be a man!

Gawain

You ain't no fuckin' man, fuckin' a
sixty-year-old lady in pigtails!

Pancake

WHY YOU BASTARD PUNK! MOUNTAIN GIRL IS
FIFTY-THREE!

They are shoving each other now, getting into it.

. . . SHE COULD RIDE YOUR ASS TO JELLY!

He lunges at him with a bear hug and his inertia sends both
men tumbling to the floor, where they roll and wrestle.

Dorr

Gentlemen, please!

Gawain

I seen Virginia hams I'd rather stick my dick in
than your old-

BANG! A muffled gunshot.

Quiet.

The two men have stopped rolling.

They stare at each other where they lie, Pancake on top.

At length:

Pancake

. . . Oh my god. . .

Horrified, he slowly rises.

. . . I think he's hit!

The men gather round and look down.

Gawain still stares up at the ceiling.

Pancake stoops, waves his hand in front of his eyes. No reaction.

. . . I'll just check the carotid artery.

He checks the carotid artery.

. . . That's a negative.

Lump

Oh, fuck.

Dorr

Oh my.

Lump

Is he dead, Professor?

Pancake

Sure he's dead. I checked his carotid artery.

Dorr

Well this is most irregular. We will need a Hefty bag.

CELLAR DOOR

Creaking open. The Professor, Lump, and the General peek out.

The living room is empty but a sliver of the kitchen is visible; its light is on, and we can hear water running.

Dorr hisses:

Dorr

She is in the kitchen. I shall distract her while you steal out with the carcass.

KITCHEN

Dorr enters breezily; Mrs. Munson is at the sink, filling a teapot.

Dorr positions himself so that, to talk to him, Mrs. Munson has her back to the living room.

Dorr

Well, my dear Mrs. Munson, I have outlined your position to my colleagues and I now return to you to return our collective verdict.

Mrs. Munson

Mm-hmm.

Behind her, the General peers around the corner and starts a catlike advance across the living room.

Dorr

There was much spirited discussion and an atmosphere of frank give-and-take. Some of our number were initially appalled at your proposal that we simply return the money; some were more receptive.

Mrs. Munson

I don't care they was receptive or not!

Dorr

And that attitude, madam, was a factor in our discussions. To a man, I must say, they were devastated at the prospect of not being able to contribute to their respective charities.

The General signals to Lump who now crosses the living room with a big garbage bag slung over one shoulder in a fireman's carry.

Mrs. Munson

Well that is a shame.

Dorr

Indeed. But at the end of the day, your position prevailed, and the men have decided that we shall return the money--every last cent of it!--and attend Sunday services, rather than spend the remainder of our years wasting away in the Mississippi Men's Correctional Facility. Though that was the original preference of some.

Mrs. Munson

Well I'm glad y'all came to see the light, anyway. I'm gonna have some tea and go to bed.

The Professor, seeing that the General and Lump have made it out the door, is anxious to wind things up:

Dorr

So the money shall be returned tomorrow at the opening of the casino office.
Enjoy your tea, madam. . .

Backing out, he looks to one side.

Through the living room window he can see the hearse pulling away from the curb. There is another car--an old Volkswagon microbus--slowly tooling the opposite way down the street.

Dorr looks back to Mrs. Munson.

. . . and congratulations on having recalled to the fold five poor, confused sheep who had momentarily strayed.

BRIDGE

We are at the middle of the bridge, the tower gargoyle looking blankly down at the doings below.

In the misty night Lump and the General are braced over the railing, looking down, each holding one of the feet that protrude from the Hefty bag cinched around Gawain's ankles.

A cigarette burns on the General's lower lip. Behind the two men we can see the idling hearse.

There is the toot of the garbage scow. Lump and the General release Gawain's feet.

Their point-of-view shows the sack receding and flumping into the garbage piled onto the scow that slips by below.

A flock of scavenger birds, disturbed by the impact, lifts off the scow with angry caws.

LIVING ROOM

Dorr skulks at a corner of the living room's picture window, peering out at the street.

The Volkswagon microbus again cruises slowly down the street in the same direction as previously; apparently it has been circling.

The Professor scowls.

The hearse pulls up to the curb.

CELLAR

The Professor clomps down the cellar stairs. Pancake is loading their digging implements into a satchel.

Pancake

They back yet?

Dorr is absent:

Dorr
Yes. . . yes, they just arrived.

Pancake straightens from the satchel.

Pancake
Good. I'll go dump these in the hearse.

He mounts the stairs with a satchel in either hand. We can hear the front door opening as the other men enter.

Dorr, bemused, but apparently moved by a hunch, advances slowly to the sackbutt case.

He slides the catch that lets its spring clasp pop up.

He lifts the lid.

Mother Jones magazine. Piles of Mother Jones magazines.

Dorr
What in heaven's name. . .

He riffles a pile, confirming that it is in fact all magazine, no money.

Lump and the General are clomping down the stairs.

. . . General!

STREET

We are pulling Clark down the street, a satchel in either hand.

His point-of-view: the microbus, parked halfway down the block, ominously idling.

THE BUS

We are close on its side-view mirror. Someone leans from the driver's seat for a view into the mirror, and in the mirror we see her, pigtails swinging: Mountain Girl.

Her point-of-view: Clark Pancake, still rather small, approaching up the empty street.

PANCAKE

Pulling him again. A smile is beginning to play at the corners of his mouth.

Pancake
No extra share, huh. . .

The smile abruptly fades.

He stops in his tracks for no discernible reason. At length:

. . . Nnnrnf.

He pants.

Behind him, in the deep background, we see the General bounding into the street and silently toward us.

. . . Oof!

The moment passes. Pancake shakes his head, as if to clear it, and resumes his walk.

His point-of-view: we are nearing the bus.

BUS

Mountain Girl sits in the idling car, waiting.

With a thunk and a gentle rock of the car, we hear its back doors opening, and Pancake's voice.

Pancake
Mountain.

Mountain
Clark.

We hear an oof! of exertion as Pancake hoists each of the two satchels into the back. The oofs are followed by:

Pancake
 . . . Nnrung! Aaarmh. . . Ninnnff. . .
 Offffflleghhl. . .

Mountain
 IBS, dear?

We cut to the back, to show Pancake being garotted by the General.

Pancake
 Nnnnnmmmmfffgh!

BRIDGE

The tower gargoyle stares sightlessly down.

Lump and the General are at their accustomed place, each holding a foot shod in a large hiking boot.

Behind them we see the hearse idling.

Near them on the bridge, both hands grasping the railing as he gazes dreamily out into the night, is the Professor.

Dorr
 ". . . Like those Nicean barks of yore
 That gently, o'er a perfumed sea. . . "

We hear the toot of the boat's horn and the men drop the body.

Lump
 Quick! Grab Carl!

They quickly stoop and grab another bag-swaddled body out of which even larger hiking boots protrude.

Dorr
 ". . . The weary, wayworn wanderer bore.
 . . . "

They drop the second body.

". . . To his own native shore."

We hear the distant flump and the cawing of scavenger birds.

CLOSE ON A FIST

With three protruding straws.

Sweating close-ups:

Lump picks a long straw: relief.

The General picks a short straw. A short grunt.

Dorr

Excellent. I believe, at last, we have
the right man for the job.

BEDROOM

Mrs. Munson lies on her back gently snoring. At the open window, sheers ripple in the evening breeze.

A large clock ticks upon the mantle. It is almost one o'clock.

CELLAR DOOR

It creaks open. The General looks stealthily out. A cigarette in his mouth plumes smoke.

He pushes the door fully open, emerges.

BEDROOM

Mrs. Munson's snore catches on an inhale. She mutters something, sighs, and resumes snoring.

STAIRWAY

The General treads lightly, noiselessly, up the stairway leading to the second floor. He slides one hand into his

jacket, pulls out a garotte.

With the faintest whoosh he whips it in a complicated loop and snags the other handle with his other hand.

UPSTAIRS

The General emerges from the staircase and advances on the closed bedroom door. As he reaches for the knob he performs the no-handed flip of the burning cigarette into his mouth.

BEDROOM

The door swings noiselessly open. The General pauses to survey:

The still room. The ticking clock. Mrs. Munson, a large sleeping mound upon the bed.

The General advances, raising the garotte in both hands.

He closes on her sleeping form.

The garotte is lowered toward her exposed neck.

It is a foot-half a foot-inches-away. . .

Somewhere a muted gear ratchets and triggers the toll of-

The clock, striking one. It is a cuckoo clock but, instead of a bird emerging, a berobed Jesus comes out with his hand resting on the head of a child who gazes up in adoration.

The General starts at the noise and then suddenly freezes, his eyes widening.

Jesus retreats back into the clock.

The General has swallowed his cigarette. He reaches up to his throat, panicked. In a silent frenzy, he yanks loose his ascot.

He gazes wildly about.

He reaches for the water glass at Mrs. Munson's bedside.

He tips it back into his mouth. There is a rattling sound.

His point-of-view: the uptilted water glass is sending false teeth-full uppers and lowers-rattling toward his face.

He frantically-but still noiselessly-sets the glass back down. Wild looks about, one hand clamped to his throat.

A mad but silent dash for the door.

UPSTAIRS

Plunging for the head of the stairs-

-a brief yowl from the cat-

-recoiling from where its tail has been stepped on, a hiss and a flash of its claws at the General's leg-

-and he falls down the stairs, each thudding impact bouncing his body like a rag doll's.

At the bottom of the stairs he lies still.

A close-up shows his head bent at an unnatural angle, unblinking eyes staring. Traces of smoke whisp from each nostril and his open mouth.

Over the mantle, Othar returns the dead man's stare. He looks somewhat smug.

CELLAR

The Professor and Lump, responding to the noise, look slowly up toward the ceiling.

BRIDGE

The body is laid out in a garbage bag by the rail.

The Professor stands looking at it, contemplatively.

Lump stands looking at it, contemplatively.

The cat sits nearby on its haunches looking at it, impassively.

The Professor muses:

Dorr
 . . . T'was our até brought us to this
 pass. . .

Lump
 What, Professor?

There is the toot! of an approaching scow. Dorr's manner is still absent, his regard still on the corpse:

Dorr
 Our overweening pride. . . The old woman
 is a more potent antagonist than one had
 imagined. . .

He rouses himself, goes over to the bagged corpse. Lump follows him and the two men hoist the body over the rail.

. . . Now, Lump, I'm afraid it falls to
 you to finish the job.

They let the body fall onto the scow passing below.

. . . The comedy must end.

The Professor turns to Lump and tries to hand him Gawain's gun, but Lump, uncomfortable, declines to take it.

Lump
 . . . Professor, I been doing some
 thinking.

Dorr
 Oh dear. Oh dear oh dear oh dear.

Lump
 Maybe she's right! Maybe we should be
 going to church!

Dorr
 Oh dear, Lump. I feared that those
 would be your words. Not that I don't

appreciate your giving the matter the benefit of your thought. But please recall, young man, our respective functions in this enterprise. I am a professor, the professor as you yourself so often say, the thinker, the "brains of the operation," trained in fact in the arts of cogitation. You, Lump, are the goon, the hooligan, the dumb brute whose actions must be directed by a higher intelligence.

Lump

Yeah, I know, but—

Dorr

No buts, dear boy! Do not repeat the error of thinking! Now is the moment of praxis! Now, my dear boy, you must act!

Lump reluctantly takes the gun that the Professor thrusts upon him.

Lump

I can't do it, Professor! A nice old lady like that!

Dorr

Think of the riches, Lump, that you and I alone shall divide! Recall the dream of wealth untold that first drew you to this enterprise!

Lump

But—

Dorr

And reflect also that if you decline to act, forcing me to do so, then you shall no longer have any entitlement to the money! Your offices shall have been nugatory!

Lump

You mean—you mean—you're gonna kill her?!

Dorr

Of course! My hand would be forced!

Lump

I can't let you do that, Professor! A nice old lady like that!

Dorr

You?! Allow? Not allow? What presumption! You stupid boy! You very very extremely stupid boy!

We hear the toot of an approaching scow--this one very long, sustained under all of the following:

Lump

Oh yeah?

He points the gun at the Professor and--

. . . Well who looks stupid now?

--squeezes--click--on an empty chamber.

. . . Huh?

He turns the gun to have a look.

. . . No bullets?

His point-of-view shows the foreshortened barrel as he experimentally squeezes the trigger.

We cut to the Professor on the BANG! and, after a sad shake of his head, cut back to Lump in time to see him finish toppling back over the rail.

The scow-horn ends.

Dorr

Perhaps. . . it had to be thus.

He goes to the railing to look down.

Lump, face-up on a pile of garbage, glides away. Disturbed birds flap upward.

The Professor muses:

" . . . Lo, in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand. . . "

His gaze rises with the ascending birds.

Among the white gulls is one black bird. The Professor eyes it as it rises past him.

. . . Hm. A raven?

From very high we look down on the Professor, the black bird rising to perch on the gargoyle on the suspension tower in the foreground.

The bird settles on a loose, teetering piece of masonry.

Back to the Professor, looking at the receding red light on the bridge of the receding scow:

" . . . The agate lamp within thy hand. . . "

Back high: the teetering chunk of masonry tips away and the perchless bird flaps off.

Back to the Professor, very dreamy: he sees something in the distance, beyond time and space:

. . . Ah, Psyche! from the regions which
Are Holy land!"

This is punctuated by the crunching impact of masonry scoring a direct hit on his head. He falls over the rail.

His cape snags on the railing and he hangs limp and lifeless. Directly below his dangling body the stern of Lump's barge is slipping away to leave black waters and the clanking of chains.

The fabric of the Professor's cape begins to tear. His body drops in fits and starts as the fabric gives way.

Finally the body rips free. It falls away from us. As it does so the clanking chains are pulling into view the second-banger—a garbage barge being chain-towed by the receding scow.

Dorr's body lands neatly on the barge.

A gust of wind.

The cape flaps free of the railing and is wind-tossed away amidst the cawing birds.

The cat, watching, blinks.

DRINKING GLASS

It is resting on the very edge of the night table—protruding, in fact, past the table's edge.

It is morning. We hear rustling from the bed.

Hands reach into frame and hesitate, finding the glass empty of water and precariously perched.

Voice

Hmm.

The hands tip the glass and take the teeth. We hear complicated oral noises.

FRONT STOOP

The door opens away to reveal the morning paper lying on the stoop. Mrs. Munson leans into frame to pick it up and we adjust as she straightens to have a look:

The headline says: \$2.6 MILLION DISAPPEARS FROM LADY LUCK CASINO. The subhead: POLICE BAFFLED.

Voice

Mm-hm.

CELLAR

Mrs. Munson is walking down the stairs.

Mrs. Munson

Professor!

She stops midway down and looks:

The empty cellar.

Money stacked neatly on the card table.

Mrs. Munson sadly shakes her head.

. . . Hmm. Couldn't face the music.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Mrs. Munson is climbing the porch in her Sunday best. She feints at the dog who lies curled in the sun:

Mrs. Munson
Scoot now! Outa the way!

INSIDE

The sheriff is busy on the phone; there is a deputy today also on the phone. The sheriff, seeing Mrs. Munson enter, covers the phone with one hand.

Sheriff
Miz Munson.

Mrs. Munson
Sheriff, I gotta make a statement.

Sheriff
Could it possibly wait, ma'am? We're a little busy today.

Mrs. Munson
I guess it can wait, but it's about that casino money.

The sheriff exchanges a significant look with the deputy, then murmurs into the phone:

Sheriff
Call you right back.

He cradles the phone and smiles at Mrs. Munson.

. . . You know something about it?

Mrs. Munson

Something? Everything! I got it at home.

Sheriff

You. . . you have what at home, now?

Mrs. Munson

The money. Two point six million dollars. Down in my root cellar. All stacked up nice and neat.

Sheriff

Mm-hmm.

The deputy pauses to look up from his phone:

Deputy

How'd it get there, Marva?

Mrs. Munson

Bunch a desperate men that stole it put it there, that's how! They was musicians of the Renaissance period, played the sackbutt and so on--well, it turns out they really couldn't play, although they could recite poems to break your heart. Their ringleader speaks in dead tongues.

Sheriff

Does he now.

Mrs. Munson

I tried to get you to see him! That night?

Sheriff

Oh yes.

Mrs. Munson

I had to yell at 'em 'bout stealin' all that money and I guess I made 'em feel pretty bad 'cause they picked up and

left without takin' the money. But I was peeved with 'em, Sheriff, they'd been up to all sorts of mischief, come close to blowin' up the house, disturbed Othar no end.

Sheriff

Angry, was he?

Mrs. Munson

Wouldn't you be? All that racket!

Sheriff

I expect so.

Mrs. Munson

And they let Pickles out too!

The sheriff sighs.

Sheriff

So you want us to go fetch him.

Mrs. Munson

No, he's back, but what you want me to do with the money?

Sheriff

Well. . .

He and the deputy exchange looks. The sheriff looks back at Mrs. Munson.

. . . Why don't you just keep it, Miz Munson.

Mrs. Munson

Keep it?

Deputy

You keep it, Marva.

Mrs. Munson

Well. . . I know it's only a penny offa everybody's policy. . .

Sheriff

How's that ma'am?

Mrs. Munson
I know folks don't much care. Could I.
. . You s'pose I could. . .

Sheriff
Yes ma'am?

Mrs. Munson
Could I give it all to Bob Jones
University?

Sheriff
That'd be nice, ma'am.

She picks up her handbag and heads for the door.

Mrs. Munson
. . . Well, long as everybody knows.

Sheriff
Thank you for the information, ma'am.

Mrs. Munson
You're welcome, sheriff. Just doin' my
duty.

STREET

Mrs. Munson is walking home. It is a beautiful spring day.

From far off, wafting toward us on the breeze, we can hear the church chorus singing. Mrs. Munson joins in. She has a strong voice:

Mrs. Munson
Leaning,
Leaning,
Safe and secure from all harm.
Lean on Jesus,
Lean on Jesus,
Leaning on the everlasting arm.

She turns up the walk to her house.

. . . What a fellowship,
What a peace of mind,
Safe and secure from all harm.
Lean on Jesus,
Lean on Jesus,
Leaning on the everlasting arm. . .

When she opens the front door the cat slips out.

. . . Pickles!

It races off down the street.

. . . Pickles!

THE BRIDGE

Pickles scurries along the walkway. We hear the toot! of an approaching scow.

The cat reaches the middle of the bridge. He sticks his head through the bars of the railing.

When we cut close on the cat as he looks down at the water, we see that he holds in his mouth a human finger.

As the scow passes underneath, the cat opens its mouth and lets the finger drop.

The finger falls away and is barely visible by the time it hits the scow.

The cat looks up into the lens, and blinks. Its sideways irises adjust.

The scow is gliding away. With the low mournful toot of its horn we tilt up the river to the great garbage island where scavenger birds pick through the trash.