

VENICE OF AMERICA

Written by

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An homage to all things Film Noir
&
Based on Actual Events

First Draft, v. 1.10
March 17, 2022

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FADE IN:

EXT. VENICE BOARDWALK AND PIER - NIGHT

(NOTE: In homage to Orson Welles' famous opening scene in *Touch of Evil* - filmed entirely in Venice, CA - this opening scene is envisioned as one continuous 3:19 shot.)

It's 1926 Venice, CA. We open on an EXTREME CLOSE UP of a RADIO MICROPHONE-

AIMEE (O.C.)

- The wages of sin is death. But
the free gift of God through our
lord and savior Jesus Christ is
eternal life-

We PULL BACK and see SISTER AIMEE MCPHERSON behind the mic; a sensuous young woman hiding her beauty behind the unadorned vestments of a zealot.

A large CROSS heaves up and down on her bust as she works the crowd.

AIMEE (CONT'D)

-And make no mistake about it as
you look around this fine Friday
evening. The gambling, the
drinking, the debauchery; this
shrine to earthly delights-

We PULL BACK to see her standing on an apple box preaching to a mixed CROWD of the faithful and drifters, grifters and weekend day trippers on the bustling Venice boardwalk.

AIMEE (CONT'D)

- For these are all the wages of
sin and are a dead end alley. A
dead end that is paved in misery
and dread. I ask you, humbly
standing here today, to give Jesus
a chance! Let him free you from
your bondage and show you the
light. A light that will lead you
out of that alley!

She finishes and relinquishes the mic to the Radio Announcer, ROY LAGANA, a puckish and polished redhead with a face for radio.

ROY

Can I get an "Amen?" Thank you Sister Aimee, "the most famous voice in America," for that rousing and profoundly inspiring sermon. What a remarkably courageous and inspiring woman, a moral beacon shining light in an immoral world-

A mysterious man, AGGO LARSSON, a.k.a. THE SWEDE, his face hidden by a fedora, a shoulder-holstered revolver concealed inside his expensive suit, takes her by the arm and they disappear into the crowd.

ROY (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Now I'd like you to show your appreciation for her ministry by reaching deep in your pockets--

As they leave the crowd behind, the announcer is DROWNED OUT by the CARNIVAL ATMOSPHERE of the Boardwalk.

Aimee loses her robe and vestments revealing a sexy FRINGED FLAPPER DRESS with a plunging V Neck.

They weave through the crowd as she replaces her cross with a STRING OF PEARLS she's pulled from her clutch.

She grabs the Swede's hand, eagerly pulling him toward the VENICE AMUSEMENT PIER'S soaring DIPPSY DOODLE Roller Coaster.

They breeze past the ticket booth, hopping on the last car.

CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK as they're pulled upward straight over the Pacific Ocean-

-Los Angeles and Santa Monica are small islands of distant light in a sea of darkness-

CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK. The Swede pulls out a whiskey flask and shares with Aimee.

She takes a draw and booze dribbles down onto her chest.

CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK. The Swede lustfully licks the whiskey off her cleavage, moving up her neck, then lips.

CLICK, CLICK. SILENCE.

They reach the peak of the coaster, hungrily eye each other--

-- Then ROAR earthward toward the crashing waves below.

The ride careens through hills of wooden trestle, blaring lights, and wrenching darkness and our lustful couple eagerly grope each other, as g-forces wrench at them.

The ride ends and the adrenaline-fueled couple race down the pier, past a ROW OF HOMELESS begging for a handout, toward the lights of bustling WINDWARD AVENUE.

The Swede pulls Aimee into a dark ALLEY behind the HOTEL ST. MARK, pushing her against a cold brick wall.

They kiss.

The couple passionately tear at each other's clothes and we CONTINUE PAST THEM, into the dank alley toward a SHAFT OF LIGHT--

--a DARK SHADOW emerges. We see the metallic sheen of a gun--

-- There's a SCREAM--

--and a FLASH BANG as the alley lights up with GUNFIRE--

--we CONTINUE AROUND THE CORNER TO WINDWARD AVENUE and see the glamorous and wealthy wine and dine at the posh hotel and outdoor cafes--

--And COME TO REST on the landmark VENICE OF AMERICA SIGN, swinging high above the distinctive promenade.

FADE OUT.

EXT. VENICE OF AMERICA CANALS - MORNING

It's 1905. New bungalows with fresh planted lawns and lush gardens line the sparkling canals. Gondolas carry passengers up and down the waterways.

HAMMERING can be heard as new homes are being built.

Two young boys - one white (THORNTON), one black (IRVING) - fish off a dock as a third, JAKE VARGAS, a sharp, inquisitive Mexican boy, searches the cattails and reeds for frogs.

IRVING
Ain't this the life!

JAKE

It don't get any better than this.
I reckon I done caught us enough
bull frogs and salamanders for us
to fish clear through the weekend.

THORNTON

I'm gonna catch myself a big ol'
fish for dinner. And my Pappa will
cook it up and my Momma will make
biscuits and honey and you two can
come over and feast with us.

IRVING

Ain't that grand! We'll be livin'
like kings!

ABBOT KINNEY (O.C.)

Who'll be living like kings?

The boys don't notice a gondola that's pulled up to the far
end of the pier.

THORNTON

Why, we will, pappa! I'm gonna
catch the biggest fish you and
mamma ever laid eyes on.

ABBOT KINNEY

Is that so. Here, Jake, tie off the
end.

Jake helps ABBOT KINNEY secure the boat. Kinney has the heart
of a grizzly but carries himself with an easy finishing
school charm.

JAKE

Yes, Mister Kinney. A fisherman
down at the wharf show'd me how to
make proper knots. I reckon I can
make a *baker's* dozen. And proper!

ABBOT KINNEY

Why, aren't you a spanky one, Jake.
Now boys, I'll cook up your fish,
but promise me not to eat like
kings.

IRVING

What d'ya mean, Mr. Kinney?

ABBOT KINNEY

We don't have kings in America. No
one high and mighty at my table.

(MORE)

ABBOT KINNEY (CONT'D)
 It ain't American. No siree. Now
 Spanky, where'd you say you caught
 those bull frogs?

JAKE
 Down in these here reeds-

Abbot looks down and frowns-

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. VENICE CANALS - MORNING

It's 1926. A woman's hand bobs in the reeds-

JAKE "SPANKY" VARGAS, a pensive man, lights a cigarette and
 takes a long deep drag. He stands near the reeds at the edge
 of the Grand Canal.

JAKE
 Where'd you say the kids found her?

COP
 Down in these reeds.

JAKE
 Geez. Always in the Grand Canal.

Jake wades into stagnant muck along the embankment, stepping
 into BLACK OILY TAR, and sees a YOUNG WOMAN floating face
 down in the bulrushes.

Fringe from her soiled flapper dress gently bobs in the
 brackish water.

COP
 I haven't moved the body. Sorry
 Spanky, but we're supposed to wait
 for the big shots from LA now.

Jake steps back and wipes the gunk off his shoe.

JAKE
 It's too early for this shit, or
 too late. I can never decide. It's
 the only time of day too early and
 too late at the same time.

COP
 Ain't that the truth.

JAKE

Anybody reported missing from the St. Mark or Cadillac?

COP

No. Not as of this morning. You think she's a day-tripper?

Jake takes his shoes off and carefully sets them aside.

JAKE

She's dressed for a night at the clip joint. Those pearls around her neck look like the real deal. That's Hotel St. Mark money. That's all I'm saying. When they find her?

COP

About an hour ago. At sunrise. Kids fishing here when they found her. Looks like the dame was a real dish-

Jake is annoyed by the callousness and wades into the muck for a closer look.

COP (CONT'D)

I mean, there's no bloating. She hasn't been in that long.

Jake eyes the body and surrounding reeds.

COP (CONT'D)

Hey Spanky, you can't do that. I got my orders.

He ignores the order and continues with his inspection, turning her over.

Both men gasp.

Half her face has been blown off.

Two cars pull up - a hearse and an unmarked LA Squad car. Four men get out; THORNTON KINNEY, the LA MEDICAL EXAMINER, and DETECTIVES MASSEY and BELCHECK.

MEDICAL EXAMINER

I thought I said not to disturb the-Jesus.

He stops when he sees the body.

JAKE

You can rule out drowning,
accidental or otherwise.

The other men catch up and stop. Thornton grabs a handkerchief to cover his mouth as he wretches.

The ME takes photos and busies prepping the body for removal while the detectives make a cursory inspection of the crime scene.

DET. MASSEY

(to Jake)

Who are you?

THORNTON

Detectives Massey and Belcheck,
this is Detective Jake Vargas. Hi
Jake.

He gives a curt nod to Thornton.

JAKE

Thornton.

(to Massey and Belcheck)

Jake Vargas, Venice Police
Department. *Retired.*

DET. BELCHECK

You're that spick Police Chief?

JAKE

(to Thornton)

Was. The great city of Angeles no
longer required my services after
the annexation.

(to Belcheck)

Apparently, you boys are cracker
jack and just don't need the savvy
skills of a seasoned wetback on the
force.

Det. Belcheck halfheartedly looks around the crime scene.

DET. BELCHECK

Ain't that a kick in the pants.

Belcheck steps in a puddle of black oily tar.

DET. BELCHECK (CONT'D)

Jesus fuckin' Christ, this shit is
worse than La Brea.

DET. MASSEY

Okay, okay. So whose dime you on now?

JAKE

I'm in private practice now- just a concerned citizen that happened to be in the neighborhood - here to offer my assistance.

THORNTON

Jake.

DET. MASSEY

That's mighty big of you. Any ideas on who'd want to bump off the dame?

Jake nods his head.

JAKE

Whatever it was, it was personal.

DET. BELCHECK

Ain't you a regular house dick.

He ignores the insult.

JAKE

All I'm saying is it ain't robbery.

DET. MASSEY

And how's that, *detective*?

JAKE

That string of pearls-

The pearls disappear from view as the ME zips up the body bag and he and the Cop load the body into the hearse.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Worth more than both your salaries. That's all.

Det. Massey pats Jake on the back and turns back to his car.

DET. MASSEY

(condescendingly)

We'll take it from here. We'll let you know if we need any help.

(to Belcheck)

Let's go.

Once the detectives are out of ear shot, Thornton leans in close to Jake.

THORNTON

I know we don't see eye to eye on most anything anymore. But do me a favor. Do it for my old man. Leave this alone.

JAKE

Why you here, Thornton? Why you slumming with these two? Lose your silver spoon?

THORNTON

Just a concerned citizen, like you, amigo.

Thornton trudges up the embankment and gets in the police car. As they pull away Jake looks out over the canal, lights up a cigarette and takes a long hard drag.

EXT. PETE'S GRILL & PUBLIC HOUSE - DAY

A KID hawks newspapers. The HEADLINE: MISSING. THE MOST FAMOUS VOICE OF AMERICA.

Jake grabs a paper, scans the headline and heads inside.

INT. PETE'S GRILL & PUBLIC HOUSE - DAY

Jake bellies up to the empty bar and cracks open the paper.

PETE

Hey Spanky. Old-Fashioned?

JAKE

It's noon somewhere. Thanks.

Pete pulls a bottle of rye from a secret compartment in the wooden bar-back. Jake notices a woman in a booth staring at him.

PETE

(in a low voice)

She's been here over an hour. Been asking about you. She's up to no good if you ask me.

JAKE

How's that?

PETE

She's nursing an earl grey.

Jake grins and heads toward her.

JAKE

I'll be sure to keep that in mind.

MILDRED JOHNSON, pulchritudinous and easily indignant, fidgets with a large cross around her neck as she swirls a spoon in her teacup. Sweat shines her brow.

Jake slides into the booth next to her, vexing her more.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Ma'am. May I help you?

MILDRED

I don't think so. I'm waiting for someone.

JAKE

A detective?

MILDRED

Why, yes. How did you-

JAKE

I'm very good at my job.

MILDRED

You? But you don't look, um, like the person I was led to believe.

Annoyed at the insult, he gets up to leave.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

I was told Abbot Kinney's man could be found here.

JAKE

Aye, he can. Like I said, I'm very good at my job.

MILDRED

You're Kinney's man?

JAKE

Hand picked by the Old Man himself. Jake Vargas, ma'am. Have a nice day.

He makes to leave.

MILDRED

My apologies, Mr. Vargas. Please sit down and join me.

(MORE)

MILDRED (CONT'D)

I haven't slept and am a bit out of sorts. I meant no disrespect.

Sitting down.

JAKE

None taken. What can I do for you?

MILDRED

I want to hire you to find my sister. I presume you've seen the morning paper?

JAKE

Just the headline. Your sister's the radio preacher?

MILDRED

Sister Aimee McPherson. Yes. 'The most famous voice in America.' She disappeared after last night's broadcast. Vanished.

JAKE

Listen, Mrs. McPherson-

MILDRED

It's Johnson. Miss Johnson.

JAKE

My apologies. Look Miss Johnson, it's not even been twenty-four hours, how can you be sure your sister's missing and not sleeping in late? I mean, this *is* Venice.

MILDRED

I am well aware of Venice's reputation for licentiousness. The devil's playground, if you ask me. That's precisely why Aimee came here for her broadcast ministry- to confront the devil and his many vices head on.

(she pauses)

I know my little sister, Mister Vargas. She is a woman of temperance and she does not 'sleep in late.'

Jake makes a point to savor his cocktail.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
(disapprovingly)
I assume the law of the land
extends to the sun-kissed beaches
of Venice?

He drains the rest of his drink.

JAKE
Now, now. There's no need for a
soap box in this dive. The ceilings
are low and you'll scuff your high
hat.

She takes the insult well.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Did you call the police - before or
after you went to the press?

MILDRED
The Los Angeles Police Department
apparently doesn't consider this 'a
high priority' case. I know my
Aimee. Something happened to her. I
will not sit idly and let precious
time slip by. And yes, if I can
grease the wheels with the power of
the Fourth estate, then so be it.

Mildred slides a PHOTOGRAPH in front of him: an angelic Aimee
blessing an infant in her arms.

JAKE
She's quite the looker.

MILDRED
Our church needs her.
(pause)
I need her.

JAKE
Miss Johnson, my services are not
cheap. I charge thirty dollars a
day, plus expenses.

MILDRED
Our radio ministry is well blessed.
Your terms are not a problem.

She pulls a fat wad of \$50 bills from her purse and sets them
next to the photo.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
Consider this a down payment. Find
Aimee, Mister Vargas. She's the
only family I have.

Jake eyes the cash, the photo, then Mildred.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
Please.

Jake counts the cash. Impressed, he coolly slips it and the
photo into his vest pocket and gets up to leave.

JAKE
All right, Miss Johnson. I'll find
your sister. Go home. Get some
sleep. I'll ring you up when I've
found her.

EXT. GRAND CANAL AND BATHING POOL - DAY

It's 1905. Mexican and Chinese gondoliers row the wealthy
along the waterways for Venice Of America's Grand Opening.

Flags and banners flutter in the breeze as CROWDS fill the
grandstands while a BRASS BAND plays.

A BEDUIN WOMAN blows kisses to the crowd from atop a CAMEL.

A CLOWN juggles flaming balls while balancing on a floating
block of ice.

Young Jake leans over the Bathing Pool railing trying to get
a better view of a STRONGMAN hoisting two MERMAIDS on his
shoulders.

Jake loses his balance and falls in.

He thrashes and kicks, but is pulled under; his cries for
help MUFFLED by mouthfuls of briny water.

From Jake's POV we see the clown and the Strongman.

A mermaid looks down and shoos away Jake's outstretched hand.

The crowd ROARS in delight.

A LAUGHING WOMAN in a gondola glances down and frowns as Jake
slips deeper beneath the water's surface.

DET. MASSEY (O.S.)
Vargas? Jake Vargas.

INT. CITY MORGUE HALLWAY - NIGHT

It's 1926. Jake sleeps upright on an hard wooden bench.

DET. MASSEY

Vargas? Hey, you all right?

JAKE

Yup. It's nice and quiet down here.
Just catching up on some shut-eye.

DET. MASSEY

In the goddamn morgue? You're lucky
you're not tossed on a slab and toe
tagged. What're you doing down
here?

He doesn't wait for an answer and starts walking down the
hall. Jake follows.

JAKE

I was hoping to take another look
at the Jane pulled out of the canal
this morning.

DET. MASSEY

You know I can't do that.

JAKE

Have you I.D.'d her yet?

DET. MASSEY

And you know I can't tell you that
either. This dame's really got
under your skin. Why you so
interested in one popped flapper?

JAKE

I'm just a wetback house dick. You
tell me. C'mon, detective. What
happened to professional courtesy?

DET. MASSEY

Oh, it's alive and well. Don't get
me wrong, I'd gladly share any
information I have with a fellow
flatfoot. But you're not a fellow
flatfoot - anymore. Plus, I got my
orders. Now, I'd love to bump gums
all day, but I got work to do.

He stops.

JAKE

Okay, okay. Detective. One last question. What's the word on the missing radio preacher?

DET. MASSEY

McPherson? There is no word. She doesn't show up on time for breakfast this morning - probably spent the night with her pins in the air - and her overbearing sister has the commissioner and every reporter this side of Reno up all our asses. It's not like we have actual crimes to solve. Who's asking?

JAKE

One overbearing sister.

Det. Massey grabs Jake by the arm. He looks back down the hallway toward the morgue.

DET. MASSEY

What angle you working, Vargas?

JAKE

Just trying to earn my retainer and do my due diligence.

He pulls out the photo and shows to the detective.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Here's a face to go with the famous voice. If you find her, do me a favor and drop me a dime-

He slips the photo back in his pocket and pulls out a wad of cash and waves it in the air.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'll make it worth your while.

Det. Massey watches him, starts for his office door, glances back toward the morgue, then hurries into the office.

INT. TEMPLE OF ANGELS CHURCH & MISSION - DAY

The church is a large austere auditorium with a stage. A giant satin cross is stitched into a black curtain backdrop. It's a bigger version of Aimee's cross.

Jake stands in a back doorway watching Roy, the announcer, run cable to a microphone off to the side of the stage.

ROY

Excuse me. We're not open.

Jake smiles and strides down the aisle toward the announcer.

ROY (CONT'D)

You'll have to come back later.

JAKE

Isn't this a church? Aren't churches always open?

ROY

Yes, of course, but we don't usually open the doors to the public until we're ready to broadcast our service.

JAKE

I see. And if I was in need of spiritual guidance?

ROY

You'd have to make an appointment to see Sister Mildred.

JAKE

An appointment. What about Sister Aimee? Is she around?

ROY

Like I said, you'll need to make an appointment. With Sister Mildred.

JAKE

You didn't answer my question. Is Sister Aimee here?

Roy stops working.

ROY

You're not a parishioner are you.

Jake hands the man his card.

JAKE

No. I'm an investigator looking for Miss McPherson.

He studies the card before pocketing it.

ROY

Oh, I don't know anything about that.

JAKE

But you know Miss McPherson - you work with her, right?

ROY

Yes, I've been intimately involved with her show from the beginning.

JAKE

Show?

ROY

Show. Service. Her ministry. Whatever you want to call it. Yes. I helped her make the transition to radio.

JAKE

I see.

ROY

She's the most famous voice in America.

JAKE

I've heard. Can you tell me a bit about her?

ROY

My relationship. It's strictly professional.

JAKE

I didn't imply it wasn't. Should I have?

ROY

No. Not at all. I just want to make that clear.

JAKE

Sure. Is it like her to not come home after a show, er, 'service'?

ROY

I wouldn't know about that.

JAKE

No?

ROY
No. Why would I?

JAKE
I don't know, you work 'intimately'
with her. I figure you were close.
Professionally speaking.

The man leans in close to Jake.

ROY
(in a low voice)
Listen, Aimee needs a strong male
role model in her life. Someone she
can lean on for moral support.
She's had her fair share of
hardships. Divorced twice. Left to
fend for herself. She's a beautiful
young woman and her passion- taken
advantage of by base men.
(pause)
I've been there for her.

He smiles at Jake.

JAKE
I see. So, is it like her to not
come home after a service?

The smile disappears.

ROY
Like I said, I wouldn't know
anything about that. Good day,
Mister Vargas.

Jake turns and leaves.

ROY (CONT'D)
She has a gift you know. I'm
helping her share that gift with
the world.

EXT. PIER & GRAND PAVILION - DAY

It's 1905 and the PIER and GRAND PAVILION are under
construction. The massive work site swarms with workers.

Young Jake practices tying sailor's knots with an OLD MEXICAN
FISHERMAN as he watches lumber off-loaded from a steamer onto
horse drawn wagons.

DIEGO VARGAS, Jake's dad, oversees the unloading.

He sees Jake and waves. Jake waves back, proudly showing off his knot.

Abbot Kinney and a group of INVESTORS pull up in a Pope-Hartford convertible.

ABBOT KINNEY

Gentlemen, feast your eyes on the centerpiece of Venice of America! When it's completed this grand pavilion will be the heart of our western outpost in democracy. It will be a wellspring of artistic renaissance, a showcase for the arts and a beacon of cultural enlightenment to these rugged, western shores!

INVESTOR 1

It's magnificent, Mr. Kinney.

INVESTOR 2

Will it be completed on time for the grand opening?

ABBOT KINNEY

Aye, it'll be completed on time.

He picks up young Jake and sets him in the driver seat.

ABBOT KINNEY (CONT'D)

I've got the best foreman and crew this side of the Rockies. Don't I, Spanky?

Jake beams and waves to his father.

JAKE

My papa built the great Palacio Postal, the pride of Mexico City.

Diego waves back.

ABBOT KINNEY

(to the investors)

For the great Boari, no less. Gentlemen, come, come. Let me show you the pavilion.

He grabs the boy's hand and sets off briskly toward the towering wooden expanse.

ABBOT KINNEY (CONT'D)
 Did I tell you we'll have a
 floating hotel docked alongside?
 It'll be magnificent-

INT. GRAND PAVILION - DAY

Abbot continues his tour of the partially completed grand hall. He absently flips a SILVER DOLLAR as he talks.

ABBOT KINNEY
 And it was this very spot - the
 sand dune beneath our feet - that I
 first had my vision for this
 cultural mecca.

INVESTOR 1
 Is that the fabled coin you won the
 land with?

ABBOT KINNEY
 Indeed it is. Indeed it is.

Abbot flips it high in the air with theatrical flair.

ABBOT KINNEY (CONT'D)
 The Fates smile on the dreamers, my
 friends.

Abbot throws open double doors and the entourage gasps.

Shafts of light stream in from windows high above the partially built balcony onto a stage full of OVERSIZED PAPIER-MÂCHÉ HEADS of Circus Clowns, Pirates and Native Americans.

Young Jake is flabbergasted.

Abbot grins and pushes the boy toward the stage.

ARTHUR REESE, a dashing and keen young African American man in spattered overalls paints a smile on one of the Heads.

He speaks with a thick Cajun drawl.

ARTHUR REESE
 Ça c'est bon.
 (He sees Abbot)
 Mister Abbot, Cher!

ABBOT KINNEY
 The indomitable Arthur Reese-

ARTHUR REESE
The "Maharajah of Mardi Gras," at
your service, yeah.

He takes a theatrical bow.

ABBOT KINNEY
Gentlemen, I've brought Mister
Reese direct from New Orleans to
oversee our Grand Opening
celebration.

ARTHUR REESE
Laissez les bons temps rouler! A
grand celebration fit to share with
your grand kids.

Abbot flips his coin and smiles.

ABBOT KINNEY
Indeed.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. VENICE BOARDWALK - DAY

It's 1926. Jake shows Aimee's photo to a couple of sidewalk
vendors. Both shake their head.

He stops for a smoke, pensively stares at the pier and takes
a long draw from his cigarette.

A young DAY TRIPPER stops and eyes the pier as he pulls out a
pack of Luckies.

DAY TRIPPER
Hey mister, can I bum a light?

JAKE
Sure, kid.

Jake tosses him a box of matches.

DAY TRIPPER
Thanks.
(lights up and tosses the
match box back)
It's blue ribbon.

Jake doesn't follow.

DAY TRIPPER (CONT'D)

The pier and coaster. What do they call it? The Dippity Do?

JAKE

The Dippsy Doodle.

DAY TRIPPER

That's right. The Dippsy Doodle. That 'big dipper' is first rate all the way.

JAKE

I don't see the allure.

DAY TRIPPER

Well, you'd be the first. No Day Tripper comes to Venice and doesn't pay top dollar for a ride on the Doodle. They can't resist. Like a moth to a flame.

JAKE

Good thing I'm not a Day Tripper.

DAY TRIPPER

That's too bad for you.

Jake eyeballs the young tourist.

JAKE

What'd you say?

DAY TRIPPER

That's too bad for you, friend.

JAKE

No, you said 'like a moth to a flame.'

DAY TRIPPER

Yeah, what of it?

JAKE

Hey, thanks amigo.

Jake urgently puts out his butt and heads to the pier.

EXT. DIPPSY DOODLE - DAY

Jake snakes through the crowd to the front of the line at the roller coaster and shows Aimee's photo to the TICKET TAKER.

JAKE

Hey, pal. Have you seen this woman?

TICKET TAKER

Nope.

JAKE

Give it a good look. She would have come through last night.

TICKET TAKER

A lot of people came through here last night. Now, do you mind?

He takes tickets from a couple and ushers them through. Disappointed, Jake pockets the photo and turns to leave.

CARNY (O.C.)

I seen her.

Jake turns and pulls out the photo. A CARNY wipes grease from his hands and takes the photo.

CARNY (CONT'D)

Yup. I seen her last night. String of pearls on the arm of that bruno.

JAKE

String of pearls?

CARNY

Yup. String of pearls. A real chippy, that one.

JAKE

Do you remember what time?

CARNY

Yup. Right after that dame preacher done got off her high horse.

JAKE

You sure?

CARNY

Whole dang lot of 'em come on over in mass. I's ready to dust out. No siree. Not last night. String of pearls beat the mass. Cock sure of dat.

JAKE

Do you remember what else she was wearing?

CARNY
No. Just another chippy flapper.

JAKE
A flapper?

CARNY
Chippy dat one. Yes siree.

Jake stuffs a \$2 bill in the carny's hand.

JAKE
Gracias, my friend. Gracias.

I/E. HOTEL ST. MARK - DAY

Jake hustles through the dapper crowd and ducks into a lobby phone booth.

JAKE
Hey, honey, get me Fairfax 7901...
yes, 7901-

DET. MASSEY (O.S.)
Homicide.

Two Tough Guys, EDDIE MULLER and GIGGLES CHARLOTTA, watch him from across the lobby.

JAKE
Massey. It's Jake Vargas. You I.D.
the Jane pulled from the canal yet?

DET. MASSEY (O.S.)
Still working on it. It takes a
little longer when you don't have a
face to work with.

JAKE
I got a face. It belongs to the
voice. Sister Aimee.

DET. MASSEY (O.S.)
What?

JAKE
You heard me. A carny working the
pier fingered her. He remembers the
pearl necklace and puts the holy
roller in a flapper dress. And get
this. She wasn't alone. She was
playing friendly with some tough
guy.

DET. MASSEY (O.S.)
Can you I.D. the 'tough guy'?

JAKE
You want me to do all your work for you? This is a gift of good will, consider it a professional courtesy- a little something something I can bank for later.

He hangs up and strides through the crowd, Eddie on his tail.

He elbows his way toward the entrance, past reporters and gawkers greeting DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS and MARY PICKFORD.

As he enters the revolving door, he sees the movie stars warmly hug- Mildred.

As he watches the trio withdraw into the bar Eddie tosses a wrapped BUNDLE into the revolving door before slipping into the crowd.

Annoyed hotel guests push on the glass as Jake stares at the parcel at his feet. A hotel concierge knocks on the door for him to move it along.

Jake kicks the bundle forward and casually picks it up, tucks it under his arm and makes his way up the street past the VENICE MINIATURE TRAIN full of beach-bound day trippers.

EXT. GRAND CANAL BATHING POOL BATH HOUSE - DAY

Jake finds an empty bench away from the crowds.

He unwraps the bundle revealing a PAIR OF DEAD BULLFROGS.

He pulls out a cigarette but forgets to light it as he contemplates the dead amphibians.

ARTHUR REESE (O.C.)
Well, well, Cher, what do we have here?

JAKE
Mister Reese. How nice to see you, Mister Councilman.

The charismatic old man holds out a 'TABER TRUCKING' MATCH BOOK to Jake. Kinney's flamboyant business partner still carries a hint of Cajun drawl.

ARTHUR REESE
Retired councilman, Spanky. May I?

Jake takes the matchbook and motions for the man to join him.

ARTHUR REESE (CONT'D)
 Thornton tells me you're looking
 into this horrible business at the
 canal.

Jake nods as he lights up and hands the matchbook back.

ARTHUR REESE (CONT'D)
 Keep it.

JAKE
 Thanks.

ARTHUR REESE
 Goin' fishing, no?

JAKE
 These? No. Someone's idea of a
 joke. How's business on the
 boardwalk?

He wraps up the frogs and sets them off to his side.

ARTHUR REESE
 Couldn't be better, my boy.
 Couldn't be better, yeah.
 (laughing)
 This ol' cajun done set himself up
 right.

JAKE
 You wear retirement better than I
 do, sir.

ARTHUR REESE
 Mais, couillon, no. There's only
 work. Put up the frogs and come
 join me. It's a beautiful day for a
 gondola ride.

EXT. GRAND CANAL - DAY

Jake and Arthur float in a gondola past idyllic bungalows.

Children play on manicured lawns while teens fish off a pier.
 A couple push a baby stroller across an arched bridge.

Arthur absently fingers a silver dollar.

JAKE
 Is that his?

ARTHUR REESE

The old man's? Why, yes, Yes it is.
It never gets old, Spanky.

JAKE

Sir?

ARTHUR REESE

Abbot's America. This here vision
was Abbot Kinney's obsession. His
triumph. And his cross to bear.

JAKE

I don't follow.

ARTHUR REESE

He gave his entire life to Venice
of America. To build this out of a
swampy lagoon- he poured his family
fortune, his life blood, into these
canals. Built this town in his
image, yeah.

(looks around)

Folks all thought he was crazy.

JAKE

He always said, 'a country of
exceptional ideals needs an ideally
exceptional city.'

The gondola rounds a corner into the swimming lagoon. It's
exceptionally carnival like- the roller coaster and arcades
line the boardwalk and cove.

ARTHUR REESE

This was Abbot's 'town square.' The
Grand Amphitheater stood there. The
Great Auditorium there, on da pier-

JAKE

I remember it- from when I was a
kid.

ARTHUR REESE

Mais, if! Two thousand people would
catch dem boat races and swimming
contests. Every weekend was
something different- exotic surfers
from Hawaii, poetry readings from
Boston, even Opera from the grand
halls of Vienna and Rome. Mais,
yeah. Abbot's dream to bring
culture to this wild west.

He breathes in the fresh air as he pulls out a fat cigar. Jake pulls out the matchbook and lights the old man's Cuban.

Arthur smiles and leans close to Jake.

ARTHUR REESE (CONT'D)

And he failed miserably. Oh sure. The crowds were big- at first. But come on, how much Opera can a man take, no?

JAKE

I thought the great storm wiped out the original boardwalk-

ARTHUR REESE

My boy, human nature killed what mother nature couldn't. Abbott was a dreamer. His Chautauqua? Shit. Venice lives today because of realists like me and Thornton. I bring in dem day trippers, tens of thousands each week. Poetry readings, fait chier. Fashion shows and bathing suits from Hollywood draws 'em in! If you can pay for it, I've got it, yeah. I turned the ocean front into a playground for the masses.

He takes a long satisfied draw of his cigar and sits back.

ARTHUR REESE (CONT'D)

Fuck culture.

He tosses the silver dollar to Jake.

ARTHUR REESE (CONT'D)

Keep it. I like you Spanky, let me put up a word of advice. Enjoy your retirement. This pétasse flapper- God rest her soul- is some nasty business. Bad for our image, no. Save the crime to dem boys in Los Angeles and go enjoy today's sunset, yeah- you never know which sunset will be your last.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. GRAND CANAL - DAY

It's 1905. Abbot, young Thornton and Jake are on horseback atop a sand dune. WAVES can be heard behind them.

Abbot and Jake watch intently as hundreds of workers dig the grand canal out of swampy creek bed.

Thornton is bored.

ABBOT KINNEY

And this will be the centerpiece to the entire city. The Grand Canal. It will be the western gateway to America... and rival the great Venice of Europe.

THORNTON

It's a bean field. Whippty-dip.

ABBOT KINNEY

Ah, a bean field today, but a renaissance city for tomorrow.

JAKE

Why is Venice so special?

ABBOT KINNEY

Venetians built a shining city full of art and music and culture - a city built on top of the water. An engineering feat to marvel the world.

JAKE

But why?

THORNTON

Because they could.

Abbot leans close to Jake, like he's sharing a secret.

ABBOT KINNEY

They built it to celebrate their culture- To celebrate beauty and life.

Jake thinks about this.

JAKE

Because that's what artists do.

Abbot grins.

ABBOT KINNEY

I suppose so, yes.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. VENICE BEACH - SUNSET

It's 1926. Jake stands defiantly against the setting sun.
He watches the surf pull his dead frogs into the undertow.

MILDRED (O.C.)

It's so beautiful.

Jake turns to see Mildred standing behind him.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

The ocean. This time of day.

JAKE

Is it? I don't see the draw.

The sun slips beneath the horizon.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I saw you today- at the St. Mark.
You keep glamorous friends.

MILDRED

Ms. Pickford is interested in
playing my sister in her next
picture.

JAKE

How exciting. And what good timing,
I mean with the press and all.

MILDRED

I beg your pardon?

JAKE

Show business makes strange
bedfellows-

MILDRED

You don't approve.

JAKE

My parents were Catholic. I was
raised on the virtue of humility.

MILDRED

Of course you were.

They stop at the edge of the boardwalk.

JAKE

And the business of saving souls?

MILDRED

Is still a business, Mister Vargas.
And something I happen to be very
good at.

JAKE

Someone's got to wear the big boy
pants-

MILDRED

Please. Spare me. We broadcast on
over five hundred radio stations,
coast to coast. Our weekly audience
is ten-fold what Chaplin pulls into
the nickelodeons. Do you know the
Vatican launched a radio show after
hearing ours?

JAKE

That's a lot of indulgences.

MILDRED

You're damn right it is. They hold
mass, but we hold a mass audience.

JAKE

So what's the end game?

MILDRED

The end game? I won't rest until
Aimee's added to DaVinci's Last
Supper.

JAKE

The thirteenth disciple?

MILDRED

The most beloved disciple.

He starts to say something, but Mildred freezes, staring at a
discarded newspaper on an overflowing trash can.

She picks up the paper, her hands trembling.

Jake takes it from her. The headline: SISTER AIMEE MURDERED

EXT. VENICE BOARDWALK - TWILIGHT

Jake leads Mildred by the arm through the festive crowds.

Nearby, a PAPER BOY hawks the same newspaper.

PAPER BOY

(shouting)

The most famous voice in America
murdered in Venice! Read all about
it! Sister Aimee found dead in the
Grand Canal!

He stops at Windward Avenue unsure of where to go next.

MILDRED

Did you know?

JAKE

I had a hunch. But I didn't want to
tell you until I had confirmation
from the LAPD. You've got to
believe me, this isn't how I wanted
to play this.

MILDRED

(a hoarse whisper)

How, Mr. Vargas? How did she die?

JAKE

Let me take you home, Miss Johnson.

MILDRED

No. I can't.

Partygoers spill out of a nearby cafe.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

How did my sister die, Mister
Vargas?

A street performer sets off firecrackers and Mildred jumps
out of her skin. Jake scans the crowd.

JAKE

Not here. Let's go somewhere quiet.
Safe.

INT. JAKE'S APARTMENT, THE WALDORF - NIGHT

Jake leads Mildred into his small, Spartan apartment. He's
not used to company.

JAKE

It's not much, but it's a safe port
in a storm. May I take your coat?

She doesn't resist the offer. He motions her to sit, but she
remains standing.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'd offer you something to eat, but
all I have is rye whiskey.

MILDRED

Yes, thank you.

Surprised, Jake pours them both stiff drinks.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

How did Aimee die, Mister Vargas?

JAKE

She was shot. And found in the
canal this morning.

MILDRED

This morning?

JAKE

Yes. But she was missing her-
identification. She was listed as a
Jane Doe.

MILDRED

I see.

She gulps down her glass of rye.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

Are there any suspects?

JAKE

No, not yet.

MILDRED

And you're certain it was her?

JAKE

Quite. Are you sure you don't want
me to take you home?

She looks intently at him, unsuccessfully fighting back
tears.

MILDRED

Mr. Vargas, I-

JAKE

It's Jake. But my friends call me Spanky.

MILDRED

Jake. I- I don't want to be alone right now.

She takes his glass from his hand and sets it down. Her fingers lingering on his hand.

He takes her in his arms.

They kiss.

The unrelenting undertow of passion is too hard to resist.

INT. JAKE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Mildred sits naked at the end of Jake's bed.

She's smoking a cigarette and watching the curtains sway back and forth in the gentle breeze.

Jake wakes up and kisses her tenderly on the shoulder.

JAKE

You're up early.

MILDRED

You were having a nightmare.

He kisses her neck. She ignores the sweet overture.

She runs her hand through her hair and turns abruptly.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

I have to go now. I have a funeral to plan.

JAKE

I will find out who did this and will make them pay.

She manages a weak smile and grabs for her blouse.

I/E. HOTEL ST. MARK - DAY

Jake watches the entrance to the hotel while getting his shoes shined.

Eddie and Giggles pulls up in a new LaSalle. Eddie hops out of the passenger seat and strides into the hotel.

Jake pays the shoe shine boy and follows Eddie inside.

Careful not to be seen, Jake spies Eddie chatting up the Concierge. He follows him toward the ballroom.

Eddie whistles at a cocktail waitress and strides into the service hallway. Jake makes sure he isn't seen, then heads into the same service hallway.

It's a short dead-end hallway that empties into the kitchen.

Jake stops at the kitchen door and peers through the window.

He sees Eddie chat up a SOUS-CHEF. There's no other doors, so he slips back to the casino to keep an eye on the hallway.

He waits for the thug.

And waits.

A WAITER emerges with a tray of food.

JAKE

Excuse me. I'm looking for a pal of mine. Dressed sharp as a whip. He had to use the head, but I think he went in the kitchen by mistake.

WAITER

No, sir. I just came from there and there's no one in there but staff.

JAKE

You don't say. Thanks.

Jake waits for him to leave then heads to the kitchen.

He looks through the window. No Eddie Muller. Puzzled, he pauses for a moment, then steps through the doors.

He scans the room. The only other doors are into a walk-in cooler and a pantry.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Good day, amigos. Well this certainly ain't the little boy's room. My apologies.

He opens the pantry door. Empty.

JAKE (CONT'D)
That's not the bathroom.

The stupefied kitchen staff watch as he helps himself to the cooler and opens that door. Empty.

JAKE (CONT'D)
And that's not it. Damn. Okay. How
does a guy find the head from here?

The sous-chef points back to the door Jake came in from.

EXT. HOTEL ST. MARK - DAY

Jake takes a seat back on his perch at the shoe shine stand.

The LaSalle still idles in front with Giggles behind the wheel reading the sporting news-

- And Eddie striding down the sidewalk from the beach munching on a churro.

He hops in the passenger seat and the pair drives off.

Puzzled, Jake traces Eddie's steps back toward the beach.

EXT. VENICE BOARDWALK - DAY

Jake looks both directions and decides to head toward the pier.

At the pier, he stops, unsure of what he's even looking for. He lights a cigarette, turns back and stops mid-stride.

Down on the beach, at the base of the pier, an OLD MEXICAN WOMAN sells homemade churros out of a big wicker basket.

EXT. BEACH AND UNDERSIDE OF PIER - DAY

Jake scrambles down the beach to the wooden timbers supporting the pier. The old Mexican woman squints in the bright sunshine as she watches Jake approach.

JAKE
(in Spanish)
Excuse me, ma'am. I'm looking for a
friend that may have come through
here. A gringo, this tall and in a
suit.

She shrugs her shoulders.

Jake gives her a dollar. She smiles and hands him a churro. She only has one tooth.

JAKE (CONT'D)
(in English)
Gracias. He would have been here
just a moment ago.

She shrugs again.

Jake looks around her, but sees nothing unusual. He pokes his head under the pier. Again, nothing out of the ordinary.

He tips his hat to the old woman and makes a big deal of taking a bite of her churro as he leaves.

At the boardwalk, he tosses the pastry in the trash.

EXT. BEACH AND UNDERSIDE OF PIER - NIGHT

Eddie and Giggles stand in the shadows under the pier at the water's edge. Giggles lights a cigarette sharing the lit match with Eddie.

They watch a SMALL SHRIMP BOAT, its running lights extinguished, approach the shore.

They make a point to both take a drag at the same time. TWO ORANGE LIGHTS stab through the shadows.

On the boat, TWO SMALL ORANGE PIN PRICKS OF LIGHT respond.

Eddie nods and Giggles wades into the surf to meet the boat as it beaches. He helps the CREW unload a dozen crates of bootleg Canadian whiskey.

Jake watches from the shadows of the pier.

At the far end of the pier's the foundation, a LIGHT pops on.

The sous-chef from the hotel appears in a DOORWAY hidden among the rocks. He nods to Eddie and disappears back into the secret passageway.

Giggles and the bootleggers haul the whiskey up the beach and through the doorway.

The last crate is unloaded, Eddie nods to Giggles, and the thug silently pushes the boat back out to sea.

The thugs hurry to the hidden doorway. Eddie nods to Giggles and disappears inside.

Giggles secures the door, piling rubbish in front of it to camouflage it.

He turns to grab more debris, but Jake blocks his way.

Jake hits him with a roundhouse punch square to the face, knocking him clean off his feet into the pile of junk.

JAKE

That's for the girl we pulled out
of the canal yesterday.

Jake hoists him by his lapels and steadies him.

Giggles spits out a tooth.

GIGGLES

I didn't have nothing to do with
that.

JAKE

Yeah? Then who did?

He pats him down, pulling out a switch blade.

GIGGLES

Who wants to know? Hey, that's
mine.

JAKE

Hey pal, I'm asking the questions.
What's your name?

GIGGLES

Giggles.

JAKE

Giggles? Funny name for a guy in
your line of work.

GIGGLES

I like a good laugh. I'm a real cut
up.

He grabs for the knife, but Jake cold cocks him with it.

JAKE

You ain't laughing now.

GIGGLES

You ain't that funny.

JAKE

What do you know about the girl?

GIGGLES

Like I said, I didn't have nothing to do with that.

JAKE

Then who did?

Giggles starts laughing.

JAKE (CONT'D)

What?

GIGGLES

Now you're funny.

Jake punches him in the face again.

GIGGLES (CONT'D)

What the fuck?!

JAKE

I'm glad I amuse you, Chuckles. I'm in no hurry, I can give you the same punch line all night long.

Giggles pulls out another bloody tooth.

GIGGLES

The name's Giggles.

JAKE

The girl?

GIGGLES

I swear I didn't have nothing to do with the girl!

Jake squares back to punch him again.

GIGGLES (CONT'D)

Okay, okay. You're a funny man. A very funny man. The Swede. Talk to The Swede.

Jake, still holding Giggles by the lapels, yanks the trash from the entrance, swings open the door and drags him into the tunnel.

INT. HOTEL ST. MARK KITCHEN PANTRY - NIGHT

Eddie and the Sous-chef are finishing stacking crates of whiskey behind a shelf of canned goods. The back wall of the pantry swings open, revealing the hidden doorway.

EDDIE

Hey, I thought I told you to-

He stops as he sees Giggles pushed into the room by Jake.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

What the hell is this?

The Sous-chef turns to run. Jake pulls out the switchblade.

JAKE

Not one move, any of you. Keep your palms in the air where I can see 'em.

He picks up a bottle of Canadian whiskey.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Funny, I always wondered how you guys were bootlegging hooch to the boardwalk joints.

He closes the hidden door, never taking his eyes of Eddie.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Kinney's old vanity tunnels. I thought they were filled in the day the first dame sauntered onto the beach in a jersey swimsuit. I'm impressed.

EDDIE

What do you want?

JAKE

I want The Swede.

Not the answer Eddie was expecting.

EDDIE

You want The Swede?

Giggles starts laughing.

GIGGLES

He's a funny man, Eddie.

EDDIE

I can't help you. The Swede ain't on our payroll.

JAKE

Who you work for? Tony Cornero?

EDDIE

Tony the Hat? Maybe we are. Maybe we aren't. Who wants to know?

GIGGLES

He asks the questions, Eddie.

EDDIE

(annoyed)

Shut up, you maroon.

GIGGLES

All I'm saying is, a question'll cost you a tooth.

He grins revealing his two missing teeth.

Jake slowly maneuvers toward the door to the kitchen.

JAKE

I don't give a canal rat's ass about this operation you're running. My business is with The Swede.

Eddie shrugs his shoulders.

EDDIE

Like I said-

JAKE

Just tell The Swede Spanky's looking for him. And thank your boss for the whiskey. Using the tunnels is brilliant.

Jake pockets the bottle of whiskey and leaves.

EXT. PIER & GRAND AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

It's 1905 and stormy. MASSIVE WAVES pound the nearly completed pier complex.

Timbers CREAK AND GROAN from the stress.

Driving wind whips a banner strung across the Auditorium. It reads: VENICE OF AMERICA GRAND OPENING 4TH OF JULY

Diego loads boxes of tools into the back of a wagon and tosses Jake on like a sack of potatoes.

He loads a last toolbox as a panicked WORKER runs up.

WORKER

Señor Vargas! Señor Vargas! There's
been an accident in the auditorium!

Diego turns to Jake.

DIEGO

(shouting over the wind)
You stay here. I'll be right back!

Jake watches the men run toward the Auditorium as another
huge wave crashes over the structure.

The pier lurches and both men are knocked down.

Diego quickly helps the worker up, but the scared man runs
toward the shore.

Diego scrambles inside.

The wind shreds the banner, ripping it from its moorings.

Jake fearfully watches another huge wave crash over the pier.

A timber support snaps and the whole structure lurches toward
the churning surf.

JAKE

Papa!!

A fierce wave snaps another timber.

There's a GROAN and the Auditorium slips further into the
raging sea.

EXT. VENICE BEACH - DAY

It's 1926. Sea Gulls squawk and sunshine dances on the surf.

Jake watches from the Boardwalk as hundreds from The Temple
Of Angels line the beach to pay respects to Sister Aimee.

They head toward a makeshift stage that's been erected at the
end of Windward Ave.

A few rows of folding chairs have been hastily placed in
front of the stage. Mildred, dressed in black, sits in front.

A simple casket, surrounded by potted palms, is front and
center. On either side, a Gospel choir hums AMAZING GRACE
while Roy works a radio mic.

ROY

We want to thank our sponsor,
Pacific All Risk Insurance, for
giving us the opportunity to
broadcast live, coast to coast, to
mourn the passing of a true saint,
Sister Aimee, but more importantly
to celebrate her godly life, a life
that inspired so many.

(pauses, choking up)

For she led a truly holy and
righteous life showing us the path
to salvation by fighting against
all the sins of the flesh. Sins
pedaled by Satan himself right here
on the Venice boardwalk. She was
viciously martyred for her faith,
like Joan of Arc before her, for
speaking out against insobriety and
drunkenness, adultery and the
carnal sins of the flesh, and the
corruption of our moral fiber-

Jake, hearing enough, turns and leaves.

EXT. RED CAR TROLLY - DAY

Jake hops on a crowded Red Car. The trolley is standing room
only and he grabs the last available hand rail.

PASSENGER

That's too bad about Venice.

JAKE

What're you talking about?

PASSENGER

Don't you read the papers? They're
ripping out the miniature rail.

JAKE

Since when?

PASSENGER

Since today. Take a look.

He shows Jake the front page photo in paper.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)

My kids practically grew up on that
train. What's a trip to the beach
without the little Venice railway?

JAKE
I wonder why?

PASSENGER
Gotta make way for the new king of
the road, is why.

On cue, a Ford Model T HONKS as it zips past the trolly-
narrowly missing an oncoming truck.

JAKE
Progress.

PASSENGER
You got that right. It's a damn
shame. Thank God they'd never do
that with these Red Cars- you'd
have to be crazy to rip out the
largest rail system in the world.

Jake sees his stop.

JAKE
Yeah, I'd miss getting elbowed and
coughed on by strangers.

The trolly stops in front of the LA Police Department and
Jake hops off.

INT. DETECTIVE'S SQUAD ROOM - DAY

The city's finest work at cramped wooden desks through a haze
of cigarette smoke and cynicism. Jake walks in, scans the
room and sees Det. Belcheck eyes deep in paperwork.

JAKE
Hey, is your partner around?

Annoyed at the interruption, Belcheck points toward a room
with the blinds drawn shut.

DET. BELCHECK
Take a ticket and check your hat.
It'll be awhile.

Jake looks at the office. He can hear MUFFLED YELLING.

DET. BELCHECK (CONT'D)
You picked a hell of a day for a
social visit. Massey's getting
reamed a new asshole.
(MORE)

DET. BELCHECK (CONT'D)
He's sure as hell going to want to use it to shit on the next poor sap that goes through that door.

JAKE
This ain't a social call. Maybe you can help me out.

Really annoyed now, Det. Belcheck makes a show of dropping his heavy file on the desk.

DET. BELCHECK
What can I do for you, *detective*?

JAKE
What do you got on a bruno called The Swede?

DET. BELCHECK
The Swede? Never heard of him. Why? What do you got?

JAKE
I'm not sure. His name came up last night. Let's just say I don't trust anyone that sunburns easily. Thought I'd do a little homework on the guy-

The office door flies open and Det. Massey storms out. Thornton Kinney, the POLICE CHIEF and WILLIAM CONELLI, the City Council President, follow him out.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Who's the suit with Kinney?

DET. BELCHECK
Conelli. The new City Council president. Now, do you mind?

JAKE
Willy Conelli? No shit.

DET. MASSEY
Hey, Belcheck. Get your two bit ass in here.

As Thornton leaves the squad room with the Chief, he makes eye contact with Jake, refusing to acknowledge him.

Belcheck gets up, closes his file and tosses it onto a stack on the edge of his desk.

DET. BELCHECK
(sarcastically)
Well, this visit has been a goddamn
pleasure, *señor*. Forgive me if I
don't show you to the door.

He disappears into Massey's office, the door slamming behind him.

Jake grabs his hat, then thinks twice about leaving.

He nonchalantly looks around, then casually thumbs through the stack of files on Belcheck's desk. He stops at a thick, dog-eared file labeled: CORNERO, ANTHONY (AKA TONY THE HAT).

He takes the file with him into the hallway and sits on a bench to leaf through it.

He flips through a dozen pages then stops cold in his tracks.

JAKE
Well, well, what do we have here?

He puts the page aside, flips through a few more, and stops at another report and reads it.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Never heard of him, my ass.

He looks around, pockets the pages, and leaves the file on the bench.

He flags down a UNIFORMED OFFICER pushing a file cart.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Officer. Excuse me. I saw one of
your detectives- Belcheck, I
believe, leave a file here on this
bench. I'm not sure if it's
important or not, but it looks
official and I wanted to make sure
it's not left here for just anyone
to find.

He puts on his sunglasses, smiles at the officer, and leaves.

I/E. LOBBY OF POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Jake giddily bounds down the steps of the main staircase, rounds a corner, and practically knocks over Thornton Kinney.

JAKE
Thornton! My apologies.

THORNTON
Hello, Jake.

JAKE
I should watch where I'm going.

THORNTON
Yes, you should.

Jake ignores the insult and walks with Thornton.

JAKE
My, my, just look at us. When we
were kids off fishing every day,
would you ever imagine where life
would take us?

THORNTON
Indeed.

JAKE
Amigo, we had it all figured out.
Catch a fish and eat like kings. We
had no worries.

THORNTON
The ignorance of childhood.

JAKE
Ignorance? No way. The
righteousness of childhood. We were
disciples of optimism. We lived in
the moment. We were kings.

THORNTON
I suppose there is some virtue to a
child's optimism. Lord knows, my
father's eternal optimism cast a
long shadow.

They stop at the foot of the steps outside. Jake pulls out a
cigarette and offers one to Thornton. He declines.

JAKE
That's a funny way to put it.

Jake searches his pockets for a light.

THORNTON
So what's your point, Jake?

Thornton pulls out a matchbook and tosses it to Jake.

JAKE

Thanks.

THORNTON

Keep it.

Jake doesn't notice its another "Taber Trucking" matchbook cover.

JAKE

My point is this. Who would have thought when we were up to our elbows in fish guts and mud, that you'd be hobnobbing with the City Council president and I'd be tracking down the killer of the most famous voice in America.

A Packard Convertible Sedan pulls up and the driver opens the passenger door for Thornton.

THORNTON

Jake. Give it a rest. Let the police do their jobs. Now, do you need a ride back to Venice?

JAKE

Thanks, but no. I prefer getting elbowed and coughed on.

(pauses)

Hey, what's this I hear about the rail line getting ripped out? The Old Man's got to be rolling in his grave-

THORNTON

My father was a relic of the past. Leave well enough alone, will you?

He nods to the driver and they pull off into traffic.

JAKE

(to himself)

Just fishing, amigo.

INT. PETE'S GRILL & PUBLIC HOUSE - NIGHT

Jake stares at the bottom of an empty high ball glass.

PETE

Another one, Spanky?

JAKE

Yessir. Answer me this, what possible reason would my dear friend, Mister born-with-a-silver-spoon-in-his-mouth Thornton Oswald Kinney and the very tony city council president have for meeting in some stooge detective's office?

PETE

Willy Conelli? I hear he's a real butter and egg man.

Jake laughs as Pete refills his glass.

JAKE

What are you, a hundred? 'Butter and egg man.' Jeez.

Pete returns the whiskey bottle to its hidden compartment.

PETE

Yeah, yeah. Laugh it up, but as long as Conelli and his South Broadway boys turn their back on the bootlegging along the boardwalk, he's got my vote. I've got a family to feed.

Jake nods, then pulls the police report from his vest pocket.

JAKE

Hey, you know a bruno named The Swede?

Pete's smile hardens. He looks around and leans in.

PETE

Do I know The Swede? No. Do I know of him? Yeah, sure, I do. And I want to keep it that way, see.

Jake puts down the report.

JAKE

Says here he's Tony The Hat's button man. What'd you know about that?

Pete's smile hardens as he takes a step back.

JAKE (CONT'D)

C'mon, Pete. It's me. You know I get amnesia once I walk out the door.

PETE

I hear he clipped those two Beverly Hills bluenoses. The ones caught putting the Chinese squeeze on Tony—that casino he runs out of the back room at The Cadillac.

JAKE

Those two studio accountants?

Pete nods.

PETE

Capped 'em both as they were leaving Chaplin's charity gala.

JAKE

I worked that case. A dead end. A hundred witnesses and nobody saw a thing.

Pete shrugs his shoulders. Jake pulls a mug shot of Tony from the file.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Why they call him The Hat?

PETE

'Cause if he gives you the high hat, you're a dead man.
(leans in close)
It's none of my business, but no good business comes from sticking your nose in The Swede's business.

EXT. MILDRED'S BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Neat bungalows with well trimmed yards, white picket fences and flowering hibiscus line the Aldebaran Canal.

Jake watches Mildred's bungalow from the edge of the nearby Rialto Street bridge.

Still dressed in black, she hugs mourners as they leave and head to the dock to waiting gondolas.

She retreats inside and Jake notices the GLOW OF A CIGARETTE pierce the darkness of the alley behind the bungalow.

He steps forward to get a better look and sinks into a small patch of BLACK, STICKY TAR.

He wipes his shoe on the grass, looks back to the alley, and sees the light extinguished.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND BUNGALOW - NIGHT

Jake carefully approaches a GARDENING SHED behind the house. It's partially hidden by overflowing hibiscus. From here, he can see Mildred cleaning up in her kitchen.

He spots a half dozen CIGARETTE BUTTS ground in the dirt.

A dog BARKS in the distance.

He glances in the darkened window of the shed. Nothing.

He prowls to the front of the shed and sees it's locked.

He creeps to the edge of the shed, pausing to listen. He hears nothing.

He peers around the corner of the shed. Nothing.

He carefully steps forward... CLICK. A gun is cocked.

JAKE
Okay, easy now.

Jake slowly raises his hands up.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I'm going to slowly turn around.
Nice and easy, see.

He turns to see a revolver pointed inches from his face.

The Swede stands an arm's length away, silhouetted in the light from the kitchen window.

THE SWEDE
Not one more inch or I blow
moonlight straight through your
forehead.

JAKE
Not one inch, amigo, see.

THE SWEDE
I ain't your friend, pal. You
packin' iron?

Jake shakes his head.

THE SWEDE (CONT'D)
Open your coat, so I can see. Nice
and slow like.

Jake slowly opens his suit coat. No shoulder holster.

JAKE
I'm unarmed, so how about you put
down the bean-shooter, and we talk.

THE SWEDE
I ain't in the mood for flapping my
lips.

He leans in closer with the gun.

THE SWEDE (CONT'D)
You a cop?

Jake shakes his head.

JAKE
I'm a private investigator. My
ticket's in my left vest pocket.

The Swede reaches in, and pulls out Jake's P.I. license.

THE SWEDE
Okay Dick Tracy, so you're a real
shamus. Now, slowly back up and
keep your hands up high.

Jake starts slowly walking backwards towards the alley.

THE SWEDE (CONT'D)
Why you snooping on the church
lady?

JAKE
I'm not. Let's say I came to pay my
respects.

The Swede looses his temper and pushes Jake up against the
shed wall, shoving the gun barrel up one of his nostrils.

THE SWEDE
Pay your respects? Listen pal, I
ain't in no mood for games.

JAKE

No games! No games. She's my client. She hired me to find The Swede. He killed her sister.

Surprised, The Swede steps away dropping his gun to his side.

THE SWEDE

Well, you found him. But I didn't kill her sister.

Without thought, Jake cold-cocks him square in the face.

The Swede just stands there, blank as slate.

Jake punches him again. This time, dropping him like a bag of wet cement.

DIP TO BLACK

INT. MILDRED'S GARDEN SHED - NIGHT

The Swede wakes up staring at a bare light bulb dangling from the dusty ceiling. His eye is swollen shut and he's bound to an old chair with clothes line.

Jake stands over him, palming the revolver in one hand and a shovel in the other.

The Swede tugs on his ropes.

JAKE

Give me a reason why I shouldn't pop you right now.

THE SWEDE

I didn't kill the dame.

Jake whacks him in the knees with the shovel.

The Swede groans in pain.

THE SWEDE (CONT'D)

I said I didn't kill the girl!

JAKE

That's for shoving a gun up my nose.

Jake pulls up an old chair and sits in front of the thug.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'm not going to shoot you - unless it's in self defense. Then, I'll pop you like a cheap stick of gum. Now, it's my turn to ask questions, see. And we're gonna' sit here, all civilized and gentlemen like, and you're going to tell me about Aimee. All right, amigo?

THE SWEDE

I ain't your amigo, you wetback fuck.

Jake stands up and coolly whacks him with the shovel again.

JAKE

I said, we're going to do this 'all civilized and gentlemen like.'
Fijate?

The Swede glares at him through his pain.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'll take that as a yes. I got your backstory- you're Tony The Hat's button man. So how 'bout we start with the night she died.

THE SWEDE

I'm telling you, you got it wrong.

JAKE

(sarcastically)
Yeah, yeah, you didn't kill America's sweetheart.

THE SWEDE

I didn't.

JAKE

Then who did?

THE SWEDE

Nobody. She's still alive.

JAKE

You expect me to believe that? I fished her out of the canal myself.

He stands up and hoists the shovel.

THE SWEDE

Aimee is still alive. At least she was this morning, when I left her in Ensenada to come here.

JAKE

This morning?

The Swede nods.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Then who's sleeping in her casket?

THE SWEDE

Listen, pal. I thought you were one of Tony's boys. I was supposed to bump her after the pictures were released, but I couldn't.

JAKE

You got pictures?

THE SWEDE

Yeah, pictures. A romp in Mexico with a night of Tequila and locoweed, her with her gams pushing the headboard. You know, compromising photographs.

JAKE

Where are they?

THE SWEDE

Safe.

JAKE

Where?

THE SWEDE

You'd have to drag me through Oakwood to find out, pal. No way.

Jake scratches the stubble on his chin.

JAKE

What's the angle? Why kill her?

THE SWEDE

I couldn't go through with it. Not this dish. Don't get me wrong, I got no problem offing a Jane. But not this one. She's different. I'm in love with her, see. And now I'm a dead man.

JAKE

Why'd you come back then?

THE SWEDE

To get word to the sister that she's all right. I gave her my word.

JAKE

You really expect me to believe that-

MILDRED (O.C.)

My sister is alive?

Surprised, Jake turns. Mildred stands in the shed doorway.

JAKE

Mildred. How much did you- I mean, this bruno can't be trusted.

He leads her out of the shed into the yard.

MILDRED

No, my sister is alive.

JAKE

That guy deserves to fry for all the terrible things he's done. He killed Aimee.

MILDRED

Aimee is alive.

JAKE

We can't prove that and it's best we-

MILDRED

No. Listen to me. I'm telling you, she's alive! I just received a phone call from the police. A woman claiming to be Aimee was just picked up at the Mexican border.

THE SWEDE

That can't be. That wasn't our plan. I'm supposed to meet Aimee back in Ensenada tomorrow. We're gonna elope-

JAKE

Shut up. You can tell it to Sweeney for all I care.

THE SWEDE

She's not supposed to leave unless
I don't show up tomorrow.

JAKE

I said shut your pie hole.

Jake points the shovel at him, then turns back to Mildred.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Now listen, I've got a friend in
San Diego. A cop.

JAKE (CONT'D)

You and I are going to get on
the blower with him and we're
going to figure this out.

THE SWEDE (O.C.)

I'm telling you, something is
wrong. You got to let me go.
I got to get back to Aimee.
She's in troub--

There's a BANG... BANG, BANG.

Jake instinctively throws Mildred to the ground, blanketing
her with his body.

FOOTSTEPS run down the alley. A dog starts BARKING.

JAKE

You okay?

Scared, Mildred nods.

Jake hops to one knee, pulling the gun out of his pocket.

The Swede, still bound to the chair, lays on his side in a
growing pool of blood. His brains splattered all over the
wall opposite the shattered window pane.

Jake runs into the alley catching the SILHOUETTE of a man
running away.

He chases him.

The man rounds a corner and when Jake gets there, he's gone.

Spent, Jake grabs his knees for air.

Behind him, TIRES SQUEAL.

He turns to see a Model T race down the alley in the opposite
direction.

He returns to Mildred's house. She's nowhere to be seen.

EXT. PETE'S GRILL & PUBLIC HOUSE - MORNING

A kid hawks the morning paper. The headline reads: SISTER AIMEE ALIVE! HARROWING ESCAPE FROM MEXICAN KIDNAPPERS!

Above the fold, a PHOTO of Aimee "recovering" in a hospital room, along with Mildred and two smiling police officers.

Jake grabs the paper and heads inside.

EXT. IRVING TABOR'S BUNGALOW - DAY

The bungalow is more mansion than bungalow. Its flowering shrubs, manicured lawn and white picket fence protect it from the surrounding poverty of Oakwood row houses.

Jake crosses the street and grabs hold of the WHITEWASHED GATE. He glances around then helps himself into the yard.

He stops and runs his hand along an out of place VERTICAL PLANK that runs straight up the entire length of the house.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. ABBOT KINNEY'S BUNGALOW - DAY

It's 1905 and the SAME BUNGALOW - minus the vertical plank - sits along a beautiful canal.

Young Jake stands at the WHITEWASH GATE, small suitcase in one hand, Abbot Kinney's hand in the other.

Young Irving and Thornton race out the door with fishing poles.

ABBOT KINNEY

Boys, come here. Thornton, I'd like you to meet our new guest. He'll be staying with us.

(to Jake)

This is your new home. You're family now.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. ABBOT KINNEY'S BUNGALOW - DAY

It's 1910. Teenage Jake throws the WHITEWASH GATE open as Thornton and Irving pile into Abbot's Maxwell convertible.

JAKE

You sure it's okay to drive this?

THORNTON

What the old man doesn't know,
won't kill him. C'mon!

JAKE

I mean, is it okay for you to drive
this?

THORNTON

C'mon. Hop in. It's easier than
riding a horse.

Irving's behind Thornton, shakes his head, mouthing "no way."

JAKE

Irving's been driving since his
foot could reach the pedal, but you-

THORNTON

-I've been watching him.

Again, Irving mouths, "nope," as Jake climbs in. Thornton
tries turning it on, but is met with a GRINDING sound.

IRVING

Remember to use the clutch-

The car lurches and GRINDS.

IRVING (CONT'D)

No, that's the clutch over there-

JAKE

This isn't such a good idea.

THORNTON

Don't be a wet blanket, Spanky-

He gets the car started.

ABBOT KINNEY (O.C.)

Hey, what in Sam Hill?

The boys look up to see Kinney getting off his horse.

ABBOT KINNEY (CONT'D)

Get off that thing now.

Jake and Irving comply, but Thornton is defiant.

THORNTON

No way, Pops. Irving's giving me lessons, I can drive this.

Irving and Jake mouth "no" to Abbot.

ABBOT KINNEY

Irving I trust. You, not so much. Get off that now, before you hurt someone--

Thornton ignores him, guns the engine; it BACKFIRES, scaring Abbot's horse. It BUCKS, KICKING free from it's reigns-

Thornton panics, knocks the car into neutral. It rolls toward the horse, Abbot stuck between them.

Jake and Irving lunge forward, pushing Abbot to safety as car and horse collide.

Irving leaps in the car, kills the engine and locks the brake.

Jake helps Abbot up as Thornton runs off into the house.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. GRAND CANAL BATHING POOL - DAY

It's 1905. Young Jake gasps for air as he slips under the placid water of the bathing pool.

The rich woman in the gondola stares down at him, frowning.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. ABBOT KINNEY'S BUNGALOW

It's 1910. Jake and Irving hold the horse down, while Abbot aims his rifle at it. The frightened horse WHINNY'S in pain.

Abbot hesitates. Jake takes the rifle from him.

JAKE

She knows you love her, sir.

Jake shoots the horse.

EXT. PIER & GRAND PAVILION - NIGHT

It's 1905. The storm rages, ripping pieces of the pier away. A huge wave crashes over the Grand Auditorium.

FLASH CUT TO:

I/E. IRVING TABOR'S BUNGALOW - DAY

It's 1926. Jake's still in the yard, still lost in thought.

He feels a tug on his jacket and sees the smiling face of a SMALL AFRICAN AMERICAN BOY, barefoot and in dirty overalls.

SMALL BOY

Hey, mister. You lost?

JAKE

Ah, no. Just paying a visit to a friend.

SMALL BOY

You a friend of Mister Tabor's?

JAKE

Who's asking?

SMALL BOY

I's am. Mister Tabor pays me to guard the place.

(leans in closer)

You know, this is *the* Abbot Kinney house. Sure is.

(leans back)

Now, are you a friend of Mister Tabor's or ain't you?

JAKE

Yes. I am.

SMALL BOY

You ain't colored. I thought you was lost. Fancy folk come to Oakwood, they either lost or up to no good.

JAKE

Well, I'm not lost, I'm not that fancy, but I am up to good. So what's that make me?

The boy smiles.

SMALL BOY

You already said it. You's a friend
of Mister Tabor!

Jake pulls a quarter from his pocket and hands it to the boy.

JAKE

Is Mister Tabor home?

SMALL BOY

He sure is. I'll go fetch him. Who
should I say is a callin'?

JAKE

Spanky. Spanky Vargas.

The boy disappears inside and Jake walks back to the fence
and looks down the street; nothing but poverty and squalor.

IRVING (O.C.)

Well, son of a bitch, look what the
cat dragged in!

Jake turns around, a big smile on his face.

JAKE

Hello, Irv.

He sticks his hand out, but IRVING TABOR ignores it and gives
him a bear hug.

IRVING

Spanky, my friend! I haven't seen
you forever. What's it been?

JAKE

Six years. Since-

IRVING

Abbot's funeral. That's right. Look
at us. Who would have thought?

Jake smiles. Irving ushers him inside into his study.

JAKE

Yes, indeed, and still making the
old man proud-

IRVING

And being a thorn in Thornton's fat
backside. You wet blanket.

JAKE

Always.

(changing the subject)

And look at you! The house looks great.

IRVING

You're damn straight it does. No way I was going to let some damn ofay-covenant-red-liners kick me out of *this* house. The Old Man would be rolling in his grave.

JAKE

I'm glad he left it to you. Although, it did raise some eyebrows. Mostly Thornton's!

The two men laugh.

Irving pulls out a pair of cigars from a humidor on his desk and hands one to Jake.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Seriously Irving, you do know, at the time there was nothing I could do. I mean, publicly.

After Irving lights his own, he tosses Jake a Tabor Trucking matchbook.

IRVING

I know, I know. That's water under the bridge. Comes with the tin star.

Jake lights up, hands the matchbook back, but Irving declines.

IRVING (CONT'D)

No, keep it. But I appreciate you saying that. Speaking of that, what happened to you after the city merger?

JAKE

I'm working as a private dick now. Turns out the good city of angels has no place for a wet-back detective with 'Chief of Police' on his resume.

IRVING

Stupid ofays. A house can be cut in half and set to a new foundation. Not a lifetime of experience. Their loss. What brings you to Oakwood? You on the clock or you just here for a beat session?

JAKE

A little of both, I guess. Tony Cornero's button man got plugged last night.

IRVING

Tony the Hat's? Shit.

JAKE

I was there- right before he died, he said something that's been gnawing at me and I thought maybe you could help.

Irving holds up both his hands.

IRVING

Spanky, I don't know no gangsters.

JAKE

I know that. Maybe it's nothing, but I asked the bruno about some photographs he had and he told me, quote, 'you couldn't drag me through Oakwood to give 'em up.'

IRVING

That's odd.

JAKE

I know, right? Why Oakwood?

IRVING

Why not? White folks terrified to come this side of the tracks unless they're looking to score a little locoweed.

JAKE

Exactly. But that's not exactly Tony Cornero's racket, or is it?

IRVING

If a pin stripe was operating out of Oakwood, I'd know about it.

(MORE)

IRVING (CONT'D)
Hell, all of Oakwood would know
about it.

JAKE
Well, if you hear anything drop me
a dime. I'd appreciate it.

He hands Irving his card.

Irving walks with Jake back to the door. Jake pauses in the hallway entrance and runs his hand along a piece of VERTICAL WOOD MOLDING running up the middle of the wall.

JAKE (CONT'D)
You got rocks, my friend. Cutting a
house in two and moving it here.
Brilliant.

IRVING
(laughs)
Funny thing is, if those bluenoses
didn't force me to move the house,
I never would have started Tabor
Construction. Best thing that ever
happened to me. Just landed the
biggest deal of my life.

JAKE
That's great, Irv. Congratulations.
I'm really happy for you. The Old
Man'd be proud.

IRVING
He always was, Spanky. He always
was.

Jake stops on the porch.

JAKE
If you hear anything. Drop a dime.
It's important.

Irving nods. Jake smiles, turns and leaves.

Irving watches, only closing the door after Jake is out of his yard, then tosses the business card.

INT. CITY MORGUE - DAY

The Medical Examiner probes what's left of a cadaver. Jake enters and is stopped in his tracks by the foul stench.

JAKE

Geez. Doc. Doesn't the smell get to you?

MEDICAL EXAMINER

(without looking up)

I coat the inside of my mask with Vick's menthol. There's some on the tray over there. I swear by it.

Jake grabs a hand full of petroleum jelly and holds his hand up in front of his face.

The doctor continues working.

MEDICAL EXAMINER (CONT'D)

What can I do for you?

Jake continues holding his hand up to his face as he talks.

JAKE

Were there any Jane Does processed the same day as the one we fished out of the Venice canal?

MEDICAL EXAMINER

No. The only other Janes that day were a murder/suicide in West Hollywood. A cat fight between a pair of lesbians that got out of hand. But we got valid toe tags on both. Why do you ask?

JAKE

Just trying to close up some loose ends. If you hear of anything-

MEDICAL EXAMINER

-I'll drop you a dime.

The coroner nods and Jake can't get out the room fast enough. As he leaves, he runs into Det. Belcheck in the hallway.

JAKE

Detective.

DET. BELCHECK

Vargas.

Jake saunters down the hall, then stops with a thought.

JAKE

Detective. One moment.

Belcheck stops and turns, visibly annoyed.

DET. BELCHECK
You never cease to annoy. What is it?

JAKE
A talent perfected over the years.

Jake walks back up to the detective.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Have there been any missing persons reported this past week?

DET. BELCHECK
What do I look like, the LA crime blotter? How the hell would I know. I'm homicide.

JAKE
Oh, right. Homicide. Duh. Thanks.

He reaches out his hand as a peace offering. The detective reaches out and shakes it, not seeing it's slathered with petroleum jelly.

Jake smiles, turns and walk away.

JAKE (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Silly me.

INT. LOBBY OF POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Jake approaches an OFFICER manning an information desk.

JAKE
Who's in charge of missing person's cases?

OFFICER
You want Thompson in the Missing Persons Unit, on the third floor.

JAKE
Thanks.

INT. DETECTIVE'S SQUAD ROOM - DAY

The Missing Person's Unit is a tiny corner office on the far side of the Squad Room, manned by a SECRETARY.

JAKE

Hi.

SECRETARY

May I help you?

JAKE

I hope so. My name is Jake Vargas. I'm a private investigator looking into the Sister Aimee murder case down in Venice.

SECRETARY

But isn't she alive, Mister Vargas?

JAKE

Spanky. My friends call me Spanky.

SECRETARY

Spanky.

JAKE

And yes, she is alive.

SECRETARY

Well, I'm afraid you've come to the wrong place. This is Missing Persons.

JAKE

I know. I think I'm in the right place. I-

The door behind her swings opens and DET. THOMPSON, a short stocky sweaty man, ambles out.

DET. THOMPSON

What can I help you with?

SECRETARY

This is Mister-

DET. THOMPSON

Yes, I heard. Vargas. There was a Vargas that ran the Venice P.D. before the merger, you related?

JAKE

One in the same, Detective...

Thompson makes no effort to give his name.

SECRETARY

Thompson. Detective Thompson.

DET. THOMPSON
What do you want?

JAKE
Are there any young women, white,
between eighteen and thirty,
slender build, recently reported
missing?

DET. THOMPSON
No. Anything else?

JAKE
Um, excuse me?

DET. THOMPSON
I said, no. Is that it?

JAKE
Just no?

DET. THOMPSON
Yes. Nobody fitting that
description. Is that it?

JAKE
Yes, I suppose it-

The detective abruptly turns back to his office, slamming the door behind him.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Well, he's quite the people person,
ain't he?

SECRETARY
I'm sorry, Mister Vargas-

JAKE
Spanky. Thank you, ma'am.

He puts his hat on to leave.

SECRETARY
We're understaffed and he's under a
lot of pressure.

He nods and heads down the hallway toward the stairwell.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)
Mister Vargas? Spanky?

He stops and turns. The secretary hurries up to him.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)

I don't know if this means anything, but there is a young woman that fits that description. She's not been reported missing, at least not officially, but we're all worried about her.

JAKE

What's her name?

SECRETARY

Mary. But we all call her Dutch.

JAKE

You got a last name?

The woman shakes her head.

SECRETARY

I don't remember. Cute girl, but real diligent. She started working in the secretarial pool down on the second floor at the beginning of the year. New in town, kept to herself mostly, but we went out hopping a couple of times. A real barlow with plenty of meringue. The kind of flap guys get goofy over.

JAKE

And how long she been missing?

SECRETARY

I'm not sure. She didn't show up for work on Monday - which is not like her- Oh, I remember, it's Zimmerman. Her last name. Like I said, Dutch is real diligent. And then they fired her. No one's seen her since.

JAKE

Maybe she just moved onto something better?

SECRETARY

Maybe. But she seemed pretty happy. Here's the thing. Her walking papers came from the first floor. Not the second. See?

Jake doesn't, but he nods.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)

I have to blouse. But I wanted you to know. You seem like a real kippy guy, for a dick. There's not enough of that around here.

She smiles and leaves.

INT. L.A. CITY HALL LOBBY - DAY

On his way out Jake stops at the WALL DIRECTORY to see what's located on the first floor: LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCIL.

He taps the directory with his finger, puts on his sun glasses and heads out the door.

EXT. VENICE LAKE AVE. TRAIN DEPOT - DAY

Jake hops off the Los Angeles Pacific train and has to navigate the CONSTRUCTION in front of the depot to hail a GONDOLA.

Dump trucks and Steam Shovels with the TABOR CONSTRUCTION logo crowd the entrance to the train depot as they rip out the little Venice railway.

He grabs for a cigarette and light and notices the same TABOR LOGO ON HIS MATCHBOOK.

As he steps into the gondola, he sees Eddie Muller wearing a HARD HAT with the same TABOR LOGO, chatting up the crew foreman inside the work zone.

Jake hops out and rushes back to the train station.

INT. L.A. DEPT. OF BUILDING & SAFETY - DAY

A dour BUREAUCRAT is hunched over a desk behind the counter in a drab, windowless basement office.

Jake saunters in and saddles up to the counter, pulling out his P.I. license - with his thumb conveniently covering most of the license.

JAKE

Hi. Detective Belcheck with Homicide. I need you to pull the permit for Tabor Construction.

The insipid Bureaucrat points to a sign on his desk: REQUESTS RECEIVED AFTER 3 PM WILL BE PROCESSED THE FOLLOWING DAY.

BUREAUCRAT
(without looking up)
You can leave your request in that
basket and we'll have it pulled by
noon tomorrow. Forms are next to
the basket.

JAKE
(firmly)
Come here, kid.

The Bureaucrat points to his name plate.

BUREAUCRAT
The name is Mister Peterson.

JAKE
Kid. Don't make me ask you again.

The Bureaucrat reluctantly does what he's told.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I need the permit for Tabor
Construction, right now. Not
tomorrow, now.

BUREAUCRAT
But, the policy-

JAKE
Uh-uh. Don't say another word. Just
listen closely.
(he pauses for effect)
You're going to go pull the file
now, see, and if you don't, I'm
going to slap a pair of bracelets
on you and arrest you for
obstruction of justice. Got it?

The petulant glare turns to fear and the man does what he's
told. He disappears into the stacks and returns with a
massive file.

BUREAUCRAT
Which permit do you want?

Surprised, Jake punts.

JAKE
How many are there?

The Bureaucrat pulls out a massive folder.

BUREAUCRAT

Hundreds.

He nosily starts perusing the paperwork.

BUREAUCRAT (CONT'D)

That's odd.

While still sifting through it, he brings the file over to the counter.

JAKE

What is it?

BUREAUCRAT

There's over a hundred permits, but it looks like he's only got one client. Here take a look.

He flips the file around for Jake. Jake looks at one permit, then another.

JAKE

Vegas Land Holdings?

The Bureaucrat shrugs as he continues to review the files. One of the permits catches his eye.

BUREAUCRAT

I stand corrected. He's got two clients.

He hands the permit over to Jake.

BUREAUCRAT (CONT'D)

The city of Los Angeles.

(he whistles to himself)

No wonder none of us got raises this year.

(to Jake)

It's attached to a copy of the city contract.

JAKE

The Venice Railway project. Bingo. That's what I was looking for.

BUREAUCRAT

If that's the lowest bid, I'd hate to see what the highest bid was.

JAKE

Is there any way to find out?

BUREAUCRAT

Sure.

He writes a reference number down off the permit, goes to another stack, pulls the file and plops it in front of Jake.

Jake scans the new paperwork, with the Bureaucrat reading along from his side of the counter.

Jake flips between two pages.

JAKE

The page with the bids is missing.

BUREAUCRAT

That can't be.

He flips the folder around and looks for himself. Nothing. He starts sifting through the rest of the folders.

BUREAUCRAT (CONT'D)

That's odd. There's pages missing from all these files.

He pulls a large bound book from the stacks, and compares reference numbers.

BUREAUCRAT (CONT'D)

There's contracts, but no bidding info-

JAKE

Let me guess. All Tabor contracts.

The bureaucrat nods, concerned.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Thanks kid, you've been a huge help.

He leaves all the files on the counter, grabs his fedora and leaves.

BUREAUCRAT

It's Peterson-

INT. L.A. CITY COUNCIL OFFICES - DAY

Jake saunters up to an overworked RECEPTIONIST.

RECEPTIONIST

May I help you?

JAKE
I hope so, Miss--

He glances at the name plate.

JAKE (CONT'D)
--Weiss. I'm here to see Councilman
Conelli.

RECEPTIONIST
Your name?

JAKE
Vargas. Jake Vargas.

She looks through her appointment book and frowns.

RECEPTIONIST
Do you have an appointment, Mister
Vargas?

JAKE
No. I just wanted to stop in and
say hello.

RECEPTIONIST
I'm afraid you need an appointment
to see the Councilman. He's
terribly busy.

JAKE
Is that so?

RECEPTIONIST
Yes, indeed. He's booked out for
weeks.

Jake puts his fedora on.

JAKE
That's too bad. Well be sure to
tell him Jake Vargas from Vegas
Land Holdings stopped by. Have a
nice day.

He starts to leave.

RECEPTIONIST
You're from Vegas Land Holdings?

JAKE
Yes.

A flash of panic crosses the Receptionist's face.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm sorry, Mister Vargas. Please don't go. Give me one moment.

She disappears behind a door. She reappears a moment later.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Please come this way, Mister Vargas.

She escorts Jake into Councilman Conelli's office.

WILLIAM CONELLI

Mister Vargas, how nice to meet you!

JAKE

The pleasure's mine, Councilman.

WILLIAM CONELLI

Please, have a seat.

JAKE

No thank you, sir. I only have a moment.

Intrigued, Conelli sits back down behind his desk.

WILLIAM CONELLI

So Mister Vargas- Have we met?

JAKE

No, not formally, sir.

WILLIAM CONELLI

I thought I knew everybody at Vegas Land Holdings. Cigar? You're early, the boys from Ohio aren't here yet.

JAKE

Ah, no, sir. I don't believe I'm with them.

WILLIAM CONELLI

Then, what can I help you with?

Jake grins.

JAKE

You already have.

Conelli's confused.

WILLIAM CONELLI
I don't understand.

JAKE
I'm not with Vegas Land Holdings.

WILLIAM CONELLI
Is this some sort of joke? Who are you?

JAKE
No joke, Councilman. Just an old fisherman tugging on some tackle to see what I hooked anything.

WILLIAM CONELLI
I don't know who you think you are, but you need to leave right now.

JAKE
That won't be necessary, sir.

Jake starts for the door.

WILLIAM CONELLI
No, on second thought, you better stay right here while I call Security. You have some nerve. Why, I'll have you--

Jake plays another hunch.

JAKE
I'm actually looking for my sister, Dutch.

Conelli's face goes white. He starts perspiring profusely.

WILLIAM CONELLI
(suddenly hoarse)
She's not here. Anymore. I--

SECRETARY (O.C.)
Mister Conelli?

Conelli's Secretary stands in his doorway.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)
Two gentlemen from Ohio Oil are here to see you.

JAKE
 (to Secretary)
 Tell them they're going to have to
 wait.
 (to Conelli)
 Sit down, Councilman. Maybe we
 should have a talk after all.

Jake shuts the Councilman's door and motions him to sit.

EXT. ROOFTOP OF THE CADILLAC HOTEL - DAY

TONY CORNERO, AKA TONY THE HAT, has a tanned and manicured
 appearance that shabbily camouflages the soul of a grifter.
 He talks with a boyish charm, but in repose, looks ravaged.

He sips champagne while a FLAPPER, in a revealing one piece
 bathing suit, picks at a crab salad while sunning herself.

Two THUGS guard the door. Jake enters handing one his fedora.

TONY CORNERO (O.C.)
 Mister Jake "Spanky" Vargas. Former
 Venice of America Chief of Police.

JAKE
 My friends call my Spanky-

TONY CORNERO
 Come join me, Spanky.

JAKE
 I said my friends call me that. You
 can call me Vargas. For now.

Tony grins.

TONY CORNERO
 Amigo, everybody calls me Tony.

JAKE
 Mister Tony 'The Hat' Cornero. In
 the flesh.

TONY CORNERO
 Like what you see? This is where
 Chaplin throws his parties.
 (to the Flapper)
 Bank's closed sweetheart. Scram.

The Flapper pouts, takes another bite of salad, then saunters
 off, making sure both men watch her leave.

TONY CORNERO (CONT'D)

Dames. How can you resist those
gams, specially when they're
wearing a fig leaf like that.

He picks up a lump of crab from the woman's salad with his
bare hand and shovels it in his mouth.

TONY CORNERO (CONT'D)

So, Albert Kinney dies, the kid
sells his old man's dream to the
city of angels, and you're out in
the street. Is that it?

JAKE

Something like that. But without
the sentiment. What can I do for
you?

Tony gets up and walks to the edge of the roof. Jake follows.

TONY CORNERO

Me and Kinney ain't so different.
Look around, look what he built.
This was a swamp. A god damn swamp
and look what he did with it! He's
my inspiration. He's a god damn
American hero!

(he leans in close)

Prohibition ain't gonna last
forever. I need to build something,
like him. Something that's bigger
than him.

JAKE

So you got your fingers in a
construction company? Tabor
Construction?

Impressed.

TONY CORNERO

Why, yes. You could say, I'm
diversifying.

Tony makes a sweeping gesture toward the glistening canals.

TONY CORNERO (CONT'D)

What do you see?

Jake shakes his head.

JAKE

I don't know. Why don't you tell me.

TONY CORNERO

I see the future. Look at all the automobiles choking the streets of Venice. The future ain't quaint canals or miniature railroads. It's the Model T.

JAKE

So you helped Tabor Construction get the contract to rip up the Venice Railway?

TONY CORNERO

Not just rip up the Venice line, no, that's just phase one. Tabor Construction got the *exclusive* contract to fill in all the canals and pave them over with smooth asphalt roads. We're going to finish what Abbot Kinney started. Fashionable new houses for the newly fashionable- and now very mobile day trippers. Folks that no longer have to live close to where they work.

JAKE

That decide weekends at the beach just ain't enough.

TONY CORNERO

Exactly. From here all the way south to the mud flats of Playa Del Rey.

Jake connects the dots.

JAKE

You're Vegas Land Company.

Tony is surprised Jake knows this.

TONY CORNERO

Majority stake holder. Perfectly legit.

JAKE

Let me guess. Your partners are one Arthur Reese, Thornton Kinney and Irving Tabor?

TONY CORNERO

Among others. But Tabor, no. I own
Tabor outright, amigo. The chump
don't even know he got played.

JAKE

I grew up with Tabor.

Tony grins.

TONY CORNERO

That's too bad, Spanky. Ain't
America grand! Abbott Kinney made
his fortune draining the swamps, I
make mine filling 'em in. Booze or
asphalt. Don't matter to me.

JAKE

You never answered my question.
What can I do for you?

TONY CORNERO

I hear you're the best private dick
in Venice.

JAKE

I do what I can.

TONY CORNERO

I want to hire you.

JAKE

I'm flattered. I'll have my
secretary draw up the paperwork.
But I'm on a case right now.

TONY CORNERO

The murdered radio preacher. But
she's turned up alive. Case closed.

JAKE

There's still the matter of a dead
Jane, buried in her place. You
wouldn't happen to know anything
about that?

TONY CORNERO

No, I can't say I do.

JAKE

Her name was Mary. Her friends
called her Dutch. She was a sweet
girl.

TONY CORNERO

How unfortunate. But how's that affect you? You ain't a cop any more. Word on the street is the preacher's sister hired you? Is that not true?

JAKE

You heard right.

TONY CORNERO

Well, then, things seem to be settled. My business is urgent, your previous case is solved. How fortunate for me.

JAKE

Like I said, I'll have my secretary draw up the paperwork.

Tony opens another bottle of champagne.

TONY CORNERO

Good. I want you to find something that belongs to me, that was stolen by The Swede. A series of photographs.

JAKE

What kind of photographs?

TONY CORNERO

The kind that are personal. And if you happen to see The Swede, give him a message for me.

JAKE

What's that?

TONY CORNERO

Tell him he's a dead man.

EXT. THE CADILLAC HOTEL - DAY

As Jake exits the posh hotel, he looks back toward the roof, and scratches his head.

He lights up a cigarette, then looks up to the roof again.

JAKE

Mildred--

He turns to leave and sees Det. Belcheck. Before he can say anything, the cop punches him in the face, knocking him out cold.

EXT. GRAND CANAL - DAY

It's 1905. Young Jake is drowning in the lagoon. He's pulled under water and looks up at the woman in the gondola.

The nearby crowd laughs at a clown.

She's laughing too. Until she looks down at him and frowns.

He reaches up for her. His hand poking out of the water...

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. THE MUD FLATS OF PLAYA DEL REY - DAY

Jake wakes up in Det. Belcheck's squad car as they drive down a dusty dirt road of bean fields.

Jake rubs his swollen jaw.

JAKE

Belcheck. Why'd you do that?

DET. BELCHECK

Because I don't like you.

Belcheck turns toward the ocean and the swampy mud flats at the mouth of a parched river bed.

DET. BELCHECK (CONT'D)

What do you got on Tony Cornero?

JAKE

Nothing. He wants to hire me.

DET. BELCHECK

The guy's untouchable, unreachable. I've been trying to build a case on him for years, and you mean to tell me you just waltz into The Cadillac, have a drink with him, and he hires you?

JAKE

Yeah, something like that. It's not like he's hiding or anything.

Belcheck punches him again, and the car swerves off the road, kicking up dust.

JAKE (CONT'D)
For fuck's sake, Belcheck.

DET. BELCHECK
The bodies are starting to pile up, Vargas. Now, I got a bruno in the morgue pushing daylight through half his head. The way I see it, the only connection between them is you.

JAKE
So you drive the Mexican out to some bean fields... that's rich. You've been watching too many serials.

Belcheck hits the brakes and a cloud of dust catches up to the car.

DET. BELCHECK
Get out.

Jake rubs his jaw.

DET. BELCHECK (CONT'D)
I said get out.

Belcheck motions him into the field.

JAKE
You seriously think I killed The Swede?

DET. BELCHECK
Did you?

JAKE
No.

DET. BELCHECK
Then who did?

JAKE
I don't know. I thought Tony Cornero did.

DET. BELCHECK
What's the angle? Why bump your own button man?

JAKE

Betrayal. To send a message. Who knows? But I don't think it was Cornero.

DET. BELCHECK

Why not?

JAKE

He doesn't know The Swede is dead.

DET. BELCHECK

How do you know?

JAKE

Because he told me so before you clocked me, you numb nutz. He hired me to give him a message.

DET. BELCHECK

And what was that?

JAKE

That he's a dead man.

Belcheck laughs and turns back toward the car.

DET. BELCHECK

Western Union's a little late delivering that news.

JAKE

You want to know what else I think?

DET. BELCHECK

Not particularly.

JAKE

That Jane sleeping in Sister Aimee's plot? Her name is Mary Zimmerman. Originally from Schenectady, New York, and formerly employed by the city of angels. That's who Cornero had killed.

DET. BELCHECK

What's his beef with her? Ex-mistress?

JAKE

Not his. Councilman Conelli's. He used the girl to send a message;

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)
to squeeze Conelli for the Venice
roads contract. They're filling in
all the canals.

Belcheck mulls it over. Then shakes his head and starts back
for the car.

DET. BELCHECK
That's some story, beaner.

Jake starts to follow. Belcheck pulls out his service
revolver and points it at him.

DET. BELCHECK (CONT'D)
Uh-uh. Not another step.

JAKE
What is this? You gonna' shoot me?

DET. BELCHECK
Thinking about it.

JAKE
Really? C'mon, man. You can't leave
me here.

DET. BELCHECK
Really. Sure I can. Watch me.

Jake pulls out a twenty dollar bill and holds it up.

JAKE
A day's wages to take me home?

Belcheck hastily marches up to Jake. Grabs and pockets the
money, but when Jake goes to follow, holds up the gun again.

JAKE (CONT'D)
C'mon on, amigo.

Belcheck gets in the car and starts the engine.

DET. BELCHECK
Like I said, I don't like you.
Adios, amigo.

He throttles the engine, and pulls away in a cloud of dust.

Jake watches the car drive back toward north.

JAKE
Mierda.

EXT. PLAYA DEL REY BEAN FIELDS - DAY

Jake walks back to Venice along a hot dusty dirt road. A MIGRANT WORKER AND HIS SON approach on a donkey.

They stop and offer him a lift. He hops up behind the boy and the threesome ambles forward down the dirt road.

I/E. MILDRED'S BUNGALO - DAY

Jake urgently knocks on the front door. He makes a vain attempt to knock some of the bean field off his suit while he waits.

MILDRED

Jake? What are you doing here?

JAKE

May I come in?

She glances behind her.

MILDRED

Now's not a good time. I've got company. Aimee...

She hesitates, sizing him up through the screen door.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

What happened? Are you all right?

JAKE

Rough day at the office.

She opens the door and touches his bruised chin. He winces.

MILDRED

We need to clean that up. Wait here.

She disappears inside. Jake watches a gondola float by.

She reappears with some rubbing alcohol and a dish towel.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

Sit down.

JAKE

How's your sister?

MILDRED

She's inside. Sleeping.

He sits on a porch bench and she starts cleaning up his face.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
Are you going to tell me what happened?

JAKE
If you told me when I woke up this morning that I'd spend the afternoon with not one, but two, jack asses, I wouldn't have believed it.

MILDRED
Well, that explains the smell.

She leans in real close as she gently tends to Jake's bruises. He can feel her warm breath on his cheek.

He locks eyes with her and kisses her. She doesn't resist.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
Is this why you came here?

JAKE
No. Yes. I mean, I want to make sure you're okay.

She kisses him again.

MILDRED
Why wouldn't I be?

ROY (O.C.)
Yeah, why wouldn't she be?

Both are startled. Roy, the Radio Announcer, stands behind the screen door glaring at Jake.

Keeping his eyes on Roy, Jake speaks to Mildred.

JAKE
You've been through a lot.

ROY
Yes. But Aimee is back. She's safe. Life can return to normal.

JAKE
Not for the dead girl in Aimee's grave. Or for The Swede.

Roy opens the door, nods for them to come inside.

ROY

No. I suppose not. But what does that have to do with us? Is she not safe now?

He shoves Jake toward the kitchen.

MILDRED

Roy, what are you doing?

JAKE

(to Mildred)

I've been so wrong, every step of the way.

(to Roy)

It was you.

MILDRED

What do mean?

JAKE

What I mean is, I've been played the stooge from day one.

ROY

If the shoe fits.

JAKE

(to Roy)

Why kill The Swede? I assumed Tony Cornero did. It's the right move.

(to Mildred)

Your radio ministry is no good for Tony's bootlegging business. He wants to quiet 'the most famous voice in America'. So how? He blackmails her. Only The Swede screws it up and it all goes to shit.

MILDRED

(confused)

So he killed this Swede?

JAKE

That's what I thought. Don't get me wrong. Cornero wants him dead. But he didn't do it.

He waits to see Mildred's reaction.

MILDRED

Then who did--

With growing dread she turns to Roy.

He pulls out a GUN.

Roy reaches for a purse on the counter and an ENVELOPE full of photographs spills out.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
That's Aimee's.

He picks it up the top photo - it's a picture of Aimee on her knees blowing The Swede.

JAKE
It's not polite to go through other people's belongings.

Roy grabs a match and lights the burner on the stove.

ROY
I'm just cleaning up another mess,
is all.

He puts the photo and the envelope on top of the burner and watches them quickly smolder.

ROY (CONT'D)
Look around Mildred. You got a real nice house here. Nice life. You've done well for yourself, we all have. Ministering to the destitute and the desperate. A grift that's totally legit. It's been easy money. But The Swede runs off with your sister. That's a game changer. We loose everything.

Mildred is horrified.

MILDRED
You killed him!

AIMEE (O.C.)
You killed Aggo?

Everyone turns to see Aimee, groggy, standing in the hallway.

ROY
No, let me explain--

AIMEE
He's dead?!

MILDRED
I meant to tell you--

JAKE
She doesn't know?

AIMEE
(to Mildred)
Aggo's dead and you didn't tell me!

ROY
My Sweetheart. I--

AIMEE
You fucking killed Aggo?!?

Aimee is hysterical.

MILDRED
Aimee, please--

ROY
It was for us. All of us. You have to believe me. All the trauma you went through, in Mexico. In the desert--

AIMEE
What trauma? There was no trauma--

ROY
You were just released from the hospital this--

AIMEE
(to Mildred)
The hospital and the photo with the police. It was your idea! For the papers!

MILDRED
That's right. The hospital was good P.R. I had to. For the church. Our ministry. For us--

ROY
Everything we worked so hard to build--

AIMEE
Everything we built? Everything I built, asshole!

ROY

Everything we spent a lifetime
building. All gone. Because you
can't help fucking every cock that
wanders into the yard.

AIMEE

How dare you- I'm the most famous
god damn voice in America!

ROY

You two would still be tramping in
the Borscht Belt if it wasn't for
me!

Aimee glares at him.

AIMEE

I hate you.

Roy wavers.

Jake seizes the opportunity and lunges for the gun.

BANG!

A SHOT just misses Mildred.

Jake shoves Roy's gun hand into the open flame on the stove.

Roy SCREAMS and drops the gun to the ground-

-Jake dives for it-

-But Roy wrestles Jake away.

They fight - trying to get the gun - but it's out of reach.

Roy grabs for a set of kitchen knives-

-Jake smashes his hand with a frying pan -

-And plows him into the linoleum.

They both grab for the gun as Jake rolls on top of him.

BANG.

A pool of blood expands on the floor under them-

-Jake finally rolls off to the side, and reveals Roy - dead.
Mildred rushes to help him.

JAKE
I'm okay. You?

She nods.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Aimee?

Aimee stands frozen, staring at Roy's body.

MILDRED
Aimee?

Mildred puts her arms around her.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
We should have-- I mean, I should
have told you sooner that this
Swede, I mean Aggo, was dead.

Aimee shrugs off the hug and starts crying again.

AIMEE
It doesn't matter. You've already
killed me.

She reaches out and grabs Roy's gun.

MILDRED
Aimee!!

JAKE
No!!

She points it to her head and pulls the trigger.

CLICK

An empty chamber. She pulls the trigger again.

CLICK

Aimee looks at the gun in surprise. Jake and Mildred both
rush her. Mildred, closer, grabs the gun. Jake tries to wrap
her up.

Hysterical, Aimee, breaks free and runs out the front door.

Mildred starts after her, but Jake stops her. She glares.

MILDRED
I didn't kill anyone.

JAKE

I know. Give me the gun.

She gives him the gun.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I'll get her. Call the police. Ask
for Detective Massey.

She nods.

MILDRED

Please hurry. Before she hurts
herself.

EXT. ALDEBARAN CANAL - DAY

Aimee runs along the banks of the canal - and people's front
yards - with Jake in pursuit.

Aimee spots a GONDOLA unloading a couple in front of their
home and runs toward the dock.

She runs past the shocked couple and jumps in the boat.

Jake gets to the pier, but is too late. The gondola is far
out of reach.

JAKE

Aimee!

He watches in vain as the boat disappears into another canal.

EXT. MILDRED'S BUNGALO - DAY

Mildred rushes out the front door and finds Jake catching his
breath.

JAKE

She's heading toward the bathing
pool.

MILDRED

I have a car out back.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND BUNGALOW - DAY

Mildred and Jake speed off down the alley toward the Grand
Canal.

EXT. GRAND CANAL BATHING POOL BATH HOUSE - DAY

Mildred pulls up alongside the Bath House and Jake jumps out before the car even stops.

He runs toward the bathing pool. It looks the same as in his nightmares, but now it's empty.

He sees the gondola in the middle of the great pool, the central hub of the canal system.

Jake dives in, and swims toward the boat.

Aimee sees him and jumps overboard.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. BATHING POOL - DAY

It's 1905. We see the clown, wealthy woman, and crowd from the POV of the drowning boy. All are laughing.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. PIER & GRAND PAVILION - NIGHT

It's 1905. The storm is raging.

Jake watches Diego disappear into the Pavilion-

JAKE

Papa!!

Another mammoth wave crashes into the Pavilion-

Jake jumps off the cart and races toward his father.

EXT. BATHING POOL - DAY

It's 1905. Young Jake's hand slips under the smooth surface of water.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. GRAND PAVILION - DAY

It's 1905. The storm is raging over the collapsed Pavilion.

Diego's hand juts out of the crashing surf grasping for life.

He's trapped and submerged under the seething waves; his legs pinned by a timber piling.

Jake reaches for his hand-

The dock lurches-

Jake's thrown into the water.

Another wave splinters support pylons.

The roof collapses-

Jake pulls himself out of the water.

JAKE

Pappa!!

His father's hand sticks out of the water. It's limp.

It's pulled under by the storm's undertow.

Diego's hand is gone forever.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. BATHING POOL - DAY

It's 1926. Jake comes up for air by the gondola. He grabs the boat for support-

And sees Aimee disappear through the Grand Stand's exit.

EXT. GRAND CANAL BATHING POOL BATH HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Mildred helps Jake out of the pool.

JAKE

She's heading toward the beach. You take the pier. I'll take the boardwalk.

EXT. VENICE BOARDWALK - LATE AFTERNOON

Jake races through the crowd, searching.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. VENICE OF AMERICA BEACH - MORNING

It's 1905. The sun is shining and there's a gentle breeze. Kinney and his investors survey the destruction of the pier.

INVESTOR 1
Shame. A damn shame.

They come upon young Jake. He mourns over the dead body of Diego, washed up in the surf.

ABBOT KINNEY
Jake-

Jake looks up, his face swollen from crying.

INVESTOR 2
Poor kid.

INVESTOR 1
Good thing it's only a Mexican.
He'll be cheap to replace.

They turn back to the destroyed pier. Abbot looks at the boy as they walk off.

INVESTOR 2
There's no way you'll be able to
open by the Fourth of July.

ABBOT KINNEY
(reluctantly)
We will open on the Fourth-

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. VENICE BOARDWALK - SUNSET

It's 1926. Jake continues searching the crowd for Aimee.

EXT. VENICE PIER - SUNSET

Mildred stops at the entrance to the MASSIVE AMUSEMENT PIER and scans the crowd. Nothing.

She's about to move on, but sees Aimee run past the FUN HOUSE, her image distorted on dozens of high hanging curvy mirrors, and runs toward her.

EXT. DIPPSY DOODLE - SUNSET

Aimee, sure she's lost them, tries to blend into the crowd.

She hurries to the entrance of the roller coaster, but is blocked by a Carny.

CARNY

Not without a ticket, lady.

She turns toward the long line at the ticket booth - and locks eyes through the crowd with Mildred.

MILDRED

Aimee, wait!!

Aimee runs down the pier to the DANCE HALL, disappearing inside.

INT. DANCE HALL - SUNSET

Aimee runs past a security guard onto the crowded dance hall floor- and the middle of a jitterbug dance marathon.

Mildred follows, pushing past exhausted dancers.

EXT. VENICE PIER - SUNSET

Jake gets to the pier entrance as TWO POLICE CARS PULL UP.

COPS jump out and fan into the crowd. More SIRENS wail in the distance as Jake sprints down the pier.

He sees Aimee and Mildred emerge from the Dance Hall.

Jake tries to catch up, avoiding crowds, by skirting along the outside edge of the pier.

He hops a rope, rounds a corner and ends up blocked by dozens of OSTRICH'S on display.

He ducks out, pushing through the crowd, TWO COPS close behind.

EXT. VENICE PIER - SUNSET

Mildred chases Aimee toward the sunset.

MILDRED

Aimee. Wait!

Aimee stops at the end of the pier. She's crying.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

Aimee. My sweet Aimee. I'm so very
sorry.

Mildred wipes tears from Aimee's swollen eyes.

Jake breaks from the crowd, sees the sisters.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

Just look at you, darling. You know
there'll be cameras-

She reaches in her clutch and pulls out a METAL COMPACT.

COP

Stop. Drop the gun!

Someone in the crowd SCREAMS.

GUY IN CROWD

Gun!

WOMAN IN CROWD

She's got a gun!!

The crowd panics. People run for cover.

Mildred turns toward Jake-

MILDRED

No. It's just makeup-

BANG BANG-

-Aimee is splattered with blood-

-She SCREAMS-

-Mildred crumples to the wooden deck-

Dead.

JAKE

No!!!

Jake turns and sees Belcheck, his REVOLVER STILL SMOKING.

Massey and TWO OTHER COPS break through the crowd.

Massey surveys the scene, taking Jake's arm.

DET. MASSEY

She mean something to you?

JAKE
Something like that.

DET. MASSEY
I'm sure she knew you loved her.
(pauses)
C'mon Spanky, let's go get a drink.
There's nothing for you to see
here.

JAKE
Just another beautiful sunset in
Venice of America, Detective?

DET. MASSEY
Yeah. The playground by the sea.

He gives Jake a more forceful tug on the arm.

Jake shakes off the detective, staring down at Mildred; one
bullet to the heart, one to the face.

Jake's hand shaking, he reaches for a pack of Lucky's and
Kinney's lucky SILVER DOLLAR slips out, falling through a
crack and is swallowed by waves.

Massey shrugs and goes to help his partner secure the scene.

DET. MASSEY (CONT'D)
(muttering)
Yeah, some playground.

SEAGULLS SQUAWK as Jake chokes back his emotions. He looks
out at the rolling surf and golden sunset.

THE SCENE FREEZES: Jake, the pier, and boardwalk-

-All FADE AWAY, replaced by OIL RIGS-

- HUNDREDS OF THEM.

SUPER:

AFTER MOST OF ITS CANALS WERE FILLED IN AND PAVED, TONY
CORNERO WAS PUSHED OUT OF VENICE WHEN OIL WAS DISCOVERED
THE NEXT YEAR.

THE SPARKLING CITY QUICKLY BECAME A TOXIC INDUSTRIAL
SITE.

AFTER THE WELLS WENT DRY, BEATNIKS, ARTISTS AND POETS
MOVED IN, DRAWN BY CHEAP RENTS AND THE PROMISE OF A NEW
LIFE BY THE SEA.

THE END

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