

**UNTITLED ROCK 'N ROLL PROJECT**

Pilot

Written by

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CLOSE ON a pair of EYES peering out at us through glass, lights reflecting off its surface. A few beats, then:

                  RICHIE (V.O.)

                  When I started in this business,  
                  rock 'n roll was defined like this:  
                  "Two Jews and a guinea recording  
                  four schvartzes on a single track."

PULL BACK to reveal RICHIE FINESTRA, early 40s, handsome, looking out through the window of his moving Cadillac limo.

                  RICHIE (V.O.)

                  It's changed so much it's not  
                  even recognizable as the thing  
                  people were so terrified of all  
                  those years ago.

INT. RICHIE'S LIMO - NIGHT

A REVERSE ANGLE reveals New York City, 1973. Graffiti-covered buildings; HOMELESS PEOPLE in cardboard boxes; a JUNKIE shooting up in a doorway.

                  RICHIE (V.O.)

                  That's not a judgment, I mean  
                  I've always believed in giving  
                  the audience what it wants.

Moving through Times Square, HOOKERS prowl the filthy streets under the watchful eyes of their PIMPS; theater marquees advertise nothing but porn and kung-fu movies.

                  RICHIE (V.O.)

                  And till pretty recently, I was  
                  always sure of what that was.

EXT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The limo turns down West 33rd Street, pulls into the open gates of a loading dock beside a tractor trailer.

                  RICHIE (V.O.)

                  I'm a record man.

INT. RICHIE'S LIMO - NIGHT

Richie runs his hands through his hair, then looks up toward his Driver:

(CONTINUED)

RICHIE  
I'll be twenty minutes.

His raspy-voiced CHAUFFEUR, African-American, late 40s, looks at him in the rear-view mirror. (Note: We never see the Chauffeur fully.)

CHAUFFEUR (O.C.)  
I'll keep it runnin'.

The Chauffeur starts coughing; a painful-sounding, violent hack. Richie hesitates, looks at him.

RICHIE  
You okay?

The Chauffeur nods. A few more beats, then Richie emerges from the limo...

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

Over the rhythmic chanting of 20,000 PEOPLE, the flames from thousands of cigarette lighters illuminate the dark arena.

CROWD  
Led Zep! Led Zep! Led Zep!

And as the chanting grows louder, on screen appears:

**Madison Square Garden**

**July 29th, 1973**

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Backstage chaos. With the chanting of the Crowd bleeding in from out front, ROADIES hustle equipment as JOURNALISTS, GROUPIES and other HANGERS-ON hover around the members of LED ZEPPELIN, dripping with sweat, post performance. As ROBERT PLANT, 29, laughs with JOHN BONHAM, the camera finds

RICHIE

approaching in an Armani jacket over T-shirt, jeans and snakeskin boots.

RICHIE  
Rob.

Plant looks up at him; his smile fades. He pats his pockets as if looking for money.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBERT PLANT

Richie, hey. You come for the rest?

RICHIE

Fuck you talking about?

ROBERT PLANT

The distribution deal.

RICHIE

(at a loss)

"G" and I came to an agreement.

ROBERT PLANT

At thirty percent. Then your Scott Levitt offered twenty.

RICHIE

You fucking kidding me?

Plant shrugs - "What can I tell you?"

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Let's talk after the show.

Plant juts his chin toward a few GROUPIES.

ROBERT PLANT

No good. I'll be in my room doing to those birds what your label's trying to do to me!

Plant starts off; Richie stops him.

RICHIE

Wait. We had a deal, I gave you my word. Now this shitbag, this fucking suit -- wants to renege?

ROBERT PLANT

It's your company, isn't it?

RICHIE

Was. I'm done. This happens, I'm leaving American Century.

ROBERT PLANT

Are you mad?

RICHIE

Nobody fucks with my artists!

(CONTINUED)

ROBERT PLANT

Richie--

RICHIE

Jethro Tull got thirty percent!  
Edgar Winter! Black Oak fucking  
Arkansas!! You're a star, baby,  
you're Michelangelo, with God's  
gift wired into your fucking brain!  
This piker, this fucking bean  
counter, he doesn't get it!

Plant looks at him. He's eating it up. A few beats, then:

ROBERT PLANT

Don't quit, mate.

RICHIE

I don't need this shit. Go back  
to Ahmet. Mercury. CBS.

ROBERT PLANT

Fucking Yetnikoff? I need you in  
my corner, Richie.

Richie sighs, looks at him. A long time, then he "caves":

RICHIE

I'd only do this for you, you  
realize that, right?

ROBERT PLANT

Thank you, mate.

The chanting from the arena grows LOUDER. The STAGE MANAGER  
approaches, taps Plant on the shoulder.

JOHN BONHAM

We've a fucking encore!

RICHIE

(to Plant)  
I'll straighten it out, okay?

And with that, Plant is hustled off into the wings with the  
rest of the band. The camera pushes in on

RICHIE,

who stands there, fuming. After a few beats, a ROAR erupts  
from the arena as Led Zeppelin re-takes the stage. And over  
John Bonham's pounding drum intro for *Rock n' Roll...*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROBERT PLANT (O.S.)  
*It's been a long time since I  
rock-and-rolled--*

INT. BATHROOM - BACKSTAGE - MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

Richie enters a stall, locks the door. He lights a cigarette and sits, fully clothed.

ROBERT PLANT (O.S.)  
*It's been a long time since I did  
the stroll--/ Ooh, let me get it  
back, let me get it back, let me  
get it back... mm-baby, where I  
come from--*

As Richie brings the cigarette to his lips, we see that his hands are trembling...

ROBERT PLANT (CONT'D)  
*It's been a long time, been a long  
time, been a long lonely, lonely,  
lonely, lonely, lonely time, yes  
it has--*

And as Richie sits there, we PRE-LAP the sound of a ringing phone...

INT. RICHIE'S LIMO - NIGHT

Richie sits in back of his limo, giant 1970s-era car phone to his ear. After a few beats, an answering machine picks up.

SCOTT LEVITT (V.O.)  
Hello. This is Scott Levitt and  
you have reached my automated  
telephone answering device.  
Please wait for the sound of the  
beep tone and leave your message.

We hear a prolonged BEEP, then:

RICHIE  
Scott, it's me.  
(a few beats; then)  
Scott. Take the cock out of your  
mouth and pick up the phone.

We hear someone pick up, then, over the phone:

(CONTINUED)

SCOTT LEVITT (V.O.)  
(annoyed)  
What, Richie.

RICHIE  
You're an imbecile, that's what.

SCOTT LEVITT (V.O.)  
It's after one a.m.

RICHIE  
Zeppelin. Plant. Remember them?

SCOTT LEVITT (V.O.)  
I sent you a memo.

RICHIE  
I must have used it to wipe my ass.

SCOTT LEVITT (V.O.)  
You sure you want to talk to me  
like that?

RICHIE  
You're not President yet, and  
until you are, let me give you  
some advice. You ever fuck up a  
deal of mine again, I'll splatter  
your corpse all over 57th Street.

Click. Richie hangs up as the limo stops. He looks out the window at a marquee -- Deep Throat XXX" -- then tosses back a few aspirin, which he washes down with Fresca. His eyes meet the Chauffeur's in the rear-view mirror.

CHAUFFEUR (O.C.)  
Max's?

RICHIE  
Who's there?

The Chauffeur coughs again, then reading:

CHAUFFEUR (O.C.)  
Springsteen again.

RICHIE  
Take me home.

CHAUFFEUR (O.C.)  
The apartment?

RICHIE  
(a few beats; then)  
Scarsdale.

And on the radio we hear...

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)  
(over radio)  
...tonight on the King Biscuit  
Flower Hour... Humble Pie.

And as Humble Pie begins, Richie shuts the radio, rests his head and closes his eyes. The Chauffeur drives in silence...

EXT. CROSS-BRONX EXPRESSWAY - NIGHT

Through the limo's windshield, we HEAR horns honking and see that cars are backed up for miles. Over the radio, we hear:

ABE BEAME (V.O.)  
(over radio)  
--and together we'll restore the  
luster to New York City. I'm Abe  
Beame and I'm running for Mayor.

Richie awakens from his slumber, looks up.

RICHIE  
What's going on? Where are we?

CHAUFFEUR (O.C.)  
Water main break.

Richie glances at his watch, then sighs - almost 2:30 a.m.

RICHIE  
I'll stay in the city.

And as the Chauffeur pulls off at an exit...

EXT. SEDGWICK AVENUE - SOUTH BRONX - NIGHT

A dicey neighborhood. The limo follows a line of other cars down the street, where outside a large apartment building, two dozen PEOPLE, all African-American, mill about. From inside the building's rec room, we hear a thumping dance rhythm accompanied by the scratching of a record...

RICHIE  
Pull over.

(CONTINUED)

CHAUFFEUR (O.C.)  
Expressway's just ahead.

RICHIE  
Just do it.

He does. A pimp we'll come to know as TOPCAT, 30, nods to two HOOKERS, who approach Richie's lowered window.

HOOKER #1  
Hey baby. Wanna party?

RICHIE  
No thanks.

HOOKER #2  
I'll suck your dick real nice.

Richie nods to Topcat; the Hookers move off as he approaches.

TOPCAT  
Blow. Reefer. Ludes.

RICHIE  
I'm sober, but thanks anyway.  
(then)  
Hey, what is this place? This  
music.

Topcat draws a .38 pistol, cocks the hammer and puts the barrel to Richie's forehead.

TOPCAT  
Pot, pussy or pills, motherfucker.

Richie looks at Topcat and forces a smile.

RICHIE  
Easy, okay? I'm just lookin'  
for the way home.

Topcat just stares at him. After an eternity, he lowers the gun. And as the Chauffeur pulls out, Richie exhales, Topcat fading into the distance along with the music.

INT. AMERICAN CENTURY MUSIC - RECEPTION AREA - DAY (DAY 2)

Loggins & Messina plays from the speakers as a few MUSICIANS mill about. A young proto-punk rocker named KIP, 23, handsome and painfully thin, stands before JESSIE, the gorgeous young receptionist.

(CONTINUED)

JESSIE  
(into phone)  
American Century, good morning.  
(transfers call; then)  
American Century, how may I direct  
your call?

As she transfers the call, the elevator DINGS. Junior A&R  
exec EMMY CAPORALE, hip, mid-20s, emerges.

JESSIE (CONT'D)  
(to Kip)  
Can I help you?

KIP  
(holds up envelope)  
I need to leave this for Richie  
Finestra.

EMMY (V.O.)  
That a tape?

Kip turns to see Emmy standing there.

KIP  
My band.

EMMY  
I'll take it.  
(sensing his trepidation)  
I work with Richie.

Jessie mouths the word "with?" as Kip hands Emmy the  
envelope. Emmy ignores her, offers her hand.

EMMY (CONT'D)  
Emmy Caporale, A&R.

KIP  
Kip Stevens.

EMMY  
Little like Cat Stevens, no?

KIP  
I've never been accused of that  
before.  
(then)  
What's this music you're playing?

EMMY  
Loggins & Messina?

CONTINUED:

Kip smirks derisively.

EMMY (CONT'D)

They moved three million units last year. How'd the...

(looks at envelope)

..."Spicy Bits" do?

KIP

(put in his place)

They're not my thing is all.

EMMY

No shit.

(a few beats; then)

You have a manager?

KIP

No, but we're at the Loft tonight.

EMMY

(smiles; holds up tape)

Great. I'll see Richie gets it.

Kip nods. Emmy and Jessie check him out as he disappears on to the elevator.

EMMY (CONT'D)

I would kill to be that skinny.

And as Emmy exits into the offices with the tape, we PRE-LAP:

EDDIE KEARNES (V.O.)

Say, I've got the hottest song you ever published in your life!

CLOSE ON a TV, on which plays the film "*The Broadway Melody*" from 1929. Songwriter EDDIE KEARNES works with a PIANIST as JIMMY GLEASON, the bald music publisher, approaches.

JIMMY GLEASON

Is that so?

EDDIE KEARNES

Is it so? Why if you get this crowd to keep quiet, I'll sing it for you!

PULL BACK to REVEAL we're in...

INT. RICHIE'S APARTMENT - NEW YORK CITY - LIVING ROOM - DAY

An Upper East Side hi-rise with amazing views but sparse furniture. With the TV on in the background, Richie stands at the window wearing only a towel, phone cradled to his ear.

RICHIE

--because it was late and I didn't want to wake you.

LYNNE (V.O.)

I'm up every two hours anyway feeding the baby. If you were home some time, you'd know that.

INT. RICHIE'S HOUSE - SCARSDALE - KITCHEN - DAY

Richie's wife LYNNE, an ex-model in her early 30s, stands at the counter on the phone as their two children, RONNIE, 11, and BETH, 9, eat breakfast at the table.

RICHIE (V.O.)

Have the nanny do it.

INTERCUT RICHIE AND LYNNE AS NEEDED

LYNNE

I'm breast-feeding, Richie!

RICHIE

(sighs; then)

I can't win, can I?

LYNNE

Win what? This isn't a game.

RICHIE

Put Ronnie on.

Lynne hands the phone to Ronnie as Beth spills juice.

LYNNE

Your father.

BETH

I got juice on my pants.

Lynne exits with Beth as Ronnie takes the phone.

RONNIE

Hello?

(CONTINUED)

RICHIE  
Hey pal, how you doin'?

RONNIE  
I have a canker sore.

RICHIE  
Wow. That stinks.

Silence for a while, then:

RICHIE (CONT'D)  
Your sister there?

RONNIE  
She went with mom to change her  
pants.

RICHIE  
Okay. Tell her I'll see her later.

RONNIE  
All right.

Ronnie hangs up. Still holding the phone, Richie stares out the window, then turns to the TV as Eddie Kearnes sings...

EDDIE KEARNES  
*--Don't bring a frown to old  
Broadway/ You've got to clown on  
Broadway/ Your troubles there are  
out of style/ Cause Broadway always  
wears a smile/ A million lights  
they flicker there/ A million  
hearts beat quicker there/ No skies  
of grey on the Great White Way/  
That's the Broadway Melody!*

As Eddie finishes up, two women conspire off to the side:

WOMAN  
Why if we can get that number we're  
a cinch for The Palace!

And as Richie watches impassively, we PRE-LAP the sounds of ringing telephones and...

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)  
American Century, good morning.

## INT. AMERICAN CENTURY - BULLPEN AREA - DAY

Decorated with tour posters, industry awards and album covers. (Note: All support staff are very attractive WOMEN, late teens to early 20s.) Outside an office marked "Richard Finestra" sits CECE, 22, a gorgeous African American woman. She looks up as Richie approaches.

RICHIE

Who and what?

CECE

Lester Bangs returned your call and David Geffen screamed something about a royalty check for Laura Nyro then hung up on me.

RICHIE

What else?

CECE

Alik wants to see you. He's in with Scott.

RICHIE

I'll take some espresso.

CECE

Already on your desk.

## INT. RICHIE'S OFFICE - AMERICAN CENTURY - CONTINUOUS

The walls are covered with GOLD RECORDS and FRAMED PHOTOS. Richie enters, closes the door. Sits at his desk, downs an espresso. He looks up, scans

THE PHOTOS -- A young Richie with Roy Orbison; Chuck Berry. A slightly older Richie with Jimi Hendrix; Bob Dylan; Elton John. We stop on one in particular. Richie, smiling, circa 1962, arm around a young black singer we'll come to know as LESTER WILLIS. And as we PUSH IN on Richie's eyes...

## INT. COFFEE HOUSE - GREENWICH VILLAGE - (FLASHBACK) NIGHT

1959. Richie, 20s, sits at the bar amid a few dozen BEATNIKS as a FOLK ACT finishes up on stage...

(CONTINUED)

EMCEE (V.O.)

All right, let's change things up  
and give a warm welcome to a young  
man who hails from Philadelphia,  
Pennsylvania. Mr. Lester Willis.

Richie waves for the check as Lester, 30, takes the stage to  
polite applause.

LESTER

Thank you. Let's go back a ways,  
down to Georgia.

The guitarist begins a blues riff, then Lester launches into  
"Milk Cow Blues", his voice soulful and strong.

RICHIE

puts down his glass, turns to listen. And as the CAMERA  
SLOWLY PUSHES in on him, mesmerized...

INT. EMMY'S OFFICE - AMERICAN CENTURY - DAY

Small, cramped; albums, cassettes and 8-tracks everywhere.  
Feet up, Emmy sits in her chair smoking, coffee in hand as  
she listens to The Spicy Bits tape; their sound is raw, but  
good. Guitars and a drummer. After a while:

MARK (O.C.)

Who's that?

Emmy turns to see Head of A&R MARK PHILIPS, 28, hip and good  
looking, standing in her doorway.

EMMY

(lowering the music)  
Nobody.

MARK

Suicide? I already passed on them.

EMMY

(calling out)  
Rebecca, will you order me a pair  
of headphones please?!  
(then)  
What do you want, Mark?

MARK

Well I was gonna ask for a hand  
job, but it seems like the moment  
passed.

(CONTINUED)

EMMY  
About three years ago.

Mark looks at her.

MARK  
You got anything?

EMMY  
A couple ludes, I dunno.

MARK  
(explaining)  
For the meeting.

EMMY  
Why, do you?

He frowns, then:

MARK  
The Good Rats got away.

EMMY  
You could set down some cheese.  
(off his look)  
Does Richie know?

MARK  
I'm still head of A&R, so probably  
not.

EMMY  
What happened?

MARK  
They went with Warners. That  
cocksucker Peppi Marchello lied  
right to my face.

EMMY  
The singer?

As Mark nods, Cece pokes his head in:

CECE  
Richie says fifteen minutes. The  
conference room.

Cece heads off. A few beats, then:

EMMY  
(to Mark)  
This should be a fun meeting.

INT. ALIK SAKHAROV'S OFFICE - AMERICAN CENTURY - DAY

American Century CEO ALIK SAKHAROV, 46, a bearded, gold-chain-wearing bear of a man, sits on a couch across from head of legal SCOTT LEVITT, 36. As Richie enters, heads to the bar:

SCOTT LEVITT  
You know you almost gave me a heart attack.

RICHIE  
What?

SCOTT LEVITT  
Last night. When you called me at one a.m.  
(off his look)  
I thought someone died, Richie.

RICHIE  
(pours an orange juice)  
You would've died I got my hands on you.

Alik chuckles.

RICHIE (CONT'D)  
You almost destroyed a relationship I took four years to build.

SCOTT LEVITT  
A distribution arrangement with a gaggle of hippies.

RICHIE  
Three nights at the Garden, not a fucking seat available.

SCOTT LEVITT  
Which is great for this year. How about next? Who've we signed lately?

Richie can't answer. He knows Scott is right.

(CONTINUED)

RICHIE

I'll tell you what. I'll stop  
fucking up every deal we have if  
you stop trying to do my job.

SCOTT LEVITT

(to Alik)

And what is it he does again?

ALIK SAKHAROV

Give us a minute, will you?

Scott exits. Richie turns to Alik.

RICHIE

If it ain't me, that's fine.  
But promise me I won't have to  
report to him.

ALIK SAKHAROV

You know it's not up to me.

(then)

Pour me a juice, will you? Throw  
in some vodka.

RICHIE

I thought you weren't drinking with  
the Nips in town.

ALIK SAKHAROV

That's not til tomorrow.

As Richie starts making Alik's screwdriver:

ALIK SAKHAROV (CONT'D)

Buck Rogers. Elegy Broadcasting.

RICHIE

Radio guy. I know who he is.

ALIK SAKHAROV

He owns fifty eight stations across  
every major market.

RICHIE

What's the problem?

ALIK SAKHAROV

Gilbert O'Sullivan stiffed him  
on some promotional thing, he's  
threatening to not play his new  
album.

(CONTINUED)

RICHIE  
I'll go see him.

ALIK SAKHAROV  
You need a buffer. Someone from  
outside the company.

RICHIE  
He's that pissed?

ALIK SAKHAROV  
He's talking a label-wide boycott.  
(beat)  
I'm bringing in Joe Caldo.

Richie hands him the drink.

RICHIE  
We're bleeding money and you want  
to pay a promotion man?

ALIK SAKHAROV  
Your pal Nate Feldstein claims  
he's very effective. That Pink  
Floyd debacle in LA?

RICHIE  
He's a gangster, Alik. A fucking  
thug.

ALIK SAKHAROV  
We can't afford that album dying on  
the vine. Tonight. He'll be with  
Rogers at the Oasis.

Richie downs his juice, leaves the glass on the table. As he  
starts heading out:

ALIK SAKHAROV (CONT'D)  
Where's the fire?

RICHIE  
(re: vodka)  
It's hard being around this shit.  
(beat)  
You're coming Saturday, right?

ALIK SAKHAROV  
(smiles)  
Wait'll you see what I got you.

And on Richie's look, we pre-lap a recording of Cheech &  
Chong's comedy routine "*Sergeant Stadanko*"...

(CONTINUED)

CHEECH MARIN  
("Female Teacher" voice)  
*Cla-ass... Cla-ass. Come to order  
please...*

INT. AMERICAN CENTURY - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

With Cheech & Chong on the turntable, the A&R team is assembled for a lunch meeting, sandwiches and Cokes all around. At the table are Emmy; Mark Philips; JULIUS "JULIE" SILVER, mid-40s; CASPER, an Albino, early 20s; and LONNIE, 22. They all laugh as the album continues, the sounds of classroom chaos in the background.

CHEECH MARIN  
("Female Teacher" voice)  
*Class, we are very privileged today  
to have a very special guest in our  
room. This guest is Mr. Stadanko  
and Mr. Stadanko is a narcotics  
officer.*

On the record, the students are now totally silent. The A&R team howls as Richie enters. Emmy nods to a sandwich:

EMMY  
Turkey and provolone.

CHEECH MARIN  
("Female Teacher" voice)  
*Now Billy, where are you going?*

More laughter from the group, then:

RICHIE  
What is this?

JULIE  
The new Cheech and Chong.

RICHIE  
(to Julie)  
They're leaving Ode?

JULIE  
No.  
(a beat, then panicky)  
Are they?

CASPER  
I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

RICHIE

Then why the fuck is it on?

CASPER

We were waiting, it's funny, I  
thought--

Richie knocks the needle off the record, then wheels around  
to face Mark Philips, whose mouth is full as he chews.

RICHIE

Where are we with The Good Rats?

Mark looks at him, keeps chewing. He holds up a finger -  
"One sec". Richie glowers at him. A few beats, then:

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Eventually you're gonna swallow  
that and when you do, I better  
hear some good news.

Several beats, then Mark swallows.

MARK

They went with Warners.

RICHIE

And you're sitting here listening  
to some vaudeville routine?!

JULIE

He should never laugh again?

RICHIE

He should be out finding the  
next fucking Good Rats like  
I'm paying him to!

MARK

It's twelve o'clock in the  
afternoon.

RICHIE

So go listen to tapes!

Richie glares at him; Mark starts to get up, then:

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Sit down, eat your fucking  
liverwurst or whatever it is.

Mark sits back down. Richie looks around the table.

(CONTINUED)

RICHIE (CONT'D)  
Anybody? Anything?  
(off the silence)  
Jesus Christ, people, come on!

CASPER  
I've been all over the city.

RICHIE  
Then get out of the city. Ahmet  
Ertegun walked through a swamp  
to sign--

CASPER  
(cutting him off)  
Professor Longhair, I know.

RICHIE  
You're a smart-ass now? With your  
Cheech and fuckin' Chong?

CASPER  
No, I just... I hear you.

RICHIE  
You do? Cause I hear nothing.  
(off their looks)  
You know what they call this  
company? Out there, in the world?  
American Cemetery. Where artists  
go to die.

He scans the room. No one dares make eye contact with him.

RICHIE (CONT'D)  
Bars. Dance clubs. High school  
talent shows. Wherever people  
sing.

JULIE  
Public restrooms. The echo.

LONNIE  
(to Mark)  
The men's toilet at Penn Station.  
You'll be the belle of the ball.

RICHIE  
If that's what it takes, then do  
it!

JULIE

Nine months I sat in the dark  
to sign Jose Feliciano.  
(off their looks)  
The man's got no lamps.

Richie looks at him and sighs. A long time, then:

EMMY

I have something. The Spicy Bits.

RICHIE

What are they?

EMMY

A band.

RICHIE

I know they're a fuckin' band!  
Glam? Pop? Acid rock?

EMMY

I dunno, they're raw, kinda simple.

MARK

Four chimps with telecasters.

RICHIE

You lost speaking privileges.

Mark looks away.

EMMY

They're at the Loft tonight, I'm  
gonna check them out.

RICHIE

Where'd you find them?

EMMY

Saw their singer on the subway,  
I liked his look.

Richie nods, turns to the others.

RICHIE

This is what I'm talking about.

MARK

Gold star for Emmy.

RICHIE

That's right. And since you're  
such an adult, you can fly to  
LA and deliver a check to  
David Geffen.

MARK

I was supposed to go to the  
Hamptons.

RICHIE

No. You were supposed to sign  
The Good Rats.

And as Richie storms out...

INT. RONDELAY RECORDS - OFFICE - (FLASHBACK) - DAY

1959. Richie and Lester sit before NATE FELDSTEIN, a barrel-  
chested 40-year-old with a cigar in his mouth, Daily Racing  
Form open before him. On the wall are dozens of GOLD RECORDS  
as well as photos of Nate with various black artists.

LESTER

...Skip James, Peetie Wheatstraw,  
Kokomo Arnold--

RICHIE

(smiling)  
"Policy Wheel Blues", right?

NATE FELDSTEIN

Great stuff. But does it sell?

Nate gestures toward the gold records on his wall.

NATE FELDSTEIN (CONT'D)

Frankie Lymon, Jackie Wilson,  
that's what I'm talkin' about.

LESTER

Kiddie music.

NATE FELDSTEIN

Who you think buys records anyway?

RICHIE

You could sing the shit outta that  
stuff.

LESTER

But it ain't who I am, man.

(CONTINUED)

RICHIE

That's right. You're Little Jimmy Little.

LESTER

Who?

NATE FELDSTEIN

That's what we'll call you.

RICHIE

You do a few records, chart a few hits, then you start recordin' the real stuff.

LESTER

(to Nate)

You'll let me sing blues?

NATE FELDSTEIN

Gimme some hits you can sing fuckin' opera.

Lester looks at him, incredulous.

LESTER

It sounds great and all, but--

NATE FELDSTEIN

(cutting him off)

You like playin' dives? I'm offering you a record contract.

LESTER

You're offering Jimmy Little a record contract.

RICHIE

(smiles)

Little Jimmy Little.

NATE FELDSTEIN

Five hundred cash and three percent of the net.

RICHIE

(off Lester's look)

That's what Sinatra gets.

INT. THE LOFT - NIGHT

Packed with proto-PUNKS, filthy walls covered with graffiti, blood and other unidentifiable substances. In the crowd we find Emmy, beer in hand, in a leather jacket and T-shirt being jostled by the Crowd as they slam-dance to

THE SPICY BITS,

a quartet led by Kip Stevens on guitar and lead vocals.

KIP

*Got blood in my sno-cone!/ Home is  
a war zone!/ Coney Island Murder so  
come down see the freak show!*

As the song continues, Emmy observes the Crowd, who are really into the band. She looks up, makes eye contact with Kip, who continues to stare at her as he sings...

KIP (CONT'D)

*Bring your mom, bring your dad/  
Bring your girl, bring your lad/  
Coney Island Murder's the best  
time you ever had!*

INT. OASIS SWING CLUB - LOBBY - NIGHT

As Richie enters, a lingerie-clad HOSTESS approaches.

HOSTESS

Mr. Finestra, welcome to the Oasis.  
Your guests are already inside.

And as she leads Richie inside past coupled-off SWINGERS...

INT. OASIS SWING CLUB - LOUNGE AREA - LATER

The room is packed. Couples and Threesomes (some clothed, some having sex) are seated on velour couches lining the walls, while in the center, a naked orgy is in progress. Off in a corner, we find radio magnate

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS,

late 40s, bearded, loud, fat and slovenly, balancing a plate of ribs on his lap, flanked by two HOOKERS. Next to him are Richie and JOE CALDO, 40s, Italian-American, each with HOOKERS of their own. Rogers is in mid-story...

(CONTINUED)

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS

My sales department arranged it months in advance, a private dinner for two dozen of my top mid-west advertisers. And this Gilbert O'Sullivan asshole--

HOOKER #1

The singer?

HOOKER #2

He's cute.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS

He's a little shitbag is what he is! Now shut up before I break my dick off in your ass.

She does. Rogers turns back to the guys.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS (CONT'D)

The big night comes, I close down Phillipe's, best restaurant in Minneapolis. The advertisers are all excited, some of them even brought their daughters to meet this asshole, take pictures. An hour goes by, then two. I get word O'Sullivan's in the hospital.

RICHIE

I know for a fact he's got asthma.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS

This was no fuckin' asthma! Next day in the gossip columns, they got a picture of him in some titty bar in Detroit and I look like a fuckin' jerkoff.

JOE CALDO

These musicians, Buck, they're like fuckin' children.

RICHIE

Bigger they get, the worse it is.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS

I don't give a shit how big he is, there's always somebody bigger and that, my friend, is the money man.

(CONTINUED)

HOOKER #1

That's you, right daddy?

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS

You better believe it, sugar.

Richie trades looks with Caldo as Buck sticks his tongue in the Hooker's mouth. He finishes, goes back to his ribs as she unzips his pants.

JOE CALDO

Let's move forward, Buck. Put this shit behind us.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS

How you suggest we do that?

JOE CALDO

As a promotion man, I facilitate.  
It's what I do.

Caldo takes out a plastic baggie full of cocaine. Richie becomes visibly uncomfortable at the sight of it.

JOE CALDO (CONT'D)

There's cocaine for managers.  
There's cocaine for rock stars.  
(holds up baggie)  
This, my friend, is cocaine for us.

And as Rogers smiles, Hooker #2 starts blowing him. And as he starts snorting spoonfuls of coke, we slowly PUSH IN on Richie, practically sweating at the sight of the coke.

EMMY (V.O.)

Omigod! Fuck me. Yes!!

INT. KIP'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A railroad flat in a tenement in the East Village. On a mattress on the floor, Kip and Emmy are naked, fucking like wild. After a while, it comes to a crescendo, then he rolls off of her. After a few beats...

EMMY

(catching her breath)  
Holy shit.

KIP

(catching his breath)  
I know, right?

(CONTINUED)

Emmy rolls over, lights a cigarette. A long time, then:

EMMY

I want you to know I've never  
done this before.

KIP

(smiles)  
You were a virgin?

EMMY

(makes a face; then)  
Fuck an artist.

KIP

An "artist". Does that mean you're  
interested?

EMMY

In the band, yes.

KIP

Ouch.

EMMY

I didn't mean it like that.  
(then)  
You know I did, actually. We'll  
need to keep this professional.

KIP

I'll try to remember that next time  
you stick your finger in my ass.

EMMY

Who said there'll be a next time?

Kip looks at her.

KIP

Well you're a little bit of a  
bitch, aren't you.

EMMY

(forging ahead)  
You need to work on a persona.

KIP

Me personally?

EMMY

The band. Your music, it's good,  
but what are you guys about? You  
heard of KISS?

KIP

Should I have?

EMMY

They've got some heat. They dress  
in leather, spandex, wear all this  
Kabuki makeup. They're cartoon  
characters basically.

KIP

We're actually real people.

EMMY

Who--?

KIP

What?

EMMY

Finish the sentence.

KIP

Don't give a shit?

EMMY

About what?

KIP

(beat)  
Anything?

EMMY

Great. That's a good start.

She gets up, starts getting dressed.

KIP

Where you going?

EMMY

Home. I need to sleep.

KIP

Pretty dark out there.

EMMY

I'll be fine, I carry mace.

(CONTINUED)

KIP

This neighborhood you should carry  
a fuckin' bazooka.

She looks at him and smiles. A few beats, then:

EMMY

Kip Van Winkle.

KIP

What?

EMMY

Your new name.

A few beats, then he smiles:

KIP

I like it.

Emmy exits, leaving Kip there alone. After a few beats, he reaches into a drawer, removes a syringe, spoon, rubber tube and packet of heroin. And as he starts tying off...

INT. RICHIE'S HOUSE - SCARSDALE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Beautifully decorated with modern furniture. Richie enters to find Lynne sitting in an arm chair, breast-feeding their infant daughter ALLY. He crosses, gives them both a peck.

RICHIE

There's my girls.

Lynne smiles.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

And the other fruits of our  
lovemaking?

LYNNE

They tried waiting up.

RICHIE

I had a dinner. Joe Caldo, this  
promotion guy. And Buck Rogers.

LYNNE

Flash Gordon not available?

RICHIE

(smiles)

He owns radio stations.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Lynne nods. A few beats, then:

LYNNE  
Your eyes are bloodshot.

RICHIE  
The smoke.  
(then; defensive)  
I'm not high, Lynne.

LYNNE  
Fine. It was just an observation.

Richie looks at her. A long time, then:

RICHIE  
I'm sorry I've been M.I.A.  
This whole year, with the Elton  
John disaster, this bullshit with  
Zepellin, and now...

Richie trails off. A few beats, then:

LYNNE  
And now what?

Richie looks at her. A few beats, then...

RICHIE  
Lester has cancer. Lungs.

LYNNE  
Omigod.

RICHIE  
It's treatable apparently, but...

A few beats, then he shakes it off.

RICHIE (CONT'D)  
What are you gonna do, huh?  
The guy smokes.

Lynne nods, continues feeding the baby. A long time, then:

LYNNE  
Any word on the promotion?

RICHIE  
I've got a dog and pony show with  
Yamata tomorrow. Man made a  
billion selling radios, knows  
nothing about the record business.

(CONTINUED)

LYNNE

I'm sure it's just a formality.  
(off his look)  
The meeting.

Richie nods. A long time, then:

RICHIE

A promotion's good, right?

LYNNE

More money, stock options.  
(smiles)  
The key to the executive washroom.

RICHIE

Sure you could live in Japan?

LYNNE

It's an adventure.

Richie nods, lost in thought. After a few beats, Lynne finishes with the baby.

LYNNE (CONT'D)

You want to burp her?

RICHIE

Sure.

Richie lays a burp cloth over his shoulder, then hoists the baby, gently patting her back.

LYNNE

I'll be upstairs.

Richie nods. Lynne exits. And as he sits there rocking the baby...

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - (FLASHBACK) - DAY

1959. Behind the glass, Lester reviews sheet music, while in the booth, Richie works the dials. Nearby, Nate Feldstein talks to gangster CARMINE ZICARI, 40s, whose daughter ANTOINETTE, 19, watches Lester like a lovesick puppy.

NATE FELDSTEIN

--it's the exacta, right? I bet  
the entire twenty grand, I mean  
it's a sure thing, this nag does  
it, that's it, I'm sittin' on a  
half million bucks.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NATE FELDSTEIN (CONT'D)  
(beat; chuckling)  
Cocksucker's still runnin'.

Zicari looks at him, stonefaced.

CARMINE ZICARI  
I'm still waiting to hear how this  
is my problem.

NATE FELDSTEIN  
It's not your problem, of course.  
I'm just sayin'.

And as Nate slips Zicari a thick wad of cash...

RICHIE  
(into mic)  
All right Lester, you ready?

ENGINEER  
Little Jimmy Little. "*I Cried When  
You Lied*", take one.

Behind the glass, the MUSICIANS begin and Lester starts  
crooning a sensitive doo-wop ballad.

LESTER  
*I cried when you lied/ Could've  
died from shame/ My heart broke  
apart/ When you played your foolish  
game/ Some boys hide and others  
ride/ Far from their shattered  
dreams/ But this boy walked while  
people talked/ About your vicious  
scheme--*

As an instrumental break kicks in, Lester smiles and winks at  
Antoinette through the glass; unseen by her mobster father,  
she gushes and smiles back. And over the music we hear:

RICHIE (V.O.)  
Last year American Century made  
\$22 million in profit, yet ninety  
percent of the records we released  
failed to break the top 30.

INT. ALIK SAKHAROV'S OFFICE - DAY (DAY 3)

Back in 1973, we're CLOSE ON RICHIE, who addresses an unseen  
audience.

(CONTINUED)

RICHIE

So how do we do it? Several ways.

A REVERSE ANGLE reveals he's sitting with Alik across from HIRO YAMATA, 74, and his translator/associate FUYU ARITA, 30.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

We have a roster of brilliant artists who we hang on to for dear life. That's where the money is. The average career span of a performer is maybe five years -- maybe. For every Elvis or Rolling Stones you've got a hundred Uriah Heeps or Brownsville Stations. We just entered into a distribution deal with Led Zeppelin.

Arita speaks to Yamata in Japanese, then:

FUYU ARITA

He's heard of them.

RICHIE

Great. Well these guys are a license to print money. Their catalog alone will generate enough revenue to keep the lights on here for the next 40 years. Then there's our record contracts, which are heavily weighted in our favor.

Arita translates. Yamata asks a question. Arita translates.

FUYU ARITA

How do you arrange that?

RICHIE

Well on one side there's us, the record execs, who'd frankly charge an artist for air if we could.

INT. AMERICAN CENTURY - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

WE SEE Richie at a table talking to a long-haired MUSICIAN.

RICHIE (V.O.)

On the other side's the artist's lawyers, who all want to be record execs, so they don't want piss us off by being too good at their job.

(CONTINUED)

WE NOW see the Musician's LAWYER, a guy in a 3-piece suit.

                  RICHIE (V.O.)  
          Next you have the contract itself.

Richie points to a contract on the table.

                  RICHIE (V.O.)  
          Assume an artist gets a dollar for  
          every record sold, less recoupable  
          expenses. Sell a million records,  
          that's a million bucks. Not bad,  
          right?

WE SEE the aforementioned Musician holding a gold record,  
smiling as his picture is taken with Richie.

                  RICHIE (V.O.)  
          But there's that word, recoupable.  
          And that means no matter how much a  
          record makes, the cost of producing  
          that record comes out of the  
          artist's end.

Over the following, we see slices of a GOLD RECORD  
disappearing like pieces of pie...

                  RICHIE (V.O.)  
          Physically manufacturing the  
          record, studio time, marketing,  
          touring costs, packaging. If an  
          artist drinks a bottle of Pepsi  
          while recording an album, believe  
          me he's paying for it at a 700%  
          mark-up.

WE SEE that the gold record has been reduced to a sliver.

INT. ALIK SAKHAROV'S OFFICE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Richie finishes up.

                  RICHIE  
          So at the end of the day, we have  
          virtually no down-side. We break  
          even on the flops and cash in big  
          on the hits.

Arita translates again. After a while, Yamata nods.

(CONTINUED)

FUYU ARITA

Mr. Yamata is very impressed. He thanks you for enlightening him.

RICHIE

It was absolutely my pleasure.

They all stand and bow to each other.

ALIK SAKHAROV

I trust you'll take in some of our sights?

Arita translates; Yamata responds.

FUYU ARITA

Mr. Yamata wants to return to Tokyo. He is afraid of your Negros.

INT. EMMY'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hair teased, wearing makeup, a spandex dress and heels, Emmy sits on the edge of her 6-year-old daughter LIZZY'S bed. (Emmy's bed is across the room.)

EMMY

What was your favorite part of the day?

LIZZY

Watching *The Brady Bunch*.

EMMY

It was a good one, huh?

Lizzy nods. Emmy strokes her hair.

LIZZY

You look pretty. Not like last night.

EMMY

(smiles)

You don't like my leather jacket?

LIZZY

Your pants were ripped.

EMMY

Those were mommy's work clothes.

(CONTINUED)

LIZZY

Are these your work clothes too?

EMMY

They are, but tonight I'm going to a disco.

LIZZY

What's that?

EMMY

It's a place where people dance and listen to music.

LIZZY

Is that your job?

EMMY

Yeah, remember? Mommy looks for new bands so people can buy their records.

LIZZY

Is it fun?

EMMY

Sometimes it is.

(beat)

What do you want to do when you grow up?

LIZZY

I don't know.

EMMY

You know you can be anything you want, right? What do we say? All you have to do is...?

LIZZY

Believe in yourself.

EMMY

And?

LIZZY

Don't give up.

EMMY

And?

LIZZY / EMMY

Find your passion!

(CONTINUED)

EMMY

(smiles)

That's right. I'll see you in the morning.

Emmy gives her a kiss. And as she exits into the hallway...

INT. EMMY'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Emmy's mother RITA, 50s, stands in the hall in a nightgown.

RITA

Where are you off to tonight?

EMMY

The city.

(off her look)

You said you'd give me six months.

RITA

Eight months ago.

EMMY

I'm so close, ma. Please.

RITA

Close to what?

EMMY

To signing a band. All I need is one.

Rita looks at her.

RITA

You've got four more weeks. And then you're getting a real job.

EMMY

Thank you.

Emmy gives her a peck and exits.

EXT. RICHIE'S HOUSE - SCARSDALE - DAY (DAY 4)

Beautifully manicured with an in-ground pool. As a relative shoots Super-8 film, Richie (in a party hat) sits among dozens of wrapped gifts, surrounded by Lynne, the Kids and two dozen other FAMILY MEMBERS and FRIENDS. He opens a guitar case to "Oohs" and "Ahhs".

(CONTINUED)

ALIK SAKHAROV  
For your summertime blues.  
(off Richie's look)  
That's a '58 Gretsch owned by  
Eddie Cochran.

As Richie takes out the guitar...

RICHIE  
Jesus. Alik, this is amazing.

ALIK SAKHAROV  
I always knew you were a frustrated  
musician. Now you got no excuse.

And as Richie starts strumming, a MAID approaches with a  
lighted birthday cake. The group all starts singing...

LYNNE / OTHERS  
*Happy birthday to you! / Happy  
birthday to you!...*

EXT. RICHIE'S HOUSE - SCARSDALE - YARD - LATER

With the other Guests in the distance, Alik and Richie stand  
off alone near the pool, smoking cigars.

ALIK SAKHAROV  
So word is our sushi-eating master  
was quite taken with you.

RICHIE  
Nice.

Alik looks at him. A few beats, then:

ALIK SAKHAROV  
Nice? That's it? This is a huge  
promotion.  
(beat)  
Assuming you get it.

Richie just looks at him. A few beats, then:

RICHIE  
You know I haven't been to a club  
in months?

ALIK SAKHAROV  
What?

RICHIE  
Max's, the Mercer. I don't listen  
to anything anymore.

ALIK SAKHAROV  
We got kids for that.

Richie nods. A long time, then:

RICHIE  
The other night, we got lost up in  
the Bronx, me and Lester. Guy put  
a gun to my head.

ALIK SAKHAROV  
Jesus.

RICHIE  
It's crazy, I know, I just...  
I dunno, at least I felt something  
for a change.

ALIK SAKHAROV  
That was piss running down your  
leg.

Richie chuckles.

RICHIE  
Am I insane, or what?

ALIK SAKHAROV  
Go to a meeting, Richie.

RICHIE  
(smiles)  
What I wouldn't give for just a  
flake of fuckin' cocaine.

Alik chuckles. A few beats, then:

RICHIE (CONT'D)  
The guitar's great, thank you  
again.

ALIK SAKHAROV  
(smiles)  
Eddie Cochran.

RICHIE  
I used to listen to that song,  
stand in front of the mirror with a  
hairbrush.

ALIK SAKHAROV  
Big Joe Turner. Joe Houston.

RICHIE  
*All Night Long.*

Alik nods. A few beats, then:

RICHIE (CONT'D)  
Summer of '55, the Kingsway Theater  
in Brooklyn, *Blackboard Jungle* was  
was playin'. The end credits,  
Bill Haley comes on, me and my  
friends went nuts, ripped out  
the fuckin' seats.

ALIK SAKHAROV  
What is that, huh?

RICHIE  
It's rock n' roll, that's what  
it is.

Alik smiles. The Spanish-accented Maid approaches.

MAID  
Mr. Finest'? The telephone.

INT. RICHIE'S HOUSE - SCARSDALE - KITCHEN - DAY

As the Kids run past screaming, Richie stands at the counter,  
phone to his ear.

RICHIE  
Hello?

JOE CALDO (V.O.)  
It's me. Caldo.

RICHIE  
Joe, hey, what's up?

INT. BUCK ROGERS' MANSION - GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT - DAY

Eyes blood-shot, wired on coke, Joe Caldo talks on the phone.  
(In the background, Buck Rogers is snorting lines.)

JOE CALDO  
We are.

INTERCUT RICHIE AND CALDO AS NEEDED

(CONTINUED)

RICHIE  
What do you mean?

JOE CALDO  
We're at his house in Greenwich.  
We're still goin'.

RICHIE  
Since two nights ago?

JOE CALDO  
Come on over.

RICHIE  
I'm in the middle of a thing.

JOE CALDO  
This is important, kid. He wants  
to talk.

RICHIE  
It's my birthday, I got a house  
full of relatives.

JOE CALDO  
I thought this was important.

And as Richie looks out the window at Alik talking to  
Lynne...

INT. RONDELAY RECORDS - RICHIE'S OFFICE - (FLASHBACK) - DAY

1963. Danish Modern furniture and a hi-fi stereo system.  
Richie sits at his desk talking on the phone.

RICHIE  
(into phone)  
Doo-wop, it's dead, I mean I know  
that, but try tellin' that to Nate.  
You got any English bands?

A KNOCK on the open door. Lester pokes his head in; Richie  
waves him in.

RICHIE (CONT'D)  
(then; into phone)  
All right, send me a tape.

Richie hangs up, looks at Lester.

RICHIE (CONT'D)  
There's my star, how's things?

(CONTINUED)

LESTER

You tell me. I haven't seen a  
check since November.

RICHIE

Sales are slow, kid.

LESTER

So let me cut another record.

RICHIE

There's a Leiber & Stoller song--

LESTER

(cutting him off)

That's Little Jimmy. Let me cut a  
record. Lester Willis.

RICHIE

It's not the right time for us to  
introduce a new act.

LESTER

That was our deal, Richie! Three  
goddamn years ago.

RICHIE

Sit tight, will you?

(beat)

It's Nate. He's having cash-flow  
problems, the fuckin' gambling.

LESTER

I got bills myself.

Richie reaches into his pocket, pulls out a wad of cash.

LESTER (CONT'D)

That's not what I meant. I just  
want to sing.

RICHIE

I know you do. Look, I got a  
meeting with his creditors, I'm  
gonna work something out. You're  
gonna get what you want, I promise.

LESTER

Thanks, man.

And as they shake hands...

EXT. BUCK ROGERS' MANSION - GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT - NIGHT

A cab pulls up before the massive home. After a beat, Richie emerges, heads for the door. And as the cab pulls away...

INT. BUCK ROGERS' MANSION - ENTERTAINMENT ROOM - NIGHT

Decorated with plaques and radio industry awards. With Edgar Winter's "*Frankenstein*" on the stereo functioning as a soundtrack, James Whale's film "*Frankenstein*" is projected on a giant screen. On a couch, Buck Rogers holds a .357 Magnum pistol, snorting coke as Richie stands with Joe Caldo.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
(incredulous)  
You took a cab? What happened to  
your nigger?

RICHIE  
Excuse me?

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
Your driver. Fella from the other  
night.

RICHIE  
He's off weekends.

Rogers nods, does another line of coke. Richie looks really antsy. Rogers holds up the gun.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
Dirty Harry.

RICHIE  
What?

Rogers points the gun at him.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
You feel lucky?

Richie just looks at him.

RICHIE  
Joe said you wanted to talk.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
(wiping his nose)  
What?

(CONTINUED)

JOE CALDO  
Before. You said to call him.

Rogers looks at him blankly.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
I'm fuckin' hungry.

Rogers gets up, crosses to a pizza box, takes the last slice. Richie gives Caldo a look -- "What the fuck?" Caldo motions for him to sit. He does. A few beats, then:

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS (CONT'D)  
You really ran out of there the other night.

RICHIE  
I thought we were done.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
The night ain't done till the big man says it's done.

RICHIE  
I had work. Family commitments.

Rogers nods, sits next to him.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
You ever see this movie?

RICHIE  
(incredulous)  
Frankenstein?

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
Scared the shit outta me as a kid. But you gotta face your fears.

JOE CALDO  
Very true.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
And this song, it's also called Frankenstein. They call that "synergy".

Richie just looks at him. A few beats, then BLAM!! Rogers blasts a hole at the monster's image on screen.

JOE CALDO  
Easy.

Rogers chuckles as Richie gives Caldo a look.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
Fuckin' hot in here.

RICHIE  
Middle of summer. You got air  
conditioning?

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
It's not healthy. Take your shirt  
off if you're hot.

RICHIE  
(slightly annoyed)  
You said you were hot.  
(beat)  
So what'd you want to talk about?

The song on the stereo changes to the Hurricane Smith's  
*"Oh Babe, What Would You Say?"*...

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
Relax, son.

RICHIE  
I left my family to come over here,  
Buck.

Rogers stands up, starts swaying.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
Let's dance.

RICHIE  
What?

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
This song. C'mon, dance.

Richie looks at Caldo, stands up.

RICHIE  
I gotta go.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
Where you goin'?

RICHIE  
Home.

Rogers grabs him by the shoulder.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
Did I say you could leave?

RICHIE  
Get your hand off me.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
What?

RICHIE  
Get your fucking hand off me.

Suddenly, Rogers points the gun and WHAM! Instinctively, Richie punches him in the face.

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS  
Motherfucker!!

Richie tackles Roger backward into a trophy cabinet, its glass front shattering as the gun skitters away. As they wrestle on the floor, fists flying, Rogers gets his hands around Richie's throat. Richie punches Rogers repeatedly in the head, to no avail. In his coked-up state, he's like a monster. Suddenly...

WHAMMM!!

Joe Caldo slams a heavy glass trophy against Rogers' head, opening up a deep gash, knocking him down. Rogers looks at him, tries to get up. Caldo hits him repeatedly as Richie struggles to his feet. Finally Rogers stops moving.

RICHIE  
(catching his breath)  
The fuck did you do?!

JOE CALDO  
You're the one fuckin' hit him!

Richie kneels, takes Rogers' pulse.

RICHIE  
I wasn't trying to kill him!

JOE CALDO  
Just relax.

RICHIE  
He's fucking dead!

JOE CALDO  
Stop saying that.

RICHIE

And what? He'll be less dead?!

JOE CALDO

Let me think for a--

Just then...

FRANK "BUCK" ROGERS

Ahhhhhhh!!!

Rogers tackles Richie to the floor, very much alive and covered with sheets of blood. As they wrestle, Caldo again grabs the glass trophy, this time bashing his skull in. After what seems like an eternity, Richie struggle to his feet. He and Caldo look at each other.

RICHIE

What are we gonna do?

JOE CALDO

We'll get rid of him. There's no one here but us, it'll be okay.

RICHIE

They're gonna check this house, Joe.

JOE CALDO

Relax, will you? We're gonna clean up first.

And as they start cleaning up...

EXT. DESERTED STREET - BEDFORD STUYVESANT, BROOKLYN - NIGHT

Burnt-out buildings, not a soul in sight except for the rats. Radio on, Joe Caldo eases his Cadillac Eldorado down the street, Richie next to him in the passenger seat.

INT. CALDO'S ELDORADO - CONTINUOUS

JOE CALDO

We dump him, they find him, cops'll think it's a drug deal gone bad.

RICHIE

And then what?

(CONTINUED)

JOE CALDO  
(shrugs)  
Keep on truckin'...

RICHIE  
And if the cops come around?

JOE CALDO  
You don't know nothin'. This  
fuckin' city, the crime rate's  
through the roof. Believe me, the  
last thing any cop wants is another  
murder to investigate, especially a  
prick like this.

A new song comes on the radio as Caldo pulls into an alley.

JOE CALDO (CONT'D)  
Here, this is good.

He puts the car in park, then:

JOE CALDO (CONT'D)  
(re: radio)  
Wait. That's Gilbert O'Sullivan,  
right?

It is. On the radio is Gilbert O'Sullivan's "*Alone Again,  
Naturally*". Caldo laughs, calls out toward the trunk:

JOE CALDO (CONT'D)  
You hear that, you prick?!

And with that, he pops the trunk. And as he and Richie start  
removing Buck Rogers' body...

INT. AMERICAN CENTURY - RICHIE'S OFFICE - DAY (DAY 5)

CLOSE ON Richie, who sits at his desk, tape in his hand as he  
wears a thousand yard stare.

EMMY (O.C.)  
They're raw, they're interesting,  
they've already got a following...  
The tape's rough, but the live show  
is killer. They're playing tonight  
if you wanna come with.

A REVERSE ANGLE reveals Emmy sitting across from him. A few  
beats, then:

(CONTINUED)

EMMY (CONT'D)  
You wanna do that?

RICHIE  
(snapping out of it)  
I'm sorry. What?

EMMY  
The band. Spicy Bits.

RICHIE  
Yeah, no. I'm a little busy.

Just then, Cece knocks and enters. Richie looks up:

CECE  
Alik needs to see you.

RICHIE  
What about?

CECE  
I don't know. But he says it's an  
emergency.

Richie nods, turns back to Emmy.

RICHIE  
We'll talk later, okay?

Emmy nods, leaves with Cece. Richie slips the tape in his  
jacket pocket, takes a deep breath, then gets up...

EXT. ALIK SAKHAROV'S OFFICE - DAY

Richie approaches the office, opens the door to--

GROUP  
Congratulations!!

INT. ALIK SAKHAROV'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Packed with American Century EMPLOYEES, including the support  
Staff, A&R team, Emmy, Cece, Alik and Scott Levitt.

ALIK SAKHAROV  
Mr. President.

RICHIE  
What?

(CONTINUED)

ALIK SAKHAROV

Not that I completely understood  
them, but Japan has spoken --  
from what I gather, you've been  
promoted.

SCOTT LEVITT

(smiles)  
Congratulations, asshole.

RICHIE

I...  
(looking around)  
Jesus, I don't know what to say.

ALIK SAKHAROV

Did someone get that on tape,  
because I've never heard him utter  
those words before.

Laughter throughout the room. Richie stands there looking  
pale.

SCOTT LEVITT

Well how does it feel?

RICHIE

Good, just... I think I'm sick.

ALIK SAKHAROV

You want a Bromo or something?

RICHIE

No, I just...  
(to Cece)  
Call my car, I need to go home.

INT. SOCIAL CLUB - LITTLE ITALY - (FLASHBACK) - DAY

1963. Over espressos, Richie sits with Nate Feldstein across  
from Carmine Zicari and another YOUNG WISEGUY...

NATE FELDSTEIN

As of last week, your own  
accountant valued my company  
at a million three.

CARMINE ZICARI

A hundred fifty grand of which you  
owe me.

(CONTINUED)

NATE FELDSTEIN

We got a top-shelf talent roster.  
The Drifters, Monotones. If you  
take a piece of my ownership--

RICHIE

(cutting him off)  
Can I make a suggestion?

The conversation stops -- all eyes are on Richie.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Mr. Zicari, what if you buy me out  
instead? With stock options, I  
hold a 25% stake in the label.  
According to your own people,  
that's worth upwards of three  
hundred grand.

CARMINE ZICARI

(to Nate)  
He can divide. Fuckin' genius,  
this kid.

RICHIE

I'm prepared to sell you my entire  
end for \$150 thousand -- half of  
what it's worth.

CARMINE ZICARI

Why would you do that?

RICHIE

Frankly? When I started in this  
business I didn't have a pot to  
piss in, pardon my language.

(nods to Nate)

This man gave me an opportunity.  
Now if selling my share allows him  
to keep what he's worked his whole  
life to build, then I'm happy to  
help in any way I can.

A few beats, then Zicari turns to a Young Wiseguy.

CARMINE ZICARI

The safe. Get the money.

The Young Wiseguy heads off to do as he's told.

RICHIE

There's one thing I'd ask, with all  
due respect. Little Jimmy Little.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Release him from his contract, let  
him come with me.

CARMINE ZICARI

The fuck is he?

YOUNG WISEGUY

That song. "I Cried."

NATE FELDSTEIN

*"I Cried When You Lied."*

CARMINE ZICARI

Right, yeah. My daughter likes  
that song.

(to Richie)

No, he's good. He stays.

The Young Wiseguy hands a dozen STACKS OF CASH to Zicari, who  
places them in front of Richie. An eternity, then:

RICHIE

All right, fine.

And as Richie slips the cash into his briefcase...

EXT. RICHIE'S HOUSE - SCARSDALE - NIGHT

The limo pulls over in front of the palatial home. Richie  
sits in back looking like shit.

CHAUFFEUR (O.C.)

Tomorrow?

RICHIE

Maybe, I don't know.

CHAUFFEUR (O.C.)

I got the doctor's at nine.

Richie nods.

CHAUFFEUR (CONT'D)

You sure you're all right?

RICHIE

Yeah. Good.

And with that, Richie exits the limo.

INT. RICHIE'S HOUSE - SCARSDALE - DEN - NIGHT

Late, lights dimmed. With the Spicy Bits tape playing on the stereo, open bottle of scotch at his side, Richie sits on the couch clearly drunk, the Gretsch guitar on his lap. He absentmindedly strums it as he watches the news, sound off...

ON TV -- we see graphic crime-scene IMAGES...

SPICY BITS

*Got blood in my sno-cone!/ Home is  
a war zone!*

Richie does a bump of cocaine, shudders at its effects.

SPICY BITS (CONT'D)

*Coney Island Murder so come down  
see the freak show!*

Click. He uses the remote to switch channels.

ON TV -- we see images of economically-ravaged New York City. The Homeless; abandoned buildings; rats crawling on garbage.

SPICY BITS (CONT'D)

*Bring your mom, bring your dad/  
Bring your girl, bring your lad--*

ON TV - we see a sign: "It's 10 p.m. -- Do You Know Where Your Children Are?"

SPICY BITS (CONT'D)

*Coney Island Murder's the best  
time you ever had!*

ON TV -- a REPORTER stands outside a high school, several STUDENTS flashing gang signs behind him.

Richie smiles, strums the guitar; the Spicy Bits blasting...

ON TV -- we see a bloated, rhine-stoned Elvis singing to an audience of aging FANS...

Richie chuckles ruefully, the Spicy Bits providing the soundtrack...

ON TV -- we see ATTENDANTS from the Coroner's office wheeling a corpse in a body bag on a gurney...

Now Richie starts laughing. He strums the guitar, his laughter building with each change of the channel.

Click. A four alarm fire rages out of control.

(CONTINUED)

Click. Sonny & Cher perform on their Comedy Hour.

Click. Footage of a prison riot at Rikers Island.

Richie stops the tape, closes his eyes. The Spicy Bits continue over the following...

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

1963. Lester exits a room with Antoinette Zicari. And as they head toward his car, two THUGS step out of the shadows and... WHAM!! One of the Thugs slams a baseball bat across Lester's back, knocking him down as Carmine Zicari appears. He takes the bat, kneels and slips its handle underneath Lester's chin, up against his throat. Carmine places a knee in Lester's back, begins to choke him, crushing his windpipe.

INT. RICHIE'S HOUSE - SCARSDALE - DEN - NIGHT

Back to present. On the couch, Richie's eyes pop open. He stands up, holding the guitar by the neck. Letting out an unearthly HOWL, he begins smashing it to pieces against the TV screen, knocking over vases and lamps like a wild man. After a few beats, a horrified Lynne appears in the doorway.

LYNNE  
What the fuck is going on?!

Richie stops, looks at her calmly. A few beats, then:

RICHIE  
I want a divorce.

INT. AMERICAN CENTURY - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY (DAY 6)

Calm, in control, Richie sits at the head of the conference table. Alik and Scott Levitt look on as he addresses the various Department Heads, including Mark Philips.

RICHIE  
As you all know, our parent company Yamata Corporation recently bestowed upon me an incredible honor, namely the presidency of American Century Music. I have decided to turn this offer down to return to my roots as head of our A&R division.

Murmurs and a few gasps throughout the room.

(CONTINUED)

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Assuming the presidency in my place is the very capable Scott Levitt, formerly head of Business and Legal Affairs.

A few ad-libbed "Congratulations", "Good Luck", etc. Scott nods his thanks.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

After a great deal of soul-searching and a brief discussion with my wife, I realized my heart belongs in rock 'n roll. It's my world -- it's the world we all live in, whether we know it or not.

Richie looks at their faces and smiles.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

And now a few brief announcements. Congratulations to Emmy Caporale, who has signed her first artists to our label, the Spicy Bits.

The A&R Team applauds, ad-libs congratulations.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

I'm also adding a new member to our team -- Lester Willis.

MARK

Your driver?

RICHIE

Yes, and as a matter of fact, he'll be working very closely with you.

Richie nods to Cece, who motions outside the room. As LESTER the Chauffeur enters, we SEE him fully for the first time -- Lester is Little Jimmy Little.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

As some of you may know, Lester has had a long and varied career in our business, and brings to the job a unique perspective that I'm sure will be helpful in your dealings with artists. Now if there are no questions, let's get on with our day.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

No questions. As the meeting breaks up, Cece approaches Richie with a business card.

CECE

He said not to interrupt, but some detective stopped by, wants you to call him.

She hands Richie's the card, on which is written:

**Detective Edward Voehl**

**Homicide Division - NYPD**

Richie smiles, slips the card in his pocket.

RICHIE

Thanks.

And as he exits the conference room...

EXT. 1520 SEDGWICK AVENUE - SOUTH BRONX - NIGHT

The same place from the opening, with very old school HIP-HOP blaring from the rec room. Lester and Mark Philips emerge from a chauffeured Lincoln Town Car, head to the front door, where Topcat, the pimp we met earlier, stands guard.

TOPCAT

Fuck you two goin'?

LESTER

Inside. And he's with me.

A brief stare-down, then Topcat steps aside.

INT. 1520 SEDGWICK AVENUE - REC ROOM - NIGHT

Lester and Mark enter, stop in their tracks -- the club is packed with PEOPLE dancing to James Brown's "*Give it Up or Turn it Loose*". Up front before two turntables is

DJ KOOL HERC,

18 years old. As James Brown hits an extended instrumental break, Herc works the vinyl with magic fingers, segueing seamlessly into the instrumental break from Booker T and the MG's "*Melting Pot*". And as the crowd goes insane...

## INT. RICHIE'S LIMO - NIGHT

The music continues as Richie, now with a new DRIVER, sits in back, using a business card to cut lines of cocaine on the New York Dolls album. And as we HEAR the opening guitar riff from the Dolls' *Jet Boy*, we PUSH IN on

THE BUSINESS CARD,

which we see is Detective Voehl's. And as Richie uses a rolled-up \$100 bill to start snorting lines...

## INT. MERCER ARTS CENTER - NIGHT

The club is packed with proto-PUNKS, dancing to the NEW YORK DOLLS, glammed out on stage.

DAVID JOHANSEN

*Whoso flyin' up in the sky/  
Faster than any boy could ever  
describe?/ Who's got that love so  
deep/ And everything alive?/  
Jet Boys fly/ Jet Boys gone/  
Jet Boy stole my baby/ Flyin  
around New York City so high/  
Like he was my baby--*

The camera PANS the crowd, going wild...

DAVID JOHANSEN (CONT'D)

*This's the kinda place where no one  
cares/ What your livin' for  
And Jet Boy's so preoccupied/  
He don't care 'bout before/  
Jet Boys fly/Jet Boys gone?  
Jet Boy stole my baby/ Flyin  
around New York City so high/  
Like he was my baby--*

The camera lands, finding RICHIE, eyes closed in the crowd, soaking up the music in the midst of the insanity.

DAVID JOHANSEN (CONT'D)

*My pretty baby/ My pretty pretty  
baby/ My pretty baby...*

And as Richie slam-dances amid the sea of Punk Rockers, content at last, we...

FADE OUT.

**THE END**