

Tartarus

written by

Vincent Dajani

443-632-8118

VinceDajani@gmail.com

INT. CORTMIGLIA GROCERY STORE - DAY

BLACK and WHITE checkerboard tile -- a repeating pattern down the aisle of an old convenience store. Vintage shelves, cans -- everything in shades of grey noir. JAZZ MUSIC squeaks through a gramophone, growing louder as we slide closer to the source over those consistent tiles. Black, White...

Black, White... Black... RED. The first hint of color.

Red speckles on one tile, at least at first. Slightly further down the aisle, they turn to smears. Then streaks all the way up to the checkout counter. Something terrible happened here.

Through the front windows, early-morning light cascades onto the body of CHARLES CORTMIGLIA, atop the conveyor belt with a HACHET stuck deep in his back, very out-of-place next to gums and glass bottles. The handle's shadow marks time like a sun dial displaying five until midnight, right at --

JOHN DAVILLA, 28, Black, too lax in posture for a military man despite his Navy Officer uniform, scanning something, eyes moving, brain moving even faster. But it's not Charles he's examining, it's a poster by the register -- a still of a whiskey bottle with a red cap and a man in scrubs smiling. It reads: DOCTOR MONATET'S MIRACLE MEDICINE | LOUISIANA'S BEST FLU REMEDY. In smaller letters: CONTAINS 8% RUM.

SUPER: New Orleans, 1919

The MUSIC SCRATCHES. JOSEPH "DOC" MUMFRY, 68, Italian, an intimidatingly-large man in a trench coat, lifts the handle of the nearby gramophone. He's pulls off a pair of gloves.

JOHN

(motioning to the poster)

Can't believe folks buy this stuff.

Doc glances. Barely. He's fishing for something in his coat.

DOC

Who plays Jazz during a murder?

Doc throws back a pill, closing the bottle. OFFICER LECLERE, 40, White, in a constable uniform, enters from a back room.

LECLERE

Mother and daughter dead, too.

Wounds match the details, details.

DOC

What about the injury bullshit?

BAM--

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

In full color, John lifts a STRAW BOATER'S HAT from his face. LeClere's hand hovers over the table, having just smacked it.

LECLERE

The fuck, John? That's not how the conversation went.

John's balancing the chair on two legs. His pinstripe vest contrasts the drab concrete of the room -- it's one of those places that constantly reminds you where you are.

LECLERE (CONT'D)

Facts only. And tell it in order.

Next to LeClere is MARGARETTE GUILLORY, 45, black Creole, and drowning in a shabby blue suit meant for a man. She's got an enormous binder laid out, which she's scribbling notes in.

JOHN

Female attorneys must need to work twice as hard these days, wouldn't you say? So it's a pretty safe bet she's literate. You can read the report, right miss Guillory?

John plops the hat back down over his face. LeClere lunges over the table, swatting it away.

GUILLORY

(eyeing LeClere)

I am aware of the extent of the injuries on the Cortmiglia family, mister Davilla. But as the coroner, I'd imagine that you knew all--

BANG. John drops the chair flat. His face now in full view, eyes bloodshot, nose running.

JOHN

Assistant coroner. Temporarily.

GUILLORY

What's the difference?

LECLERE

Lack of medical training.

JOHN

Your city's got a death problem that needed sorting. The coroner's office sent a bunch of us Navy boys out to scenes to help categorize.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

I see black fingers and red cheeks,
I call those flu doctors with the
shovels. Didn't take much training.

John snatches his hat from across the table.

GUILLORY

Still... your side of the story is
helpful on missus Pepitone's case.

JOHN

(playing with the hat)

We're all stuck in this fucking
loop. And instead of the important
parts, characters, plot... you
wanna know how much blood results
from being murdered with a hatchet?

(beat)

A lot of blood. Write that down.

Guillory glances at LeClere, annoyed.

GUILLORY

Are you always this disrespectful,
or just in present circumstances?

JOHN

Great question! My turn...

(leaning in)

Did Esther request a female defense
attorney or is it just luck? Maybe
that's her plan to get off, and I
mean that in all sense of the term.

GUILLORY

Excuse me?

JOHN

Oh, I need to explain train of
thought. Right, right. Well, that
suit of yours isn't fitted, which
means you're not making prosecutor
money. You have a binder of notes
the likes of which you're obviously
not acquainted. Ergo, state-
appointed defense. So I'm asking if
she requested you specifically, as
Esther is a little funny. Nothing
against anyone's prerogatives, of
course. I'm just curious...

LECLERE

Does it matter?

John dawns his hat again.

JOHN
 (laughing)
 You want me to tell you a story,
 right? And your legal leanings
 determine which story I tell you.

GUILLORY
 Lying during any interview is a
 federal offense.

JOHN
 Oh please... Subjective human
 experience is itself a lie.
 Anything I tell you varies by the
 elements I highlight and the timing
 of those elements, doesn't it? As a
for instance, sergeant LeClere --

LECLERE
 --Chief LeClere now.

JOHN
 Ohhh, congratulations! Did chief
 LeClere share how he and I met? My
 first case. For his story, it was a
 normal case. From my perspective...

INT. BESUMER HOME, KITCHEN - NIGHT

It's dark in the home, made even darker by the shades of grey
 filling the scene. John VOMITS onto his navy officer uniform.

LeClere looks up from the ground, knelt next to the body of
 LOUIS BESUMER, slouched back, a HACHET stuck in temple.

A COP escorts LEWIS OUBICON, 40s, black, past the scene in
 handcuffs. RUNNING WATER starts from nearby, barely audible.

LECLERE
 (back to the body)
 Negroes killing Italians. At least
 they'll take each other out...

A RAT scurries past John's vomit-speckled shoes. AN UNKNOWN
 HAND bumps John on the arm, offering him a glass of water--

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Guillory clenches her jaw as she glares at LeClere, annoyed.

LECLERE

Six months is a long time. I've learned the error of my ways.

JOHN

Look at you, LeClere -- personal and professional growth. You're on an upswing. Do the gods favor you, or does someone else more earthly?

GUILLORY

Let's make this quick, gentlemen. Who killed Mike Pepitone?

John laughs, leaning back.

JOHN

The Axeman of New Orleans, of course. The papers confirmed it! But didn't Esther tell you? We're not meant to catch him.

LECLERE

The fuck does that mean?

John fiddles with the chipped paint on the table.

JOHN

Have you ever read The Odyssey?
(to LeClere)
I know you haven't.

GUILLORY

Of course. Epic poem about the fall of Troy. Monsters and heroes.

JOHN

Don't forget the incest.

LECLERE

What's it got to with with us?

JOHN

Hopefully not the incest part.

John wipes his nose on his sleeve, clearing his throat.

JOHN (CONT'D)

There's a story where Polyphemus, the cyclops -- traps Odysseus in a cave, expecting to kill him.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Before, they exchange pleasantries,
and Odysseus tells the cyclops his
name is "Nobody." Then he blinds
the cyclops, who cries out--

GUILLORY

"Nobody is killing me..."

LECLERE

We have nine dead, at least four
more attacked, and you're saying
there is no Axeman?

John laughs. Guillory leans in, her tone hinting of a threat.

GUILLORY

That story ends with Odysseus'
pride getting the better of him. He
yells his real name from the boat.

LECLERE

And Odysseus in this is who?

John stops smiling, leaning his chair back on two legs again.

JOHN

Well I can tell you for certain
it's not "nobody."

INT. JAIL HALLWAY - DAY

LeClere and Guillory stare into a cell at ESTHER PEPITONE,
37, leg's crossed, hands folded over her lap, pristine and
proper even in a beige jumpsuit. Is she... laughing?

ESTHER

Dick tugging. That's all they're
doing. It's a bullshit story of
self-important men woven by someone
trying to sound smarter than he is.
Forgive my language... It's just--

Something's changed; she's angry. Guillory opens her binder.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

John Davilla's a boy trapped in the
body of a man. He either lives in a
fictional world, or wishes he did.

She comes to the bars, faced pressed on the metal like she's
going to whisper a secret--

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Do you know -- do you understand
why men are so obsessed with
stories about monsters?

LECLERE

Enlighted us, Esther.

ESTHER

It lets you pretend you aren't the
most awful creatures out there.

Guillory glances at LeClere, questioning her new assignment.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Back in the room, Guillory pours over the binder.

GUILLORY

That first case you worked six
months ago. The victim was officer
Louis Besumer in his home, correct?
One of your own.

LECLERE

Doc's partner.

John coughs, shivering. Guillory whispers to LeClere...

GUILLORY

If he's got the Spanish flu, we--

JOHN

I wish it was the flu.

LECLERE

Pills?

JOHN

I didn't inherit much other than
some moral sensibilities from Doc,
I'm afraid. Alcohol.

GUILLORY

Prohibition is in full effect. We
can't just--

LeClere already has a flask from his pocket. John can barely
contain himself. Guillory disapproves, but John snatches it.

JOHN

Policemen, right?

He drains nearly the entire flask.

LECLERE

Most of us weren't sad to see
Besumer go. The department was...
tense then. Split down the middle.

John finishes drinking. LeClere reaches out to take the flask, but John keeps it close to him.

JOHN

White cops versus everybody else?

LECLERE

Those of us who wanted to shut down
the red light district, and those
like Besumer and Doc... who didn't.

GUILLORY

(back to the binder)
You keep saying that name. Remind
me who Doc is again.

JOHN

Seriously? He's the hero of the
story: Joseph Mumfry.

GUILLORY

You mean you're not the hero?

JOHN

You really need to review that
binder of yours if you want to keep
Esther out of prison.

Guillory folds her hands over the binder, smiling.

GUILLORY

I'm the prosecutor on missus
Pepitone's case. But thanks for the
note about my suit. I'll get a nice
new one for trial.

JOHN

Hmph. That's why I should stick to
reading Holmes and not practicing.

John takes another sip from the flask.

JOHN (CONT'D)

So Doc Mumfry--

INT. BESUMER HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

John VOMITS. It's the same scene as before. A cop escorts Oubicon by in handcuffs. The RUNNING WATER starts again.

LECLERE

--they'll take each other out...

The rat runs by. John turns to take the GLASS HANDED TO HIM. The hand belongs to Doc, trench coat and all. Doc nods.

DOC

Anyone who says it gets easier's a liar. You just learn to keep it in.

LeClere looks up at Doc. John sips the water.

LECLERE

The real coroner can say, but it seems like two blows to the head. His wife took a knife across the throat, but she's alive for now.

DOC

This seems odd for second degree murder. Two different weapons?

LECLERE

A black man moves into the room upstairs, two days later Besumer's axed with his own hatchet. You need more evidence than that?

JOHN

Yes!

LeClere stands. He talks to Doc only--

LECLERE

Look, I'm sorry about your partner. But I say we got our guy, and last I checked, this was who's scene?

Doc takes the glass back from John, heading to the sink.

DOC

It's all yours.

John buzzes after him. Doc rinses the cup.

JOHN

You're gonna let them arrest that man without evidence? Doc!

Doc puts the glass back in the cabinet.

GUILLORY (V.O.)
Why did you call him Doc anyway?

LECLERE (V.O.)
The whole force did. He was always
taking something...

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

JURORS IN MASKS watch the court proceedings. Guillory, in a
FRESH, FITTED SUIT, stands before DOCTOR BELL on the stand.

BELL
Aspirin. Joseph Mumfry was
consuming almost a bottle a week
before I advised against it.

Guillory grandstands, loving the limelight--

GUILLORY
And what would that much Aspirin do
to the human body, doctor Bell?

Bell shifts, then addresses the jurors with his reponse.

BELL
By the time I first admitted
officer Mumfry, he had severe liver
failure and numbness in his hands.

Guillory leans on the podium, feigning exhaustion.

GUILLORY
All at the age of sixty-eight...
Why was he taking so much Aspirin?

BELL
He was prone to heart attacks since
his son died. But I believe to keep
his job and his reputation, he told
people it was--

INT. MAHOGANY HALL, BAR - NIGHT

It's BRIGHT and LOUD, a vibrant hue coloring the scene. Piano
plays in the background, people laugh and drink. Doc pours
out a handful of ASPIRIN as John takes in the crowd.

DOC
High blood pressure.

He throws back the pills, then picks up a FULL shot glass.

A few bar patrons chat up women in colorful, provocative corsets and tam hats. Doc downs the shot.

JOHN

I'd have high blood pressure too if
I policed like your department.

DOC

Besumer and I weren't that close.

JOHN

(scoffing)

You knew where the glass was in his
fucking cabinets.

DOC

Why do you care about this?

JOHN

Why don't you?

Doc taps on the shot glass. The BARTENDER comes over.

DOC

Two this time. My friend is
sticking around, it seems.

The bartender pours Doc's drink, but that's it.

BARTENDER

This is an Italian establishment.
We don't serve his kind here.

Doc reaches behind the bar and grabs a shot glass.

DOC

Oh come on. Dago; Negro... People
call us slurs just the same. We
might as well drink together.

He slams the shot glass on the bar. It's uncomfortably tense.

JOHN

(scoffing)

Yeah, they yell it to you on the
street, and us while they're
pulling ropes up trees.

DOC

(to bartender)

I'll level with you. Pour this,
then go grab Madam White.

Doc motions at the glass. The bartender caves, pouring.

A WOMAN IN A YELLOW HAT walks by, and John really watches her walk. Doc catches it. Doc offers one of the glasses...

JOHN
(absentmindedly)
I don't drink anyway.

Doc takes both shots.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Back again-- John fiddles with the brim of his hat.

LECLERE
A bartender? Was Doc drinking on
the job?

JOHN
Never. He was looking for
information.

GUILLORY
And you two bonded.

JOHN
That's not my idea of bonding, but
sure. I got to know him. Then I
quit, and didn't see him again.

LECLERE
Just when we thought you couldn't
get any worse, you go from mayor's
pet to playing... fucking Jazz.

It's the first time Guillory abandons her notes.

GUILLORY
Davilla... I knew your name sounded
familiar. You wrote that hit, the,
uh... The Axeman's Jazz!

JOHN
Don't Scare Me Papa... officially.
In honor of the letter the cops
received from the Axeman himself.

Back to the binder... Guillory scans, then leans back--

GUILLORY
The letter... right. Strange mess
that was, huh?

She slides out a piece of paper.

GUILLORY (CONT'D)
 (reading)
 Esteemed mortal... They have never
 caught me and they never will...

INT. UNKNOWN HOME - NIGHT

JAZZ music blares from outside the home. A pair of gloved hands TIGHTLY SQUEEZE the handle of a hatchet.

GUILLORY (V.O.)
 I am not a human being, but a
 spirit and a demon from the hottest
 hell.

In front of the shadowed killer is a MAN, eyes closed in bed. The figure takes a step forward, CREAKING the floorboards.

GUILLORY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I am what you Orleanians and your
 foolish police call the Axeman.

JOHN (V.O.)
 I've read it--

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Guillory puts down the paper.

GUILLORY
 Pretty silly way to address a
 letter to the police, don't you
 think?

John shrugs.

JOHN
 Aren't we all merely the stories we
 tell about ourselves? Why should a
 serial killer be any different?

GUILLORY
 (nodding)
 We can come back to it later...

She slides it back into the binder.

GUILLORY (CONT'D)
 What happened next? At the brothel.

John places the hat down onto the table.

JOHN

Doc talked to an elaborately-dressed woman. It was the first time I saw --

INT. MAHOGANY HALL, BAR - DAY

John watches Doc and MADAM WHITE, 40s, octrooon, beautiful long dress. She hands him money out in the open -- no discretion. He counts it, then hands some back.

DOC

Keep Anna out of the bedrooms.

The madam nods. John glances away quickly as Doc returns.

JOHN

Protection money? And here I thought you weren't one of them.

DOC

We're all one of them given the circumstances. Your first mistake is expecting any man to be better than the rest.

John pushes off the stool -- he's ready to write Doc off, but he can't help but look back as soon as Doc speaks.

DOC (CONT'D)

There was another axe killing a month ago. First district caught it. Not us. Similar MO -- axe to the head, knife to the throat of a husband and wife. Seems like it might be worth looking into.

Doc places some of the protection money on the bar. He brushes by John with a clear smile on his face.

DOC (CONT'D)

The madam's got ears everywhere.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Guillory writes furiously in the binder.

JOHN

I went to see the mayor after.

GUILLORY
Where did Doc go?

LECLERE
I know the answer to that one.
We'll talk later.

JOHN
Secret secrets are no fun, LeClere!

LeClere stands out of nowhere. Guillory is thrown off.

LECLERE
I need coffee. Five minute break?

Before he gets an answer, he bolts to the door. After he's gone, John leans in.

JOHN
(to Guillory)
So prosecutor, huh?
(beat)
Ask Esther about her boss and the
8th precinct...

INT. PRECINCT HALLWAY, OUTSIDE INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Doc is waiting for LeClere the moment he steps out. The hallway of the precinct has a slight blue hue... Maybe it's the overhead lights.

DOC
How's it going in there?

LECLERE
Oh don't rub it in, Mumfry.

LeClere pushes past him.

DOC
He doesn't know anything because he
wasn't involved.
(beat)
I got new information about the
murders. Something you should look
into. If you actually want to catch
the right killer, of course.

LeClere spins around to face Doc. Doc holds out a manila folder. LeClere scoffs at it.

JOHN

In your, what, seventy-five years here, now you decide you want to do real police work?

He shoves Doc, who is a little less steady on his feet than either of them thought. He catches himself against the wall.

DOC

John's got the mayor's ear. Let the guy go before there's worse backlash than just being called a racist fuck.

LeClere snatches the manila folder. He tosses it to the floor, storming off. Doc leans on the wall as he picks it up.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

MAYOR MARTIN BEHRMAN, 50s, white, fat, balding, nods behind his desk, half-listening to John's story. A younger, dolled-up Esther, the mayor's assistant, listens from a small sofa on the far side of the room.

BEHRMAN

They're calling it a pandemic, you know? The flu. And people are making fortunes selling nothing more than bourbon and a shot of cough syrup to avoid alcohol taxes.

JOHN

Is Congress really going to pass that anti-alcohol bill?

BEHRMAN

The Prohibition Act... It's coming end of the year, I'm certain. And I plan to get ahead of it, especially thanks to this killing... Storyville has been nothing but a hotbed of shady characters and spreading of disease. It's time it closed.

JOHN

Speaking of shady... I saw something today in Mahogany Hall--

John glances over at Esther-- Behrman catches his gaze.

BEHRMAN

Missus Pepitone? Her husband might be a reporter, but we don't hold that against her. Talk freely.

She smiles at John, but it's one filled with sadness.

JOHN

I saw, uh... I'd like authority to follow up on these two axe killings. My source thinks they might be connected.

BEHRMAN

Hmmm. We'll put a detective on it.

JOHN

I just witnessed one of your men arrest a resident on nothing more than circumstance.

(beat)

I was a Navy investigations officer before the war... At least let me go to the scenes.

Behrman is about to protest when--

ESTHER

Mayor Behrman, if I may-- The closing of the red light district might be seen as sweeping this under the rug... How would that look for your re-election campaign?

Behrman nods.

BEHRMAN

Fine. You have until the closing of the district. Fortunate timing for Storyville...

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Back again, but this time, with coffee.

LECLERE

Thanks for getting me kicked off the case, by the way.

JOHN

I'm surprised you didn't get fired. Seems everyone but you knew that man was innocent.

Guillory interrupts the hostility.

GUILLORY

Why didn't you tell Behrman about the cash exchange in the brothel?

JOHN

I already explained this. The timing of things is important.

GUILLORY

Well was that the first time you met Esther Pepitone?

INT. JAIL HALLWAY - DAY

LeClere and Guillory have pulled up wooden chairs in front of the jail cell. Esther's returned to her pristine demeanor.

ESTHER

I met him when the mayor first hired him... maybe a month before then. Did you know John was a war deserter? Bet he didn't tell you that, huh? Feds sent deserters all over the country to assist with the flu outbreak, rather than admit our boys are limp dick cowards. Officially, John was on loan from the Navy, but unofficially, he's a slug of a man hopping to his next fascination at the faintest hint of responsibility.

(beat)

Regrettably, I introduced him to my husband. They became fast friends.

INT. MAHOGANY HALL, BAR - NIGHT

Esther's retellings are gritty; embellished and dark as MIKE PEPITONE, 38, short and scrawny, manhandles a modestly-dressed ANNA SCHNEIDER, 28, white apron. John watches them, laughing at something they must've just said. Mike stops.

MIKE

Annie, go grab me another drink, would you?

She turns and he smacks her butt. John watches her walk away.

JOHN

What about her?

Mike grabs for a PRESS CAMERA resting on the small table.

MIKE

She's just a waitress. And she's mine. You went to war right? A soldier deserves a strong woman.

He nods to a WOMAN in a YELLOW HAT, descending the stairs. John looks after him, grinning like a kid in a candy store.

INT. MAHOGANY HALL, HALL - NIGHT

Mike sways down the wallpaper-covered hallway, the press camera bobbling around his neck. He's following the woman.

MIKE

Nawlins is famous for its three 'F's - the fucking, the fighting and the food. No other city like it in the world.

Behind them, John jumps as a rat skitters across the hallway.

INT. MAHOGANY HALL, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mike walks in first, hanging off to the side. John stands awkwardly by the bed as the woman closes the door behind her. Mike makes eye contact with her and nods toward John.

MIKE

People do much worse for much less. Have at it.

She smiles at John, coming closer.

JOHN

W-what's your name?

WOMAN

I can be anyone you want me to be.

She puts her hands on his chest, pushing him onto the bed.

MIKE

Do you know what's so special about brothels?

JOHN

Uh... I can think of a few things.

The woman straddles John on the bed. She starts to unbutton his jacket. She undresses him down to his under shirt.

MIKE

They have very little to do with sex. Which might sound surprising.

She starts to unbutton her corset. Mike is watching.

MIKE (CONT'D)

It's got much more to do with control. The power to point... And shoot.

Mike puts his fingers in a mock gun shape, aiming it behind the woman's head. He fake fires.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Inside her, or on her. You have the power to do anything you want.

The woman turns back to him, questioning what he's saying.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Within reason, love - don't worry.

She turns back to John, taking off her corset.

JOHN

Uh, aren't you going to leave?

Mike sits in the wooden chair in the corner, watching.

MIKE

No. I am not.

He raises his camera, looking at John through the lens.

INT. JAIL HALLWAY - DAY

LeClere shifts in his chair, clearly uncomfortable.

LECLERE

Mike told you about that?

Esther stands, pacing inside the cell.

ESTHER

Mike made it a point to tell me everything he did. And every one.

GUILLORY

Is it safe to say that you weren't saddened by his death then?

ESTHER

On the contrary. I was lost.

GUILLORY

How's that?

Esther falls onto her cot, staring at the ceiling.

ESTHER

Do you ever forget you who are,
missus Guillory? By that I mean,
how we define ourselves, if we even
know how to in the first place.

She sits up.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Sure, some men can be lost souls
too, but us women are blank slates
to be imprinted upon, aren't we? We
get to be someone's daughter, then
someone's wife. Someone's whore or
someone's mother. We can be the
silent, pretty type who watch like
a fly on the wall. Or We can work,
til we're too strong and forward
thinking. How about the damsels in
distress, awaiting to be saved
while playing second fiddle? Now
that's a good one.

She's gesticulating now.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

We get to be all these things...

Some good options in there. Do you
know which one they defined me as?

(beat)

A victim. So, no... When my husband
died, I was navigating unfamiliar
terrain. It wasn't until after that
I found my definition.

Guillory's pen hovers; she's engrossed in Esther's ranting.

GUILLORY

What was that definition, missus
Pepitone?

Esther puts her hand on the bars.

ESTHER

Free.

EXT. STORYVILLE TRAINYARD - DAY

A parked TRAIN sends steam up behind Behrman, standing at a podium; Esther and John -- in navy uniform -- behind him.

BEHRMAN

The last red light district will be quarantined over the next two months, as we plan for new construction, changing Storyville's storied past toward the future.

(beat)

The decision isn't one I take lightly, but it's a change we must all make for the betterment of New Orleans.

An entire crowd of onlookers watch the mayor's speech. A REPORTER speaks out.

REPORTER

What about your dismissal of the former police chief? Why now? And are you appointing a new chief?

BEHRMAN

The safety of our people is my top priority, and it's apparent some things fell into the cracks during the last regime. So I will be appointing a new chief... in due time. For now, I'll be filling in as acting chief of police beginning immediately with the evacuation of the Storyville district.

SNAP. Esther spots Mike in the crowd, taking a photo with his enormous PRESS CAMERA around his neck. He lowers the lens, smiling at Esther. She smiles back.

BEHRMAN (CONT'D)

We'll be providing temporary housing, and relocation as needed. Our local Navy base has sent additional hands to help as we curb the spread of this new disease, and revitalize our city.

Mike raises a finger to speak.

MIKE

I heard that the board approved
this plan because there's a killer
on the loose... What do you have to
say about the axe killings?

Behrman looks back at Esther, who is staring down. She
clearly told Mike about the murder. Behrman sighs.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

In a soft blue hospital room, HARIETTE BESUMER breathes along
with a machine beeping softly when LeClere enters. Doc looks
up from a chair next to the bed. LeClere is thrown off.

LECLERE

I didn't mean to interrupt.

DOC

We were deep in conversation.

LeClere walks to the foot of the bed.

LECLERE

How's she doing?

DOC

Doctors are waiting for her son to
pull the plug.

LECLERE

We let Oubicon go. The case is open
until we can get more evidence.

Doc stands.

DOC

There's never been a we, LeClere.

He heads to the door. LeClere turns.

LECLERE

I want our city to be safe too.

DOC

Safe from who?

He leaves.

INT. MAHOGANY HALL - DAY

It's nearly empty inside. John enters and looks around. He spots what he's looking for -- Anna, "Mike's girl" in the white apron. She's clearing a table near the empty piano.

John strolls by, nodding at MADAM WHITE, who observes from a corner. He sits at the piano and starts playing a few keys.

Anna is clearing a table nearby. She picks up her tray and walks behind John, who stops playing and swivels around.

JOHN

I know you. Mike Pepitone's girl?

She stops.

ANNA

Anna Schneider. Hi... uh--

JOHN

John. Davilla.

ANNA

Do you play piano, Mr. Davilla?

JOHN

I've been known to. Do you ever, uh... play?

Anna adjusts a glass on the tray.

ANNA

Is that why you're here?
Waitressing keeps my bank accounts
plenty full, thank you.

She walks away. John stands, chasing her.

JOHN

No, no, nothing like that. It's
just that... Mike has a wife,
Esther... I work with her.

Anna puts the tray on the bar.

ANNA

What is it you want, Mr. Davilla?

JOHN

A friend.

ANNA

Seems like Esther could be your friend.

John sits at the bar.

JOHN

I mean you and I. Us as friends.

ANNA

I barely know you. I'd be hard pressed to call us even acquaintances at this point.

John leans over the bar, extending a handshake.

JOHN

I'm John, born out of Georgia -- my mother's name, not the state. I'm from Philadelphia.

Anna laughs at the joke, taking his hand.

ANNA

Nice to meet you, John.

JOHN

I was a real stuffy kid. Piano lessons; books... Always wanted to be important, make a difference... so I joined the Navy, unable to find what I was looking for.

ANNA

And what are you looking for in N'awlins, John?

JOHN

Nothing any more.

He smiles at her. She stifles hers, releasing his hand.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Can I buy you a drink, miss?

Anna considers it for a moment. She teases him.

ANNA

House policy. We can only accept if a customer buys two.

JOHN

I don't drink.

ANNA
(smiling)
That's too bad then.

Before she can walk away--

JOHN
Hey bartender -- remember me? Two
bourbons, please!

He starts to pour into a glass--

INT. ANNA'S HOME - DAY

Anna POURS a cup of coffee for Doc, large and out of place at her tiny kitchen table with a checkered cloth.

DOC
Are you doing okay?

He pulls the pill bottle out, shaking them into his hand.

ANNA
You mean financially?

DOC
Or otherwise. Mike treating you
right?

Anna sits. Doc sips the coffee.

ANNA
You look like shit.

He pops the pills in the side of his mouth, full of coffee.

DOC
End of days is coming.

ANNA
So I've heard...

DOC
I'm serious, Anna, this place has
gone to hell. We should move.

ANNA
You can go wherever you want. In
fact, I insist.

She lights up a cigarette.

DOC
I can't leave you here.

ANNA
(laughs)
Please. Don't act like I'm the
reason you're staying. You chose
your other family the day dad died.

DOC
Tony was reckless.

Anna pushes out from the table, standing.

ANNA
You should go.

DOC
I'm trying to keep you safe--

ANNA
You can't keep anyone safe.

Doc swirls the cup, looking inside it. Anna's hurt him.

DOC
(standing)
It was a mistake to come.

ANNA
It wasn't. We should've had this
talk years ago. I don't want you in
my family's life. I don't need your
kind of protection any more.

Doc nods and heads for the door. SLAM.

INT. UNKNOWN HOME - NIGHT

ANOTHER SLAM. Then another. Back in the dark house, the axe
blade connects with the MAN's head as he lies in bed, audible
even over the JAZZ MUSIC.

Blood sprays the walls with each hit. The figure stops, then
wipes the blade of the axe off with his gloved hand, SHHH--

INT. TIMES-PICAYUNE, NEWSROOM - DAY

--SHING. A printing press swipes its metal arm as important-
looking people rush around, busy, as you'd expect the famed
newsroom to be after such huge news from mayor Behrman. Mike
chases after CHARLIE FONTENOT, too busy to even look at Mike.

CHARLIE

We need people covering the red light closure.

MIKE

Gus and Twigg are doing color on the residents.

CHARLIE

So you want me to run a story about a murder?

MIKE

A string of murders. Three bodies with months in between. Look...

Charlie stops; he's interested. Mike almost barrels into him. He opens a MANILA FOLDER to Charlie.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Another in the hospital. Rumor says they're connected, but all we've got is an axe used in both.

Charlie looks at the PHOTOS and recoils--

CHARLIE

Jesus, you know we can't run those. Why the fuck do you have them?

MIKE

I can get more photos from the scene, ones with less blood. Or-- or of the woman in the hospital. Three vics makes it a serial killer.

CHARLIE

New Orleans' first serial killer...

MIKE

Let me cover it, Charlie.

Charlie mulls it over...

CHARLIE

No. Gus will write it.

He starts walking again.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Stick to what you're good at, Mike!

Mike fumes, alone in the hallway.

INT. 1ST DISTRICT MEDICAL EXAMINER LAB - DAY

LeClere anxiously fiddles with a notepad and pen as a medical examiner unzips the body bag on the table under blue light.

EXAMINER

Catherine Maggio. Almost identical injuries to her husband.

LeClere places the pad down on a tray.

LECLERE

Would you mind if I had a minute?

EXAMINER

With... the bodies?

LECLERE

Exactly.

The examiner can't decide what to do.

EXAMINER

That's highly unusual. This isn't your district...

LECLERE

Mayor Behrman is interested in this case specifically. I'd hate to have to tell him we were jammed up by... What was your name again?

The examiner starts to say something and changes his mind.

EXAMINER

...Maybe I could use some air.

LECLERE

Sounds like a good idea.

LeClere is alone. He leans over Catherine's body, looking it up and down. What the hell is he doing?

He shoots his head up, looking for something in the room... He floats around, opening cabinets. He finds them: plastic gloves. He's got one on before he even makes it back to the table. He leans in...

He shoves a finger inside a GASH across Catherine's neck. He slides it down the length of the gash. Then, he pulls back out and lines up his hand across it... measuring distance?

INT. BESUMER HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

Doc is bent down, looking through the police-taped door of the Besumer home. One of the bottom panels is loose. He puts a finger inside the crevasse, wiggling it. It pops off easily. He opens the door, swinging it inside.

From the outside of the door, Doc moves his arm through the hole, then back out, trying to measure if someone can reach the door lock that way. He can't. He closes the door again.

He spaces through the home for a moment until he spots a framed PICTURE of Besumer and Harriette. He picks it up, caressing Besumer's face with his thumb.

INT. DOC'S CAR - DAY

SLAM. Doc closes the door to his 1917 Monroe Roadster. John lifts his head off the glass of the passenger window.

DOC

Took a little longer than I thought.

Doc starts the car and pulls away down the street.

DOC (CONT'D)

Besumer's front door matched the photos from the first house. Someone knocked out a panel and broke inside both. Used the owner's axe and knives. Psychopath.

JOHN

Why does that matter?

DOC

Same M.O.

JOHN

No. Why'd you call him a psychopath?

They stop at a red light. John looks back out the window.

DOC

You want to kill someone, you bring a weapon. You go in with a plan. Anyone who breaks into a home without knowing what's inside... that's a crazy mother fucker.

John stares as two uniformed men in MASKS throw a BODY into the back of a hearse with OTHER BODIES stacked inside.

DOC (CONT'D)

They say this flu drives people to madness. Maybe our killer is ill.

John nods forward.

JOHN

Light's green.

Doc drives. John gazes back out the window. People dance and walk down the street like nothing is wrong.

DOC

It's a damn shame. Men just want to forget their troubles. That's why they come here... to pretend God can't just snatch us any time.

John rubs his temples.

JOHN

Spouting opinions authoritatively doesn't make them more true.

DOC

Doesn't it? History books probably weren't on your reading list. Some sort of natural selection determining who lives and dies... It's hard not to think about.

JOHN

I was thinking about a song I heard. Or a girl.

The scenery changes as they leave the district -- more trees and less people walking around. Almost looks peaceful.

DOC

Murders make more sense though. There are rules. It's why reporters write about them; why people are fascinated with them. A solved case removes the unknown and makes the world feel a little bit safer.

(beat)

Or it's a distraction at least.

Doc turns down a small neighborhood street.

JOHN

So what is it then? Am I here to feel safe? Or to distract myself?

DOC

I'd rather be chasing a murder than go to war or pick bodies off the streets with the rest of the navy.

John flicks toward Doc, hurt by how deeply that cut. Doc smiles, stretching a hand across the wheel.

DOC (CONT'D)

Achy joints.

JOHN

You don't know me.

DOC

To know a man's motivation is to know the man.

JOHN

The fuck does that mean?

Doc puts the car in park. He grabs a folder from the back.

DOC

We're here.

He gets out. John follows in a huff--

EXT. CORNER OF UPPERLINE AND MAGNOLIA STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Doc's rummaging through his trunk by the time John slams the door shut, coming around.

JOHN

I'm not a coward.

DOC

I didn't say you were.

JOHN

I know about the war. The real shit you hear before you're deployed. What they wanted us to do... there are no heroes in war.

Doc moves a spare tire, unfazed by John's speech.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What the hell are you looking for?

Doc pops back out, holding a FLAT HEAD screwdriver.

DOC
This. Shall we?

He starts down the sidewalk. John bounds after.

JOHN
(frustrated)
What's your motivation, then?

DOC
You assigned me, boss.

JOHN
Nuh-uh. You saw questionable evidence with Besumer's death on the scene, and you asked the madam if she's heard of anything before I got the go ahead. So what's your goal? Doing your job, avenging your partner, or something else?
(beat)
You got a nice car on a cop's pay. Brand new, right? Unless of course it's not just off your salary.

Doc takes the stairs to the porch slowly. John skips up them.

DOC
LeClere is still available if you'd rather work with him.

They reach the door.

JOHN
How much are you extorting Mahogany Hall for? Couple hundred a week? That should sustain you after your retirement.

Doc takes the screw driver and fiddles with the door panel.

DOC
This is how they got into the Besumer home by the way. With enough force...

JOHN
Even if you solve this, Behrman is still going to shut down the red light district. No more hoarding gold like a dragon.

The panel pops off, falling outward. Doc catches it.

DOC
(laughing)
So my motive is just greed then?

JOHN
Since when is that not enough?

Doc knocks at the door, looking through the broken panel.

EXT. ANNA'S HOME - DAY

LeClere pulls his fist back from the door of a small, clearly poor, shotgun home. Guillory ascends the porch behind him.

GUILLORY
Why are we not questioning her in
the precinct?

LECLERE
Anna suffered some... injuries,
after she was attacked. She doesn't
leave her home.

The door opens by seemingly no one at eye level. But in the doorway, Anna sits in a wooden invalid chair with wheels. Guillory is shocked at the MISSING A CHUNK OF HAIR by a SCAR on Anna's forehead. She's holding a COVERED BABY in a sling.

LECLERE (CONT'D)
Anna Mumfry--

ANNA
It's Schneider.

GUILLORY
Miss Schneider, can we come in?

She eyes Guillory up and down before wheeling back a foot. LeClere and Guillory squeeze inside.

INT. ANNA'S HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

Anna wheels to the kitchen table.

ANNA
I already told you everything I can
remember about the Axeman.

LeClere pulls out a chair, sitting down. Guillory mimics.

LECLERE

This is about Mike's murder.

ANNA

I don't know anything about it.

The baby cries, and Anna rubs her back.

GUILLORY

Would you like to put her to bed so we can talk?

ANNA

Esther can take her.
(yelling)
Esther!

No one comes. Guillory looks to LeClere, who clears his throat.

LECLERE

Anna, Esther's been arrested. Do you remember that? Do you remember what happened here the other night?

She's clearly confused, troubled by the missing memory.

GUILLORY

Esther Pepitone has been forthright with her explanation, but we wanted more details. We were hoping John Davilla could... provide...

Esther smiles at John's name and Guillory trails off when she notices. She flips pages in the binder, looking for something.

GUILLORY (CONT'D)

Esther's told us a little bit about your past. And not to be rude, but... you were involved with a married man, and then with a friend of his. Now one ends up dead. I can only imagine that mister Davilla had something to do with it...

ANNA

I know he didn't.

LECLERE

Men do a lot of stupid things for women.

Anna smiles thinking about John--

ANNA
John wanted to be my knight in
shining armor...

Her expression sombers--

ANNA (CONT'D)
But he wasn't the monster-slaying
type.

INT. MAHOGANY HALL, BAR - NIGHT

SNAP. A photo was just taken of an animated version of John playing the piano with Anna watching. The scene comes to life -- Anna sways to the song, patrons cheer and John plays.

Mike, a cartoon villain, puts down the camera. He snatches his glass, swirling it and downing the shot.

Anna moves on, taking the dishes back toward the kitchen. Mike gets up after her...

INT. MAHOGANY HALL, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Anna is about to enter the small kitchen when--

She's shoved into the wall, dishes crashing down.

Mike's on her, nearly the same height and shouldn't be intimidating, but his anger is intense.

MIKE
Are you fucking him, too?

ANNA
You're drunk.

The music stopped at some point. Mike unbuckles his belt.

MIKE
He doesn't love you like I do.

ANNA
This is love?

Anna tries to push past him. He shoves her back into the wall, slamming her cheek into the wood. Hard.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Ahh! Get the fuck off of me!

MIKE

What's wrong? You're a lady of the night now, right? I'll pay you after.

JOHN (O.S.)

Mike?

Mike stops. John's standing in the hallway. Anna slides down onto the floor. John comes closer, as Mike kneels down. He picks up a piece of a shattered plate, running it against his hand. It bleeds, and he wipes it on her leg.

MIKE

(whispering)

You're mine. Don't forget that...

He stands as John nears. He pushes past John, who reels from the shove. Mike speeds away. John crouches next to Anna.

INT. MAHOGANY HALL, BAR - NIGHT

The buzz has stopped across the bar. Madam White stands near the corner, watching Mike. He stops.

MIKE

What? Is it extra to rough them up?
Fuck!

He throws some money on the ground, keeping eye contact with the madam. He storms off. Madam White goes down the hallway.

EXT. BASIN STREET - NIGHT

LINES of people flood the street as they shuffle away from their homes, carrying what belongings they can. Navy officers oversee the evacuation, masked and intimidating.

Esther, clipboard in hand, passes out masks to people walking. Most refuse to take them, or outright ignore her.

She extends masks to a MOTHER with two young children.

ESTHER

Here you go.

The mother snorts and shuffles her kids faster in the line. Esther walks next to them, hand still out.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Please, take some masks. It's not safe for the children.

MOTHER

Screw you! Moving us isn't for the children!

Esther crouches down and tries to hand a mask to one child.

ESTHER

Surely a mother's main concern is the health of her babies.

The mother slaps at her hand and spits at her. Esther panics at the spit, trying to wipe it off.

MOTHER

Don't touch him!

Esther fades back, away from the marching crowd.

INT. MAGGIO HOME, SITTING ROOM - DAY

The rural part of New Orleans means a nicer home, especially after the life insurance settlements. ANDREW MAGGIO nervously picks at his fingers on the sofa. Doc lets the silence go for a few too many ticks of a nearby grandfather clock. John, next to Doc, doesn't get the ploy.

JOHN

You were staying with your brother and his wife when it happened, right Andrew?

ANDREW

I was a little... down on my luck financially. And they took me in.

DOC

(side-eyeing John)

Your statement says you were too drunk to hear anything, and only discovered them hours later.

ANDREW

That's right. Cops found the axe in the back yard... and a straight razor on the street a little ways--

John butts in again.

JOHN

They found a straight razor? You're a barber, right? What did you brother do again?

ANDREW
He was a grocer.

John laughs, looking at Doc.

JOHN
We're in the wrong business. Look
how profitable selling carrots and
potatoes is!

Doc leans in.

DOC
Do you mind if we check out the
house? We'll show ourselves around.

INT. MAGGIO HOME, BEDROOM - DAY

PHEW! Doc whistles at the ornate gaudiness of the bedroom,
hard to miss as soon as you walk in. Peak 1900's style.

But as they approach the flipped-back bedsheet, still stained
with blood, clearly--

JOHN
Even money can't save you.

DOC
Andrew'll be fighting an uphill
battle keeping up his new
lifestyle. Insurance won't pay out
while the investigation's open.

Doc hands John the manila folder, then moves on to the
closet. John can't look at it.

JOHN
Why didn't you let him keep
talking? I totally had him.

Doc searches by the top of the closet, then the bottom.

DOC
Had him with what?

JOHN
He did it!

DOC
Because you've been spot on with
your other predictions today.
(MORE)

DOC (CONT'D)

Aren't you supposed to be good at this, mister Navy investigation officer?

JOHN

Andrew was nervous; he wouldn't make eye contact. Now he lives off the death of his brother? It's textbook, like a Sherlock Holmes story.

Doc is now onto the drawers. He's flinging clothes, then stuffing them in a heap back in.

DOC

A what?

JOHN

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel series from a few years ago...

DOC

Real policing is a little different than books, or determining who pissed off the side of a boat. In my experience, people who are lying make more eye contact.

He's staring right at John.

JOHN

Wait, are you lying now?

DOC

(back to the drawer)
Line up those photos.

John recoils as he opens the folder. He flips some papers. Doc pours out a few aspirin, dropping them into his mouth.

John places the photos down around the edge of the bed, angling them.

JOHN

Ugh, how can someone do this to another person? God damn Andrew if he did. They took him in...

Doc marks the photos and compares to the room. From a picture, up to the room. Back to a picture; back to the room.

DOC

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

JOHN

What happened to not believing everything you read in a book? Guess God is the one exception.

DOC

Am I supposed to believe in man?

JOHN

Oh, the brooding cop. Humanity isn't worth saving -- how original.

Doc snatches a photo off the bed, holding it at John.

DOC

Killing is harder than people think. Not only because the human body is resilient, but because when you're standing over someone, trying to swing an axe... you freeze. You question what it's like to take another human life. You can't bring yourself to actually move your muscles, no matter how many times you've told yourself you're capable of it. Most people will never experience the amount of will power it takes to do this to someone.

John studies Doc's face; not the photo.

JOHN

Have you?

Doc snatches the photo back, turning away.

JOHN (CONT'D)

So murder puts you on some moral high horse, but prostitution and extortion are okay?

DOC

There might be hope for you as a cop yet. You asked how a grocer could afford this house in the first place, right?

Doc tosses the photo onto the bed, pointing to it.

JOHN

Sure. Carrots and potatoes.

DOC
Do you notice anything in the
pictures?

Doc steps up onto the bed, shakily. Doc finds his balance. He starts lifting ceiling tiles, one at a time.

JOHN
What the fuck are you doing?

DOC
Dressers open; bed moved to the
side. But none of their valuables
in the room were taken. There's a
watch marked in one of them, right?
They were looking for something
specific.

John looks down at them, confirming.

JOHN
Like what?

Doc lifts a tile and a TAPED PACKAGE falls down onto the bed.

John picks it up in a dusting of white powder.

JOHN (CONT'D)
What's your belief system about--

JOHN (CONT'D)	GUILLORY (V.O.)
Drugs?	Drugs?

LECLERE (V.O.)
Cocaine.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Back to the room, Guillory writes in her binder.

LECLERE
Davilla and I logged about four
pounds.

JOHN
Which was weird, because there was
barely any interest in cocaine.

Guillory looks up at John for a beat.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Don't even. Everybody loves a good party, and cocaine was on the way out. No demand, means less supply. Our precinct only had one cocaine bust in 1919.

LeClere's nod confirms it to Guillory.

GUILLORY

So Maggio was involved in some sort of underground drug trafficking. What about Besumer?

JOHN

Doc wasn't sure at first.

LECLERE

(scoffing)

Yeah, Doc wasn't sure. There's a reason only Italians were killed, and it's from getting wrapped up in Black Hand mob dealings.

JOHN

Was Doc involved?

Guillory pulls out a sheet of paper.

LECLERE

He's what they call a strong back; weak mind.

GUILLORY

(clearing throat)

Doc Mumfry was a low-level enforcer before becoming a cop. Thirty or so years ago, his uncle led a group of mobsters to the 6th precinct, where they shot and killed the chief of police. It was a message not to get involved in mafia affairs, but--

LECLERE

But... that ain't like our boys in blue. We found most of those dago fucks and strung them up in the streets.

JOHN

Jesus...

GUILLORY
 (to LeClere)
 You weren't even a cop yet.

LECLERE
 Bet Doc didn't tell you that, did he? Becoming a cop doesn't change what he was at the core.

John places his head in his hands...

JOHN
 Wow. I had no idea...

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Doc pours some Aspirin into his hand, cool, calm and collected as usual. Meanwhile John's a nervous wreck, pacing by the still-running speedster.

JOHN
 What are we doing here? It's the middle of the fucking night.

DOC
 My contact will help us clear up this mess.

JOHN
 And how do you know this gentlemen?

Doc throws back the pills, revealing BRUISED KNUCKLES and MEDICAL BRACELET. John reaches for it, going to speak--

GUILLORY (V.O.)
 A medical bracelet? Why?

Doc pulls back.

DOC
 You should see the other guy.

John shakes his head. His mouth moves again, but--

GUILLORY (V.O.)
 Something happened between the Maggio's house and this evening.

JOHN (V.O.)
 You'll have to ask Esther.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Men in suits exit the room as Behrman shuffles papers into a briefcase. Esther was taking notes in a seat across the room.

BEHRMAN
Progress is exciting, is it not?

ESTHER
I never doubted you for a second.

BEHRMAN
That's why you're a good woman,
Esther.
(beat)
Close the door, would you?

He waves at her. She gets up, heading to the door.

ESTHER
Oh... We got approval back on the
demolition. In a few weeks,
Mahogany Hall and the rest of the
Brothels will be closed and ready
to be mowed over.

BEHRMAN
That's excellent news.

As she closes it, he plops a bag on top of his desk.

ESTHER
What's that?

BEHRMAN
I got you something.

ESTHER
Oh. You didn't need to do that.

BEHRMAN
Consider it a bonus.

He motions toward it. She takes a reluctant step forward. She reaches inside and pulls out--

ESTHER
A dress?

BEHRMAN
I saw it on a mannequin, and
thought it would look great on you.

She shoves it back in the bag.

ESTHER

Thank you.

BEHRMAN

Aren't you going to try it on?

Esther's frozen, understanding him...

ESTHER

I need to get back to work.

He unbuckles his belt, leaning back in his chair.

BEHRMAN

The door is closed. No one will see. Try it on.

ESTHER

Mayor Behrman...

He gets up, waddling over to her...

BEHRMAN

That's right, missus Pepitone -- Mayor. That means I tell the zoning board my plans and they approve without reproach. I order the citizens to evacuate and they go as silently as mice. I tell the police to give us a spark for change, and they ask who to axe. No protesting; no issues. Do you understand?

ESTHER

Y-yes sir...

He puts his hands on her shoulders.

BEHRMAN

I thought so. Now...

He lets go of her, walking back to his desk.

BEHRMAN (CONT'D)

Let's see if it fits.

Shaking, Esther slides the dress back out, not making eye contact. Behrman sits and leans back.

Esther steps into the dress, trying to discreetly pull it up and the other one off without revealing anything. She stares off, disassociating...

INT. MIKE & ESTHER'S HOME - NIGHT

Esther is still staring, but this time it's at Mike as he GOBBLES down food, flinging crumbs onto the kitchen table.

Like Anna's, Esther's home is shotgun-style with a small kitchen. They look very similar...

She breaks her gaze on Mike, eyeing a manila folder.

ESTHER
How was work?

MIKE
(still chewing)
I didn't go.

She takes a sip of tea.

ESTHER
We're making good progress with the shut down. I feel like I'm really valuable to mayor--

MIKE
Can you pass the salt?

He points with a piece of bread. She does. He grabs it and she notices the dried blood on his palm, grabbing his wrist.

ESTHER
What happened to your hand?

He pulls it back, then shakes the salt onto his food.

MIKE
Anna is fucking that negro you work with.

ESTHER
What did you do to him?

Mike laughs.

MIKE
It's my blood.

ESTHER
Then what did he do to you?

Mike stops chewing, abruptly.

MIKE
He wouldn't do a damn thing to me!
(beat)
I did this to myself to send a
message.

ESTHER
(standing)
Jesus Christ...

She rushes to the sink, turning on the water. Clearly upset.

She wets a towel and returns to his side. She reaches for his palm, dabbing at the blood. They enjoy the tender moment.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
(softly)
What are we doing here, Mike?

MIKE
Eating dinner.

ESTHER
I mean with us. You and I.

He slides his hand across Esther's face.

MIKE
I love you.

ESTHER
I know.

She leans into it, a little blood smearing her cheek.

She stops, looking up at him.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
But I can't do this any more.

MIKE
You want to leave?

She stands back up.

ESTHER
I don't know.

Mike stands as well. He's fuming.

MIKE
Go ahead. Tell me.

He leans his head in, ear near her face. He's waiting...

She barely exhales and he moves toward the table.

MIKE (CONT'D)
 You want to see what it's like out
 there on your own?

He grabs the manila folder, plopping it open on the table in front of them. Esther turns away, feeling small.

MIKE (CONT'D)
 Look. Look how safe you'll be.

He puts his hand on the back of her neck, turning her.

MIKE (CONT'D)
 Look, damn it!

He squeezes and she winces. He forces her head to tilt, looking at the PHOTOS... bloody carpets, people under sheets; evidence photos from the crime scenes. BANG--

The door behind them bounces off the wall, swung wide. Mike turns, but not fast enough. He takes a hard hit to the side of the head. Esther scrambles across the floor, released.

Doc is on top of Mike, one punch. Two. Esther screams and throws a plate at him. Doc stops, only needing two hits.

He climbs back up, using the table to lean. Esther just stares back at him, breathing heavily. He heads to the door. She watches him step, then sway.

He staggers. He collapses onto the floor.

INT. 8TH DISTRICT MEDICAL EXAMINER LAB - NIGHT

Doc and LeClere stand over the body of Mike Pepitone, a bloody mess in a body bag. LeClere holds up a notepad.

GUILLORY (V.O.)
 And that's when Mike Pepitone was
 killed?

ESTHER (V.O.)
 Not yet.

INT. JAIL HALLWAY - DAY

Esther was just talking -- she's leaning in.

GUILLORY
 Doc Mumfy broke into your home...

ESTHER

So you can understand why I was
afraid of him.

GUILLORY

Who is Anna to Doc Mumfry?

LeClere sits back, visibly upset by Esther's story.

LECLERE

Doc was the one who assaulted Mike?

GUILLORY

(picking up on his tone)
What's wrong?

LECLERE

I spoke to Mike in the hospital
after he was injured. He said--

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Mike beams from ear to ear in his bed, some light bandages
covering bruises on his face.

MIKE

I was attacked by the Axeman. Ow--

He winces. LeClere writes down the statement in his notepad.

LECLERE

Is that what the press is calling
our killer? The Axeman?

MIKE

They are now.

LECLERE

What a terrible name...

Doc watches from outside the room, dressed in a hospital gown
himself. Mike makes eye contact through the window.

LECLERE (CONT'D)

(following the gaze)
One second...

LeClere heads to the door.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Doc doesn't break his gaze with Mike as LeClere approaches.

LECLERE
The fuck happened to you?

DOC
Minor dizzy spell.

Doc turns to him. LeClere thinks he's being facetious.

LECLERE
(laughing)
You weren't attacked by the Axeman?

DOC
Is that what Mike said happened?

LECLERE
You know him?

Doc looks back into the room. Mike makes a kissy face at him through the glass.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Back in the alley, Doc throws back the pills, revealing BRUISED KNUCKLES and MEDICAL BRACELET.

John reaches for it -- for real this time.

JOHN
You were in the hospital?

Doc pulls back.

DOC
You should see the other guy.

John shakes his head.

JOHN
You can't be real for just one minute. Why am I even here?

He walks back to the car. There's a beat--

DOC
In case I get shot.

John comes back. He doesn't really believe Doc.

JOHN
I don't... Are we in danger? I don't have a gun.

Doc warms his hands over the car engine.

DOC
You'd run.

JOHN
Here we go again.

DOC
No more assuming. I have proof now
-- you're just not a fighter.
Nothing to be ashamed of.
(off John's look)
Madam White told me what happened.

JOHN
From Mahogany Hall? You have her
spying on me now?

DOC
(scoffing)
Please. You're not that important.

John warms his hands too.

JOHN
The waitress? Please don't tell me
you're also fuc--

Doc hits John lightly on the chest.

DOC
She's my granddaughter.

John looks horrified.

DOC (CONT'D)
Relax. I knew about you two. You're
not as bad as Mike. Yet. But if you
ever hurt her, I'll kill you, too.

JOHN
Mike's dead?

DOC
Do you think I'm that stupid?

Doc wiggles his bruised fingers. John's still catching up.

JOHN
So the madam; the extortion...

DOC
Annie's the best paid waitress in
the district.

JOHN
She doesn't know?

Someone's walking down the alley. Doc motions for John to
move around the car. SAM CAROLLO, 40s, steps into the light.

DOC
Carollo.

Doc looks on edge as Carollo continues to approach.

Carollo squares up to Doc, tiny in comparison...

Then: He smiles, throwing open his arms. Doc doesn't move.
Carollo wiggles his fingers, ordering Doc in for a hug.

He does, slowly and uncomfortable.

CAROLLO
Joey fucking Mumfry. Been too long.

They separate. John relaxes behind them, assuming they're
friends. They aren't.

DOC
How's Matranga?

CAROLLO
On his way out, if I have any say.
(nodding at John)
Who's your friend?

DOC
I have something of yours.

He pulls out the brick of cocaine.

DOC (CONT'D)
Found it in the Maggio home.
Remember them? Slit throats; axe to
the head.

Carollo takes it.

CAROLLO
Certainly sounds like Black Hand.

JOHN
Are you admitting to a murder?

DOC
Hmph. But this one...

Doc pulls out a second brick. John's face gives it away -- he didn't know there were two. Carollo tries to take it, but--

DOC (CONT'D)
I nipped this from another scene. A fellow cop found dead.

JOHN
That's how you knew to look for drugs at the Maggio house...

Doc side eyes John.

CAROLLO
And you're worried there's been a breach of contract?

DOC
I think you were trying to set up a new arrangement for after my retirement.

Carollo plays with the package in his hand.

CAROLLO
What if we were?

DOC
Then you might as well kill me now.

John's on high alert. Doc is unfazed despite the tension.

CAROLLO
The hit wasn't ours. Maybe whoever he stole it from killed him.

Carollo pockets the first brick.

CAROLLO (CONT'D)
You're resourceful, Joey. Always have been. I'm sure you'll find another working arrangement whether you're a cop or not.

Carollo smiles and walks away, whistling down the alley. Out of earshot, Doc pulls out his pills. John bolts over.

JOHN
What the hell were you doing?

DOC
Narrowing down your suspect list.

He downs the pills. He turns to get in the car.

JOHN
You had this lead from the start!
Did Besumer know what you were
mixed up in?

DOC
Church and state.

John's frozen in front. Doc throws him the brick.

DOC (CONT'D)
Here.

JOHN
What the fuck do I do with this?

DOC
Report it, use it, sell it. I don't
care. Besumer's case is yours.

He turns back to the car, struggling to open the car door
with his injured hands.

JOHN
You selfish fucking hypocrite...
Screw your dead partner; screw
solving the murder... you just
wanted to make sure you're not next
on the list?

DOC
Got to protect my hoard of gold,
right?

Doc slams the door shut behind him.

EXT. BASIN STREET - NIGHT

Anna marches down the street, not worried about the darkness
around her. John struggles to keep pace, clearly drunk.

ANNA
I'm fine, mister Davilla. I walk
this way each night uneventfully.

JOHN
Haven't you heard? There's a killer
on the loose.

ANNA

Yes, and the moment he jumps people
in broad street light, you'll be
the first I'll call.

JOHN

It's only polite to walk a lady
home after a date.

ANNA

I'd hardly call drinking at a table
while I work as a date.

JOHN

Then let's go on another.

ANNA

One was plenty.

JOHN

It was at least three.

She stops; he doesn't, bumping into her. She adjusts his
straw hat.

ANNA

You're drunk.

JOHN

You've been avoiding me. It's the
easiest way to see you.

ANNA

(motioning behind her)
My home is right there. You can see
it, and watch me get in okay.

He smiles. She turns, starting down the sidewalk again.

JOHN

(chasing)
Homes might be even more dangerous!
It's not safe to go alone.

ANNA

I've got a gun inside. I'll be
fine.

JOHN

Do you know how to use it?

ANNA

Of course.

She ascends her porch steps.

JOHN
It must run in your blood.

She turns back. He ascends the steps.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Doc told me you were... I think he gave his approval.

ANNA
I don't need his approval for nothing.

JOHN
If I tell you he forbid us, would that change your mind?

ANNA
Mister Davilla, I'm....

She approaches him, placing one hand on her stomach and one on his chest.

JOHN
Maybe I can move in! Purely platonic, of course. For protection.

She puts her hand to his lips.

ANNA
I don't need saving.

She pulls her hand away slowly. He touches her fingers.

JOHN
Maybe I do...

He puts her hand back to his lips, locking eyes. They kiss.

INT. UNKNOWN HOME, WHICH WE NOW REALIZE ISN'T UNKNOWN - DAY

Jazz music again; we know where we are. The gloved hand tosses the axe down onto the body in bed. For the first time, the man's mangled face is visible. Is that... Mike Pepitone?

JOHN (V.O.)
Do you know the significance of myths?

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

John's fingers dance across the table as he mimes playing the piano. He bobs along to an imaginary song, feeling the beat.

JOHN

They started as ways to explain natural phenomenon people couldn't make sense of. There was an effect without a cause. You see the sun, the end effect, therefore Helios drives a bright chariot across the sky from east to west every day, the cause. Persephone's descent into the underworld explained the seasons. Cause of the effect.

Guillory tilts her head sideways a bit.

GUILLORY

I thought they taught morality.

JOHN

That too. Myths teach morals, politics, physics. Newton's laws of motion are echoes of Homer and Hesiod's teachings from millennia before. Philosophers were simply early scientists. Don't harm guests in your home; don't try to bed a god's wife. Otherwise you'll be damned to eternal torture matching the crime -- every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

He stops miming abruptly.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What we were witnessing, was a myth in the making. Cause and effect. For months after Mike's attack, you couldn't sneeze without someone accusing the Axeman. Paranoia, blindness, running around screaming.

Guillory fidgets her fingers over her bottom lip.

GUILLORY

"Nobody is attacking me..."

EXT. ANNA'S HOME - DAY

Esther knocks on the door, a pie in one hand. She adjusts the scarf around her neck. No one opens the door, so she places the pie on the porch and walks back down the stairs.

She bumps into Anna, groceries in one arm, face healing from the bruises, badly covered with make up in the daylight.

ESTHER

Oh, I'm sorry. I was just--

ANNA

Mrs. Pepitone...
(off Esther's look)
I've seen pictures.

Esther nods, sad and uncomfortable.

ESTHER

Back when he took pictures of me.

She clears her throat, pointing behind her.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

I wanted to leave you a pie. And check on you... It was probably inappropriate. Please forgive me.

She starts to leave--

ANNA

He's hurt you before?

Esther turns back, unsure what to say. Anna reaches for the scarf and Esther winces. Anna hesitates, then pulls down part of the scarf to show the bruising.

ESTHER

I could uh... show you how to cover those up a little better. Just some foundation, and--

ANNA

I won't need to know. It was a one-time thing.

Esther smiles.

ESTHER

I told myself the same thing.

ANNA

No offense, but I'm not you.

ESTHER

It's not about who we are,
sweetheart. It's about who they
are. As long as we're with them...

ANNA

So leave him.

Anna adjusts the bag of groceries.

ESTHER

It's not that easy.

ANNA

Do you have kids? No, right? Then
it is that easy.

Esther looks at Anna's stomach, which is barely showing.

ESTHER

You're... Second trimester?

Anna smiles, placing a hand on her stomach.

ANNA

If there's one thing my mother
taught me, it was to never let a
man put his hands on me like that.
I'm not expecting Mike to change
his ways -- I'm just not giving him
the chance to make me a fool twice.
He'll never see us again; never be
allowed in Mahogany Hall either.

(beat)

You should take the same advice,
cause living in fear is barely
living at all.

She starts walking up to the porch. Esther frowns, thinking
that's the end of the conversation, until Anna turns--

ANNA (CONT'D)

You want some coffee with your
slice?

Esther smiles, following her.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT, BULLPEN - DAY

A manila folder under one arm, John wheels a cork bulletin
board through the bullpen. On it is a bunch of pins and piece
of paper with crudely written letters: AXEMAN VICTIMS.

LeClere is at a nearby desk, as are plenty of other officers. John stops at Doc's desk.

JOHN
Figured out how to deal with your
ticking clock?

DOC
Already got a plan.

JOHN
Of course you do.
(holding out the folder)
Can you check the evidence room
logs for any inconsistencies in
confiscated drug quantities?

DOC
You're still on this?

JOHN
There's still one unsolved murder.

John shakes the folder. From behind him--

LECLERE (O.S.)
I'll do it.

LeClere stands from his desk, coming over to them.

JOHN
I asked Doc to do it.

LeClere reaches for the folder.

LECLERE
And you should know by now, that
Doc barely does anything around
here. Behrman cares about this
case, so I'll be assisting you.

John nods, handing over the folder. LeClere snatches it, walking away. John eyes Doc's desk, grabbing a roll of tape and storming off with the bulletin board.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT, EVIDENCE ROOM - DAY

A light blue hue covers the evidence lockers. LeClere has NO FOLDER with him, but walks up to the counter. OFFICER LANDRY is behind it, sorting through evidence bags.

LECLERE
Landry, I need the room.

Landry doesn't turn.

LANDRY
No access without signing in.

LeClere comes behind the counter. Landry stands in the way.

LECLERE
Behrman's orders.

LANDRY
Sign in. And date it, please.

LeClere smiles and then signs the clipboard.

LECLERE
Easy killer. I'm just keeping him
updated on drug busts this year.

Landry nods and walks to another aisle of lockers. LeClere goes to the locker with drugs inside, opening it--

INT. TIMES-PICAYUNE, NEWSROOM - DAY

Mike drinks a cup of coffee by a water cooler, a group of his coworkers around, engrossed in his story.

MIKE
...barely missed me. I tried to get
away and he hit me with the blunt
end on the back of the axe.

COWORKER
You're so lucky he didn't kill you.

Mike scoffs.

MIKE
The Axeman is a pussy. Haven't you
read the cases? He sneaks in at
night and chops people while
they're sleeping. Not something a
real man would do, so I just put up
a little fight and he ran.

Charlie pokes out of his office. Mike sees.

MIKE (CONT'D)
'Scuse me, boys.

Charlie fidgets with a paper in his hand.

CHARLIE

You're sure you want the press?

MIKE

I can't let this go. I gotta do the follow up interviews.

Mike starts coughing. He looks a little flushed.

CHARLIE

Then we're running it.

Charlie plops a printed paper down on the table. The front page headline reads: "New Orleans' First Serial Killer - The Axeman strikes homes at night." There's a picture of Mike.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The scene cuts to Charlie, picking up the same paper on the stand. Guillory plops a second, then a third paper down.

GUILLORY

You printed the story about the Axeman. And then Mike Pepitone wrote the rest?

Charlie examines the papers.

CHARLIE

He canvassed the city, getting the story on sightings, attacks, even speculation about who the Axeman was. It was... it was a spectacular thing to be a part of.

Guillory reads off the papers.

GUILLORY

"Fleeing the red light district -- is it mandatory relocation or fear of getting The Axe?" Or "Crazed Axe Killer Loves Jazz Music..." That's a good one. Oh, how about...

"Axeman At It Again: Three more assaults result in head trauma."

(beat)

People were out there just hitting each other with axes, huh?

Charlie shuffles, clearly uncomfortable.

CHARLIE

It was the Axeman. Just one person attacking unsuspecting victims.

GUILLORY

Interesting. There were sightings all over the city, right? According to police reports, dozens of witnesses came forward. And Mike followed up with all of them?

CHARLIE

He did. It was his job.

GUILLORY

Seems a bit obsessive.

CHARLIE

Obsession is the mark of a great reporter. And Mike became one.

Guillory nods.

GUILLORY

It's fascinating how Mike was able to link all these incidents to the same Axeman, but police didn't...

INT. POLICE PRECINCT, MEETING ROOM - DAY

John tacks a photo of a bald man onto the board. Written under the photo is the name: Steve Bocca. He pulls away, revealing the rest of the board. In a row before Bocca is another photo of a woman's face, "Sarah Luamann," and before hers, "Luis Besumer," a headshot, smiling in his uniform.

From behind John--

DOC (O.S.)

"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."

John turns, picking up a folder. LeClere and Doc stand by small tables in front of the board.

JOHN

You talking about the precinct or the people?

DOC

Why not both?

LeClere leans back onto a table.

LECLERE

Why don't you have the Maggio's up there?

JOHN

We don't think it's related?

LECLERE

(pushing off the table)
Who the fuck is we?

JOHN

Doc and I.

Doc shrugs. LeClere grabs the folder from John. He slides out the photo and pins it to the board: JOSEPH & CATHERINE MAGGIO, a still from their crime scene photos.

EXT. LAUMANN HOME - DAY

LeClere and John exit through the simple entryway door. SARAH LUAMANN stands in the doorway, head wrapped in bandages. The sun sets in the background.

JOHN

Thank you for your time, miss Laumann. We'll let you know if we need any more details.

She nods, shutting the door. On the porch, LeClere shoves his notepad into his pocket.

LECLERE

This is getting ridiculous.

He starts walking down.

JOHN

The number of attacks?

LECLERE

The fact that you're dragging me around town.

Mike is waiting outside the home, notepad in hand. He's got blood-shot eyes and red cheeks. John and LeClere breeze by him toward the car.

MIKE

How did it go?

JOHN

Fuck off, Mike.

Mike keeps pace with John and LeClere.

MIKE

That's the second axe beating in a month.

JOHN

--Are you writing stories about all the assaults in New Orleans now?

MIKE

Just the ones involving an axe.

JOHN

We didn't say there was one.

MIKE

Neighbors saw you guys searching the grass.

LECLERE

We found it in the back yard.

John stops and gives LeClere a "what the fuck?" face. LeClere shrugs and gets in driver's side.

LECLERE (CONT'D)

There was another beating across town, if you can race us there.

He closes the door.

MIKE

Steve Boca. Woke up with his head bleeding; couldn't remember a thing. Already talked to him.

JOHN

You don't have all the information. You're not a cop.

MIKE

Neither are you.

(beat)

Say, is it just you guys? What happened to your old buddy?

John walks to the front of the car.

JOHN

You look like shit, Mike. Go see a doctor!

MIKE

I heard you moved in with Anna.
How's her granddaddy feel about
working with the negro fucking her?

John stops and comes back.

JOHN

In case that flu of yours damaged
your hearing, I said fuck off.

MIKE

Relax. I don't want her back. She's
damaged goods after you.

John grabs his shirt.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Go ahead. I've been through worse.

John pushes him.

JOHN

Like the Axeman, huh? I know Doc
Mumfry beat your ass.

Mike laughs and ends up coughing. John heads to the car.

MIKE

(coughing)

Chase, chase, chase. All you cops
do is follow a step behind.

JOHN

People are going to get tired of
reading about axe beatings. Then
you'll go back to being irrelevant.

He opens the car door.

INT. LECLERE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

LeClere starts the car as John gets in.

LECLERE

Seems like a nice guy.

JOHN

You're a bad judge of character.

As they pull away, John watches Mike wave eerily outside.

EXT. STORYVILLE TRAINYARD - NIGHT

Street lamps flick on as a man stumbles down a sidewalk, people parting all around. An OFFICER in a mask struggles to direct dunkards toward the approaching train.

OFFICER
Everybody out! We're closing this district tonight. Get on.

The stumbling man reaches the tracks. Esther, in a long coat with raised LAPELS, appears at the last moment and stops the man from falling. The officer notices.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
He okay?

ESTHER
Get him some medical attention. And don't let him on the train. Don't you know how disease spreads?

The officer grabs the man, whose face is BRIGHT RED. The man coughs up blood and collapses on the ground.

OFFICER
Shit!

Esther walks past the crowd, right as John and LeClere pull up in front of yellow tape, cordoning off the back yard of a nearby home. LeClere pops out of the car, John follows.

JAZZ music bellows from the house, clearly audible outside.

LECLERE
God I hate Jazz.

JOHN
Is that... a Dixieland record?

LECLERE
Apparently it was blaring when they opened the door.

Esther approaches. LeClere ducks into the yard, dodging tape.

JOHN
(to Esther)
Getting close?

ESTHER
Nearly cleared out.

Behind them, LeClere peruses the yard.

JOHN
No passengers with bloody hands or
an axe, right?

ESTHER
That's not funny.

LeClere whistles from the yard. John waves.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
(stopping John)
John.

He turns back to her.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Be careful in this...

She breaks eye contact with him and he picks up on it.

JOHN
What's wrong?
(off her protesting)
I can tell you're hiding something.

ESTHER
...That officer who was killed last
week... I don't think it was a
serial killer.

JOHN
What makes you say that?

ESTHER
...Just rumors I heard. Men
boasting.

John pats her on the shoulder.

JOHN
People are getting paranoid. Don't
trust anything you hear without
evidence.

He turns to head back, but she grabs him--

ESTHER
But the police might have been
involved in it. You know officer
Mumfry attacked my husband...

JOHN
Mike hurt his gran--

ESTHER

I know. Anna told me they're related. But she also said he's involved in some shady dealings...

LECLERE (O.S.)

Davilla, hurry the hell up.

John waves dismissively again.

ESTHER

Just be careful with whom you associate, John. For Anna at least.

John nods, leaving Esther. He ducks under the tape, going into the yard with LeClere, who is crouched down.

LECLERE

The guy's alive. Axe to the head.
(pointing to a marker)
He ran out of the house bleeding;
collapsed here. The axe is inside.

JOHN

Any razor blade?

LECLERE

None. Again. Guess this guy's set on his new method of killing.

JOHN

Two victims alive means he's not doing a very good job at it. Did they check the back door panels?

LECLERE

(standing)
What for?

John bounds up the stairs toward the door.

JOHN

Got a screwdriver?

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Esther is rooting through papers in Behrman's desk when the door opens. Behrman stops suddenly in the doorway.

BEHRMAN

Esther.

She shoots up, closing the drawer.

ESTHER

I'm sorry, sir. I was just looking for... How was the meeting?

He places his briefcase on the desk.

BEHRMAN

Excellent. It's official...

(beaming)

Storyville will be demolished on the 20th of March. Three weeks, Esther. Can you believe it?

ESTHER

I can't...

BEHRMAN

What's left on my docket?

ESTHER

That was your last meeting.

She heads for the door.

BEHRMAN

What about dinner?

ESTHER

I don't think you have a dinner meeting.

He starts to untie his tie.

BEHRMAN

I meant you and I. Are you hungry?

Esther is about to just leave, but then--

ESTHER

That serial killer... The Axeman. Did you... You started that rumor, didn't you? You ordered officer Mumfry to kill his partner...

She's afraid to look back. When she does, Behrman is smiling.

BEHRMAN

That sounds like dinner conversation.

INT. JAIL HALLWAY - DAY

Esther maintains eye contact with LeClere from the cell.

LECLERE
(to Guillory)
Are you believing this shit?

Esther flicks her eyes down to him, then turns to Guillory.

ESTHER
I thought you were conducting the
interview. Does he have a say now?

Guillory shifts and leans forward.

GUILLORY
Did you ever report what mayor
Behrman did or said to you?

ESTHER
Not until now. I told my defense
attorney. He advised I be honest
with you.

Guillory sits back.

GUILLORY
It just seems like such a
convenient coincidence to pad your
case. As if none of this is your
fault.

ESTHER
Well it's a good thing you're not
on the jury then, huh, miss
Guillory?
(turning back straight)
I never reported Behrman. I never
even stood up to him. It's not an
excuse for what I did, but an
admission of my cowardice. I was
afraid of him. Afraid of what he
told me. Afraid of what it meant
for us all.

INT. ANNA'S HOME, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Anna comes home, finding John in the kitchen in front of a
large pot of food.

ANNA
You're up late.

JOHN
Couldn't sleep. I made dinner... or
early breakfast.

She places her purse on the kitchen table.

ANNA
Well aren't you multi-talented.

JOHN
The perks of a boyfriend not from
the south. I don't expect you to do
all the cooking.

She comes over to the pot and reels back from the smell--

ANNA
Ugh.

JOHN
Sorry. Did I make it wrong?

Anna kisses his check.

ANNA
No. It's just morning sickness.

JOHN
Already?

She closes the lid of a recipe box, handwritten.

ANNA
My mother's recipes...

JOHN
Found it above the fridge. I'll
have to thank her.

Anna retreats.

ANNA
You can go see her if you like. St.
Augustine Catholic Church, up the
road.

John stop stirring.

JOHN
She's passed? I'm sorry. I didn't
know.

Anna smiles, but it's forced.

ANNA
A few years ago.

She heads down the hall.

JOHN
Was she Doc's daughter?

ANNA (O.S.)
My parents never married. My dad
was his son.

He nods, understanding the "was."

JOHN
(yelling to her)
It's his retirement party in a
couple of weeks. If you can call it
a party.

He goes back to stirring.

ANNA (O.S.)
Good for him.

JOHN
You don't want to go?

ANNA (O.S.)
(coming back in)
He's just going to drink a bourbon
and fall asleep early. He can do
that without us.

John turns, finding her in the kitchen doorway, dressed in a
night gown. He stops stirring.

JOHN
Oh my...

He wraps his arms around her. She puts a hand on her stomach,
between them. He looks down, then lets go of her.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Was that a kick?

She smiles, sitting at the table.

JOHN (CONT'D)
How is that possible? It's only
been two months...

ANNA
I'm twenty weeks pregnant.

She looks sad. He realizes...

JOHN
It's Mike's...

ANNA

I love you, John.

She puts her hand on his arm. He yanks it away.

JOHN

You knew the whole time.

She doesn't say anything. His mouth opens, but again --

JOHN (V.O.)

Intermission--

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

John pushes his chair out.

LECLERE

What? Sit your ass back down.

JOHN

I gotta piss. Figured I'm allowed to use the lavatory, seeing as you filled me with cheap whiskey.

LeClere grunts, unhappy to stand.

LECLERE

I'll take you.

JOHN

You think I'm gonna run?

GUILLORY

Actually, officer LeClere, if we could fill in some gaps quickly, that would be helpful.

John heads right for the door, seizing the opportunity.

JOHN

I know where it is. Since I'm not under arrest yet, maybe I can keep some dignity with my former coworkers.

John stops. LeClere motions to go ahead. John leaves. The lighting slowly takes a subtle BLUE TINT...

LECLERE

Why are you letting him jerk us around like this? He's clearly leaving out details.

GUILLORY

And if we want to get those details, building trust is important. Sit down; you're making me nervous.

He does.

GUILLORY (CONT'D)

Tell me about mayor Behrman...

INT. PRECINCT HALLWAY, OUTSIDE INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

John steps out of the interrogation room into a completely-normal colored precinct hallway. No blue hue to be found.

He heads to the bathroom down the hall, then ducks past it. He nods to a passing officer.

He turns into the evidence room...

INT. POLICE PRECINCT, EVIDENCE ROOM - DAY

Again, in completely normal lighting, Officer Landry sorts bags by evidence lockers. John taps on the desk between them.

JOHN

Landry, You old fuck. They've still got you stuck back here?

Landry turns, smiling at John.

LANDRY

Davilla! I thought you drank yourself to death.

John laughs.

JOHN

Close. Hey remember what we were on the lookout for? Any movement?

Landry scoots over to a cabinet and picks up a clipboard.

LANDRY

(scanning)

No drug evidence's been signed out since before your investigation.

JOHN

Before huh? How long before?

Landry looks at the clipboard.

LANDRY
About a month. It was by--

JOHN
Don't worry about it. Just checking
in case... Eh. You seen Doc?

Landry looks concerned.

LANDRY
He's in the morgue...

JOHN
Got it.

John taps on the table again.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Tell him I could use some help in
room five if you get the chance...

Landry looks like he wants to speak, but John rushes out.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

John's running his hands under the sink, staring in the
mirror. He splashes his face with water and exits.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

John comes back into the room, trying to act normal.

LECLERE
Took you long enough.

John flicks remaining water from his fingers at LeClere.

JOHN
Funny cause I didn't wash my hands.

LeClere grunts, wiping his face. John sits.

GUILLORY
Feeling better?

JOHN
Wish I could say I was.

GUILLORY

You were just about to share where
you went. After Anna's...

John leans forward.

JOHN

Why do you want all this info?

GUILLORY

For Esther's case.

JOHN

It doesn't track. Esther's fucked,
but you can't think she's the
Axeman, even if she killed Mike.

John looks at LeClere, who opens his mouth to speak. But Guillory lifts a finger. LeClere shuts up, and everyone knows who's in charge, if there was any doubt.

She smiles.

GUILLORY

We don't think Mike was the Axeman.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

A train WHISTLES in the distance as Mike stumbles out of some bar, not Mahogany Hall any more. He takes a swig from a whiskey bottle and adjusts the CAMERA around his neck.

He finds a MAN leaned against a concrete wall, barely alive.

MIKE

Hey buddy, you okay?

Mike looks down the end of the street -- One of the HEARSEs is parked as two Navy officers smoke cigarettes.

Mike crouches next to the man on the ground.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Hey.

(beat)

Hey!

The man COUGHS up blood. Mike can see his red cheeks and sunken in eyes, but he doesn't reel back. Instead, he holds out the whiskey. The man looks at it through half-opened eyes. He can't move to take it, so Mike lifts it to his lips.

Whiskey runs down the man's jowls, his lips pursed.

Mike pulls back the bottle. He leans back on his haunches.

Mike looks down one side of the alley. Nothing. Then the other, also empty. He slides back, sitting across from the man on the opposite side of the narrow alleyway.

He lifts his camera, snapping a picture of the man, who wheezes. Mike takes another picture. Then another. Flashes illuminate the dark alley as we pull back, understanding that Mike is watching the man die through the lens of the camera.

INT. MAHOGANY HALL, BAR - NIGHT

SLAM. John plops an empty shot glass onto the bar. He slides it forward, motioning to refill it when Doc walks in.

DOC
(to John)
I thought you didn't drink.

Doc grunts, taking a seat. He flags the bartender.

JOHN
Things change.

DOC
They always do.

The bartender pours him a bourbon.

JOHN
I need your help with the case.

Doc nods to the bourbon, easily within reach...

DOC
Slide that to me.

John's confused. Doc rubs his hands.

DOC (CONT'D)
My joints are stiff. Come on.

John slides it over. Doc lifts it painfully.

JOHN
Axeman attacks are popping up all over the city, too. People are reporting sightings, swearing their neighbor is the Axeman...

Doc stands suddenly, grabbing his drink and going for a walk.

DOC

I never understood the appeal of this place. Can't say I'll miss it when it closes.

John sighs and picks up his drink, following.

JOHN

But they've just been beatings. I thought serial killers are supposed to... I don't know, ramp up over time, not get less deadly.

DOC

I will miss the drinking, though. But that'd be gone soon anyway -- start of the new year, right?

Doc stops at the piano. The player stops, looking up.

PIANIST

Mister Davilla... Play us a song?

JOHN

Maybe tomorrow.

Doc motions toward the piano with his drink.

DOC

I've never heard you play.

The pianist stands, making room. John huffs, putting down his drink and taking a seat. He starts by simply fiddling with the keys... He's playing his song, Papa Don't Scare Me.

JOHN

The latest cases have just used the axe. No razor blade.

DOC

That wasn't a public detail.

JOHN

You think these are unrelated?

DOC

(laughing)

It's like a bad game of Telephone. Someone says something and by the time it gets around, the details are changed.

JOHN

Esther thinks the cops are involved. You might be.

The song picks up in pace. People are gathering.

DOC

And what do you think?

JOHN

...You have ties to... You know. You were so convinced someone else killed Besumer. You also don't seem too worried about catching this guy.

DOC

None of that answers the question.

Someone reaches across the piano, dropping a dollar onto it, a tip for John. Doc slowly slides out a wad of cash--

JOHN

I don't need your money.

DOC

You're taking care of my granddaughter after I'm gone, right?

JOHN

Gone?

He drops a LOT of money on the piano. John interrupts the song, turning to him. Doc nods to it--

DOC

Play.

John does. For just a moment, he's absorbed by the music...

JOHN

So your plan to deal with Carollo is... to just let them kill you?

Doc pulls out his pill bottle, slowly, cautiously.

JOHN (CONT'D)

That's a shitty plan. Let me talk to Behrman. Maybe I can come up with some deal that gets you out.

DOC

He's worse than Carollo. Trust me.

SHAKE SHAKE.

JOHN

You could give Carollo up to the police then. Have them confiscate the drugs and put them all in jail.

DOC

And someone else will take his place.

JOHN

We make a bunch of money and pay it off then. I can sell Jazz records--

DOC

(shaking his head)
A get rich quick scheme? Davilla...

JOHN

Maybe they won't kill you. Maybe they go after Anna to threaten you.

DOC

They won't hurt Anna.

JOHN

You can't know that.

DOC

They don't know she exists.

JOHN

It doesn't matter how hard you tried to keep it a secret. I bet--

DOC

Stop.

Doc throws back the pills with his drink. He swallows hard. There's an instant feeling of relief on his face.

DOC (CONT'D)

...They say this life is merely a test. We're faced with challenges we can supposedly handle. Frankly, I'm ready for my failing grade.

John stares down at the piano keys as he plays...

JOHN

You're going to have a great grandchild.

Doc tilts his drink in cheers--

JOHN (CONT'D)
(swiveling)
It's not mine. She's too far along.
But you should still be around to
see it.

Doc slides the rest of the cash into John's shirt pocket.

DOC
This is everything I've saved. With
what Anna has, it'll be enough for
you both to get far away from here.

JOHN
You take her. Just cause she wants
you to butt out doesn't mean you
need to listen to her.

Doc laughs.

DOC
You don't know her as well as I
thought.

JOHN
She's an open book, just like you.

DOC
I'm sure she'd love the comparison.

Doc sits next to John on the bench.

JOHN
Why does she hate you so much?

Doc turns to him, a look that says, "Really?"

JOHN (CONT'D)
I mean, I get it... But... She said
he died. Did you get him involved
with Carollo?

Doc laughs again.

DOC
...Fifteen years ago, I was just a
cop. I chose to leave my old life
behind. But that life found my son.
Tony got in over his head, so I
made a deal with the devil to take
his debt, bail him out for good...
(MORE)

DOC (CONT'D)
 (beat)
 Carollo killed him anyway.

THE SONG STUMBLES; John hit the wrong keys. He looks at Doc with sadness... Doc finishes his drink.

DOC (CONT'D)
 It's best for Anna to keep her distance from me. Safer still if you two run away.

John ends the song, hands resting on the keys, still...

DOC (CONT'D)
 Does it really matter what color the baby is, if you love her?

He's staring off. John can't look up from the piano.

JOHN
 I can't be who you want me to...

Doc puts a hand on his shoulder.

DOC
 (leaning down)
 It only matters who you want you to be.

EXT. ANNA'S BACK YARD - NIGHT

Two COPS stand on a wooden deck with their hands on their belts. They JOLT as a GUNSHOT goes off nearby.

COP 1
 You arrest her.

COP 2
 I'm not fucking touching her.

COP 1
 (stepping forward)
 Miss Mumfry, Doc asked that--

BANG, another shot.

REVEAL: Anna just fired a RUGAR BLACKHAWK REVOLVER, as she stands in the tall grass of her back yard. Glass spills from the top of a wooden bench.

ANNA
 It's Schneider!

She takes a final swig of her next glass bottle, placing it on top of the wooden bench. She takes a few paces back.

Back on the deck, Esther comes out of the house.

ESTHER

I'm sorry about this. I can take it from here.

COP 1

Get her to stop that. It's disturbing the peace.

ESTHER

Last one, I promise.

Anna FIRES AGAIN off to the side. The cops jolt again.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Last two.

She pats the cops on the back as they turn to leave. Esther descends from the deck, toward Anna.

Anna takes a big gulp from another beer.

ANNA

I owe you an apology.

Anna spins around, making Esther nervous with the gun.

ANNA (CONT'D)

I thought with you being married, I'd never have the threat of being tied down... Seems I was wrong.

ESTHER

John told me. Twenty weeks? If there's anything I can do...

Anna opens the revolver, dropping out empties.

ANNA

It's not about the baby. I can raise her alone. I'm stro--

ESTHER

Strong. I know.

ANNA

I don't need anyone to protect me. I protect me.

She starts reloading.

ESTHER

I know.

ANNA

I provide for me.

ESTHER

I know.

ANNA

So why is it that a problem?

ESTHER

Maybe they're threatened...

ANNA

By us! The weaker sex? Bah!

Anna closes the chamber; it's loaded. Esther backs off...

ANNA (CONT'D)

Did you ever want kids?

ESTHER

I did. But Mike and I...

ANNA

I never wanted kids. I wanted a career; a way to be independent.

ESTHER

I don't know if there really is a thing as independence for us. Not yet at least.

Anna wobbles to the bench, glass bottle in hand.

ANNA

Yes, let's look toward the future!
The future...

ANNA (CONT'D)

We'll never get to that future. We just keep pushing back the date, saying one day things will get better.

She places the bottle, twirling back around.

ESTHER

Maybe you're right. It's the plight of women from the dawn of time... We're cursed to bear the sins of men.

ANNA

John told me the Greek myth of the first woman... Pandora, or something. The story is the same as Eve with the forbidden apple. The same in every culture... It's always a woman tempting a man to sin with us.

She sways toward Esther. Closer... closer.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Our crime wasn't eating a fruit or opening a box -- it was showing God we had more power over Adam.

Anna looks up at her...

Esther leans in, kissing Anna.

She pulls back, worried about what she just did. Anna isn't; she spins around, raising the gun toward the bottle--

ANNA (CONT'D)

I, for one, am tired of being punished.

Esther, frozen, doesn't know what to do. Anna lowers her aim. She holds the gun out, waving it loosely.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Aren't you?

Anna jiggles the gun.

Esther takes it. Anna forces her arms up. Esther closes one eye, aiming poorly; shakily. She fires--

EXT. ROMANO HOUSE - NIGHT

John paces by the door of an unknown house, anxiously practicing a speech.

JOHN

(muttering)

Anna, I love you... The right thing to do is... The right thing is for me to... Anna, I love you...

The door opens -- Is it Anna?

No. JOSEPH ROMANO, 80s, bleeding from the head but alive is escorted from the house by two doctors. John steps aside.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 (eyeing the man's neck)
 No razor. Just the axe...

He catches the door and heads inside.

INT. ROMANO HOUSE - NIGHT

LeClere's ahead of John, heading toward another OFFICER next to two young women in nightgowns, standing to the side, MARY, 20, shivering, silent, pregnant, and Pauline, 25, arm around Mary. John walks past them toward the bloody sofa.

LECLERE
 You two doing okay?

PAULINE
 We're fine, thank God.

John examines the front door, pushing on the panels. They don't budge. Pauline pulls Mary in a little tighter.

OFFICER
 Pauline was just giving me a
 description of the assailant.

LECLERE
 You saw someone?

John crouches down by the blood stains on the sofa and carpet. A small hatchet with an evidence tag next to it rest nearby. He sizes it up...

OFFICER
 A large man, dark skin wearing a
 suit.

LECLERE
 (pulling out his notepad)
 A suit?

PAULINE
 Only briefly... He was running
 away. I guess he saw me come out of
 my bedroom. He probably jumped on a
 train right outside... I didn't get
 a good look though because I saw my
 uncle all banged up, and I ran
 over...

John saunters around the room, pacing, listening...

LECLERE

But you didn't try to help him?

PAULINE

What do you mean?

LECLERE

(pointing)

Your gown... It's still pristine. Hers is covered in blood, so I'm assuming she tried to help. What did you do?

John runs his hand over a shelf of JAZZ RECORDS. Above the shelf hangs a painting that catches John's eye.

PAULINE

I... I don't know. It was all just a blur.

John inspects the painting. He knows it -- El banquete de Tereo, c. 1635. In it, a man reels back from a head presented by two topless women.

JOHN

(pointing up to it)

King Tereus of Thrace.

LeClere turns, as if asking him to elaborate.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Tereus raped his wife's sister, so she killed their son. After the painting, he chased them around town with an axe.

The group returns to their conversation...

LECLERE

Thanks for the lesson.

OFFICER

Your uncle said he was drunk. He doesn't remember seeing anyone.

PAULINE

We were asleep... Both of us. I don't know what to tell you.

JOHN (O.S.)

Did your uncle like Jazz?

LeClere whips toward John, frustrated sigh trapped in his cheeks. He puffs out the air--

MARY
Those are mine.

Pauline moves Mary a little closer, like a jolt. John sees.

PAULINE
Jazz was actually playing in here
when we found the body.

LECLERE
You didn't mention music before.

John comes closer...

PAULINE
Sorry. I just remembered. It's why
we didn't hear anything, I'm sure.
It was playing pretty loud and woke
Mary up. I got out of bed to turn
it off, and that's when I...

She trails off because John's head is tilted sideways,
staring right at her in the eye. She stares back.

PAULINE (CONT'D)
Excuse me? What are you doing?

LECLERE
Davilla, piss off please.

LeClere shoos John away, but John gets in Pauline's face.

JOHN
Did you attack him?

PAULINE
What? No. Of course not.

She breaks the stare. John leans back.

MARY
I did.

Everyone turns toward her, taken aback.

JOHN
W-what?

PAULINE
She doesn't know what she's--

Mary pushes Pauline's arm off her.

MARY

He owned an axe. I thought he was
the axeman.

PAULINE

She's kidding--

MARY

I got him drunk and chopped him
with his own hatchet.

LECLERE

...Maybe we should do this at the
station.

He grabs for her arm and she reels back.

MARY

Don't you touch me! You're not
going to axe me first!

She kicks LeClere in the crotch and lunges for the hatchet.
John catches her as LeClere is bent over in pain. She
thrashes around as he struggles to restrain her.

LECLERE

Jesus fucking Christ!

JOHN

(struggling)
Guess we can take that latest photo
down.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT, BULLPEN - DAY

John pulls down a photo from the board, which looks different
now. There are two columns: KILLED and INJURED. He just
grabbed a photo from injured; clearly Joseph Romano's.

Behind him, there's a tap on the door. He turns, finding Mike
standing in the doorway, looking even more pale than before.

JOHN

Jesus Christ, Mike. What do you
want?

Mike steps inside, holding up a piece of paper.

MIKE

(wheezing)
I have a present for you... Figured
you and your cop buddies... would
want to see this.

JOHN
 (turning to the board)
 I'm not interested in anything you
 have to share.

Mike takes a pin and jabs the paper into the cork board.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 (jumping up, annoyed)
 That's evidence--

MIKE
 (hands up)
 So is this.

John rips the paper from the board, scanning--

JOHN
 (looking up at Mike)
 What the fuck?

MIKE
 We got this at the Times today...
 It'll be... it'll be in print
 tomorrow morning.

John faces falls into disgust the more he reads. Mike's
 sunken-in eyes shine and his snotty grin grows.

JOHN
 "Thursday, March 13, 1919. Esteemed
 Mortal: They have never caught me
 and they never will. I am what you
 Orleanians and your foolish police
 call the Axeman..."

INT. MIKE & ESTHER'S HOME - NIGHT

The background jazz song crescendos. The axe pulls back from
 the final blow to Mike Pepitone's body with a SQUELCH.

GUILLORY (V.O.)
 "Undoubtedly, you think of me as a
 most horrible murderer in fact or
 fantasy, but I could be much worse
 if I wanted to."

The man drops the axe on the side of the bed. He starts to
 slip off the gloves...

GUILLORY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 "Next Tuesday night I am going to
 pass over New Orleans."

Brown skin. The man's hands are dark...

The figure walks away from Mike Pepitone's body, into the hallway, brightly lit.

GUILLORY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

"In my infinite mercy, I am going to make a little proposition to you people. Here it is: I am very fond of jazz music, and I swear by all the monsters in Tartarus, that every person shall be spared in whose home a jazz band is in full swing. Those who do not jazz it out will get the axe..."

It's John in a trench coat. He wipes his face with his hand. He looks GREEN, sick, like he's about to throw up.

JOHN

It's done.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Guillory lowers a copy of the letter, revealing John across from her...

GUILLORY

Signed... "The Axeman."

JOHN

(unamused)

I remember it.

LECLERE

The Tuesday the letter referenced, where were you?

John plays imaginary piano keys, ending in the middle finger at LeClere from both hands. He retracts them--

JOHN

Playing Jazz in Mahogany Hall. I didn't want to get the axe.

LECLERE

The Hall was closed down the day before.

JOHN

They didn't take the piano with them.

LECLERE

That letter certainly sounds like you, doesn't it? All the shit you're constantly spouting about fantasy, jazz, monsters.

JOHN

Go ahead. You can ask me.

Guillory slides the note back into the binder.

GUILLORY

Did you write that letter, mister Davilla?

JOHN

Come on now... "Jazz it out?"
Clearly the words of a madman.

INT. MIKE & ESTHER'S HOME - NIGHT

Esther enters the home, taking off her jacket. She spots Mike, sitting at the kitchen table in the dark.

ESTHER

Mike?

Mike motions to the chair across from him.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Why are you sitting in the dark?

Esther creaks the floorboards on her way to the table. She sits. He folds his hands. There's SOMETHING on the table in front of him.

MIKE

I got fired today. Someone submitted an anonymous tip that I lacked journalistic integrity.

She grabs a matchbook from the table.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Where were you?

She lights the match, taking it over to the small table lamp.

ESTHER

Spending time with Anna. She's pregnant, you heard.

MIKE

I heard...

The lamp lights, illuminating the table a bit. Mike looks terrible; even more sick than last time. But Esther's not focused on that... Between them, on the table --

Pictures of bodies and sick people, one's he'd taken himself, cover the table cloth. Atop them, a hatchet.

She looks up at him.

ESTHER

What is this?

Mike leans in.

MIKE

Esther... I'm going to kill you.

Esther sits back in the chair, confused.

ESTHER

What?

MIKE

I'm going to bash your fucking head in. Make it look like the Axeman broke in. And then tomorrow, when I cry to the police and reporters, I'll be the grieving widower, hell bent on finding your killer... Back in the spotlight.

ESTHER

You can't be serious...

SCRAMBLE. He grabs for the axe, nearly knocking over the table. She grabs for it too, but he overpowers her--

She bolts for the door. He grabs her wrist; she can't make it out. He forces her around, back to the door.

He pulls back, swinging--

She catches the handle in a struggle. Esther kicks Mike in the crotch and he lets go of the axe. She realizes she has it now... He's bent over, in pain...

She looks at him, then the axe, him, the axe, then--

WHAM. She swings. Blood spatters up, covering her face.

WHACK.

WHAM. More blood.

JOHN (V.O.)
Whack! And again...

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Both LeClere and Guillory stare, unamused, at John who gesticulates wildly during his story.

JOHN
And again!

LECLERE
You know that's not what happened.

John stops, mid swing.

JOHN
Do I? I was just going off the autopsy report.

Guillory slides the report out from her binder.

GUILLORY
(reading)
Four blows to the head... but a knife across the throat first, according to the coroner's timeline. Where's that fit into your story?

John shrugs.

LECLERE
Esther ran away that night. Mike was alive when she left.

JOHN
You sure about that? Seems like the perfect opportunity to kill Mike... And she had motive.

Guillory puts down the file.

GUILLORY
We know Esther didn't kill her husband. Mike wasn't killed for another week.

JOHN
But you arrested her.

LeClere clenches his jaw, looking at Guillory. She nods.

LECLERE

...Esther shot and killed Doc
Mumfry yesterday evening.

John takes it like a hit to the face, blinking, June
Osbourne-esque.

JOHN

Doc is...
(beat)
Why? How?

INT. ANNA'S HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

It's hard to tell exactly where we are because we're so
focused on Esther, sobbing, shaking in a kitchen chair as
LeClere takes her statement. A baby is screaming somewhere.

COPs behind Esther put a white sheet over DOC'S BODY in a
pool of blood on the floor.

ESTHER

I don't know... he just-- he
attacked me. I couldn't... and I
just grabbed the gun... I'm so
sorry.

LeClere pulls out the chair opposite her, as he sits--

INT. JAIL HALLWAY - DAY

--in a wooden chair in the jail hallway, next to Guillory.
Esther folds her hands, prim and proper in the jumpsuit,
looks drastically different, almost scary in her composure.

ESTHER

I did the world a favor, ridding it
of Doc fucking Mumfry. He was the
Axeman of New Orleans...

Guillory writes in her binder, then she looks up--

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

--from the note, back toward John. LeClere shakes his head.

GUILLORY

We're trying to piece that together
as well. Hence why you're here.

John slumps back further in his chair. He can't believe this.

LECLERE
Can you corroborate her statement?

John laughs.

JOHN
Doc wasn't the Axeman.

GUILLORY
How can you be certain?

JOHN
Because Anna was attacked. And he'd never hurt her.

GUILLORY
Any idea who would?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

LeClere knocks on the door to a blue-tinted room. Doc looks up from a chair, next to Anna, unconscious on the bed.

DOC
(looking over)
Coming for a statement?

LECLERE
I came to see her injuries... But I can come back.

LeClere comes in. Doc doesn't take his eyes off Anna again.

DOC
It's fine. Do your job.

LeClere examines Anna's head wounds carefully.

LECLERE
You heard Besumer's wife died yesterday? Never woke back up. How's, uh, Anna Schnieder doing?

DOC
Doctors said she's pregnant.

LECLERE
Damn. Another two on the toll--

DOC
Fuck you. She'll wake up.

LECLERE

Why are you here? Can't let go of
the case?

Doc grabs Anna's hand.

DOC

She's my granddaughter.

LeClere grabs her chart.

LECLERE

Really?

DOC

(side eyeing)
You think it's gonna say that on
there?

LeClere hefts it, then puts it back.

LECLERE

Didn't know you had grand kids.
After your son, I--

DOC

That's exactly why people don't
know.

LeClere nods, heading for the door.

LECLERE

We had a murder not too far away
from missus Schneider's home. My
guess is she put up a fight, and
the killer went to find an easier
victim. Finish the job...

He stops. Doc looks up at him.

DOC

Davilla with you?

LECLERE

In the car.

Doc nods a little too much, clearly hurt John didn't come in.

LECLERE (CONT'D)

I'll let you know if we find
anything.

Doc stands before LeClere can leave.

DOC
I'll follow you there.

LECLERE
She needs you here.

DOC
She needs someone to do some real
policework.

Doc brushes past him.

LECLERE
God damn it...

INT. CORTMIGLIA GROCERY STORE - DAY

Early-morning sun shines through, and jazz music echoes in the store as John's eyes dart up and down a poster by the checkout register -- the same still of the FLU REMEDY. Very close behind him is the body of Charles Cortmiglia, axe protruding from his back.

The MUSIC SCRATCHES. Doc lifts the handle of the nearby gramophone. He's pulls off a pair of gloves.

JOHN
(motioning to the poster)
Can't believe folks buy this stuff.

Doc glances. Barely. He's fishing for something in his coat.

DOC
Who plays Jazz during a murder?

Doc throws back a pill, closing the bottle. LeClere enters from a back room.

LECLERE
Mother and daughter dead, too.
Wounds match the axe beatings.

DOC
What about the slit throat?

LECLERE
Throats in tact.

DOC
He can't kill a young woman, so he
attacks a whole family?

John turns around. He reels from the body, averting his gaze.

JOHN
You think Anna's attacker came here
after?

LECLERE
It would make sense. This fucker's
got to get his rocks off somewhere.

John is disgusted, walking away from them.

JOHN
Bullshit.

Doc responds to LeClere's confused look--

DOC
Excuse us for a moment.

He finds John sitting on the floor of the grocery aisle.

DOC (CONT'D)
(standing over him)
Are you trying to blow this?

JOHN
(looking up)
You mean blow your drug smuggling?

Doc struggles to crouch down; it's very hard for him.

DOC
Ah. Shit.

He falls on his butt, leaning hard against the shelf. A can
of green beans falls off, rolling toward them.

JOHN
The fuck is wrong with you?

DOC
Anna's attack wasn't Carollo.

John picks up the can, playing with it.

JOHN
Right. Because you kept her
existence a secret so well. They
fucking found out you weren't going
to pay your debt, and they tried to
do the same thing to Anna that they
did to your son.

Doc grabs his hand, stopping him.

DOC
It's not Carollo because Anna
wouldn't be alive. And he'd make it
overly obvious it was him. I've
heard nothing.

John yanks his hand away easily from the shaky old man.

JOHN
You're lying to yourself.

DOC
The family's throats weren't cut.
Again, not Carollo's style. Which
means whoever did this might have
also attacked Anna.

JOHN
(standing)
So you're not going to do anything?

Doc tries to stand. He can't--

DOC
There's; ah. There's nothing to do
except investigate and pray for
Anna.

JOHN
All this time... you're the fucking
coward. Not me.

DOC
(extending a hand)
Help me up so we can look at the
evidence together.

John drops the can...

JOHN
I know who did it. I'm not waiting
for you to catch up. I quit.

The can rolls by Doc, still on the floor as John marches off.

INT. MAHOGANY HALL, HALL - NIGHT

John downs a shot while playing piano with one hand. People cheer as he slams down the glass and finishes the song.

They clap for him as he gets off the stool, swaying away to the bar, but as soon as he gets into the crowd, he's stopped.

ESTHER
What the fuck are you doing?

JOHN
(confused at her presence)
You don't work here.

ESTHER
Neither do you.

John keeps going toward the bar.

JOHN
I don't work anywhere.

ESTHER
Why haven't you gone to see Anna?

JOHN
She's in a coma.

ESTHER
She woke up this morning. She needs you.

He leans on the bar.

JOHN
Nobody needs me. She certainly doesn't.

ESTHER
I know it's scary, all that responsibility, but she loves you--

JOHN
I can't.

ESTHER
For fuck's sake, John -- just step up and see one thing through!

JOHN
(cheering)
I am seeing something through.
Tonight is the last night of
Mahogany Hall!

People cheer around him.

JOHN (CONT'D)
And tomorrow is the Axeman's visit.

ESTHER

Man up and go see her.

JOHN

She needs to distance herself from me and from Doc.

ESTHER

(scoffing)

Doc. You're in with the wrong side. Behrman all but admitted that he ordered one of his cops in his to start the Axeman killings.

JOHN

What? Why?

ESTHER

For fame. Or money. Or both... A serial killer was the only way he could convince the board that the district needed to close. So you're out there playing detective with your friend while there are people who actually need you.

John taps on the bar.

JOHN

(mumbling)

It wasn't cops who attacked Anna.

ESTHER

You don't get to come into people's lives and pretend to do something noble, then run away when it gets hard. You make a commitment, and you stick to it.

The bartender slides a bottle of FLU MEDICINE across the bar.

JOHN

Speaking of commitments, how's Mike?

ESTHER

Sick. Dying maybe...

(picking up the medicine)

I came to get medicine for him.

The bartender slides a shot over to John.

JOHN

Did you berate him for not visiting
Anna?

ESTHER

Why would I?

JOHN

Cause it's his baby.

That takes Esther by surprise. John downs the shot, then slides the glass off the bar with an anguished yell, frustrated. Esther grabs the medicine and huffs off.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

John marches unsteadily down the alleyway, tightening his grip on a shovel as he approaches a group of men.

JOHN

Carollo!

It echoes down the alley, causing the men to turn. One of the MUSCLE brandishes a revolver, aiming it at John feet away.

But Carollo puts a hand on the Muscle's arm, stepping in front. The Muscle lowers his weapon.

CAROLLO

I know you... You're Doc's boy.
What can I help you with?

They stop a few feet from each other.

JOHN

(poised to swing)
I'm here about Doc's debt.

CAROLLO

You're drunk.

JOHN

I want you to let him out of it.

Carollo laughs, looking around to egg his gang into laughing.

CAROLLO

Fine; you've threatened me into
submission. Doc's off the hook.

JOHN

I'm not an idiot, I--

CAROLLO

Are you sure about that?

JOHN

(tightening his grip)

I have a proposition for you. A new way to make enough money to cover his debt and some.

CAROLLO

I'm listening.

JOHN

Flu medicine.

The group laughs again. John feels silly, but pushes on--

JOHN (CONT'D)

The feds are going to pass a prohibition bill by the end of the year, outlawing alcohol. And you could spend time and effort dealing under the table with the cops' eyes on you now that Doc is gone. Or... you can start a flu medicine brand, load it up with alcohol and sell it legally, without taxes.

CAROLLO

(motioning to the bar)

And you felt you needed that to convince me to... make money? Money talks more than steel.

...John lowers the shovel.

CAROLLO (CONT'D)

Very good. I'm a businessman after all... But if this plan of yours doesn't work...

He motions behind him and the Muscle approaches, taking the shovel. He hands it to Carollo, who smiles at John. WHAM.

Carollo nails John in the stomach with the shovel handle.

John doubles over in pain, hands on the ground, gasping.

CAROLLO (CONT'D)

(leaning over)

A debt like Doc's doesn't just disappear. Does he know you're gambling with his life?

JOHN
 ...I'll take it.

Carollo leans over further, miming that he can't hear.

CAROLLO
 What's that?

JOHN
 ...I'll take on the debt. Just
 leave him and his family alone.

CAROLLO
 See, now this is how I know you're
 dumb. Doc doesn't have a family.

John climbs back to his feet.

JOHN
 His granddaughter... Anna. You had
 someone attack her last night.

Carollo looks back. The men seem confused, shaking no.

CAROLLO
 It wasn't us. But interesting...
 Doc's deadbeat son had kids after
 all, huh? How old is she now? She's
 gotta be-- Wait, are you and her...

Carollo grins. He extends a hand.

CAROLLO (CONT'D)
 The big head always finds a way to
 make the little head happy. Fine.
 You make this happen, I'll leave
 the whole Mumfry family alone.

John reluctantly shakes it.

CAROLLO (CONT'D)
 Do you even know how much he owed?

INT. ANNA'S HOME - DAY

Doc pushes on the door to Anna's home. He's surprised that
 the panels aren't popped out, and it swings open easily.

It's because Esther's inside, gasping, shocked to see him--

Doc ignores her, pushing harder on the panels. His hands are
 shaking with curled-up fingers. His muscles are tightening.

ESTHER

Anna asked me to look after the house. I'm allowed to be here.

DOC

(not looking away)
Didn't say you weren't.

Esther picks a blanket off the sofa.

ESTHER

I'm bringing Anna some things from home. Doctors said it might help her recovery.

DOC

Were these panels loose or off when you got here?

She shakes her head; the door's fine. He hobbles painfully past Esther to the bedroom. He stops--

DOC (CONT'D)

An axe anywhere?

ESTHER

No. I don't think so.

DOC

Did you see anything out of the ordinary? I need to know if you fucked up any evidence.

ESTHER

I didn't go back there...

DOC

Good. Don't.

He marches down the hallway, leaving Esther holding onto a pile of clothes. She stares after him, unsure if she should say anything--

ESTHER

I'm glad she's okay.

DOC (O.S.)

She's not okay.

ESTHER

She's safe, though.

Doc comes back out, stomping past her again...

DOC
 She's not safe either. Not until
 the Axeman is dead or in jail.

ESTHER
 Maybe Anna's attacker though...
 might go away on his own.

Doc storms toward her, intimidating in size. He looks down at her, booming.

DOC
 Do you know who did this?
 (smacking the table)
 Tell me!

She flinches--

ESTHER
 I-- I don't--

DOC
 Stay safe tonight, missus Pepitone,
 when the Axeman passes over
 N'awlins.

He storms off, rubbing his hand on the way. In a second, he's gone with the door still open. She rushes over and slams it shut, locking it. She turns around, tears streaming.

EXT. BASIN STREET - NIGHT

LOCK. Another lock. And another. People all around the city are locking their doors. Lanterns and lights go on inside, and almost all at once--

Jazz music starts like a thunder storm, covering the district. It starts to rain...

The streets are empty. Erie. Everyone's locked away, except--

A man in a trench coat bursts from a door, slamming it.

He rushes down the street, looking for something... someone.

He turns a corner.

INT. JAIL HALLWAY - DAY

Esther tilts her head, listening and smiling like a maniac behind bars. Guillory also listens... LeClere was talking.

LECLERE

...We determined Mike Pepitone was the last victim of the Axeman, killed on the Jazz night, March 18th.

GUILLORY

And you're convinced Doc killed Mike?

ESTHER

He practically threatened it beforehand.

GUILLORY

You should've reported him.

ESTHER

To who? He's the police...

LECLERE

We're not all as bad as Doc Mumfry.

INT. 8TH DISTRICT MEDICAL EXAMINER LAB - NIGHT

Under a blue light, Doc and LeClere stand over the body of Mike Pepitone, a bloody mess in a body bag. LeClere holds up a notepad.

LECLERE

Jesus Christ...

DOC

Guess he wasn't listening to Jazz...

LECLERE

Neither was I, but here I am.

LeClere writes in the notepad.

DOC

Coroner said the injuries match the other victims perfectly. Knife to the throat, multiple blows with an axe, maybe a few minutes in between.

LECLERE

Why'd you call me down here then?

DOC

I'm retiring early.

LECLERE

Now, after all those years of pushing you out, you finally cave?

DOC

Today's my last day. Figured you can sign off on Mike instead of me; save us all some time.

He holds out the chain of custody paperwork.

LECLERE

You sign it.

Doc takes it back, looking down at it.

DOC

You know, Behrman has a big mouth and a loose zipper... He told his secretary he ordered a cop to kill Behrman.

LECLERE

I'd lie to get pussy, too.

DOC

I'm sure. Except, at Besumer's house, you didn't recover any drugs, even though...

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. POLICE PRECINCT, EVIDENCE ROOM - DAY

A light blue hue covers the evidence lockers as LeClere opens a locker, looking around. He steals a BRICK OF COCAINE.

DOC (V.O.)

...you took them from the evidence locker.

INT. 1ST DISTRICT MEDICAL EXAMINER LAB - DAY

LeClere shoves a gloved hand into Catherine Maggio's slit throat on the autopsy table under blue light.

DOC (V.O.)
 You saw the injuries from the
 Maggio murders in the first
 district and took notes, which I
 bet gave you...

INT. BESUMER HOME, KITCHEN - NIGHT

WHACK. Besumer, asleep on the sofa under a static-y blue
 light is slammed in the head with an axe.

DOC (V.O.)
 ...all the info you needed to make
 it look like Besumer was killed by
 the Black Hand mob.

The axe is pulled back. LeClere gets sprayed in the face with
 blood.

DOC (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Except none of our guys checked for
 drugs. No one found it on the
 scene.

LeClere pulls out the brick and puts it into the ceiling
 panel.

DOC (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But I did... I saw the displaced
 panel immediately, and grabbed it.
 That's why it was gone when you
 went back.

END MONTAGE:

INT. 8TH DISTRICT MEDICAL EXAMINER LAB - NIGHT

Back in the present lab with LeClere, Doc extends the
 paperwork once again, offering it.

DOC
 But I'd just like to retire in
 peace, maybe visit my new great
 grandbaby... And all this nonsense
 seems like more than I want to deal
 with. So... if you can just sign
 off on Mike's papers, I'll be outta
 your hair. What little is left.

LeClere looks down at the paperwork, then snatches it.

LECLERE

...Nice story.

But he signs. Doc nods.

DOC

Enjoy your new promotion, chief.

Doc leaves, smiling to himself.

INT. ANNA'S HOME - NIGHT

Esther places a cloth-wrapped newborn into a small crib. Next to the crib is Anna, head also wrapped in bandages, lying in bed. Esther kisses Anna's forehead as she sleepily smiles.

ESTHER

I'll be right outside if you need
me, okay?

Anna nods, clearly hopped up on pain medication.

Esther leaves, heading to the back door. She goes outside.

EXT. ANNA'S BACK YARD - NIGHT

It's getting late. Esther pulls out a pack of cigarettes, lighting one. She drags in deeply, taking in the night.

The baby starts crying. Esther ignores it. Then --

BANG. From inside the house.

Esther rushes back inside, dropping her cigarette.

INT. ANNA'S HOME - NIGHT

Esther rushes inside, down the hall to Anna's room. There's a body in the hallway, a big man in a trench coat. Esther screams, carefully stepping around it. Looking down, confirming that it's Doc Mumfry. Esther looks into the room.

Anna is standing, holding her gun. She's breathing heavily--

ANNA

The Axeman was coming for the baby.

Esther grabs the gun from Anna. Anna sits back in the bed as Esther checks on the baby; she's fine.

Esther starts to panic, looking around. Doc gurgles... Esther hears him, getting closer.

DOC
...you did it.

She crouches down, holding the gun still.

ESTHER
I'm so sorry... I didn't--

DOC
Tell them... You did it. Keep...
Anna... safe.

Esther looks at the gun, then turns to Anna, who is holding the baby happily as if nothing happened.

Esther stands, running outside--

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

John's leaning one arm, hand covering his mouth as Guillory recounts the story, or at least the one she knows--

GUILLORY
Esther said she saw Doc trying to
take the baby. When she confronted
him, he came at her, and--

LeClere motions a shooting.

LECLERE
Bang.

John shifts, lowering his arm.

JOHN
Do you believe her?

GUILLORY
No. But I don't believe you either,
for the record.

JOHN
No?

Guillory closes the binder.

GUILLORY

This case is absolutely fucked. Without more evidence, I don't really have a case against Esther's self defense plea. And it sounds like she did all of you a favor by killing him and stopping a serial killer.

JOHN

I told you, Doc wasn't the Axeman.

LECLERE

Yeah. It was "nobody," right?

John shrugs, placing his hands on the table. LeClere gets up, heading for the door.

JOHN

Nobody; somebody; who knows. I think we all are guilty of the parts we played.

Guillory pushes out her chair, standing.

GUILLORY

Except for you, right? Unless there's anything you've been lying about...

She stares at him right in the eye. He stares back...

EXT. BASIN STREET - NIGHT

A CRASH of thunder. It's Jazz night again and the trench-coat-wearing man makes a sharp turn down an alleyway.

INT. MAHOGANY HALL, BAR - NIGHT

The lights are off except for a small lantern lit by the piano. John sits at the stool, playing. It's not the same upbeat version of his song, but a slower tempo; sadder. He's not drinking, just bobbing with the deep beats of the song.

The bar is covered in a white sheet, and chairs are stacked on the nearby tables. Boards cover the windows.

John cheers for himself in the abandoned hall as he finishes the song.

There's a creak behind him; he jolts--

Doc, dripping wet, stands in the boarded up doorway. John gets up. Doc goes behind the bar.

As John makes it to the bar, Doc grabs a big bottle of whiskey from behind it, placing it shakily onto the counter.

Then, two shot glasses. John notices that Doc's hands are covered in blood...

JOHN
What happened?

Doc slides the glasses toward John with the back of his hand.

John takes a seat.

Doc fumbles with his pill bottle, trying to pull the cap off. POP and SCATTER -- pills go flying.

DOC
God damn it!

John grabs a few from the sheet, holding them out. Doc shakily takes them from him. Doc pours the whiskey shots.

JOHN
What did you do?

Doc can't lift his; it keeps slipping from his hand. John helps him drink, swallowing the pills with it.

John places the bottle down.

DOC
(out of breath)
I need your help.

INT. MIKE & ESTHER'S HOME - DAY

John stands over Mike Pepitone's body, putting on a pair of gloves. He's still alive, barely breathing as blood bubbles from a gash across his throat. Doc is behind John in the bedroom, taking off his trench coat.

DOC
Esther practically told me. I sat here with Mike, and he told me the truth. He attacked Anna that night.
(handing John the coat)
Put this on to cover the blood.

John grabs it, absentmindedly.

JOHN
...Then you slit his throat.

Doc points to an axe.

DOC
Grab that.

John looks at it, then back at Doc.

JOHN
You broke your moral code... God was supposed to judge him, even if the judicial system failed... You said that.

DOC
Grab the axe. We need to make it look like the Axeman.

JOHN
Why? Just let him die...

Doc struggles, but manages to lift the axe.

DOC
Otherwise they'll find evidence and I'll go to jail. This is the only way.

JOHN
I can't... He's still alive.

DOC
You have to. I can't grip it right. I tried... I can't raise it up. Do this for me-- Do this one God damn thing right for me Davilla. One useful fucking thing in your life that you don't absolutely fail at.

Doc plops the axe in John's arms, unable to hold it longer.

JOHN
For you...

John starts to cry. He looks down at Mike, and see's a bottle of FLU MEDICINE by the bed.

John squares up, raising the axe. He aims. Then--

THWACK. Blood shoots up, covering his face. He winces, gagging.

DOC

Again.

John takes a deep breath, disassociating, and aims again--

OVER BLACK:

John's labored breathing and heavy THWACKS continue...

SUPER: The "real" Axeman of New Orleans was never caught.

SUPER: Esther Pepitone was found not guilty, and returned home with Anna, helping raise baby Catherine.

SUPER: John Davilla never wrote another song.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

John stares at Guillory. LeClere turns back from the door.

LECLERE

John?

GUILLORY

You wouldn't lie about any of this,
would you?

John just stares at her. She stares back.

He breaks eye contact... maybe even looking into the camera.

FADE TO BLACK