

MARLOWE

by
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BASED ON A TRUE STORY: From case files of P.I. Samuel B. Marlowe

Registered with W.G.A.W. (#1492691)

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MARLOWE (BASED ON A TRUE STORY)

FADE IN:

INT. - BRIGHT WHITE EMERGENCY ROOM HALLWAY -- 1991

Gnarled hand clutches a paperback book -- Man Called Spade.

PATIENT's P.O.V. rises to E.M.T. hauling the gurney. DOCTOR, Asian, late 20's hovers with NURSE, 40's, African American.

E.M.T.

One hundred years old. Pulse
erratic. Keeps saying something.

Patient mumbles. Nurse leans in, face oblong, distorted.

Oxygen mask she lowers is brushed aside by the hand with the book. Monitor beeps quicken. Lights get brighter, mumble louder.

NURSE

What you tryin' t'say?

Monitor squeals. E.R. Team scrambles. The book gets pulled away and tossed up...up into the light. Book falls and is run over by a blur of gurney wheels.

MARLOWE V.O.

Name's Marlowe...

CUT TO:

EXT. - STREET FRONT OF THE MAYFAIR HOTEL -- 1937 -- AFTERNOON

Blur of wheels, spoked wheels, '37 Roadster skids to a stop.

MARLOWE V.O.

Name like any other name. Guess it
all comes down to how you're
remembered.

Car door opens. P.O.V. goes up an impressive lime stone and brick edifice, City's fanciest hotel.

VALETS react as keys are thrown to them. Tall, dark pinstripe-suited figure adjusts his Panama hat. Eyes follow him through the front doors.

INT. - HOTEL LOBBY -- DAY

DOORMAN, (African American in an organ-grinder's monkey uniform) opens the door. His eyes widen.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
Mayfair Hotel served tea in the
afternoons, in rooms full'v potted
plants'n old ladies...

A bell keeps ringing, as the figure is followed through the lobby by stares of hotel guests.

MARLOWE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Didn't drink tea, so I wasn't
exactly welcome.

The front desk CONCIERGE, mid-30's, painfully skinny, rings for a bellhop. He glances up at SAM MARLOWE, mid-40's, well-groomed and dressed, African American.

CONCIERGE
Coloreds go to the service
entrance.

Bangs the desk bell again. Marlowe doesn't move.

CONCIERGE (CONT'D)
What have I said that wasn't
perfectly clear?

He reaches for the bell. Marlowe puts his hand over it.

MARLOWE
Name's Marlowe. Samuel B. Got a
call from Raymond Chandler.

MANAGER, 40, impeccably groomed butterball, comes up behind.

MANAGER
Thank heavens, you're here! Mr.
Chandler's on the fifteenth floor.

His eyes widen as he sees Marlowe's face.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
You're the private investigator?

Marlowe produces a card.

MARLOWE
Licensed in the state of
California.

MARLOWE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
First licensed P.I. west of the
Mississippi. Did it by mail.
Didn't occur to them to ask what
color I was.

EXT. -- HOTEL WINDOW ON THE FIFTEENTH FLOOR -- AFTERNOON

Manager leans out and points.

RAYMOND CHANDLER, late 40's, scholarly-looking, sits a dozen feet away on the ledge, feet dangling. Tie is undone, suit disheveled, bottle of whiskey in his hand.

Marlowe comes out, stands next to Chandler, lights a cigarette. Marlowe looks down at a cluster of onlookers fifteen stories below.

MARLOWE
Nice view.

Sun is in the west, musty orange haze over the skyline.

Chandler nods. He leans forward to look, dislodging brick fragments onto the crowd.

A hand pushes Chandler back to the wall. Marlowe's hand.

CHANDLER
They say we become what we do.
Frightening thought, don't you
think, Marlowe?

MARLOWE
I try not to think that much.

CHANDLER
I like that. Can I use it?

Marlowe shrugs.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)
I think too much. So I drink, to
forget I'm so utterly appalling at
what I do!!

Chandler stands, voice echoing off the Downtown buildings.

MARLOWE
Pay you lotsa money to be that bad.

CHANDLER
It's not about the money.

Takes several weaving steps, pivots, regains his balance.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)
Or the greatly over-sold joy of
writing!!

Chandler downs a sip.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)
Eight million stories in this City!
And I can't write any of them!
Sometimes I just want to scream,
'who the hell am I to think I could
ever write?!' and throw the whole
bloody manuscript out the window!

Chandler offers Marlowe the bottle.

MARLOWE
Why the hell d'you do it?

CHANDLER
Why are you a detective?

Marlowe smiles, takes a swig and returns the bottle.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)
I have a new detective character.
You'd like him. I just can't quite
get him into focus.

He squints at Marlowe. Tall, shadowy figure outlined by a
wavering glow of the hotel's neon sign.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)
I call him Philip Mallory.

MARLOWE
Mallory. That's a girl's name.

CHANDLER
Too soft, I knew it! How about
Masters? Master, Masters. That's
stiff. Murphy. Too Irish.
Mitchell, Philip Mitchell. Boring.
Mason, Matthews, Morris, Myers,
Mosley! It's all BORING!!

He holds up the bottle. Empty, it slips from his fingers.
Crowd below scatters.

MARLOWE
Time to go get us another.

EXT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- AFTERNOON

Marlowe drives west on Wilshire Blvd. Stops at a light. Squad car pulls alongside. PATROL OFFICERS eyeball him.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
1937, north of Wilshire, someone of
color was about as conspicuous as a
fly on white rice.

Chandler leans into view, nods to the officers. Squad car pulls away.

INT. -- MARLOWE'S CAR -- AFTERNOON

Chandler sits in the passenger seat, opening a bottle as Marlowe drives.

CHANDLER
I've decided to write a book.

Marlowe's eyes dart to the rear view mirror.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)
I'm tired of Dime Store magazines.
It's time I moved up in the world.
Oh, my God! Stop!

Marlowe stops the car. Chandler lurches out, throws up in the bushes.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
I'd been sending letters to the
Black Mask Magazine. They did
detective stories. Not very well
unfortunately. Always had a
hankering to write. Never got to
it. Didn't mean I was gonna let
these magazine writers mess it up.

Chandler gets off his knees, climbs back into the car.

MARLOWE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Chandler asked to meet me. He was
new at detective fiction, and nice
for someone who thought he was
British and wanted to write serious
literature.

CHANDLER
God, I wish I was dead.

MARLOWE
Why didn't you jump?

CHANDLER
(smiles)
I'm afraid of heights.

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- AFTERNOON

Marlowe stops the car on La Jolla Avenue, in front of a sleepy-looking Spanish bungalow. He gets a glimpse of a car pulling up around the corner behind them.

CHANDLER
I can't go in like this!

Curtains in the house part briefly. Chandler ducks down. Marlowe lets the car idle.

EXT. - CENTRAL AVENUE -- AFTERNOON

Lonely drunk leans against the wall of a battered two-story brick building. Neon "S" on the saloon sign flickers out, as Marlowe parks his car out front.

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- AFTERNOON

Marlowe checks his mirror again. All he sees is Chandler, passed out in the passenger seat, cheek against the window.

INT. - DOWNSTAIRS BAR AT MARLOWE'S OFFICE BUILDING --
AFTERNOON

Bar's not dark enough to hide the dinginess. Only patron is face-down on a corner table. SMILEY the bartender, late 50's, African American, not named for his cheerful nature, stands endlessly polishing the same glass.

Marlowe pulls Chandler into the bar by his armpits.

SMILEY
Landlord's lookin' for you.

MARLOWE
I'll bet he is.

Smiley pays no attention as Marlowe drags Chandler through the bar, to a small set of stairs at the back.

INT. -- HALLWAY OUTSIDE MARLOWE'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Marlowe maneuvers Chandler down a dimly-lit hallway, past fly-by-night businesses and bored-looking ladies-of-the-evening in open doorways, giving him the eye.

Door at the end reads: Samuel B. Marlowe, Private Investigations. A note is taped to the door: Rent due. SECOND NOTICE. Marlowe balls up the note and tosses it, juggling Chandler's weight as he sticks a key in the door.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Look what the cat dragged in.

VELMA, mid-thirties, light-skinned African American, long straightened, golden brown hair falling over one of her bright green eyes. Posed against a door frame, Velma's long luscious form is hanging out of a frilly purple housecoat.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
There she was. Only woman who
could melt a man in a heartbeat.
Then kick him right back into the
deep freeze.

Man emerges through her doorway, buttoning shirt sleeves under his jacket. African American, local businessman or shopkeeper, he slips a folded bill into Velma's robe pocket. He and Marlowe lock eyes, as the man slinks down the hall.

VELMA
Wherever you go, Marlowe, trouble
follows.

MARLOWE
Trouble's already been there. I
just clean up. Got any messages,
Velma?

Her face goes from vamp to frown.

VELMA
It's been two days, Marlowe! Would
it kill you to check in? Let me
know you're not dead in an alley
somewhere.

Marlowe pushes Chandler to the wall so he can open the door.

VELMA (CONT'D)
Who's the stiff?

MARLOWE
Nobody you know.

INT. - MARLOWE'S OFFICE WAITING ROOM -- AFTERNOON

An old brown couch sits all by itself in a room in need of paint. Chandler mumbles as Marlowe drags him to a door with big black letters: PRIVATE Velma enters, picks up the letters that came in through the mail slot.

A man is hunched over, out the window. FREDDY LEROY is mid-20's, African-American, 6' 6", misshapen face and leg in a brace. I.Q. of 50, brain damaged child in a giant's body, he turns and stands, hand behind his back.

VELMA

Freddy! What you doin' here?

FREDDY

Nuthin.

Velma holds out her hand. Freddy brings his hand forward, cupped around a baby pigeon.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

Wasn't hurtin' it. Likes me, see?

Runs the bird across his cheek. Tiny fluff ball, eyes still not open, cheeps, holding up its beak to be fed.

VELMA

Do you know how dirty those are?

Marlowe lays Chandler on the floor, comes over.

MARLOWE

Velma, it's just a bird.

Velma shakes her head.

VELMA

You deal with him.

She steps over Chandler, opens the inner office door to exit.

Freddy blows on the fledgling. It cheeps.

FREDDY

Likes me.

MARLOWE

It's hungry. Hungry things like anybody with a half-assed chance of gettin' 'em what they want.

EXT. - LEDGE OUTSIDE MARLOWE'S WINDOW -- AFTERNOON

Nest of four baby pigeons hold up beaks in empty expectation.

INT. - MARLOWE'S OFFICE WAITING ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Freddy looks from the nest to his baby bird.

MARLOWE

Sure, it likes you. But don't you
have somewhere to be?

FREDDY

The case, the case, I forgot! I
forget! I always forget!

Marlowe takes the bird, deposits it back in the nest. Freddy
runs out.

Freddy runs back in, grabs a small folding camera from under
the couch.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

I forgot!

Freddy runs out again.

INT. - MARLOWE'S INNER OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

A shade hangs askew on the only window, blowing over a desk,
two mismatched chairs and a file cabinet. Marlowe carries in
Chandler, pulls down a Murphy bed, throws Chandler on it.

A small framed piece is on the floor. Marlowe's detective
license. He wipes the frame, hangs the license back in its
place on the wall. It falls down again.

He sits down at his desk. Velma is pacing.

VELMA

Freddy shouldn't be hangin' around.

MARLOWE

He's your half-brother. Gives him
somethin' to do.

VELMA

Follows you around like a puppy.

MARLOWE

Don't you like puppies, Velma?

VELMA

'Til they crap on my rug.

She sits down on the desk, sorting through mail, miles of leg hanging out of the housecoat. Marlowe reaches for that leg. Velma slaps his hand. A locket swings out of her neckline.

VELMA (CONT'D)

Bills, bills, more bills.

Marlowe grabs the locket. Small gold piece, engraved with two intertwined angels. She grabs it back from him.

VELMA (CONT'D)

Another letter from...Dash-i-ell Hammett. The writer guy.

Chandler rouses.

CHANDLER

The world's greatest author of hard boiled detective fiction.

Velma drops the envelopes.

VELMA

(to Marlowe)

You said those stories were a bunch of bunk.

MARLOWE

Forget what I said.

She shrugs and exits. Marlowe sorts his mail.

CHANDLER

Marlowe, you once asked why I wanted to write detective fiction.

Lays looking up at the ceiling fan.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)

Remember the Continental Op, Hammett's first character? Forever skulking around shadows, getting into people's heads. That odd little man was so calculating, so intuitive, so downright perceptive I realized, deep down, I always wanted to be a detective!

MARLOWE

A detective?

CHANDLER

I could learn! Hammett says a man should write what he knows.

MARLOWE

Hammett doesn't know squat.

Chandler sits up.

CHANDLER

My good man, I'll have you know Dashiell Hammett was a Pinkerton!

MARLOWE

Glorified night watchman, dreamin' of flashy dames 'n fancy footwork.

Drops his mail into the trash.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

Real P.I. work is cheap cigarettes, bad booze, long nights in cold doorways. Women hate you, Cops double-cross you. Clients want ya t'solve all their problems. An' nobody wants to pay you for pickin' thru all their Goddamn lies. Then, when you think you finally know what you're doin', knuckle ball comes outta left field. Knocks you flat on your ass.

Chandler's down again. Begins to snore.

Velma waltzes in, plunks a bottle on Marlowe's desk. Sound rouses Chandler.

VELMA

Smiley wants two-fifty for that.

MARLOWE

An' I wanna run for president.

VELMA

You're a cheap bastard! Run off for any stranger with a problem, but can't be bothered to take care of people you know!

She exits.

CHANDLER

Angry girl.

Through the open door across the hall, Marlowe can see a standing mirror, Velma inspecting herself.

MARLOWE
Wasn't always...

Image flashes back to --

EXT. - DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES STREET -- 1917 -- DAY

Reflection of a gangly light-skinned black girl in braids and overalls staring through a barbershop window.

12-YEAR-OLD VELMA watches her brother, 6-YEAR-OLD FREDDY in a barber's chair. He sticks his tongue out at her.

She turns her back on him. Her gaze goes to a store across the street. Ladies Dress Shop with a mannequin in the window wearing the most beautiful gown she's ever seen.

She glances at the barber shop, knowing she's supposed to stay, then back across the street...

EXT. - FRONT OF LADIES DRESS SHOP -- DAY

12-year-old Velma stares up at the gown. Disapproving white SHOP LADY looks down at her. All 12-year-old Velma sees is a reflection of her face replacing the mannequin's face.

There's a BANG, squeal of tires.

A Bentley with two well-dressed ladies pulls over. Driver, MRS. MACKEY, 40ish and matronly, gets out, looks down on the crumpled motionless form of a black boy in the gutter.

Banshee scream, 12-year-old Velma throws herself on her brother, gathers him in her arms.

MRS. MACKEY
(to her friend)
It's a pickaninny. Shouldn't've
been in the road.

12-year-old Velma glares up at her, tears trailing.

MRS. MACKEY (CONT'D)
All right, all right.

She pulls out a wad of bills, thrusts them at 12-year-old Velma.

12-YEAR-OLD VELMA
He's my brother!

Mrs. Mackey drops the bills into the gutter -- all ones --
returns to her car and drives away.

Holding her brother, 12-year-old Velma picks up the bills.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
She's been chasin' a buck ever
since, tryin' to fix him.

INT. - MARLOWE'S INNER OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Marlowe pours himself a drink.

MARLOWE
An' me, I'm just the son-'va-bitch,
rookie cop who took 'em home, 'cuz
no hospital'd take him.

He turns to Chandler, who's out again.

INT. - VELMA'S ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Small room, cheap lavender frills and beads. Big round
purple bed in the corner, bordered by acting head shots.
Velma changes stockings as Marlowe opens the door.

MARLOWE
Goin' out. Watch my friend for me.

Velma shakes her head. Suit and hat are laid out on the bed.

VELMA
Got a call from the studio.

MARLOWE
Who'll answer my phone?

She opens the window, leans out.

VELMA
Smiley!!

EXT. - MARLOWE'S BUILDING -- AFTERNOON

Smiley sticks his head out the downstairs window.

Velma dangles the phone by its cord, lowers it to him.

SMILEY

What'm I supposed to do with this?!

VELMA

If it rings, answer it!

She shuts her window. Smiley frowns.

INT. - MARLOWE'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Bottle on Marlowe's desk is now half empty. Chandler snores as Marlowe puts on his hat. He hears the waiting room door open and close.

INT. - MARLOWE'S OUTER WAITING ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Marlowe comes out of his office. Freddy is on the couch, crying, hand tucked inside his coat.

FREDDY

I try so hard to do everything the way you showed me, Marlowe.

Breaks down to a whimper.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

Velma'll be so mad, mad, mad at me!

MARLOWE

Freddy, Freddy...

Puts his hand on Freddy's shoulder.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

Velma'd never be mad at you.

FREDDY

I screwed up! I always screw up.

Begins to blubber.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

I'm a dummy!

Freddy doubles over on the couch.

MARLOWE

Don't say that.

FREDDY

They know I saw 'em, know I heard 'em.

MARLOWE
Who, Freddy?

Spots blood pooled around Freddy's shoe. Marlowe opens Freddy's coat, sees the deep gash across Freddy's stomach.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Oh God, Freddy!

Freddy grabs Marlowe, pulls him onto the floor as he falls. Marlowe cradles Freddy in his arms.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Need you to be strong. Can you do
that for me? Velma...!!!

FREDDY
(hoarse whisper)
Fire... Fire in the Arroyo Seco.

He presses the small folding camera into Marlowe's hands and closes his eyes.

INT. - MARLOWE'S OUTER WAITING ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Cops back away from the body, so a photographer can shoot.
Marlowe is grabbed from behind in the doorway, hurled into the hallway.

INT. - HALLWAY OUTSIDE MARLOWE'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

DETECTIVE LUCIEN WAGNER, 42, tall, flat sandy blonde hair, handlebar moustache, gold left front incisor, throws Marlowe against the wall and cuffs him.

WAGNER
Finally stepped in it, Marlowe.

MARLOWE
Yeah, Wagner. If you mean that
steaming pile you call a career!

Wagner presses Marlowe to the wall.

WAGNER
Chief Detective Wagner to you,
nigger!

Marlowe pivots, rams Wagner in the mid-section.

Wagner goes down, but springs up again, only to be blocked by a VERY large obstruction.

DEEP MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Little off your beat, aren't you,
 Chief Detective, sir?

SERGEANT ROSCOE WASHINGTON, 43, 6' 6", uniformed, African American, built like a linebacker.

INT. - MARLOWE'S WAITING ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Wagner follows Marlowe in, snatches the camera from the floor.

MARLOWE
 That's private property!

Wagner waves the bloody camera at Washington.

WAGNER
 Sergeant Washington, wouldn't you
 say this looks like evidence?

Washington locks eyes with Wagner, who slinks away.

INT. - MARLOWE'S OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Marlowe turns in the doorway.

MARLOWE
 You're dirty, Wagner, always been
 dirty! Pimp, extortionist'n
 arsonist!

Washington shoves Marlowe into his office, followed by a YOUNG COP, uniformed, African American.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
 Wagner's squeezin' workin' girls
 down to Crenshaw. Word is he's the
 one burned Mama Louella's place.

WASHINGTON
 'Spose you can prove it.

Marlowe doesn't answer.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)
 Didn't think so.

Pauses in the doorway, looks back at Freddy.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)
Poor bastard. Didn't have the
brains he was born with, but never
hurt nobody.

MARLOWE
God is my Witness, Rocky, I'm gonna
get the son-v-a-bitch who did this!

WASHINGTON
An' I'll lock you up somewhere your
own Guardian Angel won't find you!

Notices Chandler, passed out on the Murphy bed.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)
Who's sleeping beauty?

MARLOWE
Friend sleepin' it off. Didn't see
nuthin'.

Chandler begins to snore. Washington nods to the Young Cop.

WASHINGTON
Get those off him.

YOUNG COP
Sergeant Washington, sir!

The Young Cop salutes, uncuffs Marlowe.

WASHINGTON
Now that there, Marlowe, is an
ambitious young man. Most rookies
wanna be Police Chief, but uh-uh...

Young Cop smiles.

YOUNG COP
No, sir. I wanna be Mayor!

WASHINGTON
Like 'nother young dreamer I used
to know. That'll be all, Officer.

YOUNG COP
Bradley, Tom Bradley, sir.

Another salute, Young Cop exits. Washington shakes his head.

WASHINGTON

Blood all over you. Marlowe, give me one reason I shouldn't bust your sorry gun-for-hire ass!

MARLOWE

I'm a private investigator.

WASHINGTON

Same thing. Report says he was babbling 'bout a fire?

MARLOWE

He'd just run into the wrong end of a very large knife. Rocky, when've you known me to carry a blade?

WASHINGTON

Doesn't mean you didn't put him in front'v it.

MARLOWE

He was just tailin' somebody.

WASHINGTON

I knew it!

MARLOWE

Ol' man Gump. All he does is wander six blocks down Central to the bar right downstairs. Only danger's Mrs. Gump when she finds out Ike's playin' cards again.

WASHINGTON

Tell that to Freddy. Oh, you can't, 'cuz he's dead. Weren't satisfied getting fired from the Department for that boy, gotta dig yourself in deeper.

MARLOWE

Wasn't fired.

WASHINGTON

Could'a been lynched! Tryin' t'arrest a white lady?!

MARLOWE

She left the scene'v an accident.

WASHINGTON

A banker's wife! What th'hell were you thinkin' about?

MARLOWE

Justice.

WASHINGTON

For Freddy?! People like you, me
'n Freddy, we don't get that! You
been spittin' the wind ever since
I've known you, Marlowe, an' you're
always angry when you're wet.
Coulda made the grade. Woulda been
good. Good for all'v us! But
you...you don't know your place.

MARLOWE

What place is that, Rocky?

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Geez-Louise! That's gonna leave
one hell'va stain on the rug!

DISTRICT ATTORNEY BURON FITTS, 48, tall gaunt, large beak-
like nose and intense eyes, stands in the doorway, polishing
an ebony walkingstick topped by a brass eagle.

WASHINGTON

District Attorney Fitts. Since
when's your office interested in a
South Central stabbing?

FITTS

One jig killin' another's your
business. As long as you keep it
in your own neighborhood.

Digs the brass beak tip into the door frame, scratches off a
zigzag of black paint.

FITTS (CONT'D)

I'm here to pick up a witness.

MARLOWE

Whatever it is, didn't see it. If
I did, you'd be the last one I'd
tell.

Fitts points his stick at Marlowe.

FITTS

Still a smart mouth, Marlowe. You
seem to forget I can rip up that
precious detective license of yours
anytime I want.

Marlowe backs away.

FITTS (CONT'D)
Tell me, are you still runnin'
errands for that weasel, Eddie
Mannix at MGM?

MARLOWE
I handle security matters calling
for discretion.

FITTS
Mannix wouldn't know discretion if
it bit him on the ass.

Marlowe sits down behind his desk, puts up his feet.

MARLOWE
As you'd know, discretion is a
relative thing.

His feet are swept off the desk by the stick.

FITTS
You disrespectful spade!

Digs the brass tip into Marlowe's chest.

FITTS (CONT'D)
How dare you question the conduct
of my Office? What would your kind
know about what it takes to run
this City?!

A hand grabs the walkingstick, large black hand.

WASHINGTON
Must be mighty important...sir, to
bring someone like you this far
south'v Wilshire.

Washington releases the stick. Fitts plunks it on the floor.

FITTS
We're reopening the Paul Bern
suicide.

MARLOWE
That old turkey? Case is colder'n
he is.

FITTS
The Widow's being blackmailed.

MARLOWE

Jean Harlow. So she's some movie star. Why should I give a damn?

Fitts leans over the desk at him.

FITTS

The witness is someone you know.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Upsey-daisy! Whoa, whoa, whoa!

INT. - MARLOWE'S WAITING ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Two uniformed cops strain to lift Freddy's body on a stretcher. Marlowe appears in the doorway. Freddy's right arm swings loose.

MARLOWE

Stop!

Marlowe grabs Freddy's hand, holds it for a moment. Then he places it across Freddy's chest, watches the body being carried away.

INT. - DOWNSTAIRS BAR AT MARLOWE'S OFFICE BUILDING -- EVENING

Marlowe approaches Smiley behind the bar.

SMILEY

Screws're lookin' for Velma.

MARLOWE

I'm on it.

Looks over at the IKE GUMP, 70, heavy-set African-American, still face down on a corner table.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

How long's Ike been here?

SMILEY

Hasn't moved since noon. Thinkin'a seein' if he's still breathing.

MARLOWE

Get Cal to develop this for me.

Hands Smiley a spool of six-16 film.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
 An' my friend's sleepin' it off.
 Keep an eye on him.

SMILEY
 Do I look like a babysitter?!

Marlowe puts on his hat and exits.

SMILEY (CONT'D)
 (Yells after him)
 Know it's your fault, don't you?!

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- DOWNTOWN L.A. STREET -- NIGHT

Marlowe drives, scanning a chaotic mix of neon lights.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
 It was my fault, and all I could do
 was try'n make somebody pay for the
 bad things people do to each other.
 Hoped those pictures'd show who
 that was. Told myself Freddy'd
 want it that way. Truth was, I'd
 never thought about what Freddy
 wanted.

Marlowe comes to a long line of rundown trucks and cars at a
 police blockade, suitcases and furniture strapped to them.

Driving past, Marlowe focuses on two ragged, sad-eyed kids
 sitting on the curb as cops argue with their parents,
 pointing them back to the City Limits.

INT. - L.A. TIMES BUILDING LOBBY -- FRONT STEPS -- NIGHT

Marlowe walks up the steps past a bum, asleep under a cover
 of newspapers. Uniformed cop appears, billy club drawn.

POLICEMAN
 Up you go!

Bum screams as the club slams down on his knees. Another cop
 runs up, joins in the beating.

INT. - UPSTAIRS L.A. TIMES BULLPEN OFFICE -- NIGHT

Bullpen is dark and empty, except for a reporter in the
 corner, desk lit by a single desk lamp. J.C. MORAN, early
 50's, unkempt workingman's scholar, stands looking out the
 window, sipping from a whiskey bottle. Marlowe joins him.

MORAN

Hard time to be on the street.

MARLOWE

Hard time to be anywhere.

Marlowe takes the bottle, takes a sip.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

Read your piece, Moran, on that
shantytown they cleared on Temple.

Moran sits down at a desk. Marlowe returns the bottle.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

Dustbowl folks. Two, three hundred
of 'em. Escorted to the City
Limits by the Mayor's Boys in Blue.

Moran pours whiskey into a cup, hands it to Marlowe.

MORAN

Your former Brothers, lest you
forget. Trucks loaded with
whatever they could take off their
farms. Women, children, old
people, men who'd do anything to
feed their families. All with
nowhere to go.

Moran pours himself a cup.

MARLOWE

Articles like that can't be making
you popular at City Hall.

MORAN

The Mayor can kiss my Irish ass if
he thinks I'm gonna retract.

MARLOWE

Haven't changed. Still the guy who
knows everything, 'n never happy
'til you're pissin' everybody off.

Moran holds up his cup.

MORAN

To the Brotherhood of Pissin'
Everybody Off.

They drink.

MARLOWE

An' still drinking the cheap stuff.
Don't you know this'll kill you?

MORAN

We all die sometime, Marlowe. Come
to warn me of my imminent demise?

MARLOWE

Tell me about the Arroyo Seco.

MORAN

Nasty, craggy little river gulch,
that. Where'd you hear 'bout it?

MARLOWE

From a dead man.

MORAN

Why doesn't that surprise me?

MARLOWE

Have to go tell his sister, then
get the lowlife who killed him.

Marlowe downs the rest of the cup.

MORAN

Canyon runs north from China Town
through the back hills to Pasadena.
Barren as all get-out, dryer'n a
witch's tit. Orange grove country,
used to be. Remains of those
orchards still brushin' the banks
of the riverbed like a gathering of
old ghosts.

MARLOWE

Sounds like a whole lotta nothin'.

MORAN

Miles 'n miles of it, which is
interesting.

MARLOWE

Why's that so interesting?

MORAN

I just wrote about it.

He slaps the next edition on his desk, headline: "Police
Roust Homeless Camp in Arroyo Seco River Basin."

EXT. - MGM STUDIO GATES -- NIGHT

Inside the gate, Eighteenth Century Infantrymen thread their way through a line of grips rolling lights to a night shoot.

Guard waves Marlowe's car through the gate.

INT. - SOUNDSTAGE -- NIGHT

Marlowe makes his way through the backstage towards a fancy garden party set. Velma stands on the sidelines, tray in hand, dressed as a maid, waiting for her cue. All eyes are on the actor and actress center stage.

ACTRESS

Oh, Byron, what ever shall I do
without you?!

Marlowe taps Velma on the shoulder. She shakes him off, as the actress launches into a stifled series of sobs.

DIRECTOR

Cut, cut, cut!!

Marlowe whispers to Velma.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Myrna, honey, sounds like you're
strangling a cat. Give me
something!

Velma bursts into tears, runs from the set. Director turns.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Now that's what I'm talking about!

INT. - SOUNDSTAGE DRESSING ROOM HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Half-open doors provide glimpses into a series of dressing rooms. DAY PLAYER ACTRESSES turn from their mirrors to watch Marlowe catch Velma.

VELMA

Don't touch me!

She pushes him away and runs down a staircase.

INT. - SOUNDSTAGE BASEMENT -- NIGHT

Marlowe enters a dank, barren cement room full of African American ACTORS in various states of undress. Both sexes, all getting into costume and make up.

Marlowe goes to the only private booth in the room, pulls back the curtain. A shoe flies out, hits him. He dodges another shoe.

VELMA

He looked up to you, Goddamn it!
Look where it got him!

Comes at Marlowe, fists flailing on his chest.

MARLOWE

I'm gonna get the guy who did this!
Won't rest 'til I make 'em pay!

VELMA

Oh, Freddy...

Marlowe pulls Velma to him, lets her cry.

VELMA (CONT'D)

You son-of-a bitch. Take me home.

MARLOWE

Don't think so. District
Attorney's looking for you.
Thinks you have something still
stuck in your craw about Paul Bern.

She pushes away from him.

VELMA

I said all I had to say, four years
ago.

MARLOWE

Not what the widow says. Term,
blackmail was bandied about.

VELMA

Jean Harlow? She'd never say that!
I just asked her for what's mine.

MARLOWE

Sometimes it's how you ask.

VELMA

This's all so ridiculous! I was
going to tell you about it.

(MORE)

VELMA (CONT'D)

The City invalidated the deed to the house Paul gave me. Some legal mumbo-jumbo saying the land can't be owned by a person of color.

MARLOWE

Term's Restrictive Covenant. Paul dead, title goes back to the wife.

VELMA

But she doesn't want the house! She told me, and now they won't let me see her again. I'm taking every little job on the Lot, trying to get near her.

MARLOWE

Thought you'd rattle the cage.

VELMA

I never made trouble! Ask her. She's not like everybody says.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

I need three maids on stage.

SECOND A.D. in the doorway, waves a clipboard at them.

SECOND A.D.

You, you...and you.

He points to Velma.

VELMA

(to Marlowe)

Ask Miss Harlow to help me. You can get to her. The house has land along the Arroyo Seco Canyon.

SECOND A.D.

Come on, everyone.

VELMA

It's so pretty. Freddy would want to be buried there. Please...

SECOND A.D.

Chop, chop.

Marlowe steps aside. Velma follows the A.D. to the set.

MARLOWE V.O.

There it was again. Question'v what Freddy would want...

EXT. - SERVICE STREETS OUTSIDE THE SOUNDSTAGE -- NIGHT

Marlowe pushes through a line of greensmen carrying shrubs, gets tangled in a leash.

MARLOWE V.O.
 Women wind the truth around you,
 with enough guilt to make it hurt.

Chimp screams as it's yanked away.

MARLOWE V.O. (CONT'D)
 An' we fall for it every time we
 don't think with our heads.

Bannered across a soundstage wall above is a sultry Close Up of Jean Harlow, jagged lettering across the bottom: RECKLESS.

EXT. - MGM'S FRONT PLAZA -- NIGHT/CONTINUOUS

Marlowe surveys the large open concourse.

MARLOWE V.O.
 Talkin' to a movie star wouldn't
 help Freddy, but deed to a house on
 the Arroyo Seco might help explain
 what got him killed. Thing to do
 now, was look for somebody with a
 whole lot more to answer for.

Stark white edifice in front of him is the Thalberg Building. Marlowe smiles.

INT. - THALBERG BUILDING HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Marlowe walks up to an office with a sign: Edward Mannix, Vice President, Studio Security. Door is flanked by two massive men in suits.

SUIT #1
 Got an appointment, spade?

MARLOWE
 Don't need one.

SUIT #1 and SUIT #2 block Marlowe.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
 Can't you guys find a better way to
 make a living?

SUIT #1
Look who's talking. Guy who bird
dogs cheating husbands.

MARLOWE
Don't do divorce work.

SUIT #1
Yeah, not unless it's really slow.

Suits #1 and #2 push Marlowe back. He dusts himself off,
then charges them.

INT. - EDDIE MANNIX'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Marlowe and the Suits burst into the office. EDDIE MANNIX,
short, vicious-looking plug of a man is leaning back in his
desk chair.

MANNIX
Don't you guys ever knock?!

Sound of a zipper. A SECRETARY emerges from behind the desk.

SUIT #1
Sorry, boss.

Secretary stands up, smoothing back her hair.

SECRETARY
Mr. Mannix, will there be anything
else?

MANNIX
Dolores, why don't you go home?

Secretary exits. Mannix motions for the Suits to stand down.

MANNIX (CONT'D)
Marlowe, heard you were on the Lot.
Who're you workin' for?

MARLOWE
You know me. I work for myself.

MANNIX
An' I'm King'a England. Spill,
Marlowe.

MARLOWE
This is personal.

MANNIX

That would be Velma Leroy. Popular girl all of a sudden.

Marlowe shrugs.

MANNIX (CONT'D)

Nothin' but trouble since she set foot on the Lot. You should know. Didn't you get stuck givin' her the heave-ho when Paul Bern got engaged?

Rolls his eyes.

MANNIX (CONT'D)

Girl's got a temper.

MARLOWE

She was taken care of.

MANNIX

Bern gave her a house. Big kiss off for a girl who goes by the hour.

MARLOWE

She's an actress.

Mannix snorts.

MANNIX

Know the difference 'tween a star 'n a bit player? The class of their johns.

Lights a cigar.

MANNIX (CONT'D)

Always thought Bern was a fairy. Suddenly, there he was, Mr. Hollywood Producer, juggling broads! Could'a knocked me down with a feather when he got engaged to our reigning Sex Goddess.

Throws a B&W studio photo of Jean Harlow on his desk.

MANNIX (CONT'D)

Girl half his age. An', Bern, he had certain...deficiencies.

Mannix wiggles his finger.

MANNIX (CONT'D)

No bigger'n my pinkie, know what I mean? Only way he gets off is beating the bride black'n blue on their wedding night. Fine can'a worms that was. Apologized in a note, right before he shot himself in the face.

MARLOWE

Musta cost to keep it outta the papers.

Mannix shakes his head.

MANNIX

You don't wanna know. This Harlow broad's been runnin' wild ever since. Went down to those hoochie nightclubs of yours on Central Avenue two days ago. Hasn't come back. Girl's mama's goin' crazy. Got half my guys out lookin' for her.

MARLOWE

Mannix, your guys couldn't find their own dicks with a flashlight on Central.

Mannix laughs.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

What's it worth if I go find her for you?

MANNIX

Couple'v C notes, 'n my undying gratitude.

MARLOWE

I'll get on it. First thing tomorrow.

Mannix pushes the photo across the desk at Marlowe.

MANNIX

She's got a picture startin'. Make it tonight.

MARLOWE

Can't.

MANNIX

Wha'da'ya mean can't?

MARLOWE

Got a guy at my office. Needta get him home or his wife'll kill me.

Mannix smiles.

MANNIX

Better her than me.

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- DRIVING DOWN CENTRAL AVENUE -- NIGHT

Marlowe drives, surveying throngs of nightclub patrons, black and white, all dressed for a good time. Street corner bands blend competing styles of jazz. Neighborhood merchants sell food from carts, while soft shoe dancers tap for pennies on the sidewalks.

MARLOWE (V.O.)

Central Avenue Strip in all its glory. Only place in town where it didn't matter what color you were. Dozens of jazz clubs, restaurants and bars, where someone like MGM's most misunderstood star might wanna get lost. Truth was, I barely knew where to start.

EXT. - CENTRAL AVENUE -- NIGHT

Large neon sign hangs over Club Alabam, arrow pointing down at the door. Words on the sign read: **This is the place.**

INT. - CLUB ALABAM -- NIGHT

DUKE ELLINGTON leads an eighteen piece jazz band tearing the roof off the joint. People are dancing everywhere, even on the bar. The music is so loud, Marlowe can barely make himself heard as he shows Harlow's photo to the bartender.

MARLOWE

Have you seen her in here tonight?

BARTENDER keeps making drinks as he shakes his head.

INT. - THE MEMO CLUB -- NIGHT

Another lively jazz club. Marlowe talks to BARTENDER #2, who also shakes his head.

INT. - THE DOWNBEAT CLUB -- NIGHT

A funkier club, dark, smoky precursor to the beatnik joints. BARTENDER #3 looks at Harlow's photo and shrugs.

INT. - THE TURBAN ROOM -- NIGHT

A black band in bright-colored zoot suits plays high energy swing jazz. BARTENDER #4 waves off Marlowe, then beckons him back. Points Marlowe to the rear of the club.

INT. - DRESSING ROOM AT THE TURBAN CLUB -- NIGHT

Dozen zoot suited black musicians drink, smoke reefer while feeling up the ladies. Door opens. A clamor of cocking and clicking. Shotguns come out of music cases, shiny handguns and straight razors. Everyone in the room pulls a weapon. Even the ladies.

Moment of silence, as Marlowe stands in the doorway.

BIG BOOMING MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Marlowe! You son-of-a-bitch!

Man laughs. Room stands down. Marlowe winds his way through the smoke, to a man seated in back.

MARLOWE
You dirty, old junkyard dog!

Marlowe slaps palms with POP SANDERS, black, bald, 60ish, smoking a cigar, holding court from a huge winged-back chair.

POP SANDERS
Votin' for me?

MARLOWE
Last I looked, you were the only
one on the ballot.

Sanders stands up, pins a button on Marlowe's jacket: Pop Sanders for City Council.

POP SANDERS
Still nice to have a turn out.

MARLOWE
So, Pops, how's business?

POP SANDERS
Not what it used to be.

Sinks back into his chair.

POP SANDERS (CONT'D)
Time was you could make a good
living if you had what people want.
Now everybody's in your pockets,
police, even the politicians.

MARLOWE
That why you got into politics?

POP SANDERS
It was the natural progression.

Puffs on his cigar.

POP SANDERS (CONT'D)
Heard you had a row with Lucien
Wagner.

MARLOWE
Don't like pimps. No offense.

POP SANDERS
None taken.

MARLOWE
Hate dirty cops even more.

POP SANDERS
Wagner's small time, but those
little guys are like rattlesnakes.
Cut off the head, it can still bite
you. Why d'you need that kinda
trouble?

MARLOWE
Have business with him.

POP SANDERS
Got you fired from the Department.

MARLOWE
New business.

POP SANDERS
Better be worth it. Wagner's
connected.

(MORE)

POP SANDERS (CONT'D)
Marlowe, you're a man of principle.
Don't let those principles get you
killed.

MARLOWE
I try not to.

They lock hands.

POP SANDERS
So what fleeting wind blows you in
my direction?

MARLOWE
Lookin' for her.

He shows Sanders Harlow's picture.

POP SANDERS
You have good taste, my man.

MARLOWE
Can't afford this kind of taste.
But I work for people who can.

POP SANDERS
Those people might wanna check out
the jam session over at the Dunbar.

EXT. - DUNBAR HOTEL -- NIGHT

The six-story brick building rises over Central Avenue, as if it knows its unique and ambitious importance. Marlowe looks up at the neon hotel sign as he walks towards the front door, music wafting out of windows on upper floors.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
The Central Avenue Dunbar. Home-
away-from home for entertainers not
welcome elsewhere. In 1937, no
person of Color could stay at any
other fancy Los Angeles hotel.

Hand grabs Marlowe by the collar, yanks him into the shadows outside a service doorway. Feel of metal at his throat is a six inch pearl-handled switchblade.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Only one person I know who'd carry
a candy-assed blade like that.

Glint of the gold tooth, Lucien Wagner emerges from the shadows. Presses the blade to Marlowe's Adam's Apple.

WAGNER

Want me to show you how it works?

MARLOWE

I'm a bleeder. Might mess up your pinstripes.

WAGNER

Cut the crap, Marlowe, 'n cough up the film.

MARLOWE

Wagner, if I knew what you were talkin' about, I'd probably still tell ya to go screw yourself.

WAGNER

From the retard's camera.

MARLOWE

Name was Freddy. You don' give a damn who killed him. What d'you really want?

The Hotel Doorman walks by. Doesn't see them in the doorway. Wagner makes a small cut on Marlowe's neck.

WAGNER

Now look what you made me do.

MARLOWE

Been on my ass since the day we met, Wagner. Wanna a piece'v me?

Marlowe pivots and pokes at him. Wagner hesitates.

WAGNER

This's still about getting canned from the Department.

Marlowe pokes him again.

MARLOWE

May'v conned your way to a spot in the D.A.'s office. When I knew you, you were a P.D. rookie. Couldn't stand it I was a grade ahead'v you. Every time I made an arrest, could see you just all boilin' up inside.

Wagner shakes his head.

WAGNER

None'a you niggers shoulda been on
the Force in the first place.

MARLOWE

Rot in hell, Wagner!

Wagner waves the knife in Marlowe's face.

WAGNER

Something tells me I'll be seeing
you there, Marlowe.

Doorman walks by again, darkening the doorway. Wagner fades
into the shadows.

Marlowe turns to see the service door closing.

DOORMAN

What's going on here?

Marlowe tries the door. It's locked.

INT. - DUNBAR HOTEL HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Elevator doors open. Marlowe steps out, holding a
handkerchief to the cut on his neck.

Music is louder now. He smiles, follows jazz riffs down the
hall to an open door.

INT. - DUNBAR HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Marlowe enters a room, twenty black JAZZ MUSICIANS playing
their hearts out. Trumpet player offers him a reefer.
Marlowe shakes his head, shows him Harlow's photo. Trumpet
player smiles, points Marlowe to the bathroom.

INT. - DUNBAR HOTEL BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Marlowe opens the door a crack. Inside, a MAN is on the
floor in his underwear, late 20's, African American, a woman
under him. He's slapping her, hard and repeatedly.

MAN

Come on, come on!

Marlowe yanks up the man by his undershirt, flings him into
the tub. Man flails as Marlowe pummels him.

Smash! Marlowe gets it on the head with a bottle. Sinking to the floor, he looks up at JEAN HARLOW, 26, unkempt after three days of debauchery, recognizable only by her trademark platinum blonde hair.

She threatens Marlowe with the broken bottle.

MAN (CONT'D)

She's back. You deal with her.

The man rolls out of the tub, limps from the room. Slams the door behind him.

Burnt spoon, bloody syringe on the sink...cord tied around Harlow's arm and the mark on it. Marlowe stands up.

Harlow launches herself at him. Sidestepping her, he grabs the broken bottle. Pulls her down onto the floor, holds her until she stops struggling.

HARLOW

Lemme go!

MARLOWE

Not 'til I know you're not gonna hurt me. Or yourself.

HARLOW

What's it to you?

She tries to scratch him. He grabs her tighter.

MARLOWE

Miss Harlow, don't make me hurt you!

HARLOW

I know you. You're one'a them!

MARLOWE

People're worried about you.

HARLOW

They can all go to hell!

MARLOWE

You have a film starting tomorrow.

HARLOW

Haven't you heard? I'm not doin' that film. I'm gonna stay right here. Have some fun for once.

MARLOWE
This kinda fun'll kill you.

HARLOW
It's my life! I'm tired of them
all tryin' to take a piece'v it.

She tries to push him away. Marlowe yanks her to her feet,
flings her over his shoulder.

INT. - DUNBAR HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Musicians don't miss a beat as Marlowe carries Harlow through
the room, kicking and screaming.

INT. - DUNBAR HOTEL LOBBY -- NIGHT

Red velvet upholstery, mahogany paneling, sweeping staircase.
The Dunbar Lobby was determined to be as sumptuous as any
white hotel.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
There're some women who're lost 'n
misunderstood. Others just make
you wanna smack the hell out'v 'em.

Patrons pay little attention as Marlowe carries Harlow over
his shoulder through the lobby.

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- NIGHT

Marlowe throws Harlow into his back seat.

HARLOW
This is kidnapping, you big ape!

Marlowe gets into the car behind the wheel.

HARLOW (CONT'D)
Gonna have you arrested!

MARLOWE
Won't be the first time.

He starts the car, pulls onto Central Avenue. Harlow
shrieks, beats her fists on the seat. Marlowe ignores her.

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- NIGHT

Marlowe heads west, picks up Western Avenue just above Washington Blvd. Harlow leans over the seat.

HARLOW
Why do I have to ride in the back?

MARLOWE
You won't like the answer to that question.

HARLOW
I'm coming over.

He pushes her back.

MARLOWE
No, you're not.

Marlowe fights to control the car. Harlow scrambles over the seat, plants herself next to him.

Sound of a siren. He pulls the car over.

MARLOWE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
1937, three things you didn't wanna do. Bet against the Yankees, spit north'v Wilshire. Or be seen with a white woman in your car.

TRAFFIC COP #1, mid-30's, white, squirrely-looking, raps on Marlowe's window, motions for him to get out of the car. Marlowe complies.

EXT. - WESTERN AVENUE -- NIGHT

Traffic Cop #1 walks Marlowe around the car, leans Marlowe over, hands flat against the trunk. TRAFFIC COP #2, 40ish, white, a large man, peers through the passenger window. Harlow rolls down the window.

TRAFFIC COP #2
Can you get outta the car, Miss?

HARLOW
What's the problem?

TRAFFIC COP #2
Just get out of the car.

HARLOW
Well, of all the...! Do you know
who I am?

Strikes her trademark side pose.

HARLOW (CONT'D)
Jean Harlow! I'm a movie star, you
stupid flat foot.

Traffic Cop #2 yanks open the door.

TRAFFIC COP #2
You don't look anything like her.
Now get outta the car.

Marlowe watches Traffic Cop #2 drag Harlow from the car.

Traffic Cop #1 pushes Marlowe face-down onto the trunk.

TRAFFIC COP #1
Looks like a live wire, that one!
What're ya doin' with her, boy?

Drags his nightstick across the car trunk.

TRAFFIC COP #1 (CONT'D)
Thought you'd grab yourself some
powdered sugar? Sound about right,
boy? What's that?! Speak up, boy.

He nudges Marlowe with the nightstick.

MARLOWE
I'm not a boy.

Traffic Cop #1 swats Marlowe on both sides of the head.

TRAFFIC COP #1
What'd you say, boy?

MARLOWE
Go to hell.

Traffic Cop #1 pushes Marlowe's face into the car trunk.

Siren is heard as another car pulls up. Marlowe tries to
turn his head and - wham! -- he gets it with the night stick.

WAGNER (O.S.)
What've we got here?

TRAFFIC COP #1
Just a traffic stop.

WAGNER (O.S.)
What's that, officer?!

Marlowe turns his head on the car hood to see Chief Detective Lucien Wagner, nose-to-nose with the cop.

TRAFFIC COP #1
Traffic stop, sir.

WAGNER
Is this how you do a traffic stop?

Cop steps aside. Wagner smiles down at Marlowe.

WAGNER (CONT'D)
This, Officer, is how you do a traffic stop.

He rams Marlowe's face into the car trunk.

EXT. -- WESTERN AVENUE -- NIGHT

Marlowe sits on the ground against his car. Cops have gone. Harlow tries to dab the cut on his forehead with a handkerchief.

Marlowe stands up, braces himself against the car.

HARLOW
Should'a gotten their badge numbers. Louie B.'d bust those flatfoots right outta the force!

MARLOWE
Before or after he goes to hell?

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- NIGHT

Marlowe drives towards Beverly Hills. Harlow pulls up her skirt in the back seat, checks her ruined nylons.

HARLOW
Will you look at that?

Marlowe tries not to, as he stops at a light. Pair of headlights comes up behind. A big tan Packard.

He peels away from the stoplight, makes a U-turn. Watches in the mirror as the Packard sits at the light.

Marlowe turns onto a side street. Harlow leans over the front seat.

HARLOW (CONT'D)
Got any booze?

MARLOWE
Booze?

HARLOW
Hooch. I wanna drink, mister. Or
I'm gonna jump outta this here car.

INT. - THE NITE KAP -- NIGHT

Rundown, out-of-the-way bar. Marlowe and Harlow enter. The few bar patrons bar are all black. BARTENDER/OWNER, 50ish, African American, frowns at Marlowe and Harlow.

MARLOWE
Hey, Moe.

BARTENDER/OWNER
Don' want your kinda trouble in
here, Marlowe.

MARLOWE
This isn't trouble.

Harlow is bedraggled and antsy-looking.

BARTENDER/OWNER
Looks like trouble t'me.

MARLOWE
One drink, we're gone.

BARTENDER/OWNER
I'm counting.

Marlowe hustles Harlow into a booth, and heads for the rear hallway.

HARLOW
Hey, buddy, where's my drink?!

INT. - BACK HALLWAY OF THE NITE KAP -- NIGHT

Marlowe's on the pay phone.

MARLOWE
Smiley, 'bout that guy in my
office... Out? Out on Central
Avenue all by himself?!

Smiley's voice rises out of the receiver at him.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Took money from the til...? No,
I'm good for it. An' a bottle?
Figures... No, I'll look for 'im
when I can.

Hangs up.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
God takes care of drunkards 'n
fools.

INT. - THE NITE KAP -- NIGHT

Marlowe slides into the booth across from Harlow. She has her drink. Bartender/Owner slaps a shot down for Marlowe. Harlow finishes her drink, then helps herself to his.

She downs the shot, holds up the glass.

HARLOW
Hey, barkeep!

Bartender/Owner frowns.

MARLOWE
Maybe you should slow down.

HARLOW
An' maybe you should mind your own
business!

Takes the glass and walks away. She sits down at an old piano, dabbling with the keys. Marlowe walks up to her.

HARLOW (CONT'D)
I remember you. Eddie Mannix's own
personal Steppin Fetchit.

MARLOWE
I'm not here for Eddie.

HARLOW
We're all here for Eddie. We just
don't know it.

MARLOWE
Tell ya a secret. I don't work for
Eddie. Just let 'im think I do.

HARLOW
Yeah, you're the only person who
can't be bought.

MARLOWE
Just careful 'bout what I sell.

HARLOW
Everybody has their price.

MARLOWE
What's the price of the house your
husband gave away?

Harlow slams her fingers down on the piano keys and gets up.

EXT. - THE NITE KAP -- NIGHT

Marlowe follows Harlow out of the bar.

HARLOW
What do you want from me!!!

She wraps her arms around herself, slides down into a seated
position on the sidewalk against the wall.

MARLOWE
What Paul wanted. For Velma to
have the house.

HARLOW
Tell her I'm sorry.

MARLOWE
Tell her yourself.

HARLOW
My step-father took the deed! I
have no control of anything! You
have no idea what my life is like!

She begins to sob. Marlowe hands her his handkerchief.

Harlow wipes her eyes and blows her nose. Offers the
handkerchief back to him.

MARLOWE
Keep it.

She sees stitched-in initials: SBM.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Samuel B. Marlowe, at your service.

HARLOW
You work for Eddie Mannix and Louie
B. Mayer. They protect the studio.

Looks up at him, tears in her eyes.

HARLOW (CONT'D)
I just wanna know...when the hell's
anyone gonna protect me?

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- NIGHT

Harlow lays in back looking up at Marlowe in the mirror as he drives, three days of revelry catching up with her.

HARLOW
You look tough but you have kind
eyes. Anybody ever tell ya, you're
nothin' but a great big
marshmallow?

She drifts off to sleep.

Marlowe keeps his eyes on the mirror. No sign of the
Packard.

EXT. - HARLOW'S BEVERLY GLEN MANSION -- NIGHT

Harlow sleeps as Marlowe lifts her from his car and carries
her up the walkway. The house is big, white, oppressively
opulent. At the porch is a small statue -- black jockey
holding a lantern.

MARLOWE
(to the figurine)
Wonder if you feel as out of place
here as I do.

He rings the doorbell. BUTLER in his bathrobe answers.

INT. - HARLOW'S MANSION FOYER -- NIGHT

MAMA JEAN comes down the spiral staircase in her dressing
gown, mid-40's, blonde and flashy (older, more worn version
of her daughter).

MAMA JEAN
You must be Mr. Marlowe.

MARLOWE
Got a delivery for you.

MAMA JEAN

I suppose you can explain what
Eddie Mannix was thinking, sending
someone like you to do this job.

MARLOWE

I can. Doesn't mean I will.

MAMA JEAN

I don't like your manners.

MARLOWE

Don't like 'em much either.

He shrugs, swinging around with Harlow in his arms.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

Just the same, ma'am, should
probably tell me where you want
her. Could drop her right here, if
you want.

INT. - HARLOW'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Mama Jean leads Marlowe into a huge, white bedroom. He lays
Harlow on a ruffled satin-covered bed.

MARLOWE

Another big white room. Somebody
doesn't like a lotta contrast.

MAMA JEAN

(to the housekeeper)
Ella, please clean her up.

Mama Jean beckons Marlowe from the room as the HOUSEKEEPER
undresses Harlow.

INT. - HARLOW'S MANSION FOYER -- NIGHT

Mama Jean leads Marlowe down the stairs. Tiny white dog runs
after them.

MAMA JEAN

So you call yourself a private
investigator.

MARLOWE

On my better days.

Mama Jean picks up the dog. It yaps and growls at Marlowe.

MAMA JEAN
You don't like me, do you?

Marlowe doesn't answer.

MAMA JEAN (CONT'D)
You underestimate me, Mr. Marlowe.

MARLOWE
No, I'm sure you could squash me
like a bug. Or do you have people
who do that for you?

MAMA JEAN
You mustn't ever mention this
incident. Some very bad people
would be upset if you did anything
to damage my daughter's career.

MARLOWE
Ma'am, I work for those bad people.
An' your daughter seems plenty
damaged to me.

Maid emerges from a side room.

MAID
Phone call, Mrs. Bello. Benjamin
Siegel.

MARLOWE
Friends call him Bugsy.

Mama Jean gives him an icy stare, picks up a phone on a side
table in the foyer.

MAMA JEAN
(on the phone)
Yes, thank you, but she's home.

MARLOWE
(more to himself)
Lady, you know a few more bad
people than I would'a guessed.

Mama Jean turns her back on Marlowe. He gets the hint and
wanders into the next room.

INT. - HARLOW MANSION LIVINGROOM -- NIGHT

A white two-story room with huge crystal chandelier and grand
piano. Over the fireplace is an enormous oil painting of
Harlow in a white sequined gown.

Mama Jean comes up behind Marlowe, dog still in her arms.

MAMA JEAN

What do you know about the movie business, Mr. Marlowe?

MARLOWE

As little as possible.

MAMA JEAN

It's my job to shield my daughter. Sometimes it's more than I can do on my own. I ask friends for assistance. Sometimes I buy help. Are you in that business, Mr. Marlowe?

MARLOWE

Depends on the kind of help.

MAMA JEAN

Do you know my husband?

MARLOWE

I know of your husband.

MAMA JEAN

He calls himself my daughter's manager so he can hang around the studio chasing actresses. That's when he's not out selling shares in some fake Mexican gold mine. I'm divorcing him, but he has something...something I need.

MARLOWE

What is it?

MAMA JEAN

It doesn't matter.

MARLOWE

Rule #22 in the Detective Rule Book: When a client says it doesn't matter, it usually matters a hell'v a lot.

MAMA JEAN

My husband took personal papers, including a certain property deed. They belonged to my daughter's dead husband. I need these documents.

Shifting the dog in her arms, Mama Jean takes a gift-wrapped package from an armoire.

MAMA JEAN (CONT'D)
Take this to my husband. Bring back the white alabaster box he keeps with him.

MARLOWE
How will I know I have the right box?

MAMA JEAN
He won't want to give it to you.

MARLOWE
Should have your pal, Bugsy, help you.

MAMA JEAN
Benjamin might end up killing Marino. That wouldn't break my heart, but I can't have my daughter's career tainted by another scandal. I'll pay you five hundred dollars.

MARLOWE
Five hundred's a lotta money. Must be something wrong with this picture.

MAMA JEAN
It has to be done tonight.

MARLOWE
There it is.

The dog yipes in Mama Jean's arms. She drops it, then kneels trying to coax it back. Dog runs off.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Little like children.

MAMA JEAN
Jean starts rehearsals tomorrow with Clark Gable. Marino threatens to go to the set.

Holds the package out to him.

MAMA JEAN (CONT'D)
Please, Mr. Marlowe, for my daughter's sake...

INT. - HARLOW'S MANSION FOYER -- NIGHT

Marlowe picks up the telephone.

MARLOWE (V.O.)

Every time a woman appeals to my better nature, I end up on the short end of things. Why's it, that never stops me from doing it again?

Dials.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

(on the phone)

Smiley...I know, I know. Any sign of Chandler...? Izzy's? No, I gotta do one more thing. Tell Izzy to keep him there... I don't care, sit on him, lock him in the cooler, 's long as he's in one piece.

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- NIGHT

Marlowe drives towards Hollywood.

MARLOWE V.O.

Cases have a funny way 'v turning into other cases. Wanted to get Freddy's killer, but I had to find out why he was killed. Needed to know if it was my fault...

The Packard is on him. Another car comes up behind the Packard, illuminating the driver, a man with a broad-brimmed Panama hat. His features are in shadow.

Marlowe slows down. So does the Packard. Marlowe makes a couple turns. The Packard hangs back, but stays with him.

EXT. - THE ROOSEVELT HOTEL -- NIGHT

Marlowe passes the hotel, and parks on a side street.

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- NIGHT

Adjusting the rear view mirror, Marlowe watches a pair of headlights backing up, into a parking space at the corner.

He roots around the glove compartment, comes up with a steel tire pressure gauge.

INT. - THE PACKARD -- NIGHT

Driver is Lucien Wagner. Marlowe gets into the back seat, digs the tire gauge into the back of Wagner's neck.

MARLOWE
You're one hell'v a lousy tail.
Now get your hands up!

Wagner raises his hands.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
You aren't stupid enough to think
I'd have Freddy's photos on me.
How 'bout I drill you, so I don't
have to guess what you really want?

WAGNER
Velma Leroy! Fitts wants her.

MARLOWE
Only workin' girl on the Avenue who
won't give you time'v day. Mess
her up, keep the others in line,
you scum-sucking son-v-a-bitch.

He shoves the gauge into Wagner's skull.

WAGNER
Screw you! What gives the likes of
you any right to judge me?

MARLOWE
You're crooked as a snake, dirty as
a dog with fleas!

Pushes Wagner's face into the steering wheel.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
An' maybe it's 'cuz I just don't
like you!!

WAGNER
You got a big mouth, Marlowe.
Somebody's gonna close it for you.

Marlowe whacks him on the head with the tire gauge.

MARLOWE
'Til they do, Wagner, stay the hell
outta my way!

EXT. - PACKARD -- NIGHT

Marlowe slams the door. Wagner peels rubber pulling away.

EXT. - BACK OF THE ROOSEVELT HOTEL -- NIGHT

Marlowe approaches two old, black BELLHOPS, playing craps on the service door steps.

MARLOWE
Lookin' for a fellow. Italian,
late-forties, says he's a movie
producer. Name's Bello. Probably
staying under another name. Likes
the ladies.

Bellhops smile at each other

OLD BELLHOP
Who's askin'?

Marlowe produces a dollar bill.

MARLOWE
Mr. Washington.

Both old men grab for the bill. Marlowe pulls it back.

EXT. - BACK OF THE ROOSEVELT HOTEL -- NIGHT

One old bellhop returns with a page torn from the registry.

OLD BELLHOP
This is who you want.

Marlowe reaches for the sheet.

OLD BELLHOP (CONT'D)
You can have it...
(smiles a toothless grin)
If you introduce me to Mr. Lincoln.

INT. - ROOSEVELT HOTEL -- BACK SERVICE HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Marlowe grabs a bellhop jacket from a rack, puts it on.

INT. - ROOSEVELT HOTEL -- SERVICE ELEVATOR -- NIGHT

Marlowe gets onto the service elevator with a white WAITER carrying a tray. Waiter eyes Marlowe. Marlowe nods as the waiter gets off on a lower floor.

INT. - ROOSEVELT HOTEL HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Marlowe knocks on the door to Room #707. No answer.

MARLOWE
Room service.

MAN'S VOICE FROM BEHIND THE DOOR
Didn't order room service.

Door opens. MARINO BELLO, late 40's, fleshy, balding, in boxers. Behind him, RUBY, early 20's, a bad peroxide blonde, peers out from under the sheets.

Marlowe shows Bello the gift-wrapped box.

INT. - ROOSEVELT HOTEL -- BELLO'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Bello rips open the package. It's filled with paper strips.

BELLO
What the hell?

Marlowe pushes his way into the room.

BELLO (CONT'D)
She sent you, that lousy bitch!

Tries to back-hand Marlowe. Marlowe grabs Bello's arm, throws him down on the bed.

BELLO (CONT'D)
You think you're one'a Eddie
Mannix's toy soldiers, but you're
just some two-bit, South Central
Jungle Monkey. You stupid spade!

Marlowe twists Bello's arm. Ruby crawls to the corner of the bed.

MARLOWE
Shouldn't use that language in
front of a lady.

Pushes Bello face-down into the mattress.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

(to Ruby)

Might be a good time to go get dressed.

Ruby wraps a sheet around her, goes into the bathroom. Marlowe watches, his eyes crossing the dresser...and the white stone box on it. Large keepsake box, carved stone lion resting across the top.

Marlowe releases Bello and goes to the box. Bello reaches under the bed, pulls out a tiny .22 Caliber automatic. He points it at Marlowe.

BELLO

Only way my wife gets what's in that box is over my dead body.

MARLOWE

She has people who can arrange that.

BELLO

Her studio lackeys?! They're nuthin'! Hah! When I met that bitch, her precious Baby Jean was a tow-headed little brat. I made her what she is! A movie star!

Ruby peeks out of the bathroom, then closes the door.

BELLO (CONT'D)

My wife tries to cut me out, tell her I'll send her little angel to the hoosegow! Yes, drove into a ditch the night her hubby died. Drunk as a skunk she was. Came home to mama, blood all over her. Maybe 'cuz she bumped her head. Maybe not. D.A. opened a murder investigation.

MARLOWE

An' closed it as suicide.

BELLO

The Studio cleans up her messes.

Motions to the box with the gun.

BELLO (CONT'D)

Wanna see who our Baby Jean is?

Bello pulls out a folded sheet of paper.

BELLO (CONT'D)
Souvenir from Tijuana, month before
her dearly departed died.

Hospital records in Spanish, one word standing out: **ABORTO**

BELLO (CONT'D)
Stayed under her maiden name.
Harlean Carpenter. Told hubby she
was goin' down for the sun. Only
one thing that girl likes more'n
sun, 'n she married a guy who
wasn't up to it.

Points the gun at Marlowe.

BELLO (CONT'D)
Now down on your knees, spook.

MARLOWE
Or you're gonna blast me with that
pea shooter?

BELLO
I said get down!

Bello fires. Shot bounces off the alabaster box, embeds in
the bathroom door frame. Ruby peeks out again.

BELLO (CONT'D)
And you! Get out here!

Still wrapped in sheets, Ruby hesitates.

RUBY
In front of him?

Bello waves the gun at her.

BELLO
When did you get to be so shy?

Ruby comes out of the bathroom. With Bello distracted,
Marlowe grabs the gun. They struggle. Gun goes off again...

INT. - ROOSEVELT HOTEL -- BELLO'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Bello sits on the bed, still in his boxers, as Marlowe takes
the alabaster box from the dresser. Ruby, now dressed, holds
the gun on Bello.

BELLO

You no-talent, little whore! Think
you're an actress?! I'll make sure
you never work in this town!

Marlowe heads for the door.

MARLOWE

(to Ruby)

You can shoot him if you want to.

Ruby looks like she's considering it.

EXT. - DRIVEWAY OUTSIDE ROCKY WASHINGTON'S DUPLEX -- NIGHT

Sergeant Rocky Washington can be seen in an upstairs window
in his undershirt washing dishes. His wife, HAZEL, 38,
African American, five feet and three inches of spitfire,
paces in the background, talking at him.

Pebble bounces off the window. Then another. Washington
looks down at Marlowe in the driveway. Washington frowns.

WASHINGTON

Honey Mama. I'm gonna take out the
trash.

Comes down the outside stairs with the trash pail.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

Gonna be hell to pay, Marlowe, if
Hazel catches you here!

MARLOWE

Hazel usedta love me.

WASHINGTON

That was before I got reamed every
time I helped you outta a jam.

MARLOWE

When've you helped me?

WASHINGTON

I'm helpin' you now by not kicking
your sorry ass. What do you want?

MARLOWE

Why're they reopening the Paul Bern
case?

WASHINGTON

You know white folks! Some movie star's producer husband does the Dutch Act 'n nobody can let it go!

MARLOWE

We both know there's more to it. Rocky, just point me in the right direction.

Washington pokes him in the chest, backs him down the driveway.

WASHINGTON

That'd be right behind you. Keep going, keep going. Just...about ...there.

Pushes Marlowe out onto the street.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

You got it.

Washington turns to walk away.

MARLOWE

It stinks, Rocky!

WASHINGTON

Read the same damn reports you did.

MARLOWE

That was four years ago.

WASHINGTON

What makes you think they talk to me 'bout anything north'v Wilshire?

HAZEL O.S.

Rocky? You out there?

Hazel has come out onto the stairs, peering into the darkness. Marlowe and Washington freeze. She shakes her head and goes inside.

WASHINGTON

You didn't get it in uniform. An' you don't get it now! Why d'ya keep messin' in other people's business?

MARLOWE

D.A.'s lookin' for Velma.

WASHINGTON

Freddy's sister... For a smart guy, always were a soft touch, Marlowe.

Dumps his pail into a trash can, slams the lid.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

Guy from the Times is pokin' around on the case. Night Bern shot himself, taxi driver drove by. He saw a woman run from the house.

MARLOWE

Report said she was just a shadow.

WASHINGTON

Seems the driver saw something that's not in the report.

INT. -- DOWNSTAIRS BAR AT MARLOWE'S OFFICE BUILDING-- NIGHT

Marlowe walks through, towards the stairs to his office.

SMILEY

Izzy lost that fool friend's yours.

MARLOWE

Name's Chandler.

SMILEY

Walked in on the card game at Moe's place. Played two hands. Now he's at the Chicken Shack. Ivey has him cornered with her fried chicken.

MARLOWE

Big Ivey? He's a dead man!

SMILEY

(calls after him)

An' that reporter pal of yours called. Says you know where to find him.

INT. - MARLOWE'S INNER OFFICE -- NIGHT

Marlowe sets the alabaster box on his desk, pokes through it.

MARLOWE

Only one place Moran'd be this time'a night. Sure wasn't home...

EXT. - CENTRAL AVENUE -- NIGHT

Marlowe drives down Central Avenue, then turns onto a quieter, more residential street.

EXT. - BROTHER'S AFTER HOURS CLUB -- NIGHT

Marlowe parks near a large house. Curtains are drawn, but lights are on, music blaring.

Marlowe goes up the walkway. Two LARGE BLACK MEN at the door glare at him. One cracks a smile. Marlowe and the guard slap palms.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
Called this place Brother's.
Weekdays, Brother ran the bar down
at the Dunbar.

INT. - DUNBAR HOTEL BAR -- DAY/CONTINUOUS

BROTHER, large, tuxedoed, bald black man, mid-40's, greets patrons in the upscale jazz bar.

EXT. - BROTHER'S AFTER HOURS CLUB -- NIGHT/CONTINUOUS

Brother opens the door. Transvestite make up, woman's wig, African print kaftan, he kisses Marlowe on both cheeks.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
Nights, Brother was a sister, an'
ran the most exclusive After Hours
club in town.

INT. - BROTHER'S AFTER HOURS CLUB -- NIGHT

Place is packed, movie stars, black entertainers, Pasadena socialites. Band plays in the living room, a bar in every room.

Marlowe walks through elegantly furnished rooms decorated with numerous pieces of original artwork. He grabs a bar stool, makes eye contact with luscious female barflies.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
Fancy ladies. Like other pieces'v
art in here, they were all for
sale.

JOE THE BARTENDER, busy making drinks, slaps Marlowe's hand.

JOE THE BARTENDER
Marlowe, my man.

MARLOWE
Joe. Seen Velma tonight?

Joe the Bartender shakes his head. Marlowe scans the bar.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Thought Bugsy Siegel was in jail.

JOE THE BARTENDER
Technically he is.

Pours Marlowe a drink.

JOE THE BARTENDER (CONT'D)
All depends on who you know.

BENJAMIN SIEGEL, late 30's, long coat draped over his shoulders, all in white, more like a movie character than gangster. He stands, talking to a group of men, couple of tall gorgeous hookers hanging on each arm.

MARLOWE
That the Mayor?

MAYOR FRANKLIN SHAW, short officious butterball, early-50's, talks to Siegel.

JOE THE BARTENDER
And the D.A.

One of Siegel's hookers turns to accept a drink, revealing D.A. Fitts, listening over Siegel's shoulder.

Lucien Wagner approaches. Working girls scatter. Wagner whispers something in Fitts' ear. Fitts smiles.

JOE THE BARTENDER (CONT'D)
Looks pleased with himself.

MARLOWE
Lemme see what I can do 'bout that.

Joe the Bartender rolls his eyes. Marlowe downs his drink, then ambles over to Fitts.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Mr. District Attorney.

Fitts pivots. Group around him goes silent.

FITTS
Marlowe. When did they start
letting people like you in here?

MARLOWE
Long time before people like you
were comin'.

FITTS
What do you want, Marlowe?

MARLOWE
Your House Dog off my back.

FITTS
House dog?

MARLOWE
Lucien Wagner? Big, stupid, gets
tongue-tied when his brain engages.
Fortunately, that doesn't happen
often.

Wagner steps forward. Fitts stops him.

FITTS
You should leave, Marlowe, before
you embarrass yourself.

MARLOWE
Is that so?

Leans over to Siegel.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Anyone ever tell you 'bout ol'
Burton here? Thing his upper lip
does, when he's tryin' t'sell you
on somethin'. Curls up like
someone tyin' it into a bow on a
nice neat package of hooley.

Fitts' upper lip twitches. Music fades, room goes still.

Hand reaches out from the crowd. J.C. Moran drags Marlowe
back to the bar. Club activity resumes.

MORAN
Do you have a death wish?!

MARLOWE
(to the bartender)
Drink, Joe.

Joe the Bartender slaps a shot down in front of Marlowe. He throws it back and shoves his glass across the bar.

MORAN

We all feel bad about Freddy.

Joe the Bartender refills Marlowe's glass.

MARLOWE

You didn't know him. I knew 'im,
'n I'm gonna get the low-down
coward who killed 'im.

MORAN

Let Justice do its job, Marlowe.

MARLOWE

Justice goes to the highest bidder.
Anyone who can't pay, better go
find his own.

MORAN

Take the Law in your hands, you'll
be no better'n the rest of 'em.

MARLOWE

What makes you think I am?

MORAN

I know you. Never saw anyone so
quick to take on all the problems
of the world. Even ones no one can
fix.

Marlowe downs his shot.

MORAN (CONT'D)

Ask yourself, would Freddy want it?

Marlowe doesn't answer, pushes his glass across the counter
for a refill.

MORAN (CONT'D)

T'hell with it, hell with all of
it!

He holds up his glass.

MORAN (CONT'D)

Let me hear you say it.

Marlowe doesn't move.

BILLIE, 22, petite, African-American begins to sing. Voice starts as a whisper, rising to raspy heartfelt delight.

BILLIE

My Man's gone. I feel so alone.
Got the longer man blues.

ANNOUNCER

Give it up for Billie Holiday.

Crowd applauds. Marlowe grabs the bottle from Joe the Bartender, clinks Moran's upheld glass.

MORAN

To Brotherhood. Brotherhood of
Pissin' Everybody off.

They drink. Moran sighs in contentment.

MORAN (CONT'D)

Now, to Brotherhood business. I
came across something at City Hall.

Moran lays a map on the bar.

MORAN (CONT'D)

Long strip of old orange grove
property's being bought up on the
Arroyo Seco, here, here and here.

Series of plots are X-ed out in red along a curved black line labelled ARROYO SECO CANYON.

MORAN (CONT'D)

Farms were hit hard by the Big
Freeze. Creek ran dry. Land's
gone to seed.

Spreads out a stack of papers, searches through it.

MORAN (CONT'D)

Wouldn't think much of it, except
there's just one buyer. Company
calls itself Millicent Holdings,
Inc. Did a wee bit more checking,
and lo 'n behold...

Moran pulls out a newspaper clipping.

MORAN (CONT'D)

Meet Millicent.

Photo, titled "Santa Anita Derby Days", shows Benjamin Siegel trackside, with his 8-year-old daughter Millicent.

EXT. - STREET NEAR BROTHER'S AFTER HOURS CLUB -- NIGHT

Marlowe heads to his car. Moran trails unsteadily behind.
Moran stops, holds up a bottle.

MORAN
To Brotherhood.

MARLOWE
Brotherhood.

MORAN
Not so fast.

Marlowe turns. Moran's standing at some bushes.

MORAN (CONT'D)
This Brother's gotta take care'v
business.

Marlowe turns away. Sound of a zipper.

MARLOWE
Heard you're goin' back over the
Paul Bern suicide.

MORAN
Alleged suicide.

MARLOWE
Something 'bout a cab driver.

MORAN
Yeah, didn't see much. This
particular cab driver, he was more
interested in a lady in his own
back seat.

MARLOWE
Case's old news.

MORAN
Funny thing about old news. It has
a way of getting tangled up in new
news. Paul Bern bought a farm
overlooking the Arroyo Seco. And
you'll never guess what he did...

Sound of a zipper again.

MORAN (CONT'D)
He gave it away.

Marlowe turns, and WHAM!

Shakes off a glancing blow to the head. Grabs his attacker around the mid-section and propels them both into a wall.

Brass knuckles. This time they connect. Dark figure stands over Marlowe and smiles. Last thing Marlowe sees is a glint of gold.

INT. - TINY, DARK DANK JAIL CELL -- MORNING

Marlowe wakes up on a cot. His vision clears. Sees light ...shining on Sgt. Washington's face.

WASHINGTON

Two hack jobs in one day?! A lot, even for you, Marlowe. Blood all over you. Again.

Marlowe sees the blood.

MARLOWE

Dry Cleaner's gonna hate me. Who's dead?

WASHINGTON

Don' give me that! You were laying across him. Knife next to you. If I didn't know how much you liked that lousy Mick...

MARLOWE

J.C?

Washington nods.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

Oh, not J.C!

Sits up, plants his feet on the ground.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

Now they've done it! Gone and done it! Those lilly-livered, self-righteous, sons'-v-bitches're gonna wish they never heard the name, Samuel B. Marlowe!

WASHINGTON

'Fraid this's gonna cost you.

Holds up Marlowe's detective license, still in the frame.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

Been ordered to take your license.

MARLOWE

You went to my office? Yo, Rocky?!

WASHINGTON

Don't 'Yo, Rocky' me, Marlowe.
Mystery to me how you kept it this
long.

MARLOWE

What am I gonna do without my
license?!

WASHINGTON

Work for a livin'?

Marlowe puts on his hat, straightens his tie.

MARLOWE

How long've I been here?

WASHINGTON

Long enough. Someone's here for
you.

Chandler stands at the cell door, disheveled but with a smile
of the cat who ate the canary.

EXT. - POLICE STATION -- DAY

Marlowe dabs at blood on his jacket as Chandler trails him
from the Precinct.

CHANDLER

This business comes with a few
legal problems.

MARLOWE

Trouble is my business.

CHANDLER

I like that. Can I use it?

Marlowe shrugs.

MARLOWE

Where's your car?

Car horn wails, the opening refrain of La Cucaracha.

CHANDLER

I came with friends.

Long, red flame-painted low-rider filled with Mexican Pachucos in zoot suits idles curb-side.

INT. - DOWNSTAIRS BAR IN MARLOWE'S OFFICE BUILDING -- DAY

Smiley frowns as Marlowe and Chandler pass through, showing the wear-and-tear of last night's adventures.

INT. - BACK STAIRS -- MARLOWE'S OFFICE BUILDING -- DAY

Marino Bello stands on the stairs, pointing the tiny .22 caliber revolver down at Marlowe and Chandler.

MARLOWE

Not that pea shooter again.

CHANDLER

Who's that?

Marlowe shrugs him off, continues up the stairs.

MARLOWE

Don' worry about it.

INT. - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- MARLOWE'S OFFICE BUILDING -- DAY

Top of the stairs, Bello digs the gun into Marlowe's back, pushes him down the hall. Chandler follows.

BELLO

D'you know how long I've been waiting?

MARLOWE

Could've saved time by making an appointment.

Gun in his back, Marlowe opens his office door.

BELLO

You have something of mine. I want it back.

INT. - MARLOWE'S WAITING ROOM -- DAY

Bello pushes Marlowe towards his office door. Chandler follows.

MARLOWE
What makes you think I still got
it?

INT. - MARLOWE'S INNER OFFICE -- DAY

Opening the door, Marlowe, Bello and Chandler find Bugsy Siegel and GANG have made themselves comfortable. Siegel sits, feet up on Marlowe's desk.

BELLO
Mr. Siegel!

Bello steps forward. Siegel shakes his finger at him.

SIEGEL
Marino, you've been a naughty boy.

BELLO
Everything that bitch says about me
is a lie!

SIEGEL
That's not what we're talking
about. Think, Marino.

Bello nods.

BELLO
I was coming to see you. Yes!

SIEGEL
To pay me back every cent I put
into your little Mexican mining
operation.

BELLO
With interest!

SIEGEL
Lots of interest. Lots 'n lots of
interest. What d'ya say, boys?

Siegel's gang nods. Siegel stands, pats Bello on the face.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
And, Marino, while you're doing the
right thing, I know you'll want to
make your lovely wife happy.

BELLO
I will?

SIEGEL
By signing the divorce decree.

BELLO
Next time I see my lawyer!

SIEGEL
Why wait?

Pulls out a wad of papers.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
Pen someone.

Four of Siegel's guys produce pens. Making a face, Bello signs the documents.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
Here...here...and here...

Siegel folds the papers, returns them to his pocket.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
Was that so hard?

Bello seems uncertain.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
Now get lost.

Bello backs away.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
Scram.

Bello scurries away. Siegel turns to Marlowe.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
So you're the spade detective.

MARLOWE
Name's Marlowe. Samuel B.

SIEGEL
Can't be much of a livin'.

MARLOWE
I get by.

Chandler steps forward, extends his hand.

CHANDLER
Chandler, Raymond Chandler. I'm a writer.

SIEGEL
Who gives a shit?

Siegel doesn't takes Chandler's hand.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
But you, Marlowe, Samuel B, you've
been ruffling feathers. Got some
advice for you.

MARLOWE
Watch out for birds?

SIEGEL
Just the big ones. Know what big
birds do?

Raises his right hand, brings it down with the sound of
something sailing through the air from high up. Hand lands --
hard -- on Marlowe's shoulder.

SIEGEL (CONT'D)
Splat!

Siegel smiles, pats Marlowe on the cheek.

INT. -- MARLOWE'S CAR -- DAY

Marlowe lays on the horn. Traffic starts to move.

Chandler sits in the passenger seat, alabaster box on the
seat between them.

EXT. - MGM STUDIO GATES -- DAY

Marlowe's car goes through the gate.

EXT. - PARKING LOT IN FRONT OF THE THALBERG BUILDING -- DAY

Marlowe parks. Black Rolls Royce is pulling out. It pulls
back in.

CHAUFFEUR (tall, thin African American) gets out, goes around
to open the back passenger door. A finger -- stubby man's
finger with huge opal ring -- beckons Marlowe.

Marlowe gets out of his car, goes to the Rolls. Eddie Mannix
sits in the back seat, with a cigar and starlet-of-the-week.

MANNIX
So the girl got home.

Marlowe nods.

MANNIX (CONT'D)
Mama's still chewin' on me. What'd
you do, Marlowe?

MARLOWE
My job.

MANNIX
Our Number-One-Box-Office-Draw is
comin' unglued.

MARLOWE
Maybe she needs a rest.

MANNIX
She can get all the rest she wants
after she shimmies that cute little
butt across the screen a few more
times in that white satin number.

Stares up at Marlowe.

MANNIX (CONT'D)
Meantime, I need you to go out'n
bring me some hospital records.

MARLOWE
Any particular hospital records?

MANNIX
Think you know what I'm talkin'
about. Girl's contract has a
morality clause. My butt's in the
ringer if those records get out.

MARLOWE
Suppose they'll just go into some
file. Where they can come out if
you ever need somethin' to rub her
nose in.

MANNIX
Better'n with that bunch of
vultures she's got around her. All
tryin' to get a bigger piece'v her.

MARLOWE
We all want something.

Mannix flicks his ash. Marlowe has to step back, to keep it
from landing on his shoes.

MANNIX
My point exactly.

Mannix closes the car door.

INT. - THALBERG BUILDING HALLWAY -- DAY

Following Marlowe down a hallway, Chandler stops, transfixed by a movie poster. **The Thin Man** starring William Powell.

Tall, gaunt gruff-looking MAN stands over a secretary in a nearby cubicle. Dark mustache, shock of thick white hair, rumpled trench coat, he wanders over to Chandler at the poster.

THE MAN
Drivel, pure drivel. Silly
characters, hackneyed plot, ending
only your Mother'd believe. Making
that book into a movie was a
complete waste of celluloid.

The Man nods to Marlowe, turns and drifts down the hall.

THE MAN (CONT'D)
Sam...

Marlowe returns the nod.

MARLOWE
D.H.

Chandler stands, gaping after the Man. Marlowe shrugs.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
His book. His right to say.

Bannered across the poster: "Dashiell Hammett's Master Mystery".

INT. - MGM STUDIOS -- OUTSIDE HARLOW'S DRESSING ROOM -- DAY

Mama Jean opens the door. Marlowe stands with the alabaster box, Chandler behind him.

MAMA JEAN
Marlowe! Where the hell've you
been?!

MARLOWE
Plenty'a places I shouldn'ta been.

MAMA JEAN
You have it!

She reaches for the box. Marlowe pushes past her.

INT. - HARLOW'S INNER-DRESSING ROOM SUITE -- DAY

Marlowe knocks on Harlow's dressing room door.

Harlow opens the door in a feather-lined, white silk gown.
She sees Marlowe, Mama Jean behind him.

MAMA JEAN
(to Marlowe)
You can't go in there!

Harlow pulls Marlowe into her dressing room, closes the door
in her mother's face. Mama Jean pounds on the door.

Marlowe hands Harlow the alabaster box.

HARLOW
This was my husband's!

MARLOWE
Think he'd want you to have it.
Considering all the people tryin'
to keep me from giving it to you.

She opens the box, sorts through the contents.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
If you're looking for the property
deed, it's not in there. Lots'v
letters, an' this.

He fishes out the hospital records.

Harlow's eyes widen.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Did Paul know you were pregnant
when you married him?

HARLOW
I couldn't tell him! I hoped I
wouldn't have to. Paul wanted
children. He was the only man I
knew who did.

She collapses onto her white velvet couch in tears. Marlowe
offers her a handkerchief.

MARLOWE

If it's any consolation, he kept
all your letters.

Harlow takes the handkerchief, dabs her make up.

HARLOW

Paul loved me.

MARLOWE

Sure, he was a great guy. An' he
bought that house for Velma.
What're you gonna do about it?

Harlow stands up in front of a mirror. She puts on a long
white fur coat, going through the metamorphosis. Damaged,
uneducated girl...to Movie Star.

HARLOW

Mr. Marlowe, my marriage might
notta been all it shoulda been.
But my husband believed in me when
nobody in this Goddamn business
would. Yes, Paul bought that
house. He bought it for another
woman. I'll always know it's one
of the last things he ever did...

INT. - FANCY DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES HOTEL LOBBY -- DAY

Chandler sits on a couch, behind a newspaper, black man at
his feet with a shoe shine box. It's Marlowe, jacket off,
shirt sleeves rolled, polishing Chandler's shoes.

CHANDLER

(through the newspaper)
How long do we wait?

Chandler fidgets.

MARLOWE

You wanted detective work. What's
rule #24?

CHANDLER

If someone says you don't need a
gun, better bring one that works.

MARLOWE

That's #23. Rule #24: Hide in
plain sight. But look like you
belong.

Chandler freezes behind his paper as Marino Bello gets off the elevator. Bello crosses to the street entrance, turns to survey the lobby.

Couches are empty.

Bello continues out through revolving doors.

EXT. - BUSY DOWNTOWN L.A. STREETS -- DAY

Bello adjusts his hat in front of the hotel, ambles along.

Marlowe and Chandler come out, slip a dollar to the SHOE SHINE MAN (African American), returning his kit. Marlowe and Chandler follow Bello at a discreet distance.

Bello turns a corner, goes into an old-fashioned Jewish Market/Deli.

INT. - OLD-FASHIONED JEWISH MARKET/DELI -- DAY

Bello peruses bagels, sniffs steaming kettles of matzo ball soup.

EXT. - OLD-FASHIONED JEWISH MARKET/DELI -- DAY/CONTINUOUS

Marlowe and Chandler watch Bello through the window.

INT. - OLD-FASHIONED JEWISH MARKET/DELI -- DAY/CONTINUOUS

Bello replaces a kettle top, turns. Window is empty.

Bello nods to SHOPKEEPER. Shopkeeper goes into a back room.

Alone, Bello sticks his finger into a barrel.

EXT. - OLD-FASHIONED JEWISH MARKET/DELI -- DAY/CONTINUOUS

Marlowe and Chandler are back at the window.

MARLOWE

You need to learn about detective
work...

INT. - OLD-FASHIONED JEWISH MARKET/DELI -- DAY/CONTINUOUS

Bello pulls a pickled herring from the barrel, sniffs it.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
Sometimes a red herring...

Bello drops the fish back into the barrel.

MARLOWE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Is just a red herring.

Shopkeeper returns with a flat package in brown wrapping.

MARLOWE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And sometimes it's not.

Bello smiles, slips the package into his pocket.

INT. - BRADBURY BUILDING LOBBY -- DAY

Bello crosses the ornate, multi-story glass-ceilinged lobby, approaches the elevator.

INT. - BRADBURY BUILDING ELEVATOR -- DAY/CONTINUOUS

Bello pulls the package from his pocket, rips the wrapping as he gets into the open wrought-iron elevator. Elevator goes up -- slowly -- glimpses of Marlowe's face outside the elevator on two upper floors, as Bello opens a magazine.

A 1937 "girlie" magazine.

INT. - BRADBURY BUILDING -- UPPER LANDING -- DAY/CONTINUOUS

Bello rolls up the magazine, gets off the elevator. He ambles down the landing (open to the building's central atrium), stops at a door: Lucky Strike Mining Company

INT. - BELLO'S OFFICE RECEPTION AREA -- DAY

Large, empty waiting room. GLADYS, cherry red hair, three hundred pounds squeezed into a flower-print dress, looks up from the front desk as Bello passes.

GLADYS
Mr. Bello...

He bustles past her to his office.

BELLO
Not now, Gladys.

Marlowe enters as Bello disappears, Chandler in tow.

GLADYS
Excuse me...

MARLOWE
Not now, Gladys.

Barges past Gladys, Chandler following.

INT. - BELLO'S INNER OFFICE -- DAY

Bello sits at his desk behind the magazine. Marlowe and Chandler enter. Bello goes for his desk drawer. Marlowe closes the drawer on Bello's hand and holds it.

BELLO
Marlowe! What d'you want?!

MARLOWE
What you took from the box.

BELLO
Dunno what you're talking about.

MARLOWE
Certain property deed? You're thinkin' you'll turn it over to your pal, Bugsy to pay off your debt. Bad news. Title can't transfer without your stepdaughter's signature.

Bello shrugs.

BELLO
Got news for you, buster. I do her signature better'n her. Property's been sold. Got a check right here.

MARLOWE
Hand it over.

BELLO
You're kidding.

MARLOWE
Do I look like a man with a sense of humor?

Bello looks at Chandler.

BELLO
See you brought muscle.

MARLOWE

Step outta line 'n he'll beat you
with his Iambic Pentameter.

BELLO

Expect that to scare me?

MARLOWE

My associate can toss the place.
(to Chandler)
Start with those files over there.
If you find anything interesting,
hold onto it.

Chandler starts towards the file cabinets.

BELLO

All right, all right.

Marlowe opens the desk drawer, releases Bello's hand. Bello goes to the file cabinet, pulls out a large Colt .45. Points it at Marlowe and Chandler.

BELLO (CONT'D)

Think I'd just hand that check over
to some spook?

MARLOWE

Or let me take it with a minimum
amount of silliness. Guess not.

Marlowe takes a step toward Bello, who waves the pistol.

BELLO

Stop right there!

INT. - BELLO'S OFFICE RECEPTION AREA -- DAY

Gladys sits, stirring a cup of tea. Sound of a gun shot. She stops...hears nothing else. Gladys shrugs, goes back to her tea.

INT. - BELLO'S INNER OFFICE -- DAY

Marlowe holds Bello's limp body, as Chandler retrieves the gun from the floor.

CHANDLER

Are you crazy?!

MARLOWE

Just faster than he is. Wanna give me a hand?

Chandler's unhappy handling the gun. Marlowe takes it as they drag Bello.

CHANDLER

Is he dead?

MARLOWE

That was a love tap. Bring me his chair.

INT. - BELLO'S OFFICE RECEPTION AREA -- DAY

Marlowe and Chandler emerge from Bello's office. Marlowe tucks the check in his jacket, lays the pistol on Gladys' desk.

MARLOWE

Gladys, keep this so he doesn't hurt himself.

Marlowe and Chandler exit. Gladys gingerly picks up the pistol, goes to Bello's office, peers in.

INT. - BELLO'S INNER OFFICE -- DAY

Bello sits, tied to his chair by drapery cords. He tries to scream at Gladys through the gag in his mouth.

INT. - BELLO'S OFFICE RECEPTION AREA -- DAY

Gladys smiles, closes the door and goes back to her desk.

EXT. - DESERTED TWO-LANE COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

Marlowe's car winds through rolling hills covered with chaparral and oak tree groves. The car pauses at a cross street sign: Orange Grove Drive and Arroyo Seco Road.

Down an embankment, is a homeless camp. Tired sun-burned women chase ragged kids through tents and tin-and-plywood shacks. Dog packs scramble for scraps. Old people smoke pipes in rocking chairs still tied to the backs of broken-down farm trucks. There's a curious lack of able-bodied men.

In the middle of the camp is a large fire, spit turning with a half dozen tiny squirrel and rabbit carcasses.

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- DAY

Marlowe nods to Chandler, as they pass the camp.

MARLOWE
Dust bowl people.

EXT. - COUNTRY ROAD-- DAY

Marlowe's car stops, backs up to a graveled driveway closed off by a rickety wooden gate flanked by huge withered trees. A chain with a broken padlock hangs from the gate.

EXT. - LONG GRAVELED COUNTRY DRIVEWAY -- DAY

Marlowe's car travels up a shadowy driveway surrounded by a tangle of overgrowth. Remains of a dying fruit orchard.

EXT. - GRAVELLED CLEARING -- DAY

Marlowe's car emerges into sunlight...only to be eclipsed by another shadow.

Tall thin house stands above them on a small knoll. Once a prime example of Victorian architecture, the house is a stark, dilapidated ghost of itself.

Marlowe and Chandler park the car and approach the house.

MARLOWE
Good detective looks and listens.

CHANDLER
You won't even know I'm there.

Sound of gunfire. Chandler dodges behind Marlowe as rifle rounds burrow into the ground at their feet. Marlowe smiles.

MARLOWE
She's playing with us.

He urges Chandler on. Next shot takes off a tree branch behind them.

WOMAN'S VOICE THROUGH A BULLHORN
(O.S.)
You Goddamned shysters aren't
taking my house!

MARLOWE
We're not lawyers.

Rifle barrel appears over an upstairs porch railing. Marlowe takes off his hat.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Do I look like a lawyer?

EXT. - FARMHOUSE FRONT PORCH -- DAY

Chandler looks out over shriveled orchards, as he and Marlowe wait at the front door. Marlowe takes off his hat.

The door is answered by LULUBELLE. 50ish, 5' 3", 300 pounds, dark-skinned African American, hair up in a checkered scarf, she holds a large gray cat.

MARLOWE
Sorry 'bout Freddy, ma'am.

Lulubelle nods, turns. Cat squirms in her arms.

LULUBELLE
She'll be down, when the mood suits her.

Taps the cat on the nose.

LULUBELLE (CONT'D)
You gentlemen'd best come on in...

INT. - PARLOR -- DAY

Lulubelle beckons Marlowe and Chandler into a parlor cluttered with memorabilia. Taxidermied, horned owl eyes them with wizened amusement from the mantel, next to a squirrel frozen in mid-scamper.

Chandler turns to an upright grizzly posed behind him. Lulubelle shakes her head.

LULUBELLE
The late Mr. Anderssen. He was a hunter, that man. Never saw an animal he didn't wanna kill. Lordie, couldn't seem to stop himself. Guess some people, they just have this deep rootin' ache in 'em. Seems to make 'em wanna hurt other things.

Small white porcelain frame sits on the mantel. Pale blonde woman, pained expression in her eyes.

LULUBELLE (CONT'D)

Mrs. Anderssen. Now she was a delicate flower. More of a City Girl, if you ask me. Never took to the dirt. Died, trying to birth their first child.

Cat lets out a yowl.

LULUBELLE (CONT'D)

We have company. Now you behave.

MARLOWE

Marlowe, ma'am. Samuel B. We met during the business regarding Mr. Bern.

Offers Lulubelle his hand. Cat hisses.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

The movie producer...?

LULUBELLE

One who died. Paulie, she called him. Paulie, Paulie, Paulie. Comin' and goin' at strange hours. Couldn't live without her. Then, he never wanted to see her again.

Nods to Marlowe.

LULUBELLE (CONT'D)

Now I remember you!

She pulls a rag from her apron, dusts the mantel.

LULUBELLE (CONT'D)

Not that it matters. Poor man, her Paulie. One moment, you're on top in that business. Next, you're naked on your bedroom floor, bullet in your forehead.

Her dusting knocks a small unframed photo off the mantel. Marlowe catches it. 5-year-old light-skinned black girl holding a rifle, her smile is a crescent of pearly whites.

Large pale hand rests on her shoulder. The girl is leaning against the out-of-focus lower torso of a man.

Lulubelle turns back to Marlowe and Chandler.

LULUBELLE (CONT'D)
Oh Lordie, where on earth are my
manners?! Can I offer you
gentlemen a drink?

Chandler brightens.

LULUBELLE (CONT'D)
Just made fresh lemonade.

MARLOWE
No, thank you.

VELMA O.S.
He's a scotch straight up man,
Mama.

Long skirt slit up to mid-thigh, Velma comes down the stairs,
sets the rifle down against the bannister.

VELMA
Thought you worked alone, Marlowe.

MARLOWE
I do.

CHANDLER
We've met, ma'am. I was less than
vertical at the time.

Velma shrugs.

VELMA
Coulda shot you out there. Thought
you were more'v those City Hall
swindlers.

LULUBELLE
Nailed a notice to our door this
morning.

She chuckles.

LULUBELLE (CONT'D)
Left here sittin' on a load of
buckshot, that fellow.

In a large photo over the mantel, stands Olaf Anderssen,
tall, blond, confident, rifle-in-hand.

MARLOWE
Marksmanship runs in the family.

VELMA

Had to get something from him. By rights, it shoulda been the farm.

MARLOWE

That 'n a nickel'll get you a cup of coffee. Old man Anderssen died without a will as I recall.

Velma picks up the rifle, cocks it.

VELMA

He taught me to take care of myself!

MARLOWE

How long do you think that'll stop 'em?

Velma aims, takes out the squirrel on the mantel. Targeting the owl, she turns, puts a round in the grizzly.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

Is this what Paul woulda wanted?

VELMA

Don't you talk to me about Paul!

She points the gun at him.

MARLOWE

Tell me what you said to his widow.

VELMA

I begged her not to take the house.

MARLOWE

What else?

VELMA

Nothing!

MARLOWE

I don't believe you.

VELMA

Nothing she'd ever say to them!

MARLOWE

Why's it everyone's so interested in a certain cab driver?

Velma cocks the rifle again.

VELMA

I told her I was there! That what
you want?! I was there that night,
and I don't care who knows it!

Marlowe steps forward, the barrel now touching his chest.

VELMA (CONT'D)

Now get out of my house!

MARLOWE

Or you're gonna shoot me?

VELMA

What if I do?!

MARLOWE

They'll send somebody who'll bring
an army to get you off this farm.
If these're the guys who hurt
Freddy, think they'll give a damn
if your mother gets in the way?

He grabs the barrel, pushes it away. Velma sits down on the
stairs, starts to cry.

VELMA

Paul called me, sounding so small,
so lost. She'd gone to her
Mother's and left her wedding rings
on his pillow. He was drinking.

Marlowe hands the rifle to Chandler.

VELMA (CONT'D)

I went in a taxi. Paul said he'd
pay. He was generous that way.

She breaks down. Marlowe drags Velma to her feet.

MARLOWE

Tell me what you saw!

VELMA

A woman ran down the driveway when
we drove up, got into a car and
drove away.

Chandler whispers to Marlowe. Marlowe shakes him off.

VELMA (CONT'D)

I never saw her clearly.

MARLOWE

Did the cab driver see her?

VELMA

I don't know! Maybe...

MARLOWE

Which is it? Don't know or maybe?!

VELMA

Yes, he saw her! At least, I think he did. I don't know what to think anymore!

MARLOWE

Did you go in?

She starts to cry again.

VELMA

Paul was still breathing. I held him. There was so much blood! You do believe me!? I loved Paul! I could never hurt him!

MARLOWE

There's a cab driver out there who might be saying something different.

CHANDLER

(whispers again)

The hair. Ask her...

VELMA

Brown! I know what you're thinking! Her hair was brown. Nobody cared what she looked like four years ago. Why should it matter now?

MARLOWE

Who'd you tell? Big guy, gold tooth, D.A.'s Office?

Velma nods.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

I know 'im. You don't wanna be here when he comes lookin' for you. No matter how much you love this house.

VELMA

You think this is about love?!

She grabs the rifle and exits.

EXT. - PATH AROUND THE SIDE OF THE FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Dense overgrowth forms a light-speckled tunnel over the path. Velma is just a shadow moving ahead of Marlowe and Chandler.

EXT. - FARMHOUSE BACKYARD -- DAY

Path leads through the remains of a rose garden to a row of tiny deserted shacks. Marlowe and Chandler get a long view down the deep rugged chasm of the Arroyo Seco Canyon.

Around the bend, smoke trails rise from the Homeless Camp.

INT. - ONE-ROOM SHACK -- DAY

Dark unpainted room with two pieces of furniture, ancient rocking chair and big brass bed. Velma sits on the bed as Marlowe and Chandler enter.

VELMA

I was born on this bed. Spent the next sixteen years under it.

Drags the bed from the wall, revealing a small mat and cluster of covers.

VELMA (CONT'D)

Whenever we saw him comin' down from the house, Mama'd tell us to play hide'n-seek. "Don't come out," she'd say. "No matter what. Just remember, Mama loves you."

On the window sill is a crudely framed photo. Marlowe picks it up. Two children entwined in a hug, light-skinned 12-year-old girl and chubby, dark skinned 6-year-old boy.

Sound of multiple engines, high-pitched and racing.

EXT. - OUTSIDE THE SHACK -- DAY

A dozen motorcycles, mud-splattered Crocker V-Twins, Harley Knuckleheads, approach down the canyon.

Riders in mangy leather vests, helmets and boots race towards Marlowe, Chandler and Velma, splashing through a muddy trickle in the center of the creek bed.

An earth-and-stone dam holds a shallow pond just below. The cyclists roar over it, tearing down the dam.

VELMA

Freddy built that dam!

She levels her rifle, fires at the riders. They break out of their tight cluster, bobbing, weaving into a single line.

Velma takes one, two, three more shots as they pass. Rider fishtails in the pond, back tire blown out.

Next shot lands at the rider's feet as he surveys the damage. Lead bike circles back. Rider jumps onto the back of the Harley. Shots follow them down the canyon.

Marlowe grabs the rifle barrel, pulls it up. It fires in the air, brings down a tree branch.

MARLOWE

They're just joyriders! Shooting one'a those guys won't bring your brother back!

VELMA

Look who's talking!

The remark stings. She grabs the rifle back.

Chandler nudges Marlowe and points.

Rising out of the water, next to the bike is a small stake with a yellow flag.

Marlowe works his way down the canyon wall to the creek bed. Series of numbers is written on the stake in bold black grease pen. 2491-060

Twenty feet away is another stake, 2491-061.

Marlowe emerges from the creek bed, stake in hand.

CHANDLER

That's a survey stake.

They look down the canyon at a long line of stakes.

MARLOWE

On the only flat piece of land
through the Pasadena Hills. I'd
say somebody's buildin' a road.

VELMA

Not on my land, they're not.

EXT. - WILTED, OVERGROWN FARMHOUSE BACKYARD - DAY

Marlowe, Chandler and Velma walk through the remains of a
rose garden. Long path leads up stone steps towards a
rambling porch. Paint peeling, screens torn, the porch roof
is caving in.

VELMA

Wouldn't know it, but time was this
was the fanciest house in miles.

EXT. - REAR VIEW OF FARMHOUSE -- NIGHT/CONTINUOUS

House morphs into Velma's childhood memory, lantern-lit patio
filled with tables and stylish dancers. A band is playing.

VELMA (V.O.)

Garden parties and music. I always
said, someday I'm gonna live in
that big house on the hill.

EXT. - REAR VIEW OF FARMHOUSE -- DAY/CONTINUOUS

House's image fades back to its current condition.

VELMA

May not be fancy now, but it's
mine.

MARLOWE

Was yours. Farm's been sold.

Pulls the check from his pocket.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

Widow endorsed the check. She
wants you to have it.

VELMA

I don't want her money!

MARLOWE

You can bury Freddy proper. Buy
another house. Hell, in South
Central, you can buy five houses!

Sounds of explosions interrupt them. Down the canyon, black
smoke rises over the river wash area.

A much closer explosion rocks Marlowe, Chandler and Velma off
their feet. Balls of fire roll out of the farm house, smoke
spurting from upper turrets.

VELMA

Mama...!!!

She runs up the steps towards the house, followed by Marlowe
and Chandler. Another explosion shakes the old wooden
structure, which goes up like a roman candle.

Marlowe grabs Velma at the back door. Handing her off to
Chandler, he takes off his jacket, wraps it around his arm.

INT. - FARMHOUSE -- DOWNSTAIRS KITCHEN -- DAY

Marlowe pushes aside a burning door with the protected arm,
charges into the kitchen. He's repelled by a blast of flame.
Fire is all around him, a red can lying on its side. Big
black letters: PETROL.

LULUBELLE O.S.

Kitty! Here, kitty, kitty!

Marlowe follows her voice to the next room.

INT. - FARMHOUSE -- FRONT PARLOR/ENTRYWAY -- DAY

Lulubelle chases her cat across the upstairs landing above
Marlowe. Cat yowls and disappears, Lulubelle in pursuit.

Marlowe tightens the jacket around his arm, makes his way up
the burning stairs. Smoke on the landing is so thick, he
drops to his knees, crawling towards the light of a partly
open door.

INT. - FARMHOUSE -- UPSTAIRS BEDROOM -- DAY

Lulubelle reaches under a bed, room burning around her.

LULUBELLE

Come to mommy, big boy.

Blast of hot air launches Marlowe through the doorway as he opens it, onto his stomach. He rolls away as a ceiling beam above him falls.

Marlowe hoists Lulubelle to her feet and onto the window seat of a large bay window.

His view through the lattice work glass is a three story drop onto a graveled driveway. Marlowe uses his protected arm to break out the glass, triggering another blast of hot air.

EXT. - FRONT OF THE FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Whoosh of flame pours out through a three-foot hole in the bay window, then recedes.

Clink, clink. Small portions of glass and frame fall on sun-baked earth below. Window is being kicked out from inside.

INT. - FARMHOUSE -- UPSTAIRS BEDROOM -- DAY

Marlowe grabs Lulubelle's hands.

MARLOWE
(over sound of the fire)
We have to jump for it!

She looks at the ground.

LULUBELLE
I think I'll take my chances.

MARLOWE
Ma'am, trust me.

LULUBELLE
Mister, I can't!

Beep, beep! Marlowe and Lulubelle find themselves looking down at the roof of a car. Marlowe's car.

EXT. - FRONT OF THE FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Chandler gets out of the car, climbs onto its roof.

CHANDLER
Lower her to me!

INT. - FARMHOUSE -- UPSTAIRS BEDROOM -- DAY

Marlowe looks doubtfully at Lulubelle.

EXT. - FRONT OF THE FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Marlowe strains to lower Lulubelle out the window by her wrists.

LULUBELLE

But Mister! What about my cat?

Marlowe loses his grip. Lulubelle comes down on Chandler. They roll off the car.

INT. - FARM HOUSE -- UPSTAIRS BEDROOM -- DAY

Marlowe fights his way back through the flames to look under the bed...just as the ceiling caves in.

MARLOWE

Aw, hell--!

EXT. - FRONT OF THE FARMHOUSE -- DAY

Marlowe lands in the dirt next to his car and rolls. Dusts himself off, as the cat runs out of the house, singed and smoking, into the orchards. Lulubelle chases after the cat.

Marlowe and Chandler watch the old Victorian fall into itself in blazing glory. Behind them, screams can be heard from the shanty town. Cloud of smoke rises over the burning orchards.

Engine sounds and another scream. The Packard races past Marlowe and Chandler and disappears down the driveway...Velma beating at the back window.

INT. - MARLOWE'S CAR -- COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

Marlowe drives towards the City, in a line of shantytown trucks, Chandler in the passenger seat.

He pulls into the opposite lane, tries to pass them. He's forced back into the line by approaching fire trucks. Brigade races past them.

CHANDLER

They're passing the fire!

MARLOWE
Setting up to stop it at the
Pasadena Hills.

Marlowe hears Freddy's hoarse whisper in his ears.

FREDDY V.O.
Fire in the Arroyo Seco...!

MARLOWE
Burnin' a path for the road.

INT. - DOWNSTAIRS BAR AT MARLOWE'S OFFICE BUILDING -- DAY

Smiley, the bartender, frowns as Marlowe and Chandler walk through.

SMILEY
Cop was here, Marlowe. Big guy,
gold tooth. He left a note.

INT. - MARLOWE'S OUTER WAITING ROOM -- DAY

Marlowe finds his waiting room door kicked open. Inside, a note has been scrawled on the wall in big black letters:
Angel's Flight 6 p.m. Bring the pictures.

Chandler comes in behind him.

CHANDLER
What pictures?

Marlowe charges out of the office.

INT. - DOWNSTAIRS BAR -- DAY

Marlowe runs up to the bar.

MARLOWE
Smiley, tell me you got the
pictures!

Smiley pulls an envelope out from under the bar. Marlowe grabs it and dashes off.

SMILEY
(calls after Marlowe)
You're welcome.

EXT. - STREET OUTSIDE MARLOWE'S OFFICE BUILDING -- DAY

Marlowe runs to his car. Chandler follows. Marlowe stops him.

CHANDLER
Marlowe, if you go, they'll kill
you!

MARLOWE
Maybe. But they have Velma.

He jumps into his car, guns his engine. Pokes his head out the window.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Hey, Chandler! Don't think I ever
told you...actually always wanted
to be a writer.

Marlowe speeds off in his car.

EXT. - L.A. STREETS -- LATE DAY

Marlowe races Downtown in his car, honking at traffic.

MARLOWE
Come on, come on!

He pulls onto side streets, but runs into the same back up.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Move it, Goddamn it! Isn't there
someplace you people need to be?!

EXT. - DOWNTOWN L.A. STREET -- ANGEL'S FLIGHT ENTRANCE --
LATE DAY

Marlowe parks his car in a NO PARKING zone, jumps out. He runs to the entrance. Through the grand black-and-red painted arch is a single track climbing Bunker Hill. Midway up that hill is a section where the track splits, allowing two twenty-five passenger carriages, resembling old-fashioned cable cars, to pass each other. One going up, other down.

Sign on the gate: "Closed". Angel's Flight closes at 6 p.m. Marlowe looks at his watch: 6:12 p.m.

MARLOWE
Damn!

He climbs the gate to the boarding area, goes to the railcar sitting at the bottom of the tracks. It's empty.

INT. - RAILCAR -- LATE DAY

Marlowe enters the car. It starts up the hill, lurching as it picks up speed. He pulls out the packet of photos, flips through it. The light goes on in his eyes.

MARLOWE V.O.
Always said there are no
coincidences.

Another car comes down the hill towards him, setting sun glinting off its windows. Cars swing onto the double track portion in the middle of the hill to pass each other.

Velma's at the window of the other car with Lucien Wagner, arm wrapped across her, knife at her throat. Cars head away from each other.

Top of the hill, stands a tall figure, cloaked in trolley engine steam. Figure with a long spiked walking stick.

MARLOWE (V.O.)
Trouble's like a big dog. Run,
it'll bite you on the ass. Face
it, 'n at least, one'a you's gonna
get dinner.

The car reaches the top. D.A. Buron Fitts enters, hanging onto a pole opposite Marlowe. Car starts back down the hill.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Fitts, these photos better be worth
the blood you spilled for 'em.

Fitts waves his stick at Marlowe.

FITTS
That's District Attorney Fitts!
And I don't have to explain myself
to you, Marlowe.

Marlowe grabs the stick.

MARLOWE
Then explain it to the guy, mind'v
a ten-year-old, you sent crawlin'
down Central Avenue, his guts in
his hand. Name was Freddy.

FITTS

That wasn't supposed to happen. I didn't do that.

MARLOWE

You ordered it...! Don' know why Freddy took these pictures, but I'm sure as hell gonna find out.

Fitts pulls back his walkingstick.

FITTS

Curiosity killed the cat.

MARLOWE

That what killed J.C.?

FITTS

He was a writer. A writer who wanted to be paid not to write.

MARLOWE

That's a lie!

FITTS

A lifetime of scratching out stories taught your friend to play both sides.

Fitts plunks down his stick, on the wooden floor.

FITTS (CONT'D)

To his credit, your Mr. Moran knew a good story when he saw it. Took the deal-of-a-lifetime on this one.

MARLOWE

Then why's he's dead?

FITTS

Someone wanted the last word.

MARLOWE

An' right-of-way through the Arroyo Seco Canyon.

FITTS

Very good, Marlowe.

MARLOWE

Freddy, J.C.'n who knows how many others died for some Goddamn road!

FITTS

Not just any road, a super road!
First of its kind, Pasadena to
Downtown. This road is just the
beginning. Think what it will mean
to the City!

MARLOWE

So rich folks can drive down to
their offices faster. Whoop-de-do.
You're still a murderer, Fitts.

FITTS

Three lanes, both ways, no cross
streets! No stops for seventeen
miles, Marlowe! Do you know how
fast you could go?! Forty-five,
fifty miles an hours, maybe! Once
this stretch is built, the Mayor
plans to take it all the way to the
Harbor. I'm telling you, this is
the doorway to the future!

MARLOWE

Whose future is that? Yours or the
Mayor's?

FITTS

The Mayor's a fool.

MARLOWE

He's doin' it to get re-elected.
You're in it for money.

Other car approaches. Velma can be seen, Wagner's arm still
around her. Cars pass.

FITTS

You should've stayed out of it,
Marlowe.

Fitts pulls out a revolver.

MARLOWE

Doin' your own dirty work now?

FITTS

I'll take the film. And any prints
you may have.

Marlowe hands over the photos and negatives, points out one.

MARLOWE

Looks like Bugsy gave you all his money. A shame. Probably didn't leave a tip.

Photo shot through a window: Fitts and Siegel in a Musso & Frank's booth, envelope being passed between them.

Fitts smiles.

FITTS

That's deed to a certain orange farm. Why do I think you already knew that?

Marlowe looks up the line at the other car as the sun sinks. Lights blink on in both cars, illuminating Wagner's smile. He tightens his grip around Velma.

Fitts glances at the other car. Marlowe throws himself at Fitts. They struggle for the gun. It flies out of Fitts's hand and slides across the floor of the car.

Sizing up each other, they dive for the gun. Marlowe's faster.

The two men face off, gun in Marlowe's hand.

FITTS (CONT'D)

You're not going to shoot me.

Marlowe cocks the revolver.

MARLOWE

I'll take those photos.

FITTS

Marlowe, you don't know what you're doing. For God's sakes, I'm District Attorney!!

Marlowe reaches out. Fitts returns the photos.

FITTS (CONT'D)

Think you're accomplishing anything, Marlowe?! Politics never changes! People know we're corrupt! No one cares!!!

Marlowe looks up the hill. Other car is barely visible. He goes to the rear exit.

EXT. - RAILCAR -- SUNSET

Marlowe climbs up the outside of the car. Fitts grabs at him. Marlowe kicks him off. Marlowe crawls across the car roof as it makes its way up the track.

Fitts scrambles onto the roof. The two men struggle. Fitts rolls off, clings to a rail at the roof edge, dangling at the side of the car, over cement stairs thirty feet below.

Motions of the railcar toss Fitts like a rag doll. He can't find a foothold. Hanging on with one hand, Fitts claws at the smooth rooftop, unable to pull himself up.

Marlowe stares down at Fitts. Marlowe frowns...then reaches out, offers Fitts his hand.

MARLOWE

Take it!

Fitts hesitates, his disgust obvious, even though he's losing his grasp.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

Take it!!

Fitts finally loses his hold. A hand -- Marlowe's hand -- grabs Fitts' hand, makes a herculean effort to pull Fitts up onto the roof.

Marlowe and Fitts lie side-by-side on the roof, catching their breath -- staring at each other.

Other railcar approaches. Velma and Wagner can be seen in the illuminated car.

Marlowe stands and prepares to jump to the roof of the other car. He'll have only an instant.

Marlowe jumps, but has to fight to keep from sliding off.

INT. - OTHER RAILCAR -- SUNSET

Wagner hears Marlowe on the roof. Velma screams, as Wagner drags her to a window. Noises stop. Marlowe swings down through the car's back exit with the gun.

Using Velma as a shield, Wagner shows Marlowe the knife at her throat. Marlowe approaches them.

MARLOWE

What's that they say 'bout guys
with big knives?

WAGNER

They kill niggers with smart mouths.

MARLOWE

That your best line, Wagner?

WAGNER

Think you're so smart, Marlowe? You're just an uppity jig kicking up dust over some big retard with a camera.

MARLOWE

Name was Freddy...!! In his own way, he was better'n you'n me! Never hurt nobody. All he wanted was to be like the rest'v us. Would give you his last dime if you'da asked him for it. What kinda no-count, son'v-a-bitch cuts somebody like Freddy?

WAGNER

Someone who needed to get things done without a whole lotta noise.

Smiles.

WAGNER (CONT'D)

Cried like a baby when he got stuck. Dummy still wouldn't give me the damn camera!

Marlowe aims the gun at Wagner's head. Wagner throws Velma at Marlowe, grabs for the gun.

The men wrestle at the top of the tracks, rolling over each other to the car's front entrance.

Wagner pushes off Marlowe and stands up. Marlowe tackles him, knocks the gun from Wagner's hand.

Hanging out of the car, Wagner grabs a handful of walkway gravel, throws it in Marlowe's face.

Wagner crawls towards the back of the car, searching for the gun. All he sees is feet, dark stockings, five inch stiletto heels. Velma stands, framed in the car's rear entry, pointing the revolver down at Wagner.

WAGNER (CONT'D)

Mighty big gun for a little lady.

Wagner stands up.

MARLOWE
Velma, no. Freddy wouldn't want
it.

WAGNER
(to Marlowe)
You don't know, do you?

MARLOWE
Velma, he's not worth it.

WAGNER
Might wanna take another look at
those pictures, Marlowe.

MARLOWE
You're bluffing, Wagner.

WAGNER
Am I bluffing, Velma?

She cocks the hammer.

Photo shot through a window: Fitts and Siegel in a booth.
Next series of shots are inside the restaurant, each one
getting progressively closer.

Last photo shows Fitts and Siegel reacting to the camera. A
woman in a Garbo-styled fedora sits next to Siegel, back
turned, reflection of her face in a mirrored panel behind the
booth. It's Velma.

WAGNER (CONT'D)
Gonna tell him?

Velma aims.

WAGNER (CONT'D)
You thought your feminine wiles
could save the house. But your
little blackmail scheme just got
your brother killed.

MARLOWE
Velma, no...!!!

She shoots. Gun kicks up, hits Wagner in the shoulder.

Force of the .457 Magnum blast pitches Velma backwards
through the car's rear entrance.

Marlowe reaches the doorway. Velma is just a tiny figure thirty feet below on the stairs next to the tracks.

EXT. - ALLEY BELOW ANGEL'S FLIGHT -- TWILIGHT

Narrow chasm of rough surfaces, lit by a street lamp at the alley entrance. Velma lies motionless on cement stairs below the tracks, gun a few steps down.

Marlowe runs up the stairs. He kneels, cradles Velma in his arms. She opens her eyes.

MARLOWE

Velma...! Hold on now.

Passers-by are shadowy stick figures at the alley entrance, vacillating under the streetlight to look.

VELMA

Freddy needs me, you know. Boy
can't do anything without me...

She closes her eyes.

MARLOWE

Somebody help us here?!

Distant siren wails. Velma's locket lies open on the concrete, chain broken. Inside is a picture...chubby, 6-year-old dark-skinned black boy hugging a smiling, 12-year-old mixed-race girl.

EXT. - FRONT OF HARLOW'S BEVERLY GLEN MANSION -- DAY

Same locket is in Marlowe's hand as he stands at the front door. He closes the tiny gold piece, reaches for the bell.

Marlowe stops. He hears water splashing somewhere off to his left.

EXT. - HARLOW MANSION SIDE YARD -- DAY

Marlowe looks over a gate into the pool area.

Bathing suit and swim cap, Harlow is poised on the board. She dives in, swims across the pool, bobs up at his feet.

HARLOW

If it ain't the spade dick.

MARLOWE

People who hire me call me a
Private Investigator.

He offers his hand to help her out. She looks at his hand.

Mama Jean comes onto the balcony.

MAMA JEAN

What's he doing here?!

Harlow takes Marlowe's hand, hoists herself out of the pool.
She lays back onto the pavement, welcoming the sunlight.

MAMA JEAN (CONT'D)

For God's sake, Jean! Cover
yourself.

HARLOW

I might not be here if you'd
covered yourself every once in a
while! Ever thought of that?!

Mama Jean goes back inside.

Harlow relaxes. Shadow comes over her. She opens her eyes.

MARLOWE

I'm a licensed investigator. I
take jobs most people'd scrape off
the bottom of their shoes. An'
every once in a while, I do
something just because I know I
should. I have something for you.

Marlowe pulls the check from his pocket.

HARLOW

You're in my sun.

MARLOWE

Velma Leroy is dead.

HARLOW

So her last name was Leroy.

Pulls herself up onto a nearby lounge and closes her eyes.

HARLOW (CONT'D)

Wherever you go, trouble follows.

MARLOWE

I have a theory. Know what a theory is? Something you know, but you can't quite prove it.

HARLOW

What do you know?

MARLOWE

You're going to take off that cap for me.

She opens her eyes.

HARLOW

Why should I?

MARLOWE

To rub it in my face. Show me what a fool I've been. 'Cuz you know I can't do a damn thing about it.

Harlow sits up, rips off the cap, revealing short, curly light brown hair.

HARLOW

I wear a wig in public, so what?! That little half-breed told you.

MARLOWE

Velma never recognized you that night. Gave yourself away with the unconvincing poor-little-widow act.

She throws the cap at him.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

I wanna know. Would you've given her the money if you hadn'ta seen her face in that cab?

Harlow stands up, puts on a robe.

HARLOW

I didn't kill Paul, you know. We fought about the abortion, and he put the gun to his own head. I just told him he wasn't man enough. For once, I was wrong.

Marlowe returns the check to his pocket.

HARLOW (CONT'D)
So, Mr. Marlowe. You have
something for me?

MARLOWE
Bit of advice. Think you may be
getting too much sun.

EXT. - OPEN YARD BEHIND A LARGE COMMERCIAL LAUNDRY -- DAY

Chandler trails Marlowe out of a decrepit, steam-filled building to a yard where a dozen women, African American and Hispanic, are hanging laundry.

Marlowe and Chandler walk, row by row.

Three rows back, a woman turns to them. It's Lulubelle.

LULUBELLE
Mr. Marlowe, isn't it?

Marlowe hands her an envelope.

MARLOWE
This is for you.

Lulubelle opens the envelope, sees the check for the farm. She screams and faints. Washer women rush to pick her up.

Marlowe and Chandler walk away. Chandler pulls something from his pocket.

CHANDLER
I learned something today, Sam.
Some good comes out of the bad.

MARLOWE
Not enough good. If you're not
rich and white.

CHANDLER
More reason for you to want this.

Marlowe's detective license.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)
Writing comes with connections.

Marlowe takes the license.

MARLOWE
Maybe I should write.

CHANDLER
You might be good at it.

Marlowe nods. Words echo as they disappear down an alley.

MARLOWE
Have a detective character in mind.
I call him Marlowe.

CHANDLER
I like that. Can I use it?

Marlowe puts his hand on Chandler's shoulder.

MARLOWE
I'd have to think on that, Raymond.
Truth is, a man does get attached
to his own name...

FADE TO BLACK:

SUPERIMPOSE:

Fraud, arson and murder were
committed building the world's
first freeway, the Pasadena 110.

Los Angeles **Mayor Shaw** was recalled
from office for corruption.

District Attorney Fitts was
impeached. He committed suicide
with a gun from one of his trials.

Jean Harlow died at the age of 26,
height of her career.

Sgt. Rocky Washington ended up the
City's first African American
Station Chief. Mentoring
generations of young black cops
...one, who did become Mayor.

And **P.I. Sam Marlowe** lived to be a
hundred, still insisting the Sam
Spade and Philip Marlowe detective
characters were based on a black
man...just trying to make it in a
white man's world.

THE END