

# THE STING

by David S. Ward

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## THE STING

FADE IN:

A white on black TITLE appears in the lower left hand corner of the screen:

AUGUST, 1936

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. A SLUM AREA OF JOLIET - DAY

It's a bleak, windy morning, the kind that clears the streets of all but the winos (who carry their own heaters), and the point-men for juvenile gangs. We pick up a solitary figure, Joe Mottola, coming down the street and entering what appears to be an abandoned tenement. He pauses a second to dust his white-winged alligator shoes on the back of his pants leg. Sharply dressed and surrounded by the aura of one who is making money for the first time and broadcasting it on all bands, he seems an incongruity in this part of town.

We follow him up a flight of rickety stairs to a second floor flat. He knocks on the door, is admitted by a cautious doorman.

INT. NUMBERS SPOT - DAY

Suddenly we are plunged into a room of chattering, clamoring people. This is a spot for the numbers racket, a place immune from legal interference, where any sucker can bet on a number between 1 and 1000 in the hope of getting the 600 to 1 payoff that goes to those few who guess right. The bettors are queued up in several lines before a long table, where they place their bets and are given receipts in return. Others wait at a cashier's window to pick up previous earnings or to ask for credit.

Mottola moves through the crowd to a back room where betting slips are being sorted and money counted under the watchful and somewhat impatient gaze of a Supervisor, an older man named Mr. Granger. The Yankee-White Sox game is heard on the radio in the background.

Mottola, noticing that his entrance has aroused little interest, saunters over to the Phone Girl and gives her a little pinch on the cheek. The girl slaps his hand away, obviously having been through this before.

PHONE GIRL

Beat it, Mottola.

Granger glances up and exchanges a token nod with Mottola, who plops down in a folding chair next to the radio. The phone rings.

PHONE GIRL

8720...Yes, hold on a second.

(calling over to the Supervisor)

Mr. Granger, Chicago on the line.

Granger is a little apprehensive about talking to Chicago, but takes the phone anyway.

GRANGER

Yeh?

CUT TO:

INT. A WATERFRONT PROCESSING PLANT - CHICAGO - DAY

A flabby, bald man named Combs is on the other end of the line. Visible beyond the door and interior window of his office is a large room, cluttered with tables, typewriters, clerks and adding machines. This room is the clearinghouse for all the transaction of the numbers game. All the betting slips and income from the spots are brought in here and processed.

COMBS

Granger, this is Combs. Why haven't we heard from ya? Everybody else is in.

GRANGER

We had a few problems with the Law this morning. The Mayor promised the Jaycees to get tough on the rackets again, so he shut everybody down for a couple hours to make it look good. Nothing serious, it just put us a little behind for the day.

COMBS

You been making your payoffs, haven't ya?

GRANGER

Hell yes. He does this every year. There's nothing to worry about.

COMBS

Okay, finish your count and get it up here as soon as you can. I don't wanta be here all night.

GRANGER

Believe me, the Man's gonna be real happy. Looks like we cleared over ten grand this week.

COMBS

(not impressed)

We cleared 22 here.

GRANGER

Well, hell, you got the whole Chicago south side. How do ya expect the eight lousy spots I've got to compete with that?

COMBS

(reading off a sheet of paper on his desk)

They did 14 grand in Evanston, 16.5 is Gary, and 20 in Cicero. Looks like you're bringing up the rear, Granger.

INT. NUMBERS SPOT - DAY

Granger burns inside. One of the girls who's been sorting and counting hands him a slip of paper.

GRANGER

I just got the count. We'll put the take on the 4:15.

COMBS

We'll be waitin'.

Combs hangs up, smiling to himself, proud of the way he gave the needle to Granger.

CUT TO:

INT. NUMBERS SPOT - DAY

Granger storming over to a safe and jerking open the door.

GRANGER

(snapping)

Mottola.

Mottola hustles out of his chair.

GRANGER

(handing him a bundle

of bills)  
Take this up to the city on the  
4:15. They'll be waitin' for it at  
the clearing house. And don't stop  
for no drinks. You can get a cab  
down the street.

Mottola takes the money and slips it into his inside coat pocket with all the dramatic flair of the true flunky. No one would ever guess that he was just an overdressed messenger boy.

#### EXT. OF THE TENEMENT AGAIN

Mottola emerges from a side entrance into a narrow alley. He walks briskly down to the end and turns left into a large alleyway; this one connecting two streets. The alley is deserted save for one scruffy, slovenly dressed young stranger coming toward him from the opposite direction. The man carries a battered suitcase and seems to be in a hurry.

Suddenly, Mottola hears shouting coming from somewhere behind him. He turns around to see a small, weathered looking thief come racing around the corner and down the alley toward him, frantically pursued by a gray-haired black man. Limping noticeably, the black man manages a few cries for help and then stumbles and falls. The stranger yells at Mottola to cover his side of the alley, and then readies himself for the arrival of the thief. Mottola just stands there, not the least interested in the exercise of justice. Just as the thief is about to run on by, the stranger throws his suitcase at the little man's legs, sending him sprawling and separating him from the wallet he's been carrying in his left hand.

The stranger makes a dash for the wallet and kicks it back to where Mottola is standing. Almost by reflex, Mottola picks it up. The thief scrambles to his feet and starts back toward his new-found enemy, brandishing a knife. Both the stranger and Mottola brace themselves for an attack. The thief, realizing that there are two people to fight, begins to think better of it. He is not a young man, nor particularly strong.

THIEF  
(shaking his fist at  
the stranger)  
You fuckin' nigger-lover. I'll get  
you for this someday, sucker egg.

Mottola and the stranger exchange glances of relief as the thief flees out onto the street and disappears.

The black man, meanwhile, has struggled to his feet and is staggering toward them. He collapses against the alley wall after a few steps. The stranger rushes over to him, followed somewhat absently by Mottola.

BLACK MAN

The wallet. You gotta go after him.  
He's got all the money.

STRANGER

Don't worry, we got the wallet.  
What happened? He get ya with the  
knife?

The stranger opens the Black Man's coat to reveal a bloody  
wound at the top of his leg.

BLACK MAN

(trying to move)

Give it to me! Please. I gotta  
know it's all there!

STRANGER

You just sit tight, old man. We're  
gonna have to get you to a doctor.  
(starting to leave)  
I'll call a cop.

BLACK MAN

No, no cops!

Mottola has given him his wallet, which the black man now  
opens, disclosing a fat bundle of bills tied by a rubber  
band. Mottola and the stranger are amazed by the amount of  
money.

STRANGER

(a little uneasy)

You wanted by the law or somethin'?

BLACK MAN

Naw, it's okay.

STRANGER

You're crazy carryin' that kinda  
money in this neighborhood. No  
wonder you got hit.

BLACK MAN

(trying to get to his feet)

Thanks. I'm obliged to ya, but I  
gotta get goin'.

(his leg gives way  
under him)

STRANGER

You ain't goin' nowhere on that leg.

BLACK MAN

I gotta! Look, I run some slots  
down in West Bend for a mob here.  
I got a little behind on my payoffs  
so they figure I been holdin' out

on 'em. They gave me to 4:00 to come up with the cash. I don't get it there I'm dead.

STRANGER

It don't look good, gramps, it's ten of now.

BLACK MAN

I got a hundred bucks for you and your friend if you deliver the money for me.

STRANGER

(hesitates)

I dunno. That little mug that got ya is mad enough at me already – what if he's out there waitin' around a corner with some friends.

BLACK MAN

He won't know you're carryin' it. C'mon, you gotta help me out.

STRANGER

(makes up his mind)

Sorry, pal. I'll fix you up, call you a doc, but I ain't gonna walk into a bunch of knives for ya.

BLACK MAN

(desperate to Mottola)

How bout you? I'll give you the whole hundred!

STRANGER

What makes you think you can trust him? He didn't do shit.

MOTTOLA

Hey, butt out, chicken liver. I gave him back his wallet, didn't I?

(to black man)

How far is this place?

BLACK MAN

1811 Mason. Put it in Box 3C. You won't have no trouble. There's five thousand dollars there and here's a hundred for you.

MOTTOLA

(taking the bundle of bills from the black man, plus the \$100 bill)

All right. I'll make your drop for you, old man. And don't worry, you can trust me.

Mottola puts the bills in his inside coat pocket, right next to the numbers money. The stranger, who has now finished bandaging, watches him do it.

STRANGER

If that punk and his pals decide to search ya, you'll never fool 'em carryin' it there.

BLACK MAN

(suddenly afraid again)  
What do we do?

STRANGER

You got a bag or somethin'?

BLACK MAN

No.

STRANGER

How 'bout a handkerchief?

BLACK MAN

Here.

The stranger goes into the right coat pocket and pulls out a wrinkled handkerchief.

STRANGER

Let me have the money.

Mottola takes out the Black Man's five grand and hands it to the Stranger. He puts it in the handkerchief.

STRANGER

You better stick that other in here too, if you wanta keep it.

BLACK MAN

(pleading)  
Just hurry, will ya.

Mottola pulls out the numbers money and puts it in the handkerchief too. The stranger ties it all up.

STRANGER

(demonstrating by slipping the bundle down into crotch)  
All right. Carry it down in your pants here.  
(pulling it back out and tucking it in Mottola's pants)  
Ain't no hard guy in the world

gonna frisk ya there.

MOTTOLA

Thanks.

(to the black man)

So long, partner. Don't worry,  
everything's gonna be all right.

The Black Man nods gratefully, but there's still a trace of worry on his face. Mottola trots off down the alley and out onto the street, glancing around cautiously for signs of trouble. He walks hurriedly down the sidewalk toward the cab stand in the distance. Suddenly the little man with the knife appears out of a doorway about 15 yards behind him. Mottola notices him and quickens his pace, finally breaking into a dead run.

We follow him as he dashes headlong down the street, opening a big lead on the guy with the knife. He reaches the taxi zone. He hops in a cab and slams the door.

INT. TAXI - DAY

He jumps in, closes the door, and breathes a sigh of relief.

CABBIE

Where to?

MOTTOLA

Which way is Mason?

CABBIE

About 20 blocks south.

MOTTOLA

Okay, go north. The Joliet  
Station -- Fast.

Mottola settles back in his seat and starts to laugh.

CABBIE

What's so funny?

MOTTOLA

I just made the world's easiest  
five grand.

He takes the bundle out from inside his pants in order to gaze upon his new-found fortune. He unties the handkerchief. It's full of toilet paper. Mottola looks like he's just been shot.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY - DAY - THE STRANGER AND BLACK MAN

hightailing it down the street, two newly solvent con artists on the lam. It's hard to run they're laughing so hard. The stranger chucks his suitcase in a trash can and pulls the real handkerchief out of his pants.

BLACK MAN

Jesus, what a bundle. Did you know he was that loaded?

STRANGER

Hell no, I just cut into him. I woulda settled for pawning one of them shoes.

As they split off, music begins, and we go into a

#### TITLES SEQUENCE

Done to a driving Chicago blues, the sequence is designed to establish somewhat the milieu of the stranger, known to friends and enemies alike as Hooker. We see the following:

#### EXT. PAWNSHOP - LOOKING INSIDE - DAY

Hooker is getting a radio and well-worn suit out of hook. It's like seeing old friends again. All pantomime.

#### INT. HOOKER'S ROOM - DAY

A shabby little place he rents above a cigar store. We pick him up in a jerry-built outdoor shower, which he's rigged up on the fire escape. The rinse water drips down through the landing into the grimy alley below.

HOOKER

(singing)

'With plenty of money and you-oo-oo,  
Oh baby, what I wouldn't do-oo-oo...'

#### ON THE STREET AGAIN

jauntily carrying a magnum of champagne and some flowers, obviously on his way to see someone special.

#### IN A BURLESQUE HOUSE

Hooker stands in the wings holding the flowers and champagne, watching his date for the evening, a 6'3" stripper named Crystal, do her routine.

Crystal finishes up and comes off the stage.

CRYSTAL

(tired)

Hi, Hooker, you gettin' married or somethin'?

HOOKER

Come into a little dough. You  
wanna get outa here tonight?

CRYSTAL

Can't. I got a 10 o'clock show. I  
need the five bucks.

HOOKER

I'll spend fifty on ya.

Crystal looks at him a second and starts to giggle. We're  
pretty sure she's gonna get outa here tonight.

#### COMING INTO A POOR MAN'S GAMBLING JOINT

Little more than a reconverted brick basement, the place  
contains three shoddy, homemade roulette tables. Hooker,  
accompanied now by Crystal, nods a greeting to the doorman  
and proceeds to a table where there are already several  
other people laying their bets for the next spin. Hooker  
knows the wheel man, an old-timer named Jimmy.

JIMMY

(glad to see him)

Hooker!

HOOKER

How ya doin', Jimmy.

JIMMY

(collecting bets and  
paying off the winners)

Ain't seen you in months, boy.  
Thought maybe you took a fall.

HOOKER

Naw, just a little hard times,  
that's all. It's all over now.

JIMMY

You gonna have a go here?

(pointing to the  
betting board)

How 'bout a ten spot on the line  
here. The 4-9 been lookin' good  
today. Lotsa action on 28th Street  
down there, too. Pay ya 10-1.

As Jimmy finishes his spiel, he starts the wheel spinning  
and drops in the ball. Betting is allowed to continue until  
the ball drops from the outer ring into the center.

HOOKER

(taking out his wallet)

Three grand on the black.

Jimmy is stunned. The others at the table, used to dollar bets, look at Hooker like he's some kind of foreign dignitary.

JIMMY

(worried)

You sure you wanna start off that big? Bet like that could put a real dent in us.

HOOKER

I feel lucky tonight.

JIMMY

Aw, come on, Hooker, why don't you just...

HOOKER

Three grand on the black, Jimmy.

Jimmy wants to argue some more, but the ball is getting ready to drop into the center. We see Jimmy quickly press a hidden lever under the table with his foot. The ball falls and settles into red 27 with a motion that is not quite right. The others at the table fail to notice, but Hooker is not fooled. He stares venomously at Jimmy, who knows that Hooker is on to him.

JIMMY

Sorry, Hooker.

(making an attempt at levity, in order to explain)

Good thing that ball came up red. Guy could get in trouble around here, losin' a bet that big.

Jimmy reaches for Hooker's money. Hooker stops him by putting his hand on it.

HOOKER

Spin it again.

Jimmy doesn't know what the hell to do. He gives Hooker a little head motion to indicate a small window high up in one of the walls. Behind it, we see a pair of eyes. Suddenly, Hooker understands why Jimmy had to cheat him, but it doesn't change his demand.

HOOKER

Spin it anyway, Jimmy.

Jimmy is beside himself. If he doesn't spin again, Hooker may expose him. If he does spin, and loses, his management will fire him. He pleads to Hooker with his eyes, but it's no use. Jimmy spins the wheel and reluctantly drops in the ball. This time there is no foot on the lever, and it settles into black 15. Hooker stares at the ball a second

and then looks up at his terrified friend.

HOOKER

Don't worry, pal. I knew it was my night.

Hooker pushes the money over to Jimmy and walks out of the room. He's lost \$3,000, but he's still working on a lucky night.

CUT TO:

EXT. GAMBLING JOINT

Hooker and Crystal out on the street.

CRYSTAL

(irritated)

Thanks for the evening, Hooker. I can still make the 10 o'clock. If you wanna spend 50 bucks on me again, mail it.

She walks off down the street.

HOOKER

(going into his pocket for more money)

Hey wait a minute.

(he comes up with 30)

Aw, the hell with ya.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WATERFRONT PROCESSING PLANT - LATE AFTERNOON

A late model Ford roars up and screeches to a stop in front of the plant. Out bursts a carefully-groomed, tight-lipped young man named Greer, who hustles into the plant. We follow him through a maze of machinery to the service elevator and up to the third floor where we find ourselves in the clearinghouse room we saw earlier.

INT. PLANT - AFTERNOON - LATE

The working day is over now, and everyone has gone, except for Combs, who sits somberly in his office.

GREER

They found Mottola. He was drunk in a dive in Joliet. Never got on the train.

COMBS

(aggravated)

I don't wanta hear about his day, Greer. What happened to the money?

GREER

He lost it to a coupla con artists  
on his way outa the spot.

COMBS

How much?

GREER

Twelve thousand.

Combs sits in quiet thought for a second. Finally:

COMBS

All right. Better get on the phone  
to New York. See what the big mick  
wants to do about it.

(pause)

I gotta pretty good idea, though.

CUT TO:

INT. AN EXCLUSIVE NEW YORK GAMBLING CLUB - LATE AFTERNOON

An agitated young man, Floyd, weaves his way through the craps and roulette tables, and hustles up a staircase to a second floor room with a drawing of a snarling tiger on the door. Below the tiger, the word "FARO" appears. There is a large man, of thuggish demeanor, guarding the door, but Floyd gives him a small hand signal and walks right by him.

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE FARO ROOM

In the center is a beautifully-carved wooden table, on which sit a faro board and a dealing box, tended by a stone-faced Dealer, who calls the progress of the game in a continuous abacus-like device that keeps track of the cards which have already been played. On the opposite side of the table, completely absorbed in the rhythmic appearance of the cards from the dealing box, sits Doyle Lonnegan. Although his clothes and accessories are those of a wealthy man, there is a coarseness to both his movement and speech which bespeak lower class origins, for which he now has nothing but contempt.

Floyd enters the room and approaches him cautiously, trying hard to make as little noise as possible.

FLOYD

Doyle, can I see you a minute?

LONNEGAN

(not looking up from  
the table)

I'm busy, Floyd.

FLOYD

It's important. We had a little trouble in Chicago today. One of our runners got hit for 12 grand.

LONNEGAN

(calmly)

Which one?

FLOYD

Mottola.

LONNEGAN

You sure he didn't just pocket it?

FLOYD

No, we checked his story with a tipster. He was cleaned by two grifters on 47th.

LONNEGAN

They workin' for anybody?

FLOYD

I don't know. Could be. We're runnin' that down now.

LONNEGAN

All right, mark Mottola up a little and put him on a bus. Nothin' fancy, just enough to keep him from coming back. Get some local people to take care of the other two.

(impassively)

We gotta discourage this kinda thing.

CUT TO:

INT. AN OLD BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

Hooker, still in his suit, but looking a little worse for wear, knocks on the door of one of the apartments. A young black woman, Louise, answers the door, holding a baby.

HOOKER

Howdy, Louise.

LOUISE

(admiring Hooker in his suit)

Goddamn, Johnny Hooker, you're a sharp hunky in them linens. If you wasn't so pale, I'da sworn you had class.

Hooker steps inside and walks right into a big hug from an older black woman, Alva. Alva has a hat on, obviously just

about to go out. Beyond her we see the Eirie kid and the Black Man (known from here on as Luther Coleman) playing a game of mah jong on the dining table with a man whose back is to us. An 11-year-old boy is listening to the radio.

COLEMAN

Turn that down, Leroy.

ALVA

Oh, Johnny, Luther said you was somethin' to see today.

HOOKER

I'll never be as good as that mark, Alva.

ALVA

Well, we gonna hear all about it when we get back from church. Leroy, get your jacket on, boy.

Leroy goes to get his jacket. Louise is finished putting the baby to bed.

HOOKER

You goin' to church now?

ALVA

They been havin' late bingo down there. I'm gonna call on the Lord for a little cash, while he's still payin' off. Luther, you look in on that child from time to time, will ya?

Luther nods that he will. Alva, Leroy and Louise leave for church as Hooker strolls over and tosses two packets on the table. Luther doesn't pick his up, but the other man does. We now see that he is the thief in the opening sequence. He is called the Eirie kid and he is delighted at his share.

EIRIE KID

Hey, Luther told me he was carrying a wad, but I didn't figure this much.

HOOKER

Which way did he do, Eirie?

EIRIE KID

Straight north. He was gonna take it all and run.

HOOKER

(laughs)

The bastard. He can blow his nose all the way.

They laugh again, but Luther doesn't share their enthusiasm.

He watches Hooker who becomes uncomfortable under his gaze.

COLEMAN

You're late. Where you been?

HOOKER

(flopping into a chair)

I had some appointments.

COLEMAN

(not fooled)

How much did ya lose?

HOOKER

(after a pause)

All of it.

COLEMAN

(pissed)

In one goddamn night? What are ya sprayin' money around like that for? You coulda been nailed.

HOOKER

I checked the place out. There weren't no dicks in there.

COLEMAN

You're a con man, and you blew it like a pimp. I didn't teach ya to be no pimp.

HOOKER

What's eatin' you? I've blown money before.

COLEMAN

No class grifter woulda' done it, that's all.

HOOKER

You think my play is bad?

COLEMAN

I think it's the best...

Hooker sinks back, embarrassed that he misread Coleman's intentions.

COLEMAN

...It's the only reason I ain't quit before now.

HOOKER

(bewildered)

What?

COLEMAN

I'm gettin' too slow for this racket. I done the best I'm gonna do. You hang on too long, you start embarrassin' yourself.

HOOKER

What are you talkin' about? We just took off the biggest score we've ever had. We can do anything we want now.

COLEMAN

It's nothin' compared to what you could be makin' on the Big Con. You're wastin' your time workin' street marks.

HOOKER

Hey look. You think I'm gonna run out on ya or somethin'? Just cause we hit it big. Luther, I owe you everything. If you hadn't taught me con, I wouldn't know nothin'.

COLEMAN

(a little embarrassed)

Aw hell, you sound like some goddamn sucker. You know everything I know. You got nothin' more to learn from me.

HOOKER

But you played the Big Con. You said it was nothin'. A game for flakes and mama's boys.

COLEMAN

And I'm tellin' ya now, you're a fool if you don't get into it. A bigger fool than I was.

(pause, holding up the money)

I been lookin' for this one all my life, Johnny. Now I got a chance to step out at the top.

Hooker knows it's no use.

HOOKER

(after a long silence)

What the hell you gonna do with yourself?

COLEMAN

Aw, I got a brother down in K.C., runs a freight outlet. I can go halvesies with 'em! It ain't too exciting, but it's mostly legal.

Hooker just nods.

COLEMAN

Straighten up, kid. I wouldn't  
turn ya out if ya weren't ready.

(flipping Hooker a  
piece of paper)

I got a guy named Henry Gondorff I  
want you to look up. There ain't a  
better insideman alive. He'll  
teach ya everything ya gotta know.

HOOKER

You'll take a cut of what I make,  
won't ya?

COLEMAN

I'm out, Johnny.

HOOKER

If that's the way you want it.

COLEMAN

That's the way I want it.

CUT TO:

EXT. A DIMLY LIT STREET - NIGHT

It's late at night now. Hooker and Eirie wander along the  
street together, not really ready to go home, but with no  
other ideas either. Hooker, obviously preoccupied, idly  
strikes a match on a street lamp as he passes and lets it  
burn out. He does this several times.

HOOKER

How do you like that Coleman, huh?  
After three years.

EIRIE KID

Aw come on, it was the only thing  
to do. He knew he was holdin' ya  
back.

HOOKER

We were partners. If it weren't  
for Luther I'd still be hustlin'  
pinball down at Gianelli's. I  
don't need anything more than I got.

HOOKER

You ain't gonna have nothin' if you  
don't lay off them games of chance.  
There's a depression on ya know.

HOOKER

There's always a depression on.

EIRIE KID

If you saved a little, you wouldn't  
have to grift so much.

HOOKER

I like griftin'.

EIRIE KID

You could buy yourself some things.  
Clothes, or a nice car...

HOOKER

I don't look any good in clothes  
and I don't know how to drive.  
What else ya got to sell, Eirie?

EIRIE KID

Forget it.

They walk on a few more feet, when suddenly a police car  
pulls up alongside them and two men jump out. The first, a  
uniformed policeman, grabs Eirie around the neck.

Hooker makes a break for it, but the second Figure, a burly  
detective named Snyder, tackles him in the middle of the  
street, drags him back into the alley and plasters him up  
against a brick wall. The two have met before.

HOOKER

Hi there, Snyder. Things a little  
slow down at the Bunco Department  
tonight, eh? Somebody lose the  
dominoes?

SNYDER

You scored blood money today,  
Hooker. You need a friend.

HOOKER

(knocking Snyder's  
hand away)

Aw, find yourself a shoplifter to  
roll.

Snyder gives Hooker a swift knee in the thigh and follows it  
with an elbow across the head. Hooker flies into a row of  
boxes and garbage cans.

HOOKER

(getting up slowly)

You got the wrong guy, pal. I been  
home with the flu all day.

(rising to a fuller height)

You can stake out my toilet if you  
want.

Bang. Snyder, infuriated by Hooker's irreverence, slams him

to the ground again. The policeman is no longer holding Eirie but is almost daring him to make a move. Eirie wants to go to Hooker's aid, but he knows the policeman will beat him to a pulp.

SNYDER

(pulling Hooker out  
of the heap and  
smashing him against  
the wall again)

I'll tell ya what you did, smart boy. You tied into a loaded mark on 47th across from Maxies. You and Coleman played the switch for him and blew him off to a cab on 49th. If he hadn't been a numbers runner for Doyle Lonnegan, it woulda been perfect.

HOOKER

(startled by the information)

You're crazy. I'm not stupid enough to play for rackets money.

SNYDER

Not intentionally maybe, but that don't make no difference to Lonnegan. He'll swat you like any fly.

HOOKER

I'll square it with the fixer.

SNYDER

Nobody can buy you a prayer, if I put the finger on ya.

Snyder lets go. Hooker sinks back against the wall. He says nothing; he's waiting for the price.

SNYDER

I figure your end of the score was at least 3 gees. I want 2 no matter what it was.

HOOKER

(lying)

My end was only one.

SNYDER

(not taking the fake)

Then you'll have to come up with another grand somewhere.

Hooker is beat and he knows it.

HOOKER

All right.

He reaches into his coat, pulls out a stack of bills and counts out \$2000 to Snyder. Eirie looks on in amazement; he didn't think Hooker had it.

SNYDER

(pocketing the money  
and motioning his  
partner to put his  
gun away)

You're a smart egg, Hooker. No use  
dyin' for 2 grand.

Snyder and his policeman friend get in their car and start down the street. Hooker and Eirie walk nonchalantly in the other direction.

EIRIE KID

I thought you blew all your money.

HOOKER

I did. That stuff I gave him was  
counterfeit. They'll pinch him the  
first place he tries to spend it.

Snyder and his partner disappear around a corner. Hooker suddenly takes off like a shot.

INT. DRUGSTORE - NIGHT

He runs into a drugstore and goes to the phone booth. There's already a woman in it. Hooker rips open the door and throws her out. Hurriedly, he begins to dial.

EIRIE KID

(standing outside the booth)

What the hell you gonna do when  
Snyder rushes his finger right to  
Lonnegan? You're committin'  
suicide, kid.

HOOKER

(waiting for the ring)

Aw Christ, it doesn't make no  
difference now. If Snyder knows  
about it so does everybody else.  
He never gets anything first...Damn,  
there's no answer at Luther's.

EIRIE KID

Listen to me, Hooker. What ever  
you do, don't go back to your place  
tonight, don't go anyplace you  
usually go, ya hear me? Get outa  
town or somethin', but...

Hooker, still getting no answer, slams the phone down and

blasts out of the booth.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Eirie chases him frantically, calling him to come back, but he's giving away too many years and there's no stopping Hooker at this point.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT - SHOTS OF HOOKER

Pumping down the street.

EXT. LUTHER'S BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

Hooker races into Luther's brownstone, charges up to the third floor.

INT. LUTHER'S BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

Hooker runs up through a small group of people on the stairs. He bursts into Luther's room, the door of which is already open. The room shows signs of a struggle, a turned-over chair, a broken lamp, but there is no Coleman. Hooker goes slowly to the window. He looks down into the courtyard and then suddenly sprints back out the door. As we hear him scrambling down the stairs, the camera dollies to the window and looks out.

EXT. COURTYARD - NIGHT

There on the concrete below, face down, is the body of Luther Coleman. Hooker races out to it and kneels down.

HOOKER

(shaking the body)

C'mon Luther, get up. You gotta get up, Luther.

In the distance, sirens are heard. Heads are out of the windows and some people are starting to gather in the courtyard.

HOOKER (CONT'D)

Goddamn you, Luther, will you get up?

(pounding on the body)

I'm not waitin' for you, Luther.  
I'm not waitin' anymore. Get up,  
you son of a bitch. Goddamn you,  
Luther, goddamn.

The sirens are close now, and Hooker tears himself away from Luther and runs. The others gather to look at the body.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

THE SET-UP

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. THE TRAIN STATION - DAY

We open on Hooker sleeping in some remote corner of the station, covered with newspapers for warmth, and barely distinguishable from the clutter of junk surrounding him. A station security officer, on his morning sweep, wanders by and delivers a terrific blow to the soles of Hooker's feet with a nightstick. Hooker jolts awake with a cry of pain, as the officer diffidently moves on toward another sleeping victim.

Tired and sore from his night in the station, Hooker struggles to his feet and attempts to take stock of the situation. He tries to smooth the wrinkles out of his suit, but it's futile. A quick check of his wallet finds it as empty as he'd remembered it.

CUT TO:

THE STATION - GIFT SHOP - DAY

Hooker walks in and goes to the toy section. He looks through several small novelties, till he finds what he's looking for -- a little tin replica of a policeman's badge. He looks around for station detectives, and seeing none, slips the badge into his pocket.

CUT TO:

THE STATION - WASHROOM - DAY

Hooker rinses out his mouth, towels off his face and slicks his hair back with water. It's a drop in the bucket, but it seems to revitalize him a little.

CUT TO:

STATION - HALLWAY - DAY

We see Hooker removing a sign from a door, but the angle prohibits us from reading it.

INT. STATION - DAY

He drops the sign in a waste can and walks out into the crowded passenger lobby. After scanning the area carefully for a minute, he goes up to a conservative young business man, who's busy reading the schedule board.

HOOKER

(flashing open his  
wallet to reveal the  
little tin badge and  
then closing it again quickly)  
Excuse me, sir. Treasury Dept...  
I'd like to ask you a few questions.

MAN  
(flustered)  
What for? I haven't done anything.

HOOKER  
We don't doubt that, but there's a  
counterfeiting operation passing  
bad money in the station. Have you  
made any purchases here today?

MAN  
(reluctantly)  
Yes, a ticket to Chicago.

HOOKER  
Then I'm afraid we'll have to  
impound your money until we're sure  
that it's all good. Can I see your  
wallet and your ticket, please?

MAN  
(handing them over)  
But I got a train to make.

HOOKER  
(taking out the money  
and returning the wallet)  
It'll only take 20 minutes or so.  
You can pick it up at the window  
down the hall.

MAN  
But what about all these other  
people?

HOOKER  
(blowing up)  
We'll get 'em! Give us a chance.  
I'm not the only agent in here, ya  
know. We go around advertising  
ourselves, how many counterfeiters  
do you think we'd catch, huh?  
(pointing to his suit)  
You think I'm wearin' this rag here  
'cause I like it? Christ, everybody  
thinks life's a holiday or somethin'  
when you got a badge.  
(pouring it on)  
I been here since three this

morning, Charlie, and I never knew there was so much ugliness in people. You try to help 'em and they spit on you. I shoulda let ya go and gotten yourself arrested for passin' false notes.

The Businessman is totally shamed.

MAN

I'm sorry, really I am, but my train leaves in ten minutes.

HOOKER

All right, I'll give ya a break.  
(pointing to a hall)  
Down that hall there, there's an unmarked door on the left. Go on in there and wait at the window. I'll take this...  
(he holds up the money)  
...in the back and run it through right away. We'll have you outta there in a couple minutes.

MAN

Thank you. You don't know how much I appreciate this.

HOOKER

(with a little wave)  
Think nothin' of it.

The man goes off down the hall, more than grateful to be given a break like this. Hooker heads for the "back". We follow the Man down the hall to the unmarked door. He strides on through to find himself face to face with a wall of busily flushing urinals.

CUT TO:

EXT. STATION - DAY - HOOKER

Boarding the 8:10 for Chicago.

CUT TO:

INT. STATION - DAY

The Man wandering up and down the hall, wondering how he could have missed that room.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - DAY

The street runs along side an elevated train track. We pick up Hooker coming down the street, eating a hot dog he bought with the money he just earned in the train station.

He appears to be looking for an address, referring every now and then to the piece of paper Luther gave him the night before. Finally he stops in front of an old three-story building which contains a carousel on the bottom 2 floors and what appear to be apartments on the third floor. He peers inside the big, sliding glass doors and seeing no sign of life, goes around to the side to look for a way in.

A 35 year-old woman, Billie, appears in her bathrobe on the second floor landing and descends the stairs to get the morning paper. She's eating an apple. Although she has just gotten up and looks it, she has the presence of one who is probably quite striking at other hours. The sight of Hooker fazes her not at all.

HOOKER

Excuse me, I'm looking for a guy  
named Henry Gondorff. You know him?

BILLIE

(starting back up the stairs)

No.

HOOKER

Luther Coleman sent me.

Billie stops and comes back down the stairs. It's the first time she's stopped chewing.

BILLIE

(checking him out)

You Hooker?

HOOKER

Yeh.

BILLIE

Why didn't you say so. I thought  
maybe you was a copper or somethin'.

She goes to a side door and unlocks it.

BILLIE

It's the room in the back. He  
wasn't expecting you so soon though.

Hooker's not quite sure what that means, but there's something about Billie that makes him know that you don't ask.

INT. CAROUSEL - DAY

Hooker walks past the now motionless carousel to the room in the back and knocks on the door. No answer. He gives the door a little push and it swings open.

INT. GONDORFF'S ROOM - DAY

The room inside is small and cluttered, consisting of a bed,

a sink, and a bathroom, all covered by a layer of books, dirty clothes and beer bottles. Draped over a chair, fully dressed, but completely passed out is the one and only Henry Gondorff.

HOOKER  
(to himself)  
The great Henry Gondorff.

CUT TO:

INT. A SHOWER - DAY

Water blasting out of the fixture. We see Gondorff, still fully clothed, sitting in the bottom of the shower, the spray streaming off his face. An imposing figure, with deep set eyes and full beard, he just sits there stoically, looking like a soggy lumberjack. Hooker, sitting on the floor between the toilet and the sink, watches listlessly. Finally --

GONDORFF  
Turn the goddamn thing off, will ya.

HOOKER  
You sober?

GONDORFF  
I can talk, can't I?

Hooker makes no move to get up. Gondorff struggles to his knees, turns off the water, and slumps back against the wall. The two men just look past each other a second. Down in the bottom.

GONDORFF  
Glad to meet ya, kid. You're a real horse's ass.

HOOKER  
Yeh, Luther said you could teach me something. I already know how to drink.

Gondorff wipes his face with his hand. His mood softens a little.

GONDORFF  
(quietly)  
I'm sorry about Luther. He was the best street worker I ever saw.

HOOKER  
He had you down as a big-timer. What happened?

GONDORFF  
Aw, I conned a Senator from Florida

on a stocks deal. A real lop-ear.  
He thought he was gonna take over  
General Electric. Some Chantoozie  
woke him up, though, and he put the  
feds on me.

HOOKER

You mean you blew it.

GONDORFF

(pause)

Luther didn't tell me you had a big  
mouth.

HOOKER

He didn't tell me you was a fuck-  
up, either.

(Gondorff looks at  
him coldly)

You played the Big Con since then.

GONDORFF

No, I lammed it around for a while  
while things cooled off. Philly,  
Denver, Baltimore, nuthin' towns.

Hooker's disappointment is obvious.

GONDORFF

But don't kid yourself, friend, I  
still know how.

Hooker nods, unconvinced.

GONDORFF

(getting up from the  
floor and emptying  
the water out of his pockets)

You gonna stay for breakfast, or do  
you already know how to eat?

HOOKER

(tired)

I picked something up on the way.

GONDORFF

(sensing something)

Lonnegan after you, too?

HOOKER

I don't know. Haven't seen anybody.

GONDORFF

You never do, kid.

We go to Hooker. He hadn't thought of that.

EXT. A BEAUTIFUL OLD COLONIAL COUNTRY CLUB - LONG ISLAND -

DAY

Lonnegan, in plus fours and argyles sits on a bench as other members of his foursome tee off. Floyd comes up to him.

FLOYD

We got word from Chicago. They got one of the grifters last night. The nigger.

LONNEGAN

What about the other one?

FLOYD

They're still looking for him.

LONNEGAN

Who's got the contract?

FLOYD

Combs gave it to Reilly and Cole.

LONNEGAN

Hackers.

FLOYD

They staked out the other guy's place last night, but he never showed. They figure maybe he skipped town. You wanna follow 'em up?

Lonnegan regards Floyd patiently and then pats the bench beside him. Floyd sits gingerly.

LONNEGAN

You see the guy in the red sweater over there?

We cut to one of Lonnegan's foursome, a short, squat little Irishman in a red sweater. He was a good-time, friendly manner and a winning Irish smile. We like him immediately.

LONNEGAN

Name's Danny McCoy. No Neck McCoy we called him. Runs a few protection rackets for Carnello while he's waiting for something bigger to come along. Me and Danny been friends since we were six. Take a good look at that face, Floyd, cause if he ever finds out we let one lousy grifter beat us, you'll have to kill him and every other hood in Chicago who'd like to do the same thing. You understand what I'm sayin'?

FLOYD

Yes sir.

LONNEGAN

Good lad.

Lonnegan is called to the tee by one of his foursome. He exchanges a friendly smile with McCoy and belts the ball down the fairway.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CAROUSEL AGAIN - DAY

Gondorff, dried off now and in a new set of clothes, is pulling up the shades of the large facing windows of the carousel building. The morning light pours in, illuminating fully for the first time the ornate merry-go-round and its massive oaken horses. Hooker watches him go about his business. Billie calls down from the mezzanine which surrounds the carousel.

BILLIE

You feeling all right this morning,  
Henry?

GONDORFF

Fine, Billie.

BILLIE

You mind opening the round a little  
early today? We got some business  
coming in before hours.

Gondorff waves okay.

GONDORFF

(to Hooker)

Great little countess, that Billie.  
Runs a good house up there, too.  
One of the few left that Luciano  
doesn't own.

Gondorff walks around on the carousel, checking straps, bearing and poles. Hooker follows him.

HOOKER

(getting impatient)

Gondorff, you gonna teach me the  
Big Con or not?

GONDORFF

(on his back, checking  
underneath one of the horses)

You didn't act much like you wanted  
to learn it.

HOOKER

I wanna play for Lonnegan.

GONDORFF

(getting up)

You know anything about him?

HOOKER

(exploding)

Yeh, he croaked Luther. What else do I gotta know.

Gondorff just sits tight and waits for him to cool off.

HOOKER

(waving Gondorff off, embarrassed at his own outburst)

Aw right, he runs the numbers outta the south side.

GONDORFF

(going over to start the machinery)

And a packing company, a chain of Savings and Loans and half the politicians in Chicago and New York. There ain't a fix in the world gonna cool him out if he blows on ya.

HOOKER

I'll take him anyway.

GONDORFF

(whirling on him)

Why?

HOOKER

(like steel)

'Cause I don't know enough about killin' to kill him.

It's the right answer. Gondorff didn't know it himself until now.

GONDORFF

You can't do it alone, ya know. It takes a mob of guys like you and enough money to make 'em look good.

HOOKER

We'll get by without 'em.

GONDORFF

This isn't like playin' wins on the street. You gotta do more than outrun the guy.

HOOKER

(incensed)  
I never played for winos.

GONDORFF  
(going right on,  
ignoring Hooker's remark)  
You gotta keep Lonnegan's con, even  
after you spent his money. And no  
matter how much you take from his,  
he'll get more.

HOOKER  
You're sacred of 'em, aren't ya?

GONDORFF  
Right down to my socks, turkey. If  
I'da been half as scared a that  
lop-ear, I wouldn't a fallen asleep  
on 'em. Lonnegan might kill me,  
but at least he won't bore me to  
death.

HOOKER  
Then you'll do it?

GONDORFF  
If I can find a mob that'll risk it.  
But no matter what happens, I don't  
want you comin' back to me halfway  
through and sayin' it's not enough...  
cause it's all you got.

Hooker nods. Gondorff switches on the carousel and steps  
back to admire his handiwork. The carousel makes a grinding  
sound, does a few lurches and stops cold.

CUT TO:

Music begins and we are into a short:

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

Detailing the arrival of the others three members of  
Gondorff's "mob." Throughout, Gondorff wears the fedora hat  
which is his trademark. We begin with --

A tall, good-looking man, Kid Twist, making his way through  
the railway station. Impeccably dressed and carrying a  
small suitcase, he combs the terrain carefully with his eyes.  
Finally he catches a glimpse of the thing he's been looking  
for. It's Gondorff, standing by a newsstand. Gondorff  
makes a quick snubbing motion on his nose as if flicking off  
a gnat. This is known among con men as the "office." Twist  
returns the sign with a barely discernible smile as he walks  
on by. Con men rarely acknowledge each other openly in  
public, but it's obvious that these two are glad to see each  
other.

CUT TO:

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

Hooker in, having his hair cut and his nails manicured. Gondorff gives instructions to the barber.

CUT TO:

INT. HABERDASHERY - DAY

Hooker is modeling a new suit in front of a mirror. He doesn't look too pleased, but Gondorff peels out a bankroll anyway.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

A pair of white spats stepping off a bus. We follow them into a:

INT. HOTEL LOBBY

Where we tilt up to reveal J.J. Singleton, the most flamboyant of the bunch. On his way to the check-in desk, he silently exchanges the "office" with Gondorff, who is sitting on a lounge reading the paper.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Hooker being shown into a small apartment room by an old woman. It consists of a bed, a table and a sink. Hooker nods his acceptance to the woman and gives her a bill. He takes another look around the room and decides to go out somewhere, but first he wedges a small piece of paper between the door and the jamb, about an inch off the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. A BIG METROPOLITAN BANK - DAY

We hold on a slight, bespectacled teller, Eddie Niles, in the process of counting a large deposit. Niles is all business; if he's ever smiled, no one knows about it. He glances up for a second and sees Gondorff "officing" him from across the bank. Without a word he shoves the money he's been counting back into the hands of a startled customer, abruptly closes up his window, flips his identification tag on the manager's desk and walks out of the bank.

CUT TO:

INT. AN UPSTAIRS ROOM OF THE CAROUSEL BUILDING - NIGHT

This room has obviously been relegated to the status of the storage room. It contains the water heater, mops and brooms, old bed springs, etc. In the middle of the room a space has been cleared for a table, around which are seated Hooker, Gondorff, Niles, Singleton and Twist. Gondorff is in his T-shirt, but still wears his hat. Kid Twist is in a suit as usual. The room is illuminated by a single bare bulb hanging from the ceiling.

TWIST

(showing Hooker  
photographs of three men)

These are Combs' favorite torpedoes.  
Riley and Cole.

We recognize Riley and Cole as the two guys who got into Mottola's cab.

TWIST

They do most of the small jobs, but  
Lonnegan might not wanna use 'em on  
you 'cause they're kinda messy. No  
class.

We go to Hooker. He's real grateful. Billie, wearing an evening dress, enters the room and begins gathering up the empty beer mugs on the table.

TWIST

We got reason to believe Riley was  
the guy who hit Luther. But if you  
see either one of these two, find  
yourself a crowd, or take 'em  
someplace you know you can handle  
'em.

GONDORFF

But most of all let us know. If  
they got a hit on you, we gotta  
fold up the con. You're too  
exposed. You got that?

Hooker nods, but we know he hasn't really got that.

HOOKER

You sure it'll be one of these two?

TWIST

No. They're just the only ones we  
know of.

Billie has finished gathering the mugs, and leaves the room with them. We follow her down the hall and into the:

RECEIVING ROOM OF HER BROTHEL

Carousel music filters up from the arcade below. The room has a bar along one wall and the rest of the space is taken

up by tables and couches. It's a comfortable place, but not opulent. Some of the girls sit patiently on the couches, others play canasta at the tables. Most of the men are at the bar, fortifying themselves for the task at hand. Billie comes over to the bar.

BILLIE  
(to the bartender)  
Set me up five more beers, will ya  
Danny.

As Danny goes to fill the mugs, Billie's eyes fix on a man at the end of the bar.

We move to reveal Snyder, intently scanning the room, as if he'd lost a dancing partner in the crush. Not finding what he wants, he comes down the bar to Billie.

SNYDER  
You the owner here?

BILLIE  
That's right.

SNYDER  
(flipping out his badge)  
Lieutenant Snyder. Bunco.

BILLIE  
Joliet badge, Snyder. Don't cut  
much up here.

SNYDER  
(trying to ignore her remark)  
I'm lookin' for a guy on the lam  
from a counterfeiting rap. Thought  
he mighta come in here.

BILLIE  
Don't think so. I know everybody  
in the place and I always bounce  
the lamsters.

SNYDER  
All right if I look around your  
lobby?

BILLIE  
No, but you're welcome to a free  
beer before you go.

Billie grabs a bottle of beer, pours some in a shot glass and pushes it over to Snyder. He ignores the gesture.

SNYDER  
(with controlled force)  
I don't really need your permission.

We go to Billie. She knew that when he came in.

CUT TO:

THE STORAGE ROOM AGAIN

The discussion continues. Hooker, a bit out of his depth here, listens and stays silent.

SINGLETON

Lonnegan's a fast egg, Henry. He's not gonna sit still for a standard play.

GONDORFF

Everybody'll sit still for somethin'. What did ya find out about the train, Eddie?

NILES

He's been taking the 8:10 Century Limited outa New York on Friday and getting in here early Saturday morning. He usually stays a day to check on his policy operations, and then flies back.

GONDORFF

Wonder why he doesn't fly both ways.

NILES

The porters say he runs a braced card game in one of the cars. \$100 minimum, straight poker. Last time he pulled in here ten grand heavier than he left New York.

GONDORFF

Fancies himself a gambler, huh?

TWIST

Lotta plungers ride that train just to play him.

GONDORFF

(breaking into a smile)  
See J.J., he's slowly down already.

CUT TO:

THE RECEIVING ROOM AGAIN

Snyder has completed his inspection of the "lobby" and found nothing. Danny, meanwhile, has set up the five beers on a tray.

SNYDER

Which way are the rooms?

BILLIE

Who told ya this guy was in here?

SNYDER

Nobody. I just know what kinda women he likes. I'm gonna check all the joyhouses till I find him.

BILLIE

Maybe I could help ya if ya told me his name.

SNYDER

I think I'll keep that to myself.  
Which way are the rooms?

BILLIE

Right through there. But I wouldn't go in there if I were you.  
(picks up the tray)

SNYDER

(snidely)

What are ya gonna do, call the cops?

BILLIE

I don't have to. You'll be bustin' in on the Chief of Police just up the hall.  
(she exits with the drinks)

Snyder is stopped cold. He calls after her.

SNYDER

Keep your nose clean, lady. He can't spend all his time here.

CUT TO:

THE STORAGE ROOM AGAIN

Billie comes over to Gondorff and whispers in his ear, while the others talk. His eyes flick momentarily to Hooker.

SINGLETON

I think we ought to play him on the Rag. It's the tightest game we got, and it's not all over the papers yet.

NILES

No good, J.J. You're not gonna con stocks to a banker. Lonnegan's too smart for that.

TWIST

What are you going to do, con the payoff to a gambler?

SNYDER

Twist is right. It won't work.

Gondorff has nodded to Billie and now rejoins the conversation. She serves the others beer.

GONDORFF

We'll use the wire. Never known a gambler who wouldn't like to beat the ponies.

NILES

The wire is ten years outa date.

GONDORFF

That's why he won't know it.

SINGLETON

I'm not sure I know it.

GONDORFF

We'll give him the hook on the train, and play him here. You think I can get in that poker game, Eddie?

NILES

All you gotta do is show up with some money and look like a fool.

GONDORFF

I also gotta win.

He looks at Hooker. There is a challenge in their book. Gondorff smiles broadly, then casually, to them all.

GONDORFF

By the way, any of you guys been passing off any green goods lately?

We go around the table. No reply.

GONDORFF

Billie, if that Dick comes in again, stall him till I can get a look at him. And let me pay ya for these beers.

BILLIE

What are you talking about? It's on the house.

GONDORFF  
(pulling out a \$5 bill)  
Naw, I want ya to have this.

He hitches up Billie's skirt, and puts the bill in her garter.

GONDORFF  
Don't look at it till ya go to bed  
though or it'll turn to paper.

Billie smiles and leaves the room.

INT. HALLWAY

She walks halfway down the hall and stops. She can't wait. Lifting up her skirt, she finds that the five has indeed turned to paper. As she breaks into laughter and continues on down the hall, we:

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

THE HOOK

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. A SUNKEN ALLEY - DAY

Actually little more than a service area between two apartment buildings. Niles, Kid Twist, and a middle-aged black man, named Benny Garfield, enter the alley with an old man and follow him down a stairwell to a subterranean basement. A faded sign above the door says Stenner's Billiards. We follow them inside to a:

INT. A LARGE BARREN ROOM - DAY

An office comes off it at one end. Judging from the fluorescent lights overhead and the scattered cue racks which still hang tenuously on the walls, the place, indeed, used to be a pool hall. Niles and Garfield go all the way to the back, while Twist stays near the front with the old man.

NILES  
Looks all right. It's big enough  
and off the street.

GARFIELD  
I don't know. This is kinda short  
notice. I'm not sure we can get it  
all done by Saturday.

NILES  
Got to. Gondorff's ridin' the mark

in from New York on the Century.

Garfield thinks it over a little. He's taking another look at the place. We go to Twist and the old man by the door.

TWIST

We'll take it.

(pointing through the door)

You manage the building at the end of the alley?

OLD MAN

(with pride)

For fifteen years.

TWIST

I'll need a room over there that faces this way. How much a week?

OLD MAN

Only rents by the month. Two hundred and fifty for the two of them.

TWIST

(pulling out his wallet)

This is the last time I expect to see you down here.

OLD MAN

(watching the bills  
being counted into  
his hand)

Never heard of the place.

We go back to Niles and Garfield.

GARFIELD

Been a while since I stocked a wire store. Not many mobs playing that anymore.

NILES

All we need is the bookie setup for now. We'll worry about the telegraph office later.

GARFIELD

All right, I'll rent ya everything I got in the warehouse for two grand. That'll give ya phones, cages, blackboards and ticker gear. You supply the guys to move 'em. If you want a counter and bar, that's another grand. I don't know where the hell I'm gonna get 'em though.

NILES

C'mon, you can do better than that.  
We ain't no heel grifters.

GARFIELD

You want the stuff tomorrow or  
don't ya? It's gonna take hours  
just to clean it up.

(pause)

Besides, Gondorff's still a hot  
item. Where am I gonna be if he  
gets hit?

NILES

Just give us what ya can, Benny.  
We'll send a truck down.

Twist has rejoined them by now.

TWIST

(to Garfield)

You wanna work flat rate or  
percentage?

GARFIELD

Who's the mark?

TWIST

Doyle Lonnegan.

GARFIELD

Flat rate.

CUT TO:

INT. A NEW YORK TRAIN STATION - DAY

We pick up Doyle Lonnegan, accompanied by two bodyguards and  
Floyd, making his way through the station. He stops at a  
cigar counter to buy some cigarettes, and we reveal Gondorff  
and Hooker sitting on their suitcases on the other side of  
the room.

GONDORFF

(eyes fixed on Lonnegan)

Guy in the blue pinstripe and grey  
fedora.

Hooker looks and finally spots him in the crowd. We go back  
to Lonnegan, as he moves off from the cigar counter, toward  
his train. Hooker watches him with the intensity of one  
gazing on a religious object.

HOOKER

He's not as tough as he'd like to  
think.

GONDORFF

(picking up his suitcase)  
Neither are we.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN

Lonnegan and his retainers getting on the train. Two cars down the line, we see Hooker and Gondorff boarding also. On his way in, Gondorff takes the conductor aside.

GONDORFF  
I hear there's a friendly poker game on this train tonight. You know anything about that?

CONDUCTOR  
A little.

GONDORFF  
You think you could get me in that game?

CONDUCTOR  
I don't know. There's usually a waiting list.

Gondorff flashes a \$50 bill.

CONDUCTOR  
(loosening up a bit)  
That'll get you first alternate, sir.

Gondorff pulls out another fifty.

CONDUCTOR  
(taking the money)  
I'll see what I can do.

CUT TO:

INT. A BASEMENT BAR - EARLY EVENING

Kid Twist enters and threads his way through the maze of tables to a door at the back of the building. A large bull of a man is stationed there, obviously to discourage those who don't have credentials to enter. Twist is not such a man.

TWIST  
(going right on through)  
How ya doin', Lacey.

LACEY  
(innocently pleased  
for one so menacing)  
Good to see ya again, Twist.

INT. ANOTHER ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Inside is another room, this one much better lit than the outer one. There are only three tables in here, around which are seated the elite of the Con World. Twist is enthusiastically greeted by Duke Boudreau, a large, rotund man whose stylish dress and authoritative manner mark him as a powerful figure in this group.

BOUDREAU

Twist! When did you get back in town?

TWIST

Coupla days ago. I'm workin' a big one with Gondorff on the North Side.

The two men sit down together, apart from the others.

TWIST

Listen Duke, we're setting up a wire store. I need a twenty man boost right away.

BOUDREAU

I got twenty or so in here tonight. Take your pick.

TWIST

These guys have gotta be the quill, Duky. We can't afford to rank the joint.

BOUDREAU

(to one of his assistants)  
Get me the sheet, Jake. Let's see who's in town.

CUT TO:

THE OUTER PART OF THE BAR AGAIN

A silhouetted figure appears in the entrance doorway. The word "chill" races from table to table and the place falls still. The bartender pushes a button behind the bar and a buzzer goes off in the back room. Boudreau gets up from his table and opens a small viewing port in the door.

The silhouetted figure is now walking slowly past the silent tables. It's Snyder and he's checking out every face in the place.

BOUDREAU

Twist, you know this guy?

TWIST

(taking a look

through the viewing port)  
No. Never saw him before. He's a  
dick, though.

Snyder walks all the way to the back, and then retraces his  
route. About halfway back, he stops at one of the tables,  
recognizing a grifter he knows. It's the Eirie Kid.

EIRIE KID

Hello, Snyder. What are you doin'  
up here?

SNYDER

I'm on vacation. You seen your  
friend lately?

EIRIE KID

Yeh, he packed it in and enrolled  
in detective school.

Snyder, in no mood for jokes, grabs Eirie by the hair and  
slams his face into the table. Eirie just stays there; he  
knows it doesn't pay to assault a detective. Twist is  
watching all this intently from the viewing port.

SNYDER

You see him, you tell him to pay  
his debts before I get him.

Eirie raises his head slowly, but says nothing. There is a  
slight trickle of blood from his nose. Snyder turns and  
walks slowly out of the bar. When he is a safe distance  
down the street, the chatter and drinking resume.

CUT TO:

THE INSIDE ROOM AGAIN

Twist gives an all clear signal and returns to the table  
where he and Boudreau were talking. Boudreau reads from a  
list of names. Twist listens with a certain preoccupation.  
He's still thinking about the little confrontation he just  
witnessed.

BOUDREAU

Paltrow, Sterling, Furey, and the  
Big Alabama are in from New Orleans.  
Fiskin and the Boone Kid from  
Denver, and Phillips, Barnett and  
Limehouse Chappie from New York.  
Those and the guys outside should  
give ya 30 or so to choose from.

TWIST

Good, have 'em down at Stenner's  
old Pool Hall before 3:00. We're  
gonna run through the route tonight.

BOUDREAU

Okay, Twist, but you know if this blows up, I can't do ya no good downtown. Gondorff is Federal.

TWIST

Don't worry about it, pal.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPEEDING PASSENGER TRAIN - NIGHT

Ripping through an open stretch between New York and Chicago.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN - NIGHT

Singleton is walking down a passageway and stops at a door and goes in.

INT. GONDORFF'S COMPARTMENT - NIGHT

Gondorff is rapidly shuffling cards to four empty places. He is alone. He looks up as Singleton enters.

SINGLETON

You in?

GONDORFF

Yeh, I think so. I gave the kay-ducer a C-note. You find out the deck?

SINGLETON

He usually plays with a Royal or a Cadenza.

(handing him two sealed decks)

I got you one of each. He likes to cold deck low, 8's or 9's.

GONDORFF

Nice work, J.J.

Singleton slips out as Gondorff unpeels the packs.

INT. TRAIN - NIGHT

We pick up Lonnegan coming out of his compartment, flanked by only one bodyguard and Floyd. He starts through the passenger section toward the compartment where the poker game will be held. Suddenly a drunken woman comes staggering around the corner and bumps into him.

They grapple a moment and Lonnegan pushes her away in disgust.

WOMAN

(sloppy drunk)  
Keep your mitts off me, ya big lug.  
If I'da wanted you handlin' me I  
woulda asked ya.

Lonnegan ignores her and proceeds down the passageway. As the woman proceeds in the other direction between passengers, we see it is Billie. She drops something on a seat beside a passenger. A hand reaches to pick it up. It is Lonnegan's wallet and it is Hooker who picks it up.

Hooker waits a moment, then stands and goes in the direction Lonnegan has taken. He passes by the open door to the card room, hesitating only slightly to hear the greetings exchanged inside before the door is shut. Then he continues on into the next car. He turns into Gondorff's compartment.

CUT TO:

INT. GONDORFF'S COMPARTMENT - NIGHT

Gondorff is still practicing. He looks up as Hooker enters and tosses him the wallet.

HOOKER  
She got him clean. He hasn't  
missed it.

Gondorff nods, takes the money out, counts it.

GONDORFF  
Fifteen grand. Looks like he's  
expecting a big night.

He takes out his own wallet and puts the money in it, and tosses the empty wallet back to Hooker, and resumes his shuffling and dealing. Hooker sits back silently and watches him.

HOOKER  
He's waitin' for you in the card  
room.

GONDORFF  
Let him wait.

As he deals, on the second pass he attempts to cut from the bottom, muffs it completely and sprays half the deck on the table. Hooker regards him steadily as he gathers them back up. Gondorff finally meets his gaze.

GONDORFF  
You just worry about your end, kid.

HOOKER  
If we ever get to it.

CUT TO:

INT. THE POKER ROOM - NIGHT

A specially outfitted compartment with a table and chairs in the middle and leather cushions around the outside for kibitzers. Lonnegan and 3 other players are already there and seated. They're getting slightly impatient.

LONNEGAN  
(to the Conductor)  
Where the hell is this guy?

CONDUCTOR  
I don't know. He said he'd be here.

CUT TO:

GONDORFF'S CABIN AGAIN

Gondorff is standing in front of the mirror dressing. He grabs up a clean white shirt and rumples it up in his hands. He then picks up a half-full bottle of bourbon. Hooker gives him a disapproving look. Gondorff smiles and pats some on his face.

CUT TO:

THE POKER ROOM AGAIN

Everybody's itchy now.

LONNEGAN  
All right, let's start without him.  
Mr. Clemens, give me the cards.

The Conductor hands him a sealed deck. As he begins to open it, Gordoff comes into the room, coatless, ruffled, unshaven and looking slightly tipsy. The others at the table, all men of high school or financial standing, are somewhat put off.

GONDORFF  
Sorry I'm late boys. I was takin'  
a crap.

This bit of grossness does little to improve his image.

CONDUCTOR  
(making the  
introductions;  
referring first to Gondorff)  
Mr. Shaw is a bookmaker from  
Chicago. Mr. Shaw, meet Mr.  
Clayton from Pittsburgh, Mr.  
Jameson, Chicago, Mr. Lonnegan, New  
York and Mr. Lombard, Philadelphia.

Gondorff nods and takes a seat, none too gracefully.

CONDUCTOR

Straight poker, gentlemen. 100 dollar minimum, table stakes. We assume you're good for your debts.

LONNEGAN

(shuffling the cards)

Mr. Shaw, we usually require a tie at this table. If you don't have one, we can get ya one.

GONDORFF

Yeh, that'd be real nice of ya, Mr. Lonneman.

LONNEGAN

(irritated)

Lonnegan.

He begins to deal, obviously not pleased that his evening seems to be peopled with drunks.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE SUNKEN ALLEY - NIGHT

A truck is now parked at the end of the alley, and several workmen are busy unloading it. One group carries a large blackboard; others have boxes of glasses, ash tray stands, furniture, etc. Take several cuts.

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE ONCE-VACANT POOL HALL

Now a blaze of activity. We take several cuts of workmen papering the walls, tacking down carpet, putting in new light fixtures, painting signs, all under the supervision of Niles. From now on, we will refer to the pool hall as the store.

Back in the office, Kid Twist is "interviewing" one by one, a group of con men lined up outside the office door. A gray-haired old buzzard, Curly Jackson, approaches the table which is serving Twist as a desk. Curly is practically in rags and has several days growth on his face. He wears a little beret which he takes off to address Twist.

CURLY

Name's Curly Jackson. I worked for Gad Bryan outa Baltimore.

TWIST

You ever played the Wire, Curly?

CURLY

Used to rope for it long ago. I

can shill, mark board, anything you want. I don't run with ruffraff and I only drink on weekends.  
(affecting an English accent)  
Me specialty is an Englishman.

Twist is taken with the man, despite his appearance.

TWIST

All right, Curly, you're in. We got a rack of suits over there. Get yourself a nice tweed one.

CURLY

(exiting)

That's all right. I got all my own stuff.

CUT TO:

THE CARD GAME AGAIN

Gondorff and Lonnegan have most of the chips. Lonnegan is slightly ahead. Gondorff has made a token attempt to wear the provided tie, having tied it in a knot around his neck, but not having bothered to put it under his collar. He has a shot glass and a bottle next to him, from which he has been drinking heavily. He and Lonnegan are the only ones left in this hand.

LONNEGAN

(throwing chips in)

Raise 500.

GONDORFF

(likewise)

See ya and raise three.

LONNEGAN

(more chips)

See and raise five.

GONDORFF

Five and call.

Lonnegan lays down his hand, a solid two pair. Gondorff turns out three tens. Lonnegan is beat.

GONDORFF

Tough luck, Lonnihan, but that's what you get for playin' with your head up your ass. Couple more like that and we can all go to bed early, huh boys.

Lonnegan burns, and the "boys" have no comment.

CUT TO:

INT. THE STORE - NIGHT

The work is still progressing. We see two workmen installing a ticket tape machine in a secluded area of the store.

GARFIELD

We bought ya a tap into Moe Anenberg's wire. He's got eyes at every track in the country. You'll get race results, odds, scratches, pole positions, everything; and just as fast as Western Union gets 'em.

NILES

Does J.J. know how to use this thing?

GARFIELD

All he's gotta do is read.

We go to Kid Twist, still conducting interviews in the office. A young, rather sullen man, Buck Duff, steps to the table.

DUFF

Buck Duff. I was in Maxwell's boost in Troy.

TWIST

You the Duff that didn't come up with his end when Little Jeff was sent up?

DUFF

Wasn't no problem a mine.

TWIST

He was a con man, wasn't he?

DUFF

He was a tear-off rat. He got what he deserved. No sense helpin' pay his bills.

TWIST

(like ice)  
Shove off, Duff.

Duff stands there a second and then slouches away from the table. He stops however, by the door. The next man up is the Eirie Kid. Twist knows he's seen him somewhere before.

EIRIE KID

(nervous as hell)  
Names's Joe Eirie.

Twist waits for more, but it's not coming.

TWIST

You played for any particular mobs?

EIRIE KID

No.

TWIST

You know the Wire at all?

EIRIE KID

No...I never played no Big Con before. But Luther Coleman was a friend a mine. I thought maybe there was something I could do.

TWIST

(pointing to Eirie  
slightly swollen nose)

You get that nose in Duke Boudreau's tonight?

Eirie nods a reluctant "yes."

TWIST

You got moxie, Eirie. Get yourself a suit.

Eirie is so happy, he can barely blurt out a thank you. Buck Duff, enraged that Twist would hire a total amateur, turns in disgust and strides vengefully out of the store.

CUT TO:

THE CARD GAME AGAIN

The room is dense with smoke now, and the players are feeling the heat. Gondorff has his white shirt open, revealing a stained T-shirt underneath. The bottle next to him is almost empty. He sneezes and wipes his nose with the tie Lonnegan gave him.

The chips are now about equally divided between Gondorff and Lonnegan. The others are losing badly.

GONDORFF

Raise 300.

LONNEGAN

Pass.

JAMESON

(throwing in his last  
few chips)

Raise 200.

GONDORFF

Two and call.

Jameson lays down two pair. Gondorff has a flush. Gondorff rakes in the chips, which now put him ahead of Lonnegan.

JAMESON

Well, I'm out.

GONDORFF

Don't worry about it, pal. Lemongan here wouldn'ta let you in the game if you weren't a chump.

LONNEGAN

(getting to his feet)

I've had enough of your lip, Shaw.

Gondorff grabs the whiskey bottle next to him, breaks it against the table and waves the jagged end in Lonnegan's face.

GONDORFF

(barely able to stand up)

Just take it easy there, Larrabee.

Jameson and the conductor step in between.

JAMESON

Let's take a break for a couple minutes and cool off.

Lonnegan storms out of the room, followed by Floyd and Bodyguard.

INT. SMOKING ROOM

We pick up Lonnegan coming down the passageway to enter the smoking room.

LONNEGAN

(to his assistant)

I've had it with that bum, Floyd. Stack me a cooler.

FLOYD

(trying to settle him down)

You've only been playin three hours, Doyle.

LONNEGAN

(not to be pacified)

I don't care. Load me a deck. Set it up for threes and nines. I'll cut it in on his deal.

FLOYD

(taking a deck and beginning to sort it)

What do ya want the others to get?

LONNEGAN

Nothin'. They gotta be outa there early. I'm gonna bust that bastard in one play.

CUT TO:

INT. THE POKER ROOM AGAIN - NIGHT

A pair of hands shuffling. We pull back to reveal that they're Gondorff's. He passes the deck to Lonnegan to be cut and turns to pen a new whiskey bottle. Lonnegan takes the deck and in one lightning motion substitutes a new deck, while making it look like he's cutting the old one.

Gondorff picks up the deck and begins to deal. As the hand is picked up, we see that Gondorff has four threes, Lonnegan four nines, and everybody else has nothing.

CLAYTON

(opening the bidding)

Fold.

LONNEGAN

250.

GONDORFF

Raise 1,000.

LONNEGAN

Raise 500.

Gondorff looks at Lonnegan very carefully for a second. Lonnegan meets his stare.

GONDORFF

(slowly)

Raise 2,000.

The spectators shift a little. It's the biggest bet of the night.

LONNEGAN

See and raise 1,000.

GONDORFF

(taking it to him)

Raise 5,000.

Lonnegan fingers his remaining chips. He knows he's won, but he wants to bleed it for every bit of suspense.

LONNEGAN

(going for broke)

See, and raise the rest.

Lonnegan pushes in the rest of his chips. Gondorff, who is only required to match Lonnegan's total, throws in all his

too. It's a showdown.

GONDORFF

Call.

Lonnegan puts down his four nines. Gondorff just stares at them a second, lets out a deep sigh and lays down four jacks. Lonnegan is aghast. This just can't be. He glances at Floyd, who can do nothing but sit there with his mouth open.

GONDORFF

(raking in the chips)

Well that's all for me tonight,  
boys. I'm gonna leave ya some cab  
fare.

The other players look at each other in disgust, and reach for their wallets, all of which are well stocked.

GONDORFF

(to Lonnegan)

You owe me 15 grand, pal.

Lonnegan, with a stare that could kill, reaches for his wallet. Suddenly the stare goes soft. He tries a few more pockets. No soap.

LONNEGAN

(getting up to get it)

I guess I left it in my room.

GONDORFF

(blowing up)

What! Don't give me that crap you  
little weenie. How do I know you  
ain't gonna take a powder.

(waving his wallter,

which is full of

Lonnegan's money)

You come to a game like this, you  
bring your money.

Lonnegan, having had all he can take, goes for Gondorff, but is restrained by the conductor.

GONDORFF

All right, buddy, I'm gonna send a  
boy by your room in five minutes,  
and you better have that jack, or  
it's gonna be all over Chicago that  
your name ain't worth a dime.

Gondorff stalks out of the room. We pick him up coming down the passageway to his compartment.

INT. GONDORFF'S COMPARTMENT

The drunkenness has vanished. We follow him into his cabin,

where Hooker is waiting anxiously.

HOOKER

How'd ya do?

GONDORFF

(modestly)

Well we got some workin' money  
anyway.

Gondorff tosses his winnings on the table.

GONDORFF

(big smile)

Okay, kid, you're on. But I gotta  
tell ya, its a hard act to follow.

CUT TO:

INT. LONNEGAN'S CABIN - NIGHT

Lonnegan sits in a chair smoking, obviously still upset.  
Floyd paces in front of him.

FLOYD

I know I give him four threes. We  
can't let him get away with that.

LONNEGAN

What am I supposed to do? Call him  
for cheating better than me?

There's a knock at the door. Floyd goes and opens it. It's  
Hooker.

HOOKER

My name's Carver. Mr. Shaw sent me.

Floyd motions him in without a word.

LONNEGAN

Your boss is quite a card player,  
Carver. How does he do it?

HOOKER

(very matter-of-factly)

He cheats.

Lonnegan says nothing. He doesn't like smart asses. He  
looks Hooker over a second, as if considering whether to  
have him wasted or not.

LONNEGAN

(reaching into his  
coat pocket)

He'll have to take a check.

(pulling out a check)

I couldn't find my wallet.

HOOKER

Yeh, he knows that.

LONNEGAN

(startled)

What do you mean?

HOOKER

(pulling out

Lonnegan's wallet and

tossing it to him)

He hired a dame to take it from ya.

Lonnegan just holds the wallet. He can't believe it.

HOOKER

You were set up, Lonnegan. Shaw's been planning to beat your game for months. He was just waiting for you to cheat him so he could clip ya.

LONNEGAN

(the heat rising)

I could have you put under this train for this, errand boy.

HOOKER

(cool as hell)

So could Shaw.

LONNEGAN

Then why the rat?

HOOKER

Cause I'm tired of bein' his nigger.

(pause)

I want you to help me break him.

Lonnegan looks at Hooker long and hard, as if the intensity of his gaze could separate truth from fiction. Lonnegan hadn't expected this, but now that it's here, it better be on the level. The silence is suddenly broken by the noise of the train braking into the station.

LONNEGAN

(to Hooker)

C'mon, I'll give ya a lift home.

Hooker hesitates, not sure whether to accept or not.

LONNEGAN

What's the matter? You gotta get back to Shaw?

HOOKER

Naw, he picked up some jane in the bar. Can't see him till morning anyway.

LONNEGAN

All right, then.

CUT TO:

INT. LONNEGAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Driving through the city, the driver and Floyd in front, Hooker and Lonnegan in back.

Hooker glances out the window from time to time, just to make sure they're really going to his place.

LONNEGAN

Why me? Shaw probably has lotsa enemies to choose from.

HOOKER

I need somebody respectable...but not completely legit. What I'm gonna do isn't very legal.

LONNEGAN

(insulted)

I'm a banker, friend. That's legit in this state.

HOOKER

All you gotta do is place a bet for me at Shaw's place. I'll supply all the money and the information.

Lonnegan is listening, but you'd never know it.

HOOKER

If you help me out, I'll pay ya back the money you owe Shaw, myself.

LONNEGAN

That's worth fifteen grand to ya?

HOOKER

Maybe a couple million.

We go to Lonnegan. He's still not talking, but that last phrase has registered.

EXT. HOOKER'S PLACE

The car pulls up in front of Hooker's place.

LONNEGAN

You're dreamin', kid.

HOOKER  
(getting out)  
660 Marshall Street. Tomorrow at  
12:30, if you're interested.

LONNEGAN  
(diffidently)  
If I'm not there by quarter of, I'm  
not coming.

Hooker nods and walks up the steps to his apartment building. Lonnegan's car speeds away from the curb and on out of sight. Hooker breathes a sigh of relief. He's passed his first test; or has he? We follow him up the stairs to his room.

#### INT. HOOKER'S APARTMENT

He's just about to unlock the door, when he notices the little piece of paper he left in the door is on the floor. Without the slightest hesitation, Hooker leaps over the bannister and races back down the stairs. Two gunmen, Riley and Cole, burst out of his room and fire at him over the railing, but he's already too far down. Riley and Cole give chase.

CUT TO:

#### THE FRONT OF THE BUILDING

Riley and Cole barrel out of the building and onto the sidewalk. There is an empty bus stopped at a light, but they find no sign of Hooker. As the light changes, we cut to the other side of the bus, where we see Hooker crouched on the rear wheel housing, hanging on to a vent. He's a little shaken, but most of all, he's still alive. We hold on him, as the bus moves off.

GONDORFF (V.O.)  
Everything go all right?

HOOKER (V.O.)  
(lying)  
Yeh, it was easy.

CUT TO:

#### INT. THE STORE - NIGHT

Hooker and Gondorff are sitting alone in the back office while the work goes on outside. Their conversation continues.

GONDORFF  
No signs of trouble?

HOOKER  
What do ya mean?

GONDORFF

You know, somebody tailin' ya. A torpedo or somethin'.

HOOKER  
(wanting to get off  
the subject)  
No, not a thing.

Gondorff has his doubts, but lets them ride.

CUT TO:

#### OTHER PARTS OF THE STORE

We concentrate on some of the fine details, i.e. Garfield explaining how the ticker will read out to Singleton and Billie; Curly Jackson showing a younger con man how to mark the odds board properly.

GONDORFF (V.O.)  
How 'bout Lonnegan?

HOOKER (V.O.)  
I gave him the breakdown just like  
ya told me to.

GONDORFF (V.O.)  
And?

HOOKER (V.O.)  
He threatened to kill me.

GONDORFF (V.O.)  
Hell, they don't do that and you  
know you're not gettin' through to  
'em.

We concentrate on Niles, who's making up the "boodles" or fake bankrolls. He puts a real \$100 bill on the bottom, then two inches of cut green paper on top, and then another \$100 bill on top of that, so that it looks like he has a whole stack of \$100 bills. The bundle is then bound with a sealed label, like those used in banks, that says \$10,000. We see that he has already made several of these bundles.

HOOKER (V.O.)  
Then he drove me home. He tried to  
put himself away as legit, so I  
went right into the pitch.

GONDORFF (V.O.)  
Did he hold you up on anything?

HOOKER (V.O.)  
Naw, he just sat there and listened.  
I don't know if he bought it or not.

CUT TO:

INT. THE STORE

Twist in the middle of the room giving a route to the Eirie Kid. He shows him where to get his drink at the bar, where to sit and finally how to leap up and throw his racing form down in disgust.

GONDORFF (V.O.)

That's all right. Once they start listening, they're in trouble. Just don't give him more than he asks for. If you rattle his imagination a little, he'll come up with all the right answers himself. But all he's gotta do is catch you in one lie and you're dead.

CUT TO:

HOOKER AND GONDORFF IN THE STORE OFFICE AGAIN

They both look tired.

HOOKER

You think he'll show?

GONDORFF

Did he say he wouldn't?

HOOKER

No.

GONDORFF

(softly)  
He'll show.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

THE TALE

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

WE OPEN ON A WIDE SHOT OF THE ALLEY OUTSIDE THE STORE

At first it appears to be deserted, but we move to reveal a figure in an upper window of the apartment building which forms one side of the alley. It's Kid Twist. His eyes roam the street, for what, we do not yet know.

CUT TO:

INT. AN OLD DRUGSTORE ACROSS FROM THE ALLEY - DAY

Probably prosperous at one time, it has since declined, its large fountain and eating area now host to two bums and Hooker, who sits alone in a rear booth near the telephone. Dressed in a tuxedo, he nurses a cup of coffee, and anxiously alternates his glances between the clock and the empty street outside. It's 12:52.

CUT TO:

INT. THE STORE - DAY

The place is full of people, although we avoid long shot so as not to give away the room as a whole yet. Instead, we concentrate on the tense, waiting faces of some of the more familiar people:

Gondorff and Niles in tuxedos behind a barred cashier's area. Gondorff mutilates a piece of gum in his mouth. Niles just stares out into space cracking his knuckles.

GONDORFF

Eddie, cut that out, will ya.

The boardmarker walking nervously back and forth in front of his odds board, checking every letter and number. He stops to cross a T on one of the horses' names. It was already crossed, but he does it again anyway.

Billie and Singleton, in an area hidden from the rest of the room, watching the print-out on the ticker machine. The clicking of the ticker is the only sound we hear in the store.

Curly Jackson in front of a mirror, pasting a fake Van Dyke on his chin to go with his tweed suit and monocle.

A couple of Billie's girls adjusting their waitress outfits and primping their hair. Each has a tray full of drinks beside her.

The Eirie Kid silently retracing his "route" to make sure he has it down.

Despite the crowd, there is no talking and little movement, save for the constant swirling of smoke from several cigars and cigarettes. The group is like a theatre company waiting to go on opening night.

CUT TO:

THE DRUGSTORE AGAIN

It's 12:56 and Hooker is worried. He looks up to see two large men, obviously racket goons, come in the front door, and take a seat facing him in the next booth. They stare at him impassively, waving the waitress away when she comes to take their order. Hooker knows they're Lonnegan's men, but

is somewhat unsettled by the fact that Lonnegan is not with them. Suddenly, a voice.

VOICE

Carver?

Hooker turns around to find that Lonnegan is seated in the booth directly behind him. His bodyguard is in the one behind that.

LONNEGAN

You should always look to the back too, kid.

HOOKER

(sliding out of his booth and into Lonnegan's)

I was afraid you weren't gonna come. We haven't got much time.

LONNEGAN

(curtly)

Get on with it then.

HOOKER

(pointing to telephone)

Sometime after 1:00 a guy's gonna call here and give you the name of a horse.

(pulling out a wad of bills)

All you do is take this two grand across the street to Shaw's place and bet it on that pony. There's nothin' to it, but don't take too much time. We only have 3 or 4 minutes after you get the call.

LONNEGAN

You're not gonna break him with a \$2,000 bet.

HOOKER

This is just a test. The big one comes later. Be careful with that though, it's all I got.

LONNEGAN

And you were gonna pay me back?

HOOKER

I am after this race.

Lonnegan says nothing. He's not sure he likes a man who's stupid enough to bet his last dollar on a horse race.

HOOKER

I gotta get back before Shaw misses me. Good luck.

EXT. STREET

Hooker hustles out across the street and into the alley.

INT. DRUGSTORE

Lonnegan watches him through the window and then settles back in his seat to wait for the phone.

OUTSIDE STORE

As Hooker descends the stairwell into the store, he gives Kid Twist the office. Twist turns away from the window and looks at his watch. 12:58.

CUT TO:

DRUGSTORE

Lonnegan waiting by the phone, idly ping-ponging a knife on the salt shaker. It's 1:40. A man enters the store and walks over to use the phone.

LONNEGAN

We're waitin' for a call.

The man looks at Lonnegan a second, and then at his four goons. He decides maybe he'll make the call later.

CUT TO:

INT. THE STORE

Kid Twist again. Billie enters the room with a piece of paper. Kid Twist looks at it a second and then picks up the phone and begins to dial.

INT. DRUGSTORE

Lonnegan again. He's getting impatient now and lights a cigarette, and then the phone rings. He answers it quickly and we hear:

TWIST

Bluenote at 6 to 1 on the nose.

The receiver clicks down at the other end. Lonnegan hangs up and goes out the door, followed by his entourage.

EXT. STREET

We follow him across the street and into the alley, where he signals one of the bodyguards to check the place out. Kid Twist pushes a button on his window sill, and a buzzer goes off inside the store. The previously inert figures there spring to life.

Lonnegan's bodyguard descends the stairwell and knocks at the door, where he is greeted by Hooker in the capacity of host. He looks the place over and motions an okay to Lonnegan.

INT. THE STORE

As Lonnegan enters, we see the room for the first time in its entirety. Overnight it has been transformed into a swank private club, with bar, cigarette girls, upholstered furniture and chandeliers.

SINGLETON

Look at that. He's got four apes with him.

GONDORFF

That's what I like about these guys, J.J... They always got protection against things we'd never do to 'em.

Everywhere there is activity. A bank of telephones buzzes incessantly. Sheet writers scurry from phone to phone, taking bets of tremendous size from prominent people.

SHEET WRITER

Yes, Mr. Ruth, 20,000 on Dancing Cloud.

We reveal that the phones are controlled by a master switch, which one of the recruited con men operates from behind a partition.

The boardmaker, wearing headphones suspended from a sliding wire, hurriedly chalks up races and odds on a huge blackboard. From the loudspeakers we hear the words "last flash." The odds on Bluenote settle down to 8 to 1.

Lonnegan makes his way through the throng toward the betting line. His bodyguards fan out to various positions in the room. The betting crowd itself (known as the "boost") consists of close to twenty people, none of whom, of course are what they're pretending to be. There are brokers with pasty faces, sportsmen, tanned and casual, and financiers with goatees and highly tailored clothes. Large amounts of money are changing hands at the betting window. Boodles are in sight everywhere.

Lonnegan slips into the betting line, feeling somewhat estranged from the general merriment around him. There are two men in line ahead of him. The first, Curly Jackson, slaps down several bundles of cash in front of Niles, who's the cashier, and places a \$20,000 bet on War Eagle. Gondorff appears at the cashier's window and catches sight of Lonnegan.

GONDORFF

Never get enough, huh pal? I'd

think you'd get tired of losin',  
Honnigan.

LONNEGAN  
(piercingly)  
The name is Lonnegan.

GONDORFF  
(to Niles)  
Make sure you see cash from this  
guy, Eddie. He's got the name for  
bettin' money he don't have.

The man in front of Lonnegan puts \$5,000 on Dancing Cloud.  
He makes the bet on credit. Lonnegan steps to the window.

LONNEGAN  
Two-thousand on Bluenote.

NILES  
(writing out a ticket)  
Is that all?

LONNEGAN  
(pissed)  
That's all.

Bluenote's race is now up on the board. The race caller  
comes on the loudspeaker.

CALLER  
Ladies and Gentlemen. This is  
Arnold Rowe, your caller for the  
second race at Belmont in New York.  
A mile and 1/8. Four year olds and  
up. And they're off!

We see that the caller is Singleton, and that he's calling  
the race from a concealed booth next to the cashier's cage.

CALLER  
Around the first turn it's a War  
Eagle first by a length, Jail Bate  
second by one and a half, Dancing  
Cloud third by a half on the  
outside, followed by Lucky Lady,  
Mojo, Wits' End and Bluenote.

Lonnegan goes to the bar, orders a drink, and settles down  
at one of the tables. It happens to be the one the Eirie  
Kid is at. Gondorff and Niles watch it from the cashier's  
cage.

GONDORFF  
(worried)  
That's not where we want him to sit.

Eirie tries to ignore Lonnegan at first, but realizes he

better make some conversation.

EIRIE KID

C'mon War Eagle.

(to Lonnegan)

That Dancing Cloud's a hell of a finisher. War Eagle's gonna have to open up a little more on 'em.

LONNEGAN

You know anything about a horse named Bluenote?

EIRIE KID

Naw, he's never done much. Probably in here just to round out the field. War Eagle's where you wanna have your money.

Eirie excuses himself and heads for the bar.

CALLER

Into the clubhouse turn, it's War Eagle by two lengths, Dancing Cloud has moved up to second by a half, Lucky Lady is third by three followed by Jail Bait, Mojo, Bluenote and Wits' End.

The heretofore chaotic energy of the parlor is now focused on the race. Several of the patrons begin to yell for their horses. Lonnegan remains seated. He seems bored with it all. Hooker comes over to clear some empty glasses from his table.

LONNEGAN

(out of the corner of his mouth)

You really picked a winner, kid.

HOOKER

Give 'em a little time.

CALLER

Into the backstretch it's War Eagle still by a length, Dancing Cloud closing on the inside, is second by two, Lucky Lady is third by one and a half, followed by Bluenote, Jail Bait, Wits' End and Mojo.

Lonnegan perks up just a little. Bluenote, at least, has moved up. The rest of the people in the place are really rooting now. Few of them remain seated.

Hooker arrives at the bar, with the glasses he cleared from Lonnegan's table. Eirie is already there, fortifying himself with a scotch.

HOOKER

You're doin' great, Eirie. He  
loves ya.

Eirie nods, somewhat unconvinced, and heads bak to the table.

CALLER

Into the far turn, it's Dancing  
Cloud now by half a length, War  
Eagle is second by two, Bluenote is  
third by a half and moving fast on  
the outside. Lucky Lady is fourth  
by four lengths, followed by Jail  
Bait, Wits' End and Mojo.

Lonnegan is getting more intent now.

CALLER

Coming down the stretch, it's  
Dancing Cloud by one length, War  
Eagle and Bluenote are neck and  
neck by two. Now it's Dancing  
Cloud, Bluenote and War Eagle.  
(shouting now)  
Dancing Cloud and Bluenote head to  
head...

The place is going crazy. Even Singleton is standing up to  
get the necessary excitement in his voice.

CALLER

Dancing Cloud, Bluenote. Dancing  
Cloud, Bluenote. It's Bluenote by  
a nose. Dancing Cloud is second by  
two, War Eagle third by three and a  
half. Time for a mile and 1/8,  
2:01 and 6/10 seconds.

Most of the patrons collapse into their chairs like spent  
lovers. Eirie slams his racing form to the floor. Nobody  
had Bluenote.

CURLY

(tearing up his ticket)  
Bloody awful. Who in blazes is  
Bluenote?

LONNEGAN

(to Eirie, very self-satisfied)  
War Eagle's where you want to have  
your money, huh?

Eirie doesn't reply. He can't believe Bluenote won.  
Lonnegan looks to Hooker. Hooker gives him a wink. For  
the first time, Lonnegan permits a smile.

CUT TO:

LONNEGAN AT THE CASHIER'S WINDOW

Niles is counting out \$16,000 to him (all of which Gondorff won the night before). Gondorff looks somewhat perturbed. Lonnegan picks up the money and tauntingly waves it at him.

GONDORFF

(getting his name  
right this time)

Don't bother to come back with a  
piker's bet like that again,  
Lonnegan. We got a \$5,000 minimum  
here.

(to Hooker)

Show this bum out.

Hooker hesitates a second.

GONDORFF

Go on, ya goddamn ninny.

Gondorff gives Hooker a hard shove in the back with his foot, sending him into a table and sprawling to the floor.

GONDORFF

(indicating Lonnegan's  
bodyguards)

And tell him not to bring his  
garbage men in here no more. This  
is a class joint.

Hooker, pretending to be humiliated, gets to his feet and escorts Lonnegan to the door. Lonnegan stops, gives Gondorff a derisive smile, and walks out. Once he's gone, the general clatter and hubbub in the room cease, like it had been turned off by a faucet. Most of the boost sit down and relax. Curly Jackson rips off his Van Dyke. It's been itching him.

GONDORFF

He's gaffed, kid. He should start  
coming to you now.

CUT TO:

INT. COMB'S OFFICE AT THE CLEARINGHOUSE - DAY

Combs sits passively on the edge of his desk glancing across the room every now and then at Riley, who is slumped uneasily in a folding chair, looking like a defendant at the Inquisition. Both remain silent, like two men in a waiting room. Suddenly, what they've been waiting for arrives. Lonnegan comes into the office, flanked by his bodyguards. Skipping the usual pleasantries, he walks right over to Riley.

LONNEGAN

All right, Riley. What the hell

happened?

RILEY

(not looking at him)

We missed him.

LONNEGAN

You weren't hired to miss him.

RILEY

There wasn't any way he coulda known we was in there. We made a clean pick on the lock and didn't leave no footprints in the hall. Somebody musta wised him up.

LONNEGAN

Yeh, and what does Cole say about that?

RILEY

I don't know. He took it hard.

LONNEGAN

All right, get outa here. You're outta work.

Riley gets up and drags himself out the door like a whipped dog.

LONNEGAN

We'll put Salino on it. I need somebody careful.

COMBS

Salino? Why waste our best people on a small-time job like this? It ain't no heavy gee we're after. The guy's a five and dime grifter.

LONNEGAN

Then why ain't he dead?

COMBS

They didn't think he'd be so cagey, that's all. They'll get him next time.

LONNEGAN

Use Salino. It'll take a little longer, but there won't be any holes in it.

Combs gives up. The second time's the charm.

LONNEGAN

And tell Cole I wanta see him when he gets in.

COMBS

He's not comin' in. Not to get  
bounced off a job anyway.

LONNEGAN

He had his chance and all he did  
was shoot up a rooming house. Made  
a lotte noise and woke up a few  
cops, but didn't hit nothin'.

Combs keeps his mouth shut. There's no way to talk to  
Lonnegan when he's like this.

LONNEGAN

(cooling a little)

This is Salino's job now, Vince.  
If Cole wants to muscle in on it,  
that's his business. But he's  
breakin' the rules and when Salino  
finds out about it, I can't feel  
sorry for what's gonna happen to him.

CUT TO:

INT. LONNEGAN'S HOTEL - DAY

The finest the period had to offer. We pick up Hooker  
coming down the hall to Lonnegan's suite. He is admitted by  
the Bodyguard. Lonnegan, wearing a smoking jacket, is  
seated at a table counting a pile of money. There are two  
other assistants standing behind him. They don't look  
friendly.

HOOKER

Well, what did I tell ya?

LONNEGAN

You're a lucky man, all right.

HOOKER

Lucky, hell. I could do it every  
day.

LONNEGAN

Why don't ya then.

HOOKER

'Cause it's better to do it all at  
once.

(leaning close)

We're puttin' down 400 grand next  
week. At 5-1 we make 2 million.  
Twenty per cent of that is yours if  
ya stick with us.

LONNEGAN

You got a system, Carver?

HOOKER

You stayin' in or not?

LONNEGAN

I'm in.

HOOKER

(drawing up a chair,  
barely able to  
contain his enthusiasm)

It's foolproof. We got a partner downtown runs the central office of the Western Union. Race results from all over the country come in there and go right across his desk on their way to the bookies. All he does is hold them up a couple minutes until he can call us and get a bet down on the winner. Then he releases the results to the bookies and we clean up on a race that's already been run. It can't miss, unless the Western Union Dicks get onto it.

Lonnegan is amazed. He sits back a second, then comes forward again and pushes a pile of bills over to Hooker. Hooker smiles and begins to count the money.

LONNEGAN

You got the 400 grand yet?

HOOKER

Not yet, but...  
(stopping suddenly)  
Hey, there's only a grand here.

LONNEGAN

(more like a command)  
I think we oughta place another bet tomorrow.

HOOKER

(getting angry)  
What is this? That's my money.  
You tryin' to muscle me?

LONNEGAN

(controlled)  
If your system's as foolproof as you say, you'll get even more.

Hooker's in a jam and he knows it.

HOOKER

(after a pause)  
I gotta talk to me partner first.  
We can't afford to expose our game  
too much.

LONNEGAN  
Let me talk to him.

HOOKER  
(flatly)  
No.

LONNEGAN  
You want your money back? Try and  
get it in a court of law.  
(softening a bit)  
C'mon, don't be a sorehead. I'll  
make it worth your while. Migh  
even help ya finance the big play  
if this one works out.

Hooker says nothing for a minute, and then reluctantly nods  
his head.

HOOKER  
Four o'clock tomorrow. Pick me up  
at Dewey Lyle's.

CUT TO:

EXT. LONNEGAN'S HOTEL - DAY

We pick up Hooker coming out of the hotel and going off down  
the street. As he does so, we pull back all the way across  
the street and through the interior of a parked car to  
reveal the silhouette of a man seated at the wheel. We move  
to his right hand, which rests on the steering column. It's  
covered by a black glove and the middle finger is missing.  
His trigger finger, however, taps lightly on the wheel.

CUT TO:

INT. AN INDOOR TELEPHONE BOOTH - DAY

One of the old, wooden kind – accordian doors with glass  
panes in the upper half. Hooker dials rapidly.

HOOKER  
Twist? I told him the tale. He  
wants to see ya.

TWIST  
All right, when?

HOOKER  
Tomorrow, after 4:00. Stay inside,  
I'll come in and get ya. And be  
hard on him for a while; he's

talking money.

TWIST

Okay, Tootsie.

Hooker blows a mock kiss through the phone and hangs up. He turns to leave the booth, when suddenly he sees something that stops him cold. There looking through the glass is the smirking face of Detective Snyder. Hooker is immobilized.

Snyder puts his hand inside his coat and slowly draws out his gun. He points it right at Hooker's face and then violently smashes all the glass in the upper half of the door with the barrel. Fragments of glass spray into the booth, a couple of which imbed themselves in Hooker's cheek.

Hooker quickly whips open the door, trapping Snyder's hand in the accordian and jarring loose his gun. Hooker sprints out of the booth as Snyder scrambles for his pistol and gives pursuit.

EXT. ALLEYS AND SIDESTREETS - NIGHT - THE TWO MEN

We follow the two men up alleys and sidestreets as they race through the dregs of the city, two panting shadows moving through places that only get light at night. The wind blows drops of blood off Hooker's cheek as he runs. Snyder still has his gun, but would rather inflict pain than death.

CONDEMNED BUILDING

Hooker makes for a condemned building and scrambles up the stairs, steps giving way under him as he goes.

INT. BUILDING

On the fourth floor, he ducks into a room and quickly locks the door.

We pan the room to reveal that the whole back side of the building is gone. Hooker runs toward the ledge and leaps through the air, landing on the fire escape of an adjacent building, some 15 feet away. He kicks in a window and goes off down the hall. We cut back to

Snyder furiously kicking in the locked door. He finally crashes through, only to find an empty room and a beautiful panorama of the city and its nearest Hooverville.

CUT TO:

LONG SHOT - HOOKER

Winding his way through the slum area of town, dashing along backstreets, over fences and through vacant lots, making good his escape. From our angle, he looks like a rat in a maze.

GONDORFF (V.O.)  
Why didn't you tell me about Snyder  
before?

HOOKER (V.O.)  
I thought I'd lost him.

CUT TO:

INT. GONDORFF'S ROOM AT THE CAROUSEL BUILDING - DAY

Hooker sits sullenly at the table. Billie stands over him putting some ointment on his face to close the cuts. Gondorff looks on. Their discussion continues.

GONDORFF  
Well you found him again and we're  
gonna have to do somethin' about it.  
What else haven't ya been tellin' me?

HOOKER  
Nothin'. I told ya everything  
there is.

GONDORFF  
Then why'd ya move outa your room?

HOOKER  
It was too noisy.

GONDORFF  
You can't play your friends like  
marks, Hooker.

Hooker doesn't reply. He knows Gondorff's on to him.

GONDORFF  
You know how easy it'd be for one  
of Lonnegan's guys to nail you?

HOOKER  
All we need is a couple days, Henry.  
A couple days and we'll get Lonnegan  
down and stomp on 'em.

GONDORFF  
You just won't learn, will ya.  
Hell, you come in here, I teach you  
stuff maybe five guys in this world  
know, stuff most grifters couldn't  
do even if they knew it, and all  
you wanna do is run down a bullet.  
(pause)  
You're just like all them new jerks.  
Lotsa nerve and no brains. And ten  
years from now when me and the  
others are through and you dumb  
guys are all dead there won't be

one gee left who knows the Big Con was anything more than a way to make a livin'.

HOOKER

A couple days; that's all I'm askin'. I can stay clear that long.

GONDORFF

(trying to be angry  
and failing)

Christ, they'll probably miss you and hit me.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

THE WIRE

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. A SLEEPY DINER - LATE AFTERNOON

Located across the street from Hooker's apartment building. Hooker sits down alone in a booth, with a plate of ham and eggs he's hardly touched.

The two cuts on his face have pretty much stopped bleeding. A big fan above the counter area drones away lethargically, it's air stream insufficient to either cool the place or drive out the smell of onions and grease.

A waitress, Loretta, emerges from the kitchen and ambles slowly over to Hooker's table. Slim and raven-haired, she manifests an indifference bred from years spent delivering things to people who are rarely grateful for what she brings. Only a light scar on her left cheek hints at another side.

LORETTA

You done?

HOOKER

Yeh, I guess I shoulda had the meat loaf.

LORETTA

(deadpan)  
It isn't any better.

HOOKER

Where's June today?

LORETTA

(figuring up the bill)  
She don't work here no more. I'm  
fillin' in for a couple days...  
till I can get a train outa here.

HOOKER  
Where you goin'?

LORETTA  
(putting the check  
down and walking away)  
I don't know. Depends what train I  
get on.

Hooker looks for some sign that she's putting him on. He  
doesn't get it. He takes out some money, drops it on the  
table and walks out.

CUT TO:

EXT. A WESTERN UNION OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

A truck with the words CLAYTON BROS., CUSTOM PAINTING AND  
DECORATING stenciled on the side, is parked out front. Two  
men, wearing overalls and painter's caps, walk into the  
office to the reception counter, we see that they are Twist  
and Singleton.

TWIST  
(to the receptionist)  
Excuse me. We're here to paint Mr.  
Harmon's office.

RECEPTIONIST  
(obviously not  
expecting them)  
Mr. Harmon's office? Hold on just  
a second.

She goes to get Mr. Harmon.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE SLEEZY DINER - LATE AFTERNOON

Hooker is standing on the curb outside the diner, obviously  
waiting for somebody. Lonnegan's car pulls up and Hooker  
hops in the back.

LONNEGAN  
What happened to your face?

HOOKER  
Had a little fight with a raggle  
down on 13th. She got me with her  
ring.

Lonnegan laughs.

CUT TO:

INT. THE WESTERN UNION OFFICE AGAIN - LATE AFTERNOON

Mr. Harmon is looking over the authorization papers that Twist and Singleton have given him. He can't find anything wrong with it.

HARMON

Brigham signed it all right. I can't understand why he didn't tell me.

SINGLETON

Ah, he's like all them supervisors. They think they're too good for regular people. He says he was in here a while ago and the place was a mess.

Harmon looks around, hoping it's not true.

TWIST

We'll try and hurry so we don't keep you out of your office too long.

HARMON

Why can't I work with you in there?

SINGLETON

Look pal, we gotta cover the floor, the furniture, everything, so we don't spill on nothing. Now if you wanta sit in there with a tarp over your head, you're welcome to it.

HARMON

All right, how long will you be?

TWIST

Hour or two at the most. We do good work.

Harmon is resigned. Twist and Singleton pick up their gear and march into the office. Once inside, we notice that the office has an exit door which opens to an outside alley. Twist immediately removes his overalls, revealing the suit and tie he's wearing underneath. He takes out a picture of himself, a woman and three small children, and puts it on Harmon's desk, replacing a similiar picture of Harmon's family. Singleton, meanwhile, has spread a few tarps and begins to paint the walls.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WESTERN UNION OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Lonnegan's car pulls up and stops across the street.

HOOKER

We'll go to the side door.

We follow Hooker and Lonnegan across the street to the side entrance which opens into:

INT. HARMON'S OFFICE

Hooker knocks and Twist, of course, answers.

HOOKER

Les, I got Mr. Lonnegan with me.  
He wants to see you a second.

TWIST

(irritated)

What the hell's the matter with you.  
We coulda met at a club or somethin'.

HOOKER

I thought it might be good for him  
to see the setup.

TWIST

(hushed)

Well we can't talk in here. They're  
having the place painted.

Twist walks over to the intercom on his desk. He leaves the door open so that Lonnegan can get a good look at the office, Twist's picture in it, the painter, etc... Lonnegan's not missing any of it.

TWIST

(talking into the intercom)

Miss Barnes, I'm going home a  
little early today. Tell anyone  
that calls that they can reach me  
here in the morning. Thank you.

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT OFFICE

Harmon's secretary at the other end of the intercom. Mr. Harmon is with her. They look at each other a second and Harmon decides he better see what's happening in his office. He opens the door to find it empty except for a pile of painting equipment and one haphazardly painted wall.

CUT TO:

INT. A DILAPIDATED CHINESE RESTAURANT - EVENING

Dark and somewhat foreboding, its peeling dragons and shoddy lanterns compete for space with the many slot machines and arcade games that line the walls. Hooker, Lonnegan and Twist sit at one of the more secluded tables. They are not eating.

TWIST

Can't do it. There're telegraph inspectors all over the place. I got 750 grand coming in from the coast, and I'm not gonna blow it for a lousy 14 gees. We'll get somebody else to do our betting.

LONNEGAN

I could come up with 750 grand in a day if I had a reason to.

TWIST

But who says you will. I got a guy I can depend on. He's liquidating everything he has for this. You wouldn't even give Carver his money back.

LONNEGAN

I need more proof, that's all. Anybody can get lucky once.

TWIST

(stubbornly)

On a 6-1 shot? The hell with ya. We'll keep the deal we got.

LONNEGAN

If it works again tomorrow, I'll have a half million in cash here by noon the next day. We split 60-40.

TWIST

(feebly, beginning to break)

We were getting 50 from our guy.

LONNEGAN

With 20% coming off the top for me laying your bet. Either way you end up with 40.

Twist hesitates.

LONNEGAN

A week's a long time, friend. Anything can happen. All of it bad.

HOOKER

He's right, Les.

TWIST

Yeh, and what if we play tomorrow and he doesn't come up with the money. We risk our whole operation for nothing. I'll say when we make our bets.

LONNEGAN

Not if you want me to keep makin' 'em for ya.

HOOKER

And what do we know about your guy. He says a week, but who knows if it's a month? Lonnegan here's a banker. He can get that dough with no questions asked.

Twist says nothing for a minute, then:

TWIST

All right. Be at the booth at 1:00. I'll give you all three places this time, Lonnegan. That better be proof enough.

Hooker and Lonnegan smile at each other like life-long friends. They get up to leave, and we frame the shot with a coffee cup large in the foreground. As they go out the door, a black-gloved hand with four fingers enters the frame and puts a nickel down next to the cup.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

THE SHUT-OUT

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. A DOWNTOWN DINETTE - MORNING

Snyder finishes a donut and a cup of coffee, puts down a dime for the lot and exits. We follow him down the street:

EXT. STREET

To a corner newsstand, where he stops to buy a morning paper. As he peruses it, he's approached by two large, clean-cut men in white skimmers.

MAN

Are you Lieutenant William Snyder?

SNYDER

I don't know, what's up?

MAN

F.B.I... The Captain'd like a few words with ya. Ya got a couple minutes?

SNYDER

(completely floored)

Yeh, sure.

The two men show him to a waiting car.

CUT TO:

INT. AN ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - DAY

Snyder stands in the middle of a dusty old machine room, surrounded by four or five Federal Agents. Visible around the room are several folding cots and portable lockers. The agents have obviously been quartered here temporarily. They all wear white skimmers, save for one, a portly man, Captain Polk, who paces the room smoking. There is something long-suffering about him, as if he wondered how he ever got in a service that thought white skimmers were classy.

SNYDER

What is this? I got work to do.

POLK

Sit down and shut up, will ya. Try not to live up to all my expectations.

(not in the mood to screw around)

We were told you know a hustle artist named Johnny Hooker.

Snyder doesn't answer.

POLK

Do ya know him or don't ya?

SNYDER

Yeh, but I don't know where he is.

POLK

Well we do. He's chummin' around with a Big C named Henry Gondorff. Ring any bells?

SNYDER

Sure. Every bunco man in the country knows Gondorff.

POLK

There's word he's gonna run a con on the North Side here. We got a

year-old Florida warrant on him,  
but it's a thin beef, and he can  
beat it in court unless we catch  
him cold. All we want you to do is  
pick up Hooker for us.

SNYDER

Why don't you pick him up yourself?

POLK

Cause the stoolies are used to  
street dicks jumpin' him. If word  
gets around that Feds are in on it  
too, Gondorff'll fold up the whole  
thing.

SNYDER

Wouldn't that be too bad. You'd  
hafta move outa this nice office ya  
got.

POLK

(enraged)

Don't crack wise to me, flatfoot.  
I spent a lotta time in dumps like  
this, eatin' Gondorff's dust while  
the bunco squad gets rich tippin'  
him off. But it's not gonna happen  
this time. We're not even gonna  
let the police know we're here. If  
you keep your mouth shut and do a  
job, there'll be a promotion in it  
for ya. And you better take it,  
cause I can make ya work for us  
without it.

SNYDER

What the hell good is Hooker to ya?

POLK

He's gonna set up Gondorff for us.

SNYDER

He'll never do it.

POLK

(self-satisfied)

I think he will.

CUT TO:

INT. DRUGSTORE - DAY

Lonnegan sits by the phone, watching the clock and sipping a  
cup of coffee.

CUT TO:

INT. THE STORE - DAY

Specifically, the small room from which Singleton does his race broadcasts. Singleton, himself, is hunched over the ticker machine, reading the print-out. Billie sits at the microphone table with a pencil and pad, ready to write.

SINGLETON

Visitation is still up by two at the three-quarters. Single Action second, Fasanella third.

BILLIE

What's the line on Visitation?

SINGLETON

(checking further up on the print-out sheet)  
7 to 2. That ain't bad.

BILLIE

He'll probably fall down.

Gondorff appears at the doorway.

GONDORFF

How ya doin'?

SINGLETON

(eyes still glued to the ticker)  
Nothin' yet. I got a good one on the lead at Hialeah, but he's fadin'.

BILLIE

Best we had was Cat's Eye in the second at Del Mar, and he was only 5-2. Not many longshots comin' in today.

SINGLETON

(excited)  
Billie. You ready?

Billie prepares to write on her pad.

BILLIE

Yeh, go ahead.

SINGLETON

At the finish, it's Single Action by two, Fasanella second, Visitation third.  
(reading up the sheet again)  
Line on Single Action... 3 to 2.  
Hell with it, that's no good.

Billie crumples up the piece of paper she's been writing on

and chucks it in a wastecan.

GONDORFF

We don't need big odds on this one,  
J.J. Take anything you get at 3-1  
or better.

Gondorff leaves the room, as Singleton turns back to his  
vigil at the ticker.

SINGLETON

(a little weary)

Okay, the Fairfield Stakes at Santa  
Anita. Mile and a quarter for 3  
year olds and up.

CUT TO:

THE FLOOR AREA OF THE STORE

Everyone is in his place as before. Today, however, Curly  
Jackson is playing the part of the aging sport.

Well scrubbed and clean shaven, he cuts a dashing figure in  
his blue blazer and white pants. We go to Gondorff in the  
cashier's cage. He's talking to Niles, who's busy handing  
out fake bankrolls to members of the boost.

GONDORFF

He's gonna hit ya with 20 grand,  
Eddie. How much cash we got?

NILES

Not enough to cover a bet that big.

GONDORFF

Get a couple extra guys in the  
line, then. We'll give him the  
shut-out.

Niles nods.

CUT TO:

INT. DRUGSTORE - DAY

Lonnegan is still waiting. He takes the 20 grand out of his  
coat pocket and thumbs through it, just to make sure it's  
all there.

CUT TO:

INT. THE STORE - DAY

Singleton and Billie at the ticker again. Billie looks a  
little sleepy. Singleton is obviously involved with the  
progress of a race.

SINGLETON

Okay, Billie, here we go.

Billie snaps to and prepares to write as Singleton reads.

SINGLETON

At the wire it's Wrecking Crew the winner by five, Grand Theft second, Wingless third.

(reading up)

Wrecking Crew was...4 to 1.

(ripping the sheet out of the ticker)

That's our boy.

Billie and Singleton hustle out of the room.

EXT. ALLEY

We follow Billie through the store and across the alley to the building from which Twist keeps his lookout.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. THE STORE

Gondorff, holding the ticker sheet Singleton has given him, emerges from the office and starts giving instructions to the boost.

GONDORFF

All right, Furey, your horse is Wingless. Paltrow, the Big Alabama and Phillips'll take Grand Theft. Rodgers and Eirie have Wrecking Crew. Jackson -- His Dandy, Cowan -- Change of Heart, Fiskin and Chappie -- Made to Order.

(pointing to the Eirie Kid)

Eirie, he gets a bang outa seein' you lose, so we oughta use that on 'em. If you play the birds of a feather routine we worked on, it should steam him up pretty good. You think you can handle that?

EIRIE KID

(a little nervous)

Yeh, sure.

GONDORFF

O.K., you guys in line take your time, and I wanta see lotsa joy on Wrecking Crew.

CUT TO:

INT. TWIST'S ROOM - DAY

Billie enters and gives Twist the piece of paper she wrote the race results on. He picks up the phone and starts to dial.

CUT TO:

INT. DRUGSTORE - DAY

The phone rings and Lonnegan answers it.

VOICE

Wrecking Crew at 4-1, Grand Theft to place, Made to Order to show.

Lonnegan smiles and hangs up the phone.

CUT TO:

INT. THE STORE - DAY

Lonnegan's in line at the betting window. There are four people in front of him this time, and they are moving rather slowly. The "Last Flash" call is heard on the speakers.

LONNEGAN

(getting impatient)

C'mon, let's hurry up there.

The man at the head of the line turns around and gives Lonnegan a chilling look, as if he were beneath contempt. He puts down \$25,000 on Grand Theft. The next man in line plunges down \$30,000 on Wrecking Crew.

Just as Lonnegan is about to step to the window, Gondorff gives a quick signal to Singleton. The speakers come on.

CALLER

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is Arnold Rowe, your caller for the \$100,000 Fairfield Stakes at Hollywood Park in Los Angeles. A mile and 3/8 for three year olds and up. And they're off!

LONNEGAN

(counting out his money)

Twenty-thousand on Wrecking Crew.

NILES

I'm sorry, sir. We can't take bets after the race is started.

He points to a sign above the window, which says exactly that. Lonnegan grabs up his money in disgust.

GONDORFF

Don't take it so hard, pal. You probably woulda lost it.

Lonnegan wanders over to the bar in a funk.

CALLER

And around the first turn it's  
Wrecking Crew by a half length,  
Grand Theft second by one, His  
Dandy is third by one half, followed  
by Change of Heart, Back Flip, Made  
to Order and High Ground.

The assembled patrons are once again thoroughly involved in the race. Eirie comes up to Lonnegan at the bar.

EIRIE KID

Who you got?

LONNEGAN

(half-heartedly)  
Wrecking Crew.

EIRIE KID

Me too. Maybe it's our day.

Lonnegan nods and wanders away. Hooker comes over to him.

HOOKER

What happened?

LONNEGAN

I didn't get the bet down in time.

HOOKER

(pissed)  
Oh, Jesus.

CUT TO:

INT. STORE OFFICE

Gondorff and Niles, back in the office.

NILES

(looking out at the floor)  
Looks like he's sulking.

GONDORFF

If we're lucky, this'll bring him  
back stronger than ever.

CUT TO:

THE FLOOR

CALLER

Coming for home, it's Wrecking Crew

by six lengths, Made to Order is second by two and a half, High Ground is third by a length and Grand Theft is coming fast on the rail. It's Wrecking Crew, Made to Order and Grand Theft. Wrecking Crew wins it by five lengths, Grand Theft is second by a nose, Made to Order is third by two. Time for one and 3/8 mile, 2:11 and 4/10 seconds.

Eirie explodes in a joyous frenzy. He grabs Lonnegan by the shoulders and shakes him.

EIRIE KID

We won! We won! You hear that! I won 30,000! You hear that!

Yeh, Lonnegan heard that. Lonnegan shakes loose, grabs his coat and heads for the door.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

He finds Hooker waiting for him outside.

LONNEGAN

Tell your friend I'll have the money here by post-time tomorrow. We'll take the first race where the odds are 4-1 or better. And make sure I can get to that window this time.

HOOKER

How am I gonna do that?

LONNEGAN

(coarsely)

I don't know, figure something out.

Lonnegan storms across the street to his waiting car and drives off. Hooker relaxes into a smile. He's already figured something out.

CUT TO:

INT. SLEEZY DINER ACROSS FROM HOOKER'S APT. BLDG. - EVENING

Hooker sits at the counter finishing a plate of meat loaf. Loretta is down at the cash register, leaning on the counter, looking idly out into space. Hooker glances over at her every once in a while to see if she might be interested in striking up a little conversation. She's not. He finishes his meal and comes down to the register to pay his bill.

HOOKER

Meat loaf, apple pie and a cup of

coffee.

LORETTA  
(ringing it up)  
Sixty-five.

Hooker gives her a dollar. She goes to the register for change.

HOOKER  
What time you get off work here?

LORETTA  
2:00 A.M.

HOOKER  
You doin' anything tonight?

LORETTA  
(handing him his change)  
Yeh, sleepin'.

Hooker figures that's enough of that. He pockets his change and starts out the door, when suddenly he stops short.

EXT. STREET

Across the street in a doorway is the silhouette of a man. It's Cole. He's pretending not to look at the diner, but Hooker isn't fooled.

INT. DINER

He goes back to Loretta at the register.

HOOKER  
You got a back door to this place?

LORETTA  
No. What's wrong with the front?

HOOKER  
(urgently now)  
Look, I don't have time to fuck around. There's somebody out there I don't need to see. You got a fire escape or anything?

LORETTA  
No.

HOOKER  
All right, do me a favor. Go into the bathroom, open the window and wait for me there.

LORETTA  
What the hell for?

HOOKER  
Just do what I tell ya and  
everything'll be jake.

Cracks of concern begin to appear in Loretta's marble.

LORETTA  
What does this guy want?

HOOKER  
(evenly)  
He'd like to kill me.

Loretta just looks at him a second. Realizing that this is no joke, she turns and walks slowly but steadily to the bathroom. Hooker waits until she's out of sight.

EXT. STREET

Hooker goes to the front door and steps outside. Cole looks up at the sound of the door. Hooker makes a big show of spotting him, and runs back into the diner. Cole, his cover blown, draws his gun and races across the street in pursuit. Arriving just in time to see --

INT. DINER

Hooker go into the bathroom, he charges in after him, only to find the place empty. He goes quickly from stall to stall, on the chance that Hooker might be hiding in one of them.

He comes to one that's closed, and seeing a pair of woman's legs under the door, rejects that, and moves on to the next one.

We cut inside the stall to reveal Loretta sitting on the toilet with her skirt hiked up. Right behind her, crouched on the back of the seat, is Hooker.

Cole has finished his rapid inspection now, and having found nothing, looks around for Hooker's probable escape route. He sees the open window and climbs out to find himself in a small air shaft, from which he knows Hooker could not escape. Hooker, seizing the time, bursts out of the stall and runs back out through the diner. Cole sees him, but too late to get off a shot. He climbs back in the window and gives chase.

EXT. STREET

We pick up Hooker barreling down the street with Cole a hundred yards or so behind. Hooker makes a sharp cut into an alley, and we see immediately that it's a hopeless dead end. Inexplicably, he makes no attempt to run back out.

Cole draws up and cuts into the alley, anticipating the kill which should be easy now. He prepares to sight down his

victim, when suddenly he realizes there is no victim in sight. Hooker, miraculously, has vanished. Cole scans the alley frantically for some trace of him. There are no windows or doors at the street level. Not even a drain pipe. Just brick wall. It's impossible. Hooker has disappeared into thin air.

Cole slams his gun into his shoulder holster with a curse, and starts back out of the alley, when all of a sudden he stops in utter terror. His mouth drops open and he chokes out the words:

COLE

Salino, hey look. I didn't mean to  
move in on...

Before anything else can come out, two bullets rip into his chest. He falls to the concrete, coming to rest on a manhole cover, which we notice is slightly ajar. We:

CUT TO:

THE SEWER PIPES

Beneath the manhole. We see Hooker making his way through the slop, having gained another reprieve, but unaware that with two down, there is still one to go.

CUT TO:

INT. HOOKER'S APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

Hooker comes in the front entrance and goes to the elevator, one of the old-fashioned kind with the iron grid on the inside. He's still a little rattled and waiting for the elevator is making him restless. It finally arrives, and he steps inside, closing the grid behind him. As he starts to push the button for his floor, he realizes for the first time that he's not alone. He looks to the corner to find Snyder, holding a gun on him. This time there's not much doubt that he'll use it if necessary.

CUT TO:

INT. THE ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - EVENING

Snyder brings Hooker into the crate room where Capt. Polk and the other Agents are waiting. Polk, as usual, has his coat off, revealing his shoulder holster.

POLK

Hello, Mr. Hooker. Captain Polk,  
F.B.I...

(shoving a chair over  
to him)

Have a seat.

Hooker remains standing.

POLK  
(ignoring it, drinking  
from a cup)  
You want a drink or something?

HOOKER  
No.

POLK  
We want to talk to ya about Henry  
Gondorff.

HOOKER  
Don't think I know him.

POLK  
Well give yourself a couple seconds,  
crumb. You wouldn't wanna lie to  
me. Lt. Snyder here says you done  
a lotta griftin' in this town.

HOOKER  
Lt. Snyder doesn't know shit.

Capt. Polk almost laughs, but he checks it.

HOOKER  
You got nothin' on me.

POLK  
We'll get it, and if we can't,  
we'll just make it up. Grand  
larceny, extortion.  
(with special emphasis)  
Counterfeiting, anything you want.

Hooker says nothing, but it's not from defiance now. He's  
beginning to get the picture.

POLK  
Look, I got nothin' against you,  
but you're in trouble here. All  
you gotta do is tell us when  
Gondorff's gonna play his chump.  
We come in at the sting, make the  
pinch, and you walk out free as a  
bird. No questions, no court  
appearance, nothing.

HOOKER  
No.

POLK  
You've already done time twice, and  
judges don't like three time losers.

You wanna sit in the can for forty years, startin' tonight?

HOOKER

I'll make parole.

POLK

Like hell. You won't even get a review till you're seventy. And if the board starts to go soft, we'll let ya out in the yard some night with a hard-nose young bull who'll put fifty slugs in your face and ask what you were doin' there later.

Hooker wants to come back with something, but can't find it.

POLK

Don't be a sap, kid. You could save us a little trouble. But Henry Gondorff is through whether you help us or not. There's nothin' left to do now but save yourself.

Hooker's thoroughly whipped. He sits down for the first time.

HOOKER

(softly)

Will you wait until the chump is played?

POLK

Hell yes. We don't care about the mark. He deserves what he gets.

HOOKER

(with heat)

I mean completely played. Until he's beat and the score is taken. You come in before we beat him and I'll kill him. You'll have a tough time explaining that, won't ya.

POLK

All right, Hooker, but you take it on the lam, and we'll shoot you down on sight.

HOOKER

(barely audible)

Just as long as I get to finish the play.

CUT TO:

INT. GONDORFF'S ROOM - NIGHT

Gondorff and Hooker are playing gin rummy and drinking. Gondorff makes little comments as he plays, but Hooker is quiet and withdrawn. The carousel is not in operation and a heavy silence hangs over the place.

GONDORFF

What's the matter, kid? You're not sayin' much.

HOOKER

Just a little nervous, that's all.

GONDORFF

Luther always told me to bite my toenails when I get nervous. You see yourself doin' that and you realize it ain't worth it.

Hooker smiles feebly.

Billie appears at the door.

BILLIE

Things are a little slow tonight, Henry. I wanna open the round for the girls.

Gondorff takes out a set of keys and tosses them to her. She leaves to go start the merry-go-round. Gondorff settles back into the game.

GONDORFF

Take it easy, you won't lose him now. We had him 10 years ago when he decided to be somebody. Believe me, I've seen enough to know.

HOOKER

(softly)

How many guys you conned in your life, Henry?

GONDORFF

Two or three hundred I guess. Sometimes played two a day when I was in Shea's mob. We had it down to a business.

(pause)

'Course Chicago was a right town then. The fix was in. The dicks took their end without a beef. All the Wall Street boys wanted to make investments for us. Even had marks looking us up, thinkin' they could beat the game.

(pause)

Yeh, kid, it really stunk. No sense in bein' a grifter if it's

the same as bein' a citizen.

Gondorff chucks his cards on the table. He's through for the night.

GONDORFF

I better do some packin'. I'm gonna be a hot number again after tomorrow.

HOOKER

Then why you doin' it?

GONDORFF

Seems worthwhile, doesn't it? Maybe it's just for the cave-in on Lonnegan's face when we put in the sting.

That's good enough. Hooker gets up to leave.

HOOKER

Henry.

HOOKER

Yeh.

HOOKER

(apologetically)

I appreciate your stickin' your neck out. I wouldn't have asked ya if it weren't for Luther.

GONDORFF

Ain't nothin' gonna make up for Luther, kid.

(pause)

Revenge is for suckers. I been griftin' 30 years and never got any.

Hooker just nods and walks out the door.

INT. CAROUSEL

We follow him past the Carousel which is now full of giggling prostitutes in various stages of undress. Their childish frolicking is charming from a group usually so jaded, but it's lost on Hooker tonight.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CITY STREET - NIGHT

It's late now and the street is deserted save for an occasional derelict or streetwalker on her way home from a night's work. We pick up Hooker coming down the street toward his apartment building. He walks slowly, almost reluctantly, as if he didn't care whether he ever got there

or not.

As he nears his building, he notices Loretta coming out of the diner across the street. He stops and watches as she looks up and disappears into an adjacent building that advertises rooms for rent. After a few seconds, we see a light come on in one of its second story windows.

Hooker just stands there a second, debating with himself, trying to figure out a reason for doing what he's going to do anyway. We follow him across the street to Loretta's building and:

INT. LORRETA'S

He goes up the stairs to the room where the light came on. He passes a couple of derelicts on the way. He knocks twice and Loretta answers in her bathrobe. She is more than a little startled to see him.

LORETTA

Looks like he missed ya.

HOOKER

Yeh, this time anyway.

Loretta notices an old busybody peeping out at them from her room across the hall.

LORETTA

Good night, Mrs. Hillard.

Mrs. Hillard quickly closes her door.

HOOKER

(shuffling a little)

I, ah...thought you might wanna come out for a while. Maybe have a drink or somethin'.

LORETTA

You move right along, don't ya.

HOOKER

(with more innocence  
than confidence)

I don't mean nothin' by it. I just don't know many regular girls, that's all.

LORETTA

And you expect me to come over, just like that.

HOOKER

If I expected somethin', I wouldn't be still standin' out here in the hall.

Loretta looks at him carefully. She knows it's not a line.

LORETTA  
(with less resistance now)  
I don't even know you.

HOOKER  
(slowly)  
You know me. I'm just like you...  
It's two in the morning and I don't  
know nobody.

The two just stand there in silence a second. There's nothing more to say. She stands back and lets him in.

CUT TO:

INT. GONDORFF'S ROOM - NIGHT

A record spinning lazily on an old phonograph. We hear Robert Johnson's "Come On In My Kitchen." Gondorff is sitting up in bed, with his hat on, lost in thought. Billie is curled up asleep next to him. There's a packed suitcase next to the bed. Billie wakes up and turns over a second.

BILLIE  
C'mon, Henry, knock off. You've  
done everything you can.

Gondorff nods his agreement like a zombie and goes right on thinking.

CUT TO:

LORRETTA'S ROOM

Hooker and Loretta are asleep against each other, their bodies illuminated every few seconds by the light from a neon sign across the street. We dolly to the window and move in on another window in the building next door. There's no light on in it, but we can discern the basic outline of a face behind the curtains, which are slightly parted to afford a view of Hooker's room by a black-gloved hand.

"I said come on in my kitchen  
Cause it's gonna be rainin' outdoors."

Music ends.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

THE STING

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

We open on Hooker in bed, the morning sun streaming in on his face. He awakens slowly, looks at the ceiling for a second and, remembering last night, turns to the side to find that Loretta is no longer there. Still drowsy, he gets out of bed and looks around the room for a note or some evidence of her continued presence. He opens an empty closet, then opens empty drawers. Finding nothing, he suddenly hits on another possibility, and looks in his wallet. The money is still there. Almost disappointed, he slumps down in a chair, as the harsh reality of what will happen this day floods back in on him. Music begins and we:

CUT TO:

INT. AN UNKNOWN LOCATION - DAY

We see the black-gloved hand opening a small wooden box. Wrapped inside is a shiny black revolver, at this point in two pieces. The hand reaches in and takes them out.

CUT TO:

INT. THE SLEEZY DINER - DAY

Hooker is poking at a plate of waffles and sausage. The waitress on duty is not Loretta and Hooker has noticed.

CUT TO:

INT. GONDORFF'S ROOM - DAY

Gondorff is standing in front of the bathroom mirror, putting on his tuxedo. He goes to his dresser, pulls out a very small gun and tucks it in his cummerbund.

CUT TO:

THE GUNNMAN'S ROOM AGAIN

The hand swirls a pipe cleaner inside the barrel of the revolver and picks some lint out of the chamber. He then screws the barrel onto the body. This is all seen in closeup.

CUT TO:

HOOKER'S ROOM AGAIN

Hooker now has his tuxedo on. He takes two small rubber bladders out of a drawer and puts them in his pocket.

CUT TO:

INT. LONNEGAN'S SUITE - DAY

Lonnegan paces nervously around the room, looking at the clock. Obviously waiting for something, he's getting extremely impatient.

CUT TO:

THE GUNNMAN'S ROOM AGAIN

We watch the hand carefully loading bullets into the chamber of the revolver.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CAROUSEL BUILDING - DAY

Gondorff emerges from his room carrying his suitcase. He stops and looks up at the mezzanine where Billie is standing. They smile sadly at each other and give a simple wave, having done this too many times to get sentimental about it now. Gondorff walks out of the building.

CUT TO:

HOOKER'S ROOM AGAIN

Hooker is busily stuffing all his possessions in a paper bag, lumping clothes with food, records and toilet articles.

CUT TO:

LONNEGAN'S SUITE AGAIN

Lonnegan goes to the door to admit Floyd and two assistants, one of whom carries a large brief case. Lonnegan takes the brief case to a table and opens it. Inside is a half million dollars in cash.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GUNNMAN'S ROOM AGAIN

We see the hand putting a silencer on the revolver. The gunman puts the revolver up to his eye to check the alignment and for the first time we see the face that goes with the hand. It is fully as menacing as we had imagined: Broad, flat nose, thick cracked lips, narrow eyes and cauliflower ears.

CUT TO:

HOOKER'S ROOM AGAIN

Hooker is on the phone now.

INT. WAREHOUSE

We see that he's talking to Captain Polk. Snyder listens also.

## HOOKER'S ROOM

Hooker finishes the conversation, hangs up and goes to take one last look at himself in the mirror. Finding everything in order, he grabs up his sack of possessions and leaves the room.

## EXT. HOOKER'S APARTMENT

We pick him up emerging from the building, and follow him around the corner to a secluded alley which he generally takes on his way to the store. As he walks along, he notices Loretta coming toward him from the other end. She's wearing a coat, obviously on her way somewhere. As she comes closer, we move to reveal the gunman appearing suddenly in the alley behind and to the right of Hooker.

## EXT. ALLEYWAY

The gunman quickly takes out his revolver, braces it in the crook of his hand, and takes careful aim. Loretta sees him. The gunman fires. Loretta falls dead on the asphalt.

Hooker spins around in confusion. The gunman moves quickly toward him. Hooker starts to back up but the gunman stops when he gets to Loretta. He kicks her over to reveal a gun under her body.

GUNMAN

She was gonna kill ya, kid.

Hooker is stunned. He can't believe it.

GUNMAN

(dragging the body  
over behind a trash can)

Her name's Loretta Salino.  
Lonnegan's people set her up in the  
diner. C'mon, let's get outa here.

Hooker wants to stay and try to figure it all out, but the gunman drags him away.

CUT TO:

## INT. THE ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - DAY

Polk, Snyder and several federal agents are busy putting on their shoulder holsters, and checking their weapons.

POLK

(to Snyder)

Whoever Gondorff's playin' for is  
bound to be a wheel. As soon as  
we're inside, I want you to get the  
guy outa there as fast as possible,  
before the reporters show up. We

can't afford to embarrass any big shots.

Snyder nods.

CUT TO:

EXT. LONNEGAN'S HOTEL - DAY

Lonnegan, carrying the brief case personally, is seen getting into his limousine. Four assistants get in with him.

CUT TO:

INT. THE STORE - DAY

Gondorff enters the store carrying his suitcase. Several of the boost are already there. Gondorff clasps his hands to generate a little enthusiasm. He's obviously up for this one.

CUT TO:

INT. TAXI CAB - DAY

Hooker sits in the back seat with the gunman right next to him. He's still very uneasy with this man.

HOOKER

She coulda killed me last night.

GUNMAN

Too many people coulda seen ya go in her room. She was a professional. Used to work in the Dutch Schultz gang.

HOOKER

Who are you?

GUNMAN

Gondorff asked me to look after ya.

HOOKER

How do I know you're tellin' the truth.

GUNMAN

Don't have much choice, do ya?

We go to Hooker. No, he doesn't.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - DAY

We pick up Polk, Snyder and the other federal agents coming out of the warehouse in their white skimmers, and piling into cars.

CUT TO:

THE STORE AGAIN

Niles is busily spreading "boodles" all over the cashier's area. Singleton checks his microphone. It works fine. He checks it again.

CUT TO:

LONNEGAN IN HIS LIMOUSINE

He holds the brief case in his lap, his fingers tapping lightly on it.

CUT TO:

THE STORE AGAIN

Hooker and the gunman enter and go over to Gondorff, who breaks into a wide smile. Hooker returns it halfheartedly, still ill at ease about what has happened.

CUT TO:

THE F.B.I. CARS ON THEIR WAY

There are four or five driving in a column. Snyder and Polk ride together in the back of the lead car.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DRUGSTORE - DAY

Lonnegan's limousine pulls up outside, and the bodyguards pile out.

CUT TO:

THE STORE AGAIN

Gondorff, Hooker and the others waiting, the tension expressed in their faces.

INT. THE DRUGSTORE - DAY

Lonnegan sits tensely in the usual booth. He keeps both hands firmly planted on the brief case. The phone rings and Lonnegan goes to it. Music ends.

VOICE

Place it on Syphon at 8-1.

Lonnegan hangs up with the look of the financial killer. Eight to one odds is more than even he could have hoped for.

EXT. STREET

We follow Lonnegan across the street and into the store.  
The bodyguards remain outside.

INT. THE STORE

The store is buzzing with activity. Money and booze are everywhere. The sheet writer and the boardmarker can hardly keep up with the action. Lonnegan walks quickly to the betting line and finds to his relief that there's only one man ahead of him. The man puts \$25,000 on King's Image.

Lonnegan steps to the window, swings up the brief case, and opens it for Niles to see.

LONNEGAN  
(straight-faced)  
Five hundred grand on Syphon.

Niles is struck dumb. He's never seen that much money before.

NILES  
(playing the flustered  
clerk)  
Hold on, I'll have to get the  
manager.

Niles goes and returns with Gondorff.

GONDORFF  
What's the problem?

NILES  
(pointing to the  
brief case)  
He wants to put a half million on  
Syphon.

Gondorff looks at the money a second and then looks up at Lonnegan like he's gotta be crazy.

GONDORFF  
(uneasily)  
I can't lay that off in time. We  
lose a bet that big, it could break  
us.

LONNEGAN  
(challenging)  
If ya win it could make ya, too.

GONDORFF  
(to Niles)  
What are the odds on Syphon?

NILES

Eight to one.

Gondorff looks at Lonnegan long and hard.

GONDORFF

A half mill on an eight to one shot.  
You're dumber than I thought,  
Lonnegan.

LONNEGAN

You're more gutless than I thought.

The words "Last Flash" are heard on the speaker. Gondorff looks at Lonnegan with utter contempt. He turns to Niles.

GONDORFF

(chopped)

Take it.

Niles hurriedly writes out a slip for 500,000 dollars. Lonnegan, allowing himself a sly smile, picks it up and retires to a nearby table. He flashes a little okay sign to Hooker who acknowledges it with a nod.

CALLER

Ladies and gentlemen, this is  
Arnold Rowe, your caller for the  
San Antonio Handicap at Pimlico in  
Baltimore – A mile and 1/16 for  
three-year-olds. And they're off.

Lonnegan takes a deep breath and leans forward in his chair, the larceny boiling in his veins. Hooker looks to Gondorff. Gondorff gives him the "office." Hooker has to smile.

CALLER

And around the first turn it's  
King's Image by a neck, Syphon is  
second by one, Key to the Vault  
third by one half, followed by Mr.  
Moonlight, Red Ridge, Moneyman and  
No Charge.

Unexpectedly, Kid Twist bursts in through the entrance. Barely able to control his enthusiasm, he hurries over to Lonnegan's table and sits down next to him.

TWIST

Sorry, but I just couldn't wait.  
Did everything go all right?

LONNEGAN

(motioning for him to  
keep his voice down)  
Take it easy. Everything's all  
right. I put it on Syphon, on the

nose.

TWIST

(in utter horror)

On the nose! I said place. Place it on Syphon. That horse is going to run second.

Lonnegan looks like he's just been stabbed. He vaults over the table to the teller's window and grabs Niles.

LONNEGAN

You give me my goddamn money back! You hear me? There's been a mistake!

NILES

I'm sorry, sir. The betting's closed.

Lonnegan begins to shake him violently.

LONNEGAN

You give me my money back. There's been a mistake, do you hear me?

Gondorff leaps to Niles' aid when suddenly there is a crash at the entrance door, and Polk, Snyder and eight federal agents burst into the room, guns drawn. The place falls silent except for the loudspeaker, the members of the boost afraid to move. Gondorff and Niles look at each other wondering how this could have possibly happened.

POLK

(motioning to Hooker)

All right, Hooker, you can go.

Hooker's eyes go to Gondorff, who looks back at him in utter disbelief, the betrayal raging in his features. Hooker, unable to meet his gaze, lowers his head and starts to walk out. Almost unnoticed, there's a flash of movement at Gondorff's belt. A small gun. A shot. Hooker clutches his back and falls dead on the floor, the blood spurting from his mouth. Polk, reacting instantly, pours four shots into Gondorff, who goes down in a heap. Pandemonium breaks loose. The members of the boost race for the door. Lonnegan is totally stunned. First he lost his money and now he's involved in a murder. Snyder rushes over to him.

SNYDER

C'mon. We gotta get you outa here.

EXT. STREET

Snyder drags him through the crowd and out onto the street where an F.B.I. car is waiting. His bodyguards have long since fled at the sight of the F.B.I. men.

LONNEGAN

My money's back there.

SNYDER

We'll worry about that later.

Snyder gets in beside Lonnegan, and the car speeds away.

CUT TO:

INSIDE THE STORE AGAIN

The pandemonium has now ceased. Those who could escape have; the rest are lined up against the wall in frisking position. Gondorff and Hooker lie on the floor dead. The loudspeaker drones on. Singleton is still calling the race from his booth, apparently oblivious to what's happened.

CALLER

And the winner is King's Image by four lengths, Syphon is second, by two, Moneyman third by two and one half. Time for 1 and 1/16 miles, 1:21 and 2/10 seconds.

Polk walks slowly over to Hooker's body and bends down.

POLK

He's gone.

Hooker opens his eyes and slowly drags himself up off the floor, spitting out a little rubber bladder, filled with blood, that he's had in his mouth. Gondorff does likewise. Niles, Twist, Singleton and the rest of the boost begin to laugh and shake hands, as do the Federal Agents.

GONDORFF

(to Polk)

Nice con, Hickey. I thought you were Feds myself, when you first came in.

HICKEY

No problem, Henry. Snyder went for it all the way.

(laughing)

You shoulda seen the rag he lit under Lonnegan.

Gondorff turns to the others.

GONDORFF

Okay, let's take this place apart and get outa here. You can get your splits from Eddie at Boudreau's tonight.

Gondorff walks over to Hooker, who's wiping the blood off his face and hands.

GONDORFF

You beat him, kid.

HOOKER

(softly)

You were right, Henry. It's not enough... But it's close.

GONDORFF

You wanta wait for your share?

HOOKER

Naw, I'd just blow it.

Gondorff nods, and walks slowly to behind the bar. He comes out with his suitcase in one hand and Hooker's paper bag in another. He throws the paper bag to Hooker, who stops by the door. Eirie Kid is standing there. Hooker gives the "office" to Eirie, who beams and gives it back.

EXT. ALLEY AND STREET

Then Hooker and Gondorff leave. We hold on them, two ragtail grifters again as they walk off down the street and disappear around the corner.

FADE OUT.

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THE END